

STANDARDISATION:

THE · CONFLICT · BETWEEN
ORIGINALITY · AND · CONFORMITY
IN · PRODUCT · DESIGN





MOOS5829 NC

GOLDEN BROWN ALL OVER



six different types of toaster from six different manufacturers. From top to bottom: Ferrari single slot, Philips two-slice, Tefal 'Advanced browning', Morphy Richards four-slice cool-wall, Braun's 'Control Sensor' and on the right, Rowenta's four slice thick and thin toaster. (Kersley 1990 p94)

STANDARDISATION:

THE CONFLICT BETWEEN ORIGINALITY AND CONFORMITY
IN COMMERCIAL PRODUCT DESIGN.

Tutor: Paul Caffrey.

Peter Sealy. Fourth year.

B.Des. (Industrial Design.) course.

National College of Art and Design. Dublin.

- 1990 -

'For those who understand no explanation is neccessary,
For those who do not understand, no explanation is possible.'

Bobby Sands.

CONTENTS.

	Page.
Illustrations index.	1
Synopsis.	2
Introduction.	4
Chapter 1: 1900s-1930s. Mass taste.	8
Chapter 2: 1930s - 1960s. The consumer society.	17
Chapter 3: 1960s - 1980s. The creative society.	23
Chapter 4: Interpretations.	34
Chapter 5: Conclusion.	39
Bibliography.	41

ILLUSTRATIONS INDEX.

No.	Page.
1. Handcrafted glassware.	9
2. Edisons light bulbs.	10
3. Bauhaus chairs.	12
4. Loewy's early streamlining.	15
5. Streamlining and product conformity.	16
6. Selling the 'Spirit of freedom'.	22
7. Adapted streamlining.	25
8. No-stop City.	26
9. 'Synthesis' chair.	28
10. Memphis design.	33

SYNOPSIS.

The thesis is about diminishing creativity in design and traces the developments in the field of creative design during the last century. The appearance of a product is dictated partly by its function and the technology (materials) available to the designer but the rest is the designers creation. The visual similarity of most modern products indicates a lack of creativity in design.

Chapter one examines the craftsman at work and shows how the industrial revolution imposed tight restrictions on his scope for creativity, which enabled the Bauhaus and other rationalist organisations to introduce mass taste to Europe. Chapter two follows the spread of mass taste to America, via immigrant European designers such as Loewy. This chapter also examines the discovery of a subconscious rebellion against mass taste by American society. This and related discoveries led to the creation of a fashion conscious consumer society that seduced people into buying by appealing to their subconscious drives.

Chapter three follows the spread of the consumer society back to Europe and especially Italy. The wide range of design experiments taking place in Italy as a result of the questions raised about design ethics in the 1960s are also considered.

The conclusion illustrates that the events of the last century have severely impaired our ability as a society to interpret the language of design and provides a plausible overview of our social development of the last century and our present status. The limited scope of the thesis only allows the consideration of key events which have been chosen in order to demonstrate principles of the process more clearly. It is only by understanding the principles that the facts gain any meaning.

INTRODUCTION.

The thesis examines the role of creativity and individuality in the visual appearance of product designs. The terms 'standardisation' and 'conformity' therefore apply only to the visual appearance of products, those aspects not determined by function or technology. It examines the main factors contributing to visual product standardisation, and the effect that product standardisation has on creative product design. As the scope of the thesis is limited, only the key events in the decline of creativity have been examined.

A definition of creative thinking is 'the ability to break through the limits of the range- or to vary the range- from which a less creative thinker selects his trials.' (Popper 1976 P.47) This is the ability to increase one's choice of courses of action, by removing or ignoring any limitations imposed. It follows from this that the impositions of limitations on the range of a person's alternatives compromises that person's creativity. It is also clear that given a wide range of options, the choices of alternatives made is influenced by a creator's individuality. Creativity and individuality are inextricably linked. Individuality in a design indicates creativity. Standardised design cannot be considered creative. |

The lack of creativity apparent in contemporary commercial product design is dismaying. Most students of Industrial Design are under the impression that design is principally a creative process. It is of course creative to the extent that a design project results in something new that was not there previously; and is primarily done for financial gain. If this is the form that creativity takes, it is akin to stockbroking as a creative activity with the same end product - either capital gain or financial ruin.

For a creative person, there is a need to express that creativity, to give something personal to a design, rather than allowing it to be moulded entirely by research statistics. Creativity is not a mathematical process; this is illustrated by the fact that the logical and the creative functions of our minds are confined to opposing cerebral hemispheres. Successful opposition requires balance, not bias.

The concerns of most design projects can be divided into three main areas: form, function and materials and manufacturing. Obviously a certain amount of interaction between the three areas is inevitable, and economic factors must be considered throughout. In commercial design, the three main considerations are seen as marketing, ergonomics and technology. Ergonomics clearly corresponds to function, and technology to materials and manufacturing. Marketing therefore must be related to form.

Traditionally, form was left to the craftsman/designer, it was the area that allowed the craftsman his personal touch - and allowed the creation of highly individual objects. Purchasers were able to choose what they desired from a range of dissimilar products. The current tendency of letting the market dictate form has led to a stagnation of design by effectively eliminating the creative input. Creativity in design is rapidly disappearing. There is a trend towards standardisation of products in terms of cost, function and visual appearance.

Interestingly, we respect design from other countries where this isn't happening, or happens to a lesser extent, where people express something more than economics through their designs. Italian and Scandinavian design represent good examples; Italian design at its best shows individuality and experimentation, Scandinavian design tends to be more socially and traditionally motivated and demonstrates beauty, functionalism and durability. All of these are elements that we seldom encounter in our own design.

Very often the blame for this lack is laid on the designers' doorstep; but some writers say 'In an environment that is screwed up visually, physically and chemically, the best... thing that...designers could do is stop working entirely.'
(Papanek 1985 p.13) This seems to imply that industry is to blame, and that by immobilising industry the problem would be solved. Vance Packard blames the merchandisers who persuade people to buy, indiscriminately. He quotes an advertising

executive as saying 'What makes this country [America] great is the creation of wants and desires, the creation of dissatisfaction with the old and outmoded.' (Packard 1957 p.24-25) Industrialists, designers and Packard's 'ad men' together have a greater potential to mould society than any government, as is evidenced by our present society. The politicians sit on the sidelines keeping order, while the real social engineering or moulding, is done by the people who produce our surroundings, our environment, (and effectively our culture;) and condition us to accept them.

A false society was created in the 1950s and 1960s America by the social engineering experimenters or 'depth men' and was designed exclusively to serve the merchandisers, it destroys creativity. These manipulators decided that society shouldn't be allowed to express itself through freedom of choice. This was because the merchandisers were unable to predict society's choices successfully. The 'depth men' conditioned society to be fashion conscious and to accept the merchandisers' mandate. People were no longer allowed make their own choices, the need for creativity was gone, objects had to look fashionable and uniformity replaced individuality as a desirable quality. How can a person truly create something if he has to conform to this type of expectation?

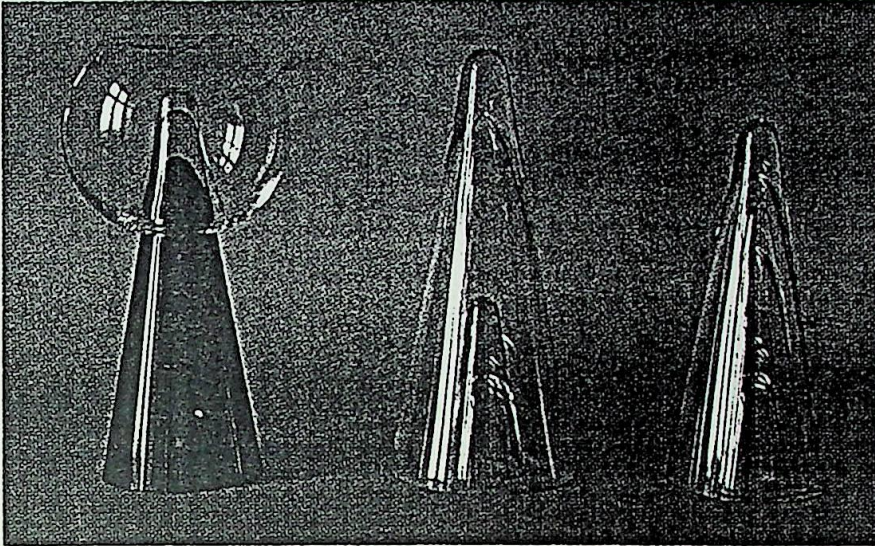
CHAPTER ONE: 1900s - 1930s. Mass taste.

This chapter examines the development of mass taste and how it effects creativity.

- \$ -

Every man-made artifact intended for consumer usage must indisputably undergo three processes; design, manufacture, and distribution. In the pre-industrial era, these processes were often seen as one. Tools, furniture, and household objects were hand-made by craftsmen, who often designed and sold the products as well.

These hand-crafted items took a lot of time and trouble to make and required a high degree of participation from the craftsmen involved. A craftsman had to be committed to his work, which, with such a large amount of personal input, virtually became an inanimate manifestation of the craftsman's personality. As Gropius said, 'There is no essential difference between the artist and the craftsman' (Institut Fur Auslandsbeziehungen (I.F.A.) 1968 p.13) and thus his products could be considered art. 'Art...is self-expression' (Popper 1976 p.61); the craftsman's self-expression resulted in art, in products that had individuality. Even today, the individuality of hand-crafted goods attracts a large market, in spite of the high labour costs involved.

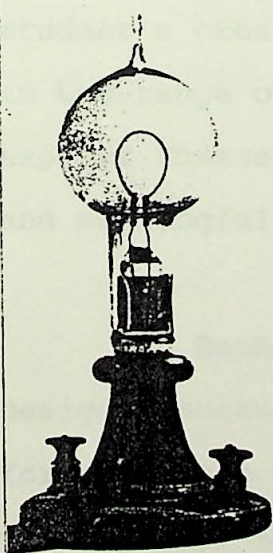


(1) This handcrafted glass is designed by Finnish designer Brita Flander. She says 'you can call them bowls or vases or anything you like..., People have imagination,' (Nyborg 1990 p.12)

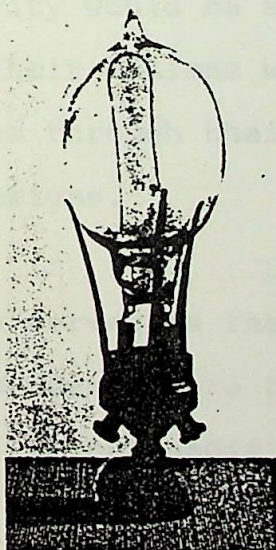
The industrial revolution and the development of mass production techniques meant that many products did not have to be carefully hand crafted, but could be produced cheaply, quickly, and easily by machines and largely unskilled workers. This was a golden age for the general public, who found a wide range of products available to them at a relatively low cost. It was to be Utopia: a society that had lived with conditions of poverty and need now found itself with full employment and its needs supplied for it. People had won a battle in the fight for survival and had time to reflect.

Gropius saw that 'Machine-made products seemed to sweep the world, leaving the artists and craftsmen in a bad plight, a natural reaction set in against the abandonment of form and the

submersion of quality.' (I.F.A. 1968 p.14) The fact that craftsmen knew little about the machinery used in mass production processes meant that they had little or no involvement with these new products. The craftsman, who had been 'a technician, an artist and a merchant combined' (I.F.A. 1968 p13) found himself less involved in the design and manufacture of his merchandise, and became almost purely a salesman. 'The complete individual, deprived of the creative part of his work, thus degenerated into a partial being.' (I.F.A. 1968 p.14) The craftsman was now unable to express his individuality as he had no understanding of the new media, so it was being done by engineers and machinery. The illustration below shows two electric lamps. The handmade prototype on the left shows craftsmanship, The commercial model on the right was mass produced.



Edison's first carbon filament lamp, 1879. London, Science Museum.



Commercial Edison lamp, c. 1890. London, Science Museum.

(2) (Lucie-Smith 1983 p.64)

The Bauhaus was founded in 1919 by Gropius as a means of combating the effects of the machine domination of design. Gropius felt that he could train apprentices to replace the 'partial beings'. To train a person to be a 'whole being', he would have to train them 'both for hand work and machine work, and as designers at the same time.' (I.F.A. 1968 p.15) He was trying to train them as artists capable of free expression through various media, one of the media being mass production.

He exposed his students to as many stimuli as possible, for he says 'the man of today is, from the outset, left too much to specialized training - which merely imparts to him a specialized knowledge, but does not make clear to him the meaning and purpose of his work.' (I.F.A. 1968 p.15) This presumably was so that his student's creativity would be stimulated by the sudden increase in the range of their options which would enable them not only to express themselves through their work but to also produce useful and meaningful designs.

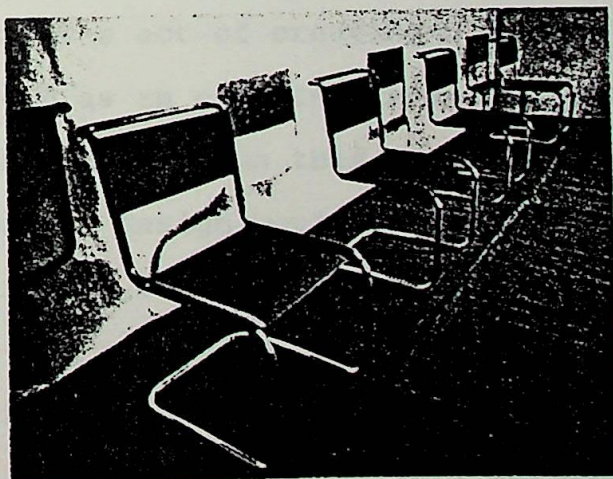
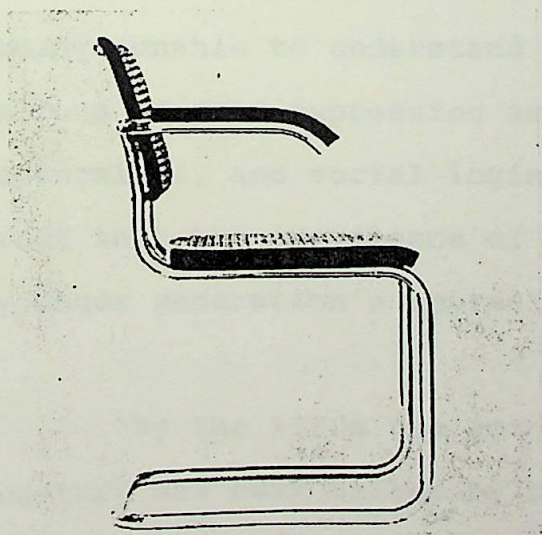
The Bauhaus served as the basis for modern industrial design. Bauhaus students were trained in the use of colour and form, the use of various media (including modern production techniques), the social context of their design, and the economics involved.

Pure functionalism formed the basis of the Werkbund, but Gropius felt that functionalism would have to be moderated by

constructivism before it could become the creative principle of the Bauhaus. According to Ludwig Grote, Gropius summed up the tenets of the moderated functionalism as follows:

Determined affirmation of the environment, of machines and vehicles. Organic shaping of things dictated by the presence of their own law, without romantic palliation or playfulness. Restriction to typical basic form and colour intelligible to us all. Simplicity in multiplicity, concise utilization of space, material, time and money. (I.F.A. 1979 p.20)

This then constituted the basis of Bauhaus style, but Gropius himself said that 'a Bauhaus style' would have been a confession of failure and a return to 'that devitalizing inertia, that stagnating academism which I called the Bauhaus into being to combat.' (I.F.A. 1968 p.20) By inflicting this 'creative principle' on his students, Gropius was limiting their scope for free expression and contributing to the 'devitalizing inertia' of product standardization. The illustration below shows similarities between chairs designed by two Bauhaus students, Mart Stam (left) and Marcel Breuer.



(3) (I.F.A. 1979 p.103)

By omitting to include the merchandiser as part of the 'whole being', merchandising was being cut out of the process and left to develop on its own. It was the merchandisers who were to discover in later years that extinguishing the expression of individuality in design had a deleterious effect on product sales.

In spite of the far-reaching consequences of the Bauhaus, the spread of mechanisation and mass production between the wars had a negative effect on creative individual design, for as Gropius said in 1935, 'only in very isolated cases have training schools been established with the aim of turning out this new type of worker who is able to combine the qualities of an artist, a technician and a businessman.' (I.F.A. 1968 p.15)

If such schools were unable to keep pace with the spread of mechanized industry, the result must have been an increase in the number of workers that Gropius described as 'partial beings', beings unable to understand that the act of creating products was a form of self-expression as well as an exercise in mechanical, economical, and social logistics. Magnifying this effect was the fact that the prevalence of machine design would debase the younger generation's appreciation of creative individualism.

'By the 1920s the economic boom of the early years of the century had been halted by the recession, and the Wall Street crash of 1929 followed.' (Bayley, Garner and Sudjik 1986 p.128)

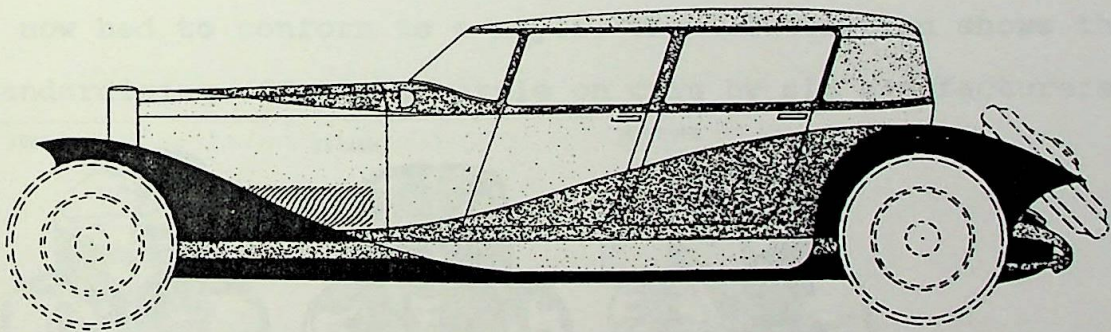
The post-industrial revolution boom ended in the '20s. This boom had provided the industrialists with the ideal conditions for the sale of their products - people hungry for goods and people with money. The public bought whatever was available. A typical advertisement simply illustrated the product and provided written details of its merits.

The boom was followed by the recession in the '20s; the increasing financial difficulties of the recession created hostile market conditions, 'so manufacturers were forced to compete against each other in order to gain a place in the market.' (Bayley, Garner, Sudjik 1986 p.128) The approach they took was based on the advertising techniques of the time; increasing the merits of a product would improve its standing over the competition.

By the time of the Wall Street crash in 1929, the situation was so bad that it became imperative to introduce a new strategy, a means of increasing merit; industrial design. Although streamlining originated with Norman Bel Geddes and Buckminster Fuller, the theory remained little used until the necessary sheet-metal working technology was developed in the 1930s.

Raymond Loewy is generally accepted as one of the most influential pioneers of industrial design in America. He says, 'Although trained in France as an engineer, the first work I got, somewhat by accident in fact, was as a fashion

illustrator.' (Loewy 1980 p.10) He also had some business background. Although he was a 'technician, an artist and a merchant combined', his artistic background was heavily influenced by fashion - which not surprisingly was evident in his design. American consumer magazines started running articles with such titles as 'Best Dressed Products Sell Best'. (Bayley Garner and Sudjik 1986 p.129) Had the pioneers of consumer product design in America been less influenced by fashion, American design might now be more creative and individualistic, more like the craftsman design that Gropius had encouraged in Europe. Figure (4) shows a 1929 patent drawing that shows Loewy's early interests in streamlining and fashion illustration.

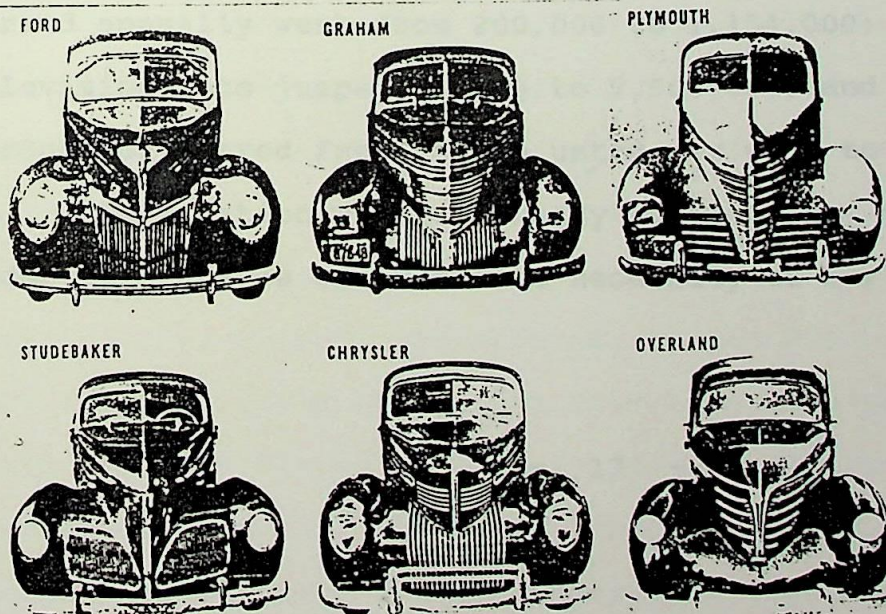


(4) (Pulos 1983 p.382)

However, Loewy's success was phenomenal.'At one time it would have been possible for an American citizen to pass his entire day surrounded by products and packages designed by Loewy and his team.' (Bayley, Garner and Sudjik 1986 p.133)

Working as a consultant, Loewy designed for a large number of firms. The success and prevalence of Loewy designed products influenced other designers to the extent that many consumer products began to look standardised. By the 1930s, streamlining, a spartan style suited to the harsh economic climate of the depression years, had become 'the first wide-spread style for consumer packaging, applied on every scale from the locomotive to the office stapler.' (Bayley, Garner and Sudjik 1986 p.134)

The industrial design solution to the increasing competition between products in the market place was to remove the competition by making all products appear similar to the general public. The widespread acceptance of streamlining in America imposed strict limitations on the creative designer, as he now had to conform to a style. The illustration shows the standardising effects of style on cars by six manufacturers.



(5) (Pulos 1983 p.391)

CHAPTER TWO: 1930s - 1960s, The Consumer society.

This chapter examines the American discovery that the public were not in favor of the mass taste imposed by standardised design, and the decision made to persuade the public to accept it, the result being the creation of an artificial society.

- \$ -

The second world war saw a temporary halt to the development of industrial design. The economic boom after the war once again saw consumer prosperity, and a massive increase in the production of consumer goods, many of which made use of wartime technological developments.

Between 1945 and 1950, the number of new households being formed annually went from 200,000 to 1,154,000; the production of television sets jumped from 0 to 7,500,000, and passenger vehicle production soared from 70,000 units per year to 6,665,000.

'As a nation we are already so rich that consumers are under no pressure of immediate necessity to buy a very large

share - perhaps as much as 40 percent - of what is produced, and the pressure will get progressively less in the years ahead. But if consumers exercise their option not to buy a large share of what is produced, a great depression is not far behind.' (Packard 1957 p.23)

With the market saturated, a new merchandising strategy was obviously required. Conventional marketing techniques of the time were known as 'nose counting' (Packard 1957 p.17). This involved interviewing population samples in order to determine whether a product was viable. It was presumed that the people interviewed

- 1) knew what they wanted,
- 2) would tell the truth about their likes and dislikes,
- 3) would behave in a rational and predictable way.

By working with the consumer public, the manufacturers hoped to produce products which would be acceptable to that public. The problem was that the practice did not live up to the theory, and the merchandisers often suffered huge losses during their campaigns: clearly, the marketers would have to change their tactics. Pioneering of a new field of behavioural research known as motivational research (M.R.) had begun in the 1930s, but 'Motivational research did not take root as a serious movement until the late forties and early fifties.' (Packard 1957 p.35) The discoveries made by motivational researchers showed that 'subsurface desires, needs, and drives' (Packard 1957 p.35) were the main influences on purchasing behaviour. This meant that the

marketers could influence the consumers' behaviour by appealing to the subconscious mind.

As early as 1953, social engineering (the manipulation of society by means of subconscious influence) was being advocated.'In June 1953...six doctors in the social sciences, headed by Lyman Bryson, a social anthropologist...told the publicists [merchandisers, advertisers]:"If you are engineering consent...you should begin with a basic analysis of the three levels upon which consent moves in a society like ours."¹ (Packard 1957 p.130) He went on to say that the three levels could be defined as human nature, cultural change, and the region of choice. He added that human nature was unalterable, but cultural change and the region of choice were open to manipulation.

If individuality is what the consumer wants from a product, it is safe to assume that if the market place were to be flooded with standardised items, a consumer reaction taking the form of a demand for individuality would follow. The following account demonstrates that this happened.

The approach of engineering a consumer society was the first to be adopted. This was probably because the biggest

'obstacle confronting the stimulators [merchandisers] was the fact that most Americans already possessed perfectly usable stoves, cars, TV sets, clothes, etc. Waiting for these products to wear out or become physically obsolete before urging replacements upon the owner was intolerable...By the mid-fifties, merchandisers of many different products were being urged by psychological counsellors to become "merchants of discontent"..., dissatisfaction with the old and outmoded.' (Packard 1957 pp 24,25)

The consumer goods market already had an element of fashion, instilled perhaps by Loewy, but by engineering a fashion conscious society this element could be exploited. A fashion conscious society would buy new products when the styling fashion changed; there would be no need to wait for the products to wear out.

The engineering of a new society was carried out by creating a subconscious fear of individuality (which is also a fear of creativity). An individualist, as somebody 'out of touch' with style, soon became an eccentric. To be part of the new society one had to conform. One of the dangers inherent in such a society was that it would buy only fashionable consumer products. This meant that even designers were being forced to conform. By forcing designers to compromise their creativity in deference to styling fashions, an aesthetically homogeneous market was created. Individuality (creativity) did not conform to the new society's ideals; it could therefore be considered superfluous. But, with blandly uniform products and uniform prices, there was no incentive for a consumer to select any particular product. This presented a second obstacle.

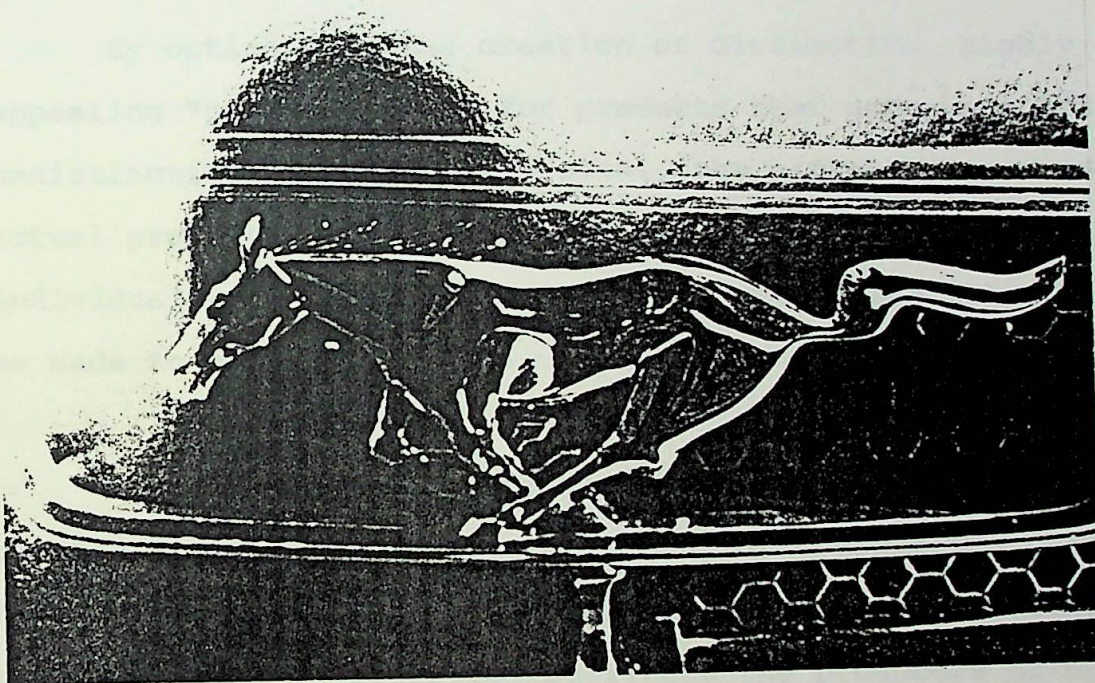
Pierre Martineau, a high apostle of image building, analysed the problem with startling candour in talking to Philadelphia advertising men in 1956..."Basically, what you are trying to create is an illogical situation. You want the customer to fall in love with your product and have a profound brand loyalty when actually content may be very similar to hundreds of competing brands...the first task is one of creating some differentiation in the mind - some individualization for the product."(Packard 1957 p.46)

There was a problem to be confronted; the infliction of a mass taste on an entire generation had destroyed its discrimination, and 'if people couldn't discriminate reasonably...marketers reasoned, they should be assisted in discriminating unreasonably.'(Packard 1957 p.45) By introducing creative individuality into consumer design, the marketers would be contravening the basic principle of the style-conscious society that they had created. This left the options of engineering a new, discriminating society of people with individual aesthetic tastes, or of creating some abstract, mental differentiation between products.

The choice of creating false brand images symbolising individuality and creating a society that accepted them as real was the logical outcome, by Gropius' reasoning. In America, the age of machine design had endured until the late 20s, when industrial design appeared. This was enough time for the Madison Avenue advertising men, or merchants, to sprout and flourish. These 'partial beings' were cut off from the design and manufacture of the products they sold, but by choosing to become merchants of images, images that they designed and manufactured utilising various visual media, they were able to become whole beings. An advertiser employing motivational research and image

building became 'a technician, an artist, and a merchant combined.' (Gropius 1975 p.14)

The Illustration below shows the Mustang image. The horse symbolised 'The spirit of freedom' and was used as a car sales device.



(6) (Barry 1988 p.54)

CHAPTER THREE: 1960s - 1980s. The creative society.

This chapter examines the designers' response to the spread of the consumer society concentrating on the European response as expressed through Italian design.

- \$ -

By opting for 'the creation of distinctive, highly appealing "personalities" for products that were essentially undistinctive' (Packard 1957 p.45), the marketers ensured that actual products would remain undistinctive. Design creativity and individuality were no longer required when false illusions could be made to order.

We have seen in the previous chapter how the merchandisers created a consumer society, a society of conformists. Almost every development in merchandising was intended to standardise people's taste in order to facilitate the producers of consumer products. Individuality had been engineered out of society. New developments in communications technology enabled the new culture to spread throughout the world.

In Italy, the potential for social and cultural expression through design was fully appreciated. Branzi says in The Hothouse that the linguistic approach and careful planning in Italian architecture and design have origins in the Fascist movement, the

radical design of the 1930s was seen as reflecting the partisans' culture. From this it is possible to see how design is a mirror of society - a cultural language. The consumer society and all it implied had penetrated as far as Italy by the late 1930s.

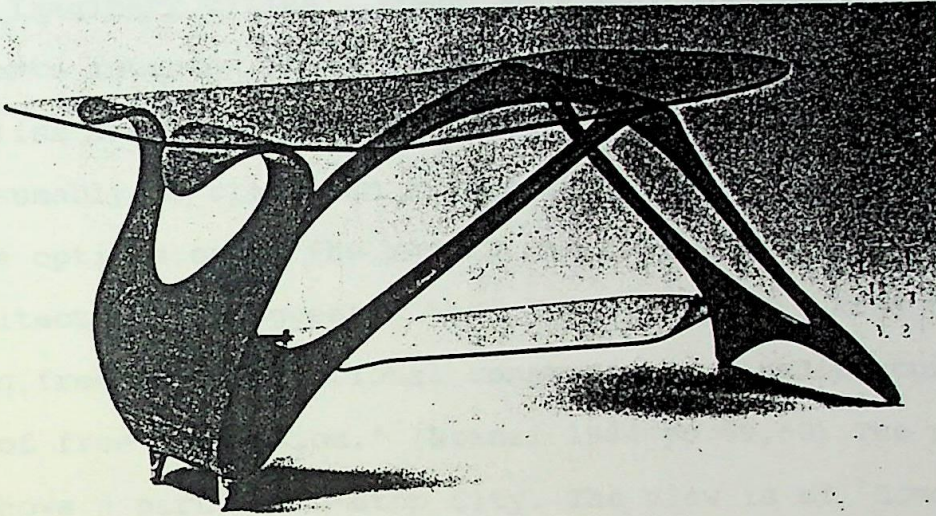
Even the prizes at the Compassi d'Oro, which in the beginning were awarded to products that showed a correct approach to design as part of a serious entrepreneurial policy, and a search for advanced projects, often ended up being awarded to examples of pure style. (Branzi 1984 p.42)

This mass suppression of individuality and creativity should theoretically lead to a mass reaction. The revitalisation of creativity would require a broadening of horizons, an increase in the range of options available to a creator. This reaction took place in the 1960s.

'The sixties were characterized right from the start by a sudden readiness to question entire systems of aesthetics and the very foundation of disciplines.' (Branzi 1984 p.51) Clearly society had isolated 'systems of aesthetics' as the root of the problem; they imposed strict limitations on the scope of creativity by the very fact that a system or discipline had to have sharply-defined boundaries.

The responses of the designers (who in Italy were the architects) varied. Some of the more creative designers, those that were always striving to increase their choice of options, adapted the pop culture to their own use. Mollino, described as an 'autobiographical' artist by Branzi, 'always used architecture as an instrument and mirror of his private enthusiasms...he had

been the first person in Italy to penetrate deep into the quagmire of kitsch though this was always offset by the precision and excellence of his design.' (Branzi 1984 p.49) The plywood and glass table below (Mollino 1951) reflects the sweeping curves of streamlining.



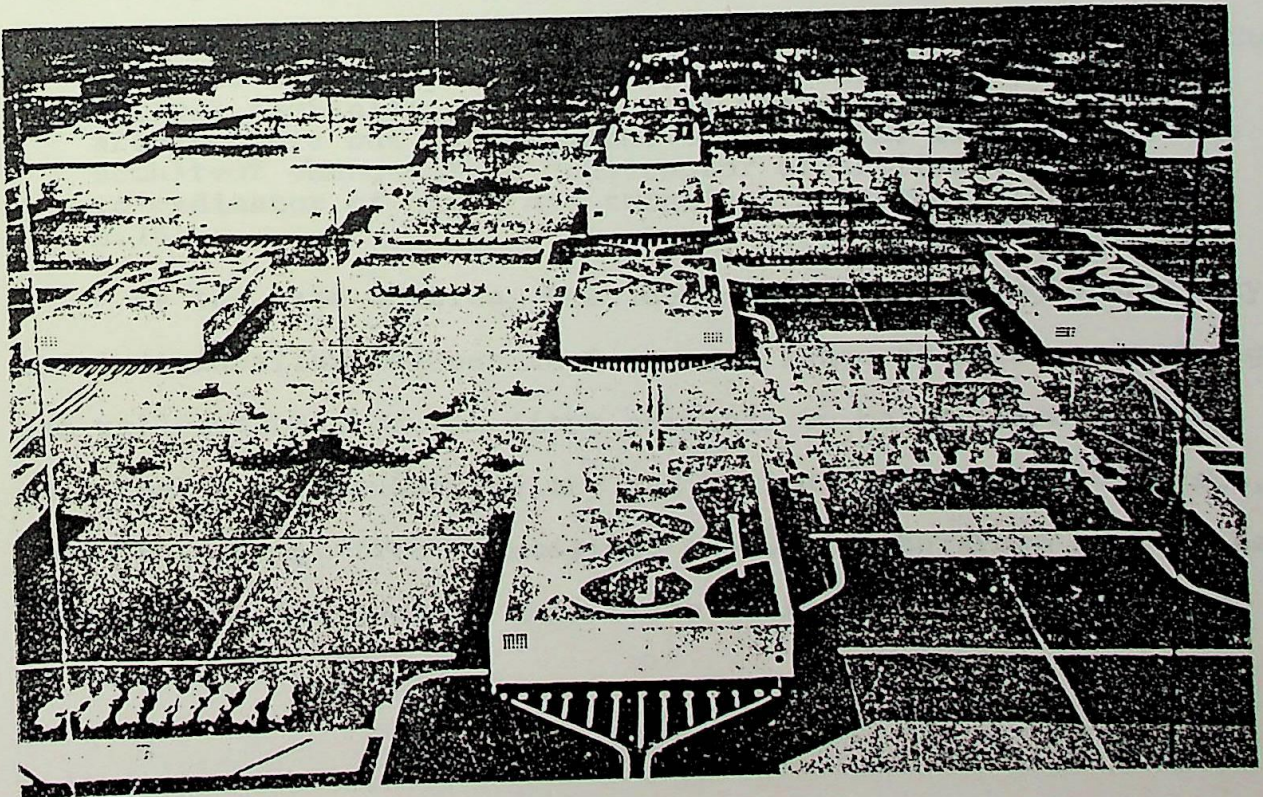
(7) (Branzi 1984 p.44)

Mollino, by 'the excellence of his design', was clearly a good enough designer to be able to take elements of pop culture and add them to his design vocabulary, thereby increasing his choice of options rather than limiting it.

Other designers chose to show what the consumer society, rationalist movement, and other often limiting factors could do if carried to their extremes. 'Archizoom Associati was one such movement. They said, "We want to bring into the house everything that has been left out: contrived banality, intentional vulgarity, urban fittings, biting dogs." (Branzi 1984 p.55)

They wanted their choice of options left open to include more or less everything.

Towards the end of the 60s Archizoom and SuperStudio were realizing design theory projects such as 'No-stop City' and 'Twelve Imaginary Cities'. These were both radical architecture experiments intended to show the results of the extremes of rationalism and the consumer society. The underlying intention was presumably to create an awareness of the necessity of keeping creative options open. The result was that talk about the 'death of architecture ...suggested the possibility of a kind of planning free from traditional constraints...Architecture became a form of free expression.' (Branzi 1984 pp.59,60) The picture below shows a part of No-Stop City. The view is of 'Homogeneous living quaters' and demonstrates the conformity of the extremes of rationalism. (Branzi 1984 p.67)



Free expression would not be acceptable in a consumer society; fashions in styling have to be adhered to in order to be socially acceptable. Thus the task remained of dismantling the society created by the Madison Avenue social engineers.

The Archizoom Associati were quoted as saying, 'The ultimate aim of modern architecture is the elimination of Architecture itself.' (Branzi 1984 p.75): in other words, to describe the field of creating an environment as architecture, or design, or town planning, placed limitations on the creators' choice of options. Their creativity was being compromised, and they wanted to dispense with these limitations and those imposed by the consumer society.

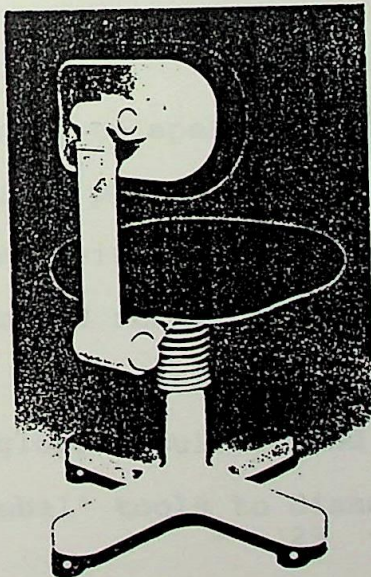
They used the medium that they were familiar with to effect this change. The new architect was seen as the

technocratic architect who uses his instruments to adjust the delicate machinery of society, as a manager who takes some logical mechanism and analytical processes from modern architecture but disdains the tools of the discipline...the architect changed from constructor of artifacts to a co-ordinator of human and technical resources.' (Branzi 1984 p.76)

By the late sixties, the idea of re-integrating creativity and individualism through an increased range of options in design was well-established. The first obstacle to be overcome was the fact that the consumer society had no individual sense of taste, would not accept free expression, and would therefore have to be re-educated. The idea of mass taste would have to be destroyed.

Branzi refers to a parallel between two composers; one, realizing that society didn't work, wanted art to change it and the other, realizing that art didn't work, wanted society to change art. The paradox illustrates the problem facing the architect/social engineers: a non-creative art had perpetuated itself by producing a non-creative society, which could only comprehend and produce more non-creative art. The solution was to rediscover creativity.

The late 1960s and early 70s saw several attempts to condition the public to think for itself, to encourage mass creativity. 'An age without bearings had begun, and out of this open system came a new tolerance that did not merely envisage a creative attitude on the part of the customer but often set out to stimulate such an attitude through the eccentric appearance of the product.' (Branzi, 1984 p.78) The 'Synthesis' chair (Sottsass 1969) was intended to introduce an element of play to the office.



(9) (Bayley Garner Sudjic 1983 p.280)

A positive effort was being made to stimulate individuality and creativity by presenting a range of consumer goods with widely varying appearances to the public in order to engineer taste back into society.

The New Domestic Landscape exhibition of Italian design in New York in 1972 featured 'an empty grey aseptic room in which a voice described a luminous and brightly-coloured domestic setting.' (Branzi 1984 p.80) This was a declaration of intent from Archizoom. By leaving the contents of the room to the imagination of each individual viewer, they must have hoped to stimulate some creative thought; each viewer would create his own individual environment. Riccardo Dalisi performed similar experiments, involving Neapolitan street urchins in design, as an investigation into uncompromised creativity. The urchins had no training in aesthetics or design and would presumably express their individuality more clearly than a person with formal training.

Archizoom began to speak of a 'liberation of man from culture' (Branzi 1984 p80), meaning a removal of cultural impositions on creativity. People would only be free to be creative if they could shake off their cultural limitations. This was becoming more and more important as the developing 'global' village implied 'global' culture and conformity. This culture would require 'global' tools to dismantle.

The organization of architects, designers and artists who were engineering the new creative society took the form of the radical architecture movement, and was typified by Global Tools.

The Global Tools co-operative was founded in 1973. The concept of an organising body originated with the Italian group SuperStudio.

The working structure derived from the idea of a secretariat that would bring into contact people and groups working in the direction defined as liberation of man from culture.' (Branzi 1984 p.83)

Global tools was known as a 'counter school' of architecture because they were dedicated to eliminating architecture as it was, along with all its conceptual limitations - by teaching people to include all cultures (and therefore styles) in their choice of formal and aesthetic options, as well as producing products which fulfilled their functional requirements. Global Tools was the 'first attempt to provide a yellow pages for culture.' (Branzi 1984 p.83) Culture was changing from being a dominating influence on designers' work into a medium for designers to use in their attempts to change the consumer society into a creative society. A neutral blend of cultural elements would theoretically allow a persons individuality to be seen against a bland background.

The difficulties of erasing cultural influence, in order to allow true creativity to be exercised, were insurmountable. The solution chosen was to adopt cultural influence as a tool, but if this happened on a large scale, the result would be standardization once more. The idea failed because, as Branzi says, 'the avant-garde became more crowded every day.' (Branzi 1984 p.84) With everybody doing the same thing, there was no more individuality to their work. Global Tools was closed down in 1975, and the official death of the radical architecture movement was announced at the Bologna conference in 1978.

The essence of the movement lived on, however, as designers and architects continued to try and break through the barriers of fashion, style, and culture. 1981 saw the birth of Memphis. Memphis was born in the 'Hothouse' of Italian alternative design, a design that was seeking to re-educate society, to broaden tastes and horizons. 'The Memphis style...consists of broadening the area of style itself, of never being satisfied with what has already been done and of looking for a new style all the time.' (Radice 1985 p.173.)

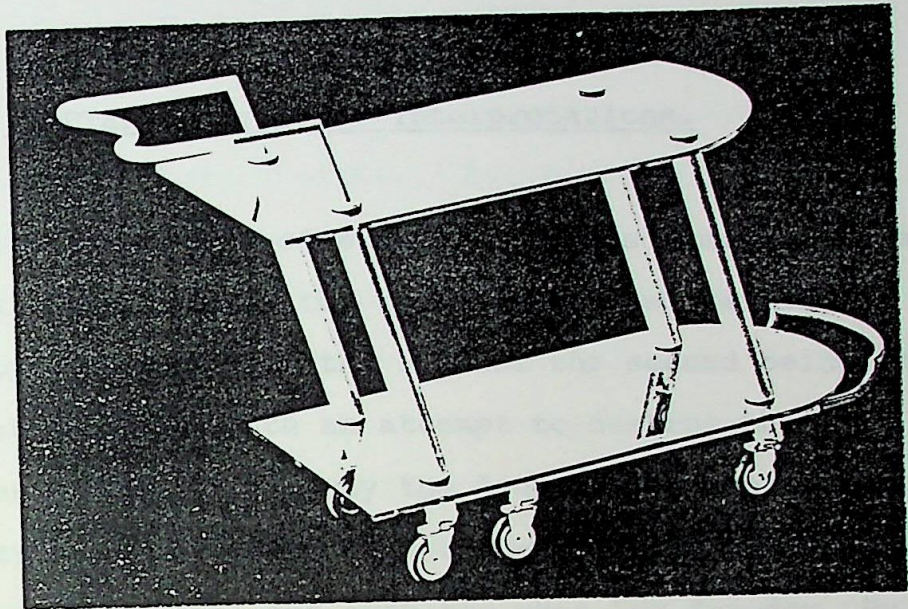
In spite of the reference to 'Memphis style', this seems to indicate that the people who made up Memphis were attempting to get on the outside of style much in the same way that Global Tools had tried to, by using cultural influence as a tool in order to denature it. Memphis however, used a set of influences that were entirely disconnected from culture, Memphis design

expresses "intermediate states", or sets of relations, instead of structured thoughts; it is not based on how we "think" of things, but on how we "experiment" them. It does not describe, imitate, or seek to explain experience, but "alludes" to experience, it speaks in the language of myth. (Radice 1985 p.173)

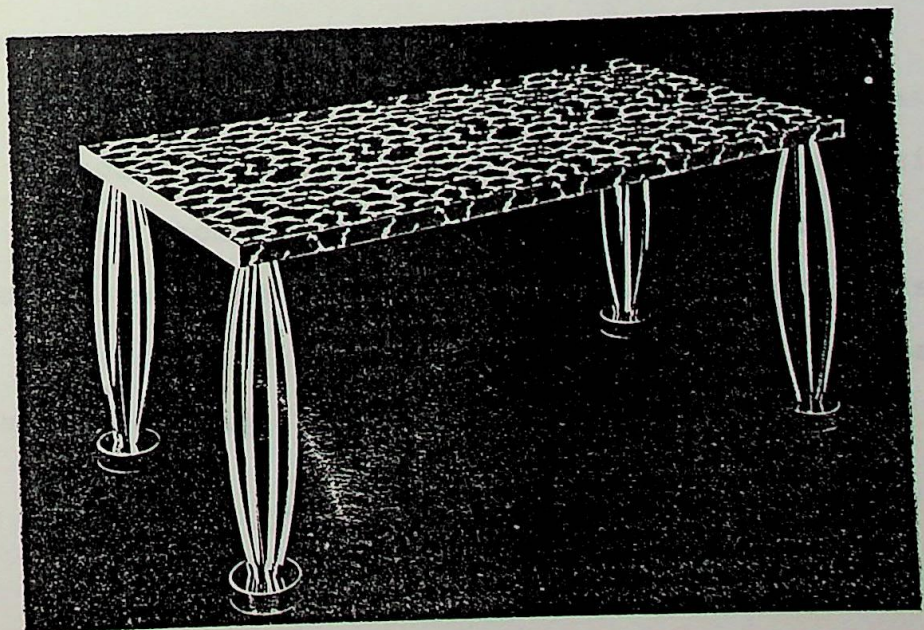
The set of influences appears to have been connected to physics and dynamics, abstract ideas very little influenced by culture. This was the root of Memphis style. In this way they could design objects possessed of an individuality. Each object would have enough individuality that it would only appeal to a small number of people; hence 'They are produced in small series...only because the demand is limited.'

(Radice,1985,p.174.) The Memphis movement, by its very nature of trying to create individuality in their products, would have failed completely if their products had achieved a wide appeal. The implications are that the synthetically derived individuality of Memphis, coupled with their trait of 'contemporaneity' (use of up-to-date technology and materials), would ensure them a permanent place in society.

The individuality of Memphis, while originally outside the sphere of cultural influence, is now part of that sphere. The adaptation of elements from Memphis design by the mainstream industry, however, dooms the Memphis individuality.



(10) The 'Hilton Cart' (Javier Mariscal, 1981) clearly shows the motion of the cart while the 'City Table' below by Soottsas expresses the weight of the table bearing down on the legs. (Radice 1985 pps.58 174)



CHAPTER FOUR: 1990. Interpretations.

In this chapter, the history of modern design is examined as a series of social experiments, the first being the creation of a consumer society in America in the 50s and the second being the avant garde that followed with an attempt to destroy that society. Chapter two explained why the language spoken by consumer society design is that of subconscious desires and urges, such as fear, greed, and even the urge for freedom. By studying Vance Packard's book The Hidden Persuaders, one seems to be able to gain some insight into the interpretation of the subconscious language of design.

- \$ -

We have seen how the mass production processes developed during the industrial revolution influenced design. The craftsman found himself unable to express himself through the new medium of mass production, and the design and manufacturing processes slipped out of his hands. He became a merchant. The result was a decline in the standard of design, a submersion of individuality and creativity in the face of the machine. Gropius saw this decline and took steps to rectify matters. He trained students in the principles of design and manufacture of products using the new processes as well as handicrafts.

The aesthetic principles that Gropius contributed to the Bauhaus could be seen as an attempt to give his students some idea of good design to work towards, in order to prevent his students from expressing the machine design that had become part of their culture. The imposition of these principles limited the students' options and stunted their creativity, their individuality, and hence their ability to express themselves through their design in any meaningful way, they became parrots rather than fluent speakers in the language of design.

The applied arts of the last century were full of signs and quotations, metaphors and ornament. But they disappeared at the beginning of this century, suffocated by the unitary principles of the Bauhaus...objects, which up till then had been autonomous signs that enriched domestic space...became cold objects, lacking in any cultural and therefore practical relationship with their users.' (Branzi 1984 p.147)

Gropius had omitted to consider that the individuality that a craftsman expressed in the days before rapid transport and improved communications was that of his local culture, a subculture of his country's society in effect. Thus by attempting to give his students an unbiased guide towards better design, he ended up by inflicting one set of standards on a large number of people, and destroying the very meaning of design. Design changed from being a language of living experimenting cultures into the language of one theoretical culture. Gropius created mass taste, taste that would encourage cultural atrophy and in effect create a society with no sense of individual taste, only a subconscious desire for individuality.

The outcome of this was that when sales began to drop in the 1920s in America, industrial design was born. Loewy and others found that by making a product look different, it achieved an air of individuality - in other words it would sell well. The manufacturers, coming from a society with a lowered capacity for creativity or individuality, interpreted this as meaning that Loewy's particular style sold well. The result was the development of the streamlining style, a development of Loewy's unique personal style. The streamlining craze peaked in the 30s, when almost every product imaginable was pseudo-aerodynamically styled. The effect was similar to that of the 'unitary styling principles' of the Bauhaus, another stalemate of product standardisation, and no scope for individuality or self-expression.

Another factor that may have contributed to the rise of the consumer society was the fact that adherents of the Bauhaus were 'technicians, artists and businessmen' in the words of Gropius. The fact that the businessman was substituted for the merchant, presumably due to economic pressures of the time, allowed the development of a new field of salesmanship by the 'incomplete' merchants, the craftsmen who were not re-educated. When sales declined after the post-World War Two economic boom, the descendants of the merchants, who had developed independently from the designers, developed the techniques of motivational research. They made two important discoveries.

The first was that subconscious reasons affect our choice between different brands of products. A buyer usually purchases products that reflect his self-image (individuality) by subconscious stimuli (colour, form, packaging). The second important discovery was social engineering - By playing on people's subconscious fears, they could be manipulated. A society's characteristics could be changed.

The marketers created their dream, a fashion-conscious consumer society; a society that would accept any product that fell within the rigid confines of continually changing styling fashions. The combination of the pressure for the search for individuality and the compulsive consumption rapidly accelerated into an explosion of styles as designers struggled to assert their individuality.

Italian design theorists were aware of the effects of product standardisation on a culture; they had seen the effects of the consumer society with its styling fashions. The Italians launched a counter-offensive against both. The first step was demonstrating the shortcomings of modernism - done by SuperStudio with their 'No-stop City' and 'Twelve Ideal Cities'. The programme to re-educate society with a sense of individual taste was initiated by Global Tools and continued by Memphis.

The great emphasis in all alternative design movements is the removing of restrictions and broadening the spheres of action. The principle is clearly the same as the definition of

creativity in the introduction. By increasing the designer's range of options, his creativity (in all areas of design), is enhanced.

It is easy to imagine a war taking place between two opposing factions, using society as a battleground and design as weapons. The first action of aggression was the creation of the consumer society by the fashion-oriented stylists, with its negative impact on creativity. The counter-attack was the educational programme launched by the avant-garde and continued by Memphis. A virtual stalemate results from the fact that any designs expressing individuality are rapidly assimilated and denatured by the mainstream industry, which merely contributes to the deterioration of aesthetic values.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION.

If design is accepted to be a cultural language, its role must be seen as that of communicating cultural ideas. Up until the last century this was so. There was no mass culture by today's standards and the 'signs and quotations, metaphors and ornament' were the dialects spoken, the dialects of subculture. The more successful ideas were adopted by other subcultures, by creative craftsmen who could speak the language and see the value of the ideas. The evolution of society would progress naturally towards harmony as the more successful elements of a huge variety of subcultures were synthesised into a global culture. This process was slowed by the Industrial Revolution and stopped dead by the spread of mass taste and the consumer society.

Although cultural atrophy may prevent the consumer society from being able to speak or understand, it still generates a psychobabble of subconscious human drives, an animal sound that provides a background for the philosophical Italian discussions. Every language should include room for original thought and ideas from the subcultures of every-day people. The variety of avant garde experiments indicates that the avant garde consists of a variety of subcultures, a consumer society also has subcultures, some with very valid social ideas, the repression of these ideas amounts to political censorship.

Such censorship has been seen to lead to social stasis resulting in stagnation, corruption and violence.

For those that see a continually self perpetuating mass taste/culture trying to create a superficial air of individuality at minimum cost expressing itself with meaningless graphics, logos, and unnecessary technology - there is an instinctive desire to express their own subcultures (equally international and far more meaningful and vital,) through their design rather than getting involved in analysing a mythical individuality or creating a synthesised version. This is a natural return to culturally meaningful design. Design as it was up until the late 19th Century. The fight for a more creative society requires that cooperation and support be as extensive as the consumer society itself. 'There must be an overall vision of a plan of intervention.' (Branzi 1984 p.76) Where is the plan? Stefan Lindfors, a top Finnish designer, explains why the situation is still more or less a stalemate in 1990:

'It's a load of crap blaming it all on industry. Designers can't communicate. We never discuss anything.' (Nyborg 1990 p.9.)

BIBLIOGRAPHY.

BARRY, David. Street Dreams
McDonald Orbis. 1988.

BAYLEY, Stephen. In good shape: Style in industrial products 1900 to 1960
Design Council. 1979.

BAYLEY, Stephen, GARNER, Phillippe, SUDJIC, Deyon. Twentieth century style and design.
Thames & Hudson. 1986.

BRANZI, Andrea. The Hothouse
Thames & Hudson. 1984.

BUSH, Donald J. The Streamline Decade
George Braziller New York. 1975.

FORTY, Adrian. Objects of desire
Thames & Hudson. 1986.

HESKETT, John. Industrial design
Thames & Hudson. 1980.

INSTITUT FUR AUSLANDSBEZIEHUNGEN. Bauhaus
Institut fur auslandsbeziehungen. 1978.

KATZ, Sylvia. Plastics, common objects, design classics
Harry N. Abrams, New York. 1984.

KERSLEY, Gill; 'Golden Brown All Over.'; The kitchen magazine;
March/April 1990; p 94.

LOEWY, Raymond. Industrial design
Fourth Estate Ltd. 1980.

LUCIE-SMITH, Edward. A history of industrial design
Phaidon Press Ltd. 1983.

NYBORG, Annika. 'Extending the limits of industrial design'; Form
Function Finland.; February 1989. pp.9-10

PACKARD, Vance. The hidden persuaders
Penguin. 1984.

PAPANEEK, Victor. Design for the real world
Thames & Hudson. 1985.

POPPER, Karl. Unended quest
Fontana. 1976.

PULOS, Arthur J. The American design ethic
M.I.T. Press. 1983.

RADICE, Barbara. Memphis - research, experiences, results,
failures and successes of new design
Thames & Hudson. 1985.