



Helena Seražin

The Home Introduction

'The House is Her World.' With the separation of work and family life, which took place as early as the 19th century, the bourgeois family home lost its decisive function as a space of production and became the area dedicated to the families' reproduction and rest. The woman was faced with the task of creating a lovely home and space for family representation, while her domestic chores within the 'non-working environment' ceased to be recognised as a proper work. Due to the specific socialisation of women –the system that legitimised the patriarchal authority, which prescribed women's lives by denying them of their own abilities and promoting their singular role as housewives, wives and mothers– the ideas of the 19th century persisted in the European society long into the 1940s and 1950s, most ardently in dictatorship regimes such as Franco's Spain. As Ana María Fernández García explains in her article, a special women's organisation, called Women's Section organised training courses for women as 'home managers', where they learned mostly about house-keeping. With State and Church prescribing and controlling domestic life, women lost what had remained of their independence. The courses trained them in the newly revived popular craftwork, decoration, furnishing and manual arts, providing an alternative to developing their creativity through higher education, which was not available to them.

With women's changing social status and their fight for equality and independence from the end of the 19th century onwards, improvement of domestic life became one of the priorities. Women's magazines such as the Dutch Feminist *De Werkende Vrouw* (The Working Woman) or Slovene *Žena in dom* (Women and Home), *Ženski svet* (Women's World) and *Gospodinja* (Housewife) advocated the Modern Movement of the 1920s and 1930s, seeking purity and simplicity in the design through rationalisation, standardisation and geometry. This functional aesthetic was in tune with striving for efficient domestic work which would provide women with more time for their professional activities and participation in public life. On the other hand, a visually professionalised working place such as the kitchen (the Frankfurt kitchen by Margarete Schütte Lihotzky) was supposed to increase the status of the housewife and acknowledge her domestic work. However, by adopting 'male' functionalism (e.g. by Gerrit Rietveld), which held the 'bad bourgeois female taste' in disregard, feminists such as An Harrenstein Schröder paradoxically surrendered the last distinctly 'female' domain to men and, as Naomi Verbeek concludes in her article, 'women could only achieve equality by adopting male values.' An exception to the rule is the case of Slovene women's magazines which

spread ideas about modern housing culture, amongst others. Based on her analysis, Alenka Di Battista established that the articles were written by leading Slovene male functionalist architects and their female colleagues, the first generation of Slovene women architects. While all authors (regardless of gender) tackled similar topics on interior design, furniture design or house design for middle-class readers, women architects also contributed the ground-breaking articles on working class apartments, farmhouse architecture and landscape design, being aware of the fact that not all their readers could afford the lifestyle pictured in most of the articles.

