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**Is it possible for mass production
to cater for the needs of the individual?**

By Sinéad Lough.

Submitted to the Faculty of History of Art and Design and Complementary Studies
in Candidacy for the Degree of Bachelor of Design in Craft. (Ceramics.) 1997.

The National College of Art & Design, London, U.K.
The National College of Art & Design (Germany)

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to cater for the needs of the individual?

by David Wright

Submitted to the Faculty of Design, Art and Design and Complementary Studies
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Introduction

Late last century British society was ill at ease, the industrialisation of towns and cities meeting with loud protests from writers and art critics such as Ruskin and Pugin. Out of this unrest grew a movement, known as Arts and Crafts, its most vocal member and unofficial leader being one William Morris, designer, writer, craftsman, socialist. Morris, fearful that man appeared to be enslaved to the new machinery, called for a return to craft tradition and the mediaeval way of life. Mediaeval times were regarded wistfully as cohesive, having a sense of community that was lacking in Industrial British society, and they looked back in desperation in an effort to bring some structure to their divided world.

Morris saw the division of labour that characterised industrial production not only reflected in society, but also in its products. He mourned the loss of the craft ethic where there was a sense of completion, the product having being designed and made by one person from beginning to end. Returning to a simpler life, the 'honesty' of the handmade, was seen as the path to true fulfilment. Mass production's main priorities were standardisation and keeping costs to a minimum, whereas producing an ultimately disposable,

expendable product was seen as undermining these human values.

“It is better to do violence to the purpose and create a true work of art than let purpose i.e cold reason get the better of you”.

(Sparke, 1987, p.145). When the Weimar Bauhaus was founded in 1919 by Walter Gropius, traditional craft values were encouraged. Emphasis was placed on the individual, the use of traditional materials, the importance of being trained in a skill - functionalism with expression. Bauhaus teaching also tried to impart a sense of unity, uniting the creative, free spirit of the arts with the skill and discipline of craft production.

“The aesthetic satisfaction of the human soul is just as important as the material. Both find their counterparts in that which is life itself ”. (Sparke, 1987, p.145). However, Gropius did see the possibilities of the machine as an advantageous tool and believed that if designers were trained in craft techniques they would have sufficient knowledge of the process - seeing a product through to completion to use such technology to their benefit. Hans Meyer took over the direction of the Bauhaus in 1928 and it was in these later years that the emphasis started to change, moving away from the individual towards anonymity, with a stress on pure functionalism. It is often not

...the product, and seen as undermining the human factor.

...the importance of the product, and a sense of the work.

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realised that the Bauhaus had its roots in craft, as the work characteristic of this later period - austere, functionalist, concrete - is what the Bauhaus is best known for today.

This only reflected the mood of the times - modernism/functionalist had arrived. The American architect Louis Sullivan had coined the phrase "form follows function" early in the century. (Sparke, 1987 p.82). The machine had by now begun to take on a more important significance than the individual. Creativity was being dictated to by functionalism. Designing for machines required careful consideration of the technical limitations and this led to simplified, basic forms. 'Modern' design dictated that the mechanics came first and the design took shape from there - the most important factor was that objects worked, or looked as though they worked efficiently. Ornamentation was seen as unnecessary, frivolous and superfluous.

The Modern Movement however, in its quest for pure form, simplicity and efficiency, had overlooked one vital element - the consumer. What mass production had not bargained for was mass culture, mass taste. Design of a particular time is always reflected in society and vice versa; by the 1950's designers and critics were

beginning to realise that design was in crisis. Concerned that the impersonal machine aesthetic was working its way into the culture at the time, that people no longer had a sense of what was 'good' design, talk began of a reinstallation of the human factor in design.

Some developments started to get underway in the 60's, due to improved technology in industry. Not only was the consumer more affluent and demanding a greater variety of products, there were also a number of sub-groups appearing on the market whose individual needs had to be catered for. Industry became increasingly more able to meet these needs; due to automation in many industries standardisation fell by the wayside and batch production of more varied items became feasible. At this stage though, all European design was still governed by the minimalist, functionalist ethic.

The real crisis of conscience came about in Britain in the 70's and was split into two camps. Firstly, the Crafts revival - a return to romanticising the handmade form. Consumers began to turn away from the increasingly processed products that surrounded them and demonstrating what is known as the "real bread" phenomenon (Sparke, 1987, p. 31), in a desire for authentic handmade goods which became synonymous with quality. It was as if design had

beginning to realize that design was in crisis. Concerned that the
corporate world was not working its way into the culture of
the time, they people no longer had a sense of what was "good"
design. It began to be a manifestation of the need for design.
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and more became feasible. At this stage though, the European
design was still not shared by the minimalist, industrialist ethic.
The new design movement was about to arrive in the 70's
and was split into two camps. Firstly the "New Wave" a return to
modernism and the "Postmodern" form. Consumerism began to run away
from the increasingly processed products and embraced them and
as a result the "New Wave" was known as the "New Wave" phenomenon.
The 70's was a decade for authentic handmade goods.
The 80's was a decade with quality. It was as if design had

come full circle - once again as the end of the century drew near, the design world was concerned with the ethics of craft production in an industrialised society.

The nostalgia of the craft revival saw craftsmen linking with artists, so once again industry was left out of the equation - not really an adequate solution to the problem. Gradually though, an awareness was emerging of the need for socially aware design, design which was perceived as improving the quality of everyday life. This required a re-evaluation of the role that design played in people's lives, of its actual function. In the words of Richard Neutra in his book Survival through Design "man may perish by his own explosive and insidious inventions". Neutra maintained that this fate could be avoided if design turned from its commercial ends to meet psychological needs (Sparke, 1987, p.234).

Victor Papanek who in 1973 published an influential book - 'Design for the real world' - echoed this sentiment imploring designers to consider design in everyday use; he suggested "a return from form to content". (Sparke, 1987, p.236). Designing for people's needs rather than people's wants became the only meaningful direction for design. Design that did not work in a vacuum, but was

...and the other, once again at the end of the century. In the 19th century, the design world was concerned with the effect of mass production on art.

Industrial design society

The first half of the 19th century saw a revival of interest in the arts, as the industrial revolution was felt out of the question. The revival of the arts was seen as the solution to the problem. It was a revival of the arts, not a revival of the need for society to be designed.

Design, then, was concerned with improving the quality of everyday life. This was a revival of the role that design played in the 18th century.

People, then, were not just functional objects. In the words of Richard Sorensen, "Survival through Design" man may perish by his own

creative and technical inventions. Sorensen maintained that this late could be avoided if design turned man to his commercial end to meet

psychological needs. (Sorensen, 1987, p. 232)

Victor Papanek, who in 1971 published an influential book, "Design for the real world," echoed this sentiment, arguing

that to consider design in everyday use is to suggest that it is not just a form of art, but a way of life. Designing for people's

needs, then, is not just a matter of becoming the only meaningful question in design. Design that did not work in a vacuum, but was

aware of its surroundings, and more importantly of the people in it. European post-war design of objects for domestic use was faced with a new breed of affluent, decisive consumer.

Designers needed to find a new direction for their work in order to realise what the needs of their consumers were and ensure that they were met. The question remains how exactly does one define people's needs and what does function mean? What is the function of design and how does one differentiate according to the individual? William Morris said "My work is the embodiment of dreams in one form or another." (Pevsner, 1984, p22).

One can see echoes of this sentiment today in the world of design, particularly in Italy, home of Alessi S.P.A., a design orientated factory. This company manufactures a wide range of products at the upper end of the market, from giftware to items for domestic use. Alberto Alessi is the marketing director at Alessi and is also responsible for research, communications and new product development. Alberto Alessi is the creative force behind the company, he is an industrialist who sees and reaps the benefits of recruiting creative people to work with him on projects. Like Morris, "Alessi's dream is to create beautiful objects that touch people emotionally". (Talarico, 1991, p61)

...of the design, and more importantly of the people in it.
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...the design of the consumer for domestic use.
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...the design of the consumer and new products
...the design of the consumer is the creative force behind the company.
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...the design of the consumer and respect the people of the world.
...the design of the consumer and respect the people of the world.

...the design of the consumer

Chapter One. Alberto Alessi & The Design Factory.

“Since the second World War design and individualism have gone hand in hand in Italy, whose highly styled goods are aimed unequivocally at the top end of the market and direct their appeal at a highly design conscious public. The strongest force behind the Italian design phenomenon, which since the 1950's has dominated the international concept of design, are the manufacturers, who during the years of the Italian industrial expansion of the early post-war period embraced design wholeheartedly in their search for a new product image. [They] all saw design as a fundamental quality of their consumer goods”. (Sparke, 1992, p.181).

Alessi is an Italian commercial outfit which has been producing household ware for use both in domestic situations and in the catering trade since 1921. The company has its roots in skilled craftsmanship - it was founded by Alberto Alessi's grandfather, Giovanni Alessi who was a lathe worker from the Strona valley on Lake Orta. The first products made were small items in metal such as coffee pots and trays. However it was not until the 1950's when Carlo Alessi (Alberto's father) became general manager, having started work as a designer, that designers from outside began to be

Albino Albini & The Design Factory

The Second World War design and industrial revolution was in full swing in Italy whose highly styled goods are almost everywhere at the top end of the market and their appeal is a highly design conscious public. The strongest force behind the Italian design phenomenon, which since the 1930s has dominated the international concept of design, are the manufacturers who during the years of the Italian industrial expansion of the early part of the century produced design wholeheartedly in their search for a new product range. (This is seen today as a fundamental quality of their creative goods, 1930s, 1940s, 1950s).

During the 1930s commercial outfit which has been producing household items for the home in domestic situations and in the catering trade since 1911. The company has its roots in 1911, in Milan, Italy. It was founded by Albino Albini's grandfather, Giovanni Albini who was a furniture maker from the Strozzi valley on Lake Orta. The first products made were small items in metal such as coffee pots and kettles. However it was not until the 1930s when Albino Albini's father became general manager, having worked with a designer, that designers from outside began to be

commissioned to design items for them. Some of these, like Luigi Massoni's cocktail shaker No. 870 from 1957, are still best sellers, with sales to date of over one and a half million.

Alessi is unusual from the point of view that he is running an enormously successful (£60 million a year) venture, exporting to 70 countries around the world. He is first and foremost a businessman - as he says: "I am not a messiah, I am not an intellectual, I am a businessman - I have a different way of doing business but everything I do is business". (Lita Talarico, 1991, p64). At the same time he is a free thinker, a risk taker, not to mention being incredibly in tune with his time. In today's terms this makes him something of a paradox.

Alessi has his own theory on why design in major companies has reached a stage where it is staid and boring. He discusses this in his 'Letter to young designers'. (Alessi, 1992, p.9). He has an interesting way of analysing design which separates it into three sections. The first of these he calls "gastronomic design" and deals with large companies. "Industry used to treat designers as cosmeticians. We would be presented with a pen which a company had developed and our contribution would be limited to saying 'make it black with a red

line around it' (a designer for Porsche)". (Sparke, 1992, p.174). This illustrates perfectly Alessi's concept of gastronomic design - a cosmetic outer shell which makes the product look more attractive. As he sees it, it is not the state of design today which is in crisis but the way in which it is being used by factories.

Large corporations, such as the manufacturers of cars or electrical goods, see design as what he calls "gastronomic". "[These] consider design as one of the many technological and marketing tools, substantially a more or less rare spice to make up products, making their preparation tasty and more palatable". (Alessi, 1992, p. 10).

This he says is what is to blame for the boring sameness of mass produced items and market saturation and quite soon, the public will probably refuse to buy the latest new "insignificant variation", (Alessi, 1992, p. 11), preferring instead to use the old one until it wears out.

Alessi separates the rest of design into two sections - 'Lyric design' and the 'Design Tale' - the distinction between these two being comparable to the distinction between poet and novelist.

line around it (a design for Porsche). (Spencer, 1997, p. 174). This illustrates precisely Alessi's concept of gastronomic design: a constant action which makes the product look more attractive as he sees it is not the state of design tools which is in crisis but the way in which it is being used by factories.

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Alessi separates the rest of design into two sections: "poetic design" and the "Design Tale". The distinction between these two being comparable to the distinction between poet and novelist.

“The Poet tends to write for and to himself; he is defined to be subjective, he doesn’t worry about a hypothetical public, nor does he necessarily need to describe the reality. The Novelist , on the contrary, tends to be objective, to describe a form of reality, even if transfigured. He writes for others so that his novel can be read by the highest number of persons; in short, he knows that he has to tell an interesting tale so that readers get to the last page, to the word “end”; this is his way, like another, to worry about his public and market”.

(Alessi, 1992, p.11).

So the poet or lyric designer, while maybe producing a design which is interesting or beautiful, is making a statement too introverted, with too limited a vocabulary and is not ‘telling a story’ the rest of the world wants to know. The producer of the ‘Design Tale’, on the other hand, arrives with a design interesting and beautiful, and weaving a tale the public feels they must hear about.

Alessi uses this example to explain why they work mainly with the established designers, ‘The Big Old’, such as Richard Sapper, Micheal Graves or Phillipe Starck at Alessi.

"The poet tends to write for and to himself; he is defined to be

subjective, he doesn't worry about a particular subject, but he

does he necessarily need to describe the reality. The novelist

on the other hand tends to be objective, to describe a world.

Really, even if transfigured, the writer for others is that his

novel can be read by the highest number of persons, in other words

knows that he has to tell an interesting tale so that readers feel

to the last page, to the very end; this is his goal, this

is his duty, to satisfy his public and his work.

On the other hand,

the poet, on the other hand, is the designer who makes products a design.

He is interested in the product, he is making a statement, he

is interested, and he creates a vocabulary and he not really is not

the poet of the world, he wants to know. The product of the poet

is not a product, it is a design, it is a design, it is a design.

And the poet, on the other hand, is the public, they are not really

the poet, they are the poet, they are the poet, they are the poet.

the poet, they are the poet, they are the poet, they are the poet.

Michael Ondaatje on the poet, they are the poet, they are the poet.

Alessi feels young designers, while they are clever and show exciting work, need the benefit of experience to be able to step back and objectively criticise their work, to understand the technical aspects of the materials they are working with, to understand their market, and to understand who exactly they are designing for.

"I think it is indispensable to realise that Design is a Global Creative Discipline, but it also a very professional discipline, so I have to advise all the designer poets I know to imagine some objects by which people (all the people and not only designers) really want to be served". (Alessi, 1992, p. 13).

Alessi sees his business really almost as a service industry, not just supplying consumer demands but meeting people's needs, fulfilling their dreams. He places the Alessi factory in the category of Italian design factories which produce mainly household items, giftware, furniture on a small to middle sized scale; anything from limited edition to middle production. "Alberto Alessi is an industrialist with a singular point of view: he thinks of his business as art and poetry and his factory as a research studio for applied art, a laboratory where he collaborates with prominent designers, Italian and international" (Talarico, 1991, p.61)

Alas! I feel being designers, while they are clever and busy
they may need the benefit of experience to be able to say that
they are really working with the technical
side of the design. They are working with the technical side
of the design, but they are not really working with the technical
side of the design.

It is important to realize that Design is a Craft.
It is a craft, but it is also a very practical craft. It is a
craft that is not just a craft, but it is a craft that is
not just a craft, but it is a craft that is not just a craft.
It is a craft that is not just a craft, but it is a craft that
is not just a craft, but it is a craft that is not just a craft.

At the moment, a business really almost as a service industry, not
as a business. It is a business that is not a business, but it is
a business that is not a business, but it is a business that is
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Alas! I feel being designers, while they are clever and busy
they may need the benefit of experience to be able to say that
they are really working with the technical
side of the design. They are working with the technical side
of the design, but they are not really working with the technical
side of the design.

Alessi does not claim to be the first to come up with this concept - it has its basis in history. Indeed this 'business in the service of culture' idea has definite echoes of the 'art for everyone' sentiment expressed by William Morris and the Arts and Crafts movement of the late nineteenth century, and the Wiener Werkstätt and the Bauhaus in its wake. However, this spirit seems to have been lost somewhere along the line in today's capitalist/consumer society and perhaps, in the context of post war mass-production, what Alessi is endeavouring to undertake is to bring this sense of design working for people back to industry.

This is hardly the capitalist approach one might expect from the leader of a multi million pound organisation, but whatever it is, judging by his sales figures, he is certainly doing something right. Of course there have been some disasters but these have been due to Alessi's willingness to take risks and more often than not, these risks have paid off. Michael Graves's quirky cone shaped stainless steel kettle, for example, with a plastic singing bird timer on the spout, see fig. 1; it took Graves a year to perfect the noise he wanted from the bird, however Alessi now sells over 100,000 of these kettles each year with a price tag of around \$100 each.

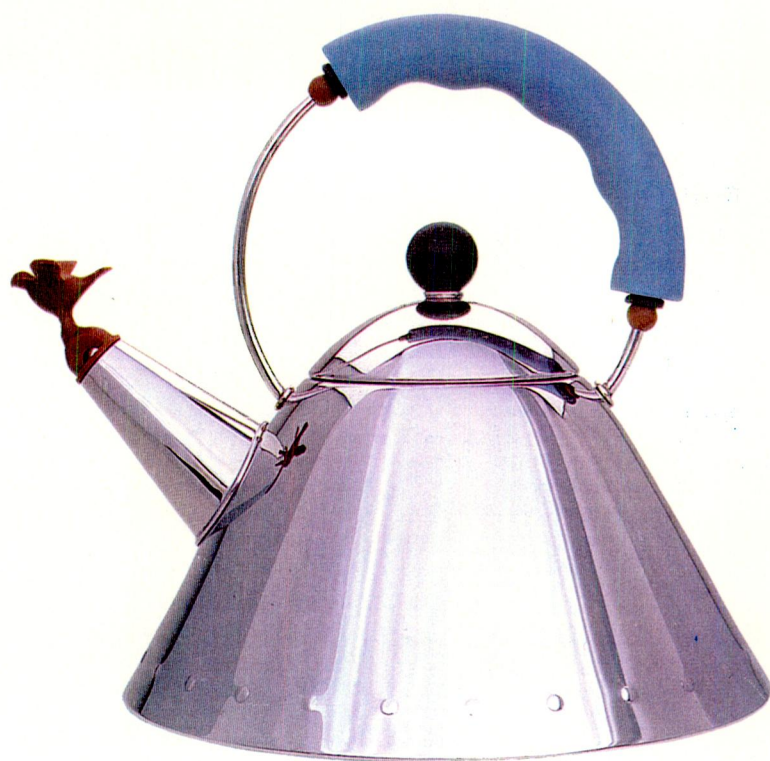


fig. 1

Alessi have a very specific way of working, they do not mind spending a lot of time on a project they feel has potential. When working on a new project, they usually start by creating the brief themselves, and they then search for the right designer to collaborate with them on the venture.

Generally speaking Alessi has a few rules he adheres to : he is always optimistic about everything he undertakes, he works only with 'formed' designers - the 'Big Old' or 'Novelists' referred to earlier-, he works very closely with all the designers, giving 90% of his time to projects, he places great emphasis on the importance of having a mediator - some one who goes through the long and arduous process of making and remaking prototypes with the designers, technicians and engineers, translating between them; he realises the importance of being as flexible as possible from a technical point of view. Often of course designers come to him with good ideas that are technically impossible but on the other hand, he cites the example of designer Richard Sapper, see fig. 2, who is very knowledgeable on the technical side of things and always pushes the factory's technology to its very limits. He sees this as a good way for Alessi to develop, so that it always up to the minute and state of the art.

It is a very specific way of working that is not
spending a lot of time on a project they have not
working on a new project, they usually start by creating the first
themselves, and then they agree that the first design is the best
with them on the way in.

From my point of view, there is a lot more to be learned from
always optimally about everything he undertakes, he works only with
former designs, the old or new ones, he never moves on, he
never moves on with all the designs, giving him the time to
project, he never gives up on the importance of having a
solution, and he always goes through the same process, he never
of making and testing prototypes with the design, he never
and engineers working together, he never gives up on the importance
of having a solution as quickly as possible from a technical point of view. Other
of course, he never gives up on the importance of having a solution, he never
inputs the design, he never gives up on the importance of having a solution.

Almost every day, he is very knowledgeable about the
technical details of the design and always pushes the design to the
as very fast, he never gives up on the importance of having a solution, and
from a technical point of view, he never gives up on the importance of having a solution.

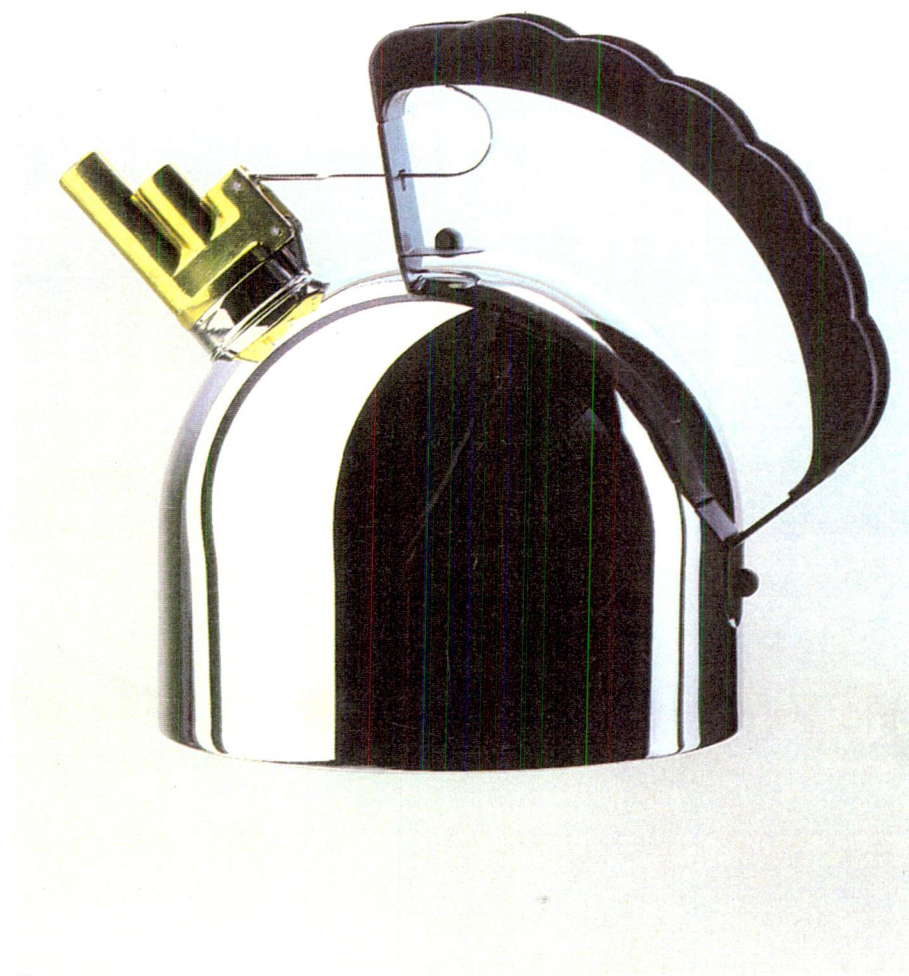
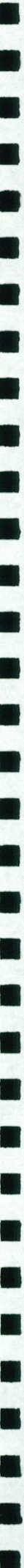


fig. 2



Breaking boundaries is what, according to Alessi, the Italian Design Factory is all about. Industry, he says, is based on a three rule system - "Technical functional rules (which regulate the material production of objects), economical rules (which regulate the entry of objects on the market) and aesthetic and communication rules (which regulate the comprehension and the acceptance of objects by people)" (Architectural Design, 1993, p.22). Alessi believes that the success of Italian design is due to the fact that it is not governed by these rules; its ability to set itself parameters which are beyond normal convention. So being able to pass over these blocks or not being afraid to challenge or confront them is a step towards great design - rigid adherence to them or even perhaps ignorance of their presence is what has got corporate design into the state it is in today. Alessi stated in 1991 that "In order to develop our work, we work on that subtle borderline between the possible and the Utopia" (Talarico, 1991, p.65).

Chapter Two. Memphis - Redefining the concept of function.

One might describe Alberto Alessi as someone who is trying to change the system from within, by finding his own way of working, rather than abandoning or railing against it. Another (also Italian) group with a similar attitude is Memphis, started in Milan in the early 1980's. Memphis's direct predecessor and one of the reasons it was brought into being was a group called Alchymia, which Ettore Sottsass, see fig. 3, later a founding member of Memphis, was involved with during the late 1970's.

Alchymia (and also later Memphis) was a reaction to the coldness and severity of the design that was emerging at the time, so called "good taste" - hard-edged black chrome, steel, glass, symbolic of the somewhat ruthless and materialistic times - vehicles for consumers to display wealth and power, which was what the eighties were all about.

The Milanese avant-garde, which consisted of people like Sottsass and Alessandro Mendini, were concerned about the fate of architecture and design and they developed a "contagious and almost reckless desire to strike a blow against current circumstances" (Radice,1994,p23).

Memphis - Redefining the concept of function.

One might think the Memphis Group is someone who is trying to

change the design scene within by finding his own way of working

rather than abandoning or coming against it. Another (also called)

group with a similar attitude is Memphis, started in Milan in the

early 1970's. Memphis's chief proponent and one of the reasons for

its success has been a group called Alinari, which since

then has been a leading member of Memphis, was

involved in the late 1960's.

Alinari (and also later Memphis) was a reaction to the

coldness and severity of the design that was emerging at the time so

called "good taste" and rigid black chromatic, ideal glass, metal,

of the same kind, which was a reaction to the times - values.

concerns to design with and power, which was not the right

word to use.

The Memphis Group was a group of people who were

and also in the 1970s were concerned about the role of

architecture and design and they developed a new language of

which was a reaction to the design scene of the 1960s.

(Bianchi, 1974, p. 11)



fig. 3



Alchymia was founded in 1976 as a graphic design studio by Sandro Guerriero and operated as a sort of sponsor for the radical, experimental projects of the avant-garde. (Mendini and Sottsass were the Italian avant-garde at the time). Guerriero in 1978 offered to help them realise the furniture designs they had been working on by organising exhibitions and such like. The only problem at this stage was that they were having difficulty in moving past experimental prototypes and the designers wanted to find manufacturers who would produce finished pieces.

However, this type of organisation appears not to have been Guerriero's strong point; his interest "lay mainly in producing exhibitions, promoting cultural activities. He failed to see that in 1980, if such cultural enterprises were to succeed, they could not remain isolated provincial exercises in avant-garde or counter culture, refined as they might be, they had to have higher ambitions, they had to get off the pedestal, throw off their artistic 'aura', and to compete directly with industry in quality, quantity and image". (Radice, 1994, p24). These designers wanted not to produce one-off art pieces, but usable items that would be bought for people's homes and used in everyday situations.

Architects was founded in 1978 as a graphic design studio by
founder, planning and executed as a sort of sponsor for the first
experimental projects of the avant-garde. (Mendini and Göttsche were
the latter avant-garde at the time). Göttsche in 1978 started to help
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would produce finished pieces.

At the time, the type of organization appears not to have been
Göttsche's strong point, but later on they really got producing.
Initially, Göttsche's studio exhibited - he failed to see that in
1980 it was not the manufacturers who were to succeed, they could not
succeed without a certain kind of avant-garde or counter culture.
Göttsche's studio might be thought to have been an official place
not to let the world know of their artistic work, and to
operate closely with industry in quality, quantity and timing.
What Göttsche's studio wanted was to produce one-off
on the one hand items that would be bought for people's homes
and used as everyday objects.

Another obstacle was Mendini, who failed to show any optimism toward the future of design, insisting that all they could do was redesign - these factors contributed to the gradual displacement of Ettore Sottsass from the group, in order to redefine what his goals were, - and leave the path clear for the beginnings of Memphis.

Things started to come together in October 1980 when friends of Sottsass, such as Renzo Brugola who had a carpentry workshop and two others, Mario and Brunella Godani, who owned a showroom in Milan offered their help. All three agreed to work with Sottsass the following year when he suggested having a show of "very up-to-date" furniture designed by "some very clever friends". (Radice, 1994, p25). There followed some meetings between Sottsass and his friends, in his house, or in restaurants in Milan and it was from there on December 1981 that Memphis was ushered into existence. There were nine in the group; Sottsass, Barbara Radice, Marco Zanini, Aldo Cibic, Matteo Thun, Michele de Lucchi, Martine Bedin, George Sowden and Nathalie du Pasquier.

They spent the best part of the next year preparing for the exhibition, drawing, finding manufacturers for the various products - furniture, lighting, ceramics, designing graphics, posters, invitations,

Another obstacle was standing, not being able to move and

toward the end of design, realizing that all they could do was
redesign the interior conditions to the great and disappointing
house. However, the group had to realize what the goals
were, and with the help of the design of the house.

The first stage is now being in October, and the house

is being built by a team of people, who had a very good
team of people, and the house is being built by a team of people.

When the house is built, all the things that are in the house

will be in the house, and the house will be in the house.

The house is being built by a team of people, who had a very good

team of people, and the house is being built by a team of people.

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The house is being built by a team of people, who had a very good

catalogues, press releases etc. They even found investors willing to form a company and prepared to launch Memphis on the international market. Two thousand five hundred people arrived to see the fifty five pieces on show at the original exhibition on September 18th 1981.

It is difficult to explain exactly what Memphis are about, in that they are an action group rather than one which lays out and precisely defines an end goal. They do not specifically seek to solve any existing problems, to put right what they feel is wrong with design but rather, in a spirit of continual optimism, to search for new possibilities and move forward that way. Everything is taken as a possibility, but nothing is certain or fixed. This viewpoint could be compared to that of Alessi, the spirit is the same, one of optimism and constant progression.

"Memphis does not propose Utopias. It does not set itself up, as the radical avant-gardes did, in a critical position toward design; it does not practice design as an ideological metaphor to say or demonstrate something else. Rather, it proposes design as a vehicle for direct communication and it attempts to improve the potential of its semantic dynamics as will as to update its contents". (Radice, 1994, p141).

...they even found it interesting to
...the company and present to French Ministry of the Interior
...the fact that the French people seemed to be very
...the place as shown at the original exhibition of September 1937

1937

...it is difficult to explain exactly what they are doing in that
...they are an action group rather than one which lays out and creates
...defined an end goal. They do not specifically seek to solve any
...existing problems or get right what they feel is wrong with design
...but rather in a spirit of a general optimism to create the new
...possibilities and move forward the way. Everything is taken as a
...possibly but nothing is certain or fixed. This viewpoint could be
...compared to that of Aesop, the spirit is the same, one of optimism
...and constant progression.

...it might be said that progress is not self-evident
...the total environment did in a critical position toward
...design. It does not create design as an independent network
...to say it is a network of ideas. Rather, it is a process
...design. It is a process of communication and interaction
...improve the quality of life through the use of design
...update its content. (Waller, 1990, p. 10)

So what Memphis were trying to say is that designers have in their power/grasp something extraordinary, a way of communicating, of connecting with society. "We are trying to connect design and industry to the broader culture within which we move". (Radice, 1994, p143). What they wanted to do was invent a new language instead of using the same tired and worn phrases. It was time for a new vocabulary. It was important also to be aware of the consumer and his/her relationship to industry - the more new signs are introduced into a system, the more new wants and desires the consumer has. Because consumerism is really much more about desire and wish fulfilment than actual need. "Consumerism besides being a necessity induced by the production system is also a pleasure, and a pleasure is never completely controllable or without consequences". (Radice,1994,p143).

Memphis believes that in order to move forward, we have to cast aside the rationality of traditional design. Sottsass wanted to create a whole new value system. He believed that qualities like beauty and even function were transient, entirely dependent on the context in which they were placed. Different signs in architecture and design had different influence/potential when applied in different situations, and so he studied certain aspects (colours, styles, decorations) and

why they might have arisen in particular contexts and how to apply them in other situations. And so they projected the idea that function is not a fixed, definable value and questioned what function really was. Memphis's argument was that the definition of function was not simply a question of ergonomics. Objects, particularly those that people surround themselves with everyday, have a far more important function and significance than is traditionally presumed. Sottsass said "as we know very well, when you try to define the function of any object, the function slips through your fingers, because function is life itself - function is not one screw more or one measure less. Function is the final possibility of the relation between an object and life". (Radice, 1994, p143). Rational thinking, logic have to be left aside, what Memphis were putting forward was that the whole field of design, that is, designing for humans, defies logic - machines are logical, consistent, but humans are not - it is impossible to standardise likes and dislikes from one person to the next.

Different people find different things comfortable or uncomfortable, attractive or not, and so on. Nothing is reliable, predictable or finite. The problem with industry, mass production, is that it tries to define these things and make them concrete when, in fact, due to the diversity of people and an ever changing society, this will never be possible.

Sottsass also pointed out that we must be aware that people are first and foremost sensory beings and their perception of design is essentially a sensory one, so therefore we must develop a new design, one that is conscious of "the physical consumption of space, material, tactile qualities, smells, sounds, colours, spatial tensions, air conditioning, and so on". (Radice,1994, p142). He felt that this is even more true of the society we live in today where most consumers are pleasure seekers.

"World culture today is concerned with the American vision of comfort. Today and for many hundreds of years to come, humanity will pursue earthly comfort. Comfort means to possess warmth, coolness, softness, light, shade, air travel, Polynesian spaces or Alaska. To have money means to possess sensory possibilities, not power. Sensoriality destroys ideology, it is anarchic, private, it takes account of consumerism and consumption, it is not moralistic, it opens up new avenues". (Radice,1994, p142).

It was also pointed out that we must be able to find a way to

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probably a very good one, and so the one we must choose is

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Chapter Three. Function and Practicality.

Alessi has talked about the need for creating beautiful products that touch people emotionally- meeting the consumer's need to be surrounded by fascinating objects. Memphis want to redefine the concept of function; it is also important to bear in mind that "Alessi is not a functionalist. He believes that people do not always buy domestic artifacts for exclusively practical reasons". (Architectural Design, 1993, p.22).

These are valid points, but the question might be posed whether Alessi and Memphis have an overly idealistic view of the situation. Ought products, designed for people's homes, no matter how beautiful, be user-friendly as well? Surely when approaching design from a sensory point of view, an important aspect is the consumer coming into actual physical contact with the object, and deciding whether it is easy to handle, whether it is too light, heavy, hot, cold etc.

Take for example one controversial Alessi product, the hot Bertea kettle, see fig. 4, designed for them by Frenchman Philippe Starck, a member of the design elite, a "star". Starck is often criticised for an

As we have seen, the main problem of the philosophy of language is to explain the meaning of words and sentences. This is a difficult task, because the meaning of words and sentences is not something that can be observed directly. It is something that we must infer from the way in which words and sentences are used in language. The philosopher of language must therefore try to explain the meaning of words and sentences in terms of their use in language. This is the main task of the philosophy of language.

There are two main points to be made here. First, the philosopher of language must try to explain the meaning of words and sentences in terms of their use in language. Second, the philosopher of language must try to explain the meaning of words and sentences in terms of their use in language. This is the main task of the philosophy of language.

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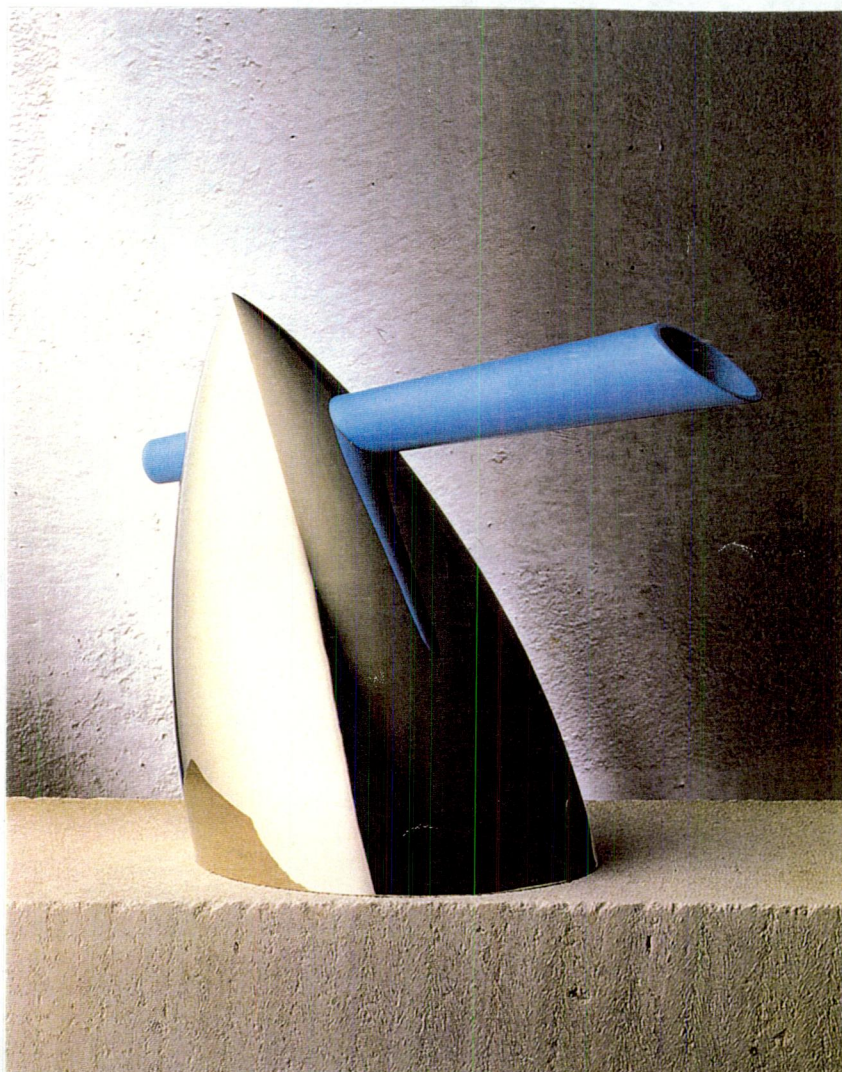


fig. 4

emphasis of styling that some believe is at the expense of function. (Gardner, 1993, p.26). Starck subscribes to the dream/wish fulfilment theory as well, he believes that people buy products not for practical reasons but to fulfill a need or a dream. He claims he is not concerned with technical or commercial considerations but with "the desire for a dream that humans have attempted to project onto an object". (Russel, 1996, p.34).

The Hot Bertaa has clean sculptural lines that are wonderful to look at, and it also has a high-tech look about it, but the question is whether its' sale as a functional item is justified or not. Craft - art pieces - (functional) - people will allow for human error and sometimes little flaws are even desirable, making the product more unique. Industrial, machine made products however are given no such leeway. In addition, if people are going to have machines to make things for them, then the design should be excellent.

Made from aluminium, the Hot Bertaa is quite a heavy piece when full, which makes it difficult to pour from; as it is filled through the hollow handle it is not possible to see how much water it contains, and water flows out through the spout when the kettle is full. The kettle is designed for use on a cooker hob, but there is no

sound to tell when it is boiled. It is also too hot to lift and pour when boiled - the manufacturer's instructions even recommend using a protective glove. Due to its weight it is difficult to pour accurately into something small, and it does not pour with a smooth, even flow but splutters; the list of flaws goes on. So, on first sight, people are impressed, but on using it they find it uncomfortable and annoying.

Practicality is a debatable matter; something which is quirky or unusual may when first used take some time to adapt to. It may even require of the consumer to find a new approach when it comes to the use of the object. However, when the product, like for example, the Hot Bertaa is dangerous and uncomfortable this is another matter entirely. Design magazine conducted a consumer test in 1993 where seven people from various professions were asked to use the Bertaa at home for a week. All the testers were impressed on first seeing the kettle, agreed that it looked well and was unusual, differing from all other kettles on the market. But from a practical point of view it was given a unanimous thumbs down. Some of the comments: "I only used it twice and scalded my hands both times. I felt I'd been totally let down - the manufacturer has a responsibility to sell usable products. I object to this being sold as a functional item - I don't think it is". David Villiers, product designer. (Gardner, 1993, p.27).

"If I can't put water into it simply it defeats the purpose of the exercise. We wouldn't sell it." Ian Remick, Marketing Director, Habitat. (Gardner, 1993, p.27). "It gets zero out of ten for function - it is a nuisance". Michael Annin, freelance translator. (Gardner, 1993, p.27). "I think it could be dangerous, particularly with children around. It is interesting that the instructions are full of apologies and qualifications". Ann Gush, former marketing manager. (Gardner, 1993, p.27). "We preferred the Graves kettle (also by Alessi) which is much prettier and much more practical". Penny Burton, actress. (Gardner, 1993, p.27). "The finish is a bit tacky in certain places . For example where the handle/spout meets the body, it doesn't quite line up". Bill Wilson, electronics engineer. (Gardner, 1993, p.27).

One should also bear in mind that the Hot Bertaa sells for around £129, placing it at the top end of the market where kettles are concerned. As the run of the mill electric kettle retails at around £20, most consumers would make the assumption that when paying greatly in excess of this sum, they might expect a well made, state of the art model. Obviously the Hot Bertaa is just one of Phillipe Starck's designs in isolation - and he has produced many innovative, quirky and stylish designs which are practical as well, like the Dr. Glob chair, 1988 see fig. 5, - but by claiming that issues such as

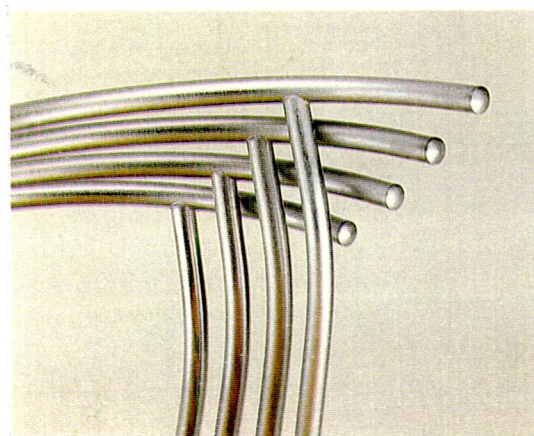
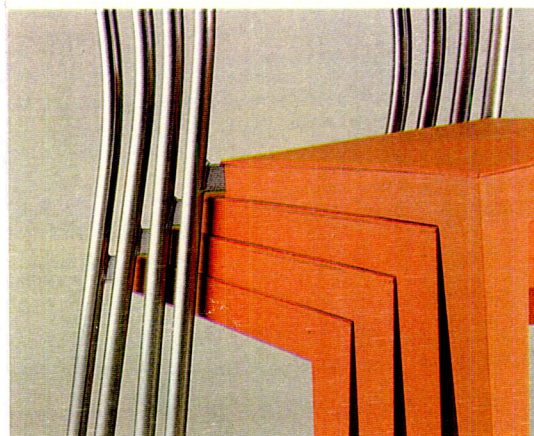
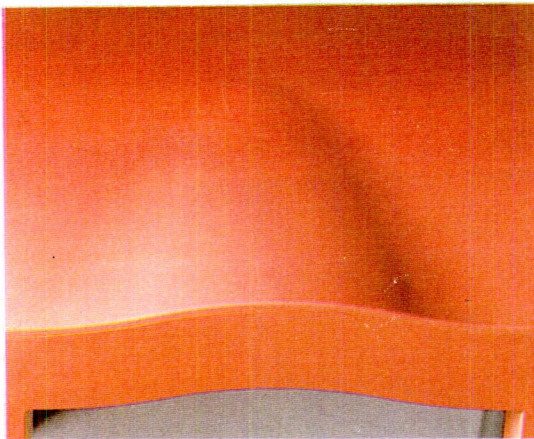


fig. 5



technical and commercial constraints do not concern him, is he just avoiding an integral part of design that is problematic? The question is whether it is the designer's job to produce a "whole" and rounded product or merely to be creative, to provide the initial idea and let the technicians and engineers get on with the task of actually putting it into production?

Francoise Jollant Kneebone (former design director at Louis Vuitton, currently director of the Ecole Camondo) has worked with Starck and would seem to agree with the latter: "He (Starck) is very good at new concepts, but you must be prepared to do the product development she says. The input of designers such as Philippe Starck does not reside only in mere designing. They are only think tanks who force you into extracting the best out of yourself". (Russel, 1996, p.39). However, as Alessi would verify, having some knowledge of the technical workings of the product being designed and the technology used to make it, and also some dialogue between the designer and the factory floor, makes for a better product. Surely the real challenge in designing for industry is to come up with a design that communicates what the designer wants to say, is commercial, technically viable etc., and that connects with a broad section of society without alienating them.

Chapter Four. Stressing the importance of surface.

“Matteo Thun-Hohenstein.

Austrian university professor.

Chief inspector of Ali Baba's cave.

Secret consultant to the mafia on questions of aesthetics.

Major of the general staff of the E.C commission for blanket consumer bombings.

Technical consultant to the “Society for the Touristic Utilisation of the Rainbow”.

Non-playing captain of Euro Disney's Davis Cup team etc. etc”. (Buck, Vogt, 1993, p.47)

Austrian born Matteo Thun was one of the young members of Memphis in the early eighties and while he has been pursuing his own individual career for some time he seems to have taken with him the essential spirit of Memphis, as he has continued to produce extraordinarily lively and animated designs ever since. Thun would appear to be the embodiment of the all round, ‘whole’ designer, taking into account the perspective of the consumer and the manufacturer when designing. According to Thun, “design must have the greatest possible expressive impact, i.e the greatest possible

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communication value while simultaneously ensuring optimal production processes and costs. Design cannot be considered perfect unless all of the structural elements of an industrial product are taken into account". (Buck, Vogt, 1993. p45). Thun designs mainly for large corporations such as Swatch, Phillips, AEG - taking on tasks ranging from the architectural to packaging design. Usually when he works on a project, Thun is involved with the client on every level - design, the business side, the technical aspects, marketing.

One project Thun has been involved with is the Illy collection, for Illy, an Italian coffee manufacturer. The collection is a series of espresso coffee cups which Illy have invited artists to decorate in their own style. Since 1992, Illy has brought out a couple of these cup ranges each year. Thun designed the original porcelain cup, see fig. 6, a simple round shape with a distinctive, quirky, doughnut shaped handle. The Illy coffee cup is one example of a mass produced product with a constantly changing, individual look - one that is seen and used by people in coffee shops every day.

The artistic, unique, nature of the collection is, it has to be said, employed by Illy as a major selling point. "The pleasure of an excellent espresso, plus an artistic touch; this is the leitmotif of the



fig. 6

'Illy collection' cups. Entrusting their decoration to the hands of artists known to all or only a few is an idea that weds creativeness, pure and simple, with the ancient wisdom of the connoisseur of fine coffee. 'Illy collection' art is art to be seen, art to be savoured". (Illy promotional literature).

Three separate sections make up the collection: 'Arts and Crafts' - creative people from various parts of the art/design world, asked to interpret the coffee cup in their own way; 'Grand Masters', a series by established artists such as Sandro Chia and Nam June Paik; and 'New Talents' which is an opportunity for young emerging artists to express their own personal statement. Thun contributed to the Arts and Crafts series in 1992 and 1993, but he was also responsible for designing the distinctive packaging for the cups. Thun is aware of the important role packaging plays in giving the first impressions of a product, it is the first line of communication between consumer and designer.

Thun has been criticised for his preoccupation with surface and decorations that some regard as superficial, but it could also be said that this is what gives him his unique approach, see fig. 7, (it is also fundamental to the ideals of Memphis, disregarding the notion that

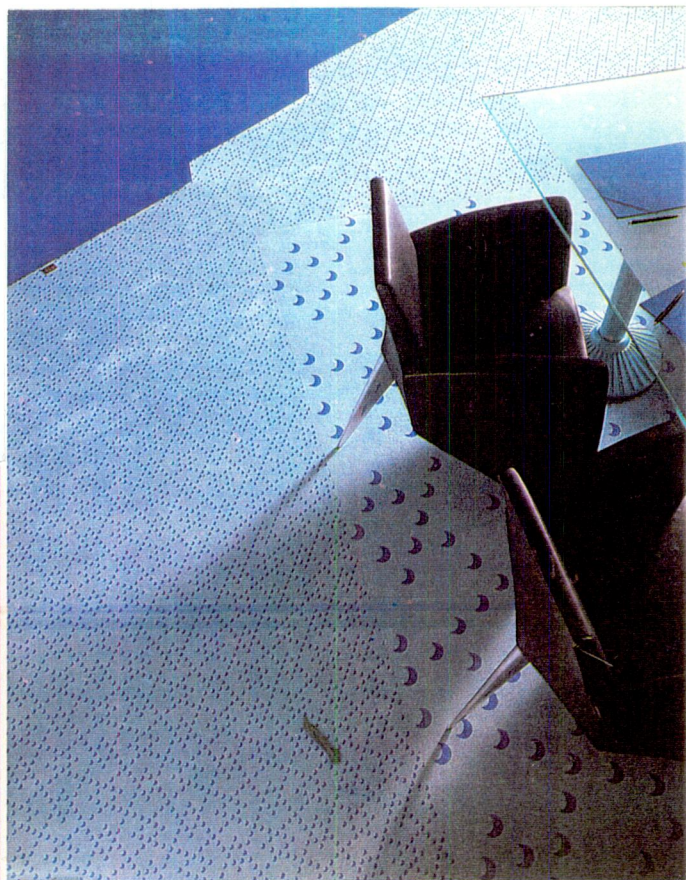
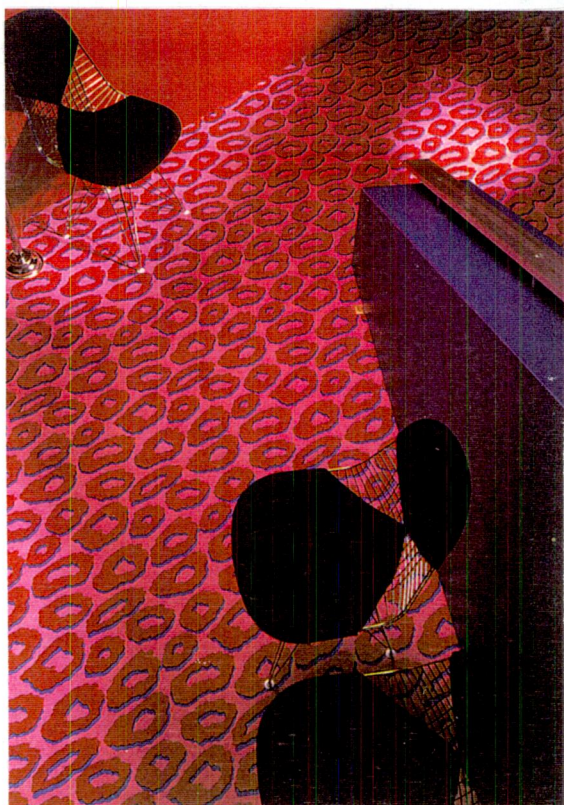


fig. 7

strong form is the most important aspect of design) and makes him such an able designer for the mass production industry. Due to industrial development, decoration and ornamentation has become a secondary consideration to form. Modernism's concern has been with 'pure form', it has made ornamentation a superfluous, cosmetic 'outer layer' - seemingly performing no apparent function. So why is it that someone like Thun has chosen to stress its importance?

Surface today has an important role to play in design, from the standpoint of both consumers and industry. Today's society is preoccupied with having, purchasing, spending. Industry has responded to this and as a result the market has become totally saturated. Consumers are also extremely fashion conscious, with people of all ages being aware of style and trends changing every few months. The marketplace today is broken into hundreds of subdivisions, with different types of customer to cater for in each one. Market saturation and product overload can lead to disaffected and bored consumers.

This is particularly true of today's consumer; so that the effects of mass media; being constantly surrounded by images in television and advertising, of an increasingly sophisticated nature has led to

...the most important aspect of design, and it is this
...the mass production industry...
...decoration and ornamentation...
...Modelism's concept...
...a superficial...
...performing no apparent function...
...is chosen to stress its importance...

...the most important role is played by design...
...of both consumer and industry...
...quality, quantity, speed, and variety...
...and as a result the market has become totally...
...the extremely high standards...
...being aware of style and trends...
...The marketplace today is broken...
...with different types of customer...
...Market saturation and product overabundance...
...new consumers...

This is why...
...being constantly surrounded by images...
...of an increasingly sophisticated nation...

somewhat of a 'seen it/heard it all before' attitude. Thus manufacturers are having to come up with even bigger, brighter, bolder ideas at a faster and faster pace, each one cleverer, quirkier, funnier and more unusual than the next.

Consumption is also about society and the individuals in it trying to form their own sense of identity. People on the one hand are fashion conscious and they want to have the things that everyone else has, (this relates to products as status symbols) but on the other hand they want something unique and different. This is why special or limited editions work - different version of the same thing make people want them because they are special or different, so they feel as though they have what everyone else wants but they have an even more special part of it. It also comes down to the message communicated between the object and the person - if the object says quality, unusual, individual, original, the owner of the object in turn says: 'I am original, unusual, etc.' both to himself and the world around him.

Fashion today has permeated every aspect of society - not just the way people look, but also their homes. The home has always been a reflection of the owner's personality but that is even more

true today, people are changing their homes more often. Perhaps this has something to do with young, affluent twenty somethings who are not getting married and having children as young as people say thirty years ago and they do not have the same need for 'functional' family homes. This has led to the rise of designer household items by 'star' designers like the aforementioned Phillipe Starck, and design shops like Conran. There is also an element of DIY to today's home, with consumers being encouraged to add their own individual touches so there are also at the lower end of the market shops like Ikea and Habitat which sell 'basic' shapes (domestic ware, lighting, furniture) in a range of colours and patterns which customers can 'mix and match' to their own taste.

This is where the importance of surface comes in. It is difficult for industry to develop prototypes and bring in new forms as quickly as trends change, so what they can do is bring in seasonal colours and patterns. It is also easier to meet the demands of the smaller subdivisions of the market and have greater variation in limited or batch production. When working within seasonal time limits, developing a new range of colours or patterns is more viable than developing a new product which, allowing for the development of prototypes etc. could take considerably longer.

Of course commercial aspects are not the only reason why Thun stresses the importance of surface. Like Sottsass, he also looks at the sensory qualities - first of all, how they look (even visual information is usually interpreted rationally so it is important to take into account all the other senses as well), but also how they sound, feel, smell etc. He applies these ideas when designing for example, the Illy package, see figs. 8 and 9, where he mixes contrasting colours, shades of the same colour, raises surface decoration, shiny and matt surfaces together; as the coffee takes care of taste and smell, he works on visual, aural and tactile senses.

Packaging, and the visual/sensual information on the surface of an object is of the utmost importance - it is the first communication between an object and a person - it is what first draws someone to the object - a serious consideration in today's society where consumers are bombarded with choices from every possible angle.

It is clear that industry today, while it can learn from traditional skilled craftsmanship, needs a form of design specifically suited to its technology, rather than men trying to imitate or improve on the handmade product. It needs a design which exploits the skills it can offer. One project by Alessi - the 10,000 vases as it is known, which

It seems reasonable to expect that the only reason why these

designs are not better is that they are not better.

The primary reason for this is that the design is not better.

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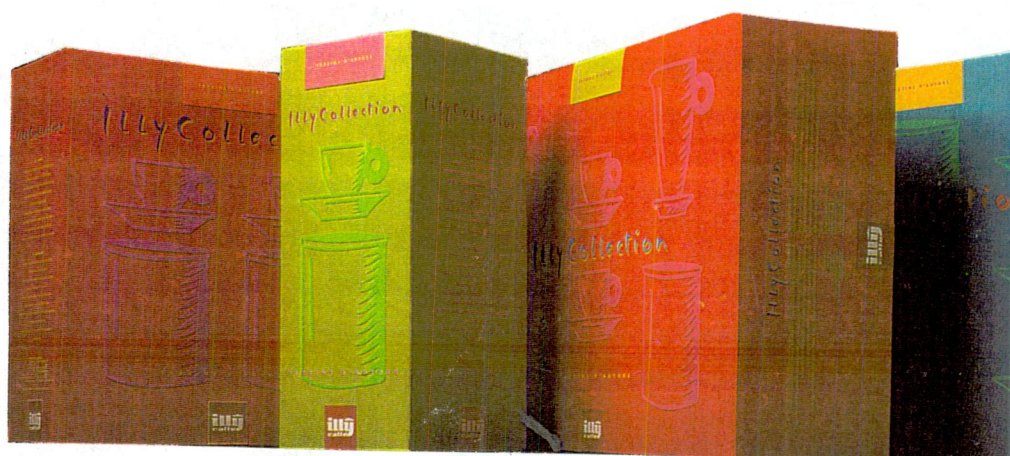
It is not better because it is not better.

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figs. 8,9





is produced by Tendenza, a small ceramics company owned by Alessi - certainly seems to have these aims in mind.

In 1991, in an article in Graphis magazine Alessi mentioned that they were involved in a top secret project - the "porcelain vase". "I think that this project is going to represent in the 1990's what the Tea and Coffee piazza represented during the 1980's in the design world".(Talarico,1991, p.65). The Tea and Coffee piazza, see fig. 10, mentioned was a series of tea and coffee services designed by eleven prominent architects at the time such as Aldo Rossi, Stanley Tigerman, Oscar Tusqueta and Robert Venturo.

The project was like architecture in miniature, 'piazza' being the Italian word for square, the tea and coffee pots were representative of the buildings on it. The services were produced (in limited edition) in stainless steel and later in sterling silver. The porcelain ware project is quite different; for a start the materials used - porcelain, while quite delicate, does not seem as precious, grand or even remote as steel or silver. The use of ceramic for this industrial project is somehow warmer, less cold or harsh than the metal used for the previous scheme. 10,000 vase, the porcelain vase, or 100% make-up as it is also called, exploits the idea of mass production.

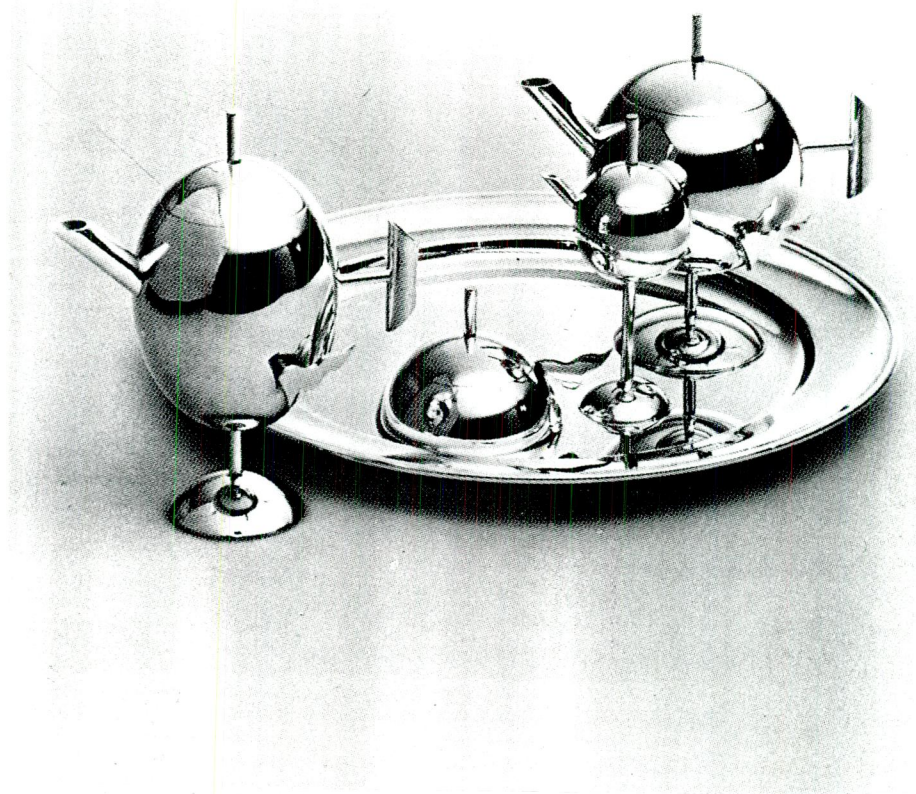
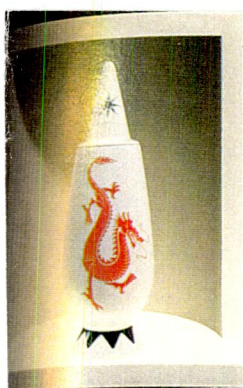
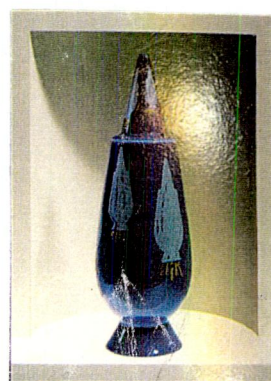
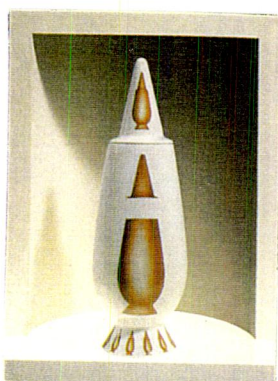
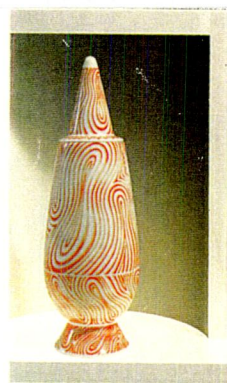


fig. 10



One hundred artists were each invited to decorate the same vase form (designed by Alessandro Mendini) and one hundred versions of each of these were produced. There is a much greater air of anonymity to this project in comparison with the tea and coffee Piazza - although many well known artists/designers are involved, such as Phillipe Starck, Michael Graves, Ettore Sottsass, Robert Venturi - all the items are 'signed' by all one hundred artists.

The designs range from the figurative to the abstract to the highly decorative, but it is clear to see from many of the designs that the artists had the issues of mass production, anonymity, individuality etc. in mind. Numbers one and six, see figs. 11 and 12, for example, by Abate and Bertozzi e Del Monte Casoni and number fourteen, see fig. 13, by Capelli E Ranzo look as if they are based on fingerprints and hands, , Alessandro Mendini, see fig. 14, has coloured his vase completely in gold - an image of rarity, preciousness, value. Some have chosen to use the form itself as a motif numbers four and fifteen by Applefeld and Coates, see figs. 15 and 16, We can also see the traditional oriental porcelain vase as an inspiration numbers twenty six and thirty, by Gaeta and Gili respectively. see figs. 17 and 18.



figs.11-17

If limited edition series, because of their higher price, are sometimes seen as implying privilege - there is a clever twist - the limited edition of the series will be sold at a lower price than the second unlimited range, and shops will not be able to order vases of their choice but will be sent a 'pot luck' selection from the factory.

If limited edition cards, because of their higher price, do

sometimes sell at a high price - there is a loss to the

limited edition. The cards will be sold at a lower price than the

second edition. The cards will not be sold at a lower price than the

third edition. The cards will not be sold at a lower price than the

Conclusion.

"I don't want art for a few, any more than education for a few or freedom for a few". - William Morris. (Sparke, 1987, p.67) Morris's idea of art for everyone was admirable, but in theory it is a lot easier to realise with the technology we have in today's industry. We can see that Morris's Utopian vision of a world without machines, a return to mediaevalism, will never be realised but perhaps his idea that man should not be a slave to his own technology can live on.

Of course machinery will never be able to reproduce the essence of a handmade product and while there will always be a market and a need for such items, there can be no replacement for the 'human' touch. However, its' labour intensive nature makes it expensive to buy and therefore exclusive. Many of Morris's own designs, such as his patterned wallpaper, because they were printed by hand were costly and out of reach to most of his public, whereas in fact they would have made ideal products for industrial production.

The roots of craft are in the production of functional, domestic ware. This tradition continues today to a certain extent, but craft today is much more about individuality - a creative, expressive art

form. People argue about the difference between artists and craftspeople. If indeed there is any, it is surely that craft, generally speaking, is regarded as a more design orientated discipline. Art is considered a more personal, more remote type of statement, while design is a more outward form of expression. Design is about people, their lifestyles and the objects they interact with everyday. This is why it is easier to envision a coalition between industry and craftspeople than industry and artists.

The question is how to develop a new design, not just for the future, but also for the present. Sottsass was right, consumers today are in search of comfort, people want pleasure. They want a sense of security and identity in today's fast paced world. Going towards a new millennium can be a daunting prospect. There is a sense of anticipation but also one of nostalgia, clearly seen in the fashion trends of the last few years - sixties and seventies revivals, in short a brief 'summary' of all the styles of the last century.

As for the debate on functionalism, 'form follows function' is not entirely unreasonable - if designers are going to try to connect with a public they have to do so with a usable product. Otherwise, consumers will be alienated, they will not connect with the product

From the point of view of the designer, the object is not only a functional object, but also a work of art. It is a work of art because it is a work of the human hand, and it is a work of art because it is a work of the human mind. The designer is a person who is interested in the object, and he is interested in the object because he is interested in the human hand and the human mind. The designer is a person who is interested in the object, and he is interested in the object because he is interested in the human hand and the human mind.

The designer is a person who is interested in the object, and he is interested in the object because he is interested in the human hand and the human mind. The designer is a person who is interested in the object, and he is interested in the object because he is interested in the human hand and the human mind. The designer is a person who is interested in the object, and he is interested in the object because he is interested in the human hand and the human mind. The designer is a person who is interested in the object, and he is interested in the object because he is interested in the human hand and the human mind.

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and will not continue to use it. The fact is that form, function or ornament or any of these qualities cannot simply be taken in isolation. It is not simply a question of one being more important than the other, all must be taken into account by the designer.

It also has to be remembered that function does not come down to mere mechanical ability - people are not machines, they are neither standard nor predictable - and vice versa - machines today can make virtually anything. But the fact remains that they need and always will need people to think creatively for them.

Sottsass would agree that the term function is open to a very broad spectrum of interpretation, the key being that we sometimes have to disregard mechanics, logic and rationality and learn to think differently. This is an industrial, technological world, and in order for it to adapt to the individuals who make up society, we must have good design. Surely the real challenge of design is to create a product which is both commercially and technically viable, 'functional' in all senses of the word, and which also meets the need for emotional fulfilment that Alessi, Memphis and others have identified.

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