

F: Is there a societal meaning of "design" that goes beyond "making things beautiful and functional"?

A: The use of the terms "beauty and function" in one sentence ought to be prohibited. "Salad and turnips" would be an equivalent. Beauty is absolutely enough. Imagine a plastic surgeon or body designer, for instance, who is attempting to explain something about beauty and function to one of his clients. If I break my leg I go to a medical doctor and for a nose-job I go to a plastic surgeon. A broken nose would be an exceptional case. I find pleasure in a lovely flower vase and am satisfied when the DVD player functions correctly. Who buys a lovely DVD player these days? The main thing is that the thing works....

This fable of "beauty and form and function" is based, like all fables, on a story that actually never happened in SUCH AND SUCH A WAY but nevertheless could have happened. An electronics maker was too stingy to entrust an artist with the design of a new radio, so he had a mechanical engineer sketch it out. He was locked in his office with the words "if it doesn't work or looks awful, you're finished". The engineer thought: "I'll design a product that'll knock you dead." He set to work with a compass, a straightedge and a set square so that it would be just right. After three days and three nights he had the electronics maker come in and ordered the new radio brought in for presentation. The engineer produced an inconspicuous little box and presented it to the amazed man, who said "I am going to--!"

But the engineer stopped him in midsentence, saying, "Sir, I'm used to fulfilling exact guidelines, as is required of my profession--no more, and no less. I did the same thing this time when you ordered me to produce a device that would fulfill its function and not look unattractive. So I limited myself to focusing on all the functions and didn't waste a thought on superfluous conceptual ideas for, as you yourself know, it is not possible for something ugly to exist without the will to design." The manager had to admit he was right, however, because the engineer had shown him a thing or two and because he understood so much about Form, he recommended him for a professorship at a school of design. The engineer then quickly developed his ideas of form through non-form, if you will, according to the following theory: By concentrating solely on the functionality, ugliness disappears and only beauty remains. Ergo: From function without design comes form and is beautiful at the same time. He found he had many supporters who spread throughout the world. And the moral of the story is: Form alone won't make it beautiful....

F: Is there a value in the experimental unto itself that extends beyond "finding the new thing"?

A: Whether or not an experiment has value can only be ascertained once it's over. If it already has value beforehand, it's not an experiment, but

rather an investigation. An experiment can also go wrong; an investigation, however, cannot. The first atomic bomb was an experiment. Genetic research is also an experimental matter that could yet turn into something quite dangerous. Designers don't experiment; they only want to play. Maybe a little designer's chair might break to pieces but that's not a catastrophe, to the contrary, it only spurs the consumer's appetite. Design is harmless. Nothing can go wrong there.

F: Does it make sense to want to design everything? (Research, shampoo, drugs, hair, bread rolls).

A: I would say that it is neither makes sense nor is it senseless. All beautiful things in this world are simply here. If they weren't designed they'd still be here, only somewhat different. If an apple wasn't an apple then perhaps it'd be a pear or a banana. Everything that is, or most things, in any case, possess a shape, if not one, then another. It's like that with design: You can't do anything against it nor can you do anything for it. It just happens.

F: Is there such a thing as "social" design?

A: Oh, this expression. Derived from "social architecture". Sounds good in public projects and if everyone is paying for something, it also needs a social angle. Social means, more or less: House the largest number of inhabitants in the smallest possible area and do it in such a way that they don't destroy themselves right away when social tensions arise. The architect himself doesn't live socially; "social design" can be seen in just the type of products that no designer or architect would ever use.

F: Is design art?

A: No. Art is spelled completely differently. Namely K-U-N-S-T (German for Art). As opposed to D-E-S-I-G-N... Closely related to both is D-U-N-S-T (play on words, Dunst meaning 'fog' or 'haze'--tr.). Art with a smattering of design, or D-E-S-T... To begin as a designer and stop as an artist...or reversed...K-U-S-I-G-N ...

F: What does the continuing enthusiasm for design mean, generally?

A: Enthusiasm in itself is a lovely thing...especially in youth who are always seeking to vent; in doing so, it is only natural that lines are crossed in the process. But the fun really begins when the frivolity ends. As an adult you can observe this for a period of time but then one ought to wholeheartedly drop the hammer on the good times and make it clear to young people that there are other things in life as well. Exactly what that is, they have to find out for themselves.

F: Can design help solve pressing problems in this world? If so, how? If

not, why not?

A: Yes, of course. Design helps where it can. Throughout the whole world, Everywhere in distant Africa. Or at the South Pole. Doesn't matter, it's always there when you need it. Just last week I had another experience with design. I'm running around a bit, my shoelace gets loose and while I'm trying to tie it again, it breaks. In complete desperation I sigh a heartfelt groan: Design, help! And what can I say? When I stand up again I see a shoe store less than a hundred meters away. Up and away straight to the shoe shelves, size 42-44, and what do I see before me? So-called leisure shoes with velcro fasteners. Tried them on immediately, of course,..size 43...and paid. Now, when I go for a walk in my new leisure shoes with velcro fasteners I no longer worry about breaking a shoestring. Thanks to design....