

Crafting Modern Design in Italy, from Post-War to Postmodernism

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Abstract: Crafting Modern Design in Italy: From Post-War to Postmodernism

The years between 1945 and the early 1980s are the most celebrated in Italy's design history. From the rhetoric of reconstruction to the postmodern provocations of the Memphis design collective, Italy's architects played a vital role in shaping the country's encounter with post-war modernity. Yet as often as this story has been told, it is incomplete. Craft was vital to the realisation of post-war Italian design, and an area of intense creativity in its own right, and yet has been marginalised and excluded in design historiography.

When craft does feature in Italy's post-war design history it is to praise "iconic" objects such as Gio Ponti's straw-seated *Superleggera* chair, Franco Albini's wicker *Margherita* chair and Venini's handblown glass on the basis of its quality craftsmanship and use of traditional materials; however the "Made in Italy" label was as much a part of the mythologising of post-war Italian design as its heroic architects and entrepreneurial manufacturers, and this tired story is ripe for re-evaluation.

Crafting Modern Design in Italy, from Post-War to Postmodernism starts from this premise: that Italy's post-war design history should be reassessed through its ongoing engagement with craft. Using extensive primary material from archives, contemporary periodicals and interviews with individuals operating in the era, the four chapters of this thesis examine the multiple ways that craft shaped the phenomena of Italian design from 1945 to 1981, the year of Memphis's establishment. As such, this research provides a radical retelling of a seemingly well-known story, one in which the skills of Italy's artisans remained vital: even in the rapid industrialisation of the early 1950s, craft workshops, small-scale, family-run businesses remained the mainstay of Italian manufacturing.

As the socio-economic and political context changed, so did the shape of design and craft's relationship. In the imperatives of reconstruction, Italy's crafts industries were viewed as the easiest, and most important, part of the nation's economy to resuscitate; by the time of the early 1960s, the artisans of Carrara, Florence, Venice, and Italy's other craft centres were being mobilised for more consumerist, luxurious ends. In the turn to radical design in the late 1960s and 1970s, the alterity of craft was picked up on by architects like Enzo Mari, Riccardo Dalisi and the Global Tools group as a way out of Italy's design crisis. Studio Alchymia and Memphis were the result of these radical experiences, and attempted to propose a new artisanal-industrial hybridity in the production of their designs that was emblematic of their postmodern condition.

The originality and potential for further application of the craft-based approach utilised here relies on the fact that craft is conceived here not just as a mode of production, set of materials or disciplines or level of skill. This thesis uses an expanded definition of craft and the concept of "modern craft" to argue that craft existed moreover as a set of ideas that designers both adopted and repressed, and lays out a series of critical and theoretical tools for thinking about design's turn to craft in other contexts. As the first such large scale study this research not only rethinks the existing history of Italian design, but also provide a paradigm for the analysis of

design and craft's relationship and a template for a craft-based approach to the study of design.

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- 3. Letizia Frailich Ponti** transcript

- 4. Pierluigi Ghianda** English translation
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Interview Participant Consent Correspondence

APPENDIX 2: Participant Email Correspondence

- 1. Alessio Sarri** English translation
 Italian transcript

Email Participant Consent Correspondence

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Author's Declaration

1. During the period of registered study in which this thesis was prepared the author has not been registered for any other academic award or qualification.
2. The material included in this thesis has not been submitted wholly or in part for any academic award or qualification other than that for which it is now submitted.

C. Rossi
March 2011

Abbreviations

Explanatory Note

The full title, in Italian and English of the following organisations are given on their first appearance in the thesis. On all subsequent references only the acronym is employed, except when it is felt necessary to remind the reader more fully of the organisation, in which case the Italian name is also given.

CADMA	<i>Comitato Assistenza Distribuzione Materiali Artigianato</i> (Committee for the Assistance and Distribution for Artists' Materials)
CNA	<i>Compania Nazionale Artigiana</i> (National Artisan Society)
CoID	Council of Industrial Design
DC	<i>Democrazia Italiana</i> (Christian Democrats)
ENAPI	<i>Ente Nazionale dell'Artigianato e delle Piccole Industrie</i> (National Organisation for the Crafts and Small Industries)
HDI	Handicraft Development Incorporated
ISOLA	<i>Istituto Sardo per l'Organizzazione del Lavoro Artigiano</i> (Sardinian Institute for the Organisation of Craft Work)
MSI	<i>Movimento Sociale Italiano</i> (Italian Social Movement)
PCI	<i>Partita Comunista Italiana</i> (Italian Communist Party)
PSI	<i>Partita Socialista Italiana</i> (Italian Socialist Party)

Introduction: Crafting Modern Design in Italy, from Post-War to Postmodernism

On the one side there are architects who do not think about anything other than “things to mass produce”, before even asking themselves if these things can be mass produced, how they can be mass produced and who wants them mass produced [...] On the other side there are artisans who continue in their slow, heavy and expensive work [...] With real difficulty the two ways of imagining production team up and become integrated, so that the rift deepens and the sides speak languages ever more incomprehensible to each other.¹

Ettore Sottsass, ‘Le Vie dell’Artigianato’, *Il Politecnico*, 1947

In 1947 Ettore Sottsass wrote what was arguably the first statement on craft and design in post-war Italy. It did not bode well for their future relationship. Italy’s architects were designing goods for industrial production that were neither feasible nor desirable, while her artisans continued to work within a handmade tradition that made no sense in a burgeoning industrial society. What he termed Italy’s “great tradition” of craft was facing an uncertain future, and it was up to architects to teach ‘a new way of being an artisan and a new tradition [...] teaching him these things, looking after him, fighting so that the world of craft does not end up in a blind alley in which it will suffocate, this is our task’.²

‘*Le Vie dell’Artigianato*’ (The Ways of Craft) was, as Sottsass later recalled, one of many ‘furious articles’ he wrote at the time ‘about the socially dangerous nostalgia

¹Ettore Sottsass, ‘Le Vie dell’Artigianato’, *Il Politecnico: Rivista di Cultura Contemporanea*, November 1947, 23 – 26 (p. 23).

² Sottsass, ‘Le Vie dell’Artigianato’, p. 25.

for handicraft as a metaphor for conservatism'.³ Like many of his contemporaries who had, like him, served in the Second World War, the young architect was intent on building Italy anew. In the fervour of post-war reconstruction, design, craft and industry needed to work together to ensure Italy's economic and cultural future on the international stage: 'only when artists and technicians, craft and industry get together in an open and close relationship, will many things be resolved, even the "problem" of craft'.⁴

Such fears appear to have abated by the early 1950s. From Gio Ponti's celebrated straw-seated *Superleggera* chair for Cassina from 1957 to Venini's handblown glass, the curves and craftsmanship of *la linea italiana* (the Italian line) helped to make Italy's products desirable on a global scale. Italian design became synonymous with quality craftsmanship and small-scale manufacture; the "Made in Italy" label was as much a part of the mythologising of post-war Italian design as its heroic architects and entrepreneurial manufacturers. Sottsass, who, like Ponti would be one of the most prodigious architects of the post-war era, engaged extensively with craft, designing ceramics, furniture, glass, jewellery, marble, metalwork and textiles that were featured in design and architecture magazines such as *Domus* and *Casabella*, and on display at the *Triennale di Milano*, the international exhibition of art, design and architecture held in Milan's Palazzo d'Arte from 1933.⁵ This was true from the 1950s through to the 1980s: craft skills were necessary for the realisation of Sottsass's plastic-laminate covered *Casablanca* bookcase and silver *Murmansk* fruit bowl for Memphis from 1981, and the rest of the group's postmodern provocations.

³ Sottsass in Jan Burney, *Ettore Sottsass* (London: Trefoil, 1991), p. 57.

⁴ Sottsass, 'Le Vie dell'Artigianato', p. 24.

⁵ Details of the various fields that Sottsass worked in and the different producers he worked in can be found in Emily Zaiden, 'Makers Biographies and Company Profiles' in *Ettore Sottsass: Architect and Designer*, ed. by Ronald T. Labaco (London: Merrell, 2006), pp. 125 – 142.

Central to the success of post-war Italian design was the ongoing existence of artisanal workshops in post-war Italy. As the architect Andrea Branzi has described, a ‘network of laboratories and small and medium industries of high artisanship made it possible to work with materials that, in more industrialised contexts, had disappeared from the territory, such as, for example, glass, ceramics, silver’.⁶ Even during the rapid industrialisation that took place in the early 1950s, the economic ‘miracle’ at the onset of the 1960s, and the international transition to a post-industrial society in the 1970s, Italy’s small-scale, family-run craft workshops remained the mainstay of Italian manufacturing. This was the case in the furniture industry, centred in the Brianza area in the northern Milanese hinterland. Here multiple scales of production existed alongside each other in integrated ‘industrial districts’ that would become a much-admired model of highly skilled and flexible production.⁷

To an extent this is a familiar aspect of the well-known story of Italian design, repeated extensively in the ample literature devoted to the subject.⁸ Yet it is intriguing to see, in Sottsass’s little-known article, how open-ended and uncertain the shape of craft and design’s future seemed in 1947. He makes it clear that there was no guarantee that the combination of architects and artisans would become a success, and that craft might not even survive the processes of post-war industrialisation. In any case, there would be an uneasy co-existence between the two. Seeing Sottsass not only writing about craft, but in such a pessimistic way, makes clear that craft was

⁶ Andrea Branzi in Silvana Annicchiarico, ‘Interview with Andrea Branzi’ in *Serie Fuori Serie/ Series Off Series*, ed. by Annicchiarico and Branzi (Milan: Mondadori Electa, 2009), p. 155.

⁷ Michael L. Blim, *Made in Italy: Small-Scale Industrialisation and its Consequences* (New York; London: Praeger, 1990); *Small Firms and Industrial Districts in Italy*, ed. by Edward Goodman, Julia Bamford and Peter Saynor (London and New York: Routledge, 1989); Michael J. Piore and Charles F. Sabel, *The Second Industrial Divide: Possibilities for Prosperity* (New York: Basic Books, 1984).

⁸ Two examples of this include: Albrecht Bangert, *Italian Furniture Design: Ideas, Styles, Movements* (Munich: Bangert, 1988) and Fumio Shimizu and David Palterer, *The Italian Furniture* (Tokyo: Graphic-sha, 1991), pp. 13 – 15.

an active and problematic ingredient for post-war Italian design, one to be considered and negotiated by Italy's architects.

This thesis starts with this premise: that there is a need to reassess Italy's post-war design history through its ongoing engagement with craft. I argue that craft played a fundamental role in shaping the phenomenon of Italian design from 1945 to the early 1980s and that craft remained a constant reference point for Italy's architects, producers, commentators and consumers. Craft was vital to the success of post-war Italian design, and yet for all that the stereotypical image of the centrality of craftsmanship to Italian design, the reality of its contribution has been overlooked. The familiar story is incomplete. Design and craft existed in relation to each other and the production, dissemination and consumption of design was shaped by craft, be it through embrace or negation. The ongoing existence of Italy's historically-rooted regional craft traditions may have been problematic, but as such they provided fertile terrain for renewal: Italian craft organisations such as the *Compania Nazionale Artigiana* (National Artisan Society (CNA)), *Comitato Assistenza Distribuzione Materiali Artigianato* (Committee for the Assistance and Distribution for Artists' Materials (CADMA)) and the *Ente Nazionale dell'Artigianato e delle Piccole Industrie* (National Organisation for the Crafts and Small Industries (ENAPI)), as well as competitions such as the *Selettiva di Cantù* (Cantù Selective), sought to update craft production on modern, design-led terms through collaboration with Italy's architects.

i.i Research Methodology: Craft-Based Approaches to Design History

This thesis uses an expanded definition of craft and the concept of "modern craft" to argue that craft did not just exist as a mode of production, a set of materials, or repository of skill, but as a concept that designers turned to in times of success, crisis

and renewal. I will show how craft was designed, curated, negated and continually relied upon by Italy's architects not only for the realisation of their designs but for the definition of their practice. The thesis will provide new interpretations of canonical figures and objects, and also brings to light largely unknown makers in order to show the importance of artisanal skills, techniques and creativity in the production of Italian furniture and products.

This thesis examines artisanal production in order to advance critical thinking about both craft and design, and its originality comes as much from the subjects of study as in the methodological and theoretical approaches. As the first large scale study to undertake such a revisionist account, this research will not only enable a rethink of the existing history of Italian design and contribute to scholarship on craft in post-war Italy, but also provide a paradigm for the analysis of design and craft's relationship in other geographies, a template for a craft-based approach to the study of design.

i.ii Locating Craft in Italian Design Historiography

A central objective of this thesis is to reassess the existing history of Italian design and overturn our familiarity with this narrative through craft. The near absence of craft in Italian design historiography is not surprising. The majority of accounts have favoured a discourse of industrial advance, innate Italian style and hagiography of mainly male, northern architects such as Vico Magistretti, Ponti and Sottsass.⁹ These have served to exclude stories that do not conform to a story of individual design

⁹ Burney's *Ettore Sottsass* was published as part of the 'Design Heroes Series'. See also Vanni Pasca, *Vico Magistretti: Elegance and Innovation in Post-War Italian Design*, trans. by Kate Singleton (London: Thames & Hudson, 1991) and Marco Romanelli, *Gio Ponti: A World* (Milan: Abitare Segesta, 2002).

genius. As some of the most prominent architects of the post-war period, these figures are key to this research: Ponti is held up as a patron of Italy's crafts, having been involved with firms included Richard Ginori and Fontana Arte since the 1920s, and repeatedly promoting Italy's crafts in the pages of *Domus*, the magazine he edited from its foundation in 1928.¹⁰ However my approach to Ponti and these other architects is informed by the imperative to re-examine, rather than repeat, their role in this story.

In the last fifteen years works have emerged that challenge the received picture of Italian design. This research is indebted to the design historian Penny Sparke, responsible not only for the first English-language publications on Italian design, but also for two articles that explored the potential of a craft-based approach over a decade ago.¹¹ In 1998's 'The Straw Donkey: Tourist Kitsch or Proto-Design? Craft and Design in Italy, 1945 - 1960' Sparke analyses the *exhibition Italy at Work: Her Renaissance in Design Today*, which is also the first case study in this thesis.¹² Citing the prevalence of 'indigenous, artisanal materials' and forms in design and neo-rationalist architecture's turn to the vernacular, Sparke argues that the 'Janus-faced role that craft played in the formation of Italian modern design in the years after 1945 was highly significant'.¹³

In 'Nature, Craft, Domesticity, and the Culture of Consumption: The Feminine Face of Design in Italy, 1945-70' from 1999, Sparke employed a gendered approach to identify three ways to think about the craft aspects of Italian design: first, in terms

¹⁰ For an authoritative survey of Ponti's work see Lisa Licitra Ponti, *Gio Ponti: The Complete Work 1923 - 1978*, trans. by Huw Evans (London: Thames & Hudson, 1990).

¹¹ See Penny Sparke, *Ettore Sottsass Jnr* (London: The Design Council, 1982, reprint, 1983) and Sparke, *Italian Design 1870 to the Present* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1988).

¹² Sparke, 'The Straw Donkey: Tourist Kitsch or Proto-Design? Craft and Design in Italy, 1945 - 1960', *Journal of Design History*, 11 (1998), pp. 59 - 69.

¹³ Sparke, 'The Straw Donkey', p. 62.

exemplifying Italy's ambiguous relationship with modernity; second its role in the projection of national unity in the marketplace; and third the injection of 'craft-based values into industrial design'.¹⁴ Gender issues are considered in my research as well, and the gendered nature of the design and architecture professions in post-war Italy is acknowledged. However the focus on addressing and retelling the existing narrative does largely limit this thesis to those well-known, mainly male, figures that populate this. This imbalance must be addressed in future research and has already been redressed to some extent in Italian-language publications.¹⁵

More recently, the appropriation of the vernacular in Italian design has been extensively scrutinised by the American architectural historian Michelangelo Sabatino. Focusing largely on architecture from the inter-war to post-war periods, Sabatino has explored the shifting, multiple shape of the turn to the vernacular by Italian architects such as Giuseppe Pagano and Ponti. His labelling of Italy's 'peasant builders and artisans' as the 'ghosts of the profession' is an apt description of the largely unknown artisans this thesis deals with, and I will turn to his idea of the vernacular in chapter one.¹⁶

¹⁴ Sparke, 'Nature, Craft, Domesticity and the Culture of Consumption: The Feminine Face of Design in Italy, 1945 -1970' *Modern Italy*, 4, (1999), 59 - 78 (p. 69).

¹⁵ An illustrative example of this consulted in this research is Tiziana Occeppo and Anty Pansera, eds., *Dal Merletto alla Motocicletta: Artigiane/Artiste e Designer nell'Italia del Novecento* (Milan: Silvana Editoriale, 2002).

¹⁶ Michelangelo Sabatino, 'Ghosts and Barbarians: The Vernacular in Italian Modern Architecture and Design', *Journal of Design History*, 21 (2008), 335 – 358 (p. 335). See also: Sabatino, 'The Politics of *Mediterraneità* in Italian Modernist Architecture' in *Modern Architecture and the Mediterranean: Vernacular Dialogues and Contested Identities*, ed. by Jean-François Lejeune and Sabatino (Abingdon, Oxon; New York: Routledge, 2010), pp. 41 - 63; Sabatino, *Pride in Modesty: Modernist Architecture and the Vernacular Tradition in Italy* (University of Toronto Press, 2010); Giuseppe Pagano, 'Documenting Rural Architecture' trans. by Sabatino, *Journal of Architectural Education*, 63 (2010) pp. 92 - 98.

Sabatino and Sparke are not the only scholars to have demonstrated the potential of ‘alternative’ readings of Italian design. Javier Gimeno Martínez and Grace Lees-Maffei have both conducted innovative research into the Alessi company, probing questions of gender and national identity respectively.¹⁷ Lisa Hockemeyer has contributed important work in ceramics. Her family’s collection of twentieth century Italian ceramics has been the subject of a PhD, publication and exhibition.¹⁸ Installed at London’s Estorick Collection of Modern Italian Art in 2009, *Terra Incognita: 20th Century Italian Ceramic Art* displayed many previously unseen works by figures including Lucio Fontana, Guido Gambone and Fausto Melotti. While ceramic interventions in architecture by Fontana, Melotti and Leoncillo Leonardi were considered in the catalogue, the emphasis on artists and ceramists does mean that the extensive engagement with Italy’s ceramic traditions by her architects was not – and I will discuss this to a certain extent in chapters one, three and four.¹⁹ The ceramics Hockemeyer discusses belong more to the realm of the Anglo-American category of studio crafts, and while examples of this genre will be considered, such as the glass produced by the Venetian Alfredo Barbini in the 1960s, it is only when these stories are seen to contribute to the larger research aims.

The interconnectivity between Italian politics, culture and design and craft is a key reference point for this research. Historians such as John Foot, Stephen Gundle and Robert Lumley have all accorded design a key role in the formation of modern

¹⁷Javier Gimeno Martínez, 'Women Only: Design Events Restricted to Female Designers During the 1990s', *Design Issues*, 23 (2007) pp. 17-30; Grace Lees-Maffei, 'Balancing the Object: The Reinvention of Alessi', *Things*, 6 (1997) pp. 75 - 91; Lees-Maffei, 'Italianità and Internationalism: Production, Design and Mediation at Alessi, 1976–96', *Modern Italy*, 7 (2002), pp. 37-57.

¹⁸ Lisa Hockemeyer, *The Hockemeyer Collection: 20th Century Italian Ceramic Art* (Munich: Hirmer Verlag, 2009). *Terra Incognita: 20th Century Italian Ceramic Art* was on display at the Estorick Collection of Modern Italian Art in London, 30 September - 20 December 2009.

¹⁹ Hockemeyer, pp. 24, 33, 44.

Italy.²⁰ Foot's *Milan Since the Miracle: City, Culture and Identity* devotes an entire chapter to Milan as the 'Capital of Design, Capital of Fashion' and he offers perceptive discussions of Milan-centred design phenomena such as Ponti's *Superleggera*, the *Triennale* and furniture manufacture in Brianza.²¹

When architects write about craft, as in Branzi's chapter on 'The New Handicrafts' in his *The Hot House: Italian New Wave Design* from 1984 and Enzo Mari's *Dov'è L'Artigiano* from 1981, it is about craft's existence in a design-led and industrial context.²² Both will be scrutinised in the final chapter as key primary texts on the transformation of design and craft's relationship following the radical, also known as the anti- or counter-design movement of the mid-seventies and are both taken as examples of the role that architects played in mediating this relationship in the public domain.²³

For the most part, Italian-authored histories of the country's design have demonstrated a narrative of progressive, industrial modernisation, in which craft is both an obstacle to overcome, but also a metaphor for the manufacturing quality of Italy's goods.²⁴ Recent publications have focused on the production aspects of

²⁰ John Foot, *Milan Since the Miracle: City, Culture and Identity* (Oxford: Berg, 2001), pp. 109 - 134; Stephen Gundle, 'Il Bel Paese: Art, Beauty and the Cult of Appearance' in *The Politics of Italian National Identity: A Multidisciplinary Perspective*, ed. by Gino Bedani and Bruce Haddock (Cardiff: Wales University Press, 2000), pp. 124 - 141 (p. 136); Gundle, 'Hollywood Glamour and Mass Consumption in Postwar Italy', *Journal of Cold War Studies*, 4 (2002), 95-118 (p. 117); Robert Lumley, *States of Emergency: Cultures of Revolt in Italy from 1968 to 1978* (London, New York: Verso, 1990), pp. 70 - 72.

²¹ Foot, *Milan Since the Miracle*, pp. 109 - 134.

²² Andrea Branzi, *The Hot House: Italian New Wave Design*, trans. by C.H. Evans (London: Thames and Hudson, 1984); Enzo Mari, *Dov'è l'Artigiano? / Where is the Artisan?*, trans. by Mark Roberts, (Florence: Electa, 1981).

²³ Branzi, *The Hot House*, pp. 136 - 141.

²⁴ For two examples, see Giovanni Albera and Nicolas Monti, *Italian Modern: A Design Heritage* (New York: Rizzoli, 1989); *Italian Style: Forms of Creativity*, ed. by Omar Calabrese (Milan: Skira, 1998)

Italian design have been useful here, such as 2007's *La Fabbrica del Design: Conversazioni con i Protagonisti del Design Italiano*.²⁵ In the last few years, the *Triennale di Milano* has produced a number of small exhibitions that have provided innovative interpretations of Italian design, and the long overdue opening of the *Triennale* Design Museum in 2007 and along with the establishment of branches of the *Triennale* in Bovisa, Incheon and New York is providing new platforms for the study of Italian design.²⁶

In both English and Italian, histories of Italy's craft have been uneven; Venetian glass and firms such as Venini have received considerable attention, jewellery and ceramics have been examined to a certain extent, but attention to Italy's straw work tradition has been negligible.²⁷ These histories largely operate at a low level of criticality and craft's presence is often described in terms of its existence at the service of design or its design credentials: the multi-authored *Mestieri d'Arte e Made in Italy: Giacimenti Culturali da Riscoprire* describes Italian design's success as predicated on 'Italian designers and the firms, nearly always small or artisanal, that believed in them and put their know-how at the service of an idea and a design'.²⁸

i.iii Defining Craft in Different Contexts

²⁵ *Brevetti del Design Italiano: Original Patents of Italian Design 1946–1965*, ed. by Giampiero Bosoni, Francesca Picchi, Marco Strina, and Nicola Zanardi (Milan: Electa, 2000); *Design in Italia: Dietro Le Quinte dell'Industria/ The Making of an Industry*, ed. by Stefano Casciani and Tom Sandberg (Milan: 5 Continents, 2008); *La Fabbrica del Design: Conversazioni con i Protagonisti del Design Italiano*, ed. by Paola Antonelli, Giulio Castelli and Francesca Picchi (Milan: Skira, 2007).

²⁶ Examples consulted in this research include: *I'm No Lady: When Objects Have Women's Names* ed. by Annicchiarico (Milan: Charta, 2002) and *Custom Built: The Concept of Unique in Italian Design* ed. by Annicchiarico (Milan: Charta, 2003).

²⁷ Representative examples of Italian literature on the crafts consulted: *Tra Creatività e Progettazione: Il Vetro Italiano a Milano 1906 – 1968*, ed. by Mariateresa Chirico, Giovanni Mori, Anty Pansera, and Claudio Salsi (Milan: Electa, 1998); Rosa Barovier Mentasti, *Il Vetro Veneziano* (Milan: Electa, 1982); Valerio Terraroli and Paola Franceschini, *Italian Art Ceramics 1900 - 1950* (Milan: Skira, 2006).

²⁸ Barbara Agostini and Alessandra Sarri, 'Design' in *Mestieri d'Arte e Made in Italy: Giacimenti Culturali da Riscoprire*, ed. by Paolo Colombo (Venice: Marsilio, 2009), pp. 67 - 96 (p. 69).

Thinking about design and craft requires some clarification of what definition of craft I am working with, and how to talk about craft in Italy in both conceptual and linguistic terms. It has already been made clear that this research is about more than the studio crafts or a set of fixed materials or disciplines. This thesis reflects the recent resurgence and intellectual reshaping of the concept of craft amongst practitioners and the public. The rise in scholarly interest has seen a number of conferences, publications and initiatives such as *Think Tank* advance discourse around craft history, theory and practice.²⁹ There has also been increasing attention to the relationship between design and craft, as seen in the *Journal of Design History*'s 2004 special issue 'Dangerous Liaisons: Relationships between Design, Craft and Art' and the International Committee for Design History and Design Studies' 2010 conference which had as its theme *Design and Craft: A History of Convergences and Divergences*, and which saw five papers devoted to Italy.³⁰

The craft theoretician Glenn Adamson has contributed significantly to the current development of ideas of craft that moves beyond the nostalgic or celebratory tone

²⁹ For more details, see *Think Tank: A European Initiative for the Applied Arts* <<http://www.thinktank04.eu/home.php>> [accessed 28 January 2011]. For a full list of craft publications consulted, see the bibliography. Books and conferences proceedings include: Alfoldy, Sandra, *Neo Craft: Modernity and the Crafts* (Halifax, NS: Press of the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design). *The Culture of Craft: Status and Future*, ed. by Peter Dormer (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1997); Paul Greenhalgh, *The Persistence of Craft: The Applied Arts Today* (London: A&C Black, 2002); *Obscure Objects of Desire: Reviewing the Crafts in the Twentieth Century*, ed. by Harrod (London: Crafts Council, 1997).

³⁰ 'Dangerous Liaisons: Relationships between Design, Craft and Art', special issue, *Journal of Design History*, 17 (2004); *Design and Craft: A History of Convergences and Divergences*, Brussels, 20 - 22 September (2010) The five papers were: Alberto Bassi, 'About Design for the Craft Industry: Vinicio Vianello, "Spatialist Craftsman" and Industrial Designer'; Daniela Prina, 'The Struggle of Design Criticism: The Case of the Italian Design Magazine *MODA*'; Yuko Sakurama, 'Objects and Interior Architecture – Concerning Installation and Stage Design by Gae Aulenti'; Carlo Vinti, 'Design and Craft in the Definition of the Graphic Designer: The Debate in Italian Graphi Arts Magazines.' I presented a paper entitled 'Making Memphis: Encounters between Design and Craft in Italian Postmodernism.'

that defines much craft writing.³¹ In his *Thinking Through Craft* from 2007, Adamson provided a loose, elastic definition of craft that has informed my own approach to this research.³² He suggests that we should think of craft as

an approach, an attitude, or a habit of action. Craft exists only in motion. It is a way of doing things, not a classification of objects, institutions or people. It is also a multiple: an amalgamation of interrelated core principles, which are put into relation with one another through the overarching idea of “craft”.³³

Adamson analyses craft in relation to modern art. He provides a set of five ‘interrelated core principles’ to think through craft: supplemental, material, skill, pastoral and the amateur.³⁴ Two qualifiers are added; firstly that craft is not art, and secondly that craft is perceived as inferior to art. This research argues the same for design: craft existed alongside design, and was continually constructed as different and subordinate to design. Where relevant, I will use these ‘core principles’, alongside the other theoretical concepts adopted and I will also propose further key concepts for craft’s relationship to design; amongst them craft’s equation with luxury, place and the primitive.

Charting Italian architects’ definitions of craft and attending to the specificity of Italian craft discourse occurs throughout the thesis. An interview with Branzi in June 2008 confirmed the importance of recognising this different national context:

In England I would say that there is a great tradition regarding the culture of craft, beginning with the English reformists [...] [William] Morris and

³¹ As my principal PhD supervisor Adamson, alongside my additional supervisors Martina Margetts and Tanya Harrod has been highly influential particularly in the formative stages of this research.

³² Glenn Adamson, *Thinking Through Craft*, (Oxford; New York: Berg, 2007).

³³ Adamson, *Thinking Through Craft*, p. 5.

³⁴ Adamson, *Thinking Through Craft*, p. 4.

everything which is very interesting, and which also has to do with Neo-Gothicism, Eclecticism and the idea that craft is evidence of a civilisation that has retained humanistic values in manual labour. But we have a different vision [...] not just from the post-war, we have a different vision from the Renaissance and that is that the craftsman is, in any case, an instrument at the disposal of the designer.³⁵

Branzi's distinction between craft in Italy and Britain is important to hold onto. The architect negates any of the Arts & Crafts movement's ideas on the moral superiority of the crafts and ideological difference between artisanal and industrial production.³⁶ Instead, in Italy the legacy of the Renaissance lives on in the separation between the figure of the designer and architect from the artisan, who exists at the service of the designer.

In 2010 Adamson made another contribution to the study of craft with *The Craft Reader*, the first "modern craft" anthology.³⁷ Two Italian texts were included: Branzi's 'The New Handicrafts' and an excerpt from Salvatore Ferragamo's 1957 *Shoemaker of Dreams: The Autobiography of Salvatore Ferragamo* (which I will discuss in chapters four and three respectively).³⁸ The Brazilian art and design historian Rafael Cardoso's 'Craft Versus Design: Moving Beyond a Tired Dichotomy' is also worth mentioning here: Cardoso charts the debates that have surrounded craft's relation to design, industry and the arts from the onset of

³⁵ Andrea Branzi, personal interview, 23 June 2008. (APPENDIX I)

³⁶ For a concise but informative account of the ideas and legacy of the Arts & Crafts movement, see Dormer, Peter, Tanya Harrod, Rosemary Hill and Barley Roscoe, *Arts & Crafts to Avant-Garde: Essays on the Crafts from 1880 to the Present* (London: Southbank Centre, 1992)

³⁷ *The Craft Reader*, ed. by Adamson (New York; Oxford: Berg, 2010).

³⁸ Branzi, 'The New Handicrafts' and Salvatore Ferragamo, 'Shoemaker of Dreams' in *The Craft Reader*, ed. by Adamson, pp. 244 – 252, 577 – 581. Ferragamo's extract was originally published in Salvatore Ferragamo, *Shoemaker of Dreams: The Autobiography of Salvatore Ferragamo* (Livorno: Sillabe, 1957, reprint 1985), pp. 40 – 41, 95 – 98, 101 – 106, 117 – 118.

modernity onwards.³⁹ Much of this was played out linguistically; from the ‘ancient’ distinction between the mechanical and liberal arts, to the synonymity of the terms ‘artisan’ and ‘craftsman’ between the sixteenth and nineteenth century in English, French and Portuguese that gave way to an idea of the craftsman as a producer of individual, manual expression.⁴⁰

A word on Italian terminology is important here. In common usage, *artigianato* is variously translated as craft, handicrafts and as craftsmanship in its noun form. Individual chapters will explore the terminology for words such as skill, design and drawing. *Artigiano* is used to describe both artisan and crafts practitioner. When deemed necessary, periodicals like *Domus* and *Zodiac* would distinguish the apparently more creative *artisti-artigiani* (artist-artisans) like Fontana and Melotti from more manual *artigiano-esecutore* (artisan-executor).⁴¹ This is evident in a 1953 edition of the Italian language *Melzi* dictionary, which describes an *artigiano* as someone who ‘exercises a manual or mechanical art’.⁴² There is a further socio-cultural and linguistic distinction to be made here: while I do discuss the presence of craft skills and workers in the industrial context, I near-exclusively focus on workshop-based *artigiani* rather than factory-based *operai* (workers). While this will impact on the relations between the architects and artisans discussed, my focus is not on the political aspect of this relationship, but rather the products that resulted. Finally, this research mostly deals with *architetti* (architects), not *progettisti*

³⁹ Rafael Cardoso, ‘Craft Versus Design: Moving Beyond a Tired Dichotomy’ in *The Craft Reader*, ed. by Adamson, (New York; Oxford: Berg, 2010), pp. 321 - 340.

⁴⁰ Cardoso, ‘Craft Versus Design’ in *The Craft Reader*, ed. by Adamson, pp. 322 - 331.

⁴¹ Gio Ponti, ‘Handicraft e Cadma. Una Occasione che Può Diventare Storica’, *Domus*, [n.d] 1948, 32 - 36 (p. 34). Giulio Carlo Argan has discussed the idea of difference between the ‘artigiano-artista’ and ‘artigiano-esecutore’: Argan, ‘Points of View: An Enquiry on Handicrafts (Où en sommes nous-avec l’Artisanat?)’, *Zodiac*, 1959, n.p.

⁴² *Melzi il Nuovissimo Dizionario Italiano*, 34th edn (Milan: Vallardi, 1953), p. 91.

(designers) as there was no discrete design pedagogy until the early 1980s.⁴³

What is central to all of the texts discussed so far is an understanding of craft in the modern condition and its necessary co-existence with art, design, architecture and industry. This is “modern craft”, a key theoretical concept of this research.

i.iv The Concept of “Modern Craft”

This thesis responds to the call for research into the ‘history, theory and practice’ of “modern craft”.⁴⁴ In 2008 Adamson, and fellow craft historians Edward Cooke and Tanya Harrod, continued their advancement of craft scholarship by launching *The Journal of Modern Craft*.⁴⁵ Cooke credits his compatriot Bruce Metcalf with being one of the first to discuss craft with this “modern” epithet.⁴⁶ Metcalf’s 2002 article ‘Contemporary Craft: A Brief Overview’ uses this term to describe the craft that has emerged as the consequence of two moments of redefinition in Europe and North America; the first during the Industrial Revolution, the second in the post-war era.⁴⁷ While the latter refers to the post-war studio crafts movement and the crafts revival

⁴³ In 1960 the Istituto d’Arte di Venezia (IUAV) set up the first degree in industrial design, however it was closed after lack of recognition from the Ministry of Public Education. The same occurred with the course set up at Florence’s Istituto Superiore per le Industrie Artistiche in 1962. In 1982 Maria Grazia Mazzochi of *Domus*, Giulio Castelli of Kartell and Andbrea Branzi set up the first postgraduate course in industrial design at the newly formed Domus Academy in Milan, and in 1993 the Politecnico di Milano established the first undergraduate degree in industrial design. See Agostini and Sarri, ‘Design’ in *Mestieri d’Arte e Made in Italy*, ed. by Colombo, p. 91.

⁴⁴ ‘Modern Craft: History, Theory and Practice’ is the title of the AHRC Collaborative Doctoral Award which has funded this research.

⁴⁵ Amongst their publications are: Edward S. Cooke Jr, ‘Modern Craft and the American Experience’, *American Art*, 21 (2007), pp. 2-9; Harrod, *The Crafts in Britain in The Twentieth Century* (New Haven; London: Published for The Bard Graduate Center for Studies in the Decorative Arts by Yale University Press, 1999)

⁴⁶ Cooke Jr, p. 9.

⁴⁷ Bruce Metcalf, ‘Contemporary Craft: A Brief Overview’ in *Exploring Contemporary Craft: History, Theory & Critical Writing*, ed. by Jean Johnson, (Toronto: Coachhouse Books and Harbourfront Centre, 2002), pp. 13 - 23.

of the 1960s and 1970s - both of which were largely external to Italy - as a time period it clearly resonates with this research.

Like Metcalf, the *Journal* editors identify the emergence of “modern craft” with the process of industrialisation. This was when ‘the handmade, as a concept, a practice or an actual object’ became ‘something worth discussing’:

Only once craft was no longer the basis of the economy did its identity become unclear. At this point, one could argue, it became a discursive rather than a merely descriptive term; and, like any subject of discourse, it was now attended by the anxieties, hopes, failures and insights that make any cultural phenomenon worthy of study.⁴⁸

“Modern craft” could be thought of as an imported concept, one as foreign to the post-war Italian situation as the Anglo-American Arts & Crafts movement. Sottsass however opens his *Il Politecnico* article with a remarkably similar premise: ‘the “problem” of craft, so current and alive in Italy, was born together with the machine’.⁴⁹ The architect was speaking at a time when the mechanisation of production seemed inevitable, yet with Italy’s partial and fragmented industrialisation, craft remained an active ingredient, or rather “problem” for Italy’s architects as it compromised the possibility for Italy even to be seen as modern. Sottsass and the first generation of post-war architects’ prediction of full industrialisation never occurred. Instead, Italy became characterised by what Branzi, following the Italian philosopher Gianni Vattimo, has called a ‘weak’ or ‘diffused’

⁴⁸ Adamson, Cooke Jr and Harrod, ‘Editorial Introduction’, *The Journal of Modern Craft*, 1 (2008), 5 – 11 (p. 6).

⁴⁹ Sottsass, ‘Le Vie dell’Artigianato’, p. 22.

modernity, a landscape of multiple, hybrid modes of production that would be exploited in the emergence of postmodern thought in the late 1970s.⁵⁰

i.v The Emphasis on Production

The making of things is central to any craft-based approach, and the production story is the foundation of this research. In some ways this goes against the tide of recent histories of design and the decorative arts, which still resonate with the shift from production to consumption orientated studies in the 1980s.⁵¹ While this shift was understandable, the *Journal of Modern Craft* editors lament that this consumption-orientated turn meant that ‘somewhere along the line, interest in production and the politics of work got lost’.⁵²

This is not to say that the role of consumption and dissemination is not of importance here. For most people Italian design was only experienced through magazines, exhibitions and shop windows, and not first-hand in the domestic sphere. In part this was a question of the luxury status of these goods, but it was also due to the export orientation of Italian design. Exhibitions such as *Italy at Work* and *Italy: The New Domestic Landscape: Problems and Achievements in Italian Design* held at the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) in 1972 acted as arbiters of Italian design in America, not just reflecting but actually shaping design practice in Italy and craft’s

⁵⁰ See Burkhardt and Cristina Morozzi, *Andrea Branzi* (Paris: Éditions Dis Voir), p. 9; Gianni Vattimo, *The End of Modernity: Nihilism and Hermeneutics in Post-Modern Culture*, trans. by Jon R. Snyder, (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1988)

⁵¹ For an overview of this shift and examples of publications, see Grace Lees-Maffei, ‘The Production-Consumption-Mediation Paradigm’, *Journal of Design History*, 22 (2009), 351 – 376 (pp. 360 – 365).

⁵² Adamson, Cooke Jr and Harrod, p.8.

role in it.⁵³ Consumption will also be considered in another way: it was only in the early 1960s that Italy emerged as a mass consumer society, and the backlash against this consumerism bred a high level of disquiet amongst architects and critics alike. As chapter three will demonstrate, for Mari and Sottsass the attempt to negate the fetishisation of the design product led to a scrutiny of the craftsmanship involved in its production.

This research investigates a number of different aspects of production. It examines the production stories behind familiar objects such as Ponti's *Superleggera* and Franco Albini's *Margherita* chair, and the Memphis furniture. In part, this serves to uncover the involvement of artisans and demonstrate how they were essential participants in design innovation and production. This research however does not seek to substitute one 'hero', the designer, with another - the artisan. Instead it looks to examine the politics of production to examine the relations between architects, artisans, entrepreneurs and consumers.

Here we can make reference to skill, another of Adamson's five 'principles' and a much-discussed subject amongst writers about the crafts.⁵⁴ Skill is a core concept in this thesis: what happens to skill is considered throughout the four chapters, which chart the changing levels of industrialisation in the post-war period. In the three volumes of *Das Kapital* Karl Marx presents craft as a manufacturing stage superseded by industrial production, but he recognised that craft does not disappear in the factory setting.⁵⁵ Industrialisation did not necessarily eradicate skill in the

⁵³ *Italy: The New Domestic Landscape: Problems and Achievements in Italian Design* was curated by Emilio Ambasz and held at MoMA, New York from May 26 to September 11 1972.

⁵⁴ Illustrative examples cited in this thesis include: Dormer, *The Art of the Maker: Skill and Meaning in Art, Craft and Design* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1994); David Pye, *The Nature and Art of Workmanship* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968) and *Skill: Papers and Exhibition* (Gmunden: Think Tank, 2008).

⁵⁵ Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, ed. by Frederick Engels and trans. by Samuel Moore and Edward Aveling, 3 vols, 3rd edition (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1983).

production of design, but did actively frame it as problematic, as John Roberts has recently demonstrated in *The Intangibilities of Form: Skill and Deskilling in Art After the Readymade*.⁵⁶ Roberts's Marxist analysis of the conceptual and manual labour involved in the artwork reveals a continual process of de- and re-skilling in twentieth century art, and shows how thinking about production was vital to artistic practice. One of the aims of this research is to demonstrate that the same was true of Italian design practice.

Roberts' theorisation of production and his assertion of its occurrence within a larger, capitalist, context affirms the ongoing validity of Marxist theory in art and design history, which has informed the critical approach adopted in this thesis. While this thesis does not adopt a strictly Marxist approach, it does closely attend to the relations in the sphere of production, and trace the relationship between production, dissemination and consumption. In particular, and in line with a desire to use critical sources that come out of the Italian context, the writings of the early twentieth century Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci have been useful for their conceptualisation of the relationship between base and superstructure.⁵⁷ Unlike more orthodox Marxist theorists, Gramsci did not see the cultural superstructure as merely a reflection of the productive base, but described a dialectical relationship between the world of production and the superstructural level of civil society, and connected their realities with the concept of hegemony. The dominance of the hegemonic group - the ruling

⁵⁶ John Roberts, *The Intangibilities of Form: Skill and Deskilling in Art After the Readymade* (London: New York, Verso, 2007).

⁵⁷ Antonio Gramsci, *Antonio Gramsci Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, ed. and trans. by Quinton Howe and Geoffrey Nowell Smith (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1971); Gramsci, *Selections from Cultural Writings of Antonio Gramsci*, ed. by David Forgacs and Geoffrey Nowell-Smith and trans. by William Boelhower (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1985); (London: New York, Verso, 2007).

class - is supported and maintained by what Gramsci called the ‘functionaries’ of the superstructure: the intellectuals.⁵⁸

In the *Quaderni del Carcere* (Prison Notebooks), which were published sporadically from the 1940s, he describes two types of intellectuals: the ‘traditional’ and the ‘organic’.⁵⁹ It is the latter that is of interest here: the ‘organic’ intellectual, who is not linked with any particular class or profession, but instead by his ‘function’ as an intellectual, which consists of ‘active participation in practical life, as constructor, organiser, “permanent persuader”’.⁶⁰ Gramsci gives an example of an ‘organic’ intellectual:

The entrepreneur [...] represents a higher level of social elaboration, already characterised by a certain directive [...] and technical (i.e. intellectual) capacity: he must have a certain technical capacity, not only in the limited sphere of his activity and initiative but in other spheres as well, at least in those which are closest to economic production. He must be an organiser of masses of men; he must be organiser of the “confidence” of investors in his business, of the customers for his product, etc.⁶¹

Gramsci conceived the intellectual in terms of his revolutionary potential, and my employment of this concept does not carry these political associations. Nevertheless, his concept of the intellectual has been very useful to this research, particularly when conceiving the significant impact of well known architects such as Branzi, Ponti and Sottsass on Italian design and its subsequent historiography, and this thesis demonstrates how Gramsci’s conceptual of intellectuals can be more broadly, and

⁵⁸ Gramsci, *Prison Notebooks*, p. 12.

⁵⁹ Gramsci, *Prison Notebooks*, p. 8.

⁶⁰ Gramsci, *Prison Notebooks*, p. 10.

⁶¹ Gramsci, *Prison Notebooks*, p. 5.

less politically, applied.⁶² As already noted, these prominent figures were not only active as architects but also editors, writers and curators and therefore played a role not just in shaping design practice, but also its representation and interpretation. The output of these intellectuals - exhibitions, objects, magazines or advertisements - constitute what Gramsci called the ‘material structure of ideology’, and where relevant to the research objectives this has been highlighted in the thesis.⁶³

Furthermore, as chapter two demonstrates, conceiving as intellectuals those artisans who owned furniture companies, and therefore played a key role in determining not only what objects were put into production, but also their appearance and manufacture, asserts makers as active participants in the formation of Italian design.

It is important to make a distinction between my employment of Gramscism as a critical tool and Italian architects’ own use of Gramsci. Many architects were members of the PCI, and involved in the protests of the late 1960s. As the interview with Branzi included in the appendix indicates, many architects were heavily influenced by left-wing politics, even if political leanings among these figures varied greatly.⁶⁴ However, as chapter four discusses, while the widespread dissemination of the *Quaderni* in the 1960s saw Gramsci become a key reference point for young architects and students, association with the PCI saw his ideas rejected in the rise of the New Left and advent of insurrectionary autonomist Marxism in the late 1960s. In this period however, Gramsci would remain a key reference point for politicised members of Italy’s anthropology profession, as the references to Ernesto Martino and

⁶² For a discussion of the influence of Gramsci and the idea of the intellectual in post-war Italy, see David Ward, ‘Intellectuals, Culture and Power in Modern Italy’ in *The Cambridge Companion to Modern Italian Culture*, ed. by Zygmunt G. Bara!ski and Rebecca J. West (Cambridge, New York; Oakleigh, Vic; Madrid, Capetown: Cambridge University Press, 2001), pp. 265 – 281.

⁶³ Gramsci, *Cultural Writings* pp. 389, 395 - 422.

⁶⁴ Branzi, personal interview, 23 June 2008. (APPENDIX I)

Alberto Mario Cirese in chapters three and four demonstrate. In order to most accurately represent this complex and often contradictory political landscape, each chapter endeavours to use those writers and thinkers referenced at the time by both architects and critics. Writers like Gillo Dorfles and Umberto Eco contributed to *Domus* and *Casabella*, and the influence of the ideas of Roland Barthes, and Claude Lévi-Strauss can all be seen in the practice of and discourse surrounding Italian design in the sixties and seventies onwards.⁶⁵

ii. Primary Research Sources

The primary sources used in this research fall into five main categories: archives; exhibition catalogues; interviews; newspapers and periodicals; objects of design and craft. Wherever possible I have analysed objects first hand in private and personal collections, the whereabouts though of many objects discussed are unknown and exist only in photographs. I conducted my research following the order of the four chapters, and employed the same research methods for all of these. Research for each chapter began with comprehensive surveys of *Domus* and *Casabella*, the two most prominent magazines of the period, of the period under consideration. This process led to the identification of key individuals and archives of interest, which were then contacted for potential research trips.

Many of the primary sources for this research are located in Italy, and eight trips were conducted over the course of this research. Most of these were to Milan and Brianza, but I also visited Florence, Parma and Venice. Ease of access, usability, and the amount and comprehensiveness of the material encountered varied hugely.

⁶⁵ See chapters three and four for the specific influence of these writers. Influential texts include: Roland Barthes, *Writing Degree Zero*, trans. by Annette Lavers and Colin Smith (London: Jonathan Cape, 1967); *Kitsch: The World of Bad Taste*, ed. by Gillo Dorfles (New York: Universe, 1969). Umberto Eco, *Apocalittici e Integrati: Comunicazioni di Massa e Teorie della Cultura di Massa*, 7th edn (Milan: Bompiani, 1988) and Eco, *Opera Aperta* (Milan: Bompiani, 1962), Claude Lévi-Strauss, *The Savage Mind*, trans. by George Weidenfeld and Nicholson Ltd (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1966, reprint. 1972).

Archives of companies, exhibitions, individuals and institutions were all utilised.⁶⁶ Company archives consulted were: Bonacina, Danese (which has two separate archives), Salvatore Ferragamo and Kartell.⁶⁷ The following archives of individual architects and artisans were visited: Alfredo Barbini, Michele De Lucchi, Ugo La Pietra, Gio Ponti, and the model maker Giovanni Sacchi.⁶⁸ Material relating to Alessandro Mendini were consulted at Parma's *Centro Studi e Archivio della Comunicazione* (CSAC). The *Archivio Storico della Selettiva* at the *Museo Galleria del Design e dell'Arredamento* in Cantù provided catalogues and press cuttings for the *Selettiva di Cantù*, a design competition discussed in chapter two. Repeated visits to the *Archivio Storico della Triennale di Milano* provided access to original photographs, press cuttings, exhibition catalogues and proceedings for conferences organised alongside each *Triennale*.

In Britain, the Manchester City Art Gallery holds material on *Modern Italian Design*, an exhibition organised by the CNA and held at the Museum in 1956. The Design Council Archive at the University of Brighton has documents on tours to Italy in the late 1950s and early 1960s that reveal the personalities and places considered essential to visit. Object files from the V&A Museum's collection provided details about materials, makers and manufacture, as well as the level of interest in objects such as Sottsass's *Carlton* bookcase and the Alessi *Tea & Coffee Piazza* project from the early 1980s. In New York, the Brooklyn Museum Archives yielded invaluable

⁶⁶ In addition to those consulted, the following archives were contacted that due to reasons of availability, accessibility, amount and nature of holdings or amenability were not visited: Artemide, Bitossi, Cleto Munari, Poltronova, Rossi & Arcandi, Valigeria Franzi, Venini, Vetreria Murano Arte, Vico Magistretti and Vistosi.

⁶⁷ The Danese label has been bought by a number of companies over the years. The archives are split in two: the Association Jacqueline Vodoz and Bruno Danese, the firm's founders holds the majority of material, while the firm's current headquarters hold photographic material and some catalogues.

⁶⁸ Despite a successful visit to view the catalogue of the holdings of the Gio Ponti archives in 2008, I have not received any of the material requested from the archive.

material on the *Italy at Work* exhibition. The library and archives at MoMA proved useful for background reading.

Oral history provided a key method for primary research, and its employment here builds on the legacy of Italy's significant contribution to this field, as the reference to Giovanni Contini's work in chapter three indicates.⁶⁹ Interviews with Italian architects, artisans, and historians filled in historical gaps and provided answers to previously unasked questions. Given the period of study under question, many of the architects involved are unfortunately no longer alive. Many however are not only still practising but agreed to my request for an interview. Where possible, translated transcripts are included as appendices at the back of the thesis.⁷⁰ These interviews provided their own challenges: renowned architects demonstrated a tendency to reel off lengthy, near-rehearsed autobiographies.

The architects interviewed were: Sergio Asti, Gae Aulenti, Andrea Branzi, Ugo La Pietra, Enzo Mari and Tobia Scarpa. I was able to obtain interviews with two furniture makers - Renzo Brugola and Pierluigi Ghianda - and informal conversations and interviews with family members who were involved in their parent's work either at the time, or are today: Flavio and Oceania Barbini, Antonia and Mario Bonacina, Letizia Frailich Ponti, and Marta Sala of Azucena. The design historian Anty Pansera provided a critical perspective on design and craft, and the journalist Barbara Radice provided crucial insights on her involvement with Memphis and Sottsass, who was her partner from the late 1970s. Conversations with glass specialists Reino Leifkes at the V&A and Anthony Harris at the RCA provided key technical details on Venetian glassware.

⁶⁹ Chapter three makes reference to the following work: Giovanni Contini, 'Creativity at Work: Miners and Quarrymen in Tuscany', *Oral History*, 37 (2009), pp. 64 - 70.

⁷⁰ Transcripts, in original and translated forms, of the following are included in the appendix: Branzi, Renzo Brugola, Letizia Frailich Ponti, Pierluigi Ghianda, Ugo La Pietra, Anty Pansera and Barbara Radice. See (APPENDIX I.) Those not included were either because recordings were not successful, or the material was not relevant to this research. Together with Adamson, I also had an informal, unrecorded interview with Jane Dillon with on 24 May 2008.

In addition to these oral histories, email correspondence with experts in a number of fields answered questions regarding materials and manufacture, notably Giuliano Parini of the glue manufacturer Collanti Parini and Alessio Sarri, the ceramist who made Matteo de Thun's ceramics for Memphis.⁷¹ The Memphis section contributes to and benefits from the forthcoming V&A exhibition *Postmodernism: Style & Subversion 1970 to 1990*, and correspondence between Adamson, the co-curator alongside Jane Pavitt, and George Sowden have provided useful material for the final chapter.

In addition to archive-located articles and press cuttings, I conducted comprehensive surveys of the two most prominent magazines of the period, *Domus* and *Casabella*, from the first post-war issues of 1946 up to 1983.⁷² Several magazines were set up during the period under concern, and runs of *Casa Vogue*, *Interni*, *Modo*, *Ottagano* and *Rassegna* were consulted when available. American and British periodicals provided international perspectives; *Design*, *Interiors*, *Crafts* and *Craft Horizons* were all consulted where relevant. I have conceived of these periodicals as both primary and secondary sources; *Domus* in particular played a significant role not just in shaping practice at the time of Ponti's tenure as editor, but in constructing the history of Italian design since then.

iii. Research Parameters and the Case Study Approach

This research examines the shifting and multiple role that craft played in design from 1945, the end of the Second World War, to 1981, the year that the Milan-based

⁷¹ Given the paucity of publications on Sarri, I have included his lengthy and hugely informative transcript as part of the appendix.

⁷² Three issues of *Casabella* appeared in 1946, and the magazine was relaunched as *Casabella-Continuità* in 1954 under Ernesto N. Rogers, a title it would retain until Gian Antonio Bernasconi took over from Rogers in 1965, when it went back to *Casabella*. For consistency, I have referred to the magazine as *Casabella* throughout.

international design collective Memphis was launched. It looks outside of these dates as necessary; the ambiguity of both modernism and neo-classicism's relationship with Fascism contributed to their troubled post-war condition, and the older architects considered in this research were educated and worked under the regime, a continuity that deserves fuller enquiry.⁷³ Memphis continued into the mid 1980s, and the conclusion offers a brief reflection on what happened next.

Book-ended by these two key dates of 1945 and 1981, the thesis spans an undeniably lengthy time period, but one that is vital to the aims and integrity of the research. 1945 did not just mark the end of a war: it was only following the Second World War that Italy was seen to emerge as a modern design nation and the design of the 1930s is referred to instead as 'proto-design'.⁷⁴ Ending with Memphis is equally important: this was a group that was not only led by Sottsass, an architect who is as significant to this thesis at its beginning as at its end. Memphis also actively commented on the design and craft traditions of the fifties, sixties and seventies and to an extent brings this research full circle, demonstrating the cohesiveness of design from the 1940s to 1980s in Italy. Furthermore, given the aim of this research to reassess the existing picture of Italian post-war design, it employs the timeframe most commonly employed in its historiography. In part this is because the early 1980s was when the first histories of Italian design were written, such as Branzi's *The Hot House*.

The same reasoning applies to the focus on Milan; the city and its surroundings were the centre of design consumption, education, exhibitions, practice, production and publications in Italy. Historic centres of Italy's craft tradition are also considered when relevant to this story of design: chapter three, which deals with the concept of luxury in the 1960s expands the geographical gaze to consider Italy's historical

⁷³ For an examples of this, see Diane Ghidardo, 'Italian Architects and Fascist Politics: An Evaluation of the Rationalist' Role in Regime Building', *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians*, 39 (1980), pp. 109 – 227.

⁷⁴ Sparke, *Italian Design 1870 to the Present*, p. 41; Vittorio Gregotti, 'Editorial' *Rassegna*, 4, October 1980 in *Custom-Built*, ed. by Annicchiarico, pp. 4 – 5.

centres of craft production - Venice, Florence and Carrara - all of which were of interest to a variety of design disciplines in this period. Furthermore, many architects are not from Milan - however their decision to study and work in the city only testifies to its importance to the design story.

The broad chronological timeframe necessitated a research method that would meet the requirements of both depth and breadth. I therefore employed a case study approach to drill down into stories of individual objects, personalities, places, events, exhibitions and phenomena, which are contextualised by wider reflections on the economic, socio-political cultural phenomena at the time that further explain these episodes. Potential case studies were identified from the planning of the research at the outset, and additions or modifications to those planned were carried out during the primary research process. I selected those case studies that seemed most revealing to this research: for the most part stories seemingly known, or at least mentioned, in existing histories. When this was not the case, as with Barbini, it was always because I felt that these stories contributed to the overall research aims. This thesis does not pretend in any way to be comprehensive, and the omissions are felt; jewellery and textiles in particular are two areas on which I hope to conduct future research.

iv. Chapter Structure

The thesis is organised into four chapters. Together, they follow a broadly chronological outline; individually, each one addresses a particular theme or set of interrelated themes. All are embedded in the socio-cultural, economic and political context of the time.

Chapter one focuses on two exhibitions of Italian craft and design in the immediate post-war period, one that took place on American soil, the other in Italy. The first section focuses on *Italy at Work*, which toured museums across the United States between 1950 and 1953 and was one of a number of American initiatives aimed at rehabilitating Italy's craft industries and assist her post-war reconstruction. The second section opens in May 1951, when the ninth *Triennale di Milano* opened in Milan and attempted to project an image of a renewed, modern Italy. The appropriation of craft in both exhibitions was heavily conditioned by the politics of the period; in *Italy at Work*, it was the Cold War and the perceived dangers of both Italian communism and fascism; in the *Triennale*, a highly polarised left and right in Italian national politics. In addition to introducing the larger context of post-war Italy and its design and craft culture, the chapter argues for America's involvement to be understood as an attempt to shape the design and craft industries, and uses the differences between the two shows not only to show up the disparity between the desired shape of Italy's crafts in both countries, but also the disunity between the arts in general in these early post-war years.

Chapter two looks at attempts to modernise and redesign Italy's craft tradition through an analysis of furniture in and around Milan during Italy's burgeoning international design success in the 1950s. It is divided into three parts. The first is an analysis of one of the "icons" of Italian design, charting the development of Ponti's *Superleggera* chair and its relationship with its rustic precedent, a ladderback chair from the Ligurian town of Chiavari. I argue that the *Superleggera* represented a challenge to the ongoing artisanal production of furniture, an argument pursued in the other two sections, both of which focus on the town of Cantù in Brianza. Cantù's specialisation in handmade reproduction furniture was seen as problematic in both design and economic terms. This led in 1955 to the *Selettiva di Cantù*, a competition that attempted to harness the region's wealth of craft skill and direct it towards a

modern design aesthetic. Open to national and international architects, this case study uses objects and design drawings to examine the close dialogue between architects and artisans in the design and production process. The last section examines how this relationship is formed at the level of education, in a comparison between Cantù's *Scuola d'Arte Applicata all'Industria* and the *Politecnico di Milano*, the Milanese architectural school where the majority of the architects discussed in this research trained.

Chapter three covers the Italy of the boom years, covering its explosive emergence as an industrial, mass consumer society from the end of the 1950s to the first half of the 1960s. A number of interrelated concepts are employed in this chapter; luxury, kitsch and taste, *italianità* ('Italian-ness') and place. It is largely divided up by materials, and it broadens the geographic scope, looking at glass production in Venice and considering Sardinian crafts, Florentine leather and Carrara marble before focusing back on Milan. It looks at how disparate materials like marble and plastic got caught up in the pervasive consumerist logic of luxury in the early 1960s, and how architects like Mari tried to design against this. The chapter closes with the first wave of radical design, otherwise known as counter or anti-design, in which architects such as Sottsass and the surrealist duo Officina Undici designed objects that rejected the fine workmanship and expensive materials that typified the luxury commodity.

The fourth and final chapter is divided into two parts. The first, larger section opens with the *Italy: The New Domestic Landscape*. As with *Italy at Work*, this exhibition was a key international arbiter of Italian design and its curator, the Argentinean architect Emilio Ambasz, similarly imposed his own design and political ideology on the Italian exhibits. He outlines the manifold strategies being undertaken by Italy's

radical designers, which serve as a backdrop in this chapter that focuses on those designers who turned to craft as a site of alterity in the highly contestatory early 1970s. All are recognised as seminal moments in Italy's radical design movement, and yet none have received any in-depth critical exploration. These are: *Autoprogettazione*, Mari's project of political self-production; *tecnica povera*, the architect Riccardo Dalisi's investigation into the primitive creativity of Neapolitan street children; Global Tools, the short-lived collective that is seen as the apotheosis of Italian radicalism; and finally Gaetano Pesce's collaboration with the experimental Cassina offshoot *Braccio di Ferro*. The second part of the chapter looks at the two of the most prominent manifestations of postmodernism in Italian design, known in Italy as *Nuovo Design* (New Design): Studio Alchymia and Memphis. Both represent attempts to change the shape of design and craft's relationship, and propose a new artisanal-industrial hybridity in the production of their designs. Craft's role in shaping Italian design did not stop in 1981, and the conclusion does briefly consider what happened to craft and design next.

Together, these four chapters provide a picture of craft's role in the shaping of Italian design, and a set of foundations to build on. In the future, I aim to conduct further research into the origins of this relationship in the early twentieth century, its legacy and transformation after this period, as well as probe further into the period in question. In addition, this research aims to provide not only a narrative of one story of design and craft's intimate and complex co-existence, but also a model for their study in other contexts. What follows here however is all about craft and design in post-war Italy. At times existing in opposition, at other times in collaboration, by locating craft in the practice and production of design, I aim to show that the history of post-war Italian design cannot be truly understood without taking into account the role of craft practitioners, processes and principles.

Chapter 1: Exhibiting the Handmade in Italy and America: Craft and the Birth of Post-War Italian Design, 1945 - 1954.

Introduction

In November 1950 *Italy at Work: Her Renaissance in Design Today* opened at New York's Brooklyn Museum (*See Illustration 1*). On display were over two thousand five hundred examples of contemporary Italian craft and design alongside five room sets designed by architects including Carlo Mollino and Gio Ponti. Enjoying both critical and popular acclaim, *Italy at Work* spent the next three years travelling to eleven other museums across the United States, closing at the Museum of the Rhode Island School of Design in November 1953.¹

Primarily American conceived, funded and organised, *Italy at Work* aimed to boost Italy's post-war reconstruction by presenting her handmade wares to the American consumer. Despite the word 'design' in the title, craft materials and techniques dominated the display. In the context of the USA's economic primacy, Italy's production was being reconstructed along American lines, her fledgling field of industrial design marginalised in favour of an image of a craft nation, one emphasised in the handmade aesthetic of the exhibition's catalogue cover.

In May 1951, just as *Italy at Work* was embarking on the second leg of its tour, the ninth *Triennale di Milano Esposizione Internazionale delle Arti Decorative e Industriali Moderne e dell'Architettura Moderna* (The Milan Triennial International Exposition of Modern Decorative and Industrial Arts and Modern Architecture) opened in Milan (*See Illustration 2*). With its theme the "Unity of the Arts", the architect and artist organisers attempted to project an image of post-war modernity; a

¹ After opening at the Brooklyn Museum, the exhibition travelled to the Art Institute of Chicago, the De Young Museum, San Francisco, the Portland Art Museum, the Minneapolis Institute of Arts, the Museum of Fine Arts in Houston, Texas, the City Art Museum, St. Louis, the Toledo Art Museum, the Albright Art Gallery in Buffalo, New York, the Carnegie Art Museum, Pittsburgh, the Baltimore Museum of Art and finally the Museum of Art at the Rhode Island School of Design. 'Institutional Sponsors', *Italy at Work: Her Renaissance in Design Today* (Baltimore, Maryland: Baltimore Museum of Art, 1950), p. 7.



Illustration 1. Catalogue cover for *Italy: at Work: Her Renaissance in Design Today*, which opened at Brooklyn Museum in November 1950.



Illustration 2. Poster for the Ninth Triennale di Milano, reprinted in *Interiors* magazine in 1951. The official symbol of the 1951 *Triennale* to the lower right was designed by Marcello Nizzoli. Poster designed by Ernst Scheidegger.

contrast with the former reflected in the bright, geometric style of its poster. However the clarity of their message was clouded by internal conflicts that reflected Italy's wider political turmoil. Although industrial design was present, craft remained the mainstay of Italy's products shown and was given multiple roles by those with differing visions for the nation's post-war design and architecture.

Two exhibitions, one in Italy, one in America, each offering contemporaneous yet contrasting views of design and craft in the early 1950s. *Italy at Work* and the Triennale offer the opportunity to examine how this relationship was being constructed; the first as seen by one of its key markets, the second a home-grown vision. In order to understand the decisions behind and reception of both these exhibitions, this chapter first considers the larger socioeconomic and political picture of the immediate post-war period and in the case of *Italy at Work*, the initiative that preceded it; Handicraft Development Incorporated, an American organisation for the support of Italy's crafts set up by an Italian émigré in 1945.

1.1 A Handmade Ricostruzione: American Promotion of Italian Craft and Design, 1945 – 1953

Italy at Work was one of a number of American-led initiatives aimed at resuscitating Italy's post-war economy. Between 1944 and 1954 Italy received \$5.5 billion in aid from the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration (UNRRA), the Interim Aid program and the European Recovery Program, better known as the Marshall Plan.² This assistance was not without political motivation: the late 1940s and early 1950s was overshadowed not just by the fallout from the end of one war, but the threat of another one - the Cold War. With the largest communist party in Europe, the historian Christopher Duggan has argued that Italy was at 'the front line of the Cold War'.³ In 1945 the PCI shared power in an anti-fascist alliance with the

² D.W. Ellwood, 'Italy, Europe and the Cold war: The Politics and Economics of Limited Sovereignty' in *Italy in the Cold War: Politics, Culture and Society 1948 – 1958*, ed. by Christopher Duggan and Christopher Wagstaff (Oxford and Herndon, VA: Berg, 1995), pp. 25 – 46 (p. 3).

³ Duggan, 'Italy in the Cold War and the Legacy of Fascism' in *Italy in the Cold War*, ed. by Duggan and Wagstaff, pp. 1 - 24 (p. 13).

Democrazia Cristiana (Christian Democrats (DC)) and other left-wing groups.⁴ This did not last long: in 1947 the DC dissolved its collaboration with the PCI and won a convincing majority over the Communist-Socialist coalition in the April 1948 parliamentary elections. America's role in this political shift has been extensively examined.⁵ As the elections approached, America not only increased the amount of aid but made the terms on which it was given clear: in early 1948 the Secretary of State George Marshall (of the Marshall Plan) warned that 'all help to Italy would immediately cease in the event of a Communist victory'.⁶

Support for Italy's craft industries was framed by this anti-communist propaganda: at a 1948 meeting of the American Chamber of Commerce for Trade with Italy a senator described them as 'a strong bulwark against communism, whose influence is waning as economic activity revives'.⁷ This rationale also informed *Italy at Work*, promoted by the press as a way 'to enable Italy to help itself more successfully in the effort to shield the country against misery and Communism'.⁸

Supporting Italy's rehabilitation also made good economic sense for both nations. Italy had to rely on heavy exporting to compensate for extensive importing, and had a limited domestic market. In 1950 over two million Italians were unemployed and the situation for those working was not much better: in 1951 the average monthly wage was 26,790 lire, just over half of the cost of living for an average family of four.⁹ This dependency on exports was also a deliberate strategy by the Italian government. In 1948, prior to the allocation of Marshall Plan funding, recipient

⁴ Paul Ginsborg, *A History of Contemporary Italy: Society and Politics 1943 – 1988* (London: Penguin, 1990), p. 82.

⁵ For example, see Chiarella Esposito, *America's Feeble Weapon: Funding the Marshall Plan in France and Italy, 1948 – 1950* (Westport, Connecticut, London: Greenwood Press, 1994) and Ginsborg, pp. 115 - 118.

⁶ Ginsborg, p. 115.

⁷ 'Handicraft Lines Recover in Italy: Senator Brewster Tells Italian Chamber Here of Amazing Gains in Short Time', *New York Times*, 1 October, 1948, p. 37.

⁸ Barrett McGurn, 'Italian Exhibit of Handicraft will Tour U.S.: Museums to Show Goods Made by Artisans; 3 Shipments to Be Sent', *New York Herald Tribune*, 11 September 1950, p. 16.

⁹ Martin Clark, *Modern Italy 1871 – 1995*, 2nd edn, (Harlow, Essex: Longman, 1996), p. 349.

countries were requested to draw up plans for their economic development.

Economic historian Vera Zamagni has outlined Italy's proposal:

To force productive investment [...] in order to squeeze costs and increase exports; this would then allow improvement in the balance of payments, and would lead to a more competitive economy in view of the imminent liberalization of international markets. This obviously implied a freezing of consumption.¹⁰

The Italian government gave financial incentives to exporters and textiles in particular received heavy encouragement, as Nicola White has shown in her research on America's role in the development of Italian fashion.¹¹ According to White, 'the US market was as keen to import Italian textiles as the Italian textile industry was to export their wares'.¹²

America's eagerness to support Italy's export market was informed by its own need for markets and trading partners to avoid the economic downturn of its European allies.¹³ It was also wrapped up in its plans to import American business and industrial practices into Europe and Japan. This was one of the Marshall Plan's aims.¹⁴ Defined by what Jonathan Zeitlin has described as 'mass production [...] special-purpose machinery and predominantly unskilled labour' as well as techniques and models of management, organisation and marketing, some Italian firms such as

¹⁰ Vera Zamagni, *The Economic History of Italy 1860 – 1990* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), p. 327.

¹¹ Nicola White, *Reconstructing Italian Fashion: America and the Development of the Italian Fashion Industry* (New York: Berg, 2000)

¹² White, p. 22.

¹³ Ginsborg, pp. 78, 93.

¹⁴ Jacqueline McGlade, 'Americanization: Ideology or Process? The Case of the United States Technical Assistance and Productivity Programme' in *Americanization and its Limits: Reworking US Technology and Management in Post-War Europe and Japan*, ed. by Zeitlin and Gary Herrigel (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), pp. 53 - 75 (p. 53).

Fiat and Olivetti did take on board these practices.¹⁵ For the most part however, attempts to import this American model of modernity had been frustrated in Italy - partly due to the insufficient size of most Italian companies.¹⁶ It was also due to European ambivalence towards the USA as a model for modernisation, a debate on the idea of Americanisation that had been going on since the late nineteenth century.¹⁷ Jacqueline McGlade has even argued that the focus on Italy's crafts industries from late 1948 onwards was a direct response to American frustration at this resistance. As such, the 'Italian artisan programme' is an example of how 'national self-determination won out over American direction in setting a course for business reform'.¹⁸

It was also in America's interests to promote Italy's crafts. As McGlade herself suggests, *Italy at Work* was neither the only nor first American-led initiative that focused on Italy's crafts. It was anticipated by the philanthropic efforts of the Jewish-Italian émigré Max Ascoli, who had emigrated from Italy in 1931 to escape political persecution and in 1945 set up Handicraft Development Incorporated (HDI), a non-profit organisation for what the *New York Times* described as 'the rehabilitation of Italian handicraft for export to the American market'.¹⁹ It would do so by three progressive strategies; first, enabling production through the supply of materials and equipment; second, exhibiting the results at HDI's New York headquarters, the House of Italian Handicraft, and third, transforming this into the Piazza, a retail space for Italy's crafts.

¹⁵ Ruggerio Ranieri, 'Remodelling the Italian Steel Industry: Americanization, Modernization, and Mass Production' in *Americanization and its Limits*, ed. by Zeitlin and Herrigel, pp. 236 – 268 (p. 236). See also Sparke 'Industrial Design or Industrial Aesthetics?: American Influence on the Emergence of the Italian Modern Design Movement, 1948 - 58' in *Italy in the Cold War*, ed by Duggan and Wagstaff, pp. 159 - 165 (p. 161).

¹⁶ Ranieri, 'Remodelling the Italian Steel Industry', p. 271.

¹⁷ Zeitlin, 'Introduction: Americanization and Its Limits: Reworking US Technology and Management in Post-war Europe and Japan' in *Americanization and its Limits*, ed. by Heigel and Zeitlin, (pp. 1 - 50) p. 2; Richard Pells, *Not Like Us: How Europeans Have Loved, Hated and Transformed American Culture since World War II* (New York: Basic Books, 1997), pp. 1 - 2.

¹⁸ McGlade, 'Americanization' in *Americanization and its Limits*, ed. by Heigel and Zeitlin, pp. 70 - 71.

¹⁹ Ascoli was also involved in the Mazzini society, the New York based anti-fascist organisation for Italian intellectual émigrés set up in 1939. 'U.S. Group to Aid Italian Handicraft: Tools and Materials Will be Loaned to Increase Exports to this Country', *New York Times*, 2 August 1945, p. 17.

The first of these was vital to the regeneration of Italy's industries in general: a paucity of natural resources, exacerbated by wartime sanctions and a policy of autarchy meant that materials were in short supply. Accordingly, together with the American designer Freda Diamond and the Italian-born 'foreign exchange adviser' Dr. Frank M. Tamagna, in August 1945 Ascoli went to Italy to conduct what the *New York Times* described as a 'field survey and initiate experiments in supplying tools, materials and technical advice to native craftsmen'.²⁰ By October HDI was exporting materials including lace, metal and leather through UNRRA to schools and individuals, and in 1947 Ascoli secured UNRRA money to purchase seven large electric kilns for artisans including Pietro Melandri and Aldo Zama in the historic ceramic town of Faenza.²¹

HDI's export of raw materials to Italy's artisans was not without benefit to his adopted nation; McGlade describes it as a 'clearing-house' that aided American manufacturers as much as Italian.²² The emphasis on developing artisanal, rather than industrial production, reflected American economic interests. While Italy was only a partially-industrialised country in 1945, only eight percent of the 1938 value of industrial plants had been destroyed in World War Two and the engineering industry had actually grown to be fifty percent higher in 1945 than in 1938.²³ The encouragement of Italy as a craft producer was therefore a way to ensure that America was not creating competition for its own producers: according to the *New York Times*, Ascoli 'emphasized that there would be not attempt to compete with established trade', a reassurance that would be repeated by *Italy at Work's* curators.²⁴

²⁰ 'U.S. Group to Aid Italian Handicraft', p. 17.

²¹ 'U.S. Group to Aid Italian Handicraft' p. 17. Jane Ellis, 'Heirs of Cellini: The Traditional Italian Handicrafts are Reviving, Thanks to American Aid', *New York Times*, 2 November 1947, p. sm15.

²² McGlade, 'Americanization' in *Americanization and its Limits*, ed. by Heigel and Zeitlin, p. 71.

²³ Zamagni, 'The Reconstruction of Italian Industry, 1946 - 1952' in *Power in Europe? Great Britain, France, Italy and Germany in a Postwar World 1945 - 1950*, ed. by Josef Becker and Franz Knipping (New York: W. de Gruyter, 1986), pp. 283 - 301 (p. 283).

²⁴ 'Americans to Aid Crafts of Italy', *New York Times*, 9 October 1945, p. 4.

Arguably, this promotion of Italy's craft industries can therefore be understood as another form of Americanisation. HDI and *Italy at Work* would seek to shape Italy's craft industries not in America's image, but rather in the direction that complimented its own manufacturing output and economic needs. As the precursor to *Italy at Work*, the HDI would not just determine which of Italy's craft industries would be assisted, but what products would come out of them. To what extent *Italy at Work's* exhibits were a product of variously American or Italian attempts at modernisation is one of the questions this chapter addresses.

1.1.1 The House of Italian Handicraft

The opening of the House of Italian Handicraft in April 1947 inaugurated the second stage in HDI's activities. Located in a three storey brownstone in New York's midtown, the showroom (*See Illustration 3*) was designed by Gustavo Pulitzer, a Trieste born architect living in America known for his work on luxury Italian cruise liners.²⁵ His design was praised in the American architectural press, who equated the crafted nature of the space with HDI's artisanal activities. For the *Architectural Record*, his design embodied the HDI's 'handicraft aim', one that was 'so different from the pure quantity-production concept' of American firms such as Knoll. Instead, 'the architect has relied for background on a hand-tailored curved wall, on mosaic murals, on special materials and devices, rather than a play with simple mass materials such as string and metal bars'.²⁶

The centrepiece of the interior was the mosaic mural that ran the length of one wall. It was conceived by the Sardinian sculptor Costantino Nivola, who would produce similarly large-scale works in sand-cast relief for interiors including the BBPR-designed Olivetti showroom on Fifth Avenue in 1954.²⁷ This form of craft as architectural decoration occurs elsewhere in this period in Italy; seen both in mosaic

²⁵ 'Italian Handicrafts', *New York Times*, 12 April 1947; 'With a Fine Italian Hand', *Architectural Record*, November 1948, 100 - 103 (p. 100); Paolo Piccione, 'Transatlantic Furnishings Cassina's Work for Ships: Ponti, Pulitzer and Zoncada' in *Made in Cassina*, ed. by Bosoni (Milan: Skira, 2008), pp. 138 - 147.

²⁶ 'With a Fine Italian Hand', p. 100. *Architectural Record* was not alone in its praise for Pulitzer's interior; it was also included in *Display*, ed. by George Nelson (New York: Whitney Publications, 1953), p. 61.

²⁷ See chapter three for an image of this interior.



Illustration 3. View of the ground floor of Handicraft Development Inc. showroom in New York, designed by Gustavo Pulitzer, c. 1948. The curved mosaic wall was conceived by Constantino Nivola.

but also ceramic interventions by artists and practitioners including Giovanni Dova, Fontana and Leoncillo.²⁸ Here, this bespoke craft object served to reinforce the handmade qualities that HDI encouraged; Nivola did not just turn to one oldest of Italy's craft traditions, but used it to depict artisans engaged in these.

On the showroom's opening, products (*See Illustration 4*) including ceramics, glass, porcelain, lingerie and leather handbags were on display.²⁹ They could not be bought at the showroom itself; as *House & Garden* described, this was 'no shop but a reference room for American importers. Visitors are shown around and directed to shops which carry any item inquired about'.³⁰ There is no mention of where products could be purchased from, but department stores including Abraham & Strauss and Lord & Taylor were all carrying Italian goods by the time of *Italy at Work*, and Macy's had been doing so since the 1920s.³¹

House & Garden praised the style of the products: 'thanks to Handicrafts' intelligent direction, all are designed in the feeling of today, yet maintain older standards of craftsmanship'.³² This 'direction' was carried out by another organisation Ascoli had set up at the same time as HDI, based in Florence. *Comitato Assistenza Distribuzione Materiali Artigianato* (CADMA) had offices in Milan, Venice and Naples as well as representatives in Italy's 'remote provinces'.³³ CADMA offered design advice and organised competitions in which artisans could win scholarships to develop their craft. If the resulting work was deemed to demonstrate 'innovation in

²⁸ Giovanni Dova designed a four storey mosaic for a Zanuso-designed building in Milan in 1952. Gio Ponti, 'Astrattismo per una Facciata', *Domus*, 267, February 1952, pp. 2 - 3; Hockemeyer, p. 28.

²⁹ 'New Arts and Crafts from Italy', *House & Garden*, June 1947, p. 120.

³⁰ 'New Arts and Crafts from Italy', p. 120.

³¹ In 1928 Macy's included a room set designed by Gio Ponti, including examples of Italian embroidery, ceramics and glass. *An International Exposition of Art in Industry* (New York: R.H. Macy and Company, 1928), pp. 54 - 58.

³² 'New Arts and Crafts from Italy', p. 120.

³³ 'Italian Handicraft Aided: Ascoli Cites Resurgence Brought About by Committee's Effort', *New York Times*, 31 July 1947, p. 34.



Illustration 4. Products on show at the House of Italian Handicraft on its opening in 1947.

artistic and technical research' it was purchased by CADMA and displayed at the House of Italian Handicraft.³⁴

The first signs of one of the defining characteristics of craft's post-war condition emerges here; it was not to be left alone, to go on practising unchanged, but required an external modernising hand. This is the "problem" of craft Sottsass identified in '*Le Vie dell'Artigianato*': craft's economic and cultural significance would only continue if it was endowed with contemporary forms of expression, and only architects and artists could do this. This was apparent in a number of exhibitions at House of Italian Handicraft between 1947 and 1948, organised in collaboration with CADMA. The title of the first is unknown, but is likely to have been of works by those awarded the CADMA scholarship.³⁵ The second, *Handicraft as a Fine Art in Italy* opened in June 1947.

Carlo Ludovico Ragghianti, CADMA's chairman, described the exhibition's aim as 'to perfect the quality of the Italian handicrafts by means of collaboration between artists and craftsmen'.³⁶ Ragghianti described this 'experiment' as 'part of a wider plan of action devoted to the revival and development of Italian handicrafts and [...] to the harmonising of Italian handicraft production with foreign and especially American, requirements'.³⁷ Exhibits included ceramics, furniture, silverware and textiles designed by artists including Renato Guttuso, Fontana, Melotti, Giorgio Morandi and an abstract sculpture (*See illustration 5*) by the architect Sottsass. The catalogue (*See Illustration 6*), designed by the artist and designer Bruno Munari, reveals the unevenness of this collaboration – or at least its representation. Although no paintings were included in the exhibition, the cut-out corrugated cardboard cover depicts the creative work of the artist rather than artisan: a painter at his easel rather than a potter at his wheel. This is continued inside: the names and profiles for the

³⁴ 'Segnalazioni: Borse di Perfezionamento per Artigiani, Elargite dalla Handicraft Development Inc., di New York', *Domus*, January 1947, p. 48.

³⁵ *Domus* reports that the works would be exhibited at the House of Italian Handicrafts in February 1947. 'Segnalazioni', p. 48.

³⁶ Carlo Ludovico Ragghianti, 'Preface', *Handicraft as a Fine Art in Italy* (New York: House of Italian Handicraft, 1947), n.p.

³⁷ Ragghianti, 'Preface', n.p.

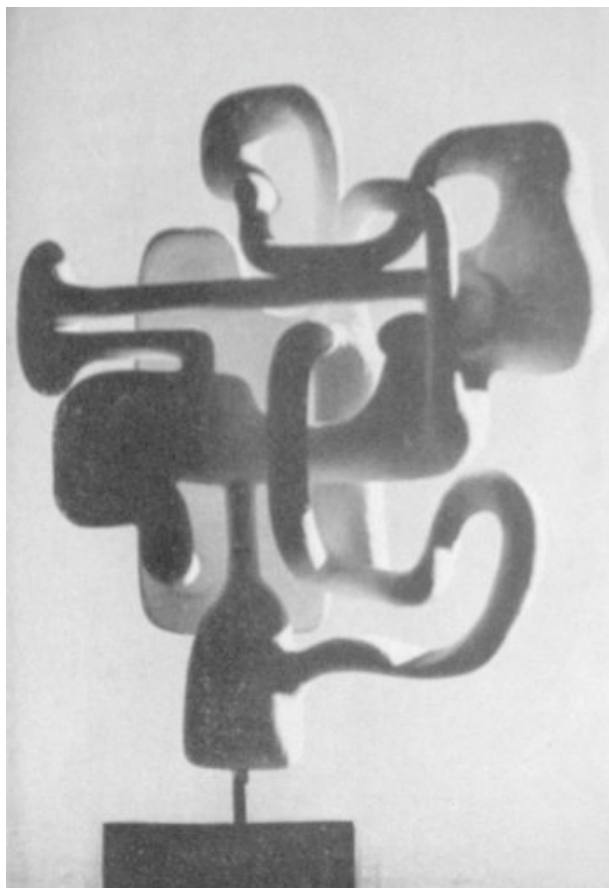


Illustration 5. *Construction 08946*, Ettore Sottsass, c. 1948. Included in the exhibition *Handicrafts as a Fine Art in Italy*, which opened at the House of Italian Handicrafts in June 1947.



Illustration 6. Catalogue cover for *Handicrafts as a Fine Art in Italy*, designed by Bruno Munari.

thirty six artists and one architect are included but no details of the makers themselves are given – these are Sabatino’s anonymous ‘ghosts of the profession’ mentioned in the introduction.³⁸

Handicrafts as a Fine Art in Italy was arguably one of the first exhibitions to present craft as art in post-war America. It precedes the larger MoMA exhibition *XX Century Italian Art* from 1949, which included terracotta and ceramic works by Arturo Martini and Fontana and which Lisa Hockemeyer has argued ‘demonstrates the curators’ acceptance of ceramic as a sculptural medium’.³⁹ Both exhibitions in fact predate the widespread acceptance of the use of clay for artistic expression in the American context – as seen in the New York art world’s resistance to the Abstract Expressionist ceramics of Peter Voulkos and his Californian cohorts.⁴⁰ It illustrates the difference of the concept of craft and art in the Italian context: for Hockemeyer, these artists’ use of clay was a result of the breakdown of hierarchies between the fine and decorative arts that occurred in the 1930s.⁴¹ It also speaks of the embryonic status of the field of design, in which there was an openness to who the modernisers of Italy’s crafts would be - artists or architects.

Given HDI’s commercial imperatives and Italian architects’ ever-increasing engagement with design, this did not last long - by the time *Vita all’Aperto* (Life Outdoors) opened in January 1948, both architects and artists were involved. *Vita all’Aperto* consisted of two room sets; the first, located on the lower floor was the artist Fabrizio Clerici’s Californian-style patio (*See Illustration 7*), a collaboration with Luigi Broggin, Fontana, Piero Fornasetti, Enrico Galassi, Melotti and Sottsass, who conceived the ceramics in the display case.⁴² Upstairs was an interior (*See*

³⁸ Sabatino, ‘Ghosts and Barbarians’, p. 335.

³⁹ James Thrall Soby and Alfred H. Barr Jr., *Twentieth Century Italian Art* (New York: MoMA, 1949); Hockemeyer, p. 32.

⁴⁰ Marcia Manhart and Tom Manhart, ‘The Widening Arcs: A Personal History of a Revolution in the Arts’ in *The Eloquent Object: The Evolution of American Art in Craft Media since 1945*, ed. by Manhart and Manhart (Tulsa: Philbrook Museum of Art, 1987), pp. 24 - 34; Adamson, *Thinking Through Craft*, p. 47

⁴¹ Hockemeyer, p. 28.

⁴² Ponti, ‘Handicraft e Cadma’, p. 35.



Illustration 7. View of Fabrizio Clerici's installation at the *Vita all'Aperto* exhibition, which opened at the House of Italian Handicrafts in January 1948. The display case on the left features ceramics designed by Sottsass. The majolica tiled floor was designed by Piero Fornasetti, and the shellwork picture frames by Clerici.



Illustration 8. View of Ignazio Gardella and Ernesto N. Rogers' installation at *Vita all'Aperto* exhibition, the House of Italian Handicrafts. 1948.

Illustration 8) designed by Ernesto N. Rogers, one third of the BBPR and until recently *Domus*'s editor, and the Milanese architect Ignazio Gardella.

Their pared down, space-saving design solution was typical of the neo-functionalism of the immediate post-war years. In both installations, an industrial design aesthetic is present in the shape of the modular metal shelving units, but these largely serve to frame and support the craft products, rather than be the main attraction. *Vita all'Aperto* demonstrates how, in this early period, Italy's craft and design products sat side by side, a co-existence that was picked up on in the *New York Times* review of *Vita all'Aperto*, 'traditional Italian crafts and advanced modern designs with a strong leaning toward the international school are presented side by side'.⁴³

Furthermore, for many of the architects involved, it was through the artisanal framing of the House of Italian Handicraft would be their first exposure in the USA.

Ponti greatly admired Clerici's installation and HDI's activities and featured them both in his first post-war issue of *Domus*. Although appointed as the Magazine's founding editor in 1928, in 1940 Ponti had left to set up the short-lived publication *Stile*. Following a rapid turnover of editors in the early 1940s, in 1946 Rogers took the helm – until Ponti expressed his desire to return and was reinstated in 1948.⁴⁴ In the context of the PCI's defeat and concomitant socio-economic shift in that year's national elections, his return was timely. Rogers' brand of socialist neo-rationalism was replaced by an increasingly elitist, tasteful and market-orientated definition of design.

Like Ragghianti, Ponti asserted the need for an external hand on Italy's crafts. He commended *Vita all'Aperto* as 'presenting craft under the "direction" of architects or artists: representative direction of that Italian taste [...] that today manifests itself

⁴³ Mary Roche, '2 Styles Offered in Italian Crafts', *New York Times*, 25 February 1948, p. 26.

⁴⁴ The intervening editors were: the trio of Massimo Bontempelli, Giuseppe Pagano and Melichiorre Bega (January 1941 – August 1942), then Bega, Bontempelli and Guglielmo Ulrich (October 1942 – January 1943), Bega (October 1943 – May 1944) and Rogers (January 1946 to December 1947). Manolo De Giorgi 'Vicissitudes of the 1940s' in *Domus*, ed. by Charlotte Fiell and Peter Fiell, 12 vols (Hong Kong; London: Taschen, 2006) II, pp. 10 - 13 (p. 10).

with such vivacity'.⁴⁵ Ponti praised HDI for leaving Italians free to 'respond to certain general themes which interest Americans, rather than those suggestions that can be given to Italian craft to [...] make it strictly satisfy the American market'.⁴⁶ He chastised American buyers who 'for reasons of profit' had the same ceramic object made in Veneto as in Abruzzi, the same lace in Cantù as in Florence, negating the regionalism of Italy's craft traditions and 'corrupting not only the hands and minds of the executors, but also the taste of us consumers!'.⁴⁷ However, what Ponti wanted for Italy's crafts only went so far. At the moment that HDI initiated its retail strategy it was no longer the Italian artist-architect who was determining the design of the objects, but the American consumer.

In 1948, Gertrude A. Dinsmore, the House of Italian Handicraft's 'director of trade relations', declared that any 'export program must be keyed to the actual needs of the American market and raw materials allocated to that merchandise with widest American appeal and greatest potential'.⁴⁸ This was seen as the only way to make the most of a near five million dollar loan that Ascoli had negotiated from the Export-Import Bank. In order to administer the loan effectively, he merged CADMA and the House of Italian Handicraft into the newly established *Compagnia Nazionale Artigiana* (CNA) based in Italy. Contemporaneously, the House of Italian Handicraft was closed until it could be ascertained what would be the most viable exports to produce.

Accordingly, in March 1948 HDI sent questionnaires to four thousand retail outfits across the USA to establish which Italian products would have the 'greatest potential market' and allocate raw materials made available thanks to the loan accordingly.⁴⁹ It covered eleven classifications of Italian merchandise already being exported and asked questions regarding 'quality, price, styling and consumer acceptance of Italian

⁴⁵ Ponti, 'Handicraft e Cadma', p. 34.

⁴⁶ Ponti, 'Handicraft e Cadma', p. 36.

⁴⁷ Ponti, 'Handicraft e Cadma', p. 37.

⁴⁸ Gertrude Dinsmore in 'Survey Conducted for Italian Goods: Questionnaire Seeks to Learn U.S. Needs, Allocate Material under Export-Import Loan', *New York Times*, 29 March 1948, p. 31.

⁴⁹ 'Survey Conducted for Italian Goods', p. 31.

handicrafts'.⁵⁰ Ascoli made clear however that while the survey would lead to the development of 'new products', the aim was 'to modernize – but not Americanize – Italian handicraft production which is currently not acceptable'.⁵¹

The results were published in January 1949. Ceramics came top of the list: sixty-two percent of department stores surveyed already carried Italian ceramics, and dinner sets and ashtrays were declared 'best sellers [...] In all its forms, Italian pottery was said to have the greatest appeal to the American buyer and therefore the greatest chance for increased imports'.⁵² The appeal of Italy's merchandise was attributed to its 'originality of design, bright colour, unusual texture or appearance, and appropriateness of certain non-conventional handicraft merchandise to casual or country living'.⁵³ Indications in terms of style were also given: 'outside of straw objects, for which modern design is preferred, the largest sales are made in Italian merchandise of traditional design'.⁵⁴

This last appeared to go against Ponti and HDI's encouragement of modern, designed crafts. When the House of Italian Handicraft re-opened as the Piazza (*See Illustration 9*) in November 1949 it was American market's thirst for 'traditional' styles that dominated the products. On sale were salt and pepper shakers in the shape of 'miniature Chianti wine bottles' and painted ceramic jam jars.⁵⁵ The merchandise was not entirely traditional. As the *New York Times* noted, both traditional and design-led pieces were available in terms of furniture: in 1950 there were both 'delicate chairs and tables, elegant and sophisticated, and again very sturdy-looking pieces, almost rustic in feeling'.⁵⁶

⁵⁰ 'Survey Conducted for Italian Goods', p. 31.

⁵¹ Ascoli in 'Survey Conducted for Italian Goods', p. 31.

⁵² 'Pottery Put First in Italian Lines: Alabaster, Leather, Glassware, Linens Ranked Next in that Order in Store Survey', *New York Times*, 18 January 1949, p. 36.

⁵³ 'Pottery Put first in Italian Lines', p. 36.

⁵⁴ 'Pottery Put first in Italian Lines', p. 36.

⁵⁵ 'Display Ad 90 – No Title', *New York Times*, 3 December 1950, p. x36.

⁵⁶ 'Italian Furniture New Design Leader', *New York Times*, 11 January 1950, p. 16.



Christmas Stocking-gift guide . . .

Handpainted jam jar in colorful assorted fruit designs. 5" high. 2.25

Salt and pepper shakers. Miniature Chianti wine bottles. Pair 1.25

Fool-proof brass cork-screw which removes cork cleanly and without effort. 2.75

All prices post paid. No C.O.D.'s, please

Piazza

Shop Italy through the House of Italian Handicrafts. You'll find the perfect gift for everyone on your list. Prices from .75 to 1000.

HOUSE OF ITALIAN HANDICRAFTS

217 East 49th St., New York 17, N. Y.

Illustration 9. *New York Times* advert for the Piazza, the House of Italian Handicrafts retail showroom that opened in November 1949, advertising Christmas gifts available in December 1950.

The popularity of these products was testimony to the success of HDI. The *New York Times* reported that Italian furniture, straw baskets, marble, alabaster and Sardinian textiles had all enjoyed increased sales following their display at the Piazza.⁵⁷ In the first six months of 1948 Italian exports to the US had totalled nearly fifty million dollars, more than for the whole of the previous year.⁵⁸ From its inception in 1945 HDI built on and exploited an appetite for Italy's crafts amongst American consumers in New York and beyond. It suggested that if *Italy at Work* was going to sell Italy in terms of its 'Renaissance in Design', it would have to take account of this preference for Italy's craft products first.

The following sections further examine the *Italy at Work* exhibition. They look first at the exhibition's coming into being, and reveal how the selection criteria adopted by the organisers speak of the co-joined ideological and political appropriation of the handmade here. This is followed by a consideration of the representation and reception of two individual makers in the show that show up the differences between American and Italian takes on craft, and the latter is explored in a focus on Ponti's room set for the show. The final section of this first part looks beyond the exhibition itself to look at the selling/ to look how sold - suggests involvement of craft not guarantor of authentic Italian expression.

1.1.2 *Italy at Work: Her Renaissance in Design Today*

Amongst the visitors to the House of Italian Handicraft in 1949 was Meyric Rogers, a curator of decorative arts at the Art Institute of Chicago (AIC). For Rogers, its opening was when 'tangible evidence of what was happening' in Italy's post-war crafts 'became available in this country'.⁵⁹ It was also the first step towards *Italy at Work*: following his visit Rogers contacted Ramy Alexander, the CNA's American vice-president, to assess the possibility of 'an exhibition illustrating the present

⁵⁷ 'Italy Again Shows Handicrafts Here', *New York Times*, 8 November 1949, p. 28.

⁵⁸ 'Handicraft Lines Recover in Italy', p. 37.

⁵⁹ Meyric Rogers, '*Italy at Work*', *Interior Design and Decoration*, 11 November 1950, 50, 108 - 110 (p. 50).

achievement of Italian designers and craftsmen in the various fields of the decorative industrial arts'.⁶⁰

That summer Rogers visited Italy. Under Alexander's 'personal guidance' he paid visits to studios, workshops, schools and shops in and around Italy's centres of craft production (*See Illustration 10*) - Rome, Naples, Florence, Bologna, Milan, Bergamo, Venice, Murano and Faenza, and also contacted 'leading architects and designers' including Ponti and Ernesto N. Rogers.⁶¹ The curator was pleased with what he saw, and produced a report concluding that there was sufficient material to make an exhibition of 'the first importance both artistically and commercially'.⁶² Ten categories of objects were identified for inclusion: woodwork and furniture, glass, ceramics, textiles, jewellery, metalwork, enamels, hard stone work 'and its substitutes', leather and 'organic substances', straw work and toys.⁶³

Not everything he saw was suitable. Rogers praised the furniture companies APEM, Azucena and Frangi in Milan, and Vigna Nuova in Florence but cautioned that 'the industry as a whole, where not guided by the more progressive architects and designers, produces either clever copies of the antique or fleshy pseudo-modern suites'.⁶⁴ Similarly, he admired Venetian jewellery 'in spite of the quantities of tourist trash', and had the same selective praise for the glassware of Venini, Seguso and Barovier & Toso, much of which had 'not yet come on to the American market'.⁶⁵

⁶⁰ Rogers, 'ITALIAN CONTEMPORARY INDUSTRIAL ARTS: Report on a Survey Made in Italy, June 2 – July 5, 1949 by Meyric R. Rogers', 1 - 5 (p. 1). New York, Brooklyn Museum Archive (BMA), Records of the Office of the Director (Charles Nagel, 1946 - 1955). Exhibitions: *Italy at Work* (1), 1949 – 1950.

⁶¹ Rogers, 'ITALIAN CONTEMPORARY INDUSTRIAL ARTS', p. 1.

⁶² Rogers, 'ITALIAN CONTEMPORARY INDUSTRIAL ARTS'. p. 2.

⁶³ Rogers, 'ITALIAN CONTEMPORARY INDUSTRIAL ARTS', p. 2.

⁶⁴ Rogers, 'ITALIAN CONTEMPORARY INDUSTRIAL ARTS', p. 2

⁶⁵ Rogers, 'ITALIAN CONTEMPORARY INDUSTRIAL ARTS', p. 5.

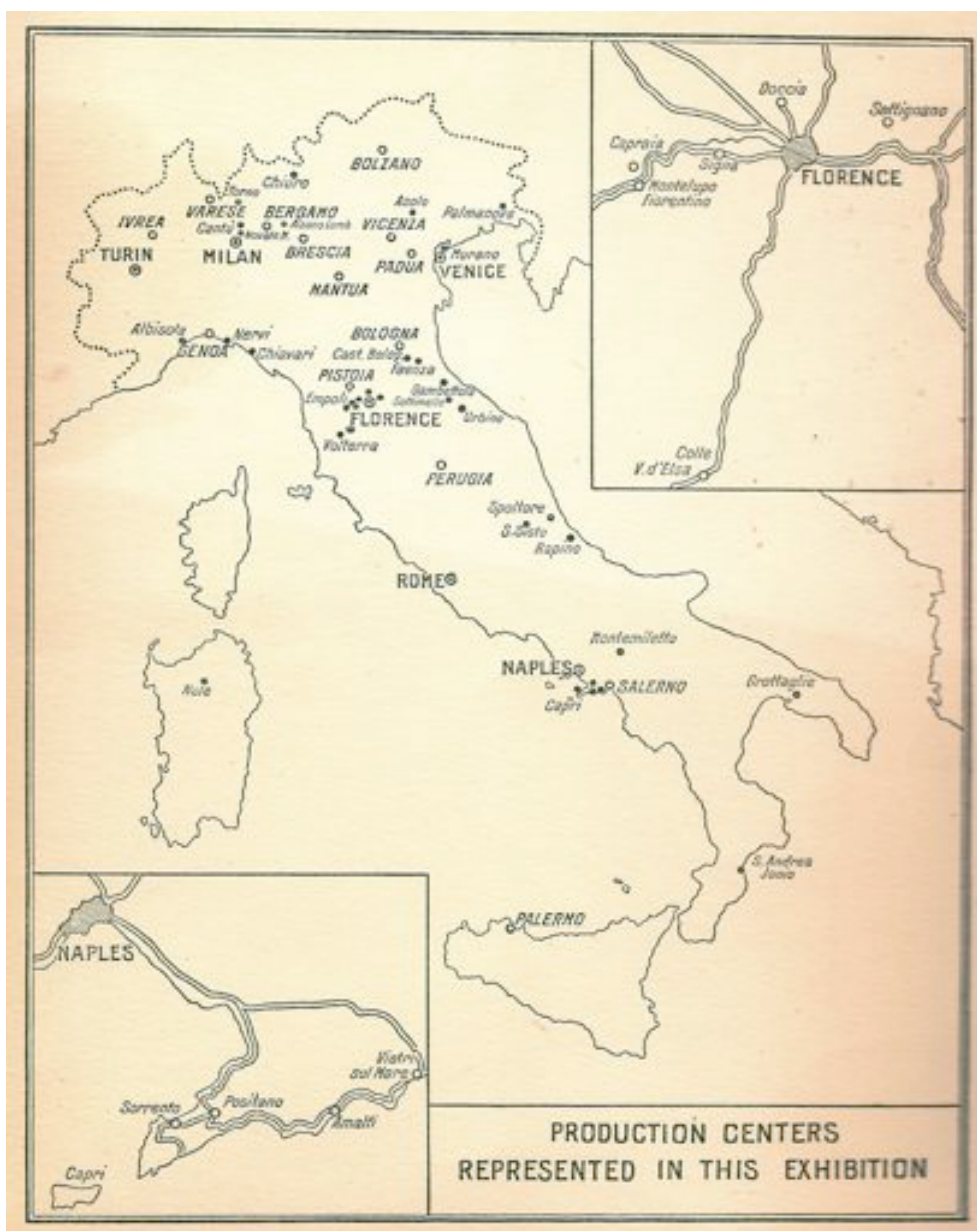


Illustration 10. Map of production centres represented in *Italy at Work* and visited by the selection committee. This map also depicts the main craft production areas discussed in this thesis. The magnified illustration of Florence shows some of the multiple ceramic-producing towns in around the city.

On his return Rogers contacted Charles Nagel, the director of the Brooklyn Museum to see if he would be interested in hosting the exhibition.⁶⁶ He invited the industrial designer Walter Dorwin Teague to serve on the jury with them, and in June 1950 this all-American selection committee made a trip to Italy to select exhibits. They were joined by Alexander, and two CNA representatives, the American Richard Miller and Italian Alberto Antico.⁶⁷ Together they toured over two hundred and fifty producers, schools, exhibitions, and shops in the areas recommended in Rogers' report to identify suitable objects.⁶⁸ These were then collected together in the basement of Florence's Uffizi gallery (*See Illustration 11*) to be catalogued and packed before being shipped to New York.⁶⁹

Rogers explained their selection criteria, one that promoted a more modern design compared to what was on sale at the Piazza: 'any object could be chosen [...] provided it was not purely traditional in design and satisfied a high standard of quality in form and color in relation to its material and purpose [...] Naturally much credit was given to sincerity of craftsmanship'.⁷⁰ They did have some restrictions. The Italian government had agreed to pay for all the objects selected, on the condition that they would be reimbursed with ticket sales profits.⁷¹ Even so, limited funds prohibited works of precious metals or gems being included.⁷²

Other materials were rejected for not being deemed falling into the category of craft. As Dorwin Teague noted: 'sometimes it was hard to say that a specific ceramic piece for instance, was not fine art; however, if it was ceramic and not bronze or marble,

⁶⁶ Rogers had initially contacted Francis Taylor at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, but Taylor could not commit to the exhibition due to large works planned at the Museum. Rogers, letter to Charles Nagel, 1 November 1949, BMA: Records of the Office of the Director (Charles Nagel, 1946 - 1955). Exhibitions: *Italy at Work* (1), 1949 - 1950.

⁶⁷ Walter Dorwin Teague, 'Italian Shopping Trip: Twelve American Museums Send Out a Battery of Buyers', *Interiors*, November 1950, 142 - 149 (p. 145).

⁶⁸ Rogers, 'Introduction' in *Italy at Work*, pp. 13 - 18 (p. 16).

⁶⁹ 'U.S. Museums Aid Italy's Recovery', *Art Digest*, 1 January 1951, p. 15.

⁷⁰ Rogers, 'Introduction' in *Italy at Work*, p. 17.

⁷¹ House of Italian Handicrafts, 'Memorandum on "Italy at Work"', 26 May 1953, BMA, Records of the Office of the Director (Charles Nagel, 1946 - 55). Exhibitions: *Italy at Work*, 12/1952 - 6/1953.

⁷² *Italy at Work*, p. 35.



Illustration 11. *Italy at Work* exhibits assembled together in the basement of the Uffizi gallery in Florence, prior to being shipped to New York, 1950.

we considered it admissible'.⁷³ This medium-based definition, one of the conventional ways that craft is defined, resulted in a heterogeneous range of ceramics, from a semi-industrially produced porcelain tea set with neo-classicist echoes from the Florentine manufacturer Richard Ginori (*See Illustration 12*) to a pair of neo-baroque vases (*See Illustration 13*) depicting a battle scene by Fontana and made in Albisola, the Ligurian town that was the centre of avant-garde ceramics at this time.⁷⁴ As the example of Voulkos would suggest, Fontana's art approach to ceramics was largely lost on the American public. Rogers noted that 'the daring and ingenuity shown in Fontana's work [...] is somewhat difficult for an untrained public to appreciate – particularly in this country'.⁷⁵ Following the closure of the exhibition its exhibits were distributed amongst participating museums: Rogers suggested that Fontana's works were given to Dorwin Teague who had greatly admired them, particularly as none of the museums expressed any interest in acquiring them.⁷⁶

The emphasis on contemporary design led to other absences. Within the realm jewellery, 'the revitalisation of the ancient Neapolitan crafts of coral, cameo, and ivory still remains an unresolved problem'.⁷⁷ Alabaster was in a similar state and so just a few pieces were included.⁷⁸

The emphasis on craft also contributed to the other near-absence in *Italy at Work*: industrial design. Rogers stated in the catalogue that 'the prevalence of handicraft or semi-handicraft production in relatively small units characteristic of Italy's individualized output does not exclude the development of highly industrialized

⁷³ Dorwin Teague, 'Italian Shopping Trip', p. 145.

⁷⁴ Hockemeyer notes that *Battaglia* (battle) scenes were a favorite of Fontana's in his ceramics in 1940s and 1950s. Hockemeyer, pp. 82 -83, 86 - 87. Fontana's vase was included in the following article that confirms its Albisolan manufacture: 'I Ceramisti della "Scuola di Albisola"', *Domus*, November - December 1950, 37 - 38 (p. 37).

⁷⁵ Rogers, letter to Baron Carlo de Ferrariis Salzano. Consul-General of Italy, Jan 22, 1954, BMA, Exhibitions: *Italy at Work*. Correspondence re disposition of materials. (1954/01 - 1954/07). Records of the Office of the Director -- D|54-55|CN.

⁷⁶ Rogers, letter to de Ferrariis Salzano.

⁷⁷ *Italy at Work*, p. 42.

⁷⁸ *Italy at Work*, p. 40.

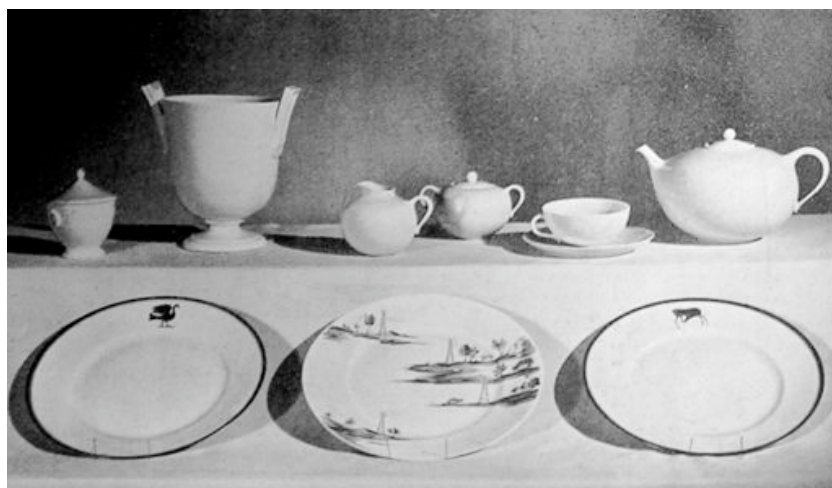


Illustration 12. Porcelain tea set, vase and plates with neo-classical echoes, made by Richard Ginori, Doccia, Florence, 1949.



Illustration 13. Multicoloured faience and lustre vase (one of a pair), depicting a battle scene. Hand painted with hand-moulded figures attached, Lucio Fontana, c. 1950. Made in Albisola.

production'.⁷⁹ It was however a marginal category. Compared to the thirty ceramic exhibits and twenty-six pieces of furniture included in the catalogue there were just four objects of industrial design: a portable Olivetti typewriter and electronic calculator, a Robbiati espresso machine and Lambretta scooter.⁸⁰

1.1.3 The Politics of the Handmade behind *Italy at Work*

To an extent, the motivations for this emphasis on the handmade were the same as those of HDI. Rogers echoes Ascoli in his assurance that 'this movement for the enrichment' of Italy's crafts 'supplements rather than competes with [...] [our] own production'.⁸¹ Rogers similarly reassured those concerned about 'possible detriment to the American craftsman and producer' as 'own craft production is insufficient to meet existing demand and the Italian production available would hardly glut our ever-widening market for handmade and individualized articles'.⁸² He attributes this rise in demand to the moral and ideological values he perceives in craft products: their consumption fulfils 'needs, material as well as spiritual, which can be supplied only by the enjoyment and practice of individual skills'.⁸³

Individual, individuality, individualism. Both Dorwin Teague and Rogers repeatedly refer to these qualities in the catalogue and articles written to promote the exhibition. For Rogers, this quality is evident in the variety within craft products: a set of plates like this black *sgraffito* dinnerware set (*See Illustration 14*) is treated 'not as a number of repetitive units but as a group of individuals all having a strong family resemblance'.⁸⁴ Preserving this individualism is paramount: 'in our times the maintenance and encouragement of such a feeling is of inestimable importance since

⁷⁹ *Italy at Work*, p. 48.

⁸⁰ *Italy at Work*, pp. 122 - 124.

⁸¹ Rogers, 'Introduction' in *Italy at Work*, p. 18.

⁸² Rogers, '*Italy at Work*', *Interior Design and Decoration*, p. 110.

⁸³ Rogers, 'Introduction' in *Italy at Work*, p. 14.

⁸⁴ Rogers, 'Introduction' in *Italy at Work*, p. 21



Illustration 14. Dinner set, faience, black *sgraffito* with chartreuse centre. Designed by the Bergamo artist Franco Normanni for Arte Artigianato Orobico, Milan, 1949.

it is a necessary counter-balance to the lifeless monotony of purely mechanical production'.⁸⁵

Rogers' comments echoed a larger embrace of the individualism of the crafts against the conformity of mass production in 1950s American craft discourse.⁸⁶ It reveals a craft ideology informed by the ideal of William Morris and the Arts & Crafts Movement; yet while these may have flourished in America, they did not in Italy. In part this was due to Italy's history of industrialisation, which had not led to the decimation of her craft traditions that had occurred elsewhere. It was also informed by a turn away by Italian intellectuals at the turn of the century from the socialist politics that were informing Morris's position at that time.⁸⁷ Morris's ideas were known to an extent in Italy but, as noted in the introduction, there was no inherited ideological opposition between craft and industry.⁸⁸ In '*Le Vie dell' Artigianato*' Sottsass notes how Morris's "great fear" that the machine would end man's humanity was found only in reactionary elements of the press, namely the *Corriere* and *Gazzetta del Popolo*.⁸⁹

Rogers was not opposed to industrial production outright. What was needed however, was a balance:

In this age of industrialization it is becoming increasingly clear that the health of our civilisation depends upon a just balance between mechanized and individual creation. An economy that permits a full development of this last cannot therefore be considered backward. On the contrary, it provides an element essential to our social well being and individual sanity.⁹⁰

⁸⁵ Rogers, 'Introduction' in *Italy at Work*, p. 21.

⁸⁶ Adamson, 'Gatherings: Creating the Studio Craft Movement' in *Craft Revolution: The American Studio Movement 1945 – 1970*, ed. by Jeannine Falino, (New York: Museum of Arts and Design, 2012 [forthcoming]), n.p.

⁸⁷ Adrian Lyttleton, 'Italian Culture and Society in the Age of Stile Floreale', *The Journal of Decorative and Propaganda Arts*, 13 (1989), 10 – 31 (p. 28). See also Agnoldomenico Pica, *Storia della Triennale 1918 - 1957* (Milan: Edizioni del Milione, 1957), pp. 11 - 12)

⁸⁸ In 1947 Giancarlo De Carlo published a small Italian-language monograph on William Morris. De Carlo, *William Morris* (Milan: Il Balcone, 1947).

⁸⁹ Sottsass, '*Le Vie dell' Artigianato*', p. 22.

⁹⁰ Rogers, 'Introduction' in *Italy at Work*, p. 14.

The economy he is talking about is not America's, but Italy's. Rogers seeks an alternative to the alienation of mechanised modernity not by returning to handicrafts in his own country, but by encouraging its continuance in Italy. He defends Italy from its persistent stigma of backwardness, but still asserts a cultural difference based on its less industrialised condition.⁹¹ As such, the exhibition and the discourse surrounding it attempts to construct Italy as America's non-industrialised, non-modern 'other', in which the spatial separation between America and Italy, and the former's superior economic and industrial might, is translated into a temporal difference.

This perceived co-joined spatial-temporal difference exposes a quasi-colonialist aspect to the nature of Italy and America's relationship at this time, at least as it is played out in the exhibition. It echoes the writings of the post-colonial theorist Homi K. Bhabha, who dismisses the idea of 'cultural contemporaneity' in the perception of those located temporally or spatially elsewhere.⁹² Similarly, the anthropologist Johannes Fabian has argued that there is 'no knowledge of the Other which is not [...] temporal, historical, a political act'.⁹³ Just as Rogers repeatedly constructs Italy as a traditional, craft society rather than modern, industrial nation, so the anthropologist denies his subject coevalness. Instead the 'other' is located in a more authentic past and utilised to critique the more advanced present: 'the posited authenticity of the past (savage, tribal, peasant) serves to denounce an inauthentic present'.⁹⁴

Furthermore, as the French Marxist Henri Lefebvre has argued, this socio-spatial difference is rooted in the politics of production: 'representations of space [...] are tied to the relations of production', the former both reifying and reproducing social

⁹¹ For more on the pervasiveness of the discourse of Italy's 'backwardness' see John Agnew, 'The Myth of Backward Italy in Modern Europe' in *Revisioning Italy: National Identity and Global Culture*, ed. by Beverly Allen and Mary Russo (Minneapolis: Minnesota University Press, 1997), pp. 23 - 42.

⁹² Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London, New York: Routledge, 1994), p. 6.

⁹³ Johannes Fabian, *Time and the Other: How Anthropology Makes Its Object* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983), pp. 1, 32.

⁹⁴ Fabian, pp. 1, 11, 32.

relations.⁹⁵ In both HDI and *Italy at Work* America's industrial hegemony informed the emphasis on Italy's artisanal industries, both to avoid creating competition for US manufacturers but also to appeal to the demands of the latter's consumers.

These socio-temporal politics appear in other guises in *Italy at Work*. The 'Renaissance' in the exhibition's title clearly has multiple meanings. It contemporaneously refers to Italy's emergence from the recent, darker past of fascism and forges a link with Italy's current design practice and the historical prestige of the Renaissance. This selective chronological continuity recalls the Marxist theorist Walter Benjamin's discussion of the use of history in modernity:

History is the subject of a structure whose site is not homogenous, empty time, but time filled by the presence of the now. Thus, to Robespierre Ancient Rome was a past charged with the time of the now which he blasted out of the continuum of history. The French Revolution regarded itself as Rome reincarnate. It quoted ancient Rome as fashion quotes a past attire. Fashion has the scent of the modern wherever it stirs in the thicket of what has been. It is the tiger's leap into the past.⁹⁶

This *Tigersprung*, as Benjamin called it, was also a strategy employed precisely in the period in Italy's history that this exhibition was trying to overcome. The historian Emilio Gentile has described Fascism's "cult of Romanness" as well as its repeated appropriation of the Italian Renaissance to assert its historical legitimacy and attempts at empire making.⁹⁷ With their ancient Roman and Renaissance associations, majolica and mosaic was amongst a number of Italian craft traditions

⁹⁵ Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, trans. by Donald Nicholson-Smith (Malden, MA; Melbourne; Oxford; Berlin: Blackwell, 1991), pp. 1, 33.

⁹⁶ Walter Benjamin, 'Theses on the Philosophy of History' in *Illuminations*, ed. by Hannah Arendt, trans. by Harry Zohn (London: Fontana, 1973), pp. 252-253.

⁹⁷ Mark Antliff has noted how under both German and Italian fascism 'selective moments from a nation's historical past were utilized for their mythic appeal as a catalyst for the radical transformation of present society'; Antliff, 'Fascism, Modernism and Modernity', *Art Bulletin*, 84 (2002), 148 - 169 (p. 150); Emilio Gentile, 'The Conquest of Modernity: From Modernist Nationalism to Fascism,' *Modernism/Modernity*, 1 (1994), 55 - 87 (p. 74) in Antliff, p. 150.

revived and patronised by the regime.⁹⁸ Both were present in *Italy at Work*, but this went largely uncommented.

References to the regime were made in the show. Rogers placed it in opposition to the much-praised Italian individualism: ‘for years the individualistic energies of the people had been repressed and canalized by totalitarian controls basically foreign to their temper’.⁹⁹ In the context of the Cold War, fascism and communism were conflated as two, equally noxious, forms of non-democracy that suppressed individual freedom. A journalist in the *New York Journal* wrote that the ‘taste of dictators, whether Fascist or Communist, obviously runs in the same uninspired groove’.¹⁰⁰ Nagel confirmed this in his opinion of some furniture seen in Turin: ‘all we knew was that the exhibits selected by the city fathers for our inspection were uninspired and dull as ditch water’, and were ‘politically innocent’ ‘of the fact that the local Turin regime is Communist’.¹⁰¹ He added ‘I’m sure Stalin would have loved every minute of it. It was the kind of conservative flub-dub stuff that Commies seem to love, and that sent Mussolini into raptures’.¹⁰²

The exhibits that Nagel and the committee selected may have been free from the politics of communism, but they were not all the unhindered, authentic forms of Italian expression that they were sold as. At least some of the products exhibited had been designed with an American market in mind: a straw tablecloth, four sets of straw table mats and a glass pitcher and glasses had all been selected from Florence’s CNA showroom, an organisation that, as the precious section demonstrated, directed the design of artisanal products specifically for export to America.¹⁰³ Similarly, others were bought from APEM, a Milan store whose name was an acronym for

⁹⁸ Claudio Lazzaro and Roger J. Crum, ‘Introduction’ in *Donatello Among the Blackshirts: History and Modernity in the Visual Culture of Fascist Italy*, ed. by Lazzaro and Crum (New York: Cornell University Press, 2005), pp. 2 - 3.

⁹⁹ Rogers, ‘Introduction’ in *Italy at Work*, p. 13.

¹⁰⁰ Inex Robb, ‘Assignment America: Political Democracy an aid to Italian Art’, *New York Journal*, 7 July 1950, p. 15.

¹⁰¹ Charles Nagel in Robb, p. 15.

¹⁰² Nagel in Robb, p. 15.

¹⁰³ Nagel, letter to Richard Miller, 9 June 1950, BMA, Record of the Office of the Director (Charles Nagel, 1946 - 55) Exhibitions: *Italy at Work* (1), 1949 - 1950.

Artigianato Produzione Esportazione Milano (Craft Production Exportation Milan).¹⁰⁴

One of the most striking ways that these crafts were promoted to the *Italy at Work* visitor was through the emphasis on the makers themselves. At the back of the catalogue there is a double page spread of photos of some of the furniture producers, ceramists and embroiders included in the exhibition.¹⁰⁵ At the front, full pages are devoted to photos (*See Illustrations 15 and 16*) of two individual makers; the cabinet maker Enrico Bernardi and the ceramist Guido Gambone. These two were singled out for special attention by the exhibition's curators, and both were seen to embody inherently Italian qualities. Juxtaposing these figures offers further insights into the values being projected onto Italy's crafts in the American context, and comparing this to their representation in the Italian press shows up the difference between the perceptions of craft in each context.

1.1.4 Enrico Bernardi and Guido Gambone: Between Tradition and Modernity

The Bolognese cabinet maker Enrico Bernardi was one of the most prominent artisans included in *Italy at Work*. Alongside the photograph of Bernardi in the catalogue, four examples of his marquetry cabinets were included in the exhibition. The *New York Herald Tribune* described Bernardi as 'one of Europe's leading inlaid wood artisans' and in 1951 Dorwin Teague dedicated an article to Bernardi in *Craft Horizons*, in which he called him 'one of the greatest Italian craftsmen of today', his cabinets 'the most remarkable examples of intarsia to be produced in modern times'.¹⁰⁶

Casa e Paesaggio (House and Landscape) (*See Illustration 17*) consisted of ten drawers, each measuring ten centimetres across and arranged around a central recess.

¹⁰⁴ Ponti was amongst the architects behind APEM's products: Enrico Freyrie, 'Dimostrazione di Qualità del nostro Lavoro', *Domus*, [n.d] 1948, p. 57; Marya Mannes, 'Italy Looks Ahead', *House & Garden*, June 1947, 92 - 101, 140 - 141 (p. 93).

¹⁰⁵ These were: the ceramist Victor Cerrato, Irene Kowaliska, the furniture maker Guglielmo Pecorini, the enamellist Paolo de Poli, the metalworker Alessandro Staccione, and an unnamed glassblower. *Italy at Work*, pp. 125 - 126.

¹⁰⁶ Barrett McGurn, 'Italian Exhibit of Handicraft Will Tour U.S.', *New York Herald Tribune*, 11 September 1950, p. 16; Dorwin Teague 'Enrico Bernardi, Master Intarsiatore', *Craft Horizons*, Summer 1951, 8 - 12 (pp. 9, 11).

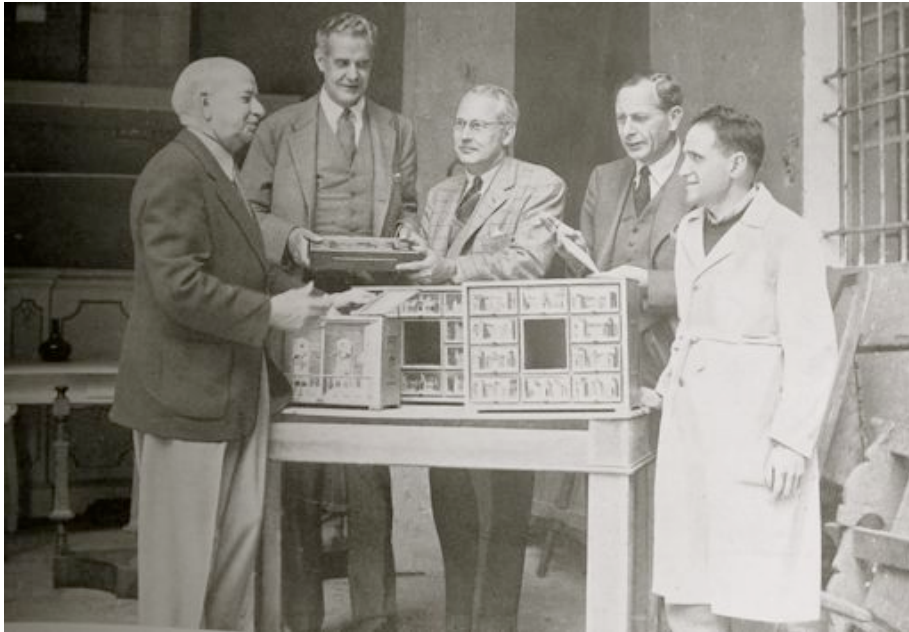


Illustration 15. Photograph of Enrico Bernardi and the *Italy at Work* selection committee in the courtyard of his Bologna workshop, included in the exhibition catalogue. Left to right: Walter Dorwin Teague, Charles Nagel, Meyric Rogers, Ramy Alexander and Bernardi.

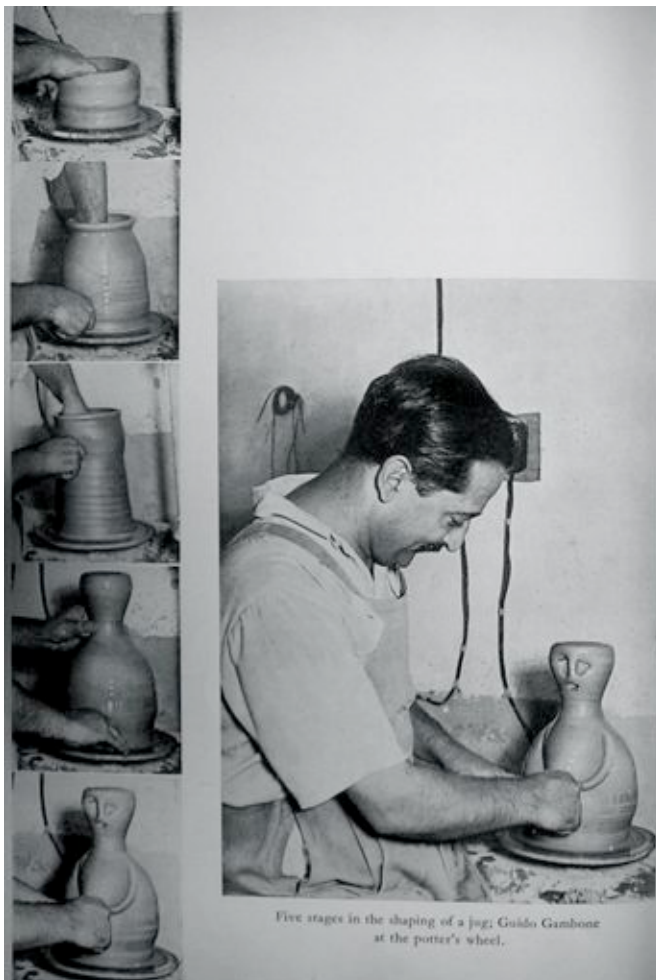


Illustration 16. Photograph of Guido Gambone included in the *Italy at Work* catalogue. The caption reads: 'Five Stages in the Shaping of a jug: Guido Gambone at the potter's wheel'.

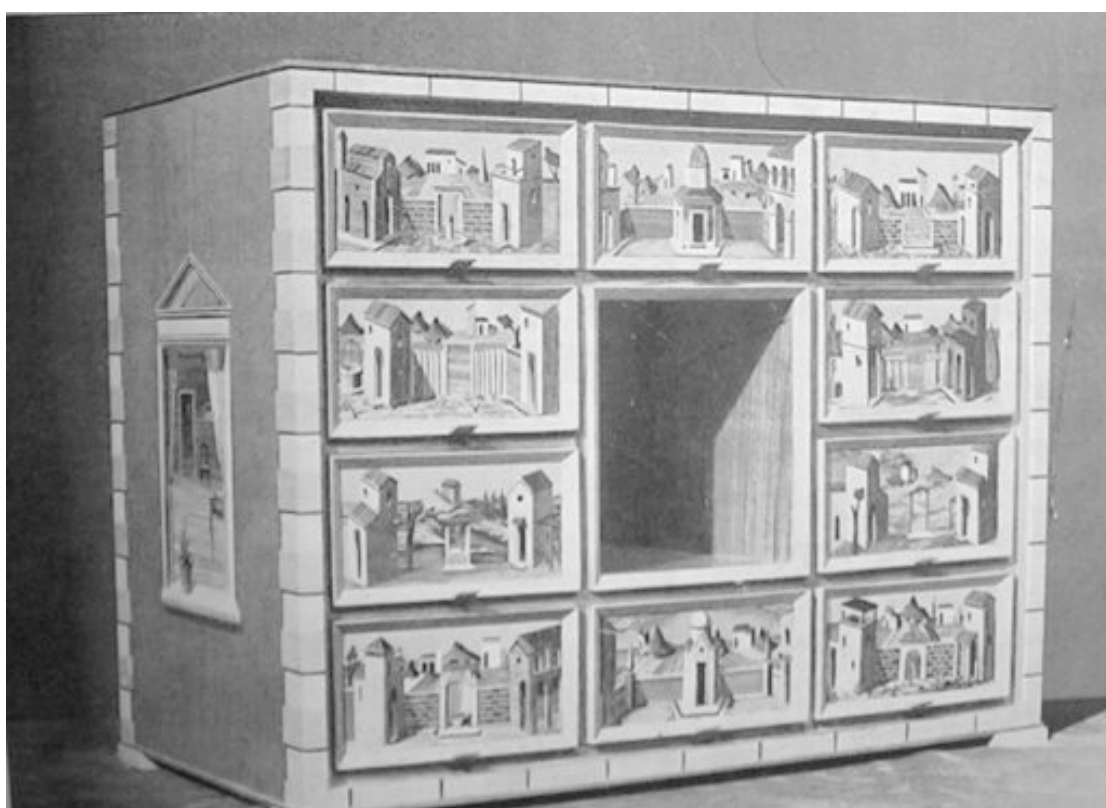


Illustration 17. *Casa e Paesaggio* (House and Landscape), cabinet with intarsia decoration designed and made by Enrico Bernardi.

The rigid wooden carcass would have been constructed using dovetail joints, a technique first utilised in the seventeenth century.¹⁰⁷ Intarsia covers every surface, combining veneers of woods including maple, cypress, fig and walnut whose different grains and shades create a strong linear perspective on the drawer fronts and bring out the *trompe l'oeil* composition on the side. The small scale complexity required a high level of craftsmanship and continues the cabinet's traditional role as what the furniture historian Christopher Wilk has called 'the pre-eminent vehicle for display'.¹⁰⁸

Dorwin Teague's praise for Bernardi was predicated on his skill and the historical legitimacy of this craft. He highlights the 'extraordinary virtuosity' involved in these modern interpretations of a 'indigenous' Italian craft, whose roots can be traced back through the Renaissance and Medieval era to Ancient Rome.¹⁰⁹ The cabinet mirrors these multiple historical episodes. It is a temporal palimpsest, a jump through history like Benjamin's *Tigersprung*, combining Renaissance architectural imagery and the era's emphasis on linear perspective and *trompe l'oeil* with seventeenth century construction methods and an early twentieth century metaphysical quality in its imagery - and yet was made in 1950.

The similarities between the empty architectural Renaissance spaces of *Casa e Paesaggio* and Giorgio De Chirico's early metaphysical paintings are notable (See *Illustrations 18 and 19*).¹¹⁰ Bernardi's biographer, Franco Solmi, identifies a metaphysical intent in the cabinetmaker's work that was arguably an attempt to add intellectual legitimacy to his craft, albeit one lost in the American context.¹¹¹ Dorwin Teague does pick up on the similarities with De Chirico, but only to say that Bernardi's designs are 'as contemporary as those of his countryman Chirico, or Jean

¹⁰⁷ Clive Edwards, *Encyclopedia of Furniture Materials, Trades and Techniques* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2000), pp. 63 – 64.

¹⁰⁸ Christopher Wilk, *Western Furniture: 1350 to the Present* (London: V&A Publications, 1989), p. 14.

¹⁰⁹ Dorwin Teague, 'Enrico Bernardi, Master Intarsiatore', pp. 11, 12.

¹¹⁰ For more on De Chirico, and the *Piazza d'Italia* series of paintings, see Maurizio Fagiolo dell'Arco, ed., *De Chirico: Gli Anni Trenta* (Milan: Mazzotta, 1998), p. 134.

¹¹¹ Franco Solmi, *Enrico Bernardi: Tarsia come Tarsia* (Casalecchio di Reno: Bo, Grafis, 1983), p. 20.



Illustration 18. Detail of one of Bernardi's instarsia cabinets, included in *Italy at Work*.



Illustration 19. *Piazza d'Italia*, Giorgio de Chirico, oil on canvas, 1913. This was one of a number of works containing this title that De Chirico painted between 1912 and 1938.

Hugo, or Dali in his saner moments' and makes no suggestion of any conceptual motivation in Bernardi's practice.¹¹² He evaluates craft as a manual, rather than mental activity, a twentieth century manifestation of what Rafael Cardoso describes as the 'dissociation between manual and intellectual labour' that dates back to the elevation of painting, architecture and sculpture to the status of liberal arts in Renaissance Italy.¹¹³

The response to Gambone was premised on a different set of concerns. Like Bernardi, Gambone was a prominent figure in the show. He was one of five ceramists Rogers singles out as 'representing extremes of individual accomplishment or experimentation' and was the only one given his own dedicated section in the Exhibition, a special treatment that *Art Digest* considered 'well worth it'.¹¹⁴ Gambone was also the subject of an article in *Craft Horizons* in 1952, this time written by the MoMA curator Greta Daniel.¹¹⁵

Born in the small Campania town of Montella, Gambone had begun working with ceramics at the age of fifteen as an apprentice in one of the area's several factories. He set up his first workshop in Vietri sul Mare on the Amalfi coast in 1947 and subsequently moved to Florence in 1950.¹¹⁶ At least six works by Gambone were included in the exhibition: a pelican-shaped jug, Madonna and Child faience plate and jug, St Martin and the Beggar faience tiles, a two-spouted vase with a handle in the centre in the shape of the female figure and a faience jug also in the shape of a female body from 1948 (*See Illustrations 20, 21*).¹¹⁷ Gambone also designed a large tiled floor depicting Southern Italy included in the Neapolitan architect Luigi Cosenza's room set.¹¹⁸

¹¹² Dorwin Teague, 'Enrico Bernardi, Master Intarsiatore', p. 12.

¹¹³ Cardoso, 'Craft Versus Design' in *The Craft Reader*, ed. by Adamson, p. 323.

¹¹⁴ The others were Pietro Cascella, Leon Leoncillo, Lucio Fontana and Fausto Melotti. Rogers, 'Notes on the Exhibition' in *Italy at Work*, p. 31; 'U.S. Museums Aid Italy's Recovery', p. 15.

¹¹⁵ Greta Daniel, 'Guido Gambone, Potter', *Craft Horizons*, January 1952, pp. 18 - 21.

¹¹⁶ Daniel, 'Guido Gambone, Potter' p. 18; Hockemeyer, p. 98.

¹¹⁷ Claudio Caserta and Nicola Scontrino, *Guido Gambone: tra Ceramica e Pittura* (Salerno: Elea Press, 1994), p. 15.

¹¹⁸ 'Luigi Cosenza - Terrace Room' in *Italy at Work*, p. 54.



Illustration 20. Jug in the shape of a pelican, polychrome faience, made by Gambone, c. 1950. Included in *Italy at Work*.



Illustration 21. *Madonna and Child*, jug in polychrome faience, made by Gambone, c. 1950. Included in *Italy at Work*.

Rogers described the appeal of Gambone's practice in the catalogue:

Using a modification of the traditional technique which brings body and glaze into such close relationship that they seem a unit, his work recalls the monumental vigor and fantasy of Etruscan figure pottery while being unmistakably contemporary in form, feeling, and decoration.¹¹⁹

His primitivist anthropomorphic and zoomorphic vessels combined the forms and techniques of Italy's ceramic tradition with a contemporary expression - a winning formula for the curators of *Italy at Work*. It would also contribute to Gambone's popularity at home. The recipient of the prestigious *Premio Faenza* three years running from 1947, Gambone exhibited regularly in Italy in the post-war years and would become, as Hockemeyer has commented, 'one of the best known Italian ceramic artists of the post-war years'.¹²⁰

The same could not be said for Bernardi, who has remained a largely unknown figure in Italy. This can partly be attributed to Bernardi himself. Following his inclusion in *Italy at Work* Bernardi received a number of American commissions for his cabinets. The artisan however became unhappy with this elevated demand and according to Solmi 'preferred to renounce these relations to not be constrained to a serial production that did not adhere to his intention to realise one-off pieces and not be obligated to the rhythms of industry'.¹²¹ Yet it is also due to his absence in Italian coverage of the exhibition: Bernardi was held up as a model Italian artisan in the American context and yet is completely absent from Ponti's extensive feature on the exhibition in *Domus* and does not appear in any subsequent issues.¹²² This was partly a question of Bernardi's skill; while industrial America valued Bernardi for his technical virtuosity, as the second half of this chapter argues more fully, Italy had a surfeit of skill, and took it for granted that there were artisans of Bernardi's merit

¹¹⁹ Rogers, 'Notes on the Exhibition', *Italy at Work*, p. 31.

¹²⁰ Hockemeyer, p. 191.

¹²¹ Solmi, p. 117.

¹²² Ponti devotes fifty pages to articles on *Italy at Work* in *Domus*: see *Domus*, November - December 1950, pp. 25 - 74.

widely available. It was also due to the different nature of the turn to history amongst the two makers.

Ponti devotes three pages of *Domus* to photos of Gambone's pots in his *Italy at Work* coverage and laments that he cannot devote more space to him.¹²³ He first featured the ceramist in *Domus* in 1948, in an article on the new form of ceramics being pioneered by Pablo Picasso and others at the kilns of Albisola.¹²⁴ His particular praise for Gambone is in part due to his identifiably Italian, European expression - Ponti describes the 'great "Mediterranean-ness" of this artist', he is a true 'Italian man'.¹²⁵ The architect also however admires 'the 'absolute modernity of this work [...] He is ancient-modern like [Massimo] Campigli and his material, the material his expression, has to be ceramics. Gambone is not only a master ceramist, he is a great artist who has found in ceramics his innate expression'.¹²⁶

This simultaneous look to the past and future is the oft-cited Janus faced nature of Italian modernity, another example of the multiple temporalities of the *Tigersprung*.¹²⁷ Following Ulrich Lehmann's description of Benjamin's term in the context of fashion history, the seemingly oxymoronic description of Gambone as 'ancient-modern' can be seen as exemplary of its dialectical qualities, able to be what Lehman termed both 'openly contemporary' and 'the eternal or classical ideal'.¹²⁸ From Ponti's perspective, Bernardi was neither ancient nor modern enough. He referred not to the ancient, classical or Etruscan ideal like Gambone but instead the early twentieth century metaphysical version of it; a form of expression that De

¹²³ Ponti, 'Guido Gambone: Ceramista Maestro', *Domus*, December 1950, pp. 34 - 36.

¹²⁴ Ponti, 'Picasso Convertirà alla Ceramica: ma noi, Dice Lucio Fontana, s'era Già Cominciato', *Domus*, 1948, 24 - 25 (p. 24).

¹²⁵ Ponti, 'Guido Gambone: Ceramista Maestro', p. 34; Ponti, 'Guido Gambone' *Domus*, March 1951, 36 - 37 (p. 37).

¹²⁶ Ponti 'Guido Gambone', p. 37.

¹²⁷ Sparke, 'The Straw Donkey', p. 62.

¹²⁸ Ulrich Lehmann, *Tigersprung: Fashion in Modernity* (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London: MIT Press, 2000), p. xviii.

Chirico had himself abandoned by the 1920s and was superseded by the *Novecento* movement with which Ponti was affiliated.¹²⁹

If Bernardi embodies the distance between Italian and American appraisal of Italy's craft practice, then Gambone was a moment of synthesis between the values that American and Italian curators and critics sought in post-war craft and brings us closer to the condition of craft in post-war Italy, and its relationship with design. In order to continue this, the next section looks one of the areas curated by Italians within the framework of *Italy at Work*: Ponti's room set.

1.1.5 Gio Ponti's *Italy at Work* Room Set: Collaboration and Copying in Craft and Design

Five 'special interiors' were included in *Italy at Work*. A dining room by Ponti (*See Illustration 22*) was joined by a living-dining room by the Turinese Carlo Mollino (*See Illustration 23*) that included his characteristically curvaceous furniture, an outdoor terrace by Cosenza, the foyer for a child's theatre by Clerici and a private chapel by the Milanese architect Roberto Menghi.¹³⁰

In *Domus*, Ponti described his fantastical dining as 'intended to be observed rather than used.'¹³¹ In comparison to the other room sets, this was a collaboration between a number of figures. Ponti designed the free-standing and built-in furniture, the latter alternately hidden or revealed by mechanised movable walls, all made by the Milanese cabinetmaker Giordano Chiesa.¹³² The decoration of flowers and butterflies on the walls and furniture was by Fornasetti, another regular Ponti collaborator. The Sardinian artist Edina Altara painted the mirrored door at the back, while Melotti conceived and made the large ceramic figures of Orpheus and Eurydice on the left hand side shelves. The rest of the ceramics were designed by

¹²⁹ Soby, 'Painting and Sculpture since 1920' in *20th Century Italian Art*, (25 - 34) pp. 25, 26.

¹³⁰ For more details on the interiors, see 'Five Special Interiors' in *Italy at Work*, pp. 50 - 61.

¹³¹ Ponti, 'Una Sala da Pranzo da Guardare, *Domus*, December 1950, p. 29.

¹³² Ponti, *ibid.*, p. 29.



Illustration 22. View of Gio Ponti's room set, designed for the *Italy at Work* exhibition. Decoration on the furniture was by Piero Fornasetti, realisation of the furniture was by Giordano Chiesa.



Illustration 23. Room set designed by Carlo Mollino for *Italy at Work*. It includes a dining table that can be folded up against a wall, and sofa bed. Furniture made by F. Apelli and L. Varesio, Turin.

Ponti and made by artisans at Richard Ginori, which had appointed Ponti as its art director in 1923 and which had led to his first encounter with Melotti.¹³³

Ponti's collaboration with firms such as Richard Ginori, Fontana Arte and Christofle is one of the reasons why he is rightly held up as a patron of Italy's craft tradition. As an editor, architect, curator, director of several Monza *Biennali* and co-director of a number of Milan *Triennali*, Ponti promoted and worked with those practitioners and firms that he saw as exemplary. His relationship with craft was however far from one dimensional, but informed by a multiple, and hierarchical view of the crafts and the artisans he worked with. At one end were the '*artisti-artigiani*', men like Fornasetti, Gambone and Melotti, and occasionally women like Altara, who Ponti endowed with a freedom of creativity.¹³⁴ These were the artisans Ponti was most interested in, as he made clear in an 1959 issue of *Zodiac* magazine, in which the architect, alongside other architects, critics and commentators including Argan and Sottsass were asked to assess the state of Italy's crafts in 1959.¹³⁵ As Ponti stated, 'my interest in the handicraft of "artists", that is of cultured men, independent from the taste of others, who work without following the market, (which means then influencing it)'.¹³⁶ This, arguably, was also how Ponti saw himself.

At the other end of the spectrum were those largely anonymous artisans whose role was to execute Ponti's furniture. The fact that Chiesa's name was given was indicative of both his standing and the extensiveness of his collaboration with Ponti. Chiesa worked on many of Ponti's projects, including an early version for the *Superleggera* chair, realising furniture for the architect's home in Milan's Via Dezza and for the Pirelli building, that was designed in collaboration with Antonio

¹³³ Paolo Campiglio, 'Ponti and the Artists', *Domus*, February 2008, 90 - 91, (p. 91).

¹³⁴ Ponti used the word '*artisti-artigiani*' to describe those artists that contributed to the *Vita all'Aperto* exhibition in which Fornasetti and Melotti both participated. Ponti, 'Handicraft e Cadma', p. 34.

¹³⁵ Responses to the survey, spread over two issues of the magazine, were from, in the first issue: Giulio Carlo Argan, the Dutch architect JJP Oud, Alberto Rosselli, Ponti, the Finnish designer Timo Sarpaneva, Ettore Sottsass. In the second these were: the French architect André Bloc, German arts publisher Gerd Hatje, the Swiss architect Mario Labò and the French André Hermant. 'Points of View', *Zodiac*, [n.d] 1959, n.p.

¹³⁶ Ponti, 'Points of View' *Zodiac*, 4.

Fornaroli, Rosselli and the engineer Pier Luigi Nervi and opened in 1958.¹³⁷ By 1960 adverts for *Chiesa Arredamenti* were appearing regularly in *Domus*, one of the many examples of the interconnectivity between Ponti's roles as an architect and editor. Under his tenure, the adverts included in the magazine were subject to his legitimising approval and he also used the magazine to promote his favoured architects and producers.

One advert for *Chiesa Arredamenti* (See *Illustration 24*) is a surreal cut-out of the torso and hands of a carpenter using a bench plane. What is deemed valuable to the would-be client is the worker's nimble hands and manual skill, as emphasised by the firm's logo; an exploded dovetail joint, which, if handmade, requires a high level of skill. Ponti praise for Chiesa's involvement in the room set was predicated on these terms: 'the furniture and the entire installation was made with extreme perfection and passionate attention by a master cabinetmaker [...] Giordano Chiesa of Milan, a man of great experience and infinite resources'.¹³⁸ Ponti's admiration for Chiesa rests on his skill as an executor, rather than as having contributed any intellectual component to the project. This was confirmed by Letizia Frailich Ponti, the architect's youngest daughter and who worked for her father in this period: Chiesa was 'a marvellous executor, not creative but technically perfect ... able to get from his workers the things that Ponti wanted'.¹³⁹

Ponti made clear that he did not make any of the objects he conceived. As the critic Nathan Shapira described in 1967, Ponti 'has always made a clear distinction between the process of making creative decisions and the activity that implements them'.¹⁴⁰ Making reference to his interest in ceramics, in 1954 the architect described his role as 'to design for able hands - not to work as a potter but to develop designs for pottery'.¹⁴¹ He denied that what he did was 'directing' artisanal activity:

¹³⁸ Ponti, 'Una Sala da Pranzo da Guardare', *Domus*, November - December 1950, 28 - 29 (p. 29).

¹³⁹ Letizia Frailich Ponti, personal interview, 13 October 2008. (APPENDIX 1)

¹⁴⁰ Nathan H. Shapira, 'The Expression of Gio Ponti', *Design Quarterly*, 1967, p. 6.

¹⁴¹ Ponti, *Espressione di Gio Ponti*, Aria d'Italia series (Milan: Guarnati, 1954) in Shapira, p. 6.



per
un
arredamento
di
qualità

CHIESA ARREDAMENTI



amministrazione e stabilimento milano via mezzanotte 20/20

Fig. 24. Advert featured in *Domus* in 1960 for Chiesa Arredamenti, Milan, a furniture manufacturer owned by Chiesa. The copy reads 'for quality furnishing'.

‘we do not direct anything, as we could make a mistake!’.¹⁴² Instead, Ponti called this an activity of ‘suggestion’.¹⁴³

This was the case with the white ceramic *Scacchi Freudiani* (Freudian Chessmen) included on the right of the room set (*See Illustration 25 and 26*). In *Domus*, Ponti describes these as ‘giant chess pieces, cleaved open, which revealed the thoughts – confessed and not - that harbour in the chest of the king (weapons and women), the queen (the jack), the jack (the queen), the knights (mares)’.¹⁴⁴ However, as he himself admits, the *Scacchi Freudiani* are not his original idea, but what the architect calls ‘a Pontian invention already beautifully realised by Andrea Parini’, examples (*See Illustration 27*) of which were included on the next page.¹⁴⁵

There is no mention of what Parini, the director of the art school in Nove in the Veneto, thought of this appropriation of his ideas.¹⁴⁶ He cannot have been too disgruntled, as the ceramist later sent photos of his work to be included in *Domus*, recognising the exposure that such inclusion could gain.¹⁴⁷ Moreover, the appropriation of ideas ran both ways. According to Manolo de Giorgi, Chiesa took the ‘liberty of turning out “parallel” products even during the original period itself, when Ponti was too busy with other things and almost flattered that his work had sparked a spate of copies’.¹⁴⁸ This copying was one way that the collaborations between architects and artisans led to the diffusion of modern design on a wider scale in post-war Italy, as small workshops produced works in the style of Ponti and others. Andrea Branzi later commented on this in *The Hot House*:

¹⁴² Ponti, ‘Points of View’.

¹⁴³ For examples of Ponti’s self-declared work of ‘suggestion’ see Ponti ‘Considerazioni su Alcuni Mobili’, *Domus*, February 1950, p.29; Ponti, ‘Oro sul “Conte Grande”’, *Domus*, March 1950, 21 - 15 (p. 25).

¹⁴⁴ Ponti, ‘Le Ceramiche Fantastiche’, *Domus*, November-December 1950, 54 - 55 (p. 54).

¹⁴⁵ Ponti, ‘Le Ceramiche Fantastiche’, p. 55.

¹⁴⁶ For more on Parini, see Piergiorgio Coin, ‘PROGETTO CULTURALE: Una prima Iniziativa Sull’Arte dei Ceramisti della Terra Veneta’ in *Terre d’Arte: Manifatture e Opere di Ceramisti Veneti dal 1930 ad Oggi*, ed. by Alberto Prandi (Venice: Coin Rialto, 1986), pp. 28 - 33.

¹⁴⁷ ‘Parini a Nove e Cinque Teste di Zucchini’, *Domus*, June, 1952, p. 46.

¹⁴⁸ Manolo de Giorgi, ‘A Costly Inheritance’, *Domus*, February 2008, 103 - 104 (p.103).



Illustrations 25 and 26. *Scacchi Freudiani*, designed by Gio Ponti and manufactured by Richard Ginori, c. 1950. These were featured on the right hand side of Ponti's room set for *Italy at Work*.



Illustration 27. *Scacchi Freudiani* conceived and made by Andrea Parini, a ceramist based in Nove, Vicenza. These were the basis for Ponti's own pieces that would then be included in *Italy at Work*.

This kind of indiscriminate and irreverent plundering permitted a renewal of form throughout the middle ranks of Italian society; the new style definitively replaced the gaudiness of Fascism and 19th-century provincialism, allowing a first sketch of modern Italy to take shape in a provisional but complete fashion.¹⁴⁹

The idea of the ‘Pontian invention’ will be discussed in more detail in the second chapter. What is already clear from his room set is the multiplicity of the relations between design and craft, and the role that Ponti played in shaping craft at the level of design, production and representation in the 1950s, and would continue to do so until his death in 1979.

The rooms would become the biggest crowd pullers in *Italy at Work*, and contribute significantly to its success, as visitors flocked to the many department stores that put on displays in connection with the exhibition. The curators’ aims behind *Italy at Work* did not end at the Museum’s walls: right from the outset, it was conceived as a large-scale version of the House of Italian Handicraft in which would-be consumers would see examples of Italy’s handicrafts, identical or similar versions of which could then be bought in stores across America. A CNA representative would also be on hand to inform visitors where items similar to those on show could be bought in local stores.¹⁵⁰ As the following short section demonstrates, the question of whether Italy’s craft would be framed by modern design or ‘tradition’ in the American context was not yet resolved.

1.1.6 ‘Italy-in-Macy’s’: Authenticity versus Americanisation

At the same time as *Italy at Work* was on its multi-state tour, department stores including Abraham & Strauss, Lord & Taylor, and Macy’s were putting on what *House & Garden* described as ‘displays of the work of leading Italian artists and

¹⁴⁹ Branzi, *the Hot House*, p. 45. Branzi also commented on this in our interview. See Branzi, personal interview, 23 June 2008 (APPENDIX I).

¹⁵⁰ Nagel, letter to Albert Kornfeld, Editor-in-Chief, House & Garden, undated, BMA, Record of the Offices of the Director (Charles Nagel) 1949-2/1951 (1)

craftsmen'.¹⁵¹ In some cases, the House of Italian Handicraft acted as intermediaries, suggesting and sourcing goods to sell. In an advert (*See Illustration 28*) included in the *New York Times* Abraham & Strauss announced that they were sending buyers to Italy to choose their own merchandise. Illustrated with drawings and blown-up photos of products including a lamp, ceramic bowl and various glassware, the emphasis in the copy was firmly on the age-old, artisanal quality of Italy and its products. The consumer could chose wares such as 'lacy baskets from Naples and Milan, glossy new leathers and brasses from Florence'.¹⁵²

The largest of these ventures came in 1951 when Italy-in-Macy's (*See Illustration 29*) opened, a fortnight of promotion of Italian crafts held at Macy's flagship store in New York, co-sponsored by the department store and the Italian government. It had been eighteen months in preparation and was billed as a celebration of Italy's "Second Renaissance" that the 'unique Italian arts and skills are creating in that historically lovely, fertile and ingenious land'.¹⁵³

Italy-in-Macy's represented the opposite to everything that Ascoli, CADMA and Ponti advocated in America's promotion and assistance of Italian craft. The advertisement depicted the Italian as a comedic harlequin, an entertainer, peddling his souvenirs with an ancient ruin in the background. It explicitly promoted the Americanisation process behind the objects on display, achieved by 'Macy buyers working on-the-spot, hand-in-hand with the best of Italy's father-to-son craftsmen'.¹⁵⁴ This involved 'a refinement, or "toning down" of the ornateness and florid finishings popular with many Italian artisans' achieved 'through tactful and patient coaching of Italian artisans and workers'.¹⁵⁵ The resulting 'amusing' earthenware boots (*See Illustration 30*), Venetian glass nativity scene, calfskin

¹⁵² 'Display Ad 55 - No Title', *New York Times*, 1 December 1950, p. 13.

¹⁵³ 'Macy's and the Italian Government, as co-sponsors, invite you to ITALY-IN-MACY'S, .U.S.A', BMA, Records of the Office of the Director (Charles Nagel, 1946 - 55). Exhibitions: *Italy at Work*, 1951 - 1952.

¹⁵⁴ 'Macy's and the Italian Government'.

¹⁵⁵ 'Macy's and the Italian Government'.

ABRAHAM & SRAUSS
 153 N. W. COR. 4TH & B'WAY

Presented with the
 following labels for
 your share of modern
 Italian handwork
 at the Exposition Universelle

"ITALY AT WORK"

Now presented in great
 variety to you at a special
COME TO AAG
 in our new store
 complete gift/choice shop
 located at
 153 N. W. COR. 4TH & B'WAY

The following is a list of the
 articles on display in our new store
 for your share of modern
 Italian handwork at the
 Exposition Universelle
 in Philadelphia, 1876.

1. A large vase, 1876
 2. A small vase, 1876
 3. A glass, 1876
 4. A circular object with radial patterns, 1876

1876

Illustration 28. Advertisement included in the *New York Times* for Abraham & Srauss department store, New York, promoting a line of goods sold in conjunction with *Italy at Work*.



Fig. 29. Promotional material for *Italy in Macy's U.S.A.*, a fortnight of promotions of Italy's crafts held at Macy's New York in September 1951, six months after the closure of *Italy at Work* at Brooklyn Museum.

The advertisement is a grid of 12 numbered items (A-L) with descriptions and prices. The items include:

- A:** A brown leather handbag with two handles.
- B:** A patterned skirt or dress with a floral design.
- C:** A pair of black boots with yellow laces.
- D:** A black leather belt with a white buckle.
- E:** A colorful patterned scarf or shawl.
- F:** A circular ceramic plate or vase with a nativity scene.
- G:** A long, thin umbrella with a curved handle.
- H:** A long, thin scarf or tie with a patterned border.
- I:** A collection of small, light-colored figurines, possibly ceramic or glass.
- J:** A pair of long, thin shoes or slippers.
- K:** A pair of small, light-colored shoes or slippers.
- L:** A small figurine or sculpture of a person.

ITALY-IN-MACY'S, U.S.A.

© MACY'S INC. 1954. PHOTO BY PHILIP H. HARRIS FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES. PHOTO BY PHILIP HARRIS FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES. PHOTO BY PHILIP HARRIS FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES.

Illustration 30. Advertisement for products sold as part of 'Italy-in-Macy's, USA', including 'earthenware boots for an amusing umbrella stand or vase', a white calfskin poodle collar and glass nativity scene, made by Cenedese of Murano.

poodle collar and other products suggest that in the case of Macy's, Americanisation translated into a reliance on motifs of Italy as traditional, as religious, even whimsical, and still an artisanal society.

The displays similarly framed Italy as seen through American eyes: one of the window displays was put together by fashion designer Ken Scott and glass designer Ginette Venini and consisted of glass Venini fish 'amid classic Chioggia fishermen's baskets and nets'.¹⁵⁶ Inside the Herald Square branch was a model replica of St Peter's Cathedral in Rome, a full-sized Venetian gondola, a donkey cart adorned with paintings of Harry Truman and Marshall alongside displays of straw-covered glass bottles and sales clerks in Italian costumes alongside Italian artisans practising their crafts.¹⁵⁷

Over twenty five thousand people came to the first day of Italy-in-Macy's in New York.¹⁵⁸ This success was surely problematic for the likes of Ponti attempting to project a modern, design-led image of Italy. Even if this future was to be handmade, then for Ponti it was important that it would be directed by Italian minds in order to assert Italy's prestige, not debased by its orientation towards American, commercial interests, as in Macy's.

The question of what to do with Italy's vast reservoir of crafts and how these could be employed for socio-cultural, economic and ideological ends in the American context has defined the arguments laid out in the first half of this chapter. The second half will show that the attempts to deal with Italy's crafts were equally problematic and undecided in the domestic context. As with Ponti's room sets, craftsmanship and Italy's craft traditions would play a defining role at the *Triennale*, and what shape these would take would be just as ideologically and politically determined as they were in HDI and *Italy at Work*.

¹⁵⁶ 'Catalogue Raisonné 1921-1986' in *Venini: Catalogue Raisonné 1921-1986*, ed. by Anna Venini Diaz de Santillana, (Milan: Skira, 2000), p. 221.

¹⁵⁷ 'Retail Trade: Abroad at Home' *Time*, 17 September 1951, n.p.
<<http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,815481,00.html>> [accessed 7 March 2011]

¹⁵⁸ 'Retail Trade', n.p.

1.2 A Contested Modernity: Craft and the “Unity of the Arts” at the Ninth *Triennale di Milano*, 1951

On the 12th May 1951 the ninth *Triennale di Milano* opened at Milan’s Palazzo d’Arte. Its theme of the “Unity of the Arts” was an apt description for an exhibition that brought both arts and nations together: in addition to the twenty-seven Italian sections was the largest-ever international participation.¹ Displays from twelve nations including the much-praised Scandinavian countries were included on the first floor of the building, while first-timer America was housed in a BBPR designed pavilion in the Palazzo’s grounds.

The international reaction was positive. Dorwin Teague told the readers of *Interiors* it was ‘the most stimulating show of its kind I have ever seen’.² Paul Reilly, director of the Council of Industrial Design (CoID), described Europe as ‘bewitched [...] by the bravado and luxury of modern Italian furniture, textiles and glass’.³ As in *Italy at Work* craft productions dominated the installations of glass (*See Illustration 31*), lighting, ceramics, metals, jewellery, leather, plastics, straw, embroidery, textiles, furnishings, and sections from Italy’s art schools. The CNA (*See Illustration 32*) was present, as was *Ente Nazionale per l’Artigianato e le Piccole Industrie* (ENAPI), another organisation aimed at modernising Italy’s crafts through collaborations with architects and artists. Industrial design was officially present for the first time too, in *La Forma dell’Utile* (The Shape of the Useful) section on the ground floor.⁴

¹ For more details on the ninth *Triennale* see *Nona Triennale di Milano: Catalogo* (Milan: *Triennale di Milano*, 1951).

² Dorwin Teague, ‘A Report by Dorwin Teague’, *Interiors*, September 1951, 92 - 123 (p. 93).

³ Paul Reilly, ‘Notes’, *Design Tour Lausanne Turin Milan 12-26 September 1964*, Brighton, Design Council Archive (DCA), “DESIGN TOURS PRINTED MATTER 1957 – 1964” 1776/3 part 1. Series 8.

⁴ *La Forma dell’Utile* was curated by Lodovico di Belgiojoso, Enrico Peressutti and Max Huber and included on the ground floor of the *Palazzo d’Arte*. Saverio Monno identifies the first ‘unofficial’ appearance of industrial design as at the seventh *Triennale* in 1940; Monno, ‘Premessa’, in *Fatto ad Arte: Arti Decorative e Artigianato*, ed. by La Pietra (Milan: Edizioni della *Triennale*, 1997), p. 5.



Illustration 31. View of the Italian glass section at the 1951 *Triennale*, housed in a specially designed gallery to the rear of the Palazzo dell'Arte. The section was curated by Roberto Menghi, and arranged by Eio Palazzo and Gianluigi Reggio.

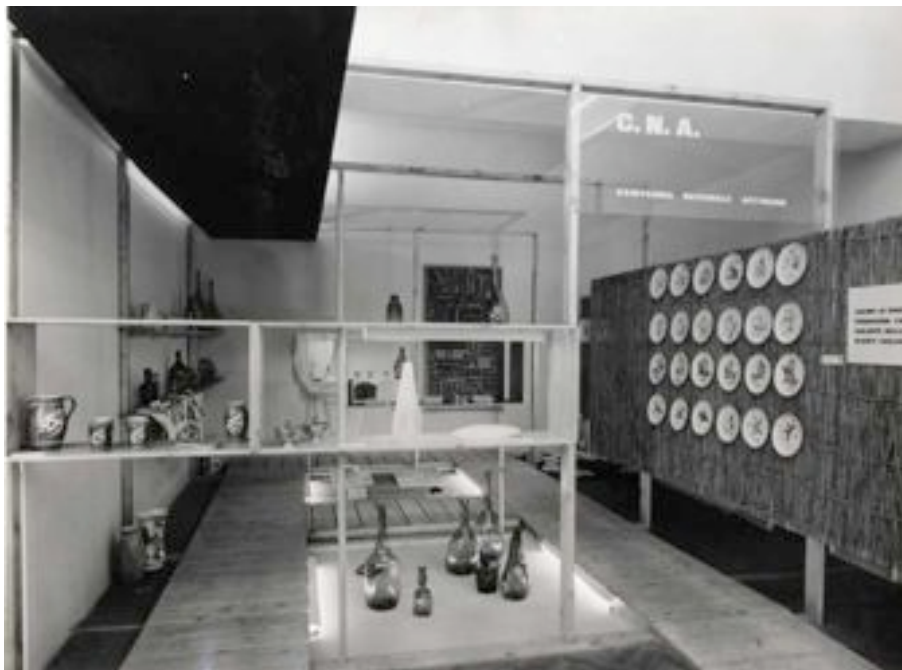


Illustration 32. View of the *Compagnia Nazionale Artigiana* (CNA) installation at the 1951 *Triennale*. On the right wall are twenty four plates made by Ceramiche Zaccagni, Florence. On the rear wall, a rug designed by Giuseppe Capogrossi and made by Figli di Guido Pugi, Florence.

Reception was not so warm at home. The *Triennale* was widely criticised for the formalism of the exhibits, a lack of social engagement and lack of unity amongst both the arts displayed and the ideas the organisers were attempting to promote. This anodyne theme, it turned out, had only been chosen because it was seen as the only one suitable to conceal the differences between those in charge.⁵

A lack of coherency and social commitment could not be said of the preceding *Triennale* of 1947. Held after seven years of wartime-caused delay, the eighth exhibition was wholly dedicated to the theme of ‘housing’, a pressing issue in Italy’s post-war reconstruction: over two million rooms - six percent - of Italy’s housing had been destroyed in the War and much of its existing stock was in poor condition.⁶ In charge was the rationalist architect Piero Bottoni, who proposed pre-fabricated housing techniques that were seen in the *Quartiere Triennale 8* (QT8) development on the outskirts of Milan that was built as part of the exhibition. Furnishings were largely neo-rationalist responses to the equally acute need for affordable, flexible furniture.⁷ Some crafts were present, including ceramics by Leoncillo and Melotti (See *Illustration 33*), enamelware by Paolo De Poli and glass designed by Ponti and Sottsass, in an installation co-curated by the latter.⁸ However, as Sottsass lamented, the public response to these innovative forms was largely one of ‘incomprehension and general disinterest’.⁹ According to the architect and critic Agnoldomenico Pica this was not quite ‘the ostracism of craft’ but was its reduction to mere bourgeois

⁵ Pansera, *Storia e Cronaca* (Milan: Longanesi, 1978), pp. 69 - 70.

⁶ Terry Kirk, *The Architecture of Modern Italy*, 2 vols (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2005) II, p. 156.

⁷ The 1947 *Triennale* was not the first exhibition at this time predicating reconstruction on these modern furniture solutions. In 1946 Carlo Pagani curated the *Riunione Italiane Mostre per l'Arredamento* (RIMA) exhibition that included neo-rationalist furniture designed by architects including Franco Albini, Ignazio Gardella and Vico Magistretti. See Alberto Bassi, ‘Design in *Triennale* 1947 – 1968: Percorsi fra Milano e Brianza’ in *Design in Triennale 1947 - 68: Percorsi fra Milano e Brianza*, ed. by Bassi, Raimonda Riccini and Cecilia Colombo (Milan: Silvana Editoriale, 2004), pp. 45 - 62 (pp. 48 – 49).

⁸ Sottsass co-curated the ‘Sezione dell’Oggetto’ with Luigi Caccia Dominioni, Luigi Fratino and Lidia Levi. Pansera, *Storia e Cronaca della Triennale*, n. 27, p. 356.

⁹ Sottsass, ‘Le Vie dell’Artigianato’, p. 25.



Illustration 33. Ceramic vases by Fausto Melotti included in the 'Sezione dell'Oggetto' (Object Section) at the eighth *Triennale*, 1947. Produced for the APEM store, Milan.

‘desirable decoration’.¹⁰ This was not the eighth *Triennale*’s only problem; by the time of its unveiling public opinion had shifted away from the Left, and Bottoni was accused of producing a ‘proletariat *Triennale*’ with a ‘communist program’.¹¹

The tenth *Triennale* of 1954 was also seen to proclaim a clear theme, even if there were two of them: “the synthesis of the arts” and “industrial design.” In reality, it was all about the latter: accompanying the widely acclaimed industrial design installation was Italy’s first international conference on industrial design.¹² Craft materials and techniques still formed the majority of Italian exhibits, but were now grouped under the homogenising banner of *merce* (commodities).¹³ Their arrangement in mixed-media displays (*See Illustration 34*) dispersed around the *Triennale* further diluted their visibility and meant that they were largely ignored by the press. *Design* magazine did pick up on their presence, but only to criticise the ‘exclusive, experimental and costly’ look of the textiles, ceramics, glass and metalwork on display.¹⁴ In the recently established *Stile Industria* magazine, the architect Alberto Rosselli, declared that by now craft had ‘fallen as a determining element of production, inert in its formal repetition of stylistic elements’ and now remained as ‘an important and precious help in the definition [...] of the industrial object’.¹⁵

¹⁰ Agnoldomenico Pica, ‘Presenza dell’Artigianato Creativo nell’Italia Contemporanea’ in *Storia dell’Artigianato Italiano* (Milan: Etas Libri, 1979), pp. 60 -87 (p. 82).

¹¹ Pansera, *Storia e Cronaca della Triennale*, p. 64. Kirk, p. 156.

¹² The *Mostra Internazionale dell’Industrial Design* (International Exhibition of Industrial Design) was curated by Achille and Pier Giacomo Castiglioni, Roberto Menghi, Augusto Morello, Marcello Nizzoli, Michele Provinciali and Alberto Rosselli. The *I Congresso dell’Industrial Design* (International Congress of Industrial Design) ran from 28 to 30 October 1954. Speakers included Max Bill, Siegfried Gideon and Enzo Paci. Pica, *Storia della Triennale di Milano 1918 – 1957* (Milan: Edizioni del Milione, 1957), p.75.

¹³ Igor Kopytoff has argued that ‘commodification homogenizes value’. See Kopytoff, ‘The Cultural Biography of Things: Commoditization as Process’ in *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective*, ed. by Arjun Appadurai (Cambridge, New York and Oakleigh, Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 1986), pp. 64 - 91 (p.73).

¹⁴ ‘Points from the *Triennale*’, *Design*, October 1954, p. 8.

¹⁵ *Stile Industria* was set up in 1954 by Editoriale *Domus* until publication ceased in 1963. Alberto Rosselli, ‘L’Oggetto d’Uso alla *Triennale*’, *Stile Industria*, October 1954, p. 1.

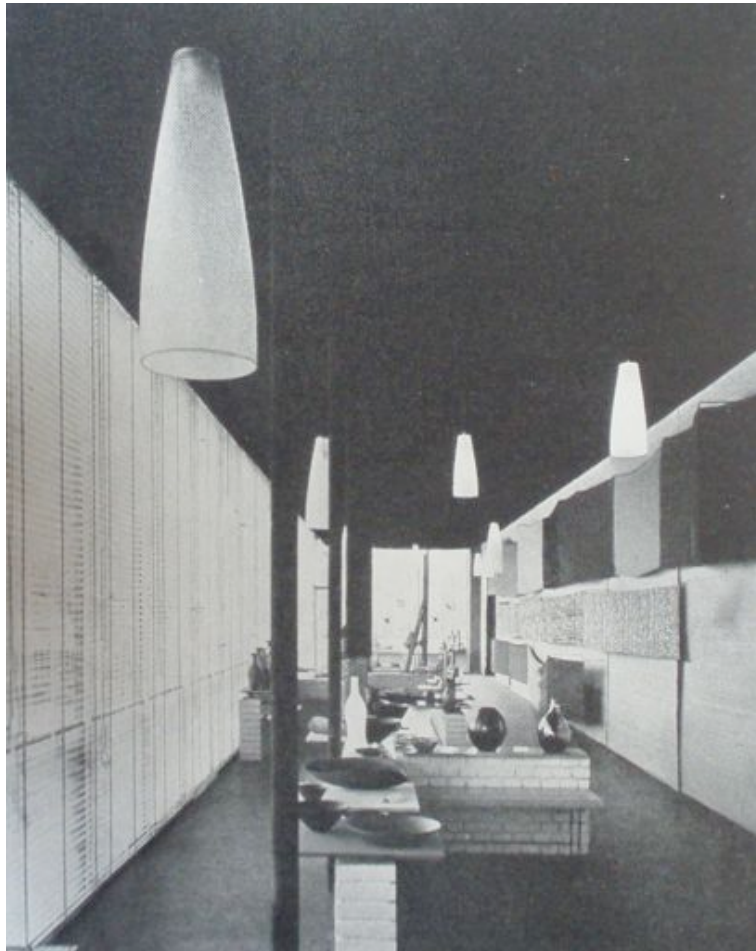


Illustration 34. View of the ‘Mostra Merceologica’ (Merceological Exhibition), section C, at the tenth *Triennale* of 1954. This mixed media installation was held in the same space that in 1951 contained the glass display. Curated by Umberto Zimelli, designed by Eugenia Alberti Reggio and Sergio Favre.

As both founding editor of *Stile Industria* and co-founder of the *Associazione per il Disegno Industriale* (Association for Industrial Design (ADI)) two years later, it is not surprising that Rosselli was so dismissive about craft. However the productive reality was not as clear-cut as Rosselli suggests. In the early 1950s the nation was undergoing the second of its industrial ‘revolutions’, the first occurring in the 1880s following Italy’s unification in 1861.¹⁶ Italy’s industries were rallying at an incredible rate: by 1948 manufacturing had reached 1938 levels and by 1951 industrial production had surpassed pre-war amounts by 127 percent.¹⁷ However this was a localised and fragmented phenomenon, concentrated in the ‘industrial triangle’ of Genoa, Milan and Turin. Agriculture was still the dominant employer and despite private and state investment in Italy’s steel, engineering and automobile industries, small-scale, manual workshop production still dominated the furnishings industries. The 1951 third *Censimento Generale dell’Industria e del Commercio* (General Census of Industry and Commerce) reported that of the 36,000 firms engaged in the production of wooden furnishings, a quarter of which were in Lombardy, ninety percent were artisanal.¹⁸

The ongoing artisanal shape of production was true of even of that most modern of materials, plastics. As the 1951 *Triennale*’s vice-president said of the plastics section, ‘here, as in all things, the work and the mind of the artist and artisan can create new and beautiful forms for communal use, both for the home, and for industry’.¹⁹ Furthermore, the 1954 *Triennale* appeared to be an expression of the desired shape of Italian industrial design rather than an expression of its reality.²⁰ As Franco Buzzi Ceriani and Vittorio Gregotti commented at the time, it was ‘clear’

¹⁶ Foot, *Modern Italy* (Basingstoke, Hampshire and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), p. 3; Zamagni, *The Economic History of Italy 1860 – 1990*, p. 31.

¹⁷ Clark, p. 348.

¹⁸ Table 1 ‘Ditte, per Ramo, Classe e Sottoclasse di Attività Economica, secondo la Forma Giuridica’ in Istituto Centrale di Statistica, *III Censimento Generale dell’Industria e del Commercio 1951*, 18 vols (Rome: Tipografia Failli, 1955), II, pp. 10 - 11.

¹⁹ Aldo Carpi, ‘Prefazione’ in *Oreficeria Metalli Pietre Marmi Legni Pelli Materie Plastiche*, ed. by I. Zetti e L. Spreafico, Quaderni *Triennale Domus* series (Milan: Editoriale Domus, 1952), n.p.

²⁰ Franco Buzzi Ceriani and Vittorio Gregotti, ‘Contributo alla Storia delle Triennali’, *Casabella*, September-October 1957, 7 - 12 (p. 11).

what the organisers' aims were:

to set going a vast operation of bringing together the forces of large Italian industry, indicating to architects the possibility of integration with the industrial cycle of production and in return the interest of these forces in integrating themselves into the Milanese show.²¹

Regardless of the actual degree of industrialisation of Italian manufacturing, there is a discernible shift in the place of craft between 1951 and 1954. From its multiple and highly visible presence at the ninth *Triennale*, it has been disarmed and limited to the realm of commodities.²² Looking first at the political positions of the organisers involved, and how these fed into the curation of spaces within the *Triennale*, the following section explores how craft's different personalities and the subsequent reduction of its role were tied up with the uncertain and highly contested nature of the direction that Italy itself would take at this time. This would impact not only on the multiple ways that craft was appropriated at the 1951 *Triennale*, but also which of these would go on to play defining roles in Italian design in the early 1950s. As the final sections discuss, the recurrence of craftsmanship and the alterity of craft at the *Triennale* exemplifies how at times there were clear parallels with the ideas and aims of *Italy at Work*; at others, the American and Italian visions indicated very different relations between the two realms.

1.2.1 Internal and National Politics at the 1951 *Triennale*

The 1951 *Triennale* was a site of cultural complexity and ideo-political contestation, in which a ruptured national political landscape was writ small within the exposition's walls. Despite its overwhelming majority in 1948, the DC's share in the vote fell in the elections of the early 1950s.²³ Tensions were high between left and right; so serious were clashes between left-wing organisations and the state that the

²¹ Buzzi Ceriani and Vittorio Gregotti, p. 11.

²² Sparke, 'The Straw Donkey', p. 62.

²³ Ginsborg, pp. 141 - 142.

Italian writer Cesare Pavese declared the nation to be in the midst of a ‘latent civil war’.²⁴ These political divisions were mirrored in the personalities behind the *Triennale*. Under the president Ivan Matteo Lombardo, organisation was divided between an executive committee and board of governors. The latter included Bottoni and Ponti, while Albini, the architect Luciano Baldessari, painter Adriano de Spilimbergo, architects Marcello Nizzoli and Elio Palazzo made up the executive committee.²⁵

Leonardo Borgese, the *Corriere della Sera*’s art critic, was amongst those to foreground the differences between the organisers. He identified two opposing positions - on the one side ‘Albini-Bottoni’ and on the other ‘Baldessari-Spilimbergo’.²⁶ Borgese allies Albini and Bottoni as belonging to the socially orientated neo-rationalist left, the latter described as ‘the man of utilitarian or social architecture, and an enemy of rich decoration’.²⁷ The other side is characterised by its apolitical stance: Baldessari is ‘an enemy of sterilised and utilitarian exhibitions’ and painter de Spilimbergo is ‘a romantic and sentimental *chiarista*’.²⁸ This division was not along industrial-artisanal lines, but rather a question of what production was for and which market. As Albini and Eugenio Gentili explained in *Metron*, the organ of Bruno Zevi’s Organic architecture movement, Albini and Palazzo aimed to ‘bring artists to the “applied arts” for objects of use, to concrete problems of production and of collaboration with craft and industry; Baldessari, Ponti, Spilimbergo turned their attention towards objects of exception, thinking of bringing artists to do “decorative arts”’.²⁹

²⁴ Cesare Pavese, *Il Mestiere di Vivere (Diario 1935 - 1950)* (Turin:1952) 399 in Duggan, ‘Introduction’ in *Italy in the Cold War*, ed. by Duggan and Wagstaff, p, 20.

²⁵ *Nona Triennale di Milano*, p. 7.

²⁶ Leonardo Borgese, ‘Si Apre Oggi a Milano la *Triennale* d’Arti Decorative’, *Corriere della Sera*, 12 May 1951, p. 3.

²⁷ Borgese, p. 3.

²⁸ *Chiarismo* was a Milanese art movement of the 1930s.

²⁹ Albini and Gentili, ‘Esperienze della T9’, *Metron*, September - December 1951, 21 - 24 (p. 22).

Several of those behind the ninth *Triennale* had been involved in previous manifestations of the exhibition, and the battleground of 1951 represented an encounter between aims either interrupted by war or frustrated as hopes for post-war renewal extinguished. 1947 had been dominated by the Albini-Bottoni position. Their attempts to retrieve rationalism from its ambiguous relationship with fascism saw it re-envisioned as a social programme rather than aesthetic style. In this new, neo-rationalism, low-cost, standardised mass production of both the home and its contents was deemed the only viable solution to provide for those classes most in need. This period of reconstruction was, as Sparke has observed, ‘the first time’ that ‘the Italian architectural and design avant-garde focused [...] upon the physical and spiritual needs of the working classes’.³⁰

The politics of 1947 were present at this *Triennale*, most notably in the section dedicated to four rationalist architects who had been killed in World War Two; Carlo Gialli, Edoardo Persico, Giuseppe Terragni and Giuseppe Pagano. These last two typified the movement’s ambivalent relationship with fascism: Terragni’s best known work was Como’s *La Casa del Fascio* while Pagano, initially a supporter of the regime, then joined the Resistance and was subsequently condemned to Mauthausen concentration camp.³¹

The Resistance activities of rationalists did much to assist the moral rehabilitation of rationalism in the immediate post-war period, and the left’s role in the anti-fascist movement contributed to the continuing cultural strength of communism in 1951, despite electoral defeat in 1948 and the repressive actions of the DC.³² It was manifested in a strong anti-Americanism, as seen in the considerable opposition to the Marshall Plan: Lombardo noted that ‘a large section of the Italian public opinion

³⁰ Sparke, ‘A Home for Everybody?: Design, Ideology and the Culture of the Home in Italy, 1945 - 1972’ in *Modernism in Design*, ed. by Paul Greenhalgh (London: Reaktion Books, 1990), pp. 185 - 202 (p. 186).

³¹ Sabatino, ‘Pride in Modesty: Giuseppe Pagano’s “Architettura Rurale”’, *Journal of Architectural Education*, 63 (2010), 93 - 98 (p. 96).

³² Ginsborg, p. 187.

[...] heavily influenced by Communists, was convinced that the intent of the Marshall Plan was to destroy the industrial and agricultural structure of our society'.³³

This resistance to American ideas was also evident in the opposition to the quality held dearest by the organisers of *Italy at Work*: individualism. In *Metron* Albin and Gentili chastised the 'individualistic spirit of the organisers [...] this new moment of reluctance or lacking attitude of the architects to unite themselves in collaboration is one of the negative factors of the T9'.³⁴ Gramsci had harsh words for what he called the 'merely brutish apoliticism' inherent in 'petty individualism', comparing it negatively to the "State spirit" ...that needs to be upheld'.³⁵ More recently, Stephen Gundle has described how

It was thought that products produced by commercial enterprise or imported from the United States furnished a set of ideas and suggestions that favoured individual, private solutions to life's problems in contrast to the faith in collective action and social solidarity that marked all strands of left-wing thinking as well as Catholic models.³⁶

This shared ground between Catholicism and communism confirms the limits of Americanisation in Italy and also suggests that the qualities that Albin and his allies were looking for in the design object would not be the same as those in the US exhibition. Yet the ongoing strength of communist politics was not the main story of the 1951 *Triennale*. Largely confined to the QT8, Bottoni and his collaborators were physically and ideologically marginalised and with them their social ideals and hopes for cultural renewal. In *Metron* Carlo Doglio expressed his despair at the state of Italy that year:

³³ Ivan M. Lombardo, *Oral History Interview with Ivan M. Lombardo*. Conducted by Theodore A. Wilson, 8 May 1964
<<http://www.trumanlibrary.org/oralhist/lombard1.htm>> [Accessed 23 January 2008]

³⁴ Albin and Gentili, p. 23

³⁵ Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, p. 147.

³⁶ Gundle, *Between Hollywood and Moscow: the Italian Communists and the Challenge of Mass Culture, 1943 – 1991* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2000), p. 39.

The war finished six years ago, but the involution which follows it drives much further back: that hopes have gone deluded is fairly natural, but that the ideas formulated then now seem incredible demonstrates how ill the roots of society are today [...] from the progressive bureaucratisation of states which kills off the ferments, however weakened, of the liberalism of capitalist regimes and shuts up again the onset of workers in communist countries; from the medievalism of the Church and from the standardisation of the political apparatus [...] to the end of the arts and culture.³⁷

1951 represented a moment of cultural stagnation. Lacking any impetus to break out of the problematic legacy of fascism, the bourgeois culture of the pre-war years had re-emerged in the 1950s. As already noted, those architects ruling over this year's *Triennale*, and even the institution itself, went largely unchanged from pre to post-war. Not insignificantly, it was precisely the re-invention of pre-war institutions that enabled Germany's post-war creative renewal: Paul Betts described the re-founding of the Werkbund in 1947 as 'part and parcel of a wider post-war initiative to recoup a liberal German past'.³⁸

It is not surprising that Borgese declares the 'Albini-Bottoni' tendency defeated at this *Triennale* and 'Baldessari-Spilimbergo' the winners. But what a pyrrhic victory this was: Baldessari's entrance spaces were the mostly heavily criticised of the whole *Triennale* and exposed the fragmented and hierarchical nature of the arts in this period.³⁹

³⁷ Carlo Doglio, 'Accademismo e Formalismo alla Base della Nona *Triennale*', *Metron*, September – December, 1951, pp. 18 – 19.

³⁸ Paul Betts, *The Authority of Everyday Objects: A Cultural History of West German Industrial Design* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, California; London: California University Press, 2007), p. 77.

³⁹ Borgese, p. 3.

1.2.2 Luciano Baldessari and the “Unity of the Arts”

Albini and Gentili credited Baldessari with being one of the few organisers who actually attempted to work towards the *Triennale’s* theme of the “Unity of the Arts”.⁴⁰ An architect, set designer and painter involved in both Futurism and Rationalism, Baldessari would soon be most known for his Breda pavilions at the *Fiera Campionaria di Milano*.⁴¹ Together with the architect Marcello Grisotti, Baldessari was in charge of the entrance hall, atrium, staircase (*See Illustration 35*) and first-floor vestibule of the building. The catalogue described their aim to bring together architecture and the ‘visual arts’ which ‘seem to ignore each other’.⁴² The spaces curated by Baldessari and Grisotti represented ‘the search for a new unity of the arts, that is of a new *completeness* of architecture’.⁴³ In order to reflect what Baldessari saw as the rich ‘diversity’ of Italy’s artistic climate, he commissioned large-scale works from a dozen artists included Agegnore Fabbri, Fontana, and Spilimbergo. In the *Corriere della Sera*, Borgese described the experience of entering the *Triennale* and encountering these works:

You enter, and here two mural paintings by Spilimbergo on the left, and of [Angelo] Del Bon, on the right. Progressing you find the sculptures of [Gastone] Panciera, [Lorenzo] Pepe, Fabbri, and along the staircase, [Bruno] Calvani and [Romano] Rui. From the stair to the floor above large mural paintings by [Giuseppe] Ajmone and [Bruno] Cassinari and an enormous abstract thing by [Vittorio] Tavernari: violet pavement, white walls, neon lighting constituting a rather displeasing whole.⁴⁴

⁴⁰ Albini and Gentili, p. 23.

⁴¹ For more on Baldessari, see Vittorio Fagone, *Baldessari: Progetti e Scenografie* (Milan: Electa, 1982).

⁴² *Nona Triennale di Milano* p. 23.

⁴³ *Nona Triennale di Milano* p. 23.

⁴⁴ Borgese, p. 3.



Illustration 35. View of the Staircase in the Palazzo dell'Arte at the 1951 *Triennale*. On view are *Concetto Spaziale* by Lucio Fontana, an abstract ironstone sculpture by Antonia Campi and a ceramic mural by Giuseppe Ajmone.

The ‘neon lighting’ that Borgese dismissively refers to was the centrepiece of the *Triennale*, a looping one hundred metre-long neon Spatialist sculpture by Fontana that dominated the architectural void above the staircase and loomed over the visitor walking up to the first floor. As Anthony White has argued, *Concetto Spaziale* was Fontana’s attempt to locate a new artistic language suitable for the developments in modern building technology.⁴⁵ This was the artist’s manifesto: ‘For this new architecture there is an art based on new techniques and media [...] neon [...] television [...] A new aesthetics is taking shape, light forms in spaces’.⁴⁶ This ‘new aesthetics’, with its populist and consumerist evocations of nightclub lighting and advertising signs did not go down well with everyone.⁴⁷ Doglio described it as ‘a Hollywood triumph of neon lights and luxury’ that epitomised the abandonment of rationalism at this *Triennale*.⁴⁸

Fontana was not the only artist overlooked by Borgese. So too was a large abstract enamelled ironstone sculpture (*See Illustration 36*) by the ceramist Antonia Campi that hung on the wall below Fontana’s work.⁴⁹ Campi had studied sculpture at Milan’s *Accademia di Belle Arti di Brera*. Her work oscillated between one-off sculptural pieces and more commercial ware made by the *Società Ceramica Italiana* (SCI) firm, based in Laveno on the shores of Lake Maggiore. The latter included a tea service (*See Illustration 37*) exhibited in the ceramics section of the *Triennale* that Ponti likened to a ‘spiky and surreal hen’.⁵⁰ It was Guido Andlovitz, the SCI’s director who recommended her for the *Triennale* staircase commission.⁵¹ Campi was one of the foremost female ceramists in Italy at this time: she had been included in *Italy at Work*, exhibited several times in Faenza, Vicenza and Varese and in 1962

⁴⁵ Anthony White, Lucio Fontana: Between Utopia and Kitsch’, *Grey Room*, 5 (2001), 55 - 77 (p. 65).

⁴⁶ Fontana, “Technical Manifesto” (1951) in White, p. 65.

⁴⁷ Dorwin Teague ‘A Report by Walter Dorwin Teague’, p. 96.

⁴⁸ Doglio, p. 19.

⁴⁹ Enzo Biffi Gentili, *Antonia Campi: Antologia Ceramica 1947 – 1997* (Laveno: Internazionale Design Ceramico and Milan: Electa, 1998), p. 88.

⁵⁰ Ponti, ‘La Ceramica Italiana’, *Domus*, July-August 1951, 32 - 42 (p. 35).

⁵¹ Biffi Gentili, p. 88.

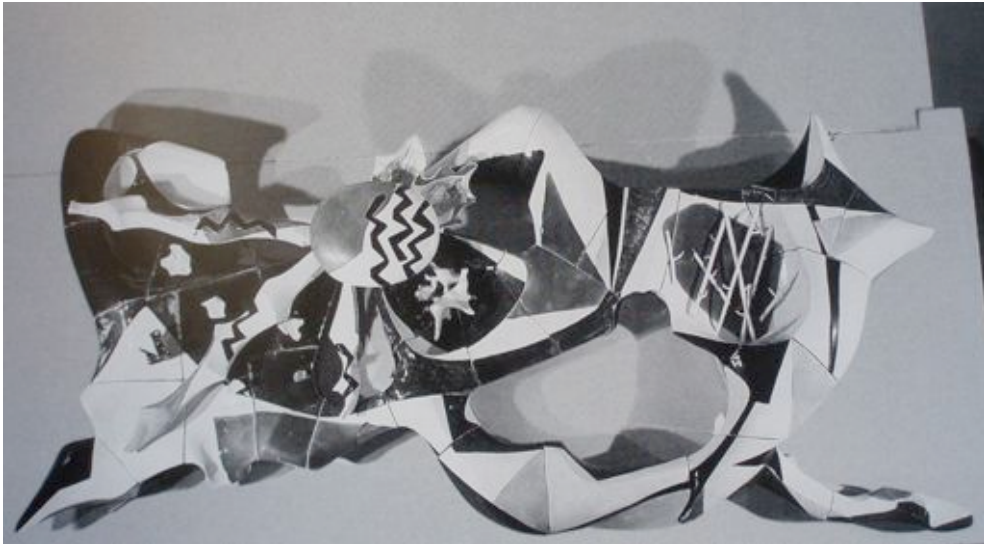


Illustration 36. Abstract multi-coloured ironstone sculpture, by Antonia Campi and show at the 1951 *Triennale*.



Illustration 37. Multicoloured tea service designed by Antonio Campi and made by Società Ceramica di Laveno. Included in the section of Italian ceramics at the 1951 *Triennale*.

replaced Andlovitz as the SCI's director.⁵² Despite this, Campi has remained a marginal figure. This was not only due to her gender; often listed just as Campi or Neto Campi, there was an ambiguity over her name that would have contributed to problems of attribution.⁵³

Campi's omission from Borgese's article at least meant that she was saved from his condemnation of the entrance spaces, which he summed up as 'abstract-concrete-spatial-function squalor'.⁵⁴ He was not alone. Gillo Dorfles described the result as

that which should not have happened; to let that the most disparate and contradictory artists do as they liked, one intermingling with the other, which gave proof of their "stylistic" incongruity, right in [...] the entrance hall of the exhibition, in the area most dedicated to and exemplary of current taste.⁵⁵

What both Borgese and Dorfles suggest is not only that Baldessari and Grisotti failed to produce a coherent representation of Italy's arts, but that they exposed the lack of coherence between these. This is what Edigio Bonfante, in the Olivetti-owned *Comunità* magazine, had already perceived two years previously: 'our time lacks a stylistic unity, its own absolute and definitive voice'.⁵⁶ Instead, each of the arts promoted their own movements and directions. While he sees all the arts as to blame for this, Bonfante singles out architecture in particular: architects 'do not yet know how to climb down from polemical positions so that today [...] they no longer assert

⁵² A multi-coloured faience sculpture in the shape of a dish of fruit conceived and made by Campi was shown at *Italy at Work*, p. 90; 'Antonia Campi' in *Dal Merletto alla Motocicletta*, ed. by Pansera and Occeppo, pp. 98 – 99.

⁵³ Neto was Campi's middle name. For example, see the 1951 *Triennale* catalogue: *Nona Triennale di Milano*, p. 24 and Alessandro Rocca, *Atlante della Triennale: Triennale di Milano* (Milan: *Triennale di Milano*, 1999), p. 20.

⁵⁴ Borgese, p. 3.

⁵⁵ Borgese, p. 3 and Gillo Dorfles, 'Piccola Guida per la IX Triennale', *Pirelli: Rivista di Informazione e di Tecnica*, June 1951, 40.

⁵⁶ Egidio Bonfante 'Le Arti Figurative nell'Architettura' *Comunità*, May-June 1949, 46 - 49 (p. 46).

themselves with the unstoppableness and obviousness of the movement's pioneers'.⁵⁷ It seemed that neo-rationalism had run its course, but no alternative had stepped in to replace it.

Bonfanti's finger-pointing at architecture is a sign of the profession's leading role over the other arts in the early post-war period. The catalogue equated the "Unity of the Arts" with the '*completeness* of architecture', while Baldessari declared the aim of the entrance spaces that of highlighting 'the necessary subjugation of painters and sculptors to the wishes of the architect. Here, what mattered was the architectonic statement of the rooms; it did not matter much which figurative or non-figurative work it was'.⁵⁸

This assertion of architecture's hegemony came at a time when it was beginning to look in doubt, particularly as the hoped-for centrality of the culture of neo-rationalist architecture in the Reconstruction failed to transpire.⁵⁹ Writing in the late 1960s Gregotti revealed the reality of architects' involvement:

Italian mistrust of modern culture isolated the architect and made his services a luxury item, which put the responsibility for reconstruction in the hands of the civil engineer and the draftsman. No one sought out the architect for what he was able to offer; no one paid him for his work: his role was somewhere between that of a servant and an antagonist, and his professional standing was humiliation.⁶⁰

Architecture's hegemonic position was being challenged on two fronts in the early 1950s. On the one side was design. As Alessandro Rocca would later argue in his history of the *Triennale*, 'the "political" pre-eminence of architecture [...] had to yield its place to design which, in the field of the applied arts, directly represented

⁵⁷ Bonfante, p. 48.

⁵⁸ Baldessari in Dorfles 'Piccola Guida per la IX *Triennale*', pp. 40-41.

⁵⁹ Pansera, *Storia e Cronaca della Triennale* p. 69.

⁶⁰ Vittorio Gregotti, *New Directions in Italian Architecture* (London: Studio Vista, 1968), p. 64.

the dominant force'.⁶¹ On the other was art. This was visible not only in the prominence given to works such as Fontana's neon sculpture, but also in the approach to the crafts. Nowhere was this more apparent than in the ceramics section, curated by Ponti.

1.2.3 Ponti's Ceramics Section at the 1951 *Triennale*

Ponti had been involved in the *Triennale* since its first appearance as a *Biennale* in Monza in 1923. He had been instrumental in its relocation to Milan for the fifth manifestation of the exhibition, and its transformation into a *Triennale* in 1933, which he directed, and he co-directed those of 1936 and 1940.⁶² 1951 saw Ponti's return to a directive role - but, as Borgese reported, this 'god of the old Triennali' decided to withdraw from the executive committee and oversee just one section: ceramics.⁶³

The installation was designed by the architect Carlo De Carli (*See Illustration 38*). Unlike the majority of the Italian sections objects were not displayed in vitrines, but on wooden trestle tables and wall-mounted shelving. A rustic looking woven-seated ladderback chair sat at the end of each table and sheets of woven raffia were suspended from the ceiling, creating a more intimate space in the neo-classical container.⁶⁴ The traditional appearance of the display was offset by the shelving, a standardised plywood system. This combination of artisanal and industrial production techniques was echoed in the ceramics displayed, which were divided

⁶¹ Rocca, p. 13.

⁶² For more on the reasons of this shift, and Ponti's role in the earlier *Triennale*, see Riccini, 'Milano-Brianza 'Disegno Industriale Italiano: la Costruzione di una Cultura fra Istituzioni e Territorio' in *Design in Triennale 1947 - 68*, ed. by Bassi, Riccini and Colombo, pp. 13 - 32 (pp. 15 - 18).

⁶³ Borgese, p. 3.

⁶⁴ The Palazzo dell'Arte was designed in 1933 by Giovanni Muzio, a Milanese architect associated with the neo-classicist Novecento movement, to which Ponti also belonged. For more on the Novecento movement, see Marianne Lamonaca, 'A "Return to Order": Issues of the Classical and the Vernacular in Italian Inter-War Design' *Designing Modernity: The Arts of Reform and Persuasion, 1885 - 1945*, ed. by Wendy Kaplan (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1995), (pp.194-221), pp. 296, 212.



Illustration 38. The ceramics section at the 1951 *Triennale*, curated by Ponti and designed by Carlo De Carli.

into three categories: ‘*industrie*’ (industries), ‘*ateliers d’arte di industrie*’ (industry studios) and ‘*artisti ceramisti italiani*’ (Italian artist-ceramists).⁶⁵

Ponti explained that the emphasis was not on the first group, the ‘prodigious richness of craft’ found throughout Italy’s historic ceramics regions and nor was it on the second, the ‘illustrious and always lively art traditions of her large manufacturers’ as found in Laveno and the Arezzo town of Doccia.⁶⁶ Instead, it was on the ‘happy marriage between ceramics and the most modern artists, painters and sculptures that represented the liveliest and audacious avant-garde of modern Italian ceramics’.⁶⁷ The artist-ceramists were divided into three sub-categories: Melandri and Gambone were ‘exclusively ceramists’; Fontana, Melotti and Fabbri amongst those to the ‘have celebrated the wedding between ceramics and artists’; and Bruno Bagnoli, Guglielmo Malato, Salvatore Meli, Parini, Pompeo Pianezzola, and Cesare Sartori represented the up-and-coming.⁶⁸ Five had individual sections: Melotti, Melandri, Fontana (*See Illustration 39*), Gambone and Fabbri. With the exception of the emerging artists, these were the same present at *Italy at Work*; although a greater number of ceramists were included in the American show.

Ponti described his curatorial approach: ‘I collected with a criteria intentionally representative than critical, to show [...] Italian ceramics as they are, at least above a certain level of taste, of capability and invention’.⁶⁹ This pretence at objective representativeness was soon dismantled by the critics. Dorwin Teague stated that ‘it is clear to anyone familiar with the field that in selecting exhibits Ponti has exercised his own highly personal taste, and the result is a stimulating collection marked by conspicuous omissions and distortions’.⁷⁰ This meant that ‘the artists with whom

⁶⁵ Ponti, ‘Ceramiche’ in *Nona Triennale di Milano*, p. 149.

⁶⁶ Ponti, ‘La Ceramica Italiana’, p. 32.

⁶⁷ Ponti, ‘La Ceramica Italiana’, p. 32.

⁶⁸ Ponti ‘Prefazione’ in *Ceramica alla 9a Triennale di Milano*, ed. by Zetti and Spreafico (Milan: Editoriale Domus, 1953), p. 8.

⁶⁹ Ponti, ‘Prefazione’, 8.

⁷⁰ Dorwin Teague, ‘A Report by Walter Dorwin Teague’, p. 116.



Illustration 39. A corner dedicated to Fontana's work at the 1951 *Triennale*. Also visible are one of the ladderback chairs that were scattered around the section.

Ponti is thoroughly in sympathy are fully shown' while 'many younger men are not present at all'.⁷¹ Albini and Gentile were more critical. They denounced Ponti's 'attempt to bring sculptors to do ceramics - not however objects, but sculptures in ceramics' as 'damaging' and also criticised the 'technical incomprehension of some of the sculptors' in the display.⁷²

The differences between Albini and Ponti had already been evident at the 1936 *Triennale*. The architect Franca Helg, who in 1952 began a thirty year collaboration with Albini, later noted that while Ponti's installation proposed 'luxury art for the elegant house', Albini exhibited industrial building techniques and 'a house for everyone'.⁷³ That is not to say that Albini was not interested in working with Italy's craft traditions, and that Ponti was not interested in large-scale production. After all, these two architects were responsible for what were arguably two of the most visible examples unveiled at the 1951 *Triennale*; Albini's rattan and reed *Margherita* chair for Bonacina, designed together with Ezio Sgrelli, and Ponti's ladderback *Leggera* for Cassina, both of which are discussed in chapter two. It was rather that Albini envisaged a different future for Italy's artisans compared to Ponti's encouragement of one-off, artistic luxuries. He praised 'a more modest, but more concrete and useful project, [in which] several artists have collaborated with artisans on rugs, fabrics, metals and other materials' - an option that 'we consider the richest road for durable results'.⁷⁴ He does not specifically name the project, but only ENAPI's display at the *Triennale* fits this description. Furthermore, Albini himself contributed to this project, in his *Gala* chair (*See Illustration 40*), designed together with the architect Ezio Sgrelli and made by Bonacina.

⁷¹ Dorwin Teague, 'A Report by Walter Dorwin Teague', p. 116.

⁷² Albini and Gentili, p. 23.

⁷³ Franca Helg, 'Franco Albini - Architect and Teacher' in Stephen Leet, *Franco Albini: Architecture and Design 1934 - 1977*, trans. by Marguerite Shore (New York: Princeton University Press, 1990), pp. 13 - 18 (p. 13).

⁷⁴ Albini and Gentili, p. 23.



Illustration 40. *Gala*, rattan and reed chair, designed by Franco Albini and Ezio Sgrelli for the ENAPI section at the ninth *Triennale* and made by Bonacina.

1.2.4 ENAPI: Bringing Architects, Artisans and Artisans Together

The ENAPI section (*See Illustration 41*) was one of a number that Ponti omitted from his coverage of the *Triennale*. Along with the CNA, the leather, lace and embroidery installations, it received no mention in the six issues of *Domus* that Ponti dedicated to the *Triennale*.⁷⁵ This silence surrounding certain crafts was another way they were dealt with in the post-war period. This occurs in other, otherwise comprehensive articles on the *Triennale*: Dorwin Teague omits the straw, lace, embroidery, plastic and leather sections in his lengthy *Interiors* article while in *Design* the designer Robin Day mentions only glass and ceramics.⁷⁶

Those sections that were overlooked were those seen as most problematic. They correlated with those crafts that ENAPI's president, Corrado Mezzano, described as 'the poorest and the most impoverished-fallen into decay': straw, alabaster, embroidery and leather.⁷⁷ Ponti did feature the straw section (*See Illustration 42*), the only one curated by female architects, Emma Calderini and Eugenia Alberti Reggio. However it was to warn that 'field of straw and wicker, for its folkloristic origins, [were] dangerous to taste – like leather, glass, alabaster, etc'.⁷⁸

Ponti was not alone in his aversion to folklore. In 1960, Tommaso Ferraris, the *Triennale*'s general secretary from 1954, described the 'false traditional forms and nauseating folklorisms that up until some ten years ago sent a good part of the bourgeois classes into raptures', and appealed to those architects currently interest in Italy's craft traditions 'to absolutely not confuse this with the inclusion of folklorism into production'.⁷⁹

⁷⁵ The six issues dedicated to the *Triennale* started in June 1951 and ended in January 1952.

⁷⁶ Robin Day, 'Milan 1951: The Ninth *Triennale* Exhibition of Decorative and Industrial Art and Architecture', *Design*, August 1951, pp. 20 - 21.

⁷⁷ Corrado Mezzano, *Ente Nazionale per l'Artigianato e le Piccole Industrie* (Milan: Esposizione *Triennale* Internazionale delle Arti Decorative e Industriali Moderne e dell'Architettura Moderna, 1951), p. 6.

⁷⁸ Ponti, 'Le Paglie alla *Triennale*', *Domus*, September 1951, p. 36.

⁷⁹ Tommaso Ferraris, 'Dove Va l'Artigianato', *Il Mobile Italiano*, 23 April 1960, p.1.



Illustration 41. View of the ENAPI section at the ninth *Triennale*. Curated by Gino Frattini of ENAPI with Ugo Blasi. Vitrines designed by Marco Romano.

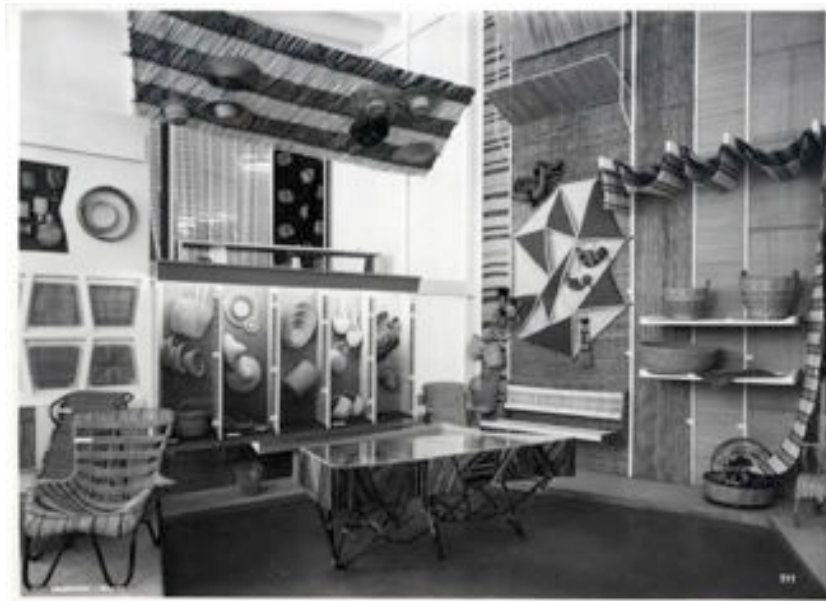


Illustration 42. Straw work and wicker section, curated by Eugenia Alberto Reggio and Emma Calderini. The two chairs on the left were designed by Alberti Reggio and made by Bonacina (front) and Ciceri (rear).

There are a number of reasons for their refutation of folklore. Although not as prevalent as in Nazi Germany, nationalistic celebrations of Italy's indigenous folk culture had take place under the regime.⁸⁰ It also had southern associations in a nation with a strong North-South divide. Furthermore, Ponti's preference for craft with high culture associations aimed at an elite and luxury market, went against a cultural genre that Gramsci described as identified with the subaltern classes, existing in opposition 'to 'official' conceptions of the world' and elaborated cultural systems.⁸¹ For Ponti, strawworkers were 'capable of beautiful productions', but only when in the hands of artists and architects such as Alberti Reggio, whose furniture designs were included in the section and in Ponti's selective coverage of it.⁸²

Organising collaborations between architects and artisans was the strategy adopted by ENAPI. It had originally been set up as the *Ente Nazionale Fascista per l'Artigianato e le Piccole Industrie* (National Fascist Organisation for the Crafts and Small Industries (ENFAPI)) in 1922 as the result of legislation that granted 300,000 lire for the establishment of regional committees for Italy's 'small industries'.⁸³ ENFAPI organised courses, exhibitions and trade fairs, established links between artisans and artists - particularly in the field of furnishings - and distributed materials.⁸⁴ This last role became the promotion of autochthonic materials for what were perceived to be traditional Italian crafts such as majolica production under autarchy.⁸⁵ Present continuously from the third *Biennale* of 1927 to the 1936 *Triennale*, ENAPI would not return to the exhibition until 1951, and in this hiatus the

⁸⁰ Eugenia Pallicelli, *Fashion under Fascism: Beyond the Black Shirt* (New York and Oxford: Berg, 2004), pp. 20 – 23.

⁸¹ Gramsci, *Cultural Writings*, pp. 189, 190.

⁸² Ponti, 'Le Paglie alla *Triennale*', p. 36.

⁸³ 'Small industries' were described as 'those which are practised at home or in the workshop of limited importance for capital used, for technical methods or staff employed'. Gregotti, *Il Disegno del Prodotto Industriale; Italia 1860-1980* (Milan: Electa, 1980), p. 170.

⁸⁴ Stefania Sanguanini, 'I "Mezzadri Urbani": Il Sindacato Fascista degli Artigiani', *Italia Contemporanea*, 165 (1986), 30 - 52, (p. 35).

⁸⁵ For an example of this, see Piero Gazzotti, *L'Artigianato del Tempo Fascista* (Rome: Centro Internazionale dell'Artigianato, 1941).

word 'fascist' was removed from its name. In the immediate post-war period, it continued to contribute to exhibitions at home and abroad.⁸⁶

In the interwar period promoting collaborations between artists and artisans was already being seen as the solution to the larger industrial phenomenon of the reduction of artisans' role to that of executors.⁸⁷ As Marianne Lamonaca has noted in her own research on Italian interwar design, ENAPI's promotion of collaboration-based activities were based on the view that it was no longer economically feasible for artisans to be both 'design innovator and executor'.⁸⁸ Providing artisans with designs from artists such as Ugo Carà and Tommaso Buzzi shortened production time, but also ensured that the objects produced would be suitably modern and desirable to the marketplace.⁸⁹

Mezzano saw these collaborations as equally beneficial to the architect and artist involved. He stated that ENAPI had always been 'preoccupied with the serious damaged caused to art and craft' when artists and artisans were distanced from each other, as the exchange of ideas ran both ways.⁹⁰ This was why 'right from the start of its activity it has worked to tear architects, painters and sculptors away from the ivory towers of their soliloquies and thrown new motifs among the anvils, lathes and looms'.⁹¹ ENAPI was a way for architects and artists to try out ideas with skilful

⁸⁶ In Britain, ENAPI was included in the exhibition *Italian Contemporary Handicrafts*, held at the Italian Cultural Institute in London in September 1955 and organized by the CNA. *Italian Contemporary Handicrafts* (Florence: Tip. Giuntina, 1955). In Italy, ENAPI products would be included in exhibitions including the *Mostra Concorso Nazionale della Ceramica di Faenza* in 1958 and the fourth and fifth *Biennale d'Arte del Metallo* held in Gubbio in 1967 and 1969. In 1978 ENAPI was effectively shut down as it was dismantled into regional entities. There is not much information on ENAPI available. Main references include Pica, 'Presenza dell'Artigianato Creativo nell'Italia Contemporanea' in *Storia dell'Artigianato Italiano*, p. 66; Joan Jocking Pearson, 'Italy', *Craft Horizons*, July-August 1956, 34 - 35 (p. 34).

⁸⁷ Sanguanini, p. 34.

⁸⁸ Lamonaca, p. 209.

⁸⁹ For examples of Carà's designs for metalware for ENAPI see 'Documenti e Modelli per L'Artigianato Italiano: Metalli per la Casa', *Domus*, June 1939, p. 80. Buzzi designed some strawwork for ENAPI: 'Artigianato: Problema Nazionale', *Domus*, September 1940, 20 - 24 (p. 20).

⁹⁰ Mezzano, p. 5.

⁹¹ Mezzano, p. 5.

artisans, free from the commercial constraints of industry - just as the early House of Italians Handicrafts exhibitions had been.

For the ninth *Triennale* ENAPI sponsored a competition for artists to submit designs for artisans to execute. However, as Mezzano openly acknowledged, they were unhappy with the results and decided instead to approach 'artists of exquisite sensibility and safe experience' and entrust their designs to those they considered 'the most skilled artisans'.⁹² Over forty artists including Giuseppe Capogrossi, Fornasetti, Enrico Prampolini and Emilio Vedova provided designs along with two architects; Albini and Alfio Fallica.⁹³ Around sixty artisans were responsible for making the designs, and were either individual makers, such as the Venetian Maria Mazzaron who embroidered Capogrossi's abstract tablemat design (*See Illustration 43*), collectives such as the Coop Alabastrini in Volterra, or small firms like Bonacina.⁹⁴

ENAPI would repeat this strategy at the 1957 *Triennale*. Pica was highly concerned for both the architect and the artisan in this arrangement, as this lengthy passage indicates:

An artist in Turin, Rome or Genoa was requested to make a design, he was paid for it, and then the designed object *was made* by an artisan in Cascina, Cantù, Torre del Greco or anywhere at all. What happened therefore was that this original designer was a complete stranger to the materials and techniques, while the design was to the artisan a bolt from the blue, equally unfamiliar; the consequence was that the craftsman was concretising in his work ideas of which he was little convinced, while the artist, conceiving forms for unknown materials and techniques, was fated to fall into an unrelated decorative approximation, a formalism as

⁹² Mezzano, p. 6.

⁹³ For a full list of artists and architects involved, see *Ente Nazionale per l'Artigianato e le Piccole Industrie* p. 9.

⁹⁴ For a full list of artisans involved, see *Ente Nazionale per l'Artigianato e le Piccole Industrie* pp. 11 - 13.



Illustration 43. Placemat, designed by Capogrossi and embroidered by Maria Mazzaron for the ENAPI section at the 1951 *Triennale*.

inevitable as it was transitory. But the worst was that the craftsman participated in this modernity merely as one executing others' ideas, a skilled workman: a layman lending his labour to the artist. The craftsman was, in a word completely annulled as an inventive power. Did this mean the redemption or the renewal of the craftsman, or was it not rather suffocating him to the point where he was reduced to a kind of qualified labourer?⁹⁵

ENAPI was actively promoting the reduction of the artisan's role to that of alienated executor. In the face of increasing mechanisation, in which the manual skill of the worker was in danger of being made redundant, to deny the craft practitioner a creative role seems odd. Perhaps ENAPI was preparing the artisan for the division of labour that is the hallmark of industrialisation. Gramsci described this dismantling of the 'psycho-physical nexus of qualified professional work, which demands a certain active participation of intelligence, fantasy and initiative on the part of the worker, and reducing productive operations exclusively to the mechanical, physical aspect' as 'simply the most recent phase of a long process that began with industrialism itself'.⁹⁶ It meant that all that was left was to the artisan, and to Italy's crafts, was its skill.

1.2.5 Praise for Italian Craftsmanship at the 1951 *Triennale*

Italian craftsmanship was one of the most commonly praised aspects of the *Triennale*. Dorwin Teague described the craftsmanship in the 'Model Apartments and Furniture' section as 'superb, the touch light, the feeling for materials sure'.⁹⁷ He saw craftsmanship as Italy's greatest resource: 'the Italians are able to assemble a range and quality of craftsmanship in many fields that no other nation in the world

⁹⁵ Pica, *Forme Nuove in Italia: Stile, Forma, Colore nell'Artigianato e nell'Industria* (Rome: Bestetti, 1957), n.p.

⁹⁶ Gramsci, *Prison Notebooks*, p. 302.

⁹⁷ Dorwin Teague, 'A Report by Walter Dorwin Teague', p. 101.

today can challenge successfully'.⁹⁸ Day admired the skill involved in the construction of the *Triennale* installations themselves and the casual intimacy between the architects and artisans in this process: 'few working drawings were in evidence while the exhibition was being built, rapid progress apparently being made through verbal instructions from architects to fast-working and skilful craftsmen'.⁹⁹ As the architectural historian James Ackerman has shown, this emphasis on verbal communication rather than detailed drawings in Italy was a trait that dates back to the Renaissance.¹⁰⁰

Chapter two will probe more fully the nature of design communication between architects and artisans. It was dependent on a degree of mutual understanding and the architect's faith in the artisan's ability to interpret and execute his ideas, as well as a plentiful supply of artisans to do so. This translated into a 'taking for granted' which epitomised architect-artisan relations in this period, in which the presence of skilled artisans was taken as a given in post-war Italy. This is exemplified in a series of articles included in four issues of *Domus* in 1952 by the architect Mario Tedeschi. Entitled '*Voi e gli Artigiani*' (You and the Artisans), the articles consisted of small sketches for furniture ideas from Tedeschi (*See Illustration 44*) that the reader then presented to their local artisan to execute.¹⁰¹ This furniture was 'easily made by artisans that everyone of us has at their disposition; bricklayers, carpenters, blacksmiths, upholsterers, etc.'.¹⁰² The distinction between 'you' and 'the artisans' rests on the premise that the *Domus* reader was not an artisan but was versed in communicating with them.

While Tedeschi's rough, approximate sketches imply the artisan's interpretative and executive skill, capable of translating informal drawings into furniture objects, the

⁹⁸ Dorwin Teague, 'A Report by Walter Dorwin Teague', p. 116.

⁹⁹ Day, p. 20.

¹⁰⁰ James Ackerman, 'Architectural Practice in the Italian Renaissance', *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians*, 12 (1954), pp. 3 - 11 (p. 8).

¹⁰¹ Mario Tedeschi's '*Voi e gli Artigiani*' article appeared in the following issues of *Domus*: January 1952, pp. 55 - 58; February 1952, pp. 53 - 56; April 1952, pp. 63 - 66; June 1952, pp. 62 - 63.

¹⁰² Tedeschi, '*Voi e Gli Artigiani*', *Domus*, February 1952, p. 53.



Illustration 44. First page from Mario Tedeschi's series of 'Voi e gli Artigiani' articles, included in *Domus* in 1952. Including sketches of design for a bed, caricatures of artisans and female user assembling the bed.

necessity for the reader to furnish the artisan with ideas endorses the perception of the artisans' creative inability, already seen with Chiesa's collaboration with Ponti. The article also exemplifies the directive, intellectual role of *Domus* towards its readership, largely professionals in the sector but also an increasingly wider audience, as what Gramsci described as 'philosophically transformable' elements, receptive to the suggestions that the magazine made.¹⁰³

Tedeschi made clear that his initiative was only possible due to Italy's wealth of artisans, one that would not be possible in more industrially advanced America: 'artisanal work over there costs infinitely more than here in Italy and if it is possible to have by now perfect products in series, it is not possible to have the availability of the artisan [...] which here one conversely finds so easily'.¹⁰⁴ Given this assertion it is curious to find another version (*See Illustration 45*) of Tedeschi's article appear in the American magazine *Interiors* later that year.¹⁰⁵ 'Easy-to-Make Furniture: Ideas by Tedeschi' features the same small caricatures of artisans at work, although translated into the more colourful house style of the magazine. The furniture appears less complex than those in *Domus*, and there was more emphasis on industrially-produced materials such as formica, foam rubber and 'plastic-coated upholstery'. Two ways to make the furniture are suggested: '1. in the elegant execution indicated by his drawings, requiring an artisan with some degree of skill; or, 2. by the weekend craftsman. The point lies in assembling simple parts, and by-passing the most difficult operations'.¹⁰⁶ The fact that the American magazine felt it necessary to emphasize the need for a skilful artisan suggests that the standard skill level was higher in Italy compared to America. Noticeably, the exhortation to do-it-yourself does not appear in *Domus*, and it would not become a widespread cultural phenomenon until the 1970s, as the final chapter discusses.

¹⁰³ Gramsci, *Cultural Writings*, pp. 400, 404.

¹⁰⁴ Tedeschi, 'Voi e gli Artigiani', *Domus*, January 1952, p. 55.

¹⁰⁵ Tedeschi, 'Easy-to-Make Furniture: Ideas by Tedeschi', *Interiors*, December 1952, pp. 100 - 101.

¹⁰⁶ Tedeschi, 'Easy-to-Make Furniture', p. 100.

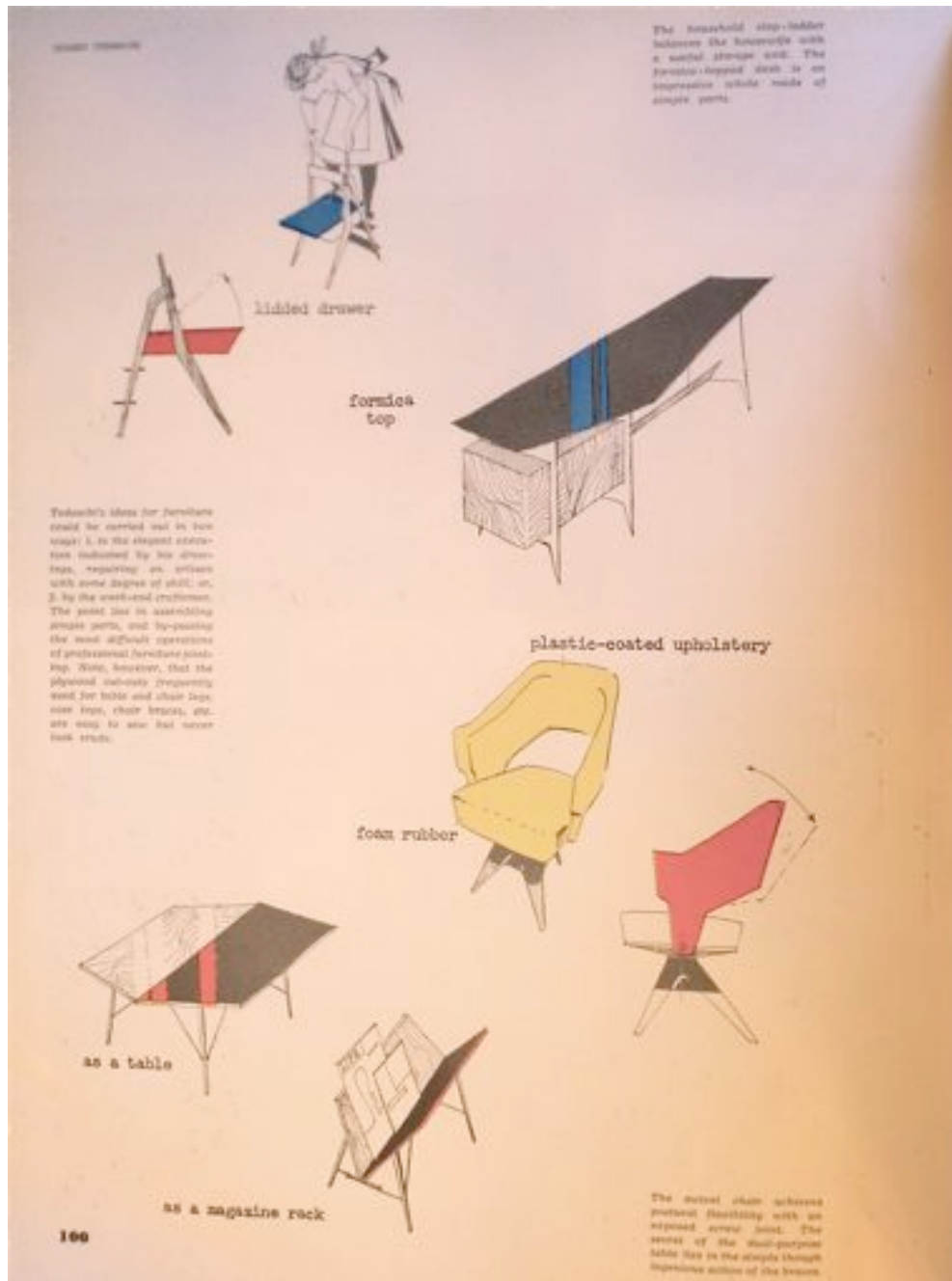


Illustration 45. Page from Tedeschi's 'Easy-to-Make Furniture' article, an American version of his 'Voi e gli Artigiani' included in *Interiors* magazine in 1952.

So important was Italy's craftsmanship to the reputation of Italian design that international commentators expressed their concern at Italian architects who seemed to play fast and loose with its contribution. On the occasion of the 1954 *Triennale*, the editor of *Interiors*, Olga Gueft, was worried that the newfound 'passionate concentration on industrial design implies that the Italian architect may deprive himself of the fabulous craftsmen who hitherto gave his work its almost universal marketability and appeal'.¹⁰⁷ Gueft made clear that craft was a key component of *la linea italiana*, but was quick to calm fears that 'the Italian style is doomed by industrialization'.¹⁰⁸ Rather, Italy was proof that craftsmanship did not necessarily die out in industrialisation: 'we may yet discover that the essential is craftsmanship in the broad sense, and not necessarily *hand-craftsmanship*. The plywood chairs of De Carli, Albini, and Gregotti, Meneghetti and Stoppino, are sufficient proof that competence, precision and wit can exist in industrial design'.¹⁰⁹

Throughout the post-war period craftsmanship would remain a key component of design of all forms. This was confirmed *Zodiac's* 1959 survey. As Giulia Veronesi noted in her summary of the responses, Argan, Ponti and Rosselli all predicted 'a peaceful coexistence and active cooperation (where it was not already taking place) between craftsmanship and industrial design'.¹¹⁰ This echoes Rosselli's comment included at the start of this *Triennale* section on the redefinition of craft as at the service of industry, a modern, supplemental role rather than autonomous field of production. Yet craftsmanship, whether located in the workshop or the factory, was not the only role that craft was being given in the development of Italian design in the early 1950s. This final section looks at one of the few installations at the 1951 *Triennale* that received near universal praise, the *Architettura Spontanea* (Spontaneous Architecture) section. It suggests that it was craft's construction as a non-modern 'other', so prevalent in the curation and representation of *Italy at Work*, would become another of the defining roles for craft in post-war Italian design.

¹⁰⁷ Olga Gueft. 'Decima *Triennale* di Milano', *Interiors*, November 1954, 83 - 100 (p. 83).

¹⁰⁸ Gueft, 'Decima *Triennale* di Milano', p. 84.

¹⁰⁹ Gueft, 'Decima *Triennale* di Milano', p. 86.

¹¹⁰ Giulia Veronesi, 'Points of View', *Zodiac*, 5, 1959, n.p.

1.2.6 The Alterity of the Vernacular: *Architettura Spontanea* at the 1951 Triennale

Architettura Spontanea (See Illustration 46) was curated by the architects Ezio Cerutti, Giancarlo de Carlo and Giuseppe Samonà, with visuals by the graphic designer Albe Steiner. They created a zig-zagging passageway in which the visitor walked past a succession of large and small-scale photographs of buildings, interspersed with captions of explanations and critical commentary. The photographs depicted examples of largely anonymous, rural buildings from all over Italy that dated from the Medieval era to the present.

Sabatino has conducted extensive research on the role of the vernacular in Italian architecture and design, and it is not the aim to repeat his findings here.¹¹¹ His work is particularly important in identifying the difference of the idea of the vernacular in the Italian language, as the English word is insufficient to describe the multiplicity of terms used in that country. Here Sabatino echoes the American architect Bernard Rudofsky, whose 1965 book and exhibition *Architecture without Architects* would become a reference point for the later, radical turn to the vernacular amongst Italy's architects.¹¹² For Rudofsky, the vernacular refers to number of different modes; 'anonymous, spontaneous, indigenous, rural, as the case may be'.¹¹³ Usage depends on the user's agenda: Sabatino explains that 'spontaneous' architecture, as with 'minor' or 'anonymous' architecture, was used by architects 'concerned with stressing the fact that vernacular buildings were not designed by professionals'.¹¹⁴ Most important here is the distinction made between vernacular and folklore, the latter negatively dismissed by Italy's architects for its sentimentality and eclecticism,

¹¹¹ See the introduction for a full list of Sabatino's work on the vernacular in Italian architecture.

¹¹² Bernard Rudofsky, *Architecture without Architects: A Short Introduction to Non-Pedigreed Architecture* (New York: MoMA, 1965)

¹¹³ Rudofsky, p. 2.

¹¹⁴ Sabatino, 'Ghosts and Barbarians', p. 336.



Illustration 46. View of the *Architettura Spontanea* (Spontaneous Architecture) section, curated by Ezio Cerutti, Giancarlo de Carlo and Giuseppe Samonà. The large photograph on the left depicts vernacular rooftops in Alberobello, in the heel of Italy.

in addition to the reasons discussed in the ENAPI section.¹¹⁵ Sabatino has confirmed this cultural-linguistic difference: ‘unlike in the ‘Anglophone world, where folklore, folk art, and folk architecture are generally considered to be synonymous with the vernacular [...] it was not the case in the Italian context’.¹¹⁶

Architettura Spontanea was commended as being one of the most aesthetically pleasing and critically engaged exhibits of the *Triennale*. Dorfles called it ‘one of the most characteristic and interesting of the *Triennale*’, while Buzzo Ceriani and Gregotti saw it as the only attempt at ‘mature criticism’ in the whole show.¹¹⁷ 1951 was not the first time this type of architecture had appeared at the Milan exhibition. At the sixth *Triennale* of 1936 Pagano and Guarnerio Daniel curated *Architettura Rurale Italiana* (Rural Italian architecture), an exhibition of research they had conducted into rural Italian housing.¹¹⁸ It chimed with a larger interest in Italy’s popular and folk arts in the earlier twentieth century, as seen in Charles Holmes’s *Peasant Art in Italy*, published by *The Studio* magazine and Eleonora Gallo’s *Arte Rustica Italiana* from 1929.¹¹⁹ In terms of those Italians interested in their native crafts, the vernacular was appropriated both by those endorsing the regime and in opposition to it; Sabatino describes Pagano’s efforts as part of an attempt to subvert the “bombastic classicism” that was being promoted as ‘an “authentic” expression of Italianness’ by the regime and its supporters.¹²⁰

To an extent, the same motivations were in place in the immediate post-war period, as neo-rationalists attempted to dissociate the movement from its fascist connotations. The vernacular was evoked in architecture designed by architects

¹¹⁵ Sabatino, ‘Back to the Drawing Board? Revisiting the Vernacular Tradition in Italian Modern Architecture’ *Annali di Architettura* 16 (2004), pp. 169 - 185 (pp. 172 – 173).

¹¹⁶ Sabatino, ‘Back to the Drawing Board?’, p. 172.

¹¹⁷ Dorfles, ‘Piccola Guida’, p. 41;

¹¹⁸ For more on the exhibition, see Sabatino, ‘Ghosts and Barbarians’, pp. 349 - 352.

¹¹⁹ Charles Holmes (ed.), *Peasant Art in Italy* (London; New York: The Studio, 1913); Eleonora Gallo, *Arte Rustica Italiana* (Florence: Giulio Giannini & Figlio, 1929).

¹²⁰ Sabatino, ‘Pride in Modesty: Giuseppe Pagano’s “Architettura Rurale”’, *Journal of Architectural Education*, 63 (2010), 93 - 98 (p. 96).

including Sottsass, De Carlo and Albini, most notably in his Pirovano Youth Hostel in Cervina built between 1949 and 1951 (*See Illustration 47*), inspired by the architecture of the surrounding Valle d'Aosta.¹²¹ They re-conceived rationalism's roots as based on the architect Edoardo Persico's interwar identification of 'an alternative current within Modernism, whose lineage began with Wright and the Chicago School and included, amongst others, William Morris, Ebenezer Howard, Loos, Berlage, Dudok, May and Gropius'.¹²² In the same vein, Veronesi identified the links with the Arts and Crafts tradition in the *Architettura Spontanea* section:

It has above all the merit of being entirely original in our century, which has totally forgotten the good side of Ruskin's theories on architecture and Morris's on craft (between spontaneous architecture and the authentic products of craft there exists, as is obvious, close analogies: the genesis is the same).¹²³

The perceived synonymy between spontaneous architecture, craft and authenticity appealed to the different positions at the *Triennale*. To the neo-rationalists, it chimed with the neo-realism movement in cinema and literature that strove for a depiction of reality untainted by fascist artifice. For Ponti, it was 'the "truth", the substance, the origin, the purity', in essence the pure *italianità* of this 'good architecture' that made it so appealing.¹²⁴ Both attitudes positioned spontaneous architecture as an exemplar to be held up in the face of 'professional' contemporary architectural practice.

Veronesi attributed to 'validity' to these architecture examples for their 'being "real", suited to the economic, material, historical, geographic cultural [...] facts of their environment'.¹²⁵ She suggests an authenticity that comes from this architecture's site

¹²¹ For more on the *Rifugio Ragazzi Pirovano*, see 'Albini in Città, Albini in Montagna', *Domus*, June 1952, pp. 19 – 21 and Sabatino, *Pride in Modesty*, p. 191.

¹²² Benedict Zucchi, *Giancarlo de Carlo* (Oxford: Butterworth Architecture, 1992), p. 3.

¹²³ Veronesi, 'L'Architettura alla *Triennale*', *Emporium: Rivista Mensile della Cultura*, October 1951, 147 - 156, (p. 147).

¹²⁴ Ponti, 'L'Architettura è Facile', *Domus*, January 1952, p.1.

¹²⁵ Veronesi, 'Architettura Spontanea', *Metron*, [n. date], 1951, 38 - 39 (p. 39).



Illustration 47. *Rifugio Ragazzi Pirovano*, youth hostel designed by Franco Albini in Cervinia, in the Valle d'Aosta, Italy, 1948 – 1952.

specificity, a place-based identity that will be further discussed in chapter three. This identification with a specific site of production is a key craft trope, one that would fuel the work of architects such as Mario Botta and Carlo Scarpa and become the subject of Kenneth Frampton's postmodern writings.¹²⁶ What is notable in the *Architettura Spontanea* section is just where the vernacular was seen to exist.

Sixteen regional committees submitted examples of buildings to the organisers. Given both the lateness of their submissions and what *Metron* called 'the lack of a homogenous way of seeing' the material, the photographs were organised not by region or by any critical theme but by geographical type; mountain, hill, plain or sea.¹²⁷ Socio-geographic differences between the *Trulli* building of Puglia, the huddled together housing of the island of Sardinia and the vernacular language of Piedmont and the other regions were abandoned in favour of natural ones. This was compounded by an erasure of historical difference, as the architecture of the fifteenth century was placed next to the architecture of the 1950s with no attempts to make visible distinctions between them. Combined with the rural location of the architecture featured this amounted to a perceived past-ness of the architecture on show. *Architettura Spontanea* articulated the cultural difference and the authenticity of a historically removed 'other' just as *Italy at Work* had done; the difference was that it was taking place on home turf.

Architettura Spontanea was not meant to provide a romantic image of rural Italy: it was not, as one of the captions declared, about 'studying ways to save' this architecture, but 'about understanding why they are well-balanced and why they disappear'.¹²⁸ However it was precisely the former goal that was perceived in the exhibition. Without 'in depth sociological research' the exhibition became merely admired, as Doglio lamented, by 'populists and romantic folklorists' and not the

¹²⁶ Kenneth Frampton, *Studies in Tectonic Culture: The Poetics of Construction in Nineteenth and Twentieth Century Architecture* (Chicago: Graham Foundation for Advanced Studies in the Fine Arts; Cambridge, Mass.; London: MIT Press, c1995).

¹²⁷ Veronesi, 'Architettura Spontanea', p. 39.

¹²⁸ Veronesi, 'L'Architettura alla Triennale', p. 149.

critical tool it was intended to be.¹²⁹ Several critics noted other problems with the display - mainly that the aestheticised photographs of the architecture concealed the poverty behind them.¹³⁰ Even if it was not properly addressed in the exhibition, the reality behind these photos was already being unraveled in the early 1950s. In 1945 Carlo Levi had published his *Cristo si è Fermato a Eboli* (Christ Stopped at Eboli), which helped to expose the conditions of the inhabitants of Matera in the Basilicata, who lived in the infamous Sassi - primitive homes carved out of the rock.¹³¹ Shamed into action, in 1952 the Italian government forced the fifteen thousand cave dwellers to re-locate to the nearby developing city of Matera.¹³² This was part of larger, generally abortive, attempts to deal with the “Southern Question” in the early 1950s, most prominently in the *Cassa del Mezzogiorno* (Fund for the South) set up in 1950 to fund investment and infrastructure in the southern regions.¹³³

Arguably, the appearance of the vernacular at the *Triennale* was also a signifier of its impending demise in Italy’s post-war modernity. Paul Greenhalgh has been amongst those to note that the vernacular is ‘noticed only when other forms of living began to destroy it’ and describes the ‘powerful irony [...] that it was the modernisation of European culture which gave the vernacular a presence on the cultural scene’.¹³⁴ This endangered condition of Italy’s spontaneous architecture made it a powerful ‘other’ for Italy’s architects looking for a shared, suitable language for post-war design and architecture. Just as the ‘otherness’ of Italy’s craft traditions had been what had made them so appealing to an industrialised America, so Italy’s architects found their own ‘other’ in the vernacular architecture of rural Italy.

¹²⁹ Doglio, p. 19.

¹³⁰ Veronesi, ‘L’Architettura alla *Triennale*’, p. 149.

¹³¹ Carlo Levi, *Cristo si è Fermato a Eboli* (Turin: Einaudi, 1945, reprint. 1947)

¹³² Foot, *Modern Italy*, p. 151.

¹³³ Clark, pp. 357 – 358.

¹³⁴ Greenhalgh, ‘The History of Craft’ in *The Culture of Craft*, ed. by Dormer, pp. 20 - 52 (p. 31).

Conclusion

This chapter has identified two key ways that craft was being constructed to play a role in post-war Italian design; first, as craftsmanship and second as vernacular 'other'. It has shown that craftsmanship, the result of an abundance of artisans and close relationship with architects, was seen as one of jewels of Italy's crown, particularly by Italy's American, and growing European, markets. It also has shown that the perceived alterity of craft was appealing to Italians and Americans alike; for the American consumer and curator it was a panacea to the country's mass industrial production, while to the Italian architect it offered an 'authentic' Italian language in a profession that appeared without direction. The House of Italian Handicrafts, *Italy at Work* and the *Triennale* all made clear that craft required the modernising hand of design to justify its ongoing existence, but these exhibitions demonstrate that Italy's crafts also provided opportunities for architects to design and to establish their international reputation. Above all this chapter has pointed to a co-existence of design and craft, of the architect and artisan, and of artisanal and industrial production, a set of relationships that the next chapter seeks to examine in more detail, looking first at one of the most well-known episodes from Italian design, and the least; Ponti's *Superleggera* and the *Selettiva di Cantù*.

Chapter 2: Promoting Encounters between Design and Craft: Furniture in Milan and Brianza in the 1950s

2.1 Crafting Design, Designing Craft: The Invention of Gio Ponti's *Superleggera*

The *Superleggera* (super-light) chair (See *Illustration 48*) is easily Ponti's most celebrated contribution to Italy's post-war design history. Also known as model 699, the chair's characteristic woven cane seat, ladder back and sharply angled profile are well-known through its widespread presence in exhibitions, collections and furniture stores alike. Nominated for a prestigious *Compasso d'Oro* (Golden Compass) award on its unveiling in 1957, and still manufactured by Cassina today, Ponti's *Superleggera* is one of the "icons" of Italian design.¹

Academic attention on the chair has focused on the *Superleggera*'s evocation of the vernacular. Sabatino describes an earlier version of the chair, the *Leggera* (light), as another example of architects' appropriation of the anonymous rural 'other' in the 1950s: its 'poetic realism' illustrates what he calls 'the tension between the hand-made and mass-produced' in Italian architecture's ambiguous relationship with rationalism.² Sparke is amongst those to have pinned down the craft origins of the *Superleggera* in a chair of 'traditional design from the fishing village of Chiavari' that was, as Lesley Jackson informs us, 'originally produced for use of the local Genoese fishermen'.³ All set up *Superleggera* as a modernising update of Italy's craft tradition; passing through the filter of Scandinavian restraint, mid-century modernism and standardised production, the chair from Chiavari became the *Superleggera*, and 'traditional' craft became modern design.

¹ The *Compasso D'Oro* award was established in 1954 by *La Rinascente* department store, on the initiative of Ponti and Rosselli. For more on its history see *Compasso d'Oro, 1954 - 1984 Trent'Anni di Design Italiano* (Milan: Electa, 1985).

² Sabatino, 'Ghosts and Barbarians', p. 355.

³ Sparke 'Nature, Craft, Domesticity', p. 66; Lesley Jackson, *The New Look: Design in the Fifties* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1991), p. 48. Others to have identified this connection between the Chiavari and the *Superleggera* include: Pansera, *Il Design del Mobile Italiano dal 1946 a Oggi* (Bari: Laterza & Figli, 1990), p. 4; Enzo Fratelli, "'Lo Stile nella Produzione" di Ponti' in *L'Arte si Innamora dell'Industria*, ed. by La Pietra (Milan: Coliseum, 1988), pp. xviii - xx (p. xix).



Illustration 48. Examples of the *Superleggera* chair, model 699, designed by Gio Ponti for Cassina, 1957. Ash frame and woven Indian cane seat.

The production story endorses the *Superleggera*'s Janus-faced nature. In the 1950s the frame was mass-produced in Cassina's factory in Meda, located to the north of Milan in the heart of the Brianza furniture making area. The seat (*See Illustration 49*) however was hand woven in Chiavari itself. The gendered division of the roles and spaces of furniture production appears here; unlike the male-dominated factory, the weaving process was domestic piecework carried out by *impagliatrici* (female 'straw weavers'), around sixty of whom lived in Chiavari's hinterlands at this time.⁴ As chapter four discusses, by the 1980s, this system of subcontracted labour and integrated scales of production would become a celebrated hallmark of Italian manufacturing. In the 1950s it spoke of the ongoing reliance on artisanal skills amidst the rhetoric of industrialisation; weaving the seat had to be done by hand.

Even the Cassina factory was a site of craftsmanship. First established in the late eighteenth century, in 1927 the family firm was taken over by brothers Cesare and Umberto Cassina.⁵ Initially consisting of just two rooms in the family home in Meda, by the 1940s Cassina had transformed from an artisanal to industrial-scale enterprise, with buyers including the *La Rinascente* department store and commissions to furnish the interiors of ocean liners such as the *Conte Grande*.⁶ They began collaborating with architects such as Albini, Paolo Buffa, Ponti, Pulitzer and Nino Zoncado; before this Umberto Cassina had been the firm's main designer. Despite the firm's increasing size, skilled craftsmen continued to define Cassina's workforce and were indispensable in its manufacturing process. As Umberto

⁴ Maria Clotilde Giuliani, 'L'Artigianato delle Sedie a Chiavari', *Annali di Ricerche e Studi di Geografia*, 16 (1960), 83 - 92 (p. 89). Silvio Leonardi, *Produzione e Consumo dei Mobili per Abitazione in Italia* (Milan: Fetrinelli, 1959), p. 52.

⁵ They called the firm Cassina Amedeo - Fabbrica Tavolini until 1935 when they changed it to Figli di Amedeo Cassina, a name they would keep into the 1950s. For more on Cassina's history see Pier Carlo Santini, *The Years of Italian Design: A Portrait of Cesare Cassina* (Milan: Electa, 1981) and *Made in Cassina*, ed. by Giampiero Bosoni, trans. by Catherine Bolton, Felicity Lutz, Paul Metcalfe, Adam Victor, Susan Ann White (Milan: Skira, 2008).

⁶ Piccione, 'Transatlantic Furnishings Cassina's Work for Ships' in *Made in Cassina*, ed. by Bosoni, p. 139; Santini, *The Years of Italian Design*, p. 10.



Illustration 49. *Superleggera* chairs being transported from Chiavari on the roof of a Fiat 1100 in the 1950s.

Cassina's said of the firm's head carpenter, Fausto Redaelli: 'without him, the *Superleggera* could not exist.'⁷

Redaelli was not the only artisan necessary for the realisation of the *Superleggera*. In 1927 Cesare Cassina became the first Meda resident to complete his apprenticeship in upholstery and has been described as a 'skilled, outstanding upholsterer'.⁸ With his combination of artisanal knowledge and directive role, Cesare Cassina can be understood as another type of 'organic' intellectual. Following Gramsci's argument that 'every social group' linked with 'the world of economic production' creates their own intellectuals, he was an 'intellectual' amongst artisans, what I will call an 'artisan entrepreneur'.⁹ This was a key figure for the realisation of much of Italy's post-war furniture. Design historian Vanni Pasca has similarly described the 'entrepreneurial carpenters' who emerged in the post-war period and took a gamble on architects' attempts to modernise furniture design - one that clearly paid off.¹⁰ Without Cesare Cassina's combination of artisanal background and organising role, he would arguably have not been so willing, or able, to invest in the slow process of developing the chair.

The *Superleggera* took shape over a near-decade of sketches (*See Illustration 50*), technical drawings, prototypes and developmental versions, all fuelled by Ponti's search for the lightest chair possible. The chair made its first embryonic appearance in 1949, in painted ash (*See Illustration 51*) with brass-tipped tapered legs and a densely woven seat and back, made by Chiesa. This chair then became the basis for model 504 (*See Illustration 52*), a small armchair with brass feet made by Cassina for the first class dining rooms of the *Conte Grande*.¹¹

⁷ Santini, *The Years of Italian Design*, p. 23.

⁸ Santini, *The Years of Italian Design*, pp. 10 - 11.

⁹ Gramsci, *Prison Notebooks*, p. 5.

¹⁰ Vanni Pasca, 'Italian Design: Elements of History' in *Made in Italy? 1951 - 2001*, ed. by Luigi Settembrini, (Milan: Skira, 2001), pp. 104 - 117 (p.104).

¹¹ Piccione, p. 140.

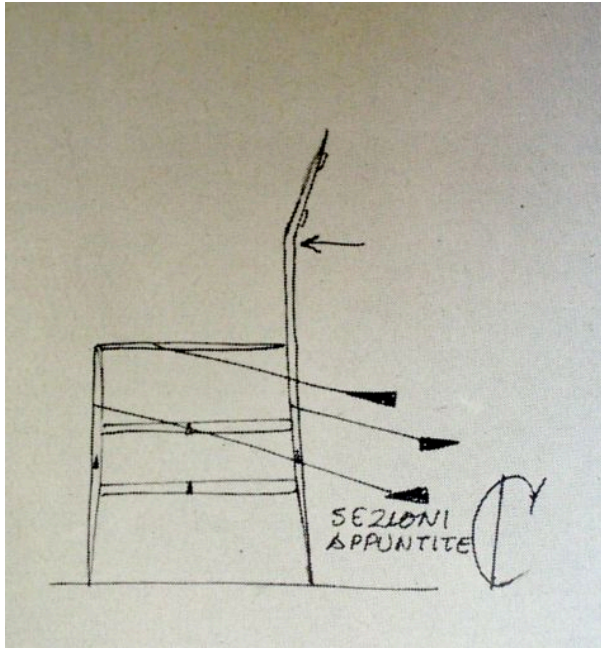


Illustration 50. Sketch by Ponti of the *Superleggera* chair highlighting its 'sezioni appuntite' (pointed sections.)



Illustration 51. The earliest appearance of the angled back, tapered legs and woven seat that make up the *Superleggera*, chair designed by Ponti and made by Chiesa, 1949.



Illustration 52. An early version of the chair that would become the *Superleggera*. Model 504, small upholstered armchair with brass feet designed by Ponti and made by Cassina for the dining room of the *Conte Grande* ocean liner, 1949.

By 1951 the design had been refined into 646, the *Leggera* chair (See *Illustration 53*), produced by Cassina and unveiled at that year's *Triennale*. The legs are significantly thinner and rounded and a second horizontal cross bar has been added to either side of the chair, no doubt to counter its increasing slenderness; at one point in this process of subtraction the chair had literally collapsed.¹² In *Domus*, Ponti draws attention to this quality of lightness: in comparison to the earlier 'heavier version' already known to *Domus*'s readers, 'this is the latest, thinner edition, ultra light'.¹³ 'Ultra light' though was clearly not enough. Ponti asked Cassina to 'affettare' (slice up) the *Leggera* who in turn presented Redaelli with the challenge, stating 'if you aren't able, leave it alone and I'll do it myself'.¹⁴ The final result was the *Superleggera*, a chair that combined aesthetic and actual lightness - the ash chair weighs just 1.66 kilograms, whose triangular tapered legs have a maximum diameter of just eighteen millimetres.

Redaelli's involvement in the design of the *Superleggera* confirms the chair's status as a collaboration between the intellectual roles of the architect and 'artisan-entrepreneur', and the skilled hands of the artisan. However the *Superleggera* was not just an encounter with the hands of Italy's craft tradition, but with its objects too - more specifically, the chair from Chiavari. The following sections establishes the story of the chair more fully by examining both the history of the chair and its existence in the 1950s design landscape; it shows that the relations between the *Superleggera* and the so-called Chiavari chair, and between design and craft, were more complex, and problematic, than they first appear.

2.1.1 Furniture Production in Chiavari in the 1950s

In 1951 Chiavari was home to sixty-four carpentry firms employing a total of three hundred and eleven workers. Averaging at less than five employees per firm, these

¹²Adele Cassina in 'Adele Cassina' in *La Fabbrica del Design*, ed. by Antonelli, Castelli and Picchi, pp. 68 - 71 (p. 69).

¹³'Tre Mobili', *Domus*, December 1951, p. 15.

¹⁴Adele Cassina in 'Adele Cassina' in *La Fabbrica del Design*, ed. by Antonelli, Castelli and Picchi, p. 69.



Illustration 53. Two examples of the *Leggera* chair, designed by Ponti and made by Cassina, as displayed at the ninth *Triennale* in 1951.

were small, largely family-run workshops.¹⁵ Despite this appearance of artisanal production, the introduction of mechanised processes in 1950 would transform large swathes of Chiavari's furniture production. In *Zodiac's* 1959 survey Argan described 'Chiavari chairs' as indicative of how 'certain crafts are already for the most part industrialised'.¹⁶ In the same article, Rosselli described the "'new" crafts practitioners' labouring in Chiavari's workshops:

Recently visiting the 'artisanal workshops' of Chiavari where they make the famous chairs according to so-called craft techniques I encountered the presence not just of modern machines, but of special machinery and special procedures to make those forms which in the past the craftsman made by hand with more time and with less technical assurance. Primitive instruments have been substituted by modern mechanical tools, improving the technical efficiency, enhancing production.¹⁷

Between 1950 and 1959 annual chair production in Chiavari rose from forty to one hundred and fifty thousand: a threefold increase in production that corresponded to a change in make up in the town's industry. As this map of the town from 1960 shows (*See Illustration 54*), there were now just fourteen chair producers, four of which were described not as *artigianato* workshops, but *fabbriche* (factories) employing more than ten workers.¹⁸

Just as the productive reality of Chiavari chips away at the sense of familiarity of the *Superleggera*, so too does the story behind the object. For the *Chiavari* chair (as it was known) is not an example of some long, unchanging anonymous vernacular craft tradition, but a nineteenth century invention, a modified imitation of a Parisian

¹⁵ Clotilde Giuliani, p. 89.

¹⁶ Argan, 'Points of View', *Zodiac*, n.p.

¹⁷ Rosselli, 'Points of View', *Zodiac*, 4, n.p.

¹⁸ Illustration. 3 'La Distribuzione delle Sedi di Artigianato Industriale delle Sedie a Chiavari', Clotilde Giuliani, p. 89.

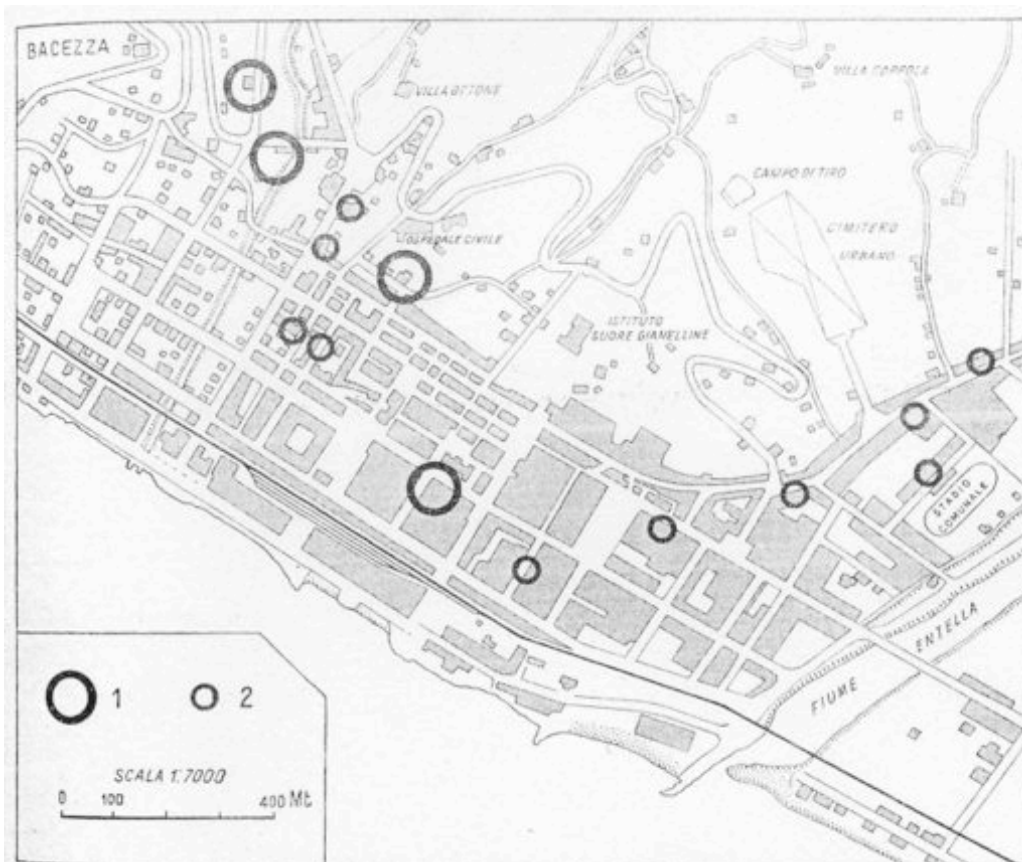


Illustration 54. Distribution of firms producing chairs in Chiavari in 1960.

Key:

1 – *fabbriche* (factories) with more than ten workers.

2 - *artigianato* (artisanal workshops) with less than ten workers.

import. It is, as with other examples of seemingly ‘vernacular’ objects, what the historian Eric Hobsbawm has called an ‘invented tradition’.¹⁹

In the late eighteenth century, furniture production in Chiavari was largely determined by its more powerful neighbour, the city of Genoa.²⁰ Rigid protectionism prevented furniture manufactured outside Genoa’s city walls being sold to the city’s wealthy residents, limiting Chiavari’s artisans to a local demand of beech oars, church furnishings and ‘crude’ imitations of Genoese styles.²¹ This changed, when in 1791 the *Società Economica di Chiavari* (Chiavari Economic Society) was set up by a group of local intellectuals. Critical of both the style and small-scale of the local industry, the group sought to increase and update Chiavari’s furniture production. Led by the Chiavari-born Marquis Stefano Rivarola, the group initially put on exhibitions of the town’s furniture that did meet their approval, largely made up of imitations of the English Chippendale and Sheraton styles.²² The decisive moment for Chiavari’s future came in 1807, when Rivarola returned from a trip to Paris armed with a number of chairs with woven seats, turned legs and a ‘curved open back’ that he then invited local artisans to copy.²³ They apparently refused the experiment, seeing the chairs as difficult to produce and only one local craftsman, Giuseppe Gaetano Descalzi, took up the challenge. He produced several versions of the chair (*See Illustration 55*) that were all seen to meet the criteria of both style and ease of reproducibility.

Regularly exhibited at national and international fairs in the mid nineteenth century, the popularity of Descalzi’s designs saw the number of furniture manufacturers grow

¹⁹ *The Invention of Tradition*, ed. by Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (Cambridge, New York and Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 1983), p. 1. For another example of a vernacular straw chair as an ‘invented tradition’, see Annette Carruthers, ‘The Social Rise of the Orkney Chair’, *Journal of Design History*, 22 (2009), 27 - 45 (p. 41).

²⁰ Loredana Pessa and Claudio Montagni, *L’Arte della Sedia a Chiavari* (Genoa: Sagep Editrice, 1985), p. 7.

²¹ Pessa and Montagni, p. 8.

²² Pessa and Montagni, p. 10.

²³ E. Baccheschi, ‘Le Sedie di Chiavari’, *La Casana*, no. 1, 1986, pp. 14 - 21 in ‘Oggetti Anonimi’, *Domus*, April 1991, 73 - 92 (p. 91); Pessa and Montagni, p. 12.



Illustration 55. An example of the *Chiavari* chair, designed by Giuseppe Gaetano Descalzi, c. 1845. Turned and carved Cherry wood with woven willow seat.

in the town, who were producing about three hundred different versions of Descalzi's models.²⁴ Descalzi's approach to the French chair was one of refinement, making the willow strips on the seat thinner and more uniform and achieving what became a celebrated combination of solidity and lightness - the *Chiavari* chair weighs on average just two kilograms, Descalzi's lightest version just six hundred grams.²⁵ This was one of the reasons for the chair's popularity, as it fed into a wider appreciation for light chairs in the early nineteenth century Biedermeier period.²⁶

This trope of lightness illustrates the extent of the role that the *Chiavari* chair played in the development of the *Superleggera*. Letizia Frailich Ponti has described the search for 'a feeling of lightness' as the defining quality of Ponti's work, from Milan's Pirelli building to the Taranto Cathedral from 1970.²⁷ As Frailich Ponti describes it, the 'illusion and miracle' of lightness was a way Ponti could make his furniture stand out.²⁸ The Catholic architect described his motivations in more spiritual terms:

the slender pointed spires of Chartres Cathedral or certain bell towers [...] the everlasting spiritual game of architecture, not the material game of sheer bulk. I despise thickness from this point of view, when it is merely a matter of weight, size, inertia, mass.²⁹

The modernity of Ponti's achievement lay in not having designed just a 'light' chair, but a chair that went 'beyond lightness'. This was confirmed by the performances that took place at the Cassina factory from 1953 onwards that Ponti organised for the

²⁴ Clotilde Giuliani, p. 91.

²⁵ Clotilde Giuliani, p. 84.

²⁶ Christian Witt Doring, 'Seating Furniture' in *Biedermeier: The Invention of Simplicity*, ed. by Hans Ottomeyer, Klaus Albrecht Schröder and Laurie Winters (Milwaukee, Wisc. : Milwaukee Art Museum, 2006) (110- 139), p. 110.

²⁷ Frailich Ponti, personal interview, 13 October 2008 (APPENDIX I).

²⁸ Frailich Ponti, personal interview, 13 October 2008. (APPENDIX I).

²⁹ Ponti, *In Praise of Architecture*, trans. by Giuseppina Salvadori and Mario Salvadori (New York: F.W. Dodge Corporation, 1960) p. 215.

architecture students he taught at the *Politecnico di Milano*.³⁰ As Ponti described, ‘if you go to the Cassina they will give you a thrilling display of throwing these chairs, which fall to the ground after dizzying flights, bouncing up again and never breaking’.³¹ Photographed in mid air (*See Illustration 56*), there are echoes of the Italian writer Italo Calvino’s description of his search for lightness in his own work; ‘above all I have tried to remove weight from the structure of stories and from language’.³² For Calvino the ‘secret of lightness’ was ‘an auspicious image for the new millennium’, a symbol of modernity that Ponti evoked in his chair.³³

As demonstrated, the quality of lightness, the most modern characteristic of the *Superleggera*, originated not in Ponti’s chair but in the *Chiavari* chair. The *Superleggera* was not Ponti’s original invention, nor based on some ‘rustic’ vernacular, but a metamorphosis of a chair already known for its lightness and refinement. It was a ‘Pontian invention’ just like his version of Parini’s *Scacchi Freudiani in Italy at Work*.

2.1.2 The *Chiavari* Chair in 1950s Italy

Despite its initial popularity, by the end of nineteenth century production of the *Chiavari* chair had gone into decline, due in part to the challenge presented by the mass-produced bentwood Thonet chair from the 1850s onwards, but also the town’s response.³⁴ In the 1920s, a local bank subsidised mass-production of these cheaper Viennese chairs in Chiavari itself, not only compromising the quality of production in the town, but also leading to the further fall in popularity of the *Chiavari* chair.³⁵

³⁰ Adele Cassina, ‘Adele Cassina’, p. 69.

³¹ Ponti in Romanelli, ‘Gio Ponti’ in *Made in Cassina*, ed. by Bosoni, pp. 147 - 159 (p. 151).

³² Italo Calvino, *Six Memos for the Next Millenium*, trans. by Patrick Creagh (London: Jonathan Cape, 1992), p. 3.

³³ Calvino, p. 12.

³⁴ Christian Witt Doring, ‘Seating Furniture’ in *Biedermeier*, ed. by Ottomeyer, Schröder and Winters, p. 110.

³⁵ Clotilde Giuliani, p. 87.



Illustration 56. *Superleggera* chair, pre-woven seat, mid-air in Cassina factory's courtyard in the 1950s.

Ponti, however, was not the first twentieth-century intellectual to update the chair. In 1932 the Chiavari painter Emanuele Rambaldi, whose designs for intarsia work were featured in *Handicrafts as a Fine Art in Italy*, designed a number of modern interpretations that were made by the local Sanguinetti workshop, owned by Giambattista Sanguinetti.³⁶ The chairs were selected for exhibition at the *Triennali* in the 1930s and 40s, and even awarded a CADMA prize on their appearance (See *Illustration 57*) at the 1947 *Triennale*.³⁷

Nor was the *Chiavari* chair forgotten as the post-war years progressed. Jackson has described the sudden popularity of the ‘elegant’ *Chiavari* chairs in the 1950s which inspired not just Ponti and architects Ico and Luisa Parisi to design their own versions, but also saw a recourse to the more general tradition of Italy’s woven-seated chairs, as in Vico Magistretti’s glossy Pop-red *Carimate* chair (See *Illustration 58*) produced by Cassina from 1963.³⁸ For the most part though, it was Chiavari-made chairs that appealed to architects, consumers and promoters of Italy’s crafts alike.

In 1949 *Chiavari* chairs made by Enrico del Monte were on sale at the House of Italian Handicraft, and were exhibited, alongside examples by Sanguinetti, in *Italy at Work*.³⁹ Among their international appearances, the chairs were included in the CNA-organised *Italian Contemporary Handicrafts*, held at London’s Italian Institute in September 1955, and *Modern Italian Design*, which toured museums in Britain and Ireland in 1956.⁴⁰ In Italy, *Chiavari* chairs were included in the *Seconda Mostra dell’Estetica Industriale* (Second Exhibition of Industrial Aesthetics) (See

³⁶ *Handicrafts as a Fine Art in Italy*, n.p.

³⁷ ‘Sezione del Mobile’, *Domus*, July 1947, 14 - 20 (p. 14).

³⁸ Jackson, *The New Look*, p. 48. For more on Magistretti’s *Carimate* chair, see ‘Club-House a *Carimate*’ *Domus* no. 384, November 1961, pp. 13 – 23 and Pasca, *Vico Magistretti*, pp. 58-59.

³⁹ ‘Italy Again Shows Handicrafts Here’.

⁴⁰ *Modern Italian Design* was exhibited in Dublin, at Liverpool’s Walker Art Gallery from 1 to 24 September 1955, at Manchester’s City Art Gallery from 10 October to 10 November 1956, and opened at the Royal Scottish Museum in Edinburgh in November 1956. *Italian Contemporary Handicrafts* (Florence: Tip. Giuntina, 1955), n.p.; Compagnia Nazionale Artigiana, *Modern Italian Design* (Manchester: City Art Gallery, 1956), n.p..



Illustration 57. Three *Chiavari* chairs designed by Emanuele Rambaldi and made by Sanguinetti, on show at the 1947 *Triennale* in the 'Sezione del Mobile' (Furniture Section). The folding table was designed Luigi Frattino.



Illustration 58. *Carimate* chairs, designed by Vico Magistretti and made by Cassina. Shown here in the dining room of the golf club in Carimate, Brianza, 1962.

Illustration 59) at the 1953 *Fiera di Milano* (Milan Trade Fair), and in the same year included in *La Rinascente's* exhibition *L'Estetica del Prodotto* (Aesthetics of the Product), and in 1957 were exhibited at the eleventh *Triennale*.⁴¹ *Domus* even published a brief article on the chairs in 1950.⁴² Significantly, this was on the same page as examples of furniture by the Danish architect Finn Juhl, and the enthusiasm for the *Chiavari* chairs can be partly attributed to their similarities with the internationally admired Scandinavian aesthetic in the early 1950s.⁴³

Giuseppe Latis, Sergio Mazza, Ernesto Rogers and Ettore Sottsass were among those architects who included *Chiavari* chairs in the interiors they designed for private, wealthy clients in the 1950s that were then included in *Domus*.⁴⁴ Ignazio Gardella used the *Chiavari* chair in his interiors for Milan's *Padiglione d'Arte Contemporanea di Milano* (PAC) in 1954. So enamoured was Gardella with the chair that he included it in his own home and put a number of versions of it on sale in Azucena, the Milan showroom and design studio he set up in 1947 with a group of fellow architects and intellectuals who were frustrated at the lack of modern design available on the Italian market.⁴⁵

These architects helped to maintain the popularity of these older forms of production even as Italy made its steps towards industrialisation. Yet as Argan and Rosselli's comments in *Zodiac* demonstrate, the production of *Chiavari* chairs was quasi-industrial, and as such these chairs could be said to represent one 'acceptable' face of Italy's craft traditions in the 1950s. As Pica commented on their appearance at the 1957 *Triennale*, *Chiavari* chairs 'represent an age-old yet very much alive

⁴¹ *Catalogo Ufficiale: Fiera di Milano 1953*, 2 vols. (Milan: Fiera di Milano: 1953) I, p. xvii; *Selected Examples of Italian Industrial Design* (London: The Italian Institute, 1955), n.p.

⁴² 'Chiavari', *Domus*, 1950 February, p.46.

⁴³ 'Poltrone Svedesi di Serie', *Domus*, February 1950, p. 46.

⁴⁴ Examples include: 'Con mobile di Serie: Sergio Mazza, Arch', *Domus*, January 1956, pp. 27 – 30; 'Forme, Arredamenti, Oggetti: Ettore Sottsass jr, arch', *Domus*, February 1953, pp. 29 – 38; 'Un Architetto per sè: L'Appartamento di Ernesto N. Rogers a Milan', *Domus*, January 1957, pp. 21 – 29; 'Particolari di un Arredamento: Gustavo Latis, Arch', *Domus*, March 1953, pp. 30 – 33.

⁴⁵ Azucena was set up by Luigi Caccia Dominioni, Corrado Corradi Dell'Acqua, Ignazio Gardella, Maria Teresa Tosi and Franca Tosi. Marta Sala, personal conversation, 10 December 2008.



Illustration 59. Two examples of Chiavari chairs on display at the *Seconda Mostra dell'Estetica Industriale* (Second Exhibition of Industrial Aesthetics) at the *Fiera di Milano* (Milan Trade Fair), 1953.

application of the principle of mass production'.⁴⁶ With their combination of 'tradition' and modern production, *Chiavari* chairs were already performing the mediating function in Italy's post-war encounter with modernity with which the *Superleggera* is credited. Furthermore, they continued to do so even after Ponti's chair went into production. This is most overt when the *Chiavari* and *Superleggera* chairs appear together, as in a 1963 apartment interior designed by Rosselli (See *Illustration 60*) but also in the *Italian Contemporary Handicrafts* and *Modern Italian Design* exhibitions.⁴⁷ In the former, one of Rambaldi's designs for Sanguinetti, listed in the catalogue as the *Leggerissima* (lightest) chair, was chosen over Ponti's as-yet unnamed *Leggera* to feature on the catalogue cover (see *illustration 61, 62*).⁴⁸

This co-existence of the *Superleggera* and *Chiavari* chair was surely problematic for Ponti. The continuing, architect-endorsed appetite for the chair counteracted his attempt to assert his own, leading role in the creation of a modern, design identity for Italy and translate its rich artisanal heritage. Ponti sought an updating rather than a re-embrace of Italy's craft traditions, ideally one that he had designed. He responded to the pre-existing *Chiavari* chair in two ways. As an architect it was to produce not a light, nor the lightest chair, but a chair beyond lightness. As editor of *Domus*, it was to stake a claim for the modernity and originality of the *Leggera* and its successors that effaced its craft predecessor. Certainly Ponti included *Chiavari* chairs in *Domus*, but their inclusion was far outweighed by his multiple endorsements of the *Leggera* and *Superleggera*, the latter regularly included in his designs for interiors such as Alitalia's New York branch from 1958.⁴⁹ More significantly, not once did Ponti mention the correlation between the two.

⁴⁶ Pica, *Forme Nuove in Italia*, n.p.

⁴⁷ 'Un Sistema di Porte' *Domus*, August 1963, pp. 30 - 34.

⁴⁸ *Italian Contemporary Handicrafts* included a wooden straw-seated chair called the "Leggerissima" designed by Rambaldi and made by Sanguinetti of Chiavari, alongside an unnamed 'wooden chair with cellophane braided seat' designed by Ponti and made by Cassina, which is clearly the *Leggera* chair. *Italian Contemporary Handicrafts*, n.p.

⁴⁹ 'La Nuova Sede dell'Alitalia a New York', *Domus*, May 1959, pp. 7 - 11. Other interiors in which Ponti included the chair include the Italian Cultural Institute in Stockholm, 1954 and Ponti's own home on Via Dezza, Milan.



Illustration 60. Interior for an apartment in Milan, designed by Alberto Rosselli in 1963, featuring a *Chiavari* chair on the left, and two *Superleggera* chairs on the right.



Illustration 61. Catalogue cover for the *Italian Contemporary Handicrafts*, exhibition, designed by Enrico Bettarini, depicting a *Chiavari* chair. The exhibition was held at the Italian Cultural Institute in London, September 1955 and organized by the CNA.



Illustration 62. *Leggerissima* chair, designed by Rambaldi and made by Sanguinetti, included in *Italian Contemporary Handicrafts*.

2.1.3 ‘*Senza Aggettivi*’: The *Superleggera* and The Supplementarity of Craft

In 1952, following its *Triennale* appearance, Ponti published an article on the as-yet unnamed *Leggera* chair in *Domus*. Entitled ‘*Senza Aggettivi*’ (Without Adjectives) Ponti attempts to differentiate his chair from all those ‘haughty chairs with adjectives’, although he uses a plethora to do so. It is a ‘chair-chair, that is a normal chair with “those” qualities, and not a chair with adjectives (rational chair, “modern” chair, prefabricated chair, organic chair etc): no, a chair-chair and that’s it, light, fine, affordable’. The article continues in this vein, and at the end Ponti states his plan to ‘make beds-beds, wardrobes-wardrobes, offices-offices’ and invited *Domus* readers to follow him, to make ‘chair-chairs [...] houses-houses’.⁵⁰

Ponti’s rejection of antecedents and adjectives serves his claim of having designed ‘the true “chair of always”, the chair that was already there, the pre-existing chair’.⁵¹ In his claim to have achieved the ‘essence’ of chairness, he shifts between Platonic and Heideggerian rhetoric and echoes Modernism’s search for archetypal forms across the arts. Yet in making the *Leggera* out to be an archetype, an original, he was denying that which actually pre-existed - the *Chiavari* chair.

Craft is simultaneously absent and present in the *Superleggera*, necessary to Ponti’s chair and yet necessarily erased. Ponti’s approach to the *Chiavari* chair can be seen to exemplify the concept of the supplemental, one of Adamson’s ‘core principles’ of craft mentioned in the introduction. To explain this concept further, Adamson turns to the French theorist Jacques Derrida on the function of the artwork’s frame, or what Derrida, following Immanuel Kant, calls the *parergon*: ‘the *parergon* is a form which has as its traditional determination not that it stands out but that it disappears, buries itself, effaces itself, melts away at the moment it deploys its greatest energy’.⁵²

Adamson recasts this in craft terms: ‘to say that craft is supplemental [...] is to say

⁵⁰ Ponti, ‘*Senza Aggettivi*’, *Domus*, March 1952, p. 1.

⁵¹ Ponti, ‘*Senza Aggettivi*’, p. 1.

⁵² Jacques Derrida, *The Truth in Painting*, trans. by Geoff Bennington and Ian McLeod (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987; orig. pub. 1978), p. 61.

that it is always essential to the end in view, but in the process of achieving that end, it disappears'.⁵³ It was clearly this quality that informed Ponti's negation of the Chiavari in his description of the *Superleggera*, and one that spelt trouble for Italy's craft tradition - relied upon for the success of Italian design and yet effaced in its representation.

In one sense, Ponti did not need to acknowledge his debt to the earlier chair; so well known was the *Chiavari* chair that he could take it for granted that his readers would be familiar with it - another manifestation of the idea of craft as the 'given' that the previous section introduced. In another sense, Ponti was right not to. If he was grasping for some chair-essence then this was not to be found in the 'invented tradition' of the *Chiavari*. Yet it was precisely the *Chiavari* chair's celebrated qualities of elegance and lightness that Ponti appropriated for the the *Superleggera*. Furthermore, the path to the *Superleggera* from its initial 1949 appearance was marked not a move away, but an inching closer to - and then beyond - the lightness that Descalzi had achieved.

Ponti was ultimately an individualist, unrepresentative of anything other than himself. Yet it is through Ponti, the architect held up as a patron of Italy's craft traditions, that we see the problem that the persistence of craft constituted for design in 1950s Italy. Attending further to the concept of the supplementarity of craft that has emerged from this picture will enable first picking apart, and then hopefully reconstructing, the messy intimacy of craft and design's relationship in this period.

Where can we go to further investigate this relationship? To where the *Superleggera* was made, to Brianza. Here, the pull of Italy's wealth of craft skills and traditions for the modernising intentions of Italy's intellectuals was produced in multiple architect-artisan encounters in Brianza's furniture producing towns and villages. The following case study on Brianza will not only furnish more examples of the 'artisan entrepreneur', but also attempts to promote encounters between architects and

⁵³ Adamson, *Thinking Through Craft*, p. 13.

artisans. The focus is on the town of Cantù, one of the most craft-orientated centres of production in the area. Looking at the origins of Cantù and what happened in the furniture-making town in this period opens up this analysis to the wider context of Italy in the 1950s and early 1960s, see the impact of industrialisation, the economic 'miracle' and the rise of mass consumption on Italy's changing craft traditions.

2.2 Designing Craft in Brianza: Furniture Production in Cantù

Located to the north of Milan, the area of Brianza (*See Illustration 63*) stretches across several Lombardy provinces. Alongside the Veneto, and the Murgian area in the heel of Italy, it is one of Italy's three main furniture-producing regions.¹ In terms of post-war design, Brianza is the most important. In 1959 it was responsible for over a third of the total amount of furniture produced in Italy, and more furniture was exported from Brianza than from any other region.² The proximity to Milan was central to this - on the one hand as a significant centre of domestic consumption, on the other as the city's place at the heart of Italy's design industry. Branzi has called Brianza 'the historic cradle of Italian design', a justifiable accolade for an area that had been responsible for the production of Italy's furniture designs from the interwar years, as well as the first home of the *Triennale*.³

Brianza is also a microcosm of the differentiated scales of production that characterised Italy's furniture industry as a whole in the 1950s. As Anna Cento Bull and Paul Corner have described, the staggered experience of industrialisation in this area saw the maintenance of individual traditions and social stability that a more 'accelerated' process would have eradicated.⁴ Accordingly, alongside the large-scale 'everyday' production of Lissone and Seregno in the South, and Meda's Cassina factory in the centre, were small workshops like those of Bonacina in Lurago d'Erba and even a whole town renowned for its 'handicraft specialisation' in the shape of Cantù in the north east.⁵

¹ Agostini and Salaris, 'Design' in *Mestieri d'Arte e Made in Italy*, ed. by Colombo, pp. 67 - 96 (pp. 85 - 86).

² Leonardi, p. 47.

³ Branzi, 'Italian Design and the Complexity of Modernity' in *The Italian Metamorphosis 1943 - 1968*, ed. by Germano Celant (New York: Guggenheim, 1994), pp. 598 - 606 (p. 602).

⁴ Anna Cento Bull and Paul Corner, *From Peasant to Entrepreneur: The Survival of the Family Economy in Italy* (Oxford; Providence, RI: Berg, 1993), p. 154. See also Foot, *Milan Since the Miracle*, p. 112.

⁵ Leonardi, p. 50

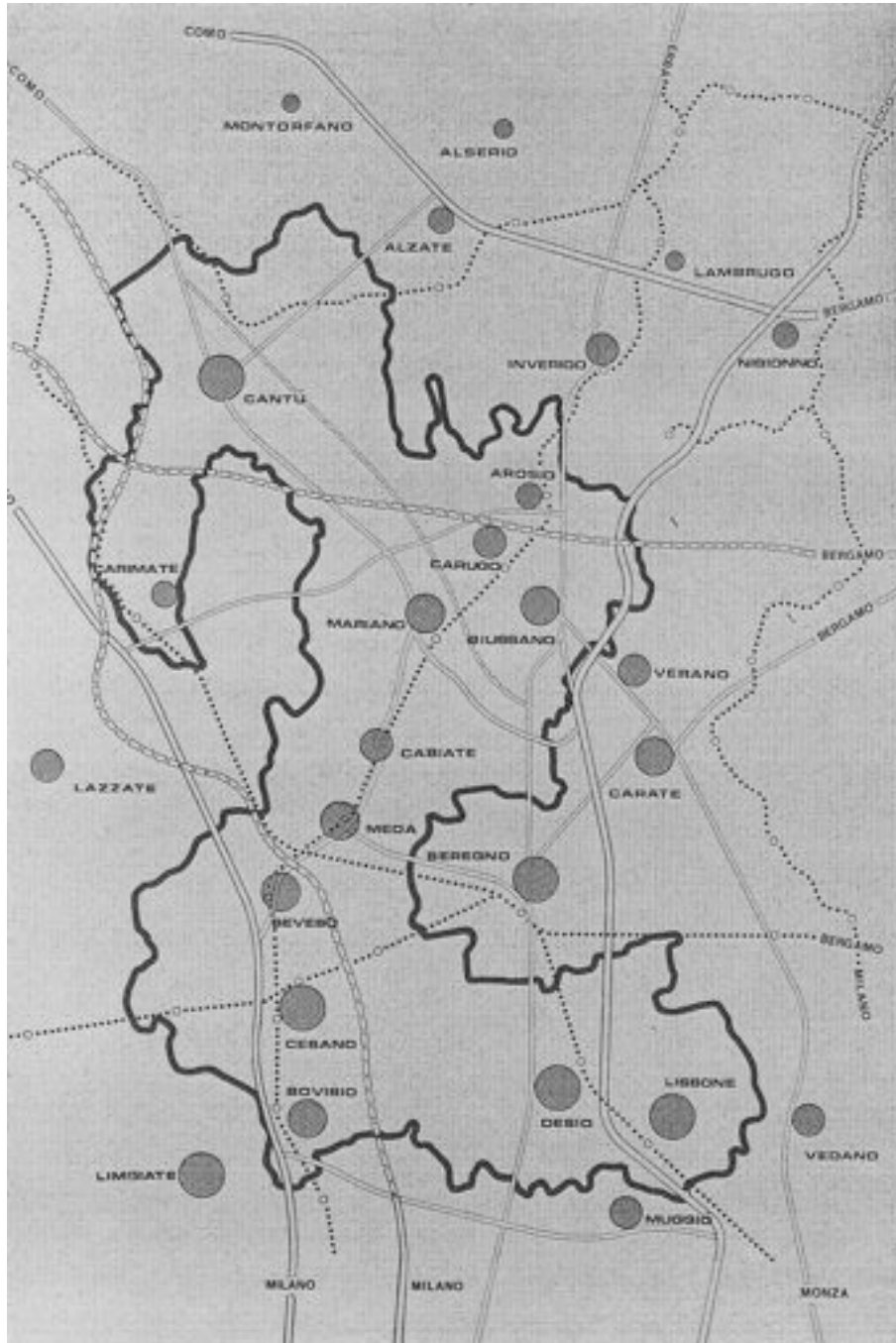


Illustration 63. Map of Brianza, showing the main producing towns in 1971. Cantù is located in the north west of the area, Lurago d'Erba (not on the map), home to Bonacina, sits above Inverigo in the north east. Cassina is located in Meda, in the centre.

The town of Cantù serves as an instructive case study to understand craft's role in Brianza's furniture industry in the 1950s. Both culturally and economically, artisanal furniture production defined the town. In 1951, just under half of the town's working population was employed in workshops that a decade later remained small and familial, often even still adjoined to the family home.⁶ Furthermore, against the tide of post-war industrialisation the number of artisanal workshops in Cantù was actually growing, from 562 in 1954 to 722 in 1957.⁷ These producers were joined by nearly two hundred small workshops including glaziers and foundries that made up a comprehensive network of furniture production.⁸ In the post-war years Cantù was becoming more, not less, artisanal.

It is not just Cantù's craft identity that makes it a suitable candidate for discussion here. It is also because Cantù was the hub of a flurry of design interest in the 1950s and 1960s. Already in the inter-war period architects including Buffa, Emilio Lancia, Ponti and Guglielmo Ulrich were coming to Cantù for the realisation of prototypes and furniture commissions.⁹ In the post-war years, Cantù firms such as Fratelli Frigerio and Serafino Arighi were still making furniture for Buffa (*See Illustration 64*) as well as Albini, BBPR, Gregotti and Angelo Mangiarotti.¹⁰ However, while these partnerships continued, for the most part it was the lack of collaboration between architects and artisans in the 1950s, and the furniture that resulted due to this, that made Cantù the focus of so much attention. The town's furniture industry was perceived as a problem that needed to be dealt with.

⁶ Gruppo di Ricerca, 'L'Artigianato come Componente Essenziale della Struttura di Territorio', *Cantù Mobili* 1971, 8 - 31 (pp. 17-18).

⁷ Flavio Guenzi and Mario Marelli, *L'Industria del Mobile nella Brianza Comasca* (Como: Camera di Commercio, Industria e Agricoltura, 1965), p. 95.

⁸ Lorenzo Carugati, 'Per Una Lettura Storica dell'Artigianato del Mobile a Cantù' in *Esperienze di Design in Cantù*, ed. by Giuseppe Furlanis, Aurelio Porro and Alfio Terraneo (Cantù: Centrostampa Banco Lariano, 1986), pp. 14 - 27 (p. 22).

⁹ Giampiero Bosoni, 'Connessioni (1919/1975)' in *Esperienze di Design in Cantù*, ed. by Furlanis, Porro and Terraneo (pp. 28 - 41), p. 29.

¹⁰ See 'Documentazione Fotografica' in *Esperienze di Design in Cantù*, ed. by Furlanis, Porro and Terraneo, pp. 98 - 134.



Illustration 64. Two Mahogany chairs, designed by Paolo Buffa, made by Serrafino Arrighi, Cantù, 1947.

2.2.1 The Furniture Industry in Cantù

Cantù's furniture industry dated back to the early eighteenth century. The first recorded workshop appeared in the town in 1730, set up by an artisan called Giovanni Orsi from nearby Meda.¹¹ Lorenzo Carugati describes the first one hundred years of Cantù's industry as its 'pioneer phase' that only ended in the late 1880s.¹² A number of closely occurring events confirm this decade as the opening of a new chapter in the local industry. In 1881 Cantù's artisans appeared for the first time at the *Esposizione Industriale di Milano* (Milan Industrial Exhibition), which saw their reputation for high quality furniture become known to a larger market.¹³ The following year the *Scuola Serale e Domenicale di Arte Applicata all'Industria* (Evening and Sunday School for Industrial Applied Arts) was established in Cantù, to teach *disegno* and model making for the local furniture and lace industries. Together these consolidated the town's position as a local centre of furniture production and led to the rapid multiplication of its workshops at the turn of the twentieth century.¹⁴

As with many of Italy's craft industries, Cantù's furniture production had its roots in agriculture, or rather in the unreliability and seasonality of the local agricultural industry, as well as the exploitative nature of *mezzadria* (sharecropping), the dominant agricultural system in Italy until the land reform of 1950.¹⁵ Cantù residents subsidised working the land with the manufacture of *brochette* (iron nails) and silk

¹¹ Guenzi and Marelli, pp. 8, 29.

¹² Carugati, 'Per Una Lettura Storica dell'Artigianato del Mobile a Cantù' in *Esperienze di Design in Cantù*, ed. by Furlanis, Porro and Terraneo, p. 14.

¹³ Gruppo di Ricerca, p. 12

¹⁴ Guenzi and Marelli, p. 31.

¹⁵ This was also the case in Tuscany. See Giovanni Contini 'The Local World View: Social Change and Memory in Three Tuscan Communities' in *Pathways to Social Class: A Qualitative Approach to Social Mobility*, ed. by Daniel Bertaux and Paul Thompson (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997) pp. 183 – 197.

and lace production, the latter originating as early as the thirteenth century, and both continuing to be important local industries for female residents into the twentieth.¹⁶

The compensatory character of Cantù's artisanal industries continued into the post-war period. Just as craft production had supplemented inadequate agricultural pay in the 1800s, so it did for the manufacturing industries of the 1950s. Many of those working in Milan's factories were commuters from this artisanal hinterland, and low pay in the city's factories saw the more skilled *operai* looking for additional earnings by 'moonlighting' in the workshops of their home towns.¹⁷

The market for Cantù's products was similarly influenced by its vicinity to the city that was at the heart of Italy's industrial 'triangle'. The wealth generated by the post-unification wave of industrialisation saw a boom in demand for elaborately made furniture suitable for the villas of an increasingly numerous, prosperous clientele, and Cantù's artisans were commissioned to produce period furniture for the local gentry in styles 'of the highest nobility'.¹⁸ The town's workshops became known not only for their artisanal ability, but specifically for the ability to interpret and adapt historical styles to contemporary tastes. In the early 1900s this field of production embraced everything from classicism to Louis XV, and by the 1930s art nouveau and even rationalism.¹⁹

This is where the problem that Cantù was seen to represent emerges. In the twentieth century firms such as Serafino Arrighi may have been producing the contemporary designs of Buffa but their output was equally defined by neo-baroque pieces (*See Illustration 65*) in the 1920s and 1930s and it was this eclectic, imitative style that

¹⁶ For a discussion of the gendered nature of the silk industry in Lombardy, see Cento Bull, 'The Lombard Silk-spinners in the Nineteenth Century: An Industrial Workforce in a Rural Setting' in *Women and Italy: Essays on Gender, Culture and History*, ed. by Barański and Shirley W. Vinall (Houndsmill, Basingstoke; London: Macmillan, 1991) pp. 11 - 42.

¹⁷ Gianfranco Petrillo, *La Capitale del Miracolo: Sviluppo Lavoro Potere a Milano 1953 - 1962* (Milan: FrancoAngeli, 1992) p. 100.

¹⁸ Carugati, pp. 15, 17

¹⁹ Carugati, pp. 17, 21.



Illustration 65. Neo-Baroque dresser, made by Serafino Arrighi, 1920s – 1930s, exemplifying the historicist eclecticism of the '*Stile Cantù*' (Cantù Style).

became the defining trait of the “*Stile Cantù*” (Cantù style).²⁰ The continuing demand for this furniture, particularly from the South of Italy, was a bone of contention to those intent on design reform in the early post-war period: Ponti wrote in *Lo Stile* in the 1940s that ‘too many producers and consumers exist, incredibly, for the most incredible style (such as that of *Chippendale* [...] or *Cantù*)’.²¹ By the 1950s, Cantù’s furniture was seen to be in urgent need of modernisation in order to compete on the market and present a suitable face to the outside world.

Cantù was seen to be failing not only on the design front, but in terms of demand. In addition to its distinctive aesthetic, Cantù was endowed with a particular distribution set-up. The majority of artisans belonged to one of five consortiums, first set up at the end of the nineteenth century: the *Artigiani del Mobile*, *Consorzio Esposizione Mobili*, *Esposizione Mobili la Canturina*, the *Galleria Mobili d’Arte* and *Esposizione Permanente Mobili* (See *Illustration 66*).²² These organisations were not co-operatives, but rather individual associations that provided financial support for members to purchase materials and machinery. The headquarters of each served as a centralised showroom to display the products made by associated artisans.

When they were first established, the showrooms were another marker of the reputation that Cantù’s artisans were beginning to enjoy in the late 1800s; they no longer had to deliver their goods to their largely Milanese buyers - now their customers came to them.²³ With export at a minimum until the post-war period, a largely Italian clientele continued to come directly to Cantù’s furniture showrooms into the twentieth century.²⁴ By the 1950s however this was no longer the case. Aside from what the architect Carlo Cavallotti described in 1960 as his ‘sense of

²⁰ Aurelio Porro, ‘La Selettiva del Mobile di Cantù’, *Artigianato Tra Arte e Design*, July-September 2003, p. 22; Carugati, ‘Per Una Lettura Storica dell’Artigianato del Mobile a Cantù’ in *Esperienze di Design in Cantù*, ed. by Furlanis, Porro and Terraneo 20 - 24 (p. 17).

²¹ Ponti, *Lo Stile* in Pasca, ‘Italian Design’, p. 104.

²² The *Esposizione Permanente Mobili* was the first of these to be established, set up in 1893. For more on this and the other organisations, see Guenzi and Marelli, pp. 33 - 34, 61, 105 - 107.

²³ Guenzi and Marelli, pp. 33-34.

²⁴ Guenzi and Marelli, pp. 70 - 71, 74.

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Illustration 66. Advert for *La Permanente Mobili*, featured in the catalogue for the sixth *Selettiva di Cantù*, 1965. *La Permanente Mobili* was the oldest of Cantù's artisanal consortia. On the left is the first building, designed in 1893. On the right, the second building, designed in 1957 by Renato Radici.

unease' at the 'undignified spectacle groups of eager men in uniform that launch themselves in the main square on potential clients', Cantù's provincial showrooms did not reflect changing consumption habits.²⁵ Consumers were turning to department stores and furnishing shops in Italy's urban areas to purchase their furniture, not trekking out to these hinterland showrooms. As Ponti railed in *Il Mobile Italiano* in 1959, a magazine set up in 1957 by De Carli precisely to address Italy's furniture production, 'it was a totally backward idea [...] to think that the public come to Cantù, to Meda, to Lissone, to Mariano etc., etc., to buy furniture on a Sunday. It is instead retail that has to go towards the public'.²⁶ For Ponti, both production and distribution in Cantù were in real need of modernisation.²⁷

Of even more concern than the domestic market was the state of the international one. While Milan and the surrounding region of Lombardy provided a market for a good part of Cantù's production, and that of Brianza as a whole, it was export (*See Illustration 67*) to countries including Egypt, Peru, Switzerland and the USA that was increasingly defining the destination of local products. Yet Italy was facing stiff competition in the 1950s, in particular from German and Scandinavian products. Between 1951 and 1954 there was a national decline in both value and quantity, dropping from nearly 1.6 million lire and over twenty two thousand units of furniture in 1951 to one million lire and just under ten thousand units in 1954.²⁸ Mindful of the increasing numbers of workshops in Cantù in the 1950s, in *Stile Industria* the architect Gianfranco Frattini warned of a "latent" crisis' caused by overproduction that Frattini saw happening in other towns.²⁹

While Germany was seen to represent competition in terms of the quantity of furniture they could produce, Scandinavia's products were the threat in design terms.

²⁵ Carlo Cavallotti, 'Cantù', *Il Mobile Italiano*, January 1960, p. 15.

²⁶ Ponti, 'Artigiani, Industriali del Mobile e gli Architetti' *Il Mobile Italiano*, March - April 1959, 3 - 6 (p. 6).

²⁷ Ponti, 'Artigiani, Industriali del Mobile e gli Architetti', p. 3.

²⁸ Guenzi and Marelli, p. 110.

²⁹ Gianfranco Frattini, 'A Cantù i Problemi della Produzione del Mobile', *Stile Industria*, October 1957, insert, pp. 18-19.



Illustration 67. Cantù furniture being packed for export to Nigeria, 1971.

Domestic and international consumers were beginning to buy modern furniture - just not from Italy. As the *Triennale's* general secretary Ferraris wrote in *il Mobile Italiano* in 1960:

too many producers are deluding themselves that they can continue to sell the same old designs, happy with the small local market, while we are all watching, for the moment impotently, as the international and even the Italian market is being won over by foreign companies, in particular from northern Europe.³⁰

Ferraris and Frattini were not the first to be concerned about Cantù. In the early 1950s a number of meetings had been held in the town, attended by exporters, producers, architects and other interested individuals. Among them was Norberto Marchi, soon to be head of the local school, who described the aim of these meetings as to examine ‘the possibility of re-qualifying the local productive image and inserting it in the panorama of contemporary furniture’.³¹ The result came in 1955 with the establishment of the *Selettiva di Cantù* (Cantù Selective), a furniture competition that sought to bring design to Cantù’s artisans, and the buying public back to the town. As the following section indicates, the controversy caused by two of the international winners of the competition shows up the importance of communication between architects and artisans and cultural specificity of craft, something that a focus on drawing helps further explore.

2.2.2 The *Selettiva di Cantù*

The economic significance of the *Selettiva* was confirmed by those groups involved in its organisation and sponsorship; amongst them the *Associazione Pro Cantù*, the Ministry of Foreign Trade and Como Chamber of Commerce, as well as a number of

³⁰ Tommaso Ferraris, ‘Lettera del Segretario Generale della Triennale sui Problemi del Mobile Italiano’, *Il Mobile Italiano*, March 1960, p. 1 in Lazzaroni, ‘From Exhibit to Event’: The Salone del Mobile “Case” in *Made in Italy?*, ed. by Settembrini, pp. 118 - 122 (p. 118).

³¹ Norberto Marchi, ‘Lineamenti Storici’, in *Gli Anni della Selettiva* (Cantù: la Grafica, 1995), n.p.

local producers and members of the Cantù associations.³² They were joined by individuals such as Ferraris and Umberto Zimelli of ENAPI, the latter sitting on the *Selettiva*'s 'technical committee'.³³

The *Selettiva* was divided up into two consecutive parts: first a competition, and then an exhibition of the results. For the competition, 'artists, architects, interior decorators of all the world' were invited to submit drawings to eight different categories of domestically-orientated furniture.³⁴ These were: 'Furnishing for four rooms', 'furnishing a living room', 'six pieces of furniture in wood', 'six pieces of furniture in metal', 'one piece of highly skilled craftsmanship', 'a series of upholstered furniture', 'three groups of office furniture' and 'three groups of service furniture'.³⁵ This significant number of categories devoted to producing furniture environments was another specialisation picked up in the late nineteenth century, as Cantù's artisans had often been commissioned to furnish entire rooms of local villas.³⁶

Entries had to be made anonymously, and competitors were required to submit orthographic drawings complete with perspectives and sections, including notes on specified materials and any explanatory details needed for construction.³⁷ They were presided over by a jury that consisted of Romano Barocchi, the director of Cantù's school, De Carli and led by the ever-present Ponti. They were joined by the Finnish architect Alvar Aalto and the Dane Juhl, whose presence not only asserted the international ambitions of the competition, but also the standing of Scandinavian design at this time.

³² *Prima Mostra Selettiva: Concorso Internazionale del Mobile* (Cantù: [n. pub] 1955) p. 11.

³³ *Prima Mostra Selettiva*, p. 11.

³⁴ 'Appendix 1: Rules of the International Furniture Competition' in *Prima Mostra Selettiva*, p. 49.

³⁵ *Prima Mostra Selettiva*, p. 6.

³⁶ Guenzi and Marelli, p. 37.

³⁷ 'Appendix 1' in *Prima Mostra Selettiva*, p. 49.

Winning designs from each category were then made by local producers either from one of the local consortia or individual workshops. In its inaugural year, over two hundred entries were received from over twenty countries, with prizes awarded to architects such as Eero Aarnio, Regina Alberti Reggio, Frattini, the Finnish architect Ilmari Tapiovaara, the British designer Nigel Walters and the Yugoslavian Niko Kraj.³⁸ Their furniture was put on display in the *Galleria Mobili d'Arte*'s Cantù showroom. The public could commission their own versions of the furniture exhibited, and it was hoped that popular pieces would go into large-scale production. Alongside the display of prize winning furniture there were three further exhibitions; one of Cantù lace, one of work from the local school (*See Illustration 68*), and the third an exhibition of crafts that included the work of Barovier & Toso, Paolo De Poli, Lucio Fontana and the cutlery and tableware firms Krupp and Sabattini. In addition, examples of contemporary craft and design were used to “dress” the furniture displays.

The first *Selettiva* received a high amount of attention and large number of visitors. Ponti praised the ‘new climate, a unity, a general taste’ in the *Selettiva* exhibits in comparison to other exhibitions of Cantù’s work.³⁹ As he went on to explain, it was also a question of taste that had motivated their decision-making. This was the case with the Swiss architect Werner Blaser, who had won first prize in the category ‘furnishing for four rooms’. Blaser had designed a collection of modular tables, chairs and other furnishings in tropical avidore wood (*See Illustration 69*) made by the *Associazione Artigiani Cantùrini del Mobile* and *Esposizione Permanente Mobili* and the firm of Angelo Molteni of nearby Giussano - who was also Cantù’s mayor and the *Selettiva*’s vice-president.

Ponti described Blaser’s design as an ‘extreme...moralistic reaction to a certain (and unfortunately majority) exuberant and tasteless part of Cantù’s normal production’.⁴⁰ He conceded that the decision to award the prize to Blaser was controversial. It went

³⁸ See the *Prima Mostra Selettiva* catalogue for a full list of winners and shortlisted entrants.

³⁹ Ponti, ‘Selettività a Cantù’, *Domus*, December 1955, 27 - 34 (p. 27).

⁴⁰ Ponti, ‘Selettività a Cantù’, p. 27.



Illustration 68. Display of work from the *Istituto Statale d'Arte per l'Arredamento di Cantù* at the first *Selettiva di Cantù* in 1955. The veneered wooden beech sculpture was designed by Noberto Marchi and made by Giovanni Tosetti and Tullio Camagni. It would also be shown at the eleventh *Triennale* of 1957.



Illustration 69. Extendable dining table and chairs, avidore wood, woven straw seats and backs. Designed by Werner Blaser and made by *Esposizione Permanente Mobili*. Awarded first prize in the 'furniture for four rooms' category at the first *Selettiva di Cantù*, 1955.

against the organic modernism of the Scandinavian architects, lacking what Aalto called the architect's responsibility to '*soit plus humaine*' (be more humane).⁴¹ As the local historian Aurelio Porro has more recently commented, it also went against De Carli and Ponti's search for an identifiably Italian style of furnishings.⁴² To this end, in *Domus* Ponti called for the involvement of both young and established Italian architects such as De Carli to be invited to participate in the next *Selettiva* alongside those of the Scandinavian architects. As he saw it, this would not only be a 'big draw' but would also be a 'useful comparison' between the different styles.⁴³

For the second *Selettiva* of 1957 Ponti got his wish. In addition to the competition, a number of prominent Italian architects were invited to exhibit their own designs, some of which were specially commissioned and made by the local producers for the event. These were BBPR, De Carli, Mango, Ponti himself, who included a *Superleggera* chair in his display (*See Illustration 70*), Ulrich and Zanuso. In terms of the competition itself, there were just six categories that year, a decrease that corresponded with a slight drop in entries; one hundred and sixty from eighteen different countries. Under a jury made up of Molteni, Italian architects Mario Asnago, Giorgio Costantini and Carlo Mollino, the Danish Erik Herlow and German Herbert Hirche, prizes were awarded to architects including Aarnio, Alberti Reggio and Tapiovaara.

If in the first *Selettiva* it had been Blaser's award that generated the most interest, in the second *Selettiva* it was Tapiovaara's. As Ferraris would note on the occasion of the ninth *Selettiva* of 1971, this had 'scandalised' opinion, although he does not say why.⁴⁴ As the following section suggests, it was due to the encounter between Italian artisans and international architects at the competition - one unusual at the time, but by the 1980s would have become a hallmark of Italian design, that was the root of the controversy.

⁴¹ Ponti, 'Selettività a Cantù', p. 27.

⁴² Porro, 'La Selettiva del Mobile di Cantù', p. 24.

⁴³ Ponti, 'Selettività a Cantù', p. 27.

⁴⁴ Ferraris in Gruppo di Ricerca, p. 41.

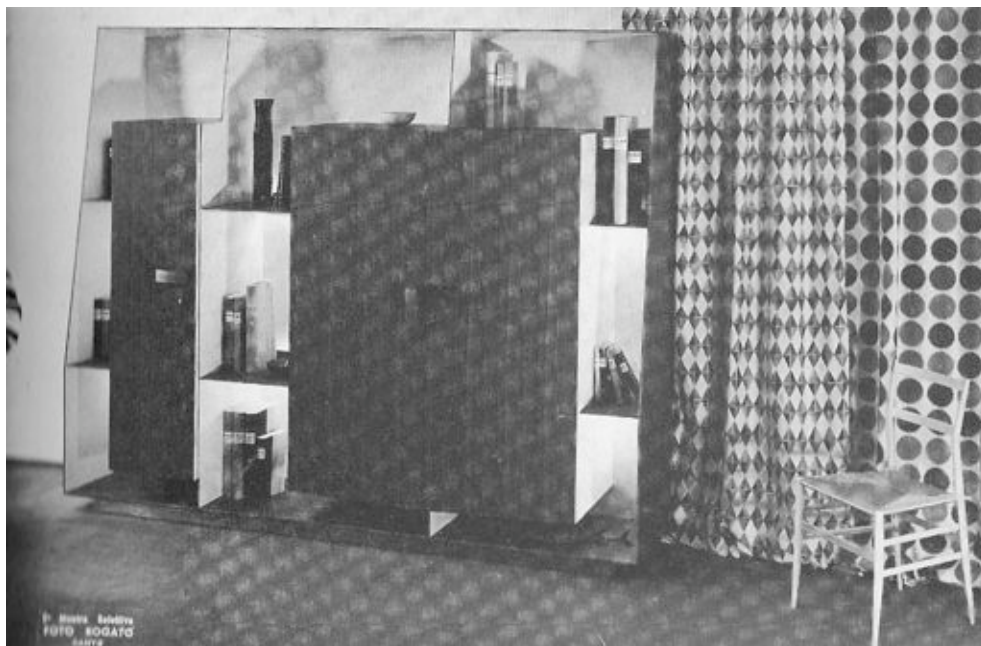


Illustration 70. Furnishing unit designed by Gio Ponti and made by the *Galleria Mobili d'Arte*, exhibited alongside a *Superleggera* chair at the second *Selettiva di Cantù* in 1957.

2.2.3 Drawings (i): Ilmari Tapiovaara and the Cultural Specificity of Skill

The Finnish architect Ilmari Tapiovaara submitted designs to two of the categories at the 1957 *Selettiva* and was awarded second place in both ‘furnishing for three rooms’ (*See Illustration 71*), designed with the assistance of Annikki Tapiovaara, Eero Aarnio and Kirsi Hyarinen, and ‘furnishing for a living room’, designed with Hyarinen, C. Mggee and Erik Ulrich.⁴⁵ To have been awarded only second prize in the latter category is revealing, seeing as no first prize had been given. Tapiovaara’s participation was the subject of an article from that year in *Il Mobile Italiano*. For the article, the firms who made Tapiovaara’s furniture were interviewed in order, as the article’s authors explained, to ‘shed light on the problem of collaboration between designer and producer’.⁴⁶

Three firms were interviewed: Paolo Arnaboldi, Tonelli & Broggi, who made the ‘furnishing for three rooms’ and Enrico e Paolo Poggi. No further information on these producers is given, except which furniture they had made. It was Arnaboldi who experienced the greatest problems in making Tapiovaara’s furniture, and it was Arnaboldi who realised the teak and leather designs for ‘furnishing for a living room’, (*See Illustration 72*) the entry that came second when no first was awarded. What transpired was a twofold problem of the drawings supplied and the designs they contained.

Arnaboldi stated that Tapiovaara’s drawings were ‘a bit slight’ and needed ‘some explanation’, particularly as they did not come with any annotations to explain the more complicated elements, or the outline of the project as a whole.⁴⁷ The firm sought help in the production process from local architects and ‘some technician friends,’ but still encountered problems. They were also unfamiliar with the construction techniques used: they had never used the indicated system of

⁴⁵ Luigi Massoni and Carlo Mazzeri, ‘Tapiovaara e gli Artigiani di Cantù’, *Il Mobile Italiano*, December 1957, n.p.

⁴⁶ Massoni and Mazzeri, ‘Tapiovaara e gli Artigiani di Cantù’, n.p.

⁴⁷ Paolo Arnaboldi in Massoni and Mazzeri, ‘Tapiovaara e gli Artigiani di Cantù’, n.p.



Illustration 71. Dining Room from the three rooms designed by Tapiovaara, Tapiovaara, Aarnio and Hyarinen and made by Tonelli & Broggi for the second *Selettiva* in 1957. The ceiling lamp is a design of Ettore Sottsass, produced by Arredoluce in 1957.



Illustration 72. Leather and teak sofa and table designed by Tapiovaara with Hyarinen, C. Mggee and Erik Ulrich and made by Paolo Arnaboldi for the 'furnishing for a living room' category at the second *Selettiva di Cantù*, 1957.

bloccaggio (locking) before. This combination of insufficiently explanatory drawings and alien methods led to mistakes being made and a recourse to the use of more familiar methods; a joint was covered up that was meant to have been left exposed on the smaller table, and Arnaboldi used their own construction techniques to join the legs and cross-bar as they had never used the one indicated by Tapiovaara.⁴⁸

The interviewers were highly critical of the result, but significantly laid blame not with any deficiency on the architect's part, but rather that of Arnaboldi: 'it seems [...] comparing the prototype with the executive drawings, that you took some liberties that damaged the aesthetic aspect of the furniture, and above all distorted some structural concepts that are normally found in Nordic furniture'.⁴⁹ The craft theorist and practitioner David Pye has described the relationship between workmanship and design extensively. He identifies two types of workmanship: 'good workmanship [...] which carries out or improves upon the intended design' and 'bad workmanship' which 'fails to do so and thwarts the design'.⁵⁰ In either case, workmanship is evaluated in terms of its service to design: 'the quality of the workmanship is judged by reference to the designer's intention' - and Arnaboldi's workmanship was clearly seen to belong to the latter.⁵¹

Another layer can be added to the criticism for Arnaboldi's workmanship. It not only frustrated Tapiovaara's designs, but did so all too visibly - this 'bad' workmanship threatened to upstage the design qualities of the object. As Adamson has argued, in line with craft's supplemental condition, the artisanal skill that was a necessary component of this furniture was not meant to be noticed: 'proper craftsmanship draws no attention to itself; it lies beneath notice, allowing other qualities to assert themselves in their fullness'.⁵² Instead, the function of craftsmanship when it comes

⁴⁸ Arnaboldi in Massoni and Mazzeri, 'Tapiovaara e gli Artigiani di Cantù', n.p.

⁴⁹ Tonelli and Broggi in Massoni and Mazzeri, 'Tapiovaara e gli Artigiani di Cantù', n.p.

⁵⁰ Pye, p. 13.

⁵¹ Pye, p. 13.

⁵² Adamson, *Thinking Through Craft*, p. 13.

to design is to ‘assert’ the qualities of the latter; craftsmanship is a means to an end, rather than an end in itself.

The catalogues confirm the supplemental role of craft in the *Selettiva*. Inside, the catalogues all followed the same pattern, including photographs and biographies of the architects, the drawings they submitted and photos of the finished objects, but in terms of the producer, only a name is given. These producers were expressly prohibited from submitting their own designs. As Roberto Aloï noted in 1956, it was rare that a piece of furniture would be ‘made directly by its inventor according to the artisanal tradition’ in Italy.⁵³ The cover (*see illustration 73*), designed by Bruno Munari, features a tool in action, a wooden G clamp whose jaws are holding in place the title of the event; an indication, like the disembodied hands in the advert for Chiesa Arredamenti, that this was a competition in what could be done with Cantù’s executive skill, rather than its expressive creativity. Taken together, these elements suggest how the *Selettiva* was representative of craft’s larger supplemental condition in post-war Italy: the *Selettiva* was not possible without Cantù’s craft skills, yet these skills were repeatedly subordinated to the aims of the architects and organisers involved, who wanted to change Cantù’s field of production.

The question of skill has not yet been held up for scrutiny and yet it was clearly an issue in Cantù; both in terms of what defined local skill and the question of how to re-orientate it towards more palatable, design-led aims. The concept of skill will be probed in both the two following chapters; what is notable here is how the different nationalities of maker and designer shows up the cultural specificity of skill, and the implications this would have on the realisation of the object.

In his comparative research on car workers in Coventry and Turin, the oral historian Paul Thompson has noted that there is ‘no direct equivalent’ for the word ‘skill’ in Italian. In place of the one English word is a multiplicity of Italian terms, including

⁵³ Roberto Aloï, *Mobili Tipo* (Hoepli: Milan, 1956), p. vii.



Illustration 73. Cover designed by Bruno Munari for the *Selettiva*. The same image, in reverse is found on back cover, and featured on all the *Selettiva* catalogues.

abilità, capacità, destrezza and *tecnica*.⁵⁴ He notes the use of the terms ‘*un operaio specializzato*’ and ‘*un operaio qualificato*’ for the English ‘a skilled man’, and demonstrates how the ‘precise and restricted sense’ of the Italian terms show up how highly prized skill was in the context of Italy’s post-war industrialisation.⁵⁵ As such, this made it a ‘contested concept’, reflected in terms of wages and social esteem. This was the source of conflict amongst skilled and ‘unskilled’ migrant workers in Milan’s factories.⁵⁶

These cultural and linguistic differences of skill are played out and reinforced not just in the performance of skill, but in its formation: aesthetic and technical judgements made in the execution of a design are based on the materials the artisan is familiar with, the tools available and the techniques learnt in the workshop or classroom. Given this cultural specificity, the encounter between architects and artisans from different nations was inevitably going to be problematic. This was acknowledged in *Il Mobile Italiano*’s critique of Arnaboldi’s work:

the artisan encountered the greatest difficulties in interpreting and realising constructive particulars of Nordic techniques for woodworking, unknown in Italy; on the other hand it is here that resides the greatest aesthetic value of the object: the same details carried out using “our” procedures completely cancel out the effect of the original model.⁵⁷

So if Arnaboldi was not able to perfectly execute Tapiovaara’s designs then it was not through inadequate skill or poor workmanship on the artisan’s part, but due to an encounter with unknown and unexplained techniques that demanded a different set of skills from his own. Even Tonelli & Broggi, who declared that they did not have ‘any difficulties’ in making Tapiovaara’s furniture, sought the assistance of an

⁵⁴ Thompson, ‘Playing at Being Skilled Men; Factory Culture and Pride in Work Skills among Coventry Car Workers’, *Social History*, 13 (1988), 45 - 69 (p. 48).

⁵⁵ Thompson, ‘Playing at Being Skilled Men’, p. 48.

⁵⁶ Thompson, ‘Playing at Being Skilled Men’, p. 48.

⁵⁷ Massoni and Mazzeri, ‘Tapiovaara e gli Artigiani di Cantù’, n.p.

architect linked to the *Selettiva* in order to interpret Tapiovaara's drawings into a realisable object.⁵⁸

Tapiovaara and the artisans who realised his furniture were not alone in experiencing these problems. On the occasion of the *Convegno Internazionale degli Architetti* (International Convention of Architects) organised on the occasion of the 1957 *Selettiva* Frattini had some critical words for the initiative:

up to now it has not been characterised by the necessary fusion of the work of the designer and the maker and, in the majority of cases, a too soon delivery date, inadequate drawings and misunderstandings of a general character, have prevented those who have contributed to the realisation of some furniture, to make the most of their creative qualities.⁵⁹

Frattini put communication in general, and the drawing in particular, at the centre of a successful outcome. Furthermore, in his criticism for those submitting drawings, he was not just referring to the international architects involved, but Italians too; as Ferraris noted in *Il Mobile Italiano* of this *Selettiva* 'the results have been less sparkling and, I have to add, the furniture designed on invitation has not been completely satisfactory'.⁶⁰

Given the seemingly widespread problems being caused by the process in place, it is not surprising to find that for the fourth *Selettiva* of 1961 the rules were changed, following reservations put forward by De Carli on the impossibility of making a judgement based on drawings alone.⁶¹ Shortlisted designs would still be made into prototypes, but these would then be examined by the jury who would then suggest

⁵⁸ Massoni and Mazzeri, 'Tapiovaara e gli Artigiani di Cantù', n.p.

⁵⁹ Frattini, 'A Cantù i Problemi della Produzione del Mobile', pp. 18 - 19.

⁶⁰ Ferraris, 'Lettera del Segretario Generale della Triennale sui Problemi del Mobile Italiano' in "Cultura del Progetto" e "Cultura Materiale": Un'Analisi Interpretativa nell'Artigianato del Mobile a Cantù, 1945/1985" in *Esperienze di Design in Cantù*, ed. by Ferraris, Porro and Terraneo, p. 56.

⁶¹ Marchi, 'Lineamenti Storici', n.p.

any necessary modifications.⁶² The reason for this was explained in the catalogue: ‘this is so that the artist’s creation and the executor’s ability have been able to complement each other more easily to attain that formal and technical perfection’ that was the competition’s aims.⁶³

De Carli also made a further plea to Italy’s architects producing designs for these local producers in the pages of *Il Mobile Italiano*: he praised the particular quality of Cantù’s artisanal skills, and wrote that ‘we need to design furniture that [...] can show off the manual ability of the workers of Cantù’s workshops’.⁶⁴ He was joined by Ponti, who argued that the crisis of Italy’s furniture market, of the ‘fraudulent and uncontrolled’ of its imitation antique and modern furniture, could ‘only be overcome with modern ‘Italian’ products’.⁶⁵

Taken together, the criticisms of the drawings and the designs rested on a problem of communication and collaboration. The example of Tapiovaara is an exaggerated example of this, as the design culture of Scandinavia was literally foreign to the materials and techniques of Italy’s craft traditions. Yet it was equally problematic when it came to Italian architects designing for Italian hands.

The *Selettiva* shows the design drawing to be one of key mediators through which ideas for furniture were not just made material, but also thought out and fully developed. The insufficiency of Tapiovaara’s drawings did not necessarily point to a deficiency on his part: built into them was the architect’s presumption that artisanal knowledge would fill in the gaps of techniques and construction details. He was not wrong in this presumption - Tedeschi’s ‘*Voi e gli Artigiani*’ articles demonstrate that it was taken for granted that artisans had the ability to translate informal sketches

⁶² ‘Regolamento’, *Quarto Mostra Selettiva e Concorso Internazionale del Mobile* (Cantù: [n. pub], 1961), pp. 11 - 12.

⁶³ *Quarto Mostra Selettiva e Concorso Internazionale del Mobile* (Cantù: 1961), p. 5.

⁶⁴ Carlo De Carli, ‘Lettera al Dottor Foppa Pedretti’, *Il Mobile Italiano*, February 1960 in Porro, ‘La Selettiva del Mobile di Cantù’, p. 22.

⁶⁵ Ponti, ‘Crisi del Mobile, Produttori, Architetti’, *Il Mobile Italiano*, April 1958, p. 3. in Lazzaroni, ‘From Exhibit to Event’ in *Made in Italy?*, ed. by Settembrini, p. 118.

into objects, and from Ponti's *Superleggera* that they played a leading role in design development. What was 'wrong' however was that the drawing was not designed with the particular skills, materials and techniques used by the makers in mind; and so a faithful interpretation of his ideas could not be made. In order to understand how drawings can be used to show the centrality of the artisan's role in the development of a successful design object, the following case study of the *Margherita* chair is an example of the ingredients required to make the transition from drawing to object work, and the shape of relations between artisan, architect and 'artisan entrepreneur' needed for this.

2.2.4 Drawings (ii): Albini, Bonacina and the *Margherita* Chair

Awarded a gold medal on its appearance at the ninth *Triennale* of 1951, the rattan and reed *Margherita* chair (*See Illustration 74*) is another example of an object seen to embody the complementarity between design and craft in post-war Italy. In a 1970 publication on craft in Lombardy, the critic and historian Vittorio Fagone singled out Albini and Sgrelli's design for Bonacina as 'one of the most-well known and widespread objects of Italian craft', while for Gregotti it was a 'true modern reincarnation [...] of the old artisan method of working this highly traditional material'.⁶⁶

Bonacina employed around twenty workers in the 1950s.⁶⁷ As with the production of the *Superleggera*, production of the *Margherita* was predicated on the gendered division of labour in Bonacina's workshop: male employees (*See Illustration 75*) worked on turning the cane and rattan materials, imported from the Far East, into chairs and other furnishings, while women were responsible for upholstery and *impagliatura* (chair weaving) (*See Illustration 76*), and both sexes worked on the varnishing stages.⁶⁸ At the centre of the handmade rattan structure of the *Margherita*

⁶⁶ Fagone, *Artigianato Lombardo* (Rome: Bestetti, 1970), p.65; Gregotti, 'Italian Design, 1945 - 1971' in *Italy: The New Domestic Landscape: Achievements and Problems of Italian Design*, ed. by Emilio Ambasz (New York: New York Graphic Society, 1972), pp. 315 - 340 (p. 321).

⁶⁷ Mario Bonacina, personal conversation, 11 December 2008.

⁶⁸ Mario Bonacina, personal conversation, 11 December 2008.

vittorio
bonacina

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(rete di Erba)

mobili
in giunco
e vimini

assortimento
cesti

 lavorazione
su disegno



MARGHERITA
patrona brevettata
disegno arch. Albin

Illustration 74. Advert featured in *Domus* in 1959 for the rattan and cane *Margherita* chair, designed by Albin and Sgrelli and made by Bonacina, 1959.



Illustration 75. Male artisan working on the structure of the *Margherita* chair, c. 1958.



Illustration 76. Inspection of female artisans' *impagliatura* (seat weaving) work in the Bonacina workshop, 1950s.

sits a Pirelli rubber cushion: like the *Superleggera*, the *Margherita* is an object of hybrid manufacture and reminder of the intertwined co-existence of craft and industrial production in 1950s Italy.

The *Margherita* shares another similarity with the *Superleggera*. Both have become “iconic” objects of Italian design, and yet neither would have occurred without the figure of the ‘artisan-entrepreneur’. In the case of the *Margherita*, this was the firm’s owner, Vittorio Bonacina. Vittorio Bonacina was the son of Giovanni Bonacina, a *maestro* basket maker who had founded the specialist wicker and cane furniture producer in Lurago d’Erba in 1889. Like his father he had been involved in the manufacture of the furniture, yet by the early 1950s Vittorio Bonacina’s role had become more managerial, fostering relationship with architects including Gae Aulenti, Albin, Raffaella Crespi, Franca Helg and Ponti.⁶⁹

Vittorio Bonacina’s involvement with the *Margherita* started when Albin was commissioned by La Rinascente’s in-house design department to design an armchair for the 1951 *Triennale*.⁷⁰ Albin turned to Bonacina, who the department store had already been employing to manufacture its designs, to make a prototype of the *Margherita*. After it had been made, La Rinascente decided not to put the armchair into production as they saw it as too avant-garde for its middle-class customers.⁷¹ Vittorio Bonacina decided to manufacture himself, and as the firm lacked its own showroom at the time, organised to have the chair sold through Azucena’s store in Milan.⁷²

Vittorio Bonacina’s material knowledge directly fed into the development of the *Margherita*. As Bonacina himself recorded, Albin ‘brought me a cardboard model; his idea was to realise a structure in fine, continuous cane’ and ‘to eliminate the

⁶⁹ Antonia Bonacina, personal conversation, 11 December 2008.

⁷⁰ Vittorio Bonacina in Massoni and Mazzeri, ‘La Produzione di Vittorio Bonacina’, *Il Mobile Italiano*, [n.d.] p.6.

⁷¹ Mario Bonacina, personal conversation, 11 December 2008.

⁷² Marta Sala, personal conversation, 10 December 2008.

classical foot structure'.⁷³ Bonacina knew that the only way to achieve this and ensure the strength and stability was to use *giunco* (rattan), a suggestion which was taken up in the final object.⁷⁴ The firm's owner was also active in the design process; on seeing the radial weave of the *Radar* armchair (*See Illustration 77*), designed by Albini and Franca Helg in 1967, Bonacina proposed another version of the chair with an additional set of cane lengths that cut diagonally across the original weave.⁷⁵ They approved, and that year the *Primavera* (*See Illustration 78*) went into production.⁷⁶

Two different types of drawings shed further light onto the different roles and forms of knowledge at play in the design and production process of the *Margherita*. First, a creased, yellowed and near-intelligible sketch (*See Illustration 79*) whose varnish-splattered surface serves to locate its place inside the Bonacina workshop. From the faded red, green and blue markings a number of words can be made out, asking if the back could be raised by ten centimetres, brought forward and made more 'gonfio' (swollen). This sketch asked questions rather than resolving them; to the top right, doubly underlined are the words 'da confermare' (to confirm). We cannot be sure of the authorship of the drawing, but Albini did produce sketches throughout the design process for both his furniture and architectural projects, as Helg later revealed:

As soon as the idea had to take shape and become something realizable, concerns for method and possible alternative means of execution guided the design process. Along with the sheet containing the general design, numerous little sketches were produced - for a joint, for a structural system, for openings, for door or window frame juncture - to verify "How will this be

⁷³ Bonacina in Massoni and Mazzeri, 'La Produzione di Vittorio Bonacina', p.6 .

⁷⁴ Bonacina in Massoni and Mazzeri, 'La Produzione di Vittorio Bonacina', p.6 .

⁷⁵ Mario Bonacina, personal conversation, 11 December 2008.

⁷⁶ Mario Bonacina, personal conversation, 11 December 2008.



Illustration 77. *Radar* chair, designed by Albini and Helg, Bonacina, Cane, 1967



Illustration 78. *Primavera* chair, designed by Albini and Helg on the suggestion of Vittorio Bonacina, Cane, 1967

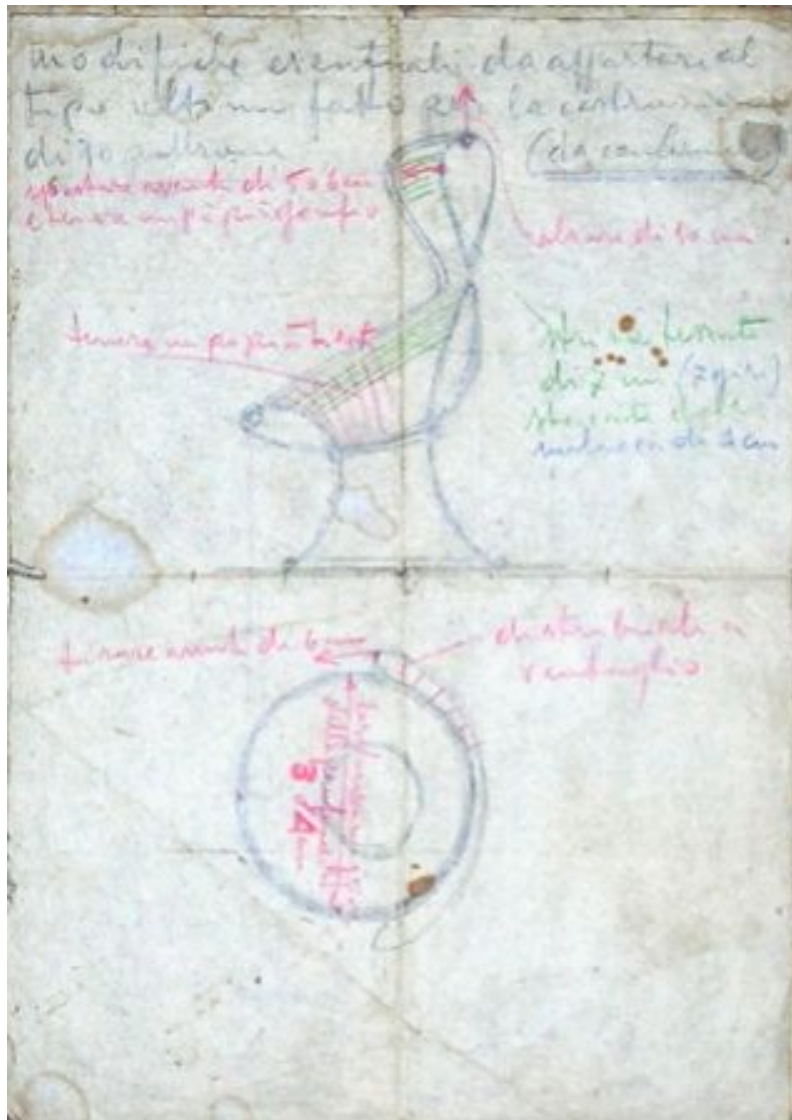


Illustration 79. Creased and varnish-splattered preparatory sketch of the *Margherita* chair, c. 1951.

built?” as well as innumerable orthogonal, axonometric, and perspective sketches to verify “How will this be seen?”⁷⁷

In this drawing questions about construction are secondary - the woven lengths of cane are only half sketched in, hinted at. Instead, the purpose of the sketch was to work out of the volumes of the chair. This was a paper-based conversation about design change between the architect and the producer, and as such what we could term a discursive rather than prescriptive form of drawing.

In the design drawing (*See Illustration 80*) the questions of shape have been resolved. Still with its project name of ‘Rinascence T9’, this is a neatly drawn out and dimensioned drawing from July 1951 that conveys the voluminous fluidity desired for the *Margherita*. Again though, it is splattered with varnish, locating this drawing like the sketch alongside the tools and materials of the artisan and confirming its position at the centre of a dialogue between the architect, artisan and entrepreneur, just as in the case of the multiple sketches and drawings that led to the *Superleggera*.

As with the sketch, we cannot be sure of the author of the drawing. The box to the bottom right credits the drawing to Albini’s studio, but Albini himself was not necessarily responsible for it. As the next section discusses, drawing was a key part of the architect’s training, but those with large enough studios such as Ponti employed *disegnatori* (draftsmen) to produce standardised design drawings, and there were between seven and ten such workers in the former’s studio at any given time.⁷⁸ While the architectural historian David Brain has argued that the similar employment of draftsmen in the American architecture profession ‘institutionalized an increasing distance between the architect and the building process’, at least with Albini this does not seem to have been the case.⁷⁹

⁷⁷ Helg in Leet, *Franco Albini*, pp. 16-17.

⁷⁸ Frailich Ponti, personal Interview, 13 October 2008. (APPENDIX 1).

⁷⁹ David Brain, ‘Practical Knowledge and Occupational Control: the Professionalization of Architecture in the United States’, *Sociological Forum*, 6 (1991), 239 - 268, (p. 246).

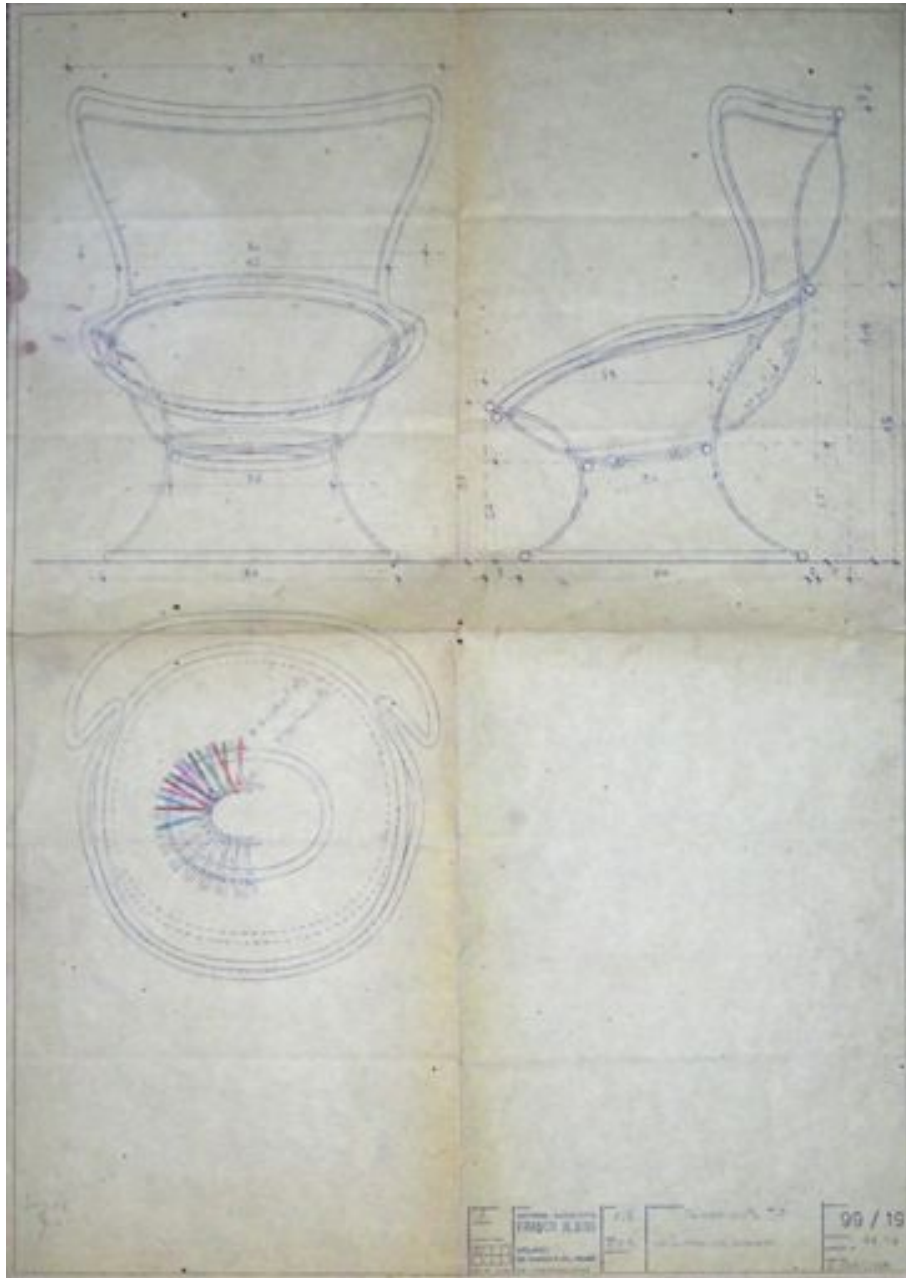


Illustration 80. Scale 1:5 design drawing of the 'Rinascente T9' produced by Albini's studio, dated 5 July 1951, with splatters of varnish on the top left corner.

There are other similarities between the design drawing and the sketch: the coloured lines that represent the woven rattan are still only partially present. Given the symmetrical design of the seat, this is not unusual; to draw out only one side of a design on the premise that the artisan would know to repeat on the other is a convention that dates back to the Renaissance.⁸⁰ With the total lack of any reference to the weave on the rest of the chair, we could say that this absence of information indicates a confidence in artisanal knowledge.

The front cover (*See Illustration 81*) of a Bonacina catalogue from the 1950s helps to illustrate this point. It shows the white outline of the chair's shape against a black background, the looping lines that make up the weave of the chair are hand drawn and irregular, creating an impression of the chair as a one-off rather than multiply produced object. This approach to design was not atypical of Albin - Paolo Farini has noted that the architect 'did not always produce forms that were easily reproducible'.⁸¹ The absence of lines on the design drawing could suggest then that it was the artisan who literally filled in the gaps, as both the material and design were resistant to the sort of mechanised, standardised production that could be pinned-down in the drawing. So the design drawing specified not just what needed to be said and unsaid by the architect to the artisan but also what could be said. Ultimately, the most 'crafty' part of the production process is omitted, unknown to the designer and achievable only thanks to what is known tacitly by the artisan.

Tacit knowledge is another component to add to further understand the role of skill in design. In 1966 the Hungarian-born British theorist Michael Polanyi published *The Tacit Dimension*, in which he made a distinction between knowledge that can be written down and that follows roles, and tacit or 'practical knowledge'.⁸² He described the latter as guided by a 'sense of approaching its solution', 'a valid

⁸⁰ Adamson, 'A Game of Two Halves', *From Sketch to Product*, 15 May 2009 <<http://www.vam.ac.uk/things-to-do/blogs/sketch-product/home>> [accessed 6 June 2009]

⁸¹ Paolo Farina, 'Design Prima del Design' in *Franco Albini Architettura e Design 1930 - 1970* (Florence: Centro Di, 1979) pp. 76 - 79 (p. 77).

⁸² Michael Polanyi, *The Tacit Dimension* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1966), p. 20.



Illustration 81. Cover for a Bonacina catalogue, with a sketch of Albin and Sgrelli's *Margherita* chair, 1960s.

anticipation of the yet indeterminate implications of the discovery arrived at in the end'.⁸³ Bonacina's foresight that rattan, rather than cane would be a better material for the *Margherita* chair is an example of how tacit knowledge could contribute to the design process. The presumption of tacit knowledge also conditioned the information that architects passed on to the maker. Following Pye, Peter Dormer notes that designers 'often do not or cannot specify [...] what needs to be done. They may specify a goal instead'.⁸⁴ Here we can think of Ponti's desire to 'affettare' the *Leggera* chair - it was Redaelli's job to find out how this could be achieved. As Dormer notes, the impossibility of articulating this form of knowledge also means that its opposite - what he calls 'propositional knowledge' is 'normally held in higher regard than tacit or practical knowledge,' even though it is 'underpinned' by the former, and thus contributes further to the marginalisation of craft's contribution in the writing up of the design.⁸⁵

The continuation of workshop-based production and the multi-authored nature of the design process that this enabled is embedded in these half-complete, varnish splattered drawings. Designs did not reach the workshop fully formed, but were the start of a conversation between the executive skills of the artisan and the ideas of the architect. This however was changing in Italy at this time. S. Leoni Orsenigo of the *Associazione Pro Cantù* noted in *Il Mobile Italiano* in April 1960 that

up until a few years ago it was normal that the designer did the drawing of the furniture occupying himself only with the aesthetics of the details and then the artisan made it in a way more or less adherent in relation to his own abilities and his own experience.⁸⁶

⁸³ Polanyi, p. 24.

⁸⁴ Dormer, *The Art of the Maker*, p. 14.

⁸⁵ Dormer, *The Art of the Maker*, p. 14.

⁸⁶ S. Leoni Orsenigo, *Il Mobile Italiano*, April 1960 in Guenzi and Marelli, p. 238.

By the time of his article, there was a tendency to ‘resolve [...] every problem on paper to reduce costs and time for experimentation to a minimum’.⁸⁷

That is not to say that drawing lost its importance; rather it was confined to the earlier stages of production process. Even as Rosselli celebrated the ‘new’ crafts practitioners in Chiavari in 1959 and relocated the artisan’s role from the workshop to the factory, he upheld the artisanal nature of the drawing stage:

Many of these ‘new’ crafts practitioners are [...] qualified and precious collaborators of the designer; they are more prepared and adapted makers of production models [...] The first phase from drawing to the model is necessarily artisanal: a phase still creative of extreme importance which requires collaborations of artisans more than of specialised labourers.⁸⁸

As Rosselli identifies, even as the shift towards mass, industrial production saw craft’s role change, it would still play a vital, if radically reduced, function in the design process. A close relationship between the architect and the artisan and an ability to communicate with each other was still necessary for a successful collaboration. It required architects who could supply viable designs suited to the production set up of the artisan, and artisans who could understand and interpret them. Rosselli suggests that this was all already formed by the time get to the factory floor, leaving the question of where and when the roles of and relationship between architects and artisans was being formulated. Clearly the answer lies not at level of production, but at the earlier stage of education.

The next section looks at those aspects of education that played the most significant role in shaping craft and design’s relationship; *disegno* in the education of Cantù’s artisans, and encounters with production in the architecture faculty at the *Politecnico di Milano*. Not surprisingly, these were also the aspects that most exercised local educators, who understood the role that education could play in forging a closer

⁸⁷ Orsenigo in Guenzi and Marelli, p.239.

⁸⁸ Rosselli, ‘Points of View’, *Zodiac*, n.p.

collaboration between architects and artisans, and led to a number of initiatives to bring them together. As such, an examination of the place of *disegno* and production in the education of architects and artisans, the nature of the attempts to bring these two groups together, and the effects that the school and the *Selettiva* had on Cantù's industry and its furniture makers as it moved into the sixties will form the last part of this chapter.

2.3 Training Architects and Artisans: The Role of *Disegno* in Craft and Design Pedagogy

‘The basis of the profession, the very beginning of all these manual operations, is drawing and painting’.¹ These are the words of the painter Cennino D’Andrea Cennini in his fourteenth century *Libro d’Arte. The Craftsman’s Handbook*, to give it its English title, offers a rare window onto the practice of craft in the early Renaissance era.² As one of the skills the artisan was expected to possess, alongside those such as making glue to preparing your own paper and paintbrushes, the practice of *disegno* has long been an essential part of the craftsman’s knowledge.

A word on the meaning of *disegno* is necessary here. Just as the English word for skill does not adequately convey its meaning in the Italian language, so ‘drawing’ does not fully encompass the concept of *disegno*. At the time of Cennini, there was an equivalence between the two: as Roberts has noted, for Cennini, *disegno* meant simply ‘to draw’ in a preparatory fashion’ and was just ‘one skill amongst many’.³ However the idea of *disegno* underwent a radical change in the middle of the following century in the process of the ‘ennobilitation of art’ that occurred during the Italian Renaissance.⁴

In Renaissance Italy *disegno* maintained its meaning as a preparatory drawing, but, as Karen-Edis Barzman has noted in her work on Florence at this time, it was also being simultaneously promoted in academic circles as a ‘cognitive process’.⁵ This was achieved most famously through Giorgio Vasari’s *Le Vite delle Più Eccellenti Pittori, Scultori, ed Architetti*, first published in 1550, in which he declared *disegno*

¹ Cennino D’Andrea Cennini, *The Craftsman’s Handbook*, trans. by Daniel V. Thompson, Jr. (New York: Dover Publications, 1933), p. 3

² Roberts, p. 139.

³ Roberts, p. 140.

⁴ Roberts, p. 140.

⁵ Karen-Edis Barzman, ‘Perception, Knowledge, and the Theory of *Disegno* in Sixteenth-Century Florence’ in *From Studio to Studiolo: Florentine Draftsmanship under the First Medici Grand Dukes*, ed. by Larry J. Feinberg (Oberlin: Allen Memorial Art Museum, Oberlin College; Seattle: distributed by University of Washington Press, 1991) pp. 37 - 48, (p. 37).

the ‘parent of our three arts, Architecture, Sculpture, and Painting’, and promoted it as an activity that had ‘its origins in the intellect’, one ‘formed in the mind’ and ‘expressed by the hands’.⁶ Held up as an intellectual activity, the practice of *disegno* was in turn used to elevate and unite the ‘liberal arts’ of painting, sculpture and architecture and thus distinguish them from the lowlier work of the craftsman. This was the fulcrum of the ‘disassociation between manual and intellectual labour’ that Cardoso has described so cogently.⁷

This emphasis on *disegno* as an activity of the ‘liberal arts’ persisted in architectural education in the twentieth century. Prior to the introduction of architecture courses at the *Politecnico di Milano* in 1865, architecture was taught alongside painting and sculpture at Milan’s *Accademia della Belle Arti di Brera*. Even when architecture was introduced at the Milan engineering school, classes in figure drawing, perspective drawing, and ‘copying of ornament by watercolour’ were taught by visiting professors from Brera.⁸ *Disegno* was a multiple discipline at the *Politecnico*, and the practice of copying, composition and technical drawing were all central to the architect’s education in the post-war years.

Disegno was not considered a vital component of just the architect’s education. In 1898 the Ministry of Public Education declared that *disegno* ‘was indispensable’ for architecture, painting and sculpture and ‘any industry that depends on the arts’.⁹ This came at a time of intense interest in education and a spate of school building in response to concerns over the newly founded nation’s industrial ‘backwardness’ and ability to compete in the international marketplace. It saw the establishment of engineering schools such as the polytechnics in Milan (1863) and Turin (1859), but

⁶ Giorgio Vasari, *Vasari on Technique: Being the Introduction to the Three Arts of Design, Architecture, Sculpture and Painting Prefixed to the Lives of the Most Excellent Painters, Sculptors and Architects*, trans. by Louise Maclehouse (London: Dent & Co., 1907) p. 205.

⁷ Cardoso, ‘Craft versus Design’ in *The Craft Reader*, ed. by Adamson, p. 323.

⁸ ‘Istituzione di Composizione Architettonica’ in *Il Centenario del Politecnico di Milano 1863 - 1963* (Milan: Tamburini, 1964) 504; Ornella Selvafolta ‘L’Istituto Tecnico Superiore di Milano: Metodi Didattici ed Ordinamento Interno (1863 - 1914)’ in *Il Politecnico di Milano: Una Scuola nella Formazione della Società Industriale 1863 - 1914* (Milan: Electa, 1981) p. 111.

⁹ Ministero della Istruzione Pubblica, *Notizie Intorno alle Scuole d’Arte e di Disegno Italiane* (Rome: 1898) p. vii.

also an increase in the quantity and types of art schools. The number of *istituti di belle arti* (fine arts schools) grew and branched off into *scuole delle arti decorativi* (decorative arts schools) and *scuole d'arte applicata all'industria* (industrial applied arts schools), the latter found in both Cantù (1882) and Chiavari (1872).¹⁰ In 1898 there were 327 of these schools with a total of twelve thousand students, the majority of which were located in Lombardy.¹¹

In the nineteenth century *disegno* functioned as a marker of social difference just as it had done in the fourteenth; as Ann Bermingham has observed in her history of drawing, the ability to draw has long been employed as a means to 'identify and locate individuals in the social order'.¹² With both architects and artisans being taught the subject, instruction in *disegno* was going to be different for both groups, and not only reflecting but also reinforcing the shape of social relations between the two.

In his notes on education Gramsci argued that 'each social group has its own type of school, intended to perpetuate a specific traditional function, ruling or subordinate'.¹³ The change of name from an *istituto statale* to a *istituto professionale* (professional institute) in 1899 confirmed Cantù's secondary school as belonging to Gramsci's category of a 'vocational (professional) school' that provided 'education for the instrumental classes'.¹⁴ This was in comparison to the secondary-school level 'classical school for the dominant classes' for those students who would then go onto gain a degree at the *Politecnico*.¹⁵ The question of class is an important factor in understanding the separate sites and skills that defined the education of architects and artisans, and will be considered here. What needs to come first however is an

¹⁰ *Notizie Intorno alle Scuole d'Arte e di Disegno Italiane*, pp. 63 – 64.

¹¹ Guenzi and Marelli, p. 31.

¹² Ann Bermingham, *Learning to Draw: Studies in the Cultural History of a Polite and Useful Art* (New Haven: Yale UP, 2000), p. x. in Lara Kriegel, *Grand Designs: Labor, Empire and the Museum in Victorian Culture* (Durham, N.C.; London: Duke University Press, 2007), p. 21.

¹³ Gramsci, *Prison Notebooks*, p. 40.

¹⁴ Gramsci, *Prison Notebooks*, p. 26.

¹⁵ Gramsci, *Prison Notebooks*, p. 26.

examination of how the two elements of their practice that most exercised the intellectuals of the *Selettiva* were being taught at Cantù's school and Milan's *Politecnico* respectively. As the following brief accounts of the institutes' demonstrate, at the former this was *disegno*, and at the latter, production.

2.3.1 Education in Cantù: The Establishment of the *Scuola d'Arte Applicata all'Industria*

The *Scuola d'Arte Applicata all'Industria* was set up in 1883 by ministerial decree. It was divided into two sections; the *scuola di disegno* and the *officina di intaglio in legno* (workshop for wooden marquetry) (See *Illustration 82*), and in its first year had seventy all-male students.¹⁶ In 1888 a separate lace section was opened for female students - a gendered division of subject areas that mirrored and reinforced that of the town.¹⁷ While this separation was in place for only a year, it persisted unofficially at the school, as females continued to be a minority - in 1939 they made up just seventy of the School's 324 students.¹⁸ There was another difference between the two: on its establishment, the female section ran on a day timetable, while the furniture section was an evening and Sunday school.¹⁹ For the male students of the latter, this was to ensure that it would not interfere with the daytime hours of the workshop-based apprenticeship that historically constituted the artisan's training.

From the start, the Cantù school was unusual in putting equal emphasis on classroom lessons in *disegno* and time spent honing skills in the school's workshop. This was in line with the school's declared function to 'bring together and accomplish the teaching of *disegno* and modelling with special application to the industries of

¹⁶ *Istituto Statale d'Arte Cantù Fausto Melotti 1883 - 1994* (Cantù: Cavallieri, 2004), p. 13.

¹⁷ Orsenigo, *Notizie dell'Artigianato Canturino del Mobile dalle Origini ai nostri Giorni e Problemi Attuali* (Cantù: Qualità Cantù, 1983), p. 5.

¹⁸ After 1940 no statistical distinction was made between female and male students. Table, 'Statistica degli Allievi della Scuola d'Arte di Cantù', Guenzi and Marelli, p. 114.

¹⁹ *Istituto Statale d'Arte Cantù 1883 - 1994*, p. 8.



Illustration 82. Furniture workshop inside the Cantù School in Piazza Parini, early twentieth century.

wooden furniture and lace production'.²⁰ As with the *Politecnico*, different types of drawing were taught, with courses in geometric, ornamental, architectonic, machine, figure and drawing that sat alongside practical courses in model making and woodcarving.²¹ This combination of multiple drawing types and practical experience carried on into the post-war period: in 1959 students in the furniture section followed courses in professional drawing, life drawing, architectonic and style drawing alongside workshop-based classes dedicated to the study of materials and new techniques.²²

Information on the content of these classes at Cantù's school is lacking. We can be sure that copying would have been a part of the drawing instruction. In *The Craftsman's Handbook*, Cennini had advocated the practice of copying as the first stage in learning to draw. At first selecting 'the easiest possible subjects', the craftsman should always take care to only ever be 'copying the best things which you can find done by the hand of great masters'.²³ In the early twentieth century, Italy's applied art schools followed the same rule. Professors presented students with increasingly complex examples of historical and contemporary craft production, which students had to copy out and then make for real in the school's workshops.²⁴

It was this culture of copying that got Cantù's first professor of *disegno*, and director of the School, into trouble. On inspecting Francesco Angiolini's course, the architect Camillo Boito, then head of architecture at the *Politecnico*, criticised his methods for simply repeating 'traditional decorative motifs'.²⁵ As Lidia Rati has stated, this

²⁰ Art. 1, 'Decreto Ministeriale del 22 - 12 - 1882 del Ministero dell'Agricoltura, Industria e Commercio' in *Istituto Statale d'Arte Cantù Fausto Melotti 1883 - 1994*, p. 13.

²¹ Art. 4, 'Decreto Ministeriale del 22 - 12 - 1882 del Ministero dell'Agricoltura, Industria e Commercio' in *Istituto Statale d'Arte Cantù Fausto Melotti 1883-2004*, p. 13.

²² Guenzi and Marelli, p.114.

²³ D'Andrea Cennini, pp. 5, 15

²⁴ Gregotti, *Il Disegno del Prodotto Industriale*, p. 222.

²⁵ Lidia Rati, 'Francesco Angiolini e le Origini della Scuola d'Arte di Cantù', *Cantùrium*, 13 (2007), 64-70 (p. 66).

<http://www.isaCantù.it/_testi/FRANCESCO%20ANGIOLINI%20E%20LE%20ORIGINI%20DELLA%20SCUOLA%20D%20si.pdf> [accessed 15 December 2010]

conflict between Angiolini and Boito was symptomatic of the larger disapproval of Cantù's historically orientated craft.²⁶ Evidently, it was at the level of education that Cantù's artisans were gaining knowledge of and learning to interpret the historical styles that characterised the "*Stile Cantù*", and it was also in the classroom that attempts would be made to alter this.

The school changed names and hands several times as it moved into the twentieth century, and in 1931 the architect Wenter Marini was appointed as director. With his appointment came the first pedagogic effort to move Cantù's furniture industry away from its specialisation in period furniture. As Marini described, he wanted to 'insert into the local craft active forces prepared for the current problems, against the worn out stylistic positions'.²⁷ As part of this strategy, he employed a number of contemporary ceramists including Rolando Hettner and Melotti to run courses at the School.²⁸

Writing in 1934, Melotti described his desire 'to direct the students towards a modern taste, to help to complete in some way the reform, already occurring in architecture and in the construction of furniture'.²⁹ He set up a course in *composizione plastica moderna* (modern formal composition), in which he directed the students towards contemporary ideas about aesthetics and ornament, and taught *disegno* not as copying, but as composition.³⁰ Optional and open to students in both the furniture and lace sections, the course culminated in a show of carved wooden bas-reliefs, furniture and lace designs (*See Illustrations 83, 84*) at the *Galleria Milione* in Milan in 1934.³¹ According to Melotti, on seeing the exhibits the

²⁶ Rati, p. 66.

²⁷ Marini in *Istituto Statale d'Arte Cantù Fausto Melotti 1883 - 1994*, p. 10.

²⁸ *Istituto Statale d'Arte Cantù Fausto Melotti 1883 - 1994*, p.10.

²⁹ Fausto Melotti, 'Idee sull'Insegnamento Artistico', *Bollettino della Galleria del Milione*, 1934, in Carlo Pirovano, *Melotti e la Scuola di Cantù* (Milan: Electa, 1999), p. 97.

³⁰ Pirovano, p. 5.

³¹ Melotti, 'Idee sull'Insegnamento Artistico' in Pirovano, p. 97.



Illustration 83. Plaster bas-relief, from Fausto Melotti's course in *Composizione Plastica Moderna*. Author unknown. Included in the exhibition of student work held at the Galleria del Milione, Milan, 6th - 30th June 1934.



Illustration 84. Lacework, designed by Fausto Melotti for the *Composizione Plastica Moderna* course, maker unknown, 1933.

Modernist architect Le Corbusier had been so astonished by their modern design that he did not believe they could be the work of students.³²

After a shaky start that saw the entire starting group of ten students drop out, Melotti's course soon became a success with the student body.³³ Its initial unpopularity was accompanied by larger suspicion of Marini's attempts to modernise the school. It was met not just with doubts, but anger by local artisans put out at this attempt to rapidly impose a new character to their craft, and it was only through the younger students and workers in the town that Marini's ideas began to be accepted and modern styles began to emerge in Cantù.³⁴

2.3.2 Changing Roles: From Apprentices to 'Artisan Entrepreneurs'

Marini's appointment in 1931 marked another, lasting change to the education of Cantù's artisans: the shift to a full time day timetable.³⁵ The significance of this lay in what it meant for the apprenticeship system - increasingly, it was the classroom rather than the workshop that was the primary site of the artisan's education. Apprenticeships would still remain a part of the artisan's training; the 1951 industrial census recorded 563 apprentices in the 'wooden furniture and furnishings industry' in the province of Como, of whom nearly five hundred were male.³⁶ For Argan, writing in his response to *Zodiac's* 1959 survey, there was a direct link between the growth of craft schools and the decline of the workshop, one that was detrimental to the artisan:

Why have craft schools emerged? Because the craft workshop, coming to an end, have ceased to be a school; because, in the workshop, the apprenticeship

³² Melotti, 'Colloquio con Fausto Melotti' in Pirovano, p. 102.

³³ Melotti, 'Idee sull'Insegnamento Artistico' in Pirovano, p. 97.

³⁴ Pirovano, p. 13.

³⁵ *Istituto Statale d'Arte Cantù Fausto Melotti 1883 - 1994*, p. 15.

³⁶ Table 6 'Addetti, Secondo la Posizione nella Professione e il Sesso', *III Censimento Generale dell'Industria e del Commercio 1951*, VII, p. 75.

does not become an artisan anymore, but remains a labourer or even servant. “Lucus a non lucendo”, craft schools were born with the decadent initiative of pedagogic function (therefore aesthetic and moral) of the craftsman, in the same way that craft markets were born out of the crisis of the crafts market.³⁷

This shift from workshop-based apprenticeship to formalised classroom education was not confined to Italy. Harrod has identified the same transition in the context of post-war Britain, which was part of the increasing industrialisation of the furniture industry.³⁸ The death of the apprenticeship system marked the end of the workshop as the site of a specific type of pedagogical ideology. The workshop was where the young apprentice would learn, through a process of observation and experience, the tacit knowledge that Polanyi has demonstrated to be at the heart of the practice of craftsmanship.³⁹

For Argan, the issue was that the workshop did not just provide education in terms of skill, but business too. Alongside ‘the transmission of technical and formal expertise in the firm through an apprenticeship’ he cited ‘free enterprise and economic autonomy’ as the three ‘fundamental characteristics of handicraft’.⁴⁰ According to the architect Mario Ridolfi in his account of the craft economy in the twentieth century, the apprenticeship was important as a ‘source for the acquisition of professionalism of an entrepreneurial order’.⁴¹ He even goes so far as to say that the apprenticeship was the ‘only source of entrepreneurialism...without which every rational process of technical-scientific education would come to nothing’.⁴²

³⁷ Argan, ‘Points of View’, n.p.

³⁸ Harrod, *The Crafts in Britain in the Twentieth Century*, pp. 226 - 227.

³⁹ For more on the relationship between tacit knowledge and apprenticeships, see Harrod, *The Crafts in Britain in the Twentieth Century*, p. 227.

⁴⁰ Argan, ‘Points of View’, n.p.

⁴¹ Mario Ridolfi, ‘Artigianato e Economia Contemporanea’ in *Storia dell’Artigianato Europeo* (Milan: Etas Libri, 1983) (pp. 70 - 91), p. 89

⁴² Ridolfi, ‘Artigianato e Economia Contemporanea’ in *Storia dell’Artigianato Europeo*, p. 89

The idea of the artisan as entrepreneur has appeared twice in this chapter already; Vittorio Bonacina and Cesare Cassina both examples of the potential achieved with a combination of technical and business knowledge. The imperative for such figures had been already been keenly felt in Cantù: the disproportionate number of workshops that closed in the town in the financial crises of the 1930s was seen to be the result of a lack of business and administrative expertise amongst these family-owned workshops.⁴³ By the 1960s, this was necessary in another way, as on leaving the school students increasingly found work not within in family firms but in directive or managerial positions in small and medium-sized firms.⁴⁴

The fact that these young graduates were prepared for these roles was made possible by the increasing emphasis on the artisan as businessman in Cantù's school. Marchi, who had been appointed as director in 1959, declared that the school needed to form 'a professional (artistic-industrial expert) capable of positively participating in the productive activities of furniture and furnishings, synthesising in himself the work of creator and technician' who operated in 'mediation between the designer and producer'.⁴⁵ He echoes Gramsci's recognition of the 'technical school' as the necessary location for forming the basis of 'the new type of intellectual' but also points to a change in the artisan's role informed by the rise of design and industry.⁴⁶

This is most overt in the issue of *disegno*. Marchi described the combination of 'practical technology' and 'professional *disegno*' as the key to 'refining' the taste of Cantù's artisans.⁴⁷ This was not, however, because Marchi envisaged the artisan as designer, but rather to optimise his activities at the service of the designer. He

⁴³ In 1932 alone, thirty nine of Cantù's near six hundred workshops were forced to close. Carugati notes that the familial nature of these firms, that reduced the use of external employees, was one of the reasons why more were not forced to do the same. Carugati, 'Per Una Lettura Storica dell'Artigianato del Mobile a Cantù' in *Esperienze di Design in Cantù*, ed. by Furlanis, Porro and Terraneo, p. 20.

⁴⁴ Carugati, 'Per Una Lettura Storica dell'Artigianato del Mobile a Cantù' in *Esperienze di Design in Cantù*, ed. by Furlanis, Porro and Terraneo, p. 23.

⁴⁵ Marchi, *Il Diplomato dell'Istituto d'Arte e la Produzione del Mobile* in *L'Industria del Mobile*, 6 (1966) p. 1061 in Carugati, 'Per Una Lettura Storica dell'Artigianato del Mobile a Cantù' in *Esperienze di Design in Cantù*, ed. by Furlanis, Porro and Terraneo, p.23.

⁴⁶ Gramsci, *Prison Notebooks*, p. 9.

⁴⁷ Marchi, 'Cantù', *Il Mobile Italiano*, December 1958, p. 15.

declared that artisans needed to ‘be able to interpret or complete without lacunae and uncertainties as much the drawing as the sketch of the professional or client’.⁴⁸ In the late 1950s, the instrumentality inscribed in ‘technical education’ was fully realised at Cantù’s school; now, drawing instruction was not about producing artisans as designers, but artisans able to interpret the drawings of the designer, in whatever form they came.

Marchi’s appointment had coincided with the relocation of the school and a new name that reconfirmed the uniqueness of Cantù’s school - the *Istituto Statale d’Arte e per l’Arredamento* was the only one of Italy’s twenty-three art institutes to have a section ‘dedicated to the art of furniture’.⁴⁹ With new buildings came new workshops (*See Illustration 85*), equipped with the modern machinery that was an increasing part of furniture production in the town in the post-war years. Although largely confined to the preparatory stages of work, by the 1950s band saws, milling machines, sanders and planers were all part of the body of tools that artisans employed in the production of furniture.⁵⁰ The investment in this machinery at the school reflected the increasing amount of time spent in the workshops; in 1959 just over a quarter of the school’s forty-four hour week was spent at its workbenches.⁵¹

In the 1950s, the artisans trained at Cantù’s school were well versed in terms of using modern machinery, and were able to both produce and, increasingly, interpret architects’ drawings. However, as the *Selettiva* and examples of Tapiovaara and Bonacina demonstrate, it was equally important to have architects who could provide designs suited to local skills and manufacture methods, and be receptive to the knowledge that artisans held. Unfortunately this was not necessarily the case.

⁴⁸ Marchi ‘Cantù’, p. 15.

⁴⁹ Guenzi and Marelli, p. 114.

⁵⁰ . Carugati, ‘Per Una Lettura Storica dell’Artigianato del Mobile a Cantù’ in *Esperienze di Design in Cantù*, ed. by Furlanis, Porro and Terraneo, p. 23.

⁵¹ Marchi, ‘Le Scuole’, *Il Mobile Italiano*, December 1958, p. 16.



Illustration 85. Inside the workshops in the newly built premises of the Cantù' school on Via Andina in the early 1960s, equipped with machinery including band saws, milling machines, sanders and planers.

2.3.3 Experiencing Production at the *Politecnico di Milano*

To an extent, the history of the *Politecnico* charts the changing fortunes for engineering, architecture and design in Italy. When courses in ‘civil architecture’ were introduced at the *Politecnico* in 1865, the school was celebrated for its innovative combination of scientific and artistic disciplines. The twinning of courses in engineering from the school with classes from the Brera art school heralded, as one historian of the school has described, the creation of a ‘new type of professional’, the university-trained architect.⁵²

Engineering continued to be an important part of the school, and would make a significant contribution to Italy’s design and architecture culture, particularly in the realm of plastics. Amongst its alumni were Giulio Natta and Giulio Castelli, the former awarded the Nobel Prize in 1963 for his discovery of polypropylene, the latter the co-founder of Kartell in 1949.⁵³ However, the establishment in 1933 of a separate architecture faculty at the school marked the consolidation of Italy’s architectural culture, with Milan as its home.⁵⁴ With alumni including Albini, Gardella, Ponti and Terragni, the *Politecnico* was responsible for educating some of Italy’s most prominent architects of the pre and post-war years, who would produce designs elaborated by Brianza’s artisans - and, at least in the case of Albini and Ponti, make regular trips to the hinterland to oversee their development.

Yet for all that a close relationship with production would become a defining feature of these collaborations, this was not a trait instilled at the architectural school. While industry-funded workshops were an integral part of the engineering students’ education in the post-war period, in order to experiment with new materials and technologies, this practical experience was not a component of architects’ education.

⁵² Carlo G. Lacaïta, ‘Introduzione al Politecnico di Milano: Il Politecnico di Milano’, in *Il Politecnico di Milano: Una Scuola nella Formazione della Società Industriale 1863 – 1914* (Milan: Electa, 1981) pp. 9 - 36 (p. 14).

⁵³ Bosoni, ‘The Italian Way to Plastics’, in *The Plastics Age: from Modernity to Postmodernity*, ed. by Sparke (London: V&A Publications, 1990), pp. 75 - 85 (p. 77) (first publ. in *Rassegna*, June 1983, 137 - 138).

⁵⁴ Lacaïta, ‘Introduzione al Politecnico di Milano’ in *Il Politecnico di Milano*, p. 30.

In *Il Mobile Italiano* De Carli lamented this absence of any workshop equipment for experimentation by architectural students: ‘on many occasions that I have spoken and still speak of workshops for experimentation in the manufacture of furniture, there is always someone who looks at me as if I were a transparent image’.⁵⁵ It was not that De Carli was envisaging the production of a new generation of architects as producers, but rather that it was vital for architects to have these facilities in order to know ‘how to move from one machine to the next in accordance with the correct cycle of production’ and so provide designs that could actually be produced.⁵⁶ He was echoed a year later by Orsenigo, who similarly called for ‘the formation of architects with a solid technical preparation.’⁵⁷ As far as Orsenigo was concerned, the renewal and the ‘affirmation of our furniture production’ could only occur in the architectural faculty.⁵⁸

By the early 1960s change was underway at the *Politecnico*. In 1963 a department of ‘interior architecture, furnishing and decoration’ was set up, signaling the confirmation of design’s increasing importance in Italy. The department was headed by De Carli, who along with Ponti had been already being teaching at the school for some years. Teachers included a number of high profile architects, such as Albini, Alberti Reggio, Vittorio Viganò, Bottoni and Rosselli.⁵⁹ De Carli got his wish in 1964 when a workshop for the modeling and technology of furniture was under construction.⁶⁰

⁵⁵ De Carli, ‘Risposta alla Lettera di Ponti’ *Il Mobile Italiano*, January 1959, p. 5.

⁵⁶ De Carli, ‘Risposta alla Lettera di Ponti’, p. 5.

⁵⁷ Leoni Orsenigo, ‘Concorso Internazionale del Mobile di Cantù: Puntualizzazione di un Esperto’, *Il Mobile Italiano*, April 1960, p.23.

⁵⁸ Orsenigo, ‘Concorso Internazionale del Mobile di Cantù’, p.23.

⁵⁹ ‘Istituzione di Composizione Architettonica’ in *Il Centenario del Politecnico di Milano 1863 - 1963*, p. 515.

⁶⁰ ‘Istituzione di Composizione Architettonica’ in *Il Centenario del Politecnico di Milano 1863 - 1963*, p. 515.

As De Carli saw it, the problem was not just that architects were not producing their own designs and so were not understanding of the reality of furniture production, but that they did not appear to be interested in the manufacturing side of design. He noted in 1959 that even those few models of furniture that were made by producers based on the designs of *Politecnico* students were ‘often observed with amiable detachment’.⁶¹ For De Carli, it was not enough to have ‘architects who know how to design and producers who know how to produce’: there needed to be a close working relationships between the two, one that appeared to be lacking - and whose basis lay outside of the education system and instead in Italy’s larger socio-economic context.⁶²

2.3.4 A Question of Class: Bridging the Gap between Architects and Artisans

One of the reasons why there was such detachment between Milan’s architectural and Cantù’s artisanal cultures was that the distance between its architects and artisans was not just geographic, but socio-economic; a question of class. Until the educational reforms of the early 1960s, much of Italy’s post-war educational system was informed by fascist-era legislation, in particular that introduced by education minister Giovanni Gentile in 1923.⁶³ In part a response to Italy’s historic problem of intellectual unemployment, Gentile’s legislation had restricted access to higher education to only those who had attended the *liceo classico* (a humanities-orientated secondary school).⁶⁴ In this system, the craft-based education of Cantù’s students prohibited them from entering the realms of higher education and it would not be

⁶¹ De Carli ‘Risposta alla Lettera di Ponti’, p. 5.

⁶² De Carli, ‘Risposta alla Lettera di Ponti’, p. 6.

⁶³ For more details on Gentile’s education reform, see Clark, pp. 277 - 278.

⁶⁴ Alessandro dei Poli, ‘Cent’Anni di Vita del Politecnico Attraverso la Lettura dei Suoi Programmi Ordinamenti ed Effemeridi’ in *Il Centenario del Politecnico di Milano 1863 - 1963*, pp. 137 - 504, (p. 175).

until 1970 that students from the School could get a diploma of *Maturità d'Arte Applicata* to enable them to attend any university in Italy, including the *Politecnico*.⁶⁵

While not unusual in its distinction between a craft-based and architectural education, Gentile's legislation served to reinforce the socio-economic differences between the architect and artisan. Gramsci, whose notes on education were written in the decade that followed Gentile's reform, described how the law created an education system that was 'destined not merely to perpetuate social differences but to crystallize them in Chinese complexities'.⁶⁶ While even from the beginning most of the *Politecnico*'s students came from the upper classes, their fathers captains of industry or 'state functionaries', a third came from the *petite bourgeoisie*, the lower middle classes that included both small-scale businessmen and artisans.⁶⁷ This was no longer the case when Gentile's law came in. As an article in *Casabella* protested in 1956, the university system is only 'open to the privileged few and closed to the instrumental classes, which the State provides with just the rudimentary tools of education'.⁶⁸

For Marchi, the school was the logical place to bring the two groups together. In an activity characteristic of his status as an 'intellectual' cultural broker, Marchi described one of his roles as director of the school to

provoke and promote in the ambit of the Cantù school, connections between architects, artists, master craftsmen and technicians, with conferences and lessons, with the aim of keeping these classes in constant contact with the

⁶⁵ *Istituto Statale d'Arte Cantù 1883 - 1994*, p. 11. Amongst the architects who would benefit from this change of legislation was Antonio Citterio. The self-described 'son of a cabinetmaker and designer' born in Cantù, Citterio had attended the local school before graduating from the *Politecnico* in 1972. Jeremy Myerson, 'More or Less', *DesignWeek*, 22 October 1993, pp. 12 - 13.

⁶⁶ Gramsci, *Prison Notebooks*, p. 40.

⁶⁷ Lacaita, 'Introduzione al Politecnico di Milano' in *Il Politecnico di Milano*, p. 22.

⁶⁸ Silvano Tintori, 'Il Dibattito sui Problemi delle Scuole di Architettura Svoltosi a Milano nella Sede del Movimento per gli Studi di Architettura - la Sera del 17 Febbraio 1956', *Casabella*, May 1956, 67 - 69, (p. 67).

most recent technical-stylistic experiences of craft and the furniture industry in general.⁶⁹

In 1959, Marchi invited architects including De Carli, Cavallotti and Luigi Massoni as well as a group of artisans to the School for a debate ‘on the problems of furniture production’.⁷⁰ The thirty artisans present described how their designs for furniture came about, in the process revealing the infrequency of architect-artisan collaborations in the furniture industry.⁷¹ They confirmed that the majority of their work was based on the reproduction or modification of pre-existing types. Otherwise, they purchased designs from an architect in Cantù, and it was only ‘occasional’ that they collaborated with Milanese architects.⁷² Cavallotti described the usefulness of this encounter for Milan’s architects ‘too often tied to the telephone or drawing table [...] it proposed to us new points of view, problems which we had ignored the existence of, gaps and prejudices that we thought had been overcome’.⁷³

It was not only the Cantù School and the *Politecnico* that sought to bring design and production together. In 1959, the workshops of the *Consorzio di Mariano Comense*, a consortium of producers similar to those of Cantù, opened up their workshops to the *Politecnico*’s architecture students ‘for directed experiments’ in furniture production.⁷⁴ This was not just confined to Brianza. Several months before the opening of the twelfth *Triennale* of 1960, Albinetti set up a short course at the *Istituto Universitario di Architettura a Venezia* (IUAV) which ‘had the aim of bringing together the school and its designers to the world of production’ and the furniture went on show at the Milan exhibition that year.⁷⁵ The question of whether these

⁶⁹ ‘Norberto Marchi, ‘Cantù’, p. 15.

⁷⁰ ‘Cantù’, *Il Mobile Italiano*, January-February, 1959, n.p.

⁷¹ Cavallotti, ‘Cantù’, *Il Mobile Italiano*, January 1960, p. 16.

⁷² Cavallotti, ‘Cantù’, p. 16.

⁷³ Cavallotti, ‘Cantù’, p. 16.

⁷⁴ ‘Cantù’, *Il Mobile Italiano*, January-February 1959, n.p.

⁷⁵ ‘Riuscito Esperimento di Collaborazioni tra Università e Artigiani del Friuli’, *Il Friuli Artigiano*, July 1960, p. 4. Milan, Archivio Storico – La Triennale di Milano (ASTM), XII Triennale di Milano, Rassegna Stampa.

attempts at unifying artisans and architects had any effect on the town forms the final part of this chapter.

2.3.5 Beyond Education and back to the *Selettiva*: Cantù in the Sixties

What was the impact of these attempts to change Cantù's furniture industry through the school and *Selettiva*? On the one hand, positive change was perceived in the town. As Cavallotti described in 1960, 'the Cantù of today is not that of 10 years ago; we see that next to the reproduction furniture although made in an excellent way, there also exists furniture designed by designers of some value'.⁷⁶ Furthermore, according to Cavallotti a 'high percentage of furniture designed by architects and specialised designers' was being sold through the town's associative showrooms.⁷⁷ By the fifth *Selettiva* of 1963, fifteen percent of furniture sold outside the *Palazzi* occurred 'in cooperation' with an architect.⁷⁸

Of course, this was not necessarily good news for Cantù's artisans. Foppa Pedretti, president of *La Permanente Mobili*, the largest of Cantù's associations, saw this change as confirming the reduced role of the artisan: 'the days in which it was possible for each artisan to realise models according to their own intention and their own taste I believe are over'.⁷⁹ He confirms the findings so far in this chapter: through its emphasis on the division of conception and execution, the *Selettiva* served to only assert the supplemental role of the artisan in the design industry.

For all the external criticism of the historicist "*Stile Cantù*" it is worth noting that Cantù's artisans were not necessarily themselves happy with their town's ongoing specialisation in period furniture. Artisans in conversation with Marchi 'declared frankly' that they 'construct reproduction furniture for pure necessity, but consider

⁷⁶ Cavallotti, 'Cantù', p. 16.

⁷⁷ Cavallotti, 'Cantù', p. 16.

⁷⁸ Guenzi and Marelli, p. 168.

⁷⁹ Foppa Pedretti in 'Le Associazioni Artigiane di Cantù', *Il Mobile Italiano*, January-February 1959, p. 21.

this type of furniture out-of-date and no longer fit for our society. They wish to construct strictly modern furniture'.⁸⁰ For the artisans, this meant furniture 'free from foreign and Italian reminiscences of every type and time'.⁸¹ However, while a market for this furniture persisted, they felt economically constrained to meet its needs.

This ongoing production of period furniture starts to cast seeds of doubt over the story of Cantù and the *Selettiva* as one of success. The late fifties and the early sixties were undoubtedly a period of huge economic growth in Italy: as the next chapter will explore, the onset of the 1960s was marked by an explosion in private consumption that reinforced Milan's status as the consumer capital of Italy. The reopening of *La Rinascente* in 1950 following heavy bomb damage marked the start of Italy's push to a mass consumer society; in the 1950s its sales increased by five hundred percent and between 1955 and 1960 the department store's profits increased at a higher rate than any other single Italian company.⁸² Milan was the city that most exemplified the rising fortunes of Italy's retail sector; in 1961, the city had the highest number of licenses in Italy for the retail of 'wood, wicker and antique furniture,' 1,648 in total compared to just over 1,200 in Rome.⁸³

Unfortunately, Milan's retail primacy did not bode well for Cantù. In the early 1960s the town's artisans were experiencing less, rather than more commercial success. Over forty percent of the 195 artisans interviewed on the occasion of the 1963 *Selettiva* reported a drop in sales through the consortiums; half had not experienced any improvement and just four percent reported a rise in sales.⁸⁴ This was in part due to the aforementioned increasingly outdated system of retail in Cantù, as there were

⁸⁰ Cavallotti, 'Cantù', p. 16.

⁸¹ Cavallotti, 'Cantù', p. 16.

⁸² Foot, *Milan Since the Miracle*, p.122.

⁸³ Table 8 'Licenza di Vendita Mobili in Legno, Vimini e Antiquariato per Provincia 1961'. Giacomo Becattini, 'Il Mercato Italiano dei Mobili in Legno', *Conferenza Nazionale sull'Industria del Mobile*, Cascina, 7 October 1962, p.xxxiii. London, British Library (BL).

⁸⁴ Guenzi and Marelli, p. 169.

reports of higher sales experienced by the town's artisans through private sales and retailers.⁸⁵

In terms of the *Selettiva*, this was the beginning of the end. The rule changes brought in for the 1961 competition became the first in a series designed to compensate for a diminishing number of designers and architects entering the competition and a declining quality of entries from those that did.⁸⁶ This was due on the one hand to the favouring of industrial production amongst designers and consumers alike, and on the other to the increased opportunities for architects to have their furniture put into mass production, therefore negating any imperative for them to participate in the design competition.⁸⁷

More changes were to come. By the tenth *Selettiva* of 1973 the competitive element had been completely removed, and the eleventh and final instalments was no longer even held in Cantù, but at the *Salone del Mobile*, the Milanese furniture trade fair that was established in 1961 and soon the only real exhibition of furniture design that was seen as a destination for architects, producers and the buying public alike.⁸⁸ At the eleventh and final *Selettiva* of 1975, the work of just four invited architects were shown: Angelo Mangiarotti, Ico Parisi, Alberto Salvati and Ambrogio Tresoldi, and Tapiovaara (*See Illustration 86*).⁸⁹ Their designs for living, dining and entrances spaces were made by a combination of Cantù's artisans, although not surprisingly the firm of Paolo Arnaboldi was not among them, and it appears that his realisation of Tapiovaara's furniture in 1957 was his first and last contribution to the competition. All responded to Cantù's specialisation in designing environments, rather than single

⁸⁵ Guenzi and Marelli, p. 169.

⁸⁶ Ferraris, 'Lettera del Segretario Generale della Triennale sui Problemi del Mobile Italiano' in Furlanis, Porro and Terraneo, "'Cultura del Progetto'" e "'Cultura Materiale'" in *Esperienze di Design in Cantù*, ed. by Ferraris, Porro and Terraneo, p. 56.

⁸⁷ Carugati, 'Per Una Lettura Storica dell'Artigianato del Mobile a Cantù' in *Esperienze di Design in Cantù*, ed. by Furlanis, Porro and Terraneo p. 24.

⁸⁸ For more on the history of the Salone del Mobile, see Lazzaroni in *Made in Italy?* ed. by Settembrini, pp. 118 - 122.

⁸⁹ Furlanis, Porro and Terraneo, "'Cultura del Progetto'" e "'Cultura Materiale'" in *Esperienze di Design in Cantù*, ed. by Ferraris, Porro and Terraneo, p. 76.



Illustration 86. Living room designed by Tapiovaara and made by La Permanente Mobili, G. Ballerini, G. Bergna, Bianchi e Tagliabue, L. Leoni and F.lli Galimberti, for the eleventh *Selettiva* of 1975.

furnishing items, but were criticised in terms of their suitability to Cantù's specific skills and specialisation in wooden furniture.⁹⁰

In spite of their 'executive quality', for Carugati the projects demonstrated a continued uncertainty in how to deal with the craft tradition of and above all 'the progressive spreading apart of the experience of design...and artisanal production'.⁹¹ In the 1950s the *Selettiva* was an attempt to bring the cultures of design and craft together; and by the seventies it seemed to have led to its further fracturing. Of course this is to leap ahead; there were many other socio-cultural and economic shifts that led to the changing shape of craft and design's relationship, and the changing role that craft would play.

Conclusion

This has been a chapter of contrasts. It started with a single chair, one that was designed by one of Italy's most prominent architects, and that would go onto be one of the most celebrated and recognisable objects of post-war Italian design. It ended with an entire town, populated by a high number of producers who made furniture far removed from the architect's gaze and who, after a period of intense international interest, faded from view and has since been overlooked in the annals of Italy's design history.

Yet for all their differences, what is most striking in terms of understanding the relationship between craft and design are the similar stories that they tell. From Chiavari to Cantù, from the *Superleggera* to the *Selettiva*, what comes out most strongly is the supplemental role of craft. The simultaneous reliance and negation, absence and presence of craft were played out in the realm of design drawings, in the press, in competition regulations, in education. This dialectic did not go away, and

⁹⁰ Furlanis, Porro and Terraneo, "Cultura del Progetto" e "Cultura Materiale" in *Esperienze di Design in Cantù*, ed. by Ferraris, Porro and Terraneo, p. 76.

⁹¹ Carugati, 'Per Una Lettura Storica dell'Artigianato del Mobile a Cantù' in *Esperienze di Design in Cantù*, ed. by Furlanis, Porro and Terraneo, p. 24.

while I will not foreground it in my analysis in the following chapters, it did remain a fundamental aspect of craft's role in the design of the post-war era.

Two main roles for craft can be identified from the case studies examined in this chapter. The first is craft's ongoing role as an endlessly available set of highly skilled hands to realise the designs of Italy's architects. Even as Italy experienced a wave of highly disruptive industrialisation in the 1950s, furniture production remained a largely artisanal concern. This was as true of the female *impagliatrici* in Chiavari's hinterlands as the artisans employed in Cassina's factory; and, as the next chapter will explore, artisanal skills remained vital even in the highly advanced industry of plastics.

The second defining characteristic of craft in relation to design that has emerged from this chapter has been the idea of a 'tradition', or rather set of 'traditions' to be variously courted or negated. While on the one hand Chiavari's woven-seated chairs proved attractive for Italy's architects looking to add that balancing 'rustic' touch to their modern designs, the historicist, untamed nature of Cantù's highly elaborate furniture needed to be eradicated. In both, the architect's modernising hand sanitised and made these 'traditions' palatable for a modern, designed, post-war Italy.

Finally, this is not the first or last time that Milan's architects were interested in craft cultures outside the city and outside modern industrial culture. This appeared in the first chapter, in the concern at the ongoing practice of folkloric crafts such as straw and alabaster, and is the focus of the next, in particular with the production of glass in Murano. It is with this idea of a set of traditions rooted in both material and place where this chapter stops and the next one starts, with a case study on glass making on the Venetian island of Murano. Here, ideas about taste, craftsmanship and *italianità* will come to the fore in those most conspicuous of consumer products, luxuries.

Chapter 3: From Luxury to Kitsch, and Back Again: Craft and Consumerism in 1960s Italy

3.1 Venice: Glass in Technicolor

A single, red glass goblet in a Venetian shop window is the silent protagonist of David Lean's 1955 film *Summertime*. This is the object that brings together its two stars, Katherine Hepburn as Jane Hudson and Rossano Brazzi as Renato De Rossi (*See Illustration 87*): the moment their eyes lock, her white-gloved hand holding the goblet she has spotted in his antiques store marks the start of their short-lived romance. He tells her it is an eighteenth century antique, a one-off. Nevertheless he promises to look for its mate, in the process soliciting the name of her hotel and ensuring further encounters between the two future lovers.

The goblet reappears later in the film, during an argument about his trustworthiness in her hotel. They are interrupted by her fellow, brash, American hotel guests, the Mcilhennys, returning from Venice's tourist attractions, having seen what Mrs Mcilhenny describes as 'glass, glass and more glass' in Murano's workshops.¹ 'You've got to do this place. You know you stand right there and you watch them. And then they put this stuff on long poles and then they heat it in the furnace, and then presto change-o, glass! And such colours! You have no idea - there!'.² With a flourish, she brandishes a red goblet (*See Illustration 88*), the doppelgänger of Hudson's antique store find. 'Isn't that exquisite' is the unhappy response Hudson musters, to which Mrs Mcilhenny blithely responds: 'well they'd be more than happy to make them for you, why I bought half a dozen - they practically make it for you while you stand there ha ha!'. The wooden crate she lifts up reveals a set of six, identical gleaming red goblets (*See Illustration 89*).³

¹ *Summertime*, dir. by David Lean (UK: Criterion, 1955)

² *Summertime*.

³ *Summertime*.



Illustration 87. Still from *Summertime*, depicting the first meeting between Jane Hudson (Katherine Hepburn) and Renato de Rossi (Rossano Brazzi) after she has spotted a red glass goblet in this Venetian antiques store.



Illustration 88. Mrs Edith Mcilhenny (Jane Rose) produces the red glass goblet she has bought on Murano, identical to Jane's purchase from de Rossi's antique store.



Illustration 89. Edith and Lloyd Mcilhenny (MacDonald Parke) show off their six new red goblets to Hudson and de Rossi.

Hudson's crestfallen face tells us all we need to know: her glass is a fake, a replica just like the McIlhennys' Venetian souvenirs, a signifier of De Rossi's deceit. He attempts to assuage Hepburn with the promise of her goblet's antique status: 'the same design is used over and over for years and years. Your goblet is eighteenth century. You can believe me or not. No, please believe me'.⁴

In one respect at least, Brazzi was telling the truth. From its dominance in the European luxury markets in the fifteenth and sixteenth century onwards, Venetian glass has long looked to history for inspiration. While discredited in Cantù, the production of replica and revivalist ware had repeatedly provided the means for the rejuvenation of Murano's unstable glass industry. In the 1860s, the Abbot Vincenzo Zanetti established a glass school, museum and archive that allowed the close study of historical glassware and preservation of skills on an island in crisis, overwhelmed by the competition from the glassmaking centres of France and Bohemia.⁵ In the early twentieth century, the fledgling company Vetri Soffiati Muranesi Cappellin Venini & C. produced a series of vases inspired by glassware depicted in Renaissance paintings.⁶ It suggests that when it comes to historical inspiration, which chosen historical period, and in which craft discipline this is expressed, is vital to its critical and commercial reception.

In *Summertime* however the glass's status is left unresolved, an ambiguity that turns on its potential fraudulence. The French social theorist Jean Baudrillard critiqued antiques for always having 'something false' about them, as they were fuelled by a 'nostalgia for origins and obsession with authenticity', but if Hepburn's goblet was genuinely eighteenth-century, then at least it offered her distance from the deceit of the tourist-orientated reproduction market.⁷ However, if the goblet was a

⁴ *Summertime*.

⁵ Astone Gasparetto, *Il Vetro di Murano: Dalle Origini ad Oggi* (Venice: Neri Pozza Editore, 1958), p. 134.

⁶ Rosa Barovier Mentasti, 'The Venini Glassworks: A Brief History' in *Venini: Catalogue Raisonné 1921-1986*, ed. by Venini Diaz de Santillana, pp. 27 - 31 (p. 28).

⁷ Jean Baudrillard, *The System of Objects*, trans. by James Benedict (London; New York: Verso, 1996), pp. 74, 76.

contemporary revivalist 'fake' - and as such what Baudrillard would describe as a second order simulacra with no original – it is just contemporary glass aching to be historical.⁸ The glass is still a souvenir, but the question remains whether it is a memento of the corruption of Venice's glass tradition or rather its historically-legitimised prestige; an uncertainty that at the very least confirms its compromised condition.

The image painted with these scenes from Lean's *Summertime* film stands in stark contrast to the received picture of post-war Venetian glass, a story of modernisation on show at the Milan *Triennale* and Venice *Biennale* that has been well documented in design history literature and in which the Mcilhennys' glassware plays no part.⁹ This was one side of the story: in the glassworks of Venini, Vistosi and Barovier & Toso architects including Sergio Asti (*See Illustration 90*) and Massimo Vignelli were creating a design-led language for Murano glass, a project initiated by Ponti and the Venetian architect Carlo Scarpa in the 1920s and 1930s.¹⁰

This modernisation was not just happening in design terms, and not just by architects born outside of Murano's glass traditions. Alfredo Barbini, Luciano Gaspari and Livio Seguso were amongst those native *maestri* (master craftsmen) spearheading a sculptural turn on Murano. This resumed a strand that had first emerged in the 1930s, led by the sculptor Napoleone Martinuzzi, and bolstered by the construction

⁸ Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, trans. by Sheila Faria Glaser (Ann Arbor, Mi: The University of Michigan Press, 1995, reprint. 2006), p. 1.

⁹ Representative examples include Marino Barovier, David Revere McFadden, Susanne K. Frantz (eds), *Venetian Glass: 20th Century Italian Glass The Nancy Olnick and Giorgio Spanu Collection* (Milan: Charta, 2000); Rosa Barovier Mentasti, *Il Vetro Veneziano* (Milan: Electa, 1982); Helmut Ricke and Eva Schmitt, *Italian Glass: Murano, Milan 1930-1970, The Collection of the Steinberg Foundation* (Munich: Prestel, 1997).

¹⁰ In 1961 Sergio Asti designed the *Marco* vase for Salviati & C, which the *Compasso D'Oro* in 1962 and was selected for MoMA's design collection in 1963. *Il Vetro Progettato: Architetti e Designer a Confronto con il Vetro Quotidiano*, ed. by Romanelli (Milan: Electa, 2000), p. 62. Massimo Vignelli started working with Venini from the 1950s onwards, and in 1954 designed a series of striped ceiling lamps included in the BBPR's Olivetti New York showroom. Ponti started working with Venini in 1927 on the occasion of the 1927 Monza *Biennale*, as part of the *Labrinio* group of architects to which he belonged. Valerio Terraroli, 'Paolo Venini and the Metamorphosis of Modern Style during the 1920s' in *Venini: Catalogue Raisonné 1921 – 1986*, ed. by Venini Diaz de Santillana, p. 21. Carlo Scarpa designed glassware for M.V.M Cappellin between 1926 and 1931 and then for Venini & C. from 1932 to 1947, in which time he became the firm's artistic director. *Carlo Scarpa: I Vetri di un Architetto*, ed. by Marino Barovier (Milan: Skira, 1997), p. 13.



Illustration 90. *Marco*, mould blown vase, designed by Sergio Asti for Salviati & C, 1961. Awarded the *Compasso d'Oro* in 1962, and selected for MoMA's permanent design collection in 1963. One of the most celebrated examples of architect-designed glass from the 1960s.

of a dedicated glass pavilion at the Venice *Biennale* in 1932, which transformed glass's aspirations from decoration to autonomous art form.¹¹

Highly visible in exhibitions and the press, these modern luxuries were only consumed and produced in small numbers, and were outnumbered by a market reality driven by largely externally located consumers. In 1955, sixty percent of Murano's 'artistic glass' was produced for export.¹² As *Summertime* suggested, these were markets interested not in the modern design of Venetian glass but its island-rooted historical prestige. What is important to note here is that on Murano the souvenir and historically-inspired glass were produced alongside these objects of modern design and sculpture, often in the same glass workshops and by the same hands. While the former are largely excluded from design history literature, they are as much a part of it as the designs of Asti, Vignelli and others, as these different realms of commodity production were defined not just by their coexistence but their co-inhabitation, the one influencing the other.

The following section examines the reality of these multiple forms of production on Murano in the late 1950s and early 1960s by looking at the output of one of its *maestri*, Alfredo Barbini, and will examine both his export and exhibition-orientated ware. Although a step away from the focus on Italy's design culture, it is in Barbini that this split production was most apparent, and with whom the key ideas that this chapter deals with emerge. Furthermore, the intense interest by Italy's architects in designing Venetian glass in this period can be understood as a response to the problems surrounding the island's glassmaking tradition that the focus on Barbini exposes. In comparison to the previous chapter, this is less the story of craft and design of one place, but of one concept; luxury. Through the discussion of luxury, I will pick up the discussion of taste, place and skill introduced in the previous chapter, and examine these through a series of largely material-based case studies: glass, marble, leather and plastic. Set against the background of the late fifties and

¹¹ Barovier Mentasti, 'Il Vetro alla Biennale' in *Il Vetro di Murano alle Biennali 1895 - 1972*, ed. by Marina Barovier, Barovier Mentasti and Attilia Dorigato (Milan: Leonardo Arte, 1995), pp. 9, 10.

¹² Gasparetto, *Il Vetro di Murano*, p. 73.

early sixties, the rise of consumerist culture in Italy and the first signs of dissent at this in the mid 1960s, it is the status of craft as a commodity, its place in Italy's growing domestic and international markets that is most pertinent here.

3.1.2 Alfredo Barbini: Exporting Glass by a Murano Maestro

Although not well-known outside glass circles, Barbini is one of Murano's most celebrated glass practitioners. Born in 1912 to a family who had been blowing glass since the seventeenth century, at thirteen Barbini was apprenticed to the *vetreria* (glassworks) of SAIAR Ferro Toso and was already a *maestro* by the age of twenty.¹³ He worked in a number of Murano firms in the 1930s, including the newly formed Zecchin e Martinuzzi in 1932 and Seguso Vetri d'Arte in 1936.¹⁴ In 1946, Barbini was awarded an HDI scholarship that he used to conduct research with Martinuzzi into glass suitable for sculptural work.¹⁵ Following the establishment of his own studio in 1950, Barbini's work was selected to be included at the 1951 *Triennale* and he was awarded prizes for his participation at the *Biennali* of 1950 and 1968.¹⁶

What marked Barbini out was his concentration on *massiccio* (solid) glass, in which a mass of glass is hot-formed with tools or moulds into solid shapes, a legacy of his experiences at Zecchin e Martinuzzi, and exemplified by pieces such as this 1952 vessel (*See Illustration 91*), similar to one of his pieces shown at the previous year's *Triennale*. Long an island of *soffiato* (blown) glass, it was thanks to Martinuzzi's 1920s experiments that solid glass grew in popularity amongst practitioners and consumers in the post-war period.¹⁷

¹³ Barovier Mentasti, 'Alfredo Barbini: Maestro', *Glass: Urban Art Quarterly*, 62 (1996), 20 - 26 (p. 20).

¹⁴ Barovier Mentasti, 'Alfredo Barbini', p. 20.

¹⁵ Barovier Mentasti, 'Alfredo Barbini', p. 20.

¹⁶ Two pieces by Barbini were included at the 1951 *Triennale*. Ponti, 'I Vetri Italiani alla Triennale', *Domus*, October 1951, 27 - 37 (p. 35).

¹⁷ In the 1920s, Martinuzzi had experimented with developing a solid glass technique he called *pulegoso*, in which petroleum was added to the molten glass mixture to produce air bubbles in the surface. Dorigato, *Murano Glass Museum*, (Milan: Electa, 1986), p. 78.



Illustration 91. *Canephora* vase, Alfredo Barbini, 1952. Hot worked *massiccio* glass with *corroso* (acid corroded) surface.

Barbini was not just known in Italy, but America too. Included in *Italy at Work*, in 1961 his work was shown in *The Artist-Craftsman in Western Europe*, an exhibition held at New York's Museum of Contemporary Crafts.¹⁸ As a *maestro* engaged in sculptural work and owner of his own studio, Barbini conformed to the studio craft ideal. The Venetian even contributed to the growth of the studio glass movement: in 1964 he began working with the Texan artist Robert Willson, one of a number of Americans alongside Dale Chihuly and Richard Marquis who made the pilgrimage to Murano in the early 1960s.¹⁹

However, as on the rest of Murano, Barbini's everyday production was not defined by these one-off sculptures, but wares destined for export markets that had more in common with the Mcilhennys' historicist souvenirs than his *Biennale* offerings.²⁰ At the onset of the 1960s, Barbini was producing replica, revivalist and contemporary glassware available to the American market through Camer Glass and Weil Ceramics & Glass, two New York based importers who dedicated entire catalogues to his products, which reveal the attraction, and underlying contradictions, on which Venetian glass was being sold.

Both firms premise the attraction of Venice's glassware on a narrative of precious materials, skills and secrecy, all tied up in the island's geographical specialness. Camer Glass describes the surrounding lagoon as providing the 'finest available' materials elaborated by skills 'undreamed of elsewhere'.²¹ The cover of a Weil Ceramics and Glass catalogue (*See Illustration 92*) promises 'HAND-BLOWN

¹⁸ *Artist-Craftsmen of Western Europe: Austria, Belgium, France, the Federal Republic of Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Spain, Switzerland* (New York: Museum of Contemporary Crafts, 1961); Two exhibits were included by Barbini in *Italy at Work*: a table decoration consisting of candlesticks and a centrepiece in blown and molded glass, and fish and pheasant-shaped ornaments in coloured *sommerso* glass with a clear overlay. *Italy at Work*, p. 91

¹⁹ For more on Willson see Matthew Kangas, *Robert Willson: Image-Maker* (San Antonio: Pace-Willson Foundation; Seattle and London: Washington University Press, 2001). For a general overview on Chihuly, Marquis and others on Murano, see Victoria Milne, 'Venini and 'Studio Glass': American Fascination for Murano Glass' in *Venini: Catalogue Raisonné 1921-1986*, ed. by Venini Diaz de Santillana, pp. 33 - 43.

²⁰ Barovier Mentasti, 'Vetriere, Vetrai e Designers' in *Il Vetro di Murano alle Biennali 1895 - 1972*, ed. by Barovier, Barovier Mentasti and Dorigato, p. 233.

²¹ 'A History of Venetian Glass', *Murano Glass by Camer Glass* (New York: Camer Glass, [1961(?)]), back cover. Murano, Alfredo Barbini Archive (ABA).

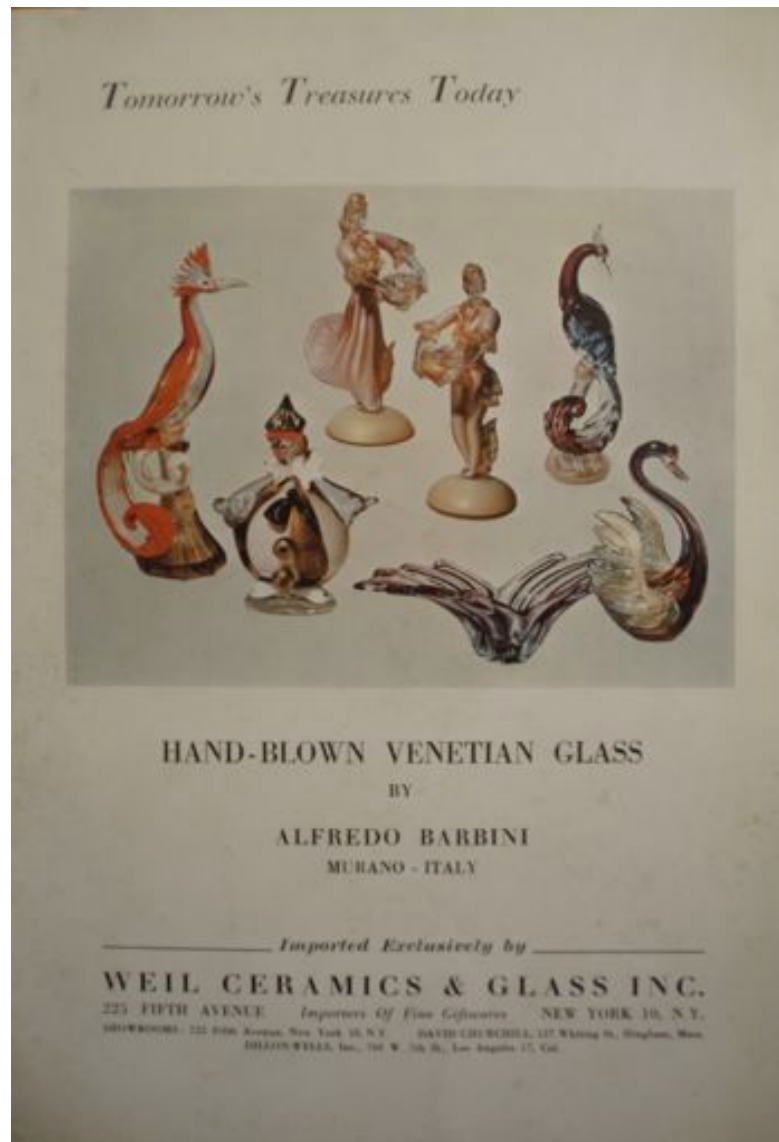


Illustration 92. Catalogue cover for Weil Ceramics & Glass, dedicated to Alfredo Barbini's export ware, c. 1961.

VENETIAN GLASS BY ALFREDO BARBINI' while the foreword by his daughter, Oceania Moretti Barbini, provides historical legitimacy: he descends from an ancient Murano glass-making family of 'consummate skill'.²² The secrecy surrounding glass production ensures the rarity of Murano's skills and is enticingly deadly: following the transferral and subsequent confinement of Venice's glass industry to Murano in 1291, 'glass workers were virtually prisoners [...] subject to the death penalty for attempting to leave or betray a secret'.²³ As the following section argues, it is the quality of place however that was the most compelling, and craft-like basis on which Italy's products were being sold - and not just those from Murano.

3.1.3 Murano Glass and Island-hood: Craft and Place-Based Identity

The prominence given to the place of production in the catalogues is notable. As with material specificity and a high level of skill, place can be viewed as another quality associated with craft. In some ways, place comes before both of these. This was already visible in the previous chapter: the skills and materials employed by Cantù's furniture makers were particular to their locale, and a key part of their identity.

A turn to the equally regionalist phenomenon of folklore is a good place to start unravelling this connection between place and craft. Regional folklorists such as Kent Ryden state that every region and community has a 'sense of place' and that folklore 'arises from and contributes to' the inhabitants' 'place-based identity'.²⁴ Ryden continues, arguing that this 'sense of place' is not just learned and expressed through folkloric genres such as storytelling, but is itself a 'genre of folklore'.²⁵ In the same vein, the manufacture of the craft object expresses an identity based on the place of production, one that is picked up in its representation and, as we shall see,

²²Oceania Moretti Barbini, 'Alfredo Barbini' in Weil Glass & Ceramics: *HAND-BLOWN VENETIAN GLASS BY ALFREDO BARBINI*, (New York: [n. pub], [1961(?)]), p.1, ABA.

²³ 'A History of Venetian Glass', *Murano Glass by Camer Glass*, back cover, ABA.

²⁴ Kent Ryden, *Mapping The Invisible: Folklore, Writing and the Sense of Place* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1993), pp. 61, 65.

²⁵ Ryden, p. 68.

appropriated in other types of production. Following Ryden, a ‘sense of place’ can therefore be called a ‘genre’ of craft.

The American folklorist William E. Lightfoot identifies two types of qualities used to establish a region’s identity by both its inhabitants and those from outside a region: the ‘ad hoc’ and ‘the ontic’.²⁶ According to Lightfoot, ‘ad hoc regions exist foremost in the minds of “alien” observers’, their boundaries drawn up according to the criteria of the observer.²⁷ The clichéd portrayal of Venice as a site of leisure and romance in *Summertime* is an example of this. The latter are what Lightfoot calls the ‘geographical, social, or cultural ‘facts’’ of a place - such as Murano’s island status (or rather archipelago of islands), and the purity of the local sand that contributed to the prized transparency of its glass.²⁸

Island-hood imposes its own particular type of identity. Rod Edmond and Vanessa Smith have discussed the fascination with the idea of the island in modern Western thought, and describe ‘boundedness’ as the ‘defining idea of an island’, one that translates into a ‘marked individuality, an obstinate separateness’ in its representation.²⁹ In the sixties, this was as true of Murano as Italy’s other islands. In *Craft Horizons*, Sicily’s craft tradition was described as ‘complementary to society yet individual in its invention’ and the same was noted of Sardinia, whose crafts were enjoying renewed interest at this time.³⁰ In 1956 the first annual *Mostra dell’Artigianato Sardo* (Exhibition of Sardinian Craft) took place in Sassari, which attracted American and European buyers alike.³¹ Two years later the *Istituto Sardo per l’Organizzazione del Lavoro Artigiano* (Sardinian Institute for the Organisation

²⁶ William E. Lightfoot, ‘Regional Folkloristics’ in *Handbook of American Folklore* (Bloomington, In: Indiana University Press, 1983), (183 - 193), p. 186 in Ryden, p. 69,

²⁷ Lightfoot in Ryden, p. 69,

²⁸ Lightfoot in Ryden, p. 69.

²⁹ Rod Edmond and Vanessa Smith, ‘Editor’s Introduction’, in *The Island in History and Representation*, ed. by Edmond and Smith (London; New York: Routledge, 2003) pp. 1 - 18 (p. 4).

³⁰ Stephanie Tatarsky and Salvatore Scarpitta, ‘Sicily’, *Craft Horizons*, April 1961, 42 - 47 (p. 43).

³¹ For more details on this exhibition, see ‘A Sassari, Mostra dell’Artigianato Sardo’, *Domus*, March 1957, pp. 37 - 44.

of Craft Work (ISOLA)) was established, an ENAPI-like organisation for the preservation and renewal of the island's crafts. By the early 1960s, ISOLA had stores in both Sardinia and on the mainland, and was advertising its updated versions of the island's basketry and weaving crafts (*See Illustration 93*) in *Domus*.³² The editor of *Craft Horizons*, Rose Slivka, described the Sardinian people as 'stubbornly insular and aloof to the mainland', while Ponti noted how the organisation's acronym 'appropriately alludes to Sardinia's insularity'.³³ The architect viewed Sardinia's island-hood positively, as a barrier to commercial corruption from the mainland that ISOLA would enforce. In a line reminiscent of his praise for HDI in chapter one, Ponti describes ISOLA as 'defending their [Sardinia's] arts from the pitfalls of success, from being contaminated by those buyers who do not care about quality and authenticity'.³⁴

On Murano, this bounded island separatism enforced the secrecy surrounding its glass production. It also translated into a temporal distancing, an example of Fabian's theory of the temporal otherness of the anthropologist's object of study that was discussed in relation to *Italy at Work*. Murano's craft skills were seen to belong to some earlier age, a continuity that ensured its contemporary prestige. As one Camer Glass catalogue noted, 'today's crackle glass and reticelli are made now as they were then [...] [which] has allowed the present generation to rival and surpass even the medieval masters'.³⁵

Furthermore, just as the islands of Murano provided their products with a 'sense of place', so the opposite was also true. Following Ryden, Murano's glassware, made from local materials and by local hands, 'gains meaning from and gives meaning to

³² 'ISOLA', *Domus*, December 1963, n.p.

³³ Rose Slivka, 'Sardinia', *Craft Horizons*, 2, April, 1961 p. 11; Ponti, 'A Sassari, alla Sesta Mostra dell'Artigianato Sardo', *Domus*, December 1962, 39 - 46 (p. 39). Anna C. Chave has similarly identified a link between isolated craft communities and the emphasis on this geographic specialness in their representation. See Anna C. Chave, 'Dis/Cover/ing the Quilts of Gee's Bend, Alabama', *The Journal of Modern Craft*, 1 (2008), 221 - 254 (pp. 222 - 223).

³⁴ Ponti, 'A Sassari, alla Sesta Mostra dell'Artigianato Sardo', p. 39.

³⁵ 'A History of Venetian Glass', *Murano Glass by Camer Glass*, back cover, ABA.

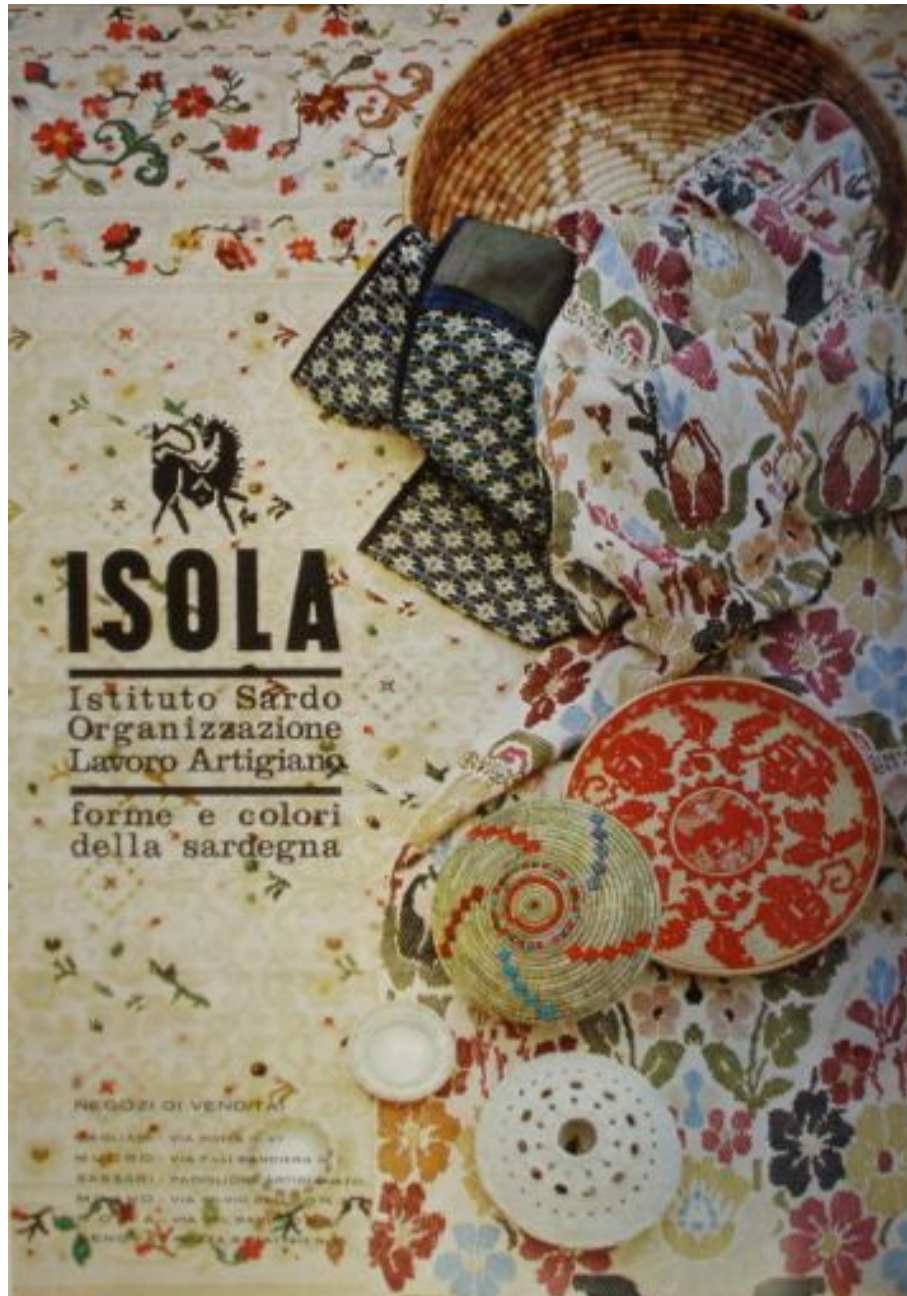


Illustration 93. Advert for ISOLA products, including details of showrooms in Sardinia and on the Italian mainland, included in *Domus* in December 1963. Textiles and basketry are two crafts traditionally associated with the island.

its geographical surroundings' and inhabitants.³⁶ Turning now to the prioritisation of skill in the promotion of the glassware it becomes clear that once appropriated for consumerist ends, this 'sense of place' was being compromised by, and was in turn compromising for, Murano's glass production.

3.1.4 Showcasing Skill in Replica and Revivalist Glass

The emphasis on skill is most overt in historically-inspired glass. A trio (*See Illustration 94*) of fluted, chalice-shaped and shallow glasses offered by Camer Glass are all variations on the dragon-stem goblet, a style fashionable in the seventeenth century and subsequently much imitated in European *façon de Venise* workshops. They are described as 'reproductions of original pieces now in the Museum of Murano. Each one a perfect replica, each one a masterpiece in itself'.³⁷

In its echo of the Renaissance artistic ideal of mimesis, Rachel Weiss has called the manufacture of replicas 'the realm of pure craft'.³⁸ Mimesis is also a particular form of copying: Lefebvre distinguishes mimesis from 'imitative repetition' for the pedagogic quality of its production.³⁹ Based on the master-servant nature of the relationship between the original and the replica, these were a key part of the apprenticeship on Murano. Even its impossibility renders the replica no less authentically crafted: Hillel Schwartz describes 'miscopying' as a better term for the 'inherently flawed' replica.⁴⁰ Gramsci, who was interested in the impact of 'Americanism and Fordism' on the industrialised worker, viewed these mistakes

³⁶ Ryden, p. 57.

³⁷ *Camer Glass, Inc* (New York: [n. pub], [1961(?)]) p. 5. ABA.

³⁸ Rachel Weiss, 'Between the Material World and the Ghosts of Dreams: An Argument about Craft in los Carpinteros', *The Journal of Modern Craft*, 1 (2008), 255 - 270 (p. 258).

³⁹ Lefebvre, *Key Writings*, ed. by Stuart Elden, Elizabeth Lebas and Eleonore Kofman (London; New York: Continuum, 2003), p. 28.

⁴⁰ Hillel Schwartz, *The Culture of the Copy: Striking Likeness, Unreasonable Facsimiles* (New York: Zone Books, 1996), p. 212.



Illustration 94. Three examples of replica 'dragon stem' glassware by Alfredo Barbini for Camer Glass, c. 1961. Each is between seven and eight inches tall.

positively; they evinced the limits of Taylorism in production, as they showed that while the hand could be mechanised, the head could not.⁴¹

The revivalist glassware offer a similar spectacle of skill. A set of coloured containers (*See Illustration 95*) with domed lids and small, fluted bases with delicate filigree and milky *lattimo* (milky) surfaces are described as ‘18th Century Venetian glass at its best!’.⁴² Even in their original historical context, such colourful and intricate ornaments functioned as cabinet pieces, designed to show off the wealth and taste of the consumer.⁴³ Like the dragon-stem goblets, the handle - a floral decorative flurry affixed to each lid - functions primarily as a signal of its elaborate manual manufacture. In *The Idea of Luxury*, Christopher Berry describes such ‘qualitative or adjectival’ ‘refinement’ as one of the processes by which necessities become luxuries.⁴⁴ Yet with its reliance on historically-legitimised aesthetics and ostentatious decoration and workmanship, this export glass offers luxury by rote, guaranteed best sellers for externally located markets that know Venice for the most part only through the popular imagination, through films such as *Summertime*. These glass objects are as much stereotypes as de Rossi’s Italian lothario, and the Mcilhenny’s American tourists.

Glassware here is defined by the logic of luxury. It is sold as commodities for the leisured consumer, conforming to the economist and sociologist Thorsten Veblen’s identification of ‘luxuries and the comforts of life’ as the preserve of the leisure classes.⁴⁵ This was as true for those consumers actually on holiday in Venice as for those at home: candy jars from Camer glass are described as ‘an essential for today’s

⁴¹ Gramsci, *Prison Notebooks*, p. 309.

⁴² *Camer Glass, Inc*, p. 6. ABA.

⁴³ Reino Leifkes, personal conversation, 6 October 2009; Dorigato, *Murano Glass Museum*, pp. 50. 52.

⁴⁴ Christopher Berry, *The Idea of Luxury: A Conceptual and Historical Investigation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), p. 11.

⁴⁵ Thorsten Veblen, *The Theory of the Leisure Class: an Economic Study of Institutions* (New York: the Modern Library, 1934), p. 70.



Illustration 95. A trio of eighteenth century revivalist containers in opaque white *lattimo* and coloured glass, with filigree decoration. Alfredo Barbini for Camer Glass, c. 1961. Each is eight inches high.

leisurely living'.⁴⁶ Destined for dressing tables, bathroom shelves and card tables, these objects are themselves at leisure. Like luxury, this is a condition that positions Venetian glass in a condition of redundancy and superfluity. This is particularly the case when considering their association with tourism - and the issues of taste that are bounded up in this archetypal leisure activity.

3.1.5 Colour, Kitsch and the 'Contemporary' Style: The Problem of Taste in Murano Glass

In 1961 a *Craft Horizons* article identified Venetian glass, alongside Italian ceramics and Black Forest wood carving, as a craft that 'has survived on order from "touristy" gift shops [...] Technical perfection is unquestionably their greatest asset - but the form language is often on the level of cuckoo clocks and donkey-shaped planters'.⁴⁷ We are not so far here from the straw donkey, the folkloric toy included in *Italy at Work*. While Sparke posited the donkey as an example of 'proto-design' in the early 1950s, she acknowledged that it had become 'little more than an appendage of the Italian tourist industry' by 1960, relegated to the realm of 'tourist kitsch'.⁴⁸ The menagerie of glass figurines on the cover of the Weil Ceramics & Glass catalogue, from the bulbous clown to the bright orange pheasant, could easily be put in this category.

The 1960s saw a spike in interest in kitsch amongst theorists and writers including Baudrillard, Gillo Dorfles and Umberto Eco, as part of a wider artistic and intellectual engagement with mass culture discussed later in this chapter.⁴⁹ Opinion was divided: for Theodor Adorno and the Frankfurt School, kitsch represented 'false aesthetic consciousness', another facet of capitalist alienation, while for the French

⁴⁶ *Murano Glass* by Camer Glass, p. 8. ABA.

⁴⁷ Hedy Backlin, 'Artist-Craftsmen of Western Europe', *Craft Horizons*, July - August 1961, 10 - 21 (p. 11).

⁴⁸ Sparke, 'The Straw Donkey', pp. 59, 65.

⁴⁹ For these authors writings on kitsch, see Baudrillard, *The Consumer Society: Myths and Structures* (London: Sage, 1998) pp. 109 - 111; The essays in *Kitsch*, ed. by Dorfles; Eco, *Apocalittici e Integrati*, pp. 65 - 129.

philosopher Abraham Moles, kitsch was ‘an aesthetic system of mass communication’, and so authentic form of popular expression.⁵⁰

There are similarities between craft and kitsch. Adamson identifies both as ‘horizons’ to modern art practice, a conceptualisation apparent in radical design’s dalliance with kitsch in the late sixties, discussed in the last part of this chapter. Like craft, kitsch is a dynamic yet delimited realm, characterised by what Celeste Olalquiaga’s calls its ‘constant shifting as a cultural practice’.⁵¹ As with craft, there are some constants in kitsch, the recourse to nostalgia, ersatz and mechanical reproduction for an external market amongst them. Dorfles cites ‘glass animals from Murano’, with their calculated emotional appeal, as ‘undoubtedly kitsch’.⁵² The same was true of the pretence to luxury in the glassware. Baudrillard describes kitsch as a ‘pseudo-object [...] a stereotype [...] a superabundance of signs, of allegorical references, disparate connotations [...] a glorification of the detail and a saturation by details’.⁵³ With their stereotype of the Venetian glass tradition and surfeit of decorative detail and signals of skilled labour, the replica, revivalist and glass figurines can all, following Baudrillard, be seen as pseudo-luxuries.

The more modern exports appear less problematic in terms of kitsch. Instead of decorative excess, the pink, blue and brown hues and unadorned curves of the *sommersi* (layers of transparent coloured glass) ashtrays and vases (*See Illustration 96*) from Weil Ceramics & Glass reflect the influence of Scandinavian glass at the time. This was seen not only in Barbini’s ware but also Poli’s *sommersi* vessels for Seguso Vetri d’Arte from the 1950s.⁵⁴ These sat alongside other objects (*See*

⁵⁰ Matei Calinescu, *Faces of Modernity: Modernism, Avant-Garde, Decadence, Kitsch, Postmodernism* (Bloomington; London: Indiana University Press, 1977), p. 241; Abraham Moles, *Le Kitsch: L’Art du Bonheur* (Paris: Mame, 1971), p. 75 in Calinescu, ‘Modernity and Popular Culture: Kitsch as Aesthetic Deception’ *Sensus Communis: Contemporary Trends in Comparative Literature*, ed. by János Riesz (Tübingen: Gunter Narr Verlag, 1986), 221 - 226 (p. 224).

⁵¹ Adamson, *Thinking Through Craft*, p. 2; Celeste Olalquiaga, *The Artificial Kingdom: A Treasury of the Kitsch Experience* (London: Bloomsbury, 1999), p. 293.

⁵² Dorfles, ‘Kitsch’ in *Kitsch*, ed. by Dorfles, (pp. 14 - 36) p. 26.

⁵³ Baudrillard, *The Consumer Society*, p. 110.

⁵⁴ Barovier Mentasti, *Il Vetro Veneziano*, p. 293.



Illustration 96. *Sommersi* ashtrays, lighters, vases and ornaments by Alfredo Barbini for Weil Ceramics & Glass, 1960s.

Illustration 97) in the 1950s ‘Contemporary’ style sold by Camer Glass as an alternative to the austerity of functionalism: a green blown lamp is promoted as ‘decidedly contemporary, almost modern but not severe’.⁵⁵ Next to it is a lamp that ‘goes beyond mere utility. A lamp that creates a mood of distinction and good taste wherever it is used’.⁵⁶ Despite these claims of tastefulness, by the early 1960s the very popularity of the ‘Contemporary’ had seen it fall prey to what Jackson describes as ‘crass commercial mass-market developments’.⁵⁷ In 1961 *Craft Horizons* condemned the “‘cutesy” effects’ of Murano’s ‘purple elephants and pink giraffes and psychedelic-colored “moderne” vases’.⁵⁸

In this criticism of Venetian glass, colour appears as another ‘horizon’. As David Batchelor has described in his work on chromophobia, colour is the property of the ‘other’, ‘relegated to the realm of the superficial, the supplementary, the inessential or the cosmetic’, regarded either as ‘alien and therefore dangerous’, or ‘unworthy of serious consideration’.⁵⁹ In comparison to the intellectual austerity of monochrome, colour is unthinking frippery. If colour was to be employed, then it had to be done with care - as the glass critic Ada Polak cautioned, ‘sometimes the colours of [Paolo] Venini’s post-war glass are toned up to a brightness which only his unflinching taste saves from being glaring’.⁶⁰

What ‘saved’ the use of colour in Venini’s glassware was not only good taste, but design - and in the early 1960s these were seen to go hand-in-hand in Italy. In *Craft Horizons* Venini was singled out as exempt from the island’s problem of taste due to its leadership ‘from a design standpoint’.⁶¹ On a 1957 CoID-organised tour of Italy,

⁵⁵ *Murano Glass by Camer Glass*, p. 18. ABA.

⁵⁶ *Murano Glass by Camer Glass*, p. 18. ABA.

⁵⁷ Jackson, *Contemporary: Architecture and Interiors of the Early 1950s* (London: Phaidon, 1994) pp. 220-221, 225.

⁵⁸ Elaine Benson, ‘Shopping in Europe’, *Craft Horizons*, May-June 1967, 23, 72 - 73 (p. 72).

⁵⁹ David Batchelor, *Chromophobia* (London: Reaktion, 2000), p. 23.

⁶⁰ Ada Polak, *Modern Glass* (London: Faber and Faber, 1962) p. 67.

⁶¹ Benson, ‘Shopping in Europe’, p. 72.

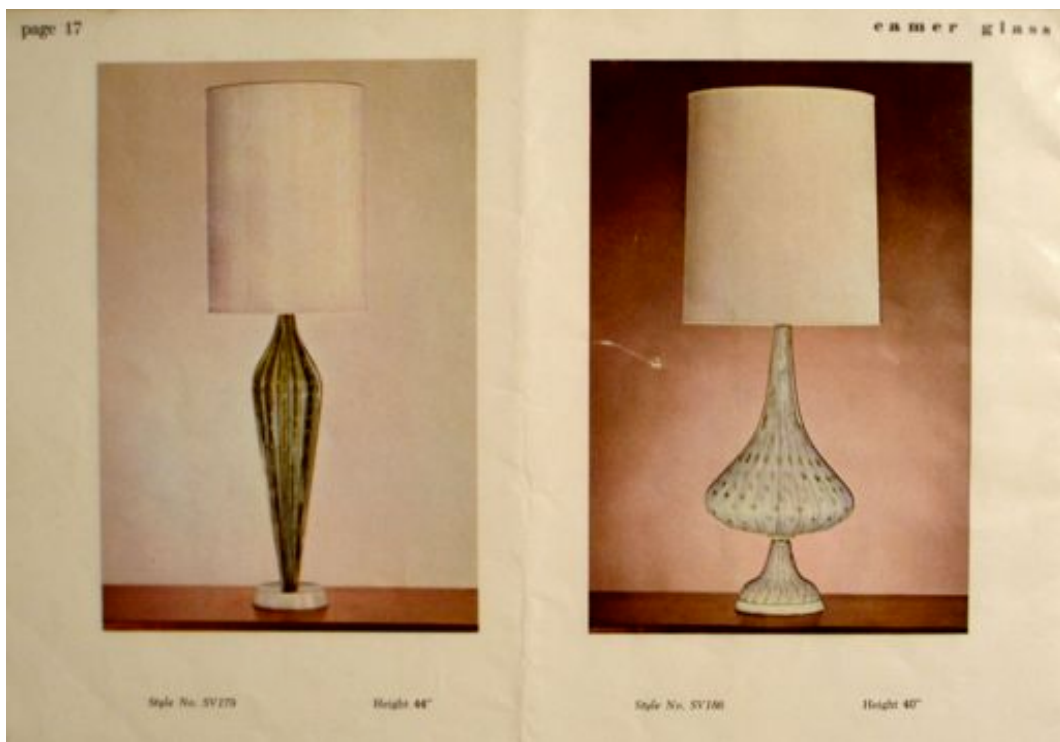


Illustration 97. Page from a Camer Glass catalogue, featuring two lamps by Alfredo Barbini in the 'Contemporary' style.

Venini's 'glass factory' was declared to be 'the only one, among forty-two on Murano Island, that concentrates on modern design', an opinion still in place on their next trip in 1960.⁶² Design offered a way to redeem Murano's glassware. Arguably, as the following pages argue, for Barbini, sculpture offered another.

3.1.6 A Divided Landscape: The Sculptural Turn on Murano

Barbini's non-export orientated ware changed markedly in this period. In the 1950s his *Biennale* exhibits became defined less by animal and human forms and increasingly by abstract shapes that became less colourful as he entered the sixties.⁶³ At the 1962 *Biennale* he presented his *Vetro Pesante* (Heavy Glass) (*See Illustration 98*), one of a series of identically titled works. Its primal, bulging mass echoes the organic primitivism of the British sculptor Henry Moore's sculpture that influenced the swooping *linea italiana* of early post-war design.⁶⁴ Surface decoration is minimal, reduced to plays of light in the layers of smoked *sommersi* glass and fine, shallow horizontal wheel-carved incisions. Suspended within the top of the vessel is a blood red vessel-like cavity, but the glass operates only minimally as a vessel. Instead it works to be a non-functional, autonomous sculpture, as the presence of the Brancusian pedestal asserts.⁶⁵

Glass here is mass, solidity and weight; the antithesis of the lightness and intricate delicacy of the export-orientated ware. While its primal quality followed a larger trend in sculptural glassware in the 1960s, it cannot be divorced from the less salubrious side of Barbini's production.⁶⁶ This is where the presence of multiple forms of glass production as a co-inhabitation is most visible; design and sculpture-

⁶² 'Notes', *The Council of Industrial Design CARPET DESIGNERS' TOUR OF NORTH Italy, September 7th to 21st 1957* DCA, "DESIGN TOURS PRINTED MATTER 1957 – 1964" 1776/3 part 1. Series 8, (ID/155).

⁶³ Dorigato, *Murano Glass Museum*, p. 92.

⁶⁴ Examples include Ponti's coffee maker for *La Pavoni* from 1949 and Battista Pininfarina's *Cistalia* car from 1946. Sparke, *Italian Design 1870 to the Present*, pp. 84 - 85

⁶⁵ Adamson, *Thinking Through Craft*, p. 19.

⁶⁶ On this transition to more sculptural forms, see Luini Martegani, 'The Revival of Glass and Cermics' in *Italian Metamorphosis*, ed by Celant, pp. 222 - 228 (p. 224).



Illustration 98. *Vetro Pesante* (Heavy Glass), one of a series by Alfredo Barbini shown at the 1962 Venice *Biennale*.

led strategies developed through negation of the stereotypical image of the island's wares.

This was the true of Fontana's work in ceramics. He described the 'primeval' quality of his *Concetto Spaziale* (Spatial Concept) slabs and vessels (*See Illustration 99*), with their heavy, punctured and slashed surfaces as a reaction against Copenhagen and Sèvres porcelain - Fontana had worked in the factory of the latter in the 1930s.⁶⁷ He stated

I detest the lacy designs and dainty nuances [...] the mystification of technique, the amazing technical achievement [...] [that] satisfies the taste of the upper classes and collectors. They are thrilled by the fragility and delicacy of the ware. I am looking for something different.⁶⁸

In 1961 Fontana even produced a series of paintings about Venice. With titles such as *Night of Love in Venice*, and *Concetto Spaziale, In Piazza San Marco di Notte con Teresita* (Spatial Concept, In the Piazza San Marco with Teresita at Night) (*See Illustration 100*) and adorned with metallic gold and silver paint and smatterings of coloured Murano glass, these were ironic comments on the touristy cliché and dubious tastefulness of both the city itself and its kitschy souvenirs.⁶⁹

Murano's glass blowers themselves were similarly scathing about the island's tourist market. Silvano Tagliapietra dismissed it as 'the output that we call "agricultural", produced and sold as if it were potatoes'.⁷⁰ Fontana's success allowed him the freedom of his avant-garde practice, but the economy of Murano necessitated the

⁶⁷ Janet Koplos, 'From Picasso to Penck: Playing with Clay' in *The Unexpected: Artists' Ceramics of the 20th Century*, ed. by Koplos ('S-Hertogenbosch: Het Kruithuis Museum of Contemporary Art; New York: Abrams, 1998) pp. 11 - 122, (p. 62).

⁶⁸ Fontana, 'La Mia Ceramica', *Tempo* no. 21, September 1939 in *Shards: Garth Clark on Ceramic Art*, ed. by John Pagliaro (New York: Distributed Art Publications, 2003), p. 55.

⁶⁹ The Venice series paintings were shown first at Venice's Palazzo Grassi and then at New York's Martha Jackson gallery later that year. See White, pp. 55, 71 – 72.

⁷⁰ Silvano Tagliapietra, 'Le Sculture in Vetro di Robert Willson', *La Voce di Murano*, August 1968, p. 1, in Kangas, p. 61.

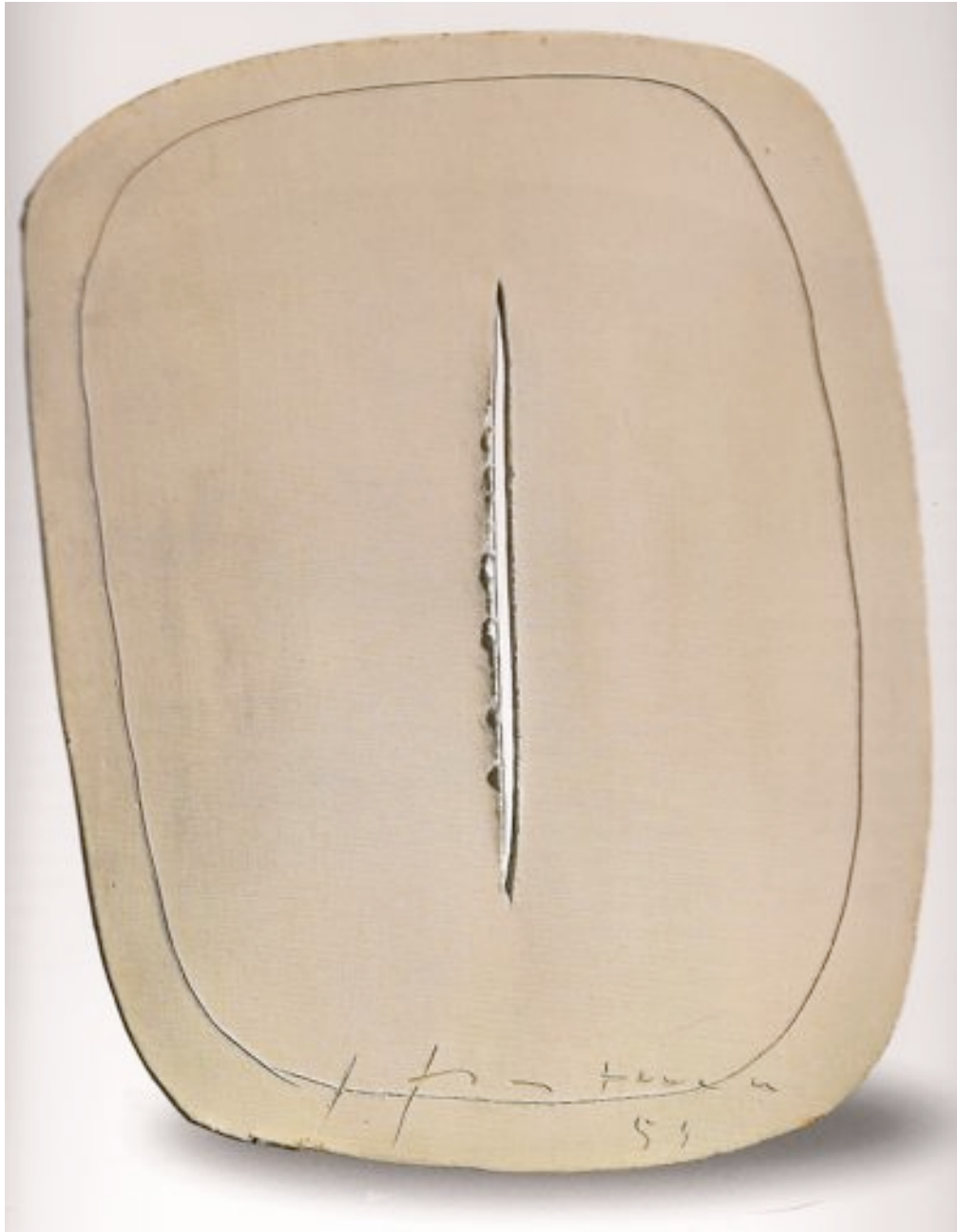


Illustration 99. *Concetto Spaziale*, Lucio Fontana, 1959. Painted, cut and incised terracotta slab.



Illustration 100. *Concetto Spaziale, In Piazza San Marco di Notte con Teresita*, 1961. Lucio Fontana. Oil, perforations and pieces of coloured glass. Displayed in the group exhibition *Arte e Contemplazione* at the Palazzo Grassi, Venice and then in a solo show *Ten Paintings of Venice*, at the Martha Jackson Gallery in New York.

continued production of such commercially oriented wares. This fed into the enthusiasm by some Murano *maestri* to experiment with the visiting American artists: according to the critic Matthew Kangas, Licio Zuffi embraced his collaboration with Willson as a ‘welcome break from tourist production work’.⁷¹

This reliance on the tourist market was preventing the glassblowers’ ability to move beyond this compromised, souvenir production in another way. Willson reported difficulties in working with another *maestro* Giordano Guarnieri, as he fell ‘back on all the extra curves of the tourist pieces’ when trying to follow the Texan’s designs.⁷² Guarnieri had become mechanised, accustomed to the repetitive rhythms of the formulaic tourist-orientated work. This is in addition to the effect on the *maestri*’s self-perception, one that fed into the objects produced. As Ryden describes, it is not just objects that contribute to and derive their identity from their place of production, but individuals too - and the products they produce are an expression of this: ‘in expressing sense of place through folklore [...] we simultaneously express sense of self’.⁷³ Producing for a distant consumer, making objects that they did not admire and knew were compromising their own identity and that of Murano, these makers were alienated from their own production, and the objects they made were too. Looking closer at production, and the productive performances that the Mcilhennys so admired in *Summertime*, only serves to reinforce this.

3.1.7 Alienation and Authenticity on Murano

This alienated condition is confirmed by a closer look at the manufacture of the glass and the secrecy surrounding it. The Weil Ceramics & Glass catalogue advertised its wares as ‘Hand-blown [...] by Barbini’ but does not mention that the name ‘Alfredo Barbini’ referred both to an individual producer and, by the early 1970s, a workshop

⁷¹ Kangas, p. 54.

⁷² Kangas, p. 54.

⁷³ Ryden, pp. 65, 67.

of forty employees.⁷⁴ Furthermore, even when Barbini was directly involved in production, glassmaking was a necessarily collective process, with one *servente* (assistant) often blowing the glass as it was worked by the *maestro*, while other elements such as the decorative elements made in another part of the workshop by other hands.⁷⁵

Nor does the term ‘hand-blown’ mean free-blown. The identically shaped outline of the small eighteenth century-style containers, and their similarities with other vessels in the Camer Glass catalogue suggest the use of pattern moulds. The dragon detail on the stems of the left and centre goblets is the same design but on a different scale, and is also found curled round the stem (*See Illustration 101*) of a ‘giant lighter’ that has been ‘skilfully modelled’ and is a ‘completely original piece’.⁷⁶ This makes these objects no less crafted, but does mean that the skill involved was not necessarily what the consumer imagined. There is no sense of the scale and standardisation of production involved, a lack of knowledge that the bounded-off island of Murano, and the air of mystery it carried, did nothing to dispel.

For the anthropologist Alfred Gell this lack of comprehension lies at the root of the our fascination with the skilfully made object: our interest in it derives not from its actual manufacture but in ‘the idea which one forms of its coming into being’.⁷⁷ This ‘enchantment of technology’ is amplified when one encounters an object from another culture, produced by unfamiliar technical means; it becomes ‘explicable only in magical terms’, the maker transformed into an ‘occult technician’.⁷⁸

⁷⁵ For more on this process, see Miani, Resini and Lamon, pp. 220 - 221.

⁷⁶ *Camer Glass*, (New York: [n. pub], (1961?)) p. 8. ABA.

⁷⁷ Alfred Gell, ‘The Technology of Enchantment and the Enchantment of Technology’ in *Anthropology, Art and Aesthetics*, ed. by Jeremy Coote and Anthony Shelton (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), pp. 40 - 63 (p. 47).

⁷⁸ Gell, pp. 46, 49.



Illustration 101. A series of “giant” lighters by Alfredo Barbini for Camer Glass, c. 1961. The second from right demonstrates the same dragon stem detail as the replica glassware. All between eleven and twelve inches tall.

‘Enchantment’ can also be seen as a source of alienation. It parallels the Italian anthropologist Ernesto De Martino’s findings in his study of magic in Southern Italy. Inspired by Gramsci’s interest in Italy’s neglected folklore culture, the Neopolitan-born De Martino conducted ethnographic research into the culture of magic in the Lucania region, and in 1959 published the results in his *Sud e Magia*.⁷⁹ With specific reference to the idea of *la fascinazione* (“evil eye”), which he describes as ‘the fundamental theme’ of Lucanian magic, De Martino describes the condition of being enchanted in Marxist terms; to be taken in by magic was to be alienated, to lack agency.⁸⁰

The anthropologist Marcel Mauss differentiates magic from craft on the basis that there is an identifiable cause and effect in watching a craft product come into being.⁸¹ Nevertheless, as Gell suggests, a lack of comprehension can still occur even when actually witnessing production, particularly when confronted with such an unknown and alchemical craft as glass blowing. This is borne out in the craft demonstration, of which the Mchilhennys were the latest in a long line to experience. Since the fifteenth century Murano’s glass blowing workshops have opened their doors to curious tourists, long aware of the value of these displays added to their products.⁸² Just as souvenirs authenticate experience, as the literary Susan Stewart has noted, so watching their production could be seen to provide authentication of the souvenirs themselves.⁸³

Adamson has described the craft demonstration as symptomatic of craft’s condition in industrial modernity: ‘the reimagination of the craft workshop as a stage for performance could only have occurred after the broader populace was separated from

⁷⁹ Ernesto De Martino, *Sud e Magia* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1959)

⁸⁰ De Martino, p. 15.

⁸¹ Marcel Mauss, *A General Theory of Magic*, trans. by Robert Brain (London; New York: Routledge, 2001) pp. 24 - 25.

⁸² Robert C. Davis and Garry R. Marvin, *Venice, The Tourist Maze: A Cultural Critique of the World’s Most Tourist City* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, Ca; London: California University Press, 2004), pp. 276, 278.

⁸³ Susan Stewart, *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1993), pp. 134 - 135.

the quotidian experience of craft production'.⁸⁴ In these performances labour has been transformed into what Dean MacCannell calls the 'work display', 'an object of touristic curiosity'.⁸⁵ For MacCannell the 'work display' is an everyday version of Marx's 'class struggle' in which both consumer and producer become divided, alienated selves:

workers are displayed, and other workers on the other side of the culture barrier watch them for their enjoyment [...] Work in the modern world does not turn class against class so much as it turns man against himself, fundamentally dividing his existence.⁸⁶

Furthermore, these craft demonstrations only ever capture a fragment of production, a partiality symptomatic of the souvenir itself, as Stewart has noted.⁸⁷ This places a question mark over their authenticity: these demonstrations often occurred in an area of the workshop set apart from 'normal' production.⁸⁸ The consumer was not witnessing some autonomous, authentic production, but a worker transforming molten glass into commodities that fulfilled the pre-existing expectations of its markets. Stewart has noted the irony of how the demand for exotic, seemingly authentic handmade goods 'creates a souvenir market of goods distinct from authentic traditional crafts [...] and these souvenir goods are often characterized by new techniques of mass production'.⁸⁹

This market was therefore changing not just the form and type of products, but how they were made. Commenting on Murano at the end of the 1950s, Astone Gasparetto described how the 'uniform tastes and demands' of the dominating American market

⁸⁴ Adamson, 'Craft and the Romance of the Studio', *American Art*, 21 (2007), 14 - 18 (p. 15).

⁸⁵ Dean MacCannell, *The Tourist: a New Theory of the Leisure Class* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, Ca: California University Press, 1999), p. 6.

⁸⁶ MacCannell, p. 37.

⁸⁷ Stewart, p. 136.

⁸⁸ Davis and Marvin, p. 278.

⁸⁹ Stewart, p. 148.

was leading to a standardisation of styles and the use of more profitable mechanised processes.⁹⁰ This homogenisation of Murano's production was also occurring in another way: according to Barovier-Mentasti, the turn to professional designers and a demand for geometric forms and modularity was 'smothering the decorative flair of the individual artisan'.⁹¹

This was part of a larger crisis on Murano at this time. The numbers employed in 'artistic' glass production dropped continually in the post-war period. In part this was due to a drop in domestic demand at the onset of the 1960s, but also the restructuring within many workshops; employment dropped by a third between 1951 and 1961 from 7,200 to 4638, and by another half in the decade that followed.⁹² By 1971, only forty percent of Murano's glass workers lived on the island, and an increasing number were not Murano-born but from nearby islands such as Burano, whose own lace making tradition was in a similar crisis.⁹³ Economic incentives saw glass works relocated away from Murano to other islands in the Venetian lagoon in the second half of the 1960, a depopulation that translated into a depletion of skill on Murano.⁹⁴ Of most concern to the Muranese *vetreria* owners was the importation of glass to Murano made elsewhere and then passed off as Murano-made, a denigration of its 'sense of place' and pollution of its production that is even more rampant today.⁹⁵ The place-hood of Murano's glass production was being attacked from all sides; by the demand for design, for souvenirs, by fake imports. All asserted the value of Murano as a site of glass production, and yet all were complicit in its degradation.

⁹⁰ Gasparetto, *Il Vetro di Murano*, p. 226; Barovier Mentasti, *Venetian Glass: 1890 - 1990*, 2nd edn (Venice: Arsenale Editrice, 1993) p. 130.

⁹¹ Barovier Mentasti *Venetian Glass: 1890 - 1990*, p. 130.

⁹² Gasparetto, 'Guardiamo a Murano dal Lato del Lavoro' in Miani, Resini and Lamon, pp. 187, 191. (first publ. in *Giornale Economico*, May 1965)

⁹³ Claudio Guglielmetti 'Murano: Davanti alle Fornaci a 35 anni si è già Vecchia' in Miani, Resini and Lamon, 190 - 192 (p. 190). (first publ. in *Avvenire*, 27 January 1971)

⁹⁴ Gasparetto, 'Guardiamo a Murano dal Lato del Lavoro' in Miani, Resini and Lamon, p. 188

⁹⁵ Gasparetto, 'Guardiamo a Murano dal Lato del Lavoro' in Miani, Resini and Lamon, p. 188. The French glassblower Patricia Ribault has provided an insightful statement on the state of production in Murano today. Ribault, 'Tradition in Question: Glassblowing in Murano, Tunisia and Afghanistan', *Journal of Modern Craft*, 3 (2010), pp. 211 - 215.

As this section has shown, Murano was not the only Italian island whose craft was being sold on the basis of an aesthetics of place and authenticity, but Sardinia and Sicily too. As islands, there appears to be an exaggerated ‘sense of place’ and greater expectation of an authentic, craft-led production, as if these offshore locales were the last outposts of non-commercialised craft in a consumerist, industrialising Italy. Yet as with Venice, so this ideal fell apart when confronted with reality. In 1961 *Craft Horizons* declared Sicily a ‘problem’, dismissing a school in the historic ceramic town of Caltagirone as ‘a chain store smacking of obstinate repetition, ruled by merchandising and profit values, to the detriment of creativity’.⁹⁶ This was evident in Sardinia in a different way. In 1961 the Italian government implemented a *Piano della Rinascita* (Plan for Rebirth) in order to improve Sardinia’s economic and social fortunes.⁹⁷ Although it had widespread effect, this was in largely negative terms, leading to what Francesco Floris has called ‘historic levels’ of emigration, the abandonment of its agriculture industry and depopulation of its rural areas.⁹⁸ The sixties witnessed not the preservation of Sardinia’s traditions but the threat of their eradication. This was most visible in the arrival of the petrochemical industry on the island, led by a Lombard entrepreneur who established a series of refineries to produce plastic products.⁹⁹

Ryden’s ‘sense of place’ arises repeatedly in the representation of these island crafts. In Italy’s export-orientated production a craft-like quality of place was highly valuable in the international marketplace. Identifiably Italian materials, places and skills were vital to the image of Italian design in the 1960s, yet they were all too susceptible to the corrupting influence of commercialism, to problems of taste, authenticity and alienation. The next section, which considers the broader context of the economic ‘miracle’, shows how these craft qualities were central to Italy’s design-led luxuries in the 1960s, from Florentine leather to Carrara marble and even

⁹⁶ Tatarsky and Scarpitta, ‘Sicily’, p. 46.

⁹⁷ Francesco Floris, *La Sardegna del Novecento* (Cagliari: Demos, 1997) p. 98

⁹⁸ Floris, p. 97

⁹⁹ Floris, p. 98

such place-less materials as plastics.. What Barbini and Venetian glass has shown is that the shape of this relationship between craft and design in the luxury commodity was not set in stone, and the creation of modern luxuries was as much about the negation of these values as their embrace.

3.2 Designs on Luxury: Italy in the early 1960s

A 'Boom', a *Miracolo*. Italy's history is prone to myths and legends, and this is certainly true of the years between 1958 and 1963 when the nation underwent huge socio-cultural transformation to explosively emerge as an industrial and consumer power. This development was fuelled by a sudden and belated rise in wages that saw private consumption leap ahead.¹ This was a period of increased affluence and leisure time, exemplified in a dramatic increase in television ownership: from twelve percent of Italian families in 1958 to forty-nine percent in 1965.²

Exports remained key drivers of this expansion, but these were no longer heading just to America: Italy's founding role in the European Economic Community (EEC) saw exports destined to her fellow European countries nearly double to forty percent in the decade up to 1965.³ Tradition-hungry America was replaced by a Europe that, as Sparke puts it, 'had plenty' of tradition and sought instead the symbols of modern living, including televisions, plastic goods and typewriters - commodities that reflected the era's technological optimism and higher incomes of more industrially-advanced nations.⁴

In recent years more nuanced readings of the period have appeared. The Italian economist Silvio Lanaro describes not a 'boom' but 'an acceleration' of economic expansion that began in the early 1950s, citing the 1955 arrival of the Fiat 600 as having 'introduced the status symbol' to the lower middle classes.⁵ While consumption did grow, 'mass' consumption remained a northern, middle class and

¹ Silvio Lanaro, *Storia della Repubblica Italiana: Dalla Fine della Guerra agli Anni Novanta* (Marsilio: Venice, 1992) pp. 224, 252 - 263.

² Ginsborg, p. 239.

³ Michele Salvati, *Economia e Politica in Italia dal Dopoguerra a Oggi* (Milan: Garzanti, 1984), pp. 60 - 61.

⁴ Sparke, 'The Straw Donkey', p. 67.

⁵ Lanaro, p. 223.

urban phenomenon.⁶ Moreover, the image of new found prosperity would be short-lived. What Ginsborg terms an ‘export-led growth [...] often of a luxury nature’ meant an emphasis on private consumption without any corresponding public investment in education, housing and hospitals.⁷ Inflation, unemployment, high wages and internal migration all went unchecked by Italy’s monetarist policy, storing up economic and social problems that would erupt in the late 1960s.⁸

Consumerism was a powerful image, one aided and abetted by the rise of mass media and advertising. Alongside new design magazines including *Abitare* and *Interni* were women’s weeklies such as *Arianna* and *Grazia* that had columns devoted to modern design.⁹ This greater public awareness of design was not always positive. In 1961 *Arianna* asked ‘*Sono Freddi i Mobili Moderni?*’ (Is Modern Furniture Cold?).¹⁰ Contemporary, industrially produced furniture was found wanting: ‘most of the time [they] lack that warmth that the work of the artisan succeeds in giving to the hand-made, one-off object’.¹¹ Amongst the suggestions (*See Illustration 102*) to render the modern home more ‘intimate, warm, alive’ were several objects by the Milanese company Danese, set up by Bruno Danese and Jacqueline Vodoz in 1957.¹² What their products say about the dynamics between design, craft and the problematic idea of luxury in this decade is one of the issues this chapter seeks to address, one that was overt in the *Triennale* that took place at the peak of the ‘miracle’ and the Neoliberal movement that emerged at this time.

⁶ David Forgacs, ‘Cultural Consumption, 1940s to 1990s’ in *Italian Cultural Studies: An Introduction*, ed. by Forgacs and Lumley (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), pp. 273 - 290 (pp. 276 - 277).

⁷ Ginsborg, p. 216

⁸ Zamagni, ‘Evolution of the Economy’ in *Italy Since 1945*, Short Oxford History of Italy series, ed. by Patrick McCarthy (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), pp. 42 - 68 (p. 50).

⁹ *Abitare* was launched in 1960, *Grazia* in 1938 and *Interni* in 1954.

¹⁰ Nella Patani Zanotti and Carlo Bartoli, ‘Sono Freddi i Mobili Moderni?’, *Arianna*, February 1961, 44 - 45 (p. 44). Milan, Archivio Danese Vodoz (ADV)

¹¹ Patani Zanotti and Bartoli, p. 44.

¹² Patani Zanotti and Bartoli, p. 45.



Illustration 102. *Arianna* magazine's suggestion for an *angolo-studio* (studio-corner). There are two objects by Danese; the ceiling lamp is a Bruno Munari design, while the red-coloured ceramic container on the desk was designed by Franco Meneguzzo in 1959.

3.2.1 ‘Only the Wealthy Deserve Beauty?’: The 1960 *Triennale* and the Neo-Liberty Movement

The twelfth *Triennale* of 1960 responded to this climate of domestic consumerism with the theme *La Casa e La Scuola* (The Home and The School). The entrance area (See *Illustration 103*), designed by Ettore Sottsass, was conceived as a ‘living room’ with sofas for conversation and respite from the exhibits.¹³ Most of the countries involved ignored any social agenda in the theme. Instead, the Czechoslovakian and Scandinavian sections led a trend for what the British critic Reyner Banham decried as the *Triennale*’s ‘trade fair’ appearance, complete with ‘luxurious bazaars of rich textiles, exquisite glass, and art pottery’.¹⁴ However, as one Italian reviewer suggests, it was precisely this display of luxury that was this *Triennale*’s main attraction:

How many Italians at the cinema have looked with envy at the luxury apartments of America? Millions. The *Triennale* now offers the opportunity to make comparisons. And this time it is not about homes dreamed up by the fantasy of Hollywood directors, and is not for millionaires, but apartments of contemporary taste.¹⁵

The ‘apartments’ were a first for the *Triennale*. These were six room sets conceived by leading architects for designated residential areas; three city centre ‘luxury’ interiors, two suburban middle class interiors and one rural.¹⁶ The two that came in for most scrutiny were those of Aulenti and Luigi Caccia Dominioni, who designed two of the luxury interiors. Floored with mottled grey marble (See *Illustration 104*),

¹³ *12 Triennale di Milano*, ed. by Pier Carlo Santini (Milan: Arti grafiche Crespi, 1960) p. 19.

¹⁴ Reyner Banham, ‘Schools of Today - Homes of Yesterday’, *The Listener*, 18 August 1960, 253 - 255 (p. 254).

¹⁵ Franco Vittorelli, ‘Paradiso delle Donne’ *La Settimana*, 10 July - 16 July 1960, n.p. ASTM, XII Triennale di Milano, 1960, Rassegna Stampa.

¹⁶ Gae Aulenti, Luigi Caccia Dominioni and Fulvio Raboni designed the three interiors in the first category, Pier Luigi Spadolini and Mario Maioli designed one of the suburban apartments, the other was by Fredi Drugman. Vittorio Gregotti, Ludovico Meneghetti and Giotto Stoppino designed the rural apartment. Panzera, *Storia e Cronaca della Triennale*, pp. 474 - 476.

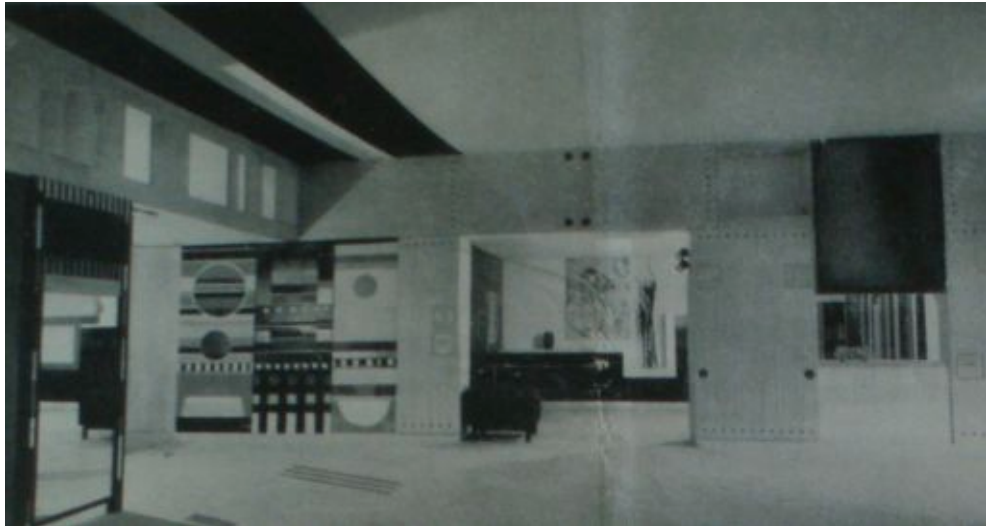


Illustration 103. Sottsass's design for the entrance hall of the twelfth *Triennale* in 1960, including sofas and obeche wood dividers made by Renzo Brugola. Sottsass also designed the ceramic panels to the left of the space, made by the Bitossi firm in the historic Tuscan ceramic town of Montelupo Fiorentino.



Illustration 104. Gae Aulenti's design for a living room for a city centre 'luxury' apartment at the 1960 *Triennale*. All the furnishings and marble floor were designed by Aulenti, while the brass and glass lamps were designed by Guido Canella.

Aulenti's living room featured brass lamps designed by the Romanian-born architect Guido Canella, and red upholstered furniture designed by Aulenti with the 'utmost comfort' in mind.¹⁷ The architect Caccia Dominioni conceived an ordered, elegant entrance hall (*See Illustration 105*) with a decorative mosaic floor designed by Corrado Corradi dell'Acqua, one of Azucena's co-founders alongside Caccia Dominioni, displays of ceramics and silverware and at the rear the *San Luca* armchair, designed by Achille and Piergiacomo Castiglioni for the Bolognese firm Gavina that year.

Both *Casabella-Continuità* and *Stile Industria* criticised the classism and elitism of the geographical distinctions in the room sets, the latter condemning the *Triennale* as 'satisfying luxury dreams rather than average needs'.¹⁸ On seeing the *Triennale* Anna Ferebee, the editor of the American *Industrial Design* magazine, asked 'if only the rich deserved beauty?'.¹⁹ This was an inevitable impression 'given that the majority of the decorative arts [...] consists of artisanal products singularly rather than mass-produced' and therefore more expensive.²⁰ Banham weighed in too, attacking the architects present as behaving like the 'baron in the trees' of Calvino's eponymous 1957 book; 'the *Barone* goes to live in a tree, the architects turn their backs on the pressing problem of modern architecture in order to realise their artistic personalities'.²¹

Banham saw this as part of a larger 'abandon of Modernism' among Italian architects, one most visible in the neoliberty movement.²² This 'new' version of art nouveau (known as *liberty* in Italy) first emerged in the mid 1950s in Turin and

¹⁷ 'L'Ultimo Grido dell'Arredamento', *Il Giorno*, 2 August 1960, n.p. ASTM

¹⁸ Ernesto Nathan Rogers, 'Dibattito sulla XII *Triennale*', *Casabella*, September 1960, 3 - 9 (p. 3); 'Discussione sulla *Triennale*', *Stile Industria*, October 1960, ix - xvi (p. ix).

¹⁹ Ann Ferebee, 'Soltanto il Ricco Merita il Bello?' in 'Discussione sulla *Triennale*', p. xii.

²⁰ Ferebee, p. xii.

²¹ Banham in 'Discussione sulla *Triennale*', p. xiii.

²² Italo Calvino's *Il Barone Rampante* was first published in 1957. Banham in 'Discussione sulla *Triennale*', p.xii. This echoed Banham's article 'Neoliberty: The Italian Retreat from Modern Architecture', *The Architectural Review*, 747 (1959), pp. 230 - 235.



Illustration 105. Luigi Caccia Dominioni's design for an entrance hall to a city centre 'luxury' apartment at the twelfth *Triennale*, 1960. The armchair is the *San Luca*, designed by Achille and Piergiacomo Castiglioni for the Bolognese firm Gavina that year. The mosaic floor was designed by Corradi dell'Acqua and executed by Biason.

Milan, and was seen in buildings such as BBPR's gothic-inspired *Torre Velasca* from 1958.²³ In March 1960 an exhibition opened in Milan dedicated to this movement that Dorfles described as 'characterising Italian design today'.²⁴ Curated by Aulenti and Canella, the exhibits in *Nuovi Disegni per il Mobile Italiano* (New Designs for Italian Furniture) were designed by architects including Aldo Rossi, Vittorio Gregotti, and Lodovico Meneghetti and made in the artisanal towns of the Milanese hinterland.²⁵

The neoliberty tag was intended disparagingly, reducing the architects involved to the level of nostalgic revivalism. While there are echoes of Art Nouveau in the looping outline of Aulenti's *Sgarsul* bentwood rocking chair (*See Illustration 106*) for Poltronova and the Castiglioni's *San Luca*, neoliberty referenced multiple historical eras - the *San Luca*'s curves are at once those of eighteenth century furniture and Umberto Boccioni's futurist sculptures and signalled what Paolo Portoghesi called the designers' 'ironic acceptance of the new Italian line'.²⁶

Neoliberty signalled the growing pluralism and fragmented nature of Italian design. Its architects challenged the modernist orthodoxy of industrial progressivism and the rejection of history, and challenged the influence of the market on their designs. They looked to history as a reaction to what Dorfles termed the 'the *speed* of consumption today'.²⁷ It also reflected the reality of a largely middle class market that preferred historical warmth to modernist asceticism. Dorfles called neoliberty 'ultra-bourgeois furniture', designed for what Banham identified as 'a particular class

²³ For more on the Torre Velasca and the origins of Neo-Liberty, see Gregotti, 'Reconstructing a History' in *The Italian Metamorphosis, 1943 – 1968*, ed. by Celant, pp. 558 - 565 (pp. 559 - 561); *Neoliberty e Dintorni*, ed. by Giacomo Polin and Ornella Selvafolta (Milan: Electa, 1989).

²⁴ Dorfles, 'Una Mostra a Milano', *Domus*, June 1960, 33 - 34 (p. 34).

²⁵ *Nuovi Disegni per il Mobile Italiano* was held at the *Osservatorio delle Arte Industriali* from the 14 - 24 March 1960. For more on this exhibition see Dorfles, 'Una Mostra a Milano', pp. 33 - 34.

²⁶ Paolo Portoghesi, 'Un Modo di Abitare e una Poltrona-Personaggio' in *La Pittura di Cagli nell'Arredamento Moderno*, ed. by E. Crispolti (Turin: Centro per l'Arredamento, 1963) in Sergio Polano, *Achille Castiglioni: Complete Works* (Milan: Electa, 2001), p. 174.

²⁷ Dorfles, 'Una Mostra a Milano', p. 34.



Illustration 106. At work on the *Sgarsul* rocking chair, designed by Aulenti in 1962. From left to right: one of Poltronova's furniture makers, Aulenti, Poltronova's owner Sergio Cammilli.

of client, who wants [...] a luxury dwelling'.²⁸ The manual manufacture and decorativeness of the historical styles referenced represented a recognisable language of luxury - the same one that fuelled the tourist-led consumption of Venetian glass. What Neoliberty and the *Triennale* suggest is that this definition of luxury was equally in demand by Italian consumers in the 1960s, as it had been for centuries previously. However in fashion as much as in furniture, the sixties appetite for luxury was proving problematic on two levels; pragmatically, in terms of production and philosophically, in terms of the social orientation of Italy's architects.

3.2.2 Italy: A Nation of Luxury

The early sixties represented a luxury moment in Italy. Traditional and not-so traditional luxury materials such as glass, leather, marble and plastics became what Sparke called a 'sine qua non of Italian design' translated by Italy's architects into desirable home furnishings.²⁹ Mario Bellini and Tobia Scarpa led a trend for leather upholstered furniture, while in fashion the Florentine leather shoes and accessories firms Gucci and Salvatore Ferragamo were consolidating their international image as purveyors of accessories to Italy's *dolce vita*.³⁰ There was an increasing demand for Italy's luxuries not just abroad, but at home too: in his 1965 publication *Il Tempo Libero* the sociologist Antonio Ciampi noted that 'the expenditure on luxuries amongst the well-off and *nouveau riche* is on the rise, but the expenditure on non-essentials is also rocketing amongst the bourgeois and working classes'.³¹

The early 1960s represented the next chapter in Italy's long history of luxury. First Siena and Luca, and then Venice and Florence dominated Italy's luxury trades in the

²⁸ Banham, 'Schools of Today', p. 255. Dorfles, 'Una Mostra a Milano', p. 33.

²⁹ Sparke, 'A Home for Everybody?' in *Culture and Conflict in Postwar Italy: Essays on Mass and Popular Culture*, ed. by Barański and Lumley, (Houndsmill, Basingstoke; London: Macmillan, 1990), fig. iii following p.178.

³⁰ Gucci was founded as a saddlery shop in Florence in 1906 by Guccio Gucci and in 1923 opened an accessories store in the city. Valerie Steele *Fashion, Italian Style* (New York: The Fashion Institute of Technology, 2003), p. 10. For more on Salvatore Ferragamo's history, *Salvatore Ferragamo*, ed. by Graziella Buccellati and Stefania Ricci (Milan: Franco Maria Ricci, 1990).

³¹ Antonio Ciampi, *Il Tempo Libero in Italia* (Milan: Bompiani, 1965), p. 23.

fourteenth century and the latter two continued to do so in the twentieth.³² These cities were built on the idea of splendour and the perceived civility and social duty of Italy's aristocratic families to display their wealth through the consumption of luxuries.³³ As in other countries, luxury did provoke debate in Italy. As early as the thirteenth century sumptuary laws were in place in Siena, although these were just as ineffective as in other countries.³⁴ However, compared to the rise of luxury debates in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in England and France, the Italian Enlightenment demonstrated what Til Wahnbaeck has called a 'reluctance' to impose any 'moral or economic' judgement on luxury, demonstrating instead 'a more flexible, ambiguous approach [...] which left room for old Christian as well as new economic considerations alike'.³⁵ This anticipated a larger shift in the luxury debate in the eighteenth century, as its merit was re-evaluated on economic terms.³⁶ At the start of the twentieth century, the German economist Werner Sombart contended that it was luxury that had given 'birth to capitalism'.³⁷

As a country with 'a large labour force and a small amount of raw materials' Gramsci recognised that Italy had the preconditions for 'specialisation for a luxury market'.³⁸ However he questioned the social inequality this implied: equating 'quality' with "expensive" production, he asks 'if a nation specialises in "qualitative" production, what industry provides the consumer goods for the poorer classes?'.³⁹

³² Susan Mosher Stuard, *Gilding the Market: Luxury and Fashion in Fourteenth-Century Italy* (Philadelphia, Penn: Pennsylvania University Press, 2006), pp. 1 - 3.

³³ Marina Belozerskaya, *Luxury Arts of the Renaissance* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2005), pp. 2, 16.

³⁴ Mosher Stuard, p. 3.

³⁵ Till Wahnbaeck, *Luxury and Public Happiness: Political Economy in the Italian Enlightenment* (Oxford: Clarendon, 2004), p. 19.

³⁶ Berry, p. xi. For a comprehensive overview of this shift in the perception of luxury in the eighteenth century, see Maxine Berg and Elizabeth Eger (eds.) *Luxury in the Eighteenth Century: Debates, Desires and Delectable Goods* (Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003).

³⁷ Werner Sombart, *Luxury and Capitalism*, trans. by W.R. Dittmar (Ann Arbor: Michigan University Press, 1967), p. 170.

³⁸ Gramsci, *Prison Notebooks*, p. 307

³⁹ Gramsci, *Prison Notebooks*, p. 308

The answer, at least according to Sottsass, was none. Even Italy's poorest social groups were caught up in cult of luxury. In a 1954 *Domus* article Sottsass described Italy as 'a poor country [...] whose poverty hits you in its all-pervasive myth: the myth of richness'.⁴⁰ He identified two essentials in Italy's ostentatious brand of luxury. The first was the use of luxury materials such as satin, brass and bronze. The second was that these materials were hand-worked: machine production was unable to achieve 'that other symbol [...] the amount of time taken to produce a work: the symbol of the "finished", of the beyond finished and perfect'.⁴¹ Sottsass did see a more palatable alternative. He cited the architecture of Alvar Aalto and Scandinavian countries in general, whose wealth negated the need for such ostentation and instead demonstrated their 'elegance and [...] dignity' in the use of humble materials such as brick and wood.⁴²

Salvatore Ferragamo traded on this well-worn luxury strategy of precious materials and Italian craftsmanship. Born in the southern Campanian village of Bonito in 1898, in 1914 the young shoemaker had joined his brothers in America, eventually moving to Hollywood, where he made shoes for the industry's film stars both on and off set.⁴³ He set up his own shop in the town, and in 1927 moved to Florence where he continued building up his business. Even when constrained by war time autarchy to use materials such as cellophane, Sardinian cork and raffia, these were worked so elaborately as in the woven blue raffia and indented cork heel of this 1940 sandal (*See Illustration 107*) that he was able to maintain their luxury status.⁴⁴

The handmade value of Ferragamo's shoes remained in place even as the firm expanded in the post-war era. In a 1960 advertisement (*See Illustration 108*)

⁴⁰ Sottsass, 'Lussuoso e Finito' *Domus*, December 1954, p. 64.

⁴¹ Sottsass, 'Lussuoso e Finito', p. 64.

⁴² Sottsass, 'Lussuoso e Finito', p. 64.

⁴³ Ricci, 'Salvatore: Ferragamo: An Evolving Legend' in *Salvatore Ferragamo: Evolving Legend 1928 - 2008*, ed. by Ricci (Milan: Skira; London: Thames & Hudson, 2008), (13 - 25), pp.13, 15.

⁴⁴ Jeffrey T. Schnapp, 'The Fabric of Modern Times', *Critical Inquiry*, 24 (1997), 191 - 124 (p. 195). Gucci was similarly affected by these sanctions, turning to domestically produced materials such as raffia and hemp in the 1930s. Sarah Mower, *Gucci by Gucci: 85 Years of Gucci* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2006), p. 16.



Illustration 107. Sandal, designed by Salvatore Ferragamo in 1940, made partly using wartime materials of woven blue raffia upper and sling back, circular indented cork heel.



Illustration 108. Advertisement announcing the arrival Salvatore Ferragamo's Autumn and Winter collections at Saks Fifth Avenue department store, New York, 1960, with sketch of shoes being handmade, and map of Italy.

announcing his new collection at Saks Fifth Avenue, a map of Italy and roughly sketched hands at work act as clear signifiers of the handmade quality and *italianità* of his products. This is bolstered in the copy: ‘Not satisfied with machine-made techniques, Ferragamo designs unique shoes, handmade by Italian master craftsmen’.⁴⁵ Yet the advert did not tell the whole truth of Ferragamo’s shoe production. In the late 1920s the shoemaker was faced with the problem of how to meet increasing demand for his shoes. He came up with what he described in his autobiography as ‘a system of making hand-made shoes by mass production’.⁴⁶ He returned to Italy and sought out first Neapolitan, then Florentine shoemaking *maestri* to take part, but they refused, and he found the workmanship of those who did agree to take part wanting.⁴⁷ Eventually Ferragamo assembled together ‘a number of good, clever boys in Florence who were learning to be shoemakers but whose technical knowledge was incomplete’ and trained them up into a Taylorist style self-described ‘assembly line’ (*See Illustration 109*) that was firmly in place by the time of the advert.⁴⁸

The increasing demand for Ferragamo’s products in the post-war period speaks of the persistent value of the idea of luxury. As Berry has shown, this is explained by the connection between luxuries and necessities. This relationship is not oppositional but one of extension; the former become the latter through a process of ‘increasing refinement’.⁴⁹ The need for this ‘refinement’ is ever-present: in 1939 the architectural critic Siegfried Giedion described how ‘the need for luxury and the wish to impress [...] occur in every civilisation’.⁵⁰ For Giedion, it was imperative that modern design responded to this need - if not, the public ‘avenges itself by

⁴⁵ ‘S.F.A. Announces the Arrival of Their new Italian Collection by FERRAGAMO, Shoemaker Principale’, 11 November 1960, Florence, Salvatore Ferragamo Archive

⁴⁶ Ferragamo, *The Shoemaker of Dreams*, p. 107.

⁴⁷ Ferragamo, *The Shoemaker of Dreams*, p. 104.

⁴⁸ Ferragamo, *The Shoemaker of Dreams*, p.118.

⁴⁹ Berry, p.11.

⁵⁰ Siegfried Giedion, ‘The Dangers and Advantages of Luxury’, *Focus*, 3 (1939), 34 - 38 (p. 36).



Illustration 109. Salvatore Ferragamo's self-declared human 'assembly line', at the Palazzo Feroni-Spini in Florence, Ferragamo's headquarters since 1937. Date unknown.

turning away and taking refuge in a substitute'.⁵¹ In early twentieth century America this manifested itself a turn to revivalism amongst consumers, one echoed in post-war Italy in the appetite for Venetian glass and Neoliberty furniture.⁵²

As Sottsass's reference to Aalto indicated, there was recognition in Italy that luxury could still meet the desire for a socially responsible architecture and design. Aalto was not the only early Modernist architect to demonstrate this. In 1925 Le Corbusier declared that while 'trash is always abundantly decorated', 'the luxury object is well made, neat and clean, pure and healthy, and its bareness reveals the quality of its manufacture'.⁵³ As Joanna Merwood-Salisbury has described, this was not the luxury of a bourgeois class wanting to imitate 'aristocratic taste' but 'a new luxury created by and for a classless modern man'.⁵⁴ This, arguably, was the form of luxury that Sottsass desired, one that could fit in with a modern, democratic language for design. As the following section demonstrates, surprisingly it was in marble, one of Italy's most precious and yet typecast of luxury materials, that some architects saw possibility of this.

3.2.3 'Marble Marble Everywhere'

In his 1966 publication *Design as Art* Munari echoed Sottsass in his identification of Italy's 'mania for luxury', one characterised by material ostentation and a confusion of 'value [...] with price'.⁵⁵ Munari described the 'luxuriously appointed home': 'the first essential is marble marble everywhere, even where it is no use, or where it needs an enormous effort to keep it polished (for marble must be polished, and very highly polished too, so that it reflects the crystal chandelier with crystal clarity)'.⁵⁶

⁵¹ Giedion, p. 36.

⁵² Giedion, p. 36.

⁵³ Le Corbusier, *The Decorative Art of Today*, (London: Architectural Press, 1925, reprint. 1987), p. 90 in Joanna Merwood-Salsibury, 'On Luxury', *AA Files*, 58 (2009), pp. 20 - 26 (p. 22).

⁵⁴ Merwood-Salsibury, 'On Luxury', p. 22.

⁵⁵ Bruno Munari, *Design as Art*, trans. by Patrick Creagh (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin, 1971), p.135.

⁵⁶ Munari, pp. 135 - 136.

Centred in the Tuscan district of Carrara, the history of Italian marble exemplifies the cycle of decline and revival typical of many of the nation's craft industries.

Exploited and then abandoned by the Roman Empire, the rediscovery of Tuscany's marble quarries in the late Middle Ages led to the material's resurgence in the Renaissance.⁵⁷ After a lull in the seventeenth century, the end of the eighteenth brought the problem of how to increase production to meet growing demand.⁵⁸ The introduction of new techniques for cutting and transportation in the nineteenth century by firms such as the French-owned Henraux and the Italian Fabbrocotti resolved this problem in part.⁵⁹ Extraction however remained an 'archaic and totally primitive' phase and industrial techniques were only introduced in the 1950s - even today artisanal methods and hand tools are used in all stages of production.⁶⁰

At all stages, marble production is a highly skilled and laborious craft; it takes a lot to transform this material from its unquarried state to the finished, polished material of the popular imagination.⁶¹ Pye, ever pragmatic, described how

Only to name precious materials like marble, silver, ivory, ebony, is to evoke a picture of thrones and treasures. It does not evoke a picture of grey boulders on a dusty hill or logs of ebony as they really are – wet dirty lumps all shakes and splinters! Material in the raw is nothing much. Only worked material has quality.⁶²

⁵⁷ Istituto Nazionale per il Commercio Estero, *Marmi Italiani* (Rome: I.C.E, 1982), p. 4.

⁵⁸ Antonio Bernieri, *Storia di Carrara Moderna (1815 - 1935)* (Pisa: Pacini Editore, 1983), p. 33.

⁵⁹ Bernieri, p. 33.

⁶⁰ Bernieri, p. 31; Maria Chiara Cattaneo, 'Pietra' in *Mestieri d'Arte e Made in Italy*, ed. by Colombo, pp. 387 - 398 (p. 388).

⁶¹ Contini and Alison Leitch both discuss the creativity involved in marble quarrying. Contini, 'Creativity at Work: Miners and Quarrymen in Tuscany', *Oral History*, 37 (2009), pp. 64 - 70 and Alison Leitch, 'The Life of Marble: The Experience and Meaning of Work in the Marble Quarries of Carrara', *The Australian Journal of Anthropology* 7 (1996), pp. 235 - 257.

⁶² Pye, p. 2.

The mountains, ravines and valleys of Carrara not only provided dangerous and difficult working conditions. Following Lightfoot, they are examples of the ‘ontic’ qualities that make up marble’s place-based identity.⁶³ Even with a single block, every single slab of marble is unique, its density, colour, veining and *pele* (hairline fractures) the result of the enormous geological pressure on the marble bed. This geographical specificity is a central part of the material’s identity, as the vast majority of marbles are named after their site of excavation.⁶⁴ The importance of these locales remained intact in the post-war period as Italy continued to dominate both the excavation and manufacture of marble. Responsible for more than a third of global production by the 1980s, a significant amount was also being imported from other countries and then worked in Italy’s marble centres.⁶⁵ Evidently it was as much the hands and the idea of this district that was important to the ‘sense of place’ of Italian marble as the local topography.

However, at the end of World War Two marble did not seem the best candidate for a modern form of luxury. In terms of architecture, Modernist architects and industrialisation had largely rejected marble in favour of iron, reinforced cement and new methods of building construction.⁶⁶ This was exacerbated by the collapse in the market for marble in the economic turmoil of the late 1920s and the imposition of trade sanctions on Italy in 1935 following its invasion of Ethiopia.⁶⁷ This is where another problem for marble’s post-war image originated; marble’s indigenouslyness and Classical and Renaissance connotations saw it swept up into fascist myth-making to become what the historian Jeffrey Schnapp has called ‘the unassailable autarchic material’.⁶⁸ From the white marble of the *Palazzo della Civiltà Italiana* in Rome’s EUR quarter to the marble cladding on Giuseppe Terragni’s *Casa del*

⁶³ Lightfoot in Ryden, p. 69.

⁶⁴ *Marmi Italiani*, p. 3.

⁶⁵ *Marmi Italiani*, pp. 9 - 10.

⁶⁶ Santini, ‘Il Materiale Marmo’ in *Marmo Tecniche e Cultura* (Milan: Piazza del Duomo, 1983), p. 14.

I ⁶⁷ Schnapp, ‘The People’s Glass House’, *South Central Review*, 25 (2008), 45 - 56, (p. 52).

⁶⁸ Schnapp, ‘The People’s Glass House’, p. 53.

Fascio, marble was used extensively by the regime in its attempt to assert its imperial legitimacy, as noted in the reference to mosaic making in chapter one.⁶⁹

The post-war years were a time of renewal for marble production. Rising demand from the building industry and the advent of new cutting machinery saw production leap from just sixty thousand tonnes in 1918 to half a million by 1960.⁷⁰ Italy's architects were involved in this recuperation on a qualitative level; in 1954 BBPR extensively employed pink Candolgia and green marble in their 1954 design for Olivetti's showroom (*See Illustration 110*) on New York's Fifth Avenue, the material used alongside Massimo Vignelli-designed multi-coloured, Venini-made glass lamps to project a historically recognisable yet highly modern image of Italy.⁷¹

In furnishing terms, Aulenti and Achille and Pier Giacomo Castiglioni were amongst those turning to marble - even if some of their highly celebrated designs can be seen to only prolong marble's compromised condition. The marble, aluminium and stainless steel used in the Castiglioni's 1962 *Arco* lamp (*See Illustration 111*) for Flos is a triumvirate of materials that, as the historian David Rifkind has shown, were all paraded under autarchy, while the monolithic assemblage of modernist geometric solids in Aulenti's 1965 *Jumbo* table (*See Illustration 112*) for the American firm Knoll appears as an exercise in styling designed to appeal to traditional, elitist taste.⁷²

Given this usage of marble it is not surprising to find the critic Pier Carlo Santini declaring in 1960 that the material remained 'the symbol of officialdom, of rhetoric, of monumentalism, of wealth, of bad taste, of ostentation'.⁷³ As with glass, so

⁶⁹ David Rifkind, 'Furnishing the Fascist Interior: Giuseppe Terragni, Mario Radice and the Casa del Fascio' *Arg*, 10 (2006) 257 – 169, (p.161); Schnapp, 'The People's Glass House', p. 53.

⁷⁰ Luciana and Tiziana Mannoni, *Marble: History of a Culture* (New York: Facts on File Publications, 1985), p. 245.

⁷¹ For more details, see 'Italia a New York: Negozio Olivetti', *Domus*, September 1954, pp. 3 - 10.

⁷² Rifkind describes stainless steel, aluminium and other alloys in the *Casa del Fascio* as reflecting 'the political symbolism of modern technology', noting that 'Steel, in particular, found common use in Mussolini's rhetoric as a trope for combat and struggle - the dictator's fondness for the sport of fencing being well publicised'. Rifkind, pp. 161 - 162.

⁷³ Santini, 'Il Materiale Marmo', p. 15.



Illustration 110. Olivetti's showroom on New York's Fifth Avenue, designed by BBPR in 1954. The bas relief mural is by Constantino Nivola, the hanging striped glass lights by Massimo Vignelli for Venini. Pink Candoglio marble has been used for the steps leading up to the office areas, and green marble for the floor and pedestals.

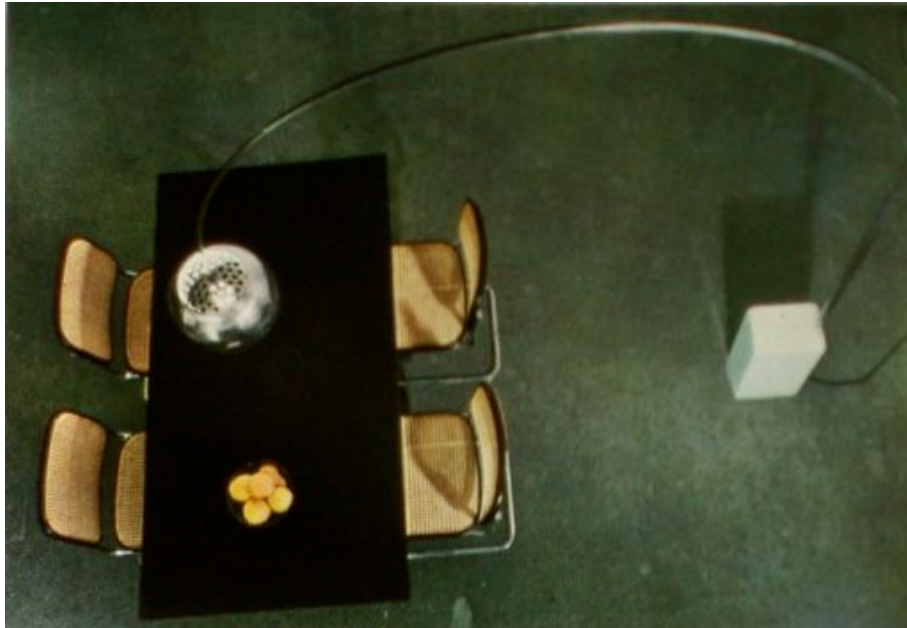


Illustration 111. *Arco* floor lamp, designed by Achille and Pier Giacomo Castiglioni for Flos in 1962, with a white Statuary Carrara marble base, stainless steel arc and aluminium reflector.

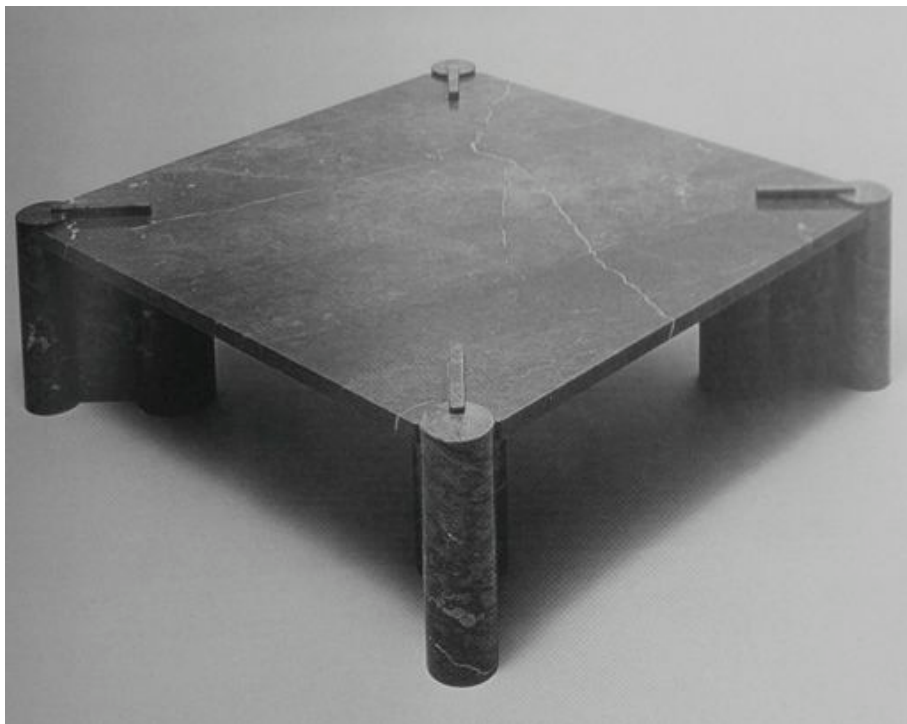


Illustration 112. *Jumbo* coffee table, designed by Gae Aulenti for Knoll International, 1965. Shown here in Nero Marquina marble, also available in white Statuary Carrara or Calacatta marble.

marble's historical prestige saw it fall prey to kitsch-like falsification; Dorfles noted the 'frequency to which exact copies of masterpieces (ancient or modern), mass-produced in good-quality materials such as marble or bronze, can be obtained and marketed'.⁷⁴ So concerned was *Casabella* about this conservatism of producers who simply 'make the most of the easy possibilities that the market offers that they predicted a possible 'decline in its use'.⁷⁵ In order to renew marble's image what was needed, as both the magazine and Santini argued, was the introduction of industrial methods and the intervention of designers not at the level of style, but production.

In 1965 the Carrara Chamber of Commerce of the annual *Mostra Nazionale della Carrara* (National Carrara Exhibition), and three years later established a dedicated design section. In charge was Henraux's director, Erminio Cidonio. His interest in the modern potential of marble dated back to 1956, when Moore commissioned the firm to transport Travertine from its quarries to the North of Rome to its headquarters in Querceta, where he executed his sculpture for New York's UNESCO headquarters.⁷⁶ The encounter proved a turning point for Cidonio, who subsequently invited sculptors including Jean Arp and Isamu Noguchi to experiment with the skills available at Henraux.⁷⁷ For this competition Cidonio invited architects including Bellini, Mangiarotti, Mari, Tobia Scarpa and Sottsass to submit designs.⁷⁸ These were made into prototypes at Henraux's workshop, and Santini optimistically described the results as 'testifying that marble was still [...] largely retrievable' in design terms.⁷⁹ Scarpa's entry, the *Biagio* lamp (*Illustration 113*), was put into production by Flos and is still manufactured by them today.

⁷⁴ Dorfles, 'Kitsch' in *Kitsch*, ed. by Dorfles, pp. 19 - 20.

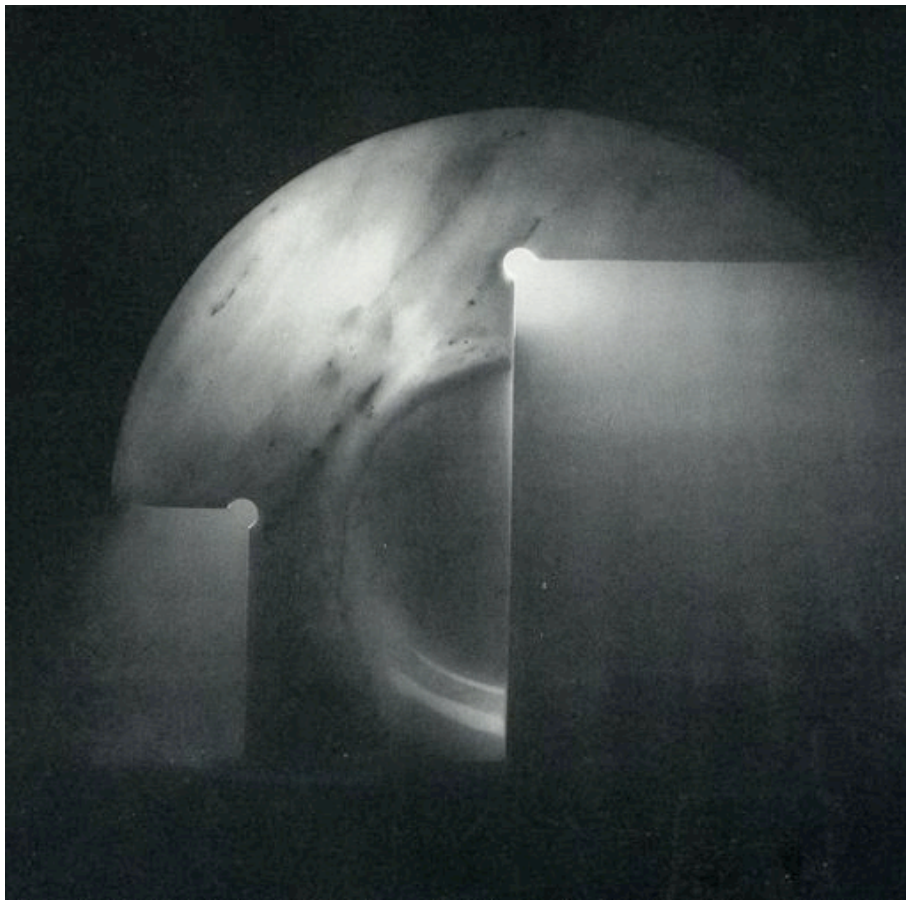
⁷⁵ Ilo Dati 'Cronache di Disegno Industriale: Pietrasanta, Lucca. Oggetti in Marmo Istituto Statale d'Arte "Stagio Stagi"', *Casabella*, November 1968, 42 - 45 (p. 43).

⁷⁶ Roger Berthoud, *The Life of Henry Moore* (London; Boston: Faber and Faber), pp. 262 - 268.

⁷⁷ Berthoud, p. 265

⁷⁸ Santini, 'Design', *Marmo Technique e Cultura*, p. 69.

⁷⁹ Santini, 'Design', *Marmo Technique e Cultura*, p. 69.



*Illustration 113. Biagio lamp, designed by Tobia Scarpa in 1968 for the *Mostra Nazionale della Carrara* and made from one block of white Statuary Carrara marble. The prototype was made at the workshop of Henraux, before the lamp was put into production by Flos.*

Made from white statuary marble, Scarpa's design for the *Biagio* lamp met the desire for an interest on the part of designers in the question of production. Instead of sawing through the material with a steel blade, the traditional method employed to produce marble slabs, Scarpa had the marble cut into a circular shape with a lathe.⁸⁰ This form was then cut in half to produce two identical shapes, albeit mirrored versions of each other, and each half was then glued to the corresponding half from another pair.⁸¹ Fabrication of the *Biagio* was designed to necessarily produce a pair of lamps, taking marble one step closer to standardised, mass production.

Putting the two half-shells put together (*See Illustration 114*) reveals a number of holes that were drilled before the marble was cut to ensure a precise right angle and prevent the cracking to which marble is prone.⁸² This interest in the right-angled cut by Tobia Scarpa was shared with his architectural father. Kenneth Frampton has described the approach taken by Carlo Scarpa for the production of steel L-shaped brackets used in his buildings: 'Scarpa drilled a small hole at the crossing point so that the saw would change tone when it hit the intersection and thus produce a clean cut with no overrun'.⁸³ Scarpa senior would then insert 'a small brass washer at the point of intersection' in order 'to finish this productive detail'.⁸⁴ Left uncovered in the *Biagio*, this hole becomes the lamp's machine-produced aesthetic, one that echoes the modernist celebration of facture - what the Bauhaus teacher Lázsló Moholy-Nagy defined as 'the way in which something has been produced shows itself in the finished product'.⁸⁵ Associated with the Modernism of both the German School and Russian Constructivism, facture was taken up in the late 1960s by Process artists such as the American Robert Morris.⁸⁶ Here it acts as a new form of

⁸⁰ Tobia Scarpa, personal interview, 15 July 2009.

⁸¹ 'Tobia Scarpa: Cose Nuove', *Domus*, August 1970, p. 31; Scarpa, personal interview, 15 July 2009.

⁸² Mannoni, *Marble: History of a Culture* p. 12.

⁸³ Frampton, p. 308.

⁸⁴ Frampton, p. 308.

⁸⁵ Lázsló Moholy-Nagy in Christopher Phillips, *Photography in the Modern Era: European Documents and Critical Writings, 1913 - 1940* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1989), p. 101 in Adamson, *Thinking Through Craft*, p. 59.

⁸⁶ Adamson, *Thinking Through Craft*, pp. 58 - 59.



Illustration 114. The two halves of the *Biagio* lamp, after having being cut in half and prior to assembly.

decoration, one that aims beyond decoration's customary supplemental condition to be the direct outcome of the manufacture process. The potential for this to usurp the handmade associations of marble were explored by one of the more radical entrants in the competition - Mari.

3.2.4 Enzo Mari: Rejecting the Marble Myth

This new marble aesthetic was echoed by Mari in his competition entry. Mari argued that marble should be used 'not just as ornamental factor, but directly as primary structural element', as seen in the eight verticals of *The Big Stone Game* (See *Illustration 115*).⁸⁷ The only ornament, save the vein and colouring of each Travertine marble slab, are child-height eye holes designed to encourage play, a ludic quality present in several of the objects that Mari and Munari designed for Danese in the 1960s.⁸⁸

With the availability of 'more functional materials' in the 1960s Mari saw the use of marble as tenable only where it was 'functionally necessary (at competitive prices with materials that give the same result)' and preferably produced industrially.⁸⁹ In his rejection of the historical associations of marble and advocacy of machine production Mari was dismantling the marble myth. Dorfles cited this process of demythification as the way to redeem materials from the realm of kitsch, a cultural strategy being employed by the wider avant-garde at this time, as seen in Barthes' collection of articles in *Mythologies*.⁹⁰

One way Mari attempted to demythify marble was to visually play with its cultural associations. A construction set from 1962 (See *Illustration 116*) composed of the

⁸⁷ Enzo Mari in *Momenti del Marmo*, (Roma : M. Bulzoni, 1969), pp. 282 -283.

⁸⁸Examples include Mari's *Sedici Animali* wooden puzzle set from 1960. Stefano Casciani, *Arte Industriale: Gioco, Oggetto, Pensiero: Danese e la sua Produzione* (Milan: Arcadia Edizioni, 1988), p. 70, pp. 113 – 133.

⁸⁹ Mari in *Momenti del Marmo*, pp. 282 -283.

⁹⁰ Dorfles, 'Kitsch' in *Kitsch*, ed. by Dorfles, p. 26; Barthes, *Mythologies*, trans. by Annette Lavers, (London: Vintage, 2000).

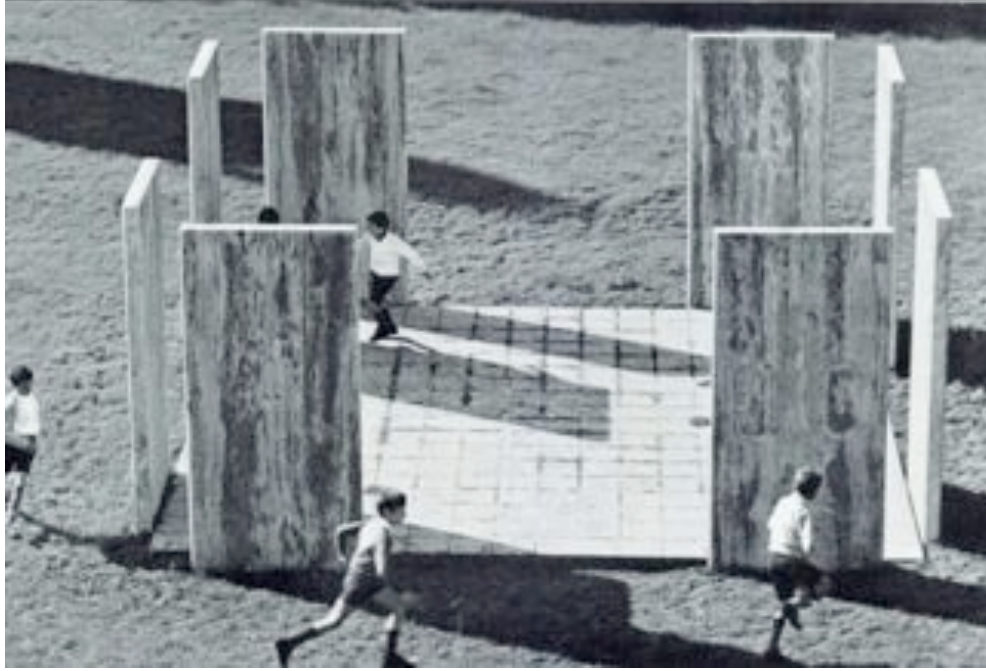


Illustration 115. Enzo Mari, *Big Stone Game*, designed for the 1968 *Mostra Nazionale della Carrara*. Eight slabs of Travertine marble, each with two circular holes at eye height.



Illustration 116. *Tetrastilo* play construction set, designed by Enzo Mari for Danese in 1962. Elements are made from a variety of marbles: Boujourdan, Statuary Carrara, Napoleon Grand Mélange and Travertine.

classical order of architecture is *Tetrastilo*, the term to describe a portico with four columns. *Tetrastilo* is not only a reminder not only of the potency of classical forms for twentieth century architects, but in its reduction of these archetypes to the level of irony and play acted to deconstruct the marble myth, in the process anticipating the postmodern turn in Italian architecture.⁹¹

Tetrastilo was not the only object by Mari named after marble's classical heritage - a cylindrical set of marble containers are *Paros*, the Greek island known for its fine white marble - although a number of different marbles are used here, from Statuary white to Belgian black. *Paros* (See *Illustration 117*) were first shown in 1964 at Danese's Milan showroom-gallery. In the exhibition leaflet Santini described the process of subtraction that defined their production:

A simple hollow cylinder, truncated/broken off at a certain point, then successively reduced in portions [...] taken away horizontal, diagonal, vertical. Every outline, even the most unexpected, is the result of the intersection of these cuts, on account of a rigorously predetermined "taking away."⁹²

Paros was a machine version of direct carving, the method developed by the Romanian sculptor Constantin Brancusi at the start of the twentieth century that results in simple, abstract forms.⁹³ In addition, as Santini suggests, these machine cuts have liberated a pre-existing form in the marble, a quality most famously associated with Michelangelo's approach to sculpture. Described by the Renaissance artist as 'that which is done by carving out', this practice was highly praised by

⁹¹ An Italian-located example of this would be *La Presenza del Passato* (The Presence of the Past), curated by Paolo Portoghesi at the Venice Biennale in 1980, and the first time that the Biennale would devote a section to architecture. Included installations by architects including Charles Jencks, Leon Krier, Aldo Rossi and Robert Venturi and Denise Scott Brown. See in particular the Austrian architect Hans Hollein's tetrastyle portico. Charles Jencks, 'The Presence of the Past', *Domus*, October 1980, pp. 9 - 15.

⁹² Santini, *Nuove Proposte di Enzo Mari per la Lavorazione del Marmo e del Vetro* (Milan: Danese, 1964)

⁹³ 'Direct Carving', *Tate Collection Glossary* <<http://www.tate.org.uk/collections/glossary/definition.jsp?entryId=89>> [accessed 7 March 2011]

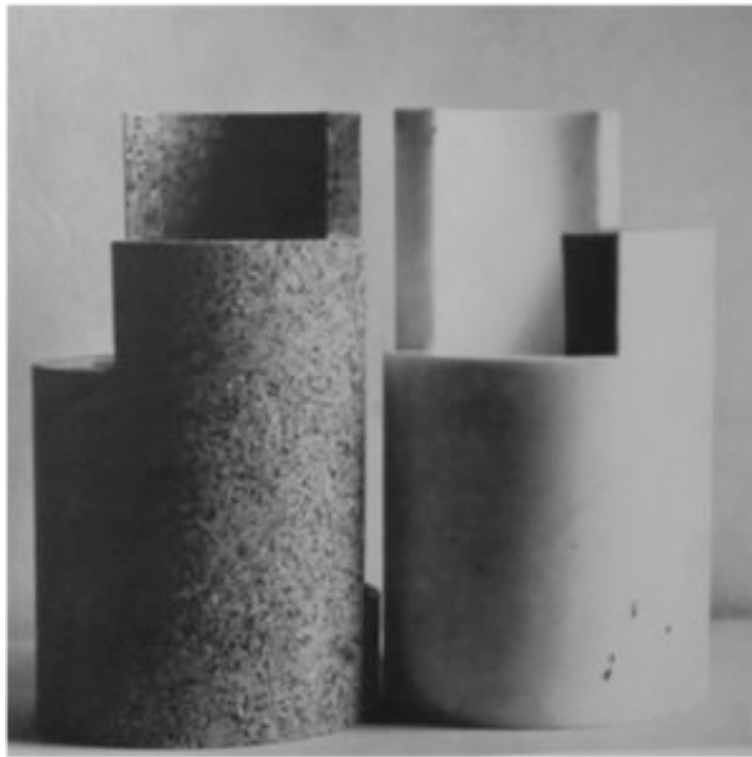


Illustration 117. Two examples from the *Paros* series of marble vases, designed by Enzo Mari for Danese in 1964. Available in a variety of marbles, including Statuary Carrara and Belgian black.

Vasari who interpreted the high proportion of incomplete Michelangelo sculptures, that showed figures emerging from roughly hewn marble, as testimony of the sculptor's employment of this approach.⁹⁴ In the twentieth century, Fontana confirmed marble's form-giving quality in another way. In 1928 he rejected 'slavery to the material' in favour of materials such as clay that could be worked by hand, or with few tools, in order to exploit what the ceramics writer Garth Clark has called 'the sensuality and immediacy of gesture'.⁹⁵ But if Fontana turned away from marble to embrace the sign of the hand, then Mari was using it precisely to negate the trace of touch.

Mari described his practice as one of research, aimed at 'experimenting with the modes of language for the purpose of attaining optimum means of communication'.⁹⁶ He approached marble as a clean slate, from what Barthes called a "degree zero", an avant-garde approach characteristic of art movements such as *Arte Povera* and *Arte Programmata* at the time.⁹⁷ Along with artists such as Munari and *Gruppo N* and *Gruppo T*, Mari was involved in the latter. Closely allied with Kinetic and Op art, the movement advocated the union of art and technology, the necessity of anonymous authorship in an age of mass production and the potential for art to transform the perspective of the viewer; this was the set of ideas that Mari wanted to communicate in his experiments for Danese.⁹⁸

A look at two other objects that Mari designed for Danese reinforces this idea. The first is *Putrella* (I-Beam) (See *Illustrations 118, 119*), a container made of a length of

⁹⁴ Letter from Michelangelo Buonarroti to Benedetto Varchi, 1549, in Franco Russoli, *All the Sculpture of Michelangelo* (London: Oldbourne, 1963), p. 71; Vasari, *Lives of the Artists*, p. 404.

⁹⁵ Sarah Whitfield, *Lucio Fontana* (London: Hayward Gallery, 1999) p. 21 in *Shards*, ed. by Pagliaro, p. 53.

⁹⁶ Mari, *The Function of Esthetic Research* (Milano, Edizioni di Comunità, 1970), p. 103.

⁹⁷ As Carolyn Christov-Bakaragiev notes of Piero Manzoni's *Achrome* painting from 1958, this was 'postulating a "degree zero" condition [...] from which a new art of life would emerge'. Christov-Bakaragiev, 'Thrust into the Whirlwind: Italian Art before Arte Povera' in *Zero to Infinity: Arte Povera 1962 - 1972*, ed. by Richard Flood and Frances Morris (London: Tate Gallery Publications, 2001), pp. 21 - 40 (p. 30.)

⁹⁸ For more on *Arte Programmata*, see *Arte Programmata e Kinetica, 1953 - 1963: L'Ultimo* | *Avanguardia* (Milan: Palazzo Reale, 1983).

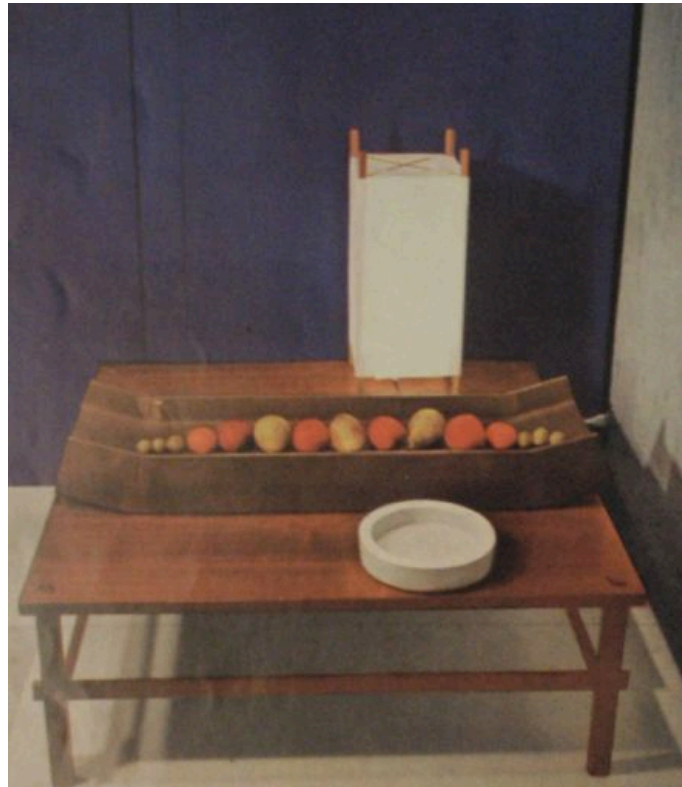


Illustration 118. *Putrella* (model 3013A) designed by Mari for Danese in 1958. Iron I-Beam, matt transparent varnish. Also visible: lamp designed by Bruno Munari, and round ashtray by Franco Meneguzzo, both for Danese.



Illustration 119. Another example from the *Putrella* series, the 3012A ashtray, showing the unsmoothed solder.

an iron I-Beam with upturned ends that first appeared in the Danese showroom in 1959, one of a series of forty vessels he designed. As with the *Biagio* the devil is in the details - this time not a neat drill hole but in the un-smoothed weld that runs its length. The architect Alberto Scarzella Mazzochi, who was also consultant to Milan's Sestante, a gallery that was praised in *Craft Horizons* for its displays of design-led crafts, described the value of this productive detail:

Mari, in these his pieces (made with mass-produced beams), has substituted the beauty of forging and the blow of the hammer for the doughiness and warmth of the weld with all its multi-coloured drips, to make it become an element of great emotive expressivity.⁹⁹

A weld is more than a joint. As a method of '*joining originally discrete surfaces in a tight connection*' it conforms to the German architectural theorist Gottfried Semper's definition of the seam, the 'motive' he identified as the basis for 'the whole theory and practice of art'.¹⁰⁰ The decorative qualities of the seam is also tied up in the issue of luxury. Semper cites Roman sumptuary laws from the fourth century that banned the Gothic fashion for 'lavishly embroidered, imported fur garments'.¹⁰¹ In response, decoration became 'visible only at the seams and borders', liminal sites in which the object's luxury was concentrated.¹⁰² Similarly, the excess solder in the *Putrella* does not function as a joint, but is the focal point of the object's aesthetic value. What is conventionally non-ornamental industrial waste is re-positioned as decoration, one that appealed, as Mari acknowledged, to the then-popular *Informale* aesthetic.¹⁰³

⁹⁹ Alberto Scarzella Mazzocchi, 'Ferro Saldato', 1960. Milan, Danese Vodoz Archive (DVA); Jan McDevitt 'Milan: "Piccolo" New York', *Craft Horizons*, March - April 1961, 29 - 37 (p. 32).

¹⁰⁰ Gottfried Semper, *Style in the Technical and Tectonic Arts: Or, Practical Aesthetics* (Los Angeles: Getty Publishing, 2004), p. 154. N. B. Italics were used in the original text.

¹⁰¹ Semper, p. 155.

¹⁰² Semper, p. 155.

¹⁰³ Arturo Carlo Quintavalle, *Enzo Mari*, (Parma: University of Parma, 1983), p. 155.

In transposing the tools and techniques of industrial to the realm of craft, Mari stated that he wanted to show that ‘the use of new machine tools does not limit the liberty and formal richness anachronistically deemed the exclusive heritage of craft (of the hand-made)’.¹⁰⁴ With all these objects he attempts to subvert the elitism that pervaded mainstream design in the 1960. It is not surprising that he chose marble, the consummate luxury material to attempt to render obsolete the deeply rooted idea that luxury had to both be and look hand-made. Of course this approach was ultimately quixotic. Marble was still marble, and the *Putrella*’s uneven lengths of solder are as much a mark of the hand as the chiselled surface of Michelangelo’s unfinished sculptures or Fontana’s punctured clay surfaces. Defined by Vittorio Gregotti as consisting of ‘inevitably deluxe products’, due in part to the small-scale of its manufacture, what Danese’s output showed was how luxury’s grip on the flow of commodities was tightening, spreading to that most industrial of materials, iron, and that most modern; plastics.¹⁰⁵

3.2.5 ‘Plastics for the Dolce Vita’: The Spread of Luxury in 1960s Italy

Plastics had been part of Italy’s productive landscape since the 1920s. First Celluloid, Bakelite and then by the 1920s dozens of different plastics were being produced in Italy by firms such as Montecatini and Pirelli.¹⁰⁶ As with other manmade materials, plastics’ early history had been one of substitution. In his *Mythologies* essay on ‘Plastic’ Barthes describes its kitsch-like origins, as a material that ‘belonging to the world of appearances [...] aimed at reproducing cheaply the rarest substances, diamonds silk, feathers, furs, silver, all the luxurious brilliance of the world’.¹⁰⁷ In Italy, this role shifted as the necessity of home-grown plastics under autarchy was promoted to become part of the campaign’s claim to provide luxury and leisure to all: for Schnapp, plastics was much a part of fascism’s ‘cult of national

¹⁰⁴ Mari in *Momenti del Marmo*, p. 283.

¹⁰⁵ Gregotti, ‘Italian Design, 1945 - 1971’ in *Italy: the New Domestic Landscape*, ed. by Ambasz, p. 336.

¹⁰⁶ Bosoni, ‘The Italian Way to Plastics’ in *The Plastics Age*, ed. by Sparke, p. 75.

¹⁰⁷ Barthes, *Mythologies*, p. 98.

fabrics' as marble.¹⁰⁸ According to the design historian Giovanni Klaus Koenig, the appropriation of such materials under the regime explains the love of natural and non-autarchic materials in the early post-war period.¹⁰⁹

Post-war, plastics were subject to scrutiny on the level of design. Specifically, there was the question of what plastics should look like: *l'Estetica della Plastica* (The Aesthetics of Plastic) was the title of both an exhibition at the 1956 *Fiera* and a special issue of *Stile Industria*.¹¹⁰ Giulio Castelli, Kartell's co-founder, was intensely interested in the design of plastics; in the magazine he described both the 'good' and 'bad' uses to which plastics were being put, and a few years later identified the problem of 'styling' in designers' response to plastics.¹¹¹ Kartell was seen as the exception to this problem of design in plastics. Established in 1949 by chemical engineer Castelli and his architect wife Anna Castelli Ferrieri, the Milanese firm had initially specialised in car accessories, lab equipment, lighting and household goods such as buckets and kitchen utensils.¹¹²

In 1964, Kartell cemented its place in the design sphere with the production of the first all-plastic chair, a first which earned it both a *Compasso d'Oro* and gold medal at that year's *Triennale*. Designed by Marco Zanuso and Richard Sapper, the model 4999 was an injection moulded polyethylene children's chair (*See Illustration 120*) four years in the making.¹¹³ Its bright colours, bold shape and youth-orientated production evinced the dissemination of a pop aesthetic in sixties design, one also visible in Joe Colombo's full-sized ABS version of the stackable chair for Kartell

¹⁰⁸ Schnapp, 'The Fabric of Modern Times', pp. 220-1.

¹⁰⁹ Giovanni Klaus Koenig, 'Plastic Articles for Use: from Substitutes to Independent Forms' in *Gli Anni di Plastica*, ed. by Pasquale Alferj and Francesca Cernia (Milan: Electa, 1983), p. 13.

¹¹⁰ This issue also contained an article on the exhibition: 'La 1a Mostra Internazionale dell'Estetica delle Materie Plastiche', *Stile Industria*, June 1956, pp. 4 - 5.

¹¹¹ Giulio Castelli, 'Buono o Cattivo Uso delle Materie Plastiche', *Stile Industria*, June 1956. pp. 10 -11; Castelli, 'Incontro del Designer con il Mondo dell'Industria: Il Designer di Fronte alle Materie Plastiche', *Triennale di Milano Arte-Artigianato-Industria: Convegno Nazionale*, Milan, Teatre dell'Arte, 29 September – 1 October 1960, ASTM,108 – 125 (p. 116).

¹¹² Anna Castelli-Ferrieri and Augusto Morello, *Plastic and Design*, trans. by Anthony Shugar (Milan: Arcadia, 1984), p. 242.

¹¹³ Castelli-Ferrieri and Morello, p. 136.



Illustration 120. 4999 children's chair, designed by Richard Sapper and Marco Zanuso in 1964 for Kartell. Made from injection moulded polyethylene and available in white, red, blue and yellow. Production of the chair stopped in 1979.

from 1968.¹¹⁴ Both of these chairs were seen to represent a new approach to plastics design, taking the material on its own terms rather than imitating another. In 1968, *Look* magazine confirmed Italy's leadership in its dealings with the synthetic: 'It is today's Italians who have really treated the virtues of the material itself - treating plastic as plastic'.¹¹⁵

Barthes described this post-war change in plastic's condition: the material had lost its imitative pretensions and had 'climbed down' to become 'the first magical substance which consents to be prosaic'.¹¹⁶ This democratic potential was seen by other critics in Italy; Argan saw plastics as enabling the possibility of producing furniture in which 'there was no longer a hierarchy between the ornamental, the useful, the instrumental. The measure of value is finally disconnected from that of cost and price'.¹¹⁷ Argan privileges what Marx terms 'use value' over 'exchange value', the latter an 'intrinsic value' of the commodity, a position that would be expressed more fully in radical design's critique of the commodity discussed in the next chapter.¹¹⁸

Despite these democratic aspirations, plastics was being promoted firmly positioned within the canon of the luxurious "Made in Italy" label. *Homes Furnishings Daily* declared:

"Made in Italy" is the new hallmark of prestige in plastic home furnishings. The Italians' respect for the inherent qualities of the material, their desire to ennoble plastics through use in furniture and lamps, their imaginative designs and their skilled labour have brought to Italy her second design renaissance since World War II.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁴ For more details on Colombo's 4860 chair, see Castell-Ferrieri and Morello, pp. 138 - 141.

¹¹⁵ John Peter, 'Good Things from Italy: La Dolce Vita', *Look*, 1 October 1968, 59 - 60 (p. 59). DVA.

¹¹⁶ Barthes, *Mythologies*, p. 98

¹¹⁷ Argan, 'Abito, Dunque Sono' in Daniele Baroni, 'La Plastica: Una Rivoluzione Incompiuta', *Ottagono*, December 1979, 44 - 57, (p. 56).

¹¹⁸ For Marx's discussion on 'use value' and 'exchange value' see Marx, *Capital*, I, pp. 43 - 48.

¹¹⁹ E V. Massai, 'Plastics: Milan', *Home Furnishings Daily*, 31 March 1968, p. 10. DVA.

Plastics was being sold as being endowed with the same qualities of place-bred identity seen in the other materials discussed in this chapter. This is reinforced in the *Look* article, which was entitled 'Good Things from Italy: Plastics for the Dolce Vita'. Its author admiringly describes the 'svelte curves, bold colours and polished surfaces [...] style enough to give anyone the savour of tomorrow's sweet life'.¹²⁰ Kartell, Artemide and Danese were all mentioned, as were their designers, including Castelli Ferrieri, Emma Gismondi, Mari and Vico Magistretti, whose designs were featured in a photo (*See Illustration 121*) accompanying the article. They are set against a backdrop of a fifteenth century rural chapel - whose portico and columns are those of Mari's *Tetrastilo* - a juxtaposition that asserts a continuity between Italy's classical tradition and its contemporary plastic design, therefore grounding the material in both history and place. The colours of the design items chosen reinforce this - the red and white hues of the plastic objects are offset by the green grass of the Pavian countryside, the colours those of Italy's *Tricolore* flag.

This assertion of the *italianità* of these objects was not without foundation. In addition to the number of synthetic fabrics developed in Italy in the 1930s, Giulio Natta's receipt of the Nobel Prize for Chemistry in 1963 for the invention of polypropylene acted as another marker of at least some plastics' Italian identity. Despite some controversies over its origins, with claims from Japan and Britain as the originators of this material, Renzo Marchelli calls it 'an all Italian plastic material', one that really was "Made in Italy".¹²¹ Despite this 'sense of place', the potential for plastic to be considered a luxury does need further consideration.

3.2.6 Can Plastic be a Luxury?

We might be forgiven for questioning plastic's luxury status. Barthes dismissed it on the grounds of artificiality alone: 'a luxurious object is still of this earth, it still

¹²⁰ Peter, p. 59.

¹²¹ Renzo Marchelli, 'A History - with a Little Nostalgia' in *Pensieri di Plastica/Plastic Thoughts*, ed. by Luca Scacchi Gracco (Milan: Mondadori, 1986), p. 31.



Illustration 121. Article from *Look* magazine on contemporary Italian plastic design. From left: Red *Studio 80* table, 1967, white *Selene* chair, 1961 and red and white *Demetrio 45* stacking tables, 1966, red *Eclisse* lamp, 1966, designed by Vico Magistretti for Artemide; table lamp *Passiflora* designed by Superstudio for Poltronova, 1966; round white and red *Giano Vano* bedside tables, Emma Gismondi for Artemide, 1966; white *Borneo* ashtray and *Lampedusa* pencil holder, Enzo Mari for Danese; white *Nesso* lamp designed by Giancarlo Mattioli for Artemide, 1967. Plastic glasses unknown.

recalls, albeit it in a precious mode, its mineral or animal origin'.¹²² Yet as Baudrillard has suggested, the perceived naturalness of a material is relative, nothing but a question of age: 'we apprehend old synthetic materials such as paper as altogether natural - indeed, glass is one of the richest substances we can conceive of'.¹²³

Plastics shared other qualities in common with more recognisably luxury material. The materials specialist Ezio Manzini describes its qualities of shine and polish as deriving from 'a complex cultural heritage based on metals, enamels and lacquers' and glass and marble.¹²⁴ It is on the level of materiality that confirmation of plastics' luxury condition appears in the 1960s, with the imitation of plastics' material qualities. As Branzi notes, the wooden frames and surfaces of the armchair, sofas, bar, table and sideboard of Leila and Massimo Vignelli's *Saratoga* series (See *Illustration 122*) for Poltronova were varnished in black or white glossy polyester lacquer and 'offered an image very similar to plastic'.¹²⁵

Plastics illustrates the shifting nature of the luxury commodity, one that expands to correspond to the growth of the consumer landscape. It met all the criteria of the luxury object discussed so far. On the one hand, it conformed to Berry's argument that 'luxuries are by definition always out of reach of mass consumption'.¹²⁶ This was true of the early plastics produced by Italian firms such as Artemide, set up by the *Politecnico* engineering graduate Ernesto Gismondi and the architect Sergio Mazza in 1959.¹²⁷ It would soon graduate to larger scales of production, but as with firms such as Tecno and Zanotta in the sixties it could only produce a limited number

¹²² Barthes, *Mythologies*, p. 99

¹²³ Baudrillard, *The System of Objects*, p. 38.

¹²⁴ Ezio Manzini, *The Material of Invention: Materials and Design* (London: Design Council, 1986) p. 184.

¹²⁵ Branzi, *Un Museo del Design Italiano: Il Design Italiano 1964 – 1990* (Milan: Electa, 1996), pp. 50, 56.

¹²⁶ Berry, p. 32.

¹²⁷ 'Artemide' in *Dizionario del Design Italiano*, ed. by Pansera (Milan: Cantini, 1995), p. 22.



Illustration 122. White versions of the *Saratoga* living room suite, including the sofa, two armchairs and coffee table, in the house of the American architect Richard Meier, 1970. Furniture designed by Lella and Massimo Vignelli for Poltronova, 1964.

of objects. Even the larger-scale Kartell subcontracted the manufacturing stage to bigger firms such as Industria Componenti Stampati and Pirelli.¹²⁸

Furthermore, even if these plastic designs did not look like the products of craftsmanship, manual skill was still instrumental to plastics production. This can be partly attributed to the ongoing importance of close architect-artisan relations in product development: so complex was the S-shaped section of the *Selene* that Magistretti said ‘it couldn’t be drawn [...] But there was this sublime model-maker, you just went to him and you spoke to him’.¹²⁹ It was also due to the relocation of artisanal skills from the workshop to the factory, to the preparatory stage of mould making. Here the importance of Rosselli’s ‘new’ craft practitioners, discussed in the previous chapter, reappears: in 1968 Castelli stated that ‘a steel mold is composed of 90% skilled labour. Italy is a country where such labour is still available at unusually reasonable prices’.¹³⁰

Different plastics demanded different manufacturing processes of varying degrees of industrialisation. For the production of complex or large size furniture made from glass fibre and polyester resin, Artemide and Kartell relied on what Massai called a ‘semi-artisan process’ in which wooden moulds were spread with layers of fibreglass and resin and then polymerized in a heated chamber.¹³¹ In all cases ‘polishing, finishing and mounting’ were still hand-processes at Kartell.¹³²

It was not surprising that Artemide and Kartell still relied on semi-artisanal procedures. Mould-making was a costly business. Castelli revealed that in 1964 the mould for the *4999* chair cost over eleven thousand dollars and ‘only now [in 1968]

¹²⁸ Morello, ‘Plastic, and Plastic Materials’ in Castelli-Ferrieri and Morello, *Plastic and Design*, p. 44.

¹²⁹ Magistretti in S. Giacomoni and A. Marcolli, *Designer Italiani* (Milan: 1988) p. 187 in Pasca, *Vico Magistretti*, p. 49

¹³⁰ Castelli in Peter, p. 60.

¹³¹ Massai, p. 10.

¹³² Massai, p. 10.

is it paying back the money invested'.¹³³ This high initial investment was exacerbated by costly errors: as they could only afford to have one model made of the chair, made in wood by the specialist Milanese model maker Giovanni Sacchi, they could not test its stackable element.¹³⁴ Unfortunately, it turned out that the first mould they made produced a chair that could not be stacked, and so the development process had to be repeated.¹³⁵ Plastic materials could be costly too, as Bruno Danese noted: 'contrary to what is generally thought, however, plastic material of quality is not cheap'.¹³⁶

The plastic furnishings made by these small, design-led firms were necessarily expensive; whether to compensate for the cost of materials, the initial investment in tooling required for the steel moulds, or the greater labour involved in the 'semi-artisan process': it took four to six hours to produce one chair by the latter, compared to just five minutes to form a *Selene* (See Illustrations 123 and 124), a productivity that Artemide advertised in 1970 by opening its factory to the public – a spectacle of the industrial age even more astonishing than Ponti's bouncing plastic-like *Superleggera*.¹³⁷

According to Sparke, it was in part this expense that meant that objects made from this 'most democratic' of materials had to be sold as luxuries - and it was design that offered the way to do this:

¹³³ Massai, p. 10.

¹³⁴ Castelli in 'Giulio Castelli' in *La Fabbrica del Design*, ed. by Antonelli, Castelli and Picchi, pp. 26 - 36 (p. 31).

From his Milan workshop Giovanni Sacchi produced his first design model for the architect Marcello Nizzoli, the Lexicon 80 for Olivetti, produced in 1948. He would go on to produce wooden models for Italian architects such as Aulenti, Sottsass and Zanuso and many more from Italy's design community. See Piero Polato, *Il Modello nel Design: La Bottega di Giovanni Sacchi* (Milan: Hoepli, 1991).

¹³⁵ Castelli in 'Giulio Castelli' in *La Fabbrica del Design*, ed. by Antonelli, Castelli and Picchi, p. 31.

¹³⁶ Bruno Danese, 'Plastics' in *Design Since 1945*, ed. by Katherine Hiesinger and George H. Marcus (London: Thames & Hudson in association with the Philadelphia Museum of Art, 1983) p. 167.

¹³⁷ Massai, p. 10; 'Una Sedia Ogni Cinque Minuti', *Domus*, February 1970, pp. 44-45.



Illustrations 123 and 124. Two stage from the compression moulding process of Magistretti's fibreglass *Selene* chair at the Artemide factory in the Milanese hinterland, 1970.

to justify their high prices, plastic furniture had to become “de luxe” objects rather than cheap accessories. To this end skilled designers such as Magistretti, Colombo and Rosselli set about evolving slick modern forms, the shiny surfaces and voluptuous curves they created symbolically transformed plastic from a cheap into a luxury material.¹³⁸

This was not the democratisation of luxury that emerged in the consumer revolution of late nineteenth century France or early twentieth century Art Nouveau, but its reverse - the endowing of the qualities of luxury onto plastics, and a transformation that spoke of the infinite alchemy of plastic.¹³⁹ Arguably it was precisely this chameleon-like ability Barthes was writing against: ‘the quick change-artistry of plastic’ meaning that it could ‘become buckets as well as jewels’.¹⁴⁰ In what Barthes called this ‘plasticized’ world, plastics covered all cultural bases, a totalising quality indelibly linked with the rise of consumerism and leisure, expressed in art and design terms in the language of pop.¹⁴¹

In the sixties, plastics was increasingly identified with the emergent pop culture, whose American artists were first shown in Italy at the 1964 *Biennale*.¹⁴² Design’s engagement with Pop was most visible in the *Valentine* typewriter, designed by Sottsass with the British designer Perry King for Olivetti in 1969. Pop permeated the bright red typewriter: it was inspired by Claes Oldenburg’s *Soft Typewriter* from 1963, one of a number of his “soft sculptures” whose influence would also be seen in objects such as *Blow*, *Sacco* and *Joe* armchairs made by Zanotta.¹⁴³ Like a

¹³⁸ Sparke, *Italian Design 1870 to the Present*, pp. 167, 169.

¹³⁹ Rosalind H. Williams, *Dream Worlds: Mass Consumption in Late Nineteenth Century France* (Berkeley; Los Angeles; London: California University Press, 1982), p. 11.

¹⁴⁰ Barthes, *Mythologies*, p. 97.

¹⁴¹ Barthes, *Mythologies*, p. 99.

¹⁴² Fagiolo dell’Arco, ‘The Literature of Pop’ in *The Italian Metamorphosis*, ed. by Celant, pp. 290 - 304 (p. 304).

¹⁴³ Richard Carr, ...*With Sottsass Catching Up* (Glasgow: The Lighthouse, 1999), n.p.; Sparke, *Ettore Sottsass Jnr*, p. 49. *Blow* was designed by Paolo Lomazzi, Jonathan De Pas, Donato D’Urbino and Carla Scolari in 1967, *Sacco* by Piero Gatti, Cesare Paolini and Franco Teodoro in 1968 and *Joe* by De Pas, D’Urbino and Paolo Lomazzi in 1970.

Lichtenstein painting, it took its name from a comic strip.¹⁴⁴ These pop credentials were played on in the American advertising campaign (*See Illustration 125*) in which Olivetti's typewriters are depicted as works of Pop Art - the oversized *Valentine* resembles the Oldenberg sculpture that inspired it. In Britain and Italy it was sold as a transportable leisure accessory (*See Illustration 126*), one 'invented for use any place except in an office, so as not to remind anyone of monotonous working hours, but rather to keep amateur poets company on quiet Sundays in the country'.¹⁴⁵

Sottsass's embrace of pop culture was an attempt to overcome the increasing elitism of Italian design and to re-connect with the consumer. In his design for the *Valentine*, he was not concerned with improving the product's performance but in its communicative potential.¹⁴⁶ The architect understood the symbolism behind the aesthetic of objects, one that had a significant impact on the relationship between the object and its user – a quality that he would explore further as the sixties and seventies progressed. The emphasis on the semiotic nature of the typewriter and the appropriation of the pop aesthetic embodied the shift in theoretical tools in this period - and that this chapter has charted through the reference to Barthes, Baudrillard, Dorfles and Eco – all who interested in the potential of linguistics for understanding contemporary society. This was occurring on an international scale: the 1963 conference of the International Council of Societies of Industrial Design (ICSID), that year held in Paris, declared the end of 'art criticism applied to design and the birth of sociology and the theory of information'.¹⁴⁷

The rise in linguistics and semiotics and their embrace in the design sphere was also visible at the 1964 *Triennale*, which attempted to take apart the myths of leisure and the mass media and expose the reality of Italy's consumer society in the 1960s. The following section uses the thirteenth instalment of the exhibition to discuss the larger

¹⁴⁴ *Valentine* was the name of a comic strip created by Guido Crepax in 1965. *I'm No Lady*, ed. by Annicchiarico, p. 92.

¹⁴⁵ *Design Process Olivetti 1908 - 1983* (Ivrea: Olivetti, 1983) p. 122.

¹⁴⁶ Sparke, *Ettore Sottsass Jnr*, p. 32.

¹⁴⁷ Alfonso Grassi and Pansera, *Atlante del Design Italiano* (Milan: Gruppo Editoriale Fabbri, 1980), p. 47.



Illustration 125. American advertisement for 'The Olivetti Collection', c. 1969. Clockwise, from bottom left: *Lettera 33*, *Lettera 31*, *Lettera 32*, and *Valentine*. All designed by Ettore Sottsass, except for the *Lettera 32*, designed by Marcello Nizzoli.



Illustration 126. English-language advertisement for the *Valentine*, featured in *Domus* in 1969. The copy reads: 'Charlie Townsend, from Cardiff, scholar, carries it at the weekend to sit and write with Valentine in the grass.'

socio-political shifts that were going on in Italy at this time, necessary to understand in order to understand the changing role that craft would have in the emerging countercultural strand in Italian design.

3.2.7 The Problem of Leisure at the 1964 *Triennale*

The 1964 *Triennale* offered the fullest expression of the semiotic turn in Italian architecture and design. With its theme of *Il Tempo Libero* (leisure) this *Triennale* was not focused on the structural sphere of production, but rather the superstructural sphere of culture - chiefly, mass consumption and leisure. Design products were reduced to small sections such as one of winners of that year's *Compasso d'Oro* - including Zanuso and Sapper's chair - while craft products were described as 'near non-existent'.¹⁴⁸

The theme of leisure was timely. The 1960s marked, as Martin Clark has described, the advent of Italy as a 'leisured society'.¹⁴⁹ Higher wages, shorter working hours and the increasing commonality of the five day week saw a rise in both holiday taking and more 'everyday' leisure activities; much of these were American-imported cultural forms, from bowling to juke boxes, light music to mini-golf.¹⁵⁰

The *Triennale* was concerned with the effect of these mass forms of leisure on the individual and aimed to demonstrate to the viewer how they had been 'habituated to a sort of stereotype [...] a mystification' about the concept of leisure.¹⁵¹ On entering the building the visitor encountered a series of 'theoretical-introductory' sections,

¹⁴⁸ Gino Traversi, 'L'Arte alla XIII *Triennale* di Milano', *Fenarete: Lettere d'Italia*, 1964, 23 - 24 (p. 24.) ASTM, XIII *Triennale* di Milano, 1964, Rassegna Stampa.

¹⁴⁹ Ciampi, p. 14. and Clark, p. 369.

¹⁵⁰ Holiday taking grew by eleven percent every year in the early 1960s, and between 1959 and 1968 the proportion of the *population* taking at least one holiday per year doubled to just over a quarter. Table - 'Extent of Holiday Taking by Italians' in *Patterns in Leisure and Holiday Travel in Three European Countries: Sweden, France and Italy* (London: British Travel Education Trust, 1977) p. 64; Ciampi, p. 186.

¹⁵¹ Eco and Gregotti, '1/Sezione Introduttiva a Carattere internazionale' in *Tredicesima Triennale di Milano* (Milan: *Triennale* di Milano, 1964), p. 14.

curated by Eco and Gregotti.¹⁵² The last of these was the most arresting - a 'kaleidoscope' (See *Illustration 127*), onto whose floor were projected two films by the Italian filmmaker Tinto Brass: *Il Tempo del Lavoro* (Work Time) and *Il Tempo Libero* (Leisure Time). Shown simultaneously, and made up largely of the same footage, these were intended to show the crossovers between the two realms.¹⁵³ Both the films and the spectator were infinitely reflected in the mirrored prism. This was an intentional gesture, as *Domus* noted: the visitor's reflected movements became 'complicit in the mechanicalness of the rhythms and reflections' in order to remind us that 'we are never free', an argument echoed by writers such as Baudrillard at this time.¹⁵⁴

This criticism for the concept of leisure at the *Triennale* reflected a bigger intellectual interest in leisure in Italy, and was part of a larger international critique of what the economist Kenneth Galbraith critically termed *The Affluent Society*, a highly influential publication that was repeatedly cited in Ciampi's own book on the subject.¹⁵⁵ It came at a time when the myths of Italy's economic 'miracle' were beginning to unravel; in 1963 Giorgio Bocca published his *La Scoperta dell'Italia* (The Discovery of Italy) which recounted the other side of the boom; 'hunger and misery remain even in the Italy of the miracle [...] a misery incapable of recognising itself, of the poor use the reason of the rich, of the hungry that believed themselves sated'.¹⁵⁶ This was also the year that, as Zamagni has noted, marked the end of the 'miraculous' phase of Italy's economic growth: 1963 had witnessed the first round of inflation and the impact of higher wages, that reduced the competitiveness of Italy's exports and in turn 'had serious repercussions for the country's balance of payments'.¹⁵⁷

¹⁵² Eco and Gregotti, p. 14.

¹⁵³ Eco and Gregotti, p. 15.

¹⁵⁴ 'Prime Immagini della Tredicesima *Triennale*', *Domus*, August 1964, p. 9; Baudrillard, *The Consumer Society*, p. 155.

¹⁵⁵ John Kenneth Galbraith, *The Affluent Society* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1958); For references in Ciampi's *Il Tempo Libero in Italia* see Ciampi, pp. 23, 58.

¹⁵⁶ Giorgio Bocca, *La Scoperta dell'Italia* (Bari: Laterza, 1963), n.p.

¹⁵⁷ Zamagni, *The Economic History of Italy*, p. 338.



Illustration 127. 'Kaleidoscope' installation at the 1964 twelfth *Triennale*, the final part of the introductory sections curated by Umberto Eco and Vico Magistretti.

The intellectual position at the *Triennale* also embodied a larger cultural and political shift in Italy, namely the re-emergence and reconfiguration of the Left. Between 1953 and 1963 the DC had maintained power through a series of right-wing coalitions, but by the onset of the 1960s their policy of excluding the left had become untenable - as the wave of strikes following their attempt to form a government with the neo-fascist *Movimento Sociale Italiano* (Italian Social Movement (MSI)) demonstrated.¹⁵⁸ The formation of the first Centre-Left coalition between the DC and *Partita Socialista Italiana* (Italian Socialist Party (PSI)) in 1963 was informed by the declining influence of the Christian Right, and the Church, in the face of increasing secularisation.¹⁵⁹ The PCI's exclusion from this alliance testified to the party's weakness and inner turmoil in this period; following the making public in 1956 of Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev's 'secret speech' that revealed the atrocities committed under Joseph Stalin's regime, the PCI lost nearly a quarter of its members, falling to one and a half million by 1966.¹⁶⁰

The PCI was still a strong cultural force in the 1960s. Its daily *L'Unità* newspaper was outsold only by the right wing *Corriere della Sera* and nearly one million people attended Togliatti's funeral in Rome in 1964.¹⁶¹ The party leader's death marked a shift in its politics, bringing the end to his Stalinist tradition and what Ginsborg describes as his top down 'Gramscian strategy'.¹⁶² Instead, like its Anglo-American counterparts, the Italian 'New Left' broke from orthodox Marxism and proposed a re-reading of Marx as what Giovanni Bechelloni termed as 'the sociologist of capitalist society'.¹⁶³ The work of international theorists such as Adorno, Guy Debord and the

¹⁵⁸ Lumley, *States of Emergency: Cultures of Revolt in Italy from 1968 to 1978* (London, New York: Verso, 1990) p. 14

¹⁵⁹ Percy Allum, 'Uniformity Undone: Aspects of Catholic Culture in Postwar Italy' in *Culture and Conflict in Postwar Italy*, ed. by Barański and Lumley, pp. 83 - 96 (p. 91).

¹⁶⁰ Ginsborg, p. 290

¹⁶¹ Ginsborg, p. 291

¹⁶² Ginsborg, p. 291

¹⁶³ Giovanni Bechelloni, *Cultura e Ideologia nella Nuova Sinistra*, (Milan: [n. pub] 1973), p. xii in Lumley, *States of Emergency*, p. 34.

French Situationists were all instrumental in this new intellectual trend, the voices of a Europe that Robert Lumley describes as ‘struggling to come to terms with a rise of commercial culture to which the United States had become habituated’.¹⁶⁴

Initially both left and right were united in their hostility towards mass culture for the Americanisation of Italian society it represented. Eco however proposed the need to understand mass culture, and argued that the fledgling field of semiotics was the only tool possible to do this; an approach that informed works such as 1962’s *Opera Aperta* and 1964’s *Apocalittici e Integrati*.¹⁶⁵ In the latter, Eco divided intellectuals into two groups based on their relationship with mass culture. The *apocalittici* (apocalyptic) are those who see it as ‘anti-culture [...] the mark of an irretrievable loss, in the face of which the man of culture [...] cannot do otherwise than give an extreme, apocalyptic testimony’.¹⁶⁶ This is compared to the *integrati* (integrated) intellectuals’ optimism on the democratising effects of mass culture.¹⁶⁷ Eco adopted the position of neither the *apocalittici* nor the *integrati*. However, in his openness to mass culture he demonstrates an interest that Lumley attributes to not having been brought up with mass culture himself, leading him to see it as possessing ‘the slightly exotic aura of forbidden fruit (an idea reinforced by its largely American provenance.)’.¹⁶⁸ While Eco represented this inbetween position in the literary realm, Sottsass was its embodiment in design terms; a position that would have a deep impact on his design practice as the sixties progressed, and not only see him engage with craft, but, like Mari, challenge the craftsmanship so associated with Italian design in this period.

¹⁶⁴ Lumley, ‘Introduction’ in Eco: *Apocalypse Postponed*, ed. by Lumley (London: Flamingo, 1995) pp. 9-10, 12.

¹⁶⁵ Eco, *The Open Work*, trans. by Anna Cacogni (London: Hutchinson Radius, 1989).

¹⁶⁶ Eco, *Apocalypse Postponed*, p. 28.

¹⁶⁷ Eco, *Apocalypse Postponed*, p. 28.

¹⁶⁸ Lumley, ‘Introduction’ in Eco, *Apocalypse Postponed*, p. 11.

3. 2.8 Sottsass and the Rejection of Luxury

Sottsass's interest in American culture demonstrates a similar position to Eco. The architect visited the country on a number of occasions in the 1950s and early 1960s, trips which would have a significant impact on his practice. The first of these was in 1956, when Sottsass was commissioned to design furnishings and accessories for the New York firm Raymor. Amongst his designs were his first ceramic objects (*See Illustration 128*), a series of vases in elementary forms described in *Domus* as illustrating Sottsass's desire to 'reconnect, even if from a distance, to that Italian ceramic tradition, that is a bit folkloristic, in which the material is simple and primitive, and the forms a bit full and shapely, fundamentally simple and unsophisticated', as compared to the 'hard and difficult' forms of Scandinavian ceramics that Sparke describes as 'flooding the market' at this time.¹⁶⁹ They were made at the Bitossi factory in the Tuscan town of Montelupo Fiorentino with the collaboration of the firm's art director, Aldo Landi.¹⁷⁰ This in turn opened up another opportunity: while overseeing production at the factory, Sottsass got to know Sergio Cammilli, the owner of nearby Poltronova, set up in Agliana in 1957 as a 'small workshop' dedicated to 'modern production' such as Aulenti's *Sgarsul* and the Vignelli's *Saratoga* pieces.¹⁷¹ Shortly afterwards Sottsass became the firm's artistic director.¹⁷²

In 1965 Sottsass designed a series of furniture for Poltronova which exemplified his interest in Pop. Amongst them were the cartoon-like curves of the walnut *Barbarella* bureau, which, like the *Valentine* took its name from a comic strip character.¹⁷³ As

¹⁶⁹ 'Nuove Ceramiche', *Domus*, March 1957, 48 - 51 (pp. 48, 49); Sparke, *Ettore Sottsass Jnr*, p. 37.

¹⁷⁰ 'Nuove Ceramiche', p. 49.

¹⁷¹ Santini, 'Filosofia di un' Azienda: Sperimentare per Vivere' in *Facendo Mobili con Archizoom, Asti, Aulenti, Ceroli, de Pas d'Urbino Lomazzi, Ernst, Fini, Mangiarotti, Marotta, Mendini, Michelucci, Nespolo, Portoghesi, Ruffi, Sottsass, Superstudio, Vignelli* (Florence: Poltronova Edizioni, 1977), pp. 7 - 13 (p. 8).

¹⁷² Sergio Cammilli in 'Sergio Cammilli', *La Fabbrica del Design*, ed. by Antonelli, Castelli and Picchi, pp. 210 - 216 (p. 210).

¹⁷³ *Barbarella* was the name of the heroine of Jean Claude Forest's 1962 comic strip, which became the eponymously titled film starring Brigitte Bardot in 1968, directed by Roger Vadim. *I'm no Lady*, ed. by Annicchiarico, p. 90.



Illustration 128. Ceramics designed by Sottsass for Raymor, made by the Florentine firm Bitossi with the assistance of its artistic-technical director, Aldo Landi.

with the typewriter, these pop qualities were played up in its promotion: one photograph showed the *Barbarella* (See *Illustration 129*) in front of a series of posters for a Dean Martin film, above it a print of Warhol's *Liz Taylor* from 1964.

Sottsass described this collection as influenced by his visit to California with his then wife Nanda Pivano. Pivano was a writer and journalist whose translations of the Beat generation authors opened up the Italian public to the contemporary American literature.¹⁷⁴ In 1962 Sottsass and Pivano had travelled to California, where they visited the homes of Allen Ginsberg, Bob Dylan, the poet Lawrence Ferlinghetti and even the Hell's Angels.¹⁷⁵ Sottsass recounted the houses of this extended social circle, whose inhabitants had

thrown the illogicalities and contradictions of the bourgeois, low bourgeois and proletarian consumeristic environment out of the window and had been left with empty rooms, with mattresses on the floor, with letters in cardboard boxes, with the shining refrigerators slashed with the points of scissors and the few pieces of furniture left - old chairs and writing desks collected in the high streets around the garbage cans - had a strange look, as of funereal monuments in the middle of the dirty square of those emptied rooms.¹⁷⁶

The Poltronova furniture was inspired by this annulment of the object's function as a status symbol that these homes exemplified, and instead searched for a new design language - one that here, as Sparke notes, 'looked less like shelves than traffic lights, dials and mechanical equipment'.¹⁷⁷

Sottsass's American experiences were not the only foreign encounter to influence his design practice: also visible in the furniture is the impact of Sottsass's trip to India,

¹⁷⁴ 'Autobiografia' <<http://www.fernandapivano.it/italiano/autobiografia.htm>> [accessed 28 February 2011]

¹⁷⁵ Sottsass, 'notes for a lecture', in Sparke, *Ettore Sottsass Jnr*, p. 40

¹⁷⁶ Sottsass, 'notes for a lecture' in Sparke, *Ettore Sottsass Jnr*, p. 40

¹⁷⁷ Sparke, *Ettore Sottsass Jnr*, p. 40.



Illustration 129. Promotional image for the *Barbarella* bureau, designed by Sottsass in 1965 for Poltronova. Walnut, with aluminium details. Above the bureau is a print of *Liz Taylor* by Andy Warhol, 1964. Pasted on the wall behind are posters advertising *Il Silenziatore* (The Silencers) from 1966, directed by Phil Karlson. Photograph, c. 1966.

Burma and Nepal in 1961. His experiences there represented a cultural awakening for Sottsass, one that was most visible in the two ceramic collections (*See Illustration 130 and 131*) he produced following a serious kidney illness in 1962: the *Ceramiche delle Tenebre* (Ceramics of Darkness) from 1963 and the *Ceramiche della Shiva* (The Ceramics of Shiva) from 1964, both of which were exhibited at Milan's Sestante gallery.¹⁷⁸ They used the iconography of eastern religions in their elemental surface decoration and forms, a primitivist aesthetic that also informed the Raymor ceramics and Poltronova furniture. As Jan Burney would later describe, these ceramics 'seem to symbolise not only his liberation from illness but also the social freedoms embraced by the hippies and the freedom from Western materialist ideology that he had found in India'.¹⁷⁹

These ceramics positioned Sottsass at the vanguard of the counter-cultural strand that was emerging in Italian design in the sixties. He rejected the conservative, luxurious elegance of "Made in Italy" in order to produce designs that Sparke describes as 'rooted in human values', embarking on an anti-functionalism that would reach its apogee in the radical design movement of the late sixties and early seventies.¹⁸⁰ As part of this turn away from the consumerist mainstream, Sottsass sought not only to temper the Italian obsession with the luxury commodity, but to design against it – and to use not just craft materials, such as ceramics, but craft qualities, such as workmanship, to do so.

This was evident in two of his interiors from the 1960s. The first is from 1963, designed for Mario Tchou, Olivetti's technical director and a close friend of the architect, and made by Renzo Brugola. Born in 1924 in the Brianza town of Lissone, Brugola was a jazz-shop owner turned cabinetmaker who had been working with the architect since 1957.¹⁸¹ Amongst Sottsass's projects that Brugola realised were the

¹⁷⁸ Fulvio Ferrari, *Ettore Sottsass: Tutta la Ceramica* (Turin: U. Allemandi, c1996), p. 18.

¹⁷⁹ Burney, p. 100.

¹⁸⁰ Sparke, *Ettore Sottsass Jnr*, p. 46.

¹⁸¹ Renzo Brugola, personal Interview, 13 April 2010, (APPENDIX I); Emilio Tadini, 'Interview', *Abitare*, 306, April 1992, pp. 244 - 245, 298.



Illustration 130. Example from the *Ceramiche di Tenebre* (The Ceramics of Darkness) series, designed by Sottsass and made by Bitossi in 1963.

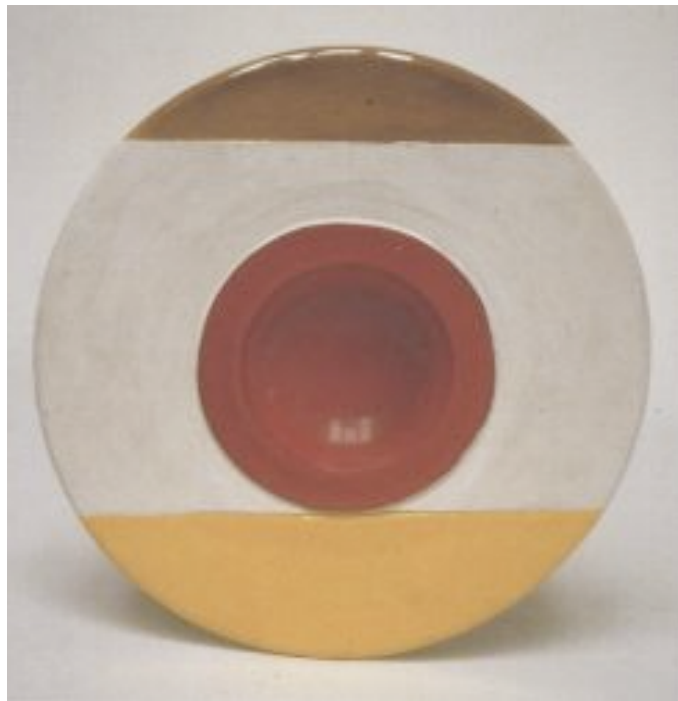


Illustration 131. Example from the *Ceramiche della Shiva* (The Ceramics of Shiva), designed by Sottsass and made by Bitossi, in 1964.

furnishings for the architect's entrance areas at the 1960 *Triennale* as well as the first Memphis collection from 1981 - as the last chapter will discuss. Describing the Tchou project in *Domus*, Sottsass focused on Brugola's approach to furniture: 'Brugola from Lissone is no use for making intelligent, hermetic, elegant houses but is useful for making houses with Sottsass [...] where the wood remains a bit broken, where the measurements are always wrong'.¹⁸² This was not an insult to Brugola's workmanship. Rather, Brugola understood and was able to translate Sottsass's rejection of the perfect craftsmanship of the luxury object, a quality that was evident in what Brugola described as the architect's own 'sketchy', imperfect drawings.¹⁸³

'Un Soggiorno Molto Semplice' (A Very Simple Living Room) from 1967 (*See Illustrations 132 and 133*) rejected the other facet of luxury that Sottsass outlined in his earlier *Domus* article from 1954: precious materials. Instead of choosing the exotic woods that 'land on the banks of Cantù', Sottsass described this as an interior in which

The cushions are not new and the sofas are mass produced [...] the textiles [...] shocking pink in colour, so as to give a bit of transparency to those "luxurious" and opulent affairs that are sofas, normally upholstered in luxurious leathers, the bigger the more luxurious, and even the plastic laminate is certainly not a luxury material but rather a material almost without tradition and without attributes.¹⁸⁴

The use of plastic laminate in this interior is significant. In the 1960s this was a material of cheap substitution, still being sold on the basis of its ability to imitate other, more natural materials such as wood.¹⁸⁵ Its use by Sottsass anticipates his rejection of luxury as leading to an embrace of its antagonist other: kitsch. The

¹⁸² Sottsass, 'La Casa con la Bambina Cinese', *Domus*, September 1963, 65 – 76 (p. 70).

¹⁸³ Brugola in Tadini, p. 244.

¹⁸⁴ Sottsass, 'In un Soggiorno Molto Semplice', *Domus*, January 1967, 23 – 28, (p. 23).

¹⁸⁵ For example, see the advert for 'Railite' described as 'Laminati Plastici come il Legno' (Plastic Laminates like Wood), *Domus*, May 1963,



Illustrations 132 and 133. Two views of a '*Soggiorno Molto Semplice*' (a Very Simple Living Room), designed by Sottsass in 1967. Furniture made by Brugola.

qualities of rarity, taste and craftsmanship could be thought of as setting luxury a world apart from kitsch. Rather, as seen in the examples of glass and marble, they exist in a dialectic, an instability that can see luxury collapse into kitsch just as kitsch can be celebrated as luxury. This ambivalence will be most fully expressed in the postmodern experiments of Sottsass and the Memphis group discussed in the next chapter. Luxury and kitsch are the two excesses of a consumer society; as the following section argues, what started emerging in the radical design emerging mid 1960s was the use of the latter to ironically critique the former.

3.2.9 The Turn to Kitsch in Italian Radical Design

The turn to kitsch amongst Italy's first wave of radical designers was not the redemption of materials and objects that Dorfles described. Rather, as Gregotti described in Dorfles' anthology, there was a willingness amongst some architects 'to re-assess the nature of kitsch [...] to entertain its possible use, not in a spirit of irony or antagonism, but with a real enthusiasm'.¹⁸⁶

In the mid sixties this embrace of kitsch was most apparent in Sottsass's use of laminates in 1966's totemic *Superboxes* (See *Illustration 134*). First appearing as small-scale models in *Domus*, by the time of the 1972 MoMA exhibition *Italy: The New Domestic Landscape* these had been made into full-scale prototypes by Poltronova.¹⁸⁷ The bright clashing colours and striped plastic laminates, produced by Abet Laminati, the Piedmont firm that would become a key supporter of Italian avant-garde design in the 1970s, spoke of the aesthetics of Op and Pop art, an appropriation of plastic laminate from the world of substitution and cafe-top counters into the realm of radical design. The *Superboxes* were not an early example of postmodernism's conspicuous display of kitsch, but what Gregotti called a sort of 'exorcism of the world of industry and mass consumption' in which architects have had 'a wave of sympathy for those products which, by their philistine quality, demonstrate at one and the same time the blindness of industrial production and the

¹⁸⁶ Gregotti, 'Kitsch and Architecture' in *Kitsch*, ed. by Dorfles, pp. 255 - 276 (p. 255).

¹⁸⁷ *Italy: The New Domestic Landscape*, ed. by Ambasz, pp. 104 - 105.



Illustration 134. Two examples of the *Superboxes*, designed by Ettore Sottsass in 1965. Shown here are cardboard scale models, the props bought from a Milanese toy store. Poltronova made full scale prototypes covered in plastic laminates from Abet Laminati that were included in the MoMA exhibition *Italy: The New Domestic Landscape: Achievements and Problems of Italian Design* in 1972 and subsequently put into limited production.

assumed indispensability of the intellectual'.¹⁸⁸ As Gregotti himself suggests, there was a critical element in this engagement with kitsch, and one, despite his other pronouncement, that made use of irony to do so.

This was evident in the early radical activity of groups such as Archizoom Associati and Superstudio, both founded in Florence in 1966. Both groups ironically employed kitsch as a critical tool. Branzi, one of Archizoom's members alongside Dario and Lucia Bartolini, Gilbero Corretti, Paolo Deganello and Massimo Morozzi described their *Dream Beds* (See Illustration 135), that combined references to fake marble, streamlining and Art Deco as 'pieces of kitsch furniture destined - like new-fangled Trojan Horses - to overrun the tenets of good taste regulating the bourgeois household'.¹⁸⁹ This furniture was designed not only to upset Italian design's reputation for good taste, but also to undermine the idea of the intellectual as imposing his culture on the masses – the model which informed Ponti's activity. According to Branzi, the popular taste that inspired the *Dream Beds* 'overturns the theory according to which culture and art have to modify society into its opposite, that it has to society that modifies these'.¹⁹⁰ This changed concept of the intellectual would have a significant impact on the activities of the second wave of radicalism in the 1970s, as the next chapter discusses.

Officina Undici were responsible for some of the most unrelentingly kitsch designs of this radical activity, producing furniture from their 'artisanal laboratory' that challenged the production aesthetics of mainstream, mass-produced design.¹⁹¹ Set up on the outskirts of Rome in 1962 by the architect Fabio De Sanctis and the artist Ugo Sterpini, Officina Undici's workshop became the centre of their Surrealist furniture experiments, producing furniture that, in line with the international surrealism of the

¹⁸⁸ Gregotti, 'Kitsch and Architecture', p. 256.

¹⁸⁹ Branzi, 'Notes on No-Stop City: Archizoom Associates 1969 - 72' in *Exit Utopia: Architectural Provocations 1956 – 76*, ed. by in Martin van Schaik and Otakar Máčel (Munich; Berlin; London; New York: Prestel, 2004), pp. 178 - 182 (p. 180).

¹⁹⁰ 'Archizoom' in *Facendo Mobili*, p. 16.

¹⁹¹ Pietro Costa Viappiani, *Il Mobile Surrealista* (Reggio Emilia: Magis, 1993), p. 69.



Illustration 135. *Dreambeds*, Archizoom Associati (Andrea Branzi), Gilberto Corretti, Dario and Lucia Bartolini, Massimo Morozzi, Paolo Deganello), 1967. They never went beyond the miniature models seen here. Although included in the *Italy: The New Domestic Landscape* catalogue, these were not featured in the Exhibition.

1960s, was a critique of capitalist consumerism.¹⁹² Of their *Cielo, Mare, Terra* (Sky, Sea, Earth) sideboard from 1962 - 63 (See *Illustration 136*) Gregotti said simply that ‘it is fortunate that the word ‘kitsch’ exists’.¹⁹³ Two Fiat 600 car doors, painted pink and with two circular, semi-spherical ‘breasts’ are joined to a Gothic-esque walnut sideboard, replete with a steel antenna on the top of the china cabinet and clawed feet. Pietro Costa Vippiani has noted how the design is intended to ‘bring to mind the idea of the car as mother and lover at the same time’, a combined sexual, Freudian and commodity fetish designed to ridicule the desires of a mass consumer society.¹⁹⁴ It is notable that *Cielo, Mare, Terra* uses the doors of the car identified by Lanaro as the first status symbol for the masses at the start of this chapter.

In 1966 *Cielo, Mare, Terra* featured in *Fantasy Furniture*, an exhibition held at The Museum of Contemporary Crafts. In the catalogue, museum director Paul J. Smith described how Officina Undici ‘manifest a revolt against the clean lines of mass production. Their craftsmanship reflects a creativity that opposes itself to machine-age aesthetics. Their pieces take full and conscious advantage of their hand production’.¹⁹⁵ This could be interpreted as an embrace of the aesthetic of highly elaborated craftsmanship that informed the luxury object – rather, it was the opposite. De Sanctis and Sterpini declared that ‘we wholeheartedly welcome the mistake [...] We avoid premeditation in our work. We accept the fact that chance and the inertia of materials - as well as their unexpected movements - can deform a preconceived shape’.¹⁹⁶ They had an attraction to ‘disorder, to asymmetry, to mistakes in the use of materials’, borne out of a desire for their furniture to not be ‘fetishes for the cult of the perfectly functional object’.¹⁹⁷ Like Mari’s *Putrella* and

¹⁹² Krystztof Fijalkowski, ‘Black Materialism: Surrealism Faces the Commercial World’ in *Surreal Things: Surrealism and Design*, ed. by Ghislaine Wood (London: V&A Publications, 2007), pp. 101 – 117 (p. 114).

¹⁹³ Gregotti, ‘Kitsch and Architecture’ in *Kitsch*, ed by Dorfles, p. 264.

¹⁹⁴ Fabio De Sanctis and Ugo Sterpini in *Fantasy Furniture* (New York: Museum of Contemporary Crafts, 1966), n.p.

¹⁹⁵ Paul J. Smith in *Fantasy Furniture*. n.p.

¹⁹⁶ De Sanctis and Sterpini in *Fantasy Furniture*, n.p.

¹⁹⁷ De Sanctis and Sterpini in *Fantasy Furniture*, n.p.



Illustration 136. *Cielo, Mare, Terra* (Sky, Sea, Earth) Designed by Officina Undici (Fabio De Sanctis and the artist Ugo Sterpini) 1962 – 63.

Sottsass's Brugola-made furniture, Officina Undici rejected what Sottsass called the 'perfect' workmanship and precious materials that had been luxury's – and craft's - most powerful signifiers in the 1960s.

Conclusion

The 1960s discussed here was in reality an arc that spanned the mid 1950s to the mid sixties, a period still conditioned by optimism and growing prosperity, one that fuelled the production and consumption of Italy's luxury goods by domestic and international consumers alike. Luxury, and craft's centrality to this concept, has been at the core of this chapter. In all the examples discussed, from glass to marble, leather to plastic what has been notable is the constant, craft-like principles of the luxury object; the respect of materiality, the strong identification with the place of manufacture, small-scale production and finally a high expenditure of quality craftsmanship.

This chapter has shown how the mutable, multiple condition of luxury was played out in the 1960s. There was an ongoing investment in the idea of luxury demonstrated in the intense interest in it on the part of several of Italy's architects. This was seen not only in the spread of the logic of luxury to the realm of mass-produced plastics and in the engagement with more established luxury materials such as glass and marble. It was also, as in the case of Mari and Sottsass, evident in the repeated attempts to negate the idea of luxury for the dubious taste and alienating mythification it was seen to embody: in Mari this was in the turn to machine production, in Sottsass the employment of kitsch. We can add Barbini to this pair. His embrace of the sculptural potential of glass was an attempt to redeem the problem of taste so often associated with the luxury commodity. In all, the status of the object was caught up in the visibility of the craftsmanship involved. In the early 1960s, luxury offered the fullest expression of the elitism of mainstream Italian design, and as such became a focal point for its negation in the emerging radical design movement. Luxury appears as an exaggerated commodity form, one in which, like on the islands of Murano, the problems of Italy's consumerist society are

magnified - problems that Mari, Sottsass and others attempt to take on in the increasingly radical experiments of the early 1970s, which are the focus of the first part of the following, and final, chapter.

Chapter 4: From Mari to Memphis: Processes and Production from Radical Design to Postmodernism

4.1 Between the *Povera* and the Primitive: Activism and Utopianism in Radical Design, 1972 - 1975

Introduction

In 1972, twenty years after *Italy at Work* had closed at the Brooklyn Museum, the next major survey of Italian post-war design opened. This was *Italy: The New Domestic Landscape: Achievements and Problems of Italian Design*, the landmark MoMA exhibition curated by the Argentinean architect Emilio Ambasz. Once again Italian design had an American institution as its arbiter, and public as its audience: although by now the nation's phoenix-like emergence from the ashes of war that had informed the former exhibition seemed but a distant memory to the 1970s visitors. As with *Italy at Work*, establishing more fully the motivations behind the exhibition, and the larger socio-economic context, serves to unlock the nature of Italian design at this time, and introduces some of the key politics and strategies underpinning design's turn to craft in this period.

Much had changed in the intervening years. Gone was the rhetoric of reconstruction and the optimism of the economic 'miracle', replaced by the economic downturn and social unrest that was spreading throughout Europe. May 1968 had its epicentre in Paris, but the year's events were more prolonged and their effects longer lasting in Italy.¹ Frustration at the lack of promised reform, soaring oil prices and high levels of unemployment were coupled with countercultural opposition to what Robert Lumley has described as an 'American mainstream' of 'economic materialism, worship of technology and imperialism' in its war with Vietnam.² Focused mostly in

¹ Jan Kurz and Marica Tolomelli, 'Italy' in *1968 in Europe: A History of Protest and Activism, 1956 - 1977*, ed. by Martin Klimke and Joachim Scharloth (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), pp. 83 - 96; Salvati, 'Muddling Through: Economics and Politics in Italy 1969 - 1979' in *Italy in Transition: Conflict and Consensus*, ed. by Peter Lange and Sidney Tarrow, (London; Totowa, N.J: Cass, 1980), pp. 31 - 48, (p. 32).

² Lumley, *Arte Povera*, (London: Tate Publishing, 2004), p. 11

central and northern Italy, first universities and then factories were occupied as students and workers from both North and South Italy came together for a series of occupations, protests and strikes that culminated in the *Autunno Caldo* (Hot Autumn) of 1969.³

The architecture profession was not immune to this mass mobilisation and radicalisation. In May 1968 the fourteenth *Triennale* opened with the theme of *Il Grande Numero* (The Greater Number), chosen by the organisers as a response to ‘the problems of a society of mass work and mass consumption’.⁴ They attempted to show their solidarity with the wave of social activism - and deflect accusations of the *Triennale*’s outdated role - by devoting an installation (*See Illustration 137*) to the *Protesta dei Giovani* (Youth Protest).⁵ Curated by the architect Giancarlo de Carlo, the pile of discarded consumer goods and cobblestones depicted a street in the aftermath of protest, surrounded on all sides by blown-up photographs of marching protesters. However the *Triennale* was not immune to the wave of anti-authoritarianism that fuelled these protests, and during the opening was itself occupied by architects, artists and students, its installations were vandalised (*See Illustration 138*), its walls daubed with declarations of worker-student solidarity by those outraged at this attempted institutionalisation of their spontaneous, grassroots movement.⁶

This ongoing context of contestation informed how the MoMA exhibition was conceived; if in *Italy at Work* this had been by degrees of industrialisation, in *Italy: The New Domestic Landscape*, it was degrees of radicalisation. The exhibition was

³ Charles F. Sabel, *Work and Politics: The Division of Labor in Industry* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), p. 17; Ginsborg, pp. 309 - 320.

⁴ Dino Gentili in *Quattordicesima Triennale di Milano: Esposizione Internazionale delle Arti Decorative e Industriali Moderne e dell'Architettura Moderna* (Milano, Arti Grafiche Crespi & Occhipinti, 1968), p. 14.

⁵ The installation was not an original part of the *Triennale*’s program, but was conceived to fill a space left empty after America had pulled out at the last minute. Paola Nicolini, ‘Protest by Design: Giancarlo de Carlo and the 14th Milan *Triennale*’ in *Cold War Modern: Design 1945 – 1970*, ed. by David Crowley and Pavitt (London: V&A, 2008), pp. 228 - 233 (p. 233).

⁶ For this criticism of the *Triennale*, see Mari, ‘La Contestazione’, *Interni: La Rivista dell'Arredamento*, Edizione Speciale Per la 14 *Triennale*, September 1968, 6 - 10 (p. 6).



Illustration 137. Close up of the *Protesta dei Giovani* (Youth Protest) installation at the fourteenth *Triennale*, 1968, curated by Giancarlo de Carlo with the artist Bruno Caruso and the film director Marco Bellocchio. The installation consisted of piled up consumer appliances, street signs, a car and piled up cobble stones. Behind, one of the blown up photos of protestors.



Illustration 138. The entrance to the *Palazzo dell'Arte*, the building that housed the *Triennale* exhibitions, vandalised following the occupation. Slogans 'insurrection against repression', equating Milan with Paris (Milan = Parigi) and student-worker solidarity (*operai studenti artisti*).

divided into two sections: eleven specially commissioned environments and one hundred and eighty objects selected from the previous decade. The first was divided into three categories: commentary, ‘pro-design’ and ‘counter-design’, designed by architects including Archizoom Associati, Bellini, Gaetano Pesce, Ettore Sottsass (*See Illustration 139*) and Superstudio (*See Illustration 140*).⁷ The second were similarly divided into three; conformist, reformist and contestatory, and this last group was subdivided into two more categories: a ‘moratorium’ position in which the architect abstained from designing anything at all, and those architects whose practice was defined by ‘active critical participation’.⁸ Ambasz interpreted this as designing objects that emphasised the user’s role in its modification or transformation; amongst these was Cini Boeri’s *Serpentone* (*See Illustration 141*) designed in 1970 - 71 for Arflex, the snake-like polyurethane rubber sofa that could be cut to any length and be used in and outdoors.⁹

Ambasz, who had studied architecture at Princeton University before being appointed MoMa’s design curator in 1970, described how Italy, now ‘the dominant force in consumer-product design’, was not important just because of ‘its remarkable formal production’ but also ‘the high level of critical consciousness’ of its architects.¹⁰ As the architectural historian Felicity D. Scott has explained, the revolutionary aims of Italy’s avant-garde appealed to Ambasz’s desire to locate an alternative to the post-utopian turn in American architectural discourse.¹¹

⁷ The following ‘environments’ were included in *Italy: The New Domestic Landscape*: Gaetano Pesce was in its own ‘prologue’ section. ‘counter-design’: Archizoom Associati, Mari, Superstudio, Gruppo Strum. ‘pro-design’: Aulenti, Bellini, Colombo, La Pietra, Rosselli, Sottsass, Zanuso and Richard Sapper. There were also displays of two un-built winning entries in the competition for designers under thirty: Studio Tecnico G. Mari and Gruppo 9999. For full details of the environments, see *Italy: The New Domestic Landscape*, ed. by Ambasz, pp. 137 – 281.

⁸ Ambasz, ‘Introduction’ in *Italy: The New Domestic Landscape*, ed. by Ambasz, (pp. 19 - 21) pp. 20, 21.

⁹ Other examples included the *Sacco* beanbag, designed by Piero Gatti, Cesare Paolini and Franco Teodoro for Zanotta in 1968 and a series of seating systems by Colombo for Sormani. *Italy: The New Domestic Landscape*, ed. by Ambasz, pp. 112, 113, 116, 117, 121.

¹⁰ Ambasz, ‘Introduction’ and ‘Summary’ in *Italy: The New Domestic Landscape*, ed. by Ambasz, p. 19, (pp. 419 - 422), p. 419.

¹¹ Felicity D. Scott, ‘Italian Design & The New Political Landscape’, in *Analyzing Ambasz*, ed. by Michael Sorkin (New York: The Monacelli Press, 2004), pp. 109 – 156, (p. 110).

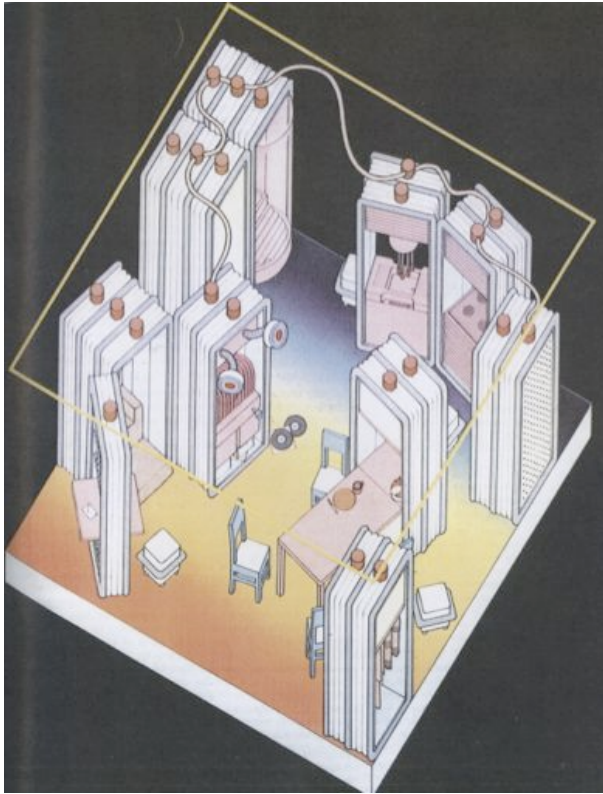


Illustration 139. Sottsass's design for his *Italy: The New Domestic Landscape* environment, included in the 'Design as Postulation' section.



Illustration 140. 'The Invisible Dome', one of the collages Superstudio exhibited as part of their *Life without Objects* environment for *Italy: The New Domestic Landscape*, included in the 'Counter Design' section.



Illustration 141. *Serpentone* (Big Snake), designed by Cini Boeri in 1971 for Arflex, the firm set up in 1950 to develop designs using Pirelli's experiments in new materials. Polyurethane foam. Cut to any size, this was included in the MoMA exhibition for its flexibility of use and open-ended design.

Ambasz was particularly drawn to the “inside and against” strategies adopted by some of the radicals. These reflected the widespread influence of *operaismo*, the worker-led or autonomist form of Marxism whose militancy represented a challenge to the communist orthodoxy of Gramsci and the PCI.¹² Originating in the early sixties writings of theorists such as Antonio Negri and Mario Tronti, groups such as *Potere Operaio* emphasised working class struggle and advocated the ‘refusal of work’, or rather the rejection of existing capitalist relations of production.¹³ As Ambasz described, although ‘avant-garde groups’ such as Archizoom and Superstudio were ‘located within, and restricted by, the present social structure and production system’ their strategies were avowedly utopian - albeit in a particular way.¹⁴ They proposed ‘negative utopias’, ones embedded in the present and characterised by the destruction of the object as a ‘status symbol’ in order to ‘to recover design for communal ends’.¹⁵ In what Germano Celant, Filiberto Menna and others called the “crisis of the object”, architects focused on behaviours and processes of production, consumption and mediation in order to overturn the alienating effects of commodity fetishism.¹⁶

The problem of design’s commodification was seen to have infected the show itself. Although a success in terms of visitor numbers, the show encountered serious criticisms for its cosy relationship with commerce: with sponsors including Abet Laminati, Alitalia, Cassina, Olivetti and the Italian Ministry of Foreign Trade, this was a heavily governmental, industrial and institutionally-endorsed show.¹⁷ Critics

¹² Nicolas Cullinan, ‘From Vietnam to Fiat-nam: The Politics of Arte Povera’, *October*, 124 (2008), 8 - 30 (p. 25).

¹³ Michael Hardt, ‘Introduction: Laboratory Italy’ in *Radical Thought in Italy: A Potential Politics*, ed. by Hardt and Paolo Virno, (University of Minnesota Press, 1996), pp. 1 -10 (p. 2).

¹⁴ Ambasz, ‘Summary’ in *Italy: The New Domestic Landscape*, ed. by Ambasz, p. 421.

¹⁵ Ambasz, ‘Summary’ *Italy: The New Domestic Landscape*, ed. by Ambasz, p. 421.

¹⁶ Two of the essays in the catalogue deal with the emergence of these behavioural strategies and what Menna and others termed the “crisis of the object”: Celant, ‘Radical Architecture’ and Filippo Menna, ‘A Design for New Behaviours’ in *Italy: The New Domestic Landscape*, ed. by Ambasz, pp. 380 - 387, 405 -414.

¹⁷ For a full list of sponsors and interested parties see ‘Acknowledgements’ in *Italy: The New Domestic Landscape*, ed. by Ambasz, pp. 13 - 16.

found this expressed most visibly not in the design objects themselves, but in their display mechanism; the forty-seven display cases-cum-shipping containers (*See Illustrations 142 and 143*) exhibited in MoMA's sculpture garden, designed by Ambasz with the American Thomas Czarnowski and the Italian Giancarlo Piretti, and made by Anonima Castelli, a Bolognese office furniture manufacturer. For *Interiors*, the similarities with the shop windows of nearby Fifth Avenue exposed the exhibition as nothing more than 'an export *Triennale*', while for *ID* these containers enshrined 'design ever more firmly as the cult of the subject in the pursuit of the object'.¹⁸ Divorced from their social context in their spot-lit cases, the objects were visible only as commodities, the viewer, as *Print's* critic noted, 'simply [...] dazzled by their colors and forms'.¹⁹ In the politically charged context of the early 1970s, even the seemingly benign language of crates was seen to be as a guilty party in the alienating fetishisation of the design object.

The wooden crates stood out in another way; their language of mass production contradicted the manufacturing reality behind the objects inside. As Ambasz noted, Italy's furniture industry had 'not yet fully resolved the problems inherent in switching from an artisan type of fabrication to industrial processes' and instead continued to be reliant on low-tech, low-scale production.²⁰ While Ambasz saw Italy design's radicalism as occurring despite its technologically 'backward' construction and furniture industry, the following chapter seeks to demonstrate that the radical design of the 1970s was actually entirely dependent on the fact that Italy had not fully industrialised: it was to non-industrial makers, means and modes of production that the critical strategies that Ambasz so admired turned. This took place in the context of a re-evaluation of craft in general in this era, most visible in the craft revival of the late 1960s and 1970s that sprung up in North America and Western

¹⁸ Olga Gueft, 'Italy's Super-Salesmen come to Moma', *Interiors*, July 1972, 78 - 84, 92 (p. 82); I.R.G., 'Dolce Far Niente', *ID*, July - August 1972, p. 19.

¹⁹ Rose DeNeve, 'Supershow in Retrospect: Review of Italy: The New Domestic Landscape', *Print*, November 1972, p. 67 in Scott, 'Italian Design & The New Political Landscape' in *Analyzing Ambasz*, ed. by Sorkin, p.119.

²⁰ Ambasz, 'Summary' in *Italy: The New Domestic Landscape*, ed. by Ambasz, pp. 419 - 420.



Illustration 142. Some of the forty seven display-cases-cum shipping containers displayed in the MoMA sculpture garden. Designed by Emilio Ambasz with the American architect Thomas Czarowski, and the Italian Giancarlo Piretti, and made by the Bolognese firm Anonima Castelli.



Illustration 143. Close up of the containers. In the foreground, the *Dondolo* rocking chair, designed by Cesare Leonardi and Franca Stagi for Elco. Moulded fibreglass, 1967.

Europe.²¹ While this would be felt in Italy, the architects discussed here pursued craft as a partner to design, rather than an independent activity.

This chapter examines the turn to craft by Italian architects of the second wave of radicalism and rise of postmodernism in the 1970s and early 1980s. It is divided into two parts. The case studies discussed in the first, longer section are some of the most prominent manifestations of early 1970s radicalism: Enzo Mari's *Autoprogettazione* (1974), Riccardo Dalisi's *tecnica povera* (1971 - 1973), the Global Tools collective (1973 - 1975) and Gaetano Pesce's work with *Braccio di Ferro*, the experimental Cassina offshoot set up in 1972. These case studies will explore radical design's engagement with the handmade in line with larger socio-cultural phenomena; chiefly, the dominance of the *povera* in avantgarde practice and its participatory nature, the impact of DIY and the craft revival in the early 1970s, and the influence of anthropological approaches on design at this time. The second part looks at how this radicalism filtered into the post-industrial and post-utopian production strategies of Studio Alchymia and Memphis. Although this was a complex and contradictory period in Italian design, and there were marked differences between these groups, they had a number of things in common. All ran counter to mainstream design practice, which continued to be dominated by the ongoing popularity of the luxurious elegance of architects such as Mario Bellini and Vico Magistretti.²² Those in the first section were all informed by Marxist critiques of production and were based on the idea of the authentic alterity of craft; be it as the foundation for the utopian strategies that were outlined in the MoMA exhibition, or the subsequent abandonment of these.

²¹ For more on the crafts revival in Britain, see: Harrod, *The Crafts in Britain in the Twentieth Century*, pp. 369 - 410; on the American craft revival, see Manhart and Manhart, *The Eloquent Object*, pp. 24 - 34.

²² Illustrative designs produced in this era include Mario Bellini's slender *Cab* leather chair from 1977, Vico Magistretti's elegant *Maralunga* from 1973, both for Cassina.

4.1.1 Enzo Mari's *Autoprogettazione*

Enzo Mari refused the invitation to design an environment for *Italy: The New Domestic Landscape*. Ambasz was undeterred: 'knowing Mr. Mari's position, the Museum extended him a formal invitation not to design an environment'.²³ Instead, Mari produced an essay in which he acknowledged the commercial necessity of his products to be exhibited but denied that 'designing objects, as physical articles to be executed and sold, has any significance today'.²⁴ The Marxist firebrand stated that there was only one worthwhile design activity: 'communication is the determining element in the class struggle' and therefore should be the basis for 'any revolutionary activity' - although he was 'less clear' how to go about this.²⁵

By 1974 Mari seemed to have come up with an answer, when he unveiled his *Proposta per un'Autoprogettazione* (Proposal For a Self-Design) at Milan's Galleria Milano. On display were eighteen scale models of furniture (*See Illustration 144*), including chairs, desks and a wardrobe, and one full-sized bed (*See Illustration 145*), all designed the previous year by Mari and produced by Simon International, a Bolognese firm recently established by Dino Gavina and Maria Simoncini.²⁶ All were made from the same prefabricated timber planks of the *Italy: The New Domestic Landscape* crates.

The freely distributed catalogue took the shape of a manual, complete with photos and design drawings (*See Illustration 146*) of the furniture displayed. At the front was a statement by Mari:

²³ Ambasz, 'Enzo Mari' in *Italy: The New Domestic Landscape*, ed. by Ambasz, p. 263.

²⁴ Ambasz, 'Enzo Mari' in *Italy: The New Domestic Landscape*, ed. by Ambasz, p. 262.

²⁵ Mari, 'Proposal for Behavior Directed to my Colleagues' in *Italy: The New Domestic Landscape*, ed. by Ambasz, pp. 263 - 265 (p. 263).

²⁶ Gavina had set up Simon International in 1968 after he had been forced to sell his own eponymously titled furniture company to Knoll International in 1967. Pansera, *Il Design del Mobile Italiano dal 1946 a Oggi*, p. 62.



Illustration 144. Furniture models displayed in the *Autoprogettazione* exhibition. Bottom right: photo of the original *Proposta per un'Autoprogettazione* catalogue.

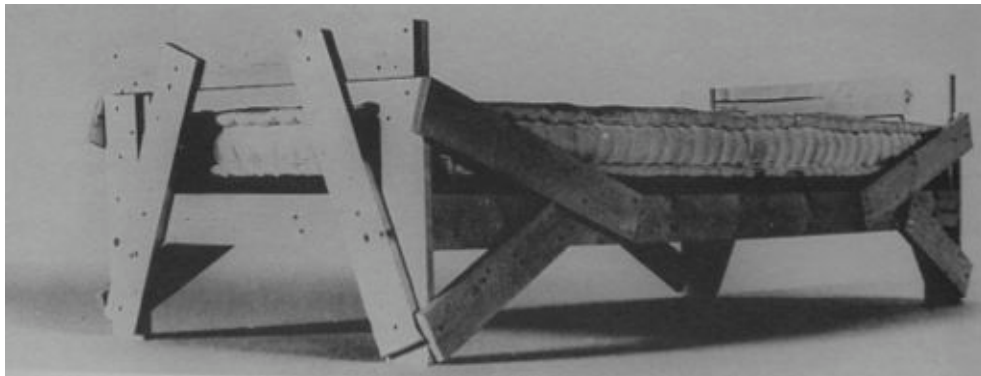


Illustration 145. The full-sized bed included in the *Autoprogettazione* exhibition, designed by Enzo Mari and made by Simon International of Bologna.

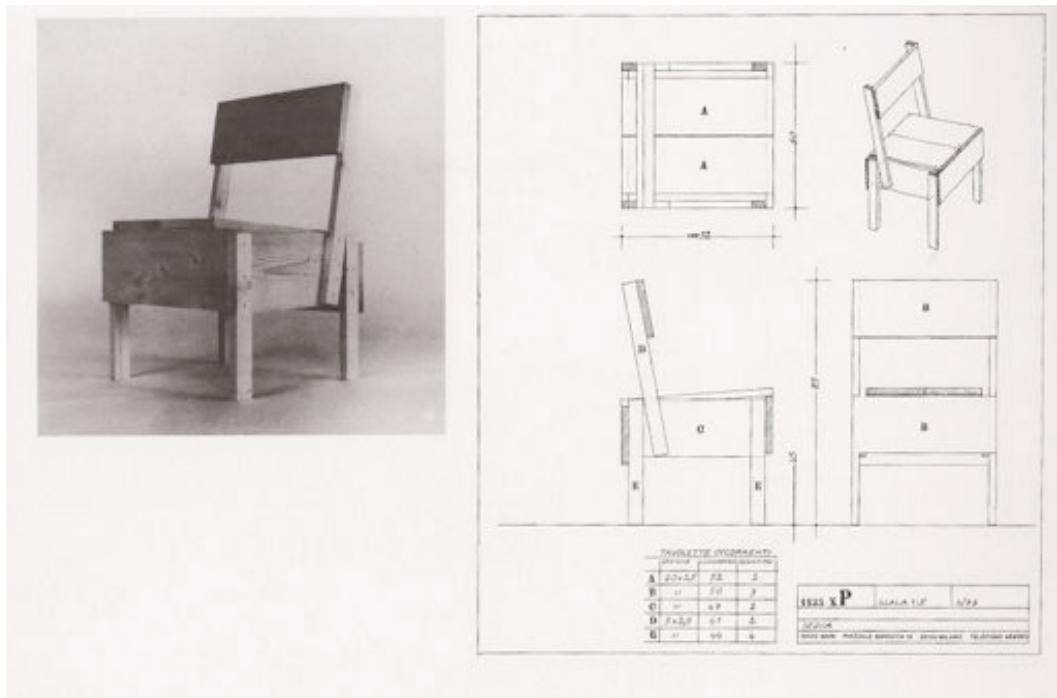


Illustration 146. Page from *Autoprogettazione* catalogue with photo, scale drawings and material required for making one of the chairs.

A project for making easy-to-assemble furniture using rough boards and nails. An elementary technique to teach anyone to look at present production with a critical eye. (Anyone, apart from factories and traders, can use these designs to make them by themselves. The author hopes the idea will last into the future and asks those who build the furniture, and in particular, variations of it, to send photos to his studio at 10 Piazzale Baracca, 10 - 20123 Milano.)²⁷

Articles in the press repeated Mari's offer, and exhibitions in Florence and Bologna in 1975 further publicised *Autoprogettazione*.²⁸ Its popularity was testified by the hundreds of letters and photos the architect received from a public grateful for this affordable, self-built design proposal. It spoke of the emergence of DIY in Italy since Mario Tedeschi's '*Voi e Gli Artigiani*' article discussed in chapter one, signalled by the launch of magazines such as *Fai Da Te* (Do It Yourself) in 1972.²⁹ In *Modo* magazine Claudia Donà attributed the late arrival of this American-associated import to the country's housing set up: most urban Italians lived in rented apartments, where maintenance duties fell to the landlord and repair men were inexpensive.³⁰ As in other countries however, the economic and energy crisis of the early seventies made skills in maintenance and making-do increasingly valuable.³¹

DIY was also taking on new meanings at this time in Italy, manifested in what Giampaolo Dossena in 1979 described as *bricolage*.³² While Italian use of the French term is normally translated as DIY, Dossena makes a number of distinctions

²⁷ Mari, *Autoprogettazione?* (Mantua: Corraini, 1974, reprint. 2008), p. 1.

²⁸ In January 1975 *Autoprogettazione* was exhibited at the Florentine showroom *International Design*, and then as part of the exhibition *Avanguardie e Cultura Popolare* at Bologna's Galleria d'Arte Moderna, from 1 May to 15 June 1975. Mari, 'Proposta per un' *Autoprogettazione*' in *Avanguardie e Cultura Popolare* (Bologna: Galleria d'Arte Moderna, 1975), pp. 218 - 225. In 1974 *Autoprogettazione* was featured in both *Casabella* and *Domus*: 'Proposta per Una *Autoprogettazione*', *Casabella*, June 1974, pp. 42 - 43; 'Do-It-Yourself', *Domus*, June 1974, p. 44.

²⁹ Giampaolo Dossena, 'Bricolage: Un Fatto di Costume dei Nostri Tempi' in *Storia dell'Artigianato Italiano*, pp. 334 - 390, (p. 335).

³⁰ Dossena, 'Bricolage', p. 335; Claudia Donà, 'Bricolage, un Problema di Definizione tra Tempo Libero e Tempo Liberato', *Modo*, July - August 1977, p. 52.

³¹ Donà, 'Bricolage', p. 52.

³² Dossena, 'Bricolage', pp. 334 - 390.

between the two. Both were ‘dilettante’ craft forms, but while DIY belonged to the category of ‘institutional hobbies’ *bricolage* was more creative, devoted to making objects such as hats, scarves and raffia lamps.³³ It was more low-tech and improvisational, and involved making do with the tools that you had to hand.³⁴ This usage chimes with the other, more recognised conception of *bricolage* at the time, associated with the French structural anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss. In *The Savage Mind* published in 1962, Lévi-Strauss defines the ‘*bricoleur*’ as ‘someone who works with his hands and uses devious means compared to those of a craftsman’.³⁵ In the Italian context it translates as a form of DIY tinged with Donà calls an ‘anti-consumerist strategy’.³⁶

Mari however asserted that *Autoprogettazione* was ‘totally the opposite’ to DIY, which was ‘nothing more than a cultural degradation [...] making imitative things, without really knowing what you’re doing [...] just as a pastime’.³⁷ His comments recall the criticism for mass leisure at the 1964 *Triennale*, and echo Adorno’s position on both the facile and fallacious qualities of DIY: as a ‘free time’ activity it was just as ‘shackled’ to the forces of work as time ‘occupied by work’.³⁸ Dossena saw the same thing in *bricolage*: it too was ‘a hobby provided by [...] consumer society’, practised by ‘bearded students’ and ‘middle and upper-middle-class women’ who were just as much ‘good consumer[s]’ as DIY practitioners.³⁹ However, in his turn to manuals and amateur producers Mari did use the language of DIY in *Autoprogettazione*. Manuals are part of the lexicon of amateur craft - Adamson describes the “‘how-to’ text’ as amateur craft’s only true literary ‘genre’.⁴⁰

³³ Dossena, ‘Bricolage’, p. 336.

³⁴ Dossena, ‘Bricolage’, p. 336.

³⁵ Lévi-Strauss, *The Savage Mind*, pp. 16 – 17.

³⁶ Donà, ‘Bricolage’, p. 52.

³⁷ Elvio Fachinelli, ‘Anche col Legno’, *L’Erba Voglia*, 16 (1974) in Mari, ‘Proposta per un’*Autoprogettazione*’ in *Avanguardie e Cultura Popolare*, p. 223.

³⁸ Theodor Adorno, *The Culture Industry: Selected Essays on Mass Culture* (London: Routledge, 1991) p. 162.

³⁹ Dossena, ‘Bricolage’, pp. 352, 353.

⁴⁰ Adamson, ‘Section Introduction’ in *The Craft Reader*, ed. by Adamson, p. 9.

Mari was not promoting amateur craft as an end in itself; as one of Adamson's 'core principals' of craft, the amateur's marginalised and non-professional associations were being deployed here, as they would also be in other avant-garde art practice at this time.⁴¹ *Autoprogettazione* was a revolutionary project of communication that would use the language of self-construction in order to politicise self-production.

Autoprogettazione had originated in a project called *Day-Night* (See *Illustration 147*), a flat-packed sofa bed designed by Mari and his brother Elio Mari for the furniture company Driade in 1971. This was affordable, functionalist furniture, made from everyday, standard components; a mass-produced mattress acted as the upholstery, the tubular steel and aluminium frame was left bare.⁴² Gillo Dorfles was a big fan, praising the uniqueness of this "povera" object, which heralded the 'possible recovery' of design and went against the prevailing taste for costly reproductions of 'Renaissance, Baroque, or Neo-Gothic [...] even pseudo-rationalist' furniture'.⁴³ This last was a reference to firms such as Gavina and Cassina, the latter having acquired the rights in 1965 for Le Corbusier's furniture, the first in their *Maestri* series of Modernist reproductions (See *Illustration 148*) led by the architect Filippo Allison that attempted to assert the movement's ongoing value at the very moment of its crisis.⁴⁴ Both *Autoprogettazione* and *Day-Night* were similarly based on Modernism's ethos of industrial materials and a "timeless" non-style, yet were deployed for their *povera* credentials rather than designed to appeal to the luxury market Cassina aimed at.

By *povera* (poor) Dorfles did not mean cheap. Rather, this was a reference to *Arte Povera*, the term originally borrowed by Celant from theatre to describe the work of a largely Turinese group of artists including Alighiero Boetti, Pino Pascali and

⁴¹ This was particularly true of feminist practice, as seen in the installations *Womanhouse* (1972) and *The Dinner Party* (1974 - 1979), both of which involved the American artist Judy Chicago. For a short discussion of this, see Adamson, *Thinking Through Craft*, pp. 4, 154 – 158.

⁴² Mari in François Burkhardt, Juli Capella and Francesca Picchi, *Perché un Libro su Enzo Mari/ Why Write a Book on Enzo Mari* (Milan: Motta, 1997), p. 138

⁴³ Dorfles, 'Un Oggetto di Design "Anti-Edonistico"', *Casabella*, July 1973, p. 51.

⁴⁴ Filippo Allison, 'I Maestri: The Ideology of Reconstruction' in *Made in Cassina*, ed. by Bosoni, pp. 73 - 79.

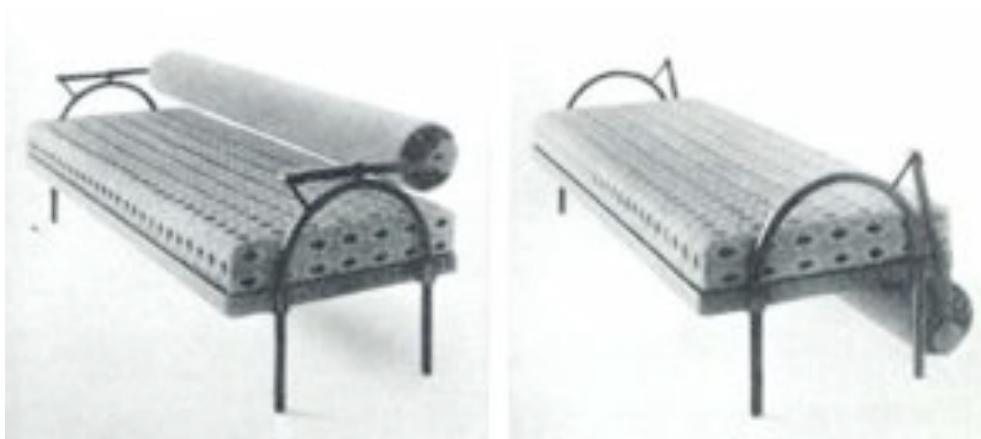


Illustration 147. *Day-Night*, otherwise known as model 1069 designed by Enzo Mari and Elio Mari in 1971 for Driade. The photograph shows the transformation of the furniture from sofa into bed through the rotating arm.



Illustration 148. Window Display of the *Maestri* series in Cassina's showroom in via Durini, Milan, early 1970s. Clockwise from top left: *Zig Zag* chair and *Red and Blue* chair by Gerrit Rietveld, *Chaise Longue* and *LCI* by Le Corbusier.

Michelangelo Pistoletto, whom he had brought together in an exhibition in Genoa in 1967.⁴⁵ He defined *Arte Povera* as an art of ‘taking away, eliminating, downgrading things to a minimum, impoverishing signs to reduce them to their archetypes’, an attempt to attain the Barthian “degree zero” discussed in chapter three.⁴⁶ United by their opposition to the art world’s consumerism these artists prioritised process and direct action over the finished, fetishised artefact. They used both industrial and ‘natural’ materials in their found state, perceiving an affinity between the products of ‘nature and culture’ that Tommaso Trini in *Domus* attributed to Lévi-Strauss’s structuralism.⁴⁷ This description fits Pistoletto’s *Quadro da Pranzo* (Oggetti in Meno) (See *Illustration 149*) from 1965 for example, which employed the same timber planks later found in *Autoprogettazione*.⁴⁸

Mari and Pascali were not the only ones interested in the everyday, overlooked qualities of this material. This was what informed their use in Ambasz’s display cases, chosen for their frame-like supplementarity and so not get in the way of the contents inside; even if this had backfired, as the criticism for the show demonstrated. Planks were appearing elsewhere in the Italian design scene in the early 1970s: in 1973 Cassina reissued the Dutch architect Gerrit Rietveld’s *Krat Meubel* (Crate Furniture) (See *Illustration 150*) as part of its *Maestri* series.⁴⁹ Mari was likely to have been aware of Rietveld’s furniture, as in 1974 *Krat Meubel* was exhibited in the same Florence gallery that would then host *Autoprogettazione*.⁵⁰ Like *Day-Night*, *Krat Meubel* was sold flat packed and needed just a few screws to assemble. However, in comparison to Mari’s project, Marijke Küper and Ida van Zij

⁴⁵ The exhibition *Arte Povera - Im Spazio*, was held in Genoa at the Galleria La Bertasca, 27 September - 20 October 1967. Celant, *Arte Povera: Histories and Protagonists* (Milan: Electa, 1985), p. 31.

⁴⁶ Celant, *Arte Povera - Im Spazio* (Genoa: Dizioni Masnata; Trentalance, 1967) in Celant, *Arte Povera*, p. 31.

⁴⁷ Tommaso Trini, ‘Nuovo Alfabeto per Corpo e Materia’ *Domus*, January 1969, p. 47.

⁴⁸ ‘Arte Povera’ in Celant, *Arte Povera*, p. 31.

⁴⁹ Allison, ‘Gerrit Thomas Rietveld’ in *Made in Cassina*, ed. by Bosoni, pp. 90 -95.

⁵⁰This took place in November 1974. ‘International D a Firenze: Un Centro di Mostre e Incontri dans un Ancien Monestière’, *Domus*, April 1975, p. 31.



Illustration 149. *Quadro da Pranzo (Oggetti in Meno)* Michelangelo Pistoletto, 1965.

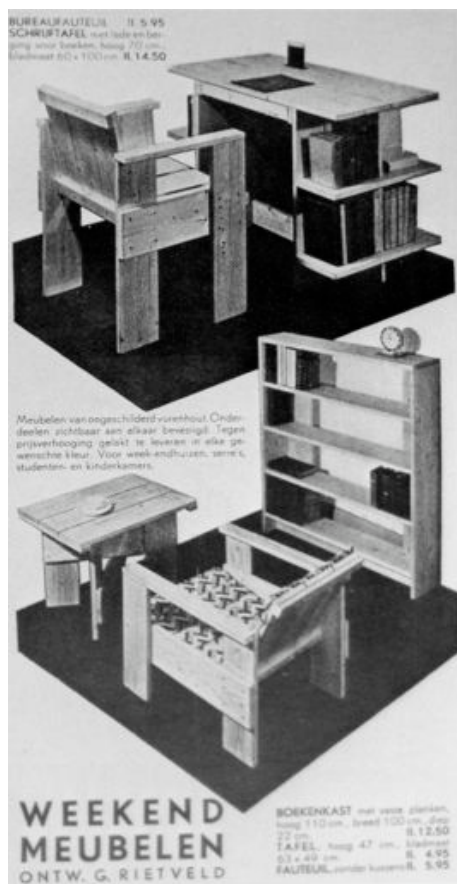


Illustration 150.
 Advertisement for Gerrit
 Rietveld's *Krat Meubel* by the
 firm Metz & Co., 1935.

argue that there was no ‘social motivation’ behind the *Krat Meubel*, and indeed it was originally sold as ‘weekend furniture’ rather than meeting an everyday need.⁵¹

As much as *Autoprogettazione* was built on the *povera* ethos of *Day-Night*, it was also a radical departure - because *Day-Night* was a commercial flop. Mari complained that he could not get its price low enough, but also that no one wanted it - not even students or ‘militant workers’.⁵² For the architect, this lack of appreciation for the *povera* was symptomatic of class oppression and false consciousness. The ‘ruling classes’ did not object to the fetishised ‘artistic manufactured object’ as it maintained their own hegemonic position, while ‘the subjugated class’ is unaware of its alienated condition.⁵³ Both the hegemonic and subaltern classes were unable to see *Day Night* as anything other than a commodity, what Marx called ‘human labour in the abstract’ and therefore evaluated on in terms of its exchange, rather than ‘use value’.⁵⁴

This was what Mari sought to overturn. *Autoprogettazione* was a project of consciousness raising in which consumers would learn to evaluate design objects on the basis of functionality, not style.⁵⁵ Mari explained how this would be achieved: ‘in making the object the user realises the structural rationale behind the object, so that, later on, he improves his ability to critically evaluate the objects that industry proposes to him’.⁵⁶ This was why ‘this experiment was called *autoprogettazione* [self-design], not *autorealizzazione* [self-production]’.⁵⁷ According to one of the journalists who interviewed him at the time he knew that this “gesture” was ‘certainly utopian, and undoubtedly impossible’, but he had tried to propose *povera*

⁵¹ Marijke Küper and Ida van Zijl, *Gerrit Th. Rietveld: The Complete Works* (Utrecht: Centraal Museum, 1992) p. 155. For more on the *Krat Meubel*, see Baroni, pp. 144 - 145.

⁵² Mari in Quintavalle, p. 269

⁵³ Mari, ‘Proposal for Behavior Directed to my Colleagues’ in *Italy: The New Domestic Landscape*, ed. by Ambasz, p. 264.

⁵⁴ Marx, *Capital* vol. I, p. 51.

⁵⁵ Mari in *Quintavalle*, p. 270

⁵⁶ Mari, ‘Proposta per un’*Autoprogettazione*’ in *Avanguardie e Cultura Popolare*, p. 224.

⁵⁷ Mari, ‘Proposta per un’*Autoprogettazione*’ in *Avanguardie e Cultura Popolare*, p. 224.

furniture through mainstream means in *Day Night*, and failed.⁵⁸ As he saw it, attending to the marginal figure of the amateur producer was the only way to achieve his utopian aims.⁵⁹

4.1.2 Amateurs, Joiners and Robinson Crusoe: The Makers behind *Autoprogettazione*

Mari may have turned to the amateur self-producer to realise his *Autoprogettazione* furniture, but the inspiration for its design and construction came from another maker, one located within the professional context. He described the *Autoprogettazione* furniture as based on ‘technique used by joiners for their workbenches’.⁶⁰ There were a number of elements to this. First, the ‘semi-spontaneous’ nature of their simultaneous design and construction that Mari emulated in the design method employed - he did not draw the objects first, but assembled sticks into miniature models with his assistants.⁶¹ The second was the methods used, based on the fundamentals of architectural construction: ‘the beam and the column’.⁶² As this method did not ‘guarantee steadiness’, strengthening diagonal lengths were added, contributing to the material-heavy appearance of the some of the designs (*See Illustration 151*). They are comparable to examples of *operaio*-produced (*See Illustration 152*) furniture that Mari would include in *Dov’è L’Artigiano* (Where the Artisan is), an exhibition of contemporary craft the architect

⁵⁸ G. Manzini, *Paese Sera*, 11 August 1964, in Mari ‘Proposta per un’*Autoprogettazione*’ in *Avanguardie e Cultura Popolare*, p. 219.

⁵⁹ The sociologist Robert A. Stebbins called amateurs ‘the marginal men of leisure’: Stebbins, ‘The Amateur: Two Sociological Definitions’, *The Pacific Sociological Review*, 20, (1977), 585 - 606 (p. 598).

⁶⁰ Manzini, *Paese Sera*, in Mari, ‘Proposta per un’*Autoprogettazione*’ in *Avanguardie e Cultura Popolare*, p. 219.

⁶¹ Mari in Quintavalle, p. 270.

⁶² Mari in Quintavalle, p. 270.



Illustration 151. One of the tables from the *Autoprogettazione* designs, demonstrating the extensive use of material in the chair. Construction involved thirty-seven in eight different lengths of plank.



Illustration 152. Two examples of chairs designed by workers for their own used in the factory context. These were included in *Dov'è L'Artigiano*, the exhibition curated by Enzo Mari in 1981.

curated in 1981 discussed in the second part of this chapter.⁶³ Paradoxically, Mari attributed the similar appearance of these objects to the lack of aesthetic consideration. He stated that, like the *operaio*, he was less interested in the ‘formal’ qualities of the object as much as producing a solid structure.⁶⁴ This was because they were designed by the worker for himself; driven by use rather than profit, these objects ‘are not false, they are not mystificatory’.⁶⁵ This was the prioritisation of ‘use value’ over ‘exchange value’ that Argan desired in his praise for plastics noted in the previous chapter.

It was these Marxist politics that informed Argan’s review of *Autoprogettazione*:

Mari does not have the myth of the good savage nor does he practice tribal cults: perhaps he thinks that one lives in the mega-necropolises of neocapitalism like Robinson on his island. To survive you have to start making the tools with which to construct an environment to live in. Mari’s right, everyone has to design; after all, it’s the best way to avoid being designed.⁶⁶

The reference to Crusoe in Argan’s Marxist critique was not without basis: Daniel Defoe’s character is mentioned in *Das Kapital* itself. Describing the ‘useful work’ which Crusoe was engaged in, including ‘making tools and furniture’ for his own use, Marx used the castaway as an example of the relations of production in pre-industrial society: in order to apportion his hours effectively, Crusoe records the labour time expended.⁶⁷ In doing so ‘the relations between Robinson and the objects

⁶³ Mari, *Dov’è L’Artigiano*, pp. 36 - 37. Mari also reproduced extracts from Dossena’s text on bricolage in the catalogue: Dossena, ‘Bricolage e Artigianato’, pp. 82 - 87. He explained that while he wanted the exhibition ‘to cover only those cases of artisan workmanship which show precise and specific professional characteristics’, leading to the exclusion of ‘every example of dilettantism, folklore, or vain foolishness’ it seemed ‘appropriate, given how wide-spread is the phenomenon’ to include extracts from Dossena’s text. Mari, *Dov’è L’Artigiano*, p. 85.

⁶⁴ Mari in Quintavalle, p. 271.

⁶⁵ Fachinelli in Quintavalle, p. 120.

⁶⁶ Argan, ‘Tanti Mobili Fatti in Casa’, *L’Espresso*, 5 May 1974 in Quintavalle, p. 122.

⁶⁷ Marx, *Capital*, I, p. 81.

that form this wealth of his own creation, are here so simple and clear as to be intelligible without exertion'.⁶⁸ Although he did not mention Crusoe himself, Mari did aspire to both this transparency of social relations as well as the uncommodified condition of Crusoe's objects. Baudrillard described the latter as a feature of the pre-industrial economy: the 'stage of artisan exchange' retained elements of the earlier stage of 'primitive exchange gift' in which 'goods are neither produced nor consumed as values'.⁶⁹ In his attempt to reproduce the unalienated pre-industrial maker in the amateur producer of 1970s Italy, Mari demonstrates a faith in the potential authenticity of artisanal self-production, one that is at the basis of *Autoprogettazione's* demystificatory potential.

Arguably, Crusoe also represented the ideal maker of *Autoprogettazione*. This was the shipwrecked sailor who declared that he 'had never handled a tool in my life', but was able to fashion a chair and table out of the rudimentary carpentry tools salvaged from the shipwreck.⁷⁰ In order to appeal to the non-professional and unskilled maker, Mari presupposed a commonly-held baseline of skill, and designed the project accordingly.

Autoprogettazione was all about being as easy as possible. Mari described the materials used as 'the easiest to acquire', available from any local workshop. For some of the designs you could send off for a kit of materials from Simon International or even purchase the finished piece from them, as part of their *Metamobile* series of designer interpretations of anonymous furniture.⁷¹ At a cost of forty thousand lire, this was deemed to be still cheaper than buying regular furniture.⁷² The user then either cut the standardised lengths to size him or herself, or

⁶⁸ Marx, *Capital*, I, p. 81.

⁶⁹ Baudrillard, *The Mirror of Production*, trans. by Mark Poster (St Louis, Mi: Telos Press, 1975), pp. 97 - 98.

⁷⁰ Daniel Defoe, *Robinson Crusoe* (London: Penguin, 2003), p. 55. *Robinson Crusoe* was first published in 1719.

⁷¹ In addition to Mari's furniture, this included designs by Carlo Scarpa. See Virgilio Vercelloni, *The Adventure of Design: Gavina*, trans. by Anthony Shugaar (New York: Rizzoli, 1987), pp. 135 - 153.

⁷² Manzini in Mari 'Proposta per un'Autoprogettazione' in *Avanguardie e Cultura Popolare*, p. 219.

had it done by a local carpenter. Assembly required just a hammer and nails, which Mari called the tools of ‘collective patrimony: nearly everyone has at least a hammer and nearly everyone has at least on occasion tried to hammer a nail’.⁷³ Paraphrasing Mari, a journalist in *Paese Sera* newspaper says ‘difficult? Not at all [...] there’s no need for glue, no need for particular joints, the method is extremely simple’.⁷⁴

In his desire to show that design ‘is an easy and simple activity’, Mari was echoing the wider position of the radical avant-garde at this time.⁷⁵ As Branzi wrote in *Casabella* in 1972:

today, creating music, poetry, painting, sculpture, dance, engaging in any other physical activity requires a technical knowledge of the particular subject matter. The avant-garde destroys these techniques, prefacing any operation it undertakes with this only program: “Art is easy”.⁷⁶

However Branzi did not think that *Autoprogettazione* fully promoted the avant-garde’s participatory message. Instead, he saw it as a project of top-down design participation, one that he attributed to Mari’s involvement in *Arte Programmata*, a movement whose aim, according to Branzi, was ‘to make a partner of you (not a protagonist)’.⁷⁷

Arguably, it was this limited participation that contributed to *Autoprogettazione*’s failure in revolutionary terms. Mari complained that only or two percent of those who wrote in appeared to have understood the project.⁷⁸ The rest were either impoverished students or bourgeois consumers who saw the rustic assemblages as

⁷³ Mari in Quintavalle, p. 270.

⁷⁴ Manzini in Mari, ‘Proposta per un’Autoprogettazione’ in *Avanguardie e Cultura Popolare*, p. 219.

⁷⁵ Mari in Falchinelli in Mari, ‘Proposta per un’Autoprogettazione’ in *Avanguardie e Cultura Popolare*, p. 224.

⁷⁶ Branzi, ‘La Gioconda Sbarbata: Il Ruolo dell’Avanguardia’, *Casabella*, March, 1972, 27 - 33 (p. 33).

⁷⁷ Branzi, *Un Museo del Design Italiano*, p. 169.

⁷⁸ Mari in Quintavalle, p. 271.

ideal for their rural retreats and second homes.⁷⁹ *Autoprogettazione* fed into a larger fashion for wooden furniture in natural finishes at the time, what Mari called the ‘ingenuous return to nature’ - a trend that he recognised his designs both benefited from and fuelled.⁸⁰ Ultimately, the *Autoprogettazione* furniture could not resist its transformation into desirable commodities, a process that Mari arguably contributed to in making it possible for these bourgeois consumers to buy the furniture ready-made from Simon International.

If Italy’s radical architects wanted to move beyond the “crisis of the object” and achieve their utopian aims then using the existing design language, and pinning their hopes on bourgeois consumers, could not provide this. The next case study upholds Mari’s optimism in the potential of alternative makers and participation-based manual manufacture, but with a difference. Dalisi’s *tecnica povera* (poor technology) was not based on the existing conventions of design conception and production, but their radical renewal. Furthermore he aimed to do so not through the amateur adult maker, but the child.

4.1.3 Riccardo Dalisi and *Tecnica Povera*

In 1973 Dalisi was invited to speak at *Significato e Creatività del Lavoro Artigianale nella Realtà di Oggi* (Meaning and Creativity of Artisanal Work Today), a conference organised by the craft association ENAPI on occasion of the fifteenth *Triennale*.⁸¹ He opened his paper by discussing the recent re-emergence of craft: ‘today people are talking about the crisis of design, that is of the cultural value of the industrial product, the manual product returns to

⁷⁹ Mari in Quintavalle, p. 271.

⁸⁰ Mari in Quintavalle, p. 271.

⁸¹ *Convegno “Significato e Creatività del Lavoro Artigiano nella Realtà d’Oggi”*, Milan, 3 – 4 November 1973. ASTM.

centre stage, and with it all the formal, social, economic values that it has always carried'.⁸²

The architect was speaking at a time when the international craft revival was becoming increasingly visible in Italy. There was a new *Sezione del Lavoro Artigiano* (Section of Artisanal Work) at the *Triennale* (See *Illustration 153*), which included studio potters such as Pompeo Pianezzola and Alessio Tasca amongst its exhibitors, all of whom were chosen for exemplifying what the organisers called craft's 'free and spontaneous creative expressiveness' as opposed to the 'loss of individuality in a uniformity of behaviour' that industrialisation had wrought.⁸³ For the architectural critic Joseph Rykwert, this 'rough, haptic' installation was 'the harbinger of a kind of protest against consumer society familiar in the Anglo-Saxon world', albeit one still out of place in the design-led *Triennale*.⁸⁴

For Dalisi, however, these two contexts were not incompatible. As he saw it, industry could benefit from craft's individualist spontaneity: 'industrial products acquire rigour only if the heterogeneous, unexpected, at most rough and asymmetric intervenes'.⁸⁵ Industry had to study and sustain 'forms of work and creativity' found in techniques which had 'for millennia, supported the economic relations of all people and their social forms'.⁸⁶

It was in this context that Dalisi introduced his own such proposal: *tecnica povera* (poor technique). In line with its *povera* credentials, this was a production technique based on found materials elaborated using a 'poverty of

⁸² Dalisi, 'Artigianato e Lotta di Quartiere' in *Convegno "Significato e Creatività' del Lavoro Artigiano nella Realta' d'Oggi"*, sheet 1.

⁸³ 'Sezione del Lavoro Artigiano' in *Quindicesima Triennale di Milano: Esposizione Internazionale delle Arti Decorative e Industriali Moderne e dell'Architettura Moderna* (Florence: Centro Di, 1973), p. 51.

⁸⁴ Joseph Rykwert, '15 Triennale', *Domus*, January 1974, 1 - 6 (p. 2).

⁸⁵ Dalisi, 'Artigianato e Lotta di Quartiere', sheet 1.

⁸⁶ Dalisi, 'Artigianato e Lotta di Quartiere', sheet 1.

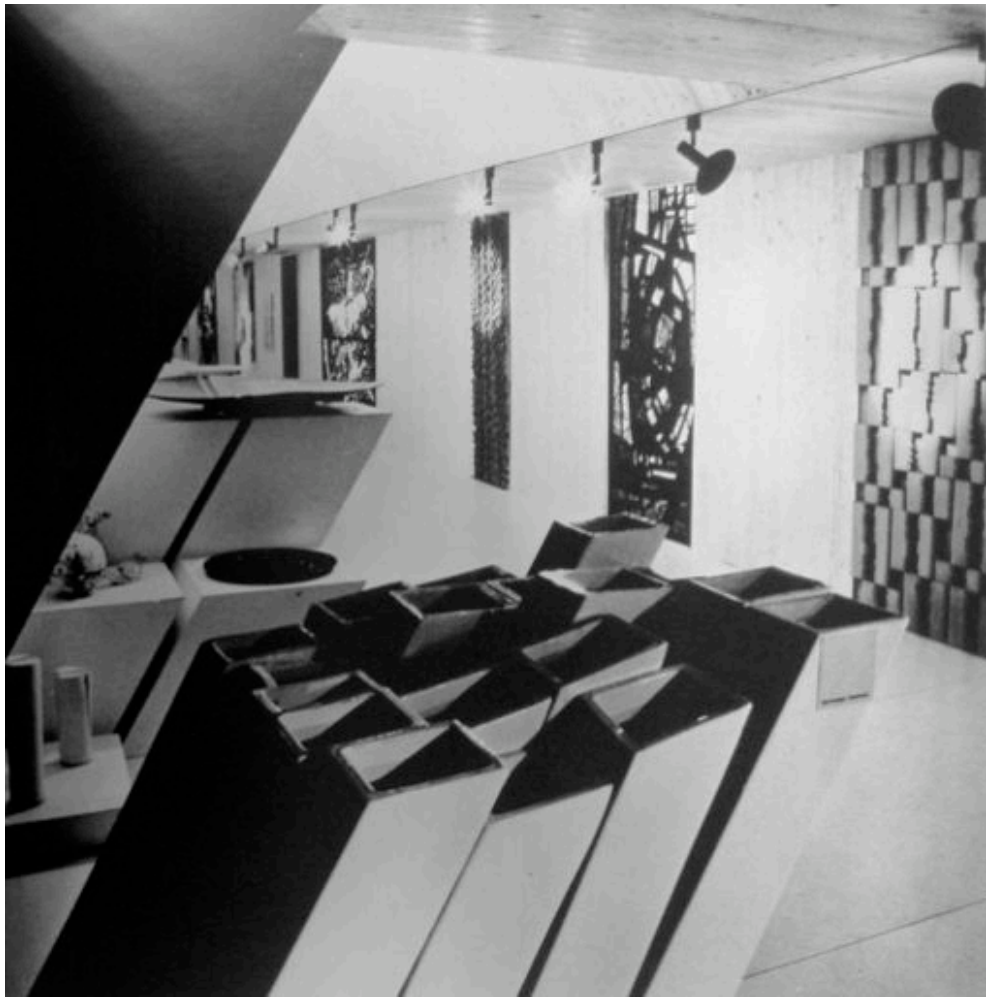


Illustration 153. View of the *Sezione del Lavoro Artigiano* (Section of Artisanal Work) at the fifteenth *Triennale*, 1973. In the foreground, a ceramic work by Pino Castagna. The temporary walls of the installation were constructed from untreated timber planks, the same as those used for Mari's *Autoprogettazione*.

means' that was intended to 'polemicise the myth of the absolute necessity of costly equipment'.⁸⁷ The advanced technologies this tooling suggested 'had accelerated the demise of craft and every technique [...] that required direct contact between man and the object', and prohibited what he saw as the necessary 'experience of direct elaboration'.⁸⁸

Like the *povera* artists, Dalisi conceived this as a liberatory technique, one that freed up an inner, universal creative impulse. In his emphasis on the experiential quality of learning he echoes the American pedagogue John Dewey, whose writings had been disseminated through Eco's *Opera Aperta* - and both Dewey and Eco were influential on the *povera* artists.⁸⁹ Dalisi thought that experiencing *tecnica povera* would 'enlarge and recuperate the sphere of creativity in work and productivity' and therefore engender 'a structural mutation of the relations of production and management'.⁹⁰

Dalisi's faith in *tecnica povera* was not mere hypothesis. He devoted the rest of his paper to describing research he had been conducting into its potential, the results of which were displayed at the *Triennale*. These chair-like 'sculpture-objects' (See *Illustrations 154 and 155*) in wooden ply and papier-mâché were made by Dalisi in collaboration with a group of artisans, students and architects, and the 'direct support' of children from the Traiano quarter of Naples, whose drawings decorated the chairs, and were displayed alongside a series of embroideries made by women from the area.⁹¹

Traiano had been Dalisi's testing ground for *tecnica povera*. In 1971 he was teaching a class in 'architectural technology' at Naples University and took a

⁸⁷ Dalisi, 'La Tecnica Povera in Rivolta: La Cultura del Sottoproletariato', *Casabella*, May, 1972, 28 - 34 (p. 28).

⁸⁸ Dalisi, 'La Tecnica Povera in Rivolta', p. 29.

⁸⁹ Flood and Morris, 'Introduction: Zero to Infinity' in *Zero to Infinity*, ed. by Flood and Morris, pp. 9 - 20 (p. 16).

⁹⁰ Dalisi, 'La Tecnica Povera in Rivolta', p. 29.

⁹¹ 'Mostra III: La Tecnica Povera in Rivolta' in *Quindicesima Triennale di Milano*, p. 92.



Illustration 154. Wooden ply chair made using *tecnica povera* (poor technique), on display at the 1973 *Triennale* in an installation entitled *Tecnica Povera in Rivolta*.



Illustration 155. Papier-mâché chairs made using *tecnica povera* on display at the 1973 *Triennale*.

group of students to this “satellite” area, one of many born in the property speculation of the boom years and now suffering from mass unemployment and widespread poverty.⁹² On arriving at the area’s deserted piazzas, the students set about building free-form structures from plywood lengths. The day took an unexpected turn, when, affronted by this intrusion, several local children stole some of the wooden lengths and used them as catapults, flinging stones at the structures and destroying the students’ work. However, on being invited to join in, these same children started helping the students and soon took the creative lead - by end of the day it was the other way around, and it was the students helping the children to realise their ideas for the structures (*See Illustration 156*).⁹³

For the next three years Dalisi returned repeatedly to Traiano to further test this participatory creativity. He adopted the role of an anthropological pedagogue, supplying the children with materials for drawing (*See Illustration 157*) and embroidery, and making objects for them to play with. He described these as ‘educative tools’ like those of the Italian educationalist Maria Montessori, designed to encourage spontaneity and educate the children into Traiano’s local craft traditions, such as embroidery, fretwork and *papier-mâché*.⁹⁴ The architect photographed the resulting furniture (*See Illustration 158 and 159*) and structures, the latter often executed with the help of local adults or the students. He kept a diary, excerpts of which were published in *Casabella*.⁹⁵ In one 1972 article he described his surprise at the ‘liveliness and complexity’ of the imagination of these children, who were endowed with a spontaneous creativity that far surpassed that of his students:

⁹² Judith Chubb, ‘Naples Under the Left: the Limits of Local Change’, *Comparative Politics*, 13 (1980), 53 – 78, (p. 59).

⁹³ Dalisi, ‘La Tecnica Povera in Rivolta’, *Casabella*, May 1972, 28 – 34, (p. 33).

⁹⁴ Dalisi, ‘La Tecnica Povera in Rivolta’, p.32. On Montessori’s educational toys, see Philip A. Dennis, ‘Lévi-Strauss in the Garden: The Montessori Pre-Schooler as *Bricoleur*’ *International Review of Education*, 20 (1974) pp. 3 - 16.

⁹⁵ Dalisi, ‘La Tecnica Povera in Rivolta’, *Casabella*, May, 1972, pp. 28 - 34; Dalisi, ‘La Partecipazione Creativa è Possibile’, *Casabella*, August-September 1972, pp. 95 - 99; Dalisi, ‘Tecnica Povera e Produttività Disperata’, *Casabella*, October 1973, pp. 46 - 47; Dalisi, ‘Minimal Technology’, *Casabella*, February 1974, pp. 43 - 45.



Illustration 156. Children and architecture students at work on one of the *tecnica povera* structures, Traiano.

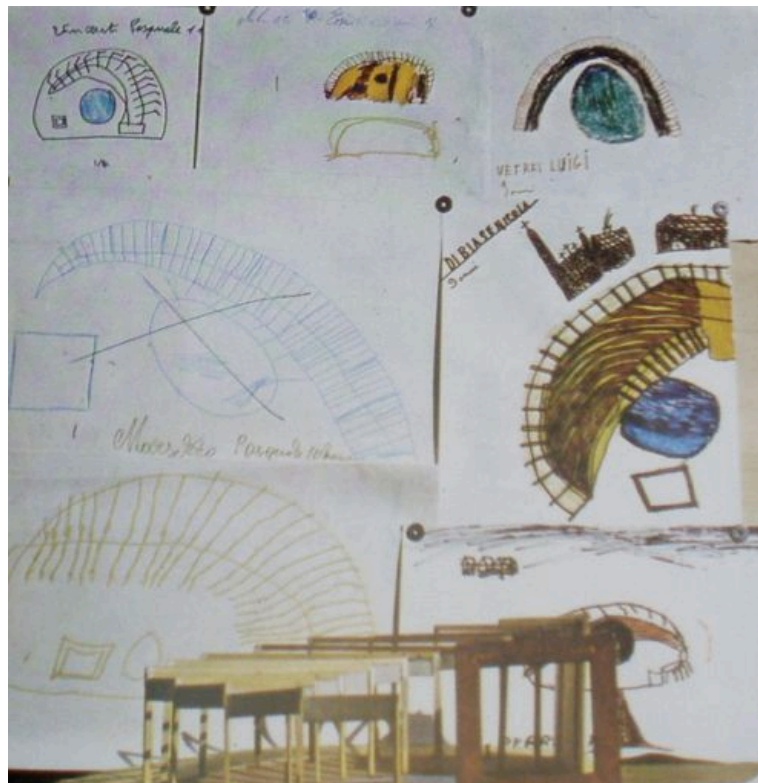


Illustration 157. A montage of the children's drawings included in *Casabella* in 1972, together with an architectural model, one of Dalisi's 'educative tools'.



Illustration 158. Some of the Traiano children, gathered in front of one of the chairs made, 1972.



Illustration 159. The chair itself, one of several made by the Traiano children using *tecnica povera*, 1972.

‘the children of the lumpenproletariat (6-15) draw better, more freely and with more imagination than architecture students (18 - 25)’.⁹⁶

Dalisi attributed the children’s superior creativity to their lack of education; their free-form drawings made it ‘clear how school today burns creativity’.⁹⁷ His critique echoed the larger crisis in Italy’s education system at the time.⁹⁸ It was also seen to be a question of work. According to Branzi, because they did not experience the “repressive” division of labour, ‘all children are artists; only one adult of a thousand is’.⁹⁹ Raggi followed the same rationale, opposing the repetitive rhythms of the assembly line to the children’s ‘spontaneous and free process’.¹⁰⁰ This was as much a question of class as of age: these were the children of the unemployed and underemployed *sottoproletariato* (lumpenproletariat) workforce that defined Naples. Historically seen as lacking class consciousness – and therefore without revolutionary potential, the success of the workers struggles in the *Caldo Autunno* was seen to have politicised the Neapolitan *sottoproletariato*, and their political potential was therefore re-evaluated.¹⁰¹ Free from the alienating effects of factory production, this was also seen to be the only socio-economic group ‘where there still resides something that remains of craft’, as one speaker at the 1973 conference put it.¹⁰²

All these writers saw the children as unalienated makers, whose affinity with *tecnica povera* testified to its own liberating qualities. They were living proof of the

⁹⁶ Dalisi, ‘La Tecnica Povera in Rivolta’, p. 29.

⁹⁷ ‘Italian Reinvolution’ *Casabella*, April 1972, p. 49.

⁹⁸ See Branzi’s notes on the ‘Abolition of School’ for an example of this. Branzi ‘Radical Notes: l’Abolizione della Scuola’, *Casabella*, January 1973, p. 10.

⁹⁹ Branzi, ‘La Gioconda Sbarbata’, p. 33.

¹⁰⁰ Franco Raggi, ‘Radical Story’, *Casabella*, October 1973, pp. 43 – 44.

¹⁰¹ Chubb, p. 61.

¹⁰² ‘Interventi di: Filippo Alison e Riccardo Dalisi’, *Convegno “Significato e Creativita’ del Lavoro Artigiano nella Realta’ d’Oggi”*, p.1.

radicals' utopian aim, which Branzi termed the 'liberation of man from labour'.¹⁰³ Dalisi declared that these 'fertile and authentic' children 'have a lot to teach (as the culture of primitives has a lot to teach us)'.¹⁰⁴ Like Mari, Dalisi looked to alternative makers to radicalise production: however, while Mari attempted to inculcate an authentic mode of production amongst the everyday adult amateur, Dalisi located this already fully formed in the infantile, primitive. As the following section argues, in his construction of these alternative, non-industrial makers there is a return of the turn to craft as an 'other' that was first seen in the American curators of *Italy at Work* and the 'Architettura Spontanea' installation at the 1951 *Triennale* discussed in chapter one.

4.1.4 The *Povera* Primitive: The Unalienated, Infantile 'Other'

Dalisi's interest in the children evinced a continued interest in infantile creativity amongst modern artists and designers. Praising the different structural logic the children demonstrated, he echoes the earlier inspiration that Klee, Miro and Picasso took from the composition of children's drawings.¹⁰⁵ In his active encouragement of infantile creativity he is comparable to the Danish artist CoBRA artist Asger Jorn, who in the early 1950s was living in Albisola.¹⁰⁶ In 1955, Jorn organised a competition for the town's children to decorate a hundred ceramic plates, and declared the results as demonstrating how 'the decorative abilities of preschool children far surpass the decorative sense of adults'.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰³ Branzi, *The Hot House*, p. 81.

¹⁰⁴ Dalisi, 'La Tecnica Povera in Rivolta', p. 29.

¹⁰⁵ John Carlin, 'From Wonder to Blunder: The Child is Mother to the Man' in *Discovering Child Art: Essays on Childhood, Primitivism and Modernism*, ed. by Jonathan Fineberg, (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press: 1998), (242 - 262) p. 245.

¹⁰⁶ Stokvis, 'COBRA and Ceramics' in *The Unexpected*, ed. by Koplos et al. pp. 143 - 157, (pp. 150 - 154).

¹⁰⁷ Troels Andersen, 'Jorn, Cobra and Children's Drawings' in *Discovering Child Art*, ed. by Fineberg, pp. 235 - 241 (p. 240); Stokvis, 'COBRA and Ceramics' in *The Unexpected*, ed. by Koplos et al. p. 153.

These artists shared a belief in the unfettered creativity of children, and like Dalisi attributed this to their uncontaminated, uncultured state. Branzi wrote of the ‘employment of poor and semi-savage children of the Traiano quarter [...] as an attempt to discover the purest possible samples of culture [...] their creative reaction [...] the nearest to a state of total spontaneity’.¹⁰⁸ In this Romantic-era idea, children are seen as closer to nature, as undivided selves - a distinction between the totality of primitive ‘other’ and the fragmented present that the anthropologist Daniel Miller has described as at the basis of primitivism in art and found in the perceived affinity between nature and culture in *Arte Povera*.¹⁰⁹

In the movement’s early years, the *povera* artists’ turn to nature was part of their attempt to distinguish themselves from American-imported Pop Art and express their opposition to a country associated with technological infatuation and its imperialist war with Vietnam.¹¹⁰ The anthropological orientation that informed Dalisi’s experiments in *tecnica povera* was equally politically charged. According to Paola Fillippucci, Italian anthropology is divided into two main traditions: the earlier folklore studies, and “cultural anthropology”, which only emerged as a discrete and institutionally recognised discipline in the post-war era.¹¹¹ Italy’s limited colonial experiences and own liminal position in the ‘self-other’ divide contributed to the distinctive shape of the latter, in which the gaze was focused on the relationship between the “primitive” and “modern” not in some spatially or temporally distant ‘other’, but in the national present.¹¹² This was most visible in Italy’s North-South division, a quasi-colonial relationship that informed the reception of these Southern children’s creativity; the critic Achille Bonito Oliva described Traiano as Naples’

¹⁰⁸ Branzi, ‘Radical Notes: Minimal Technology’, *Casabella*, January 1974, p. 6.

¹⁰⁹ Daniel Miller, ‘Primitive Art and the Necessity of Primitivism in Art’ in *The Myth of Primitivism: Perspectives on Art*, ed. by Susan Hiller (London; New York: Routledge, 1991), pp. 35 - 53 (pp. 37 - 38).

¹¹⁰ Lumley, *Arte Povera*, p.11; Christov-Bakargiev, ‘Survey’ in *Arte Povera*, ed. by Christov-Bakargiev, (London: Phaidon, 1999), pp. 14 - 47 (pp. 20, 22).

¹¹¹ Paola Filippucci, ‘Anthropological Perspectives on Culture in Italy’ in *Italian Cultural Studies*, ed. by Forgacs and Lumley, pp. 52 - 71 (pp. 59, 64).

¹¹² Diana Pinto in Vinigio Grottanelli, ‘Ethnology and/or Cultural Anthropology in Italy: Traditions and Developments’, *Current Anthropology*, 18 (1977), 593 - 612 (pp. 596, 608).

most ‘African’ area.¹¹³ However, as Dalisi was himself from Potenza, even further South than Naples, it is unlikely that his primitivist gaze was the product of this.

In effect, *tecnica povera* reflected the dominance of Marxist structuralism in Italian anthropology in the 1970s. The anthropologist Alberto Mario Cirese led a Gramscian-informed interest in *dislivelli di cultura* (cultural stratification), investigating the relationships between hegemonic and subaltern groups.¹¹⁴ This research showed that the latter did not passively receive the ideas of the dominant group, but modified and adapted them. These processes were interpreted as forms of protest, and further contributed to a re-evaluation of the revolutionary potential of the lower classes.¹¹⁵ In the same way, Dalisi described that while the children ‘assimilated’ the language of the students’ structures, they also made it their own: he described the ‘overlapping latticework’ found in their structures as their own ‘discovery’.¹¹⁶ However, closer examination of Dalisi’s idealisation of the children’s seemingly natural, unalienated constructive abilities, reveals how his construction of the ‘primitive’ portended a primitivist fetishism of the objects they produced.

4.1.5 *Bricolage, Play and the Primitivist Fetish*

Dalisi’s perceived affinity between the ‘primitive’ Traiano children and *tecnica povera* was in reality not that surprising. Like Mari’s amateur producers, these children were *bricoleurs*, but this time with the structuralist anthropology associations.¹¹⁷ This was the figure that Lévi-Strauss had used to distinguish between ‘scientific knowledge and mythical or magical

¹¹³ Achille Bonito Oliva, ‘La Sensibilità Armata’ in *Riccardo Dalisi* (Florence: Centro Di, 1977), n.p.

¹¹⁴ A. M. Cirese, *Cultura Egemonica e Culture Subalterne* (Palermo: Palumbo, 1971) in George R. Saunders, ‘Contemporary Italian Cultural Anthropology’, *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 13 (1984) 447 – 466, (p. 457).

¹¹⁵ Saunders, p. 458.

¹¹⁶ Dalisi, ‘La Tecnica Povera in Rivolta’, p. 29..

¹¹⁷ Dossena, ‘Bricolage’, p. 335.

thought'.¹¹⁸ In comparison to the engineer, the *bricoleur* works within his contained conditions: 'his universe of instruments is closed and the rules of his game are always to make do with 'whatever is at hand', that is to say with a set of tools and materials which is always finite'.¹¹⁹

In line with its primitivist strategies, *bricolage* was the productive mode of *Arte Povera*. Artists such as Boetti and Pascali adopted what Trini termed a 'mental and behavioural *bricolage*' making use of the materials at-hand in an attempt to establish 'an authentic encounter with one's primordial needs'.¹²⁰

This also corresponded to the *povera*'s rejection of technological progressivism: as the anthropologist Victor Buchli has noted, the 'work of the *bricoleur* is inherently anti-modern, because it accepts the world as it is and reconfigures it, rather than anticipating a new world and inventing it'.¹²¹ These qualities were seen elsewhere in the postmodern architecture and design that was emerging in the early 1970s; Charles Jencks and Nathan Silver mobilised *bricolage* as the production method of *Adhocism*, a debt they acknowledged in their eponymous book.¹²² As Buchli has described, this was one of the many ways that *bricolage* gained 'wider purchase' in postmodernism, albeit here without the 'qualities of fragmentation, quotation, parody and pastiche' that would define its presence in Studio Alchymia and Memphis.¹²³

In comparison to adult artists and architects, the Neapolitan children also had a greater affinity with *bricolage* because of its analogies with play. Philip Dennis has described this connection between infantile and mythical thought: 'as with the primitive artist or the French *bricoleur*, the child's cognitive processes are expressed

¹¹⁸ Lévi-Strauss, p. 22.

¹¹⁹ Lévi-Strauss, pp. 16, 17.

¹²⁰ Trini, 'Nuovo Alfabeto per Corpo e Materia', p. 47.

¹²¹ Victor Buchli, 'On Bricolage' in *Postmodernism: Style and Subversion 1970 – 1990*, ed. by Adamson and Pavitt, (London: V&A Publications, 2011 [forthcoming]), n.p.

¹²² Charles Jencks and Nathan Silver, *Adhocism: The Case for Improvisation* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1972), p. 16.

¹²³ Buchli, 'On Bricolage', n.p.

through activity'.¹²⁴ As 'primitives', children operate primarily by the 'science of the concrete', expressing themselves through mythical activities such as ritual, which, as Lévi-Strauss described, are 'played'.¹²⁵ As he suggests, play is not just the activity of children. Rather, as the medieval historian Johan Huizinga famously described, play is the archetypal, pre-cultural, human activity, one that is at the basis of all human activities.¹²⁶

The analogy between play and *bricolage* is found repeatedly in *tecnica povera*. As Huizinga described, play is defined by its 'disinterestedness', standing 'outside the immediate satisfaction of wants and appetites'.¹²⁷ This chimes with Dossena's description of *bricolage*'s 'dilettante artisans' who produced 'not for social obligation or for profit but rather out of personal necessity and private pleasure'.¹²⁸ Production was driven not by profit, but voluntary experimentation, one enabled by play's existence outside of normal social conventions. This is often characterised by a physical separation, like Traiano's piazza-playgrounds. These provided a primitive space within the everyday for its participants to experiment outside of the conventions of materials, of methods of construction, of aesthetic and function.

It was not just the opportunity for freeform experimentation that appealed to the radical architects. Just as play undermined the figure of the professional designer and the pursuit of the new, so it subverted the idea of craftsmanship. Dossena argued that 'things made badly on purpose' were a 'must' in *bricolage*: this was the only way to 'attain the anti-elegance of the gypsies, the lumpenproletariat'.¹²⁹ It recalls the welcoming of mistakes in Sottsass's collaboration with Renzo Brugola and Officina Undici's furniture discussed in the previous chapter, and the minimum level of skill required for Mari's *Autoprogettazione*.

¹²⁴ Dennis, p. 6.

¹²⁵ Lévi-Strauss, p. 30.

¹²⁶ Johan Huizinga, *Homo Ludens* (London: Maurice Temple Smith, 1970), pp. 22 - 23.

¹²⁷ Huizinga, p. 27.

¹²⁸ Dossena, 'Bricolage', p. 335.

¹²⁹ Dossena, 'Bricolage', p. 354.

Tecnica povera involved even less craftsmanship than *Autoprogettazione*. Compare one of Mari's chairs to one made by the children themselves (See *Illustration 160*). Both use hammers, nails and rely on readymade materials of prefabricated wooden lengths. However in contrast to the newly bought lengths used in *Autoprogettazione*, here they are pockmarked, their ends frayed, their previous life evident: the left of the two wooden poles that make up the back of the chair has the remnants of a half-lap joint, normally hidden away in cabinet making. In place of the beam and column and the 'good enough' of *Autoprogettazione*, *tecnica povera* offered crude construction: individual pieces appear rammed together, resulting in unevenly sized gaps and visible joints, while the fawn-like legs do not look like they would bear much weight.

Branzi praised this as part of *tecnica povera*'s 'constructional energy': its 'wobbly joints, broken nails, non-linearity, approximation work, splinters, fragility, oversized structures, cracks, drabness'.¹³⁰ In aiming for the approximate, the *ad hoc* solution, *tecnica povera* resisted what Jencks and Silver described as the standardised 'repetition of "perfect forms"' of the factory line.¹³¹ It suggests a mode of production based on minimum effort, on shortcuts, in other words, on cheating. This too was a characteristic of play: Thomas Henricks has described how Huizinga accepted 'cheating and trickery as legitimate elements' in play as they maintained the illusion on which it depends.¹³²

This idea of cheating goes against the values of authentic, honest making and integrity associated with craft - at least as it appears in the writings of Morris, Pye and even Mari. Yet as much as it wilfully negated the conspicuous skill of the luxury object, *tecnica povera* was not predicated on an absence of technical virtuosity, but rather a different type of proficiency. Aiming for the approximate was no less

¹³⁰ Branzi, 'Minimal Technology', p. 6.

¹³¹ Jencks and Silver, *Adhocism*, pp. 55, 120.

¹³² Thomas S. Henricks, *Play Reconsidered: Sociological Perspectives on Human Expression* (Urbana; Chicago: University of Illinois, 2006), p.18.



Illustration 160. One of the chairs made by the children using *tecnica povera*, 1972. Made from fur-covered seat and recycled wooden lengths.

complex or effortful than aiming for perfection, particularly when it involved skills and rules that were not your own. *Tecnica povera*, as Dalisi makes clear, was the preserve of the primitive ‘other’, not the radical architect. He describes the furry-seated chair as the ‘pure product of elementary and intuitive praxis’, putting the children’s abilities in *tecnica povera* down to nature.¹³³ In the same way that Lévi-Strauss describes how magic naturalises ‘human actions’, so these objects were seen as the product of myth, or magic.¹³⁴ Following the reference to Gell in the previous chapter, *tecnica povera* was just as ‘enchanted’, and therefore alienating, a technology to Dalisi as glassblowing was to the American tourists.¹³⁵ Dalisi had become bedazzled, over-evaluating these primitivist products just as the visitor fetishised the exhibits in the *Italy: The New Domestic Landscape* crates. Here however this was not the result of a commodity fetish, but a combined anthropological-primitive one.

This primitive fetish appears elsewhere in twentieth century avant-garde design, most notably in the surrealist movement of the 1930s. Art historian Romy Golan has cited objects such as Meret Oppenheim’s 1936 fur-covered cup, plate and spoon as an example of the incorporation of the everyday objects and ‘primitive’ tropes in surrealism, part of the movement’s aim to expose ‘the ideological triangulation between the sexual fetish (Freud), the commodity fetish (Marx) and the tribal fetish (ethnology)’.¹³⁶ However, the surrealists’ rejection of the fetish proved impossible: ‘their celebration of the erotics of the commodity through these objects ultimately extolled just as much as it critiqued the notion of exchange value’.¹³⁷ The same was true of the furry seat of the *tecnica povera* chair, albeit here without the erotics of the Freudian fetish: by making a virtue of ‘bad’ making, Dalisi ended up creating a mode

¹³³ Dalisi, ‘La Tecnica Povera in Rivolta’, p. 34.

¹³⁴ Lévi-Strauss, pp. 221.

¹³⁵ Gell, p. 59.

¹³⁶ Romy Golan, ‘Triangulating the Surrealist Fetish’, *Visual Anthropology Review*, 10 (1994) 50 – 65, (p. 52).

¹³⁷ Golan, p. 59.

of production just as fetishised as the intricate craftsmanship of the luxury commodity.

Furthermore, in the craft revival and anti-industrial turn to craft of the early 1970s, the wonky joints and rough appearance of the *povera* objects were just as appealing as the back-to-basics *Autoprogettazione* furniture. Branzi cautioned against the long-term ramifications of this: in proposing a *povera* aesthetic avant-garde architects risked worsening the current situation where ‘poverty is called simplicity and ignorance is called alternative culture’.¹³⁸ While *tecnica povera* could potentially realise the utopian desire for man’s liberation from work, it also ‘looked like a dangerous revival of the virtue of poverty’, and therefore might not only prolong, but exacerbate the current crisis of class alienation and exploitation.¹³⁹

Despite, and arguably because of, its potential problems, the architectural avant-garde’s engagement with the *povera* does not end here. Dalisi’s experiments became the starting point for the largest, most well known chapter in radical design and subject of the next case study: Global Tools. *Tecnica povera* had demonstrated the creativity of the unalienated child. The challenge facing Global Tools was how to unleash this in the alienated adult. As the group’s name suggests, this radicalisation was seen to lie not in the techniques utilised in production, but one step back, in the tools of manufacture employed. The following case study focuses on the multi-faceted conceptualisation of tools by the group, and considers how the persistence of the *povera* ideal informed their idea of tools and the role of craft envisaged in their critical utopia in the only workshop the group ever carried out.

4.1.6 Global Tools and “The Teaching of Crafts”¹⁴⁰

In January 1973 *Casabella*’s office played hosted to a group of over thirty architects, artists and critics: with the appointment of Alessandro Mendini as editor in 1970 the

¹³⁸ Branzi, ‘Design and Minority Culture’, *Casabella*, May 1975 p. 8.

¹³⁹ Branzi, *The Hot House*, p. 84.

¹⁴⁰ Mendini, ‘The Teaching of Crafts’, *Casabella*, May 1973, p. 5.

magazine had become the main publishing forum and organising force of the radical avant-garde. Those present were the representatives of what Branzi described as ‘the most advanced area of radical architecture’.¹⁴¹ In addition to Branzi and his Archizoom colleagues these were: Remo Buti, Adalberto Dal Lago of *Rassegna* magazine, Dalisi, Gruppo 9999, Mendini, Pesce, Gianni Pettena, Franco Raggi, Sottsass, Superstudio, UFO and Zziggurat. Their meeting constituted the founding of Global Tools, an event whose importance to radical design was confirmed by its appearance on the magazine’s May cover (*See Illustration 161*), and reaffirmed by articles inside on this collective that was dedicated, as Mendini declared, to ‘the teaching of crafts’.¹⁴²

Despite the fanfare, this was not an entirely positive moment for the radical avant-garde. Taking place less than a year after the celebration of Italian design at *Italy: The New Domestic Landscape*, the movement was seen to be already on its last legs. Even prior to the MoMA exhibition Branzi was arguing for ‘the immediate need for all the avant-garde focus in architecture to go beyond their occasional forays [...] and to develop a much broader “long-term” strategy’.¹⁴³ This was the aim of the *Casabella* meeting, to gather these energies together and found what they called ‘the final project of the first Italian counter-school of architecture’.¹⁴⁴

In *Casabella*, Branzi qualified the place of craft in Global Tools. He denied that they had anything to do with the anti-industrial ethos of the craft revival: ‘the manual work and handicraft (“minimal”) techniques promoted [...] are by no means to be understood as alternatives to industrial production’.¹⁴⁵ What they proposed was ‘a “system of laboratories” in which it will be possible, through experimental manual

¹⁴¹ Branzi, ‘Radical Notes: Global Tools’, *Casabella*, May 1973 p. 8.

¹⁴² Mendini, ‘The Teaching of Crafts’, p. 5.

¹⁴³ Branzi, ‘Radical Notes: Global Tools’, p. 8.

¹⁴⁴ ‘La Cronaca’ in *Global Tools* (Milan: Edizioni L’Uomo e L’Arte, 1974), n.p.

¹⁴⁵ Branzi, ‘Radical Notes: Global Tools’, p. 8.



Illustration 161. March cover of 1973 *Casabella* featuring all of the members of Global Tools, superimposed over a photograph of Florence. Photomontage designed by Adolfo Natalini of Superstudio.

activities, to recuperate creative faculties atrophied in our work-directed society'.¹⁴⁶ Engaging with craft tools and techniques was being constructed as a way to achieve the utopian aims of 'the liberation of man from the culture [...] that inhibits the individual's use of his own creativity'.¹⁴⁷

Dalisi's continuing experiments in *tecnica povera* provided initial inspiration for the group: Mendini described how they proposed to 'use "simple" technologies as tools of individual creativity and as tools with which the individual can control his environment'.¹⁴⁸ Compared to Dalisi's Neapolitan experiments, this encouragement of spontaneous making was not orientated towards children but turned inwards: the architects sought to liberate their own creativity and those of their intellectual milieu. To do this, they would harness the potential of their own recent uptake of craft practice. One member described how he had 'recently [...] given a lot of time to creative activities [...] I've been embroidering [...] it's a highly [*sic*] uninhibited doing nothing'.¹⁴⁹ This unnamed member could have been Branzi; starting in 1973 the architect had collaborated with his wife, the artist Nicoletta Branzi, on creating a series of embroideries and tapestries (*See Illustration 162*), the latter as part of their *Piccoli Punti d'Architettura* (Tapestry of Architecture) series.¹⁵⁰ As he recently described, works such as the *Coppia Metropolitana* (*See Illustration 163*) were aimed at 'overcoming the reductive definition of design as an activity exclusively orientated towards industry and mass production'.¹⁵¹ Like Dalisi's *tecnica povera*, Global Tools would challenge the industrial and market-orientated logic of production, and re-orientate it for radical means.

¹⁴⁶ Document-O No.3 "The - L'Ac-ttivit-y-a"" in *Global Tools* (Milan: Edizioni L'Uomo e L'Arte, 1974), n.p.

¹⁴⁷ 'La Cronaca', n.p.

¹⁴⁸ Mendini, 'Architecture of Animation', *Casabella* November 1974, p. 43.

¹⁴⁹ Lupo Binazzi, Branzi, Gianni Pettena and Sottsass, 'A Four-Way Conversation on Global Tools: Milan, 18 May at 10 p.m. at Ettore's Place' *Casabella*, July, 1973, p. 48

¹⁵⁰ In December 1973 one of these tapestries was featured on the front of *Casabella*; in the inside cover it was described as part of the *Piccoli Punti d'Architettura* series. *Casabella*, December 1973.

¹⁵¹ Branzi, email correspondence, 17 September 2010.



Illustration 162. Andrea Branzi, weaving the *Coppia Metropolitana* (Metropolitan Couple) tapestry, c. 1973. Surrounded by his two children, Branzi sits on an *Aeo* armchair, designed by Archizoom Associati for Cassina in 1973.



Illustration 163. *Coppia Metropolitana*, Andrea and Nicoletta Branzi, c. 1973

The group's activity was split into five areas: the body, construction, communication, survival and theory. In addition to the workshops, they proposed to publish what Branzi described as a

yellow pages for culture, a handbook of temporary and private workshops [...] agencies of social diffusion for all creative activities linked to the use of techniques of construction and all the sub-architectural systems employed in shaping the environment.¹⁵²

Like the American countercultural bible *The Whole Earth Catalog* these would put you into contact with the resources necessary for an alternative, liberated existence.¹⁵³ However, as with most of Global Tools plans, only one of these workshops ever materialised. Just two bulletins were ever published, which detailed the different positions and proposed activities of the groups. Together, they reveal much about how the group would go about achieving their radical utopia, and the centrality of tools to this.

4.1.7 “One, Two: A Hundred, a Thousand GLOBAL TOOLS”¹⁵⁴

Pictures of tools were everywhere in the Global Tools bulletins. The cover of the first issue (*See Illustrations 164 and 165*) depicts a single hammer on the front, and pump drill on the back. Inside the second was a photo (*See Illustration 166*) of architects wielding hoes and spades in front of the rural Tuscan farmhouse used for their second meeting in November 1974. Dispersed throughout the text were representations of tools in action, from step-by-step illustrations of the weaving process to cartoons of wheel throwing and coil building pots.

¹⁵² Branzi, *The Hot House*, p. 83.

¹⁵³ ‘La Cronaca’, n.p.; Pages from *The Last Whole Earth Catalog: Access to Tools* (New York: Portola Institute; distributed by Random House, 1973) were published to accompany an article by Branzi: Branzi, ‘Radical Architecture’, *Casabella*, February 1974, p. 47.

¹⁵⁴ ‘La Cronaca’, n.p.



Illustration 164. Front cover of the first issue of *Global Tools* from 1974 depicted a hammer against a pegboard background.

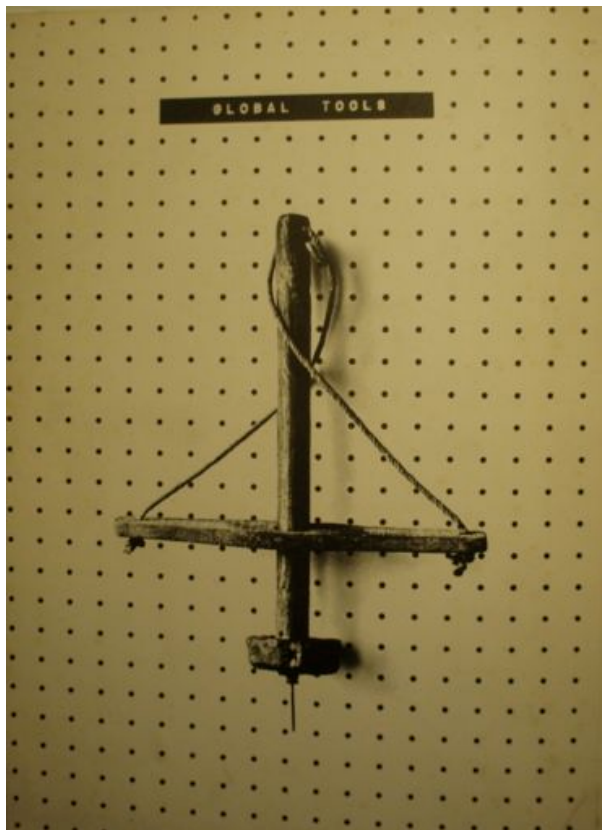


Illustration 165. Back cover of the first issue, featuring a pump drill.



Illustration 166. Members of Global Tools standing in front of the farmhouse in the Tuscan village of Sambuca that they would use for the group's meeting in November 1974.

This tool imagery aestheticised the group's theoretical main position, one premised on a Marxist critique of production. Tools are fundamental to this. As what Marx termed the 'means of production' they determine the experience of work and the shape of social relations.¹⁵⁵ In line with the radicals' desire to look beyond the object in order to get to the root of man's alienation, Global Tools recognised that they could not take the means with which objects were made for granted. As the construction group declared: 'a tool may seem neutral, but [...] it is an extremely conditioning cultural medium'.¹⁵⁶

Yet as the group's name suggests, they also saw something attractive in the idea of tools. This was similarly Marxist-informed: in tool-based production 'man', as Marx stated, 'is the motive power'.¹⁵⁷ This is in comparison to industrial production in which it is the machine that 'handles the tools' leaving the worker bereft of both skill and autonomy.¹⁵⁸ Tools therefore offered the most authentic - or most *povera* - form of production.

This conception of tools was most explicit in the construction group. Allison, Branzi, Dalisi and Sottsass proposed not just a technique, but an entire technology based on the *povera* ideal. '*Tecnologia semplice*' (simple technology) would promote *povera* materials, construction techniques, design and graphic methods.¹⁵⁹ The scope of the radical gaze was expanding; they were interested in the tools of representation, design and critical interpretation in addition to those of construction, as well as "adding" 'our senses, our perception, our body' to the materials and tools available.¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁵ Marx, *Capital*, I, pp. 713 – 715.

¹⁵⁶ Allison, Branzi, Dalisi and Sottsass, 'Co-n-stru-t-z-ion-e' in *Global Tools*, (Milan: Edizioni L'Uomo e L'Arte: 1975), n.p.

¹⁵⁷ Marx, *Capital*, I, p. 352.

¹⁵⁸ Marx, *Capital*, I, p. 365.

¹⁵⁹ Allison, Branzi, Dalisi and Sottsass, 'Co-n-stru-t-z-ion-e', n.p.

¹⁶⁰ Allison, Branzi, Dalisi and Sottsass, 'Co-n-stru-t-z-ion-e', n.p.

Echoing the influence of both Lévi-Strauss and body art on *Arte Povera*, Global Tools perceived the body as what Mendini called a ‘natural object’.¹⁶¹ This idea of the body as a *povera*, somatic, tool united the group’s different approaches: Raggi, a member of the body group alongside Dalisi, Mendini, Davide Mosconi and Pesce, described how they aimed at the ‘rediscovery of our own bodies as a primary utensil, as an instrument for measuring both the space around use and [...] between ourselves and other people’.¹⁶² Their interest in the body as both a thinking and physical entity also reflected the influence of the phenomenologist Maurice Merleau Ponty on the *povera* movement and the Italian avant-garde at this time.¹⁶³

The communication group, made up of Guido Arra, Ugo La Pietra, Gianni Pettena and Franco Vaccari, framed their interest in the body in terms of its difference to the media of mass communication. Making multiple references to the media theorist Marshall McLuhan, the communication group conceived tools as ‘information media’ and therefore another way that ‘consumer society’ wields its ‘dangerous moral authority’.¹⁶⁴ As such, ‘primary bodily tools for communicating’ such as ‘voice, gestures, touch, smells, etc.’ were the only ones capable of ‘genuine communication’.¹⁶⁵

As Menna described in his *Italy: The New Domestic Landscape* essay, this interest in recovering ‘fundamental patterns of behaviour’ and elementary modes of being was a hallmark of design practice at this time.¹⁶⁶ It marked a visibly anthropological turn

¹⁶¹ Mendini, ‘The Body: A Natural Object’, *Casabella*, March 1975, p. 4.

¹⁶² Raggi in Marion Arnoux and Jean Baptiste Dardei, ‘La Global Tools: Fin de L’Utopie Radicale/ The End of the Radical Utopia’, *Azimuts*, 30 (2008) 68 - 81 (p. 80).

¹⁶³ On the influence of Maurice Merleau Ponty on *Arte Povera*, see Christov-Bakargiev, ‘Survey’ in *Arte Povera*, ed. by Christov-Bakargiev, p. 25. Eco cites from Merleau Ponty’s *Phenomenology of Perception*, first published in 1945, in *The Open Work*, p. 17.

¹⁶⁴ Guido Arra, La Pietra, Gianni Pettena and Franco Vaccari, ‘Com-m-unica-t-z-ion-e in *Global Tools* (Milan: Edizioni L’Uomo e L’Arte, 1975) n.p.; Christov-Bakargiev in *Arte Povera*, ed. by Christov-Bakargiev, pp. 19, 23 - 24.

¹⁶⁵ Arra, La Pietra, Pettena and Vaccari, ‘Com-m-unica-t-z-ion-e, n.p.

¹⁶⁶ Menna, ‘A Design for New Behaviours’ in *Italy: The New Domestic Landscape*, ed. by Ambasz p. 413.

in design practice.¹⁶⁷ In Global Tools it was most strongly expressed in the survival group, composed of Superstudio and Gruppo 9999. Their activities built on the former's research into aboriginal material culture, in which they interpreted the simpler construction and minimal number of tools (*See Illustration 167*) amongst these 'so-called "primitives"' as indicative of their freedom from the world of goods, an allegory for their utopia of a "life without objects" that informed their MoMA environment.¹⁶⁸ For Global Tools they proposed a project of 'self-anthropology' that would investigate 'the WAYS in which we survive' as 'intellectuals on the Florence-Milan axis'.¹⁶⁹ This interest in what the construction group termed 'observation, analysis, recording, evaluation systems' was a key component of Global Tools' activities.¹⁷⁰ The body group proposed a visual 'inventory of the human body' that would provide 'a general classification of the characteristics, the use and activities of the body'.¹⁷¹ For Global Tools, producing inventories of themselves and their society was the first step towards attaining utopia in which they would have radicalised both the tools and techniques at their disposal; probing this further reveals what role the tools and artisanal techniques that the group foregrounded would have once utopia had been realised.

4.1.8 Classification and Critical Utopias in the Radical Avant-Garde

The image of Global Tools members posing in front of the Tuscan farmhouse is part of a larger page (*See Illustration 168*) devoted to pictures of tools in the group's

¹⁶⁷ This was seen in Dalisi's experiments in *tecnica povera*, and as well as in Mendini and Sottsass's shared interest in producing objects that served ritual, rather than consumerist needs. Mendini, 'Oggetti A Uso Spirituale', *Domus*, June 1974, pp. 45 - 48. Sottsass, 'Strumenti per un Rito', *Casabella*, no. 382 October 1973, pp. 10 - 11. In 1976 Sottsass was invited to participate in an exhibition that foregrounded an explicitly material culture approach to design: *MANtransFORMS: An International Exhibition on Aspects of Design, Conceived by Hans Hollein [and] Sponsored by The Johnson Wax Company, for the Opening of the Smithsonian Institution's National Museum of Design, Cooper-Hewitt Museum* (New York: Cooper Hewitt Museum, 1976).

¹⁶⁸ Piero Frassinelli, 'Essi Sono Quello che Noi Non Siamo' in *Avanguardie e Cultura Popolare* (Bologna: Galleria d'Arte Moderna, 1975), pp. 106 - 112 (p. 106).

¹⁶⁹ Superstudio, 9999, 'Sopravvivenza' in *Global Tools* (Milan: Edizioni L'Uomo e L'Arte, 1975) n.p.

¹⁷⁰ Allison, Branzi, Dalisi and Sottsass, "Co-n-stru-t-z-ion-e", n.p.

¹⁷¹ Dalisi, Mendini, Mosconi, Raggi and Pesce, 'Corpo' in *Global Tools* (Milan: Edizioni L'Uomo e L'Arte, 1975), n.p.

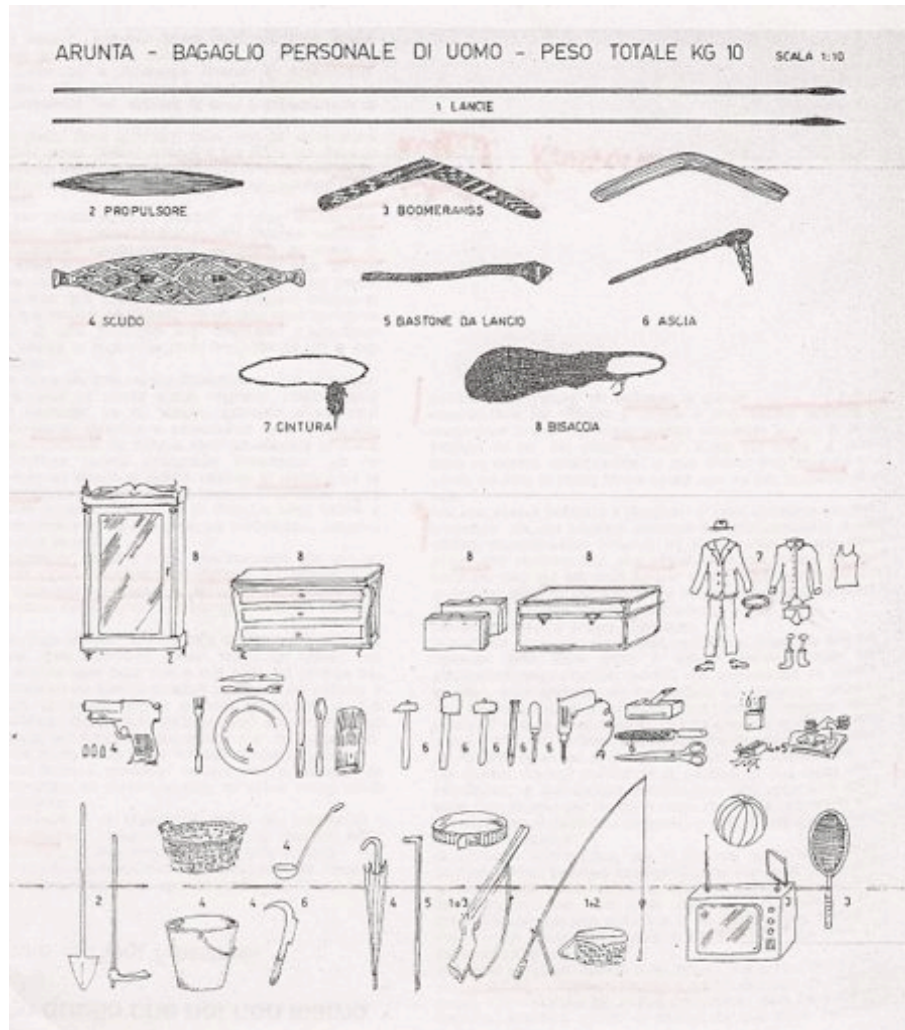


Illustration 167. Visual inventory comparing the tools utilised in Aboriginal Culture and Contemporary Italian society, as part of Superstudio's anthropological-inflected research into a 'life without objects', 1975.

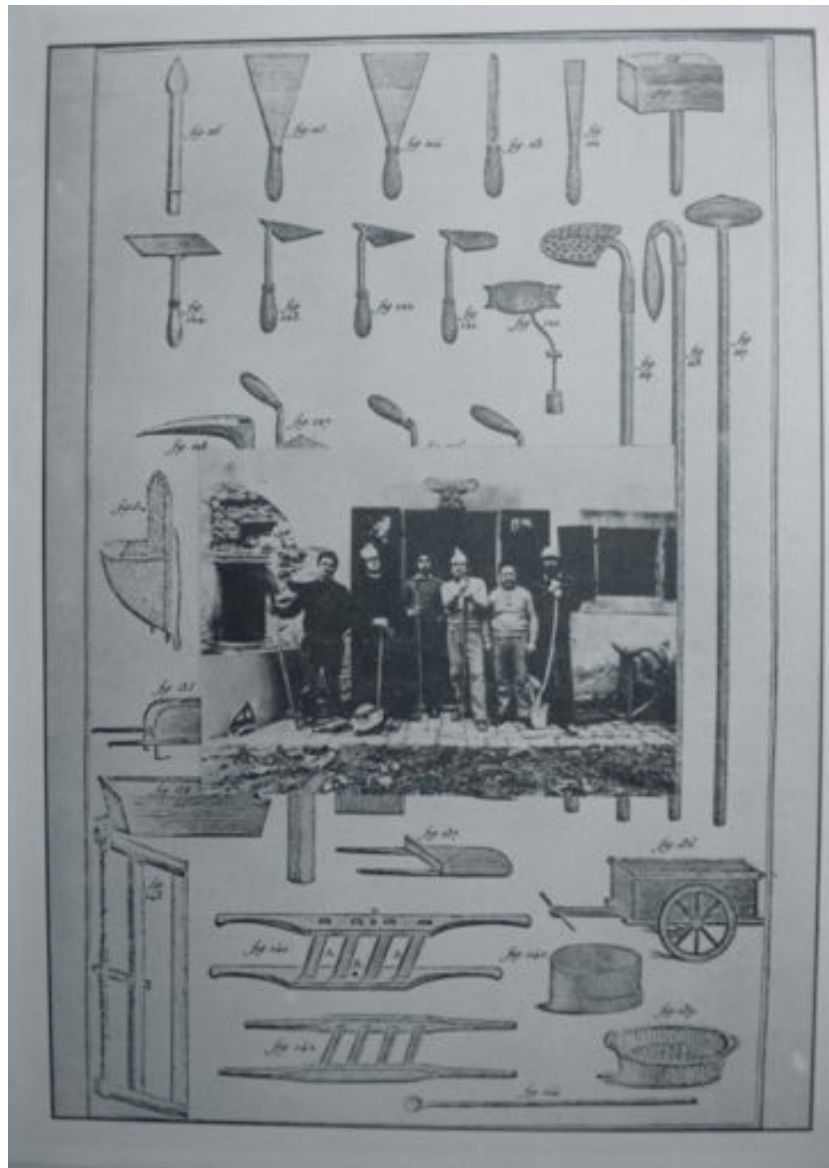


Illustration 168. Photomontage included in the *Global Tools* bulletin, composed of a photograph of Global Tools members pasted on top of a plate from the *Architecture Maçonnerie* (architectural masonry) section of Denis Diderot and Jean le Rond D'Alembert's *Encyclopédie ou Dictionnaire Raisonné des Sciences, des Arts et des Métiers, par une Société de Gens de Lettres*, published between 1751 and 1765.

second bulletin. It is superimposed on top of a plate taken from the *Architecture Maçonnerie* (Architectural Masonry) section of Denis Diderot and Jean Le Rond D'Alembert's *Encyclopédie ou Dictionnaire Raisoné des Sciences, des Arts et des Métiers, par une Société de Gens de Lettres*, published between 1751 and 1756.¹⁷²

The presence of this eighteenth century encyclopaedia is not as incongruous as it might seem; references to the *Encyclopédie* appeared repeatedly in *Casabella* in the mid 1970s, and in sixteen issues beginning in March 1975 the magazine gave away a 'critical selection' of the Encyclopaedia.¹⁷³ Nor is the reference here unexpected in a group interested in the handmade: Isabelle Frank describes the *Encyclopédie* as 'probably the earliest defence of the mechanical arts'.¹⁷⁴ Its publication was part of what Celina Fox has described as a 'sizeable flow' of manuals, handbooks, dictionaries and encyclopaedia in the eighteenth century, all part of the Enlightenment attempt to 'map the world of knowledge according to reason'.¹⁷⁵ However, the presence of these illustrations here was not to imply a complementarity between these two endeavours: these juxtaposed images functioned like a surrealist collage, the superimposed images a statement of opposition between two modes of epistemological classification.¹⁷⁶

The 1970s were seen to be defined what the Italian philosopher Aldo Gargani termed at the time a 'crisis of reason', in which the certainties of modernity were coming to

¹⁷² 'ARCHITECTURE ET PARTIES QUI EN DÉPENDENT: MAÇONNERIE' in Denis Diderot and Jean Le Rond d'Alembert, *Encyclopédie ou Dictionnaire Raisoné des Sciences, des Arts et des Métiers, par une Société de Gens de Lettres* (Paris: Neufchastel, 1751-1765), p. 16, plate xii.

¹⁷³ References to the Encyclopedia in *Casabella*: Raggi, 'Underground e Formalismo', *Casabella*, February 1975 pp. 50 - 51; Carlo Guenzi, 'Teoria e Pratica nel Ciclo Edilizio', *Casabella*, November 1976, pp. 36 - 42.

¹⁷⁴ Isabelle Frank, 'The Functions of the Decorative Arts: Introduction' in *The Theory of Decorative Art: An Anthology of European and American Writings, 1750-1940*, ed. by Frank (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), p. 21.

¹⁷⁵ Celina Fox, *The Arts of Industry in the Age of Enlightenment*, (New Haven CT: Yale University Press, 2009) pp. 233, 275.

¹⁷⁶ For more on surrealism and collage, see James Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth-Century Ethnography, Literature, and Art* (Cambridge, Mass; London: Harvard University Press, 1988), p. 146.

an end.¹⁷⁷ This was part of the larger emergence of postmodern thought, in part characterised by what Jean-François Lyotard termed the end of the ‘grand narrative’ in which the Enlightenment desire for rational, total knowledge was deemed both impossible and undesirable.¹⁷⁸ This was evident in the subjective, personal nature of the forms of knowledge that Global Tools were interested in and the forms of classification proposed. More important however is what the group intended to do with this material: Global Tools did not want to create a body of knowledge on which to build on and advance existing practice, but understand the socio-cultural meanings associated with tools of all descriptions in order to annihilate them.

This was part of what Branzi described as the avant-garde’s aim at the ‘technical destruction of culture [...] [the] removal of all the moral considerations, aesthetic creeds and codes which hamper the free expression of individual and collective freedom’, which is exemplary of the ‘critical utopia’ that Ambasz described in the *Italy: The New Domestic Landscape* catalogue.¹⁷⁹ This form of utopianism informed the group’s opposition to the most prominent new encyclopaedia from the late 1960s: *The Whole Earth Catalog*.¹⁸⁰ While Branzi acknowledged that Global Tools’ activities were based on ‘the discovery and listing of simple manual techniques carried out by the American neo-encyclopaedists’, he criticised them for ‘narrowing [...] the possibilities promised by an alternative use of capital’ rather than the alternative to a society built on capital they were proposing.¹⁸¹ Furthermore, he was

¹⁷⁷ Aldo Gargani, ed., *Crisi della Ragione* (Turin: Einaudi, 1979); For discussion on the rise of postmodern thought in Italy, see Monica Jansen, *Il Dibattito sul Postmoderno in Italia: In Bilico tra Dialettica e Ambiguità* (Florence: Francesco Cesati Editore, 2002).

¹⁷⁸ Jean-François Lyotard, ‘Answering the Question: What is Postmodernism?’ in *The Postmodern Reader*, ed. by Jencks (London: Academy Editions, 1992) pp. 138 - 150 (p. 138) (first publ. in *Critique*, April 1982)

¹⁷⁹ ‘Global Tools – Program for 1975’ in *Global Tools* (Milan: L’Uomo e L’Arte, 1975), n.p.; Ambasz, ‘Summary’ in *Italy: The New Domestic Landscape*, ed. by Ambasz p. 421. Renato Poggioli has described this as a characteristic avant-garde trait. Renato Poggioli, *The Theory of the Avant-Garde*, trans. by Gerald Fitzgerald, (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University, 1968), p. 63.

¹⁸⁰ Branzi, *The Hot House*, p. 84.

¹⁸¹ Branzi, *The Hot House* p. 84.

concerned that the model that the *Whole Earth Catalog* offered was also the same ideology of poverty that Dalisi's *tecnica povera* threatened to promote.¹⁸²

This critical utopianism informed the activities of the construction group. The claimed that they would achieve *tecnologia semplice* by conducting an inventory of every cultural meaning behind the materials, tools and techniques used, every rationale for their employment in the stages of design, construction and representation, in order to 'annihilate every technological censor, every instrumental, cultural, methodological, technical, practical and material medium'.¹⁸³ This would create what the Italian critic Renato Poggioli described in the 1960s as the 'primitive or primordial condition' for society's utopian rebirth.¹⁸⁴ In the context of Global Tool, this destructive activity would remove all values associated with the production of objects and therefore liberate the maker from any imposed cultural conformity. One member expressed the impact of this in distinctly craft-based terms:

When you say that a work of pottery is well done or badly done [...] you already acknowledge the values of technology, the meanings of technology. Well, in the Utopian society [...] these meanings should make no more sense. Because, if at any time anyone wants to make a piece of pottery badly, he will make it badly if it is vital for him to make things, to make pottery. It doesn't matter if it's bad.¹⁸⁵

These architects envisaged a future in which they would be able to employ any form of technology without having it interpreted in terms of the quality of its manufacture. Craft may have played a prominent role in Global Tools' rhetoric, but it is less positive than it first appeared. Craft is again mobilised as a problem to design: its historical and cultural associations impeding a liberated form of creativity. As a

¹⁸² Branzi, *The Hot House* p. 84.

¹⁸³ Allison, Branzi, Dalisi and Sottsass, 'Co-n-stru-t-z-ion-e', n.p.

¹⁸⁴ Renato Poggioli, *The Theory of the Avant-Garde*, trans. by Gerald Fitzgerald (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University, 1968), p. 68.

¹⁸⁵ Binazzi, Branzi, Pettena and Sottsass, 'A Four-way Conversation on Global Tools', p. 48.

mode of production, it could only be employed in design if it was divested of its traditions. As such, the group's opposition to ideas of skilful making and the proposed annihilation of the cultural and historical legitimacy of the handmade appears as an anti-craft statement, one that would clearly have implications on the way that architects designed the production of their objects. Perhaps fortunately, the construction group never did perform this project of critical classification. Only one group ever did carry out a workshop: the body group. Their findings provide a way of seeing what the effect of Global Tools activities could have been in craft and design terms if they had realised their critical utopia.

4.1.9 *Il Corpo e I Vincoli* and the End of Global Tools

In June 1975 the first and only Global Tools workshop took place. Entitled *Il Corpo e i Vincoli* (The Body and the Bonds), it was led by Mendini, Mosconi and Raggi, who were joined by a larger group including Navone, Nazareno Noja and Sottsass.¹⁸⁶ In *Casabella*, Noja described the ideas behind it. He explained that the body's potential as a *povera* tool was hindered by the lack of 'full awareness of our body as an instrument of cultural communication [...] we are greatly conditioned by the bounds that the inventory of gestures and motions of our body imposes to our free expression'.¹⁸⁷ They would increase their bodily consciousness through a series of prosthetics that would allow them to gain awareness of the body's natural movements. Two types of tools were designed to test this, all made out of everyday materials such as clay, metal and string. The first were the 'bonds', inhibitory instruments such as 'the tying shoes' and the 'shoes for walking upwards or downwards' (*See Illustrations 169 and 170*) that were intended to restrict movement and enforce a proximity with others. The second were a series of flexible, prosthetic-

¹⁸⁶ The other members of the group were: Lidia Prandi, Taraneh Jalda, Pini Pisano, Siana Futacchi, Pino Nuovo, Ines Klok, Andrea Mascardi and Almero de Angelis. 'Seminario 5 - 8 Giugno 1975: Gruppo di Lavoro Il Corpo', Parma, Centro Studi e Archivio della Comunicazione (CSAC), A. Mendini, 'Primo Seminario Global Tools sui Problemi del Corpo 1975', B007461p 165/2.

¹⁸⁷ Noja in 'Il Corpo e i Vincoli,' *Casabella*, March 1976, 34 – 38, (p. 38).



Illustration 169. Sottsass (left) and Franco Raggi (right) trying the 'tying shoes' as part of the *Il Corpo e i Vincoli* (The Body and the Chains) seminar, held in Milan June 1975.



Illustration 170. The 'shoes for walking upwards or downwards' from *Il Corpo e I Vincoli* seminar.

like extensions (*See Illustrations 171 and 172*) that extended the body into space either individually or into contact with another.

The results were not what they expected. Noja noted that ‘as paradoxical as it seems, in the chains resides a liberatory charge less unsettling and masochistic than it first appears’, while the extensions feel ‘vaguely like coercion’.¹⁸⁸ He continued: ‘I do not want to say that [...] the extension is oppressive and the bond relaxing, but, for as much as the bond denies doing, the extension presupposes and directs it’.¹⁸⁹ They found themselves more liberated by the bonds than the extensions, a preference for an inhibited state that seems to run counter to the group’s utopian objectives of the complete eradication of culture. It suggests that a clean slate would not be conducive to free expression, and the “bonds” that the current culture represented could prove just as, if not more, liberatory than the critical utopia they envisaged. In terms of production, this implied that it would be the continuation, rather than the erasure of the constraint that craft was seen to represent that would provide the architects with the greatest freedom of expression.

Yet Global Tools would never get the opportunity to explore this. By the time the body workshop was taking place, the group had already started falling apart: Superstudio had left that spring and Global Tools broke up a year later. As Natalini lamented, for all the documents drawn up and meetings proposed, Global Tools ‘remained firmly on the drawing board [...] the stage of enthusiasm and actions was over [...] we just didn’t want to admit it’.¹⁹⁰ Activity was stalled by internal political wrangling that reflected the larger politicised landscape: while the 1976 general elections saw the PCI considerably increased its vote on a national scale, this was actually a period of great conflict amongst the left.¹⁹¹ There was a split not just between the PCI and PSI, but also between the party and the revolutionary, youth-led

¹⁸⁸ Noja in ‘Il Corpo e i Vincoli’, p. 34.

¹⁸⁹ Noja in ‘Il Corpo e i Vincoli’, p. 34.

¹⁹⁰ Natalini, ‘How Great Architecture still was in 1966 (Superstudio and Radical Architecture, Ten Years on)’ in *Exit Utopia*, ed. by Van Schaik and Otakar Máčel, pp. 185 - 211 (p. 189).

¹⁹¹ Arturo Parisi and Gianfranco Pasquino, ‘Changes in Italian Electoral Behaviour: The Relationships between Parties and Voters’ in *Italy in Transition*, ed. by Lange and Tarrow, pp. 6 - 30 (p. 7).



Illustration 171. Two unnamed participants of *Il Corpo e I Vincoli* seminar using the *calza elastica* (elastic sock).

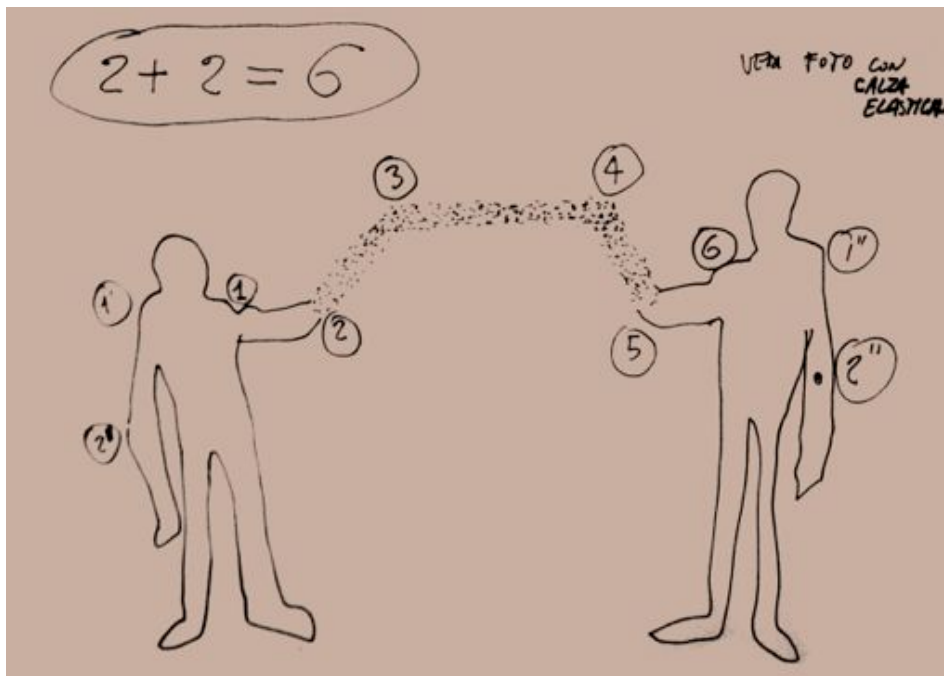


Illustration 172. Preparatory drawing for the *calza elastica*.

groups that had grown up around 1968.¹⁹² While the DC was still the ruling party, the PCI's electoral strength was seen to offer the potential for much needed reform - an opportunity that the divisiveness of the left undermined.¹⁹³

La Pietra put the end of Global Tools down to less ideological reasons. Global Tools received funding for their activities from Franco Castelli, the owner of the Milan gallery L'Uomo e L'Arte that published the group's bulletins. According to the architect, the group broke up over the Florentines' request to be reimbursed for expenses incurred by travelling to Milan for the meetings; 'unable to reach an agreement [...] it all ended quickly and wretchedly'.¹⁹⁴ For La Pietra, Global Tools had 'marked the apotheosis and death of Italian radical design', and with its closure architects saw the radical experiment over.¹⁹⁵ By 1978 he was asking 'Radical Architecture in Italy: What Happened to it?'.¹⁹⁶

On the one hand, La Pietra's pessimism seems well-judged: with its strategy of commodity refusal and largely research-based activity, Radical Design left few tangible remains. Furthermore, having never carried out their proposed activities, Global Tools would seem unable to have had any effect on the future activity of the architects involved. Yet this was not the end of the radical avant-garde's interest in tools. In 1973 Superstudio began teaching a course on *Oggetti d'Uso Semplici e Culture Materiali Extraurbane* (Simple Artefacts and Extraurban Material Culture) (See *Illustration 173*) at the University of Florence, assisted by the young architect Michele De Lucchi.¹⁹⁷ As part of this, De Lucchi, who headed up his own radical architecture group called Cavart, produced an alphabetical '*catalogue raisonné*' (See

¹⁹² Ginsborg, pp. 380 - 382.

¹⁹³ Ginsborg, p. 377.

¹⁹⁴ La Pietra in Arnoux and Dardei, p. 81.

¹⁹⁵ Ugo La Pietra, 'Architettura Radicale in Italia: Che ne è Successo?', *Domus*, March 1978, 2 - 3 (p. 3).

¹⁹⁶ La Pietra, 'Architettura Radicale in Italia', p. 2.

¹⁹⁷ Natalini, Lorenzo Netti, Alessandro Poli, Cristiano Toraldo di Francia, *Cultura Materiale Extraurbana* (Florence: Alinea Editrice, 1983).



Illustration 173. Adolfo Natalini teaching a course on *Oggetti d'Uso Semplici e Culture Materiali Extraurbane* (Simple Artefacts and Exaurban Material Culture) at the University of Florence, mid 1970s.

Illustration 174) of the functions, materials and dimensions of the agricultural tools of the Tuscan peasant culture.¹⁹⁸

Furthermore, the concept of tools that Global Tools advanced did have an impact in terms of actual production, one that built on the group's position on the cultural tradition of craft, and variously restrictive, or liberatory, potential. This was Gaetano Pesce's work for *Braccio di Ferro*, the experimental Cassina offshoot set up the year before Global Tools' foundation. The final case study of this first section focuses on the appropriation by Pesce in his designs for Braccio di Ferro of the tool that Global Tools identified as the most *povera*, and arguably most craft-like - the body.

4.1.10 The Body as Tool: Gaetano Pesce and *Braccio di Ferro*

Braccio di Ferro was the result of a series of encounters between Cesare Cassina and Pesce, a IUAV trained architect and co-founder of *Gruppo N*.¹⁹⁹ Cassina had first heard about Pesce in the late 1960s from his marketing representative Aldo Businaro, who suggested that Cassina would be interested in buying some of his designs.²⁰⁰ Intrigued, the furniture industrialist made a trip to the Padua studio that Pesce shared with his partner, Milena Vettore and saw early examples of Pesce's strongly interdisciplinary, and highly individualistic approach to design.²⁰¹

By the early 1970s Cassina was financing much of Pesce's practice and lending its production facilities for the realisation of his ideas. The firm paid him a monthly salary for research purposes, and also executed his MoMA environment (*See*

¹⁹⁸ Cavart was founded in 1973 by De Lucchi, Piero Brombin, Boris Premru and Valerio Tridenti while they were all architecture students at the University of Padua. For more on Michele De Lucchi, see Fiorella Bugelato and Sergio Polano, *Michele De Lucchi: Comincia qui e Finisce Là* (Milan: Electa, 2004).

¹⁹⁹ For more on Pesce's career see *Gaetano Pesce: Le Futur est Peut-être Passé, The Future is Perhaps Past* (Florence: Centro Di; Paris: Centre Beaubourg, 1975) and France Vanlaethem, *Gaetano Pesce: Architecture Design Art*, trans. by Huw Evans (Milan: Idea Books, 1989).

²⁰⁰ Pesce in Bosoni, 'A Conversation with Gaetano Pesce' in *Made in Cassina*, ed. by Bosoni, pp. 268 - 279 (p. 269).

²⁰¹ Vettore tragically passed away in the early 1970s following an injury incurred at Cassina's Meda factory. Pesce in 'Gaetano Pesce' in *La Fabbrica del Design*, ed. by Antonelli, Castelli and Picchi, pp. 79 - 84 (p. 79).

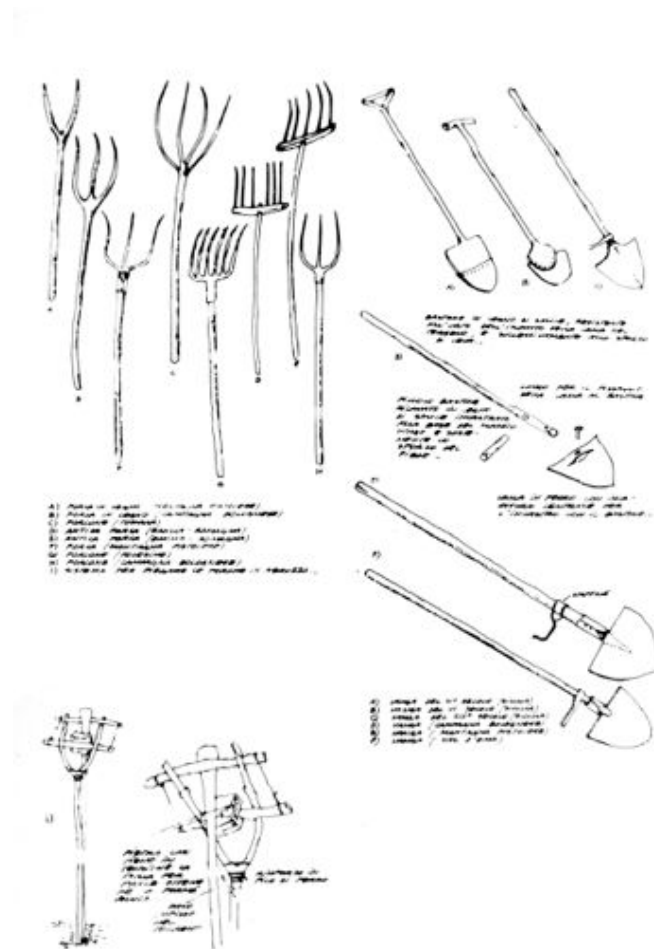


Illustration 174. An extract from Michele De Lucchi's *Catalogo degli Attrezzi Agricoli Italiani* depicting different forks, spades, hoes used in Tuscan agriculture, mid 1970s.

Illustrations 175 and 176), an apocalyptic vision of an imagined archaeological excavation from the year 3000 made from rigid and soft polyurethane foam.²⁰² This research activity was of benefit to both Pesce and Cassina: his experiments with these plastics advanced their use in the firm's more mainstream production - as his innovative polyurethane foam *Up* series of chairs from 1969 had already demonstrated.²⁰³

Cassina and Pesce became close friends. At the former's Carimate home they discussed the union problems that the manufacturer, like many of his contemporaries, was experiencing in his factory, as well as their common belief that standard industrial production was finished.²⁰⁴ The result of these conversations was *Braccio di Ferro*, an 'arm wrestle' with mainstream design and production. They set up a workshop in Genoa, a city far removed from the market-orientated concerns and industrial troubles of Cassina's Meda factory, but also home to a wealth of skilled craftsmen largely associated with the city's shipbuilding industry.²⁰⁵ This was exploited fully by Aldo Cichero, who had many contacts in the city's shipyards and whom Cassina put in charge of production.²⁰⁶

Pesce was not the only architect involved in *Braccio di Ferro*. He invited Mendini and the Cuban architect Riccardo Porro to get involved as well. In 1973 Mendini designed his *Oggetti a Uso Spirituale* (Objects for Spiritual Use) a series of ritualistic chairs, tables and lamps including the *Monumentino da Casa* (Little Household Monument) (*See Illustration 177*), a laminate-covered wooden chair that

²⁰² The environment was called *Project for an Underground City in the Age of Great Contaminations: Living Unit for Two People*. For more details see Vanlaethem, pp. 53 - 55.

²⁰³ The *Up* series was designed in 1969 for C&B Italia (Cassina & Busnelli), a firm set up in 1966 by Cesare Cassina and Pietro Busnelli. C&B Italia began trading as B&B Italia (Busnelli & Busnelli), as it is now known, in 1974.

²⁰⁴ Pesce in Bosoni, 'A Conversation with Gaetano Pesce' in *Made in Cassina*, ed. by Bosoni, p. 275.

²⁰⁵ Pesce in 'Gaetano Pesce' in *La Fabbrica del Design*, ed. by Antonelli, Castelli and Picchi, p. 81.

²⁰⁶ Pesce in 'Gaetano Pesce', ed. by Antonelli, Castelli and Picchi, p. 81.

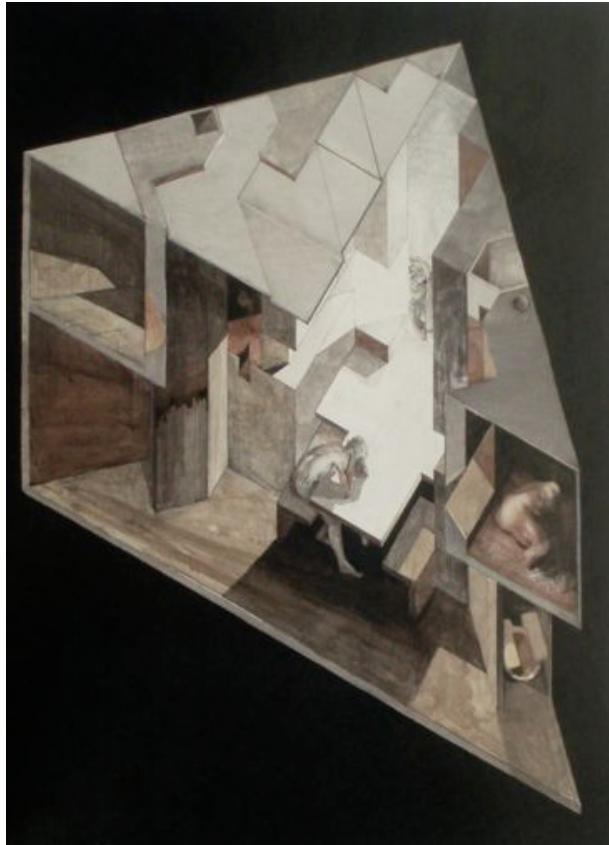


Illustration 175. Drawing by Gaetano Pesce of his *Italy: The New Domestic Landscape* environment, 1972.

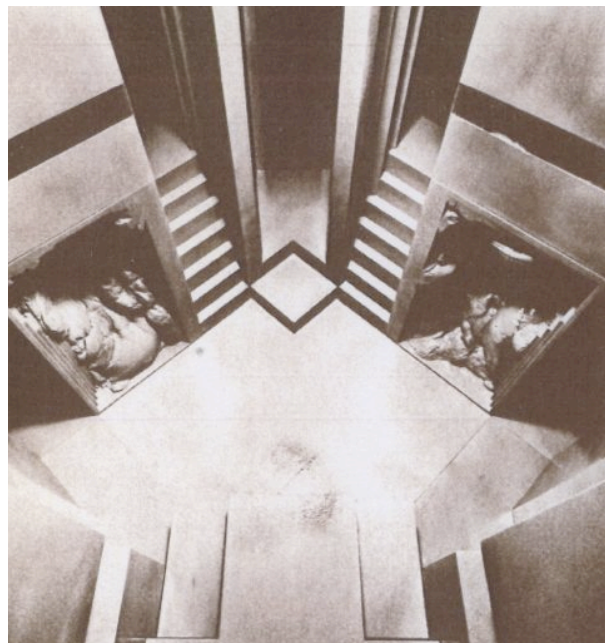


Illustration 176. The interior of Pesce's environment for his *Italy: The New Domestic Landscape* environment, showing the use of soft polyurethane foam.



Illustration 177. *Monumentino da Casa* (Household Monument) designed by Alessandro Mendini as part of the *Oggetti a Uso Spirituale* (Objects for Spiritual Use) for *Braccio di Ferro* in 1973. This is a double page spread from the *Braccio di Ferro* catalogue.

was set alight outside *Casabella's* offices and subsequently featured on its cover.²⁰⁷ This was not furniture usable in any conventional sense; it functioned as what Mendini termed a 'critical tool', a challenge to conventional design objects that are nothing but 'coarse instruments for your superficiality'.²⁰⁸

Amongst the earliest objects that Pesce designed for *Braccio di Ferro* were the *Golgotha* chair and table (See *Illustration 178*) and accompanying *Arca* desk from 1973. Unveiled at the *Triennale* in the September of that year, each one was signed and numbered.²⁰⁹ The table and desk were made from glass foam bricks glued together with polyester resin and glass wool, and were informed by the same portentous vision of his MoMA environment: Pesce described the desk as 'a response to the oil crisis - an apocalypse, in which machines no longer existed. The construction of this object was manual'.²¹⁰

The chair most explicitly demonstrates the impact that the radical ideas of both Pesce and Global Tools would have in terms of production. Made from a length of resin-soaked padded white fibreglass cloth, the *Golgotha* chairs, like the table and desk, combined industrial materials and manual manufacture, one suited to *Braccio di Ferro's* low-tech set up. As with the other thermosetting plastics that Pesce favoured, such as polyurethane foam and polyester resin, the fibreglass used in *Golgotha* could be worked by the hand - or in this case, the body. As the Pesce's following account of the production method reveals, the mould (See *Illustrations 179 and 180*) used in *Golgotha* was very different to that used in the manufacture of Magistretti's *Selene* chair from chapter three:

²⁰⁷ A number of Mendini's *Oggetti a Uso Spirituale* were featured on *Casabella's* cover: the *Sedia Terra* featured on the cover of June, the *Monumentino da Casa* of July and the *Valigia per Ultimo Viaggio*, August-September 1974.

²⁰⁸ Mendini, 'Oggetti a Uso Spirituale', *Domus*, May 1974, p. 47.

²⁰⁹ 'Tra Artigianato e Arte: Le Sedie Significanti di Gaetano Pesce', *Casa Vogue*, October 1973, n.p., ASTM, XV Triennale di Milano, 1973, Rassegna Stampa.

²¹⁰ Pesce, 'The Architecture of Sacrifice' in *Gaetano Pesce* (Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv Museum of Art; New York: Peter Joseph Gallery, 1991) p. 20.



Illustration 178. *Golgotha* chairs and table designed by Gaetano Pesce for *Braccio di Ferro* in 1973. This promotional material depicts a scene reminiscent of the Last Supper. The *Arca* desk (unseen) is identical to the table, albeit flat along one side.



Illustration 179. Two sketches by Gaetano Pesce of the mould used to produce the *Golgotha* chair.



Illustration 180. Stages in the production of the *Golgotha* chair, in *Braccio di Ferro*'s Genoa work yard in 1972.

The mold for the seat was very simple, I would say archaic, composed of a structure provided with hooks for the mattress so as to form the body of a chair. Polyester resin was poured onto the mattress, that was supported from underneath by a mold in the form of a seat, and impregnated the material.

The workman that carried out this operation sat on the material giving form to the seat. After about 20 minutes the resin solidified and each time the result was different.²¹¹

Golgotha becomes a chair through the act of sitting, its rumpled surface a record of the clothed body sat on it. This element of facture, seen in a different form in Mari's earlier *Putrella* vase, was already visible in an early version of *Golgotha*, a 1:10 scale model from 1971 (See *Illustration 181*) in 'hot and hand-molded PVC', with a burnt, uneven surface.²¹² It demonstrates an interest in surface and memory that would also be seen in Studio Alchymia and Memphis, and a performativity that recalls the process-based nature of body art and *Arte Povera*. In *Golgotha*, the body, the primitive 'primary' instrument of Global Tools has become a tool for manufacture: here it speaks of the group's unrealised critical utopianism, in which the cultural associations of craft production were still intact, but the approach towards them informed by their radical aims.

4.1.11 Bodily Making and Object Facture in the *Golgotha* chair

The body is a key idea for those writing about the crafts. Howard Risatti attributes the somatic qualities of craft objects to their manual production: 'the neck of a vase [...] the circumference of the goblet' both 'retain, in their form, what is essentially a negative imprint of the body'.²¹³ To Richard Sennett, the handmade-ness of craft is what makes it a rewarding and virtuous activity, while for the British ceramist Julian Stair the body is exemplary of its primordialism: craft objects are 'material gestures

²¹¹ Pesce in 'Storie di Sedie: Il Progetto Italiano dopo il 1947', *Domus*, September 1989, 106 - 119 (p. 116).

²¹² Vanlaethem, p. 35.

²¹³ Risatti, *A Theory of Craft* pp. 108, 109.



Illustration 181. 'Preliminary design' for the *Golgotha* chair, 1971.
Scale model 1: 10 in PVC

of the body [...] externalised, pre-linguistic expressions'.²¹⁴ A whole host of craft voices flag up the virtues of the handmade, its bodily associations central to the argument that craft is an inherently humane, morally and spiritually superior mode of making.

Golgotha: the name alone suggests that this is not quite the life affirming quality of craft that these figures were referring to. This was the site of Christ's crucifixion, before His body was wrapped in a linen cloth and taken to a Jerusalem cave for burial. This part of the story is present too in *Golgotha*: the flayed, skin-like surface chair resembles the Turin shroud, the cloth believed to depict Christ's tortured body. *Golgotha* is not only the object to convey the imagery of death and decay in Pesce's practice from this period. Dismembered body parts make a repeated appearance, as in his *Genesi?* lamp (see *Illustration 182*) from 1973 and *Manodidio* ashtray prototype from 1969-70.²¹⁵ He was not employing the body as a tool for uplifting cultural expression. These were, as Mendini described, 'instruments of torment and pain, the starkest recordings of the human condition: the truth of hard realities as opposed to the fiction of optimistic realities'.²¹⁶ For Pesce, this was the only way to express society's current condition: 'death', Pesce said, is 'the primary expression' of a reality of violence, the end of utopianism, the demise of political ideologies.²¹⁷

The *Golgotha*'s indexical, bodily production did make the chair identifiably craft-like; but in a way totally antithetical to what Risatti and other conservative critics argue for. As Jane Pavitt has described, rather than being 'an object which celebrates its radical method of production, the *Golgotha* chair is abject – shrivelled, as if

²¹⁴ Richard Sennett, *The Craftsman*, p. 9; Julian Stair, 'Introduction', *The Body Politic: The Role of the Body and Contemporary Craft*, ed. by Stair (London: Crafts Council, 2000), pp. 8 - 11 (p. 10).

²¹⁵ Vanlaethem, p. 30.

²¹⁶ Mendini, 'The Concept of Death in Gaetano Pesce' in Pesce, *Le Futur est Peut-être Passé, The Future is Perhaps Past*, trans. by Françoise Boltanski, Marie-Claire Llopès and Alberto M. Rosa, (Paris: Centre Beaubourg, 1975), n.p.

²¹⁷ Pesce, 'The Vast Limits of What I Knew up to Yesterday' reprint. in Pesce, *Le Futur est Peut-être Passé*, n.p.



Illustration 182. *Genesi?* One-off lamp made for *Braccio di Ferro*, Gaetano Pesce, 1973. Polyester resin and glass.

recorded in the process of its own decay'.²¹⁸ The very conspicuousness of the artisanal production of this chair only serves to heighten the subversive ends to which the handmade has been put here. The communicative force of the *Golgotha* chair gained its power not from the eradication of craft's cultural associations, but the continuation of these. Through the radical avant-garde's activities craft has become an active, visible, ingredient in the final object - and yet in becoming as such it has been unhinged from any artisanal culture, from any moral or cultural basis for its usage.

The case studies discussed in the first half of this chapter have demonstrated some of the disparate, differentiated strategies that defined Italy's radical design movement and that Ambasz attempted to articulate in *Italy: The New Domestic Landscape*. All however were united by a utopian belief in design, one that was founded on craft; be it through amateur makers, manual tools and techniques, or the authenticity of making by hand - or body. In the case of Dalisi's messy *tecnica povera* and the abject facture of Pesce's *Golgotha*, there have also been indications of what happened once these conceptualisations of craft entered into the realm of production: these architects turned to an idea of craft that deliberately undermined the high quality craftsmanship associated with the luxurious elegance of mainstream practice.

As the next, shorter half of this chapter demonstrates, neither radical design nor its engagement with craft ended with the dissolution of Global Tools in 1976. However it takes a markedly different turn in both Studio Alchymia and Memphis, the two final case studies discussed. These two groups repositioned craft in the context of the end of the revolutionary movements that had erupted in 1968. 1977 did witness another wave of university occupations, marked by the increasing violence that dominated the political extremes - of which the kidnapping and subsequent execution of the DC leader Aldo Moro in 1978 was the most divisive.²¹⁹ For Ginsborg, this wave of terrorism contributed to the end of collective action between the years 1976

²¹⁸ Jane Pavitt, 'The Future is Possibly Past: The Anxious Spaces of Gaetano Pesce', (unpublished conference paper, *Association of Art Historians*, Glasgow, University of Glasgow, 2010) p. 3.

²¹⁹ Ginsborg, pp. 382 - 386.

and 1979, and led to the triumph of a culture of *riflusso*, a ‘retreat into private life’, in which the appetite, and spaces, of protest had been abated.²²⁰ It is in this post-utopian, politically disenfranchised context that Studio Alchymia and Memphis’s engagement with craft took place. The second, shorter half of this chapter examines the production strategies adopted by Studio Alchymia and Memphis respectively, and finds that while they were heavily reliant on the artisanal workshop, both negated the cultural implications of this in different ways, at the same time attempting to disassociate and yet relying on the persistent values of Italy’s craft traditions.

²²⁰ Ginsborg, p. 383.

4.2 The Role of Craft in Italian Postmodernism: Production Strategies in Studio Alchymia and Memphis

4.2.1 Studio Alchymia, “New Design” and the “New Handicrafts”

In 1976 two Milanese siblings, Adriana and Alessandro Guerriero, opened Studio Alchymia as a gallery in their native city of Milan. Like Mendini, Alessandro Guerriero was a multiple cultural operator - an architect, designer, and what Sparke sums up as a ‘patron, manufacturer, exhibitor and salesman’.¹ Two years later these two figures met, when Mendini came to see an exhibition of *Valigie Radicali* (Radical Suitcases) (*See Illustration 183*) at the gallery.² Soon after, Guerriero invited Mendini, and several other radicals including Branzi, De Lucchi and Sottsass, to participate what would become a gallery-studio that declared itself devoted to the ‘projection of images for the 20th century’.³

Much of this activity was actually based on the recycling of existing images from the twentieth century, done through production strategies that combined industry-produced readymades with one-off manufacture. This was the case with the “redesigns” that first started in 1978, in which a range of found objects, from anonymous supermarket goods (*See Illustration 184*), 1940s furniture (*See Illustration 185*) and modern design “classics” such as Ponti’s *Superleggera* (*See Illustration 186*) were all subject to a variety of banal ornament.⁴ The multi-coloured flags attached to the back of Ponti’s chair made it look ‘leggera’ enough to fly; as with the whole “redesign” series, this was a gesture intended to expose the banality of design - and for Mendini, the avant-garde as a whole.⁵ He saw no way out of design’s current predicament, and declared that ‘for a future of at least ten years of design one can do nothing but redesign’.⁶

¹ Sparke, ‘The New Avant-Garde in Italian Furniture’ *Mobilia*, 1981, 20 -26, (p. 20).

² Radice, *Memphis: Research, Experiences, Results, Failures and Successes of New Design*, trans. by Paul Blanchard, (London: Thames & Hudson, 1985), p. 24.

³ Radice, *Memphis*, p. 24.

⁴ The other Modernist design “classics” subjected to a “redesign” were Colombo’s 4867 chair for Kartell (1967), Charles Rennie Mackintosh’s *Hill House* chair (c.1903) and Rietveld’s *Zig-Zag* chair (1934).

⁵ Mendini in Radice, ‘Introduzione’ in *Elogio del Banale*, ed. by Radice, (Milan: Studio Alchymia; Turin: Studio Forma: 1980) pp. 6 - 13 (p. 10).

⁶ Mendini in Radice, *Memphis*, pp. 24-5.



Illustration 183. *Ultima Cena* (Last supper), a table that ‘can be completely folder in the shape of a suitcase’, included in the *Valigie Radicali* (Radical Suitcases) exhibition at the Studio Alchymia gallery in Milan, 1978.



Illustration 184. One of the objects exhibited in Studio Alchymia’s *L’Oggetto Banale* (Banal Objects) installation as part of the inaugural Architecture Section the Venice *Biennale* in 1980. Other exhibits included a handbag, lamp, and shoe all of which were decorated with the same fluorescent arrows.

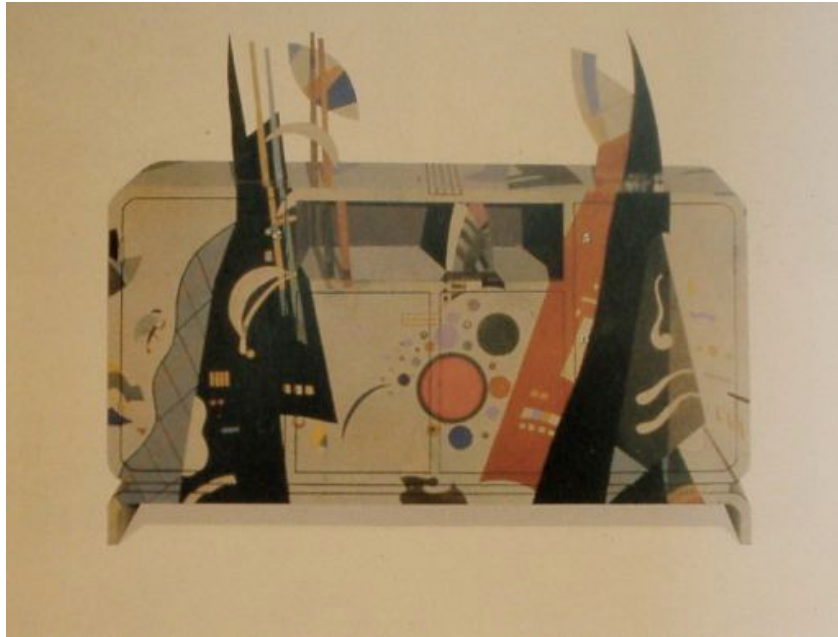


Illustration 185. *After Kandinsky*, “redesign” of cupboard from the 1940s, by Alessandro Mendini for Studio Alchymia, 1978.



Illustration 186. “Redesign” of Gio Ponti’s *Superleggera*, by Mendini for Studio Alchymia, 1978.

The combination of scales of production was also found in the second series of objects the group designed, *Bauhaus I* and *Bauhaus II* from 1979 and 1980. First shown at the sixteenth *Triennale* in 1979, *Bauhaus I* consisted of domestic furnishings designed by Branzi, De Lucchi (See *Illustration 187*) and Sottsass. They included Branzi's *A Libera* (See *Illustration 188*) bookcase, constructed from glass sheets, tubular steel and a wooden carcass covered in plastic laminates from Abet Laminati, made by furniture maker Angelo Meroni in the small Brianza town of Canonica di Triuggio.⁷

In the *Triennale* catalogue Branzi described this furniture in terms of a renewed interest in craft amongst architects. He argued that in the ongoing crisis in design and architecture the “applied arts” represented ‘the area of a possible refoundation of architecture’, because ‘the so-called “major arts” have reached the limit of their environmental ineffectiveness, in a technical and cultural sense’.⁸ Like Mendini, Branzi was pessimistic about architecture’s ability to have societal effect, but saw in the “applied arts” a way to produce - in the most literal sense - a new design and architecture language.

By 1981 the architect had developed further his ideas about craft’s role in design’s renewal. In an article published in the left-wing newspaper *La Rinascita* and then reprinted in *The Hot House*, Branzi described how the *Bauhaus* collections represented the first example of a ‘new formula of production and distribution’, one that he called the “new handicrafts”.⁹ These had ‘very precise characteristics’:

the craftsmanship employed, given that production is made up of small runs or unique pieces, does not depend on the use of particular techniques, but rather on the speed with which the models whose design makes no

⁷ Mari, *Dov'è L'Artigiano*, p. 77.

⁸ Branzi, ‘Una Grazia Perduta’ in *Catalogo: Sistemazione del Design Raccolta del Design*, ed. by De Lucchi, Franco Origoni, Daniela Puppa, Radice and Raggi (Milan: Cooperativa Il Guado, 1979), n.p. Angera, Archivio Michele De Lucchi (AMDLC).

⁹ Branzi, ‘Usare come Macchina Anche la Propria Mano’, *Rinascita*, 16 October 1981, pp – 39 - 40. I have used the English version of this article in *The Hot House*, given the quality of the translation. Branzi, *The Hot House*, p. 141.

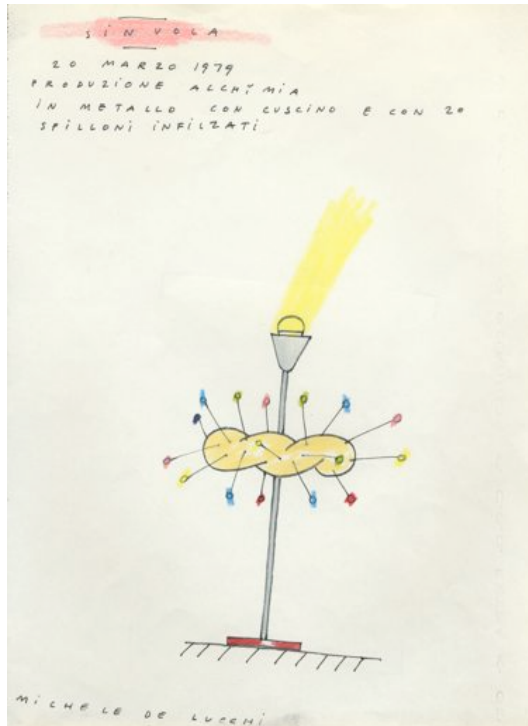


Illustration 187. Sketch for the *Sinvola* lamp for the *Bauhaus I* collection, Michele De Lucchi, 20th March 1979. The text describes the lamp to be made ‘in metal with cushion and inserted with twenty hatpins.’

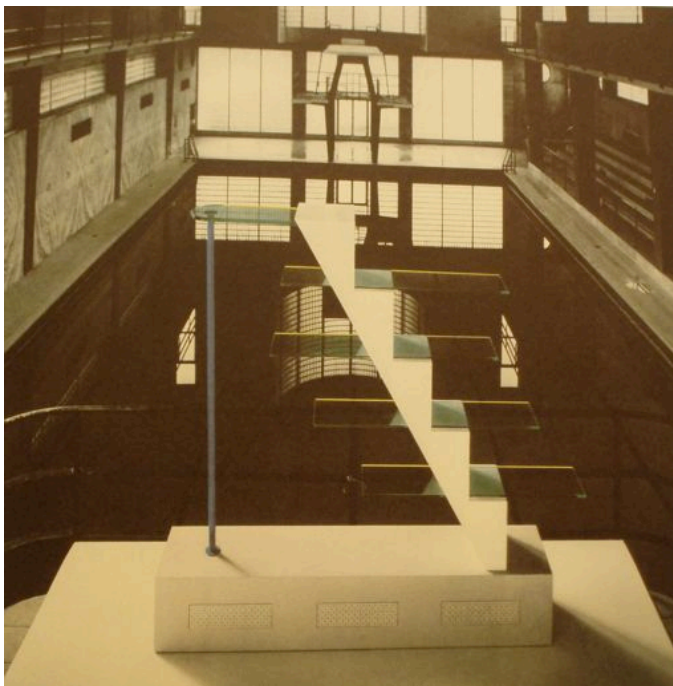


Illustration 188. *A Libera* bookshelves, designed by Andrea Branzi for the *Bauhaus I* collection. 1979. Named after the rationalist architect Adalberto Libera. Photographed inside a swimming pool designed by Giuseppe Terragni, Como. Made by Angelo Meroni, Brianza.

concessions to the possibility of future mass production are constructed by craftsmen using the most advanced techniques of modern joinery.¹⁰

In order to explain the relationship with technology in the “new handicrafts”, Branzi turned to another architect making claims about craft at this time: Mari. In 1981, Mari curated *Dov'è L'Artigiano* (Where the Artisan is) (See Illustrations 189 and 190) first shown as part of Florence's annual *Mostra Internazionale dell'Artigianato* (International Craft Exhibition) and then transferred to the *Triennale*.¹¹ It was a survey of craft in the contemporary Italian context, and included everything from industry-orientated moulds and tools to luxury Venetian glassware, handmade horseshoes and metal buckets, the stools that inspired *Autoprogettazione*, and a series of experimental prototypes devoted to ‘expressive research’ including Branzi's *A Libera* bookcase.¹²

Mari opened the *Dov'è L'Artigiano* catalogue with his definition of artisanal production: it involves ‘the ownership of the working tools and working time’, and is based on an inherited set of techniques and cultural practices in which the artisan is responsible for both design and production.¹³ Branzi, who was also involved in organising the exhibition, described this as representing the ‘optimum’ scenario in which ‘the owner of the means of production, design and execution are all the same person’.¹⁴ Mari compared this to a scenario of ‘total dissociation of all the phases of the productive process, in which the designer, the controller, the executor, the owner of the means of production are different people, with separate responsibilities and fields of knowledge’.¹⁵

¹⁰ Branzi, *The Hot House*, p.141.

¹¹ In comparison to the previous *Triennale*, the sixteenth *Triennale* last nearly two and a half years. It opened in December 1979 and closed in February 1982, and consisted of three ‘cycles’. Alchimia's furniture was included as part of the first, that ran from December 1979 to March 1980, while *Dov'è L'Artigiano* was included as part of the third, that ran from December 1981 to February 1982. For more details, see the catalogue: *Sixteenth Triennale of Milan: International Exhibition of Modern Decorative and Industrial Arts and Modern Architecture* (Milan: Triennale di Milano, 1982)

¹² Mari, *Dov'è L'Artigiano*, pp. 20 - 44, 37, 54, 68, 75 - 78.

¹³ Mari, *Dov'è L'Artigiano*, p. 9.

¹⁴ Branzi, *The Hot House*, p. 137.

¹⁵ Branzi, *The Hot House*, p. 137. Branzi, alongside Gabriele de Vecchi and Giovanni Klaus Koenig was involved in organising a series of debates that ran alongside the exhibition. He was on the ‘technical-scientific committee’ alongside Klaus Koenig, Wanda Lattes, Mari and Nicola Pagliara, Mari, *Dov'è L'Artigiano*, pp. 4, 6



Illustration 189. The dome in the grounds of the *Triennale* building that was purpose built for *Dov'è L'Artigiano*, curated by Mari and on display at the sixteenth *Triennale di Milano* from December 1981 to 1982.

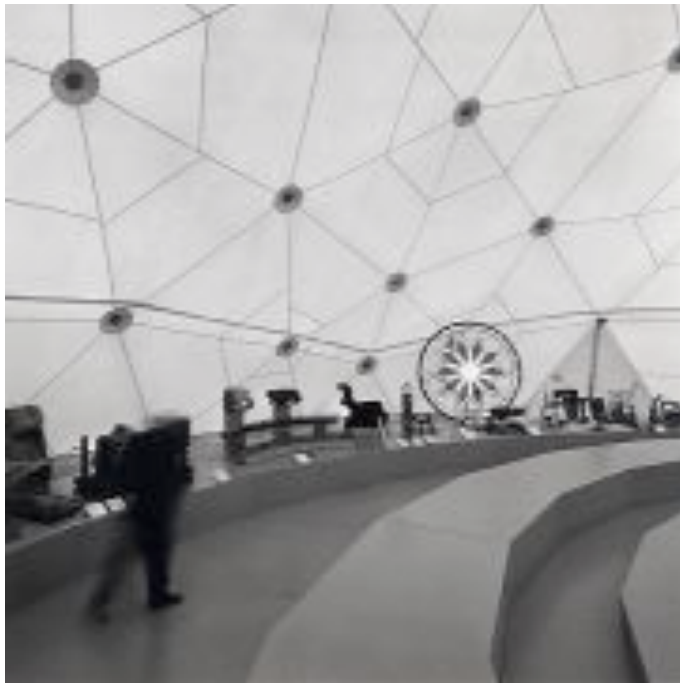


Illustration 190. Installation shot of the *Dov'è L'Artigiano* exhibition. Visible amongst the exhibits is *San Luca* armchair, designed by Achille and Piergiacomo Castiglioni in 1960 for Gavina.

Mari's interest in craft continued to be informed by his Marxist politics. He identified the possibility of an authentic, unalienated experience in workshop manufacture, one that had been degraded by the division of labour inherent in industrial capitalism. He stated his desire to restore skill and 'responsibility' to alienated assembly line workers and to 'make equal' the status of designers and makers; this was a 'revolution that has yet come to pass'.¹⁶ However, for Branzi and the rest of the Alchymia architects, the days of politicised design activism were over. Heavily influenced by the nihilistic postmodernism of the Italian philosopher Gianni Vattimo, they did not share Mari's view that there was an authentic, truthful site of production which capitalism concealed. As Vattimo declared, 'there is no high, ideal or fixed structure from which history has decayed'.¹⁷ The project of unmasking which Global Tools had aspired to undertake, and Mari continued to pursue, was therefore redundant.

Accordingly, Branzi was not interested in uniting the role of the designer and maker, but instead had turned to Mari to endorse the place of machinery in the "new handicrafts". He declared that Mari had shown how there was no 'clear-cut technical and ideological rift between handicrafts and industry' and therefore the arguments of Morris, Ruskin and others were irrelevant.¹⁸ He used Mari's argument to challenge the Taylorist associations on which machine production, and Morrisian opposition to this are founded:

being an artisan does not mean using machines in the process of manufacturing; on the contrary it means using all the machines in the workshop in rotation, maintaining direct control over all phases of production by passing [...] from one machine to the other.¹⁹

¹⁶ Mari, *Dov'è L'Artigiano*, p. 16.

¹⁷ Vattimo, 'Postmodernità e Fine della Storia' in G. Mari, ed., *Moderno Postmoderno: Soggetto, Tempo Sapere nella Società Attuale* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1987) p. 107 in Iain Chambers 'Rolling Away from the Centre Towards X: Some Notes on Italian Philosophy, 'Weak Thought' and Postmodernism' in *Culture and Conflict in Postwar Italy*, ed. by Barański and Lumley, pp. 178 -191 (p. 186).

¹⁸ Branzi, *The Hot House*, p. 137.

¹⁹ Branzi, *The Hot House*, pp. 137 - 139.

Arguably, Branzi's attention to the structure of production was not out of concern for the worker, but rather was motivated by the advantage it represented to the architect; what craft could do for design.

This openness to a plurality of manufacturing modes in the "new handicrafts" suited what Branzi called the still 'essentially artisanal nature' of Italy's furniture industry. He proposed the "new handicrafts" as a method of production that optimised the existence of craft alongside more advanced technologies at the onset of the 1980s. This exemplified what he described as Italy's 'weak and diffused modernity', a concept that the architect would discuss at length in the 1980s.²⁰ It built on Vattimo's theory of *pensiero debole* (weak thought) in which the relationship between the modern and postmodern condition was defined by *verwindung*, a Heideggerian term to describe a form of 'overcoming'.²¹ Vattimo explained that

we can define postmodernity as something that has a relationship of *verwindung* to modernity: that accepts it and takes it in hand, that carries its traces as though it were an illness from which we still suffer, that continues with it while at the same time distorting it.²²

This approach defined Alchymia's approach to design in general; through the strategies of resignation, deformation and distortion in their "redesigns", the group would twist the existing into a new design reality. Branzi explained what this would mean in terms of production. The "new handicrafts" would lead towards a *Nuovo Design* (New Design) based on an 'artisan reworking of new technologies and permitting the use of many different forms of production together with a great flexibility of organization'.²³ This productive hybridity will be considered more fully with regards to Memphis, yet as the following section argues this strategy of *verwindung* was visible in the other novelty of the "new handicrafts"- speed. Speed

²⁰ Museo Alessi, *Designer Interviews: Andrea Branzi* (Mantua: Edizioni Corraini, 2007), p. 26. For examples of this, see Branzi, *Moderno, Postmoderno, Millenario: Scritti Teorici 1972 - 1980* (Turin: Studio Forma Alchimia, 1980) and Branzi, *Learning from Milan: Design and the Second Modernity*, trans. by Huw Evans (Milan: Idea Books, 1988).

²¹ Chambers, 'Rolling Away from the Centre Towards X' in *Culture and Conflict in Postwar Italy*, ed. by Barański and Lumley, p. 185.

²² Vattimo, 'Postmodernità e Fine della Storia' in Chambers, 'Rolling Away from the Centre Towards X' in *Culture and Conflict in Postwar Italy*, ed. by Barański and Lumley, p. 185.

²³ Branzi, *Learning from Milan*, p. 34.

continued the radicals' interest in the components of production: first technique, then tools, now tempo, the relative time it took to make things in craft and industrial contexts.

4.2.2 Designs on Craft: Speeding-Up Production in the “New Handicrafts”

Industrial capitalism is founded on the premise of ever-increasing speed in production. Underpinned by the division of labour, the increased productivity of specialised, mechanised processes means ever-greater profit. Both the introduction of machinery and what Marx described as ‘increasing the speed of the machinery’ itself were historically guaranteed ways of ‘squeezing out more labour in a given time’.²⁴ Conversely, craft is seen to operate at a slower rate than the assembly line, one more in sync with the body’s natural rhythms.²⁵ The concept of slowness has informed much craft-based resistance to industrial modernity, be it the Arts & Crafts movement at the onset of the twentieth century or today’s “slow craft” movement.²⁶

However speed is a quality found in craft too, albeit of a different kind. Mònica Gaspar describes a form of artisanal speed based on the ‘wonder of an apparently effortless, flowing activity, where hands seem to run faster than the mind’.²⁷ This virtuoso speed is central to craft’s modern reworking as a performance, as seen in the glassblowing demonstrations that dazzled the visitors to Murano’s glass workshops discussed in chapter three. Yet even this ability to do things quickly in craft is slow, taking many hours of practice - at least ten thousand hours, according to Sennett’s *The Craftsman*.²⁸

In the “new handicrafts” Branzi proposed an approach to production that confronted the slowness and subverted the speed of both craft and industrial production. On the one hand, he criticised the ‘enormous amount of time and expense’ expended on the

²⁴ Marx, *Capital*, I, p. 388.

²⁵ Marx, *Capital*, I, p. 385.

²⁶ Jorunn Veiteberg, ‘Speed as Stimulation, or Reflections on a Coffee Cup’ in *Speed: Papers and Exhibition* (Gmunden: Think Thank, 2009), pp. 22 - 26 (p. 22) and Liesbeth den Besten, ‘Fragments’ in *Speed*, pp. 16 - 21 (p. 17). For an exhibition of “slow” craft: *Taking Time: Craft and the Slow Revolution*, curated by Helen Carnac. <<http://makingaslowrevolution.wordpress.com/>> [accessed 18 February 2011].

²⁷ Mònica Gaspar, ‘Out of Control (Almost)’ in *Speed*, pp. 27 - 32 (p. 28).

²⁸ Sennett, p. 20.

product development needed to ensure the ‘commercial viability’ in mass-production.²⁹ He looked favourably on small-scale, workshop-based manufacture as this did not require costly investment in research and tooling and therefore presented a more light-footed and flexible mode of production - a much admired quality of Italy’s ‘industrial districts’ discussed in the next section. However, the extensive care taken over the single product in the artisan workshop rendered it less attractive.

In the “new handicrafts”, speed was not about doing detailed things quickly or perfectly, nor was it being promoted in the name of productive efficiency: Branzi’s advocacy of one maker operating many machines challenged Taylorist logic. Rather, the accelerated production of the “new handicrafts” enabled the quick realisation of the Alchymia architects’ ideas. No longer would artisans and designers spend a near decade perfecting the technical and aesthetic qualities of their products, as in Ponti’s *Superleggera*. Instead, Branzi advocated a productive attitude that rejected the preciousness of traditional craft production in favour of the speedy, spontaneous making of *tecnica povera*.

The idea of speed here chimes with another of Calvino’s *Six Memos for the Next Millennium*. In contrast to Ponti’s desire for ‘lightness’ discussed in the second chapter, these architects can be seen to subscribe to the writer’s admiration of ‘quickness’, in which there was a ‘relationship between physical speed and speed of mind’.³⁰ In the “new handicrafts” production would be quick enough to meet the pace of the architects’ ideas, and the rapid turnover of these they envisaged: Branzi noted Alchymia’s interest in the flexibility of fashion’s fast-changing production model.³¹

This could be seen as a challenge to craft production. As Peter Assman has suggested, increasing speed can lead to ‘the loss of a manufacturing philosophy’ based on the ‘development of refined skill, which has been meticulously developed and passed on for generations’.³² Yet the emphasis on simultaneity of conception and execution arguably negated this threat: Adamson suggests that the ‘matching of

²⁹ Branzi, *The Hot House*, p. 140.

³⁰ Calvino, ‘Quickness’, p. 41.

³¹ Branzi, *The Hot House*, p. 87.

³² Peter Assman, ‘Speed Kills - But What?’ in *Speed*, pp. 10 - 12 (pp. 10, 11).

speeds (between attention and execution)' is a trait of craft making.³³ The “new handicrafts” could be therefore be seen to engender a new skill amongst its makers, one created by the apparent reskilling involved in the denial of Assman’s ‘refined skill’.³⁴

The “new handicrafts” did challenge Italy’s craft tradition in another way. Branzi argued that ‘the culture of these models [...] does not originate in “artisanal culture”, but rather uses this culture as a place for experimentation: as a means rather than an end’.³⁵ In his isolated emphasis on speed, craft is being broken down into its constituent parts, its components used as readymade tools for the designer with no apparent concern for the tradition from which they originated.

Furthermore, in its preference for fast rather than quality production, the “new handicrafts” proposed to undermine one of the ways in which craft was conventionally judged by both its practitioners and the public. For Pye, a high level of productive quality is all that justifies crafts’ continuation in the contemporary era.³⁶ That is not to say that the Alchymia products were badly made; rather that with the “new handicrafts” Branzi proposed a method of making in which the craft-associated criteria of quality was downplayed in favour of the object’s quick realisation.

In reality, the expediency of production promoted in the “new handicrafts” was a response to the difficulty of getting Alchymia’s products made in this period. In her detailed account of Memphis and its origins, Barbara Radice describes a growing sense of frustration in the group in the period 1978-1979: ‘the designers needed a manufacturer who would make not only experimental prototypes, but finished pieces as alternatives to standard production’ but Guerriero was more interested in being a cultural promoter.³⁷ The production strategies they did employ can therefore be seen as a response to this: this was not just true of the “redesign” series, but also the

³³ Adamson, ‘Paper Trial: Making and Intentionality’ in *Speed*, pp. 45 - 47 (p. 45).

³⁴ Jane L. Collins has noted the similar construction of speed as a craft skill in the mid twentieth century North American apparel industry. Jane L. Collins, ‘Mapping a Global Labor Market: Gender and Skill in the Globalizing Garment Industry’, *Gender and Society*, 16 (2002), 921 - 940 (p. 268).

³⁵ Branzi, *The Hot House*, p. 141.

³⁶ Pye, p. 76. Sabel discusses how ‘technical mastery’ is one of the standards by which artisans judge their own work and that of other craftsmen. Sabel, *Work and Politics*, p. 84.

³⁷ Radice, *Memphis*, p. 24.

largest group's largest undertaking, *Il Mobile Infinito* (Infinite Furniture) (See *Illustration 191 and 192*) unveiled at the 1981 *Salone del Mobile*, in which every part of the furniture was the result of assemblage. Each component, from handles to laminates to interior decoration provided by the thirty different architects and artists involved.³⁸ The techniques of readymades and magnetic ornaments in the *Mobile Infinito* and “redesigns” were all short cuts, ways to produce the fastest product possible.

The production strategies employed also spoke of a growing ideological rift in Alchymia. While Mendini envisaged these objects as destined for magazine covers and gallery spaces Branzi and other members of Alchymia were interested in designing objects to go into production. Sottsass and De Lucchi in particular wanted to move beyond the photo opportunity and the performance-based activities of Alchymia, and unlike Mendini thought that you could do more than “redesign”.³⁹ It was this, combined with a larger break down in relations that eventually led the pair to quit Alchimia in 1980, and just a few months later, set up their own collective, Memphis. Memphis, the focus of the final case study of this thesis. A close examination of how its products were made - specifically the laminates, furniture and glassware - shows similarities with Branzi's concept of the “new handicrafts”, and in its extensive engagement with Italy's craft traditions, and concomitant ideas of luxury and skill, shows how the group represents both a radical departure, and yet continuity, in Italian design's reliance on craft.

4.2.3 Making Memphis

At the 1981 *Salone del Mobile* the star attraction was not Alchymia's *Il Mobile Infinito*, but the fifty-five examples of furniture, clocks, lamps and ceramics on display at the Arc '74 showroom across town. This was the launch of Memphis, the international design collective led by Sottsass and populated by an assortment of young protégés and internationally-recognised architects: amongst them Branzi, De Lucchi, Natalie Du Pasquier, Martine Bedin, Matteo Thun, Michael Graves, Peter

³⁸ *Il Mobile Infinito* (Milan: Alchimia Editore, (1981), n.p.; Guida Sambonet, *Alchimia: 1977 – 1987* (Turin: Umberto Allemandi & C., 1986), pp. 69 - 74; Kazuko Sato, *Alchimia: Contemporary Italian Design* (Berlin: Taco Verlagsgesellschaft und Agentur, 1988), pp. 48 – 50.

³⁹ Radice, *Memphis*, p. 25.



Illustration 191. Cabinet from the *Mobile Infinito* (Infinite Furniture) pieces, collectively designed by Studio Alchymia in 1981.

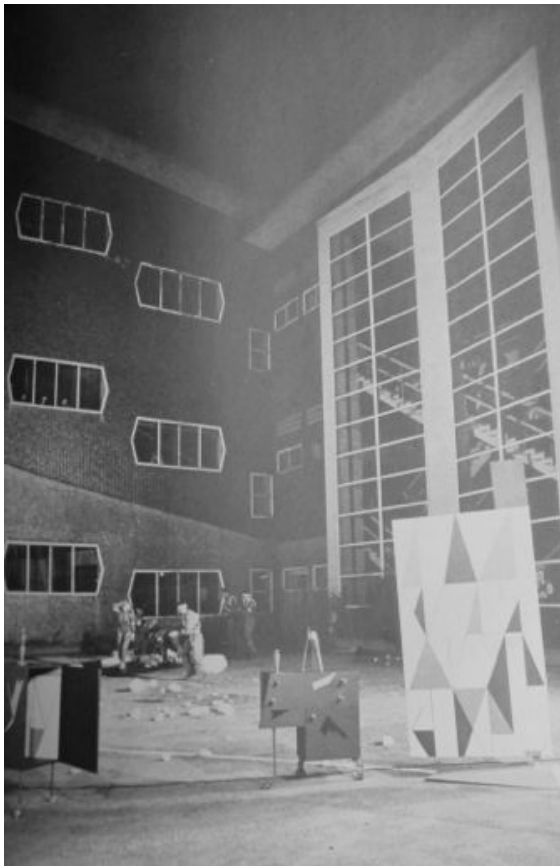


Illustration 192. The launch of Studio Alchymia's *Mobile Infinito* at the Architecture Faculty of the *Politecnico di Milano* during the *1981 Salone del Mobile*.

Shire and Masanori Umeda.⁴⁰ Mendini was there too, represented by his *Cipriani* (See *Illustration 193*) cocktail cabinet composed of the same assemblage of geometric volumes and antennae as the *Mobile Infinito* furniture.

Mendini's Alchymia-style cabinet was no match for the attention grabbing quality of Memphis. This was loud, brash, furniture (See *Illustration 194*), upholstered in clashing colours and exuberant patterns that referenced everything from primitivism to Pop, cell structures to kitsch. It was named after the Bob Dylan song *Stuck inside of Mobile with the Memphis Blues Again* from 1966, which Radice had used as the title of an article on Sottsass in 1976, and which was also stuck on repeat on one of the group's early meetings in December 1980.⁴¹ Its origins in the radical years of the late 1960s and early 1970s fed into the group's design approach: Memphis rebelled against the whole idea of Italian design, from the swooping *linea italiana* of the 1950s to the elegant luxury of the 1960s, and even the historicist Postmodernism of Paolo Portoghesi and others on show at the previous year's Venice *Biennale*.⁴² It created a media frenzy, the designs turning up in hundreds of articles, advertising foyers, fashion spreads (See *Illustration 195*) and films.⁴³ Memphis was shout-out loud furniture with a price tag to match; just the thing for the rising fashion designer Karl Lagerfeld (See *Illustration 196*), on the lookout to furnish his newly-acquired Monte Carlo apartment. Lagerfeld was apparently initially 'stumped by the banality of high-rise architecture. He was at a loss as to what to do with the space. Until he remembered Memphis' and bought the lot.⁴⁴

Memphis did not just set out to rebel against Italian design's reputation for good taste, but the craftsmanship of its manufacture. It echoed a wider fallout between the

⁴⁰ The full list of architects involved were: Andrea Branzi, Aldo Cibic, Michele De Lucchi, Natalie du Pasquier, Matteo Thun and Marco Zanini, Sottsass's three co-partners in the newborn Sottsass Associati studio. The international architects and artists involved were: Martine Bedin, Michael Graves, Arata Isozaki, Peter Shire, George Sowden, Kuramata Shiro, Masanori Umeda, and Javier Mariscal.

⁴¹ Radice, 'Ettore Sottsass e il Memphis Blues', *Data Arte*, October- November 1976, pp. 68 - 71. Radice, *Memphis*, p. 26.

⁴² See chapter 3 n. 91. See also Léa-Catherine Szacka, 'The Presence of the Past – First Venice Architecture Biennale (1980)' in *Postmodernism*, ed. by Adamson and Pavitt., n.p.

⁴³ 'Bianco o Nero Ma a Contrasto coi Colori', *Donna*, February 1982, pp. 186 – 191.

In *Ruthless People* starring Danny De Vito and Bette Midler, their home is furnished with furniture from and inspired by the Memphis collective. See *Ruthless People*, dir. by Jim Abrahams, David Zucker and Jerry Zucker (USA: *Silver Screen Partners II* and *Touchstone Pictures*, 1986)

⁴⁴ Patricia McColl, 'Renegade Decor', *New York Times*, 14 August 1983, sm 36 - 40 (p. sm 36)



Illustration 193. *Cipriani* cocktail cabinet, Alessandro Mendini for the first Memphis collection 1981. Black-painted wood with mirror front, and two fiberglass antennae topped with coloured wooden balls.



Illustration 194. *Casablanca* sideboard designed by Ettore Sottsass for the first Memphis collection, 1981. Wood covered in plastic laminate with Sottsass's *bacterio* design.



Illustration 195. Model standing in front of Sottsass's *Carlton* bookcase for a fashion shoot in *Donna* magazine, 1982. She is sporting a jumpsuit by Nadini, jewellery from Pellini, shoes by Euforia.



Illustration 196. Karl Lagerfeld in the dining room of his Monte Carlo apartment, c. 1983. Table designed by George Sowden, *Riviera* chairs by Michele de Lucchi, *Nefertiti* ceramics designed by Matteo Thun and made by Ceramiche Flavia, *Suvretta* bookcase and *Treetops* lamp by Sottsass.

Italian public and the artisanal qualities of its furniture: as one *NY Times* columnist noted, ‘many Italians have come to view the exquisitely crafted furniture that took the world by storm in the late 1960’s and early 1970’s as decadent - too beautiful and luxurious for anybody’s good’.⁴⁵ The pervasive use of plastic laminates was short hand for this double-pronged attack on Italian design. The tables, chairs and furnishing units were all plastered in kitsch-like plastic laminates that had been provided for free by Abet Laminati. Even when laminates were not used, as in Shire’s *Brazil* side table (See *Illustration 197*), its heavily lacquered surface gave it a plastic appearance just as it had done in the Vignellis’ *Saragota* discussed in the previous chapter, albeit used here to exploit plastic’s kitsch, rather than luxury, credentials.

However the widespread use of plastic laminates actually exemplified the paradoxical relationship with craft and industry in Memphis. Sottsass described how the furniture and its materials ‘can all be produced by machines. Plastic laminate is made by a machine as are all the other elements’, but laminate production could be a surprisingly artisanal process.⁴⁶ It is not a solid plastic, but made up of layers of Kraft paper impregnated with resin, which are then fused together under hot presses. In addition, Abet was endowed with a flexibility of scales of production which enabled the small-scale experimentation desired by the Memphis architects; it owned the biggest laminate press in Europe, yet also had smaller presses on which Sowden and Du Pasquier could work directly, producing one-off designs (*Illustration 198*) just two to three metres long.⁴⁷

Critics recognised this contradictory nature of Memphis’s manufacture. Stephen Bayley, who curated an exhibition on Memphis at London’s Boilerhouse gallery in 1982, described its design strategy as ‘highly contrived; Memphis uses cheap, industrially produced materials, but assembles them into furniture by arduous labour intensive and very expensive procedures’.⁴⁸ In effect, the group’s architects

⁴⁵ Marilyn Bethany, ‘Daring to Look at Italy’s Past’, *New York Times*, 26 september, 1982, p. hd 26.

⁴⁶ Deyan Sudjic, ‘Sottsass and Co.’, *Crafts*, November-December, 1982, 38 - 42 (p. 42).

⁴⁷ George Sowden, personal interview with Adamson, 22 February 2010.

⁴⁸ Stephen Bayley, ‘Memphis in London’, *Memphis in London* (London: Boilerhouse Project, 1982), n.p.



Illustration 197. *Brazil* sidetable, Peter Shire for Memphis, 1981.
Lacquered wood.

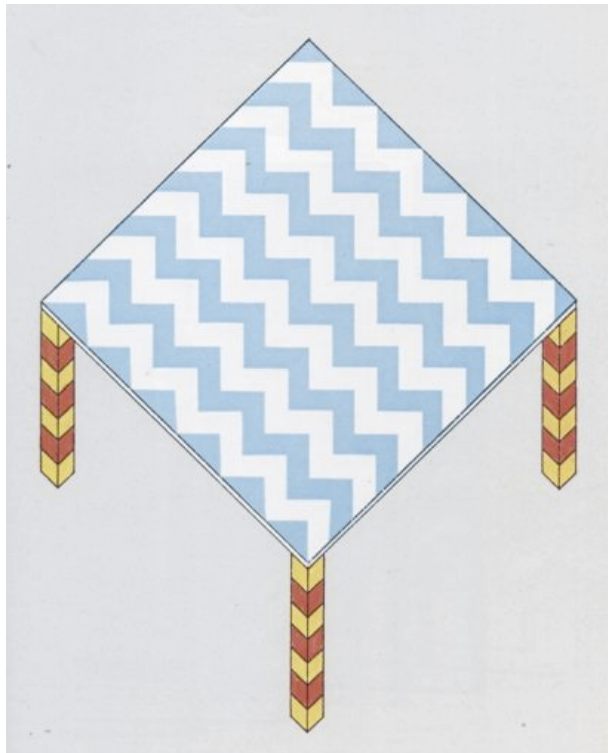


Illustration 198. George Sowden's drawing
for the table featured in Lagerfeld's
apartment, with the laminate designs for the
surface. The legs would be painted wood in
the realised object.

continued to rely on the wealth of artisanal skills that have made all the designs discussed in this thesis, however much the objects appeared otherwise.

Furniture production was overseen by Brugola, whose collaboration with Sottsass since the late 1950s was discussed in the previous chapter. No construction drawings exist for the Memphis furniture. Instead, Sottsass and Brugola relied on the same informal forms of visual and verbal communication that were praised thirty years earlier at the 1951 *Triennale*. Sottsass was not the only one to benefit from Brugola's involvement: Sowden praised Brugola's cabinetry skills in the realisation of the *Metropole* clock (*See Illustration 199*) from Memphis's second collection of 1982. Its rectangular profile was not joined together from separate pieces, but cut out from a single sheet. As Sowden said, Memphis furniture was 'fitted out, not just joined together – it's intricate work'.⁴⁹ This need for intensive, artisanal production was built into the architects' design for the objects; the thinness of the front edges of the laminate-covered *Carlton* bookcase meant that Brugola had to glue the laminate lengths to the wooden substrates by hand.⁵⁰ This made subsequent attempts to scale up production impossible. As Ernesto Gismondi, owner of the lighting producer Artemide, and one of Memphis's backers, noted:

The bookcase is built up of numerous pieces of plastic laminate glued onto wood, each piece being different from all the others. On no account can this be produced in series. There is no option other than doing it by hand. As Memphis does not have a factory of its own, they started looking for craftsmen willing to give a discount on orders for a given quantity. These furniture makers burst out laughing, because to them was no difference between making just one, or a thousand.⁵¹

This was one of the reasons why the Memphis furniture was so expensive. Each *Carlton* one was numbered, yet as Radice explained this was not because they wanted to produce a limited number, to know how many were being made; a policy that fell away when the numbered brass plates that were screwed onto each piece

⁴⁹ Sowden, personal interview with Adamson, 22 February 2010.

⁵⁰ Brugola, personal interview, 13 April 2010. (APPENDIX I).

⁵¹ Ernesto Gismondi in Gian Piero Vincenzo, 'Interview: Ernesto Gismondi' in *Memphis: 1981 – 1988* (Groningen: Groningen Museum, 1989) pp. 10 - 11 (p. 11).

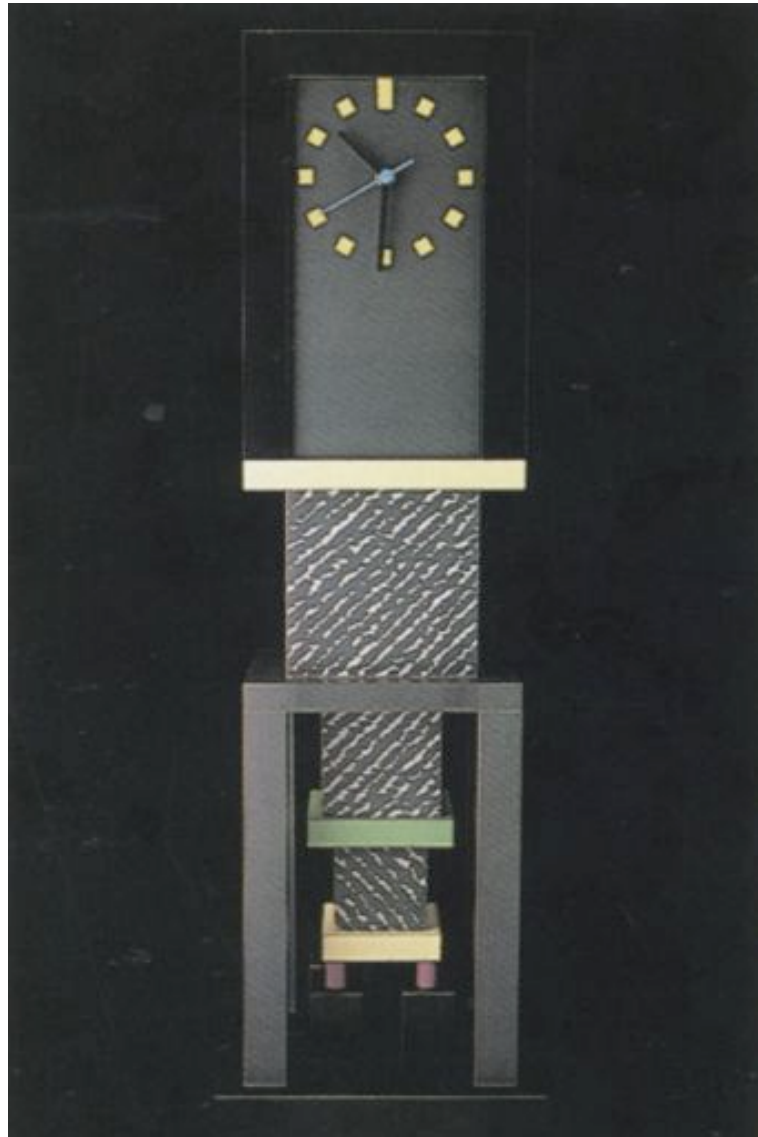


Illustration 199. *Metropole* clock, designed by Sowden and made by Renzo Brugola, for the second Memphis collection in 1982.

proved too expensive to continue.⁵² As Radice, who was also Sottsass's partner noted, these were not meant to be produced in elitist limited editions, 'it just takes time to make it'.⁵³ However, while the artisanal production of Memphis seemed to lead to the slowness of craft implied in Branzi's "new handicrafts", its production set up also demonstrated the agility of Italy's workshops that the architect so admired.

4.2.4 The Memphis 'Industrial Districts'

As Gismondi indicated, there was no Memphis factory in which production took place. Its production set up was intended to be as rebellious as the designs themselves, a guerrilla enterprise existing outside of any existing category. Early contractual documents declared that 'Memphis is not a company, a factory, an artisanal workshop or a retail shop, but a point of reference'.⁵⁴ By the time of the first collection however Memphis was a registered company, one with Sottsass Associati, Brunella and Mario Godani (the owners of the Arc '74 showroom) and Brugola as partners. Brugola also provided financial backing, as did Fausto Celati, an industrialist whose factories produced Artemide's lamps.⁵⁵ Nevertheless, Memphis did offer a more agile model of manufacture that was in line with the post-industrial landscape of Branzi's "new handicrafts" manifesto. As Brugola recently explained, he did not make all the furniture himself, but subcontracted production to a series of locally based specialised manufacturers:

I had this network of collaborators, who worked with perspex, metal, who worked with chrome, did brass, people - for example there was another artisan who made headboards in brass, this was his production. So, when I needed that, I went to him and he would make me the thing in brass, and then I would go to another who did the plating.⁵⁶

⁵² Radice, personal interview, 12 April 2010. (APPENDIX I).

⁵³ Radice in Suzanne Slesin, 'In Milan, the Bizarre Becomes Respectable', *New York Times*, 24 September 1981, p. C3.

⁵⁴ 'Memphis', 11 December 1980, n.p. AMDL.

⁵⁵ Celati owned a number of manufacturing firms, including the Riforma workshop in Pregnana Milanese that specialised in metalwork and prototype production and produced Memphis lighting including Martine Bedin's *Superlamp* and Sottsass's *Ashoka*. 'I Soci Memphis/the Memphis partners', *Memphis* (1982(?)) n.p. AMDL.

⁵⁶ Brugola, personal interview, 13 April 2010. (APPENDIX I)

All of these producers were located in the Brianza-Como-Milan triangle.⁵⁷ This geographical concentration of interconnected producers constituted an ‘industrial district’, a term defined by Edward Goodman as ‘a territorial system of small and medium-sized firms producing a group of commodities whose products are processes which can be split into different phases’.⁵⁸ At a time when industrial development based on mass production was no longer being seen as economically productive, the ongoing artisanal nature of Italian manufacturing was being recast as Italy’s productive strength.⁵⁹ The number of workshops had actually grown in recent years, as a result of the *decentramento produttivo* (productive decentralisation) that occurred in the 1970s, fuelled by firms seeking to counteract labour militancy and high labour costs by subcontracting production to smaller firms outside union control.⁶⁰

For the second collection, the Memphis architects engaged even more with the strongholds of Italy’s craft traditions, largely located in the craft-rich *Terza Italia* (Third Italy) of Emilia Romagna, Tuscany, Marche and Umbria regions.⁶¹ In the Florentine hinterland Ceramiche Flavia and Alessio Sarri made Thun’s designs for teapots (*See Illustration 200*) and cruet sets, and along with Porcellane San Marco in Nove produced ceramics designed by Sottsass, Thun, Masanori Umeda and Marco Zanini. 1982 also marked a distinctly luxurious turn; in Massa, near Carrara, UP & Up produced designs in marble such as De Lucchi’s *Sebastopole* (*See Illustration 201*) table. Rossi & Arcandi, a small Vicenza silver firm established in 1959, produced designs such as Sottsass’s *Murmansk* (*See Illustration 202*), while De Lucchi, Sottsass and Zanini designed glassware that was made on Murano by Toso Vetri d’Arte.

⁵⁷ They included: Nino Ornaghi, who upholstered the furniture in fabrics designed by Nathalie du Pasquier and produced by Rainbow, a fabric printers near Como set up in 1972 by Fabio Bellotti and produced fabrics for fashion houses including Armani, Krizia and Versace. Alberto Guardagli was in charge of the silkscreening process and F.lli Viganò the metalwork. ‘I Soci Memphis/the Memphis partners’, *Memphis*, (1982(?)) n.p. AMDL.

⁵⁸ Goodman, ‘Introduction: The Political Economy of the Small Firm in Italy’ in *Small Firms and Industrial Districts in Italy*, ed. by Goodman, Bamford and Saynor, pp. 1 - 30 (p. 21).

⁵⁹ Piore and Sabel, p. 4.

⁶⁰ James Buxton, ‘A Nation of Small Firms’, *Design*, September 1983 p. 42.

⁶¹ The phrase the *Terza Italia* was coined by Arnaldo Bagnasco in 1979. Arnaldo Bagnasco, *Tre Italie: La Problematica Territoriale dello Sviluppo Italiano* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1979). See Blim, pp - 1 - 2.



Illustration 200. *Columbina Spheroidera*, ceramic cruet, 1982. Designed by Matteo Thun and made by Alessio Sarri.



Illustration 201. Two marble tables designed by Michele De Lucchi in UP & UP's workshop in Massa, 1983.



Illustration 202. *Murmansk* fruit bowl in sterling silver, designed by Sottsass and made by Rossi & Arcandi for the second Memphis collection, 1982.

In essence, Memphis was the single largest engagement by Italy's architects with craft in the whole post-war period of Italian design. Yet despite this, Sottsass was quick to dismiss that it had anything to do with craft:

After all the years of discussion, we started thinking we could rebuild something all over again, using industrial materials as much as possible and handcrafts as little as possible. There are no quotations from the past in these works. We are not going back to history like postmodernism or attempting a folkloric/ecological approach.⁶²

This is not as contradictory as it might first seem. Rather, like Branzi and Dalisi before him, Sottsass was staking out Memphis's position in terms of the recent re-emergence of craft as a cultural force in Italy. As he declared in an interview with Deyan Sudjic in *Crafts* magazine, Memphis has 'nothing to do with the craft revival'.⁶³ Sudjic agreed: 'Memphis, though virtually hand made, is not intended as an exercise in craft'.⁶⁴ They were right. Memphis did not represent a craft revival but a rebirth of design, one that took place through the radicalisation of artisanal production that the "new handicrafts" proposed, and one that was most evident in Sottsass's designs for the Memphis glassware, the final set of objects to be discussed here.

4.2.5 Craft on Adrenalin: Glue and Glass

Sottsass acknowledged one area of Memphis's production as reliant on 'manual skill': the glassware he designed alongside De Lucchi and Zanini for the 1982 and 1986 collections. The pieces were all made by Toso Vetri d'Arte, a glass workshop set up in 1980 by Luigi Toso and three glass blowing maestri, Luigi Visentini, Dino Toso and Carlo "Caramèa" Tosi. Tosi had over thirty years experience on Murano and was particularly renowned for his skill in realising goblets.⁶⁵

⁶² Sottsass in Slesin, 'In Milan, the Bizarre Becomes Respectable', p. C3.

⁶³ Sottsass in Sudjic, 'Sottsass and Co.', p. 42.

⁶⁴ Sudjic, 'Sottsass and Co.', p. 42.

⁶⁵ In 1990 Toso Vetri d'Arte was bought out by Andrea Boscaro and renamed Compagnia Vetraria Muranese. 'I Maestri: Note Biografiche' in *Memoria del Vetro: Murano e l'Arte Vetraria nelle Storie dei Suoi Maestri*, ed. by Andrea Tosi, (Venice: Abate Zanetti; Marsilio, 2006), p. 182.

The difference between Sottsass's designs from 1982 and 1986 are striking. *Sirio* (See *Illustration 203*) was from the first collection. Despite its asymmetric handles and unexpected form, the bright colours and skill necessary to hot-join the stacked and encased glass elements cements it in the long tradition and enduring skill of Venetian glassmaking, but also shows Sottsass's irreverence for this tradition. Compare this to the *Efira* fruitbowl (See *Illustrations 204 and 205*), designed alongside the *Agesicura* and *Attide* vases for the 1986 collection. Attached below the rim of its tower of multi-coloured building blocks are a number of small semi-circular solid glass rings, from which glass shapes hang. It is not just the fragmentary nature of the *Efira* that is notable. Those ornamental earrings are dangling from handles that are not hot-joined to the main vessel as in *Sirio*, but glued.

Glue keeps on popping up in this story of Italian radical design. It was what stuck together the photomontage of Global Tools and Diderot and D'Alembert's encyclopaedia in the group's bulletin; what Pesce had use to fix together his *Arca* table and stiffen the glass fibre in *Golgotha*, what stuck the laminates to the Memphis furniture. *Blueprint* magazine equated 'the occasional dab of glue' in the Memphis glassware with 'an injection of modern design adrenalin'.⁶⁶ Sottsass echoed this idea of glue as a stimulant: 'I want to be able do design in a new way, using more than ancient artistry a new acceleration, simply by producing, for instance, a lot more adrenalin'.⁶⁷ As these references to adrenalin suggests, glue is seen to enable the speed that Branzi identified as a key component of the "new handicrafts". Yet using glue to join the glass together was not necessarily any quicker, and in fact had the potential to be even more drawn out than conventional production methods. In all likelihood, the glass had to be cooled down overnight before the glue could be applied the next day.⁶⁸

Sottsass was brazen about the use of glue: 'don't be surprised then if some of the glass is glued together to allow a little more speed rather than melted together according to custom. And what difference does it make? Isn't glue-culture an

⁶⁶ 'Breaking Glass' *Blueprint*, February 1987, 40 - 41 (p. 41).

⁶⁷ Sottsass in Memphis Milano, *Vetri: Glass Ettore Sottsass Marco Zanini* (Milan: Memphis Milano, 1986), n.p. AMDL.

⁶⁸ Anthony Harris, personal conversation, 8 September 2010.



Illustration 203. *Sirio* vase, designed by Sottsass and made by Toso Vetri d'Arte, 1982.



Illustration 204. *Efira* fruitbowl (centre) designed by Sottsass and made by Toso Vetri d'Arte, 1986. On the left is the *Agesicura* vase on the right, the *Attide* vase.



Illustration 205. Close-up of the rim of the *Efira* fruitbowl, with the glued attachments, 1986. Only seven *Efira* were ever produced, while *Sirio* was available in an unlimited edition.

invention like the culture of glass?’⁶⁹ Sottsass knew full well the difference: he had been designing Murano glassware for over twenty-five years.⁷⁰

Glue appealed on multiple levels to Sottsass. On the one hand, it permitted him to import into a luxury craft context a DIY collage aesthetic that was being explored at the time in transgressive punk graphics, such as the fanzine *Sniffin’ Glue*.⁷¹ Yet what was most attractive was precisely that it challenged what he saw as the problem of the island-hood of Murano’s skilled makers that, as we saw in chapter three, was such a central part to their identity, even if this was repeatedly corrupted through its commercial exploitation. Sottsass conceded that there ‘must be some truth’ in the merit of one person designing and making, but that problem was that ‘the craftsmen-designer of time ago, by dint of designing and doing and vice versa was often specialised to the point of becoming hermetic’.⁷²

This assault on their glass making tradition was, according to Radice, ‘quite shocking for the maestri in Murano’.⁷³ As Sottsass later recalled:

I remember a glass maestro who was left astounded by my request to glue two glass pieces together, because in the glass tradition you did not. But to do what I wanted, the glass had to be glued, and for me the fact that today there exist glues that allow joining glass - and satisfying my ideas - is a form of perfection, while for that maestro it was about imperfection.⁷⁴

This was not the first time that Sottsass had designed glass to be glued together. In 1979 he designed a series of vases for Fontana Arte, the firm set up in 1932 by Gio Ponti as an offshoot of the glass manufacturer Luigi Fontana & C, and to which Gae Aulenti had recently been appointed as art director. Amongst his designs was the 2665 amber and blue vessel (*See Illustration 206*) made of a series of plate glass

⁶⁹ Memphis Milano, *Mostre Vetri*, n.p. AMDL.

⁷⁰ Sottsass had designed his first glassware in 1947, that was displayed at that year’s *Triennale*, and in 1974 he started designing glass for Vistosi. For more details, see *Sottsass: Glass Works*, ed. by Bruno Bischofberger and Milco Carboni (Dublin: Links for Publishing, Links for Publishing, 1998), n.p.

⁷¹ For more on *Sniffin’ Glue* and the punk aesthetic, see Teal Triggs, ‘Scissors and Glue: Punk Fanzines and the Creation of a DIY Aesthetic’, *Journal of Design History*, 19 (2006), pp. 69-83.

⁷² Sottsass in Memphis Milano, *Vetri Glass*, n.p.

⁷³ Radice, personal interview, 12 April 2010. (APPENDIX I).

⁷⁴ Sottsass, ‘Intervista a Ettore Sottsass’ in Luca Bergo and Patrizia Peracchio, *Pierluigi Ghianda* (Milan: 5 Continents Editions, 2006), p. 126.

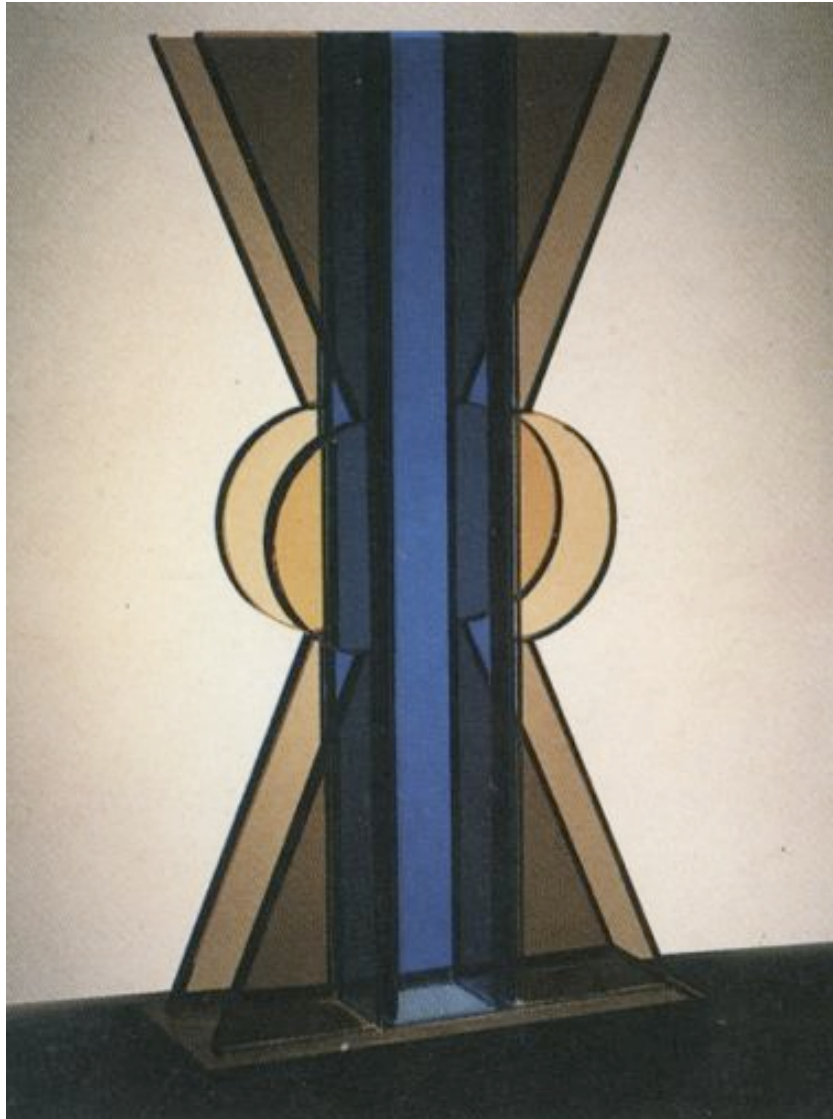


Illustration 206. 2665 amber and blue vessel, plate glass, designed by Sottsass for Fontana Arte, 1979

sheets in elementary geometric forms manufactured by St Gobain, the multi-national construction materials manufacturer who owned Fontana & C., that were then assembled by hand by Galleli, a Milanese artisan.⁷⁵ Yet it was not the industrial aesthetic of this glass that inspired Sottsass's Memphis vessels, but the expressive potential of ceramics. This was in part Sottsass's own experiences with ceramics, specifically the primordial symbolism of his *Ceramiche delle Tenebre* and *Ceramiche della Shiva* from the early 1960s discussed in chapter three. For the most part however, the inspiration for this work lay with the Californian Peter Shire.

Sottsass had first seen Shire's ceramics in the American *Wet* Magazine in 1977.⁷⁶ On the basis of this initial editorial introduction he subsequently invited the artist to Milan to design a series of objects for the first Memphis collection: in addition to the *Brazil* table, this included his *Bel Air* armchair. Sottsass would later write admiringly of Shire's clay objects, a number of which were reproduced in Radice's Memphis book (*See Illustration 207*).⁷⁷ As the architect later stated: 'he was producing ceramic planes and gluing them together like you would build a house of cards. And then he was gluing together other elements like strings or cylinders or cubes or handles - spouts, cups, and everything'.⁷⁸ The result was that you could 'produce figures that nobody could produce, ever'.⁷⁹ This was ceramics as *bricolage*; neo-constructivist assemblages in bright colours and grainy patterns with borderline functionality - a fitting description for Memphis objects as a whole.

To call it glue was a misnomer. Shire was actually using slip, liquid clay, to bind the different parts of his teapots together.⁸⁰ Yet as a material, method of assembly and idea, glue binds the Memphis objects together. It enabled the conjunction of disparate surfaces that defined the Memphis aesthetic; laminates to fibreboard, fake marble next to real. Glue was also the ideal material for the "new handicrafts": from the architect's perspective, the aesthetic possibilities it enabled liberated glass from

⁷⁵ No further details are given on Galleli. Laura Falconi, *Fontana Arte: Una Storia Trasparente/ A Transparent History*, trans. by Susan Wise, (Milan: Skira, 1998), p. 139.

⁷⁶ Sottsass was aware of *Wet* through Radice, who had conducted some interviews for the magazine. Sottsass, 'Foreword', in Hunter Drohojowska, *Tempest in a Teapot: the Ceramic Art of Peter Shire* (New York: Rizzoli, 1991), pp. 18 - 20 (p. 19).

⁷⁷ Radice, *Memphis*, p. 124.

⁷⁸ Sottsass, 'Foreword', in Hunter Drohojowska, *Tempest in a Teapot*, pp. 19 - 20).

⁷⁹ Sottsass, 'Foreword', in Drohojowska, *Tempest in a Teapot*, p. 20.

⁸⁰ Peter Shire, email correspondence with Adamson, 29 April 2010.

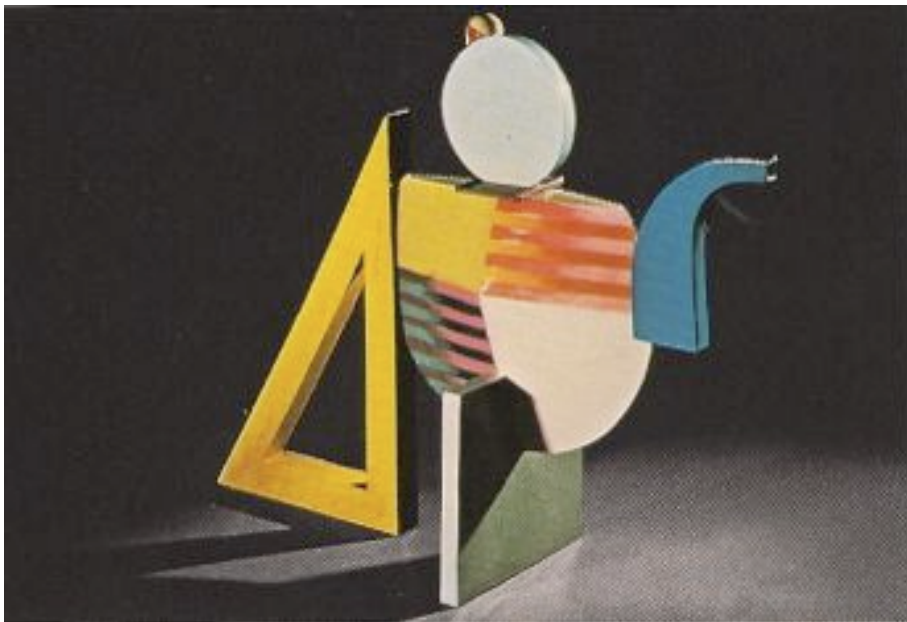


Illustration 207. Ceramic teapot designed and made by Shire, 1980 – 1983 and included in the *Memphis* catalogue.

the weight of its cultural traditions. Even when glue was not being used, it was being evoked. In objects such as *Sirio* and *Aldebaran* (See *Illustration 208*) from the 1983 collection the always-colourless over-scaled glass globules that join the handles to the vessel give the appearance of glue, an aesthetic of fragmentation repeated in the black lines of the laminate edges on the Memphis furniture.

Conclusion

This fourth and final chapter has covered a near twenty-year period, starting from the occupation of the *Triennale* in 1968 to the third Memphis collection in 1986. This was a period of huge socio-cultural upheaval, from the mass politicisation of the late 1960s and early 1970s to the culture of *riflusso* which marked the end of the 1970s and opening of the 1980s, and the case studies discussed reflected these changes. Yet whatever the degree of politicisation that informed the design practices of these radical architects, craft was a constant point of reference. For Mari and Dalisi, this was an interest in the potential of alternative craft makers to radicalise production, albeit in very different ways. Mari attempted to radicalise design production and consumption through a project of consciousness raising conducted through amateur production, while Dalisi turned to the free creativity of the child to reveal the potential of our unalienated, uneducated selves.

All the case studies discussed in this chapter attended to and attempted to reconfigure one of the most firmly-entrenched ideas about craft that this thesis has discussed; skill. While Mari was only interested in a baseline of skill, the *tecnica povera* and *tecnologia semplice* favoured by Dalisi and Global Tools respectively debased the highly skilful, specialised craftsmanship that was at the base of Italy's luxury-orientated design mainstream and demonstrated a desire to be rid of the perceived cultural and historical weight that craft was seen to represent. As we saw, they never carried out their critical utopia in which these would be eradicated, but this utopian failure still had an impact on production, as evident Pesce's *Golgotha* chair. The example of the *Golgotha* suggested that subverting craft's cultural associations could be just as effective as eradicating them: the chair gained its expressive force precisely from its degraded use as a 'tool' of this conventionally authentic, affirmative trope.



Illustration 208. *Aldebaran*, Ettore Sottsass, 1983 made by Toso Vetri d'Arte. The translucent glass globules that attach the green handles to the vessel give a glue-like appearance.

By the time of Branzi's proclamation of the "new handicrafts" in 1981, the impact that Radical design would have on the role that craft would play in design and production had become clear. In his advocacy of a speed that was intended to have no relationship with artisanal culture, Branzi exemplified how craft has been dismantled into a series of tools, techniques, processes and methods by these architects. By the late 1970s, craft has become an active, visible ingredient in the design, production and dissemination of objects, yet one to be provoked, subverted and undermined in the name of the increasing shock-led tactics of Memphis.

Branzi championed expediency rather than quality in the "new handicrafts", yet Sowden's praise for Brugola's craft skills in the realisation of the Memphis furniture show how important the latter remained. This was as true of Brugola's network of Brianza-based makers as Sottsass's glue-friendly glassblowers. Taken together, we arrive at a quality of craft on which Italy's post-war architects have largely been silent: the artisans working on Sottsass's transgressive glassware were not only able to translate his ideas into objects and learn the new skills these demanded, but were willing to do so. For all that these radical and post-radical architects worked to rebel against the 'burden' that Italy's craft traditions were seen to represent to the renewal of design, and that these artisans represented, the glass blowers of Murano proved themselves just as capable of and desiring of innovation as the architects themselves. In effect, Memphis was as much a story of continuity with Italy's history of post-war Italian design as a rebellious departure – one in which craft not only compliant, but complicit.

Conclusion: Crafting Modern Design in Italy, from 1980s to the Present

5.1 The ‘Problem’ of Craft

This thesis has opened and closed with a man and an idea: Ettore Sottsass and the ‘problem’ of craft. I introduced this research with the architect’s 1947 article ‘*Le Vie dell’Artigianato*’, in which he railed against the isolationism of Italy’s “great tradition” of craft and argued for architects’ modernising intervention in order to prevent its disappearance.¹ Chapter four ended with Sottsass’s statement on glass from 1986, in which he diagnosed the same problem in Italy’s crafts; the hermetic ‘solitude’ of Murano that had led to ‘mannerism’ and cult-like mythologisation of the ‘special knowledge’ of its glassblowing *maestri*.²

To see Sottsass still writing about craft some forty years later confirms the hypothesis on which this research was premised; the persistent relevance of craft to Italy’s architects and the continuous role that it played in the history of post-war Italian design. Sottsass, along with the likes of Andrea Branzi, Enzo Mari, Gio Ponti and Alberto Rosselli, was just one of the many architects, critics and curators cited in this research who felt compelled to make statements about craft, and in particular about the idea of craft as a ‘problem’. Each had their own, often politically motivated, concerns that were informed by the socio-cultural and economic issues of the day. In chapters one and two, which spanned the late 1940s to late 1950s, we saw how Ponti rejected Italy’s folkloric crafts in order to promote a modern *italianità* and restore the nation’s prestige. At the same time, Rosselli attempted to downplay the ongoing artisanal nature of production and position craft at the service of industrial design and mass production. In the rise of Italy as a mass consumer and leisure society discussed in chapter three, it was the cult of craftsmanship and preciousness in the luxury commodity that most troubled Mari and Sottsass, and would continue to do so, albeit in a modified form, in chapter four.

¹ Sottsass, ‘Le Vie dell’Artigianato’, n.p.

² Sottsass in *Vetri Glass: Ettore Sottsass Marco Zanini 1986* (Milan: Memphis Milano: 1986), n.p. AMDL.

The conflict between Italy's internationally-regarded craft tradition and the desire for a modern design-led identity framed these architects' practice throughout this period, be it in the articles and products they authored, or in the other activities that they undertook as Gramscian 'intellectuals'. It suggests that one of the defining ways that craft contributed to post-war Italian design was precisely in its construction as a 'problem' for architects to solve – a quality that Adamson has also found of in terms of craft and modern art.³ Craft was something to be designed against. On the one hand, this gave rise to products such as Mari's machine-made marble, Sottsass's glued-together glass and even Ponti's *Superleggera*. On the other, this resulted in a series of initiatives that sought to bring design, and therefore taste, to craft. This was the motivation behind the ENAPI competitions and Milan *Triennale* exhibitions that took place from the interwar period onwards, the later *Selettiva di Cantù* and *Mostra Nazionale della Carrara*, and resulted in objects such as Franco Albini and Ezio Sgrella's *Gala* chair and Tobia Scarpa's *Biagio* lamp.

These attempts to use design to address the problem of taste in craft continued into the 1980s. In 1987 Ugo La Pietra organised *Casa del Desiderio* (House of Desire) in Verona, an 'exhibition laboratory' that sought to bring 'design culture' to an industry that specialised in period furniture, an area he termed 'the ultimate taboo in our material culture'.⁴ Riccardo Dalisi, La Pietra (See *Illustration 209*) and Adolfo Natalini were amongst those who contributed designs that were then made by local firms.⁵ Unlike the *Selettiva*, there was a concerted effort to design with the local skills and styles in mind, an attempted sensitivity to the local tradition that La Pietra would later describe as a hallmark of Ponti's much-admired earlier approach to craft and was evident in his own neo-classical design.⁶

³ Adamson, *Thinking Through Craft*, p. 5.

⁴ La Pietra, *La Sintesi delle Arti 1960 - 2000* (Milan: Mazzotta, 2001) p. 129; La Pietra 'La Casa del Desiderio e il Mobile in Stile' in *La Casa del Desiderio*, ed. by La Pietra (Florence: Alinea Editrice, 1987), p. 14.

⁵ Luca Scacchetti, Vincenzo Pavan and Carlo Rampazzi were the other architects who contributed designs that were then made into furniture models, alongside drawings and designs by thirty others.

⁶ Interview with Ugo La Pietra, 25 June 2008 (APPENDIX I).

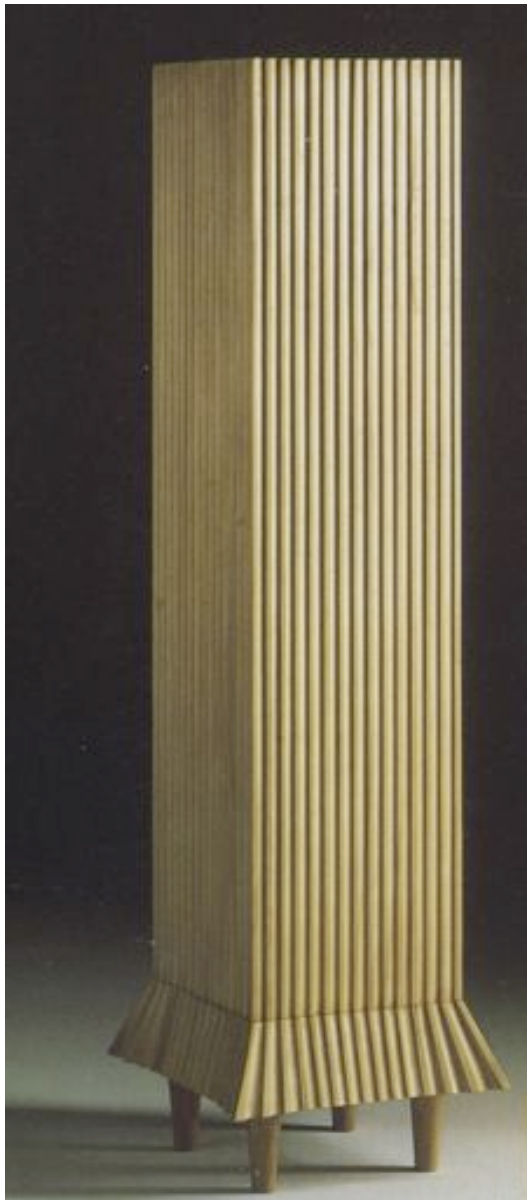


Illustration 210. Cabinet designed by Ugo la Pietra and made by F.lli Boffi of Lentate sul Seveso, Brianza for *La Casa del Desiderio*, 1987.

5.2 Craft as Design's 'Other'

Much of this construction of craft as a 'problem' was predicated on its existence outside modern design and industrial production. It was seen as insufficiently modern, unable to compete with the scales of industrial production and the style of post-war modernity. Craft was seen as design's non-modern 'other'. Yet this alterity would prove a repeated point of reference for Italy's architects. As such, I would argue that it was as an 'other' that craft would significantly contribute to Italian design.

As with its condition as a 'problem', the construction of craft as an 'other' to modern design was equally multi-faceted and culturally and politically contingent. In chapter one there were two examples of this: first, the American curators of *Italy at Work* who constructed Italy as America's handmade 'other' in order to promote the ideology of individualism and to avoid creating competition for US industries. In addition there were the architects behind the *Architettura Spontanea* installation at the 1951 *Triennale*, who appropriated the anonymous vernacular in order to provide an alternative lineage to a rationalist movement tainted by its fascist associations. Craft's role as an 'other' was most fully expressed in the counter-narrative of Italian design in the 1970s discussed in the first part of chapter four. This was when design itself was most seen as a problem, unable to do anything other than produce alienating commodities and too caught up in the dictates of industry and commerce rather than responding to real, primary needs. Having lost faith in the rhetoric of industrial progress, Italy's radical architects turned to craft as a site of alterity. This was what informed Mari's turn to the amateur producer in *Autoprogettazione*, Dalisi's interest in the 'primitive' child and playful ways of making in his *tecnica povera* experiments and the attraction of Global Tools to hammers and handicraft techniques. The early 1970s was when the interest in production was at its most Marxist-informed, when a variety of artisanal makers, means and modes of production were all seen to offer a more authentic experience of production than the repressive rhythms of the factory assembly line.

As this radical craft-based utopianism gave way to depoliticised postmodern gestures, as discussed in the final part of chapter four, the idea of craft as an authentic ‘other’ was still useful to the likes of Branzi and Gaetano Pesce - if only to articulate their negation of this powerful idea. In his macabre *Golgotha* chair, Pesce appropriated the uplifting associations of the handmade in order to most effectively express his pessimism for the state of Italian society, while Branzi used the figures of Morris and Ruskin to articulate the characteristics of his “new handicrafts”, which promoted the use of advanced and artisanal technologies side by side. The “new handicrafts” was still based on the idea of craft as a problem: the slowness of production in the “old” handicrafts, which Branzi attempted to overturn through the idea of ad hoc, faster production methods - and which Sottsass took up in his turn to glue in Memphis.

Memphis was not the last expression of the mixed technologies that the “new handicrafts” promoted. In 1987 they appeared in Andrea and Nicoletta Branzi’s *Animali Domestici* (Domestic Animals) (See *Illustration 210*) designed for Zabro, a furniture manufacturer set up in 1985 by Studio Alchymia and Zanotta.⁷ In this self-described ‘neo-primitivist’ furniture the back and arm rests are made out of a combination of thick branches of birch and hazel processed with ‘modern industrial joinery’ methods and metal tubing made to look like natural bamboo.⁸ As Branzi described, ‘the moral of the fable of these domestic beasts is that a hybrid love between different creatures is possible. It is the parable of technology in this century’.⁹ In this post-industrial ‘second modernity’ that Branzi outlined in the 1980s, the idea of a modernity predicated on industrial advance had been replaced by a postmodernity of technological hybridity.

⁷ Sambonet, *Alchimia*, p. 138.

⁸ Andrea Branzi and Nicoletta Branzi, *The Neoprimitive Style* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1987)

⁹ Branzi, *Learning from Milan*, pp. 44 - 45; Branzi and Branzi, *The Neoprimitive Style*, n.p.



Illustration 210. Armchair from the *Animali Domestici* (Domestic Animals) collection, designed by Andrea and Nicoletta Branzi, and manufactured by Zabro in 1985. Fur-covered seat, wooden base, birch, hazel and metal tubing back and armrests.

5.3 Craft as a ‘Given’

The persistence of workshop production into the 1980s and the continuing engagement with artisanal techniques even as more advanced technologies became available leads to another key way that craft contributed to Italian post-war design, and one of the defining characteristics of craft and design’s relationship: the idea of craft as a ‘given’. Whatever their motivation, in all the case studies architects conceived of craft as a realm at their disposal, to be appropriated for design ends.

This conception of craft as a ‘given’ was founded on the assumption of a widespread availability of makers willing and able to translate architects’ ideas into objects. It was taken for granted that these artisans were not just highly skilled producers, but able to interpret architects’ visual and verbal communications. Chapter one introduced this with Mario Tedeschi’s ‘*Voi e gli Artigiani*’ article, premised on the belief that there were artisans on every street corner who could translate sketches into products. Chapter two showed how artisans and architects were educated into this relationship at Cantù’s school and Milan’s *Politecnico*. While not held up for scrutiny in chapters three and four, this idea of Italy’s craft industries as a repository of skill persisted. Branzi’s “new handicrafts” manifesto was reliant on the fact that while Italy’s manufacturing landscape did transform dramatically in the wave of post-war industrialisation, the artisan and the workshop were still a constant and dependable presence.

Yet for the most part, this continuous presence of craft for Italy’s architects translated into its attempted erasure. This simultaneous negation and reliance was the supplementarity that was most fully expressed in Ponti’s *Superleggera*. It is also seen in Sottsass’s repeated disclaimers against the crafted quality of Memphis, even as we saw that Memphis had to be made by hand, and even as Sottsass was amongst those members of the group designing the handmade ceramics, glass, furniture, marble, silverware and plastics laminates that constituted its various collections. Yet these other architects demonstrated this same casual attitude towards craft: Matteo Thun wanted to mass-produce his teapots in plastic, but as this was too expensive, he

turned to Alessio Sarri's skills in ceramics to produce a set of objects that instead would look like plastic, and, as Sarri put it 'made in a way in which the ceramic was never seen'.¹⁰

In 1983 we see another example of this manifestation of craft's supplemental condition, in Alessi's *Tea & Coffee Piazza* project. In charge was Alessandro Mendini, who invited thirteen famous, international architects including Michael Graves, Charles Jencks and Aldo Rossi to design a series of services that ran the gamut of postmodern styles, from Jencks' classical columns to Rossi's architectural trinkets and Mendini's (*See Illustration 211*) own banal, bird-like forms.¹¹ Available in a limited edition of ninety-nine handmade sterling silver services, the *Tea & Coffee Piazzas* demonstrated the ongoing power of another craft idea that this research has discussed: luxury. Alessi relied on the same strategy of luxury that Gae Aulenti, Luigi Caccia Dominioni and others mobilised in the 1960s, and which reappeared in reconfigured form in the Memphis objects of the early 1980s.

Yet despite the near-notoriety of the *Tea & Coffee Piazzas*, their story is not as straightforward as it appears. The project started back in 1979, when the architects were given the choice of working with what Alberto Alessi called the firm's two '*modi operandi*' - 'small-scale artisan production and industrial production'.¹² All elected to start working towards the latter. However, as Alessi described, when sketches and drawings started to arrive several months later it transpired that 'none of the projects had the necessary characteristics for series production'.¹³ The

¹⁰ Alessio Sarri, email correspondence, 11 December 2010. (APPENDIX 2)

¹¹ At the 1979 Triennale Mendini had curated an exhibition of the history of Alessi, called *Paeseaggio Casalingo*, and edited a book of the same name. For more details, see Patrizia Scarzella, *Il Bel Metallo: Storia dei Casalinghi Nobili Alessi* (Milan: Arcadia, 1985), pp. 87 – 88. Michael Graves, Charles Jencks, Richard Meier, Paolo Portoghesi, Aldo Rossi, Stanley Tigerman, Oscar Tusquets, Robert Venturi and Denise Scott Brown, and Kazumasa Yamashita. The Swedish Ralph Erskine and the Swiss duo Reichlin and Reinhardt turned down the invitation as did Arata Isozaki, after initially accepting. Francesca Appiani, email correspondence, 12 November 2010.

¹² Extract from Alberto Alessi's Factory Journal, reproduced in *Alessi: The Design Factory*, ed. by Meret Gabra-Liddell, (London: Academy Editions, 1994) p. 38. As Lees-Maffei has shown in her work on Alessi, this 'flexible specialization' was a hallmark of Italian manufacturing in the post-industrial landscape of the early 1980s. Lees-Maffei, 'Italianità and Internationalism', pp. 41 – 43.

¹³ Gabra-Liddell, pp. 38 – 39.



Illustration 211. Alessandro Mendini's design for the *Tea & Coffee Piazza* project, initiated in 1979 and produced in 1981. Sterling silver, available in limited edition of ninety-nine services.

American architect Richard Meier appeared to not have thought about production at all; on handing over his drawings he declared that ‘they will never manage to produce them’.¹⁴

Meier was right on one count; his design for a samovar got no further than a wooden model (*See Illustration 212*) made by Giovanni Sacchi. However, to Meier’s amazement, the rest of his service (*See Illustration 213*) did go into production - even if they continued to prove a challenge. According to Alessi each of Meier’s services took three months to make, and only one of Alessi’s craftsmen was ‘up to this difficult task’.¹⁵ Like the rest of the series, Meier’s service could not be machine produced in steel but had to be handmade in silver. So the decision to make small-scale, silver objects was not desired from the outset, and yet, like Sottsass’s *Carlton* bookcase, the only way to realise the designs for the *Tea & Coffee Piazza* services was to make them by hand.

To identify one of the defining qualities of design’s relationship to craft as taking it for granted is not to cast aspersions on Italy’s architects. In the introduction I stated that I did not want to make heroes out of artisans as architects had been; nor do I want to recast admired architects as villains of the piece. Sottsass for one expressed his admiration for the ‘miraculous’ work of Murano’s *maestri*:

I remember the men in tennis shoes, the clustered silent men who possess the wisdom, who know the rules and the boundaries, the secret tensions and hardness and timing, who know all the temperatures and weights and everything there is to be known about how to look at a drawing and turn it into glass [...] if they weren’t there, would my glass objects be there?¹⁶

¹⁴ Scarzella, p. 101. Meier in Alberto Alessi, *Not in Production, Next to Production* (Crusinallo: Alessi, 1988), n.p.

¹⁵ Alessi, *Not in Production, Next to Production.*, n.p.

¹⁶ Sottsass in *Sottsass: Glass Works*, ed. by Barovier, Bischofberger and Carboni, n.p.

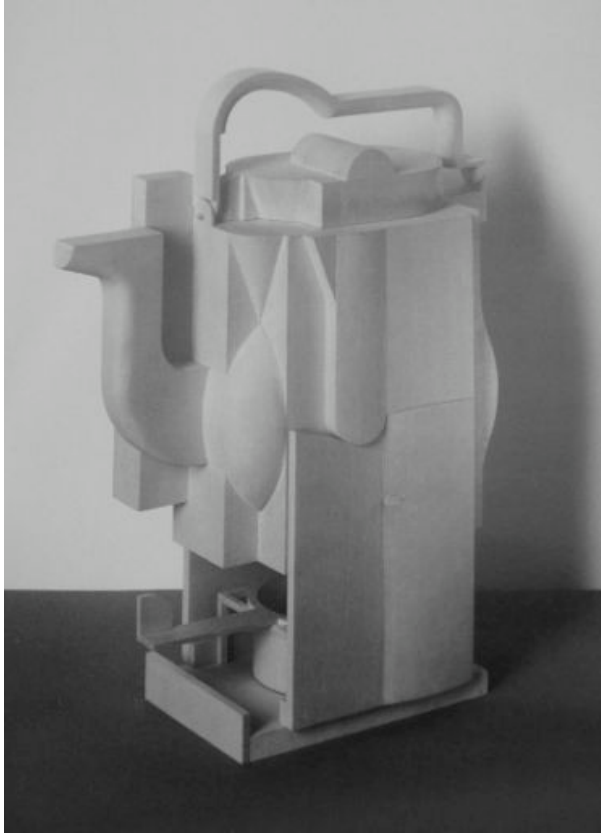


Illustration 212. Wooden model of a samovar, designed by Richard Meier, 1979 - 1981 for the *Tea & Coffee Piazza* project and made by Giovanni Sacchi, Milan. This never went into production.



Illustration 213. Meier's completed set for the *Tea & Coffee Piazza* project.

Furthermore, when there has been the opportunity to hear from the artisans involved, they all enthuse about their collaborations with these architects. As Sarri said of the makers who were involved in Memphis, they all wanted to take part, for reasons of ‘culture, boredom, entertainment, the desire to experiment with new possibilities [...] the game, the curiosity’.¹⁷ In a home filled with just some of the furniture that was the fruit of their forty-year collaboration, Renzo Brugola described Sottsass as ‘the most important architect of my life’.¹⁸

5.4 Further Research

This conclusion has identified three overarching ways in which craft contributed to post-war Italian design: as a ‘problem’, an ‘other’, a ‘given’. Utilising a production-led, craft-based approach, and informed by scholarship from disciplines including anthropology, art and semiotics, this research has identified a number of concepts that could enable future research on craft. With the emphasis on production in this research, the most notable of these is the idea of the place of production as at the base of the craft object’s identity; what Kent Ryden called the ‘sense of place’ that was first discussed in chapter three.¹⁹ While I discussed this largely in terms of glass production on Murano and marble from Carrara, this idea could be equally applied to Italy’s other regionally rooted craft specialisms, be it furniture making in Brianza or ceramics in Tuscany.

As these pointers for further research demonstrate, from the outset I knew that this could only be a partial story. I have, for the most part discussed post-war Italian craft practice as it related to design and yet craft was an intense area of creativity in its own right. We have already seen glimpses of this in the references to ceramists such as Antonia Campi and Guido Gambone, and could add here ceramists such as Alessio Tasca and Carlo Zauli, or, in terms of another craft discipline, the avant-garde

¹⁷ Alessio Sarri, email correspondence, 11 December 2010. (APPENDIX 2)

¹⁸ Brugola, personal interview, 13 April 2010. (APPENDIX 1).

¹⁹ Ryden, p. 1.

goldsmiths of the Padua School of jewellery, set up in 1944 and internationally recognised by the 1970s.²⁰

These are just two of Italy's rich set of disciplines that could provide fertile terrain for craft-based scholarship. Further research will reveal more of the many compelling ways that modern craft existed in post-war Italy both in relation to and away from design practice. This has become apparent on the occasions when I have looked outside of the dominant city of Milan, to Chiavari, to Venice, to the island of Sardinia, to the South of Italy, and outside of the current time frame; this research has made some steps into the earlier twentieth century, but this will clearly be a key period for understanding the historical background for the relationships being played out in the post-war era. But I felt that before this can happen, it was necessary to first tackle the existing design history and to provide a framework on which to start to build a more complete picture of post-war Italian design.

5.5 “Made in Italy”: Craft and Italian Design Today and Tomorrow

The focus on Milan also makes sense in light of the developments in design in Italy from the 1980s onwards. Since the early 1980s, the city has become the home of an increasing number of design schools and is still the home of Italy's design press.²¹ As noted in the introduction, in 2007 Italy gained its first museum of Italian design, in the shape of the Triennale Design Museum. Yet the prime factor for Milan's continuing international importance is the *Salone del Mobile*, the annual furniture fair that is the key date in the design calendar. This has particularly been the case for emerging designers: in 1993 the Dutch design collective Droog chose the *Salone* for the launch of their inaugural collection, and they continue to exhibit each year, now joined by fellow countrymen such as Maarten Baas and Tord Boontje whose careers

²⁰ For more on the Padua School of Jewellery, founded by the jeweller Mario Pinton and whose alumni included Giampaolo Babetto, see Graziella Folchini Grassetto, *Contemporary Jewellery: The Padua School* (Stuttgart: Arnoldsche, 2005).

²¹ These include the *Nuova Accademia di Belle Arti Milano*, set up in 1980 and the Domus Academy, set up in 1982.

have received significant boosts by the presence at the trade fair.²² Exhibiting at the *Salone* is as much an opportunity for media exposure as it is the chance for Italian manufacturers to see your work.²³

This is the main reason for Italian design's success today: the meeting of Italian craftsmanship and entrepreneurship with international designers. This combination, that first emerged in Memphis and Alessi in the early 1980s, is how Italian design maintains its international prominence. Family run firms like Cappellini in Milan and Magis and Moroso in the Veneto have been fundamental in putting young designers' work into production. Cappellini has been particularly important for its patronage of British design; Tom Dixon, Jasper Morrison, Nigel Coates and BarberOsgerby are amongst those to have benefited from Italian manufacturers who are endowed with a network of makers able to realise these designers' ideas.²⁴ This is not only true of furniture: on Murano, Venini continues to spearhead designs in contemporary glass, as in the 2010 collaboration with the ceramist Michael Eden for the British firm Established & Sons.²⁵ Even without these designer names, Italian craftsmanship continues to hold its own in the all-important area of exports. The markets opening up in Brazil and China are just as willing to buy into the idea of "made in Italy" being sold by luxury houses such as Salvatore Ferragamo as the American and European consumers of the fifties and sixties.²⁶

In the introduction, I stated that two main aims have informed this research; first, to demonstrate the crucial role that craft played in shaping post-war Italian design and

²³ As Pasca commented in 2001, designers from all over world exhibit at Milan Salone 'in the hope of being noted by both the media and above all Italian companies, Pasca, 'Italian Design: Elements of History' in *Made in Italy?*, ed. by Settembrini, p. 116.

²⁴ According to Agostini and Salaris, Jasper Morrison 'defines Brianza as a place in North Italy where you find a level of devotion so fanatic for the quality of finish and technological innovation in the field of experimentation in production, like nowhere else in the world'. Agostini and Salaris, 'Design' in *Mestieri d'Arte*, ed. by Colombo p. 84.

²⁵ 'Audrey Light, Michael Eden, Principal Collection, Established and Sons and Venini Collaboration', *Established & Sons* <<http://www.establishedandsons.com/html/Collaborations-Venini/#/Home-HomeTitle/>> [accessed 22 February 2011]

²⁶ Rachel Sanderson, 'Value of Being 'Made in Italy'', *Financial Times*, 20 January 2011, p. 16.

second, to provide a template for thinking critically about design and craft that would use a craft-based approach to design history. Post-war Italy is itself just one case study for studying the relationship between craft and design. This undertaking is particularly pertinent given design's current love affair with craft and the larger fashionability of the handmade. Much of this is caught up in an interest of how things get designed and made, with the same emphasis on the performance of production that we saw in the workshops of Murano's glassblowers. Recently, these craft-based performances have been most visible in the design sphere in *Craft Punk*, a collaboration between Fendi and Design Miami that took place at the 2009 *Salone*.²⁷ Here, emerging designers such as the Czech Tomáš Gabzdil Libertiny and the Spanish Nacho Carbonell performed the making process with the leftovers of Fendi's leather goods manufacture: fabric swatches, leather, metal and plastic components. Craft-as-performance is just one of the several craft ideas that I have discussed that we can see in design practice today, such as the interest in play and the everyday. The idea of craft has real currency in design today, yet there is a lack of critical discourse on the phenomenon. It is my hope that this research can be a real contribution to this larger project.

Finally, this thesis has showed the richness of using a craft-based approach to think about post-war Italian design. The research process has unearthed previously hidden writings by some of Italy's most celebrated architects, shed further light on the designs they conceived, and shown how intensely interested they were in the production of these objects. Craft was just one part of the rich, diverse and complex story of post-war Italian design. This story is far from complete; yet it goes some way to building up a more comprehensive and accurate picture of what was one of the most compelling periods in Italy's design history.

²⁷ 'Design Miami/ Craft Punk - Milan Design Week 09', *Designboom*, <http://www.designboom.com/snapshot/index.php?SNAPSHOT_ID=32> [accessed 28 February 2011]
For an evaluation of Fendi's *Craft Punk*, alongside the fashion house Prada's current embrace of craft, see Caroline Roux, 'Craft, Commerce and Couture', *Crafts*, March-April 2011, pp. 44 - 49.

APPENDIX 1. Participant Interviews.

1. Andrea Branzi English Translation.

Interview with Andrea Branzi, Politecnico di Milano, Bovisa, 23 June 2008.

AB = Andrea Branzi
CR = Catharine Rossi

AB: So, you're talking about craft.

CR: Yes, ok.

AB: No, you tell me - you want to talk about craft and Postmodernism.

CR: I'm talking about craft in the post-war period; so from 1945, the Reconstruction up to Postmodernism, so the 1980s. There are maybe two or three distinct things that I would like to do - but I only started in January so I am just at the start.

AB: Fine. You ask me questions and I'll reply.

CR: The first thing that I would like to ask is how you, as an Italian designer and critic, would define craft in the case of Italy, as it is very different thing in England.

AB: Well, let's say, in England I would say that there is a great tradition regarding the culture of craft, beginning with the English reformists.

CR: Yes, such as Morris.

AB: Morris and everything which is very interesting, and which also has to do with Neo-Gothicism, Eclecticism and the idea that craft is evidence of a civilisation that has retained humanistic values in manual labour. But we have a different vision...not just from the post-war, we have a different vision from the Renaissance and that is that the craftsman is, in any case, an instrument at the disposal of the designer. Therefore, in Italy, the artisan, craft does not mean *bricolage*, it does not mean creative freedom. Craft workshops – the organisation, the structure of craft workshops, is a very repressive structure.

CR: Very repressive? It's interesting that you say this

AB: Eh. Brunelleschi had already – *do you remember Brunelleschi?*

CR: Yes, I know about him.

AB: Well Brunelleschi had a long crusade with the craft order, which he belonged to, because Brunelleschi had previously stated that the artist, the designer is free, independent from craft organisations, from the traditional careers of medieval origin. Therefore in our country craft has always meant an organisation where at the top of the craft workshop there is the *maestro*, who does not tell the secrets of his trade, in order to keep its secrets; it is a Masonic organisation. So for us, historically, artisans are generally masons, reactionaries. Then after obviously seeing as today it isn't like this anymore however there is not the idea that in craft there is freedom and in industry there is instead constraint; this is a very important point.

Another aspect, instead of a historical, technical nature, is that it is often considered that industry, the difference between craft and industry lies in the fact that industry introduced series production while in reality series production was much earlier, belonging to craft. For many centuries craft developed mass producing, by hand, some archetypes, very few archetypes, so it was based on the continuous repetition by hand of the same design. If anything it was industry, that for motives of competition and market, introduced innovation, the design of new models, and the construction of new archetypes, of ever richer catalogues - therefore it is not true that craft is the territory of creativity.

The difference between craft [that is] probably true, the difference does not lie in the making of things spontaneously, in the creativity of the artisan who freely creates his models, owns his own tools - as your English grandfathers said. The difference is instead in logistical organisation - and that is that the craft workshop is organised like this [*Branzi draws a square on the table with his finger*] today, all the machines are organised like this everyone does one phase of the work.

CR: Like Fordism?

AB: That's right – no, wait. The artisan is at the centre and he uses a different machine for every phase of the work, understand? So it is not that he does not use machinery, he uses machinery much more than the industrial worker. So it is a circular organisation. While in the factory the worker stands still and the machines run past and he uses them, he does one operation at a time – this is Fordism. However the artisan uses machines a lot - rather, labourers who work in a craft workshop use machinery a lot more than the worker who only uses one machine and therefore does only one phase of the work.

So there are many misunderstandings about craft. The difference is also cultural, it is due to this that there has never been any particular interest in craft work understood as artistic work, and I would say that in post-war Italy but even up to the eighties, up to

today, craft has always been seen as an experimental phase of industrial prototypes and products, so very much integrated within the industrial cycle, not separated. It does not belong to another society. Craft enables archetypes, prototypes to be made by hand to be then produced in series. So for example in our design we have always used - in my opinion the difference between Italian design and English design, for as much as I know, is that in England design is seen as a function closely linked to industrial necessity, according to the English functionalist pragmatic tradition, of naval origin.

CR: Yes, in fact I read that you have spoken about this.

AB: Naval origin. Very important, very serious the naval tradition, the whole of English society is of the naval tradition. Well anyway, instead in Italy the idea has always been that design culture and the culture of industry are two autonomous cultures which collaborate, but which have a different logic, and we have always organised design workshops independent from industry but not [*interrupted by a student*]. So

CR: Design and Industry

AB: Yes, they are two different cultures. We have always organised experimental research workshops - not against industry - using craft technologies and processes, but not challenging industry but for simplification, because it allowed us to do research, to produce one-off objects - and it had already started with Alchymia then Memphis. These were craft workshops but they were not something that had been organised with an anti-industrial stance; on the contrary it was an experiment which had then allowed industry to renew much of its language because up to that moment, up to the seventies, design worked by responding to the needs of the large mass markets; so objects which were fine for everyone, definitive solutions designed [to be used] for a long time, large markets etc. However, in the seventies there was then this breaking up of the market, which in fact is called the post-industrial market and where society is no longer monological. It is made up of many minority groups, each one of which has very different models of behaviour. So research, experimentation [*interrupted by members of staff walking through*] and so niche markets were born, trendy market, and so design had to experiment with languages which did not work for everyone, but it selected its own users, with an expressive and highly seductive charge and this had to build itself workshops to renew these types of language. Then industry in fact adopted this strategy and now industry - many Italian businesses - even big name businesses produce - even furniture businesses - produce in small series, do limited editions, that is they have adopted the strategies which were developed in the seventies by that which was called the New Italian Design.

CR: Yes, linked to Postmodernism.

AB: Yes, linked to Postmodernism, which used craft techniques to do these experiments.

CR: In the sense that it is very different from the case of England – you have talked about this difference - to Morris and Ruskin, all those. Were the ideas of Morris and Ruskin known in Italy?

AB: No.

CR: No? At what point?

AB: They were not known - why? Because industry was much weaker and in Italy design was not born on the basis of a reformist programme of using industry to produce consumer goods of aesthetic and cultural quality. Design in Italy was born in a totally different way, it was born in the artistic avant-gardes before it was in industry. Futurism was born first, this type of climate where there was a society very behind in terms of modernity, and therefore the artistic avant-gardes pushed ahead so that society woke up and started to look at modernity. Meanwhile in England there was already a large industrial bourgeoisie, there had already been an industrial revolution, so that industry came before the intellectuals and the intellectuals worked to interpret the industrial reality, the universal exposition et cetera. Therefore the process was completely different.

CR: Yes, because something that I would like to, should address, is that I am English, I come from a particular culture and I have to find the right ways and the right words for talking about craft in Italy because clearly it is very different. It also interests me that you spoke about modernity, again this is very different from England. It seems as if there is this oscillation between the ancient and the modern, between tradition and

AB: In Italy yes there is always this type of debate. Because, well for many reasons, because Italy is the only, one of the few European countries that has not had a revolution. While in England they had it first, France, that is many countries, Italy meanwhile has never had a revolution so it has always, its history has developed through mediation. But never with clarity, never with having done a proposal, a unitary plan.

This also comes from the weakness of Italian modernity, as that there has always been a co-existence and a contrast with antiquity that has never been resolved. This constitutes – it has constituted for a long time - a defect, because modernity used to belong to a small social group, a minority, while society on the whole was not [modern]. There was not a strong, modern bourgeoisie as there was on the contrary in England, as in the Victorian era when there was a whole new model of living in respect to the aristocratic one. In Italy, the bourgeoisie has instead always been very weak; it has not produced new autonomous models etc. It has always co-existed with, on the one hand, very

conservative social groups, even populist, very reactionary, still so today; they vote for the *Lega* [*Nord*], they vote for [Silvio] Berlusconi, i.e. the workers. On the other hand, the artistic avant-gardes have always been anti-bourgeois...very advanced et cetera, there has never been a balance.

[interruption]

There has always been a state of difficulty in co-existing. So craft has never had the role of being testimony of an anti-industrial civilisation as it was in England, it has always been a middle way. However Italian design was the first to do that which happens now; namely, the historical difference between craft, industry, the hand made, the small series, the limited edition – there is no difference, it is all industrial, that is it all belongs to an industrial civilisation. None of these sectors carry different values, different strategies. They are tools at the disposal of the design, it is always the design which dominates – this is the Renaissance tradition.

CR: So figures like Gio Ponti and Ettore Sottsass who had a great rapport with craft – obviously they were part of this society.

AB: What interested Ettore – I knew him well. Gio Ponti a little – no, Gio Ponti, I saw him but I did not know him. Instead with Ettore I worked for a long time, not working together but we were great friends. What interested Ettore was not craft but what craft could do to achieve certain qualities. These qualities could then also be transmitted into industry; craft has always been seen by us as an experimental workshop for industry.

CR: for example in the work of Ettore and also in your work there are symbols, metaphors. Do you think that this is something that comes from design or something that you can – and perhaps I am thinking too much about English crafts, but are things that come from the hand made?

AB: Yes, of course, but the handmade, that is in an industrial society, everything is industry. So as in the era of Ancient Rome everything was Roman, even if it came from Syria made by crafts practitioners I don't know Egyptian, but everything belonged – there was no outside, everything was Latin or Roman, everything belonged to that society, understand? Therefore we are not in an industrial society today; we have entered into an industrial civilisation. Everything that we produce, everything that we do, even everything that we think is inside the industrial civilisation, even critique, even polemical positions towards this society. It does not mean however that through using craft we belong to another society. Craft is a very important phase of the industrial cycle, the hand-made is equal to the machine-made, it has the same value it is not different.

CR: But it seems perhaps that in critique, in history, from my perspective, craft has always had an inferior position, for example in design history.

AB: Yes, of course, of course.

CR: And do you have an opinion on this?

AB: No, in my opinion, inferior economically, however if you think – try to think about design between the wars in Europe. All the objects by Le Corbusier, Gropius, even Mies van der [Rohe], they were all handmade objects, perhaps using the machine, but it was not mass production. On the contrary those objects were only prototypes, archetypes and as such made with craft techniques, however they expressed an industrial style, which is another thing. Rietveld is completely made of wood, of screws, an artisanal carpentry ensemble, Corbusier the same. After the war they became mass-produced objects, in a totally different historical context, in another market, in another society. However between the wars ninety percent of design was hand-made, all the archetypes, prototypes. There was no market, it started afterwards, in the post-war with Charles Eames in the United States where he even became a big *business* corresponding to democracy, full of symbolic social meanings, then design took off. But beforehand there were only hand-made objects but which expressed the industrial style. Like a metaphor.

CR: When craft began to no longer define the majority of Italian production in post-war Italy, do you think that it took on a different role?

AB: No. It is important to distinguish because in craft, there are different categories; because the craft of the workshop which makes Gio Ponti sofas one at a time [*laughs*] which are identical to those produced in series by B&B, for example. It does not have autonomy and reproduces industrial objects. There is industry which imitates prototypes made by artisans. Then there is another craft which is that, let's say, that makes art objects and it is not the industrial style which prevails but the handmade... and therefore all those art objects, [which are] often kitsch, however this is a craft which has its own autonomy, it has an increasingly smaller market and survives, it doesn't ever know well what to do. Then there as another craft which seems to me the most interesting, which is completely inside industry, which are the research workshops for experimental prototypes, for making cars by hand, which are then mass produced, making cars out of plaster, out of wood, doing craft, where every is made perfectly, precisely with craft techniques, after which it becomes a model for mass production. However it is craft, hand-made, every object is hand-made.

CR: But these three types, they form an ensemble.

AB: Dialogical, of different activities, therefore when you talk about craft today you are talking about very different realities, because for example if you come [to Milan] when there is the *Salone del Mobile*, above all the *Fuori Salone* or the *Saloni Satelliti*¹

[*Branzi asks if I have been to the Salone del Mobile, and I explain that I used to live in the City.*]

So, for example, ninety percent of the *Salone*, even what you find in the *Salone*, *Salone Satellite*, the *Fuori Salone*, the *Salone del Mobile* etc, ninety percent are objects which will never go onto the market, because they were not conceived for the market but were conceived for research, for promotion and experimentation and have only a mediatory life. They belong to the world of communication, they go into magazines, they go into books, but...if you then go the next year to look for them in furniture shops they are not there. All this is craft, which reproduces the industrial style, experiments with new materials, new technologies but it is not series production it was born with another idea.

CR: yes, because for me out of these three types I am not talking about the second – about *kitsch*.

AB: Of course, in fact it is another history.

CR: But I am particularly interested in particular in the post-war period in specialisation, skill.

AB: Yes - in my view, in the post-war, the following happened: craft transformed itself into small industry, even tiny upholsterers, carpenters, ceramists, who copied - this is most interesting to me, they copied spontaneously and diffused in the post-war the mass modern style. This was not done by organisations like IKEA, it was done by a myriad, a multitude of workshops, of small businesses, laboratories which reproduced the projects of Gio Ponti, Vico Magistretti, Ettore, they did it and they disseminated it cheaply and they totally changed the national style.

CR: Yes, the domestic style – this interests me a lot, you do not read about this.

AB: Exactly. It was based on copies - this when you see industrialists lamenting about Chinese copies, it is because industrialists don't understand anything.

CR: In Italy?

¹ The *Salone del Mobile* is an annual furniture fair held in Milan. The *Fuori Salone* encompasses all those small exhibitions, shops and activities outside of the main trade fair, and the *Salone Satelliti* is the showcase for young and upcoming designers.

AB: Yes, they don't understand that the Chinese, with those copies are disseminating those products all over the world, creating a phenomenon of transforming interiors, markets, which otherwise wouldn't have happened.

CR: Why - or how - did these carpenters, ceramist know how to do this, how did this idea spread?

AB: In my view, it was in the way - I don't know how, however thinking about it, because they were these small organisations, few machines, few collaborators etc. However they realised that in Italy, in the post-war there was a large demand for innovation, for modernity, which the government did not succeed in interpreting because the Catholics did not even know that this phenomenon existed here.²

CR: Modernity?

AB: The communists were against, they did not belong to the idea of the modernisation of the country, they were always conservatives, about ideas, about conserving popular cultures et, so the middle class was the one that took it upon itself to introduce in this anarchic way this type of modernisation that had a great positive effect; because it did not just produce sofas and armchairs but also the *Vespa*, the *Lambretta*, a lot of early household appliances, they were born out of tiny experimental laboratories which started to invent, using wartime leftovers.. You know how the *Vespa* was born, the motor of an aeroplane and so on, a bit of *bricolage*, a bit of invention, so this small industrial world led the Italian industrial revolution and was also a great support to the big businesses, like Fiat etc, all the big industries found these industrial districts where apparently everyone was making the same thing. Actually it was not like this, they were like a production chain - however spread out, open. So you could go into any [*interruption*] for example you would go into certain textile districts that were made up entirely of small businesses, small textile workshops, some a bit bigger, and you would ask them "do you make velvet?" and they would say "yes". However you see that instead they have machines for making carpets and you say how, you don't understand, so when I ask, and it has happened to me at times.

CR: It still happens like this?

AB: Still. You go to a small business, sectors, certain districts for ceramics, textiles, you say "what do you make?" And they reply "it depends". Because they take an order, they are *converters*, they are *converters*. They take an order to make I don't know, a kilometre of Indian silk. They however do not have the machinery, so they go to those who do have the machinery and they make them make it, then market it, then, vice versa

² The DC was elected into government in 1948.

- at times they make things for others. Therefore it is a very flexible system, very articulated, so it is very different from the model of craft that comes out of the illuminated enlightenment encyclopaedia by [Denis] Diderot and [Rond] d'Alembert. Do you know it?

CR: Not very well.

AB: Diderot and d'Alembert made this famous encyclopaedia in the eighteenth century where there was all the knowledge and techniques about manufacturing, put in alphabetical order. So you say - how do you make glass? So with glass there is the drawing, very interesting, and it says you take a certain sand, silicon, you have to have the furnace set up like this, with the wood put like that, and then the glass melts etc. There is the whole cycle, in vertical, so everything is inside the same industry. Here however it is the opposite; the cycle is horizontal, it is spread out.

CR: Is this a product of the Renaissance workshop?

AB: Yes from its weakness, yes however also the weakness of the industrial system, which has never had an Italian [*indecipherable*], has never had large industrial organisations, great *managers* capable of creating these phenomena and therefore it was a more spontaneous phenomenon, more flexible, which however produced positive effects in the sense that it produced a model of domesticity much less Calvinist, much less Lutheran, more experimental, where the hand-made, the mass produced, the antique piece, music, good cooking, all live together.

Italy: the New Domestic Landscape of '72 at MoMa is this; where for the first time Italian design was interpreted not as a stylistic phenomenon - because in Italian design there are all styles, and not only as a sector that has high levels of technical quality, as there is the hand made, there is the machine made, all technologies. However what was winning was the great vitality of Italian design, that is of proposing a way of living to a society which was changing, which in fact had already changed – '72 it had already changed, and it did not have any more its models of reference in domesticity. So, Italian design, which had already had the phenomenon of Radical [design], of Alchymia, of all this type of– no not Alchymia not yet. However all this research, all these ideas, experiments in a design that was not very industrial and very, even semi-craft etc, so relaxed, where craft was not different to the machine made but was the model of living that was different and which was the one that won on the market.

CR: You started working in '67, '66?

AB: '66. I graduated in '66, 1900 not 1600!

CR: It was a very interesting, very particular period to start working, to be studying in.

AB: Very particular, and very particular there because while the English - in that period we were totally dependent, my generation was totally dependent on the English *New Age* and for fashion, for music, however for design there wasn't anything, and even in architecture there was, yes there was

CR: Archigram?

AB: Yes, Archigram. However Archigram always had a bit of this English faith in technology, in, they were always a pre-Pop Art movement. They remained a bit pre-Pop Art, while we had started after Pop Art, so therefore with this wider range of languages, without any more pre-conceptions about the market, etc. From the point of view of design we had few English examples. There weren't – who was there?

CR: In design? I can only think of Robin Day from the 1950s.

AB: Yes, however also in the United States there was first - there was Charles Eames.

CR: perhaps Conran, Habitat?

AB: Yes a bit, there were very intelligent people, because *This is Tomorrow*, Theo Crosby. I was a friend of Theo Crosby, who was very interested in what I was doing. That whole group was very *snob*, very nice, very English, very *dandy*, very talented, intelligent, very much so. However only intelligent, they weren't mean like we were.

CR: Mean?

AB: Yes, so...kitsch.

CR: Determined?

AB: Yes, determined as well, capable of using kitsch. In short, capable of being more avant-garde.

CR: The idea of the avant-garde is interesting – was Postmodernism its last point, its last phase - perhaps it was not avant-garde?

AB: Yes, of the whole society. Well let's say that Postmodernism was born, it coincided with the end of the avant-garde in the sense that even the Radical movement, that was ten years earlier, had already been different, it was the last of the historic avant-gardes. *Postmodernism* however coincided with the end of the avant-garde in this sense; that the avant-gardes were artistic groups, minorities inside a society of absolutely normal people, grey, where there existed – the society of normals existed. Everyone was normal, in ties, as if they were all bank clerks, conservatives.

CR: [Was this] an Italian thing?

AB: No, the whole of Europe, even England. The fact was that minorities were minorities. Then, progressively this market of normality began to break up and society became a whole series of minorities, of avant-gardes, it became a multi-coloured society and the normals became minorities. So Postmodernism is this: that all normality has disappeared, the rule, the idea of a mono-logic future and the idea of a future based only on advanced technologies, on mass production, has stopped.

CR: On progress?

AB: On progress, unitary. Instead what came out was a bit the Radical prediction that is that the development of the industrial society would bring a great complexity, a large diversification, a multiplication of languages, of ideas, of models, so that it was the Radical movement that was the first to say that by then the alliance, how to say, between design, between urban planning, architecture and design that was a bit this idea in the post-war, that all these activities collaborated to create this future of order and reason. Instead, the Radical movement, in particular the Italian one, was the first to say, look,

CR: It doesn't happen, it doesn't work like that.

AB: It doesn't work, one is against the other; urban planning is against architecture, architecture is against the city, the city is against design, design is against architecture, actually it is like this. There is no longer an overall order. It is the end of big ideas, large unity, great narratives, etc.

CR: And why do you think that it was Italy where this happened first?

AB: Because Italy is the weak link in Europe...innovations are not born, Karl Marx used to think – *do you remember Karl Marx?*

CR: *I remember Karl Marx*

AB: For example he believed that revolution, that revolutions would be born in the most strongly industrialised countries, such as Germany. Instead, the revolution was born in the poorest, the least industrialised country– Russia is an agricultural nation. So the revolution in design was not born in England, it was not born in industrial countries where there was a programme, a strong ruling class that had the capacity of planning. Instead, it was born in a system, in a country like Italy where industry was very un-structured, but it was spread in this type of micro-industrial creativity, so therefore it is the opposite from where you would imagine it would come.

CR: There are also Gramsci's ideas which had

AB: Also, this is a good hypothesis.

CR: Gramsci's work was published after the war but it was not disseminated until

AB: No, because he was in prison. Yes, the fifties, sixties, through the communist party which is different and which constituted Gramsci's work. He gave this problematic vision of Italy, not of a strong country, not of a country of geniuses, or, but of a country where there is a lot of social energy, a lot of conflicts, a country always in crisis, and this creates particular cultural conditions.

CR: Yes. For examples, Italian Postmodernism, how is it specifically Italian and not, say, Spanish Postmodernism?

AB: Yes, so, do you know about Italian political affairs?

CR: A bit, I've studied it a bit.

AB: Ok, well let's say Postmodernism, the first roots of Postmodernism are, in my opinion, to be found exactly in the Radical movements, in this idea of complexity, of the future in anarchy, that is that modernity did not bring order but brought chaos, that industrialisation did not bring mono-logical systems but systems, -that industrialisation developed through the hand-made – there. In fact it happened like this because with the robots in the factories this whole world of self-brand was reborn, was born, of micro-entrepreneurs, where everyone creates work, creates products...it is almost a proto-craft society, which was born out of the electronic revolution. This is one aspect, however it is a very important aspect, all this irregular economy done by micro-businesses etc where design had a very important strategic role.

However the Radical phenomenon was born in about '66, but already by '72, so five or six years later, there was this political turning point, where you did not talk about cultural problems any more but only about political and social problems, so there was this turning point, which didn't then produce the structural transformations of society and so it degenerated into terrorism...So at the end of the seventies... all of the political youth movement had on the one hand occupied town squares, then there were all the strikes in the factories and in the universities which were internally devastate. There was the Craxi government who had exploited this opportunity which the first Italian Postmoderns offered them, to use this movement as a return to order. Portoghesi, Paolo Portoghesi produced this Italian model. Portoghesi was a collaborator of Craxi.

CR: I didn't know that.

AB: Yes he was a socialist, Roman, in the salons etc. However he served Italian Postmodernism with this return to the pre-modern order. In the end, Italian Postmodernism became pre-modern, so a return to historic styles, to the architectural composition, so Aldo Rossi, who was a Stalinist, yes, well we were all communists, Stalinists, the left was like this. Nevertheless in the end this phenomenon came out in

here in Italy that then had a big effect even on the Americans who set themselves to re-doing the neo-classical style.

CR: Graves, Venturi

AB: Graves, Venturi. A very difficult, very difficult moment. However then it did not have [*indecipherable*] it did not correspond to anything, it did not have the capacity to place itself. It is because of this that Italian Postmodernism is very different, it could have been like the one that Charles Jencks launched. He was the first; he did the first book, which was very different, radical.

CR: Was Jencks' work known in Italy?

AB: Yes, I knew it well, I knew him as well. Yes, because he came from my radical generation. He cites my work a lot in his books, the work of Archizoom, and he gave a completely different interpretation to Italian Postmodernism.

CR: Yes but even Italian Postmodernism was not a unitary thing.

AB: Yes, however there was an alliance. But in fact I didn't belong to that movement.

CR: No? And Alchymia?

AB: No, no, no absolutely it was the other, it is not even called that, if anything it was post-industrial, but it is not the same movement.

CR: And Memphis?

AB: The same; it belongs to this strand called the New Italian Design.

CR: That's interesting, because in England Memphis equals Postmodernism

AB: No, it is post-industrial. It is another thing, another story, that departs from the Radicals. Then there was all this research on primary, sensorial design, and all this on colour, and Alchymia then came out of this and then Memphis came out, then came the Domus Academy, the first to come out of this situation, to confront the problem of the designer in the post-industrial era.

CR: So in the context of this post-modern exhibition, how can it have

AB: It depends on the curator, the definition, there are different ones. I also want to say Léon Krier who is a reactionary traditionalist, neo-medievalist, neo-gothic, he certainly does not belong to Memphis - but he belongs to the school of Uloch, but anyway, the Krier brothers – there was this whole world of reactionaries, of conservatives who

proposed a return to the historical city, that hadn't come to anything, and then disappeared.

Then, from our movement de-constructivism was born, an eighties movement. Daniel Libeskind, he started his work where No-Stop City stopped. This idea of the city without form, Libeskind had a period when he lived in Milan, in short he had contact with us. However this movement was a bit convoluted, it became a style, for example Frank Gehry was in the Radical Movement, he was our correspondent in United States [*indecipherable*] like Americans always do it, always a bit craft, lumberjacks, forests, a bit *Beat*.

CR: The relationship between America and Italy has always been something – it appears again in this period, and it changes a lot, from Reconstruction to anti-Americanism. But what is the relationship between American and Italian protagonists, design and architectural professionals?

AB: In my opinion it is a politically difficult relationship. Difficult however I have always had the impression, but I do not know if this is right, that in the world of design, even in the world of planning, America is a bit colonised by Italy, not the other way round. For example this idea of Postmodernism as a return to historical styles which then was followed in America but was born in Italy. Aldo Rossi had extraordinary success, and then New Italian Design at MoMA, all this of this phenomenon had a big influence. I remember in perhaps it was '84, '85, we went to a conference in Denver, in Colorado, near Denver. Anyway we were all there and there was a huge curiosity on the part of American designers for Memphis and Alchymia and the whole Radical movement, and then for the *maestri* – Ettore, I don't know also the Castiglioni, there was this huge fascination .

CR: There still is, for you as well

AB: Maybe there still is, however it is not the other way round. Personally, I am much more fascinated by the Japanese.

CR: how come the Japanese?

AB: Because when we were very still young, with Archizoom in Florence, still in Florence so a long time ago, the first to move themselves and come and speak with us, to understand, were the Japanese, above all, Arata, Arata Isozaki. I remember that he arrived, a young Buddha, accompanied by, the first time [*indecipherable*] the 1960s, with his wife, then he imported, he published, we had a long friendship relationship with him, we went to Japan, many times. More recently I have done many things with Toyo Ito and I also like his friend Shiguro [Ban] a lot [*indecipherable*] Also because there

was Ettore, who was very well known there and he understood Japan very well. He understood it in a certain way, however he was the first to speak about Shiro, to speak about these great architects and about their traditions, as in Italy no paid any attention to it. This is because one of the problems of design, which still partly remains in a certain type of design, is that it has kept its Eurocentric nature. It is the expression of a European ethic, of a European *savoir-faire* and so it does not have links with, it does not understand oriental countries.

In '69 Archizoom participated in the *Triennale of Milano* doing an installation in Arabic style – that is Arabic style of Gulf countries...Islamic, the Holy War, a world totally outside design, it is still, now even more. Nevertheless it is a world that exists with which we need to measure ourselves against. In the end design has become, at times, a euro-centric enclave that annoys me a bit. I had a long friendship with Ettore who instead always had a totally different vision; great attention to India, Japan, to America – so open-mindedness.

APPENDIX I. Participant Interviews.

2. Andrea Branzi. Italian Transcript.

Interview with Andrea Branzi, Politecnico di Milano, Bovisa, 23 June 2008.

AB = Andrea Branzi

CR = Catharine Rossi

AB: Allora si parla dell'artigianato?

CR: Sì va bene.

AB: Non, dimmi tu vuoi parlare dell'artigianato e del Postmodern.

CR: Io parlo del artigianato del periodo dopoguerra dunque dal '45, la Ricostruzione fino al Postmodernism, dunque fino anni ottanta diciamo e ci sono forse due o tre cose distinti che io vorrei fare, ma ho solo cominciato al gennaio dunque sono solo all'inizio.

AB: Va bene tu fai delle domande ed io ripongo.

CR: La prima cosa che vorrei chiedere è come lei come un designer italiano e un critico definire l'artigianato nel caso dell'Italia perché quello è una cosa diversa da quello nell'Inghilterra

AB: beh diciamo allora beh tanto in Inghilterra direi c'è una grande tradizione che riguarda proprio la cultura dell'artigianato a cominciare dai riformisti inglesi.

CR: sì come Morris.

AB: Morris e tutto ed è molto interessante e che riguarda poi anche il neogotico, l'eclettismo e l'idea che l'artigianato sia testimonianza di una civiltà che ha conservato dei valori umanistici nel lavoro manuale. Ma noi abbiamo una visione diversa, non solo del dopoguerra noi abbiamo una visione diversa dal Rinascimento e cioè che l'artigiano è in ogni caso uno strumento alla disposizione della progettista quindi per noi l'artigiano, l'artigianato non vuol dire *bricolage* non vuol dire libertà creativa. Le botteghe artigiane - l'organizzazione, la struttura delle botteghe artigiane è una struttura molto repressiva.

CR: molto repressiva - è interessante che dice questa.

AB: Eh. Già Brunelleschi – *do you remember* Brunelleschi?

CR: si lo conosco.

AB: Ecco lui ebbe un lunga causa con l'ordine artigianale a cui apparteneva perché Brunelleschi già affermava che l'artista, il progettista è libero indipendente dalle organizzazioni dell'artigianato, delle mestieri tradizionali di origine medioevale. Quindi da noi l'artigianato ha sempre voluto dire una organizzazione dove c'è in cima alla bottega artigiana il maestro che non dice i segreti dei mestieri, tiene i segreti è una organizzazione massonica, quindi gli artigiani in generale per noi storicamente sono dei massoni, sono dei reazionari. Poi dopo ovviamente visto che oggi non è più così però non c'è l'idea che nell'artigianato c'è libertà e nell'industria c'è invece costrizione; questo è un punto molto importante.

Un altro aspetto invece di aspetto storico, tecnico è che spesso si ritiene che l'industria, la differenza tra l'artigianato e l'industria consiste nel fatto che l'industria ha introdotto la produzione di serie mentre in realtà la produzione di serie è molto precedente, appartiene all'artigianato per molti secoli si è sviluppato riproducendo in serie a mano alcune archetipi, pochi archetipi, quindi è basato sulla ripetizione continua dello stesso modello fatto a mano. Semmai è l'industria che per motivi di concorrenza e di mercato ha introdotto l'innovazione, la progettazione di nuovi modelli, la costruzione di nuovi archetipi, di cataloghi sempre più ricchi quindi non è vero che l'artigianato sia il territorio della creatività.

La differenza probabilmente vera tra l'artigianato, la diversità non consiste nel fare le cose spontaneamente nella creatività dell'artigiano che inventa liberalmente le modelli, è possessore dei strumenti come dicevano i tuoi nonni inglesi. Invece la differenza è in un'organizzazione logistica. E cioè che la bottega artigiana è organizzata così [*Branzi draws a square on the table with his finger*] oggi ci sono tutte le macchine disposte così, ognuno fa una fase del lavoro.

CR: Come fordismo?

AB: ecco, non aspetta. L'artigiano sta nel centro e usa la macchina per ogni fase del lavoro diversa, capito? Cioè non è che non usa le macchine, usa le macchine molto più del operaio industria quindi è un'organizzazione a corona. Mentre nella fabbrica l'operaio sta fermo e le macchine scorrono e lui le usa, fa solo un'operazione alla volta – questo è il fordismo. Però l'artigiano usa molto le macchine anzi lavoratori che lavorano in una bottega artigiana la usa molto di più del operaio che usa una solo macchina cioè fa una sola fase del lavoro.

Quindi ci sono molti malintesi sull'artigiano la diversità è anche proprio culturale per questa non c'è mai stato interesse particolare nel lavoro artigiano inteso come lavoro

artistico e direi che nel dopoguerra in Italia ma anche fino agli anni ottanta fino ad oggi l'artigianato è sempre stato visto come una fase sperimentale di prodotti prototipi industriale quindi molto integrato nel ciclo industriale non separato. Quindi non appartiene ad una altra civiltà. L'artigianato permette di fare a mano le archetipi, i prototipi che poi verranno prodotti in serie. Allora per esempio nel nostro design abbiamo sempre usato - c'è la diversità tra il design italiano e il design inglese secondo me per quello che so è che in Inghilterra il design è visto come una funzione strettamente collegato alla necessità industriale secondo la tradizione pragmatica inglese funzionalista di origine navale.

CR: Si infatti ho letto che hai parlato questo.

AB: l'origine navale. Molto importante, molto seria il tradizione navale tutta la società inglese è di tradizione navale. Va bene in ogni modo invece in Italia l'idea è sempre stata che la cultura del design e la cultura industriale sono due culture autonome che collaborano ma hanno logiche diverse e noi abbiamo sempre organizzato dei laboratori di design indipendenti dall'industria ma non [*interrupted by a student*] Allora

CR: Design e industria

AB: Sì, Sono due culture diverse. allora noi abbiamo sempre organizzate dei laboratori sperimentali di ricerca non contro l'industria - usando delle tecnologie processi artigianali ma non in polemica con l'industria ma per semplificazione cioè perché questo ci permetteva di fare ricerca, di produrre oggetti unici e quindi, e ha cominciato già come Alchymia poi Memphis. Questi erano dei laboratori artigiani ma non erano qualche cosa che era organizzato che con un atteggiamento anti-industriale anzi era una sperimentazione che permetteva che poi ha permesso l'industria di rinnovare molti dei suoi linguaggi, perché fino al quel momento, fino agli anni settanta il design lavorava per rispondere a delle necessità dei grandi mercati di massa quindi oggetti che andavano bene per tutti, soluzioni definitivi destinate ai tempi lunghi, ai grandi mercati ecc. Però poi negli anni settanta è cominciato proprio questo frazionamento del mercato che si chiama di fatto il mercato postindustriale e dove la società non è più monologica. È costruita da tanti gruppi di minoranza ognuno dei quali ha dei modelli di comportamento molto diversi allora le ricerca, le sperimentazioni [*interrupted by members of staff walking through*] e quindi mercati nascevano i mercati di nicchia, mercati di tendenza quindi il design doveva sperimentare dei linguaggi non che andavano bene per tutti ma che riselezionavano i propri utenti c'è grande con una carica espressiva e molto seducenti e questo doveva crearsi dei laboratori per rinnovare questi tipi di linguaggi. Di fatti poi l'industria ha adottato questo strategia, adesso l'industria molte delle industrie italiano producano - anche industrie di grandi marchi - producano addirittura industrie automobilistiche fanno piccole serie, fanno serie numerato, c'è hanno adottato le

strategie che negli anni settanta hanno elaborato quello che si chiamava il Nuovo Design italiano.

CR: Sì, collegato al Postmodern.

AB: Sì, collegato al Postmodern e che usava per fare questa sperimentazione le tecniche artigianale.

CR: Nel senso che è molto diverso del caso inglese – Lei parla della differenza – Morris, Ruskin, tutti quelli. Le idee di Morris e Ruskin erano conosciute in Italia?

AB: Non.

CR: Non? A quel punto?

AB: Non erano conosciute perché l'industria era molto più debole e il design in Italia non è nato sulla base di una programma riformista di utilizzare gli industria per produrre beni di consumo di qualità estetica e culturale. Il design in Italia era nata in una maniera completamente diversa nelle avanguardie artistiche prima che non nell'industria quindi è nata prima il futurismo è nato questo tipo di clima dove c'è una società molto in ritardo rispetto alla modernità e quindi le avanguardie artistiche spingevano perché la società si svegliarsi e cominciarci a guardare la modernità. Mentre in Inghilterra c'era già una grande borghesia industriale, c'era già stato la rivoluzione industriale c'è l'industria aveva preceduto le intellettuali e le intellettuali hanno lavorato interpretare la realtà industriale, dell'esposizione universale ecc. quindi è completamente diverso il procedimento.

CR: Sì perché è una cosa che vorrei dovrei indirizzare che io sono inglese, vengo da una cultura particolare, e devo trovare i modi giusti e le parole giuste per parlare dell'artigianato in Italia perché ovviamente è molta diversa e anche m'intessesse che ha parlato della modernità. È ancora molto diversa dall'Inghilterra – sembra che ci sia stato questa oscillazione tra antico e moderato, tra tradizione e

AB: Sì, in Italia. si c'è sempre questo tipo di polemica. Perché, ma per tanti motivi, perché l'Italia è l'unico, è uno dei pochi paesi europei che non ha avuto una rivoluzione. Mentre l'ha avuto in Inghilterra prima, la Francia, cioè molti nazioni, mentre l'Italia non ha mai avuto una rivoluzione quindi ha sempre, si è sempre, la sua storia è sviluppata attraverso la mediazione ma non mai con chiarezza senza fare mai una proposta, di programma unitario, sempre questa partenza anche debole della modernità italiana a fatto si che ci sia sempre stato una convivenza e un contrasto con l'antichità che non si è mai risolta. Questo costituisce un – ha costituito a lungo un difetto perché la modernità apparteneva a un piccolo gruppo sociale, di minoranza, mentre la società complessivamente non erano, non c'era una borghesia moderna, forte, sempre stata

come stata invece in Inghilterra dal tempo vittoriana dove è nato tutto un modello di vita nuovo rispetto a quello aristocratico. Invece in Italia la borghesia è sempre stata molto debole, non ha prodotto modelli autonomie ecc. E quindi è sempre conservato con da una parte dei gruppi sociali molto conservatori anche popolari, proprio reazionari, ancora oggi, votano la Legga, votano Berlusconi, c'è gli operai– dall'altra le avanguardie artistiche che sono anti-borghesi contro molto avanzate ecc. Non c'è stato mai uno equilibrio [*interruption*] c'è sempre stato di difficoltà a convivere quindi l'artigianato non ha mai avuto il ruolo di essere testimonianza di una civiltà anti-industriale com'è stato in Inghilterra è sempre stato così una via di mezzo. Però il design italiano è stato il primo a fare quello che succede adesso, cioè la differenza storica tra artigianato, industria, il fatto a mano, la piccole serie, la seria numerata non c'è nessuna differenza è tutto industriale, cioè appartiene tutto a una civiltà industriale, non c'è nessuna di questi settori e portatori di valori diversi di strategie diversi e sono strumenti a disposizione del progetto ma non chi domina questa è modello Rinascimentale.

CR: Dunque le figure come Gio Ponti ed Ettore Sottsass che avevano un grande rapporto con l'artigianato ma ovviamente erano parte di questa civiltà.

AB: Quello che interessava Ettore – io l'ho conosciuto bene - Gio Ponti poco – non Gio Ponti l'ho visto, non l'ho conosciuto. Invece con Ettore ho lavorato a lungo - non lavorando insieme ma molto amici. Allora quello che interessava Ettore non era l'artigianato ma era quello che l'artigianato poteva fare per realizzare certi qualità. Queste qualità poi potevano anche essere trasmesse all'industria, l'artigianato è sempre stato visto da noi come una laboratorio sperimentale per l'industria.

CR: Ma per esempio nel lavoro di Ettore anche nel lavoro suo ci sono dei simboli, dei metafore. Pensa che questa è una cosa che venga dal design o che venga - e forse questo è dove sono troppo legato all'artigianato inglese – fatto a mano?

AB: Sì, certo, ma fatto a mano, c'è in una civiltà industriale, tutto è industria, cioè come nel epoca del Roma antica tutto era romano, anche se veniva fatto in Siria dagli artigiani non so egiziani, ma tutto appartiene – non c'è un'esterna, tutto era latino o romano, tutto apparteneva a quello civiltà, capito? Quindi noi non siamo in una civiltà industriale, oggi noi siamo infatti in una civiltà industriale tutto quello che produciamo, tutto quello che facciamo anche tutto quello che pensiamo è dentro la civiltà industriale, anche la critica anche posizioni polemiche verso questo società questo è sempre stato. Non vuol dire però apparteniamo a usando l'artigianato a un'altra civiltà l'artigianato è una fase molto importante del ciclo industriale il fatto a mano è uguale al fatto a macchina allo stesso valore non è diverso.

CR: Ma sembra che forse nella critica, nella storia, da punto visto mio, l'artigianato ha sempre avuto una posizione inferiore – per esempio nella storia di design.

AB: Sì, certo, certo.

CR: Ma ha un'opinione su questo?

AB: Non, secondo me, inferiore economicamente, però se tu pensi - provi a pensare al design tra le due guerre in Europa. Allora tutti gli oggetti di Le Corbusier, Gropius, anche Mies Van der [Rohe], tutti erano oggetti fatto a mano, magari usando la macchina, ma non c'era la produzione in serie anzi quegli oggetti erano solo dei prototipi, degli archetipi e come tali fatti con le tecniche artigianali però esprimevano uno stile industriale che è un'altra cose, Rietveld è tutto fatto di legni, di chiodi c'è completo proprio falegnameria artigianale, Corbusier lo stesso, dopo la guerra sono diventati oggetti di serie, in contesto storico completamente diverso in un altro mercato in un'altra società però tra le due guerra il novanta per cento del design era fatto a mano erano tutti archetipi, prototipi. Non c'era un mercato, è cominciato dopo nel dopoguerra con Charles Eames negli Stati Uniti è diventato una grande *business* corrispondeva a democrazia, pieno di significati sociali simbolici. Ecco allora il design è diventato decollato ma prima era solo erano oggetti fatti a mano ma che esprimevano lo stile industriale. Come metafora.

CR: Nel dopoguerra in Italia quando l'artigianato ha cominciato a non definire più la maggioranza di produzione italiano, penso che ha assunto un ruolo diverso?

AB: Non, allora bisogna distinguere, nell'artigianato ci sono diverse categorie – perché l'artigianato di bottega che fa i divani di Gio Ponti uno alla volta [*laughs*] che sono identici a quelli prodotti dalla B&B faccio per dire, c'è non ha autonomia, riproduce le cose industria. C'è l'industria che imita i prototipi fatti dagli artigiani. Poi c'è un altro artigianato che è quello diciamo che fa oggetti d'arte che dove prevale molto, non lo stile industriale, ma il fatto a mano c'è dove si vede il segno e quindi tutti quegli oggetti d'arte spesso kitsch però quello è un artigianato c'è che ha una sua autonomia, che ha un mercato sempre più ristretto sopravviene non so mai bene che cosa fa. Poi c'è un altro artigianato che mi sembra il più interessante, che è completamente interno all'industria, che sono i laboratori di ricerca per i prototipi sperimentali, per fare le automobili a mano, che poi vengono prodotte in serie, fanno le automobili di gesso, di legno, fa dell'artigianato, dove tutto è fatto perfetto proprio con le tecniche dell'artigianato dopo di che diventa un modello per la produzione di serie però è l'artigianato proprio il fatto di mano e ogni oggetto è fatto a mano.

CR: Ma questi tre tipi – è un insieme.

AB: Dialogica, di attiva diversa, quindi quando si parla dell'artigianato oggi si parla di realtà molte diverse, per esempio se tu vieni qui quando c'è il Salone del Mobile, allora soprattutto nel Fuori Salone, o Saloni Satelliti. [*Branzi asks if I have been to the Salone del Mobile, and I explain that I used to live in the City.*]

Allora per esempio, il Salone il novanta per cento, anche trova in Salone, Salone Satelliti, Salone del Mobile ecc., il novanta per cento sono oggetti che non andranno mai in mercato, che non sono pensati per il mercato ma sono pensati per la ricerca, per la promozione, per la sperimentazione e ha una vita solo mediatica, appartengono solo al mondo della comunicazione, vanno sulle riviste vanno sui libri, ma non c'è – se tu vai l'anno dopo a cercarli nei negozi di arredamento non ci sono. Allora tutto questo è l'artigianato che riproduce lo stile industriale sperimentale nuovi materiali delle nuove tecnologie ma non è produzione di serie, nasce con un'altra idea.

CR: Sì, perché a me in questi tre tipi non vorrei parlare del secondo – del kitsch.

AB: Certo, di fatti e un'altra storia.

CR: Ma m'intessesse in particolare nel periodo dopoguerra la specializzazione, la perizia – *skill*.

AB: Sì – secondo me nel dopoguerra succede questo; che l'artigianato si trasforma in piccola industria, anche piccolissima tappezzerie, falegnami, ceramisti, che copiano. Questo è molto interessante secondo me, copiano spontaneamente e diffondono e hanno diffuso in dopoguerra lo stile moderno di massa. Che non è fatto dall'organizzazione come l'Ikea, è fatto da una miriade, uno sciame, base design botteghe di piccole industrie, i laboratori che riproducevano i progetti di Gio Ponti, del Vico Magistretti, Ettore, che lo facevano e lo diffondevano a buon mercato e hanno cambiato completamente lo stile nazionale.

CR: Sì, lo stile domestico m'intessesse molto questo – non si legge.

AB: Sì infatti, è basato sulle copie, basato sulle copie, questo quando si vede gli industriali che si lamentano delle copie cinesi, è perché gli industriali capiscono poco.

Cat: In Italia?

AB: Sì e non capiscono che i cinesi, con le copie diffondono quei prodotti in tutto il mondo creando un fenomeno di trasformazione di interni, di mercati, che altrimenti loro non ci avverrebbero mai.

CR: Perché – o come – questi falegnami, ceramisti, come hanno conosciuto, hanno saputo di farlo – come e diffuso quest'idea?

AB: Secondo me in maniera - non lo so come, però pensandoci, perché loro con queste piccole organizzazioni, poche macchine, poche collaboratori ecc. Però si sono accorti che in Italia nel dopoguerra c'era una grande domanda di innovazione, di modernità, che

il governo non riusciva a interpretare sia perché i cattolici non sapevano nemmeno che esisteva questo fenomeno qui.

CR: Della modernità?

AB: I comunisti erano contrari, non gli appartenevano all'idea del modernizzazione del paese, loro sono sempre stati conservatori, di idee di conservare le idee popolari, ecc. ecc. per cui il ceto medio è quello che si è fatto carico di introdurre in questo maniera anarchica questo tipo di modernizzazione che avuto un grande effetto positivo perché non ha prodotto solo divani e poltrone, ma ha prodotto anche la Vespa, la Lambretta, un sacco i primi elettrodomestici, sono nati dai piccolissimi laboratori sperimentali che hanno cominciato ad inventare, utilizzare residui bellici. La Vespa sai come è nata, il motorino degli abbigliamento aeroplano, o così così cioè un po' di *bricolage*, un po' di invenzione, quindi questo mondo piccolo industriale ha guidato la rivoluzione industriale italiana e ha adatto anche un grande supporto alle grande industrie. La Fiat ecc., tutte le grande industrie trovavano questi distretti industriali dove apparentemente tutti facevano le stesse cose. Invece non era così, erano come delle catena di montaggio però diffuse, aperte, allora tu potete andare in qualsiasi [*interruption*] per esempio tu andavi in certi distretti tessili che sono fatti tutti di piccole industrie, piccole laboratori tessili, alcuni un po' più grande insomma, e gli chiede "voi fatti il velluto?" e loro dicono "sì" però tu vedi che hanno le macchine invece per fare i tappeti e dice ma come, come mai non capisci, quindi quando interrogo io, mi è successo alle volte.

CR: Succede ancora?

AB: Ancora. Tu vai da una piccola industria settori certi distretti delle ceramiche, del tessile, gli dice "cosa produce?" e loro rispondono - "dipende". Perché prendono un ordine, sono dei *converter*, sono dei *converter*. Prendono un ordine di fare non so un chilometro di seta indiana. Loro però non ce hanno le macchine allora vanno da chi ha le macchine e li fanno fare loro, poi commercializzano il risultato poi vice versa a volte fanno le cose per altri. Quindi è una sistema molto flessibile, molto articolato, quindi è molto diverso dal modello dell'artigianato che viene fuori dal enciclopedia illuminista di Diderot e d'Alembert. Ti Presente?

CR: Non così bene.

AB: Non – però, Diderot e d'Alembert, nel ottocento hanno fatto questo famosa enciclopedia, dove tutti il sapere, tutte le tecniche di lavorazione, sono messi in ordine alfabetico. Allora dice il vetro - come si fa il vetro? Allora il vetro c'è il disegno, molto interessante, e dice allora si prende la tale sabbia di silicio, si deve avere dei forni fatti così, con la legna messa così, e poi il vetro fonde ecc. C'è tutto il ciclo come in verticale c'è tutto dentro alla stessa industria. Qui invece è l'inverso; il ciclo è orizzontale, è diffuso.

CR: Questo è un prodotto della bottega del Rinascimento?

AB: Sì della debolezza, sì, però anche della debolezza della sistema industriale sì, che non ha mai avuto uno dell'italiano [*indecipherable*], che non ha mai avuto delle grande organizzazioni industriali, dei grandi manager capaci di creare questi fenomeni e quindi era un fenomeno più spontaneo, più flessibile, che però ha prodotto degli effetti positivi nel senso che ha prodotto modello di domesticità molto meno calvinista, molto meno luterano, più sperimentale, dove convive il fatto a mano, il prodotto di serie, il pezzo d'antiquario, la musica, la buona cucina.

Il *New Domestic Landscape* del '72 a MoMA, è questo. Dove il design italiano è stato interpretato per la prima volta non come un fenomeno stilistico perché nel design italiano ci sono tutti gli stili e non soltanto come un settore che ha delle grande qualità tecniche perché c'è il fatto a mano c'è il fatto a macchina, c'è tutte le tecnologie. Però quello che poi è vincente è la grande vitalità del design italiano c'è di proporre il modello di vita a una società che stava cambiando anzi era già cambiata – '72 era già cambiata e non aveva ancora i suoi modelli di riferimenti nella domestica quindi il design italiano che aveva già avuto il fenomeno del radicale e del Alchymia c'è tutto questo tipo– non l'Alchymia non ancora. Però tutto questa ricerca, questi idee sperimentazioni di un design poco industriale e molto anche semi-artigianale ecc. è così disinvolto dove l'artigianato non era diverso dal fatto a macchina ma era il modello di vita che era di vita che era diverso e che è stato quello vincente sul mercato.

CR: Lei ha cominciato a lavorare nel '67, '66?

AB: '66. Io me ne sono laureato nel '66 – 1900 non 1600!

CR: Un periodo per cominciare a lavorare, e studiare molto interessante, molto particolare

AB: Molto particolare, era molto particolare perché mentre gli inglesi - perché noi in quel periodo eravamo completamente dipendente – la mia generazione era completamente dipendente dalla *New Age* inglese e per la moda, per la musica, però nel design non c'era niente, e anche nell'architettura c'era, sì c'era

CR: Forse L'Archigram?

AB: Sì, L'Archigram. Però l'Archigram avevano sempre un po' questa fiducia inglese nella tecnologia, nella, loro non sono dei, sono sempre un movimento pre-Pop Art. Loro sono rimasti un po' prima della Pop Art, mentre noi abbiamo cominciato dopo la Pop Art, quindi con questa maggiore ampiezza di linguaggi, di senza più preconcetti verso il mercato, ecc. però abbiamo avuto del punto di vista di design pochi esempi dall'Inghilterra, non c'erano, chi c'era?

CR: In design, penso solo a Robin Day dagli anni cinquanta.

AB: Sì, però negli Stati Uniti c'era prima - c'è stato Charles Eames.

CR: Forse Conran, Habitat?

AB: Sì un po', c'erano persone molto intelligenti perché *This is Tomorrow*, Theo Crosby. Io sono stato un amico di Theo Crosby, chi era molto interessato a quello che facevo io e tutti quelli gruppi lì - molto *snob*, molti simpatici, molto inglesi, molto *dandy*, intelligenti, molto, però, solo intelligenti, non erano così cattivi come erano noi,

CR: Cattiva?

AB: Sì - c'è così, kitsch.

CR: Forse determinati?

AB: Sì determinati anche, capace di usare il kitsch, insomma di essere più d'avanguardia.

CR: L'idea dell'avanguardia è interessante – nel Postmodernismo è l'ultimo punto, l'ultima fase – forse non è un'avanguardia.

AB: Sì, della società intera, beh diciamo il Postmodern nasce, coincide con la fine delle avanguardie nel senso che anche il movimento radicale che era dieci anni però già diverso, l'ultima delle avanguardie storiche, però il Postmodern coincide con la fine delle avanguardie in questo senso: che le avanguardie erano dei gruppi artistici che di minoranza dentro una società di persone assolutamente normali, grigie, dove esisteva - la società di normali esisteva. Tutti erano normali, cravatte, c'è erano tutti come piegati di bambole, c'è conservatori.

CR: Una cosa dell'Italia?

AB: Non tutto l'Europa, anche in Inghilterra. Di fatti le minoranze erano minoranze. Poi progressivamente a punto di questo mercato di normalità si è cominciato a rompere e la società è diventata tutta una serie di minoranze, d'avanguardia, è diventato una società multicolore e i normali sono diventati delle minoranze, quindi il Postmodern è questo: cioè che è scomparsa del tutto la normalità, la regola, gli idea di un futuro monologico e si ha fermato l'idea di un futuro basato solo sulle tecnologie avanzate, sulla produzione di serie.

CR: Sul progresso?

AB: Sul progresso, unitario. Invece è venuto fuori quella che era un po' la profezia radicale cioè che lo sviluppo della società industriale avrebbe portato una grandissima

complessità, una grande diversificazione, una moltiplicazione di linguaggi, di proposte, di modelli, tanto che il movimento radicale è stato il primo a dire che ormai l'alleanza tra come dire tra design – tra progetto urbano, architettura e design che era un po' quest'idea che c'era nel dopoguerra - cioè che tutte queste attività collaboravano a creare questo futuro nel ordine e nel ragione. Invece il movimento radicale particolarmente, quello italiano, è stato il primo a dire guardate che

CR: Non succede, non funzione così.

AB: Non funzione, uno è contro l'altro: Il progetto urbano è contro l'architettura, l'architettura è contro la città, la città è contro il design, il design è contro l'architettura di fatto è così, non c'è più l'ordine complessivo, è la fine delle grande idee della grande unità delle grande narrazione, ecc.

CR: E perché pensa che sia l'Italia dove è successo prima?

AB: Perché l'Italia e l'agnello debole del Europa [...*[unintelligible]*] le innovazioni non nascono; un tempo si pensava anche Karl Marx – *Do you remember Karl Marx?*

CR: *I remember Karl Marx.*

AB: Per esempio lui credeva che la rivoluzione, le rivoluzioni, sarebbero nati nei paesi industrialmente più forti tipo la Germania. Invece la rivoluzione è nata in paese più povero, meno industrializzati – la Russia è un paese agricolo ecco. Allora la rivoluzione del design non è nato in Inghilterra, non è nato in paesi industriali, dove c'era una programmazione, una classe dirigente forte che aveva delle capacità di programmazione, è nato nel sistema, invece nel paese come quello italiano dove invece l'industria era molto destrutturata, era molto però diffusa in questa specie di creatività micro-industriale che quindi è l'opposto da dove immagine che si venisse.

CR: Sono anche le idee di Gramsci che avevano

AB: Anche, questo è un buono ipotesi.

CR: Il lavoro di Gramsci, è pubblicato dopo la guerra ma non è diffusa fino agli anni?

AB: Non, perché era in prigione. Si gli anni cinquanta, sessanta, attraverso la partita comunista che è diverso e ha costituito il lavoro di Gramsci. Ha dato questa visione problematica dell'Italia, non di un paese forte, non di un paese di geni, o di - ma di una paese dove ci sono molte energia sociali, molti conflitti, un paese sempre in crisi, e questo crea delle condizioni culturali e particolari.

CR: Sì – per esempio, il Postmodern italiano, come è perché era l'Italia e non il Postmodern spagnolo.

AB: Sì, allora, e qui c'è molte – tu conosci delle vicende politiche italiana?

CR: Sì un po', l'ho studiato un po'.

AB: Va bene, allora diciamo che il Postmodern, e i primi radici del Postmodern sono secondo me da ricercare propriamente nel movimento radicale, in questi idea della complessità, del futuro nell'anarchia, c'è che la modernità non portava ordina, ma portava caos, industrializzazione non portava sistemi omologici ma sistemi molto - cioè che l'industrializzazione è fatto a mano, è dovuto succedere così perché con i *robot* nelle fabbriche è rinato, è nato tutto un mondo di *self-brand*, di micro-imprenditori, ognuno si inventa al lavoro, e questa età proto-artigianali che nasce della rivoluzione elettronica va beh questo è un aspetto, però è un aspetto importante, un cosa di economia, fatta di micro imprese, di gente che inventa lavoro, inventa prodotti, mercati nuove economie ecc. dunque design aveva un ruolo strategico molto importante. Allora il - però diciamo questo fenomeno qui del radicale è nato nel '63 intorno '62, quindi cinque o sei anni dopo, questa svolta politica, dove non si parlava più di problemi culturali ma di problemi politiche sociali, quindi c'è stato questa svolta che poi non non ha prodotto dei trasformazioni strutturali della società ma quindi è poi c'è degenerato in *terrorism*, cioè proprio tipico delle cose per cui alla fine degli anni settanta, diciamo itutto il movimento politico giovanile aveva da una parte occupato delle piazze, poi c'era tutte le scioperi nelle fabbriche, le università erano internamente devastate, e quindi c'è stato il governo [Benedetto] Craxi quale ha colto l'occasione che offrivano i primi Postmodern italiani di usare questo movimento come un ritorno all'ordine. Portoghesi, Paolo Portoghesi ha prodotto questo modello Italiano. Portoghesi era un collaboratore di Craxi.

CR: Non l'ho sapevo.

AB: Sì era un socialista, romano, dei salotti ecc. Però è servito il Postmodern italiano con questo ritorno all'ordine pre-moderno, il Postmoderno italiano alla fine è diventato il pre-moderni c'è di ritornare ai stili storici, alla composizione, quindi Aldo Rossi che era un stalinista, sì, però tutti eravamo stalinisti, comunisti beh la sinistra era così. Cioè alla fine l'Italia è venuto questo fenomeno che poi ha avuto un grande effetto anche sugli americani che si sono messo a fare lo stile di neo-classico.

CR: Graves, Venturi.

AB: Graves, Venturi, un momento durissimo, durissimo, ma poi non ha rete, si perché non aveva, [*indecipherable*] non corrispondeva a niente, non aveva una capacità di collocarsi. Eh per cui il Postmodern italiano è molto diverso, come poteva essere Charles Jencks che l'aveva lanciato lui, ha lanciato il primo libro, che era molto diverso, radicale.

CR: Era conosciuto bene il lavoro di Jencks in Italia?

AB: Sì, io conoscevo anche lui sì, ma perché lui veniva dalla mia generazione radicale. Lui cita molto il mio lavoro nei suoi libri, il lavoro di Archizoom, e dava una interpretazione completamente diversa del Postmodern italiano

CR: Sì ma anche il Postmodern italiano non era una cosa unitaria.

AB: Sì, però, c'era un'alleanza, sì ma io infatti non appartenevo a quel movimento.

CR: Non? E Alchymia?

AB: Non assolutamente era l'altro, non si chiama nemmeno, semmai era il post-industriale, ma non era lo stesso movimento.

CR: E Memphis?

AB: Lo stesso, appartiene a questo filone che si chiamava Il Nuovo Design italiano.

CR: In Inghilterra Memphis è uguale a Postmodern.

AB: Non, è post-industriale, è un'altra cosa, un'altra storia che parte dal radicale. Poi c'erano tutti quelle ricerche sul design primario, sensoriale, e tutto questo sul colore, e poi da questo viene fuori Alchymia, viene fuori il Memphis, poi viene fuori Domus Academy che era la prima che esce da questa situazione che affronta l'epoca post-industriale.

CR: Dunque nel contesto di questa mostra, come può

AB: Dipende dal curatore, la definizione, c'è ne sono diversi e voglio dire anche Leon Krier che è un reazionario tradizionale neo-gotico, per forza non appartiene a Memphis – ma apparteneva alla scuola di Ullrich ma in ogni modo i fratelli Krier - c'era tutto questo mondo di reazionari conservatori che proponevano città storico, che non hanno combinato nulla, scomparsi.

E poi c'è stato tutto, da questo nostro movimento è nato decostruttivismo, un movimento degli anni ottanta, Daniel Libeskind, lui ha cominciato il suo lavoro dove finisce il No-Stop City. Questa idea di città senza forma, Libeskind ha avuto un periodo quando ha avuto vissuto a Milano, ha avuto contatto con noi. Però questo movimento si era un po' involuto, si è diventato uno stile, per esempio Frank Gehry era nella movimento radicale, era nostro corrispondente negli anni [*indecipherable*] come fanno gli americani sempre un po' artigianali, un po' foreste, un po' *Beat*.

CR: E la rapporto con gli americani e l'Italia è sempre una cosa che apparisce, cambia molto, dalla Ricostruzione ad anti-americanismo. Ma la relazione tra i professionisti di design e architetti americani e quelli italiani c'è - com'è?

AB: Secondo me si era un rapporto difficile politicamente. Difficile, però sempre ho avuto l'impressione, ma questo non so se è vero, che nel mondo del design, anche nel mondo del progetto, l'America sia un po' colonizzata dall'Italia, non vice versa, perché per esempio l'idea di questa Postmodern come ritorno ai stili storici che ha avuto in seguito in America ma era nata in Italia. Aldo Rossi ha avuto un successo straordinario, e poi Nuovo Design italiano a MoMA, c'è tutto questo fenomeno qui ha avuto una grande influenza. Mi ricordo nel '84, '85 siamo andati, c'era un convegno a Colorado, vicino a Denver, dove c'eravamo tutto noi molti di noi e c'era un'enorme curiosità a parte dei designer americani, a parte Memphis e l'Alchymia e tutto il movimento radicale, e poi i maestri - Ettore, i Castiglioni, c'era un grande fascino.

CR: C'è ancora

AB: Forse, però non vice versa. Qui io personalmente sono molto più affascinato dai giapponesi ecco.

CR: Come mai i giapponesi?

AB: Perché quando eravamo allora giovanissimi con l'Archizoom a Firenze, ancora Firenze quindi tanto tempo fa, i primi che si sono mossi a venire a parlare con noi, per capire, sono stati i giapponesi, soprattutto Arata, Arata Isozaki. Mi ricordo che lui è arrivato, un giovane Buddha, accompagnato, la prima volta ancora [*indecipherable*] anni sessanta, con la moglie, e poi lui ha importato, ha pubblicato c'è abbiamo avuto un lungo rapporto di amicizia con lui, siamo andati in Giappone, tante volte. Più recentemente con Toyo Ito, e mi piace molto l'amico Shiguro [Ban], [*indecipherable*] un po' perché c'era Ettore, molto conosciuto molto molto bene. Il Giappone era stato il primo che ha parlato di Shiro, di questi grandi architetti e poi degli grandi tradizioni, in Italia nessuno, perché. Uno dei problemi del design è quello che ancora in parte rimane di un certo tipo di design è che conserva questa sua natura eurocentrica, e proprio l'espressione europea, savoir-faire e europeo e quindi non ha rapporti non capisce i paesi orientali.

Gli Archizoom nel '69 abbiamo partecipato nella Triennale di Milano facendo installazione in stile arabo – c'è proprio arabo da paesi del golf, islamico, guerra santa, un mondo completamente esterno del design, lo è ancora, ora ancora di più, però il design alla fine è diventato un'enclave eurocentrica che mi faccia un po' le scatole perché se vissuto a lungo amicizia con Ettore che ha avuto una visione completamente diversa l'India, al Giappone, all'America, un'altra apertura.

APPENDIX I. Participant Interviews.

2. Renzo Brugola English Transcript

Interview with Renzo Brugola, Lissone, 13 April 2010

RB = Renzo Brugola
CR = Catharine Rossi

The interview takes place in Brugola's apartment in Lissone, which is filled with furniture designed by Sottsass. Also present is his wife, who also joins in with the interview.

CR: How did you meet Ettore?

RB: There was this glass industrialist, who wanted to some have wooden frames, and Sottsass designed the wooden frames - this industrialist was a friend of my father's, so we made these wooden frames, and it was the first contact I had with Sottsass. Then, at home, he needed to close up his bookshelves, because his friends [*gestures taking books from shelves*] so I did that for him. A long friendship was born from this collaboration. In fact, as I said, this is from 1957 [*gestures to shelving unit*]. Then he was given the medal for his entrance hall for the *Triennale di Milano*, and in the entrance hall he had put a large mirror, that I have - I'll show you, as it is beautiful.

Mrs Brugola: Which is the only one. You wanted to sell it as you didn't have any money!

[We walk to the bedroom, where we see the mirror, and he shows me others things he has including a De Lucchi table for Memphis. We return to the living room, where he continues to describe the furniture.]

RB: Then, he had a contract with Olivetti. And he worked with Olivetti, and Roberto Olivetti, basically, saved his life because Ettore was ill, and Italian doctors couldn't find a cure. There was a medical congress in Milan, one of these doctors came to Ettore's house, saw him, and said that in America we can cure you. But he didn't have any money - so Roberto Olivetti helped him - he was already working for Olivetti. At that time, Roberto Olivetti was really angry because the company's architects weren't succeeding in designing the large reception room for the company; he had given the orders, but these - so Ettore designed it and I made this large room, where Olivetti received guests. And then we did lots of other houses, we did - then for a certain period I worked for an Italian company that made shops, boutiques, so in Los Angeles, New York, Tokyo.

CR: Wow.

RB: Yes, Beirut, we did these things. However, Ettore didn't have anything to do with this, it was me working. When I stopped working with this company, I went to Ettore - we were great friends - and I said to him, I'm looking for work, and Ettore - if you're in, I've got an idea to create a company that we will call Memphis, and I said find, and we did this - have you see Memphis furniture?

CR: Yes, they're great

RB: Well, I did all of it.

CR: So the whole of the first Memphis exhibition?

RB: Yes, everything.

CR: All you.

RB: And then in '86 we did an exhibition in New York, at the Blum Helmann gallery. I think that you'll have seen that exhibition?

CR: I'm not sure

[*Brugola goes and gets the catalogue.*]

CR: *Curio Cabinets*, Blum Helmann...and all this was you?

RB: Everything.

CR: And did you like the Memphis objects, as objects?

RB: Yes, it was a cultural revolution.

Sig.ra Brugola: My son has it [*Carlton*] at home.

RB: I gave a *Carlton* to my son.

CR: I would like to hear about your life, your father.

RB: So, my grandfather, then my father, then on the death of my father, I continued on. However my father did a work that I didn't like very much, and I changed everything, I did this - mostly working with architects, but the most important architect of my life is Ettore Sottsass.

Sig. Brugola: Look at that frieze, that's by Ettore. [*Points to a frieze running the length of the living room.*]

RB: Because this, he had done an exhibition in Florence, that was called *La Mia Casa*, I don't know exactly, and he had put in this bedroom, had put in a wardrobe and all this - when the exhibition was finished, I collected the furniture, I collected the ceramics. So I sold the furniture, I sold the wardrobe to a Turin antique dealer, who collected all of Sottsass' objects and works, and this was left to me.

CR: Very beautiful, the colours are very beautiful. I read in *Domus* in the 1960s that you had a record shop?

RB: No, it was the fifties. Before I knew Ettore. Because then, my father died and I had never set foot inside my father's workshop, understood?

CR: What type of furniture did he make?

RB: He did furniture [*indecipherable*] stuff like this, and I - also because my father wanted to do everything on his own, I didn't have any space. So I sought my own path and I opened with someone else a record shop on [Via] Montenapoleone. Then it was the period when the '78 were finishing and vinyl was starting, however the Italian law did not anticipate the importation of vinyl discs, it was totally contraband. So I gave a record to my painter friends, and they gave me a painting. However, with this system the shop closed!

So I came back here with my father and I tried to do things, and I made things for example this coaster, things, fine, then when my father died I found myself in this workshop that was a bit, to tell the truth, **worn-out**, old. And so I changed, with my architectural friends, I changed work

Mrs Brugola Ettore designed his workshop

RB: Then Ettore had a friend - [I say] friend, he had got to know an American millionaire who was Jean Pigozzi. And this Pigozzi was really very rich. He had a house in New York, two in London, one in Cape d'Antibe, a house in Paris, and the office in Geneva. All this work, it was all furnished by Ettore, and I made the furniture. Everything. The last one was a house in New York nine hundred square metres, overlooking the park, I did that. Ah - then he had another house in the Bahamas. And some times I went to London. He had a wardrobe in his bedroom with a series of clocks which gave the time of the different houses all over the world.

CR: So you travelled a lot

Brugola: Yes, I have travelled a lot, but also not for work, I have been three times in India, Vietnam, Africa, Cuba, Montreal, New York, all fine. Then there was a period with Ettore that we were such good friends that I would be in bed, reading, at night, and he would telephone me and say - but why - and I would get up and dress and go to his house because I had his house keys, and there were loads - all the americans of a certain type that came to Milan went there, because there was Nanda Pirovano who had this, and then there was Ettore.

CR: In your workshop, was there always just you? Or did you have

Brugola: No, I came to have twelve, ten workers.

CR: In the sixties, seventies?

Brugola: More in the seventies, and then someone left, someone died, changed jobs, someone - until 2005 when I was left with just three workers. So I closed up - also because I was old, so I closed it. However all these homes - ah we did the house of Roberto Olivetti, the house of

CR: Also a Chinese man, Mario Tchou?

Mrs Brugola: Ah, Mario Tchou, Annalisa's husband.

RB: Ah, Mario Tchou.

Mrs Brugola: He died and then we stayed friends with his wife, then she left, married again, but they did the house in Milan.

RB: Mario Tchou. Then the houses of - what was he called? The president of *La Repubblica*, of *L'Espresso*? The engineer - who was also president of Olivetti at a certain point. One house in Milan, a house in Rome, but I've done things in Beirut, I did a disco in Beirut, I even sent out a smoke machine!

CR: For Ettore, I don't know if this is right, but you made the *Superboxes* - those objects with Print laminate from the sixties?

Mrs Brugola: Ah yes, those nice objects, the wardrobes with the laminates, done by Ettore, with the lines

CR: It was you that did those?

RB: Yes, because at a certain moment the contract with Blum Helmann in New York was broken, Ettore signed a contract with Bischofberger in Zurich, and so he did these things, we sent them to Zurich, to the gallery. [*Shows me a photo of Brugola and Sottsass together*]

CR: What a lovely photo, there's a real connection, rapport there.

Mrs Brugola: Yes, a very affectionate relationship, very [*indecipherable*]

CR: And how was it to work with Ettore?

Brugola: Well, it started that he, basically he did not have a studio, he worked alone and did not draw much. He would give me some pieces of paper, and then he would say - get on with it! And so I knew that he wanted rounded corners, I knew that he didn't like certain thickness and so it wasn't the case that he designed everything, I knew what he wanted. And he was very happy because when he came to see, he was totally happy, and it went well, you see. Then naturally when he had this contract with Olivetti he enlarged the studio, hired some young architects, and when I built my workshop, he designed it.

CR: Is it near, in Lissone?

Mrs Brugola: Well, we sold it.

CR: But in Lissone?

RB: Yes, then it was the periphery forty, fifty years ago. I designed this hangar and I worked there until I gave up everything, in truth the company has saved the structure, it still exists.

CR: And for the Memphis objects, there were also other architects, like De Lucchi for example,

Mrs Brugola: Ah yes, he's very good yes

CR: And so they came to your workshop?

Brugola: All of them, they would check the work, everyone. I don't know, Peter Shire for example came to Milan, I don't know why, and he came, he was the only one that came, and then the rest no, many no.

[They show me a photo of their son, in a frame made by Brugola.]

CR: I'm very interested in the laminate material, for Abet, and in fact I'm going to the Abet factory to see what it is like. Was it difficult to work?

RB: No, then let's say that - all the new laminates that Ettore designed for Abet Print, they sent me the samples, and when he designed the furniture, he said let's put these laminates. Okay then you have to I don't know, only glue them. You put them under pressure and it comes out, or sometimes, for example the surface there [*points to a laminate covered table*] was put under pressure. The side, you can't put it under pressure, you have to do it by hand. Then there are glues, adhesives, that you use by hand.

CR: So one part was done under pressure, another part by hand. And the Memphis furniture, that is very particular in form, with all the pieces like this - was it difficult to know how to fix the pieces together?

RB: No. Of course, Ettore's furniture - not everyone was capable of doing it in truth. I don't want to, you understand - however they are quite difficult, however what helped me was my passion, I really liked them, and so, for example, certain materials [*opens up a book*] this is marble, this is glass, this is metal, then there's perspex, there's a series of materials. I however would go and find other artisans who did these things. I had found an artisan who made perspex shop signs, I said - fine, seeing as you work in perspex, work the perspex in this way, make this for me

CR: This is interesting. This network, all these artisans.

RB: Yes, I had this network of collaborators, who worked perspex, metal, who worked with chrome, did brass, people - for example there was another artisan who made headboards in brass, this was his production. So, when I needed that, I went to him and he would make me the thing in brass, and then I would go to another who

did the plating - do you understand? It was a whole thing like this. It was very exciting/moving.

CR: And was this also the case for Memphis?

RB: Of course. Only that done the samples, there were about 30, then they did it again, as they were selling them. This I liked this.

CR: But it was you who also made the later ones?

RB: yes, I did it - basically there were three of us. He who did the furniture, did the lamps - the lamps part was Artemide, and then another who had a shop.

CR: The Godanis.

RB: Yes, the Godanis, that exhibited. And there were three of us. For my part, I worked - I won't say for free, but I was only paid after as I had put down the money and then slowly as the agreement ahead - Carlton sold two hundred, no? When at a certain point I'd had enough - and Ettore also got fed up, we said enough, and the Memphis director found other carpenters.

CR: A few months ago I spoke to a furniture maker called Pierluigi Ghianda.

RB: Ghianda, he's good.

CR: Very good, was he also involved?

Brugola: No. But Ghianda, when we see each other, I always compliment him. Ghianda, in terms of skill, is better than me. I'm much better at organising, do you understand? In fact, in Japan, I did some work in Japan - I've never been there, it wasn't Ettore the architect. They had offered for me to do a clothing shop, an Italian firm that was opening a shop in Tokyo. I send the designs, were accepted, I had the furniture loaded onto a ship, an aeroplane I don't know, with one of my workers, that's it. I never went. However we were lucky in finding someone that was working in an Italian embassy, in the Japanese embassy in Rome. And so it worked. Because otherwise it would have been impossible, because the Japanese are like the Germans - they don't understand anything, however they understand work, they are great workers.

CR: When they know what to do.

Brugola: When they know what to do - they stop for half an hour for a piece of rice, then they work like - really great. And I did this shop, then in terms in shops I've done many in Italy, but above all those in London, New York, Los Angeles, Dusseldorf.

CR: Truly international. And can I ask how you two met?

Mrs Brugola: Oh we've always known each other.

RB: We're both from the same town.

Mrs Brugola: Our mothers were friends.

RB: So we used to meet on the street, at the cinema, like this.

Mrs Brugola: At that time it was easy in the town.

RB: We experimented for eight years and then we married!

CR: And you have a son?

Mrs Brugola: A son, yes however he's an engineer and has nothing to do with his dad's work

CR: What a shame

[Renzo Brugola asked how I got here, how I'm getting home and offers to take me to the station, Mr. Brugola gets ready while his wife and I talk about the area.]

Mrs Brugola: Once upon a time - but not that long ago, forty, thirty years ago, every house, there was a workshop below and a house above - so you felt it - now however there are few carpenters. True, Renzo?

RB: There are still some workshops in Lissone, old ones, hardly any of them, I've closed now, that's my business, but it is a bit as if the end of the artisanal culture.

CR: This is really a shame, as this is Italy's strength, this is what I want to write its history for.

RB: I'll tell you something that happened. There was an architect designing for Memphis. And he designed a bench. And I made the bench. And he came to see it. And I said - architect, don't sit on the bench, as you'll end up on the ground. He got so angry that I said - look, take away the bench and put it in your car and go away please, eh. That is, I want to say that the collaboration between architect and artisan was very important, Ettore respected this, so much that he said to me - get on with it! The relationship between architect and artisan had to be very strong. Instead this architect, young, presumptuous, thought that he'd designed a masterpiece - you understand?

CR: Very interesting! And can I ask who this presumptuous architect was?

Mrs Brugola: No, he's still around.

RB: He became - actually he has a studio in Rome and one in Florence. In truth he's been fortunate, doing the set design for television. I don't even remember his name *[he smiles]*. Let's go!

APPENDIX I. Participant Interviews.

2. Renzo Frugola Italian Transcript

Interview with Renzo Brugola, Lissone, 13 April 2010

RB = Renzo Brugola
CR = Catharine Rossi

CR com'è che ha incontrato l'architetto Sottsass?

RB: Dunque c'era un'industriale del vetro, e desiderava avere dei cornici di legno, e Sottsass ha disegnato i cornici di legno. Quest'industriale era amico di mio padre, allora abbiamo costruito queste cornici di legno, ed è stato il primo contatto che io ho avuto con Sottsass. Poi, lui a casa aveva bisogno di chiudere la biblioteca, perché gli amici porta [*gestures taking books from shelves*] allora glielo fatto quello. Da questa collaborazione è nata una lunga amicizia. In fatti, come dico, questo è del 1957 [*gestures to shelving unit*]. Poi lui ha avuto la medaglia per l'ingresso della Triennale a Milano e in questo ingresso aveva messo un grande specchio, che io ho, e che io le mostro, perché è bellissimo, venga.

Sig.ra Brugola: Che è l'unico. Perché tu lo volevi vendere perché che avevi non soldi!

[*We walk to the bedroom, where we see the mirror, and he shows me others things he has including a De Lucchi table for Memphis. We return to the living room, where he continues to describe the furniture.*]

RB: Poi, lui aveva avuto un contratto con l'Olivetti. E lavorava a Olivetti. E Roberto Olivetti, praticamente, le ha salvato la vita perché Ettore era malato, e i medici italiani non riuscivano a trovare la soluzione. C'era un congresso medico a Milano, e uno di questi medici è stato a casa di Ettore, l'ha visitato, e ha detto - in America abbiamo la possibilità di curarlo. Ma è stato lunga, ma non aveva tanto denaro - allora l'aiutato il Roberto Olivetti, e lui già lavorava per Olivetti. Allora Roberto Olivetti si era arrabbiato molto, perché gli architetti della società non riuscivano a sistemare il grande salone del ricevimento della società. Lui aveva dato l'ordine, ma questi qui - allora Ettore ha disegnato questo e io ho fatto questo grande salone, dove Olivetti riceveva gli ospiti. E poi avevamo fatto tante altre case, abbiamo fatto - poi per un certo periodo io ho lavorato per una società italiana che faceva casa negozi, boutique, e quindi Los Angeles, New York, Tokyo.

CR: Wow.

RB: Sì, Beirut, abbiamo fatto queste cose. Però, Ettore non c'entrava, lavoravo io. Quando io ho smesso con questa società, sono andato da Ettore - eravamo molti amici - e gli ho detto - io cerco lavoro, ed Ettore - se si stai, io in mente di fare una società che chiameremo Memphis, e io l'ho detto va bene, e avevamo fatto questa - lei ha visto I mobili Memphis?

CR: Sì, sono fantastici.

RB: Ecco. Fatto tutti io.

CR: Dunque tutta la prima mostra degli oggetti Memphis?

RB: Sì, Tutto.

CR: Tutto lei.

RB: Poi abbiamo fatto nel '86 una mostra a New York, da Blum Helmann. Pensa che lei abbia visto quel catalogo?

CR: Non lo so.

[*Brugola goes and gets the catalogue.*]

CR: *Curio Cabinets*. Blum Helmann...E tutto questo l'aveva fatto lei?

RB: Tutto.

CR: E lei piaceva gli oggetti di Memphis, come oggetti.

RB: Sì, era una rivoluzione culturale

Sig.ra Brugola: Mio figlio ne ha a casa.

RB: Io ho un *Carlton* che ho regalato a mio figlio.

CR: Vorrei sentire della vita sua, suo padre.

Brugola: Allora era mio nonno, poi mio padre, e alla morte del mio padre, ho continuato io. Però mio padre faceva un lavoro che non mi piaceva molto, e ho cambiato tutto, e niente, ho fatto tutto questo - soprattutto lavorando con gli architetti, ma l'architetto importante della mia vita è Ettore Sottsass.

Sig.ra Brugola: Guarda quella frieze, quella è di Ettore. [*Points to a frieze running the length of the living room.*]

RB: Perché questo, aveva fatto una mostra a Firenze, che chiamava *La Mia Casa*, non so esattamente, e aveva messo in questa camera da letto, aveva messo un armadio e tutta questa - quando la mostra è finita, io ho ritirato i mobili, e ho ritirato le ceramiche. Allora i mobili gli ho venduti, l'armadio ho venduto a un antiquario di Torino, che raccoglieva tutte gli oggetti e le opere di Sottsass, e questo è rimasta a me.

CR: Molto bello, molto bello i colori. E Io ho letto nel *Domus* negli anni sessanta che lei aveva un negozio di dischi?

RB: Non, era negli anni cinquanta. Prima che conoscesse Ettore. Perché dunque, muore mio padre ed io non ho mai messo piedi nella bottega della mia padre, capisce?

CR: Lui che tipo di lavoro ebanisteria faceva?

RB: Ma faceva del mobile tipo [*indecipherable*] roba così, e io non, anche perché mio padre, voleva fare tutto lui, e io non avevo spazio. Allora cercavo una mia strada e ho aperto con un altro un negozio in [via] Montenapoleone di dischi. Allora era il periodo finiva il '78 giri ed incominciava il vinile, però la legge la legge italiana non prevedeva l'importazione di dischi in vinile, era tutto di contrabbando. Allora io davo un disco agli amici pittori, e loro mi davano un quadro. Però, a questa sistema, il negozio è chiuso!

Allora sono ritornata qui con mio padre e cercavo di fare delle cose, e facevo le cose così, per esempio questo sottobicchiere, questo, delle cose, va beh, fino quando alla morte di mio padre mi sono trovato in questa bottega che era un po' per la verità faticante, era vecchia. E allora ho cambiato con gli amici architetti, ho cambiato lavorazione e fino ad arrivare qui.

Sig.ra Brugola: il laboratorio aveva disegnato Ettore.

RB: Poi Ettore aveva un amico - amico, l'aveva conosciuto, un miliardo americano che era Jean Pigozzi. E questo Pigozzi era veramente molto ricco. Aveva una casa a New York, due case a Londra, una casa a Cape d'Antibes, una casa a Parigi, e l'ufficio a Ginevra. Tutto questo lavoro, è stato tutto arredato da Ettore, e i mobili gliel'ho fatto io. Tutto. L'ultimo era una casa a New York di nove cento metri quadrati, sul parco, che io ho fatto. Ah - poi un'altra casa n'aveva ai Bahamas, anche i Bahamas si. Alcune volte sono andata a Londra. Aveva un armadio in camera con una serie di orologi con l'ora della varie case dei parti del mondo.

CR: Dunque siete viaggio molto.

RB: Sì, ho viaggiato molto, ma anche non per lavoro, si sono stati tre volte in India, Vietnam, Africa, Cuba, Montreal, New York, tutto bene. E poi c'era un periodo con Ettore che eravamo così tanti amici che ero a letto a leggere, le sera, e lui mi telefonava e dice ma perché e mi alzavo e mi vestivo e andavo a casa sua perché avevo le chiavi di casa, e lì c'era un sacco - tutti gli americani di un certo tipo che arrivano a Milano andavano lì perché c'era Nanda Pirovano che aveva questo - e poi c'era Ettore.

CR: E nella sua bottega, era sempre solo lei? O anche aveva dei

RB: Non, Sono arrivato ad avere dieci, dodici operai.

CR: Negli anni sessanta, settanta?

Brugola: Sì, più negli anni settanta, e poi qualcuno se ne andava, qualcuno moriva, cambiava mestiere, qualcuno - fino ad arrivare nel 2005 che sono rimasto con tre

operai soli. Allora ho chiuso, anche perché ero vecchio, e quindi l'ho chiuso. Però tutte queste case - ah abbiamo fatto la casa di Roberto Olivetti, la casa di

CR: Anche di un cinese, non Mario Tchou?

Sig.ra Brugola: Ah, il Mario Tchou, il marito della Annalisa.

RB: Ah Mario Tchou.

Sig.ra Brugola: Era morto e poi eravamo rimasti amici con la moglie, poi se n'andata lei, si è sposata un'altra volta, ma la casa a Milano era stato fatto da loro.

RB: Mario Tchou. Poi le case di - come si chiama? Il presidente della *Repubblica*, dell'*Espresso*? L'ingegnere - che è stato anche presidente dell'Olivetti, un certo periodo. Una casa a Milano, e una casa a Roma, ma di case ho fatto delle cose a Beirut, ho fatto una discoteca e ho mandato a Beirut, anche la macchina per fare il fumo, sì!

CR: Per Ettore, forse questo non è giusto, ma lei aveva prodotto dei *Superbox* - di quegli oggetti con il Print laminato degli anni sessanta.

Sig.ra Brugola: Ah sì, quegli oggetti belli, le armadi con i laminati fatto da Ettore, con le righe così.

CR: E stato lei che l'aveva fatto?

RB: Sì, perché a un certo punto è rotto il contratto con Blum Helmann a New York, Ettore aveva fatto contratto con Bischofberger a Zurigo e allora ha fatto, facevamo, disegnavamo delle cose, e mandavamo in Zurigo, alla galleria. Aveva fatto una mostra Rovereto, l'ultima che ho fatto, al museo di Rovereto e io l'ho mandato una lavorazione. [*Shows me a photo of Brugola and Sottsass together*]

CR: Che bella foto, ma veramente c'era una grande connessione, un rapporto.

Sig.ra Brugola: Sì, un rapporto molto affettivo, molto [*indecipherable*]

CR: E com'è lavorare con Ettore?

RB: Allora, è cominciato che lui, praticamente non aveva studio, lavorava da solo e non disegnava molto. Lui mi dava dei foglietti di carta, e poi mi diceva - arrangiatevi! E allora io sapevo che lui voleva gli spigoli arrotondati, sapevo che non amava molto certi spessori e allora non era il caso che disegnasse tutto, io sapevo cose voleva. E lui era molto contento perché veniva a vedere ed era tutto felice ed andava bene così, capisce. Poi naturalmente quando lui ha avuto questo contratto con l'Olivetti ha allargato lo studio, ha assunto giovani architetti, e quando io costruito la mia bottega, l'ha disegnata lui.

CR: E vicino, a Lissone?

Sig.ra Brugola: Eh l'abbiamo venduta.

CR: Ma proprio a Lissone?

RB: Sì, sì, allora era la periferia quaranta, cinquant'anni fa. Ha disegnato questo capannone e io ci ho lavorato fino a quando ho acceduto tutto, e l'impresa per la verità ha salvato la struttura, esiste ancora.

CR: E per gli oggetti di Memphis, c'erano anche degli altri architetti, come de Lucchi per esempio,

Sig. Ra Brugola: ah sì, molto bravo lui, sì

CR: E loro sono stati venuti alla sua bottega?

RB: Tutti, controllavano i lavori, tutti. Non so, Peter Shire per esempio era venuto a Milano, non so per quale ragione, ed era venuto, era l'unico che era venuto, poi il resto non, tanti non.

[They show me a photo of their son, in a frame made by Brugola.]

CR: M'interessa molto il materiale del laminato, del Abet, e infatti vado alla fabbrica di Abet, per vedere com'è. Era difficile di lavorare?

RB: Non, poi diciamo che tutti i laminati nuovi che Ettore disegnava per l'Abet Print mi mandavano dei campioni, e lui quando disegnava dei mobili, diceva mettiamo questi laminati. Okay e poi doveva non so, solo incollava. Si metteva sottopressa, e veniva, oppure a volte per esempio il piano lì [*points to a laminate covered table*] è stato messo sottopresso. La fascia, non puoi metterla sottopresso, bisogna farla a mano. Allora ci sono degli incollanti, degli adesivi, che si usano a mano.

CR: Dunque una parte è fatto sottopressione, e una parte a mano. E il mobile di Memphis che sono molto particolare come forma, con tutti questi pezzi un po' così, era difficile sapere come fissare i pezzi?

RB: Non. Certo. Il mobile di Ettore - non tutti erano in grado di fare per la verità. Io non voglio, hai capito però sono abbastanza difficile, però che m'aiutava era la passione, mi piacevano molto, e quindi, per esempio certi materiali [*opens up a book*] questo è marmo, questo è cristallo, questo metallo, poi c'era il perspex, c'era una serie di materiale. Io però andavo in giro e trovavo altri artigiani che facevano questi cose. Avevo trovato un artigiano che faceva dei segni di negozi in perspex, l'ho detto - va bene, visto che tu lavori il perspex, lavori il perspex in questo modo, fammi questo, e anche loro, pigliavano.

CR: Questo è interessante, Questa rete - tutti questi artigiani.

RB: Sì, io avevo questo rete di collaboratori, chi lavorava il perspex, metallo, chi cromavano, chi faceva l'ottone, gente, per esempio c'era un altro artigiano che faceva le testate di letto in ottone. La sua produzione era questa qui. Allora, io quando avevo bisogno di quel cosa, andavo lì e lui mi faceva la cosa in ottone, e poi

andavo da un altro che cromava - hai capito? Era tutto un giro così. Era molto emozionante.

CR: E questo era vero anche per il progetto Memphis?

RB: Certo. Solo che fatti i campioni, erano trenta poi si ripetevano - perché allora si vendevano. Quello mi piacevano meno.

CR: Ma è stato anche lei che aveva prodotti i successivi numeri?

RB: Sì, io ho fatto - eravamo praticamente in tre. Chi faceva il mobile, chi faceva le lampade, la parte lampade che era Artemide, e poi un altro che aveva un negozio

CR: I Godani

RB: I Godani, che esponeva. E eravamo in tre. Per parte mia, ho lavorato - non dico gratis, c'è sono, ma pagato solo dopo cioè ho messo dei soldi, ho anticipato i soldi e poi mano mano che l'accordo andava avanti, il *Carlton* avrà venduto due cento, non? Quando poi a un certo punto io mi sono stufato, anche Ettore si è stufato, abbiamo detto basta, il dirigente della Memphis ha trovato altri falegnami.

CR: Io, alcuni mesi fa ho parlato con un ebanisteria che si chiama Pierluigi Ghianda.

RB: Ghianda, sì, è bravo.

CR: Molto bravo. Anche lui era coinvolto?

RB: Lui non. Ma il Ghianda, quando ci incontriamo io gli faccio sempre dei complimenti. Il Ghianda, manualmente, è più bravo di me. Io sono molto più bravo ad organizzare, hai capito? Infatti in Giappone, ho fatto un lavoro in Giappone, non sono stato in Giappone. L'architetto non era Ettore.

Mi hanno offerto di fare un negozio di abbigliamento, una ditta italiana che apriva un negozio a Tokyo. Ho mandato i disegni, hanno accettato, ho fatto i mobili, li ho caricato, su una nave, sull'aereo, non so Giappone con un operaio mio, basta. Io non sono mai stato. Però abbiamo avuto la fortuna di trovare un ragazzo che aveva lavorato all'ambasciata italiana, l'ambasciata giapponese a Roma. E quindi lavorava. Perché altrimenti impossibile, perché i giapponesi sono come dei tedeschi - capiscono niente, Però capiscono il lavoro, sono dei formidabili operai.

CR: Quando sanno cosa fare.

RB: Quando sanno cosa fare si fermavano un mezz'ora un pugno di riso, lavoravano come - bravissimi. E io ho fatto questo negozio - poi i negozi ho fatto tanti in Italia, ma soprattutto quegli fatti a Londra, a New York, a Los Angeles, a Düsseldorf.

CR: Veramente internazionale. E posso chiedere come voi due siete incontrati?

Sig.ra Brugola: Oh ci siamo conosciute da sempre.

RB: Siamo tutte due del medesimo paese.

Sig.ra Brugola: le mamme erano amiche.

RB: Quindi ci incontriamo per la strada, al cinema, non so, così.

Sig.ra Brugola: Allora nella paese era facile.

RB: Abbiamo sperimentato per otto anni e poi ci siamo sposati!

CR: E avete un figlio?

Sig. Ra Brugola: Un figlio sì, Però lui aveva fatto ingegneria non c'entra niente con il lavoro del papa.

CR: Che peccato.

[Renzo Brugola asked how I got here, how I'm getting home and offers to take me to the station, Mr. Brugola gets ready while his wife and I talk about the area.]

Sig.ra Brugola: Una volta - ma non molto, quarant'anni fa, trent'anni - ogni casa, c'era sotto il laboratorio e sopra l'abitazione - allora, sentivi, adesso invece falegnami sono pochi anche qui. Vero Renzo?

RB: Esistono ancora alcune botteghe a Lissone, vecchie, ne sono poche, io adesso ho chiuso, sono fatti miei, però è un po' la fine della cultura dell'artigianato.

CR: Questo è veramente un peccato, perché questa è la forza dell'Italia - è per questo che voglio scrivere la storia.

Brugola: Le racconto un episodio. C'era un architetto che disegnava per Memphis. E aveva disegnato una panca. E io faccio la panca. E lui era venuto a vedere. E ho detto - architetto, non si siede sulla panca, perché si finisce per terra. Si è arrabbiato al punto tale che ho detto - guarda pigli il panchetto e metterlo in macchina, e se ne vada per favore, guarda. Cioè voglio dire la collaborazione tra l'architetto e l'artigiano era molto importante, ma Ettore rispettava questa cosa, tante me lo diceva - arrangiarti! Il rapporto fra architetto e artigiano doveva essere molto stretto. Questo architetto invece giovane, presuntuoso, pensava di aver disegnato un capolavoro, capito?

CR: Molto interessante! Ma posso chiedere chi è questo architetto presuntuoso?!

Sig.ra Brugola: Non c'è ancora.

Brugola: E' diventato anche - addirittura, adesso ha uno studio a Roma e uno a Firenze. Si ha fortuna per la verità, facendo le scenografie per la televisione. Non ricordo neanche il nome *[he smiles]*. Andiamo!

APPENDIX I. Participant Interviews.

3. Letizia Frailich Ponti Transcript

Interview with Letizia Frailich Ponti, Milan, 13 October 2008.

An interview with Letizia Frailich Ponti, Gio Ponti's third and youngest daughter. The interview takes place at the apartment Frailich Ponti shares with her husband and designed by Gio Ponti – although Frailich Ponti notes that she has changed the interior quite a lot. At intervals Frailich Ponti pulls down books on Gio Ponti and refers to a project contained in it – I have included short references in brackets where possible.

Frailich Ponti slips between Italian and English, and italics are used to denote when she was speaking in Italian. Given the bilingual nature of the interview, only the English version has been included in this appendix. Due to the informal, unrecorded nature of the interview, quotation marks are used to distinguish between direct quotes and paraphrases.

LFP = Letizia Frailich Ponti

CR = Catharine Rossi

LFP: I worked as a secretary for Gio Ponti for twenty years, in the 1950s and 1960s. This was very varied work – including translating, organizing, assisting with books, *Domus*, travelling with him.

‘Ponti always had a very important interest in handcraft.’

Ponti's ‘Interest started with the work in 1928 with Richard Ginori. He [Ponti] was a designer, he was inspiring the form and decoration, but he got someone else he called “able hands” to make it, because that was the way to work at that time.’

‘Also, after World War Two there was the *Triennale*, a moment of synthesis, of strong interest – a reaction – Italy was destroyed.’

‘[This] took shape in the *Triennale* in various sections – one was the 1951 ceramics section. ...took contact with a lot of handcrafts [...] especially where handcrafts traditionally took place, I mean Imola [...] Nove di Bassano, glass in Venice, enamel in Padua, which were able to be itself a work of art. It was of the same interest of father in designing for mass production and industrial production things in handcraft material, for buildings – tiles.’

‘This cooperation with “handcraft artists” [was] maybe part of this expression.’ [shows an image of table made by Paolo De Poli on Ponti's design Gio Ponti *and artisans* means Gio Ponti and artists working in this field of art [...] like [Fausto] Melotti, [Paolo] Venini.’

‘During the travelling he did for this exhibition [1951 *Triennale*]’ he took me with him, it was ‘an opportunity to talk with father all day long. I remember going with him, Melandri was living in a large piazza, appearing at a window, and Gambone [...] father and him explaining what he wanted to renew – the world of *artigianato* – very far from the traditional *artigianato*’ of imitating, unoriginal craft, ‘*he loathed it obviously. Modern artigianato was his battle – contemporary, new and then they were contacts that he developed all through his life.*’

‘*There was a lot of desire to make after the War, a lot of things happened – the Triennale – the Triennale called up artisans – we can call them artisans – [Tappio] Wirkkala, from Germany even [...] [a] fervour after the War.*

[There is a] distinction between people like Giordano Chiesa, a marvellous executor, not creative but technically perfect. Chiesa was one who made furniture for Ponti and other architects, [he was] able to get from his workers the things that Ponti wanted.

[desk, p. 67 of *Gio Ponti: A World*] ‘*made by Giordano Chiesa. Only Chiesa was able to make it [...] with this [which] is not parallel, with this cantilever...with this way not to have handles exactly [...] Ponti was always looking [...] for a feeling of leggerezza [...] Chiesa was not a very young man [...] large, very simpatico – he understood instantly what he [Ponti] was looking for.*

CR: ‘Who else did Giordano Chiesa make furniture for?’

LFP: ‘Melchiorre Bega.’

Handcraft instead is – there were collaborators – artists really – De Poli, Gambone, [Pietro] Melandri, Paolo Venini was director [...] but he was a highly cultured person [...] he wanted to the renew the family firm with new things [...] Papa enjoyed, he loved, he revelled in designing, in discovering what craft material could do.’

[p. 45, a glass project] *for the church of the San Carlo hospital in Milan...Papa was going to a glass blowers, he saw how much they threw away because it was not good enough, but he used them to do this work. He then did all [...] of the stained glass for the hospital of San Carlo.*

[Frailich Ponti points to another Church on the same page] *Father always – these profiles, these shelves. However the section was always exactly...the illusion of lightness it gave [...] to create effects, illusions of beauty, of lightness.’*

CR: ‘*Why was Ponti so interested in lightness?*’

LFP: ‘*He said that a normal work, a normal chair, even a building expresses a weight, a force [...] I instead look for illusion and miracle...if ballerinas balance on their toes even this is a miracle.*’ [Lifting up the *Superleggera* chair in her apartment] *Visually, an architect can give the illusion, an aesthetic research which is his. [referring to p. 81] a handle, the same principle, but the strength is there.’*

‘*Pirelli [...] a blade-like effect.*’

[Referring to p. 125] *'The villa in Caracas, he realized all of these principles, they let him do everything that he wanted, from the architecture to the furniture. [Referring to p.50, 51] furniture [made] by Chiesa.'*

[Referring to a new book on Caracas] *il gioco of the splayed window – they let him do everything.*

CR: did Chiesa make everything of Ponti's?

LFP: *Chiesa was very expensive [...] it was a very high quality finish and at a very high price...so it required a client...or something for an exhibition'*

' [...] Before to arrive at definite shape he [Ponti] studied a lot. One of his characteristics [...] to make and remake [...] and this was the desperation of people working with him [...] he was not sleeping a lot.'

CR: Did he draw everything?

LFP: *'He had people to design with ink – [they] had a reputation of a great studio, had seven, ten – twelve people to design...he was always designing'*

But to realize things he need designers...with the technique of ink We were supposed to be one of the largest studios in Milan for architecture...we had a lot of disegnatori [...] but in comparison with America it was small scale. But it was the possible dimension of an architect himself willing to express himself.'

CR: What education did the *disegnatori* have – technical school or university?

LFP: *technical school – a different level. He was at the table with them. Papa had swollen ankles because he was always on his feet at the table. He would say "let's do it like this" – then at night he would rethink – threw it all away. Tremendous costs!'*

'In a small thing – a chair...."we're not doing it like this" so he would then go to the fabbrica.'

De Poli, Gambone, *'those became more collaboratori amici.'*

[Referring to Caracas] *Melotti's works – Melotti was an important collaborator, an artists, everything.'*

CR: How did he meet De Poli?

LFP: De Poli [...] at the *Biennale di Venezia*. [De Poli] *'would come to eat with us' he brought me sweets [...] [Points to a chimney in Caracas] 'all enamelled by De Poli.'*

Melotti [Referring to p. 95] *Ponti would have said to him 'make two large, light statues [...]It created such a sense...of a communal research.'*

[p. 102] *'a wardrobe made by Giordano Chiesa, and brought to Venezuela. There was not so much freedom in a piece of furniture by Ponti [for Chiesa].'*

[Opens book on De Poli] *While De Poli – ‘a collaboration, more of a search for a certain beauty. Ponti did not have a good knowledge of enamels.’*

The ships were a great occasion for collaboration

... *‘The labyrinth [table] Papa had had the idea, Chiesa made the structure and De Poli the enamelling.’*

‘pure De Poli [...] his ability as an enameller was phenomenal’

[Referring to some ornaments in the shape of devils] *‘very papa’*

[brings over from a table in the corner of the room some bowls by De Poli, including a red one that De Poli gave as a Christmas present in 1958.]

Melotti was *‘a true artist [...] he was a sculptor however’*

‘The opportunities to work that moment of Italy’s reconstruction were very much appreciated.’

Melotti and Ponti’s relationship was ‘a friendship and...a shared feeling.’

[Referring to a picture from an exhibition in 1957] *‘they were all friends’*

[points to a painting in book by Campigli of Ponti’s family, includes Letizia and Lisa, the latter now 86.]

Ponti wanted to be a painter, but his father wanted something *‘professionally recognised.’*

...[brings out a book on clouds, currently out of print] *‘he invented this thing of the clouds’*

... *‘Father had had a classical phase...even in his architecture – he was enamoured by Palladio, by Vitruvius...a bit of an academic phase.’*

Seeing the work of Picasso, Stravinsky in the 1920s and 1930s – *‘he was opened up to a whole other thing.’*

Domus ‘was the vehicle for bringing modernity to Italy and abroad [...] he had friends and worked all over the world [...] he had invented it a bit himself...in the early years it was a classical thing and then it became about architecture, art, design.’

Architects *‘understood Domus’* and would send work with pagination already ready.

It was *‘terrible living together [...] because he worked twelve hours a day.’*

APPENDIX I. Participant Interviews.

4. Pierluigi Ghianda English Translation

Interview with Pierluigi Ghianda, Bovisio Masciago, 17 February 2010

The interview took place in Pierluigi Ghianda's workshop in. Following a tour around the workshop by one of his employees, we sit down to discuss.

PG = Pierluigi Ghianda

CR = Catharine Rossi

CR: Design in the sixties, seventies, and eighties.

PG: The golden years.

CR: Why do you say the golden years?

PG: Because it happened like this, it was the moment that everything - different things, new things, the best things

[I explain that I am here as both a researcher for the Postmodernism show, and on research into design and craft's relationship in post-war Italy]

PG: I started with Sottsass that is I understood him immediately.

CR: So he came here?

PG: Yes, we knew each other already, he did other - even Sottsass's father was an architect, eh? And he had followed in his footsteps a bit at the beginning, then after a fantastic person, he had such openness to ideas, things that we could not even imagine. And when he did something, it was a party, everyone going around etc. I did the first that is in the entrance. What I call *Brazil* [*Ghianda is referring to Peter Shire's Brazil table for the first Memphis collection in 1981, an example of which stands in the entrance to the workshop*].

CR: You produced that in the eighties?

PG: I think so, yes.

[interruption]

CR: That table there, it is fantastic, the colours,

PG: You know why it is fantastic for me, because when I did it - because I have never discussed a drawing with any architect, but even Sottsass, because sometimes people arrive with drawings that not even, with all the will, because they are pieces

that mix, the *novecento*, the Renaissance, and so don't serve anything, just serve to make people rich. And this is not something that I have to respect, and so I don't - then instead I see, when I met Sottsass, that he showed me the sketch of the first piece of furniture and I said to him - look, I'll do this for free, that is to say, my predisposition is with Ettore, I had a brotherly relationship with him.

CR: But that object there, fantastic, it was not the first object that you had made for him? So when was it you started to

PG: It started with - the names escape me, but the first was that exhibited there, now I have one, two, three, four pieces of Sottsass, the last that he did, or two old - but then you see an artisanal workshop, it does not have time - I do it because it is my passion, because I do not have time to do things you have to work to eat at lunchtime and in the evening, however you also do good things. Of Sottsass I can say that he enriched my memory, also because he did not do something that someone else had already done, as any - there is always a precedent [...] there, there are no precedents!

CR: Yes, I imagine that the first time that it was seen

PG: No, it was quite something [...] eh but Sottsass is Sottsass.

CR: A particular person, a genius. And so all those Memphis objects

PG: I don't get along with Memphis. What is the Memphis director called?

CR: [*Ernesto*] Gismondi?

PG: No. [*Alberto*] Albricci.

CR: Ah but that is Memphis now, it is something else.

PG: I finished with Albricci, yes and we even argued because he wanted to do things, he made me do the first examples [...]

CR: But, if we talk about Memphis only in the 1980s, not today. You made other prototypes?

PG: Many.

CR: This morning I went to the studio of Michele de Lucchi, and I think that you also made objects for him?

PG: Yes, I have also worked with De Lucchi, yes.

CR: And you liked working with him too?

PG: Yes, yes [*indecipherable*] to De Lucchi.

CR: And why do you like working with architects?

PG: Because it is a novelty. Even an old thing, they present it in a way in which there is novelty, it goes ahead. Designing, for Sottsass, the greats, Hans Hollein, the names of everyone - you get the impression of going ahead. It is never a repetition of the thirteen hundreds, eighteen hundreds, seventeen hundreds, of [*Jacques-Emile*] Ruhlmann etc.

CR: I am very interested in the process from the initial idea, the initial conception of an idea [*interruption*]. When an architect or someone like Sottsass arrives with the idea for making a prototype, and you say no, it doesn't work, it works with this material, or how does it work exactly?

PG: No, with difficulty an outsider, I don't say carpenter, someone like me, with difficulty you can say [*this*], because if - he who put it down, who thought about it, drawing, perhaps has worked three days, three months, I don't know how much, Rather, you do it like this, when someone has arrived you must not and you cannot say anything, it has to be like this as then it will be the world that will say if it is good or not.

CR: Okay, but do you suggest ideas to improve the designs that

PG: Improving is not the right word for design. The design is already better. When you say design, you are saying something that was not there before.

CR: This is a nice definition of design.

PG: Yes.

CR: I wanted hear more about your life, which interests me a lot, and, if it is okay, I would like to start from the beginning - why you decided to become a cabinetmaker.

PG: Me? Look. Brianza, every house in the centre of Brianza, not Brianza as a region, Bovisio, Cesano, Seveso, Meda, Lissone, this is the nucleus of Brianza. Every - there were house, there were courtyardsm in the courtyards were families, let's say in the largest courtyards there were five families, four did carpentry, and one a bit of everything - therefore imagine that everyone - I went to my uncle, to go into the house I went by the workshop, it was like this, there was no apartment building.

CR: Ah so you went to school and then you did

PG: They sent me to school to become an accountant technician. With the due comparison I ended up like Cellini, whose father sent him to a school for [*indecipherable*].

CR: So you did an apprenticeship?

PG: Yes, the apprenticeship of nearly any kid in Brianza, the first at the household workshop. As you have to already start, [*indecipherable*] to straighten nails, you know that in Brianza when you hit nails, you can't use the nail, so you take the nail, you put it in something under pressure and then *tac tac* you straighten it. I have these two fingers that are little sausages, however with time, I got it, then *manualità*

came. Brianza is like this. Maybe someone has the desire, to tell the truth about Brianza, it is an unrepeatable thing. It will never happen again for an eternity.

CR: This part of history will never happen again?

PG: No, also because it was the right moment for it to happen, now it wouldn't make sense. Two hundred workshops have closed in Bovisio.

CR: Yes? So it has changed a lot from when you started?

PG: A lot. Naturally even technologies have arrived, machinery, even things that have forced us - but there's an enormous difference. Technologically, that remote controlled machine, you can make watches because this has a formula. This is metal. It has a formula. This - all metals have a formula so you can't go wrong. Wood, it does not have a formula. The same trunk, the part that has grown in the sun, is different to the part which has grown at night.

CR: They are all different.

PG: Yes, and therefore [*indecipherable*] when you hit the key on a computer, the pointer turns according to what you told it to do.

CR: This knowledge of materials is very important.

PG: Of course, for wood, for everything, for polyester, some who wants to work well has to know. However who does this? Who?

CR: The quality here is impressive, I have to say.

PG: A remainder of the old Brianza.

CR: Are there other workshops like yours in this area still?

PG: No. Some - but it is not like this, perhaps inside there is some older element so something, but like we work here, no one else in the other parts of Brianza does. Now, you become professor when you sharpen a pencil and Brianza, and Brianza, for *Brianzoli* the pencil nib is like this.

CR: A very rare form of knowledge. After having done the apprenticeship, the family - your father, grandfather

PG: Everyone. Granddad, aunt, mother, relations, everyone worked inside the workshop.

CR: When did it become the Pierluigi Ghianda workshop? That happened

PG: Immediately before the last war. We started to do things more in the thirties, twenties, thirties. And then immediately after came the last World War.

CR: A fascinating period.

PG: Yes.

CR: And when did you start working with architects?

PG: Architects - first architects from Milan - my workshop has always worked with architects, for, I don't know.

CR: Gio Ponti?

PG: Gio Ponti, fantastic, but there was the one before - Baldessari. There were few architects. [Luigi] Caccia Dominioni.

CR: Caccia Dominioni also?

PG: Yes, but many - the names, even my 'registry' has advanced now - and when the 'registry' has advanced, your memory has to choose!

CR: It is for this that historians like me come who are interested in history, so that we can document it. [*interruption*]. In order to understand a bit about the workshop, Claudio [*one of Ghianda's employees*] told me that eleven people work here. At a certain point were there ever more, or less?

PG: More. When it was the old workshop of my father, his brothers, then my brother and I, my sister, in my father's day there were perhaps fifty collaborators.

CR: Fifty?

PG: Yes, in the years of fascism let's say, in the twenties or forties, until the first war.

CR: And in the seventies, eighties?

PG: No, in the seventies and eighties we reached about fifteen, but this workshops has always been the Lombard-Venetian, because out of ten, five are from Lombardy, and five Venetian.

CR: Oh yes? Because you always think that they are from the area.

PG: No, the Veneto is very linked to Lombardy.

CR: You see it infact - there is also an area of furniture production there.

PG: Yes, yes. Because after these alert kids that arrive here, they come to these firms that have had a bit of experience, they steal the *mestiere* as you say, they go to work - it is the nicest thing in the world, mind you.

CR: So that it can spread.

PG: Yes.

CR: That is nice. So, the structure of the workshop, does everyone have their part to do? That is do they do all the process, or does one person do, I don't know, the polishing?

PG: No, now an artisanal workshop does everything that it is asked, from the handle of these that I did for Alfa Romeo, the chairs, tables, furniture, to objects of, how can I say, research for others.

CR: But are there things that you like doing more?

PG: No. I prefer to do something new. Always.

Two architects arrive to discuss a project with Ghianda, and we finish the interview

APPENDIX I. Participant Interviews.

4. Pierluigi Ghianda Italian Transcript

Interview with Pierluigi Ghianda, Bovisio Masciago, 17 February 2010

The interview took place in Pierluigi Ghianda's workshop in. Following a tour around the workshop by one of his employees, we sit down to discuss.

PG = Pierluigi Ghianda

CR = Catharine Rossi

CR: Design negli anni sessanta, settanta, ottanta.

PG: Gli anni d'oro.

CR: Come mai dice gli anni d'oro?

PG: Perché succedevano così, era il momento che tutto - cose diverse, cose nuove, gli anni migliori.

[I explain that I am here as both a researcher for the Postmodernism show, and on research into design and craft's relationship in post-war Italy]

PG: Io con l'Ettore Sottsass ho iniziato con lui, c'è l'ho seguito immediatamente.

CR: Dunque lui è venuto qui?

PG: Sì, ci conoscevamo già, faceva, altre, anche il papa di Sottsass era architetto, eh? E lui ha seguito un po' le orme all'inizio, poi dopo personaggio fantastico, lui aveva un'apertura tale d'idee, di robe, che noi non possiamo neanche immaginare. E quando ci faceva qualche cosa, era una festa, tutti in giro ecc. io ho fatto proprio il primo che e li al ingresso [...] questo qui lo chiamo *Brazil*.

CR: È quella che lei aveva prodotto negli ottanta?

PG: Penso di sì. *[interruption]*

CR: Dunque quel tavolo lì, fantastico, i colori,

PG: Sai perché per me è fantastico, perché quando io l'ho fatto perché non ho mai discusso un disegno di qualsiasi architetto, ma anche Sottsass, perché a volte arriva della gente e presente dei disegni che neanche - con tutta la buona volontà, perché ci sono dei pezzi che mischiano, il novecento, il Rinascimento, e che poi non servono a niente, servono solo per arricchire. E questo non è roba che io devo tenere in conto, e quindi non - poi invece vedo, quando ho incontrato Sottsass, che m'ha fatto giù il schizzetto del primo mobile io l'ho detto - guarda questo io l'ho faccio gratis, questo

per dire, la mia predisposizione è con l'Ettore è nata proprio, io avevo un rapporto filiale con lui.

CR: Ma quel oggetto lì, fantastico, non è stato il primo oggetto che aveva prodotto per lui, no? Dunque quando è che aveva incominciato a

PG: Ha incominciata con - i nomi mi scappano, ma la prima là è quello lì esposto, adesso qui ho uno, due, tre, quattro pezzi di Sottsass, gli ultimi che sono capitati, o due vecchie - ma poi vedi una bottega artigiana, non ha il tempo - io lo faccio perché è la mia passione, perché non ha tempo di fare delle cose deve lavorare per mangiare a mezzogiorno e sera, però si fa anche cose buone. Io di Sottsass posso dire che mi ha arricchito la memoria, anche perché non ha fatto una cosa che ha già fatto un altro, perché qualsiasi - c'è sempre un precedente, e il precedente [...] lì non sono precedenti!

CR: Sì, immagino la prima volta che è stato vista.

PG: Non c'era una qualche cosa [...] eh ma Sottsass è Sottsass.

CR: Sì, una persona particolare, un genio. E dunque tutti quegli oggetti di Memphis,

PG: Io con Memphis non vado d'accordo. Come si chiama il direttore del Memphis?

CR: [*Ernesto*] Gismondi?

PG: No. [*Alberto*] Albricci.

CR: Ah ma quello è Memphis adesso, ma è un'altra cosa.

PG: Eh ma io sono fermo con Albricci, sì e abbiamo fatto abbiamo anche litigato perché voleva fare le cose, ha fatto fare a me i primi campioni [...]

CR: Ma, se parliamo di Memphis solo degli anni ottanta, non adesso. Lei avevi prodotto altri prototipi?

PG: Tanti.

CR: Sta mattina sono andata dallo studio di Michele De Lucchi, e io credo che aveva prodotto anche dei oggetti per lui?

PG: Sì, ma io ho lavorato anche con De Lucchi, sì?

CR: E si piaceva lavorare con lui anche?

PG: Sì, sì. [*indecipherable*] a De Lucchi.

CR: E perché piace lavorare con gli architetti?

PG: Perché è una novità. Anche una cosa vecchia, la presente in una maniera c'era novità, c'è si va avanti, disegnando per Sottsass, i grandi, Hans Hollein, i nomi di tutti - si ha l'impressione di andare avanti. E mai che è una ripetizione del tre cento, otto cento, del sette cento, del [*Jacques-Emile*] Ruhlmann ecc.

CR: M'interessa molto il processo dalla prima idea, dalla prima concezione di un'idea [*interruption*]. Quando un architetto o qualcuno come Sottsass arriva con l'idea per creare un prototipo, e lei dice non, non funziona, funziona con questi materiali o come succede esattamente?

PG: Non, difficilmente un estraneo, non dico falegname, un come me, difficilmente può dire, perché se - chi l'ha messo giù, ha pensato, ha disegnato, magari c'è ha lavorato tre giorni, tre mesi, non so quanto. Anzi si fare così, fare così, quando uno è arrivato lì lei non deve e non può dire niente, deve fare così, poi sarà il mondo che dirà se va bene o no.

CR: Okay, ma lei suggerisce delle idee per migliorare i progetti che

PG: Migliorare non è la parola giusta per il design. Il design è già migliore. Quando si dice design, si dice la cosa che non c'era prima.

CR: Questa è una bella definizione del design.

PG: Eh si

CR: Io volevo sentire più della vita sua, che m'interessa molto, e se va bene, vorrei iniziare dall'inizio - perché ha deciso di diventare ebanisteria.

PG: Io? Ma guardi. La Brianza, ogni casa nel centro della Brianza, non la Brianza come regione, Bovisio, Cesano, Seveso, Meda, Lissone, questo è il nucleo della Brianza. Ogni - c'erano le case, c'erano i cortili, nei cortili c'erano delle famiglie, mettiamo che cortile più grande c'erano cinque famiglie, quattro facevano il falegname, e una qualche cosa di tutti quindi immagini che erano tutti il proprio - io andavo dal zio, per andare in casa passavo dalla bottega, era così, non c'era il condominio.

CR: Eh dunque è andato a scuola e poi ha fatto

PG: A me ha mandato a scuola per diventasse ragioniere commercialista. Con le dovute proporzioni io ho fatto la stessa fine del Cellini, il cui papa l'ha mandato dalla scuola del [*indecipherable*].

CR: Dunque ha fatto un'apprendista?

PG: Sì, l'apprendistato di qualsiasi ragazzo nella Brianza, il primo è presso la bottega di casa. Perché deve già cominciare [*indecipherable*] a raddrizzare le chiodi, sa che in Brianza, quando si picchiano le chiodi, il chiodo non si poteva più usare, allora si le chiodi si prendeva, si metteva su una roba che aveva pressatura e poi tac tac tac si raddrizzava. Ho questi due dite che sono salsicciotti, però col tempo, entrava, dopo diventava la manualità. E così la Brianza. Forse uno che ha più

disposizione, raccontare la verità sulla Brianza è una roba irripetibile. Non succederà mai più per l'eternità.

CR: Non succederà più questa parte della storia?

PG: Non, anche perché allora era il momento adatto che sorgesse, adesso non si ha più ragione. A Bovisio hanno chiuso due cento botteghe.

CR: Ah sì? Dunque ha molto cambiato da quando ha cominciato lei?

PG: Molto. Naturalmente arrivano anche le tecnologie, arrivano delle macchine, arrivano qualche cosa che noi per forza la mano - ma c'è una differenza enorme. Tecnologicamente, quelle macchine a controllo, si possono fare orologi perché questo ha una formula. Questo è metallo. Ha una formula. Questo - tutti i metalli hanno formula quindi non può sbagliare. Nel legno, non ha formula. Lo stesso tronco, quello che è cresciuto a sole, è diverso di quello che è cresciuto la notte.

CR: Sono tutte diverse

PG: Sì. E quindi [*indecipherable*]. Quando scaccia il bottone del computer, la punta gira secondo quello che l'ha detto.

CR: Ma questa conoscenza dei materiali è una cosa così molto importante.

PG: Certo per il legno, per tutto, per poliestere, uno che vuol lavorare bene deve conoscere. Però chi fa questo? Chi? [...]

CR: La qualità qui è impressionante, devo dire.

PG: Sì una rimasuglio della vecchia Brianza.

CR: E ci sono altre botteghe come il suo nella zona ancora?

PG: No. Qualche d'una - ma non è così, che magari c'è dentro qualche elemento un po' anziano allora qualche cosa, ma siccome si lavora qui, non si lavora più nessuno altre parti della Brianza. Adesso, uno diventa professore quando fa la punta della matita, e Brianza, per Brianzoli la punta della matita è così.

CR: Una conoscenza molto rara. Dopo aver fatto l'apprendista, la famiglia - il padre, il nonno.

PG: Tutti. Nonno, zia, mamma, le parenti, tutti collaboravano dentro la bottega.

CR: Quand'è che divenuto la bottega di Pierluigi Ghianda? Quello è successo negli anni

PG: Immediatamente prima dell'ultima guerra. Abbiamo cominciato a fare delle cose di più negli anni trenta - venti, trenta. E poi subito dopo l'ultima Guerra Mondiale.

CR: Un periodo affascinante.

PG: Sì.

CR: E a quale punto aveva cominciato a lavorare con gli architetti?

PG: Perché gli architetti - prima gli architetti di Milano - la mia bottega sempre ha lavorato con degli architetti, per, non so

CR: Gio Ponti?

PG: Gio Ponti, fantastico, ma quella prima - Baldessari, c'erano pochi gli architetti. [Luigi] Caccia Dominioni.

CR: Caccia Dominioni anche?

PG: Sì ma tanti, I nomi - anche perché la mia anagrafe è avanzata adesso - e quando avanza l'anagrafe deve scegliere la memoria!

CR: E per questi che vengono gli storici come me che sono così interessati nella storia, così possiamo documentarlo [*interruption*]. Per capire un po' della Bottega. Claudio [*one of Ghianda's employees*] mi ha detto che ci sono undici persone che lavorano qui. A un certo punto ci sono stato di più, o anche di meno?

PG: Di più. Quando c'era la vecchia bottega del mio papa, i suoi fratelli, poi io e il mio fratello, la mia sorella, abbiamo ai tempi del mio papa c'erano anche cinquanta collaboratori.

CR: Cinquanta?

PG: Sì, negli anni del fascismo diciamo, negli anni venti o anni quaranta, fino alla prima guerra .

CR: Eh negli anni settanta ottanta?

PG: Non, negli anni settanta e ottanta ci siamo arrivati a quindici, ma questa bottega è sempre stato il lombardo veneto, perché sul dieci, cinque erano lombardi, e cinque veneti.

CR: Ah sì? Perché si pensa sempre che sono della zona.

PG: Non, il Veneto è molto legato alla Lombardia.

CR: Si vede anche - c'è la zona di produzione di mobile anche lì.

PG: Sì, sì. Perché dopo questi ragazzi svegli che arrivano qua, entravano in queste ditte che avevano un po' di esperienza, rubavano il mestiere come si dice, andavano a lavorare - è la cosa più bella del mondo intendiamoci.

CR: Sì perché diffondere.

PG: Sì.

CR: Quello è bello. E dunque, la struttura della bottega, tutti hanno la parte loro da fare? C'è come tutti processi, o una persona fa non so la lucidatura?

PG: Non, adesso una bottega artigiana fa tutto quello che è proposto, dal manico di questi che glielo fatto per l'Alfa Romeo, le sedie, le tavole, le arredamenti, agli oggetti di come si può dire di ricerca per altre.

CR: Ma ci sono delle cose che lei preferisce fare di più?

PG: No. Preferisco fare qualche cosa di nuovo. Sempre.

Two architects arrive to discuss a project with Ghianda, and we finish the interview.

APPENDIX I. Participant Interviews.

5. Ugo La Pietra English Transcript

Interview with Ugo La Pietra, Milan, 25 June 2008.

This interview was generously organised at the last minute by Anty Pansera. Pansera telephoned La Pietra during our own interview to organise meeting up straight after we were finished talking, as he lives close by to Pansera's studio. La Pietra very kindly agreed to meet me, but only had a short amount of time available.

ULP = Ugo La Pietra

CR = Catharine Rossi

ULP: So, I can tell you things that you will not have heard anywhere.

CR: Perfect!

ULP: In Italy, in the last fifty, sixty, fifty years craft was no longer being approached by design, by the culture of design; that is to say the architect, the interior designer etc. So craft in Italy was very widespread and very competent up to the 1940s, 1945, 1950, after which it continued to exist but it no longer updated itself, which meant that craft withdrew into itself. So the artisan has continued to make things, but things of the past. So, when he sets himself to make - let's say - innovative things, craft being an area, a discipline completely abandoned by now in as much as it does not have institutions, it does not have schools, because the art schools have slowly decayed, so it does not have collecting, it does not have a market. A craft has formed which has withdrawn into itself, with a market, even if at times flourishing, for tourism; so Vietri sul Mare, Caltagirone ceramics, let's say linked to the past, and this is true both for ceramics but also for any material – alabaster, stone etc.

At the start of the eighties I began to reawaken interest towards the whole area ...of material culture which design had abandoned. Not just craft, but even, yes even the firm - so something more than the small craft enterprise - but even the firm that was however producing period pieces, reproduction [*furniture*]. So all that heritage of material culture from craft to the firm that did not however have design, it did not have any more new, contemporary design. Therefore I did this work with about a hundred, a hundred

exhibitions from the eighties, nineties, still today and in demonstrations, both at trade fairs with side exhibitions or with exhibitions linked to various regions, from Volterra alabaster to Splimbergo mosaic etc.

This was to try to bring design to where it was no longer. This operation however, with the years was no longer an operation only of experimental research. I produced about a thousand objects, mine and of many others, that naturally never went onto the market because they were works done for exhibitions, to show that you could bring a design to craft. A design however that had to be very particular, that is a gentle project, not the project of a designer but a project that started off practically, from that which the artisan knew how to do and so you gave it to him. So if the artisan knew how to model figures for a crib you could not give him a vase, do you understand? To turn [*on a wheel*], because it is another type of technique and therefore you alter a product that starts off from his ability. So a project that talks, just like Ponti did in the thirties, forties, fifties, when he had his artisan friend with whom he talked and he grew and the other grew, and they both signed the work. Therefore – if you see my pieces there are all published etc, signed by Ugo La Pietra and by the artisan.

The demonstration of this dialogue is that if I make objects at Vietri Sul Mare, they are of a certain type. If I make them at Caltagirone they are of another type. And so it is not my style, but it is my style together with the artisan's, so it changes continuously. While the designer today, who in the last few years has finally realised - after much work done by me and others - the potentiality of craft, as a place for experimentation, but also a place for making art objects, objects with added value, that globalisation demands of us today as the Chinese do the mass production and we can only do the art object. At this point they discover that the art object has to have values inside, a character that is also hand-made. But designers today go, at the beginning they go to do work with artisan however what do they do? They do not put the name of the artisan. They do not give credit to the workshop. They do not credit that which in Japan, that is that for thousands of years there is a family with its own mark, which even has its own fame and its own value on the market. Therefore the value of an object today [...] has to be a value in which there are these two entities (brings over a wooden piece with his and other signature on the back) my signature and the mark of the workshop, in this case [*Pierluigi*] Ghianda, which is a very good workshop, famous now because this artisan is very good.

So, to say briefly, this is the situation today; an awareness that is finally materialising because today design has very few resources it does not know how to develop...its own resources so it is inching ever closer to craft, to the applied arts. They are always making more objects in small series, editions, and art editions; there is an ever growing collecting market.

CR: But why was there this distance between art and design?

ULP: Because, as I said, this distance from after the forties, fifties: there was a whole current of thought that considered craft as something absolutely absurd, because they were talking about industrial design – therefore about numbers, mass production, of profit, because if I make an object with an artisan, I do not earn anything. So in Italy this contempt grew towards the artisan, a false contempt because then if you go to look at the quality of *Made in Italy*, of Italian design, the fame of Italian design, it is precisely because companies, especially furniture ones, work with artisan. Because they, only in this way can they do a flexible production, like the famous Italian development where every six months you change project, you change objects etc, because they are assemblers which give many small craft structures work.

However these small craft structures were structured so that they suffered, they always suffered – from what? From the fact of working for a company only making parts, understand? So that firm, the day on which it decides that you no longer are doing that part, but someone in Thailand is doing it, rather than in Hungary where hand-work is cheaper, you close, as an artisan. So craft is very widespread however at the service of small and medium enterprise which at the end of the day has enjoyed the favour of a widespread micro-structure but it just exploits it, understand? And so today, as craft was exploited for many years by small and medium enterprise, today it is exploited by the designer, by the young designer who when he goes to a firm to propose his project and brings along the model, already made. He goes to artisans who he has make it, and he brings the model. So the firm saves and the prototype, the experimentation - so it is a craft that has become at the service of businesses as if it was a type of technical department which made prototypes. So it is exploited.

He [*the artisan*] is exploited due to the fact that when someone comes out with an object in small series, an art edition etc, his name does not appear. The name of the designer, or the outfit appears, but the owner is not the one that makes, he is not the maker, understand? So today, still today, craft is exploited on many levels and all this because for too many years it was said that in Italy above all - not in Europe - it was said - craft, ah what a horrible thing, bad taste, things, because craft, abandoned unto itself has lived on doing often horrible things. Or redoing things from the past, etc, so the left of artistic craft has got increasingly lower; and so today it is heavily exploited.

CR: But do you think that craft itself has or does not have the capacity to renew itself or does it have to come from outside?

ULP: No, no it cannot do it, not in our country because the artisan has never been isolated. Craft in Italy has always been inside a complex system of dialogue between the various craft in the so-called factory. So something was made, all the crafts all the

crafts participated– plasterers [...] painters, all those, they worked inside of a structure. Then perhaps the structure entrusted a workshop with doing a special piece etc but it was all inside a system and so the artisan was an educated person, he was a person who lived inside a system, not isolated as he has been for many years, so he thinks that he is a great artist and makes horrible things that no one, that have no verification, no dialogue, no control, no relationship with anything, understand?

Today there starts to be this interest towards the artisan and the artisan starts to develop his own abilities and therefore - however we are still in a phase in which craft has become - it is not made to grow. So if I go to an artisan and work with him and we make things together [*La Pietra flicks through a book of his work*] these are all objects that I have done in fifty years – interiors, objects etc, I've done these in many, many years. However look at what there is at the back of this collection of works; there is mine and his biography, he and I are together.

CR: Normally you don't see it like this.

ULP: No, you do not see it because no one does this *mestiere* - which instead they should do.

CR: It is this that I would like to highlight.

ULP: Well done, let's hope.

CR: But is this also something to do with education, with Italian history – is it specific to Italian history?

ULP: Yes, very much so. You need to remember that in Europe *craft* exists, there exists a whole area of applied arts, very elevated, with museums, institutions etc we do not have anything in this sense, understand? Therefore today even if a talented artisan – and there are - there are talented artisans. This is an exhibition that I did on ceramics with a whole series of talented artisans – the younger [Bruno] Gambone, Marangoni, [Riccardo] Monachesi, Marrano, artist-artisans [...] Antonio Negri. These are all very talented artists craftsmen [...] well these here, even if they are talented they are however dying of hunger. There is no market, there is nothing, understand? So while in Europe these people would have collecting, would have collectors, would have markets, would have something [*interruption*].

CR: And the magazine *L'Artigianato*?

ULP: Unfortunately it is a magazine which is about to close.

CR: Oh, what a shame!

ULP: Well yes, because there is no money, because it is the only magazine in Italy but no one finances craft because craft is just as I told you a terrain that is only exploited, it is not helped by anyone. If someone interests themselves in craft, it is to exploit it, the designer - not to make it grow, like other areas – so even information – there is no crafts magazine. There is only the one that I do but it is a magazine that always, every time, seems that it is about to close.

CR: What a shame. But this exploitation is something also of the post-war? Did Ponti exploit craft?

ULP: No, Ponti no. Because Ponti, when worked with craftsmen he worked in a specific dialogue and made crafts practitioners grow, made Fornasetti grow, made silver grow, all the artisans were his friends [*Interruption*]. It is something to imitate, that which I am searching to copy in the sense that he had a very collaborative and friendly relationship, in the sense of exchange with artisans. It is demonstrated in the fact that Ponti, in the fifties, when he went with Fornasetti he was doing hyper-decorative things etc because he was with him. When instead he went with the silversmith – what was he called?

CR: Sabattini?

ULP: Sabattini, he was doing other things. So the artisan is who someone who then contributes fifty [percent], sometimes even more, to the end result. So the work is not Ponti's but it is Ponti and Fornasetti's. It is not mine, it is this other's and mine etc. This is the important thing, here you show the value that you have to give which is – but it is also economic because if I sell this piece, fifty percent goes to me and fifty percent goes to the artisan, this does not happen.

CR: How do you think it has changed in this period in particular?

ULP: Today it is changing a lot, as I have said, because craft is starting to become a factor let's say of interest even to the market. However the market functions with the name of the designer, not with the name of the artisan because the artisan, for international collecting, has no value. However if I make my piece with an artisan I can sell my piece, but not that of the artisan [...] understand?

Appendix I. Participant Interviews

5. Ugo La Pietra

Italian Transcript

Interview with Ugo La Pietra, Milan, 25 June 2008.

ULP = Ugo La Pietra

CR = Catharine Rossi

ULP: Allora, posso dirti delle cose che non avrai sentito da nessuno parte.

CR: Perfetto!

ULP: Dunque erm l'artigianato in Italia, negli ultimi cinquanta - sessanta anni, cinquanta anni, non è stato più avvicinato dal progetto, dalla cultura del progetto; vale a dire l'architetto, l'arredatore ecc. Quindi l'artigianato in Italia era molto diffuso è molto ben qualificato fino agli anni quaranta, quarantacinque, cinquanta. Dopo di che ha continuato ad esistere, ma non si è più rinnovato quindi vuol dire che l'artigianato si è chiuso in se stesso. Quindi l'artigiano ha continuato a fare delle cose ma le cose del passato. Quindi, quando si è messo a fare delle cose diciamo innovative, essendo l'artigianato ormai un'area, disciplinare completamente abbandonata in quanto non ha istituzioni, non ha scuole, perché istituti d'arte si sono decaduti lentamente, quindi non ha collezionismo, non ha mercato. Si è formato un artigianato chiuso in se stesso con un mercato anche qualche volta florido per un turismo; quindi il Vietri sul mare, Caltagirone, ceramiche, diciamo legato al passato, quindi questo vale sia per la ceramica ma vale per qualsiasi materia, l'alabastro, le pietre ecc.

All'inizio degli anni ottanta io ho incominciato a risvegliare l'interesse nei confronti di tutta l'area diciamo della cultura materiale che il design aveva abbandonato. Non solo l'artigianato ma anche si anche l'azienda quindi qualcosa di più della piccola impresa artigiana ma anche l'azienda che però produceva opere classiche, in stile, cioè tutto quel patrimonio di cultura materiale dall'artigianato fino all'azienda che però non avevano il progetto, non avevano più il progetto nuovo, contemporaneo. Quindi ho fatto questo lavoro con centinaia di mostre dagli anni ottanta, novanta, oggi e in manifestazioni sia nelle manifestazioni fieristiche con mostre collaterali con oppure mostre legate a dei vari territori dall'alabastro di Volterra al mosaico di Spilimbergo ecc.

Questo per cercare di portare il progetto là dove non c'era stato più. Quest'operazione però con gli anni non è stata più un'operazione soltanto di come dire ricerca sperimentale. Io ho prodotto migliaia di oggetti, miei e di tanti altri, che non sono mai andate naturalmente nel mercato perché erano opere che si facevano per delle mostre per

far vedere che si poteva portare il progetto all'artigiano. Un progetto che però doveva essere molto particolare, cioè un progetto dolce, non progetto da designer, un progetto che praticamente partiva da quello che l'artigiano sapeva fare e poi gli dava. Per cui se l'artigiano sapeva modellare delle figure per il presepe non puoi dargli da fare un vaso, capito? Da tornire, perché è un altro tipo di tecnica e quindi vari un prodotto che parte da quella sua capacità. Quindi un progetto che dialoga, proprio come faceva Ponti negli anni trenta, quaranta, cinquanta quando aveva l'amico artigiano con cui dialogava e cresceva lui e cresceva l'altro, e l'opera le firmavano tutt'e due. Quindi - questo se vede i miei pezzi sono tutti pubblicati ecc. firmati da Ugo La Pietra e dall'artigiano.

La dimostrazione che, di questo dialogo è che se io faccio degli oggetti a Vietri sul Mare sono di un certo tipo. Se li faccio a Caltagione sono di un altro tipo. E quindi non c'è uno stile mio, ma uno stile mio insieme all'artigiano, quindi cambia continuamente. Mentre il designer oggi che negli ultimi anni si è accorto finalmente dopo tanto lavoro fatto da me ed altri di questa potenzialità dell'artigianato, come luogo della sperimentazione ma anche il luogo per fare l'oggetto ad arte, l'oggetto con valore aggiunto, quello che oggi ci chiede la globalizzazione perché la grande serie si fanno i cinesi e noi possiamo fare solo dell'oggetto ad arte allora scoprono che l'oggetto d'arte deve avere dei valori dentro, il carattere anche manuale. Ma i designer oggi vanno, all'inizio vogliono fare un lavoro con gli artigiani però cosa fanno? Non mettono il nome dell'artigiano. Non danno valore alla bottega. Non valorizzano quello che in Giappone c'è da migliaia d'anni che c'è la famiglia con un proprio marchio che ha una sua fama e un suo valore sul mercato. Quindi il valore di un oggetto oggi [...] deve essere un valore in cui ci sono queste due entità (brings over a wooden piece with his and other signature on the back) la mia firma e il marchio della bottega, [Pierluigi] Ghianda, in questo caso, che è una bottega molto buono, famoso ormai perché è molto bravo questo artigiano.

Ecco questo è per dirla brevemente la situazione oggi; un'attenzione che si sta finalmente concretizzando perché il design oggi ha pochissime risorse non sa più come sviluppare ... le proprie risorse quindi si sta avvicinando sempre di più all'artigianato e alle arti applicate. Si fanno sempre più oggetti di piccola serie, edizioni, edizioni d'arte, e c'è un mercato sempre più vasto di collezionismo.

CR: Ma perché c'era questo distacco tra design e l'artigianato?

ULP: Perché come dicevo questo distacco dal dopo gli anni quaranta, cinquanta: c'è stata tutta una corrente di pensiero che considerava l'artigianato qualcosa di assolutamente improponibile perché si parlava di design industriale; quindi di numeri, di produzione di serie, di guadagno perché se io faccio un oggetto con un artigiano, non guadagno niente. Quindi in Italia quindi è cresciuto questo disprezzo nel confronto dell'artigiano, un falso disprezzo perché poi se uno va a ben guardare la qualità del

Made in Italy, del design italiano, la fama del design italiano è proprio nel fatto che le aziende del mobile soprattutto, lavorano con gli artigiani. Perché loro, solo così possono fare una produzione flessibile, come la famosa evoluzione all'italiana dove ogni sei mesi uno cambia progetto, cambia oggetti ecc perché loro sono dei assemblatori che facevano lavorare tante piccole strutture artigiani.

Però queste piccole strutture artigiani, erano strutture che soffrivano, erano sempre sofferto, di che cosa? Del fatto di lavorare per un azienda facendo solo delle parti, capito? Quindi quell'azienda, il giorno in cui decide quella parte lì non la fai più tu, ma la fa uno in Thailandia, piuttosto che in Ungheria dove costa di meno la mano d'opera tu chiudi, come artigiano. Quindi un artigianato molto diffuso però a servizio di una piccola e media impresa che tutto sommato ha goduto per tanti anni del favore di questo micro diffuso diffusa - ma però la solo sfrutta, capito? E quindi oggi, quindi l'artigianato è stato sfruttato per tanti anni dalla piccola e media impresa, è sfruttato oggi dal *designer*, dal giovane *designer* che quando va all'azienda proporre un proprio progetto porta già il modello, realizzato. Va dagli artigiani si lì fan fare e porta il modello. Così l'azienda risparmi e il prototipo della sperimentazione e c'è quindi un artigianato che diventa a servizio della impresa come fosse una specie di ufficio tecnico che fa i prototipi. Quindi sfruttato.

È sfruttato per il fatto che quando uno viene fuori con un oggetto di piccola serie , di edizione d'arte, ecc il suo nome non appare. Perché appare il nome del designer, o dell'editore, ma l'editore non è quello che fa, non è il cacciatore, capito? Quindi oggi, ancora oggi l'artigianato viene sfruttato a tanti livelli e tutto questo perché per troppi anni si è detto che in Italia soprattutto - non in Europa - si è detto l'artigianato ah robbaccia, cattivo gusto, cose, perché l'artigianato abbandonato a se stesso, ha vissuto facendo spesso cose orribili. O rifacendo cose del passato, ecc quindi si è sempre di più abbassato il livello qualitativo dell'artigianato artistico, ecco. E quindi oggi viene sfruttato pesatamente.

CR: Ma pensa che l'artigianato stesso non ha, c'è ha la capacità di rinnovamento se stesso o deve venire da fuori?

ULP: Non, non c'è la fa, da noi, non perché l'artigiano è sempre stato non mai isolato. L'artigianato in Italia è sempre stato all'interno di un sistema complesso di dialogo tra le vari artigiani nella cosiddetta fabbrica. Cioè si costruiva qualcosa, tutti gli artigiani partecipavano - gli stuccatori [...] i pittori, tutti quelli lavoravano all'interno di una struttura. Poi magari alla struttura si affidava la bottega per fare il pezzo speciale ecc ma tutto era dentro un sistema e quindi l'artigiano era una persona colta, era una persona che viveva all'interno di un sistema non isolata com'è stato per tanti anni quindi, che pensa di essere un grande artista e fa cose orribile che nessuno - che non ha nessun verifica, nessun dialogo, nessun controllo, nessun rapporto con niente, capito?

Adesso incomincia ad esserci questa interesse in confronto all'artigiano e l'artigiano comincia a sviluppare delle proprie anche capacità e quindi - però siamo ancora in una fase in cui l'artigianato viene appunto non viene fatto crescere. Perché se io vado dall'artigiano e lavoro con lui e facciamo delle cose insieme [*La Pietra flicks through a book of his work*] questi sono tutti oggetti che ho fatto in cinquant'anni - ambienti, oggetti ecc. l'ho fatti tutti in tantissimi anni arredamenti, ecc va bene. Però questa collezione di opere guarda cosa c'è in fondo; c'è la mia e la sua biografia, siamo io e lui insieme.

CR: Normalmente non si vede così.

ULP: Eh non che non si vede perché nessuno fa questa mestiere perché invece così che si dovrebbe fare.

CR: È questo che io voglio mettere in evidenza.

ULP: Brava, speriamo.

CR: Ma questa è anche una cosa di formazione, della storia italiana – è specifico alla storia italiana?

ULP: Sì, è molto sì. In tanto bisogna ricordarsi che in Europa esiste il *craft*, esiste tutto un territorio di arti applicate molto elevato con dei musei, con gli istituzioni ecc noi non abbiamo niente in questo senso, capisci? Quindi oggi anche se un bravo artigiano e c'è ne sono; ci sono bravi artigiani. Questa è una mostra che io ho fatto di ceramica con tutta una serie di artigiani bravi eh questo Gambone, Gioventù, Marangoni, Monachesi, Marano, artisti-artigiani ...Antonio Negri questi sono tutti artisti artigiani molti bravi... ecc ...beh questi qui che anche se sono bravi però muoiono di fame. Non c'è nessun mercato non c'è niente, capisci? Quindi mentre queste persone in Europa avrebbero un collezionismo, avrebbero dei collezionisti, avrebbero dei mercati, avrebbero qualcosa [*interruption*].

CR: E la rivista *l'Artigianato*?

ULP: È una rivista purtroppo che sta che per chiudere.

CR: Ah, che peccato!

ULP: Ah sì, perché non ce ne sono soldi, perché è l'unica rivista in Italia ma nessuno finanzia l'artigianato perché l'artigianato appunto come ti dicevo è un territorio solo sfruttato ma non è aiutato da nessuno. C'è se qualcuno s'interesse dell'artigiano, è per sfruttarlo - il *designer* - ma non per farlo crescere, capisci come altri territori come hai e quindi anche l'informazione - non c'è una rivista di artigianato. L'unica è quella che faccio io ma che è una rivista che sempre ogni volta sembra che debba chiudere.

CR: Che peccato. Ma questo sfruttamento è anche una cosa del dopoguerra? Ponti ha sfruttato l'artigianato?

ULP: Non, Ponti, non. Perché Ponti quando lavorava con gli artigiani lavorava in un dialogo preciso e faceva crescere gli artigiani faceva crescere Fornasetti, faceva crescere l'argenteria come si chiama - tutti gli artigiani erano suoi amici [*interruption*]. È da imitare, quello che io sto cercando di imitare in senso che quello che invece ha avuto un rapporto molto collaborativo ed amichevole in senso proprio di scambio con gli artigiani. Infatti lo dimostra proprio il fatto che Ponti negli anni cinquanta quando andava con Fornasetti, faceva le cose iper decorative, ecc perché era con lui. Quando andava invece dall'argenteria come si chiama?

CR: Sabattini?

ULP: Sabattini, faceva altre cose questo quello che ti dicevo. Cioè l'artigiano è quello che poi contribuisce al cinquanta qualche volta anche di più, alla risultato finale. Quindi l'opera non è di Ponti ma di Ponti e Fornasetti. Non però non è mia ma è mia e di quest'altro ecc. Questa è la cosa importante, qui si dimostra il valore che si deve dare, che ha - ma è anche economico perché se io vendo questo pezzo il cinquanta per cento va a me e il cinquanta per cento va all'artigiano, questo non succede.

CR: Come pensa che è cambiato in questo periodo in particolare?

ULP: Adesso sta cambiando come dicevo molto perché l'artigianato incomincia a diventare un fattore diciamo di interesse, anche di mercato. Però il mercato funziona con il nome del designer non con il nome dell'artigiano perché l'artigiano per il collezionismo internazionale non ha nessun valore. Però se io faccio il mio pezzo con un artigiano il mio pezzo lo posso vendere, ma non quello dell'artigiano [...] capito?

APPENDIX I. Participant Interviews.

6. Anty Pansera English Translation

English Translation of Interview with Anty Pansera, Milan, 25 June 2008

The interview took place at Anty Pansera's office in Milan. Also present was her assistant Antonella, who would also take part in the conversation.

Abbreviations:

AP = Anty Pansera

CR = Catharine Rossi

AP: Linked to industrial design, one is really *snobbish* against craft. There is, how to put it, a fracture that I believe is maybe reconfiguring today. That fracture makes the decorative, applied arts seem like something that has nothing to do with anything...The harmonious growth that we see beyond the Alps, in the Scandinavian countries, also in part in France and Germany, between the two different realities of making objects *d'excellence*, objects in small series, in large series, here there are different tensions.

And so one *snobs* craft, also because it is an argument about different training, no? So the artisan remains linked to a whole series of ways of doing but does not update his languages; while on the contrary he who comes out of the architecture faculty - rather than from say the *Accademia di Belle Arti [di Brera]* has, how shall I put it, a greater innovative attention towards the language of grammar, expressive syntax. However then he maybe lacks and falls down in regards to knowledge about materials, let's say it like this, no? So a whole series of 'traditional' materials. You mentioned ceramics, [*Alessio*] Tasca on the one hand and [*Antonia*] Campi on the other - who are two totally different figures; Alessio Tasca keeps going with traditional materials and on the other hand innovates in a linguistic way – he has the tools of an artist. Antonia Campi, who came from the *Accademia di Brera*, from sculpture etc, went into a company, the *Sci* of Laveno and had this great ability to instead get involved with the productive reality, and succeeding in making a landscape, something that in some ways Alesso doesn't do. So the two figures are different; Campi has in some ways kept her research on materials and as an artist but she has the great ability to apply it, to use it for the *Sci*.

CR: And do you think that you can talk, in one historical account, about Tasca, about Campi about - I don't know, about [*Andrea*] Branzi and ceramics?

AP: Well, Branzi is a whole other thing; we are even in totally different times. We could put together more the figure of Antonia Campi with that of Ambrogio Pozzi, because Pozzi, even though he came from the world of art - in his case he had his own firm because Pozzi was his father's, no? He applied some of his awareness of and interest in industrial design and series production.

Branzi is a whole other *maestro*, aside from the position of age. Branzi is an architect, he arrives from Florence, he has all his experiences, etc obviously he goes on to use even ceramics as well, like Ettore Sottsass and so on, as one of the materials of which he however doesn't have a proper understanding; meanwhile Campi, Pozzi, Tasca, when they do a project they know what happens to the material when it is fired, when it goes through all the problems of shrinkage, problems of colour, enamelling etc, they know very well what happens.

A character like Sottsass even admitted that for him it was always a miracle, always a bit of a surprise what came out of the furnace. When he went, I always remember that when he went to Murano to work with glass he said 'bah! I am working with a master glassblower, I have my idea, at the end of the day it is a whole other thing because I do not know the specifics of the materials.' So the great problem of Italian design culture has been that designers, understood in the sense of architect-designers, were well aware about changes in languages and they were, how shall I put it, capable of transforming one of the new sentences, but they did not know about materials! Meanwhile our fantastic artisans, due to an argument however linked to school education, have remained repeating a whole series of rules.

If we also think about wood, if you got to Valle d'Aosta, to the festival of S. Orso, it is this incredible place where you find a whole series of materials for the kitchen; spoons, cups, plates, bowls, the famous *grolla*, the *grolla* of friendship which is this type of box, inside of which there are these spouts from which you drink coffee with grappa and you pass round the table. It is an exceptional object, particular to gastronomic culture, let's say, or conviviality. However this *grolla*, you see it veneered and carved beautifully; but with these spouts with alpine stars, the lid with the halcyon, with the chamois - these are the same things that you find in the nineteenth century there or wherever; that is they go on repeating these stylistic features. Years ago I did a conference in Japan at Karachi precisely on this theme; there are few figures that have succeeded in getting away.

An interesting material for example is silver. Here Piero de Vecchi, who always exhibited at the *Triennale*, succeeded in making this great turning point. Then the son Gabriele who, being an artist, having done the *Accademia di Brera*, having served, let's say it like this, in *Arte Programmata*, in *Gruppo T*, Gabriele then succeeded in taking his father's work - which was nevertheless in some ways already about research - and

made it do a huge leap. But normally if you see silverware - which is one of the traditions - there few prominent figures; Lino Sabattini - who succeeded in making this leap, even he however came from a trade, from practical knowledge and then through his own sensibility succeeded in linking up with the language of the present.

In Italy unfortunately because school – making a historical argument - has not given this contribution, we [*inaudible*] have many skilled artisans who make hideous things. I'm thinking about needlework - we have the tradition of Burano lace, lace from Cantù etc. If I think about abroad, to Norway etc what they are doing with lace - our women here or those who go to these schools continue to make doilies. They have great manual skill but they do not have the ability to change the language or the typology. The doily, who puts a doily under a bunch of flowers, under a vase of flowers today? Or even on the sofa? I've seen things made in Holland where they are rescuing these materials, and in addition to students in these schools there is on the one hand knowing how to make a doily, knowing how to treat the crochet hook, the thread; but on the other hand it has an *underground* such that this type of artefact is acquiring a totally new meaning and linked to the twenty-first century.

CR: But is this type of training all part of the idea of snobbery towards craft?

AP: No, it is linked to a philosophical concept [*inaudible*] which still continues in part in Italy, which is the idealist philosophy of [Giovanni] Gentile and the reform that Gentile passed in '23, that I think you still hear today. Schools which don't have workshops, or schools which do have workshops don't instead have those other subjects that can give students the culture of design to then go and apply to materials.

I have talked about it recently with some friends who have built a hotel-management school. Cooking: the theme of Italian cooking, the great gastronomy, has by now been overtaken by foreign experiences. In Italy in hotel management schools where they teach cookery, there isn't yet a programme which puts together knowledge about pasta, about roast meats, there is not yet that series of subjects that prepares a new type of chef, a new type of character that succeeds in relating to the consumer; there are few the *craco* [?] of the situation in Milan.

There are figures who have trained themselves, who know how to lay the table in a certain way, to put just a slice of ham on the plate in a certain way etc. It is still imaginary, the chef all a bit sweaty, a chef in the kitchen, and then someone who puts the stuff on the plate and there you are. Schools don't give this type of preparation; someone who is a chef today should study art history, architecture history, the history of communication to know which is the best chicken *Cacciatore* and then should put in on the plate in a certain position, not throwing it there. This is therefore a problem of education.

Obviously there is then the single individual who succeeds in cultivating himself, no? So we do have people even in the world of – however - I was discussing this with these architect friends, in countries where cookery has never had a tradition, such as in England, seeing as you are from there - today it has important chefs in the world lists. How did this happen, where did they come from, as your cooking was, in short, a modest cuisine, no? At the level of imagination, quality, recipes etc. Spain has a reality more similar to that of Italy, however even there has been a leap precisely at the moment of education. This is why this whole series of great chefs has emerged [*inaudible*] it is a *star system* and at this point there are hardly any Italians, no? This is to move us into the field of gastronomic culture, of *food*, which fascinates so much today.

CR: Do you think that, in the sense that everyone thinks that there will always be Italians who know how to cook, the relationship between design and craft is based on the idea, on the assumption that there will always be craft skill?

AP: Yes, of course, the knowledge of materials on which you work. I often see dissertations at universities where I follow the historical-critical part, and then there is the design part - and the design part often denotes the lack of knowledge on the part of the student of the material that they go on to deal with. It is not that a designer has to know everything about everything about everything. But, how shall I put it, he has to have the humility to understand what glass means, what ceramic means, what steel means, what are the possibilities and potentialities of a material. If I can make a vase even in steel, in ceramic, in glass etc what sense is there? I have to know the material to be able to use it in a certain way.

CR: But is this an Italian thing do you think? Different from England?

AP: Yes, but of course, because we have different schools.

CR: And a different history.

AP: A different history, different school, so the background is different. How to say, clearly we had, we have a great period of Italian design, when companies even invested a lot in research.

CR: In the post-war period?

AP: Of course. But who invests today? No one, that is, hardly anyone. In those years the designer had the opportunity, for example a Marco Zanuso, to know what Pirelli was doing, and to understand this rubber that had been designed to be used in wartime to protect tanks and so on. He had at his disposal an extraordinary material; he had a company that offered him the possibility of understanding how to translate this material from the wartime moment for which it was born.

Today, who does research? The university? It doesn't have the tools to do it as there isn't very much money, a few laboratories, but - there should probably be more synergy between the architecture or design faculty at Bovisa and the laboratories of the chemistry or physics faculties, I don't know, you don't see so this synergy very much. Businesses have laboratories where they do things but maybe they only have internal people, they don't have much rapport with the outside because the designer, let's say outside, *freelance*, also has the role of displacing technological knowledge from one firm to another. I go to design a lamp, I start by entering into a firm, I discover certain things which perhaps I take and then I transfer them, which isn't very easy [*inaudible*]. At one time this type of movement was greater, no? The designer is like a bee who pollinates and moves situations. I don't know what else I can tell you.

CR: One thing that I don't even know if I want to do is to try to define craft in Italy. I come from a country, a tradition that is totally different and I do not want to make a mistake when I talk about Italy. I know that it is different, that Morris and Ruskin have nothing to do with it.

AP: Craft in Italy; there are many designers who have tried to modernise it. One is Ugo La Pietra for example, who has tried to do more all with traditional materials. Ugo La Pietra - I don't know if you want to see him, he lives nearby. He has done this magazine called *L'Artigianato*, where he has always looked to put together designers - therefore those people who have a culture of design, who have the language of contemporaneity, with artisans of all types; so not just glass and ceramics, wood a lot, well he has worked a lot on ceramics but also for example stone [...] alabaster which is a tragic material that is I mean to say they continue to do tremendous crap with alabaster but it has all these - it is porous, it has a whole series of things, it is very well studied. There are many people in Italy who have done work - Burkhardt for example, Francois Burkhardt has worked on alabaster.

CR: Mangiarotti?

AP: Angelo Mangiarotti has worked on these things. However the discussion that the pieces, I don't see that there has ever truly been a close relationship. I mean to say that I myself have had dealings, putting the designer in contact with realities; for Altari glass I did all this work, having Absolut Vodka as a sponsor. A small vodka glass, redesigned by Munari, by Campi, by a whole series, by Sardo, by a whole series of designers. However these did their little drawing, it was not everyone went down to Altari. Nanda Vigo went down, Campi went down, Sottsass all by telephone, etc but they did not go to see what the devil glass could do. They did their little drawing, then that glass there you could have made it in silver, or in ceramic, or in steel, or in God knows what and it would have been the same.

I am, I continue to be convinced and I disagree with La Pietra, that is it is not enough to take a designer and put him in contact in such a superficial way with an artisan. Above all I think that that it is necessary that artisans develop their own culture with a new language. These here at Altari who make glass, they're great, these artisans who I met, but what the devil do they do? They are making these crap little animals that they sell at Murano. Why? Because the market asks for it – that is, they function for the market. People go to Altara to visit the museum of Altari, they go around the village, what do they buy? This crap that is the same that you buy in Murano, *bestioline*. They go to school kids for three, four, five Euros, this stuff that is truly horrendous.

CR: But this also contributes to the idea of the *snob*. For example the idea that Murano glass can be luxury and at the same time terrible and touristic.

AP: Yes of course – research has been done on Murano glass. However there is also the problem there that the designer, from a history of training, does not know materials, does not truly know what to pull out of the material, as materials - historic ones but also materials which are put into new shapes today, so become new materials, which are not craft materials. This is then a discussion of other abilities, capabilities; certain resins – of course even they can use them in certain ways - the work they they're doing down in Alessandria with Gaetano Pesce, Poggio for Zero Design, however even there I don't know.

CR: Something that interests me is how at certain points the relationship between design and craft seems closer, for example in Memphis.

AP: It seems, it seems, ah I don't know, there is everything to see there, seeing as even Memphis and Alchymia were failures. The argument was that having the need to produce however few pieces, on the one hand, besides they certainly they had very simple materials, as wood - if you think about Futurism which in Italy had a real significance...It renewed the landscape with wood, it made stools, sofas, tables, but it was the stuff of carpentry which even we could do in this room in some way. Ceramics - think about Albisola, about Tullio [d'Albisola], who did this there for example – not much glass because glass is more complicated to deal with. The proposals done by Alchymia, by Memphis etc went on to break linguistically the panorama that they had gone to create so these very, very interesting proposals which had as their references on the other hand definitely Futurism, and on the other the whole experience of the Wiener Werkstätte. The references are there. So, craft. They had to make pieces, or prototypes, in small series. Their world was that of the home so they had all these links, above all with these companies in Brianza. However they hadn't even theorised this relationship with craft.

Today I have the impression that, given the complexity of the market, so I believe that the motivation can even be there, there is a return to the theme of self-production; so the designer, a kid who is the product of the *Accademia di Brera* etc, who goes on to produce something, perhaps he even opens a small shop, and he makes one, two or three pieces or what those who go to him order. So there is this, there are these small companies...Nevertheless I believe that this choice of returning to manual skill is a not a philosophical or intellectual choice but one that is even forced also by the market conditions.

[Turns to her assistant, Antonella]

Antonella, you're finishing at the faculty of industrial design etc. Relationship with materials? You've had not much? Workshops they put you into to satisfy some curiosity.

Antonella: Well in reality, the *Politecnico* education is very technical. In the sense that in Italy there is a rift between design education of the *Politecnico*, which has a tradition of engineering, architecture, which is very linked to the materials. In fact I have done a course with the head of the chemistry department so there is attention.

AP: There is, however it is much more theoretical than practical in some ways, it gives suggestions

Antonella: It is not practical to the extent that there is hardly any experimentation, there are few possibilities to apply the awareness that there is in a theoretical sense. The best part of our exams - but every year, in physics, in chemistry – at the theoretical level there is. There is not the possibility of experimenting so if I have to make a model in STL I do not have structure directly in the university, so in studying materials there is not there the practical, manual aspect.

AP: In order to understand what happens

Antonella: Yes, there's not - there is one model workshop, so there are even simple things – for metal it is more complicated, there is the metal workshop, you need to ask for an appointment. You can't do anything with glass – so there is none of this more hand-made part.

CR: This is because they think that there are artisans who can do it – you don't have to do it.

AP: Well yes, but if she has to design a new glass, she should know about glass, and which type of glass, because it is not as if there exists glass, glass can be a thousand different things. I have a student at the *Poli* who is doing his dissertation on glass. However he is someone who has done an internship, not at Bormioli but at a firm there,

because he is from Parma and is someone who has knowledge about the material on his own back. He went into a company to understand certain things, then he did the faculty and now there he wants to marry the two experiences. However it is because he is someone who is at Parma, who has a father, an uncle, a grandfather with a glass company, so he knows, he has had the understanding on his own back of what happens, no? Industrial glass has however a whole series of truly extraordinary possibilities. If Antonella has to design a ceramic cup she designs it in terms of the form but it is a whole discussion about

Antonella: Of course, it is not as if there is a clay furnace, there is a materials library so you know in terms of formulas which should the right firing temperature however you don't have direct experience.

AP: A huge problem is that there isn't in Italy any longer the figure of, what was it called, the apprentice. The apprentice was that boy who could, after age thirteen go to Pozzi or to a position at Alessio Tasca's etc - in a legal way, in an institutional way, to do these things. Today you can't any more – if someone, if Tasca makes a lad go to his workshop, or Scappino's or one of the other, in short you risk – either it is his son, well fine but – and on the other hand everyone theorises that certain practices, certain knowledge about materials has to come very early.

CR: When did the apprentice disappear?

AP: How many years ago did they remove the figure of the apprentice, perhaps twenty years ago? Maybe even more?

Antonella: Less.

AP: Less?

Antonella: Yes. Less in the sense that when there was the landscape with everyone - it was even a recent thing, with the training contracts.

AP: with the training contracts, exactly.

Antonella: It was institutionalised, in the sense that he who was the apprentice at one time entered into the faculty, in the sense that now, for faculties of a certain type, there is a compulsory internship.

AP: Which however is at a certain age, they start to already be eighteen, twenty years old. While instead they say – I can believe it – that you can pull off a piece on the wheel at a younger age: I have seen extraordinary things done by Nanni Valentini who unfortunately has passed away, by other ceramist friends. I would like to see one of Antonella's student companions, Antonella herself [*inaudible*] take a piece of earth, of

clay, and pull out an animal like this! Altari is dead, at Altara they only work on vetro pyrex – which is shameful.

The large *piazza*, which they called the *piazza*, where there was in the middle the glass blower and on the right and on the left two boys who held up, who rotated these incandescent masses of glass which they pulled out of the furnace. So the *piazza* was made up of three people; two who held this mass, this magna of boiling glass and the glass blower who was working at the centre [*inaudible*] Today there is no longer anyone who knows how to do it...I met an old man who told me these things. Either tradition goes ahead, a small boy starts and first learns to hold up the mass of red-hot glass and then - and then he blows but he needs – there is a history of manual skill which, lies in making and does not lie at the desk.

CR: A figure like Guido Gambone in ceramics

AP: Yes! Of course.

CR: He was an apprentice

AP: He is still alive – ah Bruno, no Guido was the father. Bruno is still alive, in Florence.

CR: One last question, because I don't want to take up too much of your time

AP: Please, go ahead

CR: Do you think that craft can have a presence, or what type of presence can it have in a history of design.

AP: I believe that the history of craft is most important. And certainly it would be important. A few years ago a book came out done by a journalist, which was truly a history of different Italian artisans. It is a book that a journalist from Florence did, which is a survey of all the realities of Italian craft, it is something truly extraordinary – we speak about glass and ceramics but it is a - there's everything – basket-weaving, textiles, Bonfanti, Renata Bonfanti for example, you know Renata? In short many different situations.

APPENDIX 1. Participant Interviews

6. Anty Pansera Italian Transcript

Interview with Anty Pansera, Milan 25 June 2008, Milan.

AP = Anty Pansera

CR = Catharine Rossi

AP: Legata al design industriale, si *snob* molto l'artigianato, no? C'è un, come dire, una frattura che si sta io credo ricomponendo forse ai giorni nostri. Quella frattura che fa vedere anche gli arti decorativi, applicate come qualche cosa che non c'entrano. Come dire quella crescita che noi oltralpe vediamo nei paesi scandinavi piuttosto che, anche in parte in Francia in Germania armoniosa fra le due diverse realtà del fare il prodotto d'eccellenza il prodotto di piccola serie, di grande serie, qua ci sono delle tensioni diverse.

E si *snob* l'artigiano, anche perché c'è un discorso di formazione diversa, no? Quindi l'artigiano resta legato a tutto una serie di modi di fare ma non va ad aggiornare i suoi linguaggi; mentre invece chi fuoriesce dalla facoltà dell'architettura piuttosto che dalla Accademia di Belle Arti [di Brera] ha, come dire, grande attenzione innovative nei confronti del linguaggio, della grammatica, della sintassi espressiva. Poi però magari manca e ha delle cadute su quello che riguarda la conoscenza dei materiali - diciamo così no? Quindi tutto una serie di materiali 'tradizionali'. La ceramica, lei ha citato quindi ha citato la [Alessio] Tasca da una parte la [Antonia] Campi dall'altra che sono due figure assolutamente diverse. Perché Alessio Tasca va avanti con i materiali della tradizione e dall'altro canto innova linguisticamente per [inaudible] degli strumenti un po' d'artista. Antonia Campi, che viene dall'Accademia di Brera, che viene da scultura ecc, entra in un'azienda, la Sci di Laveno, e ha questa grandissima capacità di legarsi invece a una realtà produttiva e riesce a fare un paesaggio cosa che Alessio invece non fa per certi versi, no? Quindi c'è differenza fra le due figure; Campi mantiene per certi versi la sua ricerca sui materiali e come artista, ma ha la grande capacità di applicarla, di utilizzarla per Sci.

CR: E pensa che si può parlare in una storia si può parlare di Tasca, di Campi, di non so [Andrea] Branzi e la ceramica?

AP: Beh, Branzi è tutto un'altra cosa. Siamo anche in anni completamente diversi. Noi possiamo avvicinare di più la figura di Antonia Campi a quella di Ambrogio Pozzi perché Ambrogio Pozzi anche lui che viene comunque del mondo dell'arte - nel suo caso ha una propria azienda perché la Pozzi era del padre, no? Applica certi sue attenzioni e interessi per il disegno industriale e per la riproduzione in serie, no?

Branzi è tutto un altro maestro a parte la collocazione di età come dire beh Branzi è un architetto, arriva da Firenze ha tutte le sue esperienze ecc., va a utilizzare ovviamente anche la ceramica come anche Ettore Sottsass ecc., come uno dei materiali di cui non ha però una conoscenza propria, cioè mentre la Campi, Pozzi, Tasca quando fanno un progetto, sanno cosa succede al materiale che passa attraverso la cottura attraverso tutti problemi di ritrazione, a problemi di coloratura di smaltatura, insomma ecc - sa benissimo quello che succede.

Un personaggio come Sottsass lo ammetteva anche, che per lui era sempre un miracolo sapere cioè era sempre po' come una sorpresa cosa usciva da un forno oppure quando lui andava Ettore io ricordavo sempre quando andava a Murano a lavorare il vetro diceva 'beh! Io lavoro con maestro vetraio; ho una mia idea alla fine è tutt'altro, proprio perché io non conosco lo specifico del materiale'. Cioè il grosso problema della cultura progettuale italiana è stato quella che i progettisti, intesi in senso architetti, designer erano ben consapevoli dei cambiamenti di linguaggio ed erano come dire capaci di modulare una, una delle nuove frasi diciamo così, ma non conoscevano i materiali! Mentre invece nostri artigiani, fantastici sono ancora rimasti - per un discorso però legato alla formazione alle scuole - proprio sono rimasti a ripetere tutt'una serie di canoni.

Se noi pensiamo anche a legno le va alla Valle d'Aosta, alla fiera di S. Orso questo luogo incredibile dove trova del - tutta una serie per esempio di materiali per la cucina; cucchiari, tazze, piatti, ciotole, la famosa grolla che è questa, la grolla dell'amicizia che è questa specie di scatola dentro là con dei becchi da cui si beve il caffè con la grappa e là si fa girare in tavole. È un oggetto eccezionale, particolare della cultura gastronomica, diciamo così, o della convivialità. Però questa grolla che la vede intarsiata, intagliata benissimo; ma con dei beccucci delle stelle alpine, la testina dell'alcione, del camoscio che ecc. che sono delle stesse cose che lei va a ritrovarsi nel ottocento sa lì o dove c'è si vanno ripetere questi stilemi. Io anni fa avevo fatto un convegno proprio in Giappone a Karachi proprio su questo tema; sono pochi personaggi che si sono riusciti a sganciare.

Per esempio un materiale interessante è l'argento. Qui c'è stato la grande svolta che è riuscito a fare il Piero de Vecchi che è sempre esposto in Triennale e poi il figlio, Gabriele, che essendo un artista avendo fatto l'Accademia di Brera, avendo militato - diciamo così - nell'*Arte Programmata*, Gruppo T, Gabriele è poi riuscito a prendere l'attività del padre, che comunque era già di ricerca in qualche modo, e fargli fa un

grossissimo salto. Ma normalmente se lei va a vedere l'argenteria, che è una delle tradizioni, sono pochi personaggi di spicco. Lino Sabbatini che è riuscito a fare un salto. Anche lui però viene da un mestiere, viene da una conoscenza della pratica e poi per una sua propria sensibilità riesce ad agganciare il linguaggio del contemporaneo.

Perché la scuola purtroppo in Italia, facendo un discorso storico, non ha dato questo contributo, quindi noi [*inaudible*] abbiamo moltissimi artigiani bravissimi, che fanno delle cose terrificanti. Io penso al pizzo, no? Ne abbiamo il tradizione del pizzo di Burano, il pizzo di Cantù ecc così. Se io penso all'estero a Norvegia ecc cosa che si sta facendo con il pizzo. Le nostre donne qua o chi frequenta queste scuole continua a fare il centrino. Hanno una grande manualità, ma non hanno avuto, non c'è la capacità di cambiare il linguaggio e anche la tipologia. C'è il centrino - chi mette il centrino sotto l'ammazzo di fiori, sotto il vaso di fiori oggi, non? Piuttosto che sulla poltrona. Io ho visto delle cose fatte in Olanda proprio dove si vanno a recuperare questi materiali e da parte degli studenti di queste scuole. C'è da una parte il saper fare il pizzo, c'è sanno come trattare l'uncinetto, il filo; ma dall'altro ha l'*underground* tale che questo tipo di manufatto va ad acquisire un significato assolutamente nuovo e legato al ventunesimo secolo.

CR: Ma questo tipo di formazione è tutta parte dell'idea dello *snob* verso l'artigianato?

AP: Non, è legato a un concetto filosofico [*inaudible*] che perdura ancora io credo un po' in Italia è che la filosofia idealista, [Giovanni] Gentile e quella riforma che Gentile fece nel '23 che comunque si va sentire ancora adesso insomma io ho l'impressione. Quindi le scuole che non hanno a loro interno i laboratori o le scuole che hanno le laboratori non hanno invece quelle altre materie che possono dare agli studenti la cultura del progetto da andare ad applicare poi ai materiali.

Si faceva recentemente con degli amici che hanno costruito della scuola dell'alberghiera, no? La cucina: il tema della cucina italiana, la grande gastronomia, che è stato molto superato oramai dalle esperienze straniere, no? In Italia nelle scuole alberghi dove s'insegna a cucinare non c'è ancora un programma che metta vicino al sapere qua c'è la pasta, gli arrostiti qualche non c'è, non ci sono ancora quelle serie di materie che preparino una nuova figura di cuoco, una nuova figura di personaggio che riesce a rapportarsi anche con, col consumatore; sono molti pochi il *craco* [?] della situazione a Milano.

Sono personaggi che si sono formati da solo che sanno apparecchiare tavolo in un certo modo, mettere sul piatto anche solo una fetta di prosciutto in un certo modo ecc. Sia ancora del immaginario la cuoca tutto un po' sudaticcio, il cuoco in cucina e poi qualcuno che butta la roba sui piatti e arriva. Cioè le scuole non danno questo tipo di preparazione. C'è uno che fa il cuoco oggi dovrebbe studiare la storia dell'arte, la storia

dell'architettura, la storia della comunicazione per sapere che l'ottimo pollo alla cacciatora a che fa deve poi metterlo sul piatto non buttandolo lì, ma mettendolo su un piatto a pose ecc ecc. Quindi c'è questo problema che è nella formazione.

È chiaro che poi c'è l'individuo singolo che riesce ad acculturarsi, no? Quindi noi abbiamo delle figure anche nel mondo del - però la cosa proprio si discuteva con questi amici architetti che paesi dove la cucina non ha mai avuto una tradizione leggi l'Inghilterra, non - perché lei arriva da lì, oggi hanno nelle liste mondiali ecc dei cuochi importanti. Come mai, da dove sono venuti fuori perché la vostra cucina era una cucina insomma modesta diciamo così, non? Al livello d'immagine, di qualità di ricette ecc. La Spagna ha una realtà più simile all'Italia, però anche lì c'è tutto, è stato tutto un salto proprio nel momento della formazione. Ed ecco perché sono venuti fuori tutte queste serie di grandi cuochi che vengono a occasione della [*inaudible*] è una *star system* oramai sono pochi gli italiani, no? Questo per spostarci nel campo della cultura gastronomica del *food* che tanto oggi affascina.

CR: Ma pensa che, nel senso che tutti pensano che ci saranno sempre italiani che sanno fare il cuoco, il rapporto tra il progettista di design e l'artigianato è basato sull'idea, sull'assunto che ci sarà sempre la perizia artigiana?

AP: Sì certo, la conoscenza dei materiali su cui si va a lavorare insomma. Io vedo spesso anche alle università delle tesi dove mi capita di seguire la parte storico-critica anche, in accademia ecc e dove c'è la parte progettuale. E la parte progettuale denota spesso volentieri la non conoscenza da parte dello studente del materiale che va a trattare, no? Non è che un designer deve sapere tutto di tutto di tutto. Però, deve avere, ma come dire l'umiltà di capire cosa vuol dire vetro, cosa vuol dire ceramica, cosa vuol dire acciaio, quali sono le possibilità e le potenzialità di un materiale che va conosciuto. Perché erm se non come dire - c'è io posso fare anche un vaso di acciaio, in ceramica, in vetro ecc ma che senso ha? Io devo conoscere la materiale per poterlo sforzare in un certo modo.

CR: Ma questo è una cosa italiana, pensa? Diversa dall'Inghilterra?

AP: Certo, ma certo perché abbiamo delle scuole diverse.

CR: Anche una storia diversa.

AP: Una storia diversa, una scuola diversa quindi la formazione che è diversa, erm come dire noi abbiamo avuto, abbiamo una grande stagione ovviamente del design italiano, anche quando le aziende investivano tantissimo in ricerca.

CR: Nel periodo dopoguerra?

AP: Eh certo. Oggi chi investe in ricerca? Nessuno, cioè poco, quindi in quei momenti lì i designer aveva l'opportunità di un Marco Zanuso di sapere cosa stava facendo la Pirelli, capire questa gommapiuma che era stata progettata per utilizzare in tempo guerra [...] per proteggere serbatoi ecc. Ha avuto disposizione un materiale straordinario ha avuto un'azienda che gli ha offerto la possibilità di capire come traslare questo materiale da un momento per cui era nato, bellico chiamolo così.

Oggi la ricerca chi la fa? L'università? Non ha tanto gli strumenti per farla perché non ci sono così tanti soldi, un po' di laboratori ma insomma. Ci dovrebbero essere più sinergia probabilmente per la facoltà di architettura o di design come a Bovisa ecc e magari con i laboratori di facoltà di chimica, di fisica non lo so, non la vedo così tanto una sinergia. Le aziende hanno laboratori dove fanno delle cose ma magari poi hanno soltanto figure interne, non hanno tantissimo rapporto con l'esterno perché il designer come dire esterno, *freelance* ha anche il ruolo di spostare conoscenza tecnologiche da un'azienda all'altra. Io vado a disegnare una lampada, comincio ad entrare in un'azienda scopro certe cose poi prendo e le sposto che non è così semplice [*inaudible*]. Un tempo era maggiore questo tipo di spostamento, non? Designer come un'ape che impollina e sposta delle situazioni. Non so dall'altro posso raccontare.

CR: Forse una cosa che non so se voglio fare, infatti, è di tento di definire l'artigianato in Italia perché io vengo da un paese, da una tradizione totalmente diversa e non voglio sbagliare quando parlo dell'Italia. C'è so che sia diversa e che Morris e Ruskin non si c'entrano niente.

AP: L'artigianato in Italiano - sono tante designer che hanno cercato di attualizzarlo. Uno è Ugo La Pietra per esempio che ha cercato di fare tutto di più con tutto i materiali della tradizione. Ugo La Pietra non so se vuol vederlo abita qua anche vicino, ha fatto anche questa rivista che si chiama *l'Artigianato* ecc dove ha sempre cercato di mettere in rapporto le designer e i progettisti quindi persone che avessero una cultura del progetto di quello che volevo dire il linguaggio della contemporaneità con degli artigiani. Di tutti tipi possibili quindi non solo vetro e ceramica, legno, molto va beh sulla ceramica ha lavorato, ma anche per esempio sulla pietra [...] sull'alabastro che è un materiale tragica cioè intendo dire con l'alabastro continuano a fare delle porchette tremende ma anche perché l'alabastro ha delle sue come materiale - è poroso non so, ha tutto una serie di cose molto ben studiate. È tanta la gente in Italia che ha fatto dei lavori - lo stesso Burkhardt per esempio, sull'alabastro ha lavorato François Burkhardt.

CR: Mangiarotti?

AP: Angelo Mangiarotti ha lavorato su queste cose qua. Però il discorso che i pezzi, come dire, io non vedo che ci sia mai stato davvero un rapporto stretto. Intendo dire io stesso ho fatto delle operazioni mettendo delle designer in contatto con delle realtà - ho

fatto per i vetri di Altari tutto questo lavoro porta e avendo come sponsor Absolut Vodka - quindi un bicchierino della Vodka ridisegnato da Munari, dalla stessa Campi, da tutta una serie, da Sardo, da tutta una serie di designer. Però questi qui hanno fatto loro disegnino, sono andati giù ad Altari non tutti: è andata giù la Nanda Vigo, è andata giù la Campi, Sottsass tutto per telefono ecc., ma non sono andati a vedere cosa diavolo il vetro poteva fare, no? Hanno fatto il loro disegnino poi il bicchierino lì si poteva fare in argento o in ceramica o in acciaio o sa Dio, ed era lo stesso.

Io sono, continuo a essere convinta me sono in disaccordo con la Pietra c'è che non basta prendere un designer e metterlo a contatto così molto epidermico con un artigiano. Bisogna io credo che gli artigiani soprattutto maturino una loro cultura di linguaggio nuovo. Questi qua di Altari che fanno il vetro, sono bravissimi non, questi artigiani che io ho conosciuto ecc ma cosa diavolo fanno? Fanno le porchette di animaletti che si vendono a Murano. Perché? Perché il mercato chiede - c'è loro funzionano per il mercato. La gente va da Altara a visitare il museo del Altara va in giro per il paese cosa compra? Queste porchette che sono le stesse che si comprano a Murano. Le bestioline. Vanno i ragazzini della scuola a tre, quattro cinque euro questa roba lì che sono veramente delle cose terrificanti, no?

CR: Ma questo anche contribuisca all'idea dello *snob*. Per esempio che il vetro di Murano può essere anche lusso e allo stesso tempo una cosa terribile di turistico.

AP: Eh certo sul vetro di Murano la ricerca se n'è fatta. Però anche lì il problema è che il progettista, ma per una storia di formazione, non conosce materiale non sa davvero cosa può tirare fuori dal materiale, perché i materiali hanno delle potenze, sia quelli storici ma anche materiali come dire che si stanno a oggi nuovi messi in forma saranno, verranno nuovi materiali che non sono i materiali dell'artigiano perché lì poi c'è un discorso di altra capacità, potenzialità di realizzazione di insomma. Certe resine - certo si possono anche utilizzare in certe maniere il lavoro che li fa giù ad Alessandria con Gaetano Pesce, il Poggio per Zero Design insomma però insomma anche lì non lo so.

CR: Una cosa che m'interesse è come a certi punti il relazione tra design e l'artigianato sembra forse più stretto. Per esempio nel Memphis.

AP: Sembra, sembra, beh non lo so anche lì tutto da vedere visti poi anche fallimenti Memphis e Alchymia che ci sono stati. Il discorso è stato che avendo l'esigenza di produrre comunque pochi pezzi beh - a parte che hanno certo dei materiali molto semplice perché legno - allora pensi al Futurismo che in Italia ha avuto una sua pregnanza, ha detto anche molto del manifesto che era del quindici ma in realtà non c'era dell'industria. Hanno rinnovato il panorama in legno, perché facevano seggiole, divani, tavole ma le robe della falegnameria che possiamo fare anche noi in questa stanza in qualche modo cambiava la forma proprio. Ceramica, pensiamo ad Albisola al

Tullio, a quello questo ha fatto lì per esempio - poco vetro perché è già più complicato a trattare. Le proposte fatte dall'Alchymia dalla Memphis ecc vanno a rompere linguisticamente il panorama che si erano andati a creare quindi proposte molte molte interessanti che hanno come riferimenti da una parte sicuramente il Futurismo dall'altro tutto l'esperienza del Wiener Werkstätte. Perché i riferimenti sono quelli lì. Erm, l'artigianato. Loro avevano da realizzare dei pezzi comunque o prototipi in piccola serie. Il mondo era quello della casa quindi del legno, ecco che hanno avuto tutti questi rapporti soprattutto con queste aziende della Brianza. Però non l'hanno neanche teorizzato questo rapporto con l'artigianato.

Oggi io ho l'impressione che invece, vista però la complessità del mercato, quindi la motivazione io credo che possa essere anche lì, c'è un ritorno al tema dell'auto-produzione; quindi progettista, ragazzo che è prodotto dell'Accademia di Brera ecc che va a produrre qualche cosa, addirittura magari si apre un piccolo negozio [...] e fa uno, due o tre pezzi oppure quelli che li vanno a ordinare. Quindi c'è questa, ci sono delle piccole imprese non so come dire. Però io credo che questa scelta di tornare alla manualità si è una scelta non come dire filosofica, intellettuale ma molto imposta anche dalle condizioni del mercato.

[Turns to her assistant, Antonella]

Antonella, tu che sei che stai finendo una facoltà di disegno industriale ecc. Rapporto con i materiali? Ne avete avuti pochi? Laboratori che vi hanno messo dentro a appagare.

Antonella: Ma in realtà, la formazione Politecnico è molto tecnica. In senso che in Italia si è proprio la spaccatura tra la formazione *design* del Politecnico che quindi ha una tradizione d'ingegneria, architettura che è molto legata ai materiali. C'è io ho comunque fatto il corso con il direttore del dipartimento di chimica quindi comunque l'attenzione c'è.

AP: C'è, però è molto più teorica che pratica in qualche modo, da delle suggestioni.

Antonella: Allora non è pratica nella misura in cui c'è poca sperimentazione, c'è poca possibilità di applicare in senso che in linea teorica c'è l'attenzione. Quindi c'è fior fior gli esami ma tutti gli anni, c'è di fisica, di chimica, quindi al livello teorico c'è. Non c'è la possibilità poi di sperimentare per cui di fatto se io devo fare un modello in STL non ho la struttura direttamente in università. Quindi allo studio delle materie non c'è poi l'aspetto pratico, manuale.

AP: Per capire quella cosa succede.

Antonella: Sì, quindi non c'è - c'è un laboratorio di modelli, quindi c'è su cose anche abbastanza semplici c'è per i metalli è più complesso c'è il laboratorio per i metalli

bisogna chiedere un appuntamento. C'è sul vetro non si può fare [...] nulla, quindi non c'è questa parte più artigianale.

CR: Perché pensano che ci siano degli artigiani che possono farlo c'è tu non devi farli.

AP: Eh sì, però lei, se deve disegnare un nuovo bicchiere, dovrebbe sapere il vetro, e quale tipo di vetro, perché non è come esiste il vetro, il vetro può essere trenta mila cose diverse. Allora io c'è l'ho uno studente del Poli che fa una tesi sul vetro ecc, però è uno che si è fatto uno stage non alla Bormioli ma a un'azienda li sembra perché lui è di Parma ed è uno che ha una conoscenza del materiale sulla sua pelle, no? Lui è stato in azienda a conoscere certe cose poi ha fatto la facoltà e lì vuole adesso sposare le due esperienze. Però è perché è uno che sta a Parma, che ha il padre, lo zio, il nonno che ha un'azienda di vetro allora lui sa, ha avuto sulla sua pelle la conoscenza di cose succede, no? Vetro industriale comunque ha tutto una serie di potenzialità veramente straordinaria. Sono un po' questo che se Antonella deve disegnare una tazza in ceramica la disegna formalmente ma per esempio è tutto il discorso di cosa capita.

Antonella: Sì, beh certo non c'è il forno per la ceramica, c'è una "materialteca" per cui tu sai c'è sai in termini di formuli quale deve essere la temperatura di cottura, però non hai poi l'esperienza diretta.

AP: Un grosso problema è che non esiste più in Italia la figura del come si chiamava, dell'apprendista. L'apprendista era quel ragazzo che poteva dopo le tre di medie andare dal Pozzi o dalla situazione di Alessio Tasca ecc in, maniera legale cioè in maniera istituzionale senza fare, a fare queste cose qui. Oggi non puoi più se uno se Tasca fa andare da lui in bottega o da Scappino o altri un ragazzino e insomma si rischia, o è suo figlio insomma va beh ma se non e dall'altro canto tutti teorizzano che certi pratiche certi conoscenze con il materiale devono avvenire molto presto.

CR: Ma quando è sparito l'apprendista?

AP: Quanti anni fa che l'avranno tolto la figura dell'apprendista, una ventina d'anni? Forse anche di più?

Antonella: Meno.

AP: Meno?

Antonella: Sì. Meno in senso che quando c'è stato il paesaggio con tutti è una cosa anche recentemente con i contratti di formazione.

AP: Con i contratti di formazione esattamente.

Antonella: C'è stato istituzionalizzato in senso che quello che era l'apprendista di una volta è entrato nelle facoltà nel senso che adesso c'è per la facoltà di un certo tipo c'è lo stage obbligatorio.

AP: Che però è a certi età. Cominciano ad avere già diciotto, vent'anni. Mentre invece si dice - ci posso anche credere - che a età più bassa che si riesca tira su un pezzo al tornio: io ho visto delle cose straordinarie fatte da Nanni Valentini che purtroppo è mancato, da altri amici ceramisti. Io voglio vedere se uno studente, compagno di Antonella, Antonella stessa ecc [*inaudible*] da un pezzo di terra, di argilla, tirarsi una bestia così insomma. Altari è morta, ad Altara oramai lavorano solo sul vetro pyrex - che è vergognoso ma va beh.

Perché le grandi piazze che si chiamavano piazze dove c'era in mezzo il soffiatore e a destra e a sinistra due ragazzi che tenevano su, facendo le ruotare queste masse incandescenti di vetro che toglievano dal forno. Quindi la piazza era fatto da tre persone: i due che reggevano questa massa, questo magma di bollente, di vetro e il soffiatore al centro che lavorava. [*inaudible*] Oggi non c'è più nessuno che sappia farlo perché - c'è un signore anziano che ho conosciuto che mi raccontava queste cose ma o nella tradizione va avanti un ragazzino comincia e prima impara tenersi la massa infuocata di vetro e poi - poi soffia ma ha bisogno di come dire, è una storia di manualità che si costituisce nel fare non si costituisce a tavolino insomma.

CR: Sì una figura come Guido Gambone nella ceramica.

AP: Ah! Certo.

CR: Lui era apprendista.

AP: Ancora viva ah Bruno non certo Guido era il padre. Bruno ancora vive, si trova a Firenze sì.

CR: Una domanda ultima, perché non vorrei prendere troppo tempo.

AP: Sì, prego.

CR: Pensa o pensate che l'artigianato può avere una presenza, o che tipo di presenza può avere in una storia di design.

AP: Ma io credo che sia importantissima la storia dell'artigianato. È sicuramente sarei importante, era uscito anni fa un libro che aveva fatto un giornalista che era proprio una storia di diversi artigiani italiani interessantissimi. C'è un libro che ha fatto un giornalista di Firenze che è un censimento di tutte le realtà artigianali italiane che, è qualche cosa veramente straordinario perché noi parliamo di vetro e ceramica ma è una

cavolata – c'è tutta la cesteria, tutto il tessuto, la Bonfanti, per esempio Renata Bonfanti, la conosce la Renata? Insomma sono tantissime situazioni.

APPENDIX 1. Participant Interviews

7. Barbara Radice Transcript.

Interview with Barbara Radice, Milan, 12 April 2010

We met in Barbara Radice's house in the centre of Milan, a flat she used to share with Sottsass and featured furniture and objects designed by the architect. We first discussed the forthcoming Postmodernism exhibition. The interview took place in English.

BR = Barbara Radice

CR = Catharine Rossi

BR: Shiro Kuramati has zero to do with postmodernism unless with postmodernism you put inside Kawakubo, or even Westwood - it's an American idea, Postmodernism, and that's it!

CR: My first few questions were about you,

BR: Me?

CR: I am very interested in your role in all of this period, and I'm also particularly interested in Italian women who were important in Italian design and I wanted to know a bit more about how you got involved

BR: Me?

CR: Yes

BR: But I was not a designer, nor an architect, but a writer

CR: I know, yes but that was important

BR: I was involved because I was living with Ettore, very simply.

CR: So, how did you meet, if I can ask Ettore, if I can ask?

BR: *Certo*, we met in Venice in '76 at the Biennale of Venice I was working there producing the catalogue and producing the- [Vittorio] Gregotti who at the time was the director for the *Biennale* and Sottsass was designing the exhibition at Giudecca, you know was doing the layout of the exhibition. And so we met. And that's it, and that was June, July and in November he came into my apartment! So it was very fast. But at that time he was married to a lady and he had a lover in Spain, so it really was completely out of my mind that he would be after me in any way, so I was taking him out and showing him, you know, taking him to a restaurant and blah blah

blah. And then when we got back in Milano in the fall I wrote the architect on something it's very strange in fact, at that time he was doing a work that he called *costruzioni* which were like kind of conceptual work - do you know this work? It was called Metaphors.

CR: I think I know this, they were constructions in the desert?

BR: Constructions in the desert - okay let me show you [*Radice goes to her office to retrieve book*]. This is fact the only, the only conceptual work in architecture, serious in those years, but of years - of course this has nothing to do with postmodernism.

CR: No, but it's a very interesting period.

BR: This is it. So I thought that it was incredibly beautiful. And I wrote an article - you don't believe it

[*Radice shows me a page spread from the magazine Data Arte called Memphis Blues '76*]

CR: Wow! My goodness.

BR: I invented this story there was a story that goes

CR: You're right, I don't believe you

BR: It's strange, eh? *Ma* nobody knows this. So the article begins like this - when I went to see Ettore Sottsass in - to see the works - because the works for the first time would be shown at the Cooper Hewitt in New York, in an exhibition that would be organised by Hans Hollein, called *Forms*. And he - Sottsass - I said he was continuing to sing 'oh mama can this really be the end, to be stuck inside of Mobile with the Memphis Blues again.' And then, I don't know

CR: But this was '76?!

BR: *Si*, I'm telling you

BR: This is groundbreaking!

BR: It's very strange, *allora* I don't know why I did this, but then - do you remember the song? Because I know it by heart.

CR: I know that phrase.

BR: No no, the song says [*Radice half sings*] Anyway, he answers to her, he is invited by a girl to go and dance with her kind of Panamanian moon so he must be in the Tropics and he says oh come on, you know about my debutante, he says, answers to her, I cannot come with you and she answers to him but yes oh your debutante just knows what you need, but I know what you want. So I don't know why, I just started this article, and then he read the article and he said, 'ah, very nice article you

wrote, thank you very much', and then a week later he invited me for dinner and at that point I said uh oh, maybe.

Okay, so, this song, again was on that night, and this was not invented, and then he said - but I never mentioned it - you don't have to mention it

CR: I have to mention it - the curators will be as happy as I am!

BR: Ah *si?!* So that's how we met and then he went in October around the world - to New York for the opening of the Metaphors exhibition - it was called *Man Transforms* at that time, it was organised by Hans Hollein I remember that. And then some of the later Metaphors you know the ones where I appear, usually undressed, called fiancé - *La mia fidanzata qualche volta si senta sola* [*sometimes my girlfriend feels lonely*].

CR: They're amazing you went out in the desert

BR: Yes, in Arizona...This is a great book [*Metaphors*]. Anyway that's how we met. And then we started living together immediately and then when Memphis started I was writing about art, a magazine called *Modo* that was published by - the editor was Mendini at the time. And he said, because when Memphis started -they were all architects and designers, nobody could write - not that nobody could write, they had no time they told me can you help us I said okay okay I'll help and I was involved forever in this story. But I mean it just started just like that!

CR: So you wrote the book, and put the book together.

BR: Which book?

CR: The Memphis book. Yes, I find it interesting that at the same time Memphis was happening there was already the book.

BR: What do you mean the same time? The Book was done four years later.

CR: Wasn't there something in '82, '83?

BR: The small one? Of course, that was done on purpose for the first exhibition - do you have the book?

CR: We have the big one sponsored by Abet

BR: I give it to you. I think I want to give you the book. No, it's very important

[*Radice leaves the room to fetch book on Memphis*]

BR: So here there is a very nice text, of Ettore, I'm a very good public relations! I think this is great, it's the last one, I think - this is not particularly good this translation. But better for the press release.

CR: Thank you! Before Memphis, I saw that you - and maybe this is wrong, curated an installation at Linz.

BR: No that was Alchymia, I never curated anything for Alchymia.

CR: But were you involved in Alchymia.

BR: I was involved in everything as I was living night and day with Ettore, so I was involved in absolutely everything, I was in Linz, it was a moment where everyone was discussing, I was writing in *Modo*, on these subjects, so I knew what was going on - but I was not curating.

CR: You also wrote *Elogio Banale*

BR: I wrote ... it's done by me, but that's not curating, that's curating a book.

CR: Out of interest - today you're also journalist still, and author?

BR: Today, I write, that's what I've always done [*Radice goes to get a book of her poetry*]. I basically wrote poems, sometimes articles if they ask me.

CR: Did you study literature?

BR: I studied literature at the *facoltà lettere e filosofia*, I graduated in history of art in Milano. My father was an artist. [*Radice shows me another book, and says that Sottsass' autobiography coming out in a few months, published by Adelphi*].

BR: I'm inundating you with news!

CR: Did he keep a diary?

BR: He started writing towards 2000, he arrived up to the sixties, he had written before in other periods.

CR: The 60s, 70s - that very politicised period - were you also involved in '68?

BR: I was living in London at that time [...] I was studying English.

CR: So you weren't here when for example the Triennale was occupied, all that?

BR: No.

CR: Living in London did that put a different aspect on it?

BR: I think so, I liked London, liked it very much,

CR: It's a great city. Well you speak English very well.

BR: Very well? I don't know. I remember I arrived late at this course and I spent many hours - they put me with the headphones and *una registratore*, one of those

machines, and there was someone saying Mrs Smith going out for dinner tonight and I had to repeat exactly the same way for hours! There is a Tree in the Garden

CR: I think it is still the same, unfortunately.

BR: I came back in '72, '73 when I came back I was working in *Abitare, Arte* magazine, then I met Ettore. I was finished. I wanted to go and live in LA at the time but he said to me I don't think I can come.

CR: And so you were watching everything that was going on - with Global Tools, Cavart, with radical design

BR: Cavart? It was Michele de Lucchi who was Cavart. I was at *Data Arte* at that time - I was not particularly interested in design, I started getting interested in design with Sottsass. Before I was basically writing about art. But I remember the Cavart, Napoleone, blah blah, Michele de Lucchi [...] So I started really getting involved with Memphis.

CR: I'm writing about the production of Memphis object. ...Could I ask you about some of the producers involved?

BR: If I know, I tell you for sure

CR: Someone who interests me is Renzo Brugola,

BR: Poor Renzo, I don't know if he's still alive - have you spoken to him?

[...]

CR: I heard he had a jazz record shop in the fifties

BR: He was very friendly with Ettore, and Ettore asked him to produce Memphis when he decided to do that

[Radice locates a phone number and rings Brugola as we're talking, and offers me his number to organise an interview]

BR: He's very old, he's not well, he can't move, he lives out of Milan - but he's a nice man.

CR: I know that Sottsass and Brugola worked together in the sixties, on the *Superboxes*.

BR: You are aware that most of the Superboxes that he photographed in the sixties were models, no?

CR: The ones in *Domus*?

BR: Most of them were models.

CR: That's interesting

BR: He did two or three or four, he was doing all the layout, most of the photographs

CR: They're very nice photographs

BR: He's a genius. When I was told that they were models I couldn't believe it, also I found, a little box full of dolls things for doing - I was in tears, it is so moving, to see this poor *disgraziato* who didn't have nothing - all models!

CR: Like a doll's house -

BR: Yes, like - what's her stupid name?

CR: Barbie!

BR: All photographs of models - he made up the little thing, yes I even have the objects, the doll things!

CR: You have this?

BR: If you come tomorrow to the studio I'll show you. Some were made [...] these people had nothing [...] I remember when I found those things I was in tears, you feel the stress of someone who did this incredible thing, and he was there.

[...]

CR: So Renzo Brugola was involved, Sottsass approached him.

BR: They were friends, I think he was doing, I don't know what the first things. When I met Ettore in '76 he was already there, he knew him for ages.

CR: In *Domus* they talk about it from being the early 60s

BR: The doctorate is yours eh!

CR: So when it came to saying that they wanted someone to make the Memphis furniture - because there is the Memphis 'story' that gets repeated.

BR: Because it is true

CR: Of course, but then there are also lots of other details that I'm quite interested in. One version I've seen is that the Godanis, Mario and Brunella Godani wanted Sottsass to produce a series of furniture.

BR: That's ridiculous, are you joking? Which version, who? Nobody can say this! Where did you read this? What happened is that they wanted to do an exhibition, the group of Ettore, with a group of younger people so Ettore said we need - it's very simple, we need a place to show, and someone to make the furniture. The furniture will be made by Brugola, but we need someone to make lamps. So - Brugola had already said yes, the Godanis said we give the space for the exhibition. For the

lamps Ettore went to see Gismondi, of Artemide, said yes not only will I do the lamp, but I will help you, I will do a company, we do this blah blah and that's it, finished. Nothing more, very simple, just like that. Mario and Brunella didn't ask anything - it's not so.

CR: So there was Brugola who made the furniture, if I can ask this, for a small amount - I understand it wasn't commercial.

BR: I don't know - the money problem I don't remember. We didn't pay anything for sure, I think the money was put forward by Gismondi, and by Brugola probably, and by a friend, I don't remember his name right now that was producing lamps with Gismondi at that time.

CR: Was it Fausto Celati?

BR: Fausto Celati. He was also producing lamps. And Gismondi and Celati and Brugola and Godani put the money in the sense that he put the showroom. But we didn't pay anything - I say we - I didn't design anything, I wrote, but the architect and the designer put the drawings.

CR: In February I met Pierluigi Ghianda.

BR: Ghianda? He is a fantastic maker of cabinets, he's fantastic.

CR: Amazing.

BR: Amazing.

CR: And he had a couple of prototypes in his workshop, like Peter Shire's *Brazil* table, and a George Sowden chair. Was he also involved at the beginning?

BR: No he was never involved, I don't know how he has this, I have no idea, because Ghianda is so expensive we couldn't - he's incredibly expensive. I have a piece of - come and I'll show you - it's fantastic, but it's like gold you know [*We go and inspect a cabinet made by Ghianda in another room in the apartment*] he did not work for Memphis, he made some drawings of Ettore for a gallery of Rudy Volpe, via Pontaccio 17, very beautifully, but they were not Memphis, they were done later. I can show these to you, but it had nothing to do with -

CR: Okay, in terms of Abet Laminati, were they involved from the beginning?

BR: The very beginning, because Ettore's *bacterio* and *spugnato*, the two basic laminates, and *rete* they were done, designed in '77, in the Memphis book there is a date. [*Radice goes to get the Memphis book to check the dates*]

BR: Abet was always involved with Ettore, si, *Design for Chairs* '79 there was a laminate, I think we published something - '78.

CR: Is this book the one you edited? There's a picture I find intriguing - [*I show Radice a photograph of Marco Zanini's Alpha Centauri vase from 1982, with what appears to be milk or glue being poured from it*].

BR: I don't know who did the photograph, I basically did the text.

CR: I'm interested in how these objects got made, and the relationship with traditional craft, particularly in the case of glass.

BR: The glass was quite difficult because - [*Radice refers to the laminates in the Memphis book*] it was designed in '78, '79 Ettore always a very strong relationship with Abet Print, because in the sixties they had done the plastic laminate for the Superboxes. The Striped [*inaudible*] and so they were very important and so they produced all these plastic laminates by Abet Print for Ettore.

CR: Because they could produce on any scale?

BR: Exactly they have a great - this is the *Casablanca*

CR: Yes, which we're including. So Sottsass designed some of the laminates and then Abet would send these over to the producers?

BR: Send these over to the people who were making the furniture.

CR: And then they would just glue them on.

BR: Yes

CR: So in terms of the other producers, such as Toso Vetri d'Arte who made the glass objects, you said they were quite difficult?

BR: Well you know this thing here is not so easy, I'm not an expert but there is a nice article he wrote

CR: About the glue culture

BR: Exactly - so he was asking, I don't know this particular one was glued or not, but this thing was quite shocking for the *maestri* in Murano, because it was their pride and they would do everything blah blah blah only certain things could not be done by blowing, so Ettore thought if they could add a little glue here and there, much more complicated things could be done, and more interestingly formally.

CR: Glue seems like a very non - for the *maestri*, the idea of using glue

BR: Well because they were not used to it. Not traditional you know. But everything is glued, even a skyscrapers are glued.

CR: That's a nice quote, I'll use that!

BR: Planes are glued!

[...]

CR: But obviously all the producers wanted to be involve

BR: I don't know if they wanted, we wanted them to be involved, because Memphis was zero at the beginning and so we had to find people making things, so for us - how can I say it - it was we who wanted to look for them, it was not them looking for us because we needed someone to work

CR: So did you have difficulty finding producers to work with you?

BR: No, not particularly, because Gismondi was helping and Ettore was already known, so you know there was a lot of enthusiasm. There was difficulty to get them to do things very well sometimes, but they were really helpful, everybody, I don't have memory of difficulties, the difficulties was always to find the money to produce these things, as usual.

CR: So would Sottsass, would he go out to the producers, to the *botteghe*, to the *vetrarie*

BR: They would produce drawings, and then give it to them, and then all the architects would go and check how the things were made.

CR: So the other architects were going and seeing how

BR: Yeah everybody was looking after his own pieces.

CR: And were you also involved in this process?

BR: No, I was not involved in checking the products no, if they asked me my opinion I would give it! I was not involved in production, no.

CR: Because there were lots of different architects involved in Memphis, and there were lots of different ideas and designs, would Sottsass look at them, check them before they get sent to the producers, the designs?

BR: Yeah there were meetings, I was participating in them too, we would do meetings where everybody was bringing the drawings, and everybody would discuss what would be included and what not.

CR: So some things made it and some things didn't. And you already said that some of the laminates were already designed a few years ago, and I think one of Bedin's lamps already existed as a sketch before Memphis happened.

BR: A lamp? *Super*? No *Super* was done for Memphis.

CR: What I'm getting to ask is - were all the designs new?

BR: Sottsass participated in Alchymia. So some pieces, before Memphis started, were designed for Alchymia he did some very beautiful pieces for Alchymia, some were exhibited in Linz

Like *Strutture Tremano*

BR: *Strutture Tremano*, *Factotum*, and some others - so the laminates were used even for those, in fact maybe they even designed before, they were designed for Alchymia, they were exhibited in Alchymia.

CR: Something that we'd like to make clear in the exhibition are the similarities but also the differences.

BR: The Similarities and differences are very important. The similarities are - Ettore Sottsass he doesn't change from one thing to another. The reason why - these were prototypes.

CR: For Alchymia

BR: The ones done for Alchymia have always been prototypes. They were doing *objets d'art* if you like. The reason why Ettore wanted to leave Alchymia and the Mendini stream which is more Dadaist, comes more from culture of Dadaism and from the culture of if you want Counter Design, you know, he wanted to produce, to have objects that would enter into production as furniture.

CR: Sottsass did.

BR: Yes. So mendini was interested in this, in Kandinsky, in the remake, in the banal and all that, while de Lucchi - these are very beautiful - Mendini was saying at that time - that all one can do is only to redesign, that there is no design possible, while Sottsass and de Lucchi for instance were saying no, I don't believe that all you can do is redesign, in fact we're leaving this story because we don't agree, I mean I like what you do but we'll do another story, and the other story was Memphis. That's why there was this quite fatal split in 1980, where Sottsass with this group of young people, including Michele de Lucchi who was also in Alchymia but left, say no - this is very important of course nobody - we don't need even to repeat this anymore, but this is the real production of furniture, in fact the firm still exists

CR: The Post-Memphis

BR: Exactly. So this is a very important thing, it is not redesign, it is not the quotes from kitsch and blah blah blah but furniture.

[...]

CR: Prototypes appear to appear in Italian design in different ways in the 1970s, like Enzo Mari's *Autoprogettazione*, but also Alchymia - Alchymia you say are prototypes, but Memphis?

BR: Alchymia only prototypes, they do maybe two or three, they never had the idea of producing furniture.

CR: But the First Memphis show in '81

BR: Well they were prototypes but then we were producing them. They were even numbered progressively, like, from 1 - we had this idea of producing small *targhe* [label/nameplate] with written - *Carlton 1*, *Carlton 2*, then what happened - the little *targhe* I wish we'd continued, the little *targhe* were too expensive to produce and screw on and then we decided not to number them anymore unfortunately. But I mean it was not numbered in the sense that was a limited number, it was numbered in the sense so that we'd know how many would be produced, but we stopped it.

CR: So in theory in the world, there is no.1

BR: Not in theory, there is - it might be Karl Lagerfeld's. I think the first, the first piece sold was a Casablanca and it was sold to a dentist in Sicily, or some strange thing, I don't know if it was dentist or someone selling bread, some strange *commerciante* in Sicily, or in the South of Italy, or Puglia, so strange, very strange.

CR: You mentioned the word kitsch. Personally, I don't see the Memphis objects as kitsch

BR: But they're not kitsch at all, I don't think so. Kitsch is Mendini, he wants - it's not that Mendini is kitsch himself, he speaks about, he's interested in that. Some people might figure - but I don't think they know what kitsch is anyway.

CR: Do you think these were luxury objects

BR: They were not meant to be, but er it was expensive, as Ettore was always answering - it is always expensive to go on the moon, if you go on the moon you have to spend a lot of money, of course they were expensive a lot of time, there are many materials, so the things are expensive. It's not Ikea, you know, but so what. They had to be expensive because production, not an immense production, but the *Carlton* is not so expensive. For instance I think the *Carlton* now costs from six to eight thousand Euros. I mean if you buy er the Jane Birkin bag at Hermes it costs twenty five thousand, if you buy a Chanel. That's not expensive for a piece of furniture - of course if you go to Ikea - the idea is not that they - they become luxury because that's it.

CR: Is that also one of the reasons - I saw in the period both you and Sottsass and Branzi talking about the craft status of these objects, that they're not anything to do with Arts and Crafts, which I understand, I agree.

BR: No the craft status it means that, of course - plastic laminate you have to be able to stick it properly, for instance there is a thing, I don't know much, you see this line,

CR: The black line,

[...]

BR: it's fine!

CR: I like it.

BR: Me too.

CR: It adds to the aesthetic of the object.

BR: Exactly there is an aesthetic also in plastic laminates. But the craftsmanship is that some pieces are well made, some are not, in plastic laminates or wood, that's all. But there was not craftsmanship quality in the old sense. Of course there is a piece that is better - some pieces are better made than others and then after '86, '87 Memphis was sold by Gismondi and now there are some pieces - when last year I curated the exhibition at Carla Sozzani, we tried to exhibit the old pieces because they were slightly better made, but some pieces are very well made too, then of course, today, Memphis doesn't belong to us, you know this, I don't go and control the quality, but if I buy a piece and they send me a bad birch of course it's ugly, I say why is it, because they want to spend less.

CR: So in terms of the other craft producers, I know that Memphis went to Up & Up in Carrara, so were you and Sottsass visiting the people out there?

BR: Only the people using marble, which was only Ettore and de Lucchi. Nathalie du Pasquier did something very nice in marble, the bench, no? No the bench was Ettore. *Looks in book again* - this is marble.

CR: I know that Sottsass left in '85, because he wasn't happy with his relationship - what had happened to Memphis?

BR: No, wait a second, Ettore left because he did not want to be identified with Memphis and that's all. There were no other reasons. Of course everybody was quite sad, and we continued - I saw we because the designers asked me Barbara to remain, you organise some exhibitions, for two years, and then *finito* but don't say that Ettore left because there were disagreements.

CR: Looking back on it now, do you think that Memphis was a success?

BR: A success? It was an incredible success, I mean it was absolutely unheard of, but - we didn't plan that at all, we just wanted to do a nice exhibition and then *boom* it exploded, in six months there more than four hundred publications

CR: An amazing public reaction

BR: It was amazing, people were fed up, obviously there was a need to break the bore maybe of the previous designers just was there what there was, there was zero, no colour, nothing, no different materials, but it was not a success for us, I mean it was a success. I didn't want anything, basically, I wanted to help them, but what they wanted was to change the status, to introduce into design new ideas, introduce

new colours, materials, so that's what they wanted. I don't know in what sense you mean a success?

CR: In many different ways - maybe if it succeeded in changing design?

BR: Don't you think so?

CR: Yes!

BR: Of course it's a fact, completely changed the face of design.

CR: Are you still in touch with De Lucchi, Godanis,

BR: Yes, in fact De Lucchi helped - come with me - [*Radice shows me a part of the flat that De Lucchi designed.*]

CR: There was one question I wanted to ask, about his writing, he writes beautifully. Were there particular influences in terms of who he was reading, cultural influences?

BR: He was a very well read man, he's always been very interested in archaeology, ethnography, Egyptology, and then international culture, he was very interested in India, you know he travelled there, so in books about Chinese culture, Indian culture, Chinese porcelain, Japan Haiku, Hokusai, and in terms of writing, he was, as you know, through his first wife he was friends with Ginsberg and that group, so maybe in that period.

CR: And one last question - at the very beginning we discussed the Postmodernism that Sottsass and Memphis were not - so it was not the Postmodernism of [*Paolo*] Portoghesi, or the Americans

BR: No, no, not Graves, in fact we invited Graves to participate into Memphis, do you remember? [*Radice points to Graves' Plaza piece in the Memphis book*] because at a certain point Sottsass said that this problem of producing furniture is international, it is not only Italian, so he invited Hans Hollein, [*Arata*] Isozaki and Michael Graves in America who produced this piece of furniture which is quite Postmodern I must say. But in fact he did these two and then finished. In fact we even invited Mendini the first year, he did a piece of furniture, I don't even think it was published, he did it for kind of kindness,

CR: But it was in the show

BR: It was in the first show. We invited Peter Shire, Shiro Kuramata.

CR: In terms of other ideas to do with *postmoderno*, or *postmodernismo*, would you say that the ideas of somebody like Eco, the idea of quoting different periods, high and low culture, or other thinkers like Baudrillard

BR: But Baudrillard was not postmodern, he spoke about it. He spoke about a certain culture produced by consumerism, I don't think he's postmodern at all.

CR: No, but he spoke about it.

BR: I don't even think that Rei Kawakubo was postmodern.

CR: But in terms of ideas, thinkers that you would be happy saying that Memphis was linked with

BR: No. It is not, it is not if I would be happy or not happy, Memphis is not postmodern, has nothing to do, but here it says very clearly, with Postmodernism you think that it is the American way, but it is not, if for postmodern you think - citing Sottsass - all that that comes after the modern movement, then okay, Memphis is certainly postmodern, but it is not postmodern in the sense of the beginning of Postmodernism.

APPENDIX I: Interview participant consent correspondence: Andrea Branzi



Catharine Rossi <catharine.rossi@network.rca.ac.uk>

Permesso di utilizzare materiale in una tesi di dottorato

Catharine Rossi <catharine.rossi@network.rca.ac.uk>
To: anbranzi@tin.it

8 December 2010 09:21

Egregio arch. Branzi,

Spero che quest'email le trova bene. Le scrivo oggi come studentessa di dottorato, alla richiesta della mia università. Non ci dovrebbe essere necessità di rispondere a quest'email, i suoi motivi spiego sotto.

Vorrei ringraziarla per aver consentito alla mia richiesta di un'intervista che è avvenuta a Milano il 23 giugno 2008. Grazie anche per aver consentito alla registrazione dell'intervista. Mi sono piaciuta molto la conversazione, e suoi commenti sono stati sia sagaci che di inestimabile valore per il dottorato, che si tratta del ruolo dell'artigianato nello sviluppo del design in Italia dopoguerra.

A questo momento sto per finire i miei studi presso il Royal College of Art e Victoria & Albert Museum. Ho tradotto la conversazione ed include una trascrizione nell'appendice della tesi. La mia università, il RCA e V&A Museum, richiede che l'uso dell'intervista si conformi alle sue direttive etiche. Visto che giustamente sono consenziente informale, ho prodotto questa lettera per includere nella tesi. In conformità con il diritto d'autore inglese, le parole dette sono la mia proprietà, mentre si sono proprietaria della audio cassette e la trascrizione. Vorrei precisare che il mio uso della nostra conversazione è solo per fini educative e presento le sue opinioni accuratamente nella tesi.

Spero che tutto sia chiaro. Se ha alcune domande, non esitare di chiedermi. Se ci sono altre commenti che vorrebbe fare, sono più che lieta di riceverli. Può mandare un email o scrivermi al indirizzo sotto.

Grazie mille,

Cordiali saluti,

Catharine Rossi

Il mio indirizzo:

Catharine Rossi
Flat 44,
7 Thomas Place,
London N7 7EL

Può anche contattare il mio relatore di dottorato:

Dr. Glenn Adamson,
Head of Graduate Studies
Research Department
V&A Museum
Cromwell Road
London SW7 2RL
United Kingdom
020 7942 2900
g.a.adamson@vam.ac.uk



Catharine Rossi <catharine.rossi@network.rca.ac.uk>

Permesso di utilizzare materiale in una tesi di dottorato

studio branzi <anbranzi@tin.it>
To: Catharine Rossi <catharine.rossi@network.rca.ac.uk>

6 December 2010 11:37

Gentile Catharine Rossi
Messun problema da parte mia per l'uso dell'intervista.
Cordialmente

Andrea Branzi

Il 6-12-2010 10:21, "Catharine Rossi" <catharine.rossi@network.rca.ac.uk> ha scritto:

[Quoted text hidden]

g.a.adamson@vam.ac.uk <mailto:g.a.adamson@vam.ac.uk>

APPENDIX I: Interview participant consent correspondence: Renzo Brugola

Flat 44,
7 Tiltman Place,
London, N7 7EL
United Kingdom
tel: 0044 (0) 7786950663

Sig. Renzo Brugola,
Via Buonaroti Michelangelo, 44
20851 Lissone (MB),
Italy

5 Gennaio 2011

Egregio signore Brugola,

Spero che questa lettera trova lei e sua moglie bene. Ci siamo incontrati nel Aprile 2010, quando lei aveva gentilmente acconsentito alla richiesta di un'intervista. Io sono la studentessa di dottorato inglese che faccio la ricerca sul ruolo dell'artigianato nello sviluppo del design italiano, e ho richiesto un'intervista per parlare delle sue esperienze con l'architetto Sottsass e il Memphis.

Le scrivo oggi alla richiesta delle mie istituzioni, il Royal College of Art e Victoria & Albert Museum a Londra. Non ci dovrebbe essere necessità di rispondere a questa lettera, i quali motivi spiego sotto, comunque mi farebbe piacere se continuavamo a corrispondere.

Vorrei ringraziarle per aver consentito alla richiesta di un'intervista che è avvenuto da Lei a Lissone il 13 Aprile 2010. Grazie anche per aver consentito alla registrazione dell'intervista. Mi sono piaciuta molto la conversazione, i suoi commenti sono stati sia sagaci che di inestimabile valore per il dottorato. Spero di contribuire a elevare il riconoscimento del suo ruolo importante nel mobile Italiano, e che lei aver trovato il nostro incontro gradevole.

A questo momento sto per finire i miei studi e consegnare la tesi. Ho tradotto la nostra conversazione ed includo una trascrizione nell'appendice della tesi. La mia università richiede che l'uso dell'intervista si conforma alle sue direttive etiche. Visto che glielo chiedo solo consenso informale, ho prodotto questa lettera per includere nella tesi. In conformità con il diritto d'autore inglese, le parole dette sono la sua proprietà, mentre io sono proprietaria della audio cassetta e la trascrizione. Vorrei precisare che l'uso della nostra conversazione è solo per fini educative e presento le sue opinioni accuratamente nella tesi.

Spero che tutto sia chiaro. Se ha alcune domande, non esitare di chiedermi. Se ci sono altri commenti che vorrebbe fare, sono più che lieta di riceverne. Può mandare scrivermi al indirizzo o telefonare il numero sopra. È stato un grande piacere incontrare lei e la sua moglie, e se posso essere d'aiuto in alcun modo non esitare di chiedermi.

Cordiali Saluti,

Catharine Rossi

APPENDIX I: Interview participant consent correspondence: Letizia Frailich Ponti



Catherine Rossi <catherine.rossi@network.rca.ac.uk>

Permesso di utilizzare materiale in una tesi di dottorato

Catherine Rossi <catherine.rossi@network.rca.ac.uk>
To: goem@jalco.it

6 December 2018 09:58

Egregia sig.ra Frailich Ponti,

Spero che quest'email le trova bene. Siamo incontrati due anni fa quando aveva consentito alla mia richiesta di un'intervista per la mia ricerca di dottorato. Le scrivo oggi come studentessa di dottorato, alla richiesta della mia università. Non ci dovrebbe essere necessità di rispondere a quest'email, i quali motivi spiego sotto:

Vorrei ringraziarla per aver consentito alla mia richiesta di un'intervista che è avvenuta a Milano il 13 ottobre 2018. Mi sono piaciuta molto la conversazione, e suoi momenti sono stati sia sagaci che di inestimabile valore per il dottorato, che si tratta del ruolo dell'artigianato nello sviluppo del design in Italia dopoguerra.

A questo momento sto per finire i miei studi presso il Royal College of Art e Victoria & Albert Museum. Ho tradotto la conversazione ed incluso una trascrizione degli appunti che ho preso nell'appendice della tesi. La mia università, il RCA e V&A Museum, richiede che l'uso dell'intervista si conforma alle sue direttive etiche. Visto che glielo chiedo solo consenso informale, ho prodotto questa email per includere nella tesi, in conformità con il diritto d'autore inglese, le parole dette sono la sua proprietà, mentre io sono proprietaria della trascrizione. Vorrei precisare che il mio uso della nostra conversazione è solo per fini educative e presento le sue opinioni accuratamente nella tesi.

Spero che tutto sia chiaro. Se ha alcune domande, non esitate di chiedermi. Se ci sono altre commenti che vorrebbe fare, sono più che lieta di riceverne. Può mandare un email o scrivermi al indirizzo sotto.

Grazie mille.

Cordiali saluti.

Catherine Rossi

Il mio indirizzo:

Catherine Rossi
Flat 44,
+ Tibbman Place,
London N7 7EL

Può anche contattare il mio relatore di dottorato:

Dott. Glenn Adamson,
Head of Graduate Studies
Research Department
V&A Museum
Cromwell Road
London SW7 2RL
United Kingdom
020 7942 3590
g.adamson@vam.ac.uk

APPENDIX I: Interview participant consent correspondence: Pierluigi Ghianda



Catherine Rossi <catherine.rossi@network.rca.ac.uk>

Permesso di utilizzare materiale in una tesi di dottorato

Catherine Rossi <catherine.rossi@network.rca.ac.uk>
 To: info@ghianda pierluigi.191.it

6 December 2010 09:28

Egregio Sig. Ghianda,

Spero che quest'email le trovi bene. Siamo incontrati febbraio quest'anno quando aveva consentito alla mia richiesta di un'intervista per la mia ricerca di dottorato. Le scrivo oggi come studentessa di dottorato, alla richiesta della mia università. Non ci dovrebbe essere necessità di rispondere a quest'email, i suoi motivi spiego sotto:

Vorrei ringraziarla per aver consentito alla mia richiesta di un'intervista che è avvenuta a Milano il 27 febbraio 2010. Grazie anche per aver consentito alla registrazione dell'intervista. Mi sono puntato molto la conversazione, e quei momenti sono stati sia sagaci che di inestimabile valore per il dottorato, che si tratta del ruolo dell'artigianato nello sviluppo del design in Italia dopoguerra.

A questo momento sto per finire i miei studi presso il Royal College of Art e Victoria & Albert Museum. Ho tradotto la conversazione ed incluso una trascrizione nell'appendice della tesi. La mia università, il RCA e V&A Museum, richiede che l'uso dell'intervista si conforma alle sue direttive etiche. Visto che glielo chiedo solo come un informale, ho prodotto questa lettera per includere nella tesi. In conformità con il diritto d'autore inglese, le parole dette sono la sua proprietà, mentre io sono proprietaria della audio-cassetta e la trascrizione. Vorrei precisare che il mio uso della nostra conversazione è solo per fini educative e presento le sue opinioni accuratamente nella tesi.

Spero che tutto sia chiaro. Se ha alcune domande, non esitare di chiedermi. Se ci sono altri commenti che vorrebbe fare, sono più che lieta di riceverne. Può mandare un'email o scrivermi al indirizzo sotto.

Grazie mille,

Cordiali saluti,

Catherine Rossi

Il mio indirizzo:

Catherine Rossi
 Flat 21,
 7 Tulkman Place,
 London N7 7EL

Può anche contattare il mio relatore di dottorato:

Dr. Glenn Adamson,

Head of Graduate Studies
 Research Department
 V&A Museum
 Cromwell Road
 London SW7 2RL
 United Kingdom

APPENDIX I: Interview participant consent correspondence: Ugo La Pietra



Catharine Rossi <catharine.rossi@network.rca.ac.uk>

Permesso di utilizzare materiale in una tesi di dottorato

Catharine Rossi <catharine.rossi@network.rca.ac.uk>
 To: Ugo La Pietra <info@ugolapietra.com>

6 December 2010 09:30

Egredo arch. La Pietra,

Spero che quest'email le trovi bene. Le scrivo oggi non come assistente di ricerca nella mostra "Postmodernism", ma come studentessa di dottorato, alla richiesta della mia università. Non ci dovrebbe essere necessità di rispondere a quest'email, i suoi motivi spiego sotto:

Vorrei ringraziarla per aver consentito alla mia richiesta di un'intervista che l'averete a Milano il 23 giugno 2008. Grazie anche per aver consentito alla registrazione dell'intervista. Mi sono piaciute molto la conversazione e i suoi commenti sono stati sia sagaci che di inestimabile valore per il dottorato, che si tratta del ruolo dell'artigianato nello sviluppo del design in Italia dopoguerra.

A questo momento sto per finire i miei studi presso il Royal College of Art e Victoria & Albert Museum. Ho tradotto la conversazione ed include una trascrizione nell'appendice della tesi. La mia università, il RCA e V&A Museum, richiede che l'uso dell'intervista si conformi alle sue direttive etiche. Visto che gliela chiedo solo permesso informale, ho prodotto questa lettera per includere nella tesi. In conformità con il diritto d'autore inglese, le parole dette sono la sua proprietà, mentre io sono proprietaria della audio cassetta e la trascrizione. Vorrei precisare che il mio uso della nostra conversazione è solo per fini educative e presento le sue opinioni accuratamente nella tesi.

Spero che tutto sia chiaro. Se ha alcune domande, non esitate di chiedermi. Se ci sono altre commenti che vorrebbe fare, sono più che lieta di riceverle. Può mandare un email o scrivermi al indirizzo sotto.

Grazie mille,

Cordiali saluti,

Catharine Rossi

Il mio indirizzo:

Catharine Rossi
 Flat 64,
 7 Titcham Place,
 London N7 7BL

Può anche contattare il mio relatore di dottorato:

Dr. Glenn Adamson,

School of Graduate Studies
 Research Department
 V&A Museum
 Cromwell Road
 London SW7 2RL
 United Kingdom
 +44 (0)20 7547 5240
gadamson@rca.ac.uk



Catharine Rossi <catharine.rossi@network.rca.ac.uk>

Permesso di utilizzare materiale in una tesi di dottorato

Ugo La Pietra <info@ugolapietra.com>
 To: Catharine Rossi <catharine.rossi@network.rca.ac.uk>

9 December 2010 09:20

Gentile Catharine,
 le do il permesso di utilizzare il materiale per il dottorato.

Molti auguri
 Saluti
 Ugo La Pietra

Il giorno 06/12/10, alle ore 10:30, Catharine Rossi ha scritto:
 [Quoted text hidden]

Ugo La Pietra Studio
 via Guercino 7
 20154 Milano
 tel. ++39 (0)2.317991
info@ugolapietra.com

APPENDIX I: Interview participant consent correspondence: Anty Pansera



Catharine Rossi <catharine.rossi@network.rca.ac.uk>

permesso di utilizzare materiale in una tesi di dottorato

Catharine Rossi <catharine.rossi@network.rca.ac.uk>
To: anty.pansera@fastwebnet.it

6 December 2010 09:15

Eccellenza Prof. ss Pansera,

Spesso che quest'anno le trova bene. Siamo incontrata due anni fa a Milano quando avevo consentito e risposto alle sue domande per il dottorato sul ruolo dell'artigianato nello sviluppo del design in Italia dopo guerra. Adesso le scrivo alla richiesta della mia università. Non c'è rispondere a quest'anno, i suoi motivi spiega sotto:

Vorrei ringraziarla per aver consentito alla mia richiesta di un'intervista che è avvenuta a Milano il 20 giugno 2008. Grazie anche per aver consentito alla registrazione dell'intervista. Mi sono piaciute molto le conversazioni, e tutti commenti sono stati più spigliati che di inestimabile valore per il dottorato.

In questo momento sto per finire i miei studi presso il Royal College of Art a Victoria & Albert Museum. Ho tradotto la conversazione ed include una trascrizione nell'appendice della tesi. La mia università, il RCA e V&A Museum, richiede che l'uso dell'intervista si conformi alle sue direttive etiche. Visto che quella chiesto solo consenso informale, ho guidato questa lettera per includere nella tesi. In conformità con il diritto d'autore inglese, le parole dette sono la sua proprietà, mentre io sono proprietaria delle note scritte e la trascrizione. Vorrei precisare che il mio uso della nostra conversazione è solo per fini educative e presento le sue opinioni accuratamente nella tesi.

Spesso che tutto sia chiaro. Se ha alcune domande, non esitare di chiedermi. Se ci sono altre commenti che vorrebbe fare, sono più che lieto di riceverle. Può mandare un email o avvisarmi al telefono sotto.

Grazie mille,

Cordiali saluti,

Catharine Rossi

Il mio indirizzo:

Catharine Rossi
Flat 44,
7 Whitton Place,
London N7 7EL

Può anche contattare il mio relatore di dottorato Dott.

Glen Johnson,
Head of Graduate Studies
Research Department
V&A Museum
Cromwell Road
London SW7 2RL
United Kingdom
tel: +44 20 7547 6140



Catharine Rossi <catharine.rossi@network.rca.ac.uk>

permesso di utilizzare materiale in una tesi di dottorato

Anty Pansera <anty.pansera@fastwebnet.it>
To: Catharine Rossi <catharine.rossi@network.rca.ac.uk>

6 December 2010 22:30

Berissimo!!! Tranquilla! In bocca al lupo!

Inviato da iPhone

Il giorno 06/dic/2010, alle ore 10.15, Catharine Rossi <catharine.rossi@network.rca.ac.uk> ha scritto:

[Quoted text hidden]

APPENDIX I: Interview participant consent correspondence: Barbara Radice



Catharine Rossi <catharine.rossi@network.rca.ac.uk>

Permesso di utilizzare materiale in una tesi di dottorato

Catharine Rossi <catharine.rossi@network.rca.ac.uk>
To: Barbara Radice <b.radice@sotsaas.it>

8 December 2010 09:19

Egregia sign.ra Radice,

Spero che quest'email le trova bene. Le scrivo oggi non come assistente di ricerca nella mostra 'Postmodernism', ma come studentessa di dottorato, alla richiesta della mia università. Non ci dovrebbe essere necessità di rispondere a quest'email, i suoi motivi spieghi sotto:

Vorrei ringraziarla per aver consentito alla mia richiesta di un'intervista che è avvenuta a Milano il 12 Aprile 2010. Grazie anche per aver consentito alla registrazione dell'intervista. Mi sono piaciuta molto la conversazione, e così consento come è stato sia saggi che di inestimabile valore per il dottorato, che si tratta del ruolo dell'artigianato nello sviluppo del design in Italia dopo guerra.

A questo momento sto per finire i miei studi presso il Royal College of Art e Victoria & Albert Museum. Ho tradotto la conversazione ed incluso una trascrizione nell'appendice della tesi. La mia università, il RCA e V&A Museum, richiede che l'uso dell'intervista si conformi alle sue direttive etiche. Visto che glielo chiedo solo come informazione, ho prodotto questa lettera per includere nella tesi. In conformità con il diritto d'autore inglese, le parole dette sono la sua proprietà, mentre lo sono proprietaria della audio cassette e la trascrizione. Vorrei precisare che il mio uso della nostra conversazione è solo per fini educative e presento le sue opinioni accuratamente nella tesi.

Spero che tutto sia chiaro. Se ha alcune domande, non esitare di chiedermi. Se ci sono altre commenti che vorrebbe fare, sono più che lieta di riceverne. Può mandare un'email o accontentarsi al indirizzo sotto.

Grazie mille,
Cordiali saluti,

Catharine Rossi

Il mio indirizzo:

Catharine Rossi
Flat 44,
7 Yillman Place,
London N7 9BZ.

Può anche contattare il mio relatore di dottorato:

Dot. Glenn Adamson,
Head of Graduate Studies
Research Department
V&A Museum
Cromwell Road
London SW7 2RL,
United Kingdom
t: +44 (0)20 7547 5000
g.adamson@v&a.ac.uk



Catharine Rossi <catharine.rossi@network.rca.ac.uk>

Permesso di utilizzare materiale in una tesi di dottorato

Barbara Radice <b.radice@sotsaas.it>
To: Catharine Rossi <catharine.rossi@network.rca.ac.uk>

8 December 2010 17:48

Va bene Catharine, il mio permesso c'è con questa conferma.
Buona fortuna e cari saluti,
Barbara Radice

Il giorno 06/dic/10, alle ore 09:19, Catharine Rossi ha scritto:
[Quoted text hidden]

APPENDIX 2. Participant Email Correspondence

1. Alessio Sarri English Translation

Alessio Sarri, Email Correspondence, 11 December 2010

I met Matteo Thun in 1980 by chance, thanks to friends in common; in particular a ceramist from Sesto Fiorentino, Tonino, who Matteo had turned to make some strange ceramics. At that time I was 23 years old and had long hair, and clearly for my friend Tonino I was sufficiently strange to be able to accept to do those very complex ceramics.

At the start Matteo had shown me some technical drawings, the classic plan, elevation and side view. In comparison to the majority of Sesto ceramists of that time, I was familiar with design (at the Art School one of the subjects was precisely geometric drawing), and I immediately understood what Matteo wanted. We chose, out of the many drawings, a large cruet composed of a base, body, spout and a large ring-shaped handle, to glaze in several colours and with a decoration called *bacterio*. It was the first prototype (1981) and even the first ‘test’, the first of another three attempts to arrive at the production of a collection of sixteen different models (in editions of twenty) that we called, in Latin, *RARA-AVIS*. Matteo often came to visit to see the work progressing and compare the choices to make or find unusual materials, like the cutters for modelling or the wooden rods used to make the perfect strips of clay in the desired thickness.

That first ceramic object was something particular, because I had realised it by making a collage of pieces of vases from normal production, that is I had obtained the volumes that made it up, cutting, modifying and assembling parts from other uncooked, not yet dry ceramic [*pieces*].

The whole working process was experimented with on that “cruet” and above all with the first series of *RARA AVIS* prototypes that I made nearly without the help of moulds. For this reason in the work I used even steel cutting blades, as sharp as possible, that turned out to be adapted to refinishing the ceramics in a way that the surfaces were perfectly smoothed and the corners very precise.

The edges worked in this way gave the object good definition and in a certain sense redesigned them, giving greater strength to the volumes. Matteo and I called this way of working the “technology of sharp edges”, defining a primary quality in the objects, as opposed to the general tendency, during the elaboration of ceramics, to round off any form.

The colours were applied with airbrush in three or four passes thanks to masks made with adhesive strip, card, latex and relative firings in the oven after each of them. In this way I succeeded in maintaining a good precision of the line of contact between different colours.

With regards to the decoration, we decided to transfer-print some of the *Memphis textures*, which I then applied onto some parts of the glazed object, without limits of

continuity, as if it was a body at one with the volume of the object itself; after firing the effect was notable.

The idea of the approach to the work was to change the answer to the project's question: 'it can't be done' became 'it can be done'. It was a challenge that all the artisans that had worked with Memphis in the early years were capable of doing, if you want for culture, for boredom, for entertainment, for the desire to experiment with new possibilities. The quality, the knowledge of the artisan united in the absolutely newness of the designs and also the game, the curiosity, enabled finding solutions for make those designs, without lessening the strength of the passage from design - object, at times succeeding in creating an added value to the finished piece, to the realised project.

It worked that in order to find solutions to the problems one had to ask the help of all the known techniques, that perhaps weren't being used, but their way of not being adapted to resolve that given problem, opened the possibility to another new solution. It could seem banal as a phrase, but with the impoverishment of that crafts that is, today, clearly visible to our eyes, I would say that it was not. In my opinion we can progress only with the presence and the memory of the past and it is an old question of which we seem to want to forget, as old as the handmade crafts.

With regards to the teapots, I remember that I liked them right from the moment that Matteo showed me the designs and that what got me was the dynamic aspect of the forms designed. In those years I was very interested in the theatre of movement and dance and I did them even if not professionally.

For me, the *Rara Avis* teapots were characters in movement and it was interesting to 'stop them' like a film still and transform them into clay material maintaining that dynamic force present in the drawings and present in my interest in the movement of dance. The whole of Memphis was, it seems to me, a story of something other that could be told only through the union of the words of the drawing with the words of the quality of the work, understood as possibility of a combination of expressive languages.

There was also a subtle irony, in the whole story of my collaborations with Thun and Sottsass, which minimised the Monument to the Artisan Workshop (perhaps with decorated capitals!). Matteo showed me the drawings saying: "I would like to make these teapots and containers in plastic, with shiny plastics and produce millions of them!...but seeing as one can't make the mould for the plastics, it is too expensive, lets do them in clay!"

And I played along.

At times it was also very 'entertaining' to hear the comments of people amazed and disconcerted by the precision of those ceramics: the game succeeded! I had made ceramics that really seemed to be plastic! They were ceramics, but made in a way in which the ceramic was never seen.

The realisation was something particular, with really long working times and infinite firings and lots of care. The result was the *Rara Avis* made of a material that would

easily turn to dust or become ruined, but if you had done everything properly, they came out of the kiln perfect, beautiful; then you're happy, and smiling.

The Game also meant that all the various elaboration stages were standard processes that is possible to find normally in the factory, but that I transformed a bit to obtain a result different from the standard.

I met Ettore Sottsass during the Memphis of 1982 in which the *Rara Avis* collection was also presented, which for the occasion were in two series, one of which with the original colours and one in varying colours. They were all on top of a big Abet laminate table in the centre of a room: a large loud assemblage, a colony of strange animals...

After Matteo had introduced us, we went to see the ceramics and Sottsass lifted off the lid off a teapot, then another, after he looked at how the support for the lid was made and said "you see if a ceramic has been well made from the parts that are hidden" and we smiled. A hint of irony in the words.

Some years later, in 1987, thanks to Rainer Krause and the Galleria Antonia Jannone in Milan, I had the opportunity to make the Indian Memories series, six teapots and two fruit bowls. Even here plastic returned, or rather it is from here that it departed, because the wooden prototypes were made with that intention.

Ettore had summoned me to his studio in Milan and pulled out from a cupboard the wooden models. We spoke for a bit about how they could be made, how to make the lids, the handles and the spout and how to treat the edges and the volumes. Making the models from plaster was pleasing because the drawing, even if 'angular', had a particular softness and this time I was working on the roundness that was less present in the *Rara Avis*. With regards to the quality of the execution of the models Sottsass had total faith in my ability to "read" the drawings and meet ups with him were rare. When there was a particular question I spoke on the phone with Liana Cavallaro, his assistant, or I sent Polaroids to his studio.

The most interesting thing was working on the colours when Sottsass asked me if I could use 'oily' glazes on some pieces, and powdery and shiny for others. The colour of ceramics is not just pigment, it is also the material that has different thickness, shine, transparencies, opacities, densities, surfaces; that is a bit glass and a bit earth.

It is also a long process that starts with a more or less large number of bags that contain these powdered materials, that you take and make piles of this powder on the scales, and then you mix them in a pot together with a bit of water, to loosen and sift them. At this point you write some initials and underneath write a list with the name and quantity of every group of piles. Then you apply the glaze onto lots of small pieces of ceramic, as many as colours prepared, and you put them all in the kiln and fire at 900 - 1000 degrees. After a number of hours then you look at what has happened. If it has gone well you are happy and if it has not going well you start again, and so on.

The same tonality can have very different material aspects. Ettore knew this well, because he had done lots of ceramics, together with Aldo Londi, who was a great and silent maestro.

Then the colours, defined by a Pantone number, became a wide series of tests in the shape of small tiles, about the size of a biscuit, more or less. Then I put these small tiles in order of colour of the small boxes and I took them to his studio in Milan.

The well ordered little slabs in the ordered boxes unfailingly ended up being scattered about on the table closest to the window, to compose a mosaic of resonance between colours and materials. From order to chaos to return to another order, that choice. So it seemed at least to me and anyway it was a bit of a game: in the gesture of spilling out onto the table all those clinking colours of ceramics, a special taste, a perceptible flavour.

In 1998 in Catania there was a lovely exhibition with the title *Ettore Sottsass Fragments* in which were shown for the first time, at the same time with Rome, the *Antiche Ceramiche* series. On that occasion Sottsass said to me: “these ceramics were really difficult, but seeing as they came out so well, next time lets make them even more difficult!”

And so it was. After *Antiche Ceramiche*, there were two more beautiful and challenging series, *Geology* and *Ceramiche di Buddha* (not the official name), each of which was a particular adventure.

With regards to my professional life, my way of doing things was not only to execute projects well, but also to understand and interpret them in a way to produce as much as possible the spirit, the intention. I did not always succeed and it was not always possible, but every time I tried.

For this reason, at a certain point I decided that I wanted to work above all on projects that gave me the possibility to experiment, and from 1998 I mostly worked with Sottsass and Ernest Mourmans, gallerist and editor (*Geology* and *Ceramiche di Bhudda*)

When I could I also developed my own research that in the eighties was called *Mud Stars*: in the nineties I became passionate about porcelain and I make the jugs Beatrice & Berenice for which I won a prize at Mino in Japan. I was also awarded a prize in Faenza as Best Ceramic Workshop.

I continued in time to experiment with materials that had a meaning for me at that became sometimes small prototypes, other times the prototype is closed up in the material itself. I experiment with what is for me in that moment a demand that can't be abated. At times it isn't even ceramics. This need can come from a particular desire or a reflection on a certain work done, that left a trace inside me.

Normally my projects, or simple sketches of ideas, scattered ideas, end up in a drawer.

Next year I hope to find the time to at least finish reconstructing my archive of thirty years of work.

I am a bit like my difficult ceramics, that are times comes a cropper, at times turn to dust, and then I try to mix them together again and perhaps something else will happen (perhaps I am saying this because at the moment that I am writing this paper, my ceramics are not working, they are coming out of the kiln all ruined...).

Some ceramics have been my special relationship with people that designed them, others have been my books, at times books of maestri, at others stories from friends. I have worked with designers, architects, artists, firms, editors, gallerists. Sometimes this has worked, others not.

In 2007 there was a lovely show on Ettore Sottsass in Trieste, a city of sea and borders. In the exhibition there was a lot of beautiful furniture, ceramics, glass, jewellery, architecture, and also drawings and photographs and there were words and answers.

The title, as wished by Sottsass was *I Want to Know Why*.

The same question, I have also asked myself many times.

APPENDIX 2. Participant Email Correspondence

1. Alessio Sarri Italian Transcript

Alessio Sarri, Email Correspondence, 11 December 2010

Ho conosciuto Matteo Thun nel 1980 per caso grazie ad amici comuni; in particolare un ceramista di Sesto Fiorentino, Tonino, a cui Matteo si era rivolto per realizzare delle strane ceramiche. Io a quel tempo avevo i capelli lunghi e ventitré anni, ed evidentemente per il mio amico Tonino ero abbastanza strano per poter accettare di fare quelle ceramiche molto complesse.

Matteo all'inizio mi ha fatto vedere alcuni disegni tecnici, la classica pianta più alzata e vista laterale. Diversamente dalla maggior parte dei ceramisti sestesi dell'epoca, io avevo familiarità con la progettazione (nella *Scuola D'Arte* una delle materie era appunto disegno geometrico), ed è stato per me immediato capire cosa voleva Matteo. Abbiamo scelto, fra i tanti disegni, quello di una grande oliera composta da base, corpo, beccuccio e un grande manico ad anello, da smaltare in più colori e con una decorazione chiamata *bacterio*. Era il primo prototipo (1981) ed anche la 'Prova' in assoluto, il primo di altri tre passaggi per arrivare alla produzione di una collezione di 16 diversi modelli (in tiratura 1/20), che abbiamo chiamato, in latino, *Rara Avis*. Matteo veniva spesso a trovarmi per vedere il lavoro procedere e confrontarsi sulle scelte da fare o trovare materiali non usuali, come trincetti per modellismo o bacchette di legno da usare per fare perfette lastre di terra dello spessore desiderato.

Quella prima ceramica è stata qualcosa di particolare, perché l'ho realizzata facendo un collage di pezzi di vasi della produzione normale, cioè ho ricavato i volumi che la componevano, tagliando, modificando e assemblando parti da altre ceramiche crude, non ancora essiccate.

Tutto il processo di lavorazione è stato sperimentato su quella "oliera" e soprattutto sulla prima serie di prototipi *Rara Avis* che ho realizzato quasi senza l'ausilio di stampi. Per questo motivo nella lavorazione ho usato anche lame da trincetto in acciaio, affilatissime, che risultarono adatte a rifinire le ceramiche in modo che le superfici fossero perfettamente planari e gli spigoli molto precisi.

Gli spigoli così lavorati definiscono bene l'oggetto e in un certo senso lo ridisegnano dando più forza ai volumi. Con Matteo abbiamo chiamato questa modalità di lavoro la "*tecnica degli spigoli vivi*", definendo una qualità primaria degli oggetti, in opposizione alla generalizzata tendenza, durante la lavorazione della ceramica, ad arrotondare qualsiasi forma.

I colori erano applicati ad aerografo in tre o quattro passaggi grazie a mascherature fatte con nastro adesivo, carta, lattice, e relative cotture in forno a seguito di ogni stesura. In questo modo riuscivo a mantenere una buona precisione della linea di contatto fra colori diversi.

Per quanto riguarda le decorazioni, abbiamo deciso di stampare in decalcomania ceramica alcune *textures Memphis*, che poi ho applicato su alcune parti dell'oggetto smaltato, senza limite di continuità, come se fossero corpo unico con il volume dell'oggetto stesso; dopo la cottura l'effetto era notevole.

L'idea di approccio al lavoro era cambiare la risposta alla domanda del progetto: 'Non si può fare' diventa 'Si può fare'. Era una sfida che tutti gli artigiani che hanno lavorato con *Memphis* nei primi anni, sono stati capaci di fare propria, vuoi per cultura, per noia, per divertimento, per voglia di sperimentare nuove possibilità. Le qualità, le *sapienze* dell'artigiano unite alla assoluta novità dei progetti ed anche al gioco, alla curiosità, hanno permesso di trovare le soluzioni per realizzare quei progetti, senza perdere forza nel passaggio disegno-oggetto, a volte riuscendo a creare un valore aggiunto al pezzo finito, al progetto realizzato.

Funzionava che per trovare soluzioni ai problemi si dovevano chiamare in soccorso tutte le tecniche conosciute, che magari non si usavano, ma il loro modo di non essere adatte a risolvere quel dato problema, apriva la possibilità ad un'altra nuova soluzione. Può sembrare banale come frase, ma con l'impoverimento dei mestieri che è, oggi, ben visibile ai nostri occhi, direi che non lo è affatto. Secondo me possiamo progredire solo con la presenza e la memoria del passato ed è una questione antica della quale sembriamo volerci dimenticare, antica proprio come i mestieri fatti dalle mani.

Per quanto riguarda le teiere, ricordo che mi sono piaciute fin dal momento in cui Matteo mi ha mostrato i progetti e quello che più mi ha colpito è stato l'aspetto dinamico delle forme disegnate. In quegli anni io ero molto interessato al *teatro di movimento* ed alla *danza* e li praticavo anche se in modo non professionale.

Le teiere *Rara Avis* erano per me personaggi in movimento ed è stato interessante 'fermarli' come nel fotogramma di una pellicola e trasformarli in materia ceramica mantenendo quella forza dinamica presente nei disegni e presente nel mio interesse per il movimento danzato. Tutta la *Memphis* era, mi sembra, un racconto di qualcosa d'altro che poteva essere raccontato solo attraverso l'unione delle *parole* del disegno con le *parole* della qualità del lavoro, intese come possibilità di combinazione di linguaggi espressivi.

C'era anche una sottile ironia, in tutta la storia delle mie collaborazioni con Thun e Sottsass, che sdrammatizzava il *Monumento alla Bottega Artigiana* (magari con le maiuscole arabesche!). Matteo mi ha presentato i disegni dicendomi: "queste teiere e contenitori vorrei farli in plastica, con delle plastiche scintillanti e produrli in milioni di pezzi!...ma siccome fare gli stampi per la plastica non si può, è troppo costoso, allora facciamoli in ceramica!!"

Ed io sono stato al gioco.

A volte era anche molto 'divertente' sentire i commenti delle persone meravigliate e sconcertate dalla precisione di quelle ceramiche: il gioco era riuscito! Avevo fatto delle ceramiche che sembravano veramente di plastica! Erano ceramiche, ma fatte in un modo in cui la ceramica non era mai stata vista.

La realizzazione è stata qualcosa di particolare, con tempi di lavorazione lunghissimi ed infinite cotture e cure amorevoli. Il risultato sono stati i *Rara Avis* fatti di una materia che volentieri torna polvere oppure diventa *rovina*, ma che se hai fatto proprio tutto giusto, escono dal forno perfetti, bellissimi; allora sei contento, e sorridi.

Il *Gioco* vuole anche che tutte le varie fasi di lavorazione siano processi standard che è possibile trovare normalmente nelle fabbriche, ma che ho trasformato un poco per ottenere un risultato diverso dallo standard.

Ho conosciuto Ettore Sottsass durante la *Memphis* del 1982 dove è stata presentata anche la collezione *Rara Avis*, che per l'occasione erano in due serie, di cui una con i colori originali e una in varianti di colore. Stavano tutte sopra un grande tavolo di laminato *Abet* al centro di una stanza: un grande assembramento chiassoso, una colonia di strani animali...

Dopo che Matteo ci ha presentati, siamo andati a vedere la ceramica e Sottsass ha tirato su un tappo da una teiera, dopo ancora un'altro, dopo ha guardato dentro come era fatto l'alloggio del tappo e ha detto "*se una ceramica è fatta bene si vede dalle parti che stanno nascoste*" e abbiamo sorriso. Una vena di ironia nelle parole.

Qualche anno dopo, nel 1987, grazie a Rainer Krause e alla Galleria Antonia Jannone di Milano, ho avuto la possibilità di realizzare la serie *Indian Memories*, sei teiere e due fruttiere. Anche qui è tornata la plastica, oppure è da qui che era partita, perché i prototipi di legno erano stati fatti con quella intenzione.

Ettore mi ha chiamato nel suo studio a Milano ed ha tirato fuori da un armadio i modelli di legno. Abbiamo parlato per un pò di tempo di come si potevano realizzare, come fare i tappi, come i manici ed i beccucci e di come trattare gli spigoli ed i volumi. Fare i modelli di gesso è stato piacevole perché il disegno, anche se 'spigoloso', aveva una particolare morbidezza e questa volta lavoravo su rotondità che nei *Rara Avis* erano meno presenti. Rispetto alla qualità di esecuzione dei modelli Sottsass ha avuto una totale fiducia nella mia capacità di 'leggere' i disegni e gli scambi con lui erano rari. Quando c'era una questione parlavo per telefono con Liana Cavallaro, la sua assistente, o inviavo delle polaroid allo studio.

La cosa più interessante è stato lavorare sui colori quando Sottsass mi ha chiesto se potevo usare degli smalti 'grassi' per alcuni pezzi, e polverosi e brillanti per altri. Il colore delle ceramiche non è solo pigmento, è anche materia che ha spessore, brillantezza, trasparenza, opacità, densità, superfici diverse, che è un pò vetro e un pò terra.

E' anche un lungo processo che inizia con una serie più o meno numerosa di sacchetti che contengono queste materie polverose, che tu prendi e fai dei mucchietti di questa polvere sulla bilancia, e poi li mescoli in un barattolo insieme ad un pò di acqua, per scioglierli e setacciarli. A questo punto scrivi su un foglio una sigla, e sotto scrivi un elenco con nome e quantità di ogni gruppo di mucchietti. Poi applichi lo smalto su tanti piccoli pezzetti di ceramica, quanti sono i colori preparati e metti tutto in forno a fondere a 900°-1000°. Dopo innumerevoli ore puoi guardare cosa è successo. Se va bene sei contento e se non va bene ricominci da capo, e via così.

La stessa tonalità può avere aspetti materici molto diversi. Questo Ettore lo sapeva bene, perché di ceramica ne ha fatta molta e questa volta l'ha fatta insieme ad Aldo Londi, che era un grande e silenzioso maestro.

Quindi i colori, definiti da un numero di *Pantone*, diventavano un'ampia serie di prove a forma di piccole mattonelle, grandi come un biscotto, più o meno. Poi mettevo queste piccole mattonelle in ordine per colore in delle piccole scatole e portavo tutto nel suo studio a Milano.

Le ben ordinate piastrelle nelle ordinate piccole scatole finivano immancabilmente sparpagliate sul tavolo più vicino alla finestra, a comporre un mosaico di risonanze fra colori e materie. Dall'ordine al caos per tornare ad un'altro ordine, quello scelto. Così almeno sembrava a me e comunque era un pò un gioco: c'era nel gesto di rovesciare sul tavolo tutti quei colori tintinnanti di ceramica, un gusto speciale, un sapore percepibile.

Nel 1998 a Catania c'è stata una bella mostra dal titolo *Ettore Sottsass Frammenti* in cui è stata presentata per la prima volta, in contemporanea con Roma, la serie *Antiche Ceramiche*. In quella occasione Sottsass mi ha detto: "Queste ceramiche erano proprio difficili, ma visto che ti sono venute così bene, la prossima volta le facciamo ancora più difficili!".

E così è stato. Dopo *Antiche Ceramiche*, ci sono state altre due belle e impegnative serie, *Geology* e *Ceramiche di Buddha* (nome non ufficiale), ognuna delle quali è stata una particolare avventura.

Rispetto alla mia vita professionale, il mio fare non è stato solo realizzare bene dei progetti, ma anche comprenderli ed interpretarli in modo da renderne il più possibile lo spirito, l'intenzione. Non sempre mi è riuscito e non sempre è possibile, ma ci provo ogni volta. Per questo motivo, ad un certo punto ho deciso che volevo lavorare soprattutto a progetti che mi dessero la possibilità di sperimentare, e dal 1998 ho collaborato prevalentemente con Sottsass ed Ernest Mourmans, come gallerista ed editore (*Geology* e *Ceramiche di Buddha*).

Quando ho potuto ho sviluppato anche una mia ricerca che negli anni 80' si chiamava *Mud Stars*: nei 90' mi sono appassionato alla porcellana ed ho realizzato le caraffe *Beatrice & Berenice* con cui ho vinto un premio a Mino in Giappone. Un premio mi è stato assegnato anche a Faenza come *Miglior Laboratorio Ceramico*.

Ho continuato nel tempo a sperimentare materie che avessero un senso per me e che sono diventate a volte piccoli prototipi, altre il prototipo è racchiuso nella materia stessa. Sperimento ciò che per me in quel momento è un'esigenza non rimandabile. A volte non è nemmeno ceramica. Questa esigenza può scaturire da un particolare desiderio o da una riflessione su di un certo lavoro svolto, che ha lasciato una traccia dentro di me.

Di solito i miei progetti, o semplici abbozzi di idee, pensieri sparsi, finiscono in un cassetto.

Il prossimo anno spero di trovare il tempo per finire almeno di ricostruire il mio archivio di trenta anni di laboratorio.

Sono un pò come le mie ceramiche difficili, che a volte vanno in rovina, che a volte diventano polvere, ed allora provo ad impastarle di nuovo e forse accade qualcosa d'altro (forse dico così perché nel periodo in cui scrivo questo foglio, le ceramiche mi vengono male, escono dal forno tutte rovinate...).

Alcune ceramiche sono state il mio rapporto speciale con le persone che le hanno disegnate, sono state i miei libri, a volte libri di maestri, altre volte racconti di amici. Ho lavorato con designers, architetti, artisti, aziende, editori, galleristi. Qualche volta ha funzionato bene, altre no.

Nel 2007 sul lavoro di Ettore Sottsass è stata fatta una bella mostra a Trieste, città di mare e di confine. Nella mostra c'erano molti bei mobili, ceramiche, vetri, gioielli, architetture ed anche disegni e fotografie e c'erano parole e domande.

Il titolo voluto da Sottsass era *'Vorrei Sapere Perché'*.

La stessa domanda, anch'io me la sono fatta tante volte.



Catharine Rossi <catharine.rossi@network.rca.ac.uk>

richiesta di informazione storica

Catharine Rossi <catharine.rossi@network.rca.ac.uk>
 To: alessio.sarri@libero.it

8 August 2010 10:28

Egregio signore Sarri,

Vorrei chiederti della sua assistenza in una ricerca sull'artigianato italiano - spero che non le disturbo troppo con questo contatto.

Sono una dottoranda inglese presso il Royal College of Art e il Victoria & Albert Museum, Londra, dove faccio della ricerca sul rapporto tra l'artigianato e il design in Italia dagli anni quaranta agli anni ottanta. Al stesso tempo, lavoro come assistente di ricerca su una grande mostra del Postmodernism che aprirà presso il Museo l'anno prossimo. In entrambe le cose vorrei evidenziare il ruolo importantissimo che la tradizione artigianale italiana aveva avuto nella storia del design, e capire il loro rapporto di più.

S'intendevo molto la sua collaborazione con Memphis e gli architetti Sothasaa e Thun negli anni settanta e ottanta. Se possibile, vorrei chiedere più informazioni della sua collaborazione e coinvolgimento in questa storia, per esempio come è avvenuto, le sue esperienze, il processo di sviluppo e produzione degli oggetti. Se sarebbe disponibile a rispondere alle domande o per email o telefono, sarei molto grata. Apprezzo alcun aiuto o informazione mi potrebbe dare, e se ci sono delle domande sulla mia ricerca, non esitare di chiedermi.

In attesa della sua risposta vi mando i miei più cordiali saluti.

Catharine Rossi



Catharine Rossi <catharine.rossi@network.rca.ac.uk>

richiesta di informazione storica

Alessio Sarri <alessio.sarri@libero.it>
 To: Catharine Rossi <catharine.rossi@network.rca.ac.uk>

17 August 2010 22:00

Buongiorno Miss. Catharine Rossi
 le ringrazio per il suo interesse e sarò felice di poterle aiutare nella sua interessante ricerca.

Credo che sarà più interessante, in un primo momento, rispondere alle sue domande per mail poiché l'argomento da lei trattato è per me motivo di riflessioni e interrogativi.
 La saluto cordialmente e rimango in attesa delle sue curiose domande.

Alessio Sarri



Catharine Rossi <catharine.rossi@network.rca.ac.uk>

richiesta di informazione storica

Catharine Rossi <catharine.rossi@network.rca.ac.uk>
To: Alessio Sarrì <alessio.sarri@libero.it>

31 August 2010 08:48

Egregio signore Sarrì,

Grazie mille per aver accorso ad rispondere alle mie domande, lo apprezzo molto e spero che lo trovi interessante come opportunità di riflessione.

Ho scritto alcune domande sotto. Risponde solo a quelle che vuole, e ovviamente non esitare se ci sono diverse cose che vuole raccontare.

- com'è iniziato il rapporto con Matteo Thun e Ettore Sottsass, e il suo coinvolgimento con il gruppo Memphis? Era un'esperienza felice per lei?
- Mi'interesse molto il processo di progettazione e produzione degli oggetti Memphis, e il dialogo tra architetto e ceramista. Corriera successo lo sviluppo degli oggetti che aveva prodotto lei?
- Cosa pensava delle teiere e oggetti che aveva prodotto per Thun e Sottsass?
- Sembrano assemblaggi molto complessi, con decori e colori diversi. Erano difficili da produrre - e posso chiedere quali processi erano coinvolti?
- su quale scala di produzione produceva gli oggetti Memphis.
- Quand'era che aveva cominciato a produrre le teiere Basilio, Pepper, Cinnamon e Cherries per l'architetto Sottsass?
- Vorrei anche chiedere della sua bottega e della sua opera e vita professionale.

Spero che queste non siano troppe domande, m'interesse alcune dettagli che vuole condividere, ed apprezzo molto l'opportunità di chiederle queste domande.

In attesa della sua risposta le mando i miei più cordiali saluti,

Grazie mille,

Catharine



Catharine Rossi <catharine.rossi@network.rca.ac.uk>

Permesso di utilizzare materiale in una tesi di dottorato

Catharine Rossi <catharine.rossi@network.rca.ac.uk>
To: alessio.sarri@libero.it

13 March 2011 10:00

Egregio signore Sarrì,

Vorrei ringraziarLe per le risposte che mi ha mandato per email il 30 dicembre 2010. Ho trovato il testo affascinante, sagace e molto utile per la ricerca di dottorato. L'opportunità di conoscere more delle sue esperienze e coinvolgimento nella storia del design italiano è stato di valore inestimabile, e un vero contributo alla mia conoscenza del periodo. Adesso sto per completare la ricerca e consegnare la tesi per esaminazione.

La mia università, il Royal College of Art, richiede che l'uso delle sue risposte si conformi alle sue direttive etiche. Quest'email conferma che aveva consentito a rispondere alle mie domande, le quali ho mandato per email il 6 agosto 2010, and alle quali aveva risposto il 30 dicembre 2010. Vorrei chiedere il permesso di includere le sue risposte per intero come un'appendice alla tesi. Ho tradotto le sue risposte e vorrei includere sia l'originale italiano e la traduzione. Queste saranno una risorsa molto utile per me e gli esaminatori. Vorrei precisare che il mio uso delle sue risposte è solo per fini educativi e presento le sue opinioni accuratamente nella tesi.

Spero che tutto sia chiaro. Se ha alcune domande, non esitare di chiedermi. Se ci sono altre commenti che vorrebbe fare, sono più che lieta di riceverli. Può mandare un email o scrivermi al indirizzo sotto.

Grazie mille,

Cordiali saluti,

Catharine Rossi

Il mio indirizzo:
Catharine Rossi
Flat 4L,
7 Tiltman Place,
London N7 7EL

Può anche contattare il mio relatore di dottorato:

Dr. Glenn Adams,
Head of Graduate Studies
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Bibliography

Explanatory note

1. *Primary and Secondary Printed Sources*: In accordance with regulations, the bibliography is divided into primary and secondary printed sources. Several of the architects and critics discussed in this thesis authored publications that fall into both categories. In these cases, any publications produced by Andrea Branzi, Riccardo Dalisi, Ugo La Pietra, Penny Sparke and Barbara Radice post 1990 have been included under the 'secondary printed sources' heading.

2. *Periodicals*: This research has made extensive use of primary magazine and newspaper sources. Entire runs of the following two magazines were made: *Casabella* (1954 - 1982) and *Domus* (1946 - 1984) and in this thesis I have cited extensively from these. The bibliography therefore only lists individual articles of particular significance to this research. Individual footnotes contain detailed references, and I am able to supply a full list of articles cited as necessary. In the instance of obscure or hard to locate newspapers and periodicals, the archive locations of these have also been given.

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