

## **Bodies, chairs, necklaces: Charlotte Perriand and Lina Bo Bardi\***

### **Corpos, cadeiras, colares: Charlotte Perriand e Lina Bo Bardi**

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#### **ABSTRACT**

The article explores the crossroads of the trajectories of two professional women linked to the production of space: the Italian architect Lina Bo Bardi, who worked in Brazil, and the French designer Charlotte Perriand. The article begins by comparing two photographs and then investigates the performance of these two well-known professionals, their moments of exclusion and disqualification, as well as their successes, throughout their careers. As they both had long and diversified careers, we capture two moments when they produced their emblematic chairs, which they exhibited using their own bodies, albeit in a fairly anonymous way, as an ergonomic measure.

**Keywords:** Lina Bo Bardi, Charlotte Perriand, Modernism, Domestic Space, Design.

#### **RESUMO**

O artigo investiga, a partir de duas fotografias, os pontos de encontro entre as trajetórias de duas profissionais ligadas à produção do espaço: a arquiteta italiana Lina Bo Bardi, que atuou no Brasil, e a designer francesa Charlotte Perriand. Tomando as imagens como mote, comparamos a atuação dessas duas profissionais de renome, os momentos de exclusão, desclassificação e também de sucesso de suas carreiras. Como Lina e Charlotte tiveram trajetórias longas e diversificadas, flagramos apenas dois momentos, o da produção de cadeiras emblemáticas que elas exibiram usando, ainda que de modo pretensamente anônimo, seus corpos como medida ergonômica.

**Palavras-chave:** Lina Bo Bardi, Charlotte Perriand, Modernismo, Espaço Doméstico, Design.

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\* Received for publication July 2009, accepted March 2010.

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The present text emerges from a research project that itself traces back to one singular moment: the uncanny sensation caused on observing the similarity in body postures and relations between human body and objects – in this case, two chairs – in two photographs. Posed, studied and controlled, the images show two women seated in chairs designed by themselves. In the respective photos, these women, both linked to architectural modernism, use their bodies as an ergonomic measure for their work. Despite concealing their faces, as though wishing to remain anonymous, we know who they are and that the photographs were used on various occasions as signatures, an image-symbol of their authorship. These apparent similarities begin to dissipate when we observe the clothing of the depicted women, certainly the first signal of the distance separating the year 1929, when the young Charlotte Perriand wore a dress and feminine shoes to pose with her chair at an exhibition, from 1951 when the already recognized architect Lina Bo Bardi wore long trousers and closed shoes, showing off the versatility of her chair in a variety of poses. In both cases, though, we encounter a bodily relation that involves repose and femininity, as well as a reminder of the authorship that adds its signature to the photos and situates the two chairs as unique works: points of similitude that invite us to venture a comparison that, by evoking moments from the trajectories of both artists, allied with material and visual culture, allows us to speculate on the relations between gender and cultural production.

Beyond the similarities encountered in the two biographies, my proposal in analyzing these two cases of successful trajectories, taking into account the women's careers, works and visibility, is based on the premise that the women at the centre of their respective fields, rather than who remained marginalized, can tell us something new about the silent gendered division of labour within 20<sup>th</sup> century architectural practice, as well as reveal a modernism in a feminine mould. After all, when we examine female participation in groups of modern architects, their names impose themselves (along with those of others like Eileen Gray, Ray Eames and Alison Smithson) as though their mere presence and the success they obtained were unable to indicate and indict subtle forms of subjugation and self-subjugation whose tensions appear in their works and in the way in which these were exhibited – hence the centrality of the photos. Indeed looking back on the history of architecture, which usually turns a deaf ear to gender issues, we could ask whether there is anything more in the Walter Gropius's well-known aphorism – which became a self-representation of a field in which everything from the spoon to the city could be designed by the architect. Within this spectrum perhaps some scales were assigned to female architects or women whose training complemented the projects of male architects from the so-called modern movement. The Bauhaus founder's remark on apparently equivalent scales conceals the hierarchy between genders (and genres) practiced in the school's studies from its foundation in Weimar in 1919.

Lina Bo Bardi and Charlotte Perriand both aspired to become well-known names, but for this very reason we need to demystify the success of this solitary heroines and see how their trajectories and works connect with the forms of knowledge and kinds of practice that emerged in the nineteenth century and the start of the twentieth. Registering their exceptionality only makes sense if we situate it within a wider exception than their singular qualities: that is, within a set of circumstances that combined in a highly unusual way. And here it is essential for us to take seriously some of the key moments marking gender boundaries in Bardi and Perriand's trajectories. The moment, for example, when Lina, on graduating in architecture, was told by her school director Marcello Piacentini that she, a *bella ragazza*, would end up marrying to avoid a professional career mirrors Le Corbusier's dismissal of the young Charlotte when she knocked on his studio door in search of work: "we don't embroider cushions here." In these rituals of non-investment, the domestic world appears as female destiny, at the same time as a hierarchy is established: the place to which the women were advised to return was not the space most coveted by the world to which these male professions belonged. Or was it? Beatriz Colomina argues that nothing distinguished twentieth century architecture more than the crucial role played by the private house, with the novel ideas of Adolf Loos, Le Corbusier and others being

developed through residential projects – houses that made them famous, whether or not they were actually built, especially those that were designed for shows, publications and competitions.

Leaving aside these points of proximity, it should be pointed out that the task of reviewing some of the canons of this history, such as the crucial role of the biggest names, does not only concern the female presence. The role of studios, cooperatives, groups, schools, associations and so on is crucial. Charlotte Perriand was not the only obscured figure from Le Corbusier's studio, and bringing her role to light also reveals names such as Pierre Jeanneret and Alfred Roth, to mention just two. Meanwhile Lina Bo Bardi's solo flights are only partially explained by her gender: after all, she was an Italian working in São Paulo in the period after 1956, a moment when modern Brazilian architecture was concentrated in Rio de Janeiro and a discourse of *brasilidade* was still being elaborated in various tones. Even so, at both the São Paulo Museum of Art (MASP) and the Bahia Museum of Modern Art (MAMB), she worked in a group, though the nuances of her partnership with Maria Bardi have yet to be sufficiently explored.

Identifying gender as one of the conditioning factors of the activities of these artists means thinking relationally, comparing two kinds of hierarchy: gender and artistic genre. It also means situating these figures in relations where these demarcations can become apparent. This does not simply mean depicting the glamorous Charlotte in a male studio or Pietro Maria Bardi defining the well-known museum designed by his wife as “a woman's dream.” We need to recall how the literature treated Sonia Delaunay and her presumed maternal and instinctive relation to colours (recording that she once tested out her ideas on a quilt for her new-born son) compared to the intellectual and logical approach attributed to her husband Robert;<sup>1</sup> or the relation of Anni Albers (1889-1994) to tapestry, while Joseph (1888-1976) devoted himself to colour theory;<sup>2</sup> or the highly-trained and avant-garde Ray (née Kaiser) Eames (1912-1988) becoming the assistant of husband Charles (1907-1978).<sup>3</sup> The examples are endless and are especially interesting insofar as they relate to culturally constituted divisions that, repeated and reiterated over the long term, acquired an almost universal duality.<sup>4</sup>

However to limit the scope of this text, I shall explore the moments in which Lina Bo Bardi and Charlotte Perriand designed their chairs and displayed them publicly with their bodies. This is not a case of constructing the trajectory of the two artists, but of capturing two moments in their careers,

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<sup>1</sup> The Ukrainian Sonia Terk arrived in Paris in 1905 at the age of twenty and met Robert Delaunay in 1908, beginning an intense personal and artistic partnership. From 1910 onwards the work of both of them began to tend towards abstraction, which Robert denominated ‘deconstruction’ while Sonia experimented on textile surfaces. Sonia became particularly well-known for the clothing that she designed and when Robert's work became more closely aligned with the aesthetic debates of the 1910s, Sonia's work focused on collages, pastels, fabrics and domestic objects. Concerning the work of the Delaunay couple, see Chadwick (1993).

<sup>2</sup> The Albers couple met in 1922 at the Bauhaus. He was one of the school's most influential teachers of painting, the author of a theory of colours, while she, whose maiden name was Annelise Fleischmann, dedicated her time to weaving and to writing about design. In 1933 – since Anni was Jewish – the couple migrated to the United States from where they undertook a series of voyages throughout Latin America.

<sup>3</sup> Charles Eames abandoned the architecture course in the second year, working as a photographer and also with various kinds of craftwork like pottery and printing. His affiliation to modern design largely stemmed from his proximity to the designer Eliel Saarinen and his wife Loja, and later their son Eero. In 1941 he married Ray Kaiser, a painter and sculptor trained in Nova York and a founder of the AAA (American Abstract Artists) group. Pat Kirkham observes how the common duality in artistic couples linking women to craftwork and men to abstraction was reversed at the time when the couple began their amorous and artistic partnership (Kirkham 1998:21).

<sup>4</sup> The Bauhaus pedagogy itself worked within this duality. The historical European inheritance, regarded as oppressive, was seen as ‘feminine’ and ‘maternal,’ while the admired North American industry was perceived as masculine. Herbert Bayer (1900-1985) worked with these opposites: the tastes of popular and mass culture, irrational and feminine, should be disciplined by typography and design, equivalent to the rational and rule-imposing father of Freudian theory. “These limits are echoed in the dichotomy established by Bayer between popular culture and ‘functional’ design, between (regressive) history and the (progressive) future and between (feminine) style and its (masculine) rejection” (Mills 2009:50).

situated in the two post-war periods of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, in which gender and production were especially entangled.

### CHARLOTTE PERRIAND

Born in 1903 in Paris, the daughter of a tailor father and a dressmaker mother, Charlotte Perriand grew up in the Marché Saint-Honoré neighbourhood where her parents lived and worked, observing the world of haute couture from the viewpoint of the small artisan (McLeod 2003:11). While Paris after Haussmann's interventions still retained the space of the manufacturers, the growing consumption of decorative items and clothing reserved for women, since the writings of the Goncourt brothers, the role of guardian of grace, style and embellishment.<sup>5</sup> Charlotte's parents, especially her mother, were at the small producer end of this manufacture of luxury goods, living through the transition from a profusion of small studios and workshops in the centre of Paris in the final decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century to the rise of the *grands magasins de nouveautés*, the fashion department stores which scoured the Parisian *quartiers* for merchandise to sell in spaces that also provided entertainment (Clark 2004:97-101). Their daughter entered her parents' line of work in more scholarly form, thereby completing this transition. In 1920, at the age of seventeen, she gained a scholarship to take the four-year course at the *École de l'Union Centrale des Arts Décoratifs*, a female and feminist school,<sup>6</sup> though many of the young women came from the Parisian elites and expected to marry well later. During the period in which Charlotte attended the school, it was directed by women with the exception of the artistic director, Henri Rapin (1873-1939). However this apparent peculiarity stemmed from the reformulation of the institution around 1890, based in part on the view found in official circles that was a role for women in the national regeneration of the applied arts, and from this point on the school became involved in campaigns for women's leadership in the production and consumption of luxury craft objects. At this time, women like Eileen Grey, Sonia Delaunay, Hélène Henry and others acquired growing prominence within the panorama of French decorative art (Costa Meyer 2003:22).

After her training, Charlotte received the advice from Rapin that she should try to exhibit at any cost – after all, nobody knew of her. The professional advice given to her at this time indicates that she had not taken the course on a whim, but in search of a qualification for work, distinguishing her from women friends like Dora Maar and Marianne Clouzot, the daughter of the art critic and museum director Henri Clouzot. Charlotte sought out additional training in the painting studies of Bernard Boulet de Montvel and later André Lohte. In Paris after the First World War, the large French department stores set up their own design studios and she frequented classes run by Maurice Dufrene<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> At the end of the 19th century, the writer and collector Octave Uzanne denounced the simplicity of the *femmes nouvelles* as prejudicial to the French decorative arts, which lacked feminine form and ornament. In a text that reintegrated arts and crafts, this pioneer heralded an alliance between feminine grace, interior space and refined craftwork since the 18<sup>th</sup> century. His work *La femme à Paris, nos contemporaines*, published in 1894, said that this sobriety undermined an organic and decorative Parisian woman and discussed the implications of this new posture for the urban and domestic orders. He celebrated the woman's ability to adorn her own body and interior spaces to which she naturally belonged, blending decorative and decorated women, the model for which was the artisan aristocratic woman, and urging bourgeois wives not only to decorate the walls of their houses but also to cultivate the luxuriousness and artisticness of their 'undergarments.' See Silverman (1992:71).

<sup>6</sup> The *Union Centrale des Arts Décoratifs* was founded in 1864 as a Central Union of Fine Arts applied to industry. It was located on the Place Royale (today the Place des Vosges), in the middle of the artisan district formed then by the Marais. Its members includes manufacturers of wallpaper, carpets and pianos, goldsmiths and so on. The change in name accompanied other alterations in 1890. The term 'industry' was omitted and the objectives transformed: around 1889 the idea of popularizing the sense of beauty and democratizing art was replaced by a search for the purification of beauty and aristocratization of craftwork. See Deborah Silverman (1992:111).

<sup>7</sup> Maurice Dufrene (1876-1955) was president of the *Salon des Artistes Décorateurs* and artistic director of the *Maîtrise des Galeries Lafayette*.

at Galeries Lafayette and Paul Follot<sup>8</sup> at Bon Marché, which offered more practical activities than those of the school, which was almost a family studio. One of the founders of the *Société des Artistes Décorateurs*, Dufrene had worked with important names like Victor Horta and Henry van der Velde, and it was with him that Charlotte designed curtains for a room exhibited at the 1926 Exhibition of Decorative Arts, an item produced by La Maitrise, from the Lafayette studio, and subsequently exhibited various time in the store's window displays (Costa Meyer 2003:23).

Dufrene and Follot worked for large department stores, which brought them face-to-face with the question of mass production and the market: they were expected to make scenarios accessible to the middle class in terms of form and price, but keep their focus on the wealthy clients – Dufrene claimed that it was through the rich that one could reach the bourgeoisie and eventually the working class, while Follot, far more resistant to the changes, saw mass production as the antitheses of the idea of art, a contrast between quantity and quality, like comparing a jazz band with seventy black musicians to a quartet – the latter undoubtedly his own preference. In 1925, Maurice Dufrene coordinated a 'street of shops' for the international exposition of decorative and modern industrial arts, designed among others by Gabriel Guévrekian,<sup>9</sup> René Herbst<sup>10</sup> and Francis Jourdan on the Pont Alexandre III. Charlotte also presented *Le Neuf Muses*, an art deco panel for a music saloon.

In 1926, the young designer presented a complete environment for the first time at the Annual Exhibition of the Parisian *Société des Artistes Décorateurs*. Financed by her parents, the display entitled *Coin de Salon* was deemed juvenile and criticized for mixing wood and glass. Costa Meyer notes that the work was very different from those produced by Charlotte's teachers and looked to connect with the more avant-garde work presented on the same occasion, like the room made by Georges Djo-Bourgeois<sup>11</sup> for a modernist villa designed by the architect Robert Mallet Stevens on the Cote d'Azur. The *Coin de Salon* was purchased by an English textile merchant, Percy Scholenfield, to furnish his *garçonnière* (bachelor flat).<sup>12</sup> Scholenfield, twenty years older than Charlotte and a friend of her family, was the sponsor for a set of luminaries (which she may have sold to the stylist Jeanne Lanvin) (Ruegg 2004:10) and a cupboard for silverware completed in 1926; he also offered her courses in architecture, mathematics, English and driving a car. In December of the same year they married, to everyone's surprise and the consternation of her father due to her new husband's Protestant religion, nationality and being 20 years older.<sup>13</sup> Charlotte used a red velvet dress, married without any festivities and at the end of her life defined the marriage as the only way for her to break free from various restrictions.

It is interesting to note the narrative of personal, spatial and corporal transformation during these years: to decorate their garret apartment, Charlotte felt free of the constraints of the school and stores, since she was creating for herself. Around this time she saw Josephine Baker in *Revue nègre*, "black as coal dust, dancing naked in wild, passionate rhythm, her pert little butt adorned with a bunch of bananas – an untamed woman, totally authentic" (Perriand 1998:23). It is the moment of the discovery of jazz, the Charleston, English literature. She cut her hair à *la garçonne* and commissioned a necklace

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<sup>8</sup> Paul Follot was artistic director of the Pomme Studio, the art atelier of Bon Marché.

<sup>9</sup> A Turkish architect who graduated in Vienna in 1919 and moved to Paris, where he worked with Robert Mallet-Stevens, André Lucart and Le Corbusier, among others. At the invitation of the latter, he began to commit considerable time and energy to the International Congresses of Modern Architecture (CIAMs).

<sup>10</sup> A Parisian architect born in 1891, he studied in London and Frankfurt. He later settled in Pariso where he worked as an interior architect. He was one of the founders of *Union des Artistes Modernes*.

<sup>11</sup> Georges Djo-Bourgeois (1898-1937) was born in Bezons and graduated in architecture in 1922. He formed part of the team of creators of the Studium Louvre, linked to the Grands Magazins du Louvre.

<sup>12</sup> The armchair from the suite was displayed at the annual exhibition of applied art of the Galliera museum, directed by Henri Clouzot, over the winter of 1926-7.

<sup>13</sup> According to her autobiography, the red dress was worn to avoid lace and frills, and the marriage the possibility for the caterpillar to transform into a butterfly, to which she added: but "the butterfly flies" (Perriand 1998:22).

of chrome copper balls, “a symbol and a provocation that marked my belonging to the mechanical era of the 20<sup>th</sup> century” (ibid.), at the same time as she began alpinism and other mountain sports. She began to personify the image of the modern woman described by Le Corbusier:<sup>14</sup> a short-haired woman who dresses in five minutes and is beautiful, seducing through her grace, courage and inventive spirit, which led to a revolution in clothing design, a miracle of the modern times. According to her friend Marianne Clouzot, her husband Scholenfield paraded his modern Parisian wife as a trophy.

Whether in response to the criticism received, the marriage or the contrast with the more daring work of Djo-Bourgeois, what we know is that her work altered. In 1927 in the *Salon d'Automne*, Charlotte presented a *Bar sous le Toit*, Bar under the Roof, a title with potential social implications (Costa Meyer 2003:26) given that it was designed for the garret of a Parisian building, though the work was not aimed at the poor. Moreover it was a bar, with a game table – a male environment – designed by a woman who was the author, client and user: the garret bar was designed for the apartment she shared with her husband in the most Bohemian area of Paris. More than the rupture with the idea of *genius loci* pointed out by Costa Meyer (2003:30), it was her rupture – and here this is my analysis – with preconceived ideas of domesticity. The apartment caught the press’s attention and was published in the *Révue de la Femme* as a space that seduced by its *coquetterie*.

While marriage assured her the conditions to work, the aesthetic change came from her professional relationship with a man located at the centre of the field of modern architecture – Charles Edouard Jeanneret, better known as Le Corbusier. It was the jeweller Jean Foquet who lent Charlotte the latter’s programmatic and visionary *Vers une Architecture* and *L’art décoratif d’aujourd’hui*. The texts presented an alternative to art deco by emphasizing the role of industry in the home, the house as a ‘machine for living,’ in his famous phrase.

Perriand’s frustrated visit to the atelier on rue de Sèvres – where Le Corbusier rebuffed her with the remark that they did not embroider cushions – apparently took place a few days after the Weissenhof Siedlungen exhibition in Stuttgart.<sup>15</sup> In this exhibition of actually constructed homes, the kitchen was the centre of attention with the general rules defined by a Housewives Association of Stuttgart and by the book *Der neue Haushaut*, published in 1926, by the feminist Erna Meyer on the ‘new house,’ which sold twenty-nine editions in two years and which was illustrated with houses built by architects linked to *Neues Bauen* with household equipment designed by the Bauhaus. The house presented by J.J.P. Oud was an example of this new ideal of the efficient house. Confident of her charm and her designs, Perriand heard that in that atelier they did not embroider cushions, but on visiting the *Salon d’automne*, Le Corbusier visited the *Bar sous le toit* and reconsidered his rude reception, inviting her to develop the furniture design that he had championed since the *Esprit Nouveau* pavilion of 1925.

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<sup>14</sup> “Woman has preceded us. She has reformed her dress. She found herself at an impasse: to follow fashion and give up the contribution of modern techniques, of modern life. To give up sport and, a more material problem, be unable to accept jobs that have allowed women to make a productive contribution to contemporary activities and enabled her to *earn her own living*. If she followed fashion, she would be unable to drive a car, she could not take the subway or the bus, she could not move freely around her office or the store. To be able to *construct* her toilette everyday – do her hair, put on her shoes, button up her dress – she would have no time left to sleep. So she cut her hair, her skirts and her sleeves. So now she goes out with her head uncovered, her arms exposed and her legs free. She dresses in five minutes. And she is beautiful, she seduces with the charm of her graces, which the fashion designers decided to exploit.” (Le Corbusier, 2004 [1930]:112). Later on in the same text he returns to the theme, but this time discretely emphasizing an attribute of seduction: “Modern woman cut her hair. Our gazes take in the form of her legs.” (idem:125)

<sup>15</sup> An exhibition organized by the architect Mies van der Rohe consisting of thirty-one buildings designed by seventeen architects, including apartment blocks by Mies himself, de J.J.P. Oud and de Mart Stam, and various houses, two by Le Corbusier and his cousin and associate Pierre Jeanneret. According to Mary McLeod (2003:37), the interiors of the German houses were elegant while Le Corbusier was unable to fit out his houses to the same level as his architectonic projects. In this case, at the last moment his partner Alfred Roth gave up waiting for the furnishing projects that never arrived and improvised, with a result that contrasted unfavourably with the interior of de Mies’s apartment, designed in partnership with Lilly Reich – another designer who needs to be studied. Le Corbusier was severely criticized by the Germans.

The 23-year old *nouvelle femme* who Le Corbusier accepted without pay but with the status of an associate<sup>16</sup> presented herself then as “Perriand-Scholenfield, Meubles, 74, rue de Bonaparte” and her apartment became a large laboratory, a chance to distinguish her work from the creations in wood, tapestry and other forms of craftwork. In 1928 she concluded a dining room, recreated and exhibited in the *Salon des artists décorateurs* of the same year, alongside a *salon* by Djo-Bourgeois (1898-1937) and a *fumoir* by René Herbst (1891-1982). The group decided to exhibit together to produce what they called a ‘shock unit’ and Elisa Djo-Bourgeois designed the curtains and carpets for her husband’s room. The chairs in Perriand’s room were visibly inspired by office chairs and the magazine *L’Architecture* considered the group’s work extremely left-wing, while an article published by the women’s magazine *Maison pour Tous* described the project as suited to an active life without long periods of rest, emphasizing that the author was a woman who wore metal necklaces and short hair – it was not a dining room of the traditional *femme au foyer*. McLeod emphasizes that part of the success may have been due to Perriand’s attention to detail, elegance and other traditionally female attributes, an observation that she makes based on the adjectives used by the press to describe the work: charming, youthful, *gai*: a femininity in modern terms, that may have facilitated the reception of an agenda of renewal (McLeod 2003:44). The dining room was composed of a swivelling chair (*siège tournant*) and a fold-out table covered in rubber, which in contrast to the chair never received the triple signature Corbusier-Jeanneret-Perriand. The acceptance and association never completely erased the initial tension, undoubtedly permeated by gender issues: when Charlotte invited Le Corbusier and his cousin Jeanneret to visit her apartment, where she surprised them with some newly finished chairs, the former said: “They are coquettish.”

Charlotte Perriand showed her work in the refined exhibitions hailed by the press, rather than the *Salon des Arts Menagers*, founded in 1923 by Jules-Louis Breton, a socialist engineer sympathetic to the application of Taylorist principles to the domestic world. This debate on the rationalization of everyday tasks was pursued vigorously by German designers during the same period, resulting in the Frankfurt kitchen project of 1926-7. Because of the situation of the French industry, when compared to the American and German industries, we cannot really speak of industrial design, especially if we take into account the annotations of Charlotte concerning the artisans who should execute her designs. At that time, still less committed to the social aspects of what she designed, she projected herself as a modern woman in her body and in her furniture projects – the difference in relation to Le Corbusier, especially in terms of political options, which would come only in the following decade.

We therefore come to the chair mentioned at the start of the article in which Charlotte had herself photographed, the chaise longue that allows various positions, inspired by wooden rocking chairs and also by a medical chair for resting patented as Surrepos. This work was the culmination of the years in which she worked in partnership with Le Corbusier and Jeanneret: in the photo we see Charlotte lying in her chaise longue in a photo conceived by herself and shot by Pierre Jeanneret in the absence of Le Corbusier, who was in Brazil. Her raised legs contrast with the delicacy of the doll-like shoes, her ‘manifesto’ necklace of metal balls is an assertion of modernity – she used this photo to illustrate a manifesto to which we shall return– while she candidly hides her face. At the end of her life, the feminist reading of this image made by the architectural historian Beatriz Colomina, suggesting that she looked at the wall and saw nothing, denying her vision and authorship (Colomina 1992:106-7), left Perriand, by then a renowned figure in the field, particularly angry: she argued that all she had wanted to do was emphasize the chair, which could have been used by anyone. But, as McLeod notes, with her raised legs and her dress, she was indeed flirtatious, displaying a piece of furniture that, like her image, exuded a charm verging on seduction. There are two versions of the photo with different clothes. It was

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<sup>16</sup> She has the status of associated and at the same time had private architecture classes with Alfred Roth, an activity funded by her husband.

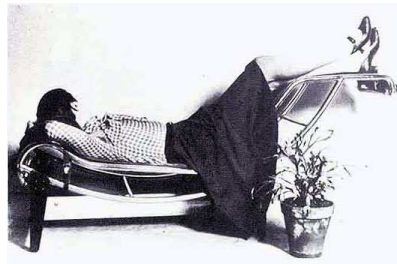
taken by Pierre Jeanneret while Le Corbusier was visiting South America,<sup>17</sup> and illustrated the second volume of the architect's *Oeuvre*, along with the article 'Wood or metal?' which Charlotte published in the English magazine *Studio*, defending the use of metal which, she argued, would spur the same revolution in furniture as cement had in architecture. The article, which presented her as a 'champion of new ideas,' concluded by appealing for transparency, blues, reds, space, light and lamenting the misfortune of those who do not keep in physical and mental shape – in other words, those who were not twentieth century men. However, somewhat in contrast to the text's irreverence, the article featured Charlotte photographed in another position, this time with her legs lowered. The rest of the photo is similar: her face turned away from the camera, arms inert by her side, but undoubtedly more modestly composed than the photo with her legs raised, albeit crossed. Although the two photos may have been produced to show the chair's versatility – a device also utilized by Lina – the choice in each situation says a lot.

Charlotte performed a central role at the rue de Sèvres atelier, especially during the periods when Le Corbusier was away on trips – like those to Brazil in 1929 and 1936. On these occasions it was up to her and Jeanneret to supervise projects, such as the *Temps Nouveaux* pavilion of 1937. At this show she and Ferdinand Léger built the *Pavillon de l'Agriculture*, fully in tune with the French left and the *Front Populaire*. During the ten years in which she worked with Le Corbusier and Pierre Jeanneret, she was responsible for the interior design for all the buildings conceived by the pair of architects (Benton 2005:15). In 1937 she was asked to leave the atelier due to her disruptive presence, a disturbing element – this at least was the explanation she received from 'Corbu.' To what extent had her political leanings, or the affective proximity that she, divorced from Scholenfield, maintained with Pierre Jeanneret, influenced this decision? The fact is that Le Corbusier at that moment seemed ideologically closer to those working in Vichy, while Jeanneret would join the French resistance and Charlotte would travel to the East, developments – in Japan she redesigned the chaise longue in bamboo – that I point out for future exploration.

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<sup>17</sup> In his tenth lecture in Buenos Aires, on October 19<sup>th</sup> 1929, Le Corbusier credited Charlotte with revolutionizing furniture design, saying that while he was there talking, her display in the Autumn Exhibition showed the principles for equipping a modern house (2004 [1930]:118).





## LINA BO BARDI

Acchilina di Enrico Bo was born in 1914 in a middle class residential district of Rome. Differently to Charlotte, from a more modest family and who had herself baptized at the age of 18, she was baptized very close to her home: in the Vatican. Her father was a civil engineer, undertook construction projects and was a Sunday painter. It was Enrico Bo who taught his oldest daughter to draw and the family pushed for her to pursue a course in Fine Arts after completing her studies at the Artistic Lyceum. In a Rome swept up by fascism, at her father's advice, Lina, as they called her, studied at the Lyceum for four years and at the same time contradicting and confirming the family disposition, enrolled at the *Università degli studi di Roma*, where she was one of two women – research has never discovered who the other woman was.<sup>18</sup> At the height of fascism, the course was run by renowned architects linked to the regime: Marcello Piacentini, responsible for designing Rome's university campus, and Gustavo Giovanonni, the biggest theoretician of restoration during this period.

To graduate in architecture in Rome, Lina Bo presented as her final course work a maternity hospital exemplifying the principles of modern architecture. As well as the relatively low grade, she was disqualified by the school's director Marcello Piacentini, who remarked that a *bella ragazza* like her would end up marrying and would therefore never practice architecture. The symbolic violence of this act mirrors the disqualification experienced by Charlotte in the 'cushion embroidery' episode, an enunciation of a gender norm that disqualifies and disinvests. She graduated in 1939 at the age of 25.

But it was primarily in female spaces that Lina, freshly graduated and swapping her natal Rome for Milan, began her professional career making *ensembles*, frequently in partnership with her colleague Carlo Pagani, and illustrating magazines, although she had opened her own architectural office with financial help from her father. Lina went to work, unpaid, for the chameleon-like architect Giò Ponti: editor, author of important buildings, designer and promoter of Italian craftwork, his office was devoted among other projects to organizing the Triennales of Decorative Arts. An interior design project, elaborated in partnership with Pagani, was executed in 1942.<sup>19</sup> The magazine *Quaderni di Domus* – which Lina founded, also with Pagani, in 1945 – was dedicated to the problems of the modern house – going on evidence, from the door inwards – and published the best examples from Italy and elsewhere of furniture and domestic appliances (Campello 1996:22). In 1946, Lina travelled across Italy researching craftwork, with the idea of organizing an exhibition of fabrics for curtains and upholstery for an Italian company, Rima. Not by chance, later in her career, by then at the São Paulo Museum of Art (MASP), she would become involved with the creation of an industrial design, the Contemporary Art Institute (Instituto de Arte Contemporânea: IAC).

In another magazine which she founded in 1945 with Bruno Zevi – *A*, or *Cultura della Vitta* – Lina proposed a game teaching the reader how to use the modern house and objects. This involved choosing between items like a glass, a household clock, an ornament. The 'wrong' choice was severely criticized as a lack of functional and aesthetic vision. In the same periodical, which lasted just nine months, she published an article on female freedom in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, a freedom provided through domestic appliances and an American kitchen. The Italian post-war period was one of reconstruction and the country played a central role in the redefinition of architectural modernism that would introduce new themes such as urban centres and identity and would culminate in the dissolution of the CIAMs (International Congresses of Modern Architecture) at the end of the 1950s. And while Charlotte discovered Japan and swapped steel for wood, Lina migrated to Brazil to begin her career as an *architetto*, as she said, in Italian and without gender inflexion.

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<sup>18</sup> The trajectory of Lina Bo Bardi in Rome, Milan, São Paulo and Salvador, up to the inauguration of the MASP in 1968, is detailed and analyzed in Rubino (2002 and 2009).

<sup>19</sup> The 'Project for the interior of an apartment in Milan' was published in *Lo Stile*, a magazine run by Ponti, in 1942. It was her only project executed in the period when she was working professionally in Italy.

Married to the journalist, critic and merchant Pietro Maria Bardi, we can add other branches of architecture to this destiny as a designer of interior spaces. Lina's later narrative about her marriage is similar to that of Charlotte's, along the lines of "I married, he was modern," without ever expressing the centrality of this union in determining her subsequent career and seldom emphasizing the force of this partnership. Though from distinct social backgrounds and apparently divided in terms of political positions – Bardi was an important figure in the cultural politics of Benito Mussolini while Lina was more involved with the Milanese left – Pietro and Lina Bardi shared an almost unbounded commitment to modern architecture and a love of Brazilian popular art, as well as co-editing the museum's magazine *Habitat*. In 1951 – having completed work on their own house, called among many other names Casa de Vidro (Glasshouse),<sup>20</sup> her laboratory for experiments enabled by the autonomy – she wrote in *Habitat* that in this house the client was the architect herself. In the same neighbourhood of Morumbi, she later designed a house for her friend Valeria Cirell and, still in 1958, began the project for the São Paulo Museum of Art – whose interior spaces she had already projected at the time of its foundation in 1948, including the design of furniture since she was unhappy with what she found in the Brazilian market.

Hence, in a way, Lina faced in Brazil the same production dilemmas confronted by Charlotte two decades earlier: the relative lethargy of the national industry relation to household furnishings. While in Paris in the period 1920-30 there was no one to execute Perriand's designs until they were finally produced by the company Thonet in 1948, which Lina founded with Bardi and their contemporary architect friend Giancarlo Piretti the Palma Studio and the Pau Brasil furniture company, which ended up closing its doors due to production problems. And for her Casa de Vidro she designed the armchair baptized Bardi's Bowl. Like Charlotte, she modelled her work, lending her body and image to her pieces. Including for an advert for the Jardim Morumbi lot, from 1952, in which she appears in the Casa de Vidro staring at a non-existent Atlantic rainforest in a photographic collage.

The Casa de Vidro was not well received by Italian critics due to the fact it had maid's quarters. Giò Ponti said that there was a secret there, a link between the Italian Lina and Brazil's insurmountable problems, and her acceptance of servile labour. The 'secret' was merely the European discomfort with an area that, in Housmann's schema for the Parisian buildings, was located in the garrets occupied by domestic employees, to which Le Corbusier referred as occupying the same status as domestic appliances and machines.



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<sup>20</sup> Glasshouses are a constant theme. The first, Maison de Verre, was built in Paris between 1928 and 1930, combining the functions of a medical clinic and a private house.



But it was a little while later, in a *Women's Encyclopaedia*, in which she appears as the author of one of the entries, that this exposure of a modern woman who knows how to use modern spaces reached what was perhaps its peak. In this entry, an American kitchen was shown (featuring appliances still unknown in Brazil), the one from her own house, but never used since the equipment was too sophisticated for the domestic staff to handle. Lina was the modern woman, but her text can be included in a long series of guides for housewives, like those that she had written with Carlo Pagani in Milan in the 1940s, as well as the manuals of domestic life.

In 1915, in the United States, Mary Peterson published *Principles of Domestic Engineering* and Christine Frederick her *Scientific Management in the Home*. Frederick's book was based on the 'twelve principles of scientific management' defined by Lillian Gilbreth for the women who worked in her own home. The idea was a sequence of activities in the right order, but central to this was the proposal that the kitchen should be a space just for cooking, meaning it could shrink in size. Smaller it would demand less movements to perform the same tasks. The European architects quickly identified this kitchen as a trademark of scientific care for the home – this at a moment when modern architecture was heralding a new home, a machine, a new way of living.<sup>21</sup>

At the end of the 1920s in Germany, the divulgation of new ideas on how to run the home, combined with the work of architects like Bruno Taut, generated a solution to the proposal for a house designed for minimal subsistence or existence (*Die Wohnung für das Existenzminimum*). The culmination of this endeavour was the project known as the Frankfurt kitchen, designed by the Austrian architect Grete Schütte-Lihotsky,<sup>22</sup> shown in *Die neue Wohnung und ihr Innenausbau* in 1925, and immediately included in various housing projects constructed in the city by Ernst May. The unit in question was a *Kochküche*, a kitchen made for cooking, small with an aura of modernity that came from the use of electricity. The novelty crossed back over the Atlantic and in 1934 the book *Modern Housing*, written by Catherine Bauer and published in New York, lauded Schütte-Lihotsky's kitchen as one of the foremost achievements of the new architecture (Bullock 1988:188).

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<sup>21</sup> An article published in the magazine *A* (later renamed *Cultura della Vita*), published in Milan, in 1946, by Lina Bo (later Bardi) was entitled 'Puo Il uomo essere libero si la Donna e una schiava?' The article, signed by RGM, took its title from a phrase by the Romantic poet P.B. Shelley (Can man be free if woman be slave?), emphasizing, however, that it was not a case of removing the woman from her familiar position, but of freeing her from her ancient burden with the help of education and modern scientific discoveries. The following article in the same issue was called 'La cucina dell'avvenire' and mentioned a kitchen designed by the American company Libbey Ovens Ford, as different from the contemporary Italian kitchen, says the unsigned article, as the pumpkin carriage of Cinderella. The article includes pictures of a well-dressed woman and an apron using an eclectic mixed and other novelties. See *A* no. 1. Editoriale Domus, February 1946.

<sup>22</sup> Margarete Schütte-Lihotsky (1897-2000) was the first woman to graduate in architecture in Austria. She studied under Joseph Hoffman and worked with Adolf Loos, as well as Ernst May, while he was the architect responsible for housing in the Frankfurt city government. Grete, as she was called, fitted more than 10,000 housing units with her planned kitchen. The Frankfurt kitchen was designed taking into account the number of movements performed by the body while making food.

The house of Lina and Pietro Bardi, like many of those designed in the 20<sup>th</sup> century by renowned architects, was also a showcase: as well as a home, it was a passageway into the field of Brazilian architecture. The Casa de Vidro was not designed for a show, but there are clues that it could have been a studio or a residence for artists invited by the São Paulo Museum of Art. While for Charlotte, her first apartment, financed by her husband, was a laboratory, for Lina, her house, designed in the same circumstances of autonomy bankrolled by her partner, was – like Ville Savoye (by Le Corbusier) and other famous homes – a manifesto ‘for an architecture.’

And in this house, used as an example of a modern abode (the other examples are houses designed by Vilanova Artigas), the images show a ‘modern’ woman who escapes the iconographic stereotypes of the period. Lina is wearing long trousers, uses a watch, and does not wear dresses or aprons. The kitchen could be compared to the functional American kitchen, a more spacious and more equipped version of the Frankfurt kitchen – after all it was a bourgeois house, while the latter was intended for housing complexes – but she did not represent the suburban housewife of *Kitchen Debate* who occupied North America at the height of the cold war. The quarters of the domestic employees mentioned in the text are not shown in the photos and drawings illustrating the encyclopaedia entry.

The kitchen was German and American, far from the traditions of bourgeois domestic space in Brazilian cities. Its furniture, however, mixed cotton cloth with local woods – whose grains enchanted her and would later enchant Charlotte Perriand – although Bardi’s Bowl was made from metal and leather, harking back to the European furniture of the 1920s and 30s, but dialoguing with what modern architects and furniture designers were doing then in São Paulo. Lina also at some moment decided to make a necklace for herself. This aquamarine necklace, which she wore to a ball at the Institute of Architects in 1948, soon after arriving in São Paulo, was a manifesto of naturalization, of assimilation in Brazil, by deliberately using (and announcing the use of) Brazilian semi-precious stones, and also a way of differentiating herself from the women with whom she socialized in the period when the MASP was founded on Rua 7 de abril. This differed from the necklace of the young Perriand, a manifesto in favour of industrialization and the metal that she used for many years at the start of her career, with her short-cropped hair to compose her image of a modern woman. She allowed herself to be photographed with it on various occasions, including lying down in her most well-known chair. Lina’s necklace was a platform for a design made from Brazilian jewels, bronze, silver, quartz and beryl, something different from the ‘diamonds of the madames.’ A project that was the same for design, for the museums, with the difference that she wore it publically on her chest.





## Conclusion

There is a hierarchy in the arts: decorative art is below, the human figure on top.  
Ozenfant and Jeanneret ('Le Corbusier'), *After Cubism*.

In her work on the Russian constructivists, Briony Fer observes the female presence in a 'useful' art. Women like Varvara Stepanova worked on constructions located between industry, the male world, and certain aspects of folk art like embroidery, implying the female. As well as participating in the so-called minor arts, female work, within the spectrum advocated by Gropius, redesigned the house, the interior, domestic life, which would never be the same again.

Mary McLeod (1996:20) calls attention to the concept of heterotopia developed by Foucault in his lecture 'Des espaces autres' from 1967. The heterotopical space, as distinct from the utopic, like the everyday landscape, provides us with a clear perception of social order: prisons, hospitals, church, brothel, etc. In contrast to utopias, heterotopias are identifiable places that allow a relation with time distinct from that of everyday spaces. However, McLeod argues, heterotopia excludes infantile and feminine spaces, places in which women encounter not only oppression but also comfort and even autonomy. Excluding the house, defining it as a 'place of rest,' the author says, may be a difficult to accept for any mother working there. The author provides us with a cue to ask, after all, for which women were modern interiors designed: for the woman who works, the 'queen of the home'?

Let's return to the photographs. Only very rarely do photos of architecture from this period include people in the constructed projects showing the spaces being used. Even in the domestic areas, rooms and kitchens that seem possible to be occupied, human figures seldom appear to indicate how to use them. In the technical drawings the human element is completely absent, and a sense of proportion is given in the plans by the well-known 'human scale.' It is worth dwelling on this point for a moment, not because Lina's designs, produced after her repose in Bardi's Bowl, always contain an idea of uses and occupations, but because the very notion of scale, of the body as a unit of measure, is particularly



interesting, since in the 20<sup>th</sup> century it was part of a ‘return to order’ in the minor and major European arts, an adaptation of the functional arts to industry and the so-called modern life.

The women used bodies, their bodies, as a measure for a piece of furniture that they had redesigned and that until then had been classified as male. Use of the Surrepos chair that served as model for the chaise longue was demonstrated by a man, and her first chairs, as mentioned earlier, were inspired by office chairs. Vania Carneiro de Carvalho shows how armchairs are part of the male spaces of the home, in contrast to sofas, precisely because the former allow just one person to sit in them, the man of the house, absorbed in thought or resting from work in the outside environment, in opposition to the sofa, the qualities of which were shown with a woman sat with her children. Lina Bo Bardi never designed a sofa and there were none in the Casa de Vidro, although a sketch showed a piece of furniture or a step in the living room where she herself, in long trousers, Bardi, a third, male figure and a cat are all sat. In these photos, are Lina and Charlotte taking possession of the furniture intended for the man, the repose that refers to work in public space, reversing the theatricality of domestic space, proposing a new kind?

The term theatricality is intentional. The publicity for Bardi’s Bowl showed an actress famous for her beauty, Odete Lara, with legs crossed, elegantly attired, wearing jewellery with her face slightly turned, her eyes shut. The chair was the cover of the American magazine *Interiors*, which included two images of Lina, one as a figure and the other as a background, like a watermark: on both images Lina is reading. In the background image she is hiding her face and her feet are on the ground; in the foreground image, we see her hands, legs and a book in contrasting colours.

Sitting, Carvalho reminds us, more than an everyday practice, is a “socially significant gesture and, for this reason, sexually active” (2008:195). The etiquette manuals analyzed by the author, taken from a period just before that of the first photo, pay special attention to the position of the woman’s legs and feet. They are allowed themselves to be photographed relaxing in the comfort of their chairs, or absorbed in the plot of a book in a photo where we cannot even see the reader’s face. There is no muscular tension in Lina and Charlotte’s legs, as befitted (and befits?) women. And in contrast to the famous chairs designed by the Bauhaus, these are more evocative of rest than work.<sup>23</sup> The chairs were unusual for their time, just like the women seated on them, displaying their full body and hiding their face. But in posing in their chairs, for whom were the respective images intended? The future buyer or user, or the interlocutor who also produced objects for modern life? In the latter case, we also need to remember that, like paintings, photos owe much to the observation of other photos, and these certainly are informed by a long series of images in circulation, which since the 1920s had shown in magazines and other publications what the modern woman was – a spectrum ranging from the images of Poiret’s mannequins to the surrealist photos taken by Man Ray of the model Lee Miller.

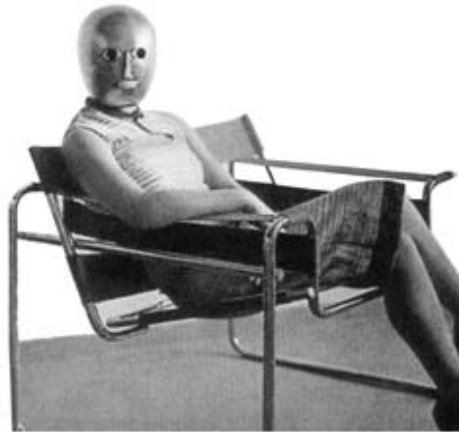
There are suggestions or hints that Lina and Charlotte met each other at some time in Rio de Janeiro in the 1950s and the latter in her autobiography declares her admiration for the former after visiting the Solar do Unhão [Unhão Manor] in Salvador. Working far away in space, with ten years difference, they shared contacts with central figures in the webs of the so-called modern movement. Charlotte was in the ship in which the 1933 CIAM was held, along with Pietro Maria Bardi, who was also a friend of Le Corbusier. At some time both women were in contact with Lucio Costa. In the second post-war period, the already fairly well established Charlotte and Lina showed greater interest in popular culture and in wood than in industrialization and metal chairs. This change in perspective was to some extent marked by the contact with Japan and Indochina in Charlotte’s case, and with Bahia and the Brazilian Northeast in the case of Lina. But whether or not they physically met changes little: their trajectories encounter and intercept each other at points, tying delicate and solid knots. Their places in the field of modern architecture and the so-called avant-gardes were predetermined, like those

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<sup>23</sup> As Mary McLeod noted, Charlotte’s chairs are not found as frequently in corporate spaces as their equivalents from the German school.

of other female modern architects and artists. An explicit determination, as in the Bauhaus of Weimar, where the women entering the institution were led directly to the textile and ceramics workshops (Droste 1990:40), or a subtle, silent and embodied determination. This invites us to observe the works, to search in them for the gender tensions that marked their trajectories, that, everything seems to suggest, conferred the women a place in the less valued domestic space and in the area of the so-called minor arts. Not coincidentally, the engineer Carmen Portinho was the founder of the Higher School of Industrial Design in Rio de Janeiro. But Carmen is the topic for another article.

It would be forcing too far the premise of research still in progress to claim that chairs and other furniture were defined within the world of modern architects as a subject for women. It would be enough to cite the famous chairs produced by the Bauhaus, such as the Wassily, designed by the architect Marcel Breuer, to demolish any such argument. And we know that, confined to the textile and ceramics workshops, Anni Alpers, Marianne Brandt and other women helped blur the boundaries between artistic genres. For now we can conclude with an image of Breuer's chair in which the female model, possibly a Bauhaus student, lends her feminine body to display the chair's qualities. She does not stare at the wall, like Charlotte, nor does she hide behind a book like Lina. She uses instead a mask, as a way of becoming anonymous. We know merely who conceived the chair and the mask – Oskar Schlemmer – but not who the model was. On the other hand, the name of Charlotte faded behind that of a denomination – LC4 – attributed to Corbusier or, at most, to himself, Jeanneret and Perriand. Even so, Lina and Charlotte returned to the publications and exhibitions from the 1990s onwards and their work began to be studied and may be partially revealed within an intellectual scene that is showing, little by little, that there were various modernisms.



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Translated by David Rodgers

Translated from **Cadernos Pagu**, Campinas, n.34, p. 331-362, Jun. 2010.