National College of Art and Design

Faculty of Design

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"To What Degree has the Globalisation Trend Within the Automotive Industry led to a Sense of Uniformity in Styling? What Affect, if any, has this Trend had on the Diversity and Progression of Design Within the Marketplace and Ultimately on the Consumer? Is There an Alternative Approach to Design Open to Manufacturers Within the Present-Day Automotive Industry?"

By

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Table of Contents:

List of Plates:

4

List of Plates (Continued)

Introduction:

Call it the 'technoculture' - the globalizing culture of modern science, technology and commerce... If it succeeds, the result, already half visible on the horizon, would be a *uniform new world civilization* consecrated to comfort and pleasure, in which religious, racial and national differences would scarcely figure, and all the old gods would have crumbled to dust. In a world community integrated by the globe-shrinking communications and transport networks of the technoculture, what could prevail against it? *Better fates for humanity come readily to mind*. So do worse. (Wager, 1992, p.310)

As a child, I enjoyed playing one particular game avidly. This game involved one object only - to prove oneself as the quickest and most able at naming cars, of all shapes and sizes as they raced by. The game was by no means difficult. How could one, at that time, fail to notice the wedge shape of the Saab 900 or mistake the sharp features of the Rover 800 'Fastback' for the boxiness of the Cortina. Victory in this game came quite easily. If I ventured to play that game today, however, I would fail miserably.

This may beg the question - is this discussion motivated by an attempt on the part of this writer to regain a mis-spent youth? Not so. As with any project of this nature, the reader is entitled to an explanation as to why the author chose the title in hand. This case is no different. And so, on a more serious note, I will address that question.

The term 'globalism' or 'global culture' has become something of a catchphrase in the vocabulary of commentators and designers alike. Yet very often the term is neither adequately defined nor explained in the context of it's 'raison d'etre'. This obscurity coupled with what can only be described as the self-evidenced convergence of styling within the present day automotive industry prompted me to ask the question whether there might be a link between this phenomenon called globalism and this similarity in car design which has hitherto remained unexplained. Additionally, if there was such a

connection, what was it's precise nature? And furthermore, what, if any would be the impact of this trend on the automotive industry and consumer alike?

In the interest of clarity, perhaps it would be appropriate to place the central questions involved in the discussion in simple terms. In effect, the rationale behind the design of a world car will be examined in the first place, and secondarily, this movement's effect on the diversity of design within the marketplace will then be investigated. Thirdly, and perhaps most importantly, the question will be asked as to whether there is an alternative approach to the design of automobiles in the present day industry.

As to the evidence that will be employed for the sake of this analysis, a variety of sources shall be drawn upon. Part of the discussion will be based on direct evidence, that is, dialogue with members and representatives of the automotive industry. By the same token, further direct evidence will be derived from a pictorial analysis of the most prominent and successful four-door saloons available on the market in recent times. The remaining data will be secondary in nature stemming predominantly from the vast body of literature to date written on this and related fields of study, by designers, manufacturers and commentators. Moreover, certain sections of the discussion will be founded on the hypotheses and observations of eminent sociologists and market researchers. Finally, before proceeding any further, a word must be said as to the fact that the evidence adopted is chiefly secondary by nature. The topic being studied is admittedly quite abstract and intangible in it's essence and consequently, naturally lends itself to subjective opinion. As a result, this student endeavoured to examine the central questions to this study, in as objective a manner as is practicable with a healthy scepticism for arbitrary opinion and comment, before drawing any final conclusions.

Regarding the structure of the study, the following applies. At the outset, focus will be centred on the phenomenon that is globalisation. What are the driving forces behind it and what serves to sustain it? Subsequently, evidence

7

of a more practical nature in support of the theoretical discussion on globalisation will take the form of a case study on the Ford Mondeo. It will examine the manner in which it was designed, the styling policy on which it was founded and the nature of its shared characteristics with competitors. A theoretical evaluation of the importance of uniqueness and diversity in automotive design to the industry itself and consumers as a whole will follow. This part of the discussion will also pose the question as to whether there is another feasible design policy available to manufacturers as opposed to that employed by Ford in producing the 'Mondeo'. Once again, as a corollary to the preceding chapter, a practical study of the Renault Twingo will follow in support of the proposition that there may well be such an alternative approach to design open to manufacturers. Finally and invariably, the conclusion to the discussion shall serve to weigh the evidence, as examined in the body of the study, and deduce which design ethos may prove most beneficial to the future of automotive design, and equally importantly, to the consumer.

Chapter 1 :

The Logics and Dynamics of Globalisation:

As with the word 'design', there appears to be no single accepted meaning of the term 'globalisation'. To some, it means the globalisation of *industries*: the growth of global competition between fiendishly clever companies which tend to vary their products from one country to another to suit the tastes of different national consumers. To others,it implies an inexorable shift towards global *products*. i.e. a single styled product capable of appealing to the tastes of consumers worldwide. To some, but not to others, it also embraces a shift towards standardised global *brands*. One view describes a truly global homogenisation from Nashville to Nigeria, Stockholm to Singapore. Another view sees it as covering only Europe, the U.S. and Japan. The permutations of meaning are confusing to say the least, if not bewildering. The only two certainties which it beholds, it seems are firstly that it involves a treatment of the greater or lesser proportions of the world as a single market beyond national differentiation and that it seems to be growing increasingly fashionable, presenting a daunting new challenge of indefineable proportions.

From what is it born? This answer too, involves a certain degree of ambiguity. At present there is considerable debate between theorists who favour a single causal logic as the driving force behind globalism and those who rely upon a multi-causal logic. Three authors stress one particular causal logic - Wallerstein, Rosenau and Gilpin. Wallerstein stresses the centrality of

capitalism to the process of globalisation, while Rosenau and Gilpin associate globalisation with technological progress and politico-military factors (power politics) respectively.(Mc Grew, 1992, p.76)

Giddens is one of the central figures giving weight to a multi causal logic in accounting for globalisation. Giddens points to four discrete intersecting dimensions of globalisation - capitalism, the interstate system, militarism and industrialism, each embodying a distinctve globalising imperative.

In examining the quite complex nature of the dynamics of globalisation, Giddens explains it as "a dialectical process in that it embraces contradictory dynamics". Briefy, several binary oppositions or dualities are commonly identified:

Universalisation Vs. Particularisation

Homogenisation Vs. Differentiation

Integration Vs. Fragmentation

Centralisation Vs. Decentralisation

Juxtaposition Vs. Syncratisation

Each reflects a conflict at different stages in the globalising process. In the context of this discussion, emphasis shall be placed specifically on the conflict between homogenisation versus differentiation and universalisation vs. particularisation. In essence, these theoretical paradoxes suggest that in the same way that "globalisation tends to universalise aspects of everyday life (For

example, Nation State, assembly line production, consumer fashions, etc.) it simultaneously encourages particularisation by revitalising both locale and place so that an intensification (or manufacturing) of uniqueness (or difference) is thereby fostered". (Mc Grew, 1992, P. 74)

Furthermore, for the purposes of this thesis, globalisation relating to automotive styling will be taken from Gidden's standpoint, that based on a multi-causal framework with particular reference to capitalism, in the genesis of the process. Giddens recognised how capitalism could drive and sustain the move toward global standardisation, reflecting the drive to achieve greater economies of scale. i.e.cost-cutting benefits arising from greater degrees of turnover. More precisely, globalism based on capitalism is about:

> achieving both scale and scope economies by targetting the shared habits and tastes of particular market segments at the global level rather than by marketing on the basis of geographical proximity, to differnent national audiences. (Mc Grew, 1992, 76)

Car manufacturers are increasingly driven to recover escalating costs over the maximum market base, over pan-regional and world markets. What is also becoming clear is the relationship between size and power - an unmistakeable recognition of the advantage of scale has and continues to give rise to an explosion of mergers, acquisitions and tactical alliances in order to gain strategic control over a range of products across a global landscape. For example, B.M.W. acquired the Rover group, Ford bought out Jaguar and Aston Martin, Mercedez-Benz sell engines to new Korean manufacturers

(SSangYong). The Americans likewise have not remained ignorant of this realisation. For example, G.M. have fostered links with Toyota, Chrysler and similarly, Misubishi.

With this strategy of scale in mind, it becomes easier to examine globalism in relation to automotive styling. Driven by the desire to gain greatest potential shares in a world market, global automotive corporations find themselves having to style an automobile which will suit habits and tastes at a global level . This cannot be underestimated in terms of its impact on the growing homogeneous design trend in automotive styling. What is the characteristic aesthetic of this all-embracing, pan-national design? One commentator, Michael Horsham, has deduced it as having:

> smoothed out lines, allowed the domination of cab-forward configuration with it's related massing of planes, curves and spatial organisation. Body surfaces have also become increasingly devoid of sculptured speed lines and detailing with sharply angled corners all but disappearing from bodywork, while windscreens are raked and curved to evermore dramatic and increasing geometries (HORSHAM, Sept. '93, p.37)

Market research is the indispensible tool employed by these firms in reaching this culturally non-specific design. Companies such as Ford have for some years placed heavy reliance on 'product clinics' - sessions at which competitors current models are disguised and displayed alongside existing and new Ford vehicles in order to be assessed by a sample of potential customers. Not surprisingly, the participants, - whether dealers, fleet operators or drivers - tended to judge everything against the features of current vehicles. The results

12

invariably supported only slight design improvements to the previous model and resistance to any dramatic change. Nevertheless, such tests have been accorded almost religious significance and have been wholeheartedly adopted by companies such as Ford , as precise guidelines to the manner in which a vehicle should be designed. Ford's Vice President of design for Europe once complained that the company:

> asked them (consumers) for detailed reactions in a most ridiculous way and then used the results as a substitute for decision-making.(Lorenz, 1986, p.103)

Granted, the importance afforded such product clinics helped greatly to eliminate risk. Moreover, this risk reduction has grown in its value, as the increasing scale of global products require greater investment input. However, two essential points must be carefully noted. The process of designing a global car demanded and indeed still demands intensive market research.. Consequently, style is essentially market led instead of the reverse. Furhermore, as more firms join the race for greater economies of scale they must join the ranks of those who rely on market research so as to abate the fears of investors. Invariably almost, these further studies in consumer taste shall yield similar, if not identical results to those undertaken by their competitors. Herein lies the innate danger of globalisation, - that similarity in car design will become something of a foregone conclusion.

The above methodology may have had little effect if the automotive industry were in a state of perfect competition. Unfortunately, the industry is

oligopolistic by nature (there are only seven major automobile manufacturers worldwide: Ford, General Motors, Toyota, B.M.W., Nissan, Mazda and Honda). Consequently, the actions of firms are interdependant, in that each company is aware of and can identify its competitors all too clearly. More particularly, companies intensely monitor and gauge any actions taken on the part of its competitors when attempting to increase profits or market share. This leads to a kind of hyper-sensitivity among investors to any relatively dramatic changes, particularly in design policy. The firms in this manner can feed off each others resistance to innovation, each refusing to move unless all move at once in unison. The mergers and alliances noted earlier have only served to enhance this tightly measured approach to progression in design, and indeed the industry itself.

Globalism, by its very nature involves a corporate policy of treating the whole world, to a greater or lesser degree, as a single market . This demands however, co-relative belief that car buyers tastes throughout the world are converging to the extent that there are no longer any strongly marked differences between the desires of customers on opposite sides of the globe, or more importantly, between customers of different backgrounds and dispositions within the same culture. This belief conveniently concords with a policy of increasing market share. It echoes the sentiments of one of the greatest proponents of globalism and its profit margin benefits, namely, Theodore Levitt.

Levitt claimed, somewhat boldly that, "the worlds needs and desires have been irrevocably homogenised".(Lorenz, 1986, p.141) He believed that, in accordance with effective marketing strategies and investment, the need for offering local adaptations of the same product to different markets could be effectively dispersed with, in a bid to conquer the cherished global market. Yet even Levitt, some time later, recognised the arrogance of such a fundamentalist approach and was bound to retrace his steps, admitting that, whilst "the need for companies to examine the growing similarities between consumer preferences" was the recipe to global conquest, nevertheless, equally acknowledging the need to take account of "differences which still persist".(Lorenz, 1986, p.142)

The trouble with Levitt and those like him was that seemingly some followers took his philosophy literally. Marketing guru, Philip Koetler, readily criticised the naivety of such an approach. Koetler complained that such a philosophy set marketing back, *by trying to bend consumer demand to suit the product rather than vice-versa*.(Lorenz, 1986, p.142) Rather than anticipating the standardisation in product ranges which Levitt had forecasted, Koetler maintained that the reverse was occurring. Many new lifestyles were and would continue to emerge with differentiated markets further opening up. He insisted that companies needed a wider range of products and range of messages for the consumer, not the reverse. Is this not reminiscent of Giddens binary opposition, inherent in the globalisation process referred to earlier?

15

Ultimately, there can be little doubt that ignoring the call for differentiation in the blind pursuance of the single design for a single global market is much in favour of automotive firms. It promises the benefits of economies of scale while alo re-assuring anxious investors and thereby insuring greater funding. The question remains however, - is it too convenient?

Chapter 2: Case Study-

The Ford Mondeo - The Urge To Build A World Car And It's Impact

The Global Design trend has been described by Michael Horsham as a curious beast, a powerful animal with a direction and mind of it's own. It enslaves the automotive industries of the world from the Pacific Rim to Detroit.(Horsham, Sept '93, p37)

As discussed previously, this enslavement has resulted in a creeping homogeneity in terms of styling within the automotive industries. Car manufacturers have embarked upon this course of action because, steered by the dictates of the trend, they believe that increasingly similar desires and needs exist between consumers on a global basis.

The Mondeo 'World Car' started life in 1988 as the CDW27 project and was given the go-ahead by the Ford board in April 1990. The idea was that the same videoconferencing and computer links which had played a major role in linking the design centres in England and Germany in the development of the Fiesta, Escort, Orion, Sierra, Granada and Scorpio should be scaled up to incorporate the Ford Headquarters at Dearborn in the United States.

The target of a world car was reached by combining design proposals from Ford Europe where the Research and Development centre at Dunton, Basildon was responsible for interiors, and Cologne for exteriors, with those offered by the Dearborn HQ, and the independant styling studios, California Concept Centre and Carrozeria Ghia of Turin, all contributing to the process.

Ford Europe, with its expertise and experience in producing this type of car was given overall responsibility for the management of the project. But the policy of 'best expertise' implemented by Ford meant that automatic

17

transmissions were developed in the US, while the new 16-valve powertrain and the manual transmission were developed in Europe.

It took five months to take the ideas from initial sketches to concept models. In choosing which concept to develop, the original Dearborn car was perceived as upmarket, while that from California had a more sporty image. The Turin design made the best possible use of the dimensions, but it was Cologne's efforts that were closest to the final product - although at the time it was criticised for having an over dominant rear end that shortened the car. Manfred Lampe, the company's Design Programme Manager decribed the developing of the exterior look as "architectural, finalising the overall dimensions and proportions such as the length of the bonnet, position of the cabin and the rake of the windscreen" (The Ford Motor Corporation, 1993, p.8) As well as ideas from all of Ford's design studios, the final styling also took account of a wealth of information gathered together from market research clinics. From the original drawings and small-scale models came preliminary full scale models, first in clay and later in fibreglass, each fine-tuning the exterior design until the styling was finally agreed.

Ford claims that paternity for the final design cannot be established , such was the global nature of the design effort , and that without the videoconferencing and the capabilities of it's Cray YMP supercomputer at Dearborn, the project could not have been completed in the five and a half years it took, if at all. In fact, buoyed by the experience of the Mondeo, Ford intend to design another global car, to be designed and manufactured in Japan, Europe and America simultaneously. Mazda, 25% of which is owned by Ford is held to be a possible collaborator. This is a new development for Ford. The concept of a world car had been tried before in 1981 with the Escort, but with individual engineering teams in Europe and the United States each working on their own ideas, the end result was two cars alike in name alone.

The trans-continental nature of the Mondeo's development is reflected in it's styling, which is a case of east meets west. "Mondeo contrives to be a vestigially Japanese looking car and at the same time European, sleek and unthreateningly attractive. It is a point of focus and confluence for the new global morphology". (Horsham, Sept '93, p38)

David Turner, European Design Director at Ford remarked that:

> It is no longer a case of the east and the west:everybody is feeding off the same set of design trends. If you think that the Mondeo has an element of the east in it, what you're really saying is that it has universal design trends in it. I accept that - it was intended in every way to be right on top of global design trends.(Horsham, 1993,pp.39 - 40)

Figure 1. The Ford Mondeo

The Mondeo, as illustrated in figure 1. adopts the cab-forward configuration evident in many cars of its type around the world. i.e. Mazda 323 (illustrated in figure 2.), Toyota Corolla, Nissan Sunny. The windscreen is raked and curved

at a sharp angle while the rear spatial arrangement is slightly elevated in comparison with the rest of the car.

The headlights and rear light clusters are curved around into the side panels not dissimilar to the arrangement in many existing cars in it's class. The familiar front grille is similar to that found on many of Ford's other designs. i.e. Fiesta, Scorpio. It is the only obvious indication that it is, in fact a Ford design. The absence of sharply angled corners is typical of the homogeneous global design trend with its soft biomorphous curves. Both the front and rear colour coded polycarbonate bumpers bend and stretch as far the wheel arches. This helps to achieve a more uniform look to the higher and lower portions of the bodywork. The adundance of horizontal lines (the profile of the rear bonnet, the door handles, lines created by the bumpers meeting the sheet steel and the thin bumper on the doors) add a rather static unaggressive quality to the overall aesthetic. It would seem, therefore, that Ford's Mondeo is the result of a strategic decision to adopt the current vernacular of the automotive design community. This is in part the result of a lesson learned in 1984 with the introduction of the Sierra, when it's mould breaking design encountered some initial market resistance. However it did go on to be one of Ford's greatest success stories. When the Sierra first appeared, it was very much a leading edge design, so much so that it is credited with "crystallising the design language upon which subsequently, Japanese manufacturers capitalised". In choosing to adopt an existing global language with the Mondeo, rather than inventing a new vocabulary, it seems that Ford's enslavement to the global design trend has moved them from a position of leadership and innovation to one which follows Japanese dominated design trends. The reasons behind this

can be elucidated by briefly examining Ford's design philosophy over recent decades.

In the early seventies, Ford had begun to realise that their cars and trucks looked characterless and non-descript. "If they were distinguishable at all from other makes, it was only for their anonymity".(Lorenz, 1986, p.91) As one top executive remarked at the time, "We clearly identified the need to re-establish our image in the marketplace. You can't do that if you're timid!". (Lorenz, 1986, p.93)

This prompted a shift in the company's competitive strategy. By the mid-seventies, management decided to:

> get Ford cars out there that people desperately want, rather than cars they will buy because they are the lowest priced on the market. You can't do that anymore because the Japanese have taken that part of the market away from us. (Lorenz, 1986, p.91)

This resulted in the development of the controversial Ford Escort 'Notchback', a new aerodynamic, boldly styled car. At that time, many cars in the small to medium sized class were hatchbacked. Ford specifically elected to risk producing an innovative, unusually shaped car instead of simply adopting the prevalent hatchback shape associated with some cars of the small to medium size at that time.

Figure 3.
Ford Escort
'Notchback'

The Escort proved a stunning success in almost every European market. Following that, in the early Eighties, Ford applied the same adventureousness to the development of the Sierra. (Medium sized saloon car). However, they

quickly learned how difficult it can be to design one car to suit a set of regional markets, let alone the global market. As one commentator stated, "It was the very aspects of the car which appealed to German buyers that deterred British buyers." (Lorenz, 1986, p.98)

Ford's move towards globalisation with the design of the Mondeo meant that if they were to design a car for the global market, the problems encountered with the Sierra would have to be overcome in order to reach the projected worldwide sales.

This brought about a massive change in design policy. Those idiosyncracies which appealed to one market and not the other had to be ironed out. It was this that prompted Ford to adopt the current design vocabulary and step back from their position of leadership and innovation.

The Ford Sierra was one of the first designs in which the front headlights were stretched around into the side panels, as illustrated in figure 4 and 5. In effect, the headlights were two separate pieces, divided by the line created between the bonnet and the side panel. A well executed curve in the upper portions, in the vicinity of the centre grille allowed the bonnet to blend into the very frontal area of the car - thus creating an innovative, unifying aesthetic between the grille, lights, bonnet and side panels. As for the rest of the body, the Sierra was a complex mixture of soft curves and solid lines - a step forward from it's rather 'boxy' predecessor, the Cortina.

Soon after 1984, marked similarities between the Sierra and the latest new designs from Japan appeared on the market. Corporations like Toyota almost carbon copied the new lighting details - as in the Toyota Corolla illustrated in figure 6. Comparatively, the grille between the two lights consisted of horizontal lines with the logo positioned centrally between them, while the upper portions of the front side panels were similarly detailed with a line stretching from the front to the rear (although Toyota indented this line). The curve above this line resembles that of the Sierra.

22

The years in between the advent of the Corolla and the launch of the Mondeo in 1992 saw curves becoming softer, leaning towards an increasingly biomorphous aesthetic. However, many similarities with the original Sierra concept are still evident.

Figure 4. The Ford Sierra - leading edge design

Figure 5. Ford Sierra lighting cluster

Figure 6. Similar Toyota Corolla lighting detail

With the Mondeo design, Ford went full circle in choosing to adopt the existing global language. As illustrated in figure 7. the profile of the Mondeo alongside that of the Mazda 626 (figure 8.), the recent Toyota Corolla (figure 9.) and the Nissan Sunny (figure 10.) seem to share the same basic characteristics. Firstly, the detailing of the wheel arches have become increasingly subtle, such that a lip is barely visible. The curvature of the arch just behind the rear door of the Mondeo is virtually identical to that of the Mazda 626. Concordantly, if one were to trace the line created by the joining of both the front and rear doors, from the roof to the underside of the cars, one would find that in all cases (save that of the Nissan Sunny), that the line is virtually identical. Additionally, each design features a small upward curve on the rear bonnet, where it meets the rear windscreen. Although the homogeneous design trend has resulted in designs becoming increasingly devoid of sculpted speed lines, (as in the Mondeo and the Mazda), Toyota still maintain the line previously grafted from the Sierra. The very shape and style of the door handles on each model of car also points to a growing similarity. The anterior region of the Mondeo is also worth comparison. Again, (as illustrated in figures 11. And 12.) one can see the recurrent separation of the two-part headlights by the line of the bonnet. Similarly, both the bonnet of the Mondeo and that of the Mazda feature a soft curve approaching the front grille. The light clusters themselves bear stark similarities - positioned directly above the front bumpers, similarly curved such that the largest width is situated at the point where the bonnet separates the two parts with a continuous line.

24

Similarities are also evident in other more recent designs. (As illustrated in figures 13, 14, 15,16)

Figure 7. The Ford Mondeo
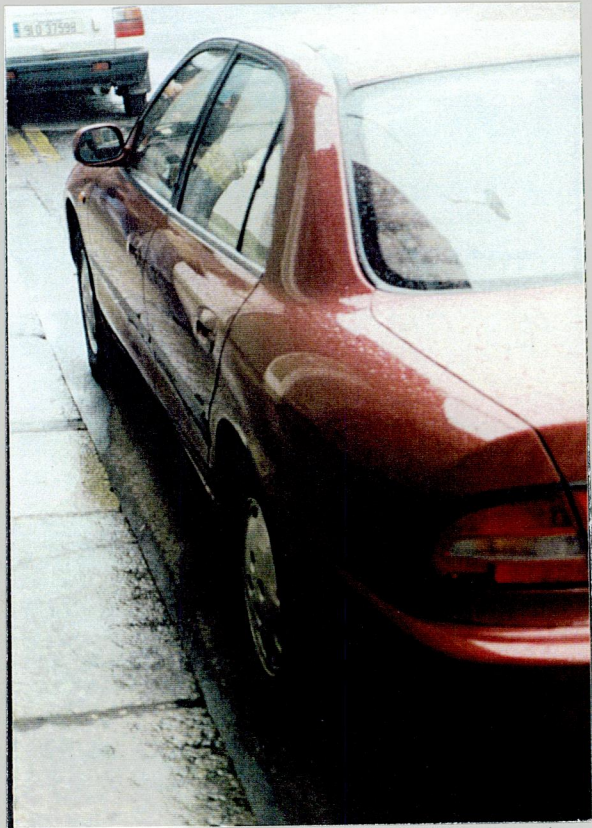
Figure 8. Mazda 626

Figure 9. Toyota Corolla

Figure 10. Nissan Sunny

Figure 11. Anterior of Mazda 626

Figure 12. Ford Mondeo lighting cluster

Figure 13. Suzuki Baleno

Figure 14. Nissan Primera

Figure 15. Toyota Corolla

Figure 16. Nissan Almera

In choosing to adopt an existing global language with the Mondeo, rather than inventing a new vocabulary, it seems that Ford's enslavement to the global design trend has moved them from a position of leadership and

innovation to one which follows Japanese dominated design trends. It is also feasible that the Mondeo offered Ford the chance to buck the current trend. To quote David Turner once again:
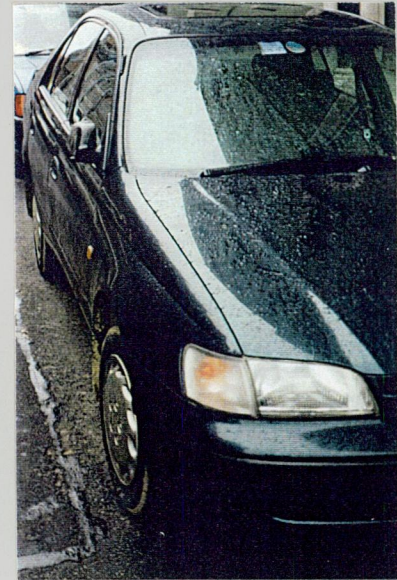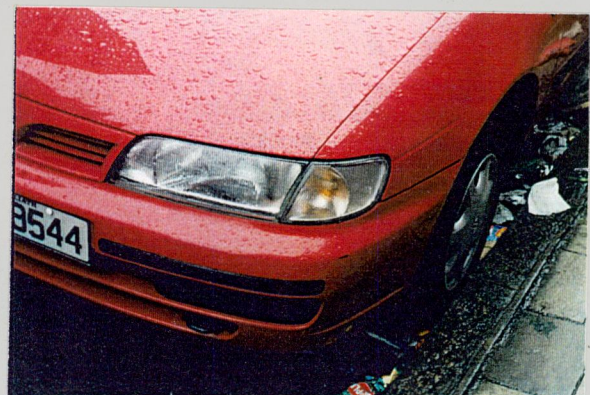
> You can't invent design trends these days, they are like a moving mass. You can steer them, you can put a product in there that's eccentric and if it's well done you can steer the trends a little bit, but you can't turn global design trends around - it doesn't work that way. But if you can understand them, they can work as a powerful tool ; if I know the ball is going to roll down the hill that way, then I can roll that way too - or choose a different route. (Horsham, 1993, p40)

It seems that Ford rolled the right way. Production capacity consisted of some 650,000 cars per year (400,000 in Europe, 250,000 in the US) all sharing identical platforms, running gear and parts. Soon after it's European launch the car appeared in the US, followed by Japan and the Far East. At peak sales ,the car reached a position among the top three best sellers . In fact , the Mondeo's sales performance on a global basis exceeded Ford's predictions, which may lead one to believe that the carefully mapped tastes and needs of the consumer were accurately researched.

In contrast, the design , was less than satisfactory from an aesthetic point of view, according to some of the opinions of corporate fleet buyers, the highly influential group of people Ford had attempted to target. Eddie Edmunds, fleet manager of BP Oil UK stated that the styling "was unimpressive and too much like a Mazda 626 " while Gerald Lidyard , Group Fleet Manager at Automated Security Holdings was indifferent to it's appearance stating that it was " a little clone - like" and "just like any other car". The author Roger Bell remarked that "Visually, the four door Mondeo does not excite any more than the Nissan Primera. It is smart and fashionable, but lost in a crowd of class lookalikes. Hardly anyone noticed it on the road. Those who did usually mistook it for a Mazda" (Bell, 1993pp.36/37,)

Reg Myatt, an independant automotive styling consultant, was sceptical of the whole global design concept.

> On the outside, the mid-market car is evolving into it's perfectly styled, safe, non-threatening , non-shocking state before our eyes. Seemingly, the range of options open to the stylists is decreasing.
> (Wood, May'92, p41)

So, although styling appears to be slipping into stasis, the near future for designs like the Mondeo looks good , as inevitably Ford and other global automobile corporations will be attempting to match the carefully researched and mapped tastes and needs of the average global consumer. However, as a project, Mondeo is so well thought out that it may appear to mark the point at which the development of cars has ceased to be "wedded to the flash and flare of the styling, as it was in the past, when a new design always heralded a stylistic departure, an automotive fashion event and a new reason to buy". i.e. the Citroen DS 19 'Shark'.

Figure 17.
1955 Citroen DS19:
At a time when lines grew heavier in the search for easier systems of manufacure, the DS19, was capable of coneying the idea of movement, without stylistic distortion...(Morteo, 1991, p.290)

Instead as styles converge and more and more manufacturers are lured by the benefits of global design, manufacture and marketing strategies, it may appear that the emergence of a new breed of global motorist will find the selection of a new car is based on even more subtle differences in styling. (Further illustration of the global design trend may be found in Appendix B) Ford believes wholeheartedly in the global design trend. It's recent models have

succumbed to the enslavement, none more so than the Mondeo. However, as it seems that some of the tastes and needs of some of the consumers, at whom the car was aimed, appear to have been 'mismapped', it may well be that the global approach to design is less than ideal for the consumer.

Chapter 3:

The Importance of Diversity in Car Design

The lay person may well question the necessity of a discussion such as this - Cars may appear to be more similar on a worldwide scale, yet if the consumer is satisfied, then what is the problem? However to the designer and to all who respect and guard culture, there is perhaps a more precarious mechanism at work. Many have come to know this phenomenon as "cultural imperialism".

One prominent commentator in this area, Paul Gregory, defines culture as a "shared sensibility - as when we speak of a consumer culture". He goes on to explain cultural imperialism as the imposition by coersion of an alien culture in one form or another.(Gregory, 1991, p.75) There is perhaps a more noteworthy use of the same expression "cultural imperialism", namely when the consumers appear to be willing collaborators in the process. In the context of this discusion, this 'alien' culture is none other than that of the global auto corporations and it's associated homogeneous design aesthetic. It can be held to be alien in the sense that the worldwide homogeneous design trend is culturally non-specific. David Turner, European design director at Ford states that these trends are a "collection of all the actions and movements the automobile business is making, and you'll find there is nothing regional about that anymore".(Horsham, 1993, p.39) In fact, it could be said that if this 'melting pot style' does belong to any culture, it can only be one of uniformity.

On one level, customers are seduced into purchasing a universally appealing automobile because it's aesthetic is intentionally void of idiosyncracies or indeed any unusual characteristics which may be deemed unattractive. In short, one which is culturally unidentifiable.

On the face of it, this may be interpreted as being in the consumers interest, in that style is meeting demand. Yet, by way of closer examination of this cultural imperialism (a phenomenon, submitted here as something every

31

first world country is experiencing to a greater or lesser degree) it is reasonable to assume that the consumer is not receiving the quality of design which may be possible in the absence of global influences which exist purely by reason of sales predictions and which do not necessarily arise out of a consideration of product advancement. A problem may have many solutions. The most profitable may not always prove to be the most suitable for the individual consumer. In the poetic words of Enrico Morteo:

> No modern object seems more able to give a tangible form to todays ideals than the motor car. Not even the telephone or television, the cornerstones of todays computer civilisation, so cogently embody the ideals of liberty and movement, the urge to compete and the striving for elegance, the mythlogy of heroism and the condemnation of aggressiveness, the rational desire for efficiency and punctuality. The motor car is a generous object which encapsulates and gives body to a vast gamut of emotions and the most guarded dreams of our era. (Morteo, Sept.'92, p.13)

Perhaps, the most interesting manifestation of these tides of symbolic values occurred in Post-war America. The general Fifties trend of fins, tails, and gawdy surface styling was a response to an American national consciousness of liberty, freedom and superiority. However, the desire for individuality remained consistent and ultimately prompted one automobile manufacturer to react accordingly. Ford, (at that time an unmistakeably American company) reacted swiflty with the creation of the Thunderbird (See figure x.) - a distinctive automobile in an increasingly monontonous field of "big, chromed-up and loaded-down family sedans." (Gartman, 1992, p.180) Ford promoted it as 'America's most individual car' and called it a 'Personal Luxury Car'. It sold in droves because "Ford had risen to the demands of an entirely new type of automotive individuality, a real designed-in diversity to replace the superficially differentiated homogeneity of American products." (Gartman, 1992, p.181)
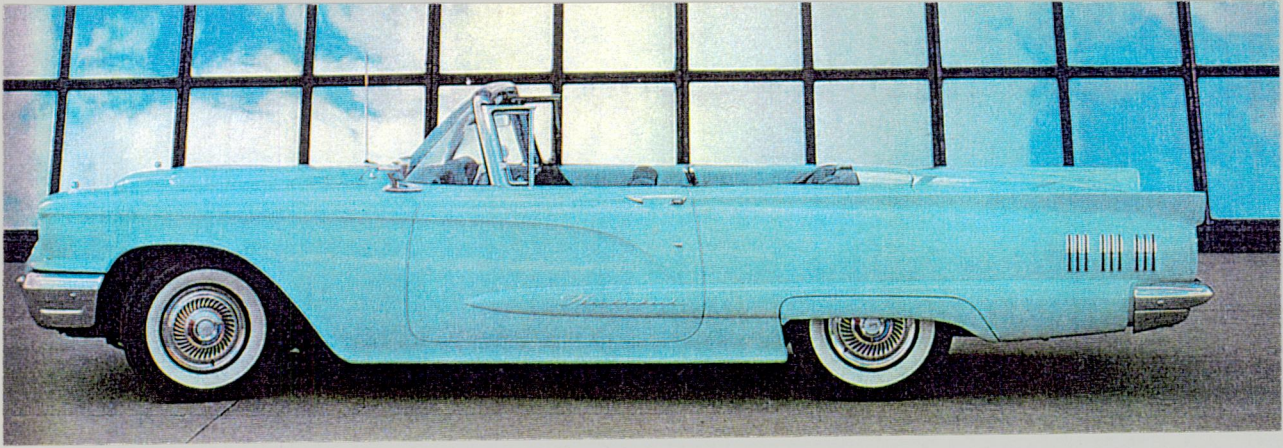
Figure. 18: The 1955 Ford Thunderbird.

Today, however, the stakes have been raised. The coveted ideal of many manufacturers is not merely a purely American or German car, but an all-embracing global one with less cultural heritage than ever before. And in attempting to design an automobile for a worldwide audience of rich and varied cultures, a globally motivated automobile corporation must inevitably choose a 'lowest common denominator' solution. If that solution is to satisfy market research predictions, it is precluded from having any traits which might be deemed unattractive or undesirable in any one of those cultures.

A statement made at the "Internationales Forum Fur Gestaltung" would help to illustrate this point:

> In applying elements of the global design trend, companies are forfeiting other possibilities which may well be possible solutions which better reflect specifically local, regional, national or geographical qualities that are perhaps more appropriate to the life of the user than the standard solution following international design trends.
> (Neumeister, 1989, p.27)

Logically therefore, it is feasible that consumers are missing out on many design possibilities. The fact that the consumer is being so deprived unwittingly does not make the loss in design any less real or indeed blameworthy.

However, this may still beg the question - if a product satisfies the fundamental need of the consumer, is it of any real importance that it's style is indistinguishable and typical? It is the contention here that it is of immense importance. As one commentator, David Bruno eloquently put it:

> To choose, buy, exchange, design or produce one object instead of another has become an act full of meaning, an act through which we declare specific identities and ways of being, thinking and behaving. Besides their functional features, objects have become instruments of communication, like the words inside a sentence they have become fragments of the language of society.(Bruno, November '92, p.13)

Bruno's words do not constitute a new concept. The French sociologist, Jean Baudrillard argued that <u>all</u> consumption is always in part the consumption of symbolic signs. These signs do not necessarily express an already pre-existing set of meanings for a person or group such as a social class. The meanings are generated within the system of signs or symbols which engage the attention of a consumer. Hence, far from consumption being conceptualised as a process in which a purchaser of a product is either trying to satisfy a basic, pre-given human need, a need rooted in biology or responding to a prompt, or a message they have received via media advertising, rather, the consumer is always <u>actively creating a sense of identity.</u> This may involve the symbolic construction of both a collective and / or individual identity.(Baudrillard, 1992, p. 212)

The essential element to be emphasized in this context is the role of desire. We are not already constituted as a handsome man or attractive woman. Rather we become the beings we desire to be, by purchasing the clothes, foods, perfumes and equally so by acquiring the Porsche 911, the Mercedes 230E, or even such an unassuming car as the Fiat Panda. By doing so, we will signify that we are 'x' or 'y' to ourselves and to others who share the same system of signifiers, signs and symbols with their concordant underlying meanings -

whether it be the fast egotistical socialite, wealthy stable conservative or young modest housewife - whether we are Irish, Italian, American, or indeed any nationality.

Baudrillard suggests that "in order to become an object of consumption, the object must become a sign". (Baudrillard, 1992, p.167) It is the relationship between signs which enables difference to be established. It is difference from others which at the level of everyday experience we can see as frequently one of the main 'uses' of consumption . People seek to establish that they have more 'taste ' than others ; that they support a better team , their team, by wearing special clothing; that they are Irish or French; well educated or "alright as I am , take it or leave it". It is no different with their choice of automobile.

Does this not provide support for the concept that consumers desire a greater degree of 'sameness' between automobiles so as to achieve a sense of social belonging? Not so. It is true that sub-cultures and consumer groupings do indeed exist. For example, British males aged 18 to 35, or European highly-successful white-collar executives who appreciate luxury. This reality however demands a *greater degree of differentiation* to accomodate the multitude of social backgrounds, personality types and outlooks scattered across the globe. It does not feasibly support a far more general coincidence of styles throughout a singularly shrinking world market.

The point Baudrillard is concerned to make in this regard is that it is through being caught up in systems of signs that difference and uniqueness can be established and the essence of modern consumer society is that same construction of difference. In sum, Baudrillard in his words stresses that consumption is

> the virtual totality of all objects and messages presently constituted in a more or less coherent discourse, Consumption in so far as it is meaningful is a systematic act of manipulation of signs...In order to

become object of consumption the object must become sign; ...yet obtaining it's coherence and consequently it's meaning from an abstract and systematic relation to all other object-signs. It is in this way that it becomes personalised and enters in the series, etc. , it is never consumed in it's materiality but in it's DIFFERENCE. (emphasis mine) (Baudrillard , 1992, p.149)

For the sake of clarity and coherence, it is perhaps apt at this stage of the discussion to take stock of what has so far been uncovered. The policy of universalisation of design which is being so readily adopted by present day automobile manufacturers , is one inspired more by market share than progress in design or the realisation of as yet undiscovered styles. It manifests itself in the 'mixed bag' aesthetic of the culturally non-specific, world automobile. In this regard, it may be seen as alien to the underlying facets of any specific world culture, social, regional or otherwise. It's imposition on the naive consumer constitutes something of a cloaked form of cultural colonialism. We have further discovered that individuals identify with their automobile at a deeper, perhaps even subconscious level. The consumer effectively "finds his soul in his automobile, hi-fi set,split level home or kitchen equipment".(Baudrillard, 1992, p.150)

Logic therefore implies that if global corporations insist on further following this 'copycat', 'more of the same' design policy, the possibilities of advancement in quality, individuality and diversity of style are thereby curtailed. Consequently, in response to the question posed - as to what extent is impact effected by the policy of globalisation on the quality and diversity of design?

The answer must be that ultimately, at the most fundamental level, the consumers potential freedom of expression, by choosing an automobile style tailor-made to his own personality and position within society, is lessened and restricted to a significant degree. In effect, if automobiles are chosen or bought , in each of the world's vastly diverse cultures, from an already limited range of

36

similar and humdrum products, then that choice being an act full of meaning may mean nothing more than the assertion of our lack of individuality and autonomy. The fact that the consumer is to date unaware of this curbing of freedom, it is submitted here, is entirely irrelevant.

The restriction of consumer choice is further compounded by the paranoid concern of many company executives to conservatively and uncompromisingly maintain corporate identity throughout its entire range of automobiles. This has become a well established corporate strategy:

> Company stylists must follow a clear company product strategy. The styling has to reinforce the company product values in the same consistent way. The range of products should not send conflicting signals to consumers. ie. the style of each product must reflect the overall image the company wish to present. In a homogeneous market, all products must generate the same basic product values. Each product must contain elements of modern styling trends without detracting from the product range, while each updated product must reflect something of it's direct predecessor. Most importantly, each additional product in the range must also add something to the overall image without setting conflicting values, which damage the perception of existing products. (ALLEN, David, Dec. '93, p.9)

It is not being suggested here that companys should forsake their corporate identity but rather that they could boost that same identity by by designing cars wich are easily recognised as standing apart from other cars in their class. In a market where replication of style has become an-all-too-common feature, this prized identity has in many cases already lessened in value by virtue of it's repetitiveness.

What can reduce this ever-increasing co-incidence of style? A switch from market-led design to one inspired by such concepts as individuality and grounded in a policy of discovery of that which has not been seen before. It cannot be denied that the market research undertaken by many global firms does point to a wish for little change and attachment to alreadypart of the

consumer. This must be accepted. Yet whoever proclaimed the consumer to be the final arbiter the future? The average individual car consumer who works a 9-5 job has little time to sit and contemplate the future of automotive design. Is it not the role of the designer to investigate hitherto unknown shapes and curves and angles and then present these to the consumer for approval? The consumer, it is submitted, is not in a position to decide on design policy, an area in which he has expertise and experience. If the consumer had dictated design in the past, we would not have experienced such revolutionary designs such as the Volkswagen Beetle, or the classic Jaguar Mk II. It is submitted here that a greater degree of independance must be afforded the designer, and room in which he may draw upon his wider experience.This suggestion is by no means without support. To quote David Arbuckle, Design Director of Rover Group:

> Designers need to be given creative room to allow them to operate effectively. Manufacturers need to understand the benefits of exciting and unique designs and not always play safe.(Arbuckle.D, Oct. '96, See Appendix A)

He lays the blame for increasing subtleties in brand recognition characteristics with

> the growing internationalism of auto design which has been significantly assisted by the ultra-conservatism of almost all manufacturers faced by enormous investment costs in a new model. (Arbuckle D., Oct. '96, See Appendix A)

It is also his belief that "exciting and unique designs will become more and more the deciding factor in the purchase decision"

In fact such an alternative approach may serve to be inevitable. As Giddens prophetically commented, as quoted in chapter 1, universalization simultaneously encourages and fosters a desire for uniqueness and difference. This we shall call the "Giddens Effect". Essentially, it is believed, that a point will be reached where consumers become aware of the sameness of products to be found in the market-place and consequently revolt against the latter in a bid

to retrieve and claim their own individuality in something of a 'donkey-kick' manner. It's only pre-requisite is consciousness among buyers of the similarity and monotony of styles that are being offered to them. As the sociologist, Daniel Bell captured quite simply in the following statement:

> We human beings are quite capable of striking out in the opposite direction , by creating a culture of unfettered individualistic 'modernism'.
> (per Daniel Bell as quoted in Wager W., 1992, p136)

As with chapter 1, the theory above relating to a new approach to automotive design , by nurturing risk taking and diversity in the creation of style, will be examined in a more practical fashion in the case study which comprises chapter 4.

It should be noted that there are basic differences between the Ford Mondeo and the Renault Twingo. They are both aimed at different markets and are very differently sized vehicles. Be that as it may, these issues are not considered central to this discussion. The emphasis is placed on the actual process of designing each car.

Chapter 4.

Case Study - Renault Twingo - An alternative approach to design?

In a market in which blandness, cheapness and homogeneity have almost become manufacturing creeds, the concept of the Renault Twingo with it's risky, shameless eccentricity breaks many of the cardinal rules of today's auto design.

Patrick Le Quement, Renault's Design Director specifically avoided pandering to the prevalent homogeneous design trend by daring to create an explicitly regional design.

> The lack of imaginative small cars is usually put down to cost, but sometimes it seems that radical styling matters less than establishing an all-purpose trademark. So many mid-sized cars share the same generic features - 'cab-forward shape , smooth lines and a certain German style austerity' that the corporate identity , such as Rover's distinctive front grille or Ford's bonnet styling can be the only way of telling one marque from another. (Redhead, 1994, p.18)

Figure 19. Renault Twingo -

Early concept rendering
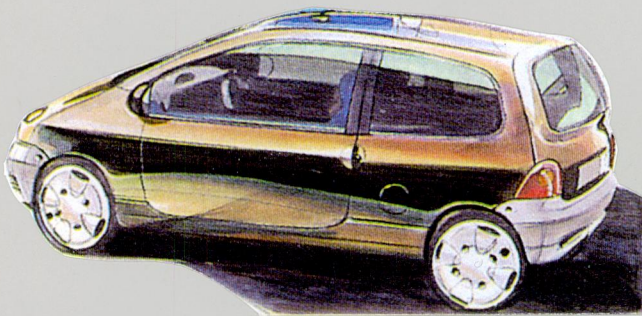
With this in mind, Patrick Le Quement understood that by eliminating many design constraints, the lead time required before production could be shortened while also improving the quality of the scheme This was a brave departure for Renault.   Le Quement, by purposely choosing to eliminate key design constraints, knew that although the design may reinforce company product values and identity, it would not be consistent with many of their more recent

designs. This could have sent conflicting signals to consumers which, in turn may have damaged the perception of existing designs in their range.

The Renault range includes similarly sized cars, such as the Renault Clio, which is at first glance, a predominantly 'global-looking' small car, designed as part of their range of different sized automobiles from monovolume people carriers to saloons to hatchbacks such as the Clio (as illustrated in figure 20).

Figure 20.
Renault Clio

This formal liberty allowed the Design Centre to manifest its ideas in both the concept and the production auto. This is attributed to the freedom of expression that has shaped it's external volume, a proto-form for which the designers have played with inventively unusual treatments and details. Hence, with the elimination of design constraints, the compromises generally associated with automotive design which hobble the designers creativity have also been eliminated.

The Twingo stands apart from other cars , in that it's volume purposely features an odd relationship between it's three dimensions (Length 3m43cm, width 1m63cm, height, 1m87cm). A similar small car would usually be slightly longer with a marginally narrower width. It proposes the idea of the modern one-box body for very small cars, although it can't really be described

as a one-box at all - the unbroken line of the small bonnet and wide windscreen looks

Figure 21. Renault Twingo production version

more sculptural in its outer form than architectural in the arrangement of its inner passenger space. (Many other small cars could be described as being 2-box in that the area surrounding the engine forms a separate 'box' to that encapsulating the passenger area.) The wheels are confined to the ends of the body, there is hardly a hint of an engine and where one would expect headlamps, two endearing frog eyes pop up instead. This is reminiscent of the kind of quirkiness and character typical of previous French car design. i.e. the reknowned Citroen 2CV. Similarly, the imaginative door handle design (illustrated in figure 21.) with it's bold, idiosyncratic quality characterise the car as being different and individual. Its form doesn't allude to the drabness and familiarity associated with the typical global aesthetic. As one commentator put it, "I think of it not so much as an aesthetic form as an aesthetic act of communication".(Tumminelli, 1993, p.8) The Twingo design philosophy combats the cultural non-specificity of the global approach adopted by Ford in that it is purposely French looking. It's unusual form challenges consumer preferences by communicating new stylistic solutions.

The design team argued that it's unclassifiability and it's charismatic form were the Twingo's greatest strengths. Even though market research
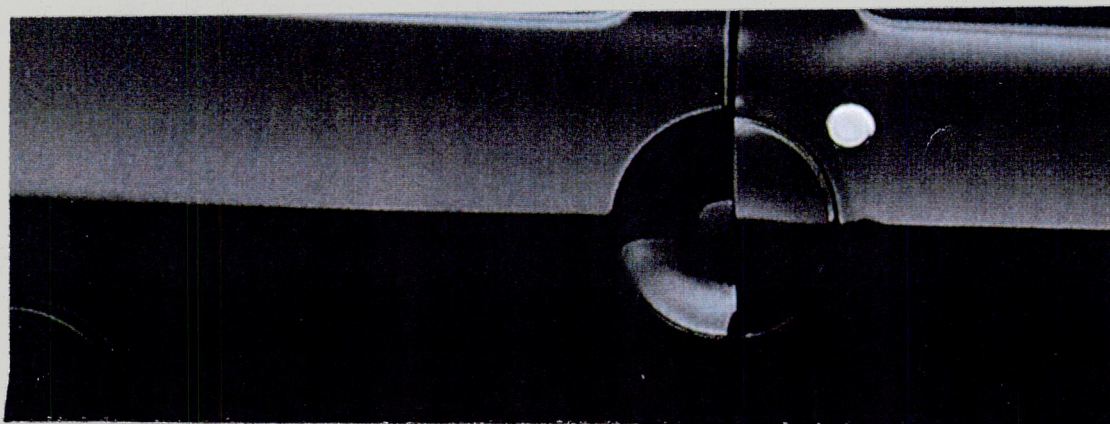

Figure 22. Bold door handle design

suggested that 40% of the public would actively dislike it , Patrick Le Quement prevailed against the chairman, telling him that "consumers needed time to build a relationship with the car" and that "the greatest risk was not to take a risk at all". (Redhead, 1994, p.16)
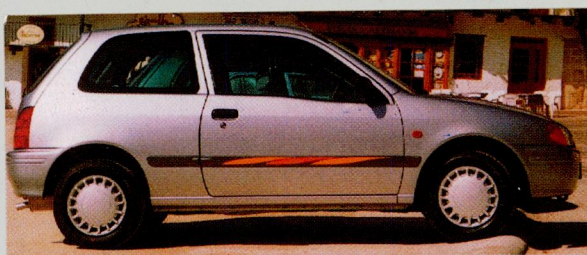

Catch all conservatism born of fear?

Figure. 23. Mitsubishi Colt   Figure 24. Toyota Starlet

The gallic character of the Twingo is an antidote to a catch-all conservatism born of fear. At a time when the automobile aesthetic is becoming increasingly culturally non-specific, the Renault design centre were swimming against the tide, in drawing consciously on areas of traditional French expertise. The vividness of the Twingo's interiors were devised by textile designers recruited from the fashion industry and are based on the paintings of Monet, Le Witt and Klee.

The danger inherent in the strategy was that the public outside France would not buy into Renault's new French vision. As Ford believe that tastes

43

have converged to such an extent around the world, that regionalism is no longer feasible, Renault's design team dismiss the notion as a "loch-ness monster" , "a myth". This is interesting in that it reiterates Renault's vision of the future being quite different to that envisaged by Ford.
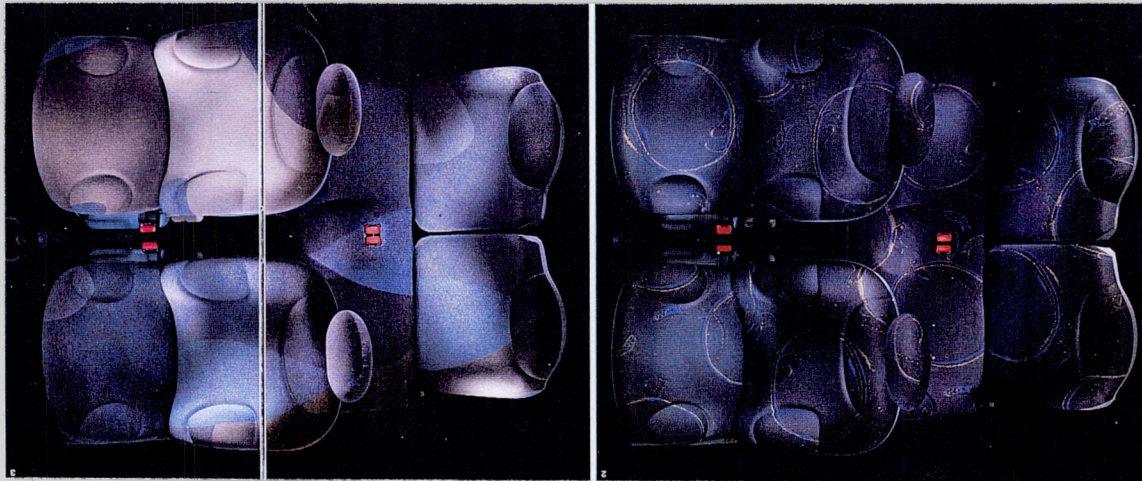

Figure 25. Interiors based on French paintings.

Le Quement also remarks that :

> Originality is a matter of principle - Individuality will re-emerge. Europe is far too rich for everything to merge into one sea of greyness- as Andre Malraux, (once France's Minister for Culture) once said , 'In the 21st century, society at large will be cultural or there will be no culture at all'" (Redead, 1994, p.19)
> (According to the Gidden's Effect, a manufacturing of uniqueness or difference is fostered due to the universalizing nature of globalisation)

According to Renault's new vision , in designing a new car the key is to have a firm grasp of it's most important characteristics, because trying to express too many (often incompatible) things results in bland neutrality. The author, Gaston Juchet remarks:

> That only a careful rendition of the spirit of the product through an understanding of the subtle way the driver relates to his car and decodes it's more intangible emotive qualities can give.....that blinding flash, that special feeling which gives one particular vehicle profile a crucial advantage over all the others cannot be created with a recipe book . (Juchet, 1993, p. 323)

44

This is a perfect illustration of the kind of foundation on which the Twingo was conceived, designed and put into production. The tendency for market research and testing to inhibit designers from developing new imagery, and expressive possibilities has been kept to a minimum, due to the firm belief that the role of the designer is to shape the car of the future and not to re-iterate the all too common design of the past. As one commentator on modern car design, Jack Telnack, has argued:

> The designer must lead the target, prepare shapes that are not immediately embraced by the public if those shapes are not to become familiar too soon. The problem with focus groups and clinics is that consumers like or dislike something immediately, - there is no time for them to digest a new and challenging shape. What consumers like today, may seem dull tomorrow. (Patton, 1994, p.57)

Most importantly, the Renault Design Centre were given a 'Carte Blanche' with the design of the Twingo. This meant that consumers immediate preferences were not weighted against the aesthetic as they may otherwise have been. (It was known that 40% of the public would actively dislike it.) Belief in the wise words of John Butcher may have ensured that the Twingo reached production.

> It is no good designing something that the consumer thinks he wants now. You have to aim for what he will discover he wants in the future. (Whiteley, '93, p.82)

Interestingly, although the Twingo received some initial market resistance, it went on to be a runaway success in the European market - originally aimed at the young and single market, increasing numbers of middle aged boomers purchased the playful small car, the appeal being both the level of specification and the 'fun' design.

The key to the success in this case, as with any profit making global corporation, was that the Twingo's difference came cheap. This was feasible

because they kept the Twingo as basic as possible. It comes in only one derivative, with a single engine size (Renault's existing 1,200cc, 4cylinder Cleon) and trim level. However, the absence of luxuries , eg. a rev. counter or oil and temperature gauges, did not discourage the public. In fact Renault's brave departure became France's second best selling car , selling at the rate of 9,000 per month, (2,000 less than the Clio).
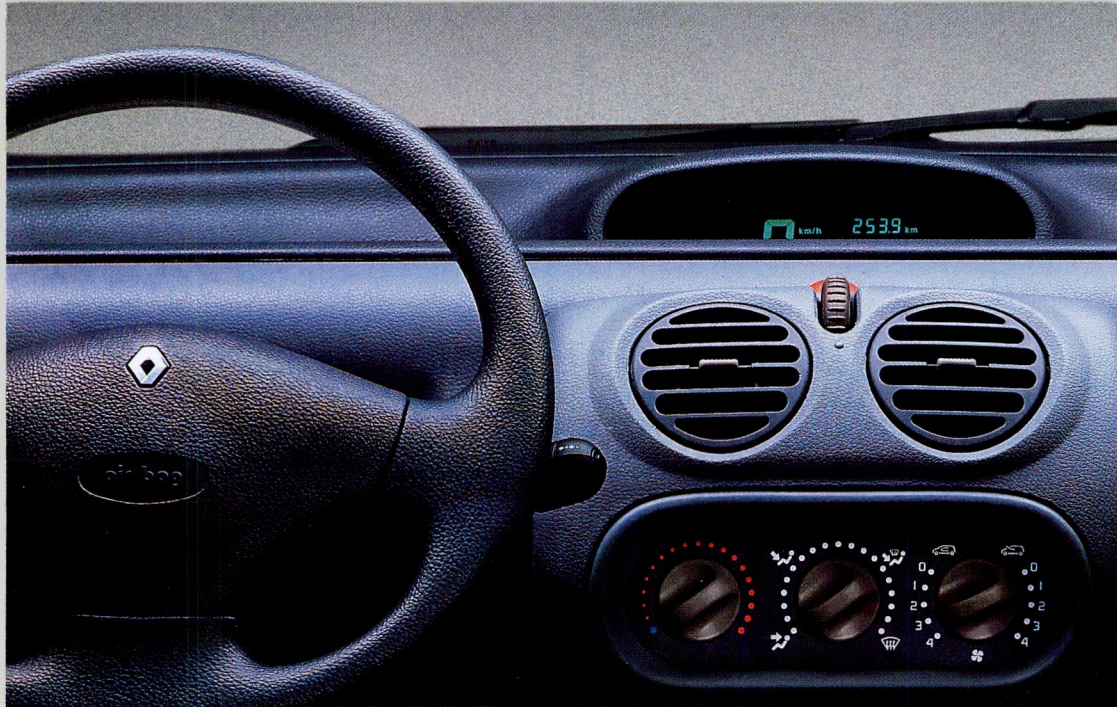

Figure 26. Twingo fascia

For Le Quement, the Twingo was the first project that he developed hand in hand with the Design Centre, that fully reflected his own philosophy , "I was delighted that people perceived the car as totally French, because that's how we measured our design success".(Redhead, 1994, p.18)

Le Quement's design philosophy, and indeed that of the Renault Design Centre actively encapsulates the brave but nonetheless risky approach which was elucidated previously.

In choosing to 'transcend the trend', a partnership between Design Director and Chairman was established in the creation of a commercially viable, but risky project. The relaxing of constraints proved beneficial in allowing the designers freedom to innovate and facilitate valid progression in

46

design, - a progression which effectivley demonstrates the possibilities of design to the consumer. In this way, such a design-led programme encourages discovery of unique shapes which may better reflect the desires of the consumer. It surpasses the cyclical nature of design trends based on strict adherence to market research preferences, which all-too-often operate as substitutes for design decisions.

Conclusion:

Effectively, the 'global car' represents the common denominator, so to speak, of consumer tastes and desires worldwide. It is born in the minds of cost-cutting executives and boardroom investors who enjoy the safety of design which is culturally unidentifiable and promises massive turnover worldwide. The criterion of economic viability is worshipped at the expense of potential product advancement and investigation into hitherto unknown styles. Market research acts as the foundation stone to this policy of risk elimination. The design quite simply must represent a 'sure thing' before it will be backed by the deep-pocketed investors. Design directors, moreover, can feebly justify this styling motto of 'sameness' by referring to consumer statistics, while at the same time conveniently ignoring their role as designers; to lead, at least to a certain extent, the creation of vibrant and fresh designs for the future of the industry. Instead, they happily resign themselves to a policy of the blind leading the blind.

This flawed approach to design is further compounded by the nature of the marketplace itself. Unfortunately, oligopolies do not lend themselves well to notions such as risk-taking or courageous new avenues in styling. Automotive firms are all too conscious of their competitors and inevitably find comfort in the knowledge that if one design succeeded for a certain firm, it can and will succeed for another. The borrowing of ideas and prominent characteristics of pre-existing styles is facilitated and partly hidden by token alterations and stresses of certain curves and lines. Ultimately, the prospect of failure in the marketplace can reach such a pitch in an industry occupied by only a few competitors that it can and does paralyse a firm when it comes to considering the design ethos of a new project.

Moreover, it is not unusual for firms to harbour something of a paranoid concern as to the maintenance of its corporate identity throughout its range of automobiles. Consequently, something of a 'ripple effect' arises whereby the

typicality in design spreads throughout the firms entire range. By this mechanism, sameness breeds more sameness. For example, the smaller two-door, is designed to represent a more compact version of its larger relative. In this way again, the security of predicted sales figures dictates the design in lieu of one founded on innovation and progression.

So what is the upshot of all this riskless enterprise? Firstly, as we have learned, it is well established that consumers do in some aspect of their persona identify with the product they choose to buy. Personal characteristics, social standing, and outlook determine taste. Furthermore, while it is true to claim that consumers, yearn to belong to groupings of purchasers which share the same personal characteristic, nonetheless common sense informs us that the human personality is sufficiently varied to require more than one style alone with which to identify. Logic would also lead us to believe that to restrict in any manner, diversity in styling is to rob many rich and varied potential consumer groupings of their opportunity to find a car which fits them like a glove. And whilst it is true that in the upper echelons of the expensive automobile (B.M.W., Mercedez Benz), distinction in styling is invariably maintained (distinction being its very motive for production) and guarded viciously, such uniqueness, it is submitted, proves to be unavailable to the financially curtailed average consumer. It is suggested here that the former equally deserves similar acces to uniqueness in styling, albeit at a leser cost.

Is there an alternative approach available to the design of future automobiles? It is this students contention that there is. It seems only wise to advocate a greater degree of autonomy for the role of the designer in the creative process and further accommodation of his / her unique perspective. The designer, it is submitted, owes a duty to both industry and consumer to guide the evolution in car design so as to accurately reflect the multitude of tastes among consumers and the onward progression of time. Let it be clear that a wholesale departure from the criteria of economic viability and market

49

research is by no means being proposed here. What benefit can an oddly-styled car bring to anyone, if it proves to be a complete flop in the marketplace? Instead, a partnership between boardroom executive and designer, each bringing his own individual expertise to the project is being suggested. It is certainly not difficult to understand how the work of a designer, strictly under the watchful eye of the boardroom executive armed with sales figures can be hampered, in an atmosphere fatal to the encouragement of novel and unique perspectives on style. Two elements, a willingness to embrace the qualities of new design with a healthy examination of its viability, within the market. It is only by compromise that both can be merged. Neither should be sacrificed in favour of the other.

In addition, a certain degree of similarity in design is bound to arise in the tightly competitive field that is the automotive industry. Indeed, there will invariably be good reason for the same, some of the time. Quite simply, if the stylistic qualities which are borrowed from a competitor are based on reasoned innovation, improving design, whether technically or aesthetically, it clearly would be foolish to ignore such advances. What instead is being criticised is the lazy wholesale adoption of already existent shapes and characteristics to sustain turnover to the detriment of real progression. This 'new partnership' should not be whimsical at the expense of good sense.

The innovation in design and uniqueness to be cultivated may, but need not necessarily be rooted in national character. In basic terms, this is not merely a case of national culture versus global culture but rather the willingness to welcome challenging concepts, even if this means forsaking the safety of a proven design. Granted, the fresh and challenging proposal may be one which incorporates a sense of national character in some way (e.g. in the case of the Twingo, it's essential Frenchness) , but the point to be noted here is that it is not a pre-requisite to innovative design. The revolutionary style could just as easily

arise from the designers wider experience with no regard for any particular nation or culture.

As regards, what perhaps may be termed the less than rational fear of company financiers of losing its aged corporate identiy, a fresh appraisal may be required. They may be well advised to note how the latter has, in any event, grown decrepit through the replication of styling within the 'eye-spy' oligopoly that is the world's car industry. Surely the rationale behind such corporate identity is to forge an unmistakeable look which allows the consumer to identify the car in question at a glance. Is its purpose not then defeated by squandering uniqueness in styling so as to opt instead for the assurance offered by rehashed, all-too-prevalent designs? Indeed to risk breaking the worn out design mould could serve to craft and copperfasten an undoubtable identity for the firm in the future, where its automobiles stand clearly apart from the competitors in its class.

Will the consumers tacit demand for greater choice prove to be a sufficient catalyst to turn the global tide?

According to anthropological folklore , in traditional societies one's identity was conveniently fixed solid and stable. Identity was simply a function of pre-defined social roles. One was born and died a member of one's clan with one's life trajectory in advance. In pre-modern societies, identity ws not problematical, nor the subject of much reflection. Individuals did not undergo identity crises or experience the need to modify their identity. One was a hunter and a member of the tribe and that was that.(Kellner, 1992, p.141)

Today's society, however is radically different. Sociologists such as Jameson (1983, 1984) and Kellner (1989) have acknowledged how "the acceleration in pace and complexity of modern society has rendered the need for individual and collective identity far more pivotal in it's social value".(Kellner, 1992, p.143) The experience of 'modernite' is one which demands novelty, innovation and transitoriness. Identity, whether individual or collective has become a freely chosen game, a theatrical presentation of the self

in which one requires the ability to present oneself in a variety of roles, images and activities. In any advanced consumer society, ones choice of goods is perhaps the most critical 'prop' in this so-called theatre. Where one's choice is significantly impaired, one may experience what is termed 'anomie', a type of social anxiety and frustration which may ultimately leave the consumer no longer feeling truly at home in the world. (as per Frisby, 1985 in Kellner, 1992, p.142) Whilst admittedly, this is an extreme worst-case scenario, it has been suggested throughout this discussion that this innate need to identify somehow with a product applies no less in the case of such an important product as one's automobile.

This certainly would seem to coincide with Gidden's theory to which we referred to earlier. While the need for greater choice remains latent in the consciousness of consumers, it's impact may linger benignly. Yet it would seem that if and when this demand becomes realised, it may prove a formidable enemy to any car manufacturer who insists on a policy of churning out more of the same. It may only be a matter of time.

Ultimately the antidote to this phobia of change remains in the hands of designers and manufacturers alike. This requires something of a leap of faith on the part of both. To lead and not be led. To welcome the challenge inherent in the risk-taking which is essential to progression of any kind. As one respected commentator, Robert Cumberford has prudently warned:

> It is important - vitally important - to take risks, even though car companies are filled with people who spend all their time trying to minimze or eliminate them. As we look to the future of car design, we must be open to the enormous possibility of changes in.....matters of elegance, proportion, harmony, symmetry....all the intangibles that make design an art, not a quantifiable science.(Cumberford R., June '96, p.13)

The consumer, it is submitted, deserves this much.

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Appendix A:

1 Is the expression of national character important in today's automotive design?

> This is now being recognised , certainly in Rover as a very important ingredient in the design of a range of vehicles, and something that to a great extent has been lost or 'watered down' in recent years.

2. Why, in your opinion have brand recognition characteristics become more subtle in recent years?

> This has been caused by the growing internationalism of auto design and also the tendency for designers to get on the same wavelength and all be heading in the same direction as some sort of design ideal. This has been significantly assisted by the ultra-conservatism of almost all manufacturers faced with enormous investment costs in a new model.

3. Do you believe there is a place for regionalism or individualism in car design at the beginning of the next century?

> Absolutely! - This is what customers want and deserve. - Good quality, reliability and customer service are becoming 'givens'. Individual and exciting design will become more and more the deciding factor in the purchase decision.

4.To what extent do you believe designers to be the leaders in todays automotive design trends?

> No-one else will do it! But designers need to be given creative room to allow them to operate efficiently. Manufacturers need to understand the benefits of exciting and unique designs, and not always play safe.

53

5. *In terms of styling, can you envisage a new design vocabulary emerging in the near future?*

The design vocabulary is always shifting - It's never totally static. So called 'edge design' is becoming significant and totally soft forms are becoming less evident on concept vehicles, which are always a useful guide. Themes used in the past come back, but as in fashion design, always in a new form.

6.*Is it possible for companies to take risks? What framework / criteria do companies consider in relation to styling?*

Companies take risks all the time - The costs are huge and sometimes the pay-back is limited. Therefore accountants will want to limit risk and the appearance of a vehicle is a most obvious area of concern. Manufacturers can be succesful with boring designs, but as I mention above, it's becoming more and more important to stand out in design terms.

Figure 27. 1980, Saab 900, Characteristic wedge shape.

Figure 28. 1990, Saab 900, Showing some more recent global characteristics. (front lights?)

Figure 29. 1985 Volvo 740: Previous reputation as 'Boxy but good' cars

Figure 30.1996 Volvo S40, Advertisement caption reads:"Underneath It's a Volvo" (possibly because it is indistinguishable from many other recent designs?)

Figure 31. 1996 Audi A8. In the time since the arrival of the Mondeo, the bonnet form has evolved and now fully encapsulates the front grille as it drapes downwards towards the bumper. (Remarkably similar to Volvo S40)

Figure 32. 1996 Rover 820, Seen here sporting triangular rear lights

Figure 33. 1996 Mitsubishi Carisma (similarly sharp rear light formation).

Figure 34. 1996 Renault Megane

Figure 35. 1994 Renault Laguna

Figure 36. 1997 Ford Ka
A bold new design from Ford
intended to target the market
Renault created with the Twingo.
The styling shows the beginnings
of 'edge design' as referred to by
David Arbuckle. (which is the next
step in the global morphology).

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