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Designated person authorising scanning: Anne Petrie

Module: Contemporary Contexts

Module no/no of students: Sca-vcl2-sep12 /500

ISBN/ISSN: 0500202613

Extract Author: Dormer, P.

Extract title: What is a Designer?

Book or Journal Title: Design Since 1945, Dormer, P.

Edition or Volume no/issue:

Publisher: Thames and Hudson, London, 1993

Page Numbers: 9 - 31

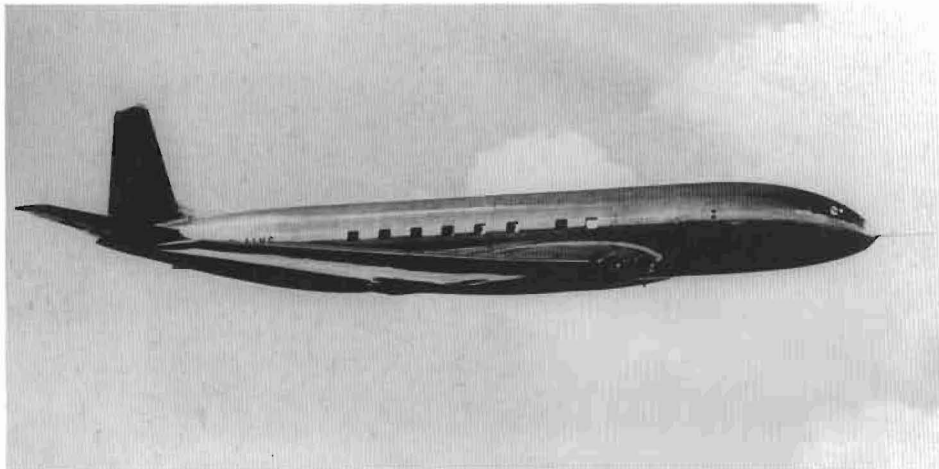
What is a Designer?

Since 1945 designing has become a profession in its own right. Gradually at first, but then more quickly (especially as Japan emerged in the 1960s as a trading competitor of formidable ingenuity), governments and large corporations became convinced that design was 'a good thing'. Design was seen to have two separate but related functions: it could be used strategically by a corporation to help plan its manufacturing and shape its marketing; and it had a more obvious role in making individual products attractive to consumers.

Designing is not a new activity. All ascendant civilizations have used it. The essential shape, form and structure of many artefacts, such as containers, tools, clothes and decorations, were fixed ten, twenty or even one hundred generations ago.

Even the professionalization of design is not 'new'. People have long specialized as potters or engineers, weavers or masons, and they often designed what they made. Moreover, old industries, such as textiles and pottery, differentiated between designers and makers – those who designed textiles in the 14th century were paid more than those who wove them.

Designers do not manufacture things. They think, they analyse, they may model or draw, and they specify. Some designers become involved in making their own prototypes. All good designers ask questions of their client and spend time helping the client to clarify what he or she really wants. Designing is about planning and making ideas explicit: if the product is to be made to the designer's specifications, then the designer must ensure that the factory has the tools and the intelligence and that each element specified is practicable. On complex jobs several product engineers will be involved, today with computer-aided software packages, to help to realize a design precisely. The greatest difference between the designer and the single independent craftsperson is that the craftsperson does not have the problem of communicating his or her intentions to others for translation into objects. The designer, however, must make

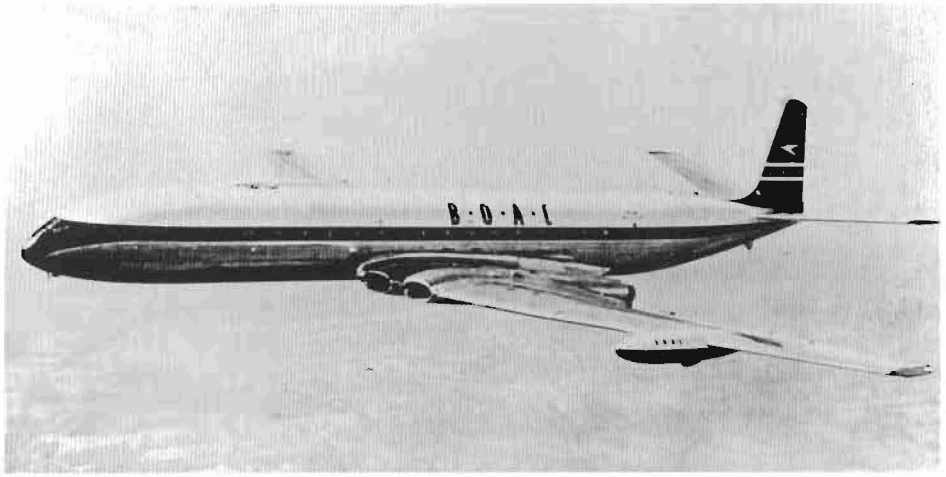


2 The square windows of the first de Havilland Comet were a fatal design flaw.

his or her intentions explicit – communication is at the heart of industrial design.

The trend that began in the USA between the two World Wars, for designers to offer their services to industry as outside consultants, became a flood in Western Europe, Scandinavia and the USA after 1945. Since the early 1950s, the activity of designing has been the subject of systematic and scientific analysis, it has been codified into set procedures, and it has become institutionalized by manufacturing corporations (Philips, Olivetti and IBM, for example) as part of the overall identity of the company. Designing the way a company looks and presents itself, and giving a ‘family’ look to the design of the company’s products, is an intricate and serious business. Designers visualize a company’s ideology and their visualizations communicate that ideology to the world. Designers provide the heraldry for the corporate baronage.

But design has not been thoroughly institutionalized. Design has also been claimed as art. Or, as Ettore Sottsass (Italy, b. 1917), a designer of enormous influence, has said: ‘To me design . . . is a way of discussing life. It is a way of discussing society, politics, eroticism, food and even design. At the end, it is a way of building up a possible figurative utopia or metaphor about life. Certainly to me design is not restricted to the necessity of giving form to a more or less stupid product for a more or less sophisticated industry.’



3 The Comet 4, 1958: by now a safe as well as a beautiful aircraft.

So what is the proper role of a designer?

Some have suggested that designers differ from engineers in that an engineer, although he or she might proceed intuitively, prefers to test and test, whereas an industrial designer is entirely happy with intuitive judgments. But, unlike an engineer, a designer is not responsible for the structural failure of the product. Or, to put the matter more graphically, in 1949 one of the most beautiful aircraft ever designed flew for the first time – the de Havilland Comet, the world's first jet airliner. Stylistically it looked right *at the time* but, in a cruel reversal of the designerly homily that 'if it looks right, it is right', it began crashing in service (1953–54). To modern eyes, the first Comets do not look right – they have square windows, and square holes are fatal design features in pressurized hulls because stress builds up at the corners, cracks occur and catastrophe follows.

This is not to imply that only design-engineers have responsibility for malfunction. Designers have a share of responsibility, especially in the design of the 'human/machine interface' – can this machine be operated safely at all times, are the switches, dials, levers or handles in the right place for a human to use effortlessly? The disciplines of ergonomics and product semantics are the disciplines of the designer's responsibility to the user.

The design-to-manufacture-to-sales-to-user process is a continuum. Between 'a designer' and 'a production line' there are many

interpreters – artisans, craftspeople, product engineers and materials specialists. These individuals (and their computers), together with other specialists such as marketing experts, exist to get an idea into reality and also to filter out as many uncertainties as possible before a design goes into production. Each person contributes to a design and although a designer may provide an important stylistic signature it is important not to confuse the idea of ‘the designer’ with that of ‘the fine artist’.

Many modern designs, especially if we consider domestic consumer goods, office equipment, power tools, automobiles and aircraft, are *not* the fruits of one individual’s mind, even if – for reasons discussed below – it can be beneficial from a marketing point of view to play up a single designer’s name as a signature that gives a product a provenance in the same way that a painter signs his or her canvas. In relatively simple, fabricated, non-mechanical objects, such as printed textiles or tableware, or furniture, a single designer can claim responsibility for the design of the whole product. However, even here, it is possible that others will interpret the designer’s design so that it can be manufactured more easily.

The first generation of modern designers who came to maturity in the late 1930s in the USA saw themselves as capable of turning a hand to anything, irrespective of whether it was a casing for a locomotive or a box for an iced cake.

A fine example of this breed of ‘designer as stylist’ is Raymond Loewy (1893–1986). Born in France, in 1919 he emigrated to the USA, where he began as a fashion illustrator before, in the late 1920s, becoming a pioneer of the putative industrial design profession. The key characteristic of the profession in its modern form was the emergence of the designer as a freelancer and then as a consultant with his or her own studio staffed with assistants.

Loewy styled several of the prewar American locomotives, including the million-pound monster S-1 steam engine (1937) and the lovely, sleek Greyhound buses of the 1940s. Loewy is also well known for the Lucky Strike cigarette pack, and for food and soft-drinks packaging.

He described design in pithy terms that manufacturers could understand. He said products were bedevilled by four parasites which the designer had always to eliminate: ‘noise, vibration, air or water resistance and villainous smells’.



4, 5 Raymond Loewy style. *Top* Silversides Greyhound motor coach, 1940–54, an early example of design enhancing corporate image. *Above* Avanti automobile for Studebaker, 1962.

The artist rather than the engineer provided the benchmark for Loewy, who said he designed the S-1 on the back of an envelope; his Avanti Studebaker car (1962), described (he said) by the chief

engineer of Porsche as almost perfect in its streamlining, was (he claimed) the result of 'design intuition'. It suited Loewy's public image to suppress the back-up teams of structural engineers and draughtsmen who turned his intuitions into mechanically sound reality.

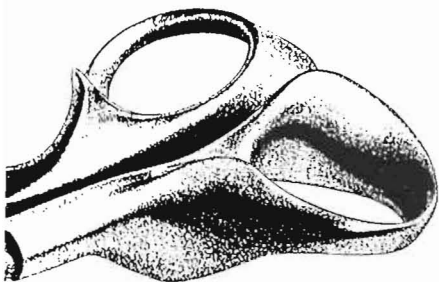
In 1949 Loewy was on the cover of *Time* magazine, which tagged his portrait with 'Designer Raymond Loewy – he streamlines the sale curve'. In 1960, he entered into Camelot itself and came to sprawl on the floor of the Oval Office where, with coloured papers and scissors, he and President John F. Kennedy redesigned the livery of Airforce One, then a Boeing 707.

The lesson that Loewy and his peers learned and then taught to the rest of the modern world was that manufacturers could be convinced that good style sells more products. This belief in the consultant designer's ability to style the sales curve upwards was the first and most formidable weapon in the new design profession's armoury.

It was not enough. After the Second World War, the global ambitions of larger corporations, running hand in hand with the aspirations of consumers, meant that industrial and manufacturing expansion occurred rapidly. Companies manufacturing consumer goods developed new marketing techniques and increased their production, their workforces, their outlets and their advertising. If designers were to have a role, they needed to be able to justify their proposals for design. Their arguments needed strengthening in order to convince other, competitive elements within corporate organizations – production, finance and marketing – that design had more to add than an attractive casing.

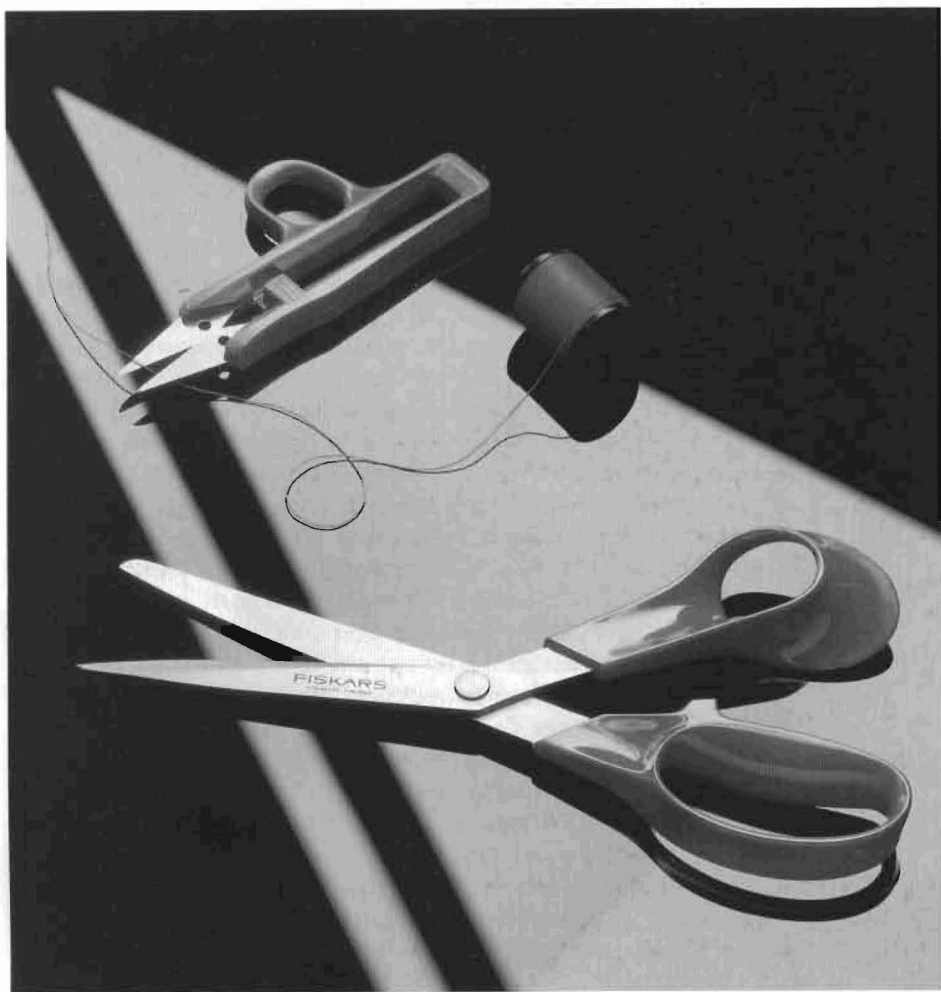
Designers themselves perceived that one approach was to put design on a quasi-scientific basis. The sort of designer emerging in the early 1950s in North America and in parts of northwest Europe and Scandinavia was not without intuition – the ability to have creative insight and suggest new solutions or new products was and remains an essential ingredient in design. However, possible solutions had to be tested, justified and modified. Set procedures, a methodology and some science seemed to be needed – and, accordingly, were created.

A good example of human engineering applied in the relatively simple context of designing hand-held power tools occurred in the 1950s. Zdenek Kovar (b. 1917), a sculptor and industrial designer at the Zdenek Nejedly School of Industrial Art in Czechoslovakia,



6 The handles of Zdenek Kovar's scissors (1952) describe their movements through their forms.

7 Human engineering applied in the simplest of contexts – Olaf Backstrom, O-Series scissors for Fiskars, Finland, 1960.



worked on the ergonomics of hand tools. His designs for scissor handles in 1952 anticipated similarly designed products produced in the West, such as Olaf Backstrom's (Finland, b. 1922) excellent scissors (1960), produced by Fiskars in 1967.

Kovar was interested in the causes of calluses, blisters and cuts on factory workers' hands. He set up trials with workers using existing tools (hammers, pneumatic drills and the like) with soft plaster wrapping on them. From the impressions left by their hands he developed new handles and grips which looked intensely organic, sculptural and humanoid.

In the decade or so immediately after the Second World War, a number of European and North American designers probably overweighted their interests towards ergonomics and empirical research into function, in the reasonable belief that a thing that is nice to handle contributes to general well-being.

Certainly several design magazines and institutions in the early 1950s were uneasy that the designer might be seen as a flippant creature. The search for a rationalist approach to designing has several roots. Many of them are German and include the pioneering work of artist and designer Peter Behrens (Germany, 1868–1940) as well as early 20th-century design 'guilds' such as the Deutscher Werkbund. One of them is in the most famous of all 20th-century art and design schools – the German Bauhaus (1919–33). Some of the ideas discussed and experimented with at the Bauhaus (such as modular design for furniture in interiors, the elimination of extraneous decoration, the prototyping of simple designs for mass production) were reborn with great vigour in the almost as famous postwar design school, the German Hochschule für Gestaltung at Ulm (1955–68). This was established to pursue a rationalist approach to design and although its curriculum included fine art when it formally opened, with the arrival of new director, Tomas Maldonado (Argentina, b. 1922), fine art was replaced by quite different subjects: mathematics, sociology, ergonomics and economics.

Ulm tried to exorcize capriciousness from design and, in the pursuit of 'correct' solutions, sought to establish standard working methods for a designer. Unlike the Bauhaus which, despite the ambitions of its teachers, failed to connect itself with industry, Ulm found a conduit for its design methodology in Braun, the German electronics company.

Braun AG, established in 1921 in Frankfurt as a radio manufactory, was rebuilt in 1945. Artur and Erwin Braun, the founder's sons, took the company forward in the 1950s. In 1960 the Braun product line was divided into four product categories, each headed by a senior designer. These were Dieter Rams, radio and hi-fi; Reinhold Weiss, household and personal care appliances; Richard Fischer, shavers; and Robert Oberheim, photographic equipment. Clocks, watches, lighters and calculators were added in 1966.

Rams is the best-known figure associated with Braun, but several talented designers contributed substantially. Weiss and Fischer, graduates of Ulm, worked in-house at Braun from the late 1950s. Weiss's Coffee Grinder KMM1 (1964), a functional and stylistic classic, is still in production. The teachings of the Ulm school were thus disseminated via its students and reach down to us through products such as the KMM1. Dr Fritz Eichler, appointed to the board in 1954, was the architect of the company's corporate design philosophy. Meanwhile, Hans Gugelot (teacher at Ulm and consultant to Braun) worked with Rams and Eichler upon radio and hi-fi.

Ulm was not unique in Germany in searching for scientific approaches to designing. Nigel Cross (*Engineering Design Methods*, 1989) notes that work has continued in Germany on rationalizing the design process. He cites the professional engineers' body Verein Deutscher Ingenieure, amongst whose published guidelines is one which states: 'The design process, as part of product creation, is subdivided into general working stages, making the design approach transparent, rational and independent of a specific branch of industry.'

In the United States the concept of scientific design procedures was developed pragmatically and effectively. One of the earliest demonstrations of the practicality of proceeding with a sound programme of analysis and empirical testing occurred in the USA with the interior design of the Boeing 707. Designed first as a tanker refuelling aircraft for the USAF it was bought in its civilian mode by Pan American World Airways in 1955, and went on to establish the standard for commercial flying for the postwar period.

Walter Dorwin Teague (USA, 1883–1960) and his deputy Frank de Giudice worked on the interior design of the 707. Their method, which cost Boeing half a million dollars, resulted in a full-scale mock-up with dozens of 'pretend flights' to test the seating, the galleys and other ergonomic factors. Their use of plastic panelling, recessed lights,

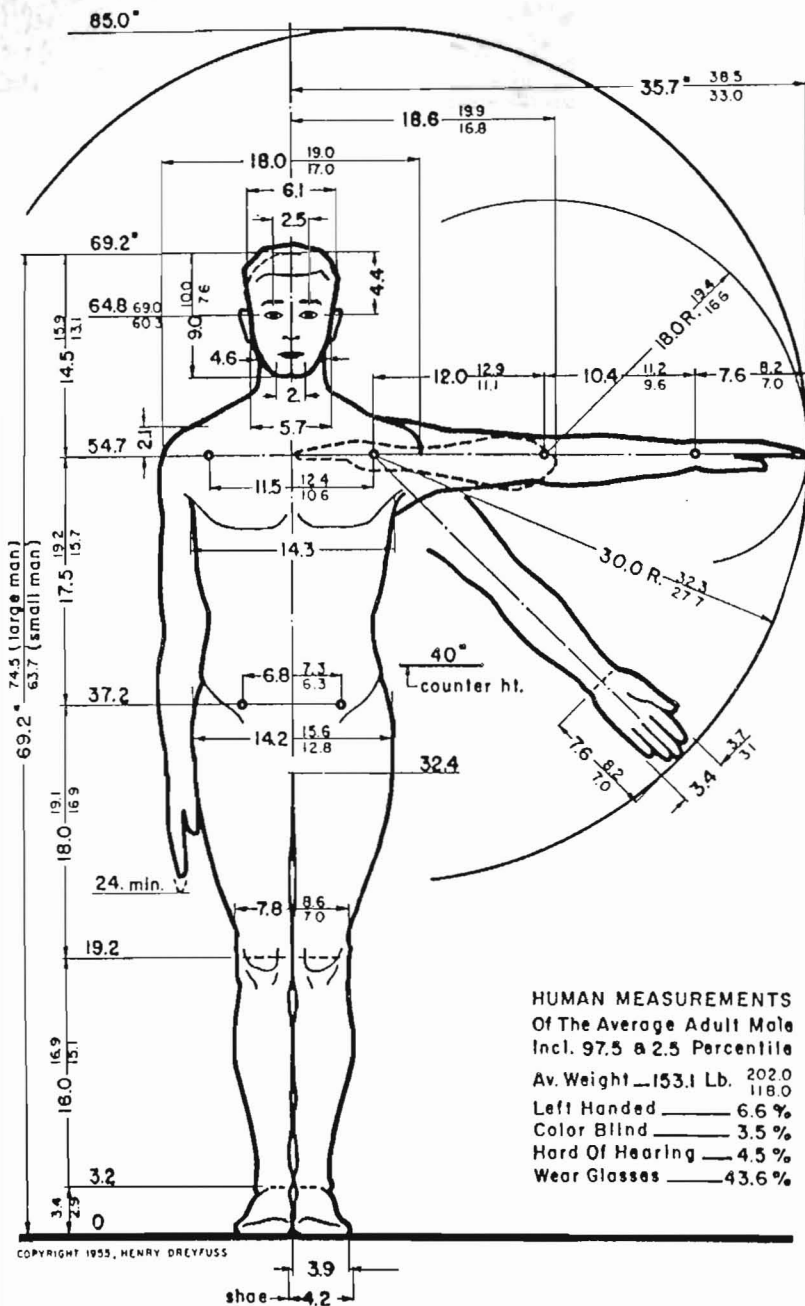


8 W.D. Teague, full-scale mock-up for the Boeing 707 interior (1955–56).

9 Henry Dreyfuss examined the demands of human size and proportions on design.

high, contoured seats, integrated customer-service units and a coherent, calming colour scheme established the basic design strategy from which airlines have yet to deviate. Aviation companies are not blind to the role of beauty in selling their products; the exterior of the 707 also received some product styling from de Giudice, who designed the shape of the fuselage nose, the tail fin and the engine housings.

The 707, bought by so many airlines, has since had several important designers work on its interior. American Airlines commissioned Henry Dreyfuss (USA, 1903–72) to design the interior of its 707s. Dreyfuss was a datum collector par excellence and ergonomic data provided the subtext for his famous book, *Designing for People* (1955). In 1960 he published a series of charts, *The Measure of Man*.



HUMAN MEASUREMENTS
 Of The Average Adult Male
 Incl. 97.5 & 2.5 Percentile
 Av. Weight — 153.1 Lb. $\frac{202.0}{118.0}$
 Left Handed — 6.6 %
 Color Blind — 3.5 %
 Hard Of Hearing — 4.5 %
 Wear Glasses — 43.6 %

COPYRIGHT 1955, HENRY DREYFUSS

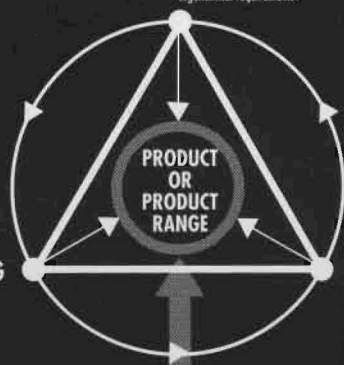
RELATION BETWEEN THE MAIN DISCIPLINES IN THE PRODUCT DEVELOPMENT PROCESS

INDUSTRIAL DESIGN (VISION)

Mainly based on:
aesthetical knowledge (form, colours)
social backgrounds
cultural backgrounds
visual trends
environmental relation
ergonomical requirements

MARKETING (VISION)

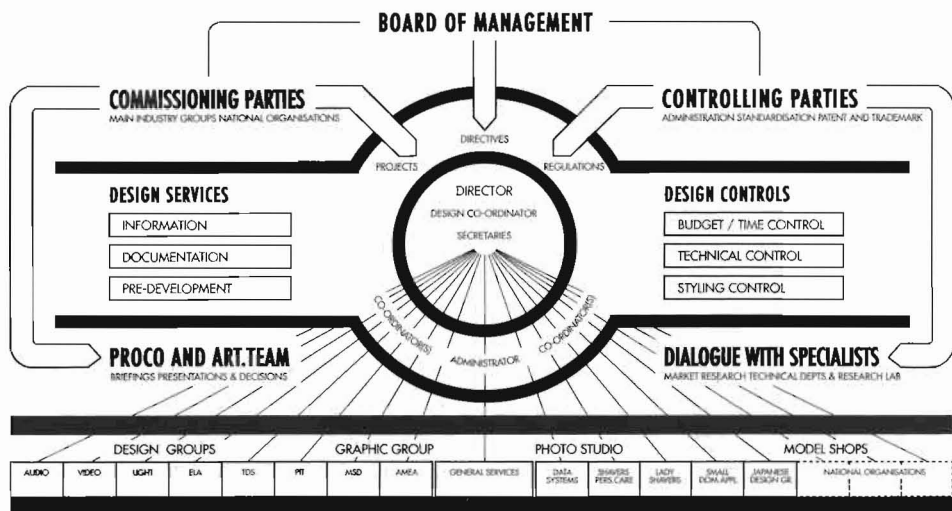
Mainly based on:
market research
market analysis
economical situation
distribution systems

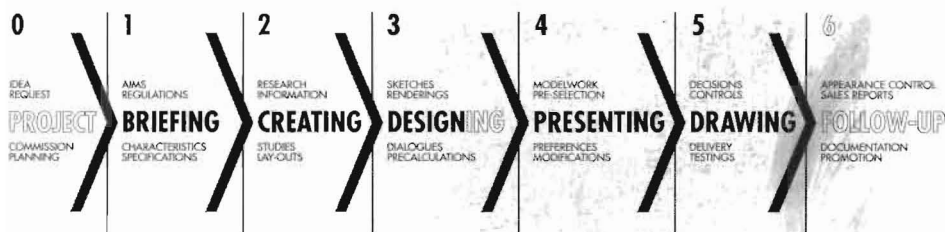


DEVELOPMENT PRODUCTION (VISION)

Mainly based on:
technical research
technical analysis
economical targets
production methods
ergonomical research

Development of a
COMMON VISION
BASED ON TEAMWORK
resulting in the
optimum solution





After the Second World War major manufacturers began to integrate design and designers into their institutional organization. These examples are from Philips.

10 Industrial design was given the same status as, for example, marketing, 1984.

11 Designers were given clearly defined roles and thus a degree of credibility in arguing with other company departments, 1969.

12 The Philips design track: design for problem-solving.

For Dreyfuss, as for many American designers, there was no conflict between the market-orientated and sales-dominated consumerism and design that has been achieved rationally and which performs properly. (Nevertheless, a generation of products that have emerged since Dreyfuss's death look nice but are difficult to use – computer printers, automatic ticket machines and video recorders are among them. Such ergonomic failures indicate that good performance remains more elusive than good looks.)

Most of the world's leading corporations illustrate how the functions of the designer and the role of design have evolved since 1945. The Dutch electrical manufacturing company Philips is an example whose design strategy has been well described by John Heskett in his book, *Philips: a study of the corporate management of design* (1989). Founded in 1891, Philips is one of the largest companies in the world and it operates across the world. Before 1950 its design strategy, though not exactly ad hoc, was not clearly set out. Changes occurred when architect Rein Veersema was appointed to head up the design of radios, televisions, record players and shavers. Over the course of fourteen years, Veersema introduced the disciplines of ergonomics and costing into design – giving designers something with which to defend their designs against other opinions in the company. He also pursued the idea that all Philips products should have a family identity.

Veersema's deputy, Frans van der Put, who took over from him for a year as caretaker head of design in 1965, carried the baton of belief that design should 'prove itself by its works'. In 1966, van der Put was replaced by a Norwegian designer, Knut Yran, who said, 'Design is a technical profession with a marketing function' and 'a designer must

realize the concern's intentions before he realizes those of his own'. Yran believed in systematic planning, and masterminded Philips' first House style manual (1973), which sought to give consistency to all aspects of the company's presentation. House style manuals, which became a commonplace in corporations worldwide in the 1970s, also became part of many public sector services and government departments.

Like a number of European-based manufacturing companies, Philips – as Heskett describes it – was worried in the early 1970s by the quality of the design and manufacture characterizing Japanese goods. Moreover, the success of Japanese products worldwide meant that the old idea that a manufacturer had to tailor all products to suit individual national tastes was not necessarily true. Sony, for example, was proving that world products sold. This realization helped influence Philips in deciding to appoint Robert Blaich as Yran's replacement in 1980.

Blaich, an American architect and industrial designer, had worked for Herman Miller Inc., one of the USA's leading office furniture companies – and one of the very few that has been design-led since the war. He espoused 'global design'; like many other designers he was impressed by the success of the Sony Walkman.

Blaich got industrial designers and engineers talking to one another and understanding one another's procedures. As Heskett explains it, he clarified the broader roles of both the product engineers and the product designers, with the designers being concerned with the systems of graphics, packaging, marketing and, 'above all, the mechanics of operations by users and groups of users'. He also became one of the loudest champions of 'product semantics', which attempts to make the meaning of a product an explicit part of the product's function. If you can see what a thing 'means', then you can more readily grasp how to use it.

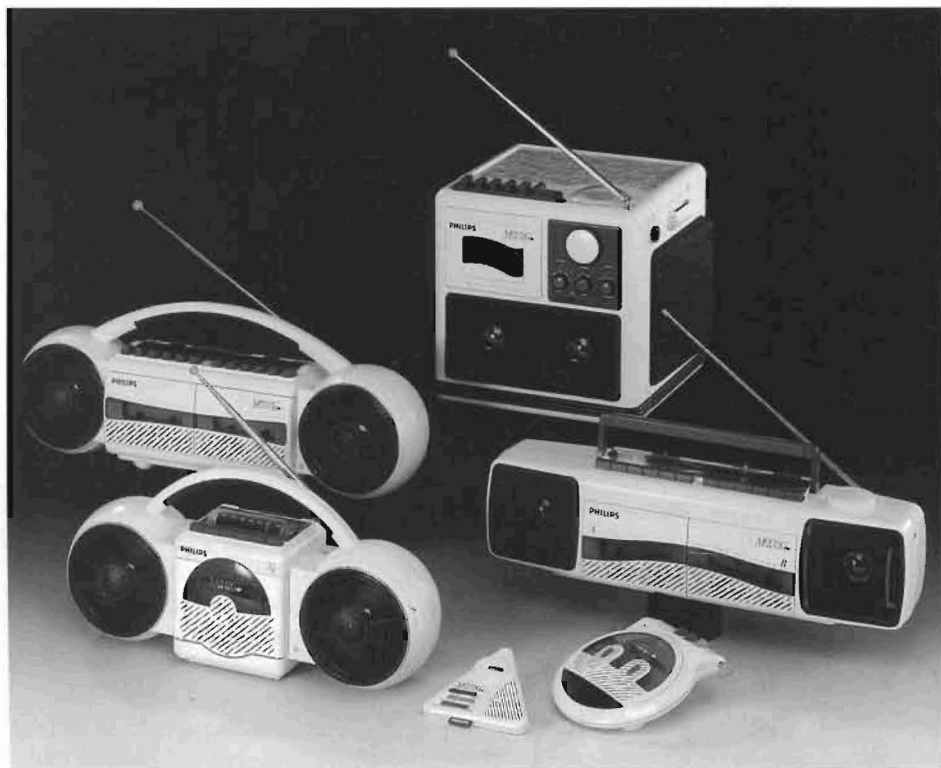
Heskett's book is part of a self-reflexive literature which has emerged, some of it written by engineers and designers, about the nature of 'designing'. Since 1945, as the responsibilities of the designer have grown, designing itself has fragmented into specialisms and designers are generating principles to guide their work.

Nigel Cross suggests that a designer sets out with a goal, some constraints, and some criteria by which the result may be judged a success or failure. This description, although it might coincide with

13 The need to maintain a coherent design image across a diverse and scattered industrial empire led to the development of house style manuals – Philips published its first in 1973.



14 During the 1980s Philips, like its competitors, began targeting niches of consumerism. The Moving Sound range of cassette and disc players was aimed at the urban teenager.



the working practice of an Italian Renaissance artist, is quite different from that of a contemporary fine artist who is likely to argue that he or she has rejected all constraints and that he or she alone determines the criteria for success or failure.

A designer given the goal of designing a new range of lamps understands that the constraints upon the design will be related to what the market is perceived to need, what the factory is capable of making and how much profit the company wants as a return on its investment. Some criteria for success will be relatively easy to fix but some, such as whether the product will capture the imagination of the marketplace, remain a limited gamble. Cross notes that the central feature of design work, however, is that it is 'solution led'. And here the first generation of industrial designers like Loewy may be right with their stories about dashing off a drawing on the back of an envelope. Cross says the designer's traditional approach to solving problems, especially if they are ill defined (as a great many necessarily are at the outset of a project), is to move fairly quickly to a potential solution. Even if the solution does not fit, it reveals further aspects of the problem and hence clarifies it for another attempt at a solution.

It should be noted, however, that although design as methodology and design as research are practical concepts, they are also (or were also) a part of a fashion, and part of a general *Zeitgeist* fascination with logic, science and problem solving. The art world was similar. For by the middle 1960s art schools in western Europe and some in North America were referring to art as 'research'; students and their tutors did not talk about subject matter so much as problems and projects. This fashion went hand in hand with the conceptual and other minimalist art movements that peaked in the late 1970s.

In Italy the practice of design as *research* has been successfully juggled with the idea of the designer as an artist. The spirit of design has remained closer to the spirit of design-as-art, maintained partly by the training of designers as architects and partly because there is a strong avant garde design movement in Italy in which ideas tapping into politics, sociology, fine art, architecture, film and music are explored, played with and sometimes used as the starting point for actual designs.

The atmosphere surrounding design is different in Italy than in Germany or North America. Whilst Olivetti, for example, shares similar concerns about global products, marketing and family

15 Although Olivetti is an advanced, technology-led company, it has caught the imagination of educated purchasers by tempering the culture of science with that of art. The objective is achieved by using high-profile artist-designers and through the sponsorship of major exhibitions.

The Horses of San Marco

A Royal Academy exhibition presented by Olivetti

Sculptures and paintings relating to the origins and the glory of the Horses of San Marco in Venice.

Royal Academy of Arts
Piccadilly London W1

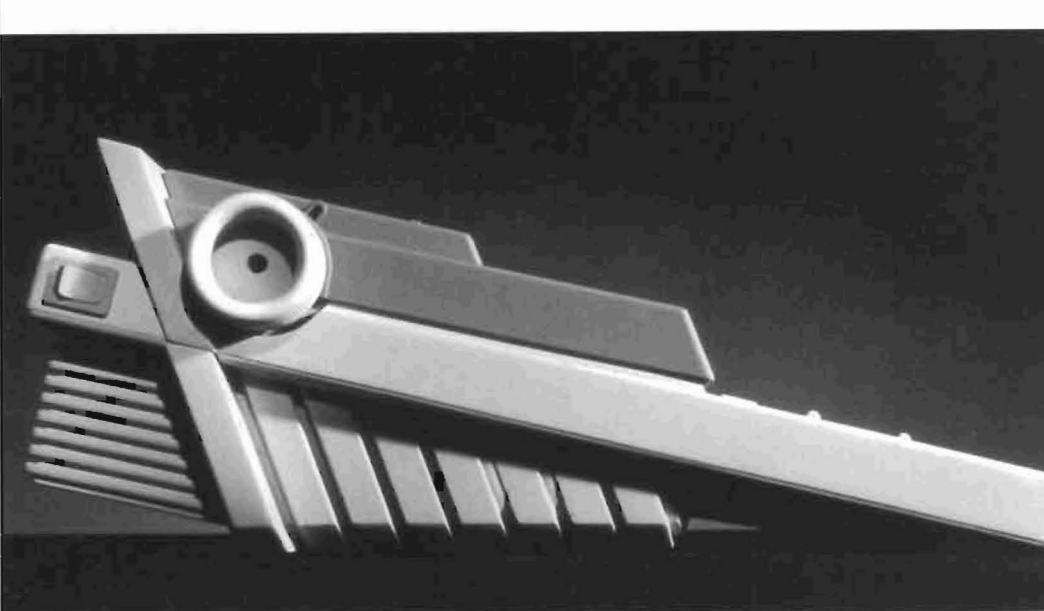
8 Sept - 28 Oct 1979

Admission: £1.40 (incl. photo, tickets £1.00 per person, and Sunday £0.75)

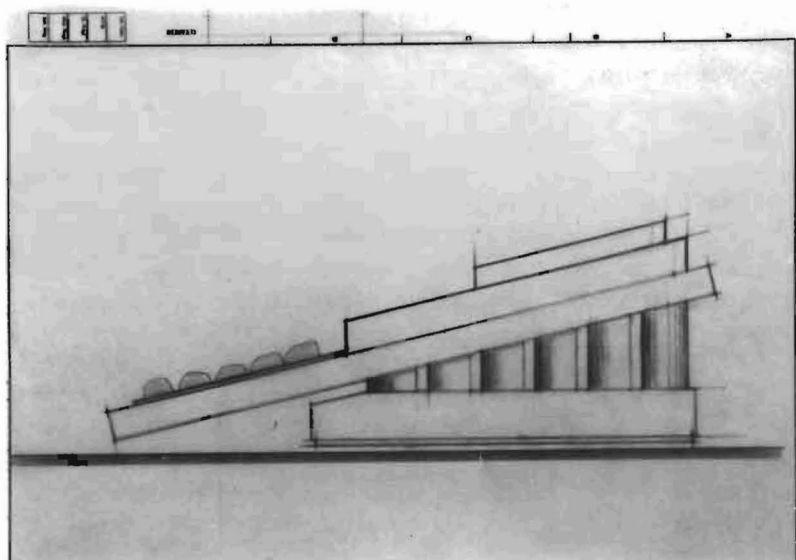


identity, claims made about how design is managed in this successful Italian company differ considerably from those of Philips or a North American company such as Ford or Pepsi-Cola. Whether the substance of the management process is very different is a moot point.

In the sister book to John Heskett's on Philips, Sibylle Kicherer's *Olivetti* (1990), we learn that 'drama' is considered to be an integral part of the design process. Italian designers generally train first as architects and tend to be more assertive of their role as individual artists. Kicherer describes the atmosphere of designing for Olivetti:



16,17 A portable electronic typewriter that is light, easy to use and has a high printing speed. Designed for Olivetti by Mario Bellini and Alessandro Chiarato, 1985-86.



'An important factor here is what can be called the "Italian drama" – the consciously created and accepted chaos that is caused by the reinforcement of different approaches, overlapping competences and extreme time pressure, all of which results in apparent confusion and explosive personal interactions. Design managers and designers see such confrontations as a challenge, even as a necessary way towards achieving excellence.'

Designers like Sottsass are given retainer fees by companies such as Olivetti. This gives a designer security and freedom to create and experiment. In the long run, the company, so it is argued, benefits from the creativity of these experimental, 'artistic' activities that have no apparent, direct connection with the mainstream work of the company.

Olivetti is not a chaotic company, but it allows its designers unique freedoms. Although the designer is treated like 'an artist', the model of artist presented is one of the Italian Renaissance where artists (including those we most admire today) created within a well-defined brief.

The stages in design at Olivetti can be summarized as follows: managers decide that a new product or range of products is required; researchers are then commissioned to collect information about market and technical aspects; specifications are worked out that can form the brief to both the designers and the development engineers. At this stage, the department responsible for the corporate image of the company is brought in, and the designers, too, are involved in initial discussions. Once all the commercial requirements have been sorted out, then the designers begin to work on the design concept.

Designing is a noisier business in Italy than almost anywhere else in the world. The atmosphere is heady, loud, colourful and as non-bureaucratic as possible; but the underlying process of design is in principle compatible with that found in Germany, Britain, Scandinavia, Holland and North America – as well as Japan.

Italian companies, as well as priding themselves on finding and encouraging new design talents, have also benefitted from the peculiarly Italian 'radical design' movement which has centred on a series of design studios, loose associations of like-minded designers, which began emerging in the mid 1960s. The leading studios were Archizoom Associati (founded Florence 1966), Superstudio (Florence 1966), Alchymia (Milan 1976) and Memphis (Milan 1981). Their

work is part philosophy, part art, and part manufacturing. They share several of the same designers and each of them has been interested in innovative design, in interpreting mass culture, and in ideas about planning and architecture. Their research was of a 'brainstorming' kind in which the results were more usually presented as prototype objects (furniture and lamps) or montages, collages and film sets to explore ideas in housing, urban planning and the future of 'the city'.

Andrea Branzi (Italy, b. 1938) – designer, philosopher and habitué of most of the Italian postwar avant garde design groups and author of the definitive book on Italian postwar design called *The Hot House* (1984) – wrote in 1983 that the New Design espoused by the Studios (see also Chapters 3 and 4) sought to recover 'a system of ties and functions' between the objects in the home and the families who live with them; one that 'cannot be explained in purely ergonomic or functional terms, that involve man in his relationship to his domestic habitat from a wider cultural and expressive point of view.' He theorizes what most non-designers already know: that we buy and acquire things for all kinds of reasons, influenced by our memories and associations, our aspirations and our friends, as well as what we see on television or in museums.

By no means all the developed, industrialized nations of the world possess a fully fledged industrial design profession. It is ironic that France, who gave us Raymond Loewy, has rather few industrial designers – only about 300 in 1987, for example. In 1983 the very word 'design' was banned from the French language as a part of the campaign to keep the French vocabulary pure of English words. It was replaced with the inadequate expression *la stylique*, which did not delight the small band of French industrial designers who protested that their work has meant more than deciding on the colour of the casing. Commentators pointed out that this linguistic confusion was revealing about the French attitude which saw design as merely styling. This has meant that designing – in the holistic sense that emerged in companies such as Philips or in the broad intellectual sense that is alive in Italy – does not exist in France. Yet France has made an impression, in public transport and in public architecture especially, with its spectacular town planning projects, such as La Défense in Paris.

France has continued its tradition of producing star quality designers in couture fashion and French furniture has recaptured the

verve and design intelligence that characterized that industry during the 1920s and 1930s. However, high-quality consumer product design is surprisingly scarce. There are exceptions, such as the Citroën DS 19 motor car (1955), and some domestic kitchen electrical equipment. But designers have yet to be viewed generally in French industry as part of the team that has a role in planning the strategy of a company. In France the designer is still a stylist, rather than the logician-artist-engineer-stylist that he or she is expected to be elsewhere in the industrial world.

In the Scandinavian countries of Denmark, Sweden and Finland (and, to a lesser extent, Norway and Iceland) design has tended towards a mixture of hand craft ideas with industrial design. In part this was because the strength of Scandinavian industry lay in furniture, ceramics, lighting and textiles – all areas with long roots in the decorative arts. In the 1950s the craft/design-based ‘Scandinavian look’ was a marketable commodity (and remained so through much of the 1960s). It meant simple, well-made shapes and forms with a gentle geometry. Natural materials were favoured, as were light colours, and the appeal was middleclass but democratic.

Although a crafts-based aesthetic shaped the style of furniture and ceramics, factory production made and makes full use of machines – it was a crafts influenced industry, not crafts based. The specialist industrial designer was a rarity for a while (although in companies such as Sweden’s Saab there were notable exceptions).

But partly as a consequence of the economic slump in the late 1970s and early 1980s and also as a result of diversification into high technology industries (with the impact of new electronics technology and materials – see Chapter 2), the Scandinavian industrial designer has emerged with a function similar to that of his or her German, Dutch or North American counterpart. This trend is confirmed by educational changes, which show that training for industrial designers has become separated from training in the crafts and decorative arts. As is the case elsewhere in northwest Europe, in Italy (also increasingly in Spain) and in North America, there has been a steady growth in the role of consultant design studios as well as in the development by individual companies of their own corporate design studios.

Japan learned very quickly that design was a tool for marketing products and modelled many of its design procedures on information

gleaned from tours of North American corporate design departments in the 1950s and 1960s. Never mind that in the 1950s Japan had a reputation as a mass producer of rather poor quality goods, by the early 1970s European and American manufacturers were gloomily analysing Japanese tape recorders, hi-fis, radios, televisions, cameras and motorcycles, not only for the quality of their manufacture and detailing but also for their style. But designers had to be 'company men': the freelance consultant designer is less important in Japan than the company design studio.

The style and psychology of Japanese design is unique (see Chapter 3), but the guiding principles of design are similar to those of corporate design strategies elsewhere in the world. In Japan the designer tends to be anonymous as far as the public is concerned. None the less, companies repay loyalty by actually producing many more of their designers' ideas than would happen in Europe or America. Designers are also encouraged to produce a considerable range of prototypes and ideas. There are signs that younger Japanese designers, those who have travelled to the West or trained in British or North American colleges, are beginning to gain more autonomy for themselves as free creative spirits but the orthodoxy is to submit to the anonymity of the company's demands.

However, in most countries, although a review of the way the job of the designer has developed since 1945 shows an emphasis upon methodologies, research, marketing and planning, there is much that remains whimsical or even arbitrary about the way designs catch on. The ideology of the designer as a planner rather than an artist has served companies well, but the ideology has not been monolithic. The existence of individual design studios throughout the West, together with a marked interest and demand for variety, pluralism and, indeed, democracy, is reshaping the role of the designer. And much depends upon how designers want to see themselves. It suited the postwar generation to become company men. It may not (and probably will not) suit their children.

And finally, a caveat. There is a danger of distorting the role of designers if we draw too strong a distinction between them and 'us' – the consumers. Analyses of the relationship between designers and consumers veer towards unrealistic extremes. On the one hand it is possible to see the relationship as adversative or manipulative – one in which designers side with manufacturers and retailers to dupe, harass

or seduce us into buying what they want to make and sell. This caricature is manifestly false. And it is false because the other caricature commonly drawn – that consumers are passive and will accept whatever is put in front of them – is also false. We forget the enormous quantities of products (and producers) that fail.

Perhaps the most interesting aspect of design and the way it has developed since the Second World War as a profession is the manner in which it has sought to get design right. Journalist Pamela Johnson's article 'Shock of the Newborn', for the British magazine *Issue* (May, 1991), details how successive designers had developed and modified a range of products for babies, young children and their parents by listening to consumer feedback. She notes that, with regard to the foldaway baby buggy designed in Britain in the mid-1960s, 'Designers have responded almost annually to parental requests: more back support, a place to put shopping, balloon tyres, swivel wheels, five-point harness, multiposition seats, linked braking system and protective rain hoods.' Designers respond to their own needs because their needs coincide with ours. Few of us are iconoclasts; even fewer iconoclasts are successful designers.