

**British Design and Culture
1945 - 1960**

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THE NATIONAL COLLEGE OF ART AND DESIGN

BRITISH DESIGN AND CULTURE 1945 - 1960

A Thesis submitted to:

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and

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by

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A Thesis submitted to

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Introduction

The aim of this thesis is to examine British Design and Culture in the post-war years (1945-1960) with the aim of finding out exactly what reasons were ultimately responsible for the change from being a traditional, reserved and highly stratified society into a more homogeneous, consumption-orientated one. The conflicts which existed at the time - Upper V Lower classes, Modernism V Pop, Socialism V Conservation - are all aspects of a country in a state of flux, and in the following pages these have been discussed and analysed. But was there something else, something even more fundamental than these principles, which was the catalyst and perhaps even the fuel in this reform? It is my feeling that there was, and consequently this essay is geared towards a qualification and explanation of this extra dimension.

CHAPTER 1

Post-war Society.

Britain was still a country of disparate groups in the years following World War II. While other European countries had, in the course of war been shattered not only physically but also socially, Britain retained its traditional social standards.

A bourgeoisie still existed, untouched both physically and mentally by the years of war. Amongst these were men such as Herbert Read, Gordon Russell, Paul Reilly, Nikolaus Pevsner and Raymond Williams. These were men who, although connected with the war movement through their roles in the Ministry of information and other Departments, played no active or front line role. That duty was retained for the working, middle and lower classes, who were in the best position to be issued orders. In Continental Europe all classes ultimately were touched and defeated, a rough but effective form of democracy, and one from which there was no automatic escape once the war ended.

In addition, Britain was the only European country not overrun by Germany, a point readily exploited by the British upper classes. The ministry for information were very quick in assembling an exhibition of their post-war reconstruction plans (Beveridge plan) which went on tour throughout Europe in 1945. Huge numbers, particularly in Austria, Belgium and Italy came to see the exhibition, and Britain was perceived at this point to be the country to look for guidance and leadership. Thus the upper classes felt themselves to be once again the manipulators of an empire, and proceeded to rejuvenate their pre-war policies, attitudes and no doubt, their port.

The 1945 election of the Liberal government, under Attlee was no doubt the first blow to their security, and one which fueled a new determination amongst the upper classes to maintain their "Britishness" in the face of what they perceived to be lightly disguised communist policies. Thus while the majority of the working classes were glad of the extra positions which the government takeover of the services industries brought about, the "old boys" could not accept it and its implication of a common mass dictating the running of what were traditionally big industrialist's preserves. Even in the newspapers (the Daily Express being perhaps the

best example) the right-wing attitudes were thinly veiled, and quite regularly broke the surface to hurl libellous comments at the socialist supporters. In the colonies, too the ruling classes were finding it more and more difficult to keep the natives in submission, with brutality and killings (on both sides) catching world attention. A further point of aggravation was the new role which the U.S.A. had adopted - that of world benefactor. Traditionally the preserve of Britain (they still retained the suspicion that they alone had won the war) she herself now found herself dependent on US aid in the form of the Marshall Plan. This generated a further degree of resentment amongst the Upper Classes and one which did not diminish rapidly.

In the light of all this the upper classes were being forced to look more and more closely at the British Isles as a source of pride and few were in any doubts as to what changes they would make if the Conservatives won the 1951 election. If at all possible the Welfare State should be dismantled or at least scaled down, and the hierarchy of governing should be returned once more to a pyramidal and not a nucleated system.

In the design field the CoID were benefiting greatly, both in terms of autonomy of control and in finance, from the Attlee regime. In terms of policies and leaders, however, the Council were very much right wing; the former being drawn from modern movement/Deutscher Werkbund philosophies, and the latter from the previously mentioned gentry who had played no active war time part, and had not been affected by any changes of philosophy in those years. These people, particularly S.C. Leslie and Gordon Russell, along with others such as N. Pevsner had a clear idea of what route the design establishment should take and a philosophy to support it should there be any confusion. That it was right for all people they had no doubt, and were equally sure of their own legitimate position to impart it.

Unfortunately at the time the minds of the working classes were more fixed on securing a job and finding a place to live than on the elevation of design standards. For the majority of those returning from the war life had changed and could not possibly be the same again. This is not to say they looked forward to the future with a fresh outlook, or that radical philosophies on social status had been spawned in the trenches. Rather they found themselves looking back, searching for the symbols of security which had existed before the war, and with which they could associate.

Within the family unit the wife was encouraged to leave the factory and return to the home, in order to create jobs for the homecoming soldiers. Thus she found herself without an income and consequently stripped of the independence attained during the war. Furniture shortages, poor choices, rationing and in a number of cases unemployment all contributed to a general dissatisfaction with life in the immediate post-war years. The end of the war had not triggered mass euphoria, end of want, and a feeling of freedom from oppression - rather there were the queues, utility furniture, poor wages and limited resources. In these circumstances the working classes became less and less interested in what they were told was good for them (six years of that had been sufficient for even the hardest) and began indulging, where they could afford it, in escapism; neo-Victorian and Georgian furniture, cinema, magazines. In light of the standard of morale in the country by 1951, it is little wonder that the exhibition of that year was called "A tonic to the nation"

Meanwhile in other countries a more homogeneous system was being constructed. Sweden, for instance was in the process of creating a system whereby the well-being of all was a central issue to the government, and likewise the well-being of the country should be of interest to all its people. Thus a multi-faceted manufacturing industry was generated, with products ranging from simple chairs which could be hand-made on farms, to the high volume pressed glassworks of companies such as the Hadeland Glassworks. In this way all were working towards a national recovery, and all shared a similar responsibility and thus a similar value to society.

In Italy the replacement of Fascism with other left-wing politics after the war marked a shift of emphasis towards the working classes, and a respective decline in status of Bourgeoisie. The setting up of state-owned companies and worker cooperatives under government guidance enabled a cohesive and consistent national policy for design to be developed. While aimed at the higher end of the market, a strong craft-influenced industry was also set up, enabling Italy to both satisfy it's requirements on the home front (rebuilding the country and generating employment) while at the same time creating a high profile outside the country, necessary to restore the credibility of the country both as a manufacturing nation and also as a politically stable one.

After 1951 Britain effectively "turned the corner", as a nation on the road to recovery. Rationing was done away with, as were the tax incentives to

those producing utility ranges of furniture. The earning potential of the lower classes rose, and more women returned to the workplace, generating further spending power for these classes. The conservative government were returned to power, satiating the upper class doyens of politics and distracting their attentions away from a dictatorial ruling of the lower classes outside of the Commons and Lords. While in some areas such as Tower Hamlets in London, but most notably Glasgow this change of power directly resulted in gross blunders being made in the redevelopment of community life, for the most part sufficient wealth existed to enable all classes to indulge in hobbies and recreational activities on a scale never achieved before. Consumption not only of domestic furnishings, "white" and "brown" consumer durables, automobiles and hobby equipment, but also of ephemera such as magazines, cinema, music and T.V. rose sharply. The setting up of ITV in 1955, along with the large-scale importation of cheap glossy magazines introduced the working classes to styles and influences which had before not been available to them. While a lot of the influences came from the USA (the Coco-Colonization of Europe, as it was less than affectionately put) a significant number came from Italy (milk and coffee bars, certain dress styles, and objects such as Vespa scooters) and Scandinavia (primarily domestic styles e.g. Open-plan living). The assimilation of these influences appalled the "establishment" and where possible they encouraged the people to follow the lines of British tradition by retaining their autonomous identity and stepping aside from such vulgarities. At the time, due in no small part to the continuing influence of the Marshall plan it was neither feasible nor possible to introduce trade sanctions against such products, so the cries of the taste-makers went unheard.

As the 1950's wore on it became apparent that even the introduction of sanctions would have very little influence on the consumption of such items. By this stage Britain had herself become a producer of these "soul-destroying" items, and the population were eager for more of the same. Vespa's were being produced under licence by Douglas in England; an independent TV station was both showing and producing films along the American model; Magazines such as The Autocar, The Motor, Homemaker, and the Practical Householder, all based loosely on the American Model were increasing their circulation monthly. While the establishment said "you shouldn't...." the magazines chorused "you can....".

You can lay a CORK TILE floor

Transform your kitchen



APRIL 1959

APRIL
1959

I promise -
if you promise
I can have a
gas water heater
in our home!

ILL. 1: Magazines such as The Householder urged consumption through colourful advertisements

By the end of the 1950's the working classes had once and for all broken free of the dictatorial utterances of the upper and middle classes. Along with the prestige of victory over "The Hun" which they now romantically looked back on, they also had the confidence of an awakening political conscience of their own, coupled with an independence which money had given them. In the words of the Politician Rab Butler, in 1960:

"We have developed an affluent, open and democratic society in which the class escalators are continually moving and in which people are divided not so much between the "haves" and "have nots" but between the "haves" and "have more"s.

It must be stated therefore that a true revolution, albeit a silent one, had taken place in Society, and it was this more than any other which forced the changes in attitude of the establishment and dissolution of their blind allegiance to the modern movement in the field of design.

Chapter II

Design Organizations

By 1943 it was becoming apparent that Germany would lose the war, and with this in mind the British Board of Trade began preparing for a rapid return to the post of international producer in a civilian world. Already it was apparent that other countries, notably American, Sweden, Switzerland and Czechoslovakia were also preparing for a strong attack on world markets, so the British Government set up a sub-committee of the Department of Overseas Trade to "consider the place of design in post-war planning for industry with particular reference to export trade and to recommend measures to ensure that the U.K. shall reach and maintain a leading position in the field of industrial art". The resultant Weir report (Sir Cecil Weir was chairman of the committee) highlighted America's position as leading manufacturer, and explicitly emphasized design as the cause. Noting British manufacturer's doubts of the value of the designer, the report indicated the need for "a means of setting up and maintaining standards" and recommended the following

- a) The institution of a central body which shall act as an authority on design to be named the Central Design Council.
- b) The simultaneous action of the various industries through co-operative action in the formation of Design Centres.

The report covered structure, funding, manning, capital outlay, functions and additional duties (down to recommending that the RCA be changed to RCAD with the chairman of the Design Council being vice-chairman of the Board of Governors). Had these being followed throughout implicitly it is conceivable that the Design Council might have grown more into the aspired for British Lion than the declawed tabby it turned out to be.

Perhaps the major flaw in the subsequent organization was the elected staff. S.C Leslie and indeed Gordon Russell were exemplary men in their own right, and had provided the government with exactly what was requested of them in the past (while associated with the Design and Industries Association). Unfortunately as idealists they lacked the purity of concept which was required to rejuvenate a stagnant manufacturing industry in a time of sharp overseas competition. While within the DIA Russell had been a supporter of the Modern movement or German-

inspired International style, but only passively; his particular affection remaining with the more simple, modest forms of the Scandinavian applied arts and styles. In this position he along with many others in the DIA retained an elitist position, and were poorly equipped to assess the commercial realities of mass production. In his role of director of the CoID his attitude cannot be said to have changed; if anything he drifted more towards his Cotwald craft-based roots. In a book of his on furniture he states: "There is much to stimulate a sensitive designer who will remember that there is no necessity to discard all old materials and methods. English oak remains a glorious material if rightly used"

Unlike the Werkbund, and a number of other organizations derived from this model, the British design bodies were unable to bridge the gap between hand and machine. The Werkbund's emphasis upon social democracy and the importance of standardization as a means of producing cheaply for the masses had saved that particular organization from the cul-de-sac of elitism which the CoID encountered very early on. By the late 1950's the Council found itself overwhelmed by the quantity of goods which appealed to popular taste yet offended it's craft-based sensitivity and it was forced to compromise it's principles in the face of this pressure from the marketplace.

Sweden, on the other hand, successfully avoided these pitfalls, mainly through an awareness of their own requirements from and applications for the Werkbund philosophies. As early as 1917 the Swedish Design Society (Svenska Slöjdföreningen) had organized an Exhibition of the Home emphasizing good yet inexpensive furniture which would suit any home of pocket - an intelligent combination of the Werkbund policy of social democracy with an awareness of local capabilities and requirements. By the end of the 1940's the Swedes had compiled a full set of anthropometrical data on house furnishings and by their second major design exhibition, "Malsinborg", in 1955 it must be stated that they had become synonymous, internationally, with high aesthetic and social standards.

In Denmark and Finland, again based loosely on the Deutscher Werkbund, it was their independent stylistic merits within the Werkbund model which enabled them to achieve the high reputation for workmanship and form which they held in the 1950's. For them the value of the modern movement lay not in the applicability of rigid rules such as "objectivity in

aesthetics" but rather as a set of guide-lines around which their designers, craftsmen and architects could intuitively work.

It was this aspect of intuition and a personal interpretation of "rightness" which the British design organization tried to dispose of - not due to their in-dept convictions in the rules of modernism, but rather as a result of their lack of understanding of the fundamentals of the Werkbund model, and the inherent flexibility contained therein. Had the design movement at the time been consciously interested enough they might have seen the fallacies in extrapolating a theory to the point where it becomes law- yet no-one, bar Reynar Banham (who had rejected the modern movement years before anyhow) cared to devote this objective analysis to the subject, and the CoID continued to be the messengers of someone else's dubious scripture.

One of the first pieces of design propaganda undertaken by the CoID (The organization was finally "baptized" in December 1949) was an exhibition in the V & A in 1946 called "Britain can make it". It was intended to have the dual functions of stimulating public interest in design and creating a show-case for the best British products in the export market. The exhibition had a number of messages for the public, amongst them the fact that Britain was alive and well and churning out a whole range of exciting new designs, from furniture to garden hoes; and also that Industrial design as a profession was in a equally admirable state of health. Designed and executed with quite a lot of assistance from the Design Research Unit (an independent design consultancy) the exhibition explored the theme of converting wartime production techniques and innovations to peacetime needs.

From a design education point of view two stands were of particular interest; "The Birth of An Egg-cup" executed by Misha Black, set out to "Demonstrate how the designer works when he is designing an article for mass production" and how different materials and different processes influence his design. Another section, entitled "Britain Looks Ahead" underlined the importance of Industrial design to the future of British society by showing the public some visionary products such as an air-conditioned bed and a streamlined sewing machine.

The exhibition was a huge success, but the ultimate conclusions drawn from a Gallup survey of the time showed that the majority of the British Public wanted more excitement, decoration and fun than they were being

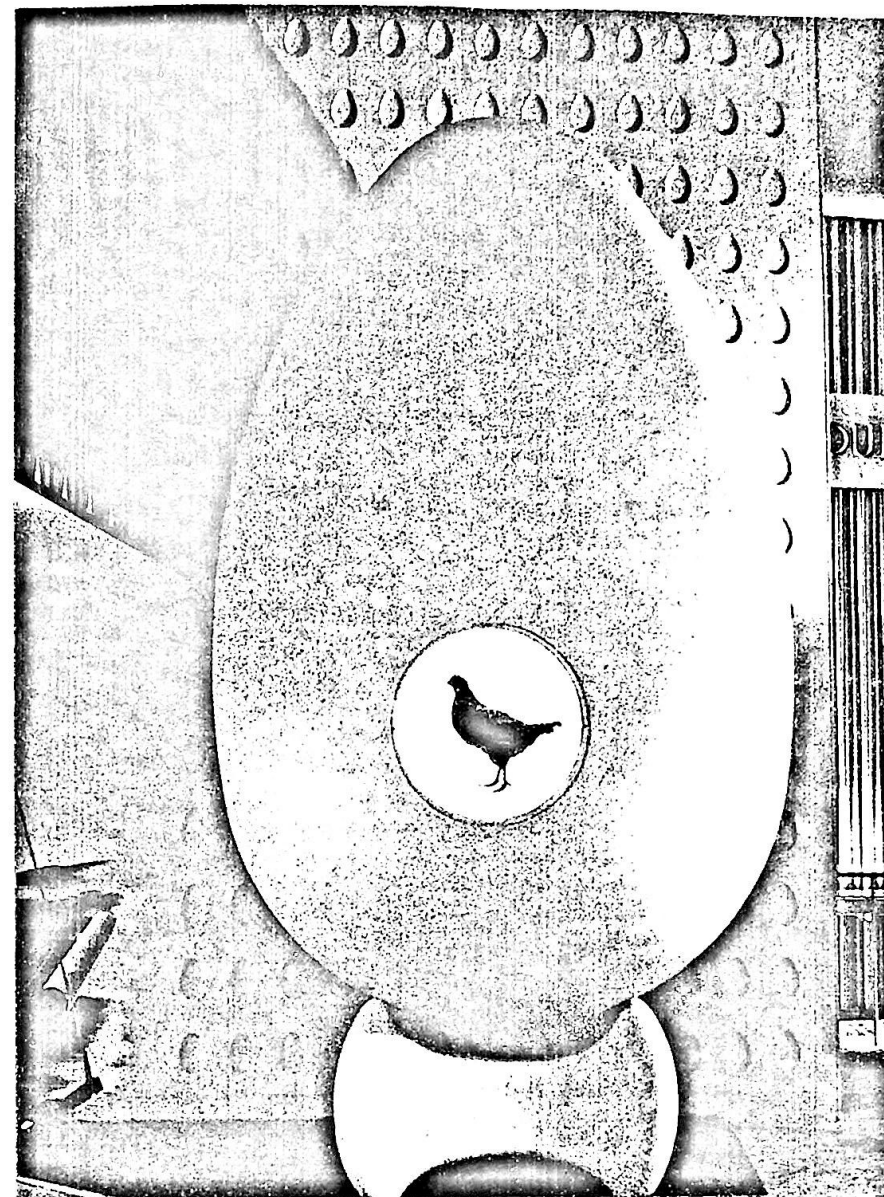
...not only as a set of guidelines, but also as a set of design criteria and standards which the designers...

It was this aspect of history and a personal involvement in the history of the design movement which was used to depict a - not due to their in-built conditions in the field of modernism, but rather as a result of their lack of understanding of the fundamental principles of modernism and the inherent flexibility contained therein. Had the design movement at the time been sufficiently interested enough they might have seen the failures in various ways a theory to the point where it became law - yet no-one, not least the designer himself, had rejected the modern movement before anyone started to devote this objective analysis to the subject and the Giff continued to be the messengers of someone else's dubious scribbles.

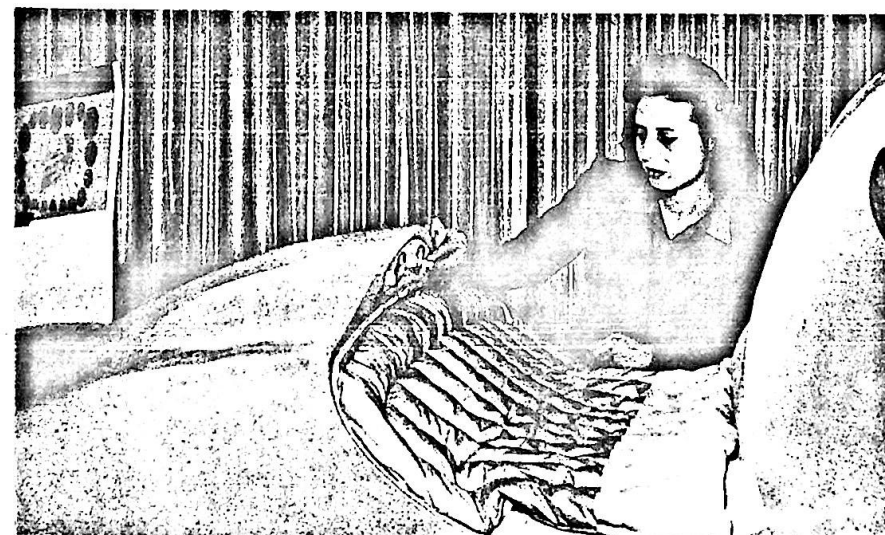
One of the first pieces of design propaganda undertaken by the Giff. The organization was firstly, founded in December 1917 as an exhibition in the V & A in 1918 called "Artistic Canons". It was intended to have the dual function of stimulating public interest in design and creating a show-case for the best British products in the 1920s market. The exhibition had a number of messages for the public: firstly, in the first place, British was alive and well and charming and a wide range of exciting new designs from furniture to car-fair doors and the last industrial design of a profession was in a rapidly changing state of flux. Designed and executed with a lot of assistance from the Design Research Ltd. an independent design consultancy, the exhibition explored the theme of "contemporary living" which produced a collection of "new things to purchase" needs.

From a design education point of view two things were of particular interest. The birth of an egg-cup, designed by Misha Black, set out to demonstrate how the designer works with his design in order to create mass production, and how different materials and different processes influence his design. Another section entitled "British Design 1914-1918" highlighted the importance of industrial design in the years of British society, by showing the public some vision of modern design as an art and conditioned bed and a suspended bed and a suspended bed.

The exhibition was a huge success for the designers involved in it. From a design survey of the time showed that the majority of the public were more interested in design and for that they were more...



ILL. 2: "The Birth of an Egg-cup" stand, designed by Misha Black



ILL. 3: Air-conditional bed

offered by that particular exhibition. What the exhibition did serve to highlight however was the gap which existed between the essentially paternalistic, middle-class attitudes of the British design establishment of the time and the desires and aspirations of the general public, a gap which was to become all too evident in the following decades.

Even before the "Britain can Make it" display the idea of an exhibition to commemorate the great exhibition of 1851 had been proposed. The Ramsden committee, formed to consider the value of such a display, reported in March 1946.

"We are strongly of the opinion that a Universal International Exhibition should be held in London at the earliest practicable date to demonstrate to the world the recovery of the UK from the effects of war in the moral, cultural spiritual and material fields... It should surpass the New York world's fair of 1939 in scale and technical achievement, and the Paris exhibition of 1937 in aesthetic excellence and personal appeal".

A noble and highly admirable proposal, but it failed to take into consideration the huge volume of space required and its attendant costs (a conservative estimate of £70 million was put on this proposal). Finally a sum of £12 million was agreed upon, to be used not only for the creation of an exhibition but also for the purchase of land, preparation of the site, and any other additional work which had to be undertaken. As a result of this constricted budget it was decided to confine the exhibition to a national scale, with the brief to demonstrate "the British contribution to civilization, past, present and future in the arts, in science and technology and in Industrial Design". A narrative theme, based on the land of Britain, the People of Britain and the British contribution to discovery evolved, enabling a diversity of subject matter to be displayed within a meaningful context.

After a number of site proposals including Earls Court, The South Kensington Museums and Hyde park had been rejected, the South Bank site around the Hungerford Bridge was finally chosen. The 30 acre site had to be leveled, drained and serviced, but construction of the exhibits got underway in earnest in early 1950. Under the leadership of Hugh Casson a controversial group of buildings were constructed including the quirkily-roofed Royal Festival Hall, the UFO-like Dome of Discovery and of

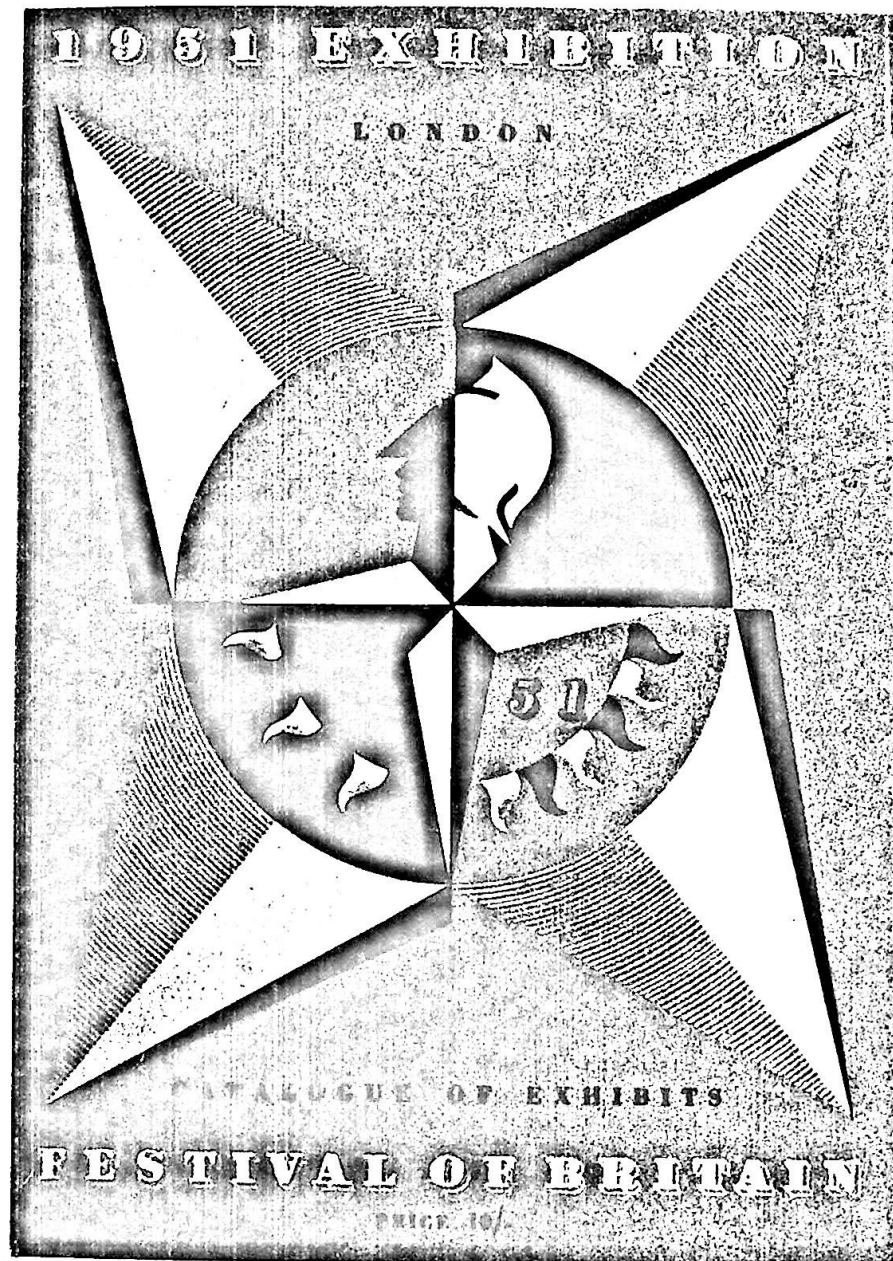
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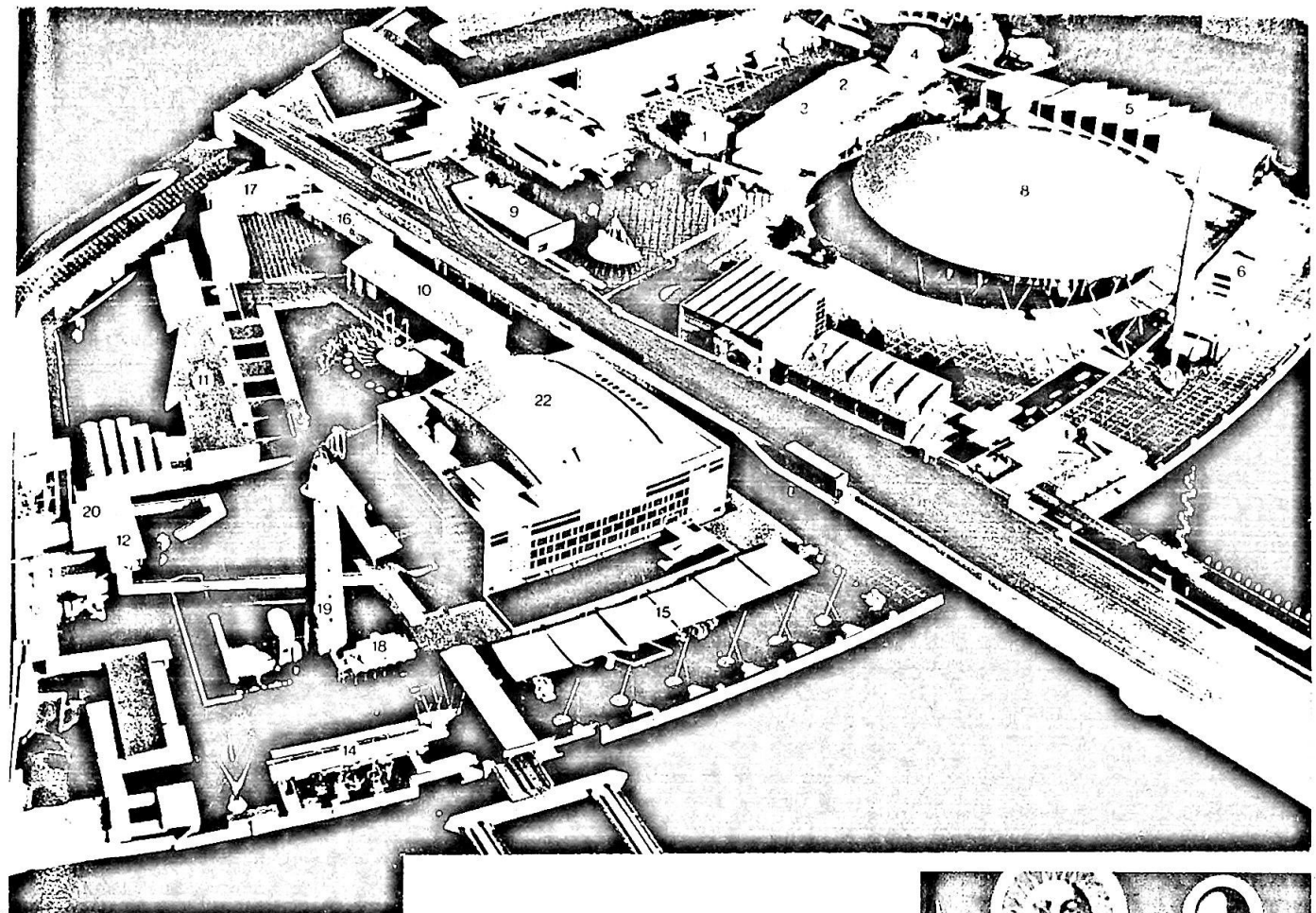
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ILL. 4: Cover of Festival Exhibition Catalogue bearing Abram Games's Festival Star. This jaunty symbol of Britannia wearing a neoclassical helmet both captured the defiant mood of the organisers and epitomised the Festival Style.



ILL. 5: Model of Festival Grounds on the South Bank

UPSTREAM CIRCUIT

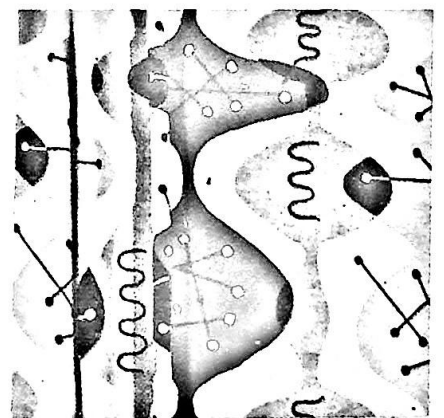
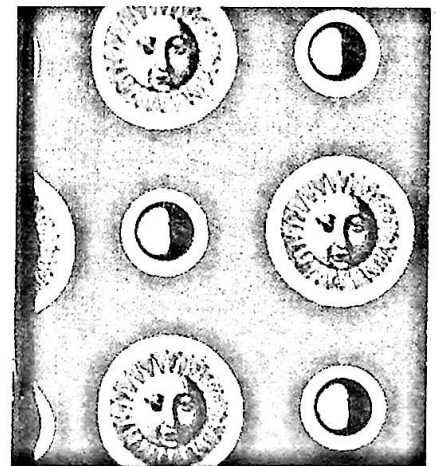
- 1 *The Natural Scene*
- 2 *The Land of Britain*
- 3 *The Country*
- 4 *Minerals of the Island*
- 5 *Power and Production*
- 6 *Sea and Ships*
- 7 *Transport*
- 8 *Dome of Discovery*

DOWNSTREAM CIRCUIT

- 9 *The People of Britain*
- 10 *The Lion and the Unicorn*
- 11 *Homes and Gardens*
- 12 *The New Schools*
- 13 *Health*
- 14 *Sport*
- 15 *Seaside*

OTHER DISPLAYS

- 16 *Television*
- 17 *Telecinema*
- 18 *1811 Centenary pavilion*
- 19 *Shot Tower*
- 20 *Design Review*
- 21 *Skylon*
- 22 *Royal Festival Hall*



ILL. 6: Festival Style: Fabrics
by the Festival Pattern Group

course the symbol of the whole exhibition, the Skylon. This 300ft cigar shaped object stood vertically in the midst of all the other exhibits and appeared to have no visible means of support. Little surprise that cynics drew analogies between it and the British economy at the time. Although dogged by material shortages, workmen's strikes, difficult site layout and incessant rain, the exhibition was opened, as proposed, on the 3rd May by HRH King George VI.

Paralleling the difficulties and complexities of constructing the exhibition halls was the equally daunting problem of what to display in them. The role of design selection was given over primarily to the CoID, who broke down the selection process into four stages.

Firstly a detailed survey was made of current production. Secondly manufactures were requested to forward to the Festival Office details and photographs of their best products. Industry itself then proceeded to make a preliminary selection, under Council guidance. Finally four teams under the guidance of Hartland Thomas approved the designs. These, Gordon Russell emphasized, "were to be real goods to go into real shops for real people" unlike quite a lot of the material displayed in the 1946 exhibition.

From the photographs and details submitted at stage 2 a list, to become known later as the 1951 stock list, was compiled. This was filed and tabulated, and available for inspection by interested parties at the exhibition itself.

The products on display were varied and diverse, varying from simple products such as electric plugs up to an 80 -ft long 2-8-2 w.g. class locomotive built for the Indian Government railways. In between were bicycles, furnishings, agricultural equipment ... the list was endless. One widely published aspect of the domestic furnishings on display was what came to be known as the festival style. This was primarily the work of the Festival pattern group, a collection of twenty firms who developed decorative patterns for textiles, pottery, glass and floor coverings, based on the molecular structures of various crystals. This preoccupation with atoms and atomic links was seen in a huge variety of products, from Earnest races "Antelope" chairs and the dustbins used at the exhibition, to the lighting fixtures, the fittings in the Dome of Discovery and the screen wall along the South Bank perimeter. These spindly quirky shapes and arrangements came to represent a style, and also the spirit of the festival

itself - the brilliant expression in abstract form of something fundamental and concrete. Unfortunately the majority of visitors not only missed the link between certain patterns and molecules, they also missed the link between what they were seeing and what the Council would ultimately like them to furnish their houses with. Thus it was that people appeared more concerned with the poor quality of the tea than the intricate differences between the various contemporary pieces.

This is not to say that the exhibition was not a success. It was visited by over 8 1/2 million people, despite the 4 shilling entrance fee. Visitors to Britain rose by 15%, bringing in approximately £74 million to the exchequer. Practically all those who had visited the South Bank and the corresponding pleasure gardens in Battersea Park immensely enjoyed themselves, and treated the whole event as a huge festival, even if they had to queue incessantly and put up with highly unpredictable weather. The words of the Archbishop of Canterbury, deputizing for the King on the closing night, must be questioned somewhat, however.

"I am sure the Festival has done a lot for our good name. It has brought a great number of visitors from overseas who have admired our spirit; it has won prestige outside our shores for the work of British manufacturers and designers and craftsmen, and the praise they have received has put them all in a "good conceit" with themselves with a keenness to do even better which encouragement always brings."

In reality exports had only risen by 3%, and the majority of the work exported was of the neo-Victorian variety, a style which other nations liked to link with Britain. The contemporary work on display had won few new followers overseas, their preference lying with the more harmonious Scandinavian works. Interest in British industrial products had increased, but this mainly came from the colonies which was of little effective use to the British Exchequer. As for the praise which the exhibitors had received from overseas, it must be looked at in the light of the attitudes of these countries to Britain. Nations such as American had adopted a "benevolent neighbour" type of attitude, borne out in Frank Lloyd Wright's comments on the Festival Hall: "I don't think it's a particularly wonderful building, but I think it is wonderful that your country has a new building."

In terms of realizing its aim of displaying Britain's contribution to civilization, past present and future it no doubt succeeded in the first, but

realistically must have raised a question mark regarding the other two. What the exhibition did succeed in doing was in raising the morale of a nation of people who had for too long been subjected to restriction, rationing and mental oppression. Coinciding as it did with the end of rationing the exhibition epitomized the new possibilities in Britain. Even if, like the Skylon, the economy had no visible means of support, at least both were pointing in the right direction.

From a design point of view the festival gave root to a style of embellishment and decoration for a huge variety of products, primarily domestic. It is interesting to note that effectively the festival style was a popular phenomenon and governed by the same rules which later controlled the accredited Pop movement; In as much as the iconography of a time was absorbed and reapplied with little regard for source but rather for the association of that source with frivolity and lightheartedness. In this manner the festival or contemporary style was as valid a popular movement as Art-Deco or Pop. The main difference must be seen to be the fact that this one held the stamp of approval of the Modern movement, and as such, must have been correct, by CoID standards.

As the 1950's progressed the CoID held a number of exhibitions, but none on the scale of the 1946 or 1951 exhibition, primarily due to lack of funds. Their main work was concentrated, up until 1956 with joint in-store exhibitions with retailers, or with smaller traveling shows.

Other methods which the CoID used in order to increase awareness of design amongst both manufactures and the general public ranged from talks and slide shows to displays and traveling exhibitions, books on the subject, educational packages for schools, and travel abroad in order to enable manufacturers to see not only what methods the opposition were using in manufacture, but also to evaluate at first hand how their products appeared when displayed side by side with leading European lines. In their first annual report the council had described these as methods of "rousing the public to a state of alert sensibility". Additionally, the report states "This should not be achieved by pressing particular dogmas on it" (the public), but rather by explaining the principles of good design in the meaningful context of the consumers' own interests and needs.

The propaganda of the CoID was aimed at a number of different groups, with a disparate method of delivery and set of material for each sector.

...the exhibition must have raised a question about the role of a nation of people who had for too long been subjected to repression and mental oppression. Considering as it did with the end of raising the exhibition against the next world war in Britain. Then it is the fact that the economy had no visible means of support, at least both were pointing in the right direction.

From a design point of view the festival gave room to a spirit of confidence and devotion for a hope of a new world. It is interesting to note that effectively the festival was a popular phenomenon and was not for the same reason which later controlled the so-called Pop movement. In as much as the economy of a time was shaped and reshaped with little regard for a sense but rather for the recreation of that sense with the festival and light-heartedness. In this manner the festival was a temporary style with as valid a popular movement as the Pop movement. The main difference must be seen to be the fact that the one held the stamp of approval of the modern movement and as such must have been correct by the standards.

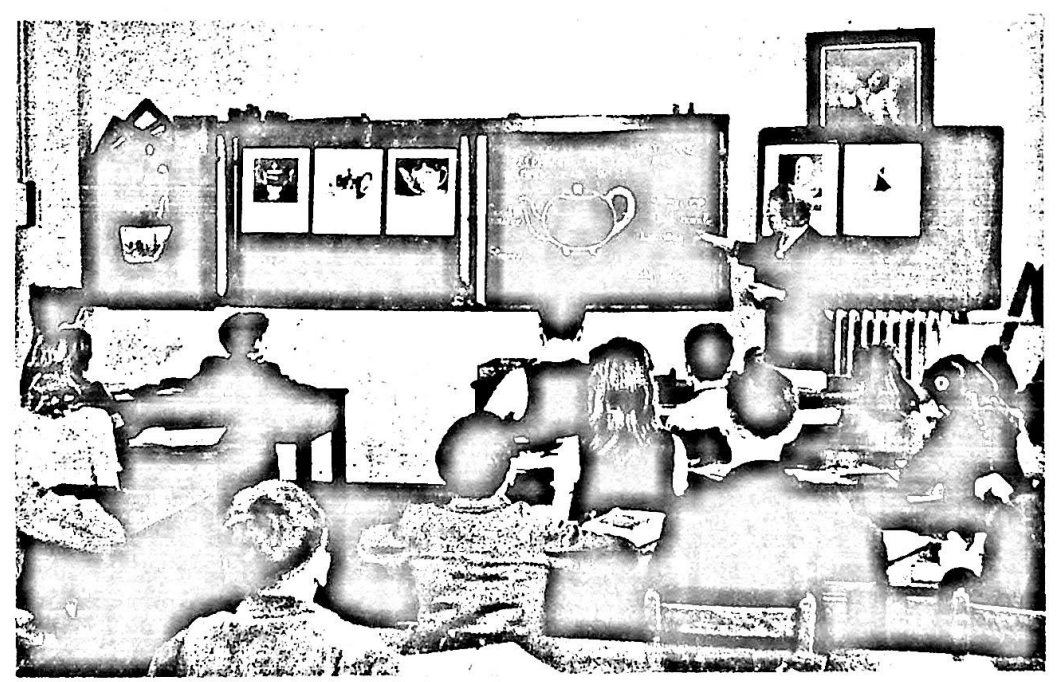
As the 1950s progressed the CoID held a number of exhibitions, but on the scale of the 1945 or 1947 exhibition, mainly due to lack of funds. Their main work was organized up until 1950 with some of these exhibitions with reviews or with smaller traveling shows.

Other methods with the CoID used in order to increase awareness of design amongst both manufacturers and the general public were to take and slide shows to display and traveling exhibitions, books on the subject, educational packages for schools and travel abroad in order to enable manufacturers to see not only what methods the opposition were using to manipulate but also to learn at first hand how their products appeared when displayed and by side with leading European firms. In their first annual report the council had drawn these as methods of reaching the public to a state of alert responsibility. Additionally, the report states: This should not be achieved by passing traditional design on to the public, but rather by explaining the principles of good design in the meaningful context of the consumers own interests and needs.

The propaganda of the CoID was aimed at a number of different groups with a separate method of delivery and set of material for each group.



ILL. 7: CoID Propaganda took the Form of T.V. programmes, Magazine Articles and traveling design Folios



These consisted of children, Adult "Leadership" group ie. those who were alert and articulate with a keen interest in design - and quite probably shared the same modernist viewpoint as the Council itself - and finally the adult "disinterested" group; the majority needless to say were in this third and most difficult to reach group. Paul Reilly was appointed Chief Information Officer and the propaganda material was ready for use in the years 1948-1949, with the information division responsible both for its propagation and promotion.

For schools the most popular items were the Design Folios, containing a set of cards on various subjects, and also the traveling exhibitions consisting of a packaged set of notes, pictures and samples on products. A photographic reference and lending library was set up to assist manufacturers in selecting good products for manufacture.

A weekly intelligence bulletin containing short details on design was produced, and this led in turn to the monthly magazine Design. While launched initially as a trade magazine, it quickly attracted readers in art schools and amongst the consumer population. Sales of the magazine grew steadily abroad as well as in Britain, such that by 1954 copies were being sent to 58 countries and territories overseas.

Another service which the Council provided was a team of specialist lecturers, available to give talks in any part of the country. As demand grew a list of Council Staff and outside members had to be drawn up, to ease the pressure. In 1959 a total of 250 lectures were given, many by famous names, and all with an undercurrent of energetic optimism, indicative of the feeling within the Council itself at the time.

To access the public at large the Council made use of the popular media including magazines, film and television. The Council press office played a vital role by feeding photographs and information to editors and reporters. Particularly strong links were forged with the women's press, logically enough when one is reminded of the fact that women at the time were responsible for practically all decisions regarding the home.

It is a question of some complexity as to whether or not these activities on the part of the Council were having any effect, or would have had were the programmes not curtailed somewhat in the early 1950's due to budget cuts. Fundamental education, being a slow process, could not be expected to yield the rewards of a similar investment in the setting up of, say, a

permanent exhibition, in a similar timespan. However, the introduction of a student at an early age to the principles of aesthetics, be they presented from a Modernist on totally arbitrary viewpoint, is something which would not be readily forgotten (were the exposure frequent enough and of a suitable calibre). It can only be construed then that the ending of the education programme at this stage in Britain's industrial history was an error of judgement and ultimately must have further retarded the development of an awareness not just of the role of products but of the role of designer. It must be said that only now in the 1980's is Britain reaching that position of awareness which could have been attained in the early 1960's had the education programme continued.

As far back as 1945 the idea of a permanent design centre had been raised by Gerald Barry. This was reiterated in the First Annual Report (1946) which stated "a Central Pavilion would be of considerable importance to the Council's future exhibitions policy and to much of its other work". Following the 1951 exhibition Dr. Walter Warboys (elected chairman in January 1953) was determined to maintain the momentum which the Council had attained, and the construction of a permanent design centre became the perfect focus for the Council's attention. A premises was found at 28 Haymarket, an ideal site, in early 1954, and work began immediately on its redevelopment. The exhibition area was conceived to be as flexible as possible to accommodate regularly changing exhibits, and illumination was from a ceiling grid of lights. In execution this treatment marked a move away from the curvilinear Festival style, and once and for all displayed that, given freedom off choice, the Design Council's affiliations and senses were tuned firmly towards the Modern Movement.

The stock list had evolved since the 1951 exhibition into a huge reference library of designs, published through the Council bulletin Design Review. The new centre became the ideal location now not only for the design review library, but also for those products which the Council felt to be exceptional. Categories of goods for inclusion were widened to take in industries such as textiles, bicycles and motorcycles. A Design Council badge was evolved, not without controversy, to identify products which had met with their approval, and was cautiously displayed by the manufacturers. A total of 1,020 Design Review products were on display, and the fees charged on these (another controversial issue) covered the Centre's expenses for the first year. The Council were quite pleased with

the success of the centre, with an average attendance of 2300 people per day, highlighted by the fact that the Daily Mail Ideal Homes Exhibition of 1957 was visited by over 1.3 million people, who purchased outright or reserved a total of £42.4 million worth of items. That such a huge amount was available for spending merely serves to highlight the reluctance of the Design Council to place the convenience of the consumer, and their own financial well-being, before their compulsion for dictating taste and style. Had a representative of the Council been present at the Ideal Homes exhibition he would have realized that the Council was failing not only to convert the public to their doctrines, but in the fundamentals of communication itself. The public, in a society led, controlled and altered by money, had little use for a centre which did not express itself in their terms. Thus "How Good" was of less significance to them than "How good at this price?" Remove the rider, and they lost interest.

For this reason primarily the general public in the early days held as much interest in the Design Centre as they did in Pop art in the I.C.A. and in some cases even less. The ranges of products being endorsed by the Design Council also came in for criticism, with Banham dubbing the centre "H. M. Fashion House".

As the decade wore on the Council began to see and alter its ways, but not before the credibility which they had so fanatically nurtured in the early days had been seriously eroded. This change of attitude was not only in response to pressure from the general public, but also from certain areas of the design field, most notably the Independent Group who were expounding a philosophy other than the modernist doctrine of the Council. It is difficult to ascertain whether one or the other group could have had a sufficient effect to cause this swing away from Modernism, but the cumulative effect was a total volte-face by the establishment from their post-war Imperialist conservatism to one more closely in tune with the pace of life and culture in the early 1960's.

Chapter III

Pop

The subject of Pop art, its roots and its effects, is one which is both complex and diverse. In speaking of its influences in the field of design, however, great care must be taken not to confuse the two separate elements of the pop movement, namely Pop Art and Pop Culture.

When Lawrence Alloway first coined the phrases sometime around 1954-55, he used them to refer to the products of the mass media, not to works of art that draw on popular culture. Subsequent understanding of the terms have taken Pop culture to mean the mode(s) of communication in this society, and Pop art to be the work of a group of artists, or movement, which draws its images from popular culture. The main problem, from a design point of view, is rationalizing the Pop movement into its disparate elements, and discovering which (if either) had an effect on the design of British products. The further complication of this approach is that as Pop Art evolved, it in itself became part of the mass media, eg on billboards.

Lawrence Alloway credits Francis Bacon with making the preliminary moves towards Pop Art in 1949-51, when he began using photographs in his work. The manner in which the photographs were used, however, differed significantly from earlier painter's applications, in that recognition of the photographic origin of the image was central to his intention. The photograph, as a document of reality and a source of fantastic imagery was to be taken far beyond Bacon's use of it, in subsequent works. In 1953 an exhibition called "Parallel of Life and Art" was held at the Institute of Contemporary Art (ICA) in London. Although primarily fine-art based, it was obvious that photography as a source of image was being pillaged on a grand scale. The show included a motion study (differing from Bacon's earlier work, in that the source was Marey instead of Eadweard Muybridge) and also x-ray, high speed and stress photographs, along with anthropological material, and children's art. The show was organized by Edward Paolozzi, Nigel Henderson (photographer) and architects Alison and Peter Smithson; all of whom were subsequently connected with the British Pop Movement.

Central to the evolution of the Pop Movement was a group (including the above) who became known as the Independent Group. The ICA was, at

the time, a meeting place for young artists, architects and writers, London being without either a café life like Paris or social exhibition openings such as New York. Initially convened in Winter 1952-53 by Reynar Banham the theme of the IG programme was on techniques (the first meeting covered helicopter design). These meetings roused little interest and the group waned, until it was reconvened in Winter 1954-55 by John McHale and Alloway, this time with the theme of Popular Culture. This topic had evolved initially from informal conversation between the various members (or ex-members as they were in this intermediary stage). They discovered that they had in common a vernacular culture that persisted beyond any special interest in art, architecture, design or art criticism that any of them may have possessed. The area of contact was mass-produced urban culture: movies, advertising, science fiction, pop music. They felt none of the dislike of commercial culture standard among most intellectuals, but accepted it as fact, discussed it in detail and consumed it enthusiastically. One result of these discussions was to take pop culture out of the realms of "Escapism", "Sheer Entertainment" and "Relaxation" and to treat it with the seriousness of any other art form. This was an ideal set apart from Pop Art in that the I.G. wished to have the work of film makers, photographers, record producers and advertising copy writers subjected to the same analysis and reverse which was at the time strictly the preserve of the fine arts. Thus expendable art was proposed as no less serious than permanent art: An aesthetic of expendability (a term coined by Banham) aggressively countering idealist and absolute art theories. To this end topics discussed and analysed by the I.G. included Detroit and the sex symbol (Banham) Consumer goods (Hamilton) and Popular music (Frank Condell).

The I.G. ran into conflicts with the "intellegentsia" and art critics on a number of fronts, not least the fact that they had defined their ideals, attitudes and philosophies for themselves, as opposed to using the vertical evolutionary processes practiced at the time. The I.G. did not refer to themselves as art critics, yet they voiced an opinion. In the staid British system this was perhaps one of the first occasions in the recent past in which a body had not gone through the usual channels of ratification to win its place.

While the Constructivists were still poring over the works of Ozenfant (Foundations of Modern Art) Giedion (Mechanization takes command) and Moholy-Nagy (Vision in motion) the artists around the I.G. were more

concerned with the illustrations than the text. In the words of Lawrence Alloway "These texts carried too many slogans about a "Modern spirit" and "the integration of the arts" for our taste.... What I liked about these books.... was their acceptance of science and the city, not on a utopian basis, but in terms of fact condensed in vivid imagery.

As yet a formal art movement, in which the media, which the I.G. were concerned about became the central source of images, had not evolved, even though the concept of mass-media images and technology having a role in art had already been accepted (at least in the ICA). Paolozzi was central in the move towards the incorporation of symbols from whatever source in his work. He felt that any object could be rewarding, because it was a multi-evocative image, meaning a variety of different things in different locations and to different people. From Paolozzi, too comes a full statement of the ideas which were necessary for the development of Pop Art. "A serious taste for Pop culture, a belief in multi-evocative imagery, and a sense of the interplay of technology and man". At this point, too (1955) Reynar Banham appears to have become less interested in the acceptance of Pop-art along with fine art, and more with the elevation of Pop-culture to a position of autonomy in society. Even with the popular movement his policies were viewed with a degree of scepticism, and on certain topics he found himself standing alone. Countering trends in architecture and furnishing at the time Banham proposed the term and philosophy of New Brutalism. It never really caught on, but as Alloway wryly comments "It agitated British architectural discussions for some time, which was probably Banham's main purpose".

Increasingly the popular movement found itself having to defend itself against scathing attacks, such as Kenneth Greenburg's article "Avant-garde and Kitsch". In this Greenburg refers to the mass-media as "ersatz culture...destined for those who are insensible to the value of genuine culture... Kitsch, using for raw material the debased and academic simulacra of genuine culture welcomes the insensibility". Obviously the Pop dream of "a Fine-art-Pop Art continuum, in which the enduring and the expendable, the timeless and the timely co-existed but without damage either to the senses of the spectator or the standards of society" was not one to which Greenburg readily subscribed.

The first exhibition to really come to public attention, as well as being the first totally concerned with popular culture and its representation as an

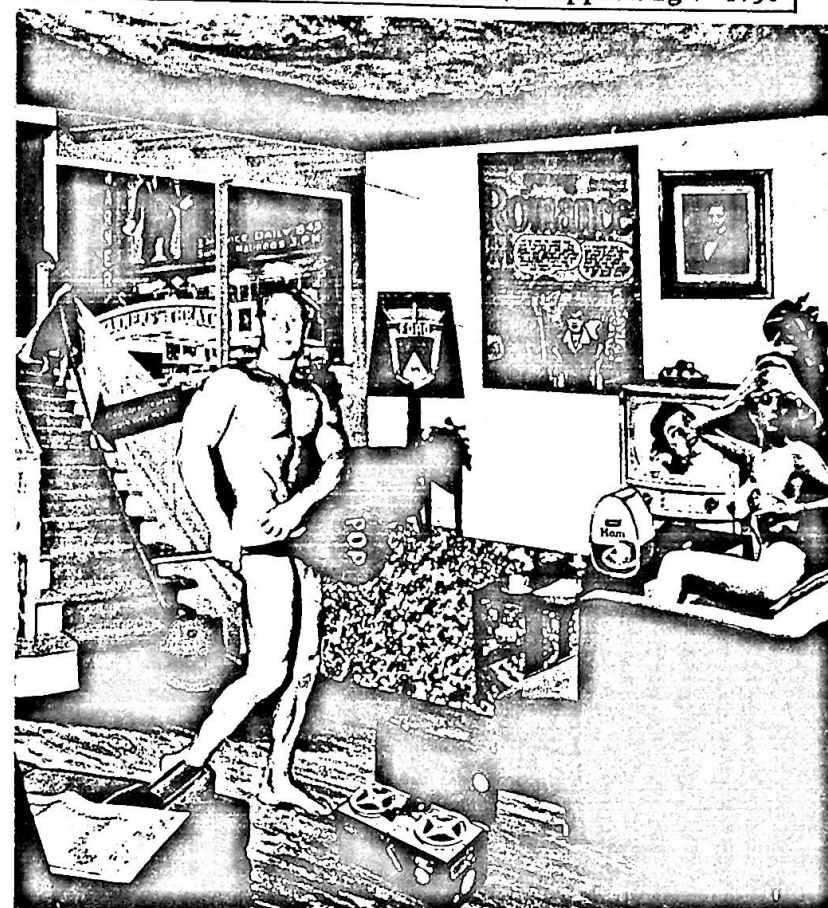
art form was "This is Tomorrow" held in the Whitechapel Art Gallery in 1956. This took the form of 12 individual displays, prepared by different individuals and groups, and displaying diverse elements of popular culture, predominantly the house.

These varied from Hamilton's now-famous collage "Just what is it that makes today's homes so different, so appealing" and "Patio and Pavilion" by Henderson, Paolozzi and Smithson, to a highly sensuous (in the pure sense of the word) funfair-style structure by Hamilton, McHale and John Vaelcker. Inside consisted of a room in exaggerated perspective with soft floor and dull lights. Outside was covered with quotations from Popular culture, including Marilyn Monroe, a giant beer bottle, and a 17 foot high robot cut-out from a movie marquee advertising the film "Forbidden Planet". The entire exhibition fitted perfectly Banham's theory of Pop, having a huge initial impact and limited sustaining power.

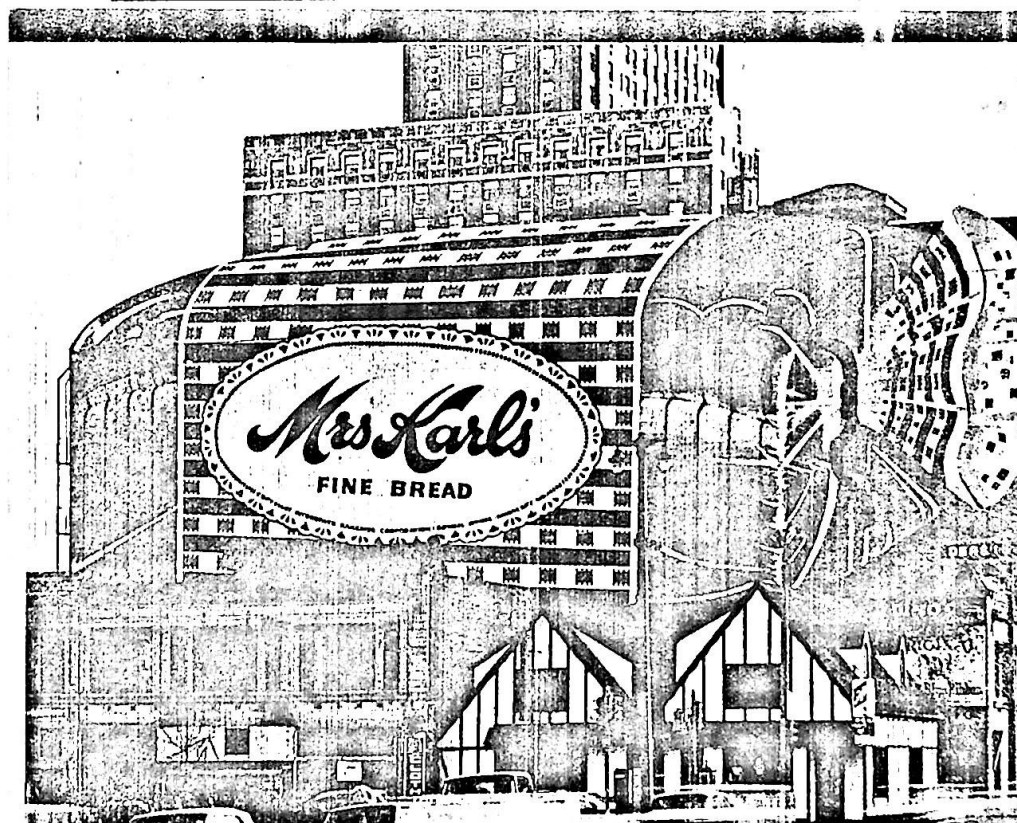
The novel aspect of the exhibition, and of the Pop-art movement in general was the aims of the artists in producing such work. It was not a critical analysis of society, with the aim of reforming it, but rather an accolade of it, an acceptance of its vices and a gleeful display of its virtues. Thus artists were revealing a sense of the city neither as a means to reform (in the style of Mondrian) nor as the topical form of Ideal Form (Léger) but as an entity in its own right; a symbol-thick scene, criss-crossed with the tracks of human activity. In this sense the artists found themselves quite alone, with accusations of being "too lethargic to evolve any substantial philosophies for a new era" being partially accurate. The only activists and high-profile people in the movement were Hamilton and Banham and the accusation could be made that they used Pop Art primarily for their own purposes. Of Hamilton this was certainly true in relation to his 1964 portrait of Hugh Gaitshell, the Labour leader. Hamilton declared him to be a "Famous monster of Film Land" because he regarded him as "the major obstacle to adoption by the Labour party of a reasonable nuclear policy, at a time when the will of a majority within the Labour movement in Britain had been expressed in condemnation of our continuing nuclear attachment." Coming from a member of what must surely have been one of the least "active" art movements of the 20th century, this didacticism was surprising and not always appreciated.

Banham was also more vociferous than a lot of the Pop-artists, having more scope to do so through the pages of Architectural Review. While his

ILL. 8: R. Hamilton: "Just what is it that makes today's home so different, so appealing?" 1956



ILL. 9: Pop Art as part of the Mass Media. Billboard for "Mrs. Karl's Bread" by Bernie Kemitz



interests were strongly rooted in products, his fundamental belief in a need for expressionism within design stretched to architecture also. hence his praise for architects such as Sant' Elia and Bruno. For Banham the value in these people's work was not in the quality of their designs, but in their philosophies, and the execution of those philosophies within their chosen field. In Sant' Elia he found his image of a great theologian, much underestimated and poorly respected. Having said that, however, the Manifesto of Futurist architecture contains a tabulated list of points which pre-empted a lot of philosophies expounded by later, much greater movements such as the Expressionists, and the theorists of the Machine Aesthetic. Perhaps the one point which caught Banham's eye, and which we can now see has real foundation states:

"That an architecture such as this breeds no permanence, no structural habits. We shall live longer than our houses, and every generation will have to make it's own city"

In this the fundamentals of obsolescence are expressed, and as such probably fitted Banham's pointed arguments admirably. In another article Banham sets out to expose the "lie" of the Modern Movement, in that they were not truly accepting the machine aesthetic as an absolute code, but rather using the symbols of this movement as a kind of surface decoration, in the same manner as Gothic columns were used to dress up otherwise bland structures. In this manner, he rationalizes, the machine is used in a symbolic rather than technological way, and is far less honest, as a result, than the American "Jazz" (Art Deco) styles. He states: "Both at the Bauhaus, and in the circle of L'Esprit Nouveau, this approach continued in however disguised and complicated a form, making it possible to bracket together architecture and machinery with the least mental strain for the architectural side". Obviously, this would be a very difficult theory for anyone to prove, but it is felt that proving such theories was not one of Banham's aims. Although highly intelligent and well versed in a huge range of architecture-related areas, fundamentally Banham was a showman, with the explicit aim of generating as much attention for himself as possible. Being controversial was one of his more frequently applied techniques, and from Architectural Review's point of view controversy generated interest, which converted pretty neatly into sales. On the other hand it must be pointed out that without Banham's cohesive and well researched arguments the Pop movement could not have hoped to receive as much publicity in the 1950's as it did. Also a degree of

Banham's work must be accepted as being sound theorizing, for example his piece entitled "A throwaway Aesthetic", first written in 1955 and published in Design magazine in March 1960. In this he makes the following points:

"We live in a throw-away culture in which the most fundamental classification of our ideas and worldly possessions is in terms of their relative expendability. Our buildings may stand for a millenium, but their mechanical equipment must be replaced in 50 years, their furniture in 20 years. A mathematical model may last long enough to solve a particular problem, which may be as long as it takes to read a newspaper, but newspaper and model will be forgotten together in the morning, and a research rocket-apex of our technological adventure - may be burned out and wrecked in a matter of minutes. It is clearly absurd to demand that objects designed for a short useful life should exhibit qualities signifying eternal validity - such qualities as "divine proportion", "pure form" and "harmony of colours".

In this, Banham makes a clear case for the acceptance of expendability, being as it was a factor of increasing significance in society. More and more, the people of Britain were consuming, not just basic domestic furnishings as in the late forties and early fifties, but also automobiles, electrical products clothing, records, magazines and film. Yet central to this trend was the home, with practically all popular references encompassing this in one way or another. The process of consumption was geared towards the home through the advent of glossy magazines depicting all that was available at the time. It was in this area particularly that the protagonists of "good" design really lost out. Design magazine, realistically, only reached a fraction of the population. And while there were contributions from the Design Council to women's magazines in the 1950's it shared page-space with material which was quite often deemed to be substandard by the CoID. To attempt to restrict the material included in these magazines would have, at any rate, killed their popularity.. Being part of the mass media it was an intrinsic requirement of magazines that they make the maximum impact, and if this involved featuring goods which had not been lauded for their high quality of design, so be it. A degree of "Laissez Faire" was in operation, with the presumption being that publishers responsibilities were lower for something disposable than a permanent item. In a few instances in the

later fifties some truly crass items appeared in British magazines, but, by and large the magazines merely published that which was in vogue, or coming into vogue, both in Britain and overseas.

It needs no reiterating that the source for quite a lot of the material was American, but Italy also began to exert an influence, acting as it did in some cases as a catalyst for putting a different face on American products.

For the most part, however, it was to American that Bretons looked for stimuli; for films, clothes, music, magazines, dance routine, even foodstuffs and expressions. These were absorbed at a phenomenal rate, and equally rapidly replaced by newer options. The modes of this turnabout are the subjects of different chapters, but it merely serves as an indication of how truly fast-moving life had become that a complete culture could become extant, from a veritable desert, in a matter of a few years. And in this manner it also shows just how futile were the hopes of maintaining the traditional values of society in such a climate of flux and change.

CHAPTER IV

The Consumer

In Britain during the war the Utility scheme, while serving the primary function of controlling the use or wastage of valuable materials, served the secondary one of controlling prices and offering the consumer a degree of quality assurance. While resented for the lack of choice it afforded the consumer, it did give the security of having a government guarantee. The end of the Utility scheme removed the security and while the tax-incentives offered to manufacturers ensured that these Utility items did not become radically different in the post-war years, there was still sufficient scope for the unscrupulous to market items which were of a substandard nature.

This, and also the mental association which these pieces held with war-time shortages, resulted in a huge demand in post war years for the heavily carved tables and overstuffed couches of the pre-war years. The harking back to Georgian and Victorian days caused great concern to the CoID who immediately set about displaying to the public through the "Britain can make it" exhibition, the new ranges of furniture which were more in keeping both with their Modernist theories and the continued state of rationing in the country. It was the latter more than the former which encouraged people to buy what were effectively continuations of the Utility ranges, but with particular emphasis being placed on materials now redundant since the war. Ernest Races' chair and sideboard of aluminium are good examples of what the government wished the public to consume. While visually quite pleasing, and acceptable to the 1980's post-hi-tech society, the concept at the time of bringing what was effectively a part of the war back into the house was simply not acceptable to most people.

As the post-war years progressed, however, people began to accept this furniture more and more, if for no reason other than the fact that the smaller houses of the post-war years were unable to accommodate the huge sofas and tables of the pre-war years. Yet that people were doggedly attached to the past can not be denied. A random survey of 50 working-class houses in Liverpool in the late 1940's revealed that while 33 had pianos, only 10 had refrigerators. This could be taken to indicate a scarcity

of refrigerators but I rather feel it highlights people's needs for objects which they associate with as being "homely"

Another reason for the failure of post-war furniture (to be called "Contemporary" from here on) in appealing to the masses was the lack of symbolism which it could offer. Conceived as an element of a greater democratic ideal, it was believed that Contemporary furniture would grace the miners home and the Mayfair apartment alike. The flaw in this concept was that, while in effect similar pieces might reside in both places, neither party could know this. Young Lord's concepts of what a miner's house should look like were probably as inaccurate as a miner's idea of a Lord's apartment. Thus the furniture which the miner was being encouraged to buy held no indication of where else it might reside, unlike an ornately carved Victorian dining-room chair. This, by its ornateness, and the mental associations which everyone holds, offered to the working class man a part impression of the opulent whole, and enabled him to participate in a degree of social climbing albeit an imaginary sense. The error which the Council made was to think it was within their capability to alter this "sentimentality", as Nicholas Pevsner rather brusquely put it. But Mr. Pevsner was as guilty as anyone else of this sentimentality. His distaste for all things American can only be taken as a direct reflection on American's state of superiority over Britain. Additionally, Pevsner would no more appreciate a reduction of the British system to a single homogeneous plane than any other member of the upper-classes. It was, after all, his position in society which ultimately gave him the power to dictate to the lower classes - it certainly was not his academic erstwhileness, at any rate.

Meanwhile in the USA no such qualms existed about where styles were sourced. Plagiarism existed on a grand scale, and a retrospective in the House and Gardens magazine of 1956 stated:

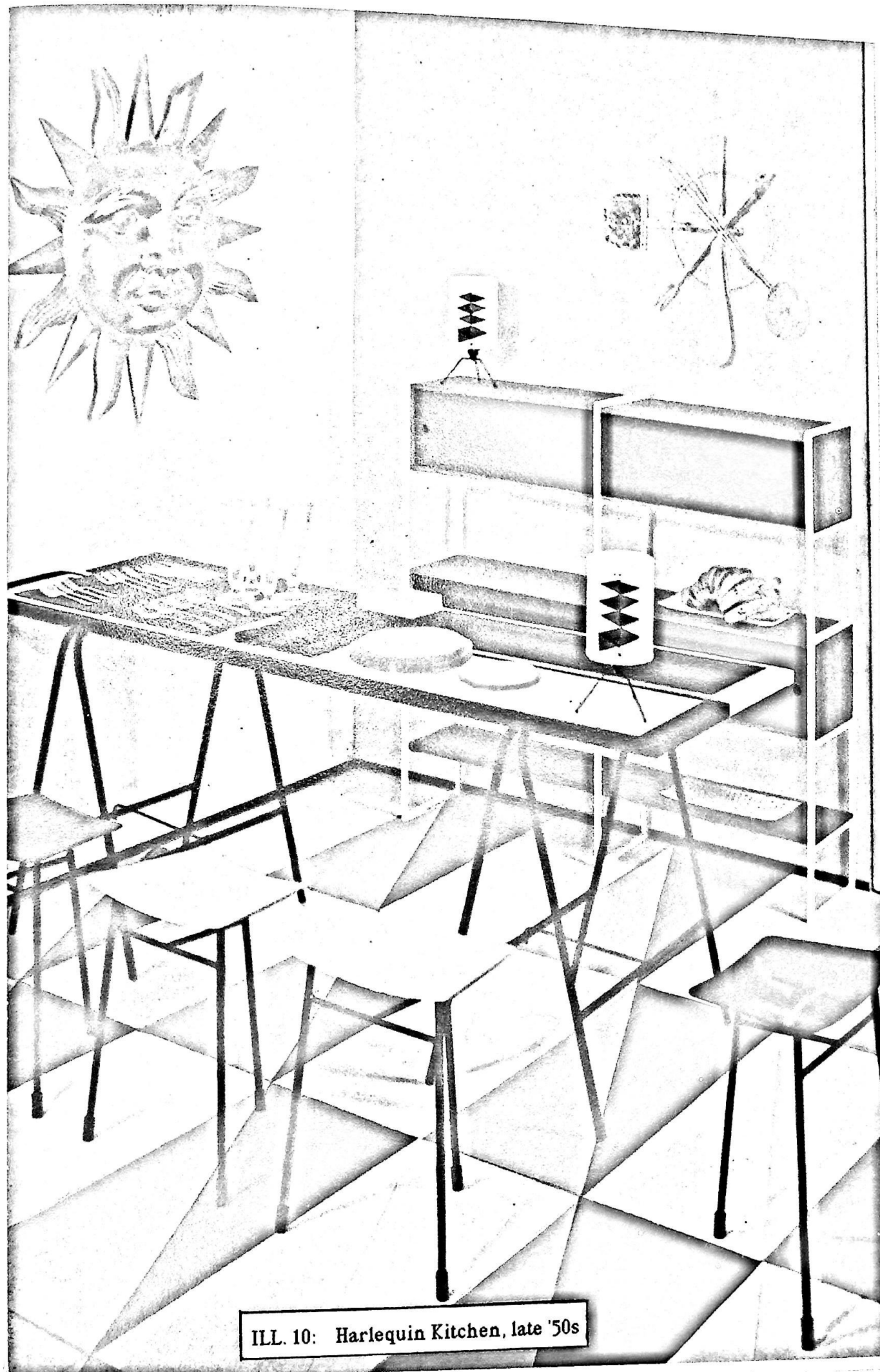
"Today scarcely a season goes by but from Grand Rapids we are swept by the publicity for a new style - Victorian, Swedish modern, Pennsylvanian Dutch. Our serenity is broken by threats of a Queen Anne revival and a West Coast movement that makes us nostalgic for the old craftsmen's styles. Those who had just recovered from Classic Modernism were left a little breathless when Regency came over the horizon or stood aghast before what was solemnly called Louis XV Modern. French Provincial had two

come-backs and Biedermeier one, as in many decades. Regency enjoyed polite support, Saltbox and Shaker furniture brought their tribute to our sterner ancestry and now, the wheel spinning merrily on, we are threatened with furniture based on Babylonian motifs"

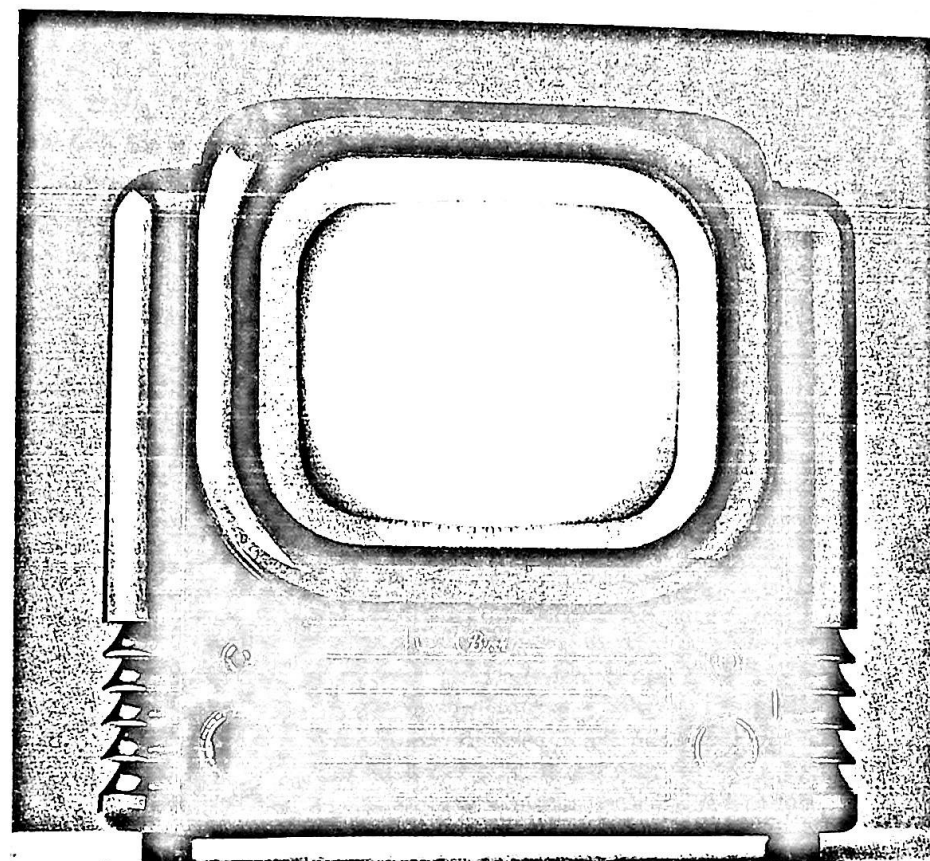
This self-indulgent consumption of titles (the products themselves varied little) represented the worst of American consumerism, and pertaining as it did to furnishings was the aspect which received most attention in Britain. The fear existed that, given freedom of choice, and based upon the public's attenuation towards pre-war styles, consumption would degenerate into a similar spiral of pseudo-reproduction style mongering

With this in mind the CoID strove even harder to ensure that the British mind would remain open to the Council's sensibility of style, and firmly closed to American borax. The festival of 1951 gave the Council the ideal opportunity to display the new style to best effect, and this, coupled with traveling exhibitions and in-store displays generated a moderate degree of interest. In retrospect it was the more frivolous items which won broad public appeal, such as the crystal-patterned prints and Ernest Races' spindly chairs. In some instances this absorption of style went as far as the highly visual but undoubtedly difficult to live with Harlequin dining-room illustrated. The bold primaries and fetishistic fixtures were smiled upon by the establishment, but on analysis of intent one wonders why such furore was created over the later Pop styles. These strong colours and overt symbols could not be called discrete, and hit the observer instantly. Again like Pop their lasting appeal must be questioned, and many such perfect images were gradually diluted by the introduction of more traditional or craft-orientated elements such as rugs wicker chairs and family memorabilia.

American influences were being felt more and more in the behaviour of society. With a greater disposable income the people of Britain began to look more at not only furnishing their homes in the traditional sense, but also at the purchase of more luxury items and labour-saving devices. Flicking through American magazines, by this stage well established in Britain, the reader was inundated with images of gleaming toasters, bulging refrigerators; dishwashers, washing machines, vacuum cleaners, food mixers - the list was endless. Many people in Britain did not even



ILL. 10: Harlequin Kitchen, late '50s



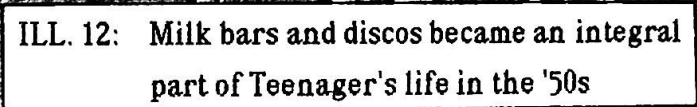
ILL. 11: Bush Television in Phenolic resin, 1949

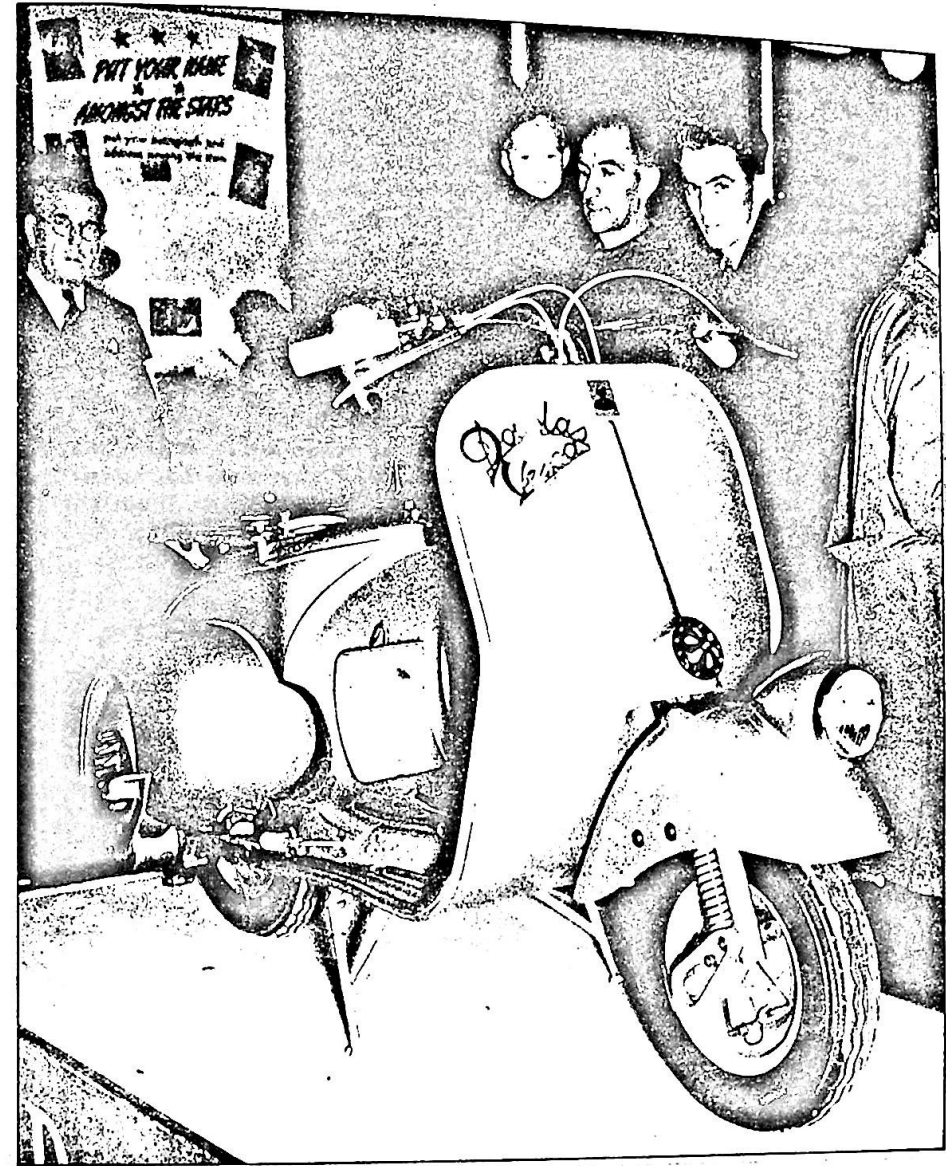
own a fridge at this stage, yet with an income to dispose of the prospect of buying a status equal to their American cousins was an irresistible one.

From the manufacturers point of view a ready and willing market existed, with a mental association of the product already formulated. Most manufacturers made little effort to stylize their products, being guaranteed a market anyhow. Where a conscious effort was made to give the products an identity it was primarily derived from American streamlined forms, this being the only precedent from which the designer could "borrow". It was particularly in the range of brown goods, however that the American influence was felt, most notably televisions. Even into the early 1950's these were treated, stylistically, in the same manner as the earlier radiograms. Faced with the problem of the "Blind Eye" sitting in the corner most manufacturers built the television in a large veneered cabinet with sliding doors to cover the screen when not in use. These monumental pieces looked rather out of place in the contemporary home, so the concept of change from a piece of furniture to a portable object was a popular, if somewhat difficult to achieve, one. One of the first British manufacturers to emulate the American lead was Bush, producing in 1949 a rather different, Art-Deco inspired television in phenolic. Most, however, struck to the idea of the television being a piece of furniture, being finished in dark veneers and laminates.

Some US influences were to be welcomed and focused the shortcomings in the overall policies of the CoID. In 1952 the Douglas Committee on purchase Tax and Utility, and the Cunliffe Committee of 1950 had urged manufacturers and consumers to adopt some form of certification scheme for consumer goods in order to safeguard against substandard products. In 1951 the BSI set up it's Women's Advisory Committee, but it was not until 1957 that an independent body, the Consumers Association (CA) was set up and their magazine "Which" went on sale. The rate at which subscriptions to the magazine increased is indicative of how starved for analytical material the British public were.

Placed in the context of the rest of the world this was a very late start. In the US the Consumers Union had been in existence since 1936, and boasted it's own laboratories, a large staff, an income of \$3 million per year, and complete independence from advertisers, manufacturers and the state. In Sweden the state had set up a body, Active Housekeeping, in 1940, which was followed up in 1944 by the Home Research Institute, a private body



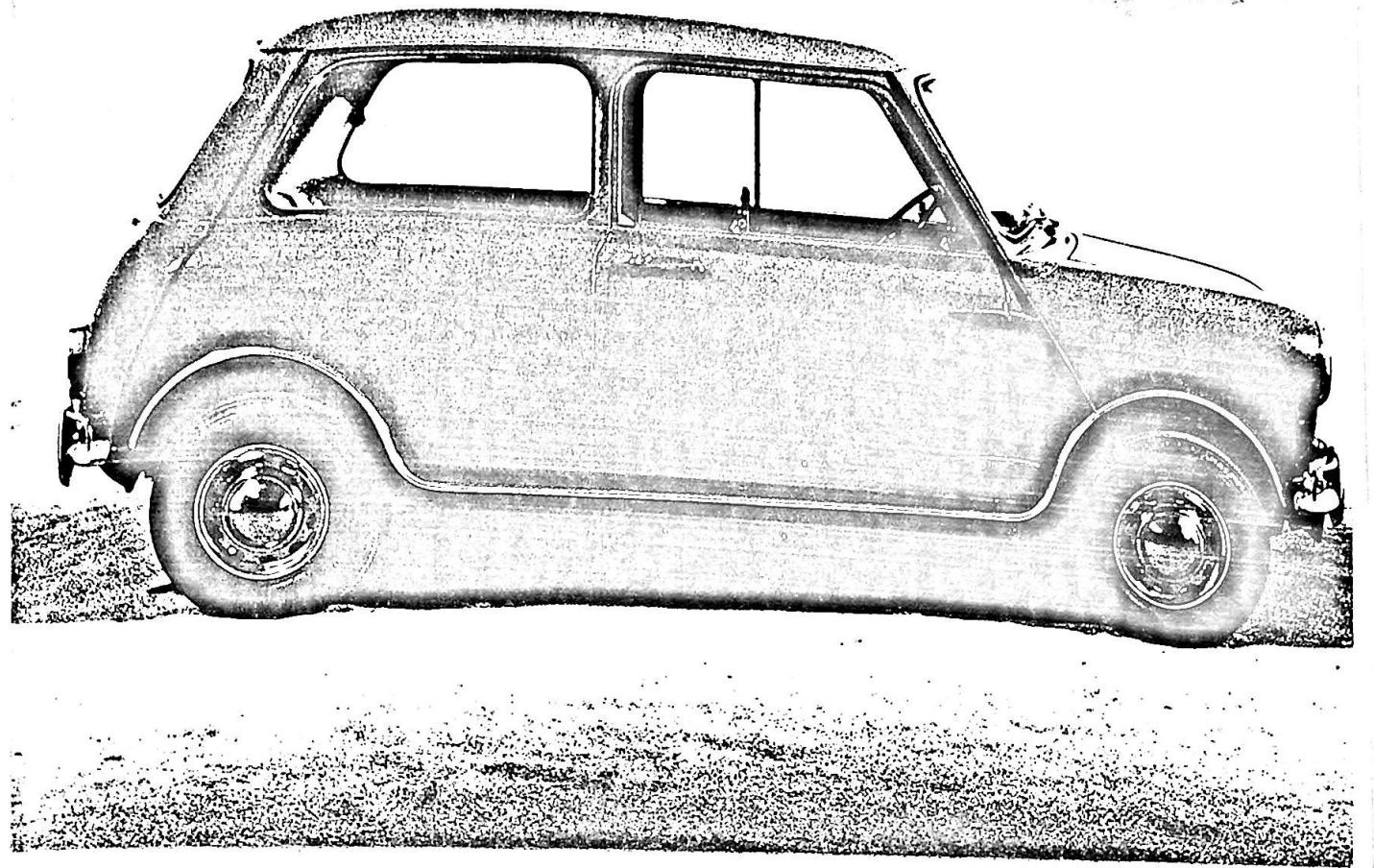


ILL. 13: The Cult-inspiring Vespa scooter, designed by Coradino D'Ascanio, and manufactured under licence by Douglas, England

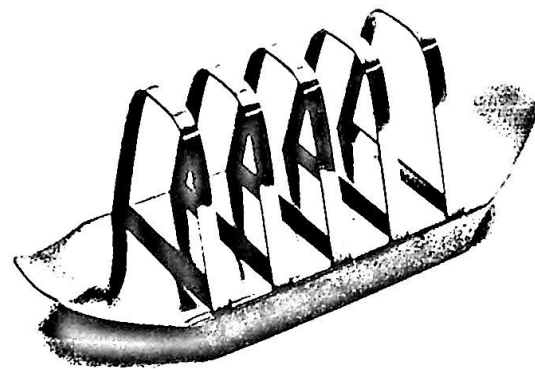
concerned with research into matters of everyday living. The two merged in 1957 to become the National Institute for Consumer Information. Germany established the first Wohnberatung, a kind of exhibition and advice centre regarding the home in Mannheim in 1953, stimulated by the favourable impression made by the Homes Advice centres in the Swedish contribution to the 1949 Cologne Exhibition.

Other magazines moulded on the American model which were popular in Britain pertained primarily to the home, although as the 1960's approached magazines catering for the younger generation (or teenagers as the marketing men so gratuitously labeled them) began to appear on the shelves. The Homemaker and other DIY magazines were quick to appear, taking advantage of the new significance which the home had taken on. Never before, not even during the Industrial Revolution, had the divorcing of home and work been so strongly emphasized. The home was seen as a sanctuary, a place to retreat to, and people were encouraged, through the DIY and women's magazines, to turn theirs into a truly individual, personal heaven. With the increase in television viewing this became more of a reality, as theatre and cinema audiences plunged to all-time lows. This disinterest in outside sources of entertainment was as much a factor of the change in perception of what constituted "value" as in the changed modes of entertainment. Whereas in the past a visit to the theatre was both a personal and public display of the quality of your life, this was replaced in the 1950's by what you owned, or could purchase. And all the consumer information you could possibly want was contained between the glossy covers of the press.

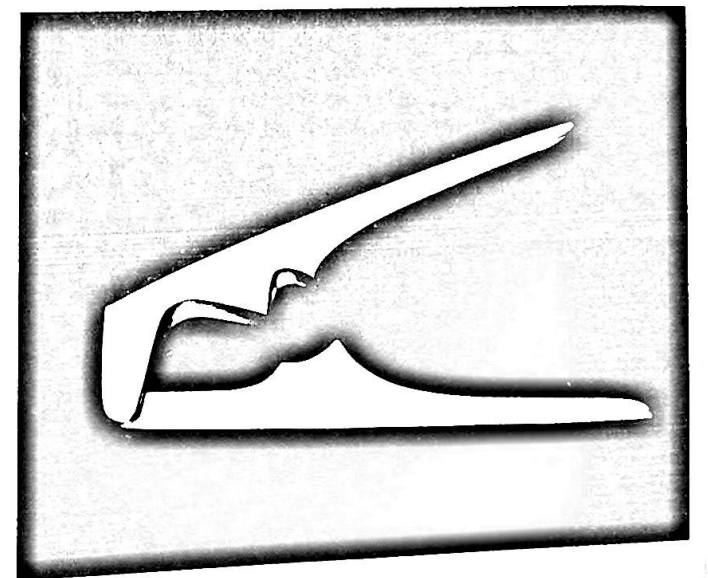
The teenagers of the 1950's, having been weaned on the philosophies of consumption, proved a ready and willing market for all the new imagery of their time. Uninhibited by precedents of taste (apart from what the CoID tried to tell them) and afforded the security of their own income they rapidly turned the traditional stratified marketplace on its head. Fashion clothes, music and stereo equipment became just as necessary to this generation as a secure home had been to those of a few years previously. Some form of transport was as essential to the young Breton as his American counterpart. While in no way as glamorous as the American chrome dreams of the time, the Vespa motor scooter became the symbol of radicalism and liberty with which the youth cults strove to be associated.



ILL. 14: Mini Minor, designed by Alec Issigonis, 1959



ILL. 15: Stainless Steel toast rack by Robert Welch, 1955



ILL. 16: Stainless Steel Nutcrackers by Robert Welch, 1958

At this time too a shift to a total life apart, mentally, from one's parents was taking place, with little to reconcile the differences in outlook. While the parents were committed to the idea of "worthwhile investments" such as a car, television, washing machine, and so on, the youth culture were more concerned with the instant gratification which the highly sensuous images and sounds gave them. As a result coffee bars, discos (or hops) and other youth-orientated meeting-places sprang up, furnished with the images of the consumer society - Coffee machines by Gio Ponti, Juke Box by Seeburg Corporation resounding to the sounds of Elvis and Bill Haley, seating and interiors owing more to American and Italian styling than the Bauhaus of the 1930's which many felt to be the source.

There still existed a mainstream rationale and style, which fell somewhere between the austerity of the modern, Braunesque style and the overt dictum of mainstream Pop. This sector was governed by a rationale which was dependent on neither one style nor another, but rather an intuition on the part of the designer for the materials being used and their application, coupled with a stylistic grace which was altogether more suitable than any rigid dogma. Examples of this must be the excellent stainless steel work of David Mellor, and the street furniture of Richard Stevens for Atlas Lighting.

The ultimate accolade for independent design thinking must go to Alec Issigonis in the designing of the Mini Minor. This has the distinction of being a truly radical departure in car design, surpassing even the Citroen Traction Avant for technical ingenuity, while at the same time not falling prey to any elitist thinking regarding its image. That it proceeded to become a cult piece in the 1960's is a less significant but none the less valid attribute, and represents the fusion of opposites which was finally taking place in the late 1950's. In the Mini the extreme right of Modernism meets the image hungry radicals of pop culture. Designed effectively from the inside out, in keeping with the Werkbund-inspired philosophy of fitness for purpose, it still embodied a charisma and appeal which suited the higher profile of the late Pop era, and thus must be taken as the ultimate symbol of the new synthesis of theories and styles which were influencing British design and culture.

Conclusion

For the Design Council in the late 1950's there was no avoiding the fact that a huge consumer of popular culture existed. Nor was it feasible to pretend that the Modern Movement was a more suitable source of imagery and theory than Pop, or for that matter, Art-Deco or streamlining. Rather a duplicity or multiplicity of equally valid sources of inspiration existed, with no single quantifiable measure of righteousness to judge them all by. A more broad-based attitude to design would have to be taken, within limitations but without the preconception of their being only one correct answer to any given problem.

Given the era this ultimately was not as difficult as might be believed. One of the initial reasons why the CoID took such a moralizing stance was a fear of what might be designed, manufactured and consumed were there no controls exercised over taste. By the end of the 1950's a large number of industries had proven themselves to be capable of turning out good, well designed products, without the continual guidance of the Design Council. While acknowledgement from the Council, in the guise of a Design Centre award, was appreciated, there was little reason to fear these industries going radically off the rails were they not under Council supervision.

Also, the emergence of more independent design consultancies such as Ogle, Conran and Allied Industrial Designers ensured a reliable source of high-quality designers for industry, when and if they needed them. as a result of their exemplary work industry felt more confident about subcontracting work, not only to them but also to the students in the newly-organized Industrial Design courses in Britain. Collectively these relieved the Council of its doubts regarding the trustworthiness of Industry and allowed it to concentrate more on publicizing British design overseas.

This new independence afforded industry was, ultimately, merely a reflection of greater changes in the overall social structure of British society. A new set of independent voices were being heard, with no rigid ties to the past, either immediate or distant, which had for so many years ensured the survival of the social ladder as it existed in Britain. This change was, for the majority of the lower and working classes, and unobserved one. It was mainly by the Upper classes that this assertiveness was noticed, but the fact that the bulk of the countries'

wealth had shifted down to the working classes left them in a poor position to react against the changes.

Thus ultimately it must be seen that the changes which took place in society, and in the design fields, in the 1950's were not the result of any strong political shifts, (the Socialist government of 1945 was quickly replaced by a hard-right Conservative one in 1951) nor the far-reaching effects of any design movement ("Pop" as a movement passed unknown to the common man, and the eventual style of the 1960's was a synthesis of Pop and the mainstream Modern) but rather as the result of a shift in the earning centre from the top stratum to the mid and lower strata of British society. This shift was coupled with a change in the philosophy of expenditure, with the process of spending and purchasing taking a higher profile, and occurring in a different manner. The splintering of society was extended to the consumer-retailer interface, with a resultant requirement for some new mode of communication to overcome the distancing of the two parties. This, in the form of colourful graphics, messages and pictures contributed to the process of consumption itself, and could be used to control it's patterns.

Thus we can see that it was the post-war requirement for new methods of expression and communication on the part of the retailer/manufacturer which prompted the new styles while for the consumer the changes were necessary as a result of new social distances and positions, coupled with a fundamentally traditional requirement for security through possession which money could bring. Collectively these gave rise to a society which was so significantly different from the one 15 years previously as to be incredible.

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