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DESIGN AS OPPOSITION: ANANALYSIS OF NEW DESIGN

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INTRODUCTION

A new type of design, a new way of looking at design, is slowly coming to the forefront of popular culture. It's stars and heroes are featured on the glossy pages of "establishment" magazines like Vogue and Harpers and Queen, as well as the more obviously youth-oriented style magazines like the Face, i-D, Blitz and Arena. At the end of 1986, John Thackera, the ex-editor of Design magazine, produced the coffee table book "New British Design" on current avant-garde design in the U.K., declaring it to be "a snapshot, taken in a crowded room" and implying that further volumes on the subject would follow with time. Design magazine reviewed the book in January 1987 and declared "this book is a provocation".

Design magazine was right. There are many divergent directions being taken within the avant-garde design community in Britain, directions which parallel those being taken in France, Italy and the USA. What they all have in common in their provocative stance in opposition to mainstream mass-production design. Of course, it is the role of the avant-garde to be provocative. But an overtly intellectual attitude towards design appears to be coming to fruition now, an attitude which previously only openly existed in Italy.

The basic unifying premise between these divergent directions in design in this: mainstream design is over-rationalistic and

blandly functional, and as such it fails to respond to the real needs and experiences of the users. The antidote is for design to become more expressive, to communicate in a fundamental way with the user. As Andrea Branzi says in his 1984 book, "The Hot House":

"A new concept of product and environmental quality thus asserts itself, one which, beyond questions of performance and service, is intent on creating an emotional value... This emotional value is created not by the objects functionality, but by its expressive level. This latter feature is made up of the object's basic materials, its shape, weight, smell, tactile characteristics and perceptual presence: from high-tech to high-touch."

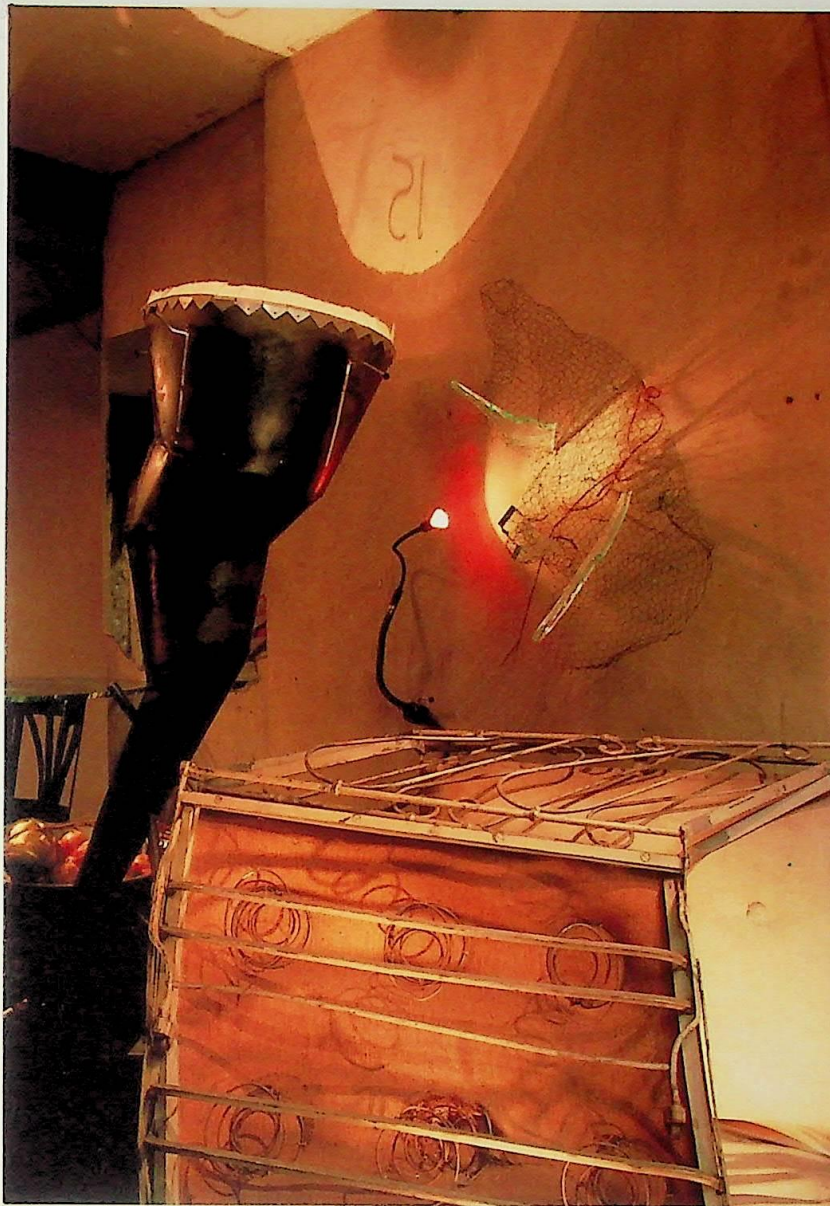


Fig. 1.



Fig. 2.

CHAPTER ONE:

THE NEW DESIGN: THE ROOTS OF NEW DESIGN IN FINE ART AND RADICAL DESIGN

The historical roots of the current anti-establishment design movement trace back to the revolutionary 1920's, with the activities of radical designers like Gropius in Germany and Le Corbusier in France, and with the birth of post-modernism.

PART I:

THE HISTORICAL BACKGROUND TO NEW DESIGN

Modernism emerged as a movement of ideas and practice which sought to break with the past and create a new, more rational and functional world. It was a response to the social and technological changes of the early 20th century, and to the desire for a more ordered and efficient society. Modernism was a movement of ideas and practice which sought to break with the past and create a new, more rational and functional world. It was a response to the social and technological changes of the early 20th century, and to the desire for a more ordered and efficient society.

Modernism was born in the wake of great change throughout Europe. A new egalitarian spirit was gaining hold, and the past was to be rejected in favor of a new, more rational and functional world. It was a response to the social and technological changes of the early 20th century, and to the desire for a more ordered and efficient society.

CHAPTER ONE:

LESS IS A BORE: THE ROOTS OF NEW DESIGN IN FINE ART AND RADICAL DESIGN

The historical roots of the current anti mainstream design movement trace back to the rebellious 1960's, with the activities of radical design groups like Archigram in England and Archizoom and Superstudio in Italy, and with the birth of post-modernism.

Ever since the 1920's and 1930's, when the Bauhaus and le Corbusier conspired to bring about the birth of the machine aesthetic, the Modernist maxim "less is more" has been the byword of design purists across the globe. It is true that the simplicity and refinement of line based on geometric ideals which Modernism advocates can be very pleasing (even soothing) to the orderly, detached part of the mind. Yet, taken to extremes Modernism has a hint of fascism inherent in its credos, a hint which took on real substance in Italy in particular, where the fascist movement and Modernist Italian architecture enjoyed a symbiotic relationship for about twenty years.

Modernism was born in an era of great change throughout Europe. A new egalitarian spirit was making itself felt; the past was to be swept away to make room for a bright new future. The modern movement urged architects and designers to come to grips with



Fig. 3.



Fig. 4.

technology to wake up to reality and to design for the new machine age. A refreshing new attitude that good design was for everybody and not just the ruling classes came to the fore.

Unfortunately, the underlying moralism which was inherent in the movement as a product of the times, and which made modernism new and innovative, also led to its downfall. The current backlash against the movement, both in the form of post-modernism and new alternative design, is a result of the very purity of modernist design. It can be too pure, and too rigid, treating humans themselves almost like machine-produced objects. Modernism may produce simple, timeless and beautiful designs - they speak to the mind of the user but they do not speak to his heart.

With the growth of modernism came the development of the idea of "standard objects" i.e. universal models for the perfect product which can be mass produced and sold on a global scale, never needing to be updated or modified. (It is interesting that this concept was first introduced when architects began to work widely in the area of product design. The idea of a standard chair, a standard table, has about it the aura of permanence and lack of free choice for many of its users, that architecture holds. In a sense every building, every creation of the architect is a standard object.)

In the first machine age a huge number and variety of people accepted that standardisation was a natural step: champions of the idea included Henry Ford, Walter Gropius, Lewis Mumford and Herbert Read. Charles Jencks summarises le Corbusier's arguments

towards standardisation in "Vers un Architecture", in his book "Adhocism".

"Standardisation is imposed by the law of selection and is an economic and social necessity... We must aim at the fixing of standards in order to face the problem of perfection... Standards are a matter of logic, analysis and minute study; they are based on a problem which has been well 'stated'... The problem of the house has not yet been stated. Nevertheless there do exist standards for the dwelling house. Machinery contains in itself the factor of economy the factor of economy which makes for selection. The house is a machine for living in.... The engineer, inspired by the law of economy and governed by mathematical calculation, puts us in accord with universal law. He achieves harmony... Working by calculation, engineers employ geometrical forms,... the most beautiful forms. If we eliminate from our hearts and minds all dead concepts in regard to the house, and look at the question from a critical and objective point of view, we shall arrive at the "House Machine", the mass-production house, healthy (and morally so too) and beautiful in the same way (as our) working tools..."

The problem is that endlessly repeated identical forms are not stimulating or provocative. Standardised forms do not encourage man to interact with them; in fact they discourage people from active participation with them, and thus can alienate people from the man-made environment. To quote Jencks, "... in pre-industrial times whatever man built had either a discernible purpose or an individual imprint to provoke involvement. But

after the Industrial Revolution, man-made artefacts were turned into another aspect of a distanced and potentially alien nature: they accumulated in great profusion, were thrown away as "waste", and lost their unique quality. The result was a reinforcing syndrome in which mass production precluded man's sensual response to form, which in turn encouraged the further exploitation of expendable products". New design aims to break this vicious circle and end man's alienation from his environment by producing object which are visually expressive and texturally rich, object which will stimulate the user into interaction with them. (Fig. 4).

However, the reaction against modernism began long before the emergence of New Design. In 1967, Robert Venturi countered the Modernist maxim "less is more" with his book "Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture." The book opened with a manifesto which made a plea for "messy vitality over obvious unity", and went on to lay the ground rules for what has become known as Post Modernism.

Post Modernism is characterised by the bold use of colour and decoration, the plundering and ad-hoc combination of historical styles, and flashes of symbolic wit, like the eggcups on Terry Farrell's TV-AM building in Camden, North London. The Pop Art movement of the 1960's was an influence on the development of Post Modernism. As Andrea Branzi says "Pop art is often described as an outburst of subversive and generally vitalistic fantasy, but in fact it presented itself at the beginning of the sixties as a moment of great realism, in the sense that it

introduced into a context of highly specialised problems and an increasingly sophisticated linguistic repertoire the now triumphant presence, in major metropolitan areas of the culture of consumption and the languages of mass communication. Hence the sixties were characterised right from the start by a sudden readiness to question entire systems of aesthetics and the very foundations of disciplines."

The Archigram group, which was formed in England in 1961, was one of the first radical groups to question accepted aesthetics and rules of architecture. Archigram used Pop Art graphics and collage to express fresh thoughts on architecture. The name "Archigram" was a witty adaptation of the word "telegram". Archigram began as a magazine, a vehicle for architectural communication. The group were hugely influential on the Italian avant garde - in fact the Archizoom group may have taken their name from a 1964 work by Archigram, a graphic which contained the word "Archigram" and "zoom". Their utopian visions of future cities, in which advanced technology creates flexibility and expendability to liberate people, rather than rigidity and uniformity to stifle them, were the predecessors of similar projects by the Italian radicals. The influence of Archigram and the intellectual attitude towards design that the group fostered is still evident today in New Design. Also, designer-architect Ron Arad trained under Archigram member Peter Cook at the Architectural Association in London.

Meanwhile in Italy, the faculty of Architecture at Florence University gave rise to a number of avant-garde groups,

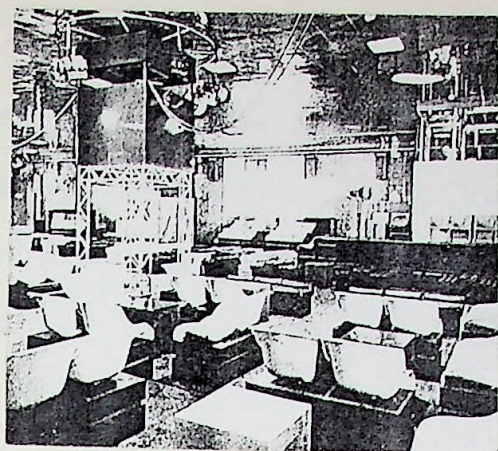


Fig. 5.

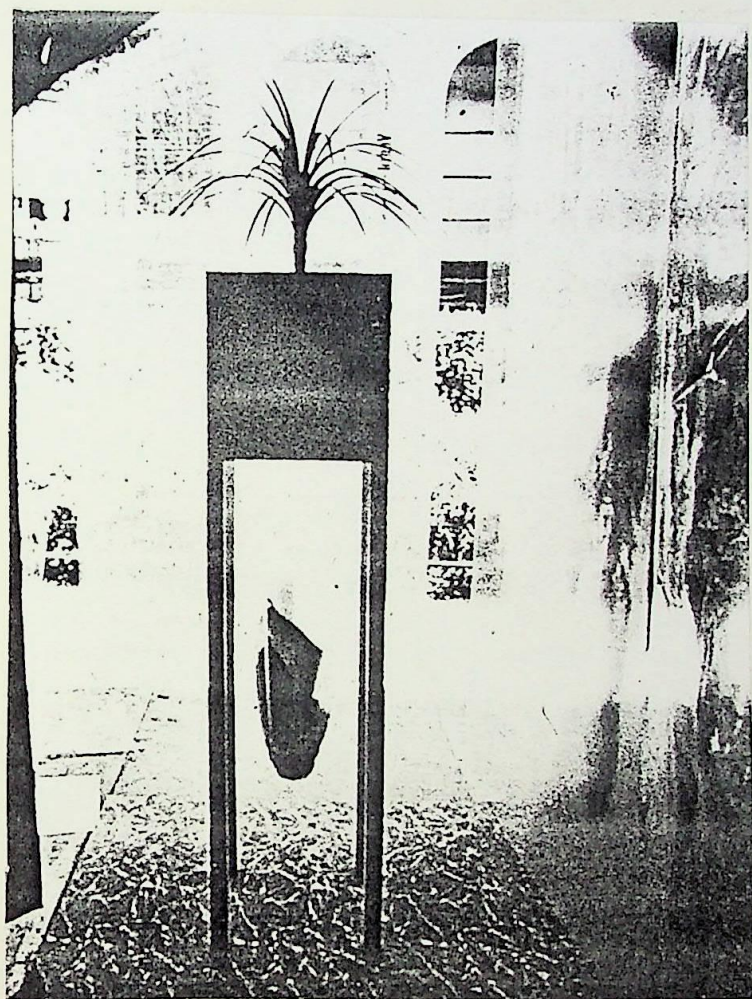


Fig. 6.

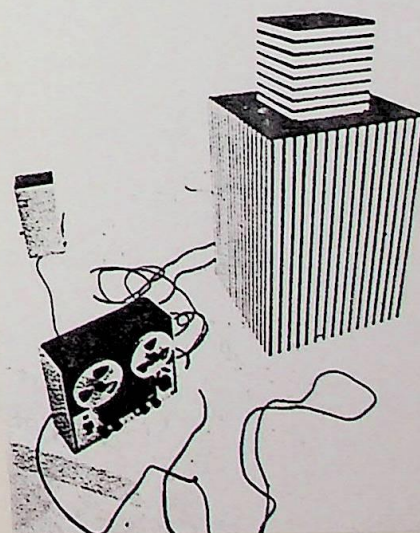
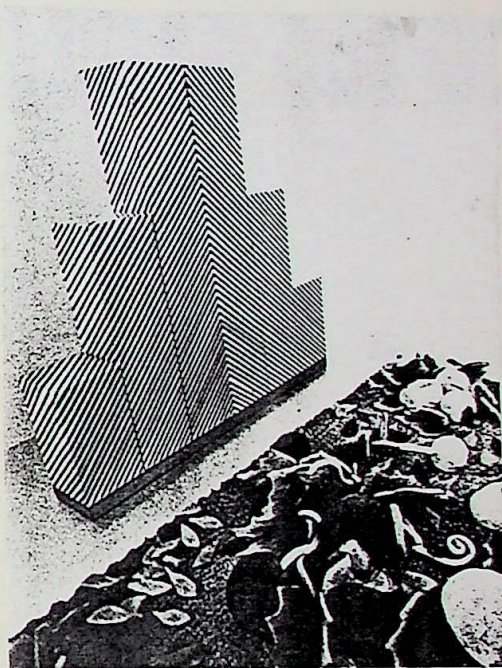


Fig. 7.

encouraged by an experimental period in teaching, a high level of student political debate and the example of Archigram in England. The two main groups were Archizoom and Superstudio: both investigated the use of architecture as a political instrument and were heavily influenced by the growing Pop Art scene.

Archizoom explored the emotional content of architecture and its power as a means of expression and communication. Archizoom drew on elements of popular culture to produce projects like the Pipers (Fig. 5) - entertainment complexes where people were bombarded with a variety of sensory stimulants (loud music, flashing lights, etc.). The assault on the senses which the Pipes provided was supposed to liberate the individual from himself and free his creative spirit. This idea was paralleled in the drug culture of the 1960s.

Another project of Archizoom's was the Centre of Eclectic Conspiracy of 1966-67, which drew on contemporary interest in ethnic religions (Fig 6). From the Centre for Eclectic conspiracy came designs for a series of Dream Beds: quiet havens of retreat for contemplation and meditation (Fig 8). The beds themselves were monumental and imposing: in this they had a kinship with Ettore Sotsass' furniture for Poltronova of the same time, which were covered with patterned plastic laminates and challenged any preconceived notions of furniture (Fig 7). The idea of meditation in the home developed into Archizoom's designs for indoor, domestic gazebos and objects to furnish them with (Fig 9).

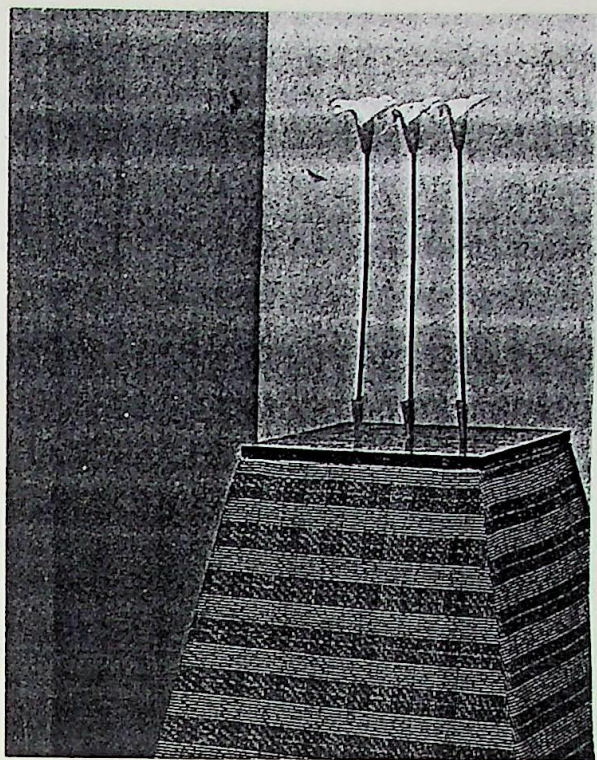


Fig. 9.

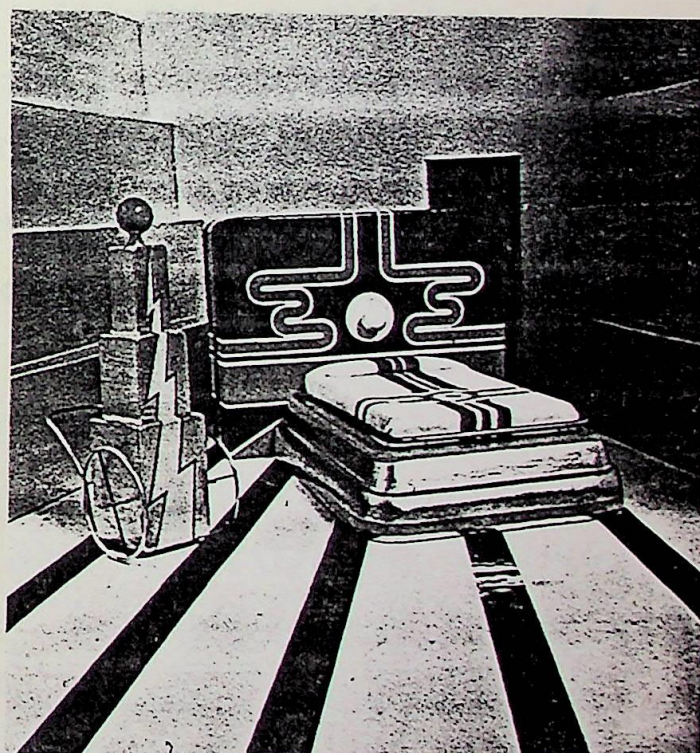
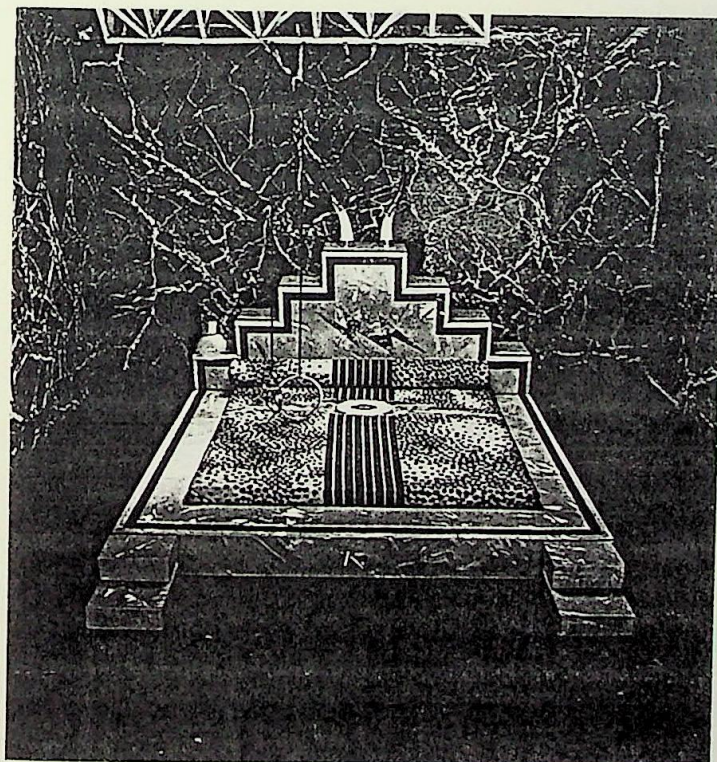


Fig. 8.

"Irony played a prime role in those years, allowing linguistic and projective experiments which professionalism would not have allowed before. Afro-Oriental "Gazebos" become a game for imaginative domestic micro-architecture, destined for individual meditation as a refuge from participation in the system." - Branzi, a member of Archizoom, in "The Hot House".

Meanwhile Superstudio was analysing the roots and nature of architecture, developing a series of "Architectural Histograms", i.e. building blocks for a new architecture (Fig 10). Superstudio and Archizoom collaborated to mount two exhibitions in 1966 and 1967 entitled "Superarchitecture". The exhibitions were heavily influenced by pop culture and were a comment on the consumer society. Both furnishings and architectural projects were featured, and the official definition of the exhibition was as follows: "Superarchitecture is the architecture of superproduction, of superconsumption, of super-inducement to consumption, of the supermarket, of Superman, of super-high-test gasoline. Super-architecture accepts the logic of production and consumption and makes an effort to demystify it." This official explanation of the work clearly shows what a strong influence Pop Art had on the avant-garde. Pop Art recognised for the first time the importance of popular culture and everyday objects to society, rather than the high culture of art and design theory. (Fig 11). In the wake of Pop Art, with its elevation of the banal object to artistic icon, came a revival of Dadaism. The Dadaist and neo-Dadaist influence can clearly be seen in New Design.

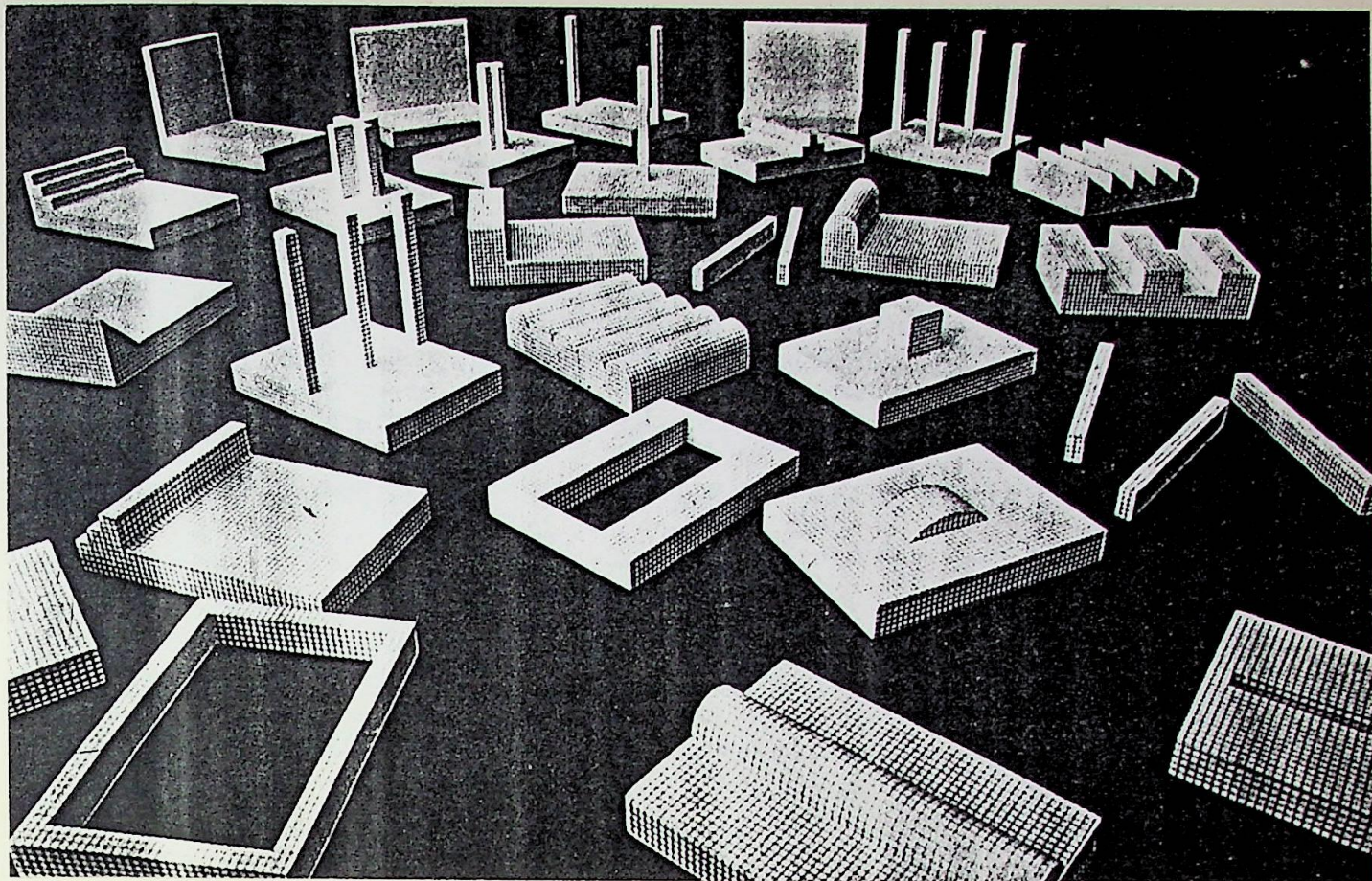


Fig. 10.



Fig. 11.

To sum up, in the 1960s radical design groups, drawing heavily on contemporary popular culture, fine art and politics, began to analyse the nature of architecture and design, how it related to people and to the reality of a world of mass production and consumption. Bourgeois values and bland mainstream design and architecture were rejected in favour of conceptual work with a high expressive and emotional value. The avant-garde imbued their work with an awareness of pop to counter the bland anonymity of bourgeois society. Their work accurately reflected the preoccupations of young people during the 1960's.

During the 1970's Archizoom and Superstudio continued their research into the position and value of architecture in modern life. They did so through the construction of "utopias" which revolved around the future roles and forms of urban architecture. However the definition of utopia in these experiments is rather different from the accepted one, i.e. the Italian avant garde described their work as the development of critical utopias; as Branzi says "their use of a utopian system was purely cognitive and represented a level of clarity beyond that of reality itself". The utopias presented the existing world with various different aspects of urban architecture and planning singled out and developed to their rational extremes. "This was an instrumental, scientific utopia, one that did not put forward a different world from the present one, but rather presented the existing one at a more advanced level of cognition." (Branzi, "The Hot House"). Superstudio's "Continuous Monument" (Fig. 13) and "Twelve Ideal Cities" (Fig 15) and Archizooms "No-Stop City"

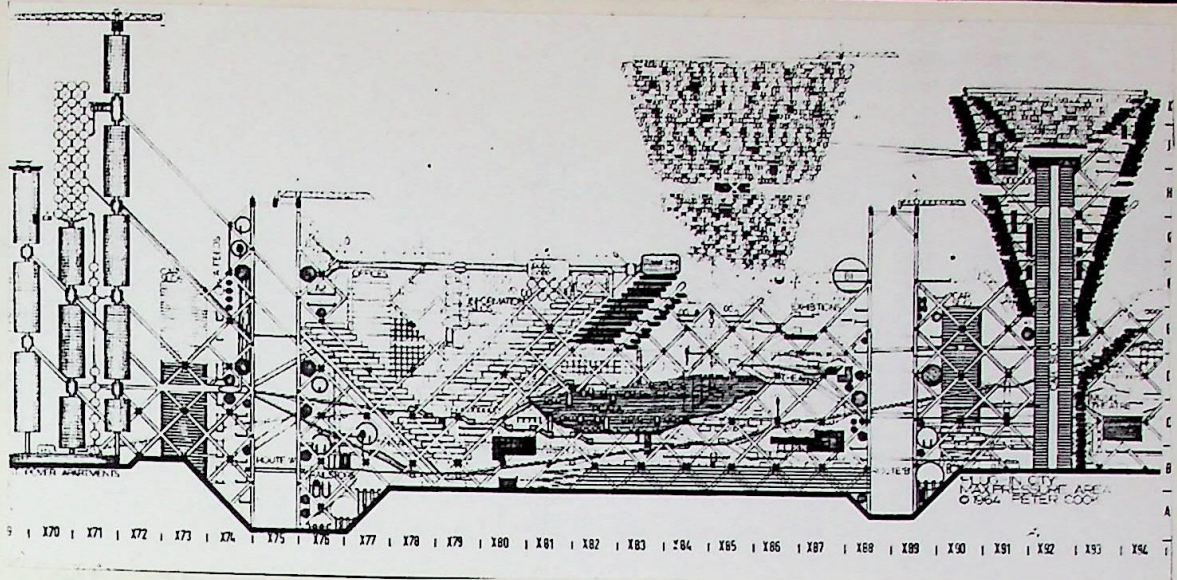


Fig. 12.

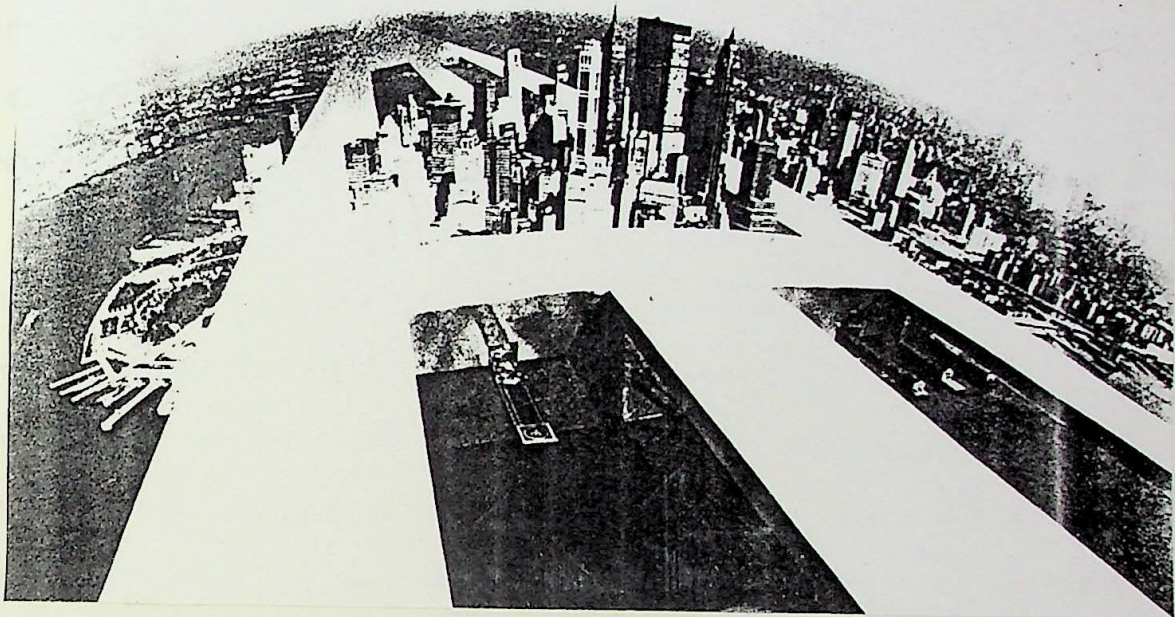


Fig. 13.

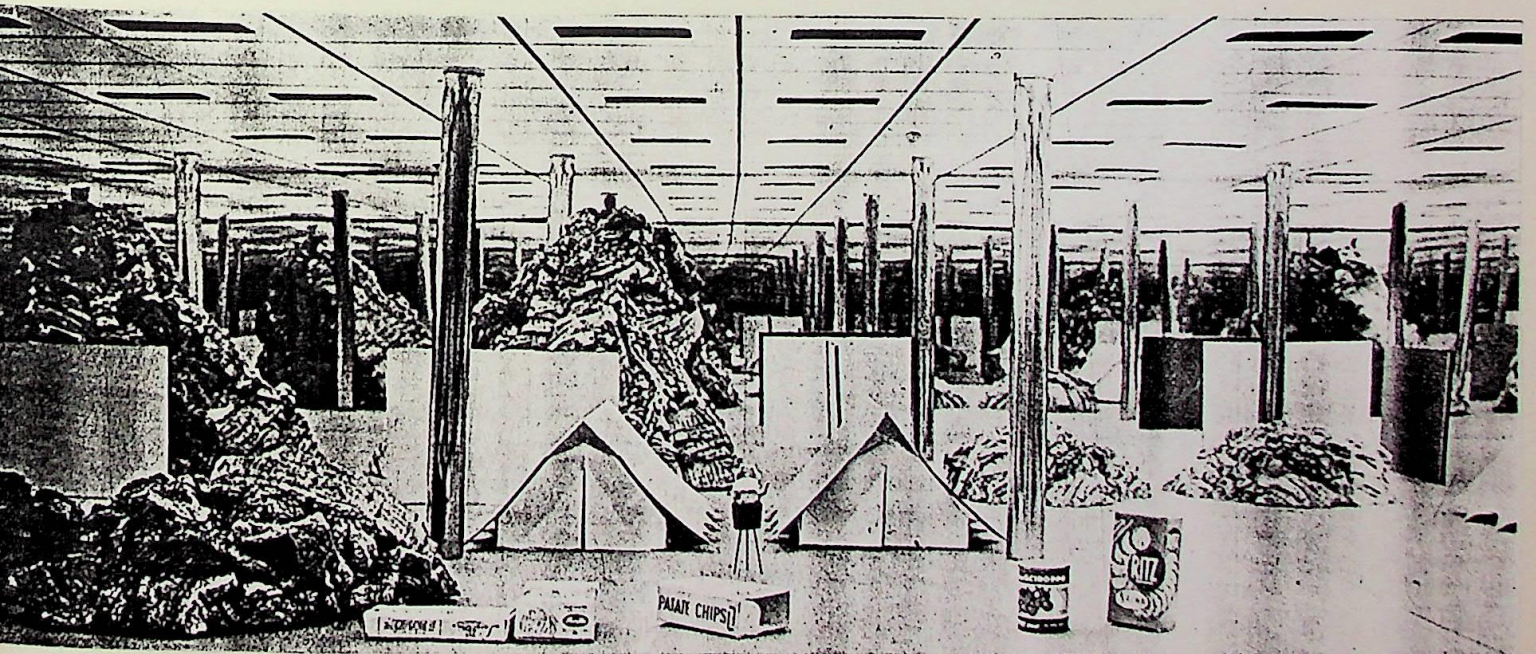


Fig. 14.

(Fig. 14) all depicted complete urbanisation, reflecting the belief that the modern city, in the form of mass production, had now impinged upon life everywhere. The city had become a condition, rather than a place, and there was no countryside with a genuine alternative culture. Implicit in these projects was a criticism of Modernism, particularly with the No-Stop City project, in which architecture was eliminated completely, the whole city being one massive interior like a factory or supermarket (recognised as symbols of production on one hand and consumption on the other) with artificial lighting and ventilation; the idea was that people rented space in the city for living quarters, like parking spaces in a car park.

Having extrapolated urban architecture to its wildest extremes and presented nightmarish future possibilities if design continued to develop along Modernist and Rationalist lines, the avant-garde design community came together in 1973 to participate in Global Tools, a workshop centred in Florence. The purpose was to re-examine the relationship between human behaviour and objects and to experiment with natural materials and techniques, with the ultimate aim of setting up a craft school. Unfortunately, the project fell apart as ideological discussion dragged on and little action was taken. By 1975 the radical architectural groups of the 1960's had fragmented or disappeared from the public eye.

In 1975 Alessandro Mendini's editorship of Casabella came to an end and he founded the design group Alchymia. Alchymia concentrated on products rather than architecture, and its

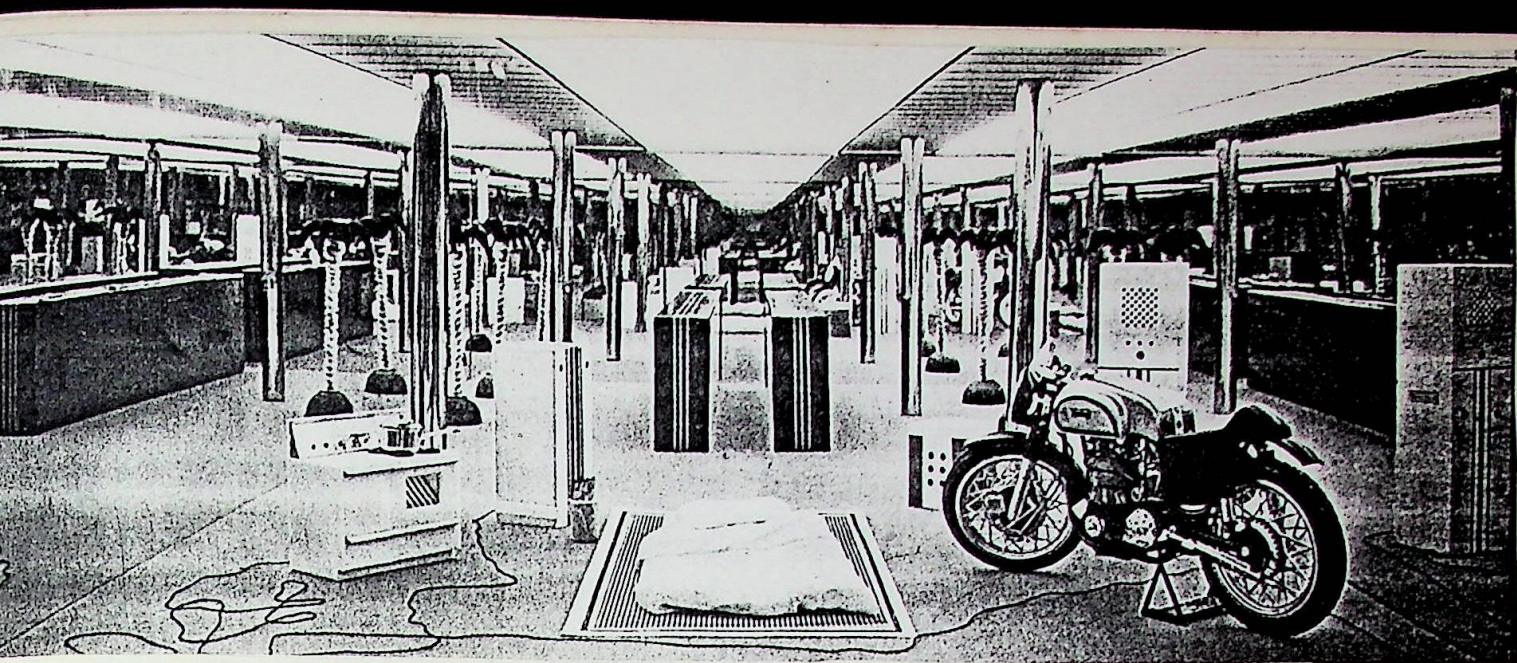


Fig. 14.

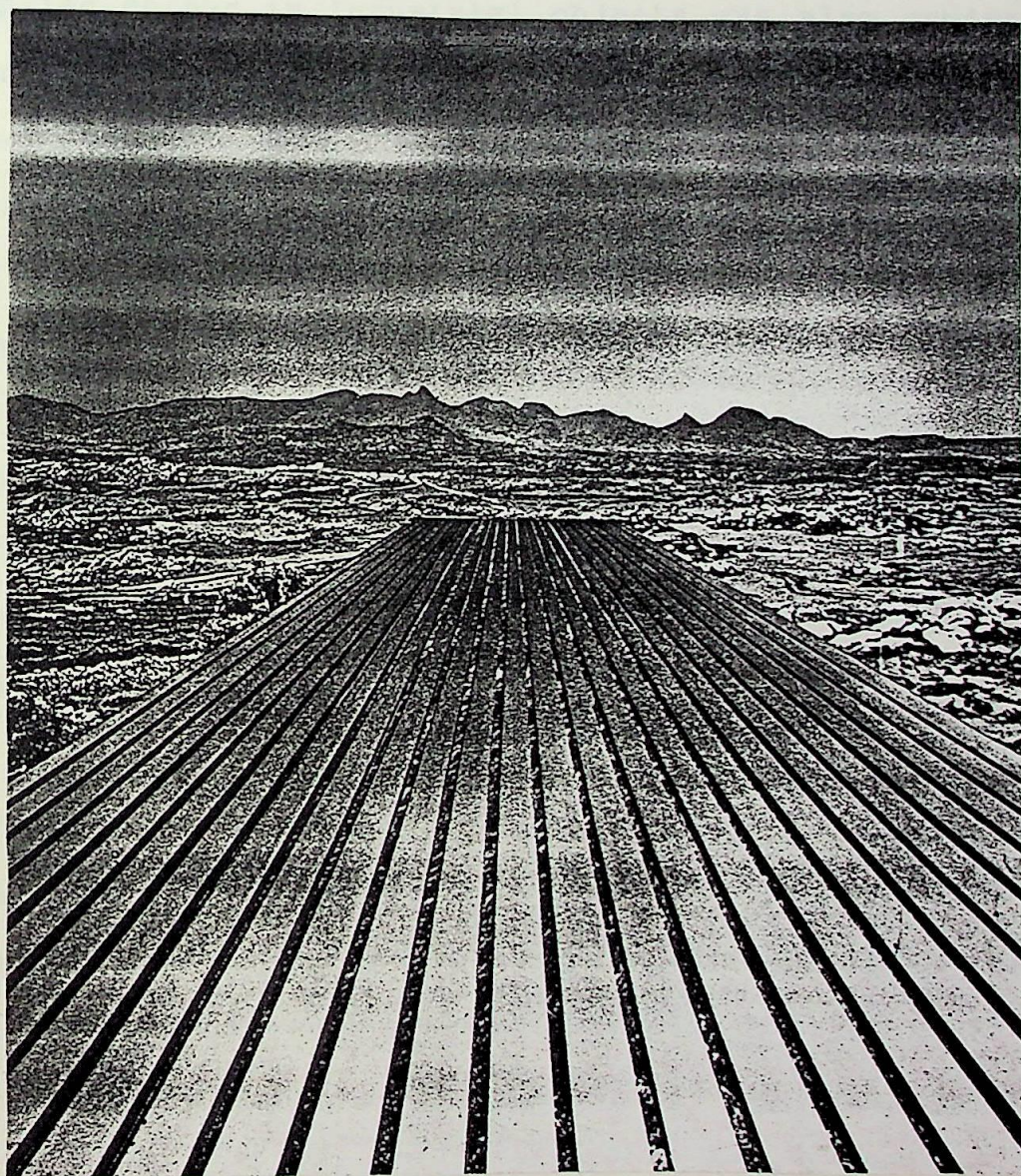


Fig. 15.

manifesto stated "Alchymia believes in despecialisation, in the hypothesis that 'confused' methods of ideation and production must be hand in hand, where craftsmanship, industry, computer science, contemporary and uncontemporary techniques and materials can be mixed. For Alchymia the concept of "variation" is a valid one". (Alessandro Mendini, introduction to "Alcymia: Never Ending Italian Design"). One of the Alchymia projects concerned with "variation" and "despecialisation" was the hand-painting of mass produced furniture, an example of "craftsmanship" and "industry" going "hand in hand" (Fig 16). Surface decoration and applied colour in industrial objects was also coming to the fore in post-modernism as it developed further. Andrea Branzi christened this type of design, "Design primario" - i.e. the secondary structural qualities of an object, for example, its colour, texture, decoration and odour, were at least of equal importance with its form in the perception of the user. In 1979 and 1980 Ettore Sotsass and Branzi produced a collection of objects under the Alchymia umbrella which were clearly linked with Post-Modernism, although Sotsass' also were a development of his monumental, expressive furniture of 1967 (Fig. 18). The designs were the precursors of the work of the Memphis design group. To emphasise the Post-Modern, anti-modernist spirit of the collection, its title was "The Bau-haus Collection" (Fig 17). Alessandro Guerriero, a founder member of Alchymia, declined to give the group's work the title "Post-Modern": "There is a philosophical concept which is fairly general, known as the post-modern condition, and I think that all of us are in this state. But there are substantial differences between the viewpoint of architecture and that of design: we said that we did

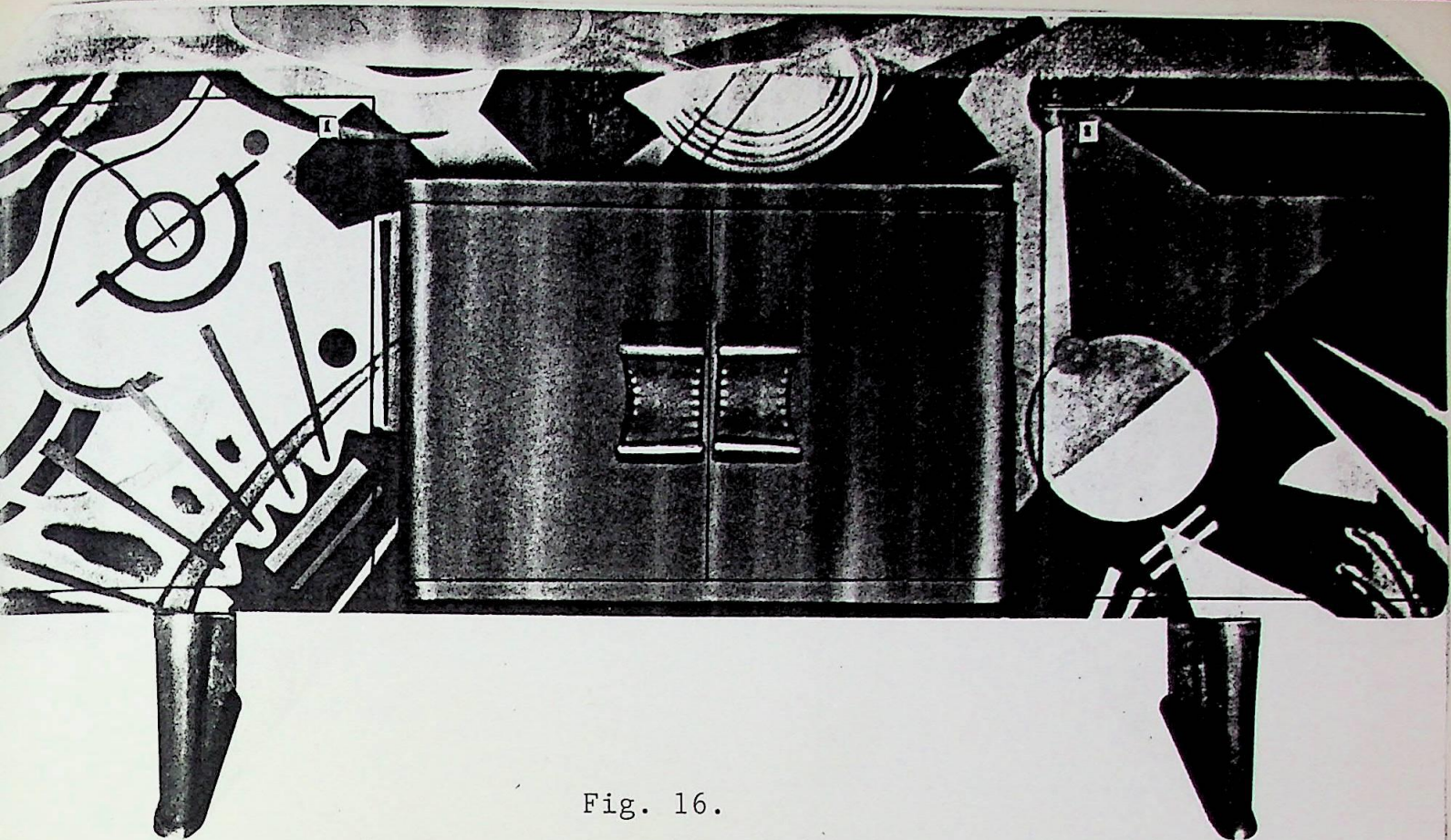


Fig. 16.

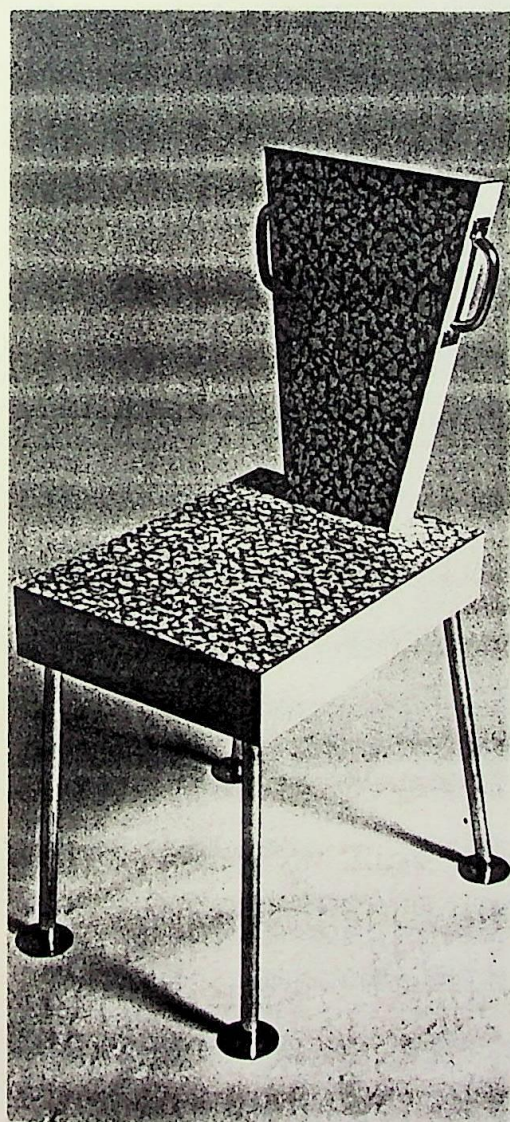


Fig. 17.

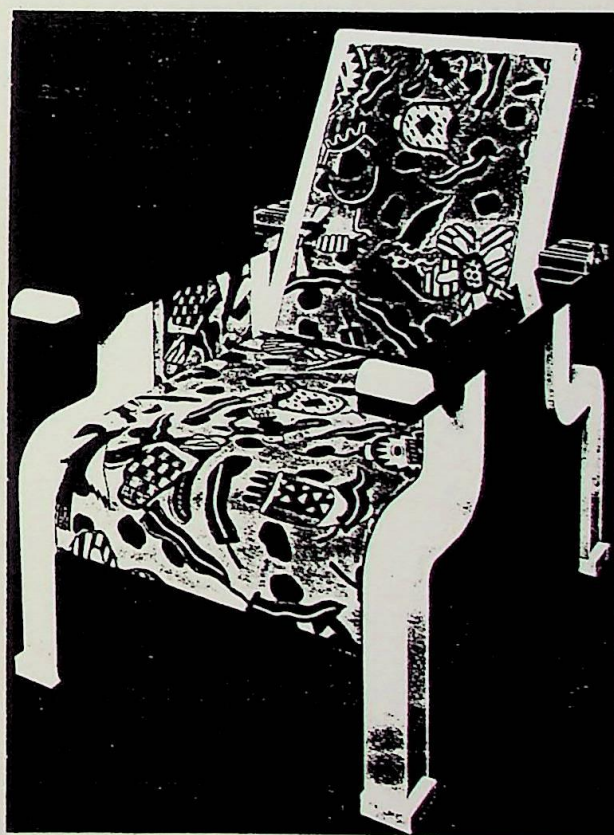


Fig. 18.

not belong to the architectonic post-modern because, as far as we are concerned, there has been no fishing around for historical styles, which is one of its involutational signs in architecture. We prefer to requalify a term that we have set against it: 'neo modern', because we are more interested in the problems of the future than in those of style." (Interview in "Alchymia: Never Ending Italian Design").

In 1980, after the Bau-haus Collection, Sotsass quietly seceded from Alchymia, due to basic ideological disagreements with Mendini. Studio Alchymia itself continued and became more and more identified with the work of Mendini alone. In December Sotsass founded the Memphis design group: "Memphis was born in the winter of 1980-1981 when a group of Milanese architects and designers felt an urgent need to reinvent an approach to design... to strike a blow against current circumstances..." (Barbara Radice, "Memphis").

The fundamental difference between Memphis and Alchymia, and everything that had gone before Alchymia in terms of radical design, was that the Memphis group wanted their designs to be manufactured and available to the public. The work was no longer to be merely conceptual, oriented towards the production of a prototype but nothing more: the idea behind Memphis was to produce "small, independent expressive mechanisms on which special communicative care was concentrated" which would "compete directly with industry in quality, quantity and image.... as alternatives to standard production." In other words,

"furniture, to be sold in stores, taken home and used every day." (Barbara Radice, "Memphis"). It could in fairness be argued that Memphis failed in the aim to make their designs accessible to the public: in many ways their products became like numbered art-objects, the antithesis of what had been envisaged by the group. But they must be credited for inaugurating the idea of avant-garde design as a viable commercial product, as a real alternative to mainstream design, rather than as a concept existing only on paper or among the exhibits at a design expo.

Memphis have never produced a manifesto or declaration of intent as such, but in the book "Memphis", Barbara Radice says: "Memphis does not propose utopias. It does not set itself up, as the radical avant-gardes did, in a critical position towards design; it does not practice designs as an ideological metaphor to say or demonstrate something else. Rather, it proposes design as a vehicle for direct communication." (Fig 18).

The basic premise behind the Memphis designs is that man perceives his environment through his senses, and not with his intellect. Because of this, the secondary structural qualities (first mooted with "Design Primario" in the 1970's) of colour, decoration, texture, odour, weight, etc., and the semantic associations of an object, were the focus of attention of the Memphis group (functional modernism, on the other hand, relied upon an intellectual perception of objects).

New Design is a direct descendant of Memphis in that new design is not conceptual, it is realistic. It develops the Memphis

belief that man's perception of objects relies more on his senses than his intellect, and yet it does not indulge itself in sensory overkill, as Memphis was wont to do. Much of New Design is thought provoking as well as producing a sensory and emotional response: thus it is a logical progression of the avant-garde movement that started in the 1960's.

CHAPTER TWO:

THE BACKLASH STARTS HERE: SOCIAL, POLITICAL AND CULTURAL BACKGROUND

New design has been influenced by social and political events of the past twenty to thirty years, as well as by radical design movements and fine art. The 1960's saw not only the first youth movement but the beginning of a cross-fertilisation process between popular culture and fine art, with design in the middle drawing from both. This heritage can be clearly seen in the products of New Design; for example, New Design is partly a reaction against the consumer society - as such it has common traits with, and draws from, youth movements like the hippies and punk.

The consumer society began after the war when the massive advances in science and technology that had been made during the wartime years were put to use in civilian applications. Perhaps Dior started the whole spend, spend, spend attitude where the measure of a man was what he owned, i.e. his buying power, by showing the New Look in 1947 (Fig 19). It signalled that the war was over and a new age had begun: after the austerity of the war years it was flamboyant and desperately extravagant: the wide, full skirts used an enormous amount of materials. It was a breath of fresh air to a war-stricken world, but it was inaccessible to most: rationing still continued in many countries and the originals were, after all, haute couture.



Fig. 19.

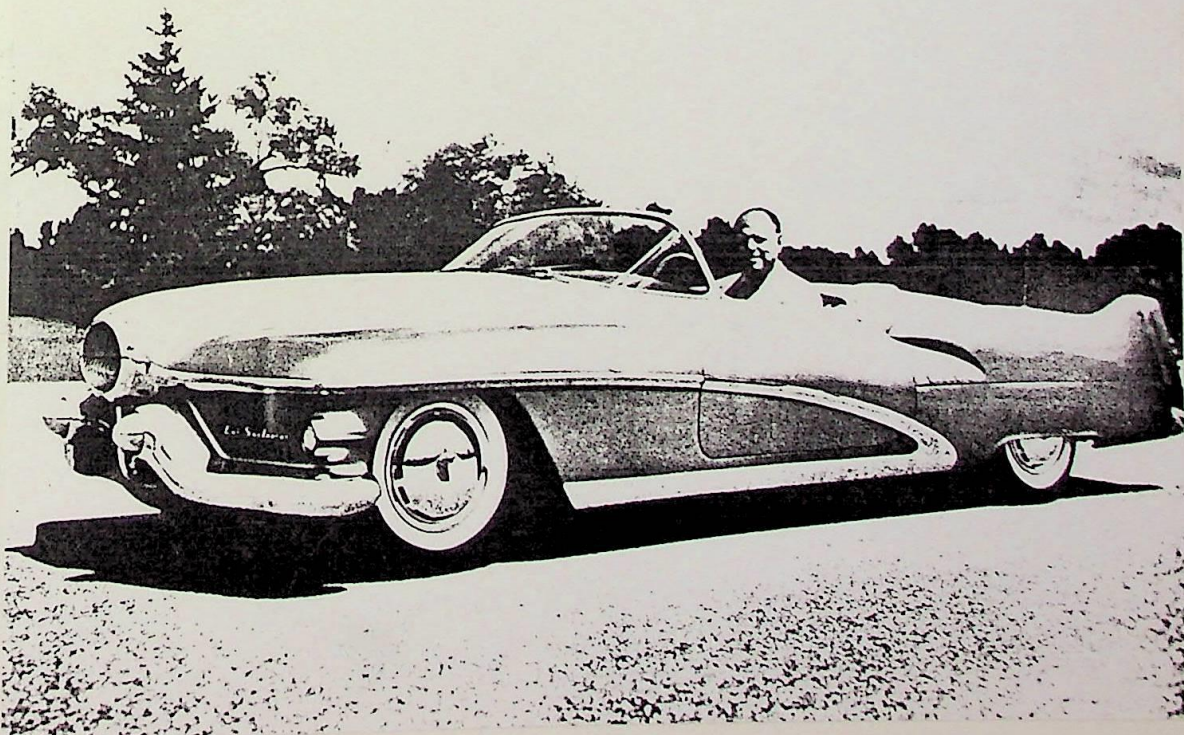


Fig. 20.

Rampant consumerism, however, developed first in the USA (where rationing had never applied; American soldiers have since been immortalised on film and in literature as suppliers of nylons and chewing gum to ration-struck Europeans), and ran amok during the 1950's. Soda fountains, TV dinners, streamlining, tailfins and chrome: the slick and glossy 1950's promised everyone the American dream - as long as you had the cash. Fig. 20. By the end of the decade the emergence of teenagers with a large disposal income provided a whole new market for manufacturers.

In the 1960's the phenomenon had struck Europe, and swinging London became the place to be for young people with money to spend who wanted to have fun. The development of the contraceptive pill and the emergence of drugs all contributed to the hedonistic atmosphere of the 1960's. A bewildering array of products were available: Pop Art had an effect on the design of consumer goods and kitsch was fashionable. If you wanted to buy a seat, for example, you could buy a fake rock made of plastic foam, the capital of an Ionic column, an inflatable armchair, a leather bag filled with plastic pellets, a gigantic baseball glove, a sectional zebra patterned swiggly sofa and so on (Fig 22). Andreas Branzi comments in his book "The Hot House", "Whereas at the beginning of the century nascent modern architecture had adopted the profound logic of the industrial machine, assuming a wholly rational man who would realise his creative potential in production, the model proposed by pop culture in the sixties was that of a man totally taken up by consumption, who would fulfil his highest potential for cultural creativity in the civilisation of prosperity. Thus in fifty



Fig. 21.



Fig. 22.

years we had moved from a civilisation of machines to a civilisation of consumers."

These heady days couldn't last forever. The sixties turned sour in 1968 with student unrest and political demonstrations throughout Europe, and the start of the Vietnam war. The hippy movement, with its slogan "Tune in, turn on, drop out" began as a reaction against the consumer society and American aggression in Vietnam. The hippies went back to nature and lived by salvaging from society and fending for themselves. They instigated a crafts revival and an interest in ethnic religions and meditation. Although the hippies believed in a peaceful, passive confrontation with society, they had a huge influence on every aspect of popular culture. By the early 1970's many aspects of the movement had been accepted by society and no longer appeared radical.

The oil crisis and resulting recession which began in 1973 meant a tightening of belts all round. Research and development into new technologies slowed down and companies concentrated on developing and using known technology to the full.

A new industrial revolution took place in the 1970's, with the lower prices of electronic circuitry, the miniaturisation of electronic consumer goods and increased automisation. Machines were more reliable, faster and cheaper than human operators: unemployment rose and the media looked on the bright side of things by predicting a future in which machines did the work and people had an unlimited amount of leisure time. The importance



Fig. 23.



Fig.24.

of employment to people's self esteem was overlooked.

Technology was the byword for the 1970's: efficiency and minimalism were back, after the kitsch excesses of the sixties. Dieter Ram's functional, pared down design for Braun was much admired and inspired the "black box" school of design: almost any product could be encased in a black box with radiused edges, and the result could be guaranteed to look smooth and efficient. LED displays on matt black watches and pocket calculators (which appeared first in the 1970's, thanks to Clive Sinclair - Fig. 26 were what the public wanted. Hundreds of technological products were turned out during this era: they all looked similar and yet they all performed different functions. The flashing lights against smooth blackness masked both the real function and the technology involved in electronic consumer goods. The style tried to give the user the feeling that he was a sophisticated modern man, in control of technology, and that technology was subjugated to his desires. In fact, black box design was so anonymous and bland, and expressed so little about the products it was used for, that it merely emphasised the fact that the average man in the street had not come to terms with or understood technology at all.

Suddenly, into all this austerity burst punk rock. Punk, in many ways, was flower power in a torn shirt. The essential ingredients of a counter-culture in reaction against the establishment and a D.I.Y. "hey kids, we can put on the show in our own back yard!" type attitude were the same, but while the hippies believed in peaceful confrontation, aggression was

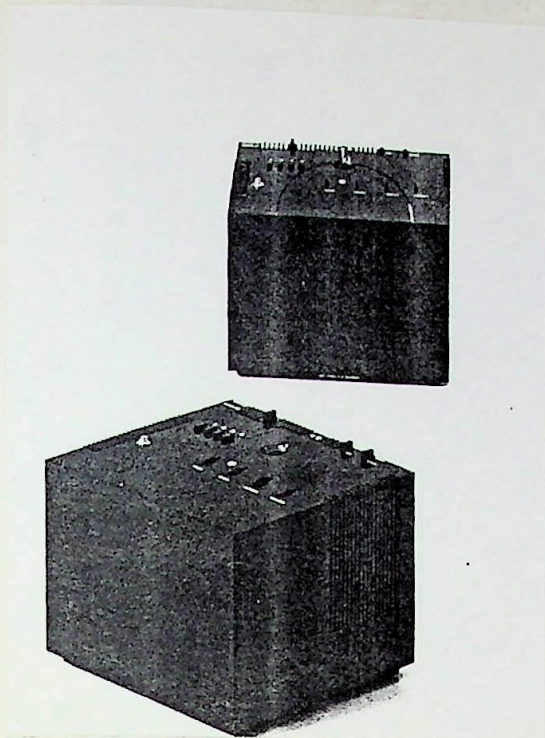


Fig. 25.

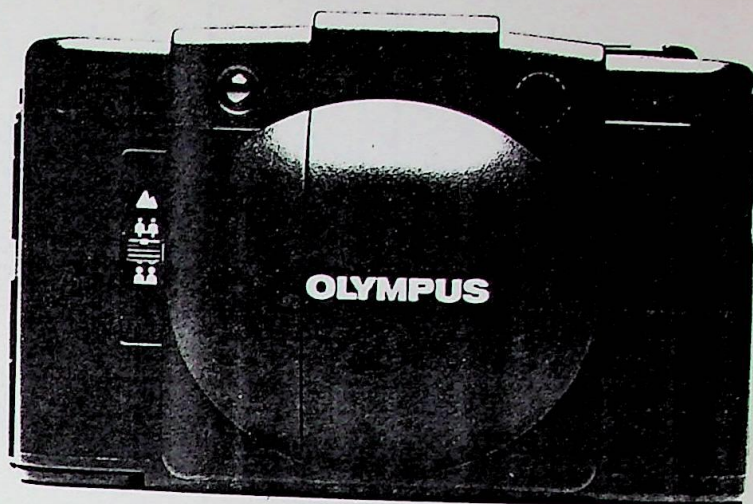


Fig. 27.

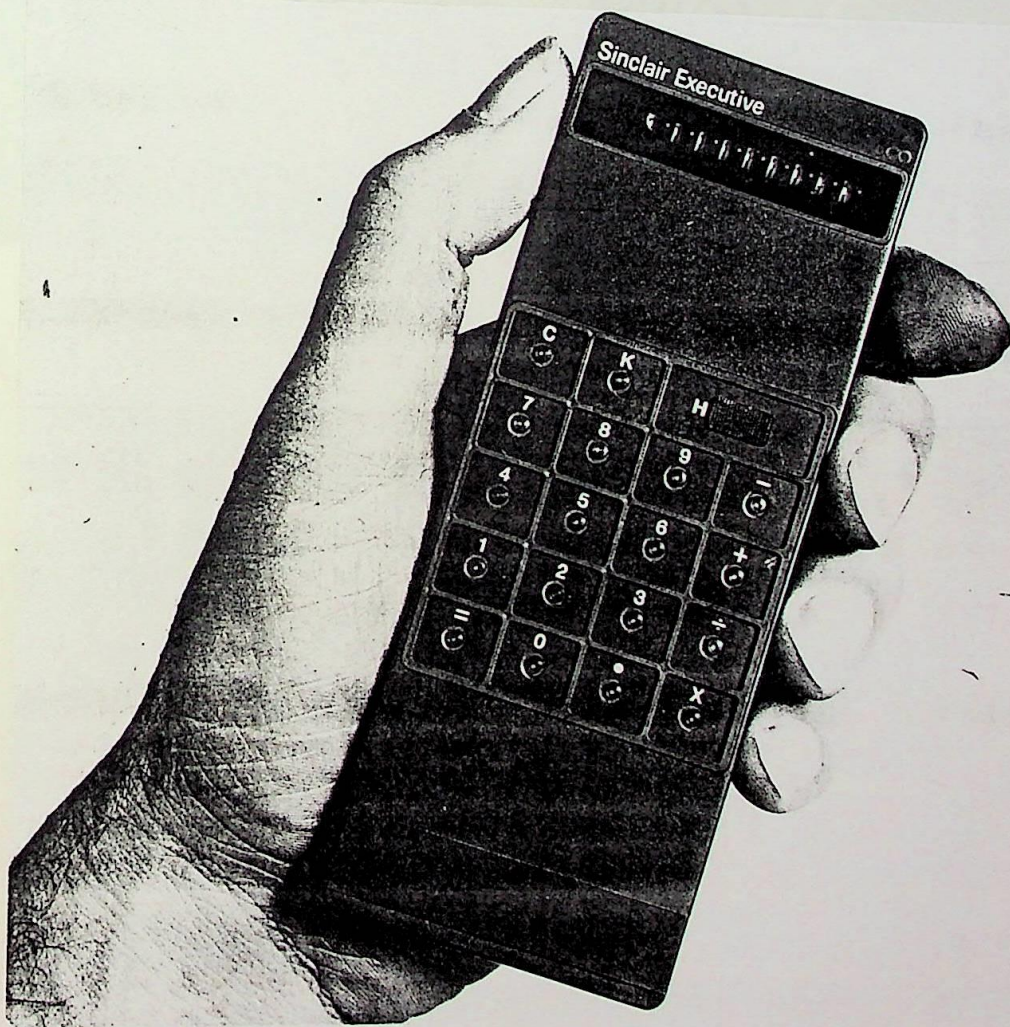


Fig. 26.



Fig. 28.

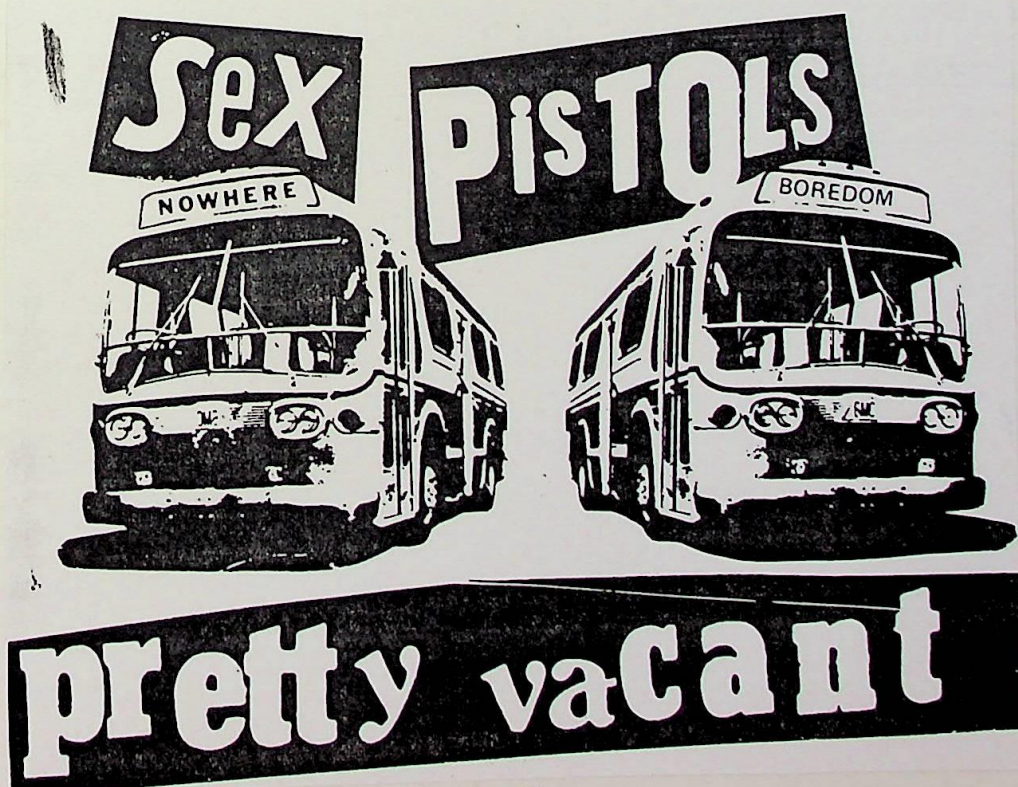


Fig. 29.

central to punk. Punk forced people to sit up and take notice, and to reconsider their attitudes through the use of images of violence, pornography and urban decay. The intention was to shock, and in this respect at least punk was successful: the enduring image of the movement will always be the famous picture of the Queen with the safety pin through her nose. The man who put it there, graphic artist Jamie Reid, also had the ability to coin pithy slogans which crystalised the controversial, always anti-establishment attitude behind punk: "Anarchy is the key, Do-It-Yourself is the Melody", "Cash From Chaos", "Save Petrol - Burn Cars", "Keep Warm this Winter - Make Trouble". Although punk had an immediate influence on graphic design and fashion, the underlying attitude behind the movement has filtered through, ten years later, to product design.

The energy of punk rock burnt itself out by 1980, as many of those originally involved in trying to change the system became absorbed into it instead and decided life was better on the inside. Besides, by then the public had almost become immured to punks' confrontationalism: Zandra Rhodes had produced a range of couture dresses carefully ripped and rejoined with safety pins, with the raw edges hand-beaded; punk had become the acceptable face of youth rebellion (Fig 31).

It was into the 1980's with the growth of globalisation, i.e. the development, production and sale of products on a near-global basis. In the 1970's Japan had recognised the opportunities for massive profits presented by production and marketing on this scale, and now Western corporations were set to follow their



Fig. 31.



Fig. 30.

example. In 1984 a top executive in Procter & Gamble commented: "We've progressed from national economics to an international business arena."

Kenidu Ohmae, head of the Tokyo office of McKinsey & Co., published "Triad Power: The Coming Shape of Global Competition" in 1985, in which the following factors were cited in favour of globalisation:

"1. The growing capital-intensity of manufacture, which until the widespread arrival of flexible manufacturing systems that allow cheap short production runs - favours even larger economies of scale than the in the past.

"2. The accelerating tempo of technologies: the cost of R & D is soaring, new technology is diffusing through the industrialised countries more rapidly than in the past, the technological advantage is therefore becoming increasingly hard to gain and then sustain. As a result many companies are having to start penetrating the 'triad' (i.e. Japan, the US and the European Community) with new products simultaneously."

Globalisation is increasingly being promoted as the best direction for multi-nationals and large corporation to go in the 1980's. The danger is that it may lead to a return of the idea of standard objects, this time based on the logic of economics rather than the logic of the machine aesthetic. Marketing guru Theodore Levitt declared in 1983 that "the world's needs and

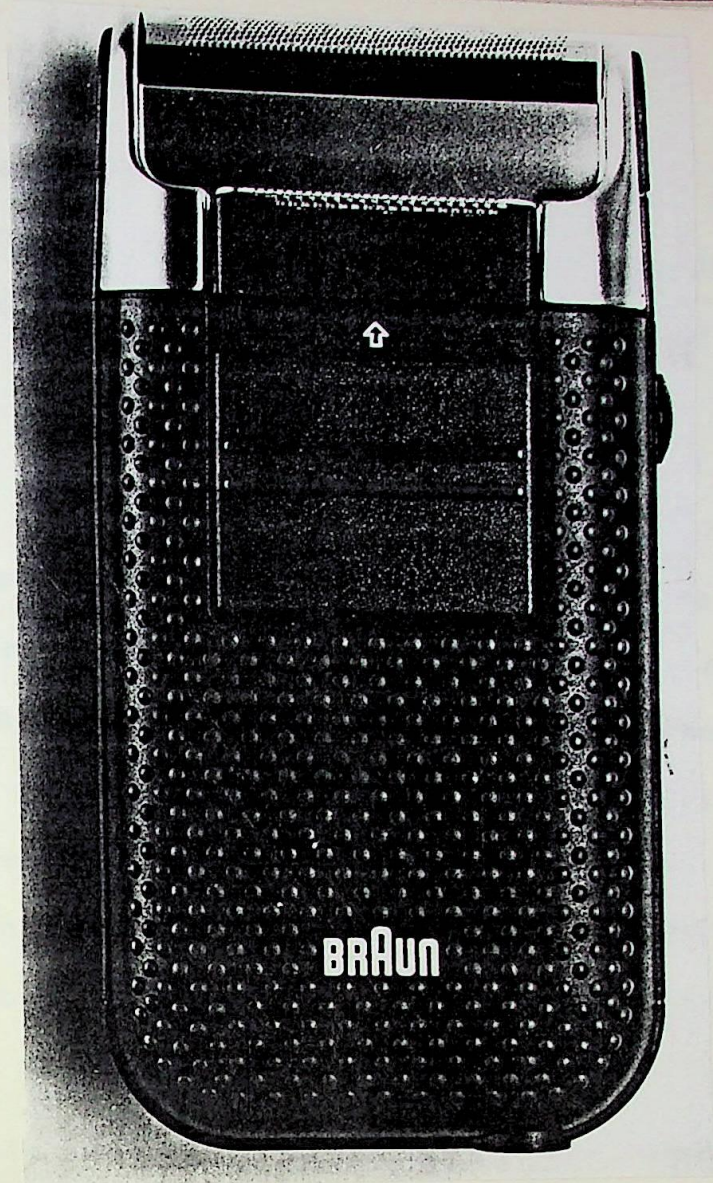


Fig. 32.



Fig. 33.

desires have been irrevocably homogenised". Will this belief give rise to and a new generation of Henry Fords, declaring that the public can have any colour they like as long as it's black?

Politically the 1980's has seen a swing to the right throughout the western world. The liberal people-oriented attitude of the 1960's and early '70's have given way to "the Me generation" Now that the worst of the recession is over, people want to hold on to what they already have and accumulate more for themselves, rather than give to others. The rich are getting richer and the poor are getting poorer. Add this to mass unemployment and cutbacks in public spending and the result is widespread dissatisfaction amongst the poorer and the more socially aware sections of society.

The new conservatism in politics has also given rise to massive increases in military spending. Huge sums of money are spent every year on developing more sophisticated nuclear weapons (Fig. 34). New schemes like the Sar Wars project have made people realise that nowadays even wars are impersonal things: instead of bloody one-on-one style fighting, the next war will probably be Armageddon, coming out of the sky without warning and making vast areas of the planet inhabitable for thousands of years afterwards.



Fig. 34.

SUMMARY OF HISTORICAL BACKGROUND TO NEW DESIGN.

What has become known as New Design takes many different forms: there is no real philosophy unifying the work, and the designers involved have never produced a group manifesto. What they all have in common is a dissatisfaction with design today, which had led them to branch off from the mainstream.

In historical terms, they are the descendants of the radical architecture groups of the of the 1960s. Up until the 1960s Modernism was the dominant force in design in Europe. In the 1960s groups of young architects in Britain and Italy, who were dissatisfied with the cold, clinical approach of modernism, broke away from mainstream design and began research into the function of architecture and the real needs of human beings. Since the new avant-garde were young, they drew on popular culture, fine art and political events and incorporated them into their work; a thread which also runs through New Design. In the late 60's the youth movement was born in the form of the hippy culture, as a reaction against the rampant consumer society and American intervention in Vietnam. The hippies initiated an interest in Eastern religions, ethnic and tribal decoration and natural materials which has resurfaced in the New Design of the 1980's.

In the 1970's, the microchip revolution and the world recession led to mass unemployment and de-skilling. In spite of this, technology was seen as the answer to everybody's problems, but the design community treated technology oriented products in an anonymous formulaic manner which alienated the user. It is only

now, with New Design, that a different treatment of technology is being presented as an alternative to this approach. In 1976-1977, punk rock began, as a reaction against apathetic urban England. The raw energy and get-up-and-go attitude behind punk has left its legacy in the present generation of designers who often design, manufacture and retail their products themselves. In 1980, Memphis arose from the ashes of the Italian avant-garde movement and set the design community alight. Memphis differed from previous radical design groups in that Memphis designs were actually manufactured and sold to the public as real products - like New Design. Therefore Memphis presented a more realistic alternative to mainstream design than before.

Now, in the mid-eighties, comes the emergence of widespread global marketing of products regardless of cultural or ethnic differences: a return to the standard objects proposed by le Corbusier and others in the modern Movement. The bland sameness of products the world over, combined with superpower military plans, like the Star Wars project, which affect the entire globe and not merely the countries directly concerned, can make people feel anonymous, ineffectual and powerless to affect their own destinies.

The New Designers follow the belief of the sixties avant garde that design must be more expressive and communicate with the user on a fundamental, emotional level. The hippies' interest in ethnic cultures and craft values are reflected in New Design, as is punk rock's ad hoc self sufficiency. "Messy vitality over obvious unity" was recommended by Robert Venturi as a quality of

Post-Modern architecture; a quality also seen in New Design. The Memphis' group's emphasis on unusual materials, colour and expressive forms is carried over into the work of these designers. Much of the work also has an awareness of political situations: there are recurring hints of an imminent apocalypse.

is mentioned previously, the primary individual contributor to the total production of a product is the individual who designs it. The designer is the one who determines the basic characteristics of the product, and the manufacturer is the one who produces it. The designer is the one who determines the basic characteristics of the product, and the manufacturer is the one who produces it.

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PART II

CHARACTERISTICS AND SOURCES OF NEW DESIGN

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SUMMARY OF CHARACTERISTICS AND SOURCE OF NEW DESIGN

As mentioned previously, the various individuals practising what has been termed "New Design" (for lack of a better name) do not constitute a coherent design movement as such. Much of the work discussed here will appear to be diverse rather than unified in terms of materials, imagery and functions.

The main element tying New Design together is that it is all produced in opposition to, and as an alternative to, mainstream design. However, there are various other aspects common to a lot of the work: these aspects are defined and discussed in the following pages.

Firstly, New Design uses different production methods from mainstream design. There is a common reliance on craft-based techniques of production, which is labour-intensive but does not rely on expensive machinery. The work that is put into machine production does so only on a small-run basis - for example 10,000 of Daniel Weil's "Radio in a Bag" have been made, but in comparison with most mass-produced items, this is a tiny number.

Small-run and crafts-type production schemes favour certain types of materials over others. New design is also characterised by a new and fresh use of materials, from rough, urban concrete and metal to frail, delicate silk and paper. The texture of the material is often highlighted, and textural effects created by production processes are frequently left exposed.

Found objects used in the designs are a recurring feature. "Waste" items are recycled and turned into furniture or other product. Other types of bricolage adapt things for new purposes (Fig 35) or use found objects for their symbolic value. An undercurrent of wry humour runs through much of New Design, and it is also characterised by an air of vitality and energy.

The use of expressive forms and imagery is another characteristic of much of the work. The imagery used usually has strong associative values: the brutal, destructive images of urban decay, elements of ritual and tribalism, revamped classicism and historical styles, and quirky anthromorphic forms (Fig 36).

Technological products are treated differently in New Design. Technology is often treated in an intimate humanised way; tamed and domesticated. Sometimes technical products are broken down into their tiny component parts, sometimes they are enlarged and made monumental. Whatever path the designer takes, it forces us to question accepted forms and perceptions of technology in domestic products (Fig. 37).



STOOLS ONE

Fig. 35.



Animating ironwork,
young British blacksmith
Colin Chetwood's mirror
"is definitely about vanity"
and of organic marine
inspiration with its fisheye lens
and seakelp leafy limbs
akin to Galliano gloves.
£235, at Monolith,
The Slaughter House,
63 Charterhouse St, EC1.
More modern furniture design,
see page 194

ANDREW BETTLES

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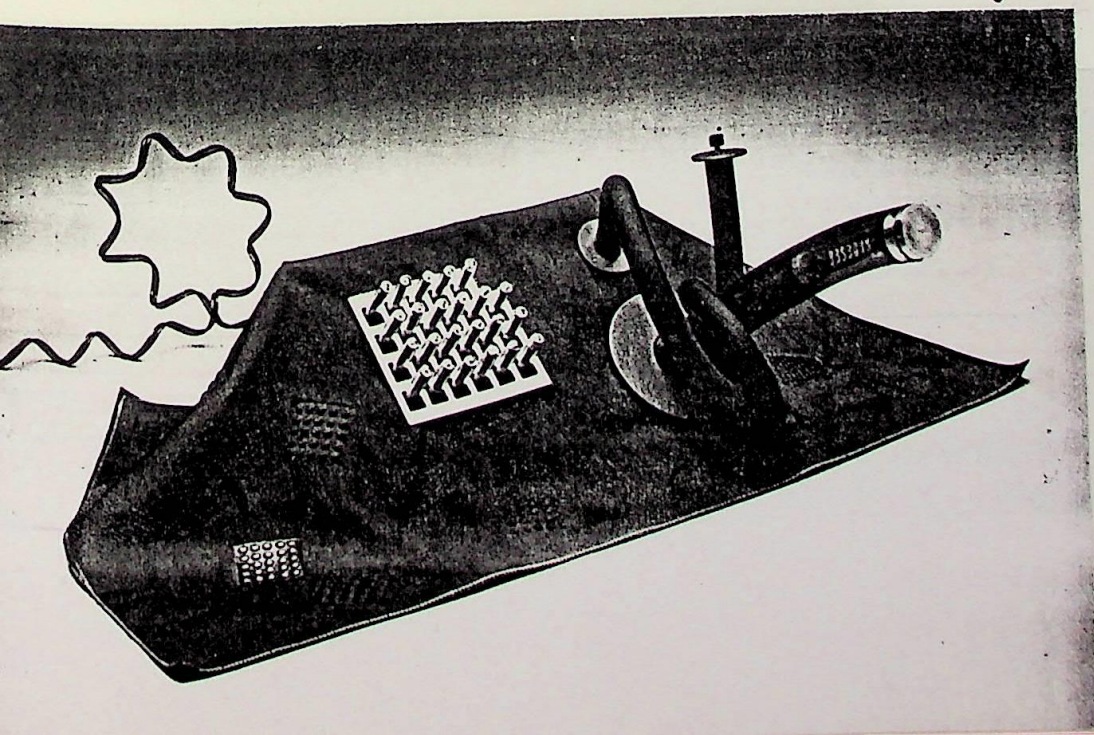


Fig. 36.

Fig. 37.

CHAPTER 1

THE CRAFTS CONNECTION

Running through New Design is a thread of basic opposition to mass production and the standardised objects that result from it: this undercurrent obviously leads back to craft and small-run type operations. Daniel Weil comments ".... the engineers rule and they say what is possible or impossible, controlling the aesthetics of objects through cost-effective arguments. These arguments are taken as absolutes, but they are not - they are totally subjective and reveal ideas of production and life that are rooted in the '60's, sometimes in the '20's and even back in the 19th century."

In a sense the New Design crafts emphasis also dates back to the 19th century. Just as the Industrial Revolution at the turn of the century spawned a crafts revival, so the microchip revolution of the twentieth century has spawned another backlash against mainstream commercial design and a return to crafts values. William Morris wrote "If the necessary reasonable work be of a mechanical kind, I must be helped to do it by a machine, not to cheapen my labour, but so that as little time as possible may be spent upon it.... I know that to some cultivated people, people of the artistic turn of mind, machinery is particularly distasteful.... (but) it is the allowing machines to be our masters and not our servants that so injures the beauty of life nowadays." A similar attitude has created and fostered the new crafts - based production methods, if "craft" can be defined as

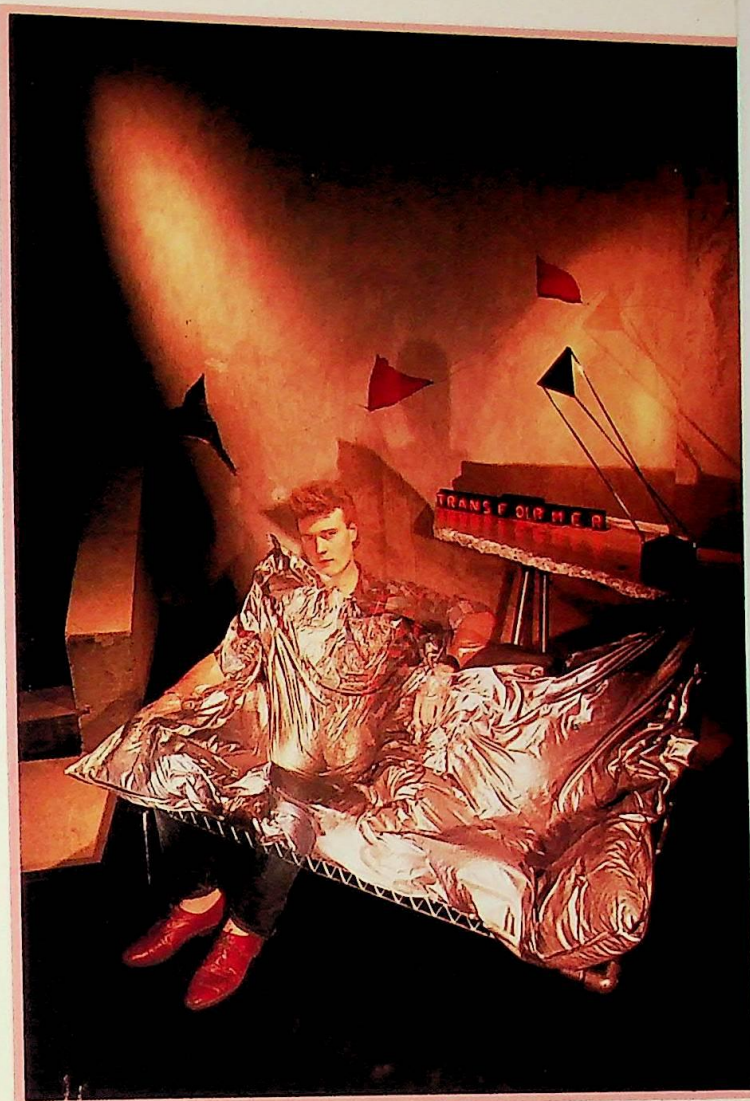
follows, in the words of Andrea Branzi: "Being an artisan does not mean not using machines in the process of manufacturing; on the contrary it means using all the machines in the workshop in rotation, maintaining direct control over all phases of production by passing - unlike the assembly line worker who is confined to a single stage of construction - from one machine to another, just as the carpenter moves directly from the planer to the electric saw and the drill as the stages and methods of his own scheme of assembly require." In other words, "crafts" in this sense does not necessarily mean "handmade" - it can just as easily designate a different type of machine production.

Another crafts-oriented approach to production involves the designer "sub-contracting" out various stages in the process to small local businesses. This method of small run production has existed in Italy for years, since Italy has retained a specialist artisan tradition which other European countries have lost. In the present economic climate, however, with widespread redundancies from large manufacturing companies and grants available to those wishing to start their own businesses, there is a new pool of resources available in Britain and elsewhere to the designer which never existed before. As Danny Lane says of his workshop-cum-studio in Hackney: "Any parts for our things that we don't have we can get within a three mile radius. I call up Glen at GT Compressors - "Hey, it's Danny here" - and I'm more at home in that environment than with the people who buy my things. I'm one of them." Or, to quote Jasper Morrison from Peter Dormer's book "The New Furniture" - "The designer with foresight builds his own factory, not with bricks, but from the

sprawling backstreets teeming with services and processes for materials both common and uncommon to his trade. The thoughtful designer knows full well that while the big-time manufacturers and his more employable colleagues are unaware or disdainful of the afternoons he spends wandering the street, he has only to make his own living to accomplish more than all of them. Why? Because it is more important to keep those small but enormously useful backstreet businesses alive than to maintain a single large stagnating producer of hand-stapled, upholstered suites."

The crafts based, small run type of method of production has, to a certain extent, dictated the materials used by New Designers. Extensive use of plastic mouldings are out of the question because they require costly moulding machines. Ron Arad says that the work sold in his shop One Off is "... liked in Italy (because) they think our work is fresh and requires no investment in machines." (Fig 38). Therefore the materials most often used by New Designers are those than can be worked with the minimum of equipment: wood, metal, concrete, glass, paper, and so on. (Fig 39).

Much New Design occupies a middle ground between sculpture, design and craft. Some of the designers, like Daniel Weil, insist that their work is design and not art. Others, like Tom Dixon, would rather theirs be read at art rather than design: There shouldn't be a distinction between artist and designer" says Dixon; as a result he is not interested in mass production of his designs. As Danny Lane says; "There are designers crawling out of the woodwork all over Covent Garden. I think you have to make things."



TRANSFORMER

Fig. 38.

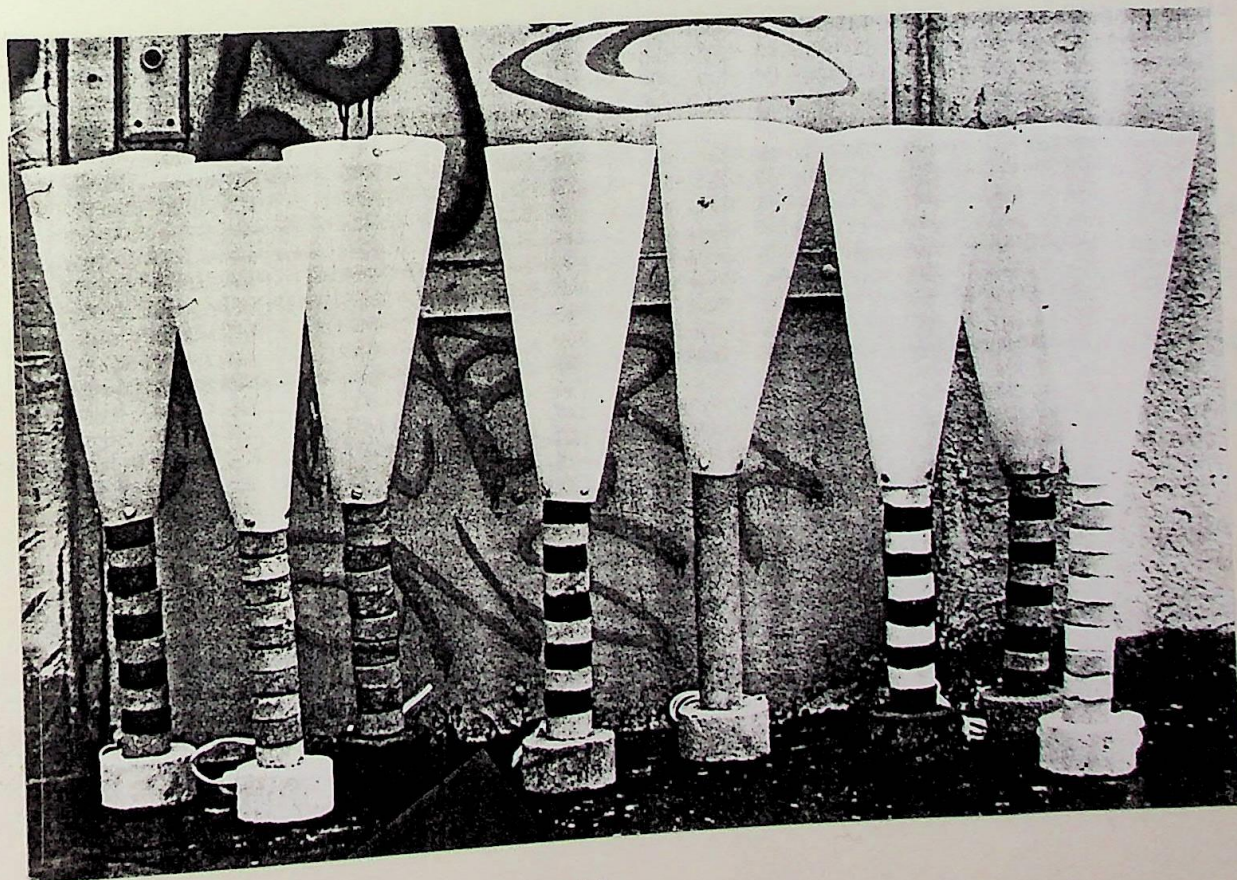


Fig. 39.

CHAPTER 2

MATERIALS AND SURFACE FINISH

"Materials have begun to be read, chosen and utilised not only as tools or supports of design (important as these may be), but as active protagonists, privileged vehicles of sensory communication, self-sufficient cells that cohabit the design without mixing, each cell with its own personal story to tell."

Barbara Radice, "Memphis".

The Memphis legacy in terms of approach to choosing materials is strong. The New Designers also use materials which "are immediate and directly sensual... which appeal more to physical qualities than to the intellect." (Barbara Radice, "Memphis"). Memphis used materials with industrial or high tech connotations, although they were never presented in a high-tech or industrial manner. The materials used in New Design are sometimes industrial or suggestive of urban society, like concrete, metal and rubber; other have ethnic or tribal connotations, for example hair, feathers, bone; some materials are treated or distressed to give a patina of "age" or "use"; others are simply surprising to find used in the context of products, like paper and glass. The use of found objects as materials is discussed in Chapter 3.

Concrete is a common material used in new design. Some designs exploit the urban associations of concrete to symbolise urban decay, while others use it in a more subtle way and highlight the

innate but often overlooked beauty of the material. The associative use of concrete is discussed further under "Amockalypse design". Chris Collicot's materials-rich bowl is an example of a different treatment. (Fig 40). The bowl is made of oxidised copper, brass and concrete. The monumental, solid qualities of concrete are exploited here to the full. The cement base has become a pedestal, upon which the bowl is raised aloft, like an offering. The three parts of the design are delineated by the use of different materials for each: the rich green patina of oxidised copper for the bowl itself; unpolished brass for the side elements, which curve upwards from the base and touch the bowl, encouraging the eye to move around the object; and the chalky concrete base. The three materials each have a powerful textural quality of their own, which combine to produce a primitive, tribal aura. There is a strong ritualistic feel to the bowl: the side pieces, which curve like a bull's horns and serve as handles, suggest sacrificial rites which take place in an otherwise civilised, sophisticated society - at Knossos perhaps? One could imagine a seer peering into this bowl to predict the future, or an eternal flame burning in it.

Glass and metal, the materials which were once synonymous with the modern movement, have resurfaced with an aggressive new treatment. Danny Lane makes glass and metal furniture; the glass usually has "broken" uneven edges, and often it is sandblasted to create a surface pattern. Metal legs are bolted to a glass table top, or glass plates are placed haphazardly onto a jagged metal base. (Fig 41). This glass seated and backed chairs are amongst his most innovative piece (Fig 42). The

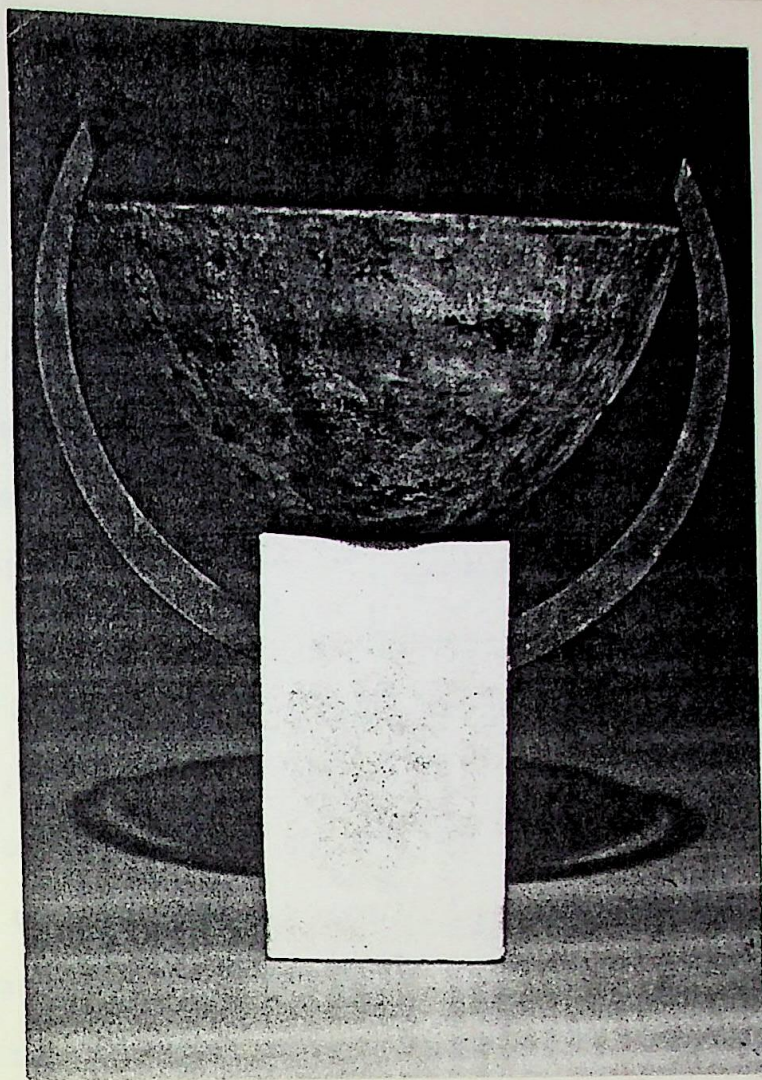


Fig. 40.

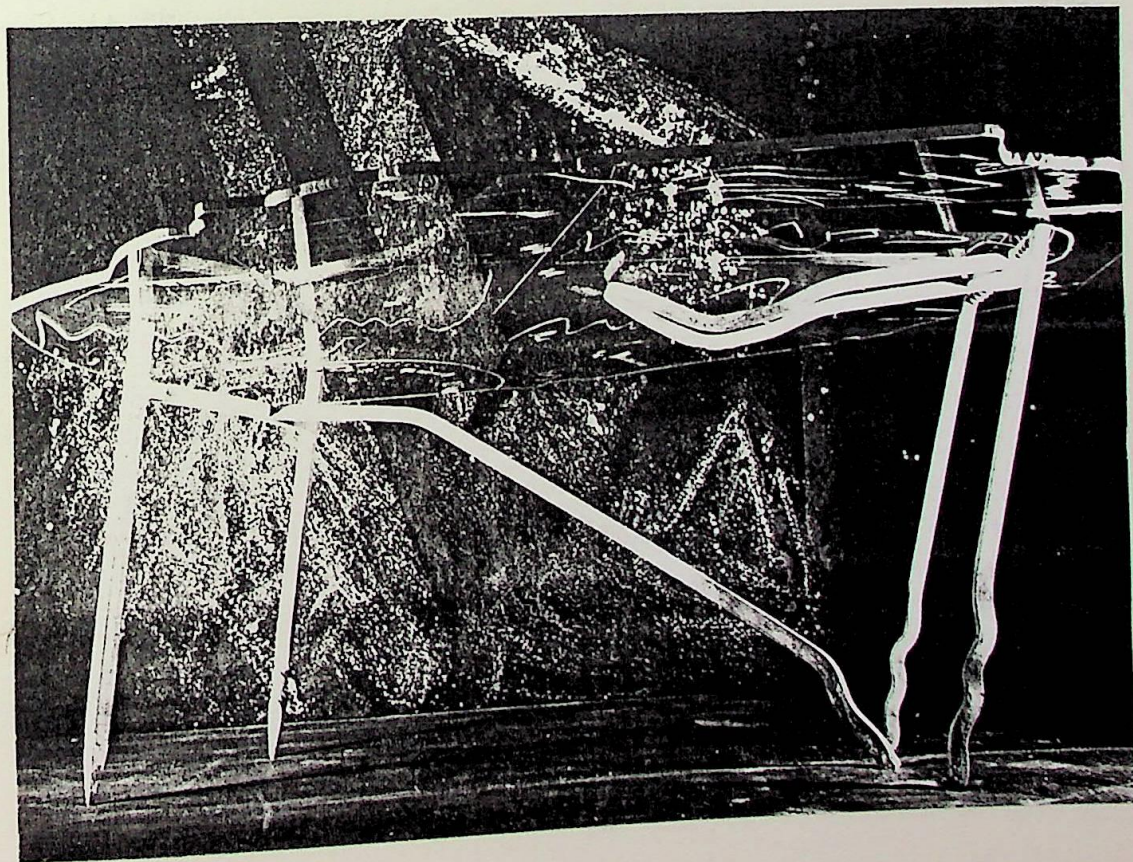


Fig. 41.

chair back consists of a series of thick glass plates with metal connectors running through them to hold the structure together. When the user leans against the chair back, the connectors flex slightly and the back "gives" with him. Lane believes that his work shows clearly the emotional power of materials: the response most often generated by glass objects like the chair is fear. People are afraid to sit on a glass seat in case it breaks beneath them; they anticipate the chair back to be rigid and are alarmed when it gives with them. These contradictions inherent in the chair, give it its interest: glass should break, but it doesn't; it should be rigid, but it isn't. The uneven edges look rough and sharp but they are polished smooth. The technical standard of Lane's work is very high. The glass is cut and fractured, then it is subjected to the same toughening process which protects a car windscreen. Next the edges are polished.

The thickness of the glass plates give them a deep seawater green transparency. The edges of the plates ripple like water: the chair looks like a frozen waterfall, or a transparent stalagmite. This sculptural quality no doubt comes from Lane's fine art training: he studied painting at Central School of Art, and turned to "glass art" after graduation.

people



Fig. 42.

CHAPTER 3

BRICOLAGE

"I shall act like the man who, because of poverty, is the last to arrive at the fair, and is therefore forced to take up all those things which others have seen and rejected, seeing no value in them. Then I shall load my humble sack with these despised leftovers, the remains of many customers."

Leonardo Da Vinci.

Bricolage is a recurring theme used by the New Designers in their designs. However it is used for a number of different final effects: the same means to different ends.

Charles Jencks and Nathan Silver, in their book "Adhocism", defined the phrase Ad Hoc as follows: "denotes a principle of action having speed or economy and purpose or utility. Basically it involves using an available system or dealing with an existing situation in a new way to solve a problem quickly and efficiently." It is doubtful whether the emphasis on speed is important in the case of adhocism in fine art, design and architecture, where the final purpose is likely to be paramount and the parts used to achieve that purpose are likely to be chosen very carefully.

Claude Levi-Strauss defines the "bricoleur" as "someone who works with his hands and uses devious means compared to those of a craftsman. The bricoleur is adept at performing a large number

of diverse tasks, but, unlike the engineer, he does not subordinate each of them to the availability of raw materials and tools conceived and procured for the purpose of the project. His universe of instruments is a set of tools and materials which is always finite and is also heterogeneous because what it contains bears no relation to the current project, or indeed to any particular project... The set of the bricoleur means cannot therefore be defined in terms of a project ... It is to be defined only by its potential use...."

One of the effects of the use of "found objects" has been christened "salvage design." (This type of adhocism or bricolage is discussed further under "Amockalypse design"). Basically, it involves the re-use of materials and objects which had originally been used for another purpose and which are often in a state of decay or disrepair. A good example is Daniel Grey of The Grey Organisation and his large dining table incorporating railway sleepers, finished in molten iron (Fig 43). The sleepers are obviously old and worn. They have not been "dressed up" in any way: the worn cracked holes where the rails were once set into them have not been covered up or treated. The table is in a raw and unrefined state, yet its very simplicity and humility holds an appeal. There is a huge contrast between this piece and the bland yet highly finished tables one finds in the Habitat catalogue or contemporary furniture shops. The table has a neo-mediaeval ambience which is found in much of Daniel Grey's work, and which no doubt led to him getting the commission to design the furniture for Derek Jarman's bio-pic "Carravaggio" (Fig 45). It also has a monumental air, and the thickness and

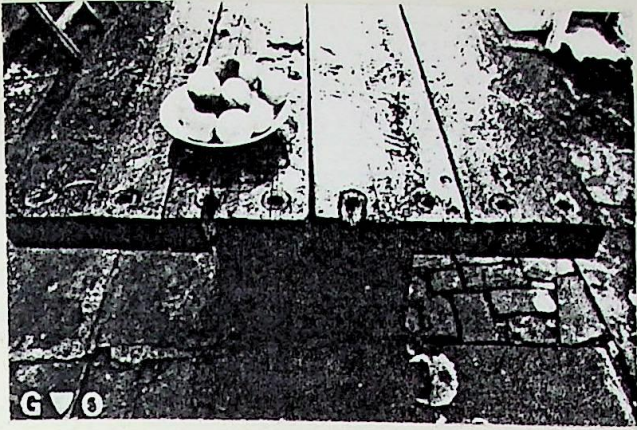


Fig. 43.



Fig. 44.

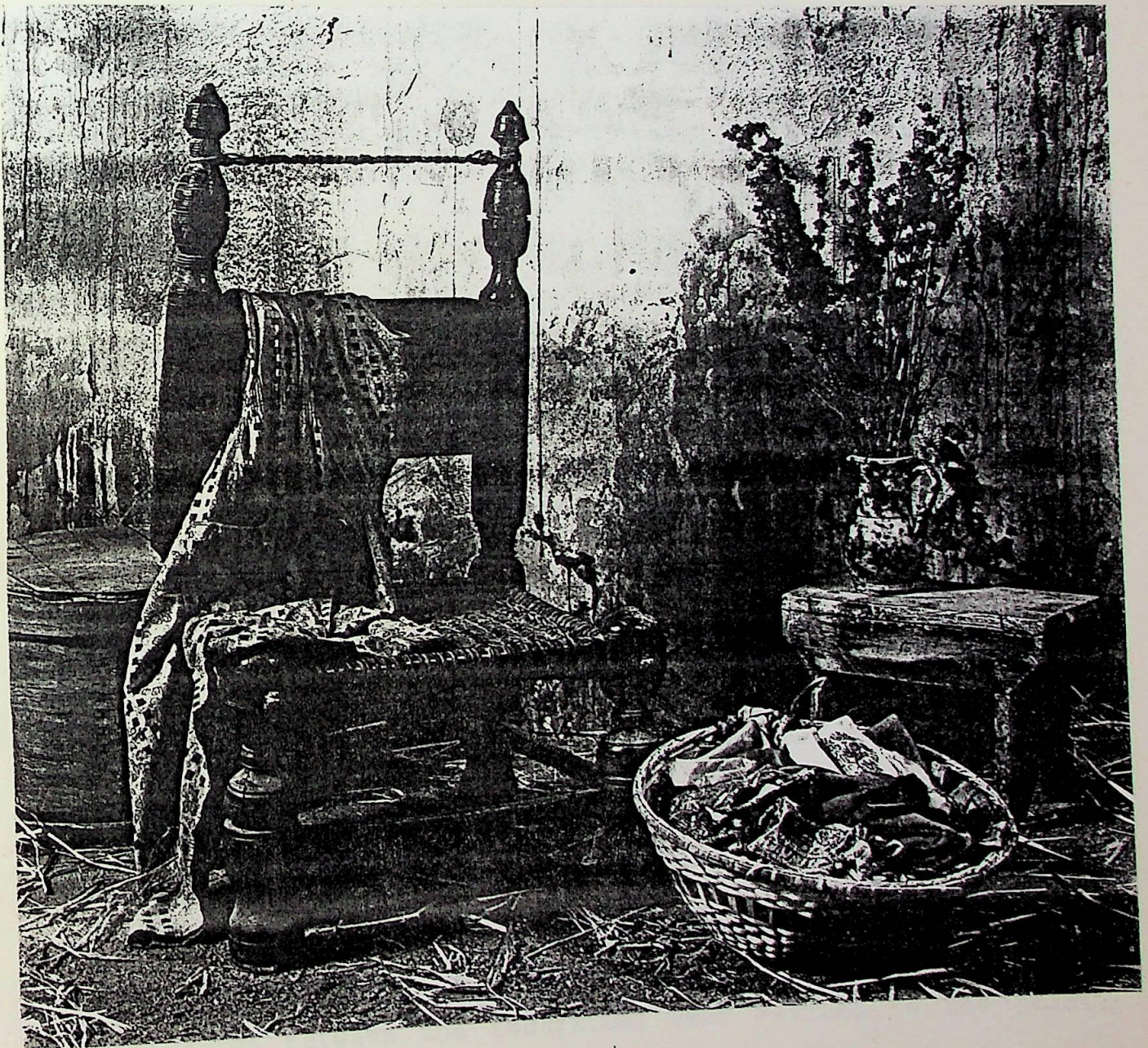


Fig. 45.

patina of age to the wood is reminiscent of large, cosy kitchen in country houses, with kitchen tables which have been worn by generations of use. It is curious that an industrial object like a railway sleeper can be transformed so successfully into a domestic object.

The idea of salvaging objects and materials which have already been used and discarded by society, and re-using them for another purpose, as a deliberate choice of action, came popular with the hippy movement in the late 1960's (obviously scavenging as a necessary means of survival has existed for as long as poverty has). As Charles Jencks says: "Forced on by the twin passions of contempt for a consumer society and love for doing your own thing, they have discovered numerous ways of living free off the unnoticed subsystems of society. A free house can be constructed from the bodies of used cars; free food can be collected at the closing hours of meat, fish and vegetable shops; free furniture can be pick up off the streets the night before the sanitation department makes it bulk pickups."

Other pieces of bricolage seen amongst the work of New Designers lie far from the humble unsophistication of Daniel Grey's furniture. Some of them would fall into the category of invention, if invention could be defined as the ad hoc combination of subsystems into a new product. The bicycle and the car were both created in this way; as time passed the relationships between the subsystems were refined to the point

where they both became non adhoc or totalistic. This process follows Picasso's account of invention:

When you make a thing, a thing that is new
It is so difficult making it
That it is bound to be ugly.
But when the others make it after you
They don't have to worry about making it,
And so they can make it beautiful,
And everyone can like it
When the others make it after you."

Ron Arad's remote controlled "Mad Max light" is not only new, however, it is beautiful as well (Fig 46). It is an ad hoc combination of electronic and electric components and yet it has a unity and grace which belies the method of its creation. The light consists of the business end of a Japanese remote control car aerial, surmounted by a quartz halogen spot bulb, with a heat sink transformer (acquired from a company that make hi-fi speakers) at the joint of the aerial, mounted on a die cast aluminium base. Between the base and the bulb run a collection of wires which give the lamp the look of a delicate robot. The wires are suspended in elegant loops from the various components: no attempt is made to hide them. Instead they are highlighted as a sinuous, twisting counterpoint to the highly technical parts which form the body of the lamp. A wireless remote control can make the light swivel, shoot up and down or around. The design looks like a robotic bird; although a highly technological product, it has an antromorphic appeal. It has grace and

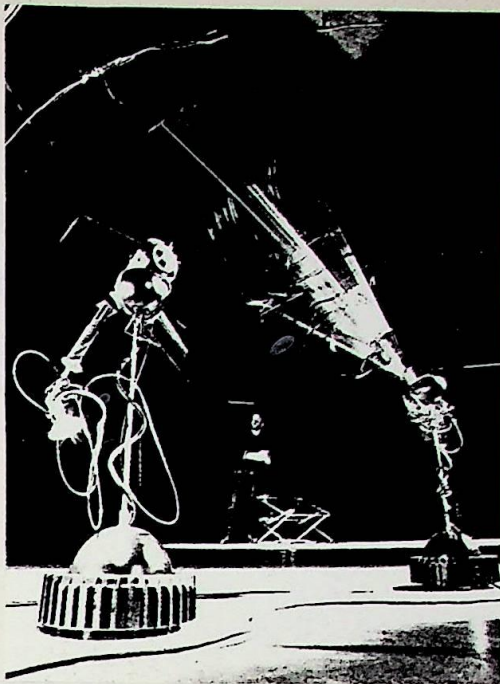
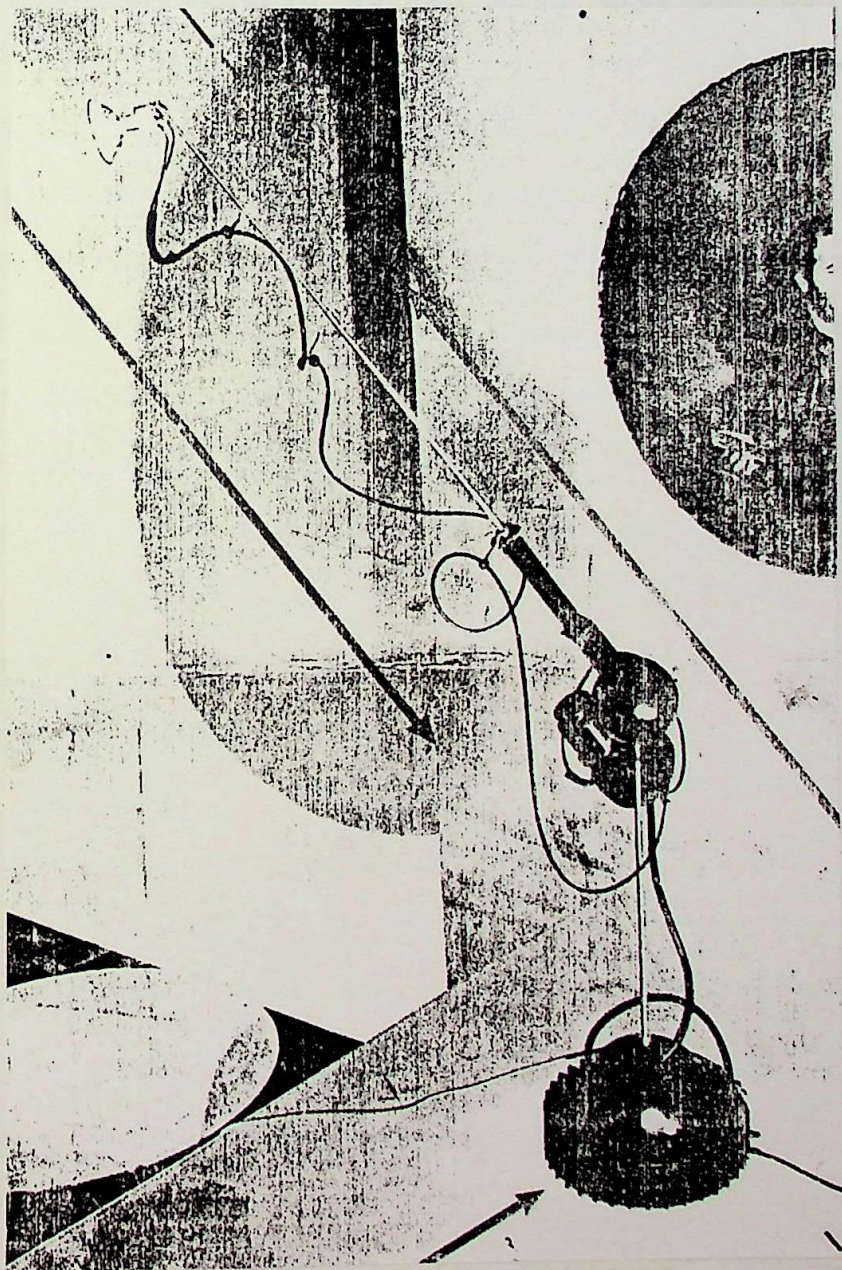


Fig. 46.



dignity, and yet when it moves it appears faintly ridiculous: a combination guaranteed to create an affectionate response in the user. The light also invokes memories of radio-controlled toy planes and boats: a clever combination of technology and whimsy has created this toy for grown-ups. (Rich grown ups: Max Max II cost £490).

A third type of bricolage practised by the new designers is influenced by Dadaism, the neo-Dadaists of the 1960's, and surrealism. Lautreamont said "Beauty is the fortuitous encounter of a sewing machine and an umbrella on a dissecting table." The Surrealists worked with everyday objects removed from their habitual contexts and placed in new situation. Marcel Duchamp displayed his "ready made" as art, although the hand of the artist no longer created, it simply chose; "a phenomenon which the surrealists have felicitously called 'objective hazard'" (Levi-Strauss) and which Duchamp called the element of chance. Dadaism also involved everyday objects in unfamiliar situations. Neo-Dadaism began with Pop Art in the 1960's, as the mass produced object became a common subject in fine art. However, because Pop Art recognised that popular culture, i.e. everyday experience, had more influence on peoples lives than high culture, neo-Dadaism was quite different from the original: as Andrea Branzi says: "If Duchamp's Dada in the twenties had introduced the ready-made as a question mark with the power to unhinge the world of culture from that of reality, American neo-Dada saw in the ready-made a confirmation of the intrusive reality of the present and an exclusion of any sort of surrealistic existence." (Figs 47, 48).

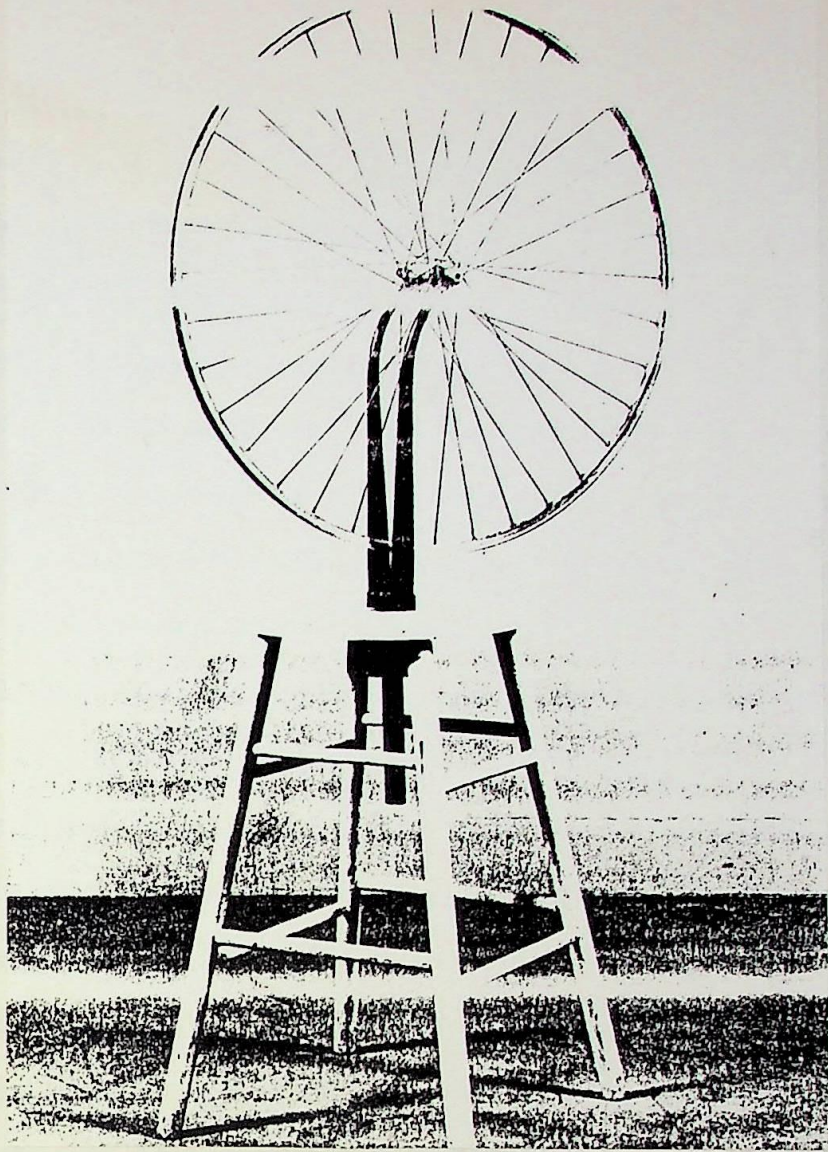


Fig. 47.

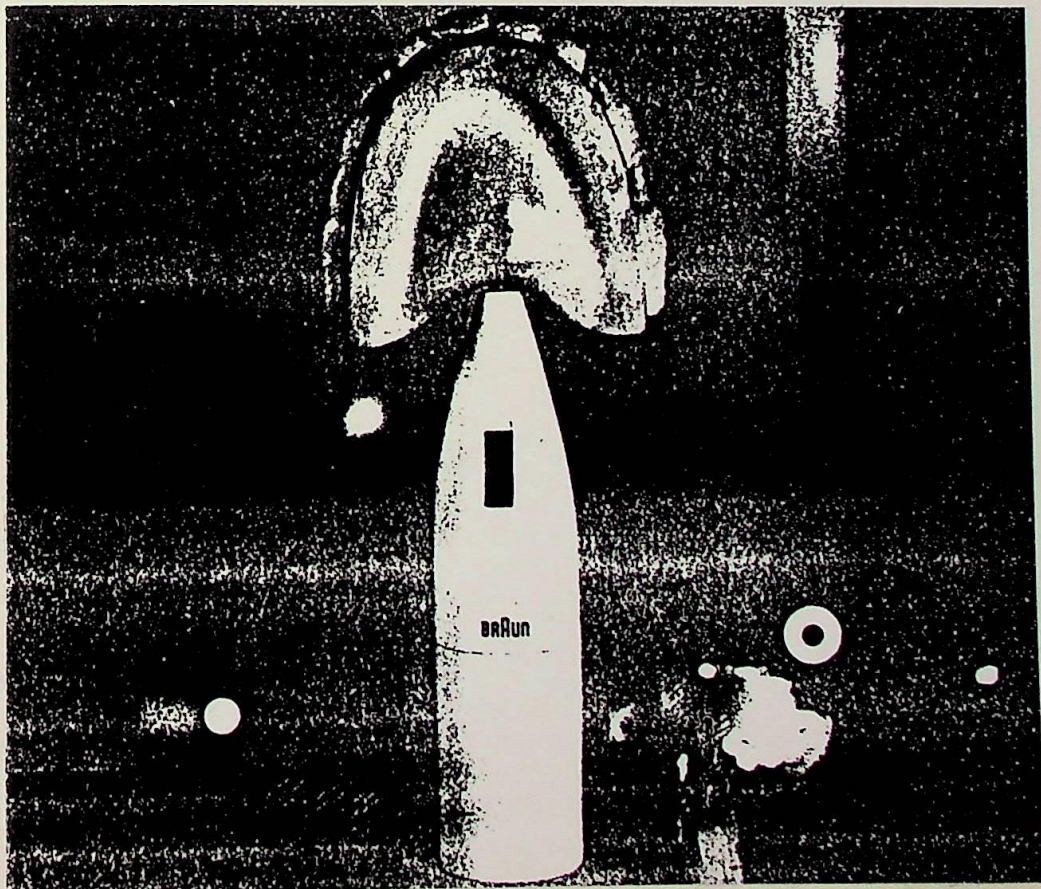


Fig. 48.

The reason why some of the ad hoc combinations are classified here as specifically Dadaist and fine-art oriented in their roots, is that the ready-mades or found objects used are chosen for their symbolic content rather than their function. The symbolic content may not be inherent in the object itself; but when it is presented in the context of the whole of which it is a part, it's symbolic power becomes evident. (This technique was used in punk rock, when a ready made, i.e. the safety pin, became a symbol for the entire movement. The safety pin thus became a symbol of anarchy, despite its function of holding things together; and its power as a symbol was never greater than in Jamie Reid's artwork for the Sex Pistols, where the queen was depicted wearing a safety pin through her nose). With the other two types of bricolage discussed, i.e. salvage design and invention, the function of the found object is at least as important as its symbolism. This type is Dadaist because the symbolism the found object accrues in its new situation is more important than its function in that situation.

Ann Tilby's candelabra is made of real bones, fake pearls and metal (Fig 49). She is a film set designer who also created one-off pieces for sale and traces her influences to Picasso and works like the Bull's Head. The Bull's Head, however combined functional bicycle parts ad hoc to produce an anthromorphic sculpture. She uses anthromorphic, sculptural parts to make functional objects. It is a curious combination, the remains of an animal used to make an object associated with wealth and grandeur. One imagine the chandelier hanging over a dining table where the diners pick the meat off similar hones with their

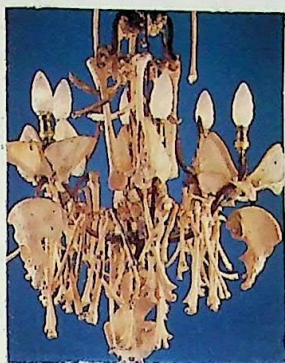


Fig. 49.

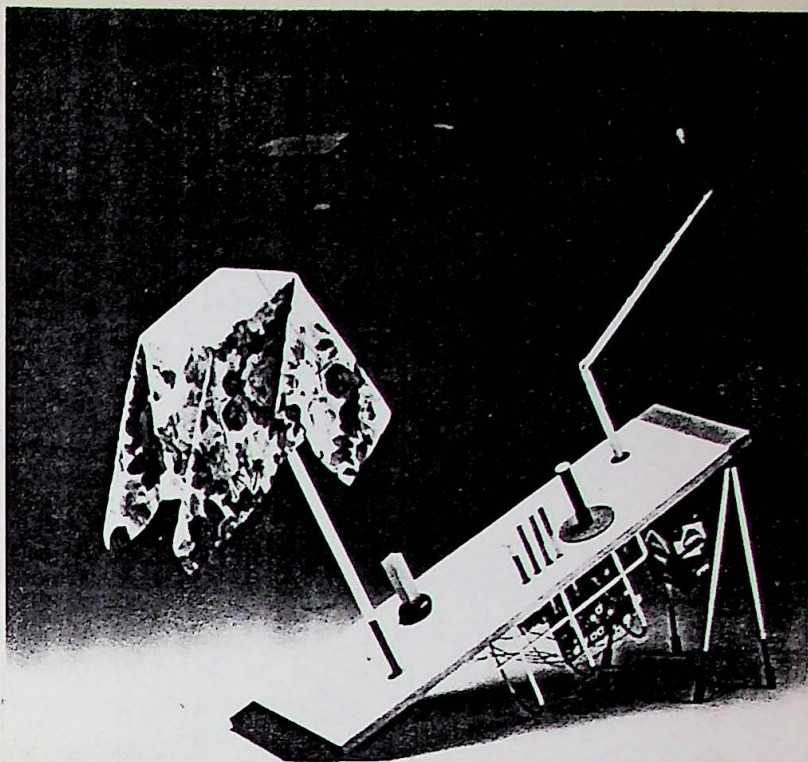


Fig. 50.

Fig. 51.



teeth. The bones are beautiful in a way very different from the flashy cut crystal usually seen in chandeliers: the colour and shapes of the bones are subtle and unusual and the shiny, uniformly round pearls add an interesting contrast in finish and shape, while preserving the monochromatic subtlety of the object. But the real power and interest of the chandelier lie in the opposing associations it invokes: the primitive nature of the bones set against the electric light bulbs; the use of primitive materials in a formal, cultured product; and the twin questions that it raises: is the designer trying to say that society is barbaric beneath a veneer of civilisation? Or perhaps she is equating the rules of civilised social behaviour with primitive ritual and tribalism?

Daniel Weil's "Small Door" three band radio is another excellent example of Dadaist bricolage in new design. (Fig 50). The object is obviously technological in nature. No attempt has been made to enclose or conceal the electronic parts which protrude beneath the slanting "fascia". The three band buttons provide a welcome dash of colour, and the articulated aerial gives another anthromorphic touch. The fascia is a smooth plane of wood, yet the radio is still somewhat cool and undomestic - until one sees the cotton chintz cover which hangs over the loudspeaker like a tablecloth. The addition of the ultra-domestic floral chintz to this strange new version of the radio changes the character of the product entirely: it makes it a friendly object, it is no longer quite so alien (although in some ways the juxtaposition of the chintz and circuitry make it even stranger), and it makes one laugh. The floral cotton is so unexpected in this context that to see it is a shock, and after

the initial shock it is funny. However it also makes one question the role of technology in the home, and accepted styles for domestic technical products. Not surprisingly, Weil admires the conceptual ideas of Marcel Duchamp. One of Duchamp's beliefs, put into action with his ready made, was that the artist only performs a part of the creative act: the user or onlooker's interpretation or interaction is necessary to complete the process. The Small Door radio demands that the user provides his own interpretation. It provokes thought along a certain line but provides no cut and dried answers.

In this design the chintz loudspeaker cover is used as a slightly kitsch symbol of domesticity and homeliness. However, its symbolism takes on an extra dimension when one looks closely at the chintz used. The floral pattern is called Chelsea Pink (Fig 51 It was very fashionable in England for domestic use in the 1920's. It then fell into obscurity until 1984 when Georgina Godley and Scott Crolla used it to make expensive high fashion men's shirts and sent it prancing down the catwalks during British Fashion Week. It became enormously popular and within a short space of time appeared in every High Street, made up into jackets and dresses. It was also very much in evidence at the 1985 Cassina Show at the Milan furniture fair. So, by a strange twist of fate (perhaps Duchamp's element of chance was at work!) the chintz chosen by Weil is no longer merely a nostalgic, jokily domestic item, but is also a symbol of high fashion!

CHAPTER 4

TECHNOLOGY

Technological products have always been problematic for industrial designers. They have never developed an expressive form of their own, unlike many other highly functional objects (e.g. water taps, cars, motorbikes). When television sets and radios first emerged, the technology used was still in its infancy and many of the components were large and heavy. Also, there was no visual precedent for these products. There was no accepted generic "look" which people associated with them. Because of their bulk and the need for people to accept technology into the home, they were originally styled as pieces of furniture with wood veneer casings. As transistors replaced valves and circuitry in the 1950's they became smaller and more versatile: portable radios and TV's were manufactured for the first time. However, despite the many interesting and colourful radios manufactured in the USA during the 1930's, for the most part technological goods were still products in search of an aesthetic.

In the 1970's, with the microchip revolution, they found it. New products, like LED and LCD watches, alarm clock-radios, pocket calculators and electronic games appeared on the market. With every year that passed, electronic goods became smaller and cheaper. No longer was the designer constrained by the limitations of bulky components, nor the consumer by problems of

cost. It was a time of great opportunity for designers; now, looking back, it appears that to a great extent it was an opportunity which was missed. The "Black Box" applied to technological products across the board: to quote Sylvia Katz; "It subjugates both material and function to preconceived form." (Fig 2).

Virtually all consumer electronic goods on sale up to the early 1980's were therefore either black, with rounded corners to soften the form, or hard-edged brushed metal boxes. The idea was to emphasise technical innovation and efficiency without intimidating the user. He had to be made to feel that he was controlling the technology (even though he knew that he didn't understand it) rather than the technological machine controlling him (a common theme in films and literature of this century).

The result was that electronic products simply looked bland and functional. They had no character or appeal beyond cold efficiency, and often alienated the user because their shape bore little or no relation to their function. In recognition of this, many manufacturers are now experimenting with new shapes and colours for technical objects, especially stereo equipment. The development of a sophisticated semantic language for consumer electronic goods is the driving concern of the design world in the late 1980's, and no doubt by the end of the decade the black box philosophy will have disappeared forever.

New Alternative Design, however, treats technology quite differently. Instead of the pastel colours and decorative fins

produced by the semanticists (Fig 52), which are somehow reminiscent of the worst decorative excesses of the car streamlining era, the New Designers examine the form of technological products at a fundamental level. Their work forces us to question our preconceived ideas about technology. It does not ignore technical innovation or try to deny the electronic nature of component parts, yet it manages to present electronic products in a completely new way.

Daniel Weil's designs are not only innovative, they also have the potential for mass production, although so far they have been limited to small scale output. His "Radio in the Bag" is probably his most famous design: 10,000 of them have been manufactured since it first appeared in 1981 (at exactly the same time as the Sony Walkman). (Figs 53, 54).

The radio "exposes" the simple components of the radio in an envelope of welded PVC. The idea of exposing functional parts of an object is not new: at one time it was held to be "honest" design to do so, since the internal function was readable on the outside. This is not strictly true in this case as the functions of the radio parts are too complex for a non-specialist to understand; but Weil's radio does clearly distinguish between the major subsets involved: the power source, the transistors and tuning knobs, and the speaker. Welded seams in the bag hold each component in position. It also shows how much miniaturisation has achieved, and presents the radio as a simple, friendly, non-intimidating object. It is a domestic, vernacular product: the poppers which seal the bag at the top are frequently found on



Fig. 52.

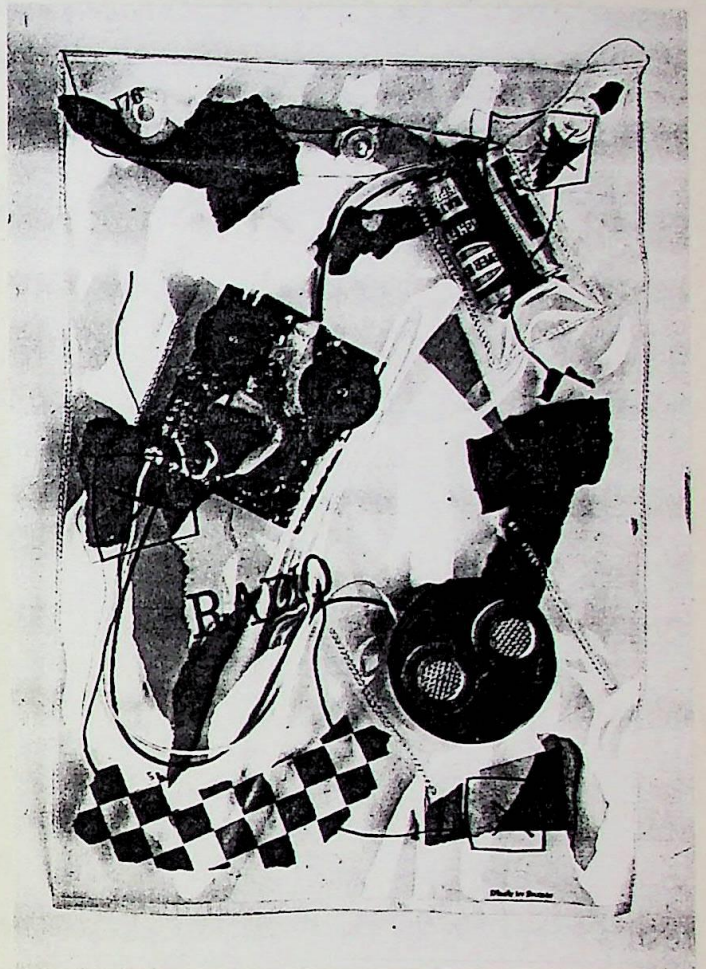


Fig. 53.



Fig. 54.

windcheaters, and the whole thing is flexible: it can be draped over chairs, hung on coat racks, or carried around in the pocket. Weil displayed it at his RCA degree show by hanging it from an ordinary wire coat hanger. The bag was manufactured in a number of different colourways: note that it has "RADIO" printed on it to dispel any doubts the first time user might have! One of these radios is now in the permanent collection at the Museum of Modern Art in New York.

Weil has since developed this idea to produce more sophisticated design using colourful, printed and welded envelopes of PVC, silk and cotton. The later designs have quirky, witty metal legs and coloured, fine spiralling wires. (Fig 55). They are more beautiful and have more anthromorphic appeal than the Bag Radio, but as their predecessor it is important for its innovation.

Weil's "Clock" is less obviously a candidate for mass production but more obviously a break from mainstream technological products (Fig. 56). The clock consists of etched copper, steel cutlery, electronic components, wine glasses and microchip. The circuit board is no longer miniaturised: on the contrary, it has been blown up out of proportion in contrast to the two LED display chips positioned under the wineglasses. The cutlery merely provides the connections from the transformer to the circuit boards: any quantity of forks and spoons could be used as long as the connections were made. Weil has used a vast quantity, intertwining the pieces to produce a clock on a grand scale which is well ordered and organised but plays at looking chaotic. The size of the circuit board and the length of the "connections"



Fig. 55.

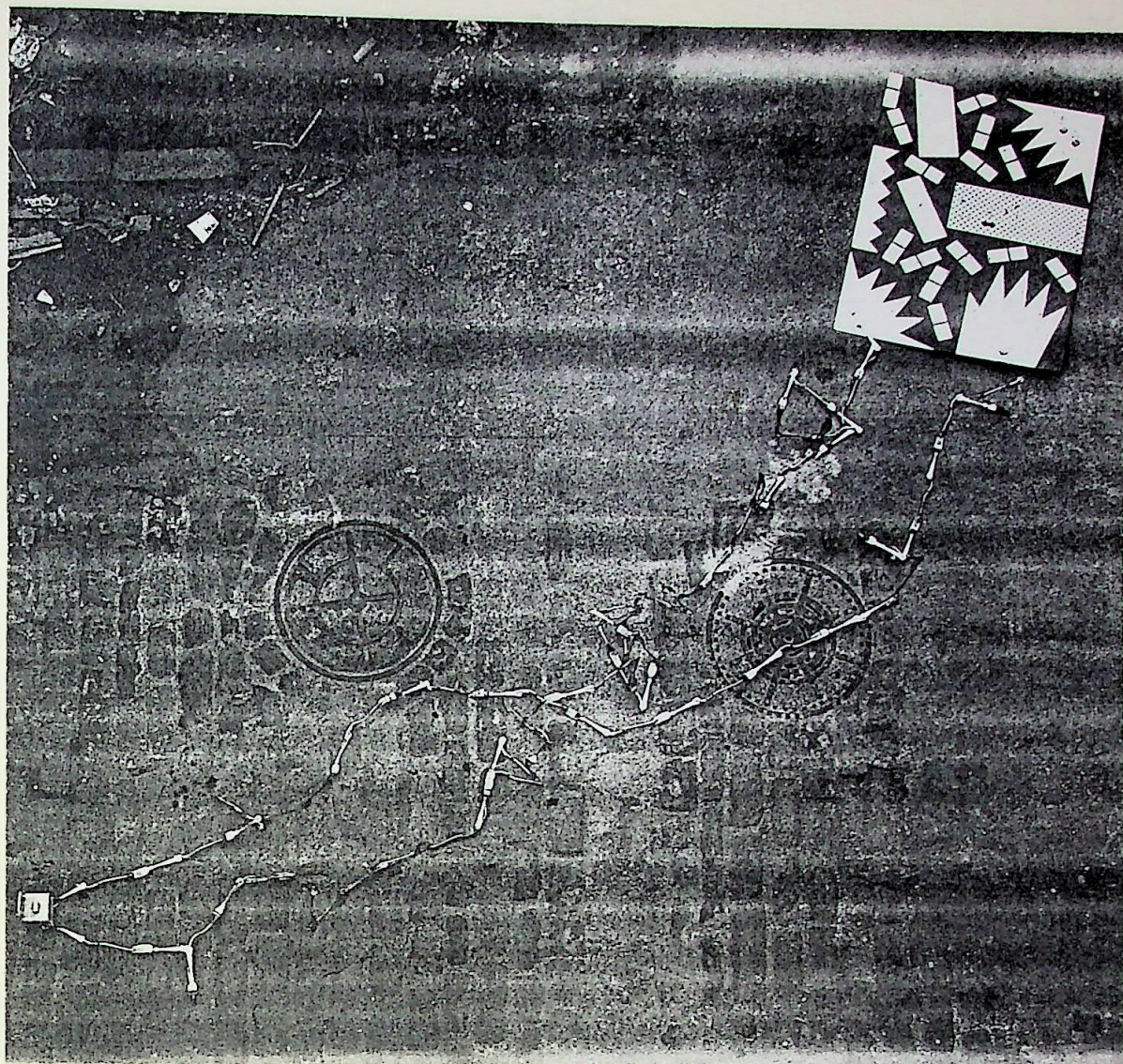
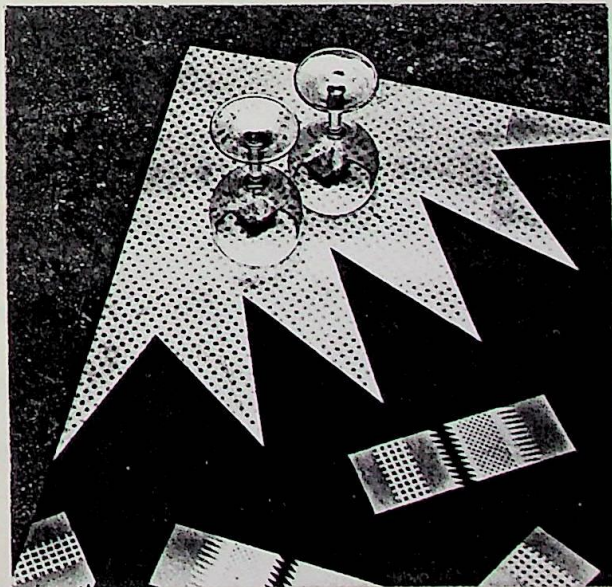
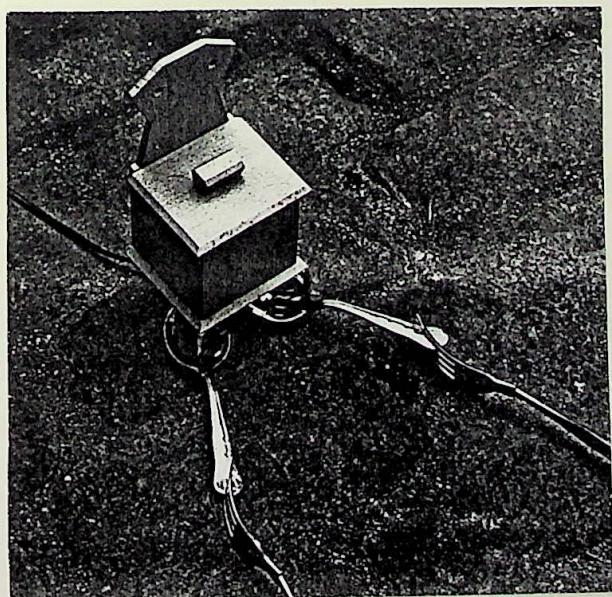


Fig. 56.



between it and the transformer make the clock appear undomestic - like a new version of the clock on the town hall steeple - but the deliberate inclusion of domestic objects, like the wineglasses and the cutlery, and the scale of the display, make one think again. Although Weil is insistent that he is an industrial designer, not an artist: "artists are involved in a totally different struggle to mine", the Clock in some ways is more a piece of art than a product. It is more conceptual than the radios: the cutlery and wineglasses add a Dadaist touch, and it is more likely to provoke debate about design for technology in the home than occupy a place in the home itself.

At the current Ideal Home Exhibition, British Gas collaborated with the RCA to produce 2020: The House of the Future. Most of the designs features relied heavily on technology and in most cases the technology was in control: technology controlled the environment and the activities of the human beings in the house. Only one or two designers broke away from this. Ken Dixon, who designed the "Spikey Telephone Box" in 1986, for his degree in Stoke on Trent (Fig 57), proposed recycling mundane objects for other purposes, in the belief that natural resources will have dwindled greatly by the year 2020. The other was Tony Dunne, who designed a meteorograph which produces "drawings" in response to atmospheric conditions (Fig 58). The object stands about two metres high and its "tentacles" are continuously moving, due to subtle changes in the environment, thus causing the three conical styli to move also and produce markings on a "page" placed in front of the opening in the box, or all around the object. Inside the box is a bag of liquid which heats up and changes

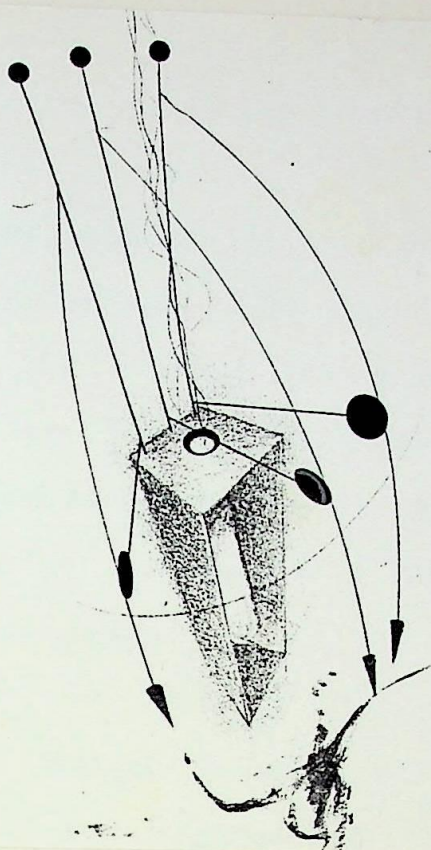


Fig. 58.

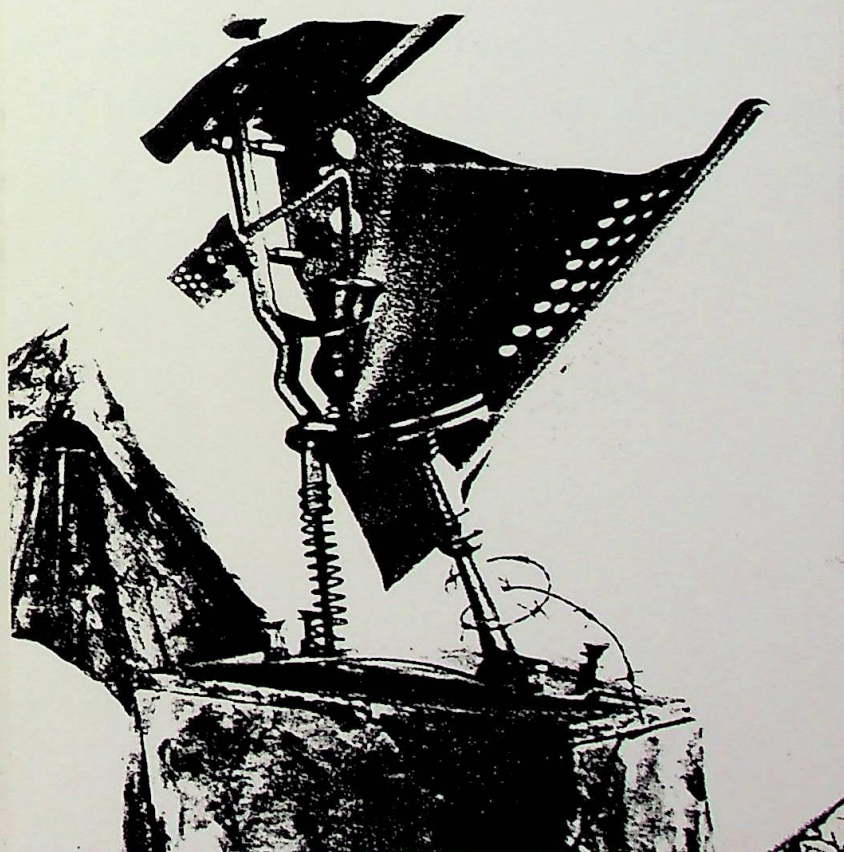


Fig. 57.

colours, as do the baubles on the ends of the tentacles.

Dunne says of it: "The apparatus can be a source of amusement or entertainment. It could, with careful and patient observation of its actions and graphic output, be used to predict the weather. It could even be used as an object for reflection, as a counterpoint to a technologically controlled environment, insofar as it is a piece of technology controlled by the environment."

The design is based on an extrapolation of current trends in materials engineering, namely the production of "intelligent" materials that can actually replace simple mechanisms. It is a good example of the treatment of technology in new design, where technical advancement is not ignored but exploited to its full potential. New Design's work on technical products is innovative, not retrograde. The difference between it and mainstream design in this area is that the human emotional response and interaction with the technology is more important than the technology itself.

CHAPTER 5

AMOCKALYPSE DESIGN

"Why, when things are broken, do they seem so much more than when they are together?"

Thomas Berger, "Crazy in Berlin".

A preoccupation of New Design is design for the post-apocalypse era, for the "few years from now" where the Max Max films are set. Amockalypse, or salvage, design is characterised by the use of found objects, recycling, and aggressive urban materials like concrete, fibreglass, metal and rubber. The designs conjure up images of people poking through the smoking rubble of ruined cities searching for something they can adapt to help them survive.

Salvage design expresses the insecurity of modern man and his fear of the nuclear holocaust. In an interview discussing how Alchymia had changed in the ten years since its founding, Alessandro Mendini said: "In ten years you can witness extraordinary social changes, like the enormous spread of computers, or the end of idealism... Ten years ago, no-one talked of Star Wars or mass laboratory reproduction of life. It's no longer possible just to do your job as a designer, to turn out design after design without worrying about the context, to create a fashion and get your living from it." One of the great concerns of the 1980's has been nuclear war. Support for

the CND has grown dramatically during this decade, and it is a sign of the strength of public feeling that the superpowers agreed last year to cut down on their numbers of medium range missiles. Meanwhile, accidents like those at Chernobyl and Three Mile Island have underlined the dangers associated with nuclear plants: oil pollutes, and electricity can kill, but neither can do so on the scale of nuclear power. There is a growing public mistrust of governments who claim that nuclear power is clean and safe: it has not proved to be so, and television has beamed the pictures of the monstrous consequences of an accident around the world.

Salvage design also presents a powerful picture of the dark side of contemporary urban existence: the world of unemployment, despair and aggression depicted by artists like Gilbert and George. Urban decay is also a common theme in literature of the last twenty years, with works like Anthony Burgess' "A Clockwork Orange": "I lived.... in Municipal flatblock 18A. I went to the lift, but there was no need to press the electric knopka to see if it was working or not... so I had to walk the ten floors up." Images of future worlds where society has gone out of control are common in many high-grossing films of the 1980's, like the Max Max trilogy and Ridley Scott's "Blade Runner". Salvage design draws upon all these sources, but it has added impact because it is real and functional and can be bought and used today as such it seems to suggest that the nightmarish futuristic worlds represented in art and literature are closer than we think.

Much of Ron Arad's work would fall under the category of salvage

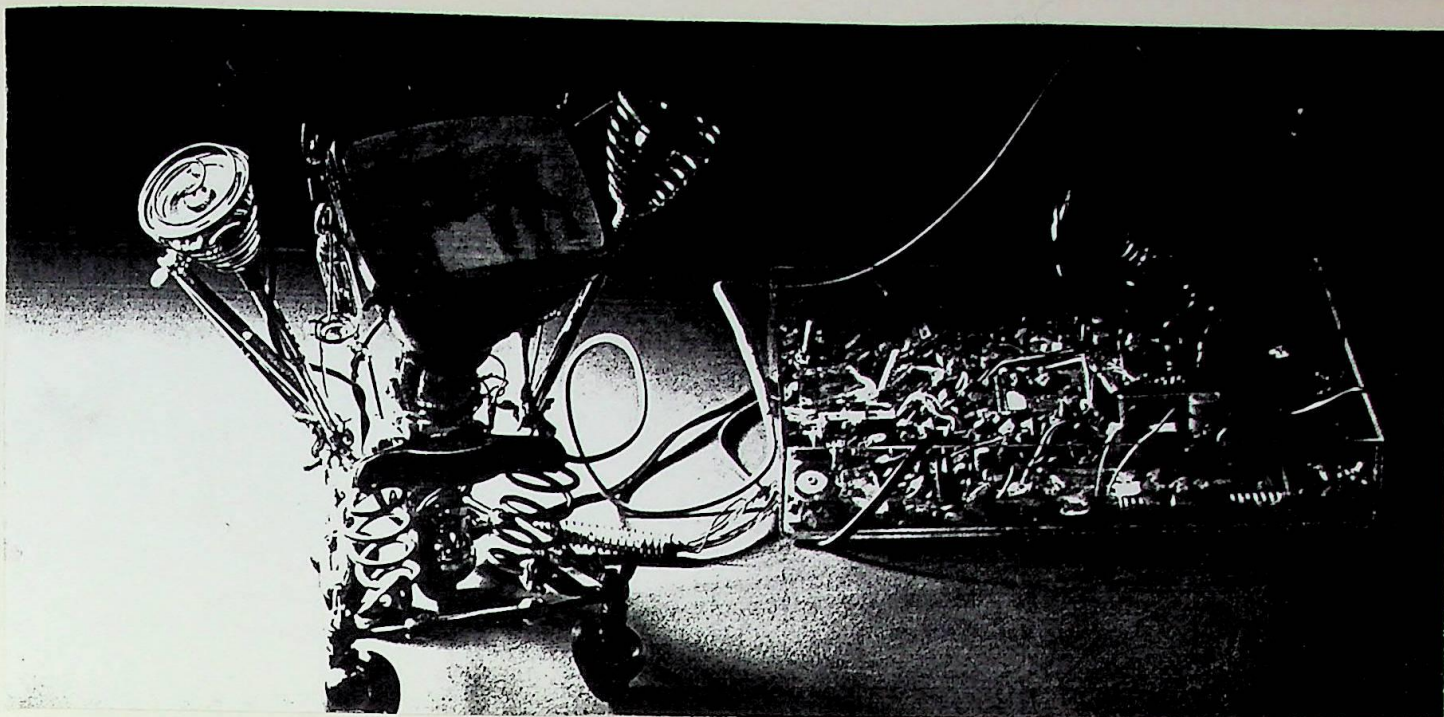
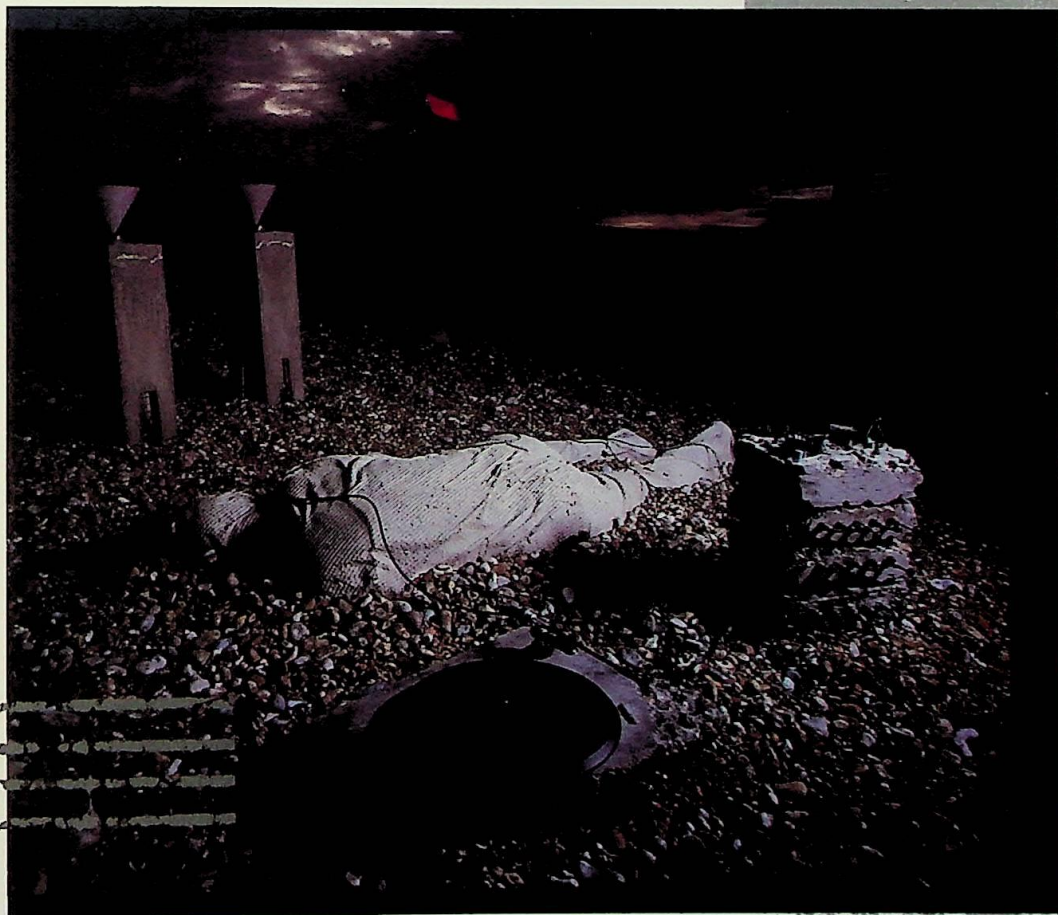


Fig. 59.

SOUND SYSTEM

CONCRETE



WITH RAPT AUDIENCE

Fig. 60.

design. He uses found objects and aggressive materials, and like Daniel Weil admires Marcel Duchamp, "... with his puns and his readymades and his ability to upset everyone." One of his most powerful designs is the "Concrete Sound System" (Figs 60, 61). Working in collaboration with an electronic engineer, Arad fitted the ready made and bought components into crumbly blocks of concrete. The concrete is rough and uneven with broken edges in places, which allow components, switches and distressed metal grilles to protrude from it. The control column is probably the least successful part of the system. The speakers and turntable are more accomplished, showing greater consideration of form and more sensitive handling of materials, with an interesting variety of textures being produced in the concrete alone. The edges of the concrete into which the turntable is set are smeared a rich blood red, and are broken away at one corner to reveal a twisted and broken metal frame, parts of which are also coloured red. The adjacent corner, beside the needle arm, has been chipped away slightly to reveal pebbles set into the concrete.

There are two different styles of speaker for the system. The more formally complex set (Fig 61) are also more visually appealing. The concrete base is the same for each: a simple, monumental square pillar, with fractured edges and a variation of textures on the faces of the pillar. The base of the pillar has been hacked away to produce four short legs, which have the effect of humanising the pillars slightly: the quirky legs are reminiscent of old-fashioned one-piece wooden clothes pegs, or of tribal wooden figures. The cones of the more sophisticated speakers have legs also: they stand on thin, bent wires which



Fig. 61.

give them the look of strange space ships which have landed on top of the concrete pillars. The metal pieces mounted on top of the concrete cones reinforce this impression. The speakers overall have a subtle anthomorphic quality, similar to that of Arad's Mad Max II light (see section on Bricolage). Again there are small touches of red in the wiring of the speakers.

The control panel is much rawer than the other parts of the system: the concrete has no smooth surfaces here, it is rough and lumpy and brutal. The electronic components protrude erratically from the rugged concrete. It looks like a piece of debris from a bombing raid on a recording studio! The control column, with the simpler (and presumably earlier) speakers is larger but less aggressive. The electronic circuitry and switches on the later version add pastel touches which give visual interest but do nothing to soften the brutal aesthetic of the piece: instead, strangely, the contrast serves only to highlight it. Here also, wires give a flash of red.

The red touches which appear on each part of the system relieve the monochromatic appearance of the cement. They also give a warming effect, but again, they fail to tame the wildness of the design: they are too much like splashes of blood upon the concrete.

Arad's publicity photo for the concrete stereo (Fig 60) expresses the "salvage design" aesthetic perfectly. Eerie, surrealistic lighting, as though the sunlight has been blocked out by radioactive clouds, rubble-like stones which make up the

landscape, a shadowed figure in the background, and a prostrate figure wearing head-phones in the foreground, wrapped up like a mummy or as though in a shroud, with the wires connecting him to the stereo trailing over his inert body. The title of the photo: "Concrete Sound System.... with rapt audience" not only sums up the atmosphere of the picture but also shows the ironic, subtle wit which runs through a lot of the New Design.

A different twist on salvage design comes from Tom Dixon's S-shaped type chair (Fig. 62). Instead of using more of the world's resources, design like this take objects which have already been used and discarded, and recycle them for another purpose. This type of design often refers back to the Third World and the adhocism of poverty (Fig 63). It is also design with a conscience: it plays no part in the destruction of the natural environment, but rather helps to preserve it by turning waste to a useful purpose. It carries a hint that today salvage design may be a choice; tomorrow it may be a necessity.

Dixon says of his chair: "my first really comfortable chair, springy and durable." It is quite different from the main body of his work, which is ornate, sensuous, neo-Baroque welded metal furniture (see Medieval style). Yet it shares a common philosophy, evident in the raw exposed quality of the chair. None of Dixon's work makes the user wonder how it was done, what processes were used: the method of manufacture is written like a signature all over it. This chair consists of a metal frame with used inner tubes stretched, wrapped and tied over it (a knot is clearly visible above the base at the back of the chair).

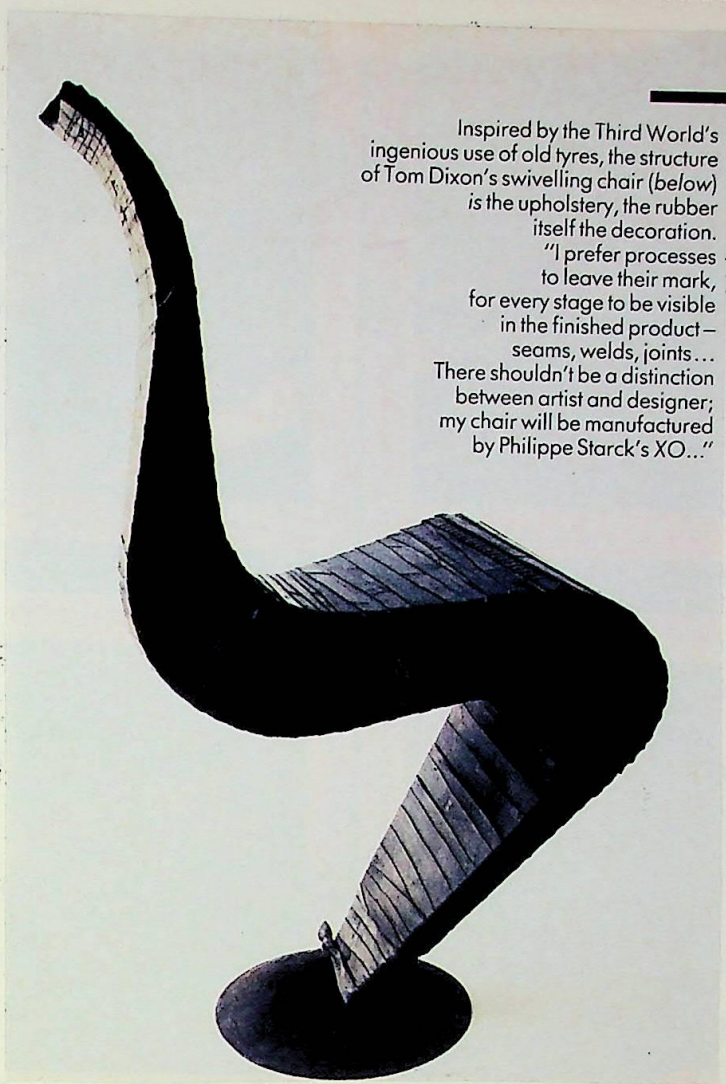


Fig. 62.



Fig. 63.

The sinuous curves of the metal frame clearly show the accomplished way Dixon uses metal, and tie it up with his other work. The chair is forcefully simple; the impact it makes relies on the materials used and its twisting shape, rather than on colour or decoration. As Vogue magazine commented "... the structure.... is the upholstery, the rubber itself the decoration." The chair swivels upon the deceptively small, rounded base. The wrapped types are again reminiscent of mummy wrappings, or of Kristo's work in the realm of fine art. The twisting form, with the tapering back flaring backwards before it breaks off, is slightly anthromorphic - like a snake charmer's snake, perhaps - and gives the chair rhythm. The visual weight of the form is concentrated at the back and creates interest; the viewer feels that it ought to fall over, the base surely isn't large or heavy enough to support it - and yet, it does support it. The monochromatic colour scheme emphasises the texture and arrangement of the tyres, in their semi-gloss, smooth layers. The surface finish of the tyres and the way they overlap each other is fascinating.

CHAPTER 6

ETHNIC AND PRIMITIVE INFLUENCES

Most, if not all, internationally marketed mass produced objects ignore ethnic and cultural differences completely, making concessions in terms of colour preferences but nothing else. Some of the New Designers have embraced primitive, ethnographic imagery, following the path begun by Ettore Sotsass in the 1960's. After his trip to India in 1961, Sotsass became interested in the semiotic value of "primitive" abstract symbols, and the power that objects can possess merely through their physical presence, a power which can influence and affect any environment or person around them. Sotsass' ideas were expressed in designs like the monumental furniture of 1967 and the "Tantra" and "Yantra" series of ceramic vases of 1969 - 1970 (Fig 64).

In the late 1960's the hippy movement's belief in personal choice and individualism made an interest in ethnic cultures and their art acceptable. In the 1970's however, with the birth of the EEC and the breaking down of national barriers, the sameness of people everywhere, rather than cultural differences, became a theme for designers to emphasise. Globalisation in the 1980's has only helped mainstream design to become more blandly international than ever before. It is only now in the late 1980's that there is a return to the use of expressive tribal imagery.

Sue Golden, who originally trained in fashion and textiles, then swapped to furniture design, says: "The transition to furniture gave me the freedom to look to Africa and ethnographic imagery. I wanted to make humorous, reassuringly human art-furniture, my own expression of tribal art, without flouting normal design principles or intimidating my customers." Her wooden shield chair is bright and colourful, ritualistic in flavour yet somehow cheerful, (Fig 65). She says, "I wanted bristles, feral colour, patina, but I also wanted a sculpture you could sit on." The chair back and seat are quite different in style and shape but are unified by colour and feeling. The deep red, wedge shaped back has a rich texture, with blackish marks in the deeper pits in the wood's surface, and a flossing finish on the smoother parts. The spikey black bristles protruding from the top form a startling contrast to the solidity of the chair back. The back has the look of a tribal shield, embellished with hair and painted like blood.

The seat, on the other hand, with the multiple black supporting legs, black edges and red top surface is composed of rounded forms rather than angular. The numerous legs, all splayed outwards from the seat, look like a circle of spears and thus continue the tribal theme. The chair back pierces the seat and rests on the ground inside the ring formed by the legs, thus unifying the two parts still further. The angled legs draw the eye upwards from the base of the chair back, over the seat itself, and then up the back of the chair to the top right hand corner, where the black bristles fan out in a seemingly erratic curve (the line formed by the bristles in the other corner



Fig. 65.

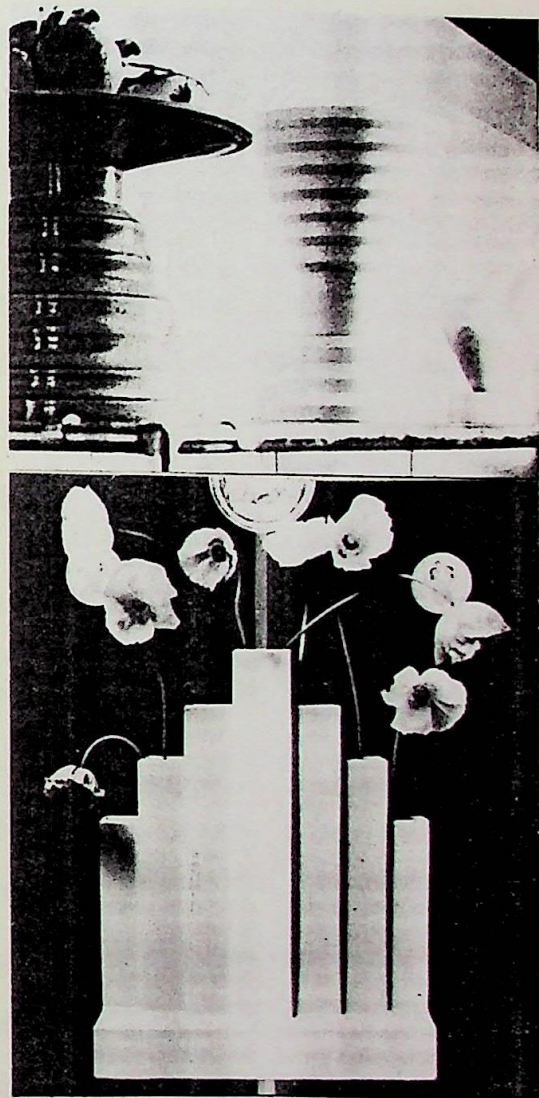


Fig. 64.

extends the line of the chairback, thus emphasising the curve on the other side). As a result, the chair has a powerful vitality and sense of movement. The colour scheme is punchy and adds to the energy of the object. The forms and colours are aggressive, but quirky details like the legs and the arcing bristles prevent it from intimidating the user.

A more serene example of ethnic influences in new design is Patrick Naggar's screen (Fig 67). Naggar echoes the tribal aesthetic seen in Sue Golden's chair, but uses a combination of modern materials to achieve a primitive effect. The base is polished steel with "ready made" nylon wheels. The panels consist of gold-leafed paper and the bound tassels on top of the screen are horsehair. Naggar's use of materials and colour are masterly. Gold and black are a primitive colour combination, the primeval colours of darkness and sunlight, and yet they are also timelessly elegant and popular in the worlds of fashion and jewellery. The gold leaf on the paper panels gives a smooth, light-diffusing, textural quality. The metal frame holding the panels is minimal. The bottom corners of the paper are gripped by the frame and tied to the base with black cord or ribbon; then, for the most of the length of the panels, the frame can barely be seen, until it flares out again slightly to hold the top edge of the panel taut. The jaunty tassels on top of the screen and the nylon wheels below give the screen a human touch, reminiscent as they are of heads (ponytails) and feet. They add wit and individuality to the screen, and the fragility of the natural horsehair tassels set against the industrial moulded nylon wheels create extra interest.

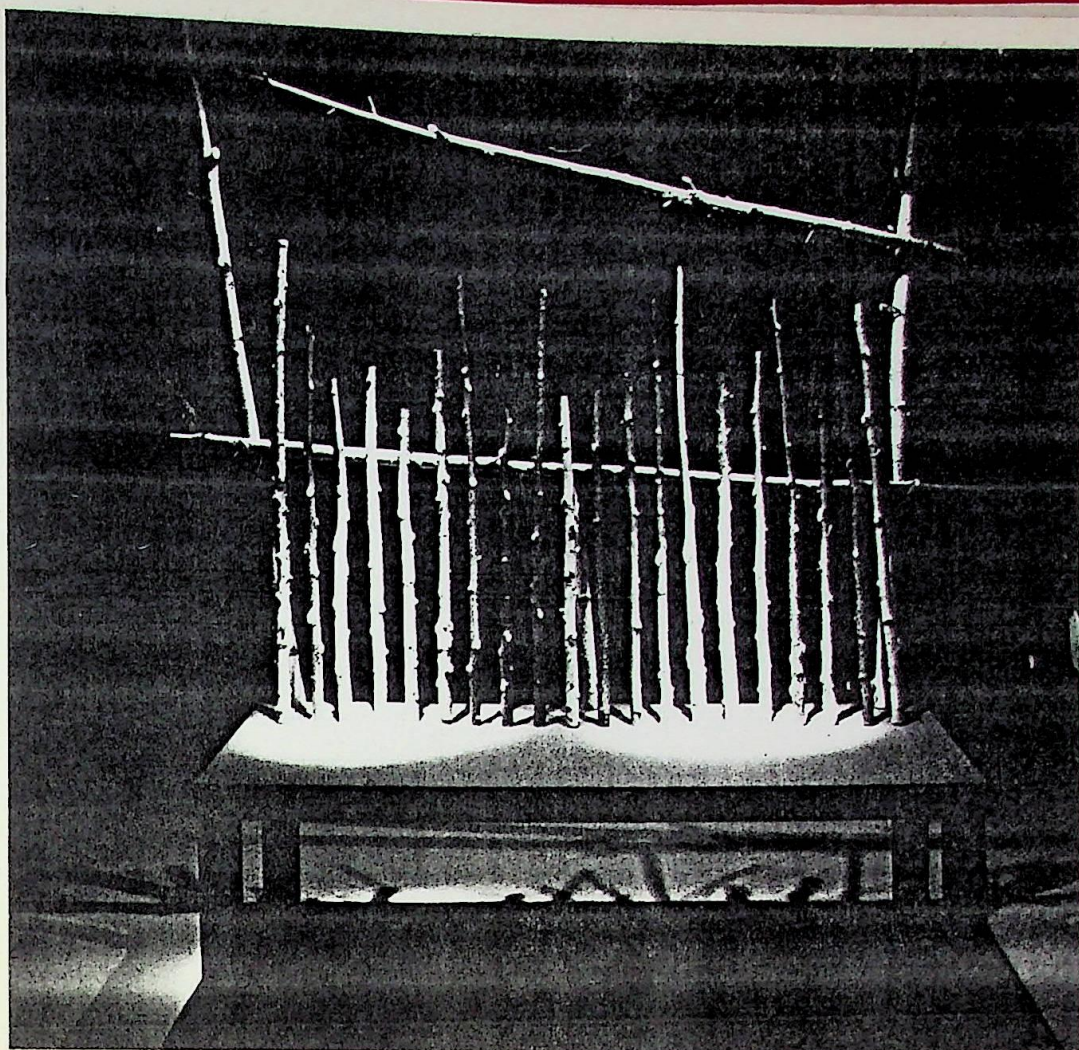


Fig. 66.

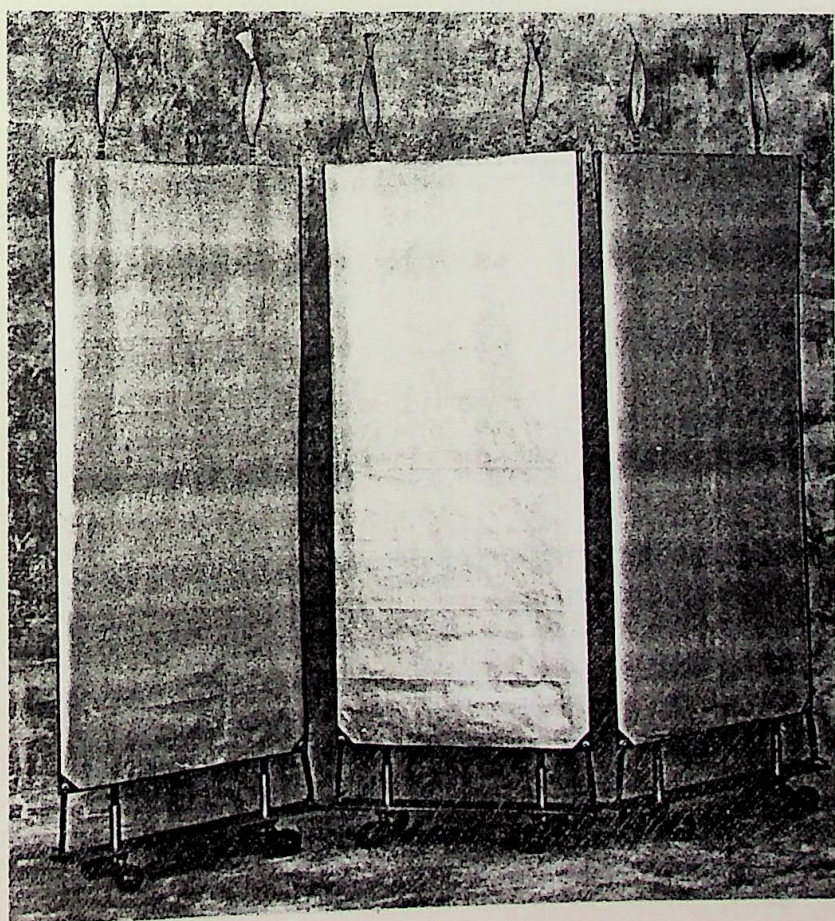


Fig. 67.

CHAPTER 7

MEDIEVAL, BAROQUE, RENAISSANCE: HISTORICAL REFERENCES

Medieval and other historical images are frequently used by new designers as expressive forms in their designs. The historical references are never slavish, sometimes they are merely passing allusions, at other times more obvious; but they always have a new twist added to them and bear the marks of a new approach. Although visual allusions to past styles is considered one of the trademarks of Post Modern design, the work discussed here is disparate from Post Modernism by virtue of its rawness. There is a rough, youthful energy and a chaotic jumble-sale adhocism to it which does not feature in Post-Modernism. Post-Modern design tends to use up to date materials with the emphasis on colour or decoration, like Colourcore and other laminates. Post modern materials are smooth and surface pattern or finish are important, rather than texture, which is emphasised in New Design (Figs 68, 69). New Design would use raw, "natural" metal, with weld and solder marks showing; Post Modernism would use chrome or polished perforated metal. New design would use rough chunky blocks of unadorned wood; Post Modernism, birds eye maple.

Both Tom Dixon and Andre Dubreil use historical imagery in their work. Both use a lot of metal and both breathe new life into furniture with their joyful, energetic forms. Dixon's work often has classical references. The two chairs shown are made of cast iron and other metal pieces (Figs 70, 71, 72). The

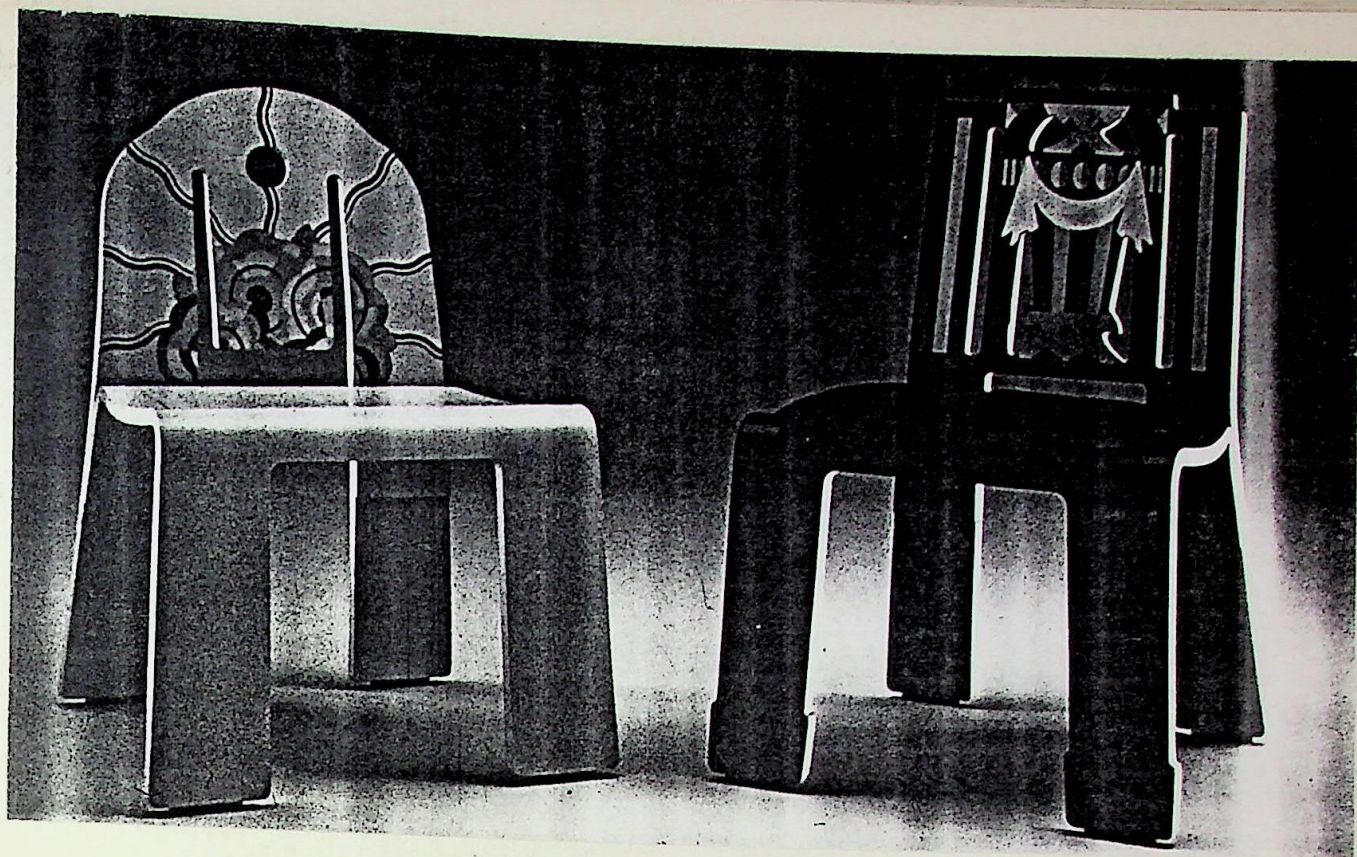


Fig. 68.

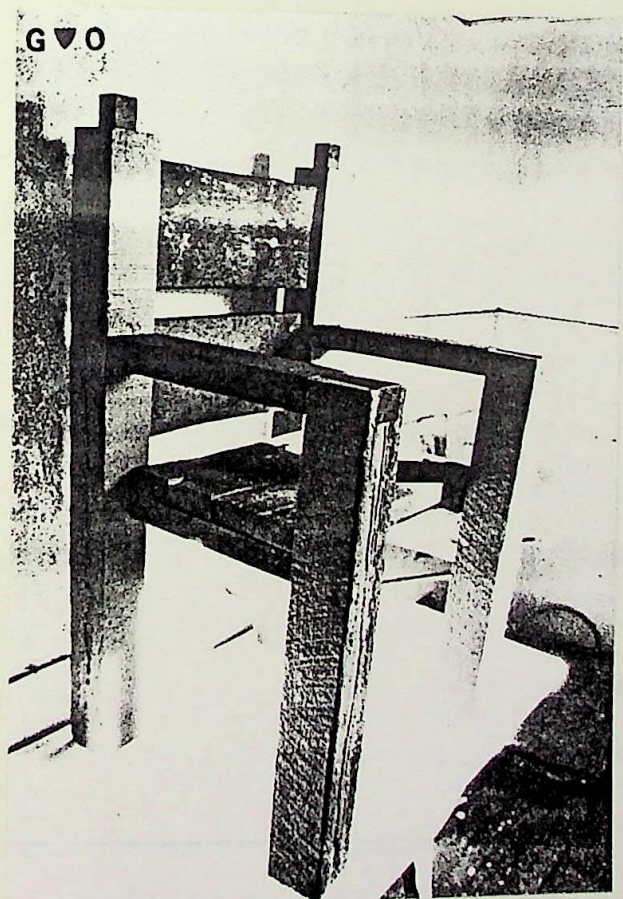


Fig. 69.

forms are reminiscent of old Singer sewing machines or Victorian garden furniture, but they have a hotchpotch, ad hoc quality which appeals.

The various parts of the chairs are welded together, and the weld marks left exposed: Dixon believes that processes should leave their marks on the finished product. He says, "I prefer processes to leave their mark, for every stage to be visible in the finished product - seams, welds and joints." Dixon also feels that his work should be read as art, not design: certainly, in common with many new designers, he blurs the boundaries between craft, sculpture and design. The chair on the right (Fig 70) is like a reworking of the traditional cast iron garden seat. It has a weight and grandeur, though, which makes it almost thronelike.

The winged chair (in Figs 71, 72) definitely owes more to sculpture than it does to design. The form is extremely complex and decorative. It is a mixture of styles, from the solid ball of the base to the rough flowerlike form of the seat. The back is composed of an ornate heraldic style casing, which evolves into a rectangular form, like a picture or mirror frame at the top, surmounted by a pair of sweeping wing-like forms, one at each side of the "frame". The castings vary greatly in details and surface finish. The ball at the base has a smooth, glossy finish, but no detail at all; the seat is fairly detailed, but with a very rough surface. The main casting for the seat back has both high detail and good surface finish, and the glorious wings are simple and roughly textured. The chair is a

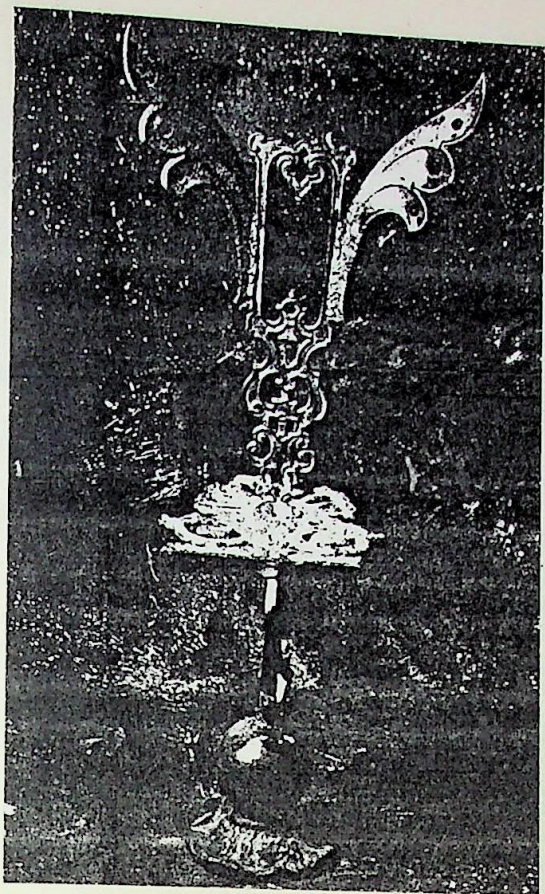


Fig. 70.



Fig. 71.

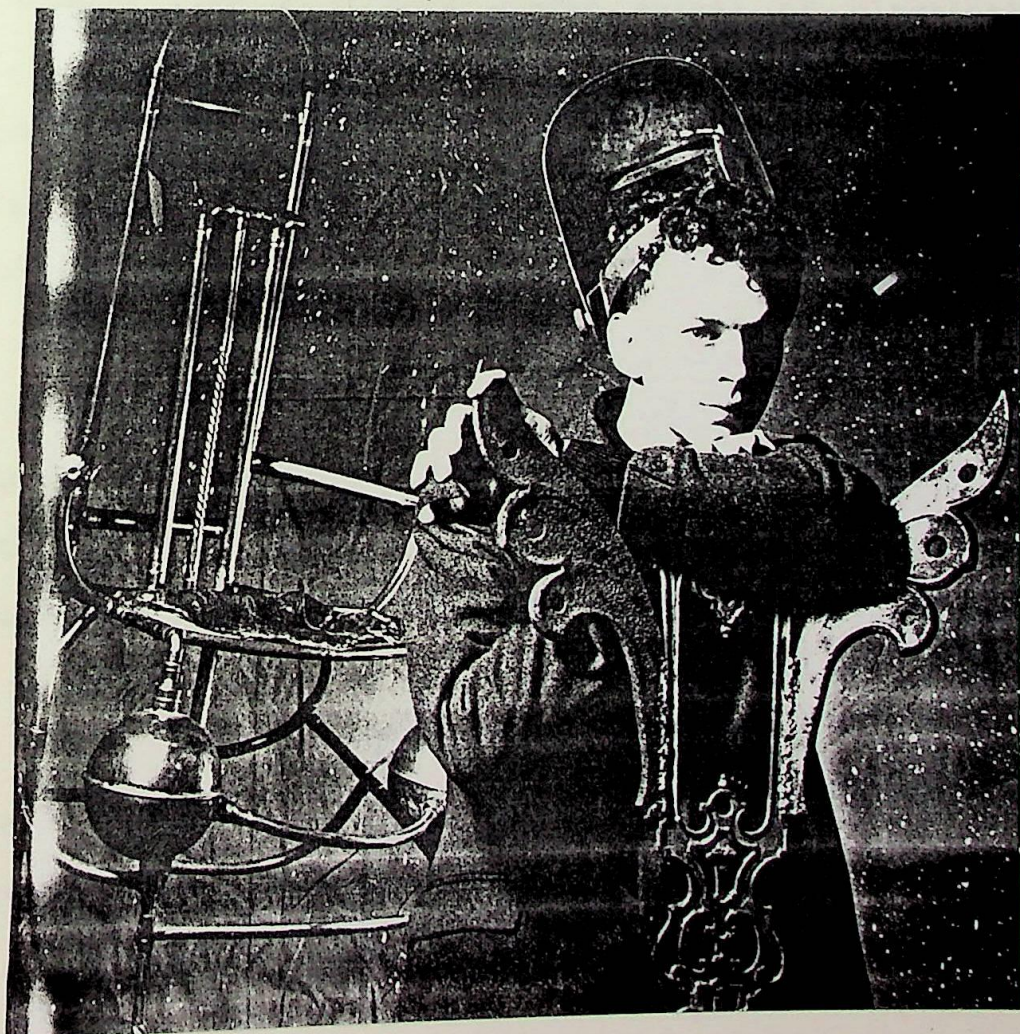


Fig. 72.

magnificent piece of bricolage: it looks like the result of a welding lesson in a scrap metal yard. Yet, as a unit it works very well. The subtly classical nature of the pieces again give it a thronelike feel. It is a chair for ritual, a chair of power. Despite this, it does not intimidate - the weld marks and composition of the chair give it an energy and humour which provokes a friendly (if somewhat puzzled) reaction in the viewer and user. The ball at the base is symbolic both of a king's sceptre and the world - sit on this and you have the world at your feet! The wings, which are the focus of the piece, conjure up many classical stories, Daedalus, who flew too close to the sun, Icarus his father, who made the wings so that they both could fly; Pegasus, the winged horse of mythology; Hermes, the messenger of the Gods, who had wings upon his feet. The chair looks almost like a strange winged animal of classical myth itself. It does not seem a contradiction, when one looks at it, that something made from solid metal should give the impression of flight, despite the fact that its wings are made of roughly cast iron.

Andre Dubreuil, like Dixon, creates poetic forms for metal furniture: John Thackera commented, "His work combines the acerbity of salvage with the romance and posture of the cavalier". His swirling shapes are indeed like the sweeping sword movements of a cavalier realised in metal. Again, a joyful energy suffuses the designs. His table clearly shows both the similarities and the differences between his work and Dixon's (Fig 73). Tom Dixon's designs are solid - there is almost a medieval quality to them because of their weightiness.

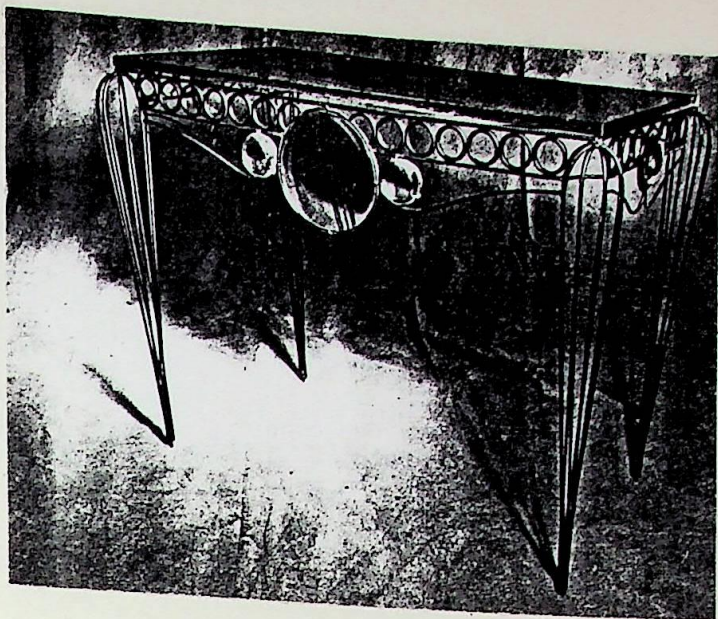


Fig. 73.

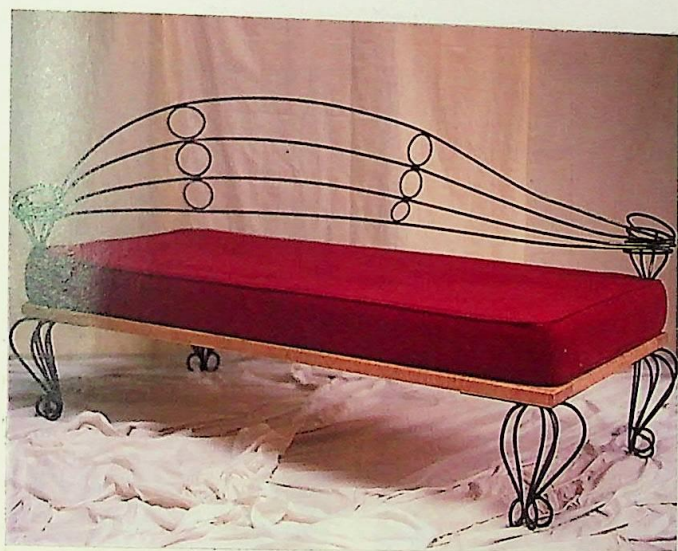


Fig. 75.

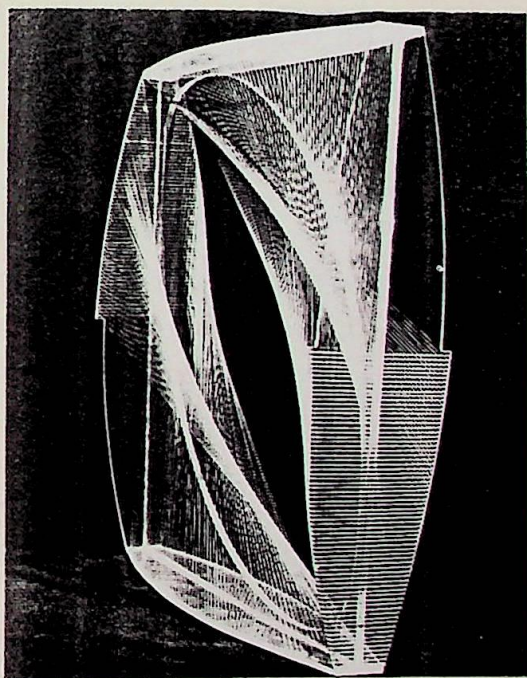


Fig. 74.

Andre Dubreuil uses sinuous lines of metal where Dixon uses mass. The table obviously refers to complex wooden carved tables of eras past, yet it merely delineates the space which the original may have taken up. It does not occupy the space itself, but it defines its own boundaries with regard to it, and by doing so produces as powerful an effect as a solid wooden table would do. Dubreuil is playing complex games of tension and counterbalance with his sweeping lines of metal, rather like the constructivist thread sculptures which enjoyed a revival of popularity in the 1970's. (Fig. 74).

The pattern of metal rings encircling the table carry the eye around it and are Dubreuil's version, in metal, of wooden inlay. The larger circles below them really are inlaid, with glass which, echoing the structure of the table itself, is see through. The glass also distorts and reflects the metal forms in its surface: its use in this context gives it the cachet of a precious jewel stone. The table top returns to the bricolage aesthetic: it is a plain sheet of dark wood with unfinished edges and adds a vital element of contrast and solidity to the piece. The table is at one restrained and boisterous, classical and innovative, elegant and sturdy.

CHAPTER 8

WIT AND ENERGY IN NEW DESIGN

New Design shows its punk heritage in the vein of raw energy which runs through much of the work. This energy is in many ways an undefineable quality: it cannot be discussed as rationally as the solid, primary qualities of the design like colour, materials, surface finishes and so on, but it is expressed in various aspects of these qualities. Sometimes this energy spills over the fine line which divides it from aggression; even so, the user of the designs never feels that the aggression is directed against him/her.

The energy of new design is apparent in the rough surface finishes often used in it: the easily worked materials used for much of the work has excellent textural qualities which are exploited to the full. These are highlighted even further by the frequent, deliberate use of "broken", fractured and unfinished edges, as in Ron Arad's concrete stereo (Figs 60, 61) and Danny Lane's designs using glass (Figs 41, 42).

Another common feature of New Design is the exposure of weld marks and the marks left by other processes, as seen in Tom Dixon's furniture. Wood is often assembled using rough, dovetailed joints which are left unfinished, as in the work of Daniel Grey and The Grey Organisation (Fig 69). This gives the work a raw, honest feel and gives it a sense of vitality: as

though the pieces have been put together quickly and in an ad hoc way.

The ad hoc theme is continued in the frequent use of found objects in New Design. Bricolage gives the work an improvisational feel. It suggests the speedy, energetic solution of problems by adapting objects to a new purpose.

Colour, when it is used, often serves to highlight variations in texture, and is usually primary in nature, as in Sue Golden's chair (Fig 65) and Ron Arad's stereo. It is primal and aggressive. More often, however, the idea of unadornment and rough finishing carries through and the materials used in the object are the only sources of colour.

All of the qualities mentioned give an impression of speed and raw unsophistication. However, the effects achieved are quite deliberate and considered. Some of the devices used to achieve the desired effects are akin to trompe l'oeil, for example Danny Lane's illusory "fractured" edges of glass tables, which upon closer examination are found to be polished smooth.

Wit is another element running through New Design. Anthromorphic forms, often fragile in appearance, are used to give both humorous and emotional appeal. Daniel Weil's radio with its birdlike legs is a good example (Fig 55). Much of the "Post Apocalypse" or salvage design has an underlying vein of black humour. The post apocalypse TV set, for example, has a whimsical appeal as a result of its jumble sale,

cobbled-together appearance. (Fig 59). Yet it is something of a barbed joke: its appearance also implies that it has been roughly assembled from salvaged, electronic components in a post-holocaust society, but what would the likelihood be of TV stations continuing to broadcast in this situation?

The use of found objects in New Design is another source of humour. The more Dadaist the use of the "ready-made" in the design, the more obviously humorous it appears, as in, for example, Daniel Weil's "Small Door" radio (Fig 50). Tom Dixon's exuberant combinations of cast iron parts are witty also. However, the bricolage technique is not used simply for its humorous effect; it has other purposes also, as discussed.

Likewise, anthromorphic elements and other quirky details are not used for their wit alone: they help to make the object more expressive and appealing to the user: they help to demand a response from the user.

CONCLUSION

QUO VADIS?

"It has been pointed out correctly that from the 18th century up to the present day, that is ever since the beginning of the Industrial Revolution, all emerging cultural movements have claimed for themselves a greater "realism" than contemporary aesthetic thought."

Andrea Branzi, The Hot House

So where does New Design go from here? Has it had any influence on mainstream design so far, or will it have in the future?

Some of the work shown has already had an influence on more mainstream design. Tom Dixon and Andre Dubreuil have had a noticeable effect on the work of furniture design graduates of 1987 (Fig. 75). The latest retailing venture by Davies Associates (of Next fame) is a Covent Garden shop called "Davies - furniture and clothing for a temperate isle": the furniture featured includes metal and wrought iron chairs, candlestick and so on, using classical motifs (Fig 76). The shop also sells oxidised copper mirrors and accessories; the products are obviously influenced by New Design and serve to highlight the high fashion image which surround it. In the '88 copy of Arena magazine for men, an advertisement for a men's clothing shop features an Andre Dubreuil chair and candle stand (background, with sun motif) and a Tom Dixon candle stand (foreground, with

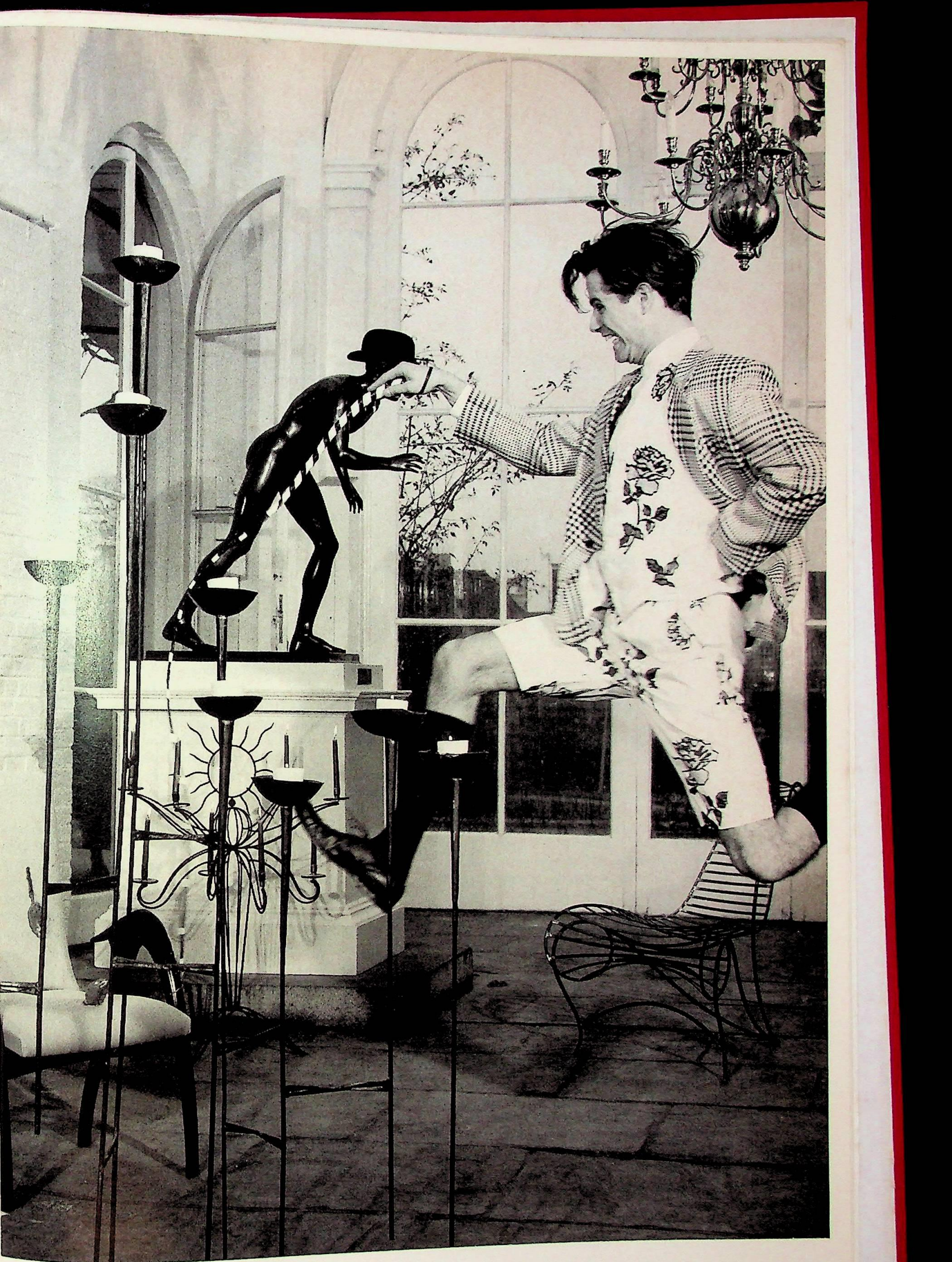


Fig. 77.

short wide candles). (Fig 77). A few pages on, a picture captioned "Art entrepreneur Anthony Fawcett in his Knightsbridge office" shows the "Art entrepreneur" seated on the same Dubreuil seat (Fig 78).

It is possible that the image which New Design now has, i.e. that it is fashionable and expensive, will alienate a large section of the public and thus prevent the work from having a wider influence. On the other hand, it could be argued that the designs of high fashion eventually trickle down to the High street at more affordable prices. However, New Design does appear to be falling into the same trap as Memphis - a lot of the New Design work falls into the category of original or "numbered:" pieces: the designers are leaving themselves open to the charge of elitism. The prices for the work seem to be very steep: Ron Arad's concrete stereo, for example, costs £2,000 and yet he says "Our prices are not arbitrary and we do not charge at whim. Neither do we charge for ideas, only for what it costs to make an object and the mark-up is the same for the retailer and the wholesaler." (Arad's designs are also features in advertisements for Akai stereo equipment: the rack system by Akai features in the advert is the antithesis, in design terms, of his work). One feels if the prices charged for New Design were lower, and hence the work was more accessible to the public, it would have more effect on everyday life, rather than being merely an arty status symbol for "Art entrepreneurs" in their "Knightsbridge offices."

Obviously it is easy to level charges like this at the

DAVIES

FURNITURE AND CLOTHING FOR A TEMPERATE ISLE

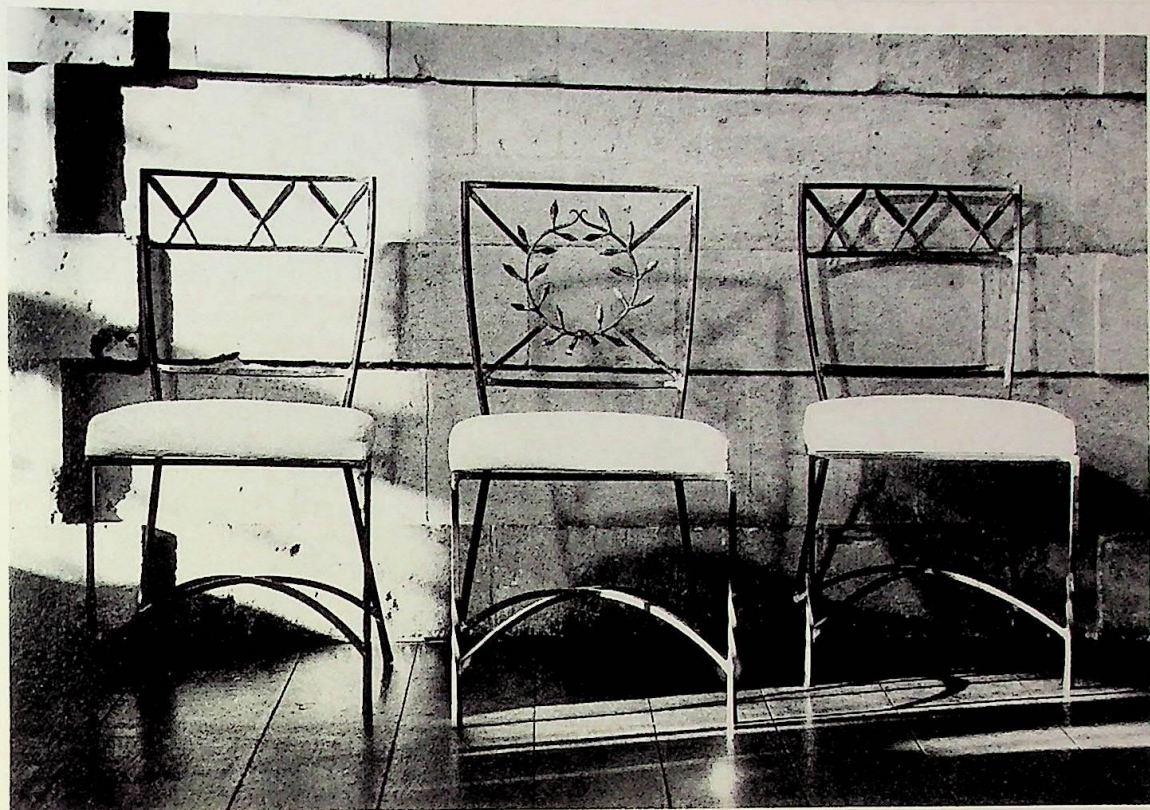


Fig. 76.



Art entrepreneur Anthony Fawcett in his Knightsbridge office

Fig. 78.

designer-makers of the art-crafts furniture and accessories. With labour-intensive production methods, costs will no doubt necessarily be high. Hopefully, some of the talented artist designers currently working with one-off type production will move into designing for small run manufacture also and hence bring their prices down. Tom Dixon has already branched out in this way: his S-shaped tyre chair is to be manufactured by Philippe Starck's company XO (although it will still cost £350, which seems a bit excessive).

The designs of people like Daniel Weil, on the other hand, have already had a considerable influence on mainstream design. Weil's "Radio in the Bag", as well as being included in the collections of modern art museums in the US and Europe, has led the way for the current experimentation in the form of technical products. Unfortunately much of the experimentation is quite superficial, dealing with the "fun" aspect of the form of stereo equipment rather than the complete restructuring and redesign carried out by Weil.

As for the future, even if New Design has not further effect on either the design community or the objects people use in everyday life, it will at least have opened young designers' eyes to the fact that there is a potential new route that they can take. As Charlotte Perriand said in 1984: "I think we can anticipate a return to a more primitive form of craftsmanship - not in the sense of going back to the techniques of the past, but a return to smaller scales of operation, making use of all the potential offered by present and future technology. There may still be a

need for manufacture on a large scale to meet some needs, but more and more will be produced by individuals, by artisans. The impact on creativity could be enormous, each individual could diversify...."

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