

**Purposes, Poetics, and Publics: The  
Shifting Dynamics of Design Criticism  
in the US and UK, 1955-2007**

**ALICE TWEMLOW**

A thesis submitted in partial  
fulfilment of the requirements of the  
Royal College of Art for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy

November 2013

The Royal College of Art

**Copyright Statement**

This text represents the submission for the degree Doctor of Philosophy at the Royal College of Art. This copy has been supplied for the purpose of research for private study, on the understanding that it is copyright material, and that no quotation from the thesis may be published without proper acknowledgment.



**Abstract: Purposes, Poetics, and Publics: The Shifting Dynamics of Design Criticism in the US and UK, 1955-2007**

The history of design criticism in the latter half of the twentieth century in the US and the UK is punctuated with self-reflective interruptions during which design critics were acutely self-conscious about their purpose, role in society, relationship to their publics and use of critical techniques and formats. This thesis examines a selection of such moments and considers the extent to which they disrupted, and even redirected, the ways in which design criticism was practiced, produced, and consumed.

The chapter focuses are as follows: a selection of articles published in the design magazines of the mid-late 1950s and early 1960s which forcibly activated a new set of values with which to engage with expendable, mass produced product design; a protest at the International Design Conference at Aspen in 1970 which posed a challenge to the established conference lecture format and to a lack of political engagement on the part of the liberal design establishment; a set of articles by cultural critics that critiqued the prevailing celebratory commentary on style and lifestyle in 1980s London; an independent exhibition that offered an alternative view of contemporary design in contrast to government-endorsed design exhibitions in 1990s London, with an additional focus on an intensification of thought about the designed object as a potentially viable critical format; and, lastly, a debate between the authors of a US design blog and an established British design critic writing in *Print* magazine that drew attention to a rift between the energetic amateur impulses of blogging culture and the editorial values of traditional print media.

Three main problematics are used to provide continuity throughout the discrete time periods of this thesis, as well as points of comparison between the critical works examined: criticism's contesting conceptions of its instrumentality, purpose and methods; criticism's idealized perceptions of, and actual engagement with, its publics; and, finally, criticism's adoption of a literary sensibility and narrative qualities in an attempt to transcend the limitations of design's promotional and market-based concerns.

In identifying five moments of historical discontinuity in the practice of design criticism, therefore, this thesis assembles a time-lapse portrait of the intellectual, stylistic and material constitution of design criticism between the early 1950s and the early 2000s, and in doing so, aims to contribute meaningfully to a growing historiography of design criticism.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgements	5
Author's Declaration	6
Abbreviations	7
Introduction	8
Chapter 1 'A Throw-Away Esthetic': New Measures and Metaphors in Product Design Criticism, 1955–1961	49
Chapter 2 'A Guaranteed Communications Failure': Consensus Meets Conflict at the International Design Conference in Aspen, 1970–1971	144
Chapter 3 Designer Celebrities and 'Monstrous, Brindled, Hybrid' Consumers: The Polarizing Effects of Style in the British Design Media, 1983–1989	232
Chapter 4 Please Touch the Criticism: Design Exhibitions and Critical Design in the UK, 1998–2001	323
Chapter 5/Conclusion The Death of the Editor: Design Criticism Goes Open Source, 2003–2007	382
Bibliography	402

## Acknowledgements

It would not have been possible to undertake and write this doctoral thesis without the help and support of many kind people, only some of whom it is possible to thank here.

It has been an extreme privilege to work with my two supervisors at the Royal College of Art: Jeremy Aynsley and David Crowley, whose research, thinking, writing, and teaching continue to inspire me. I am also grateful for the input of other RCA tutors and students during the Work in Progress sessions.

My thanks are due to all the interviewees who so generously shared the insights and memories that inform this research. They are as follows: Deborah Allen; Mary Banham; Stephen Bayley; Ralph Caplan; Claire Catterall; Sheila Levrant De Bretteville; Anthony Dunne; Simon Esterson; Richard Farson; Merrill Forde; Ken Garland; Richard Hamilton; Dick Hebidge; Mark Kingsley; Peter Murray; Rick Poynor; Eli Noyes; Fiona Raby; Deyan Sudjic; Jane Thompson; Judith Williamson; Peter York.

Thanks to Adam Harrison Levy and Russell Flinchum who read my thesis in its various states of disarray and offered helpful advice.

Thanks to all my colleagues, students, and alumni, at SVA MFA Design Criticism whose critical output continually inspires me, and especially to Steve Heller and David Rhodes.

I would also like to thank Emily King and Rick Poynor for being my long-term, and long-distance, mentors.

Finally, I would like to thank my mother Cayla Twemlow and my father Graham Twemlow, for their immeasurable love and support, my wonderful husband David Womack for all the intellect, humour, and patience he contributed to this project. Very last of all, thanks to Otto Womack for all the happy distraction he provides.

**Author's Declaration**

1. During the period of registered study in which this thesis was prepared the author has not been registered for any other academic award or qualification.

2. The material included in this thesis has not been submitted wholly or in part for any academic award or qualification other than that for which it is now submitted.

A. Twemlow  
November 1, 2013

**Abbreviations**

*The full titles of the following organizations are given on their first appearance in the thesis. On all subsequent references only the acronym is employed, except when it is felt necessary to remind the reader more fully of the organization.*

CoID	Council of Industrial Design
ICA	Institute of Contemporary Arts
IDCA	International Design Conference at Aspen
MoMA	Museum of Modern Art
RCA	Royal College of Art

## INTRODUCTION

On a July afternoon in 2007, I was conducting an interview with the British design critic Rick Poynor. The topic was his critical practice and specifically a fiery exchange of blog posts, each trailing hundreds of comments, which had been generated by Poynor's accusation that, by his yardstick of good criticism, the commentary produced by design blogs did not measure up.<sup>1</sup> Sitting at the kitchen table in his Twickenham home, reflecting on the incident that had taken place earlier that summer, he told me how he thought he'd 'moved through certainty back into uncertainty'. He said,

At a certain stage in your life, when you've lived a certain way and you thought you're clear about things, you might find doubts returning, intruding. As a critic you spend your life trying to decide what works for you in relation to the social situation, the wider public situation. [...] If you have been sorting things out and arriving at some conclusions, becoming more certain and the background shifts, in a way that renders those conclusions unworkable, untenable, what do you do?<sup>2</sup>

The introspective and tentative tone of Poynor's self-analysis contrasts emphatically with the authoritative voice he uses in his public criticism in the pages of design magazines such as *Eye* and *Print* and on the online forum Design Observer. It reminded me not only to what extent criticism is a performed activity in which critical vehicles like publications form a stage for public pronouncements, but also just how many similar doubts, uncertainties, and self-questionings I had encountered in the course of researching the history of design criticism. There was Reyner Banham's letter to his wife, written the evening after a protest by students and activists had destabilized the 1970 International Conference at Aspen, and called his own role as a progressive critic into question, and in which he declared himself 'psychologically bruised from

---

<sup>1</sup> Rick Poynor, 'Easy Writer', *Print*, May 2007, pp. 33-34. See Chapter Five for details of this incident.

<sup>2</sup> Rick Poynor, personal interview, 13 July, 2007.

the events of this morning'.<sup>3</sup> There was the episode the British critic Dick Hebdige recounted which led to his being committed to a psychiatric hospital and a lengthy process of identity rebuilding. In the process of writing an article in 1984, he had jumped out his window and was found by the police inside a giant boot being stored for a carnival near his house – 'And it's got this cross on it, with light bulbs and I thought I was on the cross' he told me.<sup>4</sup> Like design critics' individual self-questioning and recalibration, as a group, too, design critics undergo periodic moments of stocktaking, and even crisis, in which doubts about the utility and conventions of design criticism, and its ability to reach its publics rise to the surface.

The history of design criticism in the latter half of the twentieth century in the US and the UK is punctuated with self-reflective interruptions during which design critics were acutely self-conscious about their purpose, role in society, relationship to their publics and use of critical techniques and formats. This thesis examines a selection of such moments and considers the extent to which they disrupted, and even redirected, the ways in which design criticism was practiced, produced, and consumed.

Each instance of interruption spotlights a type of criticism that was new or coalescent in its time period and that was articulated in implicit or explicit response to the perceived antagonism of the dominant concerns and values of design criticism as an established practice. In identifying five moments of historical discontinuity in the practice of design criticism, therefore, this thesis assembles a kaleidoscopically reassembling, time-lapse portrait of the intellectual, stylistic and material constitution of design criticism between the early 1950s and the early 2000s.

---

<sup>3</sup> Letter from Reyner Banham to his wife, Mary, June 19, 1970, International Design Conference in Aspen Records 1949–2006, 2007.M.7, Series 1, Box 27, Fol. 3, The Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles. See Chapter Two for a fuller explanation of the events at the IDCA 1970.

<sup>4</sup> Dick Hebdige, personal interview, 3 April, 2011. Dick Hebdige's writing practice is discussed in more detail in Chapter Three.

My research uses a broad definition of design criticism as a self-conscious and subjective practice of interpreting, discerning among, encouraging or resisting the various aesthetic, moral, environmental, or social repercussions of the ideas, activities and outputs of the design industry. This research is also based on the premise that design criticism can be conveyed in multiple media, and is not confined to the written word. While criticism is more usually associated with formats such as the essay, article, book, and blog post, this thesis encompasses additional formats such as the magazine as a whole, the event, the lecture, the exhibition, and the designed object itself. This expanded conception of a critical format helps to reveal more facets of critical practice than a consideration of only written criticism would allow. The kinds of criticism conducted through such activities as editing, oration and debate, performance, the assembling and juxtaposing of objects, and the design process have different registers, textures, methods, and audience responses. Analysis of such modes, means, and sites of engagement contributes to a fuller understanding of criticism as a pervasive force exerting often invisible and unrecognized pressures on the ways in which design is developed, circulated and used. Furthermore, since the occasions of critical debate examined in this thesis involve educators, philosophers, journalists, editors, designers, curators, conference organizers, artists, and activists, who deploy theory, reporting, lived experience and ideology in combination, my broad view helps to complicate an oft-invoked binary opposition between the so-called 'academic' and 'journalistic' variants of design criticism. The apparent mutual distrust between these two cultures (academe and journalism) still underlies much discussion of criticism, typified by the terms and language used in a recent debate about the public accessibility of academic research, initiated by Rick Poynor ('The Closed Shop of Design Academia') and extended by Matt Soar ('Rick Poynor on "Design Academics": Having His Cake and Eating It Too') and Peter Hall ('Changes in Design Criticism'), among others.<sup>5</sup> Peter Hall,

---

<sup>5</sup> Rick Poynor, 'The Closed Shop of Design Academia', Design Observer, 13



writing from the perspective of a seasoned design journalist and scholar, reviews the similarities between the two fields and offers suggestions for how to move beyond this alleged divide, but by continued reference to books and magazines alone, it is hard to escape the 'ivory tower' versus popular 'marketplace of ideas' dichotomy. Extending the discussion beyond the restricted terms of a late twentieth century publishing paradigm, allows for a more expansive conception of the evolution of design criticism in all the unexpected and unfamiliar forms it may inhabit, and concerns it may animate, and the publics it may speak for and with.

The chapter focuses of this thesis are as follows: a selection of articles published in the design magazines of the mid-late 1950s and early 1960s which forcibly activated a new set of values with which to engage with expendable, mass produced product design; a protest at the International Design Conference at Aspen in 1970 which posed a challenge to the established conference lecture format and to a lack of political engagement on the part of the liberal design establishment; a set of articles by cultural critics that critiqued the prevailing celebratory commentary on style and lifestyle in 1980s London; an independent exhibition that offered an alternative view of contemporary design in contrast to government-endorsed design exhibitions in 1990s London, with an additional focus on an intensification of thought about the designed object as a potentially viable critical format; and, lastly, a debate between the authors of a US design blog and an established British design critic writing in *Print* magazine that drew attention to a rift between the energetic amateur impulses of blogging culture and the editorial values of traditional print media.

Each chapter focus reveals the specific nature of the relationship between format and the argument being sustained. In the case of the protests at the International Design

---

April 2012; Matt Soar, 'Rick Poynor on "Design Academics": Having His Cake and Eating It Too', Matt Soar's blog, 19 April, 2012; Peter Hall, 'Academe and Design Writing: Changes in Design Criticism', *Design and Culture*, Vol. 5. Issue 1., Spring 2013, pp. 21-28.

Conference at Aspen of 1970, for example, critique took the form of interstitial discussions, performances and happenings which, through their very physical form, underlined the challenges they represented to the prevailing linear mode of the delivery of content that had dominated conference proceedings until then.

**Research parameters: locales**

The US and the UK, and specifically New York and London, were among the 'centres' of design practice, commentary and publishing throughout the period under discussion. Choosing to focus on these locations allows for an examination of the exchange of ideas between the two countries, in a shared language. *Industrial Design* magazine in the US and *Design* magazine in the UK kept a sharp eye on one another's activities and the output of local design practice through their correspondents. They sometimes commissioned articles from each other's stable of writers, and often re-published articles from each other's magazines. The fact that during this period of post-war reconstruction many British social and cultural critics were absorbed by American economic and cultural values also plays a part in the geographical delimitation of this thesis. Trans-Atlantic interchanges were a feature of the International Design Conference at Aspen, which British critics visited as speakers, attendees or reporters. In the 1970 conference, which I look at in Chapter Two, this two-way dialogue expanded to include an incongruous clash of cultures between representatives of the American liberal design establishment mainly from New York, Californian environmental activists, and French left-wing philosophers, among which hostile constituencies the British design critic Reyner Banham attempted to mediate. The thread of US-UK exchange continues in my discussion of blogs in the early 2000s, when British critic Rick Poynor, writing in an American magazine angered the members of a mostly American online design community with his dismissal of their contribution to criticism, although such geographical identities dissolve somewhat in the virtual space of an online forum.

In concentrating on the US and the UK, my study does little, therefore, to correct what Glenn Adamson et al. have termed 'the lopsided representation of the history of design occurring primarily in Western Europe and the United States'.<sup>6</sup> Other design historians interested in design criticism are developing studies in their own countries which draw attention to the culturally specific inflections of design criticism and in composite do help to provide a more globally diverse portrait of the practice. Such studies include: Freddie Floré's work on the Flemish design critic K. N. Elnó; Kjetil Fallan's study of the Norwegian design magazine *Nye Bonytt*; Frederike Huygen's research on the history of design criticism in the Netherlands; and Naomi Stead's ongoing interest in Australian design and architecture criticism in Australia.<sup>7</sup> In each of these cases, the researcher has chosen to study criticism produced and consumed in the country in which they live, the benefits of which become evident in their sensitivity to the regional and cultural nuances of the discourse being analysed, and I consider my study to be a part of this dispersed, but growing historiography. I am British and I have lived in New York for the past fifteen years. My personal interest in the flow and interruption, the translation and misinterpretation, of ideas and influences between these two countries, and my access to sources in both, has contributed to my choosing them as locales for my chapter focuses.

### **Research parameters: periodization**

This research examines the shifting and multiple roles that design criticism played from the immediate post-war era until the first decade of the twenty-first century. This is a lengthy time period, but one that I feel is necessary in order

---

<sup>6</sup> Glenn Adamson, Giorgio Riello, Sarah Teasley, eds., *Global Design History*, (London and New York: Routledge, 2011), p. 2.

<sup>7</sup> Freddie Floré, 'Design Criticism and Social Responsibility: the Flemish Design Critic K.N. Elnó (1920–1993)' in Grace Lees Maffei, ed. *Writing Design*, (London: Berg, 2011); Kjetil Fallan, 'The Metamorphosis of a Norwegian Design Magazine: *Nye Bonytt*, 1968–1971', in Grace Lees Maffei, ed. *Writing Design*, (London: Berg, 2011); Frederike Huygen, 'Report from Holland, Design Criticism after Postmodernism', in *Design Issues*, Vol. 13, Number 2, Summer 1997; Naomi Stead, 'Criticism in/and/of Crisis: The Australian Context', in Jane Rendell, Mark Dorrian et al., eds., *Critical Architecture*, (London and New York: Routledge, 2007), pp. 76–83.

to embrace major developments in communication technology that have affected the production and dissemination of design criticism, as well as the transition from an industrial to a post-industrial design paradigm, and the rise of ecological consciousness, all of which influenced thinking about design.

My starting point is the immediate post-war era when two major magazines dedicated to industrial and product design in its own right were founded (*Design*, in London, founded in 1949), and *Industrial Design*, in New York, launched in 1954) and when the debate surrounding the purpose of design criticism became more evident and self-reflective. In the process of working out their own critical stances, writers, editors, and readers of such magazines raised questions about design criticism's utility in relation to design practice, social good, intellectual culture, political interests, the environment, and consumer protection and empowerment. Not all such questions were new to the period; they tapped into larger and sometimes centuries-old philosophical discourses on the role of critique in society, ranging from liberal humanist discussions of aesthetics and rhetoric to theoretical discussion of the pervasiveness of politics, the constitutive nature of language, and the contingency of meaning. The application of such discourses to design as subject matter was not entirely new to the period either. In the US early twentieth century pragmatists such as John Cotton Dana, through his work at the Newark Museum, had embraced design as subject matter.<sup>8</sup> In Britain the social criticism of design manufacture by nineteenth-century design reformists such as John Ruskin and William Morris, and a plethora of design commentators in the early twentieth century, represents a kind of proto-design criticism. What was particular to the early 1950s period, therefore, was the intensification of interest in industrial design as a topic, and the establishment of magazines devoted exclusively to industrial and product design. The industrial design profession, which had been developed in the 1930s and 1940s, began, once post-war

---

<sup>8</sup> John Cotton Dana, director of the Newark Museum, Newark, New Jersey, 1902-1929.

recovery was underway, to be both promoted and scrutinized more energetically and it is the charged nature of the discussions that emerged during this period that make this a viable starting point for my study. The early 1950s is also an interesting launch point since the journalistic impulses of certain editors at *Design* and the very existence of an independent trade publication like *Industrial Design*, signalled ways in which design criticism might escape the institutional purview of the Council of Industrial Design in Britain and the Museum of Modern Art in the US.

Ending my study in the early 2000s allows me to include the arrival of online publishing and to consider its turbulent effects on the way design criticism was conducted and consumed, as well as criticism's reconfigured relationship to democracy, authority, and professional status in the early years of the twenty-first century. Design criticism became increasingly fragmented and distributed across web media, with multiple micro-constituencies, rather than recognized publishers or institutions, initiating, hosting and feeding the many simultaneous and rhizomatic conversations. German philosopher Walter Benjamin has suggested how the metaphor of a 'constellation' is better suited to a consideration of historical associations than a straight line representing an uncritical notion of progress across time. Benjamin's constellation links past events among themselves, and can link 'what has been with the now'; its formation stimulates a flash of recognition in the anachronistic confluence between different time periods.<sup>9</sup> He believed that '[The historian who starts from this] records the constellation in which his own epoch comes into contact with that of an earlier one. He thereby establishes a concept of the present as that of the here-and-now, in which splinters of messianic time are shot through'.<sup>10</sup> In the early twenty-first century period, with

---

<sup>9</sup> Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, N1, 9/458, quoted in Christopher Rollason, 'The Passageways of Paris: Walter Benjamin's *Arcades Project* and Contemporary Cultural Debate in the West', <http://www.wbenjamin.org/passageways.html#fn76> [accessed 20 October, 2013].

<sup>10</sup> Walter Benjamin, 'On the Concept of History', *Gesammelten Schriften I:2*. Suhrkamp Verlag. Frankfurt and Main, 1974. (Translation: Dennis Redmond

which I conclude my study, design criticism underwent emphatic and constitutive change. And yet, among its characteristics such as its shape-shifting dispersal among media, discourses and disciplines, one can discern 'splinters' of earlier periods in its conception, as well as threads of continuity throughout the entire period under investigation. As this thesis will demonstrate, design criticism, as has always been a fugitive enterprise, inhabiting the interstices between recognized subject silos such as art, architecture and social sciences, and, beyond publishing, exerting influences on the approaches, activity and output of museums, institutions, professional associations, schools, publishing, research, and retail.

#### **A history in 'events' as 'ruptures'**

Using the conception of a 'rupture', described by Bruce Mazlish as 'a major cut in the continuity of the past', and Michel Foucault's non-linear approach to the history of concepts, through 'cultivat[ing] the details and accidents that accompany every beginning', maintaining 'passing events in their proper dispersion' and isolating 'the different scenes where [concepts] engage in different roles', I have chosen to focus on a series of ruptures to the practice of design criticism.<sup>11</sup> While Foucault wanted to retain the complexity of conceptual phenomena as 'entangled events', the historian M.C. Lemon, who proposes a framework for the study and writing of history which re-emphasizes the explicatory use of narrative to approach the history of political thought, uses the term 'event' to mean 'a sequence of occurrences singled out for notice'.<sup>12</sup> Lemon's examples of events include arguments, holidays, parties, elections, revolutions, evenings-out and journeys, each of which are to a large

---

8/4/01. [http://members.efn.org/~dredmond/Theses\\_on\\_History.PDF](http://members.efn.org/~dredmond/Theses_on_History.PDF) [accessed October 20, 2013]

<sup>11</sup> Bruce Mazlish, 'Ruptures in History' in *Historically Speaking* Volume 12, Number 3, June 2011 p. 32.

Michel Foucault, 'Nietzsche, Genealogy, History', in ed. Paul Rabinow, *The Foucault Reader*, (New York: Pantheon, 1984), p. 81.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.* p. 89.

M.C. Lemon, *The Discipline of History and the History of Thought*, (London: Routledge, 1995) p. 71.

extent, 'deliberately planned orderings of occurrences'.<sup>13</sup> One of the implications of the analytic principle of events is the necessity to 'select out' events of import to 'narrow down' their parameters, in order to 'locate contexts of occurrences where meaningful sequences (that is, genuinely related temporalities), are to be found' and in order to recount the extent to which such meaningful sequences constitute change.<sup>14</sup> In this thesis I deploy both modes of history writing – I identify significant events that represent moments of rupture in the history of design criticism, and then, within them, I use a narrative approach to unfold their meaning.

Each of my 'moments' of charged discussion about design criticism exemplifies an emphatic confluence of my key themes, which will be discussed below. I tried to select instances of design criticism in action, each of which illustrates a different critical voice, subject matter, technique, medium, and type of public engagement. The main concern, however, was to pick the examples that best demonstrated moments of transition and change at which critics were most self-aware both of the means and purpose of their criticism. Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben reads Nietzsche's *Untimely Mediations* as being about the way in which true contemporariness, is about 'disconnection and out-of-jointness' with respect to the present.<sup>15</sup> Those who neither perfectly coincide with their time nor adjust themselves to its demands, are 'precisely through this disconnection [...] more capable than others of perceiving and grasping their own time'.<sup>16</sup> In refusing the 'demands' of the prevailing strains of design commentary in each of their periods of practice, the critics discussed in this thesis each used their 'out-of-joint' perspectives on design to grasp their contemporary moment more fully. In accounting for 'out-of-jointness' and in charting ruptures – moments of tension, conflict, change, and acute self consciousness about criticism – this thesis hopes

---

<sup>13</sup> Ibid. p. 72.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid. p. 112 and p. 43.

<sup>15</sup> Giorgio Agamben 'What is the Contemporary?' in *What is Apparatus and Other Essays*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009), p. 40.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

to show design criticism's features in sharper relief than a contiguous history of its formative constitution would allow for.

### **Finding a place in design historiography for product design criticism**

This thesis focuses on product design criticism in particular. While architecture criticism has an evolving historiography and graphic design has self-reflective practitioners interested in charting the history of its critical output through books, conferences, and contributions to online forums, the history of criticism about product design is only marginally covered so far.

Aside from growing numbers of studies of architectural publications such as *The Architectural Review* and *Architectural Design*, among others, architecture historians have made significant contributions to a gathering literature about architecture criticism.<sup>17</sup> These include Mark Linder and Ann Bergren's critical monograph of the architects Scogin, Elam, and Bray, Anthony Vidler's *Histories of the Immediate Present*, and numerous articles by architectural historians including Felicity Scott, Mark Wigley, and Kazys Varnelis, among others.<sup>18</sup> Alexandra Lange's *Writing About Architecture: Mastering the Language of Buildings and Cities* is particularly useful contribution to the ongoing study of criticism through close analysis of, and discussion of writerly strategies at play in key essays by architecture critics such as Ada Louise Huxtable, Lewis Mumford, and Michael Sorkin.<sup>19</sup>

---

<sup>17</sup> In her study of the British architecture journal *The Architectural Review* under JM Richards' editorship, Jessica Kelly uses private correspondence and institutional archives to contextualize her study of the journal's critical voice to examine the importance of a public discussion of architecture to the evolution of a discourse around modernist architecture in Britain. Steve Parnell's study of *Architectural Design* under Monica Pidgeon's editorship explores the impact of the experimental British architectural magazine on architectural discourse and on the writing of architectural history.

<sup>18</sup> Mark Linder and Ann Bergren, *Scogin, Elam, and Bray: Critical Architecture/Architectural Criticism*, (New York: Rizzoli, 1992). Anthony Vidler, *Histories of the Immediate Present: Inventing Architectural Modernism*, (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2008).

<sup>19</sup> Alexandra Lange, *Writing About Architecture: Mastering the Language of Buildings and Cities*, (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2012).



Since the 1980s design historians have turned their attention to design publications, and there have been increasing numbers of article-length studies about such publications as the British journal *Design*, the Italian magazine *Domus*, the German magazine *Gebrauchsgrafik*, the British magazine *Blueprint*, and the Norwegian design magazine *nye bonytt*.<sup>20</sup> Rick Poynor's intellectual history of the British graphic design publication *Typographica*, his study of the significance of the American publication *Emigre* within his book on postmodern design, and his more recent essay on large format visual arts magazines in V&A's Postmodernism catalogue, put graphic design magazines and their editors at the centre of historical investigation.<sup>21</sup> Alex Seago's work on the Royal College of Art's ARK magazine provides an informative account of the far-reaching effects of a small-scale student publication.<sup>22</sup> These magazine histories look at the editing and art direction of the magazine in relation to its role as a conveyor of ideas and in relation to other cultural production of the period. They are particularly concerned with a magazine's avant-garde status, its prescience

---

<sup>20</sup> Paul Burall, 'The Official Critic: Irrelevant or Influential?' *Design Issues*, Vol. 13, No. 2, A Critical Condition: Design and Its Criticism Summer, 1997, pp. 36-39.

For an account of *Domus* magazine, see Simona Storchi, 'La Casa All'Italiana': *Domus* and the Ideology of the Domestic Interior in 1930s Italy', in ed. Simona Storchi, *Beyond the Piazza: Public and Private Spaces in Modern Italy* (Brussels: PIE, Peter Lang, 2013) pp. 57-79.

For an account of *Gebrauchsgraphik* magazine, see Jeremy Aynsley, 'Gebrauchsgraphik as an Early Graphic Design Journal, 1924- 1938' in *Journal of Design History*, vol. 5, no. 1, 1992, pp. 53-72.

For accounts of *Blueprint* magazine, see: Liz Farrelly, 'Design Journalism: The Production of Definitions', MA thesis, V&A/RCA, 1989 and Penelope Dean, 'Magazine' in 'Delivery without Discipline: Architecture in the Age of Design', PhD thesis, University of California, 2008, pp. 62-90.

For an account of *Nye Bonytt* see: Kjetil Fallan, 'The Metamorphosis of a Norwegian Design Magazine: *Nye Bonytt*, 1968-1971', in Grace Lees Maffei, ed. *Writing Design*, (London: Berg, 2011).

For an overview of British design journalism, see: David Crowley, 'Design Magazines and Design Culture' in *Communicate: Independent Graphic Design in Britain Since the Sixties*, ed. Rick Poynor (London: Laurence King, 2004). For insights into the magazine as a designed object, see: Jeremy Aynsley and Kate Forde, eds. *Design and the Modern Magazine* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007).

<sup>21</sup> Rick Poynor, *Typographica*, (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2001).

Rick Poynor, *No More Rules: Graphic Design and Postmodernism*, (London: Laurence King Publishing, 2003), pp. 148-171.

Rick Poynor, 'Big Magazines: Design as the Message' in *Postmodernism: Style and Subversion, 1970-1990*, eds. Glen Adamson and Jane Pavitt (London: V&A Publishing, 2011), pp. 214-220.

<sup>22</sup> Alex Seago, *Burning the Box of Beautiful Things: ARK Magazine and the Development of a Postmodern Sensibility at the Royal College of Art, 1950-1962*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995).

in identifying topics for discussion, the breadth of its influence and its lasting impact. They are less concerned with how particular pieces were written and why and how readers engaged with them, and do not specifically address the question of criticism per se.

One of the most significant contributions to the history of product design criticism thus far is the historian Nigel Whiteley's 2002 book *Reyner Banham: Historian of the Immediate Future*, the first book-length critical assessment of Banham's entire body of work.<sup>23</sup> Prior to Whiteley's book, selections of Banham's articles had been gathered into two major anthologies – *Design by Choice*, edited by Penny Sparke (1981) and *A Critic Writes* (1996), edited by Banham's widow, Mary, and his former colleagues Cedric Price and Paul Barker – but neither attempted critical appraisal.<sup>24</sup>

Whiteley devotes a chapter of his book to Banham's design criticism, specifically, but since in the book he addresses Banham's entire oeuvre – his twelve books and more than 700 articles covering design and architecture and history and criticism – Whiteley is not able to go into much detail in analysing Banham's product design criticism. This leaves room, I believe, for my own study of a small selection of Banham's articles which, through a more granular reading, aims to elicit new perspectives on Banham's writing in relation to that of his like-minded peers, and the establishment values which his articles sought to counter. I agree with Whiteley's assessment that over the course of his entire career Banham says too little about environmental issues and the political and social limitations of the market economy – 'This was undoubtedly the weakest point of his theory of design',

---

<sup>23</sup> Nigel Whiteley, *Reyner Banham: Historian of the Immediate Future* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2002).

<sup>24</sup> Penny Sparke, ed. *Design By Choice: Reyner Banham* (New York: Rizzoli, 1981). Mary Banham, Sutherland Lyall, Cedric Price, Paul Barker, eds. *A Critic Writes: Selected Essays by Reyner Banham*, (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1999).

Since the publication of Whiteley's book the lectures delivered by scholars as part of the Reyner Banham Memorial Lecture series have been anthologized in Harriet Atkinson and Jeremy Aynsley, eds. *The Banham Lectures: Essays on Designing the Future* (London: Berg, 2009).

Whiteley writes.<sup>25</sup> The examples of Banham's work that I am interested in, however, represent a different type of radical incursion in the realm of mid-late 1950s design publishing. The articles I have chosen to study were focused on dismantling the aesthetic and moral standards that were unquestioningly deployed in prevailing commentary about design of the period that, in Banham's view, prevented adequate appreciation of the social significance of mass-produced goods.

Whiteley was also the guest editor of the summer 1997 edition of *Design Issues* in which he sought to chart the territory of design criticism under the title 'A Critical Condition: Design and its Criticism'. He began the study with the provocation that, 'In recent theory and criticism, interpretation has replaced evaluation as the critic seeks to deconstruct meaning and values [...] rather than judge'.<sup>26</sup> The statement is accompanied by two questions: 'Has criticism become merely the application of theory?' and 'Does criticism now have any meaningful role or function?' Whiteley saw criticism in the 1990s as profoundly and irreversibly informed by postmodern theoretical discourses regarding power, authority and vested interests. He identified a 'pre-theory' criticism that dealt with particularities and judgments, and a 'post-theory' criticism that prioritizes interpretation over evaluation. The essays selected for the issue include studies of the recent history of criticism such as Paul Burall's consideration of the rise and fall of the institutionally endorsed critic at the Council of Industrial Design;<sup>27</sup> challenges to prevailing assumptions about criticism such as Anne Bush's analysis of a body of graphic design criticism published in *Looking Closer: Critical Writings on Graphic Design*, which, in her view, appears unable to escape from the formalist constraints of

---

<sup>25</sup> Nigel Whiteley, *Reyner Banham: Historian of the Immediate Future* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2002), p. 314.

<sup>26</sup> Nigel Whiteley, 'Olympus and the Market Place: Reyner Banham and Design Criticism' in *Design Issues*, Vol: 13, n. 2, Summer 1997, pp. 1-16.

<sup>27</sup> Paul Burall, 'The Official Critic: Irrelevant or Influential?', *Design Issues*, Vol. 13, No. 2, (Summer, 1997), pp. 36-39.

'the modernist artistic paradigm';<sup>28</sup> and those that raise questions about the limitations of recent criticism such as Frederike Huygen's castigation of contemporary Dutch critics for hiding behind the relativism of the 'postmodern façade';<sup>29</sup> and Steve Baker's recommendation for an alternative critical practice that incorporates, or at least acknowledges, its proximity to fiction and fabulation.<sup>30</sup> These examples of research into design criticism are valuable to the project of charting the history of design criticism, yet they remain fragmentary and focused on single critics or publications. This research, therefore, offers a model for a broader investigation of design criticism and contributes to a growing discourse about the importance of historicizing design criticism.

In the early 2000s, some scholars adopted the label of 'mediation' to describe their interest in the ways in which designed objects and design thinking are presented, reflected, promoted and interpreted and through the mechanisms of museums, publishing, PR, and corporate literature. In her introduction to a special issue of the *Design History Journal* devoted to advice literature, Grace Lees Maffei argued that advice literature, which can help in an understanding of how ideal models of the consumption of designed goods were mediated to a reading or viewing public, 'can be more than complementary sources: they can be the focus of analysis'.<sup>31</sup>

Mediation is useful as a conceptual methodology for this research in that it draws attention to the textual surfaces of design documentation and provokes a questioning of the ways in which prevailing notions about design's value, principles, and significance circulate. In this thesis I am attentive to the ways in which design magazines can be seen as conduits through

---

<sup>28</sup> Anne Bush, 'Criticism and the Discerning Eye', *Design Issues*, Vol. 13, No. 2 (Summer 1997) pp. 16-23.

<sup>29</sup> Frederike Huygen, 'Report from Holland: Design Criticism after Postmodernism', *Design Issues*, Vol. 13, No. 2 (Summer 1997) pp. 40-43.

<sup>30</sup> Steve Baker, 'Flying, Stealing: Design's Improper Criticism', *Design Issues*, Vol. 13, No. 2 (Summer 1997) pp. 65-76.

<sup>31</sup> Grace Lees Maffei, Introduction, 'Studying Advice: Historiography, Methodology, Commentary, Bibliography', *Journal of Design History*, Vol 16 No 1, 2003, p. 10.

which discussion about consumption might re-enter the sites of production. (Design magazines are the products of graphic design practice, the media through which design ideas are communicated, and their storage and use in the design studio represents can be evaluated to a certain extent). Like Slovenian design historian Barbara Predan, I am interested in locating 'detectable traces' in design practice of the impact and effects of design criticism.<sup>32</sup>

A history of mediation seems chiefly concerned with the transfer of ideas between the design industry and an ideal consumer, while a history of design criticism must also take into account the reading and viewing publics that encounter design criticism beyond the activities of either design practice or the purchase and use of designed products. My research may be situated within what Lees Maffei has termed 'The Production-Consumption-Mediation Paradigm', but intends to expand that paradigm further to include the dynamics of the public's engagement with criticism.

### **The materiality of criticism**

This research considers the object nature, or materiality, of modes of criticism such as exhibitions, conferences, and critical design products. Even the manifestations of written criticism – articles, essays, blog posts – can be considered as designed objects themselves. A piece of text exists in space, is a designed entity made of materials, and is subject to similar economic pressures as other designed products.

To understand how a piece of criticism was encountered and used at the time of its publication, it is useful to reconstruct the original context in which an article was presented – what kind of publication it was, where the piece occurred within the publication, what advertising it was juxtaposed with, whether it meshed with other content in the publication, how it was commissioned, how much the writer was paid, and so on.

---

<sup>32</sup> Barbara Predan, 'The Intervention of Criticism into Practice', paper presented at the 2nd International Conference for Design Education Researchers, Oslo, 14–17 May 2013, p. 3.

In its original context, design criticism borrows energy from everything around it – in the case of written criticism, the work of other writers in the magazine, newspaper or blog, the juxtapositions between articles and advertising, the choice of images, the editorial statement, news pieces, the letters to the editor, the pacing of the sequencing and the layout of the pages. A piece of writing is usually intended for a particular time, place, and audience; by returning to examine an article in its original location in a publication, one can piece together the live community in which it had a particular purpose and intention, in which it mattered. As a social group, what did the publishers, editors, writers, photographers, art directors, advertisers, and readers, care about at that time, and why?

The other articles in the publication and its textual traces of a community of readers all contribute to our understanding of a piece of design criticism. This research, which considers critical documents as nodes in larger networks of writing, designed objects, ideas, and people, seeks to reconnect the links between them and to re-imagine the social geographies that gave rise to their creation. Rather than trying to create some perfect reconstruction of an article in situ, like a period interior, however, this research acknowledges the fluidity and instability of the intertextual framework, and the ways in which looking at historical examples of criticism necessarily involves reflecting the ways it has been previously interpreted and the concerns of the present. An intertextual reading is thus invoked here in two ways: firstly in the sense that Julia Kristeva coined the term in her study of Bakhtin's work on dialogue and carnival, as a means of appreciating a text as an author's production of a mosaic of references to, quotations from, and implicit dialogues with other texts.<sup>33</sup> It can also be applied to the reader's engagement with a text. In their article, 'Reading Intertextually: Multiple Mediations and Critical Practice',

---

<sup>33</sup> Julia Kristeva, *Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art*, ed. Leon S. Roudiez, trans. Thomas Gora, Alice Jardine, and Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1980), p. 91.

Beverly Whitaker Long and Mary Susan Strine also use the term 'intertextuality', to describe the way in which the reader of a text draws on his experience with other texts and makes connections between these various texts and the present text being experienced.<sup>34</sup>

Ann Sobiech Munson's analysis of Lewis Mumford *New Yorker* review of the Lever House building published on August 9, 1952 is a particularly good example of an attempt to reconstruct the social life of a piece of writing through a detailed description of its location in the magazine, abutted by advertisements for synthetic fabrics, air travel, and the 1952 Lincoln (with its '3,721 square inches of glass',) other articles, reviews, cartoons, and pieces of fiction, and how it would have been received by what *New Yorker* historian Mary F. Corey's has termed 'a recognizable *New Yorker* reader, habitat, and geography of the mind'. Sobiech Munson also compares the article to others written by Mumford in his ongoing 'The Skyline' column, and to other reviews of the Lever building published in other contemporaneous magazines. In doing so, Sobiech Munson makes a case for the vital role of Mumford's writing in the mid-century American understanding of modernism, not merely 'representing' architecture, but actively participating in the way it was understood, and adding to the construction of the architectural subjects, thus contributing to the social-historical record of the built artefact. She writes, 'writing becomes the object of study, one that not only reflects the built object Lever House but also inflects back into the icon Lever House and becomes complicit in the construction of the world it inhabits'.<sup>35</sup> Peter Hall has observed that design historians and theorists, 'loosely characterized, use journalistic writing as source material, the raw fodder for the writing of history and

---

<sup>34</sup> Beverly Long and Mary Susan Strine, 'Reading Intertextually: Multiple Mediations and Critical Practice', *Quarterly Journal of Speech*. 75, 1989, p. 468.

<sup>35</sup> Ann Sobiech Munson, 'Lewis Mumford's Lever House: Writing a House of Glass' in *Writing Design: Words and Objects*, ed. Grace Lees-Maffei, (London: Berg, 2011), pp. 119-132.

theory'.<sup>36</sup> Repositioning writing about design from its marginal location as design history's raw fodder and source material, to a more central location where it 'becomes the object of study' brings with it specific methodological challenges.

In 1984 design historian Clive Dilnot suggested that,

a history of the rise of the design journal as the vehicle for projecting the ideology or value of 'design' would be an enormous contribution to understanding the profession's self-promotion of design values. To map the changing values, idea, and beliefs expressed or communicated in text and graphic layout could, in a sense, map the history of the professions. Is the history literally contained in the glossy pages of *Domus* or *Industrial Design*?<sup>37</sup>

While I agree with Dilnot that there is much to be contributed to design history by gleaning information from 'the glossy pages of *Domus* or *Industrial Design*', his view of the design journal as a self-promoting 'projector' of the values of the design profession is limiting. Magazines encompass the contrary views of, and complex relationships between, publishers, editors, writers, readers, and subjects, in ways far more heterodox than Dilnot's assessment suggests. Product design critics of the early 1950s attempted to balance the perceived needs of their various constituencies – designers, manufacturers, policymakers, and consumers – with the aims of the commissioning magazine and their personal literary ambitions. A more nuanced study of design magazines should account for the political, social, and economic pressures that shape them, the variety of voices and opinions expressed, and especially for the moments of resistance to design's ideologies and values, that occur on their pages. This flux of contradictory ideas, imperatives, and interpretations, I call the 'dynamics of criticism'. As M.C. Lemon has observed, history involves the examination of 'the genuine interplay (rather than meaningless juxtapositions) of individuals with each other and with a multiplicity of phenomena such as

---

<sup>36</sup> Peter Hall, 'Academe and Design Writing: Changes in Design Criticism', *Design and Culture*, Vol. 5. Issue 1., Spring 2013, p. 22.

<sup>37</sup> Clive Dilnot, 'The State of Design History, Part I: Mapping the Field', *Design Issues*, Vol. 1, No. 1, Spring, 1984, p. 249.



groups, parties, institutions and ideas'.<sup>38</sup> Cultural studies, too, identifies such interplay. In his inaugural address as the first director of the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies at the University of Birmingham in 1963, the sociologist Richard Hoggart outlined an approach to what he provisionally called 'Literature and Contemporary Cultural Studies'. Hoggart identified four main foci for this nascent discipline: writers and artists (how do they become what they are, and what are their financial rewards?); audiences (what expectations do they have, and what background knowledge do they bring?); opinion-formers, guardians, the elite, the clerisy (where do they come from and what are their channels of influence?); and the organization for the production and distribution of the written and spoken word (what are their natures, financial and otherwise?). Lastly, Hoggart spoke of an urgent need to find out more about what happens when all four shaping forces interact, 'about interrelations between writers and their audiences, and about their shared assumptions; about interrelations between writers and organs of opinion, between writers, politics, power, class and cash.'<sup>39</sup> Hoggart's summary of the concerns of the CCCS aptly describes the project of an historian of design criticism, and such questions impel this research.

### **Methods and sources**

Each chapter focus deals with a different type of design criticism, a different conception of design criticism's conventions, and thus a different set of sources. The primary sources consulted for this thesis falls into the following categories: individual articles and posts; whole magazines and blogs; letters to the editor and comments; interviews; collected papers such as letters, working documents, memos, board minutes, and press releases; catalogues, photographs, and reviews of exhibitions; films, audio recordings and transcripts of conferences and broadcasts.

---

<sup>38</sup> M.C. Lemon, *The Discipline of History and the History of Thought*, (London: Routledge, 1995) p. 109.

<sup>39</sup> Richard Hoggart, 'Schools of English and Contemporary Society', *Speaking to Each Other* (Vol. 2). (London: Chatto & Windus, 1970), pp. 256-257.

The historian of design criticism must use a combination of methods including textual analysis, biography, and oral history, and scholarship from a number of disciplines including media history, literary criticism, philosophy, historical sociology, and cultural studies. The two main research methods used in this thesis are the literary technique of close textual analysis and the oral history interview. I use close textual analysis to unpack the arguments and stylistic techniques of each article, focusing on the use of such devices as vocabulary, metaphor, references, point of view, sentence structure, rhetoric, and the visual format of the articles as they appeared in their original publications.

Material derived from interviews is used throughout the thesis and I will make a few general observations about them here. Architect Wayne Attoe has written that, 'Criticism is best characterized as behavior; and it should be seen, like other behaviors, in relation to underlying motives, fears, intentions, and habits'.<sup>40</sup> Due to the dearth of design critics' papers, letters, or other documents that might have recorded their working processes, reflections on design criticism as a practice, and their roles as design critics, I attempted to elicit such information through interviews.<sup>41</sup>

The design critics interviewed in this thesis were: Deborah Allen, Jane Thompson, Ralph Caplan, Richard Hamilton, Dick Farson, Deyan Sudjic, Peter York, Stephen Bayley, Judith Williamson, Dick Hebdige, Fiona Raby, Anthony Dunne, Claire Catterall, Nigel Coates, Rick Poynor and Mark Kingsley. Reyner Banham, a pivotal critic in this thesis died in 1988 but I was able to learn something of his working practice through an interview with his widow Mary Banham. For contextual information I also interviewed the magazine art directors Ken

---

<sup>40</sup> Wayne Attoe, 'Methods of Criticism and Response to Criticism', *Journal of Architectural Education*, Vol 29, No. 4, April 1976, p. 20.

<sup>41</sup> There is no complete archive for the best known and most prolific critic of the latter half of the twentieth century, Reyner Banham, for example. When he moved from London to Buffalo, NY, in 1976 he burnt all his papers. According to his widow, Mary Banham, 'He wasn't interested in posterity, so the other 10 versions of the article went on the bonfire'. His post-1976 papers are collected at the Getty Research Institute.

Garland and Simon Esterson, the IDCA secretary Merrill Ford, the designer Sheila Levrant de Bretteville, and the publisher Peter Murray. I conducted email interviews with Chip Lord, Eli Noyes, and Sim Van der Ryn.<sup>42</sup>

The most successful interview in this respect was with British design critic Rick Poynor. We had several preliminary conversations before I conducted a long, formal interview at his house in Twickenham. Poynor is unusual in his ability to remember details of what he was reading and why at different periods of his life, and in his acute self-consciousness both about the practice of criticism generally and his own critical practice. Other interviewees were more reticent, unwilling to cast themselves as design critics. The American co-editor of *Industrial Design* and car critic Deborah Allen had never been interviewed on the topic and was disinclined, when interviewed by me, to acknowledge the significance of her work. The British artist Richard Hamilton had carefully presented his own autobiography as an artist and had edited out his early work as a designer and a critic. After our telephone interview, he followed up with me in a series of emails, in which he revised his prior statements. 'I may have mislead you into supposing I haven't been that interested in design. When I think back to our chat, I was a trifle offhand. I didn't mention that I had designed a few things in my time, and written about them'.<sup>43</sup> One of the challenges of interviewing journalists is that, through their own experience of being

---

<sup>42</sup> Deborah Allen, personal interview, 6 July, 2007  
 Mary Banham, personal interview, 26 February, 2007  
 Stephen Bayley, personal interview, 6 January, 2011  
 Claire Catterall, personal interview, 17 September, 2007  
 Sheila Levrant De Bretteville, personal interview, 14 May, 2008  
 Anthony Dunne, personal interview, 21 July, 2011  
 Simon Esterson, personal interview, 5 August, 2010  
 Richard Farson, personal interview, 30 June, 2008  
 Ken Garland, personal interview, 14 February, 2007  
 Richard Hamilton, personal interview, 23 February, 2007  
 Dick Hebdige, personal interview, 3 April, 2011  
 Mark Kingsley, personal interview, 13 November, 2012  
 Rick Poynor, personal interview 13 July, 2007  
 Eli Noyes, personal interview, 28 March, 2008  
 Fiona Raby, personal interview, 21 July, 2011  
 Deyan Sudjic, personal interview, 2009, June 1, 2010  
 Jane Thompson (Fiske), personal interview, 30 July, 2007  
 Judith Williamson, personal interview, 4 August, 2010  
 Peter York, personal interview, 16 August, 2007

<sup>43</sup> Richard Hamilton, email correspondence, 3 March 2007.

interviewers, they consider the goal of an interview to capture an unguarded remark or a strong opinion. Deyan Sudjic, former editor of *Blueprint*, and a veteran newspaper journalist, for example, was wary of voicing opinions that, even though they were about a former period of his life, might compromise his current role as the director of London's Design Museum. At the other end of the spectrum the problem became not reticence but, rather, the repetition of rehearsed statements. In interviewing the British curator and author Stephen Bayley, who is frequently quoted in the media, I heard echoes of statements from previous interviews and had to push past these to gain new insights. Similarly, Jane Thompson's reflections on her design criticism from the 1950s appeared to be coloured by her current views on criticism, and some of her anecdotes had been rehearsed in previous interviews and in her own articles. Following her early career as a design curator, critic and editor of *Industrial Design Magazine*, Thompson recast herself as an urban designer. My interview with her was conducted in a car as we were driving from Boston airport to her summerhouse in Cape Cod. Sitting side by side, rather than across from each other at a table, and the fact that she was also engaged in the activity of driving was conducive to a productive interview. We continued the next day at her house, joined by another critic and her successor as editor of *Industrial Design*, Ralph Caplan, which added another dynamic to the conversation, and helped her to elaborate on some of her more rote memories of the period.

Some interviewees were reluctant either to be associated with design – management consultant Peter York and cultural critic Judith Williamson are better known for writing about other topics – or to be considered as a critic, as in the case of design curator Claire Catterall, interaction designers and educators Anthony Dunne and Fiona Raby, Deyan Sudjic, and Deborah Allen. They each produced works of design criticism, as defined by this thesis, but their qualified attitudes to the label, is acknowledged and is in fact an integral part of the story of design criticism's indistinctness.

Memory is partial and fallible. Personal narratives extracted from subjects don't necessarily match up with other documentary sources. Yet by conducting narrative analysis of the interview transcripts, it is possible, as oral history expert Linda Sandino suggests, to learn from how and why certain language, anecdotes, parables, hesitations, backtrackings, diversions, and digressions might have been used might have been used.<sup>44</sup>

As an analytical design historical method, biography can be limiting in its tendency to privilege the intentions of the designer-as-author and to overlook the desires, needs, and resistance of users. But in design criticism, where a self-reflective history is only beginning to be built, biographical accounts of writers provide useful foundation stones and can supplement textual analysis, in understanding and interpreting a critic's point of view, convictions, or ideology. Critics frequently write or express themselves in the first person and their opinions derive from idiosyncratic personal motivations, life experiences, education, political inclinations, class roots, and habits. When cross-referenced with the residues of their behaviours and beliefs that appear in their writing, knowledge of their actual behaviours and beliefs, contributes to an informed appreciation of design critics' work.

One example of a biographical history that illuminates writing practice is Timothy Mowl's comparative study of the British architectural writers, John Betjeman and Nikolaus Pevsner, who he deems responsible for interpreting and shaping much of Britain's visual landscape in the interwar period. *Stylistic Cold Wars: Betjeman vs Pevsner* contrasts the very different personalities, motivations, and approaches of these influential critics, and portrays Pevsner as a rigid, but thorough, academic intent on promoting international modernism and Betjeman as a popular, but sentimental, traditionalist, keen to preserve the best of English heritage. One gets a clear sense of the writers' respective methods – Pevsner's

---

<sup>44</sup> Linda Sandino, Introduction, 'Design History and Oral History: Objects and Subjects', *Journal of Design History*, Vol. 19. No. 4, pp. 275-282.

exhaustively scientific and taxonomical data collection for his series *The Buildings of England* are compared with Betjeman's more slapdash and poetic impressions of sites for his *Shell Guides*, poems, and television and radio broadcasts.<sup>45</sup>

### **Thematics and problematics**

In her study of Dutch design criticism Frederike Huygen identified three main types of design criticism: first, a genre, which she believes has died out, focused on the 'instruction and propaganda on how to design, how to live, and what taste to acquire'; second, a critique concerned with aesthetics and the establishment of criteria for measuring them; and thirdly, 'cultural criticism', which she defines as 'a critique that focuses on the context of design and its impact on society, and on the ideology and the way it functions'.<sup>46</sup> Didactic, aesthetic and cultural are only three modes of design criticism, however. Other variants, which will be discussed in this thesis, include: interpretative, promotional, oppositional, poetic, political, and ideological. Such imperatives are much harder to separate out into genres or time periods than Huygen's summary suggests. In fact many operate simultaneously. I have found it more useful to consider design criticism through the three following problematics, which are the thematic refrains of this thesis: criticism's contesting conceptions of its instrumentality, purpose and methods; criticism's idealized perceptions of, and actual engagement with, its publics; and, finally, criticism's adoption of a literary sensibility and narrative qualities in an attempt to transcend the limitations of design's promotional and market-based concerns.

---

<sup>45</sup> Timothy Mowl, *Stylistic Cold Wars: Betjeman vs Pevsner* (London: John Murray Publishers Ltd, 2000).

<sup>46</sup> Frederike Huygen, 'Report from Holland, Design Criticism after Postmodernism', in *Design Issues*, Vol. 13, Number 2, Summer 1997, pp. 40-43.

### **Theme One: Design criticism's instrumentality and purpose**

Art critic Jonathan Crary shows us how newness became a defining ideal of product design, when he describes mass production as having shifted the value of objects from their original position of singularity and authority to a more neutral position of appearance, so that the valued commodity became the novel commodity. As representations of a distanced ideal, commodities assumed their own autonomy and authority, with newness being the earmark of desirability.<sup>47</sup>

The ability to identify and respond cogently to newness, and establish 'new bearings', as literary critic F.R. Leavis called them, is one of the critic's key skills.<sup>48</sup> More than that though, it can also be seen as a creative act: to recognize significance in, and to make fine distinctions between what is new and immediate and as yet un-sifted is where the work of the critic meets that of the poet or designer. Too often however, criticism's engagement with design has tended to focus on one moment in a designed object's lifecycle – the moment when it is brand new and suspended in a perpetual present – without attending to the ways in which it might be used by someone over time, or what happens to it after its period of usefulness is over.

In a 1979 review of Michael Thompson's book *Rubbish Theory: The Creation and Destruction of Value*, the critic Reyner Banham observed that, 'all transient consumables slide slowly down the parallel scales of social esteem and actual cash value until they bottom out as absolute rubbish. At that point, however, they are not necessarily discarded, but may suddenly leap to the top of both scales'.<sup>49</sup>

Mark Linder, an architect and theorist, has written, 'Criticism sifts through all of the trash in the world of contemporary architecture hoping to find something valuable.'

---

<sup>47</sup> Jonathan Crary, *Techniques of the Observer* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1993) p. 19.

<sup>48</sup> F.R. Leavis, *New Bearings in English Poetry*, (London, Faber and Faber, 2011). Originally published in 1932.

<sup>49</sup> Reyner Banham, 'Rubbish: It's as Easy as Falling off a Cusp', review of Michael Thompson's book *Rubbish Theory: The Creation and Destruction of Value*, *New Society*, 2 August, 1979, p. 252.

Criticism is not about saving capital, collecting scraps, or "aestheticizing garbage" but about dissolving artificial problems and recycling refuse. At its best criticism turns garbage into a gift'.<sup>50</sup>

These depictions of criticism as the exercise of making fine distinctions, stems from a long tradition of liberal humanist criticism, encapsulated by literary critic I.A. Richards as 'the endeavour to discriminate between experiences and to evaluate them' or by R.P. Blackmur as the endless search 'with every fresh impulse or impression for better names and more orderly arrangements'.<sup>51</sup>

Since the 1950s, design criticism has co-existed with mass production, and has, to varying degrees, addressed the troubling velocity of the production-consumption-disposal cycle and the exponential profusion of designed things whose creation, promotion, distribution, use, and disposal impact the world in profound and often harmful ways. As Ben Highmore has acknowledged, 'Most catastrophically, it is hard not to see global warming and climate change as a consequence of a variety of design processes, design values and design products'.<sup>52</sup> French social scientist Bruno Latour's 'Enquiry into the Modes of Existence' project succinctly summarizes the quandary facing society and critics, in particular, under the provocation 'Between modernizing and ecologizing, we have to choose'.<sup>53</sup>

Some design critics chose the latter of Latour's options, however, and each has sifted the trash differently. Before the rise of ecological consciousness, Reyner Banham sought to

---

<sup>50</sup> Mark Linder in Mark Linder and Ann Bergren, eds. *Scogin, Elam, and Bray: Critical Architecture/Architectural Criticism*, (New York: Rizzoli, 1992), p. 15.

<sup>51</sup> I.A. Richards, *The Principles of Literary Criticism* ed. Paul Kegan, (London: Trench, Trubner, 1924), p. vii.  
R.P. Blackmur, 'A Critic's Job of Work' in ed. Denis Donoghue *Selected Essays of R. P. Blackmur*, (New York: Ecco Press, 1986), p. 19.

<sup>52</sup> Ben Highmore, *The Design Culture Reader*, (London: Routledge, 2008), p. 1.

<sup>53</sup> Bruno Latour, introduction, AIME website, [http://modesofexistence.org/index.php/#b\[chapter\]=#36945&b\[subheading\]=#36975&a=SET+TEXT+LEADER&c\[leading\]=TEXT&c\[slave\]=DOC&s=0](http://modesofexistence.org/index.php/#b[chapter]=#36945&b[subheading]=#36975&a=SET+TEXT+LEADER&c[leading]=TEXT&c[slave]=DOC&s=0) [accessed 25 October 2013]. For an fuller account of Latour's thesis see: Bruno Latour, 'To Modernize or to Ecologize ? That is the Question' in Kristin Asdal, Brita Brena and Ingunn Moser, eds. *Technoscience, The Politics of Intervention*, Oslo: Unipub , 2007), pp.249-272.



develop an 'aesthetics of expendability', through his analysis of mass-produced consumer goods, with which to counter an entrenched value system based on durability and permanence. Richard Hamilton identified and recommended the environmentally and socially unpalatable practices of built-in product obsolescence to a plodding post-war British design economy. Deborah Allen met the maligned topic of Detroit styling with her richly poetic prose and plucked an idiosyncratic image of an empowered female car driver from the uniformity of 1950s American car advertising. The environmental activists at the International Design Conference at Aspen in 1970 referenced and deployed actual garbage to protest the conference's lack of concern for environmental protection, a sentiment encapsulated by Ecology Action's founder Clifford Humphrey: 'If an item is made to be wasted, to be dumped on a dump, then don't make it!'<sup>54</sup> Stephen Bayley sent the design objects he thought 'disgusting' back to the landfill, by placing them on upturned dustbins in his 1983 Boilerhouse exhibition on 'Taste'. In the 1998 'Stealing Beauty' exhibition Claire Catterall gathered them back up with the examples of contemporary design in 1990s London made from, and inspired by, the detritus of everyday life. And finally Rick Poyner consigned the verbal junk of early twenty-first century writing on design blogs back into the computer's trash icon.<sup>55</sup>

Through rummaging in the quotidian realm, design criticism redraws the front lines of taste and value, retrieving what seems to be of worth from ignominy, and questioning the merits of design previously sanctioned by the canon.

Running alongside, and sometimes in opposition to, this imperative to sift the trash and assign value has been the compulsion – on the part of design critics – to diagnose and

---

<sup>54</sup> Clifford Humphrey, *Speakers Papers, IDCA 1970, International Design Conference in Aspen Records 1949-2006, 2007.M.7, Series 1, Box 28, Fol. 4-6*, The Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles.

<sup>55</sup> A small icon of a waste container for deleting files was implemented during the development of the Apple Lisa user interface in 1982 by Bill Atkinson where it was called the 'Wastebasket'. The concept carried over to the Apple Macintosh, as the 'Trash'.

even provide therapy for physical and mental sickness in a society perceived to be binge-consuming itself into a state of collective psychosis. As architectural theorist Manfredo Tafuri, has suggested, 'any criticism, to do more than whining, must make a diagnosis'.<sup>56</sup>

The post-war British design establishment wielded 'disinfectants and anaesthetics' on 'socialized welfare state man' in their efforts to cleanse him of poor taste.<sup>57</sup> When Jean Baudrillard wrote a paper for the International Design Conference at Aspen in 1970 he critiqued the American design community's supposed concern about the environment as 'naive euphoria in a hygienic nature', and the establishment's focus on environmental pollution as a means of seeking to protect itself from the polluting influence of communism, immigration, and disorder.<sup>58</sup> Dick Hebdige, Judith Williamson, and other critics repeatedly referenced sickness, and particularly mental illness to characterize the effects of design, and specifically style, on society in 1980s Britain. They critiqued 1980s British design for its collusion with Thatcherist enterprise culture and its provision of 'institutionalized therapy' in the form of more consumer goods for the very consumerist sickness it had helped engender.<sup>59</sup> In the late-1990s the design firm Dunne & Raby created placebo objects to draw attention to, and provide a salve for anxieties about, the electromagnetic fields in peoples' homes. And in 2007 Rick Poynor and others concerned about the quality of design criticism itself in its online manifestations, subjected it to a rigorous 'health check'. Poynor said, 'I think criticism has a requirement periodically to run a health check on itself and to be fairly open and explicit about what the findings are'.<sup>60</sup>

---

<sup>56</sup> Manfredo Tafuri, *Theories and Histories of Architecture*, 1980, quoted in Clive Dilnot, 'The State of Design History, Part I: Mapping the Field', *Design Issues*, Vol. 1, No. 1, Spring, 1984, p. 1.

<sup>57</sup> Stephen Spender, 'Thoughts on Design in Everyday Life', 1958 Design Oration of the SIA, 1958, excerpted on the 'Clips and Quotes' page in *Industrial Design*, March 1959, p. 8.

<sup>58</sup> Baudrillard's paper will be discussed in details in Chapter Two.

<sup>59</sup> These ideas are discussed in Chapter Three.

<sup>60</sup> Rick Poynor, personal interview, 13 July, 2007.

Sifting trash in order to salvage or relegate and the desire to label and cure the social sicknesses seen as responsible for generating the trash, are just two of the compulsions that drive design critics. In the events studied in this thesis, however, these are the dominant imperatives at play. Both the winnowing and the diagnostic roles of criticism imagine a public that needs it values deciding and its sickness identified.

**Theme Two: Design criticism's relationship to its publics, imagined and real**

There can be multiple publics for a piece of design criticism. Jürgen Habermas, the German philosopher who has perhaps done most to conceptualise public life, has described a 'public sphere', where people 'behave neither like business or professional people transacting private affairs, nor like members of a constitutional order subject to the legal constraints of a state bureaucracy', but rather as 'citizens'.<sup>61</sup> Habermas, writing within the Marxist tradition and concerns of the Institute for Social Research, saw political participation as the core of a democratic society and as an essential element in individual self-development. He traced the historical genesis of the bourgeois public sphere, and contrasted it with the contemporary public sphere, which he saw as having been structurally changed by the rise of state capitalism, the culture industries, and the increasingly powerful positions of economic corporations in public life.<sup>62</sup> Habermas' conception of a once-extant engaged citizenry and an arena assembled for the purposes of debate and for forming public opinion, separate from the commercial transactions of the marketplace, has provided much of the impetus for the performance of design criticism, despite its shadowy and formless nature of public agency in the contemporary era. Through the adoption of a particular voice, argument and

---

<sup>61</sup> Jürgen Habermas, 'The Public Sphere: An Encyclopedia Article', *New German Critique* 3, 1974, p. 49.

<sup>62</sup> Douglas Kellner, 'Habermas, the Public Sphere, and Democracy: A Critical Intervention', <http://pages.gseis.ucla.edu/faculty/kellner/papers/habermas.htm> [accessed 20, October 2013].

attitude in the artificially staged environment of a magazine or blog, or more literally at the podium of a lecture hall (where many pieces of written criticism begin) a design critic performs in imagined dialogue with former critics, peers, and the designers whose work she discusses, and before the imagined audience of the reading public.

For the French philosopher and social scientist Bruno Latour, publics are provoked into being around junctures of concern. Latour observes, 'We might be more connected to each other by our worries, our matters of concern, the issues we care about, than by any other set of values, opinions, attitudes, or principles'.<sup>63</sup> Latour sees the critic's role as that of an instigator of public conversation: 'The critic is not the one who debunks but the one who assembles. The critic is not the one who lifts the rugs from under the feet of the naïve believers, but the one who offers the participants arenas in which to gather'.<sup>64</sup>

His 'Making Things Public: Atmospheres of Democracy' project – an exhibition and anthology of texts – considers the spaces in which communal public debate takes place:

Scientific laboratories, technical institutions, marketplaces, churches and temples, financial trading rooms, Internet forums, ecological disputes – without forgetting the very shape of the museum inside which we gather all those *membra disjecta* – are just some of the forums and agoras in which we speak, vote, decide, are decided upon, prove, are being convinced. Each has its own architecture, its own technology of speech, its complex set of procedures, its definition of freedom and domination, its ways of bringing together those who are concerned – and even more important, those who are not concerned – and what concerns them, its expedient way to obtain closure and come to a decision.<sup>65</sup>

To what extent is it possible to consider media entities in this light, as agoras for public discussion? What conditions

---

<sup>63</sup> Bruno Latour, *Making Things Public: Atmospheres of Democracy*, (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2005), p. 14.

This notion of a public temporarily coalescing around a 'matter of concern' stems from a longer trajectory of thinking about the public sphere explored by such philosophers as John Dewey, William James, Walter Lippman, and more recently Oskar Negt and Alexander Kluge.

<sup>64</sup> Bruno Latour, 'Has Critique Run Out of Steam? From Matters of Fact to Matters of Concern', *Critical Inquiry* 30, Winter 2004, p. 246.

<sup>65</sup> Bruno Latour, *Making Things Public: Atmospheres of Democracy*, (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2005), p. 31.

need to be in place for the media to be public in the Latourian sense? The letters pages of magazines and newspapers, educational activities associated with radio broadcasts and, more recently, call-in sections, and comments function of blogs, are all created to bring together 'those who are concerned'. These portals to the public open up the otherwise closed system of an edited magazine or a scripted radio program, but, as Latour suggests, they have their own 'definition of freedom and domination', and only allow in external opinion, and possible heckling, on their terms. Letters are always filtered (and sometimes even written) by the editor, a radio host moderates listener contributions and has the power to cut them off, and blog comments are either edited by a moderator or policed by the commenting community.

A recurring contemporary concern about criticism is the perceived erosion of a public sphere and the disappearance of public intellectuals equipped to ignite it. Articulations of this concern are characterized by their wistfulness and nostalgic reverence for an unspecified historical era in which literary, leftist, ideologically driven criticism in a written form, engaged a politicized public. For example, in a blog posting titled 'Where are the Design Critics?' Rick Poynor wrote that, 'criticism, in the deeper, more historical, more self-aware sense [...] possessed a larger ideological purpose. Its role was oppositional and it was often identified with the left. It took issue with capitalism and sought the transformation of society'.<sup>66</sup> Art historian James Elkins's postscript to a dialogue on art criticism expresses a similar yearning for a more engaged public:

I honestly believe that if there is a crisis of criticism today, it is not because critics are writing badly, nor because of journalistic pressures, nor because of the academicization of criticism, but because this crisis is linked to the problem of constituting a new public sphere. This is a performative condition for criticism; by which I mean that critical writing in its rhetorical performance constitutes its "ideal" reader – as it has done since Diderot and Baudelaire – but cannot succeed alone in *actually*

---

<sup>66</sup> Rick Poynor, 'Where are the Design Critics?' Design Observer, 25 September, 2005.

constituting the sphere in which it will have been read.<sup>67</sup>

In framing a colloquium on publishing and distribution, the author Deanya Lattimore proposes more optimistically:

Publication is not the production of books but the production of a public for whom those books have meaning. There is no pre-existing public. The public is created through deliberate, wilful acts: the circulation of texts, discussions and gatherings in physical space, and the maintenance of a related digital commons. These construct a common space of conversation, a public space, which beckons a public into being.<sup>68</sup>

In their tone of address and themes covered, it is evident that the design critics considered in this thesis conceived of their public as a body of citizens that might need educating in relation to, castigation for their complicity within, or protecting from, design. Whether or not such a public responded or engaged with criticism in the ways critics envisaged, is much harder to gauge.

In addition to the imagined presence of a larger public that may or may not come directly into contact with the ideas expressed in the criticism, there is an actual community of individuals that subscribe to, buy, visit, attend or otherwise seek out the vehicle through which the criticism is disseminated. They may leave traces of their engagement through their letters to the editor or their own articles in the case of a publication, their comments in the case of a blog, their questions or protests in the case of a conference.

Throughout the latter half of the twentieth century one can trace three main conceptions of the public addressed by design critics: a public that needs to be educated on behalf of the larger design enterprise in order to make, sell, and buy better products; a public that needs to be protected from the machinations of commerce and advocated for; and a public that

---

<sup>67</sup> James Elkins, *The State of Art Criticism*, eds. James Elkins and Michael Newman, (New York: Routledge, 2008), p. 370.

<sup>68</sup> Deanna Lattimore, *Diigo.com*, 26, June 2008, <https://www.diigo.com/list/deanya/public-space-exhibitions> [accessed 28 October, 2013].

through their reading and self-publishing behaviours is seen as both a fulfilment of, and a threat to, design criticism itself.

The first – the didactic critical imperative – has its roots in deep-set traditions of design reform dating back to the mid-nineteenth century and to the notion of public service in Britain, and public good in the US, which shaped much thinking about design in the first half of the twentieth century, but reached fruition in the inter and immediate post-war period. The second – the protective imperative – gained traction with the development of consumer protection organizations and publications such as *Consumer Reports* and *Which* in the 1950s. The third category which might be called a do-it-yourself mode of design criticism became most pronounced with the advent of blogs in the early 2000s and the opportunity they afforded for members of the public to launch their own publications and contribute comments to others, posing a dilemma for the kind of design criticism which had wanted to empower its public to perform critique, but whose own power and authority was increasingly eroded in the process.

While these conceptions of the public can be allotted to time periods, in fact all three co-existed and exchanged predominance throughout the entire period. The style and lifestyle discourse of British 1980s design publications can be seen to continue the instructional work of the 1950s design establishment who wanted to teach people how to acquire taste and how to live, and continues to this day in many exhibitions and blogs. The democratizing impulse to share the strategies and insights of the critical apparatus, while most apparent in the recent era of blogging, was also a concern of the editors of *Industrial Design* magazine in the 1950s, who sometimes published articles sent in by readers, and saw their role as enabling a reader to perform their own criticism.

**Theme Three: The poetic, literary and narrative qualities of design criticism.**

A democratizing impulse on the part of design critics, mentioned above, is genuine but it does rub up against another

quality which all of the critics studied in this research display, and that is their acute sense of their writerly abilities, their delight in the use of language, and their sympathy for and ambition to achieve literary status.

Few words are more offensive to literary ears than 'use', evoking as it does paperclips and hair-dryers. The Romantic opposition to the utilitarian ideology of capitalism has made 'use' an unusable word: for the aesthetes, the glory of art is its utter uselessness.<sup>69</sup>

Literary critic Terry Eagleton's observation captures much of the anxiety and tension that has by turns stultified and fuelled design criticism in the latter half of the twentieth century. For, of course, paperclips and hair-dryers are design criticism's subject matter – its stock-in-trade – and despite their personal romanticism, idealism, literary ambitions, or aesthetic, social and moral imperatives, design critics must engage with how things are used.

The glory of design is its usefulness. It is mostly experienced in everyday conditions rather than in those spaces separated for enabling transcendent thought, like theatres or art galleries. So design criticism, unlike most other forms of criticism, is often characterized by its focus on the ordinary and the ephemeral, although, as art critic Dave Hickey reminds us, seeking to overcome the incommensurability of sensory experience, let alone the 'enigmatic whoosh of ordinary experience', is no easy task. In his own attempts, Hickey found himself 'slamming [...] against the fact that writing, even the best writing, invariably suppresses and displaces the greater and more intimate part of any experience that it seeks to express'.<sup>70</sup>

The fact that design is so centrally located within arenas of economic exchange affects what is written about it. Design criticism is unusual, possibly unique, among other genres of criticism in that it attempts to directly discuss the

---

<sup>69</sup> Terry Eagleton, *Literary Theory: An Introduction*, (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 1983), p. 181.

<sup>70</sup> Dave Hickey, *Air Guitar: Essays on Art and Democracy*, (Los Angeles: Art Issues Press, 1997).



processes of manufacture, retail, and distribution. Other genres of criticism are subject to the same economic realities, and operate in the same, or at least overlapping, commercial spheres. Literary, film, and art criticism (and not just reviews) each have a direct impact on sales of their respective products, but the commercial implications of such influences are rarely discussed. Although the depth and quality of economic discussion in design criticism is usually slight, design critics do have to consider of the mechanics of making and selling, in more explicit terms than critics in other genres.

This doesn't mean that design critics are comfortable with the situation. 'The New Citroën', Roland Barthes' essay about the 1955 Déesse car, exposes Barthes' reluctance to deal with the grubbiness of retail culture. The nature of the essay means that inevitably he must discuss the display and marketing of the car but his simultaneous repulsion is evident in his condemnation of the speed of the process of its mediatisation – a process which he sees as wholly symbolic of petit-bourgeois values. Yet he attended the car show; reporting from the scene of the Déesse's commercial exhibition and on the details of its mediation was necessary to a full discussion of its symbolic value. By contrast, is not necessary for literary critics to report on, say, the circumstances of a book's display at the Frankfurt book fair. Deborah Allen, automobile reviewer for *Industrial Design* in the 1950s, did not hide her dislike of the machinations of the Detroit auto industry and yet completed her formal analysis of the latest car models with discussion of the economic strategies of their manufacturers, sales figures, and the ways they were marketed. In his scrutiny of products such as the Habitat catalogue or *Face* magazine in the 1980s, critic and theorist Dick Hebdige combined his semiotic readings of these products' imagery with appraisals of the way they shaped their readers' behaviour in the marketplace.

Design criticism is often torn between its need to report from the bustle of the bazaar, and its cultural ambition to

contribute to a discourse that hovers above the arena of business transaction, dealing with seemingly loftier themes of inspiration, emotion, morals, and human values in the evocation of possible worlds.<sup>71</sup>

Design criticism is also tied to the design industry and the marketplace, through the means by which it is generated, funded, and broadcast. There are few instances of truly independent design criticism – perhaps a solely publicly funded institution such as the BBC, or a section of a newspaper that contains no design-related advertising, or a self-coded blog or website might count as such. Most design criticism is commissioned, paid for, and distributed by companies, institutions, and non-profit organizations and grants that are supported and sponsored by commercial design enterprise. Thus the impossibility of design criticism's true disinterestedness sits uneasily with the idealism of its non-commercial, anti-capitalist motivations, such as literary ambition, the desire to oppose and resist, and the search for social and political justice.

Writing more than twenty years ago, Andrew Wernick, in *Promotional Culture*, portrayed an emerging culture whose communicative processes were coming to be saturated in the medium of promotion. He argues that neither satire nor critique is immune from the process it may seek to destroy through laughter or pointed insight:

Once we are communicating at all, and especially in public, and therefore in a medium which is promotional through and through, there is no going outside promotional discourse. These very words are continuous with what they are seeking to distance themselves from. To paraphrase what Derrida remarked of textuality in general: there is no hors-promotion.<sup>72</sup>

Many of the critics studied in this research attempted to find an escape from the 'no hors-promotion' conundrum through their

---

<sup>71</sup> 'Utopia, then, is what Derrida called a "specter", a ghost that infuses everyday reality with other, possible worlds, rather than some otherworldly dream'. Reinhold Martin, 'Critical of What? Toward a Utopian Realism', in *Harvard Design Magazine*, Spring/Summer 2005, Number 22, p. 5.

<sup>72</sup> Andrew Wernick, *Promotional Culture: Advertising, Ideology and Symbolic Expression*, (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications Ltd, 1991) p. 195.

use of rich, metaphorical and poetic language as a means to both transcend the banal functionality of the products they dealt with and to get even closer to them. Many believe that design criticism is so deeply entrenched within the design industry, so closely tied to its professional goals, that its ultimate effect will always be promotional rather than critical. When Industrial Design's car critic Deborah Allen and the French sociologist Roland Barthes wrote about cars they summoned ethereal and religious imagery. Reviewing the 1955 Buick Allen suggested that the beholder should suspend their disbelief as they would when encountering solid wooden clouds on the underside of a canopy of state in Baroque cathedral architecture, and 'accept the romantic notion that materials have no more weight than the designer chooses to give them'. Allen's analysis of the way in which the car's styling reinforced its dynamics combined both technical specificity and a kind of breathless lyricism:

The Buick's designers put the greatest weight over the wheels, where the engine is, which is natural enough. The heavy bumper helps to pull the weight forward; the dip in the body and the chrome spear express how the thrust of the front wheels is dissipated in turbulence toward the rear. Just behind the strong shoulder of the car, a sturdy post lifts up the roof, which trails off like a banner in the air. The driver sits in the dead calm at the center of all this motion; hers is a lush situation.<sup>73</sup>

In his short essay on the D.S. 19, (referred to as 'the Goddess' because of the phonetic similarity between D.S. and the French word *déesse*) written in 1957, Roland Barthes also used cathedral architecture as point of comparison. 'I think that cars today are almost the exact equivalent of the great Gothic cathedrals: I mean the supreme creation of an era, conceived with passion by unknown artists, and consumed in image if not in usage by a whole population which appropriates them as a purely magical object'.<sup>74</sup> Then, like Allen, he takes the reader on a sensory exploration of the car's surfaces, which he had observed being enacted by consumers at car shows, writing:

---

<sup>73</sup> Deborah Allen, 'Cars 55', *Industrial Design*, February 1955, p. 89.

<sup>74</sup> Roland Barthes, 'The New Citroën', *Mythologies*, (London: Vintage, 1993), p. 88.

yet it is the dove-tailing of its sections which interest the public most: one keenly fingers the edges of the windows, one feels along the wide rubber grooves which link the back window to its metal surround. There are in the D.S. the beginnings of a new phenomenology of assembling, as if one progressed from a world where elements are welded to a world where they are juxtaposed and hold together by sole virtue of their wondrous shape...<sup>75</sup>

Barthes wrote about the car's interior from the perspective of the driver, and compared the levers to 'utensils' and the dashboard to a homely kitchen environment: 'The dashboard looks more like the working surface of a modern kitchen than the control room of a factory; the slim panes of matt fluted metal, the small levers topped by a white ball, the very simple dials, the very discreetness of the nickel-work, all this signifies a kind of control exercised over motion rather than performance. One is obviously turning from an alchemy of speed to a relish in driving'.<sup>76</sup> Magical and spiritual allusions, such as 'alchemy', Gothic cathedrals, and 'wonder' and diaphanous evocations such as 'dissipation' motion and airiness exist in tense juxtaposition with more technical, ergonomic, substantial, and humdrum points of reference such as 'heavy bumper', 'sturdy post', 'utensils', 'kitchen', 'factory' and 'wide rubber grooves'.

Such tensions pervade much of the writing I have analysed in this thesis and reflect the fraught nature of design critics' predicament as writers with the potential to create poetry, but also as critics with the responsibility to explain, evaluate, and sell. When Rick Poyner took the Speak Up bloggers to task in 2007, one of his main bones of contention was their lack of sensitivity to language. He listed 'quality of writing style' as one of eight key tenets of good criticism, in contrast to an admission by Mark Kingsley that Speak Up contained a lot of 'shitty prose'. In the instances explored in this thesis where language was abandoned in favour of atmospheric impressionism in the case of the 'powerhouse::uk' and the 'Stealing Beauty' in the late 1990s

---

<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid. p. 89.

exhibitions, and the agency of mute objects in the case of Dunne & Raby's criticism-embodying products of the early 2000s, their publics were confused. Critic Judith Williamson, who reviewed the 'powerhouse::uk' exhibition took issue with its language – 'babble', 'blab', 'meaningless chatter', and 'self-congratulatory streams of dislocated words and circular messages', as she variously referred to it.<sup>77</sup> Michael Horsham, writing of 'Stealing Beauty' noted that, 'this show is about our collective confusion and it follows that the things in it also, intentionally or unintentionally, concern that confusion'.<sup>78</sup> When they made hybrid furniture and appliances whose primary purpose was to question social and political values, the designers Dunne & Raby found the need to insert them into narratives in order to make their critiques legible. They created elaborate videos and publications with staged photographs and even though the objects were meant to embody questions, they had to present their users with written questionnaires to elicit responses to such questions.

These three interwoven themes provide threads of continuity throughout the discrete chapter focuses of this thesis, as well as points of comparison between the critical works that are examined. Some of the chapter focuses will be familiar to design historians but, reading them through the lens of a history of design criticism, which emphasizes the materiality of critical ideas as a product of creative and technological processes, economic forces and social structures, I aim to contribute a new inflection on their significance. In doing so, I hope that this research contributes to a growing literature that considers the aims, ambit, poetics, and intellectual circuitry of design criticism with the attentiveness that it deserves.

---

<sup>77</sup> Judith Williamson, 'Inflated Intangibles', *Eye Magazine*, Spring, 1999, p. 7.

<sup>78</sup> Michael Horsham, 'The Value of Confusion', *Stealing Beauty: British Design Now*, (London: ICA, 1999), p. 13.

*In the gay town of Lepingville I bought her four books of comics, a box of candy, a box of sanitary pads, two cokes, a manicure set, a travel clock with a luminous dial, a ring with a real topaz, a tennis racket, roller skates with white high shoes, field glasses, a portable radio set, chewing gum, a transparent raincoat, sunglasses, some more garments – swooners, shorts, all kinds of summer frocks.<sup>79</sup>*

---

<sup>79</sup> Vladimir Nabokov, *Lolita*, (New York: Vintage Books, 1989) pp. 141-142. (First published 1955 in Paris, and in 1958 in New York).

## CHAPTER ONE

### 'A Throw-Away Esthetic': New Measures and Metaphors in Product Design Criticism, 1955–1961

#### INTRODUCTION

In the post-second world war period the dominant strain of design proselytising, typified by the activities of the Council of Industrial Design in the UK, and the Museum of Modern Art in the US, evaluated design using abstract and value-laden criteria such as harmony, honesty, and modesty, and was elitist in intention and omniscient in voice. Against this backdrop, new writers emerged who wanted to highlight the ways people actually used design, and allow for a wider spectrum of consumer needs and tastes; some even hoped to empower readers to conduct their own product design criticism. They introduced different kinds of evaluative criteria and methods for illuminating the newly invented and reconceived manufactured goods that were increasingly available in the post-war period. They used a direct, first person mode of address, and included personal anecdotes and experiences. Through the use of such literary devices as neologisms, compression, rhythmic play, and rich imagery, a new genre of writing gained definition, transcending its journalistic setting, aspiring to a hybrid form of poetic prose.

In this chapter the following articles will be considered in detail: 'The Persuading Image' written by Richard Hamilton for the British publication *Design* in 1960; car reviews written by Deborah Allen for the US-based *Industrial Design* magazine in the mid-1950s; 'Vehicles of Desire', 'Industrial Design and Popular Art', and 'Design by Choice' written by Reyner Banham for *Art* (1955) *Civiltà delle Macchine* (1955) and *The Architectural Review* (July 1961) respectively. I selected these articles because they deal with expendable, mass-produced design as their subject matter, attempt new ways of writing about it, and exhibit a self-awareness both of design criticism as a practice and a genre, and of the ways in which

they attempt to disrupt its norms. The articles also have an internal logic amongst themselves through shared ideas and cross-referencing. They also generated palpable responses among their reading publics of other writers and designers of the period.

This chapter seeks to identify the extent to which these examples of a product design criticism in the mid- to late-1950s and early 1960s represented a new and abrasive counter current to prevailing modes and registers of design criticism, and the extent to which their ideas resonated with their intended audiences. The larger concerns of this thesis, such as the instrumentality, self-image, and shifting values of design criticism, are explored through granular readings of key articles and lectures in the contexts in which they were written and encountered – the broad intellectual, media, and socio-political landscapes in which they performed as criticism, and the immediate setting of their publication (in such magazines as *Design*, in the UK and *Industrial Design* in the US).

### **The witch-hunt for design's 'sensational aspects'**

British design criticism in the mid-twentieth century was, for the most part, promotional and didactic – a form of economically driven public service intended to improve the quality of British design, the taste of British retailers and consumers, and the health of British manufacturing. Its language, references, and philosophical underpinnings, rooted in mid-nineteenth-century design reform, had been reinforced through the publications, broadcasts and exhibitions of early twentieth-century institutions such as The Design and Industries Association (1915), The Council for Art and Industry (1933), and the Society of Industrial Artists (1930).

In the US in the 1950s efforts to promote and popularize 'good design' in order to boost the sales of American industrial design in the marketplace were led by The Museum of Modern Art, which staged multiple exhibitions and competitions as part of its 'Good Design' programme, directed by Edgar



Kaufmann Jr. Between 1950 and 1955 three exhibitions were staged each year, two at the Merchandise Mart in Chicago and a third at the MoMA in New York, with award-winning examples of good design indicated with distinctive orange and black labels.<sup>80</sup> The Museum's activities were further promulgated through its own publications, talks and panel discussions, and through lengthy reviews and transcripts of these events in trade architecture and design publications. In the US the emphasis was on commercial competitiveness, what *Interiors* magazine summarized as a combination of 'facility and economy of manufacture, and sales appeal,' and what the selection committee of the 1951 'Good Design' exhibitions described as 'a real contribution, in looks, in efficiency or in price'.<sup>81</sup> In the UK, the CoID-led initiatives valued abstract aesthetic qualities that underlined perceived functionalism above manufacturing pragmatics. Whether they originated in the UK or the US, however, definitions of what constituted 'good design' or 'contemporary design' often sounded similar. Each referenced Arts and Crafts and Modernist-derived moral and aesthetic values, which advocated that the structure, means of manufacture, construction materials, and purpose of a product should all be evident, while decoration should not.<sup>82</sup> Kaufmann asserted that, 'Modern design should be simple, its structure, evident in its appearance, avoiding extraneous enrichment'. His 'Good Design' selection committee passed over 'pieces that would dominate a room by their sensational aspects' in favour of ones 'that showed a more controlled design'. Paul Reilly, soon-to-be director of the CoID, echoed such sentiments when he defined 'contemporary design' as 'honest,' 'decent,'

---

<sup>80</sup> Products were chosen for the 'Good Design' exhibitions by a selection committee, comprised of Edgar Kaufmann Jr., director of the 'Good Design' programme, Philip C. Johnson, director of the Museum's Architecture and Design department, and the designer Eero Saarinen. Press release, June 22, 1951, The Museum of Modern Art and the Merchandise Mart, p. 1, MoMA online press archive, [http://www.moma.org/docs/press\\_archives/1522/releases/MOMA\\_1951\\_0040.pdf](http://www.moma.org/docs/press_archives/1522/releases/MOMA_1951_0040.pdf) [accessed 9 October 2013].

<sup>81</sup> 'Good Design for 1949,' *Interiors*, vol. 108, December 1948, p. 114. Press release, June 22, 1951, The Museum of Modern Art and the Merchandise Mart, p. 1, MoMA online press archive, [http://www.moma.org/docs/press\\_archives/1522/releases/MOMA\\_1951\\_0040.pdf](http://www.moma.org/docs/press_archives/1522/releases/MOMA_1951_0040.pdf) [accessed 9 October 2013].

<sup>82</sup> The tenth of 'Twelve Precepts of Modern Design', in Edgar Kaufmann Jr., *What is Modern Design?*, (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1950) p. 7.

'straight-forward,' 'modest' and 'to the point,' in contradistinction to 'the rootless, vulgar, modernist furniture that glittered in chain store windows'.<sup>83</sup><sup>84</sup>

The new design critics under consideration in this chapter were often hired to write for and about institutions like MoMA and CoID, but, as independent critics, they were not beholden to them.<sup>85</sup> They included, in the UK, the design and architecture critic Reyner Banham and the artist and writer Richard Hamilton, and, in the US, the co-editors of *Industrial Design* magazine, Jane Fiske and Deborah Allen. These writers questioned the CoID's official line on contemporary design and the normative rhetoric of MoMA's 'Good Design' programme, demonstrating instead, an appreciation of surfaces, symbols, and styling, technological advances, planned obsolescence, and the perspective of the knowing user-consumer.

Another more anxious current of criticism also gained traction in the latter half of the 1950s, particularly in the US. This directed public attention toward the adverse effects of the product design industry on the environment and on society, and was written for a general audience by commentators such as the sociologist C. Wright Mills and the lawyer and author Ralph Nader. Such writers considered consumer goods from the perspectives of fields beyond design such as sociology, economics, politics, and ecology. By the early 1960s these very different strands of resistance – literary and sociological – were beginning to disturb, and in some cases redirect, how and why interpretative commentary about design was conducted, and whom it was for.

---

<sup>83</sup> Paul Reilly, Manuscript, 'Presenting the Case for Furnishing: Vintage or Contemporary?', 1958, pp. 1-2. Paul Reilly, design administrator, papers, ca.1920 - ca.1989, Archive of Art and Design, London.

<sup>84</sup> [http://www.moma.org/docs/press\\_archives/1522/releases/MOMA\\_1951\\_0040.pdf](http://www.moma.org/docs/press_archives/1522/releases/MOMA_1951_0040.pdf)

<sup>85</sup> Hamilton, for example, referred to MoMA as 'a custodian of relics as well as a propaganda machine'. Richard Hamilton, Review of Arthur Drexler's *Introduction to Twentieth Century Design*, in *Design*, December 1959. And Banham, for example, castigated the Council of Industrial Design for its 'narrow, middle-class' interpretation of taste, and its misguided belief that there was 'some kind of necessary relationship between the appearance of an object and its performance or quality'. Reyner Banham, 'H.M. Fashion House', *New Statesman*, 27 January, 1961, p. 151.

American Studies historian Daniel Horowitz observes that in the 1960s new types of writing about consumer culture emerged in Western Europe and the US that encapsulated changing attitudes towards pleasure and playfulness.<sup>86</sup> Acknowledging that early twentieth century writers had also dealt with pleasurable experiences created by commercialism, but had usually 'linked them with what they considered lowly, corrupting and escapist indulgences such as excessive drinking and illicit sex,' Horowitz posits that by the 1960s changing moral attitudes had allowed for new ways of looking at consumer culture.<sup>87</sup> He identifies the ways in which writers such as Tom Wolfe, Umberto Eco, and Roland Barthes challenged the divide between high and low, adopting what he calls an 'anthropological outlook' on culture.<sup>88</sup> They were 'increasingly focused on pleasure, playfulness, and sexuality as key aspects of a more positive interpretation of commercial culture. They wrote of the way automobiles, clothing, the built environment, comics, advertisements and movies enabled people to gain emotional enrichment from commercial goods and experiences'.<sup>89</sup> Such writers depicted consumer culture as a broadly defined social phenomenon and its products typologically rather than specifically. While Wolfe tended to use designed objects in his writing as stage props to support the veracity of his detailed character portraits, and while Eco and Barthes studied them in essentialist terms, the design critics under consideration in this chapter engaged more directly with the design, manufacture, and use of commercial goods. Writers like Banham and Allen used poetic language to illuminate the products they depicted, rather than using the names of products to enliven their prose, and addressed the detail of specific year models and editions rather than generic types.

This chapter charts the emergence and impact of a genre of writing that represented a new attitude toward the design,

---

<sup>86</sup> Daniel Horowitz, *Consuming Pleasures: Intellectuals and Popular Culture in the Postwar World*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012).

<sup>87</sup> Ibid. p. 2.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid. p. 1.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid. p. 2.

manufacture, and use of consumer products in the post-war period in the US and the UK. This new writing, which countered the elitist and didactic motivations of official design propaganda through interpretations that embraced emotional responses as well as practical realities and through the introduction of anti-establishment values, was attuned to its role as criticism. Most notably, this new brand of writing aimed to engage readers through the use of heightened language and could be termed poetic prose product design criticism.

**PART ONE: A CLASH OF VALUES IN *DESIGN* MAGAZINE, BRITAIN, 1960**

In the February 1960 issue of *Design*, the monthly journal of the British Council of Industrial Design (CoID), readers found an article that didn't seem to belong with the journal's typical content. Titled 'The Persuading Image', it was written by the artist Richard Hamilton, who, in the late 1950s and 1960s, was gaining recognition as one of the founders of the British Pop Art movement but was also practicing as a designer, teaching in the Royal College of Art's interior design department and the fine art department at King's College, Newcastle, and occasionally writing about design.<sup>90</sup>

In 'The Persuading Image', Hamilton wrote about how during the 1950s American industrial manufacturers and designers had been using sophisticated and witty imagery to seduce their consumers, to 'mould' them to fit the products they had already created, and the implications of these precedents for manufacturing, marketing, and consumer practice in 1960s Britain. Hamilton's positive interpretation of these calculating activities, and his serious consideration of such issues as styling, image re-touching, motivational research, and planned obsolescence, disrupted *Design's* narrow editorial

---

<sup>90</sup> Hamilton worked with industrial designer Misha Black on a heated breakfast tray, among other products. Hamilton also worked on models of New Towns for the Festival of Britain, and consulted as a designer at Granada Television. Between 1958 and 1960 Hamilton wrote several articles about design in *Architectural Design*, *The Architect's Journal*, *Uppercase*, and *Design*, among other publications.

perspective, visually, tonally, and in terms of its values. *Design's* philosophy was based upon 'well established principles', which John Blake summarized in his editorial preface to the February 1960 issue as 'truth to materials, to production techniques, to the expression of the nature of a product and its function and, more recently perhaps, to the fulfilment of basic human needs'.<sup>91</sup> According to Blake, who used an anecdote in which 'an American designer recently expressed bewilderment at his young British assistant's pre-occupation with honesty in design', there was a profound disjuncture between British and American views of design's positioning in society.<sup>92</sup> While the British considered design a social and moral concern, Blake and *Design* magazine, averred, the Americans, apparently, could only conceive of its value in commercial terms.

Hamilton's idiosyncratic take on the social benefits of advanced capitalist product design challenged the established viewpoint of the CoID, and the British design professions it represented. His article offered a more pragmatic, style-oriented, and American-influenced perspective of the inevitability of capitalism and the designer's complicated role therein.

#### **A 'duty' to fight against 'shoddy design'**<sup>93</sup>

In order to understand the ways in which Hamilton's article jarred with the values of its host publication, it is necessary to take a look back at the formation of these values. The Council of Industrial Design was a government agency established in London in 1944 in anticipation of the need for a post-war boost to Britain's manufacturing industries and to help the transition from the state-controlled production of wartime to a mixed state-directed and market-based system.<sup>94</sup> The CoID translated Britain's need for a

---

<sup>91</sup> John E. Blake, 'Consumers in Danger', *Design* 134, February 1960, p. 25.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid.

<sup>93</sup> Michael Farr, *Design in British Industry: A Mid-Century Survey*, (Cambridge: University Press, 1955), p.xxxvi.

<sup>94</sup> Patrick Maguire and Jonathan Woodham, *Design and Cultural Politics in Postwar Britain: The 'Britain Can Make It' Exhibition of 1946*, (London: Leicester University Press, 1997).

competitive edge in international markets into a two-pronged domestically focused mission: to raise consumer taste and to encourage manufacturers to produce better-designed goods. In its campaign to raise standards in British manufacturing as a matter of civic duty, the CoID followed in the footsteps of other propagandizing organizations established in the first half of the twentieth century such as The Faculty of Royal Designers for Industry, The Design and Industries Association, The Council for Art and Industry, and the Society of Industrial Artists.

The CoID was funded by the Board of Trade, but while the main impetus for improving design standards was economic, the CoID was also a direct descendent of the nineteenth-century design reformists who believed in the power of good design to effect *social* change and to uphold *moral* values. As architecture and design critic Nikolaus Pevsner averred, 'Bad design is just as devastating for people as bad air and over-long hours'.<sup>95</sup>

Design reformists such as John Ruskin and William Morris transposed human virtues to the field of craft production, invoking such tenets as 'truth to materials' and 'honesty of construction' in their efforts to improve the aesthetic quality of the decorative arts and the moral quality of the society in which they were produced.

Ruskin, a leading critic of the Victorian era, saw the state of decorative arts and architecture as indices of the spiritual health of society. He was concerned that Britain's too-rapid industrialization would obliterate its natural landscape with mills, quarries, kilns, coal-pits, and brick-fields. In a lecture at the Bradford School of Design in northern England, he said, 'Unless you provide some elements

---

<sup>95</sup> Nikolaus Pevsner, 'The Visual Arts', Transcript of BBC Radio Third programme, 10 October, 1946, p.4, BBC talks, 1946-1977, Series II, Box 52, Nikolaus Pevsner papers, 1919-1979, The Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles.

of beauty for your workmen to be surrounded by, you will find that no elements of beauty can be invented by them'.<sup>96</sup>

Morris, a socialist writer and designer who became the best-known theorist of the late-nineteenth-century Arts and Crafts movement, also linked aesthetics to social conditions. In a lecture in Burslem, a town at the centre of the Midlands pottery industry, he spoke of the correlation between a beautiful living environment and the creation of beautiful design, conscious that as he spoke he was standing 'in a district that makes as much smoke as pottery'.<sup>97</sup> He proposed that the land would have to be turned from the 'grimy back yard of a workshop' into a 'garden' in order for art to flourish: 'Of all the things that is likely to give us back popular art in England, the cleaning of England is the first and the most necessary'.<sup>98</sup>

The principles of such reformists as Morris and Ruskin had a pervasive legacy due to their extensively published writings and the design-related institutions they helped to shape, and they still informed the tenor of most CoID activities more than half a century later. For example, a 1936 article charting twenty-one years of the Designers and Industries Association devoted a spread to a family tree of influences converging on current DIA exhibitions and publications.<sup>99</sup> At the head of this family tree was a photograph of William Morris. (See Illustration 1) Additionally, Gillian Naylor, an editorial assistant at *Design*, hired in 1956, has recalled the importance of William Morris, specifically, and that, 'once, in an editorial, C.R. Ashbee was spelt Ashby and Gordon Russell, then director of the CoID pointed this out and said, 'These are the people this institution is founded upon and you must at the very least get their names right in the

---

<sup>96</sup> John Ruskin, 'Modern Manufacture and Design', Lecture to Bradford School of Design, 1859, in *The Works of John Ruskin Volume 10*, (London: George Allen, 1878), p. 103.

<sup>97</sup> William Morris, 'Art and the Beauty of the Earth', Lecture delivered at Burslem Town Hall, October 13, 1881, in William Morris, *Art and the Beauty of the Earth* (London: Longmans, 1898), p. 29.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.* p. 23.

<sup>99</sup> *Trend*, Spring 1936, pp. 41-42.

magazine!<sup>100</sup>

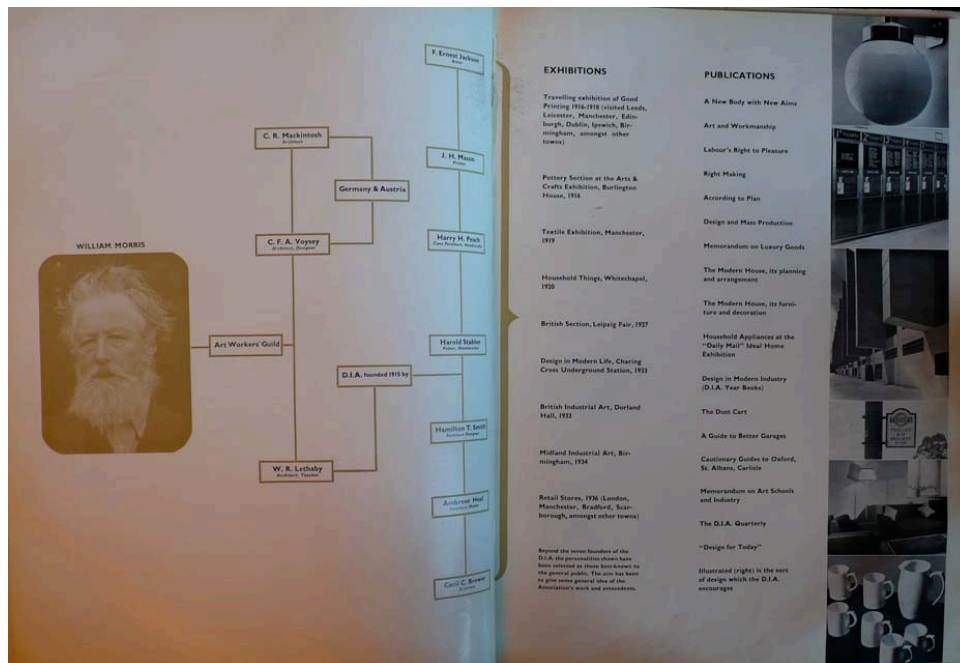


Illustration 1. Spread from *Trend*, Spring 1936, showing the DIA family tree, with William Morris at its head.

Michael Farr, who edited the CoID's journal *Design* from 1952-1959, had studied English Literature at Cambridge, with the literary critic F.R. Leavis.<sup>101</sup> His introduction to design was a kind of trial by fire in the form of a massive study of hundreds of British manufacturers, designers, and retailers, conducted under Nikolaus Pevsner's supervision.<sup>102</sup> This resulted in the book *Design in British Industry: a Mid-Century Survey*, published in 1955. In its introduction Michael Farr revealed his belief, in line with Pevsner's, and echoing those of Morris and Ruskin, that the mission of design reform was inextricably connected to that of social reform:

One cannot approve of thoughtless and insensitive designs. Neither can one approve of dishonest designs, such as a

<sup>100</sup> Gillian Naylor, 'Design magazine, a conversation, 22 September 2003', Chapter 8, *Design and the Modern Magazine*, ed. by Jeremy Aynsley and Kate Forde, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007), p. 165.

<sup>101</sup> Obituary, Michael Farr, *Design*, October 1993, p.6.

<sup>102</sup> Nikolaus Pevsner, who became the Slade Professor of Fine Art at Cambridge in 1949, asked Michael Farr, who had studied English Literature at Cambridge, to write the updated version of his 1937 *Enquiry into Industrial Art in England*, which was published in 1955.



pressed glass bowl trying to look like cut crystal glass, a plastic-covered handbag made to resemble snakeskin, an aluminium teapot masquerading as hand-beaten pewter. In the same way one cannot approve of imitations of period designs. As we shall see, the arbitrary invocation of antique styles is a disease from which few industries are free [...] Such false and meretricious designs attempt to provide a substitute for the needed splendour which all aspects of our environment should be made to concede. The pleasure which most people take in an entertainment so vicarious as the cinema, as well as the pleasure in vulgar and boastful design, is largely accounted for by the universal longing to escape. Looked at from this point of view, the question of industrial art is a social question, it is an integral part of *the* social question of our time. To fight against the shoddy design of those goods by which most of our fellow-men are surrounded becomes a duty.<sup>103</sup>

Farr depicted a designed landscape infected by mass culture and such anti-social values as 'thoughtlessness', 'insensitivity', 'dishonesty', 'falsehood', 'vulgarity', 'boastfulness' and 'shoddiness', all of which he believed it was his 'duty' as a design critic to 'fight against'. Through enumerating the evils of an environment lacking in 'splendour', he conjured a conception of a contrasting ideal society, guided by the direct opposites of such values, namely: honesty, functionality, taste, modesty, and craftsmanship and durability. The ideals expressed in this passage, inherited from the design reformist tradition, as well as the use of the formal, seemingly objective third-person pronoun to express strongly subjective and elitist views, were typical of the prose style in the numerous publications issued by the CoID well into the 1960s.

**'One more word about teapots:' *Design magazine***<sup>104</sup>

*Design magazine*, founded in 1949 as the CoID's journal of record, functioned as another weapon in the Council's propagandist armoury, alongside its exhibitions of good design held at the Design Centre in the Haymarket, London (opened in 1956), its Good Design Award Scheme (begun in 1957), its

<sup>103</sup> Michael Farr, *Design in British Industry: A Mid-Century Survey*, (Cambridge: University Press, 1955), p.xxxvi.

<sup>104</sup> D. M Forrest, Commissioner, The Tea Bureau, 'One more word about teapots', *Design* 82, October 1955, p. 50.

educational films, wall cards, portable box exhibitions, newsletter, joint ventures with the BBC and Penguin Books, and its Design Index (a catalogue of British products which met the Council's selection criteria). The CoID was organized into the Industrial Division and the Information Division, which corresponded to its dual objective of 'the creation of a Supply of good design' and 'the creation of a Demand for good design', respectively.<sup>105</sup> The magazine, which fell under the auspices of the Information Division, reported on consumer goods already endorsed by the Council; as Gillian Naylor remembers it, 'The CoID used to feed us material which they wanted us to feature in the magazine'.<sup>106</sup> The schematic organization of the magazine also derived from the CoID Design Centre, which grouped its objects and design files 'as far as possible to correspond with department store practice'.<sup>107</sup> (See Illustrations 2 and 3)



Illustration 2. Exhibition of 1960 Design Awards, Design Centre, London

<sup>105</sup> 'The Aims and Organization of the Council of Industrial Design', paper prepared for discussion at Regional Controllers' Office, on 8<sup>th</sup> September, 1948, Paul Reilly, design administrator, papers, ca.1920 - ca.1989, Archive of Art and Design, London.

<sup>106</sup> Gillian Naylor, 'Design magazine, a conversation, 22 September 2003', Chapter 8, *Design and the Modern Magazine*, ed. by Jeremy Aynsley and Kate Forde, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007), p. 165.

<sup>107</sup> Council of Industrial Design Memorandum on A Design Centre for British Industry, p. ii, Paul Reilly, design administrator, papers, ca.1920 - ca.1989, Archive of Art and Design, London.



Illustration 3. Design Index, Design Centre, London

Design historian Paul Burall has pointed out that the CoID's main role was 'to define and extol "good" design in order to try and persuade the British public that modern design was what people should be buying'.<sup>108</sup> 'Appropriate materials', 'good appearance', 'good workmanship', 'suitability for purpose', and 'pleasure in use' were some of the recurring criteria by which examples of 'good design' were selected for the Council's Design Index and, by extrapolation, for inclusion in the magazine. A 1954 Readership Survey revealed that its readers were not particularly inspired by the magazine's reliance on the unexplained absolute of 'good design' for its editorial decision-making. The survey makers summarized the readers' responses by saying, 'There is a good deal of demand for articles presenting points of view other than an "official" one'.<sup>109</sup> It is also telling that the survey found that the most popular section in a magazine devoted to the improvement of British product design was the 'Foreign Review'.<sup>110</sup>

<sup>108</sup> Paul Burall, 'The Official Critic: Irrelevant or Critical?' in *Design Issues*, Vol. 13. No. 2, 'A Critical Condition: Design and its Criticism', Summer 1997, p. 37.

<sup>109</sup> 'Interim Notes on the Editorial Contents of Design', Prepared by Mass Observation Ltd., December 13 1954, Design Council Archive, The University of Brighton Design Archives, Brighton.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid.

The readership survey also reveals that very few members of the 'British public' were actually reading *Design*. Its readership was comprised mainly of designers and educators and it was only available at specialist bookstores and through subscription. Of its 13,600 readers in 1960, the highest percentage worked in the furniture and appliances sector, and the second-highest readership was from educational establishments.<sup>111</sup> And yet, since few other British publications of the period were singly focused on contemporary industrial design, *Design*, filled a significant gap in the market for coverage of industrial and product design.<sup>112</sup>

The other articles in the February 1960 issue, in which Hamilton's unorthodox article was published, included a piece on street furniture with an introduction by the Minister of Transport; an article about a stool designed to help factory workers move between work stations; and a report about design in Czechoslovakia.<sup>113</sup> (See Illustrations 4 and 5)

---

<sup>111</sup> 'A Report on Design Readership', Prepared by Mass Observation Ltd., August 1961, Design Council Archive, The University of Brighton Design Archives, Brighton.

<sup>112</sup> Among those that devoted coverage to the topic were *Art and Industry* (1936–1958), a private publication mainly focused on commercial art, *House and Garden*, with an emphasis on antiques, *The Architect's Journal* which considered industrial design from an architect's point of view, and *The Architectural Review* (1897–) which ran a 'Design Review' section and published irregular special issues on industrial design (December 1935 and October 1946) edited by Nikolaus Pevsner and Sadie Speight.

<sup>113</sup> *Design* had become interested in human factors (what would later be known as ergonomics), and devoted many articles to this topic. As Blake recalled, 'By the early sixties [...] articles looked at the needs of consumers [...] much attention was devoted to ergonomics, then emerging as a practical science that could describe more precisely the physical and psychological needs of people'. John Blake, 'Towards a New Editorial Strategy', Memo, October 1976, Design Council Archive, Design History Research Centre, University of Brighton.

**Design**

134 February 1960

EDITOR *John E. Blyde*  
 EDITORIAL ADVISERS *Paul Boffy*  
*J. Noel White*  
*Michael Furey*  
 ART EDITOR *Kenneth Garland*  
 ASSISTANT EDITOR *Malcolm J. Brookes*  
 EDITORIAL ASSISTANT *Gillian E. Naylor*  
 PRODUCTION *Ashley Haxton*  
 STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER *Alfred Lammner*  
 BUSINESS MANAGER *Arthur Sully*

OVERSEAS  
 correspondents  
 AUSTRALIA *Kath Newman*  
 AUSTRIA *Bettina Horak*  
 BELGIUM *Loni Drummay*  
 CANADA *John Kettle*  
 DENMARK *Bi Tine Mørch*  
 FINLAND *Olof Gunnarsson*  
 FRANCE *Roger Cario*  
 GERMANY *Heinrich König*  
 HOLLAND *Nico Tolboom*  
 ITALY *Letizia Fratelli Panti*  
 JAPAN *Hiroki Yamamoto*  
 NEW ZEALAND *Victor Bodean*  
 NORWAY *Ferdinand Aars*  
 SOUTH AFRICA *Charles Winckley*  
 SWEDEN *Ewa Ruff*  
 SWITZERLAND *Alfred Hiltner*  
 U.S.A. *Luzette Van Hecke*

25 **Consumers in danger**  
 27 **New chairman**  
 28 **Persuading image** *Richard Hamilton*  
 Faced with mass markets and mass media the designer must adjust himself to a new set of values. The author discusses the values of the '60s, as they were reflected in the pages of American magazines. He suggests that the 'sixties will bring a wider use of psychological techniques to design the consumer to the product  
 33 **Street furniture** *Peter Whitworth*  
 In a foreword specially written for DESIGN, the Rt Hon Ernest Marples MP, Minister of Transport, introduces a progress report on current designs for street furniture  
 40 **Review of current design**  
 44 **Design analysis 17: cup and saucer in melamine** *L. Bruce Archer*  
 The design of a new range of plastics cups and saucers is radically different from traditional shapes. The comments of users in seven households indicate that the new design concept is welcome, but falls short of the ideal in some respects. The manufacturer's comments are on page 47  
 48 **The double dividend** *Robin Darwin*  
 The principal of the Royal College of Art discusses the implications, for both art schools and industrialists, of an exhibition of work by the staff of L.C.C. Central School of Arts and Crafts  
 51 **Extended sitting** *W. F. Floyd*  
 Many jobs in factories and elsewhere can be done by a seated operator but the work layout may demand movement from one working point to another, so discouraging sitting. The stool discussed in this article will help to overcome this problem  
 54 **Overseas review**  
 Czechoslovakia: new standards in the making *Bernard Orszag*  
 A growing awareness of design is leading Czechoslovakia to a position where she can exert a strong influence on other eastern European countries  
 Directions: a miscellany of new products and ideas from abroad  
 63 **Reports**  
 65 **Miscellany**  
 67 **News** 73 **Letters** 75 **Books**

Addresses of British manufacturers in this issue are on page 75

Editorial Circulation Advertisements Council of Industrial Design, The Design Centre, 28 Haymarket, London SW1 Tel: TR 4dgar 8000 AND the Council of Industrial Design Scottish Committee, Scottish Design Centre, 46 West George Street, Glasgow G2 Tel: DOWGLAS 2914  
 Design may be obtained from booksellers at home and abroad or from the addresses above.  
 Yearly subscription rate: UK 96p post free

Illustration 4. Contents page of *Design*, February 1960

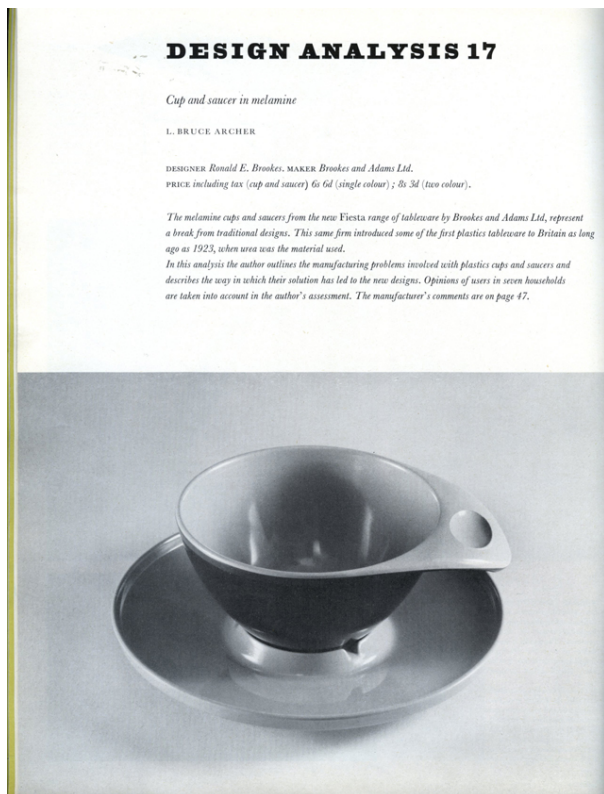


Illustration 5. First page of Bruce Archer's review of Melamine cup and saucer. *Design*, February 1960.



These kinds of informative, but rather dry, articles about aspects of design's application to British industry were a mainstay of the magazine at the time. The showcased projects tended to be worthy municipal initiatives, evaluated through the good design lens, in earnest, sometimes hectoring language, illustrated with black-and-white photographs. Bruce Archer's analysis of a new range of melamine cups and saucers represents the extreme of a quasi-scientific approach to design evaluation that pervaded the magazine. Archer, who sought to bring the robustness of his engineering background to bear upon design criticism, started a series of 'Design Analysis' in 1957. He took on one product every other month and used a set of concrete standards he had developed in order to measure the worth of its design. 'By selecting one product at a time,' Farr reflected of the project, 'it shows how the design stands up to technical cross-examination at the manufacturing stages, and functional analysis at the point of use.'<sup>114</sup>

The left-wing poet, essayist, and former editor of *Encounter* magazine, Stephen Spender, in a 1958 speech to the Society of Industrial Artists, crystallized mounting unease among the design-conscious public about CoID's stultifying bias toward functionalism. Spender saw too many designed goods 'pincered' between the 'two extremes of utilitarian functionalism – the airplane on one flank and the kitchen utensil on the other'.<sup>115</sup> He listed the visual attributes of functionalism as 'bareness, simplicity, squareness or roundness, solidity, seriousness' and warned that saying the functional is beautiful (a message often contained in the pages of *Design* magazine) is really a sleight of hand. He continued:

I know the objection to my way of thinking. It is that designers are designing today for socialized welfare state man, leading him down the Welwyn Garden path, educating him gently with discourse piped from the Third Programme. None must talk too loud, no one must flash a light too brightly in his eyes, there must be no violent splashes of colour, he must

---

<sup>114</sup> Michael Farr, *Design in British Industry: A Mid-Century Survey*, (Cambridge: University Press, 1955), p.208.

<sup>115</sup> Stephen Spender, 'Thoughts on Design in Everyday Life', Design Oration of the Society of Industrial Artists, 1958, excerpted on the 'Clips and Quotes' page in *Industrial Design*, March 1959, p. 8.

be anaesthetised with good taste, and who but the British, with the British Council, the Arts Council, the Third Programme, the Design Centre, panethol, chlorophyll, Dettol, know most about disinfectants and anaesthetics.<sup>116</sup>

### **A challenge to the taste anaesthetists**

Only a year later along came a writer more than willing to talk loudly, flash lights, and splash colour in the faces of the taste anaesthetists at the CoID. With his 'Persuading Image' article, Richard Hamilton upset the delicate balance of good taste, belief in the conflation of usefulness and beauty, and adherence to design reform social values that the CoID had endeavoured to maintain in the post-war years.

Hamilton, was born in London, the son of a car showroom driver, and disparately schooled in art at a variety of adult education evening classes, the Royal Academy Schools and, when they closed in 1940, in engineering draughtsmanship at a Government Training Centre, and finally at the Slade. In the late 1950s, Hamilton was developing a new art practice inspired by popular culture and a writing practice through which he tested his ideas. Recalling his life at the time, he said in 2007:

Why was I going to the cinema three times a week, and reading *Esquire* and *Life* magazine and then going home to the studio and painting monochrome squares and hard-edged abstraction? It didn't seem to fit. So I tried to incorporate the material I was interested in – the sociological aspects of current living – and create a kind of aesthetic which would enable me to produce a painting that I felt reflected the situation in which I found myself. Writing helped me work through these ideas.<sup>117</sup>

The 'Persuading Image' article was based on a lecture titled 'The Designed Image of the Fifties' that Hamilton had delivered in 1959 at the ICA to members of The Independent Group. This loose-knit salon included artists, critics, and architects Lawrence Alloway, Reyner Banham, Theo Crosby, and Alison and Peter Smithson. The group had been meeting since

---

<sup>116</sup> Ibid.

<sup>117</sup> Richard Hamilton, personal interview, 23 February, 2007.

1952 to plan exhibitions and discuss ideas about the machine aesthetic, science fiction, communication theory, and other aspects of pop culture, specifically American pop culture, as a rebuttal to prevailing standards of good taste in 1950s Britain, and in particular those of the founders of the ICA, the critics and collectors of modern art Herbert Read and Roland Penrose.<sup>118</sup>

The Independent Group discussions were motivated by an impulse to break down the divide between high and low culture. Group members prided themselves on being genuinely interested in, and bone fide childhood consumers of, what Banham termed 'the popular arts of motorized, mechanized cultures [...] like the cinema, picture magazines, science fiction, comic books, radio television, dance music, sport'.<sup>119</sup> Alloway, in particular, theorized this position vis-à-vis the popular arts. In his 1959 article 'The Long Front of Culture', he presented a conceptual model that conceived of culture existing along a horizontal spectrum, rather than stacked in a hierarchical pyramid, with mass culture at the bottom and refined high culture at the top: 'unique oil paintings and highly personal poems as well as mass-distributed films and group-aimed magazines can be placed within a continuum rather than frozen in layers in a pyramid'.<sup>120</sup> Alloway's article dismantled the idea that the arts were the exclusive possession of an elite, and that permanence and uniqueness should be the only criteria by which the value of material culture might be judged.

Among the influential exhibitions the Independent Group organized, with Alloway's premise at their centres, were: 'Man Machine and Motion' (ICA, 1955), in which Hamilton attached blown-up photographs of machines in use to a modular steel frame; 'This Is Tomorrow' (Whitechapel Gallery, 1956), in which Crosby coordinated twelve teams of artists and

---

<sup>118</sup> David Robbins, ed., *The Independent Group: Postwar Britain and the Aesthetics of Plenty* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1990), p. 28.

<sup>119</sup> Reyner Banham, 'A Throw-away Esthetic', *Industrial Design*, March 1960, p. 64. (Originally published as 'Industrial Design and Popular Art' in *Civiltà delle Macchine*, November 1955).

<sup>120</sup> Lawrence Alloway, 'The Long Front of Culture', *Cambridge Opinion*, no.17, 1959, pp. 25-6.



architects who each explored through mixed media different aspects of the future; and 'House of the Future' (Ideal Home Exhibition, Olympia, 1956), the Smithsons' projection of domestic life in the year 1980 in the form of a one-bedroom house made largely of plastic and incorporating a garden in its interior. These exhibitions reached a wider public than the Group's internal discussions, and when the Group disbanded in the 1960s their sensitivity to popular culture was credited with paving the way for the development of a British Pop Art movement.<sup>121</sup>

The Independent Group also arranged a series of lectures for small groups of invited guests, including expositions on Elvis and on violence in the cinema. Hamilton's lecture 'The Design Image of the Fifties' investigated appliances such as washing machines, vacuum cleaners, radios, and refrigerators and the role of advertising in creating the image of these consumer goods. 'It was about advertising as much as the goods themselves', Hamilton said.<sup>122</sup>

Hamilton described his ICA presentation as being rather 'exotic'. He had three projectors and three screens, one of which took up the whole of the back wall of the ICA room, then located at 17-18 Dover Street. This format was his response to the multi-screen film *Glimpses of the U.S.A.*, produced by the American designers Charles and Ray Eames for the 1959 American National Exhibition in Moscow, in which 2,200 images were projected on seven twenty-by-thirty-foot screens, and which had been published in the April 1959 issue of the American *Industrial Design* magazine. 'In my modest little way I was trying to catch up with the avant-garde', Hamilton recalled.<sup>123</sup> Hamilton had consulted *Industrial Design* in the US Embassy

---

<sup>121</sup> This founding story, perpetuated by Alloway and Banham in their retrospective accounts during the 1960s, has since been reconsidered, especially by the work of design historians Penny Sparke and Anne Massey, who suggest that the working class interests and supposedly radical output of the Group were complicated by a deep engagement with European modernism. See: Anne Massey, *The Independent Group: Modernism and Mass Culture, 1945-59*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995) and Anne Massey and Penny Sparke, 'The Myth of the Independent Group', *Block*, 10, 1985, pp. 48-56.

<sup>122</sup> Richard Hamilton, personal interview, 23 February, 2007.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid.

Library on Grosvenor Square. In its pages, he found the consumer appliances that featured in his lecture and article and would feed other aspects of his work.

### **How to design a consumer for a product**

Hamilton's lecture and article described how the image of America's opulent 1950s was one constructed by a sophisticated image industry.<sup>124</sup> He examined the relationship between designers, manufacturers, publicists, magazine editors, and consumers, and how the image functioned at each juncture of the production, distribution, and consumption of goods. He was particularly impressed by the ways in which manufacturers hired image-makers to manipulate consumers to buy the products they had already created: an efficient system where 'the consumer can come from the same drawing board' as the product.<sup>125</sup>

Hamilton argued that while the British design student was being taught to 'respect his job, to be interested in the form of the object for its own sake as a solution to given engineering and design problems', social and economic realities had effected a complete reversal of these values. What his American counterpart realized was that the most important aspects of design were not appearance or usefulness, but rather the sustainability of production and consumption. Hamilton recounted how American designers had developed 'a new respect for the ability of big business to raise living standards', and big business now appreciated 'the part that design has to play in sales promotion'.<sup>126</sup> In Hamilton's view, the virtue of American industrial design was that it had come 'to terms with a mass society' in ways that British designers still seemed incapable of. Functionality now had to encompass how well a product was working in the market.

---

<sup>124</sup> The theme of the 1959 International Design Conference at Aspen was 'Communication: The Image Speaks'. The proceedings were published in the August 1959 issue of *Industrial Design*, and could, therefore, have informed Hamilton's article.

<sup>125</sup> Richard Hamilton, 'Persuading Image', *Design* 134, February 1960, p. 32.

<sup>126</sup> *Ibid.* p. 29.

Hamilton's article was conspicuous in the pages of *Design* through its role as a conduit for American perspectives on economic and social practices. The idea, for example, that manufacturing efficiency and national prosperity were contingent upon accelerated obsolescence had been propounded by American economists like Peter Drucker.<sup>127</sup> The sentiment that 'we are obligated to work on obsolescence as our contribution to a healthy, growing society' was typical of a kind of growth-based thinking in late 1950s America.<sup>128</sup> Hamilton had read the articles of American industrial designer George Nelson. In his 1956 article on 'Obsolescence', Nelson had explained that America's wealth was dependent on its wastefulness, which enabled mass production at an ever-increasing pace and 'provides a way of getting a maximum of goods to a maximum of people'.<sup>129</sup> Nelson astutely characterized the European view of this situation as 'a blend of appalled curiosity, downright disbelief, righteous indignation and envy'.<sup>130</sup> What he did not foresee is what would happen when a self-proclaimed 'intellectual' artist like Hamilton added his ambivalent stance to that mix. Hamilton seemed convinced that rapid large-scale consumption improved manufacturing processes and boosted industry, deducing that 'increased productive capacity is a basic social good.'<sup>131</sup> And in fact, the righteously indignant response to the issue came from an American, the journalist Vance Packard, whose book *The Waste Makers*, a hard-hitting social critique of planned obsolescence, was published in 1960 and crystallized concern over the contribution of planned obsolescence to a perceived crisis of American cultural values.

Hamilton applauded the way in which American industrial design had come to terms with mass society and 'big business' (a term Hamilton had used in his 1957 enumeration of the qualities of

---

<sup>127</sup> Peter Drucker, 'The Promise of the Next 20 Years', *Harper's Bazaar*, April 1955.

<sup>128</sup> Peter Drucker quoted in Vance Packard, *The Waste Makers*, (Brooklyn: Ig publishing, 2011), p. 66.

<sup>129</sup> George Nelson, 'Obsolescence', *Industrial Design*, December 1956, p. 88.

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid.* p. 81.

<sup>131</sup> Richard Hamilton, 'Persuading Image: A Symposium', *Design* 138, June 1960, p. 57.

the emerging genre of Pop Art).<sup>132</sup> 'Even the production of goods of dubious value, is, in the long term, likely to benefit society', he argued.<sup>133</sup> 'Change is most likely to occur in those objects that least deserve to live', Hamilton opined in another article about obsolescence, demonstrating his belief in the tenets of free-market economics.<sup>134</sup> He was frustrated by the slow uptake of such ideas on his side of the Atlantic.

Most other writers published in *Design* displayed a preference for pure forms dictated by function, natural materials, craftsmanship, and the work of Scandinavian designers, for example. Hamilton, by contrast, provided a glimpse of the economic reality in which mass-produced design actually operated. He conceived of industrial designers not as craftspeople but as canny commercial operators, describing them variously as 'marketing aids', 'men who establish the visual criteria', operators of 'the machinery of motivation control', and collaborators with 'ad-man, copywriter and feature editor'.<sup>135</sup>

Hamilton admired the people who knowingly constructed the 'designed image of our present society' in the pages of 'glossy magazines'. These were the very images, after all, that provided Hamilton and other members of the Independent Group with such a rich source of raw material for their discussions and artwork. He talked of their creators' 'skill and imagination' and 'wit', and quoted their slogans – 'plush at popular prices' – surely aware of the goading effects such language would have on *Design* magazine's readership.<sup>136</sup> Even the very use of the word 'glossy' would have triggered complex

---

<sup>132</sup> 'Pop Art is: Popular (designed for a mass audience), transient (short term solution), expendable (easily forgotten), low cost, mass produced, young (aimed at youth), witty, sexy, gimmicky, glamorous, big business'. Richard Hamilton, 'Pop Art Is', unpublished, 1957 in Richard Hamilton, *Collected Words*, (London: Thames & Hudson, 1983) p. 24.

<sup>133</sup> Richard Hamilton, 'Persuading Image: A Symposium', *Design* 138, June 1960, p. 57.

<sup>134</sup> Richard Hamilton, 'Artificial Obsolescence' in *Collected Words*, (London: Thames & Hudson, 1983) p. 155. Originally published in *Product Design Engineering*, January 1963.

<sup>135</sup> Richard Hamilton, 'Persuading Image', *Design* 134, February 1960, pp. 28-32.

<sup>136</sup> *Ibid.*

reactions in post-war Britain. Paper rationing continued in Britain for several years after the end of the war and even by 1960 British magazines were rarely printed on gloss paper. Hamilton was using the word to describe American mainstream magazines such as *Life*, *Look*, and *Esquire*. But he was also aware of the pejorative nature of the term's metaphoric connotations in a post-war Britain fearful of Americanizing influences of 'ersatz' and 'candy-floss' mass arts on the previously 'organic' expressions and 'oral traditions' of working-class culture, as left-wing sociologist Richard Hoggart had termed them.<sup>137</sup> In the 1957 book *The Uses of Literacy* Hoggart used the term 'glossy' as a negative label for the kinds of furniture shops, novelettes, and magazines he believed were exerting such a worrying influence on British society. In describing monthly pin-up magazines, he wrote, 'The 'cheesecake' is a little more advanced than most newspapers would be prepared to print at present, and especially well photographed on glossy paper'.<sup>138</sup> The 1961 *Design* Readership report, produced after Hamilton's article had been published, revealed that some *Design* readers considered that the magazine was becoming 'too glossy'. The director of a firm producing tubular steel products opined, 'There is too much window-dressing by art people and it has gone off the functional idea. It is tending to become an art-glossy'.<sup>139</sup>

Hamilton was keen to draw a distinction between the popular arts, 'in the old sense of arising from the masses', and his own conception of a more industrialized and calculated pop art, which he saw as stemming 'from a professional group with a highly-developed cultural sensibility'.<sup>140</sup> In a 1960 lecture at the National Union of Teachers conference, Hamilton re-emphasized the difference between unsophisticated working class popular arts such as club singing, on the one hand, and

---

<sup>137</sup> Richard Hoggart, *The Uses of Literacy*, (London: Penguin Books, 1992). First published (London: Chatto & Windus, 1957).

<sup>138</sup> Ibid. p. 215.

<sup>139</sup> 'A Report on *Design* Readership', Prepared by Mass Observation Ltd., August 1961, p. 13. Design Council Archive, The University of Brighton Design Archives, Brighton.

<sup>140</sup> Richard Hamilton, 'Persuading Image', *Design* 134, February 1960, p. 31.

the current manifestations of the commercially-driven, urbane pop culture he was so fascinated by, on the other: 'The analysts of popular culture in recent years have been negative in their approach. Whyte, Packard and Hoggart, whose ideas as we know have been given full rein in the mass media, are unanimous in their condemnation [of 'gloss, glamour and professionalism'.] The story is the same: the end of the world is upon us unless we purge ourselves of the evils of soft living and reject the drive for social and economic advantages'.<sup>141</sup>

The title of Hamilton's *Design* article, 'Persuading Image', evokes the title of American social critic Vance Packard's 1957 book *The Hidden Persuaders*, a best-selling critique of Motivation Research (MR), a practice being used by the American advertising and marketing industries to 'depth-probe' the consumer psyche. Based on methods used by the government during World War II, which drew on the depth psychology of Freud, but also sociological and anthropological research techniques, MR attempted to ascertain the effects of consumers' psychological weaknesses on their buying habits. Packard identified eight 'compelling needs', including secret hostilities, guilty feelings, and sexual impulses, that marketers convinced people they might fulfil through the products they bought. 'These depth manipulators are, in their operations, beneath the surface of conscious life, starting to acquire a power of persuasion that is becoming a matter of justifiable public scrutiny', wrote Packard.<sup>142</sup> Hamilton, on the other hand, thought that 'the effect of this criticism of our culture, coloured as it is by the hysterical overtones of its re-interpretation within the mass media, has been to create an atmosphere of unrest, which can itself be dangerous'.<sup>143</sup> His use of the word 'Persuading' in his title

---

<sup>141</sup> Richard Hamilton, 'Popular Culture and Personal Responsibility', lecture at National Union of Teachers Conference, October 26–28, 1960, in Richard Hamilton, *Collected Words*, (London: Thames & Hudson, 1983) p. 155.

<sup>142</sup> Vance Packard, *The Hidden Persuaders*, (London: Pelican, 1962) p. 16.

<sup>143</sup> Richard Hamilton, 'Popular Culture and Personal Responsibility' lecture at National Union of Teachers Conference, October 26–28, 1960, in Richard Hamilton, *Collected Words*, (London: Thames & Hudson, 1983) p. 155.

invoked Packard's work, therefore, but not its moral viewpoints.

Equally provocative to *Design's* readership, perhaps, was Hamilton's use of the word 'Image' in the title. At *Design*, there was a suspicion of the visual image; the technical and functional attributes of products were always stressed as if in compensation for the superficial allure of their visual appearance. In a review of two graphic design exhibitions held in London in 1960, for example, John Blake observed of an image's need to compete for attention with its neighbour, 'there is a danger in such demands for attention, for the designer is tempted either to produce work that is vulgar or, in escaping from this, to resort to sophisticated pattern-making'.<sup>144</sup> Suspicion of the image in *Design* tended to be conflated with suspicion of American culture and design. In Blake's review of an exhibition of American design held at the US Trade Center in London, he revealed resentment at the commercial nature of American packaging design, concluding that there was little on display 'that would have been acceptable to even the most catholic of British selection panels'.<sup>145</sup> He added that the difference between a British and an American designer lay in the fact that the latter was 'untroubled by the pangs of conscience that afflict at least some of his European colleagues'.<sup>146</sup> This anti-American sentiment was widespread in British commentary of the period, a residue from Britain's comparative decline after the war. American popular culture was a blatant reminder of the country's global economic dominance. Cultural critic Raymond Williams wrote in 1962 that the very worst of the mass media 'is American in origin. At certain levels we are culturally an American colony [...] To go pseudo-American is a way out of the English complex of class and culture, but of course it solves nothing; it merely ritualises the emptiness and despair'.<sup>147</sup>

---

<sup>144</sup> John Blake, 'Communication and Persuasion', *Design* 140, August 1960, p. 34.

<sup>145</sup> John Blake, 'American Design in London', *Design* 200, August 1965, p. 53.

<sup>146</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>147</sup> Raymond Williams, *Britain in the Sixties: Communications*, (London: Penguin, 1964, p. 75.

For Hamilton, however, the constructed image was far from sinister. The exchange of art-directed images was a shared connection among his peers, who were obsessed by 'pin-board culture'. 'We would walk into the houses of friends and find we all had exactly the same picture', he said. 'There was a picture of an American model wearing a backless dress, showing her backside cleavage, which was very venturesome. That was on everyone's pin boards'.<sup>148</sup> The image of swimwear model Vicky Dougan's back, framed by a low-cut white dress, used to illustrate 'Persuading Image', was clipped from *Esquire* and was reworked for the artwork Hamilton created between 1958 and 1961 titled '\$he'. (See Illustrations 6 and 7)

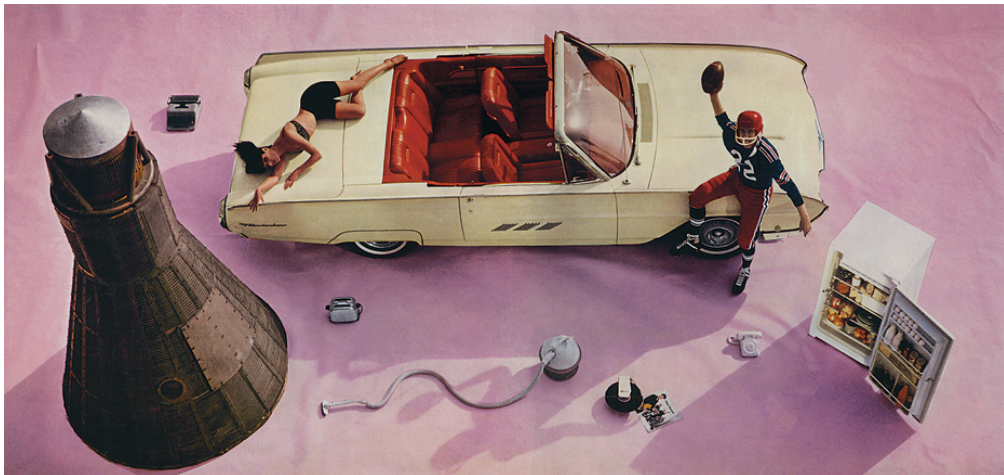


Illustration 6. Richard Hamilton's self-portrait created for the cover of a 1963 ICA publication titled *Living Arts*. The image, photographed from above by photojournalist Robert Freeman, features a 1963 Ford Thunderbird with a lingerie model sprawled on the back and a male model wearing an American football uniform leaning on the hood, a Mercury spacecraft capsule on loan from Shepperton Film Studios, a refrigerator stuffed with American food, a Wondergram, a vacuum cleaner, telephone, typewriter, and toaster—all arranged on a background of high-gloss pink paper.

<sup>148</sup> Richard Hamilton, personal interview, 23 February, 2007.



<b>Cover credits</b>	
Producer	Richard Hamilton
Photographer	Robert Freeman
Stylist	Betsy Scherman
Model	Jenny Freeth
Lingerie	Silhouette Corsets
Football uniform	Pan Pacific Co + American High School
63 Ford Thunderbird	Lincoln Cars Ltd
Mercury capsule	Shepperton Film Studio
Refrigerator	Roy Moore (Hire) Ltd
Display foods	Pytram Ltd
Wondergram	Sherbourne TV Service
Background paper	Allied Paper Merchants
Site	Taylor Woodrow Construction Limited
Vantage point	Spillers Ltd

Illustration 7. In a 14-item list of the crew and props it took to produce the image, printed on the magazine's title page, Hamilton credits the photographer and the stylist, and lists himself as the 'producer' of the image—a label notably different from those used by British designers and commentators of the period.

#### **'Stirring the pot of controversy'<sup>149</sup>**

Considering how divergent Hamilton's article was from CoID's values and *Design's* typical content, why did the magazine's editor commission the piece? By 1960, Paul Reilly, who had worked at the CoID since 1948, succeeded Gordon Russell as director, and Michael Farr, who had edited *Design* since 1952, became Chief Information Officer, handing the magazine's editorship to his deputy editor, John E. Blake.<sup>150</sup> In February 1960 Blake had only been editor of *Design* for a couple of months but had been deputy editor for several years before that.<sup>151</sup> It is possible that, with the publication of this piece, he was trying to define a new direction for the magazine and stake out the different terms of his editorship.

<sup>149</sup> Ken Garland, quoted in Michael Farr, obituary, *Design*, October 1993, p. 6.

<sup>150</sup> Council of Industrial Design Newsletter, December 1959, p. 2.

<sup>151</sup> John Blake had studied in the School of Woods, Metals and Plastics at the Royal College of Art and was introduced to writing and then editing through working on *ARK*, the college publication.

Blake made his views on criticism explicit in an editorial introduction, where he reaffirmed *Design's* intention to evaluate design based on an analysis of the distance between 'the promise of the product's appearance' and its actual ease of use.<sup>152</sup> He referred to 'testing' but distinguished *Design's* role from that of bodies such as the Consumers' Association, founded in 1957 (which subjected products to rigorous laboratory testing). He wrote, 'Our intention is less to provide a guide to what is best on the market than to suggest, through a close study of individual products, what are the things that really matter in design, and consequently what are those areas of investigation and research which are of most concern to designers and manufacturers'.<sup>153</sup> He saw design criticism less as a type of social criticism, as his predecessors had, but rather as an evaluative activity tied closely to the relationship between product aesthetics and performance.

It is likely that it was the newly departed editor, Farr, who asked Hamilton to convert the ICA lecture into an article.<sup>154</sup> In his new role as Chief of the Information Division at CoID, and as Blake's mntor, Farr was certainly in a position to influence Blake's decision-making in the transitional months of his editorship.

Most historical accounts portray *Design* as merely a propagandist 'mouthpiece' of the CoID, and there are certainly grounds for this view in the close parallels between CoID's values and the content of the magazine.<sup>155</sup> Still, there was a

---

<sup>152</sup> John Blake, 'The Case for Criticism', Comment, *Design* 137, May 1960, p. 43.

<sup>153</sup> Ibid.

The Consumers' Association, a product-testing and consumer advocacy charity, was set up in 1957, championed by Michael Young, research director for the Labour Party, and encouraged by the work of the American Consumers Union which had been active since the 1930s. In October 1957 the Consumers Association launched a publication, *Which?*, with the aim of improving the standard of goods and services available to the public in the UK. The publication started as a small 32-page magazine that included reports on electric kettles, sunglasses, aspirin, cake-mixes, scouring powders, no-iron cottons and British cars. By 1959, membership had reached 150,000.

<sup>154</sup> Ken Garland, personal interview, 14 February, 2007.

<sup>155</sup> For example: 'Design magazine, official mouthpiece of the Council of Industrial Design', Rick Poyner, 'First Things First', *Émigré* 51, 1999; 'Design, the mouthpiece of CoID', Patrick Joseph Macguire and Jonathan Woodham, *Design and Cultural Politics in Postwar Britain*, (London: T&T

tension at play in the pages of *Design* between the principles of CoID-endorsed good design on the one hand and the imperatives of critical journalism on the other. The editors were often under pressure from the Council's Information Division to include in the magazine CoID-approved consumer goods and especially those manufactured by its trustees who were also advertisers and thus among CoID's sources of income.<sup>156</sup> By the early 1960s, advertising had assumed an increased influence in the magazine's editorial content. Particularly objectionable to the management were articles that seemed in any way 'anti-British industry' and the fact that *Design's* editorial was increasingly devoted to 'overseas material', which presents 'an almost hopeless task for gaining advertisements'.<sup>157</sup> But editors like Farr and his mentee Blake had a journalistic appreciation for controversy and saw their role as injecting lively debate into the journal's pages.

According to *Design's* art director Ken Garland, Farr's own inclinations were towards human-factors design – and he was most comfortable working with writers like Christopher Jones, Brian Shackel, and Bruce Archer, who held similar views.<sup>158</sup> He also 'relished stirring the pot of controversy', Garland wrote.<sup>159</sup> Farr was interested enough in other design and consumer magazines to instruct Garland to prepare for him a monthly report on them. Prior to joining *Design*, Farr had also worked as News Editor for *The Architect's Journal* and *The Architectural Review*.<sup>160</sup> In *Architectural Review* during 1959 and 1960, critical debates were signalled with the use of yellow paper stock, red type, and attention-grabbing typographic devices such as starbursts, enlarged quote marks,

---

Clark, 1997); 'CoID's official mouthpiece, *Design Magazine*', Judy Attfield, *Utility Reassessed* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999) p. 55.

<sup>156</sup> Memos and Minutes of *Design* magazine meetings, 1954–1978, Design Council Archive, The University of Brighton Design Archives, Brighton.

<sup>157</sup> Memo from Mr. Tree to Mr. Hughes-Stanton, 26, June 1969, Memos and Minutes of *Design* magazine meetings, 1954–1978, Design Council Archive, The University of Brighton Design Archives, Brighton.

<sup>158</sup> In 1961 Bruce Archer was appointed guest professor at the Hochschule für Gestaltung at Ulm where he lectured for four months in the industrial design department on design criticism and design analysis.

<sup>159</sup> Ken Garland, quoted in Michael Farr, obituary, *Design*, October 1993, p.6.

<sup>160</sup> Interview with Michael Farr, 15 August 1991, Archive of Art & Design, AAD 7–1989. The collection of *Architectural Review* magazines housed in the V&A's National Art Library was donated by Michael Farr.

and arrows, and led to heated letters printed in subsequent issues.<sup>161</sup> It is probable, therefore, that in asking writers like Richard Hamilton, Reyner Banham, and Lawrence Alloway to contribute to *Design* articles that challenged CoID's worldview, Farr and Blake were seeking to emulate *Architectural Review's* debate-generating strategy in the hope of gaining more readers.

**The image of 'Persuading Image' (See Illustration 8)**

Within the pages of the February 1960 issue of *Design* Hamilton's article was emphatically flagged. It was the lead article. Its first page was printed on bright yellow paper, and colour tints were used, at a time when colour only tended to appear in the magazine when manufacturers paid for it in order to better show off their products.<sup>162</sup> Garland recalls that the bolding of key phrases, such as 'control of the consumer' and 'plush at popular prices' was to 'enliven and emphasize' the text and was done in consultation with Hamilton.<sup>163</sup> Hamilton's use of imagery was also unique within the pages of *Design*. The images he and Garland selected to illustrate his piece floated alongside the text allusively rather than as directly referenced examples. Also floating were Hamilton's enigmatic captions, which quoted advertising slogans and editorial hyperbole, as a form of poetry. Beneath a selection of images of car detailing and a page excerpted from *Look* magazine, for example, is the text: "'Functionalism is not enough for Americans", says the page from *Look*, and the automobile body designer knows it. High fashion stylists in metal use the symbols of speed, sex and status to gain sales appeal'.<sup>164</sup> (See Illustration 9) This kind of unfiltered sampling of American advertising and editorial language sits

<sup>161</sup> *Architectural Review* initiated a 'Criticism' section in June 1951.

<sup>162</sup> Memos and Minutes of *Design* magazine meetings, 1954-1978, Design Council Archive, The University of Brighton Design Archives, Brighton.

<sup>163</sup> Ken Garland, personal interview, 14 February, 2007.

Like Hamilton, Garland was a fan of the American magazines *Interiors* and *Industrial Design*. He recalled, 'if I had a model it would be these magazines [...] we used to receive these publications with great eagerness each month'. Ken Garland, 'Design magazine, a conversation, 22 September 2003', Chapter 8, *Design and the Modern Magazine*, ed. by Jeremy Aynsley and Kate Forde, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007), p. 171.

<sup>164</sup> Richard Hamilton, 'Persuading Image', *Design* 134, February 1960, p. 29.

uneasily in the pages of *Design* but found a more fitting home in Hamilton's artworks and more creative pieces of writing (such as his 'Urbane Image' article published in *Living Arts* in 1963), where ambiguity lends the works their tension.

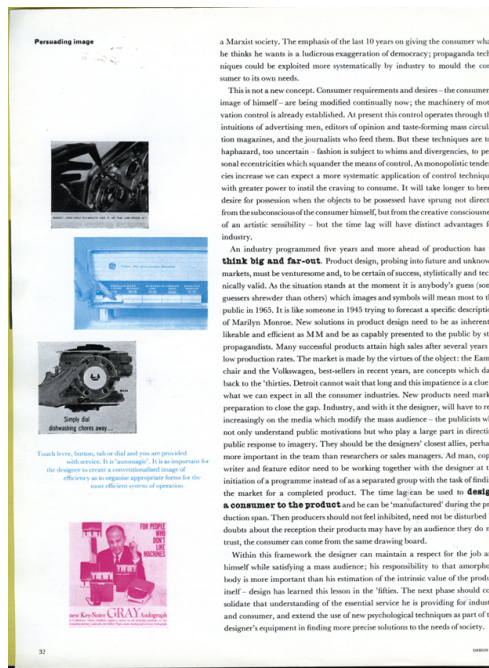


Illustration 8. Pages from Richard Hamilton's 'Persuading Image' article in *Design*, February 1960.



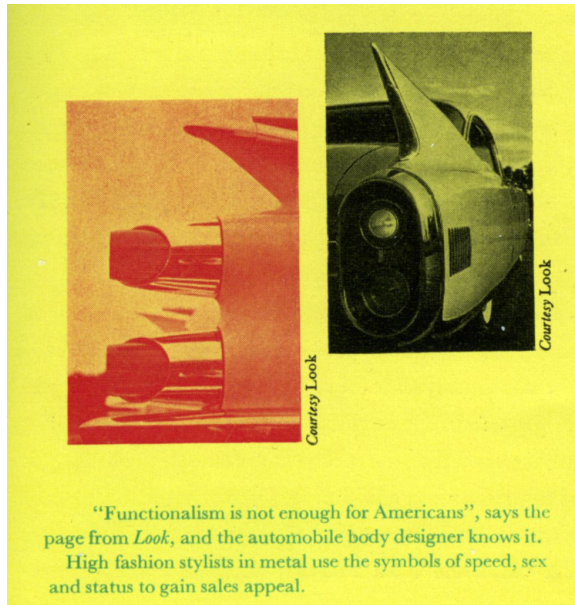


Illustration 9. Detail of one of the pages of Richard Hamilton's 'Persuading Image' article in *Design*, February 1960, showing his use of allusive poetic image captions.

The contentious nature of Hamilton's article was suggested in Blake's editorial introduction to the issue. Under the headline 'Consumers in Danger', Blake primed his readers by promising them a 'controversial' article with a conclusion 'of a form of economic totalitarianism not greatly dissimilar from Orwell's terrifying prophesy'. Blake summoned the force of George Orwell's novel about totalitarian ideology, *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, which had been published in 1949 and had sustained the public's attention, as its details seemed to be confirmed by actual events of the Cold War. He concluded his introduction with the rhetorically loaded question: 'Do we believe it is more important for industry, and the designer, to serve the real needs of the consumer, or are we content with the prospect of the consumer becoming a pawn in the grip of an economic master who rules exclusively to serve his own ends?'<sup>165</sup>

<sup>165</sup> John Blake, 'Consumers in Danger', *Design* 134, February 1960, p. 25.

In his editorial leader, Blake drew readers' attention to what he perceived to be the key phrase of the piece: 'design a consumer to the product'. In an effort to extend the article's lifespan across several issues, just as *The Architectural Review* was doing so successfully, Blake promised a continuation of the debate in a subsequent issue, where he planned to publish the 'comments of designers and design critics from Europe and America on the issues raised in this controversial article'.<sup>166</sup> Examining this text, Garland observed, 'Being contentious was a typical thing to do in most magazines. But in this sort of magazine it was unusual'.<sup>167</sup>

### **The readers respond**

*Design* magazine invited responses to Hamilton's article from a select group of American and European designers, manufacturers, and critics. Their comments, which appeared in the magazine's June issue, focused on their perception that the piece condoned planned obsolescence, styling, and motivation research. Most objected to what they perceived to be Hamilton's lack of social responsibility and his complicity with reviled American values, which to the European post-war Left was often used as a new target to replace Fascism. Industrial designer Misha Black said, 'The designer can admittedly 'maintain a respect for the job and himself while satisfying a mass audience', but only while he retains some respect for the civilisation of which he is a part; if he ceases to be concerned with real values in society then he becomes a polite equivalent of the dope pedlar who also satisfies a social need'.<sup>168</sup> D.W. Morphy, of British home appliances firm Morphy Richards, considered the design Hamilton talked about 'false design', and hardly likely to deceive the public.<sup>169</sup> Alberto Rosselli, editor of the Italian magazine *Stile Industria*, was reported as saying, 'The Hamilton prescription is immoral in that it might lead to

<sup>166</sup> John Blake, Preface to 'Persuading Image', *Design* 134, February 1960, p. 28.

<sup>167</sup> Ken Garland, personal interview, 14 February, 2007.

<sup>168</sup> 'Persuading Image: A Symposium', *Design* 138, June 1960, pp. 54–57.

<sup>169</sup> *Ibid.* p. 54.

indiscriminate use of persuasion'.<sup>170</sup> Even George Nelson, whose articles in *Industrial Design* had inspired Hamilton, commented that Hamilton's conclusions were 'depressing, even nauseous'.<sup>171</sup>

The discussion continued in the form of readers' letters in subsequent issues, but Hamilton was given the last word. He wrote, 'The phrase that caused the alarm, 'designing the consumer to the product', is a redefinition of a well-known process; for the ultimate political evil it was called fascism, when directed at purely commercial objectives it is called salesmanship, without the moral overtones it is known as education. We are all concerned, in one way or other with the conversion of others to a point of view'.<sup>172</sup> Hamilton was particularly keen to have the last word with regard to the comments submitted by Reyner Banham, then assistant executive editor of *The Architectural Review* and Hamilton's intellectual sparring partner in the Independent Group. Banham was dismissive of Hamilton's arguments and seemed to be defending his own preserve of writing about industrial design. He suggested that one benefit of high obsolescence could be the creation of a situation in which 'fine art designers' (possibly a veiled reference to Hamilton) 'who believe a 'good design is forever', will decide that product design is beneath their contempt, and get out, leaving the field to men far better qualified to realise the satisfaction of consumer wants with a far clearer sense of the product designer's position as the *servant* of his mass public'.<sup>173</sup> Hamilton responded to his 'critics' generally except in the case of Banham, who he singled out for direct rebuttal: '([Banham's] reading was as slipshod as any since he repeats much of what I said in a tone of contradiction) but he is so much a democrat that he equates 'controlled' with 'being pushed around'. If his conception of democracy is carried much further there is a danger of his becoming conservative'.<sup>174</sup>

---

<sup>170</sup> Ibid. p. 55.

<sup>171</sup> Ibid.

<sup>172</sup> Ibid. p. 56.

<sup>173</sup> Ibid. p. 55.

<sup>174</sup> Ibid. p. 57.



Writing of the effects of Hamilton's 'Persuading Image' article, design historian John Hewitt has concluded that, 'To a Council that had always preferred the idea of serving a consumer, of responding to his/her needs, not those created through market research or advertising, the very idea of controlling the consumer and of integrating him/her totally into the market processes in order to meet different, purely commercial objectives, was total anathema'.<sup>175</sup>

And yet, ironically, it had also been the CoID's longstanding mission to 'mould' British consumers by seeking to educate them in the principles of good design. *Design* magazine, specifically, under pressure to sell more issues, was beginning to show curiosity about, if not exactly to 'depth probe', its own consumers. While Hamilton's article was being published, *Design's* managers were in the process of employing a market research firm to conduct surveys with their readers. Mass Observation's 1961 report on *Design* magazine's readership unearthed a litany of grumbles about the magazine's form and content.<sup>176</sup>

It turned out that the consumer of *Design* was harder to shape than its managers thought. Readers had specific views about *Design* and how it could be improved. 17% thought it should contain more about readers' own jobs. It was deemed by some as 'too arty and academic;' or 'not sufficiently up-to-date;' while others objected to the criteria it used to judge good design. Others thought it 'should have more expert reports;' that it was 'badly written;' 'needs more outside writers;' and 'should be aimed more at the man in the street'.<sup>177</sup> 'My main criticism', said a design consultant honing in on a growing public perception of the CoID as elitist and out-of-step with the times, 'is that it is too snooty about everything. There is no link made – or no effort at a link – between the designer and the ordinary people. It fails because it relies

---

<sup>175</sup> John Hewitt, 'Good Design in the Marketplace: The Rise of Habitat Man', *The Oxford Art Journal* 10:2, 1987, p. 30.

<sup>176</sup> 'A Report on Design Readership', Prepared by Mass Observation Ltd., August 1961, Design Council Archive, The University of Brighton Design Archives, Brighton.

<sup>177</sup> *Ibid.* p. 13.

too much on snob value. I feel that a 'Design Establishment' is emerging which is far too tight'.<sup>178</sup>

One of the subscribers interviewed, a production planning manager in an engineering firm, objected to the 'parochial tendencies' of the magazine, and said he wanted 'more variety among contributors'.<sup>179</sup> In explaining his request he unconsciously quoted Hamilton's 'Persuading Image' article, saying: '[*Design*] should deal with the social side of design. You can now design the customer to the product as well as the product to the customer'.<sup>180</sup> It appeared that however heterodoxical Hamilton's argument might have been in the context of CoID's anti-commercial, socially and morally driven view of design, amongst *Design's* actual readership its message had hit home.<sup>181</sup> (See Illustration 10)

---

<sup>178</sup> Ibid. p. 14.

<sup>179</sup> Ibid. p. 15.

<sup>180</sup> Ibid.

<sup>181</sup> In his article Hamilton made several references to the February 1959 issue of *Industrial Design* magazine. It was checked out of the Royal College of Art library repeatedly during March 1960, suggesting that his article created a new and temporary readership for the American magazine.

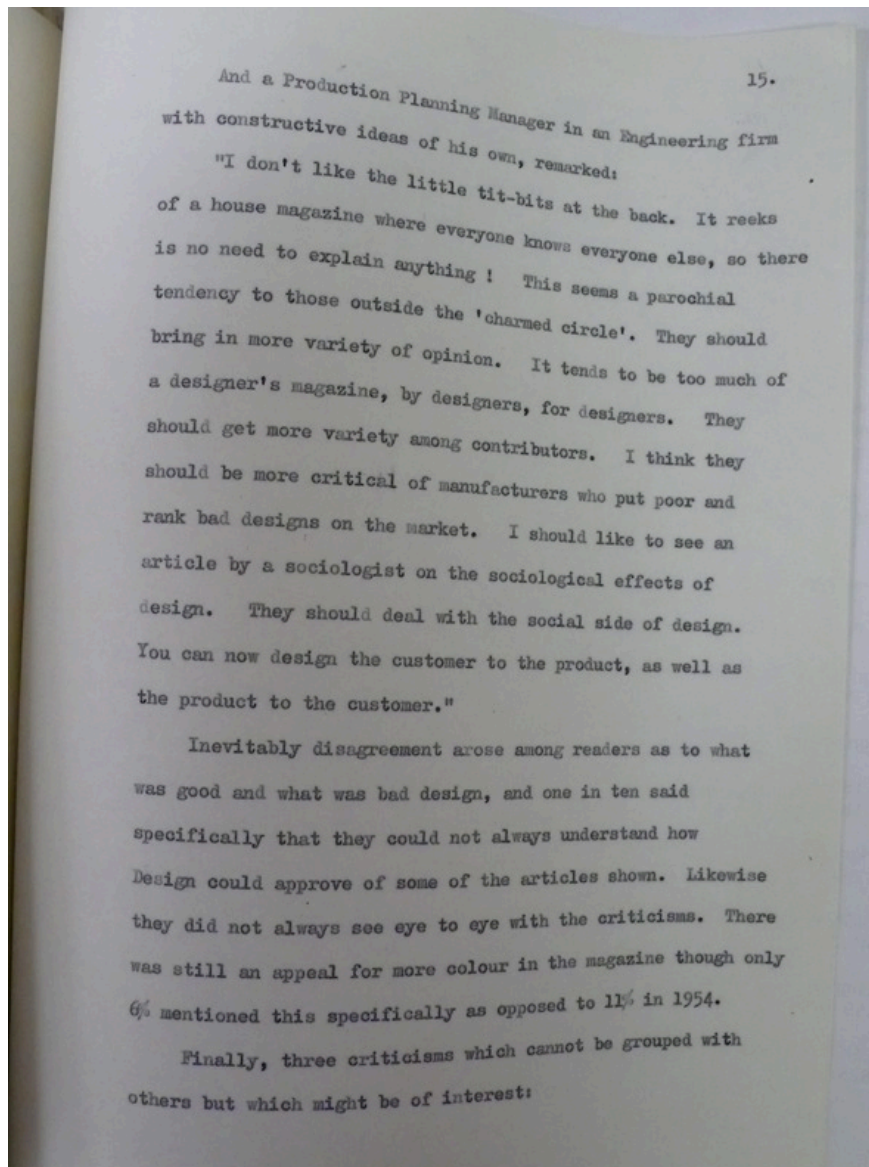


Illustration 10. Page from 1961 *Design Readership Survey*, conducted by Mass Observation.

Hamilton did not consider himself a design critic; 'I've always thought of myself as a design hobbyist', he later said.<sup>182</sup> And yet he had clear views about his role as an educator, which do seem to have translated into his critical writing: 'It is for us as teachers to promote in the youth we teach a healthy suspicion of all dogma, whether it is politically oriented or aimed at fixing the pattern of our culture', he said in the 1960 lecture to the National Union of

<sup>182</sup> Richard Hamilton, personal interview, 23 February, 2007.

Teachers.<sup>183</sup> He believed that in order to achieve 'freedom of choice [...] the youth of today' should be made fully aware of the techniques of mass media, 'whose products they already know and appreciate'.<sup>184</sup> Hamilton's perceptive analysis of the techniques of image-making, the social and economic implications of mass-produced goods, and the inevitability of expendability helped to challenge the main current of design discourse in post-war Britain with a level of authority seldom found among the writings of establishment-sanctioned design commentators of the period.

**PART TWO: THE APPLIED LIFE OF PRODUCTS AT *INDUSTRIAL DESIGN* MAGAZINE, US, 1955-1960**

While Hamilton's article ran counter to the ethos of the British CoID and the content of its house magazine, it connected quite closely to the kinds of preoccupations of American design discourse being rehearsed in the New York-based independent trade publication *Industrial Design*. This magazine was among the sources of images and articles that members of the Independent Group used for their lectures, articles, and artworks – and was referenced in particular by Banham and Hamilton. Under the editorship of Jane Fiske and Deborah Allen, *Industrial Design* offered a pluralist view of product design that acknowledged the existence of 'a mass culture, in which artifacts are produced under completely new circumstances', and the reality that 'we have in mass-produced objects a new kind of folk art in a new dimension: an anonymous, or group-oriented expression of the twentieth century in terms of practical needs – which is not by all the people, but at least for the people'.<sup>185</sup>

*Industrial Design* had begun life in 1941 as a column in *Interiors*, a magazine, headquartered in New York, devoted to

---

<sup>183</sup> Richard Hamilton, 'Popular Culture and Personal Responsibility' lecture at National Union of Teachers Conference, October 26–28, 1960, in Richard Hamilton, *Collected Words*, (London: Thames & Hudson, 1983) p. 154.

<sup>184</sup> Ibid.

<sup>185</sup> Jane Fiske Mitarachi, 'Evaluating Industrial Design', *Journal of the American Association of University Women*, October 1958, p. 17.

the interior design profession. Upon the advice of designer George Nelson, publisher Charles E. Whitney decided to develop the column into a publication aimed at industrial designers 'concerned with product planning, design, development and marketing'.<sup>186</sup> In 1954 the 'Industrial Design' column editors Jane Fiske and Deborah Allen became the new magazine's first editors, with Nelson as editorial contributor and advisor.<sup>187</sup>

In his 'Publisher's Postscript' to *Industrial Design's* first issue (February 1954), Whitney explained his perspective on the genesis of the bi-monthly journal: 'The establishment of a new magazine was made almost mandatory by a series of developments in the last decade – the ascent of the product designer to a position of executive authority in industry; the vigorous demand by designers for a publication edited exclusively for them; and more particularly, the enlightening contacts we made at Walter P. Paepcke's Aspen Design Conference two years ago'.<sup>188</sup>

The magazine went on to develop a close relationship with the International Conference at Aspen (IDCA) in the ensuing years, through reporting its activities, republishing its papers, and the magazine editors' involvement as moderators and conference board members. Like the conference in this period, *Industrial Design* campaigned for greater recognition of design's value to business and society and sought to promote the significance of design 'as a unique, autonomous function in the overall industrial operation – on parity with engineering, manufacturing and sales'.<sup>189</sup>

Nelson's article in the first issue of *Industrial Design*, on his role in developing a new line of bubble lamps for Howard

---

<sup>186</sup> Magazine subhead, *Industrial Design*, February 1954, p. 1.

<sup>187</sup> Nelson's design office was in the same building as the magazine and he seems to have had some influence on the content of the magazine. Fiske remembers, 'He would decide what he wanted to write and once in a while he decided what you wanted to write'. Nelson, primarily a designer and at the time design director for Herman Miller, also had experience as an editor. He was co-managing editor of *Architectural Forum*, a contributor to *Fortune*, and *Interiors*. In 1958 his collected essays were published by Whitney in the book *Problems of Design*, (New York: Whitney Publishing, 1959).

<sup>188</sup> Charles Whitney, 'Publishers Postscript', *Industrial Design*, February 1954, p. 150.

<sup>189</sup> Subscription card, *Industrial Design*, February 1954.

Miller Clocks (a subsidiary of Herman Miller Furniture Company, where Nelson was Design Director) is also indicative of this mission to elevate the standing of the designer in the 'industrial operation'. Nelson wrote, 'The designer functions as a member of the top policy group and his recommendations carry the same weight as those of the production and sales executives'.<sup>190</sup> The designer Don Wallance was also keen to assert a designer's influence in manufacturing company decision-making, and by doing so illuminates the way in which, in the US, industrial design was conceptually framed in commercial terms. In his 1956 book *Shaping America's Products*, Wallance wrote:

As the designer has received increasing recognition and status with the company the authority of the designer has likewise increased. He is no longer a subservient artist – highly suspect as an impractical esthete – to be called in after all major policy and technical decisions about a new product have been made. In many companies the design director is given a seat at the table on a par with the director of production, technical research or sales.<sup>191</sup>

In addition to the IDCA, *Industrial Design* operated within a network of other contemporaneous general interest magazines (*Harper's*, *Colliers*, *House & Home*, and *The New Yorker*), international design magazines (*Design* in Britain and *Domus* in Italy), conferences (IDCA), and museums (MoMA). *Industrial Design* frequently commissioned writers and republished articles from other magazines, and from recently published design books from the Whitney publishing stable, while its editors both participated in, and reported on, debates on styling and 'good design' at MoMA. Despite this interplay, *Industrial Design's* engagement with its subject matter was unique. A 1958 panel, organized to discuss an exhibition of '20<sup>th</sup> Century Design from the Museum Collection', moderated by *Industrial Design's* then-consulting editor Jane Fiske McCullough, and recorded in the magazine under the title 'Design as Commentary', revealed some of the differences

---

<sup>190</sup> George Nelson, 'Planned Expansion', *Industrial Design*, February 1954, p. 148.

<sup>191</sup> Don Wallance, *Shaping America's Products* (New York: Reinhold Publishing Corporation, 1956), pp. 50-51.

between the Museum's and the magazine's conception of design. Arthur Drexler, director of MoMA's Department of Architecture and Design since 1956, stated that the collection purposefully excluded 'those mass-produced objects supposed to be characteristic of our 'high standard of living.'<sup>192</sup> There are no television sets, no refrigerators, no telephones, and only a few mechanical appliances – not because such objects are intrinsically unworthy but rather because their design seldom rises above the vulgarity of today's high-pressure salesmanship'.<sup>193</sup> *Industrial Design*, on the other hand, devoted a whole section of the magazine each month to analysis of such appliances. (See Illustration 11) Drexler went on to observe, 'The Museum's collection is not concerned with persuading people to use objects, to buy them, to consume. Our interests are concerned primarily with art'.<sup>194</sup> While *Industrial Design* certainly promoted design, its editors also critiqued it. They considered formal beauty too limiting a criterion, however, and focused instead upon the way products worked, how they were used, and what they said about 'a heavily goods-oriented society', as William Snaith, president of the Raymond Loewy Corporation, put it during the panel discussion.<sup>195</sup>

---

<sup>192</sup> Arthur Drexler, quoted in 'Design as Commentary', *Industrial Design*, February 1959, p. 56.

<sup>193</sup> Ibid.

<sup>194</sup> Ibid. p. 61.

<sup>195</sup> William Snaith, quoted in 'Design as Commentary', *Industrial Design*, February 1959, p. 60.



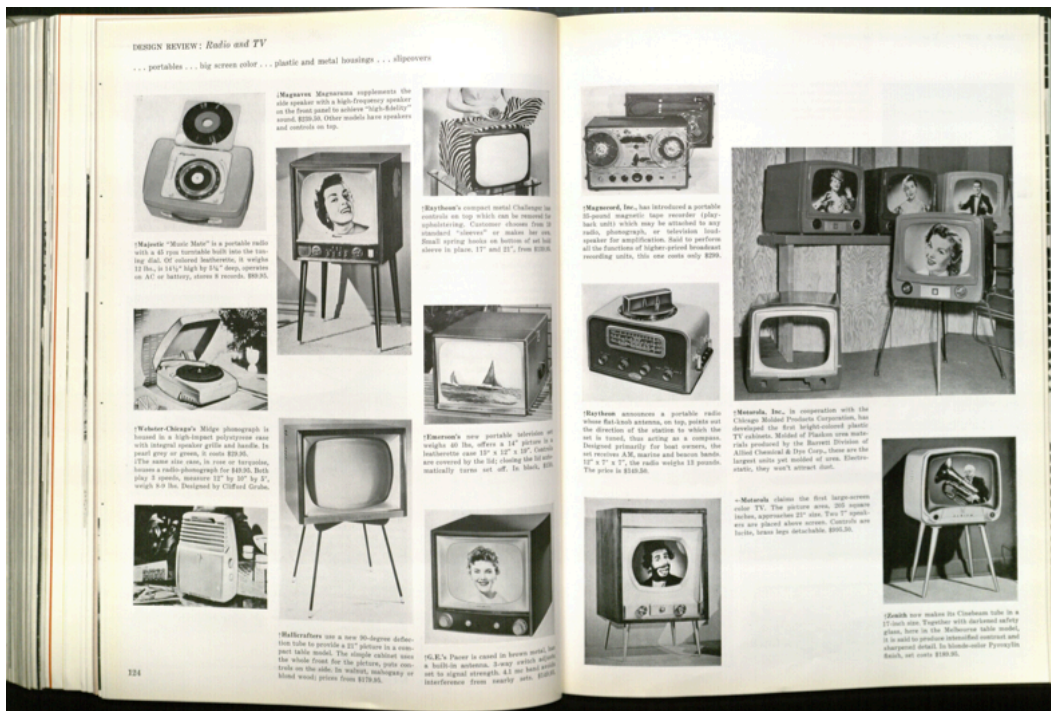
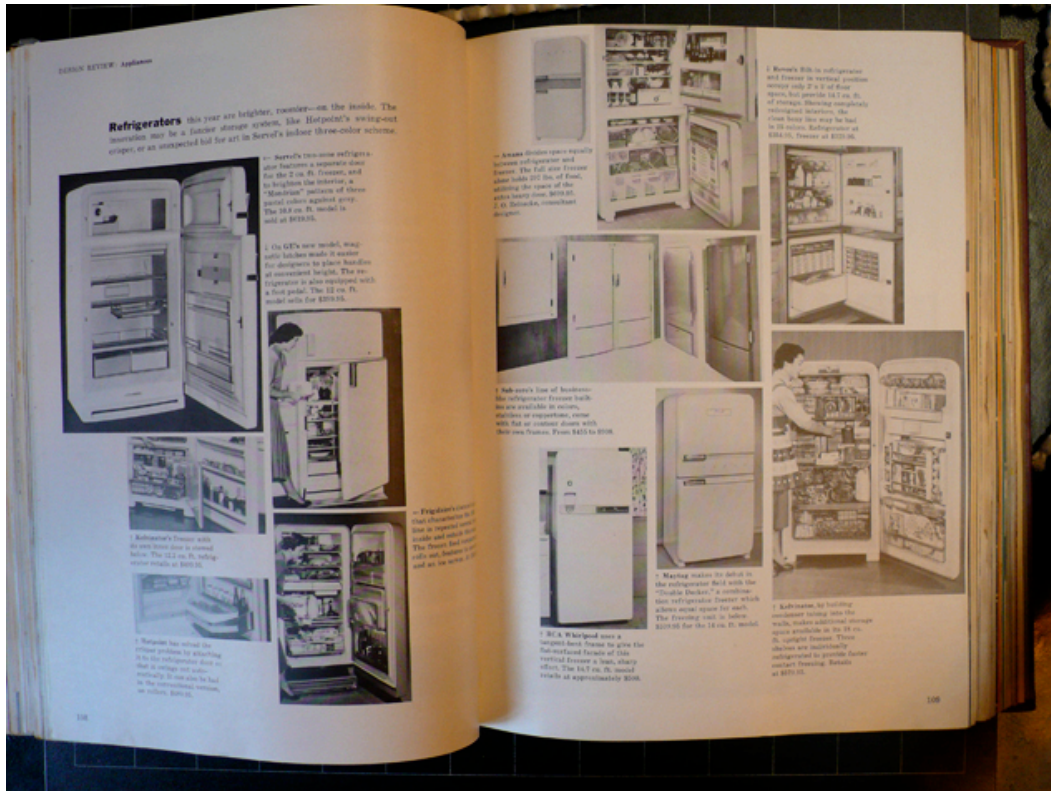


Illustration 11. Typical spreads from 'Design Review' section of *Industrial Design*, which discussed the latest consumer appliances and white goods.

Without a government agency like the British COID, in the US the job of campaigning for the importance of design to



industry was left to entrepreneurial individuals who had been instrumental in the formation of the country's industrial design profession. In the 1940s they had started to collect into professional organizations. The Society of Industrial Designers had been established in New York in 1944, initially with fourteen members, including Raymond Loewy, Norman Bel Geddes, Walter Dorwin Teague, Henry Dreyfuss, Donald Deskey, Harold Van Doren, and Russel Wright.<sup>196</sup> The group initiated an annual awards scheme and produced an irregularly appearing annual publication called *US Industrial Design*, but they did not possess the journalistic drive to create news stories nor the distance necessary to taking a critical stance.<sup>197</sup> Jane Fiske and Deborah Allen, co-editors of the first five years of *Industrial Design*, on the other hand, helped to pioneer a distinctively American, mass-market product design criticism, fuelled by their personal beliefs, intellectual backgrounds, and experiences as both professional working women and as homemakers.

### **Televisions, refrigerators, and 'a rhapsody of perceptions'**<sup>198</sup>

The interrelated philosophies of relativism and pragmatism permeated much liberal intellectual American culture in the post-war period. In 1950 the historian Henry Steele Commager praised pragmatism, describing it as deriving directly from the country's historical experience and becoming, in the twentieth century, 'almost the official philosophy of

---

<sup>196</sup> Their focus was primarily to introduce stricter codes of professional practice and to reinforce the legality of industrial design as a profession, established in a seminal case in 1940 where Teague successfully argued it should be considered a profession in terms of taxation.

<sup>197</sup> Membership was restricted to experienced professionals. Each of the founding members could invite one additional designer, who had designed at least three mass-produced products in different industries, to join the following year, thus excluding automotive designers of Detroit. In 1951 the organization changed its name to the Society of Industrial Designers, merging in 1965 with two other bodies to become the Industrial Designers Society of America (IDSA).

<sup>198</sup> 'Experience, however, depends on the synthetical unity of phenomena, that is, on a synthesis according to concepts of the object of phenomena in general. Without it, it would not even be knowledge, but only a rhapsody of perceptions, which would never grow into a connected text according to the rules of an altogether coherent (possible) consciousness, nor into a transcendental and necessary unity of apperception'. Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, (London: MacMillan, 1922) p. 128.

America'.<sup>199</sup> Sociologist Daniel Bell recommended the eschewal of utopian ideologies that had been tainted by the totalitarianism, and adherence, instead, to a quintessentially American tradition of sober, prudent practicality, while historian Daniel J. Boorstin advocated for a 'doctrinally naked' and therefore flexible America able to accept 'the givenness of experience'.<sup>200</sup> Disturbed by the activities of anti-communist ideologists in the 1940s such as Senator Joseph McCarthy, the American intellectual critical community, typified by such groups as the New York Intellectuals (which included essayists such as Lionel Trilling, Harold Rosenberg, and Daniel Bell), abandoned what Neil Jumonville has termed 'their earlier ideological and faith and prophetic partisanship', and adopted 'a more modest and precise outlook based on reason, analysis, and pragmatism'.<sup>201</sup>

Fiske and Allen, while not overtly political, deployed a similarly rationalist, pluralist, and non-partisan outlook as the New York Intellectuals. But where the latter found it hard to embrace the mass culture they saw as threatening their professional status, Fiske and Allen dealt very directly with the products of mass culture. They saw the role of design in mass manufacture and its impact on everyday life, as ripe territory for their own literary exploration. Throughout the pages of *Industrial Design* their version of pragmatic relativism was manifested in their frequent use of personal experience to illuminate the specifics of a product, their innovative use of explanatory diagrams and 'how-to' guides, and in their refusal of aesthetic absolutes and prevailing ideologies such as 'good design'.

---

<sup>199</sup> Henry Steele Commanger, *The American Mind*, (New Haven, CT: The Yale University Press, 1959), quoted in John Patrick Diggins, *The Promise of Pragmatism: Modernism and the Crisis of Knowledge and Authority* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1994) p. 400.

<sup>200</sup> Daniel Bell, *The End of Ideology: On the Exhaustion of Political Ideas in the Fifties*, (New York: The Free Press, 1960) and Daniel J. Boorstin, *The Genius of American Politics*, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1953). For a detailed account of the influence of pragmatism in American culture, see: John Patrick Diggins, *The Promise of Pragmatism: Modernism and the Crisis of Knowledge and Authority* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1994).

<sup>201</sup> Neil Jumonville, *Critical Crossings: The New York Intellectuals in Postwar America*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), p. xii.

Jane Fiske grew up in Larchmont, Westchester Co., NY, the daughter of an air conditioning and refrigeration engineer and who also edited a trade association magazine and 'wrote a lot'. Remembering the role of writing in her childhood years, Fiske said, 'I was used to the idea of sitting at a typewriter and grinding things out'.<sup>202</sup> Fiske studied at Vassar College, a prestigious women's liberal arts college in Poughkeepsie, NY (she also pursued graduate studies at New York University's Institute of Fine Arts), and began her career as secretary to the architect Philip Johnson, the young curator and head of MoMA's Department of Architecture and Design. She soon transitioned to the role of acting assistant curator. Of this period, during which the museum staged the first US Mies van der Rohe exhibition (1947) and installed the Marcel Breuer House in its garden (1949), she has reflected, 'It was an education in the history of architecture and its future, and it also helped me to develop my critical sense'.<sup>203</sup> In 1949 Johnson hired Arthur Drexler, architecture editor from *Interiors* magazine, to be a curator, and Fiske took his position at the magazine.

Deborah Allen was an associate editor at *Interiors* and Fiske identified her as a likely collaborator. Allen believes her interest in design, her opinionated nature, her taste and her work ethic derived from a cultured family upbringing and some interesting female role models. Her aunt was Ethel B. Power, the editor of the home decorating magazine *House Beautiful* 1923-1934 and her aunt's partner was the architect Eleanor Raymond. Allen's mother, Dwight Hutchinson, worked as a copywriter at J Walter Thompson, and then as a freelance writer for women's magazines. Allen's childhood home in Boston was filled with magazines about design and interiors and designed objects her mother had brought back from trips to Sweden. Like Fiske, Allen grew up around writing. She recalls that her mother 'criticized my writing very harshly. I think that gave me a very good idea of what direction I should go

---

<sup>202</sup> Jane Fiske, personal interview, 30 July, 2007.

<sup>203</sup> Jane Thompson, *Architecture Boston*, Vol 9, No. 4 July/August 2006, p. 50.

in'.<sup>204</sup> While studying art history at Smith College, a liberal arts college for women, Allen wrote for the college newspaper and the writer Mary Ellen Chase, who was in residence at Smith at the time, read her work and sought her out. 'She said, "don't do anything that will teach you to be glib. Take your writing seriously", I liked that', Allen recalls.<sup>205</sup> After graduating Allen worked for a short while at the Metropolitan Museum of Art and married Oliver Allen, an editor at *Life* and son of Frederick Lewis Allen, the editor of *Harper's*.

In 1953, when *Interiors* publisher Whitney asked Fiske to edit a new magazine for industrial designers, she asked that Allen be her co-editor. The women were given a small budget and the sole the mandate that the magazine should be as graphically bold and handsome as *Fortune* magazine was at the time. 'He wanted flashy gate folds', Fiske recalls.<sup>206</sup>

Unfettered by any established or prescriptive viewpoint on design, Fiske and Allen set out to build from scratch a magazine for the industrial design profession informed by their own educational backgrounds in the humanities, their professional experience as journalists, and their domestic responsibilities as wives and mothers. (These were not insignificant – Fiske married four times and had two children, while Allen had five children.)

The magazine's business model was based on a mixture of advertising and subscriptions, which rose from 5,910 in 1955 to around 10,000 by 1959.<sup>207</sup> Advertisements (mainly for materials producers and fabrication services such as Arabol Adhesives, Marco Polyester Resins, Chicopee Specialty Weaves, Aluminum Extrusions, and Dupont, and a handful of furniture companies like Knoll) were mostly grouped in the front-of-book, with the editorial preface marking the start of the feature well.<sup>208</sup> As Ralph Caplan, who joined *Industrial Design*

---

<sup>204</sup> Deborah Allen, personal interview, 6 July, 2007.

<sup>205</sup> Ibid.

<sup>206</sup> Jane Fiske, personal interview, 30 July, 2007.

<sup>207</sup> This growth is comparable to that of *Design* magazine in the UK, which grew from 5,000 in 1952 to 12,740 by 1960.

<sup>208</sup> Surprisingly, the British grant-funded magazine had better success with its advertising than the commercially driven US publication. Its

as a writer in 1957 and was editor of the magazine 1960–1964, remembers it, the publisher was disappointed with the advertising revenue; he had mistakenly thought that industrial designers specified furniture and materials, just as interior designers did, and that he could sell advertising on the same basis as he did at his other magazine, *Interiors*. Caplan observed, 'Although an industrial designer might specify that a product be made of aluminum, he was not empowered to choose Reynolds or Alcoa'.<sup>209</sup>

While the stated purpose of *Industrial Design* was to elevate the standing of the designer in the realm of commerce, for Allen and Fiske there was another goal, expressed through their chosen subject matter and examples, and that was 'to connect designers to consumers and users – the applied life of the product'.<sup>210</sup> Unlike *Design* magazine, however, where the consumer was conceived of as rational and willing to be educated by the editors' superior taste and knowledge, Allen and Fiske wrote for a consumer who also had irrational and emotional concerns. Fiske recalls that, 'we perceived things that we needed that were not being answered by the designer. We saw from a consumer's perspective the way a product works or doesn't work, or pleases or offends'.<sup>211</sup>

In an editorial about taxi design, for example, they described an industrial designer in their own terms, thus subtly guiding their readership towards a similar view: 'He's not so much a stylist – a man who slaps jumbo grilles and speedlines on another fellow's chassis – as a skilled and critical taxi rider, professionally fitted to give a roadworthy chassis a body worthy of human occupation'.<sup>212</sup> Their choice of the terms

---

advertisements were mainly for materials too, such as Pirelli rubber, Formica and the British Aluminium Co., but they also managed to attract furniture companies like Hille, Knoll International, and Ercol, presumably because they were not in competition with an interior design magazine as *Industrial Design* was, but also judging by the *Design* magazine memos and correspondence of the 1970s *Design* had a comparatively fierce sales staff.

<sup>209</sup> Ralph Caplan, 'I.D. Magazine, 1954–2009', *Voice*, AIGA website (January 5, 2010): <http://www.aiga.org/i-d-magazine-1954-2009/>, [accessed 17, September 2012] (para. 4).

<sup>210</sup> Jane Thompson, *Architecture Boston*, Vol 9, No. 4 July/August 2006, p. 50.

<sup>211</sup> Jane Fiske, personal interview, 30 July, 2007.

<sup>212</sup> Jane Fiske and Deborah Allen, 'The Trouble with Taxis', *Industrial Design*, February 1954, p. 11.

'taxi-rider' and 'human occupation' were key to their own guiding principles as critics: designers should be bodily familiar with the use of the things they are designing and concerned for the physical and emotional well-being of other users. (See Illustration 12)

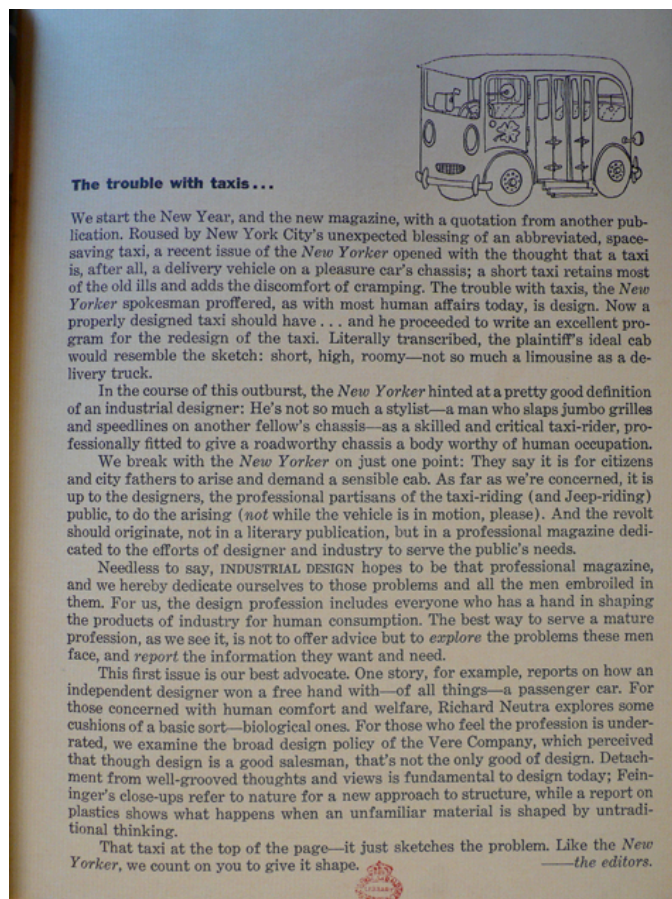


Illustration 12. 'The Trouble with Taxis' editorial statement by Jane Fiske and Deborah Allen in first issue of *Industrial Design* magazine, February 1954.

The articles addressed a wide range of subjects, from bathrooms and plastics to tractors and design planning, and were characterized by deep research, clear exposition of complex technical issues, and extensive annotation. In addition to the staple fare of a design magazine, such as product reviews and issue-based essays, Allen and Fiske introduced a wide array of unfamiliar article formats, including historical surveys of product types, cartoon interludes, photographic portfolios, book extracts, profiles of designers, and elaborate graphic devices such as timelines and charts. Allen had initiated such approaches while still at

*Interiors* magazine. For her report of a 1950 MoMA panel discussion about the aesthetics of car design, Allen integrated condensed extracts of the panellists arguments (not omitting their jokey quips) with images of the cars being discussed and diagrams of their components, adorned with pointing hand symbols and hand-drawn arrows. Her piece conveyed the dynamic nature of a live conversation and the voiced opinions of the participants far more directly than a linear report.<sup>213</sup> Allen continued to develop her visual article formats at *Industrial Design*. 'What's So Special About Plastics', for example, was laid out as a series of extended picture captions on spreads edged with binder file markings, suggesting its practical use in the design studio. (See Illustrations 13 and 14) In 1958 the designer Walter Dorwin Teague wrote in to congratulate the magazine for an article titled 'Is This Change Necessary?' by Richard Latham, indicating one of the ways the magazine was used in a design studio: 'I have asked all our partners here to read Latham's article – exceptionally well written by the way – and I shall read it again myself and keep it at hand for ready reference'.<sup>214</sup>

---

<sup>213</sup> Deborah Allen, 'The Body Beautiful: A Museum Asks 7 Men to Eye Automobiles', *Interiors*, May 1950, pp. 112-116.

<sup>214</sup> Walter Dorwin Teague, Letter to the Editors, *Industrial Design*, April 1958, p. 8.



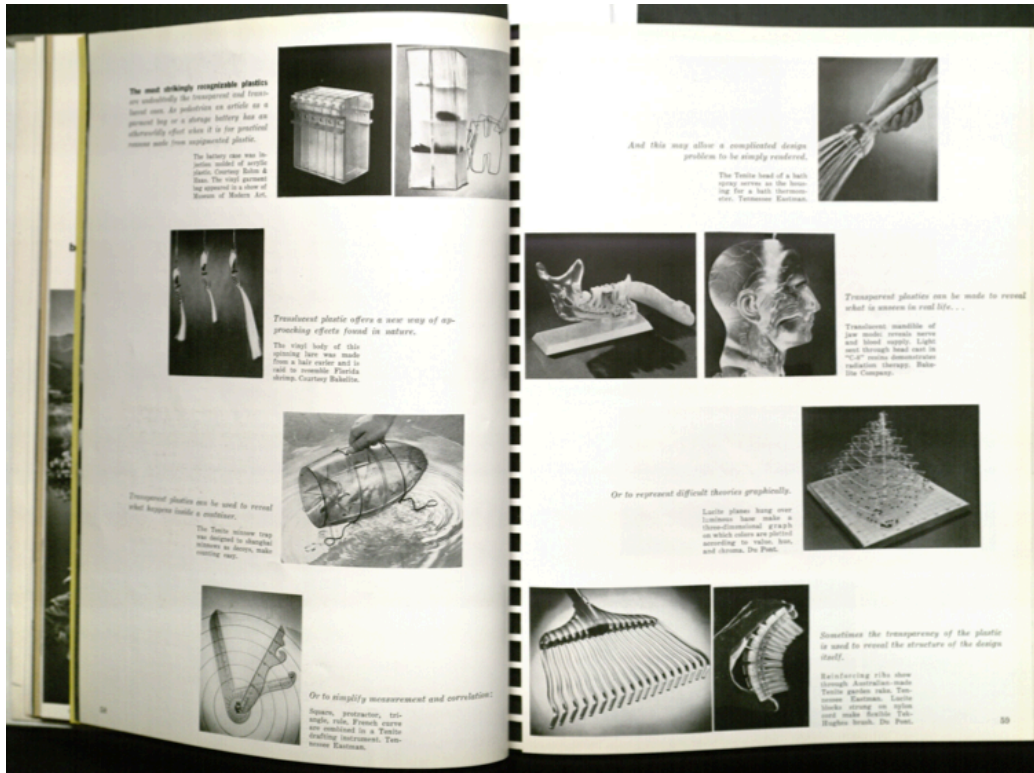


Illustration 13. Article about plastics in *Industrial Design*, February 1954, showing printed binder markings.

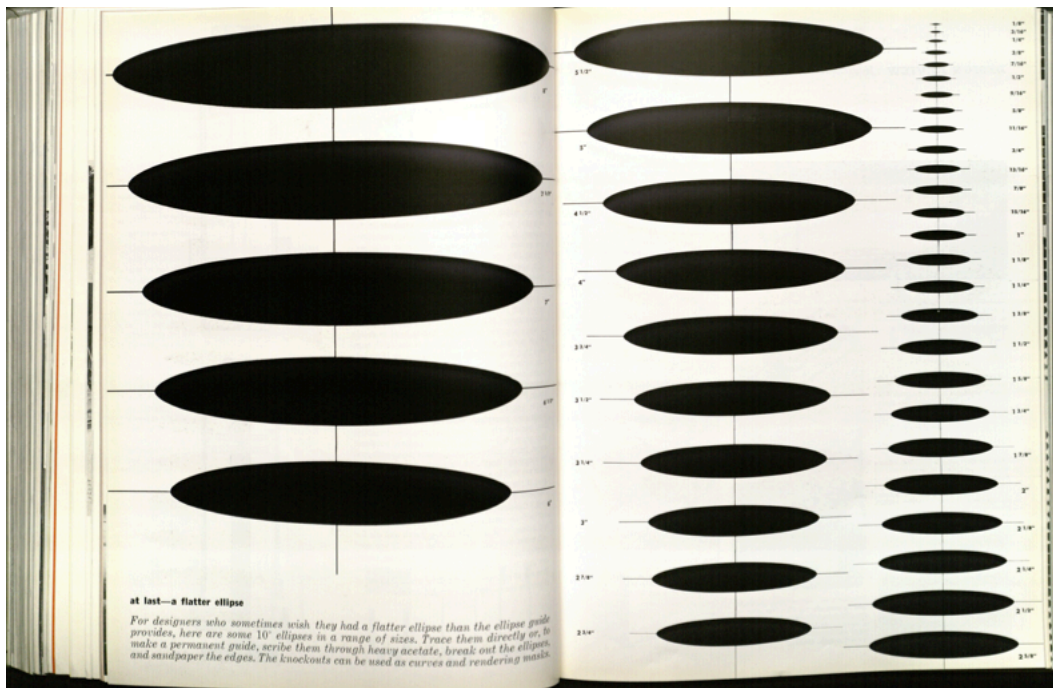


Illustration 14. *Industrial Design* often included handy tools for use in the design studio, such as this set of ellipses.



Other readers' letters commended the magazine's range of formats. Raymond Loewy, probably the best-known designer in the US at the time, applauded the editors for 'the variety of methods you are employing to report design activities – as projects, as individual case histories, as analyses of an office's operating techniques, and as aesthetic critiques'.<sup>215</sup>

One of Fiske's primary concerns was the clear explication of complex ideas and technical processes through visual storytelling. The narrative of an article often continued into the image captions; manufacturing processes were broken down into digestible steps illustrated with cartoons; photographs of cars were silhouetted, cropped to highlight features and grouped for comparison. (See Illustration 15) Of the other design magazines of the period Fiske recalls, 'There was no sense of energy, no attempt to convey ideas through the way you place things on a page, or how you use the type'.<sup>216</sup> Fiske and Allen were unhappy with the art director of the first few issues, the acclaimed graphic designer Alvin Lustig, complaining that he was 'too stiff' and resistant to a conception of page layouts as news-driven, visually animated, and busy compositions. 'We wanted scale, changes of scale, big type, and a newsiness', said Fiske.<sup>217</sup>

---

<sup>215</sup> Raymond Loewy, Letter to the Editors, *Industrial Design*, April 1954, p. 18.

<sup>216</sup> Jane Fiske, personal interview, 30 July, 2007.

<sup>217</sup> Ibid.





their official résumés. In the first issue, a series of cartoons by the illustrator Robert Osborn and Thomas B. Hess, editor of *Art News* and an exponent of biography-based criticism, satirized the stereotypes and pretensions of such résumés in portraits and fake biographies of Will C. Werk, Asa U Waite, Cozz McFields, and Rram de 'Vhwh.<sup>218</sup> (See Illustration 16)

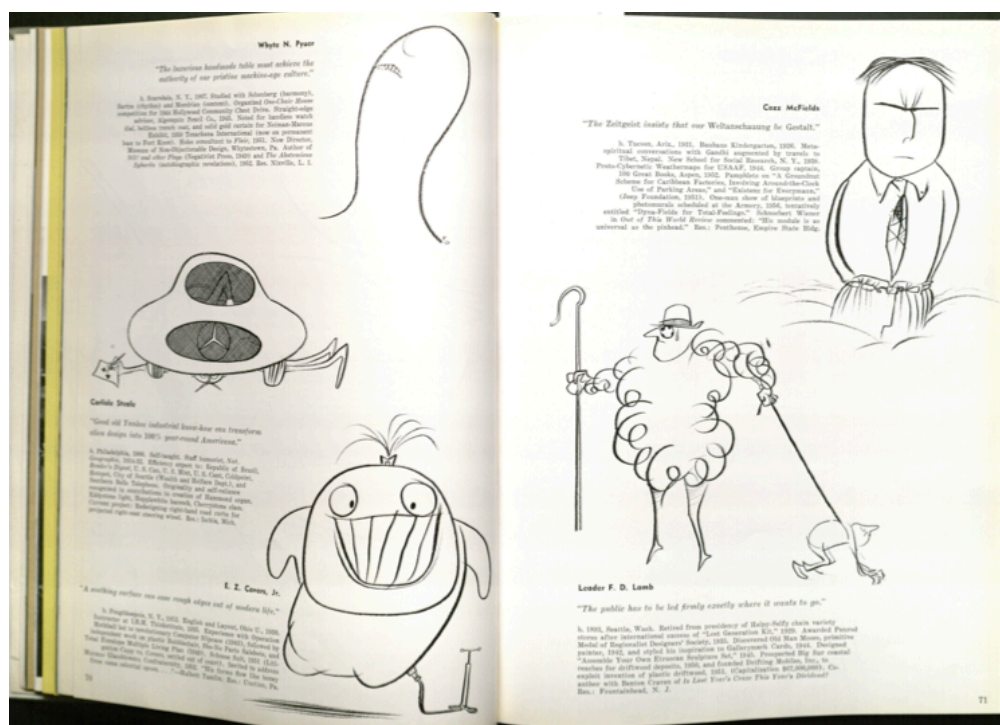


Illustration 16. Spread of satirical cartoons by Robert Osborn and Thomas B. Hess in *Industrial Design*, February, 1954.

### 'Dear Sirs': the significance of gender

The fact that the editors of a magazine catering to an almost wholly male readership of designers, engineers, and executives were women highlighted some of the gender polarization in the design industry and in society at large in the 1950s. Letters to the editors were addressed 'Dear Sirs;' the magazine's female writers were rarely mentioned in the list of contributors; not a single woman designer was profiled at

<sup>218</sup> Robert Osborn and Thomas B. Hess, 'Who's Who in Distinguished Design', *Industrial Design*, February 1954, pp. 68-71.



least in the first decade of the magazine; and in 1957 Fiske noted that 80 percent of her appointments and interviews in the previous six months had been with men (See Illustration 17).<sup>219</sup> One of the most pronounced examples of the gender divide, against which Fiske and Allen's roles appeared in stark relief, was in a report of the American Society of Industrial Designers' fourteenth annual conference, which 'ended with a luncheon panel of designers' wives, each with her own idea of how and why to be one'.<sup>220</sup>

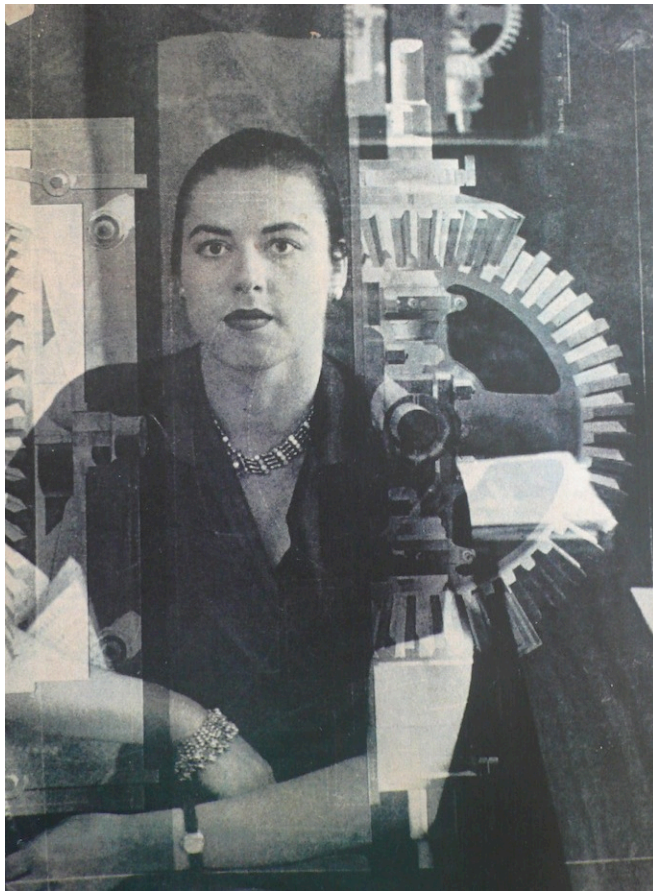


Illustration 17. Portrait of Jane Fiske, published in *Charm*, November 1957, to accompany her article 'Working in a Man's World'.

Fiske and Allen brought a feminine perspective to bear on their subject matter, not in a politicized manner, but through

<sup>219</sup> 'Checking through my appointment calendar for the past six months, for instance, I estimate that about 80 percent of my appointments, interviews, and luncheon dates have been with men'. Jane Fiske, 'Working in a Man's World', *Charm*, November 1957, p. 87.

<sup>220</sup> Report on ASID's 14<sup>th</sup> annual conference, *Industrial Design*, June 1959, p. 60.

what Fiske terms 'an experienced and educated female instinct'.<sup>221</sup> She said, 'Women can look at a sharp object and know immediately that someone will get hurt with it. Men will never see it that way'.<sup>222</sup> This maternal sense of danger was a recurring trope in the pages of *Industrial Design*. In her car reviews Allen would point out 'the sharp edge' of the overhanging cowl of a Buick, which 'looks as dangerous as the knobs it is supposed to shield', or car ashtrays which when opened make the dashboard turn menacing since they are 'frequently jagged edged and sticky'.<sup>223</sup>

Fiske and Allen brought to traditionally masculine subject matter, such as cars, power tools, tractors, DIY, and plumbing, a point of view based on their domestic experience.<sup>224</sup> And they brought the domestic experience, direct from their own homes and those of their friends, as subject matter into the pages of the magazine. The idea of changing lifestyles in the home, for example, became the focus of articles. 'We knew that the separation between the dining room and the kitchen was breaking down', said Fiske.<sup>225</sup> To demonstrate a liberated view of the home and family, they staged a photograph at some architect friends' apartment in Greenwich Village showing the family eating a meal in the kitchen.

Fiske believed that she and Allen managed to 'turn the female perspective to natural advantage in interpreting design. Our articles were informed not only with hard facts and real news, but also with the insights and attitudes of designers' ultimate customers – the female purchasers and users of products. This editorial pluralism built a perspective that no other design publication could offer to this special audience'.<sup>226</sup> In an article titled 'Working in a Man's World' she wrote for *Charm* magazine in 1957, Fiske (by then

---

<sup>221</sup> Jane Fiske, personal interview, 30 July, 2007.

<sup>222</sup> Ibid.

<sup>223</sup> Deborah Allen, 'The Driver's View: Cars 56', *Industrial Design*, August 1956, p. 138.

<sup>224</sup> Articles about cars in *Industrial Design* were mostly written by women – Fiske, Allen, and Ann Ferebee most notably.

<sup>225</sup> Jane Fiske, personal interview, 30 July, 2007.

<sup>226</sup> Jane Thompson, 'Urbanist without Portfolio: Notes on a Career' in Claire Lorenz, *Women in Architecture USA*, (New York: Rizzoli, 1990).

McCullough) tried to convince working women that their female characteristics – ‘instinctual nurturing qualities’, attention to detail, and insights from humble daily experience – were actually assets in the businesses where they worked. While such advice may seem conservative in an era of burgeoning second-wave feminism, fuelled by the 1963 publication of Betty Friedan’s *The Feminine Mystique*, Fiske’s own robust career and those of her female colleagues chart a more progressive path (Ann Ferebee founded and directed the Institute for Urban Design, and Ada Louise Huxtable became the first architecture critic for *The New York Times* in 1963.) Even within such careers, the spheres of home and work were not separate, but inextricably entwined.<sup>227</sup>

Fiske and Allen co-wrote much of the magazine’s copy, especially the editorial prefaces, and enjoyed a symbiotic working relationship. Allen’s husband worked on weekends, closing the book at *Life* on Saturday nights. Allen had to stay home to look after the children, so the women would work at her apartment. They wrote articles collaboratively rather like playing a game of hangman, Fiske recalled. Fiske would write a line and Allen the next, using an Olivetti typewriter. ‘And we’d write all the way through until we got something and then probably one person would patch it up, and then the other person would read it and patch it up some more. Our thinking was always in parallel and going in the same direction’.<sup>228</sup>

### **Magazine editing as criticism**

In a 1958 article for the *Journal of the American Association of University Women*, Fiske set out her credo on evaluating industrial design. She dismissed the use of set standards, which she termed ‘automatic evaluation:’ ‘The end result is a code-book of styles; no one need bother to think for himself

---

<sup>227</sup> Recent work on the history of women’s work has sought to dismantle the metaphor of the ‘female sphere’, which had been used as a trope to characterize unequal power relations between the sexes, demonstrating instead, the fluidity of interchange between the household and the world. See, for example, Linda K. Kerber, *Toward an Intellectual History of Women: Essays* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997).

<sup>228</sup> Jane Fiske, personal interview, 30 July, 2007.

as long as he has the rules firmly memorized'.<sup>229</sup> Her preferred method was 'creative evaluation', which necessitates an immersive understanding in order to 'look at a thing and understand not how it conforms to existing rules, but what new rules it may be suggesting for the future'.<sup>230</sup>

Fiske believed that taste was a 'smokescreen' that prevented one getting to the 'deeper implications' of design, a 'substitute for evaluation, rather than a basis of evaluation'. In her July 1957 editorial preface in *Industrial Design*, 'Taste, Travel and Temptations', Fiske further expanded her relativist position on assessing design: '[Design] can be judged 'superior' or 'inferior' only on its own terms. I am aware that moralists do not enjoy this point of view. It is hard not to rely on the crutch of our own absolute Good and absolute Bad. Yet if one is serious about judging design, the task, as in viewing all art, is to overcome the temptation to judge its subject matter alone, or its moral value, and to sense its vigor, its aptness, its communication'.<sup>231</sup>

Considering her training ground was The Museum of Modern Art, it is perhaps surprising how pluralist Fiske's views were. In 1957, when asked in a questionnaire by the journal of the British Society of Industrial Arts to comment on the merits of British design, she suggested that British designers were too preoccupied with adhering to accepted rules of taste. With the work published on the pages of *Design* magazine as her reference, she opined, 'the [British] designer seems more concerned with making things acceptable within an acknowledged standard than with making something really rich, buoyant, or inventive'.<sup>232</sup>

---

<sup>229</sup> Jane Fiske, *Journal of the American Association of University Women*, October 1958, pp. 14-15.

<sup>230</sup> Ibid.

<sup>231</sup> Jane Fiske, 'Taste, Travel and Temptations', editorial preface, *Industrial Design*, July 1957, p. 25. For the full interview, see SIA journal 53, October/December 1956, pp. 13-19.

<sup>232</sup> Ibid.



Allen and Fiske conceived of the entire project of editing the magazine as a form of criticism. Fiske devoted her April 1957 editorial preface to the topic of criticism, provoked by a reader who had written in to say, 'It is not the business of the magazine to act as critic'. She observed, 'The editorial effort itself is a critical one'.<sup>233</sup>

Fiske and Allen believed that self-knowledge, which takes hard work, was essential to navigating the contemporary American consumer landscape and to outwitting 'would-be manipulators'. In her review of Vance Packard's book *The Hidden Persuaders*, Fiske wrote,

Now there is no denying that Americans today are living out their lives, and their needs, through material symbols: the fins and portholes serve a deep-seated purpose in leading consumers into new social realms – imagined or real. But [Packard] reserves not one word of comment for the irrational consumer, and the ambitions and insecurities that drive him into the arms of businessmen. Is the condition the fault of merchandisers? Or are the merchandisers, rather, a symptom that people themselves might do well to examine.<sup>234</sup>

Fiske and Allen were also attentive to the needs of consumers of criticism, which included designers. In the 1957 'Critical Horseplay' editorial in which she addressed criticism as a topic, Fiske suggested that a designer needs critics in order to develop his own critical faculties:

It is here that a magazine edited for him – continually studying his work and his problems – can be of some service. By expressing considered opinions and evaluating our motives for having them, the editors of *Industrial Design* hope to offer not only the news that each reader needs, but one set of views to help him form his opinions and examine *his* motives for doing what he does.<sup>235</sup>

Reflecting on this generous impulse in criticism later in her life, Fiske (now Thompson) said, 'I think critical writing [...]

---

<sup>233</sup> Ibid. p. 43.

<sup>234</sup> Jane Fiske McCullough, review of *The Hidden Persuaders*, Books section, *Industrial Design*, May 1957, p. 10.

<sup>235</sup> Jane Fiske, 'Critical Horseplay', editorial preface, *Industrial Design*, April 1957, p. 43.

is about trying to explain something so that the other person could have an opinion or evaluate it as well as you'.<sup>236</sup> Fiske, Allen, and other writers, like the British critic Banham, did this by making their critical process accessible and visible, often taking readers through the process with them step by step, with the intention of empowering readers to critique design for themselves.

### **Deborah Allen's 'lush situation'**

By the mid-1950s, the American automobile industry, based in the Midwestern city of Detroit, had reached a plateau in technological developments to offer consumers; in order to compete for market share, the major companies, Ford, General Motors, and Chrysler (or 'the Big Three', as they were called), put their resources into applying styling to the body shell of the car, focusing on details such as grilles, lights, fenders, tail fins, and chrome trim and painted metal strips, and into marketing these incremental style changes in their new models, using the women's fashion industry as inspiration. By 1957, General Motors was offering seventy-five body styles in 450 trim combinations.<sup>237</sup> Towards the end of the decade the automakers were bringing out new body shells every year, and these excesses were attracting criticism of the auto industry from all quarters.<sup>238</sup>

In articles such as 'The Safe Car You Can't Buy', published in *The Nation* in 1959, Ralph Nader drew attention to the safety concerns and inconveniences (such as their inability to fit into parking spaces) of the huge cars of the late 1950s. Meanwhile Vance Packard sought to expose the unethical business practices of automakers through their use of rapid style changes to fuel consumers' desire to own the latest

---

<sup>236</sup> Jane Fiske, personal interview, 30 July, 2007.

<sup>237</sup> C. Edson Armi, *The Art of American Car Design: The Profession and Personalities*, (Philadelphia: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1989), p. 50.

<sup>238</sup> 'Ford's promise of major styling changes every year gave pause to care ment and laymen alike', Deborah Allen, 'Crisis Year for Cars', *Industrial Design*, 1958, p. 71.

model.<sup>239</sup> In panel discussions at the Museum of Modern Art and the International Design Conference at Aspen, and in articles in the design press, the gaudily commercial nature of car styling was targeted for its disregard of modernist values such as efficiency, durability, and economy of form. In art historian C. Edson Armi's view, MoMA, which excluded modern mass-produced American cars from its collection, 'treated the American car like an illegitimate child. After all, the primary function of a car's appearance was sales, and the 'philosophy' of its designers was likely to be a combination of power, fantasy, raw sexuality, and newness for its own sake – all basically abhorrent to the Bauhaus-oriented industrial arts establishment'.<sup>240</sup> MoMA's Director of Industrial Design, Edgar Kaufmann Jr., had famously critiqued contemporary car design and styling in the service of increased obsolescence in his 1948 article 'Borax or the Chromium Plated Calf', published in the *Architectural Review*.<sup>241</sup> *Industrial Design*, by contrast, conducted comprehensive car design reviews in response to the automakers' annual changes, and can be seen as an emphatic example of the new type of criticism of popular, mass-produced, standardized design with which this chapter is concerned.

Deborah Allen, who covered the automobile industry for the magazine until the late 1950s, fused pragmatic explication and vivid imagery in her articles to create a hybrid form of writing I have referred to as poetic prose. Allen is not well known as a design critic. She came into the profession through a series of chance encounters, rather than being driven by a mission. For four years at *Industrial Design* she wrote a series of razor-sharp analyses of car design, and then stopped

---

<sup>239</sup> 'It is from Los Angeles that the most anguished cries are heard for the rescue from the rubber-tired incubi. It is Los Angeles that sends its officials to plead with the grand viziers of Detroit not to put longer fins on the cars, not to widen the machines because there is just not room on the streets or in the parking places. It is in Los Angeles that serious officials say that the system is exhausting the elements necessary for human life – land, air, and water'. Harrison E. Salisbury, *The New York Times*, March 2, 1959, excerpted in *Industrial Design*, April 1959.

<sup>240</sup> C. Edson Armi, *The Art of American Car Design: The Profession and Personalities*, (Philadelphia: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1989), p. 54.

<sup>241</sup> Edgar J. Kaufmann, 'Borax or the Chromium Plated Calf', *Architectural Review*, August 1948, pp. 88-92.

abruptly, due to the pressures of family life, never to be heard from again in a design context. Her oeuvre is well worth examination, however, since she reckoned with the design of cars, the most visible and profitable manifestation of American mass production, with a level of acuity and stylistic flair unparalleled among design critics of her time, and since.

Overall, Allen had little patience for the 'expensive toys' she reviewed as a car critic.<sup>242</sup> She lived in New York, used public transport, and didn't even like cars that much. 'It was hard to write about them because I thought they were senseless', she said of the exaggeratedly low-slung, long and streamlined cars of the period.<sup>243</sup> One review began, 'In 1957, as far as we can make out, the American cars are as expensive, fuel-hungry, space-consuming, inconvenient, liable to damage, and subject to speedy obsolescence as they have ever been'.<sup>244</sup> Allen's impatience with the stylistic flourishes of cars comes through in other reviews. For example, of the 1958 Chevrolet, she wrote: 'The gull wing is as easy to identify and as annoying in its relationship to the rest of the car as all of GM's trademark tails'. And to Allen, the 'arbitrary whiplash' of the 1955 Buick Century's 'rear fender is the final straw that makes one wonder what sense there is in any of these curves'.

Her mind changed, however, one summer evening while riding into New York from Westport in a friend's 1955 Buick. 'I saw how he lived in his car and how he enjoyed it', Allen recalls. 'And I was so amazed that there could be some sense in this car. It was a revelation'.<sup>245</sup> Back in the magazine's midtown office, Allen typed up a report on her Olivetti Lettera 22. All the exhilarating motion of her recent ride was captured in

---

<sup>242</sup> Deborah Allen, 'Cars 55', *Industrial Design*, February 1955, p. 82.

<sup>243</sup> Deborah Allen, personal interview, 6 July, 2007.

'Except for the limousines, the brand-new Lincoln is the longest car on the road. At 229 inches, it is 4 inches longer than the last model, which also broke existing length records'. Deborah Allen, 'Cars 58', *Industrial Design*, February 1958, p. 73.

<sup>244</sup> Deborah Allen, 'The dream cars come true again', *Design Review: Cars 1957*, *Industrial Design*, February 1957, p.103.

<sup>245</sup> Deborah Allen, personal interview, 6 July, 2007.

a review that, unlike many of her others, seems to epitomize the era's most optimistic view of cars and all that they promised in terms of mobility, modernity, and social progress. The Buick, she wrote, 'was not designed to sit on the ground or even roll on the ground; it is perpetually floating on currents that are conveniently built into the design'. Elsewhere she referred to it as a 'slab on waves' (demonstrating what she meant with accompanying diagrams). Allen was sceptical of this illusion of weightlessness, since the materials at the designers' disposal were actually very heavy. She observed that it was hard to believe in the 'diaphanous' pretence of the Buick's heavy rear cantilever when you witnessed the effect upon it of a bump in the road. She wrote, 'This attempt to achieve buoyancy with masses of metal is bound to have the same awkward effect as the solid wooden clouds of a Baroque baldacino...' but went on to suggest that the beholder should suspend disbelief as they would when encountering solid wooden clouds on the underside of a canopy of state in Baroque cathedral architecture, and 'accept the romantic notion that materials have no more weight than the designer chooses to give them'. (See Illustration 18)

Allen's analysis of the way in which the car's styling reinforced its dynamics combined both technical specificity and lyricism:

The Buick's designers put the greatest weight over the wheels, where the engine is, which is natural enough. The heavy bumper helps to pull the weight forward; the dip in the body and the chrome spear express how the thrust of the front wheels is dissipated in turbulence toward the rear. Just behind the strong shoulder of the car, a sturdy post lifts up the roof, which trails off like a banner in the air. The driver sits in the dead calm at the center of all this motion; hers is a lush situation.<sup>246</sup>

---

<sup>246</sup> Deborah Allen, 'Cars 55', *Industrial Design*, February 1955, p. 89.

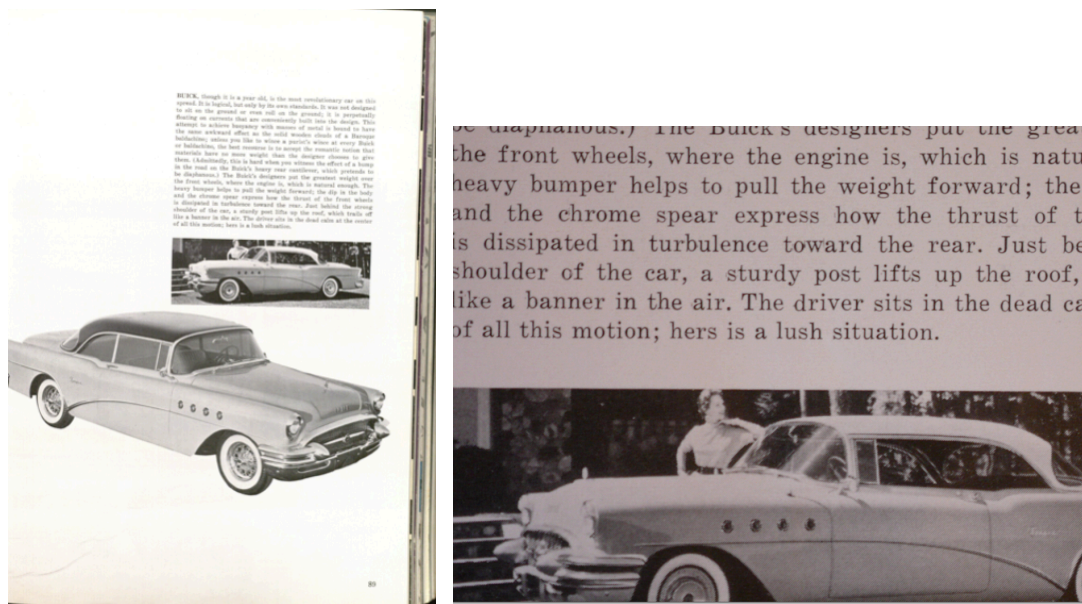


Illustration 18. Page and detail from Deborah Allen's review of 1955 cars, showing her poetic response to the 1955 Buick.

The depiction of a female driver in the last line of this passage referred both to Allen's personal experience of this particular car, but also to the fact that most publicity shots supplied by car manufacturers featured women driving their cars. Manufacturers used women both to model the car and to acknowledge that women were key decision-makers in the purchase of family cars in the US; also, due to the post-war demographic shift to the suburbs, increasing numbers of women needed their own cars to perform household management tasks or to get to work.<sup>247</sup>

The lyricism of the closing phrase, 'hers is a lush situation', is achieved through the self-consciously poetic use of the third-person possessive pronoun, a set of circumstances as the object, and the calculated misuse of the word 'lush', an adjective more usually applied to vegetation. The phrase also conjures a novel image of a 1950s American woman, not trapped in the meaninglessness of her suburban existence as Betty Friedan and others portrayed her, but rather, calmly poised, in control of 5,000 pounds of metal,

<sup>247</sup> Margaret Walsh, 'Gender and Automobility: Selling Cars to American Women after the Second World War', *Journal of Macromarketing*, March 2011 vol. 31 no. 1, pp. 57-72.

and embodying all the potential for growth evoked by the term 'lush'.

*Industrial Design* was run on a small budget. There was no money for Allen to go to Detroit for first-hand reporting, so she based her analyses on what she 'saw on the road' and examination of the brochures the manufacturers sent her.<sup>248</sup> In this way she made use of art historical techniques, such as comparison and type analysis, that she would have studied at Smith College and practiced briefly at the Metropolitan Museum of Art. Indeed, in a 1955 essay titled 'Vehicles of Desire', Reyner Banham referred to Allen's 'ability to write automobile critique of almost Berensonian sensibility'.<sup>249</sup> Allen betrayed her art historical bias in another review, of 1955's brightly coloured cars. (See Illustration 19) She drew attention to the replacement of sheet metal, which had previously been used to convey speed, with that year's use of paint to describe 'the more exaggerated effects of motion – a far more fitting medium for such impressionism'.<sup>250</sup> And in her appraisal of the 1955 Studebaker's 'rakish' new body shape, she wrote in form-appreciate terms, 'It is a stylish, Italianate combination of slow compound curves and sharply contrasting angles...'<sup>251</sup> In her review of the 1958 new Lincoln, she revealed more of her art historian's eye:

American cars often look as if they were based on quick sketches rather than a careful study of form. At Ford, especially among the high-price cars, these sketches are apparently in clay: on Lincoln's side body, the sculptor's tool shows clearly in swift long lines, sharp edges, and concave modeling. This breeziness is slightly out of place in expensive

---

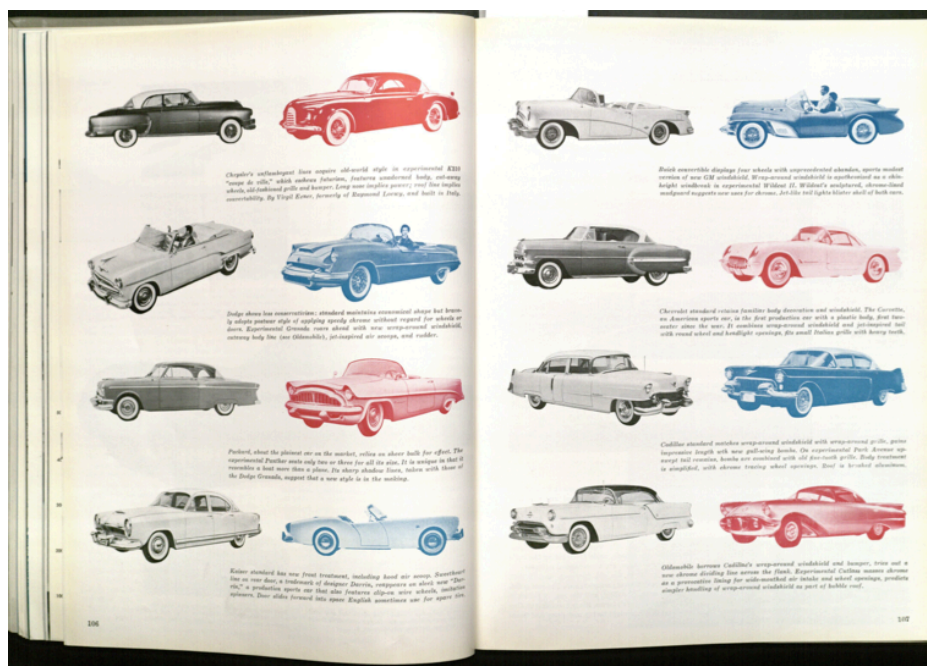
<sup>248</sup> Deborah Allen, personal interview, 6 July, 2007.

<sup>249</sup> Reyner Banham, 'Vehicles of Desire', *Art*, September 1, 1955, p. 4. Banham is referring to the American financier and art historian Bernard Berenson (1865–1959) who specialized in the Renaissance and whose connoisseurial approach, codified in his essay 'The Rudiments of Connoisseurship (A Fragment)', was highly influential in art history. According to the art critic Robert Hughes, Berenson pursued a 'scientific' ideal of connoisseurship: 'a system of discrimination based not on any special power of argument, still less on the iconographical or social meanings of art, but on meticulous observation of detail, sensitivity to style, and exhaustive comparison based on a retentive visual memory'. Robert Hughes, 'Only in America', *The New York Review of Books*, December 20, 1979, *The New York Review of Books* online archive, <http://www.nybooks.com/articles/archives/1979/dec/20/only-in-america> [accessed 18 September 2012], (para 18).

<sup>251</sup> Deborah Allen, 'Cars 55', *Industrial Design*, February 1955, p. 82.

hardgoods – with a little more time the sculptor would certainly have smoothed out the kick of metal ahead of the front wheel, the dust-catching ledge down the body, the extra metal at the back window. Furthermore, this sophisticated side-modeling conflicts with front and rear motifs that seem to be borrowed from below: sloping light mounts and chromed ovals recalling Edsel and Mercury and coy wings from the lowly Ford.<sup>252</sup>

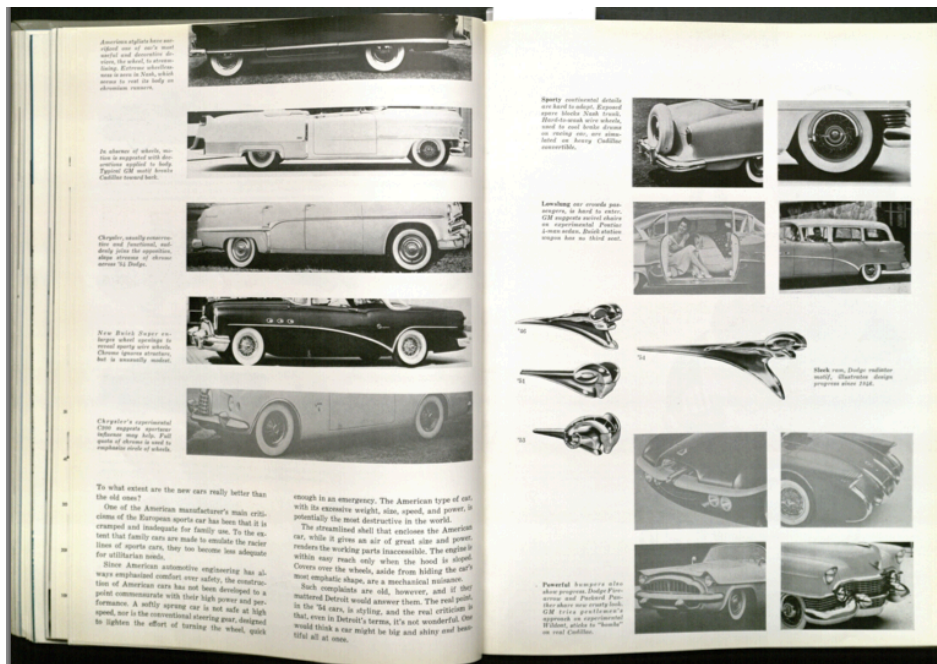
Additionally, her cropping of photographs of cars to highlight certain features such as rears, bombs, posts, bulges, spears, saddles, speed-lines, doors, bumpers, and her meticulous assemblage of these images in pairs and typological groups recalls the Wölfflinian technique of visual comparison so fundamental to the art history slide show and represents a visual rhetorical technique unusual in design criticism.<sup>253</sup>



<sup>252</sup> Deborah Allen, 'Crisis Year for Cars, Cars '58', *Industrial Design*, p. 72.

<sup>253</sup> Tim Benton has observed how Banham, too, used the Wölfflinian technique of visual comparison: 'For if Banham rejected parts of the high art history lecture, he was a master of the very Wölfflinian technique of visual comparison. We were all brought up in the tradition of the left and right projector screens and the basic grammar of art historical comparison [...] Selection and 'play' of images lies at the heart of this tradition and constitutes part of the argument'. Tim Benton, 'The Art of the Well-Tempered Lecture: Reyner Banham and Le Corbusier', *The Banham Lectures: Essays on Designing the Future*, ed. by Jeremy Aynsley and Harriet Atkinson, with a foreword by Mary Banham, (Oxford: Berg, 2009), pp. 11-32.





Illustrations 19. Spreads from Deborah Allen's car reviews showing her use of typological analysis and visual comparison.

By 1957, companies advertising in *Industrial Design* were using similar techniques. In the April 1957 issue an advertisement for Rohm & Haas Plexiglas for example, eight cropped images of tail fins from various cars were shown in a grid over a spread with the tagline 'What do they have in common?'<sup>254</sup> And in the same issue an advertisement for Enjay Butyl rubber displayed all the rubber components of a car, just as Allen had done with zinc die castings in her review of 1957 cars a month earlier.<sup>255</sup>

In addition to her appreciation of the car as image, however, Allen's analysis also demonstrated a concern with the realities of its use. Her sensitivity to the ways in which people inhabited cars, and to how industrial design was experienced bodily, differentiated her writing from more ocular-centric, connoisseurial art criticism. She often drew attention to cars' safety hazards – the protruding rockets on the grilles, the sharp edges and knobs of the interior dashboards, and the poor visibility of wrap-around windshields

<sup>254</sup> Rohm & Haas advertisement, *Industrial Design*, April 1957, pp. 30-31.

<sup>255</sup> Enjay Butyl advertisement, *Industrial Design*, April 1957, p. 29.

– and the cramped conditions of car interiors, especially the third man spots over the drive shaft ‘hillocks’. Allen’s discussion of use was not confined to ergonomics and functionality, however. She also took into account the phenomenological qualities of driving. In a section of her 1955 review, devoted to the positioning of the Plymouth’s posts (the vertical structural elements that support the roof of a car), she concluded, ‘At GM a post isn’t a post, it is a design on your emotions, and if it defies purist logic, it nonetheless succeeds in its real aim, which is purely psychological’. And of the 1955 Buick, she wrote, ‘But when the driver gets into the car’, ‘something else begins to operate. In the Buick she is couched at just the right point among the flattering curves, and her distance from the windshield gives her an air of command that may do more for her driving than a clear view of the road’.<sup>256</sup> In a special feature titled ‘Cars ‘56: The Driver’s View’, she led with a picture of a steering wheel and dashboard in which three disembodied white-gloved hands manipulated the car’s ‘appalling number of gauges, controls, and push-button devices’, which included record players, air conditioning, ashtrays, antenna, and convertible top controls. (See Illustration 20) The article made typological comparisons between features like speedometers and crash features, using cropped photographs gathered in tight juxtapositions and a listed taxonomy of all the ‘Watch’ and ‘Work’ functions of the car. In her introduction she opined:

Yet logic and legibility are only one part of dashboard design. A second challenge – and often it seems the major one – is psychological. As a nerve center of the car, the dashboard explains and advertises its performance and builds up the pleasure and excitement of driving. Like most psychological problems, this one is complex: the car must generally look powerful and heavy yet fast and maneuverable, loaded with conveniences yet simple to master, safe yet daring, lush yet sporty.<sup>257</sup>

---

<sup>256</sup> Deborah Allen, ‘Cars ‘55,’ *Industrial Design*, February 1955, p. 82.

<sup>257</sup> Deborah Allen, ‘Cars ‘56: The Driver’s View’ *Industrial Design*, August 1956, p. 134.

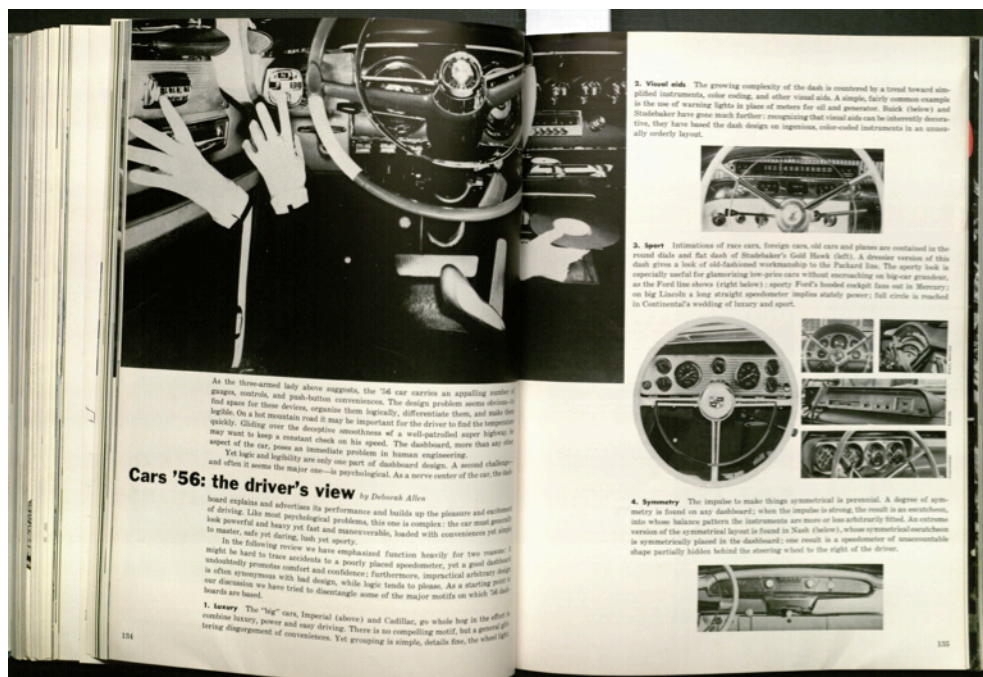


Illustration 20. Spread from Deborah Allen's article about 1956 car models showing aspects of the cars from the driver's perspective.

Furthermore, Allen's writing shows that she also understood the interrelated economic processes of manufacture, retail, and distribution. She tracked sales figures and made predictions about a model's commercial success. She explained technical aspects of car production with clarity and precision, using diagrams to supplement her written description. In her review of the 1958 Chevrolet, for example, she wrote, 'To achieve the lowness of its competitors, Chevy uses a new frame that seems to provide good interior space [...] Rather than a box frame or an x-frame, this is an 'hour-glass' frame that concentrates structure at the driveshaft, where there is a hump anyhow. In place of the heavy side rails that brace the usual x-frame, Chevy has light rails attached to the body rather than to the frame'.<sup>258</sup>

Allen's writing was informed by art historical study and literary flair, tempered by lived experience and technical knowledge, and applied to human interaction with cars as well as the mechanics of their economic exchange. Allen was, as she

<sup>258</sup> Deborah Allen, 'Crisis Year for Cars, Cars '58', *Industrial Design*, February 1958, p. 74.

put it, deeply interested in car design, not on moral grounds – ‘we can’t say this is wrong, any more than Eve was wrong’ – but simply because cars were ‘the most unavoidable, costly, and popular example of industrial design on the American market, and of all popular American products they are the most aesthetic in concept and purpose’.<sup>259</sup>

Allen struggled to balance the pressures of running a large family and maintaining an editorial career. She and her husband had moved to Washington D.C., and she commuted to New York for some time, taking a magazine’s worth of copy to edit on the train, but finally bowed out in 1957, leaving the editorship in Fiske’s hands (she would continue as a consultant to the magazine for a few more years). Fiske continued at the magazine as editor in chief until 1959, (when she handed the editorship to Ralph Caplan) and as consultant editor until 1964. Fiske went on to become a director of the Kaufmann International Design Awards, develop research on the history of the Bauhaus, join the board of directors of the International Design Conference at Aspen, and chair three of its conferences. She switched her focus to architecture when she married the architect Ben Thompson and collaborated with him on many projects including the concept planning of the 1976 renovation of Boston’s Faneuil Hall Marketplace, the running of the restaurant Harvest, and the influential store Design Research.

Fiske and Allen’s work from this period lived on in unexpected ways. Allen’s phrase ‘hers is a lush situation’ attracted the attention of Richard Hamilton and became the launch point and title for a series of studies and a painting (1957–58) that explored the relationship between the automobile and feminine form. The lipstick-red mouth of a body-less driver hovers above a diagrammatic inventory of Detroit styling features including visored headlamps, chrome spears, tail fins, speed markings, and a CinemaScope windshield, details which Hamilton had gleaned from Allen’s work. Despite her own disillusionment

---

<sup>259</sup> Deborah Allen, ‘The Dream Cars Come True Again’, *Design Review: Cars ’57*, *Industrial Design*, 1957, p. 103.

with her subject matter and her rejection of the medium she was so skilled in, Allen's writing transcended, or at least escaped, its genre and made a curious voyage across continents, disciplines, and contexts to live on in the canons of British, and international, art.

Reyner Banham, too, found in Allen's writing inspiration for his own appraisals of cars, and more generally for his desire to develop a new mode of writing about the expendable, mass-produced materiality of popular culture. In 1955, he declared excitedly of Allen's Buick review, 'This is the stuff of which the aesthetics of expendability will eventually be made'.<sup>260</sup> He applauded Allen's writing for its ability to channel the vitality of the Detroit body-stylists themselves, to approximate 'the sense and dynamism of that extraordinary continuum of emotional-engineering-by-public-consent which enables the automobile industry to create vehicles of palpably fulfilled desire'.<sup>261</sup> Banham saw the body stylists of the automobile industry, vilified by most other design writers both in the US and the UK, as providing essential arbitration between industry and the consumer. Such arbitration would become a key reference point for Banham in developing his new literary arsenal for dealing with pop culture, in his 'attempt to face up to Pop, as the basic cultural stream of mechanized urban culture'.<sup>262</sup>

Although Banham did not learn to drive until 1966, preferring the Moulton bicycle as a mode of transport through London's streets and regarding 'auto-addicts' as 'an ugly mob', he found in cars subject matter that suited his knowledge of engineering and appreciation of popular culture.<sup>263</sup> In the 1960s, during travels to the United States, and possibly inspired by Allen's writing, he began to appreciate the bodily experience of driving, writing of negotiating Los Angeles

---

<sup>260</sup> Reyner Banham, 'Vehicles of Desire', *Art*, September 1, 1955, p. 3.

<sup>261</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>262</sup> Reyner Banham, 'The Atavism of the Short-Distance Mini-Cyclist', *Reyner Banham: Design by Choice*, ed. Penny Sparke (New York: Rizzoli, 1981), p. 88. Originally published in *Living Arts* 3, 1964, pp. 91-97.

<sup>263</sup> Reyner Banham, 'Unlovable at any speed', *The Architects' Journal* 144, 21 December 1966, pp. 1527-1529.

freeways in ecstatic terms: 'To drive over those ramps in a high sweeping 60-mile-an-hour trajectory and plunge down to ground level again is a spatial experience of a sort one does not normally associate with monuments of engineering – the nearest thing to flight on four wheels I know'.<sup>264</sup>

**PART THREE: DEVELOPING AN AESTHETICS OF EXPENDABILITY,  
BANHAM'S CRITICAL WRITING, 1955-1961**

In the late 1950s and early 1960s Reyner Banham was preoccupied with formulating a new type of critical writing equipped to reckon with popular, mass-produced, expendable product design. Banham believed that the modes and values of design criticism as it had been conducted were distilled from the precepts of Modernist architecture, and thus were out of date and insufficient for any convincing appraisal of the contemporary situation. A different kind of criticism was necessary for assessing the products of a throwaway economy. Such criticism would require new diction, metaphors, syntax, methods, purpose, values, and readerships. It also required a sensitivity to the products under consideration, and an empathy with the concerns of their consumers. In a 1963 article he introduced the term 'Vidiot', which he characterized as someone 'trained to extract every subtlety, marginal meaning, overtone or technical nicety from any of the mass media', and thus in this term he conflated himself as critic with the knowing consumer he represented.<sup>265</sup>

Banham advanced his argument in several articles of the period by tracing the historical lineage of industrial design criticism, critiquing contemporaneous writing and the influence of design institutions, and by experimenting himself with the nascent form. Assembled together, these fragments of

---

<sup>264</sup> Reyner Banham, 'Roadscape with Rusting Rails', *The Listener* 80, 29 August 1968, pp. 267-268.

<sup>265</sup> Reyner Banham, 'Who is this Pop?', *Motif*, Winter, 1962/63, p.5.

various articles constitute Banham's statement of practice as a design critic.

**Goods and 'goodies': Banham's subject matter<sup>266</sup>**

Banham identified his subject matter as the kinds of new, cheap, mass-produced, often "flashy and vulgar" products that figured in peoples' lives. These were the things found in high street stores, such as transistor radios, cameras, and Coke cans. He also examined what he later termed as 'Goodies', the tangible ingredients, the material culture and the 'loot' of Pop. These were not readily available goods, but rather esoteric examples of popular culture, as identified by pop artists, like the 'genuine Brand-X cigarettes, Japanese wrestling magazines, foreign paper-backs from Krogh and Brentano's', or John McHale's trunk full of American magazines that provided the material for Banham and Hamilton's studies of American white goods and cars.<sup>267</sup> By training his gaze on popular goods and the manifestations of popular culture, he made a political statement that countered the work of design critics to date, who usually excluded this material using criteria of restrained aesthetics and durability as their filter. Banham was also indulging a personal affection for such things. Banham was raised in Norwich in the eastern British county of Norfolk, the son of a gas engineer. He trained in aeromechanical engineering at Bristol Technical College, focusing on management training, and then worked at Bristol Airplane Company as an engine-fitter. After the war he returned to Norwich, where he wrote reviews of art exhibitions for local newspapers such as *The Eastern Evening News* and the *Eastern Daily Press* and enrolled in an adult education art history course taught by Helen Lowenthal. With Lowenthal's assistance, and after learning German (the language required

---

<sup>266</sup> Ibid. p.10.

<sup>267</sup> John McHale had spent a year as a visiting student at Yale University and returned to London with a collection of American magazines such as *Life*, *Look*, and *Esquire*, and other ephemera. 'Goodies' could also refer to Peter Blake's 'kit of images', which was an insert in *Ark 32*, 1962, or the 'Living City Survival Kit' compiled in 1962 by Archigram, a team of experimental architects.

for entry) he was admitted to the Courtauld Institute in London to study architectural history. While a student, he attended the Independent Group meetings at the ICA as an organizing member and recorder. When he earned his BA in 1952 he began to study with Nikolaus Pevsner, working on a PhD, which he published as *Theory and Design in the First Machine Age* in 1960. In 1952 Banham joined the staff of the *Architectural Review* as a part-time literary editor.

Through discussions at the Independent Group in the early 1950s Banham realized that his working class, provincial upbringing – a disadvantage at the Courtauld Institute and in art history more generally – was, in the pluralist atmosphere of pop, actually an asset to be leveraged. The usual trajectory for a Courtauld graduate, according to Mary Banham, was to go and work in a provincial gallery or museum, with a view to returning to London after a few years. She believes Anthony Blunt, the director of the Courtauld, and Pevsner helped him to circumvent this route, because Banham was already an accomplished journalist and didn't want to return to the provinces, but mainly, she suspects, because 'he was not a gentleman and said what he thought'.<sup>268</sup> Banham became increasingly comfortable with the fact of his working class background, using it to his advantage, and in 1964 claimed that, 'it gives me a right to talk about certain subjects'.<sup>269</sup>

As others had caught on to pop culture as subject matter, Banham was keen to locate himself at the wellspring of Pop ideas – someone who had 'helped to create the mental climate in which the Pop-art painters have been able to flourish'. He reinforced his working-class roots and those of most of the Independent Group members who he said were all brought up 'in the Pop belt somewhere', all knowing consumers of American

---

<sup>268</sup> Mary Banham, personal interview, 26 February, 2007.

<sup>269</sup> Reyner Banham, 'The Atavism of the Short-Distance Mini-Cyclist', in *Reyner Banham: Design by Choice*, ed. Penny Sparke (New York: Rizzoli, 1981), p. 84. Originally published in *Living Arts* 3, 1964, pp. 91-97. For a fuller account of Banham's cultural background and ideals in relation to class, see Nigel Whiteley, *Reyner Banham: Historian of the Immediate Future*, (Boston, MA: MIT Press, 2002), pp.378-382.



films and magazines in an inevitable rather than a studied way. In this first-person autobiographical passage he attempts to demonstrate a claim to the practice of knowing consumption:

I have a crystal clear memory of myself, aged sixteen, reading a copy of *Fantastic Stories* while waiting to go on in the school play, which was Fielding's *Tom Thumb the Great*, and deriving equal relish from the *recherché* literature I should shortly be performing and the equally far out pulp in my hand. We returned to Pop in the early fifties like Behans going to Dublin or Thomases to Llaregub, back to our native literature, our native arts.<sup>270</sup>

In the mid- to late-1950s, when British design criticism tended to be enfolded in the proselytizing missions of design institutions such as the CoID, Banham worked independently as a freelance writer for various publications and was free to explore different topics, stances, and writing styles. He gradually began to expand his subject matter beyond architecture and art, and to embrace more quotidian aspects of material culture. In 1955 he wrote his first piece for *Design* magazine 'A Rejoinder.'<sup>271</sup> In 1956 he wrote about industrial design and "the common user" for *The Listener*, and with his "Not Quite Architecture" column for the *Architects' Journal*, begun in 1957, and his *New Statesman* column on architecture, technology and design, begun in 1958, he experimented with broadening his field to include reviews of science fiction and blockbuster films, and industrial design or the themes that framed it, such as the retreat of the Italian influence in British society. By the mid-1960s, with a weekly 'Design and Society' column at *New Society*, he was knee-deep in popular culture as subject matter, devoting columns to the British potato crisp, bank notes, sunglasses as fashion accessories, Californian surfboards, paperback book covers, the decoration of ice cream trucks, Carnaby Street, and commercial signage. But in the mid-late 1950s period he was still finding his footing in this territory.

---

<sup>270</sup> Reyner Banham, 'Who is this Pop?', *Motif*, Winter, 1962/63, p.13.

<sup>271</sup> Reyner Banham, 'A Space for Decoration: A Rejoinder,' *Design* 19, July, 1955, pp. 24-25.

**'Many, because orchids': Banham's critical values<sup>272</sup>**

The new subject matter that Banham had identified demanded a corresponding shift in values that grated with the establishment view of design. A critic of serially produced popular product design would have to grasp the implications of expendability, decoration, and manufacturing and marketing processes. He would also have to have the ability to intuit the desires of the knowing consumer and the worldview of the designer.

Banham claimed that the aesthetics of Pop are dependent upon 'a massive initial impact and small sustaining power', how consumer goods are designed to be expendable like an ice-lolly or a daily newspaper: "The addition of the word expendable to the vocabulary of criticism was essential before Pop art could be faced honestly, since this is the first quality of an object to be consumed."<sup>273</sup>

Banham dismissed what he saw as a century of thinking about designed products informed by 'a mystique of form and function under the dominance of architecture', and misled by a confused idolization of simplicity and standardization. Inspired by automobile designer Jean Gregoire's observation that the European Bugatti engine, so careful to conceal its wiring and accessories, was in fact less beautiful than American engines where the manifolds are clearly seen and easy to access for repair purposes, Banham compared a Bugatti engine with a Buick V-8. He wrote, 'The Bugatti, as Gregoire noted, conceals many components and presents an almost two-dimensional picture to the eye, while the Buick flaunts as many accessories as possible in a rich three-dimensional composition, countering Bugatti's fine art reticence with a wild rhetoric of power'.<sup>274</sup> Summarizing the appeal of the Buick, he enumerated the following qualities: glitter, bulk, three-dimensionality, deliberate exposure of technical means, ability to signify power, and immediate impact. To Banham, these qualities

<sup>272</sup> Reyner Banham, 'A Throw-away Esthetic', *Industrial Design*, March 1960, p. 61.

<sup>273</sup> Reyner Banham, 'Who is this Pop?', *Motif*, Winter, 1962/63, p.8.

<sup>274</sup> Reyner Banham, 'A Throw-away Esthetic', *Industrial Design*, March 1960, pp. 64.

represented the antithesis of fine art values and fulfilled instead the literary critic Leslie Fiedler's definition of Pop Art articulated in an essay on comic books in *Encounter*, which Banham appreciated.<sup>275</sup> Banham quoted Fiedler, who had written that although contemporary popular culture differs from folk art, in 'its refusal to be shabby or second rate in appearance, its refusal to know its place', it is not designed to 'be treasured, but to be thrown away'.<sup>276</sup> Banham proposed that thinking about design should be relocated to a more appropriate home in the popular arts.

In his 1955 article 'Vehicles of Desire' Banham bemoaned the fact that Platonic ideals of permanence more befitting architecture were still being used to measure value in industrial design, saying, 'We are still making do with Plato because in aesthetics, as in most other things, we still have no formulated intellectual attitudes for living in a throwaway economy'.<sup>277</sup> He continued, 'We eagerly consume noisy ephemeridae, here with a bang today, gone with a whimper tomorrow – movies, beach-wear, pulp magazines, this morning's headlines and tomorrow's TV programmes – yet we insist on aesthetic and moral standards hitched to permanency, durability and perennity'.<sup>278</sup>

In 'Design by Choice', published in July 1961 in *Architectural Review*, Banham surveyed the landmarks and influences that he felt had shaped industrial design criticism of the past decade. The six-page article was laid out in an alphabetical chronicle of 27 topics, each described in a paragraph and accompanied by thumbnail images running down the wide margins of the page layout, functioning as a glossary for terms mentioned in the main text.<sup>279</sup>

In the essay Banham reviewed the previous decade of thinking about industrial design and charted the shifts in attitudes

---

<sup>275</sup> Leslie Fiedler, 'The Middle Against Both Ends', *Encounter*, August 1955, pp. 16–23.

<sup>276</sup> Ibid.

<sup>277</sup> Reyner Banham, 'Vehicles of Desire', *Art*, September 1, 1955, p. 3.

<sup>278</sup> Ibid.

<sup>279</sup> Reyner Banham, 'Design by Choice', *Architectural Review*, July 1961, pp.44–48.

toward, and methods for, evaluating industrial design that had taken place. Since he was writing for an audience of architects, he focused on 'the position of the architect in these changed circumstances'. 'New men and the new concepts', he wrote, had replaced the architects and the architecture-focused discourse that previously directed the conversation, claiming that, 'the foundation stone of the previous intellectual structure of Design Theory has crumbled – there is no longer universal acceptance of architecture as the universal analogy of design'.<sup>280</sup>

In his introductory paragraph Banham considered the marked difference between design criticism written at the beginning of the decade – 'the apparent calm and certainty with which judgment was passed on individual products, a situation bespeaking settled and widely-held standards' – and the situation in 1961, when 'different sections of 'informed opinion' (who were allies and firm friends ten years ago) not only differ in their judgments on individual products, but differ even more fundamentally on methods of criticism'.<sup>281</sup>

In Banham's view, neither the subject matter of industrial design (quality, performance, and style) nor its basic 'problem' had changed – 'it is still a problem of affluent democracy, where the purchasing power of the masses is in conflict with the preferences of the élite'. What had changed were the ways in which industrial design was approached – the 'judgments' and the 'methods of criticism'.

Banham thought that while the Modern Movement held sway in the early twentieth century architects such as Voysey, Lethaby, Muthesius, Gropius, Wright and Le Corbusier, and writers influenced by them such as Edgar Kaufmann and Herbert Read, directed the production and discussion of industrial design. By 1961, however, Banham noted that architects had relinquished control of the discussion to 'theorists and critics from practically any other field under the sun:'

---

<sup>280</sup> Ibid. p.44.

<sup>281</sup> Ibid. p. 43.

The new men in the USA, for instance, are typically liberal sociologists like David Reisman or Eric Larrabee; in Germany, the new men at Ulm are mathematicians, like Horst Rittel, or experimental psychologists like Mervyn Perrine; in Britain they tend to come from an industrial design background, like Peter Sharp, John Chris Jones, or Bruce Archer, or from the Pop Art polemics at the ICA like Richard Hamilton. In most Western countries, the appearance of consumer-defence organizations has added yet another voice, though no very positive philosophy.<sup>282</sup>

In these newly configured circumstances, opinion on industrial design was fractured and eclectic, and served the ideological purposes of each commentator. Banham saw an opening amid such pluralism for architecture to re-establish its contribution, albeit on more modest and less moralistic terms. He thought that it might make 'operational sense' if architects renewed their concentration, not on 'the whole human environment', as they had done previously, but on 'objects in or near buildings', specifically, things like 'automobiles, lamp-posts, refrigerators and crockery'.<sup>283</sup> Rather than attempting to design such things themselves, an activity they would find incompatible with their ingrained notions of durability, they should instead 'exercise creative choice', and like Le Corbusier in his Pavillon de l'Esprit Nouveau, should specify appurtenances selected from manufacturers' catalogues. As such, and by way of contract furnishing, architects were actually powerful consumers, and by extension, critics: 'Simply by the exercise of their market influence, architects may find they are in a position to kill a poor design, encourage a new one, and embolden a manufacturer to tool up for a new product'.<sup>284</sup> In the numerous instances where an architect cannot control the ways in which 'an ordinary domestic occupier' will furnish their home, Banham suggested that the architect take on the role not of a theatrical director, but of a producer of a play, 'handling a mixed cast of metropolitan professionals and local talent'. In this extended analogy, he compared a homeowner's input as 'ad-libbing and playing off the cuff', and the living room as a

---

<sup>282</sup> Ibid. p. 44.

<sup>283</sup> Ibid.

<sup>284</sup> Ibid. p. 46.

'stage', and argued that an architect well-informed about the visual fascination of tape recorders and coffee percolators should be able to gauge how the homeowner might position them on their stage set.<sup>285</sup> The trend toward miniaturization of products would not, Banham thought, make them more invisible, but rather their technical novelty would 'demand attention with a hard, gem-like insistence, and focus attention as surely as the red button on which our atomic fate depends'.<sup>286</sup> He concluded that while the architect could no longer claim to be the absolute master of the visual environment, his responsibilities in a smaller zone of influence were actually increased.

Banham showed the architect readership that they needed to understand product design in emotional terms, and that they would need a guide in such unfamiliar territory. By inserting numerous hints of his knowledge and ability to translate jargon terms such as 'Detroitniks' and 'hidden persuaders', Banham prepared the way for his own role as indispensable teacher.

Banham's alphabetical chronicle of 'landmarks and influences' between 1951 and 1961 included his personal and critical takes on a spectrum of topics, most of which he had devoted full-length articles to elsewhere. The list included: the International Design Conference at Aspen's displacement of the Triennale as 'a world centre of opinion and debate;' Consumer Research, and the way in which 'the formal recognition of a specific consumer viewpoint in relation to industrial design' had emerged as 'one of the more important new factors'; Detroit as a 'symbol for the War of the Generations;' Magazines such as *Design*, notable for Michael Farr's editorship, and the way in which it propagated the 'science of ergonomics', and *Industrial Design*, 'the most professional of design magazines' under Jane Fiske McCullough; Motivation Research, a 'rather dubious science', most suspect from the

---

<sup>285</sup> Banham's use of this extended theatrical metaphor may have been drawn from his experience working as stagehand at the Maddermarket Theatre in Norwich in the late 1940s.

<sup>286</sup> Reyner Banham, 'Design by Choice', *Architectural Review*, July 1961, p. 47.

designer's point of view as a 'restriction on his freedom to design;' Packaging which enabled 'the latest and most sophisticated types of design into domestic environment' via frozen foods, LP records, and paperback books; Pop Art and its claim that 'there was no such thing as good and bad taste, but that each stratum of society had its own characteristic taste and style of design – a proposition which clearly undermines the argument on which nearly all previous writing about taste in design has been based;' Television as the main stimulus of the 'great increase in popular sophistication about all visual matters, including design;' and the Hochschule für Gestaltung at Ulm, the 'cool training ground for the technocratic elite'.<sup>287</sup>

### **Selling the consumer to capital: Banham's role as design critic**

Banham outlined a new and commercially focused role for the product critic, as partner of the designer, which is 'not to disdain what sells' but to help industry determine 'what *will* sell'. Part of this role involved selling not just the product to the consumer, but also the consumer to capital. He wrote:

Both designer and critic must be in close touch with the dynamics of mass-communication. The critic, especially, must have the ability to sell the public to the manufacturer, the courage to speak out in the face of academic hostility, the knowledge to decide where, when and to what extent the standards of the popular arts are preferable to those of the fine arts. He must project the future dreams and desires of people as one who speaks from within their ranks. It is only thus that he can participate in the extraordinary adventure of mass-production.<sup>288</sup>

By urging critics to get closer to the design industry and to participate more actively in its manipulation of popular desire, Banham took a contrary stance, one that identified

---

<sup>287</sup> Reyner Banham, margins, 'Design by Choice', *Architectural Review*, July 1961, pp. 44-48.

<sup>288</sup> Reyner Banham, 'A Throw-away Esthetic', *Industrial Design*, March 1960, pp. 65.

"academic hostility" as the primary impediment to progress, rather than manufacturers or designers.

Tomás Maldonado, who became director of the Hochschule für Gestaltung Ulm in Germany in 1956, invited Banham to visit the school in March 1959. Banham delivered two lectures, 'The Influence of Expendability on Product Design' and 'Democratic Taste', which were afterwards 'heatedly discussed.'<sup>289</sup> In fact, it is hard to picture a setting more antithetical for the Banham to present his thesis on the virtues of ephemerality and the idiosyncrasies of public taste. Ulm's pedagogical philosophy under Maldonado, was highly scientific and technological, and underpinned by functionalism. Maldonado critiqued Banham's article in a 1959 piece for *Stile Industria*.<sup>290</sup> Maldonado, in line with Frankfurt School arguments, drew attention to what he saw as Banham's mistaken assumption that Detroit car styling was an expression of the people, when in fact it was a calculating marketing exercise designed cynically by large corporations. He wrote, 'I am not much convinced that the aerodynamic fantasies of Vice Presidents of Styling have much in common with the artistic needs of the man in the street'.<sup>291</sup>

Maldonado, an anti-capitalist design theorist committed to a rational approach to design, saw Banham's argument as fundamentally flawed. Banham's point, however, was that to truly understand industrial design as a critic, one needed to get close to the sources both of manufacture and consumption, to report from the ground, rather than to philosophize from a distance. What does appear contradictory in Banham's argument is his requirement that a critic of popular product design should be an ally of the designer and to help serve the industrial complex consumers on platters, while also representing the emotional desires of the knowing consumer.

---

<sup>289</sup> *Ulm 5*, Quarterly bulletin of the Hochschule für Gestaltung, July 1959, p.79.

<sup>290</sup> Tomás Maldonado, 'New Perspectives on Industrial Design Education', *Stile Industria* 20, 1959, reprinted in *Industrial Design*, March 1960, pp. 89-92.

<sup>291</sup> *Ibid.*



## **Negotiating 'the thick ripe stream of loaded symbols':**

### **Banham's methods**

Banham set out a method for critical analysis in the new conditions of expendability, which would take into account a product's content, symbolism, and the popular culture it spoke to. The proper criticism of popular product design depended, he opined, on 'an analysis of content', 'an appreciation of superficial rather than abstract qualities', and an ability to see the product as 'an interaction between the sources of the symbols and the consumer's understanding of them'.<sup>292</sup> He explained how a critic 'must deal with the language of signs'. Improved criticism was contingent upon, 'the ability of design critics to master the workings of the popular art vocabulary which constitutes the aesthetics of expendability'.<sup>293</sup>

Banham highlighted a sample of Deborah Allen's writing about cars in *Industrial Design*, discussed earlier in this chapter. He regarded Allen as one of the few commentators equipped to write about cars and 'the thick ripe stream of loaded symbols' with which stylists adorned them.<sup>294</sup> Seeking an alternative to architecture with which to compare cars, Banham lit upon comics, movies, and musicals as the nearest point of reference, for these pop products bore 'the same creative thumb-prints – finish, fantasy, punch, professionalism, swagger'. Top body stylists, he argued, were looking in the same direction. They used symbolic iconographies 'drawn from Science fiction movies, earth-moving equipment, supersonic aircraft, racing cars, heraldry, and certain deep-seated mental dispositions about the great outdoors and the kinship between technology and sex'.<sup>295</sup> Deploying such popular visual references, the body stylists were able to mediate between industry and the consumer, and 'a means of saying something of breathless, but unverbalisable, consequence to the live

---

<sup>292</sup> Reyner Banham, 'A Throw-away Esthetic', *Industrial Design*, March 1960, p. 65.

<sup>293</sup> Reyner Banham, 'Space for Decoration, A Rejoinder', *Design*, July 1955, p.24.

<sup>294</sup> Reyner Banham, 'Vehicles of Desire', *Art*, 1, September 1955, p. 4.

<sup>295</sup> *Ibid.* p. 5.

culture of the Technological Century'.<sup>296</sup> It was this ability of the Detroit body stylists, to conduct a 'repertoire' of styling details, to 'give tone and social connotation to the body envelope', and to connect to a 'live culture' that Banham sought to capture and make 'verbalisable' through his own writing.

**'Boeing along to Honolulu': Banham's language<sup>297</sup>**

Banham's most significant and enduring contribution to a new form of product design criticism is to be found in the language and the new vocabulary he introduced to design discourse. The project of using language to approximate the contours of a pop sensibility was already underway in the literary forays of authors such as Anthony Burgess, especially in his novels *Nothing Like the Sun* and *Clockwork Orange*.

Literary critic John J. Stinson, observed that:

The art that Burgess gives us is, in fact, very much akin to that of the Pop Artists of the graphic arts, chiefly in the fact that the countless mundane objects he gives us come very near themselves to being the subject matter, although also as in the graphic arts, they are superinflated (in Burgess by a bursting sort of neo-Jacobean language) so as to bring us to new perceptual and ontological levels of awareness....<sup>298</sup>

Burgess later observed that, "By extension of vocabulary, by careful distortion of syntax, by exploitation of various prosodic devices traditionally monopolized by poetry, surely certain indefinite or complex areas of the mind can more competently be rendered than in the style of, say, Irving Stone or Wallace."<sup>299</sup> In non-fiction writing, too, American writers such as Tom Wolfe and Gay Talese were exploring a new immersive approach, saturated with technical detail, allusion,

---

<sup>296</sup> Ibid.

<sup>297</sup> Reyner Banham, 'Who is this Pop?', *Motif*, Winter, 1962/63, p. 3.

<sup>298</sup> John J. Stinson, 'Anthony Burgess: Novelist on the Margin,' in *Journal of Popular Culture*, Summer, 1973, pp. 136-51.

<sup>299</sup> Anthony Burgess interviewed by John Cullinan, *The Paris Review*, Spring 1973, <http://www.theparisreview.org/interviews/3994/the-art-of-fiction-no-48-anthony-burgess>

extensive passages of dialogue, and imagined scenarios, which would later be dubbed by Wolfe himself as 'New Journalism'.<sup>300</sup>

Banham transplanted neologisms, the rhythm and diction of contemporary vernacular dialogue, the language and brand names of commercial culture, and poetic phrasing to the context of design writing. Consider one of Banham's sentences: 'The New Brutalists, pace-makers and phrase-makers of the Anti-Academic line-up, having delivered a smart KO to the Land-Rover some months back, have now followed it with a pop-eyed OK for the Cadillac convertible...'<sup>301</sup> In this dense sentence Banham hyphenated words to make new ones (pace-setters, phrase-makers, pop-eyed), emphasizing the condensed information-packed impression of the sentence. He used the colloquial abbreviations KO and OK in a pleasingly symmetrical and palindromic shorthand for evoking his perception of a change in taste (the British establishment as represented by the sensible Land-Rover was given a 'Knock Out', while the excesses of Detroit car styling symbolized by the Cadillac were given approval). Through such playful linguistic devices Banham began to work out a distinctive writerly voice capable of engaging with the vitality of popular culture on its own terms.

#### **'The woman on the bus': Banham's readers**

Banham, who between 1958 and the late 1970s was writing weekly columns, knew very well the pressures of writing to deadlines and directly into the fast-flowing current of contemporary culture. His articles about contemporary design can be seen as expendable as the topics he was writing about. Reflecting on the journalistic aspect of his oeuvre, he wrote:

---

<sup>300</sup> Banham's first piece for *New Society* on August 19, 1965, would be 'Kandy Kulture Kikerone', a review of Tom Wolfe's essay collection *The Kandy-Kolored Tangerine-Flake Streamline Baby* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1965). The essay after which the book was titled first appeared in *Esquire*, a magazine that Hamilton and Banham both read, in November 1963, as 'There Goes (Varoom! Varoom!) That Kandy-Kolored (Thphhhhhh!) Tangerine-Flake Streamline Baby (Rahghhh!) Around the Bend (Brummmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmm)...' and is regarded as the first product of the 'New Journalism' genre.

<sup>301</sup> Reyner Banham, 'Vehicles of Desire', *A Critic Writes: Essays by Reyner Banham*, eds. Mary Banham, Paul Barker, Sutherland Lyall, Cedric Price, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), p. 3.

The splendour (and misery) of writing for dailies, weeklies, or even monthlies, is that one can address current problems currently, and leave posterity to wait for the hardbacks and PhD dissertations to appear later [...] the splendour comes, if at all, years and years later, when some flip, throw-away, smarty-pants look-at-me paragraph will prove to distil the essence of an epoch far better than subsequent scholarly studies ever can.<sup>302</sup>

Banham's belief in expendability extended to the record of his own work. He burnt all of his papers in 1976 before he moved his family to Buffalo, New York. 'He wasn't interested in posterity', Mary Banham observed. She decided to save his subsequent papers and those written since 1976 are collected in the Getty Archive.

Banham was a dextrous and witty writer who wrote out in longhand on foolscap paper preparatory versions of his articles before typing them up and showing them to his wife, Mary Banham, an art teacher by training, who, in addition to doing architectural drawings for his articles for the *Architectural Review*, said she performed for him the role of 'the woman on the bus, or everyday reader'.<sup>303</sup> Mary said she helped him 'break down his long sentences' and made him explain technicalities, 'because he wanted to introduce what he was interested in to as big a public as possible'.<sup>304</sup>

Through publishing in popular mainstream publications, he made the tools of criticism available to his readers so that more people could apprehend the design that surrounded them. He used the iconographic methods of art history he learnt as a student at the Courtauld Institute, in which one focused on the identification, description, and the interpretation of the content of images, but he applied them to designed objects and phenomena that lay beyond art or even architecture criticism's regular territory – he took criticism, quite literally, out into the field.

---

<sup>302</sup> Reyner Banham, Preface to *Design by Choice*, (London: Academy Editions, 1981), p. 7.

<sup>303</sup> Mary Banham, personal interview, 26 February, 2007.

<sup>304</sup> Ibid.

## CONCLUSION

The March 1960 issue of *Industrial Design*, guest edited by Jane Fiske McCullough as her last effort for the magazine as a consulting editor, was an anthology of 40 articles and excerpts, written by foreign critics gathered from design magazines in Italy, France, Germany, Norway, Sweden, India, and England. Fiske McCullough wanted to explore the differences between European and American design, which she saw as being at different stages of development in terms of their large-scale production and competitive marketing. Freed from the responsibility of being the editorial figurehead of a magazine founded to promote the interests of American designers to industry, in this issue Fiske McCullough was able to introduce more critical content than she had thus far.

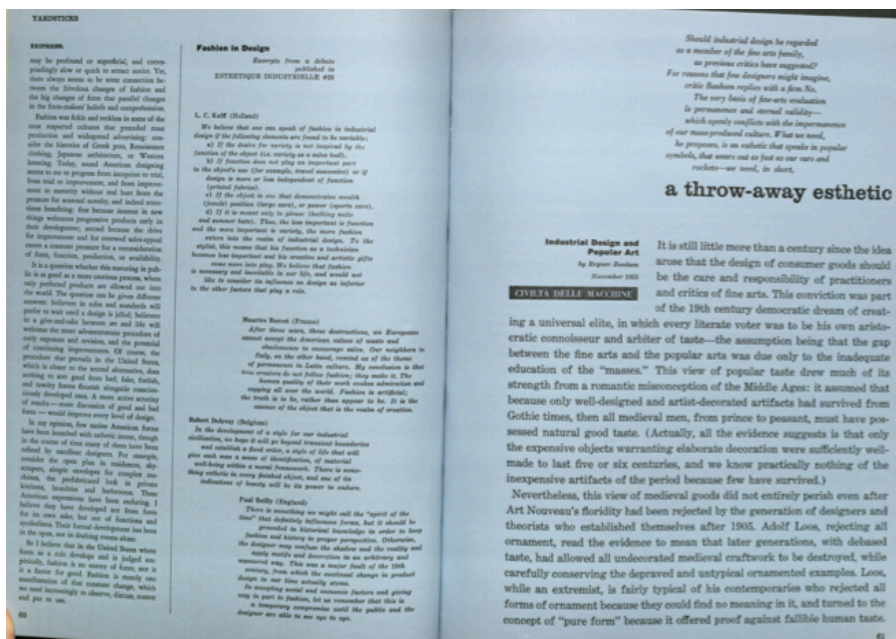
Through her selection of such a variety of voices, the text-heavy nature of the issue, the complex layout of the magazine which incorporated her chatty marginalia and responses from writers to particular claims in articles set alongside the appropriate passages, Fiske McCullough created in the pages of the magazine the feeling of a live debate in action, and a snapshot of international design discourse in the late 1950s as filtered through her editorial viewpoint. In her introduction she observed that,

Overseas [the designer] puts out fewer products and more words than his busy American counterpart [...] But is this really for the lack of time and thought? Doesn't this really go back to the traditional belief, as old as the depression-born profession itself, that to sell itself to business, industrial design had to adopt the standards of business, and cut itself off from the American arts? Our self-willed isolation has had curious effects, among them the lack of a critical tradition among designers and the lack of any active school of professional critics who support the designer in his search for valid expression and purpose. There are many ramifications to this critical void, but they boil down to this: US industrial design itself has not believed in criticism or accepted it, because it grew up on business' belief that you can't criticize design if it sells, daren't criticize it for fear of harming sales.<sup>305</sup>

---

<sup>305</sup> Jane Fiske McCullough, 'To the Reader', editorial preface, *Industrial Design*, March 1960, p. 35.

Among the featured essays were Banham's 'Industrial Design and Popular Art', republished with the new title 'A Throw Away Esthetic', and an excerpt from Hamilton's 'Persuading Image'. (See Illustration 21) In this new context, these articles felt incongruous in their lack of concern for the social issues that were beginning to absorb intellectual culture. Banham's piece had been written five years previously and Hamilton's article, although it had only been published in *Design* magazine the month before, looked back to the mid-1950s in its references. Industrial designer Don Wallance pointed out the anachronistic nature of the articles in a letter published in the June issue. Referring to Banham's piece, Wallance wrote, 'Some of our friends having belatedly embraced the techniques of mass marketing are not content merely to enjoy its economic benefits, but are impelled to idealize and institutionalize its esthetic consequences'. He went on to point out that this 'is at a time when many thoughtful Americans such as John Galbraith, Walter Lippmann and C. Wright Mills are questioning the economic and social premises of the Big Sell that underlie Mr Banham's throwaway esthetic'.<sup>306</sup>



<sup>306</sup> Don Wallance, Letter to Editors, *Industrial Design*, June 1960, p. 10.

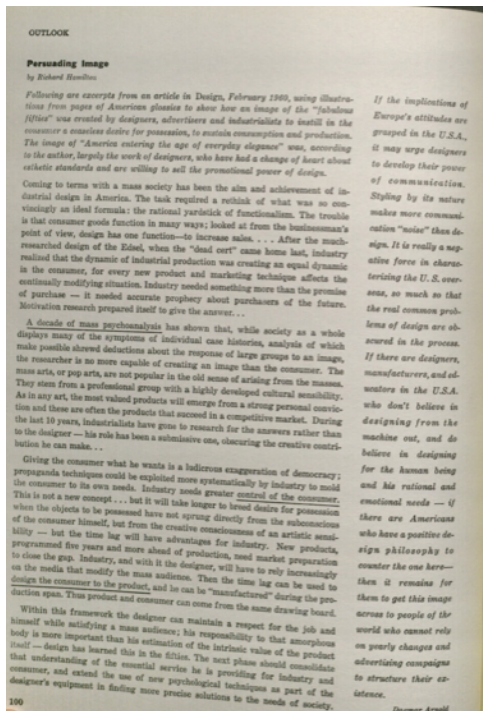
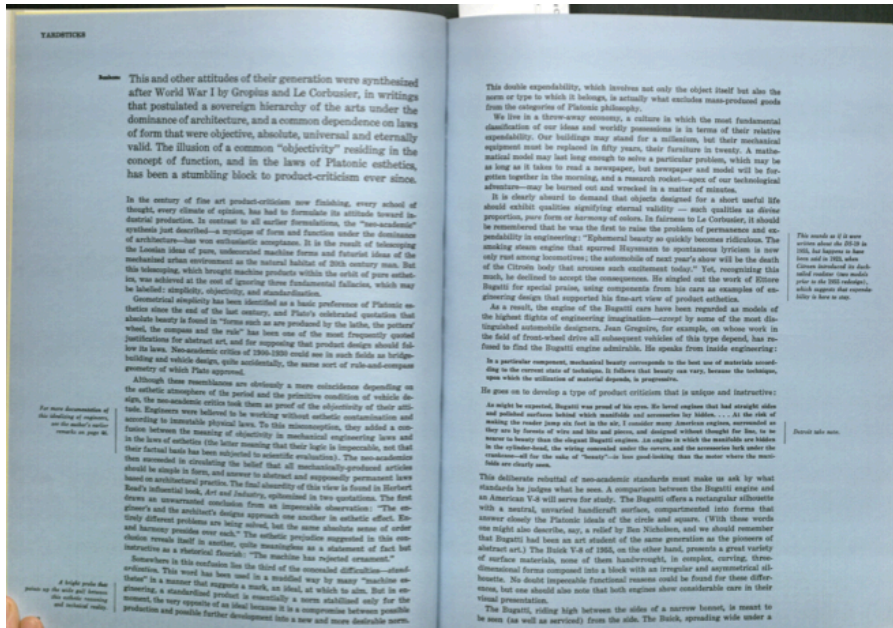


Illustration 21. Spreads from *Industrial Design*, March 1960, and international issue, which republished Banham's 1955 'Industrial Design and Popular Art' and Hamilton's 1960 'Persuading Image' articles.

Wallance's observation suggests a disconnection between Hamilton and Banham's fascination with American consumer culture of the late 1950s and the emergent concerns of some American designers. By 1960 a new more serious, anxious, and

morally driven species of design criticism was taking shape that called for accountability in the design profession and its associated industries.

The Harvard economist John Galbraith critiqued the assumption that continually increasing material production is a sign of economic and societal health. His 1958 book *The Affluent Society* became a bestseller.<sup>307</sup> Political scientist Walter Lippmann, who was awarded a Pulitzer prize in 1958 for his syndicated column, 'Today and Tomorrow', which ran from 1931-1949 in New York *Herald Tribune*, was a prominent critic of the propagandist machinations of the mass media, and of US anti-Communist foreign policy. The Marxist C. Wright Mills, professor of sociology at Columbia University, was critical of designers' complicity in eroding left wing values through their role in the misleading conflation of culture and commerce. His ideas on the 'cultural apparatus' were available to the design community through his lecture at the International Design Conference at Aspen in 1958 and its subsequent publication in *Industrial Design* magazine. Wright Mills used the term 'cultural apparatus' to apply to both the 'organizations and milieus in which artistic, intellectual and scientific work goes on' and 'the means by which such work is made available to small circles, wider publics, and to the great masses'. While other theorists had made the claim that mass culture generated 'second-hand images', which stood between man and reality, Wright argued that all culture is second-hand, not just mass culture. Because man's experiences are increasingly indirect, he is more dependent on ways in which events are filtered by designers. 'The world men are going to believe they understand is now in this cultural apparatus, being defined and built, made into a slogan, a story, a diagram, a release, a dream, a fact, a blue-print, a tune, a sketch, a formula; and presented to them'. Wright Mills posited that by squandering their responsibility as 'observation posts', 'interpretation centers' and 'presentation depots', designers were succumbing to the

---

<sup>307</sup> John Galbraith, *The Affluent Society* (Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin, 1958).



commercial imperatives 'which use 'culture' for their own non-cultural—indeed anti-cultural—ends'.

Wright Mills's argument was directed squarely at the designer, so celebrated in the writing of Banham and Hamilton, and in the editorial premise of *Industrial Design* magazine, in which the critic was positioned a designer's ally.<sup>308</sup> Wright Mills identified planned obsolescence as the economic environment in which 'the designer gets his main chance', writing, 'The silly needs of salesmanship are thus met by the silly designing and redesigning of things. The waste of human labor and material become irrationally central to the performance of the capitalist mechanism. Society itself becomes a great sales room, a network of public rackets, and a continuous fashion show'.<sup>309</sup> (See Illustration 22)

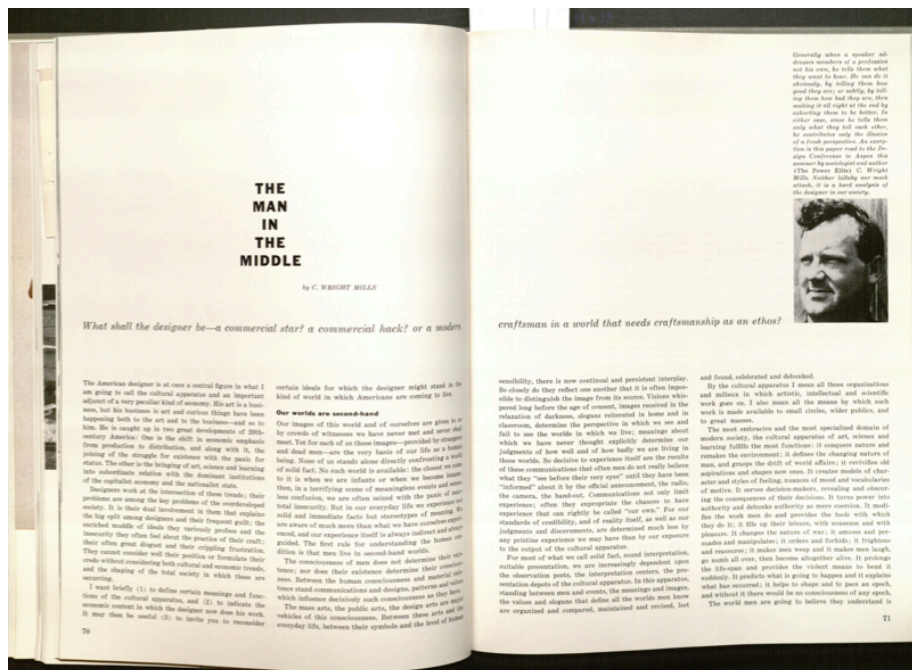


Illustration 22. 'The Man in the Middle' by C. Wright Mills, published in *Industrial Design*, November 1958.

<sup>308</sup> As Caplan observed in his first editorial as editor of *Industrial Design*, 'On the designer's side', 'Our relationship to our readers is something like the industrial designer's relationship to his clients: as experienced generalists we can offer the benefits of an unspecialized approach. The service we can perform is based largely on our being in a position to see what the designer may have neither time nor perspective to notice because he is too busy doing it. As design-conscious journalists we are, in effect, the designer's consultants'. Ralph Caplan, 'On the designer's side', *Industrial Design*, February 1958, p. 33.

<sup>309</sup> C. Wright Mills, 'The Man in the Middle', *Industrial Design*, November 1958, p. 73.

The article provoked several responses among Industrial Design's readership. In June 1959 Fred Eichenberger, Assistant Professor of Design in the College of Applied Arts, at the University of Cincinnati, wrote to commend the piece and to underline its moral message:

It seems to me that the heart of Mills' thesis is the consideration of public and private morality. We are all familiar with the statements of aims and ethics published by the various professional societies of design. These have to do mainly with the designer's working relationships, his obligations to his client, and his attitudes towards other professionals. Now this too is morality, but of a very specific sort. The kind of morality I mean is concerned with the way our efforts affect the larger society. In a world of exploding populations and exploding nuclear devices, of contracting natural resources, in a world in which urbanization and supra-nationalism are making enormous advances, all of us must, as never before, question the consequences of our actions.<sup>310</sup>

In addition to the thinkers cited by Wallace, others too, were exposing the social, psychological, and physical dangers of planned obsolescence, public relations, motivation research, car design, waste, litter, and the lack of attention to third-world poverty. The journalist Vance Packard levelled critiques at the advertising industry and its obsession with motivational research, which he held accountable for persuading people to buy things they didn't need (1957's *The Hidden Persuaders*), and at American manufacturers for their adoption of planned obsolescence as a business model and consumers for their excessive consumption (1960's *Waste-Makers: A Startling Revelation of Planned Wastefulness*).<sup>311</sup> Ralph Nader's investigations of deficiencies in American automobile design included the 1965 book *Unsafe at Any Speed: The Designed-In Dangers of the American Automobile*.<sup>312</sup> The architect Richard Buckminster Fuller, author of *Inventory of World Resources* and *No More Secondhand God and Other Writings*, was a strong critic of what he saw as the wasteful practice of industrial design.<sup>313</sup> (See Illustration 23)

---

<sup>310</sup> Fred Eichenberger, Letter to the Editors, *Industrial Design*, June 1959, p. 8.

<sup>311</sup> Vance Packard, *The Hidden Persuaders*, (New York: D. McKay Co., 1957); *Waste-Makers: A Startling Revelation of Planned Wastefulness* (New York: D. McKay Co., 1960).

<sup>312</sup> Ralph Nader, *Unsafe at Any Speed: The Designed-In Dangers of the American Automobile*, (New York: Grossman, 1965).

<sup>313</sup> Richard Buckminster Fuller, *Inventory of World Resources* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1964); *No More Secondhand God and other Writings*, (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1963). Even though these books were published after 1960, they collected Fuller's earlier writings.

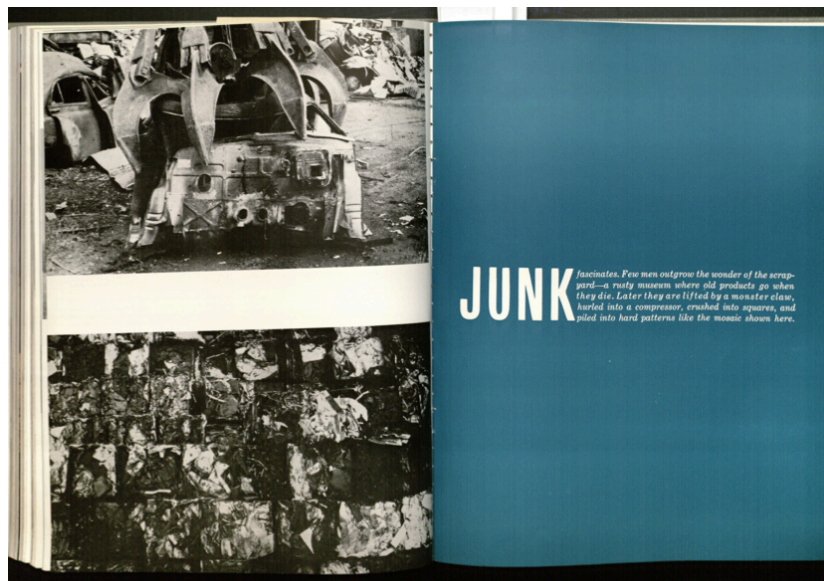


Illustration 23. Spread from feature article about waste disposal techniques, *Industrial Design*, August 1960.

It was as if two tectonic plates of design criticism – one driven by a need to shake up old establishment values and to extend ‘the long front of culture’ on their own new stylistic terms, and the other directed by social and moral concerns and in some cases recommending a return to the old values – were grating past one another as they headed in different directions. They shared the same subject matter – car styling and white appliances – but their motivations, arguments, style of language, and points of origin were profoundly different.

Banham stood his ground. In his ‘Design by Choice’ article of 1961 he gave ‘the new men in the USA [...] typically liberal sociologists...’ short shrift:

Lash-up formulations of this sort are, of course, only ad hoc intellectual structures and should be neatly put away when they have done the job for which they were assembled. Thus, a narrowly Stalinist frame of reference, rigidly maintained beyond its last point of utility, has resulted in the sterility and subsequent disappearance of radical left-wing design criticism in Western democracies, and leaves intelligent sociologists, like Richard Hoggart, apparently sharing the opinions of an ‘Establishment’ that they otherwise despise.<sup>314</sup>

<sup>314</sup> Reyner Banham, ‘Design by Choice’, *Architectural Review*, July 1961 p. 44.

In his alphabetical list of landmarks and influences of the years 1951-1961 he focuses on debunking Vance Packard under the heading 'Alarmist Literature', writing that,

In the 1950s the shortcomings of some aspects of product design became a subject for sensational journalism which – in some cases – contained an element of serious warning. The most prolific of these professional Jeremiahs was the American writer Vance Packard, whose book *The Hidden Persuaders* drew attention to the social consequences of motivation research. His subsequent works *The Status Seekers* and *The Waste Makers* continued variations of the same theme of social enquiry into design, but began to suggest that he had fallen victim to the very situation against which he was protesting: his elevation to the best-seller list involved him in the dynamics of the mass market and more or less committed him to bring out a 'new model' every other year.<sup>315</sup>

Banham would have plenty more to say about Pop and popular culture in the 1960s and he continued to deploy his newly formed aesthetics of expendability on the explication of product design. Meanwhile, the wider climate of opinion was shifting away from a celebration of pop culture and technological progress toward a more questioning approach with regard to the social and environmental consequences of a disposable product design culture. Such concerns would force themselves onto the main stage of design discourse when, as will be discussed in the following chapter, students and environmental activists disrupted the proceedings of the 1970 International Design Conference at Aspen, and Banham, acting as moderator, would be confronted with a vehement backlash against the values of expendability, excess, and surface styling that he and others had spent the late 1950s and early 1960s endorsing so personally, persuasively, and poetically.

---

<sup>315</sup> Reyner Banham, 'Design by Choice', *Architectural Review*, July 1961, p. 43.

*We cut the tops off cars with axes and then shaped them to modular size. They are cheap, strong, have an excellent paint job and are available almost everywhere. The thickness of the tin varies from car to car; some are only about 20 gauge, others 18 and 19 gauge. The tops can be cut into huge shingles and nailed on to a wood frame, or their edges can be bent on a sheet metal brake and be made into structural panels themselves, which can be bolted, screwed, riveted or welded together to form a dome made of only car tops.*<sup>316</sup>

---

<sup>316</sup> Bill Voyd, 'Drop City' in *Sources: An Anthology of Contemporary Materials Useful for Preserving Personal Sanity While Braving the Technological Wilderness*, ed. Roszak (New York: Harper & Row, 1972), p. 286. Originally published in *Shelter and Society* ed. Paul Oliver (New York: Praeger, 1969).

## CHAPTER TWO

### 'A Guaranteed Communications Failure': Consensus Meets Conflict at the International Design Conference in Aspen, 1970-1971

#### INTRODUCTION

The 1970 meeting of the International Design Conference in Aspen (IDCA) provided the setting for an ideological collision between members of the American liberal design establishment, who organized the conference, and an assortment of environmentalists, design and architecture students, and a French delegation with representatives from the Utopie group, who were all frustrated by what they saw as the conference's lack of political engagement and its hubristic belief in design's power to solve social problems.

The critique that materialized at IDCA 1970 was also directed at the ways in which design discourse was advanced. The design establishment, represented by the conference organizers, favoured consensus-building as a goal of discussion and a lecture format where speakers delivered long, non-visual, pre-written papers from a raised stage to a seated audience.<sup>317</sup> Dissenters at the conference, interested in participatory formats that could incorporate conflict and agonistic reflection, introduced theatrical performances, games, workshops, and happenings, and confronted the conference organizers directly with a series of resolutions they wanted attendees to vote on.

Each of these dissenting groups – the design students, environmental activists, and the French Group – was coming from a very different place, both geographically and ideologically. But in combination, their protests, which took shape during the weeklong event (14-20, June, 1970) in the mountain town of Aspen, Colorado, targeted the conference's flimsy grasp of pressing environmental issues and its outmoded non-participatory format. As such, the Aspen protests

---

<sup>317</sup> It was impossible to show slides in the conference tent during daylight hours. Speakers were asked to prepare 45-minute papers, but they were rarely that short.

epitomized more widespread clashes that took place during the late 1960s and early 1970s between a counterculture and the dominant regime over issues such as the US government's military intervention in Vietnam, the draft, and the civil rights movement. In terms of design discourse, the protests connected with contemporaneous debates in which Italian radical architecture collectives such as Superstudio and UFO used their anti-design ethos to challenge modernist orthodoxies.

By eschewing the written text in favour of physical actions and the spectacle of a public vote, the protestors at Aspen disrupted design criticism itself, which, in this period, was usually rendered public in its written form. As such, it was practiced within structured institutional environments where the basic assumptions of design's role in society were generally agreed upon, and points of difference were debated using historical precedents and examples within a common frame of reference. So, although a design critic writing in the 1950s and early 1960s might have been critical, he or she was operating within a reformist tradition rather than a revolutionary one, and his and her criticisms were still contained within the pages of a publication usually paid for, and published by, upholders of establishment values.

For the most part, written design criticism of the period was a one-way communication. Critics could gauge response to their articles only indirectly through letters published in subsequent issues of the magazine; mostly their criticism was uttered into a silent void. As Jean Baudrillard wrote in his 1971 essay 'Requiem for the Media', 'the entirety of contemporary media architecture' is based on the fact that 'it speaks and no response can be made'.<sup>318</sup>

With the criticism at IDCA 1970, the situation was different: While the students' provocative resolutions and the French

---

<sup>318</sup> Jean Baudrillard, *Utopia Deferred: Writings from Utopie 1967–1978*, trans. by Stuart Kendall, (New York, NY, Semiotext(e), 2006), pp. 77–78.

Group's cynical statement, for example were written documents, they only partially represent the complexity of the revolt. The protest that punctured the conference was also made up of numerous non-written, ephemeral elements, including corridor discussions, Q&A sessions, attire, body language and gestures, theatrical performances, inflatable structures, parties and picnics, objects, and graphic ephemera. These facets were recorded kaleidoscopically in photographs, a film, and audio recordings of presentations and discussions, (which include the audience comments that were shouted out). In combination they represented a form of criticism as a spontaneous and performative event, which used countercultural activist strategies to convey its argument, and as their 'style of action'.<sup>319</sup> (See Illustrations 1-2)



---

<sup>319</sup> Michel de Certeau, 'Making Do: Uses and Tactics' in *The Practice of Everyday Life*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), p. 30.





Illustrations 1-2. Stills from IDCA '70 showing the improvisational theatre troupe the Moving Company.

The protestors were able to confront their targets and could register the effects of their criticism in real time. The multi-pronged internal critique of the conference led to a complete transformation of its content and structure not just in 1971, which saw the most emphatic demonstration of response and change, but also in subsequent conferences at least through the mid-1970s. This makes the events of IDCA 1970 a particularly illuminating case study of a disruption to, and a paradigm shift in, the established practice and role of design criticism in the post-war era. (See Illustration 3)



Illustration 3. Photographs of people and scenes of IDCA 1970.

### **IDCA '70 as a source**

Both the cocktail hobnobbing of the IDCA board members and the countercultural discontent of the attendees at IDCA 1970 are captured in a twenty-minute documentary film of the conference, *IDCA '70*, made by Eli Noyes, the 28-year-old son of industrial designer and current IDCA president Eliot Noyes, and his 24-year-old girlfriend, Claudia Weill.<sup>320</sup> (See Illustration 4)

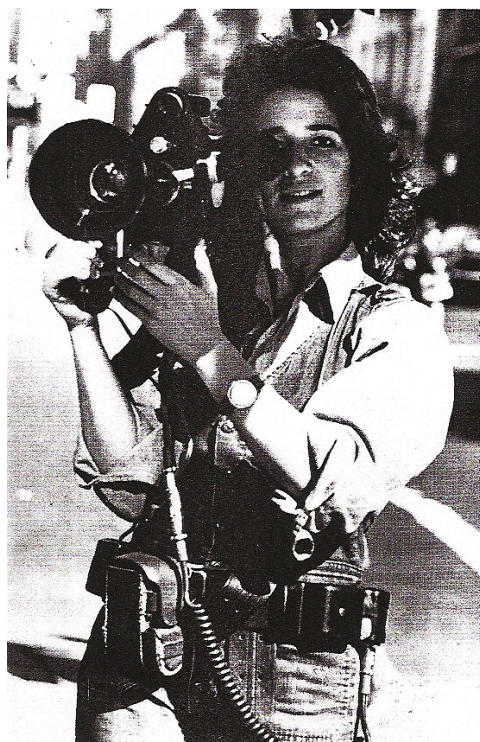


Illustration 4. Eli Noyes and Claudia Weill, directors of *IDCA '70*, at IDCA 1970. Noyes holds the Eclair NPR camera.

Recent graduates of Harvard and budding filmmakers in New York, Noyes and Weill had been invited by the IDCA board to document the conference.<sup>321</sup> They were given a budget of \$5,000 but no brief. Immersed in the cinema verité approach practiced at that time by directors such as the Maysles Brothers, Weill and Eli Noyes had just spent several months living with a black family in Washington D.C. to produce the documentary

<sup>320</sup> *IDCA '70*, Dir. Eli Noyes and Claudia Weill. IDCA. 1970.

<sup>321</sup> Eli Noyes pursued a career in animation and Claudia Weill went on to direct documentaries and the 1978 hit movie, *Girlfriends*.

*This Is the Home of Mrs. Levant Graham.*<sup>322</sup> As East Coasters in their late twenties, Eli Noyes and Weill were not a part of the West Coast student hippy contingent at Aspen. And while Eli Noyes had grown up in the family home in the modernist design enclave of New Canaan, Connecticut, surrounded by such friends and neighbours as Charles and Ray Eames, Alexander Calder, and Philip Johnson, he had chosen a career path that led away from industrial design and, therefore, did not feel that he fitted easily in the world of the Aspen leadership either.<sup>323</sup> The filmmakers used the newly available Eclair NPR, a French 16mm camera that, with its pre-loadable magazines, enabled documentary makers to speed up the film changes, (and minimize interruption to the flow of content). The camera had a crystal-controlled motor and was designed to ride on your shoulder, so that the filmmakers could move more freely in and around their subjects. They also used a state-of-the-art Swiss Nagra tape recorder with a shotgun microphone. Noyes recalls of the camera that, 'the eyepiece rotated so you could cradle the camera in your lap and look down into the eyepiece even as you filmed something that was horizontally away from you. We wore a battery pack around our waist. It was innovative for its time'.<sup>324</sup> He and Weill seemed to be ideal documentarians, therefore, since they could move freely among the conference's different constituencies, neither encumbered by personal loyalties nor technology. In reality what comes across is not so much their neutrality as their shifting sympathies. Through numerous cuts, the filmmakers used the technique of juxtaposition of contrasting scenes to accentuate their view of a conceptual divide between the modernist organizers of the conference and the countercultural contingent. (See Illustration 5) At times Noyes and Weill got caught up in the excitement of the protests, but they also gave airtime to the

---

<sup>322</sup> Cinema verité played a key role in documenting many counter cultural movements of the late 1960s. It was characterized by its departure from documentary traditions such as face-the-reporter interviews and voice-over diegetic narration, thus allowing for a potentially more democratic and non-hierarchical version of events to be presented, a method that seemed particularly appropriate for recording the political and social protests of the period.

<sup>323</sup> Eli Noyes, personal interview, 28 March, 2008.

<sup>324</sup> Eli Noyes, personal correspondence, 10 July, 2008.



board members' points of view, ultimately giving them the last word. Their film is, therefore, useful to me as a document of the conference organizers' response to the critiques that were levelled against them.



Illustration 5. Still from *IDCA '70* showing how by following and filming an improvised performance by the Moving Company, the filmmakers appear to be a part of it.

### **IDCA 1970: the protagonists**

In 1970 the board members of the IDCA included designers such as: Herbert Bayer, the Austrian émigré and consultant to Container Corporation of America; Saul Bass, the Los Angeles-based graphic designer; Eliot Noyes, design director at IBM and IDCA president since 1965; and George Nelson, design director at the high-end office furniture firm Herman Miller. To them, design was a problem-solving activity in the service of industry—albeit with roots in architecture and the fine arts.

The film *IDCA '70* includes footage of these designers and their wives gathered for a cocktail party on the terrace of

one of the modernist houses in the Aspen Meadows complex designed by Herbert Bayer. (See Illustrations 6-8)



Illustrations 6-8. Stills from *IDCA '70* showing IDCA board members at cocktail party at Aspen Institute Trustee's house, designed by Herbert Bayer.

The men are dressed in plaid jackets and ties; their hair, if they still have it, is cropped close and greying. Their wives' hair has been curled and set and barely moves in the breeze that ruffles the surrounding Aspen trees.<sup>325</sup> Most of these men had been trained as artists and architects but through their own pioneering work had helped to define the American graphic and industrial design professions in the 1940s and 1950s. Their careers had flourished in the post-war period of economic expansion and were tied to the rise of a consumer society. Now in their middle age, they held prominent positions both within the newly professionalized design community and within the flagship corporations of the day. As the sun begins to dip behind the snow-capped mountains that encircle the idyllic Colorado resort town, and they sip their Gimlets and pat one another on the back in collegial amiability, these representatives of the American design elite are clearly enjoying the fruits of their labours.

Meanwhile, in the meadows beyond the cocktail soiree, groups of activists are arriving in chartered buses from California and pitching tents. With their waist-length hair, beards, open-necked shirts, and jean jackets, they signal their adherence to an alternative lifestyle and set of values (of which the University of California at Berkeley and the surrounding Bay Area was the unofficial American capital), as well as their physical and philosophical distance from the conference organizers. (See Illustrations 9-10)

---

<sup>325</sup> Wives were extended a reduced conference fee, and designers often brought their whole families to the weeklong conference, combining the event with a family vacation in the Colorado Rockies.



Illustrations 9-10. Stills from *IDCA '70* showing members of the Ant Farm at IDCA 1970.

The dissenters had a very different conception of design from their hosts. In their view, design was not merely about the promulgation of good taste; it had much larger social repercussions for which designers must claim responsibility. Nor, for them, was design only about material objects and structures; it should also be understood in terms of interconnected systems and, particularly, within the context of the increasing concern about population growth and exploitation of natural resources.

Among them were student designers and architects, some of their young professors and, since the theme of the conference in 1970 was 'Environment by Design', several representatives of environmental action groups invited on behalf of the IDCA by Sim Van der Ryn, an assistant professor of architecture at the University of California, Berkeley.<sup>326</sup> Among those invited were: Michael Doyle, founder of the Environmental Workshop in San Francisco, and Cliff Humphrey, who was the founder of Ecology Action, originator of the first drop-off recycling centre in the US, and member of a Berkeley commune that had just been featured in a *New York Times Magazine* cover story. The cover image portrayed Cliff Humphrey pushing a bandaged globe in a baby stroller. The accompanying article depicted Humphrey's commune, the headquarters of the Ecology Action group, and their militant activities, which included smashing and burying cars.<sup>327</sup>

Other dissidents in attendance included members of the San Francisco media collective Ant Farm, who, by 1970, were beginning to experiment with video as a vehicle for critique and were using inflatable structures as the setting for free-form architectural performances. (See Illustration 11) In a biographical statement they characterized themselves as 'an extended family [...] of environmentalists, artists, designers, builders, actors, cooks, lifers and an inflatable named Frank; war babies, television children, Rod & Custom subscribers, university trained media freaks and hippies interested in balancing the environment by total transformation of existing social and economic systems'.<sup>328</sup>

---

<sup>326</sup> Sim Van der Ryn was also the founder of the Farallones Institute, a research centre for 'studying environmentally sound building and design, low-technology solutions to problems of energy conservation and generation, pest and waste management, and small-scale food production'.  
<http://whol615.com/pdfs/IUHFACTS.pdf>

<sup>327</sup> Steven Roberts, 'The Better Earth; A report on Ecology Action, a brash, activist, radical group fighting for a better environment', *The New York Times Magazine*, March 29, 1970, p. 8.

Other groups invited by Sim Van der Ryn were the Peoples Architecture Group and Pacific High School. Not invited, but in attendance, was Steve Baer founder of Zomeworks, the Albuquerque solar energy enthusiast who developed many of the housing structures for communes such as Drop City and Manara Nueva.

<sup>328</sup> Ant Farm, biography, *Design Quarterly* 78/79, 1970, Special Double Issue on Conceptual Architecture, p. 10.



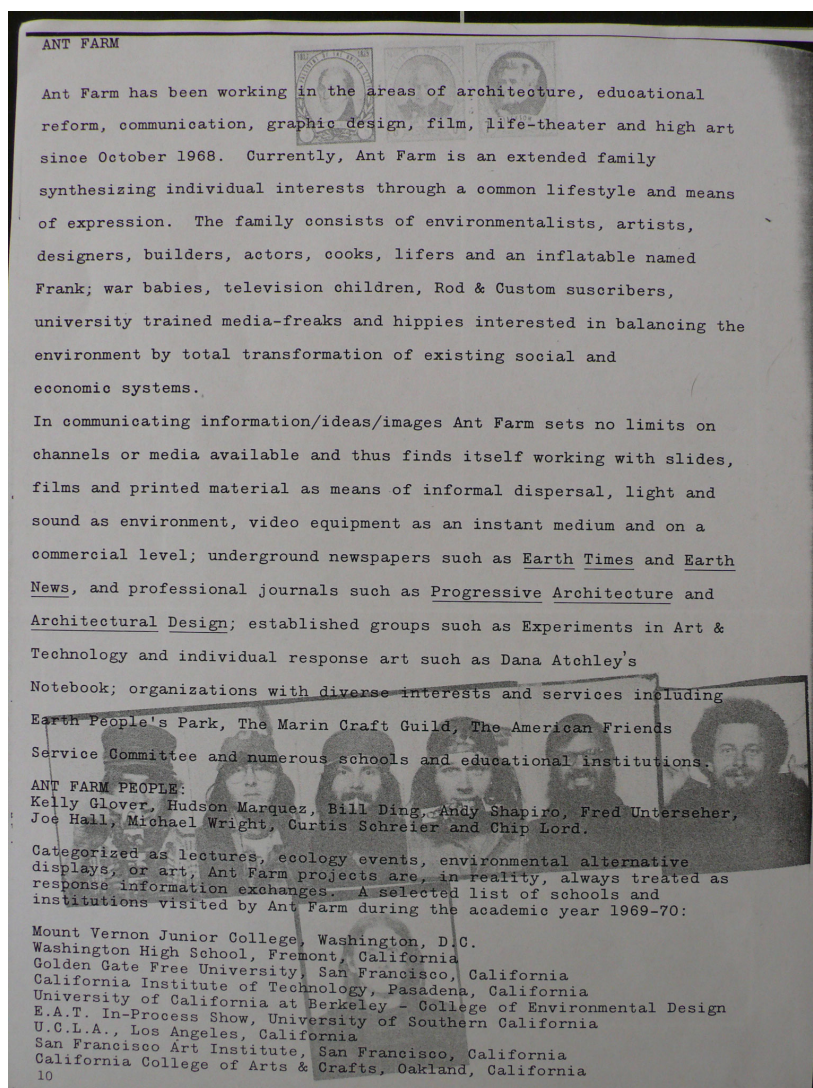


Illustration 11. Ant Farm, biography, *Design Quarterly* 78/79, 1970, Special Double Issue on Conceptual Architecture, p. 10.

Also in attendance at Aspen that year was a delegation of thirteen special guests, known collectively at the conference as the French Group, who had been selected by industrial designer Roger Tallon.<sup>329</sup> Each year from 1965 onwards, the IBM International Fellowship was awarded to a number of delegates from a foreign country to allow them to attend the conference. When Eliot Noyes asked the board to suggest a country for the

<sup>329</sup> The French Group also included Eric Le Compte, an industrial designer at Eliot Noyes and Associates; Gilles De Bure, a design and media journalist who contributed to the CoID's *Design* magazine; and industrial designers Claude Braunstein and Roger Tallon and their wives, a professor of Greek and Latin literature and a physician, respectively. André Fischer, who read their statement at the closing session of the conference, is listed in the conference brochure as a 'geographer'.

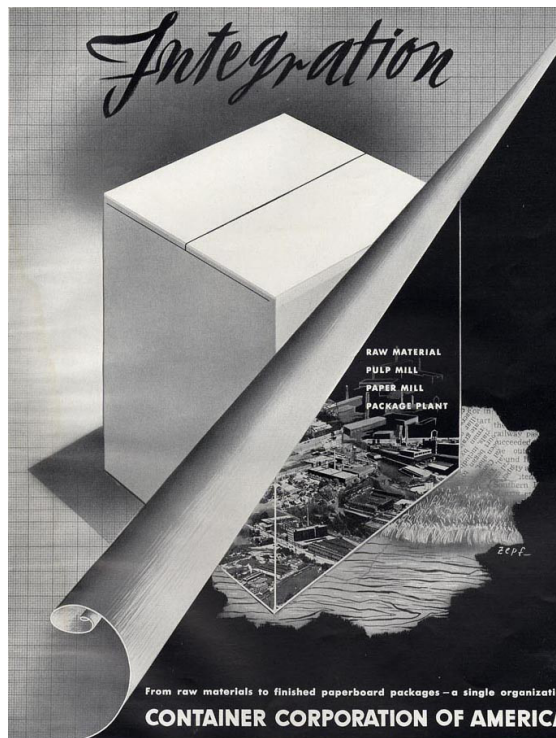
1970 conference, France was proposed. There is no indication that France was chosen because of the uprisings in Paris that put it at centre stage of world politics in 1968. The logic had more to do with the fact that a country as influential as France, in terms of design and architecture, should no longer be overlooked. The French Group included Jean Baudrillard, the philosopher and sociologist, and a left-leaning sympathizer of the student protests of 1968. Other members included the architect Jean Aubert, who, like Baudrillard, was a member of Utopie, the Paris-based collective of thinkers and architects that, between 1966 and 1970, was engaged in a radical leftist critique of the urban environment. To understand the extent to which the critiques of these new arrivals represented a disruption to the typical conference content and format, it is necessary to look back at the formation and evolution of IDCA.

#### **Fish fries and kite-flying: early years at Aspen**

The International Design Conference at Aspen was conceived in 1951 as a forum for designers and businessmen to discuss the shared interests of culture and commerce at a far remove from their everyday concerns.<sup>330</sup> Its founders were Walter Paepcke and Egbert Jacobson, president and art director, respectively, of the Chicago-based packaging company the Container Corporation of America (CCA), which was well known for its integrated corporate design. (See Illustrations 12-13)

---

<sup>330</sup> Aspen, at 8,000 feet in the Colorado Rockies, was notoriously difficult to reach. In the early years of the conference, telephone and telegraph service was unreliable and there was no radio or television. Several speakers recorded the experience of traveling to the conference and the turbulent last leg of the journey from Denver to Aspen, either by car on poorly finished winding roads or on a small twin-prop plane.



Illustrations 12-13.

Advertisements for Container Corporation of America, art directed by Egbert Jacobsen, designed by Ad Zepf and Herbert Bayer, 1938.

As Jacobsen pictured it, a conference that included opinion-makers of the American business world 'would give the designers a chance to present their case to men ordinarily difficult to reach. For while such men would probably not be tempted to come to hear a speaker like Herbert Read on "Education through Art" they might be willing to make an effort to hear business peers on the very same subject'.<sup>331</sup> This unabashed fusion of high ideals and shrewd pragmatism was not unique to Jacobson; it informed the conception of many subsequent design conferences at Aspen.

The conference leadership sought to encourage business executives to apply design cohesively throughout their entire organizations, from letterhead and advertising to truck livery

<sup>331</sup> Letter from Egbert Jacobsen to Frank Stanton, President of Columbia Broadcasting System, January 2, 1951, International Design Conference in Aspen Records 1949-2006, 2007.M.7, Series 1, Box 1, Fol. 2, The Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles.

and office design, just as it was at firms like CCA. 'Good Design is Good Business' was considered as a title for the first conference, and this remained the IDCA's unofficial motto throughout the 1950s, even though it was rejected as a title in favour of the less blatant 'Design as a Function of Management'.<sup>332</sup> In a speech to the Yale Alumni of Chicago, excerpted in the advertising brochure for the 1951 conference, Paepcke said, 'a Design Department, properly staffed, and given support and wide latitude, can enhance a company's reputation as an alert and progressive business institution within and without its organization, and assist materially in improving its competitive position'.<sup>333</sup>

The conference's loftier aim was to imbue businessmen with cultural responsibility and humanist values, and was part of Paepcke's larger mission to promote the arts and culture within American society. Paepcke and his wife Elizabeth had helped develop Aspen from a deserted silver mining town into a winter ski resort and summer cultural festival destination in the late 1940s. In 1949 Paepcke commissioned Finnish architect Eero Saarinen to build a tent for his first cultural festival, the Goethe Bicentennial Festival.<sup>334</sup>

In 1950 Paepcke then established the Aspen Institute for Humanistic Studies, an idealistic think tank with the goal of extending a crusade for the reform of American higher education that University of Chicago president Robert Hutchins and philosopher Mortimer Adler had begun in the 1930s and

---

<sup>332</sup> Minutes of the planning meeting, February 19, 1951. International Design Conference in Aspen Records 1949-2006, 2007.M.7, Series 1, Box 1, Fol. 3, The Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles.

<sup>333</sup> Walter P. Paepcke, 'The Importance of Design to American Industry', in promotional brochure for IDCA 1951. International Design Conference in Aspen papers, MSIDCA87, Box 15, Fol. 734, Special Collections and University Archives, University of Illinois at Chicago.

<sup>334</sup> The twenty-day gathering attracted such prominent intellectuals and artists as Albert Schweitzer, José Ortega y Gasset, Thornton Wilder, and Arthur Rubinstein, along with more than 2,000 other attendees. The following year Paepcke organized an eleven-week summer programme of concerts, lectures, and 'Great Books' seminars held in Aspen's Wheeler Opera House and at the Hotel Jerome. Participants included Reinhold Niebuhr, Clare Booth Luce, Mortimer Adler, Karl Menninger, and Isaac Stern. For a fuller account of the formation of the Aspen Institute of Humanistic Studies, see James Sloan Allen, *The Romance of Commerce and Culture: Capitalism, Modernism, and the Chicago-Aspen Crusade for Cultural Reform* (Boulder, CO: University Press of Colorado, 2002).

1940s. In a 1951 brochure the Institute described itself in the following high-minded terms:

The essence of its humanistic ideal is the affirmation of man's dignity, not simply as a political credo, but through the contemplation of the noblest work of man – in the creation of beauty and the attainment of truth.<sup>335</sup>

As historian James Sloan Allen argues, the Institute's version of humanism emphasized the application of reason to scientifically irresolvable questions of principle and value. 'Thus "humanistic studies" meant an analytical way of thinking sharpened by repudiation of the moral relativism associated with empirical science'.<sup>336</sup>

The IDCA, conceived as an offshoot of the Aspen Institute, with the aim of increasing understanding between business and culture, was timed to run at the end of June each year right before Aspen's summer programme of music and cultural discussion, which started at the beginning of July, with the intention that some businessmen would stay for this too. IDCA promotional brochures of the period used exalted language similar to that of the Institute, referring to design 'in its larger concept as one of the important distinguishing features of our civilization'.<sup>337</sup>

Two hundred and fifty designers and their spouses attended the first IDCA, at which top-billed speakers included, on the business side: Stanley Marcus, president of Neiman Marcus; Andrew McNally III of Rand McNally; Harley Earl of General Motors; and Hans Knoll, president of Knoll Associates. Representing design and architecture were: Josef Albers, then a teacher at Yale University; architect Louis Kahn; industrial designers and architects Charles Eames and George Nelson; and

---

<sup>335</sup> Promotional brochure, IDCA 1951, International Design Conference in Aspen papers, MSIDCA87, Box 15, Fol. 734, Special Collections and University Archives, University of Illinois at Chicago.

<sup>336</sup> James Sloan Allen, *The Romance of Commerce and Culture: Capitalism, Modernism, and the Chicago-Aspen Crusade for Cultural Reform*, (Boulder, CO: University Press of Colorado, 2002) p. 262.

<sup>337</sup> Promotional brochure, IDCA 1957, International Design Conference in Aspen papers, MSIDCA87, Box 15, Fol. 736, Special Collections and University Archives, University of Illinois at Chicago.



graphic artists such as Leo Lionni, Ben Shahn, and Herbert Bayer.

With the exception of Paepcke, the conference leadership came from the design camp, however, and, over the years, they were unable to sustain the participation of business leaders. As the conference evolved, and particularly after Paepcke died in 1960, attempts to improve the dialogue between designers and their clients were abandoned (although the topic was ever-present) and the conference mission broadened to include almost any subject that the leadership believed design touched or was touched by. Scientific philosophers such as Lancelot Law Whyte and Jacob Bronowski, the microbiologist René Dubos, African-American poet Gwendolyn Brooks, and the composer John Cage, for example, were typical of the participants from other professions that began to populate the speaker rosters. And throughout the 1960s the conference was used as a forum to introduce social and behavioural sciences to architectural and design discourse. (See Illustration 14)



Illustration 14. Brochure for IDCA 1965 showing the range of speakers from disciplines other than design included by the conference.

While the scope of the conference expanded and the theme changed from year to year, the format remained the same. Speakers addressed conferees from a raised stage in Saarinen's large, tented auditorium, which was replaced in 1965 with a new one by Herbert Bayer. There was little opportunity for improvisation since speakers' presentations tended to be printed and circulated ahead of time.<sup>338</sup> Daytime lectures in the tent were delivered without images; slide presentations were scheduled in the evenings when it was dark enough for projections.<sup>339</sup> (See Illustration 15)



Illustration 15. Exterior of IDCA tent designed by Herbert Bayer, 1965.

---

<sup>338</sup> 'Conferees are advised to read each speaker's paper in advance of the session'. '10<sup>th</sup> International Design Conference in Aspen', in *Communication Arts*, July 1960.

<sup>339</sup> Eliot Noyes established the tradition of night-time projection of visual imagery in 1964.

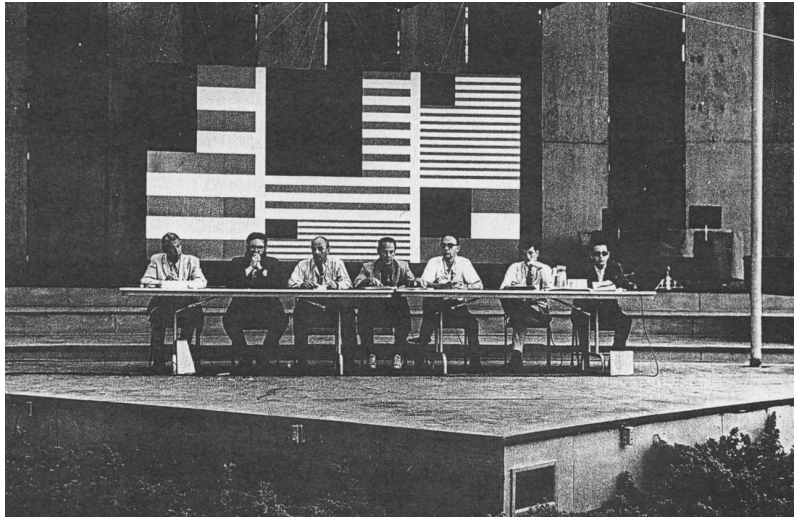


Illustration 16. Speakers at IDCA 1968.

Paepcke had always hoped that attendees would return home from the conference renewed in body and spirit, as well as in mind. The pace of the conference was leisurely, with presentations spread out over a week and interspersed with long lunches and rambles in the surrounding mountains. An annual favourite of this designers' summer camp was the Fish Fry, an al-fresco lunch by the river. (See Illustrations 17-18) A typical outdoors afternoon event was billed as: 'A discussion and demonstration of international kites, led by Charles Eames and Michael Farr'.<sup>340</sup>

---

<sup>340</sup> 'Tentative Program for the 1955 conference', memo, Papers housed at Aspen Institute, not archived.

Charles Eames was a frequent speaker at the conference but by 1966 he excused himself from the proceedings, writing to Allen Hurlburt, who was directing the conference that year, 'I can't face it, all that nature, and people, and above all, the talk about design'. Letter from Charles Eames to Allen Hurlburt, May 6, 1966, Papers housed at Aspen Institute, not archived.





Illustration 17. Attendees congregate outside the tent, showing mountain setting.



Illustration 18. Annual fish fry at IDCA, 1960.

In the evenings there were cocktail parties by the pool at the Hotel Jerome. The brochure for the 1961 conference dispensed the following advice on attire: 'Sportswear is the norm for the daytime, and evening dining is only a shade more formal. At the Monday night IDCA cocktail party at the Jerome pool, a

little black dress and mosquito repellent will do for the ladies, and a plaid coat, tie and Bermudas for the men...'.<sup>341</sup>

The design historian Nikolaus Pevsner attended the conference in 1953, and on his return shared his impressions with British listeners on a radio broadcast. Pevsner was fascinated by the casual attire of the attendees, their 'coloured printed' and 'wildly patterned' shirts, in which he located the source of America's advanced progress in modern industrial design:

I am, as a matter of fact, quite ready to appreciate these shirts intellectually, and if that daring, that naive trust in novelty were not part of the American character, modern design of the best quality would not have made such spectacular progress in the last ten years—along, of course, with modern vile design.<sup>342</sup>

Among this collegial group of IDCA board members, there was a shared belief in what constituted good design, and, where opinions differed on points of detail, there was a shared belief in the worth of debating an issue toward the goal of mutual understanding. This desire to forge consensus derived from the conference's origin as an offshoot of the Aspen Institute. Even in 1970, many of the conference's organizers still espoused the humanist values advocated by the Institute and by liberal social theorists of the early 1950s such as David Riesman and Erving Goffman.

Throughout this period, the IDCA, the only design conference of its kind, was a key event on the international design calendar. Thanks to the dissemination of speakers' papers and extensive press coverage — whole issues of design magazines were sometimes devoted to it — the conference's influence extended well beyond the 1,000 or so attendees it attracted each year. As Reyner Banham observed, the IDCA was 'the most heavily reported design conference on the calendar, outranking even the Triennale di Milano, let alone the biennial congresses of the International Council of Societies of

---

<sup>341</sup> Promotional brochure, IDCA 1961, International Design Conference in Aspen papers, MSIDCA87, Box 15, Fol. 740, Special Collections and University Archives, University of Illinois at Chicago.

<sup>342</sup> Nikolaus Pevsner, 'At Aspen in Colorado', *The Listener*, 1953, republished in Reyner Banham, ed., *The Aspen Papers*, (New York: Praeger, 1974) p. 16.

Industrial Design...'.<sup>343</sup> By 1970, therefore, what had started as an experimental meeting to improve communication between business interests and design culture had evolved into a robust institution that represented the higher echelons of industrial design, graphic design, and architecture.<sup>344</sup> As the American cultural climate underwent dramatic change toward the end of the 1960s, a younger generation of more politicized designers emerged whose practices incorporated critique; the IDCA, which now represented the design establishment, was ripe for attack.

### **The format problem**

In the documentary *IDCA 70*, a range of conference participants aired their grievances, mostly on the topic of format. 'It's curious to me that change is so long in coming to this design conference', a bearded youth told the filmmakers. 'It's one speaker and 1,000 people glued to their seats by regulation, or boredom, or both'.<sup>345</sup> Another attendee was quoted in a conference review, remarking, 'The format's outmoded. Nobody wants to sit passively and listen anymore'.<sup>346</sup>

The format itself became symbolic of the inadequacies of the prevailing regime and of the potential of a new vision of participatory information exchange. The one-way transmission of information from designated expert on a raised stage to a passively seated audience was seen as anachronistic in this period of experimentation with new modes of communication. At campuses across the nation, particularly in California, new educational configurations were being tested. In some cases, entire schools were being reinvented in the form of free

---

<sup>343</sup> Reyner Banham, 'A Private Memoir', *The Aspen Papers*, (New York: Praeger, 1974) p. 110.

<sup>344</sup> In 1954, the design conference organization was formalized via a not-for-profit corporation: The International Design Conference at Aspen (IDCA), headquartered in Chicago. The IDCA was administered by an elected executive committee, which elected their own chairman, or president, as the role later became known. The organization was funded by membership dues, conference fees, and industrial sponsorship.

<sup>345</sup> *IDCA 1970*, Dir. Eli Noyes and Claudia Weill, IDCA, 1970.

<sup>346</sup> 'Aspen One-upmanship', Editorial in *Environment Planning and Design* (July/August 1970), p. 13.

universities or anti-universities.<sup>347</sup> The California Institute of the Arts (CalArts), for example, was established in 1970 and through an educational programme of independent study and non-hierarchical teaching relationships hoped to provide "a radically different prototype for training the artist of the future".<sup>348</sup> The Ant Farm, who visited numerous California schools during the academic year 1969-1970, described their work – 'lectures, ecology events, environmental alternative displays, or art' – as 'response information exchanges'.<sup>349</sup> Yet, even though the topic of format often came up in IDCA board meetings throughout the 1960s, conference chairmen inevitably returned to the same lecture setup dictated to them by the interior architecture of the tent.<sup>350</sup> (See Illustrations 19-21)

---

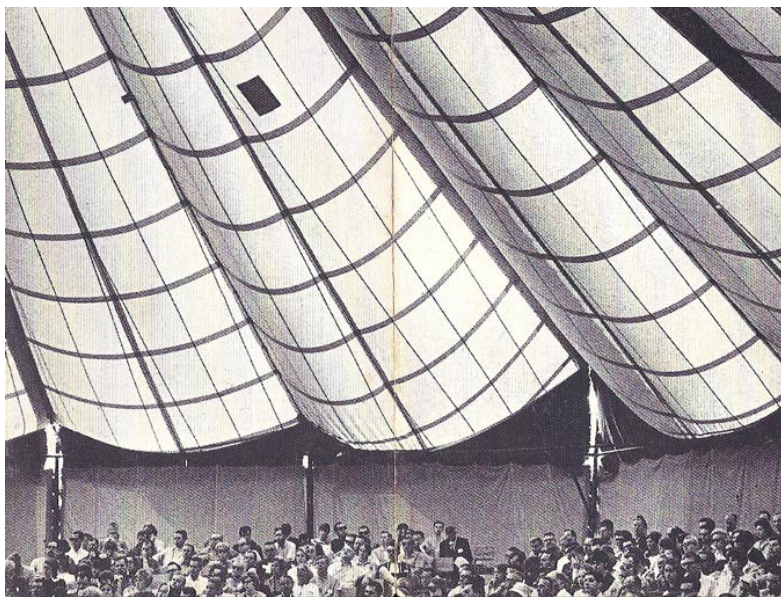
<sup>347</sup> Roberta Elzey's account of the 'Founding of an Anti-University' gives details of how the anti-university movement spread from New York to London and the principles of non-hierarchical, freeform education that it espoused: 'Anti-University classes were totally different from those at academic universities, as were the roles of "teacher and student". These were fluid, with students becoming teachers, and teachers attending one another's classes. About half those in Francis Huxley's course on Dragons were Anti-University teachers at other times. There was one lounge, used by all: no sacrosanct staff lounge or common room'. Roberta Elzey, 'Founding an Anti-University' in *Counter Culture: The Creation of an Alternative Society*, ed. Joseph Berke (London: Peter Owen Ltd., 1969), p.244.

<sup>348</sup> Robert W. Corrigan, dean, and Herbert Blau, provost, assembled a liberal and unorthodox faculty that included artists Allan Kaprow and Nam June Paik and architects and designers such as Peter de Bretteville and Sheila Levrant de Bretteville. A 1969 poster for the School of Design at CalArts, designed by Levrant de Bretteville, read, 'If the designer is to make a deliberate contribution to society, he must be able to integrate all he can learn about behavior and resources, ecology and human needs. Taste and style just aren't enough'.

<sup>349</sup> *Design Quarterly* 78/79, 1970, Special Double Issue on Conceptual Architecture, pp. 6-10.

<sup>350</sup> Alan Hurlburt, for example, asked 'how much should the attendees participate in the conference? Should they, in fact, be conferees or an audience?' 'Report on Long Range planning of the IDCA', November 14, 1964, p. 2., Papers housed at Aspen Institute, not archived.





Illustrations 19-21. Views of interior of IDCA tent showing speakers on the stage and the seated audience.

### **The student problem**

Students presented the IDCA leadership with a perennial problem. In the conference's early years they attended in small numbers, gaining free admission in return for their labours. They escorted speakers between the airport, hotel, and the main tent, helped with audio-visual equipment, ran errands, and helped clean up.<sup>351</sup> As they began to attend in greater numbers, at a reduced conference fee, they made more demands of the conference, such as involvement in the planning and travel grants, and in 1968 a group of them set up their own Student Commission to organize such demands.

The twice-yearly meetings of the IDCA board devoted more and more time to the discussion of students. The board members doubted the students' 'seriousness' and were unsure about what kind of contributions they could actually make. Board members at the post-IDCA 1969 board meeting noted that students 'seemed to be in about the same mood as in the previous year, lacking direction, being considerably confused, and yet groping for some additional identification'.<sup>352</sup> None of the board members mentioned the student protests that had filled the streets of Paris the previous summer, but urban planner Julian Beinart observed 'the student problem had to be handled in a most flexible manner, since it is impossible to predict much about them or their attitudes'.<sup>353</sup>

In 1970 students represented a larger proportion of the conference community than ever before. Of the 625 conferees who pre-paid their registration fees, 175 were students. However, most estimates placed total attendance at more than 1,000, suggesting that students, who either registered onsite or gate crashed, could have made up more than a third of the total attendees.

---

<sup>351</sup> Philip B. Meggs, 'Great Ideals: John Massey and the Corporate Design Elite', AIGA website, 1997.

<sup>352</sup> Minutes of the Board Meeting, June 1969, International Design Conference in Aspen papers, MSIDCA87, Box 2, Fol. 25, Special Collections and University Archives, University of Illinois at Chicago.

<sup>353</sup> Minutes of the Board Meeting, June 1969, International Design Conference in Aspen papers, MSIDCA87, Box 2, Fol. 25, Special Collections and University Archives, University of Illinois at Chicago.

The lead-up to the 1970 conference saw an intensification of the student attendees' dissatisfaction with their peripheral role. Traditionally students received free admission to the conference in return for their ushering services and general assistance. Increasingly throughout the 1960s, they had requested a more integral involvement in the conference as bona fide participants. Minutes of the planning meeting prior to the 1970 conference show that board members still did not take the issue seriously, however. They assumed that the students' gripes could be appeased by giving them more responsibility and 'a desk somewhere'.<sup>354</sup> The students had other plans.

#### **The planning of an 'anti-conference'**

As Sim Van der Ryn remembers it, in the month preceding the conference, 'the Aspen board got word that a number of long hairs and radical edge groups planned to show up and stir up the stodgy elitist establishment Aspen Design Conference'.<sup>355</sup> Van der Ryn was asked to invite and represent some the students and environmental action groups because, as a professor at the University of California, he could be considered as someone within the 'establishment' who also had connections and sympathies with radical groups: 'I'd been the university negotiator in the famous Berkeley People's Park incident of 1969 when students and street people took over a vacant piece of UC property and turned it into a park, which pissed off Ronald Reagan (then governor), who called out troops and helicopters to spray poison gas'.<sup>356</sup> From the activists' point of view, Van der Ryn was a viable representative thanks to his work as founder of the Farallones Institute in Berkeley, and his promotion of sustainable energy

---

<sup>354</sup> Minutes of Board Meeting, November 1969, International Design Conference in Aspen papers, MSIDCA87, Box 2, Fol. 25, Special Collections and University Archives, University of Illinois at Chicago.

<sup>355</sup> Sim Van der Ryn, personal interview, 18 June, 2008.

<sup>356</sup> Sim Van der Ryn, personal interview, 18 June, 2008.

In May 1969, student protestors who sought to claim an empty lot belonging to the University of California at Berkeley for a park and location for demonstrations were fired upon with buckshot by police, under orders from Governor Reagan who saw the creation of the park as a leftist challenge to the property rights of the university.

and waste systems within architectural construction. (See Illustration 22)



Illustration 22. Still from *IDCA '70* showing Sym van der Ryn addressing the audience.

The students and activist groups had been invited to submit a proposal to create something at the conference, which would be eligible for funding from the Graham Foundation. The previous year, Northern Illinois University students had used their funding to create a sculpture of junked cars, toilets, sinks, and old tires, sprayed white, intended to embody the current state of contemporary design. (See Illustration 23)





Illustration 23.

Cover of Student Handbook, produced by students for IDCA 1970 showing the sculpture of junked cars that had been made by students of Northern Illinois University, under the supervision of their tutor Don Strel, at IDCA 1969.

When the environmental groups' proposal for the 1970 conference was received, however, it was not for a sculpture (a material form that the conference leadership understood); rather, they sought to use the funds to bring thirty-five people from their organizations to Aspen in a chartered bus, giving small theatrical performances along the way for several weeks. They proposed to set up inflatable structures in Aspen,

in which to hold meetings and exhibitions, present performances, and create a series of events that would, it seemed to Eliot Noyes, 'be in conflict with the Conference itself, almost as a counter-conference, or an anti-conference'.<sup>357</sup> The pre-meditated nature of the ensuing protest, that this correspondence reveals, suggests the revolutionary nature of its purpose. According to critic John Berger, writing in 1968, demonstrations are 'rehearsals for revolution' and their very 'artificiality' and 'separation from ordinary life' component parts of their value as means of 'rehearsing 'revolutionary awareness''.<sup>358</sup>

The valuable 'artificiality' of the Aspen protests, in Berger's terms, was compounded not only by the theatrical nature of their presentation, but also by the costumes that the protesters wore. Tensions between the authorities and the increasingly unruly student attendees derived from the physical appearance of this hippy contingent. As Banham observed:

Once a distinctive student culture began to emerge, taking neither [professionalism and professional status] seriously nor for granted, and began to replace the deferential boy-scoutism of students at earlier Aspens, there began to be some sense of strain about many human aspects of the conference—not least its relations with the worthy burghers of the business community in Aspen itself, who had a well-nourished paranoia about long hair, bare feet, and all the rest of it.<sup>359</sup>

Most provocative to the Aspen community, however, was the students' intention to sleep outside in inflatable structures, rather than in the hotels in which most attendees stayed. The Aspen Institute, which lent the Aspen Meadows location to the IDCA each year, notified the IDCA board that no structures might be built on Institute grounds around the tent if there was any chance that students would spend the night in them.

---

<sup>357</sup> Minutes of Board Meeting, 1970, International Design Conference in Aspen papers, MSIDCA87, Box 2, Fol. 25, Special Collections and University Archives, University of Illinois at Chicago.

<sup>358</sup> John Berger, 'The Nature of Mass Demonstrations', in Geoff Dyer, ed. *John Berger: Selected Essays* (New York: Vintage Books, 2001) p. 247.

<sup>359</sup> Reyner Banham, 'A Private Memoir' in *The Aspen Papers*, ed. by Reyner Banham, (New York: Praeger, 1974), p. 111.

The threat to the establishment contained in the notion of students sleeping in tents had also been at the core of the disturbances at the 1968 Democratic National Convention in Chicago.<sup>360</sup> As journalist Mark Kurlansky has recounted, the Yippies' (Youth International Party) planned programme of events 'was in conflict with the Chicago police because it was based on the premise that everyone would sleep in Lincoln Park, an idea ruled out by the city'.<sup>361</sup>

Disregarding the conference organizers' stipulations that visitors should not bring their own tents, Ant Farm promptly erected *Spare Tire Inflatable*, a tube-like inflatable, twelve feet in diameter, which they had created earlier that year.<sup>362</sup> Power for the air pumps was supplied by their Media Van, in which they had travelled to the conference.<sup>363</sup> (See Illustration 24)

---

<sup>360</sup> Protesters, including members of the Youth International Party, better known as Yippies and led by Abbie Hoffman and Jerry Rubin, converged on Chicago on the occasion of the 1968 National Democratic Convention to support Eugene McCarthy and his anti-war platform against Hubert Humphrey. The protests, which took the form of satirical street theater – or put-ons – and the violent response by the Chicago police force, were captured by multiple television news channels, and chronicled by journalists including Norman Mailer and Hunter S. Thompson. The Yippies had planned a weeklong schedule of events under the heading 'A Festival of Life', which included 'a workshop in drug problems, underground communications, how to live free, guerrilla theater, self defense, draft resistance, communes, etc.'. The ensuing clashes between the Chicago police force and the protesters lasted for eight days. Mark Kurlansky, *1968: The Year that Rocked the World* (New York: Random House, 2004), p. 273.

<sup>361</sup> Ibid. p. 274.

<sup>362</sup> As Ant Farm member Chip Lord remembers it, 'Once we arrived we did not have passes to attend all the sessions, so we became rabble rousers around the edge'. Personal interview, 18 June, 2008.

<sup>363</sup> Between 1969 and 1970 Ant Farm visited numerous schools and institutions, especially on the West Coast, staging multimedia 'response information exchanges'. It is probable, therefore, that many of the design and architecture students in Aspen that summer had had some previous contact with the group.



Illustration 24. Spare Tire inflatable by the Ant Farm, in California, 1970.



Illustration 25. Spare Tire inflatable by the Ant Farm at IDCA 1970.



Illustration 26. Still from *IDCA '70* showing attendees in the inflatable.



When asked by the *IDCA '70* filmmakers why they were at the conference, Chip Lord, a founding member of Ant Farm responded, 'We ripped off \$2,000. We're here on vacation like everyone else' (referring to the grant given by the IDCA board to the five invited environmental action groups to enable them to attend the conference).<sup>364</sup> Ant Farm member Hudson Marquez, captured on the film sporting a bushy beard, beads, and dark sunglasses, explained further:

We wanted to go to Boston to shut down the AIA conference but we didn't have money to get there. So we pushed buttons and pulled levers and threatened to have thousands of hippies show up at Aspen. We said we were going to put an ad in the underground newspapers in Berkeley advertising free food and hanging out with Aquarian age architects and all that bullshit. I guess they bought it.<sup>365</sup>

Marquez's comment suggests that the protesters planned more than discourse: the ultimate disruption of the Aspen conference was at least partially premeditated. As part of a growing critique against corporate modernism and rationalist approaches toward design, and possibly inspired by the well-publicized attempt to 'close down' the city of Chicago on the occasion of the 1968 National Democratic Convention, students and activists occupied other design conferences of the period. The 1970 edition of the American Institute of Architects' (AIA) annual conference, which was running concurrently with Aspen in Boston, was subject to a revolt in which students, led by Taylor Culver, took over the podium from the AIA president, Rex Whitaker Allen.<sup>366</sup> Similarly, Utopie member Hubert Tonka has recalled going to the 'Utopia or Revolution' conference organized by the architecture department at Turin Polytechnic in April 1969: 'We held the whole conference hostage for several hours with a leftist group called the Vikings. The cops showed up with submachine guns, etc. Oh yes,

---

<sup>364</sup> Van der Ryn distributed the IDCA's \$2,000 grant to the Ant Farm, Ecology Action, Environment Workshop, Peoples Architecture Group and Pacific High School, to help cover their costs of coming to the conference. Memorandum to the IDCA Board of Directors, June 8, 1970, International Design Conference in Aspen papers, MSIDCA87, Box 3, Fol. 35, Special Collections and University Archives, University of Illinois at Chicago.

<sup>365</sup> Hudson Marquez in *IDCA 1970*, Dir. Eli Noyes and Claudia Weill, IDCA, 1970.

<sup>366</sup> *1971 World Book Year Book*, (Chicago: Field Enterprises Educational Corporation, 1971), p. 199.

"Utopia or Revolution", that was a bad scene'.<sup>367</sup> Also, in May 1968 radical demonstrators in Milan had protested against the elitist organization of the Milan Triennale, its aestheticization of the student protests, and its reformist approach to that year's theme of 'World Population Explosion'.<sup>368</sup> They managed to close the Triennale down only hours after it had opened and to provoke the resignation of the event's executive committee.<sup>369</sup> (See Illustration 27) As the Italian magazine *Domus* commented, the ease with which it was shut down suggests that the organizers themselves had doubts about the worth of their enterprise and 'a desire for renewal'.<sup>370</sup> By 1970, therefore, the design event had already been identified as a public stage upon which to resist the design establishment.



Illustration 27. Photo of protests at the 1968 Milan Triennale, printed in *Domus* 466, September 1968.

<sup>367</sup> Hubert Tonka, in *The Inflatable Moment: Pneumatics and Protest in '68*, ed. by Marc Dessauce (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1999), p. 49.

<sup>368</sup> A translation of the Italian term 'Il Grande Numero'. Anty Pansera, 'The Triennale of Milan: Past, Present, and Future', *Design Issues* 2, no. 1 (Spring 1985), p. 23.

<sup>369</sup> 'Protest Among the Young', an exhibition that documented recent student protests around the world, was organized and designed by Triennale director Giancarlo De Carlo, film director Marco Bellocchio, and painter Bruno Caruso. Many students saw the objective, reportage-style approach of the exhibition as insufficient and erected banners that read, 'The Triennale Is Not Paris – Merde to the Falsifiers', thus criticizing De Carlo's aestheticization of these contemporary political issues.

<sup>370</sup> 'Milano 14 Triennale', *Domus* 466, September 1968, p. 15. Interestingly, both IDCA board members Saul Bass and George Nelson had installations in the Triennale that year, so they had some first-hand experience of the effectiveness of a student-motivated revolt.

### **'Environment by Design': differing definitions**

While the traditional format of the conference invited attack, IDCA 1970's theme rendered it still more vulnerable. What transpired at IDCA 1970 reveals that two very different definitions of the concept of 'environment' were at play in design discourse and beyond, and highlights the conceptual fault line along which the conference would ultimately split.

For the most part, the IDCA leadership considered 'Environment' to be simply the context in which their designed images, products, buildings and urban plans would exist. When they had devoted another conference to the topic in 1962, chaired by Ralph Eckerstrom, CCA's director of design, advertising, and public relations, they had portrayed 'environment' as a 'physical setting' which could expand along a spectrum of scale: 'a room, a house, a city, a countryside, a nation, the world—the universe'.<sup>371</sup> A consideration of the environment, for the 1962 conference organizers, was closely tied to a consideration of aesthetics. The 'critical problem' in environment, to them, was the difficulty of isolating technological advances and good design from the polluting presence of mass culture: 'Wider windows of distortion-free glass for better transmission of uglier vistas; higher fidelity for clearer reception of cacophony [...] Mass production for endless repetition of the meretricious'. This discussion of the environment as an arena for one's work, often subject to aesthetic assault by unchecked development, was continued at IDCA 1970 by speakers Stewart Udall, James Lash, Reyner Banham, and Peter Hall, who spoke of urban decay, ghettos, and the possibility of renewal through New Towns.

The chair of the 1970 conference was William Houseman, the editor and publisher of *Environment Monthly*.<sup>372</sup> His biographical statement in the conference brochure indicated that, 'his interests in the subject range from the Aviation environment

---

<sup>371</sup> Promotional brochure, IDCA 1962, International Design Conference in Aspen papers, MSIDCA87, Box 15, Fol. 741, Special Collections and University Archives, University of Illinois at Chicago.

<sup>372</sup> Houseman was a columnist on environmental subjects for *Moderator Magazine*, was president of the Environment League, and was a charter board member of the Institute of Environmental Design in Washington D.C.

to the role of color and design in the everyday lives of people'.<sup>373</sup> (See Illustration 28)

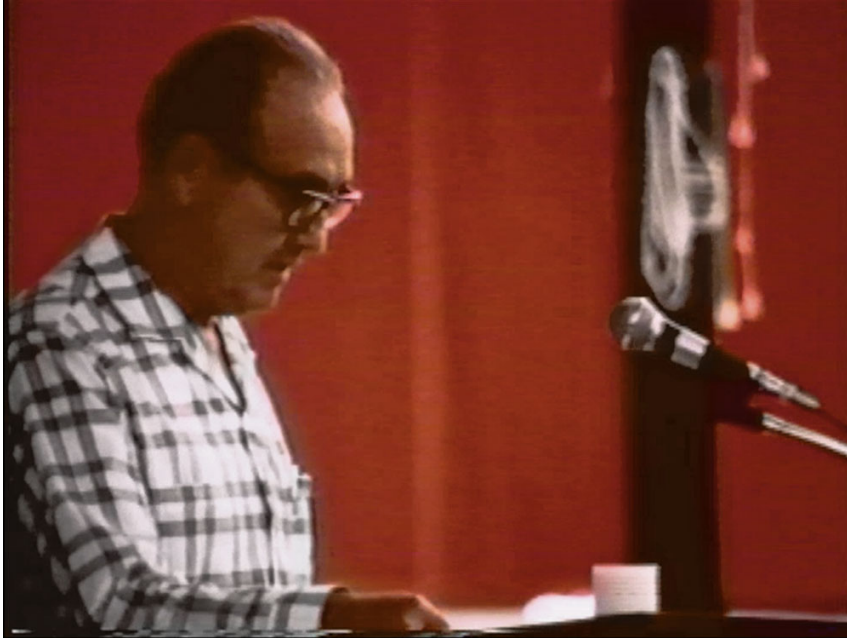


Illustration 28. Still from *IDCA '70* showing IDCA 1970 programme chairman, William Houseman.

In his opening remarks, Houseman further confirmed that his interpretation of the concept of environment, as the backdrop for design rather than as a political issue, was firmly aligned with that of the IDCA board. Houseman quoted a lecture in which 'our good friend' George Nelson portrayed the extent of the designed environment: 'When you walk down any street in any town', he recalled Nelson as saying, 'you will find endless objects that are objects of design [...] the man hole covers [...] mailboxes, screen doors [...] they have all got design'.<sup>374</sup> For many of the conference organizers, environment was, quite simply, the backdrop for their work.

For the ecology groups, on the other hand, 'environment' was shorthand for a pressing political issue – the overwhelming

<sup>373</sup> Speaker biographies, IDCA 1970, International Design Conference in Aspen Records 1949–2006, 2007.M.7, Series 1, Box 28, Fol. 3, The Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles.

<sup>374</sup> Speakers Papers, IDCA 1970, International Design Conference in Aspen Records 1949–2006, 2007.M.7, Series 1, Box 28, Fol. 4–6, The Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles.



need to protect the earth's natural resources from further destruction at the hands of the dominant political and economic interests. As Ecology Action founder Cliff Humphrey said in his main-stage lecture, 'What we are talking about, then, is manifesting by design a survival gap—a survival gap between the people on this planet and the ability of the life support system to support these people'.<sup>375</sup> (See Illustration 29)

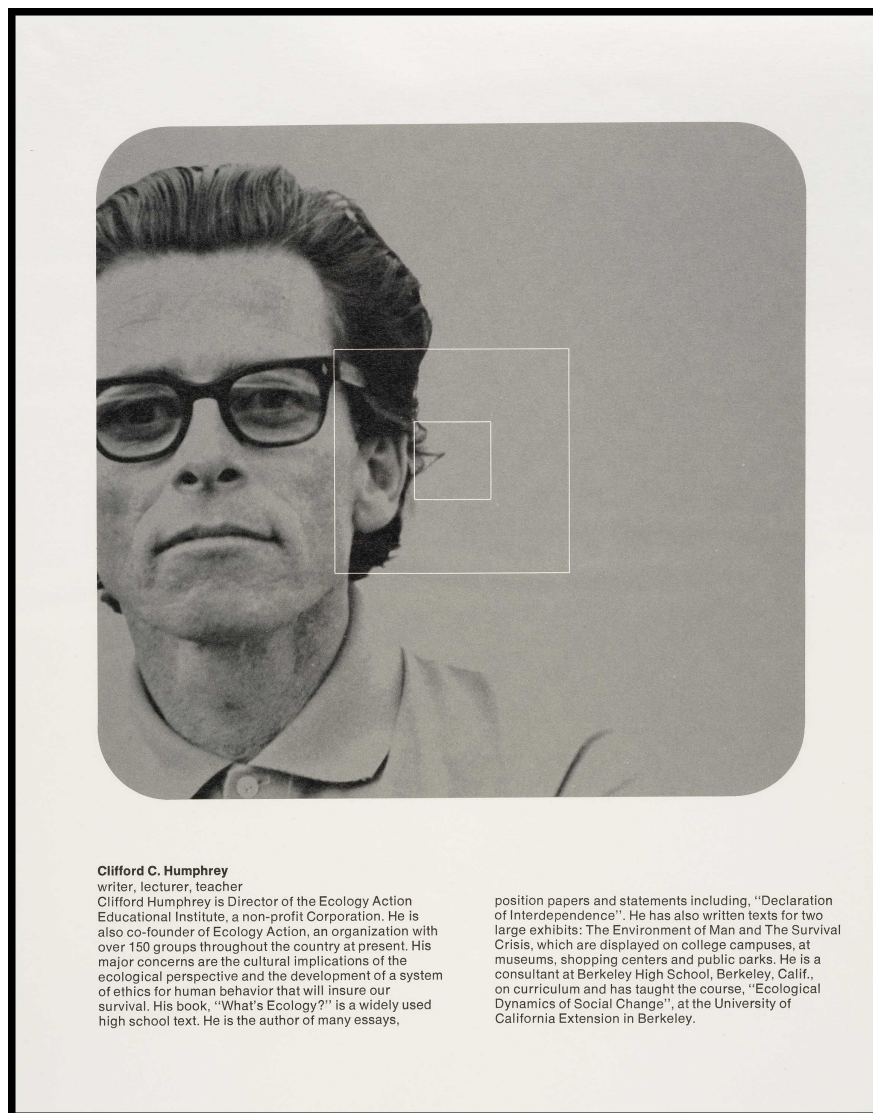


Illustration 29. Clifford Humphrey's biography in IDCA 1970 Speaker Biography booklet.

<sup>375</sup> Ibid.

Humphrey made use of an array of visual props on stage, including a pile of garbage gathered during the conference and an image of the earth seen from space (reproduced from the cover of the Fall 1969 *Whole Earth Catalog*) to enact a kind of three-dimensional diagram, demonstrating the urgency of the impending environmental crisis, which he emphatically framed in terms of species survival.<sup>376</sup> 'If an item is made to be wasted, to be dumped on a dump, then don't make it!'. Humphrey proclaimed, to much applause.<sup>377</sup> 'You know, if our youth can say "Hell, no!" to the draft, then I think that a few of you have to learn to say "Hell, no" to some salesmen and to some developers'.<sup>378</sup>

An unofficial *Student Handbook* created for the 1970 conference reported on students' responses to the previous year's conference and included articles on issues of contemporary interest such as: a *Science* magazine article on the historical roots of the ecological crisis; World Game, a simulation tool for visualizing 'spaceship earth' (developed by Mark Victor Hansen and inspired by Buckminster Fuller's Dymaxion sky-ocean map); and yoga breathing. In an introductory sally to the students, the editors of the *Handbook* enumerated what they thought would be the important aspects of the conference, such as which speakers would be worth their attention (all the speakers mentioned were the special guests of Van der Ryn) and concluding with a nihilistic amendment to the official conference prose: 'According to the official litter bag, we are here to ponder what is worth keeping, what is worth

---

<sup>376</sup> The *Whole Earth Catalog*, published twice a year between 1969 and 1971, assembled a plethora of tools, resources, and tips useful for a creative or self-sustainable lifestyle, became the cult publication of the counterculture and the environmental movement but also won more mainstream acknowledgement with a National Book Award in 1972.

<sup>377</sup> Audio cassette of IDCA 1970 proceedings, International Design Conference in Aspen papers, MSIDCA87, Box 11, Fol. 565, Special Collections and University Archives, University of Illinois at Chicago.

<sup>378</sup> Speakers Papers, IDCA 1970, International Design Conference in Aspen Records 1949-2006, 2007.M.7, Series 1, Box 28, Fol. 4-6, The Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles.

restoring, and what is worth building. (May I add, "What is worth destroying?")'.<sup>379</sup>

In IDCA thinking, the environment could be improved through thoughtful design. From the perspective of a new generation of designers and their environmentalist mentors, the design system (supported by capitalist interests) was an integral part of the environmental problem and should be resisted and ultimately rejected.

#### **Off-stage activity: new formats tested**

The ecology groups initiated numerous interventions during the week of the conference, with varying degrees of success. Among them was an impromptu 'Favorite Foods Picnic' on the grass outside the tent.<sup>380</sup> It was Van der Ryn, rather than programme chairman Houseman, who invited the ecology groups to participate in the conference, and Houseman's cynical view of their interventions is evident in his flippant 'A Program Chairman's Diary of Sorts', included in the conference publication distributed after the conference. Under the heading 'Monday Noon', for example, he satirized the groups' attempt to create, and then clear up, an organic picnic:

Precedent! For the first time ever, an impromptu Favorite Foods Picnic on the grass outside the tent. The young and otherwise decimated the local shopkeepers' shelves in frantic quest for favorite foods. Mostly salami. Enough for the Bulgarian cavalry. Ecological havoc! Cliff Humphrey officiated at the burial of the picnic's organic residue. But what of the nondegradables? Under the cover of darkness, Aspen's anthropomorphological dogs scattered paper plates and Reynolds Wrap across the greensward. A regular Les Levine sculpture.<sup>381</sup>

The film of the conference, *IDCA '70*, documents an unscheduled session in which the attendees were instructed to stand up and

---

<sup>379</sup> Student Handbook, p. 1, IDCA 1970, International Design Conference in Aspen Records 1949-2006, 2007.M.7, Series 1, Box 28, Fol. 8, The Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles.

<sup>380</sup> William Houseman's sarcastic account of the picnic and its poorly planned cleanup was published in the conference proceedings. William Houseman, 'A Program Chairman's Diary of Sorts', Speakers Papers, IDCA 1970, International Design Conference in Aspen Records 1949-2006, 2007.M.7, Series 1, Box 28, Fol. 4-6, The Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles.

<sup>381</sup> Ibid.

pass their name badge to the next person and so on, and then embark on a process of relocating themselves. (See Illustration 30)



Illustration 30. Still from *IDCA '70* showing Chip Chappell and Craig Hodgetts conducting the name-badge swapping exercise from the stage.

This rather crude attempt at encouraging audience interactivity was instigated by 'some of the young people from California', as artist Les Levine described them – namely: Chip Chappell, a teacher at Oakwood School; Tony Cohan, a writer from Los Angeles; and Mike Doyle, leader of the Environmental Workshop and an employee of Lawrence Halprin & Associates.<sup>382</sup> While attendees searched for their identities, Chappell, Cohan, and Doyle paced about on the stage with hand-held microphones rationalizing the exercise as a demonstration of the attendees' interdependence as part of an 'ecological chain'.<sup>383</sup> Cliff Humphrey's militant manifesto, 'The Unanimous Declaration of Interdependence', in circulation at the conference, was a neatly wrought subversion of Thomas

<sup>382</sup> Les Levine was a special guest of the conference and wrote a report for *The Aspen Times*. He saw the spontaneous name card exchange as an 'opportunity to pull out his "Merry Cambodia" and "Happy New War" cards' which he had printed in ornate type. Les Levine, 'Les Levine Comments on the IDCA', *The Aspen Times*, June 25, 1970, 1-B.

<sup>383</sup> Cliff Humphrey, 'The Unanimous Declaration of Interdependence', *Difficult but Possible: Supplement to the Whole Earth Catalogue*, (Menlo Park, CA: Portola Institute, September 1969) pp. 12-13.

Jefferson's Declaration of Independence. It declared that 'all species are interdependent' and that 'whenever any behavior by members of one species becomes destructive to these principles, it is the function of other members of that species to alter or abolish such behavior and to re-establish the theme of interdependence with all life...'.<sup>384</sup>

The name-badge swap is not documented elsewhere in the conference papers, apart from a disparaging reference in Houseman's account. Yet the film shows us that as an exercise in interactive participation, it was indeed effective; we see people getting up and talking to one another, and devising handmade signs, in the search for their name badges.

#### **'Conflicting definition of key terms'**

In between the speaker presentations on the main stage, attendees gathered in small discussion groups in the Aspen Institute seminar rooms. The *IDCA '70* film shows that IDCA board members made numerous attempts to engage attendees in conversation, but it was clear that the middle-aged modernists and the young environmentalists had great difficulty communicating with one another. Not only did they *look* different, they didn't even share the same basic vocabulary.

S. I. Hayakawa, a linguist who specialized in semantics, and who would go on to be a U.S. Senator, gave a paper at IDCA 1956, which was reprinted and circulated at several subsequent conferences. In 'How to Attend a Conference', Hayakawa articulated the gentlemanly code of conduct required from both speaker and listener at an IDCA conference in order to reach consensus. He portrayed the conference as a 'situation created specially for the purposes of communication' in which ideas are exchanged and personal viewpoints are enriched 'through the challenge provided by the views of others.' Discussion is

---

<sup>384</sup> Ibid.

stalemated, wrote Hayakawa, by the 'terminological tangle', or 'conflicting definitions of key terms'.<sup>385</sup>

As if in illustration of this predicament, the *IDCA 70* film includes a particularly heated conversation between some board members, including Saul Bass and Eliot Noyes, and members of the Moving Company theatre troupe, one of whom has to explain the then-new term 'hype' to a confused Noyes. Subsequently the conversation between a crisp-looking man and the leader of the Moving Company breaks down completely. (See Illustrations 31-32) They lean in and jab their index fingers at one another, as they become visibly frustrated with their inability to communicate:

Man: So, you're saying that I have to understand what you're telling me today? I don't understand it.

Actor: We were saying that everything is a rip off. Everyone is stealing [...] The entire civilization is based on the wrong premises. Dig that. We are living in the wrong reality.

Man: Tell me what the right civilization is.

Actor: I can't talk to you if you say that, because you're already saying that you're alienated.<sup>386</sup>

---

<sup>385</sup> Samuel Ichiye Hayakawa, 'How to Attend a Conference', Speakers Papers, IDCA 1970, International Design Conference in Aspen Records 1949-2006, 2007.M.7, Series 1, Box 3, Fol. 6, The Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles.

<sup>386</sup> *IDCA 70*, Dir. Eli Noyes and Claudia Weill, IDCA, 1970. This concept of 'alienation', codified most prominently by Herbert Marcuse, had been key to the student protests in Paris of 1968 and, by 1970, through the mediation of the underground press, had clearly become part of the lexicon of those adopting alternative lifestyles in California. Marcuse's *One-Dimensional Man* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1964) was published in the US in 1964 and popular interpretations of his thinking such as Paul Goodman's *Growing Up Absurd* (New York: Random House, 1960) were widely available throughout the 1960s and were both listed on the IDCA 1971 reading list.





Illustrations 31-32. Stills from *IDCA '70* showing Eliot Noyes and a member of the Moving Company theatre troupe in heated discussion.

Another corridor conversation captured in the film demonstrates a stark ideological disparity between the IDCA leadership, who were interested in the environment on a surface level as a theme for the design conference, and the young attendees, some of whom were actually living in communes and practicing ecological sustainability as part of their everyday lives. Bass, who joins a group of students seated on the floor, asks them, 'Why do we have to assess capitalism? We're just trying to stage a design conference'.<sup>387</sup> A young, intense-looking individual attempts to explain: 'Unless you actually live the lifestyle, it's just bullshit'.<sup>388</sup> Bass was clearly upset that his attempts to understand these unfamiliar beliefs were rebuffed so emphatically. In the board meeting after the conference he reflected, 'If I walk away from this I will feel defeated as a person [...] This time the design problem is ourselves. That's why I'm so shook up about this whole thing'.<sup>389</sup>

With a theme as broad as 'environment' under discussion, it is not surprising that multiple definitions were being wielded by IDCA 1970's different constituents. The severity of the breakdown in communication, however, was new to a conference that prided itself on debating to the point of understanding and consensus.

### **The closing session: The French Group's statement and the students' resolutions**

Tensions mounted throughout the week, reaching a crescendo in the closing session on Friday morning. This session centred on voting for a series of resolutions formulated by the protesters that criticized the intellectual and moral

---

<sup>387</sup> As historian Pat Kirkham pointed out, for fifty-year old Bass to sit on the floor like this with the young attendees would have caused him physical pain, since he had a bad leg.

<sup>388</sup> *IDCA 70*, Dir. Eli Noyes and Claudia Weill, IDCA, 1970. The sentiment expressed by the young attendee echoes a larger shift in sensibility which Theodore Roszak characterized as 'the question facing us is not "How shall we know?" but "How shall we live?"'.

<sup>389</sup> *IDCA 70*, Dir. Eli Noyes and Claudia Weill, IDCA, 1970.



limitations of the conference content, the conference as a designed entity, and the design profession itself.

Reyner Banham, who had attended the conference several times as a speaker since 1963 and had organized the 1968 conference, was the chair of the closing session.<sup>390</sup> In a letter written later that evening to his wife, in which he said he was feeling 'psychologically bruised from the events of this morning', Banham explained that it was actually his idea to turn the final session into a soapbox for the disgruntled attendees. (See Illustration 33)



Illustration 33. Reyner Banham biography in IDCA 1970 Speaker Biographies booklet.

<sup>390</sup> Banham's 1968 conference was titled 'Dialogues: Europe/America'.



Illustrations 34-35. Reyner Banham at IDCA 1968 and IDCA 1970. Banham's attire changed markedly between 1968, when he still wore a suit, bow tie and 1950s-era black framed glasses and slicked back his hair, and looked like very professorial, and 1970 when he wore Aviator sunglasses, a white artist's smock top, and jokey badges with slogans such as 'Have Jug, Will Mug' and he looked to audience member and artist Les Levine, 'a bit like Sir Edmund Hillary, the mountain climber'.

at the meadows, Friday, 9.30 pm between me <sup>University Research Institute</sup> ~~thing and another~~  
Special Collections and Visual Resources  
 300 Gates Center Drive, Suite 500  
 Los Angeles, CA 90097-0528  
 Tel 310 441 7300  
 www.library.edu

Hello you

It's not been one of the great days: beginning with the election news on the Bam Bulletin this morning — did Ben survive the landslide? No, sorry, to be fair, the fish-fry was as super as ever, but I am still feeling psychologically bruised from the events of the morning. It was billed as 'Summing up; Reyner Banham and others' but this has been too fundamentally disorganized a conference to sum up — intellectually disorganized, that is — Bill Houseman really hadn't got the programme together enough for it to gel, and the kinds of people he had invited (from ex Secretaries of State to the Ant Farm Conspiracy) were a guaranteed communications failure. So I proposed we use the morning for second thoughts, statements, and the like. P. Hall, for instance, had to revise some of his propositions after the election, Juan wanted to get a word in; the French party wanted to make a declaration of no-confidence in the whole Environmental bit; the Chicago Black Panthers appeared to be holding something ugly behind their backs, etc. And the usual type resolution, only with several extra clauses about the Third World, Women's Liberation and like that.

In the event, most of the first part of the morning went fairly quietly: the French statement was tough, but gentlemanly; the others friendly or informative, but I was deliberately using my moderator role and unique possession of the list of names to hold back the most probably explosive items until after coffee break. However, the resolutions were read out before coffee so that people could have time to think about them — and it immediately became clear that the conference was liable to polarize into irreconcilable factions and split as the tensions of the week came to the surface. In the upshot, the separate resolution about rural recovery programmes in New Mexico pueblo country was carried by acclamation, and deserved to be — it was all practicable stuff about road improvements and the like. The Black statement was routine stuff, also — just the usual threats 'we're together, and we're here, baby' — though effective enough when addressed to an unticketed white liberal audience. Actually

Illustration 36. First page of letter from Reyner Banham to Mary Banham, Friday, 19, June, 1970.

This suggests that Banham, like the IDCA board members, felt the need to resolve the dispute:

This has been too fundamentally disorganised a conference to sum up — intellectually disorganised, that is — Bill Houseman really hadn't got the programme together enough for it to gel, and the kinds of people he had invited (from ex Secretaries of State to the Ant Farm Conspiracy) were a guaranteed

communications failure. So I proposed we use the morning for second thoughts, statements, and the like.<sup>391</sup>

Banham's self-imposed challenge of consensus-building was made particularly tough by the fact that the goals of the groups who converged in this session – from Stephen Frazier's group of fifteen Black and Mexican-American industrial design students from Chicago to the seemingly arbitrarily selected group of French participants represented by Jean Baudrillard's text – were so heterogeneous.

The French Group's contribution to the conference was a statement written by Baudrillard that explained the group's refusal to participate in the regular conference proceedings. In their view, essential matters concerning the social and political status of design were not being addressed by the conference. 'In these circumstances', the statement began, 'any participation could not but reinforce the ambiguity and the complicity of silence which hangs over this meeting'.<sup>392</sup>

It is unclear whether Baudrillard himself actually attended the conference. It is probable that he did since he is listed in the conference programme brochure and in later interviews his responses to questions about Aspen suggest that he was present. In 1997 he said, 'we were simply delegates in Aspen. It's true that we created a "moment", a little event in Aspen, in passing. [...] America truly started things, an illuminating trip, even if we didn't bring much back to France when we returned'.<sup>393</sup> Baudrillard could be using the first person plural to refer to the activities of the *Utopie* group as a collective, however, (which he often did in writings for the *Utopie* journal) irrespective of whether he was personally in attendance or not. The film, *IDCA '70*, does not contain

---

<sup>391</sup> Letter from Reyner Banham to his wife, Mary, June 19, 1970, International Design Conference in Aspen Records 1949–2006, 2007.M.7, Series 1, Box 27, Fol. 3, The Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles.

<sup>392</sup> Jean Baudrillard, 'Statement Made by the French Group', Speakers Papers, IDCA 1970, International Design Conference in Aspen Records 1949–2006, 2007.M.7, Series 1, Box 28, Fol. 4–6, The Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles.

<sup>393</sup> 'On *Utopie*, an interview with Jean Baudrillard', *Utopia Deferred: Writings for Utopie (1967–1978)*, trans. by Stuart Kendall (New York: Semiotext(e), 2006), p. 18.



footage of the French Group or Baudrillard, there are no mentions of him in any of the documentation, and neither Eli Noyes nor Richard Farson remembers seeing him. (See Illustration 37)



Illustrations 37. Photograph of Jean Baudrillard and Jean Aubert, published in *C.R.É.É magazine* n°6, November/December, 1970, captioned as having been taken in Aspen 1970.

Baudrillard's text, read aloud at the closing session by the geographer André Fischer, openly dismissed the conference's theme of 'Environment by Design'. It also rejected the more widespread interest in environmental issues, as an opiate concocted by the capitalist system to unify a 'disintegrating society'.<sup>394</sup> Baudrillard posited that both the conference theme and the wider crusade currently preoccupying the nation simply diverted attention and energy toward 'a boy-scout idealism with a naive euphoria in a hygienic nature', and away from the real social and political problems of the day such as 'class discrimination', the Vietnam War, and 'neo-imperialistic conflicts'.<sup>395</sup> The new focus on pollution, Baudrillard pointed out, was not merely about protecting flora and fauna, but about the establishment seeking to protect itself from the polluting influence of communism, immigration, and disorder.<sup>396</sup>

---

<sup>394</sup> Ibid.

<sup>395</sup> Ibid.

<sup>396</sup> *IDCA '70*, Dir. Eli Noyes and Claudia Weill, IDCA, 1970.

During an informal debate with the speaker Cora Walker, with the audience seated cross-legged on the floor of a seminar room, Jivan Tabibian, a Lebanese-born political scientist who had been educated in French schools and later became the ambassador of Armenia, also pointed to the liberal design establishment's 'utopian' belief that increased understanding would enable change. He remarked that, 'what I call the great fallacy of the men of good will totally overlooks the concrete reality of vested interest, of institutional power. Those things don't change because people understand'.<sup>397</sup>

Far from espousing environmentalism, Baudrillard contended that it was a ruse of government to maintain the very economy that threatens the environment.<sup>398</sup> Baudrillard identified an insidious 'therapeutic mythology' at work, which framed society as being ill, in order that a cure might be offered. Designers, 'who are acting like medicine-men towards this ill society', were castigated by Baudrillard for their complicity in such myth making, in this semantic slippage between the realms of military defence, the environment, and society.<sup>399</sup>

The statement did not have much impact at the conference. French journalist Gilles de Bure reported that, the 'text was greeted with polite applause. Neither interrupted, nor discussed, it provoked a reaction of surprise at the most elementary level [...] One may wonder if, in the end, the text by Jean Baudrillard had hit home at all, other than with the French group, which had accepted it even before he wrote it?'.<sup>400</sup>

---

<sup>397</sup> Ibid.

<sup>398</sup> Earth Day, founded by Senator Gaylord Nelson, a liberal democrat from Wisconsin, was first celebrated in April 1970. As historian Felicity Scott notes, it had 'set out to repackage environmental concerns for the general public by decoupling questions of ecology from more radical elements and bringing the movement into alignment with those in Congress pursuing environmental regulations. With re-election campaigns in the works, a cynical "war on pollution" had been added to those already launched through the media on poverty and hunger'. Felicity Scott, *Architecture or Techno-utopia: Politics after Modernism*, (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2007) p. 238.

<sup>399</sup> Jean Baudrillard, 'Statement Made by the French Group', Speakers Papers, IDCA 1970, International Design Conference in Aspen Records 1949-2006, 2007.M.7, Series 1, Box 28, Fol. 4-6, The Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles.

<sup>400</sup> Gilles de Bure, *C.R.É.É magazine* n°6, November/December, 1970. Trans. by Patricia Chen for Rosa B (2013)

Reflecting on what occurred at Aspen in 1970, Baudrillard identified yet another communicative rupture between the various factions of conference participants, based on national identity. He said, 'This "counter-culture" was foreign to us. We were very "French", therefore very "metaphysical", a French metaphysics of revolt, of insubordination, while the counter culture that expressed itself in Aspen was largely American'. When he tried to bring back something of the 'vigor' of the American movement, he found there was a translation barrier: 'There was no way to metabolize this contribution in a French context dominated by the "politio-careerist" New Left...'.<sup>401</sup>

Despite Baudrillard's retrospective enthusiasm for the Aspen 'moment', he found the physical setting of the conference to be fundamentally at odds with the seriousness of the issue at hand, referring to Aspen as 'the Disneyland of environment and design', and drawing attention to the fact that 'we are speaking [...] about apocalypse in a magic ambiance'.<sup>402</sup> Cora Walker, the only black speaker on the conference programme, had also highlighted the surreally removed location of the conference, telling the crowd, 'When asked if I'd ever been to Aspen before, I had to respond that I'd never even *heard* of Aspen before'.<sup>403</sup> The high-altitude resort of Aspen that had once been seen as the ideal setting for designers to gain critical distance from their practice was now being criticized for its physical and symbolic remoteness from the social problems they should be engaging with.

As moderator, Banham was able to control the final session to only a limited extent. He contrived to hold back what he thought would be the 'most explosive items' until after the coffee break. The first part of the morning, Banham told his wife in the four-page letter he wrote that night, went quietly: The French Group's statement he considered 'tough,

---

<sup>401</sup> Jean Baudrillard, interview with Jean-Louis Violeau, May 1997, in Jean Baudrillard, *Utopia Deferred*, ed. by Stuart Kendall, (New York: Semiotext(e), 2006), p.18.

<sup>402</sup> Jean Baudrillard, 'Statement Made by the French Group', Speakers Papers, IDCA 1970, International Design Conference in Aspen Records 1949-2006, 2007.M.7, Series 1, Box 28, Fol. 4-6, The Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles.

<sup>403</sup> IDCA '70, Dir. Eli Noyes and Claudia Weill, IDCA, 1970.

but gentlemanly', and the 'Black Statement', presented by Stephen Frazier, he saw as 'routine stuff ... just the usual threats "we're together and we're *here, baby*" – though effective enough when addressed to an uptight white liberal audience'.<sup>404</sup> (See Illustration 38)



Illustration 38. Still from *IDCA '70* showing Stephen Frazier addressing the crowd.

The students' resolutions, read aloud after the coffee break by Michael Doyle, shared some of the same goals as the French Group's statement.<sup>405</sup> The resolutions called for, among other things, the withdrawal of troops from Southeast Asia and an end to the draft, the legalization of abortion, the

---

<sup>404</sup> Letter from Reyner Banham to his wife, Mary, 19 June, 1970, International Design Conference in Aspen Records 1949–2006, 2007.M.7, Series 1, Box 27, Fol. 3, The Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles.

Stephen Frazier, a black industrial designer who brought a group of fifteen black and Mexican-American students from Chicago to Aspen, was given a standing ovation for an impromptu speech that drew attention to the symbolic nature of the black students' presence at the all-white design conference.

<sup>405</sup> Michael Doyle, an architect with Lawrence Halprin & Associates and co-founder of the Environmental Workshop, would go on to become a strategic planner, change consultant, and coach for corporate and non-profit organization leaders and, in 1976, to co-author (with David Straus) the best-selling book on groups, *How to Make Meetings Work* (New York: Wyden Books, 1976) as well as to work on training films such as *Meetings, Isn't There a Better Way?* Visucom Productions, 1981.



restoration of land to Native American Indians, and the end of government persecution of 'Blacks, Mexican-Americans, longhairs, homosexuals, and women'.<sup>406</sup> (See Illustrations 39-41)



Illustration 39. Still from *IDCA '70* showing Michael Doyle presenting the students' resolutions.

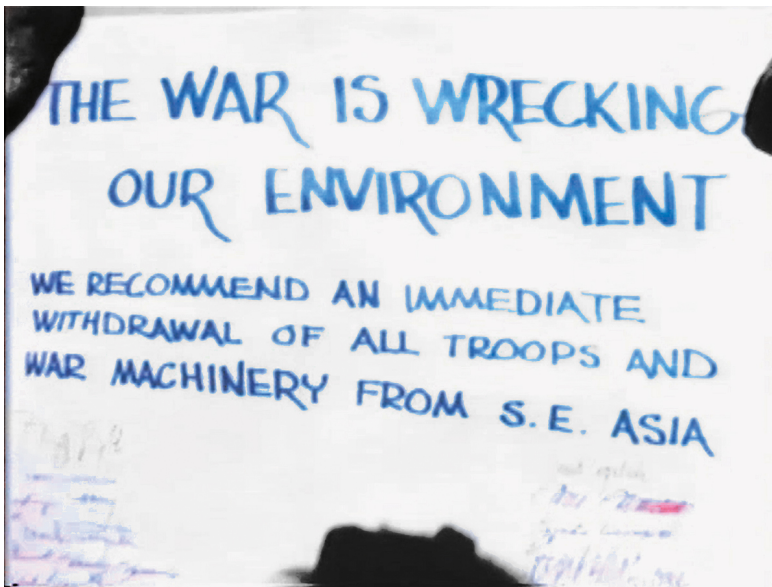


Illustration 40. Still from *IDCA '70* showing the students resolutions.

---

<sup>406</sup> 'Resolutions by those attending the 1970 International Design Conference in Aspen, Friday, June 19, 1970, in recognition of our national-social-physical environment'.

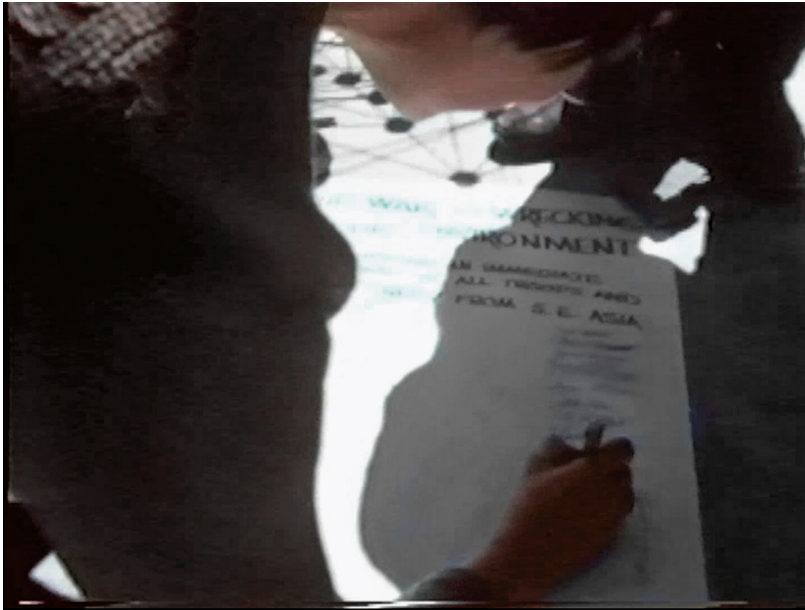


Illustration 41. Still from *IDCA '70* showing attendees signing the student resolutions.

The final point of the document was the most contentious: it asked that designers attending the conference 'refuse to create structures, advertisements, products, and develop ideas whose primary purpose is to sell materials for the sole purpose of creating profit', stating that, 'This attitude is a destructive force in our society'.<sup>407</sup> Striking at the core of the design profession, as it was represented by the conference board, this resolution also pointed to the contradiction in the conference's environmental theme being discussed and, indeed, sponsored by those deeply implicated through their day-to-day transactions in harming the environment. Stewart Udall, former Secretary of the Interior from 1961 to 1969, observed in his keynote speech, that Walter Paepcke 'would be amused in 1970, if he were here, to realize that the container industry is in trouble, and on the defensive with the environment movement'.<sup>408</sup> Very few of the IDCA board members and

<sup>407</sup> Ibid.

<sup>408</sup> Stuart Udall, *Speakers Papers, IDCA 1970, International Design Conference in Aspen Records 1949-2006, 2007.M.7, Series 1, Box 28, Fol. 4-6, The Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles.*

In 1970, possibly under pressure from a mounting environmental movement, CCA sponsored a contest to create a design that would symbolize the recycling process. CCA would use the symbol to identify packages made from recycled and recyclable fibres. Gary Anderson, a graduate student at the University of Southern California in Los Angeles, won the contest, which was judged

speakers at the 1970 conference could claim to work for companies whose main goal was *not* to 'sell materials for the sole purpose of creating profit', and even fewer worked for companies with environmentally responsible practices. The corporate contributors for the 1970 conference included Alcoa, Coca-Cola Company, Ford Motor Company, IBM, and Mobil Oil, all well known for their resource-heavy manufacturing and distribution processes.<sup>409</sup>

After reading the resolutions aloud, Doyle hectored the conference attendees into voting on whether or not to adopt them. Banham noted, 'It immediately became clear that the conference was liable to polarize into irreconcilable factions and split as the tensions of the week came to the surface'.<sup>410</sup>

It was apparent to Banham that even though Noyes and most of the board were 'clearly frightened and didn't want it voted', that what he called 'the Berkeley/Ant Farm/Mad Environmentalist coalition' wanted to commit the conference through a vote.<sup>411</sup> He suggested that it could be rephrased as a petition 'if only as a way of getting the pressure off honest folks who were frightened of looking conspicuous in the ensuing mob scenes if they didn't vote'.<sup>412</sup> He deliberately kept the debate going on this point by calling on the loquacious Jivan Tabibian, and 'picking up every point from the floor, in order to give frightened souls a chance to slip out quietly (they didn't of course; they went out conspicuously later, and got shouted at and threatened)'.<sup>413</sup>

Doyle denounced the idea of a petition as a 'cop out', but Banham did manage to persuade the assembly that the resolution

---

during IDCA 1970, with his design based on the Mobius strip and was awarded his tuition scholarship of \$2,500.

<sup>409</sup> Administrative and financial records, IDCA 1970, International Design Conference in Aspen Records 1949-2006, 2007.M.7, Series 1, Box 26, Fol. 1-5, The Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles.

<sup>410</sup> Letter from Reyner Banham to his wife, Mary, June 19, 1970, International Design Conference in Aspen Records 1949-2006, 2007.M.7, Series 1, Box 27, Fol. 3, The Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles.

<sup>411</sup> Ibid.

<sup>412</sup> Ibid.

<sup>413</sup> Ibid.

should be voted clause-by-clause, and not as a package, in an effort to overturn the final anti-corporate design proposition.<sup>414</sup> Banham's personal frustration with the whole event is evident in a parenthetical aside in the letter to his wife: '(I was doing the whole show single-handed without a whisper of help from Houseman or the Board. In fact, there were a couple of moments during the shouting when I was sorely tempted to pull the plug on the whole operation and leave the Board with the shambles I felt—at that time—they deserved.)'.<sup>415</sup> By the end of the session, by Banham's reckoning, only half the conferees remained. 'I shall not soon forget the hostility vibes that were coming up from the floor', he wrote, 'nor how uptight the students could get the moment they thought they weren't getting their own way'.<sup>416</sup> Noyes's account of the session, published after the event, tallies with Banham's, with the addition of his own observation that, during the voting process, several children were observed standing up along with their parents to be counted. (See Illustration 42)



Illustration 42. Still from IDCA '70 showing children in the audience.

<sup>414</sup> Audio cassette, Summary, Michael Doyle, Fischer, Tabibian, Banham, 1970, International Design Conference in Aspen papers, MSIDCA87, Box 11, Fol. 578, Special Collections and University Archives, University of Illinois at Chicago.

<sup>415</sup> Letter from Reyner Banham to his wife, Mary, 19 June, 1970, International Design Conference in Aspen Records 1949-2006, 2007.M.7, Series 1, Box 27, Fol. 3, The Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles.

<sup>416</sup> Ibid.

Noyes wrote, as an official summation:

There was a tremendous reaction to the events of the morning, many of which came to my attention as President. It was clear that the vote was not an official statement by IDCA of its Board, but a statement by a minority of the conferees who were nevertheless a majority in the tent at that time. Among the complaints I received were that the vote was illegal, that it was pressed through with a small threat of violence, that conferees who wished not to be identified with some or all of the points were nevertheless made to appear involved, and so forth.<sup>417</sup>

As moderator of the closing session, the 48-year-old Banham found himself in an awkward position: as an educator and sympathizer with student sit-ins that had taken place in London in the last two years, he wanted to give the students and environmentalists airtime. Less than a decade before this, students at the Bartlett School of Architecture, University College, London had invited Banham to give lectures for their own alternative course, which they were running concurrently with the official degree programme. By 1970, however, he was an officially appointed professor at the college's newly formed School of Environmental Studies. Furthermore, as an advisor to the IDCA board, a prior conference chairman, the editor of *The Aspen Papers*, and a close friend of Noyes, he also felt loyalty toward the conference organizers against whom the protests were directed. Ultimately, Banham adhered to the consensus-building tendency that had characterized IDCA to date. By contrast, the writer Tony Cohan, who travelled to the conference with the California environmentalists, advocated dissensus, calling for a new conference format in which 'the thrust would have been away from language and toward action encounter, away from fruitless attempts at consensus and toward forms that incorporate conflict'.<sup>418</sup>

Only the year before, at the 1969 conference, titled 'The Rest of Our Lives' – and as if he were speaking directly to the

---

<sup>417</sup> Eliot Noyes, Conference Summary, Speakers Papers, IDCA 1970, International Design Conference in Aspen Records 1949–2006, 2007.M.7, Series 1, Box 28, Fol. 4–6, The Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles.

<sup>418</sup> Tony Cohan, 'Questions About Approach Plague Aspen', *Progressive Architecture*, August 1970, p. 39.

following year's attendees – George Nelson had given a speech in which he warned of the self-perpetuating nature of establishments, despite the efforts of the hippies to overthrow them: 'But let us rejoice prematurely at the impending doom hovering over the establishments, for the blanket-carrying party members of the young (I'm referring to the party founded by Linus, not Marx, Lenin and Engels) and the bearded, barefoot conformists are presently going to set up new establishments no better or worse than the old ones'.<sup>419</sup>

The question of how to engage with, and how to resist, the liberal establishment preoccupied the earnest and impassioned students at the Aspen conference just as it did students more generally in the late 1960s and early 1970s. It was clear, however, that new forms of resistance were necessary; mere criticism as it was conventionally practiced in a written form was no longer suited to the task.

During IDCA 1969 at a meeting arranged by the student attendees, to which they had invited some of the speakers (including Nelson), discussion had turned to the widely publicized attempt to create a public park in Berkeley on an unused lot, and whether or not to work with the establishment, to become a part of it, try to destroy it, or to create a new establishment. The report of the meeting records that, 'Finally one student in anger said, "You can't write a letter to a vending machine; you have to kick it!" Again there was applause'.<sup>420</sup>

#### **After the storm: the IDCA board meeting**

It was traditional for the IDCA board of directors to convene immediately following a conference. On Saturday 20 June, 1970, the morning after the stormy closing session, the following board members gathered in an Aspen Institute seminar room:

---

<sup>419</sup> George Nelson, untitled lecture, Speakers Papers, IDCA 1969, International Design Conference in Aspen Records 1949–2006, 2007.M.7, Series 1, Box 25, Fol. 1–5, The Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles.

<sup>420</sup> Student Handbook, IDCA 1970, International Design Conference in Aspen Records 1949–2006, 2007.M.7, Series 1, Box 28, Fol. 8, The Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles.



Eliot Noyes, Ben Yoshioka, Saul Bass, Herbert Bayer, Peter Blake, Ralph Caplan, William C Janss, John Massey, George Nelson, Herbert Pinzke, Jack Roberts, and Henry Wolf. Also present were William Houseman, the 1970 programme chairman; Richard Farson, 1971 chairman elect; Merrill Ford, executive secretary; and advisors Reyner Banham and Alex Strassle. Fred Noyes, Eliot's other son, was invited at the behest of some board members as an interpreter for the foreign-seeming student contingent. (See Illustration 43)



Illustration 43. Still from *IDCA '70* showing IDCA board members Saul Bass and Ralph Caplan.



Illustration 44. Still from *IDCA '70* showing Fred Noyes, Eliot Noyes' son.

When asked if he could describe what the students would like the conference to become, Fred Noyes resisted the idea that the students could be considered a unified body with one easily communicated point of view. By the time of the meeting, however, the directors had convinced themselves of a 'them and us' situation. Henry Wolf said: 'Unless we design a form where all this energy can be used there will be a takeover. We have been trying to pacify them. We have to come up with a plan of channeling their energy'.<sup>421</sup>

The discussion returned repeatedly to the failures of the conference format. Houseman, whose weak programming may have been partly responsible for the ensuing chaos, appears to have been remarkably sensitive to the interests of the attendees, after all. The meeting minutes record his belief that,

First of all, the conference in our society has been on the endangered species list. I'm not sure we shouldn't let it die. If that is so, I'm not so sure that the boards of directors of conferences are not also on the endangered species list. It seems to me you should stop this Conference or alter it radically. And I mean make it a radical conference.<sup>422</sup>

Toward the end of the three-and-a-half-hour meeting Noyes, who stated that the conference has left him 'battered, bruised, stale, and weary', resigned his presidency of the IDCA, a position he'd held for five years:

It now does appear that this form has become unsatisfactory to enough people that we should never try to stage a conference in this way again. While we have not learned from any individual or any of the dissenting groups what kind of conference they would like, it appears to me that it would be something so different from our past conferences and perhaps from our concerns with design that it must be put together with an entirely new vision if it is to continue.<sup>423</sup>

---

<sup>421</sup> Minutes of Meeting, IDCA 1970, p. 4, Minutes 1966-1973, International Design Conference in Aspen papers, MSIDCA87, Box 2, Fol. 25, Special Collections and University Archives, University of Illinois at Chicago.

<sup>422</sup> Ibid.

<sup>423</sup> Ibid.



The other directors clearly felt less depressed, however, as the majority voted that there should be another conference, after all. (See illustration 45)



Illustration 45. Still from *IDCA '70* showing IDCA board members voting to continue the conference.

Charged with organizing the following year's conference, Richard Farson, dean of the School of Design at the newly formed CalArts, shared his vision for what a radically redesigned conference might look like:

I would like to run a high-risk design conference.

Very dignified and sleazy, very specific and general. I would like to go both ways at once. I question the star system. I think we may need names to get them into the tent, but beyond that we don't need them. Reverse the flow of communication. [...] It shouldn't be just informational. It should be mind-stretching. [...] Should be more of a carnival.<sup>424</sup>

Farson, who in addition to his CalArts deanship, was a psychologist and chairman of the Western Behavioral Sciences Institute, an organization involved in research on the leadership and communication of groups, believed it was

---

<sup>424</sup> Ibid.

important to redesign the conference from the bottom up. By introducing workshops, games, and other participatory formats, he wanted to bring it in line with the new teaching methods taking place on campuses and at demonstrations across America. After excitably enumerating his catalogue of ideas, Farson concluded on a philosophical note: 'I would like to say that any human grouping is vulnerable. We have a saying it is easy to damage an individual and not an institution. I disagree. We are very vulnerable as an institution'.<sup>425</sup> (See Illustration 46)

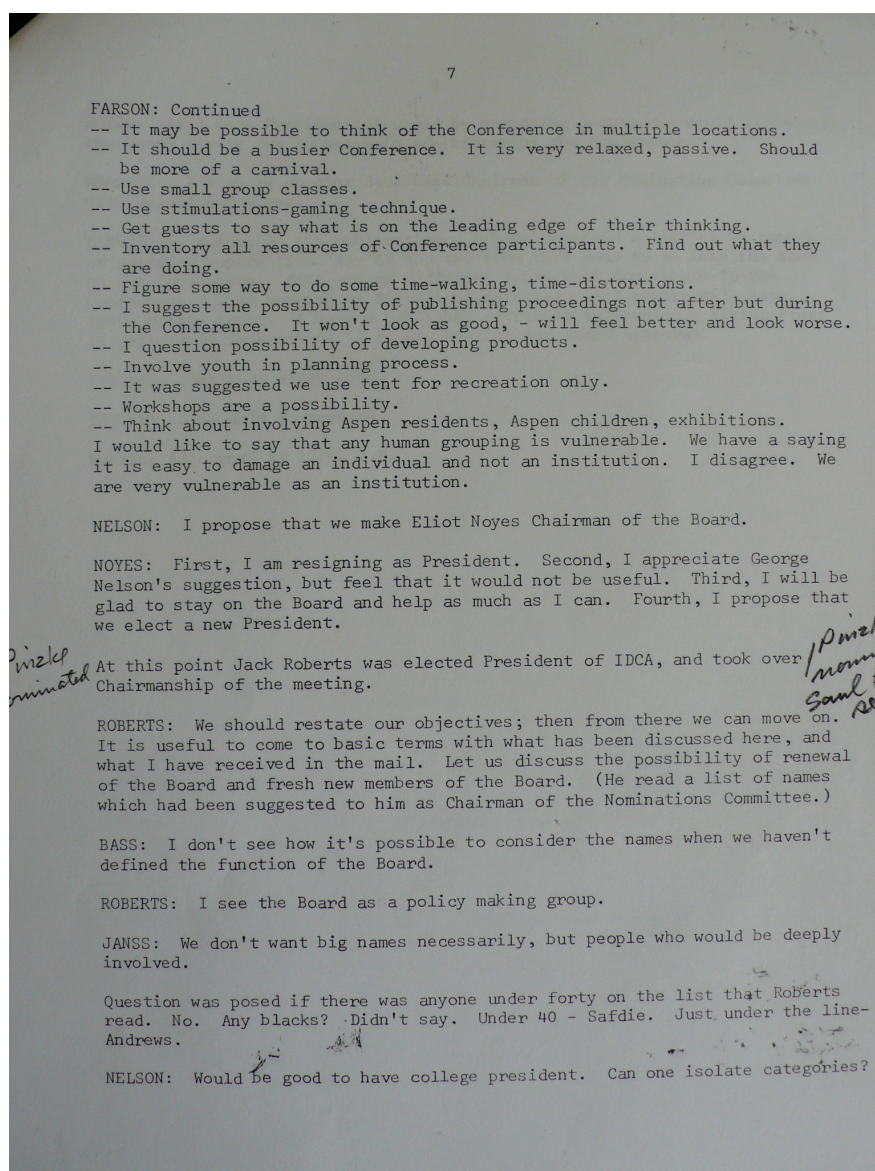


Illustration 46. Page from minutes of IDCA 1970 board meeting showing Richard Farson's excitable catalogue of ideas for the following year's conference, demanding a different and more note-like form of recording on the part of Merrill Ford, the minute-taker.

<sup>425</sup> Ibid.

In fact, the institution of the International Design Conference in Aspen was battle-scarred but ultimately resilient. It remained under IDCA's leadership until 2005, when the American Institute of Graphic Arts assumed its administration. But the 1970 conflict did have consequences for the individuals involved. In a discussion between Noyes and Bass before the board meeting began (captured by Noyes's son's camera), Noyes appears bemused and upset; he scratches his arms and his eyes wander as he attempts to make sense of the palpable change in the conference atmosphere. 'All those resolutions at the end had nothing to do with the subject of the conference', he said. 'This is the politicizing – I believe that's the word – of the Aspen Design Conference. And I am not a political guy. I'm not interested in becoming a political guy. I'm interested in making my points through my work. I don't play games with this kind of thing. I just can't. It's not in me'.<sup>426</sup> (See Illustration 47)



Illustration 47. Still from *IDCA '70* showing Eliot Noyes and Saul Bass in discussion about the events of the conference.

---

<sup>426</sup> *IDCA 1970*, Dir. Eli Noyes and Claudia Weill, IDCA, 1970.

It is possible that Banham, too, underwent a personal re-evaluation during this conference, as right before his eyes he saw the mood of the students turn against the pop values he had championed in the previous decade. In his letter to Mary Banham, he commented, 'so we didn't blow the conference, but I count it among the hollower victories of my public career'.<sup>427</sup>

As discussed in the previous chapter, hitherto Banham had been the hip spokesman for pop, identifying emerging trends considered taboo by the design establishment. Banham had challenged the traditional design canon and introduced new subject matter for evaluation – from crisp packets to surfboards – and a new vocabulary for discussing them, which connected to the contemporary lexicon. Now that the qualities he had celebrated such as expendability and surface styling were being rejected by the younger generation of anti-consumerist designers, Banham found himself dislocated from the concerns of the counterculture. Furthermore, his critical apparatus, which for the past decade, in the context of design magazines like *Design*, *Architect's Review* and *Industrial Design* and general interest publications like *The Listener* and *The New Statesman*, had seemed unconventional and even revolutionary, was, in this new critical environment of improvisational theatre, petitions, and protest through resistance, no longer considered particularly relevant or effective.

The IDCA board had charged Banham with compiling a book of IDCA papers. Even though *The Aspen Papers* was not published until 1974, Banham's narrative ends with the 1970 conference, which, he opined, 'will be the last Aspen conference in anything like the form on which its reputation has been built'.<sup>428</sup> He selected only two of the lectures from that year for publication and put them under the title 'Polarization': One was the French Group's statement, which he re-titled 'The

---

<sup>427</sup> Letter from Reyner Banham to his wife, Mary, June 19, 1970, International Design Conference in Aspen Records 1949-2006, 2007.M.7, Series 1, Box 27, Fol. 3, The Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles.

<sup>428</sup> Reyner Banham, *The Aspen Papers*, (New York: Praeger, 1974) p. 11.

Environmental Witch-Hunt', and the other was Peter Hall's pragmatic presentation on English New Towns. Banham's preface to the 1970 section, which draws attention to the 'gulf divid[ing] those who believed that rational action was possible within "the system", and those who wanted out', makes clear his preference for Hall's liberal reformist position.<sup>429</sup> In a draft manuscript for the book written in 1971, he wrote, 'As I write this envoi Aspen has survived (the right word, I hear) the conference of 1971 masterminded by the California connection (Jack Roberts, Richard Farson, Jivan Tabibian) and is girding its loins for 1972 under Richard Saul Wurman as Program chairman'.<sup>430</sup> Because the book's publication was delayed, he rewrote the passage, but his ambivalence is still evident when he refers to the 'extraordinary scenes of 1971 – masterminded by Richard Farson under the entirely appropriate title of "Paradox"'.<sup>431</sup>

To omit the proceedings of the recent years' conferences, in which he was not involved, seems uncharacteristically conservative of Banham. He explains that these 'years of participation and workshops and be-ins' didn't produce papers in the classic sense, yet he also admits that, when he arrived for the 1973 conference, 'Performance', chaired by Milton Glaser and Jivan Tabibian, 'it would be an operation to which I was somewhat a stranger', suggesting that the reason he did not include the events of 1971 to 1973 was due to his new outsider status in relation to them.<sup>432</sup> While others were enthused by the way the conference was evolving in line with contemporary attitudes – and many saw 1970 as the beginning of something new – Banham's framing of *The Aspen Papers* is conspicuous for being a lament or a 'memorial of sorts' for the conference.<sup>433</sup>

---

<sup>429</sup> Ibid. p. 207.

<sup>430</sup> Reyner Banham, Manuscript, Aspen Reader, 1965–1973, Reyner Banham Papers, 1877–1988, undated, bulk 1960–1988, Series VI, Box 18, Fol. 1–4, The Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles.

<sup>431</sup> Reyner Banham, *The Aspen Papers*, (New York: Praeger, 1974) p. 222.

<sup>432</sup> Ibid.

<sup>433</sup> Ibid. p. 223.





Illustration 48. Photo by Tim Street-Porter of Reyner Banham, Silurian Lake, San Bernardino County, California, 1972.

#### **Dissent at IDCA prior to 1970**

IDCA conferences in the two decades prior to IDCA 1970 were not devoid of criticism and the impetus toward consensus-building did not preclude dissenting voices, but since they were presented in the written form of pre-prepared lectures, IDCA was able to frame them on its own terms and ultimately to absorb them. Among the forceful critics who had appeared at past IDCA conferences were the sociologist C. Wright Mills, who delivered a harsh critique of industrial design to the Aspen audience in 1958 (discussed in the previous chapter). In 1964 Dexter Masters, director of Consumers Union and editor of *Consumer Reports*, spoke out about the conspicuous absence of serious criticism within the design industry, specifically with regard to the 'corruption in designing that has the effect of economically cheating the buyer or endangering his health, or possibly his life, and insulting him as a fellow human being in the process'.<sup>434</sup> In his lecture, 'Quick and Cheesy, Cheap and Dirty', Dexter Masters described the work of *Consumer Reports* as exposing the various concealments

---

<sup>434</sup> Dexter Masters, 'Quick and Cheesy, Cheap and Dirty', in *The Aspen Papers*, ed. by Reyner Banham, (New York: Praeger, 1964), p. 141.

practiced both by manufacturers and designers. He expressed his disappointment that designers did not want to perform criticism in its pages, since it provided such ideal conditions: *Consumer Reports*, he told the audience, was objective because it employed scientific research (they tested products in laboratories, and bought them rather than being sent them by manufacturers and PR companies) and because it didn't rely on advertising for revenue. In the past he had commissioned Eliot Noyes to write a design review for *Consumer Reports*, a series of articles titled 'The Shape of Things' that Noyes had written between 1947 and 1960. In recent years, when Masters asked Noyes and other industrial designers to review design products, however, they declined, refusing to comment on the work of other designers, seemingly under pressure from the Industrial Designers Society of America.<sup>435</sup>

Perhaps stimulated by Masters' words, 1964 conferees prepared a special document concerning the 'failures of criticism', which outlined four resolutions intended to improve the situation. They called on design organizations, designers, manufacturers, and the media to take more responsibility for the encouragement of design criticism. Reyner Banham and Ralph Caplan (who had been editor of *Industrial Design* 1959–1963) were both at the conference and helped to shepherd this initiative, which was subsequently published in *Industrial Design*.<sup>436</sup> Two of their resolutions concerned the unstated but widely adhered-to rules of the industrial design professional societies:

Firstly—a lively interchange of well-informed critical opinion is essential to all branches of the business of design, and the professional bodies representing designers are strongly urged to encourage it.

Secondly—designers have a duty to contribute their knowledge freely and honestly to public discussion of design in all its aspects. All restrictive rules which subject the public good to a narrow concept of loyalty to the profession by prohibiting

---

<sup>435</sup> Ibid.

<sup>436</sup> Reyner Banham and Ralph Caplan, 'The Aspen Papers', in *Industrial Design*, August 1964, pp. 58–61.

designers from commenting on one another's work should be relaxed as soon and as far as possible.<sup>437</sup>

Furthermore, IDCA board members sometimes took aim at their own foibles and the shortcomings of the conference. In a 1969 speech, George Nelson painted a dystopian portrait of contemporary society as a staged play dominated by the military-industrial complex and tarnished by environmental pollution. In his vision, floating above the stage-earth are thousands of shiny, beautiful ice-blue spheres containing fusion material. Nelson noted how gratifying it is to see on these spheres a special credit for graphic design. 'You may recall the decision made about a year and a half ago at the first international conference on orbiting garbage, when it was decreed that every aspect of man's environment should be studied by leading design professionals with the view to the ultimate beautification of everything', he said, clearly satirizing the limited and aesthetically focused objectives of the IDCA conferences which he helped to lead.<sup>438</sup>

It is important to note that these prior examples of criticism at the IDCA were articulated *within* the speeches of invited participants, and thus were contained in the accepted structure of the conference. Banham chose to publish two of these critiques in *The Aspen Papers* (by artist and writer James Real and Dexter Masters). In his preface to the section labelled 'Dissent', Banham observed that, 'Aspen often called on the services of the more formidable social critics of the day...'.<sup>439</sup> By framing these critics' commentaries as a commissioned 'service', he could thus package them palatably alongside the more benign material. Even the 1964 attendees' resolutions, which arose spontaneously during the conference, were endorsed by the conference leadership and, because they took a written form, were published in the conference materials.

---

<sup>437</sup> Ibid.

<sup>438</sup> George Nelson, 'The Rest of Our Lives', Speakers Papers, IDCA 1969, International Design Conference in Aspen Records 1949-2006, 2007.M.7, Series 1, Box 25, Fol. 1-5, The Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles.

<sup>439</sup> Reyner Banham, *The Aspen Papers*, (New York: Praeger, 1974) p. 92.



What happened at the 1970 conference, by contrast, represented a more radical variant of criticism, one that was harder for the IDCA to assimilate. Chairman Houseman's lack of preparation for such a physical onslaught to the structures of the conference can be deduced from his opening remarks, in which he proposed the setting off of 'some rhetorical fireworks, which I am sure are going to illuminate this congenial tent during the next five days'.<sup>440</sup> He assumed critiques would be articulated only in the form of persuasive language and contained in the prescribed arena of the conference tent. As we have seen from what actually transpired at IDCA 1970, written papers and moderated debate were only one option among many for conveying critique, which now included not just contributing to a conference, but also the possibility of non-participation and resistance.

#### **The 1971 conference as a response to the 1970 critiques**

Just as he had outlined during the post-IDCA 1970 board meeting, Dick Farson used his chairmanship of IDCA 1971, titled 'Paradox', to introduce more politically relevant themes and experimental communication formats. He picked up on the leftist thrust of the students' IDCA 1970 resolutions and the French Group's statement by attempting to address the major socio-political issues of the moment such as sexual politics, Third World hunger, and what he termed the 'revolution of consciousness' – an umbrella heading that allowed him to discuss the impact of drugs such as LSD.<sup>441</sup> Sensitive to the 1970 conference attendees' critiques, he included a 'Conference Feedback' session on the final day, during which the conference board members would 'react to

---

<sup>440</sup> William Houseman, Speakers Papers, IDCA 1969, International Design Conference in Aspen Records 1949-2006, 2007.M.7, Series 1, Box 28, Fol. 4-6, The Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles.

<sup>441</sup> 'Much of the content, structure, and tone of this year's IDCA has emerged in answer to the challenges you will see raised in "Aspen '70'".' Letter from Jack Roberts to August Saul, ALCOA, May 12, 1971, Film Bookings, International Design Conference in Aspen papers, MSIDCA87, Box 1, Fol. 8, Special Collections and University Archives, University of Illinois at Chicago.

criticisms and comments about this year's conference'.<sup>442</sup> There was only one main-stage speaker, the environmentally conscious architect-engineer R. Buckminster Fuller.<sup>443</sup> Other well-known figures such as *Design for the Real World* author Victor Papanek, psychologist Milton Wexler, and *Born Female* author Caroline Bird were presented as discussion leaders rather than keynote speakers, and there were fewer formal presentations and more roving, carnivalesque sessions, or 'experiences', as Farson described them.<sup>444</sup> Banham's conclusion to *The Aspen Papers* contained his predictions for the future of IDCA and a summation of IDCA 1971 (which he did not attend, relying instead on friends 'to report the extraordinary scenes'). He wrote, 'these were the years of participation and workshops and be-ins, and they emphatically did not produce "papers" in the classic sense. Tape cassettes, yes—entirely appropriate electronic simulacra of verbal happenings, proof against effective transcription onto the printed page...'.<sup>445</sup> (See Illustrations 49-50)

---

<sup>442</sup> Annotated Events List, Program, IDCA 1971, International Design Conference in Aspen Records 1949-2006, 2007.M.7, Series 1, Box 29, Fol. 8, The Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles.

<sup>443</sup> R. Buckminster Fuller was not Farson's choice as a speaker. Saul Bass and Eliot Noyes had visited Farson during the planning of the conference to express their concern that the kinds of speakers he was enlisting were not recognized in the design community. They persuaded him to invite Fuller who was liable to draw attendees. Farson recalls, 'They thought it was going to go bust. I was used to being in a shapeless environment, but it was very difficult for them'. Personal interview, 30 June, 2008.

<sup>444</sup> Promotional brochure, Publicity, IDCA 1971, International Design Conference in Aspen Records 1949-2006, 2007.M.7, Series 1, Box 29, Fol. 11, The Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles.

<sup>445</sup> Reyner Banham, *The Aspen Papers*, (New York: Praeger) p. 222.



Illustrations 49-50. Stills from IDCA '70 showing group discussions with participants seated on the floor.

On the first day of IDCA 1971, for example, Stanford University psychologist James Fadiman led a consciousness-expansion session in which participants explored their 'transpersonal psychic states' through such techniques as 'psychosynthesis'. Later, Michael Aldrich, a member of the Critical Studies faculty at CalArts and co-editor of *Marijuana Review*, discussed 'the role that drugs have played and will

likely play in the history and future of civilization'.<sup>446</sup> Other sessions saw an Esalen Institute staff member 'enabling people to get in touch with the messages from their bodies', and 'mythematician' Bob Walter conducting a game workshop in which participants explored 'changing individual and social conceptions of sexuality, male-female balances, and the likely directions of sexuality in the seventies'.<sup>447</sup> (See Illustration 51)

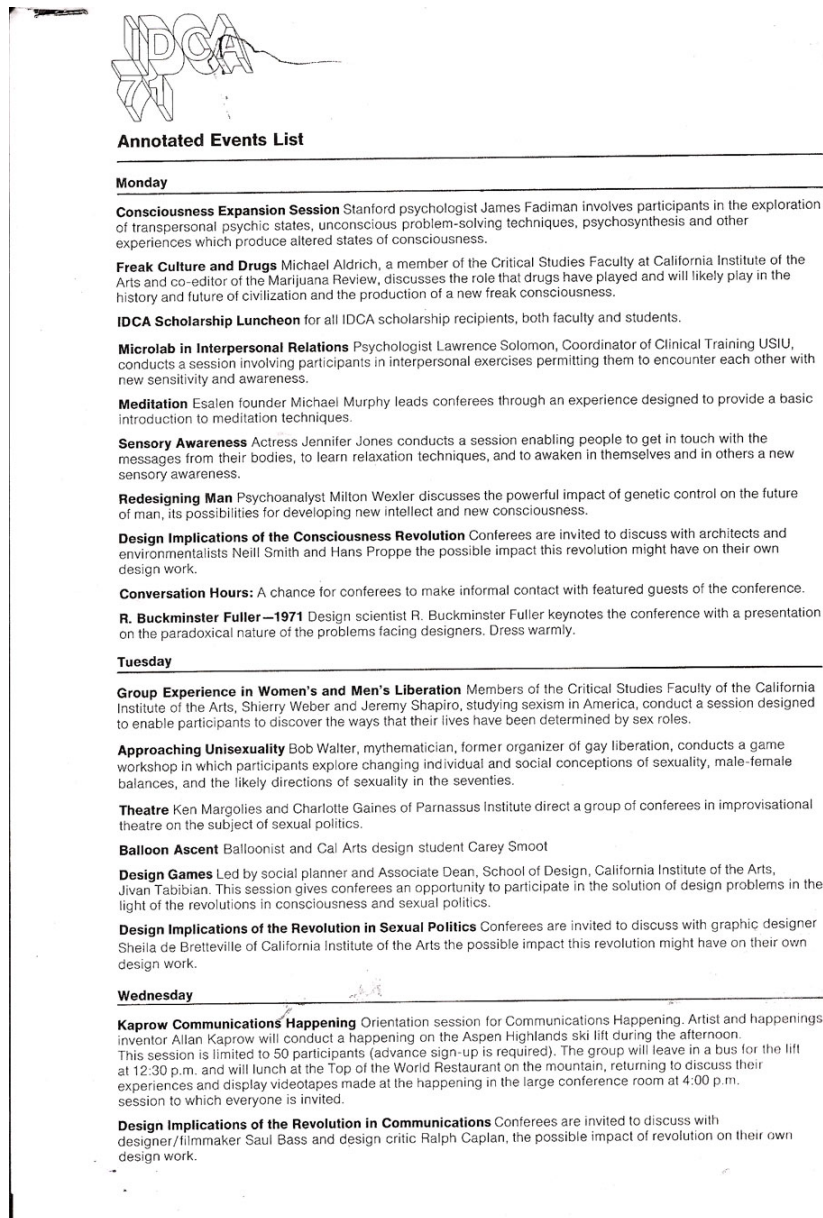


Illustration 51. Annotated Events List, IDCA 1971.

<sup>446</sup> Program, IDCA 1971, International Design Conference in Aspen Records 1949-2006, 2007.M.7, Series 1, Box 29, Fol. 8, The Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles.

<sup>447</sup> Ibid.

Farson wanted to introduce a new perspective on design to the Aspen attendees: 'Design had been taught as a problem-oriented, Aristotelian thing. So designers would see things as problems rather than as predicaments. But in social design, we have predicaments, not problems. I wanted to show designers they were on the wrong track but also to be hopeful about the future'.<sup>448</sup>

Other activities included video workshops led by the artist and CalArts faculty member Nam June Paik, meditation, a balloon ascent, design games, and the screening of films such as Kenneth Anger's *Invocation of My Demon Brother* and Thomas Reichman's *How Could I Not Be Among You*. The artist and associate dean of Art at CalArts Allan Kaprow, who was interested in what he termed "participation happenings" as a counter to 'the whole concept of spectatorship', organized a "Communications Happening" using the Aspen ski lift and video technology.<sup>449</sup> Recalling the events of 1971, Farson said, 'People had a chance to shape the situations they were in. They had a chance to effect the outcome and direction of the things they were participating in'.<sup>450</sup> (See Illustrations 52-53)

---

<sup>448</sup> Richard Farson, personal interview, 30 June, 2008.

<sup>449</sup> Allan Kaprow, 'Environments and Happenings' panel discussion, 1966, Jeanne Siegel, *Artwords: Discourse on the 60s and 70s*, (Ann Arbor, MI: UMI Press, 1985) p. 173 and p. 169.

<sup>450</sup> Richard Farson, personal interview, 30 June, 2008.



Illustrations 52-53. Participants in Allan Kaprow's 'Tag' happening were videoed while riding the Aspen ski lift and then invited to reflect on the experience of viewing themselves on video monitors.

The activities of IDCA 1971 can be understood in terms of the French Marxist philosopher Henri Lefebvre's theory of 'moments'.<sup>451</sup> Lefebvre's 'moment' was an intense, euphoric, and ephemeral point of rupture in the flow of normal experience in which the possibilities of everyday life reveal themselves. Even though the moment passes and folds back into normality,

---

<sup>451</sup> The concept of the moment was advanced in his autobiography: Henri Lefebvre, *La Somme et le Reste*, (Paris: Edition La Nef de Paris, 1959).



the fact that something new has been exposed might have the capacity to change people's consciousness and to help them escape their alienated condition. Through this critique of everyday life, Lefebvre hoped to refocus attention onto the body and the senses, and in so doing perhaps inspire the imagination to conceive of revolutionary or utopian possibilities.<sup>452</sup>

Utopie architect Antoine Stinco has observed how anti-monumental, mobile, low-pressure inflatable structures, like those erected at IDCA 1970 and IDCA 1971, were a means of enacting Lefebvre's celebration of the festival of everyday life. Stinco explained, 'The inflatable represented [...] a festive symbol of the new energy. It did so through its fragility, its will to express the ideas of lightness, mobility, and obsolescence, through a joyous critique of gravity, boredom with the world, and of the contemporary form of urbanism that had been realized'.<sup>453</sup> The moments of playful participation, a refocusing on the body, and the ethos of critique which characterized the fringe activities at IDCA 1970 conference and the core of IDCA 1971 conference can certainly be seen in Lefebvrian terms as ruptures in the smooth structure of the Aspen Design Conference and the principles of humanism, consensus, and pragmatism that underpinned it.<sup>454</sup>

The list of books available in IDCA 1971's conference bookstore (also where the coffee was served, suggesting it would have received high traffic) covered a wide spectrum of contemporary thought ranging from feminist manifestoes such as Caroline Bird's *Born Female* (1969), Kate Millett's *Sexual Politics* (1969), and Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* (1963) to expositions on psychology such as Abraham H.

---

<sup>452</sup> David Harvey, Afterword, in Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, trans. by Donald Nicholson-Smith (Oxford: Blackwell Press, 1991), p. 429.

<sup>453</sup> Antoine Stinco in Marc Dessauce, *The Inflatable Moment: Pneumatics and Protest in '68* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1999) p. 70.

<sup>454</sup> While Lefebvre was Utopie's primary mentor, and so his influence can be said to have reached Aspen at least indirectly through the French Group's Statement of 1970, his work had not yet been translated and was not widely available in the US in the early 1970s.

Maslow's *Toward a Psychology of Being* (1962), Ken Kesey's *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* (1962), and R. D. Laing's *Politics of Experience* (1967). The book list also encompassed Marxist texts such as Herbert Marcuse's *One-Dimensional Man* (1964) and readings of Marxist influence on the rise of an American counterculture such as Theodor Roszak's *The Making of a Counterculture* (1969). The list referenced recent thinking about communication such as Gene Youngblood's *Expanded Cinema* (1970) and Marshall McLuhan's *Understanding Media* (1964) and *The Medium is the Massage* (1967), as well as politicized texts that inspired the civil rights and decolonization movements: *Wretched of the Earth* (1961) by Franz Fanon, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* (1965), and George Jackson's *Soledad Brother* (1970).<sup>455</sup> (See Illustration 54)

---

<sup>455</sup> Reading List, Program, IDCA 1971, International Design Conference in Aspen Records 1949-2006, 2007.M.7, Series 1, Box 29, Fol. 8, The Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles.





### Books

Author	Title	Publisher	Price
Bennis, W. G.	Temporary Society	Harper-Row	1.60
Bird, C.	Born Female	Pocket Books	0.95
Castaneda, C.	Teachings of Don Juan	Ballantine	0.95
Cleaver, E.	Soul On Ice	Dell	0.95
Debray, R.	Revolution in the Revolution	Grove	0.95
Eisen, J., ed	Age of Rock: Sounds of the American Cultural Revolution	Random	2.95
Fanon, F.	Wretched of the Earth	Grove	1.45
Farina, R.	Been Down So Long; It Looks Like Up To Me	Dell	0.75
Farson, R., ed	Science & Human Affairs	Science & Behavior	4.95
Friedan, B.	Feminine Mystique	Dell	1.25
Fromm, E.	Art of Loving	Bantam	0.75
Fuller, R. B.	I Seem to be a Verb	Bantam	1.65
	Operating Manual for Spaceship Earth	Pocket Books	1.25 ✓
	Utopia or Oblivion	Bantam	1.25
Goodman, P.	Growing Up Absurd	Random	1.95
Guevara, C.	Complete Bolivian Diaries	Stein & Day	2.95
Hersey, J.	Algiers Motel Incident	Bantam	1.25
Hoffman, A.	Steal This Book	Grove	1.95
Jackson, G.	Soledad Brother	Bantam	1.50 ✓
Johnson, N.	How To Talk Back To Your Television Set	Bantam	0.95
Kesey, K.	One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest	NAL	0.95
Laing, R. D.	Politics of Experience	Ballantine	0.95
Leonard, G.	Education & Ecstasy	Dell	2.25
Malcolm X	Autobiography	Grove	1.50
Marcuse, H.	One Dimensional Man	Beacon	2.25
Marshall,	Experiences in Being	Wadsworth	?
Maslow, A. H.	Toward a Psychology of Being	VanN-Rein	2.95
May, Rollo	Love and Will	Norton	7.95
McLuhan, M.	Medium Is the Message	Bantam	1.65
	Understanding Media	NAL	1.25
Millet, K.	Sexual Politics	Doubleday	7.95
Morgan, R.	Sisterhood is Powerful	Random	2.45
Powell, W.	Anarchist Cookbook, 1971	Stuart	5.95
Reich, C. A.	Greening of America	Random	6.95
Rogers, C.	On Encounter Groups	Harper-Row	1.95
Rozzak, T.	Making of a Counter Culture	Doubleday	1.95
Rubin, J.	Do It	Ballantine	1.25 ✓
Schutz, W. C.	Joy: Expanding Human Awareness	Grove	1.25
Stein, M.	Blueprint for Counter Education	Doubleday	10.00
Youngblood, G.	Expanded Cinema	Dutton	4.95
	<b>Magazines</b>		
	Radical Software		1.25
	Everywoman		0.50
	Advocate		0.50
	Rolling Stone		0.50
	Arts & Society		2.00

Illustration 54. Book list for IDCA 1971.

The list was largely based on the reading requirements of the Critical Studies department at CalArts, but it is also indicative of the kinds of literature that may have been read by other activists in attendance at IDCA 1970. Theodore Roszak is helpful in highlighting the differences between the radical

politics of students in Europe and those in America, and gives some insight into the likely mindset of the students at Aspen. In *The Making of a Counter Culture* he characterized the young dissidents' worldview as a ragbag of philosophies. The countercultural young, he wrote,

[...] are the matrix in which an alternative, but still excessively fragile future is taking shape. Granted that alternative comes dressed in a garish motley, its costume borrowed from many and exotic sources—from depth psychiatry, from the mellowed remnants of left-wing ideology, from the oriental religions, from Romantic Weltschmerz, from anarchist social theory, from Dada and American Indian lore, and, I suppose, the perennial wisdom.<sup>456</sup>

The 'garish motley' to which Roszak referred was exemplified most literally in the garb of improvisational theatre groups such as the Moving Company, present both at IDCA 1970 and 1971. Roszak's phrase refers figuratively to the eclecticism of the students' references, which ranged from the socio-political teachings of Buckminster Fuller and Victor Papanek and the pages of the *Whole Earth Catalog*, Stewart Brand's hectic compendium of countercultural information and tools, to Eastern philosophy.<sup>457</sup> Roszak's characterization is reinforced by Maurice Stein, the dean of Critical Studies at CalArts who observed of the students that, 'They still read Fuller [...] They are reading Dubos, Goodman. They're reading Gary Snyder, they're reading the Whole Earth Catalog, they are reading the occult'.<sup>458</sup>

Farson's emphasis on audience participation and on 'new kinds of social architecture created to enable higher levels of interaction' extended to the planning of the conference. The registration materials included a matrix that outlined along

---

<sup>456</sup> Theodore Roszak, *The Making of a Counter Culture: Reflections on the Technocratic Society and Its Youthful Opposition* (London: Faber and Faber, 1972), xiii.

<sup>457</sup> Buckminster Fuller's geodesic domes, cartographic innovations and visionary thinking inspired a generation of architects through such books as *Operating Manual for Spaceship Earth* (1969) and *Utopia or Oblivion: The Prospects for Humanity* (1972). Victor Papanek, faculty member and then dean at CalArts and designer wrote *Design for the Real World: Human Ecology and Social Change* (1972). This screed against unsafe and wastefully manufactured objects became a totemic title in the search for alternative design practices to suit an alternative lifestyle.

<sup>458</sup> Maurice Stein, *Arts in Society*, vol. 7, no. 3, Fall/Winter 1970, p. 64.

the vertical axis 'some old social institutions' such as 'Marriage and Family' and 'Learning and Schools' and along the horizontal axis some of the 'social revolutions' such as 'Communication' and 'Sexual Politics'. Registrants were invited to indicate the intersections that interested them the most.<sup>459</sup> (See Illustration 55) Furthermore, Farson enlisted the help of the design students in his department at CalArts – 'creating the conference was their project that semester'.<sup>460</sup> He also asked Sheila Levrant de Bretteville, a young teacher in the design department at CalArts, and a speaker at IDCA 1971, to create a publication onsite at the conference. Her solution was informed both by the need to be expeditious (she had a three-month-old son in tow) and her interest in participatory and non-hierarchical publishing models. She handed out diagonal strips of paper to attendees and encouraged them to fill them with comments on the conference using handwritten and typed text, drawings, and Polaroids. On the last evening of the conference she collected the strips, pasted them up to form the pages of a newspaper, printed copies using the *Aspen Times* offset press, and delivered them to attendees the following morning. She explained her idea for the newspaper, and her work of the period more generally, as being 'based on an idea about participatory democracy in which if everyone contributes you get a better picture of what's going on'.<sup>461</sup>

---

<sup>459</sup> Registration brochure, Publicity, IDCA 1971, International Design Conference in Aspen Records 1949-2006, 2007.M.7, Series 1, Box 29, Fol. 11, The Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles.

<sup>460</sup> Richard Farson, personal interview, 30 June, 2008.

<sup>461</sup> The term 'participatory democracy' was coined in 1962 by Tom Hayden in the founding document of Students for a Democratic Society. The SDS believed that individual citizens could help make 'those social decisions determining the quality and direction' of their lives.

The 1971 International Design Conference in Aspen explores the paradoxical nature of design, especially as it applies to the design of human experience and human systems. The IDCA Program Committee - Richard E. Farson, Chairman - has been studying the paradoxical design implications of some new social revolutions on some old social institutions. For example, what are the likely effects of the powerful new revolution in sexual politics on the anachronistic institution of learning and schools? Of the communications revolution on crime and punishment? In Aspen, conferees will participate in experiences designed to pursue these issues in depth and will confront specialists from these fields in new kinds of social architecture created to enable higher levels of interaction. Here is the matrix with which the program committee has been working. When returning the registration form you can assist the committee in the design of the conference by indicating the areas which interest you most, and in addition, by writing any related ideas or information you may have.

	Communication	Sexual Politics	Consciousness	Third World
Marriage and Family				
Aging and Dying				
Consuming and Corporations				
Learning and Schools				
Crime and Punishment				

Name	Profession
Address	City
	Country
Company	

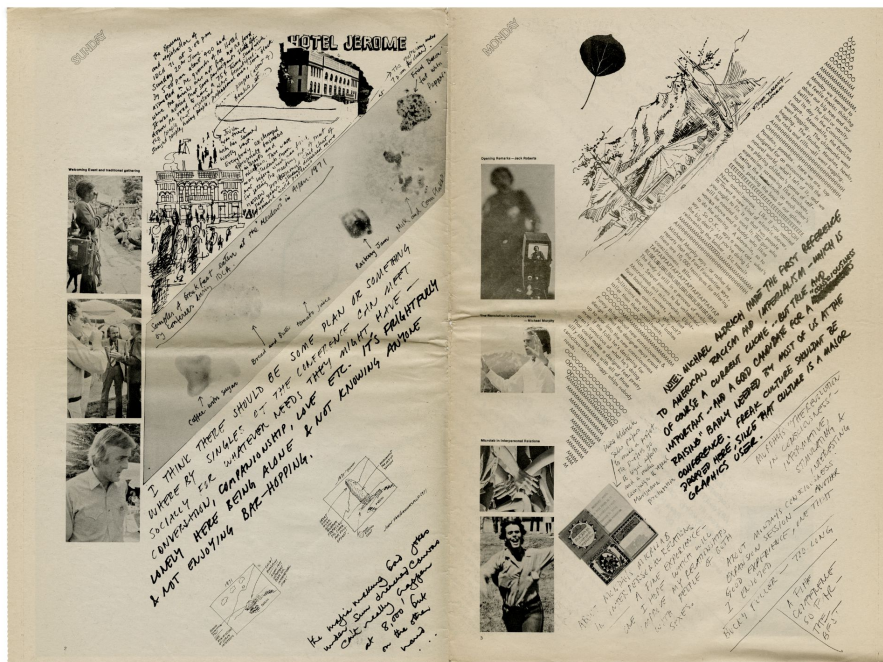
I am enclosing \$ \_\_\_\_\_ and have checked the appropriate box(es) Your check will be your receipt  \$100.00 regular registration fee.  
 \$25.00 registration fee for spouses.  \$25.00 student registration fee. School registration proof required.  
 \$10.00 IDCA Membership fee (for those unable to attend Conference) includes all IDCA literature relating to the conference.

Illustration 55. Page from registration brochure for IDCA 1971 showing Richard Farson's request for audience participation in the organization of the conference, through use of a matrix of contemporary topics.

Inspired by the collective editorial process in publications such as *The Whole Earth Catalog*, she chose not to prioritize the voices of the main speakers, but rather to 'let the

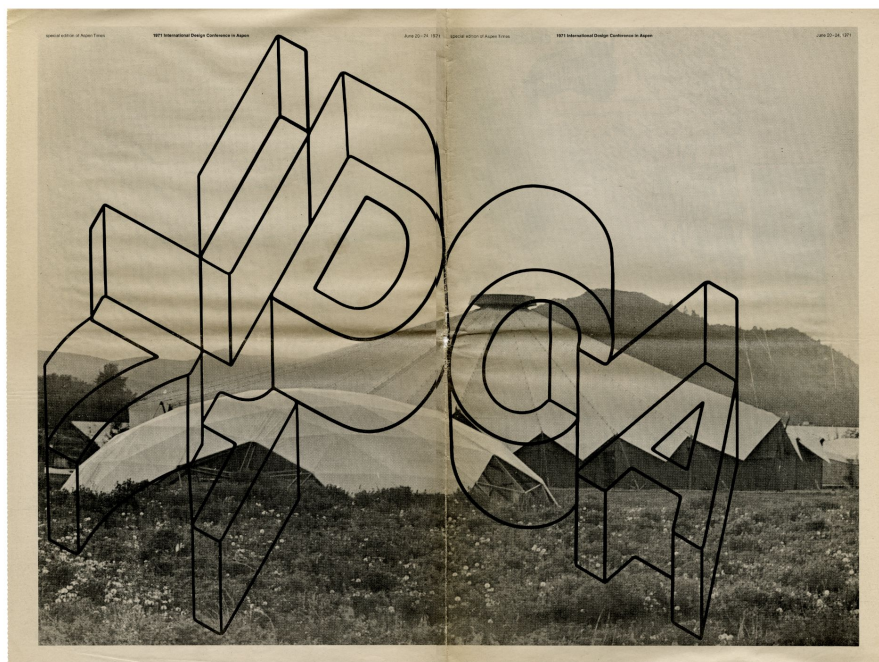
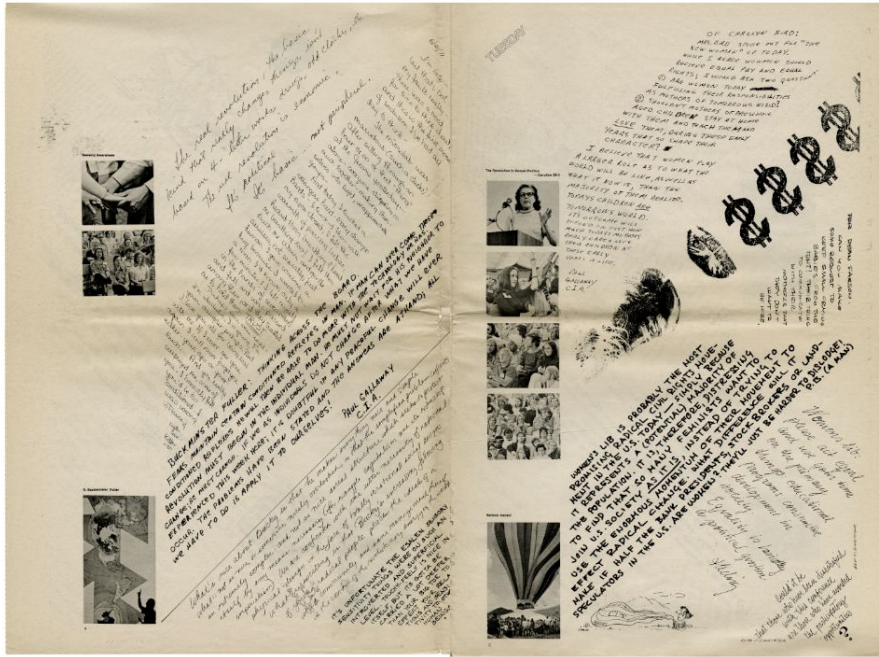


participants speak for themselves'.<sup>462</sup> De Bretteville considers that her left-wing politics, and her belief that graphic design could be 'more than telling people when and how to get places', was 'part of the zeitgeist'.<sup>463</sup> (See Illustrations 56-58)



<sup>462</sup> Sheila Levrant de Bretteville, personal interview, 14 May, 2008. For a fuller explanation of her approach to the design of participatory, non-hierarchical publications, which also included a special issue of *Arts in Society* about California Institute of the Arts in which she assembled fragments of information about the school in a non-linear way, see: 'Some Aspects of Design from the Perspective of a Woman Designer', *icographic: A Quarterly Review of International Visual Communication Design*, no. 6, 1973, pp. 1-11.

<sup>463</sup> Sheila Levrant de Bretteville, personal interview, 14 May, 2008.



Illustrations 56-58.  
Spreads and cover from newspaper designed by Sheila Levrant de Bretteville for IDCA 1971, incorporating contributions from audience members in an attempt to engage in participatory democracy through design.

Farson's emphasis on the audience members' participation with one another and the speakers became an embedded principle of future conferences. In 1974 it was even stated as a motion and ratified thus: 'The Program Chairman will be encouraged to provide an opportunity for participants to engage in direct exchange with invited guests, Board members, and each other'.<sup>464</sup> Still, Farson remembered thinking the 1971 conference was 'a mess'.<sup>465</sup> Instead of having a closing speech, he had asked a guerrilla theatre group to do a finale that would provide a summary of the conference.<sup>466</sup> 'I guess they couldn't think of what to do, so what they did was to get miniature marshmallows and ran down the aisles and threw them at people. My heart sank, especially when afterwards I saw Elizabeth Paepcke [Walter Paepcke's widow, who continued to attend the conference each year] on her hands and knees peeling off these marshmallows from the floor'.<sup>467</sup>

A conference framework, with its built-in need for purpose, pre-planning, and a timetable, will always be an awkward social architecture for un-programmed and genuinely participatory activity – and especially for critique directed against the host organization. The rupture at IDCA 1970 was truly spontaneous; the participants who stirred up the crowd believed in what they did and were excited at the possibility of change. The 1971 iteration of the conference, despite its vast array of group activities and its embrace of the social themes of the period, was ultimately, true to its title, a 'Paradox'. No matter how creative Farson's ideas were for his 'high-risk design conference', he was ultimately the ringmaster of the project, and in many respects had to follow

---

<sup>464</sup> After considerable debate the motion was carried 14-3. Minutes of Board Meeting, IDCA 1974, International Design Conference in Aspen papers, MSIDCA87, Box 2, Fol. 25, Special Collections and University Archives, University of Illinois at Chicago.

<sup>465</sup> Richard Farson, personal interview, 30 June, 2008.

<sup>466</sup> Ken Margolies and Charlotte Gaines of the Parnassus Institute were asked to 'direct a group of conferees in improvisational theater reflecting on the conference as a whole'. 'Annotated Events List', Program, IDCA 1971, International Design Conference in Aspen Records 1949-2006, 2007.M.7, Series 1, Box 28, Fol. 9, The Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles.

<sup>467</sup> Richard Farson, personal interview, 30 June, 2008.

IDCA protocol.<sup>468</sup> The consciousness-expanding sessions, favoured by Farson, were fairly radical in terms of conference planning of the period, but the very fact they were planned dissipated some of the energy of the spontaneous corridor debates and heated resolution readings of the previous year.

**'Massive collusion under the sign of satisfaction'**

The conference was promoted each year by a printed brochure, which was usually designed by that year's chair. In 1971, perhaps since Farson was not a designer, the IDCA board decided to use Noyes and Weill's film, *IDCA '70*, to promote the conference, even though it captured key moments of critical dissent. IDCA president Jack Roberts (he took over when Eliot Noyes resigned) suggested that a two-minute epilogue or 'commercial' for the 1971 conference be added to the end of the documentary. In a letter to Farson, he suggested that the epilogue 'should say that's what happened, we're facing the climate-for-change and this is your invitation to come and participate in '71.'<sup>469</sup> With such an epilogue attached, ending with the briskly jovial line, 'We'll turn over a new leaf in Aspen!' the film would, in Roberts's opinion, 'make excellent programming for professional groups, clubs, schools, etc.'. It would enable the IDCA to 'reach a new audience, and redefine ourselves to our old audience'.<sup>470</sup> Several prints were made and loaned to design organizations and such corporations as Alcoa, Westinghouse Electric Corporation, and Whirlpool, who arranged screenings for their design departments. Seemingly there was much demand for the film, and IDCA quickly ran out of prints, advising some who wanted to see it to arrange group screenings.<sup>471</sup>

---

<sup>468</sup> Farson and his wife still invited board members and other dignitaries to cocktails, at Trustee House #5, Aspen Meadows, for example.

<sup>469</sup> Letter from Jack Roberts, IDCA president, to Richard Farson, January 18, 1971, Correspondence, International Design Conference in Aspen Records 1949-2006, 2007.M.7, Series 1, Box 29, Fol. 7, The Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles.

<sup>470</sup> Ibid.

<sup>471</sup> Letters, Film Bookings, International Design Conference in Aspen papers, MSIDCA87, Box 1, Fol. 8, Special Collections and University Archives, University of Illinois at Chicago.



Rather than suppress the previous year's critique and, by extension, the problems inherent in the profession, the IDCA leadership embraced them. Yet by using *IDCA 70* and the critique it documented to promote their future conferences, rather than attempting to resolve the real issues that had been brought to light, they demonstrated their similarity to the capitalist system's ability to assimilate its internal contradictions, an ability often pointed out by Baudrillard, among others. As Baudrillard wrote in 'Play and the Police', an article about the events of May 1968 for *Utopie*,

When a system is able to stay in balance by blindly refusing to come to terms with a problem, when it is able to assimilate its own problems and even turn its own crises to advantage [...] what is left other than to interrupt it by insisting on the almost blind need for a real pleasure principle, the radical demand for transgression, against the massive collusion under the sign of satisfaction.<sup>472</sup>

The interruption of IDCA 1970's proceedings, seen as a manifestation of Baudrillard's directive, was indeed insistent in its 'blind need' for the sensory pleasures of stumbling around in inflatable structures, play-acting, and picnics, and in its resounding 'demand for transgression' of the prevailing institutional norms, but was ultimately short-lived. (See Illustration 59)

---

<sup>472</sup> Jean Baudrillard, 'Play and the Police', in *Utopia Deferred: Writings for Utopie (1967-1978)*, trans. By Stuart Kendall (New York: Semiotext(e), 2006), p. 36.



Illustration 59. Cover of *The Aspen Flyer*, 22 June, 1971.

The protest's lack of sustaining power was partly due to the simple fact that once the protesters left Aspen it was difficult for them to maintain the political energy generated during that week in June in the mountains, and to the larger reality of the declining energy of the counterculture throughout the 1970s.

## CONCLUSION

Although in 1974, when *The Aspen Papers* was published, Banham felt despondent enough about the future of the conference to observe that 'an epoch had ended', in fact, despite the intensity of the protests in 1970 and the experimentation with communicative formats in 1971, the IDCA did not implode, nor even irreversibly redirect its course. It absorbed the critiques levelled against it and appropriated some of the new

formats (it inserted a sanctioned space in the programme for 'conference feedback' and started calling speakers 'resource people'), but eventually returned to a lecture-based structure with a bias toward celebrity designers, and continued to regard scholarship student attendees as the hired help while initiating a policy to cap the number of regular student attendees.<sup>473</sup> As Matthew Holt has observed, Baudrillard regarded critique of a system as an essential function of that system's self-organization and triumph: 'Critique in this sense is not a negation but an 'adjustment' to which the system responds... (a thoroughly cybernetic vision of relations.) Critique is now information in a system, not the presentation of a genuine alternative to that system'.<sup>474</sup>

As the liberal design establishment folded the conflict of IDCA 1970 back into its thick blanket of consensus, the protesters dispersed like cotton bolls. Some became the celebrity designers of future conferences, and many founded their own institutions, albeit alternative ones – Farallones Institute, the Environmental Workshop, Ecology Action, Esalen Institute, and CalArts, for example.<sup>475</sup> In their new positions of responsibility they faced their own internal contradictions as they attempted to balance a continued desire for transgression with the real needs of actual institutions. The content of the critique directed at IDCA 1970 was ultimately fleeting, but the methods and means that its manifestation exposed, took root. Its combination of non-written and written forms expanded the expressive potential of design criticism beyond the printed page. As Lefebvre had observed:

There is a space of speech whose prerequisites, as we have seen, are the lips, the ears, the ability to articulate, masses of air, sounds, and so on. This is a space, however, for which such material preconditions are not an adequate definition: a space of actions and of inter-actions, of calling and of calling back and forth, of expressiveness and power, and – already at this level – of latent violence and revolt; the space, then, of a discourse that does not coincide with any

---

<sup>473</sup> Minutes of the IDCA Board, June 22 1974, Board of Directors, International Design Conference in Aspen papers, MSIDCA87, Box 2, Fol. 21, Special Collections and University Archives, University of Illinois at Chicago.

<sup>474</sup> Matthew Holt, personal correspondence, 10 May, 2012.

<sup>475</sup> Sim van der Ryn was never invited to be a speaker and never went to the conference again after the 1970 edition.

discourse on or in space. The space of speech envelops the space of bodies and develops by means of traces, of writings, of prescriptions and inscriptions.<sup>476</sup>

As this thesis will go on to explore, design criticism would develop in fits and starts throughout the remainder of the twentieth century, recalibrating itself around a combination of formats, including actions, interactions, calls and responses, speech and its traces.

---

<sup>476</sup> Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, trans. by Donald Nicholson-Smith (Oxford: Blackwell Press, 1991), p. 403.

The kitchen has the latest compact computer dishwasher and compact microwave, garbage compactor, and sinks with infrared controls... A brief food montage gives us a sense of the modernist approach to food and its preparation:

- 1) Darien hones the knives on the electric knife sharpener as
- 2) Bud uses a stainless steel Cape Cod oyster opener to work on two dozen oysters...
- 3) at the same time working on the automatic vinaigrette mixer, the phone ringing to the tune of Mozart's 'Jupiter'...

BUD

(picking it up)

Yes...no...at 37 1/2. Convert the bonds right...and check the price in Tokyo at 8:00 LA time. Thanks...

- 4) As he starts his pasta sauce flame and his O'Reilly fat-free grill with a flexible neck fire starter...

5) A freshly heated roll pops out of a hanging space-saving toaster, as Darien works the electric pasta maker while melting the frozen ice cream cartons in the microwave.

6) Bud manages to sneak a kiss on her lips humming the bars from Verdi's 'Rigoletto' as he works the piece de resistance--the automatic sushi maker...

7) Dinner is finally served on a demolished dinner table. Red wine, pasta, sushi...it looks perfect, lit by candlelight, the view of the city below.

DARIEN

...isn't it perfect!

BUD

...too perfect...let's not even eat.  
Let's just watch it and think about it.  
(pause)<sup>477</sup>

---

<sup>477</sup> Wall Street, screenplay by Stanley Weiser and Oliver Stone, 1987.  
[http://sfy.ru/?script=wall\\_street](http://sfy.ru/?script=wall_street) [accessed 12 October, 2012].

### CHAPTER THREE

#### Designer Celebrities and 'Monstrous, Brindled, Hybrid' Consumers: The Polarizing Effects of Style in the British Design Media, 1983–1989

##### INTRODUCTION

In early 1980s Britain the design media began to celebrate the nebulous but pervasive concept of style – the considered expression of personal identity and social position through consumer goods, personal attire, and lifestyle choices. This chapter explores the ways in which some design critics offered a darker interpretation of style and the lifestyle 'craze', diagnosing them as symptoms of a social pathology in need of remedy.

The independent design publication *Blueprint*, first published in 1983, and the privately funded design exhibition centre The Boilerhouse Project, launched in 1981, both portrayed and embodied a burgeoning popular obsession with design, style, and lifestyle. They each found that style as subject matter, as a mode of visual and verbal expression, and as a ground of practice, helped them distinguish themselves from their competitors. Beyond pragmatics, however, the topic of style held a particular fascination for the editors, writers, and curators who orbited *Blueprint* and the Boilerhouse, including Peter Murray, Deyan Sudjic, Peter York, and Stephen Bayley. Their engagement with style extended beyond aesthetics to include the very modes in which their activities were undertaken, in the way that historians of entrepreneurship Fernando Flores, Charles Spinosa and Hubert Dreyfus define style, 'not an aspect of things, people, or activity', but rather, what 'constitutes them as what they are'.<sup>478</sup>

---

<sup>478</sup> Charles Spinosa, Fernando Flores, and Hubert Dreyfus, *Disclosing New Worlds: Entrepreneurship, Democratic Action and the Cultivation of Solidarity*, (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1999), p. 19.

'There is more to the organization of practices, however, than interrelated equipment, purposes and identities. All our pragmatic activity is organized by a style. Style is our name for the way all the practices ultimately fit together. A common misunderstanding is to see style as one aspect among many

Left-leaning critics of the period, interested in design and consumer culture as subject matter, pointed to the more troubling aspects of the way in which the media conflated design and style with identity and status during the Thatcher era. They identified design practice and design commentary as perpetuating the values that led to the irresponsible use of credit, the concealment of real class and racial schisms, society's separation from the means of production, and its abandonment of communal values. Among such critics are the socialist cultural critic Judith Williamson and the cultural theorist Dick Hebdige, who wrote about design, style, and consumer culture in Leftist publications such as *Marxism Today* and *New Socialist*, academic journals such as the visual culture journal *Block* and the photography theory journal *Ten.8* as well as in more widely read magazines such as the social issues magazine *New Society*, the style, music, and fashion magazine *The Face*, and London listings magazines *Time Out* and *City Limits*.<sup>479</sup> Williamson and Hebdige, among others, warned against the way a design and style rhetoric was being used both by the Right to conceal social and economic problems such as unemployment, unrest in inner cities, anti-Trade Union legislation, and continuing violence in Northern Ireland, and by the Left as a seductive distraction from internal rifts in its organizing Parties and inability to provide a powerful alternative to Thatcherism.

---

of either a human being or human activity, just as we may see the style as one aspect of many of a jacket. Our claim is precisely that a style is not an aspect of things, people or activity, but rather, constitutes them as what they are'.

<sup>479</sup> *Marxism Today*, the British Communist Party's theoretical journal, published monthly, 1977–1991, edited by Martin Jacques.

*New Socialist*, a monthly magazine of the British Labour Party, edited by Stuart Weir.

*Block*, Middlesex Polytechnic's visual culture journal, published 1979–1989, edited by Jon Bird, Barry Curtis, Melinda Mash, Tim Putnam, George Robertson, and Lisa Tickner.

*Ten.8*, a photography theory journal, based in Birmingham, published 1979–1992, edited by Derek Bishton, Brian Homer and John Reardon.

*New Society*, a weekly magazine of social inquiry and social and cultural comment, published 1962–88, edited by Paul Barker, 1968–86.

*The Face*, a monthly fashion, music, and style magazine, published 1980–2004, designed by Neville Brody, 1981–86, edited by Nick Logan and Sheryl Garrett.

*Time Out*, an alternative weekly London listings magazine, first published in 1968, by Tony Elliott, and until 1980 based on co-operative structure.

*City Limits*, a weekly London listing magazine, established after *Time Out's* staff resigned in 1980 when it abandoned its equal pay policy, published by a workers cooperative, 1981–1993, edited by John Fordham.

This chapter explores how The Boilerhouse Project and *Blueprint* magazine exemplified a type of commentary about design and style that was sophisticated, polemical, engaging, and largely apolitical and non-ideological. It examines the writings of critics such as Hebdige and Willimson as ideologically- and politically-motivated counterpoints to this strain of design commentary. It spotlights the moments of friction, and the multiple sparks that arose when the two takes on design and style collided.

As I will show *Blueprint* and The Boilerhouse and the writers and curators associated with them can be seen, in Bruno Latour's term, as having 'gathered' new publics for design.<sup>480</sup> In their roles as public sites of debate and exchange, the magazine and the exhibition centre opened up discussion of design to an expanded audience and helped to map, label, and define the unfamiliar territories of design, style, and taste during a period of intense, but often confused, interest in such topics. This chapter charts the production and mediation of a design magazine and an exhibition centre in 1980s Britain, specifically London, a city newly absorbed in design as a lifestyle phenomenon and arguably the global centre of design practice and commentary at the time, and assesses the ways in which their readers and visitors responded.

Using a selection of their articles that deal explicitly with style and lifestyle, the chapter looks at how Hebdige and Williamson situated design in a multi-dimensional context, incorporating discussion of the emotional needs of the consumer and the role of class, gender, and identity in ways that, although marginal at the time, anticipated the direction in which design discourse was to develop in the 1990s and beyond. Toggling between analysis of the magazine and the exhibition centre as institutions, and of the articles and exhibitions as both conveyors of arguments and exemplars of critical formats, this chapter seeks to elicit the

---

<sup>480</sup> Bruno Latour deploys this term to indicate both the ways in which an activated object or an issue 'gathers around itself a different assembly of relevant parties' and the various physical forums and agoras of discussion that also gather their participants. Bruno Latour, *Making Things Public: Atmospheres of Democracy*, (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2005), p. 5.



significance of their contributions to the evolution of design criticism as a genre.

**Design as an 'economic weapon' and a 'key to national salvation'**

Design played such a visible role in the credit and consumer boom of 1980s Britain – through interiors for the fashion retail revolution in the high street, identities for the new corporate mergers and privatized public utilities, and in design-referencing television commercials – that commentators referred to the 1980s as the 'design decade', even before it was over.<sup>481</sup> Design consultancies like Michael Peters and Fitch & Co. went public, diversified their services, and grew their ranks to many hundreds.

The Conservative Party, with Margaret Thatcher as prime minister, and which came into power in 1979 and was re-elected in 1983 and 1987, supported design's entrepreneurial growth. According to historian Nigel Whiteley, 'in the mid 1980s the Conservative Government looked towards design as a key weapon in the economic strategy for a more prosperous Britain.'<sup>482</sup> In 1984, for example, it granted £20 million to the funded consultancy scheme, which paid the design fees of a manufacturer who hired a design firm, and in 1986 spent a further £12 million on design.<sup>483</sup> A 1984 *Blueprint* editorial enthused,

It has been a remarkable year for the world of design and architecture. In Britain, the design boom has accelerated, with

---

<sup>481</sup> *Blueprint*, for example, included a special supplement in its fifth anniversary issue in 1988 titled 'The Design Decade', *Blueprint*, October 1988.

<sup>482</sup> Nigel Whiteley, *Design for Society* (London: Reaktion Books, 1993), p. 162.

<sup>483</sup> 'The extent of the Department [of Design]'s commitment is illustrated by the fact that we have trebled expenditure on design from £4 million in 1982–83 to £12 million in the current year.' John Butcher, Hansard, British Design Talent, HC Deb 12 March 1986, vol. 93 c928.

'The Department also offers practical help through the funded consultancy scheme, re-named support for design. With the longer-term aim of changing attitudes in industry towards design, this is targeted at small and medium-sized firms, giving them the opportunity to use expert design advice at reduced rates. Since its inception in 1982 the scheme has been successful in attracting nearly 7,000 applications for assistance and 3,000 projects have been completed. Successful case histories from the scheme are publicised as part of our management awareness effort.' John Butcher, Hansard, Design (Consultancy Scheme) HC Deb 04 December 1986, vol. 106 cc728–9W.

clients, being prepared for the first time, to take industrial design seriously. The design consultants are chasing each other onto the Stock Exchange in pursuit, one suspects, of prestige as much as investment. Mrs. Thatcher's government has increased its backing for design considerably. It has doubled the sum allocated for the funded consultancy scheme to £20m, in effect providing any manufacturer with a free sample of the potential of a design consultant.<sup>484</sup>

Thatcher held lunches for designers at Downing Street and appointed John Butcher as the first Minister for Design with a mandate to engage design in service of the national interest. In a 1987 speech, Butcher praised a selection of design companies, saying, 'Here is design at work. Improving competitiveness. Winning markets. Increasing profitability [...] That's what design is about.'<sup>485</sup>

The credit boom led to an expansion in shopping and retailing. High street chain stores, banks, and boutiques – such as Next, Richard Shops, Midland Bank, Esprit, and Joseph – used design to give them a competitive edge. They employed interior design firms such as Fitch, David Davies Associates, and Eva Jiricna to design their muted interiors, accented with matt black fittings and polished granite and timber detailing to create dramatic settings for consumption, and graphic design firms like Why Not Associates to design their new wave catalogues, signage, and logos.<sup>486</sup> 'A centrepiece of this new retailing is design', wrote Robin Murray, chief economist of the Labour Greater London Council, in *Marxism Today*:

Designers produce the innovations. They shape the lifestyles. They design the shops, which are described as 'stages' for the act of shopping. There are now 29,000 people working in design consultancies in the UK, which have sales of £1,600m per annum. They are the engineers of designer capitalism. With market researchers they have steered the high street from being

---

<sup>484</sup> Editorial leader, *Blueprint*, October 1984, p. 3.

<sup>485</sup> John Butcher, 'Design and the National Interest: 1' in Peter Gorb, ed. *Design Talks!* (London: Ashgate Publishing, 1988), p. 218.

<sup>486</sup> Esprit, for example, commissioned designers such as Ettore Sottsass, Antonio Citterio, Norman Foster, Daniel Weil and Gerard Taylor, and Shiro Kuramata to design interiors for the stores and offices 'in styles ranging from candy-box Memphis to high-tech.' Editorial, *Blueprint*, October 1988. 'It was the decade in which the design boom seemed to deprive Britain of its sense of reality – when the high street became a circus, and shops were treated as stage sets, to be gutted and transformed every two years...' Deyan Sudjic, *Blueprint*, October 1988.

retailers of goods to retailers of style.<sup>487</sup>

Robin Kinross, graphic designer and author, identified graphic design – its rapid generation of new images, identities, and fashionable skins for stores and corporations alike – as the defining design practice of the era.<sup>488</sup> In an overview of post-war graphic design written for *Blueprint* on its fifth anniversary in 1988, Kinross announced the simultaneous aggrandizement and implosion of the discipline in 1980s Britain:

The most remarkable development in graphic design in the 1980s has been the process by which everything aspires to the condition of graphics: not just print or screens, but architecture, interiors and products. As working parts dematerialize into slivers, so the false fronts, pastel shades and 'Matisse effects' take over. Or, seen another way, the developed world becomes a weather-free shopping arcade, with beggars kept on the move. This might as well be the apotheosis of graphic design, as it explodes into 'marketing design,' 'retail design,' or whatever term settles. Design becomes inflated into a way of life, a key to national salvation.<sup>489</sup>

### **Design and style in the public eye**

Several new publications dedicated to design, advertising, and marketing, such as Marketing Week Publications' *Creative Review*, launched in 1980, and *Design Week*, launched in 1986, joined existing design-focused magazines on the newsstand such as *Design*, *The Designer*, and *The Architectural Review*.<sup>490</sup>

More significantly, design and designing began to be seen as subjects of general interest beyond the concerns of the profession, and received increased media attention in the 1980s, especially through new television programmes. In 1981 the BBC launched a series of Horizon programs called 'Little Boxes', about design and scientific thinking, and was written and presented by Stephen Bayley and directed and produced by

<sup>487</sup> Robin Murray, 'Life After Henry (Ford)', 'New Times' issue of *Marxism Today*, October 1988.

<sup>488</sup> Many stores employed designers rather than architects to design their interiors – 'there's often a preoccupation with surface imagery at the expense of volume.' Editorial, *Blueprint*, October 1988.

<sup>489</sup> Robin Kinross, 'From Commercial Art to Plain Commercial', in Deyan Sudjic, ed. *From Matt Black to Memphis and Back Again* (London: Architecture, Design and Technology Press, 1989). Originally published in *Blueprint*, April 1988.

<sup>490</sup> For descriptions of these magazines, see Appendix.

Patrick Uden (with research by Penny Sparke) and featured interviews with the designers such as Raymond Loewy, Dieter Rams and Ettore Sottsass. In 1986 the 'BBC Design Awards', presented by the media personality Janet Street Porter, attempted to engage viewers by inviting people to vote for their favourite example of contemporary design. The BBC also began a 'Design Classics' series in 1987, produced by Christopher Martin and commissioned by Alan Yentob, with 30-minute episodes devoted to the VW Beetle, Sony Walkman, Barcelona Chair, Coca Cola bottle, and Levi's 501 jeans. Meanwhile other channels developed their own design coverage. In 1984 London Weekend Television's 'Hey Good Looking' series, produced and directed by Kim Evans and Bob Lee, and screened on Channel Four, devoted twenty fifteen-minute programs to four subjects – Style, Architecture, Design, and Advertising, written and presented by Peter York, Deyan Sudjic, Stephen Bayley, and Janet Street Porter, respectively. In their focus on the icons of design and celebrity designers, such programmes enforced the conventions of design commentary. 'Design Matters' was a more ideas-oriented ten-part series launched in 1984, advised by Ken Baynes, and commissioned by Channel Four from the production company Malachite. According to media theorist Paul Springer the show saw high audience figures, in the 500,000s, due to its focus on design as it affects everyday life: 'The objective was not to tell stories of famous design or show fixed perspectives, but to show a cross-section of design as a fluid process. A typical episode juxtaposed a fruit and vegetable storeowner organizing his display, alongside Sainsbury's supermarket organizing theirs. It showed everyday designers and their decision-making and planning processes.'<sup>491</sup>

In addition to television's instrumental role in shaping the public conception of style, many newly launched youth culture and style magazines such as *The Face*, *Sky*, *Blitz*, and the men's magazine *Arena* also covered design alongside their staple fare of music and fashion. Writers such as Robert Elms,

---

<sup>491</sup> Paul Springer, personal interview via email, July 16, 2012.

Julie Burchill, and Peter York often wrote about design through the lens of style.<sup>492</sup> In the context of these magazines, style was mainly understood in terms of the styling of fashion shoots, which included casting, selecting clothes and accessories, hairstyling, and the directing of facial expression and body stance.<sup>493</sup> As Celia Lury points out, however, in these magazines style was also synonymous with youth. In her analysis of the emergence of 'youth' as a distinctive market segment during the 1980s, Lury refers to the way 'consumer culture provides an environment in which age – specifically what it is to be young – is constituted as a style rather than a biological or even generational category.'<sup>494</sup> According to this reading, therefore, style, as depicted in youth culture magazines, was free from any ideological moorings and thus was available for appropriation in other media contexts such as *Blueprint* magazine or The Boilerhouse Project.

**'Style's become the new language'**<sup>495</sup>

Peter York, style editor of *Harpers and Queen*, management consultant and marketing specialist began his episode of the Channel Four television programme, 'Hey Good Looking', with the pronouncement: 'Style is the way things look and the way they are.'<sup>496</sup> According to York, who, with a pop sociologist's eye, tracked the struggles between the various style tribes, style in early 1980s Britain was both 'the most difficult word in the language' and 'the new language.'<sup>497</sup> Style could be used to 'express not just who you are, but who you'd like to be'

---

<sup>492</sup> The May 1985 issue of *The Face* featured pieces on contemporary architecture, Nigel Coates, Ron Arad, and *The Face's* art director Neville Brody, while the June 1985 issue featured a profile of Terence Conran, and the end of year round up issue featured Philippe Starck, for example.

<sup>493</sup> This activity was most famously encapsulated in the work of stylist Ray Petrie whose iconic images of model Nick Kamen in *The Face*, for example, introduced the Buffalo style in which Petrie cast sultry looking teenagers, often of mixed racial descent, to wear designer clothes that he paired with underwear, vintage pieces and athletic basics.

<sup>494</sup> Celia Lury, *Consumer Culture* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1996), p. 225.

<sup>495</sup> Peter York, 'Style', *Modern Times*, (London: Futura Publications, 1984), p. 9.

<sup>496</sup> *Ibid.* p. 8.

<sup>497</sup> *Ibid.* p. 9.

and was democratically accessible thanks to a profusion of images spread by magazines, film, and television.<sup>498</sup>

This characterization of style as a consumable and interchangeable element of personal identity runs hard up against the traditional art historical understanding of the term. In art history, style is generally considered to be an analytical tool and a descriptor, a means of identifying and labelling the work of an artist or an epoch based on its visual characteristics. The art historian Meyer Schapiro, known for his mid-twentieth-century study of style as a diagnostic tool, propounded the formalist definition: 'By style is usually meant the constant form.'<sup>499</sup> His belief in the 'constancy,' rather than the variability, of style represents the prevailing view of the term in most art discourse for much of the twentieth century.<sup>500</sup>

By the 1980s, when transposed to design discourse, the term style still bore residues of these definitions – some design journalists and critics, including Rick Poynor and Stephen Bayley, were trained as art historians, after all – but the term had accrued new meanings, partly through its popularization in the media. Design discourse was also still negotiating a much older definition of style as the surface appearance of a product – a quality that was held in implicit contrast to its substance or function. The term style had also accrued derogatory connotations during the 1950s and 1960s, through its association with the planned obsolescence techniques of the Detroit automobile industry. Richard Hamilton's and Reyner Banham's fascination with the glamorous qualities of American image art direction and the symbolism of popular products, discussed in Chapter One of this thesis, anticipated to some extent the enthusiastic embrace of style in the 1980s. Banham's and Hamilton's analyses were focused more on the style of objects and images as physical entities, however, while, by the 1980s, design commentary had begun to

---

<sup>498</sup> Ibid.

<sup>499</sup> Meyer Schapiro, *Theory and Philosophy of Art: Style, Artist, and Society* (New York: George Braziller, 1994), p. 51. (Schapiro's essay on Style was first published in 1953 in *Anthropology Today*.)

<sup>500</sup> Ibid.

be attuned to more ephemeral and body-centric manifestations of style such as clothing, accessories, and consumers' lifestyle choices.

Another shift in the meaning of style can be deduced from the fact that while historically style was a measure of a culture, in 1980s Britain it was increasingly associated with the individual and individualism, a narcissistic condition that had been wryly celebrated by American journalist Tom Wolfe, in his article 'The "Me" Decade and the Third Great Awakening', as a millenarian outburst of vitality, and castigated by cultural historian Christopher Lasch in *The Culture of Narcissism: American Life in an Age of Diminishing Expectations* as a social pathology and a decadent defiance of nature and kinship.<sup>501</sup>

Complicating this etymological evolution still further, the term 'lifestyle' began to be used interchangeably with, and even to supplant, the term 'style' in design conversations of the 1980s. Where style was commonly understood at the time to mean the outward appearance of objects and of people (through their clothing, hair, and accessories), 'lifestyle' reflected a set of values that extended to leisure activities such as where one dined, what one read, and how one appointed one's home. It had reached the high street in the physical form of House of Fraser's 'Lifestyle' shop, a boutique section of the department store, selling tableware, fashion, menswear, furniture, and lighting, aimed at twenty-five- to forty-five-year-olds and newlyweds. In its review of the year 1985, *The Face* magazine reported, 'the designer lifestyle became the mass-market lifestyle via Miami Vice. The aesthetics of consumer goods became a subject of intense interest as architects became window dressers and artists became interior designers. If you couldn't change the world this year, at least you could change your curtains.'<sup>502</sup>

---

<sup>501</sup> Tom Wolfe, 'The "Me" Decade and the Third Great Awakening', *New York Magazine*, August 23, 1976. Christopher Lasch, *The Culture of Narcissism: American Life in an Age of Diminishing Expectations*, (New York: W.W. Norton, 1979).

<sup>502</sup> *The Face*, December 1985, p. 46.

### What lettuce can say about you

In 1979 the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu published an analysis of the relationships between 'the universe of economic and social conditions and the universe of life-styles' in contemporary French society.<sup>503</sup> *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste* was translated into English in 1984 and was quickly adopted by many British cultural theorists as a landmark text and a helpful model in their own efforts to understand the ways in which taste is used as a tool for establishing and maintaining class distinction. It also helped to focus intellectual attention on the notion of lifestyle as subject matter. Bourdieu used the term 'habitus' to refer to the relationship between 'the capacity to produce classifiable practices and works, and the capacity to differentiate and appreciate these practices and products (taste), that the represented social world, i.e. the space of life-styles, is constituted.'<sup>504</sup>

Celia Lury identifies the emergence of 'lifestyle as the definitive mode of consumption' in the 1980s.<sup>505</sup> She draws both on Bourdieu's observations of the socially patterned nature of taste and on Dick Hebdige's characterizations of the ways in which subcultures used style choices to define themselves and how objects and surfaces and the 'signifying practices which represent those objects and render them meaningful'.<sup>506</sup> Lury defines 'lifestyle' in the 1980s as a 'new consumer sensibility' through which people sought to 'symbolically' and 'aesthetically' 'display their individuality and their sense of style through the choice of a particular range of goods.'<sup>507</sup>

The notion of a designer lifestyle as a kind of 'disposition', generated by a particular type of 'habitus' that determined particular choices and practices, and that could be tracked

---

<sup>503</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste*, trans. By Richard Nice (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1984), p. xi.

<sup>504</sup> Ibid. pp. 170-173.

<sup>505</sup> Celia Lury, *Consumer Culture* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1996), p. 80.

<sup>506</sup> Dick Hebdige, *Subculture: The Meaning of Style*, (London: Methuen, 1979), p. 126.

<sup>507</sup> Celia Lury, *Consumer Culture* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1996), p. 80.



and purchased, had emerged in the 1960s through the design-led retail enterprises of Terence Conran in Britain and Ben Thompson's Design Research store in Boston in the US. As Jane Thompson observed, her husband 'pioneered a new way of buying for life – an integrated way of thinking about your life.'<sup>508</sup> Both retail entrepreneurs were also designers and restaurateurs, reinforcing Bourdieu's portraits of the parallels between people's literal taste – what they like to eat – and their aesthetic taste in household furnishings.<sup>509</sup>

By the 1980s lifestyle had become increasingly pivotal to marketing strategy and to product development in companies such as Sony, which launched a range of niche-market Walkman products starting in 1979. The lifestyle phenomenon had also gained visibility due to the increasing numbers of publications, commercials, and television programmes that featured the lifestyle choices, working environments, processes, and habits of designers.

In all varieties of discourse of the period – from youth culture magazines to Leftist mouthpieces – lifestyle was portrayed as a means of signifying one's identity, the attributes of which could be learned, and the products of which, for those who could afford them, were readily available for purchase. In its most optimistic conception, consumption of the designer lifestyle offered a way to cut across class boundaries in a period in which they were already shifting due to the rise of what Lury terms 'the new middle classes' in the flux of a post-Fordist economy.<sup>510</sup>

*The Face* cynically characterized the phenomenon in 1988 as a top-down imposition: 'From Adlands ideal home (Montblanc pen,

---

<sup>508</sup> Jane Thompson lecture at SVA MFA Design Criticism, 22 September, 2010.

<sup>509</sup> 'Before lifestyle was a buzzword, architect Ben Thompson (1918–2002) sold it – his version of the most up-to-date way to live – from a clapboard house on Brattle Street in Harvard Square. His store, founded in 1953, was called Design Research, and what it sold was a warm, eclectic, colorful, and international version of modernism, one that mixed folk art and Mies van der Rohe, Noguchi and no-name Bolivian sweaters, offering newlyweds and Nobel Prize winners one-stop shopping for tools to eat, sleep, dress, even to party in a beautiful way.' Jane Thompson and Alexandra Lange, Prologue, *Design Research*, (San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 2010), p. 11.

<sup>510</sup> Celia Lury, *Consumer Culture* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1996), p. 93.

Braun calculator, Tizio lamp) to Sainsbury's fresh food counter (why buy Radicchio rather than Iceberg? Kos it says much more about you than ordinary lettuce can) [...] Design is everything and everything is design.'<sup>511</sup> Meanwhile, *Marxism Today* presented it as marketing's efforts to catch up with working-class behaviours:

The buzzword is lifestyles – a concept which goes hand-in-hand with the retail revolution. Lifestyle advertising is all about designer-led retailing which reflects changing consumer demand. In essence it is marketing's bid to get to grips with today's social agenda – the changing shape of working-class culture, the impact of feminism, ethnic spending power, the 'new man' – all these identities are up for grabs in lifestyle campaigns.<sup>512</sup>

And yet, as critics like Judith Williamson argued, merely buying the accoutrements of a designer lifestyle didn't bring you any closer to it. In her view, ideologies such as consumer fads were still firmly tied to, rather than cut loose from, the economic realities of people's lives:

The possession of expensive jogging shoes, videos, home computers and so on does not necessarily mark a level of fulfilment for the supposedly right-wing 'bourgeoisified' working class but, in part at least, a measure of frustration. Their aspirations have been caught up in the wheel of consumer production. Wearing a Lacoste sweatshirt doesn't make anyone middle class any more than wearing legwarmers makes you a feminist.<sup>513</sup>

Other commentators also suspected that the sense of choice brought about by an expanded consumer culture – York's belief that 'the whole world, past and present, is your dressing-up box' – was actually limited to a prescribed set of options, and ultimately illusory. As Social Democratic Party member David Marquand writing in 1985, observed of social behaviour during Thatcher's term,

The range of identities legitimized by the enterprise culture is very limited. It gives increased scope for one's identity as a consumer, but not to other identities. Indeed it is positively hostile to identity-choices that threaten the authority of the entrepreneur and the supremacy of

<sup>511</sup> *The Face*, 1988, p. 154.

<sup>512</sup> Frank Mort and Nicholas Green, 'You've Never Had it so Good Again!', *Marxism Today*, May 1988, p. 32.

<sup>513</sup> Judith Williamson, 'The Politics of Consumption' in *Consuming Passions: The Dynamics of Popular Culture* (London: Marion Boyers Publishing, 1987), p. 233. First published in *New Socialist*, October, 1985.

entrepreneurial values.<sup>514</sup>

Similarly, in 1985 Williamson wrote of the way that the enterprise culture used consumerism to distract the public from ever widening social and economic inequalities: 'it is precisely the illusion of autonomy which makes consumerism such an effective diversion from the lack of other kinds of power in people's lives.'<sup>515</sup> Such critiques will be explored in more detail in the latter part of this chapter.

### **Illness as metaphor**

Some British critics in the 1980s cast the viral behaviour of style as an infecting property, and the cause of bodily and mental sickness. Clinical metaphors abound in their writings of the period. In her 1978 essay 'Illness as Metaphor', the American novelist and essayist Susan Sontag discussed the way in which the diseases tuberculosis and cancer were 'encumbered by the trappings of metaphor', closely related to the economic practices of the periods to which they're connected. She characterized the nineteenth-century disease TB as being linked to 'consumption' and 'wasting' and the twentieth-century disease cancer as being linked to 'abnormal growth' and 'refusal to consume or spend.'<sup>516</sup>

Critics of excessive consumption in the 1980s, such as Williamson and Hebdige shared Sontag's critical view of capitalism's dependence upon 'the irrational indulgence of desire', but continued to use the metaphorical imagery of sickness, nevertheless.<sup>517</sup> It was as if the symptoms of Sontag's characterization of the nineteenth-century condition of TB – the wasting, the inability to gain nourishment from consumption – had re-emerged even more vigorously in late

---

<sup>514</sup> David Marquand, 'The Enterprise Culture: Old Wine in New Bottles' in P. Heelas and P. Morris eds. *The Values of The Enterprise Culture: The Moral Debate* (London: Routledge, 1992), p. 65.

<sup>515</sup> Judith Williamson, 'The Politics of Consumption' in *Consuming Passions: The Dynamics of Popular Culture* (London: Marion Boyers Publishing, 1987), p. 233.

<sup>516</sup> Susan Sontag, *Illness as Metaphor and AIDS and its Metaphors*, (New York: Anchor Books, 1993) p. 63.

<sup>517</sup> Ibid.

capitalist society but were also applied to society's moral character and mental equilibrium. In a second essay written in 1989, Sontag turned her attention to the stigmatizing effects of military metaphors used to describe AIDS, which had come to public attention in the mid-1980s. She looked at the way in which individual cases were transposed onto society as a whole: 'AIDS seems to foster ominous fantasies about a disease that is a marker of both individual and social vulnerabilities. The virus invades the body; the disease ([...] or the fear of the disease) is described as invading the whole society.'<sup>518</sup> Similarly, in design commentary of the 1980s, the style sickness was often identified as not merely an individual affliction, to be attended to on a local level, but rather a national epidemic necessitating sweeping social and political reform.

Martin Pawley, an architecture critic, reflecting in the *Weekend Guardian* on the relentless assault of home furnishing companies, wrote, '[Home] isn't safe, it is infested with the virus of consumption. The vast flood of credit it generates enables it to play the part of the Swiss sanatorium in the drama of the last stages of your disease.'<sup>519</sup>

Compulsive shopping, shopping addiction, shopaholism, and compulsive buying (CB) are all terms that began to be used during this period. 1994 saw the start of a two-year British study into shopping addiction, funded by a grant from the Economic and Social Research Council, 'to establish if there is a 'continuum' of shopping, running from normal purchasing, through impulse buying or binge shopping into full-scale addictive behaviour.'<sup>520</sup>

In a December 1989 piece in *The Guardian* by the writer Jon Wozencroft and graphic designer Neville Brody, the authors talked of 'symptoms', 'design's current state of *hysterical*

---

<sup>518</sup> Susan Sontag, *Illness as Metaphor and AIDS and its Metaphors*, (New York: Anchor Books, 1993) pp. 153-154.

<sup>519</sup> Martin Pawley, 'This is What Did Me In', *Blueprint*, June 1989.

<sup>520</sup> 'Compulsive Shopping "Real Illness",' *The Guardian*, 6 October 1994, quoted in Celia Lury, *Consumer Culture* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1996), p. 38.

self-indulgence', and 'the present design *mania*', alluding to ideas in Freudian psychoanalysis.<sup>521</sup> They extended this set of references into the biological realm when they posited that, 'Style is a Virus' and that 'like design, 'style' is now a badly infected word.'<sup>522</sup>

Hebdige, in 'A Report on the Western Front: Postmodernism and the "Politics" of Style', published in *Block* in 1986, forcefully forged the connection between psychosis and the contemporary preoccupation with style, and even pathologized his own writerly voice.<sup>523</sup> Many of the symptoms of the psychotic state Hebdige associated with consumerism find their equivalents in the physical form of his essay, which will be discussed in detail in this chapter.

The title of Williamson's book *Consuming Passions*, and the substance of her collected articles therein, suggested that the greater our focus on individualism and away from communal values, the greater our appetite for consumer goods, the more we waste away, like victims of diseases like consumption or bulimia nervosa.<sup>524</sup> In an article titled 'Anorexia of the Soul', York depicted the baby look phenomenon, where adults – once hippies, now yuppies – dress like children to avoid having to confront guilty feelings about embracing capitalism. He painted a harsh portrait of 'Little Mo', a female of the species regressed into infantilism, with 'a big brown Just William satchel with a sticker of Rupert Bear on it'.<sup>525</sup>

The pathological metaphor was also extended to the activity of criticism. In one of his postscripts in the final section of the book *Hiding in the Light*, Hebdige used a surgical metaphor to describe his perception of the shifting role of the critic. Speaking of the philosopher Jean Baudrillard's use of negation as a tactic, he wrote:

---

<sup>521</sup> Jon Wozencroft and Neville Brody, Review, *The Guardian*, 2 December, 1988, p. 25.

<sup>522</sup> Ibid.

<sup>523</sup> Dick Hebdige, 'A Report on the Western Front: Postmodernism and the "Politics" of Style,' *Block* 12, 1986/87.

<sup>524</sup> Judith Williamson, *Consuming Passions: The Dynamics of Popular Culture* (London: Marion Boyers Publishing, 1987).

<sup>525</sup> Peter York, 'Anorexia of the Soul', *Modern Times* (London, Futura Publishing, 1985, pp. 62-67.

Psychosis, waste and death are positively valued so that only 'fatal strategies' can prevail. A 'negative' cultural tendency is countered not in 'resistance' or 'struggle' (the terms of dialectic) but in a doubling of the same: a 'hyperconformity' or hyper-compliance. The critic-as-surgeon cutting out and analyzing diseased or damaged tissue is replaced by the critic-as-homeopath 'shadowing' and paralleling the signs of sickness by prescribing natural poisons which produce in the patient's body a simulation of the original symptoms.<sup>526</sup>

In their engagement with style, the magazine *Blueprint* and the exhibition space The Boilerhouse can be seen, in Baudrillardian terms, as spaces of 'homeopathic' commentary rather than 'surgical' criticism. They performed less as precision instruments calculated to 'gouge out the rot', and more as simulating mirrors of a condition, 'shadowing and paralleling the signs of sickness' in the design community and beyond.<sup>527</sup> These ideas will be further explored later in this chapter. At this point it is necessary to provide some background on *Blueprint* and The Boilerhouse as primary protagonists in shaping style-centric design discourse in 1980s Britain.

#### **PART ONE: BLUEPRINT MAGAZINE'S ENGAGEMENT WITH STYLE TO RESET THE STAGE FOR DESIGN DISCUSSION**

**'London's magazine of design, architecture and style.'**

*Blueprint*, a large A3-sized format and image-rich publication about design and architecture was launched in October 1983 with an extravagant party in the almost completed Lloyds Building. The magazine was published by the architect Peter Murray (through his company Wordsearch Ltd), edited by the architecture and design journalist Deyan Sudjic, and art directed by Simon Esterson.<sup>528</sup>

---

<sup>526</sup> Dick Hebdige, *Hiding in the Light: On Images and Things*, (London: Routledge, 1988) p. 209.

<sup>527</sup> Nicola Roberts, 'Black on Black', *New Musical Express*, 19 July 1986.

<sup>528</sup> Murray had written about design for *Nova Magazine*, *Domus*, and *Town Magazine*. He had been the technical editor of *Architectural Design* in the early 1970s; edited *Building Design*, *RIBA Journal* and *Transactions*; and had been managing director of the RIBA Magazines Ltd. He had written books about The Lloyds Building (1980), Ove Arup & Partners (1981), and Skidmore Owens Merrill (1982). As a student in the 1960s at the Architectural Association in

Sudjic believed there was a market-share gap for a magazine like *Blueprint*, which would address both architecture and design and would distinguish itself through the addition of style as subject matter. For the first year of its existence *Blueprint's* all-caps titular subhead was 'London's magazine of design, architecture and style.'<sup>529</sup> The addition of 'style' gave *Blueprint* a thematic device to cut across typically segregated disciplines and to open up design to a broader public by connecting it to a popular concern of the period. *Blueprint's* conception of style evoked the calculated activities, products, and attitudes of an elite subset of London's design culture, in relation to which *Blueprint* positioned itself both as an insider and interpreter.

Sudjic recalled, 'we were pushing back against the *Architectural Review*, which was spectacularly dull. It featured dull buildings and the writing was didactic, careful, polite, good taste – dull.'<sup>530</sup> Sudjic also saw a void to fill in product design coverage since *Design* magazine 'was so tedious [...] It had lost faith in itself and had no direction. The Design Council came from a strand of thinking that design was something the well-bred inflicted on those that had no choice, which seemed deathly and, once the well-bred lost any sense of what they believed in, then they were a fantastic Aunt Sally to target and be very rude about. It was a gift.'<sup>531</sup> Indeed, *Design* in this period did follow a somewhat formulaic pattern, with features categorized baldly according to their industrial

---

London, he edited the influential underground architecture publications *Megascape* and *Clip Kit*.

In 1983 Deyan Sudjic was the architecture correspondent at the *Sunday Times*, a freelancer at *The Guardian* and features editor at *Building Design*. He had worked previously as Assistant Editor on *Design*, the Design Council's journal. At Edinburgh University, where he studied architecture, Sudjic ran the student newspaper and met Peter Murray in 1974. They kept in touch and when Sudjic graduated in 1976 Murray gave him his first job at *Building Design*. Deyan Sudjic personal interview, 2009, June 1, 2010.

Simon Esterson, *Blueprint's* art director was a young designer with no formal training, but plenty of practical experience from working on his school newspaper and then in a print shop. Esterson art directed the weekly *Designer's Journal* published by the Architectural Press and had met Sudjic in the Architectural Press art room shared with the *Architectural Review* where Sudjic also freelanced.

<sup>529</sup> The word 'Style' was removed from the subhead by October 1984.

<sup>530</sup> Deyan Sudjic personal interview, 2009, June 1, 2010.

<sup>531</sup> Ibid. Sudjic had worked at *Design* magazine as assistant editor under the editor-in-chief John E. Blake, and left in the early 1980s. In 1983 John Thackera was the editor, and its honorary advisor was The Earl of Snowden.

types – tableware, ceramics, appliances, and furniture, for example. The thematic articles, with titles such as 'Should Products be Decorated?' seemed to be still grappling with the preoccupations of an earlier era.<sup>532</sup> The May 1983 issue of *Design*, for example, included an article on Scandinavian furnishings, a special survey on plastics, and an analysis of the Duracell flip-top Durabeam torch, which was introduced with an unquestioning acceptance of its success, 'financially, functionally, and aesthetically.'<sup>533</sup> The issue's coverage of style was confined to a report from the very dull-sounding 'International Slipper and Footwear Fair in Blackpool.'<sup>534</sup>

Sudjic, Murray, and Esterson assembled *Blueprint* after-hours from their day jobs, capitalizing on their experience and contacts at other publications but keen to create a distinctly new magazine over which they could exert complete aesthetic and editorial control. They drew on influences from a whole range of publications, including: Le Corbusier's avant-garde early-twentieth-century *L'Esprit Nouveau*; Italian architecture magazine *Domus*, with its designer-as-editor philosophy; the celebrity-focused *Harper's Bazaar*; and the caustic *Private Eye* (and, later, New York's satirical celebrity magazine *Spy*).

To begin with, the magazine was assembled in an ad-hoc fashion in the Architectural Association's Communications Unit in Bedford Square. In 1984, when they had overstayed their welcome in the AA basement, they moved to the Putney offices of the graphic design firm Minale Tattersfield. Here they had a desk and an answer-phone, and once a month on Saturdays, Murray, Sudjic, subeditor Jane Hutchings, Esterson, and a couple of graphic designers congregated to put the magazine together.

The magazine's launch was funded by a group of leading architects and design consultants including Sir Terence Conran, Terry Farrell, Rodney Fitch, Norman Foster, Marcello Minale, Michael Peters, and Richard Rogers, who each contributed between £1,000 and £2,000 and who would go on to

<sup>532</sup> Peter Fuller, 'Should Products be Decorated?' *Design*, August 1983, p. 33.

<sup>533</sup> Jane Lott, 'Flip-top Torch', *Design*, May 1983, p. 49.

<sup>534</sup> Jane Lott, 'Walking Away from Violent Summer Shades', *Design*, May 1983, p. 13.



feature as advertisers, contributors, and the subjects of articles. The magazine was sold at 95p on newsstands and via subscriptions, but its main source of funding came from full-page advertisements sold to contract furniture and lighting companies, furniture showrooms, and construction materials fabricators.<sup>535</sup> Murray and Sudjic raised more money by taking advantage of the Enterprise Allowance Scheme, a Thatcherite initiative in which investors in a business would be guaranteed a tax write-off if their prospect failed. The magazine prospered, and by 1989, Sudjic could observe, 'I've become an entrepreneur in the Thatcher revolution [...] a company director.'<sup>536</sup>

### ***Blueprint's* writers and readers**

The writing published in *Blueprint* was more ambitious and self-consciously literary than most design journalism of the period. The magazine was literary in its writers' sensitivity to language, its inclusion of book reviews, and its literary references.<sup>537</sup> Sudjic was keen to bring to the magazine's pages as many divergent voices as possible, to represent both sides of the modernist-traditionalist debate which dominated architectural discourse of the time.<sup>538</sup> Between 1983 and 1989 the most frequent contributors were Janet Abrams, Colin Amery, Gillian Darley, Jonathan Glancey, James Woudhuysen, Martin Pawley, and, in the later years of the decade, Rick Poynor, who became deputy editor in 1988. *Blueprint* offered these

---

<sup>535</sup> Casa and Design, The Lighting Workshop, Bristol International, Artemide, Intercraft office systems, for example.

<sup>536</sup> Deyan Sudjic, interview, Deyan Sudjic, interview, Liz Farrelly 'Design Journalism: The Production of Definitions', MA thesis, V&A/RCA, 1989, p. 39.

<sup>537</sup> In the approach to the year 1984, references to George Orwell's novel *1984* abound, and other literary and cultural references add colour and dimension to news pieces. In a piece touting an upcoming 'Designers' Saturday' event, for example, Sudjic writes 'Oscar Collins will introduce you to the great and, as Mel Brooks says on his *2000 Year Old Man* LPs, the 'near-great' too. But does he know that one of his intimates, John Le Carré, refers to a 'posh light' (probably the famed Tizio) in his paean to the Israeli secret service, *The Little Drummer Girl?* 'Designers' Saturday', *Blueprint*, October 1983, p. 3.

<sup>538</sup> *Blueprint's* initial editorial meeting, which took place in a private room at the design-conscious and celebrity-favoured restaurant L'Escargot, was attended by such commentators and journalists as Peter York, Loyd Grossman, Colin Amery, and Jules Lubbock – some of whom became associate editors of the magazine.

writers a space for serious and sceptical reflection on design and its meaning. As Robin Kinross has recalled of contributing to *Blueprint* in the late 1980s, 'I felt I was part of some sort of intellectual scene, in conversation with writers (Jan Abrams, Brian Hatton, Rowan Moore come to mind first) who were way beyond the hack journalists in powers of thought and expression, and in their intellectual reach.'<sup>539</sup>

By the late 1980s *Blueprint* estimated that its paid circulation was 7,500 and its 'pass-on readership' around 30,000 – small, as compared to more mainstream style magazines such as *The Face*, which had a circulation of 55,000–92,000.<sup>540</sup> Two-thirds of its readers were architects and interior designers, and the remainder were and 'other designers.'<sup>541</sup> The first three issues were distributed only in London, but the magazine increased its distribution, until by 1986 it heralded itself as 'Europe's Leading Magazine of Architecture and Design'.

In her study of the early twentieth-century American women's magazine *Ladies Home Journal*, the historian Jennifer Scanlon identifies a contradiction between the educated and professionally satisfied women who edited and wrote articles in the *Journal* and the disenfranchised middle-class housewives who read them.<sup>542</sup> Junior designers and architects in 1980s Britain may have felt a similar disconnect between the everyday reality of their mundane jobs and the glamorous parties they read about in *Blueprint*, which created the impression of behind-the-scenes access to the stars of the design world. It referenced the habits and proclivities of designers with an easy familiarity, and used titles for its articles that exaggerated the social nature of interview appointments. Janet Abrams' article on Andree Putman was titled 'My Tea With Andree.' Headlines such as 'Maurice Cooper

---

<sup>539</sup> Robin Kinross, Introduction, *Unjustified texts: perspectives on typography*, (London: Hyphen Press, 2002).

<sup>540</sup> Dick Hebdige, *Hiding in the Light: On Images and Things*, (London: Routledge, 1988) p. 157.

<sup>541</sup> According to a 1987 profile, 67% of *Blueprint's* readers were architects and interior designers and 26% were 'other designers'.

<sup>542</sup> Jennifer Scanlon, *Inarticulate Longings*, (New York: Routledge, 1995).

meets...' or 'Deyan Sudjic talks to...' helped to draw readers into seemingly exclusive conversations, which they, at only one remove, could feel they were a part of.

Esterson, *Blueprint's* art director, was both a producer and consumer of design and a typical reader of the magazine. As Peter York put it, 'Designers live in and through magazines, on the colour-printed page. History is fifties collectors' issues of *Look* and *Harper's Bazaar*. The play of Ideas comes through *Zoom* and *The Face* [...] Designers are magazine freaks and a half.'<sup>543</sup> Esterson's collected back issues of *Architectural Review* and found in the art direction of *The Face*, *Arena*, and *Skyline* inspiration for his own work at *Blueprint*.<sup>544</sup> In Sudjic's opinion, Esterson was 'the intellectual conscience of the [*Blueprint*] operation. He had a huge range of references, from Constructivism to the history of the Architectural Press, and made me think about what we were doing in a way you don't as an innocent.'<sup>545</sup>

A figure like Stephen Bayley might be considered another of *Blueprint's* typical readers. He was the subject of several reviews, profiles, and gossip items in *Blueprint*. He also contributed articles to the magazine, most controversially his takedowns of John Betjeman and William Morris. And he clearly read the magazine, or at least parts of it, since his letters, protesting perceived inaccuracies or unfair critiques of his work, were published so regularly they provoked Fiona MacCarthy to comment, 'I hope it is not a reflection of the paucity of material available to your correspondence columns that every issue of *Blueprint* seems to include a letter from Stephen Bayley'.<sup>546</sup> In a profile on Charles Jencks, written by Sudjic, Jencks was quoted saying of Bayley – 'that's what's so unspeakable about that taste show by Stephen Bailiff. It's low kitsch, he's trying to become an arbiter of taste [...] and

---

<sup>543</sup> Peter York, 'Chic Graphique', *Modern Times* (London: Futura Publications, 1984), p. 36.

<sup>544</sup> Simon Esterson, personal interview, 5 August, 2010.

<sup>545</sup> Deyan Sudjic personal interview, 2009, June 1, 2010.

<sup>546</sup> Fiona MacCarthy, letter, 'The Bayley Spot', *Blueprint*, February, 1984, p. 3.

that's repressive, vulgar and in terribly poor taste.'<sup>547</sup> Bayley wrote in to retort, 'The first trouble with Dr. Jencks, to say nothing of the hypocrisy when it comes to castigating self-styled ambitious tastemakers, is that he and his supporting circus of super-annuated hippies think that architecture is *only* style, rather as if it were pop music or coiffure...'<sup>548</sup>

This kind of verbal sparring between major players in London's design and architecture world, which tracked across the issues of *Blueprint*, must have made for compelling reading. One can imagine readers receiving the latest issue of *Blueprint* with anticipation of its lively content, and turning first to the letters pages to see what new controversy might be afoot.

### ***Blueprint's* ontology of style**

Style manifested in the pages of *Blueprint* in several guises. Most explicitly, it meant fashion and fashionable living as subject matter: articles about clothes retailing; profiles of fashion designers such as Rei Kawakubo, Katharine Hamnett, Paul Smith, and Issey Miyake; and articles on the sites of fashionable urban life such as nightclubs, restaurants, and boutique hotels. Secondly it was both an overt aim – the founding editorial said the magazine intended to 'keep a sharp eye on styles and trends' – and a subtext of much of the editorial decision-making: *Blueprint* favoured a particular set of recognizable stylistic types in architecture and design that might be characterized as postmodern, Japanese, high-tech, and minimal. Thirdly, through its profiles of celebrity designers, its closely observed accounts of design events, and its tracking of the activities of design personalities through the 'Sour Grapes' gossip column, *Blueprint* painted a wry, but mostly admiring portrait of the designer lifestyle. Fourthly and fifthly, *Blueprint* engaged with style through its lively, and sometimes literary, brand- and designer-name bespangled prose and through its visual appearance – its art direction, its stylized photography, the kinds of advertising it

---

<sup>547</sup> Charles Jencks quoted in Deyan Sudjic, 'High Jencks', *Blueprint*, November 1984, p. 16.

<sup>548</sup> Letter from Stephen Bayley, *Blueprint*, December/January, 1984, p. 3.

solicited, and its self-consciously oversized format. Through its tone and appearance, *Blueprint* clearly aimed to be assimilated as another cult object into the very designer lifestyle that it portrayed.

**'What is there to say about clothes?'**

*Blueprint* covered fashion fairly consistently, but always tentatively, between 1983 and 1989. A self-questioning editorial in the June 1987 issue described a difficulty in talking about fashion: 'What is there to say about clothes beyond mere description?'<sup>549</sup> In an October 1984 feature on Katherine Hamnett's political slogan T-shirts, *Blueprint* made a provisional attempt to address the connection between style and politics. Hamnett was quoted as saying: 'I've managed to make ecology fashionable.' Clothes, she said, convey unwritten codes that are more effective than overt statements at telling us who we are:

You are what you wear. There are messages in clothing which are non-verbal, but which express the kind of person you are. You choose your clothes, but your subconscious picks something because it represents a lifestyle – values, ideals, tribal identifications – and expresses who you are as well as who you would like to be.<sup>550</sup>

Her words echoed those of Peter York, who, by-lined as 'style-monger extraordinaire', reported on four London fashion stores in an article titled 'The Meaning of Clothes.' The title of the piece oversold; York didn't actually address meaning. Instead he focused on spotting details, tracing references, naming clientele, and devising vivid linguistic labels such as 'theatrical actor-gentish' for Crolla's suits, or 'Tom of Finland meets Cobra Woman' for Anthony Price's tailoring.<sup>551</sup> He later said of the piece, 'I wrote about the worlds they represented and their milieu.'<sup>552</sup>

In his editorial to the April 1984 issue, Sudjic addressed the subject of how styles change with the questions: 'What

<sup>549</sup> *Blueprint*, June 1987, p. 3.

<sup>550</sup> Katherine Hamnett in *Blueprint*, October 1984.

<sup>551</sup> Peter York, 'The Meaning of Clothes', *Blueprint*, October 1983.

<sup>552</sup> Peter York, personal interview, 16 August, 2007.

triggers off those curious and seemingly tiny changes in sensibility that suddenly open up from invisible fissures and produce earthquakes in the taste landscape? Why do narrow tapered jeans look absurdly antediluvian one moment, and completely the business the next?' The issue included an article by Sebastian Conran (Terence Conran's son) about Tommy Roberts, co-founder of Mr Freedom, the 1970s Kings Road clothing and furniture boutique, whose latest venture was Practical Styling, a furniture store in the basement of the Centre Point building in London's West End with an eclectic selection of wares. Sudjic was interested in Roberts' ability to 'know what's going to happen next', intuit the stylistic whim of the moment, and to take risks. He saw Roberts as a kind of cultural barometer, with an ability to predict new trends – a role that the magazine also hoped to perform.

#### **'The joy of matt black'**

Among the architects Sudjic and Murray endorsed in the pages of the magazine were Richard Rogers, Norman Foster and James Stirling, proponents of a Late-Modernist services-as-structure mode of building typified by Rogers' Pompidou Centre in Paris.<sup>553</sup> Sudjic and Murray each wrote books about these architects, and in 1986 they curated an exhibition at the Royal Academy on the trio. Sudjic eulogised Foster's Hong Kong and Shanghai Bank building as 'nothing less than the reinvention of the skyscraper.'<sup>554</sup> He was particularly struck by the high-tech innovations found in every aspect of the building, from its computer-programmed motorized sun scoops which delivered sunshine to the atrium all year round, to the 'elegant brass dowells' used in place of 'conventionally

---

<sup>553</sup> The editors preferred the term 'Late Modernism' to Postmodernism. In their mini-glossary of architectural isms in the first issue, they dismiss Postmodernism as 'the use of distorted Classical motifs, columns and pediments tacked on to the work of architects like Michael Graves, Robert Stern, and Terry Farrell' and present Late Modernism more positively, as 'exciting formal architecture.' 'New Readers Start Here', *Blueprint*, October 1983, p. 7.

<sup>554</sup> Deyan Sudjic, 'Reinventing the Skyscraper', in Deyan Sudjic, ed. *From Matt Black to Memphis and Back Again*, (London: Architecture Design and Technology Press, 1989) p. 12. Originally published in *Blueprint*, November 1985.

shaped keys' to displace the locking mechanism of the building's doors.<sup>555</sup>

In interiors *Blueprint's* editors favoured both a high-tech, industrial, matt black and aluminium look and a Japanese-infused minimal aesthetic. In a report on Jiricna/Kerr Associate's interior for the Legends nightclub, *Blueprint* gushed over a 'strictly disciplined colour scheme' with 'polished plaster for the walls, black for the ceiling to show off the elaborate lasers, and more black for the upholstery with polished chrome and steel everywhere else, which reflects the customers and provides a touch of glitter.'<sup>556</sup> They were equally enthusiastic about the puritanical minimalism of Pawson and Silverstrin's 'dazzling' interior for the Wakaba sushi restaurant in Swiss Cottage, with its 'all-white walls, unadorned by any extraneous detail', the 'extreme economy and elegance of means' by which the designers had subdivided a private area of the restaurant with a five-foot high screen.<sup>557</sup>

In the field of product design it was high-tech gadgets such as the NEC fax machine, the mobile telephone, and the matt black Braun ET 22 calculator that intrigued *Blueprint's* editors.<sup>558</sup> Sudjic described the latter with reverence, as 'the supreme cult object in the sense that it becomes a constant presence. It will slip into a pocket, or fit in the hand, and inevitably it begins to affect its owner's mannerisms and the image that he projects to the world.'<sup>559</sup> He noted its 'ultra-precise mouldings', its 'shiny control buttons, bright as Smarties', its 'chiselled ribbing.' He knew that 'it isn't the real technocrats who have made such a fetish out of the ET 22 but the design groupies with an eye for its looks', and that,

---

<sup>555</sup> Ibid.

<sup>556</sup> Richard Bryant, 'Sex Tech' in Deyan Sudjic, ed. *From Matt Black to Memphis and Back Again*, (London: Architecture Design and Technology Press, 1989) p. 126. Originally published in *Blueprint*, March 1987.

<sup>557</sup> Deyan Sudjic, 'Inconspicuous Consumption', in Deyan Sudjic, ed. *From Matt Black to Memphis and Back Again*, (London: Architecture Design and Technology Press, 1989) p. 131. Originally published in *Blueprint*, July/August 1987.

<sup>558</sup> Deyan Sudjic, 'The Joy of Matt Black,' *Blueprint*, November 1985, p. 44.

<sup>559</sup> Ibid.

'left suggestively on your desk, the calculator starts transmitting all kinds of flattering signals.'<sup>560</sup>

Sudjic and Murray were consistently critical of: Prince Charles, who had spearheaded a public campaign against late and postmodernist architecture of the kind *Blueprint* liked best; the Design Council's inadequacies and increasing isolation from the concerns of the design industry; and any aspect of the design world they thought to be 'fogey' or unstylish. *Blueprint* repeatedly drew a distinction between the 'softness' and 'cosiness' of old guard design values – its figureheads are depicted as 'herbivores' – with the 'sharpness', 'hard-headedness', and 'carnivorous' nature of modern design and their own brand of modern design commentary.<sup>561</sup> The most direct manifestation of the magazine's ongoing anti-Design Council commentary was an editorial leader titled 'Abolish the Design Council', in which the magazine called for the Government to dissolve its failed experiment, 'now little more than a vulgar gift shop and sandwich bar, to disperse its teeming hordes of leaderless bureaucrats, and to set about the real task of putting design to work for this country.'<sup>562</sup>

To some extent, stating these aversions was a case of natural generational upheaval – Sudjic was twenty-five at the time – and, as he later remarked, 'every generation makes its reputation by trashing its predecessors.'<sup>563</sup> But it was also to do with taking a critical stance within the sphere of design writing. 'Critics make their reputations by nailing people

---

<sup>560</sup> Ibid.

<sup>561</sup> '[In 1983] there was a fondness of the director of the Design Council for safari suits and open-toed sandals: the herbivores were still in charge'. Deyan Sudjic, 'How We Got from There to Here', *Blueprint*, September 1983, p. 16.

<sup>562</sup> 'Abolish the Design Council', Editorial, *Blueprint*, December 1984/January 1985, p.3.

The Design Council refused to sell *Blueprint* in its bookstore due to the publication's consistently negative stance toward the organization. Readers responded in defense of the Design Council. Designers including Nick Butler and Kenneth Grange signed a letter that began 'Your ill-informed attacks on The Design Council, culminating in the leader in your latest issue recommending the Council's abolition may do something to establish the notoriety which appears to be your main ambition, but will do nothing to advance the cause of design and designers in this country.'

Letters, *Blueprint*, February 1985, p. 9.

<sup>563</sup> Deyan Sudjic, personal interview, 2009, June 1, 2010.



they think are uninteresting and promoting those that are interesting', Sudjic said.<sup>564</sup>

Sudjic clearly had greater writerly ambition than to be a 'sycophantic handmaiden for the doers and professionals'; he wanted to interpret what was unsaid.<sup>565</sup> Through championing Rogers, Stirling, and Foster, and lambasting the Design Council, he explored what it would be to stake a position, and yet he did not seem comfortable with use of the first-person address, critical takedowns, and engaging in intellectual sparring matches with his peers. Rather, he commissioned other writers to do these things, preferring instead to develop a subtle and detail-rich writing style and to use the satirical technique of holding a mirror to the excesses of 1980s design culture.

### ***Blueprint* anoints its stars**

A third way in which *Blueprint* engaged with style was to cultivate the notion of designer-as-celebrity. The cover of the first issue of *Blueprint* (October 1983) features a three-quarter-height photograph of Eva Jiricna. The forty-four-year-old Czech-born interior designer had recently caught the attention of London's architecture and design media for her dramatically minimalist interiors for the upscale restaurant Caprice, the Joseph fashion stores, and designer Joseph Ettedgui's Sloane Street flat. For the *Blueprint* cover shot she was captured emerging through a mirrored door, her hands clasped around an electric lamp, echoing images of Florence Nightingale with her oil lamp. Her face and hair shone in the dramatic lighting, and she smiled a closed-mouthed smile, as if bemused by the attention of the photographer.<sup>566</sup> She was literally framed within a mise-en-scene of her own making, the bathroom of her Belsize Park flat, which featured bright green industrial rubber dot floor material as wall covering and a porthole and was accented with a pair of nautical buoys hanging from an S-hook. Jiricna wore a white round-necked top

<sup>564</sup> Ibid.

<sup>565</sup> Deyan Sudjic, 'High Jencks', *Blueprint*, November 1984, p. 16.

<sup>566</sup> 'Architects, blinking mole-like in the sudden glare of unfamiliar exposure, were nonplussed at first.' Deyan Sudjic, *Cult Heroes*, (London: Norton, 1989) p. 92. Excerpted in *Blueprint*, May 1989, p 72.

with an oversized chain necklace and black belted trousers, which readers learnt in the profile, written by Maurice Cooper, was her 'signature look.' The image captured Jiricna's sensibility as a designer, and because it was taken in her own ship's-cabin-themed home, it also provided the viewer with a sense of privileged access to the designer's life beyond the studio. Cooper's profile provided more detail about his perception of Jiricna's personality:

Home now is a flat in Belsize Park, the architect's ghetto. You can't help noticing that most of the furniture, from the life jackets on the sofa to the bulkhead lights strung up on yacht hawser, seem to have come from a ship's chandlery. The living room feels like a swimming pool, with a vivid green rim and deep blue carpet. The dining table is perforated black metal and folds up out of sight. And the kitchen is more galley than anything else. It's a tough uncompromising place to live, which is just as she wants it. Every item in the flat has been chosen with measured care, pondered over and debated, just as the rest of her interiors.<sup>567</sup>

The Jiricna cover and others featuring fashion designer Joseph Ettedgui and furniture designer Ron Arad incorporated mirrors to provide a reflected image of their subjects, further underlining role that the magazine performed in conferring celebrity status upon their cover stars.

By putting the designer front and centre on the full-colour A3-sized magazine, *Blueprint's* editorial team used these stylized narrative images, created by the photographer Phil Sayer, to encourage a sense of access to designers' unique sensibilities. Visually they set the tone for this new publication, differentiating it from other magazines of the period, which (apart from the Italian magazine *Domus*) typically featured design products or, in the case of *Design*, abstract illustrations on their covers, but never designers themselves.<sup>568</sup>

The magazine's first editorial statement declared its intention to take a personality-centric approach: 'we will be profiling the tastemakers and talking to designers and

---

<sup>567</sup> Maurice Cooper, 'The Deceptively Simple Style of Eva Jiricna', *Blueprint*, October 1983, p. 14.

<sup>568</sup> The structure and lighting of the cover images echoed the staged photocompositions of Dutch graphic designer Gert Dumbar.

architects in a way which, we believe, is not currently being done by either the professional or the lay media.<sup>569</sup> Few other architecture and design publications of the period ran profiles of practitioners. *Blueprint*, drawing from an approach found in music and society magazines, wanted to capture the designer as a personality, including details of where they ate and what they wore.<sup>570</sup>

*Blueprint's* profiles of prominent designers were based on interviews, with some of the most incisive pieces written by Janet Abrams, who clearly relished the potential of the format for intense debate with the big minds in design. She considered that her role as a journalist, far from merely reporting the facts, was to figure as a co-protagonist in the story. A profile of architect Peter Eisenman began, "'Are you going to do a number on me?" Peter Eisenman inquires when I phone to arrange this interview. One of the distinguishing characteristics of Ivy League architect-academics is to veil their rapturous delight in publicity with feigned outrage at the mere prospect; Eisenman is perhaps the archetype of the genus.'<sup>571</sup> In an era fascinated with the construction of identity through consumptive practices, the journalistic device of the interview assumed new significance. The American magazine *Interview* typified the genre, with its intimate, lengthy, and often unedited interviews with celebrities. As Paul Atkinson and David Silverman have observed, 'The interview, with its implied invitations toward self-revelation, is a pervasive device for the production of selves, biographies, and experiences. It furnishes the viewer/reader/hearer with the promise of privileged—however fleeting—glimpses into the private domain of the speaker'.<sup>572</sup>

Until *Blueprint* began to prioritize the interview-based profile as a journalistic format, most designers had stood

---

<sup>569</sup> First editorial, *Blueprint*, October 1983, p. 2.

<sup>570</sup> Rick Poynor, 'Grow Up *Blueprint!*', *Blueprint*, September, 1993, p. 14.

<sup>571</sup> Janet Abrams, '(Mis) Reading Between the Lines', *Blueprint*, February, 1985, p.88.

<sup>572</sup> Paul Atkinson and David Silverman, 'Kundera's Immortality: The Interview Society and the Invention of the Self', *Qualitative Inquiry*, September 1997 vol. 3 no. 3, pp. 304-325.

well behind their work, keeping their private lives separate from the more public and carefully constructed environments of their studios. Increasingly writers asked for access to designers' homes and observed them in their daily lives, giving rise to a new kind of pseudo-psychoanalytic character analysis in design journalism.

Sudjic was a keen observer of identity himself. In a 2006 *Observer* article about his first visit to his parents' hometown of Belgrade in twenty-five years, he traced the roots of his own need to decode identity as a response to his immigrant parents' precarious relationship to the city of London, and his uncertain status in relation to entrenched British class divisions. He wrote of his realization that he has always been interested in 'understanding how buildings and daily objects shape our sense of who we are', and that it was only when his parents died that he began to see that it was a fascination that had a personal aspect:

How identity is manufactured has always interested me from the first time that I began to wonder why money in Yugoslavia was in the form of banknotes embellished with portraits of heroic power stations workers and apple cheeked peasants, and in Britain money is signified by men with whiskers and big wigs. These are the clues that you need to decode in order to get a grip on exactly who you are.

In *Cult Objects: The Complete Guide to Having It All*, a 1985 catalogue of the accoutrements of the designer lifestyle, Sudjic worked through his fascination with products and identity and attempted to answer the question 'Are you what you own?'. Sudjic's peer Stephen Bayley was also motivated by this question. His exhibition and catalogue *The Good Design Guide: 100 Best Ever Products* featured such status conferring design icons as 501 jeans, Oxford shirt, Panama hat, Zippo lighter, Oyster Rolex, Raybans, Bass Weejun shoes, K100 motorbike, and a Porsche pipe.<sup>573</sup>

---

<sup>573</sup> Stephen Bayley, *The Good Design Guide: 100 Best Ever Products*, (London: The Conran Foundation, 1985). Bayley owned and used nearly all of the products featured in the *Guide*. A 1986 advertisement for Herbert Johnson Panama hats in *Portrait Magazine* proudly referenced its selection as 'one of

Sudjic's book and Bayley's catalogue were visual anatomies of the well-appointed man who oriented himself in 1980s London as either a producer or consumer of designed objects, and often both. The taxonomy as a format suited the mood of 1980s design journalism, which was coming to terms with the new emphasis on design as a lifestyle choice. By classifying the visual attributes of the designer lifestyle, Sudjic and Bayley were establishing their vocabularies, charting their territories by naming and identifying, but not analyzing, and certainly not critiquing the unspoken status anxiety that underlay their projects. The tone of each writer differed. Bayley was earnest. He hoped the 'Guide' would provide 'exemplars for imitation in the future' and a 'stimulus for creativity.'<sup>574</sup> His descriptions of each object were assured to the point of dogmatism: 'The Rolex Oyster has become the archetype of the wristwatch, an unimprovable classic of design that has often been imitated but never surpassed.'<sup>575</sup> Sudjic was more ambivalent: in the case of the Mont Blanc he both lovingly described the pen's attributes and exposed the 'largely spurious' nature of its 'archaic' styling: 'It is an upstart pretender, a fountain pen born of the Biro and Pentel era, and manufactured in Hamburg by a subsidiary of the Dunhill tobacco empire.'<sup>576</sup> But neither author questioned the 'cult' of designed objects, nor the confusion about 'where to draw the line between who we are and what we have', as Hebdige put it in a *Blueprint* essay on late 1980s décor magazines.<sup>577</sup>

### **Using prose to pose**

Sudjic was fascinated by the manifestations of style and lifestyle he noted in 1980s London – the objects, clothing, and behaviours that signalled knowingness on the part of the bearer. He was a subtle observer of stylistic codes; moreover, he possessed the linguistic panache to approximate them in his

---

the "100 best designed products" for a Boilerhouse project at the Victoria & Albert exhibition last year'.

<sup>574</sup> Ibid. p. 3.

<sup>575</sup> Stephen Bayley, *The Good Design Guide: 100 Best Ever Products*, (London: The Conran Foundation, 1985) p. 25.

<sup>576</sup> Deyan Sudjic, *Cult Objects: The Complete Guide to Having it All* (London: Paladin Granada Publishing, 1985).

<sup>577</sup> Dick Hebdige, 'World of Interiors', *Blueprint*, May 1989, p. 40.

prose. Due to *Blueprint's* budgetary constraints, Sudjic had to write most of the copy in the early issues, so it was largely his writing that defined the prose style of the magazine.

Sudjic was interested in the writing of several of his peers but says his biggest influence was the design critic Reyner Banham, whose weekly columns about the complexion of everyday design products Sudjic read in *New Society*. As editor of *Blueprint*, Sudjic appreciated that a new approach to writing about design required a new type of vivid, entertaining prose, which he has referred to as 'gloss.'<sup>578</sup>

The style-conscious, brand-labelling, and semi-fictional approach to design writing exemplified by Sudjic's prose belongs to the literary lineage of New Journalism, popularized in the 1970s by American authors such as Tom Wolfe and Gay Talese.<sup>579</sup> Wolfe was also an important literary touchstone for other British design commentators of the period, as well as Sudjic. They had read his non-fiction writing from the 1960s and, more recently, his account of what he saw as the repressive tyranny of architectural Modernism in *From Bauhaus to Our House*, published in the UK in 1981, as well as his *Harper's* and *Esquire* articles collected in the 1976 book *Mauve Gloves & Madmen, Clutter & Vine*. Bayley made frequent reference to Wolfe in his writing and corresponded with him about his work.<sup>580</sup> When Wolfe came to England to give a lecture at the University of Kent on a damp November evening in 1983, Robert Hewison reported that all the 'acolytes of style, hot off British Rail are there to hear him: Faber & Faber (the funding fathers), Harpers & Queen, the RCA, and the

---

<sup>578</sup> 'The magazine is partly about entertainment [...] you can tackle the serious issues with a gloss of something else.' Deyan Sudjic, interview, Deyan Sudjic, interview, Liz Farrelly 'Design Journalism: The Production of Definitions', MA thesis, V&A/RCA, 1989, p. 28. *Blueprint's* one year anniversary editorial stated: 'At *Blueprint* we hope that we have played a part in [...] entertaining not just those involved with design but all those interested in it.' *Blueprint*, October, 1984, p. 3.

<sup>579</sup> It also anticipated to some extent, and co-existed, with the fiction writing of Brat-pack novelists Jay McInerney and Brett Easton Ellis, whose characters in *Bright Lights Big City* and *American Psycho*, for example, were defined by the products and status conferring totems they surrounded themselves with.

<sup>580</sup> On November 15 Tom Wolfe wrote to Bayley, 'I've been following with great amusement the furor over Taste. It's marvelous.' Letter from Tom Wolfe to Stephen Bayley, 15, November, 1983, The V&A Archive, MA/28/387, Blythe House, London.

Boilerhouse Project...'; while *Blueprint* registered 'Sloane chronicler Peter York, in the second row, taking copious notes, like a keen young undergraduate.'<sup>581</sup> Wolfe lectured on 'The Trend Who Walks Like a Man', a discourse both about art criticism and contemporary art, and used as his case study the 'vast sociological experiment' that is New York's SoHo – 'the lifestyle of the 100,000 registered artists clustered in the lofts and rookeries.'<sup>582</sup> *Blueprint* recounted, 'we meet the artists, the dealers, and their girlfriends, we discover how they live and – in great detail – what they wear.'<sup>583</sup>

The techniques of New Journalism included immersing readers into a dramatic scene through in-media-res beginnings and into characters' minds through appropriating their voices, use of the first or second person, the historical present tense, long sections of dialogue, and the deployment of narrative prose saturated with relentless detail and exaggerated metaphor. Visually it looked different from other journalism, too, characterized by a playful and abundant use of dashes, dots, and exclamation points, which Wolfe said helped him 'give the illusion not only of a person talking, but of a person thinking.'<sup>584</sup>

A self-described 'prose stylist', York was enamoured of Wolfe's stylistic panache, and his ability to recognize 'the entire pattern of behaviour and possessions through which people express their position in the world or what they think

---

<sup>581</sup> Robert Hewison, 'Behind the Lines', 1983. Steve Wood, 'The Man Who Walks Like a Trend', *Blueprint*, December/January, 1983, p. 19.

<sup>582</sup> Ibid.

<sup>583</sup> Ibid.

<sup>584</sup> Wolfe, in his introduction to an anthology of examples of New Journalism, identified four devices that he saw as corresponding to the techniques of realism practiced by novelists such as Fielding, Balzac, Dickens, and Gogol, and which journalists were using 'with the full passion of innocents and discoverers.' These devices were: scene-by-scene construction, rather than continuous chronological narrative – scene is what underlies 'the sophisticated strategies of prose;' the recording of full dialogue as a way to paint character; use of the third-person point of view – entering the private world of the subject's mind – accessed through extensive interviewing; and the 'recording of everyday gestures, habits, manners, customs, styles of furniture, clothing, decoration, styles of traveling, eating, keeping house...' – the accumulated details that symbolize status as a way to immerse and absorb the reader. Tom Wolfe, *The New Journalism* (London: Pan Books, 1990) p. 48 and p. 36.

it is or what they hope it to be.'<sup>585</sup> The fact that Wolfe seemed to suspend his judgement between love and hate of his subjects, and could move so nimbly between the worlds he reported on without being weighed down by a fixed viewpoint, was also appealing to York. In article about Wolfe for *Harpers & Queen*, York quoted *Harper's* editor Lewis Lapham saying of Wolfe, whom he regularly commissioned, 'He has a view of US society not shrouded by cant, he sees it in terms of money, sex and class, he's free from ideological arguments.'<sup>586</sup>

There was a macho and masculine quality to New Journalism that may have represented part of its allure to writers like Sudjic, Bayley, and York. York appreciated Wolfe's continued liberating influence on English journalists, both directly through his own writing, and indirectly through a generation of rock writers and colour supplement writers whom he had influenced in the 1960s. York cited Reyner Banham's 'visually-oriented pop/sociological' brand of writing in *New Society* as a key example.<sup>587</sup> More than this, though, York revered Wolfe's notoriety – the fact that he was the 'first journalist other journalists wrote about', and that he provided writers like himself with a role model, and journalism itself with a new celebrity status. In his explanation of English journalists' 'hyper-awareness' of Wolfe, York wrote, 'Wolfe was a celebrity to other journalists all right. And he had done more even than set an example in subject-matter and style and celebrification, he was providing the building blocks of a rationale that said journalists – journalists on the lowbrow papers and slick magazines and the specialist press – could be in the fast lane of Modern Culture, pushing deadbeat novelists off the road.'<sup>588</sup>

*Blueprint's* gossip column, titled 'Sour Grapes', provides the most emphatic evidence of Sudjic's urbane and often acerbic writerly voice. Sour Grapes based its snarky digs, bold-type names, and third-person anonymity on gossip columns in society

---

<sup>585</sup> Ibid. p. 47.

<sup>586</sup> Peter York, 'Tom, Tom the Farmer's Son', *Harper's & Queen*, October 1979, p. 210.

<sup>587</sup> Ibid.

<sup>588</sup> Ibid.



magazines, 'Pseud's Corner' in *Private Eye*, and on the tone of New York satirical magazine *Spy*, which lambasted the vices and follies of media personalities like Donald Trump. 'Sour Grapes' recorded, and created, the controversies of the design scene, and provided a soap-opera-like running commentary on the lifestyles of the designers featured in *Blueprint*.<sup>589</sup> The column reflected Sudjic's preoccupations and prejudices – missteps made by Boilerhouse curator Stephen Bayley, who usually retorted in the letters page, and disdain for *bête noirs* such as his ex-employer The Design Council's out-of-touch perspective on the design profession and Prince Charles' widely publicized campaigns for conservative architecture. It also provided closely observed reports on the appointments, firings, achievements, and mistakes of London's architecture and design writers and editors, demonstrating another way in which the magazine was self-aware of its role within the larger matrix of an evolving design media industry.

*Blueprint* played a key role in taste-making politics of the 1980s. Sudjic's values were evident in his selection of subject matter but also through the judgmental language used. Terms like 'vulgar', 'upmarket', 'downmarket', and 'brash' littered the magazine's pages. The young architect Nigel Coates was described as being 'not quite one of us', and Sudjic remarked of the crowd in Milan that 'everybody who was anybody was there.'<sup>590</sup>

Coverage of the annual Milan Furniture Fair provides a telling example of *Blueprint's*, and primarily Sudjic's, fascination with the designer lifestyle. For the occasion he translated 'Sour Grapes' to 'Grappa Acido' and printed photos of design celebrities at the various parties. Readers were told that the Tecno party is the one *everyone* goes to. 'Those not invited are allowed the food but not the present. Last year everyone got a Swatch watch – the Swiss answer to the Japanese domination of the watch industry. This year they gave radios

---

<sup>589</sup> *Spy* magazine was launched in 1986.

<sup>590</sup> Deyan Sudjic, *Blueprint* October 1988.

the size of a credit card...'<sup>591</sup> At the Memphis party, to which thousands flocked but only a handful gained admittance, 'Ettore Sottsass arrived after a couple of hours and moved regally through the throng, kissing and shaking hands with the adoring fans as he passed.'<sup>592</sup> Sudjic always noted designers' attire (furniture designer Ron Arad was 'wearing a bowler hat' and architect and editor of *Domus*, Alessandro Mendini, 'sports designer jeans'), their jet-set lifestyles (Terence Conran 'popped into the Fair on his way back from New York to London', and Norman Foster 'flew over in his jet for the occasion'), and their propensity for over-indulgence.<sup>593</sup> In another piece about the Fair, 'Milan: The Party Is Over', Sudjic employed the scenic immersion techniques of New Journalism to transport his readers viscerally into the Milan Furniture Fair experience: 'It's just getting dark as we step out of Vico Magistretti's party at the Cassina showroom into a sticky Milanese dusk full of sirens and orange trams, when a glistening face detaches itself from the ravening hoards of Paolos and Tomassos gulping Cassina's white wine and shoveling down Cassina's caviar sandwiches.'<sup>594</sup> At another party Sudjic described the excessiveness of the spread with a characteristic mixture of relish and repulsion: 'there are relays of white-gloved waiters, decked with chains of office, dispensing champagne, mountains of langoustines, baby octopuses, risotto and blueberries to brawling crowds of elegantly tanned ladies wearing great chunks of brass around their necks and wrists.'<sup>595</sup> He deconstructed the social hierarchies of Milan, 'the Design World Headquarters', allowing *Blueprint* readers who were there to feel validated, and those who weren't to share vicariously in its business machinations, social pleasures, and sartorial details.

In 1989 York drew attention to the role of satire in the larger popular assessment of the design boom, and to

---

<sup>591</sup> Grappa Acido, *Blueprint*, p. 8.

<sup>592</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>593</sup> Deyan Sudjic, 'Milan: The Party is Over', *Blueprint*, p. 22.

<sup>594</sup> *Ibid.*

*Blueprint's* insufficiency in this area.<sup>596</sup> From his vantage point – an outsider who found designers comical in the caricatured forms that he portrayed them – *Blueprint* didn't contain enough humour. Other media, he posited, were better able to undercut the phenomenon: 'design has itself started to turn up in plays and films of a satirical or left wing kind as a metaphor for whatever their writers see as dishonest or manipulative for the 1980s.'<sup>597</sup>

York's own satirical portraits of designers could be found among his essays in the magazine *Harpers & Queen* during the late 1970s, collected in the book *Style Wars*, and in those he contributed to magazines such as *Vanity Fair* in the early 1980s, collected in the 1984 book *Modern Times*. When *Modern Times* was published, Sudjic excerpted one of the essays in *Blueprint*: 'Chic Graphique' sends up the lifestyle and accoutrements of what York calls 'the Graphic', a social archetype which epitomizes the early 1980s graphic designer, but also other design aficionados, which clearly include the *Blueprint* readership and its contributors.

In his review of York's *Modern Times*, Sudjic portrayed York as an urban entomologist, 'wielding his butterfly net over Homo Covent Gardeniensis', who saw the potential in design as satirical fodder. 'He dissects the foibles of the breed with merciless accuracy', wrote Sudjic, approvingly, of York's pinioning of the graphic designer's home furnishings (exposed structures, nylon door handles, white tiles, teaspoons in an old Keiller marmalade pot), grooming habits (short, even-length, all-over beard/moustache), clothes (Paul Smith

<sup>596</sup> Peter York, Introduction, ed. Deyan Sudjic, *From Matt Black to Memphis and Back Again*, (London: Architecture Design and Technology Press, 1989) p. 6.

<sup>597</sup> The ABC-TV series 'Thirty Something' (1987–1991) features the advertising mogul Miles Drenttel (played by David Clennon). The character, who 'wears expensive suits, strokes a zen sandbox, and speaks in a terrifyingly snide, controlled monotone', and the interior of the office are Hollywood composites of details gathered from research into the design and advertising industry. William Drenttel, a designer with experience in advertising provided much of the information, in conversation with his college friend Edward Zwick, the series producer. 'We were white and generally male. We bought our (white) shirts at one of three places: Brooks Brothers, J. Press ('of New Haven'), or Paul Stuart. There were no other acceptable choices.' William Drenttel, 'I was a Madman', *Design Observer*, 11 July, 2008, <http://observatory.designobserver.com/entry.html?entry=6997> [accessed 14 October 2013].

cashmere red scarf, raspberry-coloured jelly framed glasses, denim shirt with no tie), accessories (Mont Blanc or Lamy pens, metal mesh or one-piece moulded polythene carrying cases in primary colours), heroes (Milton Glaser, Gropius, Bruce Weber), and horrors (*Interiors* magazine, Laura Ashley, herbaceous borders).<sup>598</sup>

York's tone was arch, yet he did little to actually puncture the designer lifestyle bubble and he certainly didn't draw attention to its complicity with Thatcherist politics or its unsustainable production and consumption practices. The eye that saw all those details was essentially detached and amused, not angry. York didn't consider what he did as critique, in the sense that criticism might have a moral or political purpose. He later observed, 'a critique has to come from a fixed position, doesn't it? I saw myself as giving a bit of fun along the way. It wasn't my concern whether the nation got a good deal from serious designers, or whatever.'<sup>599</sup>

York wrote colloquially, rhythmically, in the present tense, addressed the second person, and used allusive vocabulary and lists of references to be appreciated by those in the know. But for York, even though he loved writing in the sense that it was a 'performance' through which he could 'show off', journalism was a hobby. He was primarily a management and marketing consultant, adept at characterizing 'tribes' firstly as potential markets and only secondly as topics for his journalism. York quickly discerned that the 'designer lifestyle' he saw at play in 1980s London was a good topic:

I came from outside the stockade and on the face of it with unkindly intentions. The things people say and wear, things like fell walker shoes, were funny but it was also important. And if you have these factors on an upward trajectory, it's got to be something to write about. The design classes, that movement, we were seeing from the world of the word, of which literary novelists would be part, and a whole swathe of other kinds of academics. You just had this gorgeous material. There

---

<sup>598</sup> Deyan Sudjic, 'Is There Life After Sloane?' *Blueprint*, November 1984, p.11.

<sup>599</sup> Peter York, personal interview, 16 August, 2007.

are times when particular things are hot. I recognized it with every instinct I had.<sup>600</sup>

### ***Blueprint's 'hardcore' image***

The final way in which *Blueprint* engaged with style was through its art direction. Simon Esterson, *Blueprint's* art director, developed a bold and distinctive design for the magazine that used all-caps blocky headlines, an architectural compositional system of thick rules and text boxes, coupled with oversized photographs that took full advantage of the A3 size of the pages. British graphic design of the 1980s was going through what Esterson terms 'a classical, centred, woodcutty phase', typified by packaging design by Michael Peters and Trickett and Webb. Esterson responded to other designers of the period, like David King, and Neville Brody, who were rediscovering Russian Constructivism and using its visual energy to infuse their own graphics for political movements such as Rock Against Racism and Red Wedge. In particular Esterson channelled the tough, urban graphic style of the New York architecture journal *Skyline*, which was designed by Massimo Vignelli and Michael Bierut.<sup>601</sup>

The tabloid newspaper format was chosen to emphasize the intentionally ephemeral nature of the project.<sup>602</sup> 'We wanted it to last for only ten issues and then die', said Sudjic. 'We deliberately chose the *Blueprint* format as a disposable one.' He and Murray thought the awkwardness of the *Blueprint's* shape would prevent it from being filed with other magazines in a design studio library and therefore it would be thrown away. As design historian Liz Farrelly has observed, this emphasis on the magazine's ephemerality is in fact part of the somewhat disingenuous myth-making that surrounds its inception, since an advertisement for back issues appeared in issue 8, June

---

<sup>600</sup> Peter York, personal interview, 16 August, 2007.

<sup>601</sup> Simon Esterson, personal interview, 5 August, 2010.

<sup>602</sup> *Skyline* was published by the Institute for Architecture and Urban Studies in New York, 1979-1983.

1984, acknowledging the fact that architects and designers would want to keep and file this stylish-looking object.<sup>603</sup>

Style was also an integral part of *Blueprint's* business model, in which, as Sudjic characterized it in 1989, rather than 'bending over backwards to write about advertiser X's chairs or advertiser B's office furniture systems', they played 'hard to get', making it seem 'like quite the place to advertise.' Sudjic reflected that the style of the magazine was what helped to attract advertisers: 'It is current and it is presenting things in a stylish kind of way, and the advertisers see that reflecting on their products and they want to be in it.'<sup>604</sup> Furthermore, Esterson would often redesign the submitted advertisement artwork, ostensibly because of *Blueprint's* unusually large format, but also to make the advertisements more consistent with the visual tone of the magazine.

### **Sober reflections**

Although Sudjic did not leave the magazine until 1993, towards the end of the 1980s he became more self-questioning, alluding in his writing to the ways in which the magazine's creators might have been implicated in the creation of an inflated view of design. To mark *Blueprint's* five-year anniversary in 1988, its editors devoted a special issue to surveying the 'design decade.' Sudjic's editorial leader reflected back on *Blueprint's* role in 'chronicling' Britain's design boom. Throughout the 1980s the design industry expanded exponentially, as a service to business. Sudjic observed how close big-business design and Thatcherism had become by this time—how the 'once essentially liberal profession of design has accommodated itself so readily to the new orthodoxies.'<sup>605</sup> At a practical level, Thatcher's government supported design's

---

<sup>603</sup> The culture of filing magazines in design studios was well established. *Architectural Review* provided their issues with holes pre-punched in sections that would be added to subject specific ring binders in studio libraries.

<sup>604</sup> Deyan Sudjic, interview, Liz Farrelly 'Design Journalism: The Production of Definitions', MA thesis, V&A/RCA, 1989, p. 45.

<sup>605</sup> 'The Design Decade', *Blueprint*, October 1988.

entrepreneurial growth. But ideologically the similarities between Conservative Party politics and design's applications were more striking and therefore presumably discomfiting to someone like Sudjic, whose architectural training rested on liberal and idealist philosophies. Sudjic viewed the situation as a detached observer, however, rather than an implicated player. He wrote, 'The present-day business of design, with its stock market listings, its takeovers and its tycoons, might be taken as a metaphor for the Thatcher years. Indeed design is in danger of becoming so closely associated with Mrs. Thatcher's brand of radical conservatism that it may yet find itself in real difficulties in a post Reagan and Thatcher era.'<sup>606</sup> In doing so, he framed the Thatcherist entrepreneurial spirit as just another style, which had been unquestioningly adopted by design culture during the mid-1980s and would eventually be disposed of. In another end-of-decade editorial Sudjic pondered how design might redefine itself in the coming decade with 'the prospect of a Labour government seeming like a real possibility [...] Will it seek to ally itself with the green movement and social responsibility...?'<sup>607</sup>

In 1989, the same year as a collection of *Blueprint* cover-star portraits were installed on the wall of the *Blueprint* café at the newly opened Design Museum, Sudjic wrote the book *Cult Heroes: How to be Famous for more than Fifteen Minutes*.<sup>608</sup> One of the book's chapters chronicled the rise of the architect and designer to celebrity status, a phenomenon that *Blueprint* had encouraged, and yet that Sudjic again regarded with characteristic detachment, writing, 'fame has become the most valuable, the most sought after, and the most perishable of commodities'.<sup>609</sup> And in his 1988 round-up of the 'design decade', Sudjic wrote of the 1980s as a decade 'that has become addicted to the cult of personality' – a curiously passive turn of phrase, which deflected responsibility away from his own editorial decision-making and toward the culture

---

<sup>606</sup> Ibid.

<sup>607</sup> Editorial, *Blueprint*, December 1989, p. 7.

<sup>608</sup> Deyan Sudjic, *Cult Heroes: How to be Famous for More than Fifteen Minutes* (London: Andre Deutsch, 1989).

<sup>609</sup> Ibid. p. 10.

at large.<sup>610</sup> In *Cult Heroes* he wrote of the media's short attention span, keeping his own involvement at arm's length again through use of the passive tense: 'Designers may achieve brief periods of fame and fortune, but all too soon find themselves discarded [...] their work exhausted of meaning and content.'<sup>611</sup>

Beyond the pages of *Blueprint*, Sudjic could be more candid about his culpability in boosting designers to star status. In 1989, when questioned about this, he said, 'I think we write articles that are very sceptical of the whole star thing, and look at what it means. *Cult Heroes* looks at this [...] it's very worrisome [...] and maybe we are part of the system but obviously it's not a prime motive, maybe we've helped it along a bit in design, helped invent a few design stars.'<sup>612</sup>

In a September 1988 editorial discussing the folding of the Milan design collective Memphis, Sudjic wrote of the design media's role in flattening the complexity of much design: 'The real lessons of the Memphis movement, however, will be the double-edged nature of media attention, and the way design is trivialized when turned into fodder for the consumption of an image-obsessed society.'<sup>613</sup> Through the process of evaluating what his magazine had achieved to date, Sudjic realized that designers were turning their attention toward environmental and social issues and more public projects, and in a 1989 editorial titled 'Design sobers up as the decade closes', he prophesized a return to the 'purism of the modern movement' in the 1990s.<sup>614</sup>

Sudjic's accomplishment as a prose stylist, his ironically detached stance as a reporter, and his entertainment-based approach to editing were perfectly suited to the exuberance and fetishism of the dominant strain of 1980s design culture.

---

<sup>610</sup> Deyan Sudjic, 'The Design Decade', special supplement, *Blueprint*, October 1988.

<sup>611</sup> Deyan Sudjic, *Cult Heroes: How to be Famous for More than Fifteen Minutes* (London: Andre Deutsch, 1989), p. 109.

<sup>612</sup> Deyan Sudjic, interview, Liz Farrelly 'Design Journalism: The Production of Definitions', MA thesis, V&A/RCA, 1989, p. 45.

<sup>613</sup> Editorial, *Blueprint*, September, 1988, p 7.

<sup>614</sup> Editorial, *Blueprint*, December, 1989, p. 7.



Whether he liked it or not, by the late 1980s *Blueprint* was inextricably enmeshed – economically through its advertising revenue, and ideologically through its editorial choices – with the values of enterprise culture design. The magazine would have to be significantly re-tooled to deal with the sober topics Sudjic saw on the horizon.

**PART TWO: THE BOILERHOUSE PROJECT'S USE OF STYLE TO DECONTAMINATE TASTE**

When home furnishings entrepreneur Terence Conran profitably floated his Habitat chain on the stock market in 1981, he used some of the proceeds to set up The Conran Foundation, a charity dedicated to improving public appreciation for good industrial design. Conran had initially wanted to publish a magazine, with Sudjic as its editor. When the Victoria & Albert Museum offered him its disused basement boiler rooms, however, he decided that an exhibition space was the most expedient outlet for his aims – and selected Stephen Bayley as its director.

By 1986, after staging twenty-four exhibitions on topics ranging from the Ford Sierra to carrier bag design, and generating extensive, and often vituperative, national and international press coverage, The Boilerhouse Project closed, to be replaced within the V&A by its own Twentieth Century Gallery of industrial design.<sup>615</sup> Meanwhile Bayley and Conran moved on to realize their aim of a permanent collection of industrial design in the form of the Design Museum at Butler's Wharf, which opened to the public in 1989.

---

<sup>615</sup> The V&A Archive houses an enormous file of several hundred press cuttings relating to The Boilerhouse exhibitions, written between 1981 and 1989–perhaps. The exhibitions generated as many as 16,000 column inches of press comment, according to Adrian Ellis, administrative director of the Design Museum, 'Design Museum of Ideas', *ABSA Business and Arts Bulletin*, 1988. In one response to the numerous angry letters and reviews of the Taste exhibition, for example, Stephen Bayley, wrote to *Design* magazine, saying 'Oh dear, here we are deafened by the sound of grinding axes. We have had people evacuating their frustrations all over our Visitors' Book and now we have them doing it over your pages too.' Stephen Bayley, Letter, *Design*, March 1984.

There were several correspondences between The Boilerhouse and *Blueprint* magazine. *Blueprint* paid close attention to The Boilerhouse, assiduously reviewing each of its exhibitions, a habit established in the first issue with James Woudhuysen's review of the 'Taste' exhibition.<sup>616</sup> Some of *Blueprint*'s writers – Jonathan Glancey, for example – curated shows for Bayley. Furthermore, the exhibitions themselves were often likened, both by Bayley and their visitors, to three-dimensional magazine articles.<sup>617</sup>

The two enterprises differed in terms of their popular appeal. *Blueprint*, despite its desire to reach a broad readership, was mostly read by a small core group of professional architects and designers. The Boilerhouse on the other hand, was advertised throughout London, reported on in all branches of the media, and located within a major national museum, and thus attracted large numbers of visitors, as many as 1.5 million over the course of its existence.

The Boilerhouse Project's director was the twenty-nine-year-old Bayley, an art historian by training and a lecturer at the Open University, who helped to write the A305 History of Modern Architecture and Design course. Bayley was introduced to Conran by Paul Reilly, the director of the Design Council, who in 1979 had published Bayley's first book, *In Good Shape: Style in Industrial Products 1900–1960*.<sup>618</sup>

Bayley referred to the disused and flooded boiler rooms as 'a fetid bunker'. Conran Associates renovated the 500 square metres of underground space by covering the walls and floor with bright white tiles, thus creating a pure white cube of exhibition space, with an aesthetic that was frequently described as clinical.

---

<sup>616</sup> James Woudhuysen, 'Acquired Taste', *Blueprint*, October 1983, p. 17.

<sup>617</sup> Stephen Bayley, personal interview, 6 January, 2011. Bayley appears to have written his exhibitions into being like texts, rather than by conceiving of them as spatial juxtapositions of objects. This impression is underscored by the use of his handwriting for the lengthy wall texts and captions in the 'Taste' exhibition.

<sup>618</sup> Stephen Bayley, *In Good Shape: Style in Industrial Products 1900–1960* (London: Design Council Books, 1979).

'It looks like a private hospital', remarked an *NME* journalist, a loaded observation since the Thatcher government had begun major reforms of the NHS with the aim of pushing many toward private hospitals.<sup>619</sup> The conservative art critic Brian Sewell in the *Tatler* called it 'a subterranean installation so aesthetically hygienic that it seemed to have been sanitized for our protection'.<sup>620</sup>

These descriptions recall Jules Lubbock's evocation of The Saatchi Gallery as '30,000 square feet of whitewashed and windowless gallery'. Lubbock extrapolated that 'modernists are obsessed with hygiene. It is the Hoover and deodorant style [...] Mrs Thatcher doesn't smell. Not a whiff of a pheromone escapes her armpits'.<sup>621</sup> Through his exhibiting practice, Bayley can be seen to have functioned like the hygienic modernist Lubbock had conjured, seeking to cleanse the cluttered and dirty popular notions of taste with his own organized and sanitary vision.

The tiles also formed a graph paper-like backdrop, which meant objects were always seen in their pure, drawing-board state, uncontaminated by use. Furthermore, the clinically white, frictionless, and disorientating stage set created by Conran Associates can be seen to manifest a contemporary condition that Jean Baudrillard had termed 'simulacrum'. According to Baudrillard, signs had become increasingly disconnected from the things they referred to, until by the 1980s people inhabited a hyperreal universe made up only of signs, surfaces, and images circulating with no connection to any real world outside themselves.<sup>622</sup> Baudrillard was fascinated by theme parks, political campaigns, television shows, conferences like Aspen, and museums, arguing that these simulations hide not reality, but the disappearance of reality.<sup>623</sup> (See Illustrations 1-3)

---

<sup>619</sup> *New Musical Express*, July 19, 1986.

<sup>620</sup> Brian Sewell, *The Tatler*, 3 September, 1983.

<sup>621</sup> Jules Lubbock, 'Style Victim', 1985.

<sup>622</sup> Jean Baudrillard, 'The Ecstasy of Communication' in Hal Foster, ed. *The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays on Postmodern Culture*, (New York: The New Press, 1998), pp. 145-154.

<sup>623</sup> *Ibid.*



Illustrations 1-3. Interior of The Boilerhouse, during its inaugural Art & Industry exhibition, 1981.

The Boilerhouse exhibitions followed a fast-paced schedule of around five per year, each with its own catalogue, and were researched, assembled, and designed with the rapidity of magazine articles. Indeed, in characterizing his approach to curation during this period, Bayley said, 'I was doing journalism in three dimensions. So I would just set up an argument, a debate, and flesh it out with objects'.<sup>624</sup> The exhibitions ranged from explorations of the values and mechanisms of design, such as 'Taste' (1983) and 'Art & Industry' (1981) to showcases of archetypes or trends such as 'Robots' (1984) and 'Post-modern Colour' (1984) and blatantly commercial celebrations of stylish brands, including Coca-Cola (1986) and Sony (1982).

Bayley was keen to distinguish his activity at The Boilerhouse from museum curation, perhaps due to his negligible experience as a curator, but also because of The Boilerhouse's mission to be 'an abrasive stimulus to the public'.<sup>625</sup> He claimed that he 'always fought against preposterous conceits and vanities of the museum establishment and their art historical indulgences'.<sup>626</sup> Exhibition making, in Bayley's view, was 'something more' than museum curation – 'It has to be more like theatre'. To create this sense of theatricality he used attention-grabbing exhibition design, such as John Pawson's extreme minimalist design for the 1984 'Handtools' exhibition, which used long, low, black wedges to display the objects and meant visitors had to bend down to see them. Bayley also manipulated the media skilfully, encouraging them to report on any controversy that arose around the exhibitions, thus helping to increase the theatricality of what went on in The Boilerhouse.

Just as Murray and Sudjic sought to differentiate *Blueprint* from other design and architecture magazines, Bayley and Conran were keen to make a distinction between The Boilerhouse and other design collections of the period. Bayley had

---

<sup>624</sup> Stephen Bayley, personal interview, 6 January, 2011.

<sup>625</sup> *Conran and the Habitat Story*, Barty Phillips, Weidenfield and Nicholson, 1984, p. 103.

<sup>626</sup> Stephen Bayley, personal interview, 6 January, 2011.

travelled to several major design collections in the US and Europe in the research phase of the project. Speaking to *What's On In London* in 1981, Bayley said: 'What distinguishes our project is its serious purpose. We're not talking about a MoMA type collection that has no idea behind it, and is a dilettante's exhibition. It seems to contain whatever has happened at one particular moment to catch the eye of the keeper or his committee [...] There are other small design collections around but none of the people involved has any real understanding of the concept of design'.<sup>627</sup>

Bayley and Conran were careful not to refer to The Boilerhouse as a museum because they disliked the moral certainties associated with museological conventions. Instead they called it a 'found object with readymade industrial overtones', and the use of the provisional term 'Project' connected it more to the actual work of a design or architectural studio than to the institutional construct of a museum.

The Boilerhouse was certainly different from most museums of the period: it was administratively light on its feet, with no permanent collection and no keepers; it emphasized its clean, modernist aesthetic as opposed to the Victorian galleries and antiquated display cases of museums in the main building of the V&A; it addressed popular culture head-on and presented objects as part of a narrative, rather than according to museological organizational techniques such as chronology, typology, or materials; and it was privately funded and deeply enmeshed with commerce. It was also fuelled by a subjective, editorializing approach. Influenced by Henry Cole's 'Chamber of Horrors', Bayley said he was 'never been worried about putting my judgment on display'.<sup>628</sup> The Boilerhouse, as an exhibiting framework, therefore, was Conran and Bayley's

---

<sup>627</sup> Stephen Bayley quoted in Kenneth Robinson, *What's On In London*, 13, February, 1981.

<sup>628</sup> The V&A Museum, founded in 1852, included Henry Cole's 'Gallery of False Principles,' which pilloried examples of contemporary design, and came to be 'Chamber of Horrors.' For a fuller account see Christopher Frayling, *Henry Cole and the Chamber of Horrors: The Curious Origins of the V&A* (London: V&A Publishing, 2010).

critique of the institutionalized methods of collecting, curating, and exhibiting design.

Nevertheless, The Boilerhouse was nurtured by its host, as the critic and historian Robert Hewison puts it, 'like a mutant strain [...] within the viscera of the V&A Museum'.<sup>629</sup> And in 1989, Conran and Bayley turned the Project into an actual museum, a cornerstone of Conran's £200 million Docklands Butler's Wharf redevelopment project. By that point Conran was happy to use the label 'museum' to help confer cultural status upon his development, not least because it would set 'the tone for retailing'.<sup>630</sup>

It was always Conran's goal that The Boilerhouse should increase his market base and deliver more educated and eager consumers into his stores.<sup>631</sup> This aim was fulfilled most explicitly when Conran's own goods, or the goods of appliance companies he endorsed through Habitat, such as Russell Hobbs or Braun, were included in an exhibition. The larger goal, though, was to make the exhibition visitor feel as if he had good taste and to empower him to demonstrate this discernment through buying things. This meant introducing the potential consumer to the accoutrements of a modern designer lifestyle and allowing him to feel familiar in this milieu, so that next time he happened upon a Habitat catalogue, the world it represented would feel recognizable and he would be ready to make informed purchases. A 1982 *Reader's Digest* article about Conran credited the 'Conran style' with an ability to span 'age groups, class barriers and national boundaries' and quoted a *Le Monde* piece which said, 'The Habitat style is a phenomenon of our times, so well-defined that no one who buys

---

<sup>629</sup> Robert Hewison, *Culture and Consensus: England, Art and Politics since 1940* (London: Methuen, 1995) pp. 271-272.

<sup>630</sup> 'A Tale of Two Cities' advertisement for Butler's Wharf, *Blueprint*, 1989. In her speech at the museum's opening Margaret Thatcher, who endorsed the museum's fund raising campaign to leading industrialists, said she thought the term Museum 'something that is really rather dead', and that she'd prefer to think of it as an 'exhibition centre', which sounded more 'living', suggesting another way in which, when the Boilerhouse had been billed as an exhibition center – before it became the Design Museum – it was meshed with Thatcher's 'enterprise culture.'

<sup>631</sup> Stephen Bayley, personal interview, 6 January, 2011.

there needs a decorator. It is not just a style but a lifestyle'.<sup>632</sup>

As Bayley remembered it, even though Conran never asked for his products to be included in exhibitions, the business arrangement was such that, "I'll give you a million shares, but part of the design education has to be construed about teaching people about the Conran Way. The more you promote awareness of design the more they'll go to Habitat and the more money I'll give you." Bayley recollected, 'It was meant to be a glorious circle'.<sup>633</sup>

Glorious indeed for Conran, the V&A (which, according to Christopher Wilk benefited from the increase in visitors and tested the market for its Twentieth Century Gallery which opened in 1989), for the numerous design and architecture magazines spawned around this time – especially *Blueprint*, for which The Boilerhouse provided so much material and controversial quotation – and glorious for Bayley, whose career as a mediagenic style guru was launched so emphatically through his role as director.<sup>634</sup> But this circular flow of culture and capital was more problematic for critics who were sceptical of the actual value of the Habitat lifestyle to the general public. As Judith Williamson remarked, 'lifestyle and lifestyle choices makes an overlay, a thin veneer, on distinctions that are actually *class* distinctions. The idea that you can choose your place in society through the things you buy is complete nonsense'.<sup>635</sup>

### **Bayley's Dust-off canister of taste**

In autumn of 1983 The Boilerhouse mounted 'Taste: An Exhibition about Values in Design'. The show was intended to provoke and unsettle; the concept of taste encompassed issues of class, social, economic, and cultural capital – as well as the fact that taste was, as Bayley observed, 'among the

<sup>632</sup> 'He Sells Living in Style' *Readers Digest*, February 1982, p.51.

<sup>633</sup> Stephen Bayley, personal interview, 6 January, 2011.

<sup>634</sup> Christopher Wilk, 'Collecting the Twentieth Century' V&A website, [http://www.vam.ac.uk/vastatic/microsites/1159\\_grand\\_design/essay-collecting-the\\_new.html](http://www.vam.ac.uk/vastatic/microsites/1159_grand_design/essay-collecting-the_new.html) [accessed 9, October, 2013].

<sup>635</sup> Judith Williamson, personal interview, 4 August, 2010.



processes we use to make judgments about design'.<sup>636</sup> The exhibition was also calculated to impress with its historical purview; Bayley created a narrative in six parts, which told the history of taste and design, the way it had been philosophized upon, constructed, and materialized through objects at different historical junctures from the eighteenth century onwards.<sup>637</sup> He labelled these phases The Antique Ideal, Mass Consumption, A New Way, The Romance of the Machine, Pluralism, and Kitsch.

The exhibition was designed by the graphic design firm Minale Tattersfield, who, with Bayley, developed a conceit whereby objects were displayed either on upturned galvanized steel dustbins or on white plinths, depending on Bayley's view of their 'taste value'. The identity for the show was rendered in a three-dimensional model at the entrance, which performed as a key to the exhibition's organizing device. The word 'Taste' was spelled out with the 'T' in Roman type made out of oak and resting on a white plinth to indicate the tasteful end of the spectrum and the 'E' made of pink synthetic fur and resting on a dustbin, aesthetic worlds away. (See Illustration 4-5)

---

<sup>636</sup> Stephen Bayley, *Taste: An Exhibition about Values in Design* (London: The Conran Foundation, 1983) , p.11.

<sup>637</sup> In the catalogue Bayley anthologized authors who had addressed the confluence of taste and design ranging from Henry Morley and Charles Eastlake to Nicholas Pevsner and Jules Lubbock.



Illustration 4. Identity for the 'Taste' exhibition at The Boilerhouse, 1983, designed by Minale Tattersfield and rendered in a three-dimensional model at the entrance.



Illustration 5. Interior shot of the 'Taste' exhibition at The Boilerhouse, 1983, showing how objects that Bayley deemed to be kisch were rested atop dustbins.

One of the most publicized controversies to arise from this show was when Bayley put a model of the architect Terry Farrell's postmodern TV-AM Studios in the 'Kitsch' section of the show, albeit resting on both a dustbin *and* a plinth. This decision incensed Farrell, who wrote a letter of complaint and, on the second day of the show, sent members of his studio to remove the model.<sup>638</sup> Bayley left the plinths where they were and in place of the model he put Farrell's letter and a Polaroid he had taken of the model being carried away. This move and his loaded descriptions of postmodern architecture such as 'ham-fisted decoration, the techniques of shoplifting rather than building', also upset some architecture critics, such as Colin Amery, who, writing in the *Financial Times*, said he saw this as evidence of 'how far Bayley is from understanding the new climate of Postmodern architecture'.<sup>639</sup>

Bayley's choice of a dustbin as a display device did not refer to the overuse of resources or the concept of built-in obsolescence, although it may have conjured recent memories of the 1979 dustmen's strike in London, when uncollected rubbish was strewn around the streets prompting concerns over public health. *Harper & Queen's* Anne Engel asked, 'Is the museum to become [...] the show-place of the detritus of a Keep Britain Tidy campaign?' Another comment in the visitors' book simply concluded: 'Rubbish'.<sup>640</sup>

The use of unused and shining galvanized steel dustbins as display devices in the clean, white-tiled environment that resembled a hospital was emblematic of The Boilerhouse's attempts to define a sanitized territory for design and thereby to repress and extinguish the illness and pollution of everyday life. 'Modernism means an overwhelming urge to tidy up. And we wanted to show what benefits tidying up could bring', Bayley says.<sup>641</sup>

---

<sup>638</sup> This incident was reported in numerous publications, including *Blueprint: 'Farrell's Fury,' Sour Grapes, Blueprint*, October 1983, p. 26.

<sup>639</sup> Colin Amery, *Financial Times*, 19 September, 1983.

<sup>640</sup> The Keep Britain Tidy campaign had been initiated by the Women's Institute in 1955 and in 1984 it became a limited company.

<sup>641</sup> Stephen Bayley, personal interview, 6 January, 2011.

The anthropologist Mary Douglas has studied the symbolic nature of notions of impurity and dirt in relation to a range of societies, writing that, 'reflection on dirt involves reflection on the relation of order to disorder, being to non-being, form to formlessness, life to death'.<sup>642</sup> Her observations of the ways in which societies react to dirt point to an illuminating parallel in the ways in which curators, retailers, editors, and writers often approach designed objects: 'Dirt offends against order. Eliminating it is not a negative movement, but a positive effort to organize the environment'.<sup>643</sup>

Curating an exhibition about taste-making was both about creating order and drawing evaluative distinctions between dirty, disordered, distasteful real life and the carefully selected, hygienic constructions of an idealized and exotic designer lifestyle. Tellingly, Bayley's 'favourite toy', as reported in a *Times* article, was a 'Falcon Safety Products' Dust Off canister of compressed air for blasting dust away'.<sup>644</sup>

In an article titled 'Three Kinds of Dirt', Judith Williamson deconstructed the *Hoover Book of Home Management*.<sup>645</sup> She described the three kinds of carpet dirt identified by Hoover and the 'particular dangers' posed by each type, and then the three cleaning principles that can banish them. She was both amused and disheartened at how 'the product is wheeled on as the 'answer' to a 'problem', while in fact the product itself defines the problem it claims to solve'. She wrote, 'Each attachment of your Hoover corresponds to some natural function dictated by the very nature of dirt itself!'<sup>646</sup> She drew a parallel between Hoover's marketing practices and those of washing powders that introduced the problem of a 'biological stain' in order to provide the solution of a

---

<sup>642</sup> Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of the Concepts of Pollution and Taboo*, (New York: Routledge, 2000) pp. 2-6.

<sup>643</sup> Ibid.

<sup>644</sup> Robin Young, 'The Great Taste Test; *The Times*, November 14, 1983, p. 7.

<sup>645</sup> Judith Williamson, 'Three Kinds of Dirt', 1984, in *Consuming Passions: The Dynamics of Popular Culture* (London: Marion Boyars Publishing, 1987), pp. 223-227.

<sup>646</sup> Ibid. p. 225.

biological washing powder which is required to combat it. No matter that the washing powder is in fact a *chemical* substance, it must be named to match the stain. The product must be distinguished from its rivals. And it does this by defining the world around it, creating new categories out of previously undifferentiated areas of experience [...] It takes the law to define 'crime'; it takes medicine to define 'sickness'; it takes science to define 'nature'; and it takes Hoover to define the *three kinds of dirt*.<sup>647</sup>

In 1980s design discourse, the notion of taste, presented as an ineffable quality which could only be understood by an elite few, was proffered, like Hoover products, as a panacea for the lack of taste on the part of the many – a problem most people did not know they had until it was labelled as such.

Bayley's views on the cleansing potential of taste, evident in the exhibition, were even more direct in the press. He was called on with frequency by the Sunday supplements to offer his opinions on what was 'in' or 'out', 'good' or 'bad'. The in-and-out list was a staple editorial feature. The same labelling, binary mindset was used by Bayley, York, and Sudjic in their taxonomical or field-guide-like books and essays to help their readers navigate designer lifestyle territory. And it was materialized in the dustbin/plinth device in the 'Taste' show. Mary Blume of the *Herald Tribune* wrote, 'Both (taste and manners) have been absorbed into the ever changing and repellent notion of lifestyle, and the main thing about lifestyle is that a new set of self-named judges is constantly determining what is good and bad in terms of what is in and out'.<sup>648</sup>

In a piece in the *Sunday Express* he told readers, addressing them in an exaggeratedly hectoring and direct second person:

Every time you buy something you exercise your taste [...] If you think about it you will find that you prefer neatness and restraint. In the end these qualities are more rewarding than confusion and excess [...] Why do you have a gold wristwatch? This metal is inappropriate for the intended purpose. Steel or plastic is better. Perhaps you want to look like a Libyan arms dealer [...] Your choice of the Honesty pattern toaster declares you to be the sort of person who will cheerfully admit, 'I love buying cynical junk. Anything the marketing department does is

---

<sup>647</sup> Ibid. p. 227.

<sup>648</sup> Mary Blume, *Herald Tribune*.

good enough for me'. If 'country kitchen' is what you want, you'd be better off buying a griddle.<sup>649</sup>

The most emphatic demonstration of the forces of 'neatness and restraint' was to be found in Bayley's office, which adjoined The Boilerhouse gallery space, and was often considered to be one of the exhibits. The office was designed by Oliver Gregory, one of Conran Associates' founding members, and can be seen as a tangible manifestation of the studied way in which Bayley presented his public image as a modernist and academic aesthete. He told Fiona McCarthy that he 'drank' *Pevsner's Pioneers of Modern Design*.<sup>650</sup> Bayley recalls that in his role as director of The Boilerhouse, he was 'part of a missionary campaign to clarify, modernize, and make the world more comfortable, polite and delightful through the application of a chaste version of modern design'.<sup>651</sup> (See Illustration 6)



Illustration 6. Stephen Bayley's office at The Boilerhouse designed by Oliver Gregory.

<sup>649</sup> Stephen Bayley, *Sunday Express*.

<sup>650</sup> Fiona MacCarthy, 'A Lot of Things', *London*, June 1989, p. 8.

<sup>651</sup> Stephen Bayley, personal interview, 6 January, 2011.

Architecture critic Gavin Stamp, writing in *The Spectator*, described the office with obvious disdain both for its occupant's exhibitionism and for its high-tech and modernist appurtenances: 'The venetian blind in the large internal window of the director's office is always left ever-so-slightly open, so the public can see a carefully posed, High Tec, Clockwork Orange interior. The office is lit by one of those thin, contrived Italian light fittings...'.<sup>652</sup>

Roy Strong, director of the V&A Museum, warned Bayley, 'Remember you are not an exhibit even though your office is a lit-up showcase in which you sit, Tussauds-like, but a human being with passions and feelings and foibles, whose expression explodes in clutter, the true mirrors of humanity and sentiment'.<sup>653</sup>

Peter York was also fascinated by Bayley's office and in particular by the curator-on-display phenomenon. In a BBC Radio Four piece, he ends his contribution with: 'If you go into the corner, there's a special glass box, with an art person working, simultaneously reading a magazine and talking on the telephone [...] that's the one pièce de résistance, and it's marked "Young Master Stephen Bayley", who runs the thing. And that's the real art show'.<sup>654</sup>

A full-page article in the *Times*, titled the 'Great Taste Test', analysed the interiors of Bayley's office and home, as well as his personal style.<sup>655</sup> The piece was divided into sections: 'Exhibit A: Bayley at Work', 'Exhibit B: Bayley at Home'.<sup>656</sup> This diptych amounted to an exaggeratedly parodic account of Bayley's carefully wrought tastes and cultivated eccentricities. The *Times* article panned lingeringly across the surfaces of Bayley's office:

---

<sup>652</sup> Gavin Stamp, 'Hard Boiled and Half Baked', *The Spectator*, 27 February, 1982.

<sup>653</sup> Roy Strong, quoted in Robin Young, 'The Great Taste Test', *The Times*, Monday, November 14, 1983, p. 7.

<sup>654</sup> Peter York, transcript, BBC Radio 4.

<sup>655</sup> Robin Young 'The Great Taste Test', *The Times*, Monday, November 14, 1983, p. 7.

<sup>656</sup> The fact that Sir Roy Strong, director of the V&A, gave such a damning verdict on Bayley and his exhibits, suggests that even by 1983, Strong's enthusiasm for his wayward basement guests must have been waning.

He makes his coffee black, for 'purity of vision', and drinks from an Apilco cup and saucer – not in the familiar green and gold favoured by French brasseries, but white lined with silver grey. The principal furniture is a black Conran table surrounded by black and chrome Mies van de Rohe chairs. Down shelving on one sidewall are ranged magazines of the technology and design business – 'my daily reading' – but among the vivid display are *Forbes*, *New York*, *Atlantic* and *French Vogue*.

On the desk in a white porcelain vase there are always white flowers. Beneath them is a British Telecom push button telephone resprayed to Bayley's requirement in quiet dove grey. "It is the ordinary parrot vomit colour underneath, which I am afraid you can see where it is flaking. The original purity of the design, I feel, has been extensively fouled up by British Telecom".

At the front of the desk is a spirit level – 'alas you see my desk is not perfectly right' – and a toy model of the 'world's most beautiful car – Pininfarina's Lancia Aurelia B20GT – in original grey'. At Bayley's side is his dark grey electronic typewriter, an Olivetti ET121.

Illumination comes from a giraffe-necked and tiny-headed black Tizio lamp by Richard Sapper for Artemide of Italy.<sup>657</sup>

After the guided tour of Bayley's Vauxhall home, which he shared with his wife Flo Bayley, senior graphic designer at Conran Associates, the reporter concluded, 'He must have been aching, I realize now, for someone to come and write about his taste'.<sup>658</sup> If, as Bayley averred, 'the major mechanism for establishing good taste is through a small elite of influential individuals who spark off the public's tastebuds', then he was clearly comfortable with being portrayed as an integral part of the 'Taste' exhibit.

The museum exhibition format began to look rather constricting to Bayley. He became increasingly enamored with other vehicles for expression including fiction writing and especially television. If his Boilerhouse exhibitions were more like magazine articles than exhibits, then the ones he had begun to plan at the Design Museum, which opened in 1989, leaned more toward television as a model. Bayley's plans for the museum included sharing research costs for the temporary exhibitions with television companies, who would then go to make

---

<sup>657</sup> Robin Young, 'The Great Taste Test; *The Times*, November 14, 1983, p. 7.

<sup>658</sup> *Ibid.*



programmes on the same themes.<sup>659</sup> Bayley explained that, 'the process of organizing an exhibition is much the same as making a TV programme, you get an idea, write a script, do a storyboard and interview people [...] The Design Museum will turn its exhibitions into television, creating a far wider constituency'.<sup>660</sup>

Indeed, 'Commerce and Culture', the Design Museum's inaugural exhibition in 1989, may well have given the visitor the sensation of passing through the sets of a television studio. The exhibition included full-scale reconstructions of the entrance to an American shopping mall, a Corinthian column from the Earls Court Sainsbury's store, and of Brucciani's gallery of casts found in the cast courts of the V&A. These examples of reconstructed reconstructions illustrated a historicizing impulse evident in postmodern design and architecture and drew attention to the artifice, as well as the expense, of exhibition making.<sup>661</sup> Reviewers of the exhibition noted visitors' confusion when greeted by such an eclectic 'jumble of objects'. Sudjic thought the exhibition 'an anxiety-inducing experience, in which the visitor is assaulted on all sides by music and layered images', but he did concede that the chief purpose of the exhibition 'is to explore just what the terms of discussion of design can be'.<sup>662</sup>

*Blueprint* and *The Boilerhouse* opened up a vibrant, polemic discussion to an expanded audience. Despite self-awareness on the part of *Blueprint*, and an apolitical stance on the part of *The Boilerhouse*, however, they were quintessential products of the entrepreneurial individualism espoused by the Thatcher government. Centrally positioned in the nation's capital and within design and architectural practice, and deeply entangled with corporate concerns, these media and museological entities were disinclined to provide critical commentary on the social

---

<sup>659</sup> Barbara Usherwood, 'The Design Museum: Form Follows Funding', *Design Issues*: Vol VII, Number 2, Spring 1991, p.87.

<sup>660</sup> Stephen Bayley, 'A Haven For Modern Muses', *Weekend Guardian*, 1-2 July, 1989.

<sup>661</sup> The exhibition budget allotted £150,00 to the reconstructions. Commerce and Culture exhibition budget, January 9, 1989. Design Museum archive, uncatalogued.

<sup>662</sup> Deyan Sudjic, 'Commercial but Cultured', *Blueprint*, September 1989, p.62.

ramifications of consumer practice. Other figures, such as the critics Dick Hebdige and Judith Williamson, more marginally located in design discourse, were both more interested and able to attain critical distance on the phenomenon of the designer lifestyle. Their work will be explored in the next section of this chapter.

**PART THREE: DICK HEBDIGE'S AND JUDITH WILLIAMSON'S  
PATHOLOGICAL AND POLITICAL CRITIQUES OF STYLE**

**Dick Hebdige: cruising the postmodern condition**

During the mid-1980s, Dick Hebdige lived in Dalston, in London's East End. Based on interest in his 1979 book *Subculture: The Meaning of Style*, in which he had explored the ways in which subcultures appropriated and reconfigured the meanings of images and objects, Hebdige was asked to write for academic journals like *Block* and *Ten.8* as well as for design magazines like *Blueprint* and socialist publications like *Marxism Today*. He also taught in the Communications department at Goldsmiths College, where he enjoyed 'being in the shadow of practice'. He said, 'I was always trying to get away from theory, being defined as a theorist'. He wanted to write academically and critically, 'to be a public intellectual', and because the publications didn't pay well, or at all, he used teaching to fund the writing.<sup>663</sup>

Having grown up in Fulham, London, Hebdige saw himself as urban, and when it came to choosing a university, he eschewed Oxbridge and picked Birmingham instead, because it was the second-largest city in Britain. He read English Literature and spent his third year in the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS) while its founder Stuart Hall was director. He recalled that even though the 'revolutionary type students saw that I was a decadent proletarian', Hall took him on as a

---

<sup>663</sup> More income came from public speaking, which he was increasingly asked to do during this period. Rather than delivering succinct papers, Hebdige chose a looser and more experimental and performance based mode of delivery, which he likens to DJ-ing, where he would 'stitch' ideas together as a way of 'working through, rather than about something.' Dick Hebdige, personal interview, 3 April, 2011.

student based on the ethnographic work Hebdige had begun on pubs in Fulham.<sup>664</sup> In 1984 Hebdige suffered a psychotic episode while trying to write an essay on masculinity for *New Socialist* magazine.<sup>665</sup> 'I was writing this thing and I just got stuck. It was a bit like *The Shining*. I didn't sleep for days. I did automatic writing. And then I jumped out a window, first floor, and ran off shouting. I thought I was John the Baptist. And the police found me in a giant plastic shoe. It was behind the college, where the carnival stored all their stuff. It was inside this giant boot. And it's got this cross on it, with light bulbs and I thought I was on the cross'.<sup>666</sup>

Hebdige was committed to a psychiatric ward and upon his release he reflected on his breakdown in an essay published the next year in *Ten.8*, titled 'Some Sons and Their Fathers'.<sup>667</sup> In the piece he attempted to come to terms with the way in which he had built a masculine identity from fragments of other masculine identities and father figures portrayed in the news, in fiction, his own life, and recent cultural memory. Feeling as if with the breakdown a narcissistic mirror had shattered, he considered both the example of female role models and the reality of his own father as a way forward in his identity-rebuilding process. The piece was a montage of autobiographical, observed, and imagined scenes told in voices that shifted from the public to the personal, from autobiography to polemic, and to narrative accounts of current events such as the miner's strike, Youth Training Schemes, and the deaths of Diana Dors and Alan Lake. As he explained his method in the piece, 'By trying to speak in more than one

---

<sup>664</sup> In one of the pubs Hebdige had met a charismatic man who was 'an artist but also a kind of villain' from a gypsy background and who became the subject of his undergraduate dissertation, published in the CCCS Occasional Papers as 'Subcultural Conflict and Criminal Performance in Fulham (West London).' It explored the deployment of the 'wind up' – a linguistic narrative strategy that Hebdige described as, 'When you're not sure when what someone says is true or not.' Hebdige was drawn to what he identified as the use of 'coded language', and 'silent signs' performed between the man and other pub-goers. He recalled that it was 'incredibly exotic to me. This is where my definition of criticality comes from – having this very unstable distinction between play and not play.' The game of identifying the coded references of various subcultures was one that preoccupied Hebdige throughout his career. Dick Hebdige, personal interview, 3 April, 2011.

<sup>665</sup> In-house journal of the Labour Party.

<sup>666</sup> Dick Hebdige, personal interview, 3 April, 2011.

<sup>667</sup> Dick Hebdige, 'Some Sons and their Fathers', *The Impossible Self*, Winnipeg Art Gallery, 1988, pp. 71-82.

dimension – by using different voices and images – I am trying to explore certain possibilities which a more straight-forward approach would, I think, ignore'.<sup>668</sup>

Hebdige considered that his breakdown and hospitalization both 'broke' and profoundly 'changed' him. Upon his release he felt very strongly that what had happened was 'a gift' to his writing, observing, 'Maybe it's a romantic thing, not to murder the madman, but to let it come out in the writing'. Hebdige was interested in developing a mode of writing in which he could channel his own mental instability to achieve a new quality of insight and expression. 'I was trying to go in there and do it differently, and come out in a different way. Like you go into the underworld. And to me that's what writing is—you enter into this other dimension. And it is always a risk and an adventure'.<sup>669</sup>

This section considers two of Hebdige's articles from the mid-late 1980s, paying attention to the ways in which they provided a critique of notions of style, lifestyle, and taste presented to the public via *Blueprint* magazine and The Boilerhouse Project, as well as being illustrative of Hebdige's experimental writing project.

#### **'A Report on the Western Front'**

In his essay 'A Report on the Western Front: Postmodernism and the "Politics" of Style', published in *Block 12* in 1986/87, Hebdige continued to forge the connection between psychosis and schizophrenia and the contemporary preoccupation with style, basing his thinking on theorists such as Jacques Lacan, Fredric Jameson and Jean Baudrillard.<sup>670</sup>

In the essay 'Postmodernism and Consumer Society', Jameson, in an argument influenced by Lacan, had drawn a comparison

---

<sup>668</sup> Ibid. p. 72.

<sup>669</sup> Dick Hebdige, personal interview, 3 April, 2011.

<sup>670</sup> Dick Hebdige, 'A Report on the Western Front: Postmodernism and the "Politics" of Style,' *Block 12*, 1986/87, pp. 4-26.

between the postmodern condition and schizophrenia.<sup>671</sup> As Hebdige summarized it, 'For Jameson there is the schizophrenic consumer disintegrating into a succession of inassimilable instants, condemned through the ubiquity and instantaneousness of commodified images and instants to live forever in *chronos* (this then this then this) without having access to the (centering) sanctuary of *kairos* (cyclical, mythical, meaningful time)'.<sup>672</sup> Baudrillard had also considered the state of schizophrenia to be symptomatic of the postmodern age, and averred that it was not only confusing, but terrifying: 'We are now in a new form of schizophrenia. No more hysteria, no more projective paranoia, but this state of terror proper to the schizophrenic [...] The schizophrenic can no longer produce the limits of its own being [...] He is only a pure screen'.<sup>673</sup>

The subject matter in 'Report on the Western Front', which includes Disneyland, science fiction, urban lifestyles, consumption practices, advertising, and photography, allowed Hebdige to discuss the ideological nature of representation, the confusion of reality or authenticity with unreality or hyperreality. Yet his aim was not to decode these confusions, to reveal some true meaning beneath them, but rather to glance off and reflect upon their very surfaces as a way to empirically approximate and to channel-surf his way through the experience of living in a postmodern age.

The symptoms of psychosis include disorganized thought and speech, delusions, mania, a loss of touch with reality, and hallucinations. Many of these symptoms found their equivalents in the physical form of Hebdige's article 'Report on the Western Front'. The psychotic state Hebdige associated with consumerism was embodied in the very structure and texture of

---

<sup>671</sup> Fredric Jameson, 'Postmodernism and Consumer Society' in Hal Foster, ed. *The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays on Postmodern Culture*, (New York: The New Press, 1998), pp. 127-144. Originally delivered as a lecture at the Whitney Museum, autumn, 1982.

<sup>672</sup> Dick Hebdige, 'The Impossible Object: Towards a Sociology of the Sublime', *New Formations*, number 1, Spring 1987, p. 69.

<sup>673</sup> Jean Baudrillard, 'The Ecstasy of Communication', trans. John Johnston, in Hal Foster, ed. *The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays on Postmodern Culture*, (New York: The New Press, 1998), p. 132.

his writing. His method was to immerse himself as a writer into the subject matter and to create an authorial character, a particular voice or set of voices to deal with the material. In the case of this article, he wrote the foreword from the point of view of Ubik, a character from a Philip K Dick novel. Ubik talks of 'Dick' (Philip K. Dick) and 'dick' (Dick Hebidge) and the way in which the latter was influenced by the former's 1978 lecture/essay 'How to Build a Universe that Doesn't Fall Apart Two Days Later', in which Philip K. Dick discussed his lifelong fascination with Disneyland, the nature of reality, and the authentic human being. The Ubik foreword set up a conceptual frame of reference for Hebidge's article – essential philosophical questions of theology, simulation and inauthenticity – and highlighted the correspondences between the Dick essay and Hebidge's article ('the same limited obsessions... the same underlying structure of preference and aversion, the same general drift – the scary, funny ride through 'Disneyland' and then the journey home'). In its simulation of schizophrenia through the use of multiple voices, the foreword also established a mood of confused identity, which was a thematic concern in the rest of the article.<sup>674</sup>

After the foreword, the article switched to the first person. This was the voice of Hebidge as academic, speaking both to his audience of art and design students – the article was based on a Bill Chaitken Memorial Lecture he gave at Central School of Art in London in 1985 – and to the *Block* readership of his academic peers. It launched with a 270-word sentence, an intentionally unwieldy catalogue of the elements of the postmodern 'predicament', from 'the layout of a page in a fashion magazine' and 'the décor of a room' to the 'collective chagrin and morbid projections of a Post War generation of baby boomers confronting disillusioned middle age'. The extensiveness of the list was used by Hebidge to demonstrate postmodernism's own schizophrenic state, its 'semantic

---

<sup>674</sup> Dick Hebidge, 'A Report on the Western Front: Postmodernism and the "Politics" of Style,' *Block* 12, 1986/87 p.6.

complexity', and its status as a contemporary catchall 'buzzword'.<sup>675</sup>

In order to write about such a multifaceted entity as postmodernism, Hebdige proposed to approach it from an oblique angle, which he said necessitated the article's 'eccentric trajectory'. The article juxtaposed images, arguments, and parables in an attempt to 'reproduce on paper the flow and grain of television discourse switching back and forth between different channels'. Much of the work of his critique, then, was done not in the conventionally academic form of a linearly developed argument, but rather through the form of the article itself, a distracted assemblage of textual and visual fragments. The sudden scene switches and new topics returned the reader to square one at each new section, but as the scenes accumulate they create both an impressionistic portrait of the postmodern condition and a composite argument composed of Hebdige's disjointed critiques.

A key tactic of Post-Structuralist theorists was wordplay. This was, in part, the legacy of Jacques Derrida's work on language *Of Grammatology*, which was an influential text for Hebdige and his fellow students at the CCCS.<sup>676</sup> Similarly, Baudrillard rarely passed up an opportunity to use punning, assonance, and other linguistic tinkering to draw attention to the flexibility and multiple meanings of language, as well as to the surface of his text.<sup>677</sup>

Hebdige channelled some of these tendencies, especially when he wrote about Baudrillard: 'In the (ob)scenario sketched out by Jean Baudrillard [...] the metaphor of television as the nether-eye (never I)'. Hebdige even commented on himself doing it: 'Somewhere in the middle, between the seminar and the

---

<sup>675</sup> Ibid. pp. 6-7.

<sup>676</sup> *Of Grammatology* was published in 1967 and made available in an English translation in 1976 published by John Hopkins Press.

<sup>677</sup> As Peter Barry observes in *Beginning Theory*, 'Post-Structuralist writing [...] tends to be [...] emotive. Often the tone is urgent and euphoric, and the style flamboyant and self-consciously showy. Titles may well contain puns and allusions, and often the central line of argument is based on a pun or a world-play of some kind'. Peter Barry, *Beginning Theory: An Introduction to Literary and Cultural Theory*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2009) p. 61.

cinema sits the work of Jean Baudrillard (the rhyme seminar/cinema/Baudrillard is an irritating if apposite coincidence...)'.<sup>678</sup> Hebdige's self-reflective incursions interrupt the flow, forcing a reader's attention back to the experience of negotiating the article, which was an integral part of the article's argument.

While the aim of 'Report on the Western Front' was to 'cruise the postmodern condition' in its entirety, within this larger purpose, Hebdige focused specifically on the ways in which style and lifestyle epitomized aspects of postmodernism, in ways that connect and contrast to the other writers discussed in this chapter. 'There are plenty of signs of the Post on the frantic surfaces of style and 'lifestyle' in the mid to late 80's', he wrote, as a way to narrow his field, to allow him to reference particular examples, and to introduce another more positive view of postmodernism which connects to the concerns of criticism: 'it often gets depicted [...] as a celebration of what is there and what might be possible...'<sup>679</sup> He wrote of 'a growing public familiarity with formal and representational codes, a profusion of consumption 'lifestyles', cultures, subcultures; a generalized sensitivity to style (as language, as option, as game) and to difference – ethnic, gender, regional and local difference: what Fredric Jameson has called "heterogeneity without norms"'.<sup>680</sup>

Hebdige referred to an 'Ideal Consumer' of the late 1980s as an, 'it', stripped of personal pronouns in reference to the latest urban fashion for transgendered experimentation. He described this ideal consumer as 'a bundle of contradictions: monstrous, brindled, hybrid'.<sup>681</sup> It was 'a young but powerful (ie. Solvent) Porsche owning gender bender who wears Katherine Hamnett skirts and Gucci loafers, watched Dallas on air and Eastenders on video, drinks lager, white wine or Grolsch and Cointreau, uses tampons, smokes St Bruno pipe tobacco, and uses Glintz hair color, cooks nouvelle cuisine and eats out at

<sup>678</sup> Dick Hebdige, 'A Report on the Western Front: Postmodernism and the "Politics" of Style,' *Block 12*, 1986/87, p. 7.

<sup>679</sup> Ibid. p. 11.

<sup>680</sup> Ibid. p. 12.

<sup>681</sup> Ibid. p. 13.



McDonalds, is an international jetsetter who holidays in the Caribbean and lives in a mock-Georgian mansion in Milton Keynes with an MFI self-assembled kitchen unit, an Amstrad computer and a custom-built jacuzzi'.<sup>682</sup> Hebdige's characterization of an impossible being, indulging all of its contradictory desires, as well as its national, cultural, class, and sexual identities with a motley of conflicting brands and lifestyle choices, points to a schizophrenic state of being, where fantasy and reality collide in a dystopian orgy of consumer choice, symbolic of the postmodern condition. 'It [the postmodern consumer] is a complete social and psychological mess'.<sup>683</sup> This account of dual-gender consumer values provided a compelling counterpoint to the narratives presented by The Boilerhouse and *Blueprint*, which when they did consider the use of designed products, privileged a male viewpoint.

In a section of the article that deals with what Hebdige terms 'A Monetarist Imagery', he analysed the Habitat catalogue, which, first introduced in 1966, was one of the furnishing company's primary marketing tools. In 'A Matter of Taste' in *Designing* in 1983, James Woudhuysen wrote about the Habitat catalogue and Terence Conran's role in nurturing a consumer base in Britain for clean, modern design. Woudhuysen described the catalogue as being 'thick with pastel-shaded blinds, jolly Anglepoise lamps and tables that look so wholesome and chunky they could almost double as chopping boards'. In explaining the catalogue's role in facilitating Conran's mission to improve the taste of his potential market, Woudhuysen wrote: 'The Brixtonians buy it; so, every year, do a million other people in Britain.'<sup>684</sup> It has been designer and entrepreneur Sir Terence Conran's singular achievement to find them and train them to trust his sense of form, line and colour, come what may'.<sup>685</sup> Where Woudhuysen's account suggests his scepticism of Conran's role as a 'trainer' of the public, Hebdige's reading

---

<sup>682</sup> Ibid.

<sup>683</sup> Ibid. p. 14

<sup>684</sup> The catalogue was sold at £1.25 in the early 1980s, double the price of other lifestyle magazines such as *The Face*.

<sup>685</sup> James Woudhuysen, 'A Matter of Taste', *Designing*, 1983.

of the catalogue and Conran's influence, was much darker, and illustrates how forcefully his perspectives clashed with those of most design journalists of the period. Hebdige saw the catalogue as a paradigmatic example of a 'consumer aesthetic which privileges the criterion of looking good, of style – a theology of appearances – over virtually everything else'.<sup>686</sup> He considered the Habitat catalogue, like glossy magazines, commercials, and mail-order catalogues, as a 'dreamscape' in which 'future markets are invited to meet existing products'. (This concept recalls Richard Hamilton's evocation in 'The Persuading Image' of manufacturers in 1950s America 'moulding' consumers to fit products they had already created, discussed in Chapter One). Hebdige credited Habitat with pioneering what he calls 'syntax selling' – where consumers were encouraged to buy into a particular lifestyle by purchasing a complete ensemble of furniture and products.<sup>687</sup>

Hebdige compared Conran's ability to provide niche products for emerging niche markets to Pierre Bourdieu's concept of "habitus" – the internalized system of socially structured, class specific gestures, tastes, aspirations, dispositions which can dictate everything from an individual's "body hexis" to her/his education performance, speech, dress and perception of life opportunities'.<sup>688</sup> Acknowledging that Conran's goal was to generate profits, to educate the public, and to raise the general standard of design in Britain, Hebdige also observed that 'it may also incidentally lead to the development of the 'cultivated habitus', a 'semi-learned grammar' of good taste which would serve to perpetuate a hierarchy of taste by establishing a scale ranging from excellence (mastery of the code), the rule converted into a habitus capable of playing with the rule of the game, through the strict conformity of those condemned merely to execute, to the dispossession of the layman'.<sup>689</sup>

---

<sup>686</sup> Dick Hebdige, 'A Report on the Western Front: Postmodernism and the "Politics" of Style,' *Block 12*, 1986/87, p. 19.

<sup>687</sup> Ibid.

<sup>688</sup> Ibid. p. 20.

<sup>689</sup> Ibid.

The room settings and complementary ensembles of household items on display in the Habitat catalogue provided the consumer with the 'security and imaginary coherence of prescribed life style sequences', Hebdige asserted. This type of marketing is a form of 'institutionalized therapy for the psychotic consumer' which he imagined thus: 'This is the chair to sit in, the food to eat, the plates to eat it off, the table settings to place it in, the cutlery to eat it with. This is the wine to drink with it. These are the glasses to drink the wine in, the clothes to wear, the books to decorate the bookshelves with. Now that Conran has taken over Mothercare, you can colour co-ordinate your entire life from cradle to grave'.<sup>690</sup>

The soothing rhythm of this passage with its repeated clause 'This is..'. in the voice of someone speaking to a mentally ill patient or a young child, cast the lifestyle shopping experience as a form of therapy for the very condition which it gave rise to. Hebdige acknowledges that syntax selling was not unique to the 1980s but what he did identify as new was the 'lack of local resistance' to these increasingly sophisticated marketing strategies due to the 'spread and penetration of market values', enabled in part by *Blueprint* and *The Boilerhouse*.<sup>691</sup>

Reflecting on the role of criticism, however, Hebdige questions whether his criticism was always about resistance. 'It's also about articulation, about creating bridges, and orchestrating transitions, imagining another way of moving forward', he says. 'You're actually giving a prescription, which is also like a piece of marketing, really [...] You have a role to play in shaping opinion [...] it's not about saying 'no' all the time'.<sup>692</sup>

### **'Shopping-Spree in Conran Hell'**

In 'Shopping-Spree in Conran Hell', published in *Block* and

---

<sup>690</sup> Ibid.

<sup>691</sup> Ibid. p. 21.

<sup>692</sup> Dick Hebdige, personal interview, 3 April, 2011.

republished in an edited version as 'Shopping for Souvenirs in the Occupied Zone' in *Blueprint* in 1989, Hebdige recounted a 1988 trip to Eastern Europe through his observations of shopping, shop windows, and consumer behaviours and his own 'captured images' and souvenirs.<sup>693</sup> He contrasted the lacklustre experience of consuming, or attempting to consume, in the Eastern Bloc just prior to the fall of the Berlin Wall, to the excesses of Western shopping habits and in particular to those typified by Habitat stores, likening Poland to a 'Conran Hell', where objects 'look and feel as if they've fallen into the material world from some more shadowy dimension'.<sup>694</sup> Hebdige's 'hunt for souvenirs' acquired an 'unsavoury patina when it's clear that most local people have to spend a large part of their waking lives hunting down the bare necessities, the most minimal kinds of luxury goods'.<sup>695</sup> He returned from the trip with

a spring hipped cardboard suitcase bought in Prague filled with literal souvenirs – a golden plastic saxophone made in Russia, a heavy Czech military issue combination cork screw/can opener in no-nonsense steel, a genuine zinc samovar, a rare half-melted tablet of soft greasy Polish hotel soap, a plastic spoon the colour of fresh egg yolk from Czechoslovakia Air Lines, an assortment of documents: visa and currency exchange stubs, hotel bills, museum, cinema and tram tickets.<sup>696</sup>

His list provides a critical counterpoint both to Banham's catalogue of exotic American 'goodies' in his 1963 autobiographical article 'Who is this Pop?' (discussed in Chapter One of this thesis), and to the numerous lists of expensive designer objects deemed essential to the construction of a designer lifestyle in 1980s London, enumerated on plinths at The Boilerhouse. By importing these mundane Eastern bloc objects and ephemera into the pages of *Blueprint*, he confronted *Blueprint* readers with the realities of privation beyond their Western capsule of privilege, and offered a politicized riposte to the fetishization of luxury

---

<sup>693</sup> Dick Hebdige, 'Shopping-Spree in Conran Hell', in *Block 15* 1989, pp. 56-68. Republished as 'Shopping for Souvenirs in the Occupied Zone', in *Blueprint*, December 1988/January 1989, p. 12.

<sup>694</sup> Dick Hebdige, 'Shopping-Spree in Conran Hell', in *Block 15* 1989, p. 61.

<sup>695</sup> Ibid. p. 56.

<sup>696</sup> Ibid. p. 57.

goods, which was the regular fare of the magazine. And yet through his addition of luxury conferring adjectives such as 'golden', 'genuine', and 'rare', Hebdige ends up romanticizing the objects, almost undercutting his political intention.

Hebdige observed the relationship between 'goods and cultural values' in the dressings of shop windows in which he saw a soured shadow of the American dream of consumption.<sup>697</sup> In Warsaw, where 'scarcity makes for a more generally desolate dreamscape pierced by the odd transcendental shaft of purist aspiration', Hebdige noted that:

Window shopping here takes on an ethereal quality which is enhanced by portraits of the Pope which smile benignly down on empty spaces, dusty glass from the walls of the shop interiors. The typical display: a few items – some hats, or shoes, a doll, a box of unidentified machine parts – are placed against a faded curtain or a piece of paper complete with drawing pins and yellowed in the sun. In the window of one clothes shop they've given up pretending that looking and buying are in any way related. The window is empty except for an old copy of *Vogue* from the late 70's. It lies open in the centre of the window: a sign of a dream or a dream of consumption which may have taken place some time ago and somewhere else.<sup>698</sup>

Hebdige's evocation of the entropic character of consumption was not confined to the Eastern Bloc; in the West, too, in his view, the satisfaction supposed to follow from buying things was similarly inaccessible to most. In 'Western Front', Hebdige describes the claustrophobic nature of a consumption-driven society in which shops represent both the source of discontent and the only available public space for expression of that discontent. He wrote,

Now in 1986 with the steady erosion of social, political, and ideological alternatives, with the ascendancy of the stunted logic of the market, the implication is that there is nowhere else to go but the shops even if all you have to go to the shops with is a bottle and a petrol bomb when you go shopping at midnight for the only things that lift you up and give you

---

<sup>697</sup> Similarly, Czech interior designer Eva Jiricna, said of coming to London in 1968, 'When you first arrive, you are absolutely amazed by being able to choose. You can select any one of 200 carpets, or thousands of bricks. It takes you years to realize that most of them are junk.' Maurice Cooper, 'The Deceptively Simple Style of Eva Jiricna', *Blueprint*, October 1983, p. 15.

<sup>698</sup> Dick Hebdige, 'Shopping-Spree in Conran Hell', in *Block 15* 1989, p. 60.

value: clothes, videos, records, tapes, consumption: high gloss  
i-d, high gloss identity...<sup>699</sup>

Judith Williamson had a less fatalistic view of shopping, at least of the social potential of shopping.<sup>700</sup> Even though she believed that products are used by consumer society to 'channel' and 'contain' extreme emotions such as passion, she admitted that 'consuming products does give a thrill, a sense of both belonging and being different'.<sup>701</sup> She wrote that 'Consumerism is often represented as a supremely individualistic act – yet it is also very social: shopping is a socially endorsed event, a form of social cement. It makes you feel normal. Most people find it cheers them up – even window-shopping'.<sup>702</sup> And in her introduction to *Consuming Passions*, she conjured 'Christmas trips of childhood to Oxford Street' where in the lighted windows she saw 'passions leaping through the plate glass, filling the forms of a hundred products, tracing the shapes of a hundred hopes'.<sup>703</sup>

#### **Judith Williamson: redirecting emotions from objects to actions**

Although she addressed the same kinds of subject matter that Dick Hebdige did, the socialist cultural critic Judith Williamson approached it from a more defined political and class-conscious angle. Her feminism and Marxism were both explicit and implicit in most of what she wrote, and, in line with her politics, she sought a broader audience for her writing, choosing wide-circulation publications such as *Time*

---

<sup>699</sup> Dick Hebdige, 'A Report on the Western Front: Postmodernism and the "Politics" of Style,' *Block 12*, 1986/87, p. 19.

<sup>700</sup> Dick Hebdige characterizes postmodernism as a discourse of negation: 'The discourse of PM is fatal and fatalistic: at every turn the word 'death' opens up to engulf us: 'death of the subject,' death of the author,' death of art, death of reason, end of history. Dick Hebdige, *Hiding in the Light: On Images and Things* (London: Routledge, 1988) p. 210.

<sup>701</sup> Judith Williamson, Introduction, *Consuming Passions: The Dynamics of Popular Culture* (London: Marion Boyars Publishing, 1987), p. 13.

<sup>702</sup> Judith Williamson, 'The Politics of Consumption' in *Consuming Passions: The Dynamics of Popular Culture* (London: Marion Boyars Publishing, 1987), p. 230.

<sup>703</sup> Judith Williamson, Introduction, *Consuming Passions: The Dynamics of Popular Culture* (London: Marion Boyars Publishing, 1987), p. 13.

*Out* and *City Limits* over academic publications such as *Block*. Like Hebdige, Williamson's critiques of consumer culture targeted Thatcherist values, but she was equally critical of the political left, as represented by the British Communist Party (which she saw as having co-opted style as a means of re-branding) and the left-leaning academic community (which she saw as having embraced cultural studies, and in particular, style, grateful for the 'softer' territory of the superstructure and in an attempt to align with contemporary fashion).

In the 1980s Judith Williamson lived on a council estate in Tufnell Park, in North London, and was closely involved in community politics.<sup>704</sup> She wrote cultural and film criticism for publications such as *Time Out*, *City Limits*, *New Statesman* and *Marxism Today*. Whether writing about films, designed products, commercials, or politics, she was critical of the way in which their narratives encouraged viewers, users, and citizens to consume lifestyles from a limited palette of options.

Her parents were from different class backgrounds. 'My father was working class and my mother was from a very upper-middle-class background', a disparity that she thought gave rise to her 'political sense of aesthetics'.<sup>705</sup> Williamson studied English Literature at Sussex University in the School of English and American Studies, with a final year at the University of California, Berkeley. The work she did at Berkeley, developing a semiotic analysis of advertisements using clippings she had been collecting since she was a teenager, was published in 1978 when she was only 22 in the book *Decoding Advertisements*.<sup>706</sup> In 1982, when she graduated from the Royal College of Art with an MA in Film and

---

<sup>704</sup> Williamson was recognized with a Mayor's Civic Award in 2008 for her work for the Brecknock Road Estate Tenants & Residents Association.

<sup>705</sup> Judith Williamson, in an interview with Gerry Beegan, *dot dot dot*, issue 4. Dot dot dot website: [accessed 9 October 2013].

<sup>706</sup> Williamson would continue this practice of filing clippings from newspapers and magazines. Her shelves still house files with labels such as 'Riots 1981', 'Royal Wedding 1981', 'Falklands 1982', 'Madonna', 'Production', 'Ads-Gender', and 'Sellafield/ Nuclear Power' for example. She also collected issues of the magazines she wrote for such as *Marxism Today* and *City Limits*, as well as other titles such as *Viz* and *Spy* and Habitat catalogues.

Television, she began writing film criticism for *Time Out*.

In its early days the weekly London listings magazine *Time Out* was run on co-operative principles, with staff members paid the same amount (£8,500) whether they were receptionists, typesetters, or writers. In 1981, when the management decided to introduce a sliding pay scale, the staff went on strike, creating an ad-hoc publication supported by donations from the public. Williamson recalls that she felt as if she were in direct communication with her audience. 'I was [...] aware of no longer being an anonymous commentator on movies, but being in a situation known to every reader of the broadsheet, and I learned one of the first lessons of journalism – your readers are real', she has written. 'You are not writing to yourself. There was a sense of liberation and for me, perhaps a loosening up of style and tone, which lasted through the rest of my time as a critic'.<sup>707</sup>

The group failed to win the strike, but set up *City Limits*, a rival listings magazine organized as a cooperative. The launch issue's editorial states: 'Six months, innumerable dismissals, several writs, threats, recriminations, sit-ins, lock-outs and undignified rumbles later, we have brought you *City Limits* – a paper that we think you'll agree was worth the fight'.<sup>708</sup> The graphic designer David King created 'a bold, quasi-constructivist design' for the publication that reflected its alternative viewpoint.<sup>709</sup> 'We looked oppositional', Williamson reflected. She continued at *City Limits* as a staff member, also teaching in the History of Art, Design, and Film department at Middlesex Polytechnic – a role which she saw as having contributed to her sense that 'explaining is a big part of criticism' – even as she took up a new post as film critic, responsible for a weekly column at *The New Statesman* starting

---

<sup>707</sup> Judith Williamson, Foreword, *Deadline at Dawn: Film Criticism 1980–1990*, (London: Marion Boyers, 1993) p. 9.

<sup>708</sup> Editorial, *City Limits*, October 1981.

<sup>709</sup> Judith Williamson, personal interview, 4 August, 2010.



in 1986.<sup>710</sup>

Williamson, more than most critics of the period, was emphatically clear about her political stance. 'I came into writing and thinking as a fully formed Marxist with a critique of the way the world is', she said.<sup>711</sup> While Hebdige and Sudjic used ambiguity and multiple voices as writerly modes, for Williamson declaring one's 'position' was fundamental to the practice of criticism.<sup>712</sup> She used an early column at *New Statesman* to articulate this position so that her readers would know exactly how to interpret her commentary on film, writing: 'It should be clear to anyone who has read this column over the last few months that I am writing with a feminist and a Marxist politics [...] a political view of cinema [can] provide ways of questioning assumptions about the structure of society, of challenging what we take for granted'.<sup>713</sup>

Williamson was aware of what she saw as a contradictory impulse in criticism between the exercise of personal taste and the idea of absolute values – that 'critics' judgments are seen as at once totally personal, and yet – paradoxically – profoundly objective'. She wrote, 'I have tried to suggest that the "personal," supposedly random nature of taste effectively depoliticizes it, takes it away from the realm of class. But the other side of this contradiction, the idea of inherent value, plays a key role in *maintaining* what amount to class divisions in the realm of Culture, where some products are seen as infinitely more 'value-ful' than others'.<sup>714</sup>

Williamson's writing negotiated these poles, and yet its personal nature is striking. 'It is impossible to write regularly, week after week, under intense pressure, without

---

<sup>710</sup> Judith Williamson, Foreword, *Deadline at Dawn: Film Criticism 1980–1990*, (London: Marion Boyers, 1993) p. 10.

<sup>711</sup> Judith Williamson, personal interview, 4 August, 2010.

<sup>712</sup> Judith Williamson, 'Viewfinder', in *Deadline at Dawn: Film Criticism 1980–1990*, (London: Marion Boyers, 1993) p. 21.

<sup>713</sup> Judith Williamson, 'Viewfinder' in *Deadline at Dawn: Film Criticism 1980–1990*, (London: Marion Boyers, 1993) p. 22. Originally published in *New Statesman*, 12 December, 1986.

<sup>714</sup> *Ibid.* p. 15.

feeling that you are squeezing a little bit of yourself into it all the time', she wrote of her work as a film critic.<sup>715</sup> The self that she squeezed was manifest in her always-present political filter, but also in anecdotes and images from her daily life. In a *City Limits* piece on the need for socialists to fight for social and public life, instead of personal ownership, she wrote that 'the sense of Welfare State is one of the earliest things I can remember, the delicious Clinic Orange Juice that was quite unlike 'bought', the equally foul Cod-Liver Oil, the reverence with which my father spoke of Nye Bevan, and the idea that the world was supposed to get better'.<sup>716</sup> What elevated this kind of personal writing beyond the merely anecdotal or 'quirky', for Williamson, was its potential to connect with its audiences and to provide them with a means for performing criticism themselves, to give them 'access to intellectual structures whereby they (the audiences and readers) might make their own critical judgments and decisions'.<sup>717</sup> 'I live and work within the same culture that produces the films I write about; my feelings and reactions may be my own, but they are not necessarily *only* my own'.<sup>718</sup> Similarly, when reflecting back on design criticism of the period, she said, 'People who write about design aren't fuelled by different drives from anyone else'.<sup>719</sup>

As a socialist and a Marxist, Williamson was sceptical of style, which she saw as a manifestation of capitalist, and particularly Thatcherist, culture, and the way it was idealized in the design press.<sup>720</sup> She was also frustrated by what she saw as the academic left's soft engagement, and seeming infatuation, with style – its lack of a more 'daring

---

<sup>715</sup> Ibid. p. 5.

<sup>716</sup> Judith Williamson, 'Belonging to Us', in *Consuming Passions: The Dynamics of Popular Culture* (London: Marion Boyars Publishing, 1987), p. 206. Originally published in *City Limits*, 1983.

<sup>717</sup> Judith Williamson, Introduction, *Deadline at Dawn: Film Criticism 1980–1990*, (London: Marion Boyars, 1993) p. 15.

<sup>718</sup> Judith Williamson, Foreword, *Deadline at Dawn: Film Criticism 1980–1990*, (London: Marion Boyars, 1993) p. 8.

<sup>719</sup> Judith Williamson, personal interview, 4 August, 2010.

<sup>720</sup> Ibid.

socialism'.<sup>721</sup> She distanced herself from both camps, preferring instead a fast-paced schedule of weekly columns for widely read publications.

Williamson's writing lacked the fizz and verbal dexterity of the New Journalism-infused style found in *Blueprint*, but it engaged and persuaded through its forthright conviction and clarity. She maintained her own distinctly non-academic language, summoning Marx, Freud, Barthes, and Benjamin only when necessary to give ballast to her points. She strongly believed in the power of writing; language, for Williamson, in 1984, was 'the only power we have left in the undeniable world of consumerism'.<sup>722</sup> She wrote for a broad audience, seeking to make complex ideas accessible. She deployed everyday, personally observed examples of mostly working-class social behaviour to illustrate her arguments. Her reference base was drawn from a London-centric urban landscape of communal experiences on buses, housing estates, and public parks. When depicting the joys of spontaneous community experience, in a 1984 essay about the Walkman, she wrote, 'There is a kind of freedom about chance encounters, which is why conversations and arguments in buses are so much livelier than those of the wittiest dinner party. Help is easy to come by on urban streets, whether with a burst shopping bag or a road accident'.<sup>723</sup> Her readers must have been convinced that when Williamson wrote of the social dynamics of housing estates and public transport, that these situations were lived experiences rather than detached, writerly observations. The characters that figured in her articles gathered in one another's living rooms to watch TV programmes like 'Dallas', went to the cinema, wore Walkmans and legwarmers. Unlike the characters portrayed in the pages of *Blueprint*, they didn't go to the Milan Furniture Fair, wear Rolex watches, or drive Porsches.

---

<sup>721</sup> Judith Williamson, 'The Politics of Consumption', in *Consuming Passions: The Dynamics of Popular Culture* (London: Marion Boyars Publishing, 1987) p. 231.

<sup>722</sup> Judith Williamson, 'Three Kinds of Dirt', in *Consuming Passions: The Dynamics of Popular Culture* (London: Marion Boyars Publishing, 1987), p. 226.

<sup>723</sup> Judith Williamson, 'Urban Spaceman' in *Consuming Passions: The Dynamics of Popular Culture* (London: Marion Boyars Publishing, 1987), p. 211.

Williamson used humour and emotional persuasion to make her points, but mostly her writing was serious and concerned with what might be done at the level of grassroots activism.

Williamson's writing on design, consumption, and lifestyle represents a more politically motivated take on the subject matter than seen in the other writers discussed in this chapter. She demanded more of design than *Blueprint* did, but she also thought that the cultural theorists of the time, who she saw as preoccupied with meaning at an abstract level, could have used a little more of *Blueprint's* concreteness in their work.

### **'Urban Spaceman'**

Williamson's essay 'Urban Spaceman', written in 1984 specially for her *Consuming Passions* collection, considered the Walkman not as a designed object per se, but rather through the way its image is advertised, the way it is used, the way it shapes or alters public space, and its larger symbolic meaning as a reflection of an increasingly individualized culture of the kind engendered by the Conservative government. She wrote,

[The Walkman] provides a concrete image of alienation, suggesting an implicit hostility to, and isolation from, the environment in which it is worn. Yet it also embodies the underlying values of precisely the society which produces that alienation – those principles which are the lynch-pin of Thatcherite Britain: individualism, privatization, and "choice".<sup>724</sup>

Williamson was not being paranoid; she was attuned to the politics of the period. The historian Robert Hewison recounts that through Thatcherism, 'The British soul was to be remade, by creating a new myth of economic individualism to replace the old ideals of community and collectivism'.<sup>725</sup>

Williamson's depiction of the Walkman differs dramatically from those of other design writers. Sudjic heralded the Walkman as a 'cult object' along with the Zippo lighter, the Mont Blanc pen, and other status-conferring products in his

<sup>724</sup> Judith Williamson, 'Urban Spaceman', 1984, in *Consuming Passions: The Dynamics of Popular Culture* (London: Marion Boyars Publishing, 1987), p. 201.

<sup>725</sup> Robert Hewison, *Culture and Consensus: England, Art and Politics since 1940* (London: Methuen, 1995) p. 212.

1985 book *Cult Objects: The Complete Guide to Having it All*.<sup>726</sup> And Bayley put it on display as part of a 1982 exhibition devoted to Sony at The Boilerhouse, writing at length about its genesis in the accompanying catalogue.<sup>727</sup> In his 1985 exhibition catalogue *Good Design Guide: 100 Best Ever Products*, Bayley described the Walkman Personal Stereo as 'perhaps the definitive consumer product of the eighties, another example of Sony's remarkable flair for innovation'.<sup>728</sup> A gushing newspaper article, which leaned heavily on The Boilerhouse-issued press release about the Sony exhibition, proclaimed,

Among the extraordinary exhibits at the Boilerhouse was the latest Walkman person radio. The Walkman is one of the happiest inventions of modern times, since it allows music fans better quality than ever without causing others the fury of being forced to listen to music they don't like.<sup>729</sup>

At the other end of the spectrum, Baudrillard also considered the Walkman, a product that both fascinated and repelled him. He saw its use in apocalyptic terms, writing, 'Nothing evokes the end of the world more than a man running straight ahead on a beach, swathed in the sounds of his Walkman, cocooned in the solitary sacrifice of his energy...'<sup>730</sup>

For her part, Williamson discussed the Walkman in terms of the ways it reshaped urban space, anticipating a focus on design's social and political context that design criticism would go on to engage with in the coming decades. She said, 'I was profoundly interested in [designed products] as physical objects which organize space and organize behaviour. The way you use an implement is going to be partly determined by its design and shape and with public spaces the ways they are designed and organized make people move or sit in particular ways'.<sup>731</sup> In 'Urban Spaceman', she depicted the Walkman as 'primarily a way of escaping from a shared experience or

<sup>726</sup> Deyan Sudjic, *Cult Objects: The Complete Guide to Having it All* (London: Paladin Granada Publishing, 1985).

<sup>727</sup> Stephen Bayley, *Sony Design* (London: The Conran Foundation, 1982).

<sup>728</sup> Stephen Bayley, *The Good Design Guide: 100 Best Ever Products*, (London: The Conran Foundation, 1985).

<sup>729</sup> 'Walkman Receives a Belting Innovation', 31 March 3, 1982.

<sup>730</sup> Jean Baudrillard, *America*, (London: Verso, 2010), p. 39. Originally published in 1986.

<sup>731</sup> Judith Williamson, personal interview, 4 August, 2010.

environment. It produces a privatized sound, in the public domain; a weapon of the individual against the communal'.<sup>732</sup> And unlike the author of the *Planner* piece, who preferred the Walkman to the use of 'squawking suitcases', Williamson recommended the ghetto blaster, which 'stands for a shared experience, a communal event'.<sup>733</sup>

### **'The Politics of Consumption'**

Williamson's article 'The Politics of Consumption', published in *New Socialist* in 1985, drew attention to the way in which the needs and desires that fuel consumption were 'both sharpened and denied by the economic system that makes them'.<sup>734</sup> The article was also about how she thought left-wing writers should write about products – in particular, why they should identify the ideologies and economic realities that drive their consumption. Rather than approaching design from within its industry, as many of the *Blueprint* writers were, Williamson was looking at the phenomenon from the outside. She explained that she 'was coming from the approach of someone trying to understand design culture. At that time design was hot. The idea of the designer object emerged right then. The idea of a lifestyle was central to the early 1980s idea of consumerism and consuming designed objects that would speak about you'.<sup>735</sup> This outsider status, unconstrained by any friendships with designers and, more importantly – since she rarely wrote for design magazines – any economic ties, may explain Williamson's ability to achieve critical distance in her writing about design.

In 'The Politics of Consumption', Williamson positioned her own ability to discern the way in which working-class aspirations are 'caught up in the wheel of consumer

---

<sup>732</sup> Judith Williamson, 'Urban Spaceman', 1984, in *Consuming Passions: The Dynamics of Popular Culture* (London: Marion Boyars Publishing, 1987), p. 210.

<sup>733</sup> Ibid.

<sup>734</sup> Judith Williamson, 'The Politics of Consumption' in *Consuming Passions: The Dynamics of Popular Culture* (London: Marion Boyars Publishing, 1987), p. 232.

<sup>735</sup> Judith Williamson, personal interview, 4 August, 2010.

production' as essential to effecting political change: 'The analysis of consumer items as the concrete forms taken by particular needs is essential if socialists are to envisage different ways of meeting them'.<sup>736</sup>

Her critique was directed in part at recent writing about the 'lifestyle craze' she saw in publications such as *Blueprint*. Journalistic writing about consumer goods was implicitly to blame because it dealt only with their forms, which are, she said, 'fundamentally those of market capitalism', and because it did not deal with the 'needs that underlie use'.<sup>737</sup>

In an essay titled 'Belonging to Us', written for *City Limits* in 1983, Williamson used a section of an election broadcast by Margaret Thatcher about the Conservative value of property ownership to discuss a social situation in which possessions and the concept of home had become 'more than ever a symbol of yearned-for security'.<sup>738</sup> The tragedy is, she wrote, 'that as this right-wing government makes ordinary life harder and harder, it creates the social conditions for precisely the individual fears and anxieties which fuel its support'.<sup>739</sup> Home, to Williamson, was not the staged room settings of a Habitat catalogue, nor the designed interiors featured in *Blueprint*. Home was not constituted by belongings, in the sense of things owned, as she thought Tory individualism would have British society believe, but rather the feeling of belonging to a place – in her case a shared, public, urban place like London.

Just as emphatic as her critique of Thatcherism and design culture's collusion with its values, though, was the critique Williamson levelled at the Left, at the cultural theorists' embrace of postmodernism and the Communist Party of Great Britain's seemingly uncritical adoption of the style phenomenon for its own rebranding purposes: 'What ought to

---

<sup>736</sup> Judith Williamson, 'The Politics of Consumption' in *Consuming Passions: The Dynamics of Popular Culture* (London: Marion Boyars Publishing, 1987), p. 232.

<sup>737</sup> Judith Williamson, personal interview, 4 August, 2010.

<sup>738</sup> Judith Williamson, 'Belonging to Us', 1984, in *Consuming Passions: The Dynamics of Popular Culture* (London: Marion Boyars Publishing, 1987), p. 205.

<sup>739</sup> *Ibid.* p. 206.

have been opposition in many parts of the left, what should have been a left wing politics offering something different actually went with the flow and moved into the lifestyle mindset'.<sup>740</sup> One incident encapsulated this unsettling tendency for her. In 1981 on Remembrance Day the Labour Party leader Michael Foot wore a black duffel coat to the annual wreath-laying ceremony at the Whitehall Cenotaph. Williamson recalls,

There was an outcry. He was supposed to have worn a smarter, more stylish coat. The media pounced on him. The left-wing writers who should have been there putting the argument that style doesn't count in this context, didn't. The coat became symbolic of what this new trendy, cultural studies-influenced individualist left interested in identity politics wanted to cast off. Post punk stylists were saying that the left should smarten up.<sup>741</sup>

Williamson was impatient with the 'post-punk stylists', the propounders of cultural studies – Hebdige included – and members of the 1960s left who had recently 'discovered' style and who portrayed consumerism as a 'progressive trend' where commodities or styles can be 'subverted'.<sup>742</sup> She was particularly dubious of postmodern readings of culture, in which meaning was unfixed and 'one can claim as radical almost anything provided it is taken out of its original context'.<sup>743</sup> Postmodernism rankled with her because it bred what she saw as the lazy use of theory in academia – 'you can apply the same term to a building, a political party, or a hairstyle, without apparently, the slightest need for modification'.<sup>744</sup> It was also a conspicuously male-dominated field. 'Why is so much of the 'serious' stuff on postmodernism written by men? Especially when pm is supposed to be all about the feminine, the other, dispersal, difference, blah, blah, blah'.<sup>745</sup>

To Williamson the 'post-punk stylists' were too caught up with the meaning of consumerism and not interested enough in the failing sphere of British production. In a Post-Fordist era in

---

<sup>740</sup> Judith Williamson, personal interview, 4 August, 2010.

<sup>741</sup> Ibid.

<sup>742</sup> Ibid. p. 229.

<sup>743</sup> Ibid.

<sup>744</sup> Judith Williamson, 'Textuality: On Postmodern Reading', Books section, *Marxism Today*, September 1991.

<sup>745</sup> Ibid.



which society was becoming increasingly disconnected from the means of production, she recalled the examples of miners' and printing union strikes (between 1984 and 1986) as important attempts on the part of working-class citizens to regain control of their products, environment, and communal identities, and therefore as important as subjects of study. But leftist cultural writers seemed to her to find street-style struggles more 'riveting' than labour struggles, and thus the widening gap between production and consumption was left unchallenged.<sup>746</sup>

Williamson apportioned some of the blame for this state of affairs to Jean Baudrillard, whose ideas had captured the imagination of cultural theorists, style-conscious youth, and journalists alike. Writing in 1988 she observed,

He has become the prophet of the style era – and with good reason: for his writing perfectly describes the world of, for example, *The Face*, and it is little wonder that the world in turn looks to him as its guru.<sup>747</sup>

Her frustration lay in Baudrillard's increasing rejection of the possibility of a world beyond the simulacra, and the 'depth model', that sees the cultural surface of signifiers and images to be an ideological distortion of operant forces 'below', which can be excavated through ideological critique, and was a premise of the Marxist and psychoanalytic thinking she was guided by. When Williamson interviewed Baudrillard for *City Limits* in 1988, she asked him to locate the space from which an evaluation of what he had called 'the double challenge of the masses and their silence, and of the media' might take place. He responded that according to his conception, 'there is no longer any possibility of evaluation [...] There isn't any point of view from which to criticize [the masses] external to that space', confirming her dismay

---

<sup>746</sup> Judith Williamson, personal interview, 4 August, 2010.

<sup>747</sup> Judith Williamson, 'Lost in the Hypermarket,' *City Limits*, December, 1988, p. 12.

that the notion of 'seduction' had indeed replaced 'interpretation'.<sup>748</sup>

At the end of the 1980s, *Marxism Today*, the British Communist Party's journal, which had been edited by Martin Jacques since 1977, drafted a manifesto and commissioned a series of articles and responses around a movement they dubbed 'New Times'. In this special edition published in October 1988, *Marxism Today* was forced to admit that

increasingly, at the heart of Thatcherism, has been its sense of New Times, of living in a new era. While the Left remains profoundly wedded to the past, to 1945, to the old social democratic order, to the priorities of Keynes and Beveridge, the Right has glimpsed the future and run with it. As a result, it is the Right which now appears modern, radical, innovative and brimming with confidence and ideas about the future.<sup>749</sup>

Williamson was sceptical, believing that the Left had got caught up in misguided reverence for the dynamism and populism of the Thatcher government, and abandoned wholesale its own socialist traditions. She wrote a response to the 'New Times' manifesto for *New Statesman & Society*, attempting to explain her unease with the document by studying it symptomatically. The important question for Williamson was, 'why has the market place been such a powerful platform for both right and left wing rhetoric?' She acknowledged that 'the appeal to voters as consumers is a powerful one because it recognises people's needs for pleasure', but pointed out the problem of 'shopping for democracy' lay in the unequal distribution of the means to do it, 'plus the appalling conditions and pay of the workers in places like South Korea where so many of our lifestyle accoutrements are produced'.<sup>750</sup> She took issue with the fact that 'New Times', referred to by *Marxism Today* in the singular, implied that it was one inflexible entity, rather than a multitude of views. From this standpoint, those who wanted new ideas for the future, but without losing socialist

---

<sup>748</sup> Ibid. p. 13.

<sup>749</sup> Introduction, special issue on 'New Times', *Marxism Today*, October 1988, p. 3.

<sup>750</sup> Judith Williamson, 'Even New Times Change', *New Statesman & Society*, 7 July, 1989, p. 33.

traditions, were constrained by the rigidity of the New Times programme: 'Any wish to maintain a link with the past is portrayed as "hankering"'.<sup>751</sup>

While Williamson, in her critiques of both the Left and the Right's engagement with style, appears to have been caught in a stalemate situation, Hebdige was ultimately more positive about the future of criticism and the possibility of articulating 'a new kind of socialism'. In his contribution to the 'New Times' discourse, he concluded an article about postmodernism's relationship to the newly conceived socialism by averring, 'Contrary to what Baudrillard says [in Hebdige's words, "decadence is the yearned for end of everything"] there is nothing fatal or finished about the new times. The task for the 90s has to be how to rise to the challenge, how to abjure certain kinds of authority we might have laid claim to in the past, without losing sight of the longer-term objectives, how to articulate a new kind of socialism, how to make socialism, as Raymond Williams might have said, without the masses'.<sup>752</sup>

## CONCLUSION

By the end of the 1980s the British design boom that design commentary of the period had both fed, and fed from, was imploding. Several of the large design consultancies collapsed. Michael Peters, who had been one of the initial funders of *Blueprint*, experienced pre-tax loss of £2.94 million in the six months to December 1990. Fitch, another *Blueprint* funder, saw its share price dropping, and Conran's Storehouse was also in trouble.

In Sudjic's 1993 assessment of design's rise and fall, the greed associated with the design boom had finally consumed itself:

Like Tom and Jerry running over the edge of a cliff, their paws whizzing round like propellers until they finally looked down, smart young developers continued to invest in property and designers continued to go public. The building societies and

---

<sup>751</sup> Ibid. p. 35.

<sup>752</sup> Dick Hebdige, 'After the Masses', *Marxism Today*, January 1989, p. 56.

the banks fell over themselves to fund it all, and the economy was awash with cash and Starck chairs as a result. Then the sky started to fall in.<sup>753</sup>

*Blueprint* was partly responsible for generating the design boom that in the late 1980s was in the process of imploding. Through its stylish appearance and role as a convergence point for key writers and designers of the decade, it became a part of the story that it told.

As the design decade drew to a close a palpable weariness becomes evident among the editors, critics, and curators considered in this chapter, in the face of what they saw as an increasing velocity in the turnover of fashions, and the demands of the media industry – the increasing rate of obsolescence of their own media products – their exhibitions and magazines. They also became more reflective and introspective. Sudjic at *Blueprint* began to consider the ecological impact of design's production processes, to question his role in the design star-making system, and advocate for improved historical knowledge in design criticism.

In his 1988 summary of the decade, Sudjic asserted,

If design criticism is to have any usefulness at all, it must be to draw attention to this phenomenon, [the way in which designers turned out styles] to remind designers of the need for a sense of history. It's been a decade in which design has sought to discover a critical and theoretical underpinning for what it does. After decades of depending on architectural discourse, design has tried to strike out on its own to find a sense of direction. And design theory and history has burgeoned as an academic study...<sup>754</sup>

Stephen Bayley, too, in his description of the 1989 'Culture and Commerce' exhibition, the first to be held at the new Design Museum, sounded jaded when he noted, 'Metaphorically,

---

<sup>753</sup> Deyan Sudjic, 'How We Got from There to Here', *Blueprint*, September 1993, p. 17.

<sup>754</sup> Deyan Sudjic, 'The Design Decade', *Blueprint*, October 1988. Sudjic is referring to his own efforts on the part of design at *Blueprint*, and to the emergence of design history as a discipline, fostered by the Design History Society, founded in 1977 and which gained momentum in parallel to the design decade, and the V&A/RCA History of Design MA course, founded in 1982, and closely connected to the design boom, through such links as its Rodney Fitch scholarship.

'designer' has become a journalistic cliché'. He devoted a section of the exhibition to the subject of the 'Designer Cult', which he amplified in strident, if reformist-sounding terms, in the exhibition catalogue: 'The designer cult, with all its pompous absurdities, travesties of value and its short lived pretensions, is a sort of revenge of tradition of the carefully nurtured culture of mass production'.<sup>755</sup> He continued in the same dyspeptic tone: 'Hitherto separate these gauges of consumption (style, fashion, taste) were all rolled in to the 'designer', one of the silliest (and most transient) manifestations of postmodernism's dedication to expensive trash'.<sup>756</sup>

'I was overwhelmed with a sense of futility', Bayley recalled of the year 1989. He remembered thinking, 'What have we done? We've spent all this money and we've just recreated the Conran shop. Personally, I had spent eleven to twelve years setting up the Design Museum. By the time it opened, design was no longer this noble world-improving calling with a very clear aesthetic. It had become a synonym for anything meretricious, expensive, odd and curious which was never my intention. Which was part of my falling out with it all'.<sup>757</sup>

The writer Jon Wozencroft and designer Neville Brody seemed to have fallen out with design too. In their anti-style manifesto published on the front page of the Review section of *The Guardian* on December 2, 1988, they gave typographic form to what they perceived as erosion of design's status: 'DESIGN, Design, dsgn. The word itself has grown tiresome'.<sup>758</sup> This succinct obituary for the concerns of an era served as a coda for the end of, or a pause in, the forward thrust and boosting of design commentary. Their weariness was probably in response to Neville Brody's own experience at the time, which illustrates the pitfalls of making designers into celebrities. Brody had been the April 1988 *Blueprint* cover star and it was Phil Sayer's iconic photograph of Brody

<sup>755</sup> Stephen Bayley, *Commerce and Culture* (London: Design Museum, 1989) p. 83.

<sup>756</sup> Ibid.

<sup>757</sup> Stephen Bayley, personal interview, 6 January, 2011.

<sup>758</sup> Jon Wozencroft and Neville Brody, Review, *The Guardian*, 2 December, 1988, p. 25.

swaggering in a bomber jacket that fixed him as the roguish visual spokesman for youth culture in the popular imagination. In April 1988 when he was only thirty, the V&A museum held a retrospective exhibition of Brody's work, which was attended by 40,000 people. The accompanying book, written by Wozencroft, who worked within Brody's design studio, *The Graphic Language of Neville Brody*, was *The Guardian's* bestselling design book. The following year Brody's studio lost many of its clients, and faced bankruptcy, however. Part of the problem, as recounted by Wozencroft in 1994, was that the cult of Brody's design personality had grown too big for the British design community. 'Brody was seen to be over-exposed and too successful for his own good, wrote Wozencroft in *Graphic Language*. 'The gap between public perception and personal reality was wider than ever.'<sup>759</sup> A decade's worth of media activity spent promoting the accoutrements of the designer lifestyle had simultaneously reached its apotheosis and its nadir.

In terms of design criticism, what had been a 'scratch of an exhibition centre' became a fully fledged, government-funded design museum in 1989, and what had been an ad-hoc and irreverent design magazine, with its every detail controlled by its publisher and editor, was sold in 1994. *Blueprint's* spotlighting of design icons, promotion of iconic designers, and fascination with the designer lifestyle all became recognizable journalistic tropes. The Boilerhouse's compulsion to dictate good taste and to 'Hoover' or 'Dust-Off' society, spread well beyond its bunker. Such innovations and impulses were incorporated and intensified in design media of the 1990s, typified most obviously in a magazine like *Wallpaper*, launched in 1996, with two of Hebdige's 'monstrous brindled hybrid' consumers depicted on its cover as 'urban modernists'. Hebdige's use of theory and Williamson's use of politics enriched design criticism and their concern with the social and psychological effects of design suggested multiple routes for its diversification. But the design media of the 1990s,

---

<sup>759</sup> Jon Wozencroft, *The Graphic Language of Neville Brody: v. 2*, (London: Thames & Hudson, 1994), p. 11.

progeny of *Blueprint* and the Boilerhouse, in many respects, found they had very little space or time for extended critique of the international jetset lifestyle they were immersed in. While *Wallpaper* heralded the 'global nomad' as the social archetype of the 1990s, design criticism found itself increasingly homeless. An increasing sense of the futility of critical judgment – of language, even – engendered a silence in critical discourse in 1990s Britain, in contrast to the 'babble' of design promotion, out of which emerged two non-verbal alternative modes of design criticism: the exhibition and the designed product itself.

*'Some hacker came up with this scheme to show me his stuff. And everything worked fine until the moment the Brandy opened the scroll – but his code was buggy, and it snow-crashed at the wrong moment, so instead of seeing his output, all I saw was snow'.*

*'Then why did he call the thing Snow Crash?'*

*'Gallows humor. He knew it was buggy'.*

*'What did the Brandy whisper in your ear?'*

*'Some language I didn't recognize'. Da5id says. 'Just a bunch of babble'.*

Babble. Babel.

*'Afterward, you looked sort of stunned'.*

*Da5id looks resentful. 'I wasn't stunned. I just found the whole experience so weird, I guess I just was taken aback for a second'.<sup>760</sup>*

---

<sup>760</sup> Neal Stephenson, *Snow Crash* (New York: Bantam, 2003), p. 74. Originally published in 1992.



## CHAPTER FOUR

### Please Touch the Criticism: Design Exhibitions and Critical Design in the UK, 1998–2001

#### INTRODUCTION

As the British design boom of the mid-1980s fizzled at the decade's close, designers were forced to renegotiate the identity of their profession in relation to the new realities of an economic recession, globalization, and climate change. The design press, closely tied to design's fortunes, also appeared to founder. Out of a weariness with the excesses of design celebrity culture, and a silence engendered by a sense of the futility of critical judgment – of language, even – there emerged in 1990s Britain two non-verbal and alternative modes of design criticism: the exhibition and the designed product itself.

This chapter examines the design exhibition and the designed object itself as means of conducting design criticism, and considers the extent to which they provided alternatives to, or even supplanted, the role of the journalistic design critic in late-1990s London. It contrasts two exhibitions:

'powerhouse::uk' was a 1998 Department of Trade and Industry initiative, emblematic of New Labour's attempts to rebrand Britain in corporate terms, using design and creativity as nation-defining qualities as well as international political and economic tools. The other exhibition considered here, 'Stealing Beauty: British Design Now', was held at the Institute of Contemporary Arts (ICA) in 1999, and collected the work of designers who used the 'everyday' as conceptual and physical inspiration and whose efforts were directed inward toward an urban domestic setting, thus complicating any outwardly projected vision of a national identity based on design and design as a national export.

In addition to analysing the exhibition as a critical device, this chapter also examines a design genre known as 'critical design', and labelled as such by Dunne & Raby, a design

practice formed in the early 1990s, whose work was displayed in both the aforementioned exhibitions as well as many others of the period.<sup>761</sup> Dunne & Raby's work offered a riposte to design's then-established role as a problem-solver and a profit-generator. Their work, which included appliances, furniture, and invented products, was characterised by its lack of obvious style or function and its intention to question social and political values, particularly those surrounding information technology and electronic products. This chapter assesses the extent to which Dunne & Raby's work and the 'Stealing Beauty' exhibition provided a viable alternative to the role of the design critic during the late 1990s. In doing so it also considers the contribution of non-verbal, experiential critique to design criticism as a genre.

Both the exhibitions and the designed objects they displayed are considered against a backdrop of a declining goods trade and manufacturing industry in late 1990s Britain and a concerted drive on the part of government-endorsed institutions to generate investment in British design. This was at the very time when national identity was being destabilized by the increasing availability of interactive communication technologies that seemed to intensify the effects of economic globalism, creating what philosopher Paul Virilio termed 'the telepresence of the era of globalization'.<sup>762</sup>

## **PART ONE: THE DESIGN EXHIBITION IN LATE-1990s LONDON**

### **Britain™**

In 1997, after eighteen years of Conservative government, Britain elected a Labour government with the forty-three-year-

---

<sup>761</sup> Anthony Dunne, *Hertzian Tales: Electronic Products, Aesthetic Experience and Critical Design*, (London: RCA CRD Research Publications, 1999).

<sup>762</sup> Paul Virilio, *The Information Bomb*, (London: Verso, 2005), p. 9. Writing in the late 1990s, Paul Virilio used the term 'telepresence', a type of virtual reality technology, to stand in for the phenomenon in which the use of 'cybernetic interactivity' was collapsing the physical distances between cultures and replacing the 'territorial contiguity of nations' with a visual (audiovisual) contiguity'.

old Tony Blair as prime minister. Blair had helped lead the party's dramatic repositioning: 'New Labour', a term first used as a conference slogan in 1994 and cemented in a 1996 manifesto for the party, *New Labour, New Life For Britain*, represented a shift in party values away from traditional tenets of socialism and trade unionism and toward more centrist policies and market economics.<sup>763</sup>

Design, which had become ideologically enmeshed with Thatcher's enterprise culture in the 1980s, was increasingly reframed in New Labour's political rhetoric as 'creativity' and 'innovation' – qualities perceived to be more encompassing than design and more representative of economic shifts that had taken place in the 1980s from traditional production-line industry to the market-dependent service sectors of banking, advertising, design consultancy, media, property, and retail. In their efforts to reposition Britain in the global knowledge-based economy, New Labour adopted the language of marketing, encouraged by their media-savvy Director of Communications, Alastair Campbell, and embarked on a national rebranding effort that came to be known as 'Cool Britannia'. The government hoped to create a revitalized image of Britain as youthful, creative, and contemporary, and as Jon White and Leslie de Chernatony have observed, 'New Labour as a brand was successful in part because of its ambiguity. It represented values with which large swathes of the population could identify, such as personal opportunity flowing out of strong communities'.<sup>764</sup>

Building on momentum generated during the 1980s, design-dependent media and cultural institutions continued their efforts to keep design in the public eye through publications, awards schemes, television programmes, educational initiatives, exhibitions, and trade shows. As *Time Out*

---

<sup>763</sup> Andrew Rawnsley, *Servants of the People: The Inside Story of New Labour* (London: Penguin, 2001) and *The End of the Party: The Rise and Fall of New Labour* (London: Penguin, 2010).

<sup>764</sup> Jon White and Leslie de Chernatony, 'New Labour: A Study of the Creation, Development and Demise of a Political Brand', [http://marketingpedia.com/Marketing-Library/Branding/InterBrand\\_Papers/politicalbrand.pdf](http://marketingpedia.com/Marketing-Library/Branding/InterBrand_Papers/politicalbrand.pdf) [accessed 9, October 2013].

proclaimed in 1999, 'From the dinner party cachet of dropping the names Eames or Mies down to the disastrous 'makeovers' of Changing Rooms, the great British public has been swept along by a tide of design consciousness'.<sup>765</sup>

The reality of British design as an industry was somewhat bleaker, with its weakened manufacturing base and a poor international image. The Design Council was dramatically cut in size and restructured in 1994, resulting in the closure of its Design Centre and regional offices. Government-funded institutions such as the British Council and the Crafts Council attempted to buttress the eroding British manufacturing industry with their propaganda efforts, but for the most part, mirroring national policy, they focused their attention on the less tangible notion of British creativity as a particularly British quality and a marketable export. Britain's state-endorsed design organizations were obviously concerned with British design's image abroad, and sought to counter a longstanding and entrenched governmental reliance on 'heritage' as national export with a more modern conception of Britain as 'a global island, uniquely well placed to thrive in the more interconnected world of the next century'.<sup>766</sup>

Demos, an independent think-tank launched in 1993, published an influential, if controversial, report in 1997.<sup>767</sup>

Commissioned by the Design Council, written by Demos senior researcher Mark Leonard, and titled *Britain™: Renewing our Identity*, the report recommended a rebranding of national identity through capitalization of homegrown creativity and design.<sup>768</sup> The upbeat views and the marketing language of this report quickly entered the lexicons of New Labour and design rhetoric of the period.

The largest section of the report dealt with Britain as 'a creative island' and enumerated statistics for various aspects

---

<sup>765</sup> 'Art Preview', *Time Out*, April 1999.

<sup>766</sup> Mark Leonard, *Britain™: Renewing our Identity*, (London: Demos, 1997), p. 3.

<sup>767</sup> Mark Leonard, *Britain™: Renewing our Identity*, (London: Demos, 1997).

<sup>768</sup> The report was based on work Leonard had previously done with the Design Council – a discussion paper titled 'Views on Britain's Identity', Design Council, 1997.

of creative production: It valued design and related activity in Britain at £12 billion a year with 300,000 people in its employ.<sup>769</sup> Using a 'survey of design managers in large Japanese companies' as its source, it posited 'Britain ranks among the world's top five nations for design skills'.<sup>770</sup>

Leonard borrowed the phrase 'Cool Britannia', a Ben & Jerry's ice cream flavour which was used on the cover of a 1996 issue of the American publication *Newsweek*, as a catchall for British creativity: 'Britain has a new spring in its step. National success in creative industries like music, design and architecture has combined with steady economic growth to dispel much of the introversion and pessimism of recent decades. 'Cool Britannia' sets the pace in everything from food to fashion'.<sup>771</sup>

#### **Taking creativity on the road**

Exhibitions, trade shows, and travelling showcases of contemporary British design proliferated in the 1990s, impelled by funding from sources such as the 1993 National Lottery Act, and a mission on the part of the government and government-funded institutions to promote British creative industries. International furniture trade shows were expanding with an increasing number of fringe exhibitions. In 1998 *Blueprint* and the British Council staged a supplementary exhibition for the Salone del Mobile in Milan called 'Zuppa Inglese'. It consisted of filmed interviews with eight British designers and architects (including Dunne & Raby) and a set of eight customized travelling cases containing representations of each designer's creative influences. In London several new trade shows were initiated to provide commercial platforms for contemporary design, including '100% Design' in 1995 and 'Designers Block' in 1996. Museums such as the Victoria & Albert Museum exhibited contemporary design on topics such as 'Selling Lifestyle: 30 Years of Habitat' (1994) and 'Green Furniture: Ecological Design' (1996) in the Design Now Room

---

<sup>769</sup> Mark Leonard, *Britain™: Renewing our Identity*, (London: Demos, 1997), p. 6.

<sup>770</sup> *Ibid.* p. 49.

<sup>771</sup> *Ibid.* p. 6.

and in large-scale temporary exhibitions such as 1991's 'Visions of Japan'. The Design Museum, launched in 1989, held exhibitions organized around themes such as sports, French design, or plastics, and retrospectives of designers such as Paul Smith, Philippe Starck, and David Mellor. In 1994 the Design Museum initiated its Conran Foundation Collection, which presented selections of contemporary design. Designers also presented their own work in their own gallery spaces, like Tom Dixon's Space gallery, or like Droog, the Dutch design collective, who organized travelling exhibitions of their oeuvre.

The Department of Trade and Industry was particularly active in the 1990s, arranging several exhibitions to promote British design abroad, including, in 1999, British Design Excellence in Bahrain and Techno Fair, Korea. The BBC Design Awards programme, launched in 1986, began in 1996 to be accompanied by exhibitions of its finalists, staged throughout the UK. City-specific design festivals provided another opportunity for temporary exhibitions. Glasgow UK City of Architecture and Design 1999, for example, directed by former *Blueprint* editor Deyan Sudjic, hosted exhibitions on 'Food' curated by Claire Catterall, 'The Shape of Colour' by Jane Pavitt, and 'Identity Crisis' by David Redhead. Finally, and most monumentally, design was also included among the exhibits in the Millennium Experience, Britain's controversial and ultimately under-performing celebration of the new century, sited in Greenwich and open to the public during 2000.

Due to the nature of their funding and the missions of their organizing institutions, most of these exhibitions were promotional, providing little opportunity for critical reflection on the part of their curators. They presented variations on the theme of design and creativity as marketable assets in the political project of asserting a dynamically reconceived national identity.

**'powerhouse::uk': inflation and babble**

One such promotional exhibition, and a highly visible example of New Labour's cooption of design and creativity under its

'Cool Britannia' banner, came in the first few months of its administration. 'powerhouse::uk' was an exhibition commissioned by the Department of Trade and Industry to encourage a global community to purchase British products and invest in British industry. Its opening was timed to coincide with the Second Asian Europe Summit (ASEM2) which was hosted in London, on 3 and 4, April, 1998. The summit was attended by heads of state and government from ten Asian and fifteen European nations and the DTI's thinking was that since, as Lord Clinton Davis, Minister of Department of Trade and Industry, explained to Parliament, 'each of the leaders will be accompanied by business delegations and large media teams', this was 'an opportunity to demonstrate, to an influential audience, how British creativity has led to world class products and services in design, fashion, technology, engineering and scientific research'.<sup>772</sup> The exhibition was then open to the public for a further two weeks.<sup>773</sup>

'powerhouse::uk' took its name and much of its tone and terminology – which included such buzzwords as 'hubs', 'hybridity', 'networking', 'connectivity', and 'innovation' – directly from the 1997 Britain™ Demos report. Architecture critic Hugh Pearman, writing in *The Sunday Times*, observed the direct link between the report and the DTI exhibition, suggesting that architect Nigel Coates' involvement in both projects was partly responsible: 'The report, which found a willing audience in the new government, put forward the idea of Britain as a 'creative island' in fashion, music, drama, architecture, design, films, advertising, science, medicine – even computer games. Coates was one of those consulted for the

---

<sup>772</sup> Lord Clinton Davis to the House of Lords, 30 March 1998, HL Deb 30 March 1998, vol 588 ccl1-2WA, [http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/written\\_answers/1998/mar/30/powerhouseuk-exhibition](http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/written_answers/1998/mar/30/powerhouseuk-exhibition) [accessed 7 October 2013].

<sup>773</sup> Panel 2000, a Foreign and Commonwealth Office initiative, launched on the same day as 'powerhouse::uk', was intended to produce 'a strategy to improve the way Britain is seen overseas'. Its panelists included John Sorrell, director of the Design Council and commissioner of the Demos report, as well as Mark Leonard, the report's author, along with industrialists and MPs.

report. Powerhouse UK is an exhibition of exactly these things'.<sup>774</sup> (See Illustration 1)

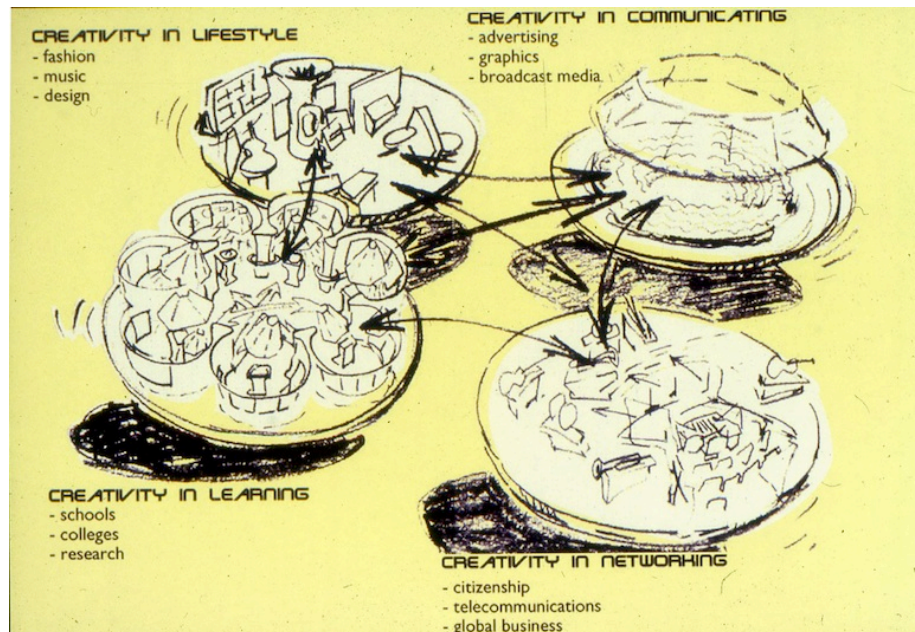


Illustration 1. Sketch for 'powerhouse::uk' by Branson Coates, 1998.

The £1 million-exhibition was staged on Horse Guards' Parade in Whitehall, in a four-drum silver inflatable structure designed by the architectural practice Branson Coates, and based on their building for The National Centre for Popular Music in Sheffield. Branson Coates won the DTI's competition at the end of 1997 and were charged with designing, building, curating, managing, and de-installing the exhibition in three-and-a-half months. Each sixteen-metre steel framed dome could contain 300-400 people and was clad in silver coated polyester PVC membrane, the pockets of which were puffed out by a low-power electric fan.<sup>775</sup> (See Illustration 2)

<sup>774</sup> Hugh Pearman, 'Upwardly Mobile', *The Sunday Times*, March 15, 1998.

<sup>775</sup> The inflatableness of the architecture was not structural, therefore; it was a skin intended to attract attention. Being sited on Horseguards Parade, the structure couldn't have foundations, so it was weighted down by concrete entrance ramps and electricity was provided through cables, which ran to a generator in Admiralty Arch.



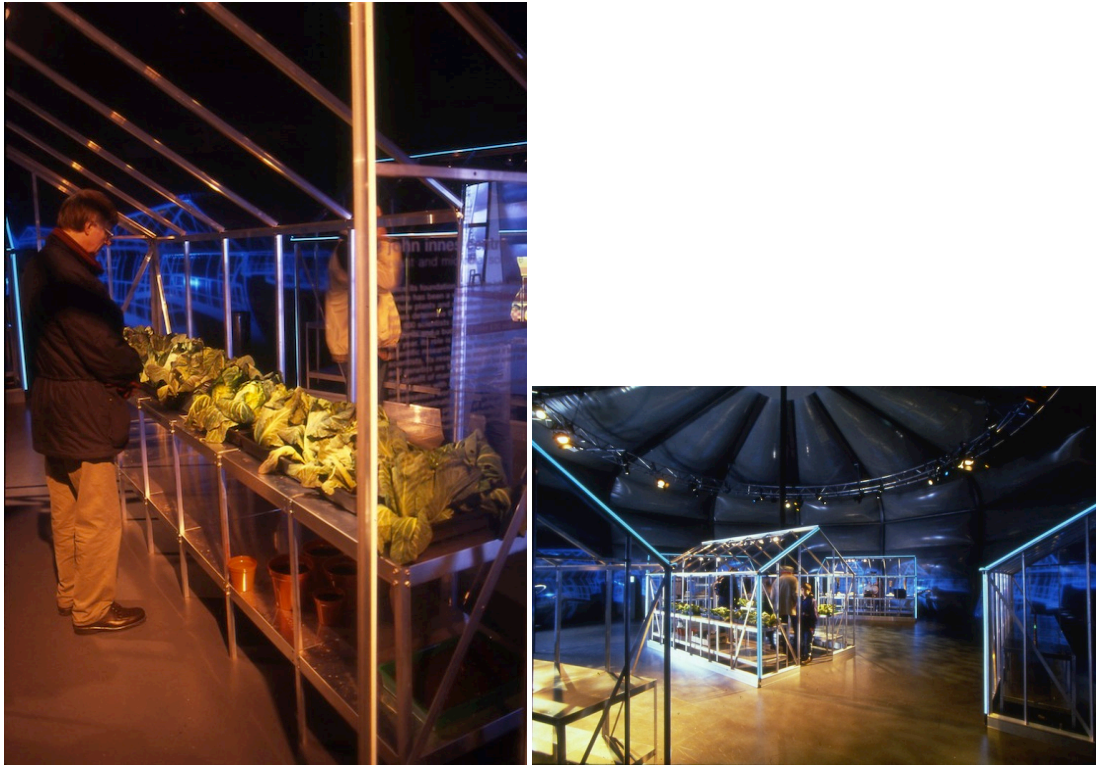


Illustration 2. Exterior shot of 'powerhouse::uk' in Horseguards Parade, London.

President of the Board of Trade Margaret Beckett said in a press conference about the exhibition, 'the recent Demos report identified Britain as a centre of creative energy, combining individuality, nonconformity and new ideas. However, this is not always seen to be the case overseas or even at home'.<sup>776</sup> The DTI sought to display the physical manifestations of British creativity in fashion, design, communication, and science, but also to convey more intangible British qualities such as eccentricity and 'potting shed' invention. In the 'Learning' section of the exhibition examples of scientific innovation were displayed in five garden greenhouses, lending them the air of homegrown invention rather than hi-tech laboratory. (See Illustrations 3- 4)

---

<sup>776</sup> Margaret Beckett quoted in Department of Trade and Industry press release, 17, February 1998. DTI website via Web Archive, <http://web.archive.org/web/19980206142451/http://www.dti.gov.uk> [accessed 8, October 2013].

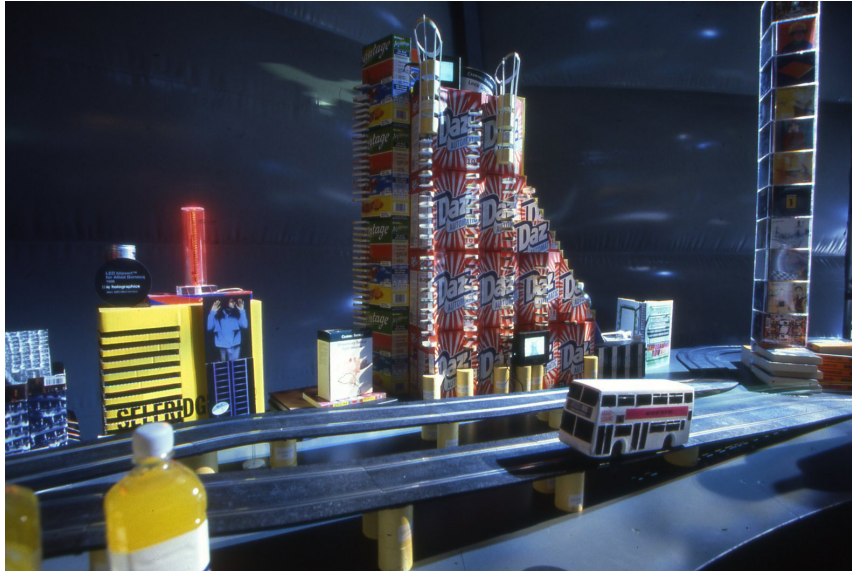


Illustrations 3 and 4. Photographs of 'Learning' section of 'powerhouse::uk' showing the 'potting shed' nature of British scientific invention.

The exhibition was divided into four sections, one in each pod of the structure: 'Communications', which comprised graphic design, advertising, special effects, computer games, and film; 'Lifestyle', which encompassed industrial design, furniture, and fashion; 'Networking', meant to demonstrate working processes; and 'Learning', where the outcomes of scientific and medical research were made tangible.

Branson Coates brought Claire Catterall on as curator. Ultimately, Catterall's authorial role in the exhibition was subsumed by Branson Coates' architectural vision. The architects were not concerned with curation in the conventional sense of telling a particular story through objects. Instead they designed a spectacular environment, in which the selected exhibits became absorbed into the very structures of the exhibition design. They wanted to convey a surface-level impression of British creativity and had neither the inclination nor the time to analyze the significance of specific examples. In the 'Communication' pod, examples of

packaging design were used to construct a London cityscape with a St. Paul's Cathedral made from Conran's Bluebird wine boxes, book jackets, tins, and CD cases. Toy buses and taxis, customized by selected designers, whizzed around the packaging city on a Scalectrix track. (See Illustrations 5-6)

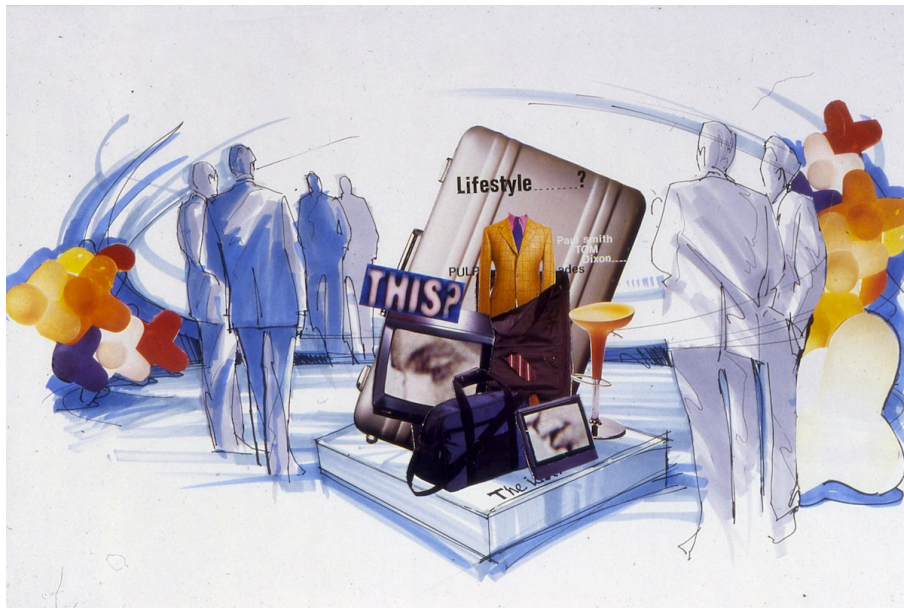


Illustrations 5 and 6. Photographs of the interior of 'powerhouse::uk' showing the 'Communication' pod.

The 'Lifestyle' pod featured a luggage carousel, which dipped and veered around the room conveying 31 open suitcases



containing Manolo Blahnik stilettos, Paul Smith suits, Ron Arad stacking chairs, Tom Dixon 'Jack' lamps, and Psion calculators. (See Illustrations 7 and 8)



Illustrations 7 and 8. Sketch and photograph of the 'Lifestyle' pod.

Architecture critic Giles Worsley observed, 'Some architects reckon that if they have been asked to design an exhibition it is because their work is quite as interesting as anything on

display. That was certainly true of Coates's 'powerhouse::uk', which was really no more than a trade show full of bio-crops and wackily inventive vacuum cleaners. The impact lay more in the totality of effect than in the individual objects'.<sup>777</sup>

Nigel Coates was under no illusion that 'powerhouse::uk' was anything more than a trade show; he highlighted its commercial objectives, saying 'everything here is connected to business in some way'.<sup>778</sup> And Trade and Industry minister John Battle baldly identified the exhibition as an example of Britain 'setting out its stall better'.<sup>779</sup> But Ian Peters of the British Chambers of Commerce argued that what was really needed to improve the British economy was 'a lower level of interest rate and a stable economy' and 'long term investment', a line of thinking he saw as being resolutely ignored by New Labour's public message.<sup>780</sup>

The extravagant ambition of 'powerhouse::uk', and its emblematic role in New Labour's efforts to deploy creativity as a national branding tool, put it at the centre of the gathering backlash against the 'Cool Britannia' marketing ploy.<sup>781</sup> The balloon-like quality of the structure leant itself to charges of being full of 'hot air' and, as such, a physical manifestation of empty political rhetoric.<sup>782</sup> Commentators on the exhibition were particularly distrustful of its use of 'marketing jargon' and 'US business school language'.<sup>783</sup> Critic Judith Williamson, who reviewed the exhibition for the graphic design journal *Eye*, took issue with its language – 'babble', 'blab', 'meaningless chatter', and 'self-congratulatory streams of dislocated words and circular messages', as she variously referred to it – and the ways in which such language

---

<sup>777</sup> Giles Worsley, 'Portrait of the Artist as an Architect', 17 July, 1999.

<sup>778</sup> Nigel Coates, quoted in 'Cool Britannia Hits the Street', BBC News website, 3 April, 1998.

<sup>779</sup> John Battle quoted in 'Cool Britannia Hits the Street', BBC News website, 3 April, 1998.

<sup>780</sup> BBC News website, 3 April, 1998.

<sup>781</sup> According to an article in *PR Week*, PR agencies were beginning to advise celebrities to disassociate themselves from the 'Cool Britannia' campaign. Sophie Barker, 'Rebranding: PR Caution Over Cool as a Corporate Tool', *PR Week*, 24 April 1998.

<sup>782</sup> Nonie Niesewand, 'Britain's Export Showcase is Hot Air', *The Independent*, March 27, 1998, and Philip Browning, 'Blairite Britain Enshrined in a Bouncy Castle', *The New York Times*, 15 April 1998.

<sup>783</sup> Jonathan Glancey, 'Repacking Britain', *The Guardian*, 2 April, 1998, p. 4.

spoke not of the actual creativity on display, but merely reflected the values of the politics that shaped it. She focused on the emptiness of the words and phrases that were projected on giant screens (intimate, rain, memory, work, laugh and hand me down, splash it all over, and west end girls.) She wrote,

The room was a babble of electronic messages made up largely of buzzwords and clichés. It was clear that they were meant to invoke a medley of British lifestyles and cultural trends. But what they invoked most of all was, appropriately, precisely the increasing bombardment of repetitive lifestyle verbiage that makes up much of British culture at present.<sup>784</sup>

Considering the relationship of the catalogue to the exhibition, Williamson wrote, 'the lowercase babble of the brochure – packed as it was with buzz-words about creativity, innovation, mapping, diversity – was precisely the hard-copy counterpart of the digital babble in the show itself. For the most part, the babble was the show'.<sup>785</sup> (See Illustrations 9 and 10)



<sup>784</sup> Judith Williamson, 'Inflated Intangibles', *Eye Magazine*, Spring, 1999, p. 7.

<sup>785</sup> *Ibid.*





Illustrations 9 and 10. Sketches of interior of 'powerhouse::uk' showing use of 'lifestyle' language on electronic displays.

Former Boilerhouse and Design Museum director Stephen Bayley published his satirical reflections on New Labour's national rebranding campaign, *Labour Camp: The Failure of Style Over Substance*, in 1998.<sup>786</sup> Like Williamson, he focused on what he saw as the inadequacies of language in Leonard's Demos report, and concluded that, 'The folly of having an influential report about national identity, a matter of aesthetics, written by someone with no apparent interest in the visual, is a depressingly apt emblem of New Britain where an obsession with appearances does not entail any very precise aesthetic awareness'.<sup>787</sup>

Another target for criticism was the exhibition's evocation of a nation networked by intangible digital technology, which seemed out of touch with the still-fragmented, localized, and very tangible realities of the country's decrepit physical infrastructure. Architecture critic Jonathan Glancey wrote, 'For many first-time visitors to Britain – including the business executives the Government wishes to woo – the

<sup>786</sup> Stephen Bayley, *Labour Camp: The Failure of Style Over Substance*, (London: BT Batsford 1998).

<sup>787</sup> Stephen Bayley, "Welcome to Logoland", *The Independent*, 27 September, 1998.

impression here is one of garish carpets that disfigure the airport lounges, deregulated buses, clapped-out privatized railways, major roads in a permanent state of disrepair or being repaired, trashy 'vernacular' housing, people sleeping in doorways, overflowing rubbish bins, and, lastly, American-style fast-food outlets'.<sup>788</sup>

The overflowing rubbish bins of Britain, evoked by Glancey, were the point of departure for a very different exhibition, held the following spring at the Institute of Contemporary Arts. 'Stealing Beauty: British Design Now' portrayed what its curator, Claire Catterall, discerned as a new sensibility evident in design and the way it was being practiced in late 1990s London.

**'Stealing Beauty': 'a complete environment' as criticism**

In 1998 Andrea Rose, director of Visual Arts at the British Council, commissioned Claire Catterall to organize an exhibition of contemporary British design, a first for the Council.<sup>789</sup> After being made redundant from the Design Museum in 1994, Catterall had become a freelance curator, working out of the studio of the young architecture firm Urban Salon, curating shows such as 'Design of the Times: One Hundred Years of the Royal College of Art' in 1996 and 'Portable Architecture' at the Royal Institute of British Architects in 1997. Catterall came up with a list for Andrea Rose of relatively unknown designers and architects who she felt represented a new approach to designing and making, 'a mixture of passion, beauty, rough edges, rawness'.<sup>790</sup> Rose was puzzled by Catterall's proposal, however, and asked some advisers to look at it for her. They included the artist Richard Wentworth, Design Museum curator Paul Thompson, and Architecture Consultant to the British Council Victoria

---

<sup>788</sup> Jonathan Glancey, 'Repacking Britain', *The Guardian*, 2 April, 1998, p. 4.

<sup>789</sup> The first British Council design exhibition was 'Work from London: Graphics, Visual Languages and Culture'. The exhibition was curated by Michael Horsham with design by Graphic Thought Facility and opened in Malta in November 1996.

<sup>790</sup> Claire Catterall, personal interview, 17 September, 2007.



Thornton – none of whom supported the proposal.<sup>791</sup> ‘They didn’t know the exhibitors and said that it wasn’t encompassing enough’, Catterall remarked at the time.<sup>792</sup>

Also on Rose’s panel was Emma Dexter, the director of exhibitions at ICA, who supported Catterall’s concept. On the colophon page of the exhibition catalogue, Catterall acknowledges the ICA for their support and hints at the exhibition’s difficult passage, writing, ‘Where other institutions shied away from the concept, the ICA welcomed and encouraged us to push the conversation to the furthest limit’.<sup>793</sup>

The ICA, established in 1946 as an alternative meeting space for artists, writers, and scientists had included design in its remit ever since members of the Independent Group, who staged exhibitions at the ICA in the early 1950s, turned their attention to mass-produced design. But it was better known for staging avant-garde experimental performances, seminars, film, and art exhibitions. The ICA was not concerned with promoting British design, or indeed any worldview in particular. It was a broadly defined arts institution, partially publically funded, but heavily dependent on commercial sponsorship – Perrier Jouet Champagne, in the case of ‘Stealing Beauty’.<sup>794</sup> It operated in an interstitial space between government, culture, and commerce, and afforded Catterall – who was born in Malaysia, already considered herself an outsider – a position beyond both the state- and commerce-driven demands on a design exhibition.

‘Stealing Beauty’, hastily assembled in three months, with a small budget of £20,000 (compared to the £1 million spent on ‘powerhouse::uk’ or the £250,000 spent on ‘Culture and

---

<sup>791</sup> The British Council ended up hiring Nick Barley, Stephen Coates, and Marcus Field whose 1999 show, titled ‘Lost and Found’, showcased British manufactured products, and toured to Cologne, Paris and Brussels.

<sup>792</sup> Claire Catterall quoted in Liz Farrelly, ‘Display Cases’, *Design Week*, 26 March 1999, p. 41.

<sup>793</sup> Colophon, *Stealing Beauty: British Design Now*, (London: ICA, 1999).

<sup>794</sup> In notes for the exhibition, under the question ‘What do Perrier-Jouët want out of this?’ one of the answers was: ‘to be seen to have integrity in their understanding of design’. ‘Stealing Beauty’ files, un-catalogued, ICA Archive.

Commerce', the Design Museum's inaugural 1989 exhibition), was only on show for seven weeks, yet its influence extended well beyond its modest scope.<sup>795</sup> It was widely reviewed in the national press, lifestyle publications, and art and design magazines (generating at least 50 reviews and features thanks to formidable press outreach on the part of the ICA).<sup>796</sup>

'Stealing Beauty' gathered the recent work of seven individual designers and nine design collectives, with some pieces commissioned specifically, to highlight the interests and methods emergent in contemporary design. Most of the designers were British; the foreign-born ones were based in Britain. They were in their twenties and thirties, and recently graduated. Some of the designers worked in the same spaces that they lived, and many of the objects they produced were small-scale, improvisational fixes to domestic quandaries such as how to hang one's clothes without getting the marks of a wire hanger in the shoulders or how to bring small moments of beauty into a low-rent, sparsely furnished living space.<sup>797</sup> The work they contributed to the exhibition was concerned with the experience of living a transient, non-committal, urban existence. It turned away from public issues of deregulated capitalism, environmental catastrophe, and globalization, and looked inward instead to issues of personal meaning; it functioned in a circumscribed sphere in which designers designed primarily for, and amongst, themselves.

### **Raiding the rubbish**

Most of the exhibits were made from, or inspired by found materials and rubbish. 'If you look at the work it is,

---

<sup>795</sup> The £20,000 comprised a £1,000 fee for Catterall, £1,000 for Graphic Thought Facility and £3,500 for Urban Salon. The remainder was spent on the production of the exhibits and the fabrication and installation of the exhibition structures. 'Stealing Beauty' files, un-catalogued, ICA Archive. Commerce and Culture Exhibition Budget, Design Museum archive, un-catalogued.

powerhouse:uk budget, personal papers, un-catalogued.

<sup>796</sup> The ICA PR department reported that 'We have mailed out 250 press packs TV, Radio, Design, Style and Art magazine. Also all the weekend supplements and daily newspapers'. 'Stealing Beauty' Press Update, 'Stealing Beauty' Files, un-catalogued, ICA archive.

<sup>797</sup> The members of El Ultimo Grito lived and worked in a council flat in Peckham, for example.

essentially, just a load of old tat. Supermarket trolleys, lottery tickets, flyposters, blue and white table china, office signage, 2 x 4 ply football terrace chants, council estate maps, the work is littered with things stolen from the landscape of our everyday lives...’, wrote Catterall in the exhibition catalogue.<sup>798</sup> A relish for austerity and an emphatic modesty of means was evident in the work on display. The use of scavenged materials and the act of ‘urban hunting and gathering’ were deliberate responses to the slick processed materials used by more established designers.

The designers included in the exhibition were inspired by everyday life. By repurposing pieces of mundane detritus such as bus tickets, lottery numbers, and second-hand clothes, they celebrated the everyday as ‘an arena of authentic experience’, as Rita Felski termed it.<sup>799</sup> None of the work in ‘Stealing Beauty’ dealt explicitly with the political potential of an engagement with the everyday to resist power structures, cut across class barriers, or problematise capitalism.<sup>800</sup> Such ideals were implicit in much of the work, however, and, to some extent, can be seen as the delayed, material manifestations of earlier philosophical thinking that had theorized the everyday.

The exhibition’s title, with the term ‘beauty’ suggests an urge to transcend the everyday, and to render the ordinary extraordinary.<sup>801</sup> Most of the work in the exhibition engaged with the everyday, however, not as a negative or residual state to be transcended or resisted, but rather, as the expression of the small pleasures to be found in ‘repetition,

---

<sup>798</sup> Claire Catterall, *Stealing Beauty: British Design Now*, (London: ICA, 1999), p. 7.

<sup>799</sup> Rita Felski, *Doing Time: Feminist Theory and Postmodern Culture* (New York: NYU Press, 2000), p. 79.

<sup>800</sup> Theorists such as Henri Lefebvre and the Situationists of 1960s Paris had explored the everyday in politicized terms as a strategy for countering society’s infatuation with ‘the spectacle’. See in particular Henri Lefebvre, *Critique of Everyday Life Vol.1*, trans. by John Moore (London: Verso, 1991).

<sup>801</sup> The exhibition went through many name changes before ‘Stealing Beauty’ was approved by ICA director Philip Dodd. ‘Nothing Out of the Ordinary’, a title which evokes more closely Felski’s ‘world leached of transcendence’, was Catterall’s preference, but Dodd considered that the word ‘ordinary had pejorative overtones’. Notes in ‘Stealing Beauty’ files, un-catalogued, ICA Archive.

home, and habit' (Felski's conception of three facets of the everyday), pleasures that could be embodied through the methods, circumstances, and materials of its making.<sup>802</sup>

The Spanish trio El Ultimo Grito, who produced hybrid, multifunctional furnishings, used a rolled-up newspaper secured with a piece of wire to make a coat hanger called 'Millwall Brick'. Swedish fashion designer Ann-Sofie Back used second-hand clothes as her raw materials, which she reconstructed with new additions of plastic bags, safety pins, and colour from felt-tip pens. George Badele stacked rolls of masking tape, pulled up their centres into cones, and inserted a bulb within them to create his Stalagmite lanterns.

The furniture designer Michael Marriott repurposed an inverted bucket as a pendant lampshade and a sign found at London's disused Aldwych underground station as a table. In 'Furniture for people without gardens', he constructed a post-apocalyptic living space from plywood frame and plastic sheeting as walls, with pieces of furniture designed to support combinations of flower vases.

The approaches to everyday life represented in 'Stealing Beauty', did consider it a manifestation of the social degradation that occurs under capitalism, but mostly they celebrated the potential of the concept as a liberating alternative to style-based conceptions of design.

A prevailing theme in design of the 1990s was a rejection of the perceived excesses of the 1980s and a return to minimalist or neo-functional forms, humble materials, and the designer's more sober public presence. 'Humility is an inevitable step in the cleansing process that has been taking place in design', observed design historian Penny Sparke.<sup>803</sup>

In a special section of the October 1997 issue of *Blueprint* titled 'Product Overload', contributing editor Rick Poynor

---

<sup>802</sup> Rita Felski, *Doing Time: Feminist Theory and Postmodern Culture* (New York: NYU Press, 2000), p. 81.

<sup>803</sup> Penny Sparke, quoted in David Redhead, 'The Irresistible Rise of the Anonymous', *Blueprint*, September 1993, p. 79.

wrote that the contemporary shopping experience involved 'too much variety. Too much duplication. Too many choices to make that have nothing to do with need. Too much fantasy. Too much stuff'.<sup>804</sup> This condition presented a 'central dilemma' for designers of consumer goods, which is that whatever they produced – however well-intentioned, thoughtful, or alluring – simply 'contributes to the gigantic over-production of things'.<sup>805</sup> The design critic used to be able to mitigate the situation by helping people make informed choices. But a decade or more later, Poynor observed, 'design-watchers' appeared to be paralysed were leaving TV, the newspapers, and the shelter magazine *Wallpaper*, 'a buy-it-all bible of 'urban modernism', to tell the dominant story of design – as consumption, business opportunity, and status symbol. 'An alternative vision of design, not dedicated to consumerist over-production, has all but disappeared within design itself as well as the press'.<sup>806</sup>

Concerns over climate change, implicit in Poynor's comments about over-production, also contributed to the designer's dilemma. Curator and critic John Thackara summed up the impotency felt in the late 1990s: 'For 30 years scientists, think tanks, and global summits, have measured and analysed the 'environment' [...] They've produced a stream of such ghastly projections that many people have been de-motivated by deep eco-gloom [...] The 'eco-problem' leaves us with guilt, denial, despair, or a combination of all three'.<sup>807</sup> By logical extension, he and others inferred, a green designer is one who designs nothing at all.

Some designers responded to this stymieing of the ostensible goals of their profession by retreating from the extravagances of 1980s design and focusing instead on modest incursions into the domestic environment that used recycled or cheap materials. Paul Neale, a founding partner of Graphic Thought

---

<sup>804</sup> Rick Poynor, 'When Too Much is Too Much', *Blueprint*, October 1997, pp. 36-37.

<sup>805</sup> Ibid.

<sup>806</sup> Ibid.

<sup>807</sup> John Thackara, preface, ed. by Ed van Hinte, *Eternally Yours: Visions on Product Endurance*, (Rotterdam: 010 Publishers, 1997).

Facility recalls how 'working with everyday undervalued materials', 'optimising small opportunities', and using 'modesty as a component' of practice, made complete sense to he and his partners, as a reaction against the 'style-led design of the late 1980s'.<sup>808</sup> In 1993 Droog Design, a loose collective based in Amsterdam, introduced products that featured the doggedly straightforward treatment of recycled materials, and the ironic subversion of recognizable design typologies. Their collection included such pieces as a chandelier made from eighty-five exposed light bulbs (Rody Graumans, 1993), a chest of drawers made by strapping together a random assortment of used drawers (Tejo Remy, 1991), and a chair made from layers of rags bound with metal strips (Tejo Remy, 1991).

In a review of new furniture at the Royal College of Art degree show in 1993, David Redhead observed, 'Everywhere there was modular, minimal and everyday furniture made of easily assembled, eco-friendly materials'.<sup>809</sup> The students' work, Redhead argued, was symptomatic of 'a broader European shift away from self-indulgence and flamboyance and towards self-denial and restraint which Italian critics have already christened New Functionalism'. The furniture designer Jasper Morrison, who had been working in this austere mode even during the 1980s, told Redhead he 'believed that designers have once again begun to think about the 'contextual value' of an object to its user and to restate fundamentals – usefulness, longevity, and ordinariness – that were squeezed off the agenda in the rush for self-expression'.<sup>810</sup>

Removing their work from the aspirational and glamorous sphere in which design had operated in the 1980s, designers like Morrison, Konstantin Grcic, Axel Kufus, and a younger generation influenced by them, such as Thomas Sandell and Luke Pearson, refocused on the mundane rituals of the everyday. Some designers reasoned that the more connected someone felt

<sup>808</sup> Paul Neale, interview with Putri Trisulo, 2 March 2011, 'Curating Now', MA thesis, RCA/V&A, 2001.

<sup>809</sup> David Redhead, 'The Irresistible Rise of the Anonymous', *Blueprint*, September 1993, p. 77.

<sup>810</sup> *Ibid.*

to a product, the longer they would likely keep it, and so they sought ways to ignite emotional responses to their work, with the hope that product endurance would enrich users' lives and be less damaging to the environment.<sup>811</sup>

Much of the work in 'Stealing Beauty' drew attention to the emotional resonance of designed objects – how objects could activate and embody the memories both of their designers and their users. When asked to state whom they designed for (ideally), almost all the exhibited designers responded that they designed for themselves.

The design firm Dunne & Raby collaborated with furniture designer Michael Anastassiades to create a project they titled 'Weeds, Aliens and Other Stories'.<sup>812</sup> It consisted of a series of sketches and objects exploring the interface between home interiors and gardens. Among the objects or pieces of furniture, as they called them, were: talking labels that read aloud to potted plants; a Cricket Box to bring the sound of crickets into the home; a rustling branch, intended to perform as a sonic vase; and a bench to be shared with flowers. This propositional work, highlighting a tension between fantasy and everyday life, was intended to provoke curiosity and an emotional response in viewers.

As Catterall remarked, 'I think the designers wanted to put out something familiar and something you could respond to on an emotional level. They wanted to show that design wasn't a global monster that has no integrity and personality and intimacy. Design is driven by need but also by emotional need. It was a turning point, really when we realized that design could really make you feel different, that it could provide comfort'.<sup>813</sup>

---

<sup>811</sup> In 1998 the Eternally Yours Foundation, a Dutch product think tank, published *Eternally Yours: Visions on Product Endurance*, a book that made the claim that green thinking needed to focus on how to persuade people to keep their products for longer, through the use of well-built hardware, updatable software, and by making them lovable.

<sup>812</sup> This project had been previously displayed in 1998 in the Window Gallery of the British Council's Prague offices, commissioned by the curator Andree Cooke.

<sup>813</sup> Claire Catterall, personal interview, 17 September, 2007.

### **Making do**

Technological developments such as desktop publishing, Computer Aided Design and Computer Aided Milling altered the way designers worked in the 1990s, allowing for smaller studios and more rapid prototyping, while increasingly computerized production processes and larger scales of production led to a more risk-averse manufacturing climate. Miniaturized electronics enabled by the microprocessor chips necessitated acts of translation on the part of designers who were asked to create readable interfaces to allow the operation of appliances where the mechanisms were not easily understood. The abstract qualities of new technologies, such as lightness, transparency, transformability, and elasticity gave rise to anxieties over the dematerialization of objects.

Most of the designers featured in 'Stealing Beauty' made a virtue of their enforced role as post-industrial designers-as-makers. Making the things themselves, and showing the public how they could do so too, was a response to their lack of access to Italian manufacturers like Cappellini and Moroso, who tended to work with well-established names. The neutral authorial voice of these designers, the self-consciously provisional nature of their 'make-do' solutions, and their dependence on default shapes and production processes and found materials were partly a reaction to the flamboyant stylistic flourishes of many designers in the public eye at the time, such as Philippe Starck, Ron Arad, Marc Newson, and Frank Gehry. Quality, craftsmanship, and signature styles were beside the point in chairs made of plywood and army blankets; these were anti-luxury statements.

Some used existing manufacturing processes but subverted their intended use for their own purpose. Shin and Tomoko Azumi's wire frame chair and stool-shelf were made by the manufacturing process used to make shopping trolleys and hamster cages, albeit with a nod to the 1980s high-end wire furniture of the Japanese designer Shiro Kuramata. (See

---



Illustration 11) Architects 24/seven appropriated Robin Day's 1964 polypropylene chair and changed the production process to turn the normally brightly coloured seat to monochrome and, for their bar design in the ICA café, they specified the fireclay used by Staffordshire ceramics firm Armitage Shanks for toilets and urinals.

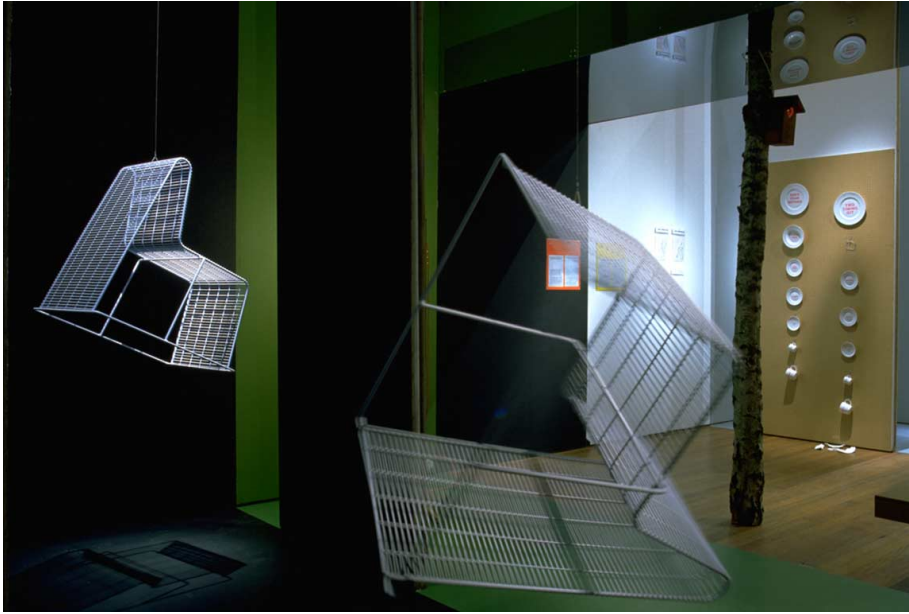


Illustration 11. Interior shot of 'Stealing Beauty' showing wire frame furniture designed by the Azumis.

The exhibition graphics and the catalogue, designed by Graphic Thought Facility, also made use of readymade production processes. The wall panels were engraved on laminate and the catalogue was spiral-bound with different paper stocks to evoke a utilitarian commercial brochure, in distinct reaction to the refined production quality of a more typical glossy art catalogue. (See Illustrations 12-14)



Illustrations 12-14. Laminated signage and ring-bound catalogue designed by Graphic Thought Facility for 'Stealing Beauty'.

Another way designers responded to their collective professional guilt about the perceived over-exposure of design celebrities was to work collaboratively, conceiving of themselves less as authors of complete works and more as facilitators of social interactions; in an activity termed 'co-design', they created incomplete and ambiguous products, which needed to be completed and interpreted by their users.<sup>814</sup>

The Dutch designer Tord Boontje, probably the best known of the exhibited designers at the time, had graduated from the RCA Industrial Design course in 1994. He contributed a set of glasses and a decanter made from sliced-off old wine bottles – and his 'Rough and Ready' furniture and lighting made from materials that could be 'found in the street and on building sites', such as softwood, plywood, chip board, screws, army blankets, plastic sheeting, second-hand fluorescent tubes and metallic tape. Boontje provided exhibition-goers with instructions and a list of materials so they could make their own at home. 'The unconcluded appearance of the pieces makes them feel as if they are subject to change', wrote Boontje in notes accompanying his work.<sup>815</sup> (See Illustration 15)

---

<sup>814</sup> In 2001 Droog and Kessels Kramer offered a series of domestic products under the 'do-create' label in an unfinished state which consumers were invited to complete through violent and emotionally driven actions such as smashing and wielding a sledge hammer, thus recording the emotional life of the household. The 'do-hit' chair was presented as a cube of steel, a rough template, that the owner must hammer into their preferred shape and the do-break vase had an inner plastic membrane that meant it could be shattered and still hold its form.

<sup>815</sup> Tord Boontje, 'Rough and Ready', sheet of explanatory notes, 'Stealing Beauty' files, un-catalogued, ICA Archive.



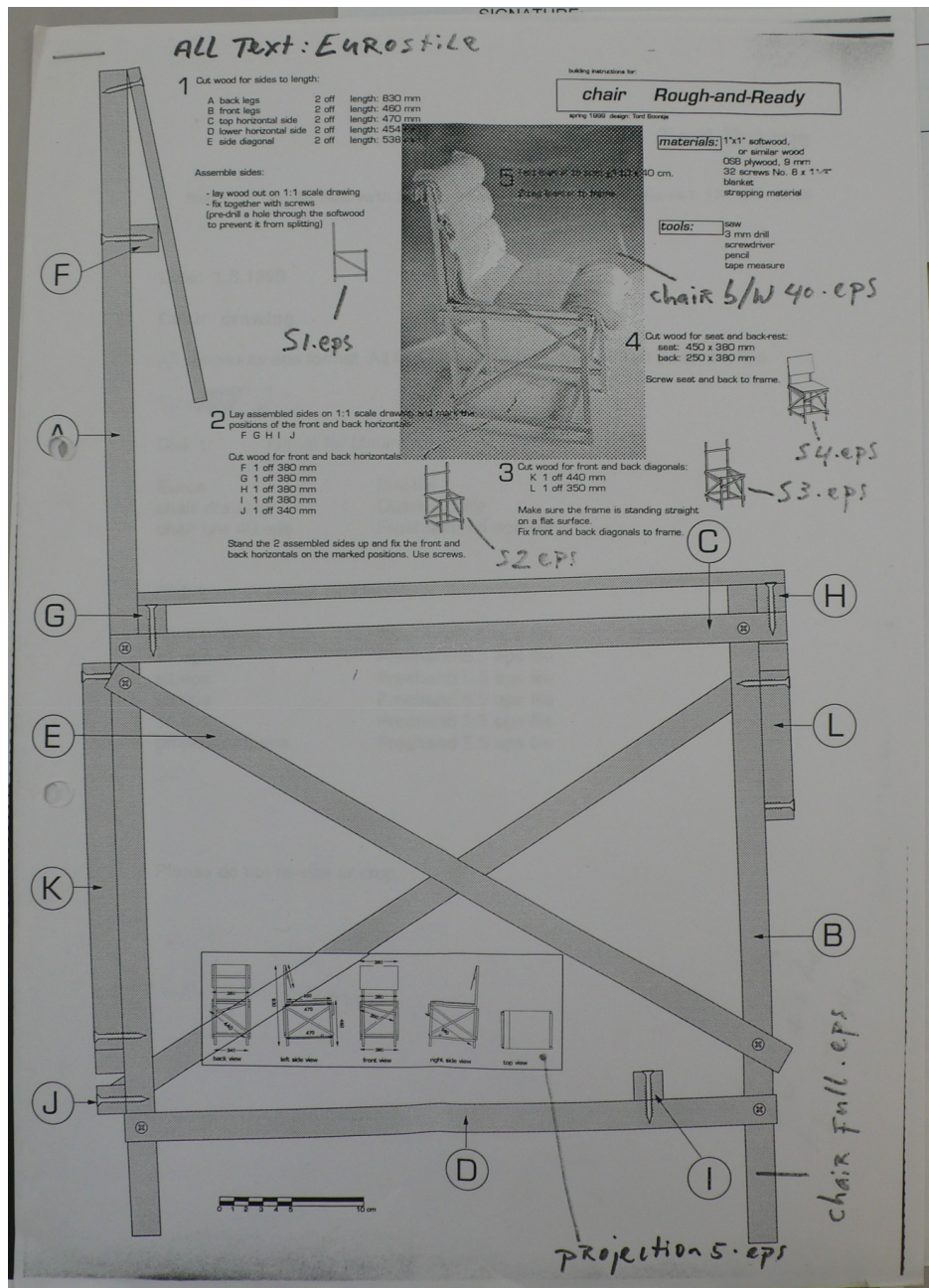


Illustration 15. Sheet of explanatory notes for DIY 'Rough and Ready' chair designed by Tord Boontje.

Boontje's approach connected with contemporary art in its need for a user to complete it and in its demystification of the processes of the maker. As art theorist Nicholas Bourriaud noted, 'Present day art does not present the outcome of a labour, it is the labour itself, or the labour-to-be'.<sup>816</sup>

<sup>816</sup> Nicholas Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, trans. by Simon Pleasance and Fronza Woods (Les presses du real, 2002) p. 110. Originally published in French in 1998.

This kind of work was similar to socially collaborative art, practiced by artists such as Martha Rosler, Carsten Holler, Jeremy Deller, and Rirkrit Tiravanija and typified, in Claire Bishop's words, by its 'striving to collapse the distinction between performer and audience, professional and amateur, production and reception'.<sup>817</sup> The participation that designers like Boontje offered with his kits of parts was limited, however. Users, in the role of deferred assembly labourers, followed a prescribed set of instructions; there was little room for creative input on their part. Like the artists interested in participation, however, designers found the space of an exhibition to be an ideal testing ground for their work. Most young British designers' work was unlikely to be put into production, while exhibitions provided them with a rare opportunity to introduce their work to the public.

### **The anti-lifestyle style**

'Stealing Beauty's' most explicit critique was directed at a consumerist culture and a fetishisation of design and lifestyle that had developed in the 1980s. As Catterall wrote in her exhibition catalogue essay, 'Stealing Beauty' is partly a reaction against the current saturation of the media by design – all those books, magazines and TV programmes which offer instant access to 'stylish living', dispensing advice on how to 'get the look' and performing makeovers on our homes'.<sup>818</sup>

Catterall saw lifestyle being used by the 'style mafia' as a panacea for a society in crisis, or at least a state of malaise, one marked by 'feelings of deep insecurity, in ourselves and our role in life, and in the machinations of a world where even the axes of time, space and reality are disintegrating'.<sup>819</sup>

The 'style mafia' Catterall invoked were represented most literally in the pages of *Wallpaper*, a magazine launched in London in 1996 by journalist and entrepreneur Tyler Brûlé,

<sup>817</sup> Claire Bishop, *Participation* (London: Whitechapel, 2006) p. 10.

<sup>818</sup> Claire Catterall, *Stealing Beauty: British Design Now*, (London: ICA, 1999), p. 8.

<sup>819</sup> Claire Catterall, 'New Graphic Realism', *Blueprint*, November, 1998, p. 34.

which enfolded design coverage with travel, fashion, and lifestyle. Its characterization of design as a necessary component of the kind of style-conscious, jet-setting way of life that Brûlé espoused was extremely successful in terms of publishing strategy, and yet was easily lampooned and quickly rejected by a younger generation of designers who found the glamorous lifestyle depicted in its pages out of touch with the concerns of their everyday lives. When *Wallpaper* wrote of the mission of 'Stealing Beauty' ('the ICA's snappy new exhibition') as being 'to reverse the 90s obsession for the sleek, the shiny, and the sanitized', they must have recognized themselves in its wording for they added, 'though we have always maintained that a little of what you fancy does you good'.<sup>820</sup> The title of the magazine became a popular adjective to describe a genre of injection-moulded furniture, products or 'bobjects', (dictated by the spline curve allowed for by computer aided design technology) and sinuously surfaced interiors prevalent in 1990s Britain. As Richard Benson put it in *The Face*, 'A lot of people are sick of super-slick, Wallpaper-esque bars and furniture, and all that taupe and curvy-cornered stuff is looking suspiciously like angular matt black things did around '89'.<sup>821</sup>

A specific target for this group of designers' angst was often Terence Conran and his propagation of modern design, which had spread so vigorously in the 1980s. In answer to the question, 'What is your worst design memory?' the architectural practice FAT (Fashion Architecture Taste) had responded: 'A panic attack induced by good tastes in the kitchenware department of the Conran store'.

The anti-lifestyle theme of the exhibition was embodied most directly in the photographs included in the 'Stealing Beauty' catalogue. Objects were photographed in exaggeratedly banal and messy environments. The Azumis' shopping trolley chair was shot in a decrepit backyard replete with generic plastic chairs, hose, weeds, and peeling stucco. Michael Marriott's

---

<sup>820</sup> 'Steal Yourself', *Wallpaper*, April 1999, p. 154.

<sup>821</sup> Richard Benson, 'Folk', *The Face*, January 2000, p. 83.

table was pictured standing on dirty paint-spattered floorboards, and his bucket light glowed amid a student-flat-like mise-en-scene with washing up in the sink, dead flowers in a vase, a Double-Bubble coffee mug, and looped electrical wires all in view. Boontje's salvaged furniture was returned to its source and was shot in an alley between buildings. And Sofie-Ann Back's clothing was depicted on deliberately unglamorous models, with partial body shots pieced together in mismatched sections like a game of Exquisite Corpse.

With their calculated nonchalance, these anti-glamour shots (redolent of Wolfgang Tillmans' still-life photography of the detritus of everyday life at the time) were clearly styled just as much as those in the design magazines and showroom catalogues that they sought to counter.<sup>822</sup>

Through critiquing lifestyle culture, the designers replaced it with another anti-lifestyle aesthetic, which itself would become increasingly commodified in the ensuing years. Celebrating the imperfect make-do approach to production became a stereotyped practice in itself. As the critic Nick Currie observed several years later in *Frieze* magazine, 'Stealing Beauty' 'failed to avoid the post-materialist paradox: attempts to snub status-seeking quickly become new claims to status'.<sup>823</sup> And Giles Reid, writing in *Object* magazine, averred, "'Stealing Beauty"' didn't blur boundaries between high and low design, rampant materialism and gritty realism. It only entrenched a new aesthetic range of appreciation to maintain an elitist hold on the proceedings'.<sup>824</sup>

And yet, at that moment in the late 1990s, the work of these designers did seem to present an alternative to the slick, lifestyle-oriented notion of design that dominated retail and design media. Catterall explained, 'If design caters only for those who can afford it, who subscribe to a certain ideal and

---

<sup>822</sup> Wolfgang Tillmans had a solo show in 1997 at the Chisenhale Gallery in London.

During the spring of 1999, *The Guardian's* 'Designer Living' column featured several of the abodes of the 'Stealing Beauty' designers.

<sup>823</sup> Nick Currie, 'A Duchamp Moment', *Frieze*, 6 August, 2008.

<sup>824</sup> Giles Reid, 'Gruel Britannia', *Object*, issue 6, 1999, p. 29.

approach to life, what is left for those who cannot aspire to such lofty heights or simply don't want to? In this light, the work can be seen to have a political and social resonance only because it responds so directly to the circumstances of its need, conception, production and, ultimately, its consumption and use'.<sup>825</sup>

Even though the exhibition would inevitably be caught up by media spectacularisation, in a process of mainstream appropriation and commodification whose speed had increased to the point that it was happening in parallel to the production of the work itself, the work included in 'Stealing Beauty' was still produced in the spirit of protest. The exhibition could never exist completely outside of the predominant strain of design discourse, but in seeking to present a strand of contemporary design still in formation, 'Stealing Beauty' attempted to offer a counterstatement. As Paul O'Neill observed of art exhibitions with similar ambitions, using cultural critic Raymond Williams' conception of 'dominant, residual, and emergent cultural moments',

emergent cultural innovation comprises new practices that produce new meanings, values and kinds of relationships. Emergence is thus not the mere appearance of novelty: it is the site of dialectical opposition to the dominant – the promise of overcoming, transgressing, evading, renegotiating or bypassing the dominant – and not simply delivering more of the same under the blandishments of the 'new'.<sup>826</sup>

While all of the designers featured in 'Stealing Beauty' made use of free or inexpensive materials and processes, the resulting work was largely inaccessible; the products and proposals were limited editions, prototypes, and one-offs. As Gareth Williams, assistant curator in the Furniture department at the V&A Museum, pointed out,

Many people expect an ICA show to be transgressive just because of the venue. I suspect design may suffer more than art in this environment, as we understand art to be made for these rarefied places. Design on the other hand is still primarily to be used

---

<sup>825</sup> Claire Catterall, *Stealing Beauty: British Design Now*, (London: ICA, 1999), p. 9.

<sup>826</sup> Paul O'Neill, *The Culture of Curation and the Curation of Cultures*, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2012), p. 26.



in the real world. Design in a gallery can appear precious and even pretentious, not because it is intended to be so, but because it is out of context.<sup>827</sup>

In the case of 'Stealing Beauty', however, the exhibition space at the ICA was the intended context for the design. There was no real world in which the objects once existed and from which they were subsequently decontextualized, and in that sense the show was a critique of young designers' lack of access to manufacturing deals. (The ICA bookstore store sold the pieces that could be produced in multiples, and took 50% of the retail price).<sup>828</sup> Most of the work on display was produced specifically for the exhibition and the pieces were carefully juxtaposed to create environments specific to the gallery. 6876's jackets in 'pavement grey' and 'steel blue' hung above George Badele's two-tone floorboards in which layers of paint had been exposed by the wear of feet. Tord Boontje and Michael Marriott provided the furniture and lighting, Bump supplied the cups and plates.<sup>829</sup> All the appurtenances of the Millennial London designer's domestic interior were represented in this composite portrait of design in thrall to the everyday.

### **Objects in conversation**

In marked contrast to Stephen Bayley's exhibition-as-magazine-article approach to curating at The Boilerhouse, discussed in the previous chapter, Catterall made minimal use of wall texts and captions in the exhibition, using them to orientate the visitor, rather than to explain the objects on display. She preferred to exercise her curatorial judgment by editing out 'dead wood'; using juxtaposition to create 'conversation' between objects; accumulating multiples for rhetorical effect; 'precisely' positioning objects; and creating atmosphere through constructed all-encompassing environment.<sup>830</sup> In notes for the exhibition she wrote, 'the few successful design shows

<sup>827</sup> Gareth Williams, 'Design in a Dilemma', *Blueprint*, May 1999, p. 71.

<sup>828</sup> Letters from ICA exhibition organizer Katya Garcia-Anton to the exhibited designers, 'Stealing Beauty' files, un-catalogued, ICA Archive.

<sup>829</sup> Bump's You're Not My China Plate Anymore crockery was labeled with insults suitable for plate-throwing arguments.

<sup>830</sup> Claire Catterall, *Stealing Beauty: British Design Now*, (London: ICA, 1999), p. 7.

are more like art installations – communicating something through the very space they occupy. It's time to change the form and format of design exhibitions – so that they engage, challenge, and provoke'.<sup>831</sup>

The exhibition, designed by Urban Salon, delineated each designer's equally sized space with a coloured strip, which extended across the gallery floor, up the walls and into the corridor outside. (See Illustration 16) The work was displayed on the floor, hanging from the ceiling, and leaning against walls. FAT used a mirror on the ceiling of their allotment-like strip to extend the height of their forest of silver birch trees. (See Illustration 17) Exaggerated contrasts in lighting were used for dramatic effect and various floor textures were used throughout (maintenance instructions for the exhibition note that 'Dunne & Raby's grass should be watered every day').<sup>832</sup> The stairway was fly-posted with British Creative Decay's screen-printed images of anti-fly-posting devices. In the upper gallery, video-jockeys The Light Surgeons simulated in an immersive environment of projected images and video footage of the lightshows they created for clubs. (See Illustration 17) Sounds such as Dunne & Raby's talking plant labels, rustling branch, and cricket box provided an aural backdrop for the work. Catterall eschewed the use of plinths and vitrines. Her primary inspiration for curating in this sense-evoking and atmosphere-producing manner was the 'Bodyworks' exhibition by Japanese fashion designer Issey Miyake, which originated in Toyko in 1983 and was shown at The Boilerhouse in 1985. Miyake displayed his work on custom-made black silicon mannequins hanging from the ceiling. Catterall enthusiastically recalls of the show that,

it was a complete environment, it was about the inside of [Miyake's] head more than anything – no really wordy captions – but a whole environment, with torsos bouncing up and down. And it made you feel really fantastic. And in a way I think that's what the "Stealing Beauty" exhibition tried to do—rather than putting an object on the plinth and just telling you that 'this

<sup>831</sup> Claire Catterall, Working notes for 'Stealing Beauty', then titled 'All Kinds of Everything Remind Me of You', fax, 29 July 1998, 'Stealing Beauty' files, un-catalogued, ICA archive.

<sup>832</sup> 'Stealing Beauty' (Things to know in my absence) by David Wilkingson, 'Stealing Beauty' files, un-catalogued, ICA Archive.

is this' and 'this is about this'. You were kind of meant to go into the exhibition and feel it. Or taste it, as the case may be.<sup>833</sup>

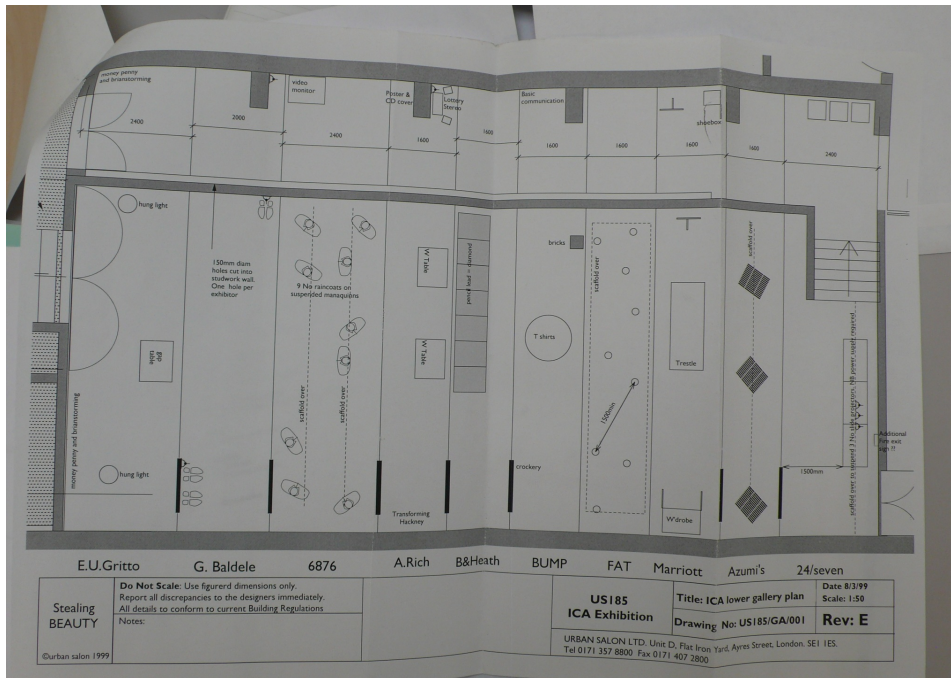


Illustration 16. Plan for exhibition by Urban Salon showing strip allotment for featured designers.



Illustration 17. Birch tree installation by FAT.

<sup>833</sup> Claire Catterall, personal interview, 17 September, 2007.

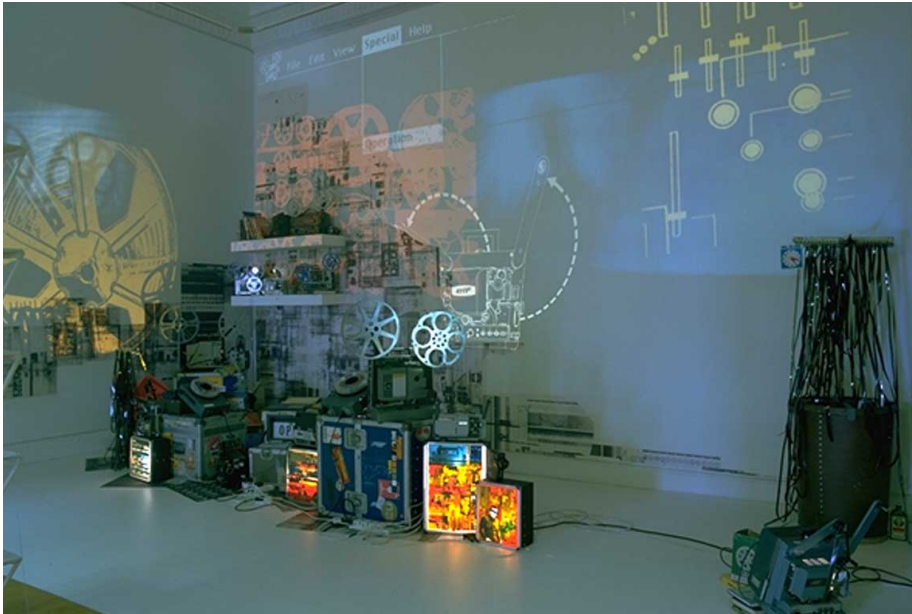


Illustration 18. Movie machine by The Light Surgeons.

Catterall was interested in curating as a largely non-verbal practice, which was less about illustrating a pre-written essay with objects than it was about 'weighing things up against each other, and seeing how they react to each other'.<sup>834</sup>

In art practice, curating gained currency in the mid- to late-1990s, a period which Michael Brenson called 'the curator's moment'.<sup>835</sup> Paul O'Neill suggests that artists were turning to curation as a new means of generating debate in response to the silence of the art critic: 'The ascendancy of the curatorial gesture in the 1990s also began to establish curating as a potential nexus for discussion, critique and debate, where the evacuated role of the critic in parallel cultural discourse was usurped by the neo-critical space of curating'.<sup>836</sup> Likewise, the artist Liam Gillick described what he saw as a shift of attention away from criticism and toward curation:

People you might have met before who in the past were critics were now curators. The brightest, smartest people get involved

<sup>834</sup> Ibid.

<sup>835</sup> Michael Brenson, 'The Curator's Moment', *Art Journal*, Vol. 57, No. 4, Winter 1998.

<sup>836</sup> Paul O'Neill 'The Curatorial Turn: From Practice to Discourse', in eds. Judith Rugg and Michele Sedgwick, *Issues in Curating Contemporary Art and Performance* (Bristol: Intellect Books, 2008), p. 13.

in this multiple activity of being mediator, producer, interface and neo-critic. It is arguable that the most important essays about art over the last ten years have not been in magazines but they have been in catalogues and other material produced around galleries, art centres and exhibitions.<sup>837</sup>

French curator Nicholas Bourriaud used the term 'relational aesthetics' in 1997 to characterize a tendency in artistic practice of the 1990s in which art works staged social encounters (literal or potential) in which meaning might be produced collectively, through the participation of exhibition goers, rather than in the privatized space of individual consumption.<sup>838</sup> Artists such as Rirkrit Tiravanija and Gabriel Orozco began to speak of their projects as 'platforms or stations as places that gather and then disperse in order to underscore the casual communities they sought to create'.<sup>839</sup> Their interests also began to encroach on architecture and design, typified by the Swedish group exhibition 'What If: Art on the Verge of Architecture and Design' curated by Maria Lind, at the Modern Museet in Stockholm in 2000. The thinking surrounding these art practices undoubtedly seeped into design culture and influenced curators who were looking for new ways to present design. The ICA would seem to have provided an ideal location for such seepage since it hosted numerous discussions about the cross fertilization of ideas between art and design. Michael Horsham's essay in the catalogue was written, as he attested in an email to the ICA exhibition organizer, 'from an art perspective' because he believed 'art practice created the permission for the modes of practice in this exhibition to exist'.<sup>840</sup> Instances where the exhibition was used as a medium to critically reflect upon design remained rare, but 'Stealing Beauty', at least, used the exhibition

---

<sup>837</sup> Liam Gillick in Saskia Bos and Liam Gillick, 'Towards a Scenario: Debate with Liam Gillick' in *De Appel Reader No. 1: Modernity Today: Contributions to a Topical Artistic Discourse* (Amsterdam: De Appel, 2005), p. 74.

<sup>838</sup> Nicholas Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, trans. by Simon Pleasance and Fronza Woods (Les presses du réel, 2002). Originally published in French in 1998.

<sup>839</sup> Hal Foster, 'Chat Rooms' in Claire Bishop, ed. *Participation* (London: Whitechapel, 2006) p. 192.

<sup>840</sup> Michael Horsham in email to Katya Garcia-Anton, 22, February, 1999 (in response to an extended critique of his essay by Philip Dodd, ICA director. 'Stealing Beauty' files, un-catalogued, ICA Archive.

medium to explore more complicated ideas about design than the trade show or museum exhibition format allowed.

### **A species of quiet criticism**

'Stealing Beauty's' quiet introspection contrasted emphatically with the bombast and 'babble' of the 'powerhouse::uk' exhibit which had taken place the previous spring. Both exhibitions attempted to materialize the nebulous concept of British creativity and represented a contemporary moment in time, but while 'Stealing Beauty' was a ruminative exhibition, carefully contained beyond the fray of the marketplace in an independent art gallery, 'powerhouse::uk' – from its macho name and its showy architecture to its alien-like landing in the middle of Horse Guards Parade – was intended to seduce a very particular audience of Asian businessmen and politicians. The form of Branson Coates' circular exhibition space was literally inflated and its ambition metaphorically so.

Art critic Hal Foster, in reflecting on the 'inflated' condition of design of the period, wrote of the way in which prices for design as a service (branding) and as an object (collectible pieces) were inflated in a contemporary situation in which there is no 'running room' for culture. Everything is folded back into 'the near-total system of contemporary consumerism'.<sup>841</sup> Charles Leadbeater, author and advisor to Tony Blair, commented a couple of years later, 'We are all in the thin air business these days [...] most people in advanced economies produce nothing that can be weighed: communications, software, advertising, financial services. They trade, write, design, talk, spin, and create; rarely do they make anything'.<sup>842</sup>

'Stealing Beauty', by contrast, was grounded by its focus on physical objects and the process of making, albeit a limited conception of manufacture. Furthermore, its comparative distance from the concerns of commerce enabled it the space to

<sup>841</sup> Hal Foster, 'Hey, That's Me', *London Review of Books*, 5 April, 2001, p.13.

<sup>842</sup> Charles Leadbeater, 'The New Entrepreneurism', *The Guardian*, 7 February, 2000. See also: Charles Leadbeater, *Living on Thin Air: The New Economy*, (London: Penguin, 2000).

experiment and take a more irreverent stance. In the context of the ICA the exhibition performed as a space, not for business-focused discussion, but for contemplation of more poetic themes – epiphany, even.

The extent to which 'Stealing Beauty' could achieve any significant critical distance on its subject matter might have been compromised by its very format as an exhibition. According to Frankfurt School-influenced thinkers such as Bruce Ferguson, Dean of the School of Arts at Columbia University, exhibitions are always framed by institutional and commercial concerns, and will always perform ideologically. He writes,

Exhibitions are [...] contemporary forms of rhetoric, complex expressions of persuasion, whose strategies aim to produce a prescribed set of values and social relations for their audiences. As such exhibitions are subjective political tools, as well as being modern ritual settings, which uphold identities (artists, national, subcultural, international, gender-or-race specific, avant-garde, regional, global, geopolitical etc.); they are to be understood as institutional 'utterances' within a larger culture industry.<sup>843</sup>

Yet 'Stealing Beauty's' form was more atmospheric than rhetoric. As an institutional 'utterance', 'Stealing Beauty' was taciturn. It refused the model of exhibition-as-text (indeed, it contained very little text at all) and instead used the entire environment of the exhibition, to convey its ideas. Catterall also refused the art historical tendency to label groupings of work as a 'movement', preferring instead to characterize her selections as examples of a 'mood and an energy'.<sup>844</sup> Using minimal explanatory captions and, in the catalogue, letting the designers speak for themselves, 'Stealing Beauty' left viewers space to elicit meaning or to remain confused by what they saw. Michael Horsham's essay written for the 'Stealing Beauty' catalogue was titled 'The Value of Confusion', and he wrote, 'this show is about our

---

<sup>843</sup> Bruce Ferguson, 'Exhibition Rhetorics', in Reesa Greenberg, Bruce Ferguson, and Sandy Nairne, eds. *Thinking About Exhibitions*, (London: Routledge, 1996), p. 178.

<sup>844</sup> Claire Catterall quoted in Vanessa Pawsey, 'Just a Feeling', *Design Week*, 9 April, 1999, p. 36.

collective confusion and it follows that the things in it also, intentionally or unintentionally, concern that confusion'.<sup>845</sup>

'Stealing Beauty' critiqued the state of manufacturing, other designers, design retailers, the lifestyle press, and unthinking consumption. But it also critiqued the apparatuses of criticism through its non-linear and non-narrative, format. As a piece of design criticism, 'Stealing Beauty' relied on the palpable tensions and correspondences between featured objects to stimulate discussion about design in late 1990s London. 'I'm hoping "Stealing Beauty" will spark a renaissance of design shows which provide a platform for debate', Catterall told *Design Week*.<sup>846</sup>

Beyond the reviews and readers' letters in the press that the exhibitions generated, is difficult to discern the quality of the kinds of debate and exchange that Catterall averred were stimulated by her exhibition. One measure of the exhibition's lasting effects can be seen in the work of Dunne & Raby, who at the time were formulating their own ideas about design. Their work, exhibited both in 'Stealing Beauty' and in 'powerhouse::uk', was positioned at the intersections of art and design, and of industry and academia. They explored the idea that criticism could be embodied in products and speculative proposals, and could provide a viable alternative to the role of the journalistic design critic during the late 1990s. As such their work provides the most instructive example of the continued discussion of ideas presented in 'Stealing Beauty', and the trajectory away from the criticism as the design journalist's purview that the exhibition helped to impel.

Dunne & Raby point to 'Stealing Beauty' as a 'pivotal' moment in their practice and a place where everyone was brought together for discussion of the issues they were most interested in, issues such as the inexorable rise of digital

---

<sup>845</sup> Michael Horsham, 'The Value of Confusion', *Stealing Beauty: British Design Now*, (London: ICA, 1999), p. 13.

<sup>846</sup> Claire Catterall, quoted in *Design Week*, 26 March 1999.



technology, globalization, climate change, and anxieties surrounding the approaching millennium. They identified in particular with Alex Rich, El Ultimo Grito, and Michael Marriott, and went on to rent a studio in the same building as FAT. Dunne reflected, 'up to that point we felt quite isolated, really like outsiders. 'Stealing Beauty' definitely made us feel like there were other designers who were doing really interesting work, and who we felt an affinity with, and kept in touch ever since'.<sup>847</sup>

#### **PART TWO: THE DESIGNED OBJECT AS CRITICISM**

Although Dunne & Raby have relabelled their practice several times since this period, and currently do not use the term 'critical design', in the mid- late-1990s they did use it to describe electronic product design's potential as criticism. 'We view design as a form of criticism', they wrote, 'where design proposals represent not utopian dreams or didactic blueprints, but simply a point of view'.<sup>848</sup> They saw their work as a challenge to manufacturers and users 'to question products through products'.<sup>849</sup>

Their work was also a challenge to design criticism as it was conventionally conducted, since they wanted to reposition criticism from its location in the media to a potentially more direct location within the design object. Dunne wrote that 'design, too, has much to contribute as a form of social commentary, stimulating discussion and debate amongst designers, industry, and the public about the quality of our electronically mediated life'.<sup>850</sup>

Dunne & Raby wanted to create electronic products that, as Dunne put it, 'facilitate sociological awareness, reflective,

---

<sup>847</sup> Fiona Raby, personal interview, 21 July, 2011.

<sup>848</sup> Anthony Dunne and Fiona Raby, 'Hertzian Tales and Other Proposals' in *Frequencies: Investigations into Culture, History and Technology*, ed. by Melanie Keen, (London: Iniva, 1998), p. 46.

<sup>849</sup> Anthony Dunne and Fiona Raby quoted in 'Product Overload: Designers Fight Back', *Blueprint*, October 1997, p. 38.

<sup>850</sup> Anthony Dunne, Preface, *Hertzian Tales: Electronic Products, Aesthetic Experience and Critical Design*, (London: RCA CRD Research Publications, 1999).

and critical involvement with the electronic object rather than its passive consumption and unthinking acceptance'.<sup>851</sup> They believed that objects could be designed to increase the critical distance between an object and its use. It followed, then, that the act of criticism would be performed in an unspoken dialogue between designers and users, thus deemphasizing the more established role of the critic as a skilled interpreter or translator between these two constituencies. In Dunne's conception of 'critical involvement', the kinds of questions usually asked of an object by a critic, would be embodied in the object itself, waiting to be read by the user. The ways in which such objects were presented assumed increased significance and Dunne & Raby's confronted a continuing challenge of how to create the conditions in which such questions could be made specific or even legible.

In developing this brand of criticism, Dunne & Raby turned in part to the genres of film and fiction, seeking a mode of address that was 'gentle and slightly subdued'.<sup>852</sup> Dunne explains that their criticism 'was really all over the place. A mish-mash, [ranging] from media theory, to people like Reyner Banham, to literary theory. It was kind of messy'.<sup>853</sup> They did not want to encourage resistance on the part of the consumer, nor did they wish to prescribe or moralize; they wanted instead to stimulate thought about what Dunne termed an, 'enriched' and 'expanded' experience of everyday life. Dunne wrote in *Blueprint* magazine,

Industrial design's position at the heart of consumer culture (after all, it is fuelled by the capitalist system) could be subverted for more socially beneficial ends by enriching our experiences. It could provide a unique aesthetic language that engages the viewer in ways a film might, without being utopian or prescriptive.<sup>854</sup>

---

<sup>851</sup> Alex Seago and Anthony Dunne, 'Methodologies in Art and Design Research: The Object as Discourse', *Royal College of Art Research Papers*, Volume 2, Number 1, 1996/1997, p. 3.

<sup>852</sup> Anthony Dunne, personal interview, 21 July, 2011.

<sup>853</sup> Ibid.

<sup>854</sup> Anthony Dunne, 'Design Noir', *Blueprint*, November 1998, p. 25.

Part of Dunne & Raby's technique was to play with time, framing their work in the future subjunctive tense so that it could express various states of unreality such as wish, emotion, possibility, judgment, or action that has not yet occurred. Yet using that tense did not mean that they conceived of their objects as futuristic products; it was better that the future their objects spoke of was close at hand, and better still, one that could 'sit uncomfortably alongside the now'.<sup>855</sup> Their objects operated in fictive social scenarios set in a near future, or parallel present, in order to amplify current anxieties and practices. They blended critique of the present with projection into a hypothetical, prototyped future, exposing the mechanisms by which cultural values are made, and showing that it was still possible to reshape that future and those values.

#### **Dunne & Raby: locating their practice**

Anthony Dunne and Fiona Raby met while studying Industrial Design and Architecture, respectively, at the Royal College of Art. Upon their graduation in 1988, the couple relocated to Tokyo, excited by the possibilities of a country with such a high rate of technological change, and disillusioned with the state of design manufacturing, the lack of advanced design research, and the drudgery required of a young architect in Britain. Dunne observed in 1994,

In this country the only opportunities for young industrial designers seem to be to abandon their idealism, become designer-makers, or leave to work in another country. Contact with unimaginative and short-sighted British industry ensures that the radical experimentation necessary for such a young profession to mature is all but impossible.<sup>856</sup>

In Tokyo Raby worked with the experimental architect Kei'ichi Irie, and Dunne worked in Sony Corporation's Design Centre. Here he created the Noiseman, a prototyped subversion of the Walkman, which recorded street sounds and distorted them to create an abstract ambient soundscape, thus re-establishing a

---

<sup>855</sup> Anthony Dunne, *Hertzian Tales: Electronic Products, Aesthetic Experience and Critical Design*, (London: RCA CRD Research Publications, 1999), p. 51.

<sup>856</sup> Anthony Dunne, quoted in 'Soundbites', *Blueprint*, May 1994, p. 10.

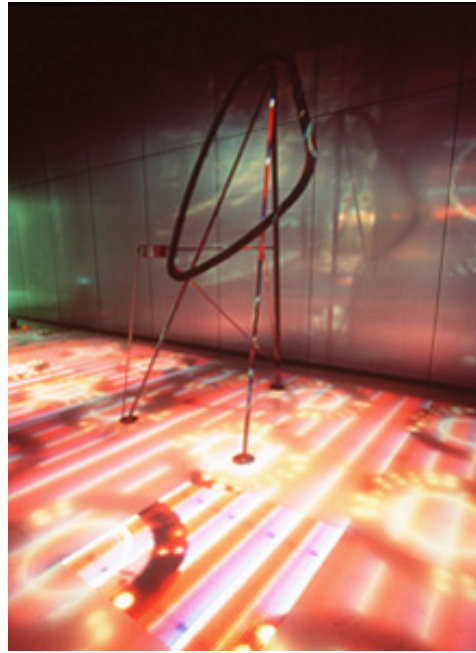
link, albeit a transfigured one, between the Walkman wearer and the city he or she moves through.

When they returned to London the couple established a collaborative practice. Their experience in Japan was pivotal, both through the contacts they made and through what they absorbed about the relationship of society and technology. 'Tokyo is a city immersed in a sea of signs', wrote Dunne. 'Every available surface is used to transmit information; clothes, objects, buildings all become screens, terminals for a vast information machine'.<sup>857</sup>

One of their first clients was the Japanese architect Toyo Ito, who had been commissioned to create a thematic section of the 'Visions of Japan' exhibition at the V&A in 1991. He had seen Dunne's Noiseman in Tokyo and asked the couple to work with him. Ito created a 'Dreams Room', in which hundreds of video clips of processed computer imagery and scenes from Toyko life were projected onto the floors and walls. Dunne and Raby contributed a set of media terminals through which they addressed such questions as user unfriendliness and the notion of data stored in spaces rather than in objects. (See Illustrations 19-21) Through this set of objects created for Ito, Dunne and Raby began to work out a design philosophy dedicated to revealing invisible aspects of the environment, such as electromagnetic fields, and to critiquing existing approaches to product design.

---

<sup>857</sup> Anthony Dunne, 'Form Follows the Software', review of 'Metropolis: Tokyo Design Visions', *Blueprint*, December-January, 1992, p. 44.



Illustrations 19–21. Photographs of Toyo Ito's section of the 'Visions of Japan' exhibition at the V&A in 1991, showing Dunne & Raby's installations.

The gallery space would provide Dunne & Raby with a public sphere for these ideas, but its location outside of everyday life troubled them. They considered themselves designers, not artists, and wanted to find ways to connect their work to lived contexts. The role of the gallery space would be a discomfiting theme for them throughout the 1990s, as they worried about 'facing criticism of escapism, utopianism, or fantasy'. In 1997, when interviewed by *Blueprint*, Dunne commented, 'we want to steer this debate away from a purely fine art context. Having our work shown at the Saatchi Gallery

would be good. But being shown at Dixon's would be much better'.<sup>858</sup>

Over the years the duo would continue to wrestle with the way their work was presented. They concluded that working in an academic environment provided them with the most freedom and potential, although even within this field they were keen to forge a new kind of practice that fed from a continual exchange between research, making, teaching, lecturing at conferences, and exhibiting.<sup>859</sup>

### **Anthony Dunne's *Hertzian Tales***

Dunne joined a research group, funded by the Californian technology incubator Interval Research Corporation, in the RCA's Computer Related Design department, which was headed by Gillian Crampton Smith. The group, which Raby also joined, became known as the Critical Design Unit. Raby recalls, 'We used to joke that the Critical Design Unit was like a refugee camp for architects who didn't want to do architecture, product designers who didn't want to do products, and graphic designers who didn't want to do graphics. And I think it provided a kind of shelter for us to get on with it'.<sup>860</sup>

Dunne enrolled as a PhD student and embarked on a six-year research project with the title 'Hertzian Tales'. With this move, he was able to start to work through all the frustrations that he felt with the design industry and confusion over where his own work could exist if he rejected commercial design. 'It was a personal journey that I was trying to make sense of', he recalls, but through the PhD he was able to position his work in an intellectual context, to suggest a path forward for others as well as himself.

Product semantics, an approach to design developed at the Hochschule für Gestaltung at Ulm in the 1960s, came to fruition in the early 1990s, and led to a focus among product

---

<sup>858</sup> Anthony Dunne, quoted in 'Product Overload', *Blueprint*, October 1997, p. 38.

<sup>859</sup> Anthony Dunne, 'Design Noir', *Blueprint*, November, 1998, p. 25.

<sup>860</sup> Fiona Raby, personal interview, 21 July, 2011.

designers on information displays, graphic elements, and the form, shape, and texture of a product as ways to indicate a product's internal state. 'Hertzian Tales' critiqued the current state of electronic product design and speculated on new and more poetic modes of engagement with electronic technology. Dunne dismissed what he saw as the prevailing emphasis on the optimization of the technical and semiotic functionality of products, focusing instead on their potential to contain and provoke what he termed 'psychosocial narratives' and 'real-fictions' and to embody 'inhuman factors' and 'post-optimal aesthetics'.

The research was driven by Dunne's need to carve out a new genre of design through which his evolving practice as a designer might be validated – in his experience, new electronic products were shaped by marketing and engineering concerns, not by designers.

The project was published as a book under the RCA/CRD imprint in 1999 titled *Hertzian Tales: Electronic Products, Aesthetic Experience and Critical Design*. It consists of six essays and five conceptual design proposals. The essays explore historical precedents (particularly the work and thinking of Andrea Branzi from the 1960s and 1970s, Daniel Weil from the 1980s, and Ezio Manzini in the early 1990s), the work of peers in art, design, architecture, and literature (especially the instruments, projections, and vehicles of Polish-born industrial designer and director of the Interrogative Design Group at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Krzysztof Wodiczko), and the thinking of philosophers (especially Jean Baudrillard).

In the final section Dunne documented and reflected on five of his projects, or 'sublime gadgets': 'Electroclimates', 'When Objects Dream', 'Thief of Affections', 'Tuneable Cities', and 'Faraday Chair' – each a radio of one form or another or, as

Dunne put it, 'an interface between the electro magnetic environment of hertzian space and people'.<sup>861</sup>

'Electroclimates' used a pillow-like PVC inflatable casing to contain a wideband radio scanner and a horizontally positioned LCD screen in a fluorescent polycarbonate box. It was created to be a kind of barometer of ambient electromagnetic radiation which it converted into abstract sounds and pulsing patterns. It was exhibited at the RCA exhibition 'Monitor as Material' in 1996 but as an object, its commentary on the problematic interface between public and private space remained mysterious to the exhibition-goers. (See Illustration 22)



Illustration 22. Anthony Dunne's 'Electroclimates' in the 'Monitor as Material' exhibition at Royal College of Art, 1996.

A pseudo-documentary video made with Dan Sellars and Raby, which depicted an elderly lady interacting with the pillow in

---

<sup>861</sup> Anthony Dunne, *Hertzian Tales: Electronic Products, Aesthetic Experience and Critical Design*, (London: RCA CRD Research Publications, 1999), p. 92.



her home, surrounded by doilies, teacups and a copy of the *Sun*, made the pillow's story much clearer and drew an audience into shared speculation on its meaning. Thereafter Dunne was careful to present his objects in use through staged photographs or videos. (See Illustrations 23-24)



Illustrations 22 and 23. Stills from video by Anthony Dunne, Fiona Raby and Dan Sellars, which inserted the 'Electroclimates' pillow into a recognizable narrative context.

'When Objects Dream' visualized through changing colour fields and sounds the intensity of electromagnetic leakage from domestic consumer appliances like televisions, computers, and fax machines. Dunne characterized the EM radiation in poetic terms – 'the dreams of electronic objects' – conferring unexpected agency onto electronic objects. 'Thief of Affections' offered a more perverse or rebellious role for the user to perform. Dunne wanted to create a kind of Walkman for a socially dysfunctional character that would enable him, when in the vicinity of someone with a pacemaker, to experience intimacy by technologically 'groping' the victim's heart – via the pacemaker – an activity that would be signalled by its conversion into vaguely erotic audible sounds. Dunne fabricated a flesh-coloured prosthesis resembling a riding crop or police truncheon that when slung onto the shoulder would activate its scanner to search for pacemaker frequencies and to lock onto a close signal.

Dunne's final object developed for his 'Hertzian Tales' research was the most unsettling and dystopian of the group in the way that it gave physical form to anxieties about the effects of electromagnetic waves. The 'Faraday Chair' took the form of a simple transparent box on legs, like a vitrine, inside of which someone would be protected from EM. The box was not quite long enough for the person to lie outstretched, nor comfortable enough for relaxation, and so the supposed luxury and repose of a pure electronic radiation-free space was subverted by the inhabitant's awkward and vulnerable position. (See Illustration 25)



Illustration 25. Anthony Dunne's 'Faraday Chair'.

Dunne's 'Hertzian Tales' objects were conceived of as stories in which objects figured as characters, props, plot devices, and atmospheres, and through which different values (spying, thieving, hiding) could be considered as possible means for survival in an increasingly electromagnetically radiated environment. Dunne was interested in shifting an electronic product designer's focus away from the skin and interface of a product and toward the psychological experience inherent in the product.

In a paper Dunne and Alex Seago presented in 1996 titled 'New Methodologies in Art and Design Research: The Object as Discourse', they attempted to validate Dunne's role as a researcher within academia with the coinage 'action research by project'.<sup>862</sup> They wrote, 'Dunne's work offers a positive and radical model of the action researcher in design as a critical interpreter of design processes and their relationship to culture and society rather than a skilled applied technician preoccupied by the minutiae of industrial production or a slick but intellectually shallow semiotician'.<sup>863</sup> This was at a time when the value of applied academic research was being contested in the academic sphere. Dunne's work, he and Seago suggested, provided a model of systematic research containing explicit data and reproducible methodologies. In Dunne's work, they wrote, 'the electronic object produced as the studio section of doctorate is still 'design' but in the sense of a 'material thesis' in which the object itself becomes a physical critique'.<sup>864</sup>

#### **Dunne & Raby: exhibition as 'reporting space'**

Dunne was still collaborating with Raby while working on *Hertzian Tales*. Throughout the 1990s the duo was invited to participate in design exhibitions in Britain and around the world.<sup>865</sup> The exhibition became the medium through which Dunne and Raby introduced their projects to the public, and they were sensitive to its peculiar qualities as a mode of presentation, and torn between its role as showcase for completed work on the one hand, or as a medium for making work in the form of installations that could be engaged with by visitors. Dunne & Raby worked with art curators like Hans Ulrich Obrist, for whom they made a suite of furniture as sex objects in the park of the French Academy in Rome in 2000.

---

<sup>862</sup> Alex Seago and Anthony Dunne, 'Methodologies in Art and Design Research: The Object as Discourse', *Royal College of Art Research Papers*, Volume 2, Number 1, 1996/1997, p. 1.

<sup>863</sup> Ibid. p. 4.

<sup>864</sup> Ibid.

<sup>865</sup> Dunne & Raby recall that two in particular, held at the RCA in 1996 – 'This Appliance Might be Earthed' and 'Monitor as Material' – helped gain visibility for their work and to attract the attention of the design media and curators from the V&A and the British Council.

(See Illustration 26) In 1999 when Rebecca Nesbit and Maria Lind converted an old TV salesroom in the Elephant and Castle Shopping Centre into a gallery space, Salon 3, Dunne & Raby turned it into a de-electrification centre.



Illustration 26. Bench by Dunne & Raby at the French Academy in Rome, 2000.

Nagged by the feeling that such installations were too concerned with a particular space and moment and only made sense unto themselves, Dunne & Raby started to disengage from this mode. They returned to an exhibition's role as showcase, modified in their conception to a 'reporting space' to which they could bring a project, in order to gauge the public's reaction, and then incorporate the reactions in the project's development. The exhibition began to function for Dunne & Raby therefore as a part of the design process, and a space for testing their critical ideas.<sup>866</sup> And despite fruitful discussions with artists concerned with similar issues (such as Liam Gillick and Dominique Gonzalez-Foerster at La Labyrinthe de MoraliteLe, Consortium contemporary art space, Dijon, France, 1995), they also decided to move away from the art world: 'Around the end of the 1990s, we said, 'No, we want

---

<sup>866</sup> Fiona Raby, personal interview, 21 July, 2011.

to contribute to the design discourse, and be designers even if we don't fit in''.<sup>867</sup>

In addition to using the gallery space as 'test site' for their work, in the late 1990s Dunne & Raby made increasing use of heavily stylized videos of fictional scenarios to present their work. The scenarios they invented to frame their objects took place, not in the realm of the everyday, but often in alien, depthless worlds that, through their aesthetical unfamiliarity, are also morally disorientating. Dunne & Raby thought the videos were able to 'focus the viewer's attention on the space between the experience of looking at the work and prospect of using them.'<sup>868</sup> Beyond videos and the gallery space, they still sought a situation where people might actually engage with their objects in their homes.

### **Placebo Project**

With 'Placebo Project', a body of work created in 2001, Dunne & Raby realized their ambition of inserting their work into actual domestic environments, to allow for critical reflection by a using, rather than merely a viewing, public. They created eight pieces of furniture, constructed in MDF, each of which gave material form to an aspect of the anxiety surrounding the presence of electromagnetic fields (EM) in the home, and that could be used as tools either to measure the presence of EM or protect users from it. 'Compass Table' contained twenty-five magnetic compasses that twitched or spun when an electronic product such as a laptop computer was set upon it. (See Illustration 27) 'Nipple Chair' incorporated a sensor that caused two nipple-like protrusions in the chair's back to vibrate in the presence of electromagnetic fields, making the sitter feel as if the radio waves were entering his or her torso. (See Illustration 28) 'Loft' comprised a ladder topped with a box that was lined in lead to allow for the storage of sensitive magnetic recordings. 'Electro-draught Excluder' was a foam-lined 'shield' that provided only a false semblance of

---

<sup>867</sup> Ibid.

<sup>868</sup> Anthony Dunne, *Hertzian Tales: Electronic Products, Aesthetic Experience and Critical Design*, (London: RCA CRD Research Publications, 1999), p. 58.

protection from electro-magnetic radiation, but that users could place between themselves and a television or computer to create a 'sort of a shadow – a comfort zone where you simply feel better'. (See Illustration 29) None of the objects actually removed or counteracted electro-magnetic radiation, but they could, as placebo devices, the designers hypothesized, 'provide psychological comfort'.<sup>869</sup>



---

<sup>869</sup> Anthony Dunne and Fiona Raby, *Design Noir: The Secret Life of Electronic Objects*, (London: August, 2001), p. 75.

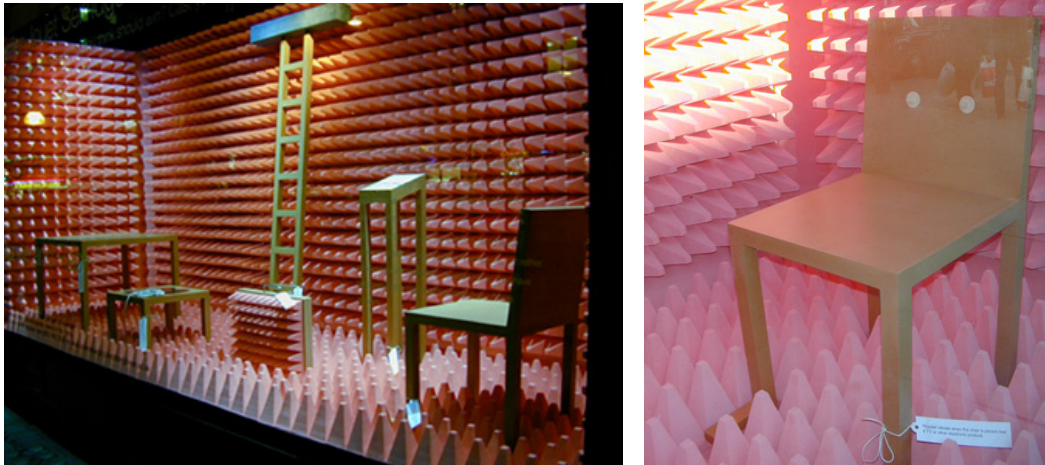


Illustrations 27–29. ‘Compass Table’, ‘Nipple Chair’ and ‘Electro-draught Excluder’ by Dunne & Raby as part of Placebo Project, 2001.

As one of five finalists of the newly inaugurated Perrier-Jouët Selfridges Design Prize, in the spring of 2001 Dunne & Raby got to display their work in the windows of Selfridges department store in central London, exposing it to an estimated 1.7 million passers-by. They used the opportunity to present their Placebo furniture/objects, in an ideologically problematic, yet expedient conflation of the commerce’s co-option of design, and their work’s intended critique of the commercial focus of design.<sup>870</sup> Using notices in the Selfridges windows and advertisements in a London listings magazine, Dunne & Raby solicited individuals to adopt one of the ‘Placebo’ objects and live with it for several weeks. (See Illustrations 30– 31) Once their allotted time with the object was up, Dunne, Raby, and the photographer Jason Evans visited their homes to interview them about their experience of living with the object, and to photograph them interacting with it.

<sup>870</sup> The Perrier-Jouët Selfridges Design Prize was initiated in 2000 to award an annual prize for British (or British-based) designers, selected by a panel of international judges, which included Alberto Alessi; Royal College of Art rector Christopher Frayling; Droog Design’s Renny Ramakers; and New York MoMA curator Paola Antonelli. Other finalists in 2001 were Ron Arad, Jasper Morrison, Marc Newson and Tom Dixon.





Illustrations 30 and 31. Photographs of Dunne & Raby's 'Placebo Project' objects displayed in Selfridges' windows in London, 2001.

In this example of critical design in action, the design criticism occurred at several junctures in the process. It was contained in the objects themselves, which were fabricated in as pared-down a way as possible. Dunne says, 'The stripped-back form is very intentional, to get against the emphasis on form'.<sup>871</sup> In themselves, then, the ambiguous Placebo objects – hybrids of furniture and appliances – provoked questions about their use. The criticism also occurred during the use of these objects. The people who lived with them experimented with putting them in different places in their homes, and they reflected on the presence of invisible electromagnetic fields in their homes, brought to their awareness through the physical form of the objects. Next, the objects' potential for performing criticism was made available to others, through the extensive documentation of the project – stylized photographs of the adopters interacting with the objects, and interviews which elicited the questions the objects had raised for them. These photos and interviews were published in the book *Design Noir* and exhibited in multiple exhibitions around the world,

<sup>871</sup> Anthony Dunne, personal interview, 21 July, 2011.



in cities including Milan, Amsterdam, and New York.<sup>872</sup>

## CONCLUSION

Dunne & Raby's attempt to break free from the gallery had been short-circuited, and in fact their association with the exhibition as a format only intensified. Their ideas on critical design were dispersed through a profusion of exhibitions throughout the 2000s devoted to the topic, including: 'Don't Panic: Emergent Critical Design' at London's Architecture Foundation in 2007 and 'Designing Critical Design' at Z33 in Hasselt, Belgium, in 2007. Their teaching, and later directorship of the RCA MA course in Computer Related Design, also spread their ideas, with students such as James Auger, Noam Toran, and Elio Caccavale embarking on their own explorations into critical design.

As critics Dunne & Raby were nomads operating in between the conventional spaces of discourse in the 1990s. Through their connections to Japan, their critique of British manufacturing, and the global diaspora of their students and exhibitions, they did not belong to the conception of a British national identity being espoused by New Labour. As academics, they countered traditional notions of what constituted research, and as practicing designers, their work fell outside of the driving concern of commerce. Dunne & Raby's work seemed to fit well in the context of art practice, and yet they rejected (or at least attempted to reject) the art gallery as a site. Moreover, while their work operated as criticism, it was not considered by design critics and writers as such, and thus they existed outside of the conventions of the design media.

The non-textual design exhibition, as a multi-point entry space for public debate, represented an alternative format for design criticism at a time when the design press appeared to have been subsumed by lifestyle marketing. Critical design provided a seductive alternative to commercially driven product design for designers-as-critics. By using design

---

<sup>872</sup> Anthony Dunne and Fiona Raby, *Design Noir: The Secret Life of Electronic Objects*, (London: August, 2001).

itself as a means of questioning, rather than answering, the demands of mainstream culture, the criticism discussed in this chapter opened up new avenues in which curators and designers might contribute to criticism. The divide between critic and designer would widen in the age of the design blog, discussed in the next chapter, which drew into question still further the role of the professional critic.

*In this diminished form the words rush out of the cornucopia of my brain to course over the surface of the world, tickling reality like fingers on piano keys. Caressing, nudging. They're an invisible army on a peacekeeping mission, a peaceable horde. They mean no harm. They placate, interpret, massage. Everywhere they're smoothing down imperfections, putting hairs in place, putting ducks in a row, replacing divots. Counting and polishing the silver. Patting old ladies gently on the behind, eliciting a giggle. Only—here's the rub—when they find too much perfection, when the surface is already buffed smooth, the ducks already orderly, the old ladies complacent, then my little army rebels, breaks into the stores. Reality needs a prick here and there, the carpet needs a flaw. My words begin plucking at threads nervously, seeking purchase, a weak point, a vulnerable ear. That's when it comes, the urge to shout in the church, the nursery, the crowded movie house. It's an itch at first. Inconsequential. But that itch is soon a torrent behind a straining dam. Noah's flood. That itch is my whole life. Here it comes now. Cover your ears. Build an ark.*

*"Eat me!" I scream.*<sup>873</sup>

---

<sup>873</sup> Jonathan Lethem, *Motherless Brooklyn*, (New York: Vintage, 2000), pp. 1-2.

## CHAPTER FIVE/CONCLUSION

### The Death of the Editor: Design Criticism Goes Open Source, 2003–2007

By the mid-2000s, design criticism had found new means for dissemination in online forums such as blogs and websites.<sup>874</sup> Seen as a democratizing force, helping to open up the previously inaccessible realms of criticism, these forums elicited new forms of writing and brought into sharp focus many of the concerns that had been gathering during the previous decades over the purpose, quality, and format of design criticism and its ability to engage its publics.

Blogs, according to political scientist Jodi Dean, 'are retroactive effects of networked practices of storing and linking. In the words of the Digital Methods Initiative, they are "natively digital" and in this way kin to threads, tags, links, and search engines'.<sup>875</sup> Before blogging software became readily available, the blog pioneers wrote their own code, and thus tended to come from the worlds of technology and design – mostly website production. Unlike printed magazines, the new aggregated context for reading in the era of social networking – or Web 2.0, as it was termed – had no temporal or spatial limitations; it grew and spread rhizomatically even as you read it. A piece of design criticism might begin with a short provocative salvo in the main post of a blog and continue via a back-and-forth exchange in the comments section. It could then migrate via links to other sites, its concerns highlighted in tagclouds and RSS feeds. This reading experience challenged the long-standing authority of editors and authors and conferred new responsibilities on readers and commenters, who with the click of the 'publish' button could also become authors. Design criticism became increasingly fragmented, with multiple micro-constituencies, rather than recognized publishers or institutions, hosting and feeding the multiple conversations.

---

<sup>874</sup> For a history of the Weblog, see Jodi Dean, *Blog Theory: Feedback and the Capture of the Circuits of Drive* (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2010), pp. 19–26.

<sup>875</sup> *Ibid*, p. 40.

Blogging about product design had become a profitable enterprise, because reviews led readers to make purchases. As Jodi Dean puts it, 'by starting their own blogs, hiring bloggers, and participating in discussions related to their products, companies could market in another mode.'<sup>876</sup> Product design firms identified prolific bloggers such as Grace Bonney at Design Sponge or Tina Eisenberg at Swiss Miss and sent them samples to review. By 2009 seventy percent of bloggers said they blogged about brands.<sup>877</sup> The sense that one's work as a blogger could be monetized accelerated what Dean calls 'blogging's centripetal momentum.'<sup>878</sup> Writing about the culture of design or about graphic design, in which there was no identifiable product to purchase, however, did not lend itself to such an economic model. Graphic design blogs of the mid-2000s operated in the gift economy. Bloggers exchanged reciprocal links and helped to promote each other's blogs. Some design blogs, especially those derived from magazines such as *Metropolis* or from commercial concerns such as Mediabistro sold advertising or posted sponsored content. Some individual bloggers such as John Thackara and Joe Clark attempted to initiate micro-patronage by which readers would donate contributions to support their work. Some blogs were funded by grants and endowments. Mostly, however, blogging about graphic design was accepted as an amateur sport, something you did in your spare time, for free.

The virtue of an open-source media landscape was that anyone with an opinion and an audience might contribute to critical discussion through their own blogs or those of others. In her 2006 essay titled 'Blogs. The New Public Forum', Sabine Himmelsbach asked, 'Are blogs thus the long cherished utopia of the World Wide Web as a global forum come true, the electronic agora and the democratic instrument that offers every person the possibility of exerting direct influence?'<sup>879</sup>

---

<sup>876</sup> Jodi Dean, *Blog Theory: Feedback and the Capture of the Circuits of Drive* (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2010), p. 33.

<sup>877</sup> Ibid.

<sup>878</sup> Ibid, p. 38.

<sup>879</sup> Sabine Himmelsbach, 'Blogs. The New Public Forum,' in Bruno Latour, ed., *Making Things Public: Atmospheres of Democracy*, (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2009) p. 919.

She concluded that the large numbers of bloggers indicated a metamorphosis of passive readership into an active public, and of consumers into participants, and the optimistic terms used in her question – ‘global forum’, ‘electronic agora’, and ‘democratic instrument’ – were typical of those in circulation at the time.<sup>880</sup>

Among the commentators less enthusiastic about the benefits of blogging culture, was digital media entrepreneur and journalist Andrew Keen who was concerned about the ‘consequences of a flattening of culture that is blurring the lines between traditional audience and author, creator and consumer, expert and amateur.’<sup>881</sup> Keen saw the mass amateurism of society as an insidious threat both to culture and the economy. Mainstream media, he suggested, ‘provides us with common frames of reference, a common conversation and common values.’ In a filter- and editor-free, individualistic Web 2.0 world, however, long-held social values, such as the belief in a common culture, became fractured and were perceived as irrelevant:

Wittingly or not, we seek out the information that mirrors back our own biases and opinions and conforms with our distorted versions of reality. We lose that common conversation or informed debate over our mutually agreed-upon facts. Rather, we perpetuate one another’s biases. The common community is increasingly shattering into three hundred million narrow, personalized points of view. Many of us have strong opinions, yet most of us are profoundly uninformed.<sup>882</sup>

### **Speaking Up**

Designers with strong opinions, and little inclination for reporting and research, found a new and welcoming home in the blog Speak Up. Speak Up was founded in 2002 by the graphic designers Armin Vit and Bryony Gomez Palacio, then in their early twenties and based in Chicago. Vit and Gomez Palacio were born in Mexico and moved to the US in 1999 when Gomez Palacio enrolled at the Portfolio Center in Atlanta. Vit

---

<sup>880</sup> Ibid.

<sup>881</sup> Andrew Keen, *The Cult of the Amateur: How Today’s Internet is Killing Our Culture and Assaulting Our Economy*, (London: Nicholas Brealey Publishing, 2007), p. 2.

<sup>882</sup> Ibid. p. 83.

worked at the digital design firm USWeb/CKS, which became March First and then went bankrupt when the Internet bubble burst in 2001. After Gomez Palacio's graduation, the couple moved from Atlanta to Chicago where Vit worked at a small agency called Norman Design and Gomez Palacio at Bagby and Company. In the evenings they blogged.

They adopted a plain-speaking, approachable voice for the blog, recasting conventional navigational headings in conversational terms: 'So what exactly is this place?' (for the more usual 'About' section) and 'Let me go please' (instead of the more prosaic 'Unsubscribe'). To introduce himself, Vit wrote, 'And what makes me a design critic? Nothing really. I just need an outlet to speak up, and hopefully somebody will listen and would like to say something too.'<sup>883</sup>

Vit's posts were short, opinion-based observations, crudely articulated in off-the-cuff rushes, mostly about new design work, the activities of professional organizations such as the AIGA, or visual tropes he had noticed. Encouraged by the enthusiastic response of the design community – some posts gathered more than 200 comments – Vit further emphasized the 'open dialogue' aspect of the site and started to invite others to contribute to the blog, including designers Jason A. Tselentis, Marian Bantjes, Tan Le, Graham Wood, and Mark Kingsley. By the time Vit and Palacio Gomez moved to New York in 2005, Speak Up was an active online community generating multiple posts per day and many hundreds of comments.

By May 2007 things had quieted down, and most of the pieces posted that month garnered few comments. They dealt with topics such as a new contest-structured website that connected companies with video-makers; design workshops as a genre; and a favorable review of Steven Heller and Mirco Ilic's *The Anatomy of Design*. There was one piece, however, posted on 4 May, 2007 by New York-based designer and creative director

---

<sup>883</sup> Armin Vit, 'Bio', Speak Up, 2003  
<http://web.archive.org/web/20030110104655/http://www.underconsideration.com/speakup/> [accessed 31 October, 2013]

Mark Kingsley, that generated 125 comments and refocused the design blogging community's attention back onto blogging as a medium.<sup>884</sup> Mark Kingsley grew up near Buffalo in upstate New York and studied graphic design at Rochester Institute of Technology in the mid-1980s, where he received a broad-based education in visual culture. In the early 2000s, as Speak Up was gaining momentum, Kingsley and his wife ran a small boutique design firm based in Chelsea specializing in music packaging and branding for cultural organizations such as Summer Stage. Around 2005 Vit invited him to become a Speak Up author which involved contributing at least one post a month and being an active presence among the commenters.

On that spring morning in 2007, Kingsley received an email from Vit, who was on paternity leave from Pentagram at the time, asking him to take a look at Rick Poynor's column in the May/June issue of *Print* magazine. Could he respond on behalf of Speak Up? Kingsley bought the issue, took it to the Empire Diner on the corner of 22<sup>nd</sup> St and 10<sup>th</sup> Avenue, which he liked to frequent since he learned that Einstein had once eaten there, and sat with a large cup of coffee, reading Poynor's column. Leaving his coffee half-finished, Kingsley leapt up from his corner booth and strode back to his studio, already in his head drafting the impassioned response he would post on Speak Up. Kingsley hadn't contributed for a while, but Poynor's provocation was enough to bring him back onto the online soapbox.

### **Easy Writing**

By 2007, aged fifty, Poynor had authored twelve books, edited and contributed to many more, and published three volumes of collected essays. In the late 1980s he had been deputy editor of *Blueprint* magazine, and in 1990 he became founding editor of *Eye*, an international quarterly journal on graphic design and probably the best-respected publication on the topic at the time. In 1997 he gave up the editorship and continued to

---

<sup>884</sup> Mark Kingsley, 'Rick Poynor: Ipse Dixit', Speak Up, 7 May, 2007 <http://web.archive.org/web/20070531222459/http://www.underconsideration.com/speakup/archives/003354.html#138338> [accessed 31 October, 2013]



write as a freelance critic from his home base in a suburb of South London. In 2003 Poynor joined Connecticut-based designers and publishers Jessica Helfand and William Drenttel and New York Pentagram partner Michael Bierut to become a founding member of the online forum Design Observer. He left the site in 2005, frustrated with his co-founders' lack of interest in editing the contributions, and with the lack of remuneration for writers. He continued as contributing editor to several publications including *ID Magazine*, *AIGA Journal of Graphic Design*, *Graphis*, *Eye*, and *Blueprint*, but, by 2007, his primary column was in *Print* magazine, where he had been a contributing editor since 2000.

Poynor's 1,300-word column titled 'Easy Writer' published in the May/June issue of *Print*, argued that without editors to help shape their articles, design blogs were unable to produce writing of the same standard as print publications.<sup>885</sup> (See Illustration 1) After five years of operation, Poynor wrote, *Speak Up* had failed to produce any high-quality design criticism – writing he saw as characterized by its 'range of commentary, depth of research, quality of thought,' among other attributes. (See Illustration 1) He used the recently published edition of graphic design writing anthology *Looking Closer 5* as his litmus test: in a collection of forty-four examples of supposedly exemplary writing published in the past five years, only four pieces derived from blogs and none of those were from *Speak Up* – even though, as Poynor observed, 'according to Vit, *Speak Up* alone has produced more than 1,500 posts.' The period of time the anthology covered, 2002–2007, was the same period that *Speak Up* had been in existence. 'It has been quite common during this time to suggest that blogs represent the great hope for a thriving new critical debate, a place where an ambitious upcoming generation of design writers can sharpen their critical skills and prose. I have made the same claim, or at least expressed the same hope, a few times myself', Poynor wrote, summarizing the widely felt optimism

---

<sup>885</sup> Rick Poynor, 'Easy Writer', *Print*, May/Jun 2007, Vol. 61 Issue 3, p. 33–34.

that still surrounded blogs in this period.<sup>886</sup>

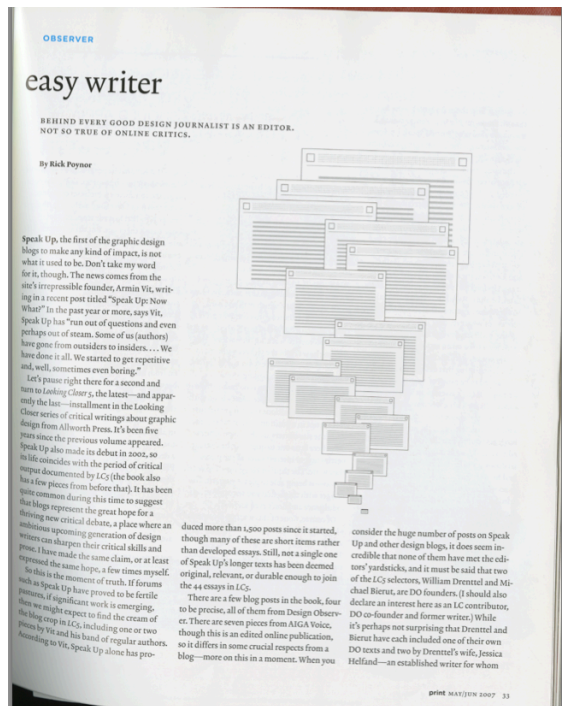


Illustration 1. 'Easy Writer' by Rick Poyner in Print May/June 2007.

According to Kingsley, using more damning language about SU than anything to be found in my column, SU is “a mess, there’s a lot of shitty prose to wade through, and many of the ideas are half-baked. But at its best, Speak Up makes that emotional connection.” While passion does indeed help to make an emotional connection with the reader, it’s hardly the bedrock of good writing. A piece of writing without at least several of the following qualities (in no particular order) will amount to very little:

1. New information or arguments
2. Exceptional knowledge of a subject
3. Relevance to readership
4. Range and depth of research
5. Accuracy of reporting
6. Capacity to weigh the evidence, and reliability of judgement
7. Quality of writing style
8. Originality of individual sensibility and approach

And, if these standards are to be maintained, proper editing is vital.

The question, for anyone who wants to think seriously about Speak Up’s—or any other blog’s—value as writing and commentary, as opposed to its social or community function, is the extent to which it demonstrates any of the qualities above.

Illustration 2. Section of Rick Poynor’s post on Print magazine’s website, written in response to Mark Kingsley’s ‘Rick Poynor: Ipse Dixit’ post on Speak Up, showing the eight qualities he saw as fundamental to good writing.

What was to blame for what he saw as the blogs’ poor performance? In Poynor’s view, the biggest single problem with blogs was the absence of editors. As both a writer and an experienced editor himself, he knew the kind of work that went on behind the scenes to ‘produce something fit for print’: ‘Some of this effort has to do with larger issues of content and the development of a strong argument; some of it with details of copywriting.’<sup>887</sup> Most Speak Up contributors had never worked with an editor before, had never benefitted from being forced to answer difficult questions, re-write, polish, and fact-check a piece. Editing in the sense of giving shape to the publication as a cohesive entity was also absent. Poynor pointed out this amateurish approach to the production of writing was unexpected since ‘designers are quick to reject amateurishness within design; exactly the same considerations should apply to editing and writing.’

The problem of the lack of editing, in Poynor’s view, was compounded by the lack of remuneration for writers in the

---

<sup>887</sup> Ibid.

online sphere—the amateur nature of their enterprise.

'Research will always suffer where there is no cash to fund it,' he wrote.<sup>888</sup> He believed that without payment to offer, it is hard to sustain contributors' involvement over time or to attract established writers, who depend on fees to make a living. To Poynor, the fact that design writing was not valued monetarily was among the biggest threats to its survival.

Hopes for *Speak Up* and other blogs' output had been set too high, Poynor opined. In a post written earlier in 2007, titled 'Speak Up: Now What?' Vit had suggested that he and his authors might have run out of steam. Poynor took Vit's post to task for making 'grandiose claims about how critical *Speak Up* had been.' *Speak Up* may have generated 'sharp and revealing exchanges,' but printed publications, he argued, ultimately provided a better environment for good writing and good criticism to flourish.<sup>889</sup>

#### **Tourette's syndrome and bar brawls**

Despite his lack of experience as a writer, Mark Kingsley took pride in his writing for *Speak Up*, choosing to work in the early hours of the morning, 'when one's defenses are down', in long, 'Tourette's-like' streams of 'automatic writing', that he compares to the creative process of the American composer Robert Ashley.<sup>890</sup> He considers his writing to be visual, and often used images, as links or inserted into the text, as integral component of his argument, a mode that was well suited to the blog medium. Kingsley studied French and liked to use foreign words and Latin or obscure terms to give his readers pause, and often used etymology to give ballast to a point, a tendency that he now dismisses as being a 'crutch.'<sup>891</sup>

Kingsley's fiery 1,400-word missive was posted on 4 May, 2007 with the title 'Rick Poynor: Ipse Dixit'.<sup>892</sup> The Latin phrase

---

<sup>888</sup> Ibid.

<sup>889</sup> Ibid.

<sup>890</sup> Mark Kingsley, personal interview, 13 November, 2012.

<sup>891</sup> Ibid.

<sup>892</sup> Mark Kingsley, 'Rick Poynor: Ipse Dixit', *Speak Up*, 7, May, 2007 <http://web.archive.org/web/20070531222459/http://www.underconsideration.com/speakup/archives/003354.html#138338> [accessed 31 October, 2013]

means, literally, 'he, himself, said it', which in the field of logic refers to an unproven assertion that the speaker claims is true based only on his or her authority. (See Illustration 3) Kingsley objected to the causal connection Poynor had made between the lack of Speak Up essays in the *Looking Closer* anthology and the quality of Speak Up essays. While he admitted Speak Up may have lacked professionalism, he believed its authors' passionate writing, their ability to engage their audience, and the way in which novice commenters were being educated through participation outweighed any of its deficiencies. 'It's a mess, there's a lot of shitty prose to wade through, and many of the ideas are half-baked,' Kingsley wrote. 'But at its best, Speak Up makes that emotional connection.'<sup>893</sup> Kingsley was not interested in probing Poynor's main assertion – that the site suffered from its lack of editing – and focused instead on what he saw as Poynor's blatant miscomprehension of the qualities of a blog – which he considered to be 'a unique aesthetic – not quite conversation, not quite a measured exchange of belles lettres,' but something else not easily compared to a printed magazine.<sup>894</sup> Kingsley felt 'Rick's impulse was misdirected. He didn't understand how blogs worked and that the important thing about Speak Up was its intent, its intensity, and the fact that, like after a good jazz session, you could see blood on the floor.'<sup>895</sup> Kingsley wrote to stimulate the views and objections, new arguments and references of his peers. He relished the presence of his audience, which he considered more akin to a theatre audience than a readership, referring to them in one comment as the 'peanut gallery.' He always engaged in the comments, entering into long sparring matches with whoever was willing to take him on, enjoying the performative aspect and public nature of such exchanges. In his view, in a blog 'the comments are the editing. It's more of a discussion than an ex cathedra missive. Shouldn't you be present for the comments and allow them to try to change your mind and to try to change theirs? It's through that conflict where things are built'.

---

<sup>893</sup> Ibid.

<sup>894</sup> Ibid.

<sup>895</sup> Ibid.

**A DIVISION OF UNDER CONSIDERATION** [?](#)

3x3 Advertisements [» SEE ALL](#)

Want to Advertise on UnderConsideration?  
E-mail Us

**Recommended Reading** [» SEE ALL](#)

Random Selections From our Selection  
(To See All: [Click!](#))

**STOP BEING SHEEP**  
Stop Being Sheep Year Four

Old Author

**AUTHORS ABOUT CONTACT**

Word It > Wet [» SEE ALL](#)

[?](#)

Wet  
Joy  
Light

Search

Enter Keywords

Search in:

Posts  
 Comments  
 Both

go find it!

Archives

By Month [↓](#)  
By Category [↓](#)

Speak Up is run with Six Apart's MovableType 3.2

**Rick Poynor: Ipse Dixit**

.....  
Esays  
.....

A lovely quality about weblogs is their immediacy. At times, a fever-pitched volley of instant self-expression and feedback manifests a unique aesthetic — not quite conversation, not quite a measured exchange of belles lettres. And much like Massimo Vignelli gazing upon an Emigre typeface, some of our colleagues have yet to develop an appreciation for the very things that seem so wrong about blogs.

Like our friend and colleague Rick Poynor.

In the May/June issue of *Print*, Rick opines upon the shortcomings of *Speak Up*; using certain comments by Armin Vit as his punctum. And while I agree with several of his conclusions and axioms, something about the general tone and structure of the piece left me bothered.

He starts by quoting Armin. "In the past twelve to sixteen months, however, we've run out of questions and even perhaps out of steam. Some of us (authors) have gone from outsiders to insiders. ... We have done it all. We started to get repetitive and, well, sometimes even boring." (For the sake of clarity, the ellipsis before the phrase "we have done it all" refers to the wide range of posted subjects.)

Rick then pauses to present *Looking Closer 5* — the latest in a series which debuted in 1994 — as a paragon of good critical writing, *argumentum ad verecundiam*.

Illustration 3. Mark Kingsley's post on *Speak Up*, 7, May 2007.

As the comments started to pour in, in response to Kingsley's post, they echoed his belief in *Speak Up*'s unique ability to make an emotional connection to its readers. (See Illustration 3) The commenters frequently compared the 'detached' style of *Design Observer* writers with the 'passionate' approach of *Speak Up*. The erudite pieces on *Design Observer* were meant to be admired from a distance, *Speak Up* commenters averred, while at *Speak Up* you could plunge in and take part in the conversation, no matter how little knowledge you had on the topic at hand. (See Illustration 4)

**Jose Nieto's comment is:**

"Cri de coeur" would make a great category name, even if it confuses the search bots. It certainly sounds classier than "Rant" (which I believe was the title of an issue of *Emigre*).

By the way, now that Amazon allows you to search within books and Google is planning to digitize the text of all published works (unless they're stopped by the EU, I guess), I wouldn't call searchability a particularly bloggy function.

ON MAY.08.2007 AT 12:21 PM

**m.kingsley's comment is:**

Jose, in answering the question of which came first, chicken or egg; Aristotle argued that since actuality supersedes potentiality, the chicken came first. An object can be a potential something only if there already is an actual thing for it to become.

So I remain by my point. Searchability is a web-based metaphor and thus "bloggy."

ON MAY.08.2007 AT 01:22 PM

**diane witman's comment is:**

I'm really coming in late on this one but I read this article over the weekend.

Illustration 4. Examples of comments posted on Speak Up in response to Mark Kingsley's 'Rick Poynor: Ipse Dixit' post.

The very first comment, from 'ben,' asked, 'Is Rick saying Design Observer is better than Speak Up?' Kingsley responded by saying, 'Ben, it is inferred,' and then picked out the quote from Poynor's piece most likely to incite the Speak Up community of commenters: 'but the main point is he has found what we do here to be unworthy. Readers' comments are described as having to "wade through a lot of bilge to fish out sharp and revealing exchanges"'.<sup>896</sup> Subsequent commenters made the same assumption as 'ben,' and added their own views on the comparison between Speak Up and Design Observer. It was obvious that very few of them had read Poynor's original essay – which did not compare Speak Up with Design Observer – but depended instead on Kingsley's summary of it. Derrick Schultz characterized Speak Up as a 'learning environment' for emerging writers like himself. 'Sometimes the articles on here are eye-rolling from an audience standpoint, but they are eye-opening for the writer', Schultz wrote, revealing another of Poynor's charges against un-edited blogs—the danger of succumbing to 'self-indulgence'.

<sup>896</sup> Armin Vit, comment, Speak Up, 6, May 2007, in reponse to Mark Kingsley, 'Rick Poynor: Ipse Dixit', Speak Up, 4 May, 2007 <http://web.archive.org/web/20070531222459/http://www.underconsideration.com/speakup/archives/003354.html#138338> [accessed 31 October, 2013]

One of the more thoughtful comments was posted by Marian Bantjes, a regular Speak Up author. It exposed what she saw as a flaw in Poynor's original article more precisely than Kingsley had done in his post. She wrote: 'Speak Up is \*not\* an online magazine or a journal, but a place where people gather: much closer in analogy to a bar than a publication'. The purpose of Speak Up, in Bantjes's opinion, was not to create 'perfect' articles along the lines that Poynor had described in *Print*, but rather to engage commentary. Her point was that while Poynor saw the absence of Speak Up essays in the *Looking Closer* collection as an indicator of the poor health of blog writing, Speak Up authors would never have expected their work to be found in such a publication, since their posts were not conceived as essays and their success was not measured by the standards that Poynor used, but rather by their ability to stimulate the most discussion. Speak Up founder Vit echoed Bantjes's point in his own comment, writing, 'I couldn't care any more about not having anything in *LC5* than I do about missing an episode of *Dancing with the Stars*. Speak Up is a blog, and its place is the internet.'<sup>897</sup>

### **Responding to a response**

By 11 May, Kingsley's article had generated more than sixty comments. At this point Poynor stepped in again, but instead of adding a comment to the Speak Up site, and with another slap in the face to the bloggers, Poynor used *Print* magazine's website to publish his reply. 'Telling that Poynor does not participate in the discussion where it happens but elsewhere', remarked 'ps' of this move.<sup>898</sup> In his response, Poynor methodically unstitched Kingsley's 'false opposition' between 'dull professional perfectionism and thrillingly passionate amateurism [...] this is clearly nonsense—you can be both

---

<sup>897</sup> Mark Kingsley, comment, Speak Up, 6, May 2007, in reponse to Mark Kingsley, 'Rick Poynor: Ipse Dixit', Speak Up, 4 May, 2007 <http://web.archive.org/web/20070531222459/http://www.underconsideration.com/speakup/archives/003354.html#138338> [accessed 31 October, 2013]

<sup>898</sup> ps, comment, Speak Up, 11, May 2007, in reponse to Mark Kingsley, 'Rick Poynor: Ipse Dixit', Speak Up, 4 May, 2007 <http://web.archive.org/web/20070531222459/http://www.underconsideration.com/speakup/archives/003354.html#138338> [accessed 31 October, 2013]



passionate and totally wrong-headed [...] while passion does indeed help make an emotional connection with the reader, it's hardly the bedrock of good writing'.<sup>899</sup>

*Print's* editor, Joyce Rutter Kaye, posted in the Speak Up comment thread a link to Poynor's response and another geyser of comments erupted. Marian Bantjes drew attention again to Poynor's insistent focus on the initial posts rather than to the holistic experience of blog participation, which included, and for some began with, the comments thread. 'To ignore the discussion as a huge part of the reading experience is to miss the point of a blog.'<sup>900</sup>

Poynor notes of his time at *Blueprint*, when he began to realize that the 1980s obsession with style was 'almost always masking a hollowness,' that he 'was always very preoccupied with issues of worth and value.' This belief in value was to do with his training in art history, but was also, he offered, 'just probably what I'm like. It's the way I weigh up and measure things [...] I think that's a pretty reasonable, indeed a standard, preoccupation for a critic to have.'<sup>901</sup>

Meanwhile, Speak Up commenter Joe Natoli represented a view held by many Speak Up contributors that professional writers were elitist and patronizing; far preferable was the idea that through writing comments, and not necessarily reading articles or even the original post, one could learn about design as well as how to write. He added to the thread of comments generated by Poynor's response to Kingsley's post:

*We don't need or want to be told how to think, we don't need these people to tell us what is of value and what isn't. Instead, we need to talk to each other, dive deep and learn from the exchange. All the responses above have done just that for me [...] I've gained more valuable knowledge, inspiration and insight from Armin Vit and the folks who regularly post to*

<sup>899</sup> Rick Poynor, 'Poynor Replies To Speak Up's Discussion Of "Easy Writer"', 'Easy Writer', *Print* website, 11 May, 2007. [http://web.archive.org/web/20070515072818/http://www.printmag.com/design\\_articles/poynor\\_easy\\_writer/tabid/221/Default.aspx#response](http://web.archive.org/web/20070515072818/http://www.printmag.com/design_articles/poynor_easy_writer/tabid/221/Default.aspx#response) [accessed 31 October, 2013].

<sup>900</sup> Marian Bantjes, comment, *Speak Up*, 5, May 2007, in response to Mark Kingsley, 'Rick Poynor: Ipse Dixit', *Speak Up*, 4 May, 2007. <http://web.archive.org/web/20070531222459/http://www.underconsideration.com/speakup/archives/003354.html#138338> [accessed 31 October, 2013]

<sup>901</sup> Rick Poynor, Personal conversation, 13 July, 2007.

*Speak Up* than I have from 10 years of reading the Poynor and Hellers of the world.<sup>902</sup>

They may have shared design as subject matter, but ultimately the *Speak Up* authors and Poynor appeared to be separated by an unbridgeable gulf. *Speak Up* provides a palpable example of the ways in which the German Marxist poet, editor, and broadcaster Hans Magnus Enzensberger had predicted, in 1970, writing's demotion to 'a secondary technique.'<sup>903</sup> It did so through its very title, the conversational and stream-of-consciousness writing style of its authors, the lack of respect for 'good writing,' the lack of editors, and the conscious attempt by its participants to approximate the atmosphere of a heated discussion at a 'bar.' Jodi Dean also references the oral nature of posts: 'Instead of judging blog posts as a literary form, it is more useful to consider them as a form of expression in between orality and literacy...'<sup>904</sup>

### **Aftermath**

Even by May 2007, when the clash over Poynor's 'Easy Writer' article took place, the trouble-making aspects of *Speak Up* had begun to recede; the views of its authors were moving towards those of the design orthodoxy. In February, Vit had written a repositioning post, suggesting that the blog was having a mid-life crisis: 'In the past twelve to sixteen months [...] we've run out of questions and even perhaps out of steam. Some of us (authors) have gone from outsiders to insiders.'<sup>905</sup> Vit was by then thirty, a designer working on Michael Bierut's team at Pentagram, involved in AIGA, and had recently become a father. Mark Kingsley freelanced for the Branding Integration Group at

---

<sup>902</sup> Joe Natoli, comment, *Speak Up*, 18, May 2007, in reponse to Mark Kingsley, 'Rick Poynor: Ipse Dixit', *Speak Up*, 4 May, 2007 <http://web.archive.org/web/20070531222459/http://www.underconsideration.com/speakup/archives/003354.html#138338> [accessed 31 October, 2013]

<sup>903</sup> Hans Magnus Enzensberger, 'Constituents of a Theory of the Media', in Hans Magnus Enzensberger, *Critical Essays*, (New York: Continuum Publishing, 1982), p. 73. The essay was originally published in 1970.

<sup>904</sup> Jodi Dean, *Blog Theory: Feedback and the Capture of the Circuits of Drive* (Cambridge, UK, Polity Press, 2010), p. 48.

<sup>905</sup> Armin Vit, 'Speak Up: Now What?', *Speak Up*, 13 February, 2007 <http://web.archive.org/web/20070224215334/http://www.underconsideration.com/speakup/archives/003011.html> [accessed 31 October, 2013].

Ogilvy & Mather and later went to work for Landor Associates as the global creative lead for the Citibank account. Even as it argued the virtues of its thriving community to Poynor, Speak Up was already nostalgic for its days of hosting online barroom brawls; now, as Vit explained, the blog would turn its attention to 'Design Relevance,' a bland-sounding concept that echoed the language of contemporaneous press releases from AIGA, Cooper Hewitt National Design Museum, and other establishment institutions.

In April 2009, after 1,600 posts and 43,000 comments, Vit and Palacio Gomez pulled the code on Speak Up, acknowledging that the blog was dying before their eyes. In a series of parting posts, Vit attributed their decision to a loss of sustaining power on the part of its founders and contributors, declining numbers of posts, comments, and visitors, and the fact that its energy had been diluted by its splinter blogs – Brand New, Quipsologies, and Word It. He reflected, 'I also strongly believe that the kind of general-topic and long-form writing of Speak Up is just not as appealing as it used to be. With so many web sites devoted to quick bursts of visuals and the proliferation of short-message communication enhanced by Twitter and Facebook, it becomes increasingly hard to hold the attention of anyone.'<sup>906</sup>

Meanwhile *Print* magazine struggled financially as its readership dropped 50% to around 40,000. It underwent several changes of editorship in the late 2000s but ultimately survived (at least until 2013), and Poynor continued to write his column. Vit became a regional juror for its design competitions, and Speak Up authors including Debbie Millman became regular contributors. In 2010 Poynor rejoined Design Observer as the author of his own blog, titled 'Adventures in the Image World.' By this time Design Observer was able to pay its regular writers through advertising revenue and a substantial grant from the Rockefeller Foundation. By being the sole author of this blog, albeit under the larger Design

---

<sup>906</sup> Armin Vit, 'Goodbye, SpeakUp', Speak Up, 13, April, 2009 <http://www.underconsideration.com/speakup/archives/006034.html> [accessed 31 October, 2013].

Observer Group umbrella, Poynor lacked the editorial oversight he had told the Speak Up community was necessary to good writing. Nevertheless, he maintained a sense of mission that was in striking contradistinction to those of Vit's Brand New blog, stating, 'The more commerce attempts to corral and confine design and the image world for its own purposes, the more we need to seek out, savor and support work that connects with areas of experience other than lifestyle and celebrity-work that is awkward, offbeat, difficult, socially challenging, strange or fantastical and that offers vital, mind and spirit sustaining alternatives to the insidious, corporatized monoculture.'<sup>907</sup>

The qualities that made Speak Up resonate so powerfully with its readership of graphic designers – its amateurism and lack of editorial focus – and the very attributes that Poynor had called out as being so problematic, were also what ultimately led to its demise. An amateur means of production cannot support sustained critical output, or families. Critics are human beings too.

### **Death, desire and drive**

In a chapter titled 'The Death of Blogging', Jodi Dean identifies the summer of 2007 as the moment when the 'bell tolled for blogging.'<sup>908</sup> Even as the number of blogs steadily rose, and corporations became increasingly involved in blogging, 'word spread rapidly that blogs had been killed by boredom, success, and even newer media. A sure sign of the triumph of a practice or idea is the declaration of its death.' She goes on to amplify this idea using a Lacanian conceptualisation of 'desire' and 'drive:'

Blogging's obituary [...] alerts us to a change in practice, a change that appears as an effect of our looking back. When bloggers are killers ushering in fundamental changes in media, politics, and journalism, they are understood within a logic of desire. That is, there is an underlying supposition that at

---

<sup>907</sup> Rick Poynor, 'Adventures in the Image World', *Design Observer*, November 5, 2010 <http://observatory.designobserver.com/entry.html?entry=21758> [accessed 31 October, 2013].

<sup>908</sup> Jodi Dean, *Blog Theory: Feedback and the Capture of the Circuits of Drive* (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2010), p. 40.

some point in time some people wanted blogs, that blogs were objects of desire produced to fill a previous lack. For example, people didn't trust the mainstream media, so they started blogging in order to produce a journalism they could trust. The shift to death rhetoric marks a move away from this economy of desire and toward one of drive. When blogs are situated in a logic of drive, they aren't something we want but lack, aren't something introduced into a lack that they can't fill. They are objects difficult to avoid, elements of an inescapable circuit in which we are caught, compelled, driven.<sup>909</sup>

And what of design criticism itself? Similar death rhetoric was being used in connection to design criticism in the mid-2000s, and has intensified as design magazines continue to fold. Toronto-based writer Joe Clark runs a blog devoted to what he calls 'the long, slow, deserved death of 'traditional' graphic-design criticism'; he dissects each issue of *Eye* magazine as it appears, pointing out how and why it is in decline. Morbidly titled articles published on and offline appear with frequency, among them: 'The Death of Graphic Design Criticism', 'The Death and Life of Great Architecture Criticism', 'Another Design Voice Falls Silent', 'The Death of the Critic', and 'Where are the Design Critics?'.<sup>910</sup>

The writers of such articles consider design criticism's dematerialization as a defined and largely textual entity as evidence of its identity crisis or demise. In fact, I believe that design criticism's integration into the broader cloth of cultural criticism might be seen as an indicator of its maturation, a sign that as Dean averred in relation to blogs, it has passed from a logic of 'desire' to one of 'drive'.

---

<sup>909</sup> Ibid.

<sup>910</sup> Joe Clark, 'The Death of Graphic Design Criticism' category on his personal website <http://blog.fawny.org/category/graphic-design/dcrit/> [accessed 31 October, 2013].  
 Thomas Fisher, 'The Death and Life of Great Architecture Criticism', *Places*, *Design Observer*, 1 December, 2011  
<http://places.designobserver.com/feature/death-and-life-of-great-architecture-criticism/30448/> [accessed 31 October, 2013].  
 Rick Poynor, 'Another Design Voice Falls Silent', *Design Observer*, 11 December, 2011 <http://observatory.designobserver.com/feature/another-design-voice-falls-silent/31828/> [accessed 31 October, 2013].  
 Rick Poynor, 'The Death of the Critic', *Icon* website, March 2006, <http://www.iconeye.com/read-previous-issues/icon-033-|-march-2006/the-death-of-the-critic-|-icon-033-|-march-2006> [accessed 31 October, 2013].  
 Rick Poynor, 'Where are the Design Critics?' *Design Observer*, 25 September, 2005, <http://observatory.designobserver.com/entry.html?entry=3767> [accessed 31 October, 2013].

Design criticism, like blog culture, has become 'difficult to avoid', an element 'of an inescapable circuit in which we are caught, compelled, driven'.<sup>911</sup>

The wistful eulogies pronounced in discourse surrounding the death of design criticism alert us both 'to a change in practice,' as Dean posits in the case of blogs, and to a belated recognition that the practice even exists on the part of many. Without a visible section or column devoted to it in national newspapers in the US or the UK, design criticism is by necessity a nomadic discipline dispersed over multiple sites and print publications. And yet while people continue to look for the column- or review-shaped piece of writing that has been the traditional format of critical writing in most genres to date, they will mostly come up empty-handed. Design has neither performances or shows to review, nor narrative content to analyze. The practice of design criticism has changed – or at least it has been rediscovered and illuminated where it has always been at work. As Michael Rock observed in his 1995 debate with Rick Poynor titled 'What is This Thing Called Graphic Design Criticism?', 'design criticism is everywhere, underpinning all institutional activity—design education, history, publishing and professional associations.'<sup>912</sup> This holds true, and the list has only expanded in the intervening years to include the curation of exhibitions, the direction of conferences and events, the production of videos and podcasts, indeed the choreographing of any kind of activity through which one's arguments about the successes, failures, meanings, and social and environmental implications of design might be expressed.

In 2013 design criticism is in a moment of anxious flux, uncertain about how to beckon its publics into being. The design publishing industry, in economic disarray due to the emergence of online media, is attempting to reassert itself through new formats and with new funding models. Rather than

---

<sup>911</sup> Jodi Dean, *Blog Theory: Feedback and the Capture of the Circuits of Drive* (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2010), p. 40.

<sup>912</sup> Michael Rock in Michael Rock and Rick Poynor, 'What is this Thing Called Graphic Design Criticism,' *Eye* no. 16 vol. 4, Spring 1995.

bemoaning the lack of coverage devoted to design in national newspapers, and lamenting the demise of design publications, however, I believe there are hopeful signs amid this period of doubt and uncertainty. Design is too amorphous and encompassing to be given its own section of a newspaper, to be ghettoized into professional and trade publications. Instead it is, and should be, discussed in connection with all the other topics that the media values and covers, such as consumer products, real estate, local politics, urban planning, environmental issues, entertainment and international affairs. Like the British design theorist John Wood, I believe that 'in an overcrowded and rapidly changing world, it is clear that more people need to think more deeply about things...'.<sup>913</sup> Unlike Wood, who sees designers and their clients as the chief beneficiaries of the increased and deeper thinking, I see the need for a broader and richer design criticism to be directed at all of us who engage with design on a daily basis, thereby creating, as a by-product, what Naomi Stead has termed 'an engaged context in which designers can operate'.<sup>914</sup> Design criticism need no longer be wrapped up with boosting national economies and bolstering professional insecurities; it can be discussed alongside all the other facets of human experience.<sup>915</sup> Art critic Boris Groys notes how some art critics of the historical avant-garde used the artwork, not merely as the 'object of judgment' but instead as 'the point of departure for a critique aimed at society and the world'.<sup>916</sup> Similarly, I believe that through functioning as a variant of social criticism, diagnosing symptoms of harmful and wasteful practice, and then illuminating paths to recovery and conducting informed salvage, design criticism can enrich the ways its 'object of judgment' is engendered, manufactured, used, and interpreted.

---

<sup>913</sup> John Wood, 'Situated Criticism and the Experiential Criticism', *Design Issues*, Volume 13, Number 2, Summer 1997, p. 11.

<sup>914</sup> Naomi Stead, "'Nobody Tears Down a Building if the Architecture Critic Doesn't Like it": The Utility of Written Criticism', unpublished paper.

<sup>915</sup> See Massimo Vignelli's 1983 'Call for Criticism' in which design criticism is cast as an intellectual support structure necessary to the maturation of design as a profession: 'Graphic design will not be a profession until we have criticism'.

<sup>916</sup> Boris Groys, *Art Power*, (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2008), p. 111.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

### Manuscripts Sources

'A Report on Design Readership', Prepared by Mass Observation Ltd., August 1961, Design Council Archive, The University of Brighton Design Archives, Brighton

Administrative and financial records, IDCA 1970, International Design Conference in Aspen Records 1949-2006, 2007.M.7, Series 1, Box 26, Fol. 1-5, The Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles

Annotated Events List, Program, IDCA 1971, International Design Conference in Aspen Records 1949-2006, 2007.M.7, Series 1, Box 29, Fol. 8, The Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles

Banham, Reyner, Manuscript, Aspen Reader, 1965-1973, Reyner Banham Papers, 1877-1988, undated, bulk 1960-1988, Series VI, Box 18, Fol. 1-4, The Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles

Blake, John, 'Towards a New Editorial Strategy', Memo, October 1976, Design Council Archive, Design History Research Centre, University of Brighton

Commerce and Culture Exhibition Budget, Design Museum archive, un-catalogued

Council of Industrial Design Memorandum on A Design Centre for British Industry, p. ii, Paul Reilly, design administrator, papers, c.1920-1989, Archive of Art and Design, London

'Interim Notes on the Editorial Contents of Design', Prepared by Mass Observation Ltd., 13 December 1954, Design Council Archive, The University of Brighton Design Archives, Brighton

International Design Conference in Aspen papers, MSIDCA87, Box 2, Fol. 25, Special Collections and University Archives, University of Illinois at Chicago

Letter from Egbert Jacobsen to Frank Stanton, President of Columbia Broadcasting System, 2 January 1951, International Design Conference in Aspen Records 1949-2006, 2007.M.7, Series 1, Box 1, Fol. 2, The Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles

Letter from Jack Roberts, IDCA president, to Richard Farson, 18 January 1971, Correspondence, International Design Conference in Aspen Records 1949-2006, 2007.M.7, Series 1, Box 29, Fol. 7, The Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles

Letter from Jack Roberts to August Saul, ALCOA, 12 May 1971, Film Bookings, International Design Conference in Aspen papers, MSIDCA87, Box 1, Fol. 8, Special Collections and University Archives, University of Illinois at Chicago

Letter from Reyner Banham to his wife, Mary, 19 June 1970, International Design Conference in Aspen Records 1949-2006,



2007.M.7, Series 1, Box 27, Fol. 3, The Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles

Letter from Tom Wolfe to Stephen Bayley, 15 November 1983, The V&A Archive, MA/28/387, Blythe House, London

Letters, Film Bookings, International Design Conference in Aspen papers, MSIDCA87, Box 1, Fol. 8, Special Collections and University Archives, University of Illinois at Chicago

Memo from Mr. Tree to Mr. Hughes-Stanton, 26 June 1969, Memos and Minutes of *Design* magazine meetings, 1954-1978, Design Council Archive, The University of Brighton Design Archives, Brighton

Memorandum to the IDCA Board of Directors, 8 June 1970, International Design Conference in Aspen papers, MSIDCA87, Box 3, Fol. 35, Special Collections and University Archives, University of Illinois at Chicago

Memos and Minutes of *Design* magazine meetings, 1954-1978, Design Council Archive, The University of Brighton Design Archives, Brighton

Minutes of the planning meeting, 19 February 1951. International Design Conference in Aspen Records 1949-2006, 2007.M.7, Series 1, Box 1, Fol. 3, The Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles

powerhouse::uk budget, personal papers, un-catalogued

Registration brochure, Publicity, IDCA 1971, International Design Conference in Aspen Records 1949-2006, 2007.M.7, Series 1, Box 29, Fol. 11, The Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles

Reilly, Paul, Manuscript, 'Presenting the Case for Furnishing: Vintage or Contemporary?', 1958, pp. 1-2. Paul Reilly, design administrator, papers, c.1920-1989, Archive of Art and Design, London

'Report on Long Range Planning of the IDCA', November 14, 1964, Papers housed at Aspen Institute, not archived

Speaker biographies, IDCA 1970, International Design Conference in Aspen Records 1949-2006, 2007.M.7, Series 1, Box 28, Fol. 3-6, The Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles

Speakers Papers, IDCA 1970, International Design Conference in Aspen Records 1949-2006, 2007.M.7, Series 1, Box 28, Fol. 4-6, The Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles

'Stealing Beauty' files, un-catalogued, ICA Archive

Student Handbook, p. 1, IDCA 1970, International Design Conference in Aspen Records 1949-2006, 2007.M.7, Series 1, Box 28, Fol. 8, The Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles

'The Aims and Organization of the Council of Industrial Design', paper prepared for discussion at Regional Controllers' Office, on 8<sup>th</sup> September, 1948, Paul Reilly, design administrator, papers, c.1920-1989, Archive of Art and Design, London

### Primary Printed Sources

1971 *World Book Year Book*, (Chicago: Field Enterprises Educational Corporation, 1971)

A Tale of Two Cities' advertisement for Butler's Wharf, *Blueprint*, 1989

'Abolish the Design Council', Editorial, *Blueprint*, December 1984/January 1985, p. 3

Abrams, Janet, '(Mis) Reading Between the Lines', *Blueprint*, February 1985, p. 88

Adamson, Glenn, Giorgio Riello, and Sarah Teasley, eds., *Global Design History* (London and New York: Routledge, 2011)

Agamben, Giorgio, 'What is the Contemporary?' *What is Apparatus and Other Essays* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009), p. 40

Allen, Deborah, 'Cars '55', *Industrial Design*, February 1955

Allen, Deborah, 'Cars '56: The Driver's View' *Industrial Design*, August 1956, p. 134

Allen, Deborah, 'Cars '58', *Industrial Design*, February 1958, p. 73

Allen, Deborah, 'Crisis Year for Cars', *Industrial Design*, 1958

Allen, Deborah, 'The Body Beautiful: A Museum Asks 7 Men to Eye Automobiles', *Interiors*, May 1950, pp. 112-116

Allen, Deborah, 'The dream cars come true again', *Design Review: Cars 1957*, *Industrial Design*, February 1957, p. 103

Allen, Deborah, 'The Driver's View: Cars 56', *Industrial Design*, August 1956, p. 138

Alloway, Lawrence, 'The Long Front of Culture', *Cambridge Opinion*, no.17, 1959, pp. 25-6

Amery, Colin, *Financial Times*, 19 September 1983

Ant Farm, biography, *Design Quarterly* 78/79, 1970, Special Double Issue on Conceptual Architecture

'Art Preview', *Time Out*, April 1999

'Aspen One-upmanship', Editorial in *Environment Planning and Design* (July/August 1970), p. 13

Attoe, Wayne, 'Methods of Criticism and Response to Criticism', *Journal of Architectural Education*, Vol 29, No. 4, April 1976, p. 20

- Aynsley, Jeremy. 'Gebrauchsgraphik as an Early Graphic Design Journal, 1924- 1938', *Journal of Design History*, vol. 5, no. 1, 1992, pp. 53-72
- Baker, Steve, 'Flying, Stealing: Design's Improper Criticism', *Design Issues*, Vol. 13, No. 2, Summer 1997, pp. 65-76
- Banham, Reyner, 'A Space for Decoration: A Rejoinder,' *Design* 19, July 1955, pp. 24-25
- Banham, Reyner, 'A Throw-away Esthetic', *Industrial Design*, March 1960. (Originally published as 'Industrial Design and Popular Art' in *Civiltà delle Macchine*, November 1955)
- Banham, Reyner, and Caplan, Ralph, 'The Aspen Papers', in *Industrial Design*, August 1964, pp. 58-61
- Banham, Reyner, 'Design by Choice', *Architectural Review*, July 1961
- Banham, Reyner, ed., *The Aspen Papers*, (New York: Praeger, 1974)
- Banham, Reyner, 'H.M. Fashion House', *New Statesman*, 27 January 1961, p. 151
- Banham, Reyner, Preface to *Design by Choice* (London: Academy Editions, 1981), p. 7
- Banham, Reyner, 'Roadscape with Rusting Rails', *The Listener* 80, 29 August 1968, pp. 267-268
- Banham, Reyner 'Rubbish: It's as Easy as Falling off a Cusp', *New Society*, 2 August 1979, p. 252
- Banham, Reyner, 'The Atavism of the Short-Distance Mini-Cyclist', *Reyner Banham: Design by Choice*, ed. Penny Sparke (New York: Rizzoli, 1981), p. 88. (Originally published in *Living Arts* 3, 1964, pp. 91-97)
- Banham, Reyner, 'Unlovable at any speed', *The Architects' Journal* 144, 21 December 1966, pp. 1527-1529
- Banham, Reyner, 'Vehicles of Desire', *Art*, 1 September 1955
- Banham, Reyner, 'Vehicles of Desire', *A Critic Writes: Essays by Reyner Banham*, eds. Mary Banham, Paul Barker, Sutherland Lyall, Cedric Price (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), p. 3
- Banham, Reyner, 'Who is this Pop?', *Motif*, Winter, 1962/63
- Barker, Sophie, 'Rebranding: PR Caution Over Cool as a Corporate Tool', *PR Week*, 24 April 1998
- Barthes, Roland, *Mythologies*, (London: Vintage, 1993)

Baudrillard, Jean, 'Statement Made by the French Group', Speakers Papers, IDCA 1970, International Design Conference in Aspen Records 1949-2006, 2007.M.7, Series 1, Box 28, Fol. 4-6, The Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles

Baudrillard, Jean, *Utopia Deferred: Writings from Utopie 1967-1978*, trans. by Stuart Kendall, (New York, NY, Semiotext(e), 2006)

Bayley, Stephen, 'A Haven For Modern Muses', *Weekend Guardian*, 1-2 July 1989

Bayley, Stephen, *Commerce and Culture* (London: Design Museum, 1989), p. 83

Bayley, Stephen, *In Good Shape: Style in Industrial Products 1900-1960*, (London: Design Council Books, 1979)

Bayley, Stephen, *Labour Camp: The Failure of Style Over Substance*, (London: BT Batsford 1998)

Bayley, Stephen, Letter, *Design*, March 1984

Bayley, Stephen, *Sony Design*, (London: The Conran Foundation, 1982)

Bayley, Stephen, *Taste: An Exhibition about Values in Design* (London: The Conran Foundation, 1983), p. 11

Bayley, Stephen, *The Good Design Guide: 100 Best Ever Products*, (London: The Conran Foundation, 1985)

Bayley, Stephen, 'Welcome to Logoland', *The Independent*, 27 September 1998

Benson, Richard, 'Folk', *The Face*, January 2000, p. 83

Benton, Tim, 'The Art of the Well-Tempered Lecture: Reyner Banham and Le Corbusier', *The Banham Lectures: Essays on Designing the Future*, ed. by Jeremy Aynsley and Harriet Atkinson, with a foreword by Mary Banham (Oxford: Berg, 2009), pp. 11-32

Blake, John, 'American Design in London', *Design 200*, August 1965, p. 53

Blake, John, 'Communication and Persuasion', *Design 140*, August 1960, p. 34

Blake, John, 'Consumers in Danger', *Design 134*, February 1960, p. 25

Blake, John, Preface to 'Persuading Image', *Design 134*, February 1960, p. 28

- Blake, John, 'The Case for Criticism', Comment, *Design* 137, May 1960, p. 43
- Brenson, Michael, 'The Curator's Moment', *Art Journal*, Vol. 57, No. 4, Winter 1998
- Browning, Philip, 'Blairite Britain Enshrined in a Bouncy Castle', *The New York Times*, 15 April 1998
- Mazlish, Bruce. 'Ruptures in History,' *Historically Speaking* Volume 12, Number 3, June 2011, p. 32
- Bryant, Richard, 'Sex Tech' in Deyan Sudjic, ed. *From Matt Black to Memphis and Back Again* (London: Architecture Design and Technology Press, 1989), p. 126. (Originally published in *Blueprint*, March 1987)
- Bush, Anne, 'Criticism and the Discerning Eye', *Design Issues*, Vol. 13, No. 2, Summer 1997, pp. 16-23
- Butcher, John, 'Design and the National Interest: 1' in Peter Gorb, ed. *Design Talks!* (London: Ashgate Publishing, 1988), p. 218
- Butcher, John, Hansard, British Design Talent, HC Deb 12 March 1986, vol. 93 c928
- Butcher, John, Hansard, Design (Consultancy Scheme), HC Deb 04 December 1986, vol. 106 cc728-9W
- Burall, Paul, 'The Official Critic: Irrelevant or Influential?', *Design Issues*, Vol. 13, No. 2, A Critical Condition: Design and Its Criticism Summer 1997, pp. 36-39
- Caplan, Ralph, 'On the Designer's Side', *Industrial Design*, February 1958, p. 33
- Catterall, Claire, 'New Graphic Realism', *Blueprint*, November 1998, p. 34
- Cohan, Tony, 'Questions About Approach Plague Aspen', *Progressive Architecture*, August 1970, p. 39
- Colophon, *Stealing Beauty: British Design Now*, (London: ICA, 1999)
- Cooper, Maurice, 'The Deceptively Simple Style of Eva Jiricna', *Blueprint*, October 1983
- Council of Industrial Design Newsletter, December 1959, p. 2
- Crary, Jonathan, *Techniques of the Observer* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1993)
- Currie, Nick, 'A Duchamp Moment', *Frieze*, 6 August, 2008

De Bretteville, Sheila Levrant, 'Some Aspects of Design from the Perspective of a Woman Designer', *Icographic: A Quarterly Review of International Visual Communication Design*, no. 6, 1973, pp. 1-11

De Bure, Gilles, *C.R.É.É magazine n°6*, November/December, 1970. Trans. by Patricia Chen for Rosa B (2013)

'Design as Commentary', *Industrial Design*, February 1959

*Design Week*, 26 March 1999

Dilnot, Clive, 'The State of Design History, Part I: Mapping the Field', *Design Issues*, Vol. 1, No. 1, Spring 1984, p. 249

Drucker, Peter, 'The Promise of the Next 20 Years', *Harper's Bazaar*, April 1955

Dunne, Anthony, 'Design Noir', *Blueprint*, November 1998, p. 25

Dunne, Anthony, 'Form Follows the Software', review of 'Metropolis: Tokyo Design Visions', *Blueprint*, December-January 1992, p. 44

Dunne, Anthony, and Raby, Fiona, *Design Noir: The Secret Life of Electronic Objects*, (London: August 2001)

Dunne, Anthony, and Raby, Fiona, 'Hertzian Tales and Other Proposals' in *Frequencies: Investigations into Culture, History and Technology*, ed. by Melanie Keen, (London: Iniva, 1998)

Dunne, Anthony, Preface, *Hertzian Tales: Electronic Products, Aesthetic Experience and Critical Design*, (London: RCA CRD Research Publications, 1999)

Editorial leader, *Blueprint*, October 1984, p. 3

Editorial, *Blueprint*, October 1988

Editorial, *Blueprint*, September 1988, p. 7

Editorial, *Blueprint* December 1989, p. 7

Editorial, *City Limits*, October 1981

Eichenberger, Fred, Letter to the Editors, *Industrial Design*, June 1959, p. 8

Elzey, Roberta, 'Founding an Anti-University', *Counter Culture: The Creation of an Alternative Society*, ed. by Joseph Berke, (London: Peter Owen Ltd., 1969)

Enjoy Butyl advertisement, *Industrial Design*, April 1957, p. 29

- Farr, Michael, *Design in British Industry: A Mid-Century Survey*, (Cambridge: University Press, 1955)
- 'Farrell's Fury,' *Sour Grapes, Blueprint*, October 1983, p. 26
- Farrelly, Liz, 'Display Cases', *Design Week*, 26 March 1999, p. 41
- Fiedler, Leslie, 'The Middle Against Both Ends', *Encounter*, August 1955, pp. 16-23
- First editorial, *Blueprint*, October 1983, p. 2
- Fiske, Jane, and Allen, Deborah, 'The Trouble with Taxis', *Industrial Design*, February 1954, p. 11
- Fiske, Jane, 'Critical Horseplay', editorial preface, *Industrial Design*, April 1957, p. 43
- Fiske, Jane, *Journal of the American Association of University Women*, October 1958, pp. 14-15
- Fiske, Jane, 'Taste, Travel and Temptations', editorial preface, *Industrial Design*, July 1957, p. 25
- Fiske, Jane, 'Working in a Man's World', *Charm*, November 1957, p. 87
- Forrest, D. M., Commissioner, The Tea Bureau, 'One More Word About Teapots', *Design* 82, October 1955, p. 50
- Foster, Hal, 'Chat Rooms' in ed. Claire Bishop *Participation* (London: Whitechapel, 2006), p. 192
- Foster, Hal, 'Hey, That's Me', *London Review of Books*, 5 April 2001, p. 13
- Foucault, Michel, 'Nietzsche, Genealogy, History', in ed. Paul Rabinow, *The Foucault Reader* (New York: Pantheon, 1984), p. 81
- Fuller, Peter, 'Should Products be Decorated?' *Design*, August 1983, p. 33
- Fuller, Richard Buckminster, *Inventory of World Resources* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1964)
- Fuller, Richard Buckminster, *No More Secondhand God and other Writings*, (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1963)
- Galbraith, John, *The Affluent Society* (Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin, 1958)
- Glancey, Jonathan, 'Repacking Britain', *The Guardian*, 2 April 1998, p. 4



'Good Design for 1949,' *Interiors*, vol. 108, December 1948, p. 114

Groys, Boris, *Art Power*, (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2008)

Habermas, Jurgen, 'The Public Sphere: An Encyclopedia Article', *New German Critique* 3, 1974, p. 49

Hall, Peter, 'Academe and Design Writing: Changes in Design Criticism', *Design and Culture*, Vol. 5. Issue 1., Spring 2013, pp. 21-28

Hamilton, Richard, *Collected Words*, (London: Thames & Hudson, 1983)

Hamilton, Richard, 'Persuading Image: A Symposium', *Design* 138, June 1960, p. 57

Hamilton, Richard, 'Persuading Image', *Design* 134, February 1960, pp. 28-32

Hayakawa, Samuel Ichiye, 'How to Attend a Conference', *Speakers Papers, IDCA 1970, International Design Conference in Aspen Records 1949-2006, 2007.M.7, Series 1, Box 3, Fol. 6, The Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles*

'He Sells Living in Style' *Readers Digest*, February 1982, p. 51

Hebdige, Dick, 'A Report on the Western Front: Postmodernism and the "Politics" of Style,' *Block* 12, 1986/87

Hebdige, Dick, 'After the Masses', *Marxism Today*, January 1989, p. 56

Hebdige, Dick, *Hiding in the Light: On Images and Things*, (London: Routledge, 1988)

Hebdige, Dick, 'Shopping-Spree in Conran Hell', in *Block* 15 1989, pp. 56-68. (Republished as 'Shopping for Souvenirs in the Occupied Zone', in *Blueprint*, December 1988/January 1989, p. 12)

Hebdige, Dick, 'Some Sons and their Fathers', *The Impossible Self*, Winnipeg Art Gallery, 1988, pp. 71-82

Hebdige, Dick, *Subculture: The Meaning of Style* (London: Methuen, 1979), p. 126

Hebdige, Dick, 'The Impossible Object: Towards a Sociology of the Sublime', *New Formations*, number 1, Spring 1987, p. 69

Hebdige, Dick, 'World of Interiors', *Blueprint*, May 1989, p. 40

Hewison, Robert, 'Behind the Lines', 1983

- Hickey, Dave, *Air Guitar: Essays on Art and Democracy*, (Los Angeles: Art Issues Press, 1997)
- Hoggart, Richard, 'Schools of English and Contemporary Society', *Speaking to Each Other*, Vol. 2 (London: Chatto & Windus, 1970), pp. 256-257
- Hoggart, Richard, *The Uses of Literacy*, (London: Penguin Books, 1992). First published (London: Chatto & Windus, 1957)
- Horsham, Michael, 'The Value of Confusion', *Stealing Beauty: British Design Now*, (London: ICA, 1999), p. 13
- Houseman, William, *Speakers Papers, IDCA 1969, International Design Conference in Aspen Records 1949-2006, 2007.M.7, Series 1, Box 28, Fol. 4-6*, The Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles
- Humphrey, Cliff, 'The Unanimous Declaration of Interdependence', *Difficult but Possible: Supplement to the Whole Earth Catalogue*, (Menlo Park, CA: Portola Institute, September 1969) pp. 12-13
- Huygen, Frederike, 'Report from Holland, Design Criticism after Postmodernism', in *Design Issues*, Vol. 13, Number 2, Summer 1997, pp. 40-43
- Interview with Michael Farr, 15 August 1991, Archive of Art & Design, AAD 7-1989
- Introduction, special issue on 'New Times', *Marxism Today*, October 1988, p. 3
- Kaufmann, Edgar J., 'Borax or the Chromium Plated Calf', *Architectural Review*, August 1948, pp. 88-92
- Kinross, Robin, 'From Commercial Art to Plain Commercial', in ed. Deyan Sudjic *From Matt Black to Memphis and Back Again* (London: Architecture, Design and Technology Press, 1989). (Originally published in *Blueprint*, April 1988)
- Lange, Alexandra, *Writing About Architecture: Mastering the Language of Buildings and Cities*, (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2012)
- Lasch, Christopher, *The Culture of Narcissism: American Life in an Age of Diminishing Expectations*, (New York: W.W. Norton, 1979)
- Latour, Bruno, 'Has Critique Run Out of Steam? From Matters of Fact to Matters of Concern', *Critical Inquiry* 30, Winter 2004, p. 246
- Leadbeater, Charles, *Living on Thin Air: The New Economy*, (London: Penguin, 2000)
- Leadbeater, Charles, 'The New Entrepreneurism', *The Guardian*, 7 February, 2000

- Leavis, F.R., *New Bearings in English Poetry* (London, Faber and Faber, 2011, Originally published in 1932)
- Lemon, M.C., *The Discipline of History and the History of Thought* (London: Routledge, 1995)
- Leonard, Mark, *Britain™: Renewing our Identity*, (London: Demos, 1997)
- Letter from Stephen Bayley, *Blueprint*, December/January, 1984, p. 3
- Levine, Les, 'Les Levine Comments on the IDCA', *The Aspen Times*, 25 June 1970, 1-B
- Linder, Mark and Bergren, Ann, *Scogin, Elam, and Bray: Critical Architecture/Architectural Criticism*, (New York: Rizzoli, 1992)
- Long, Beverly and Strine, Mary Susan, 'Reading Intertextually: Multiple Mediations and Critical Practice', *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 75, 1989, p. 468
- Lott, Jane, 'Flip-top Torch', *Design*, May 1983, p. 49
- Lott, Jane, 'Walking Away from Violent Summer Shades', *Design*, May 1983, p. 13
- Loewy, Raymond, Letter to the Editors, *Industrial Design*, April 1954, p. 18
- MacCarthy, Fiona, 'A Lot of Things', *London*, June 1989, p. 8
- MacCarthy, Fiona, letter, 'The Bayley Spot', *Blueprint*, February 1984, p. 3
- Maldonado, Tomas, 'New Perspectives on Industrial Design Education', *Stile Industria* 20, 1959, reprinted in *Industrial Design*, March 1960, pp. 89-92
- Martin, Reinhold, 'Critical of What? Toward a Utopian Realism', in *Harvard Design Magazine*, Spring/Summer 2005, Number 22, p. 5.
- Massey, Anne, and Penny Sparkle, 'The Myth of the Independent Group', *Block*, 10, 1985, pp. 48-56
- McCullough, Jane Fiske, review of *The Hidden Persuaders*, Books section, *Industrial Design*, May 1957, p. 10
- McCullough, Jane Fiske, 'To the Reader', editorial preface, *Industrial Design*, March 1960, p. 35
- 'Milano 14 Triennale', *Domus* 466, September 1968, p. 15
- Mills, C. Wright, 'The Man in the Middle', *Industrial Design*, November 1958, p. 73

Mitarachi, Jane Fiske, 'Evaluating Industrial Design', *Journal of the American Association of University Women*, October 1958, p. 17

Mort, Frank, and Green, Nicholas, 'You've Never Had it so Good Again!', *Marxism Today*, May 1988, p. 32

Munson, Ann Sobiech, 'Lewis Mumford's Lever House: Writing a House of Glass' in *Writing Design: Words and Objects*, ed. Grace Lees-Maffei, (London: Berg, 2011), pp. 119-132

Murray, Robin, 'Life After Henry (Ford)', 'New Times' issue of *Marxism Today*, October 1988

Nader, Ralph, *Unsafe at Any Speed: The Designed-In Dangers of the American Automobile*, (New York: Grossman, 1965)

Nelson, George, 'Obsolescence', *Industrial Design*, December 1956, p. 88

Nelson, George, 'Planned Expansion', *Industrial Design*, February 1954, p.148

Nelson, George, untitled lecture, Speakers Papers, IDCA 1969, International Design Conference in Aspen Records 1949-2006, 2007.M.7, Series 1, Box 25, Fol. 1-5, The Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles

New Musical Express, July 19, 1986

'New Readers Start Here', *Blueprint*, October 1983, p. 7

Niesewand, Nonie, 'Britain's Export Showcase is Hot Air', *The Independent*, March 27, 1998

Noyes, Eliot, Conference Summary, Speakers Papers, IDCA 1970, International Design Conference in Aspen Records 1949-2006, 2007.M.7, Series 1, Box 28, Fol. 4-6, The Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles

Osborn, Robert, and Hess, Thomas B., 'Who's Who in Distinguished Design', *Industrial Design*, February 1954, pp. 68-71

Packard, Vance, *The Hidden Persuaders*, (London: Pelican, 1962) p. 16

Paepcke, Walter P., 'The Importance of Design to American Industry', in promotional brochure for IDCA 1951. International Design Conference in Aspen papers, MSIDCA87, Box 15, Fol. 734, Special Collections and University Archives, University of Illinois at Chicago

Pansera, Anty, 'The Triennale of Milan: Past, Present, and Future', *Design Issues* 2, no. 1 (Spring 1985), p. 2

Pawley, Martin, 'This is What Did Me In', *Blueprint*, June 1989

Pawsey, Vanessa, 'Just a Feeling', *Design Week*, 9 April, 1999, p. 36

Phillips, Barty, *Conran and the Habitat Story* (Weidenfield and Nicholson), 1984, p. 103

Poynor, Rick, 'Easy Writer', *Print*, May/June 2007, Vol. 61 Issue 3, p. 33

Poynor, Rick, 'Grow Up *Blueprint!*', *Blueprint*, September, 1993, p. 14

Poynor, Rick, 'The Closed Shop of Design Academia', *Design Observer*, 13 April 2012

Poynor, Rick, *Typographica*, (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2001)

Poynor, Rick, *No More Rules: Graphic Design and Postmodernism*, (London: Laurence King Publishing, 2003)

Poynor, Rick, 'When Too Much is Too Much', *Blueprint*, October 1997, pp. 36-37

Poynor, Rick, 'Where are the Design Critics?' *Design Observer*, 25 September, 2005

Poynor, Rick and Michael Rock, 'What is this Thing Called Graphic Design Criticism,' *Eye* no. 16 vol. 4, Spring 1995

'Product Overload: Designers Fight Back', *Blueprint*, October 1997, p. 38

Program, IDCA 1971, International Design Conference in Aspen Records 1949-2006, 2007.M.7, Series 1, Box 29, Fol. 8, The Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles

Promotional brochure, IDCA 1951, International Design Conference in Aspen papers, MSIDCA87, Box 15, Fol. 734, Special Collections and University Archives, University of Illinois at Chicago

Promotional brochure, IDCA 1957, International Design Conference in Aspen papers, MSIDCA87, Box 15, Fol. 736, Special Collections and University Archives, University of Illinois at Chicago

Promotional brochure, IDCA 1961, International Design Conference in Aspen papers, MSIDCA87, Box 15, Fol. 740, Special Collections and University Archives, University of Illinois at Chicago

Promotional brochure, IDCA 1962, International Design Conference in Aspen papers, MSIDCA87, Box 15, Fol. 741,

Special Collections and University Archives, University of Illinois at Chicago

Promotional brochure, Publicity, IDCA 1971, International Design Conference in Aspen Records 1949-2006, 2007.M.7, Series 1, Box 29, Fol. 11, The Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles

Redhead, David, 'The Irresistible Rise of the Anonymous', *Blueprint*, September 1993

Reid, Giles, 'Gruel Britannia', *Object*, issue 6, 1999, p. 29

Report on ASID's 14<sup>th</sup> annual conference, *Industrial Design*, June 1959, p. 60

Richards, I.A. *The Principles of Literary Criticism*, ed. Paul Kegan (London: Trench, Trubner, 1924)

Roberts, Nicola, 'Black on Black', *New Musical Express*, 19 July 1986

Roberts, Steven, 'The Better Earth; A report on Ecology Action, a brash, activist, radical group fighting for a better environment', *The New York Times Magazine*, 29 March 1970, p. 8

Robinson, Kenneth, *What's On In London*, 13 Feb 1981

Rohm & Haas advertisement, *Industrial Design*, April 1957, pp. 30-31

Roszak, Theodore, *The Making of a Counter Culture: Reflections on the Technocratic Society and Its Youthful Opposition* (London: Faber and Faber, 1972)

Roszak, Theodore, ed. *Sources: An Anthology of Contemporary Materials Useful for Preserving Personal Sanity While Braving the Technological Wilderness*, (New York: Harper & Row, 1972)

Salisbury, Harrison E., *The New York Times*, 2 March 1959, excerpted in *Industrial Design*, April 1959

Seago, Alex, and Dunne, Anthony, 'Methodologies in Art and Design Research: The Object as Discourse', *Royal College of Art Research Papers*, Volume 2, Number 1, 1996/1997

Seago, Alex, *Burning the Box of Beautiful Things: ARK Magazine and the Development of a Postmodern Sensibility at the Royal College of Art, 1950-1962*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995)

Sewell, Brian, *The Tatler*, 3 September, 1983

'Soundbites', *Blueprint*, May 1994, p. 10

Spender, Stephen, 'Thoughts on Design in Everyday Life', Design Oration of the Society of Industrial Artists, 1958,

excerpted on the 'Clips and Quotes' page in *Industrial Design*, March 1959, p. 8

Stamp, Gavin, 'Hard Boiled and Half Baked', *The Spectator*, 27 February 1982

'Steal Yourself', *Wallpaper*, April 1999, p. 154

Stein, Maurice, *Arts in Society*, vol. 7, no. 3, Fall/Winter 1970, p. 64

Stinson, John J., 'Anthony Burgess: Novelist on the Margin,' *Journal of Popular Culture*, Summer 1973, pp. 136-51

Subscription card, *Industrial Design*, February 1954.

Sudjic, Deyan, 'Commercial but Cultured', *Blueprint*, September 1989, p. 62

Sudjic, Deyan, *Cult Heroes*, (London: Norton, 1989) p. 92.  
Excerpted in *Blueprint*, May 1989, p. 72

Sudjic, Deyan, *Cult Heroes: How to be Famous for More than Fifteen Minutes*, (London: Andre Deutsch, 1989)

Sudjic, Deyan, *Cult Objects: The Complete Guide to Having it All*, (London: Paladin Granada Publishing, 1985)

Sudjic, Deyan, 'Designers' Saturday', *Blueprint*, October 1983, p. 3

Sudjic, Deyan, ed. *From Matt Black to Memphis and Back Again*, (London: Architecture Design and Technology Press, 1989)

Sudjic, Deyan, 'High Jencks', *Blueprint*, November 1984, p. 16

Sudjic, Deyan, 'How We Got from There to Here', *Blueprint*, September 1983

Sudjic, Deyan, 'Is There Life After Sloane?' *Blueprint*, November 1984, p.11

Sudjic, Deyan, 'The Design Decade', special supplement, *Blueprint*, October 1988

Sudjic, Deyan, 'The Joy of Matt Black,' *Blueprint*, November 1985, p. 44

Teague, Walter Dorwin, Letter to the Editors, *Industrial Design*, April 1958, p. 8

The tenth of 'Twelve Precepts of Modern Design', in Edgar Kaufmann Jr., *What is Modern Design?* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1950), p. 7

Udall, Stuart, *Speakers Papers*, IDCA 1970, International Design Conference in Aspen Records 1949–2006, 2007.M.7, Series 1, Box 28, Fol. 4–6, The Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles

*Ulm 5*, Quarterly bulletin of the Hochschule für Gestaltung, July 1959, p. 79

Vidler, Anthony, *Histories of the Immediate Present: Inventing Architectural Modernism*, (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2008)

Vignelli, Massimo, 'Call for Criticism,' *Graphis Annual 83/84* (Zurich: 1983)

Wallace, Don, Letter to Editors, *Industrial Design*, June 1960, p. 10

Wallace, Don, *Shaping America's Products* (New York: Reinhold Publishing Corporation, 1956), pp. 50–51

*Waste-Makers: A Startling Revelation of Planned Wastefulness*, (New York: D. McKay Co., 1960)

Whiteley, Nigel, 'Olympus and the Market Place: Reyner Banham and Design Criticism', *Design Issues*, Vol: 13, n. 2, Summer 1997, pp. 1–16

Whitney, Charles, 'Publishers Postscript', *Industrial Design*, February 1954, p. 150

Williams, Gareth, 'Design in a Dilemma', *Blueprint*, May 1999, p. 71

Williams, Raymond, *Britain in the Sixties: Communications* (London: Penguin, 1964), p. 75

Williamson, Judith, *Consuming Passions: The Dynamics of Popular Culture*, (London: Marion Boyars Publishing, 1987)

Williamson, Judith, *Deadline at Dawn: Film Criticism 1980–1990*, (London: Marion Boyars, 1993)

Williamson, Judith, 'Even New Times Change', *New Statesman & Society*, 7 July 1989, p. 33

Williamson, Judith, 'Inflated Intangibles', *Eye*, Spring, 1999, p. 7

Williamson, Judith, 'Lost in the Hypermarket', *City Limits*, 8–15, December 1988, p. 12

Williamson, Judith, 'Textuality: On Postmodern Reading', Books section, *Marxism Today*, September 1991

Wolfe, Tom, 'The 'Me' Decade and the Third Great Awakening', *New York Magazine*, 23 August 1976



- Wood, John, 'Situated Criticism and the Experiential Criticism', *Design Issues*, Volume 13, Number 2, Summer 1997, p. 11
- Wood, Steve, 'The Man Who Walks Like a Trend', *Blueprint*, December/January 1983, p. 19
- Worsley, Giles, 'Portrait of the Artist as an Architect', 17 July 1999
- Woudhuysen, James, 'A Matter of Taste', *Designing*, 1983
- Woudhuysen, James, 'Acquired Taste', *Blueprint*, October 1983, p. 17
- Wozencroft, Jon, and Neville Brody, Review, *The Guardian*, 2 December 1988, p. 25
- York, Peter, 'Anorexia of the Soul', *Modern Times* (London, Futura Publishing, 1985), pp. 62-67
- York, Peter, 'Chic Graphique', *Modern Times* (London: Futura Publications, 1984), p. 36
- York, Peter, Introduction, ed. by Deyan Sudjic, *From Matt Black to Memphis and Back Again* (London: Architecture Design and Technology Press, 1989), p. 6
- York, Peter, 'Style', *Modern Times*, (London: Futura Publications, 1984)
- York, Peter, 'The Meaning of Clothes', *Blueprint*, October 1983
- York, Peter, 'Tom, Tom the Farmer's Son', *Harper's & Queen*, October 1979, p. 210
- Young, Robin, 'The Great Taste Test', *The Times*, 14 November 1983, p. 7

### **Secondary Printed Sources**

- Allen, James Sloan, *The Romance of Commerce and Culture: Capitalism, Modernism, and the Chicago-Aspen Crusade for Cultural Reform*, (Boulder, CO: University Press of Colorado, 2002)
- Armi, C. Edson, *The Art of American Car Design: The Profession and Personalities*, (Philadelphia: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1989)
- Atkinson, Paul, and Silverman, David, 'Kundera's Immortality: The Interview Society and the Invention of the Self', *Qualitative Inquiry*, September 1997, vol. 3 no. 3, pp. 304-325

Banham, Mary, Sutherland Lyall, Cedric Price and Paul Barker, eds. *A Critic Writes: Selected Essays by Reyner Banham*, (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1999)

Barry, Peter, *Beginning Theory: An Introduction to Literary and Cultural Theory* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2009), p. 61

Baudrillard, Jean, *America* (London: Verso, 2010), p. 39. (Originally published in 1986)

Baudrillard, Jean, 'The Ecstasy of Communication' in Hal Foster, ed. *The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays on Postmodern Culture*, (New York: The New Press, 1998), pp. 145-154

Bell, Daniel, *The End of Ideology: On the Exhaustion of Political Ideas in the Fifties*, (New York: The Free Press, 1960)

Berger, John, 'The Nature of Mass Demonstrations', in Geoff Dyer, ed. *John Berger: Selected Essays* (New York: Vintage Books, 2001) pp. 246-249

Bishop, Claire, *Participation* (London: Whitechapel, 2006), p. 10

Boorstin, Daniel J., *The Genius of American Politics*, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1953)

Bourdieu, Pierre, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste*, trans. by Richard Nice (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1984)

Bourriaud, Nicholas, *Relational Aesthetics*, trans. by Simon Pleasance and Fronza Woods (Les presses du real, 2002), p. 110. (Originally published in French in 1998)

Burall, Paul, 'The Official Critic: Irrelevant or Influential?' in *Design Issues*, Vol. 13. No. 2, 'A Critical Condition: Design and its Criticism', Summer 1997, p. 36-39

Catterall, Claire, *Stealing Beauty: British Design Now*, (London: ICA, 1999)

Crowley, David, 'Design Magazines and Design Culture', *Communicate: Independent Graphic Design in Britain Since the Sixties*, in Rick Poynor ed. (London: Laurence King, 2004)

Dean, Jodi. *Blog Theory: Feedback and the Capture of the Circuits of Drive*, (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2010)

De Certeau, Michel, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984)

Dessauce, Marc, ed., *The Inflatable Moment: Pneumatics and Protest in '68*, (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1999)

- Diggins, John Patrick, *The Promise of Pragmatism: Modernism and the Crisis of Knowledge and Authority* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1994)
- Donoghue, Dennis, ed. *Selected Essays of R. P. Blackmur*, (New York: Ecco Press, 1986)
- Douglas, Mary, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of the Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* (New York: Routledge, 2000), pp. 2-6
- Dunne, Anthony, *Hertzian Tales: Electronic Products, Aesthetic Experience and Critical Design*, (London: RCA CRD Research Publications, 1999)
- Eagleton, Terry, *Literary Theory: An Introduction*, (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 1983)
- Elkins, James, and Michael Newman, eds., *The State of Art Criticism*, (New York: Routledge, 2008)
- Enzensberger, Hans Magnus, *Critical Essayist* (New York: Continuum Publishing, 1982), Originally published in 1970
- Fallan, Kjetil, 'The Metamorphosis of a Norwegian Design Magazine: Nye Bonytt, 1968-1971', in Grace Lees Maffei, ed., *Writing Design*, (London: Berg, 2011)
- Felski, Rita, *Doing Time: Feminist Theory and Postmodern Culture*, (New York: NYU Press, 2000)
- Ferguson, Bruce, 'Exhibition Rhetorics', in Reesa Greenberg, Bruce Ferguson, and Sandy Nairne, eds. *Thinking About Exhibitions* (London: Routledge, 1996), p. 178
- Floré, Freddie, 'Design Criticism and Social Responsibility: The Flemish Design Critic K.N. Elnó (1920-1993)', in Grace Lees Maffei, ed., *Writing Design*, (London: Berg, 2011)
- Frayling, Christopher, *Henry Cole and the Chamber of Horrors: The Curious Origins of the V&A*, (London: V&A Publishing, 2010)
- Garland, Ken, 'Design Magazine, A Conversation, 22 September 2003', Chapter 8, *Design and the Modern Magazine*, ed. by Jeremy Aynsley and Kate Forde (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007), p. 171
- Gillick, Liam, in Saskia Bos and Liam Gillick, 'Towards a Scenario: Debate with Liam Gillick' in *De Appel Reader No. 1: Modernity Today: Contributions to a Topical Artistic Discourse* (Amsterdam: De Appel, 2005), p. 74
- Harvey, David, Afterword, in Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, trans. by Donald Nicholson-Smith, (Oxford: Blackwell Press, 1991)

- Hewison, Robert, *Culture and Consensus: England, Art and Politics since 1940*, (London: Methuen, 1995)
- Hewitt, John, 'Good Design in the Marketplace: The Rise of Habitat Man', *The Oxford Art Journal* 10:2, 1987, p. 30
- Highmore, Ben, *The Design Culture Reader*, (London: Routledge, 2008)
- Himmelsbach, Sabine, 'Blogs. The New Public Forum,' in ed. Bruno Latour *Atmospheres of Democracy*, p. 919
- Horowitz, Daniel, *Consuming Pleasures: Intellectuals and Popular Culture in the Postwar World*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012)
- Jameson, Fredric, 'Postmodernism and Consumer Society' in Hal Foster, ed. *The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays on Postmodern Culture* (New York: The New Press, 1998), pp. 127-144. (Originally delivered as a lecture at the Whitney Museum, autumn, 1982)
- Jumonville, Neil, *Critical Crossings: The New York Intellectuals in Postwar America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), p. xii
- Kant, Immanuel, *Critique of Pure Reason* (London: MacMillan, 1922), p. 128
- Keen, Andrew, *The Cult of the Amateur: How Today's Internet is Killing Our Culture and Assaulting Our Economy* (London: Nicholas Brealey Publishing, 2007)
- Kerber, Linda K., *Toward an Intellectual History of Women: Essays* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997)
- Kinross, Robin, Introduction, *Unjustified texts: perspectives on typography*, (London: Hyphen Press, 2002)
- Kristeva, Julia, *Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art*, ed. Leon S. Roudiez, trans. Thomas Gora, Alice Jardine, and Leon S. Roudiez, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1980)
- Kurlansky, Mark, *1968: The Year that Rocked the World*, (New York: Random House, 2004)
- Latour, Bruno, *Making Things Public: Atmospheres of Democracy* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2005)
- Latour, Bruno, 'To Modernize or to Ecologize? That is the Question' in Kristin Asdal, Brita Brenna and Ingunn Moser, eds., *Technoscience, The Politics of Intervention*, (Oslo: Unipub, 2007)
- Lefebvre, Henri, *La Somme et le Reste*, (Paris: Edition La Nef de Paris, 1959)

- Lefebvre, Henri, *The Production of Space*, trans. by Donald Nicholson-Smith, (Oxford: Blackwell Press, 1991)
- Lethem, Jonathan, *Motherless Brooklyn* (New York: Vintage, 2000), pp. 1-2
- Lury, Celia, *Consumer Culture*, (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1996)
- Maffei, Grace Lees, Introduction, 'Studying Advice: Historiography, Methodology, Commentary, Bibliography', *Journal of Design History*, Vol 16 No 1, 2003, p. 10
- Maguire, Patrick, and Woodham, Jonathan, *Design and Cultural Politics in Postwar Britain: The 'Britain Can Make It' Exhibition of 1946*, (London: Leicester University Press, 1997)
- Marquand, David, 'The Enterprise Culture: Old Wine in New Bottles' in P. Heelas and P. Morris eds. *The Values of The Enterprise Culture: The Moral Debate* (London: Routledge, 1992), p. 65
- Massey, Anne, *The Independent Group: Modernism and Mass Culture, 1945-59*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995)
- Meggs, Philip B., 'Great Ideals: John Massey and the Corporate Design Elite', AIGA website, 1997
- Morris, William, 'Art and the Beauty of the Earth', Lecture delivered at Burslem Town Hall, October 13, 1881, in William Morris, *Art and the Beauty of the Earth* (London: Longmans, 1898), p. 29
- Mowl, Timothy, *Stylistic Cold Wars: Betjeman vs Pevsner* (London: John Murray Publishers Ltd, 2000)
- Nabokov, Vladamir, *Lolita* (New York: Vintage Books, 1989), pp. 141-142. (First published 1955 in Paris, and in 1958 in New York)
- Naylor, Gillian, 'Design Magazine, A Conversation, 22 September 2003', Chapter 8, *Design and the Modern Magazine*, ed. by Jeremy Aynsley and Kate Forde (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007), p. 165
- O'Neill, Paul, *The Culture of Curation and the Curation of Cultures*, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press 2012), p. 26
- O'Neill, Paul, 'The Curatorial Turn: From Practice to Discourse', in eds. Judith Rugg and Michele Sedgwick, *Issues in Curating Contemporary Art and Performance* (Bristol: Intellect Books, 2008), p. 13
- Obituary, Michael Farr, *Design*, October 1993, p. 6

- Packard, Vance, *The Waste Makers* (Brooklyn: Ig publishing, 2011), p. 66
- Pevsner, Nikolaus, 'The Visual Arts', Transcript of BBC Radio Third programme, 10 October 1946, p.4, BBC talks, 1946-1977, Series II, Box 52, Nikolaus Pevsner papers, 1919-1979, The Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles
- Poynor, Rick, 'Big Magazines: Design as the Message,' *Postmodernism: Style and Subversion, 1970-1990*, eds. Glen Adamson and Jane Pavitt (London: V&A Publishing, 2011), pp. 214-220.
- Rawnsley, Andrew, *Servants of the People: The Inside Story of New Labour* (London: Penguin, 2001)
- Rawnsley, Andrew, *The End of the Party: The Rise and Fall of New Labour* (London: Penguin, 2010)
- Robbins, David, ed., *The Independent Group: Postwar Britain and the Aesthetics of Plenty* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1990), p. 28
- Ruskin, John, 'Modern Manufacture and Design', Lecture to Bradford School of Design, 1859, in *The Works of John Ruskin Volume 10* (London: George Allen, 1878), p. 103
- Sandino, Linda, Introduction, 'Design History and Oral History: Objects and Subjects', *Journal of Design History*, Vol. 19. No. 4, pp. 275-282
- Scanlon, Jennifer, *Inarticulate Longings*, (New York: Routledge, 1995)
- Scott, Felicity, *Architecture or Techno-utopia: Politics after Modernism* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2007), p. 238
- Shapiro, Meyer, *Theory and Philosophy of Art: Style, Artist, and Society* (New York: George Braziller, 1994), p. 51. (Shapiro's essay on Style was first published in 1953 in *Anthropology Today*)
- Siegel, Jeanne, *Artwords: Discourse on the 60s and 70s*, (Ann Arbor, MI: UMI Press, 1985)
- Soar, Matt, 'Rick Poynor on "Design Academics": Having His Cake and Eating It Too', Matt Soar's blog, 19 April 2012
- Sontag, Susan, *Illness as Metaphor and AIDS and its Metaphors*, (New York: Anchor Books, 1993)
- Spinosa, Charles, Flores, Fernando, and Dreyfus, Hubert, *Disclosing New Worlds: Entrepreneurship, Democratic Action and the Cultivation of Solidarity* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1999), p. 19
- Stead, Naomi, 'Criticism in/and/of Crisis: The Australian

Context', in Jane Rendell, Mark Dorrian et al., eds., *Critical Architecture* (London and New York: Routledge, 2007), pp. 76-83

Stephenson, Neal, *Snow Crash* (New York: Bantam, 2003), p. 74.  
(Originally published in 1992)

Storchi, Simona, 'La Casa all'Italiana': Domus and the Ideology of the Domestic Interior in 1930s Italy', in ed. Simona Storchi, *Beyond the Piazza: Public and Private Spaces in Modern Italy* (Brussels: PIE, Peter Lang, 2013), pp. 57-79

Thackara, John, preface, ed. by Ed van Hinte, *Eternally Yours: Visions on Product Endurance*, (Rotterdam: 010 Publishers, 1997)

Thompson, Jane, *Architecture Boston*, Vol 9, No. 4 July/August 2006, p. 50

Thompson, Jane, 'Urbanist without Portfolio: Notes on a Career' in Claire Lorenz, *Women in Architecture USA*, (New York: Rizzoli, 1990)

Thompson, Jane, and Lange, Alexandra, Prologue, *Design Research* (San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 2010), p. 11

*Trend*, Spring 1936, pp. 41-42

Virilio, Paul, *The Information Bomb* (London: Verso, 2005), p. 9

Walsh, Margaret, 'Gender and Automobility: Selling Cars to American Women after the Second World War', *Journal of Macromarketing*, March 2011 vol. 31 no. 1, pp. 57-72

Wernick, Andrew, *Promotional Culture: Advertising, Ideology and Symbolic Expression*, (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications Ltd, 1991)

Whiteley, Nigel, *Design for Society* (London: Reaktion Books, 1993), p. 162

Whiteley, Nigel, *Reyner Banham: Historian of the Immediate Future* (Boston, MA: MIT Press, 2002), pp.3 78-382

Wolfe, Tom, *The New Journalism* (London: Pan Books, 1990)

Wozencroft, Jon, *The Graphic Language of Neville Brody: v. 2* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1994), p. 11

### Unpublished Secondary Sources

Dean, Penelope, 'Delivery without Discipline: Architecture in the Age of Design', PhD thesis, University of California, 2008, pp. 62-90

Farrelly, Liz, 'Design Journalism: The Production of Definitions', MA thesis, V&A/RCA, 1989, p. 39

Neale, Paul, interview with Putri Trisulo, 2 March 2011, 'Curating Now', MA thesis, RCA/V&A, 2001

Predan, Barbara, 'The Intervention of Criticism into Practice', paper presented at the 2nd International Conference for Design Education Researchers, Oslo, 14-17 May 2013, p. 3

Stead, Naomi, 'Nobody Tears Down a Building if the Architecture Critic Doesn't Like it': The Utility of Written Criticism', unpublished paper

### Web Sources

Beegan, Gerry, Interview with Judith Williamson, *dot dot dot*, issue 4. Dot dot dot website, [accessed 9 October 2013]

Benjamin, Walter, 'On the Concept of History', *Gesammelten Schriften I:2*. Suhrkamp Verlag. Frankfurt and Main, 1974. (Translation: Dennis Redmond 8/4/01.  
[http://members.efn.org/~dredmond/Theses\\_on\\_History.PDF](http://members.efn.org/~dredmond/Theses_on_History.PDF)  
[accessed October 20 2013]

Benjamin, Walter, *The Arcades Project*, N1, 9/458, quoted in Christopher Rollason, 'The Passageways of Paris: Walter Benjamin's Arcades Project and Contemporary Cultural Debate in the West', <http://www.wbenjamin.org/passageways.html#fn76>  
[accessed 20 October 2013].

Caplan, Ralph, 'I.D. Magazine, 1954-2009', *Voice*, AIGA website (January 5 2010), <http://www.aiga.org/i-d-magazine-1954-2009/>  
[accessed 17, September 2012] (para. 4)

Clark, Joe, 'The Death of Graphic Design Criticism' category on his personal website  
<http://blog.fawny.org/category/graphic-design/dcrit/> [accessed 31 October 2013]

'Cool Britannia Hits the Street', BBC News website, 3 April 1998

Cullinan, John, Interview with Anthony Burgess, *The Paris Review*, Spring 1973,  
<http://www.theparisreview.org/interviews/3994/the-art-of-fiction-no-48-anthony-burgess>



Department of Trade and Industry press release, 17 February 1998. DTI website via Web Archive, <http://web.archive.org/web/19980206142451/http://www.dti.gov.uk> [accessed 8 October 2013]

Drenttel, William, 'I was a Madman', *Design Observer*, 11 July 2008, <http://observatory.designobserver.com/entry.html?entry=6997> [accessed 14 October 2013]

Fisher, Thomas, 'The Death and Life of Great Architecture Criticism', Plasces, *Design Observer*, 1 December 2011, <http://places.designobserver.com/feature/death-and-life-of-great-architecture-criticism/30448/> [accessed 31 October 2013].

Hughes, Robert, 'Only in America', *The New York Review of Books*, December 20, 1979, The New York Review of Books online archive, <http://www.nybooks.com/articles/archives/1979/dec/20/only-in-america> [accessed 18 September 2012], (para 18)

Kellner, Douglas, 'Habermas, the Public Sphere, and Democracy: A Critical Intervention', <http://pages.gseis.ucla.edu/faculty/kellner/papers/habermas.htm> [accessed 20 October 2013]

Kingsley, Mark. 'Rick Poynor: Ipse Dixit', *Speak Up*, 7 May 2007 <http://web.archive.org/web/20070531222459/http://www.underconsideration.com/speakup/archives/003354.html#138338> [accessed 31 October 2013]

Latour, Bruno, introduction, AIME website, [http://modesofexistence.org/index.php/#b\[chapter\]=#36945&b\[subheading\]=#36975&a=SET+TEXT+LEADER&c\[leading\]=TEXT&c\[slave\]=DOC&s=0](http://modesofexistence.org/index.php/#b[chapter]=#36945&b[subheading]=#36975&a=SET+TEXT+LEADER&c[leading]=TEXT&c[slave]=DOC&s=0) [accessed 25 October 2013]

Lattimore, Deanna, Diigo.com, 26, June 2008, <https://www.diigo.com/list/deanya/public-space-exhibitions> [accessed 28 October 2013]

Lord Clinton Davis to the House of Lords, 30 March 1998, HL Deb 30 March 1998, vol 588 cc11-2WA, [http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/written\\_answers/1998/mar/30/powerhouseuk-exhibition](http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/written_answers/1998/mar/30/powerhouseuk-exhibition) [accessed 7 October 2013]

Poynor, Rick, 'Adventures in the Image World', *Design Observer*, 5 November 2010 <http://observatory.designobserver.com/entry.html?entry=21758> [accessed 31 October 2013]

Poynor, Rick, 'Another Design Voice Falls Silent', *Design Observer*, 11 December 2011 <http://observatory.designobserver.com/feature/another-design-voice-falls-silent/31828/> [accessed 31 October, 2013]

Poynor, Rick, 'Poynor Replies To Speak Up's Discussion Of 'Easy Writer'', 'Easy Writer', *Print* website, 11 May 2007.  
[http://web.archive.org/web/20070515072818/http://www.printmag.com/design\\_articles/poynor\\_easy\\_writer/tabid/221/Default.aspx#response](http://web.archive.org/web/20070515072818/http://www.printmag.com/design_articles/poynor_easy_writer/tabid/221/Default.aspx#response) [accessed 31 October 2013]

Poynor, Rick, 'The Death of the Critic', *Icon* website, March 2006, <http://www.iconeye.com/read-previous-issues/icon-033-|-march-2006/the-death-of-the-critic-|-icon-033-|-march-2006> [accessed 31 October 2013]

Poynor, Rick, 'Where are the Design Critics?' *Design Observer*, 25 September 2005,  
<http://observatory.designobserver.com/entry.html?entry=3767>  
 [accessed 31 October 2013]

Press release, June 22, 1951, The Museum of Modern Art and the Merchandise Mart, p. 1, MoMA online press archive,  
[http://www.moma.org/docs/press\\_archives/1522/releases/MOMA\\_1951\\_0040.pdf](http://www.moma.org/docs/press_archives/1522/releases/MOMA_1951_0040.pdf) [accessed 9 October 2013]

Vit, Armin, 'Bio', *Speak Up*, 2003  
<http://web.archive.org/web/20030110104655/http://www.underconsideration.com/speakup/> [accessed 31 October 2013]

Vit, Armin, 'Goodbye, SpeakUp', *Speak Up*, 2009  
<http://www.underconsideration.com/speakup/archives/006034.html>  
 [accessed 31 October 2013]

*Wall Street*, screenplay by Stanley Weiser and Oliver Stone, 1987,  
[http://sfy.ru/?script=wall\\_street](http://sfy.ru/?script=wall_street) [accessed 12 October 2012]

White, Jon, and de Chernatony, Leslie, 'New Labour: A Study of the Creation, Development and Demise of a Political Brand',  
[http://marketingpedia.com/Marketing-Library/Branding/InterBrand\\_Papers/politicalbrand.pdf](http://marketingpedia.com/Marketing-Library/Branding/InterBrand_Papers/politicalbrand.pdf)  
 [accessed 9 October 2013]

Wilk, Christopher, 'Collecting the Twentieth Century' V&A website,  
[http://www.vam.ac.uk/vastatic/microsites/1159\\_grand\\_design/essay-collecting-the\\_new.html](http://www.vam.ac.uk/vastatic/microsites/1159_grand_design/essay-collecting-the_new.html) [accessed 9 October, 2013]

### Audio Sources

Audio cassette of IDCA 1970 proceedings, International Design Conference in Aspen papers, MSIDCA87, Box 11, Fol. 565, Special Collections and University Archives, University of Illinois at Chicago

Audio cassette, Summary, Michael Doyle, Fischer, Tabibian, Banham, 1970, International Design Conference in Aspen papers, MSIDCA87, Box 11, Fol. 578, Special Collections and University Archives, University of Illinois at Chicago

Thompson, Jane, Lecture at SVA MFA Design Criticism, 22  
September 2010

**Film Sources**

*IDCA '70*, Dir. Eli Noyes and Claudia Weill. IDCA. 1970

**Personal Interviews & Correspondences**

Allen, Deborah, personal interview, 6 July 2007

Banham, Mary, personal interview, 26 February 2007

Bayley, Stephen, personal interview, 6 January 2011

Catterall, Claire, personal interview, 17 September 2007

De Bretteville, Sheila Levrant, personal interview, 14 May 2008

Dunne, Anthony, personal interview, 21 July 2011

Esterson, Simon, personal interview, 5 August 2010

Farson, Richard, personal interview, 30 June 2008

Fiske, Jane, personal interview, 30 July 2007

Garland, Ken, personal interview, 14 February 2007

Hamilton, Richard, personal interview, 23 February 2007

Hebdige, Dick, personal interview, 3 April 2011

Holt, Matthew, personal correspondence, 10 May 2012

Kingsley, Mark, personal interview, 13 November 2012

Lord, Chip, personal correspondence, 18 June 2008

Noyes, Eli, personal interview, 28 March 2008

Noyes, Eli, personal correspondence, 10 July 2008

Poynor, Rick, personal interview, 13 July 2007.

Raby, Fiona, personal interview, 21 July 2011

Springer, Paul, personal interview via email, July 16 2012

Sudjic, Deyan, personal interview, 2009, June 1 2010

Van der Ryn, Sim, personal interview, 18 June 2008

Williamson, Judith, personal interview, 4 August 2010

York, Peter, personal interview, 16 August 2007