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MASTER OF FINE ART SUBMISSION

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1994

DRAWN

BY

DESIRE

TOWARDS

THE

THIRD

DIMENSION

C O N T E N T S

Acknowledgments

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Review of Statement

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ORIGINAL PROPOSAL

TO REDEFINE THE CLASSICAL LANGUAGE OF FURNITURE IN THE CONTEXT OF OUR CULTURAL ENVIRONMENT TODAY.

"Another unsettling element in modern art is that common symptom of immaturity, the dread of doing what has been done before."

EDITH WHARTON

An investigation of the classical language of furniture will enable me to understand the social and cultural implications of style, through the study of forms, materials, and details expressed in selected furniture pieces. I will redefine classical language by translating these ideas into a modern context, using technology to explore the different possibilities and uses within our cultural environment.

I will begin my research with the Neo Classical period which can be traced from approximately 1750 to 1850. Neo Classicism became the first international style, influencing design from St Petersburg to Virginia, and strongly influencing the modern movement, both intellectually and visually.

"It was inspired by the recent archaeological discoveries in Greece and Rome, by the rational ideas of the Enlightenment and the resulting notions of 'apparent utility' developed by Laugier, and the rejection of Baroque and Rococo forms in favour of simple geometrics, largely rectilinear shapes derived from antique sources."

Fontana dictionary of Modern Thought

I am particularly attracted to Biedermeier furniture, with its simple lines and pure forms. The technical and design brilliance of this furniture are apparent by both the visual ease of the forms and the ease with which this furniture can be incorporated into a diverse range of interiors.

Within this century large developments have been made in the area of consumer design. Furniture design however, has suffered at the hands of economic rationalism, with a design mindset devoid of organic flowing forms. It is emotionless - lacking a connection with human qualities that give furniture a presence and soul in an

environment. A cultural void has been created with contemporary furniture 'design' the exclusive domain of 'designer set' clientele. Very little of contemporary design advances filter through to the masses.

I believe the 90's to be a time to challenge many thoughts and ideas that the 20th century has created.

...from past generations the moderns have inherited two things, as Hugo von Hofmansthal observed: fine antique furniture and hypersensitive nerves. "In furniture there is all that draws us to the past and in our nerves the drama of the presents doubts."

THE HISTORY OF INTERIOR DECORATION

BY MARIO PRAZ

PUBLISHED THAMES & HUDSON

My research may take me into the abstract allowing me the freedom to create designs from a variety of sources, whether that be in response to a feeling, the use of materials, or from some attention to detail. My work will reflect the summary of my investigations within a contemporary cultural context which incorporates our way of life, values, customs, beliefs and living conditions.

RESPONSE TO MY ORIGINAL PROPOSAL:

My M.F.A. research has developed and progressed simultaneously with two parallel themes: the impact of gender in design, and the recontextualisation of machine-like parts into interior accessories.

Over the last two years gender issues have affected me, both within my personal life and everything about my work.

Coming from a purely design background my technical / craft skills in relation to the construction of furniture were limited. In the process of attempting to gain these skills I was confronted by the obvious stereotypic roles and concerns that operate within furniture design and construction.

As a woman within a traditionally male domain I was confronted with resistance to my ideas and resistance to sharing knowledge. I began to recognise my experience as a form of repression. The keepers of the knowledge, and structure of the institution reinforced the power imbalance. The constructs of the feminist perspective have put body and shape to my experience.

The issues raised by the external experience of working in an institution, with men, in a traditionally male profession, translated to an internal questioning of stereotypic roles performed by myself and others within the institution.

This questioning stirred an investigation into the correlation of how gender relates to design and the construction of furniture and formed the basis of my first paper.

I made a conscious decision to develop and celebrate the exploration of the feminine within my work with accessories. Accessories are traditionally seen as a female preoccupation, however I chose to use this to strengthen the meaning of my work. It was at this point that I could not deny the existence of my own masculinity, and this brought about a desire to bring balance not only within myself, but within the concerns of my work. My work therefore became an expression of the balance of the masculine and feminine in myself.

My relationship and familiarity with machine-like parts stems from my childhood relationship with my father accompanying him at industrial sites. The MFA has enabled me to creatively express and integrate these machine-like forms into my furniture.

I wanted to take forms that have a serious function and recontextualise their function and meaning. By changing its function the furniture takes on a new life creating a sense of play and animation, evoking a new emotional response.

The original use of these forms can be seen as part of the rational discourse developed by a patriarchal society. The forms are however quite feminine and sensual. What I have endeavoured to do is manipulate this male structure, by creating new functions, which often disguises its original use. The use of such forms is yet another expression of the exploration of the balance of masculine and feminine.

DESIGNING AND THE FEMININE:

THE IMPACT OF GENDER ON THE DESIGN

of

DOMESTIC INTERIORS AND FURNISHINGS

KARINA CLARKE

MFA 1994

THE BOX

The box is a feminine symbol and is interpreted as a manifestation of the mother's body and the subconscious, and as such it always contains a certain secret; that which is precious fragile or dangerous. The box closes in and separates from the world. It protects, but it can also suffocate.

Dictionary of Symbols by J. Schevalier & A. Gheerbrant.

In this paper I will be discussing the role of femininity in relationship to the design of the interior, by proposing the connection of gender stereotyping within architecture and interior design. In my investigations, I have found the strong correlation of gender bias within architecture and its relationship to interior design.

In the same way that sexual politics operate between men and women throughout the ages, so to have the politics of space operated in exactly the same way.

I will investigate these male/female constructs that operate between men and women, and between architecture and interior design, with an historical overview beginning with the Renaissance, through the 18th and 19th centuries to the present day.

The arena for my architectural investigation is Northern European. Through the writings of Alberti came the development of 'architectural theory' and the intellectual discourse that followed, effectively elevated architecture to the rank of a discipline. This intellectualisation created an institution of itself, where men had the freedom to discuss, create and ponder at the exclusion of women who remained within the domain of the home - as wife of the man, homemaker, and protector of man's virtues. Ornamentation, as the domain of the woman is equated with the feminine, and as such was seen to be used sparingly for fear of succumbing to the irrational and over indulgent. Ornamentation is sensual, arousing, and therefore some form of 'control' was needed to ensure containment within safe boundaries.

It is the investigation of these themes that form the foundation of the relationship I have with myself, my work, and this institution.

In my work I am focusing on the design of accessories. Coming from a background of interior design, it has been important for me to explore the psychology of the interior, in order to help me compartmentalise my work. By accessories I mean objects that embellish a room but also have a function eg. lighting or a hall stand, a coffee table etc. They are not knick knacks or bibelots or bric a brac since they have a function beyond a purely decorative one.

The interior, namely the house, is the stage for my accessories.

Furniture and accessories all decorate a room. I distinguish the difference as a matter of functional priority. For example, the bookcase in a library has a major function within that room but a bookcase within a bedroom has a rather minor role to play and in this context becomes an accessory. The accessories that I design are not void of function but their sense of priority within a room is due to the desire of the occupant. Everyone needs a bed to sleep in but not everyone needs a bedside lamp. I believe that it is important to acknowledge the fact that furniture is just another appendage to ourselves like clothes.

It helps to mask or create a life defining who we are.

In order to understand the interior one must also consider the exterior and the doctrines that enforce its application - architecture.

It would be impossible for me to critically discuss all cultural positions on the genderization of architecture. Therefore my paper shall concentrate on English and Northern European role models, given their influence on Australian culture. Historically, spaces have been divided by gender, the exterior belonging to the male and the interior belonging to the female. Because of the culturally defined differences between men and women, different spaces have acquired different values.

Furthermore, within the interior, certain domains have been marked out as male or female. The study or library was largely the domain of men. It was created by man around the 14th -15th Century as a private space where he could entertain himself with the business of the outside world and personal matters without being interrupted by his wife or family.

Often it was furnished in heavy club style leather couches, timber desk and rich sombre colours (refer ill.no.1.). Edith Wharton discusses the differences between the decoration of rooms. In *The Decoration of Houses*, she speaks of the study as a male gender area.

*"Whatever extravagances the upholsterer may have committed in other parts of the house, it is usually conceded that common sense should regulate the furnishing of the den. Fragile chairs, lace petticoat lamp shades and irrelevant bric a brac are consequently excluded, and the master's sense of comfort often expresses itself in a set of 'office' furniture."*¹

¹ Wharton Edith & Codman Jr Ogden, New York, p152.

In contrast, the bedroom was an extension of the medieval hall. It was divided into two rooms - the drawing room and the actual sleeping room. The bedroom was not a totally private space given that it was used as the family living area or a room for suppers and the informal card games. Yet it was the only room in which women could obtain a semi private space. Edith Wharton informs us that the embellishment of the actual bed in the Renaissance was due in part to the fact that the lady of the house would lie in bed while receiving company. This ritual was common practice until the late eighteenth century (refer ill.no.2).

The domain of architecture has predominantly been a male profession.

The institutions and academies of architectural thought have produced a discourse over the centuries which has largely distanced the male gender from that of the feminine, and has helped to establish stereotypical roles for women in the design of the home. *"Man (meaning Architecture) is a cultural construction which emerges from the control of the feminine"*¹.

Mark Wigley in his essay "Gender Housings" looks at the writing of Alberti of the Renaissance. Alberti wrote a series of books called *On The Art of Building*. These texts were partly responsible for architecture's promotion into the liberal arts and therefore into academies and universities today. The aesthetic ideal with which architecture was elevated above the mechanical arts depended upon particular mechanisms of domestication, namely the privileging of rational structure over ornament .

The idea of ornament and decoration in housing was only meant to represent and consolidate man's achievements in the actual building. In fact, classical architectural theory dictated that the building should have the proportions of the body of a man, but the actual body that was being composed, the material being shaped was likened to a woman.

¹ Colomina Beatriz, New York, 1992, p357

What is interesting to find in Alberti's writings is an acknowledgment of the building or rather, the materials out of which the building is constructed as feminine and the repression of the feminine within the building structures, which is identified with ornament and decoration. Ornamentation and decoration have been used to differing degrees over the centuries. Architecture has always moved in cycles of rational and emotional styles, eg Neo-Classicism was a reaction to the emotional architecture of Baroque. Similarly Victorian to Georgian, Post Modernism to twentieth century Modernism. Yet generally, structure has been identified with the masculine and ornament with the feminine. Mark Wigley writes;

"The feminine material of the building is given a masculine order and then masked off by a white skin (the building elements which constitute the basic body of the building are then to be covered with a "skin" made up of coats of plaster").

*The skin effaces the transformation from feminine to masculine and maintains a division, a visible line, between structure and decoration as a gender division."*¹

The ornament becomes subsidiary to the structure, subject to its order.

Like women in the house, it is given responsibilities for embellishing the very structural order that contains it.

The house's main function is for shelter from the elements and as a place to contain things. When a man marries, traditionally he is looked at as the provider. Women bring to the marriage a glory box and possibly some form of dowry, but it is the man's job to find a house for his wife. While the man provides the house, his role definitely is that of an outsider. If he was to spend too much time busying himself with women's work it would be thought that he may become effeminate and that his mind would lose its strength. I return to the writings of Alberti who expressed this fear of gender mixing in his book *Della Famiglia* volume 3.

"It would hardly win us respect if our wife busied herself among the men in the marketplace, out in the public eye. It also seems somewhat demeaning to me to remain shut up in the house among women when I have manly things to do among men... Those idle creatures who stay all day among the little females or who keep their minds occupied with little feminine trifles certainly lack a masculine and glorious spirit... I believe that a man who is the father of a

¹ *ibid*, p354

*family not only should do all that is proper to a man but that he must abstain from such activities as properly pertain to women."*¹

The woman's body has been used as a metaphor for the house since the beginning of time .Bachelard in *The Poetics of Space* quotes Bosco in his novel *La Redousse* as an example of the house as a metaphor for the mother.

*"Though the shutters and doors were insulated, though huge threats were proffered, and there was loud bugling in the chimney, it was of no avail. The already human being in whom I had sought shelter for my body yielded nothing to the storm. The house clung close to me, like a she wolf and at times, I could smell her odour penetrating maternally to my very heart. That night she was really my mother."*²

The idea of the feminine being a protector of the soul, the home maker, is a myth that has been institutionalised for hundreds of years. Since the eighteenth century, middle class women have been identified with the house and decoration of its interior as their main role in life. The domestic furnishings became an expression of their personalities and the family's social status in the world at large.

Women in the nineteenth century were thought to have qualities that made them unsuitable for work. Their role was to consume leisure, to appease their husbands, to represent the home as virtuous and pure. John Ruskin wrote in his lecture 'Of Queens Gardens', *"The woman's power is not for rule, not for battle - and her intellect is not for invention or creation, but for sweet ordering, management and decision"*.³

Men of this time were given recognition in society not only through their jobs but also their homes-their possessions. The home was a way of expressing moral virtues and honest emotions that was separate from the commercial world.

The home was a place of escape, as Walter Benjamin writes, *"a sensual place of unreality, a place where illusions flourished ."* He goes on to say, *"The interior represents the*

¹ *ibid*, p334

² Gaston Bachelard, U.S.A. 1969, p45

³ Forty Adrian, London, 1986, p105.

universe for the private individual. He collects there whatever is distant, whatever is of the past. His living room is a box in the theatre of the world ".1

The creation of such a virtuous environment required special codes of behaviour at home, with special roles to be played mainly by women. Traditionally, it has been the woman's role to bring life and love into the interior under the patriarchal supervision of man. The woman, in decorating the house, had to follow strict rules just as she did in codes of dress. The unspoken rule was that of purification and virtue. Given the fact that most middle class households had servants, there were few outlets for creative or individual expression. Social conditioning required all traces of work to be banished from the interior, for the home was metaphorically speaking, like heaven for men to come home from work and forget about the day in/day out routine (refer ill.no.3).

Yet women by the end of the nineteenth century were starting to take a more assertive role in the decoration of their homes, given a more relaxed convention in regards to entertainment. This of course did not alter the fact that women were judged by their environment and sensibility to it, just as they were "valued" by their morals instilled in their homes previously.

Bachelard in the Poetics of Space in the chapter on "House and the Universe" writes:

"A house that shines from the care it receives appears to have been built from the inside; it is as though it were new inside. In the intimate harmony of walls and furniture, it may be said that we become conscious of a house that is built by women, since men only know how to build a house from the outside, and they know little or nothing of the "wax" civilisation.

He goes on to say...

*It is the women that bring the life into the objects within a room. From one object in a room to another, housewifely care weaves the ties that write a very ancient past to the new epoch. The housewife awakens furniture that is asleep"*²

¹ Praz Mario, London, 1987, 4th ed, p25. In a criticism to Benjamin's account of the bourgeois interior Laura Mulvey writes, " Benjamin does not mention the fact that the private sphere, the domestic, is an essential adjunct to the bourgeois marriage and is thus associated with woman, not simply as female but as wife and mother." (Melodrama Inside and Outside of the home. London 1989.)

² Bachelard Gaston, Boston, 1969, p69.

At the same time as the woman was seen as the protector of virtues, the fulfilment of this role depended on her confinement in the domestic sphere.

The house was seen as a means of containing female sexuality.

Woman, just like mother nature was seen to be unpredictable and irrational in terms of controlling her sensuality. The house allowed the man to hide, protect the woman from the other world and herself, given that her fluid sexuality endlessly threatened to overflow and disrupt the boundaries imposed by man. Historically, if women moved outside the house, they were seen to be more dangerous to themselves and society. Hence, men contained women within the boundaries of the house. The house was in itself a boundary which allowed man to secure his identity by keeping women within it. *"The house can only operate as such if the woman's sexuality, which threatens to pollute it is contained within and by it."*¹

The 20th century and industrialisation brought with it some change of attitude towards the home and its decoration. The role of the home as virtuous and moral changed to that of the home as a place of cleanliness and hygiene. The loss of the full time domestic servant meant that many women had to literally take over the management of the home. The women changed from being idle dolls to domestic servants. Cleanliness became the basis of beauty. Dirt did not just relate to hygiene but to matter that was out of place. It was through domestication that women created for themselves a sense of worth. A clean home inferred a safe environment not only for the family but the nation at large. For a woman during WW1 to do her domestic duty equated to a man doing his duty for his country.

"Cleaning the bathroom sink was not just cleaning but an exercise for the maternal instincts, protecting the family from disease ".²

The overall planning of the house changed in order to achieve a cleaner environment. Kitchens were placed on the top floors of houses so that the smells did not infiltrate the rest of the house. Glass and tiles were incorporated into bathrooms, new heating systems, including white enamel stoves and electric fires along with the overall colour schemes from browns and red to white were used in a hope of achieving a cleaner

¹ Columnia Beatriz, New York, 1992, p337.

²Forty Adrian, London, 1986, p169.

environment (refer ill.no.4, 5, 6.). Young girls were taught Home Economics and hygiene in school so that they would understand what was essential for keeping their homes. *"Teach your children that a house is only habitable when it is full of light and air and when the floors and walls are clear."*¹

Le Corbusier wrote a manual in 1923 entitled *Manual of the Dwelling*.

This manual set out what was required in a modern house. He discusses the bathroom in much detail, suggesting that it should be one of the largest rooms in the house, with up to date fittings ie, white tiles, glass, a shower bath and gymnastic appliances. He goes on to say that;

*"An adjoining room to be a dressing room in which you can dress and undress. Never undress in your bedroom. It is not a clean thing to do and makes the room horribly untidy...Demand bare walls in your bedroom, your living room and your dining room. Built in furniture to take the place of much of the furniture which is expensive to buy, takes up too much room and needs looking after."*²

Much of Le Corbusier's writings about modern living were not fully adopted by society until after WW2. The adoption of open planning and utilitarian environments was seen as a cost efficient, clean, and holistic way of living (refer ill.no.7). The open plan consisted of kitchen, dining and living area as one big room. This meant that the housewife cum hostess could keep a watchful eye on her guests or family while preparing the evening meal. This arrangement was also easier to clean given that there was no maid to do the housework. It should also be noted that most open plan houses still had a study where men could retire from the rest of the family.

*"Here the business man late home for a meal can have it in peace, if the main living area is a hubbub of chatter."*³

After WW2, it was important for men to see women resume their role as domestic housewives rather than being employed in the general workforce. Advertising was

¹ Ibid, p157.

² Ibid, p157. Here Corbusier makes the association that the feminine space, the bedroom is unclean and needs to be kept sterile and pure. It is this type of attitude that was to infiltrate modernist architecture and in turn the domestic space, signifying the continual repression of the feminine.

³ Daily Mail, London, 1953, p47.

used to promote household appliances as labour saving devices. (Which did not necessarily liberate women from the home). These appliances brought with them a higher standard of hygiene which meant women would spend just as much time using them to achieve a clean home. During the 1950's there was an increase of women in the workforce. Ironically, much of their money was spent on appliances to make their life easier.

The other main role of the home - that of containing female sexuality- continued in the twentieth century and was evident in the modernist designers' attitude toward ornament. Modernism represented the new clean age of technology, which was a reaction against the embellishment of architecture in the Victorian era. The new order in modernist Architecture was as rational as ever.

"The woman's use of decoration and makeup is condemned because its dissimulation calls into question her chastity." ¹ The same can be said of the over embellishment of ornament.

"The threat of ornament was seen to rest in its sensuality, which distracted the proper eye.

*The need to appropriate architecture from the feminine domain of pleasure had its risks, the risk precisely of seduction. The depiction of superficially "pleasing appearance" interfered with the sensuality of the body and confused the mind that sought to control it. As always, reason was threatened by fantasised sexual mobility of the feminine."*²

The criticism of ornament in the 20th century with the formulation of modernist aesthetics arose in many ways as a reaction against Art Nouveau. Adolf Loos, the Viennese architect and critic was a big player in the argument. For Loos, ornamentation was not seen as progressive or economical in a world where function, technology and mass production were the order of the day. Ornamentation he condemned as something with pathological symptoms.(refer ill.no.8.)

"The Papuan tattoos his skin, his boat, in short, everything he can get his hands on.

*He is no criminal. The modern man who tattoos himself is a criminal or a degenerate. There are prisons in which 80% of the prisoners are tattooed. Tattooed men who are not behind bars are either latent criminals or degenerate aristocrats."*³

¹ Colomina Beatriz, New York, 1992, p355

² Colomina Beatriz, New York, 1992, p355

³ Benton Tim & Charlotte, London 1975, p 42.

The expression of ornament was regarded as a sensual act. Loos tolerated this in primitive societies because they were not civilised, but he believed the civilised man should not need such forms of erotica. Loos once stated that the "The evolution of culture is synonymous with the separation of the ornamental from the functional..."

1. His writings suggest a future beyond ornament, which relates to mass produced items and excludes the decorative or women's work as unnecessary.

He predicted, " *The coming of a golden age of functionalism, a golden age which will be a white age, white being the modern colour par excellence*".²

Loos, wrote about his first house;

*"When I was finally given the task of building a house I said to myself; in its external appearance a house can only have changed as much as a dinner jacket, not a lot. Therefore I had to become significantly simpler. I had to substitute the golden buttons with black ones. The house has to look inconspicuous."*³

The exterior of a house, Loos argued, should resemble a dinner jacket, a male mask; as the unified self, protected by a seamless facade, the exterior is masculine.

The interior was the scene of sexuality and of reproduction.

Women occupy and decorate the spaces defined by the patriarchal society. Today the issues surrounding gender and the house are not as clear cut. Many women have moved outside the boundaries of the house into the workforce. Yet the structure in which they operate in the business world is still dominated by men. (There is a social expectation that women should look after the house as well as hold down a full time job). As long as social roles are associated with one's biological sex then women will be forever defined or limited by their biology and kept within the boundaries of the home. The unspoken word is still the house as a feminine domain created by man for the benefit of man.

¹ Ibid p 42

² Ibid p 45

³ Colomina Beatriz, New York, 1992, p 94

In my designs I am forever redefining my own sexuality in relationship to existing value systems. Through the creation of accessories I wish to express the sensuality that is within both me, the materials, the object and the room. Accessories should highlight sensuality within a room in order to give that room its "essence". The feminine has had a long association with the "sensuous". Yet sensuous is not a word which defines masculine or feminine.

The Oxford dictionary defines it as - *stimulating or operating through the senses, aesthetic.*

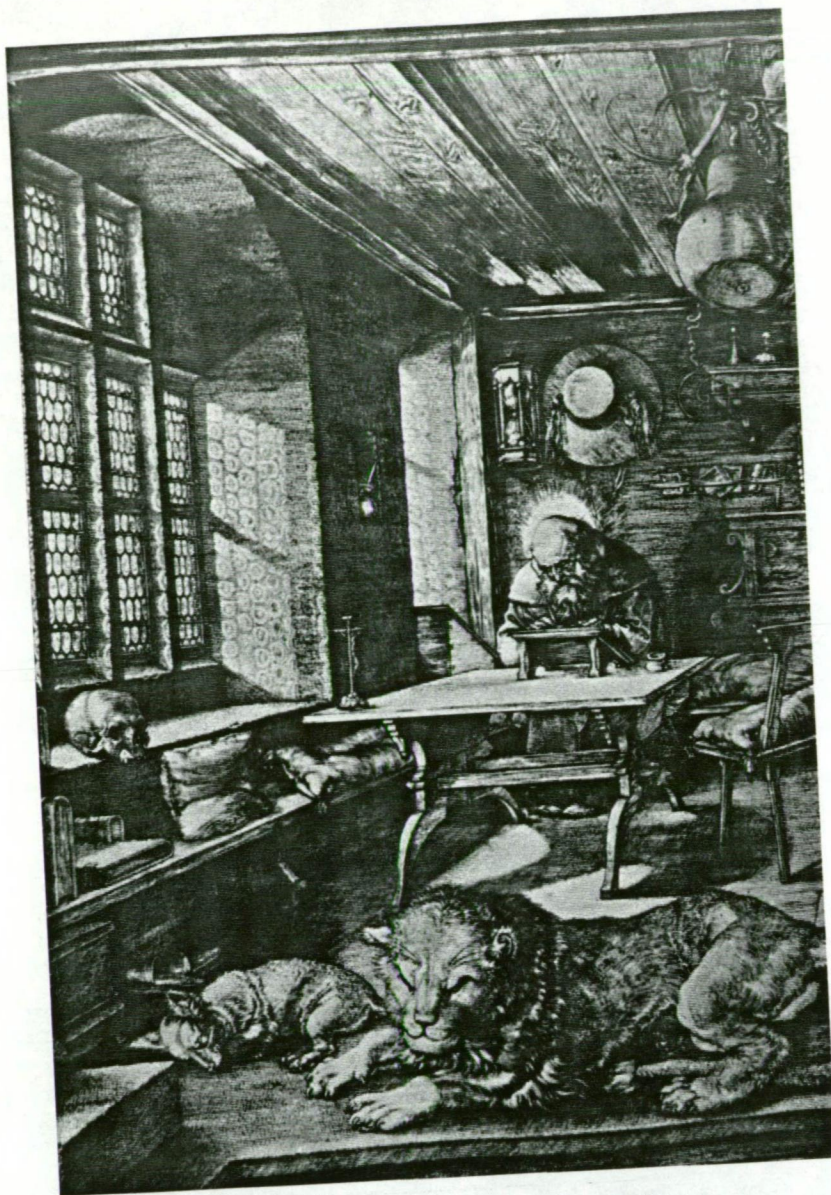
My accessories contain attributes of both masculine and feminine aesthetics. I wish for them to be both seductive and sensual to the viewer. One design which exemplifies this is the synergy stool,(refer ill.no.9.). Its strong vertical timber legs and aluminium foot rest suggest a masculine presence, yet all the detailing is rounded off or curved, creating a very tactile sensuous object. It plays on the different stereotypes of masculine and feminine producing a rather curious uneasiness for some people.

Another way in which I have redefined gender in my work is through the use of decontextualization. My lighting designs are based on different forms found in aeroplanes. The aeroplane has an association with technology and the masculine. By changing its context and creating ambient lighting, I feel the gender orientation of the object has been displaced, thus suggesting ambiguity, (refer ill.no.10.).

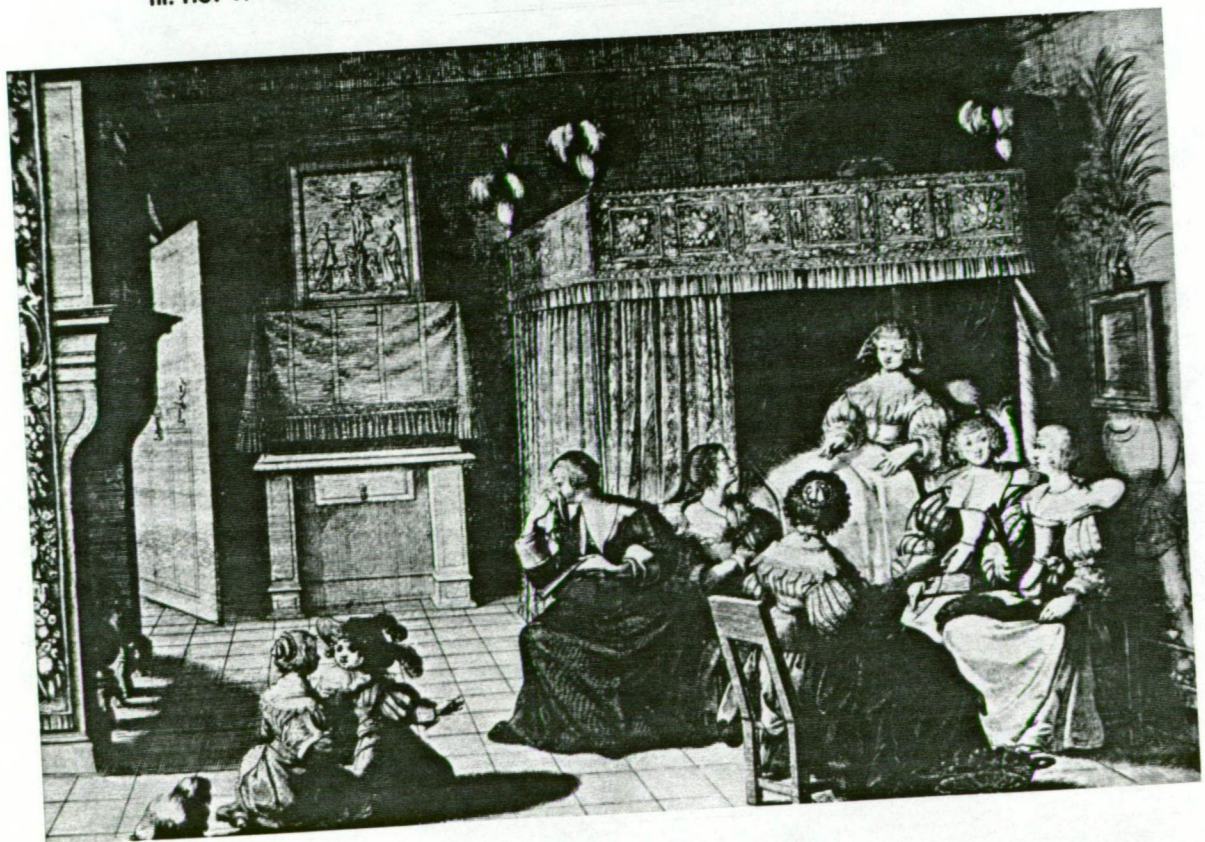
In combining both masculine and feminine elements in my work I am aiming to challenge the usually clear demarcation between the two, causing us to question what we traditionally associate with masculine and with feminine. The creation of "hybrid forms" can be seen as a challenge to the traditional binary logic which seeks to not only define male and female as opposing opposites, but treats the feminine as inferior to and dependent upon the masculine.

My role as a designer is to redefine and reanalyse the meaning within furniture -

To create space that is void of gender is basically to have no space at all. My argument is about questioning gender stereotypes in furniture and interior design, and producing designs which don't reinforce existing inequalities between the sexes. There are many different forms that can be assumed masculine or feminine depending on the reading. It is not only the furniture/ accessories that must change; rather, the attitudes towards them, creating a more equal stage for their representation and interpretation.



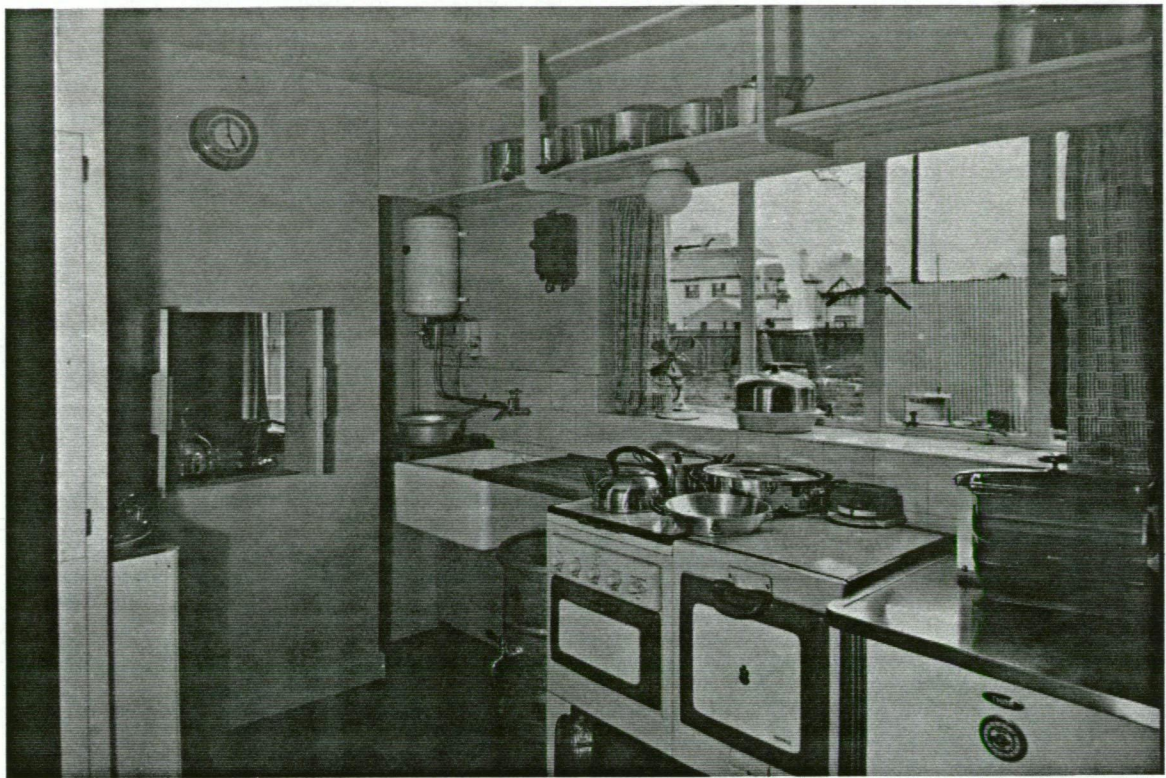
III. no. 1. Albrecht Durer, Saint Jerome in his study.



Manheim Rosse. The visit to the new mother. 1650.



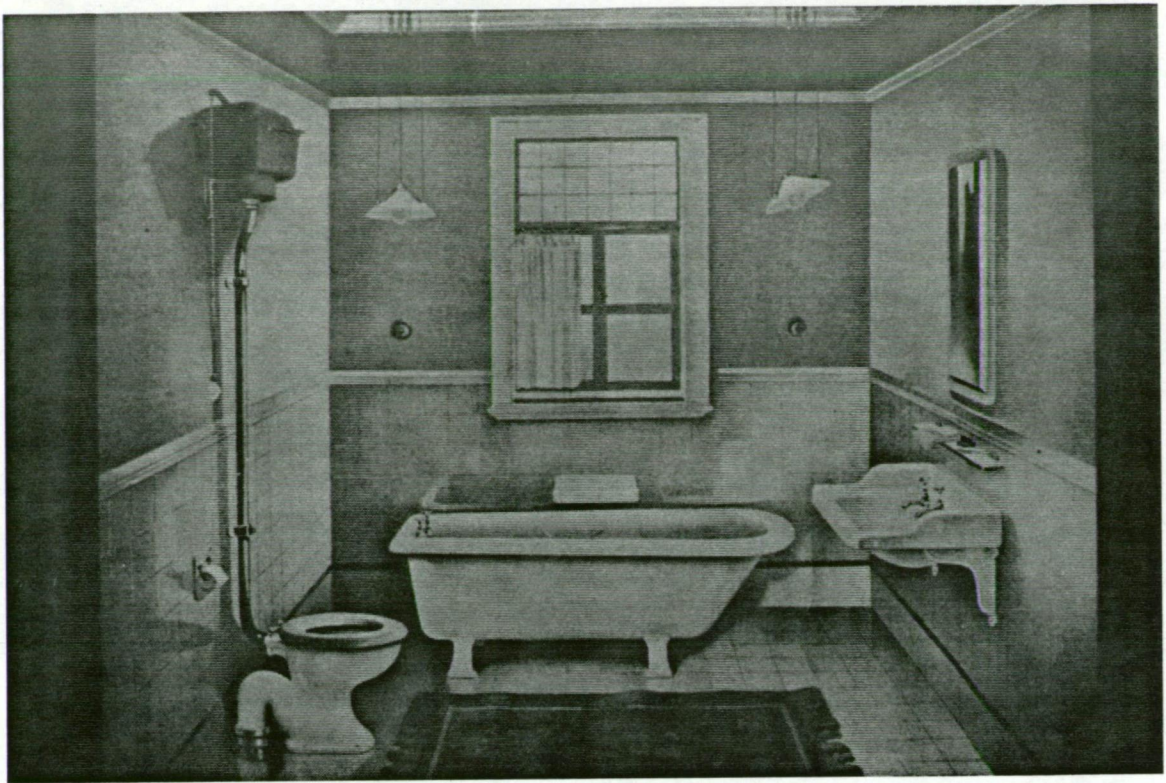
III. no. 3. Jules Emile Saintin. Distraction, exhibited 1875.



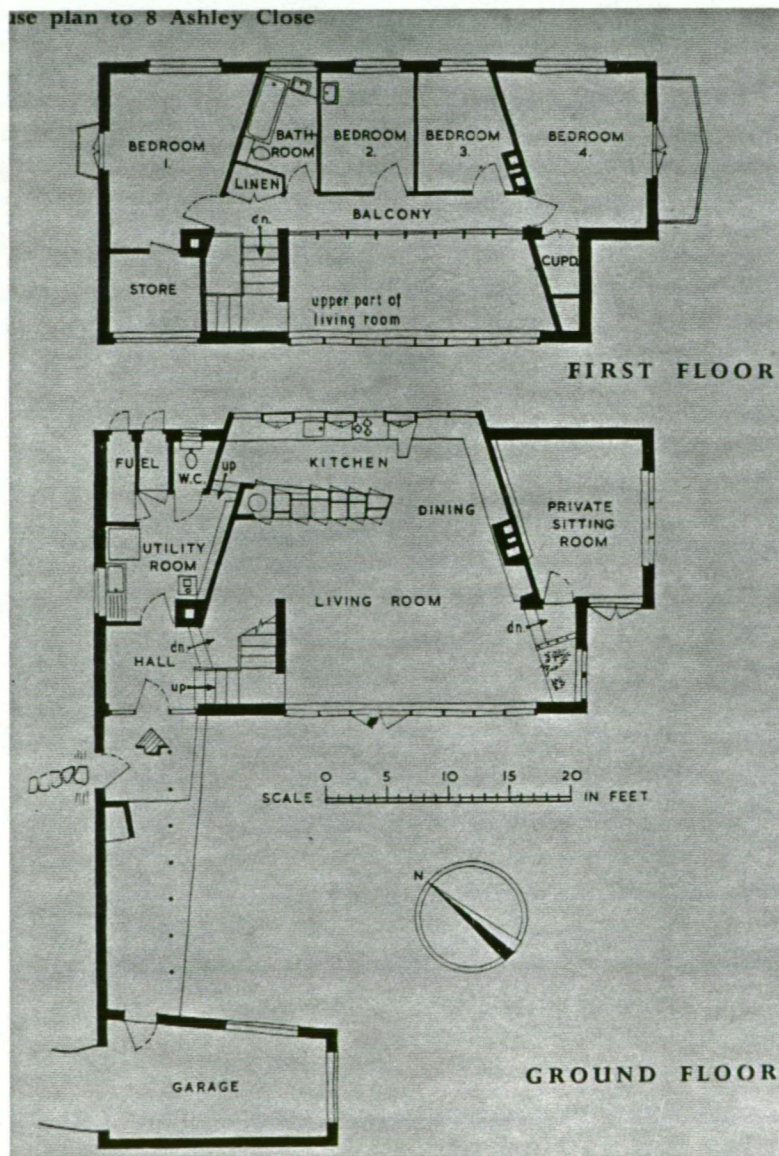
III. no. 4. The kitchen in the Electrical Assoc. for Women's 'All Electric House' in Bristol, 1930's.



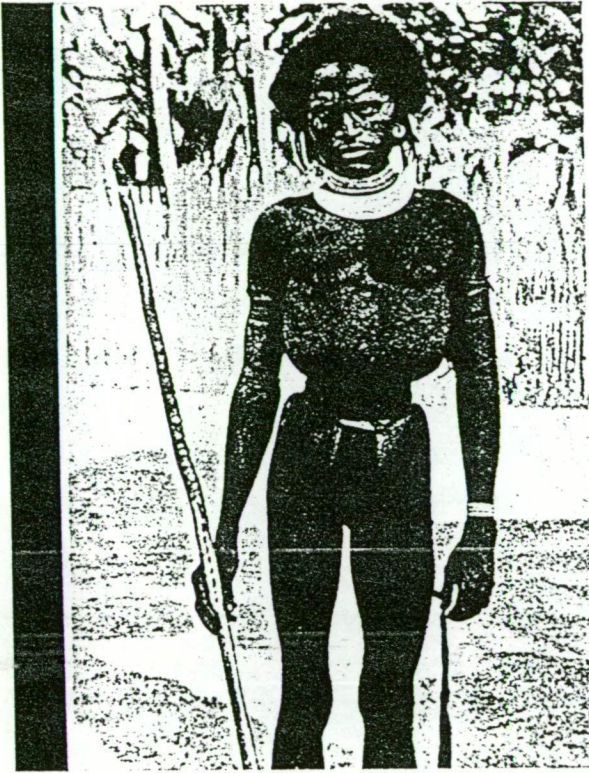
III. no. 5. Housewifery lesson. London, 1908.



Ill. no. 6 Twyford's J7, 1911, Bathroom.



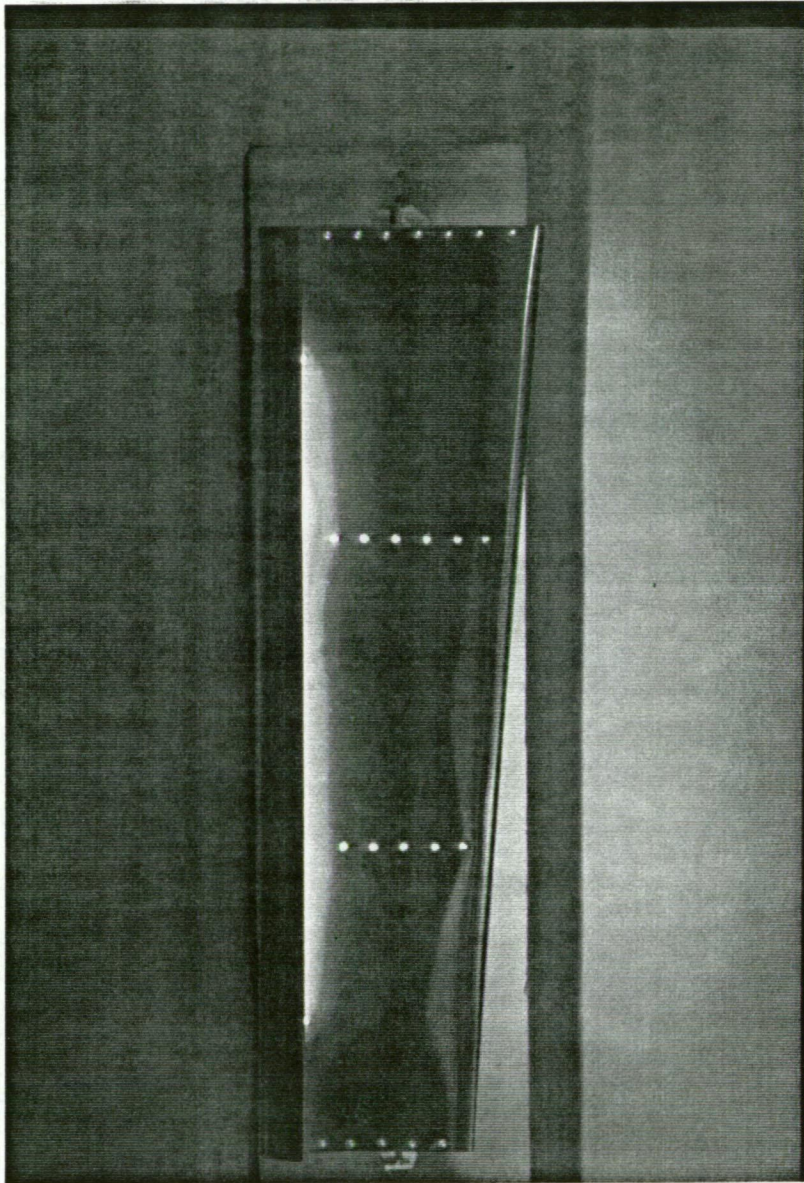
Ill. no. 7. Example of open planning, 1950. The kitchen is open to the living/dining area.



III. no. 8. Papuan native & Tattooed Japanese man. From Max von Boehn *Bekleidungskunst und Mode*, 1918.



III. no. 9. Synergy Stool, 1992



III. no. 10. Casper light, 1994.

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THE OTHER SIDE

of

MODERNISM:

DESIGNERS

WITH ATTITUDE

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M.F.A. 1994

In my first paper I established a background for my work, namely the impact of gender on the design of the interior and how the interior and its decoration has been seen through history.

In this paper I will be discussing my position as a designer in relation to the world of design and technology. I will explain this position by using some examples of different designers and movements throughout the 20th century who have influenced my work.

From my research into the background of the Modernist Movement I have realised that the historical account of modernist philosophies can be reviewed as one-sided, ie. slanted towards the commercialisation of industrial products. This industrial appropriation of Modernism was not the only Modernist style to be produced. However, it was the one that received the most attention given its simplicity and ability to fit within the capitalist market. In fact, modernism has been projected as a monolithic movement, a single entity, but there were many differing styles that counteracted the commercial, industrial approach to Modernism.

One of the results of the commercialisation of Modernism was the uncritical celebration of modern technology encompassed by the machine aesthetic. There was at the same time however, a significant undercurrent which remained sceptical of technology, and for good reasons. Writing about these matters, Walter Rathenau— the German industrialist, philosopher and author— confronted '*The mechanisation of the human soul*' with the '*longing of the human soul for escape from the imprisonment of this mechanisation*'. Thus wrote Rathenau over half a century ago.

*There is no doubt that the present trend to mechanisation is going to penetrate all of humanity so that even the most remote jungle dweller of New Guinea will have his share of it, eventually. But at the same time there is already now, at the very crossroads of this mechanisation, evident signs of longing to get away from its grip. And no doubt the more the mechanisation trend spreads and the deeper it touches the most intimate human chords, the stronger the longing for freedom will grow.*¹

¹ Saarinen Eliel, 1950 p92.

My work has been influenced by designers who did not uncritically embrace the machine aesthetic but included organic elements in their work. They also believed in a symbiotic relationship between ornament and structure within their furniture, rather than a monocausal relationship between form and function as occurs in simplified versions of modernism. Their work, like mine, aims to evoke meanings more complex than the functional meaning of an object. Their designs are characterised by contradiction, paradox, ambiguity and fluidity. Today, I see similarities between the Baroque period and their design. I do not mean Baroque in a purely historical context but as Omar Calabrese has detailed in his book

Neo-Baroque . . . 'many important cultural phenomena of our time are distinguished by a specific internal 'form' that recalls the Baroque.' Calabrese, quoting Sarduy defines Baroque '*not only or not exactly as a specific period in the history of culture, but as a general attitude and formal quality of those objects in which the attitude is expressed*'.¹ Similar to the Baroque, the designers who have influenced me have taken life and design and integrated it to create designs that express sensorial elements.

Often the forms given to objects suggest anamorphic or biomorphic tendencies. An anamorphic representation constitutes a visual disturbance with the intention of decentring or destabilising the rational. Biomorphic forms are abstracted natural forms that take on amoeboid or cellular structures. They are not governed by the rational but rather, subconscious thoughts. My work is eclectic, combining themes of industrial production with the nostalgia of past craft traditions, at the same time absorbing the stimuli of the visual culture of mass communication.

The first of the designers whose work has been influential to mine is van de Velde, one of the leading designers of the Art Nouveau movement. Art Nouveau forms were characterised by organic plant like structures or waves or flames. Some artists kept close to nature. Others like van de Velde, preferred abstract forms as being a purer expression of the dynamics aimed at. It is the latter style that has been most influential in my work.

Through his theories van de Velde, tried to reconcile the ambiguities of his time by combining an artistic approach and honesty in structure to his designs.²

¹ Calabrese O. 1992, p15.

² Honesty in structure is a term that I refer to consistently in this paper.

Van de Velde's ideal was to save the modern world from its own ugliness by creating designs that would establish the everyday object above the mundane historicism of the Nineteenth Century.

The evolution of ideas and the conditions of social life can no longer be accommodated to pictures and statues alone. It is folly to rely only on them to provide for our material existence, as it is blindness to suppose that they can satisfy all the artistic needs of our time. 1893.¹

The idea of design being a role model for society may sound rather dictatorial but one can not deny the fact that design today does play a major role in ordering our society. What interests me about van de Velde's work was the way he interpreted natural forms to create liquid organic shapes that were uniform and balanced and had a presence all of their own.

Following on from William Morris, van de Velde wrote prolifically about the social needs to reform design in order to give objects a greater clarification and meaning in the hope of creating a more democratic world.

Objects or things become beautiful when they are what they should be, as they would have been if someone for the first time wondered what use and service might be expected of them had they designed them spontaneously . . . objects remain beautiful until greedy mischief-making manufacturers chose to embellish them in their own way and then, utterly disregarding their original necessity, rob them of their forms. These highly dangerous afterthoughts, which are evil always know on which sources to draw in order to appeal to the masses who have no experience of the real character of modern beauty and are always mesmerised and immediately taken in by the myriad guises of outward ornamental fantasy.²

Van de Velde was dubious of mass production, and monitored all his work carefully, believing that there was no point if honesty towards production and materials was not employed.

This term refers to objects in which there is an integral relation between structure and decoration as opposed to forms where the ornament appears "tacked" on as a gimmick to enhance their commercial viability on an unsuspecting audience.

¹Sembach K. J. London, 1989, p11

The foundations for a new style in design lie in never creating anything which has no valid reason for existing even with the almighty sanction of industry and the manifold consequences of its powerful machines.¹

Van de Velde's work was not dictated by manufacturers or the need to standardise one's ideas in order to make a profit. His work was fluid and liquid in form and showed an extensive knowledge in terms of materials and technologies. His work was governed by three rules in relationship to form and ornamentation.

These were:

Complementary contrasts

Repulsion and attraction

The desire to give the negative forms (ground) the same degree of significance as the positive forms (figure).²

Through these rules, van de Velde created symbiotic designs where all the components and inherent values of an object came together by embracing and repelling each other at the same time.

Van de Velde's work was very individual and artistic. He designed interior spaces to excentuate not only an inner harmony but also a balanced structure between the individual furniture pieces and the overall decoration of a particular space. Although objects were individual entities that clearly displayed the ideas and concepts that made up a particular piece. This would be expressed through the form and structure of an object. Take for example the Havana Company Saleroom 1899, (refer ill.no.1). The interior, combines linear and spatial elements in a very controlled manner. The design is a synthesis of two and three dimensional linear structures. The motif on the wall appears to hold up the ceiling as well as integrate the differing heights of doorways, arches and shelf units. It is also graphically representative of rising smoke, thus indicating the room's purpose.

The shelf units are bulging under the archways creating an ambiguity — one is unsure if they are holding the arches up or being pressed to bend beneath them.

² Benton T & C, London, 1975, p 33.

¹ ibid p 18.

² ibid p 32

Van de Velde's work displayed a plasticity of form that was completely free from superfluous matter. As he wrote:

An individual piece of furniture only has unity if all the elements which could be described as alien, such as screws, hinges, locks, handles and hooks, do not remain self sufficient but are subsumed within it . . . otherwise we will not achieve the unity for which we strive above all other qualities.¹

An example of this is the silver Janderine Service designed as part of a table set in 1902,(refer ill.no.2). The Jandarine is encircled by a line running around the entire oval of the vessel, allowing the handles to grow organically from the volume of the bowl. The decorative form works both as a sensuous enlivening device and as an indication of function.

Like many Art Nouveau designers, van de Velde employed the use of line to be both decorative and constructive. Line in van de Velde's work was represented as solid forms, they contained volume. Van de Velde wrote '*A line is a force like all elemental forces; several connected but contradictory lines have the same effect as several elemental forces working against each other.*² When this is represented in three dimensional architecture and design, the forms appear to grow from the inside out. This gives the designs an animated presence - a life of their own. Their function and purpose directs the use of sculptural form so that all elements are integrally related.

Take for example, van de Velde's kidney-shaped writing desk,(refer ill.no.3 & 4). This is not just an object of abstract decorative beauty, but rather a highly rational organised unit where the formal and functional elements are found in symbiosis. Neither can be perceived as subordinate; they mutually enhance each other in dramatic fashion. Rather than function determining form as occurred later in the simplified interpretation of modernism, the two are mutually interdependent.

This expresses the purpose of the piece of furniture in a highly individual manner. Its character is not passive but active. This desk is not only useful but every detail accentuates its usefulness, ie. the candlesticks have been incorporated for illumination. Here the dominant large scale movement is accompanied by a more

¹Benton T & C. London 1975, p11

²Benton T & C. London 1975, p48

delicate paraphrase, a double band of brass curves from the foot of one candlestick to the other, forming a system of small bridges, and making the candlesticks, which could have seemed rather alien, an organic part of the desk.

Between 1899 and 1905, van de Velde produced numerous designs for ceramics, silver, porcelain, and ivory. In almost all these designs, the sculptural three dimensional forms were based on a functional justification.

The cutlery is intended to be pleasing to hold which is why the spoon is shaped differently. He has designed each item separately and then re-established the formal relationship by his treatment of line.

Van de Veldes' work incorporated a number of principles that I feel are relevant to my work today. It went beyond the commercial orientation and the way he used abstract natural forms and materials allowed emotive responses to the work.

This I believe is an important consideration for design today.

In the period between the wars, Art Nouveau was forced into a marginal position. Art Deco and the International Style took precedence in the years leading up to the second world war. Within its marginal position it was influential in movements such as Dadaism and Surrealism.

What these movements had in common with Art Nouveau was the need to express an inner quality or essence within art and design relying on the subconscious for creative inspiration. Similar to Art Nouveau, their work encapsulated forms that instilled quality by using technology and materials in a different context.

Their inner content displayed features that suggested more than those of purely machine aesthetics. The way in which this was achieved differed within each movement. Through this, much of the work appears animated, displays movement and character— it takes on a life of its own.

Echoes of Art Nouveau can be found scattered through the work of early Dada and Surrealist artists eg. Miro on whom the work of Gaudi was influential and Jean Arp who was influenced by van de Velde. Dada and Surrealist critics/practitioners never really spoke of Art Nouveau except for Salvador Dali. Dali was interested in the process of natural growth and read extensively on the subject including such books as Edouard Monod-Herzon. He wrote directly about Art Nouveau and

about the abstract quality of their work. He used biomorphic and organic forms in his work, ie: The Mae West Lips Sofa designed in 1936. The idea first appeared in a drawing entitled Mae West 1934, depicting an interior in which her lips are represented by a sofa, her nose by a sideboard and her hair as curtains,(refer ill.no.5).

Dada was fundamentally a life movement rather than a traditional art movement. Its ideal expression was through social rather than aesthetic activity. Dada according to the Concise Oxford Dictionary means "*an infantile sound*". This suggested the deliberate rejection of the inherited world of adult values in return for absolute naivete. With the disillusionment of WW1 where many artists saw the senseless waste of life and destruction, Dada set out to destroy the bourgeois morality and rationalism in order to create a new world order. "*Dada*" wrote Arp "*wished to destroy the hoaxes of reason and to discover an unreasoned order*".¹

On reflection, biomorphic and organic forms are represented in many of the Dada and Surrealist artists. It acts as a common denominator which allows one to draw together the varying stylistic concerns of Dada and Surrealism. By the 1930's two dimensional biomorphic forms were part of the paintings of Salvador Dali , Rene Magritte, Joan Miro, and Jean Arp. These artists were to inspire the designers of the 30's 40's and 50's with their use of organic and biomorphic form. The idea was to create designs that had a close association with nature and thus relate to human emotions rather than a traditional rational machine aesthetic.

Two artists of this period that have informed my work are Jean Arp and Marcel Duchamp; Arp for his use of biomorphic forms and Duchamp for his Readymades.

Jean Arp was one of the first artists to use abstract organic forms in his work. Arp was living in Zurich between the years 1915-1917 and was experimenting with automatism, doodling on paper, drawing on inorganic and organic forms like eggs, pebbles, leaves and the human body. The resultant forms resemble, but are in no sense descriptive, of vegetable and animal shapes. Arp was unquestionably influenced by Art Nouveau. He travelled widely and as a student saw an exhibition of works by van de Velde which had a special effect on him. The Stag of 1914,(refer ill.no.6) is an example of Arp's departure into biomorphic form.

¹ Abrams Harry N.,New York, p 10.

Arp's mature work bears the same elliptical relationship to the uncomplicated, highly abstract language of van de Velde. Arp's work was the exploration of the inner self. This developed into a fluid and morphological language that took on four basic forms; the egg (representing the world) the seed (identity) the cloud (water on the loose) and the naval (a focal point - a lunar symbol). These forms culminated in works that were simple and natural, where nothing could be disorientated. They were an attempt to probe and poetically express the internal organic and psychological processes behind the surfaces of things- they constituted in some ways a continuation of the plastic representation of an internal event,(refer ill.no.7).

Arp's work has been important to my own through the creation of sensual forms that have associations with the organic. I am inspired by the simplicity within his work. Many of my light forms I believe to have a close association to the forms found within Arp's work, ie, The Axolotl light or my Wasp Wall lights.

These forms are simple, sensual and in turn make reference to the organic.

Duchamp was one of the leading members of the Dada movement. Through the use of humour and decontextualisation, rational and analytical processes were broken down. This is best expressed through Duchamp's readymades. Duchamp took manufactured everyday objects then placed them in a new environment where the original function and meaning replaced another, in an attempt to liberate its hidden meaning. Often the readymade was given a title or a sentence which assisted in the new reading of an object.

Readymades were intended to be devoid of aesthetic interest. Duchamp said, "*A point that I want very much to establish is that the choice of these readymades was never dictated by an aesthetic delectation. The choice was based on a reaction of visual indifference with at the same time a total absence of good or bad taste in fact a complete anaesthesia*".¹ In retrospect, many of the readymades have taken on an inescapably 'arty' look, ie the Bottlerack of 1914.(refer ill.no.8) The readymades relied heavily on the observer's mental set of expectations and can be read in a variety of ways. This is what gives them their enigmatic status.

¹ Sanojuliet Michel & Peterson Elmer, Oxford, 1973 p 141

The idea of decontextualization of objects and forms explored by the Dada and Surrealist artists opened up a whole new way of thinking in both art and design. Designers such as Phillipe Stark have recontextualized existing forms in his furniture and interiors that allude to say aeroplanes. An example of this in my own work is my use of aeroplane components modified and recontextualized to become ambient lighting. This can also be seen in my Splatterbug Coffee Table, where I have taken a car windscreen and used it in combination with cast aluminium cabriolet legs. The viewer is familiar with the form but because of its new function, the original form has become displaced with another, thus changing its reading.

It is also hoped that humour can be found in the form of animation of the actual object,(refer ill.no.9).

During the period of Modernism, known as the 'International Style', Carlo Mollino, a designer in Italy went against the conventions of the time by incorporating the use of biomorphic and organic like structures within his work. His work is far from conventional and suggests multiplicity of meanings, similar to that of the Surrealists and Duchamp. It is ambiguous and unpredictable. He drew on a variety of interests which all fed off each other to create an individualistic architecture and design; those interests included aeronautics, car racing, downhill skiing, photography, set design, fashion, literature, eroticism and the occult, (refer ill.no.10). He grew up in Turin, the son of an Architect and was influenced by Art Nouveau and the local Baroque architecture.

Mollino's work is more relevant and respected today than when it was originally conceived in the 30's 40's and 50's. He was an isolated individual who stood out against a background of rational architectural practices and for this reason he was looked on with disdain by fellow architects and critics.

His work also displays recurring references to some of the Modern Masters of Architecture such as Gaudi, Sant Elia, van de Velde, Mendelsohn, le Corbusier and Alvar Aalto.

His designs show a high level of craftsmanship which were manufactured in small runs often limited to one offs or prototypes. This is similar to the way in which I approach my work. Mollino's furniture is best understood in the context of the environment for which it was made. His interiors can be read as theatrical architecture, where one is unsure of what is real and what is illusion. It is here

that one can see the influences of Surrealism, and the theatricality of the Baroque interior, where they relied on the deception of perspective. Mollino exploits perspective to map space and embraces the paradox of seeing: *illusion is a reality, reality is a illusion*. This is in direct opposition to the rationalist approach to design where interiors and objects are clearly defined and ordered.

Mollino's love of flying and car racing contributed greatly to his design in architecture and furniture design. His use of curves is derived from the curved structures of wings and wooden cockpits of stunt aircraft. The famous Baroque Cutlery he designed for Reed and Burton in the 60's derive from the contours of propellers and also forms found in Art Nouveau (refer ill.no's 11 & 12).¹.

He also designed in collaboration a number of racing cars, displaying sensuous use of curves, that expressed a sense of aerodynamics and speed.

Mollino's enthusiasm in cars, aeroplanes and speed started when he was a young boy, under the influence of his father. His work possesses qualities that are emotive and well beyond the boundaries of the machine aesthetic.

My interest in such forms also stems back to childhood memories of industrial sites trucks etc when I would accompany my father to work, subconsciously soaking up the unusual forms and structures that made up that world. The use of such forms has had a very direct influence on my work. My light forms are taken from aeroplane wings, tail lights, etc, and like Mollino's work they are sensuous and seductive, implying movement, tactile qualities, and the reference to industrial technologies. Mollino's work differs from the Modernist machine aesthetic in that it 'humanizes' machines ie, gives them human qualities.

Mollino's love of speed can be seen in a design for a table for the Singer Store Turin in 1950 (refer ill.no.13). The free-form top and floating, leaf-shaped lower tier are attached to the honey coloured frame with brass mounts that appear to pierce the glass. The construction is refined and delicate and gives the table the appearance of lightness.

¹ Note the similarities between Mollino's and van de Velde's cutlery.

Carlo Mollino's most fluid and organic design, as well as his most popular and sought after, is the Arabesque Table (refer ill.no.14) Like the Singer Table the glass top and lower tier, which are securely attached to the frame with brass elements, appear to be suspended in air. The understructure is moulded ply and he has exploited its expressive quality to the fullest.

Mollino's use of two dimensional planar forms that are composed to create sophisticated three dimensional forms has also been influential to me. I believe Mollino's work to be based on the notion of components. If you look at his furniture designs every item is easily identified, this is like a jigsaw puzzle of components that are assembled producing complex designs. My design methodology is similar to Mollino in that I break up a design into component details and then reconstruct them within a given framework. Take for example the Synergy stools and table, (refer ill.no.15.) Here, each element is easily identifiable but is constructed in such a way as to produce a homogenous whole.

Mollino's use of the female figure has also had influenced my work. The cast wall lights that I have produced display subtle, sensuous form that has a close association to the female body, which is similar to the simple forms seen in Mollino's work.

My work over the last two years has involved the exploration of technologies, forms and materials. From my research into modern design, it is apparent to me that we need to address design from a broader spectrum than just the commercialisation of industrial products. I think it is important that design places a greater emphasis on humanism. I have tried to achieve this by concentrating on the use of biomorphic and organic like forms, that express a sense of animation and movement, in an effort to increase the level of physical and mental interaction with the viewer.

In this essay I have used examples of works that demonstrated a command of the technologies available at the time of their conception and construction.

The designers I have discussed have used technology as a tool to enhance design as an emotive experience, where objects displayed character and individuality beyond pure function. The artists/designers offered more; they invested objects with cultural meaning beyond the machine aesthetic of mainstream modernism.

Technologies today leave one with very little input. Radios, televisions, clocks etc are all pre-programmed giving you no opportunity to interact with the objects. People are turning into machines themselves as Marx predicted: '*At the same pace that mankind masters nature, man seems to become enslaved to other men and his own infamy*'.¹ There have been some fundamental flaws in its evolution. For despite all that we have invented in the name of progress we have left little room for those expressions of feeling that assert our humanity;*with brilliant machines and mechanical systems playing all the leading rolesthere is precious little for modern man to do except to plug in.*² Marshall Berman writes in All That is Solid Melts into Air.

This is not to imply that I am anti technology for without it there would be very little creativity and human inventiveness, but it is apparent that industrial production has altered the make-up of every culture alive on this planet. In fact, instead of creating diversification, it has unified the differing cultures into one mass culture - one totally encompassing consumer market.

In the rush to streamline experience and make technology do all the work for us, some vital dimension has been lost. We need a stronger relationship to the furniture we use and a much greater regard for the importance of the tactile environment, if we are not going to lose the sense of ourselves as physical beings.

The technologies that are available to designers today were not even dreamed of earlier this century. Technology today is not limited to basic geometric forms like earlier designs, but has the ability to produce a multitude of abstract organic configurations previously found only in nature. Technology has outgrown the Modernist and socialist ideals of standardization and rational machine aesthetics.

As a furniture designer today I must acknowledge the existence of technology, for my livelihood depends upon the creative use of its machines. Yet technology does not necessarily produce good designs. Good design embodies more than the simplified notions of 'form follows function' and the modernist principles of rationalism. Good designs do not rely on gimmicks, expensive advertising packages but rather possess what Ralph Caplan describes as " *the quality to have a*

¹ Thackera John, London, 1988, p39.

² Thackara John, London, 1988, p40.

life of their own." Good design conjures up an emotional response in people. Often its structure has an association found within the natural world. Good design uses materials in the most appropriate fashion and often establishes different uses for those materials.

It is for this reason that I have suggested in this essay a need to get back to some of the qualities found in the Baroque and the writings of the early Modernist van der Velde. Those qualities consist of a symbiotic relationship between ornament and structure; honesty in the use of materials and construction; the development of feelings and sensuous forms, through the use of subconscious thoughts. We need to release ourselves into a freer lifestyle and shake off the 'truth of functionalism' and its technical achievements in favour of individual creativity.

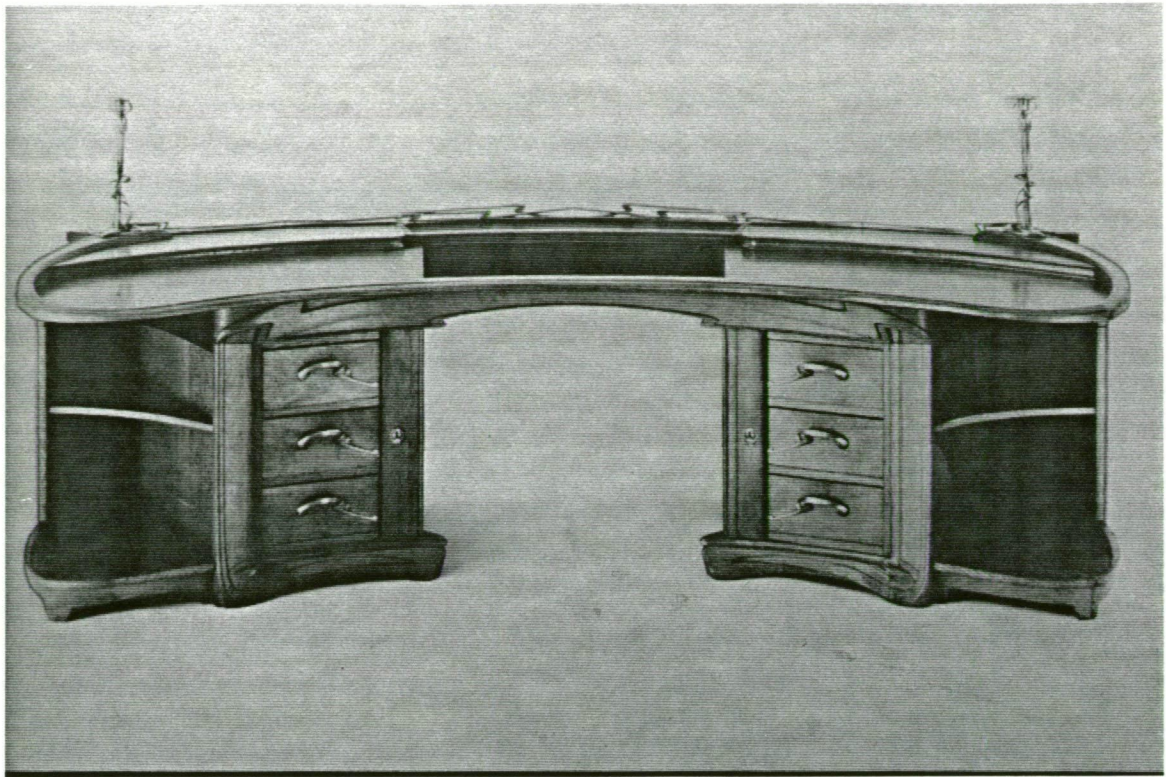
Today the essence of design is to find the substance of an object. During the 80's, design went about as far as it could go. It was starting to become exhausting, crazy even. People have become tired of the sameness of recent design, that the modernist aesthetic imposes. In my work I am trying to redefine the relationship that furniture plays in society; to produce works that display the complexity of life in the 1990's, rather than the commercialisation of Modernist aesthetics, which simplified and regulated life in a very superficial way. Van de Velde, the Dadaists and Surrealists and Carlo Mollino, for example, tirelessly challenged this aesthetic, determined to give design substance and honesty. It is these issues that make up the central concerns in my work.



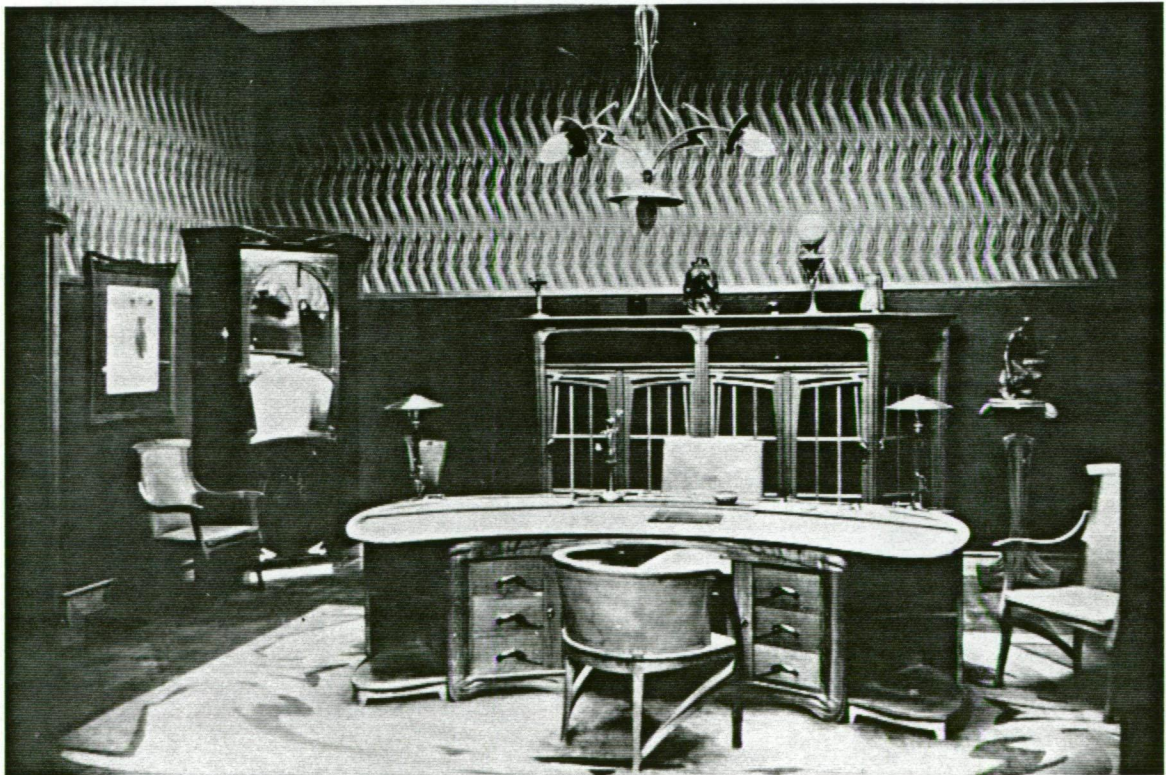
III. no. 1 van de Velde, Havana Company Cigar Store, Berlin, 1900.



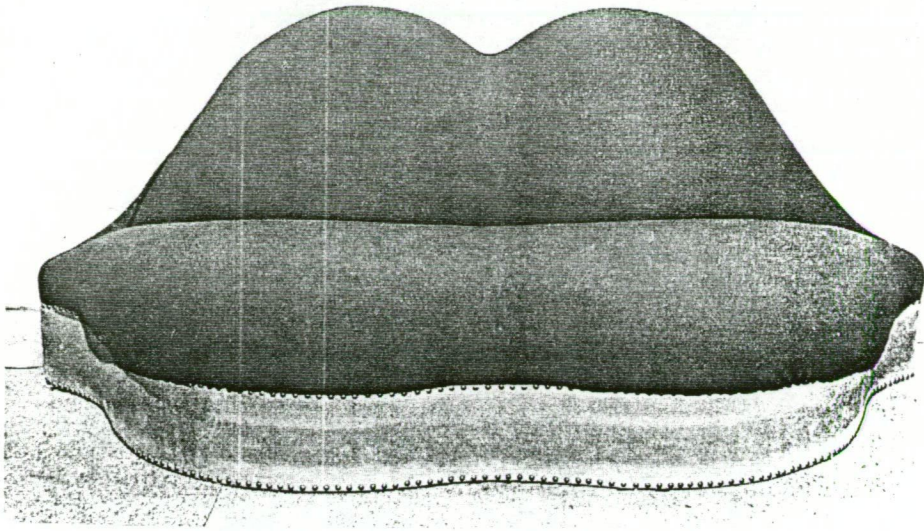
III. no. 2. van de Velde, Janderine, 1902.



III. no.3. van de Velde Writing desk, Brussels, 1899.



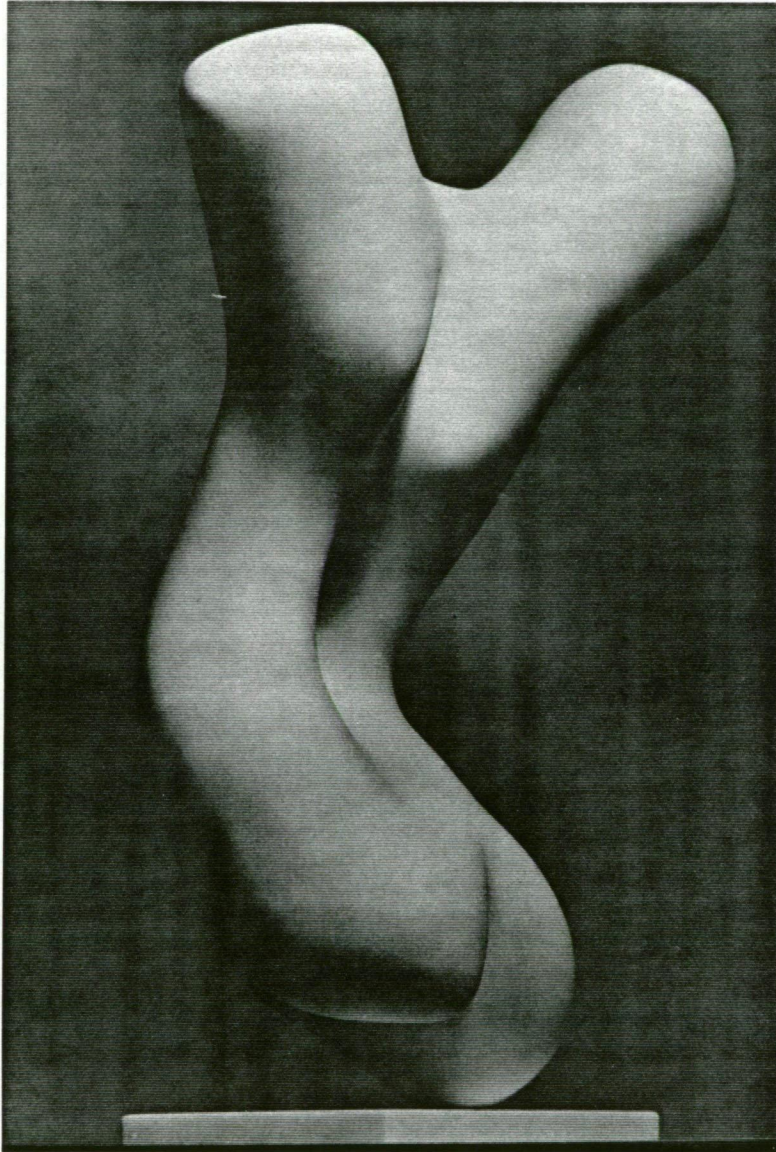
III. no. 4. van de Velde, Study shown at the Munich Secession Exhibition in 1899.



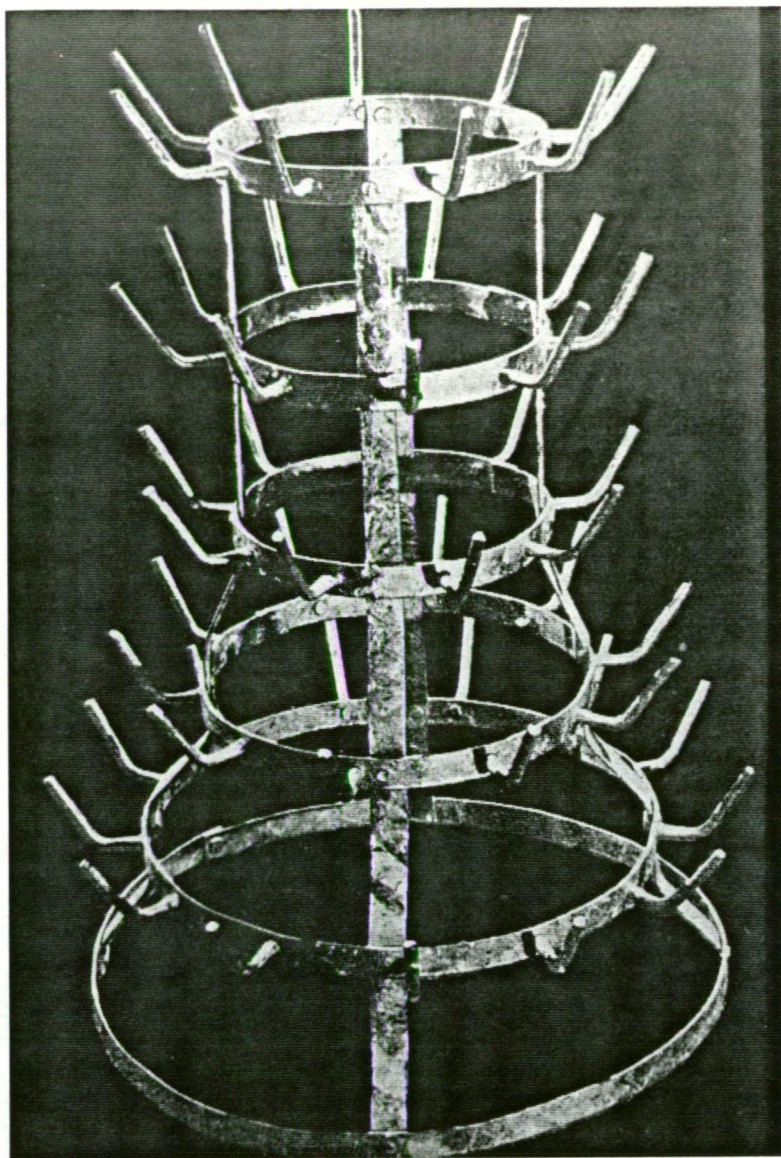
III. no. 5. Dali Salvador, Mae West Lips Couch,



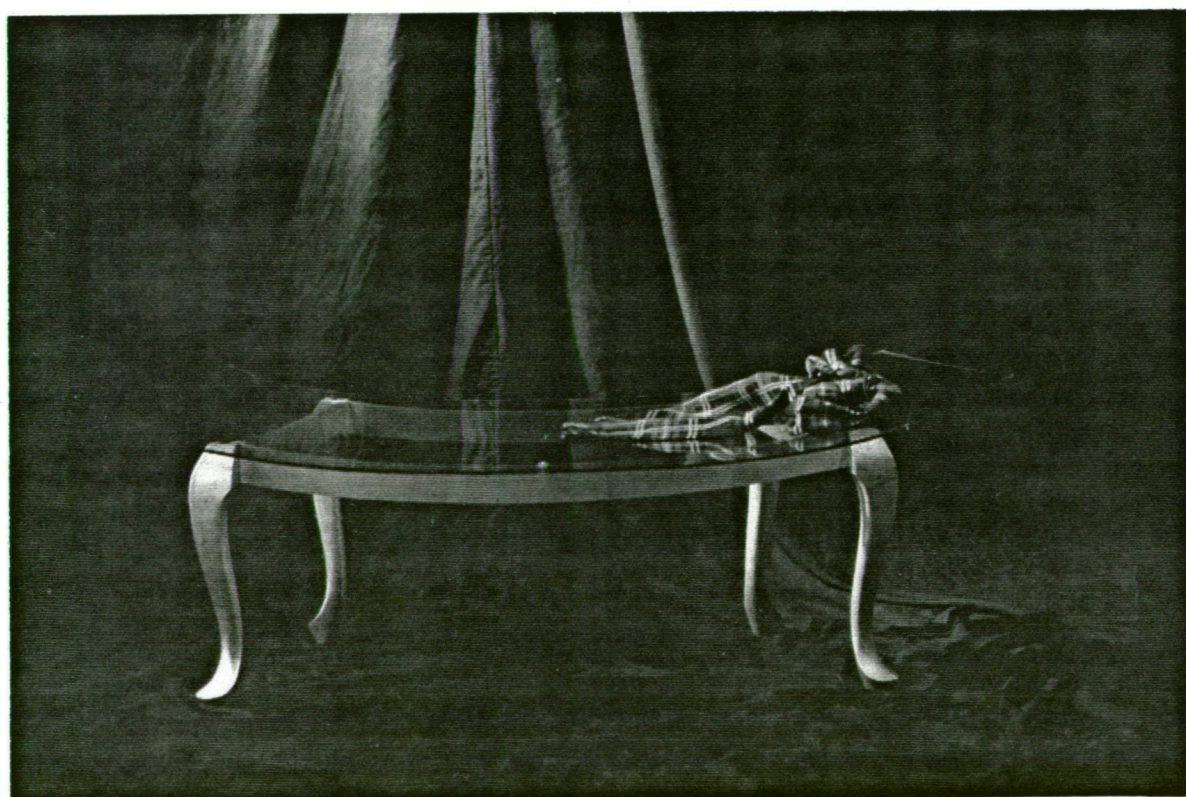
III. no. 6. Arp Jean, The Stag. 1914.



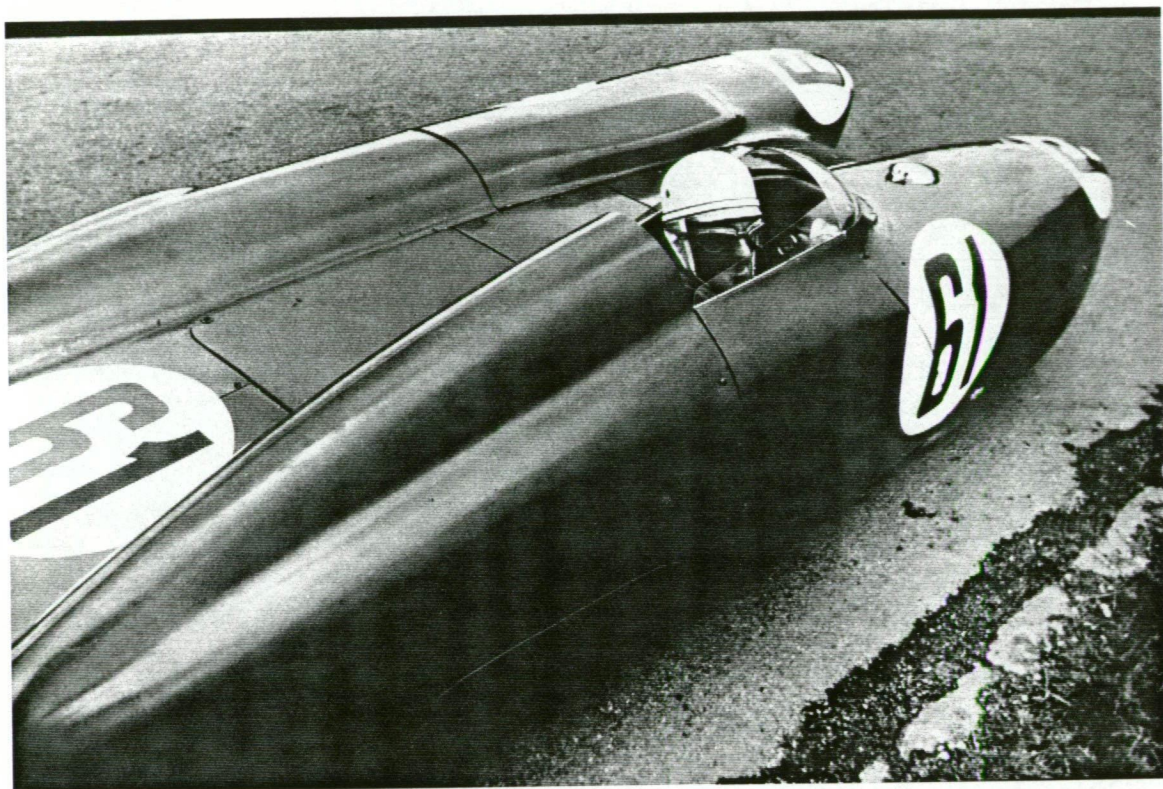
III. no. 7. Arp Jean, Torso. 1957. Bronze, 36" high.



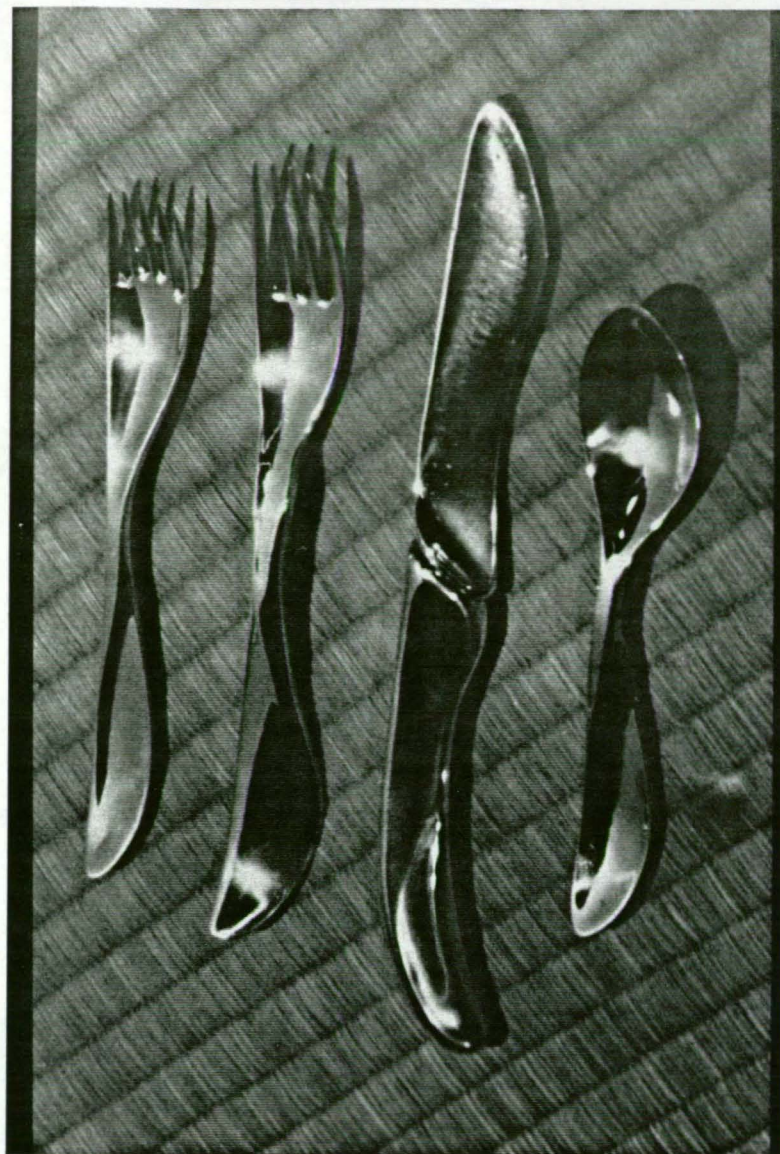
III no. 8 Duchamp Marcel, Bottlerack readymade 2nd version, 1961 (original, 1914, lost).



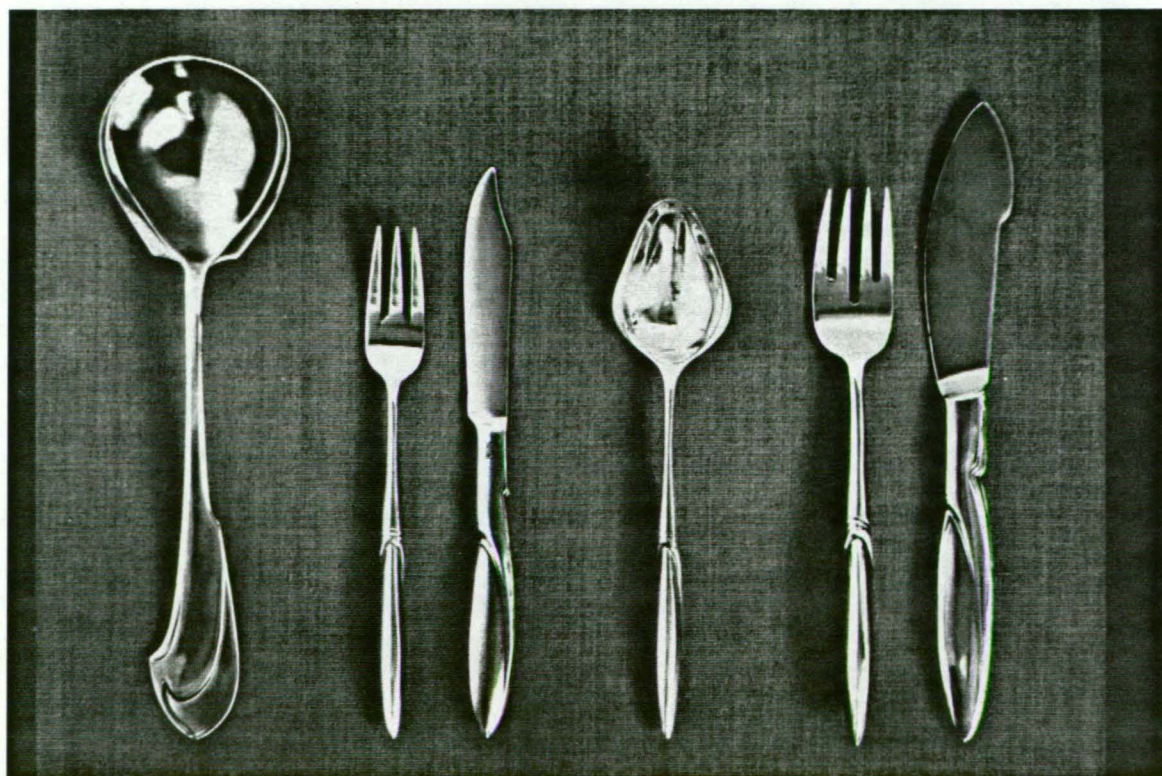
III. no. 9 Splatterbug Coffee Table. 1992



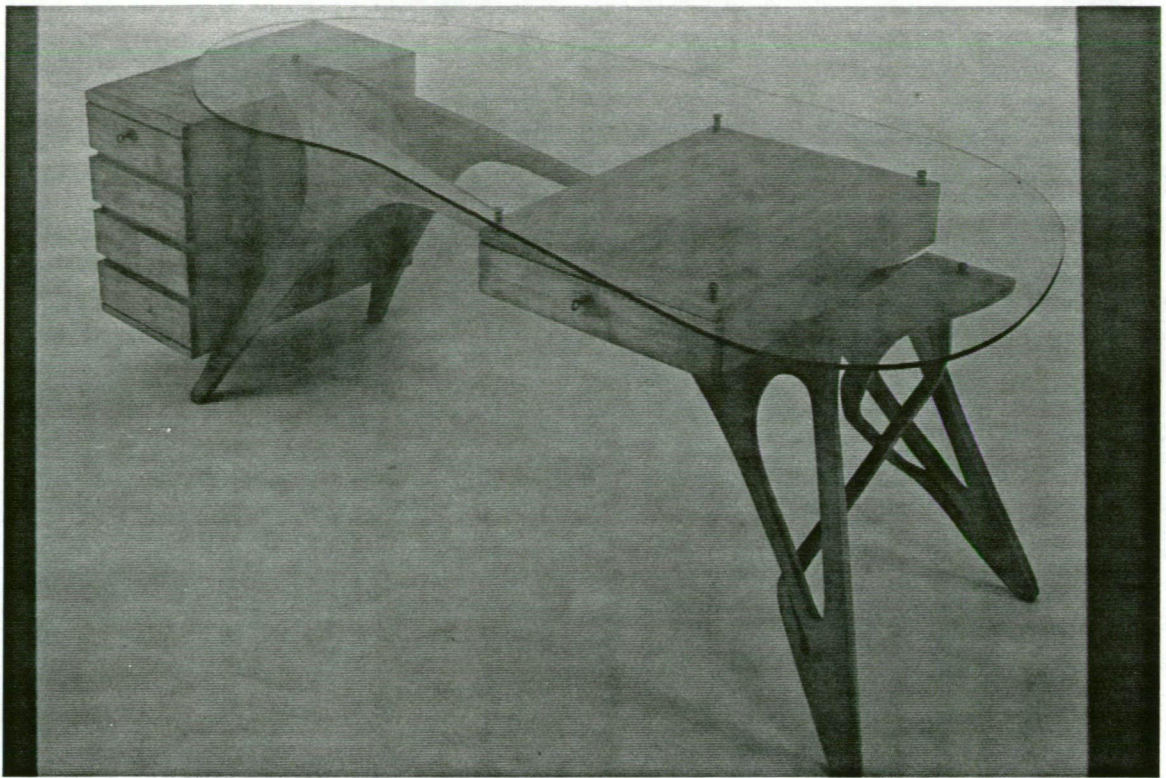
III. no. 10 Mollino at the wheel of the "Bisiluro" 1950's.



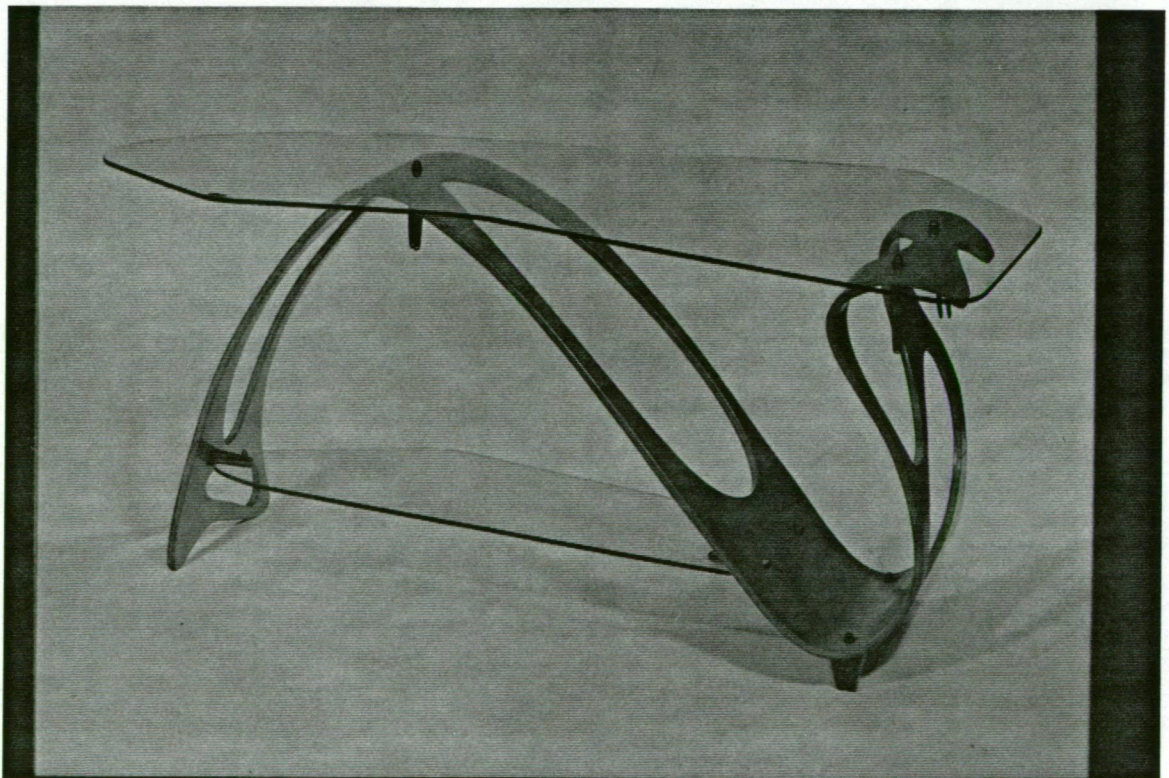
III. no. 11. Reed & Barton Cutlery: prototypes 1960.



III. no. 12. van de Velde Henry, Cutlery 1903



III no. 13. Mollino Carlo, Singer Table 1950.



III. no. 14. Mollino carlo, Arabesque Table 1950.



III. no.15. Synergy Stool 1992.

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