

PESANDO A.B. e DELLAPIANA E., In front off and behind the Mirror. Women in Italian Radical Design

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# Proceedings of the 3rd MoMoWo International Conference - Workshop

University of Oviedo, 2–4 October 2017, Oviedo

**Proceedings of the 3<sup>rd</sup> MoMoWo International Conference-Workshop**  
**University of Oviedo, 2–4 October 2017, Oviedo**

Collected by Ana María Fernández García, Helena Seražin, Caterina Franchini and Emilia Garda

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## **POLITICS, POLICIES AND POLITICAL REGIMES**

## In front of and behind the Mirror

### Women in Italian Radical Design

Elena Dellapiana and Annalisa B. Pesando \*

#### Introduction

In the history of Italian feminism, some dates are crucial: the universal suffrage, obtained in 1945 together with the new republican Constitution, the divorce (1970) and the abortion laws (1975), the definitive version of both was the results of popular referendums, and the reform of the family law (1975) meant to reduce discrimination in social and work environments<sup>1</sup>.

The politic and social movements which struggled for that had their roots in left-wing groups, mainly consisting of students and intellectuals trained during the early years of contestation and counterculture and grown in high schools, universities and political circles. It should have allowed young women, following the pioneers, to make themselves more and more independent and aware of their possibilities in professional fields, especially after the university

transformation that became, from 1968, a mass-educational system<sup>2</sup>.

In Italian universities meetings and congresses about the “hot topics” were organized with the self-convocation formula, without the support or even against the official academic institutions. Among the others, the Architecture Faculties were the first in which urban development, in relationship with social inequalities, pollution, cultural heritage and environmental preservation, were the debated issues, and where the number of girls enrolled as students was growing.

At the end of Fifties squatting, demonstrations, protests began and became frequent from 1963<sup>3</sup>, but the crucial phase was in 1968, the year of student mobilizations worldwide.

#### The feminine presence in groups

The “historical” Radical groups, founded around 1966 and 1971, highlighted nevertheless a limited presence of women in the original groups.

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\* The paper is the result of a continuous match between the authors. In particular it is to Elena Dellapiana the Introduction, the second and third paragraphs and the conclusion, to Annalisa Pesando the fourth paragraph. The authors want to thank the interviewed architects and designers who have been generously available to speak not only about professional events but also about personal feelings.

<sup>1</sup> Miguel Malagrecà, “Lottiamo ancora: Reviewing one Hundred and Fifty Years of Italian Feminism”, *Journal of International Women's Studies* 4 (May 2006), 68-89.

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<sup>2</sup> Giovanni Genovesi, *Storia della scuola italiana dal Settecento a oggi*, (Roma-Bari: Laterza, 1998).

<sup>3</sup> First squatting were in Venice (1958 and 1960) and Turin (1959) to protest against the introduction of some restrictive rules; Francisca Insulza, *Studenti, architetti, città: da facoltà d'élite a università di massa*, PHD Dissertation, “Storia e valorizzazione del Patrimonio Architettonico, Urbanistico e Ambientale”, Politecnico di Torino 2009, sup. G. Montanari.



The Florentine 9999 (1967), Ziggurat (1968), Superstudio (1966) and the Turin Strum (1971) were totally male while in UFO (Florence, 1967) we find Patrizia Cammeo; Lucia Bartolini entered the Archizoom (Florence, 1966), in 1967 and Athena Sampanitou, later joined by her sister Angelica, was one of the founding members of the Studio 65 group (Turin 1965).

The different groups included in the “Radical”<sup>4</sup> category, all dislocated eccentrically with respect to Milan –the “mecca” of Good Design- were affected by the cultural and artistic influences of their respective cities of origin. In Florence the courses held by Leonardo Ricci and Leonardo Savioli<sup>5</sup> criticized the mega structural widespread trend, proposing a more human and social scale for both architecture and objects, and the architecture and art historian Lara Vinca Masini pointed her attention on the post-avant-gard art<sup>6</sup>. On the contrary in Turin the academic courses were still traditional and even the entrance of Achille Castiglioni as professor of “Progettazione artistica per l’industria” (“Artistic design for the industry”, from 1969 to 1982), sounded alien to the ongoing experimentations influenced by the politic spurs and the artistic researches<sup>7</sup>.

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<sup>4</sup> Germano Celant, “Radical Architecture”. In Emilo Ambasz (ed.), *Italy: The New Domestic Landscape. Achievements and Problems of Italian Design* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1972), 380-387.

<sup>5</sup> Fiorella Bulegato, Rosa Chiesa, “Note sull’insegnamento della storia del Design in Italia: 1950-1990”, in Pier Paolo Peruccio, Dario Russo (eds.), *Storia hic et nunc. La formazione dello storico del design in Italia e all'estero*, (Torino: Allemandi, 2015).

<sup>6</sup> Laura Lombardi, “Lara-Vinca Masini”, in Maura Pozzati (ed.), *Artiste della Critica*, (Mantova: Corraini, 2015).

<sup>7</sup> Elena Dellapiana, “Da dove vengono i designer (se non si insegna il design)? Torino dagli

Furthermore Lara Vinca Masini<sup>8</sup> who saw in the Radical groups a way to “open” Florence, folded on its Renaissance past, towards an international artistic future, favoured the contacts between the young architects and the most international personalities of the moment: for example with Fernanda Pivano, journalist and translator of American novelists and poets belonging to the Beat Generation, and Ettore Sottsass, architect and designer, art-director, from 1957, of the Tuscany furniture firm Poltronova<sup>9</sup>. After the flood that hit Florence in 1967, they attempted to collect works of all the contemporary Pop artists to establish an international museum of contemporary art, becoming the core of a huge networking action in which two women, Lara and Nanda, were pivotal figures.

However, the women in the groups were really few: Patrizia Cammeo was one of the original members of UFO group<sup>10</sup>. Patrizia remembers an atmosphere of great competition between the guys and tolerance toward her due to her prettiness and her bond with Riccardo Foresi, her future husband: “I was the nice girl who was the model in the photo shootings and despite the fact that we were revolutionary, the women touched only the most “domestic” topics”. In the UFO *Superhappening* in San Giovanni Valdarno (1968), for example, she was charged to create the costumes and her own feeling was not to be much important. On the contrary, when she and Riccardo had a

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anni Trenta ai Sessanta”, *QUAD. Quaderni di Architettura e Design* 1 (2017), forthcoming.

<sup>8</sup> Interview collected on 13.07.2017.

<sup>9</sup> Francesca Balena Arista (ed.), *Poltronova Backstage. Archizoom, Sottsass and Superstudio. The Radical Era 1962 - 1972* (Miami: Fortino Editions, 2017).

<sup>10</sup> Stefano Pezzato (ed.), *UFO STORY Dall'architettura radicale al design globale*, (Prato: Centro Luigi Pecci, 2012); interview collected on 20.09.2017.

baby and Patrizia left the group, the group itself crashed as if the only female figure was its glue, and, after the end of the Radical season, the couple continued their common work on the topics of urban planning as a result of their previous researches on social themes<sup>11</sup>.

In 1967 Lucia Morozzi and Dario Bartolini, who will marry in 1969, joined the Archizoom group<sup>12</sup>, collaborating to all the collective projects, but with a later specialization, especially by Lucia, on dressing design.

Since the beginning the group's work was affected by the cultural and habit changes, particularly by the "sexual revolution", traces of which were founded in many of their projects as the *Scroto* (scrotum) furnishing (1969) and the *Manhattan skyscraper* (1969), both in phallic shape, or the double room *Dream Beds* and the *Gazebo project* (1967)<sup>13</sup> which, with their quoting of American visual and musical counterculture (rainbows, arrows, animalier fabrics, folksingers portraits), or with their transparencies and indeterminacy of spaces, pushed the audience to imagine hot nights and informal uses in contrast with the bourgeois schemes. These first experimentations were spread by the countercultural magazine "Pianeta fresco" created and directed by Pivano, with Allen Ginsberg as deputy director (irresponsible director) and her husband Ettore Sottsass jr. as art director (head of the gardens).

<sup>11</sup> She started, aged 53, her collaboration with the Vittorio Gregotti firm, in the garden and urban park design.

<sup>12</sup> Roberto Gargiani, *Dall'onda pop alla superficie neutra. Archizoom Associati 1966-1974*, (Milan: Electa, 2007).

<sup>13</sup> About the magazine *Pianeta fresco*: Mario Maffi, *La cultura Underground*, (Bologna: Odoja, 2009); Martina Spalla, *Le Origini della sostenibilità ambientale nel progetto italiano. Dibattiti ed esiti tra il dopoguerra e la crisi energetica*, Degree dissertation, Politecnico di Torino, sup. Elena Dellapiana, a.a. 2016-17.

Their researches developed from pieces of furniture to the large scale of the *No-stop city* (1970-1971) and on this ground grew the idea of a global design that also included clothing items. The reflection on the supply of objects for life in anti-urban sites came to the proposal of a *Rational clothing system* (1970) followed by the *Dressing design* (1972). Based on the idea of the user's participation in the finishing and on the use and declination of neutral dresses, the *Dressing Design* was far from a stylists' approach and focused on production systems and new materials development. Lucia Bartolini, with her sister Nicoletta Morozzi, later Andrea Branzi's wife, was the most active in this line of research, even if, as Lara Vinca Masini states "after the very beginning, she was mainly occupied in the care of her children, home and husband". The improvement of experimental fabrics used for basic garments as the *Overall* or the *Body* –unisex and combinable– produced in joint venture with the Fiorucci brand and published on *Vogue*<sup>14</sup>, highlighted once more how the design in relationship with fashion was one of the opportunities open to women as a traditionally feminine field and able to define their roles in project. Indeed, in 1974, two different projects were published on "Casabella"<sup>15</sup> and "Domus"<sup>16</sup>, showing the proposals for the competition for the Libyan national costume by Lucia and Dario Bartolini and by Nanni Strada and Clino T. Castelli (couples in real life). In both cases the aim was to claim for design the fashion

<sup>14</sup> The shooting is by Oliviero Toscani, the models are Donna Jordan and the architect Benedetto Gravagnuolo, for *L'Uomo Vogue* 19 (aug- sept. 1972) 68-73; Archizoom, "Dressing design", *Casabella* 373 (january 1973), 17-22.

<sup>15</sup> N. 510 (may 1972).

<sup>16</sup> "Vestirsi Arabo", *Domus* 537 (august 1974), 22-25; "Abitare l'abito", *Domus* 510 (may 1972), 33-38. Nanni Strada, *Lezioni. Moda-design e cultura del progetto*, (Milan: Lupetti, 2013).

stylism, using the common spurs – industrial production, seriality, material experimentation- and mixing those with liminary disciplines, as semiology, following Roland Barthes writings<sup>17</sup>, anthropology and ethnology in the direction traced by Bernard Rudofsky<sup>18</sup>. Clothes easy to wear, informal, interchangeable, practical, economic were the results of this renovation research which remained anchored to the design method but switched to a field traditionally feminine, considered, during the years of contestation, at the frivolous limit. While Nanni Strada continued her activity as fashion designer, Lucia Bartolini didn't appear in further professional occupations.

In Turin, due to the social turmoil typical of the workers' cities, the design debate was oriented towards a more political approach. In 1969 a huge conference, organized by the “volunteer assistant committee” took place. Titled *Architettura: Utopia e/o Rivoluzione* (Architecture: Utopia and/or Revolution)<sup>19</sup>, the conference collected reports by the most international innovative firms as the French Architecture Principe, Yona Friedman,

<sup>17</sup> Roland Barthes, *Système de la Mode*, (Paris: Ed. Du Seuil, 1967).

<sup>18</sup> The MoMA exhibition edited by Rudofsky, “Are the Clothes Modern? An essay on contemporary apparel” is dated 1944; MoMA Archives, New York, <http://www.moma.org/calendar/exhibitions/3159?locale=en> accessed September 6, 2017; Elena Dellapiana, “Case e sandali. Bernard Rudofsky dalle isole del Mediterraneo al mito dell'anonimo”, in A. Maglio, F. Mangone, A. Pizza (eds.), *Immaginare il Mediterraneo. Architettura arti fotografia*, (Naples: Paparo, 2017), 205-214.

<sup>19</sup> The conference held from 25 (anniversary of the liberation from Nazi-fascism in Italy) to 27 April 1969, in the historical site of the Faculty of Architecture, the Castello del Valentino. The scheduled speeches and the debates are published in the magazine *Marcatre* 50/55 (February-July 1969), 6-133.

Utopie, the British Archigram, the Italian Archizoom and the elder Italian born active in USA Aldo Gurgiola and Paolo Soleri<sup>20</sup>.

In the organizing committee, named U e/o R, we find, among the seven members, three women, Graziella Gay Derossi, Adriana Ferroni and Elena Tamagno, and, among the younger participants – still studying or just graduating- Angelica Sampanitou and Maria Schiappa.

Some of them gathered in the local Radical group, as STRUM (male exclusive group), or Studio 65<sup>21</sup>, founded by Franco Audrito, with his wife Angelica –Nanà-Sampanitou, Franco Tartaglia, later joined by Adriana Ferroni (born Garizio). Nanà tells of meetings to prepare contest projects<sup>22</sup> – a seat in fibreglass, the *Omoteca*<sup>23</sup>- mixing the social themes and the design of items and architecture. She states that women were quite numerous at meetings –the “chat time”- but a few in professional life. She remembers how to be a pretty woman helped her and her own group in making contacts with firms and beginning the successfully professional career which followed with the design of some of the most iconic pieces of Radical design as the *Bocca* couch (1970) or the *Capitello* seat (1971) in collaboration with Gufram company.

The “Gufram Track” which involved other designer as the Strum group and Giuseppe Raimondi allowed the group to

<sup>20</sup> Alicia Imperiale, “Utopia e/o Rivoluzione, Politecnico di Torino 1969”, in B. Colomina (ed.), *Radical Pedagogies*, Princeton, 2013-2014, <http://radical-pedagogies.com/> Accessed September 7, 2017.

<sup>21</sup> Franco Audrito, Maria Cristina Didero, *Il mercante di nuvole*, (Milan: Skira 2015).

<sup>22</sup> Interview collected on September, 12<sup>th</sup>, 2017, Turin.

<sup>23</sup> A kind of chaise-lounge obtained with the mold of the figure of a person lying down, never realized except in the form of a prototype.

meet the artistic milieu, thus characterizing the Turin mood as the most artistic in Italian outline. The collaboration with artists as Piero Gilardi and Ugo Nespolo, the attending of the post-avant-garde galleries<sup>24</sup> and the involvement in design-driven exhibition as EuroDomus<sup>25</sup>, turned away from the social themes the projects and the groups raised on these challenges. Furthermore, the radicalization of the social struggle melt the dichotomy “Utopia and/or Revolution”, discussed in 1969. On one hand somebody from the original groups turned in the armed struggle in the following dramatic decade, on the other hand the initial optimism about changing the goals of the architect's work ceased and many had to emigrate or switch field of action and, regarding women, interrupting the work when babies were born, “a vacation from the tension of work competition”, says Nanà<sup>26</sup>.

The greater presence of women occurred in the groups created by Alessandro Mendini, the most influencing architect, following Gio Ponti, in organising crews, creating and directing specialized magazines and events<sup>27</sup>. He was the director of “Casabella” from 1970

to 1976, of “Modo” from 1977 to 1979 and then of “Domus”, and he involved several women in the different newsrooms, or in groups as Global Tools (1973) the multidisciplinary self-design and self-build workshops. Lidia Prandi, Mendini's wife, Ines Klok, wife of the musician Davide Mosconi and musician herself, were Global Tools members and appeared as co-protagonists and background of their partners' performances (for example the Gufram polyurethane seat, 1974, with Gilardi, or the *Sitting woman performance*, 1976, with Mosconi or the *Costume for woman and harp* 1977). Mendini tells that they were “an help”<sup>28</sup> and almost always, after these early experiences, they turned to different occupations: journalism (Prandi) and music (Klok). Even in groups where they were many, women played roles of “order” in editorial and organizing staffs and when they started solo careers they did that as journalists, critics, curators and artists. This is the case of the “Modo” editorial staff: Nives Ciardi editor and later child psychoanalyst, Claudia Donà curator, Cristina Morozzi, architect Massimo Morozzi's wife<sup>29</sup>, journalist, Barbara Radice, the daughter of the painter Mario Radice journalist and curator, Patrizia Rizzi, illustrator and artist, Daniela Puppa fashion designer. The same thing happened with the former “Domus” collaborators under Mendini's direction: Lisa Licitra Ponti, Ponti's daughter, curator, Marianne Lorenz historical editor of the magazine, Maria Grazia Mazzocchi chief publisher, Rosa Maria Rinaldi journalist and artist, Patrizia Scarzella journalist. As designers they collaborated, e.g. in the Alchymia group (1979) mainly

<sup>24</sup> The Galleria Sperone opened in 1964 initiating collaboration with Ileana Sonnabend, introducing American Pop Artist in Italy and Italian artist in New York, Luca Massimo Barbero, Cecilia Widenheim (eds.), *Time & Place: Milano-Torino 1958-1968*, Moderna Museet, (Stockholm: Steidl Verlag, 2008).

<sup>25</sup> The first edition of the fair-exhibition promoted by the magazine Domus held in Genova in 1966, the second and the fourth in Torino in 1968 and 1972. Elisa Argenta, *Decorare, arredare, abitare. Tre decenni di design per la casa nelle pagine di Domus*, Degree dissertation, Politecnico di Torino, 2009, sup. E. Dellapiana.

<sup>26</sup> Adriana Garizio was arrested in 1976 for her belonging to the “Brigate Rosse” group. The couple Nanà and Franco Audrito (Studio 65), went to Arab Emirates in 1975.

<sup>27</sup> Peter Weiss, *Alessandro Mendini. Cose progetti costruzioni*, (Milano: Electa, 2000).

<sup>28</sup> Interview collected on September 18<sup>th</sup> 2017, Milan.

<sup>29</sup> Cristina Morozzi, *Il design non è una cosa seria. Memorie di una ragazza radicale*, (Milan: Rizzoli 2017).

on the topics of decoration, clothes, fabrics.

### The solo careers

Just in few cases, from the group and the couple or family dynamics, some women started their own careers. Paola Navone, graduated in Torino with an early dissertation on Radical Architecture (1973)<sup>30</sup> that was published the next year in the "Documenti di Casabella" by Mendini's decision, and involved in many initiatives, became an important sign of Italian design, also as art director of several design companies<sup>31</sup>. She states that one of her luck was not having children. This allowed her to travel in far countries, to know cultures and situations from which to get ideas and projects always new<sup>32</sup>.

The absence of a family is one of the critical points highlighted by Nanda Vigo<sup>33</sup> too. She, after graduating in architecture from the École polytechnique de l'Université de Lausanne, and a work experience in the United States, started her interest in relationship between architecture, art, and design. Piero Manzoni's partner during the Sixties, after 1959 she worked on interdisciplinary projects – art, standard production pieces, interior and exhibition design-, that explored the relationship between space and light which became the unifying

characteristic of her work. She was interested in women approach, as shown in a collective exhibition held in Brescia (Castello di Oldofredi, 1976) titled *Magma* edited with the art critic and Enzo Mari's wife Lea Vergine<sup>34</sup> (who in turn will edit the gorgeous exhibition "The other avant-garde half" in 1980)<sup>35</sup>, but, she states, "the womanhood as to tend to family and reproduction, was the obstacle the women themselves set on their own way, they did not want to leave the old road for a new one". She remembers also to have been twitted by colleagues for her eclecticism and for her relationship with elder people belonging to the "old guard" as Gio Ponti. Nanda Vigo, once again, represented the crossover and overlapping attitude between different fields –architecture, design, art, curatorship, critic- which was typical of women in those year in which was objectively difficult to play masculine roles as the traditional architect or designer.

Even in the professional relationships with companies, often the alternative ones asked the collaboration of these borderline designers: Gufram, Poltronova, Fiorucci, which worked with the radical groups, or Simon-Gavina who produced in 1971 the "Ron-ron" seat by the Romanian born artist Marion Baruch or the table "Traccia" by Meret Oppenheim, included in the series *Ultramobile* (1971-1973), addressed to dialogue with surrealist artists and not only with "traditional" designers<sup>36</sup>.

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<sup>30</sup> Paola Navone, Bruno Orlandoni, *Architettura "radicale"*, (Milan: Documenti di Casabella, 1974).

<sup>31</sup> Spencer Bailey, *Tham Ma Da: The Adventurous Interiors of Paola Navone*, (New York: Pointed Leaf Press, 2016).

<sup>32</sup> *Sing of Design*, Paola Navone, Televisionet, 3 March 2011, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YLIStdNjOeU> Accessed Settembre 8, 2017.

<sup>33</sup> Interview collected on July, 24<sup>th</sup> 2017; Barbara Pastor, *Nanda Vigo interni '60-'70*, (Milan: Segesta, 2006).

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<sup>34</sup> Francesca Alfano Miglietti, "Lea Vergine, la signora della body-art", in Maura Pozzati (ed.), *Artiste della critica*, (Mantova: Corraini, 2015) 108-125.

<sup>35</sup> Lea Vergine, *L' altra metà dell' avanguardia 1910-1940: pittrici e scultrici nei movimenti delle avanguardie storiche*, (Milan: Mazzotta, 1980).

<sup>36</sup> Elena Brigi, Daniele Vincenzi (eds.), *Atlas Dino Gavina*, (Mantova: Corraini, 2010).

## Women as mean of Radical communication

Architects, designers or artists, women were anyway a strong mean of communication for the Radical design items, in turn icons of social, cultural and artistic changes.

Especially the photography became one of the preferred means to express this need for a change and women were the protagonists -symbol of these reforms- both as favourite subjects to be photographed and as photo reporters and photographers<sup>37</sup>. The great number of artist-photographers who worked in the 1970s magazines shows how photography was a profession appreciated by the female universe in which observation and communication through a medium -the camera- became an expression of their identity and working dignity. This remains in fact a challenge that was not resolved by the contesting season, even if intellectuals and critics fueled the discussion on the women role between 1969 and 1975<sup>38</sup>. The social changes that had to overwhelm the traditional Italian family were interpreted, among others, by Pier Paolo Pasolini interviewed in the Rai Uno tv-show "Donna Donna" in 1974. He stated that an epochal change was underway in which "we no longer need the family"; in his opinion the family,

understood as the original social code of Italian rural life, was going to be replaced by consumer groups linked to a new technological civilization<sup>39</sup>. His speech, that was a part of the more general Pasolini's reflection on the "mutation of anthropology" in Italy, told about a new woman, emancipated and free from the role of mother and from the codes of the paternalistic society (*pater familias*), but also under the thumbs of the new laws of consumption carried out by bourgeois society<sup>40</sup>. So house, with its equipments and decorations, become the perfect stage on which playing both the social role and the transformation of goods system one.

The feminist historian Lea Melandri (1941) wrote: "It is no coincidence that women gather in homes, it may look like regression, a step backwards in their path of emancipation, but in reality they touch on issues that have always been considered marginal and non-political"<sup>41</sup>.

Among the several interesting pictures of that period, that became very iconic, there is the black and white portrait depicting *Superonda*, the couch made of foam blocks designed in 1968 by the Archizoom group and produced by Poltronova. On the *Superonda* stands voluptuous pose Florinda Bolkan (Florinda Soares Bulcão 1941), a Brazilian actress noticed by Luchino Visconti who in 1969

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<sup>37</sup> Pierre Lannoy, "L'usine, la photographie et la nation. L'entreprise automobile fordiste et la production des photographes industriels", *Genèses* 80 (2010), 114-133; more generally Mario Piazza, "La grafica per il 'Made in Italy'", <http://www.aisdesign.org/aisd/la-grafica-per-il-made-in-italy>. Accessed September 10, 2017.

<sup>38</sup> Ilaria Bussoni and Raffaella Perna (eds.), *Il gesto femminista. La rivolta delle donne: nel corpo, nel lavoro, nell'arte*, (Rome: Derive Approdi, 2014); Carla Lonzi, *Sputiamo su Hegel*, (Milan: Scritti di rivolta femminile, 1970 1°ed).

<sup>39</sup> Videos aired on September 21, 1974, <http://www.teche.rai.it/2015/02/intervista-a-pasolini-su-donna-e-famiglia-21091974/> Accessed August 21, 2017.

<sup>40</sup> Enzo Golino and Pier Paolo Pasolini, *il sogno di una cosa: pedagogia, eros, letteratura dal mito del popolo alla società di massa*, (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1985); Pier Paolo Pasolini, *Saggi sulla politica e sulla società*, (Milan: Mondadori, 1999).

<sup>41</sup> *Storia del movimento femminista in Italia* – Gli anni Settanta <http://www.lastoriasiamonoi.rai.it/puntate/storia-del-movimento-femminista-in-italia/739/default.aspx> Accessed September 5, 2017.

was awarded with the David of Donatello price as the protagonist of the film *Metti una sera a cena* by Giuseppe Patroni Griffi. The shoot author was Elisabetta Catalano (1941-2015)<sup>42</sup> who had immortalized a generation of artists as a portraitist in the fashion and cinema world. Catalano's career began in the 1960s as the partner of the photographer Fabio Mauri in the Roman cultural setting, where, with other artists and intellectuals, they carried on visual experimentations that would to overcome the post-war Realism in order to reach "picture reported" formulas. Her monochrome studies fascinated Federico Fellini who consequently chose her for the photo shooting of his movies.

The "Superonda/Bolkan" picture became a symbol of a creative and cultural women claim: a lady is the creator and subject of the photo; the *Superonda* sofa was an household but nonconformist item which subverted the rules of sitting and rest as well as those of space; the model, Florinda, interpreted the feminine beauty, the freedom from the social conventions as an independent actress to whom the Sapphic partnership with the film producer Countess Marina Cicogna (1934), added sensual charm and sexual uninhibitedness claims typical of this period<sup>43</sup>.

<sup>42</sup> Barbara Martusciello, "Elisabetta Catalano, fotografa di una generazione pionieristica, bellissima principessa per sempre", January 7, 2015 <http://www.artapartofculture.net/2015/01/07/elisabetta-catalano-fotografa-di-una-generazione-pionieristica-bellissima-principessa-per-sempre/> Accessed August 31, 2017. <http://www.archivioelisabettacatalano.it/> August 31, 2017.

<sup>43</sup> Mario Cirrito, Il mondo dorato di Marina Cicogna in mostra a Roma: "Che anni felici con la Bolkan", *Queer Blog*, May 27, 2009. <http://www.queerblog.it/post/5362/il-mondo-dorato-di-marina-cicogna-in-mostra-a-roma-che-anni-felici-con-la-bolkan>. Accessed on September 2017.

Similarly, Cristiano Toraldo di Francia (1941) – one of the Superstudio founders and also the group "official" photographer - immortalized their *Onos* bed produced by Giovannetti (1968) along with two black women. The image conceived for the market, caring the colours and the arrangement of the subjects with the bed in foreground - highlighted a delicate social theme as the racial segregation.

The irreverent and nonconforming design object created and communicated by the radical groups became therefore the main subject of artistic choices to reach broadened public not only for commercial goals but also to stimulate deeper interpretations and social challenges.

The same approach characterized the communication for the *Bazaar* armchair, a rugged polyester resin seat with double-curved fiberglass shell and acrylic fur produced by the Tuscany firm Giovannetti (1968)<sup>44</sup>.

Toraldo di Francia made the shoots series for this 'pumpkin' seat too<sup>45</sup>: idyllic arcadic scenery with young ladies dressed vestals playing the flute (and drinking Coca Cola) or nude on the pink fausse-fourrure chair; hippy scenarios set on the brown peluche *Bazaar* with blond models or a cheerful black model dressed in red. It is interesting to note that the marketing choice proposed by the "Domus" magazine, which in January 1970 (No. 482/1970) devoted a page to Superstudio's pumpkin, opting for the white armchair and brown beaver fabric with family setting scenes (a woman alone

<sup>44</sup> Giuseppe Lotti (ed.), *La fabbrica bella: design toscano. Storia e Prospettive*, (Florence: Alinea, 2003).

<sup>45</sup> Toraldo di Francia was the author of almost all the photo shooting for catalogues Guerrieri, and Poltronova; Francesca Balena Arista (ed.), *Poltronova Backstage. Archizoom, Sottsass and Superstudio. The Radical Era 1962 – 1972*, (Miami: Fortino Editions, 2017).



or with a young girl) or at the very least with a quiet hippy mood. The pumpkin is so transformed into a protected environment and in a context anchored to the bourgeois tradition rather than to the series of Radical transgressive objects.

In widespread imaginary - thanks to advertising and happening - Radical design alternated reassuring images with others more subversive with regard to the customers' common behaviours. For example the *Pratone* seat produced by Gufram (Strum Group des.), denied through the model's posture, the idea itself of outdoor/indoor space as well as the conventional seating arrangements and dimensions. In the case of the pvc *Blow* Inflatable Chair (Jonathan De Pas, Donato D'Urbino, Paolo Lomazzi and Carla Scolari des., Prod. By Zanotta in 1967<sup>46</sup>), in the advertising campaign the comfort of the living room is shifted outdoors, for all and no place in particular, and nice middle class ladies, pearl necklace and well combed - "rebuild" family environments on meadows, on the sea, in the city streets. To this "reassuring" catalogue picture, the photographer Veronique Bucossi<sup>47</sup> - among the most entertaining artists who handed down the image of the sixties and seventies - immortalized on *Blow* in 1968 a sensual Jane Birkin. She had just appeared in a somewhat scandalous scene in *Blow-up* (1966, dir. M. Antonioni) and was going to interpret the famous song *Je t'aime ... moi non plus* (1969).

The *Sacco* chair designed by Piero Gatti, Cesare Paolini and Franco Teodoro in 1968 (prod. Zanotta) mean the search for a new comfort and adaptation to any form and place. It was the embodiment of relaxes, fitting for a new generation that

can sink, fall asleep and immerse itself in the new offbeat furniture. The picture to be published in magazines showed a sophisticated model conveniently lay on the "Sacco", in an image between the market's compromise and Pop's trends of the period.

Among the radical products that attracted more publicity and criticism was the *Up* series, designed by Gaetano Pesce and produced by Cassina and Busnelli (C & B) in 1968. The series made of polyurethane foam combined searches of harmonic shapes, flexibility of use and transport thanks to the vacuum packaging. The most aware of the series was the *Up5* chair titled *Donna* for evoking the female shapes emulating a wraparound womb; this was often together with the *Up6*, a spherical footrest. In Pesce's mind the *Up5* and *6* were the symbols of woman's imprisonment, victim of male bias<sup>48</sup>, but the item also lend itself to more free and sensual interpretations, especially by photographic shootings.

For example, Sean Connery -as James Bond- sitting on *Donna* and photographed by Terry O'Neill in 1971 in Las Vegas on the *Diamond Are Forever* set, gets an ambiguous meaning and a strong sensual connotation. On the other hand the producing company (C & B) conceived a descriptive advertising - with a coordinated image designed by Enrico Trabacchi - focused on the functional features of the chair, its transportability and friendly use. Anyway is a woman - black-dressed as a mime - the user who illustrated the steps for transporting and assembling the *Up5*. The effectiveness of the image lied in the contrast between the large and seemingly heavy object, and the typically feminine weakness.

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<sup>46</sup> Zanotta Archives, Nova Milanese.

<sup>47</sup> David Wills, *Switched on: women who revolutionized style in the 60's*, (Weldon Owen: Blue Streak, 2017).

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<sup>48</sup> Domitilla Dardi, Gianni Mercurio (eds.), *Gaetano Pesce: il tempo della diversità*, Catalogue of the Exhibition, Rome, MAXXI (Milano: Electa, 2014).



Similarly, one of the most sensual and provocative pieces of the Radical period, the Studio 65's *Bocca* couch (produced by Gufram 1971), inspired by the surrealist Salvador Dalí's lounge with Mae West lips (1935) and by the provocative Hollywood stars' red-hot lips, was published on "Life magazine" along with "The Girl of the Seventies" - Marisa Berenson (1947)<sup>49</sup>, actress, model and Dalí's muse. Once again, Richard Avedon<sup>50</sup> (1923-2004) mixed radical object and female icons.

Poltronova published on "Domus" an advertisement rather unconventional of Archizoom's *Safari*: an 'imperial' sofa, with Fiberglas structure and faux leopard finish, fabric or leather. The image portrays a thoughtful woman and an observing child both sitting on the modular couch, and a sobering caption in twin languages (English and Italian) says: "An imperial piece in the dreariness of your domestic walls. A piece that's finer than you. A very beautiful piece that you would not deserve. Clear your sitting-room! Clear even your life!" ("Domus" 510, 1972).

This ambivalence between provocative photography and the need to adhere to the market rules, although mainly related to Radical items, also invested other kind of objects of this period in particular those produced by the company Busnelli, which was investing in advertising with its marketing director, the photographer Gianni Sassi (1938-1993) who founded the semi-annual corporate magazine *Kaleidoscope*. The chosen

language and authors were anyway more or less the same: for the Mario Bellini's *Bambole* the photos for the advertising campaign were realized by Oliviero Toscani, who made a series of disinhibited shots of the androgynous model Donna Jordan, a Pop icon who inspired Andy Warhol too. Among the various provocative shots, however, only one of the softer was chosen: the model showed only a flash of naked breasts and assumed a fairly composite posture, ambiguously at the limit of the promises of love in the advertising slogan "... Dolls who go away on dolls who remain".

The provocative uses of women body in visual communication, as a manifesto of the countercultural design, and the radical design itself were, as we have seen, somehow controlled and clean by the magazine editorial board, almost entirely composed of women.

This is the case for the magazine "Abitare" directed by Piera Peroni (1929-1974)<sup>51</sup>. Particularly in the number 82 (1970), devoted to the living room furnishing and titled "Less pieces furniture, please"<sup>52</sup> despite the author did not appreciate the radical exaggerations defined "at the limit of the paradox"<sup>53</sup> and in some cases completely rejected<sup>54</sup>, she

<sup>49</sup> Leonetta Bentivoglio, "Marisa Berenson", *La Repubblica*, May 17, 2009; Chiara Caputo, "Marisa Berenson: icona di stile e bellezza", <http://d-art.it/moda/marisa-berenson-icona-di-stile-e-bellezza/20074>. Accessed September 17, 2017; Marisa Berenson, *A life in Pictures*, (Milan: Rizzoli, 2011).

<sup>50</sup> Jane Livingston, Adam Gopnik, *Evidence 1944-1994*, (New York: Random House, 1994).

<sup>51</sup> Marco Sammiceli, "Piera Peroni e il talento senza gender", in Raimonda Riccini (ed.), *Angelica e Bradamante. Le donne del design*, (Padova: Il Poligrafo: 2017) 95-102; Annalisa B. Pesando, *Design and women through the pioneering magazine Stile Industria (1954-1963)*, 2<sup>nd</sup> MoMoWo Conference-Workshop, Ljubiana, 2016, Forthcoming.

<sup>52</sup> Piera Peroni, "Meno mobili per favore", *Abitare* 82 (1970), 2-3.

<sup>53</sup> Ead. .5.

<sup>54</sup> Piera Peroni, "No, no questo poi no", *Abitare* 92 (1971), 191-198. Without comments, Piera Peroni put on a "NO" written background a series of images of homewares considered unacceptable, including the Ettore Sottsass's mirror *Ultrafragola*, the Studio 65 group's *Pratone*, etc.

spend ample space just to radical productions, considered as well innovative and worthy of attention. In a long article of 34 pages, the magazine opened with a double page dedicated to the Archizoom's *Mies* chair. Piera Peroni recognized the innovative and imaginative value of the Archizoom sitting system, compared to the "often sterile" variations on the theme of the armchair. She appreciated its essential and geometric taste, the shape of the rubber seat, which thanks to its elasticity accommodates the body, bends to all the movements and then returns perfectly in line. Presented with the title "let's lie on the hypotenuse", the article was provided with 5 photos by the Dance + Dance studio, founded by Aldo Ballo (1928-1994) - brother of the art historian Guido Ballo - and Marirosa Toscano Ballo (1931), another pivotal woman - daughter of the *Corriere della Sera* photo reporter Sergio Fedele Toscani and Oliviero Toscani sister<sup>55</sup>. In the captions only Aldo Ballo was mentioned, while the acknowledgment of the their common work will only be later.

Piera Peroni's article explored then Gaetano Pesce's *Up* Series and about the *Donna* chair she preferred to underline its "maternal image", its "almost prenatal" relaxation that protects from daily fears<sup>56</sup>. For the *Bazaar* she exalted its "temple" image, devoted to daily life, alone or gathered together in a somehow

traditional living room<sup>57</sup>. Even the *Sacco* by Gatti, Paolini and Teodoro was described as "a return to the origins" told as a light sitting-shelter for children and women<sup>58</sup>. This will to transform the revolutionary trigger of the Radical items into more reassuring products for everyday life reveals both the commercial aim, and the general need - of which many women were interpreters- to bring the politic struggles back to the safer household.

Similarly, "Domus" focused on the radical production enhancing its innovative and non-conforming aspects, although the choice of those images was oriented to a commercial improvement using a "reassuring" visual communication with mannequin who resembled mothers and sisters in a bourgeois approach<sup>59</sup>.

"Casabella" directed by Alessandro Mendini (from 1970 to 1976) as one of the main radicalism amplifiers, dedicated instead extensive chapters to "Interplanetary Architecture", told as a method of comprehensive and all-scale project, dealing indeed very little specifically with objects.

As in previous examples, women were the authors of most of these reports<sup>60</sup> highlighting once again the roles they have played as critics, storytellers -in words and images-, sorters, "groups glue" and problem solvers.

<sup>55</sup> Giovanna Calvenzi and Salvatore Gregoriotti (eds.), *Il linguaggio dell'oggetto attraverso le fotografie di Aldo Ballo e Marirosa Toscani Ballo*, (Cinisello Balsamo: Silvana Editoriale, 2009); Ilaria Defilippo, *Catturare su pellicola l'essenza del design italiano. Conversazione con Marirosa Toscani Ballo*, 24.03.2017, <http://www.alleyoop.ilsole24ore.com/2017/03/24/catturare-su-pellicola-lessenza-del-design-italiano-conversazione-con-marirosa-toscani-ballo/> Accessed September 5, 2017.

<sup>56</sup> Piera Peroni, "La balia sottovuoto", *Abitare* 82 (1970), 6-7.

<sup>57</sup> Eadem, "Chiacchiere nella conchiglia", *Abitare* 82 (1970), 8-9.

<sup>58</sup> Eadem, "Lasciati mettere nel sacco", *Abitare* 82 (1970), 12-13.

<sup>59</sup> E.g., the magazine *Domus* dedicated an article to Archizoom's products presented by Ettore Sottsass. *Domus* 455 (1967), 26-31.

<sup>60</sup> E.g., Daniela Puppa "Molti mobili ma per chi" (*Casabella* 361 (1972), 56-62); another character to be studied is Aurelia Raffo (1948), photographer and graphic designer, who was charged in recording Ugo La Pietra's cinematic experience and urban performances.

## Conclusions

While this very first overview raises the tangential nature of women roles in the design world, in spite of the social changing and costuming trends, on the other hand, it is possible to identify the Radical phase as the one in which the disciplinary division, or rather, the exclusive design management by architects, ceased, somehow thanks to women. Indeed, their liminary works, chased to remedy the closure of the "male" project, their educations and careers as artists, psychologists, journalists and critics have made possible to melt the project, making it increasingly complex and made of different, new contributions, of which women are often the engine and the main promoters.

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