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TITLE

THE EPISTEMOLOGY OF MEMPHIS AND THEIR INFLUENCES

STUDENT:

JOHN PAUL O'NELIL,  
4TH YEAR INDUSTRIAL DESIGN,  
N.I.H.E.,  
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## INTRODUCTION

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## INTRODUCTION



Memphis is what happens when Italy's most talented designers are free from all practical constraints in furniture design. Memphis grew out of a need experienced in 1980 by Milanese architects and designers who felt the urgency to reinvent an approach to design. No longer accepting the slick sophistication of modernism as a standard they sought a new vector which was to shock and affront the universal value or 'good taste'.

Their pieces are an unexpected juxtaposition of the sophistication of modernism, the vernacular of arts and crafts, the novelty of Popism and the irony of kitch. We must therefore carry out an epistemology of Memphis to try and understand, appreciate and identify with their philosophy.

A chemist, when examining a substance and trying to establish its composition, does not superficially look at its outside, he examines and scrutinises it under a microscope, discovering its composition and its source to give him a clear terse insight into its derivation. It is essential to adopt this approach to Memphis with the view to establishing its genealogical background and the traits and characteristics which resulted in the breaking of the dam of Modernism.

Taking as very name 'Memphis', it appears on a superficial level to be just another name, Werkbund De Stijl, but on closer examination we see that it is indicative of what it stands for. It is mentioned in numerous songs, e.g., Memphis Tennessee, birthplace of W.C. Handy, the father of the Blues, of Elvis Presley, father of Rock 'n' Roll. Memphis is also the ancient capital of Egypt and sight of the great temple of the god Ptah, artist among the gods and protector of the Arts and finally the experimental centre of the design world.

Memphis designers, like artists, make a statement with each piece and it is crucial to look at their lives and influences to try and understand Memphis.

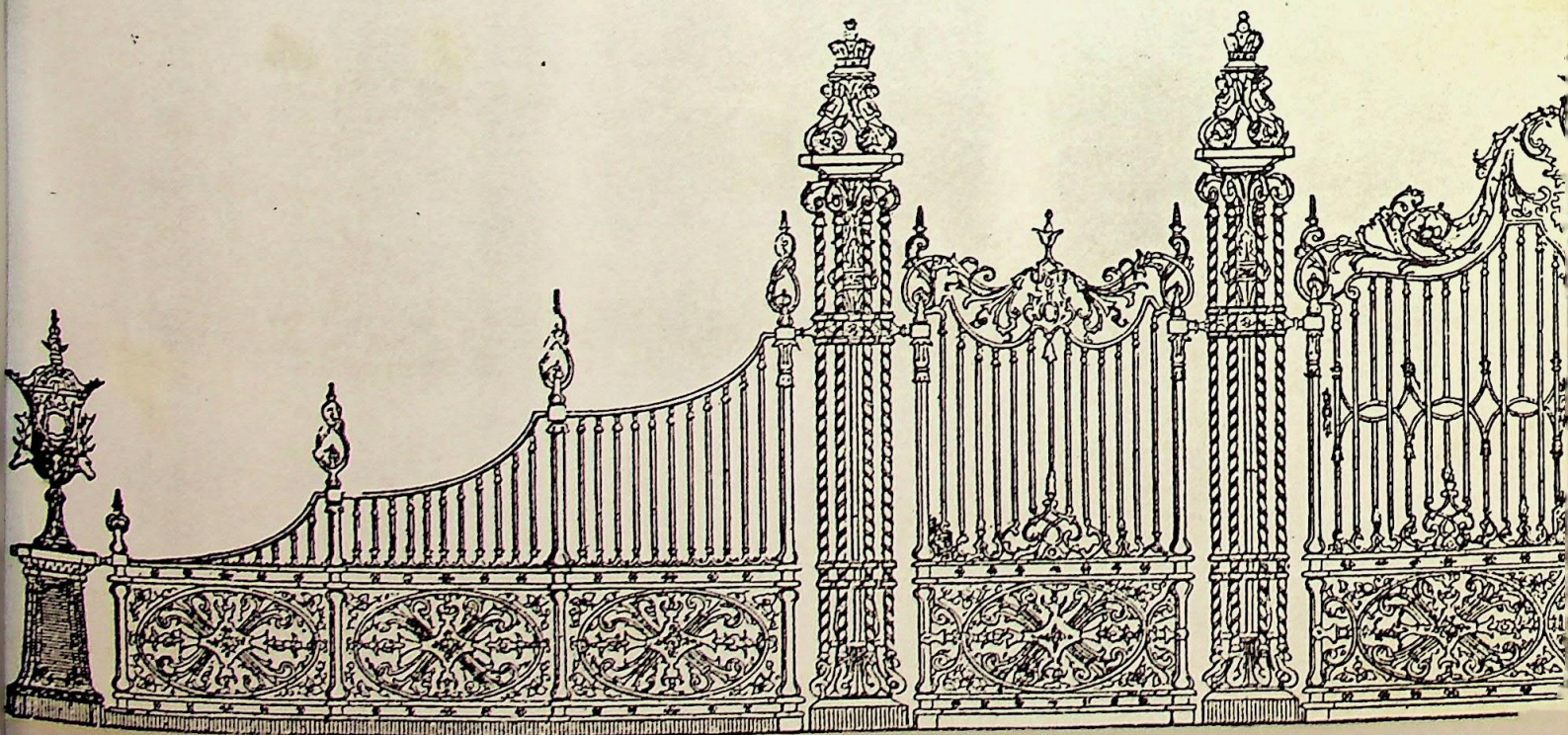




What Memphis "wanted to make, was not collectors' items, but furniture to be sold, taken home and used every day". Barbara Radice - Memphis journalist.



1. THE PIONEERS





"Memphis is the breaking of a dam and the water is running out".

Ettore Sottsass.

This river flowing with irreverence, nihilism and eclecticism is synomous with the present time. Looking at the broken dam we must examine the movements which have caused the accumulation of strength and energy resulting in the "breeding".

To find the beginning it is necessary to navigate the river of time from its estuary to its source to get a clear insight into its course and the terrain through which it runs.

A child when growing up comes to a stage in its development when it propetually asks Why? Memphis and its precursors were founded on this simple but complex question. It is essential to trace these inquisitive and provocative thoughts back to their source as with a river.

The avant-gards movements came into being as an indirect result of the Industrial Revolution. The modifications and production process brought about by it proved to be too rapid and complex and have always caught the 'status quo' unprepared and arrested with respect to react to the changes taking place. This need to win back in a traumatic and rapid way the reigns of a history in flight has caused the birth of a new cultural category; the avant-garde movement, of which Memphis is a present day member.

The avant-garde movements therefore carry out a recouperating of reality from the changing world, while at the same time realising new cultural energies,



by regenerating a space for research and by and by disseminating new forms of expression for further planning.

The nineteenth century Universal Expositions gave the public the first chance to weigh up the achievements of the emerging industrial civilisation. These expositions provided the earliest forms of modern architecture, e.g., Paxton's, Crystal Palace, London (Illustration 1.1.), and the Eiffel Tower, Paris (Ill. 1.2).

The enthusiasm for the expositions shown by business men and the public was not shared by the arts of the time. The low esteem in which industrially manufactured products were held led to a total new phenomenon of arguments between industrial production, culture and society.

The applied arts with their handmade items which were very suitable to manufacture by mechanical means were the first to be hit and they sought a new vector to regain their decline in production.

Leading artists/designers e.g., Pugin, Roskin, Cole and Morris' desire for reform was aimed at salvaging society through art and to restore the values lost in the decadence of the new industrial age. Their aim was "To produce articles designed individually with handcrafted work carried out in the spirit of co-operation, joy and hard work". (Ref. 1.).

They saw the rediscovery of the Gothic style as the answer because of its religious purity, social cohesion and also it was a style society was on the way to loosing for good (Ill.1.3.). The solution to this decadence of moral and social standards was to see a comprehensive model such as the Gothic on which to rebuild society.

Similar comparisons appear today, with the fundamentally unchanged American





Illustration 1. Beefeater Guards await the arrival of Queen Victoria by the Coalbrookdale Gates. Beyond, the magnificent Crystal Fountain by F. & C. Osler appropriately placed at the centrepont of the whole exposition.



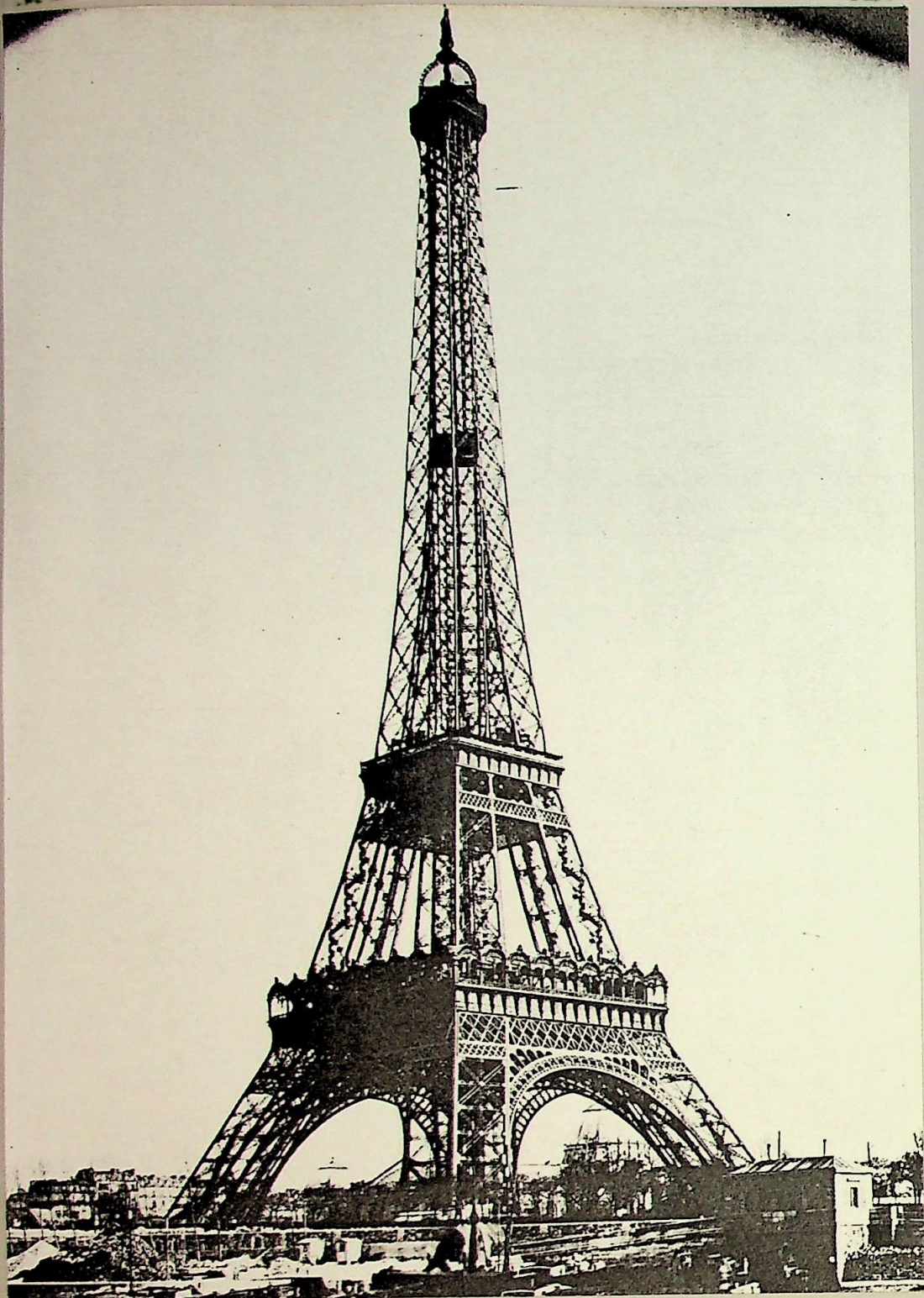
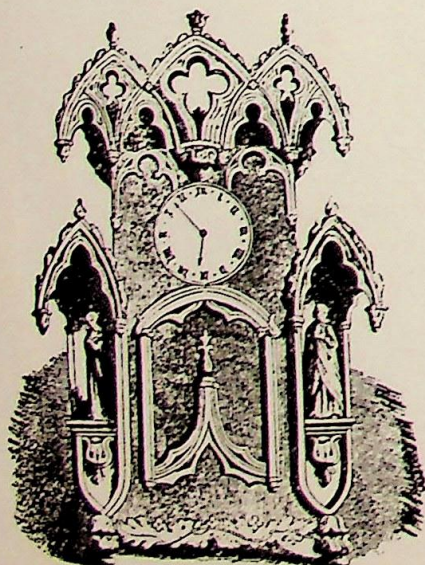


Illustration 2.

*Victorian Themes*



*Gothic clock by G.G. Adams*

Illustration 3.

- (Above) Eiffel's Tower from the Paris Exhibition of 1889, a virtuoso display of ironwork, 984 feet high.
- (Left) The application of the neo gothic style to the domestic clock by G.G. Adams.



culture of the 50's reappearing in Japan in the 80's, mirrors the icecream parlour, rock 'n' roll cults of the American 50's (Ill. 1.4.a.) The reoccurrence of pink cassettes and record players with toning coloured discs is an example of this (Ill. 4.b.).

"Eclecticism as a postmodern practice is more concerned with reproducing of older images or their re-interpretation than creating something new". (Ref. 2).

The humiliation workers encountered in factories led to the revival of the handcrafts, because it capitalised on the value of human labour. This humiliation led to the foundation of the British Arts and Crafts Movement in the late nineteenth century, which was characterised by the formation of guilds and societies, e.g., Mackmurdo and the Century Guild, The Guild of Saint George, the Arts and Crafts Exhibition Society and the Art Workers Guild.

The aim of the latter for example, was "To advance education in all the visual arts and crafts by means of lectures, meetings, demonstrations, discussions and other methods" (Ref. 3.).

This philosophy was the foundation nearly one hundred years later for Alessandro Guerriero's Malinese avant-garde group Studio Alchymin in 1976, the precursor to Memphis, The New International Style which was to be founded later by Ettore Sottsass Jnr. in 1980.

The Arts and Crafts Movements were formally reorganised in 1915 by the establishment of the Design and Industry Association in England.

The ideas and ambitions of the Arts and Crafts Movement were never fully realised, but have been an immense influence on design in the twentieth century.





Illustration 4.

(Above) Rock 'n' Roll dancers of the 50's, synonymous with icecream parlours and Jupe boxes.

(Below) Sony's attitude of anything goes in any colour for the affluent Japanese consumer of today. Graphics, styling, colour and dress all contribute to the rebirth of the American 50's culture.

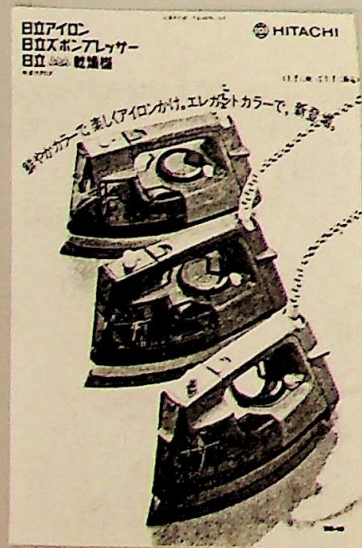


Illustration 5.



Eclecticism is part of the Memphis approach to design and an example of the influence of the arts and crafts form on contemporary Memphis designer George James Sowden, can be seen in comparing his 'Metropole' clock (Memphis 1982) (Ill.1.6.), with C.F. Voyes clock of 1906 (Ill.1.7.). Sowden's clock is made up of the same basic elements, but inverted and slightly elongated.

The goal of early industrial production was to achieve total automation in production, having little or no time for imperfection or deviations. While we have arrived at their Utopia of total automation and accept uniformity as a standard with robotic and electronic automation, we are permitted to make even the minutest alteration to the basic model in production to the extent that the number of variations makes it possible to imagine a production line where every piece is unique, hence returning to the goal of the Arts and Crafts Movement.

"Accusations of exclusiveness, elitism and high price - ironic inevitabilities of trying to break new ground and reach a wider audience - have long been levelled at the activities and product of the avant-garde; Since William Morris and Studio Alchymia and Memphis are no exceptions". (Ref. 4.).



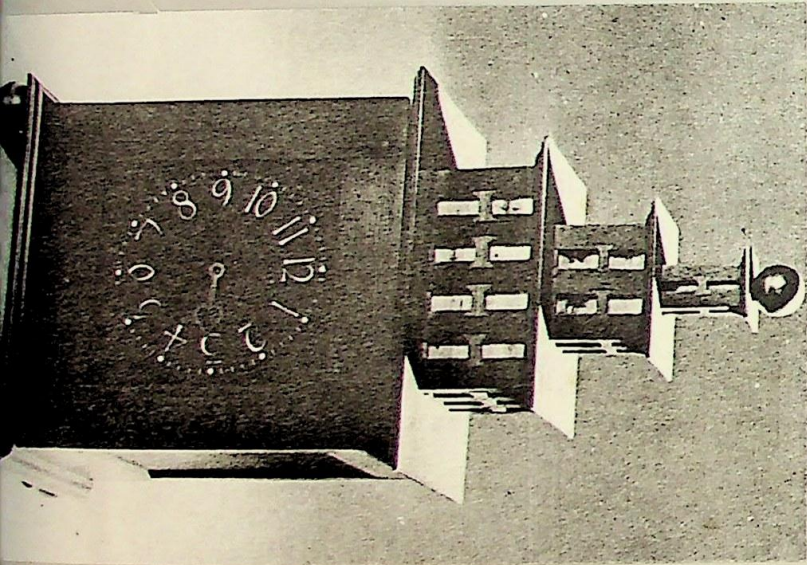
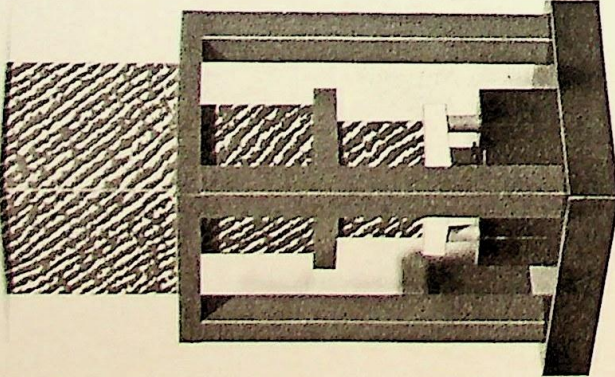
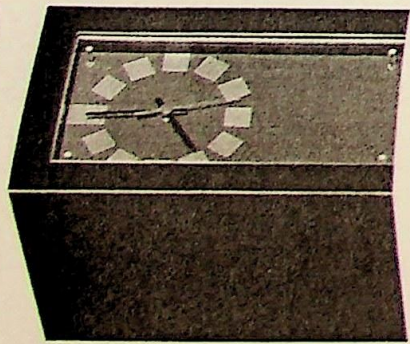


Illustration 7a

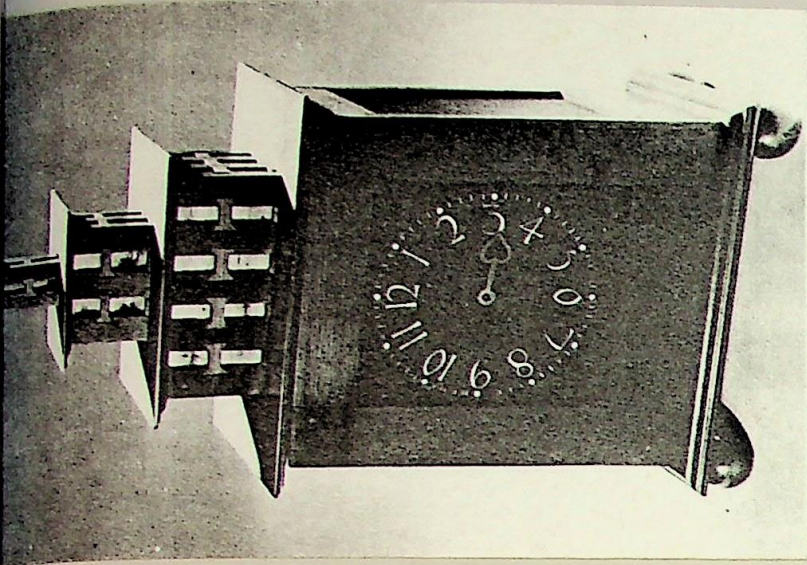


Illustration 7b

- (left) George Sowden's 'Metropole' clock for Memphis 1982, shows a remarkable resemblance to C.F. Voyes clock of 1906.
- (Top) C.F. Voyes clock inverted to showing same basic elements for construction but Sowden's 'Metropole' being slightly elongated.
- (Left) C.F. Voyes clock of 1906, constructed of ebony with ivory inlay. The open work crown is lined with yellow silk and topped by a brass ball like those it stands on. Yellow appearing also in Sowden's clock.

Illustration 6.



THE CIVILISATION OF THE MACHINE





The beginning of the twentieth century saw a zeitgeist taking place throughout Europe. There was a gradual rethink of the critical attitude towards the machine and a shift towards a new concept of design that relied on the use of the machine as opposed to handtools. Theodor Fischer declared at the first meeting of the German Werkbund, "It is not the machine that is responsible for poor work but our incapacity to use it".

The positive attitude was an indication of the changing attitude - a new technology for a new century. Society was now breaking free from the mould of humanism and operating under the new logic of the machine.

The factory had now become a model of rational and economic logic, admired and looked up to by the agriculture and mercantile sectors.

This setting of a model on which to rebuild society was a reoccurrence of the neo Gothic style adopted by the Arts and Crafts movement. The British Arts and Crafts movement figured strongly in the Bauhaus thinking with Walter Gropius paying direct homage to it in the Bauhaus Manifesto.

The Modern Movement forms an important tributary to the Memphis river of eclecticism; the smaller tributaries flowing into this tributary brought the energy and ideas which resulted in the main flow of the Modern movement.

The flowing lines of Art Nouveau, Mediaeval Revivals, decoration and ornamentation were now making way. For the new stark "Machine Aesthetic". objects were being transformed into elementary and simple geometric shapes for industrial production exemplified by Miles van der Rohe's cantilevered tubular chair (Ill. 2.1.) of the 1920's.



While Memphis philosophy is to undermine the universal value of 'good taste' associated with the Bauhaus and Modern Movement, it encourages us to think about the meaning and function of design in the 80's. Design is no longer designing for the mass market, it is designing for what Charles Jencks calls 'semantic groups' - new cultural sets that make up society, distinguishing themselves by their cloths, fashions and religion - a modern day version of the 60's Teddy Boys, Rockers, Beatnicks and Hippies.

"...the relationship with the public which is going to use the product has grown complex...that I simply don't know how to touch people I am not familiar with". Ettore Sottsass Jnr. (Ref. 5).

Memphis, while striving for new frontiers in an attempt to broaden the design vocabulary, hasn't been able to get away from the powerful and influencial style of the Modern Movement.

Emilio Ambasz, when commenting on Memphis plastic laminates, said, "They are forever young and eternally vibrant". This would certainly be the case in Christoph Radl's 'Isole' laminate for Memphis in 1982 (Ill. 2.2.). It is almost a direct clone of a wood cutting done sixty years previously by Lothar Schreyer in the Bauhaus. (Ill. 2.3.).

Alessandro Gieuirro's Studio Alchymia ironic naming of their first two exhibitions 'Bauhaus 1' and Bauhaus 2', were perhaps not so ironic. Appearing firstly as intellectually esoterical there is a cohesion between Alchymia's work and creations and those done at the Buahaus.

Oskar Schlemmer characters from the 'Triatic Ballet' of 1922 (Ill. 2.4.), are mirrored in Alessandro Mindini's Studio Alchymia Dress Furniture for Fiorucci



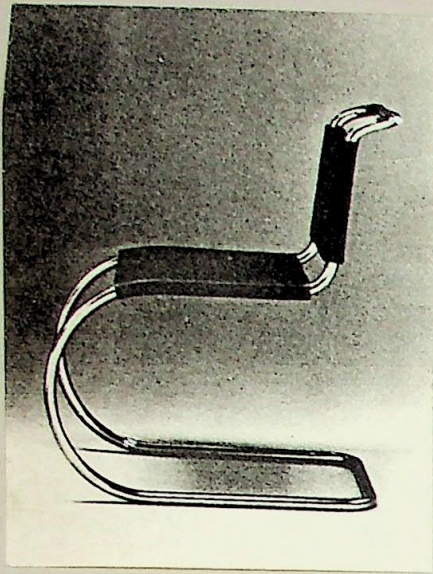


Illustration 2.1.

Ludwig Mies van der Rohe's cantilevered tubular steel chair a product of Bauhaus thinking of the 1920's.

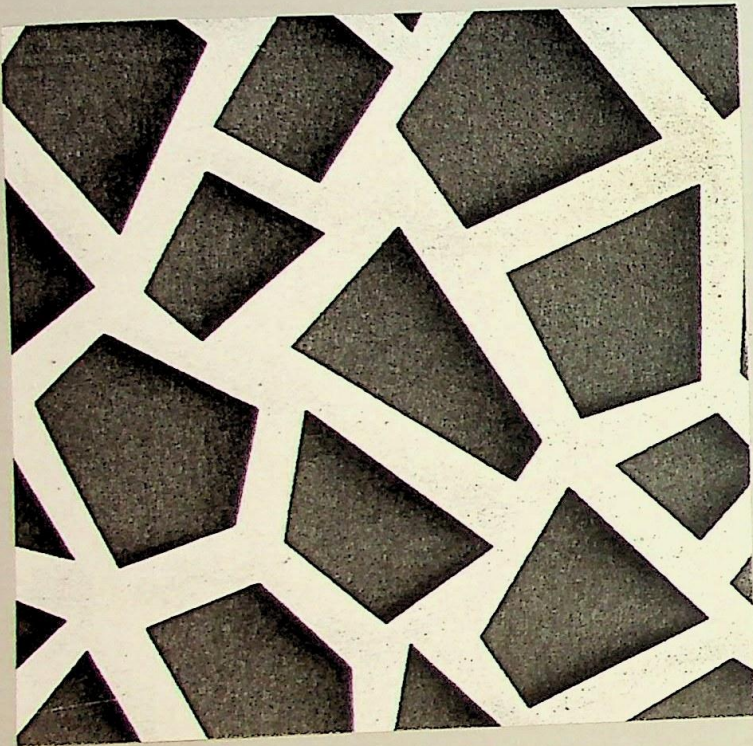


Illustration 2.2.

Christoph Radl's 'Isole' laminate for Memphis, 1982 shows a striking resemblance to a Bauhaus woodcutting done by Lothar Schreyer sixty years previously.

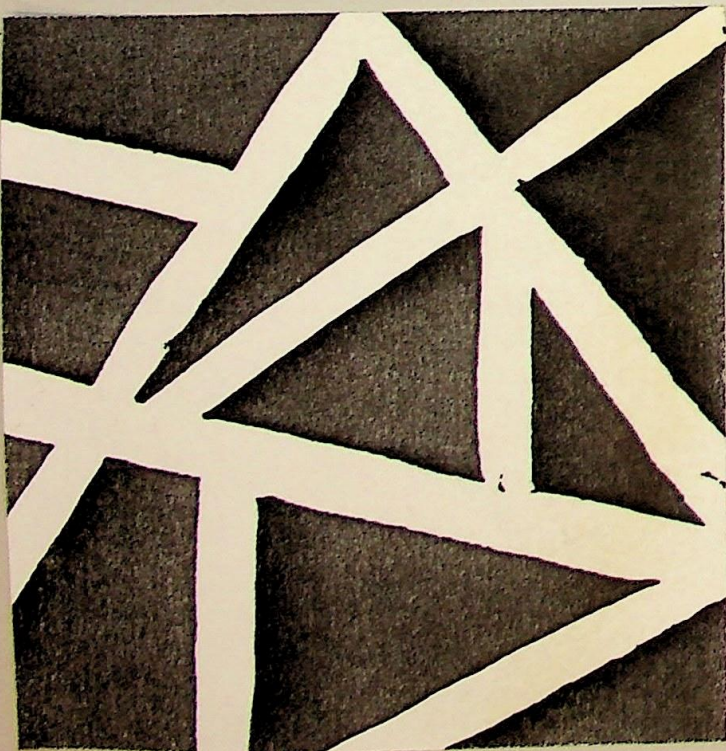


Illustration 2.3.

Bauhaus woodcutting done by Lothar Schreyer, 1922.



Milan '82 (Ill. 2.5.). Schilemmer's living architecture reduces man into a special cubistic entity similar to what Mendini has done.

Rectangular blocks and grid formations are characteristic of Modern Movement, and can be seen in architectural works such as Frank Lloyd Wright's 'Falling Water'. (Ill. 2.6.).

The hidden treasures of African colonies were being discovered and there was an obsession with African minimalist art, because it was essentially primitive but also extremely expressive in its forms which were contradictory to European sculpture because they eliminated unnecessary detail (Ill. 2.7.). This obsession has reappeared in the work of Memphis designer Nathalie du Pasquier. Her fabrics and patterns conspicuous, brightly coloured and have a very strong influence stemming from African tribal dress and, with names like 'Kenya', 'Gabon', 'Zaire', and 'Zambia' they are proudly announcing their influences (Ill. 2.8.).

This time around it is not essentially form that Memphis is seeking, but colour and decoration our new equivalent .

"A Memphis table is decoration. Structure and decoration are one thing".

Ettore Sottsass Jr. (Ref. 6).

Memphis furniture is made up of unexpected juxtaposition with all the furniture being constructed from basic geometric shapes, cones, cylinders, cubes, rectangles and circles, all in keeping with 'machine aesthetic'. As Memphis designer Michele de Lucchi put it, "Today the tendency is to see the design not so much as a unit, but as a sum of parts. We have almost come to study the cells that make up objects more than the objects themselves. Materials and decoration are cells of objects, and they are part of the



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"For the mutation of the human body in the sense of this stage costume, the following can be fundamentally decisive: The law of the surrounding cubistic forms; here the cubic forms are transferred to the human body forms: head, torso, arms, legs are changed into spatial-cubistic entities.  
Result: *Living architecture*."

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The functional laws of the human body in relation to space; these typify the body forms: the oval head, the base form of the torso, the club forms of the arms and legs, the spherical form of the joints.  
Result: *The jointed manikin*.

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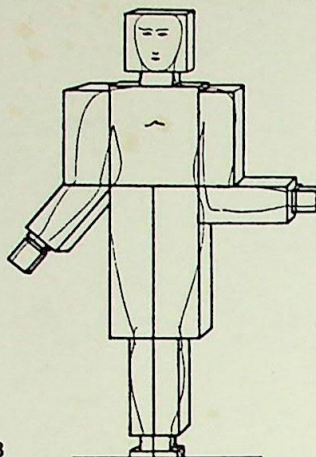
The laws of motion of the human body in space; here they are the forms of rotation, direction, section of space: cone, helix, spiral, disk.  
Result: *A technical organism*.

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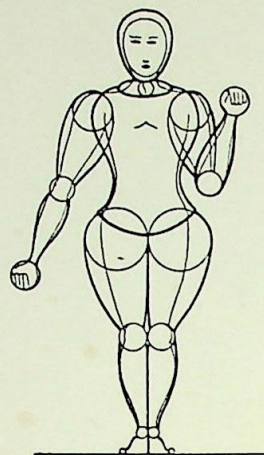
The metaphysical forms of expression symbolizing the members of the human body: the star form of the spread hand, the  $\infty$  of the crossed arms, the cruciform of the spine and shoulder; also double head, multiple limbs, division and neutralization of forms.  
Result: *Dematerialization*.

All drawings from "Man and Artistic Figure."

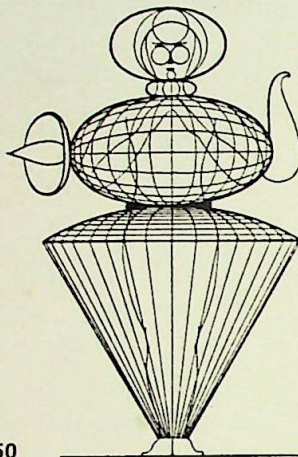
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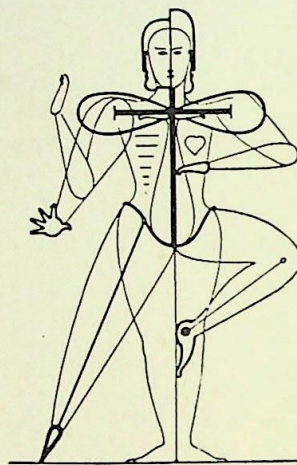


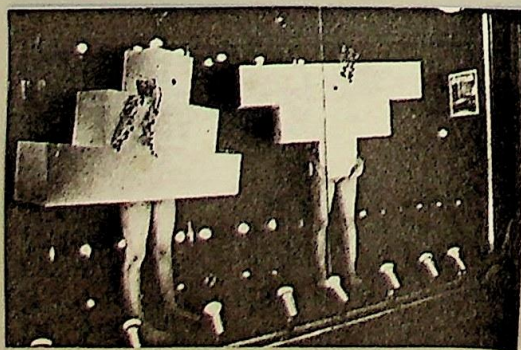
Illustration 2.4. Characters from Oskar Schlemmer 'Triatic Ballet' - 1922.



Illustration 2.5.(a), 2.5.(b).

'Dress Furniture' designed by Alessandro Mendini for Fiorucci, Milan - 1981.

Studio Alchymia 'Dress Furniture' and 'Triatic Ballet' reduce man to simple geometric forms.





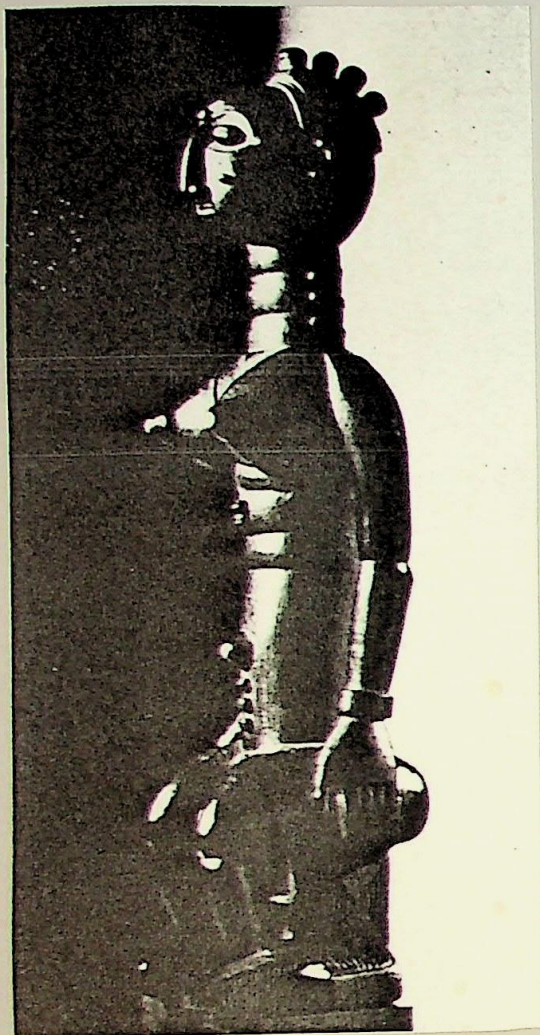


Illustration 2.6.

Falling Water, Bear Run, grid formation of Modern Movement seen in Frank Lloyd Wright's falling water. Wright considered concrete to be 'conglomerata' and wanted to cover concrete in gold leaf, a kitsch gesture which gave way to apricot paint in the end.

Illustration 2.7.

African Female Figure. There was an obsession with African minimalist art because of its extremely expressive forms.

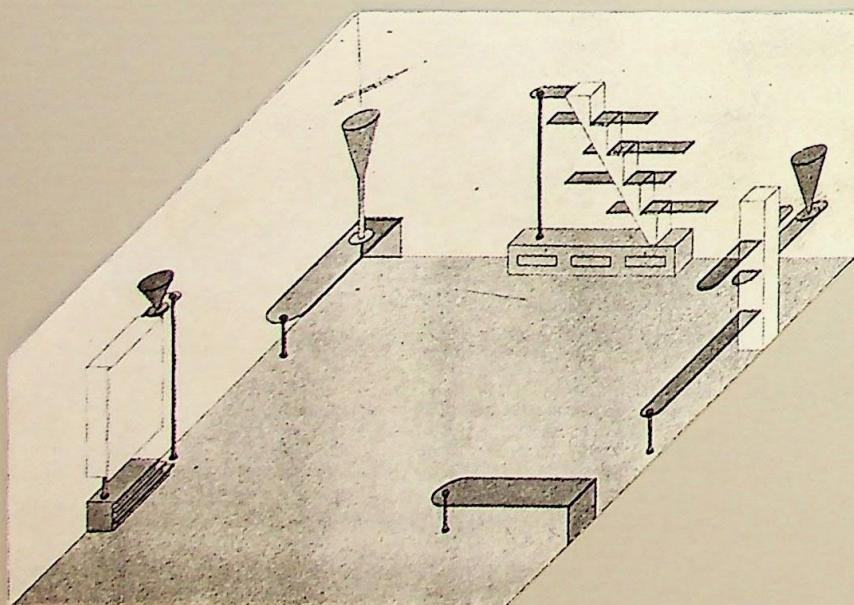


Illustration 2.9.

'Interno Urbanistico' shows Andrea Branzi's affinity for inverted cones, a cubist influence and semicircles. This collection of furniture was designed for Studio Alchymia in 1980.



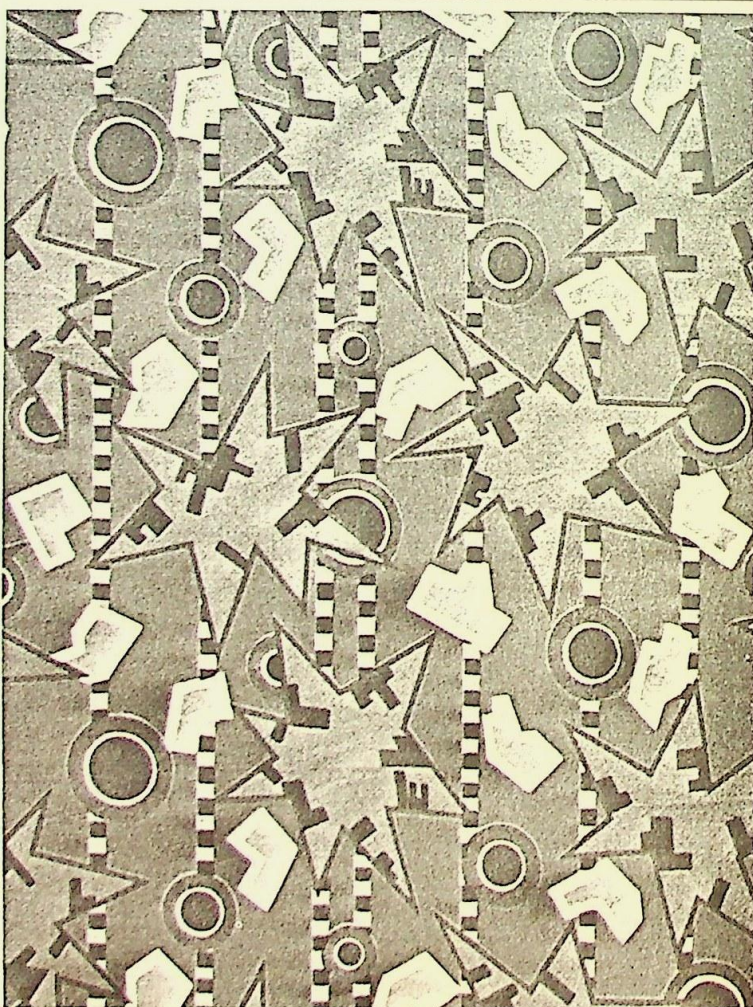
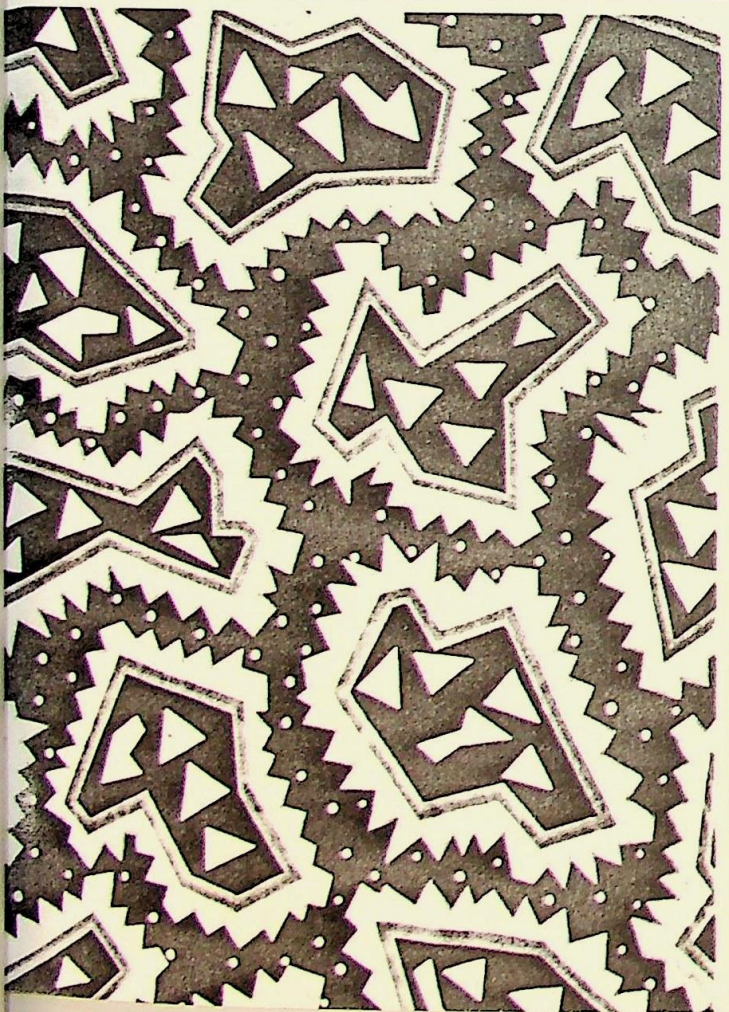
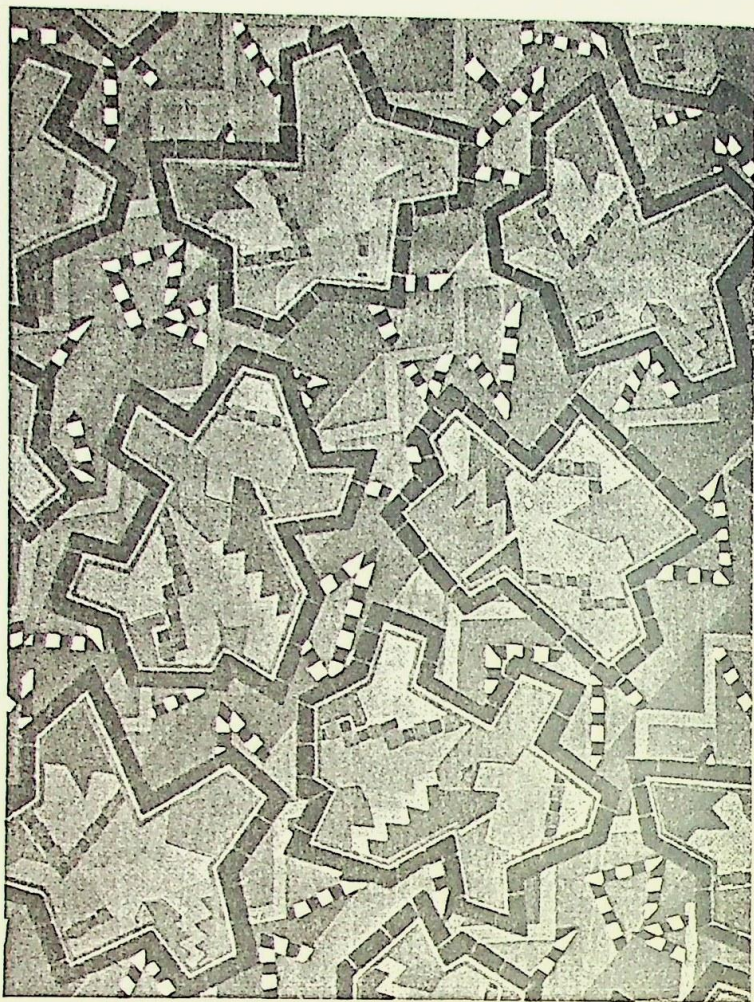
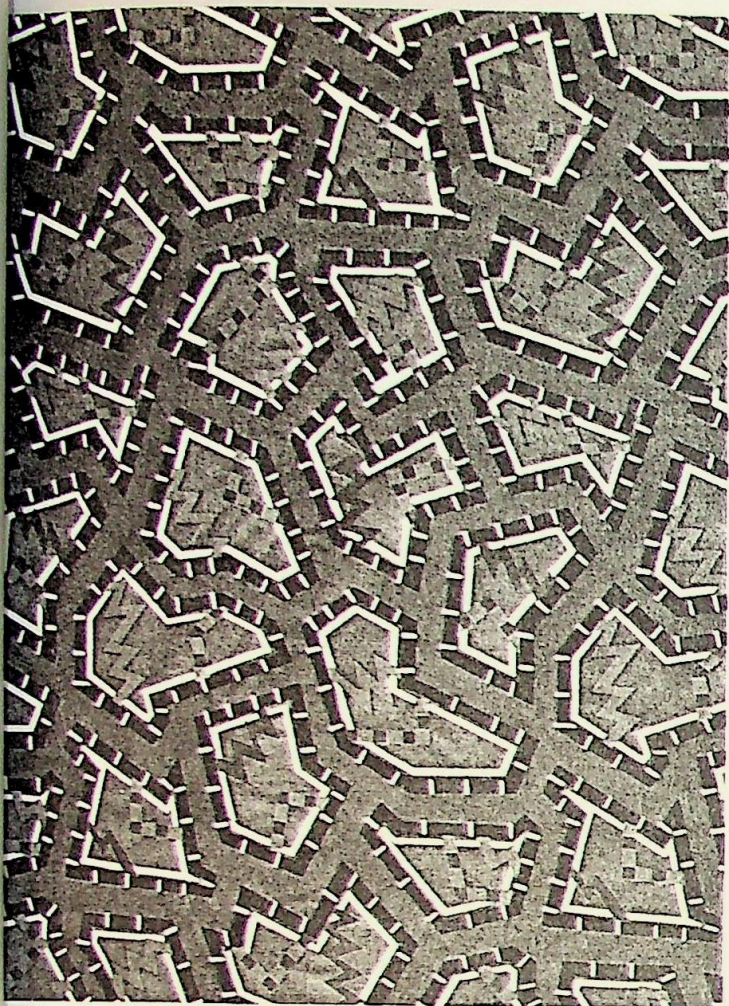


Illustration 2.8.

Fabrics by Mathalie du Pasquier derived from African tribal dress, appropriately named 'Kenya', 'Gabon', 'Zaire' and 'Zambia' - Memphis 1982.



process" showing Memphis belief in decoration as opposed to the starkness of the Modern Movement".

An examination of the Memphis designers pieces reveals certain reoccurring shapes and motifs characteristic to individuals' styles. Designers like Andrea Branzi, while using the basic building blocks creatively, have an affinity for cones, especially inverted ones, (Ill. 2.9.), a cubist influence, semicircles and asymmetry (Ill. 2.10.), which are all predominant features of the Modern Movement.

The geometric aesthetic that accompanied the alliance between art and industry early in the century drew heavily on the architectural ideas developed in America at the time. The Modern Movement was influenced by American architects Louis Sullivan and Frank Lloyd Wright.

Wright was strongly influenced by Japanese architecture and design, adopting the Japanese grids as both a structural and decorative motif (Ill. 2.12.). Memphis in its search for the new direction for design has looked to Japanese and Oriental cultures and been strongly influenced by them (Ill. 2.13.). This illustration shows Memphis designers collectively in one of their creations 'Tawaraya'. The straw mats being comparable with Japanese 'Tatami' mats.

The impulse to reduce things to their essentials of standard parts to permit rapid production of consumer goods was common practice in America with early examples of this being Colt's revolver and McCormick's repeater, which both appeared in the Great Exposition of 1851 in London. They described it as being "openly demonstrat the standardisation of their production interchangeability of parts and utilitarian function". Henry Ford's standardisation of the automobile for production line assemblage was another example of the birth of mass production.



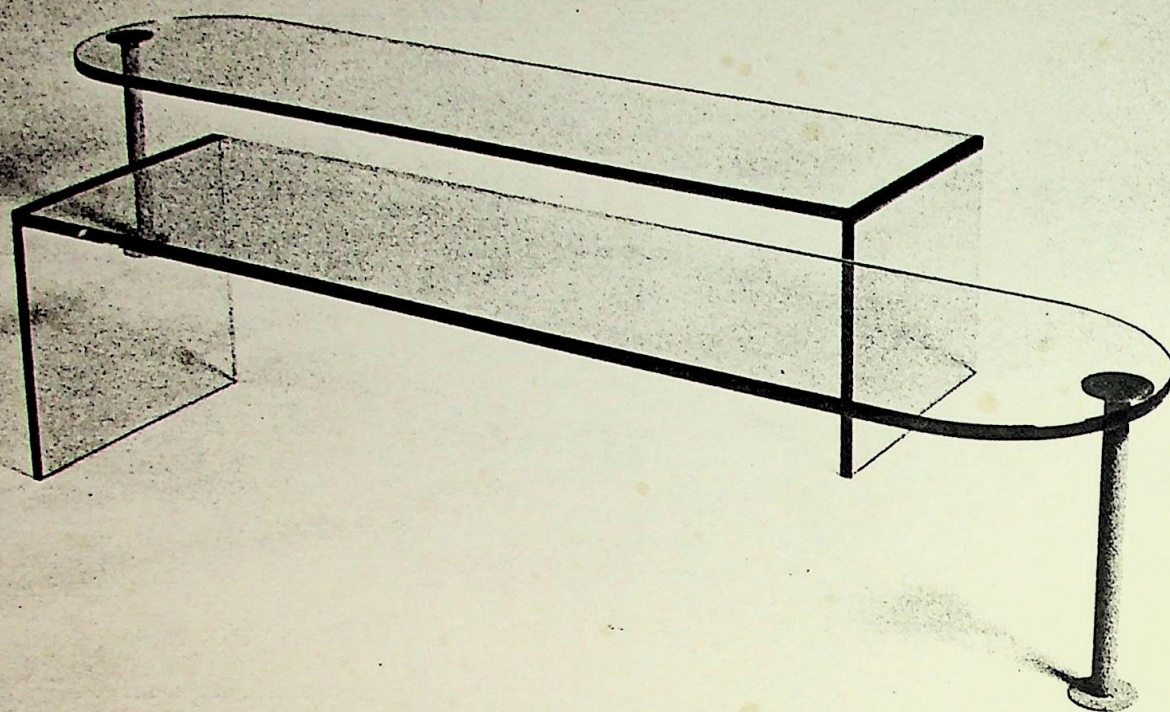


Illustration 2.10.

(Above) Andrea Branzi's 'Centrale' table for Studio Alcliymia - 1974, showing his affinity for semi-circles which were a predominant motif in the Modern Movement.

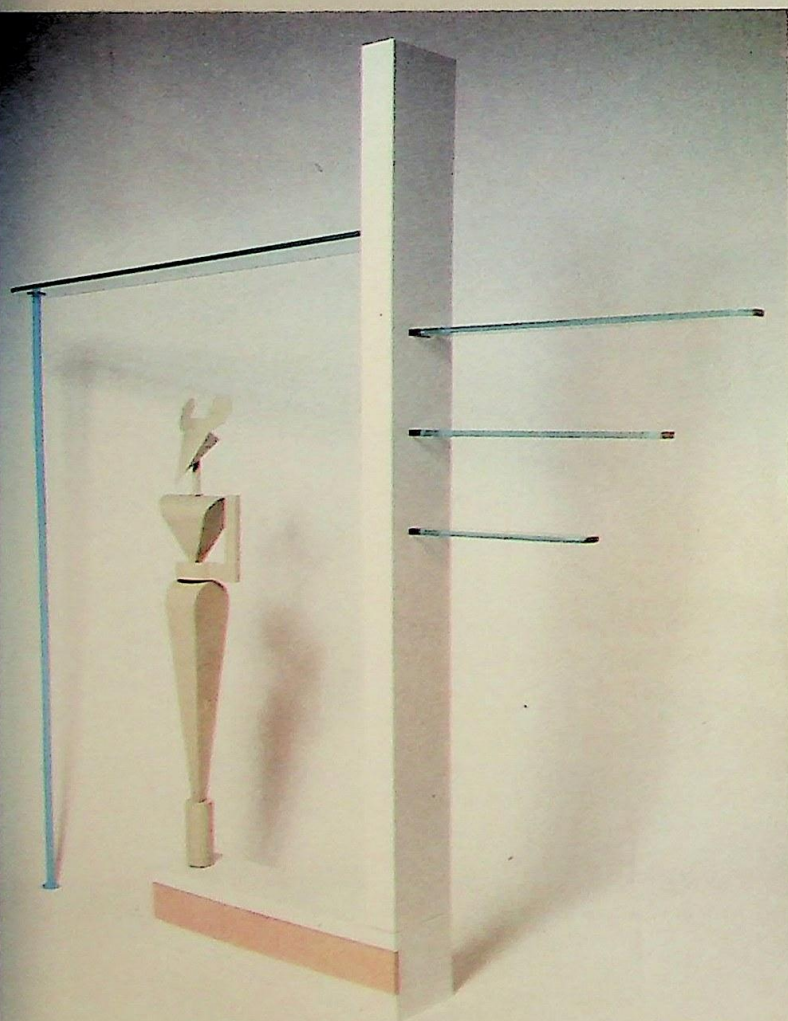


Illustration 2.11.

(Left) A piece of furniture from Andrea Branzi's 'Interno Urbanistico', showing the Bauhaus characteristic of asymmetrical design.



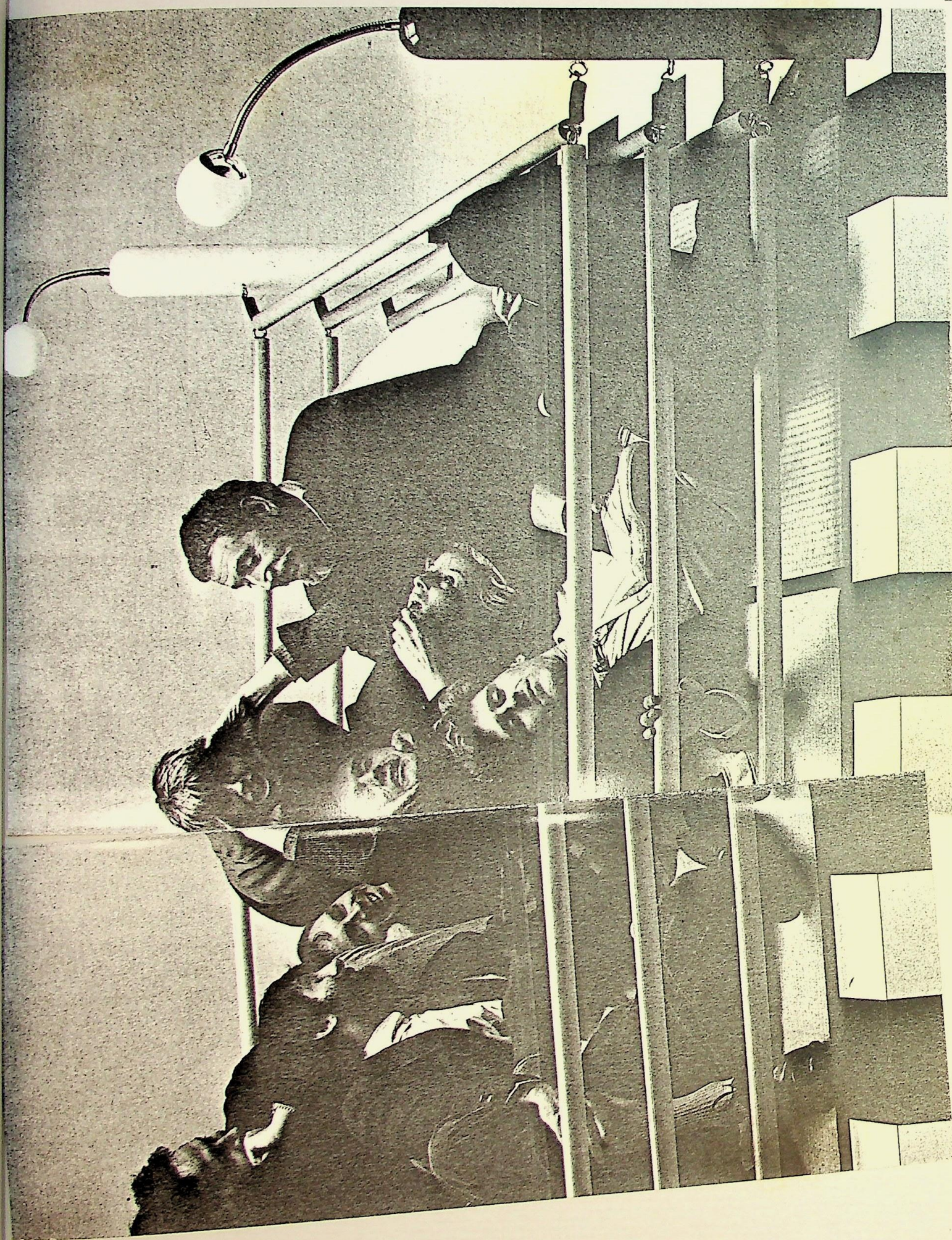


Illustration 2.13. Masanori Umeda's 'Tawaraya' bed, showing Japanese cultural influences in respect to their unorthodox way of sleeping on mats compared to the European way.



The American approach towards the mass manufacture and standardisation was also apparent in furniture which was to stimulate the emergence of the new machine aesthetic.

In Germany in 1907, a number of progressive workshops formed the German Werkbund. The founder members being Hermann Muthesius, Frederick Naumann, Theodor Fischer with Walter Gropius joining later. Hermann Muthesius had studied the British Arts and Crafts Movement and had written a book called 'The English House', from which the Werkbund saw the way forward for a new twentieth century aesthetic. The Arts and Crafts with their simple aesthetic inspired by the vernacular was appropriate to the age of the machine.

The Fagus Shoe Factory (Ill. 2.14.), designed by Peter Behrens, hailed as the first industrial designer was Europe's first building to express itself exclusively through new materials - steel, glass.

"Materials have begun to read, chosen and utilized not only as tools or supports of design, but as active protagonists, privileged vehicles of sensory communication, self-sufficient cells that cohabit the design without mixing each cell with its own personal story to tell".

Barbara Radice, P.R.O. Memphis Group (Ref. 7.)

A comparison can be seen between Walter Gropius' earlier work for the German Werkbund and Ettore Sottsass Jnr.'s work for Studio Alchimia. The parallel being that they were both the formation and foundation of doctrines of which they were to profess later in Gropius' case the Bauhaus and Sottsass' Memphis, the New International Style.

By the First World War (1914-1918), ideas generated within the avant-garde circles had become completely dominated with the applied arts and industrial



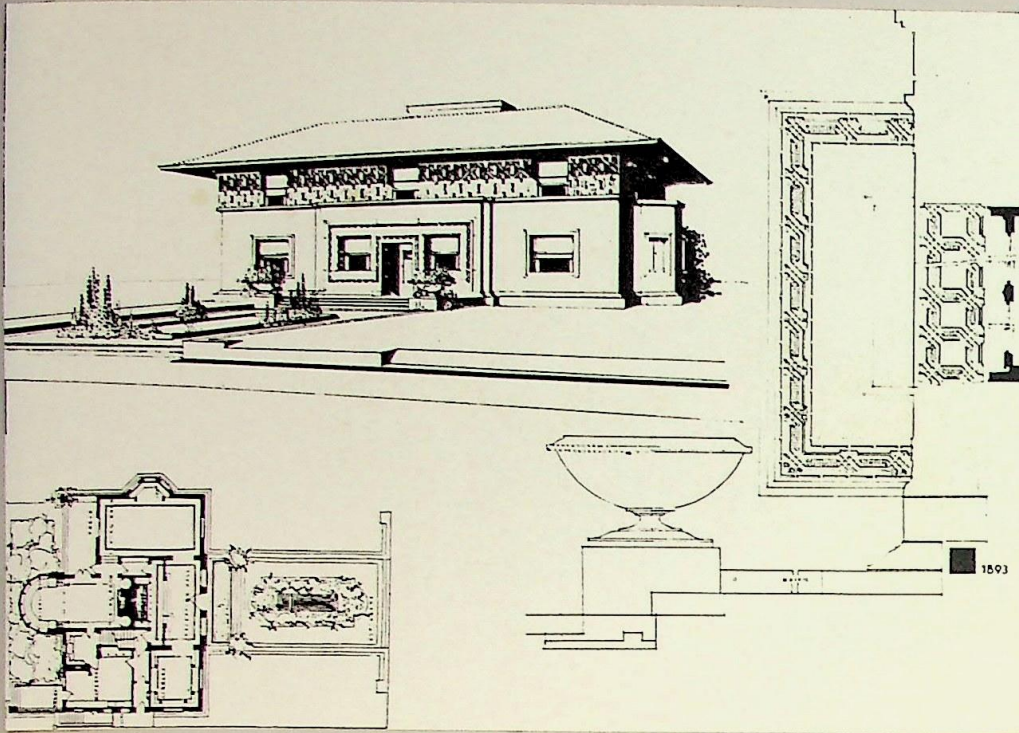


Illustration 2.12.

(Above) View and site plan of Wright's Winslow House, 1893, showing a strong Japanese influence which reappears in a lot of his work of this period.

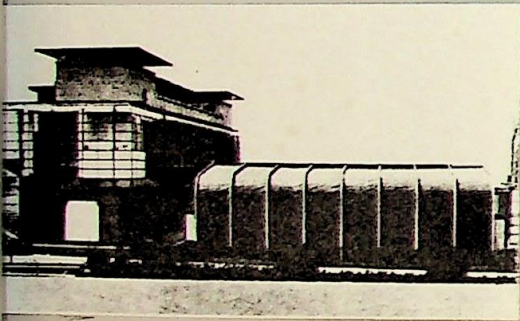


Illustration 2.14(a).

(Top Left) Peter Behren's design for Fagus Shoe Factory, which was Europe's first building to express itself exclusively through new materials - glass, steel.

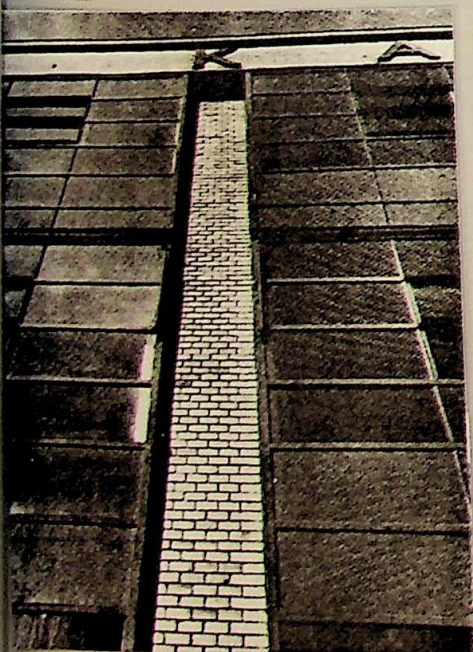


Illustration 2.14(b).

Detail of the Fagus Shoe Factory.



design. The work in these medias derived from the preoccupation with the machine and became collectively associated with the concept of the Modern Movement.

The Netherlands, which had remained neutral during the war and it was here that the Modern Movement took a special significance. Hendrick P. Berlage, a Dutch architect had returned from America and with him he brought Frank Lloyd Wright's ideas about functional architecture, which was to be instrumental in the formation of the Dutch Modern Movement (Elementarism).

De Stijl stressed minimum visual effects using horizontal and vertical lines with occasional diagonals and basic colour (Ill. 2.15.). In De Stijl as later in the Bauhaus colour was chiefly structural, it emphasized the way furniture was built. Tietveld's 'Red and Blue' chair (Ill. 2.16.), when it was designed in 1917, was not red and blue, the colour was added after 1919, apparently at Van Doesburg's suggestion.

Comparing Rietveld's end table (Ill. 2.19.) and Memphis designer Michele De Lucchi's 'Continental Table' (Ill. 2.18.), it becomes evident that Rietveld's end table has had a profound effect on De Lucchi, although nearly sixty five years in the difference, there is little or no change. They are both elementarist exercises, both emphasising the juxtaposition of planes. In De Lucchi's table, the circular and rectangular planes seem to intersect in mid space, while Rietveld's table appears heavier, taller and has a more horizontal quality of a table, perhaps in keeping with the line of thought - "Form follows function". The circular base in red and its square planes in black and white with blue and yellow showing details, conforms to the De Stijl doctrine of colour emphasising structure compared to De Lucchi's softer muted tones.

Piet Mondrian was one of the De Stijl painters, with his abstract compositions being the ultimate in minimalism painting (Ill. 2.19.). Domus describing



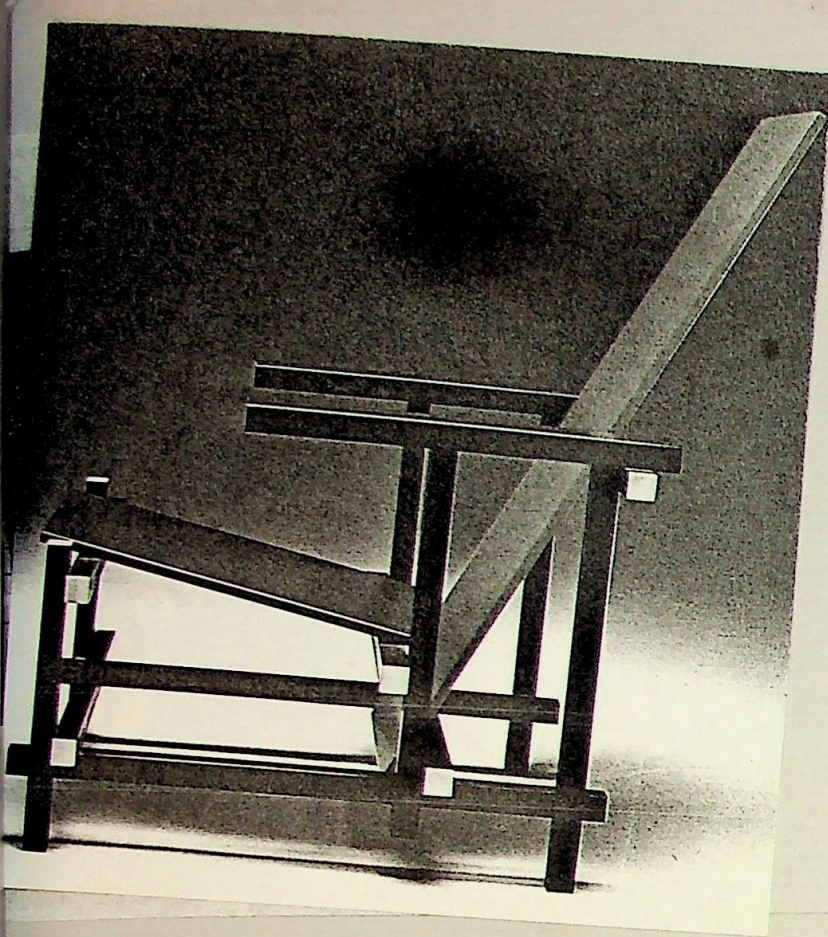


Illustration 2.15.

Reitveld's Schroeder's House, complying to Ernest Gropius's saying "From a spoon to a city". Reitveld applies the same principal in his furniture as to his buildings.

Illustration 2.16.

Reitveld's 'Red and Blue' chair, designed in 1917, the colour being applied in 1919. Extended joining points to emphasise construction.



Illustration 2.17.

Reitveld's 'End Table' shows the juxtaposition of planes. Colour is used to emphasise the construction.

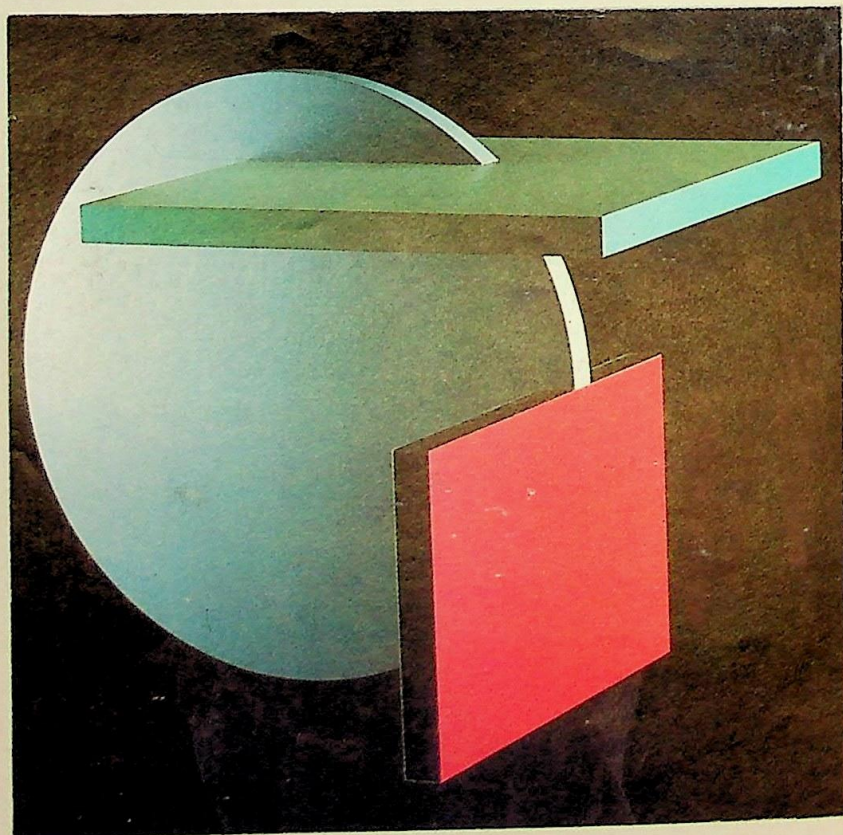


Illustration 2.18.

De Lucchi's 'Continental Table' is inspired by Reitveld's, but has softer lines due to the circle dominating appearing more stable than Reitveld's.



Andrea Branzi's 'Gallery of Copyism' (Ill. 2.20.) for Studio Alchymin (1979) commented;

"Branzi goes further in his return to former styles in his 'Copy Gallery'. He pays homage to Matisse, Kadinsky and Mondrain'. (Ref. 8).

Some of De Stijl's most lasting images were produced by architect and designer Garret Rietveld. In his constructions he exaggerates all the joining points by extending the elements a little further than necessary (Ill. 2.21.). Andrea Branzi again exhibits some of these qualities in his 'Gritti' bookcase for Memphis in 1981 (Ill. 2.22.). The horizontal and vertical emphasis are achieved by extending the shelves through the vertical uprights to exaggerate the meeting point. This piece is softer and less harsh due to the absence on the strong direct colours of De Stijl.

Russian Constructivism happened around the same time as De Stijl and both had the similar aesthetics based on the machine, but not having any great impact on Memphis thinking (Ill. 2.23.).

The Bauhaus also adopted the machine for aesthetic inspiration, but treated it as an idea rather than a reality. Walter Gropius when writing the Bauhaus Manifesto paid homage to the British Arts and Crafts Movement and in their teaching program they encouraged students to be proficient in both craft skills and in the manipulation of the language of elementary forms. Laszlo Moholy-Nagy was a European constructivist in the design process. Michele De Lucchi has adopted this approach for his Germi range of products which include vacuum cleaners, toasters, hair dryers and coffee mills (Ill. 2.24.), breaking them down into elementary forms. Two other influential painters from the Bauhaus were Paul Klee and Wassily Kandinsky. Klee mainly concentrated on line while Kandinsky concentrated on colour.





Illustration 2.19.

Piet Mondrian's composition with red, yellow and blue.

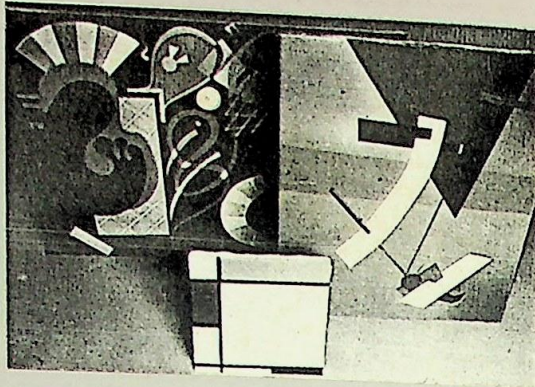


Illustration 2.20.

Andrea Branzi's 'Gallery of Copyism', which pays homage to Matisse, Kadinsky and Mondrian.

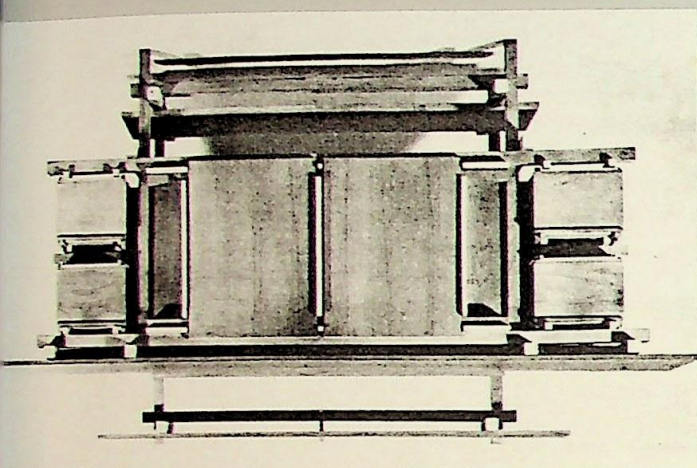
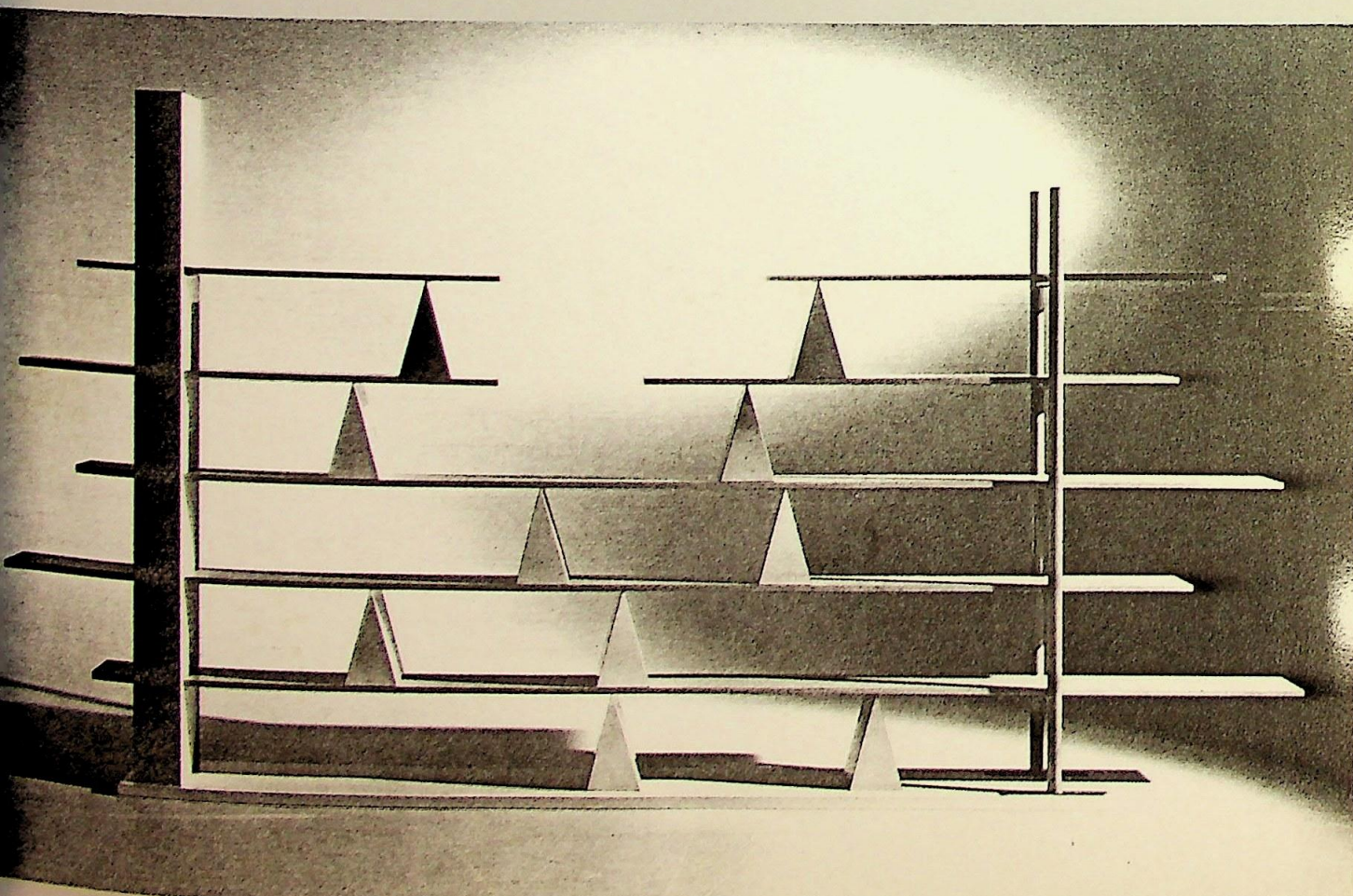


Illustration 2.21.

Rietveld's 'Buffet' bookcase shows extended elements emphasizing construction.

Illustration 2.23.

(Below) Andrea Branzi's 'Gritti' bookcase shows the same characteristics as Rietveld's in extension of meeting points.





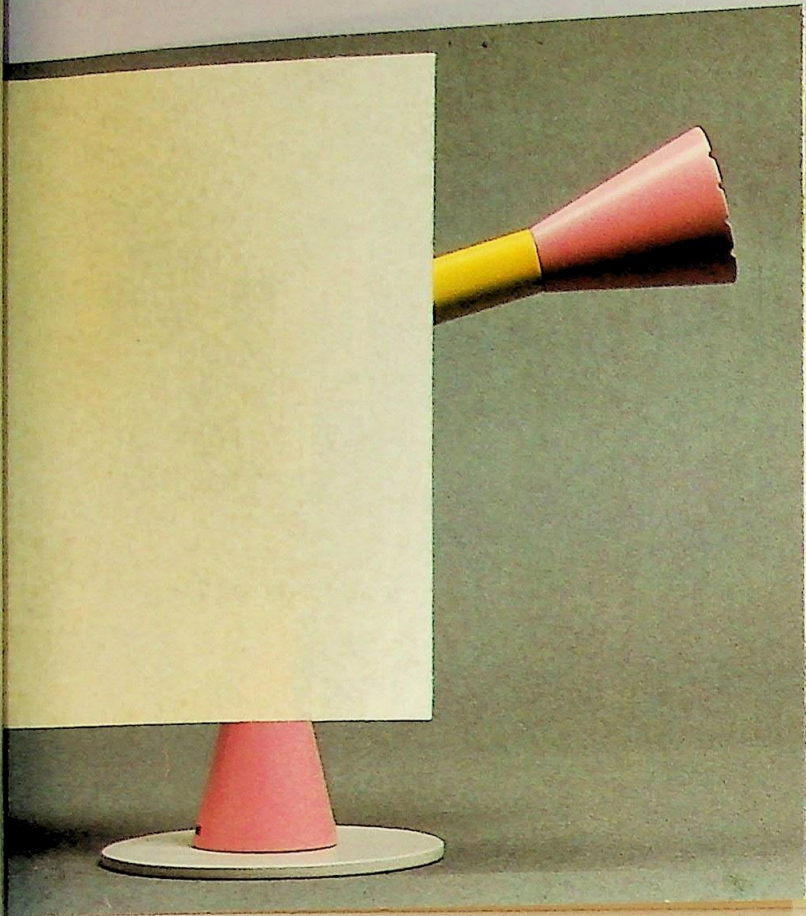


Illustration 2.24.

Hair dryer from the Germi range, designed by Michele De Lucchi, showing a reoccurrence of basic geometric shapes (Alchymia - 1979).

Illustration 2.23.

Russian Constructivist  
Tatlin's model for third  
international - 1919-1920.

Illustration 2.25.

Alessandro Mendini's 'Kandinsky' sofa, which is loosely derived from a Kandinsky painting.





Alessandro Mendini's redesigned (redesigned because due to financial constraints, had to buy old furniture and redecorate) sideboard and Kandinsky sofa (Ill. 2.25) are paying homage to the Bauhaus artist. The patterns are loosely derived from Kandinsky's paint dominant curve (Ill. 2.26). Comparing Kandinsky's painting (Ill. 2.27) with a piece of furniture from the Mobile Infinito or Bauhaus 2 exhibition, it is apparent that Kandinsky's work has been realised in three dimension even to the extent that the three isosceles triangles the top of the composition reappear as three ornaments (Ill. 2.28.)

These ornaments (Ill. 2.29.) by Michele Di Lucchi and Andrea Branzi are derived from paintings done by Oskar Schlemmer's dancer (Ill.2.30.) and Wassily Knadinsky's 'Pictures at an exhibition' (Ill. 2.31.), which goes to verify the strong influence the Bauhaus has had on the Studio Alchymia, which was the formation of the ideas and beliefs resulting in Memphis.

When Marcel Breuer started in the Bauhaus, his work resembled Reithveld's and it was not until a few years later that he started experimenting with tubular steel, resulting in chairs like his cantilever and club armchairs.

Breuer, like Reithveld, believed that his chairs were styleless and he also believed that all objects that emerged from the Bauhaus were of a "definitive series", beyond time and space in a society made uniform by consumption (Ref. 9.).

This philosophy is totally contradictory to the transient way of thinking portrayed by Sottsass - "Today, everything is not consumed, it is dedicated to life not eternity; we tend to imagine the design as a series of accidents that came together by chance, we imagine a possible sum not an inevitable story, and what we believe holds this story of accidents together that has



a formal decorative identity". (Ref. 10.)

The definitive series design were precise and definite and now seem to have been arrived at rather than designed.

Arata Isozaki points out: "Memphis appears suddenly, as fashion does, and it has a very strong impact all over the world...Things always change rapidly anyhow. At the Bauhaus the tubular chairs were designed between 1920 and 1925. No earlier, no later". (Ref. 11.).

The Bauhause design remained mainly craft based, committed as it was to the machine as a motivating symbol. Memphis, whilst being basically craft based, has all its pieces, except for the blown glass, designed for industrial production. If they are produced in small quantities it is because the demand is limited.

Memphis, while being influenced by the Modern Movement still have their ultimate goal as being to undermine it and the universal value of 'Good design' associated with it and encourage us to think about the meaning and function of design in the 80's.

Does form follow function? "We all know very well, when you try to define the function of any object, the function slips through your fingers, because function is life itself. Function is not one screw more or one measure less. Function is the final possibility of the relation between an object and life".

Ettore Sottsass. (Ref. 12.).



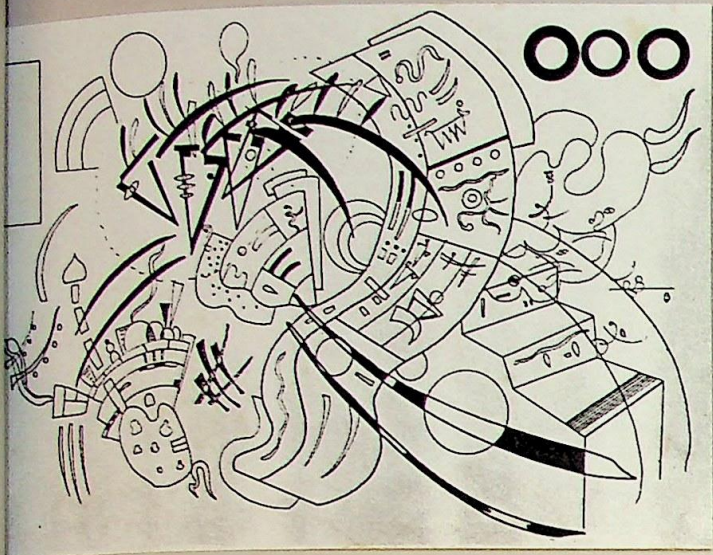


Illustration 2.26.

Kandinsky's 'Dominant Curve',  
inspiration for Mendini's 'Kandinsky'  
sofa.

Illustration 2.27.

Painting by Kandinsky.

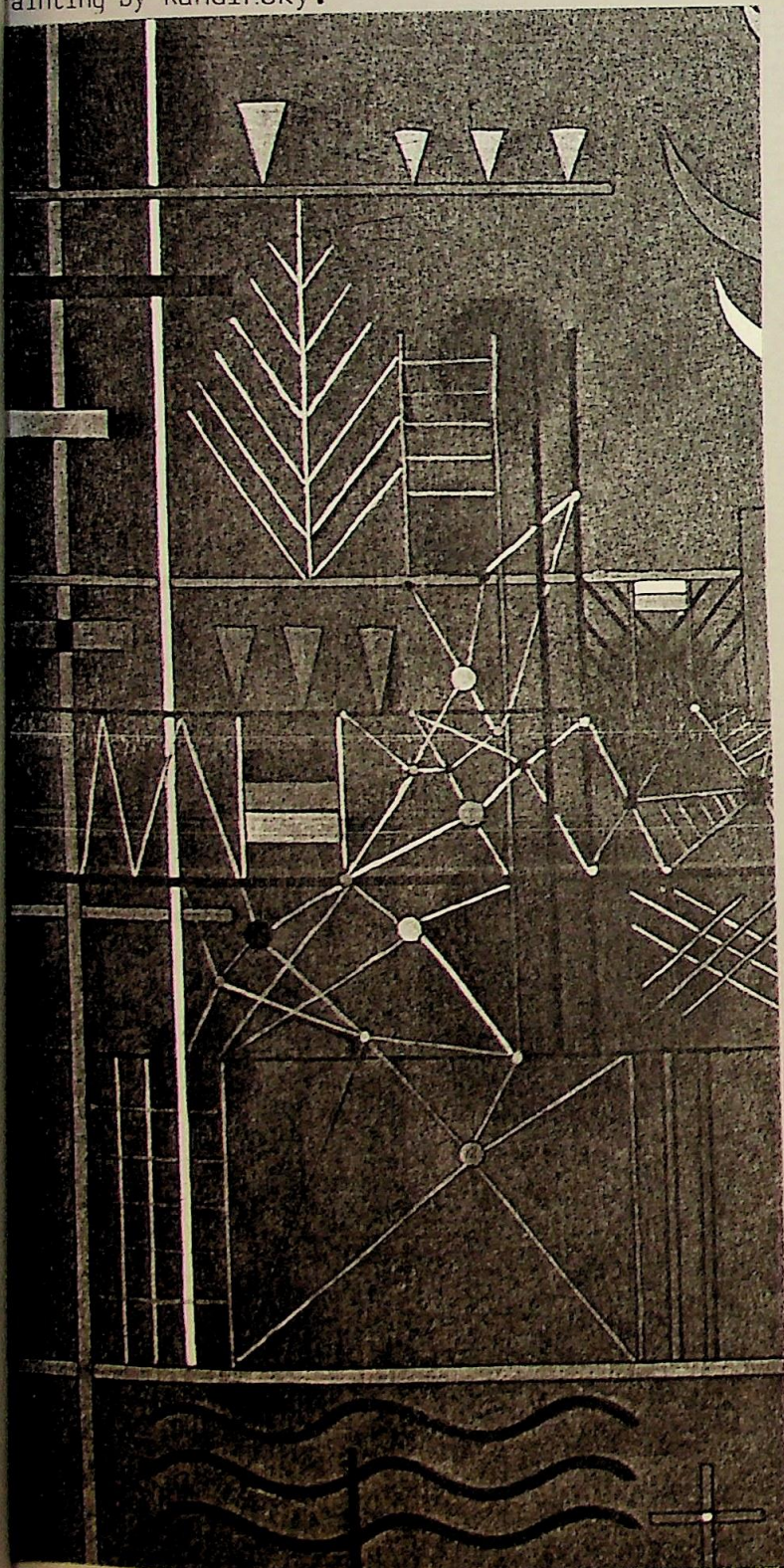
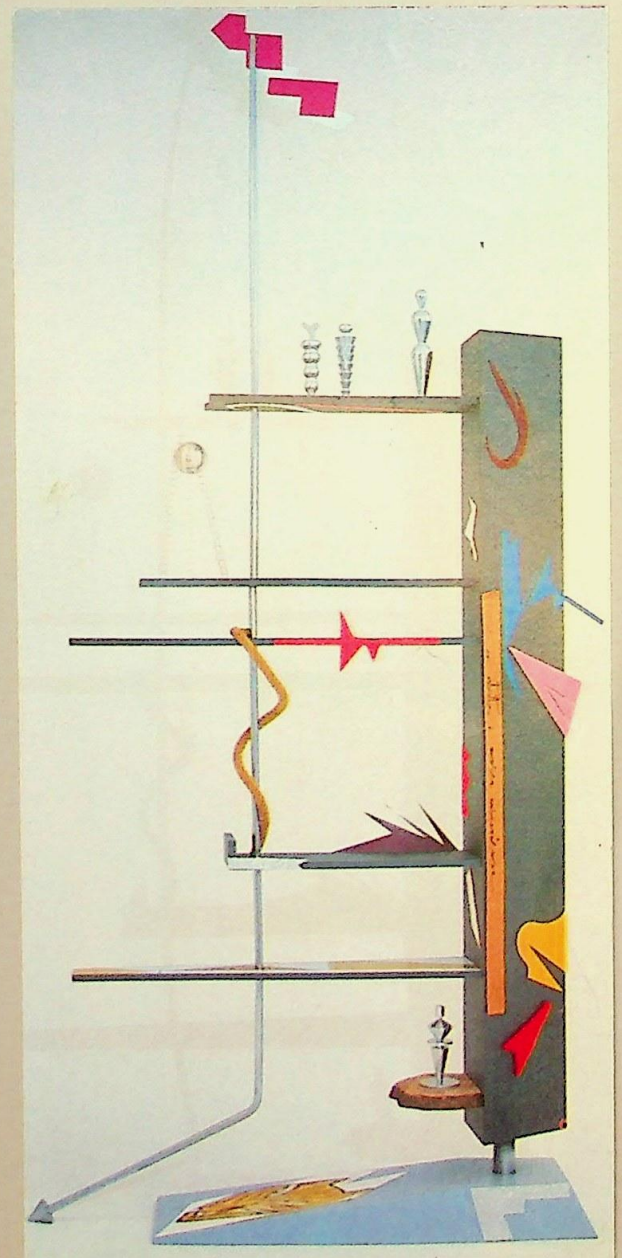


Illustration 2.28.

Piece of furniture from 'Mobile Infinite'  
inspired by Illustration 2.27.





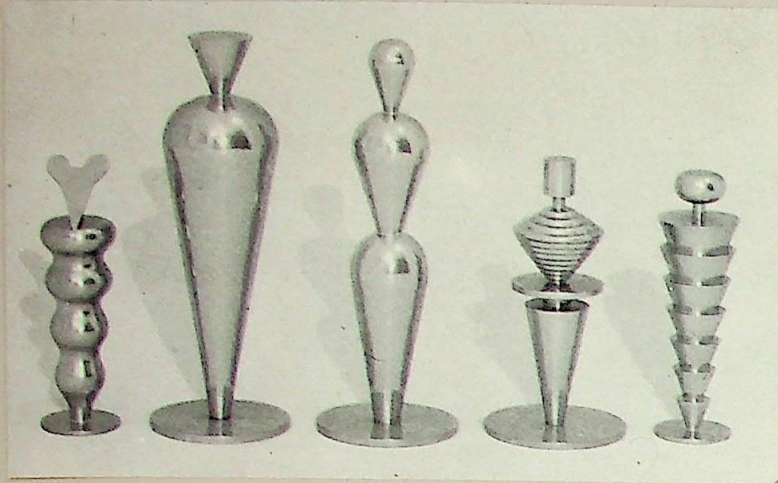


Illustration 2.29.

Ornaments by Michele Di Lucchi and Andrea Branzi, inspired by Oskar Schlemmer's painting the 'Dancer', Kandinsky's picture 'Picture at an Exhibition'.

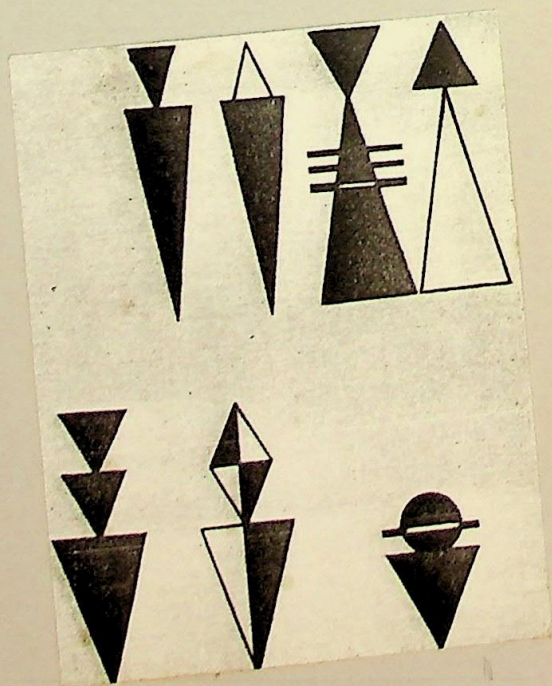


Illustration 2.30.

Oskar Schlemmer's painting 'The Dancer'.

Illustration 2.31.

Kandinsky's painting 'Picture at an Exhibition' 1928.

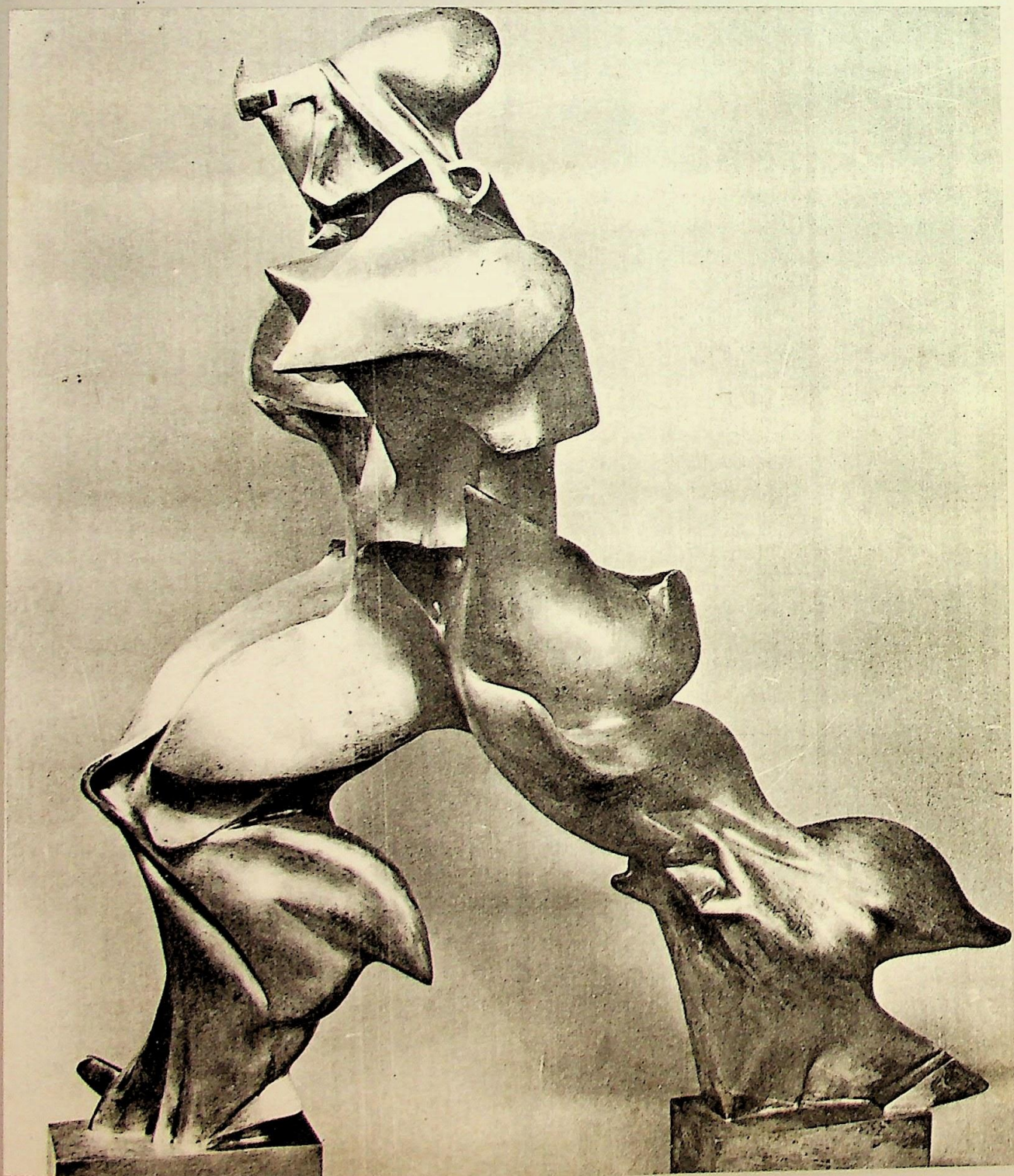




THE ITALIAN FUTURISTS

"We stand on the promontory of the centuries...Why should we look back when what we want is to break down the mysterious doors of the impossible".

Fillipo Marinette - 1910.





The Futurists went mad with the idea of throwing it all out and starting with science: the same was said of Memphis in 1985.

"The Milanese took Memphis which was conceived a joke, far too seriously for their own good. Before Memphis there was a rule book of what was good, modern Italian design. Memphis chucked the rule book out of the window and now the Italians have lost direction". (Ref. 13.)

"The only true modern drug is speed". Aldous Huxby.

1910 saw the foundation of the Futurist Movement in Milan under Fillipo Marinette. Their manifesto consisted of eleven points. The first four were concerned with the supreme magnificence of mechanical speed which declared - "A racing car is more beautiful than the winged victory of somath race". The driver of such a vehicle was an "integral with trajectories of the universe". Other points concerned patriotism, glorification of war and destruction of all academic institutes, while the eleventh point itemized the ideal context of a Futurist Architecture. (Ill. 3.1.)

"Motor Cars, Ships, Factories and Railways are more vitally akin to life today than Theatre". Norman Bel Geddes - 1929.

By 1910 the Futurists had made the first definite shift in the focal point of culture and aesthetic production from the home to the Metropolis. The renewal of culture up to now had always been seen as coming from domestic goods, this being evident from the Great Expositions.

The Futurists on the other hand with their changed reference point believed that the Metropolis offered the greatest potential for renewal. The theme of the Metropolis initiated by the Futurists reappears in the Radical Movements of the 60's



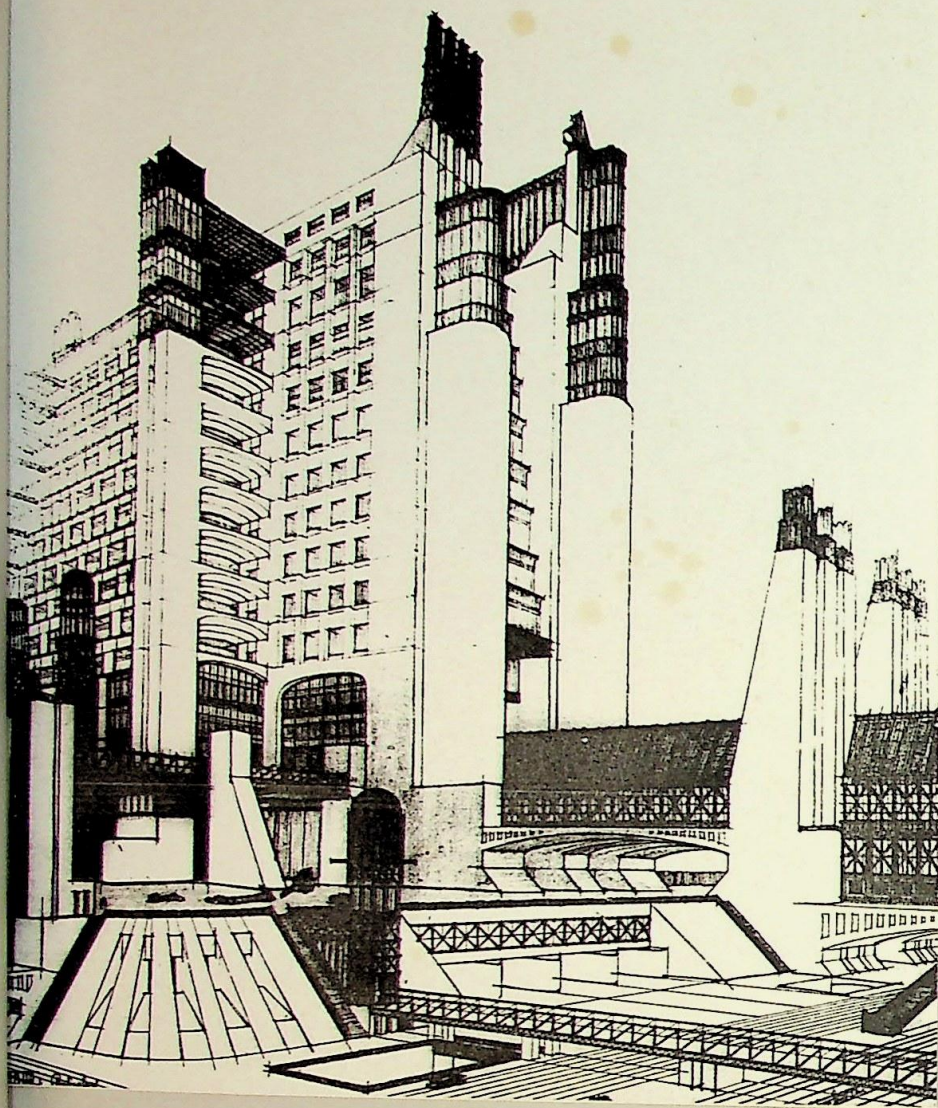
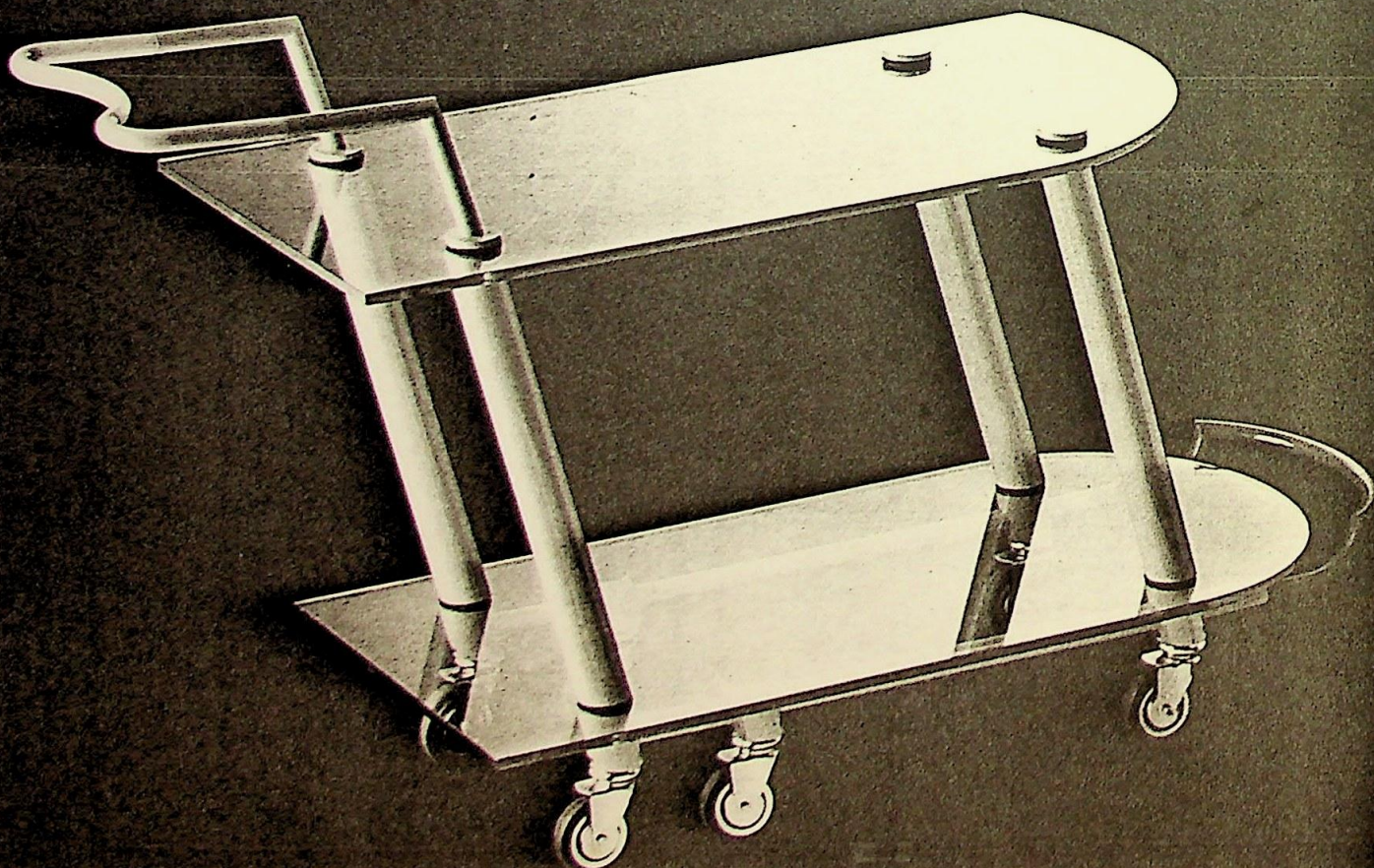


Illustration 3.1.

Sant' Elia's Casa Gradinate  
for the Citta Nuova - 1914.

Illustration 3.3.

Javier Mariscal's 'Hilton' service trolley.





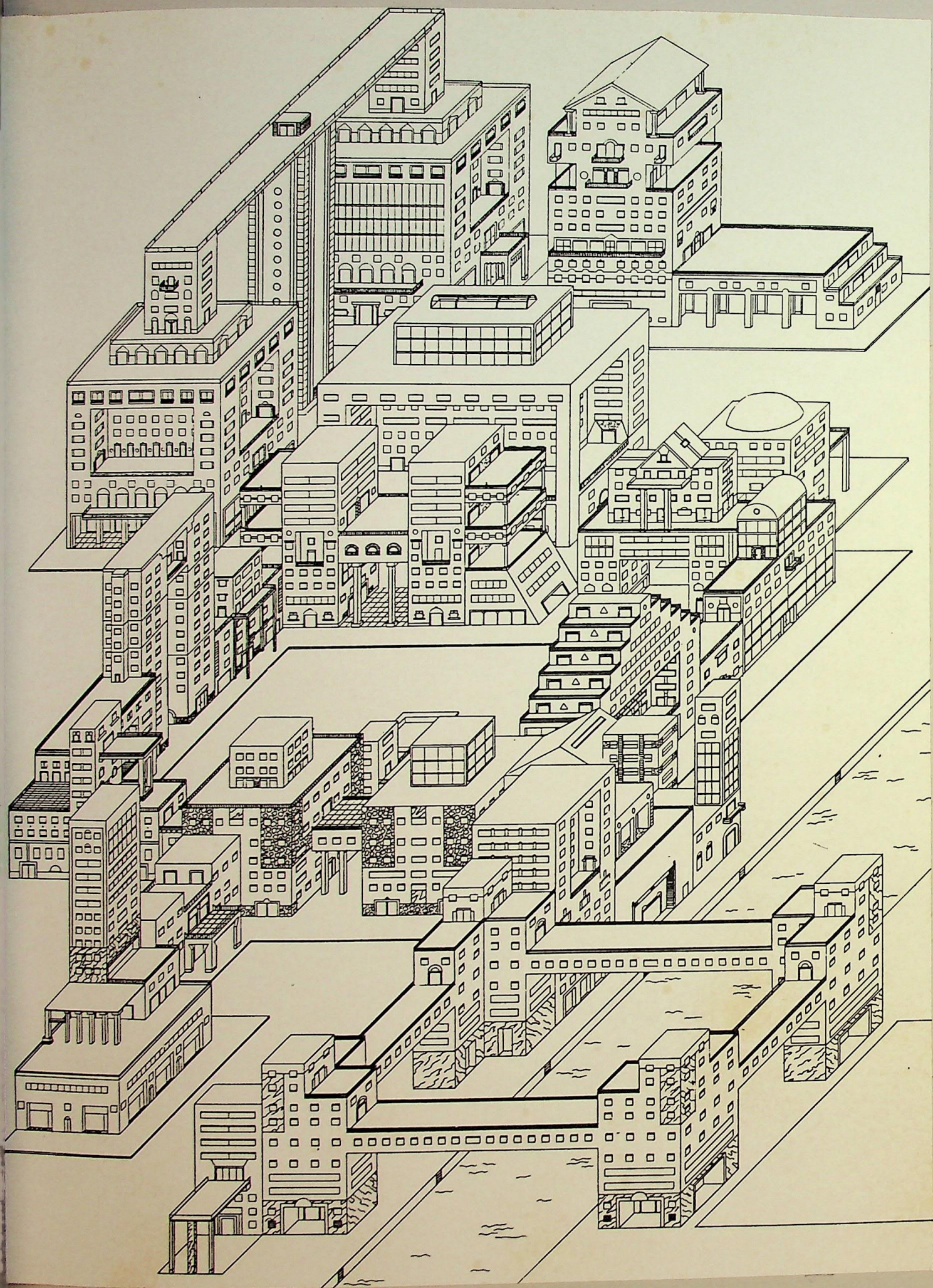


Illustration 3.2.

George Sowden and Natolie du Pasquier City Memphis - 1983.



with Archigrams (U.K.), Plug in City, Archizoom Associati (Italy), No-Stop City, Superstudio's Twelve Imaginary Cities, and George Sowden and Nathalie du Pasquer designing a city for Memphis in 1983. (Ill. 3.2.).

"If your daylight comes from a limitless electric grid, your day can last forever and if you travel by train or motor car you can go as fast as the power of the engine - faster than progress itself". Sentiments expressed in Memphis designers Javier Mariscal's 'Hilton' serving trolley (Ill. 3.3.), Peter Shire's 'Armchair' (Ill. 3.4.). Too fast for time to catch up but as Einstein said, and everybody has heard about this one, though few read it in the original, "that everything was affected by everything else, and that if you travel far and fast enough you can get to the past".

Making a comparison between Shire's Armchair and Giacomo Balla's painting (Ill. 3.5) 'A car has passed' they seem to be as one with Shire sharing the same supreme magnificence of the machine whether consciously or unconsciously.

The Metropolis (Ill. 3.6.) became an entity. There was no longer an internal and external space and the harmonious balance between interior, architecture and town planning was lost. Instead everything was connected to the Metropolis.

Architecture was experiencing its first crisis. The required space for interpretation which allowed you to stand back and view it had vanished. The individuals within the Metropolis only experienced disjointed images and would never view the city as anything else.

An urban dweller experience of a city is of the street with its signs, posters, shop windows and above this height is just taken for granted.



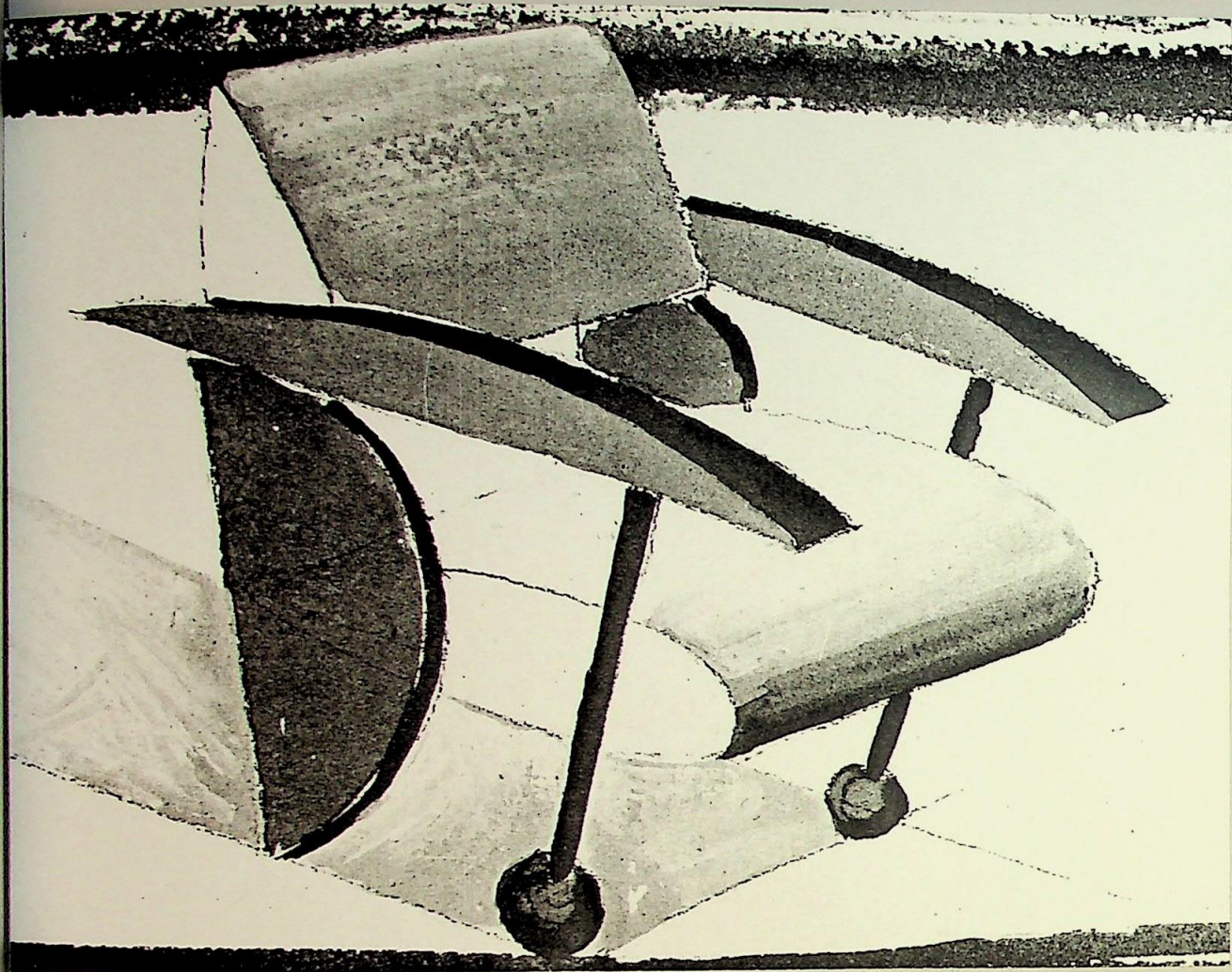


Illustration 3.4.

Peter Shire's drawings for an Armchair - 1981.

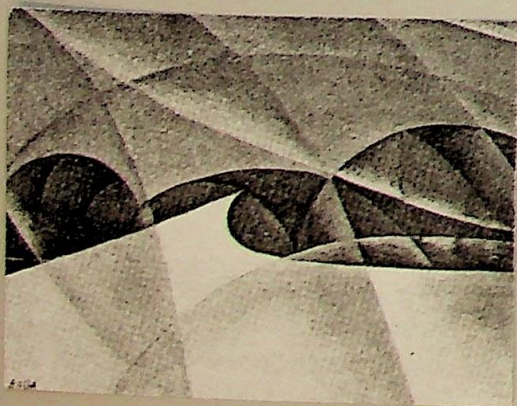


Illustration 3.5.

Giacomo Balla's 'The car has passed'. The Futurists wanted to capture images of speed and flight, a feature Shire has achieved in his drawing consciously or unconsciously.



"To me, doing design does not mean giving form to a more or less stupid product for a more or less sophisticated industry. Design for me is a way of discussing life, sociality, politics, food and even design". Ettore Sottsass (Ref. 14.).

Memphis design is the relation with a series of problems and their intercourse, a relation that cannot be made systematic because it obeys the logic of circumstance. In keeping with this attitude and with the idea that there are no objective realities but only cultural forms and perceptions, Memphis designers started not to build objects around a structure as the Futurists did, but to tear them open, so to speak, to explore them, to disintegrate them in order to read and manipulate them as sign systems.



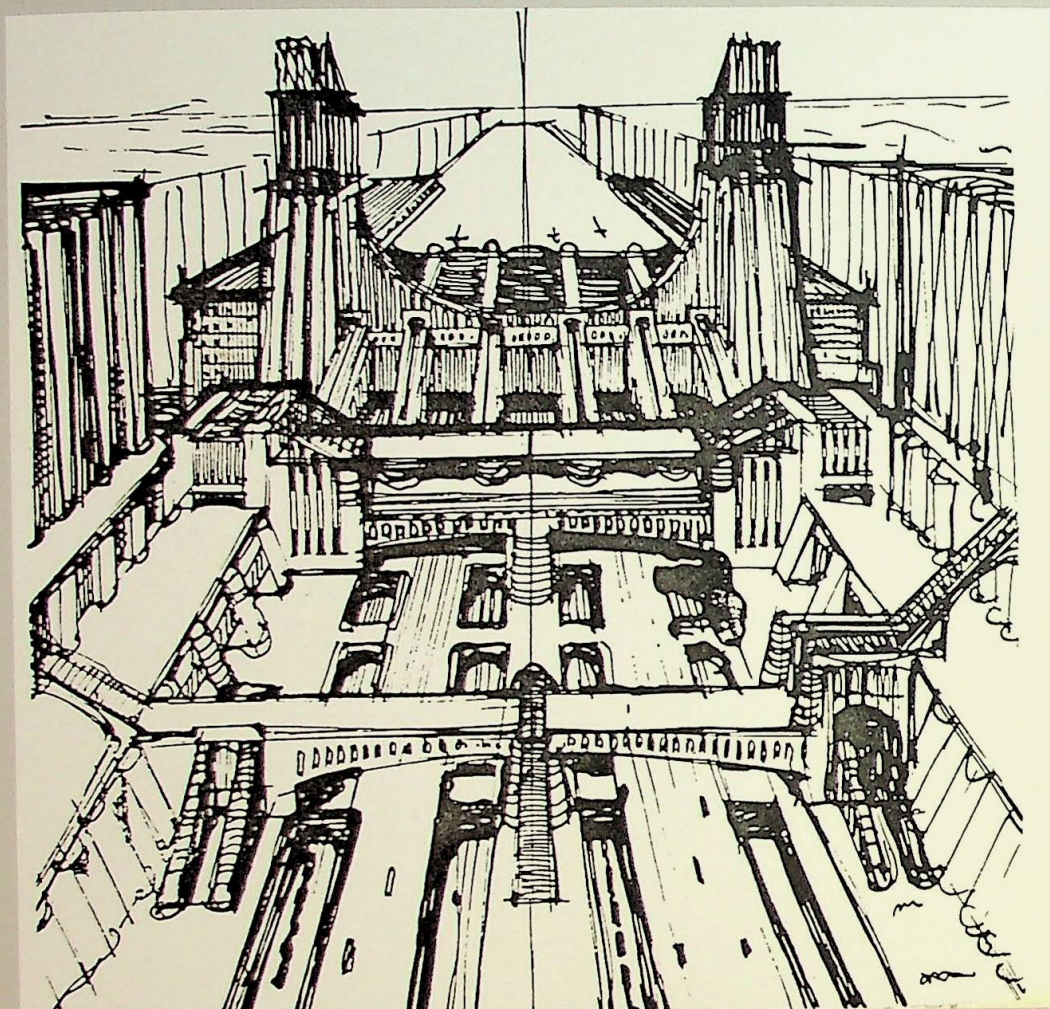
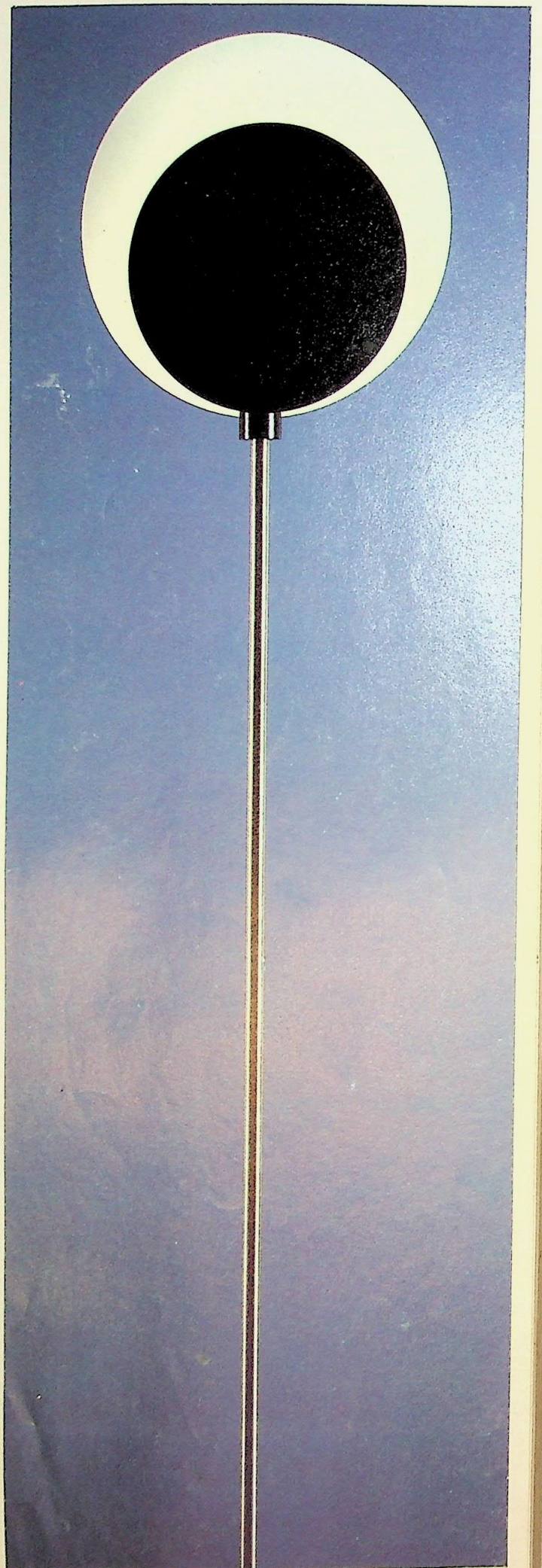


Illustration 3.6.

Sant' Elia's brilliant futurist idea of multi-level traffic - cars below, pedestrian ways linking terraced buildings - 1913-1914.



DES ARTS DECORATIFS





Des Arts Decoratifs, an exhibition in Paris in 1925, celebrated the new style which used high quality materials as components in the name of elegance and attraction.

It denounced the Bauhaus sophisticated research into materials and used bakelite, formica, mirror-glass, aluminium, chrome, and luxury skins coupled with vivid colours - brilliant reds, shocking pinks, gold, silver and bronze to emphasise the rich, luxurious and hectic pace of life.

Diaghilev's 'Ballet Russes' and Paul Poiret's fashions were the initial inspiration for 'Art Deco'. Paul Poiret's revolutionary fashions were a direct result of the Ballet Russes in 1915, also coupled with exotic oriental and arabic influences.

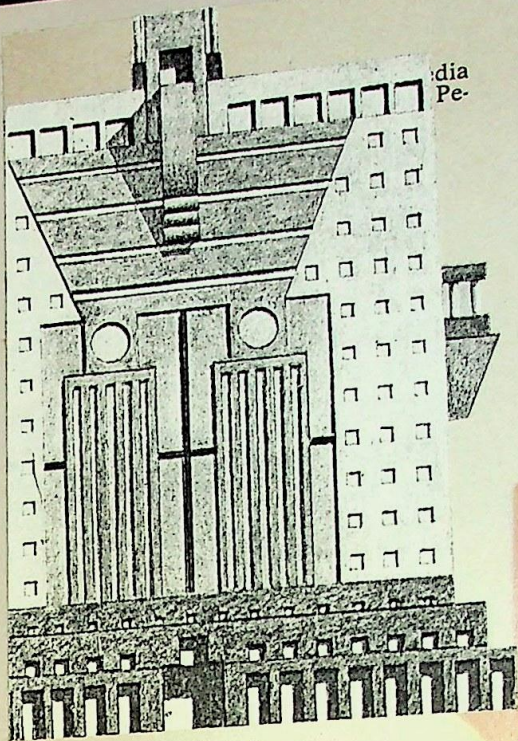
The discovery of Tutankhamun's Tomb (Ill. 4.1.) by Howard Carter in 1922, created a craze for antique shades of gold, peach and turquoise. This sudden archaeological find stimulated interest in Egyptian, Aztec and Red Indian cultures, resulting in a stressing of geometric interplay and dramatic colour contrasts. Memphis resembles this with its hard edged geometric forms and vibrant coloured decoration (Ill. 4.2.).

Le Corbusier and his followers had a large impact on the 1925 Paris Exhibition with their architectural works contrasting sharply with the rich, extravagant ornamentation of the Art Deco (Ill. 4.3., 4.4.).

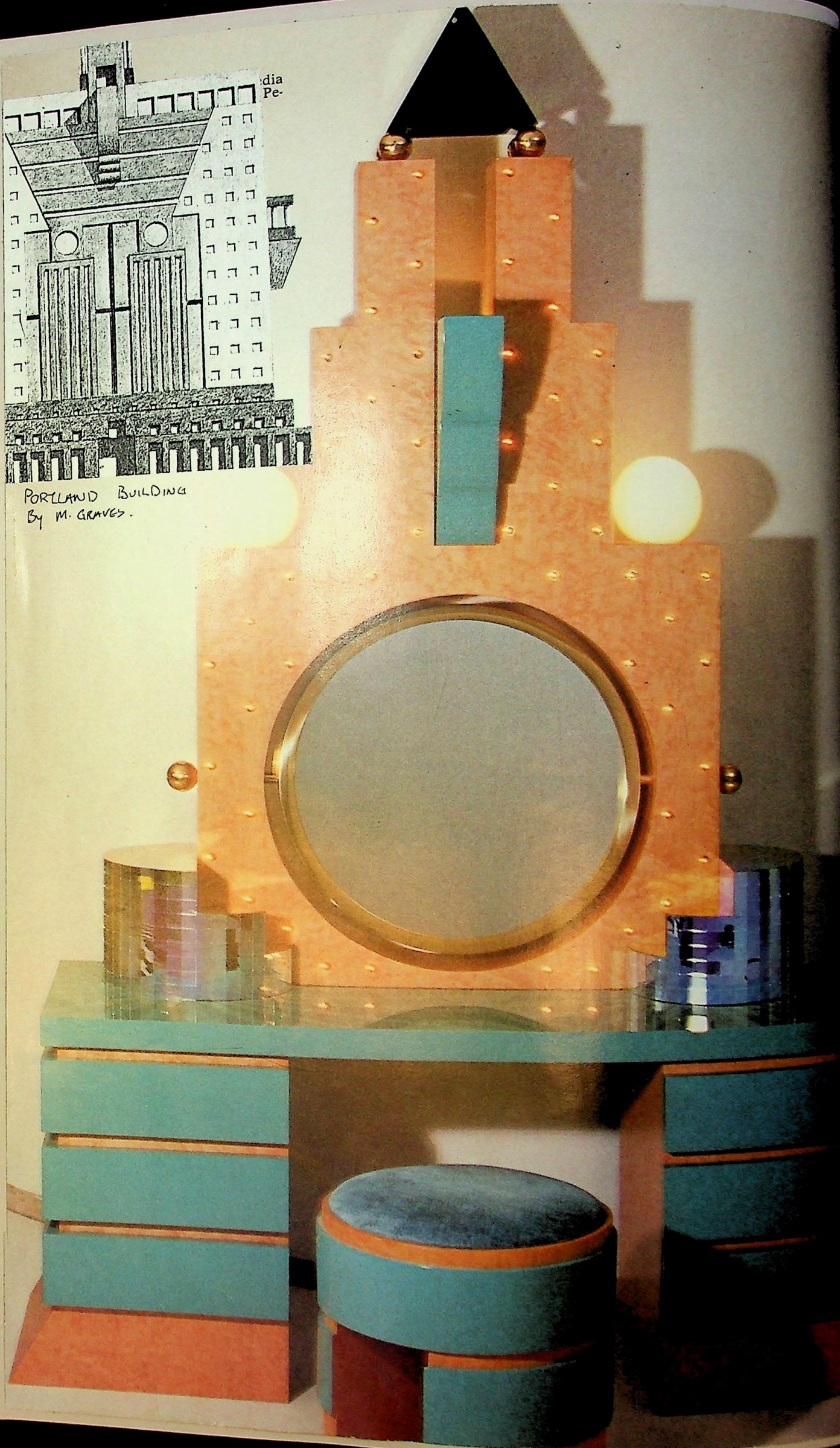
Art Deco consists of two distinct parts. The 20's with its sumptuous exoticism and the 30's with its sleek modernism.

After the First World War there was a preoccupation with speed, travel, leisure and luxury exemplified by artists like Cassandre (Ill. 4.5., 4.6.). Their preoccupation with luxury and comfort can be seen in pieces like the luxury Queen Mary Liner of 1935 (Ill. 4.7.). The furniture is sturdy and solidly constructed, putting the emphasis on comfort. Memphis has picked up on this





PORTLAND BUILDING  
By M. GRAVES.





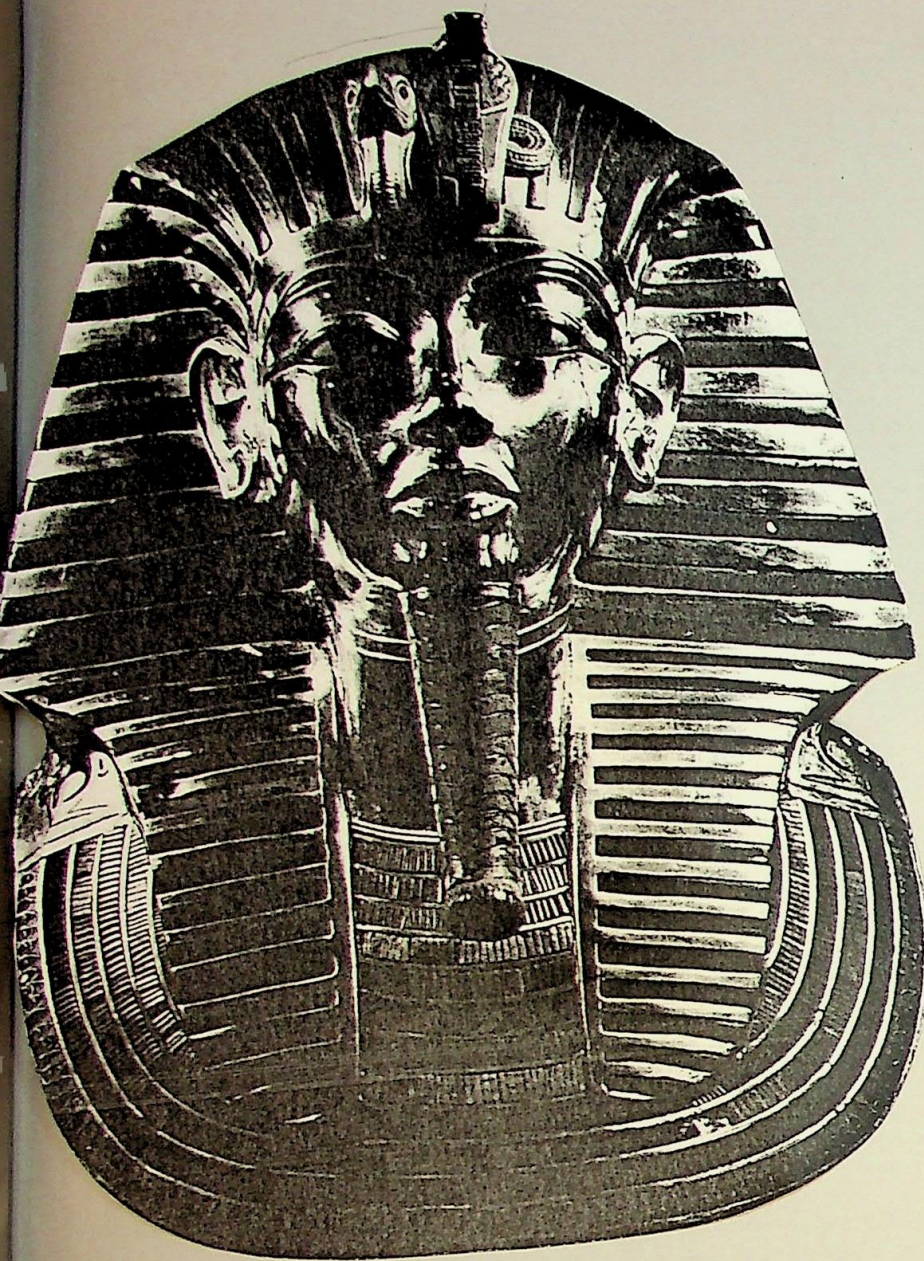


Illustration 4.1.

Mask from the tomb of Tutankhamun discovered in 1922. It caused a craze for antiquity and a relook at primitive cultures.

Illustration 4.2. (Opposite)

Dressing table and chair designed by Michael Graves, shows (Memphis 1981) the hard edge geometric shapes associated with Art Deco.

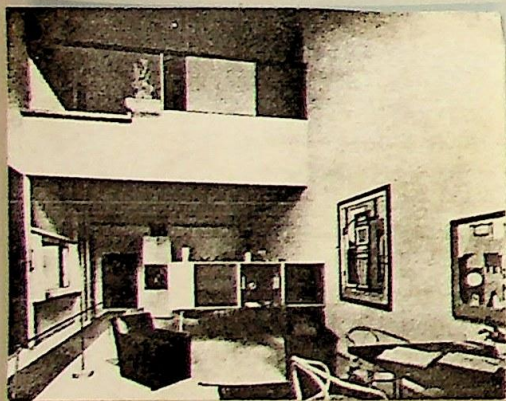


Illustration 4.3.

Le Corbusier l'Esprit Nouveau, showing the stark plain interior.



Illustration 4.4.

Rene Lalique watch of 1925, showing a fascination with geometric form and decoration.



# L'AMERIQUE DU SUD

A. M. CASSANDRE



PAR LE PAQUEBOT

## "L'ATLANTIQUE"

(40000 T.)

COMPAGNIE DE NAVIGATION  
SUD-ATLANTIQUE

### Illustration 4.5.

Showing Cassandra's direct approach characterized the period's craze for travel and speed.  
(l'Atlantique - 1931).

### Illustration 4.6.

Cassandra (C.M.S. - 1928) Poster for C.M.S. Railways.





characteristic and adopted it in pieces like Sottsass' 'Hyatt' table (Ill. 4.8.) and George Sowden's 'Oberoi' chair (Ill. 4.9.). Both Sottsass and Sowden's pieces evoke luxury of yesteryear by their solid, rigid appearance. The 'Hyatt' table is constructed of two slabs joined by four sturdy chrome pillars which gives it that sturdy appearance of its predecessor of fifty years, while Sowden's 'Oberoi' chair has been influenced by both Art Deco and the Bauhaus. The Bauhaus influence is seen in the semicircular ending to each block of the chair. A similar influence is seen in Andrea Branzi's work. Both chairs have a block appearance as if they have been constructed from slabs of composit, a common visual occurrence in Victorian furniture of the last century. Art Deco stylisation in the treatment of line and colour affected a wide range of decorative components. Energetic zig-zags, chevrons and lighting bolts were common motifs. De Lucchi and Sottsass have been influenced by these motifs. De Lucchi's patterned laminates are hard and aggressive with their defined edges showing the recurrence of the zig-zag in pieces like 'Traumatic' (Ill. 4.10.) and 'Michael' (Ill. 4.11.). Sottsass' 'Murmonsk' fruit dish (Ill. 4.12.) is similar to his 'Hyatt' table - the chrome pillars have been replaced with cylindrical zig-zags. Another common motif Sottsass has borrowed is the Aztec shaped plinths which appear regularly in his work exemplified by the 'Park Lane' table (Ill. 4.13.). Sottsass' most famous piece 'Casablanca' sideboard of 1981, in his own words is 'an altar to the god', inspired by South American primitive cultures (Ill 4.15.).

While German Expressionist Painters of the 20's and 30's emphasised the more decadent aspects of life, the Art Deco Paintings were a celebration of the vitality and gaiety of life.

"Today everything...is dedicated to life and not eternity". Ettore Sottsass Jr.  
(Ref. 15).

Memphis furniture, which is mainly geometric, forms with the emphasis on colour and decoration resembles Art Deco sculpture in its angularity which was influenced



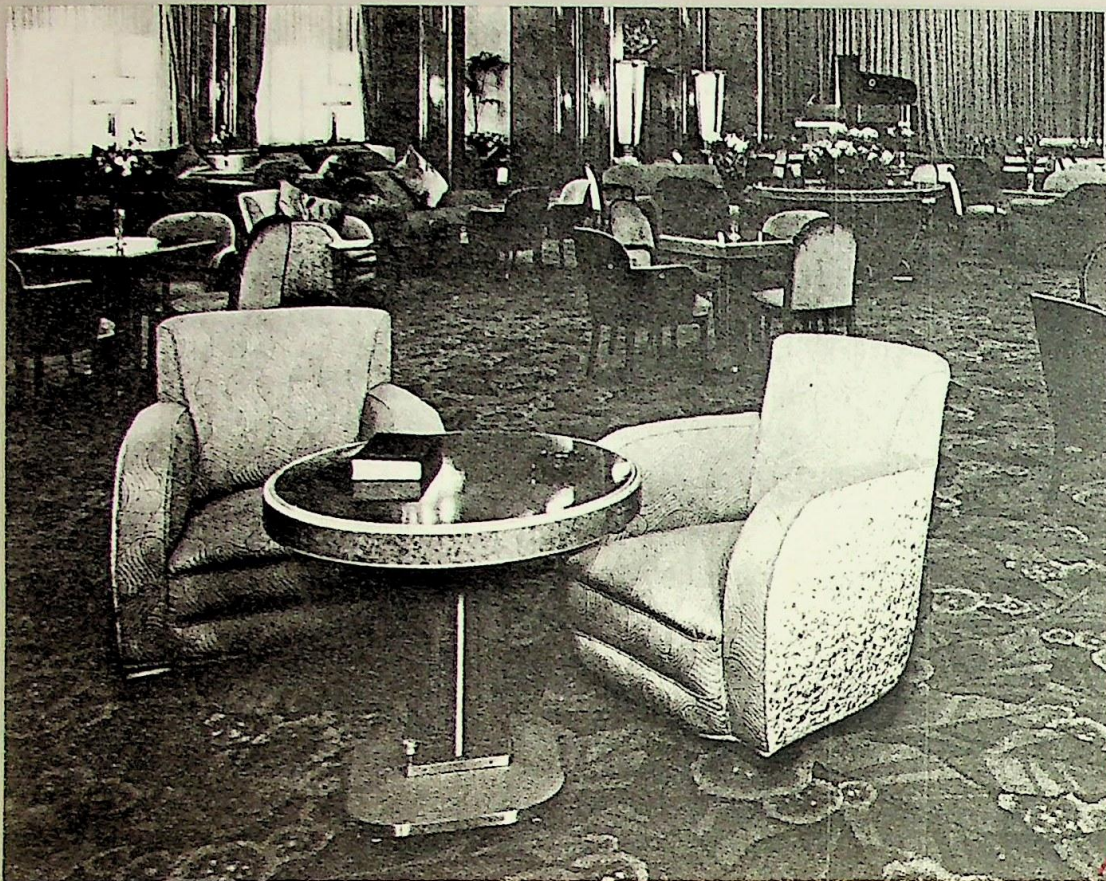


Illustration 4.7.

The main lounge cabin of the Queen Mary - 1935, exemplifying their preoccupation with comfort.

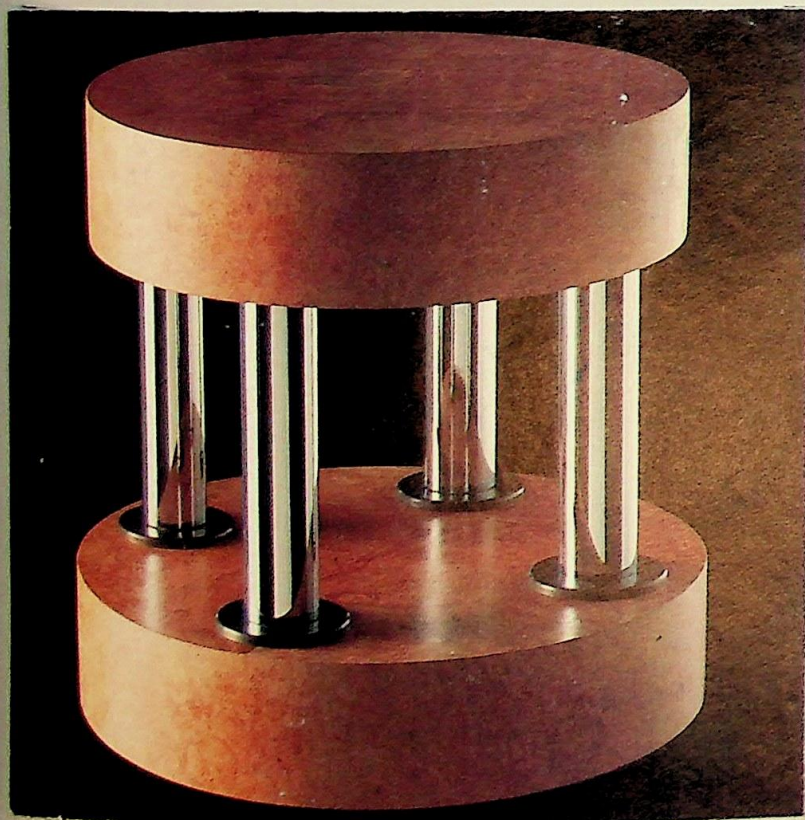


Illustration 4.8.

Ettore Sottsass' 'Hyatt' table for Memphis - 1982, evokes the luxury of yesteryear.



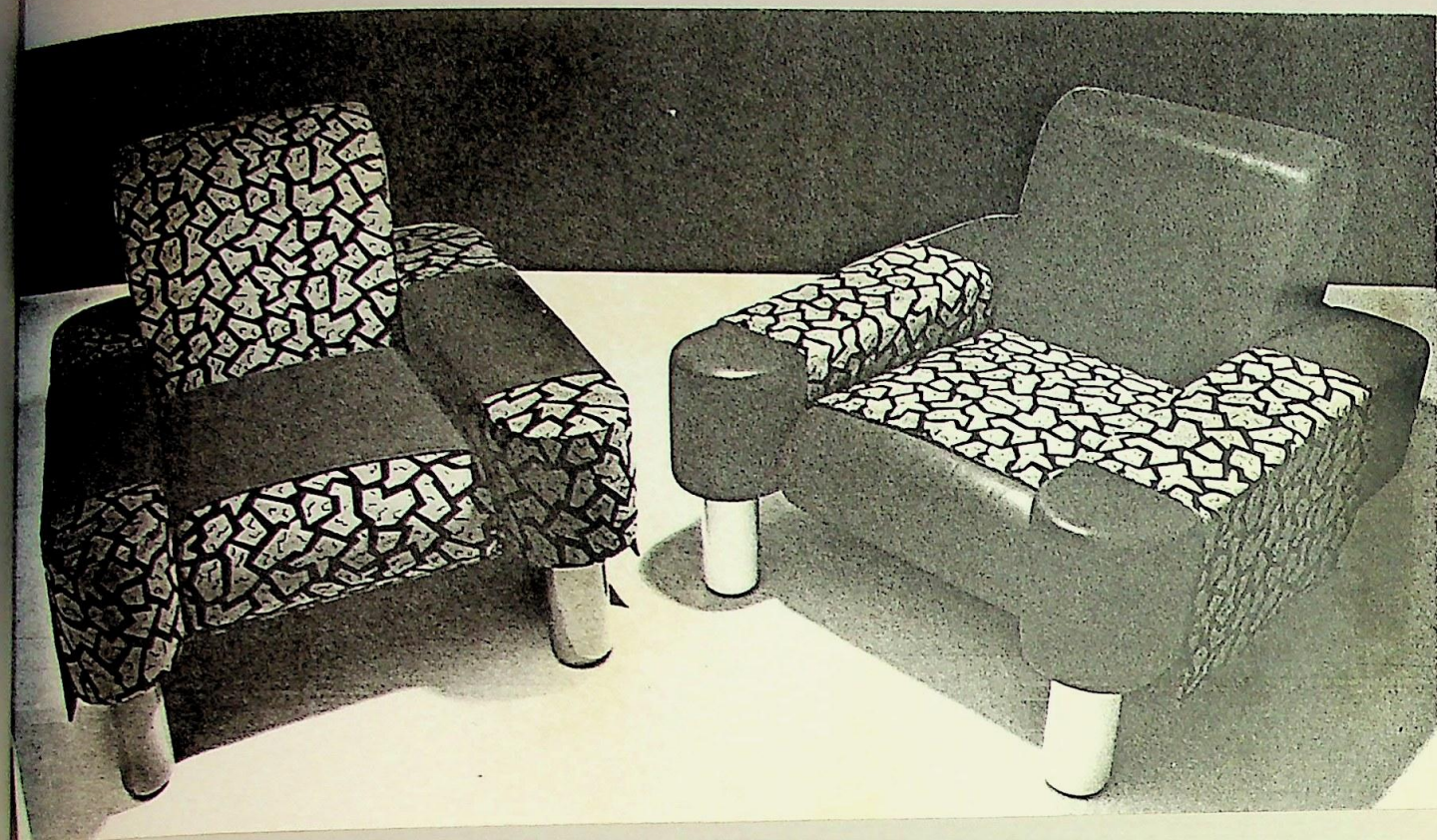


Illustration 4.9. George Sowden's 'Oberoi' chair (Memphis - 1981).



Illustration 4.10.

Michele Di Lucchi's plastic laminate  
'Traumatic' for Memphis - 1983.

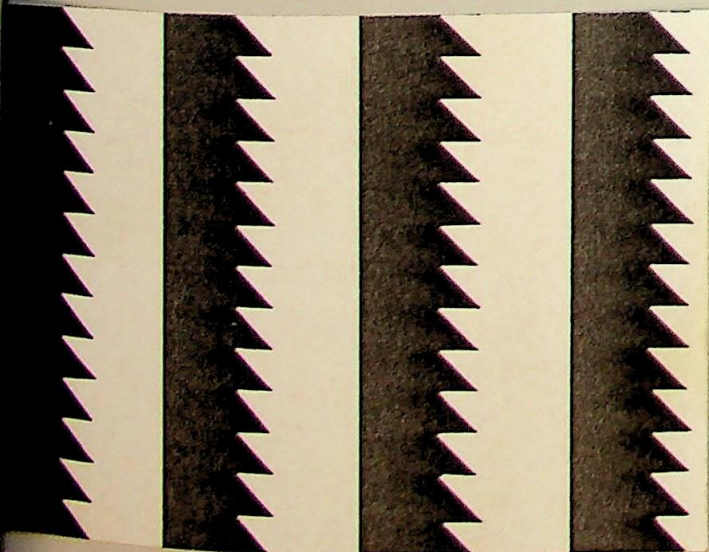


Illustration 4.11.

Michele Di Lucchi's plastic laminate  
'Micidial' for Memphis - 1981.



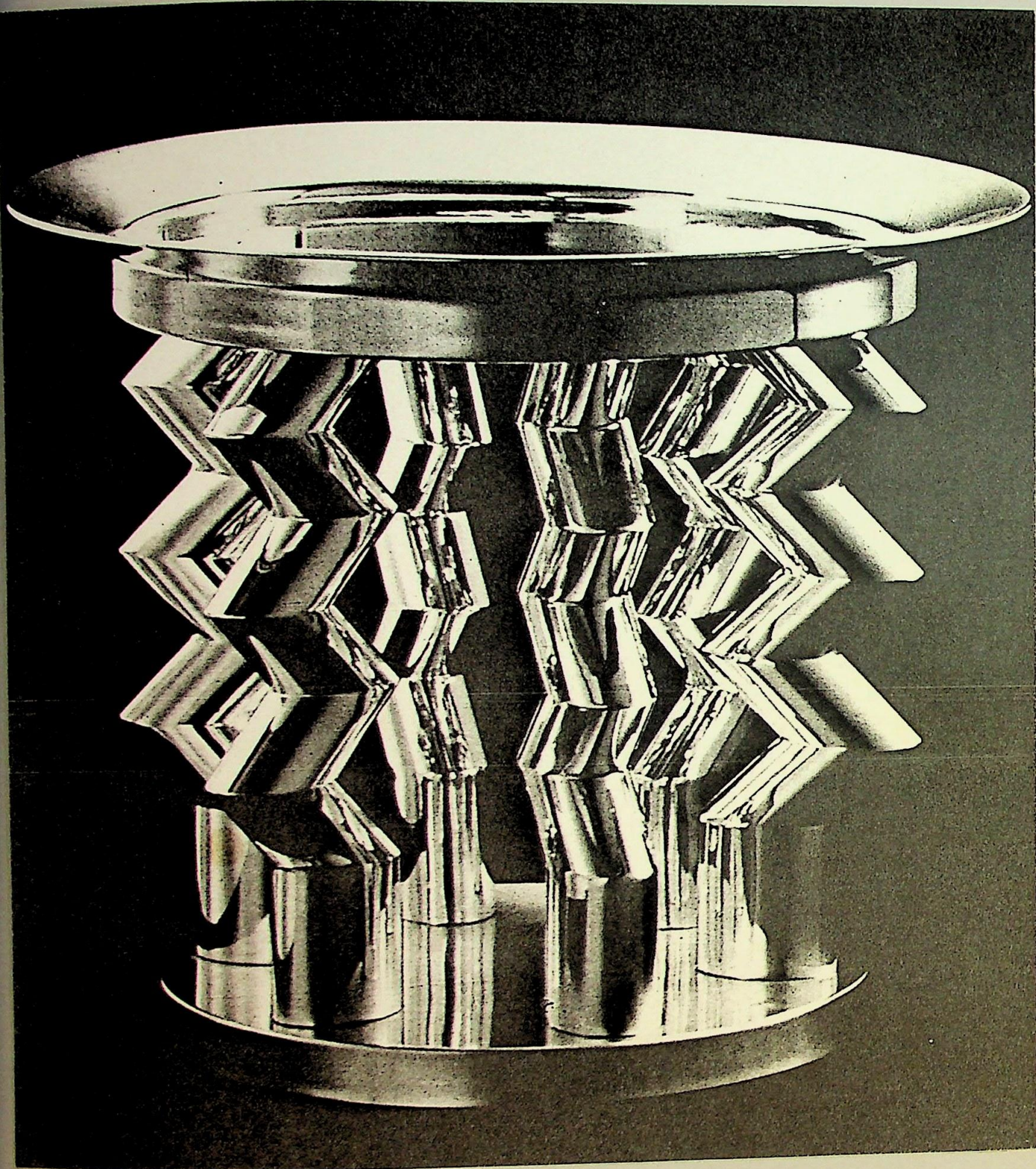


Illustration 4.12.

Ettore Sottsass' 'Murmansk' fruit dish (Memphis - 1982).



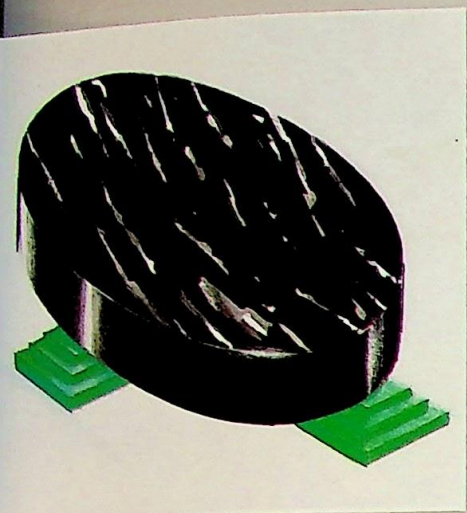


Illustration 4.13.

'Park Lane' table designed by Ettore Sottsass, Memphis - 1983.

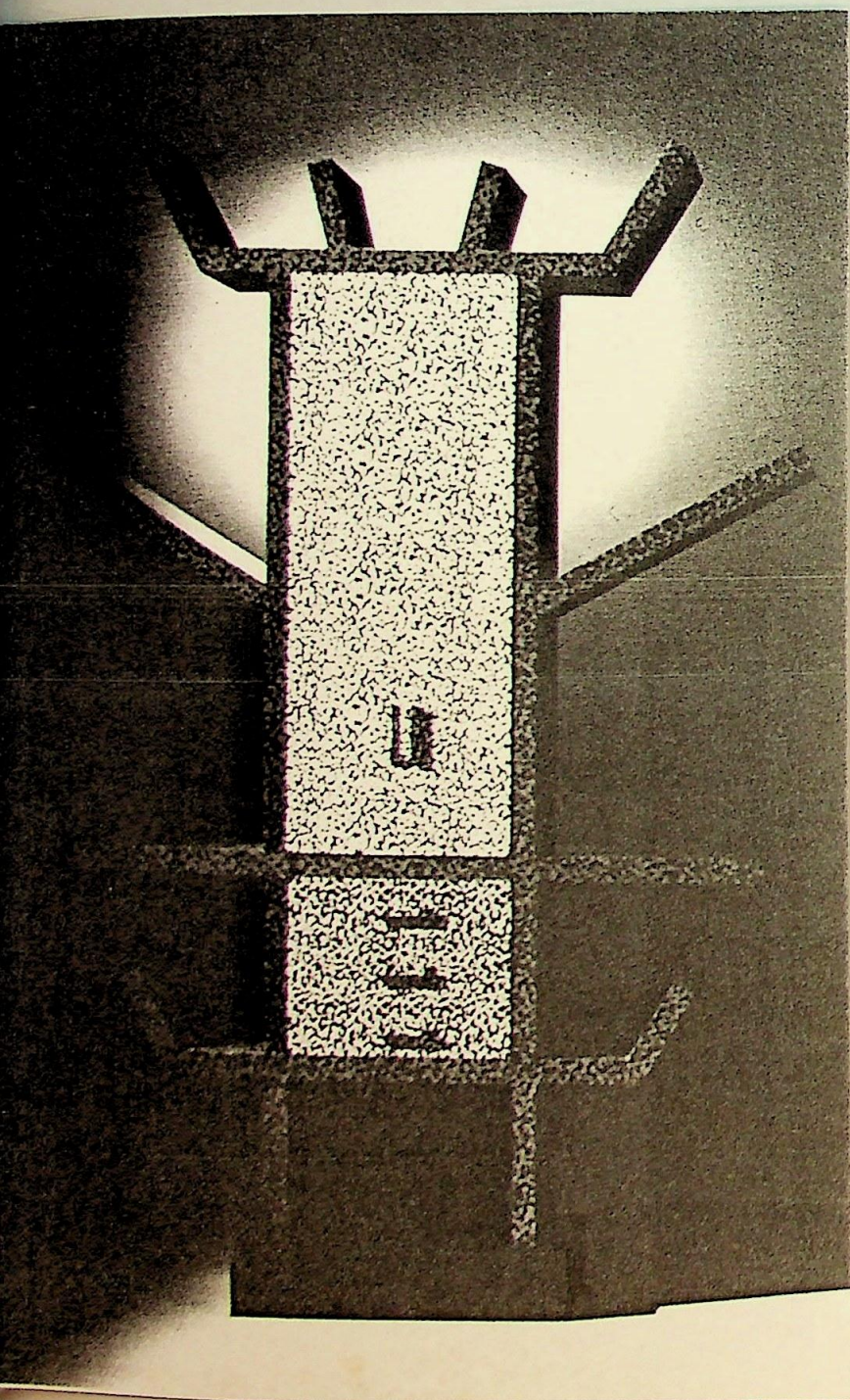


Illustration 4.14.

Sottsass' most famous piece  
'Casablanca', Memphis - 1981.



by the revival in primitive cultures.

Being the period of African Safaries and Colognies where the animals possessed strange and unusual hides, led to the introduction of these hides in the exclusive and exotic furniture where leopard, zebra and tiger skins were common materials for the renounded designers like Emile Jacques Ruffmann.

The fascination that Art Deco had for the exotic animal skins was not unique. It reappears in Pop Art with the introduction of leopard skin and zebra skin vinyl (Ill. 4.15.) and again in Memphis laminates (Ill. 4.16.).

Exotic materials such as ebony, embayna, buck walnut and cuban mahogany with their decorative grains and beautiful colours, were the essence for a style formed on elegance and attraction. These materials were often inlayed with ivory or mother-of-pearl, which were used in the name of sophistication, which horrifies Marco Zanini.

"Hoffmann often used precious materials like mother-of-pearl to draw lines. They were lines of mother-of-pearl, but they were essentially lines. If we use mother-of-pearl, that tells the story not the line". Memphis designer Marco Zanine (Ref. 16.).

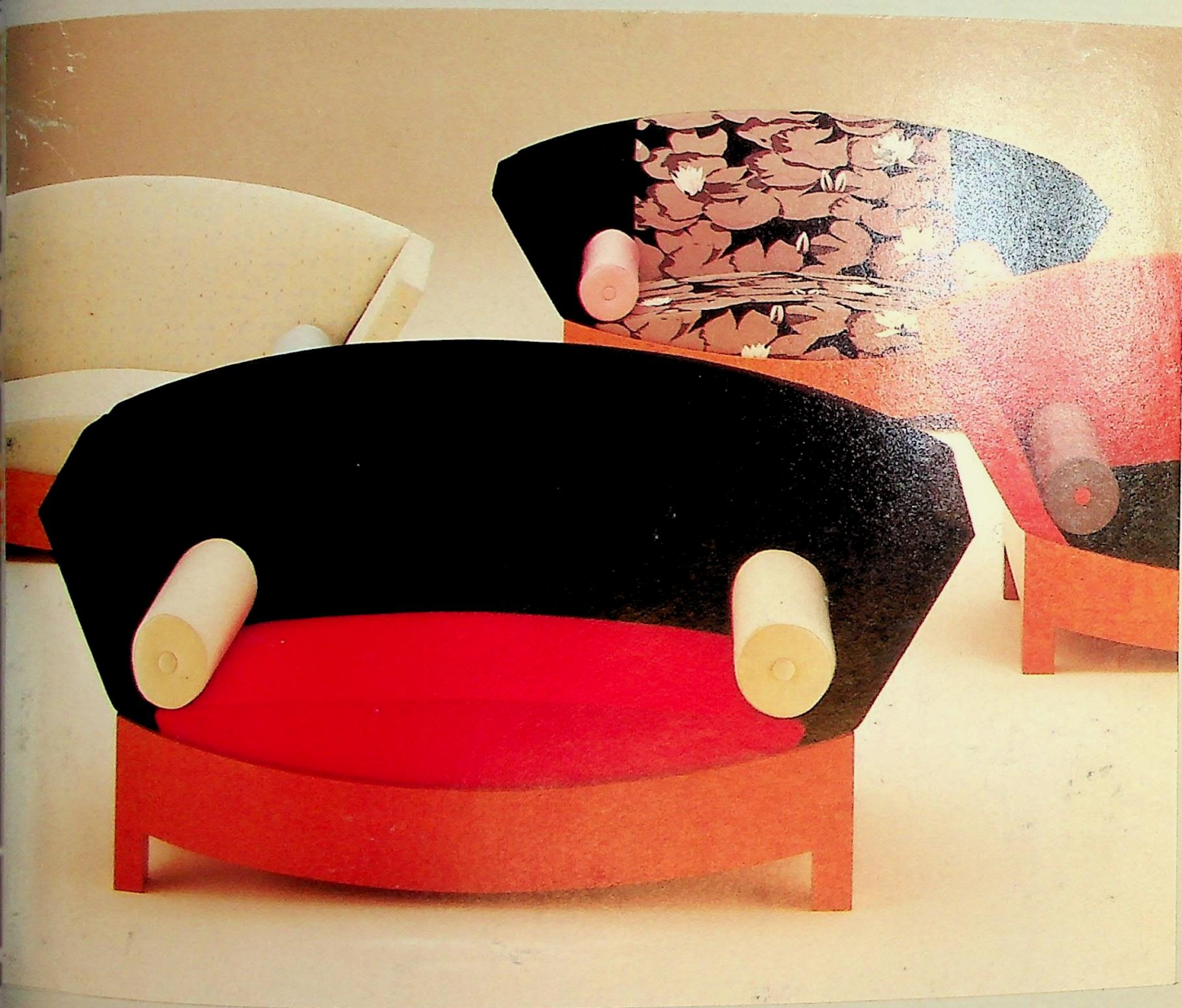
Similar to Memphis furniture, Art Deco was comprised of geometric forms and simple blocks. Designer Hans Hollgin trys to recapture the vitality and gaeity of Art Deco in his appropriatly named 'Mitzy' sofa (Ill. 4.17.). This piece is a graceful throwback to the thirties with its Art Deco patterned upholstery and stylized maple base.

Art Deco was responsible for the renewal of the oriental technique of lacquering pieces, the colours wer predominantly black, brown and gold. Memphis have borrowed techniques and apply it to all their pieces, but have no colour



Illustration 4.17.

Hans Hollein's 'Mitzy' sofa - 1984, shows a graceful throwback to the thirties with its Art Deco upholstery.





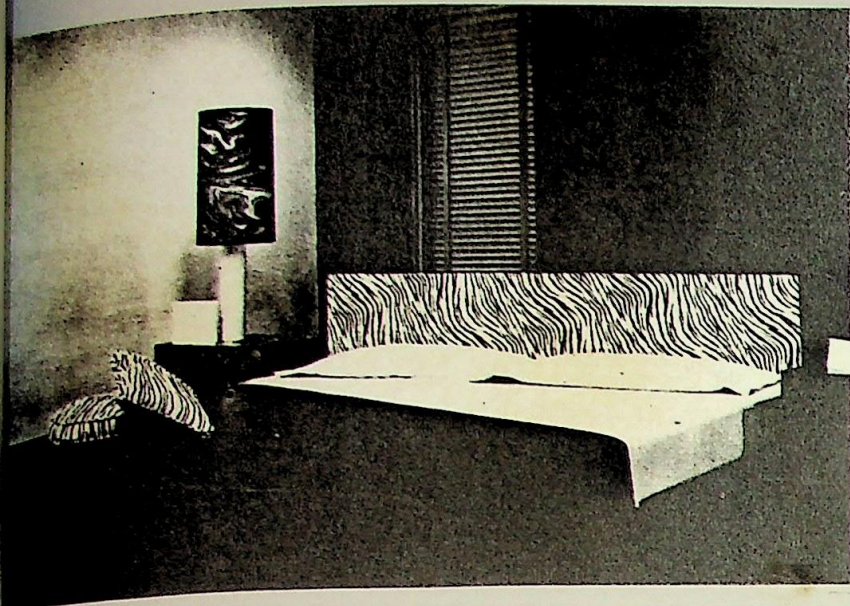


Illustration 4.15.

Claes Oldenburg's design for  
bedroom - 1964.

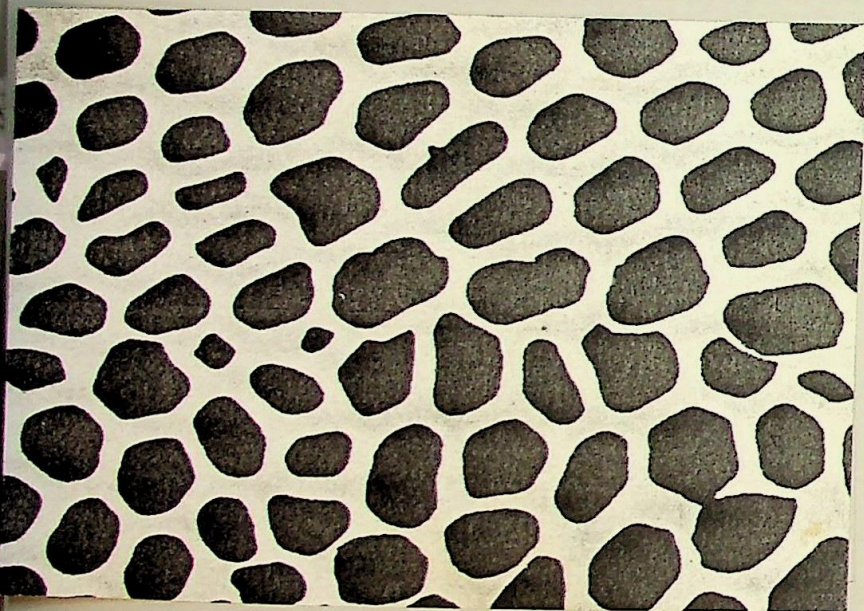
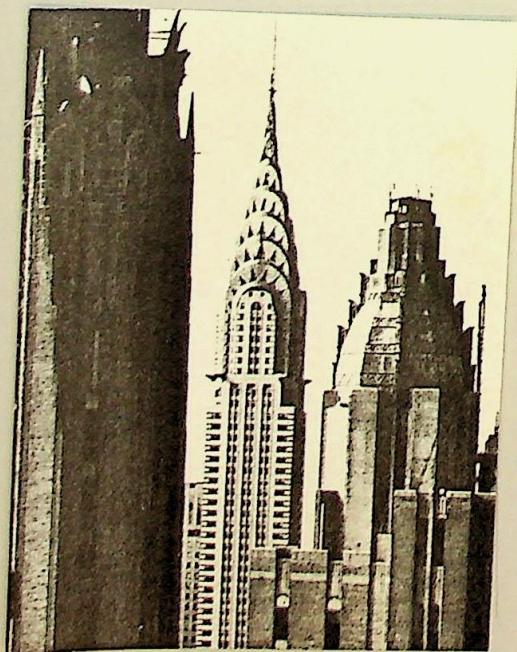


Illustration 4.16.

Sottsass' 'Serpente', laminate,  
Memphis - 1980.

Illustration 4.18.

Van Alen, Chrysler Building,  
New York - 1930.





restrictions. Anything that is not covered in laminate is lacquered.

Their ceramics were inspired by ancient civilizations in the near-far east and classical forms, coupled with Chinese glazing techniques. Similar eclectisms are inherent in Memphis ceramics designed by Matteo Thun.

Fashions of the twenties with their short hair styles, created a need for long dangling earrings and long strands of coloured beads of pearls, which were used to emphasise the lower neck line and waist line. Platinum, diamonds, emeralds and sapphires were typical elements for the more extravagant Art Deco jewellery (Ill. 4.14.). Art Deco simplicity and richness gave rise to mass production imitations in chrome, paste and bakelite. Here we see a distinct division between expensive materials and imitations. In Memphis there are no imitations as Marco Zanini would say (Ref. 14.). Memphis let the material tell its own story and it is not uncommon to find marble in a juxtaposition with aluminium or fiberglass, because cheap or expensive, each material has its own textures and qualities.

"Truth to Materials". William Morris (Ref. 17.).

While Paris was the centre of Art Deco, it could not boast as New York could of its "Cathedrals of Commerce, or Castles in the sky". The two most famous Art Deco skyscrapers are the Empire State Building and The Chrysler Building (Ill. 4.18.), New York.



THE RATIONALISTS

"A NEW ARCHITECTURE FOR A NEW SOCIETY"



"A recent Exhibition at the New York Architectural League showed that the formal sources for recent experiments in Post Modern Architecture could be found in traditional Minanese Buildings of the 1920's and 30's". (Ref. 18.)

The Rationalists were Italy's contribution to the Modern Movement, but always remaining radical in the sense of having a high degree of freedom from the strict canons of the Modern Movement with a more sculptural approach (Ill. 5.1.).

The Rationalists emergence on the Italian design scene was through interior design (with the first Rationalist creation being Ivo Ponnaggi's Casa Zampini - 1925 (Ill. 5.2.)) and later through Architecture (Ill. 5.3.).

The Futurists viewed Architecture as aesthetic (Chapter 2, Ill. 2.1., 2.6.), while the Rationalists saw it as a working system - analysis and design solutions could be achieved.

The Rationalists, while living in a Fascist country, were not sympathetic and had a firm association with Anti-Fascist Movements. They sought the modification of the human race as did the Fascists and Nazis and they demanded extreme measures as did the latter, their starting point being the human component. Today, the vast markets towards which design has always aspired has disappeared. In their place we find numerous semantic groups, new cultural sets that make up society, eliminating the old social classes. These groups are divided under numerous headings - fashion, religious, linguistic etc., which demands merchandise capable of selecting its own user. There is no longer a credible and comprehensive matrix of natural needs by which every object can be given adequate solutions; design must be able to produce industrial goods which will simultaneously display impeccable technical performances and distinct signs of cultural identity and must also induce strong emotions. Memphis has adopted the Rationalist reference point of the individual and this is evident in De Lucci



work where he tries to render domestic appliances and furniture less hostile and alienating by making them look like toys (Ill. 5.4.).

"It is a technology that is marked not only to intelligence but also to imagination. It enters into our homes as decorative objects or joins onto our body as organic prolongation of the epidermis". De Lucchi explaining his philosophy in relation to his hi-fis (Ref. 19.).

The Rationalists' international culture was to be based on reason and technology. The plan being to change man through their actions and hence changing their mental behaviour. With society being so complex and segmented, Memphis has reversed this by initiating a change of thought followed by a change of action. Sottsass would say that you can think what you want, just as long as you think. Sottsass was trained as a Rationalist architect and the influence of the Rationalists geometric forms can be seen in his work and also in the work of other Memphis designers.





Illustration 5.1.  
Giuseppe Terragni's 'Benita'  
chair, showing a more fluid  
design than Mies Van der Rohe's  
rationalized chair.

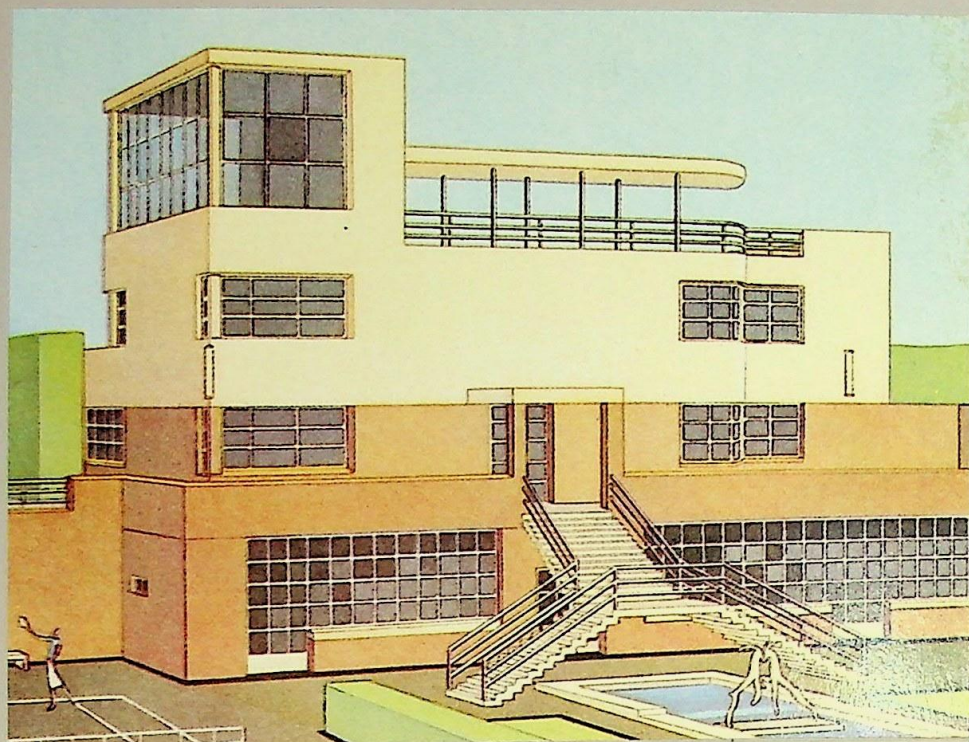


Illustration 5.3.  
Giuseppe Pagano and Levi Montalcini's Villa  
in Collina, Torino - 1930. Rationalist  
Architecture..

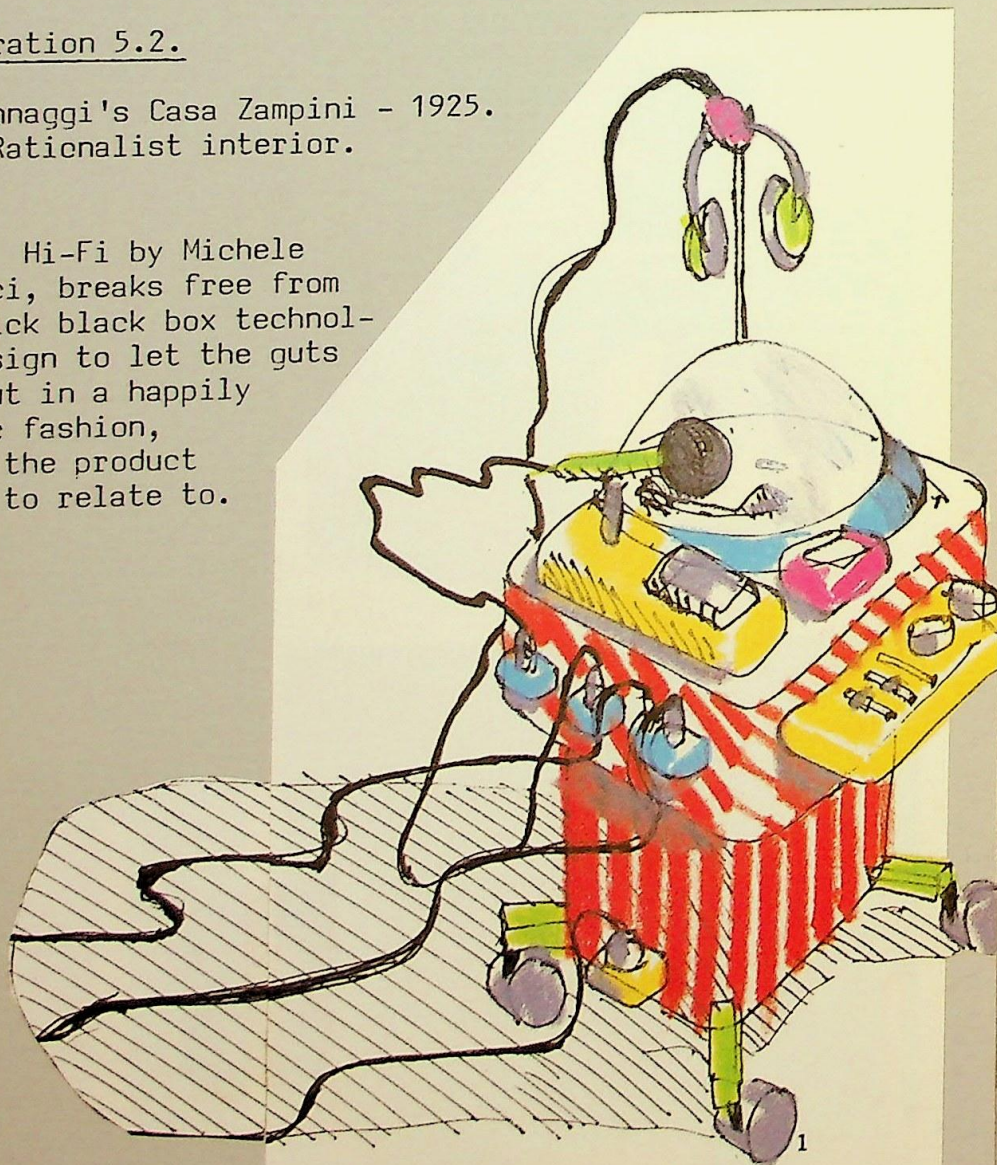


Illustration 5.2.

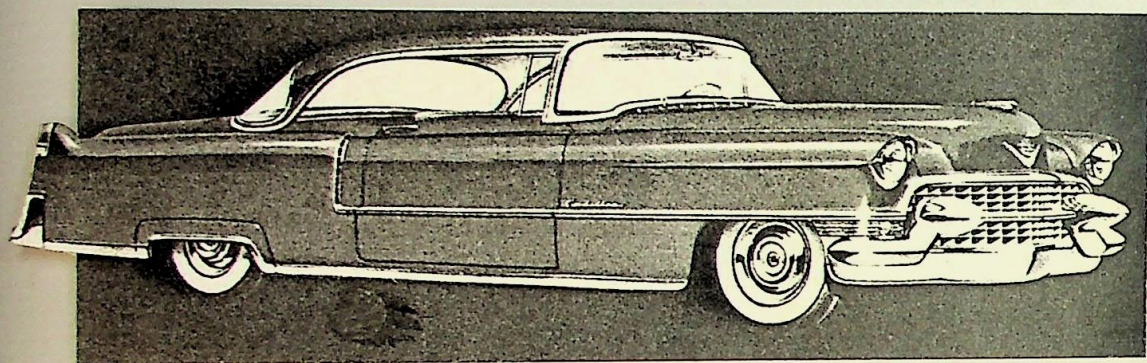
Ivo Pannaggi's Casa Zampini - 1925.  
First Rationalist interior.

(Left) Hi-Fi by Michele  
De Lucci, breaks free from  
the slick black box technol-  
ogy design to let the guts  
hang out in a happily  
chaotic fashion,  
making the product  
easier to relate to.

Illustration 5.4.







THE AGE OF STREAM LINING



'Modo', an Italian avant-garde Magazine, rescribed Memphis as been "A reaction against the formal techno-functional aesthetic of the masters of the 1950's - '60's".

Genealogically and otherwise, a son is influenced by his father and Memphis, while being Zenus the son who overthrew his father to become the supreme god, can not help but have been influenced by the 1950's style.

The 50's was a prosperous era, which saw an increase in wealth of social groups who up until then never had enough money to spend on anything more than the bare essentials.

This wealth saw the surge of style-conscious goods for the mass market which were excessable to all. In this air of optimism, manufacturers increased their output and experimented with new materials like metal, their alloys and of course plastics.

The product that reached the largest section of the mass audience was the automobile. In America styling had become the norm and all the big American Corporations had employed stylists since the 1920's to create their dream machines (Ill. 6.1.). The facination with rockets resulted in automobiles resembling them - projections on the front and rear, with the addition of chrome trim to exaggerate their long aerodynamic profile.

Industrial development of the Second World War and its advances in chemistry and physics, had discovered that solids were not solids. Discoveries in engineering and rocketry resulted in the launching of the first artificial Satelite in 1957 (Ill. 6.2.), sending the world into ecstasies and would have done the same for the Futurists. A Satelite seemed to represent the ultimate triumph over nature:



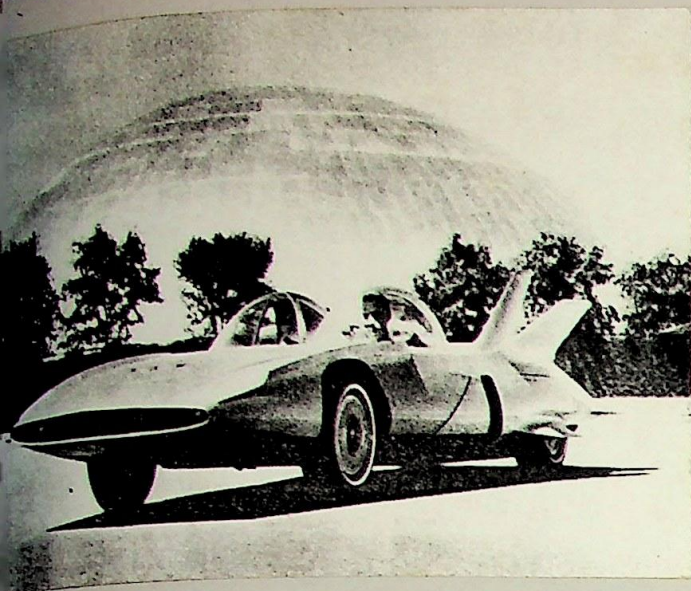


Illustration 6.1.

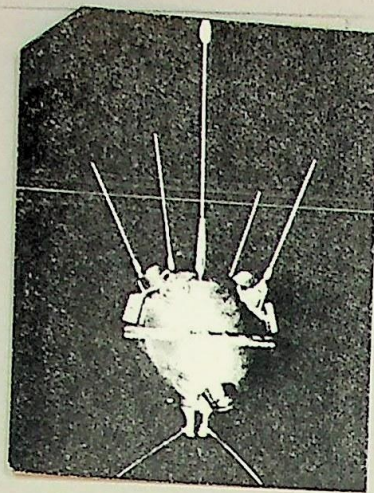


Illustration 6.2.



(Top Left) An American 'Dream Machine', resembling a rocket with fins and bubble hoods.

(Top Right) 'Sputnik', the first mechanical satellite - 1957.

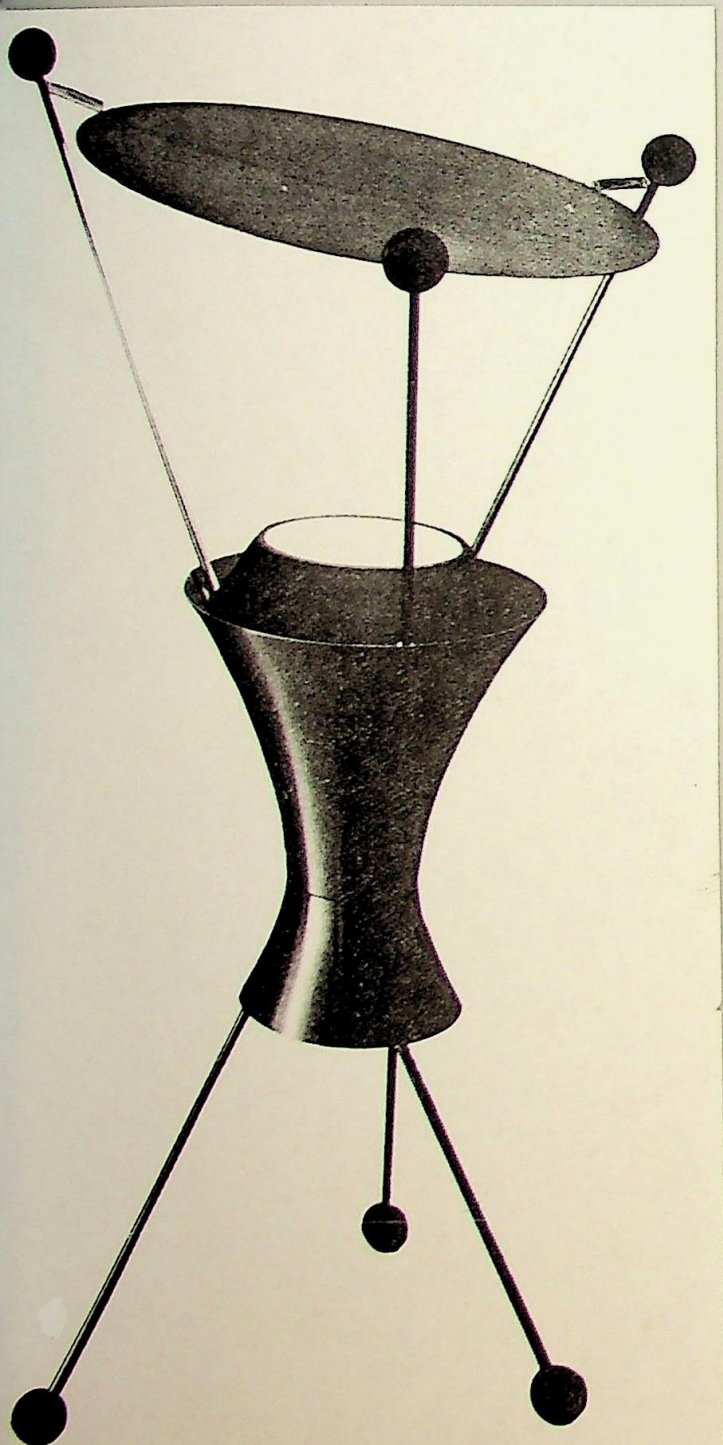


Illustration 6.3.

(Left) Lamp design by James Crate showing his preoccupation with space and fusion.



once up there, staying for ever, free from the burdon of gravity. 'Sputnik' motifs appeared on everything from teacups to scooters. Aesthetics were also dominated by the discovery of fussion, coat stands, lights (Ill. 6.3.), and architecture were all encaptured (Ill. 6.4., 6.5.).

Spheres were a common motif of the 50's, which have become an adopted motif for Memphis creations. Michele De Lucchi's 'First' (Ill. 6.6.) chair, which may just appear as a juxtaposition of circular objects, has a greater insight on examination. The torso is encircled in an orbital with two electrons which are representative of the two electrons which fill the first shell (orbital) closest to the nucleus (the body) shows the intellectual derivative of such an apparently simple piece. Streamlining was clearly a style intended to appeal to aspiring Americans whatever their income. Torpedos, Zeppelins and Tear Drops were all inspirations for these aerodynamic(?) automobiles (Ill. 6.7.).

Europe was been weighed down by the velvet drapes of the old aristocracy, resulting in her automobiles been more utilitarian, with their aesthetics been dictated by engineers rather than stylists (Ill. 6.8.). Although there was never much evidence that streamlined automobiles were more aerodynamic than chunky ones and the virtue of streamlining fridges (Ill. 6.9.), foodmixers and pencil sharpeners (Ill. 6.10.) was a bit obscure, but the images they portrayed of clean, gleaming and powerful were extremely beneficial in helping America through the Depression.

Design was no longer the privilage of an exclusive few, but available to everybody. 1980 saw Memphis breaking away from Studio Alchymia's exclusiveness, elitism and high prices seeking not to create collectors pieces but furniture to be sold in stores, taken home and used every day.



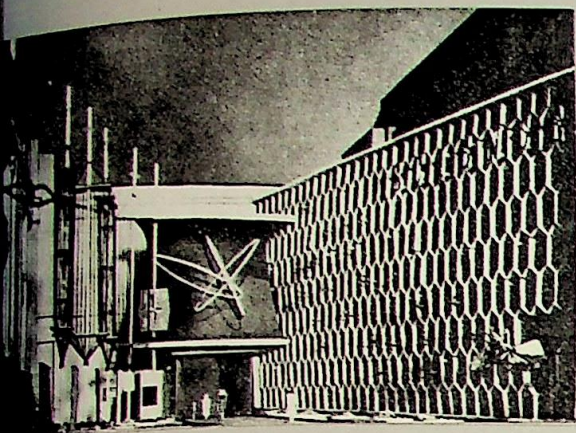


Illustration 6.4.

Science Exhibition at the Festival -  
51, London.

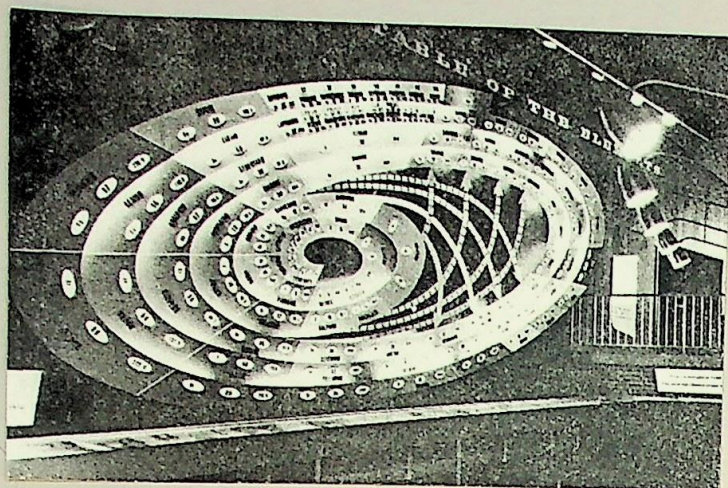


Illustration 6.5.

Periodic Table of Elements.

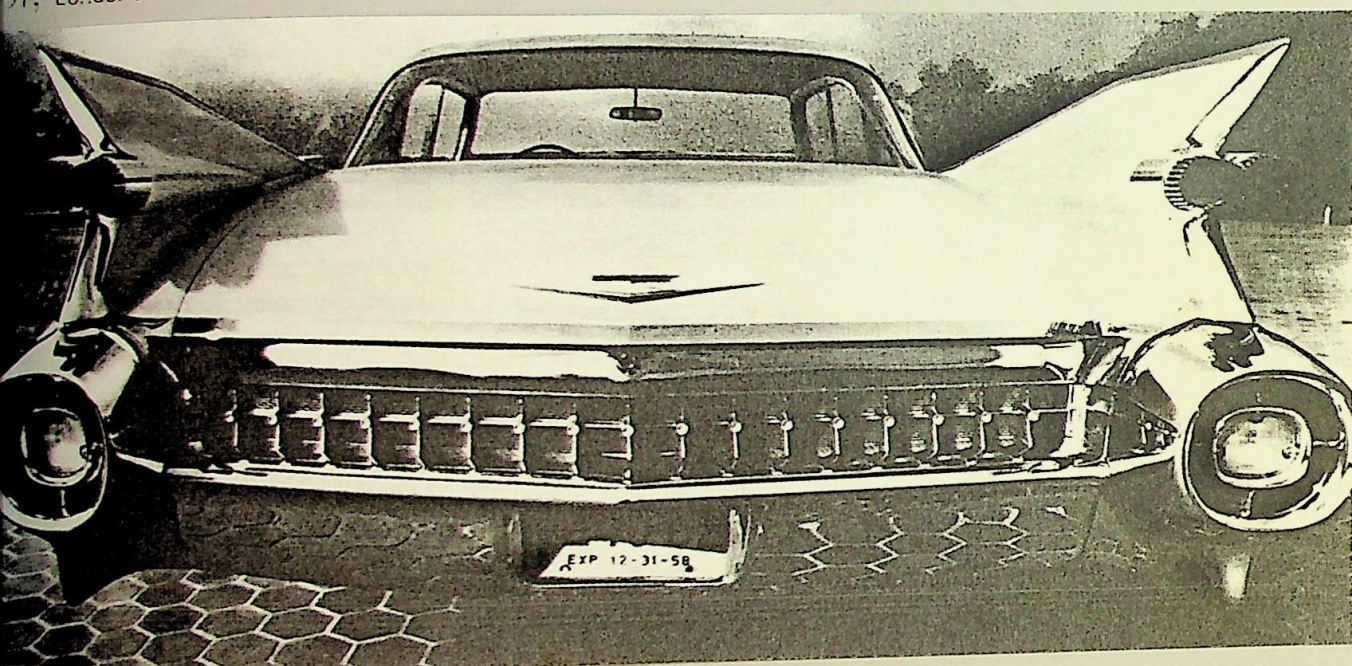


Illustration 6.7.

above) Cadillac looking like a Chrome Rocket.

Illustration 6.8.

below) Volkswagen 'Beetle'. European cars tended to be more utilitarian.



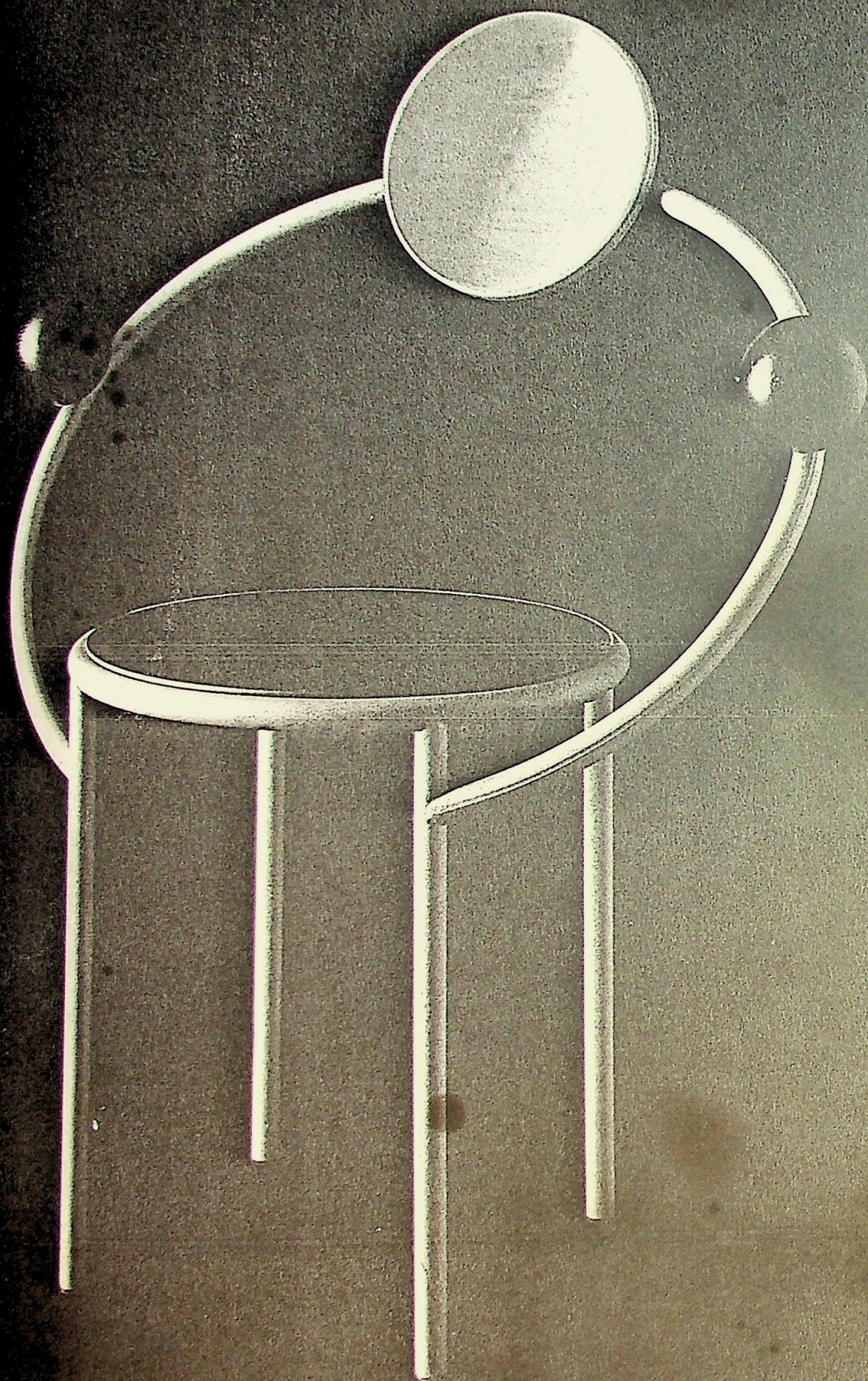


Illustration 6.6.

'First' chair, designed by Michele De Lucchi, inspired by basic atomic structure.



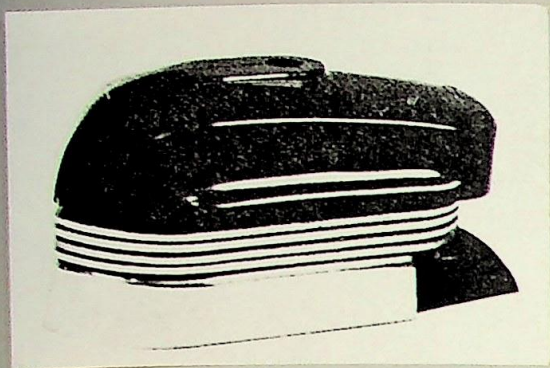


Illustration 6.10.

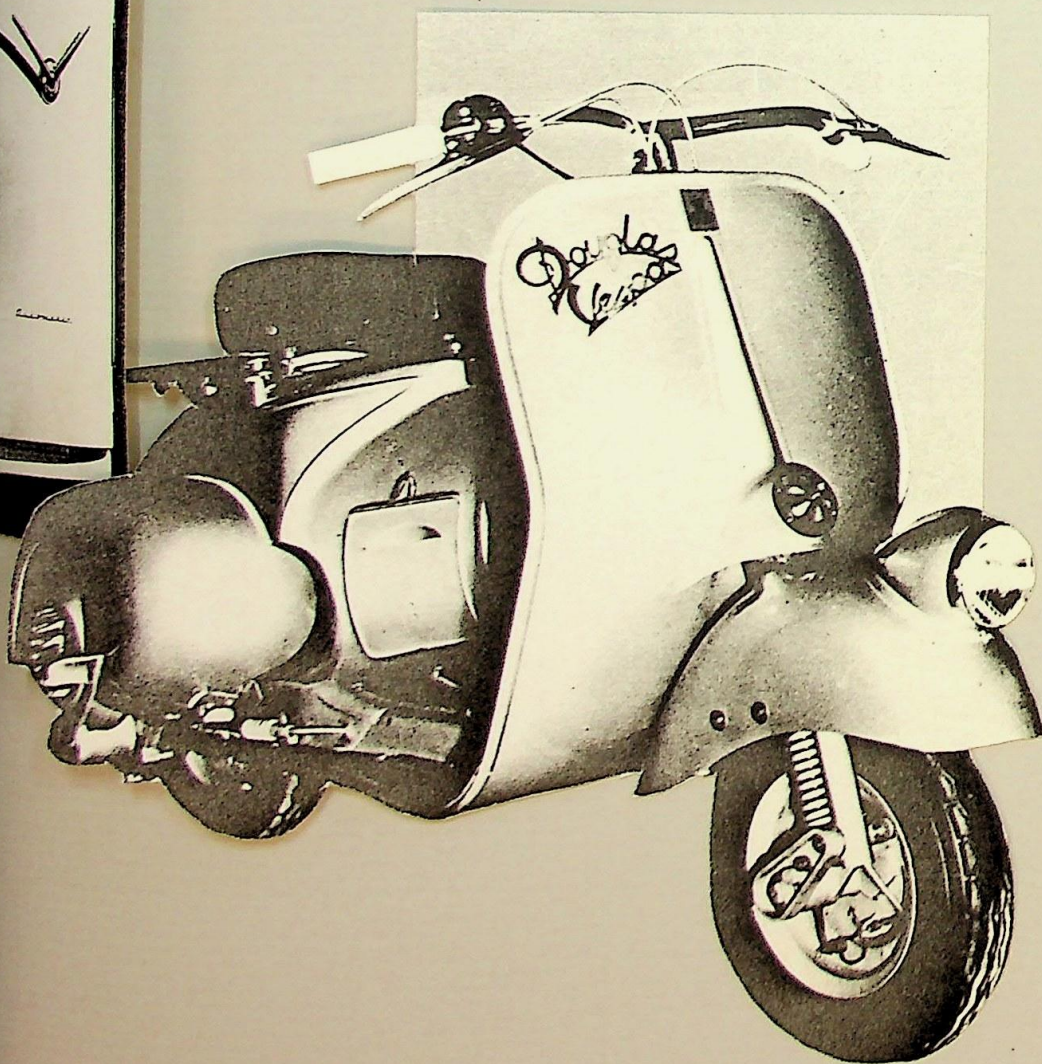
Streamlined Pencil sharpner.

Illustration 6.9.

Philco Streamlined Refrifgerator  
by Harold Van Doren.

Illustration 6.11.

(Below) Piaggio's 'Vespa' motor, part of  
the 'Italian Line', showing Italian  
sophisticated streamlining.





The Italian styling of the 50's was characterised by an elegant modification of the American streamlineing, exemplified by Marcello Nizzoli's 'Lexicon 80' typewriter, Gio Ponti's 'Espresso' coffee machine and Piaggio's 'Vespo' motor scooter (Ill. 6.11.). The 1950's sought to increase your leisure options with machines which aimed at eliminating the boredom of almost every task.

The complex Italian aesthetic of the 50's owed a great debt to surrealism and organic sculpture, which had surprisingly appeared in the 1937 Paris Exhibition. The 50's saw products gradually dropping the Victorian idea of eclecticism with highly ornate and decorative features. Things began to look more like pieces of cast stamped or pressed metal that they really were using just enough decoration to conceal ugly seams (Ill. 6.9.), conforming to William Morris' theory "Truth to Materials". While Memphis agrees with Morris, it also sees decoration as an essential feature in the overall design. As Sottsass would say, decoration and structure are one thing.

"In traditionally designed objects, the surface is a single unit. Until four or five years ago people devoted all their energies to make surfaces homogeneous, associable and continuous". De Lucchi (Ref. 23.)

Memphis furniture is built on decoration, a feature I am sure would shock the Modern Movement and is clearly evident in the work of Sottsass, De Lucchi and Sowden (Ill. 6.12.) American designers of the 50's, Walter Dikwin, Teaous, Raymond Loewy and Henry Dreyfuss were obsessed with the aesthetic and decorative potential of a whole new range of materials, including aluminium and plastics, with Dreyfuss creating an acetal telephone in a wide range of colours (Ill. 6.13.) which provided an early popular image for a modern machine. While furniture such as Charles Eames' were more concerned with bent and moulded plywood (Ill. 6.14.) These new shapes in wood were to dominate American living rooms of the 50's.



"We have to get off the pedestal, throw off our artistic 'aura' and to compete directly with industry in quality, quantity and image". Barbara Radice (Ref. 20).

While Memphis pieces are extremely expensive, it is only because the demand has not been big enough. The most successful Memphis piece has only sold 300.

Sottsass, justifying his prices, says, "Memphis is an experiment, like going to the moon, its very expensive". (Ref. 21.). Although some critics like James Woudhuysen and Deyan Sudjic would dispute that Memphis is aiming at the mass production.

"The nearest analogy is Zandra Rhodes in her punk phase, producing street fashions complete with rips and safety pins. But charging prices that only the despised bourgeoisie can afford". Woudhuysen (Ref. 22.).

"All Memphis pieces except for the blown glass, are designed for mass production. Zandra Rhodes decided to create individual pieces which she could have mass produced, but didn't, hence keeping the price high and unobtainable for the majority of the public. While Memphis, on the other hand, want their pieces to be mass produced at a reasonable cost, which was the very reason for the split from Studio Alchymia".

The Italian Design Revolution was taking place during the 50's and they had no illusions about it taking two hundred years as the British had.

The 'Recostruzione' period, after the war, highlighted Italian industries' lack of technology but faced with this dilemma, they created the 'Italian Line', which established a national and international image of design, thus compensating brilliantly for the technical weakness in production with the view to outmaneuvering the stiff opposition.



"There is a lot of similarity with the 50's in our work". Michele De Lucchi (Ref. 24.).

But Memphis amorphous decoration did not exist in the 50's, but it was the boomerang curves and gold veined counter tops of the 50's luncheonettes that are the fodder for Memphis' imaginative creations. Sottsass' first inspiration for his patterned plastic laminates came while in one of these luncheonettes, drinking coffee and sitting at a pink and blue veined counter. Memphis is more than 50's vernacular, it is the fulfillment of Robert Venturi's argument of twenty years ago which demonstrates that a designer can take a popular vernacular, accept its vocabulary of signs and symbols and transform it. Memphis have fulfilled his dream by taking plastic laminates, a metaphor of vulgarity, and taken out of them out of the hidden places like inside of cupboards and kitchens and boldly displayed them in more formal places like the hall and sitting room.

The Italians have always been quick to pick up on ideas and transform them like the laminates and streamlinings, which they took from the Americans. Taking the Americans robust streamlining, they modified it to create a more elegant Italian version like the 'Italian Line'. The use of curves was a general decision to get away from the geometric forms of the Rationalists to which Memphis have returned, hence bringing truth to the saying - history repeats itself.

According to De Lucchi, "Italy's current domination of design is due to architects; Italian design started because architects in Milan and Turin did not have any work, so they started to design, manufacture objects". (Ref. 25.).

Architects like Vico Magistretti, Ettore Sottsass, Achille and Pier Giacomo Castiglioni and Marco Zanuso were all trained in the Rationalist tradition of the 30's. This Rationalist theory of geometric forms is still prevalent in Sottsass and Memphis work, with all the pieces being constructed of hard edged



geometric forms.

The end of the 50's saw a calmer, more sophisticated fusion of technology and form, similar to the transformation that has overcome Memphis. Memphis' first exhibition in 1981 set out to affront and provoke good taste with anarchic and radical designs which were to lose some of their zap in the 1984 Milan Exhibition according to some.

"Its new pieces are more quieter, with wood laminates and darker colours contributing to a more sophisticated feeling collectively". (Ref. 26.).

It was the initial impact of the 1981 Memphis Exhibition with its new anarchic shapes (Ill. 6.17.), alien to anything that had been done before, which resulted in it making a lasting impression on us. Now we have come to accept Memphis and it is no longer a shocking sensation.

While Memphis have been influenced by the 50's styling, its biggest influence has been the philosophy to inject fun, gaiety and life into products, which can be seen in Michele De Lucchi's Hi-Fi (Ill. 5.4.), which breaks free from the slick black box technology designed, to let guts hang out in a happily chaotic fashion, making the product easier to relate to.

De Lucchi's 'Caoetto' table typifies the 50's influence, being aptly displayed with soda fountain, shaker and straws (Ill. 6.14.).



Illustration 6.12.

Henry Dreyfuss' design for Bell telephone.



Illustration 6.13.

(Below) Charles Eames - 1949 'From Modern Living Exhibition', shows his preoccupation with bent wood.

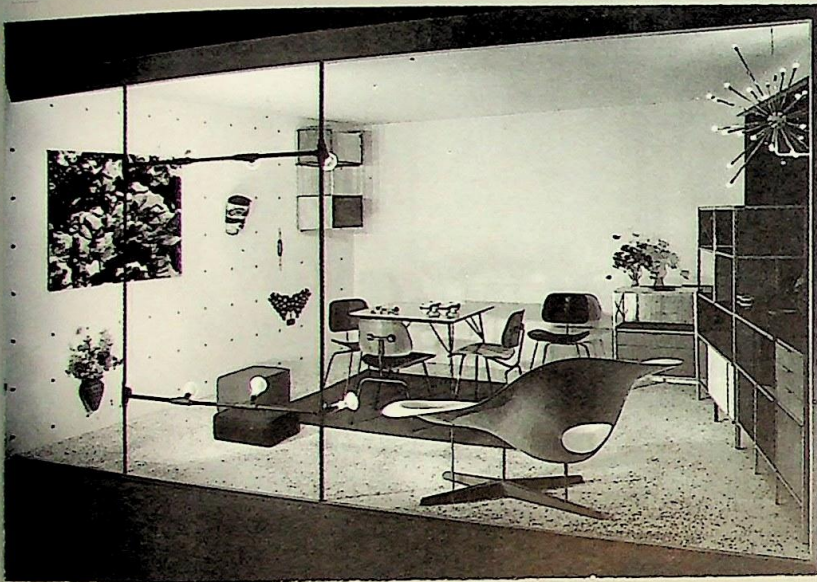
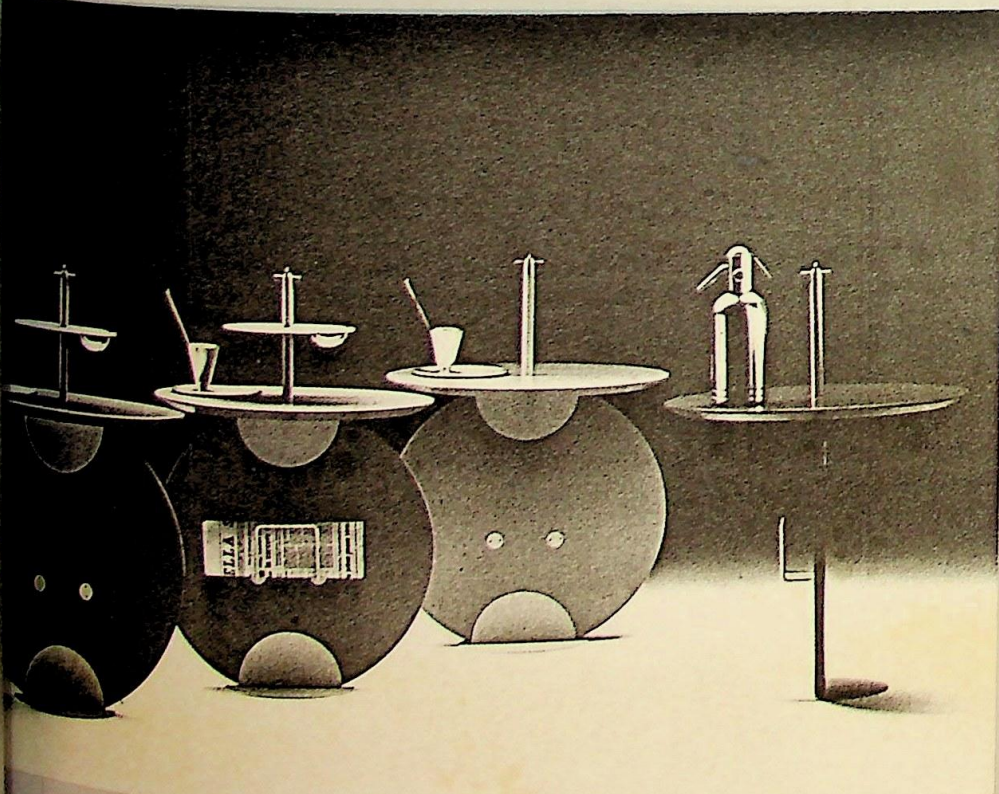


Illustration 6.14.

(Below) Michele De Lucchi's 'Caoetto' table.





POPISM

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Painting By Roy Lichtenstem



"We may have to learn to enjoy a complete new palette, for gaudy colours have long been associated with expendable ephemera"

Paul Realy Design Council London.

The inspiration for the name Memphis came from the song, Stuck Inside A Mobile With Those Memphis Blues Again by a cult figure of the 60's Bob Dylan. The 609 were dominated by the exploration of mass culture and by a constant research for stylistic novelty.

In an exhibition in the late 50's in the Museum of Modern Art in New York it became apparent that a new style was on its way. Inspired by Hollywood movies, Advertising and new Pop Music which was soon to invade homes all around the world.

Together with American financial assistance to Europe came the awareness of the newest and most important consumer the teenager. They had a considerable disposable income to spend on luxury goods and life style accessories. This consumerism drove a wedge between youth and their parents. The introduction of Rock 'n' Roll to Europe also brought with it ready to wear clothes, blue jeans which were originally born as fashionable article of large scale mass products and devoid of any real expressive features. Became the culture base out of which developed some of the most existentialist fashions of the period Teddy Boys, Rockers, Hippies. Memphis has done the same with its cultural base of plastics laminates. Society was becoming segmented and design in turn tried to become more pluralistic. To cope with it, today this is more prevalent as Ettore Sottsass says.



" If somebody comes to me with a new light fitting we will work on it for two or three months. There was a time when I would have known what the product was supposed to do and ..... Avanti Today I am not sure I don't know what to do and in what style to do it... The relationship with the groups that are going to use the product have grown so complex that I simply just don't know how to touch the people. I am not familiar with "Ettore Sottsass (Ref 26).

The Modern Movement with its hand and fast roles had arrived at its day of reckoning. Design had now become more eclectic and openminded dealing mainly with short-term rather than long term and marked with birth of the throw away ethic. (ILL7.1) Functionalism no longer had a say in the context of mass throw away culture. They sought style rather than eternity.

Design is dedicated to life and not eternity Ettore Sottsass Popism offered a popular alternative to the concept of good design as Memphis offers an alternative to the conservative styles of today (ILL 7.2, 7.4. The bright coloured curved forms that made up the pop style proved a much needed vitality in man's environment.

Jonathan De Pas inflatable divan is an example of this vitality (ILL 7.3). Comparing it to Di Lucchi 'Lido' sofa (ILL 7.4) we can immediately see its sensual, exocit and even phallic form echoing the emphasis on sexuality of the period, while De Lucchi's sofa as an upright, definite asserting quality a product of our time. Both





Illustration 7.1

(Above) Peter Murdocks  
"Paper" Chair (1965) Showing  
The Transience of Popism

(Top Right) 'Sinbad' Chairs  
By Vico Magistretti (1982)  
The Essence Of Good Taste

(Middle)  
Jonathan De Pas  
Inflatable Chair 1967  
Showing a sensual exact quality

(Below)  
Michele Di Lucchi  
'Lido' Sofa for Memphis  
1981 A Striking Piece  
of Furniture



Illustration 7.2

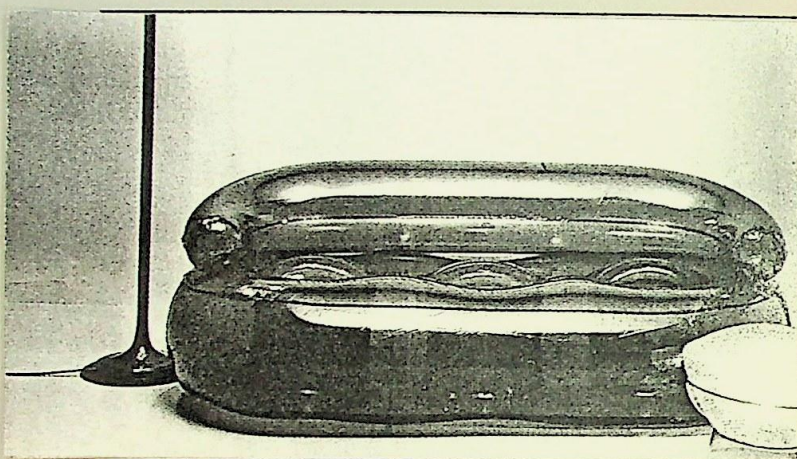


Illustration 7.3

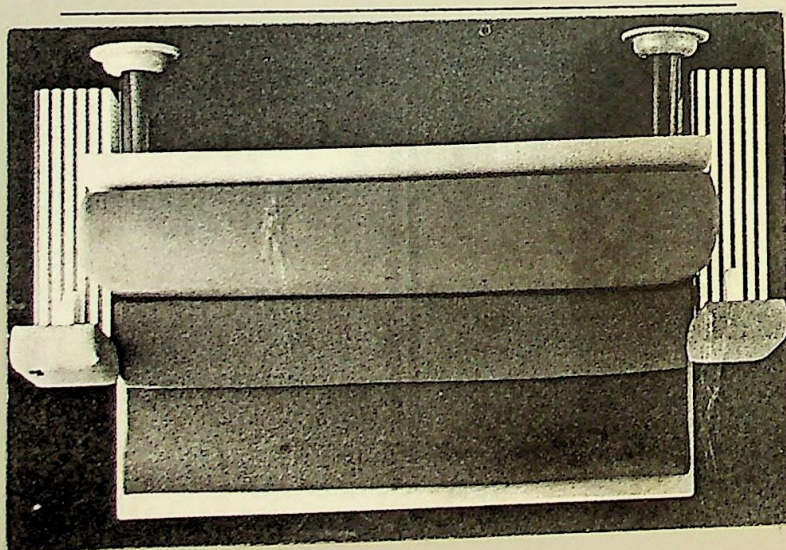


Illustration 7.4



Both pieces are linked in their efforts to inject life into products, making the fun furniture easier to associate with an live with.

Their preoccupation with sex can be seen in paintings like Tom Wesselmann's 'Great American Nude, 48', 1963 (Ill. 7.5.). Seduced by the images of pop music and its culture, inspired English artists and critics to meet in London to try and analyse the imagery of American mass culture, concentration on movies, advertising and automobile styling, resulting in Robert Hamilton's 1956 College of American magazine advertisements. Just what is it about today's home that makes it so different, so appealing? (ill. 7.6.).

The Pop artists' works were catalists in isolating and making respectable such notions as bright colours; paving the way for creations like Memphis' brightly coloured laminates (Ill. 7.7.) being applied to office interiors, domestic appliences, ect. Lichtenstein's impactful comic book imagery (Ill. 7.8.) has been a direct influence on Sottsass, resulting in him putting Mickey Mouse feet on an Olivetti secretary's chair and his red 'Valentine' typewriter (Ill. 7.9.). Pop imagery, science fiction, advertising and comic had another instantly appealing visual quality - surface patterns, which occure in all Memphis' pieces, where pattern is a major component (Ill. 7.4.). Memphis as Popism came about because of designers' dissatisfaction with the antiquated ideas about design that had been inherited from the Modern Movement.

The wealthy young markets were ready to buy the transient pop objects and it was now up to the retailers, entrepreneurs and manufactures to fulfill these needs. Clothes were the first to be revolutionised because it was easier to promote style in fashion items and cheap accessories than in more expensive goods. Mary Quant pioneered pop fashions with the opening up of boutiques and also using unsophisticated models in an attempt to make her fashions identifiable with the young.

The young, energetic graduate desingers strove to break down the barriers between



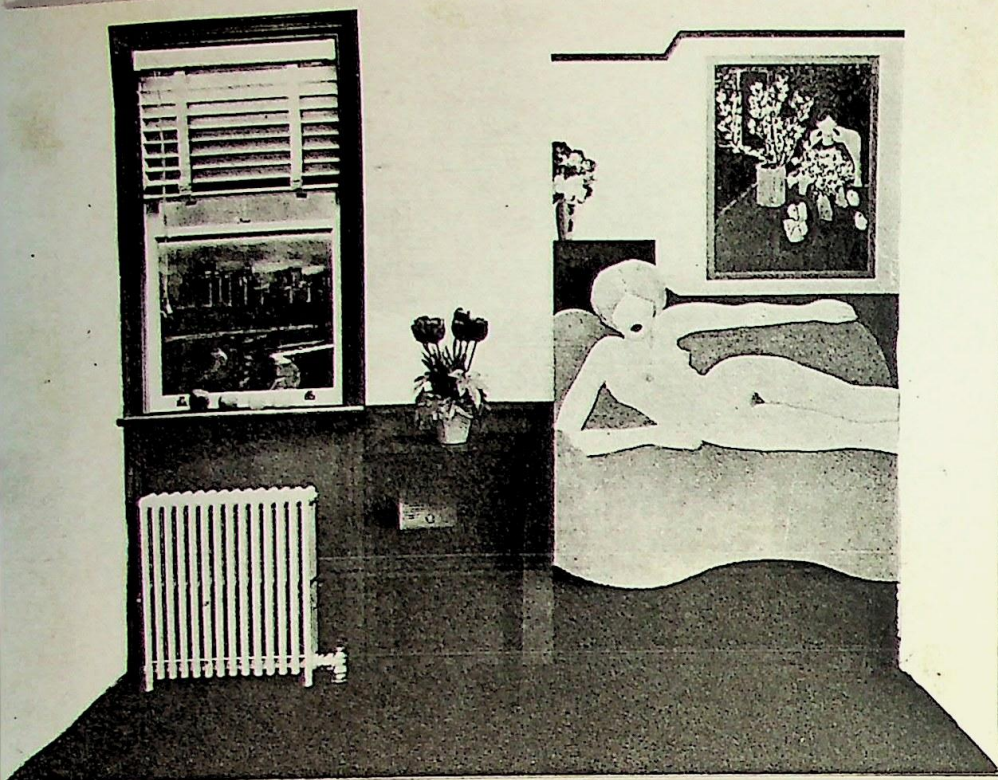


Illustration 7.5



Illustration 7.6

(Top) Tom Wesselmann's  
'Great American Nude 48'  
1963

(Left) Robert Hamilton's  
'Just What Is It About  
Today's Home That Makes  
It So Different, So Appealing ?'

(Bottom Left)  
Memphis Brightly Coloured  
Laminate 'Traumatic' is an  
office interior



Illustration 7.7

(Below) Lichtenstein's 'Whaam'  
1962



Illustration 7.8



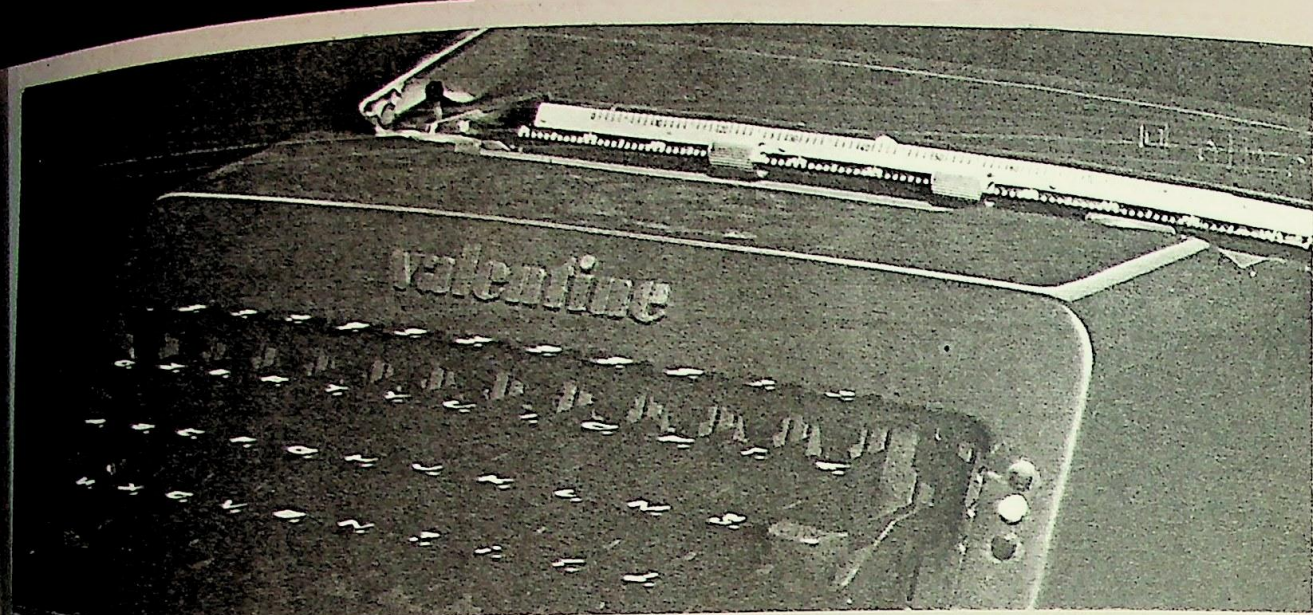


Illustration 7.9

Sottsass 'Red Valentine'  
Type writer inspired  
by pop imagery

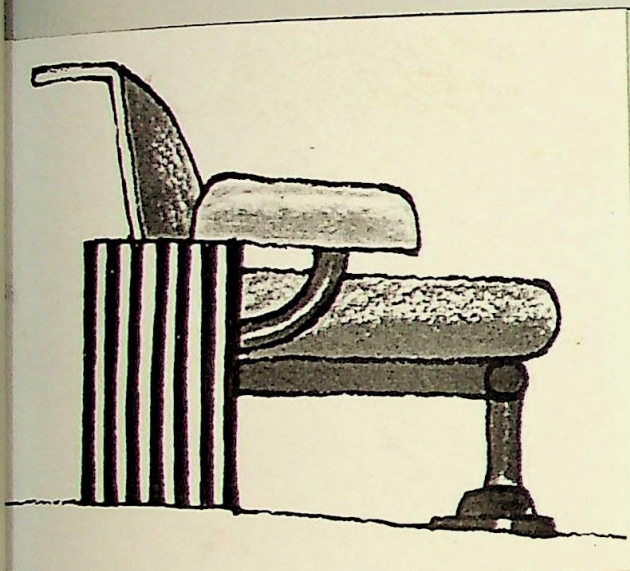
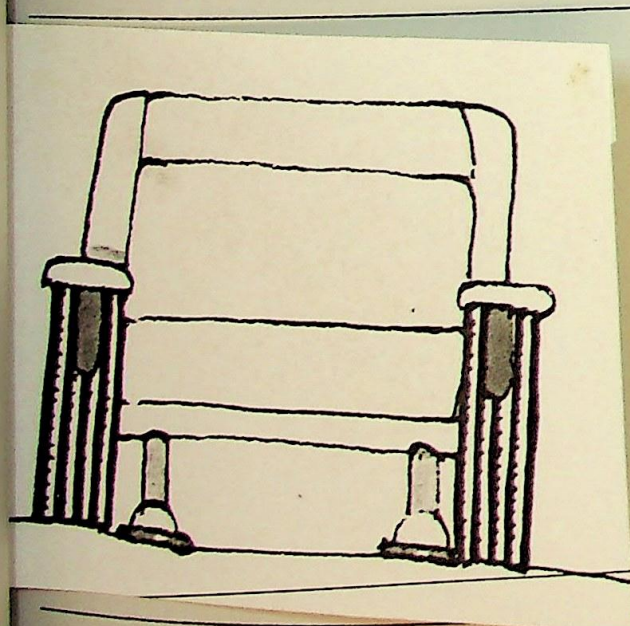


Illustration 7.10 (a) + (b)

Michele De Lucchi  
Drawings for a sofa  
Memphis 1982 showing  
a Bridget Riley influence

(a)



(b)



the different disciplines of fashion, graphics and product and style was now viewed as whole rather than bits. This philosophy has been carried through to Memphis' designers who are all multi-disciplinary (See biographies). The Pop craze for stylistic novelty resulted in a pillaging of any style which was applied to furniture, graphics, clocks and even mugs. Victorian decoration, paisley patterns and Art Nouveau were all revived and were usually short lived, conforming to the Bauhaus theory, "massive initial impact and small substantial power". Memphis defies this rule, even surprising Sottsass, "I would be terrified to think that Memphis may carry on for ten years, or even five". Cubism too for that matter, without wishing to draw comparisons, lasted from 1910 to 1914. (Ref. 27.).

1980 saw Memphis launch itself internationally. "The Milan Furniture Fair was overshadowed by the opening of Memphis, Ettore Sottsass' new showroom". (Ref. 28.)

This initial enthusiasm has continued and is evident in reviews from the same exhibition four years later.

"The launch of the jazzy, anarchic Memphis movement in 1981 has brought the world's press thronging repeatedly through Milanese tram-lined streets" (Ref. 29.).

Flags, Bullseyes and stripes were all common visual surface motifs, which were derived from paintings by Jasper John and Bridget Riley; their reappearance is not unusual in Michele De Lucchi works as he was a teenager or the Pop Era (Ill. 7.10). Riley's influence can also be seen in his drawings for Hi-Fis. The same wavey patterns appearing in both pieces (Ill. 7.11., 7.12.). George J. Sowden's work has also been influenced by Popism (Ill. 7.13., 7.14.).

Sottsass' interest in Pop was so profound that he grew his hair long and went to India to study the mystical escapism of the Eastern Cults. He designed the first Fiorucci boutiques in Milan in 1967 and was infatuated by London's Kings Road



efflorescences during the 60's. Sottsass saw Popism as a liberation opening up numerous doors for design.

Escapism is the key to both Popism and Memphis. Both question the established views about design and took upon themselves to create their own based on the fun aspects of life.

Joe Colombo captures the spirit of the times with his base-ball glove sofa, bigger and larger than life.



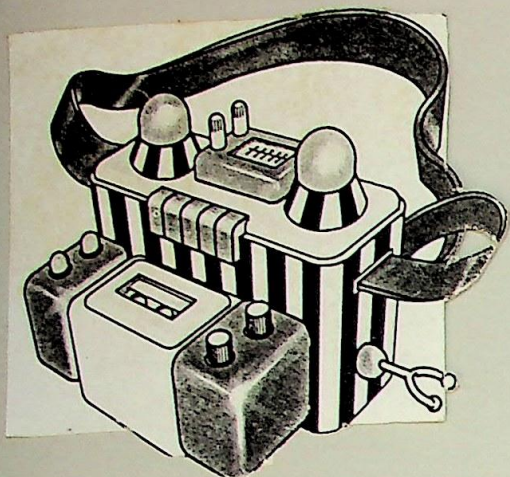


Illustration 7.11  
Drawing For A Hi-Fi  
Michele De Lucchi

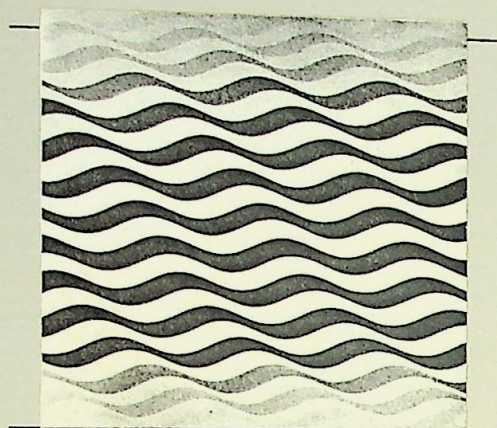


Illustration 7.12  
Bridget Riley  
Paint which has influenced  
De Lucchi work

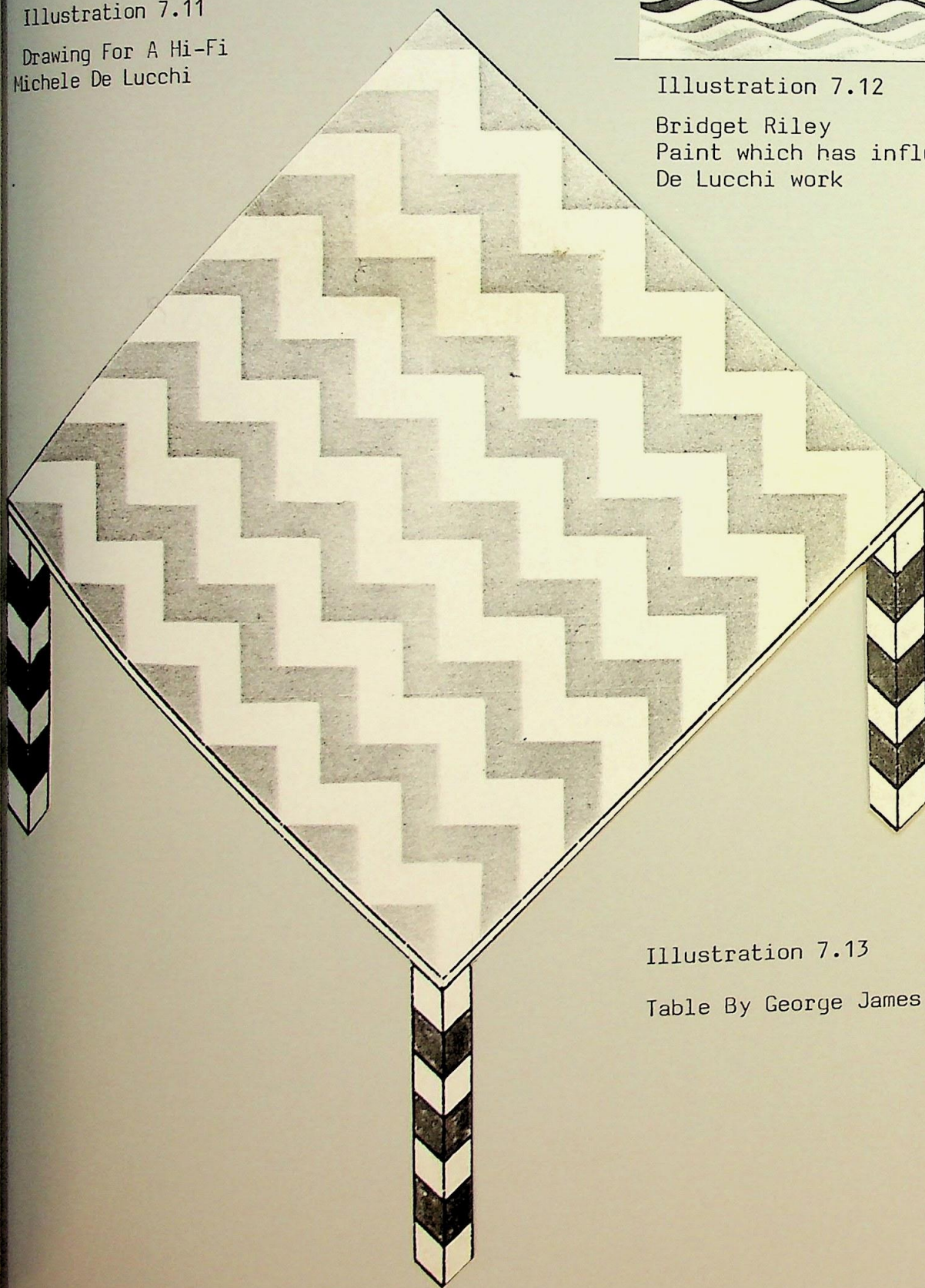


Illustration 7.13  
Table By George James Sowden



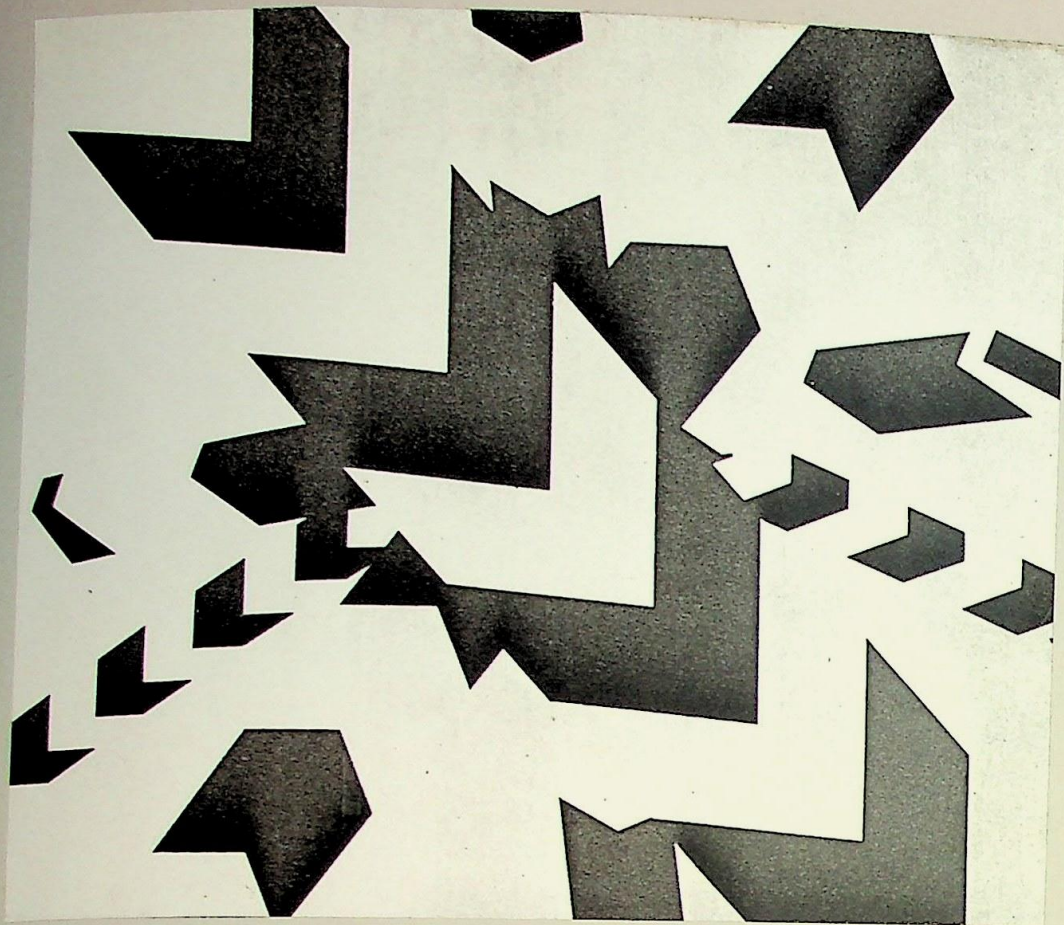


Illustration 7.14



Illustration 7.15

Jo Colgmo Char in the shape of a  
Base Ball Glove



RADICLES THE ANTI DESIGN MOVEMENT



"The story of how Memphis came to happen is a long one, and its not only my story but also the story of the Milanese Groups and the School of Radical Design".

Ettore Sottsass Jr. (Ref. 30).

The 60's were characterized by a sudden readiness to question entire systems of aesthetics and the very foundations of discipline which are the foundations of Memphis inherited from the Radicals.

Hans Hollein (present Memphis designer, see biographies), Japan's 'Metabolism' and England's 'Archigram' (1961) who attempted to intergrate architecture with mass culture (Ill. 8.1.) had a profound effect on Italian Radicals during the late 60's and early 70's.

While at the beginning of the century the Modern Movement adopted the logic of the industrial machine, assuming that man's creative potential was through production, Pop Culture of the 60's saw consumption being the place for man to achieve his greatest creative potential. Fifty years had seen a change from civilisation of the machine to the civilisation of the consumer.

Memphis and the Radicals' intention was to affront the good taste associated with the modern Movement and seek a new direction for design. The main influence on the Italian Radicals was Robert Venturi's analysis of Las Vegas Architecture in 1966 (Ill. 8.2.). He offered an advertising image of architecture as a model of the modern city. This setting forward of a model is a reoccurrence of what happened with the Arts and Crafts, Neo-Gothic, Modern Movement, Machine Aesthetic. Other influences included Pop Music, Politics and Fashion.

The great Utopia of Radicalism was based on the concept of manual labour and the rejection of industrialism and advocated the concept of creativity of the masses. Memphis opposes this creativity of the masses by its association with industry.



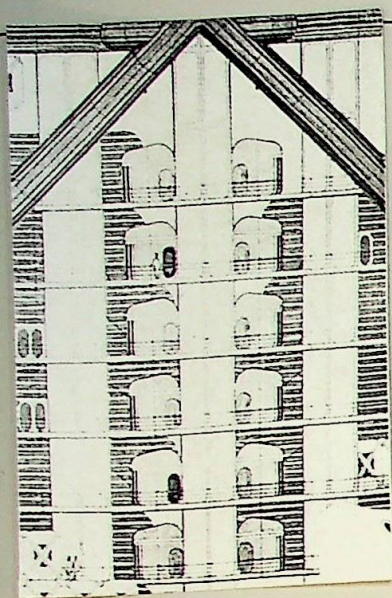


Illustration 8.1

A 'University Node'  
A Technophilic Architectural  
Fantasy of British Archigram

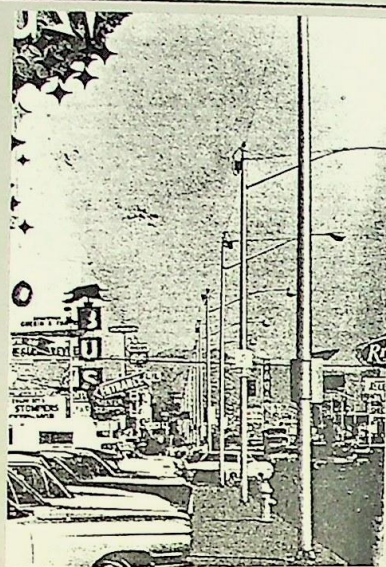


Illustration 8.2

Upper Street From 'Learning Form  
Las Vegas Robert Venturi



Illustration 8.3

The First Exhibition of 'Superarchitecture'  
Jolly 2 gallery Pistoia 1966.

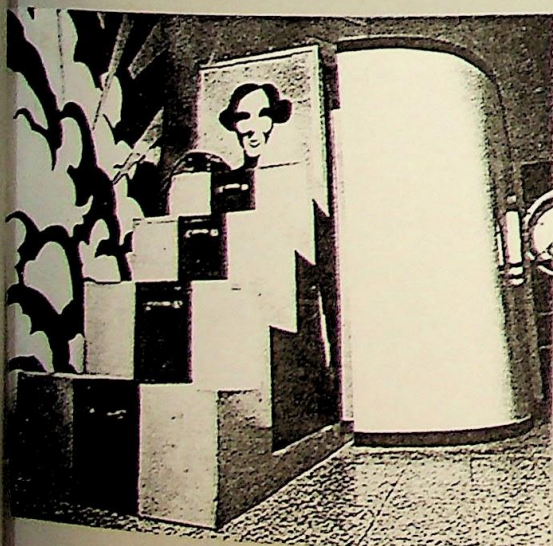


Illustration 8.4

Archizoom Associati Phototype of  
Bracket Furniture 1966.



All Memphis pieces are designed for mass production with the exception of the blown glass and the only reason they have not been mass produced is because the demand is not sufficient. (Ref. 20.). Two of the Radical Groups Archizoom Associates and Superstudio, despite their political and cultural differences, mounted two exhibitions, one in Pistoia in 1966 and one in Modena in 1967. Both were entitled Super Architecture.

"Super Architecture is the architecture for super products of super consumption of super inducement to consumption of the supermarket, of superman, of super-highest gasoline. Super Architecture accepts the logic of production and consumption and makes an effort to demystify it".

These exhibitions consisted mainly of furniture and architectural projects, all influenced by Pop Culture (Ill. 8.3., 8.4.). They sought to replace the Italian style of flexibility, unit assemble and mass production with a new more solid concept of the Radicals, which were unitary objects and spaces that were solid immobile and aggressive in their appearance. This marked the starting point of Sottsass' experimentation with plastic laminates. Sottsass had developed a line of research that undermined the traditional relationship with the house. He introduced figerative objects with autonomous function that were to promote a new type of behaviour in the house as Memphis pieces postulate. These pieces were made by Poltronova (Ill. 8.5) are very akin to the products Sottsass is designing today, but perhaps more crudely geometric in their construction. Examining these pieces they seem to appear as monuments in a empty room. This is prevalent in Memphis pieces today when seen in use.

Soon after Sottsass' creations, Archizoom Associates were inspired to create the 'Dream Beds' (Ill 8.6.). These monumental beds with their strong kitchy and eastern Islamic influence resemble the Utopian bed of Michael Graves 'Stanhole' bed, with its Art Deco influence (Ill. 8.7.) and Masanori Umedas 'Tamaraya' ring bed (Ill. 8.8.). These beds has the same intensions as Memphis furniture to be provocitiv



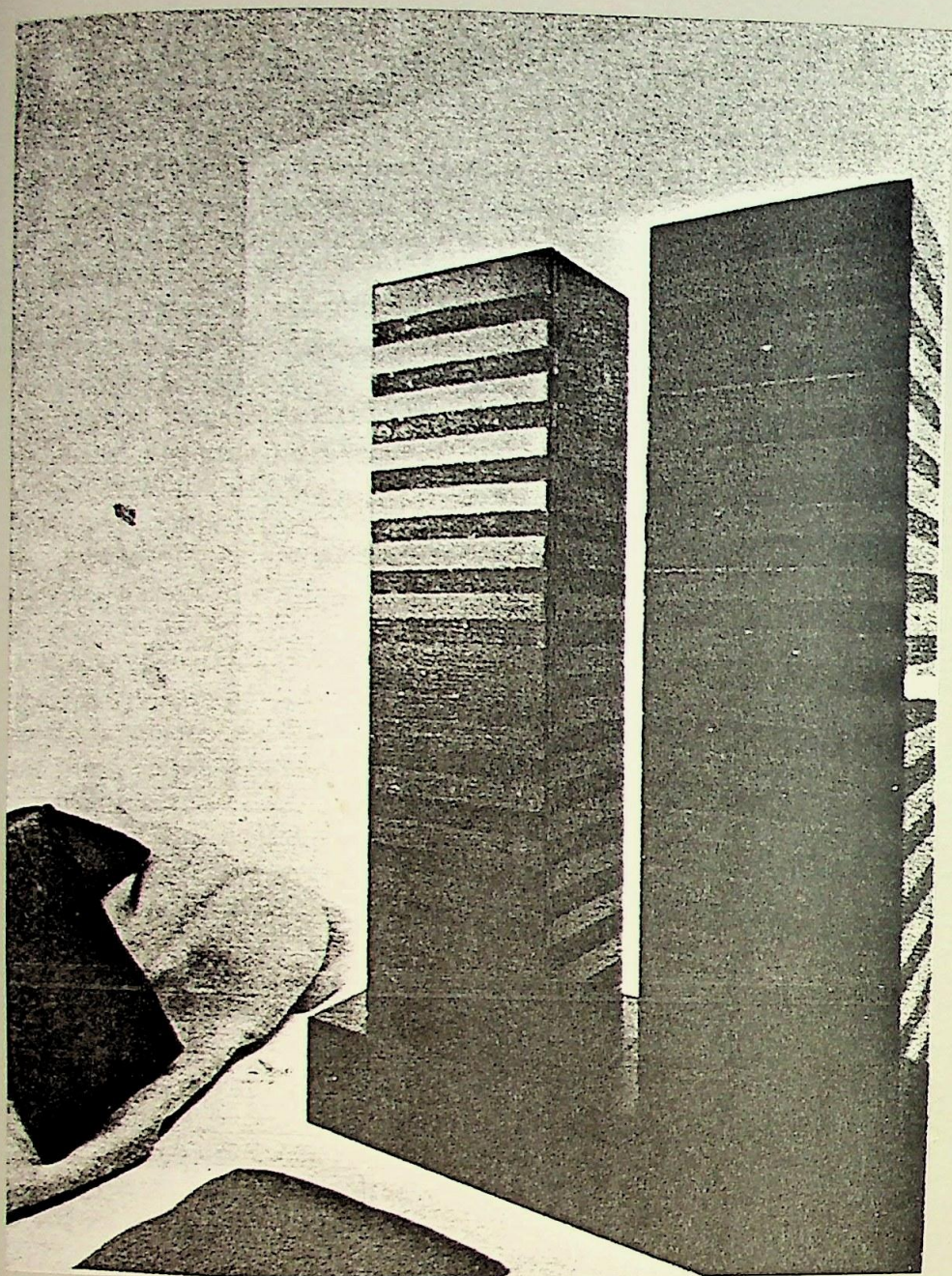


Illustration 8.5.

Ettore Sottsass' laminate furniture for Poltronova, 1967.



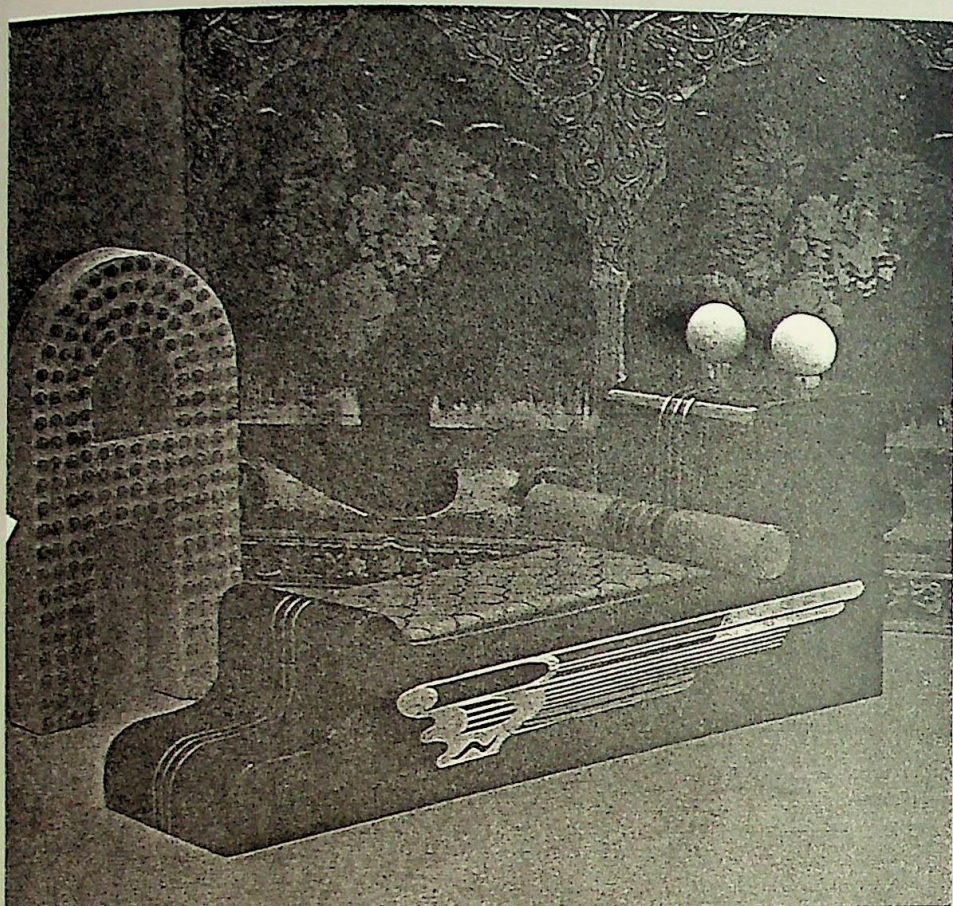


Illustration 8.6.

Archizoom Associates 'Naufragio di Rose' dream bed - 1967.

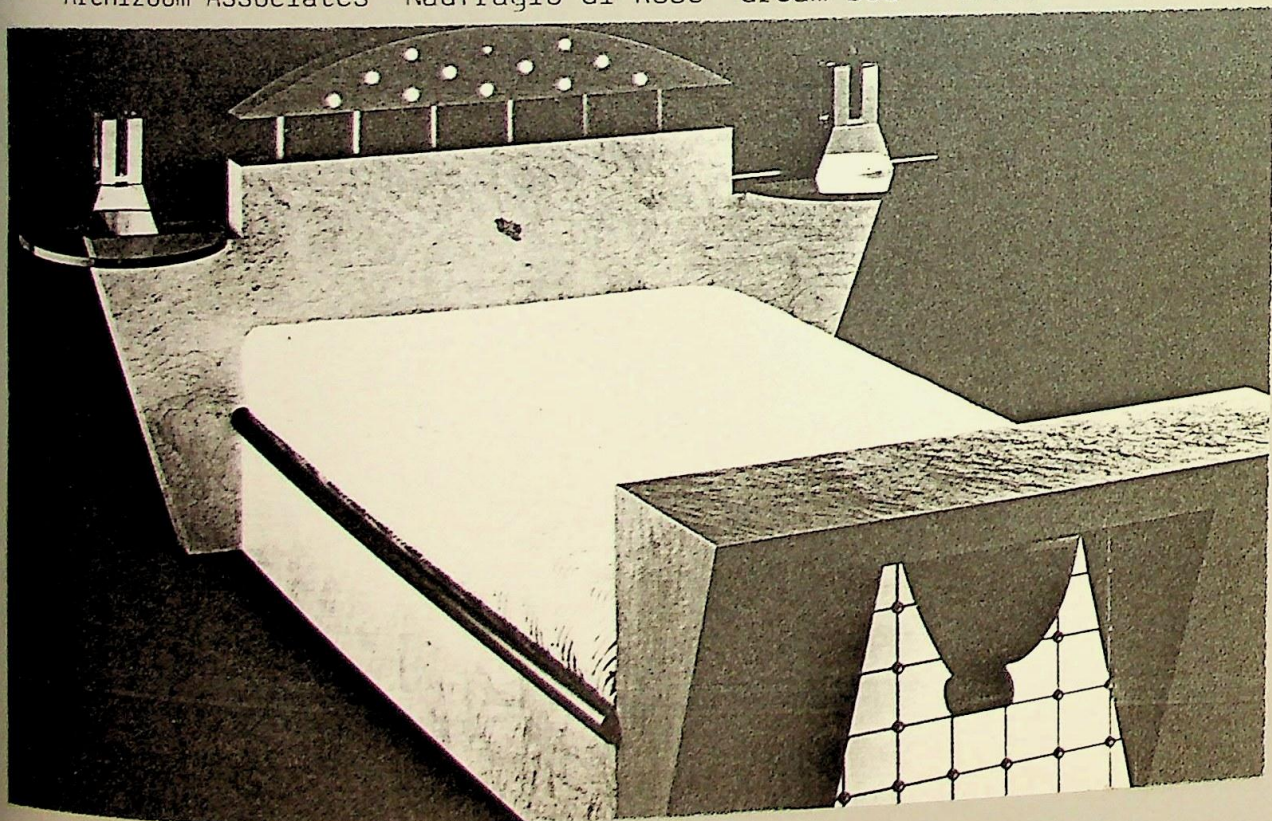


Illustration 8.7.

Michael Graves 'Stanhole' bed.



with caustic combinations of imagery with the intention of affronting the bourgeois taste.

"We want to bring into the house everything that has been left out, contrived banality, international vulgarity, urban fittings and biting dogs" Archizoom Associates.

This being the Archizoom doctrine of 1969 it mirrors the thoughts of Memphis nearly twenty years later. Memphis materials are all industrial, chipboard, plastic laminates ( A. Bourgeois Symbol Of Vulgarity) and metal tubing (Ill 8.8).

The Radicals accepted conditions without postulating an alternative, it accepted it has to work on a continuation of the present making projections into the future. Memphis Philosophy accepts today's conditions and seeks to expand the parameters of design unlike their Post Modern counter parts.

" The Memphis style consists of broadening the area of style itself of never being satisfied with what has already been done and looking for a new style all the time". George James Sowden.

Archizoom and Super Studio were opposed to formal Utopia professed by Archigram (U.K.) and Metabolism (Japan) because of its association with the machine civilisation and proposing a mechanical architecture and metropolis. Archizoom Associates (carried out an analysis of housing conditions which resulted in 'No-Stop City' (Ill 8.9). Their analysis had proved that the metropolis was no longer a place but was a condition. Living in a city no longer meant inhabiting a place but adopting a mode of behaviour. This was what Charles Jenks would have called Semantic Groups , new culture sets that make up society. Identifying themselves by certain fashions, Linguistic



Groups , Religion etc.

There was no place left that was not connected to the city in its pattern of consumption.

The present ideology of the city derived from 18th century natural objects was obsolete. It was indispensable to get away from the very idea of a limit to urban space. The city in the Rationalists eyes was a homogeneous collection of facilities and functions for living. Traditionally the solid block of buildings was divided by streets which gave a surface for architecture to display itself. While the Radicals concentration was on architectural experiments Memphis experiments take place in furniture.

While the Rationalists sought to overthrow tradition by seeing urban space not as a group of architectural monuments but as a hollow space filled with furniture, where urban furniture became domestic furniture. Memphis revolution has taken a different form. Believing firmly in decoration as a key element in the reinvention of figuration and of images.

"In traditional designed objects the surface was a sample unit until four or five years ago people dedicated all their energy to making surfaces Homogeneous factories and supermarkets were the most complete expression of the industrial system logic and potentially unlimited structures freely organised in continuous planes appearing uniform by a system of artificial lighting and ventilation".

No-stop City applied this principle of spatial organisation to the metropolis. Every city and building up till then had been based on certain standards of natural light and ventilation, 20m in depth for penetration of light and air, but with the introduction of artificial light and ventilation





Illustration 8.8.

Peter Shire's 'Brazil' table, Memphis 1981.

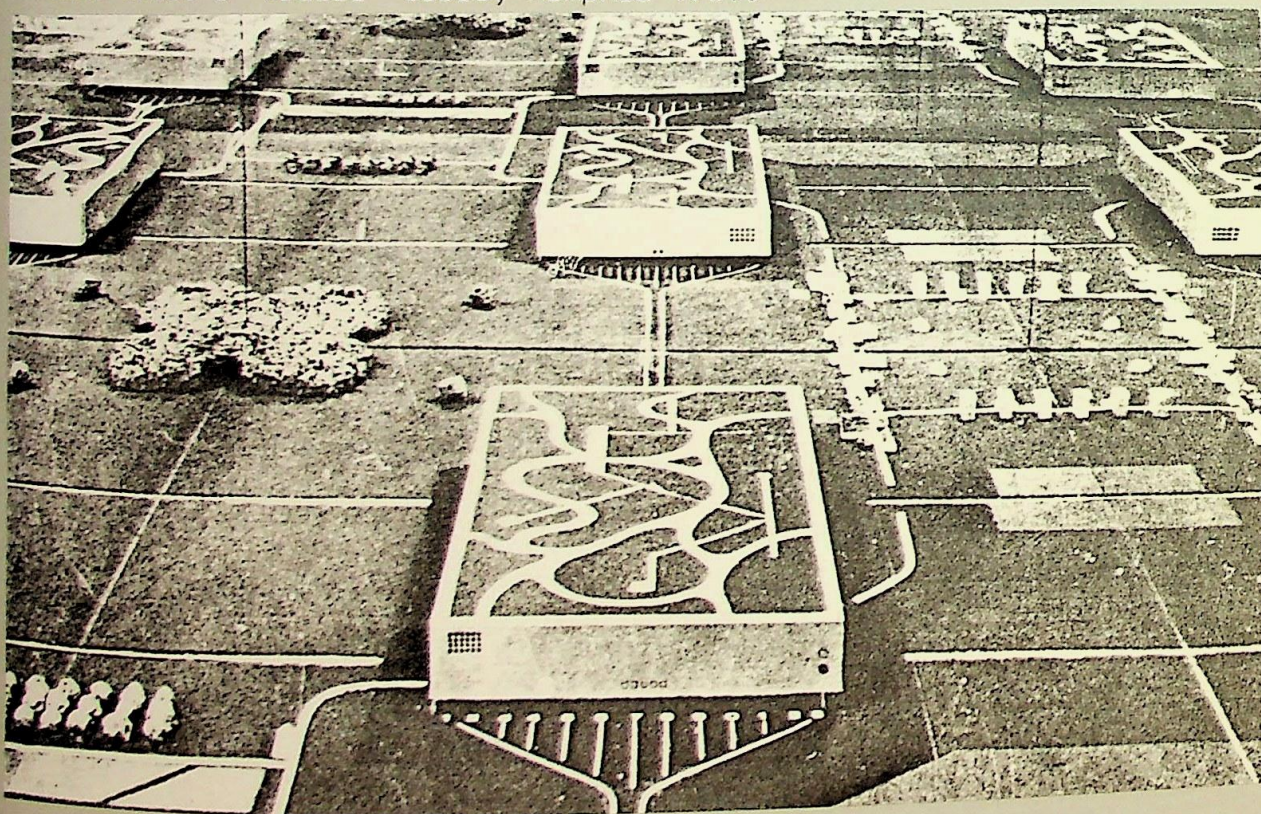


Illustration 8.9.

Interior of Non-Stop City.



Skyscrapers in practice were a segment of no-stop city. They could potentially extend in all four horizontal directions as they had vertically if they were not restricted by site size.

1973 saw the foundation of a counter school of design called Global Tools; which brought together all the groups and individuals of Radical design with the intention of encouraging creativity. New design initiated by Memphis has done the same with the formation of Domus Academy the first post graduate school of design in Italy.



## ALCHYMIA

'The Projection Of Images For The Twentieth Century'

"For a future of at least ten years of design, one can do nothing but design".





studio Alchymia was set up in 1976 by Alessandro Guerriero, a former graphic designer for Olivetti. Alchymia's purpose was to act as a design studio and think-tank as well as to exhibit furniture not constrained by the visual problems of industrial production.

The first objects to emerge from the studio were ironic, mildly subversive and sufficient to attract the attention of Milan's design elite. By 1978, Guerriero had attracted powerful names of the Avant-garde into Alchymia, including Ettore Sottsass, Andrea Branzi and Alessandro Mendini.

Alchymia launched collections of furniture at both the 1978 and 1979 Milan Furniture Fairs, called respectively 'Bauhaus I' and 'Bauhaus II'. These objects became increasingly colourful, violent kitch, decorative and unusable (Ill. 9.1.) They were anti-taste or non-taste. The designs explored the banal, taking as the decorative themes elements from mass produced objects e.g., shoes, washing-up liquid containers, clocks etc., and transforming them or using them in an unfamiliar way (Ill. 9.2.). The aim was to show how everything, even fine art was made banal by mass production. Alchymia's objects began to erode the boundaries between fine art and design by questioning mass production itself. These designs were the starting point for Memphis.

But Alchymia could not contain two characters as different in personality and approach as Sottsass and Mendini for long. Mendini was a Marxist and ultimately pessimistic and felt that the individual was doomed in such an alien and corrupt world.

"My attitude, always critical, always pessimistic, is such that when I have reached an objective, I move to a new one. This is not avant-garde. It is perhaps existential transformation. It almost amounts to a personal fact".

Alessandro Mendini (Ref. 33.).



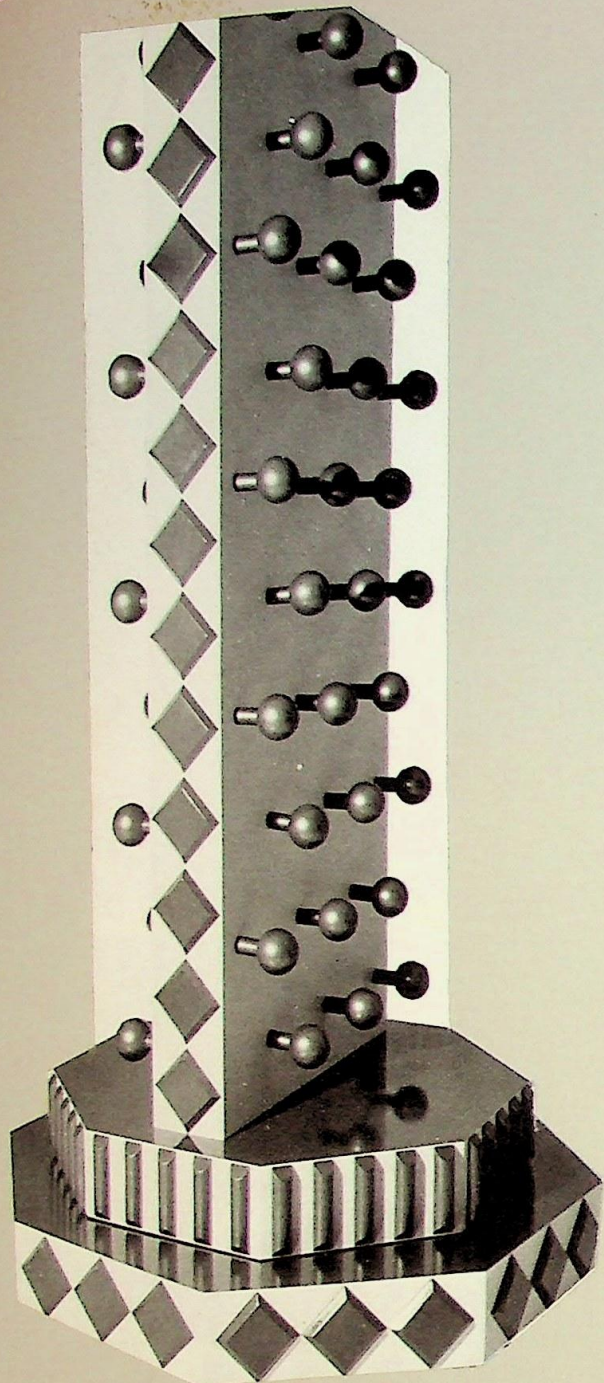
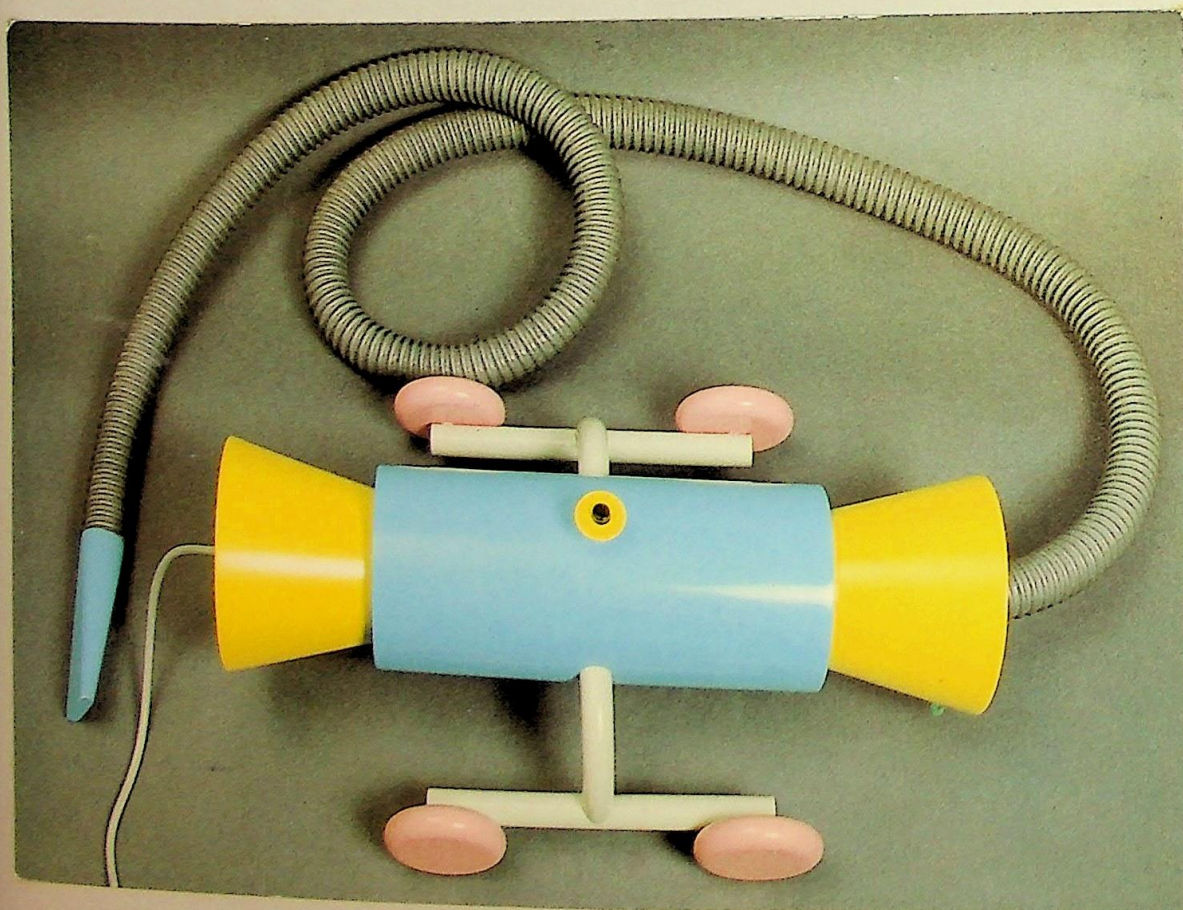


Illustration 9.1.

(Left) Coat Stand by Paolo Navone -  
Bauhaus Exhibition - 1978.

Illustration 9.1.(b).

(Below) Vacuum Cleaner by Michele  
De Lucchi - Bauhaus Exhibition, 1979





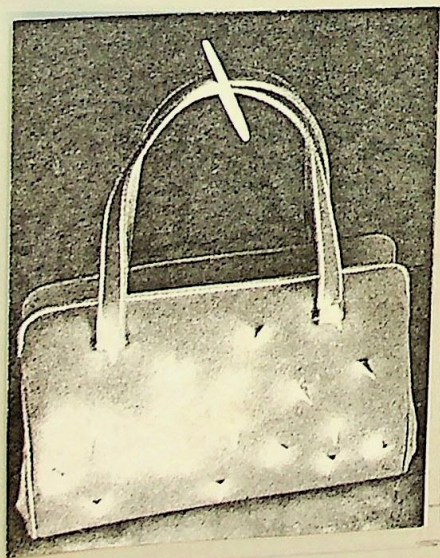
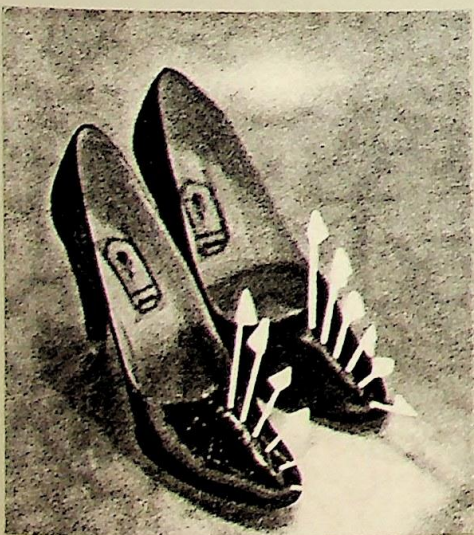
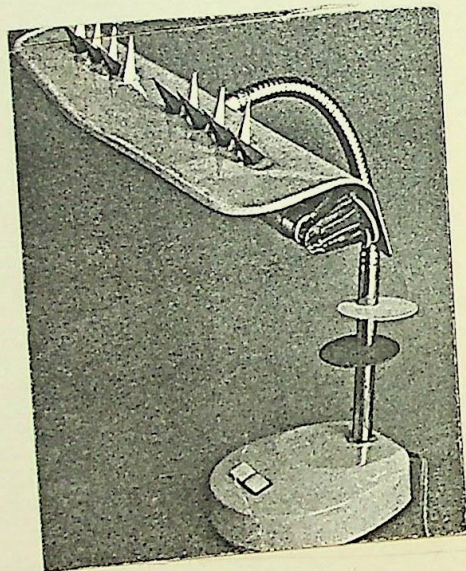
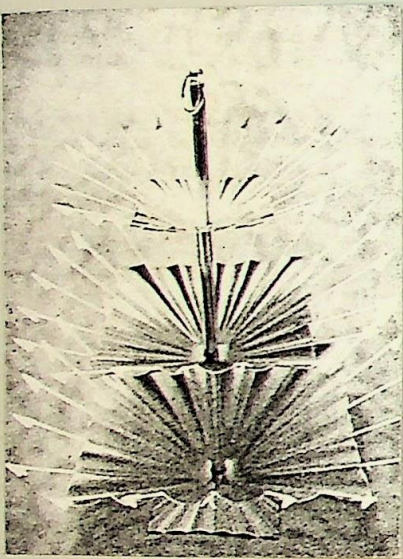
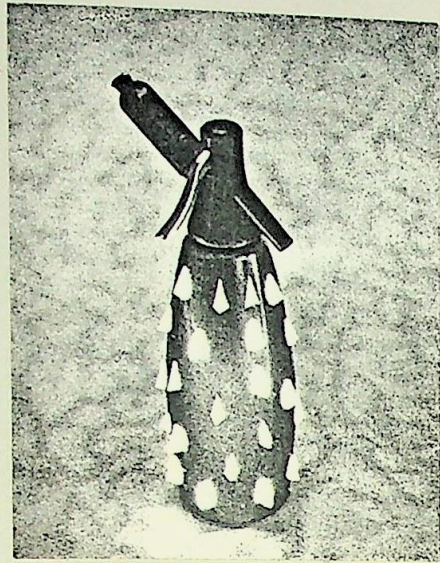
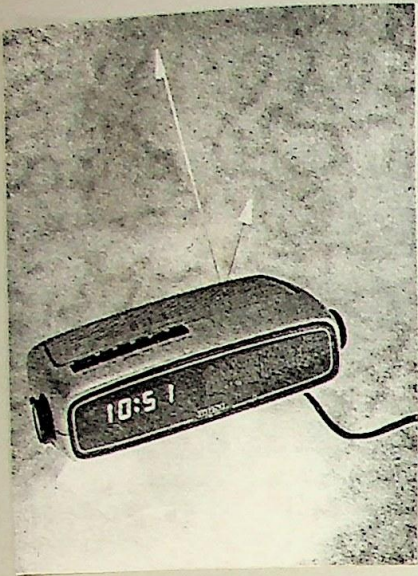


Illustration 9.2.

A selection of banal objects transformed by Alessandro Mendini, Paolo Navoe, Andrea Branzi and Ettore Sottsass.



Sottsass, while being left-wing, is optimistic and sees the designer as an agent capable of improving the situation. For Sottsass, the theory is only as important as the object, while for Mendini the idea is the thing. So Sottsass went away and founded Memphis. Memphis wanted street credibility and to move away from elitist to popular design; with him went Michele De Lucchi.

"It is not our intention to create ironic objects like Mendini, but only to create new objects, new images. Consumerism is no longer a dirty word". Michele De Lucchi. (Ref. 34.).

Alchymia's pieces are eclectic, complex creations, removed from traditional design methods. It is a deliberate, yet random meeting of mental, design, philosophical artistic and theatrical transition by the group.

Alessandro Gueriero claimed that the work assumes a critical stance towards society without being overly political or aggressive. Alchymia products might look like simple exercises in kitch, but beneath the surface, Gueriero's creations are based on principles that go beyond the band wagon of Post Modernism.

"We must realise that a city's image is not the achievement of architecture and town planning, but of popular, even pop creativity. The work of a whole range of window dressers, advertising agents, photographers and consumers in their choice of objects and products". (Ref. 35.).

The concept of new no longer applied to Alchymia's furniture, if everything belongs to the past then there are hidden treasures of new approaches in the old formulas, styles and modules previously used, but fallen into 'banality', required the operation of Alchemy of systematic recycling what Alchymia call re-design.

Sottsass, the father of Anti-Design, has demonstrated that the objects trouves



of popular architecture may contain rationalist modules. These should be made warmer through the use of colour. De Lucchi has adopted a similar line of thought for her Germi range of products and Hi-Fi's, trying to make them less hostile. (Ill. 9.1(b)., 9.3.).

The provocatively coloured module was Sottsass' way of starting to get out of modernism as far back as the 50's, with significantly named "Structures Snake", whose supports stalks respond to vibrations as if affected by earth tremors, (Ill. 9.4.).

According to Andrea Branzi, Alchymia's aim was to oppose the typical Modern Movement idea that you have to start from a unified and central concept and then try to impose it at all levels, from town planning right down to furniture. When Branzi carries out his theories, attempting to regain the lost grace of the applied arts, he bases his (Ill. 9.6.) tables and sideboards (Ill. 9.5., 9.4.) almost entirely on the dramatic connections between straight lines and semi circle. This approach involves homage to the Modern Movement. There seems to be a return to the 'Novecento' Movement, Italy's slightly more rigid and compact style of Art Deco. Branzi goes even further in his 'Copy Galler', paying homage to Matisse, Kandinski, Modrian (Ill. 9.7.), just like in the originals, but in baser and more banal materials - tapastry, carpets and embroidery. (Ill. 9.8.). In this way certain elements of style, rare and suffocated in museums, comes out, circulates and fertilizes society.

"Better a phoney life but life nevertheless, than frigid isolation in purity and unity".

The claims for purity and unity resulted in the eliminating that necessary life blood decoration. Alchymia sought to encourage decoration, as with Paola Navone



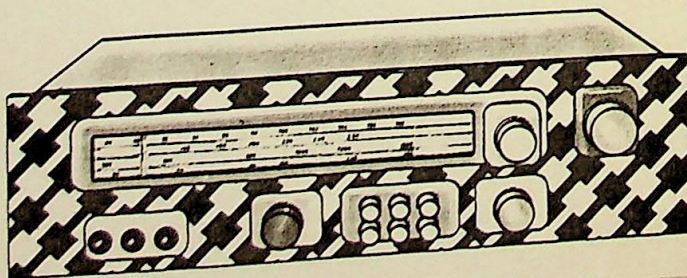
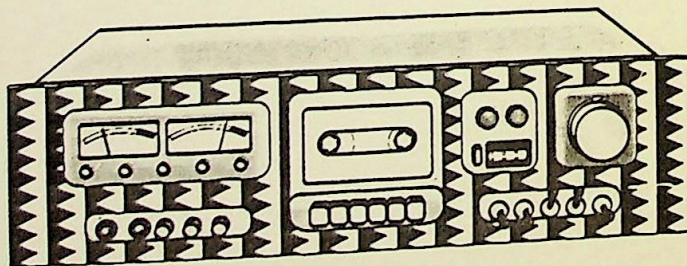
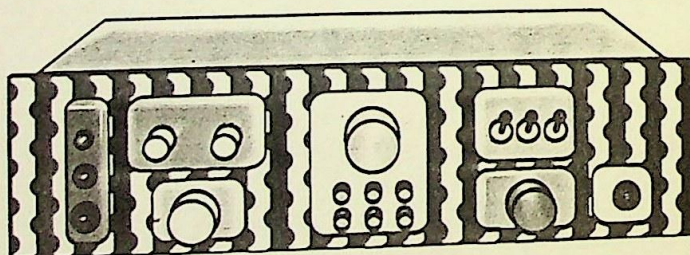
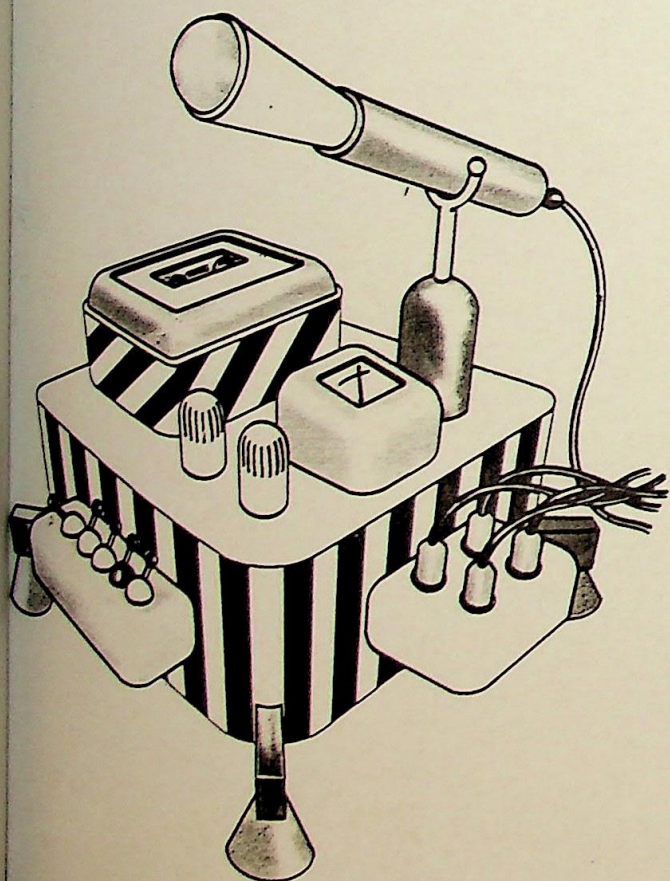
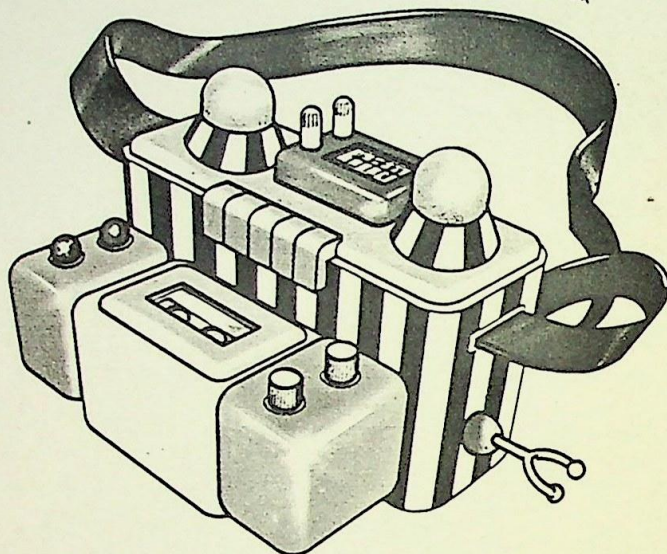
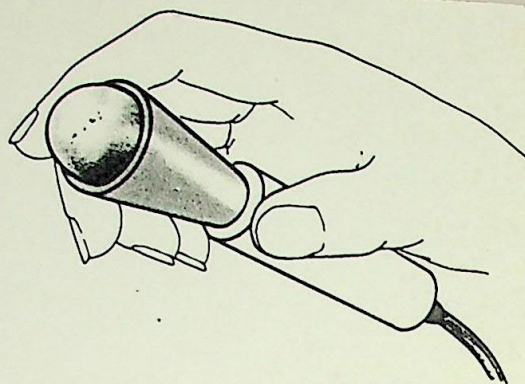
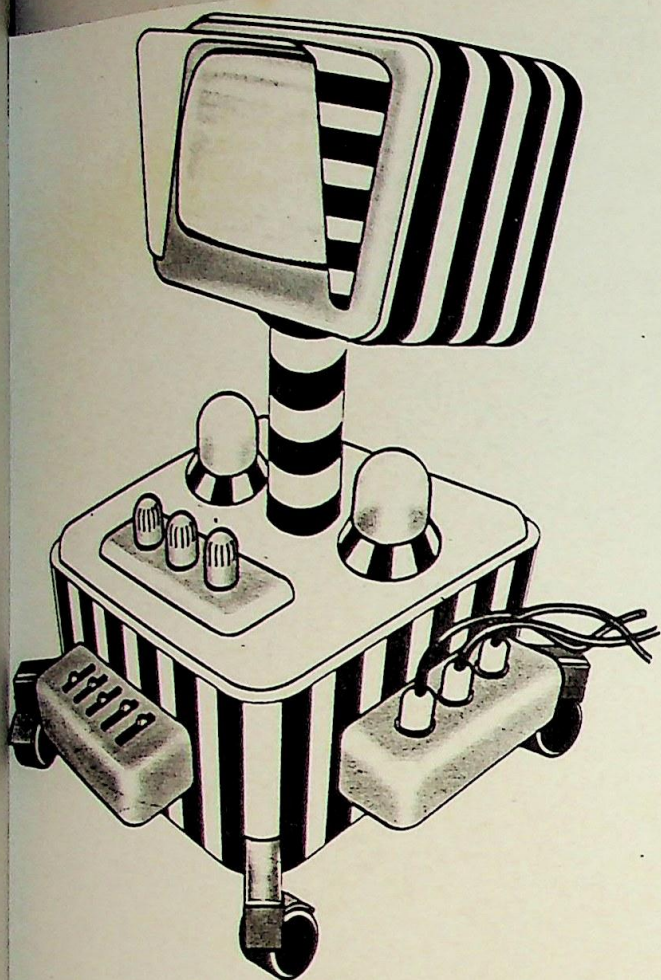


Illustration 9.3. Drawings for Hi-Fis by Michele De Lucchi.



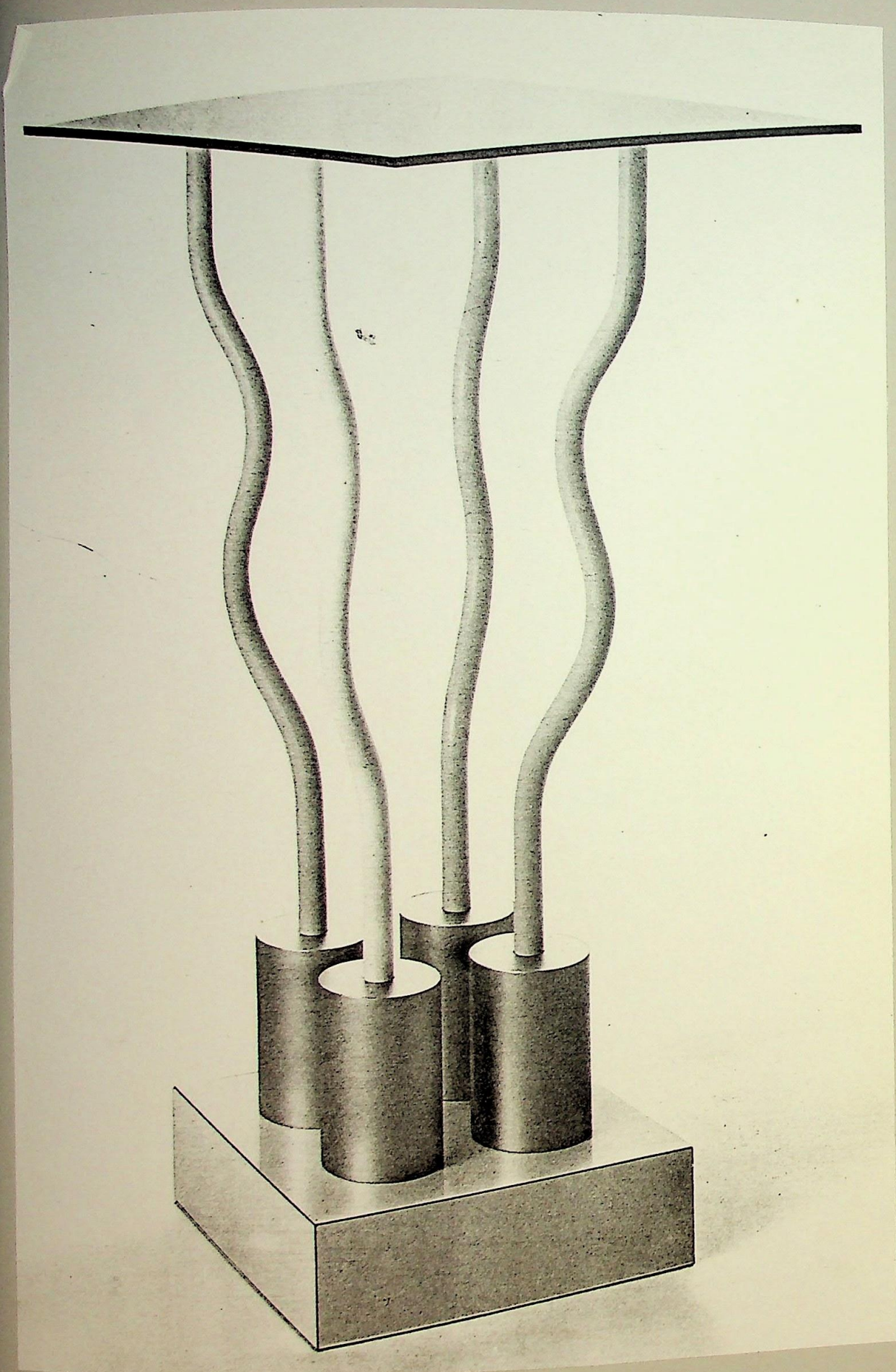


Illustration 9.4. 'Le Strutture Tremano' by Ettore Sottsass, Alchymia - 1979.



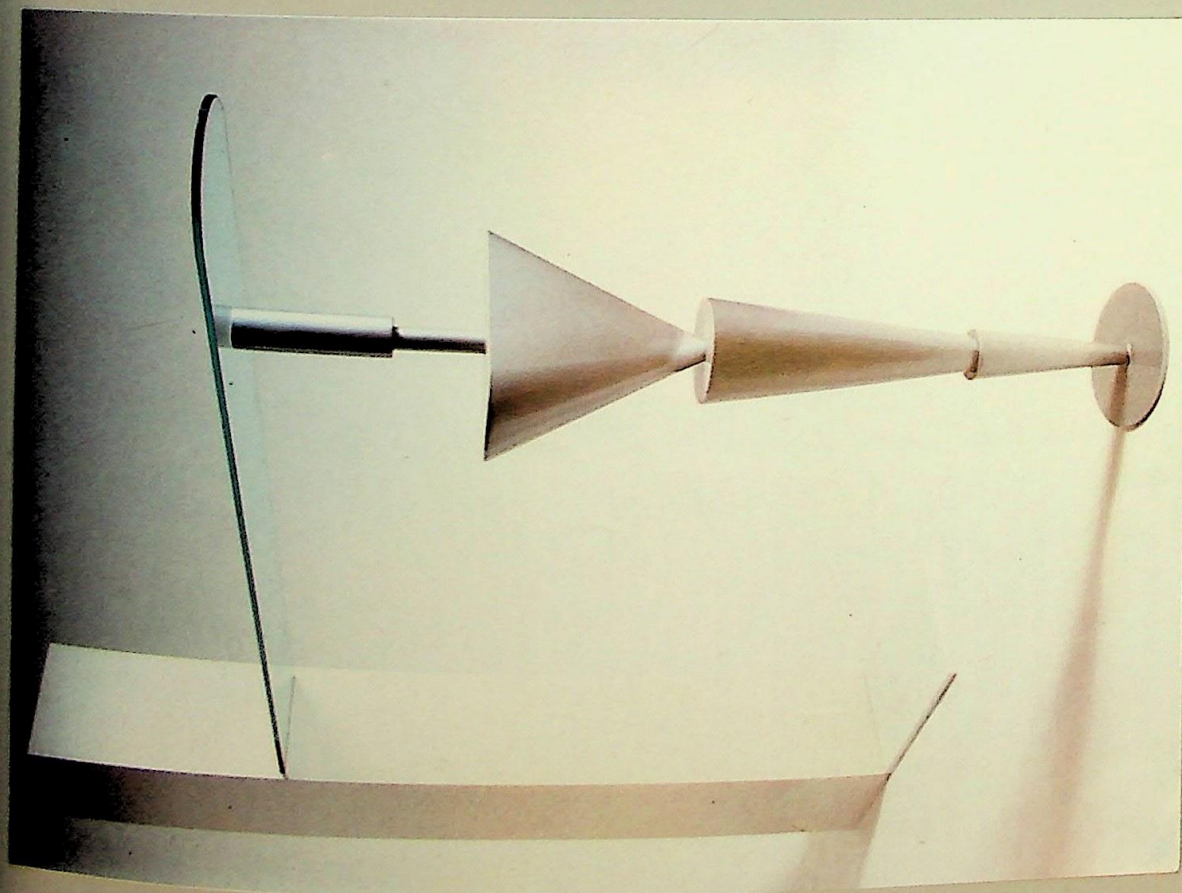


Illustration 9.5. Sideboard by  
Andrea Branzi,  
Studio Alchymia - 1979.

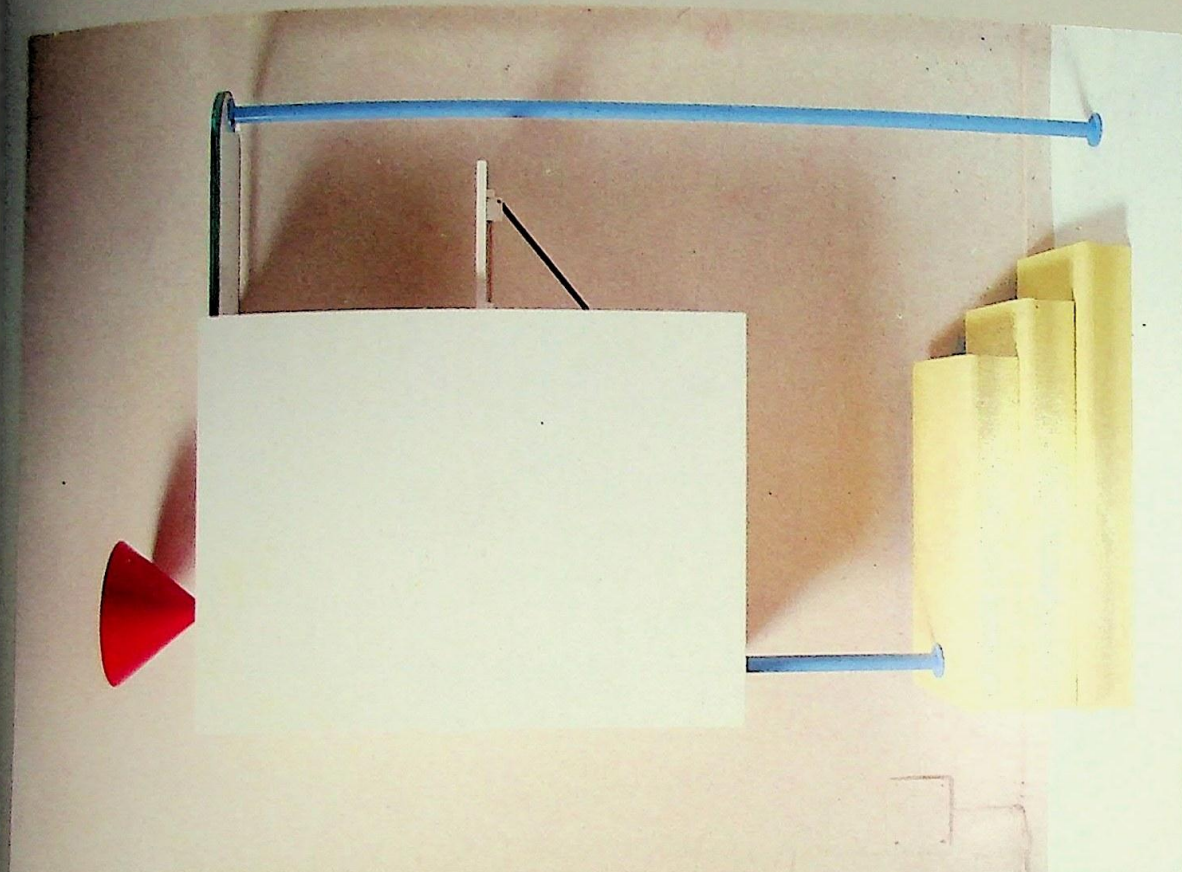


Illustration 9.6. Sideboard by Andrea Branzi  
Studio Alchymia - 1979.



in her cupboards, chests of drawers (Ill. 9.9., 9.10.), unmistakably 'Novecento', but with a great amount of surface - decorative and spotted laminates.

Mendini's work was the most resolute of the group in his tackling of the excesses of kitsch. He is even prepared to stimulate them, encourage their rebirth.

The result is 'Proust's New Armchair', (Ill. 9.11., 9.12.), the negation of design, anti-design, suddenly produced in the flesh. This sofa, with its styleless reflecting Prague Cubism.

When Mendini designed a picture frame, he makes it crooked, absurdly alien in the context of other frames. When he draws he makes marks, maybe ironically quoting a popular cartoon, rejecting the dignified path trodden lightly by official drawing as cannonized in design work.

Banality as defined by the bouregois, which they may finally judge worth a notice, was the aim of Mendini, with his awakening of critical awareness. Mendini wanted to make us see how a little change in perspective can revitalise a perviously rejected culture.

When we look at Art Nouveau of the 20's, 30's and 50's styling, which are hunted for all over the world, it brings home the point that we seem to consistantly revive past periods just as soon as they are sufficently far away, as soon as the are several decades behind or as seems increasingly the case, a few years past.

In 1986, Alchymia made a connection with Zanotta, one of Italy's leading and most enlightening furniture manufacturer with the association been called 'Zabro'. Alchymia's whole philosophy has long questioned mass productions, yet it seems to have fallen victim to the very disease it sought to eradicate.

The fundamental difference between Studio Alchymia and Memphis is that Alchymia



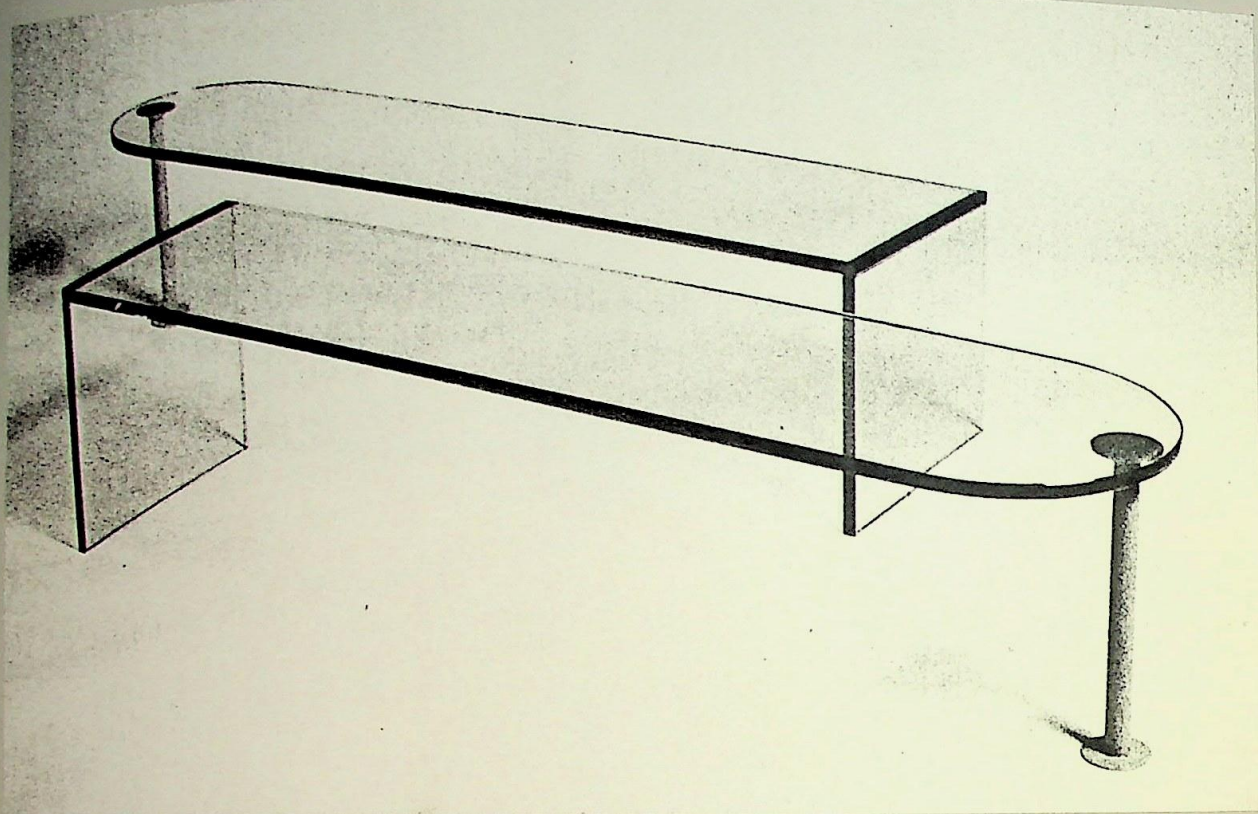
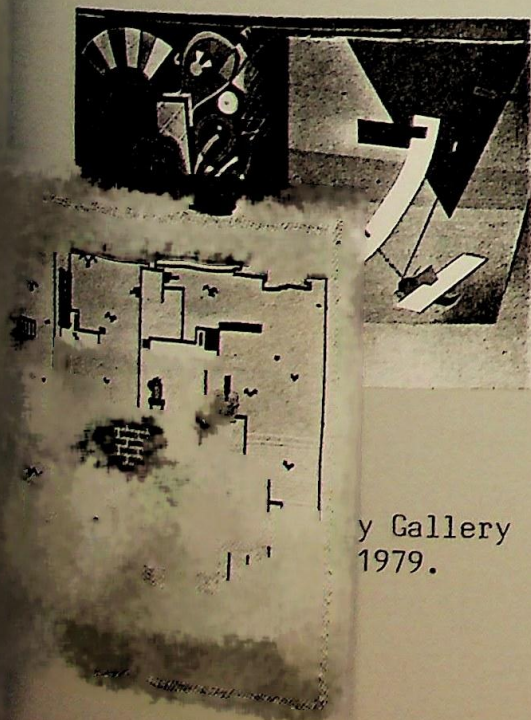


Illustration 9.6.

Central table by Andrea Branzi.



y Gallery  
1979.

Illustration 9.8.

Andrea Branzi's 'Metropolitan Couple' tapestry, Studio Alchymia - 1977.



freely admits that it is more in the business of locating problems than providing answers, while Memphis searches for the problems, they also come up with the answers.



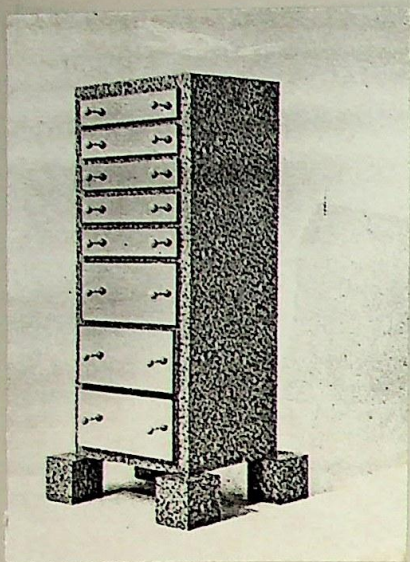


Illustration 9.9.

Paolo Navone's 'Gadames'  
chest of drawers.

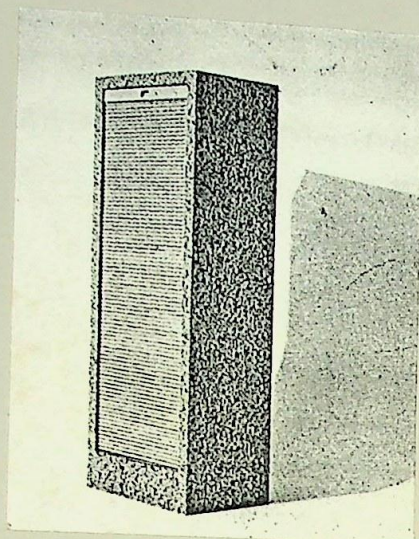


Illustration 9.10.

Paolo Navone's 'Fort Cardel'  
cupboard.



Illustration 9.11.

'Proust's New Armchair'  
by Alessandro Mendini.



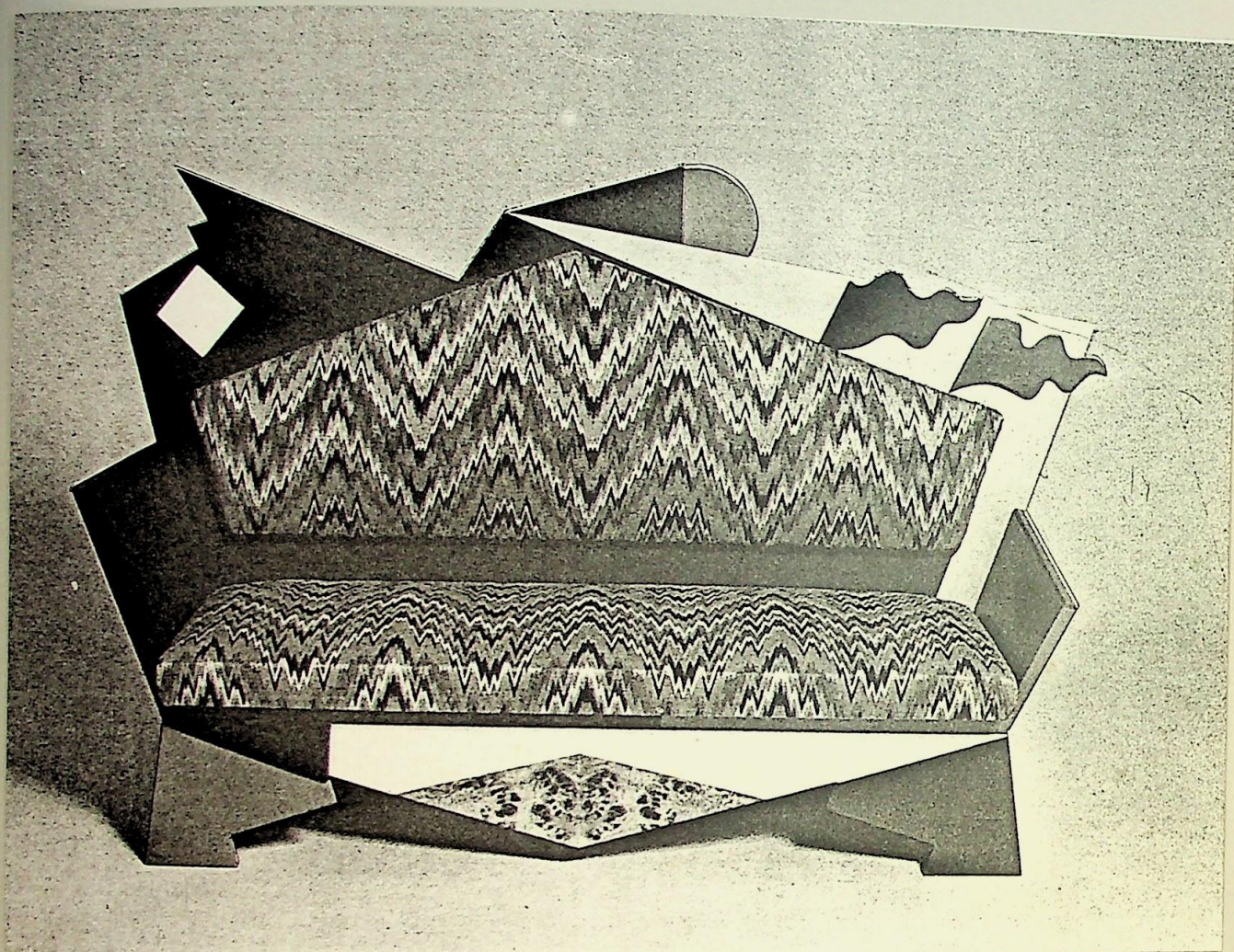


Illustration 9.12.

'Kindinski Sofa' by Alessandro Mendini.



DECORATION - MEMPHIS STYLE



Like Alchymia's 'Banal' designs, which were intended to make us all see how a little change in perspective can reveal a previously rejected culture. Memphis has taken the same approach and caused a renewal of plastic laminates, but unlike Alchymia it has not covered them in phosphorescent flags but anarchical and radical decoration (Ill. 10.1.).

Plastic laminates by Bourgeois standards have always epitomised vulgarity, bad taste and poverty. Memphis have turned this theory on its head by taking laminates out of their hiding places and making them conspicuous by displaying them in the most prominent places, like the living-room, hall or office.

When looking at a Memphis pattern (Ill. 10.2.), they seem so natural and obvious that one would think they always existed. This is because they have, but they have never been presented in a two dimensional form before. Most of the patterns are photographic enlargements of the most ordinary, to use an Alchymia phrase, 'Banal' originals, coffee beans (Ill. 10.3.), rice, liquid, salad (Ill. 10.4.), etc., Their anomosity is compared to sublimel advertising which acts on the subconscious level. Their patterns are abstract, non-directional and homogeneous and are born with the design as a 'Cell' (as De Lucchi would say) of the design.

Decoration as we imagine it, involves disregarding of support structure as the basic structure of design. People have always believed in the basic structure; they have always believed that the structure 'had' to exist; they have always believed in the design as a succession of moments and in the unalienability of mental structures, as earnestly as they have believed in the principle of causality. We tend to imagine the design as a series of accidents that come together by chance. We imagine a possible sum not an inevitable story, and what we believe holds this story together and gives it meaning, and that is that every accident has a formal, decorative identity. A Memphis table is decoration; structure and decoration are one thing. Ettore Sottsass (Ref. 41.)





**Decori Serigrafia... The Evolution of**  
**The Evolution of The Italian Design Concept**  
**Italian Design Concept... Decori Serigrafia**

Illustration 10.1.

Selection of coloured laminates  
designed by Memphis for Abet.





Illustration 10.2.

Decorative fabrics designed by Natholie du Pasquier.

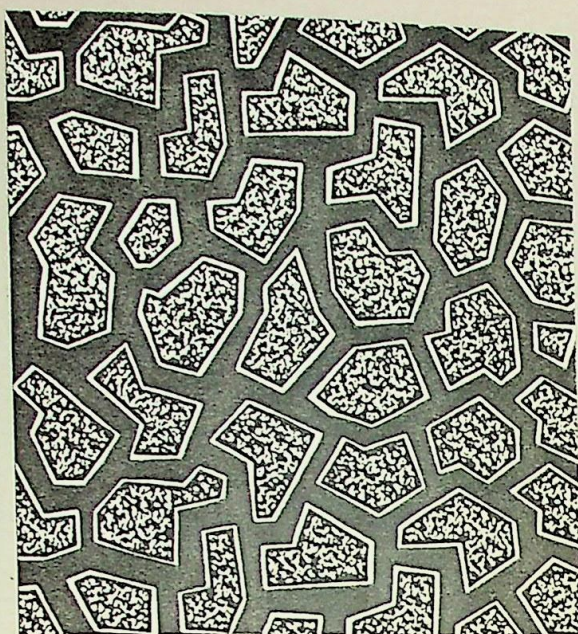


Illustration 10.3.

Decoration derived from a banal object - coffee beans.

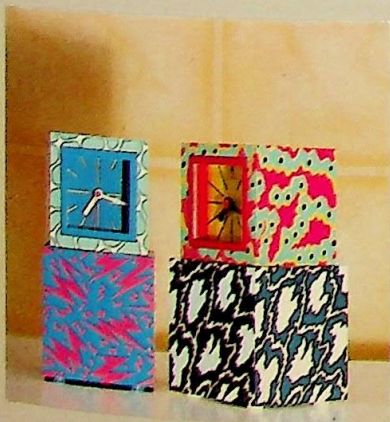
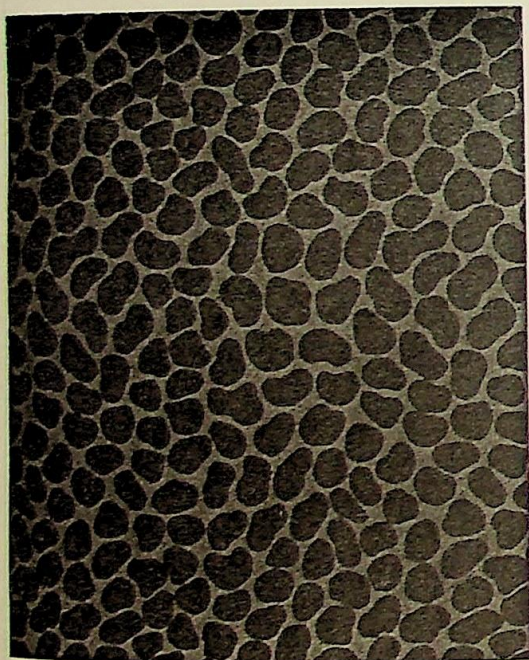


Illustration 10.4.

Clocks designed by George Sowden. The top of the clock on the right-hand side was inspired while looking into a bowl of salad.



This philosophy of accidents coupled with their anarchic and unrestrained attitude towards design has led to a juxtaposition of material qualities. Combining rough with smooth, cheap with expensive, resulting in furniture with complex systems of communications. This new research into materials is now used to support design by complying with William Morris' theory of "truth to materials"

"Hoffmann often used precious materials like mother-of-pearl to draw lines. They were lines of mother-of-pearl. But they were essentially lines. If we use mother-of-pearl we use square miles of it because it is the mother-of-pearl that tells the story, not the line". Marco Zanini (Ref. 42.).

Memphis' primary concern with decoration is the role that decoration plays within design.

"In a traditionally designed object the surface is a single unit. Until four or five years ago, people devoted all their energy to make surfaces homogeneous, associable and continuous. Today, the tendency is to see the design not so much as a unit but as a sum of parts. We have almost come to study the cells that make up objects themselves. Materials and decoration are cells of objects and they are part of this process". Michele De Lucchi (Ref. 40.).

Their iconography of decoration comes from unorganised cultural sources such as suburbs and growing cities. Sottsass' inspiration for his 'Bacterio' (Ill. 10.5.) and 'Spugnato' (Ill. 10.6.) came from a 50's pink and blue veined counter top in a suburban milk bar in Milan, while De Lucchi was inspired by Punks with talc-white faces in Trafalgar Square in London. These are both socio-linguistic inspirations picked up by minds aware and prepared for such influences.

Perhaps Memphis' greatest and most innovative contribution to design has been the reintroduction of decorative plastic laminates. Laminates are certainly not new



Illustration 10.5.



(Right) 'Bacterio' laminate, designed by Ettore having a certain organic quality.



Illustration 10.6.

'Spugnato' laminate by Ettore Sottsass.



Illustration 10.7.

'Beverley' bookcase by Ettore Sottsass, shows his freedom of expression.



and have been use extensively since the 50's for their hygenic and hard wearing quality. They give the designer the freedom to invent his/her own decoration and patterns for their creations (Ill. 10.7.).

Materials, no matter what their social evaluation are, are included in Memphis' work (Ill. 10.8.). Industrial materials like chipboard, sheet metal, steel tubing neon lights, industrial paint, are transformed when put into a Memphis context. They immediatly loose their hi-tech quality and examined objectively for what they really are - textures and surfaces, appealing more to our physical rather than our intellectual sens .

The reintorduction of marble is a result of theri experiments into materials. It is thrown into juxtaposition with industrial materials like fiberglass, metal tubing which is alien to its recognised use (Ill. 10.9.). When it comes to materials, Memphis is irreverent in regard to its associated values and they are seen basically as another material. Memphis' experiments with materials, decoration and colour are accidents unlike the experiments of the Bauhaus, which resembled chemical experiments.

Sottsass said, "Memphis is quoting from life". For Memphis colour has never been an ideological process as it was for De Stijl and the Bauhaus, introducing it together with decoration it softens the object (Ill. 10.10.), and a message is transmitted by the object. Decoration, as with colour, are never added, they are born with the design.

"The juxtaposition of coloured masses, materials and volumes, like little taps on a tuning fork, make the whole colour vibrate". Barbara Radice (Ref. 43) (Ill. 10.11.).

Memphis, in their search and experiments, has sought to dismiss the conditioned routine and recover fresh energy, and to look at things from a new point of view.



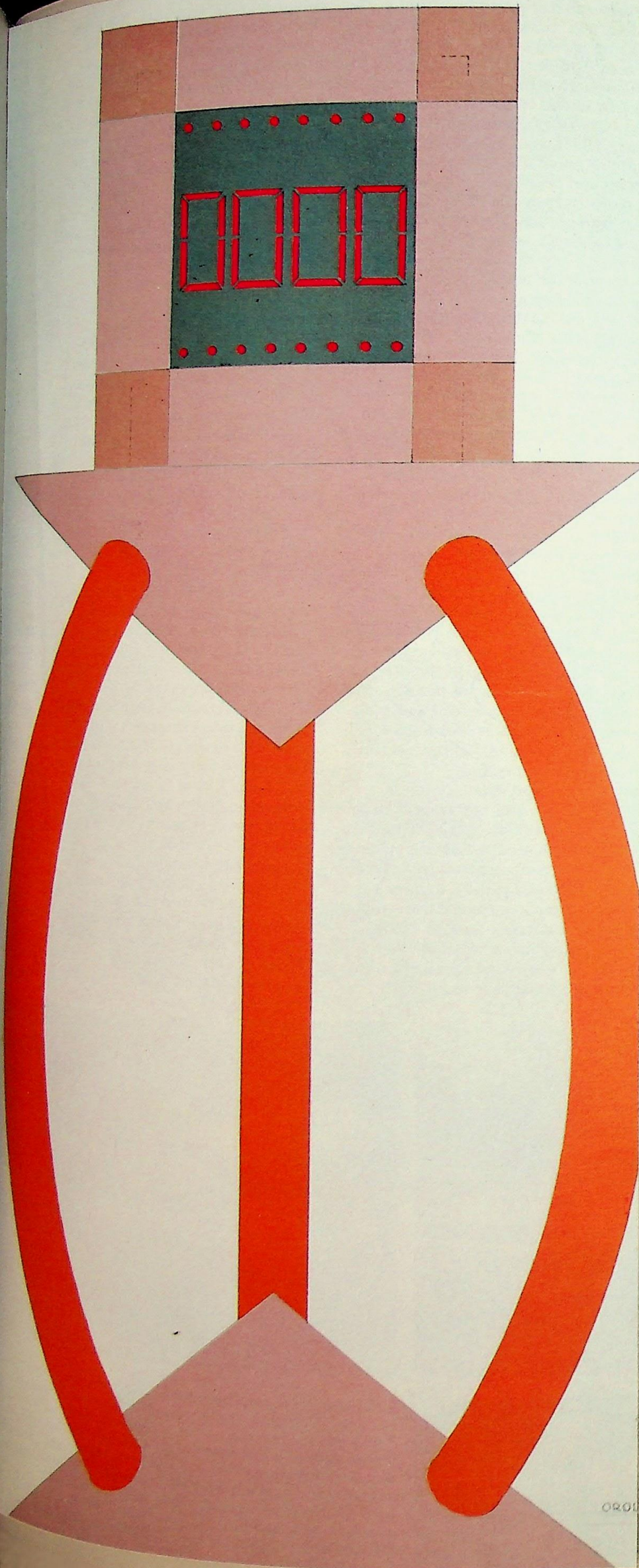


Illustration 10.8.

'San Diago' clock by  
Matteo Thun, combines  
electronics, metal tubing  
and plastic laminates.





Illustration 10.9.

'Diva' mirror by Ettore Sottsass in the spirit of the 30's, with its Art Deco styling, combining mirror fiberglass (discs), natural briar (base) and marble supports (triangles).



Illustration 10.10.

'Palace' chair, designed by George Sowden.

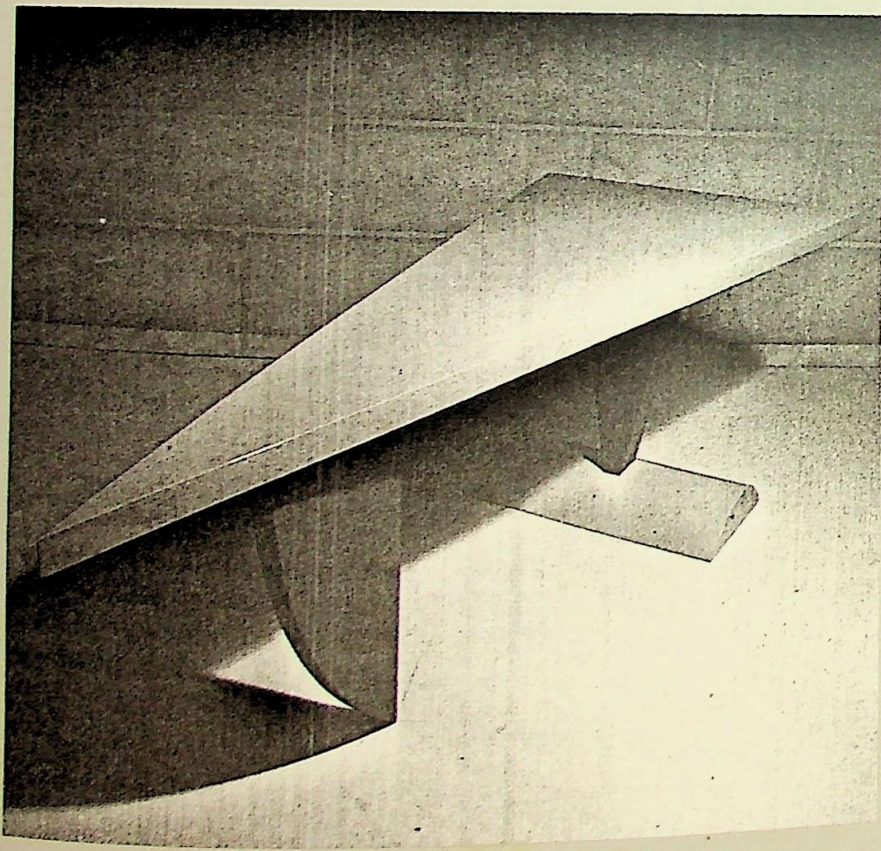
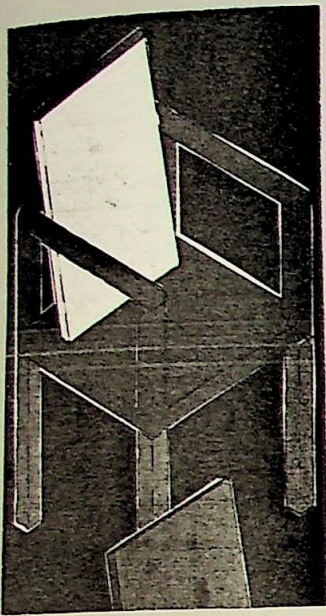


Illustration 10.11.

'Brazil' table by Peter Shire.



## MEMPHIS IDEOLOGY

"Every journalist reacts by saying that the furniture we designed was in bad taste. I think its super taste. It is Buckingham Palace that is bad taste. Memphis relates to the actual world; we are quoting the present and the future".

Ettore Sottsass.



Marting Bedin's 'Super' lamp - Memphis 1981.



Memphis was born in Italy in 1980 from a complex and sophisticated result of a cultural debate which went on for more than fifteen years having gone through the experience of the Radical Avant-Garde movement and the political manifestation of the 60's.

Memphis is dealing with the problem of linguistic reformulation, contesting many of the assumptions on which the Modern Movement was based.

In 1980, it broke away from Alchymia, and its provincial exercises of the Avant-Garde and counter culture having a broader and more long term ambition.

"...must step down from the pedestal, ridding itself of the artistic aura and measure itself directly on the level of quality and quantity (Ref. 36.) against the world of production which was Alchymia's first and most direct objective.

Memphis, unlike the Futurists and Bauhaus, does not see the need for manifestos. Their philosophy is that 'actions speak louder than words', doing design, making decisions and carrying out experiments is the goal to which they aspire. Expanding the vocabulary, breaking new ground, shaking things up and setting up a fresh opposition is the way it sees of developing design. Memphis does not seek solutions but rather possibilities.

One of the key reasons for Memphis' success and one of its most important innovations is the relationship it has established with industry. It has pushed industry into realining itself with the variety and opulence of the images into reviewing the concept of function into reconsideration.

Instead of proving a threat to the furniture establishment, the rib-poking - two-finger experiments presented by Memphis last September, which were received with hostility by the Italian Design Press, may in fact be the saving of the Italian Furniture Industry (Ref. 37.).



Although there is a pessimistic view as well -

"The Milanese took Memphis, which was conceived a joke, far too seriously for their own good. Before Memphis there was a rule book of what was good, modern Italian Design. Memphis chucked the rule book out the window, and now the Italians have lost direction". (Ref. 13.).

Memphis as compared to its predecessor Alchymia, has taken its bid for mainstream design very seriously and not as a "joke", as Jerom Myerson would try to make you believe, setting up a management structure of production, distribution and sales systems to compete in the competitive design world.

Sottsass did not invent the Memphis ideology, but discovered it through exhausting experiments initiated in the late 50's and the result has been a selective gathering of desired characteristics. Memphis designers are aware of history and are conscious of consumption as a search for social identity and of the object as a sign through which a message is conveyed.

Sottsass' work has no illusions of intellectualism, but appeals to the most basic of senses - sight, touch (Ill. 11.1.). Complying to the philosophy that the world is perceived through the senses, one can use these senses to communicate information of all kinds. Design is a sophisticated instrument of communication.

"A preplexed British journalist stroking a bookcase in natural polished briar (used along side a yellow and green snake skin laminate in the same piece of furniture, sighed, "Fantastic, it looks like plastic"").

The intrinsic characteristic of design is the fact that it is used and distributed anyway even without communicating anything. Memphis is trying to communicate through objects with designers like De Lucchi, ambition 'to consumer products less



hostile' (Ill. 11.2.), sometimes even looking like toys.

"My feeling is that the vacuum cleaner is a mass produced object that is capable of communicating. It is possible to communicate that with a change of image there will be a change on the inside. Design pushes technology. Technology can be ready to do something, but the technology does not create a job for itself. The designer creates the job. Technology fills the design". Michele De Lucchi (Ref. 38.).

Memphis is trying to connect design to a broader culture within which we move. Memphis pieces do not just hold, pour, support or contain objects, they are a set of expressive signs with certain cultural contents communicating through design means, thinking of designs as semantic events, using information to change an object, making it a metaphor, designing it as an active presence (Ill. 11.3.).

The Bauhaus with its hard and fast rule of form follows function is no longer applicable, if it ever was. This made everything so clear-cut and simple, just define a function and it gives you a form. But function is a highly complex and variable element (Ill. 11.4.).

"As we know very well when you try to define the function of any object, the function slips through your fingers, because function is life itself. Function is not one screw more or one measurement less. Function is the final possibility of the relation between an object and life". Ettore Sottsass (Ref. 39.).

Memphis is interested in putting together a different culture in recovering a system of ties and functions that cannot be explained in purely ergonomic or functional terms that involves man and his relationship to his domestic habitat from a wider cultural and expressive point of view. In 1954 Sottsass said, "When Charles Eames



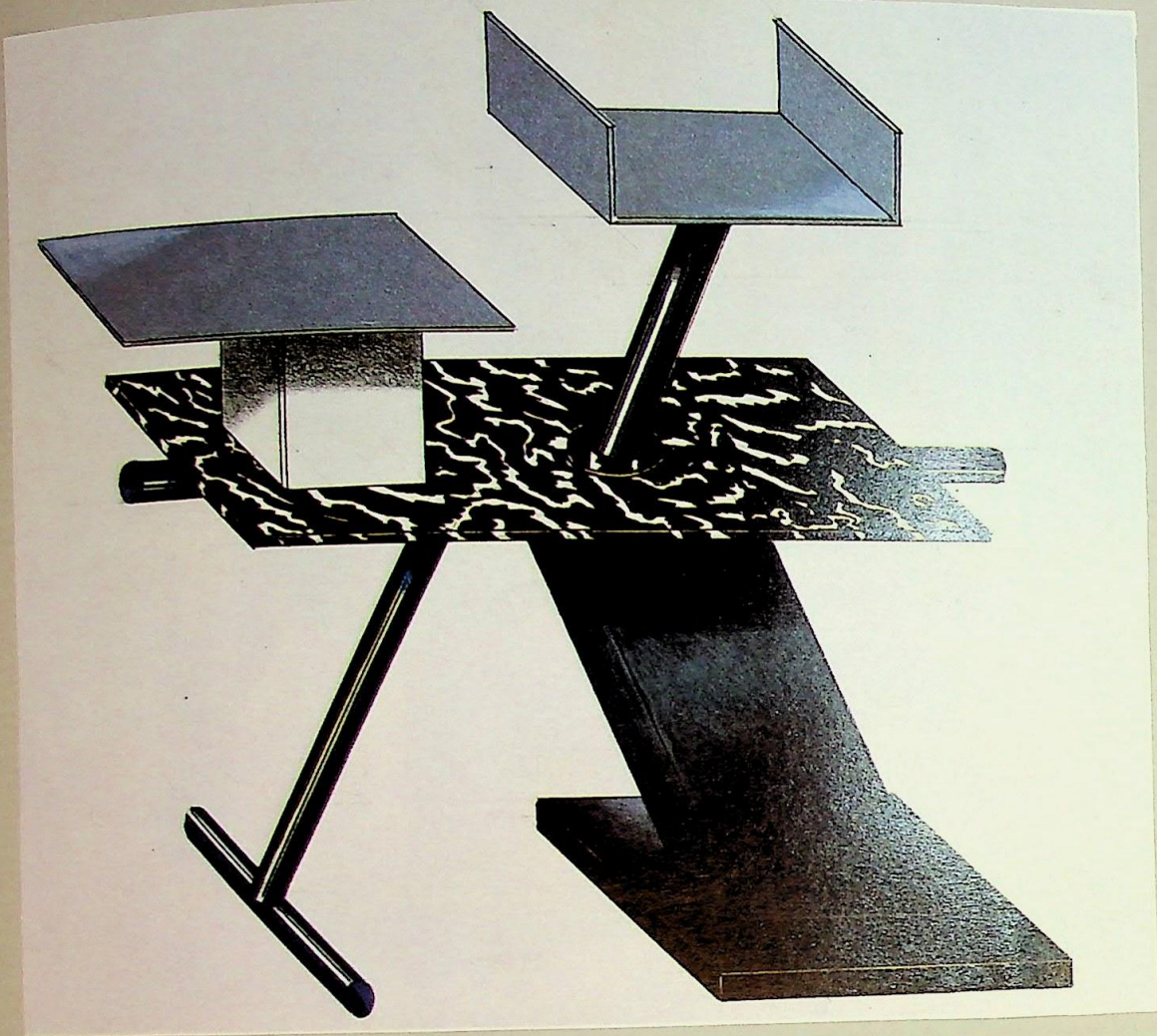


Illustration 11.1.

'Metro' by Ettore Sottsass - 1983, constructed of laminate, marble and metal.

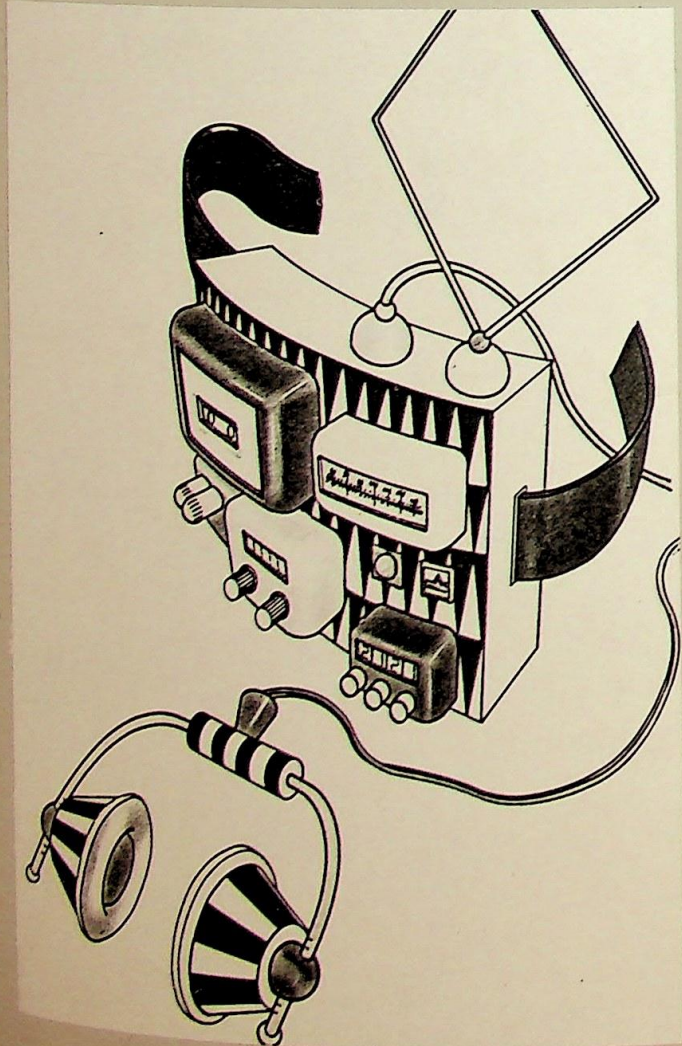


Illustration 11.2.

Portable radio and headphones by Michele De Lucchi - 1981.



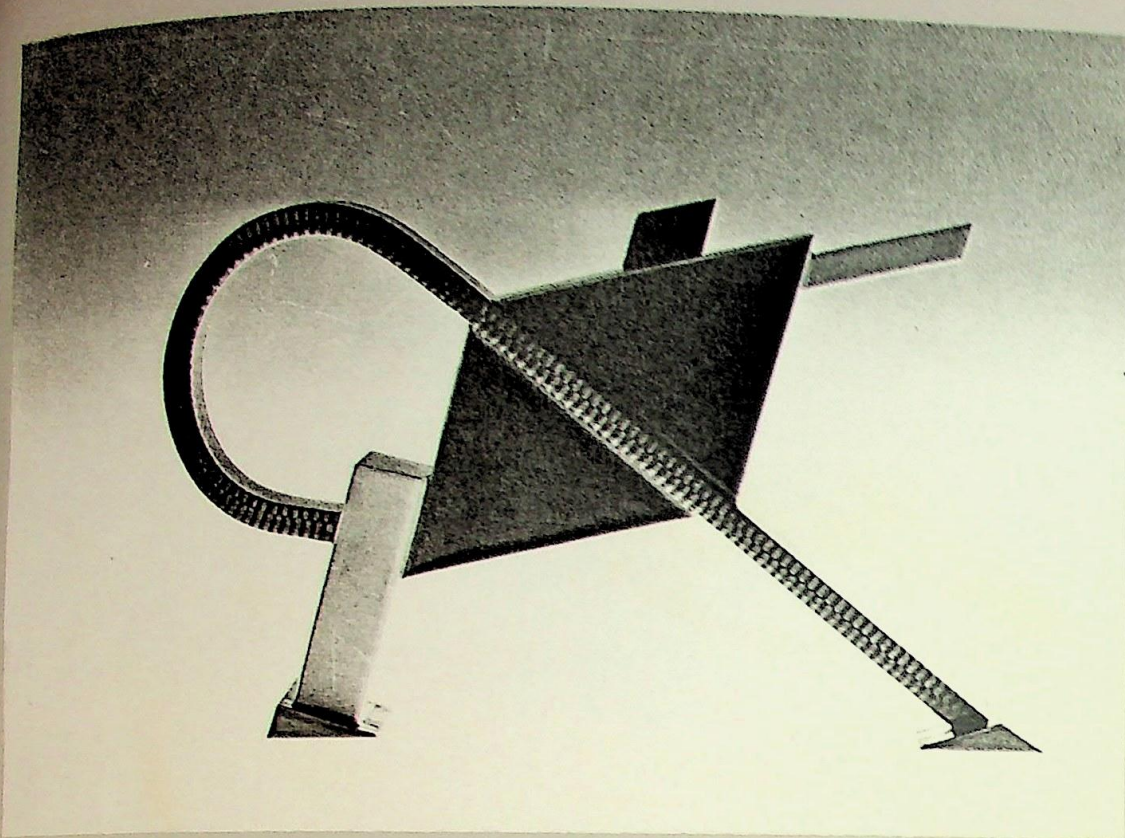


Illustration 11.4.

'Pelicanus Bellicosus', designed by Matteo Thun - Memphis 1982.



Illustration 11.3.

'Cavalieri' lamp by  
Ettore Sottsass.

Illustration 11.5.

(Left) 'Camilla' park bench,  
a post modern creation.



designed his chair, he did not design just a chair, he designed a way of sitting down, in other words, he designed a function, not for a function".

Memphis' objects exist as a system of signs and a catalyst of emotions. Memphis' whole iconographic package deals with contemporarity and markedly departs from post modernism, which is historicist and tendentiously conservative because it looks back to the themes and motifs of classical and vernacular architectural cultures as did Art Deco (Ill. 11.5., 11.6.). Memphis' efforts are focused in a completely different direction. Its objectives are to comprehend, to penetrate and to communicate with the contemporary culture of mass markets (Ill. 11.3.).

Memphis' greatest attribute is the liberation from the puritism of the modern movement it has given design, which has triggered a chain reaction of new design. The Domus Academy is now the first post graduate school of design in Italy and its curriculum of new design was initiated by Memphis experiments. New Design is the first attempt after the Bauhaus to successfully carry modernity forward. Domus Academy can boast of its international staff without fear of been ridiculed, having names like Ettore Sottsass, Andrea Branzi, Carlo Alfonsi, Marco Zanini, Gianni Pettena and Gianfranco Ferre. It has the pedigree to produce winners. Since its opening in 1983, the results have been promising and seem to be paving the way for the future of international design.





Illustration 11.6.

'Acale' by Antonia Astori, a post modern look at classical architecture



CONCLUSION



Memphis has had its critics, particularly among the design establishment.

"In my opinion, this furniture offers no possibility for development whatsoever. It is only a variant of fashion". Vico Magistretti.

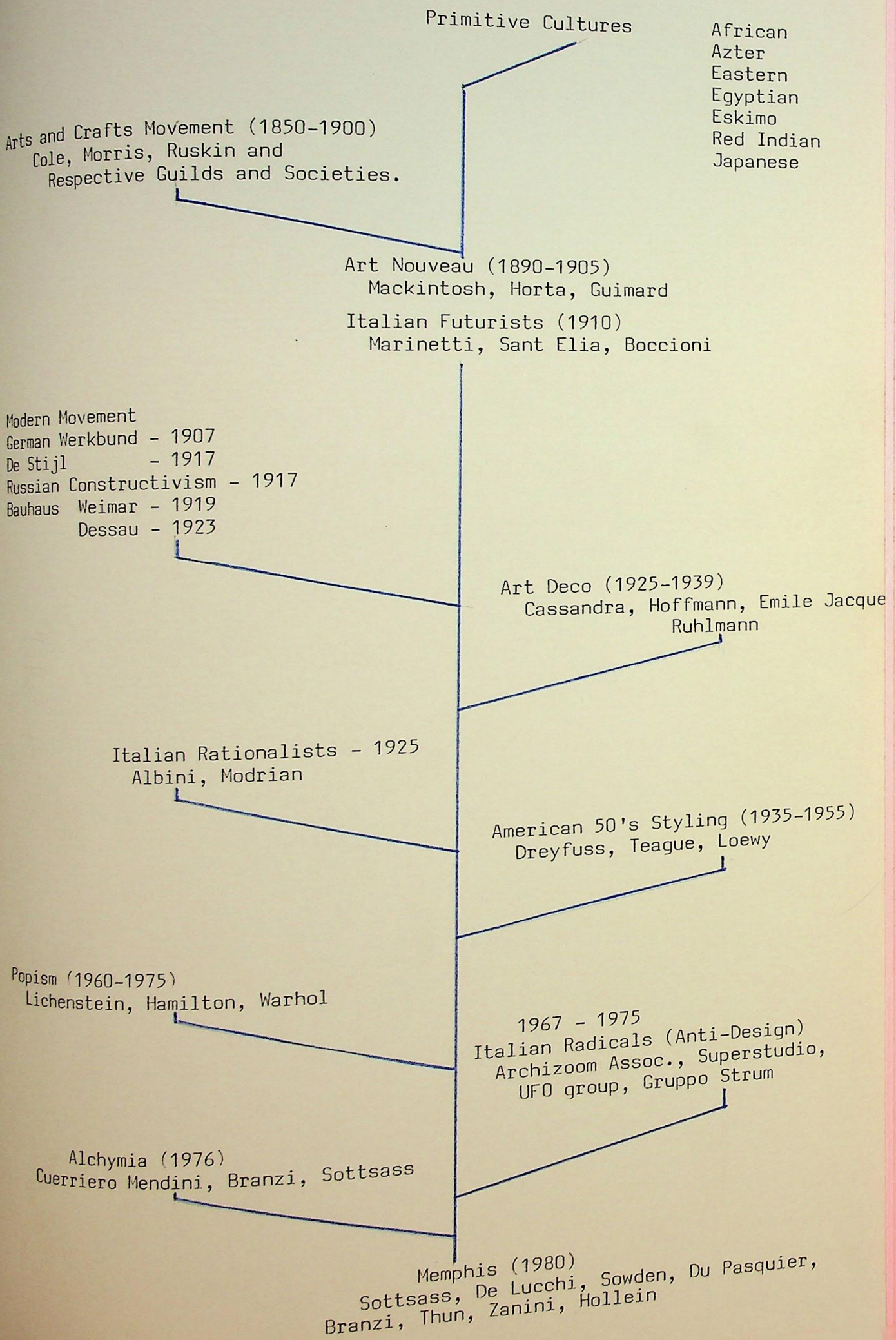
Memphis has strived on such criticism and has shaken up the establishment values of the Modern Movement, with an injection of life and virility. It is not a fruitless or childish approach, it's the first attempt since Modernism to carry modernity forward.

This river of eclecticism has drawn from numerous and diverse sources - Modern Movement, Art Deco, Arts and Crafts and primitive cultures, with the ambition of broadening the vocabulary of design in an attempt to comprehend, to penetrate and to communicate with the contemporary culture of the mass market.

Memphis' "function is to exist", (Sottsass), and by existing elaborating on its course with the intensity of an overflowing river that opens new paths and then closes them, changing its course, dragging earth with it, leaving stones behind, changing depth and direction until it is no longer recognizable and becomes a new river with different banks, different vegetation, different shades, different birds, different stories and different people who live on its shores.



## SOURCES OF MEMPHIS

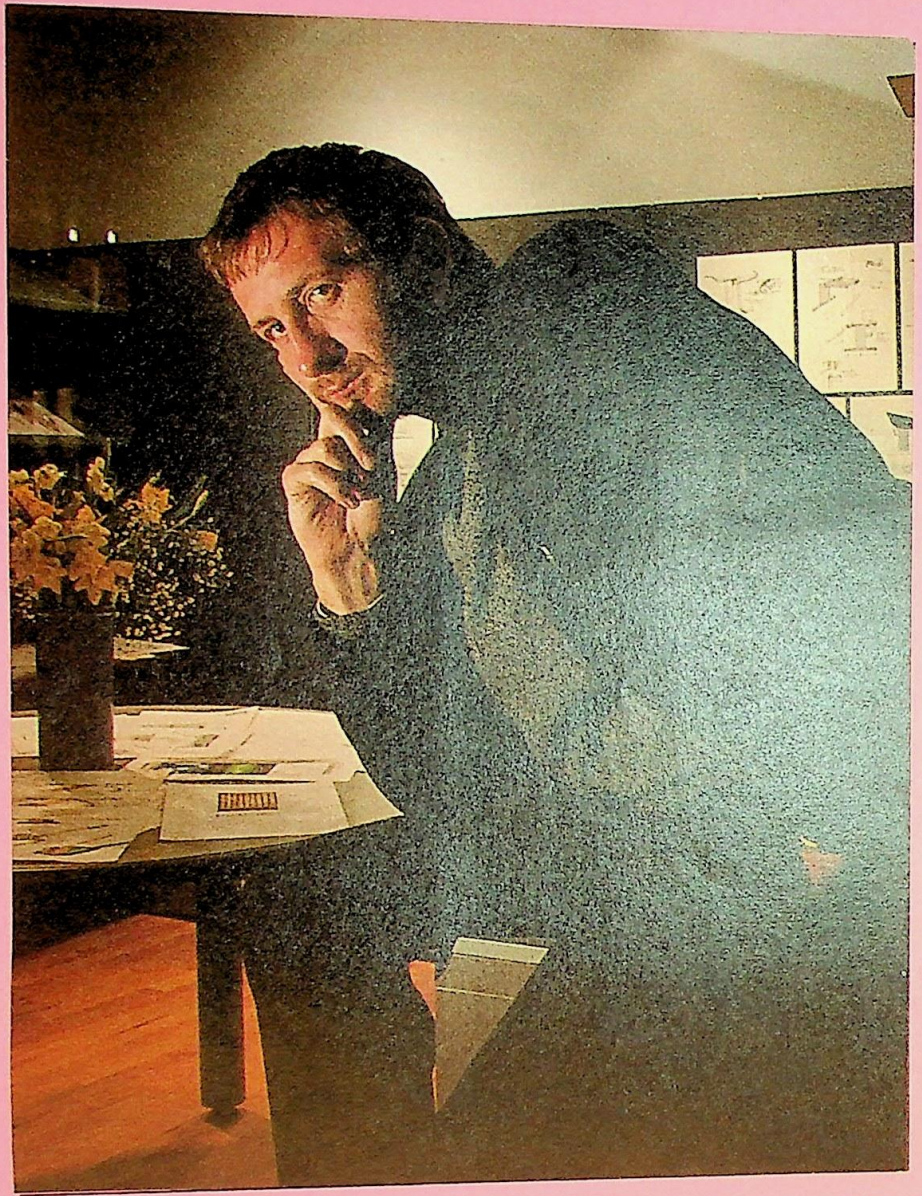




BIOGRAPHIES



# MICHELE DE LUCCHI SON OF SOTTsass



Michael De Lucchi

"I never actually decided to become a designer ..... But I'm not a frustrated artist" Designers Journal March 1984.  
De Lucchi possesses a very wide range of skills from Industrial, Graphic, Interior and Exhibition Design.

He was born in Ferrara Italy in November, 1951. He studied first in Padva and then at Florence University where along with Piero Bombin, Borg Pre mru and Valerio Tridenti they formed



"Gruppo Cavat" (1973-76) which produced Avant-Garde and Radical architecture. He was also a founder member along with Ettore Sottsass and Andrea Branzi of Super Studio Group. Both groups being influenced by British Archigram.

An example of Gruppo Cavat's diverse approach was the holding of a seminar on "Culturally Impossible Architecture" in the Monsekice Quarries just outside Padua.

He obtained his degree in architecture from Florence University in 1975 and subsequently became assistant professor to Adolfo Natalini at the faculty of architecture and also at The International Art University of Florence.

In 1978 he left teaching and went to Milan where he began a close collaboration with Ettore Sottsass. He worked and designed for Alchimia until he left to form Memphis 'The New International Style' in 1980.

For Memphis he has designed and carried out some of the best known products.

In 1979 he became a consultant to Olivetti and under the supervision of Sottsass (his adopted father "I am son of Sottsass" De Lucca Designers Journal May, 1984) He designed Olivetti Icarus Office Furniture, at the same time with Sottsass Associates he designed both the interior decoration and the



The image of technology is different from actual technology, and there exist a lot of possibilities within the image of technology. We are living in an epoch of consumerism. Our way of communicating with each other is mass-produced. We see it as sophisticated technology, for example, when the Japanese produce a stereo that is matte black and silver. We recognize it immediately as such because the "image" of sophisticated technology is matte black. Today we use more images, and the images we use are very sophisticated. People who work with images deal in a kind of iconology, a very sophisticated iconography. The ideal is to have a catalogue of iconography that exists today and to use this iconography to open up possibilities.

I chose household objects that we have in our homes—objects that everybody uses, but no one would think to design—to explore the possibilities. We see a vacuum cleaner, but we don't think about the image of the vacuum cleaner. My feeling is that the vacuum cleaner is a mass-produced object that is also a means of communicating. It is possible to communicate an image with a vacuum cleaner. When I design a vacuum cleaner—even if it is only decorative—it will change the technology. As the design of the shell changes, there will be changes on the inside. The designer creates the job. Technology fills the design. Decoration will change the way the object is perceived, the very nature of design. Not to just make a lamp, but that this lamp will change the very idea of lamps. It's not that this lamp or this vacuum cleaner is the best lamp or the best vacuum cleaner, or that this is the final lamp or vacuum cleaner, but that each will change the whole idea—a very little—of the way we conceive design.

I'm working on designing the idea of design. The traditional designer works with the manufacturer whose idea is to produce something that will become a best-seller. Then there are designers with a longer view. Ettore Sottsass was the first to say that when you design an object, you don't just design the object but also the environment in which the object will be put. And you also design the behavior of the people who will use the object. The idea was to open the possibilities of design so that people could exercise their creativity, but we realize that most people need to have models. By seeing a model of change, the consumer is able to see the possibilities of change.

- Michele De Lucchi



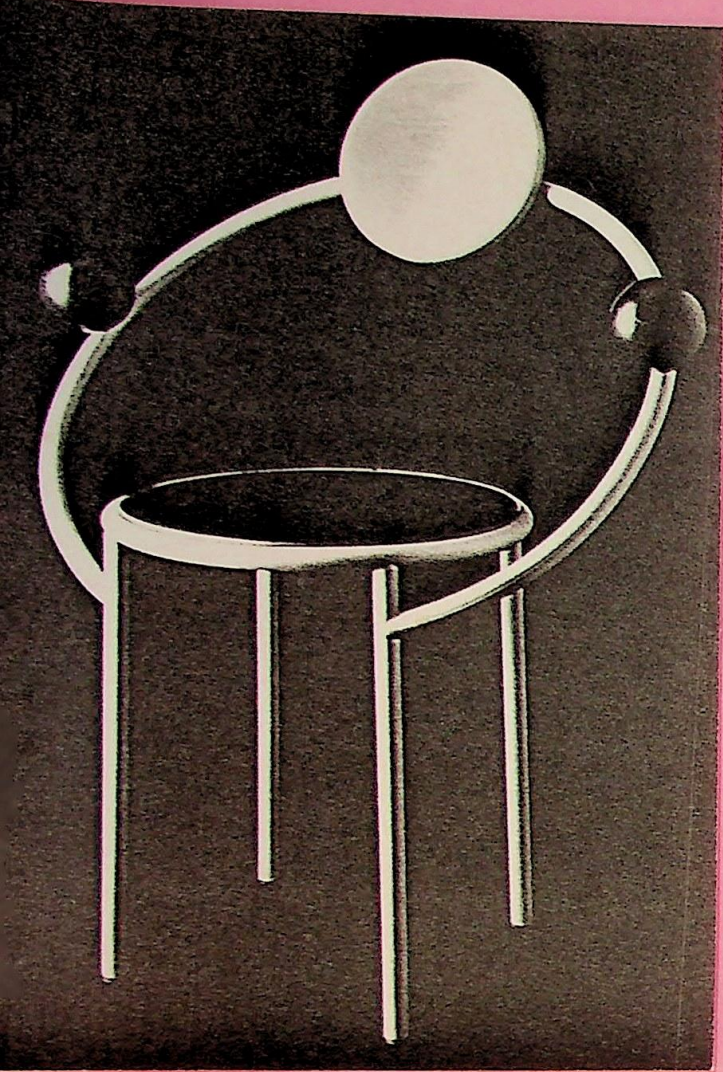
images of more than fifty Fiorucci shops in Italy and abroad. Currently he is designing for a wide range of important international furniture manufactures among them, acerbis artemide, bieffe plast, cleto monari De Lucchi believes firmly in decoration as a key element in the reinvention of figuration and of image.

"In a traditional designed object the surface is a single unit. Until four or five years ago people devoted all their energy to make surfaces homogenous associable and continuous. Today the tendency is to see the design not so much as a unit but as a sum of parts. We have almost come to study the cell that make up objects themselves. Materials and decorations are cells of objects and they are part of this process".

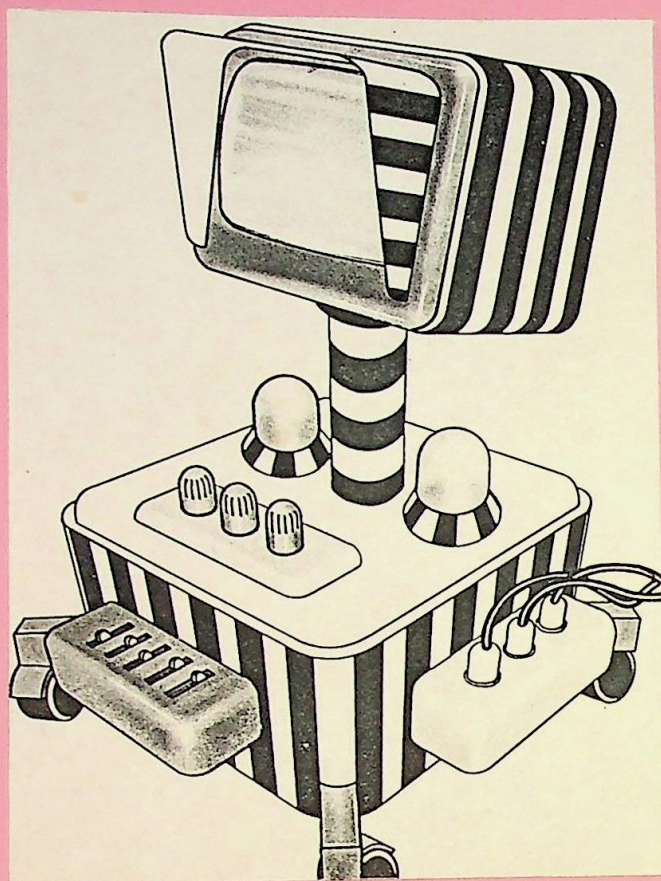
His aesthetic is influenced by his philosophy to render domestic appliances and furniture less hostile and alienating by making them look like toys.

Penny Sparke " De Lucchi designs toys for adults.



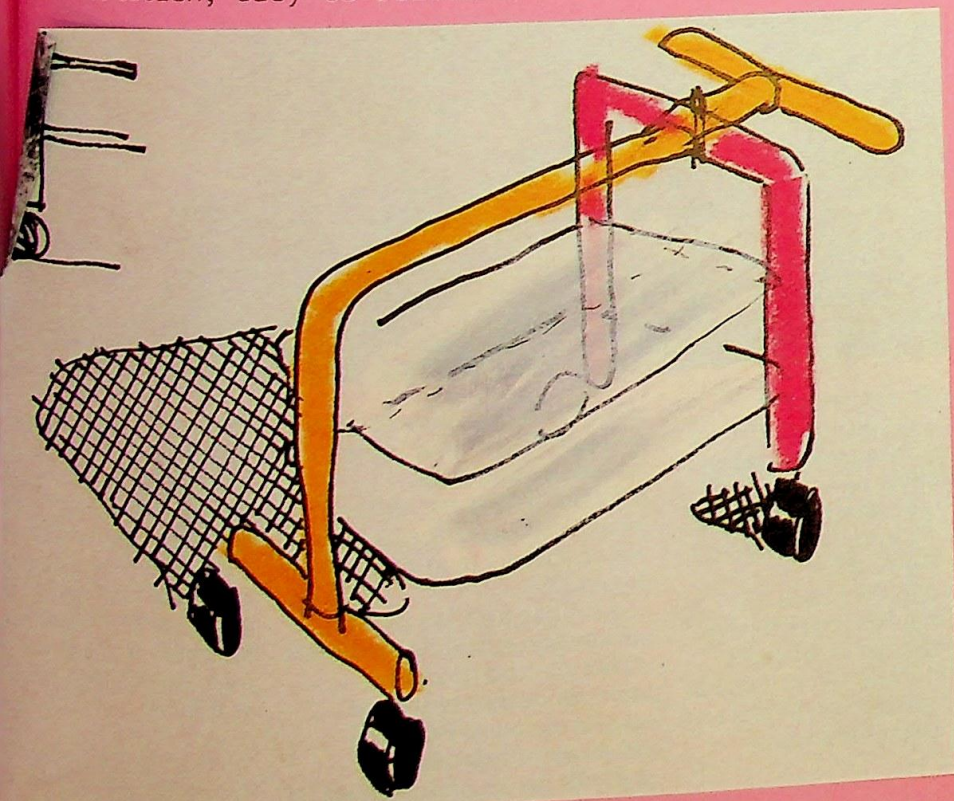


'First' chair, designed by De Lucchi,  
inspired by basic chemistry.



Examples of De Lucchi's philosophy  
to render products less hostile.

Trolley designed by De Lucchi, simple  
construction, easy to relate to.



'Rivera' chair -  
Memphis 1981.





## NATHALIE DU PASQUIER (29)

Nathalie was born in Bordeaux, France in 1957. She spent three years from 1975 - '78 travelling extensively in Australia and India, cultures which she draws inspiration from for some of her creations.

Returning to Bordeaux in 1978 from her travels, she started studying architecture and design. In 1979 she left the home of good wine and headed to Italy with the intentions of putting theory into practice. Her first stop was Rome and then Milan, her new adopted home.

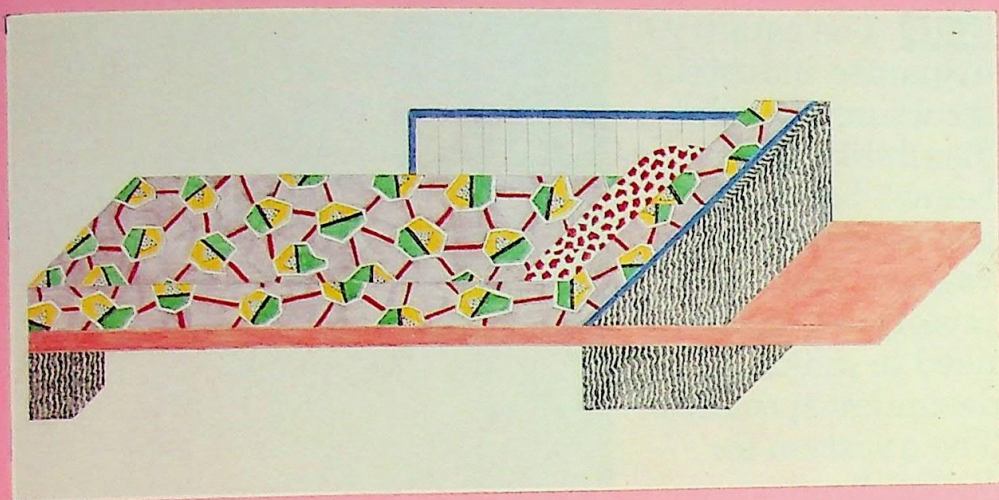
She started her illustrious career as a fabric designer for Studio Rainbow. Shortly afterwards she came in contact with the Memphis designers and began working with them on textiles and later moved on to furniture and graphics.

A large proportion of her work is taken up designing with her Memphis colleague George J. Sowden. This collaboration has been very fruitful with contracts for large international firms such as Tomkinson Carpets (U.K.), Credit Tiles, Wounder World Village etc. (see biography on George J. Sowden). She still finds time for designing for Memphis, of which she is a founder member and also designs for Sottsass Associates.

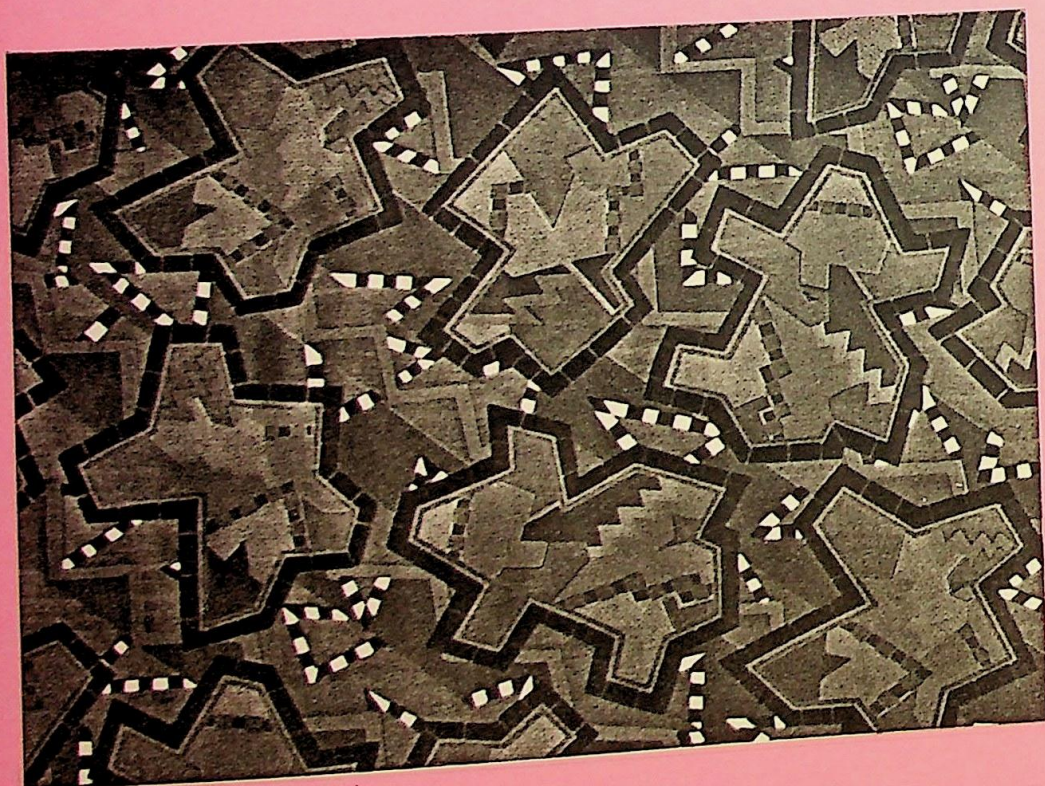
In 1982, she joined the creative staff of Fiorucci. Her patterns are anarchic, highly sensitive and wildly abstract. Her eclecticism draws from Cubism, Futurism, Art Deco, Indian, African, Science Fiction and Comic Imagery.

The African influence is very strong with traits of primitive tribal dress appearing in her creations. Some of the fabrics have been named after her particular influences resulting in names like 'Zaire', 'Gabon', 'Zamisia' and 'Kenya'.





'Royal' sofa, designed by Nathalie du Pasquier - Memphis 1983.



'Gabon' fabric, designed by Nathalie du Pasquier - Memphis 1982, showing African influence.



Professor Michael Graves (52)

Born in the U.S.A. in 1934, he is presently the Professor of Architecture at Princiton University. He was the architect for the Nework Museum and Whitney Museum and the contraversial Portland Building in Origan. Graves within an architecture structure has challenged the established order of modernism.

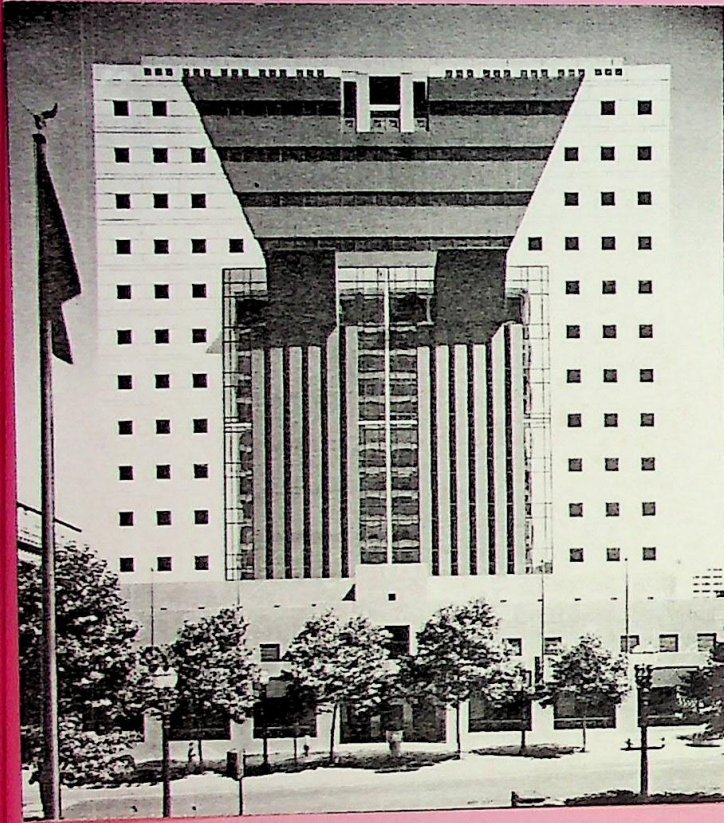
Dealing in the most intense and esoteric eclectic imagery. His sources are incredibly personal, private and diverse. His objects and images come from the most random associations and are filtered through a gifted artists eye.

"The rigerous purism of the first works having been abandoned the Portland Building by Michael Graves suggest the strategy of an inclusive and allusive language open to the relief of decoration and the gratification of historic quotation ..... Opening gaps through which a double current of "repression of the new" and " return to the repressed can flow" Domus 609.

He is pushing out the boundaries of architectural vocabulary and has received many awards for his architectural work and has been widely exhibited.

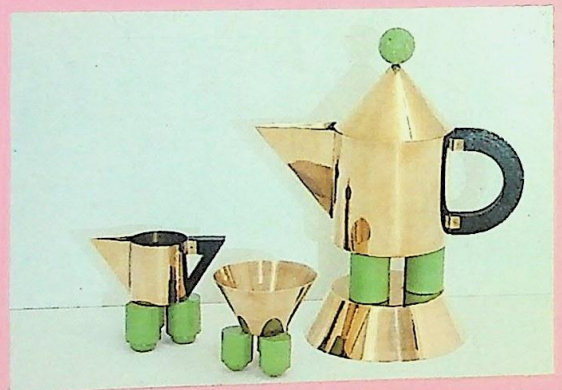
Influences on his work include printing civilisation, Egyptian, Art Deco, Modernism, and 50's Styling.



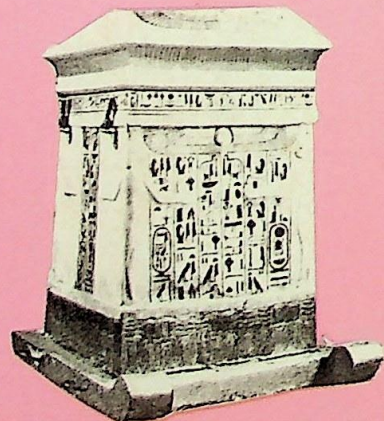


Portland Building Origion designed  
by Michael Graves. The facade of  
this building resembles a shrine  
found in Tutankhamuns Tomb.

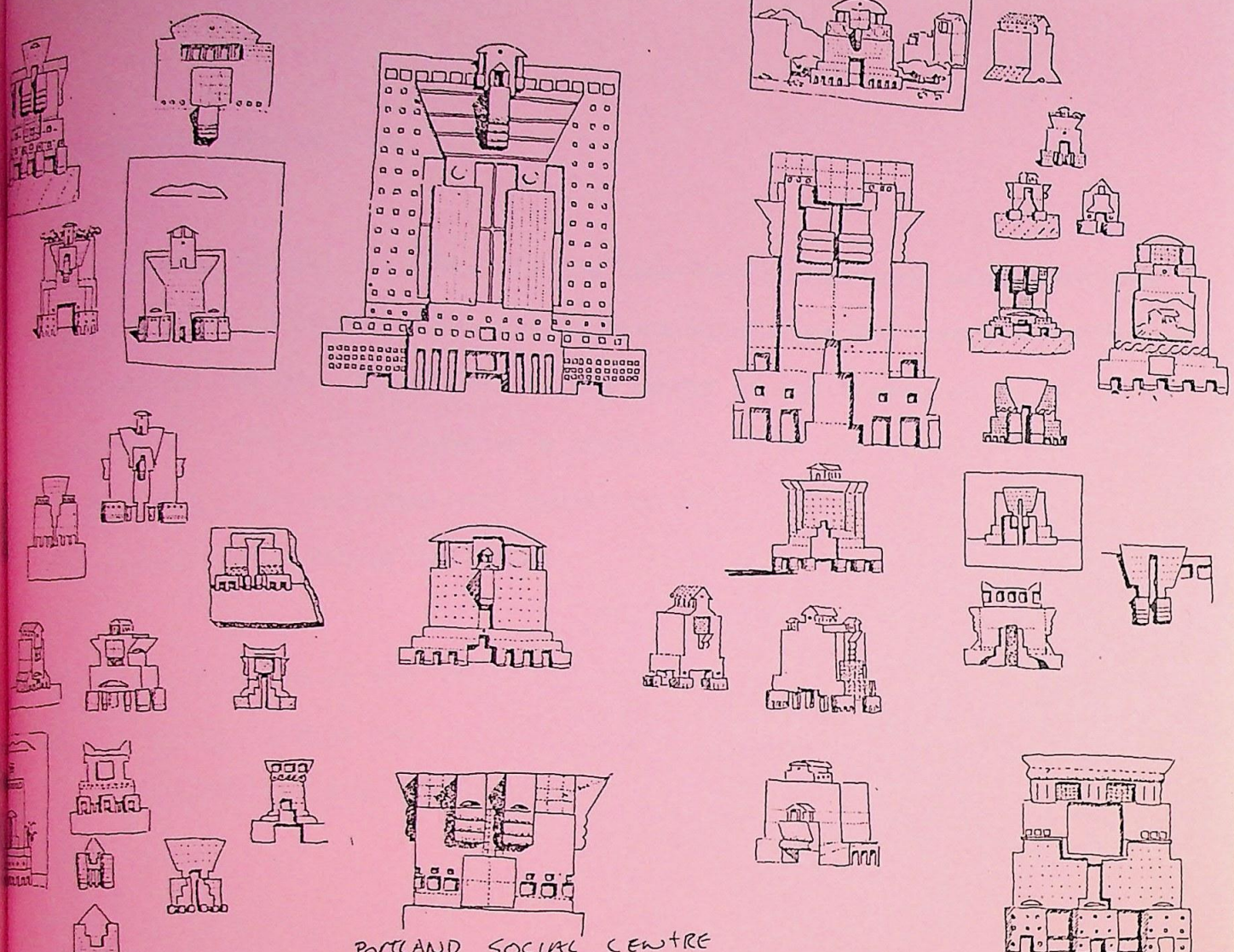
2000 year Alabaster Canopic  
Shrine from Tutankhamuns Tomb



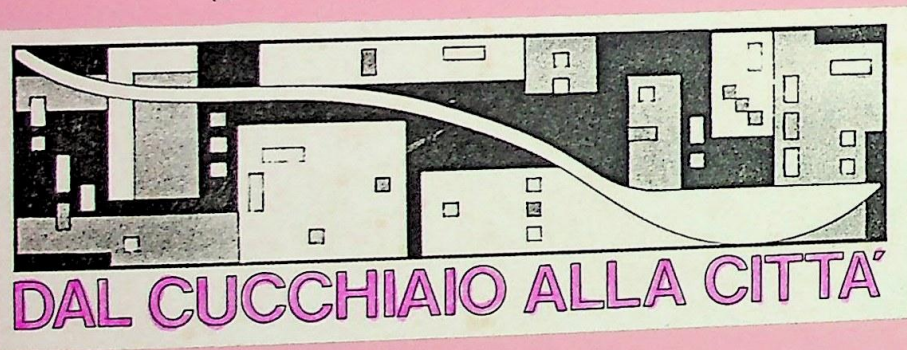
Tea Service designed by  
Michael Graves.



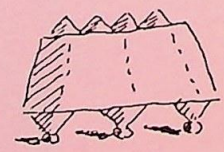
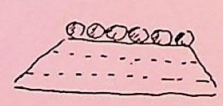




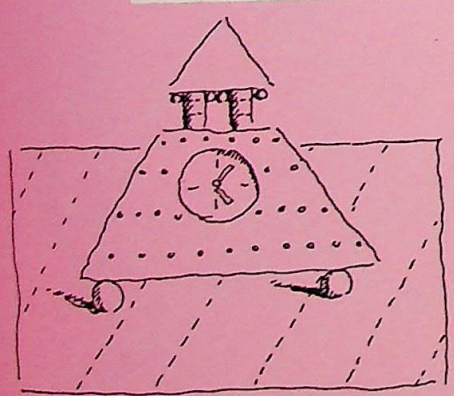
PORTLAND SOCIAL CENTRE



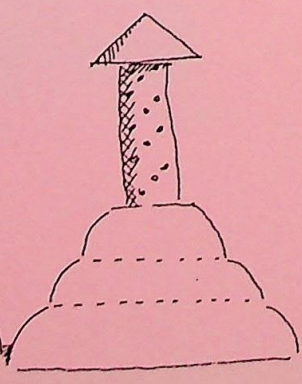
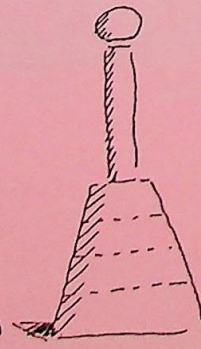
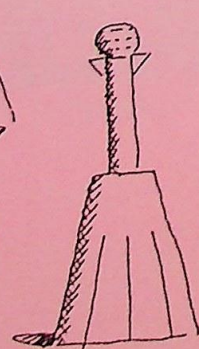
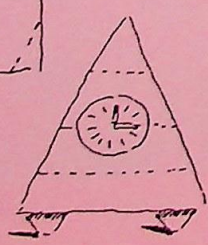
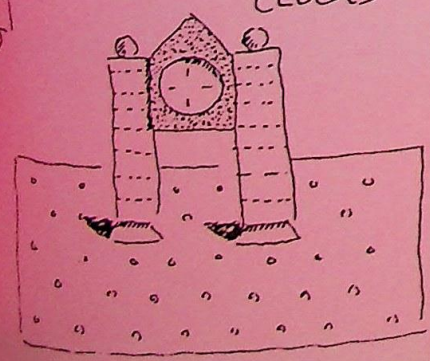
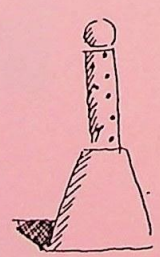
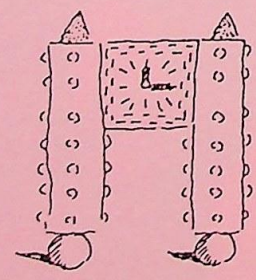
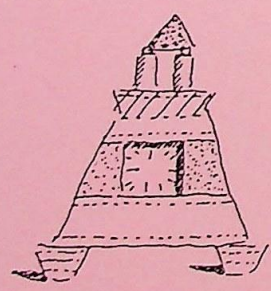
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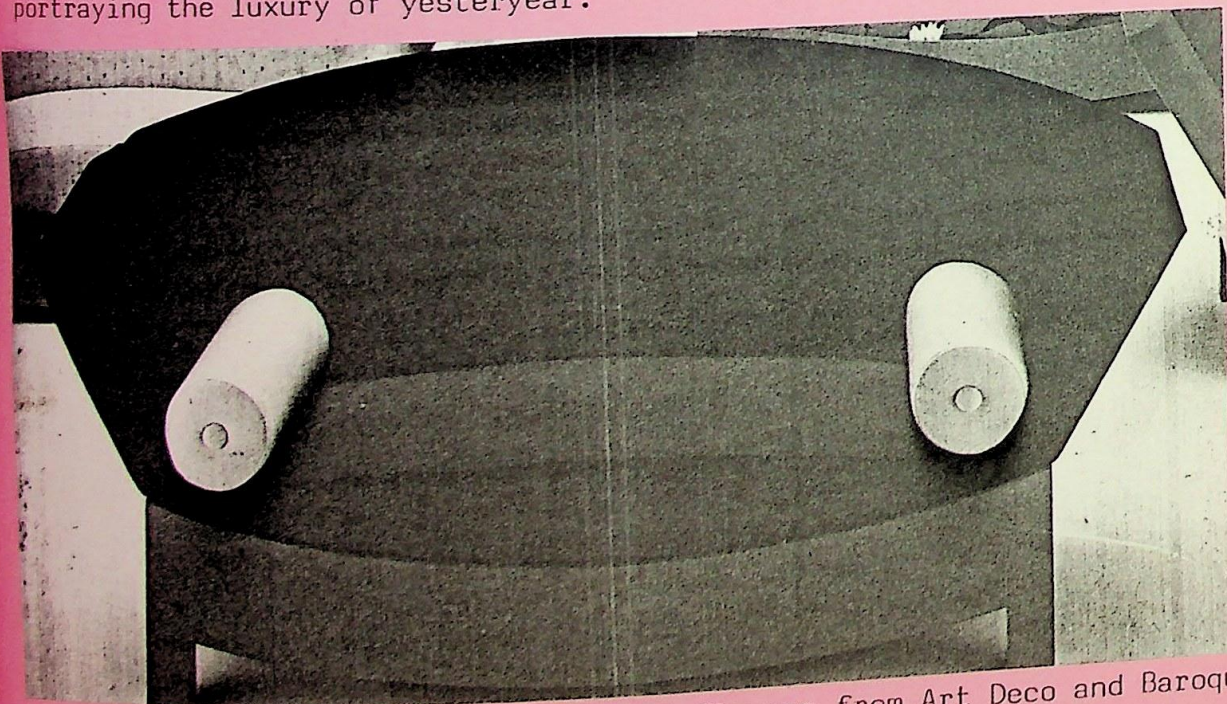


PROFESSOR HANS HOLLEIN (52).

Born in Vienna, Austria in 1934. In the late 1960's, his work, along with work from the British Archigram Group and Japanese Metabolism had a profound effect on Italian Radial Design. Since 1967 he has taught at the Academy of Art at Dusseldorf and 1976 saw him take up a professorship at The College of Applied Arts in Vienna. His work has been exhibited widely and he has been commissioned to design a large number of buildings.

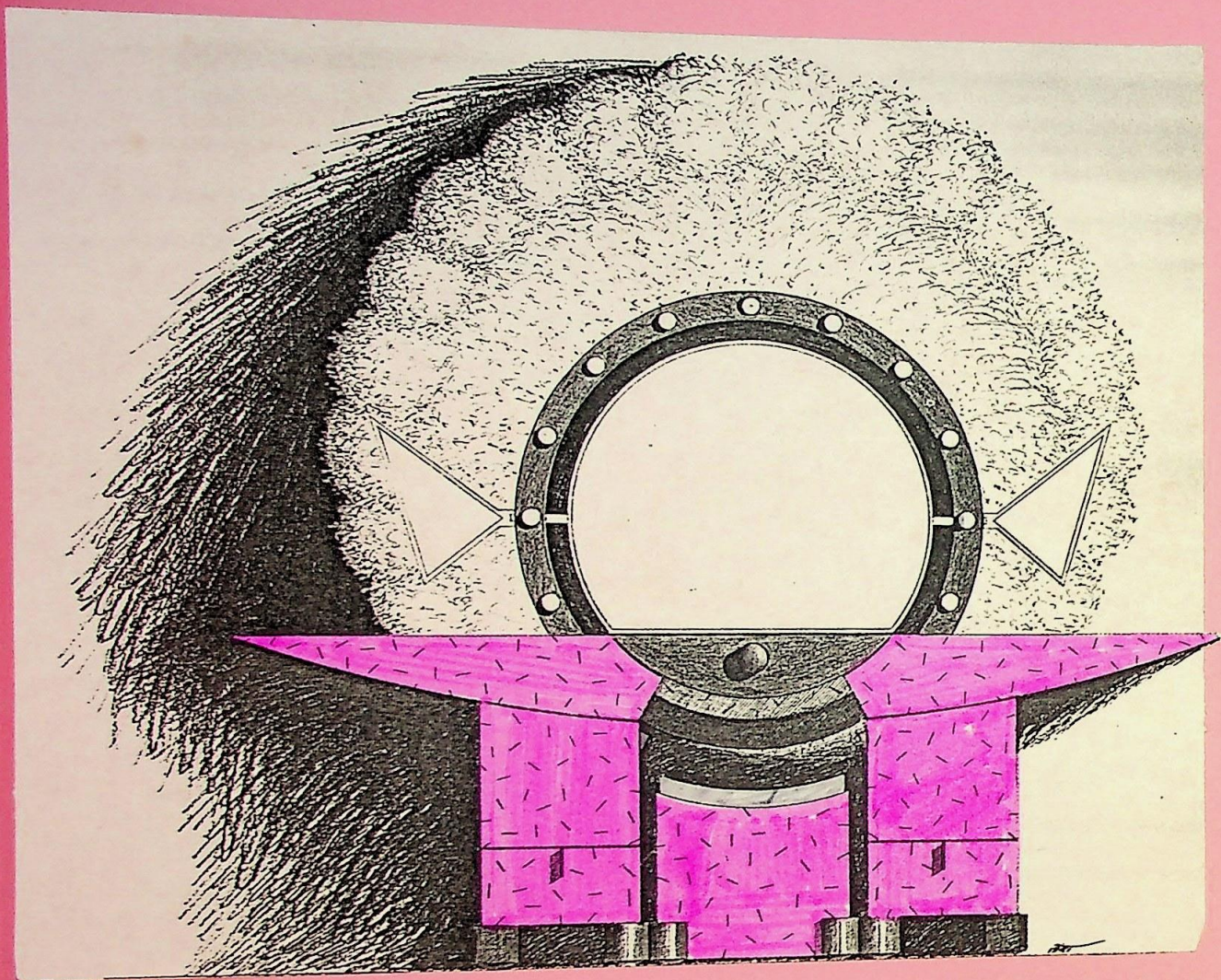
Described as been one of the "most sophisticated and refined designers" - Domus 628. His formal freedom has led to a pomposity of expressive language, resulting in his pink dressing table with feather surroundings, synomous with Hollywood Dressing rooms.

Hollein's influences include American 30's Styling, Baroque, Art Deco, Popism and Kitch. His Art Deco influence can be seen in his 'Marilyn' sofa for Poltronova, portraying the luxury of yesteryear.



Hans Hollein's 'Marilyn' sofa, showing influence from Art Deco and Baroque.





Hans Hollein's 'Mobile Da Toeletta', influenced by Hollywood styling of the 30's.



Peter Shire (39)

Born in 1947, Shire is an American Artist and Designer living in Los Angeles. He has spread the Memphis anti-Design philosophy in the working area with juxtaposition pieces like 'Lexcen' table for the Australian Tourist Board in Los Angeles. He has taken the characteristic features of Australia as he sees them: Yauching and Sheep Farming and combined them.

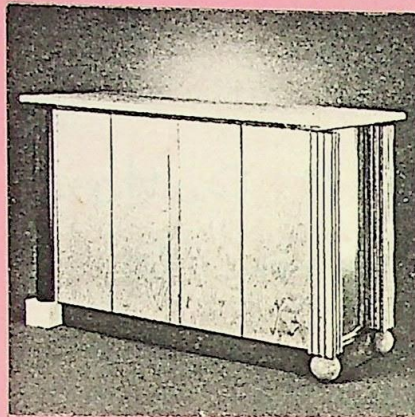
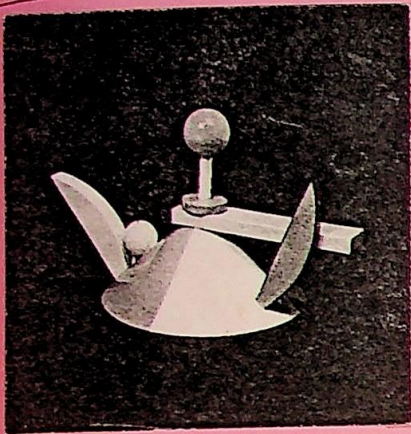
The creation is representative of a Yacht paying homage to another designer Ben Lexcen creator of the yacht 'Australia II' with its sheepskin covered keel (leg) a zoomorphic reference to sheep.

What has simply crazy and fun has become a drama of driving brads with sledge hammer and pulling spikes with jeweller's pliers ..... to think, to allow oneself to think during the night without convention or constraint"

His influences include Omni Presence, Futurism Bauhaus, Urban Eccentricism, rationalism. Pope Art. Shire entitled his exhibition in Washington in 1981 as " Demiurge of Clay" meaning the creation of the world of clay. Many of the same traits that are found in Matteo Thun's ceramics are present in Shire's work.

Shire rejects the conventions and brings the material to its extreme.

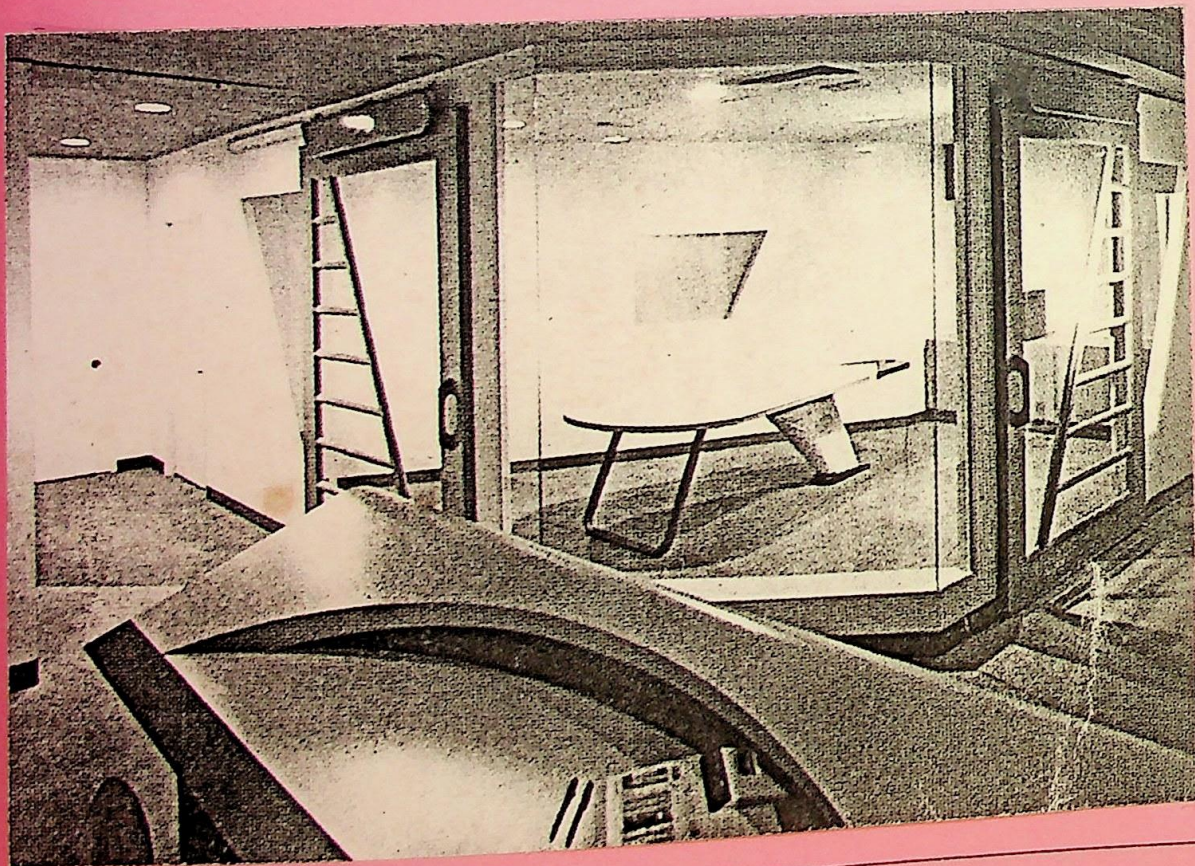




Ceramic Tea Pot

Side Board by Shire

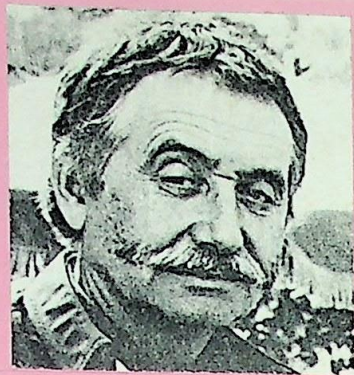
showing Shires eclecticism



Lencen table designed by Shire showing reference to sheep farming and yachting.



ETTORE SOTTASS (69).



One of the most protean and productive figures of Italian Design (Interior, Furniture, Exhibition, Industrial and Architecture).

He was born in Innsbruck, Austria in 1917 and graduated at the Turin Polytechnic in 1939. His professional career started with the opening of a studio in Milan in 1947, preparing projects, participating in architecture competitions and working on the 'Ricostruzione' of Italy after the war through housing developments.

He has contributed to numerous Triennale Exhibitions winning the Compass D'or in 1959. Internationally recognised as one of the originators of the renewal of design and architecture. In 1959, he received a Honorary Doctorate from the Royal College of Art in London. He was a founder member of Global Tools and Superstudio, two radical groups in the 70's. 1980 saw the foundation of Sottsass Associati, his consultancy firm outside Memphis and Olivetti.

His career has two distinct parts. The first one as leading protagonist of the great post war wave of modern design aesthetics in Italy. This work was cool and precise, combining post Bauhaus aesthetic of form follows function with a characteristically Italian sensuousness and delicacy.

Sottsass was also experimenting with furniture and some of his pieces designed in the 1960's, such as the green-and-white striped 'Nefertiti' desk and furniture for Poltronova, designed by Archizoom Associates, indicated the sea of change that was about to come into his work. Sottsass was becoming a 'Guru' of radical Movement or Counter Design (Global Tools, Archizoom, Superstudio), which eventually led to the establishment of



Studio Alchymia in 1976, for which he designed many pieces before, leaving to form Memphis in 1980.

For many years he has designed furniture for Memphis, of which he has been one of the guiding lights or even as he has been referred to as a 'Guru'. He lectures in urban furniture at the Domus Academy.

Sottsass' Memphis furniture, often bold, deliberately garish, sometimes dysfunctional, often covered in bizarre custom designed formica or fake snakeskin shows eclectic and philosophical mind.

"A perplexed British Journalist stroking a bookcase in natural polished briar (used along side yellow and green snake skin laminate in the same piece of furniture Beverly), sighed, "Fantastic, it looks like plastic"".

He draws inspiration from a wide variety of sources: India, Far Eastern cultures, Pop Painters such as Roy Lichtenstein and Andy Warhol. Shapes from painters like Frank Stella and Minimal structure of Sculpture such as Sal de Witt, Don Jabb.

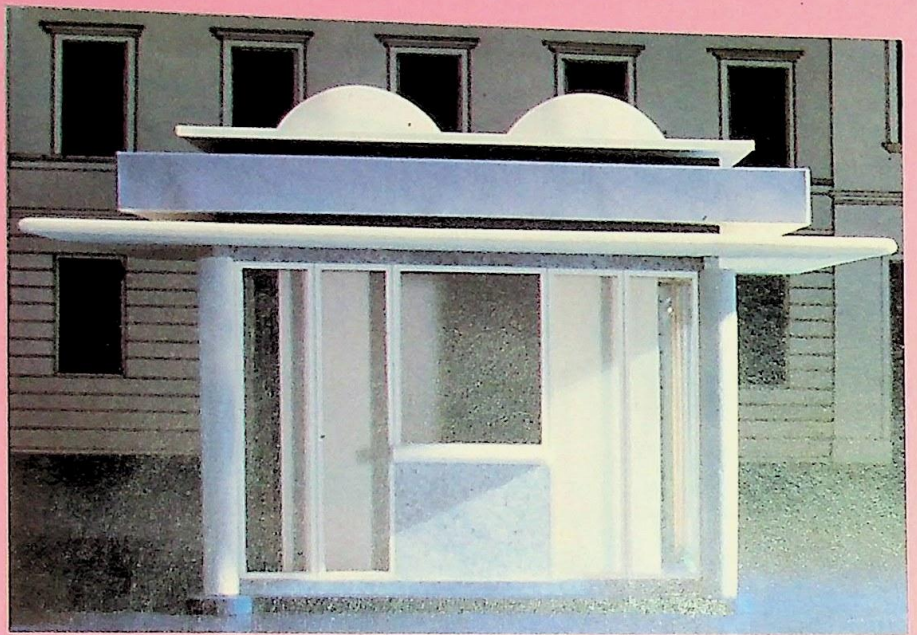




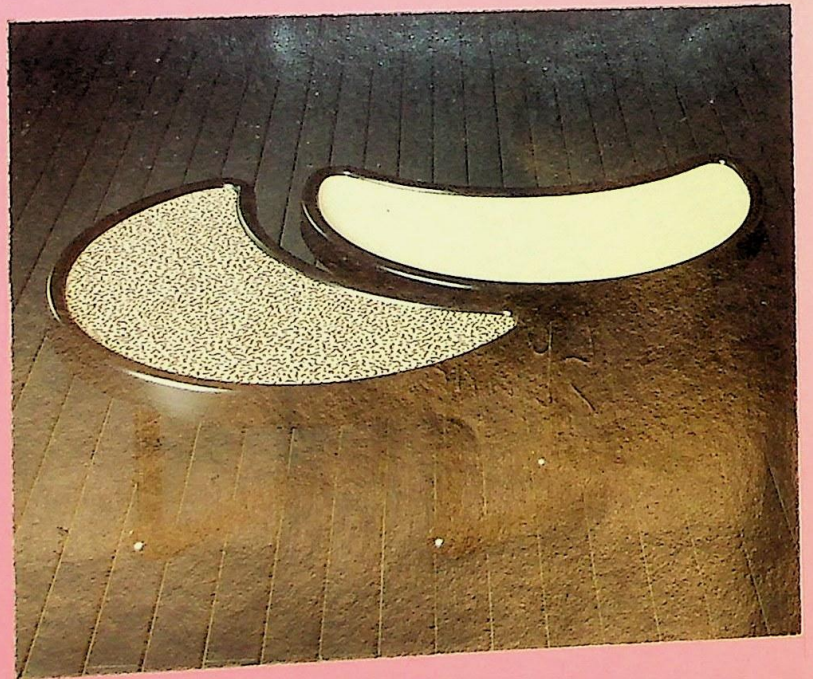
Ceramics by Sottsass.



'Bacterio' Laminate by Sottsass.



Sottsass Associates design for Kiosks for the streets of Turin.



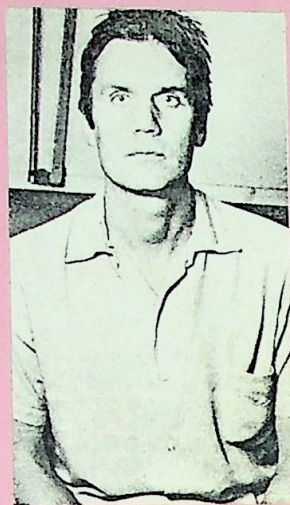
Sottsass' 'Crescent' table.



GEORGE JAMES SOWDEN (44).

He was born in Leeds, England in 1942. Studied architecture at Gloucestershire College of Art, graduating in 1964. For the following two years he traveled in the Middle East, returning in 1966 to take a design course lasting another two

years. On completion of the course, he founded a small business producing furniture which was not a success.



Disillusioned with English design, he fled to Italy in 1970 and became a consultant to Olivetti where he got to know, understand and admire Ettore Sottsass.

In 1973, he took part in an exhibition entitled 'The Invention of the Neutral Surface'. This was to have an astounding effect on him. His ideas had been fermenting, coming to a head in 1978 with his total dedication to research into decorative surfaces.

Sowden feels that decoration is fundamental and that it coincides with the search for a future aesthetic.

"The colours and shapes that evoke emotions and excite curiosity; colours and shapes that form patterns transforming the material into swirling or agitated or blinding surfaces". Robert A.M. Stern, commenting on Sowden's patterns.

He has achieved international success for his energetic creativity and novel approach to design problems. Frequently, he collaborates with Nathalie du Pasquier to produce dazzling designs featuring zig-zags, Leopard Spots and Splurging amoba. Their clients include Tomkinson Carpets (U.K.).

"Who with their 'Drug-Crazed' Florals and Africana will certainly make a memorable

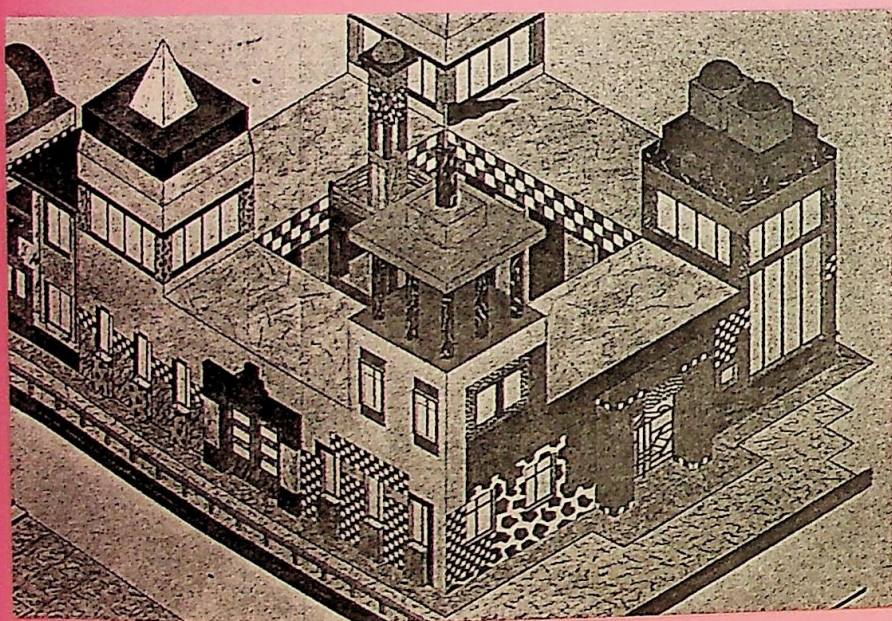


impact on their archives dating back to 1867". Design Magazine - August 1984.

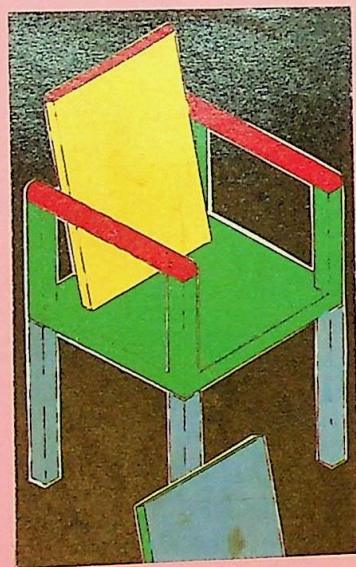
Other clients include Credit Tiles and a multimillion pound village for Wounder World, to be built in Northhamptonshire, England. Their dream brief being "to create an entire village in a new idiom".

His influences include Bauhaus, Futurists, Art Deco, Rationalists, Cubism, Popism, Primitive Cultures and Optimism.

"The Memphis Style", says Sowden, "consists of broadening the area of style itself, of never being satisfied with what has already been done, and looking for a new style all the time".



Detail of 'Village of Rhyme', designed by George J. Sowden and Nathalie du Pasquier.



'Palace' chair, designed by George J. Sowden - Memphis 1983.

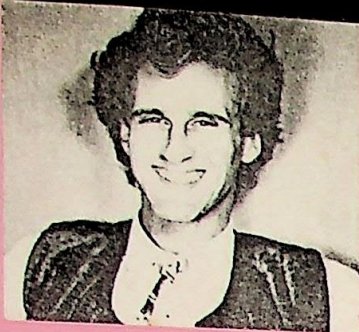


(Left) Squat harlequin-coloured clock by George J. Sowden seen in a juxtaposition surrounded by Richard Sapper's 'Tizio Lamp'.

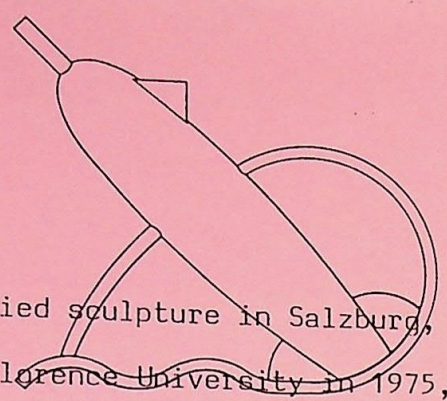




PROFESSOR MATTEO THUN (34).



Matteo was born in Balzano, Austria in 1952. He studied sculpture in Salzburg, Germany and then took a degree in architecture from Florence University in 1975, which oddly enough included the designing and building of a flying machine.



He was a founder member of Memphis in December 1980. Living presently in Milan he established his own design company in 1984. He also works for Sottsass Associates, Milan, Quortett, West Germany and ofcourse Memphis.

Being a busy international designer he still finds time to impart his skills and knowledge to students at the Academy of Art in Vienna, where he is Professor of Product Design and Ceramics.

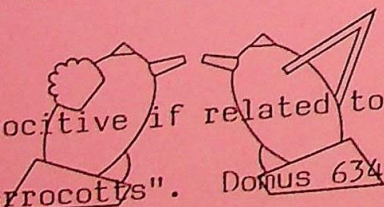
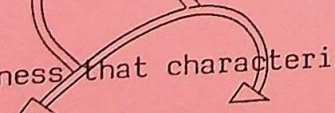
Taking a cross section of his work, we get an insight into his versatility from furniture to ceramics. To quote Ernesto N. Rogers, "An architect designs everything from city to spoons", a characteristic of Memphis designers.

Ceramics, his favourite medium, are produced from Italian Tascan clay. It is from this dilemma of poor quality clay, distinguished by standardised wares and total absence of any expressive language that his creations are born.

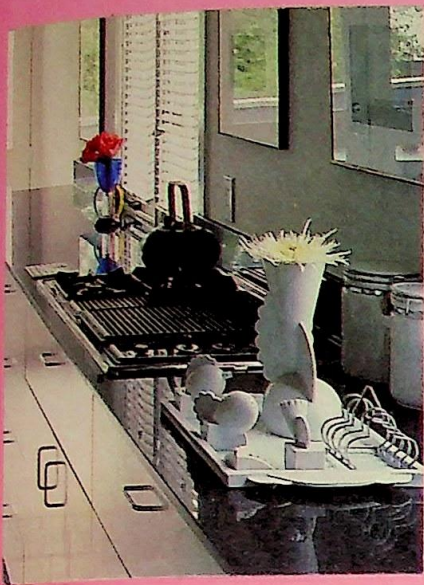
Robert Venturi said " A designer can take a popular vernacular accept its vocabulary of signs and symbols and transform it".

Many pieces have sharp edges and carry the material to extreme tension, seeing just how far it can be stretched.

"The forms are provocative if related to the round softness that characterizes the story of the terracottas". Domus 634.



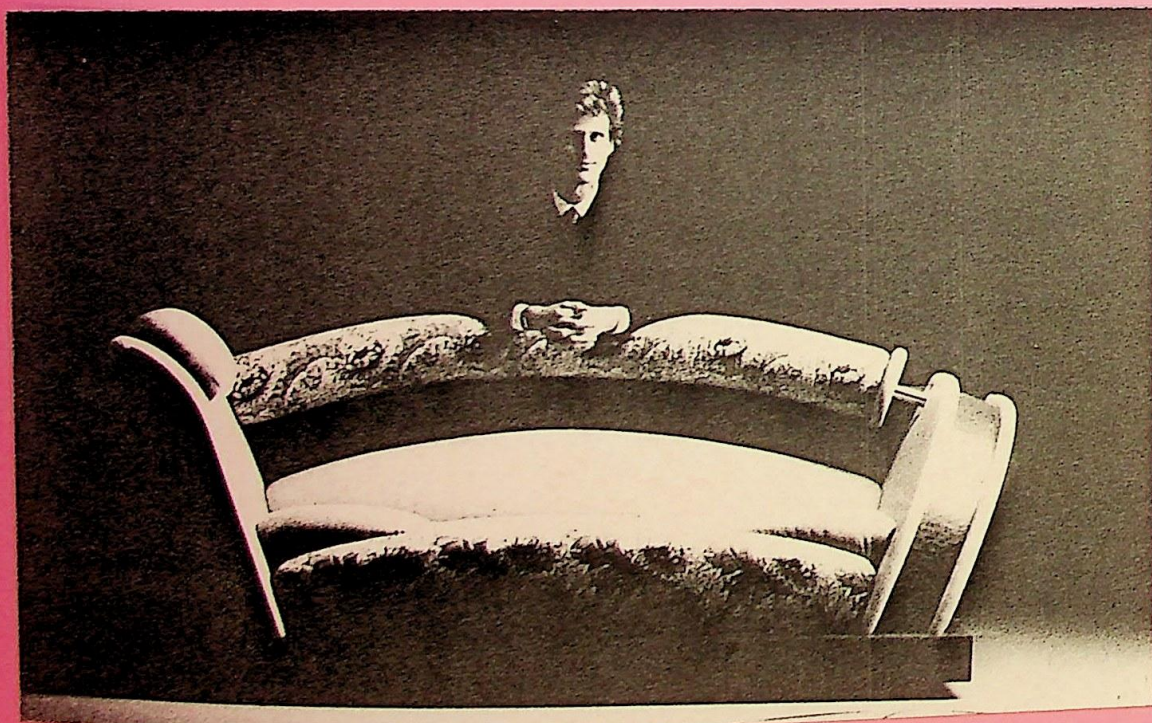




Matteo Thun's 'Manitoba' serving tray - Memphis 1982.



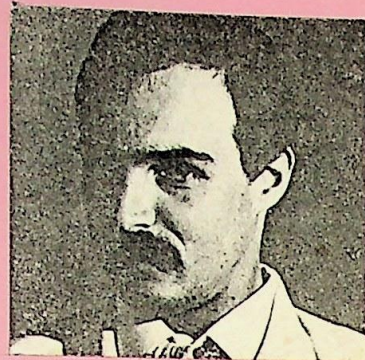
Ceramic teapot by Matteo Thun.



Matteo Thun's chaise long 'Rainer'.



MARCO ZANINI (32)



Born at Trento Italy in 1954. He studied Architecture under adolfo natalini at the University of Florence and graduated in 1978. From 1975 to 1977 he worked in Los Angeles for Argonani Company and also did free lance work in San Francisco.

He was a founder member of Memphis " The New International Style / and has been working with Ettore Sottsass since 1977 Zanini became a member of sottsass associates in 1980.

Zanini " Hoffmann often used precious materials like mother-of-pearl, but they were essentially lines. If we use mother of pearl we use square miles of it because its the mother of pearl that tells the story not the line.

Zanini started with Memphis in 1986 and has mainly been involved in creative ceramics and glass wares. But has done some furniture design notabily the 'Dublin' sofa and 'Lucrezia' chair. His style is less dogmatic and more subtle compared to some of his Memphis peers.

He sources of eclectic imagery are mainly through association with other colture. With pieces liek 'Colarado' and 'Mississippi' obviously influenced by his encounters in the States.

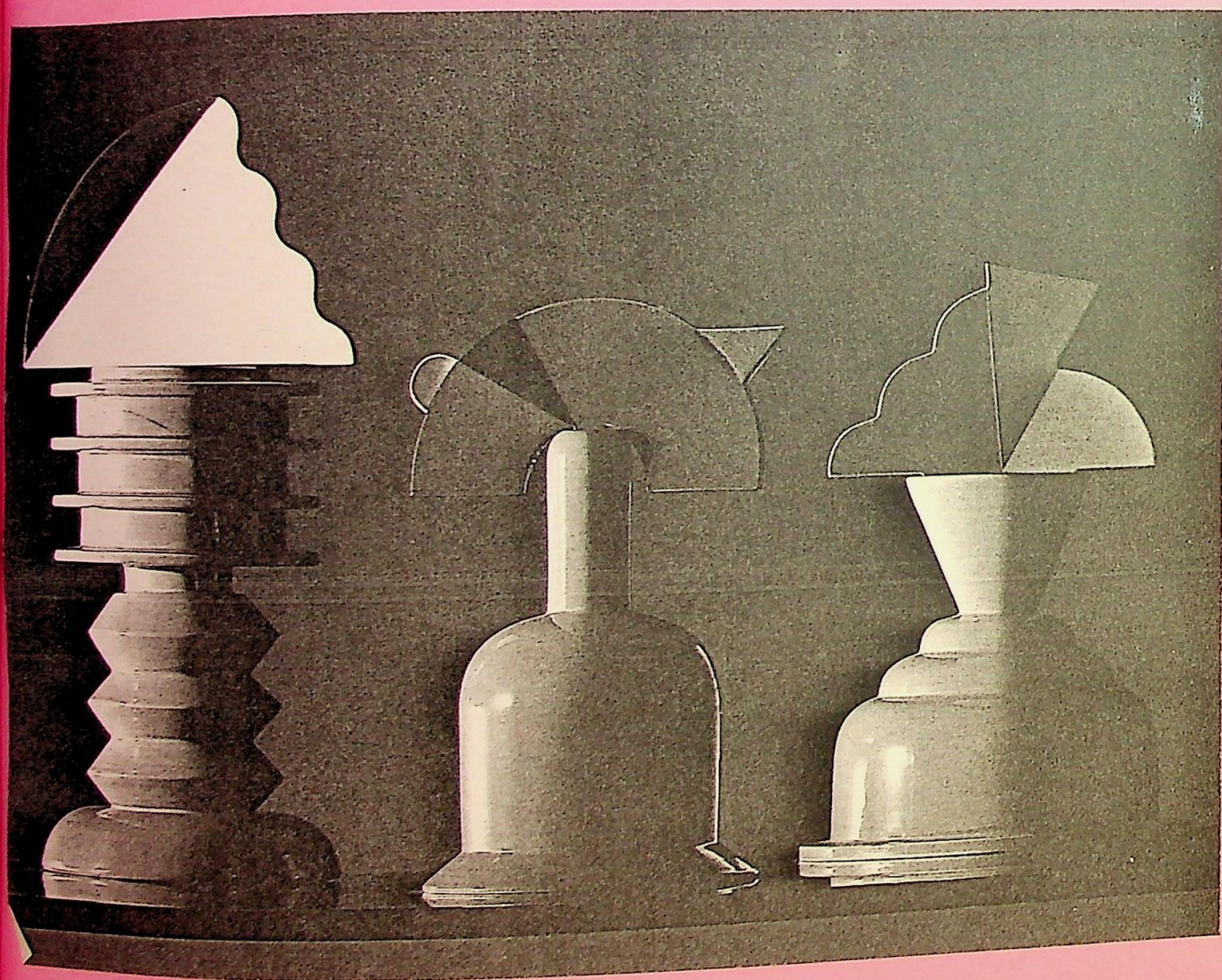


(Left) Marco Zanini  
'Lucrezia' Chair



(Below) Marco Zanini

'Victoria', "Baykac and "Tanganyka" vases Memphis 1983.





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