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# The Place of Anxiety in the Design and Consumption of Products

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## LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

## INTRODUCTION

This thesis examines the way products are consumed in Western society. Products stimulate the desire for consumption, whilst at the same time they constantly respond to new trends, create new desires and indicate the possibility of something better on its way. This thesis aims to show how the characteristics of present day consumption are based largely on the human condition, namely that of anxiety.

The design process is divided amongst three main parties - the designer, the manufacturer and the entrepreneur. In the late twentieth century, the designer has to explore cultural concerns. He attempts to satisfy new global markets. Designers have a responsibility to help ensure that technology reflects our aspirations and to help shape technology for use by consumers. The manufacturer uses materials to create the objects which are mass produced and fill the marketplace. Generally, the entrepreneur funds the operation, and is the main force behind the introduction of the products to the public. It is also true that the entrepreneur is largely at financial risk during the process. The result of the efforts of these three parties is a product ready for the mass market. The consumerist society is exposed, and attracted, towards this product through three commonly understood methods; packaging, advertising and marketing.

In order for a product to sell, there must be a demand for the product. It must satisfy wants and needs of the consumer. It must be economically justified for both the consumer and the producer. If all of these are positively addressed then it results in a product which is successful.

Consumption is a long process, starting with the consumer hearing about or

seeing the product in an attractive environment. Dreaming and visualising of the possession and use of the product is followed by window shopping. Only after a period of built up anticipation and want will the product be purchased. This period is what consumption really is all about - the longing for the commodity. It is this duration of weakness on the part of the consumer that the designer aims their product at. In doing so, a huge range of products become available to the consumer.

As a consequence of this, the consumer is exposed to a huge array of commodities in the form of colours, images, shapes and visuals. On entering any popular retail outlet today, one is enticed by variations and diversities of products which attract the emotions of the consumer. There is a huge choice available, which enables the consumer to show individuality and freedom of expression in their purchasing power.

These two important criteria to the act of consumption are linked very much by a tangent that is the creation of myths, and the transformation of them into reality; both of which are in the hands of the designer.

It is true that the majority of media through which the designer's methods are expressed come in the form of advertisements, television and radio. These are so successful because they have the ability of creating myths, images and emotions. One which perhaps forgets the fundamentals of living, such as self-expression, imagination and basic happiness. This culture revolves around consumption, in fact it can be said that it breeds and depends on it. Through the methods mentioned above, consumers become materialistic in their outlook. Naturally, producers work on satisfying these wants and needs. In doing so they create new 'wants' through branches such as technologies, fashions and film industries. Thus resulting in the growth of peer pressure

amongst consumers, especially the younger generations. Peer pressure is part of the human condition, which has its roots deeply entwined in that resentful emotion named jealousy. The constant onslaught of the market by 'the latest' in everything exposes this emotion more and more, the result of which is anxiety and paranoia. An example of this is Bang & Olufsen's stereo marketing. The advertising campaigns for this company revolves around the slogan "Introducing a New View on Music." They continue to introduce expensive reproductions of stereo equipment differing from the last in styling. They create an image surrounding their equipment which takes music to be a serious, yet fun, characteristic in the life of anyone with 'serious' taste. The following extract is taken from a Bang & Olufsen advertisement:

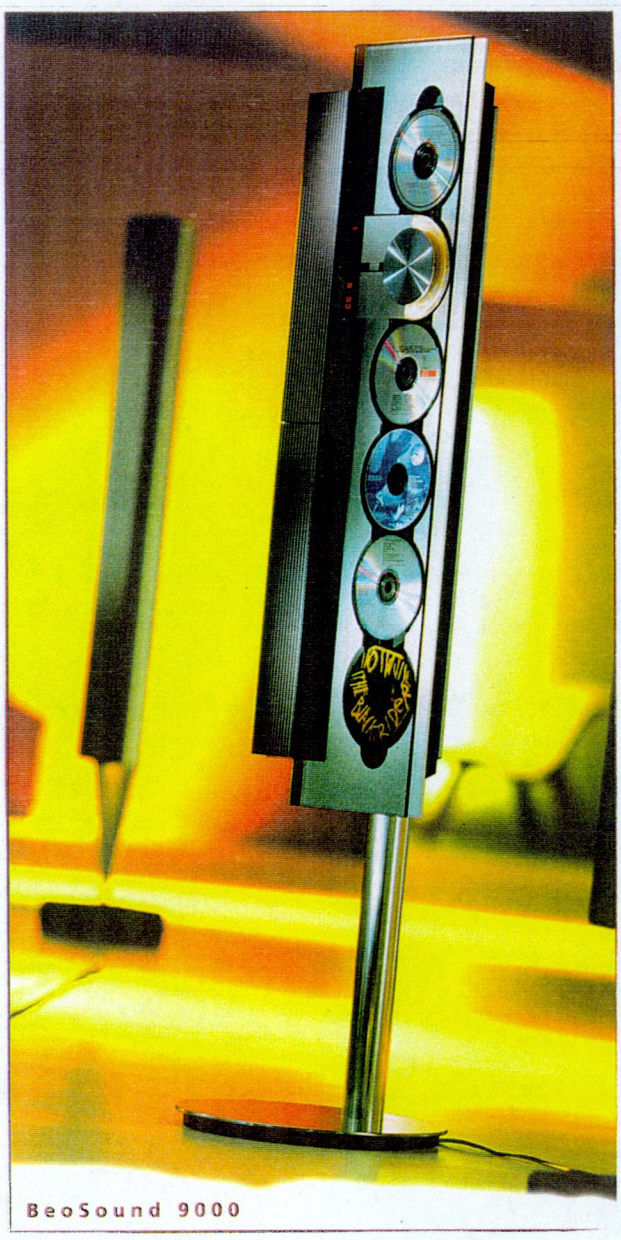


Fig. 1: Bang & Olufsen 'BeoSound 9000'

> Startling. Fascinating. Sculptural. There are many words to describe the new BeoSound 9000 multi CD player from Bang & Olufsen. Sense the exhilaration as you programme it to play the tracks you decide, or choose random play and let it make all the decisions for you. Enjoy the unique relationship between you and your music as the compelling art of each CD allows you to listen with your eyes as well as your ears. Feel the adrenalin race as the polished aluminium sector moves at speed from one CD to another, ready to bathe you in pure, clear sound (*Wired*, November 1996, back cover).

In western society there is a continual downward spiral of goods, initialised by the methods in which products are exposed to the consumerist society, and finalised by feelings of anxiety and pressure on the part of the consumer. That is what this thesis is about; the place of anxiety in the design and consumption of products.

"Anxiety" is defined in *The Shorter Oxford Dictionary* as, "1. the quality or state of being troubled in mind about some uncertain event; being in disturbing suspense; concerned, solicitous" (Oxford University Press, 1973, p.84). This definition certainly applies to the human condition and thus stands as an emotion with which this thesis will trace. It is also defined as, "2. a condition of agitation and depression, with a sensation of tightness and distress in the praecordial region" (Oxford University Press, 1973, p.84). Reading this makes one realise that anxiety is a strong emotive force, with marking personal consequences, both physical and mental. This manifests itself even more when put into context with consumers, especially when the same dictionary defines consumption as "1. the action or fact of making away with, destroying, as by fire, evaporation".

The first chapter of this thesis deals with consumerism. How it works and how it affects our society. The psychology behind consumerism will be interpreted, and its relationship with the human being. It will examine the presence of this human condition called anxiety, within the context.

The second chapter explains the psychology of the consumer. This deals with the consumer group types, how a product is perceived by them and expresses how style plays a role in the consumer's perception.

The third chapter deals with the psychology behind the designer - their

responsibilities, niche marketing and how designers create lifestyles through such avenues as packaging and advertising.

The fourth chapter then traces and explains the presence of anxiety with relation to the design of products. With it comes the phenomenon of 'obsolescence', streamlining and the beginnings of design as a lifestyle. The chapter explains the presence of anxiety-forming products, and why they are thus.

In her book *The Edge of the Millennium* (1993), she analyses the political and cultural development of the end of the twentieth century - comparing the defeat of the Spanish Armada at the close of the sixteenth century with the American and French Revolutions and the Reign of Terror leading up to the end of the eighteenth century; as well as the advent of World War One at the beginning of the Nineteenth century. The link being the "notion of the century as a temporal frame for historical change" (Yelavich, 1993, p.12). The pressures and countless impediments of global disaster, from AIDS to political and social terrorism have helped to format this era of instability.

She believes that designers, who are conditioned to plan, will become vulnerable to the development of insecurity in this present countdown to the new century. This composition deals with the role of the designer within the mentioned context. Yelavich believes that one of the designer's major roles is to make myths real, especially amongst the uncertainties and insecurities present in our society leading up to the twenty first century. Yelavich justly maintains that the dematerialisation of products is a consequence of electronic digital technologies, and that:

> In the face of discredited utopias and jaded dystopias, there is an irrefutable need for authentic engagement. Civilisation depends upon it. So it is in a mood of apprehension and anticipation that we begin our ritualistic dance toward the edge of the millennium - moved by a

> vestigial faith in the redemptive possibilities of design and awed by the tasks that await " (Yelavich, 1993, p.14).

The content of Yelavich's argument is valid and was found to be of inspiration in the construction of this thesis.

However, the cry out that "Civilisation depends upon it" is somewhat over the top. Ever since civilisation evolved, the human being has adapted to overcome problems, improvements, necessities and changes in life. The fact that the introduction of technology, myths and images into our society is new, is not the case. The Industrial Design profession, through technologies, ideas and resulting products reinforces this fact. Technology is "the study of mechanical arts and applied science" according to *The Shorter Oxford English Dictionary* , and so has always existed in human civilisation - as far back as the Ape Man using tools and weapons to improve life.

Jim McGuigan on the other hand, lays down a sympathetic critique of cultural populism. Throughout the volume *Cultural Populism* (1992) McGuigan raises valid points on the topic in general, but was found to be unworthy in terms of developing them in some form of context. For example, "in the modern era, the mass culture critique was theorised and spread widely as educated common sense" (McGuigan, 1992, p.45). The author goes on to quote, first Nietzsche, then a seminal guidebook for teachers of English and history Culture *and Environments*. As a result the topic was mentioned in two contexts but no conclusions were deduced.

With relation to this thesis, McGuigan was found to be generally unhelpful because of the continual casting general views on culturalism with no relevance to particular scenarios.

Nigel Whiteley, in his volume *Design for Society* (1993), stated that the mood was right for the status and role of the designer in our society to change. He goes on to say that this is an examination of what design consists of, in its many forms, at present. According to Whiteley:

> Design directly expresses the cultural, social, political and economic complexion of a society, and it thus provides a snapshot of that society's condition. In so doing it reveals a great deal about a society's priorities and values. Design matters: it is too important just to celebrate, collect or historicise (Whiteley, 1993, p.158).

A good understanding of what design is and what roles it plays in our society is evident in this. One relevant conclusion Whitely arrives at is "Good industrial design means mass acceptance" (Whiteley, 1993, p.161). The author reflects design on society, and in this sense was found to be of importance in the construction of this thesis.

Chris Jencks's *Culture: Key Ideas* (1994) is a sociological view on society and the psychological roles of the players.

> I am a sociologist and I approach culture as primarily a sociological problem. I also believe that the concept of culture has a history and that it does so in relation to tradition of thought; all of which are, in turn, located in social structures (Jencks, 1994, p.2).

This underlying thread allows him to investigate the energy that motivates whatever is most contemporary in the literature dedicated to the topic of culturalism.

In the sense of relating culture to the many social variables, such as social structure, social stratification and cultural reproduction.

## CHAPTER 1:

## ANXIETY IN THE PSYCHOLOGY OF CONSUMPTION AND THE DESIGN PROCESS

The nature of the human condition is such that there is a need to own and to consume, as well as to be identified as a group type. Economic activity revolves around this condition, which manifests itself as anxiety in various forms. Does design create this anxiety? or is design a result of it? There are thousands of forms of anxiety in our present society. And in many ways our society is based on the phenomenon of being afraid of failing.

In terms of design and economic activity there are two fore-running groups which both stimulate and gain from the role of anxiety; advertising and technology. Society has become more than just materialistic. The human body has become invaded by technology and the electronic world of modem communications. That is cinema, television, compact discs, computer graphics and the huge scope of media.

There is no metaphor more appropriate of this phenomenon than that of Arnold Schwarzenegger in his science fiction characterisations. The most artificial, yet tactile, of bodies - the machine beneath the skin in *Terminator*; the memory of a dream, or reality? in *Total Recall.* This is the core of cyber-culture. A culture which can be said to be hugely visually orientated. A World Library of information, communication and entertainments is available essentially 'on-line'. That is, one can electronically browse, comment, cut-and-paste their way through images, films and sounds. All through a narrow tunnel in the form of a monitor.

The visual dependency does not stop there. It carries into other media such as

advertising. Within this theme there is a notably expanding world of competing and compelling images being forced into our faces. One of the places on which we, and the media, are firmly fixated on is the mouth. For example the ascendancy of large-lipped women are now in great demand in the cosmetic industry's countless advertisements of lurid products. The mouth has become the orifice of choice in advertisements.

While advertisements celebrate one thing, they promote the most desperate version of the other at the same time. The under-arm deodorant advert for "Sure" anti-perspirant highlights the happy user through images of satisfaction and, at the same time, invokes our deepest anxieties. It imprints an appropriate moral view on the consumer's conscience. One which tells them that if you smell 'bad' you will be anti-social. You will not be able to have an enjoyable night out with all your friends, and worst of all, you will not be acceptable by the opposite sex.

Television is the all-encompassing box of anxieties. "...an amphitheatre of consumption whose function is to offer up images of longing" (Berger, 1995, p.17). It is the most pervasive mass medium, and the principle leisure activity, in a society desperate for effective communication. According to the BBC, the national daily average (Britain) for viewing in 1989 was 3 hours and 46 minutes (Oxfin, 1994, p. 4). In other words, for people who have grown up with television, around 10 years of their life will be spent in front of the set. From the same source, BBC found that 58 percent of the population use television as their main source of news and that 68 percent of all those interviewed believed that TV news was a trustworthy medium. Meanwhile a new deep fear grows into society. The fear of loneliness.

Then there is the relationship between the human (that thing of flesh and

imagination), and technology. There are two relevant contexts which need to be addressed. One which considers technology as extra human, as an extension of our own physical characteristics, a tool for making the "human machine" more effective and convenient; and secondly, one which considers technology as anti-human, something that has overwhelmed its origins, to now shape and direct human activity.

With relation to the first context there is an interesting aspect which evolves in present day design. Designers are moving closer to their audiences, the people who use the technology. They are trying to understand and empathise with a particular culture and its needs. For example, the designer of high-tec Scuba diving equipment is more than likely to be a relatively good diver as well.

Within this context the computer industry thrives. Apple Macintosh successfully releases new model after new model making each one that essential bit better that the previous, at the same time dismissing £2,000 worth of technology into obsolescence.

The second context consists of consumers who find technology complicated and a force that cannot, and perhaps should not, be stopped. These are the same people who buy fool-proof black-box cameras (aimed honestly at such an audience) only to find that the product reinforces the idea that they are fools.

Within the same context there are many profit making offshoots which rely on this anxiety. One such formidable method is through the massive Hollywood motion pictures such as *Terminator Two* and *Aliens*. Both of these rotate around the theme of possible human annihilation due to technological

advances not yet fully understood.

Technology is an extension of ourselves, not an alien virus injected from another planet. It reflects the worst and the best of us, from the atom bomb to the Macintosh computer.

In terms of person - product relationships there is fundamentally an exchange. Something that is (certainly) purchased and absorbed, but is not consumed. In a related discussion of exchange and consumption practices:

> what distinguishes consumption from exchange is not that consumption has a physiological dimension that exchange lacks (as in food consumption), but that consumption involves the incorporation of the consumed item into the personal and social identity of the consumer (Silverstone, 1992, p.200).

Although consumption in many cases appears to be about the destruction of things (as in the food example above) it is really about the process of incorporation into the social settings in which things are either produced or acquired through exchange.

Consumerism encompasses many fields and so has no definition as such. What can be said is that consumerism exists within a consumerist society. In turn a consumerist society is based on a market economy, and so has been in existence for a long time now. Private affluence, on behalf of the consumer, is the dominant force in the workplace.

As a result consumerism is, in many ways, about stages of cultural transformation, about fundamental shifts in values, and about confusions over class. Regional, generational and gender identities are certainly taken into account also, as the Sony Walkman is proof of. This is a product which is focussed on a lifestyle, a class, a generational and even a gender identity.


Fig. 2: Sony Walkman introduced in 1978. A styling concept using existing technology.

People who carry one seem, to the rest of us, to signify a void of emptiness of urban life. To the user it offers a power of imposition. They can manipulate their aural environment and thereby domesticate the external world. And it is done simply through pressing the STOP/START, FAST FORWARD and REWIND buttons. The Sony Walkman is a symbolic gadget for the "Nomads of modernity" (Chambers, 1994, p.51) wandering the highways of cyber-culture. It succeeds in simultaneously being a technical instrument and a cultural activity.

There are also different manners of consumption. 'Foodies' with money in fashionable restaurants; the young in McDonalds; school-children eating hot school dinners. These are all aspects of a developed consumerism. Their respective prominence acts as an indicator to which direction the consumer culture is actually moving. Individualised school packed-lunch boxes and single cartons of juice represent the prominence of a particular kind of consumer practice over a more collectivist type. There are two angles of consumerism which relate to this thesis. They are the scenarios of "needing" and "wanting".

With relation to 'need' I have already said that there are different scales of need. Two very important levels, in terms of the creation of an anxious consumer, are, 1. The real needs of a human being, for example foods such as fruit or grain. 2. Are the other needs which companies, such as "Sure", have created an order to sell their products on a mass scale. These needs are not essential to the life of a human being.

It can be said that there is no production without a need and that it is the act of consumption which reproduces the need. However there are different scales of need. Again with relation to food, eating cooked meat with a knife and a fork is not the same manner of consumption as devouring raw meat with hand and mouth.

Secondly there is "want". This is part of the human condition which flourishes due to the mass availability of a huge range of products today (and is greatly aided by technological advances and continued advertising). This availability grew only because of the human condition mentioned. And so both sides manage to thrive on each other resulting in more money on the side of the

producers and more anxiety on the consumers. Mass production has produced mass consumption. The current problem for the productive process is how to meet the new demand for fragmentation.

One of the commonest practices of the consumer is window shopping, a consumption of images. A window shopper searches "a visual vocabulary from which to make statements about herself and her social relations" (Fiske, 1989, p.34).

Commodities are the resources of people who are trying to control their look, social relations and relation to general social order. A wide consumer choice is not an economic requirement, but a requirement of the ideology of individualism which enhances the power of the consumer.

The consumer in our society is very much capitalist-led. There is a sense of self gratification and freedom to be able to choose and pick (and dispose) as one pleases. As a result it is essential for capitalist societies to encourage huge shopping centres to emphasise the plenitude of commodities - the range of colours, materials, accessories and prices available to everyone who wants when they want. As John Fiske puts it:

> shopping malls are cathedrals of consumption...in which commodities become the icons of worship and the rituals of exchanging money for goods become a secular equivalent of holy communion (Fiske, 1989, p.13).

With relation to the design and manufacture of products consumerism has many effects.

One important aspect is design for the real world where Victor Paparnek is accepted to be the most articulate voice on the subject. This is design which accounts for social minorities such as the handicapped, disabled, survival

consumers and more society on the contrary. Mass production has brought mass consumption. This current problem for the productive process is how to meet the new demands for fragmentation.

One of the commercial practices of the consumer is window shopping, a consumption of images. A window shopper becomes a visual voyeurism from which to make assumptions about taste and her social behaviors (Davis, 1993, p.24).

Commodities are the mediators of people who are trying to control their social relations and relations to personal social order. A work consumer shops for an economic requirement, for a requirement of the society or motivation which enhances the power of the consumer.

The work ethic in our society is very much capitalistic. There is a sense of self-satisfaction and freedom to be able to choose and not (and discover as one does). As a result it is customary for capitalist societies to encourage huge shopping centres to emphasize the plenitude of commodities - the range of objects, materials, accessories and goods available to everyone who wants when they want. As John Fiske puts it:

> Shopping malls are cathedrals of consumption. In secular communities they celebrate the icons of worship and the rituals of accepting money for goods become a sacrament as a relic of holy communion (Fiske, 1989, p.13).

With relation to the design and manufacture of products consumerism has many effects.

One important aspect is design for the real world where Victor Papanek is concerned to be the most anonymous voice on the subject. This is design which aims for social information such as the consumers' cognitive, sensual

systems and the Third World; responsible and innovative rather than the conservative approach to continual refinement of existing products.

Another important aspect of consumerism in relation to design was the arrival of the "ethical" consumer in the 1970s and 1980s. For this type of consumer the functional efficiency of a product is by far the most important criterion. The editors of publications such as *The Ethical Consumer* argue that the world can become a better through changes in consumption. By not buying a company's goods (and so helping to harm profits) consumers can make a company change its products and perhaps even its policies towards political, social and environmental issues.

The power of consumers acting together on an issue is evident in 1980 and 1984 when Coca-Cola was the target of sustained boycotts when evidence suggested that attempts to unionise its Guatemalan bottling plant were being met with intimidation and even killings.

The design of products has a huge bearings on whether the consumer opts for a certain product or not. It alters the way people see commodities because it tells us about the society in which they live. "It represents political, economic, and cultural power and values" (Whiteley,1993,p.136).

Gender relations to product design is a major player in the evaluation of products. Gender stereotyping has always been most evident in advertising. Women are usually depicted as mothers, cleaners, cooks or beautiful models - the provider of primary needs for the family; there is also the case of vicarious consumption which reflects the male contribution to consumption. This notion is commonly assumed, from the late nineteenth century to today. It takes place in the form of the male dressing and acting understated, and spending money

on his wife and children. This is a sign of wealth and prosperity for a man - the transfer of money on to others.

A product's meaning is determined by its social, cultural and political context. Advertising is a way of making the product more desirable because of its 'added value'. Any shop or catalogue with a range of products will almost always have a feminine version and will be so due to details, graphics, colour or form in the design of the product. In most cases the styling is the only difference. Functionally and ergonomically feminine versions are usually on the same par as masculine ones. This applies to many products ranging from lady razors to portable stereos.

Products are marketed differently in order to stimulate various emotions. This is true with gender but also with many other themes. Corporate identities have large roles in determining market strategies.

An example of this is Vidal Sassoon who, in the 1960s, saw a commercial opportunity in the hairdressing world. He used all the classic identity tools: products - the styling of hair and the appropriate maintenance products; environments - the layout and interior design of his studios/saloons; information - publicity, advertising and PR; and behaviour - relaxed, informal atmosphere created by his own staff inside the salon.

He brought about a political revolution, with freedom, ease and mobility as its seeds. As well as a social revolution by changing the daily routine of women worldwide, freeing them from the tyranny of the beauty parlour. Sassoon was a major role player in the cultural revolution of England in the 1960s (along with The Beatles, Mary Quant and Carnaby Street). From the outset he wanted to "get rid of the superfluous" (Fishman and Powell, 1993, p.7). He was a

Modernist and this was his fundamental outlook. From 1954 to 1960 he experimented with the concept that there could be a modern style for women's hair. Modern art and architecture offered him inspiring examples from which to work from. Vidal Sassoon was the first designer in this century to invite the woman into the modern interior. He focussed the design of hair on its structure, He demanded casualness about hair, as opposed to the existing belief that women could not even conceive leaving the beauty parlour without their hair being and feeling fixed in place.

Fig. 3: A 1964 asymmetric cut by Sassoon.

There is an analogy to modern art and architecture in his work which makes it distinctive and important. As well as this, all through his career his designs have paralleled the work of fashion designers. In doing this he has created a unique blend of structure, power and style in his designs which result in many other design related areas to be influenced by them.

The Sassoon slogan "If you don't look good, we don't look good" (Fishman and Powell, 1993, p.13) reflects the respect they show to their clients. The results of his marketing ploys were evident immediately in the 1960s when daughters started bringing their mothers into the salons. When companies use identity expressed through design, they use it as a commercial tool. With Sassoon, he introduced a new livelier, younger more informal environment into what previously had been boxy and rigid.

In a product based company it is the product that is the most important single factor in creating an identity. For example, Jaguar cars have an identity based on the look, the feel, the smell, the sound, how it starts, stops and goes and how much it costs.


Fig. 4: Carbriolet version of the Jaguar XK8.

## CHAPTER 2:

## PSYCHOLOGY OF THE CONSUMER

Consumers want to be amused, enlightened and stimulated. Even the advertisers in today's world have long understood that consumers are not necessarily moved by glistening pictures of products, nor by their technical properties, for example faster! More efficient! Longer lasting!

This may account for the most successful advertising campaigns being about something other than the product, For example, in 1991, Levi's Jeans began a campaign for womens' jeans. It featured "abstract illustrations that interpreted women's emotions ranging from love to insecurity", said George Chadwick, director of the campaign (Berger, 1995, p. 21). As the ads progressed the illustrations dealt with how a woman feels while wearing the jeans. The fact that the campaign dealt with human emotions rather than the denim features of the jeans resulted in the consumer appreciating them as statements of their own thoughts. The campaign was hugely successful with the market share doubling in the following three years.

This campaign triggered off a world of products directed at the consumer through emotive powers. The consumer now considered it his 'duty' to accept socially and culturally new products. As Marilyn Strathern, Professor of Anthropology at the University of Manchester puts it:

> the consumer is a processor, the turner of things into social and cultural values, but most active in the self-referential, authorship of its own processes of consumption (Strathern. 1992, p. 7).

From this there is a plain paradoxical essence forming around the theme of consumer authority. After all no one else, besides the consumers themselves, have the right to make decisions or challenge their own judgments. Yet there

is a continuing ability of the producers to exercise power over the consumer through advertising and marketing. This can only be due to two reasons. One that simply the consumer accepts that the producers have authority, or two, that the producers gain the "power" through persuasive and instrumental means.

> ... the essential feature of the market is the sovereignty of the consumer, and hence the exercise of control by the judgments of consumers over what is produced (Keat, 1994, p.24).

An important issue to bring in here is style. Style has now become a critical factor in self definition of the consumers. As they meet friends and strangers alike style is a way of stating who one is. This is true politically, sexually and in terms of status and class. Style conveys and is a device through which people judge, and are judged by. Style is worn on the surface of the bodies, it organises the space in which we live in.

Through the styling of products, variety and a degree of choice enables individuality of the consumer. At the same time the range of choices, and even decisions to be made when entering shopping centres or clothes shops acts on the anxiety which already exists about which "box" do I fit into? Psychologically speaking there are three groups of consumers.

> It has become standard practice to differentiate consumers by lifestyle rather than socioeconomic factors (Whiteley, 1993, p.26).

There are the 'Traditionalists', the mainstream buyers. They possess a brand loyalty towards a certain product area and have certain ideals they act upon. They are conservative in the sense that they are not prepared to experiment with new products that may malfunction, but may operate better than what they are used to. A certain amount of the Volvo car market would fall in to this group. These 'Traditionalists' are the majority of consumers and account for the continued success of companies such as Marks and Spencers.

Secondly there are the 'Initiators'. This group develops and creates new fashion trends. Many of them are achievers who are financially secure. They are loyal to one another in that they have respect for others who experiment with something new, aside from the normal or socially accepted. The people themselves tend to be mature and experienced, or to have been educated in such a way as not to accept what is existing. A successful, long-term, company in this market group would be Mercedes.


Fig. 5: Mercedes-Benz F200.

The third consumer group is the 'Aspirational' type. They tend towards products which sometimes imitate good quality original ones, but are none the less comfortable, functional and 'look good'. An example of a company which fits into this group is Toyata. They are bland yet all-embracing in terms of adequate style, quality and service.

Taking these consumer groups into account one can say that style is a process, carried out by the producers, to create commodity images for people to strive for. As a result the constant availability of alternative styles to adopt creates a huge discomfort, in that the consumer becomes uncomfortable and anxious in himself.

This continuing desire for the new on the part of the consumer is what modern consumerism generally depends on. There are three senses of new, the freshly created; the improved; and the unfamiliar. None of these imply something new or different from what went before however. New is implied to indicate a new generation. The link with the consumer is that pristine products will command a higher price than a used version. This is due to the fact that some people see this as a continuation in a sense. As a result the consumer will wear the product out before replacing it - producers know this and manufacture goods which, perhaps, deteriorates quicker than others.

In terms of the second sense of 'how' a product will sell is because it is new and improved and state of the art. A battery may have twenty five percent longer life than 'conventional' batteries, or a washing powder could have an ingredient which makes your whites whiter than white, if that is possible. This product type creates tension amongst consumers in that it works on the human emotions - chiefly jealousy, envy and desire.

The third sense - the unfamiliar. This type of product, usually technological, sells on the knowledge that the consumer is familiar with principal underlying features of a past product and thus sees the advantages, and feels confident about using it.

All these factors, when exposed together to the consuming public add more discomfort to the overall anguish involved in the consumption of products.

## CHAPTER 3:

## PSYCHOLOGY OF THE DESIGNER

> It is not this or that tangible steel and brass machine which we want to get rid of, but the great intangible machine of commercial tyranny, which oppresses the lives of all of us - William Morris, 1914 (Silverstone, 1992, p.46).

Designers have a social responsibility in today's world. As professionals they have the opportunity to directly shape the role that products play in social stratification. They have they potential to shape more than the form that technology and materials can take. However instead of producing what they think ought to be produced, or what is more technologically advanced, they produce what the consumer is assumed to want. Generally speaking the ethics of present day designers are laid aside in order to reap commercial rewards. Perhaps this is justified however by the fact that designers themselves are consumers and feel the need to 'compete' for status, individuality and a sense of power in today's society. And as it is widely known this achievement revolves around the availability or lack, as the case may be, of money.

Nevertheless designers and producers progressively widen the scope of the idea of the consumer through the creation of images and symbols into things which can be bought and sold. The consumer is expected to behave hedonistically - primarily interested in pleasure and pursuing his own needs.

The relationship between producer and consumer, as mentioned previously, is potentially authoritative. This is because producers are responsible for creating a good or a service; in doing so they have created a consumer who will speculate, fantasise, dream about and finally consume the product.

However, as Nicholas Abercrombie points out, "there is a shift of authority from

producers to consumers" (Abercrombie, 1994, p.53).This is due to the fact that today consumers are acquiring skill and knowledge which was presumed previously only the producers could possess. They have become active with an authority and a voice. This can be seen in the development of consumer choice magazines such as *Which?*.

At the same time design does indeed alter the way people see commodities. This is something that will never be changed. It will sell 'new' products in any sense of the word. An example of such power is in the 1920s and 1930s when producers were looking for solutions to house the crude assemblies of resistors, wires and valves in the wireless radio sets.

There were three results. The archaic version of housing them in a cabinet which initiated retrospective furniture was aimed at the 'Traditionalists'. The 'Initiators' were catered for by using a cabinet which suggested a futuristic, better world, and the 'Aspirational' group of consumers were pleased with concealing the apparatus within a piece of furniture.

In a sense this is the construction of an image around the product or commodity. But there is another 'layer' to a commodity, which lends itself one hundred percent to the image of what is being bought. This is packaging.

There are a number of versions of packaging, from the shipper's crate and the wholesaler's case to the retailer's box and the water-proof, air-tight cellophane wrapper ( which must not be violated in any way for fear of the consumer brushing it aside). But by far the most important in terms of selling a product is the graphics of the packaging.

A classic example of successful image producing packaging is John Player

producers to consumers" (Abercombie, 1994, p.59). This is due to the fact that today consumers are acquiring skill and knowledge which was previously only the producers could possess. They have become active with an audio by and a video. This can be seen in the development of consumer image magazines such as Mixed.

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A classic example of successful image producing packaging is Coca Cola.

King Size cigarettes. The black and the gold form a hi-tech image with Grand-Prix car racing connections. The consumer will buy this brand not only because he himself is attracted towards it but because of the image it will conjure amongst his acquaintances. From this it is plain to see that the standard practice of producers is to differentiate consumers by their lifestyle rather than by socioeconomic factors, such as work type and income.

In saying that, there are two contrasting design ideals amongst productive companies in today's world. The first group tend to apply intelligent, 'good' design in order to satisfy world markets. They differentiate by lifestyle for two reasons. One is because the world is too big a place to cater for everyone and so some form of categorisation of commodities is necessary. The other reason is , due to rapid globalisation in the last ten years, similar lifestyles are relevant to many more people.

An example of a global product designed for a world 'need' within a certain lifestyle is the Apple Macintosh 'mouse'. This tool totally altered the relationship between man and machine and brought the industry closer to an interactive model, as opposed to the binary one.

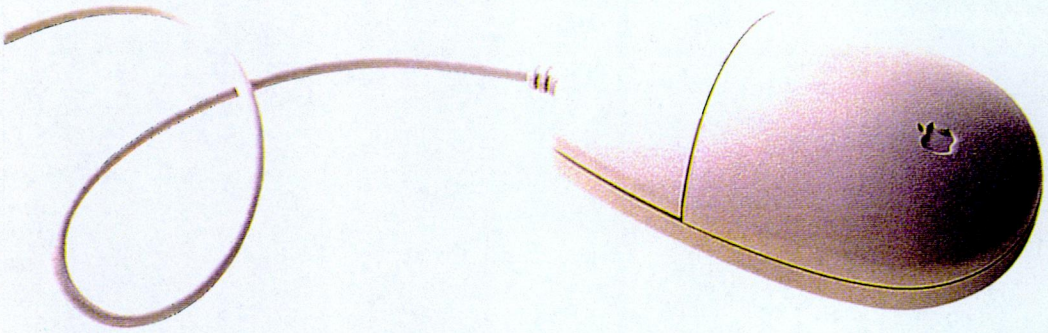

Fig. 6: Apple Macintosh mouse.

The second group tend to possess solely profit making priorities. Cheap materials and labour are used to produce plentiful supplies of short term luxuries for the consumerist society. This can be seen in Korea and Taiwan where a guitar making industry thrives (see figure 7). As Tony Bacon, a British music journalist and author describes:

> the prime requirement from the Korean maker is a guitar built down to a price, and almost inevitably this causes compromises in the materials used. The result is often a guitar where fashionable features and a good paint job take precedence over quality and durability (Bacon, 1992, p.112).

Lifestyle is thus presumed to be one of the most important issues of public life at the moment. As Nigel Whiteley puts it, "it seems as if design has become merely an offshoot of the fashion industry" (Whiteley, 1992, p.56).

The consumer wants impression from a product - a statement or elaboration of an emotion. As a result the market-led designer produces commodities with immediate impacting commodities. The parody of it is that the greater the initial impact the shorter time the sustaining power in the market place. This can be seen in the continual onslaught of the market by the merchandising of Hollywood film characters. From Disney's *Beauty and the Beast*, to Steven Spielberg's *Jurassic Park.*

With the advances of technology in today's society producers are feeding on the impression which commodities such as television and home-computing manifest. The one basic impression is the sense of there being more interaction than there actually is. An example of this concept is the role that personal computers are perceived to play with regard to the education and training of children. A home computer will supposedly make children 'feel comfortable' with PCs at school. One can hook up to the world wide web and access information on a global scale twenty four hours a day.

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Fig. 7: Yamaha RGX Custom (1989) made in Taiwan.

Similarly with television, it brings people 'together' in individual family units to view what 'everyone else' believes, under the title of 'giving us what we want'. We are nurtured about life in fictional suburban settings - everybody needs good neighbours, now that we do not know who lives next door. Technology is a means through which producers can successfully create a way of thinking amongst consumerist societies.

In the years surrounding 1870, sewing machine producers realised that the only way to stay in business, with this technological device, was to persuade the public that they 'needed' a sewing machine at home. By purchasing one and introducing it into the domestic environment they would be making their family worthy of a new era. Mothers could produce a garment when the need arose, instead of spending hard earned money on something they might not be totally satisfied with.

A similar scenario hit Apple Computing Incorporated in 1983 when they realised that they could no longer compete just with technology with the likes of IBM and Xerox. They were forced into becoming more responsive to the preferences to the customer/consumer. To do this they had to become choosy about market segments and more effective in selling and distribution. As a result there was a general growth in sophistication in corporate strategy and marketing.

Up until then computers were sold to offices, factories and shops in a business-to-business environment. They were the equivalent in product design terms of white shirts with grey flannel suits. Computers had no relation to people's ordinary lives. Apple made the personal computer a user friendly tool for word processing, accounts and games which could be used by all the family.

The designers tasks has changed tremendously in the last ten years. From designing for a need or a want within society design is now becoming a projection of contemporary myth. Products symbolise stories of culture, myths and interpretations of the unknown utopias. As Michael McCoy iterates:

> The Harley-Davidson motorcycle carries with it the myth of Odysseus transported to our times as *Easy Rider*. The cubic black volume of the NeXT computer echoes the mysterious obelisk of *2001* and the myth of an omniscient rational god. These are examples typical of the objects of choice of cyberpunks, madonnas, home boys, urban cowboys, and road warriors (Yelavich, 1993, p.132).

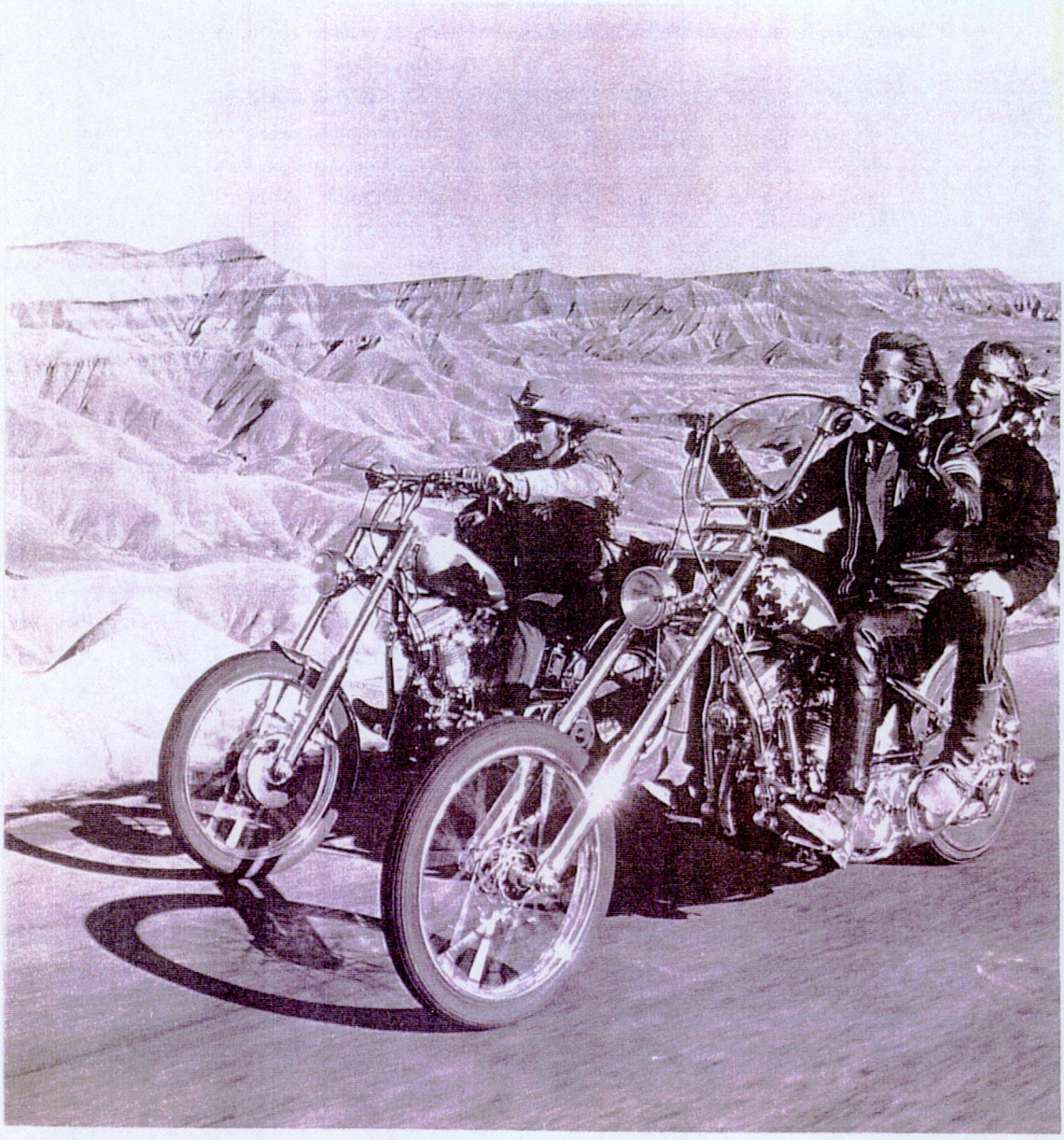

Fig. 8: Still from *Easy Rider* , 1969.

## CHAPTER 4:

## THE PSYCHOLOGY OF ANXIETY AND THE DESIGN OF PRODUCTS

At all stages of design history there has been a presence of anxiety within society. Even if it consisted only of a form of 'peer' pressure or fashion consciousness to obtain the newest (which was and is not necessarily the best).

America in the late 1920s and early 1930s is a good example of such a period when stylism flourished, caused sensations and sold products due to its 'extra value' expressions.

In a sense stylists and commercialists became designers. It became fashionable to be, and to employ, an Industrial Designer. This is evident in Alfred Hitchcock's *North by Northwest* set in the mid 1950s,where the mysterious and beautiful woman spy is introduced as "an Industrial Designer".

Fig. 9: Still from *North by Northwest* , 1955. Bottom picture shows Grant and Saint, the suspect and mysterious spy.

They would take a normal product like a toaster or vacuum cleaner and style it according to some principle symbols. These were usually derived from speed, fast travel, transport - thus initialising the entire streamlining effects which thrived in the 1930s. The styling became a form of a language through which a concept, image or feeling could be expressed.

This styling stimulated a demand for goods. Consumers were now able to purchase desirable products which appealed to their tastes. It must be said that at this stage the design was not consumer led as the manufacturers were determining the style of the products, also they were still determining the consumer's taste. "Consumers were being engineered to fit the product rather than the other way round" (Whiteley, 1993, p.15).

Another important point to note is that by giving a product a fashionable appearance virtually guaranteed it to look out of date within three years, thus ensuring the "need" to purchase a new toaster or vacuum cleaner during that period. This is the introduction of "obsolescence" into design, which still exists today even though social and environmental consciences would be threatened if it were admitted. There are very few 'timeless' classic designs which have fought off newer versions successfully. One example is the Volkswagen beetle car which, along with the Mini Cooper, has managed to maintain a steady market from its introduction around World War 2.

Obsolescence brought about mass consumption in the USA. Obsolescence would only grow in this country at the time because it was a continent free of aristocratic tradition. Emigrants from around the world installed an enterprise spirit and resourcefulness into society. There was a sense of it being a new world in need of new methods, and so details such as styling the exterior of products were important to them and became inherent into their design values.

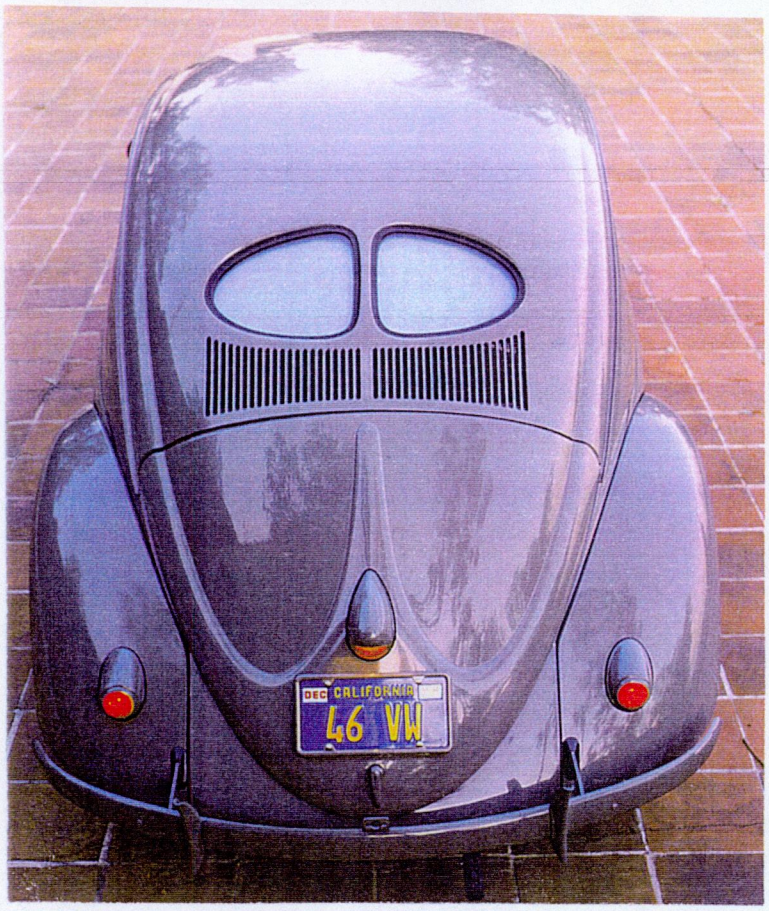


Fig. 9(b): Ferdinand Porsche, Volkswagen beetle (1933).

In Europe it was different. The design here was an elaboration of ideas and reflections. It encouraged problem solving intellectually rather than pragmatically. A product was generally worked from the inside out and beauty of form became inextricable from functional considerations. This resulted in production which would marry the aesthetic and cultural realms , thus improving quality of life in Europe.

In terms of anxious connotations within European design realms, these were on a very different scale from the USA, where the post war era caused new design to reflect and enhance their optimism and erase their wartime memories. Harley J. Earl, director of General Motors in the 1940s and 1950s, built cars that were visual odes to USA and their ideals of power, mobility and speed, They had spacious interiors, high performance engines, better brakes, lighting and automatic transmission. Inspiration for the car shapes came from developments in the aircraft industry. One of the most extreme examples was Earl's Le Sabre show car. It had a mock turbine air intake, like a gaping mouth, and the boot extruded into a jet filter tail pipe. However they were not economical and they were not built to last and so were totally fashion items

built for a nation of consumers.

To European designers, Earl was the "machiavellian architect of planned obsolescence and of a styling ethic that enticed and pandered to the visually sophisticated" (Nahume, 1984, p.56).

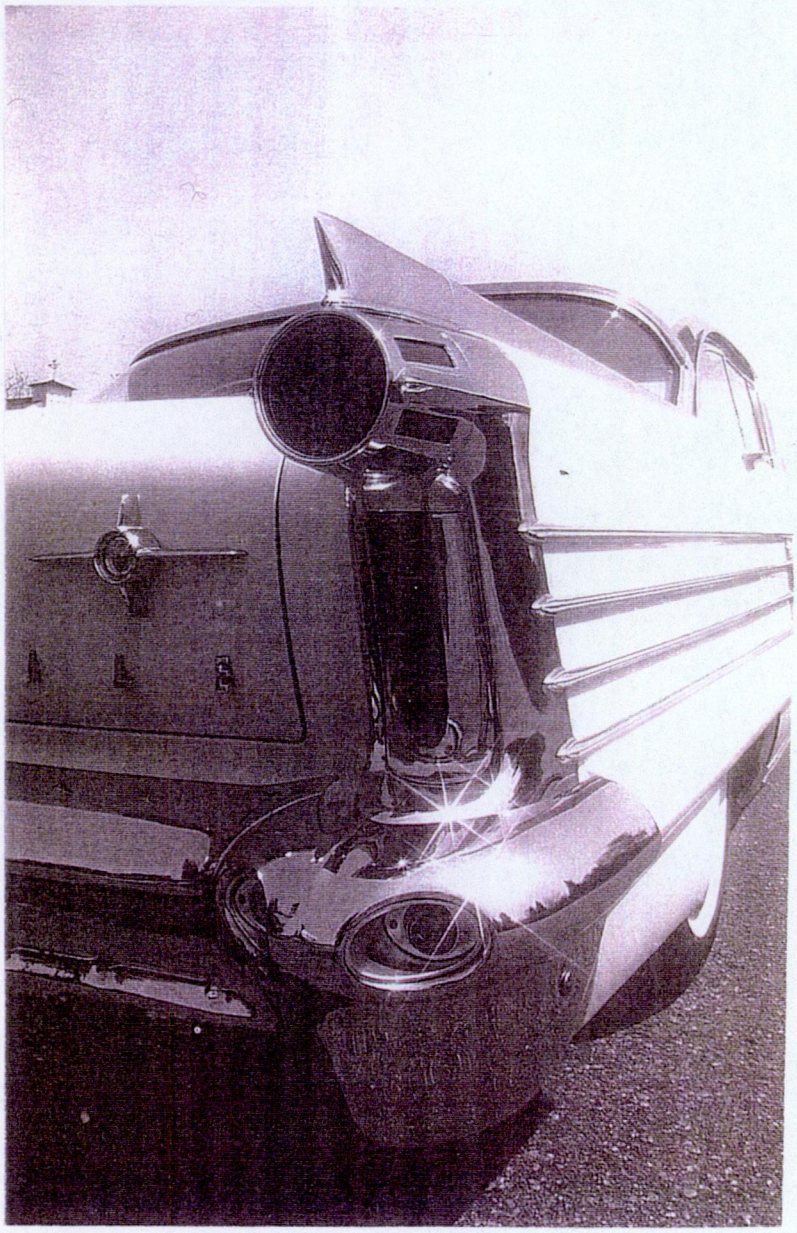

Fig.10: Tail wing of an Earl classic.

He started out, in 1920, as a custom car body builder in Los Angeles. After World War Two, when he worked for General Motors, his job was to excite and entice the clientele. After all, the USA were successfully enhancing their optimism rather than plummeting into post-war depression like so many other countries would.

Above all, General Motors designs were meant to be fun. It was not planned obsolescence, but dynamic obsolescence. In 1955, Earl unashamedly pronounced that "our job is to hasten obsolescence. In 1934, the average car

ownership span was five years; now it is two years. When it is one year, we will have a perfect score" (Whiteley,1993,p.16).

The same trends could be seen throughout the domestic industrial design front. "Dream" kitchens used colours such as cerulean blue, sea green, yellow and copper, along with customary white. Life was made 'easy' in the home. More storage space was put into fridges, several cycles were put into dishwashers. Melamine, a cheap, lightweight plastic, gave kitchen surfaces an easy clean, smart appearance.

Industrial design revolved now around honest good looks, sensible proportions, cleanliness, and subtle juxtaposition. Functional, convenient and decorative (e.g. Whirlpool washing machines) something that the American consumer found enticing both practically and aesthetically.

And so we see that the introduction of styling and streamlining brought about a huge increase in consumption throughout the USA. It initiated a series of waves of new fashions and trends in product design which kick started feelings of pressure, 'want' and anxiety within the consuming public. Basically, design was becoming a lifestyle. Consumerism was increasing within Europe also. In 1959 a marketing report on working class teenage spending pattern estimated that teenagers controlled 10 percent of the country's disposable income (McDermott, 1992, p.25).

Britain's consumerist society was being introduced to the same theme in the mid 1960s through Terence Conran and the Habitat stores. This was the era when the nation was changing from being a consumer to a consumerist. Designers were producing products which people wanted rather than needed. Habitat was aimed at the mobile middle class, Conran described the shop as,

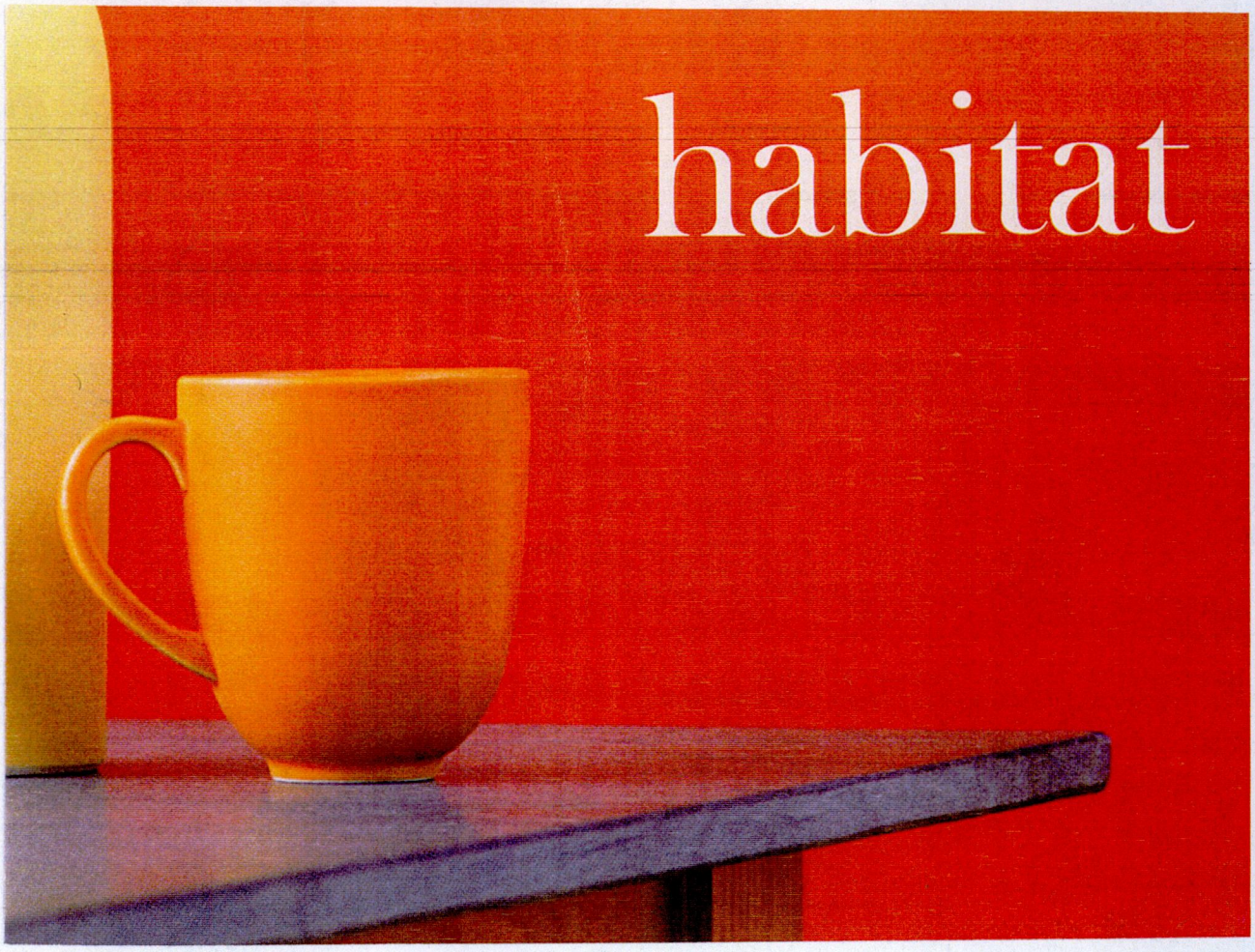


Fig. 11: An Habitat image.

"functional and beautiful" (Philips, 1984). Habitat's furniture consisted of a wide range of unusual and top quality goods which were selected so that they fitted aesthetically with each other. This was a totally coordinated approach to shopping and living which expressed and conserved a lifestyle. This strategic anticipation by Terence Conran gave rise to Next Clothing company in the 1980's. Alan Tomlinson describes Sir Terence Conran (along with Richard Branson of Virgin) as:

> the quintessence of entrepreneurial giants of late capitalism, peddling interior design and cultural software for a new generation of lifestyle specialists (Tomlinson, 1990, p.5).

The effects of Habitat and coordinated shopping in Britain were the same as in the USA. Need changed to want in terms of consumer products. A good

example of a product which exemplifies this statement as well as the theme of this thesis is the Sony Waterproof Walkman. This was created by Sony in 1987 by studying a market, identifying a customer and then creating a product in an environment which aimed specifically at the customer.

Sony successfully created a demand for a bright yellow waterproof Walkman which, obviously was not produced for the sole purpose of being able to listen to it as one swims. Designers were now shaping customer preferences - in terms of colours, shapes and styles, as well as entice product concepts.

As a result we can see that for the last sixty years there has been a considerable growth in the power of the designer to shape the consumers preferences in aesthetics and functionality of products. This ability has given rise to a growth in anxiety within the consumer group as to how they should keep up appearances, stay in fashion, listen to the correct music and so on.

All age groups are affected by this phenomenon which manifests itself mainly through advertising. Television is the most effective method of doing this, even though the media realises that it cannot tell people exactly what to think but what to think about. For example, during the Gulf War there was an impression that what was occurring had greater significance than our normal day's events. Television's conjuring trick is to be at the scene and in your front room at the same time, producing and discharging anxiety, stirring up a frenzy of apathy.

With the prospect of the new millennium, television is booming and with it both optimistic and pessimistic anticipation. The fear of the unknown is exemplified in Arthur C. Clarke's chilling vision of the year which is only four Winters away from now *2001: A Space Odyssey*.

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With the prospect of the new millennium, television is booming and with it both calculable and passionate exploration. The fear of the unknown is exemplified in Angel C. Clarke's chilling vision of the year which is only four Wimbledons away from now 2001: A Space Odyssey.

An example of television which has benefited hugely from this paranoia is *The X - Files*. This is a programme about insisting on truth that runs counter to all ideas about how things are supposed to work, ideas so deeply ingrained that those in power can call them up to deny reality merely because it sounds crazy. The programme is about two FBI agents, Fox Molder and Dana Scully who investigate paranormal phenomena. Week after week they find that behind their cases lies some secret government experiment of program kept from the public because it won't be able to 'handle' the truth. What makes the show truly frightening is that it doesn't explain away any of it's horror.

According to *West Magazine*, a Sunday supplement in the *San Jose Mercury News* (California) Jeff Jarvis wrote in the T.V guide:

> It's the perfect show for a generation raised on Kennedy conspiracy theories, global paranoia, self indulgent, feel-good cults, tabloids, and talk shows(http://rschp2.anu.edu.au:8080/Gainter).

Along the same lines, Gillian Anderson, who plays agent Dana Scully in *The X-Files,* in a recent interview explained:

> I think that as the millennium approaches, people are honestly looking for an answer of some sort. The end of the millennium also touches the issue of the end of the world... 1999... everybody is looking for answers. They haven't found the answers they're looking for in religion and so they're moving more readily now towards something which is not so much God-worldly as alien-worldly (Hughes, 1996, p.32).

In terms of the arts, there is evidence of the same themes running throughout. Simon Pummell's Award winning short film *Butcher's Hook* is a simple, macabre and transfixing story of a taxidermist who is attacked by the menagerie of dead he preserved. His work spurred by the fascination with what he sees as the similarities between the late 19th century and today's millennium countdown. "Both are times when there's been an explosion of technological potential", he says, "Both show an anxiety about the human body, and how it fits in with technology" (Thrift, 1996, p.27).

What is happening now is there is a huge mix of cultural thoughts and impressions of what is right, what is wrong and what is around the corner. People are finding it difficult to find a foothold as to which direction to take, in terms of taste and opinion. There is evidence of this close to home in the Irish music charts. In the beginning of October, 1996, I took note of the top 15 singles sold in Ireland within that week in the pop music charts. I found there to be a huge variety in mixture of music types, from reasonably hard core dance music such as Josh Wink at 15; to Irish traditional singer Frances Black at 14; to the Wexford County hurling song at 11; topped off with the female version of Take That, The Spice Girls at 4. In fact the entire music industry has changed into "an artful form of commerce designed by marketing/entertainment theoreticians, created by studio technicians, and performed by trained actors" (Mills, 1994, p.103). A song is now indivisible from the videos, clothing, magazines, electronic games, foods, drugs and beverages with which it is marketed. The concept of the musician is disappearing.

Because of this uncertainty of opinion and taste and general feeling of anxiety within our society there is a series of products which have risen in stature with relation to this human condition. Products which sell on reliability, strength and robustness of design. Products which counteract obsolescence and are strong emotionally.

One such product is that of the Volvo car company. Their cars have three underlying strengths which are timeless. They are safe on the road, they last a long time and they are ideal for families. The word Volvo comes from the Latin verb *Volvere*, which means 'to roll', thus indicating the strength involved in the image of the car. The graphic shape is from the traditional chemical symbol for iron.

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Fig.12: Volvo 850. Strong and reliable.

The first series - produced Volvo car, the OV4 of 1927, was built as ash and beech frame, covered with sheet metal and was only available in one colour combination - dark blue with black wings. The PV4, of 1927 also, had an insulated wooden frame covered with fabric instead of steel, and the seats could be transformed into a comfortable bed for two people. The PV653-5, of 1929, was a quiet, rugged car for everyday use with a reliable engine.

The Volvo car, from the outset, was designed for strength and reliability. Even the newest models, including the compact 540 and V40 have definitive identifications which relate to the earliest models.

Another good example is the Caterpillar Inc. Company which manufacture construction, mining and agricultural machinery, engines and offer financial services.

They are one of the globes strongest competitors in this field and their image is pure strength and reliability. In recent years Caterpillar have licensed their name to a clothes company. Under this name they have successfully created a market for strong imaged clothing produce. With slogans for their shoes like "Walking Machines" they have formed a consumer market which has become fashionable today.

Other products which are categorised in the same field are Jeep vehicles, denim clothes and Yorkie chocolate bars. All of which stand on their own, amongst a huge range of obsolescent products, as reliable, honest products aimed at the consumer who knows that what he is paying for will not be unfashionable or inadequate in anyway.

## CONCLUSION

In the context of the theme - anxiety in the place of consumption and design of products - and the content of this volume, industrial and product design may seem to exist on somewhat immoral terms. This is not true however. After all design, in the words of Nigel Whiteley, "expresses the cultural, social, political and economic complexion of a society" (Whiteley, 1993, p.158). This implies quite a responsibility on the part of the designer. It also implies a considerable amount of 'power' over the consumption and thus the culture in society. Terence Conran describes design as "ninety eight percent common sense and two percent aesthetics" (Conran, 1993, foreword).

Whatever the outcome, design is basically a constructive mixture of experience, innovation, craft and art with the ideal outcome of a product that will be pleasing in all aspects of life. This may be applied to design across the world, from Japanese design learned through years of imitation to the Italians discovery of new formulae for the 'marriage' between art and industry.

The design process exists as the route of materialisation of ideas into real things and products. Because of the huge range of products available to the consumer today, there is an ever increasing need for designers to market their commodity in new and innovative ways. This is important in order for it to be successful on the market. The most effective of which have shown to be the creation of myths, and hence the transformation of that myth into a real thing. The creation of the myth is not always accounted for by the designer. Often images from films and television can create a phase of interest or infatuation within a society from which the designer will build a market upon.

Whatever myth is created, the principal is the same. That is to generate a

sense of esteem around the product which will lead to feelings of unrest, desire and longing. Within the solicitude that follows there is a period where the product is yearned. This is the significant time for the power of advertising; details such as use of colour, positioning in shop displays, price and so on. This is also the time when the product is sold - not necessarily a transfer of money, but the formation of an image of that product in the consumer's personal life.

The longing and the anxiety surrounding the phenomenon of 'want' is tremendous, as can be seen by simply observing the hive of activities in any shopping centre. As if in a state of panic, the anxious consumer will hunt down their image-formed commodity. In doing so they are exposed to the plenitude of other commodities available. They find that they are able to choose between products. This gives them a sense of power, individuality and happiness.

As a consequence of this weekly scenario, both designer and consumer are, in a sense, satisfied with the result. The entrepreneur, manufacturer and designer have successfully fulfilled their aim - to use the design process as a method of transforming an idea into a product and then sell it. The consumer's satisfaction is that he has in his possession the yearned-for commodity, and has succeeded in maintaining a sense of individuality by choosing from a range. This is short-live however, and he will soon form another sense of anxiety with regard to a different product.

So it can be said that the place of anxiety in the design of products manifests itself through the fact that most product design today is market-led. This means that companies are following where consumers are leading. However it can also be said that consumers need to be enticed to want something new. Wether they need to or not is besides the point. The important point to make is

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So it can be said that the place of anxiety in the design of products manifests itself through the fact that most product design today is market-led. This means that companies are following where consumers are leading. However it can also be said that consumers need to be entitled to want something new, whether they need it or not is besides the point. The important point to make is

the design process does use advertising, packaging and so on to develop a feeling of want amongst consumers. As a result the concept of market-led design being the major form of product design in our society, seems to revolve back on itself.

There is another way in which anxiety exists among consumers. The main route of this destructive emotive force of the human condition (in this context) is through the continual bombardment of the market by new commodities. Advertising and global communication has reached a stage where virtually anyone, anywhere can gain access to information about people living elsewhere. Because of the, in a sense, two dimensional nature of this information people form a "grass is greener on the other side of the hill" attitude towards commodities. This is especially true of children who have only ever been exposed to this form of advertising and media.

The majority of television commercials take the form of parables. They put forward a concept of original sin, intimations of a way to redemption and a vision of Heaven. In the parable of the teenager with acne, we are shown a child, ignorant of the technological solution to the problem, being enlightened by a room mate. The advice is taken and the results are shown in the last five seconds with the joyous individual on the telephone to a new partner.

In conclusion, one can see that the huge consumption of products which exists in Western culture today can largely be put down to the presence of an anxious society. We consume because we feel impelled to.

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