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Reasons to Research in the Mediterranean Area

Editorial #14

Research and Reasoning in the Mediterranean Area

Marinella Ferrara

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The Italian design history from a different perspective: the case of Ico Parisi

Chiara Lecce, Design Department, Politecnico di Milano, Italy

Keywords

Ico Parisi, Mediterranean Design History, Italian Design

Abstract

The history of Ico Parisi (1916-1996), multifaceted designer, architect, photographer and artist, originally from Palermo but then living in Como, is considered here as one of the many “satellites” in the history of Italian design. There are two ways of considering Mediterranean, here: on the one hand considering Italy as a geographical area of the Mediterranean sea but that, in relation to the history of design, is a separate chapter compared to the most debated and studied history of “Milanese” design, resulting in this sense relevant and interesting all those Italian cases isolated from it, including the Ico Parisi case. It is then added, at the origin of Parisi path, a first clear point of contact with that part of rationalist culture openly inspired by the Mediterranean, between the Thirties and Forties.

1. The “Milanocentric” perspective

The history of Italian design of the Twentieth century has seen a large predominance of authors belonging to Milan, creating Italian design stories that can often be described as “milanocentric”. Of course, there is no doubt about the centrality that this city and its industrial surroundings (principally the Brianza area) has had in the maturation of Italian design. An area in which, between the two wars, intellectuals and entrepreneurs established “a sort of operative alliance, which chose to immediately start, from industrial products, the transformation of society and structures that Rome was slow to plan” (Branzi 1999, p.110).

It is also true, however, that the references to the world of the Milanese design were somehow influenced by a concentration of other factors such as, first of all, the presence of the newsrooms of the most important Italian architecture and design magazines of the Twentieth century: *Domus* (1928), *La Casa Bella* (1928, *Casabella* after '33), *Edilizia Moderna* (1929), *Interni* (1954), *Casa Novità* then *Abitare* (1961), *Zodiac* (1957), *Caleidoscopio* (1964), *Ottagono* (1966), *Stile Industria* (1955-63), *Artecasa* (1958-60), *Modo* (1977) and *Spazio e Società* (1978). Secondly, the role of the various *Triennale* editions must certainly be considered as another fundamental, attractive (and proactive) core of the design world starting from the editions of Monza but even more, from 1933, with those of the Palazzo dell'Arte of Milan.

As a consequence of these (and many others) factors, the names of the protagonists of the Milan area such as Gio Ponti, Giuseppe Pagano, Franco Albini, BBPR, Ignazio Gardella, Marco Zanuso, Ettore Sottsass, Carlo De Carli, Achille and

Pier Giacomo Castiglioni, Enzo Mari and Bruno Munari, frequently recur in the history of Italian design and have been, with good reason, worthily studied.

But equally numerous and worthy are those designers who sometimes only for a different geographical location were somehow put aside and for a long time forgotten, but whose work represented, on the other hand, an equally significant experience of Italian design.

If it is true, in this publication we want to give voice to that design stories which are transversal to the Mediterranean area and we can start by identifying all those cases that have been “neglected” by this “milanocentric” trend.

On September 23rd of the 2016 there has been the centenary of Ico Parisi’s birth, a designer, a builder, a sculptor, a photographer. For this occasion, the exhibition *Ritrovare Ico Parisi* (January - May 2017) was set up in the Royal Villa of Monza by Roberta Lietti who also edited *Ico Parisi. Design. Reasoned catalog 1936-1960* (2017). Ico Parisi’s story is one of those stories somehow marginalized in the debate of the history of Italian design and that in this article we would like to propose again, analyzing in particular two moments: the contact with that part of rationalist culture inspired by the Mediterranean in the Thirties and Forties, and the furniture design between the Forties and the Sixties together with his wife Luisa.

2. Ico Parisi (1916-1996): training years

Ico Parisi is born in Palermo on September 23rd of 1916, son of Eduardo Parisi and Olimpia Volpes, and he arrives in Como in 1920 following his father who was a professor of drawing. After graduating in construction industry (1935), the twenty-

year-old Parisi publishes in 1936, on the *Provincia di Como*, an article entitled “Arte, Arte” in support of abstractionism influenced by the reading of the book *KN* by Carlo Belli, a reference text for the artistic avant-garde operating in Como in those years around Giuseppe Terragni and Alberto Sartoris. And it is precisely in the Terragni studio that the young Parisi begins working between 1936 and 1937, a period of great artistic and cultural fervor in Como, an innovative fervor that was not provincial and that was determined by the presence of some enlightened personalities, autonomous and distinctly in contrast with the rhetoric of official culture, a disagreement that, as admitted by Parisi himself (1991, p. 34), is more tolerated in Como since it was considered a peripheral border town, with a little importance regarding the propaganda effects of the fascist regime. The innovative climate of those years was supported by continuous reports on international artistic movements and events, information for the most part provided by the architect Alberto Sartoris, a collaborator of Terragni resident in Lausanne who was constantly in contact with artists from all over the world (Parisi 1991, p.34).

The passion for photography soon becomes the first important work opportunity for Parisi. In 1936 Giuseppe Terragni entrusts his young assistant with the task of taking some photographs from particular angles “that interpret the architectural spirit” of his *Casa del Fascio* (1932-36) to be published in the monographic issue number 35/36 of the *Quadrante* magazine, entirely dedicated to the masterpiece of Italian rationalist architecture.

The story then continues following a historical period of exceptional vitality that for Parisi is the immersion in a reality

made of still progressive utopias and solid productive realities aimed to mediate the legacies and the contradictions of the enormous baggage of ideas and forms constituted by the experience of the masters of modernity. The names of those taking part in this univocal adventure are Giuseppe Terragni, Adalberto Libera, Luigi Figini, Gino Pollini, Alberto Sartoris, Gio Ponti, the group of abstract painters from Como Mario Radice and Manlio Rho, Mario Sironi and the most solitary Fausto Melotti who in those years teaches at the Cantù School of Art. A heterogeneous community that is able to produce and transmit knowledge, a theoretical and feverish knowledge with the ability to instill doubt rather than certainty, and to plan the future without escaping the responsibilities of the present (Guadagnini, 1990).

The integration of the arts is one of the variously declined issues of these years. It is also in this same period that Alberto Sartoris defines his idea of “Mediterranean functionalism”, publishing a fundamental book for the history of Italian Rationalism: *Gli elementi dell’Architettura funzionale* (1935).

In it Sartoris, while recognizing the great importance of technique and new materials in art, believes that functional architecture does not derive only from the “poetry of iron” but also from other economic, philosophical and artistic factors that have often preceded it, accelerating its evolution and accentuating its social scope. Sartoris, after having explained how the masters of Como during the centuries of work in Italy and abroad remained faithful to a rigid spirit of functionality, claims to them, and in general to the Mediterranean architects, the application of the first functional motifs in the history of architecture.

40 - GRONDE IN MURATURA, SCALE RAMPANTI, TERRAZZI SOVRAPPosti, TAVOLI DI PIETRA E CISTERNE PER L'ACQUA PIOVANA NELLE CASE RURALI DEL GOLFO DI NAPOLI

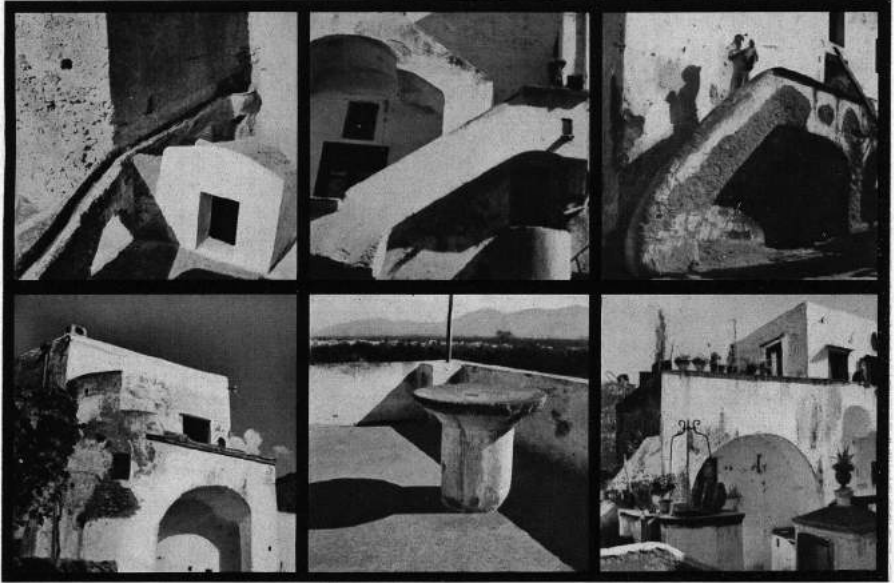


Figure 1. Giuseppe Pagano, pages of the catalogue of the exhibition *Architettura Rurale Italiana* at the VI Triennale of Milan, 1936.

The historical examples reported by Sartoris will contribute to influence the Italian rationalist design that will always maintain its identifiable dialogue between modernity and Mediterranean culture (see the works of Giuseppe Pagano, Figini and Pollini, but above all of Gio Ponti).

3. The Mediterranean villas

A second important commission for Parisi arrives with the great *Mostra dell'Impero* (Exhibition Of The Empire), organized in 1937 in Villa Olmo in Como. On this occasion, Fulvio Cappelletti, Giovanni Galfetti, Silvio Longhi and Parisi, form the group *Alta Quota*, a group who is entrusted with the realization of the ticket offices, of a signal tower, of the “war briefing” room and of the honor hall.

Between 1937 and 1939 the *Alta Quota* group, strong of a great youthful fervor, elaborate refined projects such as the villa of Alida Valle on the Appia Antica in Rome, the Casa del Fascio in Rebbio or a building in Capri, all project which were not realized. The villas are aligned with a series of works of the same year dedicated to the architecture of the Mediterranean area, especially with the extensive research of Giuseppe Pagano on the *Architettura Rurale Italiana* (Italian Rural Architecture) from which derives the homonymous exhibition at the *VI Triennale* of 1936 and a corresponding volume (Fig.1).

In the same years the Austrian architect Bernard Rudofsky travels through different Mediterranean countries; in 1925 he travels through the Balkans to Turkey, four years later he stays for two months on the Greek island of Santorini to complete his doctoral thesis and then returns again in Mediterra-

nean visiting Sicily and finally moving to the island of Capri¹ in 1932, visiting the nearby islands of Procida and Ischia in the same period. During these travels Rudofsky elaborates his interest in what he will define as “spontaneous architecture”². In Capri, Rudofsky met Luigi Cosenza with whom he designed one of the symbols of Mediterranean rationalism: Villa Oro on the promontory of Posillipo in Naples (1934-37) (Rossi, 2012).

In 1937 Rudofsky was invited by Ponti to collaborate with *Domus* magazine, years in which several articles about the Mediterranean area emerge from the pages of the magazine, such as the article by Rudofsky dedicated to the Island of Procida (1938) (Fig. 2), or the *Domus* number 152 of August 1940, containing a series of projects of beach houses of Gio Ponti and Carlo Pagani, “The beach house in Sicily” by Lina Bo and Carlo Pagani (Fig.3), the beach house by Fabrizio Clerici, the beautiful graphic project by Banfi, Belgioioso and Peressutti for the Island of Elba and finally an article dedicated to “furniture and objects for a beach house”.

The Second World War was almost upon us, and in 1941 Ico Parisi is enlisted as a lieutenant in the IX Pontieri Battalion on the Russian front. The ferocious experience at the front, represented by a vast series of photographs and paintings, requires a profound reflection on the existential values, which leads Parisi to “become aware of the fundamental role of the

-
1. The island of Capri was already known since the late Nineteenth century as an exemplary case of vernacular architecture studied by Josef Hoffmann and Joseph Maria Olbrich (Rossi 2012, pp. 96-97).
 2. Only many years later, in 1964 he will publish the book *Architecture Without Architecture* that accompanied the homonymous exhibition at the MoMA in New York.



Figure 2. Bernard Rudofsky, drawing for a house in Procida, published on *Domus* 123, March 1938.

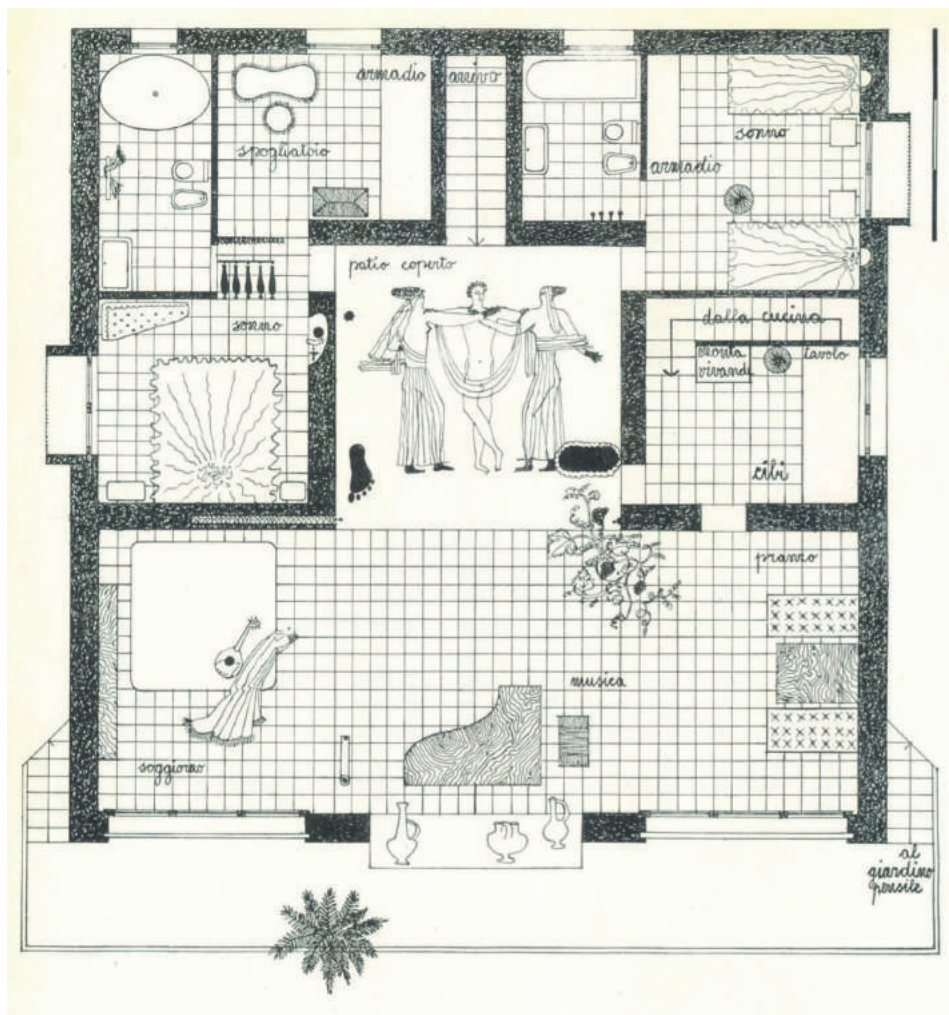


Figure 3. Lina Bo and Carlo Pagani, “Casa sul mare in Sicilia”, *Domus* 152, August 1940, p. 32.

house and of the constant and daily need for fantasy and creativity, comparable by their importance, to the primary needs of man” (Tenconi 2012, p.13).

4. The post-war period and the invention of the single piece of furniture

The period before the war will be a “training center” for Parisi, and it will be the post-war years to fully define his figure as an architect, designer and artist. In 1943 Parisi was discharged and returned to Como where he perceived, like everybody, the urgency of the reconstruction of society and of the country. According to a damage evaluation, the destroyed houses are more than three million. Looking to the future, everyone start to work hard.

The Italian industry rapidly uplifts itself from the disasters of the war, finding new sectors of activity, including the definition and implementation of new models of daily living. Aware of their role, the architects feel invested with the responsibilities that their job entails; they live it as a mission. In a climate of high hopes they design furniture and houses for a new democratic society, more composite and open to change (De Guttry & Maino, 1992).

In this sense, at the same time we find working together the masters of the pre-war and a new generation of young architects (among whom we find Parisi), who were trained by them and who in the war years did not have the opportunity to make themselves known.

Solidarity and optimism do not prevent the formation of two opposing orientations, in many cases deriving from political ideology; the one of those who, having in mind the collective

well-being, plan for the industrial sector and that of those who, to protect the creative autonomy, enhances individuality (De Guttry & Maino, 1992).

In 1945 the *Prima Mostra dell'Arredamento* (First Furnishings Exhibition), promoted by the Provincial Tourism Board in Como in the Broletto halls, was organized by Ico Parisi with Silvio Longo (also a pupil and collaborator of the deceased Terragni). The two organizers feel that the development of the local economy, based entirely on the production of furniture, is the primary problem of reconstruction. On the occasion of this exhibition, Parisi and Longo design with Paolo Buffa a dozen of rooms in detail, set up as if they were rooms in an apartment and enriched with paintings by contemporary artists.

The exhibit, enriched and entitled *Mostra Mercato per la Ricostruzione* (Market Exhibition for Reconstruction), is replicated and inaugurated on May 25th of 1946 in the Galleria del Sagrato in Piazza Duomo in Milan. The exhibition involves new names, such as Giulio Moscatelli, Antonio Cassi Ramelli, Guglielmo Ulrich, Patrizio Merighi, Mauro Cappelletti. Now, also the circle of small industrial furniture companies based in Brianza and Milan is bigger. The exhibition is a show of refined and precious furniture, examples indicative of the “Italian style” whose strength and consistency can be found in the architect’s collaboration with an expert craftsman (De Guttry & Maino, 1992). The most experimental pieces of furniture are those of Ponti based on the principle of “aggregation”: writing desk and bar table are integrated into the bookcase, the headboard extends itself in the bedside table.

Ico Parisi immediately imposes himself as a protagonist, since his pieces of furniture have very modern silhouettes, and he

sets up a terrace-like environment covered by a three spindle-shaped diagonal rods, a motif that starting from the 1940's *Veliero* bookcase by Franco Albini and continuing with some projects of Carlo Mollino and the BBPR, finds in the work of Parisi a further stylistic recognition typical of that time.

At the same time, in the spring of 1946, the great Furnishing Exhibition promoted by R.I.M.A. (*Riunione Italiana Mostre per l'Arredamento*) is inaugurated at the Palazzo dell'Arte in Milan and attracts a wide range of architects specialized in the realization of "single furniture" or "typical housings" with the intent to start a production of practical, inexpensive and tasteful furniture to reply to the urgent needs of that moment.

The theme of "single furniture" assumes centrality a year later on the occasion of the *Triennale Proletaria* of 1947 organized by Piero Bottoni. For a series production, only furniture that does not come from a complete "coordinated" environment is functional and interesting. Each piece is conceived as an independent unit with its own character and must be able to be freely united to other pieces, also them single according to the new logic of flexibility and practicality.

The list of designers and fitters includes the well-known exponents of historical rationalism (Pietro Bottoni, Gabriele Mucchi, the BBPR, Franco Albini, Ignazio Gardella), but also a large group of young people including Vico Magistretti, Franca Helg, Giancarlo de Carlo, Luciano Canella, Ettore Sottsass, Marco Zanuso, Luigi Fratino.

From these experiences it emerges that the production of simple and functional pieces of furniture meets two difficulties in Italy: the first is given by the general public who does not like the uniformity and standardization of the series but instead

wants showy and original artifacts; the second is given by the still semi-artisanal nature of small furniture industries that technically are not yet able to produce large numbers of furniture. The result of this peculiar reality is represented by furniture that however simple, will all be characterized by their own originality and will bring the signature of the architect who designed them (Fig.4).

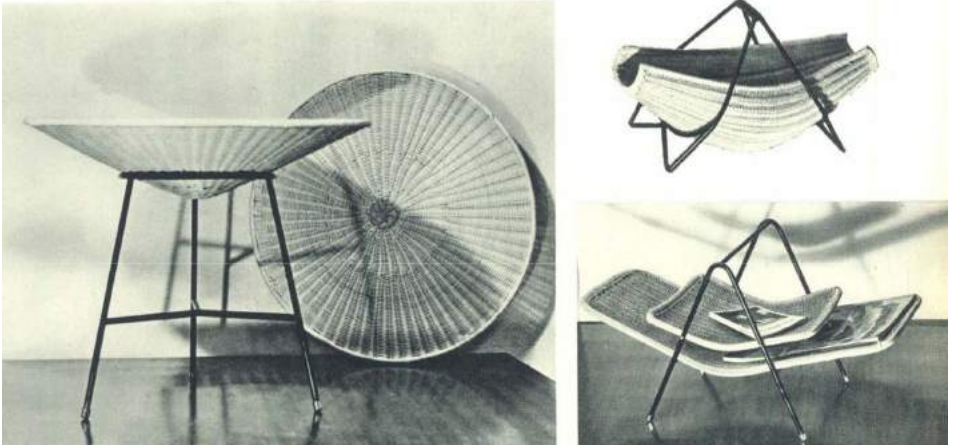


Figure 4. Luisa and Ico Parisi, little table and a nest realized with rattan and metal tube painted black, 1950.

As for the furniture from a formal point of view, it can be generally observed that pre-war rationalism has affirmed the taste of lightness and purity of the form that during the Forties was transformed from linear and geometric rigor in sinuous lines and enveloping shapes. The oblique and the elliptical have substituted the horizontal and the vertical, and from a theoretical point of view the “organic architecture” of Frank Lloyd Wright and the aerodynamic style (it is no coincidence that both styles come from the United States, which have become a symbol of democracy and progress) affirm themselves as main stylistic references of the time.

The references do not come exclusively from overseas, in fact during the Forties an idea of Mediterranean nature lives again. Ettore Sottsass quickly grasps the change in taste during the post-war period as a reaction to those:

shiny and plastic materials of the 20s (...) that comes from a certain taste for all that is Mediterranean, from Capri to Morocco, from Sicily to Tunisia, and for the colors of the South; a love that then includes not only the Mediterranean sea but also the rustic and rough things of all the seas of the South (...); a love for all things done with hands and corroded by centuries, sun and boiling sands; a love for violent and ancient colors, for sweet and grainy materials, for soft and fragile pastes (Sottsass 1954, pp. 47-48).

5. *La Ruota* studio and the lifetime duo with Luisa Aiani

In 1947 Ico Parisi furnishes the State Library of Milan in the Galleria Vittorio Emanuele and the following year he participates with Bottoni, Sottsass, Minoletti, B.P.R., Buffa and Ulrich at the *Salon des artistes décorateurs* in Paris.

The same year he marries Luisa Aiani (widow of his friend Giovanni Galfetti) and in 1948 they found together *La Ruota* studio in Como, a studio that will embody that “sober and intelligent civility of life” that the couple shares with Gio Ponti and a few others.

They do not think of the house as a form, or as a functional machine. They think of it as a den of the intellect and of existential functions, and their furnishings are its life apparatuses (Gualdoni, 2008).

La Ruota is also a gallery/shop, a crossroads of a typically Italian world in which art, craftsmanship and culture in the

broadest sense coexist. Thus the splendid enamels of Paolo De Poli, the precious yarns of Gegia and Marisa Bronzini, the carpets of Renata Bonfanti, the splendid glasses of Fulvio Bianconi or even the daring ceramics of Alessio Tasca, meet the works of Boccioni, the engravings of Picasso and the sculptures of Bruno Munari to name just a few. Of course, items made by Parisi are also on display and on sale: ceramics, glasses, jewelry and home accessories that they will continue to draw and produce until the closure of the space in 1995. During the years immediately following the war, Parisi's design thinking is mainly influenced by the figure of Gio Ponti, as he himself admits: "Some important meetings can guide and even modify our life choices or change our behavior because they are enlightening and clarifying" (Parisi, 1991, p.81). Parisi is struck by the eternally enthusiastic and lively nature of Ponti in tackling and solving any professional problem with the same fervor and seriousness "from the skyscraper to the fork, from the cathedral to the chair, from the conference to the caption for an illustration" (Parisi, 1991, p.81). The enthusiasm of this period becomes an intensive activity of furnishings, interior design, proto-design and cultural organization, in "a sort of feverish vitality that is more than just the reconfiguration of a professional attitude, which proves itself in the daily invention, and together in the rigor of always critically penetrating the prime reasons of an idea, of a necessity" (Gualdoni, 1999, p. n.n.). Now more than ever, the activity of Parisi is inseparable from that of his life partner, Luisa, much more than a simple presence of completion, "She is conscience and fierce culture, of a destined and pragmatic doing, under the utopian rind, of

a hazard that continually question itself. She is director and first critic” (Gualdoni, 1990, p. n.n).

Luisa possesses the intuition of beauty, the ability to select things and situations in which the form was a thought, a vision: “Was it a very thin essential splinter of Dieter Roth or the simple fruit of a hand of Grottaglie, the mental twist of Boccioni or of a Murano craftsman” (Gualdoni, 1990, p. n.n). However, her role was always “behind the scenes”, and how much this depends on her precise choice and how it was dictated by the common destiny of other women who in those same years designed and worked in the shadow of men, is still to be discovered. However, it has been established that since the foundation of *La Ruota* studio each piece of furniture is signed by both (Fig.5).



Figure 5. Left: group portrait of Ico Parisi with Luisa Parisi and two friends; right: Ico Parisi, portrait of Luisa Parisi, 1950. Credits: Pinacoteca Civica di Palazzo Volpi, Fondo Ico Parisi.

In Como, the Parisi find themselves working in close contact with local artisans, in particular with some enlightened companies of Cantù maintaining a constant relationship with the artists.

Starting from 1946, at the Milan Fairs the Parisi exhibit furniture designed for those same houses, born in the artisan workshops with which, after the first post-war period, they establish real productive continuity, from *Ariberto Colombo* to *Arte Casa*, from *Fratelli Rizzi* and *Spartaco Brugnoli* of Cantù.

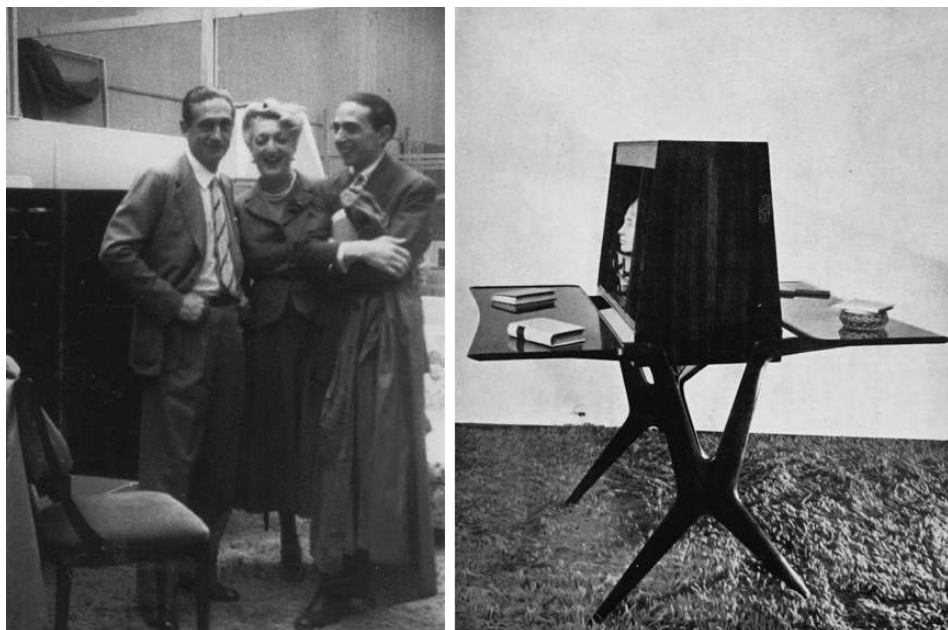


Figure 6. Left: group portrait of Ico Parisi with Fede Cheti and Gulielmo Urlich, France, 1949; right: Ico and Luisa Parisi, the “toilette-desk” presented at the exhibition, *Lo stile nell'arredamento moderno*, Milan 1948. Credits: Pinacoteca Civica di Palazzo Volpi, Fondo Ico Parisi.

Leafing through the photographic archive, for example, the first furnishings realized with the Colombo company of Cantù emerge. The images show beautiful armchairs and sofas (1946) with soft shapes but perfectly described in the design covered with black and white satin, whose executive perfection is surprising; two versions of chair (1946) in crossed iron, with stuffed seat and back and covered in white

satin; the series of modular sofas presented at the FMC in 1946, conceptually modern because they feature individual modules that can be freely assembled but still characterized by an extremely classic design.

Of this period the “toilette-desk” is also very famous, made by the Brugnoli company in rosewood: a double-function lady’s furniture, on one side writing desk and on the other side toilette, divided by a central double-cabinet (Fig.6).

The “toilette-desk” is presented by Parisi in 1948 on the occasion of the first exhibition organized by Fede Cheti in his home in via Manzoni 23 in Milan, *Lo stile nell’arredamento moderno* and commented by Leonardo Borgese in this way: “it has the simple and lively beauty of a little horse” (Borgese, 1949, p. n.n.).

The exhibition presents furnishings designed by Franco Albini, Giulio Minoletti, Carlo Mollino, Gio Ponti, Carlo Enrico Rava and Ettore Sottsass. Parisi’s comment on this event confirms the topics of discussion between industry and craftsmanship, uniqueness and seriality:

Overall, it is a somewhat snobbish, somewhat frivolous event, which in the eyes of many seems to be in opposition to the *VIII Triennale* that, led by Piero Bottoni, has an extremely social and urban orientation. But it is surely a starting point for what will become the Italian style in furniture and industrial design (Parisi 1991, p.65).

After the exhibition of Fede Cheti, important orders arrive for the Parisi: the furnishings design of the State Library (Milan, 1947), the setting up of the Journalism Exhibition (Milan 1948) and the First Bergamo Fair (Bergamo, 1950).



Figure 7. Ico and Luisa Parisi, rosewood and brass tables, “Mobili italiani per l’Altamira”, *Domus* 292, March 1954, pp. 57-72.

At the beginning of the Fifties, Ico and Luisa Parisi are among the main authors of the Italian furniture style (De Guttry & Maino, 1992).

An example of renowned international fame (more international than national, probably) are the magnificent tables designed between 1947 and 1954 for the Altamira gallery-shop and the Singer & Son furniture factory in New York.

The celebrated “table-shelf”, of which there are variants in polished walnut with feet and connections in silver metal, in walnut and brass, and in the then favorite rosewood with brass, originally designed between 1944 and 1946, will be the object of conspicuous production also by Altamira and Singer & Sons (Fig.7).

During the Fifties, the founding characteristics of the Parisi’s invention stand out: the highest quality of the materials used, preference for curvilinear dominant used as organic echo ribs (“like the limbs of the human body”, Radice writes in an article) and diagonal joints, skilful use of the roundings, oval sections and shining polishings with an executive level that must be perfect, search for a primarily tactile sinuosity and for an aesthetic quality that transcends the mere functional.

Quando, di lì a un trentennio, si cercherà di fare un bilancio di quel tempo e di quel clima, che va dal barocco lussureggiante di un Mollino al genio essenziale di un Albini e che vede in Parisi un interprete primario e un propulsore, si immaginerà di definirlo non casualmente come neo-liberty (Guadagnini, 1990, p.34).

We can see the multiple artistic influences of Parisi in drawings of objects with an almost antithetical language. For the

Milan *IX Triennale* of 1951, Parisi presents a desk in walnut with a sculptural form, realized by Arte Casa, whose characteristic motif are the feet “gushing out like a static rib taken from the sides”, in turn treated themselves in bas-relief with abstract biomorph motifs from Vittorio Tavernari.

In 1950, instead, Parisi presents for the Brugnoli company a chest of drawers in natural wenge and white lacquer treated with reliefs that looked like neoplastic, with perfect geometry. One of the most fruitful collaborations of Parisi during the Fifties is certainly that with the Cassina company. In 1953 the *armchair 813* marks, already at its debut, an apex in the long-standing collaboration with Cassina (also the model had been prototyped in 1952 by the Colombo company). The *813 model* has gone down in history as an “egg chair” (not to be confused with the equally iconic *Egg Armchair* by Arne Jacobsen produced by Fritz Hansen since 1957) for its construction on only curvilinear motifs generated by a circle that draw a wraparound shape, suspended by four slender metal feet that accentuate the visual dynamism typical of other pieces of the Fifties.

The design of the *sofa 812* (1953) is equally harmonious and welcoming, maintaining the same formal principle but revealing the curved multilayered wooden ring that holds the seat and rests on longilineal metal legs (Fig.8).

È lo scatto decisivo di Parisi, il quale nella raggiunta nudità strutturale della forma tipica di tutti i progetti per Cassina – che si legge tipica anche nella coeva sedia 691 e in realizzazioni successive come, ad esempio, la poltrona e sgabello 856, con scheletro a balestra in acciaio e legno, e la poltrona e divano 865 – non fa che

distillare un uso sapiente delle tensioni curvilinee, delle diagonali, in nome di una presenza spaziale comunque fortemente estetizzante (Gualdoni, 2008, p.180).

Ponti is also a precious witness to the extraordinary nature of these intuitions, and in some letters to Parisi, figurative and of extraordinary ironic and poetic verve as always, letters that now are kept at the Galleria Civica di Modena, he redesigns the “egg chair” (Fig.9) writing: “My dears, your egg chair is a marvel. You are the masters, now I can only retire and live in oblivion in Civate. (...) Dear Parisi immediately sends the picture of your armchair to *Domus*”.

Devoid of oriented superstructures, Parisi carries out a research aimed at enriching (not only aesthetically) the existing things, and he is willing to bet on a very high quality production, even if with less probability of incidence on a quantitative level. It should be also noted that during the Fifties Cantù also participates in the complex debate on the destinies of design in Italy through the establishment of the *Concorso Internazionale del Mobile* (International Furniture Competition) and the consequent *Mostra Selettiva del Mobile* (whose first jury of the 1955 is chaired by Gio Ponti and composed by Aalto, Barocchi, De Carli and Juhl; the brand is designed by Munari and the catalog is edited by Pica) and the birth of the magazine *Il mobile italiano* directed by De Carli, in 1957.

1954 marks a milestone in the history of Italian design with two main events: the X Triennale which sees the birth of the *industrial design* promoting the collaboration between the world of art and that of industrial production and reiterating once again the importance of unity and correlation between

the arts. The second event is the establishment of the *Compasso D'Oro* award of the *Rinascence* that reward the best design of the objects of Italian production.

Parisi gains an highlighting in the Compasso d'oro award in 1955 for the *chair 691* and the *hollow armchair 839*, designed together with the famous *egg armchair 813* and other original piece of furniture for the production of Cassina of the Fifties. Equally appreciated were the detachable pieces of furniture produced by MIM (Mobili Italiani Moderni) and dedicated to well-known Italian (and Mediterranean) locations, such as the *Lerici* bookcase, the *Ischia* bed, the *Sestri* small table. Smaller but equally rigorous and functional objects were designed for Lamperti and Stildomus Selezione in the Sixties (Fig.10).

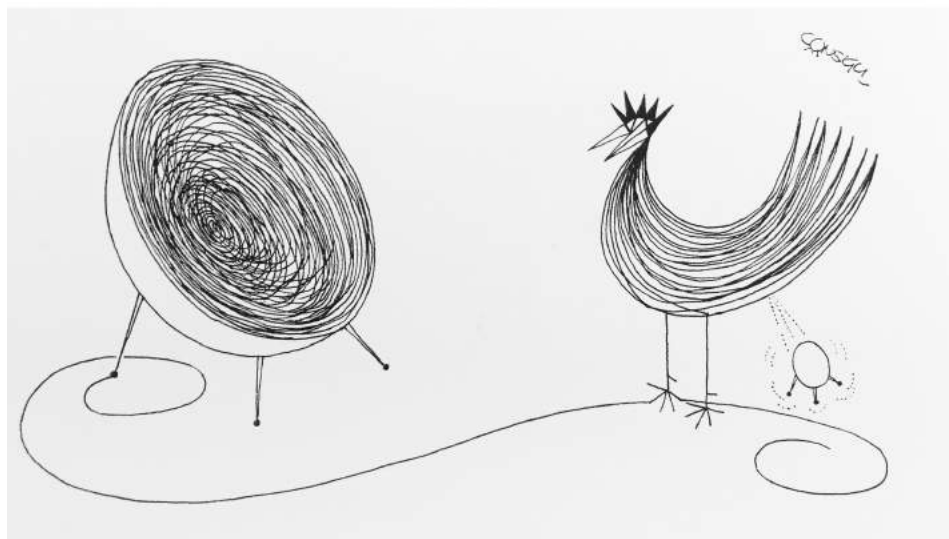
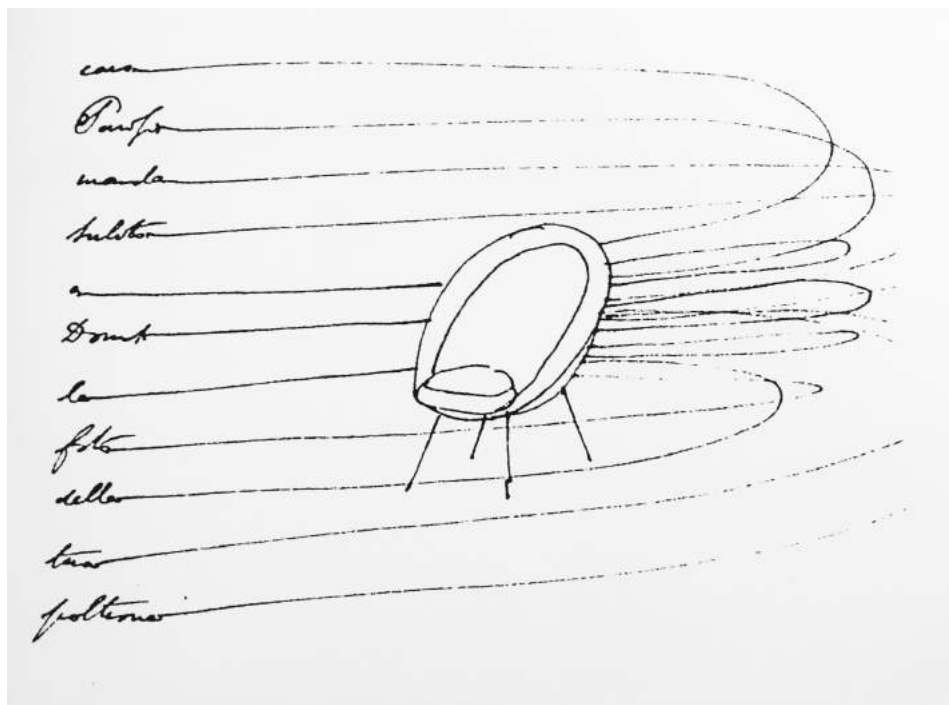
In 1957 Ico Parisi is in the executive committee of the exhibition *Colori e forme nella casa d'oggi* (Colors and forms in today's house), set up in Villa Olmo in Como, which should have continued the theme of the *Unità delle Arti* (Unity of the arts) introduced by the *IX Triennale* of 1951 (Dellapiana, 2014). Here the Parisi duo will make one of their most famous staging, together with Gian Paolo Allevi, that is the “Holiday Home” pavilion built inside the park of the villa.

Afterword

The case of Ico Parisi's design has been here reported as one of the many figures that compose a wider panorama composed by all the other stories collocated outside the boundaries of Milan. In this sense the article seeks to introduce in the future other similar cases in order to start a new map of the history of the Italian design following a trans-regional trace.



Figure 8. Ico and Luisa Parisi, sofa n.812, Cassina, 1953.





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