Contents

Synopsis ........................................................................................................................................... 2

Acknowledgements .......................................................................................................................... 2

Introduction ....................................................................................................................................... 3

Part One - Existence and Experience ............................................................................................. 6
  Preface: Feminist Approaches to Design History .......................................................................... 7
  Chapter One: Women in the Minority: Education, Employment and Gender .............................. 10
  Chapter Two: Women Designers and Gendered Experiences ....................................................... 21
  Chapter Three: Female, Feminine, Feminist: Alternative Perspectives on Italian Post-War Furniture ................................................................................................................................. 30

Part Two ‘Representation’ .................................................................................................................. 39
  Preface: Women and Cultural Representation ............................................................................. 40
  Chapter Four: Contemporary Representation in the Italian Design Press: the Female Presence in Domus, 1946-1975 ............................................................................................................. 43
  Chapter Five: Retrospective Representation: Writing Women In and Out of Design History 53

Conclusion .......................................................................................................................................... 62

Bibliography ...................................................................................................................................... 63
Synopsis

‘Existence, Experience and Representation: Women and Design in Post-War Italy’ is in reality a series of individual case studies of women designers’ experiences, objects and representation that seeks to combine a ‘women designers’ approach with alternative, inclusive approaches enabled by the feminist perspective adopted here. The focus is on professional women furniture designers who operated from the immediate post-war period to the mid-1970s, concentrating on those women who were part of the Milanese design scene. The dissertation has been divided into two parts, each preceded by a preface which examines the critical approaches adopted. The first part, ‘Existence and Experience’ asks why women were in a minority, looking at the gendered nature of furniture and the profession, their presence in design education, the educative and employment legislation and lastly what factors enabled women to enter the profession. It then examines their experiences as designers, noting the trend for male-female partnership and the consequences this had and the relations amongst women. The last section in the first part looks at alternative, ‘feminine’ aspects of post-war Italian design. Part two, ‘Representation’, examines women’s cultural representation. Focusing first on the contemporary design press and then on design history literature, and including recent developments in this field. Together, the chapters attempt to highlight the contribution of women furniture designers, explain the reasons behind their scarcity in both ‘reality’ and in terms of our knowledge, and also aim to show the continuing relevance and potential of feminist approaches to design history.

Acknowledgements

I am indebted to all the assistance, advice and recommendations for reading which Jill Seddon has given during the course of researching and writing this dissertation. I was also very fortunate to have had the opportunity to interview designer/architect Cini Boeri who kindly gave me not only her time but also a copy of her biography. The staff at the Archivio Centrale del Politecnico di Milano were also most helpful in gaining original documents, obtaining access to the annuals of the Politecnico and recommending further Italian reading.
**Introduction**

Feminist approaches to design history have expanded considerably since their first interventions in the 1970s. Today, they offer the possibility not just of new subjects of study but also alternative approaches which challenge existing knowledge. ‘Existence, experience and representation: women and design in post-war Italy’ is one such attempt, exploring the objects and experiences of women designers and asking questions regarding their minority status both in the profession and in history.

Considering the potential enormity of such a study a number of parameters have been set. The focus is predominantly on furniture design, although other areas are considered where relevant. ‘Italy’ translates largely as ‘Milan’, its industrial, economic and cultural capital. In Judith Adler Hellman’s words: ‘Milan is the fountainhead of new ideas, of...interpretations of foreign concepts, ideologies and intellectual trends.’

Milan was also the home of post-war Italian design; accommodating the design press and international expositions – the Triennale, the Salone del Mobile and Eurodomus. The surrounding area of Brianza is also the centre of modern furniture production and the city itself home to the Politecnico di Milano, the most prestigious of design and architecture schools. It is axiomatic to state that there was a world of design outside of furniture design, the profession, Milan. The decision to focus on these was that the histories of these are widely accepted and it seems important to investigate how ‘true’ this history is. A common thread throughout this dissertation is challenging what we already know about the era, looking at those women who challenged and defied gender expectations by practising furniture design in a profession, both male-dominated arenas. Even with these limitations this study does not claim to be comprehensive or definitive: there are huge gaps in knowledge about these women and unfortunately some names which have appeared during my research have remained just that, a name. Although a particular historical framework has been employed, this dissertation looks outside of the post-war period in order to understand the full scope of women designers’ experiences.

Although approximately fifty women emerged in the post-war period, few – if any, have reached anything approaching the levels of recognition of their male counterparts (appendix one). It seemed inconceivable that Gae Aulenti, Cini Boeri, Anna Castelli-Ferrieri, Franca Helg and Afra Scarpa, the only women designers to be mentioned with any regularity, were the only females practising - it was from this absence that this research first sprang.

This is only a partial history, but this partiality is a reaction to and in recognition of the separatism of mainstream history which excludes and marginalises women and the ‘feminine’. The separatist stance here not only redresses this balance but also enables a wider discussion of women and feminist related issues.

This is not a straightforward ‘women designers’ approach. This is both because it is

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potentially anachronistic but also because it has proved problematic for feminist historians. Its biographical nature prioritises the designer over the design and continues the myth of the individual, autonomous designer, not accounting for those objects with multiple or even anonymous authors. It’s most contentious aspect is that it is the method traditionally employed in mainstream, largely male-written; design history and a feminist approach cannot simply replicate its exclusionary methods but seek alternative, inclusive methods. One of the most recent successful manifestations of this approach was Pat Kirkham’s *Women Designers in the USA 1900-2000: Diversity and Difference*. Of particular interest to Kirkham is ‘the gendered nature of work…the shifting conception of what was and what was not thought to be appropriate for women to design’ and this element features here too.\(^2\) The possibilities of an underlying ‘women designers’ approach are also evident in Jill Seddon and Suzette Worden’s *Women Designing: Redefining Design in Britain between the Wars*. ‘Mindful’ of ‘the weaknesses of a ‘me too’ approach which merely involves an unearthing of forgotten or neglected female designers and their reinstatement alongside their male counterparts’ Seddon and Worden aimed to also ‘provide an insight into the ways in which the words ‘design’ and ‘designer’ were constructed at a specific moment in history.’\(^3\) ‘Existence, Experience and Representation’ builds on this existing body of feminist writing not just in design history but art and architectural histories too. It aims to use a variety of theoretical approaches which embrace the alternative aspects of Italian design history.

The research is organised into five chapters in two parts. The chapters in each part share similar objectives, themes and theoretical approaches and are introduced by a preface which explains these and the critical debate surrounding them. The first part, ‘Existence and Experience’ contains three chapters. Chapter one asks why there were so few women in the profession, examining the ‘gender’ of furniture design, the profession and the female presence in design education. This chapter also looks at the wider social context, the impact legislation passed under the fascist regime and not reformed until the 1960s. Lastly, given the obstacles that faced them, this chapter asks what factors prompted a woman to enter the profession and enabled her to do so.

Chapter two looks at the experiences of women designers. It focuses on the trend for male-female partnership and how this impacted on women designers’ experiences and opportunities before examining other ways women dealt with their minority status. While some women joined A.I.D.I.A. (The Association of Italian Women Engineers and Architects) in search of female solidarity, other women rejected both the ‘feminine’ and feminism. The reasons and consequences of both approaches will be considered here.

Chapter three is the object-based section, discussing the ‘feminine’ aspects of Italian post-war design. Penny Sparke’s article ‘Nature, Craft and Domesticity and the

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Culture of Consumption’ was influential in the formation of this chapter and uses women-designed objects and also considers forms of ‘feminine’ and feminist expression in men and women designers alike.4

‘Representation’ is the title of the second part. Chapter four considers women designers’ contemporary representation, looking at the most influential of the Italian design press; *Domus*. The fifth and final chapter reflects instead on retrospective representation, considering the place of the ‘female’ in Italian design historiography and how this has developed.

One aspect not as yet discussed is imposing a feminist perspective on women who were not necessarily feminists, or imposing a brand of feminism which these women did not follow - it has become increasingly clear that emancipation, rather than feminism, was the dominant means of self-perception among these women. Judy Attfield’s consideration of this problem with relation to Seddon and Worden’s *Women Designing* appeased my concerns: ‘the women designers featured did not necessarily associate themselves with gender politics in any ideological manner, although they may well have had to engage with them in their day-to day practice.’5

Admitting positionality and partiality does not weaken but strengthen the argument here.

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Part One - Existence and Experience
Preface: Feminist Approaches to Design History

This preface defines the feminist approaches employed in both parts one and two along with a critical evaluation of the thinking behind them. Four main interlinking concepts are introduced here; patriarchy, gender construction versus essentialism, ‘Separates Spheres’ and the emancipationist tradition.

In ‘Made in Patriarchy: Toward a Feminist Analysis of Women and Design’ Cheryl Buckley considers patriarchy “central” to a feminist analysis of women and design:

Patriarchy has circumscribed women’s opportunities to participate fully in all areas of society and, more specifically, in all sectors of design, through a variety of means — institutional, social, economic, psychological, and historical. The resulting female stereotypes delineate certain modes of behaviour as being appropriate for women.  

Buckley views female stereotypes and femininity as ‘socially constructed …sexuality and gender are acquired at conscious and unconscious levels in the family and through language acquisition.’ However, while Anglo-American feminists mostly share Buckley’s perspective, Italian feminists lean towards a more essentialist sexual difference between the sexes. The influence of French feminists such as Luce Irigaray here is patent; it is visible in two of the most well-known of Italian feminists, Luisa Muraro and Adriana Cavarero and is epitomised in Cavarero’s ‘L’Elaborazione Filosofica della Differenza Sessuale’:

By essential and original difference I mean, for women, being gendered in a different sex is something [which is] non-negotiable. For each one born female, it is always already like this and not otherwise; the difference is rooted in her being not something superfluous or extra, but that which she necessarily is: female.

A belief in biologically founded sexual difference was evident in the fascist Regime and the Catholic Church and was incredibly damaging for women’s opportunities and experiences in the public and private spheres. It seems surprising therefore that Italian feminists continue this essentialist stance. Cavarero does actually shy away from accusations of essentialism but there is a clear and fundamental difference in this approach towards the differences between sexes. In chapter one I shall argue how this viewpoint impacted on women’s decision to pursue – or not – a career in furniture design.

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7 Buckley, ‘Made in Patriarchy’ 3.
8 ‘Con essenziale ed originario differire intendo dire che per le donne l’essere sessuate nella differenza è qualche cosa di imprescindibile, è, per ciascuna che si trova a nascere donna, un da sempre già dato così e non altrimenti, che si radica nel suo essere non come un che di superfluo o di più, ma come ciò che essa neccariamente è: appunto donna.’ Adriana Cavarero, ‘L’Elaborazione Filosofica della Differenza Sessuale,’ C. Marcuzzo and D. Rossi, eds. La Ricerca delle Donne. Studi Femministi in Italia (Turin: Rosenberg & Sellier, 1987) 180 – 181.
The concepts discussed thus far depend on stereotypical notions of femininity and masculinity: in ‘Nature, Craft, Domesticity and the Culture of Consumption’ Sparke recounts how modern concepts of these rose out of industrialization:

Industrialization drove a physical wedge between the worlds of men and women such that men inhabited the world of work...whereas women remained in the home, charged with a role as aesthetic and moral keepers of that domain...From the public/private separation flowed a number of oppositions which linked the ideas of (among others) intuition, decoration, hand-making, amateurism and consumption with the ‘feminine’ sphere and rationality, simplicity, mechanized production and professionalism with the public, ‘masculine’ sphere.9

‘Masculinity’ and ‘femininity’ are examples of the oppositional and hierarchical nature of ‘binary opposites’, where ‘femininity’ always occupies the subordinate position. This model of gender difference is utilised throughout the chapters but it is problematic. Despite its pervasiveness as a ‘spatial configuration of sexual and social relations’, Jane Rendell thinks that its rigid binary nature renders it inadequate.10 This assertion is justified as an either/or approach neither covers the scope of human nature or behaviour nor allows for the fact that binary ‘opposites’ can be both complementary and co-existent. If, however, it is considered in the way that Sparke does in ‘Nature, Craft, Domesticity and the Culture of Consumption’, as a ‘spectrum’ rather than a dualism, it is a valuable tool.11

Both the ‘Separate Spheres’ paradigm and patriarchy also suffer from their potential ‘a-culturalness’ in the Italian post-war context. Sparke utilizes ‘Separate ‘Spheres’ in her analysis of craft in post-war Italy in ‘Nature, Craft, Domesticity and the Culture of Consumption’ and as evident in the quote above views industrialization as key to its occurrence. However, Italy did not fully industrialize until the 1940s, and yet these concepts were already in place in pre-war Italy - so industrialisation was not necessary for this sexual division of labour, or notions of ‘masculinity’ and ‘femininity’, to occur.

Judy Attfield criticizes Buckley’s reliance on the concept of patriarchy due to its dependency on gender stereotypes and thinks that the concept depends on potentially ‘a-historical’, and in my view a-cultural and even a-temporal stereotypes.12 Post-war Italy has a different social, political, financial and cultural history from Britain and it is worth bearing in mind that the manifestations of ‘masculinity’ and ‘femininity’ could have been different in each country. Attfield does concede that patriarchy is still a useful tool ‘where it can be still seen as a determining force, ideological position or systematic mentality derived from the division of labour that

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9 Sparke, ‘Nature, Craft, Domesticity and the Culture of Consumption’ 76.
followed from urbanization and the industrialization of production.\textsuperscript{13}

The final area to be addressed is also related to the dangers of ‘a-culturalness’. A significant number of the female designers here were already operating prior to the advent of feminism. As mentioned in the introduction for these women it was emancipation, rather than feminism, that informed their self-perception, the possibilities open to women, and even relations among women. The emancipationist tradition even continued on to be one of the defining characteristics of Italian feminism, as aspect that Lesley Caldwell has discussed in-depth in ‘Italian Feminism: Some Considerations.’\textsuperscript{14} Both emancipation and feminism had resonances on women’s decision to study architecture, the way they experienced the profession and the way they dealt with their minority status within it. It is a concept that will be elaborated on in the following chapter and makes an appearance in the other chapters in this first part of ‘Existence, Experience and Representation’.

\textsuperscript{13} Attfield, ‘Review Article’ 83.

Chapter One: Women in the Minority: Education, Employment and Gender

This chapter examines the reasons behind the paucity of women practising furniture design in post-war Italy. Of particular interest is their education and employment as designers in a highly gendered domain, itself existing in a wider socio-, cultural and political context. Change is a vital concept in this chapter, as the numbers of women in design education and subsequently practising altered dramatically from the 1930s to the 1970s, reflecting wider changes in women’s condition and their emergence as ‘new social subjects’ in this period. 15

The ‘maleness’ of furniture design and the profession are the first areas to be considered. This is followed by a case study of the female presence at the Politecnico di Milano, the training ground for the majority of women featured here. In line with similar studies, the assumption here is that there was a ‘connection between the progress of women in the profession and their access to architectural schools. 16

Design education and even a career as a designer were marginal options in female education and employment in Italy. Although in 1950-51 women made up thirty percent of graduates in architecture from the Politecnico, women made up just one percent of the total number of graduates in Italy that year. 17 The following section therefore contextualises their presence in the professional design sphere, focusing on examples of educative and employment legislation from the 1930s to the 1970s. While legislation is not the only explanatory factor for women’s marginalisation, the laws which were passed and subsequently reformed during these years reflect the changing cultural values, political leanings and processes of modernization that Italy underwent from the pre-war to the post-war years.

‘Masculinity’ and ‘Femininity’ in Design

The gendered nature of design is addressed in Attfield and Kirkham’s A View from the Interior: Feminism, Women and Design, and the essays it contains have been particularly useful in identifying the ‘gender’ of design types and their reasoning. 18 However, prior to discussing the ‘maleness’ of furniture design, it is vital to bring architecture into the gender equation, as, at least at the start of this period, furniture designers both trained and practised as architects.


The architect-designer phenomenon was a result of the fascist regime, when architects had little opportunity to build. Instead, as Karl Mang has noted, they took ‘advantage of the comparative laxness of Italian Fascism and direct their creative energies elsewhere – to home furnishings, for instance.’\(^\text{19}\) In the aftermath of the regime’s collapse and Italy’s defeat only architects were able to respond to the immediacy of the exigencies of Reconstruction and build not only the three million homes needed but also furnish their interiors.\(^\text{20}\) In ‘Women and Architecture’ Lynne Walker describes architecture as occupying prime position in the ‘hierarchy of the arts’, whose origins lay in the division of the arts in the Renaissance period:

[This] privileged architecture over decoration, made architecture more prestigious, and more financially rewarding, than decoration. Thus, through the repressive mechanism of the sexual division of labour, women were assigned to the ‘lesser arts’, without the option that male architect-designers had of architectural design.\(^\text{21}\)

Valerie Wigfall has also voiced the idea that ‘architecture...has always been thought of as a man’s field.\(^\text{22}\) Wigfall attributes this to its pre- seventeenth century origins when a lengthy apprenticeship and working closely alongside builders was a necessary characteristic of architecture.\(^\text{23}\) Despite changes in the profession, its origins ‘continue to colour the image of the architect as a masculine figure.\(^\text{24}\)

Kirkham has described the similarly ‘male’ nature of furniture in ‘‘If You Have No Sons’: Furniture-Making in Britain’: ‘furniture-making is and has been...male dominated at the levels of production, design and entrepreneurial activities.’\(^\text{25}\) The apprenticeship tradition, the use of materials such as wood and metal, and particularly the physical connotations of producing furniture render it ‘male’ and yet in the context of post-war Italy, designers of neither sex would have been actually producing furniture.\(^\text{26}\) It would have been in the hands of the small scale artisan workshops and then in the factories of the burgeoning furniture industry. Nonetheless, although the reality of furniture production has developed, its gendered assumptions have not and furniture continues to be conceived as a predominantly ‘male’ occupation.

Certainly those men within the profession did not seem overly enthusiastic on the possibility of women architects and designers. Celebrated architect Carlo Scarpa would use his lectures at Venice University to state that ‘women could not be


\(^{20}\) The period of reconstruction is generally defined as the years from 1945 – 1955. Sparke, *Italian Design: 1870 to the Present* (New York : Abbeville Press, 1988

\(^{21}\) Lynne Walker, ‘Women and Architecture’ in Attfield and Kirkham, 98.


\(^{23}\) Wigfall 51.

\(^{24}\) Kirkam, “‘If You Have No Sons’: Furniture-Making in Britain,’ in Attfield and Kirkham, 109.

\(^{25}\) Kirkam, “‘If You Have No Sons’”111.
architects, in as much as they lack a sense of ‘gravitas’. In a 1939 issue of Domus Gio Ponti made his view crystal clear:

It is the natural work of the woman, it should be the only work of the woman, it is the work that does not take her away from the home and does not distance her from the cradle and the hearth. It brings her closer to expressions of art, it educates her, refines her taste...many young girls who pursue vague aspirations of art, painting or designing without an exact aim, would find their way dedicating themselves to creating and weaving delicate textiles...if I wanted to draw the ... kindest image of the Italian woman, I would depict her sat next to the ajar door of the home, watching the children, needlework resting on her knee. A woman who sews is close to the Madonna.

The gender of design types is relational and dynamic, defined according to the particular circumstances. With women in the architecture profession, it was necessary to demarcate ‘feminine’ areas within this so as to not disturb its gender hierarchy. Smaller in scale, furniture became the ‘female’ to the architectural ‘male’ and accordingly women found more opportunities in design rather than architecture. In this vein Catherine King cites, in addition to domestic architecture, the predominance of women in the design of ‘smaller and lighter’ objects and children’s furniture.

It was of course possible to practice furniture design without an architectural training but instead one rooted in artisanry; Luisa Morassi even went on to teach at such a school, the Gorizia Scuola dell’Arte. However, those women who attended these schools did not become a part of the profession and their work is difficult to trace.

Paddy Maguire has described design’s bid for higher social status in inter-war Britain and has noted how the process of professionalization ‘often ensured relative exclusion for females. This is also evident in Italy where both architecture and design, in a quest for respectability did so through ‘professionalising’ the field and

30 Luisa Morassi: Architetto. 1 August 2006.
31 Paddy Maguire ‘Women and the Profession of Design’ in Seddon and Worden, 46.
emphasising its intellectual aspects, and in the process eliminating certain groups from participating. Careers in design and architecture required high levels of education and the link between the female presence in education and subsequently in the profession cannot be overlooked.

**Women and Design Education**

Margaret Bruce and Jenny Lewis attribute the lack of women in industrial design directly to education. Only two percent of industrial design graduates in 1988 in the United Kingdom were female - due to 'gender stereotyping and a lack of confidence on the part of women. Industrial design courses are usually presented as masculine, technical and inherently difficult for women. Buckley has also noted how educational institutions have 'legitimized ideologically' the gender hierarchy within design in Britain:

British art and design education at degree level...reinforces this hierarchical and sexist split between male and female design activities. Because of sexism few women industrial design students survive to the end of their courses which are outside the female stereotype. They succeed well with fashion and textile courses which are considered to be suited to female abilities, but fare badly with industrial design, which is considered male.

In Italy, the dominant form of design/architectural school was the *Politecnico* and the most prestigious of these the *Politecnico di Milano*. It was also the most influential, the home of rationalist and later radical teachings by some of the most famous Italian architects. Several of the women designers also went on to teach at the School, including Cini Boeri, Raffaella Crespi and Franca Helg.

Founded in 1863, the *Politecnico* was initially an engineering school. Two years later ‘architettura civile’ was introduced, accompanied by courses on history and life drawing taught by professors from the Milanese *Accademia di Belle Arti di Brera*. This combination of technical and artistic disciplines rendered the *Politecnico* unique in Italy. There were however problems between the two faculties: Crespi has stated that ‘it is not in doubt that in our polytechnic the strong pole is represented by the faculty of engineering, while the faculty of architecture is the weak pole.’ There is certainly evidence for this, as a separate architecture faculty was not established until 1933 and the numbers of students in each faculty continued to be widely uneven. In 1936-7 a total of 1,075 students were enrolled in the engineering faculty, compared

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32 Margaret Bruce and Jenny Lewis, ‘Cherchez la femme,’ *Design May.* 1989: 59.
33 Buckley ‘Made in Patriarchy’ 6
35 Grasselli and Valota, 79.
with just 1965 in architecture. Even twenty years later in 1956-57 out of 2,837 students just 637 were studying architecture. While the entry of women into architecture was much retarded in comparison with engineering, women have remained an even smaller minority in the latter.

Crespi’s view of the inferiority of architecture to engineering reinforces the argument that values of ‘male’ and ‘female’ are relative and not ossified. Crespi states that ‘if it is still true – and it is still true – that a woman has a subordinate role in respect of men, the woman architect has a role two times subordinate: as woman and as architect. Following her argument, the woman furniture designer therefore has a role three times subordinate.

Carla Maria Bassi and Elvira Luisa Morassi were the first women architecture students, entering the School in 1922 and graduating in 1928 (figs. 1 - 2). It would take some years for women to become a visible presence; until 1940-41 fewer than twenty women were enrolled, less than ten percent of the total number of architecture students (appendix 2 and fig. 3). From 1932 to 1970, years in which the enrolment figures are divided by gender, growth is staggered. Throughout World War Two the numbers of students of both sexes rose at an exponentially faster rate, from just eighteen in 1939/40 to eighty-three in 1944/45. The end of the War brought a huge rise in female enrolment to 138, 26.6 percent of the total. This boom continued for a couple of years, plateauing out towards the mid 1950s at just below twenty-five percent of the total and then slowly increasing until another upsurge at the start of the 1960s. While 186 were enrolled in 1960/61, 434 did so in 1961/62, a record forty-nine percent. This continued until 1969/70 with 791 women, thirty-six percent of the total. The increase in female presence was disproportionately greater than the general growth of the architectural faculty, both in number and proportion.

Figures regarding women graduates are less consistent and not so encouraging (appendix 2 and fig. 4). Between 1929 and 1939 there were six years in which no women graduated at all, and in the years that they did, were never more than three. In terms of percentage this was actually relatively high; the three women graduates in 1936 were nearly sixteen percent of the total. There are some interesting figures – for example in 1943/44 women made up only 4.4 percent, the next year 33.3 percent, with seven women graduating compared to just one in the previous year. From the end of World War Two to 1969/70 there was not any notable growth in terms of percentage, for the most part remaining in the low twenties, escalating to thirty-four percent in 1950-51 but falling to 13.5 percent in 1952-53. The same is true of real

39 Crespi, 85.
figures with sporadic growth at the end of the fifties, rising to twenty-six women, countered by a low of just eight in 1954-55. By the end of the 1960s the numbers do increase, jumping into the sixties in 1966-67 and 1967-68 and then to over 200 in 1968-69. Like the growth in iscritti, the increase in laureate was disproportionate to the number of laureati (male graduates). Unfortunately in this case they remained disproportionately lower.

The disparity between enrolment and graduate figures is higher than would be expected, despite a higher trend in Italy than elsewhere in Europe for abandoning one’s studies.  

Crespi notes that this mostly happened within the first two years of the course and thinks that it was ‘probably because they found the workload excessive or because the practical approach disappointed their expectations.’ For Cini Boeri it was more gender-related: ‘hostility was not lacking and above all it was clear that any professional success after graduating was unthinkable.’ Any ‘hostility’ or overwhelm would surely have been compounded by their status as a sexual minority. While Morassi found that there was a ‘great spirit of collaboration and solidarity’ at the Politecnico, all projects and exams apart from town-planning were undertaken individually, inevitably increasing any sense of isolation. Some women such as Boeri and Anna Castelli-Ferrieri (figs. 5 and 6) had already got married while at the Politecnico and juggling the twin roles of student and wife/mother would have made a demanding course even more so.

Sexual discrimination was an unfortunate aspect of women’s experiences at the School. Boeri recalls how she was ridiculed by Professor Annoni during an exam for Restauro: ‘but how can you think of being an architect with those curls?’

Architect Sofia Badoni studied at the Politecnico in the 1930s. Here she recounts how professors had problems believing the capabilities of women architects, to detrimental effect:

There was some personal satisfaction, when I realised that my professors sometimes did not believe that the work I presented was my own...But the worst was for the dissertation. Professor Portaluppi...didn’t believe at all, despite my repeated confirmations, that the project was from my own mind and gave me only twenty-six.
It is surely not coincidental that Annoni and Portaluppi were both misogynistic and openly fascist as fascist teachings were an element at the School, even after the fall of the regime. Boeri was studying at the Politecnico in this period: ‘professors would say to me if you design a courthouse you should include a set of stairs with two fountains because you should give a sense of power to this building.’\(^{47}\) Fortunately, fascist professors were in a minority, and the female students seem unimpressed and untouched by the rhetoric of fascism. Certainly if they had they probably would not have decided to study architecture in the first place given the misogynistic nature of the regime which sought to confine women to their maternal roles and the domestic sphere.

**Female Education and Employment from the Regime to Reform**

For Annamaria Galbani the female presence at the Politecnico was ultimately ‘hindered by a social and familial structure pivoted on typically masculine models, and for the twenty years of Fascism, by a politics hostile to female work and sustained by the family tradition.’\(^{48}\) Nowhere was this more evident than in the education and employment legislation passed under Mussolini’s reign.

Mussolini simultaneously circumscribed women’s educative and employment opportunities, publicly denounced professional women and exalted their maternal role, effectively the only option left for women in this period. These attempts to remove women from the workplace were for reasons both economic and ideological.\(^{49}\) Mussolini stated that work ‘distracts from reproduction, if it does not directly impede it, and foments independence and the accompanying physical-moral styles contrary to birth ing.’\(^{50}\) Motherhood was ‘held up as a patriotic virtue’ with monetary prizes for those with the largest families.\(^{51}\) The influence of Catholicism is clear in this, an institution that also did a lot to curb women’s opportunities in the public sphere and in the private.\(^{52}\)

In 1923 law ‘1054’, Gentile’s law, was passed.\(^{53}\) It had two aims; ‘to inculcate Italian youth with the ideology of the fascist state and to select and promote only the elite

\(^{47}\) ‘Professori mi diceva se fai il tribunale devi fare una scalinata con due fontane perché devi dare un senso di potere a quest’edificio.’ Cini Boeri, personal interview, 28 July 2006.

\(^{48}\) ‘Ostacoloato da una struttura sociale e familiare imperniati su modelli prettamente maschili e, per il ventennio fascista, da una politica ostile al lavoro femminile; e sostenuto dalla tradizione familiare.’ Galbani 55.

\(^{49}\) For a full discussion of the sexist ideologies of fascism, see Maria-Antonietta Macciocchi, ‘Female Sexuality in Fascist Ideology,’ Feminist Review 1 (1979): 67-82.

\(^{50}\) Benito Mussolini ‘Macchina e donna’ Aug ’31, 1934 in Oper Omnia Edoardo Susmel and Duilio Susmel, (eds) 44 vols Florence: La Fenice, 1951-80, 26:311 in De Grazia 168.

\(^{51}\) Tamara Molinari ‘Images of an environment and an era through the lives of women: Florence. Upbringing and Emergencies’ in Abitare December 160 69.

\(^{52}\) Women, the family and Catholicism have been the subject of a number of academics. Including Lesley Caldwell, Italian Family Matters: Women, Politics and Legal Reform (London: Macmillian, 1991) and Jeff Pratt, ‘Catholic Culture,’ in David Forgacs and Robert Lumley, eds. Italian Cultural Studies (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1996) 129-143.

\(^{53}\) Grasselli and Valota, 49.
so as not to overload the market for intellectual labor. Access to university was allowed to only those who had attended the *liceo-ginnasio*. Simultaneously the *licei femminili* were formed, initially just one of the forms of schooling open to females, subsequently their only choice, thus ruling them out of the possibility of a university education. Both Bassi and Morassi entered the *Politecnico* just before Gentile’s law was passed, and the lack of female graduates in early 1930s is a consequence of this law. It would not be until 1962, when the minimum school leaving age was raised to fourteen that the female presence in higher education as a whole changed dramatically, evident in the figures from the *Politecnico*.

The attempt to stop women from going to university did not actually have the desired effect – between 1913-14 and 1950 the total percentage of female university students went from 5.8 percent of the total student population in 1913-14 to twenty-six percent. During the 1930s there was a boom in female education as the *licei femminili* were abolished. Female enrolment in secondary education went from 100,000 in 1930 to 350,000 in 1940.

However more education did not lead to more employment and there seems to be a direct link between female unemployment and rising education. By 1932 women made up less than three percent of the teaching population thanks to legislation which banned them from teaching Latin, Italian, Greek, History and Economics in the *licei*. In 1929, law number 1272 was introduced, whereby tax for female teachers increased from thirty to fifty percent of wages.

De Grazia notes that it was in professions such as design and architecture which required extensive study, ‘intellectual commitment’ and involved ‘subtle peer discrimination’ where ‘discriminatory legislation was most effective at blocking access.’ The *Duce*, speaking to Emil Ludwig in a widely read interview, stated that the small number of women in architecture was a ‘symbol of her [subalter]n destiny’: ‘Ask her to build you a mere hut, not even a temple, she cannot do it.’

The educational and employment reform of the 1960s and 1970s reflects the successes of the women’s movement. In 1963, unisex education was introduced for the first time, when the *scuola media unificata* was established. In 1965, the Gentile law was repealed, and in 1969 access to university was liberalized and potential students could apply with any form of school diploma. With regards to

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55 Luisa Passerini ‘Gender Relations’ in Forgacs and Lumley, 144.
56 Dunnage, 83.
57 Dunnage, 83. Grasselli and Valota, 43.
58 Dunnage, 83. Grasselli and Valota, 43.
59 Grasselli and Valota, 54.
60 De Grazia, 195.
62 Grasselli and Valota, 65.
63 Crespi, 85.
employment, in 1971 law 1204 was passed which guaranteed the protection of working mothers, but it was not until 1977 that equality in the workplace was legislated. Law 903 prohibited ‘all discrimination on the basis of sex as regards the availability of work, rates of pay, access to qualifications, permanency of employment, and promotion.’

While the number of women in the design profession did increase, they remained a minority. This was not just down to legislation but also women’s own position on sexual difference in feminism, and prior to this in emancipation. The effect of emancipation can be seen in the fact that women were allowed in the profession, but had to remain a minority. Legislative reform initially did not affect women’s subordination in the private sphere, nor did it challenge the areas of work that women were allowed into. Under feminism, the desire was not to be ‘a-like’ men as it was in feminism, but to be and act like a woman. This is visible in Adriana Cavarero’s ‘Towards a Theory of Sexual Difference.’ Cavarero recommends women to find their own voice, their own ‘essence’ which is ‘a thousand times better than aping the enlightened adventures of the masculine subject, which for centuries have relegated her to darkness.’ So while feminism and the women’s movement had improved women’s possibilities, it seems that part of the reaction against men was a rejection of male values. While this was understandable, it did mean that architecture has remained a male dominated discipline.

In view of all of these factors, both legislative and ideological, what factors could have facilitated women’s participation in such male-dominated environment? The key is in their personal background and experiences.

Facilitating Factors in Entering the Profession
The women furniture designers share similarities in birthplace, schooling, and even familial background. Most were born in the northern industrial triangle, a significant number in Milan. Italian students tend to study in or close to their home towns and so opportunities in higher education and employment were often prescribed by what was in their area.

The introduction established Milan as the unofficial capital of Italy, the most avant-garde of Italian cities. Those who belonged to its progressive elite, such as Anna Castelli-Ferrieri and Cini Boeri, were less bound by conventional cultural traditions and gender roles. Both also had architects in their social group – Ernesto Rogers was a friend of Castelli-Ferrieri and encouraged her to join the profession; conversely De Finetti advised Boeri against it, stating that it was ‘a career absolutely for men.’

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64 Passerini, 146.
65 Passerini, 148.
68 ‘E un mestiere per l’uomo assolutamente’ Cini Boeri, personal interview, 28 July 2006.
Kirkham’s essay “If you Have No Sons” ‘shows just how contingent on accidents of birth or marriage entry into the furniture trade was for women.’ 69 Kirkham was referring to opportunities for women in families who had no sons in the furniture business, while conversely having a brother was more positive for women in Italy. This is true of Antonia Astori, Emma Gismonde Schweinberger and Cini Boeri and also extends to having a father in design or architecture. Giorgina Castiglioni and Maria Luisa Belgiojoso are both the offspring of ‘famous’ architectural fathers. The value of a familial connection was commented in one of the first issues of A.I.D.I.A.: ‘In general, in order that a woman succeeds in practising the libera professione it’s good to be supported or at least introduced by a father or brother and that she work in collaboration with a colleague.’ 70 Partnership was a popular choice amongst women designers. However, while it may have been a positive factor in enabling women to overcome the obstacles to entering the profession described above, it did not ensure a smooth career path once women had entered the profession. Partnership and women’s experiences as a minority in the design profession are the focus of chapter two.

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69 ‘Introduction’ in Attfield and Kirkham, 2.
70 ‘In generale, affinché una donna riesca ad esercitare la libera professione è bene che sia appoggiata o almeno introdotta dal padre o da un fratello e che lavori in collaborazione con una collega.’ Notizie dall’A.I.D.I.A. 5 1957: 3.
Chapter Two: Women Designers and Gendered Experiences

Chapter one established the minority status of women designers. This chapter examines how this ‘minority status’ was translated into how they experienced the profession, looking first at the trend for male-female partnership and architect ‘couples’ mentioned in chapter one. If collaboration was seen as a form of overcoming the obstacles women designers faced, organisations such as the A.I.D.I.A offered another, through female solidarity and embracing feminism. This second aspect therefore looks at relations between women and why women designers such as Franca Helg chose to reject female solidarity and ‘forgot’ their female status.\(^7\)

The decision to focus on experiences that were common to most of the women rather than a more straight-forward biographical approach is a result of the disparity in levels of information on these women and a desire to employ alternative approaches. This is so as to not further marginalise those on whom very little information exists but at the same time make the most of the material gathered. Viewing more ‘known’ women designers as representative of others is one way of avoiding this and is a method previously employed in Women’s Places: Architecture and Design 1860-1960:

The aim is not...to elevate them to the status of ‘heroines’ but rather to use them as examples of women who actively engaged with architecture and/or design in the period in question and who, in doing so, highlighted themes which increase our understanding of the relationship of women with the built and designed environments more generally.\(^8\)

However viewing these women as ‘representative’ could imply that female furniture designers were a homogenous group. The intention is rather to examine the experiences of those women who did speak for those who have had no voice, by utilising a form of taxonomy which embraces all the women involved.

A trend for collaboration

Out of the forty-seven women designers, eight worked consistently or regularly with their husbands, nine with male partners, five with female partners and six in mixed-gender groups, leaving nineteen who worked predominantly alone (appendix 1).

This was the era of the freelance designer, when designers collaborated with a number of firms and either set up their own studio or worked in others. With ‘tradition’ prevalent in both society and the profession, women had few opportunities

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\(^7\) Crespi notes that this mostly happened within the first two years of the course and thinks that it was ‘probably because they found the workload excessive or because the practical approach disappointed their expectations.’ \[15\] Donald Sassoon, Contemporary Italy: Politics, Economy and Society since 1945 (Marlow: Longman, 1986) 100-109.

to set up their own practices and male collaboration offered the opportunity of more commissions, commercial success and prestige. Jane Rendell describes the benefits of working with a husband/partner/father/brother (it is never mother/sister, and rarely a female partner) in Gender, Space, Architecture: An Interdisciplinary Introduction. 

Taking a role as the female architect in a male-female architectural partnership has long been a chosen form of architectural practice for women...Certainly for many women this model has provided them with a stable and often high-profile form of practice. Arguably, the male partner eases routes of access to a male professional elite and provides the continuity required to sustain practice while raising children. 

A number of women worked in conjunction with high-profile male designers. Anna Castelli-Ferrieri worked with Ignazio Gardella from 1959 to 1973, and Cini Boeri with Marco Zanuso (fig 7), from 1952 to 1963. The longest partnership was between Franca Helg and Franco Albini (fig 8), which lasted for over thirty years. The studio also became the home of Antonio Piva and Albini’s son Marco, and changed its name to accommodate them all accordingly. Obviously as with any studio it was not just these figures involved, and it should be remembered as with all these women that there were multiple anonymous figures behind them whose names are never credited.

Helg clearly had infinite respect for Albini, one of the most prominent and esteemed figures of the early post-war period:

I worked by him, for him, with him for over thirty years, and I don’t think there has ever been an artist who has been more generous in passing on his knowledge, more open to a democratic exchange and to an equal collaboration with all who were willing, as he was, to believe in and to labor toward intelligent work.

Helg ‘collaborated very willingly with others, and never felt the need to posit herself as the absolute protagonist of her works, did not have the need to ‘put her signature’ on projects thought and followed up directly by her.’ This ambivalence towards recognition of her own work ‘sprung out of her great professional honesty, and the contribution she gave to Albini was certainly willing, that is understood, she was certainly not a woman who cancelled herself out for someone.’ Interestingly, Helg

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74 Rendell, 228-229.
78 Franca Helg, ‘Franco Albini – Architect and Teacher,’ Leet, 18.
79 'Collaborava molto volentieri con altri, e non ha mai sentito il bisogno di porsi come l’assoluta protagonista dei suoi lavori, non aveva l’esigenza ‘di mettere la firma’ su alcuni progetti pensati e seguiti direttamente da lei.’ Grasselli and Valota, 346.
80 'Non ha mai sentito il bisogno di far riconoscere il proprio lavoro in qualche modo; questo atteggiamento scaturiva dalla sua grande correttezza professionale, e l’opporto che lei ha dato ad
has contributed to the myth of Albini as a solitary figure – and thus to her own marginalisation - in her essay ‘Franco Albini – Architect and Teacher’.\textsuperscript{80}

The only sign Helg was aware of the problems of collaboration was in a remark to Cini Boeri regarding her partnership with Zanuso: ‘but what are you doing, you’ll finish up always being in the shadow of someone, get yourself away, decide, be brave.’\textsuperscript{81} In Helg’s case it was perhaps as much an awareness of Boeri’s different temperament and the increased opportunities open to women designers of the younger generation as dissatisfaction with her own position that led her to make this comment.

Helg is only ever mentioned in connection with Albini, while the reverse is not true, when she was also designing independently for Bonacina.\textsuperscript{82} Helg is just one example of a female designer subsumed under the figure of her male partner, a trend more commonly found in architect/designer ‘couples’ such as Luisa and Ico Parisi, Lella and Massimo Vignelli and Eugenia Alberti and Gian Luigi Reggio. Luisa is never mentioned without Ico and yet also worked with textile designers Marisa Bronzini and Renata Bonfanti. Bronzini has even remarked on Luisa’s ‘total creative autonomy’ in the partnership and Bonfanti commented that Luisa was:

[An] inventive and intelligent designer (who) with originality and confidence designed furniture and furnishings... (and as regards the) works that appeared in various publications, signed Ico and Luisa Parisi, I know, from direct experience, that it was always she who formulated these designs.\textsuperscript{83}

Unlike the creative relationships discussed in Whitney Chadwick and Isabelle de Courtivron’s Significant Others: Creativity and Intimate Partnership, the couples and partnerships here were working collectively rather than producing work separately within a couple.\textsuperscript{84} Significant Others fascinatingly explores the ‘complexities’ of partnership and asks how they operate in a society where ‘the dominant belief about art and literature is that they are produced by solitary individuals, but the dominant social structures are concerned with familial, matrimonial, and heterosexual arrangements.’\textsuperscript{85} The result, given ‘our culture’s emphasis on solitary creation’ is that ‘one is always constructed as Significant, and the partner as Other.’\textsuperscript{86} This is most evident in cultural representation as discussed in chapters four and five but it also had

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\textsuperscript{80} Albini era sicuramente voluto, cioè consapevole, non era di certo una donna che si annullava per qualcuno.’ Grasselli and Valota, 347.

\textsuperscript{81} ‘Ma cosa fai, finirai per essere sempre l’ombra di qualcuno, ma staccato dai, decidi, abbi coraggio.’ Grasselli and Valota, 16.

\textsuperscript{82} Bonacina was established in 1896 and specialises in the production of cane furniture. The relationship with designers started with the company’s collaboration with Franco Albini in 1951, the product of which was the ‘Margherita’ chair. Vittorio Bonacina. 21 September 2006.


\textsuperscript{84} Lynne Chadwick and Isabelle de Courtivron, eds. Significant Others: Creativity and Intimate Partnership (London: Thames and Hudson, 1993)

\textsuperscript{85} Chadwick and de Courtivron, 7.

\textsuperscript{86} Chadwick and de Courtivron, 10.
resonances at the time these women were practicing, even in how each partner perceived their role in the partnership. By awarding himself the creative role Massimo already establishes himself as the ‘Significant’ partner and Lella as the ‘Other’:

The Vignellis have always carefully balanced impulse and control in their work. Indeed, they see their partnership as an alliance and dialectic between the possible (Massimo) and practical (Lella). ‘I talk of feelings,’ says Massimo, ‘Lella of feasibilities’.87

The same is true of Castelli-Ferrieri’s relationship with Gardella. She feels indebted to him for the opportunities and experience gained at his studio, and they shared ‘communal convictions…shared enthusiasms.’88 Her esteem however is tempered by bitterness: she may have been assigned ‘the most interesting things of my life’; working with Adriana Olivetti, but Gardella took the recognition, so adamant was he on being the ‘master’ of his studio.89 Anna conceded this, aware of its importance and interestingly it is a pattern she has repeated in her own studio.90 Both Castelli-Ferrieri and Gardella seem to have subscribed to the ‘Significant’/‘Other’ dichotomy and negotiated their own roles within it. Cristina Morozzi has described their relationship as exemplary of that ‘eternal conflict between central male personality and the female figure that searches to make her own path with obstinacy in a terrain ploughed almost exclusively by men.’91

During the latter years of her work with Gardella, Castelli-Ferrieri started producing furniture and products for Kartell, established in 1949 by her husband Giulio Castelli.92 This occurred on Giulio’s request following the departure of two of his colleagues. Castelli-Ferrieri states that that Giulio felt ‘very alone…I did it, but not willingly, as I was convinced and I still am that you should never work with your husband.’93 The reasons behind Castelli-Ferrieri’s discontent are unclear as it was her products for Kartell which earned her international recognition. Yet she felt restrained by the relationship and stopped working with plastics for some time ‘to renew my image as designer.’94

Castelli-Ferrieri has also described the nature of her marital relationship and it seems that sacrifice occurred both at work and at home. She found it difficult juggling her

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87 Eleni M. Constantine Skyline May 1980 in Oclepplo and Pansera, Ibid.
88 ‘convizioni comuni...entusiasmi condivisi’ Morozzi Anna Castelli-Ferrieri11.
89 ‘Le cose più interessanti della mia vita.’ Grasselli and Valota, 296.
90 Grasselli and Valota, 297. Luca Pialta is Anna Castelli-Ferrieri’s assistant at her studio.
91 ‘L’eterno conflitto tra personalità maschile accentratrice e figure femminile che cerca di farsi strada con caparbietà in un terreno arato quasi esclusivamente da uomini.’ Morozzi 11.
92 Kartell is a firm which specialised in the manufacture of plastic products. Anty Pansera has described ‘quality of design, incredibly advanced technology of production and quality of materials [as] the three fundamental levels which characterise...the firm’. ‘Qualità della progettazione, qualità avanztissima della tecnologia di produzione e qualità dei materiali sono i tre livelli fondamentali che caratterizzano [l’]azienda.’ Anty Pansera, Il Design del Mobile Italiano dal 1946 a Oggi (Rome: Laterza, 1990) 24.
93 ‘Molto solo...lo feci ma volentieri perché ero convinta e io sono tuttora che mai si dovrebbe lavorare con il proprio marito.’ Grasselli and Valota, 300.
94 Grasselli and Valota, 300.
roles of designer and wife/mother, and has said that ‘I have always felt a bit hurt because I could not dedicate myself to my home and my husband.’\textsuperscript{95} The Castells married in 1943, the year Anna graduated from the Politecnico.\textsuperscript{96} As it was wartime there was little work available and so she threw herself into the role of diligent housewife.\textsuperscript{97} When she did start working, she announced ‘enough already - there is no time to prepare food...we’ll eat white rice and two eggs with butter...a healthy meal that can be done in two minutes,’ a regime which her husband did not take kindly to.\textsuperscript{98} For the birth of each of her children she took just five days off work and when she had just one child would take him around with her.\textsuperscript{99} When she was at work she fortunately always had someone at home to look after the children; at first the couple lived with her parents, and there was also an aunt and a domestic servant.\textsuperscript{100} Initially she was always home in time to bathe the children: ‘Then I understood that children have a lot more need (for parents) when they are fifty than when they are fifteen days old.’\textsuperscript{101} With this in mind, and knowing that she could always leave them in good hands, she ‘looked instead to spoil... (her) husband, taking care of him.’\textsuperscript{102}

Cini Boeri was already married and pregnant with her first child by the time of her graduation from the Politecnico in 1951.\textsuperscript{103} She had three sons with husband Renato Boeri but divorced in the late 1970s – an unusual choice in this period and only possible since the Divorce law was passed in 1970.\textsuperscript{104} Boeri strived to keep her professional and family lives separate, but close, as for a short period she kept her studio above her apartment, and she always put her family first – something which she says perhaps penalized her career.\textsuperscript{105}

Boeri and Castelli-Ferrieri are unusual in that we know something of their private life; in the case of many of these designers, there is no trace of their personal lives. This could be because these women did not have ‘traditional’ family setups, due to a climate less amenable than today to working mothers, which often meant having to choose between a career and a family. What Boeri and Castelli-Ferrieri’s experiences both show is that as working women facing obstacles in the public sphere the private realm was not necessarily easier. Beverley Thiele has discussed male and female experiences of the private sphere in ‘Vanishing Acts in Social and Political Thought: Tricks of the Trade’:

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\item[95] ‘In questo modo mi sono sempre sentiva po’ in dolo, perchè non potevo dedicarmi molto alla casa ed al mio marito.’ Grasselli and Valota, 293.
\item[96] Grasselli and Valota, 293.
\item[97] Grasselli and Valota 293.
\item[98] ‘Adesso basta non c’è più tempo per preparare da mangiare; mangiamo riso in bianco e due uova al burro...questa è una cosa sana e si fa in due minuti.’ Grasselli and Valota, 293.
\item[99] Grasselli and Valota, 293.
\item[100] Grasselli and Valota, 294.
\item[101] ‘Poi ho capito che i bambini hanno molto più bisogno quando hanno cinquanta anni che quando hanno quindici giorni.’ Grasselli and Valota, 293.
\item[102] ‘Cercavo piuttosto di viziare mio marito prendendomi cura di lui.’ Grasselli and Valota, 294.
\item[103] Grassi and Pansera, 278.
\item[104] Avo gadro, 34.
\item[105] Grasselli and Valota, 254.
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
The private realm as an arena of freedom and autonomy, as compensation for
the compromises of the public sphere, has meaning only for men. Women
exist principally in the private sphere...For them the private sphere expresses
control not freedom, submission not autonomy; it is the realm in which they
consent to be ruled by the exercise of male autonomy and freewill.  

Thiele’s comment is particularly true when one considers the nature of women’s
careers, which, as Donald Sassoon has commented, are ‘interrupted’ by child-bearing
and rearing. Figures such as Giulio Castelli may have had a professional and familial
life but they did not experience them as incompatible, largely because they were
absolved of familial and domestic duties. For women, this incompatibility resulted in
their decreasing presence in the profession; while in northern European countries the
rate of women working commonly falls when having children only to rise again, in
Italy the rate lowers continually with progressing age and increasing numbers of
children.

Female Solidarity

The theme of incompatibility between career and home life regularly featured in the
newsletters of the A.I.D.I.A from this period (fig 2.x). A.I.D.I.A. was set up in Turin in
1955 with four aims: ‘[to]promote the exchange of ideas with cultural and
professional aim,’ ‘[to]evaluate women’s work in technical arenas,’ ‘[to] encourage
reciprocal assistance in the profession’ and ‘[to] cultivate cultural and professional
links with similar associations in Italy and abroad.’ The first issue published
excerpts from the XIII Pax Romana congress, held at Nottingham University. That
year’s theme was entitled ‘From University to the Profession.’ One of the papers
featured was on women graduates, and it repeatedly states that ‘the first duty of the
young married graduate is towards her family.’ Moreover ‘the young [woman]
graduate who decides to practise the profession, when she is married, must make
herself fully aware of the effects that it can have on her family life.’ More
opportunities are available to ‘the young single [woman] graduate [who] is in a better
position to take an active part in society,’ Presumably if she intended to continue

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McDowell and Rosemary Pringle, eds. Defining Women: Social Institutions and Gender Divisions,
107 Sassoon, 104.
108 Galbani, 121.
109 ‘Promuovere scambi di idee a scopo culturale e professionale’, ‘valorizzare il lavoro della donna nel
campo della tecnica’, ‘favorire l’assistenza reciproca nel campo della professione’, ‘cattivare legami
culturali e professionali con analoghe associazioni italiani ed estere.’ Notizie dall’ A.I.D.I.A. n.1
January-February 1956 unnumbered.
110 Pax Romana is an international Catholic organisation set up in 1921. 20 August 2006. Notizie dall’
A.I.D.I.A.
1956: n.d.
113 ‘La giovane laureata che decide di esercitare la professione, quando è sposata, deve rendersi
1956: n.d.
114 ‘La giovane laureata non sposata è in una posizione migliore per prendere parte attiva alla vita della
taking ‘an active part in society’ she would have to remain single. The presence of the Catholic Church in the newsletter is interesting, demonstrating its continuing cultural hegemony. As the Church started to lose power and the women’s movement gathered momentum, the women of the A.I.D.I.A. began to question the necessity of the ‘spirit of sacrifice’ that the Church expected of women. At the onset of the 1960s, A.I.D.I.A. published letters from its members who commented on the detrimental effect of the family on career possibilities, not the other way around: ‘it is right...that the family represents for every woman the principal ideal and aim, but it is also true that it influences substantially their possibilities of a career.’ By the 1970s, the family was seen as the problem: ‘the family in its current form represents...the biggest obstacle in women’s liberation; the family is a closed microcosm (in which man commands) in antithesis with the social macrocosm.’ While A.I.D.I.A. became increasingly feminist as an organisation, it retained that work and motherhood were incompatible — what changed was which should be sacrificed. Interestingly, this is similar to the position adopted by women’s professional associations under fascism. As Victoria de Grazia has noted, ‘to justify their right to be exceptions, elite women thus affirmed that as a rule, work and motherhood were incompatible.’ There might have been a sense of solidarity amongst these women, but not with the women’s cause at large.

The newsletters of A.I.D.I.A. provide an insight into the discrimination that women faced in the profession — less pay, hostility from male colleagues, cases of being fired rather than promoted. They also demonstrate women’s attempts to improve their position through coming together collectively as women, raising consciousness by forming groups, characteristic of trends in the women’s movement in Italy at this time. Only one female furniture designer seems to have been a member of A.I.D.I.A. Ada Bursi is one of the least-known women here, and there are unfortunately few examples of her work. Of the most prominent women, namely Gae Aulenti, Cini Boeri, Anna Castelli-Ferrieri and Franca Helg, none showed much - if any - interest in the women’s movement or feminism, and certainly were not members of organisations such as A.I.D.I.A. Helg for one felt that being a part of such an organisation was a sign of weakness, as Anna Giorgi has described in ‘Nel Segno di Estia. Istruzione Politecnico e Professione in Architettura delle donne a Milano’:

> It signified admitting the need to be in a group in order to defend oneself, something that she could not support because I believe that she considered herself indestructible...She was delicate and had lots of insecurities, but I think

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117 ‘La famiglia nella sua forma attuale costituisce dunque il più grande ostacolo alla liberazione della donna; la famiglia è un microcosmo sociale, (in cui commanda l’uomo) in antitesi con il macrocosmo sociale.’ Notizie n.20 1” semester 1972 5.
118 Victoria de Grazia, 199.
119 Notizie 1956
that a woman like herself did not feel the need to associate herself with other women. I would say rather that she forget that she was a woman.\footnote{\textit{Questo significava ammettere una necessità di consorziarsi (to group, to be in a group) per difendersi, cosa che non sopportava perché credo che si considerasse indistruttibile. Poi avevo delle grandi fragilità e delle grandi insicurezze, ma credo che una donna così non sentisse il bisogno di associarsi con altre donne. Direi piuttosto che si era dimenticata di essere una donna.} Grasselli and Valota, 349.}

Helg’s rejection of female solidarity and her own gender is a position also shared by Gae Aulenti, arguably the most ‘famous’ of the female designers and more known for her architectural projects such as the \textit{Musée D’Orsay} rather than her furniture.\footnote{For a description of Gae Aulenti’s architecture and design projects see Margherita Petranzan \textit{Gae Aulenti} (New York: Rizzoli, 1997).}

Aulenti has been described by biographer Margherita Petranzan as a ‘strong, ‘authoritative’ female presence’, while Boeri has described her as a ‘panther’ who was ‘considered a man.’\footnote{\textit{Perdute tante, perché essere donna (mi spiace dirlo ancora nel 2004) non mi ha aiutato ad avere grandi incarichi, che spesso mi sono passati davanti al naso, senza firmarsi.} Avogadro, 94.}

In ‘\textit{Nel Segno di Estia}’ Aulenti dismisses feminism and any subject with feminine connotations as tiresome, fearing that it can ‘hide easy self-commiserations.’\footnote{\textit{Un treno o un aereo purtroppo…ne una bicicletta} Cini Boeri, personal interview. 28th July 2006.}

She does, reluctantly, admit to having encountered problems: ‘let’s admit also that they did not give me important work straight away, however for that little work that I did, I did it so well that in some way I was awarded.’\footnote{\textit{Come donna in genere è sempre stato un disastro e lo è tutt’ora identico.} Cini Boeri, personal interview. 28th July 2006.}

Boeri is similarly sceptical and even more caustic on the subject of feminism than Aulenti. She knows that she has lost out on projects ‘because being a woman…has not helped me to be awarded big commissions, which often have passed under my nose, without stopping.’\footnote{\textit{‘Ammettiamo anche che non mi abbiano dato subito dei lavori importanti, però quell’piccolo lavoro che ho fatto in seguito l’ho fatto talmente bene in qualche modo sono stata segnalata.’ Grasselli and Valota, 192.}

It has also affected the type of commissions she has received — it was not a coincidence that her first architectural project was for a nursery, most of her work has been domestic in nature, and she has never been asked to design ‘a train or an aeroplane unfortunately…nor a bicycle.’\footnote{\textit{‘Come donna in genere è sempre stato un disastro e lo è tutt’ora identico.’ Cini Boeri, personal interview. 28th July 2006.}

This fits in with Catherine King’s comments described in the first chapter regarding the demarcation of certain areas as female/inferior within design.\footnote{\textit{‘Il femminismo come movimento non è entrato nel nostro campo di professione che non avevo bisogna perché ho elevato tre maschi figli da sola lavoravo quindi il mio battaglio era già iniziato.’ Cini Boeri, personal interview. 28th July 2006.}

Boeri is frank on the status of women in Italy: ‘as a woman in general it has always been a disaster and it is the all the same now.’\footnote{\textit{‘Feminism ‘did not enter into our profession’ and she did not feel she needed it either as she had ‘raised three sons alone whilst working and so my battle had already begun.’\footnote{\textit{‘Il femminismo come movimento non è entrato nel nostro campo di professione che non avevo bisogna perché ho elevato tre maschi figli da sola lavoravo quindi il mio battaglio era già iniziato.’ Cini Boeri, personal interview. 28th July 2006.}}

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merit in the movement or any change as a result of it. ‘I have had fifty years in the profession...I have serious clients even. Here I have male and female young collaborators [and] I have to tell you that when I am here speaking with my clients I speak and they reply looking at the men.’

She thinks that if the result of the feminist movement is game shows with ‘foxes waddling naked around [male] presenters’, and ‘overbearing women and frustrated men...I don’t know if it is positive.’ Boeri had few female friends and has said that she preferred to be around male colleagues.

Aulenti’s display of masculine attributes and her refusal of male partnership, Boeri and Helg’s rejection of female solidarity are in my opinion due to the combination of a male-dominated profession and continuing legacy of the emancipationist tradition. Aulenti has even stated that the women’s movement was ‘not important. I belonged to that generation that had not directly lived feminism, but emancipation instead.’

In a male-dominated profession, it would have been ‘male’ attributes that would have enabled female designers to prosper. Women designers such as Boeri would have been willing to adopt ‘male’ strategies due to the influence of emancipation: an individual strategy that offered the possibility of equality with men only for particular women, who, as a result, assumed a new status, which consisted of being different from other women and instead being like men. Emancipation was largely based on access to waged work and these women believed therefore that they had already succeeded in overcoming obstacles of being a woman by entering the profession. Instead, their masculine behaviour actually demonstrates how ‘women architects are expected to adopt values and codes of form and representation formulated within the context of patriarchy.’

Even as feminism emerged in the late 1960s, it was not welcomed in architecture thanks to it’s violently (understandably) anti-male stance and the threat it posed to the gender hierarchy and traditional social structure. For women such as Aulenti and Boeri the rejection of feminism and feminist values was therefore also a political choice, born out of the fact that career success in architecture was often as much about networking and connections, rather than professional merit and capabilities. Ultimately, it was not a coincidence that Aulenti and the other most commercially successful women adopted ‘manly’ behaviour and became as successful as they did,

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130 ‘Dunque io ho cinquant’anni di professione...ho tanti ho dei clienti serie anche presente in ho qui collaborati ragazzi maschi che femmine devo dirti che quando sono qui a parlare con i miei clienti io parlo e loro rispondono guardando ai ragazzi.’ Cini Boeri, personal interview. 28th July 2006.
131 ‘Veline che sculettano nude attorno ai presentatori’ ‘Donne prepotenti e maschi frustrati sono un obiettivo raggiunto, ma non so se positivo.’ Avogadro, 126.
132 ‘Non aveva importanza. Io appartenago a quella generazione che non ha vissuto direttamente il femminismo, ma ha vissuto l’emancipazione.’ Grasselli and Valota, 190.
133 Caldwell ‘Italian Feminism’, 100.
134 Buckley ‘Made in Patriarchy’, 12.
Chapter Three: Female, Feminine, Feminist: Alternative Perspectives on Italian Post-War Furniture

Chapter three concludes this first section on the ‘existence and experience’ of women designers by combining an object-based approach with one that examines other more ‘feminine’ aspects of design. Aspects, as noted by Sparke in ‘Nature, Craft, Domesticity and the Culture of Consumption’ largely absent from ‘existing narratives… [which] have largely ignored those aspects of the story which do not concur with a characterization of that phenomenon that relies on the concepts of rationality, mass production and the impact of new materials.’\(^{135}\) Sparke’s essay and her application of the ‘feminine’ and the ‘masculine’ to Italian postwar design is vital to this chapter. Where this chapter differs significantly from Sparke’s essay is that virtually all the objects are female-designed.

This discussion of the ‘feminine’ aspects of Italian furniture design takes place within a more over-arching history of the period, loosely structured by decade. This format is not without its problems: Andrea Branzi thinks it is ‘difficult to make cultural phenomena fit into the narrow confines of a critical categorization based on decades, given that such categories often contain materials that are unconnected if not diametrically opposed.’\(^{136}\) However I think that a fluid adoption of a decadal organization offers the opportunity for a legible reading of post-war Italian design.

The objects in this discussion have been selected due to their representative abilities, and it is hoped to achieve a balance between more and less well known designers. By conceding the partiality and positionality of this chapter the glaring omissions of many of the designs of this period will hopefully be understood. The inclusion of an illustrated appendix of all the furniture designs produced by the women designers also lays the ground for acknowledging the very real female contribution to Italian post-war furniture design (appendix 6).

Female Designers and ‘Feminine’ Designs

The concept of the ‘feminine’ in designed objects needs to be clarified. As in Il Design delle Donne, the aim is not to ‘define what is female creativity by putting together a certain number of objects created by women’, as what appears as ‘typically’ female is mostly ‘transitory’ and usually defined in relation to masculine values.\(^ {137}\) This was also evident in the relative ‘male’ and ‘female’ characteristics of furniture design in chapter one and here applies both to the types of furniture (the preponderance of women in children’s furniture) to the forms that were produced. However, I do not agree with Anna Giorgi that Helg’s predilection for circular forms can be solely attributed to her sex: designs such as ‘Radar’ (fig 9) were predominantly informed by the nature of the material and its curving forms are found throughout the 1950s in...
designs by both sexes. This is not to say that gender did not intersect in design and that Aulenti was right to state that ‘architecture is a discipline...where masculine and feminine do not come into it,’ What Aulenti perceives as gender neutrality is rather an unwillingness to accept that ‘neutral’ nearly always means ‘masculine.’ In Bacci’s view, Aulenti’s pretence to neutrality is ultimately due to her own gendered experiences:

If a few prefer to think that belonging to their sex is a marginal question it is certainly because women have always met with theory of art apparently neutral, in reality exclusively male, and have seen their work belittled and unappreciated in as much as they have been produced by women.

The point here is rather that the focus on female-designed objects should not be misinterpreted as evidence that women were only involved in the ‘feminine’ aspects of Italian post-war design or inherently created ‘feminine’ forms. Not only were men also involved in this respect but both sexes were present in all areas of the furniture produced in this period.

‘Masculine’ and ‘Feminine’ in Post-War Neo-Rationalism
‘Up to 1946, the tradition of Italian design had been completely formed and developed along the lines of a culture closely linked to architecture...Rationalist architecture.’

In feminist approaches to design history, modernism and its various national permutations is conceived as ‘masculine.’ Sparke has discussed the gender of modernism in Women’s Places:

[Modernism] aligned itself more closely with stereotypically masculine cultural values – ones that were linked to the public sphere, to rationalism and to the technological metaphor – than with values associated with the world of domestic femininity.

Denise Scott Brown has also painted the modernist architect as a male figure: ‘the heroically original, Modern architectural revolutionary with his avant-garde

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138 Grasselli and Valota, 350.
139 ‘L’architettura è una disciplina che si esercita attraverso una teoria e una sua pratica e dove il maschile e il femminile proprio non c’entrano’ Grasselli and Valota, 197.
140 ‘Se alcune ancora preferiscono pensare che l’appartenza al loro sesso sia una questione del tutto marginale è certamente perché le donne da sempre hanno avuto confrontarsi con una teoria dell’arte apparentemente neutrale, in realtà esclusivamente maschile, e hanno visto il loro lavoro sminuito e disprezzato in quanto prodotto di donna.’ Bacci, 12.
142 This is true of amongst others Cheryl Buckley’s ‘Women and Modernism: A Case Study of Grete Marks (1899-1990)’ in Seddon and Worden, 105.
143 Sparke ‘Elsie de Wolfe and her Female Clients’ in Women’s Places 48. Sparke has also discussed this extensively in As Long as its Pink: The Sexual Politics of Taste (London: Harper Collins, 1995)
technology, out to save the masses through mass production, is a macho image if ever there was one.

Design historians often talk of ‘generations’ in Italian design. As the dominant ideology when the first and second ‘generations’ of designers were embarking on the path to the profession, one could question why such a ‘masculine’ movement/ideology appealed to this group of women and why women designers continued to practice in the rationalist mould. Rationalist tendencies such as the utilization of new materials, and a concern for furniture ‘made in series’ that resulted in a certain ‘stylistic unity’ is certainly evident in Emma Peressutti Pasquinelli and Lucia Ponti Bonicalzi’s furniture designs from 1946 (figs 10, 11). Peressutti Pasquinelli’s rocking chair has the appearance of a chaise-longue, with elongated plywood sides and horizontal bands of cherry-wood forming the seat and base. Ponti Bonicalzi’s chairs are more angular but equally pared down, with tapered legs and arms seemingly continuous from the leg to the back. Her table, which functions as either a card or breakfast table, is also foldable, demonstrative of the concerns of flexibility and space-saving at this time. Luisa Elvira Morassi remained the most ‘true’ to the style of this period, continuing to produce furniture predominantly from wood, sparse in use of materials and aesthetic, with a minimum of stylized geometric decoration (fig 12, 13). Margherita Bravi and Luisa Castiglioni’s designs (figs 14, 15) demonstrate the perception of furniture as part of the architectural environment, discussed in chapter one.

As with any theoretical approach based on binary opposites, rationalism had shades of ‘male’ and ‘female’ and therefore should not be read in an entirely ‘male’ light. Jill Seddon is amongst those to have discussed the attraction of modernism to women architects in Women Designing. Seddon acknowledges that this might be viewed as a ‘challenging statement’ considering that feminists ‘have spent the last two decades attacking the monolithic structures of modernism for its exclusion of women and their desires and needs.’ She is however in agreement with Lynne Walker as to the reasons behind its appeal, the latter having discussed this in relation to Eileen Gray’s participation in the Movement:

From a feminist perspective, modernism can be read positively in terms of the conditions of production, as we have seen in both modernism’s refiguring of the artistic architect and in the social programme of modernism, which facilitated the architectural practice of Gray and other women of her generation.

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144 Denise Scott Brown ‘Room at the Top? Sexism and the Star System in Architecture’ in Rendell, Penner and Borden (eds) Gender Space Architecture 261.
145 See Pansera Dizionario del Design Italiano and Grassi and Pansera Atlante del Design for a discussion of ‘generations’ in Italian design.
146 Jill Seddon ‘Sadie Speight and The Flat Book’ in Women Designing: Redesigning in Britain Between the Wars 131.
It is the ‘social programme’ of rationalism that made it attractive to women, appealing perhaps to the nurturing/caring role of women – although these are admittedly stereotypical female characteristics. The communicative potential of objects was also important – both Boeri and Castelli-Ferrieri are keen on this point.\textsuperscript{148} It was also this aspect that made rationalism, with its concerns of standardization and prefabrication the only feasible ideology in the immediate post-war years, despite the ideological implications of the movement’s fascist connotations.

Despite Nathan Rogers’s vociferous promotion of rationalism through the pages of \textit{Domus} he was unable to halt the move from neo-rationalism to anti-rationalism by the end of this decade. Anti-rationalism ‘took sculpture rather than architecture as its mother discipline [and]... defined itself as a movement with more pronounced bourgeois, rather than specifically working-class, tendencies.’\textsuperscript{149} This \textit{volte-face} mirrored a change on the larger political landscape, as the 1948 elections saw the communists and Socialist expelled from the coalition government and the centrist Christian Democrats come to power.

\textbf{Fifties Organicism and the Craft Revival}

The dominant perception of 1950s Italian design was this turn from architecture to art, inspired in particular by the organic, curving sculptures of international figures such as Henry Moore and Jean Arp. The crucial financial role of America in the Italy’s sudden economic and industrial development was accompanied by a cultural invasion and the beginnings of a consumer culture concerned with status rather than functionality in designed objects.\textsuperscript{150} The American influence on ‘\textit{la linea italiana}’ can also not be denied as there are also clear visual references to the streamline form. Sparke has described streamline as a ‘feminized version’ of modernism but it should be remembered that while Italy undoubtedly was inspired by its exaggerated curving forms, it was not with the unrelenting commercial objectives of its American cousin.\textsuperscript{151}

One of the most exaggerated interpretations appeared in the furniture of Carlo Mollino (fig. 16). Mollino’s fetishisation of the female body (and to a lesser extent the ‘female’ form of much of the organic style) could be interpreted negatively from a feminist standpoint given its objectification of women. It could also be seen as evidence of the subordinate position of women in the 1950s. This is in line with Sparke’s findings in \textit{As Long as it’s Pink: The Sexual Politics of Taste} where she notes that at ‘moments of feminist achievement...objects were often at their most masculine while at moments of feminist inactivity – the 1950s come to mind- many objects were extremely feminine.’\textsuperscript{152} Her reasoning behind this comment is unstated, but it holds more sway than Jane Rendell’s perspective on female forms in architecture:

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{148} Morozzi, Castelli-Ferrieri 11.
\item \textsuperscript{149} Sparke \textit{Italian Design: 1870 to the Present} (New York: Abbeville Press, 1988) 80.
\item \textsuperscript{150} Vittorio Gregotti ‘ITALIAN DESIGN, 1945–1971’ in Emilio Ambasz \textit{Italy: A New Domestic Landscape} 322.
\item \textsuperscript{151} Sparke ‘Nature, Craft, Domesticity and the Culture of Consumption’ 73.
\item \textsuperscript{152} Sparke \textit{As Longs as its Pink} 9.
\end{itemize}
Contemporary societies which are patriarchal – which organise and monopolise private property to the benefit of the male head of the family – reflect such values in the often phallic building forms that they produce, the quintessential example being the skyscraper. Conversely, cultures that revere the feminine principle and treat women as equals produce forms related to the morphology of the female body.\footnote{153}

Rendell’s comment does not have much currency when one remembers that the organic style of the 1950s predated the feminist movement, Italian society was still under the cultural hegemony of the Catholic Church and much of the legislation set in place under the fascist regime over a decade previously was still in place. Nevertheless, curving ‘female’ forms were a hallmark of 1950s design, seen also in the craft revival that occurred in the first half of this decade:

In gender terms the concept of handicraft – originating as it does from a base of domestically-based, amateur work, dependent upon a pre-modern model of manufacture – sits, in our century, near to the ‘feminine’ end of the cultural spectrum. Its strong presence in post-war Italy suggested, therefore, a deviation from the dominant, masculine model of modern design that has been documented to date.\footnote{154}

The craft revival can be seen as a form of tempered modernity, a bid to retain a link with the rural traditions of the past in the face of the mass urbanization, industrialization and accelerated modernization of the present. The resulting products used traditional materials such as wicker, cane and bamboo to produce an aesthetic that was either similarly ‘traditional’ or part of a ‘search for modern forms’ that could unite the country and represent the new, ‘modern’ face of Italy on the international market.\footnote{155}

Several designers were experimenting with craft materials to produce ‘modern forms’. GPA Monti’s cane chair (fig 17) was their first intervention in the field of furniture design.\footnote{156} It was Raffaella Crespi and Franca Helg who produced the most imaginative and memorable forms of craft furniture and they continued experimenting into the 1960s. Their re-interpretation of the expressive qualities of these materials in furniture such as Crespi’s series of chairs for Bonacina (fig 18) and Franca Helg’s ‘Primavera’ and ‘Radar’ chairs (fig. 9, 19) also for Bonacina is in line with the dominant organic style of this period. The natural decorative qualities of these materials and their composition also lend credence to Sparke’s evaluation of fifties craft design as ‘feminine’ in nature.\footnote{157}

The Emergence of Industrial Production

At the start of the post-war period the home was at the centre of designers’ concerns and the ‘strong links with the domestic sphere...reinforce[d] the tendency towards a more feminine model of modernism, given the ‘feminization’ of the private sphere that had been in places since the mid-nineteenth century.’¹⁵⁸ As discussed in the preface the ‘separate spheres’ paradigm does have problems in its use in the Italian context but it is valid to say that the concentration on the domestic sphere facilitated women’s presence in furniture design. However, the end of the 1950s saw designers expanding their remit to the public sphere, in particular office furniture, and the first attempts to construct furniture designed for mass-production. This was in the context of the Economic ‘Miracle’ that started in 1958 and the methods of traditional artisan production were not sufficient to meet the demands of ever-growing mass consumption.

Industrial production and office furniture are not traditional female domains and yet designers such as Eleonora Peduzzi Riva were meeting the demands of both with an emphasis on modular furniture, a characteristic of late 1950s furniture. Peduzzi Riva’s office desk (fig 20) ‘with a rationalist slant’ for Bernini has a segmented appearance perhaps indicative of a modular construction, while chairs were ‘the first...to combine various technological materials for “truly” industrial production, [and] modularity is an important value.’¹⁵⁹ The elegant aesthetic of Peduzzi Riva’s design is also exemplary of the changed image of Italian design by this time and its emphasis on ‘style, status and product aesthetics’ which would soon see its usurpation of Scandinavian design as the dominant style on the international scene in the 1960s.¹⁶⁰

Consumer Culture in the 1960s

If a return to nature-inspired form, a commitment to handicraft and a focus on domesticity stand for three faces of ‘feminine’ culture in this century, a fourth is represented by the concept of consumption, complementing the ‘masculine’ sphere of production.¹⁶¹

The advent of the consumer society in 1960s Italy and its effect on design can be read as another component of the feminine aspects of Italian furniture design. For a short period, the relationships with mass consumption remained unchallenged. The ‘modern luxury’ of Afra and Tobia’s Scarpas experiments with polyurethane foam (fig. 21), one of the new materials of this period, was joined by the return to more traditional luxury materials such as in Aulenti’s ‘Jumbo’ table made from marble (fig. 22). This trend would continue into the 1970s with examples such as Silvana Bertold’s adjustable marble and glass coffee table (fig. 23).

¹⁵⁸ Sparke ‘Nature, Craft, Domesticity and the Culture of Consumption’ 70.
¹⁶⁰ Woodham, 127.
¹⁶¹ Sparke, ‘Nature, Craft, Domesticity and the Culture of Consumption’73.
The elitism of much of Italian design was joined by a more ‘humane’ aspect. While Anna Castelli-Ferrieri could be accused of contributing to the elitism of sixties design with her elegant plastic designs for Kartell, such as the 4900 series of stackable units (fig 24), she maintained that ‘communication’ was at the heart of her work. Cini Boeri’s designs for the ‘Bobo’ series (fig. 25), and the ‘Gradual’ seating system (fig. 26) demonstrate not only a continuing concern with multiple-usage and flexibility characteristic of the rationalist ideal but also to have the ‘human’ at the centre of her work. Boeri is similar to Eileen Gray in her insistence on ‘a more humane and richer architecture, guided by human needs and conditions, not formulae. Gray’s theoretical position…set her apart from the male elite of modernism.’

Despite the ‘feminine’ aspects that Boeri demonstrated in her employment of rationalist tenets, there were strong reactions against the continuing influence of rationalism in design. One of these was the ‘Neo-Liberty’ movement, an attempt by the avant-garde, searching for a new visual language, to replace the aesthetic of mainstream design, an elitist form of rationalism. One of its protagonists was Gae Aulenti, and both ‘Sgarsul’ (fig.27) and ‘Locus Solus’ are brimming with references to the Art-Nouveau style (known as Liberty in Italy) and the bent-wood furniture of Thonet. 164 1964 was also the year of Lella and Massimo Vignelli’s ‘Saragota’ sofa (fig. 28), and the solid, geometric form and lacquered dark wood structure anticipated the Mackintosh revival of the seventies in which their ‘Ara’ designs were central (fig. 29, 30).

Other designers found different means of expressing their distaste at contemporary society. Cini Boeri found her critical voice in ‘Borgogna’ (fig. 31), a cumbersome but highly functional armchair replete with the accessories of the modern world designed for the ‘lazy caprices of the new rich.’ Interestingly, only three ‘Borgogna’ chairs were sold, perhaps as an object which is functional rather than aesthetically pleasing was unpalatable in a society overly concerned with style and status. It is also worth noting that Boeri thought to display her criticism regarding class issues in the chair, but not gender-issues – another characteristic perhaps of the dominance of emancipation, where Marxism held sway over feminism.

‘Pop’ Culture

The birth of ‘pop’ culture in Italy, as seen in products such as ‘Blow’(fig 32), designed by Jonathon De Pas, Donato D’Urbino, Paolo Lomazzi and Carla Scolari was an

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162 Morozzi, Anna Castelli-Ferrieri 11.
163 Walker in Martin and Sparke, 103.
164 Liberty was the Italian version of Art-Nouveau. Sgarsul means ‘street urchin’ in Neapolitan dialect, indicative of Aulenti’s interest in the nascent field of linguistics.
166 ‘Pigri Capricci’ Gramigna, 107.
167 Avogadro, 97.
alternative response to the dominance of consumer culture. ‘Blow’ might be seen as fantastical, but Branzi has argued convincingly that the products of ‘pop’ culture were highly realistic, introducing the ‘culture of consumption and the languages of mass communication’ into design.\(^{168}\) Pop culture was therefore an attempt to reconnect with the social reality of Italian society, and as such a critique on contemporary society.

One of its most interesting (male-designed) manifestations of pop culture is Gaetano Pesce’s ‘UP 5 Donna’ chair (fig 33):

In this design I have expressed my idea of women. A woman is always confined, a prisoner of herself against her will. For this reason I wanted to give this chair the shape of a woman with a ball chained to her foot to use the traditional image of the prisoner.\(^{169}\)

The strongly anthropomorphic form of Pesce’s chair also offers opportunities for a semiotic interpretation: the ball is tied to the chair and looks as if it fits into the seat, suggesting a woman and womb/baby; the cord her inextricable link to her reproductive function, and the way that the ball fits into the chair suggesting that only with her reproductive element is a woman whole. It is fascinating that Pesce decided to reify his concern at the female condition, when no woman seems to have done so; the reasons for this are explored briefly in the final section of this chapter.

Feminism and Designed Objects
The previous chapter concluded discussing why prominent women designers were not a part of feminist organisations, were dismissive of the movement and even their belonging to the female gender. It is a feature that extended to how women designed furniture too. None of the women designed furniture in an overtly (stereotypically) ‘feminine’ way nor used furniture as a material expression of their frustrations in a male-dominated profession – frustration we know they felt from their experiences described in the previous chapter.

Women should of course not have to design according to their gender, or make public through their designs their experiences as women. At the same time however, in the words of Nicoletta Livi Bacci, ‘there is something deeply tragic if a woman feels the need to negate her belonging to a sex in order to affirm herself in the world.’\(^{170}\) In avoiding feminist expression in furniture design, consciously or unconsciously, women designers were expressing materially the necessity to play down their gender in the same way that the majority of the female furniture designers were not part of any feminist associations. The fact that two male designers produced overtly feminine and subsequently feminist designs shows the freedom of expression that men had in the profession. This also extends to the near absence of women in radical design – only Lucia Bartolini appears to have participated in the movement. Together with

\(^{168}\) Branzi, 51.
\(^{170}\) Bacci, 13.
husband Dario she was a member of Archizoom who produced objects such as the ‘Dream beds’ series in 1967 (fig 34, 35). In Clean New World: Culture, Politics and Graphic Design Maud Lavin asks if the lack of women producing experimental work is because women earned less money and it was less likely that they had the financial freedom to pursue projects without a commercial aim.\textsuperscript{171} Perhaps this too is the reason behind the lack of experimental, feminist expression in furniture which did find room in the graphic design of the 1960s and 1970s. Aligning oneself with one’s gender meant further marginalisation in a discipline wholly traditional in its perception of gender roles. A neat, if over-simplified example can be found between those unknown women who were members A.I.D.I.A. and Luisa Elvira Morassi, who continued to use decorative elements and traditional production methods and materials throughout her career, does not feature in the contemporary design press or design history. The presence and representation of women who did (and did not) appear in these two cultural manifestations is the focus of the second part of this dissertation.

Aligning oneself with one’s gender meant further marginalisation in a discipline wholly traditional in its perception of gender roles. A neat, if over-simplified example can be found between those unknown women who were members A.I.D.I.A. and Luisa Elvira Morassi, who continued to use decorative elements and traditional production methods and materials throughout her career, does not feature in the contemporary design press or design history. The presence and representation of women who did (and did not) appear in these two cultural manifestations is the focus of the second part of this dissertation.

\textsuperscript{171} Maud Lavin Clean New World: Culture, Politics and Graphic Design (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 201) 109.
Part Two
‘Representation’
Preface: Women and Cultural Representation

This preface to the final two chapters introduces the critical debate surrounding women’s cultural representation and highlights the themes which form the basic tenets to this discussion. Each chapter gives examples of the exclusion and marginalisation of women in cultural representations; together, overwhelming proof of the discrimination against women ingrained in mainstream – or rather ‘male-stream’ design criticism, theory and history.\(^\text{172}\)

Examining historiography is a fundamental component of feminist approaches to design history; only once women’s representation and the mechanisms behind it are understood can change be attempted. Surveying the contemporary design press is an as-yet unexplored area in design history and yet has proved a fertile area for examining women’s representation at the time of their practising. It will also be interesting to consider if and how there have been changes in how women have been represented over time.

One of the most problematic aspects of this examination of the design press and design history here is that they have also been utilized as sources of information on women designers here. It is vital to make the distinction between their representative and reflective qualities in order to understand how to utilize them and to what extent they can be considered reliable resources. Frances Bonner has precisely this in *Imagining Women: Cultural Representations and Gender*:

> Reflection...implies that there is a direct correspondence between phenomena (events, people, things) in the ‘real’ world and their appearance in texts. Representation, however, indicates that some kind of modulation or interpretive process is involved.\(^\text{173}\)

This distinction is important. As, admittedly minor, forms of mass media the gender stereotypes/representations present play a part in the construction and reinforcement of gender stereotypes in and outside of the design sphere.\(^\text{174}\) Once the representative nature of women’s presence in cultural manifestations such as *Domus* is realised, then, as in Griselda Pollock’s view, ‘then the hierarchies which sustain masculine dominance [can] come under scrutiny and stress’.\(^\text{175}\) Design histories are each others’ secondary sources while the design press - magazines such as *Domus* but also *Casabella* and *Ottagono* - are perceived as primary sources, holding legitimating


views of cultural authority. This position has remained unchallenged and furthermore the contemporary representation of female designers is compounded by their retrospective representation. This has also been noted by Cecilia Bione in Parametro: ‘It is fundamental to remember how sexual discriminations in intellectual spheres have been often aggravated by posthumous discriminations...historiographic manipulations [which have] subsequently become “truths.”’\(^\text{176}\)

The lack of awareness regarding the representational character of the contemporary design press is part of a larger absence of self-consciousness amongst those responsible for these representations with regards to the ‘gender-skewed’ nature of history.\(^\text{177}\) Those responsible for recording and history are oblivious to both their positionality and subjectivity and the effects that this can have. This illusion of objectivity is wholly undesirable in a postmodern society where positivism is no longer tenable. For Dana Arnold, the lack of discussion regarding the absence of women is because ‘the white western male viewpoint is unconsciously and unquestioningly accepted as the viewpoint of the historian. ... [This] is of course, elitist and therefore morally unacceptable.’\(^\text{178}\) A naturalised and normative male perspective leads to a masculinist discourse imbued with values that serve to exclude or marginalise women. As Buckley has noted in ‘Made in Patriarchy’:

> The omissions (of women)...are so overwhelming, and the rare acknowledgement so cursory and marginalized... [that] these silences are not accidental and haphazard; rather, they are the direct consequence of specific historical methods. These methods involve the selection, classification, and prioritization of types of design, categories of designers, distinct styles and movements, and different modes of production, are inherently biased against women and, in effect, serve to exclude them from history.\(^\text{179}\)

Buckley adds that when women do appear, it is within a framework of patriarchy which has two implications for women. Firstly, they are seen as naturally suited to only ‘feminine’/inferior areas of design, and furthermore their skill is viewed as innate, a product of their sex - problematic in a culture where mind is valued over body, theory over instinct.\(^\text{180}\) Secondly, when women are mentioned it often is in conjunction with, and therefore ‘subsumed’ under, a male partner or family member – a feature already highlighted in chapter two.\(^\text{181}\)

Patriarchy is clearly useful here for revealing another facet of the difficulties of working in male partnership and it will be applied to both the contemporary and

\(^{176}\) ‘E’ fondamentale ricordarsi come le discriminazioni sessuali nelle sfere intellettuali siano state aggravate spesso da discriminazioni postume, riconducibili a manipolazioni storigrafiche diventate poi “verità.”’ Cecilia Bione, 17.


\(^{179}\) Buckley, ‘Made in Patriarchy’ 3.

\(^{180}\) Buckley, ‘Made in Patriarchy’ 3, 5.

\(^{181}\) Buckley, ‘Made in Patriarchy’ 3.
retrospective representation of women. However in view of its problematical nature, as discussed in the preface to part one, it will be used as part of a broader feminist perspective that informs the whole of ‘Existence, Experience and Representation’, in order to understand women designers’ contemporary and retrospective cultural representation. The separate spheres paradigm, gender as a social construction both appear, as does the place of language in gendered analysis. This last theme features to a lesser extent but it is one of the most revealing tools for uncovering the mechanisms of representation, both in the present and the past.
Chapter Four: Contemporary Representation in the Italian Design Press: the Female Presence in Domus, 1946-1975

This chapter examines the contemporary cultural representation of women through a case-study of Domus magazine. Domus can be considered representative of the Italian design press due to its coverage of all areas of art, design and architecture, which made it a paradigm for successive design magazines and archetypal of its field. The years 1946 and 1975 were key in the magazine’s history, marking its first post-war issue and Gio Ponti’s replacement as director by Cesare Casati respectively.\(^{182}\) Surveying such an extensive part of the life of one magazine also allows for an in-depth understanding of how the most influential and prestigious of design magazines represented women in its pages.

Given its stature, longevity and level of recognition it is surprising that up until now Domus has not been the subject of academic treatment. The first publication on the magazine is only due out later this year Charlotte and Peter Fiell’s Domus: Highlights From the Seminal Architecture and Design Journal: 1928-1999.\(^{183}\)

Design magazines such as Domus were produced and consumed by a progressive, educated elite with an international outlook and so cannot be considered representative of the way the majority of Italian women experienced design. They are also a minor form of cultural representation – on its launch, only 100,000 copies were produced.\(^{184}\) This does not diminish the importance of surveying women’s representation in Domus as it can be considered representative of the microcosm of the Milanese design profession to which the women designers who are at the centre of this research belonged.

A number of indices were used to determine women’s representation in Domus: the number of articles on or including projects with female involvement; the names of women featured, their nationality and frequency of appearance; the method of working – in partnership, group or individually; the area of design they were involved in and the number of articles written by women. Prior to a discussion of these themes is a brief history of Domus and its place in the Italian design press.

‘The Mediterranean Megaphone’:\(^{185}\) Domus and the Italian Design Press
Set up by Gio Ponti in 1928, Domus was initially a lifestyle magazine, covering areas such as ‘cookery, gardening and...animal husbandry’ as well as design, architecture

and the arts.\textsuperscript{186} Ponti was officially director for the majority of this period, with the exception of Ernesto N.Roger’s directorship from 1941 to 1947.\textsuperscript{187} From 1961 Cesare Casati was unofficially director due to Ponti’s disputes with the editor Gianni Mazzocchi.\textsuperscript{188} Unlike the magazine \textit{Casabella}, which would not feature furniture design until the 1970s, the magazine ‘continued to interest itself regularly with furniture and furnishings’ in the fifties and sixties and in particular with the nascent field of industrial design, although Ponti was to retain a strong interest in artisanal production, in the capacity of both director and designer.\textsuperscript{189}

\textit{Domus} was just one of the design magazines in existence in this period; notable others included \textit{Casabella} (est. 1928), \textit{Abitare}, founded in 1954 by Piera Peroni and \textit{Interni} (est. 1954).\textsuperscript{190} The tri-monthly \textit{Ottagono} (est. 1966) was the result of collaboration between several companies – \textit{Artemide}, \textit{Arflex}, \textit{Bernini}, \textit{Boffi}, \textit{Cassina}, \textit{Flos}, \textit{Tecno} and \textit{Zanuso} and was edited by Giuliana Gramigna.\textsuperscript{191} Several other companies produced their own individual in-house magazines: Pirelli the bi-monthly \textit{Edilizia Moderna} since 1929, \textit{Zodiac} by Olivetti since 1957 and Kartell’s \textit{Qualità} (1956-60).\textsuperscript{192} The presence of designers and architects at the helm of virtually all of these magazines was a trait particular to the Italian design press, a characteristic which is evident in the integrity of design discourse and a deep understanding of the concerns of the designer.\textsuperscript{193}

**The Female Presence in Domus**

In a total of 321 issues spanning twenty nine years, seventy are completely devoid of articles on or by women (appendix 4). Approximately five hundred articles feature women’s work and considering that each issue contained on average twenty to thirty articles, women were a distinctly marginal presence. This was a situation that would not change over the years, although the highest number of women in any one issue was in 1972 (issue 512) when twenty-four women were featured. This was largely due to the magazine’s extensive coverage of \textit{Eurodomus}, an annual design exposition which showcased predominantly Italian goods.

Over half of the women featured in \textit{Domus} worked independently, and circa a third with one or more male partners (fig. 36). It was more likely that a woman working independently would feature alongside other women than have an entire article devoted to her.

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\textsuperscript{186} Pansera has suggested that the establishment was inspired by Ponti’s column on the decorative arts for \textit{Poligono} magazine in the 1920s. Pansera, \textit{Storie e Cronache della Triennale} (Milan: Longanesi, 1978) 37.

\textsuperscript{187} Pansera, Il Design del Mobile Italiano 1946 ad \textit{Oggi} 33.

\textsuperscript{188} Pansera, Il Design del Mobile Italiano 1946 ad \textit{Oggi} 32-33.

\textsuperscript{189} ‘Continua a interessarsi puntualmente di mobili e componenti d’arredo’ Pansera, \textit{Dizionario del Design Italiano} (Milan: Cantini, 1995) 108.

\textsuperscript{190} Pansera, Il Design del Mobile Italiano 1946 ad \textit{Oggi} 33

\textsuperscript{191} \textit{Ottagono} 1.1 (1966): n.d.

\textsuperscript{192} Pansera, Il Design del Mobile Italiano 1946 ad \textit{Oggi} 32-33.

\textsuperscript{193} Pansera, Il Design del Mobile Italiano 1946 ad \textit{Oggi} 32-33.
The small numbers of women in Domus would have marked them as an exception to the normative male coverage with its androcentric nature, a characteristic which can be largely attributed to the predominantly male editorial staff and the imposing figures of Rogers and Ponti. It has been difficult to assess the female presence on the editorial team as articles are often unsigned or only with unidentifiable initials. Even taking this into account, only seventy-six articles were definitely female-written, the equivalent to approximately three entire issues. There was one female editor, but as the daughter of Gio Ponti, Lisa Ponti was an exception rather than the rule and another example of the advantage of having a male connection in the profession. Even with women on the editorial staff, Domus was in reality a mouthpiece of Ponti and Roger’s ideologies. These two figures were hugely influential, responsible for the two most powerful statements regarding architecture and design in this period; Roger’s dictum ‘from the spoon to the city’ and Ponti’s Pirelli building in Milan, the first skyscraper in Italy.¹⁹⁴

**Woman’s Place in the Hierarchy of the Arts in Domus**

In Italy at Work: Her Renaissance in Design Today Meyric Rogers describes the phenomenon of the ‘unity of the arts’ in Italian design:

> The arts of architecture, painting, and of design in all its many material and utilitarian manifestations have neither been canalized into mutually exclusive specialities nor been separated in such a way as to make an exclusive professional aristocracy out of the practioners of the first three and a commonality of the remainder.¹⁹⁵

Anty Pansera went so far as to label this ‘unity’ ‘Pontian’, so involved was Ponti in this concept, evident in the range of cultural manifestations in the pages of Domus under his tenure. While Meyric Rogers correctly identified the presence of all of the arts in Domus he did not see the hierarchy that existed within it. The concept of a gendered hierarchy of the arts was discussed in previous chapters with reference to the ‘male’ nature of architecture and furniture design. The presence of virtually the entire gamut of the arts in Domus enables additional insights into women’s representation across the arts.

Ceramics and crafts are perceived as ‘female’ areas of design, due to their domestic origins, hand-made manufacture and amateur connotations. They are consumed by a largely female audience, and the gendered nature of ceramics has been argued convincingly in Moira Vincentelli’s Women and ceramics: gendered vessels.¹⁹⁶ Vincentelli also describes glassware as ‘female’; while this may be true of its consumption; its physical method of production renders it a ‘male’ area, in the same

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¹⁹⁶ Moira, Vincentelli, Women and Ceramics: Gendered Vessels (Manchester: Manchester UP, 2000)
way that industrial design is also ‘male’.

Italy is renowned for its glassware, particularly the Venetian tradition, and so it would be unlikely to have imbued it with ‘feminine’ connotations. The concept of shades of ‘masculinity’ and ‘femininity’ as discussed in chapter one in relation to architecture and furniture is also evident in art and sculpture; while fine art was at the top of the hierarchy, women’s place within it was often defined by the size of their works, its content, and the materials used.

Approximately two-thirds of the appearances made by women in Domus are in ‘masculine’ areas (fig. 37), the overwhelming majority in architecture and furniture. This could be misinterpreted as evidence that Domus did not discriminate against women in ‘male’ areas of design, when it is in fact evidence that the gendered hierarchy is manifested in Domus through its prioritization of ‘male’ areas. This is confirmed when one considers that less than fifty women were responsible for the female-designed furniture objects in the magazine. Thirty-four Italians make up the majority of this group, but Italians constituted less than half of the total of women featured (appendix 5). We already know that furniture was a marginal option for women, and yet those women who did practice furniture design featured most regularly in the pages of Domus. Furthermore, of the small group of women who made over ten appearances, only one was involved in a ‘female’ area of design. Ruth Bryk was a Finnish ceramist; her multiple appearances can be interpreted as exemplary of the popularity of Swedish design in the 1950s in Italy and beyond. The rest, including Luisa Parisi who made a record twenty-six appearances, were all involved in furniture design and/or architecture.

In a period documented in most histories as predominantly modern, the not-insubstantial numbers of women in craft is a reminder of its renewed popularity in the fifties, as discussed in chapter three. Ponti’s enthusiasm for the craft revival is played out in the pages of Domus, and women made up the majority of those practising craft-based design – particularly in the fields of ceramics and textiles. Ponti was keen on a contemporary aesthetic rather than traditional craft aesthetic as evinced in his own Superleggera chair (fig. 38) and this was the style of craft that dominated in Domus, exemplified by Crespi and Helg’s furniture for Bonacina. Domus did acknowledge that some areas of the arts were male-dominated; noting that art merchant Erica Brausen ‘is one of the first women to have successfully undertaken ... [a] traditionally male career’. Their appraisal of Sofia Badoni (whose experiences at the Politecnico are highlighted in chapter one) in a 1946 issue makes it clear that as a woman architect she is an exception:

Women experience the home more intimately, giving valued suggestions and these can be so much more reasonable when then come from people who unite a specific ability to

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197 Vincentelli, 110.

empirical experience. In this way woman “architects” are always more frequent among us.¹⁹⁹

The use of speech marks around the word *architetti* is loaded with the implication that her career choice is outside of normal language. It would not be until at least a decade later that women architects were given their own word – ‘*architette*’ – but they were still usually referred to as ‘*architetti*’, the masculine form of the noun.²⁰⁰ In ‘Towards a Theory of Sexual Difference’ Cavarero describes the effects of the absence of a ‘language of woman’ and moreover how the ‘alleged neutrality of thought’ evident in the use of *architetti* for both sexes is in fact ‘false neutrality...tantamount to woman’s alienation.’²⁰¹ Badoni’s demarcation as an anomaly is also an example of what Thiele has termed ‘pseudo-inclusion’, another form of guaranteeing the invisibility of women in cultural representation: ‘women become defined as a ‘special case’,... exceptions to the rule which can be noted and then forgotten about. What is normative is male.’²⁰² The essentialist position they adopt is also worthy of note, linking women’s skills to their place in the domestic sphere, and implying the inherent irrationality of women which can only be overcome through professional training.

Patriarchy and Male/Female Creativity
Chapter two described how the myth of solitary genius prevails even within creative partnerships, noting how there will always be a ‘Significant’ and an ‘Other’.²⁰³ This occurs in representation through the ascription of a different set of skills to each partner, as seen in descriptions of the painter-couple Sonia and Robert Delaunay:

Sonia Delaunay...is noted by historians for her “instinctive” feeling for colour, whereas her husband, Robert, is attributed as having formulated a colour theory. Robert Delaunay embodies the male stereotype as logical and intellectual, Sonia embodies the female stereotype as instinctive and emotional.²⁰⁴

Lynne Walker has described this phenomenon more fully in *Significant Others*:

The identification of a woman artist’s creativity with the innate and powerful generative forces of nature places women’s productions outside the mediated sphere of male cultural activity. Men study and think; women feel and generate instinctively. In the Western polarizing of mind and body, men are


²⁰⁰ In the Italian language, female plural nouns normally end in –e, while masculine plural ends normally end in –i. In a group which contains both female and male objects, the presence of one male renders the group ‘masculine’ – similar to French grammar.


²⁰² Thiele, 27.

²⁰³ Chadwick and de Courtivron, 10.

²⁰⁴ Buckley, ‘Made in Patriarchy’ 5.
rewarded for being intellectual and theoretical, women for being intuitive and procreational. Constructions such as these reinforce powerful and widely held cultural beliefs that women and their actions are inexplicable and unknowable, and they are widely internalized. An ‘instinctive’ decorative ability is widely ascribed to women in Domus, and not just to professional creative figures. In a 1946 article, ‘Communal Habitation for Three People’ the inhabitants of the flat, a writer, a student and his sister, speak about the redesign of their home.

Mirella, who is described only as the sister, describes the baubles which she has used to decorate her room – the only decoration visible in the flat. Her brother’s correspondent remark is offhand, but revealing: ‘Mirella is a woman, she has a frivolous room.’ He automatically links the female gender with ‘frivolity’ manages to be disparaging both about his sister’s decorative abilities and decoration in general. In As Long as its Pink Sparke has noted the perceived triviality of decoration at this time: ‘By the 1950s, domesticity had become a more private, marginal phenomenon, and domestic tasks – the exercising of taste being one among many – occupied a low position within the hierarchy of things.’

‘Due Fanciulle Artiste’ was a 1952 article on Carmelina Piccolis and Manuela D’Altri. ‘Fanciulla’ translates as young, but in Italian it also suggests childishness. Piccolis is described as ‘the young and courageous sculptor’ with a ‘virile capacity to feel’. Manuela D’Altri on the other hand ‘is not a shrewd artist, but simple and wholesome, full of desire and instinct.’ The evaluation of these two young designers finds resonance in Adrian Forty’s ‘Masculine, Feminine or Neuter’ where he discusses the use of gender in architectural criticism. Forty argues that despite the absence of gendered metaphors from the 1950s onwards, due to the heavy use of the ‘masculine’ in ideologically-suspect rationalism, the ‘metaphor of sexual difference’ was not ‘renounced’.

The evaluation of D’Altri reveals another aspect of women’s representation in Domus. Her art is described as ‘primordial, with barbaric elements, which she owes to the unconscious influence of her father.’ D’Altri is therefore defined in relation to her father and even has her skills attributed to him. This is in line with Chadwick and de Courtivron’s findings in Significant Others, where they state that ‘if not a direct competitor, then women are often seen as pale copies, imitators with little originality

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207 ‘Mirella è una donna, ha una stanza friolva.’ Mongiardino, 24.
208 Sparke, As Long as its Pink 3.
211 ‘Non è un’artista scultrice, ma semplice e sana, piena di volontà e istinto.’ Domus 271 (1952): 49.
213 Forty, 148.
of their own...Whereas he transcends his sources, goes the stereotype, she remains limited/and or defined by hers.\textsuperscript{215} This particular form of marginalization is not limited to D'Altri: Hedda Sterne, painter, is simply described as the wife of artist Saul Steinberg.\textsuperscript{216} Furniture designer Elaine Lustig is also subject to this: ‘wife of Alvin Lustig, the famous and genial American designer who died in 1956...Elaine Lustig follows his style and continues his work’ - in her case she is not even entitled to call the work her own.\textsuperscript{217}

The belief in the male designer’s primary creative role also explains the instances of misattributions and omissions in \textit{Domus} - although these occur less than in design history, indicative perhaps of a lesser patriarchal context in the Magazine.

As far as it is possible to establish, the complete omission of a woman’s contribution is not so prevalent in contemporary representation; instead, she could be listed under the title of an article but then left out of the article itself. This occurs twice with Albini and Helg: ‘Interiors by the Sea’ and ‘House for an Art Collector in Bergamo’ both list Albini and Helg under the title, and yet discuss only Albini’s work.\textsuperscript{218} This habit predates Helg - in 1946 an article is entitled simply ‘Franco Albini and his Collaborators’ and no reference is made to who these ‘collaborators’ were.\textsuperscript{219} This was not a feature particular to Albini: ‘Latest News on the New Baths in Ischia’ is described on the contents page as by Ignazio Gardella and Elena Berrone Balsari.\textsuperscript{220} Under the title, only he is cited, but in the article she is stated as a collaborator.\textsuperscript{221} With discrepancies such as these, gender assumptions take over and the male is presumed the sole author – the woman might as well not appear. Working as a collaborator clearly provided an opportunity to work with prominent architects such as Gardella, but could lead to the designer being subsumed under his name, prolonging the myth of the ‘autonomous’ designer.\textsuperscript{222} Those women who worked with men in this way also rarely featured in articles on their own.

There are examples of omissions and discrepancies. Afra and Tobia Scarpa’s ‘Soriana’ chair (fig. 39) is attributed solely to Tobia in a three-page article devoted to the design.\textsuperscript{223} Four issues later and both are credited when ‘Soriana’ is announced as

\textsuperscript{215} Chadwick and de Courtrivron, 10.
\textsuperscript{216} ‘Olii su tela’ \textit{Domus} 278 (1953): 26-7.
\textsuperscript{217} ‘Moglie di alvin lustig, il famoso e geniale designer americano che scomparve nel 1956...Elaine Lustig ne segue il gusto e ne continua il lavoro.’ ‘Un Appartamento a New York’ \textit{Domus} 343 (1958): 13-18.
\textsuperscript{218} ‘Interni sul Mare’ \textit{Domus} 313 (1955): 19-24, ‘Casa per un Collezionista a Bergamo’ \textit{Domus} 338 (1958): 29. The former cites the ‘the interventions of the architect’ and that ‘for the most part the architect has made use of furniture designed by him.’
\textsuperscript{219} \textit{Domus} 221 (1946): . Helg joined the Studio in 1951 Pansera, \textit{Dal Merletto alla Motocicletta} 130.
\textsuperscript{220} Architect Elena Berrone Balsari graduated from the Politecnico in 1945. She worked mainly in landscape architecture. ‘Tabella 3. Diplomate e Laureate dal 1912-13 al 1949-50’ Annamaria Galbani, 76.
\textsuperscript{221} ‘Notizie sui nuovi bagni a Ischia’ \textit{Domus} 268 (1952): 2-5.
\textsuperscript{222} See Chapter Two, Castelli-Ferrieri also had problems with this. For a discussion on myth of the ‘autonomous’ designer see Adrian Forty \textit{Objects of Desire: Design and Society since 1750} (London: Thames and Hudson, 1986) 242.
\textsuperscript{223} \textit{Domus} 485 (1970): 32-34.
winner of the Compasso D’Oro; the earlier omission is not mentioned. The Helg-Albini problem recurs with the ‘Luisa’ chair (fig. 40) attributed solely to Albini.

Domus is not only oblivious to the problems that working in partnership can cause for women, symptomatic of a general androcentric culture in the magazine, but even enthusiastic on the trend for architect couples. Here they are describing the office of Eugenia Alberti and Gian Luigi Reggio:

As with the two Parisis that we presented a few issues ago, so the two Reggios are both young and excellent architects...their “office”, the studio in which they receive and work, with the two twin armchairs, for one and the other, is sign of their professional “parity” and a happy marriage.

Nearly fifteen years later, this quote regarding a French architect couple is interesting for its small reflection on what was a very big change in society:

They are known as the Lalannes...as François-Xavier (him) and Claude (her)...husband and wife closely united by the daily work which they take on side by side, offering a fine example of what has sadly become anachronistic nowadays – the unitary promotion of the couple.

Domus does not consider the negative aspects for women in architect-couples and no feminist commentary or design is included in its pages. Even though the Magazine did discuss the wider social changes which were occurring it does not appear to have mentioned the women’s movement once. Abitare did comment on these aspects, and significantly it not only had more females on its editorial team but a woman as its founder. A strong female editorial presence clearly impacted on the content in the magazine. It could have also impacted on the universally male outlook which is evident in Domus, particularly in the language present.

Generic or ‘Genderic’? Language and Cultural Representation
Language is a key component in the representation of women in Domus and particularly important given the gendered nature of the Italian language. It has already been seen to imply women’s inferiority in the creative sphere and therefore

224 The Compasso D’Oro was an annual prize for design established by the Rinascente department store. ‘Il Premio Compasso d’Oro ADI 1970’ Domus 489 (1970): 34-6.
225 ‘Come i due Parisi che abbiamo presentato qualche numero fa su queste pagine, così i due Reggio sono entrambi pregevoli architetti e giovani entrambi...loro «officina», lo studio in cui ricevono e lavorano, con le due poltrone gemelle, per l’uno e per l’altra, segno della “parità” professionale e di un allegro coniugale.’ ‘Moglie a Marito Architetti.’ Domus 232 (1949): 30.
228 Thiele, 29.
to justify their marginalization within art, architecture and design in the pages of the Magazine and beyond. Nowhere is the exclusionary potential of language more evident than in the employment of supposedly gender ‘neutral’ words.

Until 1949 Domus had a subheading of ‘the House of Man’ and a number of articles from this early period also make heavy use of ‘man’. This is not just in their titles, “Programme: Domus, House of Man” written by Ernesto N. Rogers and “Man and Objects”, by Enrico Peressutti but in the articles themselves:

Every part of man’s house is damaged ... From every part come in the voices of the wind and come out cries of women and children. We have to run in with a brick, a beam, a sheet of glass, and instead, here we are with a magazine. To the hungry we do not give bread, to the shipwrecked not a raft but words.229

‘This is the house of man. And a man is not truly a man until he possesses... a house.’230

‘Man drinks, man eats, man sleeps, man procreates’231

Arguably the use of ‘man’ can be considered gender ‘neutral’, a generic term applicable to men and women. However, in conjunction with the direct reference to women and their role in the first quote, the gender-specific nature of ‘uomo’ cannot be denied. As Cavarero has noted, woman is the universal ‘man’ with a ‘plus’ of feminine gender.232 Buckley noted the importance of language acquisition in the construction of the ‘feminine in ‘Made in Patriarchy’. 233 She was building on theory which originated in the Lacanian school and has been continued by feminists such as Julia Kristeva. Kristeva was admittedly referring to a universal concept in the importance of language acquisition in gender construction. However it would be interesting, if perhaps impossible, to know to what extent an emphatically gendered language such as Italian reinforced gender difference and women’s self-perception both as professional designers and women in the public and private realms.234

The gender representations in Domus are part of the history of how gender has been socially constructed. They have contributed to the representation of women in design history which reproduces, legitimates and naturalises these representations

229 Enrico Peressutti is the husband of Emma Pasquinelli Peressutti. ‘Sa ogni parte la casa dell’uomo è incrinata ... Da ogni parte entrano le voci del vento e n’escono pianti di donne e di bimbi. Dovremmo accorrere con un mattone, una trave, una lastra di vetro e, invece, eccoci qui con una rivista. All’affamato non diamo pane, al naufrago non una zattera ma parole.’ E.N. Rogers “Programma: Domus, la Casa dell’Uomo” 2.

230 ‘Questa è la casa dell’uomo. È un uomo non è veramente uomo finché non posside una simile casa.’ Domus 205 (1946): 3.


233 Buckley, ‘Made in Patriarchy’ 3.

through their un-stated (and therefore unquestioned) claim to objectivity. How and why this has occurred is the subject of the fifth and final chapter.
Chapter Five: Retrospective Representation: Writing Women In and Out of Design History

In ‘Nature, Craft, Domesticity and the Culture of Consumption’ Sparke highlights the uniformity of Italian design historiography. Anchored on the triumvirate of reconstruction, the economic ‘Miracle’ and social crises of the late sixties, the centrality of design to the modernization of Italy in these years and the modern aspects of Italian design are emphasised, often at the expense of coverage areas such as craft, fashion and graphics. Most of the books were written between 1972 and 1985, including Sparke’s *Italian Design: 1870 to the Present*.

The conclusion to the article identifies another aspect of the 'one-sided' approach of Italian design literature; the 'tiny handful' of women practitioners present, naming just Aulenti and Afra Scarpa to have appeared in design history. In the previous chapter it was evident that the male-dominated editorial team at *Domus* was instrumental in women’s representation in the Magazine. Similarly, as only one of two female authors in Italian design historiography (together with Anty Pansera); Sparke does not find it difficult to locate the cause behind the scarcity of women in its literature:

The general patriarchal climate within which Italian design existed and within which it had been documented extends to the design world itself...This conforms to the general pattern of things in this century in which men have significantly controlled the professional practice of many aesthetically orientated activities which began as amateur feminine tasks...It is not surprising, therefore, that these arenas have tended to become imbued with values emanating from the masculine sphere.

The books featured in this survey of Italian design historiography are those most commonly referenced by other design historians and are also amongst those Sparke lists as exemplary of the homogeneity of Italian design history literature. There is an overarching chronological aspect to these two final chapters; while the previous chapter dealt with women’s representation in the post-war period itself, this chapter considers how they have been represented from the end of this period onwards, ending on the current, alternative approaches which are now being embraced by some quarters in the field.

The Quantitative Female Presence in Design Histories

The most obvious characteristic of women’s representation in design history is their absence. Take *Italian Modern: A Design Heritage* for instance. It is divided into two sections; the first a history of design from pre World War Two to the 1980s, and the second a catalogue of images of designed objects entitled ‘The Production’. In the first section, only three women appear; Gae Aulenti, Franca Helg and Margherita


\[238\] Sparke, ‘Nature, Craft, Domesticity and the Culture of Consumption’ 75.

Of the images which accompany the text in this first section, two more women appear; Lella Vignelli and Carla Scolari. Over four hundred objects feature in the second section and just thirty four are female designed, many in collaboration (the names of the women in all of the design histories featured here are listed in appendix). In Pansera and Grassi’s Atlante del Design Italiano 1940 – 1980 only seven women are mentioned. Andrea Branzi includes just three women in the main body of The Hot House; of the fifty-two biographies at the back of the book, eighteen mention women, including one male-female partnership and several groups. Branzi gives no clue as to the selection process behind those chosen and this lack of explanation suggests that those included are the most important, or even the only, Italian designers operating between the 1940s and 1980s, the period covered in the book.

In Sparke’s Italian Design, twelve different female designers are cited. The first occurrence is not until after a hundred pages and as in Italian Modern Helg is the first female to appear, alongside Franco Albini. This is also true of Vittorio Gregotti’s Il Design del Prodotto Industriale 1860-1980 where just five female designers are mentioned – in a book over four hundred pages long.

Helg’s position as the first woman to appear in design history is understandable seeing as she was one of the earliest practioners and worked alongside one of the most famous. She is a part of the small pool of designers who feature in all of the books here, - Gae Aulenti, Cini Boeri and Anna Castelli-Ferrieri. The commonality between books in this respect reinforces the impression that women designers were a tiny minority and that only these four were of any note.

While Repertorio del Mobile Italiano 1950 – 2000 per L’Arredamento Domestico does feature several different women designers, Pier Carlo Santini makes it very clear that they did not make any significant contribution:

Franco Albini, Vico Magistretti, Luciano Canella, Paolo Chessa, Ignazio Gardella, I Castiglioni, I BBPR, Vittoriano Viganò, Carlo Mollino, Gio Ponti, Marco Zanuso Angelo Mangiaroti, Giovanni Michelucci, Luigi Caccia Dominioni, Ettore Sottsass, Ico Parisi, Roberto Menghi. The list is obviously incomplete, but nevertheless includes the crème de la crème of Italian architectonic culture, from the generation of the ‘masters’ now full mature, to the young and youngest.

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240 Margherita Sarfatti appears on page sixteen and is described as an organizer of the iii Triennale, held in 1929. Helg appears on page twenty-nine and Aulenti on page thirty five. Albera and Monti, 16, 29, 35.
241 Albera and Monti, 10, 30.
242 Branzi, 151.
Aside from there being no women at all in Santini’s list, he cites Ico Parisi and yet not Luisa, despite then attributing furniture to both of them later on in the book. Women might not as well feature at all in books such as Gramigna’s, if they are left out of the major defining statements – similar to the marginal and irregular appearances in Domus. In fact by omitting Luisa from this statement but subsequently including her in the catalogue of images, Santini actually emphasises that Luisa made only a marginal contribution to Italian design – if she was as ‘important’ as Ico she would have appeared both next to the images of their furniture and in the above statement.

The Legacy of Modernism
The hierarchy of the arts present in Domus is seen here in the pre-eminence of furniture and industrial design over craft and fashion, co-joined with women’s ‘relegation’ to the latter. The presence and effect of the gender hierarchy in retrospective representation is exacerbated by the modernist critique that informs the majority of these works and it seems more prevalent in retrospective, than in contemporary, representation. Chapter three discussed the ‘male’ aspects of modernism, and Attfield has commented its importance in design history in ‘FORM/female FOLLOWS FUNCTION/male: Feminist Critiques of Design’:

Design history still suffers from its provenance in the Modern Movement, where to some extent it remains, sealed in a time lock which still considers form the effect of function, and a concept of design – the product of professional designers, industrial production and the division of labour.\(^{244}\)

The prioritization of production and industrially-produced goods is most prevalent in Italian Modern. Albera and Monti continually interchange Italian design and industrial design as if they were the same and state that ‘the designer’s common aim is to build a more rational, pleasant and beautiful human society, even with regard to minor aspects, such as a television or an alarm clock.’\(^{245}\) Albera and Monti do not admit to the partiality of their history or their own positionality, potentially leaving the reader with the mistaken impression that Italian design is entirely modern.

Attfield has also spoken of a ‘value system’ in design history which strongly affects the types of designs that are included:

This value system, entirely based on the ideology of modernism, cannot be applied to non-functional or handmade objects, nor to those which do not conform to the rules of good design. This has made it impossible to deal seriously with a whole galaxy of objects, i.e. those falling outside the prescribed category of the ‘modern classic’. Omitted are fashion, ephemera and many other areas of design in which women have been most prominent; this omission therefore accounts for their lack of visibility.\(^{246}\)


\(^{245}\) Albera and Monti, 10.

\(^{246}\) Attfield, ‘FORM/Female FOLLOWS FUNCTION/Male’, 207.
Although Attfield was talking about design history in general, it is certainly true of Italian Modern. The book is divided into fourteen design types - transportation, residential, lighting, storage, appliances, kitchen/bathroom, building elements, accessories, electronics, sporting equipment, office furniture, professional equipment and weaponry. The inclusion of weaponry and exclusion of fashion are explained by the authors:

It has been decided to exclude fashion products, bound essentially to factors of style and taste, and thus ephemeral. Weapons, on the other hand, have been included, as they are undoubtedly amongst the most highly designed and fascinating objects of human production.  

Albera and Monti see weaponry and fashion as diametrically opposite, an extreme manifestation of the male/female dichotomy and the presumed inferiority of the female/fashion within it. Buckley views the continuing mistreatment of fashion in design history as ‘further evidence...of the intrinsic misogyny of much design history.’ Even taking seriously Albera and Monti’s comment, the idea that weaponry has ‘contributed to a great extent to the definition of the image of Italian Design’ is surely not a statement that would be made by any of those involved in Italian design or its documentation. This is also their justification for selecting only objects still in production: this prioritization of production over consumption is another illustration of the dominance of ‘male’ over ‘female’ values in Italian Modern and design historiography as a whole.

The critique of objects in design historiography is also indicative of its modernist, and moreover art history, origins. In Vision and Difference: Feminism, Femininity and the Histories of Art Pollock described the three basic tenets of modernist criticism:

The specificity of the aesthetic experience; the self-sufficiency of the visual; the teleological evolution of art autonomous from any other social causation or pressure. Modernist protocols describe what is validated as ‘modern art’, i.e. what is relevant, progressing, and in the lead. Art which engages with the social world is political, sociological, narrative, demeaning the proper concerns of the artist.

Albera and Monti demonstrate this out-dated, modernist concern with appearance and the relationship between form and function in Italian Modern. Discussing refrigerators, they note that ‘many industrial designers have successfully avoided arbitrary shapes, while at the same time emphasizing a certain object’s functional parts so that its very form suggests its correct use.’ Furthermore, they dismiss those movements which engaged with the ‘social world’:

247 Albera and Monti, 43.
248 Buckley, ‘Made in Patriarchy’ 112.
249 Albera and Monti, 42.
250 Pollock, Vision and Difference 14.
251 Albera and Monti, 27.
At the very moment that Italian design had succeeded in consolidating its undisputed international supremacy, it was surprisingly put at stake by a minority of Italian designers who, in an effort to get into the limelight (in which they succeeded), launched two successive subversive movements, Radical Design, and Memphis.²⁵²

This disregard for social commentary in design is also present in David Raizman’s History of Modern Design: Graphics and Products Since the Industrial Revolution.²⁵³ Raizman does not appreciate the thinking behind Pesce’s ‘UP 5 Donna’ chair, which proved to be so illuminating in chapter three:

Its concave and convex forms are suggestive of the female form as evoked in Neolithic fertility figures as well as in the contemporary sculpture of Henry Moore. Yet the round ottoman attached to the chair with a rod creates alternative meanings, alluding to issues relating to the women’s liberation movement, undermining the sensual reading.²⁵⁴

By stating that the political message in the chair is ‘undermining’ to its appearance, Raizman reveals his opinion that there is no place for political commentary in design, and also that women cannot be both political and sensual creatures. Just one woman is present in Raizman’s History of Modern Design and Helg’s lonely status epitomises a perspective that women have no place neither as agents nor as subjects of design.

The Construction of the ‘Feminine’ in Modernist Discourse
The introduction to the previous section noted how women are excluded from ‘male’ areas of design in design history. This is another effect of the patriarchal context and modernist criticism widespread in design history, as Judy Attfield has noted:

The dominant conception prioritizes the machine (masculine) over the body (feminine). It assigns men to the determining, functional areas of design – science, technology, industrial production – and women to the private, domestic realm and the ‘soft’, decorative fields of design.²⁵⁵

Of the categories in Italian Modern, women are absent in transport, appliances, office furniture, sporting equipment and weaponry. Residential furnishings and storage contain the highest number of women, with seven in each. In building elements women are restricted to ceramic tiles and door handles.²⁵⁶ In Branzi’s The Hot House,

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²⁵² Albera and Monti, 29.
²⁵⁴ Raizman, 348.
²⁵⁵ Attfield, ‘FORM/Female follows FUNCTION/Male’ 201.
the highest proportion of women is present in the chapter on fashion and the same is true of Italian Design.257

Even when women were involved in ‘masculine’ areas such as furniture design, they have still been excluded. While it is undesirable to talk of ‘canons’ and ‘design classics’ in feminist approaches to design history, the absence of much of Anna Castelli-Ferrieri’s furniture, for example, which demonstrates those qualities privileged in the modern design ‘canon’ is indicative of a selectivity in Italian Modern and others which is entirely male-biased and blind to the real nature of women’s contribution.258

Misattributions and Gender Assumptions in Design Discourse
Chapter four highlighted the issue of misattributions in male-female partnerships and this is a theme that will be elaborated here. Discrepancies between books on authorship are most notable in the ‘Margherita’ chair and ‘Blow’. Despite earlier belief that both Albini and Helg were responsible for its design, according to Sparke in Italian Design and Woodham in Twentieth Century Design only Albini was responsible.259 Raizman credits both Albini and Helg, but only Albini’s dates of birth and death are mentioned – why is this so, is Helg less important, the information so very hard to find?260 ‘Margherita’ also appears in Sparke’s ‘Nature, Craft, Domesticity and the Culture of Consumption.’ The inscription below a photograph of the chair reads ‘Franco Albini, ‘Margherita’ armchair for Bonacina (1954) (Albini/Helg).’261 As a partnership, it is ultimately impossible and even undesirable to attribute designs to just one of the pair, but as it is repeatedly Helg and never Albini who is omitted then the question of authorship is important.

The same is true of ‘Blow’. Alongside Lomazzi, D’Urbino and De Pas, Carla Scolari is sometimes cited as one of the designers. In Woodham, under a photograph of ‘Blow’, Scolari is mentioned, and yet in the text her name is omitted. Sparke is even contradictory between her own books: in An Introduction to Design and Culture in the Twentieth Century, Scolari is referenced while in Italian Design she is not.262 Every mention of ‘Blow’ in Abitare and Domus included Scolari as one of the designers and yet is not even mentioned on the website of Zanotta, the producers of ‘Blow’.263

This problem of uncertainty in attribution has been mentioned by Pansera in Dal Merletto alla Motocicletta and she finds the widespread trend of using only surnames

259 Sparke, Italian Design 102. Woodham, 126.
260 Raizman, 274.
261 Sparke, ‘Nature Craft Domesticity and the Culture of Consumption’ 65.
263 Zanotta. 15 August 2006.
to blame: ‘in short, the abbreviated names raise and leave doubts.’\textsuperscript{264} At this point, gender assumptions take over: in A View from the Interior, Attfield and Kirkham describe how ‘one of the most common assumptions when looking at a female designer whose partner was also in the profession is that the man assumes the primary creative role and that the women must necessarily be influenced by him.’\textsuperscript{265}

Lynne Walker has discussed this phenomenon in relation to Eileen Gray, whose most celebrated building, the E.1027 house, has been (and still is) repeatedly assigned to Jean Badovici.\textsuperscript{266} For Walker ‘asset stripping’ is a regular occurrence and can have long lasting consequences:

> The attribution of an object or building, and therefore the credit for it, is often given to the woman’s male collaborator, partner or teacher. To be a part of history an architect, like an artist, has to have a body of work which can be seen and assessed, but when the exact role or contribution is unclear or in doubt, cultural assumptions about women’s auxiliary role and subservient nature take over.\textsuperscript{267}

This presumption of the male’s dominant creative role is particularly evident in Afra and Tobia Scarpa. While Tobia is mentioned in virtually every book on design history, Afra is not, and she is never mentioned without reference to Tobia. In Architecture for Benetton: Works of Afra and Tobia Scarpa and Tadao Ando Luciano Benetton discusses Tobia and Afra’s first architectural commission, the Benetton knitwear factory.\textsuperscript{268} Luciano only ever refers to Tobia, even stating ‘I had the good fortune to find Tobia.’\textsuperscript{269} Although it is Tobia’s voice throughout the book, Luciano’s comments seem strange when even Tobia continually uses the pronoun ‘we’ to describe his and Afra’s work. The tendency for women to be ‘subsumed’ under their male partner has already been discussed in previous chapters and is particularly noticeable in the Scarpas’ chase as Tobia is hardly ever referred to in conjunction with his father Carlo, himself an architect. This same is true of the Parisis. Ico has even been the subject of his own retrospective in which Luisa is acknowledged only once and even then in brackets: ‘she was in her turn interlocutor, guide, unavoidable critic and conscience of everything, Luisa.’\textsuperscript{270}

\begin{footnotes}
\item \textsuperscript{264}Pansera, Dal Merletto alla Motocicletta 44.
\item \textsuperscript{265}Attfield and Kirkham, A View From The Interior, 8.
\item \textsuperscript{266}Walker, ‘Architecture and Reputation: Eileen Gray, Gender and Modernism’ in Women’s Places 100.
\item \textsuperscript{267}Walker, ‘Architecture and Reputation’ 100.
\item \textsuperscript{269}Antonio Mulas, ‘Interview with Luciano Benetton’ Architecture for Benetton 13.
\item \textsuperscript{270}‘Ed era a sua volta interlocutrice, maestra e coscienza critica imprescindibile, di tutto ciò, Luisa’ Flaminio Gualdoni ‘Testimonianza per Parisi’ in Luigi Cavadini and Flaminio Gualdoni (eds) Ico Parisi, Architettura, Design Utopie, (Lugano, Fidia Edizioni d’Arte, 1991) 9-10.
\end{footnotes}
Gender Assumptions in Language

In Italy: a New Domestic Landscape Emilio Ambasz describes design as ‘an activity whereby man creates artifacts to mediate between his hopes and aspirations, and the pressures and restrictions imposed upon him by nature and the manmade environment that his culture has created.’\(^{271}\) Ambasz’s usage of universalisms such as ‘man’ and even ‘manmade’, an aspect discussed in the previous chapter, is compounded here by repeated use of the male pronoun. While Casey Miller and Kate Swift were referring to the English language in this excerpt from The Handbook of Non-Sexist Writing, their observation is clearly applicable to Italian as well:

> Use of pronouns he, his and him to refer to any unspecified or hypothetical person who may be either female or male is usually justified on two grounds. First, the practice is said to be an ancient rule of English grammar long and faithfully followed by educated speakers and writers. Second, it is asserted – somewhat paradoxically, if the usage is thought to distinguish the educated from the uneducated – that everybody knows he includes she in generalizations. Historical and psychological research in the past few years has produced evidence to refute both claims.\(^{272}\)

Examples of gender metaphors do not seem to appear in Italian design historiography as much as in contemporary cultural representation and even the use of universalisms such as ‘man’ are less prevalent in retrospective writings. The majority of the books discussed here were written some years ago and while this does not decrease their potency, it should be noted that as a discipline design history has developed and expanded to include new subjects, methods and theoretical approaches. Although the discipline is less developed in Italy than in Britain and America, new alternative approaches have emerged in both Italian and English in the last decade. The last section briefly considers some of these, all of which have taken women as subjects and agents in design.

Alternative Approaches in Italian Design History

Silvana Annicchiarico has been responsible for some of the most innovative exhibitions at the Triennale di Milano in recent years, including ‘I’m No Lady: When Objects Have Women’s Names’ in 2002.\(^{273}\) Earlier this year she curated an exhibition at the Triennale on Nanda Vigo, entitled ‘Nanda Vigo: Light is Life’ which looked at Vigo’s experiments with mirrors and lighting.\(^{274}\)

Women designers have been the subject of three exhibitions in Italy since 1990. Il Design delle Donne was organised by the Libreria delle Donne in Florence and was the first of these exhibitions, held in 1991. The curators employed a wide definition of


\(^{273}\) Silvana Annicchiarico, I’m No Lady: When Objects Have Women’s Names (Milan:Charta, 2002)

\(^{274}\) ‘Nanda Vigo: Light is Life’ was held at the Triennale from the 4 April 2006 to the 16 July 2006. Triennale di Milano. 1 August 2006.
design, including spaces, places and events, convinced that investigating the relationship between female subjectivity and design would redefine not only the relationship between design and industry, but of the idea of designing itself. They wanted to know if there existed an interrelationship between research, technical development, realization and the aspirations of a subject- woman - that has for centuries been confined to the domestic sphere.

The second of these exhibitions, held in 2000, was much more specific in its remit, held at the Politecnico. Donne Politechniche traced the female presence at the Politecnico and their subsequent participation in the architecture and industrial design professions. The most recent exhibition was held in 2002 at the Padiglione d’Arte Contemporanea in Ferrara, to celebrate the tenth Biennale Donna. Entitled ‘From Lace to the Motorcycle. A Century of Women’s Designing/Creativity’, the exhibition was in three sections, divided chronologically. The first section focuses on the ‘pioneering work of women artisan/artists’ from the start of the twentieth century to the end of the Second World War; the second ‘women’s contribution to the profession of designer from 1945 to the present day’ and the last section focuses on the work of female journalists, historians and ‘entrepreneurs’ in popularising design in the cultural industries. This last book contained parallel texts in English and Italian and the extensive biographies at the rear of the book have been particularly helpful in this dissertation.

Whilst there have been no more exhibitions on Italian women designers since these, encouragingly, at this year’s Salone del Mobile, there was a special exhibition devoted to contemporary female designers from Italy and abroad, entitled ‘The Devil of Hearth and Home’. While the continued separatist stance that all of these exhibitions have adopted is perhaps not desirable, as it potentially exempts mainstream design history from showing an interest in these areas, until the task of identification and explanation is complete, it is necessary. The next step will be the revision of mainstream history. This means the inclusion not just of both genders and different types of design, but a more multidisciplinary approach which integrates the social aspects of design, looks at consumption as well as production and above all does not exclude those women designing in the professional and domestic spheres, not just in furniture design, but in craft, fashion, and graphics too.

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276 Lupi, 10.
277 Angelo Andreotti Dal Merletto alla Motocicletta 10.
278 Alberto Ronchi Dal Merletto alla Motocicletta n.d.
Conclusion

[Currently subject to editing for inclusion.]
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