

**An Investigation of the
Modern Movement**

Ann Scroope

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"AN INVESTIGATION OF THE MODERN MOVEMENT"

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CONTENTS

<u>CHAPTER</u>		<u>PAGE</u>
1.	INTRODUCTION	1
2.	MAPPING THE TRAIL	2 - 6
3.	THE PIONEERS	7 - 11
4.	THE HEROS	12 - 17
5.	THE BATTLE WON	18 - 22
6.	ILLUSTRATIONS	23 - 30
7.	THE WAR LOST	31 - 33
8.	SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION	34 - 35
9.	REFERENCES	36
10.	BIBLIOGRAPHY	37 - 38

"... part of the great progressive do-gooder complex of ideas based upon the proposition that the majority is always wrong, that the public must be led, cajoled, caroted and stucked onward and upward".

Reyner Bauham on the Modern Movement.

"ALL THAT GLITTERS IS NOT STAINLESS" 1967

1. INTRODUCTION

As a student of Industrial Design I have often wondered about the who, why, where and when of many of the design movements introduced to me through my studies. As a product of today's cynical age, I cannot willingly accept everything at face value. Because of today's transient and mobile world I find myself looking more for reasons and explanations a basis for ideas, for ideas do not fall from the sky!

Much has already been written about the modern movement and more recently the Bauhaus era, appraisals, reappraisals and nostalgic reflections. In alot of these writings many of my own questions have been left unanswered. It is because of this I have decided to attempt a more critical stance in my investigation of where the Modern Movement sprung from, what initiated it, who were the main figures and what were it's aims and achievements or lack of them?

In context with the society of 1900 to 1960 I present my interpretation of research carried out on the Modern Movement. Because of the limitations on time and available research material I do not claim to present an all encompassing or conclusive study but I hope this direction taken will raise queries about the validity of design ethics and philosophies and open new and more informative investigations into the histories of design

2. MAPPING THE TRAIL

The Industrial Revolution swept the medieval social system out of existence and with it the class of cultured and leisurely patrons as well as the class of cultured and guild trained craftsmen. Industry meant the bourgeoisie as opposed to the Church and the Nobility.

With the extinction of the craftsman, the shape and appearance of all products were left to the uneducated manufacturer. Designers had not penetrated into industry and artists kept aloof. By means of new machinery manufacturers were able to turn out thousands of cheap articles in the same time and at the same cost as were formerly required for the production of one hand-crafted object. Demand was increasing from year to year, but demand was from an uneducated public with either too much money and no time or no money and no time. The artist was left with the choice of adopting the views of the public and supporting the structure of society, designed to satisfy the "coarse" tastes of the masses. A structure which allowed the indiscriminating masses to command and to judge. The Exhibition of 1851 served to illustrate two things - how the 19th century patron's appreciation of the products displayed went no further than their own commercial freedom and also how the bourgeoisie manipulated the machine to mass produce imitations of the 18th century craftsmans skill. The artist withdrew in disgust, he began to dispise the public.

William Morris was the key artist to realize how precarious and decayed the social foundations of art had become. Through a series of lectures between 1877 and 1894 Morris pointed out that art had lost its roots. Artists had lost touch and were still wrapped up in their dreams of Greece and Italy. He was not the only one to express a new doctrine of bringing art to the people and educating them in art appreciation. But

while Morris wanted art for the people and by the people, he felt cheap art was impossible because

"all art costs time, trouble and thought" 1

Instead of his doctrine leading towards an industrial art, Morris and his followers refused to accept modern means of production. The result was the revival of the Arts and Crafts Movement.

It was clearly understood though that to educate the masses (the new patrons of the arts) through new products, the medium of mechanisation had to be used. Cr. R. Ashbee proceeded from Morris in his belief that the constructive and decorative arts were the real backbone of any artistic culture. But Ashbee's doctrine went on to say that the machine should be mastered and recognised as a system for encouraging the teaching of the Arts.

This was looked upon as the adoption of the basic premises of the Modern Movement, i.e., through the mastery of the machine by the artist, the masses can be educated to appreciate the sensitive qualities of art. The old styles of decoration and ornamentation were disregarded and a new style was developed. Through the purge of all unnecessary ornament, truth to materials and purity of form, the Modern Movement was born.

"The lower the standard of people, the more lavish are its ornaments. To find beauty in form instead of making it depend on ornament, is the goal towards which humanity is aspiring" 2

According to Lewis Mumford, to master the machine the artist had to first learn the lessons of objectivity, impersonality and neutrality - the lessons of the mechanical realm. As the 1900's progressed much of the progress towards these new ideals was halted in England. Instead the most important step towards the establishment of an universally

recognised style was the foundation of the Deutscher Werkbund in Germany in 1907.

Hermann Muthesius was attached to the German Embassy in London between 1896 and 1903. He became a convinced supporter of the new doctrine of "perfect and pure utility". Upon his return to Germany he was appointed a position as Superintendant within the Prussian Board of Trade for Schools of Arts and Crafts.

There he became the mouthpiece for official attitudes to design reform. In a speech made by Muthesius in 1907 he condemned what he called the surrogate style of historicism and the Jugendstil and made known his belief that industry rather than the Artist had the vigour and the energy to inspire a new cultural revolution. In the ensuing furore there were lobbies made to the Kaiser for Muthesius' resignation while his supporter announced the formation of the Werkbund - an alliance of artists, architects, designers, trademen and manufacturers that would promote Muthesius' cause. The aim of the organisation according to a statement drawn up in 1910, was to promote the best in art, industry craftsmanship and trade and to co-ordinate "all those efforts to achieve quality". A theory, however, was needed to define "quality" and a programme had to be established to implement these ideals.

Muthesius also stood for standardisation, only by standardisation can a generally accepted and reliable taste be introduced, the universal importance which they believed was possessed in the harmonious ages of Greek and Egyption civilisations. Objectivity, reason and intellect were to replace intuition, individuality and creativity as the inspiration form. Ideal form acquired the classical connotations of the pure, the absolute and the Universal. Muthesius' attack on individuality was looked upon as a threat to creativity and a denial of the autonomy of the

artist. The belief was held at the Werkbund that design was essentially normative, that left to itself without relying on frills, the ordinary designer would produce good contemporary design in which the pure, universal abstract aesthetic would be revealed automatically.

Nicholaus Pevsner teaches that the Bauhaus and consequently 1930's British design developed directly out of the Werkbund ideals. But if one looks closely at the Bauhaus ideals they did not reflect those of the Werkbund. The Bauhaus developed the language of abstract form and applied this language to specific areas of design in which they had a specific interest. The result, despite the claims by Gropius was that the Bauhaus was really about dictating a style rather than through experimentation of the pure and abstract, letting a style reveal itself automatically. The definition of the Bauhaus ideals and their language of abstract form which was to be necessary for mass produced objects in a Machine Age were presented by the Bauhaus itself in its own publications. Beyond its own propaganda statements, where is the proof that the Bauhaus represented the true pioneers of applying new industrial methods of mass production and thus discovered the form of the twentieth century? Whatever the answer may be the Bauhaus did influence the Modern Movement in England but until research is attempted into the main firms in Germany - Standard Mobel Thonet etc., one cannot state for certain that the Bauhaus experiment demonstrated a positive effect of the new ideals and theories in the design of mass produced objects.

From Morris to Gropius the problem of integrating the designer within industry to produce a pure and absolute solution became a moral one. Attempting to relate creativity and changing concepts of craftsmanship to the demands of industrial production were Utopian and ambiguous ideals.

As theories and definitions were being sought the idea of bringing

art to the masses was left aside for many years and later the idea was changed to bringing the masses to the new art.

3. THE PRIONEERS

The works of Herbert Read were to have the most profound influence on the Modern Movement in England. Read was a poet and a writer and through such works as "The Philosophy of Modern Art" and in particular "Art and Industry" he was to dictate the path the Modern Movement was to follow. It is for this reason that this chapter is concerned mostly with Herbert Read and his work "Art and Industry".

Herbert Read's "Art and Industry" is based almost entirely on German aesthetic theory and German illustrations. For Read industrial design was the province of the abstract artist

"Objects designed primarily for use appeal to the abstract aesthetic"³

To validate this theory, Read draws upon the works from the twelfth and thirteenth centuries in Northern Europe and Greece which he says have never been excelled in history and that these periods were without an aesthetic - what those people did they did as a solution of practical problems. It was according to Read the innate sensibilities of the society, those of clarity, order and functional integrity which made their solutions monuments of excellence. These sensibilities were lost to modern man

"due to the imposition of false and irrelevant ideals of art.... fostered by our academies, institutes and schools of art"⁴

He takes his opinion of the masses "sensibilities" further when he addresses the problem of the function of ornament and decoration on machine made objects. Ornament, he states, is a psychological necessity for man cannot tolerate an empty space. This need or instinct to break up a plain empty surface is strongest in

"certain savage races and in decadent periods of civilisation.....a really civilised person would as soon tattoo his body as cover the form of a good work of art with meaningless ornament"⁵

Just as the application of traditional aesthetics to the machine was identified as a problem so also was the ordinary man on the street for he was not as sensitive or even as civilised as would be necessary for the success of the new aesthetic. In theory the aim was to bring a new aesthetic to the people but the people would have to learn to appreciate this aesthetic. By defining the aesthetics of centuries gone by and drawing upon the images of the Parthenon and the cathedrals of the Middle Ages the Modern Movement created an image of authority, one which was never questioned publically for many years, maybe for fear of being classified as "savage or decadent".

To understand more clearly how the Modern Movement attained this position of authority we must establish the source of their aspirations. As architecture was regarded as the mother of the arts and as France at the time was the leader of the new concrete architecture it seems feasible to look at this area and in particular the influences and philosophies of Jeanneret Le Corbusier.

Le Corbusier acquired the ability to observe, analyse and depict not merely what was apparent but how structures came to be like they are, how they are organised and with what consequences. This analytical observation became the basis for his creative technique. In his formative years it would seem he was greatly influenced by the philosophical attitudes of Henri Provencal and Edouard Schure. Provencal, through his book "L'arc de Demain" (1904), suggested that the role of the artist is to correct man with the "absolute". The absolute is revealed through laws of unity harmony and number. He believed the materialistic and spiritual forces in the world could be united by art and that a new art would appear that no longer imitated past forms. The new art would be more abstract and more likely appear through the form of architecture. He suggested that these forms would be the result of new architectural

laws about to be discovered, laws probably having a mathematical basis. Provencal maintained that the vast majority of men are bound to their animal instincts and are incapable of original thought. He maintained that an artistic elite was necessary who would be entrusted with the discovery of a spiritual truth and its revelation to mankind. Schure in his book "Les Grands Initiés" believed in the supremacy of the spiritual over the material. In a description of Pythagorean numerology he explains this as a system unfolding mathematically from simple divine numbers. This idea is also reflected in Le Corbusier's "Modulor".

Le Corbusier's own philosophy was concerned with the spiritual rather than the material. He compared the works of the past with nature and later wrote that nature was

"order law, unity and diversity without end, subtlety, harmony and strength".⁶

In 1911 he embarked on a tour which took him to the main cities of central Europe and Asia. This tour provided him with the specific information about the actual technique of design. In the Greek temples he saw Provencal's "absolute" by establishing certain relationships of forms. The Parthenon gave him a design formula in which standardised parts were assembled to provide dramatic impact established by means of an elaborate code of rules. It was the combination of his visual perception and selective analysis on which his theories were founded.

In Nicholas Pevsner's "Pioneers of Modern Design", Le Corbusier is dismissed from the role of honour because unlike the works of the other "pioneers" to whom the book is devoted, Corbusier's works were not as easily patented or documented. Though Pevsner may dismiss Le Corbusier so abruptly, it cannot be a simple coincidence that Herbert Read uses the same selective analysis as Le Corbusier to validate his theories on harmony, order and purity of form - the basis of the abstract

aesthetic. Le Corbusier's theories and philosophies were adopted by the Modern Movement, the body of people who saw themselves as the "artistic" elite who would be entrusted with the discovery of the spiritual truth and its revelation to mankind".

This revelation continues in "Art and Industry" as Read defines aesthetic values. He divides the visual arts into "abstract" which is of a mechanical nature and gives rise to the beauty of the object and "humanistic" which is of organic nature and gives rise to the vitality of the object. That functional efficiency and beauty do often coincide, that different functions lead to different forms are admitted, but the beauty is reliant on order harmony and the beauty of the straight line. In the continued selection of illustrations to enhance his theory, Read makes a comparison between the offices of a newspaper company and the amplifier bay at the BBC. (Ref. Illus. 1.)

Here we are to appreciate

"the harmony, the purity of form, the absolute sense of order".⁷

which presides over both images. One wonders if Alvar Alto, the Architect of the "Turun Sanomat" building was aware of how similiar his design method is to that of the engineer who designed the amplifier bay? The rectangular form predominates in both designs but the design's functional fulfilment cannot be assessed from photographs or drawings. In the introduction chapters of "Art and Industry" Read carries out an analysis between an earthenware vase from the Sung dynasty (960 - 1279) and an earthenward drinking cup from Attic (530 B.C.) concluding that the Chinese vase is far superior as a work of art. (Ref. Illus. 2.). There is no basis to justify making a comparative analysis between two objects from totally different eras and social cultures without taking those cultures into account also. By the same token we can also say that a design is

only appreciated within the constraints of the society which makes the analysis. As society changes so also will its appreciation of design. Though we may criticise the continued analogies and comparisons that Read makes in his book "Art and Industry" became the bible for the industrial designer in the 1930's and most quoted book by the Modern Movement activists.

If Read's work was not assimilated by the ordinary man on the street it was recognised by Royalty as Read was knighted for his valuable contribution to the arts in Britain.

4. THE HEROS

This royal recognition gave the Movement a sense of righteousness purpose and honour. They were to become "heros, pioneers and leaders", taking design on an ethical crusade looking towards the Bauhaus from whence all truth springs. The Modern Movement was going to transform the environment and in doing so transform mankind.

The Royal Society of Arts in association with the Royal Academy at Burlington organised an exhibition in 1935 called "British Art in Industry". The joint committee expressed a wish not to exhibit anything that had been shown elsewhere. This meant that the exhibition consisted of mainly handmade prototypes from the craft based industries. Many of the mass producing industries had their own methods of presenting new designs to dealers at trade exhibitions and refused to join in the more radical approach of exhibiting at a prestigious gallery. The exhibition also failed to demonstrate to the public that good design could be sold. However, despite these drawbacks it marked the commencement of a widespread movement advocating the cause of art in industry.

In 1937 Sir Henry MacMachon then chairman of the Council of the Royal Society of Arts suggested that relations between designer and manufacturer would be encouraged if the designer was given some readily recognisable honour similiar to that given to painters, sculptors and architects by the Royal Academy. The proposal was approved by the Council, a joint committee of the Royal Society of Arts and the London Chamber of Commerce was established to consider the award of "Royal Designer for Industry". Who exactly selected the first Royal Designers is vague nor is there much information available as to the criteria used for assessing the designers and their work. With regard to Douglas Cockrell, one of the first to be awarded the distinction,

"there was never any doubt that he was there to make the world a better place".⁸

Another choice was C.F.A. Voysey, a designer of furniture, fabrics, metalwork and carpets, a writer and a theorist. His fabric designs for James Morton in particular were followed through to mass production. Voysey was recognised more for his theory that a new design approach was necessary for mastering the machine, rather than to live in its shadow. His award was given for his artistic vision to commercial production. Keith Murray an architect turned industrial designer also joined the assembly of heroes for his loan war against the glass industry. The idea of these heroes being on an ethical crusade is expounded upon when Fiona McCarthy in her address to the Royal Designer for Industry faculty in 1981 says,

"the most Keith Murray ever made in his best year was £750, the sum total of £250 from each of the three manufacturers who employed him"⁹

Wedgwood, Stevens and Williams (glass) and Mappin and Webb (silver). These heroes carried out their work, not to reap any financial benefits but the benefits of improving society and transforming the environment against all odds. But making society better depended on the goodwill of the patrons.

Francis Pick was known as the greatest of all patrons of the thirties. He was Chief Executive of the London Passenger Transport Board. In redesigning the London Transport System he employed up to ten Royal Designers. However, in discussions on the London Transport's design policy, little attention has been given to the design itself and what it was expected to achieve. Much of the discussion is centered on the contribution of Francis Pick who assumed the position of "design manager" in the project. In Nicholas Pevsner's article about Pick, "Patient Progress One, Frank Pick" he implies that the success of the Transport Design Policy was due to Pick's own taste and aesthetic idealism. Pick

may have believed in the power of design as a civilising factor, as a means of achieving a vast harmony of all thing but one cannot ignore the fact that he was the manager of a large and very complicated organisation. Everything he did with design had to satisfy commercial ends and to meet with approval of the rest of the management.

If one looks at the origins of the London Transport Design Policy the reasoning behind it becomes more clear. In 1863 the first underground railway in London was opened. In the following years many other lines were opened by individual companies. As individual enterprises, they were none too profitable. By 1908 the companies agreed to publicise themselves collectively as the Underground System and by 1913 they merged fully as the Underground Electric Railways of London (UERL). It proved impossible for the UERL to establish a monopoly by commercial takeovers and mergers, only government intervention could bring this about. In 1933 the London Transport was created in which ownership and management of all London's buses, trains and railways was transferred to a new single authority. It was an amalgamation of 165 different companies. One of the main reasons for the Transports design policy was to encourage people to travel more which meant transforming the public's perception of travelling from an inconvenience to a comfortable experience. That the same design features used in booking kiosks, ticket machines, bookstalls, light fittings, barriers and graphics was used to contribute to the passenger's sense that London Transport was a system designed and managed with the same thoroughness. That a conspicuously modern style was adopted was not simply motivated by Pick's liking but by the fact that it conformed to the image of progress. Pick was not so much one of the "heros" of the Modern Movement but a shrewd calculating business man with considerable foresight and insight to public reaction. He knew that it was the overall image of cleanliness, brightness and accessibility which would affect the public and not the finer details of harmonious

lines, pure shapes and order.

It would be very wrong to say that the Modern Movement's philosophy of design was accepted by both manufacturers and the public simply because everyone wanted a more harmonious and pure environment. The business of making money had a greater influence on its acceptance than the theorists would like to admit. The issue of design for business and profits seemed to threaten the moral and philosophical foundations of the movement. But if one examines the general economy of England between 1930 and 1960 its fluctuations are reflected on the popularity of the design movement.

In the early 1930's electricity prices began to fall and technical development got to the stage where manufacturers were unable to compete with each other by technical innovation alone. The most important reason why manufacturers became more interested in innovative design was that they foresaw the prospect of a mass market which would justify a greater outlay on design. New designs were to fulfill the idea that electricity was the modern fuel and therefore be more attractive to customers. To symbolise the qualities of clean, quiet, instantaneous and revolutionary, manufacturers employed a "modern" style based on the style of the Modern Movement.

Wireless sets were the first pieces of electrical equipment to be owned on a mass scale in Britain. To compete in the market place they were to adopt the symbol of future progress. Many firms turned towards designers associated with the Modern Movement to help fulfill the required image. Murphy turned to Gordon Russell, then a leading designer of modern furniture. They wanted a modern design that was also a piece of furniture to give the alien sounds of radion a place in the home. In 1934 Ekco invited several modern architects to submit designs for wireless sets in competition and chose to put those of Wells Coates and Serge Chermayeff into production. (Ref. Illus. 3).

These designs beared no resemblance to furniture but conveyed the impression of modern objects of technology breaking the frontiers of science. The use of imagery to make products appear ahead of their time was seen by manufacturers as a crucial factor in achieving sales. The reaction to this by the Movement's activists is reflected in the writings of Misha Black.

"It is not for me to question the morality of competitive trading, but it is justifiable for designers to question whether their skill and experience are more usefully engaged in creating demand for products and services which serve no purpose except to satisfy the desire for novelty and personal acquisition".¹⁰

The middle thirties was a great period of patronage for the elite Royal Designers. The advent of war cast a cloud over their feeling of promise. The most notable designer appointed Royal Designer for Industry was Gordon Russell receiving his distinction in 1940 for his work on the Utility furniture committee. By 1944 Russell had gained the influential position as Director of the Council of Industrial Design. (COID).

In his article printed in Design Magazine, January 1949 called "What is Good Design?" Russell carefully argues the case of maintaining truth to materials, and purity of form. He condemns the application of "irrelevant" images to certain objects, for example, the stream lining of refrigerators. "These design cliches are not the right answer to human needs". This idealism also follows through Misha Black's writings. In his speech "Fitness for What Purpose" he calls upon the aesthetic sensitivity of the designer. When a number of alternatives present themselves it should not be seen as the opportunity to impose a preconceived form but should remain part of the searching process. Whether they are right or wrong the fact remains that borrowed imagery was received very successfully by the public.

With Raymond Loewy's Coldspot Refrigerator designed in 1936 for

Sears, Roebuck New York, sales jumped to 275,000 units per year as opposed to the 60,000 units for its predecessor. (Illus 4).

Russell's reply to these facts is that the public does not possess a critical standard, it lacks the essential factor for design to be as good as it might be.

So it is up to the designer to raise the standards of design

"this will not only improve the standard of living of every man, woman and child in this country, but will enhance our prestige abroad and thus to our advantage, profoundly affect our competitive position in the markets of the world".¹¹

Indeed this idealist, heroic attitude is a reflection of the policy of the Council. A policy which it would seem was based on a deep distrust of the practises of trade and commerce and on an anti-capitalist feeling. The formation of Councils, Design Awards, committees and Faculties served the Movement in enhancing their superiority and self righteousness but it all served also to alienate the Movement from the public and it's own social revolution.

5. THE BATTLE WON

The Council of Industrial Design was to play a major role in the public's perception of the Modern Movement. To elevate the design appreciation of the public the Council played a major part in organising many exhibitions throughout Britain. The most important was the Festival of Britain held on the South Bank of the Thames in 1951.

The first suggestion for a national festival was made by the Royal Society of Arts in 1943, as a commemoration of the 1851 Great Exhibition. The original proposal made by Gerald Barry was that it should be an international exhibition with a trade fair aspect. The government rejected this proposal on both economic and political grounds. The war had left Europe decimated and also Britain was wary of forming any alliance with countries such as France and Italy which had powerful communist parties. The Government did feel a national exhibition would be more beneficial to the morale of the post-war public. Politically, the exhibition was designed to show the ingenuity of the British people and declare a belief in the British way of life.....

"with sober and humble trust, that by holding fast to all which is good and rejecting from our midst that which is evil we may continue to be a nation at unity in itself and of service to the world".

Archbishop of Canterbury at the opening ceremony of the festival.¹²

The theme of the Exhibition was "Britain's Contribution to World Civilisation in the Arts". It was not just a celebration of Britain's artists who answered the call of the Modern Movement's fathers, it was also to set the stage for those architects who could profit from a new climate of

"perception and acceptance".¹³

The councils role was to embrace the selection and collection of all industrially produced exhibits and consequently it was to invest much

of it's own reputation in the Exhibition.

In making selections the Council set up a survey of British Industry in order to find the best products and the most interesting developments. The results of this survey, called "Design Review", were also put on exhibition.

The pavilions of the Exhibition were placed in a deliberate sequence so as to tell the story of Britain's contribution to science, technology, design and the arts. Every concourse was designed to house a major work of art. The Festival provided colour, light and a carnival atmosphere to entertain the people after the blackness of war. For five months, the festival, it's exhibitors and it's organisers revelled in their success. Eight and a half million people thronged through the turnstiles to gaze in awe at what was looked upon as a promise of their future. The public saw an end to shortages and rationing, an image carefully constructed of what Britain might be like with full employment and a welfare state. It created a vision of a world of plenty that seemed almost within reach. The slogan "You've never had it so good" by Harold MacMillan was designed to persuade the people that the dream had come true. The dream of a healthy bright and cheerful future. Through manipulation of the public's perception the organisers believed they had achieved in revealing the new aesthetic. Here was their proof that they could change the environment (albeit a select one) and in doing so transform mankind. This illusion was shattered much more quickly for the public than for the designers. In August the lights went out, the music stopped and the gates closed. The South Bank degenerated into a National Car Park and Shell Petrol Centre. Many of the exhibits were auctioned off to the public and the pavilions torn down, sold as scrap. The public returned to deal with the realities of 1951, coal shortages, unemployment, inflation and bad housing. The alleged influence of the

Festival was a major issue for some years and an essential part of the official myth. It was the COID itself which cited most frequently that the festival was a turning point in public taste. The reputation of the Council was too tightly bound up with that of the Festival to let its position become seriously eroded.

"It was a great battle with a small band of enthusiasts ready to fight solidly entrenched public opinion and today the battle has been partially won"¹⁴

Basically two beliefs evolved from the festival of Britain, first that the Festival created a style that was new and valuably English and secondly, this style was influential, especially on popular taste.

If one looks at the content of the exhibition it is easy to falsify the first belief. Earnest Race, founder of Race furniture in 1945, designed the "Antelope" chair for the Festival. He is credited with producing

"a long series of designs which have British quality of moderation"¹⁵

The chair reflects very much the design style of American, Charles Eames and many imitations of the American's work had appeared in British magazines at the beginning of 1950. The "Antelope" does make a visual reference to the traditional English arm chair, but in the Eames style. (Ref. Illus. 5).

George Cullen's "Skylon" bears a striking similarity to Renzo Zavanello's tension hung pavilion roof designed for the Milan Trade Fair of 1948. (Ref. Illus. 6).

That the Festival of Britain created an original British style is a myth.

"The significance of the festival for us today is not so much that it made a particularly stylistic statement in design but that it was a genuinely national public event of amazing proportions"¹⁶

The criteria for this statement lies in one obvious fact, eight and a half

million thronged the pavilions at the South Bank and in retrospect that is the only truthful base on which to lay the success of the Festival.

As early as August 1951, just as the Festival drew to a close, Lionel Brett, in an article, reviewing the South Bank, saw that the Festival style was just about exhausted. He expressed a fear that the style had reached a degree of refinement from which there was no advance except complete change of direction. He was right but not proven so until late into the fifties. In the meantime, the Council retained it's ethos, design was still being seen to have a serious social purpose as defined by the "Establishment" and the best design of all was simple and straightforward not wayward or eccentric.

In time confidence in this leadership was undermined, culturally by the Pop movement and in material terms by demonstrations from some consumer publications that items from the Design Index were ill designed and functionally incorrect.

In 1961 the COID staged a ten page retrospective on the Festival in Design Magazine. They made the enquiry as to the importance of the "Festival Styles" contribution to subsequent design developments. The replies were made by the major figures of the design world in Britain. Sir Gerald Barry admitted that the style did not progress from the South Bank but became a cliché for coffee bars and pubs throughout England. Misha Black went further by saying that the Festival merely spotlight an existing style but did not create one. John Murray denied the expression "Festival Style" saying there was only good design. Richard Hamilton a representative voice of the next generation who was hostile to the Festival was able to show the influence of the style only in objects that were clearly ill designed.

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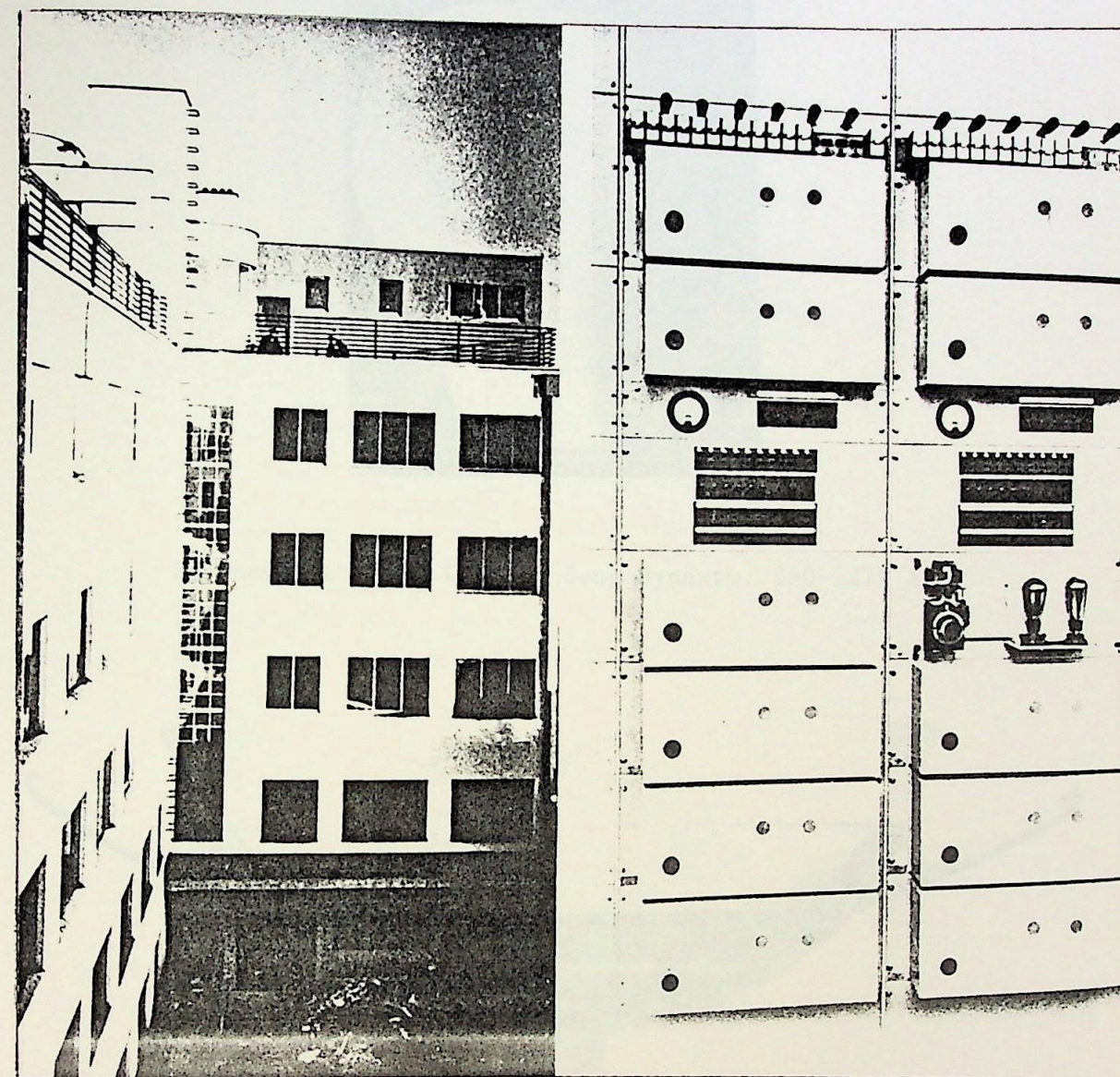
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Had the initial enquiry been made regarding the impact the "Festival Style" had on subsequent design developments, the replies would have probably been more positive. The impact of the Festival was far from insignificant for it is from that carnival like playground that the idea of design being fun and playful was first glimpsed. This idea was to become known as the Pop Movement and become seen by the Modernists as a threat to the principles of design that they cherished.

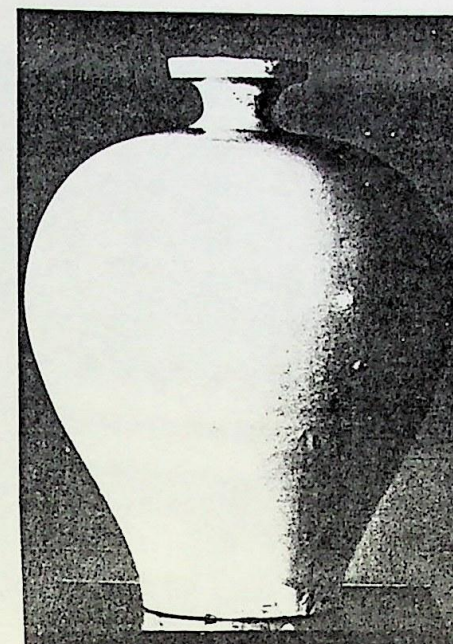
ILLUSTRATIONS

ILLUSTRATION 1

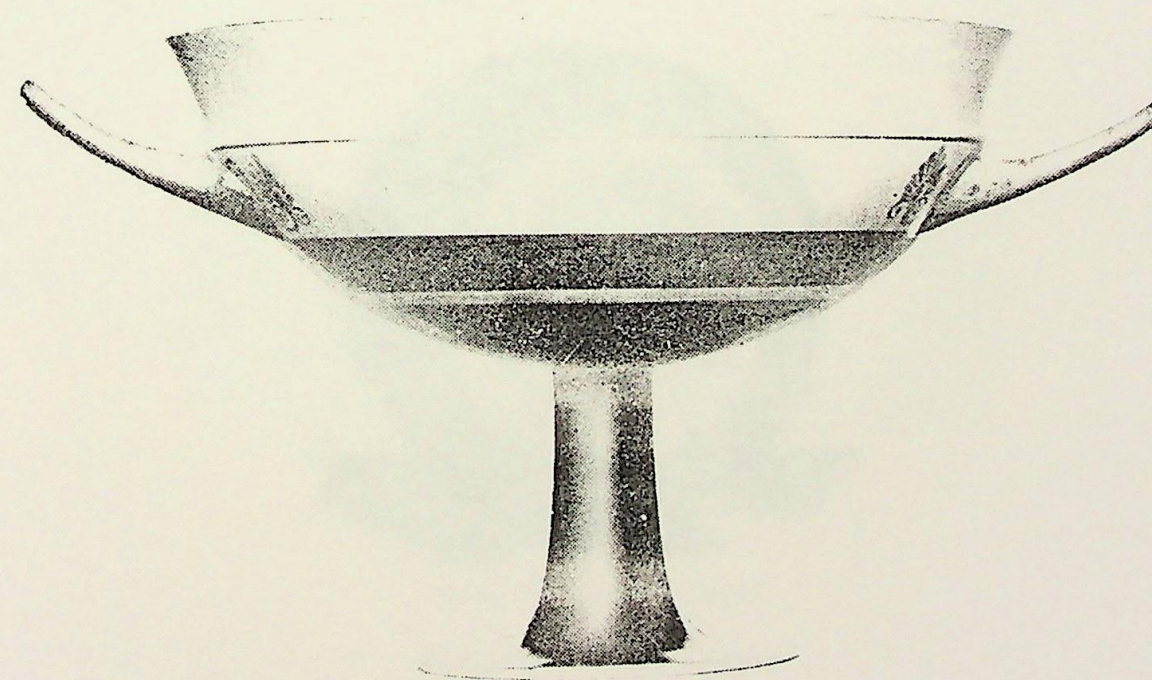


The officers of the "Turun Sanomat", Alvar Aalto and the "C" Amplifier Bays, BBC.

ILLUSTRATION 2

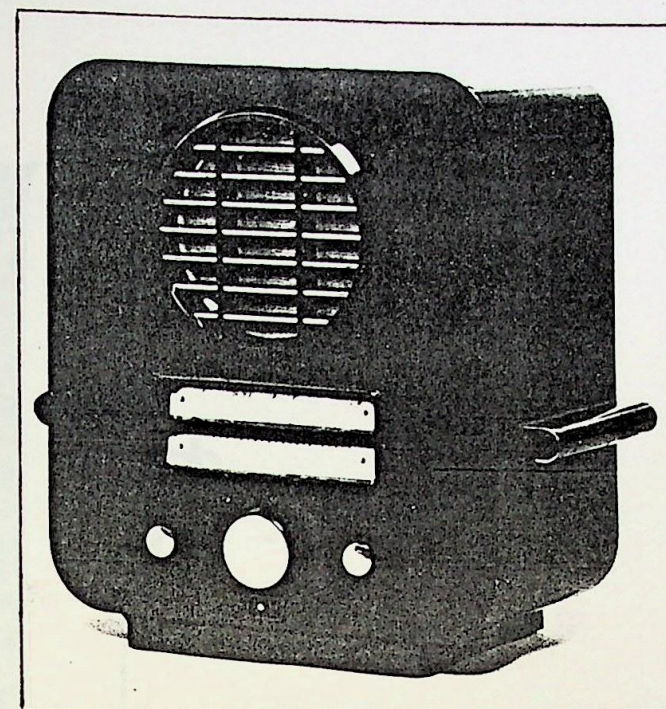


Earthenware Vase. Chinese Sung Dynasty. 960-1279 A.D.



Earthenware Cup. Attic 530 B.C.

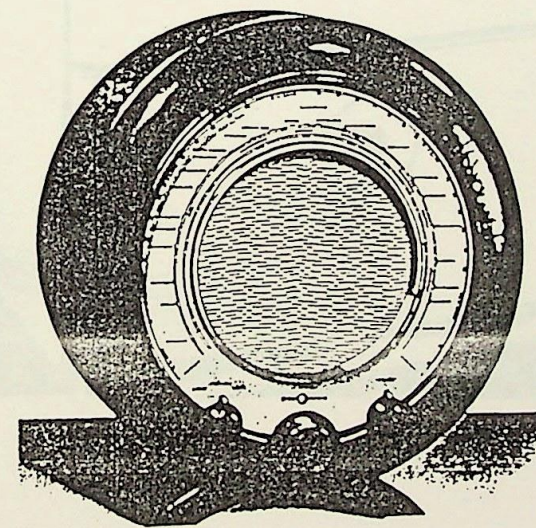
ILLUSTRATION 3



Ekco Model AC 74 Radio

Designer: Serge Chermayeff

1933.

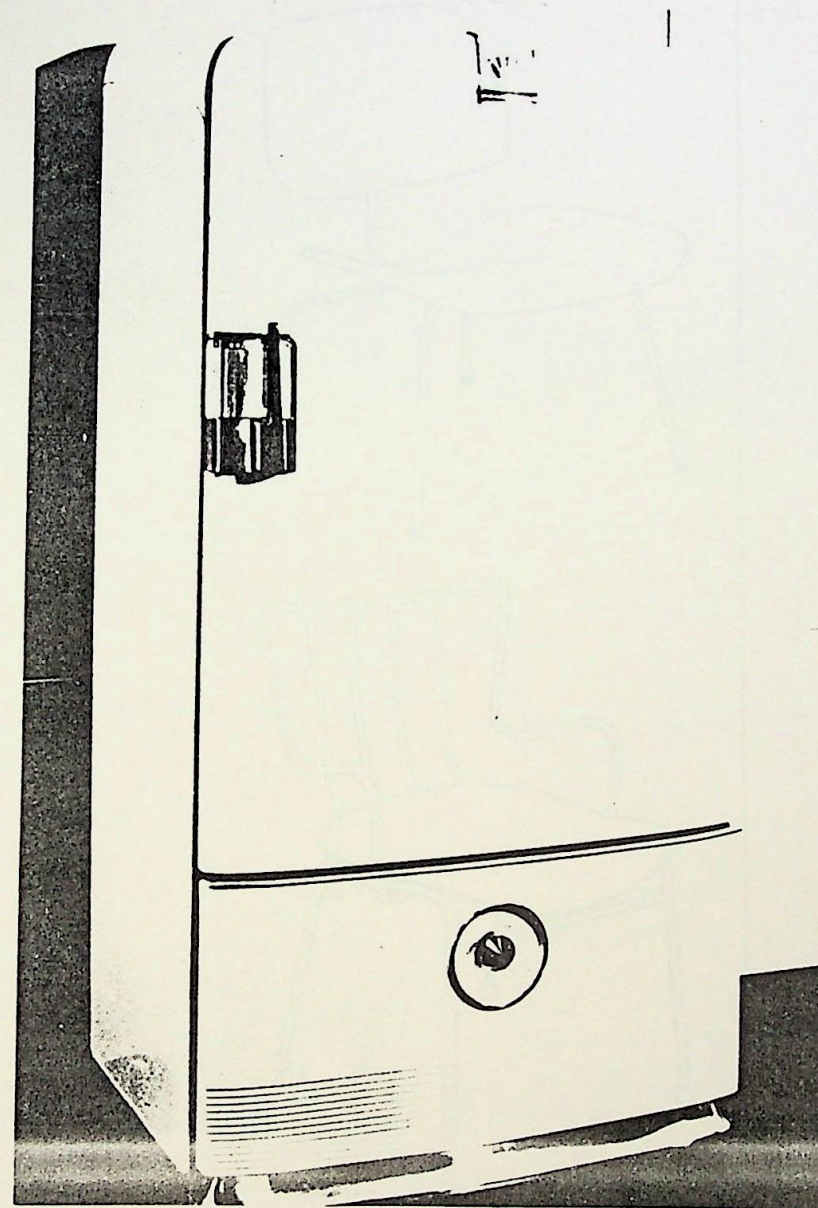


Ekco Model A22 Radio

Designer: Wells Coates

1945.

ILLUSTRATION 4

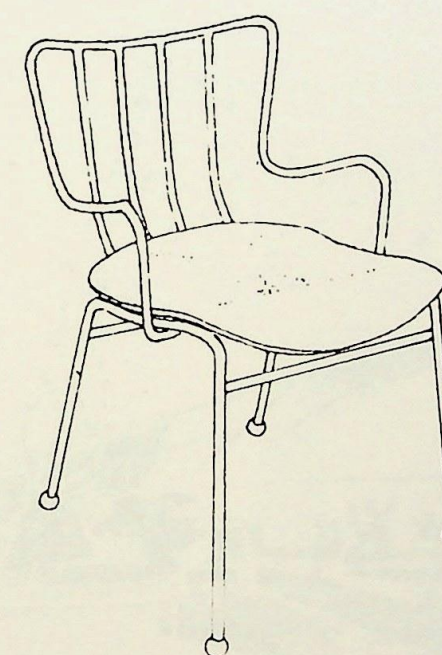


Coldspot Refrigerator

Designer: Raymond Loewy

1935.

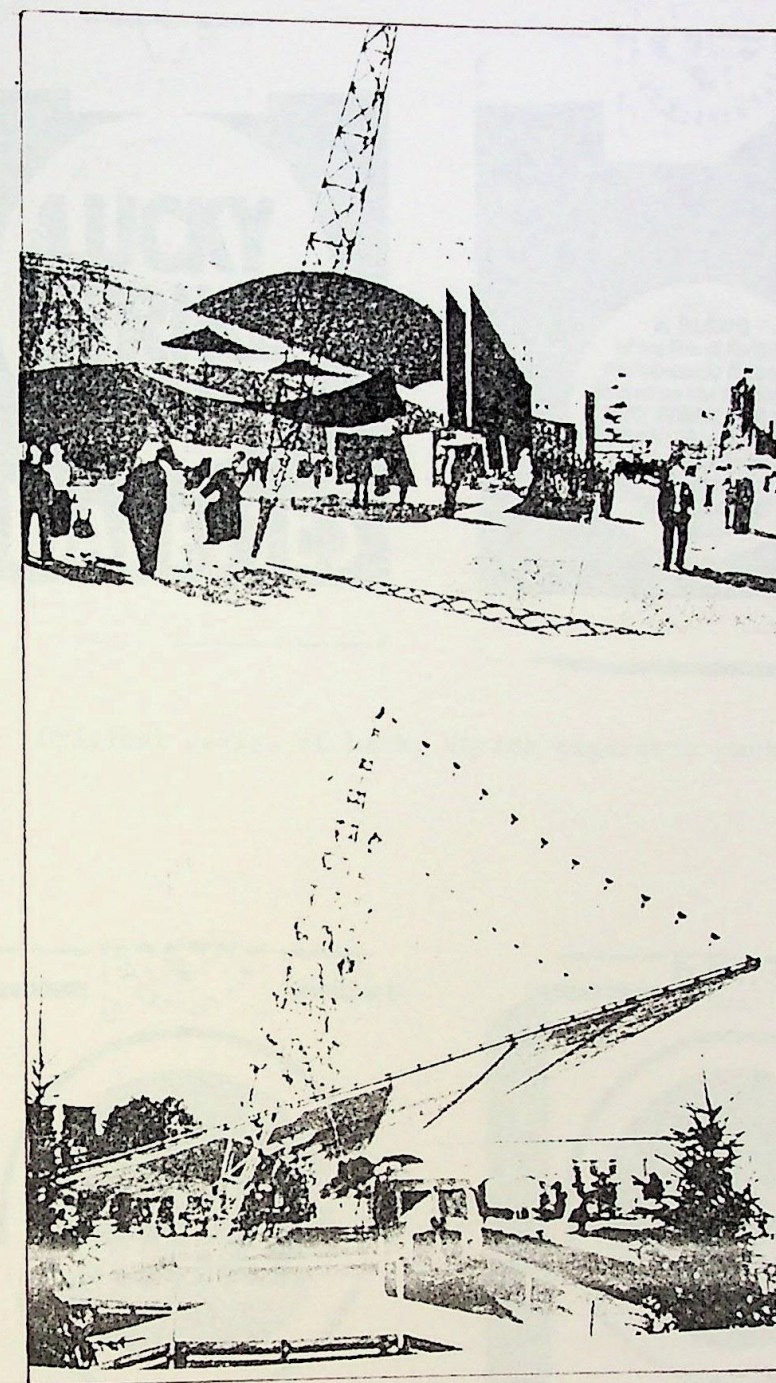
ILLUSTRATION 5



Top: Chair designed by Charles Eames

Bottom: "Antelope" chair by Earnest Race

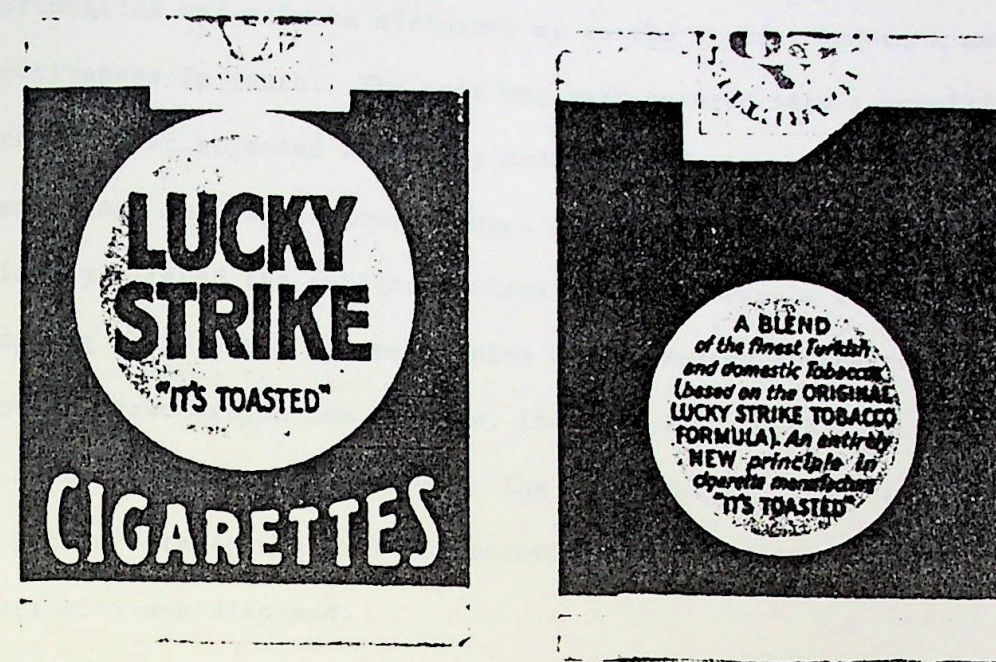
ILLUSTRATION 6



Top: Drawing for the "Skylon" by Gordon Cullen for the Festival of Britain. 1951

Bottom: Hanging platform canopy by Renzo Zavarella for Milan Trade fair. 1948

ILLUSTRATION 7.



Original design of Lucky Strick cigarette packet



Redesign by Raymond Loewy 1940

7. THE WAR LOST

Throughout the 1950's Britain saw major social and economic changes. The growth of consumerism, commercial television, job opportunities and private affluence up to the sixties led to a new assertiveness in youth. The post war baby matured into a rebellious character that rejected authority and resented class divisions. Expectations and aspirations changed rapidly and the mass media radically altered the public's outlook on life. People were no longer accepting their lot. The principles of the Modern Movements design theories, standardisation, purity, the abstract and utility fell under the feet of the protest marches. The modernist attitude of dictating the public's taste was seen as patronising and elitist and the moral superiority was dispised.

The Modernists looked upon Pop as both trivial and unacademic, they classed it as having an anti-articulate and anti-literate character. They refused to recognise it's validity as a movement which reflected a spirit of an age more accurately than the output of a minority cultural elite.

In his article "Taste Style and the Industrial Designer" published in Motif 1962, Misha Black makes a strong polite but withering reply to the new attitudes taking form in Britain. He condemns the American influence because of it's lack of ethics and righteousness.

"If they (the Americans) were convinced that a television set disguised as a eighteenth century commode would appeal to next year's market, then it would clearly be their duty to design plastic versions of Georgian Furniture"¹⁷

The arrogance and superior self image of the Modern Movement is reflected in his article as Black goes on to justify his opposition to post modernism. If the designer is sensitive to social movements he is justified in assuming

that his taste and appreciation of form is more righteous than that of the public.

"For there is no doubt that the natural tendency of twentieth century man is to prefer the common place to the beautiful"¹⁸

In 1962 after such economic and social changes, the same idealism and moral righteousness of Herbert Read prevails within the strict unyielding design ethos of the Modern Movement. It is not until 1971 that Misha Black gives any indication that their conservative attitude was indeed fallible.

"The concept of an ideal solution to problems of content and form carries within the formula the certainty of failure"¹⁹

The Council of Industrial Design was faced with dilemma of either accepting or rejecting Pop. If it accepted Pop, it faced the accusation of jumping on the bandwagon of popularity and undermining the principles of the Modern Movement, but if it rejected Pop it risked further isolation from the public and enhancing their elitism. In 1967, Paul Reilly then the Director of the COID made a very important statement regarding the function of design within society.

"We are shifting perhaps from attachment to permanent universal values, to acceptance that a design maybe valid at a given time for a given purpose to a given group of people in a given set of circumstances, but that outside these limits it may not be valid at all All this means that a product must be good of it's kind for the set of circumstances for which it has been changed"²⁰

For design there is no absolute or ideal solution, it's values are relative to the society within which the design is created. This is a vast leap from the highest aspirations of the Modern Movement, which sought to sensitise human perception, affect the quality of life and improve society, to the realisation that design cannot lead society but by careful interaction reflect it's character, it's desires and aspirations.

In all the writings by designers on design throughout the Modern

Movement it is implied that the designers were solely responsible for successful results and the insensitive uneducated public was held responsible for the failures. This alone contradicts the earlier teachings of Herman Mothesius who rejected the autonomy of the designer and it also served to obscure the fact that design is determined by ideas and material conditions over which the designer has no control. No design works unless it embodies ideas that are held in common by the people for whom the object is intended. Designers are agents of ideology which is generated by society. The mass media and in particular television has been a major dictator to society's aspirations and desires and successful design embodies these aspirations in a single image.

In Raymond Loewy's redesign of the Lucky Strike cigarette packet he conveys what the American culture aspired to, cleanliness and freshness. (Ref. Illus. 7).

Design cannot be severed from its part in the workings of society and as society changes so must the design ethos. The Modern Movement may have believed they won a battle through the Festival of Britain but by 1962 they had lost their war against public opinion.

8. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The roots of the Modern Movement are found in the early years of the Industrial Revolution. It was a revolt against society's passive acceptance of the machined imitations of the craftsman's skill. In formulating their laws of design they drew upon the philosophies and images of Greek and Egyptian cultures. The Movement was not just concerned with design but with the public's perception of it. Fuelled by their aspirations of changing society and elevating mankind from his "barbaric" surroundings, they placed themselves on an elitist pedestal which they believed would survive an ever changing society. As the Movement clothed itself in moral superiority and patted itself on the back for meeting its own achievements it distanced itself from the rapidly changing world. This was the beginning of its downfall. The Modern Movement designers lost touch with the needs of the people for whom they were designing. Instead of recognising these needs they strove to dictate to the people what was best for them. In their attempt to reveal to mankind the new abstract aesthetic within the concept of the absolute they failed to recognise the new twentieth century man for what he really was, not a character insensitive and ignorant of all that is beautiful but one who would not accept the unquestioned authority of any establishment. The Movement was left upon its crumbling pedestal as society fought to keep up with the Jones' and invest in material wealth.

As the Modern Movement drew to a close they were very much aware of the direction society was taking towards the twenty first century.

"The technological changes which are taking place at an ever increasing pace have not, unfortunately, been balanced by a corresponding growth in the humanities and therefore our age which is supremely confident that it can do anything is uncertain what it wants to do and hasn't even got the time to sit down and think about it. Is it really so much more important to make a slum of the moon than to abolish our slums here."

Gordon Russell
"Designers Trade" 1968

As a student of design in a world where violence or the threat of it seems to be the major Factor which changes society it is relatively easy to look upon the idealistic attitudes of the Modern Movement with cynicism, but it would seem that despite their superior illusions their failure was a very human one. Like most people today and in years gone by, they found it easier to reflect on the past, dream of the future and close their eyes to the harsh realities of the present. The Movement did not vanish without a trace or reference for the future. It is from their work, theories and aspirations that today's designer realises that his success lies in reflecting the quality of the society in which he lives, embodying it's ideals and desires into his images and being aware of what the present, good or bad, has to offer.

9. REFERENCES

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