THE BAUHAUS ISN'T OUR HOUSE

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INTRODUCTION

THE principles of the Bauhaus and the design precepts of the Swiss Style are no longer a valid model for late twentieth-century American design. The emphasis on hard, uncompromising surfaces characteristic of the Bauhaus is alienating and remote. Something more comfortable is needed for everyday use.

America and Europe are sufficiently different that no single design philosophy can serve the needs of both. No "International Style" is international enough to be allowed outside the hothouse environment of architecture schools and graphic design classes.

While America was developing as a nation, Europe was spending its energies in war and colonial expansion. By the early 1950s, the European powers had lost all that their earlier efforts had gained, and were well on the way to becoming geographically and politically insignificant. The wars had not only stripped them of their young men, but had indentured unborn generations to the crushing debts incurred in the process. Nineteenth-century Americans pursued a conscientious course of isolationism, and mainly tended to business. The development of a nation of three million square miles provided Americans with markets for industry and sources of raw materials that European powers could satisfy only through colonialism. The American design ethic was founded on domestic expansion, immigration, transportation and invention.

This frontier/pioneer model for a design ethic did not survive long into the present century. In the late 1920s, Americans began to neglect their excellent domestic design tradition in favor of that of the Bauhaus. The aesthetic developed and promoted by designers such as Greene & Greene, Bernard Maybeck, Julia Morgan and Louis Sullivan was replaced by that of Le Corbusier, Mies van der Rohe and Marcel Breuer. We wanted to be more European than American, and this yearning for the false sophistication of foreign traditions led us astray. A feeling of bumpkinish inferiority (exaggerated, to no small extent, by the pious lunacy of prohibition) tricked us into the "foreign = good, domestic = bad" error, which has persisted and flourished in the face of massive evidence to the contrary.

A foreign design tradition has been grafted onto the domestic trunk, but it should not be mistaken for the tree. The appeal of working entirely within an aesthetic system, such as Modular Design or Swiss Style, is that it is easy. It is easy because thinking has been reduced to a minimum. It would be interesting to speculate why post-war Americans didn't want to think anymore. Unfortunately, to do good work, the designer does have to think. Totalitarian design systems do not fit all, or even most, situations. They

bend the facts to fit the theory, and bent facts have a way of springing back sooner or later.

ORIGINS OF THE BAUHAUS

NEW ways of doing things immediately confront established tradition. The struggle to legitimize a new idea demands a substantial investment from its proponents. This investment can make them reluctant to recognize newer ideas. The fire-breathing, young revolutionary often evolves into a staid, elderly reactionary.

The rhetoric created by change can be more powerful than the changes themselves. If the rhetoric is really good, with lots of swell catch-phrases and easy concepts (form follows function, man is the measure, &c.), it can take on a life of its own. The Bauhaus had, if nothing else, terrific rhetoric.

To understand why the Bauhaus' time has passed, it is first necessary to see what created it, and to realize that those influences are not as important now as they were at the beginning of the twentieth century. The Bauhaus, which dominates modern architecture and exerts a profound influence on all aspects of design, was founded in 1919, in Weimar, Germany, by Walter Gropius. This new movement was founded simultaneously with the rise of the monumental totalitarian systems of fascism and communism.

The Bauhaus was founded immediately after a war that had introduced unprecedented destruction, and during the great influenza epidemic which, in addition to the apocalyptic slaughter of the war, killed 20 million more. The world and Walter Gropius were desperate for order.

The ideal of perfection in workmanship as the measure of skilled labor and the goal of art, suffered a serious challenge when the effects of the industrial revolution began to be felt in aesthetic circles. Uniformity and exactitude, formerly the mark of the master, became the mark of the machine, to which precise and undeviating work were not only natural but necessary. Qualities sought in art became not so much those of perfect workmanship, but of creativity and originality. It was felt that artists should be as unlike machinery as possible. "Handmade" is a relatively new quality. Everything used to be handmade.

An aesthetic and theoretical bridge between the Bauhaus and nineteenth century gingerbread is found in the Vienna Secession (1897-1918) and architect Joseph Hoffman and artist Kolo Moser's Wiener Werkstaette (1903-1932) which encompassed many of the ideals of William Morris' English Arts and Crafts movement (1861) and C. R. Ashbee's Guild of Handicraft (1888) in its emphasis on the nobility of labor and equality of status between artists and craftsmen. The WW's "New Artists" were at pains to bring together an international brotherhood of kindred spirits, but differed fundamentally from their successors in that the Bauhaus did not aspire to individual, unrepeatable objects for the middle class. At the Bauhaus, the intention was to create good prototype designs which could then be mass-produced (world revolution permitting) to encompass all aspects of the environment of the emancipated proletariat.

The aesthetic philosophers of the nineteenth century, such as Ruskin, Carlisle, and Morris, were united in a fear and hatred of the machine and its influence, and in the encouragement of certain excesses in the direction of romanticism and over-ornamentation. They defined Man as that which was least like The Machine. A sense of unreality permeated the late nineteenth century, and the stage was set for reaction.

The aesthetic notions of the 19th century continued in the Vienna Secession. Led by Gustav Klimt, a group of young artists banded together to form their own independent exhibiting society. The group admired and was much influenced by the Scottish Nouveau, and when the Wiener Werkstätte was founded by Josef Hoffman and Koloman Moser in 1903 the ideals of the Arts and Crafts movement, typically expressed in a desire to break down the barriers between artist and craftsman, continued the 19th century affection for excessive ornament and the cult of refinement.

The architect and design theorist Adolf Loos provides a bridge between the decorative Secessionists and the anti-decorative Bauhaus. A proponent of logic and utility, as an outspoken critic of the Wiener Werkstätte's aesthetic of decoration used purely out of force of habit and ornament for its own sake, and he attacked it in a celebrated essay "Ornament and Crime," in which he draws a parallel between conventional, meaningless decoration and a state of barbaric degeneracy typified by the high incidence of tattooing among the inmates of Vienna's prisons. "For Loos, the art of the designer consisted not in imposing some fixed aesthetic standpoint on his hapless client, but in selecting and juxtaposing the simplest and most convenient, and therefore most elegant objects of common use." (1) His startlingly plain design for a new department store on Vienna's Michaelerplatz, with its unadorned window openings and the entirely blank facade of the upper storeys anticipates the work of the Bauhaus.

The Bauhaus looked at men and machines in the exact opposite way from both the Secession and Arts & Crafts: man was vile and the machine was clean and pure. The Bauhaus philosophy nearly amounts to machine-worship.

The following quote of Frank Lloyd Wright, writing in 1900, will serve to illustrate:

My God is machinery, and the art of the future will be the expression of the individual artist through the thousand powers of the machine.

In his memoir My Life in Art, (Moscow, Soviet Publishing House, 1948 pp 387-389) the Russian director Constantin Stanislavsky makes the avant-guarde intellectual attitude toward people appallingly clear. Though he is recounting a conversation with the English artist and actor Edward Gordon Craig (1872 -), clearly the two are of one mind:

He enthusiastically explained his beloved fundamental principles, his original quest for a new art of movement. He showed me sketches of this new art in which lines and clouds and rocks created an unceasing impetus upward . . . Craig said that every work of art must be made of dead material: stone, marble, bronze, canvas, paper, paint-and fixed forever in artistic form.... the living material of the actor's body, which changes continually and is never the same, was not useful for the purposes of creation. ...

Craig dreamed of a theatre without men and women, i.e., without actors. He wanted to replace them with puppets, who had no bad habits or gestures, no painted faces, exaggerated voices, no smallness of soul, no worthless ambitions. The puppets would have cleansed the atmosphere of the theatre and added seriousness to the enterprise.

The "International Style" is predicated on the notion of interchangeable, machine-made parts from which buildings, books, furniture and all attributes of life can be made, cheaply and well. Alas, the greatest monuments to the Bauhaus and the International Style were painstakingly hand made to give the appearance of mass-produced, machine-made, interchangeable parts. I realize that it is not entirely fair to blame 1920s philosopher-designers for desiring buildings, furniture and fittings which could not be mass produced until miracle substances and techniques were invented, and which in the meanwhile had to be handmade by master craftsmen pretending to be factories, but the temptation is too great to resist.

The Great War, as it was called until round two began in 1939, left Europe in a state of profound disorder. When the soldiers marched off to battle in 1914, the war was not expected to last more than a few weeks. It was thought that no major power could afford the drain on its economy for longer. However, in addition to making warfare more destructive, the industrial revolution had the unanticipated effect of decreasing the work force necessary to sustain the economy while at the same time increasing its productive capacity. Although this had been demonstrated in the American Civil War, the lesson was not taken to heart by military or political strategists.

Consider the change in population and occupation in the case of one prominent industrial power. The population of England and Wales in 1750 was six and a half million, of which nearly 95% were engaged in agrarian pursuits. By 1850, improved agricultural methods had allowed the population to expand to eighteen million, fed by 20% of the population. In 1900, 7% fed thirty-three million. In one hundred fifty years, the greatly increased populations of the major Western powers had shifted from agrarian to industrial, and from rural to urban. By 1900 there were both people and productive capacity to spare, and food in abundance. This made possible a kind of warfare which had only been hinted at before. There was no anticipation of the war of attrition which developed.

The war ground on, dragging in the whole world, as levy after levy of men were thrown against the impossible barriers of machine guns and barbed wire. The Hero Warrior was laid to final rest, at least in the minds of the troops, as the overwhelming engines of destruction demonstrated that man was nothing. In 1918, exhausted and facing revolution, the antagonists fell apart, swearing revenge. Germany's economy was a ruin. The harsh demands of the Versailles Treaty did nothing but enhance the misery of the populace. The astounding stupidity of Germany's post-war government contributed to greater chaos, and everyone had been touched by death.

Although germs and micro-organisms had been discovered, and the causes of disease identified, there remained no greater defense than hygiene and prophylaxis. The best way to deal with disease was to prevent it. It is not surprising that the dark clutter of the Victorian era was ruthlessly swept away to be replaced with white walls, smooth surfaces and above all, order and cleanliness. The late teens and early

twenties of this century are the cradle of that generation of fanatic housekeepers whose floors exceed operating theaters in cleanliness and whose avowed purpose for cooking food is not to make it palatable but to "kill the germs."

Out of this shattered world, reeling from the madness of war, impotent in the face of disease except to trace it to filth and uncleanliness, reacting against what was perceived as the pious idiocy of nineteenth-century morality, there arose that perennial savior of troubled mankind: the monumental social system. This ancient and time-honored subterfuge involves the glorification of humanity at the expense of the individual. It is particularly attractive when times are tough.

In the twentieth century, this profound urge for order has taken the form of totalitarianism-an attempt to impose order on systems that are essentially disorderly. Like the perpetual motion machine, which almost-but-not-quite works, idealized systems and plans break down when an attempt is made to make them work with actual people. Le Corbusier's austere "Machine for Living In" can be perfect only if no one is allowed to live in it. If the designs for buildings and cities created by the Bauhaus, and emulated line-for-line by modern architects, seem inhuman and give the general impression that they would be happier if they were utterly deserted, it is because it is so. As with any all-embracing system of ethics, aesthetics or government, people are the problem. There is an urge to force people to accommodate themselves to the preconceived vision, whether they want to or not, while the system's advocates loudly profess only a desire to serve.

The failure of the Bauhaus is not that the designs are bad, or better suited to another age. It fails because it does not accept humanity as it is, but only as it ought to be. Its attraction is in these same traits. Deep in their hearts, designers know what is good for other people, and are going to give it to them whether they like it or not. If it is unpleasant, so much the better. Medicine is best when it tastes bad. When you get right down to it, designers are a bunch of penny-ante dictators.

II

TECHNOLOGY AND AESTHETICS

....a culture survives not only through its high-art embodiments; we study beauty less from paintings at the Metropolitan than from daily encounters with an honestly designed beer bottle. - Donald Hall, Fathers Playing Catch With Sons, North Point Press, 1985, page 135

TECHNOLOGICAL change heavily influences aesthetics. As soon as materials and techniques are developed, art follows closely behind. Frequently, this relationship is not perceived by critics, artists and designers, who often attribute what they are doing to other causes, such as their own unaided cleverness. Plywood, plate glass, structural steel and prestressed concrete are far more responsible for the appearance of contemporary cities than any designer, architect or philosopher. Building models are made of cardboard: the finished buildings come to resemble cardboard boxes. Architects become so wedded to the flat, hard-edged aesthetic of their endless school projects that they find satisfaction only in

reproducing them, line-for-line, full-scale and of more durable materials in real-world projects. Thus the larger structures often look as though they were the box that a really nice building came in.

People do things under two, usually combined, circumstances: when they can, and when they must. The desire to do something follows hard on the heels of the ability to do it. As an added fillip, people usually jump at the chance to annoy the sand out of their elders, betters or bosses. If what they are doing is "thundered at from every pulpit in the land," all the more fun. To say, "Here's one in the eye for you, you old toad," is a pleasure few of us deny ourselves. As an illustration, let us examine the following question.

Why, in the early 1920s, did women begin to wear short skirts? The first thing to ask of this or any other question is, "Is this so?" When asked, for example, "Why does God want us to suffer?" don't just assume that the question contains within itself a correct statement that is worth examination. Fabulous amounts of philosophical lumber could be cleared away by this simple approach.

First off, did women, in fact, begin wearing short skirts for the very first time in the 1920s? Sort of. Women's skirts had been on a steady rise even before W.W.I, but the "flapper" of the Roaring Twenties is the image that most comes to mind.

What else was going on? Well, a great deal was going on. From the 1890s, the bicycle had exerted a considerable influence on both fashion and society, and had been about as popular as anything can be, creating an independence for both men and women that was lost on neither the youth of the day nor their alarmed parents. Both men and women of the middle class were increasingly interested in sports such as golf and tennis. Furthering the independence of young people, the automobile had by the 'twenties become so common that most members of the middle class had one. In response to the demands created by bicycles and motorized transport, great public works projects were initiated, resulting in tens of thousands of miles of mapped and paved roads. The airplane had been improved to a point where it was actually useful, and not merely a novelty. The Great War had just ended, and the world was still not in tip-top shape. Worldwide, twenty million people had just died of influenza. Prohibition had been enacted, and was perhaps the least honored bit of legislation in the history of the human race. An entire nation of law-abiding Christians had been turned overnight into an army of scofflaws, and the amazing part was that everyone seemed to be enjoying it. It was chic to be immoral. Women had just gotten the vote and were feeling their oats. The Gillette safety razor had recently been invented. Lighting was electric, and people stayed up later and went out more. The radio brought the whole world to your ears. The motion picture was a popular new form of entertainment and a near instantaneous disseminator of fashion information. Many people had telephones. The phonograph was ubiquitous, bringing to the popular ear new music in a new manner. Manmade cellulose products were increasingly available, including rayon, an artificial silk. The Russian revolution had just occurred, with Whites battling Reds in a seesaw that entranced the world. Cubism, Dada, Surrealism, Jazz and the Bauhaus had turned the art world on its head. The out-of-date, and by that was largely meant anything at all that had been around before the war, was on the run, relentlessly pursued by the new broom of men and women "as old as the century."

People were excited by speed, by the rapid pace of progress, by the overthrow of the old and the breakneck introduction of the new, even at the cost of the destruction of whole social orders.

So we ask ourselves, "Is there a relationship between these events and short skirts?" Like anything else, fashion changes are a process with more than one cause. Skirts did not leap up all at once: the 1915 Sears catalog showed skirts that were several inches above the ankle; in 1916, skirts were illustrated that were slightly shorter yet.

The influence of sports attire on style is probably the first place to look. The virtues of exercise were widely recognized in the latter half of the 19th century, and were an important part of the educational programs offered by the increasingly popular women's colleges (there was even a growing number of co-ed colleges, such as UC Berkeley). As college women developed their physical side, they also experimented with unconventional attire. Between 1850 and 1870 women's athletic clothing became shorter and looser, but was worn only in the privacy of the segregated gymnasium. The garments allowed freedom of movement and were designed with loose fitting waistlines. Gradually, voluminous bloomers and loose-fitting middy blouses were replaced with shorts and skirts, and eventually the two pieces were combined into a one piece style with an elastic waistband.

The sport of lawn tennis was introduced among the wealthy in 1889. Golf also grew popular as a middle and upper class entertainment. By 1896, bicycling had become wildly popular and the sharp increase in women's public physical performance was one of the sport's more striking features; more adventurous women followed the Parisian fashion of bloomers, shortened skirts worn over knickerbockers, divided skirts, and even "Syrian trousers" that reached the ankle.

If you were to look at the short, waistless skirt and armless blouse of the flapper as athletic clothing gone public, you would not be too far off the mark. By comparison with clothing of only a decade earlier, women's clothes of the 1920s are lighter in weight and less restricting, in physical freedom echoing the political and moral freedoms won through the efforts of their mothers, the suffragettes. The new body-skimming silhouette represented important changes: the acceptance of female athleticism and the introduction of a slimmer ideal of both feminine and masculine beauty. For idealized images of the flapper look, consult the 1920's editions of George McManus' Bringing Up Father comic strip, which portray the hapless Jiggs and his fashionable wife and college-aged daughters. The contemporary cartoons of John Held, Jr. provide an archetype of the collegiate look. (In the last quarter of this century we have witnessed a similar emphasis on sportswear as fashion.) It is interesting to note that, in direct proportion as her role in society expanded, woman's hats, hair, clothing, purses and jewelry shrank, until the cylindrical volume consumed by a well dressed woman was no more than that which was occupied by a similarly well-dressed man.

In 1895, the Gillette safety razor was invented. Until then, men reaped their beards with long, exceedingly sharp blades and, as you might expect, cut themselves to flinders with some regularity. So grave was the risk that the task was ordinarily entrusted to professionals, and the amateur shaver usually restricted himself to once weekly on Saturday night, giving himself adequate time to clot before church.

The elderly and infirm did not shave at all. It is unnecessary to point out that women shaved neither their legs nor their underarms with cutthroat razors. The very contemplation of such a thing is enough to give you the heeby-jeebies.

Just as with most other major technological innovations, the safety razor did not catch on immediately. Six years elapsed before Gillette developed a successful process for producing blades, invented in 1901 by his partner, William Nickerson. The first safety razor, with 20 blades, cost five dollars, and a 12-pack of blades alone sold for a dollar. This was, in fact, pretty damned expensive: in 1900 the annual wage for a working man was around six hundred dollars. In 1903, 51 razors and 168 blades crossed the counter. The company grew steadily but slowly until 1917, when the mobilized military ordered 3.5 million razors and 36 million blades. (2) When my grandfather (1890 - 1971) was in a French hospital in 1918, he was given his first Gillette safety razor by an Army nurse. It was made out of solid brass, and he used it all his life and bequeathed it to my brother, who uses it daily. Well made, you might say.

The popular song, "I Want a Clean-Shaven Man" (ca. 1918) provides inferential evidence that men were shaving themselves with greater regularity, and less risk, with the safety razor. Although the manufacture of straight razors continued, its days were numbered.

Among women, from ancient times cosmetic hair removal was done by plucking, waxing, and by acids and alkalis in preparations similar to those used today for the same purposes. (3) Though this was done often enough by high-class prostitutes, as near as I can determine, ordinary American and European women did not commonly remove the hair from their bodies before the invention of the safety razor.

Why now, of all times, did women begin shaving their underarms and legs? First, they were able to do so, and so they did. They had not been able to do so before, with any degree of comfort or safety. The female leg (and, indeed, the whole female body excepting the head) has been depicted in Western art, for thousands of years, as hairless and smooth. This artistic model could now be fully and easily emulated. The ability to shave led, by the early 1920s, to a positive orgy of depilation. Legs, forearms, underarms and foreheads were shaved; eyebrows plucked out and painted on again in a different spot (giving women a look of permanent surprise) and the hair, once uncut and bound in complicated ways, bobbed short into athletic "boy cuts." For any unfashionable laggards, the cloche hat absolutely enforced short hair. Again, we may look to the model of the athlete for the appeal of short hair.

A 1919 Ladies' Home Journal advertisement for "Odoronto," an underarm deodorant toilet water for women begins, "Within the Curve of a Woman's Arm: A frank discussion of a subject too often avoided." And continues,

"A woman's arm! Poets have sung of its grace; artists have painted its beauty. It should be the daintiest, sweetest thing in the world. And yet, unfortunately, it isn't, always. There's an old offender in this quest for perfect daintiness - an offender of which we ourselves my be ever so unconscious, but which is just as truly present. ...You may offend without knowing it."

And continues in this vein for three columns. The illustration is of a young woman raising her bare and hairless arms to embrace a tall, formally-dressed man, the picture captioned: "There isn't a girl who can't have the irresistible, appealing loveliness of perfect daintiness."

Perhaps inherited from our English ancestors, but certainly solidly in place by the time my own Scotch-Irish-English-Welsh-Canadian-American great grandmother (1861 - 1956) was born was a positive horror of "smelling." Poor people and members of inferior races, as though by design and to be purposefully annoying, sweated and "smelled," while white gentlemen and ladies did neither. Now, if there's one place on the human body that captures sweaty smells and holds them, it's dat ol' debbil hairy underarm. Get rid of the hair and you also get rid of most of the smell. It would be a while yet before advertising dared address itself to the other part of woman's body that "smells," but by the 1960s that bastion, too, would fall, and Western women could at last attain the pinnacle of my great grandmother's desire, of having no natural smell at all. Dogs can't track 'em.

The conspicuous use of fabric (as well as other clothing material, such as fur, leather and metal) has been the major element of fashion for at least ten thousand years. The more expensive, the better. Silk stockings, long a treasured symbol of wealth, were worn before the 20th century more by men than by women. The male ankle so adorned could be shown to considerable advantage, and was for many years displayed from the knee down in white silk or cotton. A well filled-out calf was a thing of pride, and the taunt "Spindle-Shanks" (applied as you will recall to that miserable wretch, Ichabod Crane) was so feared, that oakum was sometimes stuffed into the inadequately filled stocking, much as certain other parts of the body are artificially enhanced today. In fact, should you be so disposed, you can get a calf implant for around $3,500 right there in LA.

With the advent of professional teams in the 1870s and 1880s, baseball uniforms became more colorful and, according to some accounts, more revealing. Reporting on the Red Stockings-Eagles match in 1869, the San Francisco Chronicle commented that 'It is easy to see why they adopted the Red Stockings style of dress which shows their calves in all their magnitude and rotundity. Everyone of them has a large and well-turned leg and everyone of them knows how to use it.'" - Men and Women: Dressing the Part, Edited by Claudia Brush Kidwell and Valerie Steele, Smithsonian Institution, 1989, page 104

Sheer silk was manufactured, but not used for stockings. Both men's and women's stockings were thick and opaque, and around the turn of the century, usually made of some dark color such as blue or black. (4) The lighter and more sheer the silk, the more expensive it became, but, alas, even the most costly, beautiful sheer silk is not enhanced by mashed-down hair showing through beneath it.

The safety razor enabled women to shave their legs, thereby making the sheer silk stocking a delightful and hideously expensive companion to the now glabrous limb. But what fun is there in wearing something beautiful and costly if no one can possibly see it? Hemlines began to creep, then rocket, upwards. The stocking, and quite incidentally, the leg, was now on display. Hose was often rolled down at the knee, (" ... rolled down hose, turned up nose, has anybody seen my gal?") because a really expensive sheer stocking is nearly invisible, and could be made obvious only by bunching it up.

The combination of the smooth legs and hairless underarms with short skirts and waistless, figure-disguising fashion provides the appearance of a pre-pubescent girl, instead of a grown woman. Little girls wore short skirts, were smooth-bodied and figureless; grown women put their long hair up, wore long dresses and had breasts and hips. Why this Peter Pan desire never to grow up? Hazarding a guess, I would imagine that it is an extreme statement of youthfulness, interpreting the brief clothing and shaving as creating a combination of little-girl regression and athletic, slender youthfulness. Indeed, the grown-woman dress of 1925 looks like nothing so much as a scaled-up version of little-girl clothing of 1900; breastless, hipless, low-waisted. (5)

A contrary way of looking at it is this: The emphasis on the feminine form usually centered on the waist, thereby emphasizing both the hips and the bust. An interesting exception is the early nineteenth century "Empire" style that de-emphasizes the waist but draws great, almost exclusive, attention to the bust. From the high middle ages on, the bust has received great attention, while the feminine leg has been totally hidden. Women's costume thus emphasized her role as nurturer, and by this means de-emphasized her sexuality. With the flapper style, women-who had just gotten the vote and were feeling the stirrings of an independence that had never before existed-were themselves de-emphasizing their role as nurturer and drawing attention as dramatically as possible to their own emerging sexuality, their essential woman-ness, hiding or erasing secondary sexual characteristics while for the first time in post-classical Greek fashion history emphasizing the leg, the avenue to their primary sexual characteristic.

Every extreme fashion trend breeds its own reaction, and by the mid 1930s, long, curly, unbound hair was the fashionable ideal, and the waist and figure had returned to women's clothing (though the leg did not ever again disappear), but among English and American women legs and underarms remained as smooth as marble.

III

"We should make things as simple as possible, but not simpler." - Albert Einstein

BAD DESIGNS AND INCORRECT THINKING

DESIGNS are sometimes correct, pertinent and useful, but just as often they are:

WRONG: The Bauhaus gave us many designs for ordinary objects that look modern and severe and that appear to do a particular task with a minimum of fuss and bother. This simplicity can be deceptive. Often, in order to attain the purified line, essential elements have been left out.

For example: most institutional doorknobs are patterned on a Bauhaus design. These doorknobs are smooth, brushed silver and nearly spherical. They work just fine if you are of average strength, normal height and somewhere between twelve and sixty-five years of age. If you have wet hands, arms full of packages, arthritis or rheumatism, are elderly, handicapped or very small, you can just forget it. Before you protest that these disadvantaged groups are not a large or reasonable sample of the population, and

that a design should not be criticized if it ignores a tiny group of people, remember this: everybody started out very small. The class of children includes everyone at one time or another. Furthermore, if you're lucky, you will grow up and become elderly, and it will serve you right if you have ignored the needs of old folks when you were a young and healthy designer. A rough, ornamented doorknob would include many more users, and would also be nicer to look at. Better yet would be a lever, as it actually pays some attention to the laws of physics, and is the easiest to use for the largest possible group. The best thing I can say for the Bauhaus doorknob is that it sure must have been easy to design.

Design can also be POINTLESS: The aerodynamically-sound waffle iron stands out in my mind as illustrative of this class. Here we have an instance of mere superficial styling and ornamentation without regard for the nature of the object or its actual use. The excesses in this direction, committed by Art Nouveau and Victorian designers, were a prime gripe with the Bauhaus, and it must be admitted that they had a point. A certain amount of whimsy is tolerable and even enjoyable, but when everything looks like something else, and materials are customarily tortured into curious shapes, one begins to yearn for blank white walls. I don't mean to imply that "form follows function" (which it doesn't), but the '58 Chrysler Imperial is enough to make an entire nation lose its taste for gingerbread; so watch it.

Or, designs can be USELESS: The real hazard with useless design is that it seems to be useful, but is not. The task of the designer should not be to abet cheapskates in their desire to swindle the public in various new and creative ways. Some of the rhetoric of the Bauhaus, if willingly misinterpreted by the incompetent or merely stupid, can lead to the paring away of essentials in clever, inconspicuous ways that are only discovered when it's too late to do anything but swear.

Poor workmanship and materials can frustrate any design, and when the design itself is bad, the end user can find himself in a real pickle. What is important is balance. If the designer envisions a smooth, clean perfection, and the finished product is rough and clumsy, then all is for naught. Design and workmanship must go hand-in-hand, and the designer can help by making things easy to do right and hard to do wrong. The more exotic the demands, the more failure is to be expected, and if the budget does not allow for a good deal of backing and filling, the designer is at fault for having refused to deal with reality.

Once upon a time I had a small foreign car, and that small foreign car had a flat tire. I looked around for the tools to change the flat, and then tried to figure out how to use them. It's not the sort of thing that you practice in advance, and when the occasion arises, you expect the tools to be correct for the job because any damned fool knows that when you have a flat tire you've got to fix it and it cannot be done with the bare hands or by Christian Science. The tools were really weird and tinny, but I did finally manage to jack the car up. The jack had been designed by someone who assumed that most flat tires happen in an automotive garage, I guess. The lug wrench was a triumph of parsimony, and when I applied sufficient force to loosen the bolts, it twisted into a pretzel. Keep in mind that I'm late for an appointment, in an unsavory neighborhood, it's dark and it's raining. Weeping with rage and frustration, I finally called Triple A and endured the condescending glances of the pimply cretin who had real tools, and who fixed my flat. If the designer of my jack and lug wrench had been anywhere around, he would have had tools for lunch. Next day, I went out and bought some good ones. Naturally, I have not had a flat since.

The dashboards of modern automobiles have lots of knobs, lights and levers, and it really is important that the operator know what each one does. Instead of conveying their functions in simple English, there are little pictures on or near them that you have to decipher. These "international symbols," as the advertising boys are pleased to call them, are really stupid. For one thing, this is a monolingual nation, and a very big one, too. In order to get a driver's license, it is presumed you can read English. For another thing, these symbols vary from one car to the next. I imagine that some malicious nerd actually makes them up as a kind of game or amusement for the driver: "Wonder what this one does, hmmm. How about this one, drat." The reality is this: If you are manufacturing a car to be sold in many nations, not all of which speak the same language, you can either make a set of knobs tailored to each national tongue, or you can save big bucks and make them all the same and stick everyone with this little guessing-game. I submit that America provides a large enough market to justify a special set of knobs in English. "But," you might say, "what about all those folks in this country who don't read English but drive anyway?" Well, they will have no more trouble trying to figure out that the knob that says "Lights," means that if you pull it the lights will go on, than they will deciphering a picture that looks like Halley's comet. A plain word, in any language, is better than some phony "international symbol." In Europe, international symbols may be OK. This is not Europe.

MISLEADING: Good workmanship and high-quality materials can effectively obscure bad design. Almost anything can be made to work if enough time and money are invested in it. Not everything is worth this investment.

Take, if you will, the S32 chair, which was designed in Germany in 1927, by Marcel Breuer. This beautiful piece of furniture, still in production, depends upon the very highest quality of manufacture. The S32 chair seems to be a good design, because it works and looks slick. But the design is not what is working. The craftsmanship and materials are what is working; the design is silly. Its shape is essentially weak, and unless great pains are taken in manufacture, it will fail in ordinary use.

Although it is not strictly necessary for chairs to have four legs, any design which reduces the number of legs from four, should have a good reason for doing so. Furthermore, without regard to the number of legs, the chair should be strong and steady. If, in order to attain some aesthetic or moral height, the designer feels that essential elements should be eliminated, he should examine his conscience and ask himself, "Why am I doing this?" The S-32 chair is liable to collapse; it skids around if the footing is unsteady; you can't lean back in it and you can't lean forward in it. The sitter is controlled by the chair to an unreasonable extent. Under the guise of functionalism, and the paring away of frivolous elements, the Bauhaus encouraged the elimination of necessary design elements. This philosophy is not worthy of emulation.

Another example, perhaps more illustrative of a refusal to design than of poor design, is certain models of Rolls-Royce engine of the l930s, which I am reliably informed, were built with square pushrods. Nobody knows why. It is hard to imagine the cost and effort necessitated by this preposterous decision, and only exquisite craftsmanship could allow it to happen at all. The engines soon began to sound like

threshing machines, and had to be reground for round pushrods. An important part of good design is that it doesn't waste time, materials or money. Brute force is not good design.

Another class of misleading design is that which is dictated by an unexamined, overriding social theory. The idea that one's religion, gender or skin color imparts peculiar virtue, wisdom or strength will result in stupid decisions bearing stupid fruit. It is very hard to step outside one's time and culture, and easy to make fun of the dumb mistakes that people in bygone times seem to us to have made, but it remains the case that decisions based on incorrect data will give unwanted results: garbage in, garbage out. Part of the designer's responsibility is to try to step outside, and look at a problem as though he were the classic "man from Mars."

By way of illustration: why do men's shirts button opposite from women's blouses? One commonly accepted explanation is that men wore swords, and as the sword was worn on the left, the clothing opened from the right. An opening from the left might snag the sword as it was drawn. Women did not wear swords; women nursed babies. Many nursing mothers favor the left breast, so the garment opened from the left. This really is a splendid answer. It is interesting and complete, and satisfies all sorts of accepted ideas about people and their roles in society. It is also nonsense. In the first place, although a substantial percentage of women have nursed babies, only a small percentage of men ever wore swords.

It is true that fashion is not often strictly functional, and the fact that only a minority of men wore swords, and purely decoratively at that, would not have stopped this social elite from setting the fashion. It is furthermore of interest that men's clothing, in the form of military uniforms, was both mass-produced and standardized, and that this significantly predates the mass-production of other clothing. Distinctive, uniform, military clothing can be dated from parliament's "own" army of 1645, where the costume was of ordinary civilian fashion but with the distinctive color throughout the army of red coats and regimental facings of various colors. Near as I can tell, the buttons always opened to the right. Military uniforms employed such a lavish profusion of buttons that the button itself came to be associated, at least in the minds of the Amish, with pride and militarism, and they in consequence prohibit the use of buttons on their clothing to this very day.

An examination of paintings and sculpture will show that, prior to about 1825, with the exception of military uniforms (the sword theory), men's clothing buttoned every which way, without regard to anything at all, though indeed the preponderance of adult men's clothing buttoned to the right. This examination will show something else interesting: women's clothes don't seem to have any buttons at all until the mid-nineteenth century, and then they seem to be more of a decoration than otherwise. Women's clothing favored hooks and eyes instead. Men's clothing eschewed hooks and eyes, and always buttoned up the front. Indeed, men's clothing had buttons from about the middle of the sixteenth century, though the button makes no practical appearance on women's clothing until the middle of the nineteenth century.

Buttons start out as purely decorative embellishments, making an early appearance as ornaments to 14th century women's clothing. When they make a functional appearance, it is by ones and twos as a

fastenings on men's blouses (take a look at early 16th century woodcuts of Albrecht Dürer), but by the middle of that century are used in great profusion on both male civilian and military costume.

It seems that the button per se was a masculine preserve for almost three hundred years. Looked at from this angle, the button and button hole take on a decidedly Freudian aspect.

Last, if women's clothing were really made to facilitate nursing a child next to her heart, the opening would be to the right.

The nineteenth century was one marked to a great extent by social theories, foremost among which was the notion that men and women are and should be different; in fact, as different as possible; in fact, different in every particular. Dress is the most convenient and visible way of showing that people are different from one another, and it is not surprising that the clothing of men and women throughout the nineteenth century makes them appear to belong to different species.

As an aside, the importance of clothing as delineating rank and social condition led Captain Cook into an understandable error. When he first encountered the near-naked savages of the South Seas, he concluded quite erroneously that they reveled in an egalitarian idyll.

Clothing was made entirely by hand until the invention of the sewing machine. As soon as clothing could be mass produced cheaply, which was not until about 1875, it began to be standardized. Contained within this standardization were many differences that existed at the time, becoming institutionalized without anybody's being aware of it.

By coincidence, this point in the latter nineteenth century also represents the most extreme efflorescence of social theories which, taken as a whole, bolster and justify the grossest disparity between men and women. Women were scientifically demonstrated to be the inferior of men in every respect: morally, physically, emotionally and mentally. Men did not want to look like women, and, equally important, did not want women to look in any way like men. Ordinary men of the late 19th century had not worn swords for nearly a hundred years, though the military model was increasingly followed until it displaced variety, at least in fashionable clothing. Much as in a society where the things that men eat are taboo to the women, so were the things that men wore taboo to nineteenth century women. So, even in so small a matter as buttons, there had to be a visible distinction.

The "sword and breast" explanation was given after clothing was standardized as an ex post facto explanation of something that had happened unconsciously and really didn't make any overt sense.

You've really got to watch out for designs that are dictated by overriding theories. Bad things usually result from them; flat roofs (which always leak) and bright orange airplane interiors (which make you crazy), by way of example.

Inappropriate theories are not the only pitfall for the designer. Remember the story of the seven blind

men and the elephant. Often, designs are based on insufficient or poorly perceived data.

CONFUSING design often results from not thinking a problem out all the way, or from failing to do a little elementary detective work to see what else is going on or what might already exist in the same general class.

Why do the numbers on a calculator keypad and the numbers on a pushbutton telephone go opposite ways? Probably because one or the other designer didn't look around or think.

The most dangerous class of incorrect design is that which is MALICIOUS or WILLFULLY INCORRECT. This is the "Big Lie" class. The Big Lie maintains one thing in the face of evidence to the contrary, and can, if promoted with sufficient vigor, obliterate the truth.

I give you the everyday example of the typewriter keyboard. The way the letters are arranged is mighty strange. If you were an inquiring child, you might have asked your typing teacher why they were that way. Here is the answer I got: "The QWERTY keyboard was scientifically developed to be the most efficient arrangement for ease and speed of typing." This is completely false. The inventor of the first really good typewriter, which was licensed to the Remington company for production, found that a halfway-decent typist could type so fast, that the keys, which were arranged alphabetically, got all jammed up. Through a combination of mathematics and trial-and-error, he determined a sequence which demanded the maximum finger motion for English-language typing. The J and K keys were located under the two strongest fingers of the right hand. The frequency of use of these letters is very low. The purpose of the QWERTY keyboard configuration was to slow you down. Typewriters are no longer purely mechanical, but the keyboard will probably remain the same. People who have learned to touch type on the QWERTY keyboard are reluctant to learn a new system. This is an illustration of a short-term, self-serving design decision which will plague mankind long after the original reason has been utterly forgotten. (6)

IV

WIGGLY LINES

THE designer is, in effect, setting tasks for other people. If the designs are good, the tasks will be performed correctly. If the tasks are presented improperly, they will be performed poorly, not at all, or quite differently from what may have been the original intent.

People are rather lazy and tend to do things in the simplest way, rather than the most complicated or difficult. This quality should not always be catered to, but it is necessary to accept its influence on action and thought. The eye is lazy, doing the least amount of work necessary to attain a given end, and if the work is too difficult, it might not get done at all. The designer should, so far from placing stumbling blocks in the path of the eye, make its task as easy and pleasant as possible, so that his work will be effective. What is easier to look at will be looked at in preference to something that is harder to look at.

Images are perceived at boundaries and vertexes (vertexes are where boundaries meet). Boundaries and vertexes are where the chromatic data change, and the ratios of reflectance are measured by the receptors in the eye. If you stare fixedly at a regular image, such as a piece of graph paper, you will notice that some of the lines begin to disappear. This is an example of the phenomenon of stabilized images on the retina. If an image is held steady on the retina, it vanishes, to be replaced by a peculiar feeling of blindness called the "empty field." The vanishing is due mainly to the fact that each cone in the eye adjusts itself to the light on it. Receptors are designed to signal to the brain only change, not a steady state. Vision is good as long as the eye or the image moves about. When the eye rests, vision deteriorates. You have no doubt observed that motion makes things that are otherwise invisible highly noticeable, especially out of the corners of your eyes, or in poor light. This demonstrates that boundary and vertex information is crucial for seeing. The eye or image must move so that individual receptors can experience boundary crossings. Obviously, if the number of boundaries and vertexes is increased, the visibility of an image increases proportionately.

Consider two pieces of string laid out to span a given distance. One is nearly straight and the other wiggly. Neither is a straight line, but each implies a delineation or series of boundaries. In string number one, the minimum clean line is represented, and in number two, a rough line. It is plain that in line number two there is more string; more to look at. Given a choice between a rough line and a clean one, the former is to be preferred. Since there is more of it, it is easier to see.

A hard, sharp line is also a hard, sharp contrast; a sort of visual barrier where the eye might be inclined to stop, rather than continue. A rough line eases the transition from one area to another. People are more likely to climb stairs than to scale walls.

Some typefaces are easier to read than others. The concept of rough and clean lines can be useful in evaluating legibility. Serif type is easier to read than sans-serif. Extra information is provided by the serif, and its horizontal thrust improves legibility. Caslon can be read quickly, with high comprehension, for long periods of time. The vertical emphasis of a sans-serif face impedes legibility. Helvetica gives you a headache. Things set in Caslon get read, things set in Helvetica get looked at.

The blackletter of Gutenberg's 42-line Bible set a precedent for German type design which persisted well into the twentieth century. Fraktur and Schwabacher types are gratuitously hard to read. They have a pronounced vertical emphasis, and hordes of little spiky doo-dads poking out of every nook and cranny. A page set in blackletter is a formidable barrier to legibility. The signal to noise ratio is just too low. These faces persisted in Germany, the birthplace of the Bauhaus, for so long after they had been rejected everywhere else, that one is inclined to become suspicious. Reading is made so difficult that, although people certainly can read, they might choose not to do so. It could be said that German type design created a literate but non-reading public. German typography encouraged the populace to let scholars do the reading and politicians do the thinking. People who can read but don't, and in consequence can think but don't, might find themselves kindly disposed toward the kind of state that calls itself a National Socialist Republic, but isn't.

The avant-garde of German design rejected the old-fashioned bramble thicket of blackletter and set out to create new typefaces. The faces designed in the 1920s by the Bauhaus and related schools are the sans-serifs that we have come to associate with modernity and progress. They are plain and severe, of apparent uniform weight, and without extraneous details such as serifs. It might be thought that these new designs are as far from the dark medieval types of Gutenberg as one could possibly get, but, as far as the appearance of the page and levels of legibility and comprehension go, they are exactly the same, if not worse. Instead of spikes and curlicues, they have hard sharp corners. The vertical emphasis is even greater than that of blackletter. The horizontal emphasis provided by the serif, which improves legibility, is missing. There is less differentiation between letters than in a serif face, and within the letters themselves, there is less differentiation of the top half from the bottom half. These letters are not called "Gothic" for nothing, you know. It appears that the thornbush of blackletter has been exchanged for the much more modern barbed-wire entanglement of sans-serif.

In mitigation of these criticisms, it may be true that a reader, born and raised with a given range of typefaces, will find them comfortably legible. That another reader, unfamiliar with those faces, might find them bizarre and illegible, is not necessarily a valid complaint. It would be difficult to put this to a test, as blackletter has completely gone out of fashion and there are likely few or no readers nurtured entirely on sans-serif. Despite this possibility, it remains true that, all things being equal, legibility and comprehension are greater in text set in conservative old-style or transitional faces, than in text set in the most handsome sans-serif. Even the modern calligraphic faces of Herman Zapf err in the same directions as their equally calligraphic blackletter grandparents, and are neither as legible nor as suitable for extended reading as the Italianate Romans.

The calligraphic influence on modern type design shows the desire of calligraphers for rhythm and uniformity, sacrificing legibility in the process of seeking over much uniformity. The letters of Caslon are irregular: comparing the ascenders, descenders and finals of letters one sees that they are all different. In Stone, Lutecia or any of Zapf's faces, these elements are uniform. Legibility suffers, but the page looks nice.

In designs dependent on hard, sharp contrasts, the slightest imperfection is annoying and obvious. With rough lines, imperfection, wear and dirt are less noticeable, often not bothersome, and occasionally enhancing. Helvetica is continually struggling toward self-sabotage, and is occasionally thwarted by expert craftsmen. Usually, however, it gracelessly succeeds.

The handcut Caslon of Benjamin Franklin's time received so much hard wear that it would have been sent to the hell box with pleasure by the printers who used it, but they had nothing else. These pages retain a charm and legibility, nonetheless, that has an undeniable appeal. By contrast, improperly printed Helvetica, particularly in the smaller sizes, is simply unreadable.

Those same elements that make a typeface pleasant to look at and easy to read, apply as well to architecture. The heavy, intricate detail of carpenter Gothic and Victorian buildings is a rough line. The mass of detail resolves at a slight distance into an interesting, soft transition from one element to the

next.

One difference between a nice neighborhood and a depressing row of dwelling units, is street trees. Trees soften and break up the otherwise sterile line of roads and buildings. The straight line of artifact is modified by the rough line of nature.

A feeling of warmth and intimacy is created by a rough texture or line. A hard, perfect surface or line feels cold and remote. The more intimate with, or closer one is to the manufacture (either theoretically, as in buying a handmade item, or psychologically, if one knows who made it and how), the better one likes it. The more distant, either in sensation or in reality, the less one is inclined to like it.

The smooth, featureless, white wall does not appear to change as it is approached. No new detail is resolved, and a sense of scale is hard to get. A brick wall, wood shingle house or carpenter gothic house resolves into intricate detail as it is approached, giving the viewer a sense of scale. The sense of proportion is distorted by uniformity. The uniformity provided by corporate structures, faceless gigantic buildings, and the anonymity of Helvetica, can also remove a sense of scale from the viewer.

Dirt, wear and imperfection add more information to both the smooth, white wall and the rough, intricate wall. These forces of time and humanity, disregarded by the Bauhaus, must be considered in the real world. Things that don't have to be perfect to look good, look good longer. Things that are dependent upon perfection are offensive when imperfect. People stand in awe of smooth, featureless perfection, but it worries them and makes them feel inferior, as if it is throwing their humanity at them like a sneer, and demanding that they wash their hands before approaching (which indeed they must, if the perfection is to remain untarnished). Sometimes a smooth white wall gets humanized anyway, and then it looks tacky. In a rough line, such as a brick wall, there is more information, it shows the dirt less, and it is prettier.

A contemporary typeface or building, committed to being unlike anything old-fashioned, bears an uneasy relation to the future. It cannot afford to grow old at all, let alone grow old gracefully. Its very newness is its trump card, and often this precludes design which foresees aging well.

Thus we see typefaces, furniture, buildings and clothing fashions which have no chance to wear out or show the dirt, as their design is so extreme that they become ludicrous and dated in months or a few years.

Extreme clothing fashions change frequently and at small expense (and large pleasure) to the wearer. An unfashionable "yesterday's newspaper" building or typeface cannot be so casually discarded.

Intense contrasts are harder on the eye than soft transitions. Type printed by photo-offset lithography is completely flat on the page, whereas type printed by letterpress is indented, with a little ridge of ink squeezed out around it, making a slight shadow around the letter. An offset page looks flat and dull in comparison to a letterpress page, and the harsher contrast between paper and type is more tiring to the eye. The pleasant, slightly sculptured feeling of a letterpress page also enhances the pleasure of reading.

Bright primary colors are immediately captivating, but as they lack complexity or subtlety, they soon grow wearisome and irritating. A bright color is like a loud automobile horn or an explosion. It quickly captures the interest, but if sustained is unbearable. To imagine that a huge wall or corridor painted in a primary color is modern or in the spirit of the twentieth century because it is simple and plain and pares away inessentials, is to live in the fevered dreams of a lunatic. Tertiary colors are like complex chords, rather than the pure note of the primary or the simple harmony of the secondary. The complex harmonics have a lesser immediate impact, but can be pleasing for long intervals. Small children are allegedly unable to distinguish subtle shades of color. As they learn and mature, greater complexity becomes intelligible and attractive. The use of harsh primaries and secondaries is calculated to appeal to the childlike aspect, rather than to the adult, or to the primitive, rather than the sophisticated and civilized. (7)

Whenever reasonable, complementary colors should be employed, as they satisfy the eye. The eye demands the complement. When you see a red square, and look fixedly at it and then away, you will see a square, green afterimage. This goes on within the eye continually; everything has an afterimage. Providing the complement satisfies a sub-visual demand and makes things more pleasant, that is, easier to look at.

Important information should shout. Information that is not so immediate, nor of interest to everyone, should be more calmly presented. Most design should be rather quiet, if only out of consideration for others. The designer should be a good neighbor. She should not throw wild parties on week nights, he should not play his stereo too loudly or too late in the evening. He should mow his lawn, and she should design things that enhance the community, rather than diminish it. He should not design crummy things that everybody else gets stuck with. A design that is easier to look at than others, will be more successful than its competition. A loud, harsh design will get attention first, but the design that is easiest to live with will be looked at more often and for a longer time.

Posters, signs, and billboards are usually designed up close, and viewed from a distance. If they are designed full size or larger, design decisions will be made on the basis of head motions rather than small eye movements. When the image is seen at viewing distance, as opposed to working distance, it may look imbalanced or clumsy. If the design is done at working distance, but at viewing size, this problem will not arise. The work will be more harmonious and intelligible, having neither excessive detail that turns into mud nor lines that are weak.

Here is a rule of thumb. One and one half inches sketch height at a working distance of eighteen inches, equals two feet of finished poster height at a viewing distance of 25 feet. Thus a design sketch of one and one half inches height will lead to a clear, easily understood poster or sign, two feet tall at 25 feet distance, four feet tall at 50 feet distance, eight feet tall at 100 feet, and so on. Billboards are not only viewed at a distance, but at speeds of 25 to 60 miles an hour. Therefore, they must be even simpler and clearer. Eye motion must be kept to an absolute minimum, not only to make the design work, but to prevent the motorist from looking too long at the billboard and not looking at the road. It's a good way to lose customers-permanently. If an element cannot be incorporated into the small sketch, then it shouldn't

go in, as it will turn to mud at thirty feet. Obviously, designs should never be reduced, as that weakens the line and destroys the ratio of figure to ground. Although reduction sharpens things up and hides irregularities, sharpness and regularity are not intrinsically good or desirable, whereas balance and intelligibility are.

People like intricacy, complexity, and variety. The completely-finished, perfect thing has no room in it for the "me." It is a flat statement admitting no further discussion; it is rude; it makes people angry. There are three participants in every event, no one of which is more important than the others, and all of which must have equal weight for that thing to be endurable: the designer, the thing itself, and the audience.

Designs meant to be looked at for prolonged stretches should be strong, to capture the eye; have subtle colors and soft contrasts to prevent the eye from tiring; and have interesting elements to look at and think about. Leave room in the design for the user, viewer, or listener. The audience is as important as the performer.

V

THE BAUHAUS DOES HAVE A PLACE IN CONTEMPORARY DESIGN

A certain Swiss approach of today ... for which I do not feel responsible, is the exemplar of a most inflexible typography which makes no distinction between the advertising of an artistic performance or of a screw catalog. Nor does this typography allow for the human desire for variety. It has an entirely militaristic attitude.

Jan Tschichold, 1959 (Quoted by Steven Heller in "The 1960s: Mainstream and Counterculture," Print Magazine, November/December 1989)

THE design concepts associated with the Swiss Style, the typeface Helvetica, and the Bauhaus, which dominate much of current design, are not suitable for many applications. This is not to say that they are completely without virtue. Wherever a dehumanizing atmosphere is desired, they are perfect. They uniquely suit the needs of very large corporations, gigantic faceless buildings, hostile and remote bureaucracies, major airports and indeed any situation in which people are to be processed efficiently. When the designer is required to promote uniformity, to glorify totalitarianism, and to foster the impression of sterile impersonal might; when an illusion of usefulness, clarity or service is, for reasons of expedience, all that is to be provided, he should unhesitatingly employ the precepts of the Bauhaus and Swiss Style.

It is, however, an error to apply these principles indiscriminately. Their effect can be destroyed, and the result be merely tedious, absurd and slightly confusing. The careless employment of identical images to a corner hot dog stand and to a multi-national conglomerate is to make one or the other ridiculous.

This is as much a matter of scale as of taste. If the scale is modest, if man is the measure, other approaches ought to be considered. If, in scale, the thing dwarfs the individual, is by its nature monolithic, huge and institutional, then by all means present its image in Helvetica, preferably set too tight, with a pointless logo to match. (8) In addition, by way of icing on the cake, in all situations where information in plain English would serve, substitute incomprehensible symbols.

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FOOTNOTES

(1) Vienna 1900, Peter Vergo, National Museum of antiquities of Scotland, Edinburgh, Her Majesty's Stationary Office, 1983, page 54.

(2) This information is gleaned from Panati's Extraordinary Origins of Everyday Things, Harper & Row, 1987 pp 215-216.

(3) The Babylonians used depilatories, and Ovid in "Art of Love," advises, "Should I warn you to keep the rank goat hair out of your armpits? Warn you to keep your legs free of coarse bristling hair?" Implying that not everyone did so, but that some definitely did.

(4) A 1915 advertisement for "Onyx" silk hosiery sold by Lord and Taylor shows a young woman in bathing costume showing her legs to the knee. She is wearing black silk stockings and ballet-like slippers. (Advertising: Reflections of a Century, Bryan Holme, Viking Press, New York, 1982, page 57)

A 1918 ad for Luxite Hosiery indicates a young woman who is a passenger in an automobile struggling to keep her dress from blowing up. Her hose is black, but sheer. (Advertising: Reflections of a Century, Bryan Holme, Viking Press, New York, 1982, page 69)

A 1921 ad for Holeproof Hosiery shows a woman dressed in her slip and hose. The hose is sheer, but black. Advertising: Reflections of a Century, Bryan Holme, Viking Press, New York, 1982, page 81)

By 1926 hose have become sheer and flesh-colored.

(5) For illustration, see page 53, The Poster in History, Max Gallo, American Heritage Publishing, 1974.

(6) This concept is called "path dependence," after the notion that, once you start down a certain path, it is hard to get off. The name is from a 1985 essay by Paul David, a Stanford University economist, who cited the QWERTY keyboard as an outstanding illustration, and attributed its survival in the face of the superior keyboard developed in the 1930s by August Dvorak to the fact that the QWERTY keyboard had such a great headstart. However, the idea has been challenged by two economists, Stan Liebowitz of the University of Texas and Stephen E. Margolis of North Carolina State University. They debunk the QWERTY tale, calling it largely a myth perpetuated by August Dvorak. Recent studies (such as one by the General Services Administration) have shown that there is little or no difference between various

keyboard configurations in such areas as learning ease, speed and comfort.

Though for reasons which seemed good and sufficient at the time, in late 1987 I learned the Dvorak keyboard, and after experiencing a short but frustrating learning curve, my typing speed and accuracy returned to its former level but were not significantly improved. My conclusion, after thinking about this problem for some time, is that, within limits, it makes no difference what configuration you may use, and that the limiting factor is not the rapidity with which fingers can strike keys, but something else which has no important connection to the keyboard layout. The only argument in favor of the Dvorak keyboard is that it is more efficient, and the biggest argument against the Dvorak keyboard is that I am restricted to my own keyboard and have the Devil of a time typing on any one of the millions of other keyboards in the English-speaking world. If there is no change in speed or accuracy, then there is no point in typing on a Dvorak keyboard, no matter what its theoretical virtues may be. Perhaps I will switch back. (Source for "path dependence" information: Wall Street Journal, week of February 28, 1998)

(7) Jorge Frascara in his article "The ABC's of Teaching Aids," discusses his intrigue with children's preferences for illustration styles. He organized a test that involved the preparation of four pairs of illustrations. The subject was a giraffe and a calf in front of a tree. Pair #1 showed one version with natural colors and the other with intensified colors. Pair #2 showed one version with natural forms and the other with simplified and schematic contours. Pair #3 presented the object in the same color and shape, but one of the scenes included additional elements such as trees, clouds and two more animals. Pair #4 showed one illustration having lights and shades and soft edges while the other had flat surfaces and hard edges. Over 400 children, aged seven to eleven were used as subjects. Upon the presentation of each pair, they were asked to indicate which of the two illustrations they liked better.

Children across elementary school levels prefer complex illustrations (83%) over simple ones. They also prefer intense colors (69% overall, 76% excluding eleven-year-old boys, who showed a preference rate of only 31%) over natural ones; natural forms (86%) over geometrical simplifications; and shaded drawings with soft edges and atmospheric effects (66%) over flat surfaces and hard edges. Only 11 year-old boys preferred natural colors (69%) and sharp edges (56%). The youngest boys were the least inclined to prefer natural shapes (64% as opposed to 91% for the rest of the group), while the oldest girls were most decidedly in favor of them (100%).

Many of the illustrators in the 1950s and 1960s made abstract and simplified illustrations for children's books since small children tend to paint that way. But children do not necessarily like what they themselves do and are quite able to recognize and enjoy different levels of skill in the representation of reality. Complex, realistic illustrations not only attract children, but they also develop their curiosity and perceptual skills.

It is also the case that simple illustrations require less skill and thus are cheaper for the publisher, who is always interested in saving money.

(8) The abstract total-design logo is the most marvelous fraud that the American graphic arts have ever perpetrated upon American business. Contrary to the conventional wisdom, these abstract logos, which a company (Chase Manhattan, Pan Am, Winston Sprocket, Kor Ban Chemical) is supposed to put on everything from memo pads to the side of its 50-story building, make absolutely no impact-conscious or unconscious-upon its customers or the general public, except insofar as they create a feeling of vagueness or confusion. I'm talking about the prevailing mode of abstract logos. Pictorial logos or written logos are a different story. Random house (the little house), Alfred Knopf (the Borzoi dog), the old Mobil flying red horse, or the written logos of Coca-Cola or Hertz-they stick in the mind and create the desired effect of instant recognition ("identity"). Abstract logos are a dead loss in that respect, and yet millions continue to be poured into the design of them. Why? Because the conversion to a total-design abstract logo format somehow makes it possible for the head of the corporation to tell himself: "I'm modern, up-to-date, with it, a man of the future. I've streamlined this old baby." Why else would they have their companies pour $30,000, $50,000, $100,000 into the concoction of symbols that any student at Pratt could, and would gladly, give him for $125 plus a couple of lunches at the Tratorria, or even the Zum-Zum? The answer: if the fee doesn't run into five figures, he doesn't feel streamlined. Logos are strictly a vanity industry, and all who enter the field should be merciless cynics if they wish to guarantee satisfaction. - Excerpted from Tom Wolfe's (of Bonfire of the Vanities fame) remarks as a judge for the 1972 AIGA Communication Graphics competition.

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