

Pippa Pippa, They broil frogs

Robert Carter and Lauren Velvick

The Surinam Toad specimen held by Manchester Museum is over 100 years old, although its exact age is unknown. It is also unknown whether the Toad died of natural causes, but either way it was somehow captured and preserved during the process by which its young emerge through the permeable, temporary second skin covering its back. The specimen, bleached pale over the years, appears to have been punctured, and has tiny, perfectly formed, ghostly white baby toads emerging from its body. It had been on display in the Museum's Vivarium for a number of years as part of a display on Frog and Toad reproduction, and is remembered with awe.

In their natural habitat Surinam Toads are well camouflaged, described as looking like 'a dead leaf'. Camouflage is, of course, a defence mechanism, designed to keep the wearer unseen, and therefore safe. In Lucian's *Vera Historia* (True History) the only female presence in his satirical moonscape are woman/grape vine hybrids, a kiss from whom sends the moon-men 'reeling drunk'. Written some time in between the year 125 - 180 *Vera Historia* is regarded as one of the first examples of Science Fiction; using space travel and the moon as a means to satirise humanity and contemplate reality from a vantage point of detachment.



A marble bust of Clytie by GF Watts is held by The Harris Museum, Preston. Clytie is shown straining to face Apollo, the sun who has spurned her, as a flower within an urn.



Lunacy

The state of being a lunatic; insanity (not in technical use): it has been suggested that originality demands a degree of lunacy. ORIGIN mid 16th cent. Originally referring to insanity of an intermittent kind attributed to changes of the moon.



Bruno Munari's moon prints designed to furnish the home

Around the time of the first moon landing, at the close of the nineteen sixties, science fiction had become firmly rooted as a cultural phenomenon, whereby we could project futures determined by political possibilities latent in the present. In 1973 Gerry and Sylvia Anderson produced and shot *Space 1999* a TV series whereby the the moon served as an ‘unwieldily gimmick’ to represent dreams of leaving behind the earth in the uncertainty of the atomic age. According to the SF Encyclopaedia *Space 1999* is ‘among the worst sf television series ever produced’ but is not completely without its merit.

A feature on the show in *Vogue Italia* magazine in April 2011 reflects on the influence of Italian style in the set design of the show; as in most science fiction, social utopias materialise in design, architecture and everyday objects. In the simple forms and colourless plastic surfaces of Moonbase Alpha “design is not a decorative element, but the protagonist itself”.



Electrocution, asphyxiation, chlorination, death by bombing...nothing seemed to affect the mindless frog-like hybrid which the Space Cloud had sent



A ‘Mezzatessera’ and ‘Selene’ chair round table conceived in 1966 by Vico Magistretti

‘Throwaway’ sofas, designed by the Italian Willie Landels and distributed from 1965 by Aurelio Zanotta

‘Toga’ chairs, designed in 1968 by Sergio Mazza and manufactured by the Italian company Artemide

Italian designers like Vico Magistretti dominated the international design scene throughout the 60s/70s, and featured in the seminal exhibition at MoMA in 1972 *Italy: the New Domestic Landscape: Achievements and Problems of Italian Design*. Curated by Emilio Ambasz, on one hand the show exemplified the use of new materials and plastics in the likes of Magistretti’s desirable objects, but what set the show apart was the emergence of a ‘high level of critical consciousness’ amongst its designers.

It is this critical consciousness that we have come to associate with the Italian Radical Design of the 1970s; In *Superstudio*’s proposal for a “life without objects” - or a life without enslavement to them - we have what Ambasz described as a negative form of utopia in its ethos of reduction and destruction, a stripping back that we see shared with the impoverished minimalism of Arte Povera’s marked interest in nature, the living and the vegetal.



In *Space 1999*, through some kind of miracle and a blatant disregard for basic science, after traversing the galaxy, the moon's inhabitants return to the Earth's orbit, and can only stare bleakly at its apparent demise and destruction. Floating in space, sat on his *Mezzatessera*, Commander Koenig is left to ponder; should *I* have let the frog in instead?



Sites referenced:

<http://catacombs.space1999.net>

<http://www.munart.org>

http://www.nottinghamcontemporary.org/writing/rossi#_ftn21

<http://www.sf-encyclopedia.com>

Introduction to The Exhibition Centre for the Life and Use of Books

The Life and Use of Books began as a pilot programme, and was first referred to as an artist-led reading room as we attempted different formats under uncertain conditions, reacting to circumstances that we found ourselves in, and the opportunities that presented themselves to us. For the first two to three months Marcus Barnett occupied the position of 'library curator' and for the second part of this pilot programme, we curated an exhibition with Michael Butterworth.

For Modern Histories Vol 1. Robert and Lauren have worked collaboratively to produce screen printed textile designs informed by shared research.

"Only collective or collaborative expression can capture something of the real in its totality and remediate it, each contributor reflecting on the perspective they bring to the work as well as the standpoints they exclude"

- Esther Leslie, *Derelicts: Thought Worms from the Wreckage*, p.80