

SOFT MATTER

Curated by Justin Beal



WALLSPACE

SOFT MATTER

SOFT MATTER

Curated by Justin Beal

Wallspace Gallery
New York, New York

Editorial conception: Mark Owens
Art Direction: Mark Owens
Enzo Mari excerpt translated by: Stephen Marth

Design: Mark Owens with Nilas Andersen

First Wallspace Gallery edition, 2014

© Wallspace Gallery, New York.

All rights reserved.No part of this book may be reproduced in any form
by any electronic or mechanical means (including photocopying, recording,
or information storage and retrieval) without permission in writing from
the publisher.

Cover: Something awesome.

Set, printed, and bound in USA.

Beal, Justin.
Wallspace Gallery.
ISBN 0-TEST-52136-9

Contents

Introduction by Justin Beal	p. 10
Plates	p. 15
Design and Passion by Enzo Mari	p. 52
Checklist	p. 69

Introduction



Archizoom Associati, *Mies*, 1969

Wallspace is pleased to announce Soft Matter, a group exhibition organized by New York based artist Justin Beal. The show borrows its title from a classification of material including organic matter, plastics, and foams used as a curatorial subcategory in Ezio Manzini's 1989 survey of postmodern design, *The Material of Invention*. Manzini takes the term from French physicist Pierre-Gilles de Gelles, who used it to describe matter, both biological and synthetic, which self-organizes into physical structures whose behavior cannot be predicted by their microscopic constituents or their macroscopic whole. Tracing Beal's interests in his own sculptural practice, this grouping of work expands the notion of soft matter to include the unconventional manipulation of rigid architectural forms, the indexical relationship between body and furniture and the physical presence of objects that have the plasticity to shift between disciplines. The exhibition includes works by Enzo Mari, Carlo Mollino, Luisa Lambri, Tom Burr, Talia Chetrit, Gaylen Gerber, Becky Beasley, Hans Breder, Michael E. Smith and Archizoom Associati.

Perhaps closest to the physical definition of soft matter, Gaylen Gerber's *Support* appropriates the expanded polyurethane *Puffo* designed by the Italian collective Gruppo Strum into his own monochromatic lexicon with a coat of white oil paint. In the same room, the iconic rubber, chrome and leather, *Mies Chair*, by the design collective Archizoom Associati, is presented disassembled on the floor as it was pictured in an early production photograph.

Luisa Lambri's photographs of Erich Mendelsohn and Serge Chermayeff's *De La Warr Pavilion* and Carlo Scarpa's *Brion Cemetery* capture "the synthesis of structural economy and ergonomic form" that Kenneth Frampton describes in his seminal essay *Carlo Scarpa and the Adoration of the Joint* and which embody Scarpa's distinctly organic reinterpretation of late modernism. While Carlo Mollino regularly referenced the female body as a generative form in his architectural work (most notably Turin's *Teatro Regio*), he transformed his own domestic environments into elaborate and enigmatic sets for hundreds of polaroids of models and prostitutes taken over the course of a decade beginning in the late sixties. In contrast to Mollino's portraits, Hans Breder's photographs from the same time present fractured limbs and mirrors in the unadorned studio, exaggerating the haptic relationship between body, furniture and sculpture.

This relationship is present in different ways in the work of Talia Chetrit, Michael E. Smith and Tom Burr, where mundane objects are imbued with a metonymic relationship to the body. A similar metonymy emerges in the cucumber forms photographed and cast in brass in works from Becky Beasley's recent exhibition *Spring Rain*. In all cases, a restrained or sexualized body is alluded to but not present in the physical material of the work or the object pictured.

Finally, a selection of Enzo Mari's *Bambu* and *Pago-Pago* vases (the latter pictured above), manufactured by Danese in the late 1960's, exemplify the literal exploration of the plasticity of soft matter within the history of industrial design. As a whole, the works in this show evoke moments when the corporeal enters the restrained space of architecture and design, succinctly described in Mark Wigley's essay, *Untitled, The Housing of Gender*: "Before it can defend the body, architecture must defend itself against the body by ordering it... place is not simply a mechanism for controlling sexuality. Rather, it is the control of sexuality by systems of representation that produces space."

Plates



Enzo Mari, *Pago Pago Vase*, Model No. 3087, 1969







Luisa Lambri, *Untitled (De La War Pavillion, #01)*, 2007



Luisa Lambri, *Untitled (De La War Pavillion, #02)*, 2007



Becky Beasley, *Spring Rain (Family)*, 2013



Hans Breder, *Body/Sculpture*, 1970







Tom Burr, *Two Blue Night Stands*, 2013



Gaylen Gerber, *Support*



Archizoom Associati, *Mies*, 1969



Talia Chetrit, *Bike Seat*, 2013



Becky Beasley, *Cucumber Hand (I), (II), (III)*, 2013





Hans Breder, *Body/Sculpture*, 1972



Michael E. Smith, *Untitled*, 2010



Hans Breder, *Body/Sculpture*, 1970



Luisa Lambri, *Untitled (Cimitero Monumentale Brion, #01)*, 2007





Carlo Mollino, *Untitled*, 1960s



Carlo Mollino, *Untitled*, 1960s



Enzo Mari, *Bambú vase*, 1969

Design and Passion (*Progetto e Passione*)

Excerpt from
Progetto e Passione
by Enzo Mari, 1986



So what has inspired me to compile these notes on the subject of design (*Il progetto*)?

Really the question was, and remains, “what to do” with my life, or better, with our lives. The quality of life, at least with regard to those aspects of it that are under our control, is based on the quality of our work.

The higher the level of design (*progettualità*) involved in our work is, the better our quality of life should be. I am not referring to design as an opportunity reserved for the elite or privileged. What I mean by “level of design (*progettualità*)” is the ability to make one’s own choices, even if they are small, in one’s work and one’s life.

With that we come to an obvious existential fact: work is either alienating or transformative. The selfevidence of this fact makes it hard to outline any sort of theory of design that is not reductive.

Aware of the difficulty of tackling the problem of design (*il progetto*) in its entirety, with limited means—and this is the objective—I offer, however, these notes, with a clear understanding of the difference between prescriptive and observational ideas.

The word “design” (“*il progetto*”) encompasses various types of work. It does so in the moment each specific practice looks for “other” solutions or, more commonly, when it seeks to optimize its own norms and purposes. This could entail the design of anything, “from a spoon to a city”¹ for example, but we could also talk about the design of a legislative or linguistic code.

The range of these areas of practice, often very different from one another, makes it difficult to imagine the possibility of a thorough study of the overall implications of design that is not would not be overly schematic in its claims.

My practice, intended to define the formal quality of industrial products,² in line with my artistic training—might offer us an example that encompasses many of these areas. Quality of form, if it is ever attained—as we will see in the chapter “methodology according to nature” implicates the involvement of everything that regards or could possibly regard us. On the other hand, it is precisely this inclination toward the global, in particular in the domain of industrial culture, which has increased the redundancy permeating the values, objec-

1) This phrase comes from Ernesto N. Roger's article "Ricostruzione: dall'oggetto d'uso alla casa," *Domus*, Milan, n.215, November 1946. The date of publication is important. The war had just ended. Europe had to be reconstructed. In those years, and today also, Roger's phrase carried the weight of a manifesto.

2) A practice which I have passionately carried out for over 40 years.

tives, and shapes of the work of designers of form.³ Perhaps no other discipline is contaminated by the confounding force of such an entity. However, it is precisely this excess that drives one to want to find a connecting thread that may prevent this redundancy from overtaking and dumbing us down. With this objective in mind, I will attempt in the following chapters, to propose and contextualize a series of ideas which I consider incontrovertible within a larger frame of reference (some will seem obvious, but are necessary as points of reference, others are less so).

I can tell you ahead of time that I will not be attempting to provide a new definition nor propose an anthology of those already put forward in an attempt to qualify design as a "profession". Perhaps the redundancy grew out of this: the attempt to resolve irremediable contradictions for the sole sake of legitimizing a job, albeit a necessary one

I. A HISTORY IN BROAD STROKES

Obviously from his beginnings man has always conceived of was to realize objects (*progetta*) and the descriptions of these ancient designs, when properly documented, are commonly accepted.

This is not the case for the last two centuries of history. This difference is not just dependent on a change in historical perspective. Above all, the change comes about following a chain of interconnected events that took place between the 18th and 19th centuries, and which provided the imprinting for an ideology of a new and contradictory way of conceiving of objects (*progettare*): *design*.⁴

In order, the events are:

- The French Revolution
- The Industrial Revolution
- The birth of Socialism
- The emergence of the idea of design

Regardless of the religious or political beliefs of the reader of these notes, these first three should be considered fundamental for the history of man as they radically changed his understanding of the world; the fourth ...

Let's begin by trying to briefly describe them.

1. Three events

The French Revolution is the culminating point of a slow process of transformation set in motion by the birth of the bourgeoisie during the age of the medieval communes and by the Galilean revolution that followed. For the first time there is opposition to the idea of the world as static, impenetrable and unchangeable. Up until then, no matter how wretched the conditions of the common man were, they had to be accepted. In fact, they represented the bench test for accessing a Paradise beyond the Earth (a place of perfect knowledge, of perfect equality, absent of all misfortune): the world was fixed; it could not be transformed.

The *Declaration of the Rights of Man* proclaims the equality of men and legitimizes the aspiration to better the quality of one's life. The natural science model provided the instruments necessary for collective knowledge.

A new ideology emerged: the world can be transformed and Paradise can be realized here on earth (a place of perfect knowledge, absent of every misfortune, of perfect equality).

Now, after 200 years, the ideal of equality remains nominal. Nevertheless everyone the planet over continues to feel strongly about it, despite differences of race, religion, education, and – what counts the most in our context – of social structure and political system. So, it is unforeseeable that this ideal will be questioned. It cannot help but exercise a strong influence on the meaning of "design".

But let's get back to the decapitation of King Louis. Symbolically the event constituted ultimate equality. Every marginalized underdog (so almost everyone) interpreted it as an "obvious" sign that they too should expect to own the possessions of the king. This claim to the right to possess resulted for two reasons. The first, explicit in nature, was the material need of certain objects, a chair for example. The second, implicit in nature and perhaps subconscious, was that the chair corresponded in form to the king's throne: "Now that we are equals, I am also king". It should have been (or at least today it should be): "now that we

3) *Design* is now the established title used to define multiple and diverse activities and the various experts of these activities, the *designers*. Within this context, every form of naive utopia (the idea that it can be realized) is confounded with every form of cynicism; every form of concrete knowledge gets confused with a fog of ignorance; every concept that seems clear on a theoretical level gets tripped up when it comes to the practical act. Despite all of this, and independently of this Babel – albeit rarely – a good design is made.

4) The most recent "poetics" of *design* claim to be liberated from the archetypal ideology and reject the concept of ideology itself in favor "free" experimentation. If we look back at the material origins of design, we see how by rejecting those origins today's design becomes a contemporary, opposing ideology.

are equal, thrones are no longer necessary" (but perhaps even today we continue to think like that because equality is still not a reality and design's main purpose seems to be to respond to the subconscious).

Now, let's discuss the industry which developed, above all, in response to the need for equality established by the French Revolution.⁵ Before then everything that the king and his subjects needed was created from an artisanal system of production, in small, specialized shops, with very few competent practitioners by means of a technical-economic knowledge passed down from father to son (or more precisely from master craftsman to apprentice). The small size of cities (with the exception of a few capitals), together with the difficulty of transport and, in particular the small number of objects that could be made (objects with symbolic value for the nobility and essential work tools for peasants and the artisans themselves), made it so that artisans were responsible for making really everything (here the use of the word "everything" is not an exaggeration).

Let me give you an example: a peasant needs a sickle so he goes to a blacksmith to discuss exactly what he needs (his land is on a slope rather than flat, hard rather than soft stalks, suitable for the arms of a child rather than an adult...) when and how he will be able to pay him (with money or through a trade, that year or the next...). The blacksmith, after adapting (each time differently) the ideal design of a sickle to the one in question, and discussing how to exchange part of the hay (that he will be receiving as a payment the following year) for the wood-coal necessary to forge the iron he will need to procure the iron itself (an

old sword or the worn out rim of a wheel might work). Not only will he need to procure these and other scraps, but he will also need to know how to meld them and create the bar that will later be reheated, forged, tempered and sharpened...and let's not forget about the handle that would need to be discussed with the carpenter, the new leather bel-lows for the furnace that would need to be made, and the young apprentice who has just arrived...

5) Examples of work being organized in a manner similar to today are certainly present in antiquity but for the most part they were intended to fulfill the needs of the State.; for example, the production of bricks for fortifications.

6) The knowledge (know-how) of every single modern industry (Ford for example) is formed by a group of artisans who operate both inside and outside the factory, who work together closely to make different prototypes for cars, from artisans who work purely on the form of the car to those who are responsible for the internal mechanics; together with those responsible for the molds and the machine tools used for producing the car; or the test driving and marketing. And even the men and women in the white coveralls (working with pliers and hammer) and those in white shirts (with compasses and computers) all make the same or analogous contributions of technical-economic knowledge.

In a sense, all of this laborious work was also wonderful in its variety and for its margins of experimentation and participation within a field of comprehensive knowledge (an apprenticeship could last over ten years and was similar but more concrete than that of a designer today). Yet it appears very wasteful by today's standards of efficiency (the consequences of which we will evaluate momentarily). The resulting price of that sickle was extremely high; perhaps more than what a modern day farmer would have to pay for a gas powered lawn mower.

If the cost was high for a simple object like a sickle we can imagine the cost of a throne... The artisan would have had to speak with the king and his ministers, as well as the philosophers and poets of his court, and interpret the drawings of his artists. He would have had to travel long distances to study the throne of the Pharaoh or to understand the secret recipe for a certain type of glass mix.... Then he would have needed rose-wood and ivory, not to mention gems and gold... The cost would have been enormous. A throne or another type of ornamental object could symbolize the fame of an entire nation or the conquest of an entire continent.

But, with the king dead, everyone wants, if not a real throne at least something that resembles one. A throne, made in the artisan mode described above, even if it were made out of paper-mâché, would still have been expensive for our *citoyens* who, despite their equality, were still without money. To save money and be more efficient there was a need to eliminate the wastefulness of the complicated process that had to be repeated every time for each object (as described in the example of the sickle). The cost of producing an object would inevitably remain high, but one single design could now establish everything necessary for the fabrication of a multitude of identical objects. In this way, the high cost of conceiving of and realizing an object (*proget-to*) could be subdivided by the high number of objects produced having a minimal effect on the cost of each object created. In addition, only a small number of artisans would continue to possess the costly technical know-how (following ten years of apprenticeship) necessary for realizing the design (*progetto*).⁶ All of the others, now "laborers," would forever carry out just one of the operations necessary for the creation of an object (at a minimal training cost); quickly repeatable without needing to acquire a comprehensive knowledge of the process... and easily controllable...

We should also remember that this low cost of production (necessary in relation to the limited buying power of the *citoyens*) would need to be further lowered to allow for attractive profit margins for the suppliers of capital, as well as the producers and the sellers. All this makes it so that, inevitably, the division of labor (it's dehumanization) must be further increased while the compensation paid laborers is kept as low as possible.... This is the *Industrial revolution*.⁷

A monster which would beget others.⁸ In addition to the loss of the artisanal know-how itself (which I have already mentioned) there is a consequent degradation⁹ of the family and society life in an increase in conurbation strictly connected with the growth of the factory: homes which are all the same in their

meanness, without any form of autonomous growth (understood as waste...), and the emergence of "goods", the new protagonist and arbiter of socio-economic relations. Alongside the production of essential objects, there is an exponential increase in the production of objects of a symbolic function, which are for the most part antithetical to the concept of equality, the papier-mâché thrones mentioned above, i.e. "goods".

Goods are objects whose type or, independently of this, formal connotations make them desirable as a sign of an "other" social condition. But every "other" social condition excludes in and of itself the ideal of equality. The *idea of socialism* begins to grow and gain force as a response—in addition to the alienation associated with labor—to this type of alienation. At the same time, and for the same reasons, the *idea of good design* ("*il buon progetto*").

7) Histories of technology, or also of design, emphasize the importance of the birth of new forms of energy that were more efficient, cheaper and more easily distributed. They were certainly important. However, even without them the groundbreaking ideal of equality would have brought about mass production, perhaps in a different form and (maybe) with an even more disruptive effect.

8) The list of all that is negative goes on (and will continue to go on). One could object, claiming that the industrial system is without equals as a supporter of equality; that it also produces good things; that the quality of life has greatly improved; that the initial aberrations were the price to pay. It's true. But it is also true that we know today that some aberrations continue to persist, alongside many others, which were impossible to predict back then. It is important to remember what was, and should continue to be, the ideological matrix of *design*.

9) As I already mentioned in the forward, and which is worth insisting on, the knowledge that one gains from his or her work is central to his or her quality of life. Such knowledge induces us to dream of realizing the Paradise of equality (it is impossible to understand how, under the pretext of realism, one can imagine that a private paradise is possible in solitude)

10) William Morris is perhaps the best known representative of this elite. Of all of his literary, artistic, entrepreneurial and political activities I will limited myself here to citing his novel, *Notizie da nessun luogo* (1891) in which he imagines an England governed by a socialist regime that reflects its utopian ideas.

11) A fundamental characteristic of goods is their rapid obsolescence, which allows them to be continually re-proposed. One violent example would be (not so paradoxical in its reference to death (also the death of thought): the bullets of war-gun, which can only be used once, in continuation....

2. The Idea of Good Design (*il buon progetto*)

The *idea of good design* could only be formulated or understood by the *elite*¹⁰, who for the very fact of not finding themselves in thrall to the forms of division, are able to interpret them as a whole. The elite recognize the degradation of work and the quality of life in the deteriorated state of the city, and it dream of a future in which every man, regaining and improving his potential for artisan work, experiences utopia through a blissful relationship with nature; they also recognize that the forms of new objects superficially imitate every past style, from western to exotic or extinct civilizations, in what is a redundant, continual cycle from obsolescence to reproposal¹¹; they also recognize that formal quality is heavily dependent on the cost of the tools used to make an object and they observe that new tools are inevitably a crude imitation of ancient ones (i.e. all of the vital modulations involved in the creation of man-made objects are lost);¹² substantially they believe that new tools, created to realize the "absolute" of equality", must create absolute objects that will not easily become obsolete, because if they did, so would equality. As one can see, the idea of "good design" (*il buon progetto*) is the superstructure of socialism.¹³

Later, once it is established that someone can offer their professional services of "buon progetto" the Italian word, *disegno* (commonly used in the early Renaissance with the acceptance of "progetto") is replaced with the English term, *design*, which implicitly refers to its origins: the early Industrial Revolution in England.

Therefore, central to the ideological matrix of design is the supposition that it can contribute to resolve the contradictions of industrial culture's relations of production.¹⁴ However, as we know, the struggle of "workers and intellectuals", carried out in different forms over a period of two hundred years in order to improve and overturn these con-

13) For Marx the superstructure was the whole of the "legal, political, religious, artistic and philosophical forms – in short the ideological forms". The material forces of production represent the structure of a society, to which the relations of production, their legal and political regulation and the various manifestations of social consciousness (the superstructure) conform: "it is not the consciousness of men which determines their existence but their social existence which determines their consciousness". This term is commonly understood to represent everything that is not justified inside of a work or a concept, which is useless or external. But perhaps it is precisely this way of thinking (that the superstructure) is secondary, which has resulted in the failed management of every socialist experience. The impact is much worse in relation to the "culture of good design" since this culture was, and is, the one most closely connected with relations of production.

14) The quality of the relations of production must involve the quality of the needs that result from them. To those who might reply that the relations of production are no longer the same as those of the early Industrial Revolution, with such a harsh →

ditions, proved to be substantially impotent, despite the passion of millions of people, notable cultural developments and many different political-administrative directions.¹⁵ Design, however, from the moment it claims to be a tool for rationalizing industry – not an insignificant element – cannot help but becoming its emblem. Let's see why.

The culture of goods dictates that – regardless of every other need – only that which can be sold will be produced. The reasons for the commercial success of a product, given the incredibly complex interrelations between material needs, general symbolic needs and specific symbolic needs, under the exaggerated rule of competition, makes it so that every entrepreneur (the only artisan who has really survived, together with a second one, his subordinate: the designer) acts more on intuition than on reason (if rationality was effective we would have billions of entrepreneurs...). The entrepreneur, as such, either succeeds in his intent or perishes. No industry, regardless of its size or organizational structure, is able to survive without intuition, which, as such, becomes something analogous to that expressed by an artist (you can't teach an artist anything). Only hindsight allows us to talk about any rationalization of the rules of entrepreneurship (at least those that are central to its functioning).

Those who theorize the "profession" of design aspire to teach rationality. But, good design (*il progetto*) is the embodiment of socialism, the form of utopia... Instead, our entrepreneur, an individual who might well have this intention, has just one problem: produce that which can be concretely sold. That which should be sold but cannot belong to the spheres of utopia and

art, and certainly not that of a profession.

While a professional designer may, at least in part, have some influence on the functionality of what is to be produced, he has no say, from a material perspective (in the event that he wanted to occupy himself with that) as to the quality of the relations of production, which is however the true objective of design. We could say, therefore, that our designer has nothing to teach to industry.

→ division of labor, in the place of today's robots, I will specify again that industry does not refer to all types of machines, but rather to the division of labor. This division persists today in the form of specializations, also on the managerial level. It is true that the complexity includes diversified sets of knowledge, but only if those sets of knowledge are put to use dealing with the complexity itself rather than towards self-satisfaction within their own microcosms.

15) "Workers and Intellectuals". I intentionally use this expression taken from old socialist rhetoric, in opposition to today's culture which claims the figure of the worker has been overcome in our robotized factories in order to reaffirm (see the previous footnote) that workers are those people who (independent of the type of work or their salaries) continue to function in a condition of division. With regard to the "political-administrative directions" its obvious they have also failed in part; two times over, if the objective was to favor good design.

That which he is capable of creating, if we assume his design is permeated by the values of equality, is only an allegorical form of that utopia. Indeed, he is just another person working on the assembly line, playing a role of which he senses but of which he is almost never rationally aware.¹⁶ This role can be considered from the point of view of a specific project or more generally, to include all designs and all designers.

In the case of a specific project, the designer is called upon as the bearer of a pre-established sign – that of his poetic – deemed suitable for the market for which that product is destined. Defining the essence of an object (its form) is not necessary, and not permitted. It must be suggested through approved forms which are recognizable, being subjectively reiterative (a good always suggests a brand).

The sum of these individual "poetics" constitutes, generally speaking, the overall poetic of design, which we can articulate according to historical intentionality: one form which develops according to logic of goods and another form that is born out of the values of equality. The first is not worth lingering on other than to say that it is ruled by redundancy (in the sense that everything and its opposite are acceptable: superficiality, and thus ignorance: the rule of goods implies the ignorance of the *citoyens*).

Also the second poetic, the form of equality, from the point of view of its material results (the objects produced), cannot help but belong to the sphere of goods. Precisely because of its aspiration toward utopia it becomes, especially in its elitist forms, the standard of industry.

At this point, in order to avoid confusion, it would be helpful to separate the industrial production of goods of consumption¹⁷ into two large sectors. One, for the most part on a quantitative

16) Beginning in the 1960s, the profession of the *designer* became fashionable and grew, assuming itself the same characteristics as goods. The number of graduates in design became much larger than the number of possible projects, in the face of an obsessive research for new forms. The adolescent tendency toward diversity (biologically necessary to move out from under the protection of the family and experience one's own potential for survival) serve as an opportunity to open good-related avenues (goods = "creative"). On top of all of this there was a general questioning of the values of socialism in this period, brought about by its well-known errors of economic leadership. (That the idea of good design belongs substantially to the realm of utopia is proven by its impotence today, in the world of capital but also in the world experience in those countries where there is real socialism). All this makes it so that the world of equality seems incomprehensible to most people or a form of self-censure is enacted.

17) Academically speaking, industrial production is subdivided into goods of consumption and goods of production. I prefer the expression "goods of consumption" because it is more suitable for defining goods. When a good of production (for example a machine tool) is produced to be sold it immediately assumes the characteristics of a good of consumption (a different form implies a different quality). Goods of production which remain as such – so they are not made to be sold – are those produced by the artisans of industry as industrial prototypes. I have not included this important type of industrial production in my discussion here, but will do so in chapters 2 and 4.

level, does not feel the need to emphasize the possible design qualities of products of mass consumption, if not in a crude manner. The other, the minority, directed at consumers who are more culturally prepared, or at least want to appear tags such (this represents the majority of this group), needs to underline a certain supposed design quality (traces of which can be found in crude form in the first sector).

The aspiration toward utopia or the quality of formal elaboration (when rarely it occurs), even if only intuited, through the support of museums or publications, is like a large fresco, in some ways analogous to the Sistine Chapel.

However, while Michelangelo's work illustrates the great value of the "other-than-self", what value does the fresco of design aspire to illustrate? Without a doubt it is the value of industry... But is it not more correct to say that industry is only an instrument and not a value?

The discipline of design has suffered such contradictions from its very beginnings. Disciplines, in general (despite the great ideals of many teachers) are directed at two types of students: a) those who belong or aspire to belong to the leadership class (knowledge is power) and b) those who are encouraged to belong to the class of doers.

Schools of the first type a) entail the acquisition of humanistic knowledge, a comprehensive knowledge (language, form, history, and less explicitly anthropology and sociology). While a concentration on technical-manual type knowledge is absent. This results in the teaching of a global knowledge that, however, risks being ahistorical, being abstracted from and lacking any origin in concrete reality; something which is guaranteed through hands-on activities.

Schools of the second type b) exclude the acquisition of any type of humanistic, global knowledge (the length of these programs is however shorter). In the absence of any critical reflection, this results in a sort of exploitation of hands-on work.

The teaching of design has been and continues to be practiced in both types of schools, with the second type being prevailing over the first (industry needs "workers" not thinkers, is what the proponents of the fourth industrial revolution say). Consequently, the defects of both types of schools have been aggravated by the following contradictions:

– the socialist aspiration toward utopia insists on design as a profession.

– the demand for scientific rationality over the utopia of power reduces the industry to an instrument of work.

Otherwise, good design ("*il buon progetto*"), because of its ideal implications, can only be carried out intuitively through the type of allegory of form common to artistic activities; it cannot aspire to establish itself as a completely rational activity (as would be necessary for a profession).

It is easy to understand, then, how the teaching of design, no matter how passionate the teacher or the students are, contributes to the very redundancy that reinforces the dominance of goods.

Please do not imagine that everything I've said up to now is born of excess pessimism. I've made many of my arguments with broad, crude strokes in order to underline those essential points that are pulverized in the excess of redundancy. One begins to suspect that, on a subconscious level, the irremediable contradiction between utopia and material reality is the crux impeding many "theorists" or "practitioners" of proven intellectual honesty from stoically accepting such a dichotomy. Although this reference is closely connected with defenders of the "modern movement" it is actually much better suited to its objectors. Affirming the death of utopia and giving free reign to creativity of form without rules (without ideals) just confirms the dominance of goods; saying that an object cannot escape the rule of goods is the same as saying that since every man must die, he might as well not design (*progettare*) or should limit himself to designing funerary objects.

Let me summarize what I think have been the essential points.

Industry, as it is configured, is not a value. It is only an instrument that helps to confirm the dominance of goods. This should not mean that the sum total of manufactured goods are always to be understood negatively: some of them should be understood positively. The negativity of goods comes from their over-development, above and beyond the needs of humans, resulting in negative effects not only for the human or material resources of the planet, but also for the capacity to think autonomously of those who reap the fruit of this plundering.

From the beginning, all of this has been opposed by ideals of equality and transformation. Design or "*il buon progetto*" is an allegory for this. Equality, transformation, design are heavily permeated by utopia.

Utopia is the heavenly place that is not (improbable future ad-

vances will move us further away). The result then is that: firstly, a design which is permeated by utopia cannot result in concrete realizations or realizations that quantitatively influence the behavior of the masses ("quantity" from the perspective of both socialism and capital is the "quality"); secondly, the aspiration toward utopia corresponds to social dignity and, as such, cannot be interpreted as an ethical guide for tackling the contradictions of the real.

This said, a designer (whatever the nature of the project he might be carrying out) must do his work conscious of these two worlds: that of utopia and that of the real. The world of the real cannot be lived while espousing the causes of utopia;¹⁸ and in light of this, negotiating with the opposite party every time over how much (albeit minimal) of the good-superfetations of the product to be realized and the behaviors which favor it as such can be eliminated. These are the behaviors, in part induced and in part biologically archetypal, which determine the need for frills in design. Today the true quality of a design should be recognized according to its capability to negotiate these behaviors in a effective manner.

The designer is—with the entrepreneur if he is "enlightened"—in the eye of the goods-storm.

This allows him, much more than others, to come close to understanding that which truly conditions our modernity (or our "post"-modernity if you prefer). Transmitting this perception of these contradictions in an understandable way is perhaps the main objective of design today.

Before concluding this somewhat sociological chapter, I would like to advance a few thoughts on the importance of the formal quality of a hand-manufactured object. A product of high formal quality more effectively resists expressive obsolescence: albeit minimally, the need to renew is reduced.

Furthermore, if the advent of the division of labor took from every man—except in part from the designer—the potential to design with the objective of allowing everyone to possess objects, this privilege must be repaid with the highest level of quality.

This last point brings up a question. Today, at least in the western world, the basic needs of survival have been overcome,

but not the conditions of alienation: we accept to squander our lives in order to possess more and more objects. Does a "well-made"

18) Many young designers are afraid that in espousing a utopian approach they will be marginalized. I assure them that the risk of marginalization is only present when one does not fully know his or her own work, which in order to be done properly must sustain itself with utopia.

object improve or worsen the state of things? I remain of the opinion that a well-made object has a positive influence, if only as a model of reference. But we must understand what is meant by "well-made". I'll try to address this in the following chapters.

Checklist

