ITALIAN AND NORDIC DESIGN CULTURES
IDENTITIES IN TRANSITION 1925–2025

EDITED BY
MADDALENA DALLA MURA
ANDERS V. MUNCH



EDIZIONI QUASAR

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Contents

Preface 7

Maddalena Dalla Mura and Anders V. Munch
Italian and Nordic Design Cultures: Identities in Transition 1925–2025 9

Translating Design Cultures

Kjetil Fallan
La Linea Nordica: Reading Nordic Design in the Italian Design Press in the 1950s and 1960s . . 21

Alba Cappellieri and Beatrice Rossato
"Good Design" in Italian and Nordic Silver Jewellery 37

Joachim Allouche
National Design Cultures of Production: A Comparative Study of the Danish and Italian Glass Design Cultures 49

Astrid Skjerven
A Foreign Provocation: Memphis Milano in Norway 63

Transforming Design Cultures

Anders V. Munch
Nordic Lighting? Poul Henningsen, Christian Norberg-Schulz and the Myths of Scandinavian Twilight 75

Toke Riis Ebbesen
Marble, Monumentality and Modernity: Italian Connections in the Aarhus City Hall 87

Rita Marcangelo
Italian-Nordic Dialogues: The Expanding Territories of Contemporary Jewellery. 99

Niels Peter Skou
Flowering Fields Forever: "Scandinavia" as Imagined Place in "New Scandinavian Design" . . 113

Transgressing Design Cultures

Maddalena Dalla Mura
Graphic Design in the Middle of Communication, 1960s–80s: Gianni Sassi's Dilettantism and the Public Utility Movement. 129

Denise Hagströmer
Activity, Play and Self-Flagellation: The Nordic *The Child's Environment* Exhibition at the Milan Triennale 1973 143

Elena Fava
"Dressing Is Easy, for Elegance Is Dead": Radical Design and Italian Fashion 159

Annette Svaneklink Jakobsen
Furniture Station as Design Cultural Heritage: Assembling a Community Space and a Museum 173

Biographies 185

Preface

The international prominence of both Italian and Nordic design grew during the same decades, across the same markets and within the same Mid-Century Modern style of the 1950s and 1960s. Yet, despite this parallel rise, the two seemed to have been cast to different roles on the international lifestyle scene, shaped by their contrasting cultural contexts and distinct national and regional identities. Although these identities have since been transformed and repeatedly questioned through developments in industry, markets and media, national and regional clichés still exert a powerful influence, circulating through communication, branding and the professional cultures of design and production.

This volume explores these diverging design cultures and identities in transition across ten decades. It is based on a seminar at the Danish Academy in Rome in May 2023 arranged by Design Culture Studies, University of Southern Denmark. We would like to thank the Danish Academy and the former director, Charlotte Bundgaard, as well as the current director, Mikkel Harder Munck-Hansen, for both hosting the seminar and including this volume in its book series Analecta Romana Instituti Danici Supplementum, and we are especially grateful for the help of Maria Adelaide Zocchi as editor of this series.

On behalf of both the seminar participants, the authors and ourselves as editors, we also wish to thank the Carlsberg Foundation warmly for their full support of both the seminar and the publication.

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Italian and Nordic Design Cultures: Identities in Transition 1925–2025

Maddalena Dalla Mura and Anders V. Munch

This book emerges from the seminar *Design Cultures in Italy and the Nordic Countries* organised by Anders V. Munch and Sisse Tanderup from the University of Southern Denmark and held at the Danish Academy in Rome on May 15–16, 2023. Reflecting recent developments in the fields of design culture and design history, this gathering aimed to establish a framework for transnational exchange and critical reflection on the identities of Nordic design and Italian design as dynamic and contested entities that invite diverse analytical perspectives and that allow for comparative investigation. The seminar's open call, intended to attract contributions that would challenge national and regional stereotypical and promotional storytelling, asked participants to consider broad aspects of "design culture" and to propose presentations related to one of the two regions or to any transnational relations between them. The same request was extended to a number of Italian scholars, who were invited to participate in the seminar and help expand the initial inquiry. This publication, therefore, features both national cases as well as comparative and transnational ones. It brings together studies that approach design cultures from different scales and perspectives, reflecting the variety of analytical and historiographical orientations that emerged in response to the initial call. In doing so, the volume considers both the national design identities of Italy and of the individual Nordic countries, and the broader supranational identity of Nordic design.[1]

Identities, Cultures and Histories

Three decades into the new millennium, everyday life is populated by myriad products, interfaces and environments with elusive origins, items that may be designed in one country and produced, sold and experienced anywhere in the world. Despite—or perhaps because of—this reality, national and regional labels continue to assert their influence on the production and promotion of design. The possibility of claiming an authentic or unique design identity rooted in "their" country or region—or having a design "DNA", as it is often called by marketing consultants—seems to offer firms and professionals an inexhaustible resource for branding to compete within global markets and media networks (Danish Design Council 2017). Designers themselves tend to project diversified and hybrid identities, emphasising national, regional or global connections in response to their target contexts and stakeholders. Imbued with their associated legacies of tradition and heritage, moreover, national and local labels also function as key markers for institutions, organisations and schools. However, a closer look easily reveals a more complex scenario. Much design production inherently contains a blend of elements and relies on chains of actors and processes that cross geographical and cultural boundaries. This becomes even more evident when considering that design today largely concerns not individual artefacts, but hybrid systems of products and services as well as platforms that connect objects and people at multiple scales (Julier et al. 2019, 2). Furthermore, if one shifts the focus from solely design production

1. We use "Nordic" to cover Norway, Sweden, Denmark, Finland and Iceland, and refer only to "Scandinavian" as the international breakthrough of this label in the 1950s and its subsequent iteration and continuation (Skou and Munch 2016).

to include design mediation and consumption practices (Lees-Maffei 2009), and from designer culture to everyday life, the picture becomes even more articulated. By considering the use, representation and dissemination of design —which are also carried out through design —one quickly realises that design is a broad socio-cultural phenomenon that intersects with multiple individual and collective values and sensibilities that may transcend or conflict with established notions of nationality or regionality.

Exclusive national or local affiliations cannot adequately account for the essence of design or fully explain design cultures. However, as mentioned above, it is undeniable that the articulation of national and regional identities in networks and policies has nevertheless had, and still has, a significant role in shaping design practices, institutions and discourses. At the same time design economies and cultures impact on regional, national and global contexts. National or regional traditions, networks—as well as perceptions and memories—do exist; or rather, they perform and are performed: they morph over time, subjected to continual renegotiation among stakeholders and to constant interpretation and appropriation by consumers, users and larger communities (Mordhorst 2021). Rather than dismissing them as mere rhetorical devices, concepts of national or regional identities should be treated as constructs that require critical examination.

In this regard, we posit that "design culture", as an object of study and as a discipline concerned with the "networks and relationships between the domains of design practice and production and everyday life", as outlined by scholars like Guy Julier (Julier et al. 2019, 1; see also Julier 2000), can offer productive research and analytical frameworks. Cultures are entities that exist and evolve at multiple scales. Design cultures permeate various spheres and contexts from professional practice to daily routines, from institutional discourse to lifestyle media. They delineate both tangible and intangible dynamics within and between companies, professional communities, organisations and a multitude of publics (e.g. Deserti and Rizzo 2014; Manzini 2016). Within this framework, local, national or regional identities can emerge and assert their influence, resonating with distinct understandings of design, its traditions and contemporary conditions. This process in turn shapes specific national or regional design cultures. Their uniqueness becomes particularly apparent when contrasted with other, divergent cultures. It is against this backdrop that our book seeks to explore the terrains of Italian and Nordic design cultures, striving not only to juxtapose their distinct identities but also to interrogate the dynamics that transcend regional and national boundaries. As Joana Meroz noted, national design identities "may be imagined not in terms of points of origin, but of open destinations" (Meroz 2016, 283). Historical and critical understanding is therefore crucial. Cultures are never static entities and not determined by specific origins, so to comprehend their continuous redefinitions, one needs to trace their trajectories or "genealogies", as Michel Foucault puts it (Foucault 1971).

National and international perspectives and paradigms have dominated the early phase of design historiography, with hegemonic modernism viewed as inherently international. However, recent scholarship has challenged these perspectives, deeming them too restricted, predicated on essentialist categories and often relying on stereotypes that fail to account for the dynamic and hybrid processes that characterise the contemporary global conditions. Following developments in the humanities and social sciences—most notably post-structuralism and post-colonial theory—and the emergence, within historical studies, of world and global history, and of comparative and transnational approaches, design historians too have begun to explore and adopt more inclusive approaches, thereby expanding the geo-cultural reach of design history (Woodham 2005). Some scholars have championed the idea of a world history of design that would recognise and incorporate the diverse circumstances of design's development within the different cultures and communities (Margolin 2005, 2015). Others have instead proposed global history as a more open and better framework that acknowledges design as a multi-sited practice and that fosters an outlook that extends beyond geographical boundaries (Adamson, Riello and Teasley 2011).

The push to transcend Eurocentric and Anglo-American biases, as well as to break down persistent centre-periphery dichotomies—resilient even within the self-critical strand of design historiography—has led to multiple discussions of these new approaches and contributed to a more plural understanding of design culture that also considers the multi-directionality of influences, networks and flows and the interplay of different scales, ranging from global to regional, from national to local (Calvera 2005; Kikuchi and Lee 2014; Huppatz 2014, 2015). For instance, the Catalan design historian Anna Calvera highlighted the significance of Barcelona's unique design culture and the internationalism of the Spanish-speaking world compared to the overarching national framework of Spain (Calvera 2005). Increased attention to transnational, supra-regional and inter-regional dynamics has further illuminated the porous and constructed nature of national conceptions of design cultures (Aynsley, Clarke and Messell 2022; Fallan, 2012; Fiss 2009; Kikuchi and Lee 2014; Meroz and Gimeno Martínez 2016). Meanwhile, the notions of nationhood, national identity and national culture have experienced a resurgence of critical interest, with scholars scrutinising their impact on design and, conversely, the role of design and creative industries in their formation, especially in relation to nationalism (Gimeno Martínez 2016; Narotzky 2009; Yagou 2007).

In this new interpretive framework, the national category has therefore all but disappeared, or rather, it has gained a renewed understanding. No longer conceived as monolithic units bound by geographical confines, national contexts and identities have instead been recognised as dynamic and contested entities in active relationships with other regional, supranational and global identities, contributing to and influenced by these interactions. Indeed, even comparative, transnational and global histories ultimately reference national entities, albeit to re-examine them and provide more nuanced interpretations.[2]

Although design operates within the global industry and image economy, it remains shaped by conditions and generates context-dependent meanings at smaller geographical scales: "design might be more global than ever before, it is still conditioned by, and in turn informs, its global, regional, national and local contexts at once", as Kjetil Fallan and Grace Lees-Maffei (2016, 1) argued in the introduction to their edited volume *Designing Worlds*. While it would be limiting to confine our analysis within national boundaries, it would be equally reductive to disregard the national perspective. The national level of design culture often represents the richest and most detailed field of investigation, as cases and sources are often tied to languages, national institutions, media and organisations. Of course, design is rarely isolated inside national borders, but everyday life is often dominated by the closest issues, habits and understandings. As Fallan and Lees-Maffei put it "the relationship between design and national identity is both extremely practical, concrete and material, and operates at the level of the public imaginary, myth and symbol" (Fallan and Lees-Maffei 2016, 9). People's relations to design oscillate between mute everyday experience and more articulate public imaginaries, where national myths and symbols play a more pronounced role along with other layers of identity, profession, lifestyle and social class. In this way, our cases span across very concrete practices and abstract imaginaries looking for ongoing exchanges and reversible relations.

As more regions of the world have started to gain visibility in the discourse and literature of design history, the diversified, critical understandings have also spurred scholars to revisit the stories of countries and traditions previously embedded in canonical accounts. Along these lines, the design histories and cultures of the Nordic countries and of Italy have also been the subject of renewed attention, featuring prominently in articles, monographs and edited collections (Fallan 2012, 2018; Fallan and Maffei, 2013; Dellapiana 2022; Ashby and Kallestrup 2023; Fallan, Zetterlund and Munch 2023; Gotlieb and Skjerven 2025). In particular, the volumes edited by Fallan and Lees-Maffei

2. "Ultimately, though, both comparative history and transnational history rely on the nation as an entity and conceptual category, and therefore produce histories that complement rather than contest national histories" (Fallan and Lees-Maffei 2016, 6).

—*Scandinavian Design* (Fallan 2012) and *Made in Italy* (Lees-Maffei and Fallan, 2013)—have questioned stereotypical myths and transcended the boundaries of canonical narratives. Providing a critical reassessment of Scandinavian Design and Italian Design as analytical categories and sharing an approach that acknowledges the role of various actors and networks in the production, mediation and consumption of design, they have offered the framework for diverse viewpoints ranging from the local to the transnational. More recently, the anthology *Nordic Design Cultures in Transformation, 1960–1980: Revolt and Resilience*, edited by Fallan, Christina Zetterlund and Anders V. Munch (2023), has further advanced the exploration of Nordic design cultures by focusing on a period, the years between the 1960s and 1980s, that has often been overlooked in conventional narratives of Scandinavian Design but deemed pivotal for understanding the major features of contemporary Nordic design. Grounded in an inclusive conception of design culture, this volume has embraced a multidisciplinary and collaborative stance, gathering insights from various authors and contributors, both within and outside academia, emphasising a transnational and comparative lens.

Seeking to add to this body of literature, our volume aims to delve further into the design cultures of Italy and of the Nordic countries, providing a broad framework for reconsidering national design identities across diverse scales and for transnational discussion spanning a broad chronology, from 1925 to the present.

Intersections and Divergences of Italian and Nordic Design Cultures

There are certainly good reasons to bring together the design histories and cultures of Italy and the Nordic countries for both individual analysis and comparative examination. Both symbols of modern lifestyles and paradigms for design organisation, marketing and professionalisation in the mid-20th century, Italian design and Nordic design have subsequently become emblematic of the contradictions and transformations that have marked the evolution of design production and culture from the latter half of the century up to the present, especially in terms of industrial decline, critiques of capitalism, and the emergence of environmental concerns. Although the economic and cultural conditions of Italy and of the Nordic countries have changed significantly since the rise of the *Italian Line* and of *Scandinavian Modern* in the 1950s, these labels—and more recent ones such as *Made in Italy* and *New Nordic Design*, which imply unified and coherent identities[3]—continue to display unabated vigour.

Emerging in the mid-20th century with a focus on furniture and home design, Italian design and Scandinavian design shared some traits as successful contributions of the Mid Century Modern, when each was recognized as possessing a sophisticated aesthetic idiom and a unique identity in relation to the modernist tradition and representing in different respects a sort of "third" or "middle way" compared to the extremes of industry and craft, of standardisation and individual expressions. In this respect, the Italian and Nordic design communities, designers, firms and institutions also looked at and measured each other at particular times, seeking inspiration and reference and establishing successful commercial bridges. Articles and commentaries in magazines like *Domus* and *Stile Industria*, international exhibitions such as the Triennale in Milan, specialised shops as well as small firms such as Arform in Milan and the Home shop in Turin testify to this kind of attention in Italy to Scandinavian design in the 1950s. The attention was affirmed by the Italian award of the Compasso d'Oro in 1958 to Den Permanente, the international showroom of Danish design in Copenhagen.

The design communities of Italy and the Nordic countries engaged in a mutual gaze, driven not only by a willingness to learn but also by competition and the intent to promote and distinguish themselves in an increasingly international market. A later example of the reverse attention to Italy is a Danish report on Italian design in 1973, which is worth presenting as a minor transnational case here. The author was Frederik Fogh, trained as an architect in

3. For a discussion of these more recent labels, see Lees-Maffei and Fallan (2013) and Skou and Munch (2016).

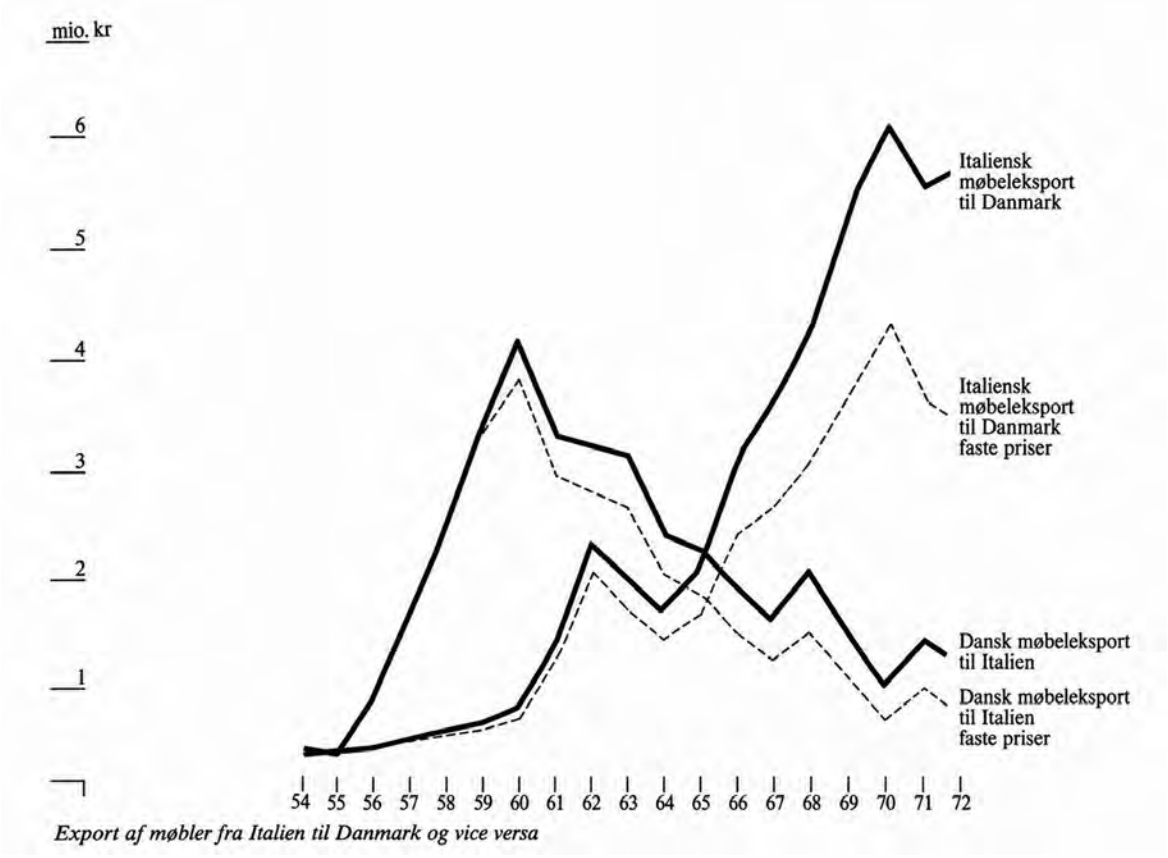


Fig. 1. Developments in export of furniture from Italy to Denmark and vice versa 1954–72. The dashed curves show "fixed prices", i.e. adjusted according to the price index. Frederik Fogh, "Italiensk formning", BID 10, 1973.

Denmark but living in Milan for many years and working as an architect on factory projects for the Italian furniture firm Cassina, later B&B. He knew the realities of big-scale industrial production and stressed the importance of industrial research to keep ahead of the development of markets and technologies. The report was commissioned by the Danish National Bank's *Anniversary Foundation of 1968*, recently established to strengthen both the arts and crafts and the design in Denmark. On the committee was Erik Herløw, the first Danish professor in industrial design and a strong promoter of this field, and a friend of Fogh from the Royal Academy School of Architecture. So Fogh was surely asked to give the Danish readers and authorities some facts on the role of design and the development of technology in industry to challenge the more conservative formula of Danish industrial art. The core message was very clear in the diagram (Fig. 1), with the development in the mutual export of furniture between Denmark and Italy. Denmark reached an early peak in 1959, but dropped, while Italy had a slower start, becoming much stronger in the 1960s and leaving Denmark behind.

Fogh would highlight three causes for the strength of the Italian furniture industry:

> Around 1960 it was usual to have fully industrialised manufacturing processes, even fully automated assembly line processes inspired by the car industry. New synthetic materials were on the market, much better suited to automatic manufacture than natural materials, and finally a huge, rather young audience grew forth, which not only has purchasing power on its own, but also in a much more decisive way than earlier affects the leading taste (Fogh 1973, 18).

While Fogh saw the Italian furniture industry adapting technology from car manufacture and embracing new synthetic materials suited for this, the Danish art industries still tried to balance technology and craft and only introduced plastic reluctantly. According to Fogh, the Italian industry also researched the market

and targeted an upcoming younger generation, while the Danish design industry reacted rather late and more defensively to this change in the market. The report highlighted the strength of a broad scope of industrial design through introductions to Olivetti and Italian car design. Denmark lacked such strong industrial locomotives to lead in design, while Sweden had large, profiled industrial firms in both the car and furniture industries.

Despite general points of mutual interest, the conditions of design production and development in the Italian and Nordic contexts were quite different, and their identities and cultures have been promoted and interpreted as representing distinct heritages, mentalities and societal conditions. The case of Nordic design serves as an illustrative example: it is a regional brand encompassing the five distinct yet interconnected design cultures of Finland, Sweden, Norway, Denmark and Iceland. However, the promotion of Scandinavian Design in the 1950s was as precise and coherent as any national branding initiative, with few international consumers able to distinguish between designs from these countries. Even today, national labels and references to New Nordic or New Scandinavian Design are used without any clear discrimination (Skou and Munch 2016). Italy, conversely, with a population more than double that of all the Nordic countries combined, presents a contrasting situation. The concepts of nationhood and national identity give rise to different considerations here, as the country is marked by a profound internal diversity, entailing a series of economic, productive, social and cultural distinctions and intersections that operate at the local, regional and inter-regional levels. This diversity has also been played out at specific times in the international promotion of Italian design, giving rise to conflicting visions and interpretations of its identity. Thus, while the so-called Italian Line from the 1950s predominantly implied modern industrial design created in Milan and produced by companies in the north-western regions, the spread of design culture and awareness in various production districts, especially after the 1980s, led to other regions and even to single cities, claiming the distinctiveness of their own traditions and contributions as champions of Italian design.[4]

Throughout the second half of the 20th century, moreover, the identities of Nordic design and Italian design were contested, renegotiated and transformed multiple times. Following the 1950s, Italy and the Nordic countries entered international markets and responded to the new consumer society. Rapid industrialisation was soon followed by setbacks and crises. Economic, social and political agendas changed and transformed the focus and conditions of design and designers. As a critique of consumerism began to mature in society and also in the design community, and awareness of the social and environmental responsibilities of design matured, new areas of design took hold, including the birth of luxury brands out of craft traditions.

In 1972, when the architect and curator Emilio Ambasz presented the exhibition *Italy: The New Domestic Landscape* at the Museum of Modern Art in New York, he argued that the "achievements and problems" of Italian design offered a micro-model of the broader condition of contemporary design. This model, however, was loaded with contradictions. While in Italy the 1960s and 1970s marked the consolidation of the design profession in a wide range of sectors, the same period was also characterised by the rise of opposing pro- and anti-design attitudes, with the latter receiving the most media attention both in Italy and internationally. New approaches emerged that looked to the world of youth and protest movements, demystified the role of the designer and of industry, or conversely exasperated the conditions of the industrial system to liberate new behaviours and lifestyles. In the end, the radical aspirations and experiments of this period ultimately failed to transform the structural conditions of society and production. However, their break with the principles of modernism, rationalism and functionalism ultimately laid the foundations for the emergence of postmodern, disengaged and hedonistic design practices, as well as for the subsequent stylistic turns of the 1980s and 1990s.

4. Therefore, it is justifiable to perceive Italy as a collection of subnational regions, acknowledging the distinct conditions and production cultures in areas such as Milan, Venice, Florence, and extending to Turin, Parma and Naples.

While Italian anti-design and radical architects took the headlines, the Nordic design communities also met the challenges. The volume *Nordic Design Cultures in Transformation 1960–1980: Revolt and Resilience* has shown how design discourses, institutions and practices in the Nordic countries changed radically around 1970 (Fallan, Zetterlund and Munch 2023). While Scandinavian Modern was known mostly for its minimalist, elegant utensils and furniture for interior design by celebrated furniture architects, the scope of tasks and interests broadened, embracing other environments as well as social and environmental issues. In the Nordic design histories, this has mostly been read as some kind of decay from the golden years. However, as that book shows, it is precisely in those years of revolt and transformation that some of the most important roots of contemporary Nordic design can be found. Whereas parallel developments and trends can be traced in general terms, the Italian and Nordic design communities also offered diverging responses and even oppositions. Nordic designers tended to distance themselves from the Italian postmodern movements, and their criticism of modernism has been less dismissive. The following trends of neominimalism and supermodernism of the 1990s, however, had strongholds in both Italian and Nordic design (Johnsen 2003; Munch 2025).

In this volume, we seek intersections as well as divergences between Italian and Nordic design cultures through our selection of specific cases across the decades since 1925 and across different design sectors and practices. By mirroring these design cultures, we see how apparent historical similarities might rest on very different conditions in industry and society, but also how broad scopes of culture and historical trajectories might show other possibilities for comparison. We aim to show how the historical and contemporary transitions of design cultures have translated, transformed and transgressed stereotypes of identity, not only national identities, but also professional, institutional and other cultural identities of design. We track these transitions by searching broad aspects of design cultures, across industrial design, fashion, jewellery, glassware, graphic design, furniture, playgrounds and architecture, as well as activities like exhibitions, festivals and other kinds of cultural promotions and events.

Translating, Transforming, Transgressing Design Cultures

This book is structured in three sections that revolve around verbs characterised by the prefix *trans-*, which evokes motion and negotiation, suggesting acts of mediation, influence and infiltration that traverse boundaries. The notion of *trans-* provides a conceptual framework through which design cultures are understood as dynamic fields of ideas, artefacts, practices and people, constantly moving between geographical, cultural, temporal, disciplinary and professional contexts, acting as agents of exchange, resistance and critique. From this perspective, Italian and Nordic design cultures are conceived as evolving terrains shaped by processes of *translation*, *transformation* and *transgression*. These three trajectories offer complementary yet interconnected perspectives on design cultures as living systems of interaction, dialogue and renewal.

The first section, "Translating Design Cultures", presents both transnational cases of design transfer and mediation and comparative analyses of specific fields of design production during the second half of the 20th century. The introduction, display and promotion of ideas, approaches and styles from one context to another—whether from north to south or vice versa, and addressing either professional or general audiences—has often relied on, or reinforced, stereotypical views of the foreign counterpart. Sweeping conceptions of design tend either to assume similarities between countries due to international trends or, conversely, profound disparity due to divergent mentalities or centuries-old traditions and legacies. Deliberate attempts to translate design culture across geographical and societal distance thus often oscillate between these assumptions, resulting in the exoticisation of the "other" and even in self-exoticisation—when one performs to align with the other's expectations, or supposed expectations (Kahla 1998; Munch 2017). Going beyond prejudices and stereotypes, however, translations and appropriations from one cultural context to another—deliberate or not—can also be productive and add new layers of meaning. As

Kjetil Fallan has noted, "[i]n design culture, too, objects and ideas are subject to […] processes of translation, where resources are mobilized and interests aligned in the construction of cultural meaning" (2023, 292). This remark is stated in his epilogue to the recent volume *Nordic Design in Translation*, edited by Charlotte Ashby and Shona Kallestrup (2023), unfolding the theme of cultural translation in a very broad historical perspective. The chapters by Fallan and Astrid Skjerven in the first part of our book look into specific stories of design mediation and transfer, focusing respectively on the reception of Nordic industrial design in the Italian design magazines of the 1950s and 1960s, and on the Nordic reception of Italian postmodern design through an exhibition of the Memphis group in Oslo in 1985. The contributions by Alba Cappellieri and Beatrice Rossato and by Joachim Allouche compare and discuss the structural and cultural convergences and differences of Italian and Nordic design and production within the fields of jewellery and glassware respectively. Together, these contributions enhance an understanding of design that challenges simplistic notions of fixed identities.

The second section, "Transforming Design Cultures", focuses on issues of cultural positioning and change—either strategic or incremental—based on negotiations between tradition and modernity, local and global dynamics, tangible and intangible contexts and heritage, and between the implied design ideals and logics. Spanning the 20th and 21st centuries, the varied case studies collected in this part of the book—comparative, transnational, regional and national—illuminate how design identities can be reformulated through intimate exchanges with materials, technologies and skills, as well as through discourse and communication aimed at engaging specific networks and audiences. In their chapters, Anders V. Munch and Toke Riis Ebbesen examine design and culture as both material and ideological phenomena, investigating respectively how a Nordic culture of lighting was transformed, through architectural discourse and design, by the advent of electrical light, and how a specific marble was used in the functionalist design of a Danish town hall to challenge ideas of monumentality and to mediate between local modernism and international architectural languages. Focusing on the contemporary, Rita Marcangelo compares Italian and Nordic jewellery and discusses this as a key area of experimentation and cross-disciplinary reflection on crucial issues of globalised societies, from sustainability to cultural belonging. The processes and effects of globalisation are also focused on by Niels Peter Skou, who demonstrates how Nordic furniture is repeatedly promoted through natural imaginaries employed in the heydays of Scandinavian Design, however detached from any specific location and despite considerable changes in the design industry.

The third section, "Transgressing Design Cultures", turns from processes of transformation to acts of transgression—moments when designers, institutions and communities question the limits of their own disciplines and challenge the conventions of what design is or can be. Here, transgression implies critical expansion: a crossing of boundaries that can redefine the field's professional, social, political and cultural scope. The avant-garde and progressive ethos inherent in modern design—as a discipline that seeks not merely to adapt to social change but to provoke and shape it—has re-emerged repeatedly in different contexts throughout the 20th century, and again in the new millennium. Alterations may be urged by rapid economic development or by impending crises, with designers compelled to transcend conventional thinking or outmoded traditions and to seek new solutions and pathways. Design thus acts as a form of transgression both to expand its impact and to achieve greater coherence (Munch 2024). However, radical attempts to change practices, meanings and conditions can also put design and designer cultures under scrutiny, as their institutions, networks and models are contested, redefined and renegotiated. In this section, three national cases and a transnational case explore design as a practice of critical agency, capable of both revealing and reshaping the structures it inhabits. Focusing on Italy and the years between the 1960s and the 1980s when design culture was marked by a perceived professional identity crisis, Maddalena Dalla Mura and Elena Fava examine respectively the trajectory

of an art director who questioned the notion of graphic design's "public utility", and the radical convergence of fashion and industrial design in Archizoom's project *Dressing Design*, aimed at a critique of established production-consumption relationships. Remaining in Italy during the same period but adopting a transnational perspective, Denise Hagströmer analyses the concept and display of the co-Nordic exhibit at the 1973 Milan Triennale, revealing how its political agenda resonated across both Nordic and Italian design cultures. Finally, Annette Svaneklink Jakobsen brings transgression into the present, analysing a local community project in Denmark as a participatory reassembly of local heritage and collective agency that reconfigures the roles of designer, institution and citizen.

The studies collected in this publication contribute to evidence that translation, transformation and transgression are not only historical and structural conditions but also methodological stances that require changing perspectives through which design history and culture themselves are analysed and written.

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