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Good As We Know It: Goodness in Design Discourse Since 1870

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Good As We Know It: Goodness in Design Discourse Since 1870

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy at Virginia Commonwealth University.

by

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perhaps now I believe you.

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Table of Contents

Abstract

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This dissertation examines the ways in which design and design practitioners have defined value in the design discourse through the vocabulary and concept of goodness since 1870. These definitions of value have been central to design discourse both past and present and deal with the impact and purpose of design work as well as its role in the creation of the approaching future. Since before the coalescence of graphic design as a separate field of design, these questions have been tied to the form, function or social impact of the objects created by designers. Despite the prevalence of this line of inquiry in the discourse, current usage tends toward uncritical and uninformed usage because of a separation of the terminology from the historical context in which this conversation

developed. The purpose of this investigation, then, is not to segment terms into "right" or "proper" definitions, but to apply a critical historical lens to the vocabulary of goodness as it has been used in the larger design discourse since 1870 in order to better understand the state of current discussions of value and to inform paths of future inquiry.

In order to do so, this investigation developed a framework by which to understand the ways in which goodness has been contextualized over the last 150 years. This historical context does not limit us to a historicist approach to design, and it not presented as an essentialist or teleological marker of things to come. Instead, knowledge of the historical context and various uses of a term makes us better educated practitioners of design who are more capable of combating the individualistic fallacy of the enlightened genius. Through a fuller knowledge of the critical historical context in which our field's vocabulary developed, we can better understand notions of creativity that position designers as expert guides through networks of information and meaning.

Introduction

Prior to any discussion within the broad scope of design, certain parameters must be established. In the case of this investigation, the foundational term of design must be properly understood within the context in which it will be used. "To understand the meaning of design is to sense the common thread that weaves its way through the arts of painting, architecture and industrial and graphic design," Paul Rand wrote in his 1993 book *Design, Form and Chaos.*[1] "It is also to understand…that design is also commentary, opinion, a point of view, and social responsibility."[2]

Design, as a general term, has been around for far longer than its current usage would suggest. As early as the 1500s, scholars used the term to describe the way in which ideas are given visual form. Architect and painter Giorgio Vasari remarked in 1568 that design was "nothing but a visual expression of the concept which one has in the intellect."[3]

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[1] Paul Rand, *Design, Form and Chaos,* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), 3.

[2] Rand, *Design, Form and Chaos,* 3.

Likewise, 60 years later, English author Sir Henry Wotton commented that Vitruvius' use of *despositio* (proper usage) was nothing "more than a neate and full expression of the first *Idea* or *Designment* thereof."[4] Rand expanded these ideas of design as initial concept to include more than mere ordering or ideation. In Rand's view, design provided a service to society that afforded a descriptor of social importance. "To design is much more than simply to assemble, to order or even to edit; it is to add value and meaning," he wrote. "Design is the product of feeling and awareness of ideas that originate in the designer and culminate, one hopes, in the mind of the spectator."[5] It is not the differences in these definitions of design, but their similarities that provide the richest context for this investigation. Whether visual expression, proper usage, or social value, design is understood as noun and verb: an object that has been made and the action undertaken to make such an object.

The same vagueness of definition is shared by the addition of the appellation of graphic to design. This modifier narrows the focus of design somewhat, but in a time where more and more design is digital or process-based practice, the term does not provide the same context as it once did in the early twentieth century. When graphic design was first used in 1922 by W.A. Dwiggins to describe the coalescence of several vocational pursuits, it was merely describing an activity that had been taking place and developing for hundreds

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[3] Giorgio Vasari, *Le vite de piu eccelenti pittori, scultori ed architetti* (1550; 1568), ed. G. Milanesi, 9 vols, Florence, 1878 quoted in Adrian Forty, *Words and Buildings: A Vocabulary of Modern Architecture*, (New York: Thames & Hudson, 2000), 136.

[4] Sir Henry Wotton, *The Elements of Architecture,* (London, 1624), 118 quoted in Adrian Forty, *Words and Buildings: A Vocabulary of Modern Architecture* (New York: Thames & Hudson, 2000), 136.

[5] Rand, 3.

of years; it was the graphic representation of ideas. Today, these representations may take may forms, some not falling within a standard definition of graphic.

This "complex matrix of different sign systems and media" as Paul Jobling and David Crowley describe it, existed long before the work or the field were ever associated with the term.[6] Graphic design emerged from printing and other industrial arts and shared foundations with fields such as architecture and industrial design, but the discourse of graphic design had already existed prior to its coalescence as a profession. In this way, graphic design, architecture, industrial design and other subsets of the larger field of design have foundations in a shared discourse. While these fields have separated from one another within the modern structure of the university and contemporary industry, their historical similarities allow an interdisciplinary approach to their historical investigation.

The purpose of this investigation, then, is not to segment terms into "right" or "proper" definitions, but to apply a critical historical lens to the vocabulary of goodness as it has been used in the larger design discourse since 1870 in order to better understand the state of current discussions of value and to inform paths of future inquiry. The interdisciplinary nature of the history of graphic design requires the broad discussion of design as it has developed through various fields such as architecture, commercial art, graphic design and industrial design. For this reason, while the two terms are not to be understood as synonymous, both graphic design and design carry the same connotation for this project. Design can be understood as the overarching field, with graphic design being a direct application within the larger context of design. This direct application still relies

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[6] Paul Jobling and David Crowley, *Graphic Design: Reproduction and Representation Since 1800* (New York: Manchester University Press, 1996), 2.

heavily on the general design discourse for much of its philosophical and theoretical foundation. The application of this discourse could be narrowly applied to graphic design, but due to the disparate branches of design discussed in this investigation, it is of more value to defer to the general term of design when undertaking this particular history of terminology. What has been lost in the discourse of graphic design is its connection to the established and rich historical discourse of design. The disciplinary separation that occurred in the modern university helped build independence for graphic design as a field of study, but a loss of connection to shared foundations can also be seen in this separation.

The concepts of design and the professional designer expanded substantially in Europe and the United States during the last three decades of the nineteenth century. Prior to the Industrial Revolution, compositing, printing, type setting and image engraving were not performed by specialized professionals, but were, rather, aspects of the printing trade. Following considerable changes in the means of production, paper and press technology, and advances in photography and image reproduction, design began to form as a specialization within the printing industry. By 1900, a group was emerging that was no longer in charge of the production of materials but for the design of typography, illustration, publications and advertisements. As Ellen Mazur Thomson states in her book *The Origins of Graphic Design in America 1870-1920,* "when people in these fields began to think self-consciously about designing for mass audiences and faced new design problems, they began to identify themselves with a new profession."[7]

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[7] Ellen Mazur Thomson, *The Origins of Graphic Design in America 1870-1920* (New Haven: Yale, 1997), 2.

Despite this categorization as a separate discipline, graphic design was still understood as a small section of the larger design field. In 1834, William Dunlap wrote what has been classified as the first American art history text, *A History of the Rise and Progress of the Arts of Design in the United States.*[8] In it Dunlap refers to design as a broad planning or conceiving and defined it as "the plan of the whole…the art of representing form."[9] Design was primarily understood as a varied field responsible for giving form to ideas or concepts formed in the mind, and could easily mean any work in fields such as sculpture, painting, engraving and architecture. It was during this period that our understanding of the terminology that defined design as a discipline began to exist as demarcations that could be used "loosely and interchangeably."[10] Concurrently, the printing industry, from which design originally emerged, began to specialize, and by 1922 the field was conscious enough of being a profession that a new name was needed for the emerging discipline that combined visual art with mass communication.

As this specialization and professionalization advanced, designers began asking the same questions that had already been posed in other disciplines like painting, sculpture and architecture. What is the value of my work? How does work affect individuals and society? How do I measure the effectiveness of my work? As the work became less about production and more about ideation and implementation, the field began questioning its qualitative role in society.

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[8] Thomson, 3.

[9] William Dunlap, *A History of the Rise and Progress of the Arts of Design in the United States* (New York: G.P. Scott, 1834, 2 vols.; Boston: C.E. Goodspeed, 1919, 3 vols.), 1:1-3.

[10] Thomson, 3.

As design has further developed and expanded over the last nearly 100 years, specialization has continued and new branches of the discipline have grown out from what was, at one point, a very narrow field. Additionally, as means of production and technology have advanced, new branches have emerged within the field that require looking at the history of design with new eyes and returning to the discourse to help contextualize these developments. One such development is the area of social design.

Social design is a branch of design that focuses on creating products, good and services that use "creativity, experience, and knowledge to transform the means by which millions of people live…[by] looking around the world, identifying true problems and needs, and working with the users to design solutions to meet them."[11] This is not accomplished through a single medium, but instead, can operate within graphic, industrial, interior, architectural, process or countless other branches of design.

The agenda of social design was first outlined by Victor Papanek in the early 1970s. His book *Design for the Real World* is a seminal text in this branch of design and centers on processes that contribute to improving human well-being. Social design stresses the responsibility of designers to carefully consider the effects of their work. It is this responsibility as well as a faith in a designer's ability to practice good actions that forms the foundation for social design's belief that designers have the power to change the world through the objects, systems and solutions they create.

On March 20, 2012, the foreword to Andrew Shea's book *Designing for Social Change: Strategies for Community-Based Graphic Design* was posted on *Design Observer*, one

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[11] Barbara Bloemink, "Forward" in *Design for the Other 90%* (New York, Cooper-Hewitt National Design Museum, Smithsonian Institution, 2007), 8.

of the design community's foremost online forums for discussion of current issues. Right at the beginning, Shea admits the difficulty in understanding what social design means and how it can be put into practice:

> [Social design] is a larger activity that depends upon design in all its forms — thought, processes, tools, methodologies, skills, histories, systems—to contribute to the needs of a larger society. It implies at once an attitude and an approach to life: as such, it can help us frame how we want to live in the future. It is therefore inherently pragmatic and results-oriented, simultaneously humble and ambitious, and fundamentally optimistic and forward-looking.
>
> So where do we start?[12]

Shea's definition of social design is wide-ranging, vague, and describes a method of design practice focused on the value of design and its possible impacts on society and culture. The practice of judging design by its "goodness" is central to the current discourse surrounding social design, but this standard is nothing new to design discourse.

The discourse of goodness predates graphic design as a part of the larger, already established discourse of design. This broader discourse was already in existence when graphic design developed in the early twentieth century as a separate discipline, after discussions of aesthetic goodness and social value in design had begun. As early as his 1882 book *Hopes and Fears for Art,* William Morris strongly equated good work with social

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[12] Andrew Shea, *Designing for Social Change: Strategies for Community-Based Graphic Design* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2012), 7.

good. “But now only let the [decorative arts] beautify our labor, and be widely spread, intelligent, well understood both by the maker and the user,” he wrote. “Let them grow in one word *popular*, and there will be pretty much an end of dull work and its wearing slavery; and no man will any longer have an excuse for talking about the curse of labor, no man will any longer have an excuse for evading the blessing of labor.”[13] Morris believed that not only would the good work of artists elevate the objects they created, but it could save the world as well.

Other practitioners and polemicists, including Walter Gropius and Victor Papanek, have repeatedly revisited this topic in the same vein, provoking some of the largest shifts in focus within design discourse. While early usage of goodness in design, as seen in Morris’ words, referred to form and beauty, the current understanding of this term—seen in the foundational writings of Papanek and the on going conversation regarding social design—focuses on function and process.

Despite the seemingly drastic difference in definition, the concepts of form and function are interconnected and each is helpful in understanding the changing idea of goodness in design. I seek to show the philosophical and historical foundations of the concept of goodness within graphic design in order to promote a more consistent conversation and provide a more concrete foundation for the current discussion of social responsibility.

Shea may still be asking “where do we begin?” but others in the field of social design have already provided a good starting point. In 1971, Papanek drew a very clear line in the

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[13] William Morris, *Hopes and Fears for Art* (London: Roberts Brothers, 1882), 5-6.

sand. "There are professions more harmful than industrial design, but only a very few of them,"[14] he wrote in the preface to the first edition of *Design for the Real World.* "And possibly only one profession is phonier. Advertising design, in persuading people to buy things they don't need, with money they don't have, in order to impress others who don't care, is probably the phoniest field in existence today."[15] This polemical stance against the excesses of design and the irresponsibility of the individuals who practice it is the beginning Shea seeks. Papanek clearly established social design as a new subset of design, marked by considerations of intent, purpose and ethics in the design process.

Central to Papanek's understanding of design was its responsibility to society. Papanek argued that the smallest changes in design can have far-reaching effects, and that, for designers, there is much responsibility that must be assumed and appreciated as part of the design process. This responsibility was not only to the design and use of an object, but also to the environment, the economy, the materials, and countless other areas. This "integrated design" should be comprehensive in its thinking, and "any attempt to separate design, to make it a thing-by-itself, works counter to the inherent value of design as the primary, underlying matrix of life."[16]

Beyond Papanek, the conversation of social design has been active for some time, providing even more direction to Shea's question. One of the founding editors of the journal *Design Issues*, Victor Margolin, continues to write extensively on sustainable design and

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[14] Victor Papanek, *Design for the Real World: Human Ecology and Social Change* (Toronto: Bantam Books, 1973), ix.

[15] Papanek, *Design for the Real World*, ix.

[16] Papanek, *Design for the Real World*, 321.

utopian designers like Lissitzky and Moholy-Nagy. The journal has given considerable space to articles dealing with social design interests such as co-design and community design participation.

More recently, organizations such as Designers without Borders, IDEO, Project M, Storefront for Community Design, Alter and the Yale Building Project have focused on solving community problems through design. By focusing on solutions that may be manifest in ways beyond traditional two-dimensional design, these groups have established social design as a main branch of design, with goodness as its central tenet. This idealism is illustrated by David B. Berman in his book *Do Good Design:* "I am going to share with you how we can use design to help repair (or destroy) our civilization. … Imagine: what if we didn't just do good design…we did good?"[17]

With social design and service design now so prominent in the design community, conceptions of positive value are taken for granted and the terms "good" and "goodness" are bandied about with little discussion of their meaning. Instead, both the conception of value and the terms "good" and "goodness" appear across myriad situations, with idiosyncratic and often unstated definitions devoid of any discipline-specific meaning. Our role as communicators, however, requires us to make sure we use them conscientiously. If designers desire to do "good" work and create a "good society," it is important they more fully understand what these concepts mean and how they have changed over time.

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[17]David B. Berman, *Do Good Design: How Design Can Change Our World* (Berkeley, CA: New Riders, 2009), 3. Second ellipsis in original.

Uncritical, simplistic and misunderstood views of postmodernism have resulted in watered-down, highly individualistic thinking within design discourse.[18] In climates like this, concepts like goodness have become overlooked vestiges of a forgotten past. A past that found referents in the world around us and that positioned connection and interaction with the material world as the basis of exploration because they are the two experiences all humankind shares, regardless of cultural, economic or social position. While individual pursuits, preferences and work are a common thread throughout the histories of art and design, the individual as the sole object of focus is a relatively new idea within design discourse. Educational structures that prioritize individual knowledge stemming solely from personal experience attempt to meet a desire for new definitions that can be created through new theories that promise freedom, transcendence or social salvation; yet this way of thinking often turns a blind eye to the fact that ideas develop over time. Ideas are not better understood by their detachment from the weight of history just as wiping a chalkboard clean does not nullify the words that were erased. The design of objects—whether industrial, architectural, commercial or graphic—necessarily requires a connection and tether to the structures, people and systems active within a society and culture. For this reason, the history of goodness in design is not about defining an arbitrary Zeitgeist or recording points of idealist thought; instead, it frames an understanding of the values inherent in a society as shown through the way in which material culture was created. The objects designers create may carry social connotations and weight, but they will never carry more weight than the ideas that allowed the objects to be created in the

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[18] For a critical survey of design and postmodernism, see Rick Poynor *No More Rules: Graphic Design and Postmodernism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 8-37.

first place. In the same way, the network of meaning that develops through a critical understanding of goodness will always carry a greater historical weight than that of an exclusive, individual definition.

Building on this basis in inclusion and culture, my research explores the concept of goodness as employed within the discourse of design through an examination of four key areas. The first two areas, the philosophical concept of value and the historical concept of goodness in design discourse, frame the research within specific terms and language as employed by early designers and design writers. They create a foundation upon which the rest of the project can be based. The next two, the specific usage of goodness in American Modernism and the functional concept of goodness as understood as social responsibility, help frame a more practical and less theoretical definition of goodness.

While graphic design history has largely been written by a "few historians from within its own ranks," the aim of this research project is to bring together multiple discourses in order to, as Rick Poynor has urged, "[open] up the often insular and inward-looking discipline of graphic design to broader cultural scrutiny."[19]

Philip Meggs' *History of Graphic Design* and Richard Hollis' *Graphic Design: A Concise History* are the two canonical histories of graphic design. These two histories are solid introductions to the field, but were both written by individuals who very closely aligned and identified with the field of graphic design. While this allows them to easily enter the conversation with other designers, it has the drawback that, at times, some areas are too quickly summarized because of Meggs' and Hollis' knowledge of the internal, implicit

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[19] Michael Bierut, *Looking Closer 3: Classic Writings on Graphic Design* (New York: Allworth Press, 1999), xvi.

vocabulary and conversation within the specialized field of graphic design. In addition, the historical timelines applied to the field by both man vary greatly. Meggs begins his investigation with Art Nouveau, while Hollis extends the discipline's reach into prehistory. As Jobling and Crowley note, this exceptional difference in periodization demonstrates"huge latitude not just in what can be legitimately categorized as graphic design but also how far back in time the subject can be traced."[20]

Johanna Drucker and Emily McVarish's *Graphic Design History: A Critical Guide* is gaining ground as an acceptable third history of the discipline. Where Meggs and Hollis tend toward recitation of historical data, Drucker and McVarish are more concerned with history as an interaction and development of changing ideas. As its subtitle suggests, this text is a critical guide that also incorporates information from other fields to present a more complete view of design within its cultural context. In the authors' own words "the critical approach to graphic design is not a series of descriptions of artifacts but a set of theoretical frameworks for seeing the forces and conditions within which those objects came into being."[21] While Meggs and Hollis focus on these artifacts as central to their exploration of history, Drucker and McVarish outline their primary concern as the "basic principles for thinking about the way historical origins inform contemporary practice."[22] While an interesting perspective on design, the critical history often prioritizes the authors' current view of the world, resulting in simplified connections and deterministic leanings.

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[20] Jobling and Crowley, 3.

[21] Johanna Drucker and Emily McVarish, *Graphic Design: A Critical Guide* (Boston: Pearson, 2013), xxii.

[22] Drucker and McVarish, xxii.

While each of these primarily chronological histories offers a specific perspective on the foundations and paths of graphic design, none of them pays specific attention to the disparate references to goodness and value scattered throughout graphic design discourse and their unacknowledged connection to the larger design discourse. Likewise, there has been no focused study of how these concepts have been defined by or function within that discourse, or their historical roots or foundations. As Poynor has observed, even though other views of the discipline have emerged, "they have not featured strongly in standard narratives of graphic design."[23] The histories we use today wonderfully recount the past, but offer little context for understanding the presence of that past in our present understanding of goodness in design.

These standard narratives, as most fields have discovered within their own discourses, are largely Western, largely white and steeped in privilege. The nonchalant way terms like goodness are bandied about by designers and design writers shows a lack of understanding of their philosophical foundation and of the deep need for goodness in the face of the negative affects of globalism, hyper-capitalism, natural disasters, widespread disease and malnutrition. And that is only a short list of areas where social designers wish to affect change through their work.

In affluent cultures, goodness is largely unnecessary and beyond the scope of most experience. For those in the world that have enough food, clothing and shelter, the daily life of those that do not have these necessities is a completely foreign idea. However, for the majority of the world, the need for goodness in design is a large part of their experience. Identifying and solving social issues within the world has the power to affect billions of

[23] Bierut, xvi.

lives for the better. Goodness is inherent in the "life, liberty and pursuit of happiness" that has defined the American, and increasingly the world, commodity-driven commercial culture, a point that cannot be lightly made. A point that is, often, understood more directly by those outside of its reach.

It is important that the ignorance experienced by the most affluent countries on earth through the blessing of excess is not ignored as we help train the next generation of designers. As an educator, I would not allow my students to use potentially dangerous tools within the studio without ensuring their proper handling. Similarly, educators must not be too quick to dismiss the power of misunderstood or wrongly applied ideas and historical concepts. A tool used improperly can hurt, and an idea or concept in the hands of the ill-equipped can be extremely harmful.

While many influential designers and design thinkers use "good" and "goodness," and implicit assertions of value, uncritically to bolster the role of designers or design in society, no one has yet ventured to help the design community understand what is meant by saying design and design thinking are good and have the potential to help in forming answers to many of society's issues and problems.

Rationale

The questions that animate this discussion are both broadly academic and deeply personal. The academic questions center on placing the currently imprecise conceptions of goodness and value within a more comprehensive framework of meaning. This entails not merely asking what the design community now means by good design, but also tracing that term back to what it has meant in the past. By approaching the topic in this way, I hope to

avoid flagrant wanderings into determinism, teleology and purple prose. So, while language is, by nature, flexible and fluid, this does not negate the meanings and connotations terms carry as they pass through generations of debate. The way good and goodness are used today is often different from how these terms have been used and understood in the past, but current usage cannot be assumed to be independent of this history.

In his 1985 work *Producing Signs,* Umberto Eco paraphrased semiotician Charles Sanders Peirce, explaining the basic function of language as representation of objects and ideas. In this philosophy of language, meaning refers to a "relation or referring back, where…something stands to somebody for something else in some respect or capacity."[24] While this may sound simple, semiotics suggests it is instead quite complex. Communication rests on clear meaning, and meaning is not arbitrarily assigned without regard to context and usage. For language to function properly, there must be an understanding of what these words—or signs—mean. And even though these signs have the ability to mean different things to different people, they mean nothing if there is no broadly shared cultural understanding. For this reason, a vague definition of goodness in graphic design not only makes for a difficult conversation, it undercuts the credibility of social design as a viable branch of the larger discipline.

Far from being merely semantic, this question of meaning and understanding must be asked because the design community is at a critical juncture. As what designers do moves further away from production and into realms of planning and social design, it is

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[24] Umberto Eco "Producing Signs" in *On Signs* ed. Marshall Blonsky (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1985) 176.

increasingly important that there be a firm understanding of the role designers play in society and culture.

The personal question for individual designers regards the need to know that what they are doing in their practice is good. This constant questioning arises from aesthetic concerns and the desire to create pleasing work that people will like. On a deeper level, however, there is a desire to know that the things we create are helpful and do no harm. In a world that is quickly being filled with plastic bottles and throwaway products, it is important for designers to know that their work is of lasting value. We need to know that what we do is of some good to the world in which we live.

Methodology and Challenges

This investigation combines methods from philosophy, design history and art history. From the writings of selected philosophers, it constructs a conceptual framework for understanding the changing nature of language and meaning as employed in design discourse. It employs existing scholarship in design history and art history to trace usage of the concepts in the early phases of the field. Investigation of little-studied archival and other primary sources brings the narrative into the mid-twentieth century.

Much scholarship in graphic design history focuses on individual practitioners and their work. Designer-authored histories appeared early in the field with designers such as László Moholy-Nagy and Josef Müller-Brockmann authoring books about their own work which influenced the history of the discipline. This trend was reinvigorated in the mid-1990s as "designers became the originators of the message and in turn adopted their own

authorial voice and 'signature style.'"[25] This study will give precedence to the history of the discipline over designer-authored histories, not in an attempt to limit the role of the designer, but to more fully develop a narrative history of design through a clearer understanding of the concepts of goodness and value in graphic design discourse. The designers included in this project are used as a way to follow the changing usage of ideas through known work. For each individual, several sources were used to gain a more comprehensive view of the designer and their contributions to the discussion. These sources, placed alongside the designers' own words allow for a more complete and, hopefully, less biased engagement with history. Any self-authored "histories" of the field were removed from consideration as main sources. These texts, as noted by Ellen Lupton and J. Abbot Miller, have often been fashioned into a "romantic theory of self-expression"[26] that aims for the aggrandizement of the author above any other consideration. And while designer-authored histories are not central to this discussion, they do play a part and in no way should their removal as main sources be understood as a critique of their place within the development of design discourse. Their unique place within the field, according to Steven McCarthy, should be seen as "a transitional stage in graphic design history's development, with more academic specialization and scrutiny to come."[27]

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[25] Teal Triggs, "Designing Graphic Design History," *Journal of Design History* 22, no. 4 (December 2009): 325.

[26] Ellen Lupton and Miller, J. Abbott, "Deconstruction and Graphic Design: History Meets Theory," *Visible Language* 28, no. 4, (Autumn 1994): 352.

[27] McCarthy, Steven, "Designer-Authored Histories: Graphic Design at the Goldstein Museum of Design," *Design Issues,* no. 1 (2011): 7-20.

Despite an abundance of design history writing and texts focused on good design, this project presents two large challenges. The first of these is the inconsistent usage of terminology across disciplinary lines within the larger field of art. Terms such as form and formalism, function and functionalism, as well as aesthetics carry common usage in design that, often, can be quite different from the art historical usage of the same terms. For this reason, these three terms in particular must be defined at the beginning to avoid any confusion.

In the scope of this discussion, form refers to the shape of an object. This definition of form draws from Walter Gropius' in his 1923 article "The Theory and Organization of the Bauhaus." This idea suggests that the shape of an object is not directly tied to any idealized form or conception of historical precedent; instead, "the objective of all creative effort in the visual arts is to give form to space."[28] Gropius did not believe that form could be taught, per se, but students could be lead to uncover principles of form. This idea that each student "is given the mental equipment with which to shape his own ideas of form."[29] This definition of form emerges from the discourse in the early twentieth century as defense against historicist ideas of form and concepts of "right" form that were popular prior to the rise of modernism in Europe, but were also being adopted by dictatorial regimes following the turn of the century. This definition of form can be easily seen in discussions ranging from ideal versus historical form at the Bauhaus to writings on a designer's responsibility to ecology and universality in social design.

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[28] Walter Gropius, "The Theory and Organization of the Bauhaus," in *Bauhaus, 1919-1928*, ed. Herbert Bayer, Walter Gropius and Ise Gropius (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1936), 22.

[29] Gropius, "The Theory and Organization of the Bauhaus," 22.

Function is often paired with form as a binary within the context of modern design. Despite this pairing, the definition of function is highly contested due to its various definitions. With connotations in mathematics, biology and sociology, function has been historically understood as the forces that acted upon an object, such as tectonic forces in architecture. But since the beginning of the twentieth century, this term has been used more metaphorically to redefine function as how forms "themselves were described as acting upon people, or social material. …and its converse, the action of society in determining the forms of buildings."[30]

Function, for the sake of our discussion, refers to the quality of usefulness being primary in design considerations. The functional aspects of an object—legibility, ergonomics, price, communication, etc.—always supersede the stylistic or formal choices a designer may make during ideation and production. Designers such as Paul Rand prized function above all else. In Rand's particular view, design could not be successful if it did not serve a particular function: clear communication. Even the most beautiful design held no value if it did not serve its intended function.

Of these three terms, aesthetics may be the most problematic. Within art history and philosophy, aesthetics carries particular meaning and historical baggage. While the common usage of aesthetics in design refers to the appearance and visual qualities of an object, this is far different from its usage in other disciplines. Aesthetics is a branch of philosophy that is concerned with the nature of beauty and taste and carries the weight of

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[30] "Function" in Adrian Forty *Words and Buildings A Vocabulary of Modern Architecture* (New York: Thames and Hudson, 2000), 174. Function is a historically loaded term. While the definition used for this investigation is simplified, a thorough reading of this entire section of Forty's work is beneficial to any designer.

two well-established conversations. One being centered around subjective responses to art that are not influenced by facts about art theory, art practice or art history. These responses are autonomous, immediate and sensory and are informed by sustained contemplation of an object. This conversation is subjective, holding beauty itself as the object of study: Art for Art's sake.

The second conversation claims a more rational tone. This "objective" view of aesthetics rests on right form that extends from right process, content and style. As James Elkins states, this view claims "theory and practice are logically implicated in aesthetic judgment because they are logically implicated in the artwork itself."[31] It is this understanding of aesthetics where discussions of "true" and "false," "better" and "worse" find a foothold. A work of art will have beauty if it conforms to "right" or "true" forms or styles.

While these definitions of aesthetics focus on the understanding of whether an art or design object is "independent of their theoretical properties or necessarily constrained by them,"[32] this investigation defines aesthetics as the appearance and visual qualities of an object.

The definitions of these terms, as well as others within the discussion, lean toward common usage within the larger discourse of design. While academic usage may vary, the common usage of these terms is more true to the ongoing conversations within the

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[31] James Elkins, *Art History Versus Aesthetics* (Abingdon, United Kingdom: Routledge, 2005), 3.

[32] Elkins, 4.

discipline and among the individual practitioners whose work shapes the field of social design moving forward.

The second challenge of this project is in finding a framework for a body of material that has, nearly without exception, been discussed or related in noncritical ways. The literature on goodness within the discourse is fragmented, detached from a larger conversation, and is largely focused on a single aspect i.e. goodness as aesthetic, goodness as social responsibility. This fragmentation provides historical data, but does little to situate this data within a broader cultural perspective. The one-sided focus impedes the fuller development of goodness as a shared idea across design discourse, creating disparate conversations that may or may not be seen as directly related. In short, this has not been done before and the first steps are always the most difficult.

The sources used in this project are varied in scope, quality, and, some may argue, validity. Some of the few attempts at systematically collating materials on goodness into a cohesive discussion are myopic or so geographically specific that they lose sight of the broadly shared culture significance this discussion seeks to define. My evaluation of sources can be illustrated with two questions: 1) Does this source provide me with a required part of the larger discussion that cannot be found elsewhere? and 2) Does this source give me insight into the discussion of goodness and design *as it was taking place* during important periods in the idea's development? It is not enough, for this discussion, to simply find the individuals who are seen as experts and recite their work, and it is even more important for me to show a timeline of sorts for how the concept of goodness has morphed, changed and expanded over the last 150 years.

Structure

This discussion is divided into four chapters and a conclusion. Each of the chapters will explore a particular time period within the overall discussion of goodness within twentieth-century design: goodness as a philosophical concept, goodness as a historical concept, goodness as commerce, and goodness as social responsibility. The conclusion will offer insights and direction based on the chapters as well as possible actions that should be taken in order to ensure that the conversation of goodness in design remains grounded in history and clear language.

It is important to reiterate that this discussion is guided by ideas as they were emerging in order to show the development of an idea and field within the framework of history. Therefore, as a first step in the uncovering, recontextualizing and refitting of the history of goodness in design, this discussion is not to be seen as a complete history of the term or its uses in design discourse. The aim of this project is to provide an initial framework that outlines an area of investigation and study on which to build. While many of the individuals included in this project may not fit within the current definition of social design, their work, ideas or attitudes about design have contributed to the identity of the field as it has emerged. The chapters that follow are an initial cartography of a previously unchartered territory in design.

Chapter One: Goodness as a Philosophical Concept

This chapter focuses on the philosophical foundations of goodness through the concept of value. Throughout history, philosophy has focused its questioning on the world around us and our place within it. The discussion of value within philosophy has a rich past

to draw from. By defining goodness as a part of the larger philosophical discussion of value, this chapter connects design discourse to an established set of definitions. In this way, the chapter accomplishes two goals: it serves as an introduction to terms that will ground the entire discussion, and it provides a philosophical framework upon which to build subsequent chapters.

Philosophers have wrestled with questions of goodness for hundreds of years. At times, they have agreed about the meaning or definition of goodness but the majority of the historical investigation deals with what goodness refers to and how the resulting claims can be made. If there is one constant in this conversation, it is that there is a great uncertainty about where truth originates and or how we claim to place our work under such a statement.

Plato is known for his concept that the world is but a poor reflection of the reality toward which we all struggle. Despite this imperfection around us, we still sense the abstract forms or ideals of true reality. As the highest of these forms, Goodness can only be understood through deep and thorough knowledge of the world. Goodness was central to his concept of knowledge and the way in which the world operated. This level of importance bolsters the rationale for this study.

In his *Principia Ethica,* G.E. Moore discusses how good is not a term that can be defined, but simply something that can only be shown and grasped. Furthermore, he argued that any attempt at defining good will merely shift the question of definition elsewhere. He believed the discussion of goodness was central and was foundational to an

understanding of ethics. “This, then, is our first question:,” he wrote. “What is good? And What is bad?”[33]

Ludwig Wittgenstein expands the debate by allowing the terms good and goodness to change and evolve over time through particular use and employment. Wittgenstein asserted that meaning comes through usage. “For a *large* class of cases, though not for all, in which we employ the word ‘meaning,’” he stated, ”it can be defined thus: the meaning of a word is its use in the language.”[34] When defining language, Wittgenstein argued for looking for the many uses of a word in order to understand its meaning.

These philosophers, as well as Aristotle and W.D. Ross, discuss value in their writing and are used as starting points to explore this concept further. While this group of philosophers never spoke directly to the work of a designer, they are helpful in establishing a framework for the term goodness. While this term takes on specific connotations in the field of social design, those connotations did not emerge in isolation or as unconnected to this larger, ongoing discussion in philosophy. The differing use in design still benefits from an understanding of the concept as it was being used by philosophers directly preceding the writings of William Morris.

Chapter Two: Goodness as a Historical Concept

This chapter offers a general overview of goodness in art and design history between 1870 and 1935. This chapter employs a three-part framework to provide areas of correspondence between four responses to modernity. The Crystal Palace, William Morris,

[33] G.E. Moore, *Principia Ethica* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1903), 2.

[34]Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1953), 43.

Frank Lloyd Wright and the Bauhaus will each be examined through the attitudes apparent regarding individual creation and creators, on technology as central to modernity, and their illustration of the dialogue between form and function. The Crystal Palace, as a particular response to modernity, begins this chapter. Discussion around this controversial structure provides the foundation for terminology within this chapter as well as an illustration of how to understand the network of meaning attached to "modern." As one of the most recognizable institutions in modernism and as a revolutionary departure from traditional art practice, the Bauhaus provides ample examples of the foundational structure of concepts of goodness in twentieth century design and ends the selected timeline for chapter two. Additionally, the dissolution of the Bauhaus and the emigration of large parts of its faculty to the United States provides a direct bridge between European and American modernism. These designers and architects were prominent in the growth of American modernism and the dispersion of its ideas and forms.

With the philosophical foundations of goodness already established in chapter one, this chapter provides an historical overview of how goodness was employed as a concept within early design discourse and in the "service of revolutionary politics and the transformation of society."[35] This chapter shows how the historical development of design coincides with the further development of concepts of goodness and value.

In 1893, William Morris described the design of the ideal book as that which "can still be a work of art, if the type be good and attention be paid to its general

[35] Bierut, xvi.

arrangement."[36] In this statement, made nearly 30 years before W.A. Dwiggins would label the profession as graphic design, connections were being made between design and goodness. Later and more explicitly, the philosophy behind the Bauhaus held goodness as a central value in the creation of graphic, architectural, and industrial design. Alfred Barr of MoMA in conjunction with Herbert Bayer and Walter Gropius of the Bauhaus released a definitive history of the school in 1938. Additionally, Nikolaus Pevsner's *Pioneers of Modern Design: From William Morris to Walter Gropius* provides detailed historical insights from within period. The Bauhaus is often seen as a near-mythic institution in part due to this book. *Pioneers* places Bauhaus founding director Walter Gropius at the zenith of a teleological evolution of modern design that began with William Morris and resulted in the creation of a universally accepted form of design, the ideal endpoint of design progress. While issues with Pevsner's scholarship have been raised, the author's relationship with MoMA administrators as well as Edgar Kaufmann, Jr., place the work within a particularly useful position for this project. Finally, Ellen Lupton and J. Abbott Miller's *The ABC's of Triangle, Square, Circle: The Bauhaus and Design Theory* provides insight into the Bauhaus belief that the ideologies of designers can be propagated through form, and a discussion of the attempt at developing a universal visual language.

Chapter Three: Goodness as Economy

This chapter is an in-depth study of Good Design as a key aspect of modernism in early to mid-twentieth century in the United States. The goal is to understand the particular

[36] Bierut, 3.

brand of modernism championed by Edgar Kaufmann, Jr., and the Museum of Modern Art in Manhattan among others such as Alfred Barr, Philip Johnson, and Eliot Noyes, all of whom drew heavily from the ideas and work of the Bauhaus and its masters.

The movement originated during the early introduction of modernism into American art culture in the late 1930s following a large influx of continental designers in response to growing fascism in Europe. As an aspect of the larger modernist movement, Good Design emphasized formalism, and thus downplayed or even cancelled out the earlier idealist philosophies that grounded modern design espoused by the Bauhaus. The form alone, according to MoMA Director Alfred Barr, was easier to sell than the ideas behind it.

The point of interest in this period is not merely as a continuation of the historical timeline of American design. The Good Design program departed from other movements within modernism to include commercial value as central to its definition of goodness. This inclusion marks a definite departure from the earlier, sometimes anti-capitalist ideals of modernism, redefining goodness as a measurable, commercial concept and not just an ideal. Where the Bauhaus understood the role of the designer within the framework of manufacturing, sales and consumption, the Good Design program prioritized the designer as a tool for commercial success.

The Good Design program has been closely aligned with the International Style in Europe, yet its focus on commercial viability created a large ideological gulf between the two. While this alignment has been convenient, it has left the Good Design program largely unstudied. While MoMA has published some scholarship on the movement in its *Studies in Modern Art*, little else has been written that deals specifically with this movement. Terence Riley and Edward Eigen's essay *Between the Museum and the Marketplace: Selling Good*

Design,[37] provides a careful review of the museum's Good Design exhibitions, but offers little insight into the ideas behind the program. Irene Sunwoo's article "Whose Design? MoMA and Pevsner's *Pioneers*" is one of the few scholarly articles on Kaufmann, Jr., and provides excellent context for the relationship between MoMA, Kaufmann, Jr., and the revisions made for the second edition of Nikolaus Pevsner's *Pioneers of Modern Design.*

A large amount of material held within the archives of the Museum of Modern Art in Manhattan was examined for the writing of this chapter. This material includes product requisition forms, individual correspondence with artists and craftsmen, and internal communications between members of Kaufmann, Jr.'s staff. Individually, these materials offer little more than concrete information on the particulars of the Good Design program, but, collectively, they create context and insight for the man behind the Good Design program as well as his efforts for its survival. This context shows a man who, while deeply passionate about the place of design in the structure and hierarchy of the museum, found an uncomfortable home at MoMA as a transplant from a successful family-run commercial enterprise. As the lessons he learned at his father's department store informed the direction he would lead the department of design, Kaufmann, Jr., increased the status and role of design in the American home, but moved the meaning of goodness away from its philosophical roots in the first three decades of the twentieth century into the new area of commercial and popular appeal.

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[37] Terence Riley and Edward Eigen, "Between the Museum and the Marketplace: Selling Good Design," in *Studies in Modern Art 4: The Museum of Modern Art at Mid-Century, At Home and Abroad, ed. John Elderfield,* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1994), 150-179.

Chapter Four: Goodness as Responsibility

This chapter provides a selective overview of the history of social design beginning with Eliot Noyes' work on a comprehensive design program for IBM and concluding with the polemics of Victor Papanek. This branch of design was most decidedly marked by considerations of intent, purpose, and ethics in the design process, but held other concepts in high regard as well. Papanek argued that the smallest changes in design can have far-reaching effects, and that, for designers, there is much more responsibility than historically assumed. This responsibility was not only to the design and use of an object but to the environment, the economy, the materials, and the community of individuals who designed, manufactured and used a given product.

This "integrated design"[38] should be comprehensive in its thinking, and "any attempt to separate design, to make it a thing-by-itself, works counter to the inherent value of design as the primary, underlying matrix of life."[39] This comprehensive process must be interdisciplinary in scope and aim. These "different disciplines" work together to "research our true needs and to reshape environments, tools, and the way in which we think about them."[40]

This chapter provides a point of departure for additional research and frames the disparate conversation of responsible design by way of its common history. Inclusive design, user-centered design, design thinking and design activism all emerge from the ideas

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[38] Papanek, *Design for the Real World*, 321.

[39] Papanek, *Design for the Real World*, 321.

[40] Papanek, *Design for the Real World*, 324.

of design's social role in connecting individuals through the material objects created by design.

Conclusion

Building on the preceding philosophical and historical analysis of "good" in design discourse and practice, the conclusion offers some thoughts on current directions for the future of good design as well as a critique of the usage of the term. Additionally, it points to potential areas of growth as well as ways in which the term or concept of goodness is extending into other fields of design.

The investigation of a term such as "goodness," as well as its usage in historical discourse, is a large undertaking, and this project should not be seen as a comprehensive study of the term and its implications, but rather as an historical grounding and a starting point for navigating an extremely complex topic. While many discussions in graphic design have been developed in various forums, this topic has been largely ignored. Works such as Adrian Forty's *Words and Buildings* provide precedent for developing a critical historical vocabulary of design as well as direction for the development of such a vocabulary for graphic design. This investigation into goodness is a single step in that direction and aims to create the initial framework necessary for the expansion of the larger conversation.

Goodness as a Philosophical Concept: Foundations and Fluidity

In the foreword to the book *Design Does Matter,* Sara L. Beckman poses a familiar question in design: "How do we know that design matters?" In a field of work where a job well done is not easily measured, this question sits squarely at the base of many design discussions. Designers have no diseases to cure, no records to break and no elections to win that would provide an easy metric of success. "Much of what we rely on to make the assertion that design matters is a collection of stories about companies…for whom design has made a difference," she continues. "In some cases, we have evidence of performance improvements associated with design. In other cases, we can only assert that good design underpins the company's success." [41] There is truth in these statements, but a closer look shows an uncertainty about where that truth originates or how we as designers can even make such claims.

While this concept of goodness has been an ongoing topic of discussion in philosophy for hundreds of years and designers have raised the question of goodness since

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[41] Sara L. Beckman, "Introduction," in *Design Does Matter,* ed. Beverly Russell and Georgy Olivieri (Mt. Laurel, New Jersey: Teknion, 2001), viii.

at least the late 1800s, these two conversations have never met. History has a great deal to teach us about the formation of this elusive concept. Likewise, it contains an abundance of information regarding design that elicits a general agreement on its value. Goodness, whether in direct usage or as a conceptual framework, pepper design discourse. As Beckman alludes, many fields have the confidence that accompanies metrics or measurements that provide a rationale for success or failure. With no such security, design has struggled with this concept, creating its own rubrics, definitions and standards. Regardless of this history, the field's current discourse and vocabulary still struggle with the uncertainty of this term. Whether stated or implied, goodness remains a qualifier of our work, even without a working historical and critical definition.

We aim at merit when we pose questions of good or bad, better or worse, and what is more or less desirable. These questions illuminate our values as well as what we hold to be of utmost importance to ourselves and the world in which we live. Our answers and the merit with which we imbue them create judgments concerning the desirability of the objects, ideas or practices, but this desirability should not be confused with the simple desire or praise of an object, idea or practice.

While our judgments of value point to something being *worthy* in some respect, they are often subsumed in the more crude idea of preference. An individual may prefer an object, idea or practice without making any judgment regarding its worth or goodness or badness. Baseball may be enjoyed, even preferred over other sports, without even the slightest consideration of its importance to a culture or society. This preference is not to be belittled, but it offers little to help us in determining the value of the game itself, and any conflation of these two ideas can only result in ambiguous, at best, or utterly confounding

discussions of purpose, place or value within society. Preference may guide stylistic choices, but consistently upheld values allow for the creation of culture over time.

Additionally, preferences are statements about an individual's personal feelings, and can only be false if they are not true of the speaker. Value judgments are external to the speaker and, therefore, must rely on something more than simple preference or personal point of view. In this way, simply describing goodness as an arbitrary or subjective idea pushes aside judgments of value that have the capability to perpetuate or stultify cultural movement. Assertions such as "I like it" or "I think it is good" serve no purpose beyond expressing individualized preference. This is not to paint preference as unnecessary or problematic, but preference does little in helping to understand or frame design's role within culture and the larger social context.

In a culture such as this, one that places the value of the individual far above the value of society as a whole, it is no wonder that judgments of value have been eclipsed and even subsumed into the concept of preference. If, as we see in current Western culture, especially in its privileging of the uniqueness and supremacy of the individual artist, that personal desires and expression are paramount, then we have lost sight of a large part of how we evaluate the work we create as graphic designers and must return once more to the guiding, foundational principle of goodness. To do so, we must understand the historical context of goodness in order to evaluate usage as applied today. This seemingly simple point is of utmost importance and forms the basis for the remainder of this discussion.

Plato

Since Plato philosophers have discussed goodness. To more fully understand the ramifications of its usage, it is important to survey these ideas as an historical timeline, not as a progression or evolution, but as a broadening, a deepening understanding of the weight of the term. The remainder of this chapter focuses on four philosophers who spent considerable time unpacking concepts of value and how we understand and define the world around us. Plato, Aristotle, G.E. Moore and Ludwig Wittgenstein provide this historical arc, and their differences contribute greatly to the historical weight of the term in question.

Throughout history, philosophy has focused its questions on the world around us and our place within it. We have sought to know our place so we may better understand our relationship to everything else. In his allegory of the Cave, Plato not only provides us with a sketch of how he saw this relationship, but outlines the general structure of his system of thinking. [42]

The Cave illustrates how the majority of society lives with a veil over its eyes and thus with only rudimentary knowledge of Truth and Beauty. A group of shackled inhabitants lives within the cave, which is only dimly illuminated by a fire located behind them. This fire provides some light, but only enough to throw shadows and flickering images onto the cave wall.

The inhabitants do not know the cave is poorly lit; this is the only reality they know. Most do not care to discover more and simply accept their circumstance as the totality of

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[42] John M. Cooper and D.S. Hutchison, eds., *Plato: Complete Works* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1997).

reality. Others observe patterns and wonder if there is more than the cave, but Truth eludes them.

One of the prisoners manages to break free and escapes the cave. As he emerges into the sunlight, he is blinded, unable to make sense of the shapes and objects he is seeing for the first time. Over time, his eyes adjust to the new world he is seeing and he makes sense of everything the sun illuminates.

Eventually, the newly enlightened man returns to the cave to tell others about the world he has seen, the Truth that lives beyond the dark recesses of the cave, and the reality of the world they inhabit. He urges the others to understand that the world they see is not the full extent of all that is, that much more lies beyond their singular and crude visual realm.

With the allegory of The Cave as his starting point, Plato questioned how we might best create good and just societies. We can only perceive shadowy versions of Truth, Beauty, Virtue and Goodness, but through proper pursuit and acquisition of knowledge, we may ascend to a higher understanding of the true world in which we live. As inhabitants of the cave, we all are subject to the tension between reality and Ideal Forms. These Forms give us our first insight into the development of the concept of Goodness.

Plato's Theory of the Forms divided existence into two distinct realms. The first is the realm of our senses—the empirical world. This realm is in constant flux, always changing, and allows us to derive knowledge from experience, particularly sensory observation. The empirical world, according to Plato, did not allow for knowledge based on the application of logic, but the experience of it gave rise to opinions. The second realm, the realm of the Forms, is external to space and time and everything contained within it is

permanent and ideal. The contents of this realm are things as they should be, while the empirical world shows only crude shadows or poor copies of these Forms. These rudimentary representations are less real than the realm of the Forms and are, therefore, inadequate as proper forms of knowledge. It is the knowledge of the Forms themselves that gives us insight into the world around us.

The forms exist in a hierarchy and are interrelated. Beginning with the knowledge from imagination, dreams and the unconscious (Images), the lowest of the Forms, they rise in importance to our perception of the outside world (Material Objects), mathematical knowledge (Lower Forms), philosophical knowledge (Higher Forms) and culminate in the ultimate Form, the Form of the Good. Each form builds upon the previous, so that no one may have complete understanding of the real or ideal world without knowing a great deal about many things. Therefore, by Plato's logic, true knowledge becomes, in the end, a knowledge of Goodness, because the Form of the Good is only understood once the preceding forms are rightly studied.

While the specific terms may be unfamiliar, the concept Plato describes is the basis for much of our modern-day education system as well as how we grow to understand our world. We acquire mathematical knowledge by learning numbers, addition, multiplication and fractions before we can know geometry, trigonometry or calculus. Likewise, we learn the laws of the road, the operation of the vehicle, and the proper etiquette before we are freely given the responsibility of operating a car.

In design education, would we not think that a student who had failed to learn line, movement, color, balance and perspective was uneducated in the skills necessary to become a great designer? This understanding of knowledge built upon knowledge grounds

all our educational practices, and Plato believed that philosophers, the ones most focused on this education, would be best suited to lead a society in the proper way. They would understand Goodness because they had sought understanding of the concepts that come before it.

In what may be the most well-known passage in all of his writing, Plato asserts the importance of this knowledge by stating that "unless…philosophers become kings in the cities or those whom we now call kings and rulers philosophize truly and adequately and there is a conjunction of political power and philosophy…there can be no cessation of evils…for cities nor, I think, for the human race."[43] This single statement illuminates Plato's view that, not only should those in power practice Goodness, but that Goodness should be the ultimate goal of any society.

Philosophers become the most fit to rule, not because of their general knowledge or expertise, but because of their knowledge of the Good. Like the Sun in the allegory of The Cave, the Form of the Good allows all other forms to be seen. It is not good itself, but it does illuminate what is Good for all other Forms. While we have not seen perfection, we do see shadows of it because we understand and can recognize how objects, ideas and practices correspond to an innate knowledge of the Form of the Good.

What is most important about Plato's concept of Goodness for our purpose is not *who* is most fit to lead or *what* is Good, but *why* one is fit to lead and *how* we grow to understand Goodness. The philosopher is fit to lead because he, or she as we now know, has devoted time to acquiring knowledge that gives insight into how the world works. He

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[43] *Rep.* V.473c11-d6. Translations draw on those in John Cooper, ed., *Plato: Complete Works* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1997).

has grown to understand Goodness, not by developing a unique personal preference or style, but by acquiring knowledge of some[44] or all the Forms:[45]

> each of you in turn must go down to live in the common dwelling place of the others and grow accustomed to seeing in the dark. When you are used to it, you will see vastly better than the people there. And because you have seen the truth about the fine, the just, and the good, you will know each image for what it is and also that of which it is the image. Thus, for you and for us, the city will be governed, not like most cities nowadays, by people who fight over shadows…but by people who are awake rather than dreaming.[46]

Goodness is then seen as an ultimate judgment of value that can only be made with a large knowledge base and careful consideration. Regardless of our agreement with his system, Plato established knowledge of Goodness at the summit of the pursuit of knowledge, a point not easily reached. Evaluations of Goodness would not have been given lightly. They, likewise, were not based upon simple preference.

Aristotle

Aristotle, Plato's most well known student, believed the Theory of the Forms to be illogical and impossible to prove. Rejecting Plato's Idealism, Aristotle held that the world in

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[44] *Rep.* VII.517bc and VII.532ab

[45] *Rep.* VII.517b7-9 and VII.532a5-b2.

[46] *Rep.* VII.520c1-d1.

which we live is not only real, but substantive as well. The Forms were not separate Ideas floating beyond our reach, but were, instead, characteristics embodied in the world around us that we can understand and interpret with our senses.

Aristotle agreed with Plato that ethical virtues like justice, courage or goodness are complex rational skills. However, he rejected Plato's idea that a deep education was a necessary prerequisite for understanding Goodness. While Plato stressed knowledge of how the world works, Aristotle asserted that the key to living a good life was not just knowledge, but a proper appreciation of how friendship, pleasure, virtue and other goods fit together as a whole. For this reason, practical wisdom cannot be acquired through general rules, but is built through deliberative, emotional and social skills that allow us to put our knowledge of goodness into practice.

In his *Nicomachean Ethics,* Aristotle spends considerable time exploring the seemingly simple concept of Goodness and its role in society, culture, and the work of humankind. From the outset, Aristotle understands that Goodness is not based in arbitrary preference, but instead, finds its definition in all pursuits of man. "Every art and every inquiry, and similarly every action and pursuit," Aristotle states, "is thought to aim at some good; and for this reason the good has rightly been declared to be that at which all things are aimed."[47] And no small amount of time should be spent seeking to understand what is good, because the concept of goodness is central to everything with which humankind is involved. "The beginning is thought to be more than half of the whole," he explained, "and

[47] Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book 1, 1.

many of the questions we ask are cleared up by it."[48] So, according to Aristotle, the question "what do we mean by good?" is not only the starting point for our discussion, but is the beginning of almost every philosophical discussion.

Taking a different route than Plato, Aristotle begins his exploration by stating that there are many different opinions about what is best for humans, and that, to make any progress, we must resolve such a disagreement. We do not seek Goodness because we want to acquire more knowledge, but, instead, we seek it because this knowledge will allow us to more adequately achieve Goodness in what we do. We pay careful attention to the foundation so that the entirety of the building may be more properly constructed.

Aristotle is not interested in creating a commonly agreed-upon checklist of what is good. Although he asserts this list can be made quite easily, his concern is with the designations we make in regard to whether one good is more desirable than another. His exploration of Goodness is a search for the highest form of good, this object having three characteristics: it is desirable for itself, it is not desirable for the sake of something else, and all other goods are desirable for its sake. In short, it is ultimate in its claim.

While claims to ultimate answers and objective truth may seem quaint or outdated, Aristotle grounds his claims in our shared humanity. The good of a human being must in some way have something to do with being human, and, Aristotle states, what sets us apart from other forms in nature is our capacity to guide ourselves by using reason. We are not wholly subject to base instincts or fleeting preference like other animals.

Aristotle's view of Goodness was based on his belief that the Ideals that defined Plato's philosophy are very real parts of the world in which we live. These could be

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[48] Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book 1, 7.

perceived by our senses, and can, therefore, be understood and agreed upon by everyone. Aristotle's Realism, while counter to the Idealism of Plato, held that Goodness exists as a universal concept, attainable through our pursuit of knowledge and understanding.

In the classical sense, Goodness is not fleeting, but consists of activities led by our exercise as rational beings. This ability to be rational allows us to observe the world, weigh it against reason and form judgments of the way things are, are not or should be. This view of humankind has fallen out of favor in many circles, but Plato and Aristotle's understandings of Goodness were largely accepted until the early stages of modernity.

It is only a recent phenomenon that we have come to believe it impossible, or more exactly, irresponsible, for an educated person to believe he or she can come to know the important things of how the universe works. From science to math to literature to art, "the universe made a kind of sense [prior to modernity], had a kind of intelligibility, and was becoming ever more accessible through the steadily increasing growth of knowledge and understanding."[49] It was also completely plausible for educated people to feel their personal beliefs about religion, morality and ethics could be aligned with their scientific and experiential knowledge.

G. E. Moore

While the causes of, challenges to and undermining of this way of thinking are highly debatable[50], there is no denying that a radical shift in the way Western thought

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[49] John Searle, *Mind, Language and Society: Philosophy in the Real World* (New York: Basic Books, 1998), 1.

views the world happened around the turn of the twentieth century. This shift is seen easily in the writing of G.E. Moore. Writing predominantly in the early 1900s, Moore departs substantially from the ideas of Plato and Aristotle in regard to the concept of Goodness.

Further illustrating the gulf between Plato's Idealism and Aristotle's Realism, Moore stands as a third way, mixing elements of both philosophers' ideas into a "quasi-Platonist conception of values as abstract objects, detached from empirical reality but nonetheless as real as any empirical object."[51] Moore could not bring himself to believe in the Ideals of Plato, but he was also not able to completely remove them from the realm of possibility as Aristotle did.

As one of the founders of the analytic tradition in philosophy, he led British philosophy away from idealism and more toward what he termed common sense[52] concepts. Much in the same way that his predecessors believed the world could be understood through knowledge and observation, Moore believed this common sense to be, not only attainable by all, but a common characteristic shared by all humankind.

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[50] While not unimportant to this current discussion, the specifics of this point are better discussed in Chapter 2, particularly as to how these changes create a fertile landscape in which modernism in graphic design could flourish.

[51] Moore, *Pricipia Ethica,* xii.

[52] In philosophy, common sense has a meaning somewhat different from that found in everyday use. While the term is generally understood to mean sound practical judgment derived from experience rather than study, according to Aristotle it is the capability of the "animal soul" to perceive the characteristics of physical things through the collective work of the individual senses. This idea is not the same as sensory perception or rational thinking, but it does operate alongside each. As used by Moore, common sense can then be seen to operate as a quasi-scientific methodology for understanding the world around us and our place and role within it. As an echo of Plato's pursuit of the Forms, Moore's common sense is something all have the ability toward, but not all take advantage of.

This study in Goodness is found in *Pricipia Ethica,* Moore's most well known work. This text is rooted in the research he conducted for two drafts of his dissertation at Trinity College following his graduation in 1896.[53] Both drafts begin with the same idea: a criticism of what Moore calls "the fallacy involved in all empirical definitions of the good."[54] This idea would later be known to those familiar with Moore as the naturalistic fallacy, the assertion that it is a mistake to define the concept of Good in terms of some other natural property.

Using common sense, Moore argued that Goodness is as impossible to define as the color yellow. Explaining what goodness is to someone who does not know of it would be as fruitless as describing yellow to a person with no knowledge of color; its simplicity becomes its downfall. "Definitions of the kind that I was asking for, definitions which describe the real nature of the object or notion in question is something complex," Moore states. "[There] are simply something[s] which you think of or perceive, and to any one who cannot think of or perceive them, you can never, by any definition, make their nature known."[55]

This analogy with the color yellow is Moore's attempt to make the naturalistic fallacy more clear. As a simple term, like Good, yellow is impossible to define. Unlike complex notions, yellow and Good are not made of parts, which we can explain in order to add up to a complete definition. Animals like horses are made of legs and eyes and hair.

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[53] Moore's first draft was rejected in 1897 and Moore spent the next year rewriting the text for resubmission in 1898. Both entitled *The Metaphysical Basis of Ethics*, they are widely regarded as the foundation for *Principia Ethica.*

[54] Moore, *Principia Ethica,* xii.

[55] Moore, *Principia Ethica,* 59.

These can all be described in order to arrive at an idea of a horse, but any attempt at describing simple concepts devolves into a dependence on irrational comparisons. For yellow, it may be defined as a certain wavelength of light, but even that is not yellow but the way we perceive the wavelength.

Simple ideas like yellow and Good "are not complex," Moore argues. "They are notions of that simple kind, out of which definitions are composed and with which the power of further defining ceases."[56] It may be true that all things that are Good are also something else—Plato believed so: Virtue, Friendship, Beauty, etc.—but everything has properties. Moore argues that many philosophers are merely describing its properties when they believe themselves to be defining good.

At first glance, Moore seems to be telling us that since Goodness is a simple term and these terms are indefinable, that there is no way to understand the idea. It seems to be a large discussion about how pointless the pursuit of its definition is, but this is not the case. Moore's basic assertion is that Good is Good and cannot be defined as Virtue, Truth, Honesty or a number of other properties that may be present in Goodness. Far from mere tautology, Moore's point is that in identifying or discussing Goodness, it is imperative that we are not lazy in our thinking or our definitions. He is not stating that the definition of simple concepts is futile, but quite the opposite. Because of their simplicity, we must take great care in analyzing their use. It is fallacious to just pass off their definition to some synonym instead of dissecting and understanding properties that all good things have in common. To reduce Goodness to a single property (i.e. truth in materials) is to diminish the significance of the term.

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[56] Moore, *Principia Ethica,* 59-60.

Ludwig Wittgenstein

One of Moore's students, Ludwig Wittgenstein, would further develop the idea that how we define concepts like Goodness is no small task. Unlike Moore, Wittgenstein did not believe that the simplicity and irreducibility of certain concepts made them impossible to define; instead, these terms could only be rightly understood within the space that they occupy within language.

This space is incredibly difficult to navigate. Not only does current usage occupy the area but so does past usage as well as the concepts behind the language that are difficult to form into thoughts and words. "One cannot guess how a word functions," Wittgenstein argued. "One has to *look at* its use and learn from that. But the difficulty is to remove the prejudice, which stands in the way of doing this. It is not a *stupid* prejudice."[57] In this way of understanding language, Wittgenstein seems to be saying that we not only communicate through language but we also learn from it as we use it. There is something more important than the words we use that we attempt to reach when we communicate. This requires a great deal of attention to the details of language and its usage. Simply bandying words around is reckless. Employing words is a simple task, but understanding the words themselves becomes very difficult. As Wittgenstein stated: "What we will say will be easy, but to know why we say it will be very difficult."[58]

In contrast to what Plato argued, this difficulty is not because the world around us is only a representation of an Ideal version. Likewise, it was not as simple as Aristotle

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[57] Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, 340.

[58] Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Wittgenstein's Lectures, Cambridge 1930-1932*. ed. Desmond Lee (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 1980), 77.

believed: that Goodness was a part of the world and we need only seek it using our senses, eventually reaching a point of agreement. Even his teacher Moore missed the mark with his arguments that concepts like Goodness were simple and indefinable. Instead, Wittgenstein believed that language was not given all the attention it deserved. "We are tempted to think that the action of language consists of two parts," he wrote. "An inorganic part, the handling of signs, and an organic part, which we may call understanding these signs, meaning them, interpreting them, thinking."[59] Earlier philosophers argued within these two veins of language: the sign and the signified. Wittgenstein ventured beyond these into a realm where the imprecision of language was not a deficit but a sign of something beyond words. What makes a discussion, a term or an idea hard to understand is not a breakdown in abstruse disciplines like logic, but what makes the thing hard to understand is simply the difference between understanding it as it is and as we want it to be: "Because of this the very things which are most obvious may become the hardest of all to understand. What has to be overcome is a difficulty having to do with the will, rather than with the intellect."[60]

Despite elucidating a system by which to understand how language functions within society, Wittgenstein did not believe it was the job of a philosopher to provide insight into the way language connects with the world. It was the philosopher's wholly conceptual task to identify the logical conditions which must be obtained for there to even be a link between language and the world. He undertook this task over the entirety of his career

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[59] Ludwig Wittgenstein, *The Blue and Brown Books (Preliminary Studies for Philosophical Investigations)* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1965), 3.

[60] Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Culture and Value* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1980), 17.

beginning with his work in the *Tractatus* and concluding, through some massive changes in argument, in *Philosophical Inquiry.*

Wittgenstein's basic premise was that language is composed of things called propositions that could be broken down into less complex propositions until the individual could arrive at basic truths. In this idea, we see aspects of his teacher Moore who believed that using common sense, complex ideas could be reduced to simple concepts. For Wittgenstein, the world was composed of facts. We are able to perceive facts by turning them into thoughts, mental pictures of the facts themselves. These thoughts can then be expressed through language as propositions. By reducing these propositions, thoughts and facts could be winnowed down to their simple form: atomic sentences. These sentences would describe reality as we know it.

As a simple expression of facts then, language carried no particular meaning. And as simple vocabulary, language was incapable of expressing subjective notions like Beauty, Love, and Goodness. It was only in its usage that language achieved descriptions of this sort. In this way, Wittgenstein did not believe that language failed when used incorrectly or in a manner that did not allow for understanding. He believed in this case that language simply becomes nonsense, failing to truly carry meaning from one person to another. It returns to a wholly arbitrary system, devoid of connection to our experience and understanding. When the signs we use to employ meaning fail, they are not false, "it is that they say nothing at all, for [they] fail to picture anything in the world and hence [have] no connection with the world."[61]

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[61] A.C. Grayling, *Wittgenstein* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 31.

In his later life, Wittgenstein changed his argument about language in ways that seemed quite drastic. Instead of words being the basis for propositions, he argued that words were tools used to perform different tasks in communicating. Language was a game where individuals developed their own rules. His movement was away from logical consistency and toward linguistic diversity. While the underlying assertions of these two ways of understanding language seem quite different, their central premise still remains that language is not a cohesive, singular construction.

Language, Wittgenstein asserts, is not a single uniform activity. Semioticians made moves toward this concept, yet philosophers had not ventured fully into this territory. The core of language and communication is not simple agreement of definitions, but it is varied. We use language to describe, report, affirm, give orders, tell jokes, translate, request, provide context, communicate sarcasm, greet, curse and pray. All of these activities have language at their core and each falls under Wittgenstein's banner of language-games. Wittgenstein uses this term generally and by it he means any of the language-using activities we participate and engage in. "The term 'language-game' is meant to bring into prominence the fact that the *speaking* of language is part of an activity, or of a form of life."[62]

Wittgenstein spends time discussing the "multiplicity of language games," stating later that it is interesting "to compare the multiplicity of the tools in language and of the way they are used, the multiplicity of kinds of words and sentences, with what logicians

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[62] Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations,* 23.

have said about the structure of language."[63] This statement reinforces the diversity Wittgenstein sees in language-games over the monolithic single underlying logical structure proposed by many philosophers.

The term game should not be seen to show language as frivolous or unimportant, instead it is employed as a complex system of overlapping and inter-related rules and relationships. Much as card games involve more than an agreed upon assertion of the rules of play, language-games are dependent on context, gestures, inside jokes, and myriad other interjections that contribute to a particular meaning. "We see a complicated network of similarities overlapping and criss-crossing…I can think of no better expression to characterize these similarities than 'family resemblances,'" he wrote in *Philosophical Investigations*. "For the various resemblances between members of a family: build, features, colour of eyes, gait, temperament, etc., etc., overlap and criss-cross in the same way. —And I shall say: 'games' form a family."[64] This family is understood as a more comprehensive understanding of language.

For Wittgenstein, language is not a singular structure that can be simply understood. Language games point us to the variance and multiplicity in language and describe an understanding of communication where no single essence can be unearthed for a term, an idea or an object. As Wittgenstein argues, "Instead of producing something common to all that we call language, I am saying that these phenomena have no one thing in common which makes us use the same word for all, but that they are *related* to one

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[63] Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations,* 23.

[64] Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations,* 66-7.

another in many different ways."[65] In this statement he reverses his view from the *Tractatus* wherein he believed that the meaning of a word lay in the objects it denoted. Instead, the meaning of a word for Wittgenstein is now in its use in one or a number of language-games: "the meaning of a word is its use in the language."[66]

Obvious questions arise at this point. We may wonder how language is shared if the use denotes meaning. Beginning in childhood, we are taught that meaning drives usage; our vocabulary is taught through definitions and the correct application of them. Likewise, who should be the one to decide how definitions change? These are not unimportant questions, but they miss Wittgenstein's entire point about how we actually understand language.

While it may be easy to dismiss Wittgenstein as a subjective waffler, intent on creating a muddled soup of language, he is not calling for a free-for-all of meaning. Instead, he opens the walls of meaning by positioning language as a shared activity among people and groups. Words may take on new understandings. Groups may use words in ways that differ from accepted standards. Language-games may be played that distort and twist meaning for effect. These all happen regularly among friends, between enemies, and in advertising, for example. Use becomes important as the context that allows language to have meaning beyond mere arbitrary phonetic building blocks.

Additionally, meaning is not lost by insisting that language may change through use. Any distortion or change in language is only made possible by having a right understanding of standard meaning to begin with. Without first knowing the language-game of *naming*, there can be no reinterpretation or realignment in meaning. Naming of an object or an idea

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[65] Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations,* 65.

[66] Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations,* 43.

is not contrary to Wittgenstein's understanding of how language works in society, it is merely one of the first "family resemblances" we understand as we take part in language-games.

Conclusion

Since recorded time, humankind has struggled with understanding the concept of Goodness. For Plato, Goodness was the highest ideal toward which we must struggle in order to have any hope of a just society. For Aristotle, Goodness was a very real part of the world around us, and if we lived our life well, we could perceive it with our senses and come to a greater knowledge of its place and role in society. For Moore, Goodness was such a simple and irreducible concept that even proposing a definition would lead to an illogical discussion; instead, he advocated for a deeper reflection upon the words we use and how we attach meaning to them. For Wittgenstein, words do not need definitions, rather they require situations or context to be fully understood; words are not in question but rather the characteristics of their usage begin the discussion about their meanings.

This line of philosophical inquiry weaves itself through history and has not reached a final point. While they differ on the particulars of how we understand Goodness, these four philosophers all agree that the words we employ are of no small importance. Language and communication provide connection between individuals, objects and ideas. They weave connecting strands that provide meaning to our work and our ideas. The usage of Goodness in design literature has been ubiquitous and varied. It is of utmost importance that we deeply consider the language that represents the meaning and value of our work.

As practitioners of design, we are remiss if we work within an intellectual vacuum. Doing so undermines the power of our work to communicate to others. Designers of all varieties work within a particular culture that conforms to certain ideological principles that provide the context for how objects and ideas are presented and understood. We must understand our cultural context, including its philosophical past, in order to communicate ideas about it to others.

It may seem a residue of a different time, but our past is as much a part of how we understand our culture and society as current events or conversations. The complexity and depth of our cultural surroundings has come about through the past and the present mingling together. Intellectual threads tie us together in the present and extend their reach into the past, providing foundation for future pursuits. It is through a fuller understanding of this historical conversation that we become better communicators and designers. We cannot know the ways in which we may use the terms and concepts surrounding ideas of Good and Goodness without first knowing the ways in which they have been used in the past.

This historical context does not limit us to a historicist approach to design, and it need not present itself as an essentialist or teleological marker of things to come. Instead, knowledge of the historical context and various uses of a term makes us better-educated practitioners of design who are more capable of combating the individualistic fallacy of the enlightened genius. Through a fuller knowledge of the critical historical context of our field's vocabulary, we can better understand notions of creativity that position designers as expert guides through networks of information and meaning.

Goodness as a Historical Concept: Assumption and Imposition in Modernism

G.E. Moore and Ludwig Wittgenstein may seem to have little to do with the discourse of design in the twentieth century, but their philosophical investigations into meaning in language developed in concert with the prevailing skepticism toward language apparent in early twentieth century design discourse. In his 1949 essay *Function in Modern Design*, György Kepes remarked that we "tend to mistake the slogan for truth," and that "vigilance is needed" when it comes to language.[67] He insisted that this vigilance is important within areas susceptible to bias like political propaganda or aspects of advertising, but that it is also important to remain skeptical of language "in fields where we assume that we know what we are talking about, in our own profession. Here we must be doubly alert, for we lack the perspective that distance offers."[68] For Kepes, clear meaning is an assumption – a wrong one – built on a lack of examination. A deep examination is

[67] György Kepes, "Function in Modern Design" in *Looking Closer 3: Classic Writings on Graphic Design*, ed. Michael Bierut (New York: Allworth Press, 1999), 98.

[68] Kepes, 98.

needed, he argued, especially of terms fundamental to the discussion of design; these "catchwords" of our profession should always be viewed with the strictest of scrutiny.

Kepes was not alone in his distrust of language. Having experienced the manipulation and contortion of language exercised by fascist regimes in the early part of the twentieth century, Kepes and other European designers harbored a deep distrust of words, siding more comfortably with visual language, which they viewed as pure and incapable of biased leanings. László Moholy-Nagy, some 20 years earlier, expressed this view in his book *The New Vision:* "Language is inadequate to formulate the exact meaning and the rich variations of the realm of sensory experiences."[69] Mies van der Rohe issued a similar decree for architecture as he bluntly stated, "Build – don't talk."[70]

Sensory experience, according to this line of thinking, was a natural activity of the individual and therefore could not be manipulated by an external force. Language was learned and understood through cultural lenses that were also taught. In this way, language could be hijacked by ideologues and used as a tool against the very people who believed in its power to explain. While the power of language had been to describe and explain the reality around us, this reality was being regarded with increasing suspicion in the early twentieth century. Language could no longer be trusted to represent the world.[71] In this way, this chapter examines the way in which designers and practitioners engaged with the

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[69] László Moholy-Nagy, *The New Vision* (1928), 63.

[70] J.P. Bonta, "Reading and Writing about Architecture," *Design Book Review*, no. 18, (1990), 13.

[71] For a more detailed discussion of the suspicion of language in modernism, see "The Secret of the Corpse-Language Machine: *The Birth of the Clinic* and *Raymond Roussel*" by David Scott in *Understanding Foucault, Understanding Modernism* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2017), 39-60.

concept of goodness without relying on its direct and discreet usage within the discourse. The skepticism toward language removed critical discussions of terminology from the popular discourse, replacing them with nuanced and, oftentimes, contradicting functional definitions of terms central to the practice of design.

Wittgenstein reversed the concept of meaning in language from a concept of mere representation to a process of necessary investigation, positing a modern approach to language that called into question traditional theories of meaning in philosophy. Traditional ideas of language had previously rested on an exterior force that imbued or endowed words with meaning. We see this in Plato's discussion of ideal forms or in Aristotle's foundation for essentialism: we can understand a specific entity (word or proposition), no matter how imperfect it may be, by a set of attributes that are necessary to its identity and function. For Wittgenstein, this was an unsettling thought, and he instead argued that usage, not representation, should be the focus of investigation. The severity of this break cannot be understated. So different was Wittgenstein's perspective that he repeated a call to look and see how many uses a word might be involved in as it carries meaning from one context to another. "Don't think, but look!" he urged.[72] And this looking is to be done in particular cases, not as generalizations.

Wittgenstein's view of language is much more active than the traditional representational view of language. We cannot simply assume meaning within this framework; instead, we are required to replace a generalized understanding of a word with particular descriptions of use. In this way, restricted usage gives way to diversity, multiplicity, and un-fixedness. While it may be easier to crave the general over the specific

[72] Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations,* 66.

due to its ease, Wittgenstein argues for family resemblance as a more suitable analogy for connecting multiple uses of the same word. This frees words from the dogma of essential meaning and allows language to travel through "a complicated network of similarities overlapping and criss-crossing."[73]

These networks are no small feat to navigate, and this navigation is the heart of the matter as we seek to understand how the descriptors of our field have shaped it and continue to shape it. Language, as we have seen in the previous chapter, is not simple. Likewise, it is not straightforward as Kepes and Moholy-Nagy asserted. Meaning is not shaped by a single definition changing into a new one as time progresses. Instead, this meaning is developed and built over time through accumulation. In building a vocabulary of design in his book *Words and Buildings,* Adrian Forty summarizes the task of understanding language as it relates to the visual arts. "To find the meaning of a word at any one time is to know the available possibilities: meanings cannot be identified the way one looks up a word in a dictionary. Critical vocabulary is not about things, it is about encounters with things, and it is above all as a means of structuring those experiences that language is of value," he writes. "The particular resource of language, itself a system of differences, is its capacity to make distinctions."[74]

It is this critical approach to language that allows us to begin understanding the importance of the discussion of *good* in design. While its myriad uses and contexts are difficult, at best, to understand within traditional theories of meaning, the family

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[73] Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations,* 66.

[74] Adrian Forty, *Words and Buildings: A Vocabulary of Modern Architecture* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2013), 15.

resemblance Wittgenstein argues for of allows us to better understand the complexity of diverse definitions instead of simply brushing aside competing uses as nonsense, gibberish or ignorance. These family resemblances also direct our investigation away from individual claims of genius or expertise that bestow a sense of mysticism on the practice and study of design and toward a more complete picture of design as a field of artistic inquiry capable of operating within myriad contexts not defined by a single race, gender, geographic region or time period. Where a single definition of goodness may elevate an individual or singular expression of design, understanding the critical historical context of goodness allows for a deepening of work in several areas and pursuits. The value of goodness, then, is in its ownership by a larger community of designers, not by a single set of individuals or practitioners.

By following these particular uses through the twentieth century, we can arrive at a more comprehensive idea of goodness in design rather than a muddled and oftentimes distracting watering down of meaning. In short, the various uses of good and goodness in design discourse throughout the twentieth century do not serve to increase confusion or show ignorance, but rather these differing uses expand the value of design through a more robust understanding of value within the field. While some scholars and practitioners use the terms good and goodness to help define the work or effects of the work of design, the concepts behind these words often underlie many conversations in design discourse as well. These uses within the direct vocabulary and the context of twentieth century design discourse form the basis for the exploration of value in design practice. In this way, even when the words themselves are not specifically used, we must be mindful of the concepts being used that carry the same meaning.

Modernity, Modern, Modernism

Pursuing similar ideas of language's fluidity, Susan Stanford Friedman sheds light on another term central to our discussion as well as nearly every discussion in design discourse over the last century. In her article "Definitional Excursions: The Meanings of Modern/Modernity/Modernism," Friedman challenges the monolithic understanding of *modern* by weaving a network of uses, creating a picture of the diversity of the term in the same way that I seek to do with goodness. "Definitional activities are fictionalizing processes," she begins, "however much they sound like rational categorization."[75] By strictly defining a term, we often create specific spaces where meaning must live, ignoring the fact that meaning changes over time, through usage and within cultures. By creating a network of meaning, this usage provides a way for language to change over time and acquire new meaning.

Casting aside any intention to operate within the prescribed vein of dogmatic definitions, Friedman instead argues for an open view of modernism shaped by the varying expressions seen across cultures and time. "Definitions spawn plurality in the very act of attempting to herd meaning inside consensual boundaries. Definitions mean to fence in, to fix, to stabilize. But they often end up being fluid, in a destabilized state of ongoing formation, deformation, and reformation that serves the changing needs of the moment," she continues. "I have no expectation, therefore, of determining or discovering a fixed meaning for terms like *modern*, *modernity* and *modernism*. I expect differences."[76]

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[75] Susan Stanford Friedman, "Definitional Excursions: The Meanings of Modern/Modernity/Modernism," *Modernism/Modernity* 8, no. 3 (2001): 493.

[76] Friedman, 497.

How, then, do we find common ground upon which to explore these differences? To begin understanding meaning, we can build a basic framework of terms that help us understand the context of design as it had developed in the late nineteenth century and moved into the twentieth. This framework is not based on strict definitions that limit, but provides a general understanding that allows discussion to extend from the same baseline. Following Wittgenstein, we can find resemblances in terms that can help us explore the diversity of meaning within design discourse.

This diversity, just as with Wittgenstein's understanding of multiplicity in language, is not an opposition to meaning. Instead, it is a staunch resistance to totality within narratives of modernism and helps to explain the contradictory status of meanings found within its history.[77] Diversity allows for multiple veins of discussion even with difficult terms like modern and its many forms. Modern is noun and adjective, has been used as a concrete descriptor and a vague qualifier, and moves with little fixity between ideas of promotion and process. Our only choices, then, are to determine a set definition that renders all opposing ideas null and void, or to understand the term as expansive and capable of widespread usage, creating an open discussion of the many contexts in which modernity and modernism can be rightly understood. "*Modernisms* is one thing," Friedman states. "But *modernism* as absolute contradiction is quite another."[78] While it is common for individuals to use these three terms interchangeably, the definitional framework

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[77] In respect to the expectation of differences within definitions of modern/modernity/modernism, Friedman is not alone or the first to establish such a line of thought. For more information on others who have taken part in this discussion, please see "Definitional Excursions," note 17.

[78] Susan Stanford Friedman, *Planetary Modernisms: Provocations on Modernity Across Time,* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015), 25.

established through Wittgenstein and Friedman work against simplifying these three terms into synonyms.

The current state of the world since the 1700s can be broadly understood as modernity. While different disciplines have taken it upon themselves to define what is considered modern, social scientists, philosophers, critical theorists, and social anthropologists have marked the Enlightenment as the beginning of the rise of rationalist thought as a basis for society. Following this model, modernity (as it is understood for this project) is the state of the world since the Enlightenment. For the purposes of our discussion, modernity is a descriptor of time (Enlightenment to the present) and social conditions (the various characteristics that define Western culture over the last 200 years).[79]

The Enlightenment—beginning in the mid-seventeenth century and becoming a definitive feature of eighteenth-century culture—is classically identified as the period when the social, philosophical, scientific and political realms were rigorously subjected to rationalist methodologies. Jonathan Israel gives particular importance to the early Enlightenment's role in a shift toward a modern world:

> …philosophy and philosophers seemed to have burst upon the European scene in the late seventeenth century with terrifying force. Countless books reflect the unprecedented and, for some, intoxicating, intellectual and spiritual upheaval of those decades, a vast turbulence in every sphere of

[79] This model of modernity borrows heavily from historian Dorothy Ross in her article "American Modernities, Past and Present," *The American Historical Review* 116, no. 3 (June 2011): 702-714.

> knowledge and belief which shook European civilization to its foundations…During the later Middle Ages and the early modern age down to around 1650, western civilization was based on a largely shared core of faith, tradition, and authority. By contrast, after 1650, everything, no matter how fundamental or deeply rooted, was questioned in the light of philosophical reason and frequently challenged or replaced by startlingly different concepts generated by the New Philosophy and what may still usefully be termed the Scientific Revolution.[80]

According to British Sociologist Gerard Delanty, this tension between belief and reason was fundamental to the period. Additionally, he argues that modernity "as the self-consciousness of the Enlightenment was self-evidently the emancipation of human beings from the prejudices of tradition."[81] Expanding on this idea, Kenneth Allan affirmed that "modernism grew out of the de-mystification of the universe," and "[held the] hope that science could discover and use law-like principles to improve the condition of humanity, not only physically but socially as well."[82]

As a descriptor of time and social conditions, modernity outlines a general framework of society that drastically altered life in many areas. This stage of history has

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[80] Jonathan Israel, *Radical Enlightenment: Philosophy and the Making of Modernity 1650-1750* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 3.

[81] Gerard Delanty, *Social theory in a Changing World: Conceptions of Modernity* (London: Polity, 1999), 3.

[82] Kenneth Allan, *The Meaning of Culture: Moving the Postmodern Critique Forward* (Westport: Praeger, 1998), 15.

been "characterized by national state formation, industrialization, and the rise of new ideas of reason, human agency, and historical progress."[83] While this general characterization largely holds true across cultural boundaries, it is important to note that not all groups, industries or cultures adapted or reacted to modernity in the same way. Participants and observers of modernity have approached these changes through specific historical and cultural contexts, allowing for a wide range of effects. The fact of many particular responses to modernity is the general working definition of modernism for this project. Modernity describes the world in which we live; and modernism describes the specific responses to that world. These two terms are interconnected but not equivalent. Modernity and modern cannot be interchanged with modernist.

For this reason, the usage of modernism is highly problematic due to its ability to function differently within many different contexts. But even more problematic is its usage within the narrow understanding of meaning that Friedman and Wittgenstein argue against. This "terminological quagmire," as Friedman describes it, is rife with historical baggage denoted by the capitalized Modernism, the intensified *high* modernism and usage confined to particular periods, styles or movements within design history. These narrow descriptors do little more than cordon off space within design history that limits interaction, access or discussion of the state of the world within modernity. Anthropologist Arjun Appadurai acknowledges this problem and refers to it as "one of the most problematic legacies of grand Western social science," arguing that it reinforces a "sense of some single moment – call it the modern moment – that by its appearance creates a

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[83] Dorothy Ross, "American Modernities, Past and Present," *The American Historical Review* 116, no. 3 (June 2011): 702.

dramatic and unprecedented break between past and present." This moment does not help us understand cultural connection or context better; instead it "has been shown repeatedly to distort the meanings of change and the politics of pastness."[84] This binary of inclusion and exclusion is an intellectual imperialism, intent on claiming territory for one group over another. As Indian historian Sanjay Subrahmanyam describes it, modernism is a "global phenomenon…not a virus that spreads from one place to another."[85] Modernism, then, is not to be seen as a fixed descriptor of period or style, but instead as a set of responses to the modern world in which we live.

An openness of this kind to the terminology of modernism allows for deeper discussions into how context and place help create a cultural response and is not dependent on Western definitions of progress, advancement or influence. This mode of thinking destabilizes the monolithic nature of Modernism as a mode of thinking or enlightenment beginning in Europe and extending outward and replaces it with the recognition that the expression of modernism seen in twentieth-century design discourse is but one way to understand humankind's struggle with the state of the world following the increased rationalism of the Enlightenment.

Within this framework of meaning we can understand modernism in Europe as a set of various responses that at times seem incompatible and competing. The set of ideas and stylistic choices that would become known as Arts & Crafts held a disdain for technology, while adherents of Futurism advocated a deep embrace of technology as central to their

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[84] Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 3.

[85] Sanjay Subrahmanyam, "Hearing Voices: Vignettes of Early Modernity in South Asia, 1400-1750," *Daedalus* 127, no.3 (Summer 1998), 99-100.

practice as artists and designers. Despite differences such as these, each individual response can provide insight into how we can better understand the concept of goodness in design during this period. These collective insights give us a more complete picture of the term goodness and its role in twentieth century design practice. A single response may give insights into a particular usage, but a collective understanding of the ways in which these terms and concepts changed and developed over time builds a fuller picture of the role of goodness as a key concept in twentieth century design.

The following section will adopt a three-part framework to demonstrate points of correspondence across four responses to modernity. The Crystal Palace, William Morris, Frank Lloyd Wright and the Bauhaus will each be examined for their attitudes toward individual creation and creators, their views on technology as central to modernity, and their understanding of the dialogue between form and function.[86] While not using the term itself, a majority of the discourse in this period relied on the concept of goodness to provide a greater sense of meaning and value to the field. Goodness was used as a goal and not as a specifically defined descriptor of design; it was a prescriptive term, not a descriptive one. These subjects provide insight into development of ideas and concepts central to the overall discussion of this project. These four points allow us to produce a greater sense of the concept of goodness as it was understood within the discourse of this period.

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[86] As noted by many scholars, the use of the term "form" can be highly problematic. Competing definitions, general misunderstandings and particular ideological ties to the term can lead researchers into the same "terminological quagmire" as modern and its related vocabulary. Definitions tend to fall into categories of shape or essence; for this project, form should be understood as particular shape. For a detailed discussion of form within modern design discourse, see "Form" in Adrian Forty's *Words and Buildings: A Vocabulary of Modern Architecture*, 149-173.

The Crystal Palace

In Europe, modernity encompassed increasing industrialization beginning in the eighteenth century, rising nationalism in the nineteenth century and the effects of mechanized warfare in the early twentieth century. These developments left many Europeans dazed by a world that was far different from the life that had defined Europe since its emergence from the Middle Ages. Largely agrarian societies that were loosely held together by feudal and aristocratic social and governance structures were being replaced by city-based, industry-driven societies fighting for independence as emerging democracies. These nations were taking shape as independent identities and expanding democratization was increasing the role of the individual politically while manufacturing jobs offered the promise of disposable income and affordable products.

Role of the Individual Creator

The division of "high" and "low" design was only one of several binaries commonplace in nineteenth- and early twentieth-century design discourse. In architecture, these competing attitudes could be seen in the vocabulary of "architecture" and "building." Architecture denoted an informed and correct historicist application of style, while building meant little more than commercial and undignified. This binary is seen in many areas of the visual arts, including W. A. Dwiggins 1922 article "New Kind of Printing Calls for New Design." Dwiggins reinforced this binary of high and low, describing the "plain lines of cleavage within the modern industry."[87] This cleavage between printer and

[87] W.A. Dwiggins "New Kind of Printing Calls for New Design," *Boston Evening Transcript* (August 29, 1922), Graphic Arts Section, 3:6.

designer, according to Dwiggins, was not something that needed to be remedied; it was how the industry operated. " All the main purposes of printing can be served without calling upon the help of art," he wrote, "[The manufacturer with something to sell] may be under the illusion that his printing is art. We are not."[88] Printing and art are not at the same level of social acceptance but are two of "several distinct classes of things" within printing, design and art.[89] Just as architecture did, graphic design separated the work of the artist and the work of the tradesperson into categories of high and low.[90] High art was about the genius, the inspired creator who was capable of expressing the inexpressible through the arts; low art was merely a shadow of that genius.

This division of "low" and "high" design characterizes the transition of designers from within the printing industry to a separate profession. Similar to the designation in architecture, designing was considered a "high" art while making was a "low" art. According to Ray Nash, "previously the designer with respect had been one who added illustrations or ornamental features to it. Now…the designer could find a place to stand in the printing field analogous to that occupied by the architect."[91]

While art and design have separated "high" and "low" in similar ways, manufacturers tended to combine them in pursuit of popular, cheaply made items. High art used stylistic elements as a means of imbuing an object with beauty and sophistication, but

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[88] Dwiggins, 3:6.

[89] Dwiggins, 3:6

[90] For a more complete discussion of the separation of art from trade, especially in the early years of American graphic design, see Ellen Mazur Thomson *The Origins of Graphic Design in America 1870-1920* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), 1-84.

[91] Ray Nash, *Printing as an Art* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1955), 53.

the low art of manufacturing simply applied those elements in a superficial manner. Machines were now capable of producing the same embellishments that craftsmen would have been responsible for prior to industrialization, elevating mass-produced pieces to a higher status – according to some.

Technology as Central to Modernity

The use of industrialized means of manufacturing marked a turning point in modernism, but the delineation of high and low art kept design firmly planted in the past. This dichotomy created an uneasy predicament for artists and designers. During this period, design was the prerogative of the manufacturer, not the designer. The ideal autonomy of the designer was becoming increasingly irrelevant as industrial processes showed manufacturing to require the work of craftsmen less and less.

This mass production of objects further eroded ideas of the artistic individuality of producers and consumers and was seen by many as destroying the individuality of the object as well. Bound together with a manufacturer's ability to create cheaply made goods without the aid of an artist or designer was a feeling of alienation experienced by artists and designers who felt they were being subsumed into industrialized manufacturing and were no longer part of the intellectual elite. Individuals, it seemed to many, were quickly losing their identity at the hands of industrial machines. Oscar Wilde remarked, "There is something tragic in the fact that as soon as man had invented a machine to do his work he began to starve."[92]

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[92] Oscar Wilde, "The Soul of the Man Under Socialism," *The Complete Works of Oscar Wilde*, (Collins Classics, 2003), 381.

Despite this outcry, the effects of advancements in manufacturing technology allowed for exploration and experimentation with materials that had not been available before, creating new possibilities for materials and design. An apt illustration of these changes is the design of the Crystal Palace for the Great Exhibition of 1851. Seen by some as the "Crystal Humbug," the "Glass Monster,"[93] or decried as "a greenhouse larger than greenhouse was ever built before,"[94] the Crystal Palace was poorly received but later extolled for its use of several key elements central to modern design. The enormous structure was only realized through the advancements of industrialization. Its modular form was composed of individual panes of glass supported by an iron framework. These modules were arranged to construct a 24'x24' grid system that would supply the external structure of the building. With a length of 1851 feet and just shy of 1,000,000 square feet of exhibition space, the Crystal Palace allowed for more than 14,000 exhibitors to showcase products and designs from around the world. Because of the simplicity of its form, this massive space was constructed from start to finish in less than five months and at a cost nearly 70% less than other proposed designs.

The structure itself was built to house an exhibit with a very particular purpose. The Great Exhibition of 1851 was conceived as a showcase of the manufacturing prowess and economic might of England by Prince Albert and was a product of his "expansive

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[93] Quoted in Nikolaus Pevsner, *Pioneers of Modern Design: From William Morris to Walter Gropius* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), 111, from the unpublished letters of Augutus Pugin.

[94] Ruskin, *The Stones of Venice*, *Volume 1* (Boston: Estes and Lauriat, 1886), 381.

optimism."[95] The event brought together manufactured items such as furniture, textiles and appliances from around the British Empire in an attempt to "instruct the public in the principles of good design—and by implication, good taste."[96] Likewise, in a break from traditionalism, Prince Albert believed that the Exhibition was a marker of enormous change. "Nobody who has paid any attention to the particular features of the present era will doubt for a moment that we are living in a period of most wonderful transition," he said in an introductory speech to the Exhibition. "[This transition] tends rapidly to the accomplishment of that great end to which all history points, the realization of the unity of mankind."[97] Prince Albert's idealistic and elitist ideas about the event hinted at ideas of social improvement through design that were shared by his contemporaries. "An event like this exhibition could not have taken place at any other period," the Official Catalog of the Exhibition stressed. "And perhaps not among any other people than ourselves."[98] Yet while the Crystal Palace and the Great Exhibition are easily included within many histories of modernism, most of the objects on display at the Exhibition are usually not. Printing machines and train engines were shown alongside animal substances used in manufacturing, stuffed kittens and soaps in the shape of the Queen.[99] While the style of

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[95] Pevsner, 37.

[96] Pevsner, 52.

[97] Francis Albert Augustus Charles Emmanuel, *The Principal Speeches and Addresses of H.R.H., the Prince Consort* (London: John Murray, 1862),110.

[98] *Official Catalogue of the Great Exhibition of the Works of Industry of All Nations, 1851* (London: Spicer Brothers, Wholesale Stationers; W. Clowes & Sons, Printers, 1851), 1.

[99] *Official Catalogue of the Great Exhibition of the Works of Industry of All Nations, 1851*, 15.

objects on display may not have collectively qualified as modernist, the industrial processes and capabilities that allowed the manufacturing of the objects were quite modern.

From our vantage point, the design considerations of the Crystal Palace are remarkable, but the building was not well-received. The size and scale were awe-inspiring by most onlookers' standards, but its use of prefabricated, mass-produced parts was not. In its construction, the "Glass Monster" was little more than a factory. The "cast-iron columns and wrought-iron rails, used in conjunction with modular glazing, had become the standard technique for the rapid prefabrication and erection of urban distribution centres—market halls, exchanges and arcades."[100] This classification, as existing in the same aesthetic space as a market hall, was not understood as innovation of a building of this scale and prominence, one which had been approved and endorsed by Prince Albert for a showcase of the prominence of Great Britain's global reach. The Crystal Palace was more closely akin to a greenhouse than a temple to imperialism and Western progress and was extremely problematic for its conflation of classic high and low demarcations within art and design.

Despite such criticism as well as concerns regarding the safety of the building itself, the Great Exhibition of 1851 was a resounding success in terms of popular opinion. By the end of 1851, nearly six million people had visited the exhibition; however, for many designers, artists and educators the show was nothing more than "a disaster."[101] Designer

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[100] Kenneth Frampton, *Modern Architecture: A Critical History, fourth edition* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2007), 33.

[101] Christopher Crouch, *Modernism in Art, Design and Architecture* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999), 23.

and artist Richard Redgrave as part of his employment by the Government School of Design (now Royal College of Art) observed during an official inquiry that the machine-made ornamentation on mass-produced objects showcased in the exhibition was degraded. This was in part due, he noted, to the fact that the machines used to produce the goods could supply overdesigned and ornate goods at the same low cost as simple designs, but that the more ornate items were tied to popular appeal at the time. [102] The new materials and processes of modernity meant that simple objects of utility could now be produced very cheaply, and, with the addition of ornament, could be popularly viewed as works of art.

Redgrave's report not only criticized the lack of quality in mass produced goods at the Great Exhibition of 1851, it also implied a system of correct and incorrect usage of materials. John Ruskin is perhaps the most well-known proponent of this line of thinking: an understanding of truth in materials. His ideas strongly suggest that materials have intrinsic qualities that should not be transgressed if an object is to retain any level of aesthetic worth. "In proportion as the material worked upon is less delicate, the execution necessarily becomes lower, and the art with it. This is the one main principle of all work," he wrote. "Another is, that whatever the material you choose to work with, your art is base if it does not bring out the distinctive qualities of that material."[103]

This evaluation of art based on the qualities of material points to one specific concept of goodness made popular by John Ruskin during the middle of the nineteenth

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[102] See Richard Redgrave, "Report of Design." *The Illustrated Magazine of Art*, vol. 1 (London: John Cassell, 1853).

[103] John Ruskin, "The Work of Iron in Nature, Art and Policy," in *The Two Paths. Lectures in Art and Its Appreciation and its Application to Decoration, Delivered in 1858-59* (George Allen, 1901), 205.

century. In his *Seven Lamps of Architecture,* Ruskin argued against the technical innovations that he believed had removed the spiritual content of art and design from the process and product. "Architectural Deceits," as he referred to them, were unnecessary uses of ornament or materials in ways that lied to the viewer. His categorization of these deceits included three main areas:

> 1st. The suggestion of a mode of structure or support, other than the true one; as in pendants of late Gothic roofs.
>
> 2d. The painting of surfaces to represent some other material than that which they actually consist (as in the marbling of wood), or the deceptive representation of sculptured ornament upon them.
>
> 3d. The use of machine-made ornaments of any kind.[104]

By misusing materials and creating purposeful deceit, the work of an artist or designer was degraded, therefore degrading the individual who took part in such deception. In this way, the goodness of an object was in direct relation to the goodness of the individual practicing their craft or art. No object, created through deceit, could be a good object, in this view. Through the ideas of Ruskin, we can more easily understand Redgrave's remarks because, during this time, it was understood that the materials, the processes and the individuals involved in the creation of an object all worked together to imbue the designed world with truth, and therefore goodness, upon the designed world.

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[104] John Ruskin, "The Lamp of Truth" *Seven Lamps of Architecture* (New York: John Wiley, 1849), 31.

William Morris

Among the six million in attendance at the Great Exhibition was a young William Morris. "William Morris, the future designer and aesthete, then aged seventeen, was so appalled by what he saw as the exhibition's lack of taste and veneration of excess that he staggered from the building and was sick in the bushes," Bill Bryson wrote in his book *At Home: A Short History of Private Life*.[105] While the truth of this anecdote has been questioned, it has become commonplace because it crystalizes a set of values and beliefs pervasive within design discourse. [106]

Morris was easily bored in school, especially with his classically based education. After enrolling at Exeter College in 1852, he developed an interest in Medieval history and architecture, inspired by many of the buildings in Oxford.[107] This initial interest would become a lifelong pursuit, connecting him to Britain's growing Medievalist movement and eventually exposing him to writers and philosophers who stoked a growing socialist tendency, which rejected many of the values of industrial capitalism.

Role of the Individual Creator

Morris had high regard for the writings of John Ruskin, who praised the art of medieval craftsmen, sculptors and carvers who, he believed, were free to express their

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[105] Bill Bryson, *At Home: A Short History of Private Life* (New York: Anchor Books, 2010), 32.

[106] *Royal Institute of British Architects Journal, Vol. 58*, 1951 and *The Journal of the Royal Architecture Institute of Canada, Vol. 29*, 1952.

[107] Thompson, E.P., *William Morris: Romantic to Revolutionary* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1955), 6.

creative individualism. Ruskin was also very critical of the artists of the 19th century, whom he accused of being servants of the industrial age. Art critic Patrick Conner wrote that "Ruskin... proved an inspiration to William Morris… [He] inherited from Ruskin a hostility to classical and Renaissance culture, which extended to the arts and design of [his] own time. Ruskin and his followers believed that the nineteenth century was still afflicted by a demand for mass-production... They opposed themselves to mechanized production, meaningless ornament and anonymous architecture of cast iron and plate glass."

Morris was a staunch critic of mass-production and the system of industrial consumption it allowed. He believed that the ease and lack of care evident in manufacturing not only produced lower quality goods, but removed dignity from the individual craftsman as well as the society that allowed this degradation to take place:

> I want handicraftsmen proper, that is, those who make wares, to be in such a position that they may be able to refuse to make foolish and useless wares, or to make the cheap and nasty wares which are the mainstay of competitive commerce, and are indeed slave-wares, made by and for slaves. And in order that the workmen may be in this position, I want division of labour restricted within reasonable limits, and men taught to think over their work and take pleasure in it. I also want the wasteful system of middlemen restricted, so that workmen may be brought into contact with the public, who will thus learn something about their work, and so be able to give them due reward of praise for excellence."[108]

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[108] William Morris, "Art, Wealth and Riches" in *The Collected Works of William Morris,* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 150.

Factories were capable of churning out hundreds of objects created through "unintelligent work" and with no regard for the humanity of the individuals employed. The nature of manufacturing work, according to Morris, separated individuals, dividing them instead of bringing them together in pursuit of an elevation of society "which the daily sight of beautiful handiwork brings to bear upon people."[109]

For Morris, the role of design and designed objects was not promotion of progress or utilitarianism as was seen with the Crystal Palace; instead, handiwork as he called it, reminded the craftsman of his or her own individuality and role in the creation of a beautiful society. Morris' ideas were more than a little tinged with sentimentality for a romanticized past, but his writing on beauty promotes the central role of the individual within design and shows a deep distrust of the utility of mass production and industrialization as means to improve society. For whatever utility these advancements might afford, they were not worth the removal of the designer or artist from a place of importance within the construction of a more just future society.

Just as for Ruskin, the people and processes of design could not be separated from the overall goodness of an object; in this way of thinking all parts need to function correctly for goodness to be achieved. If the individual's role was reduced to little more than operating a mindless machine, the end product would always be less than one created by the skilled hands of a craftsperson. Likewise, the process of work endowed an object with an increased value. Borrowing from Ruskin, a handmade book was always of more value than one produced by a machine. With these individual creations, the skills of the artist separated the work from the degrading work of industrialized production.

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[109] Morris, "Art, Wealth and Riches," 150.

Technology as Central to Modernity

Morris' writings very clearly point to a distaste for advancements in manufacturing, but he was not so shortsighted that he did not see the effect of technology on English society. "I know that this machine-organized labour is necessary to competitive commerce; that is to say, to the present constitution of society," he wrote. "I can only say that change must come, or at least be on the way, before art can be made to touch the mass of the people… Let us face the truth, and admit that a society which allows little other human and un-degrading pleasure to the greater part of its toilers save the pleasure that comes of rest after the torment of weary work - that such a society should not be stable if it is."[110]

The centrality of technology to modern society was evident to Morris. Despite his displeasure with its effects on society, Morris did not ignore the changes taking place. As a response to these changes, Morris called for a return to past modes of production as a means to mend a fractured society. The importance of technology stood in inverse proportion to the role of the individual in the creation of objects. As technology advanced, the role of the craftsman retreated, creating a more splintered society divided along lines of ownership of the means of production. For Morris, this was no different from medieval feudalism. Despite his strong views on industrialization, Morris wavered between full reversal of industrialization and the responsible use of manufacturing. The loss of individualism Morris believed was inherent in mass-produced goods was often balanced out by the possibility of reduced working hours as a part of a more ideal society.

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[110] Morris, "Art, Wealth and Riches," 151-152.

Dialogue Between Form and Function

In *Words and Buildings,* Adrian Forty explored the network of meaning that surrounds the modern usage of the term form. He identified four central ways the term was understood through usage by the end of the nineteenth century. These opposing ideas were main threads within the design discourse leading into the twentieth century:

> (i) 'form' as a property of seeing of objects (Kant). Or of the objects themselves;
> (ii) 'form' as a 'germ', a generative principle contained within organic matter, or works of art (Goethe); or as an 'idea' preceding the thing (Hegel);
> (iii) 'form' as the end of art, and entire subject of art, as Göller had proposed; or as merely the sign, through which an idea or force was revealed;
> (iv) 'form' in architecture presented by their mass or space.[111]

This network of meaning clearly illustrates the extreme difficulty in understanding what was meant in early modernist design discourse when form was used interchangeably as a descriptor, goal or product of design processes. Despite these differences, the thread that runs through all usage of form in the late nineteenth century is one of the relationship between the immaterial world and the material world created by artists and designers. As architect Leopold Eidlitz wrote in his book *The Nature and Function of Art,* form is the "[expression] of ideas in matter."[112] A few decades later, Louis Sullivan expressed this even

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[111] Adrian Forty "Form" *Words and Buildings: A Vocabulary of Modern Architecture*, (New York: Thames & Hudson, 2000), 160.

more directly. "All [forms], without fail, stand for relationships between the immaterial and the material, between the subjective and the objective – between the Infinite Spirit and the finite mind."[113] Form, no matter what its end goal, was understood as the expression of the unseen mind into the seen world.

Emerging from these ideas, function's role within early modernist design was in direct relationship with form. Just as processes and materials of design implied the goodness of the objects, the understanding of 'right' form dictated right function. If proper attention were paid to form, then proper function would follow. Function was not a singular aspect of design, but existed primarily within the binary with form; one did not exist independent of the other. In 1926 art critic and historian Adolf Behne wrote about the connected nature of function in his book *The Modern Functional Building.* "If every building is part of a built whole, then it recognizes from its aesthetic and formal requirements certain universally valid rules, rules that do not arise from its individual functional character but from requirements of this whole."[114] Functional character, for Behne, means an object's purpose or how it is to be used. This function, if properly pursued, gives direction to formal choices. Form, therefore, is the material way in which ideal function could be manifested.

It is within this context, then, that we can understand Louis Sullivan's dictate that form follow function. Form, according to Sullivan, was an organic manifestation of function,

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[112] Leopold Eidlitz *The Nature and Function of Art* (New York: A.C. Armstrong and Son, 1881), 307.

[113] Louis Sullivan "Kindergarten Chats" in *Kindergarten Chats and Other Writings* (New York: Wittenborn, 1947).

[114] Adolf Behne *The Modern Functional Building* (Los Angeles: The Getty Center for the History of Art, 1996), 137.

allowing form to become a common-sense effect of the underlying function of an object, a building or a space. It is not, as most often wrongly assumed, that formal considerations were only possible once a proper understanding of function existed; instead form, just as with truth to materials or processes, was the proof of proper function. "It is the pervading law of all things organic and inorganic, of all things physical and metaphysical, of all things super-human, of all true manifestations of the head, of the heart, of the soul," Sullivan wrote, "that the life is recognizable in its expression, that form ever follows function. *This is the law*."[115]

Frank Lloyd Wright

The most famous of Sullivan's apprentices and a self-described "enthusiast of the anti-machine Arts and Crafts Movement," Frank Lloyd Wright, responded to the implications of the modern world less polemically than Morris but more self-aggrandizingly.

Role of the Individual Creator

Frank Lloyd Wright was never one to shy away from strong statements, especially as they pertained to his work as a designer. "A creative being is a god," he asserted in 1927. "There will never be too many gods."[116] His concept of the individual's role in creation was unmatched in its arrogance. For Wright, the creation of art was nothing less than "the

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[115] Louis Sullivan, "The Tall Office Building Artistically Considered" in *Lippincott's Monthly Magazine* (March 1896).

[116] Frank Lloyd Wright, *The Essential Frank Lloyd Wright: Critical Writings on Architecture,* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008), 102.

creation of man as a perfect follower of nature."[117] A proponent of the ideal of the enlightened genius, Wright went so far as to say nature exercised "no freedom of choice," and that even the grandest natural formations were "not architecture at all."[118] The individual was the nexus of all things, performing as "nature's higher nature," which in turn made design "a higher type of and expression of nature."[119] In keeping with his admiration of Morris and the Arts and Crafts philosophy, Wright staunchly believed in the "illustrious sovereignty of the individual," and he reminded his colleagues of this unsparingly.[120]

Where William Morris called for the elevation of craftsmen to previous heights of respect, Frank Lloyd Wright demanded it. The diminished nature of the individual that Arts and Crafts philosophy mourned was championed by Wright on a daily basis. Even as early as his first apprenticeship, Wright resorted to physical violence when disagreements over work arose. He was even fired by Louis Sullivan for breaking a clause in his contract by designing buildings outside of company scope. The individual was the genius and genius was bestowed by nature, making creative pursuits not only a natural development but ordained by the processes of the world.

Technology as Central to Modernity

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[117] Letter to Lewis Mumford in Frank Lloyd Wright, *Letters to Architects,* (London: The Architectural Press Limited, 1987), 143.

[118] Frank Lloyd Wright, *Modern Architecture: Being the Kahn Lectures for 1930,* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008), endnotes.

[119] Baker Brownell and Frank Lloyd Wright, *Architecture and Modern Life,* (Harper & Brothers, 1937), 42.

[120] Frank Lloyd Wright, *A Testament,* (Horizon Press, 1957), 60.

Beginning as a draftsman in the late 1880s, Wright began and ended his career during a period of expansive technological change in design and materials. Wright's architectural sensibility was largely informed by the commercial education he received in the Chicago office of Adler & Sullivan tempered by the use of traditional forms espoused by the Arts and Crafts movement. These two modes of thinking were in constant conflict with one another, yet Wright was often more in favor of commercial aspects in design over the idealism of Arts and Crafts philosophies.

For Wright, technology allowed for superiority of materials. He firmly believed that steel was the exemplary material of the age, yet believed that the true nature of tools and materials should be learned so that they could be used according to their best purpose. In his essay "In the Cause of Architecture II: Standardization, The Soul of the Machine," Wright praised the standardization that manufacturing afforded and saw it as a tool for democracy if used by the proper hands. However, standardization like other tools, must be learned so that individuals could discern what made it natural, or in Wright's terminology, organic. Wright's split with his European colleagues came with his belief that machines did not remove the natural appeal or characteristics of materials, but instead, could promote the best aspects of nature. Exposing the pure grain of wood, plating glass in repeatable fashion, and even forming steel to show strength were all readily available because of advances in technology that marked the modern period.[121]

Technology allowed for new styles as well. Through the use of steel, Wright believed modern architecture and design to have made the same profound advancement as the

[121] See Frank Lloyd Wright, "The Cause of Architecture II: Standardization, the Soul of the Machine" in *The Architectural Record,* June 1927, 478-480.

discovery and mastery of the arch. The arch, extending from Ruskinian ideas of truth in architecture, supported a structure with beauty. It was useful and pleasing to the idea, forming an example of proper form through proper function. Steel, in this same way, with its naturally unadorned qualities was perfect for both architects and designers. Through its strength and unimposing characteristics, steel allowed architecture to transcend the limiting factors of masonry and move into new territories of design. Steel – and its partner concrete – were tools for liberating design from the "weight of taste that still ties minds to dead forms."[122] This weight of taste, according to the Wright, was the reliance of architecture and design on outdated historicist forms. By repeating these forms, not only was the designer limited in their artistic pursuits, but they were also limiting their work through the exclusion of new materials that allowed new forms such as the exaggerated cantilever to be used.

Dialogue Between Form and Function

As an apprentice of Louis Sullivan, Wright was no doubt accustomed to hearing the adage *form follows function.* After parting ways with Sullivan in 1893, his projects incorporated the tenets of his master, but they began to take on new form. For Wright, form and function were not a binary, but were an interconnected, singular thought. Instead of strictly adhering to the idea that the purpose of a building should be the starting point for its design, Wright extended the teachings of Sullivan, changing the phrase to "form and function are one." Separate them and the resulting work would be sterile.

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[122] Jerome Klinkowitz, *Frank Lloyd Wright and His Manner of Thought,* (University of Wisconsin Press, 2014), 74.

The application of this axiom can be seen in Wright's 1903 Larkin Administration Building in Buffalo, New York, through its focus on function as a means for radical restatement of the form and social environment of the office building. This restatement also allows the form to dictate function, creating a conversation – not an unbalanced binary – between form and function. Through his use of steel frame construction and brick exterior, Wright created a massive building that allowed for space to be open within the building and not broken up by unnecessary repeating structural supports. Its imposing exterior is "challenging and rather forbidding, but it tells that something is contained inside. Entrance to it must be sought."[123] And while the exterior defines the internal space, a central glass-roofed hall rises through the height of the structure allowing for natural light and a feeling of internal space that works against the imposing nature of the exterior once entry is gained.

The interconnectedness of form and function – or organic design - is perhaps best seen in his home and studio, Taliesin. Wright employed the term organic to describe his philosophy of design. Not unlike its current usage in commercial food production, organic denotes a purity and natural quality that emanated from an inherent or inevitable idea of form. The function rightly understood would complement a form rightly developed, resulting in an organic design that fit the area and circumstances exactly. Organic design, when developed properly, would result in a lasting or universal form that would feel as natural as a tree or mountain. Taliesin wraps around the brow of a hill in the Wisconsin countryside. From its place below the peak of the hill, the structure integrates itself into

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[123] Vincent Scully, Jr., "Frank Lloyd Wright" in William Alex's *The Masters of World Architecture Series,* (New York: George Braziller, Inc., 1960).

nature and does not disturb the view of the hill from a distance. It was built with local materials, incorporated large glass windows and relied on natural light. In these ways, it lived in harmony with the nature it was a part of, becoming a feature of the surrounding landscape.

In the second half of his career, Wright worked on a series of houses that didn't just showcase his ideas of form and function but were designed with the idea that the way their function was re-envisioned as a new form could actually improve society and provide for a more democratic future. The houses were to be foundational structures in the United States of North America – or Usonia – Wright's idealized vision of the United States. These homes would be modest but comfortable, well-made and beautiful structures for working and middle-class Americans. The cost for each home would be around $5,000 (around $85,000 today). Usonia embodied Wright's ideas that not only do form and function become one concept if conceived rightly, but that the form thus created could inspire its residents to eat better, dress better, listen to better music and be better people. This betterment was in no small part a result of the individualization that mass-customization would allow for. Usonia would be a land where individuals would spread away from the degrading and crowded cities and transition into independent lives lived humbly and in harmony with nature.

The Jacobs House in the suburbs of Madison, Wisconsin, was the first Usonian home, and it reversed many ideas of urban architecture. Upon approaching the house, visitors are met by an exterior wooden paneled wall with few windows. In Wright's view, the exterior of a house should be a functional aspect for the inhabitants, not a grandiose display for those who only experience it from the outside. The front wall, like the exterior of the Larkin Administration Building, moves the function of the house inside the exterior walls. A row of

windows extends along the entire back of the house, drawing the eye to the backyard and into nature. The small footprint of the house is balanced by the openness of the floor plan and the visual space created by a near continuous wall of glass windows.

In Usonia Wright envisioned designing all the houses, but also the furniture, the dishes and utensils and the possibly even the clothes. By redesigning the objects that intersect with the daily life of people, Wright believed he could redesign America. Wright's belief in the power of design to reshape society is very similar to Morris' belief that by incorporating more beauty into the daily lives of individuals, he could return some of the dignity that had been stolen by the modernization of manufacturing and industrialization. For both men, good design could make the country more beautiful, but, more importantly, it could make it more enlightened.

The Bauhaus

The Bauhaus is perhaps the most well-known of design's responses to modernity and – because of this – its practices and style are equated with a general definition of modernism. While the Bauhaus factors heavily in the development of modernism in design, this overemphasis promotes undue aggrandizement or the near-mythic elevation of its place within the history of design.

The Bauhaus is seen in this light in part due to Nikolaus Pevsner's *Pioneers of Modern Design.* This book places Bauhaus founding director Walter Gropius at the zenith of a teleological evolution of modern design that began with William Morris and resulted in the creation of a universally accepted form of design, the ideal endpoint of the design progress. Gropius' work as an architect and as director of the Bauhaus created "the new

style, the genuine and legitimate style of our century."[124] In this statement we read several features common across modernist design discourse such as movement toward an ideal future and ideas of inside knowledge of pure truth. We also find a surety and confidence in the language seen in the statements by Prince Albert, Morris and Wright. The Bauhaus and its associated designers were no different in their thinking about the promise of a bright future. The period of its development was marked by "an age that felt itself to be revolutionary…the ideas of the Russian October Revolution kindled versions of the renewal of society."[125]

In 1919, Walter Gropius was confirmed as the director of the Bauhaus, a school that combined the applied arts-oriented Weimar Arts and Crafts School and the fine arts-oriented Weimar Art Academy. The manifesto of the school was clear in its aim to unite all artistic endeavors under a new banner of progressive utopianism:

> The ultimate goal of all art is the building! The ornamentation of the building was once the main purpose of the visual arts, and they were considered indispensable parts of the great building. Today, they exist in complacent isolation, from which they can only be salvaged by the purposeful and cooperative endeavours of all artisans. Architects, painters and sculptors must learn a new way of seeing and understanding the composite character of the building…The art schools of old were incapable of producing this unity

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[124] Pevsner, 27.

[125] Andreas Haus, "Bauhaus: History" in *Bauhaus,* edited by Jeannine Fuller and Peter Feierabend, (Potsdam, Germany: H.F. Ullman, 2013), 14.

> – and how could they, for art may not be taught. They must return to the workshop. This world of mere drawing and painting of draughtsmen and applied artists must at long last become a world that builds…Architects, sculptors, painters – we all must return to craftsmanship! For there is no such thing as "art by profession". There is no essential difference between the artist and the artisan…So let us therefore create a new guild of craftsmen, free of the divisive class pretensions that endeavoured to raise a prideful barrier between craftsmen and artists! Let us strive for, conceive and create the new building of the future that will unite every discipline, architecture and sculpture and painting, and which will one day rise heavenwards from the million hands of craftsmen as a clear symbol of a new belief to come.[126]

This new building of the future found its model in the past. Gropius did not build his utopian vision upon the metaphor of futuristic architectural fantasy; instead, he used the Gothic cathedral, establishing a more direct conversation based within an approachable European context. The Gothic cathedral was a culmination of a combined community's labors, and rose toward heaven as a "crystalline symbol" of faith. While the manifesto never makes explicit mention of the medieval cathedral, Gropius "cites it in virtually every other text [during this period]."[127] By presenting the cathedral as an ideal for the genesis of the Bauhaus curriculum, Gropius was not calling for a return to historicist form, but he was

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[126] Walter Gropius, "Bauhaus Manifesto and Program" 1919.

[127] Charles W. Haxthausen, "Walter Gropius and Lyonel Feininger: Bauhaus Manifesto 1919" in *Bauhaus 1919-1933: Workshops for Modernity* edited by Barry Bergdoll and Leah Dickerman, (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 2009,) 64.

calling for a return to Gothic modes of production. As seen in the writing of earlier designers, these modes of production were seen as imbuing dignity upon the craftsmen, and where proper process was maintained, proper form would be assured. In line with Morris and Wright, Gropius believed designers to be of ultimate importance to the overall health of a community. The cathedral stood for combined efforts that were in pursuit of the betterment of a community and created a brighter future.

According to art historian Horst Claussen, Gropius "employed the Middle Ages as a code to designate something fundamentally new, yet indeterminate."[128] Toward this aim, Gropius invoked the *Bauhütten* or the mason's lodges from the medieval "golden age of cathedrals." These lodges served as the model for the *Arbeitsgemeinschaft*, the community of architects, artists, and craftsmen Gropius believed would collaborate on the longed-for *Einheitskunstwerk*, the fully unified work of art and the ultimate goal of the Bauhaus.[129] This complete work of art was described as "the cathedral of the future"[130] or the "cathedral of socialism."[131] The cathedral, in this way, became less important as a building and more important as the embodiment of utopian ideals central to Gropius' vision for a new world transformed by art.

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[128] Horst Clausen, *Walter Gropius* (Olms: Hildesheim, 1986), 32.

[129] Haxthausen, 64.

[130] Walter Gropius, "From the First Proclamation of the Bauhaus" in *Bauhaus 1919-1928,* (New York: The Museum of Moden Art, 1936), 16.

[131] Oskar Schlemmer, "The Staatliche Bauhaus in Weimar" in *The Bauhaus: Weimar, Dessau, Berlin, Chicago,* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1969), 65.

Role of the Individual Creator

While many accounts of the Bauhaus, such as Pevsner's, have a tendency to focus on metaphysical or stylistic descriptions of the school's importance, these areas are not where the school's most lasting impacts are found. The Bauhaus nurtured a sustained cross-media conversation about the nature of art in the modern age.[132] Where Morris and Wright stressed the importance of the individual with a singularity of purpose, Gropius and the other Bauhaus masters developed curriculum that assembled artists, architects and designers together into a melting pot of ideas. The inclusion and mix of various prominent participants from across the visual arts was unprecedented and presented a challenge to earlier ideas of the separation of fine art and design that had been a dominant strand of conversation in the arts. This multidisciplinary approach to design education developed as a series of positions "varying, and sometimes at variance with one another, that attempted to work through the ways in which a new modern culture of technological media, machine production, global communication, and post-war politics might shape the role of the artist."[133]

The Bauhaus's response to modernity can be most clearly seen in its pedagogical structure. Stemming from his ideal of the Gothic cathedral and the system of labor surrounding it, Gropius placed workshops as a central feature of Bauhaus curriculum. These workshops aligned the Bauhaus with a current of progressive thinking about design

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[132] For a deeper examination of the context of this statement, see Leah Dickerman "Bauhaus Fundaments" in *Bauhaus 1919-1933: Workshops for Modernity* edited by Barry Bergdoll and Leah Dickerman, (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 2009) 14-39.

[133] Dickerman, 15.

reform established before World War I.[134] This model of workshop education had become central to other modern craft schools and focused on drawing students away from the studio settings of the nineteenth century that focused on the replication and reproduction of historical forms. The workshops were areas for exploration through experience; students were urged to learn by creating.

These workshops also fought against prevailing nineteenth-century notions of the separation of fine arts and applied arts. The demarcation seen in design as high and low art would be abolished through the teaching structure of the workshops. Each workshop was led by a craftsman (*Werkmeister*) and a fine artist (*Formmeister*) that spoke to Gropius' "desire to assure that technical knowledge was complemented by aesthetic ambition."[135] After a first-year class of less-than-stellar students, Gropius amended the curriculum to include a first-year preliminary course focusing on theoretical training in color, form and materials. This preliminary course furthered the erasure of the boundary between fine art and craft.

Gropius and fellow master Johannes Itten developed the preliminary course with the belief that theoretical training could be based on the fundamentals of design. Through their work, they believed they could see through the specific elements of any given work and define timeless abstract laws. In this way of thinking, if these laws could be taught to students early on, the break with historicist forms and outdated means of design and

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[134] For more on precedents within design reform prior to the Bauhaus, see John V. Maciuika, *Before the Bauhaus: Architecture, Politics and the German State, 1890-1920* (Cambridge: University Press, 2005) and Frederic J. Schwartz, *The Werkbund: Design Theory and Mass Culture before the First World War* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996).

[135] Dickerman, 15.

production could be assured. The preliminary course existed to create epistemological doubt, "a skepticism of received knowledge."[136] Itten's chief aim was to rid students of "all the dead wood of convention" in order to help them unlearn what they had been taught previously and return them to a state of childlike potential where learning could begin anew.[137]

The role of the individual creator within the philosophy of the Bauhaus has many similarities to the role William Morris believed the artist or designer to hold. The pedagogical aim of the Bauhaus was to create a type of enlightened individual, whose primary role was in promoting the return of beauty to society. However, in a break with these more romantic notions of design, the Bauhaus shared similarities with Wright's thinking regarding the need for design to enable the transcending of language and historical form, to break with the old and use new techniques and materials to explore the possibilities of an unlimited future. The designer was not a lone genius as Wright championed, but there was an innate power in his or her ability to discern the truth of the world based on exploration of the Itten's *fundaments* of visual art. "Every work of art carries the signature of its creator," Gropius wrote in 1924. "From the multiplicity of equally economical solutions – for there is not just one in each case – the creative individual selects that one that suits his personal feelings and taste."[138]

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[136] Dickerman, 15.

[137] Johnanes Itten, *Design and Form: The Basic Course at the Bauhaus and Later, 1963* (New York: Litton Educational Publishing, 1975), 7.

[138] Walter Gropius "Breviary for Bauhaus Members" in *The Bauhaus: Weimar, Dessau, Berlin, Chicago,* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1969), 76.

Technology as Central to Modernity

The Bauhaus was founded not on the suspicion or rejection of industrialization propagated by Morris but on the hopeful potential and possibility technology that Wright had become such an avid proponent of. The Bauhaus internalized a rejection of past society, which was seen as responsible for the First World War and the decorative excesses of design that marked this period. The curriculum focused on new design approaches that resulted in geometric forms, primary colors and a language of abstraction that was "synonymous with the nature of machine-produced forms."[139] Following this idea, the Bauhaus masters believed design could harness industrial mass-production to transform every aspect of life.

The founding of the Bauhaus by Gropius focused on medievalism, craft handwork and aspects of Expressionism as means to develop a new utopian society following World War I. This period culminated in the 1923 Bauhaus Exhibition, but in 1924, Gropius established a new path forward for the Bauhaus. His "Breviary for Bauhaus Members" looked ahead to further developments at the school and introduced the theme "Art and Technology: A New Unity."[140] Design was to be an agent of change within the emerging social order of post-war Germany.

During his work with the Deutscher Werkbund before World War I, Gropius had passionately argued the primacy of designers in relation to technology and industry.[141] He

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[139] John Heskett, "Design in Inter-War Germany" in *Designing Modernity: The Arts of Reform and Persuasion, 1885-1945* (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1995), 257.

[140] Gropius, "Breviary for Bauhaus Members," 76.

[141] See John Heskett, *German Design: 1870-1918* (New York, 1986), 135-136.

expanded this idea with the Bauhaus by positioning the artist workshops as equivalent to scientific laboratories where students could learn the best and most advanced means of developing and producing products for a new age. The prototypes that emerged from the workshops would be suitable for mass-production and would be the means by which the Bauhaus vision of utopia would be transferred to the masses through industry, thus affecting a transformation within social life. Good products would be made that pointed toward a better, ideal future.

Dialogue Between Form and Function

An example of this philosophy can be seen in Herbert Bayer's advertisement for the 1931 Adler Standard 8 "Modell Gropius," a mass-produced automobile. The text of the advertisement not only mimics Gropius' own ideas from "Breviary for Bauhaus Members," but also directly appeals to the Bauhaus's new concept of the dialogue between form and function:

> In purchasing an automobile, the form of the car, its *aesthetic total impression,* plays a decisive role. What are the means that enable a *beautiful* car to originate? The measure of the beauty of an auto depends on harmonizing the form of its external appearance with the logic of its technical function, not on the trimmings of flourishes of trimming and ornamentation. The complete technical organization must therefore find its worthy complement in a fully matured, well-proportioned form, that functions in aesthetic sense exactly as the technical apparatus itself.[142]

Removing the dialogue of form and function further from Sullivan's statement and much more in line with Wright's idea of form and function as one, work created by masters and students of the Bauhaus shows that form does not follow function or even arise from it. Instead, form is a choice made by the designer according to a set of ultimately aesthetic ideals. As seen in the Adler advertisement, it was not geometric form that dictated the shape of the automobile, but a personal choice of the designer who claimed to understand the interconnectedness of technology, form and function.

Conclusion

Far too often, the early twentieth century is defined by expansive terms like modern, ignoring the subtle changes and nuances that occurred within design discourse and practice. This ignorance does not just flatten the work and expression of diverse designers into monolithic periods or movements, but also serves to reduce design discourse's role in the experiences and material production of a newly industrialized world. Through an inclusive understanding of modernity, one that accepts multiple expressions of modernism as equally valid, commonality can be found and themes can be understood. The fact of modernity may be near-universal, but the ways in which this modernity played out in particular communities under particular points of view is not.

Because of the proximity of many of its nations, the sociopolitical climates of Western Europe in the early twentieth century shared similarities in their response to modernity. By examining these similarities through a lens of design, the concept of

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[142] "Der Neue Adler: Adler Schaf-Kabriolet 'Standard' 8, 'Modell Gropius'," (pamphlet) 1931, Wolfsonian Collection XB1991.834.

goodness as a foundational theme in the prevailing design discourse emerges. Despite a growing distrust of language following the turn of the century, goodness as a concept remained dominant in leftist and idealist groups and individuals who envisioned their ideas as catalysts for new utopian societies that would take the place of authoritarian regimes.

In this way, the objects, buildings and spaces created by designers in the early twentieth century were carriers of philosophical ideas and experiments into the possibilities of new materials and industrial processes. The rise of manufacturing may have played a large role in the definition of the design field in the early decades of the 1900s, but its role would expand even further as manufacturing became central to the work of designers following World War II. This was evident to many design practitioners, and the central struggle of their work shows their interest in reconciling the work of artists and designers with the increasing ability and societal preference to produce cost-effective, mass-produced objects.

Toward mid-century, this development would be better understood through the ideas and framework established during the opening decades of the century. The Crystal Palace, William Morris, Frank Lloyd Wright and the Bauhaus serve as examples of the ways in which particular modernisms engaged with culture in the areas of ideas surrounding the individual creation and creators, technology's central role in modernity and the understanding of the dialogue between form and function. These expressions of modernism maintained an elevated, and at times assumed enlightened, position of design authority over the common man and society. The ideas developed were not developed in connection with individuals, but in supposed service to society; the artists and designers

actively engaging these conversations were not working for the individual, but on behalf of humankind.

While each expression of modernism upheld its own reasoning or philosophies in these areas as paramount, each was informed by the larger context of design that was developing during this time. This cultural conversation incorporated new ideas, struggled with established concepts and developed new ways of understanding the world through art and design. As the century progressed, this conversation would increase and provide fertile ground for a distinctly American modernism to emerge following the rise of totalitarianism in Western Europe.

Goodness as Commerce: The Museum of Modern Art and American Modernism

As curator of the Museum of Modern Art's 1934 exhibition *Machine Art,* Philip Johnson attempted to re-contextualize and redefine modern design for an American public who, at best, were uninterested in the idealist design of the Bauhaus and other European schools. And while Johnson was concerned with educating the public, he had a more pressing goal. Johnson, in agreement with philosopher L.P. Jacks, believed that "industrial civilization must find a means of ending the divorce between its industry and its 'culture' or perish."[143] This attitude was common during this period. As a holdover of earlier ideas embodied by the Arts and Crafts movement and early reactions to modernity, this "divorce" was the separation of "high" from "low," from the designers and those in charge of production.

Despite a growing dependence on machines, American industrial design seemed uninterested in the aesthetic possibilities afforded by a burgeoning knowledge of materials and their expanding industrial advantage. In American manufacturing, cheap

[143] Lawrence Pearsall Jacks, *Responsibility and Culture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1925).

"modernistic"[144] tricks were routinely employed to mimic modern design considerations. Just had been the critique of the Crystal Palace from artists and designers, the ability to quickly produce these modern seeming forms superseded the perspectives that marked their creation at institutions such as the Bauhaus. These modernistic tricks were, therefore, seen as "misappropriated fragments of antiquity"[145] that merely applied a particular style without regard for materials, function or process, and, in instances where products were designed with materials in mind, engineers were largely ambivalent about the creative direction afforded by new industrial processes and materials.

In the exhibition catalog for *Machine Art,* Johnson sought to combat this practice:

> The problem in America has not been the conflict against a strong handicraft tradition but rather against a "modernistic" French machine-age aesthetic. Besides the French Decorative movement in the 20s there developed in America a desire for "styling" objects for advertising. Styling a commercial object gives it more "eye-appeal" and therefore helps sales. Principles such as "streamlining" often receive homage out of all proportions to their applicability.

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[144] In the December 1938 *Bulletin of the Museum of Modern Art*, then-curator of the museum's Department of Architecture and Industrial Art, John McAndrew, spent considerable space combatting the use of modernistic. The press surrounding the recent Bauhaus exhibit predominantly illustrated Bauhaus and modern design considerations as gimmicks employed to sell streamlined products that appeared modern but did not focus on the design process or functionalism as a means to creation. Modern was the correct term, according to McAndrew, for the work taking place at the Bauhaus, where modernistic was applied to non-critical application of popularized form. The terms modernistic, moderne and streamlined can all be seen as derogatory toward the then-current state of non-critical design.

[145] "Machinery and the Modern Style." *The New Republic*, August 3, 1921.

> Conscious design and the development in machine building have fused and the twentieth century restores the art of making machines and useful objects to its place, as a technic of making rapidly, simply and well the useful objects of current life.[146]

This large undertaking occurred through a series of programmatic choices made by MoMA from the mid-1930s into the 1950s, all of which focused on the elevation of everyday objects through their adherence to modern design principles, ultimately defining good design for an entire generation. No small task, indeed.

From its introduction in the United States in the early twentieth century, modernism struggled to gain wide acceptance as either a stylistic choice or as a set of aesthetic and intellectual ideals. As the editor of *The Journal of the American Institute of Architects,* Charles Harris Whitaker printed articles and reviews that routinely discounted the work of modernists.[147] Irving Pond, a Chicago School architect who reviewed foreign architectural press for Whitaker thought German architecture to be "disturbing." Despite being impressed with their "bigness of spirit and…simplicity and directness," he despised German designers for being "modernistic and individualistic in their tendencies" and "prone to

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[146] Philip Johnson, "History of Machine Art," in *Machine Art* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1934), n.p.

[147] While architecture and graphic design may be largely separated by the current structure of the university, architecture plays a large role in the history of modern design. While industry historically differentiated graphic arts/design as a decorative or industrial art, architecture has been included in the art historical canon. Specifically, the Museum of Modern Art views architecture as art and it is a major factor in its collections and philosophy. For this reason, any discussion of modern graphic design in twentieth century America would be lacking if it did not include architecture as a point of departure for discussions of design.

attempt the bizarre."[148] Within in this myopic view of modernism as mere stylistic choice, the architecture emerging in Germany and across Europe was a sign, to Pond, Whitaker and other Americans, of irresponsible and unworkable design. Individually, these comments could be seen as expressions of personal preference, but as a whole the sentiments of the prevailing design press showed an unfavorable disdain for emerging European modernist tenets in lieu of historicist styles of neo-expressionism and Arts & Crafts neo-medievalism.[149] In general, Americans at large were skeptical of German intellectual and cultural developments following World War I and was culturally unwilling to align itself with the radical departure from traditional art that European modernism espoused.

Despite this widespread ignorance or ambivalence, pockets of modernist proponents, including MoMA, worked hard to help the ideals of the Bauhaus and other modernist groups become commonplace as standards of design excellence. With its simple tenets—form is determined by use, form is influenced by materials, form is the result of the process of manufacturing, and form is the creation of the designer—the focus of the Bauhaus consistently allowed a space for exploration in the design process, often resulting in products that felt current even after decades of use. The idealism that undergirded all Bauhaus teaching allowed for focus on function, which in turn, informed formal choices.

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[148] Irving K. Pond, "From Foreign Shores," JAIA. 12, no. 3 (March, 1924), 122; 13, no. 1 (January 1925), 11-12; 13, no. 7 (July 1925), 251-252; 13, no. 11 (November 1925), 403.

[149] As architectural expressions, neo-expressionism and neo-medievalism both found space within the early years of European modernism, especially in Germany. Despite the Bauhaus's alignment, through the early writings of Gropius, with the form of the Gothic cathedral, that building was more a symbolic than literal model for the aims of the Bauhaus. Its form was less important than its exemplification of an inclusive mode of production.

This "singular directness"[150] was appealing to individuals within the American art community, and its reliance on functionalism set the Bauhaus apart as the distinguished and, as some would argue, logical continuation of Ruskinian honesty in design.

While the idealism central to Bauhaus design rested on deeply held social and political principles, the introduction of its aesthetic principles into American modernism was found through its capitalistic, not philosophic, value. While both the Bauhaus and modernism in America shared an interest in creating a more enlightened public through exposure to good design, in America this introduction would be made primarily through adoption and adaptation of style, of form stripped of its suspect and poorly understood idealist baggage. In this way the designs of the Bauhaus would find a home in America, but with much less reliance on the philosophy that helped give their function form. As a major player in this evolution, the Museum of Modern Art positioned modern design as a stylistic preference and a commercial aim. Goodness in American design was, therefore, no longer contingent on its idealist roots, but was instead a function of its commercial value. As the Bauhaus teachers fled Germany and were incorporated into American design practice, their idealism was reconstructed to place its end goal not in utopia, but in aesthetically pleasing and affordably priced objects for the American home. The improvement of society through design would not be in the pursuit of utopia, but rather for be through the commercial education of right or proper form that would be found in the objects of daily life.

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[150] John McAndrew, *The Bulletin of the Museum of Modern Art*, Vol. 5, No. 6 (Dec., 1938), 3.

Design Enters the Museum

The precedent for design as a part of the modern museum was well established in Europe prior to MoMA's similar activities, especially through the development of the South Kensington, now Victoria & Albert, Museum in England. Prince Albert envisioned South Kensington to be a part of a larger group of institutions, all focused on the "production of useful knowledge"[151] for the benefit of the entire nation, a key priority in its initial founding. Under the guidance of its first director, Henry Cole, South Kensington served as a museum only in title, instead functioning as a unit of the British government's educational programs within the Department of Science and Art. In the Annual Report to the Department in 1877, four years after Cole's retirement, the priorities for the museum were listed, in order of importance, as instruction in science and industry, drawing and fine arts as applied to industry and, finally, as a museum.[152] This development, Nikolaus Pevsner pointed out in *Academies of Art,* had begun much earlier from the Renaissance onward, but was reinvigorated by "mercantilism" in support of manufacturing and commerce. He also asserted that this growth was not an incidental development but shows "the paramount importance of economic considerations."[153]

The South Kensington Museum's path from idea to institution was circuitous and not without its hazards, but its emergence as a social force for educating the public on

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[151] Bruce Robertson, "The South Kensington Museum in Context: An Alternative History," *Museum and Society* 2, no. 1 (2004), 2.

[152] Robertson, 3-4.

[153] Nikolaus Pevsner, *Academies of Art Past and Present* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1940), 158. Despite his fall from grace in the 1970s due to concerns over his methodology and ideology, Pevsner's work presents an historical view from within modernism itself.

industry and design was not an accident. Liberal politics in England during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries pushed for the public good, dispensing with royalty and nobility in favor of more democratic systems of government and society, particularly in the establishment of public education as a means to elevate all classes of citizens. To this end, the Lancashire trade unionist John Doherty remarked in 1832 that "knowledge…is the most closely connected with, and essential to,...social happiness and moral regeneration."[154] As Anthony Burton points out in *Vision & Accident: The Story of the Victoria & Albert Museum,* these sentiments were based in workers' movements and were not the direct context for the formation of the South Kensington Museum, but they do indicate the conversation from which its roots would develop. These workers' movements had more pressing tasks than setting up museums, but these were still acknowledged "as a means of educational advancement by the 1830s."[155]

This conversation about public education and the role of museums continued for several decades, but the subject was most notably debated in English government during the 1830s. One of the most vigorous proponents of art education was painter Benjamin Robert Haydon. During the 1820s and 1830s, Haydon petitioned Parliament for greater development of the arts in society at least five times[156] before connecting with Radical MP William Ewart in 1834. Haydon championed "to obtain from the Government and the

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[154] Quoted (from *The Poor Man's Advocate,* 25 February 1832) in Brian Simon, *Studies in the History of Education, 1780-1870,* London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1960, 219.

[155] Anthony Burton, *Vision & Accident: The Story of the Victoria & Albert Museum* (London: V&A Publications, 1999), 14.

[156] Quentin Bell, 'Haydon versus Shee,' *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 22, (1959), 347.

nobility the recognition of Art as a business of national concern."[157] This could only be achieved, Haydon and Ewart argued, by the establishment of art schools and public galleries. According to Haydon, Ewart believed the need for the public's access to art to be paramount within English society, responding to letters from Haydon by saying "the subject [of public art education] is one too *nationally* important to be lost sight of."[158]

Outside of Parliament, tradesmen and craftsmen were likewise taking heed of the role of art and design in the elevation of society. In 1835, during a hearing before the Select Committee on Arts and their Connexion with Manufactures, architect C.R. Cockerell noted the expansive differences between the connection the workmen of continental Europe had to good design and that of his own countrymen:

> …the leisure of the artizans in most of the cities, of France especially, is passed in the palaces and gardens of the king, where they have beautiful works before their eyes and architecture, sculpture, and painting; a paternal and enlightened government long ago (near 300 years) provided these elegant recreations for the people, instead of passing their holidays, as our artizans do, in the pot-house. In various manufacturing cities…I have been struck with the degrading comparison.[159]

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[157] Benjamin Robert Haydon, *Correspondence and Table-Talk. With a Memoir by his son, Frederick Wordsworth Haydon* , vol. 1 (London: Chatto and Windus, 1876), xi-xii.

[158] Haydon, 228.

[159] *Report* [Second Report] *from the Select Committee on Arts and their Connexion with Manufactures…Ordered, by the House of Commons, to be Printed, 16 August 1836,* viii-ix.

Cockerell's words were echoed a year later at a second session of the Committee. The Committee commented that Britain's "failure to produce well-designed goods"[160] rested squarely on "the want of instruction in design" and the "absence of public and freely open galleries containing approved specimens of art."[161] Going further, the Committee recommended that "the principles of design should form a portion of any permanent system of national education"[162] The Committee believed this to be true of all classes within society. Other European countries possessed an advantage over Britain because they did not charge admission to museums but allowed them to be free and open to the public. The Committee believed the admission fees not only to be unnecessary for Britain's museums, but that they created a system where "the poor are necessarily excluded."[163]

Burton traces the development of the South Kensington Museum to the actions of the Select Committee, especially the formation of the School of Design, which was established by the British government in 1836. As the School of Design gave way to the South Kensington and ultimately the Victoria & Albert Museum, its aims changed, but its history is rooted in the Select Committee's observations on public art and education and their place within a functioning progressive society. The museum was established and

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[160] Burton, 18.

[161] *Report,* iii.

[162] *Report,* vi; Minutes of Evidence, paras 2250-8.

[163] *Report,* v.

directed itself "toward the common populace and adopted an anti-Establishment stance,"[164] providing an example for other museums to follow.

In the United States, this transition began much later. Slowly, beginning in the 1920s and 1930s, American museums began taking chances in their curatorial decision-making, leading the way for the incorporation of modern design into established galleries and institutions. Many of the world's galleries and museums began as the private collections of royalty or nobility. As these collections were acquired by modern states and those states in turn became more democratic, the status of the collections remained unchanged, upholding a canon of High Art established in Western Europe since the Renaissance.

This deeply engrained belief that art museums should be solely for classical art and post-medieval European painting and sculpture was a repressive force to those who sought to expand the canon of art and include decorative, industrial and modern arts. In one instance, during the 1924 opening of the Metropolitan Museum of Art's American Wing, director Edward Robinson gave a lukewarm introduction to the new collection of American decorative art. "Their builders and craftsmen were endowed with a fine sense of line, proportion and the proper limits of decoration," he said. "Their work is never vulgar."[165] While this statement of support may seem understated and highly restrained, it places design within a context that sought the elevation of craft—and society—through its connection to the fine arts. This comment was a direct challenge to the accepted canon of American museum galleries in the early twentieth century that depended heavily on a

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[164] Burton, 9.

[165] "The World of Art: Houses of Our Ancestors in the Metropolitan Museum of Art," *New York Times,* August 24, 1924, SM12.

canon of High Art. Despite the precedent set by the South Kensington Museum and despite the Metropolitan Museum of Art's reputation in the early twentieth century as the most important art museum in the United States and a major force in the international art community, its director still needed to frame its more modern American collection items, furniture, silver, ceramics and other decorative objects, within an established historical conversation.

A few years later, a group of individuals would go beyond the simple introduction of American decorative objects into a gallery and would create a museum whose sole focus would be on consistently displaying avant-garde and modern art from around the globe that "truly reflect the taste, feeling and tendencies of the day."[166] The Museum of Modern Art in Manhattan was chartered under the auspices of a group of patrons, most notably Mrs. John D. Rockefeller and Mr. A. Conger Goodyear, who believed the interest in modern art had not been adequately met by its presence in established museums. For this reason, in 1929, the Museum of Modern Art opened its doors for "a series of frequently occurring exhibitions to be held during a period of at least two years"[167] financed by a privately raised endowment of $200,000. The museum would focus on painters, predominantly, from Cezanne to the present, positioning itself alongside other institutions such as the Tate Gallery in London and the Luxembourg in Paris.

Despite the charter's emphasis on painting, the patrons did not preclude the possibility that additional mediums would be considered as part of the permanent

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[166] Glenn Lowry, *Art in Our Time: A Chronicle of the Museum of Modern Art* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 2004), *27.*

[167] Lowry, *27.*

collection or exhibitions. Following the lead of the Metropolitan Museum of Art's tepid leadership in the expansion of gallery offerings, the patrons included a small paragraph in the museum's charter that left the door open for the future role MoMA would take in advocating for the cultural and commercial viability of modern design. "Our ultimate purpose is to establish a permanent public museum in this city," the charter stated. "The possibilities of such an institution are so varied and so great that it seems unwise to lay down too definite a program for it beyond our present one of a series of frequently occurring exhibitions."[168] This phrase had been included in the final draft due to a level of caution by the trustees prior to publication. According to Alfred H. Barr, Jr., MoMA's founding Director, the original draft was more pointed and included language pointing to the eventual segmentation and separation of other museum departments. "In time the Museum would probably expand beyond the narrow limits of painting and sculpture in order to include other departments devoted to…the arts of design in commerce and industry."[169] This language, proposed by Barr, was seen as too ambitious, and it was ultimately reduced to the more restrained and conservative text cited above.

The Museum of Modern Art was an attempt to change the culture of museums in the United States, but its strength was not in the renewed gallery conservatism exhibited by the tepid language of its trustees. Instead, MoMA's potential for disruption within the art world was embodied by Barr, its founding Director. His lofty goals and particular vision for the museum were not naiveté of youth, but rather evidence of a concept of art that sought to understand all that European modernism was attempting to embody. Barr's goals and

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[168] Lowry, *27.*

[169] Lowry, 29.

vision would guide MoMA beyond a series of exhibitions and would help establish the museum as the leading space for modern design in North America as well as the institution furthering Bauhaus principles once the school was closed by the fascists in 1933.

Industrial Design at MoMA

Prior to the Bauhaus closing, the Museum of Modern Art organized an exhibition of modern architecture that heavily leaned on the concepts of the soon-to-be defunct design school. The exhibition focused on J.J.P. Oud, Le Corbusier and Bauhaus directors Mies van der Rohe and Walter Gropius. This exhibit would not only be the first time that Bauhaus design principles would play heavily into a MoMA exhibition[170], but also the first step in the development of a separate Department of Industrial Design.

Museum director Alfred Barr, architectural historian Henry-Russell Hitchcock and architect Philip Johnson curated the show and wanted to display what was truly modern. They were not interested in decorative elements or modernistic style choices,[171] but design that "in their view obeyed the imperatives of objectivity and freedom."[172] The European architects were seen as radical by the curators, so the exhibition was presented in a manner that largely ignored political or social aims, like utopianism, focusing instead on

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[170] In 1938, following his appointment at the Harvard School of Architecture, Walter Gropius was invited by Barr to created a retrospective along with Herbert Bayer entitled "Bauhaus: 1919-1928." While overdue according to Barr, the exhibition was still timely in that many American design and architecture schools were currently modeling their curriculum after Bauhaus principles.

[171] See note 2.

[172] Sybil Gordon Kantor, *Alfred H. Barr, Jr., and the Intellectual Origins of the Museum of Modern Art* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2002), 276.

shared formal qualities as the context for the pieces.[173] Such aims were unimportant to a museum wishing to promote and present aesthetic developments void of ideology and hoping to educate an uninformed society on the formal characteristics of good design.

The idea of modernism was divisive, even among proponents of the term. Various groups throughout this time in Germany did not attempt stylistic experimentation, but relied, rather, on attempts to maintain continuity with the past while simultaneously being contemporary.[174] The Bauhaus, by forging a distinct separation from the past and focusing on idealist design, created a space for its students and practitioners to not only focus on new methods of production, but new formal possibilities as well. Consequently, the unique formalism that was seen in Bauhaus work was reason enough for Barr to keep the aims of the Bauhaus alive in the museum. "In modern times there have never been so many men of distinguished talent of any other art school or academy," he stated in 1938.

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[173] A focus on formal qualities alone marks much of Henry-Russell Hitchcock's work as an architectural historian. "Thorough and workman-like," according to David Watkin, Hitchcock's work was nonetheless marked by a lack of "conceptual or intellectual interest." Like the exhibition, much of Hitchcock's work was genealogical in form, relying on concepts of the individual author and direct influence within architecture. This is important to note as a principal reason for the lack of critical ideological context for the exhibition, but also as an idea of prevailing academic thoughts in design at the time. David Watkin, *The Rise of Architectural History,* (London: Architectural Press, 1980), 41-43.

[174] Mainstream alternatives to modernism in Europe have been described in many ways: Conservative Modernism, Conservative Functionalism, and Conservative Architecture. But all design historians agree that the proponents of design were simply seeking modernistic style that could overlay a historicist approach to design. These styles were attempts to make modernism more approachable to the conservative middle class of Germany prior to World War I. For more, see note seven, John Heskett "Design in Inter-War Germany" in *Designing Modernity: The Arts of Reform and Pursuasion 1885-1945,* ed. Wendy Kaplan (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1995), 284.

"[The Bauhaus] lives and grows through the men who made it." [175] So it would seem, according to the curatorial choices of MoMA, it would live and grow through public adoption as well.

"Modern Architecture: International Exhibition" was a success and launched the Department of Architecture, which was led and personally financed by Johnson. Johnson described the exhibition as "a cry of faith, a belief in a creed, a belief in a mission, a messianic show if you will…Hitchcock codified it, Alfred Barr gave it a name, and I did the propaganda and screaming. We prognosticated a revolutionary change in the architecture world."[176] Hitchcock proclaimed its importance even more ostentatiously. In his view, the exhibition "was not a history of the subject, but rather, at least for the United States, an event in its history."[177]

The exhibition was indeed a success. It was so successful that it launched the Department of Architecture later that year, personally financed by Johnson himself. The importance of encouraging good design grew within the museum over the next decade, prompting an expansion of exhibitions and programs focused on industrial design and the decorative arts. Following Johnson's departure from the museum in 1935 due to internal politics, the department continued to grow until 1940 when it split into two departments, the Department of Architecture and the Department of Industrial Design, before being reconciled into the unified Department of Architecture and Design in 1948. This split, as

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[175] Barr, preface to Bayer, Gropius, and Gropius, *Bauhaus,* 5-6.

[176] Martin Filler, "Philip Johnson, Deconstruction Worker," *Interview* 18 (May 1988), 104.

[177] Henry-Russell Hitchcock, "Modern Architecture—A Memoir," *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 27 (December 1968), 233.

noted by Irene Sunwoo, was not just about MoMA's "efforts to reconcile the role of the 'minor arts' within its broader program," but showed a "contentious" split between curators as well as a developing idea of the place of design within the spectrum of art.[178]

Before proceeding, it is important to remember that the museum as it was directed by Alfred Barr was not positioned as a politically active or engaged entity. Its charter was to showcase modern art, both accepted and newly emerging. The radicalization of the modern movement as it occurred in Europe was of no interest to the museum's trustees, patrons or director. Because of this, the focus of the Department of Architecture and Design—from its founding—was on form over functionalism. In the same way that European Modernism was losing its ideological roots, it was also losing its philosophical roots in America. Barr consistently neutralized modernism's polemical history by evoking the ambiguous term "international" for what he saw emerging as a style throughout Europe and the United States. Discussions of functionalism were replaced by concepts of formalism, removing any politically divisive possibilities. Barr sought simply to describe and champion an emerging style. According to Sybil Gordon Kantor, Barr neutralized the ethics or philosophy associated with the Bauhaus-influenced International Style in order to promote its formal qualities. Architecture as an art superseded much else, and she notes that Barr believed "a disciplined 'taste' [must accompany] any technological decision."[179] And because Barr and his compatriots saw goodness as form, they advocated for "its study and emulation," but

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[178] Irene Sunwoo, "Whose Design? MoMA and Pevsner's *Pioneers,*" *Getty Research Journal*, no. 2 (2010): 72.

[179] Kantor, 294.

not "its preservation without change,"[180] allowing modern style to be transformed but only as it extended from the stylistic trajectory established by Barr and the curators at MoMA. In the book *The International Style*, Barr goes further and provides a rubric for the formal characteristics of modernism in architecture: emphasis upon volume, regularity as opposed to symmetry, and focus on the elegance of materials.[181] And although this list would change as MoMA's curators did,[182] these ideas are easily identifiable in the work of Barr's architect contemporaries as well as in the industrial and graphic design that would become the hallmark of MoMA's design department through the 1950s.

The American public, according to Johnson in 1931, was not only not ready for modernism, but was not yet properly informed about the work of the Bauhaus. "In the world of Industrial Design, the accepted style was the *moderne*[183] of the teardrop shape, applied even to toasters and refrigerators—not the Bauhaus machine art we at the museum favored."[184] America, Johnson admonished, was more interested in the Paris of the 1920s, not the America of the 1930s.[185]

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[180] Barr to Mumford, February 27, 1948, MoMA Archives, NY: AHB [AAA: 2175; 548].

[181] Barr, foreward to Hitchcock and Johnson, *The International Style* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1932), 14.

[182] Barr built this list based upon the architects included in *The International Style*. It is not meant to be viewed as a comprehensive or complete list of the tenets of modern architecture as we understand them today.

[183] Moderne was a specific aesthetic preference that emerged in the 1930s. As a late type of Art Deco, moderne design emphasized curved forms, long horizontal lines and, at times, nautical elements. Moderne design can be seen in Airsteam trailers, Bakelite radios, and the Emerald City in the 1939 film *The Wizard of Oz.* In the terminology of this chapter, moderne and modernistic are nearly synonymous.

Over the next three decades, Johnson, Barr, and Edgar Kaufmann, Jr., would organize exhibitions and programming that placed the Museum of Modern Art at the center of an educational program that would span oceans and cross continents, spreading its ideas about good design to individuals and industry. One way in which MoMA affected public perception of design was neither exhibition nor programming, but through direct involvement in the revised edition of Nikolaus Pevsner's 1936 book *Pioneers of the Modern Movement.* MoMA's role in the 1949 edition was stark, according to Sunwoo: "The repackaging of the book, from its text to its appearance to its title, which conspicuously changed from *Pioneers of the Modern Movement* to *Pioneers of Modern Design*, marked its deployment in MoMA's campaign to cultivate an American breed of modernism."[186] The revision of the book was a collaborative effort from all accounts, with Pevsner requesting feedback from the now-esteemed young museum and museum staff, including Johnson, Kaufmann and Barr, forwarding materials to the author, which allowed for a MoMA-directed expansion of the modern narrative that Pevsner had already crafted an outline of in the first edition.[187] This collaboration was not simply a courteous gesture between friends and colleagues, but, because of the central role of Pevsner's work in defining

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[184] Philip Johnson, "Beyond Monuments," in *The Architectural Forum* 138, no. 1, (1972), 58.

[185] The core of modernism in the United States at this time focused on what we now call Art Deco. The practitioners of this style were seen by the modernists associated with MoMA as crowd-pleasers. According to Franklin Toker's *Fallingwater Rising,* Art Deco designers did not have the intense drive for originality as other forms of modernism or the philosophical balance that was seen in the Bauhaus.

[186] Sunwoo, 69.

[187] Sunwoo, 72-74.

modernism in the first half of the twentieth century, allowed MoMA's philosophy on art and design to become central to the development of historical timelines of European modernism. These timelines, as developed in *Pioneers of Modern Design,* implied that "the American design field had picked up where the European pioneers had left off," positioning American modernism as the logical outgrowth and continuation of work done in Europe during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century.[188] Pevsner's work, according to Sunwoo, was not only valuable as "documentation of the achievements of this historical moment but also the way in which its establishment of a historical past set the stage for contemporary progress in American cultural production."[189]

MoMA's Move Toward Good Design

Following the "Modern Architecture" exhibition, interest in design grew in the museum and among the museum's public. Industrial design was soon added to the museum's architecture department and was led by industrial designer Eliot Noyes. Noyes joined the museum after finishing his degree at the Harvard Graduate School for Design and joining Walter Gropius' architecture firm in 1938. As a student, Noyes was influenced by the Beaux-Arts focused curriculum that was prominent at Harvard during that time. After a chance meeting with Le Corbusier in the university library, Noyes' interest in more modern design grew and he began to study the Bauhaus in depth. When Noyes returned to Harvard following an archaeological expedition to Iran, Bauhaus masters Walter Gropius

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[188] Sunwoo, 79.

[189] Sunwoo, 79.

and Marcel Breuer had been hired and the school had undergone realignment with a more modern, Bauhaus-inspired design philosophy.[190]

The Gestapo formally closed the Bauhaus in 1933 after Nazi sympathizers Wilhelm Frick and Alfred Rosenberg labeled it un-German, claiming that the teachings of the Bauhaus, and consequently the masters themselves, produced "degenerate art." Following the shuttering of the school, its masters spread across the globe, many of them to North America where they became prominent in their fields and began new iterations of the Bauhaus, free from fascist constraints. Walter Gropius, Marcel Breuer and Laszlo Moholy-Nagy regrouped in Britain following the closing, with Gropius and Breuer later teaching at Harvard. Moholy-Nagy moved to Chicago and began the New Bauhaus in 1937 with almost no change to the original school's curriculum or focus. Moholy-Nagy was joined in Chicago by his old faculty colleague Mies van der Rohe, who went on to become one of the pre-eminent architects in the world. Noyes' training under and work with the émigré Bauhaus masters is just one example of the Bauhaus influence on the design world. Despite its short lifespan as an institution, the Bauhaus' impact was still felt through the work of the Museum of Modern Art.[191]

The first extension of Bauhaus design into MoMA was in the spring of 1933. Barr and Johnson, after difficulty convincing the trustees that such an exhibition was worthwhile, presented "Modern Art 1900 and Today" that juxtaposed art nouveau pieces

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[190] For a more complete timeline of Noyes' earlier life including the impact of Bauhaus masters on his education at Harvard, see Gordon Bruce's *Eliot Noyes: A Pioneer of Design and Architecture in the Age of American Modernism,* London: Phaidon, 2006.

[191] For a deeper look into the lives of Bauhaus masters, both during and after their time in Weimar and Dassau, see Nicolas Fox Weber *The Bauhaus Group: Six Masters of Modernism* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2009).

with more angular and severe pieces from the Bauhaus. From this first show, a full exhibition entitled "Machine Art" was arranged for the spring of 1934 with 400 objects ranging from ball bearings and propellers to lavatory flushes and vacuum cleaners. Compared with what is now commonly seen in museums and galleries, these objects do not seem extraordinary for inclusion in such an exhibition, but "it was the first time such objects had been shown at a Museum of Art and the first time they were installed as objects of beauty…'Machine Art' established a standard of taste."[192]

This high profile, unprecedented display of manufactured objects beside historically accepted works of art showed parts of machines as works of art. This juxtaposition forced the public to become aware of the "intrinsic beauty in the machine, its parts and its products, and to see it as a source for the art of their own time."[193] There were differences between the designer and the painter or sculptor, but the two were paired by their process of creation: "The artist and the [designer] start out with the same necessity. No true artist ever starts to make 'beauty'…he has no aesthetic intention—he has a problem. No beauty has ever been achieved which was not reached through the necessity to deal with some particular problem."[194] This dissolution of differentiation was summed up by Johnson in the catalog for "Machine Art" where he quoted philosopher L.P. Jacks:

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[192] Ernestine Fantil, *With Tongue in Cheek* (London: Michael Joseph, 1974), p. 28.

[193] Kantor, 306.

[194] Jane Heap, "Machine Age Exposition," *Little Review* 11 (Spring 1925), pp. 23-24.

"Industrial civilization must either find a means of ending the divorce between its industry and its 'culture' or perish."[195]

The exhibition also established a trajectory of programming that would focus on designed, industrial objects. MoMA immediately became associated with quality in design and the promotion of industrial objects as museum artifacts. Competitions were held by the museum, seeking to reward designers for their use of modern design principles in the conception of industrial products. Most notably, these competitions attracted Charles Eames and Eero Saarinen, who experimented with bent plywood and steel for the construction of their now-iconic side chair. This entry into the 1940 Competition for Organic Design in Home Furnishings not only launched Eames' career as an industrial designer but would also help define a style that continues to be copied today. From these competitions, exhibitions emerged to showcase the winners. These exhibitions would continue to grow into what became the "Good Design" program that was directed by Edgar J. Kaufmann, Jr., from 1950 to 1955. In an attempt to end the separation of industry and culture, the Good Design program's underlying purpose was the direct influence of manufacturers through public education and opinion.

Edgar J. Kaufmann, Jr.

An enigmatic, perplexing, and, at times, indefinable character, Edgar J. Kaufmann, Jr., was particularly suited to head the Good Design program at MoMA during the early 1950s. As the only son of Pittsburgh department store magnate Edgar J. Kaufmann, Kaufmann, Jr.,

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[195] Lawrence Pearsall Jacks, *Responsibility and Culture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1925).

had an unique blend of experience and skills, allowing him to spearhead a large-scale collection and curation program with "its ambition ultimately to influence the buying habits of American consumers and the selling practice of retailers."[196] Despite Kaufman noting in 1949 that "twelve American museums of art held exhibitions of applied design that served to guide the public toward good taste in objects available for purchase,"[197] the Good Design project's history and scope set it apart from similar programs. MoMA's intervention into the housewares industry—especially its ultimate ambition to influence the buying habits of American consumers and the selling practice of retailers—was unprecedented in the history of American museums. Much like the Deutscher Werkbund in the 1920s, Kaufmann, Jr., worked closely with other museums, manufacturers, universities and retailers to directly affect these decisions.

Edgar Jonas Kaufmann, Jr., was born into an historically wealthy Pittsburgh family in April 1910. He was highly sheltered, considered "a complete mama's boy"[198] by his affluent, private school classmates and began collecting art at an early age. By sixteen he had already used his own money to purchase a Rembrandt etching that still hangs at Fallingwater, his family's iconic vacation home. By 1935 Kaufmann, Jr., sold a portion of his personal collection for $45,000. His classmates regarded him as the "poet and artist" of his

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[196] Terence Riley and Edward Eigen, "Between the Museum and the Marketplace: Selling Good Design," in *Studies of Modern Art,* no.4, *The Museum of Modern Art at Mid-Century at Home and Abroad,* New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1994, 151.

[197] Rene D'Harnoncourt and Edgar Kaufmann, Jr., "Museums and Industrial Design," *Museums 2* (May 1949), 35.

[198] Kantor, 360.

graduating class but were quick to include the admonishment from Hamlet alongside his photo: "One may smile, and smile, and be a villain."

Following high school, which he left one credit short of graduation, Kaufmann, Jr., studied painting in New York and applied arts at the Kunstgewerbeschule in Vienna. Beginning in 1930, he held an apprenticeship with painter and typographer Victor Hammer, mainly in Florence, where he helped in all areas of Hammer's fine-printing press Stamperia del Santuccio until Hitler's rise to power in 1933 forced Kaufmann, Jr., to return home out of fear for his safety as a Jew in Europe. After returning to the United States, he spent a short time as a fellow at Frank Lloyd Wright's Taliesin, where he was removed for what Wright referred to as " a lack of 'circumspection.'"[199] After Taliesin, Kaufmann, Jr., spent the next few years working in his father's Pittsburgh department store in the bookshop, home furnishings and, most notably, as the merchandise manager for the Home Furnishings department.

The elder Edgar Kaufmann believed the department store was much more than a place to buy household items. For him, the department store's role in a community allowed for progressive cultural life. Department stores were places for good business, but also could be pivotal in education, social awareness and good taste. During the 1925 renovation of Kaufmann's first floor, an advertisement boasted "Our destiny as a creative nation which sponsors and encourages artistry is assured providing our power to appreciate continues

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[199] Kantor, 371. Wright and Kaufmann, Jr., had a strained relationship from the beginning. Many historians believe that Kaufmann, Jr.'s acceptance into Taliesan was a stipulation of Kaufmann, Sr.'s hiring of Wright to design and build Fallingwater. Having his hand forced in the matter led Wright to dislike Kaufmann, Jr. Throughout his career, Wright used the term circumspection to refer to sexual orientation and lack of discretion by his apprentices and fellows. He was also known to hold a grudge.

to grow…No modern organization is in a better position to observe this artistic evolution than a large department store."[200]School children wrote essays about the store's "Peak of Progress" window displays that illustrated the previous year's "ten most important scientific, sociological and historical events."[201] Kaufmann's even played host to travelling art exhibitions, some of which originated at the Museum of Modern Art.

By 1937, Kaufmann, Jr.'s time as merchandise manager at his father's department store was coming to an end. He was increasingly more active[202] with the family's weekend home, Fallingwater, which was in the final stages of construction, and he had begun a friendship with then-director of MoMA's Architecture Department, John McAndrews. Upon learning of the Kaufmann family's newly constructed Frank Lloyd Wright house, McAndrews requested to see the property, which resulted in a small photography-based exhibition at MoMA during 1938. This small exhibition would result in Kaufmann, Jr.'s future involvement and eventual directorship in MoMA's Department of Architecture and Design.

The first inkling of what would become the Good Design program was launched in the Fall of 1938 by John McAndrews and was called *Useful Household Objects Under $5.00.* These annual exhibitions featured seemingly ordinary and mundane objects that could be

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[200] Quoted in Christopher Wilk, *Frank Lloyd Wright: The Kaufmann Office* (London: Victoria and Albert Museum, 1993) p. 30.

[201] Riley and Eigen, 153.

[202] The history Kaufmann, Jr., recounted to biographers and journalists is very different from several other sources. While Kaufmann, Jr., was a part of the work at Fallingwater, his involvement was actually much less than what press and historians have recorded in the past. For a complete understanding, see Franklin Toker's *Fallingwater Rising.*

found in any home, with one major difference: McAndrews used the reputation of MoMA to promote standards for good design. The shows focused on inexpensive products that held a certain visual appeal, making the show not only beautiful but highly utilitarian. The tableware, glass, pottery, and cooking utensils came as a "delight to customers" according to A. Conger Goodyear, MoMA's founding president. And he believed it "undoubtedly improved the quality of many Christmas gifts."[203] During the previous decade, MoMA had been instrumental in America's education regarding modern art and design, but the *Useful Objects* shows were a new level of taste-making for the institution.

Kaufmann, Jr., was involved in the inaugural exhibition as a member of the Department of Architecture and Industrial Design Advisory Board. According to McAndrews, the board was small, carefully chosen and selected all of the objects that would be displayed in the exhibition. Kaufmann, Jr., was chosen because of his experience in his father's store. His knowledge of the trade impressed McAndrews who noted that Kaufmann, Jr., "produced all sorts of things, some highly suitable and hard to find, and urged us to have handicrafts as well as industrial design."[204]

The selections for the shows were made by the advisory board. Members would select pieces they had found or knew about through their connections to the larger modern art community in New York and across the country. Artists and craftsmen and women could also submit objects of their own that they felt met the museum's criteria for "good design." As early as 1941, under the guidance of then-Director of Industrial Design Eliot

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[203] Quoted in Russell Lynes, *Good Old Modern: An Intimate Portrait of the Museum of Modern Art* (New York: Antheneum, 1973), 180.

[204] Quoted in Lynes, 180-181.

Noyes, the museum's standards were four-fold. Each object chosen would need to show evidence of intention to: fulfill its function, respect its materials, be suited to methods of production and combine these three traits in imaginative expression.[205] It should be noted that these guidelines, even at the time, were very vague, resulting in a wide understanding of acceptability by the advisory board members. Eventually, as the program continued, the choices came down to Kaufmann and a few like-minded individuals. The selection process was not unlike the competitive nature of contests MoMA had sponsored such as the Organic Designs in Home Furnishings Competition.[206]

The shows were extremely well received at MoMA as well as across the country as a traveling exhibition. The innovation of the show was not simply its low price point or singular focus on aesthetic appeal but also its ability to affect public taste. During the first year, many visitors requested objects from the show and inquired about details for subsequent exhibitions. Wherever the exhibition travelled, vendors and local distributors experienced a rise in sales of the included objects. Likewise, some manufacturers experienced such increased interest in their *Useful Objects* that new retail locations were opened to fulfill public demand. The success of the initial show proved to the museum trustees that industrial design was a proper concern for MoMA and showed America that good design was also good business.

Kaufmann, Jr., continued his involvement with the Department of Architecture and Industrial Design as the *Useful Objects* shows increased in popularity and cost. The exhibition's name changed to *Useful Household Objects Under $10*, to *Useful Household*

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[205] Bruce, 55.

[206] Riley and Eigen, 154.

Objects Under $25 in 1946, and finally to *100 Useful Objects of Fine Design, Available Under $100* in 1948. During the majority of this time he remained a member of the advisory board but was not on the payroll or staff listing of MoMA until he returned from his time with the U.S. Air Force Intelligence Office in 1946.[207]

The Department of Architecture and Industrial Design was split into the Department of Architecture and Department of Industrial Design in 1939 following the departure of John McAndrews. The new design department was lead by Eliot Noyes and would be marked by an even larger increase in MoMA's industrial design presence. In 1940, Kaufmann, Jr., proposed the *Organic Design in Home Furnishings Competition* with the purpose of "discovering young designers who are capable of a fresh approach to design problems."[208] The competitions were as much about marketing as they were about curating. Winning entries would be produced and sold through department stores across the country. The competitions would create "a group of designs which [served] their purpose simply and efficiently and [were] a contemporary design expression."[209]

Kaufmann, Jr., envisioned the organic competitions as a way to merge modern design and American commercial interests. The museum would develop guidelines for

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[207] Riley and Eigen, 154.

[208] "The Museum of Modern Art will sponsor a comprehensive competition for furniture and textile designs", Press Release, Museum of Modern Art New York, August 3 or 4 1940 http://www.moma.org/momaorg/shared/pdfs/docs/press_archives/625/releases/MOMA_1940_0056_1940-07-31_40731-49.pdf Accessed 05.24.2015

[209] "The Museum of Modern Art will sponsor a comprehensive competition for furniture and textile designs", Press Release, Museum of Modern Art New York, August 3 or 4 1940 http://www.moma.org/momaorg/shared/pdfs/docs/press_archives/625/releases/MOMA_1940_0056_1940-07-31_40731-49.pdf Accessed 05.24.2015

entries and spearhead the effort, department stores would provide financing and space, and the designers would engage manufacturers to produce the designs. The competitions officially began in 1941 with twelve major department stores agreeing to take part, including Bloomingdale's in New York, Marshall Field's in Chicago, Gimbel's in Philadelphia and Kaufmann's in Pittsburgh. By enlisting department stores to agree to sell the winning designs, MoMA was able to "eliminate the lag time between theory and application," a condition that many within the design community felt had "a [tendency] to discourage public interest in good design."[210] Industry desperately needed the help of an organization like MoMA. With new material possibilities as well as an industrial manufacturing process that provided fewer barriers for new products, more designers were creating products and prototypes, but few of these were becoming commercially viable. With the help of MoMA and the *Organic Design* shows, more designers were receiving technical and financial assistance to translate their ideas into reality.

Kaufmann, Jr., officially joined the museum in 1946 following a tour of duty with the U.S. Air Force Intelligence Office and the resignation of Eliot Noyes as director of the Department of Industrial Design. Evidence of Kaufmann, Jr.'s ability to handle amorphous, large-scale exhibitions had been proven over the past decade, and the success of *Useful Objects* and *Organic Design* was undeniable. During that same year, Kaufmann, Jr., followed in the footsteps of MoMA's previous director Alfred Barr by proposing a definition for modern art with the release of the small pamphlet *What is Modern Industrial Design?,* later expanded into the 1950 release of *What is Modern Design?* Both books attempted what Barr

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[210] "'Organic Design in Home Furnishings' Opens September 24," MoMA press release no. 69, September 9, 1941. MoMA Archives. The Museum of Modern Art.

had done years before for modern painting and sculpture. Both authors included snippets of information concerning what could be considered modern, but their largest role was in establishing what was *not* considered modern. From Kaufmann's definition, modern design was "an application of principles" which focused on "the needs of an industrialized community." Design, for Kaufmann, was "conceiving and giving form to objects used in everyday life," and modern design was "the planning and making of objects suited to our way of life, our abilities, our ideals."[211] And while this definition seemed to speak to the ideals of the Bauhaus masters, the following sentence was a reminder that MoMA was still interested in good design as a commercially viable product. "In the hands of a great artist, the resulting design will be beautiful." Modernism would continue to be stripped of its idealist roots. Modern American design, as defined by its most ardent proponent was a pleasing form that allowed for a pleasing bottom line in a manufacturer's ledger.

Good Design

After Johnson returned to the museum in 1949 to replace Kaufmann as the Director of the Department of Industrial Design, Kaufmann focused solely on the annual industrial design exhibition. The *Useful Objects* show was abandoned in 1949 and after a short hiatus in that year and 1950, industrial design at MoMA returned with a new fervor. The exhibition would lose its original name in favor of the more expansive *Good Design.* From 1951 to 1955, the *Good Design* program would make an even more dramatic departure from judging items on function, utility and value, streamlining its rubric to a single,

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[211] Edgar Kaufmann, Jr., *What is Modern Design?* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1950), 7.

essentially stylistic criterion. In the words of industrial designer George Nelson, a regular participant in the Good Design exhibitions, Good Design was no more than a tool for department store marketing. "Good Design, as popularized by the Museum of Modern Art and the Merchandise Mart, has come to mean a certain number of objects selected by Mr. Kaufmann," Nelson wrote. "Objects which may then carry a kind of label of approval when displayed for sale in stores."[212] By the end of the Good Design program, its commercial role was so intertwined with the program that D'Harnoncourt had to request that Robert M. Johnson, the Merchandise Mart's publicity manner, use the term "exhibition" instead of "promotion" when referring to the displays at the Mart.[213]

Unlike earlier aims associated with design's inclusion in the modern museum, Kaufmann, with an upbringing in the practical world of commerce at his father's department store, was not interested in education and improvement of the masses. Under his guidance, the *Good Design* program became a populist tool, something to provide a more domesticated modernism to a public unable to discern for itself the difference. In this way, the program was educational, but in a limited sense, addressed only to promoting desired buying habits. In this way, Kaufmann, Jr., continued to follow in the footsteps of Barr, realizing that the adoption and consumption of style was far easier, and more successful, than proselytizing for an ideal.

Rene D'Harnoncourt was named MoMA's new director in 1949 and saw great value in the *Good Design* program. Although he was not a personal fan of Kaufmann,

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[212] George Nelson, "Good Design, What Is It For?," *Interiors* 113 (July 1954), 72-75.

[213] D'Harnoncourt, memo to Kaufmann, March 5, 1951. Architecture and Design Archive, The Museum of Modern Art, New York.

D'Harnoncourt saw the program as a way for the museum to continue to guide popular taste and remain in the news. During 1950, D'Harnoncourt spent a week in St. Louis touting the *Good Design* program to department stores like Scruggs, Vandevoort and Barney's. The value was still not completely understood by the wealthy and powerful elite class who felt the museum was their property. Despite this resistance, D'Harnoncourt continued to straddle the public and elite interests in the museum deftly throughout the run of the annual program. "Of every 100 persons who come to the Museum we estimate that no more than 10 actually accept a geometric abstraction by Piet Mondrian as valid art," he explained to the *St. Louis Dispatch* in 1950. "But when principles of good design permeate a home, the occupants tend to be more tolerant, more receptive to new ideas in art."[214] While the Mondrians may have been for the elite to appreciate, *Good Design*, according to D'Harnoncourt, slowly helped transform the average American into appreciators of modern art.

Kaufmann and D'Harnoncourt wanted to influence public taste and Chicago's Merchandise Mart was the most direct line to every household in America. During the Depression, Joseph P. Kennedy purchased the 4,000,000 square foot building for pennies on the dollar and transformed the warehouse into the world's largest wholesale market for home furnishings. The Merchandise Mart boasted that everything a buyer needed could be found under one roof. Using the language we now identify with shopping malls, its publicity

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[214] Quoted in "Museum Director Explains Role of Art in Design of Today," *St. Louis Dispatch,* October 13, 1950.

brochures touted "a maximum of convenience and comfort."[215] The North Side Chicago building housed showrooms, manufacturer offices and even television studios for NBC and ABC. The Merchandise Mart was interested in the potential partnership with MoMA because of its aim to arouse interest in specific items. With 3,200 manufacturers showcasing over 1.2 million home furnishings and household items within its walls[216], anything that provided differentiation among the offerings was welcomed. The approval of the *Good Design* program's jury not only provided that differentiation but also raised its level of importance. A *Good Design* label was equal in reputation to the Good Housekeeping Seal of Approval and assured the popularity and profitability of any product. In 1951, the Merchandise Mart became home to the annual January and June *Good Design* showcases held within 5,300 square feet of showroom space. The events would draw countless visitors, including more than 27,000 professional buyers annually.

The partnership with the Merchandise Mart afforded MoMA exceptional press coverage and exposure through the use of its space, but the partnership was not simply to get products into the public's view. The program also employed a large market research component. While buyers and the public were introduced to various products, they were also asked to vote on the objects they felt were the best of the *Good Design* shows. During its inaugural show, 8,310 ballots were cast by buyers and consumers resulting in the choosing of 126 of the 250 items that would later be displayed in MoMA's *Good Design* exhibition. Thus the program was two-fold: a twice-yearly showcase of aesthetically

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[215] "Colossus of Chicago: The Merchandise Mart," brochure issued by The Merchandise Mart, Chicago, 1950.

[216] Riley and Eigen, 156.

appropriate industrial design at the Merchandise Mart and a *Good Design* exhibition held annually at the Museum in Manhattan.

Another aspect of his upbringing within commercial culture was Kaufmann's ability to utilize commerce to extend the Museum's vision. Commerce's role is easily seen within the stated objectives of the *Good Design* program: "1. Greater consumer interest is to be focused on original design by taking advantage of its inherent news value. 2. To provide greater impetus for designers to produce good new products. 3. To encourage manufacturers to produce good design, and to draw their attention to the growing market by the wider consumer demand."[217] The success of the *Good Design* program was not in its ability to bring more visitors to the Museum or to enlarge the Museum's membership; instead, its success would be completely measured by its effect on retail sales. "Such effect," a brief about the program stated, "would enhance the reputation of the Merchandise Mart and the Museum as leaders in sound design trends." In effect, Kaufmann had created a mechanism that bridged the gap between the museum and the furniture showroom while leveraging the cultural capital of the Museum of Modern Art.

Increased reputations aside, the lasting effect of MoMA's partnership with the Merchandise Mart was commercial. D'Harnoncourt may have seen the value of the program in defining popular taste, but under Kaufmann, *Good Design* was built to sell merchandise. Its widespread coverage in the press was severely lacking in any level of criticism. *House & Garden* offered little more than blanket praise and promotion within their review of the

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[217] "Program of Home Furnishings Exhibitions to Be Held by the Merchandise Mart, Chicago, and The Museum of Modern Art, New York," typed script, 1950. The Museum of Modern Art Architecture and Design Archive.

shows. “We hope you will visit the show in New York and Chicago,” the magazine blandly stated in 1951. “And have fun of being your own judge, deciding for yourself why each item was chosen.”[218]

The *Good Design* program depended on this type of uncritical press coverage. The shows and exhibitions did not extoll one designer over another, but presented all objects as satisfactory to the eye of a discerning public. The aim was not layers of increasing superlatives, but a general mark of “good.” In this way, there was no scramble for one particular design or product, but customers and buyers would have the freedom to mix and match objects within their home, knowing that everything had been approved by the informed elite that extended their expertise beyond the walls of the Museum. MoMA was curating not just the museum, but also the modern American’s living room, kitchen and dining room. To this end, Kaufmann devised a series of marketing ploys to further entice retailers to carry, and promote prominently, items chosen by the *Good Design* program. “Homemakers know GOOD DESIGN selections can be bought with confidence,” one advertisement claimed. “GOOD DESIGN gives your store an unbiased choice of newly designed home furnishings most in keeping with modern living.”[219] Small tags were produced by Morton Goldshall, a student of Moholy-Nagy, with Good Design set in white sans serif type on a black circle on a bright orange background. These seals of approval provided high visibility to products, as well as the Museum, and were provided to retailers at no cost.

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[218] *House & Garden* no. 122, November 1951, 114.

[219] Advertisement, *Retailing Daily,* Aug. 6, 1951.

In its final year, the *Good Design* program expanded its search for new designers to American design schools. Kaufmann invited university design programs such as the Cranbrook Academy of Art, the Illinois Institute of Technology, the North Carolina State College School of Design and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology to create displays that showcased the findings of academic exploration into new materials and processes of design. These educational displays were a part of the 1955 *Good Design* exhibition and allowed for MoMA's presence to expand further into the classroom. The move also provided manufacturers with untapped streams of talent for their industries.

The *Good Design* program was highly successful in its attempts to influence industry, curate popular taste, and connect MoMA with American homes, but its success should not be misunderstood as critical acclaim. The *Good Design* program had several glaring issues that kept it from being seen as a lasting cultural success. Kaufmann borrowed the history and terminology of good design in the same shallow way he had borrowed Frank Lloyd Wright's vocabulary of organic design for earlier competitions the museum held. Since its inception, MoMA had an intimate relationship with Bauhaus principles and masters, but the *Good Design* program did not extend this relationship to the philosophy of its annual industrial design exhibitions. While Johnson's *Machine Art* exhibitions dealt with philosophical issues in industrialization, Kaufmann kept the criteria of *Good Design* purposefully vague, allowing far too much latitude for individual jurors' personal preferences concerning visual appeal, function, construction and cost. Kaufmann's stance has been characterized politely as "nonpolemical…toward the machine and handcraft;"[220] but is more precisely characterized as vague. The program was run by a director and juries

[220] Riley and Eigen, 162.

that were not critical of a piece beyond abstract ideas of beauty. In Kaufmann's own words, the program was created, judged and staged "by people with no axes to grind."[221] This reliance on eye appeal was exactly what Barr and Johnson had derided in *Machine Art* and it showed Kaufmann's experience and interest in department store retail more than modern art curating. The *Good Design* program existed because of a synergy between education and consumption. Johnson had stated specific selection criteria for *Machine Art,* positioning it as supporting a particular worldview or ideology; but the lack of specifics did not support Kaufmann's claim to neutrality, it simply opened the door for critical assumptions.

Kaufmann's actions also disproved his supposed neutrality in choices. Within the guidelines of the competition, it was required that all objects to be displayed or exhibited be new to the market since the previous show. This conflation of "good" with "new" can be seen throughout post-war industry and marketing, where both terms were understood as synonymous within a level of manufacturing and consumption in the 1950s never seen before in American history.[222] This binary of manufacturing and consumption functioned well within a specific cultural context, but it was also responsible for a large number of

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[221] Edgar Kaufmann, Jr., "Good Design '51, as Seen by Its Director," *Interiors* 110 (March 1951), 100.

[222] Gerard Dumenil and Dominique Levy, "Why Does Profitability Matter? Profitability and Stability in the U.S. Economy Since the 1950s," *Review of Radical Political Economics* 25, no. 1, (1993): 27-61.

objects that later would be described as "permanent garbage to clutter up the landscape"[223] and contributed to the "perpetual novelty"[224] of the Good Design program.

While at their inception, the *Useful Objects* exhibitions showcased economical value in industrial design, the inflation of cost from $5 to ultimately $100 erased value or availability to average American households as a criterion between 1936 and 1951. While mass-produced glassware was available for between fifteen and seventy cents per glass, the Baccarat highball glasses selected by Kaufmann cost $6.50 each. And at $210, a sterling silver pitcher designed by Johan Rohde was included within the list of "value" items promoted by the program, "equivalent in price to the washing machine designed by Henry Dreyfuss for the Hoover Company shown that same year."[225]

Despite these glaring issues, with the *Good Design* program Kaufmann was continuing the work begun by Barr and Johnson nearly two decades earlier. As their philosophical starting point, *Machine Art, Useful Objects* and *Good Design* all sought to end the divorce between industry and culture, but *Good Design* showed no evidence of this being a driving force for its selection criteria or continued existence. Where Johnson had consciously attempted to connect aesthetic form with machine processes, Kaufmann had dropped all pretense of modernist idealism with *Good Design*, leaving nothing more than a commercially driven enterprise run by a leading American museum, which allowed MoMA to shape American taste through successful merchandising.

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[223] Papanek, *Design for the Real World,* ix.

[224] Jeffrey Meikle, *Oxford History of Art: Design in the USA* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 149.

[225] Riley and Eigen, 161.

The End of Good Design

At the height of the Good Design program and exhibitions, the entirety of the endeavor depended solely on Kaufmann. Not known for his cheerful demeanor and agreeable temperament, Kaufmann's constant tantrums and threats to leave if not appeased had alienated him from the larger museum staff and internal realignments had further marginalized his role within the museum. The program was also raising concerns from within the staff and administration of the Merchandise Mart. MoMA was required to pay no rent for the valuable space the showcase occupied, and rent-paying tenants watched as attention was diverted from their sales floors to the twice annual event. Behind a growing resentment in Chicago and a waning interest in New York, the Good Design program had its final installment—a five-year retrospective of the program—in 1955. Kaufmann left MoMA soon after when museum director Rene D'Harnoncourt finally accepted one of his many threats to quit.

The end of the Good Design program aroused many contradictory sentiments. On the one hand, the program had ballooned in size from its relatively small *Useful Objects* roots, commanding large numbers of man-hours and considerable storage space. "The material was running pretty thin," said Arthur Drexler, who had come to the museum to reorganize the newly rejoined Department of Architecture and Design. "And they were big shows that took a lot of time and got on everybody's nerves, and besides it had become a kind of shopper's service."[226] On the other hand, the program was a monumental success when judged by its original objectives. Modern design had thundered into the American home by way of MoMA's evangelism of form. Products featured in the showcases and

[226] Lynes, 319.

exhibitions saw major financial success, some of them—like the Eames chairs—continue that success nearly seventy years later. Lazette van Houton, one of the Good Design jurors remarked that "an Eames, a Wormley, a Robsjohn-Gibbings…can now be spotted by customers whose furniture designer knowledge five years ago probably consisted of Chippendale."[227]

Kaufmann and MoMA brought modernism into the American living room through strong partnerships and keen marketing, but also through good timing. During the post-war buying boom of the late 1940s and early 1950s, the public was ready to re-establish normalcy alongside the expansion of the American suburbs. And with the Axis powers defeated, a new, modern world held exciting promise. Kaufmann, through his background in department store sales, saw an opportunity and took advantage of it, but not without cost. While the formal qualities of modernism pleased him, he had no interest in the philosophical foundation established during the first half of the twentieth century, stripping design of its theoretical basis almost entirely.

After the Department of Architecture and Design parted ways with Kaufmann, new director Arthur Drexler replaced the Good Design program with exhibitions more resembling the *Bauhaus* and *Machine Age* shows curated by Barr and Johnson. At the beginning of his tenure, Drexler mounted *Olivetti: Design in Industry,* an exhibition devoted to the comprehensive design plan that the Italian technology manufacturer adopted during the 1940s. These shows emphasized the design theories that led company thinking in graphic design, product design, architecture and business. In following years, Drexler

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[227] Lazette Van Houten, Quoted in *Five Years of Good Design* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1954), 35.

would mount similar exhibitions about Braun and Chemex, signaling the museum's departure from commercial cheerleading and a return to professionalism within the field.

Conclusion

Philosopher L.P. Jacks, believed that "industrial civilization must find a means of ending the divorce between its industry and its 'culture' or perish."[228] This attitude was common during this period as a holdover of earlier ideas embodied by the Arts and Crafts movement and early reactions to modernity. This "divorce" was the separation of "high" from "low," from the designers and those in charge of production. In the United States, during a period of public distrust of German culture, the dominant expression of modernism was modernistic and relied on mass produced embellishments and streamlining. Just as had been expressed earlier in Europe, this uneducated adornment for the sake of sales, was seen as detrimental to a public ignorant of the effects of bad form or bad design upon their lives. The objects that surrounded an individual in their everyday life, it was believed, created a context that was beneficial or detrimental depending on the nature of the objects themselves.

Working against this American preference and in the same tradition as English museums, the newly formed Museum of Modern Art in New York took on the role of educating the public as to proper design preference. MoMA became a tastemaker and forged a path to bring design education to American households through exposure to good design. This crusade began as an interest in machine made design and grew into a larger

[228] Lawrence Pearsall Jacks, *Responsibility and Culture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1925).

program of industrial design, a first for an American museum. This program was marked by a deep relationship with scholars of modernism, particularly Nikolaus Pevsner, in which MoMA helped to craft the canon and timeline of modernism and its role in art and design, which positioned American modernism as the logical outgrowth and continuation of work done in Europe during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century.[229] As a trained artist and having experience in retail sales through his father's Pittsburgh department store, Kaufmann, Jr., spearheaded this effort through what would become known as the Good Design program and later the Department of Architecture and Industrial Design in an effort to inform the American public on the proper forms of machine made design. His time as an art student in Europe and apprentice at Wright's Taliesin afforded him exposure to expression of modernism that become a part of American design sentiment following the shuttering of the Bauhaus in 1933 and the subsequent emigration of a stable of its Masters to the United States. While the program exposed many Americans to the formal qualities of modernism as developed in the Bauhaus, the separation of the philosophical underpinnings from the form resulted in the commercial success of form regardless of function. With the aim of educating the public, MoMA exported its biased ideas of form through a fantastic merging of museum and commerce.

By 1954, as the *Good Design* showcases and exhibitions were circulating in their final installment, a less prominent current in design practice was beginning to gain momentum. While Edgar Kaufmann, Jr., and the rest of the *Good Design* organizers "used

[229] Sunwoo, 79.

visual excellence as [design's] sole criteria,"[230] others were seeking a more utilitarian role for objects in the lives of everyday people. The *Good Design* program had accomplished its original goal of bringing modern design into the homes of average Americans, but it had also promoted the production of a fantastic number of new objects, regardless of value, utility or function. The constant turnover of items that were identified as Good Design created by the twice-annual showcase quickly turned designers' sentiments from excitement to disdain. What began as a showcase of exceptional work had become nothing more than modernistic items following a style with little intellectual foundation. Industrial designer Harold Van Doren did not hide his contempt for the program's "pretty ashtrays" and "$60 salad bowls" in a letter to fellow designer W.D. Teague.[231] For Van Doren, the program erred on several accounts including its "pitifully inadequate selection" that served no purpose other than reforming shopping habits to something resembling more refined, modern taste.

While the Museum of Modern Art may have helped propel design to new heights of professional and artistic acceptance, the museum was proving itself "incapable of coming to grips with the realities of design in everyday life."[232] The objects held fast to stylistic similarity, but this similarity ignored function to such a degree that many of the objects had become little more than museum pieces, which now felt at home in suburban American homes. The social idealism of the museum had educated a public on what was and was not

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[230] Riley and Eigen, 175.

[231] H. Van Doren letter to W.D. Teague, 27 November, 1950, Walter Dorwin Teague Papers.

[232] H. Van Doren letter to W.D. Teague, 27 November, 1950, Walter Dorwin Teague Papers.

acceptable modern form, at least by MoMA's definition, elevating the average American household's knowledge of design; but it had not prioritized design's role in utility or function in everyday life. Where MoMA had succeeded in creating a canon for mid-century modernism, it failed in its ability to reach the public it claimed to serve. Amidst the chairs, dining sets, flatware and desks, the *Good Design* program lost track of an important factor in design: the people who use it.

Goodness as Responsibility: Social Design and the Path Forward

In 1955, corresponding nearly with the conclusion of MoMA's partnership with the Merchandise Mart, Henry Dreyfuss released his seminal book *Designing for People.* While not necessarily radical, the concepts Dreyfuss championed were far different from the stylistic criteria of Kaufmann and MoMA:

> The industrial designer began by eliminating excess decoration…then making it look better. He never forgets that beauty is only skin-deep. For years in our office we have kept before us the concept that what we are working on is going to be ridden in, sat upon, looked at, talked into, activated, operated, or in some way used by people individually or en masse. If the point of contact between the product and the people becomes a point of friction, then the industrial designer has failed. If, on the other hand, people are made safer, more comfortable, more eager to purchase, more efficient—or just plain happier—the designer has succeeded.[233]

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[233] Henry Dreyfuss, *Designing for People,* (New York: Allworth Press, 1955), 23-24.

While echoing the by-now familiar modernist tenet of functionalism, Dreyfuss rejects the paternalism that defined its practice since the nineteenth century. The designer is not an enlightened genius, carving objects out of stone tablets and bringing them down to the masses; instead, his work is defined by experience and alertness to problems. "He approaches every problem with a willingness to do painstaking study and perform exhaustive research," Dreyfuss argued. "One of his greatest rewards is the realization that by producing a good design he is affecting the lives of millions of people. And if he designs enough things in good taste, he brings better living and satisfaction."[234] On its surface, Dreyfuss' view of design may seem more like a platitude than a guiding philosophy, but his sentiment echoes Bauhaus masters in its ramification. Walter Gropius spoke of "a world of beauty built completely anew"[235] at the school's inception in 1919, more than 30 years prior to Dreyfuss' book. Despite the passing of time, modernist ideas remained integral to the practice of design. Dreyfuss asserts that beauty and form are of value, but not at the expense of function. And this value is directly tied to the elevation of society through design.

In Dreyfuss' mode of thinking, good design moved beyond the established and transcendent binary of form and function posited by Louis Sullivan in 1896. For Sullivan, form was the common-sense effect of the underlying function of an object, a building or a space, and while earlier discussions in design debated the prominence of form or function within this set, idealized binary, the group of designers that emerged in the late 1950s

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[234] Dreyfuss, 24-25.

[235] Ulrich Conrads and Hans G. Sperlich, *Architecture of Fantasy*, ed. Christiane Craseman Collins (New York, Frederick A. Praeger, 1964), 137.

eschewed the binary altogether, viewing both form and function as secondary to the needs of the individual. The overarching aim of good design remained the benefit of society, but in the second half of the twentieth century, it would be accomplished through a connection to the material world and a commitment to the needs of people.

Connection to the Material World

Industrial design, as seen in the previous chapter, built its credibility by inclusion in the museum. By placement in the gallery setting, objects that were commonplace or even unimportant in the scope of culture became opportunities for excellence in design. Pocketknives, travel irons and cigarette boxes were everyday objects, but their mundane classification did not exclude them from the possibility of pleasing stylistic choices. By showcasing these everyday objects with a pleasing visual form, MoMA elevated design in a way never done before, but the museum, by its elevated status, worked against the objects' comprehensive inclusion into everyday life. The cloistered display of individual objects within a museum removes the work of the designer from its larger social, physical, and functional contexts. Likewise, the manner in which objects are on display but not for use further lowers the ability of a museumgoer to judge the appropriateness of an object beyond any standard but personal preference in appearance. For painting and sculpture this is of little consequence since, it can be argued, their primary purpose is to be viewed; but for design, inclusion in the museum is a double-edged validation, elevating form, while removing items from a necessary critique through use.

Eliot Noyes and Comprehensive Design

Eliot Noyes, the director of MoMA's Department of Industrial Design from 1940 to 1946, struggled with the concept of design as a museum department. In 1946, Noyes remarked in a review for an exhibition at the Walker Art Center that "a program for the purpose of teaching and helping consumers in the matter of design of everyday things is in itself a really creative effort to build up in the public an understanding of the elements of design, to teach people how to discriminate between good and bad design."[236] Despite his approval of what was being done at the Walker and MoMA, Noyes' personal design philosophy did not rank an individual buyer's opinion as highly. "The only consumer preference he is interested in is that of his client's executives and engineers," a 1963 article in *Fortune* remarked about him. "Not because he scorns the mass customers' taste but because he trusts it. He believes the mass market will buy good design when it gets the chance." The problem, in Noyes' summation, was that the public had not yet had the chance to do so, a thought that may have been influenced by his time working with Charles Eames during the *Organic Design* competitions at MoMA. In a September 1946 article in *Arts & Architecture*, Noyes remarked that Charles Eames "never worried much (as many designers do) about 'what the public wants' or 'what the public will accept', because he had a profound belief in the public, and the conviction that if they didn't want or didn't accept the

[236] Eliot Noyes, "Everyday Art," *Magazine of Art,* April 1946, 134.

furniture that he was designing for their use, the fault lay in his designs, not in the public."[237] These were both provocative ideas, but each promoted a radically different view of design.

Noyes' time at MoMA contributed heavily to his understanding of design, but the activities of the museum left him desiring a more active role in the field. Noyes "grew impatient at talking about design and not doing enough [himself],"[238] and made a break from the museum in 1946 "to get back into the world of doing things."[239] Following his resignation from MoMA, Noyes worked with designer Norman Bel Geddes at his industrial design firm near Rockefeller Center. His experience during his time at Harvard under the tutelage of Bauhaus masters Gropius, Breuer and Albers had left an indelible mark on his design philosophy, one that would guide his practice throughout his career. The diluted modernism that became synonymous with MoMA toward the end of the *Good Design* program did not interest Noyes. For him, modernism reached its pinnacle with the Bauhaus. As a trained architect, he shared many similarities with his previous mentor and employer Walter Gropius, not least of which was a desire to integrate disparate design professions into one common pursuit. Architecture, art, interiors, products and graphic design were more similar in his mind than not. The goals of each were the same and, therefore, the differences should be minimized into a singular pursuit of excellence in the material world. All design pursuits should work toward compatibility between the parts, not in the myopic pursuit of individual aesthetic form. "A cardinal point about design is that

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[237] Eliot Noyes, "Charles Eames," *Arts & Architecture,* September 1946, 26.

[238] Eliot Noyes. Notes for 1962 Architecture and Industrial Design speech.

[239] Scott Kelly, *ID Magazine*, June 1966, 3.

nothing exists or is used only itself," Noyes said during a speech in 1962. "A typewriter sits in a room in a building. There must be a sense of their relationship in the design of each of these. Good design, whether of a building, an office machine, or a company's operating statement derives from the nature of the problem: when the design problems have been solved, the end products will have in common a clarity and appropriateness of form…Thus, a company's buildings, offices, graphic design and so forth should all contribute to a total statement."[240]

Noyes chance to propagate this idea came in 1946 by way of an old war buddy, Tom Watson, Jr., the heir apparent of IBM. Noyes, as an employee of Bel Geddes, was assigned to the IBM account and set out working on the IBM Model A typewriter. The two designers were very different in their view of how design is deemed successful, with Noyes' interest resting much more in the realm of usefulness over pure beauty. "Bel Geddes and Noyes could not have been more dissimilar as designers or as people. Noyes has never admired the techniques of the salesman or the showman even when they are raised to an art, and his grave New England moral sense was outraged by Bel Geddes' disregard of the feelings of others," journalist and architecture critic Walter McQuade, wrote in 1963. "He was not too outraged to see the funny side of the situation, however, or to profit from the practical experience in design and dealing with clients."[241]

And profit he did; the Model A's design changes were highly successful in increasing sales, and its formal qualities would remain constant for nearly two decades. Its success

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[240] Eliot Noyes, "Architecture and Industrial Design," February 1962.

[241] Walter McQuade, "An Industrial Designer with a Conspicuous Conscience," *Fortune,* August 1963.

and acceptance by the general public led to the creation of the even more successful Model B in 1954. The unique aspect in the design of both models was Noyes' dependence on the problem to inform the design of the product instead of relying on a presumed solution for its form. Old typewriters relied on a flat surface and a carriage that moved the paper behind a stationary typeball, while Noyes and his team developed the new IBM models to work based on an internal mechanism that moved across the surface of the paper. The new design allowed for a fully enclosed outer case for the machine, increasing possibilities for improved design. IBM designer Jim LaDue described the Model B as "a very good-looking [typewriter]… the best designed typewriter ever,"[242] far different from other typewriters of the same period. Even by this point in the 1950s, designers were still creating typewriters that looked very similar, despite technological advancements, to the typewriters used in the 1930s. Because of this, the performance of the machines suffered. Typewriters did not function the same as they had two decades earlier, but the design had not changed to accommodate the new machine. Noyes' design for IBM was a commercial success, eclipsing $50 million in sales by 1956, but it also proved to Watson that his trust in Noyes was well founded.

The work Noyes did with the electric typewriter program at IBM set the stage for deeper development of what would become known as comprehensive design. Since his time at MoMA, Noyes had been advocating for an ideology of design that saw the material world as explicitly connected. For him, design existed within a particular world that had direct effect on the way in which society develops and grows. Without knowledge of the

[242] Jim LaDue, interview with Gordon Bruce, Cocoa Beach, FL, 2004, quoted in Gordon Bruce, *Eliot Noyes: A Pioneer of Design and Architecture in the Age of American Modernism,* (London: Phaidon, 2006), 149.

context of an object, the object became useless. Its only real purpose was as an extension of that material world. This view, as opposed to earlier views within modernism, was not a prioritization of form or function; instead, the work of a designer was informed by how form and function could be appropriately applied to problems within the material world. As Marcel Breuer, Noyes' longtime friend and colleague, explained, "The solution for every problem lies within the problem itself. If you look hard enough for it, you will find it." This was the center of Noyes' design ideology, and as such, it illuminated new design potential in areas where others were complacent and accepting of the status quo.

For over a decade, Noyes continued to work on new products and design projects for IBM as a contractor, while deflecting a barrage of full-time employment offers from Watson. Noyes' constant refusal was based in his belief that as an IBM employee, he would be subject to management's ability to cancel his projects or veto his design direction. Even after being offered the position of Design Director for the company, Noyes accepted under the condition that he remain an independent contractor. Watson agreed and the IBM Design Program was launched. This program placed nothing off limits.

For the remainder of his life, Noyes redefined the spaces, identity, buildings and brand of IBM. His view that all design affects and is affected by the material world resulted in large-scale changes to IBM's buildings, interior design, visual identity and business practices. As Design Director, Noyes reimagined IBM from an antiquated tabulating equipment provider to the computing giant that pioneered artificial intelligence and helped NASA land a man on the moon. During his tenure with the company, Noyes enlisted Paul Rand to develop the now-iconic brand identity, Charles and Ray Eames to develop

exhibitions and films, and architect George Nelson and his old MoMA colleague Edgar Kaufmann, Jr., to advise him as general consultants.

Noyes and Watson, Jr., were in agreement about the need for IBM to move into a new period of design and development. While Tom Watson, Sr., had no interest in contemporary design or architecture, the design programs at Olivetti and Braun had caught his attention. These programs functioned not only as improvements in design quality and visual appeal for the products the companies produced, but as a consistent way to position the companies as cutting-edge and desirable. "The Olivetti [brochure] was filled with color and excitement and fit together like a beautiful picture puzzle," Watson, Jr., recalled about the need for changes at IBM. "Ours looked like directions on how to make bicarbonate of soda."[243] Olivetti and Braun both excelled in their focus on design as central to their management policies, but even more impressive was the manner in which their focus on design was proving to be a commercial success as well.

Braun and Good Design

While Olivetti caught the eye of Noyes and Watson, Jr., the success story of comprehensive design was Braun, a German consumer goods company that manufactured radios, slide viewers and electric razors. Following the implementation of its design program in the mid-1950s, Braun's sales rose dramatically. Between 1951 and 1967, company sales skyrocketed from 14 to 276 million deutschmarks and the company hired nearly 5,000 employees. This growth was fueled by equal commitments to quality and

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[243] Tom Watson, Jr. in address at National Building Museum Awards Dinner, Washington D.C., 21 March 1990.

design. The sleek, modern design of Braun's high-end audio equipment fused the streamlined moderne with the minimalist and functionalist design considerations of Dieter Rams, the company's Chief Design Officer from 1961 to 1995.

As the first company to include a designer at the C-suite level, Braun defined modern design for an entire generation. While other areas of design were tiring of the stark minimalism of modernism, Dieter Rams designed products guided by the lessons he learned as a collaborator with the Ulm School of Design. The main point of "less, but better" was a constant refrain from Ulm professors including its Bauhaus-educated founder Max Bill. The interdisciplinary curriculum of the school integrated all aspects of learning into its design education. Sociology, psychology, politics, economics and more were included as considerations in the design process; nothing was off limits as the context, source or framework from which design could emerge. Because of this, Rams saw no difference between the process to produce a quality product or building or the best way to frame a commercial conversation. Everything contained a potential problem to solve and design was the obvious answer across the board.[244]

As integrated as Braun's approach was, interdisciplinarity was not as far as Rams would push design during his time as chief design officer.[245] At the beginning of modernism, early adherents advocated for works of art or processes that incorporated all

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[244] For more about the connection of Braun and Dieter Rams to the Ulm School of Deisgn, see Klaus Klemp "Dieter Rams, Braun, Vitsœ and the Shrinking World," in *Less and More: The Design Ethos of Dieter Rams,* eds. Keiko Ueki-Polet and Klaus Klamp, (Berlin: Die Gestaltung Verlag GmbH & Co., 2009) 433-499.

[245] For a complete history of Rams' time at Braun as well as an in-depth view of his processes, see *Less and More: The Design Ethos of Dieter Rams,* eds. Keiko Ueki-Polet and Klaus Klamp, (Berlin: Die Gestaltung Verlag GmbH & Co., 2009).

mediums, fusing into one absolute form that would help usher in a new age of utopia. After the Second World War, the dismal reality of the Cold War, and growing international Communism, the concept of utopia was far off, but Rams saw the interconnection of individuals striving toward a common goal as a way to create better, more democratized objects and communities. The connection with the real world was not just in the interaction of material objects as Noyes had proposed, but could also be found in the interaction of designers working toward a collective goal.

To this end, Rams created a very specific but basic team approach to design. By the end of the 1960s, Braun's single design team was well on its way to the three smaller units that would define Braun's interdisciplinary design process for the next three decades. While the separation may have appeared to be a weak point in Rams' design leadership, it proved to be the opposite. The Product Design, Product Graphics and Model Workshop teams worked separately but in a more focused area of each project. In this way, individual expertise could be applied to a particular area of a problem, while the interconnectivity of the teams allowed for different, if not competing, viewpoints during the process. These varied viewpoints, much like the interdisciplinary curriculum of the Ulm School, exposed areas of weakness, underlined stylistic faults and illuminated possible production difficulties; the design team was stronger because greater input allowed for a deeper level of critique during the design process.

With all projects, effort was applied toward expanding knowledge across team and company boundaries. Individuals did not experience the world in isolation and products were not created for a single individual; because of this, individual designers were constantly urged to work together across their boundaries. "For all areas of responsibility

but especially for [Product Design] and [Product Graphics]," an internal Braun manual stated, "The aim should be in accordance with the goals set to participate in and influence the coordination of interdisciplinary cooperation."[246] In effect, the designers were being asked to show the same level of connection to the surrounding world as they were asking of the products they designed.

By this point in the 1960s, it was becoming more difficult to dictate to a designer what his or her work would be. With an increase in the reputation and necessity of design within the manufacturing process, designers had established a greater degree of agency than they had ever experienced. Directing, intervening or conducting was increasingly difficult. Charles and Ray Eames are a prime example of designers finding their own way and producing what they felt was most needed. The same was true for the studios of Peter Behrens, Ernst May and Mies van der Rohe. The authority of a workshop or a studio director was no longer respected based upon the title of the office, and over the next decade, Braun and Rams would struggle to develop a common sense[247] that guided the group's designs. All problems have a best solution; so good design is not consensual and is not interested in compromise. Good design, as Rams saw it, is the systematic realization of a good idea in collaboration with everyone involved in the process. For these reasons, Rams had no need to thrust his ideas upon his designers, but instead set standards through

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[246] *Braun, Funktionsbeschreibung Produktgestaltung, No. 77.333-16,* quoted in Klaus Klemp, "Dieter Rams, Braun, Vitsoe and the Shrinking World" in Keiko Ueki-Polet and Klaus Klemp, eds., *Less and More: The Design Ethos of Dieter Rams,* (Berlin: Die Gestalten Verlag GmbH & Co., 2009), 475.

[247] The use of common sense by Rams is similar to that of Aristotle and G.E. Moore. It is not sound judgment but an individual's ability to perceive the characteristics of physical things through the collective work of the individual senses. See Chapter 2, Note 12.

his own design work that others saw as common sense solutions to problems. In turn, when exposed to a common sense solution by someone else, the pursuit for quality forced Rams to incorporate them into his own work.

This unique team-based approach to design stood in stark contrast to the individualized practice that was seen in architecture and the history of industrial design. The historical archetype of the enlightened genius was being slowly replaced by a more connected and inclusive practice of design. This approach was what made Braun's designs so persuasive. The democracy developed by this approach contained diverse thoughts and inclusive solutions, guaranteeing objects and process more applicable to a larger cross-section of society. "It is not normative and it is not monogamous," one design historian remarked. "But rather it occupies an immense spectrum within the framework of a defined basic approach."[248]

Through this navigation of a changing design model, Rams spent considerable time streamlining his personal philosophy of design. As a design leader not only at Braun, but also in the profession worldwide, Rams understood the need to formulate specific principles to guide his practice as well as those of his team. Beginning in lecture manuscripts in 1975, Rams spent the next fifteen years condensing his experience and understanding of design into ten points that would be referred to, by some, as the Ten Commandments of Design. Starting from the original four and growing to the final ten, Rams evoked his list of design tenets repeatedly in speeches, lectures and interviews.

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[248] Klaus Klemp, "Dieter Rams, Braun, Vitsoe and the Shrinking World" in Keiko Ueki-Polet and Klaus Klemp, eds., *Less and More: The Design Ethos of Dieter Rams,* (Berlin: Die Gestalten Verlag GmbH & Co., 2009), 487.

Always a proponent of simplicity in design, Rams' ten principles reduced good design to a set of guiding ideas that could be employed within any project.

At the opening of the exhibition *Designed in Germany,* Rams stressed "design is not a theory or a philosophy. Design is a practical art, evolved under continuously changing social conditions."[249] These changing social conditions made the overcoming of the "deficit in sensuality engendered by Modernism" the designer's main concern; however, he stressed that the main principles never changed. No matter the society or constraints, innovation, utility, aesthetics, understanding, unobtrusiveness, honesty, durability, conscientiousness, conservation and simplicity would always be the guiding factors of good design.

As the design group at Braun flourished and the company expanded even further, Rams became increasingly bothered by the effects his designs were having on the world. His designs were considered some of the most beautiful, but his interests were moving increasingly toward the social and ecological impact of the creation of new products. From the mid-1970s on, Rams spent a great deal of time formulating his ideas on the ecology of design, the wastefulness of manufacturing and the necessity of restraint within his profession. "We must drastically and lastingly reduce the quantity of our product arsenals. And simultaneously we must also drastically raise the quality of the products…'Less, but better" means that we must move away from the product culture of the superfluous, waste, cheapness both literally but also in a broader sense," he said much later in a speech to an

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[249] Dieter Rams, Speech at the opening of *Designed in Germany,* May 1990, quoted in Klaus Klemp, "Dieter Rams, Braun, Vitsoe and the Shrinking World" in Keiko Ueki-Polet and Klaus Klemp, eds., *Less and More: The Design Ethos of Dieter Rams,* (Berlin: Die Gestalten Verlag GmbH & Co., 2009), 493.

international design council. “From a product culture for which industrial nations have plundered the Earth’s resources, polluted the environment, filled up the garbage dumps…Design must become one of the engines for the switchover to sustainability in the product culture.”[250]

Just as he had expanded design considerations within commercial design culture, Rams now called for designers to expand this list even further. Rams called for more business training within design schools with an even deeper concern for technological advances. Simplicity in design would come at no small cost. As the needs of the planet and society were growing, so were the necessary viewpoints by which designers could better inform their processes and products. Despite this growing list of goals, the designer’s job had not changed from what Dreyfuss had described twenty years earlier. It was still the role of the designer “to fit the new machines and materials—whatever they may be, wherever they appear—to people…to relate the inanimate with the animate, to improve, if you’ll forgive the conceit, a world of non-designer people, non-designer machines and non-designed things.”[251] Despite this similarity, the growth of design and production, as Rams advocated, made that job a bit more difficult to do well if a designer were not intimately connected to his or her surroundings.

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[250] Speech by Dieter Rams, ICSID Meeting, Taipei, Taiwan, 1995, quoted in Klaus Klemp, “Dieter Rams, Braun, Vitsoe and the Shrinking World” in Keiko Ueki-Polet and Klaus Klemp, eds., *Less and More: The Design Ethos of Dieter Rams,* (Berlin: Die Gestalten Verlag GmbH & Co., 2009), 487.

[251] Dreyfuss, 246.

Commitment to People

"To create a home, design a chair, fashion a cooling vessel, develop sound-reproduction equipment, make a better bicycle, or help plan a village---is a joyful adventure," Victor Papanek wrote in the introduction to his 1983 book *Design for Human Scale.* "At the most basic level, design and architecture are activities that affirm life."[252] Papanek spoke candidly about his belief that designers had largely failed to attach their work to the real world in which they lived. This failure did not result in unwanted products, but did result in wasteful production and the systematic ignoring of groups beyond the mainstream retail buyers of American society. Designers, Papanek argued, "neglected the handicapped, the poor, the [mentally disabled], children and babied, the elderly, the obese, and people in developing countries, among others."[253] This was not acceptable in an age of increasing connection between people, he argued, because people, not products, should be the central aim of design.

Victor Papanek and Design for the Real World

While Dieter Rams was advocating simplicity as a means of improving design, Victor Papanek was advocating a much more radical simplicity. While Rams and Papanek agreed that the work of designers was necessary but increasingly harmful to the world, their agreement did not extend much further. Papanek was a staunch advocate for the idea that design had lost its way. "There are professions more harmful than industrial design," Papanek wrote in the preface to his seminal 1971 work *Design for the Real World.* "But only

[252] Victor Papanek, *Design for Human Scale* (New York: Chapman and Hall, 1983), 1.

[253] Papanek, *Design for Human Scale,* 11.

a very few of them. And possibly only one profession is phonier. Advertising design." In his view, design contained a moral and social obligation that was lacking following the post-war shopping spree of the 1950s and 60s. Industrial and advertising design were inseparably linked and functioned as a means to persuade individuals to buy "things they don't need, with money they don't have." The clean lines used by industrial designers and the uncluttered and well-organized layouts of advertising designers merely influenced a social order dependent on impressing neighbors and buying the newest thing in order to remain socially relevant. Design, he cried, "is probably the phoniest field in existence today." [254]

For Papanek, designers like IBM's Eliot Noyes, Braun's Dieter Rams and the Container Corporation of America's Herbert Bayer were examples of design's unwavering alignment with industry, an alignment that precluded design's ability to function as a tool for progress in society. While manufacturing advancements had enabled modern man to work fewer hours to achieve the same result, designers and their direct tie to unbridled capitalism had enslaved the American public with the promise of new products and improved social standing. Papanek spoke for an emerging counterculture in design that called for restraint in production and, more importantly, the introduction of individuals as the central focus of design.

"How do you start a design?" Henry Dreyfuss had asked. "With the man, woman or child who will use it."[255] This sentiment, along with similar ideas by Noyes and Rams, stressed the importance of the individual within design, but only as a tool for determining

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[254] Papanek, *Design for the Real World*, ix.

[255] Dreyfuss, 264-265.

proportion, size and ergonomics. It was important that people be included in the process because they would physically interact with a product, but no one had so strongly called for design to question whether a product should or should not exist in the first place. Papanek was not so naïve as to call for designers to move outside of the commercial commodity system of capitalism, but he did call for a broadened view of design practice. "The designer bears a responsibility for the way the products he designs are received at the marketplace. But this view is still too narrow and parochial…His social and moral judgment must be brought into play long before he begins to design," he wrote in a chapter entitled "Do-it-Yourself Murder." "In other words, will his design be on the side of social good or not." So the preliminary discussion for designers as Papanek saw it, was not who would use a thing, but whether or not that thing should even be designed in the first place.

During the socially volatile 1960s, this idea of restraint in production was fueled by the burgeoning ecological movement in the United States. This radical movement called for a swift departure from the status quo of developed nations. Environmental damage, pollution, a dependence on foreign oil that nearly crippled America in the 1970s and the potential depletion of natural resources forced some designers to re-examine the way in which their design process operated. Design had always been a problem solving activity, but designers were now urged to consider materials not for their manufacturing potential, cost efficiency or formal qualities, but for recyclability, energy efficiency and durability. During this period, ideas of sustainability re-emerged in design discourse. Echoing earlier writings of William Morris, the field was asking itself to consider the actual benefits of synthetic products with limited lifespans. However, unlike Morris, designers in the 1960s and 1970s did not see this change as an antidote to the decline in moral and artistic

standards; instead, it was an emergency maneuver to save the planet from ultimate destruction. "In all pollution, designers are implicated at least partially," Papanek wrote. "It seems to me that we can go beyond not working at all, and work positively."[256] If designers, according to Papanek had contributed to the problems in nature and society, then it was their responsibility to think critically about how to reverse that course through their work.

Papanek never shied away from strong, polemical language, but his fierceness was not out of place. As a major world power, the United States has a huge responsibility for the world it creates through its policies and actions. American culture is even more effective in its ability to spread ideas and promote change. Papanek argued that American culture has always been a main export of our design industry. Initially this culture was spread through our new form of citizen-led government, but later moved to the images of American life we spread through media. The idealized environments of Hollywood with their "make-believe, fairyland"[257] qualities promoted an America ripe with all the latest products and gadgets. As time passed, the image of the perfect life was supplanted by the export of the products themselves. The happy smiles of care-free Americans sell Coca-Cola products and the cheerful dancing of silhouetted twenty-somethings indelibly link the iPod to a better life. This exportation of a material culture that existed to further capitalism was not what design should aim for. Papanek drew a strong line in the sand: "Design, as we have come to know it, should cease to exist."[258]

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[256] Papanek, *Design for the Real World,* xiii.

[257] Papanek, *Design for the Real World,* 56.

[258] Papanek, *Design for the Real World*, x.

Papanek's view positions design as a purely bourgeois pursuit, intent on creating vanity items for affluent people within first-world countries. By focusing on this group, designers and the manufacturing industry had ignored the majority of the world, especially those in most need. To realign design, Papanek introduced the idea of design for the Third World, where designers could envision and create the basic tools needed for survival in struggling countries. This call to designers wasn't just to make more stuff, but to create in an appropriate manner: with low capital costs, using local labor and materials, all while helping to create jobs that would be controlled by local people as appropriate to their needs. Corporate capitalist design didn't need more support, but the individuals left out of the system of design/consume/dispose continuum were consumers with needs, albeit unmet, as well. Papanek would go on to call for action for other marginalized groups like the elderly and the disabled.

In the year before the release of *Design for the Real World,* the 1970 Aspen Design Conference fell under attack from students protesting the organization's corporate-dominated board of directors. During the entirety of the conference, student groups, environmentalists, design educators, and outsider media collectives camped out demanding an end to the conference's lack of political engagement, dearth of environmental concern, and dependence on a non-participatory concept of design. According to design historian Alice Twemlow, "The protests at the 1970 Aspen conference epitomized more widespread clashes that took place in the late 1960s and early 1970s between an emerging counterculture and the economically and politically dominant

regime."[259] For these protestors, design was no longer about objects, structures, the propagation of good taste or interdisciplinary approaches to teambuilding; design was about bringing people into an interconnected system of discovery and representation. Where IBM and Braun had acknowledged that problems formed the basis for design practice, this new counterculture was demanding that real questions be asked before the designer presumed to know the problem. To do this, design would need to open its rigid boundaries and ask for the non-designer's help in the creation of a more humane culture.

This idea of democratizing design is an uneasy one for some and stands in direct opposition to the modernist concept that a designer is somehow more in tune with the true nature of materials, processes or the necessary requirements of a just and humane future. By opening the rigid boundaries of design to bring people, especially those under-represented or under-served, into preliminary discussions concerned with need, appropriateness and utility does not reduce the role of the designer, as some would argue. Many professions retain their mantle of expertise while holding inclusivity in high regard. The social sciences largely rest on this idea, as do service professions, but design has been slow to adopt this idea wholeheartedly; instead discounting user-centered design, inclusive design, universal design and social design as pursuits separate from general practice and subjugated to pro-bono or not-for-profit pursuits. Some of this friction can be attributed to the massive weight of capitalist pressure in First World economies, but this idea also

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[259] Alice Twemlow, "I Can't Talk to You If You Say That: An Ideological Collision at the International Design Conference at Aspen, 1970," *Design and Culture* 1, no. 1 (2009): 25.

confronts "the boundaries of the profession itself."[260] Confrontation may be unavoidable if we continue perpetuating a world so dependent on the objects of design. The inclusion of others is necessary, therefore, not only in pursuit of personal agency and social justice, but also for a fuller understanding of the way in which everyone contributes to a culture dependent on material objects. Likewise, professional exclusion serves no purpose during a period in which the skills of designers are so readily attainable. While rigid disciplinary boundaries may protect some modicum of "expertise" now, understanding the social practice of design may well position designers as central to not just manufacturing, but also central to the needs government, business, health care, and other major industries struggling to understand their role in an ever-increasing social landscape.

By arguing that design should be framed through a societal understanding of its practice, Papanek also drew attention to the link between design and the politics of everyday life. Additionally, he proposed an embedded approach to design that would become central to his understanding of the field going forward and would fuel broader design activism throughout the late 1960s and into the 1970s. Beginning with design conferences and seminars, Papanek began evangelizing the benefits of anthropological and participation-based research. In 1968 Papanek created a series of seminars with students at the Institute of Industrial Art in Helsinki that would lead to the creation of toys created specifically for children with cerebral palsy, something that had never been done before. Moving beyond basic observation techniques, Papanek created environments where the disabled individuals could "play" with designers who were engaged in research through the

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[260] Richard Buchanan and Victor Margolin, eds., *Discovering Design: Explorations in Design Studies,* (Chicago, The University of Chicago Press, 1995), 123.

activity. This simple social interaction the students experienced through play allowed face-to-face research that would have been absent from a project of this kind twenty years earlier. By entering into the situation alongside people for whom a product would be designed, designers not only saw how an object might be used, but could also discover unexposed needs or wants through empathy and shared experiences. These seminars lasted a total of twelve hours and culminated in the creation of an "environmental, two-meter cube that could travel in knocked-down form from clinic to clinic." In the end a product was made, and the designers adhered to their responsibility to the marketplace, but in sharing experiences and empathizing with users, Papanek and his students created a more appropriate design that prioritized social connection over commercial viability.

The concept of the design lab, as introduced by Papanek drew attention to a "vast area of design neglect" and made sure "that each of the students who had participated afterward would forever feel a little ashamed when designing a 'sexy' coffee percolator with tail fins, a grenade launcher or a transistorized back-scratcher."[261] The outcome of design was the same, but the process shifted focus to the needs, wants and desires of the individual within society. The goal was not to outfit a home with tastefully designed objects, but to give agency back to the individual by maintaining their role as prominent in society. The focus for Papanek was not sales, although selling, buying and wealth were not outside of his goals, but for humans to take back the reigns of society from an industry that sought money and consumption above all else. American commodity culture had distanced each of us from our neighbors and our ties to society. The design lab was Papanek's way of reconnecting individuals through shared experiences and empathy.

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[261] Papanek, *Design for the Real World*, 43.

Three key points outline Papanek's vision for the new role of design and designers moving forward. First, the problems affecting our time need to be researched in order to gain better insight into the real problems. This research requires an investment into a diverse and varied collection of people and facts. Design must become an international effort as globalization becomes more ingrained in business, government and public life. Second, this research should lead to realigning present design efforts to be more in service to the areas illuminated by the research. This is not to say that design in pursuit of manufacturing, industry or art should cease, but that a portion of effort should be allotted for "short-range practical design needs."[262] Lastly, Papanek calls for a broadening within design education. Design schools that seek only to serve commercial interests are limited in scope and should adopt classes, projects or extended curricula that would educate students about the effects of the profession on the world, culture and environment.

These changes have already been seen in many areas of the world. Empathetic design research is taught in universities around the world and large companies like IDEO and IBM utilize empathetic principles to guide their problem solving and production processes. Other companies, like Google, allow their designers to spend portions of their workweek on personal projects, allowing for a range of work to be produced, not all of which is expressly commercial. Likewise, design-build programs—like the one Charles W. Moore began in the Yale School of Architecture—give students hands-on experience in building with the needs of economically disadvantaged clients as the starting point for design. Other schools such as Brown, Harvard, the Maryland Institute College of Art, the School of Visual Arts and Design Academy Eindhoven, among others, have graduate

[262] Papanek, *Design for the Real World*, 341.

programs in social design. These changes in design have not weakened the industry and have not detracted from the industrial goal of the majority of design; instead, they have broadened the practice and increased the social value for design.

A Basic Human Activity

While many readers and designers have been offended by Papanek's tone, the central premises of his acerbic writing have had an impact on design practice. At its core, Papanek wrote, "design is basic to all human activities,"[263] and based on the idea that humans, by their nature, are social creatures design is never separate from its social context. Eliot Noyes understood that the material objects created by designers have an effect, but this effect was not social, but architectural. Objects, for Noyes, interacted within space in a way that required designers to understand how the entirety of a space influenced design considerations like scale, materials and ergonomics. This material concept of design was only the beginning for understanding the interaction of objects; Papanek took the concept further by illustrating how objects interact with people. People's interaction with objects was not simply another concept to incorporate into design practice, but was the foundational concern for designers. Design is more than a comprehensive system as Noyes proposed, it is an integrated system. As Papanek wrote in *Design for the Real World,* "The planning and patterning of any act toward a desired, foreseeable end constitutes the design process. Any attempt to separate design, to make it a

[263] Papanek, *Design for the Real World*, 322.

thing-by-itself, works counter to the inherent value of design as the primary, underlying matrix of design."[264]

Papanek is not alone in his view of design's monumental role in society. Herbert Simon begins his book *The Sciences of the Artificial* by stating that design's underlying function "is concerned with how things ought to be—how they ought to be in order to attain goals and to function."[265] Following this idea, questions are raised as to how designers are to make such judgments and how we decide how things ought to be. For Papanek, the answers are found once more in the social responsibility of design. It is not enough to know that design has a social role, but designers must also understand that their work now helps create the society of the future. This idea has been central to several of the responses to modernity discussed in this investigation. Within the framework of socially responsible design, we can better understand the totality of design's function in the world.

Conclusion

By the end of MoMA's Good Design program, designers in many fields were questioning the way in which design was produced. Henry Dreyfuss, in response to a lack of universality in product development, released *Designing for People* in 1955, which called into question the manner in which individual designs developed. With the individual as his central focus, Dreyfuss called for a greater knowledge of an object's end user and a greater dependence on research for illuminating the design process. In this way, the overarching

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[264] Papanek, *Design for the Real World*, 322.

[265] Herbert A. Simon, *The Sciences of the Artificial,* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1969).

aim of good design remained the benefit of society, but in the second half of the twentieth century, it would be accomplished through a connection to the material world and a commitment to the needs of people, not through a dependence on proper form.

Dreyfuss believed the value of an object was in how well it performed or worked for an individual, on the strength of its function as well as the success of its form. In this way, the binary of form and function that had been debated by various expressions of modernism changed. Form and function still held a central role in the discussion of design, but the binary had given way to a more interdependent relationship: neither form nor function was prioritized over the other, instead, both served as measuring sticks, helping to evaluate the goodness or usefulness of an object.

By the time Eliot Noyes joined IBM as their Director of Design, the concept of comprehensive design had already begun to develop. This concept of design hinged on the belief that all parts of a system work together and, therefore, all parts require equal design attention. Noyes applied this way of thinking to the spaces, materials, objects and processes used at IBM's main offices incorporating graphic, industrial, interior and industrial design into his work. Goodness was no longer confined to an individual object as Kaufmann, Jr., saw it, but was once again – just as in William Morris' philosophy – a product of collective work of design.

As these same ideas were being integrated and developed at Braun through the work of Dieter Rams, other considerations became central to design as well. With an explosive growth in commercial sales following World War II, much of the United States and Western Europe were experiencing a glut of new products. Rams' focus was on comprehensive design but also moved to include ideas of ecology and sustainability. The

responsibility of design was still to create beauty, but it also included a responsibility to the resources design depended on. Goodness was now understood to include responsibility toward nature and the world around us.

Victor Papanek believed ecology to be of paramount importance to designers as well, but strongly advocated for individuals as the central focus of designers no matter their specific branch of practice. For too long, Papanek argued, commercial interests had fueled a systematic ignorance of groups outside of mainstream, middle class buyers. Objects and products has not been directed outside of this bubble, and millions of individuals were excluded because of it. Papanek inserted these outliers into the conversation of design and called for the recognition of all people as equally important and valid in the design process. His focus on people was not just on them as potential consumers, it was also on individuals as partners in design. Goodness was not just form, commercial success or attention to all people groups, it was also understood as the inclusion of individuals in the research process as designers sought to discover true problems that were plaguing an ever-increasing industrial society of the 1970s and 1980s.

Papanek's claims are a large part of the current discussion of good design. The objects we make do define our lives as the curators at MoMA understood in the 1930s, but the current conversation offers a slight reorientation of what this definition accomplishes. "What does design do?" Victor Margolin asked in his 2002 book *The Politics of the Artificial.* "It collaborates actively and proactively in the social construction of meaning." Designers not only have a responsibility to their present time, but also to the future their work creates. Despite the disagreement with its claim that design and the industrial commodity complex are inextricably intertwined, social design shares much with philosophies of

modernism. Social design is an idealistic pursuit at its core: we design in response to the needs of the world, to better the world we are in and to create the future we desire. In short, design allows for utopia, but only if it is inclusive of and connected to the communities in which we live.

Conclusion

Questions of value have been central to design discourse both past and present. These questions deal with the impact and purpose of design work as well as its role in the creation of the approaching future. Since before the coalescence of graphic design as a separate field of design, these questions have been tied to the form, function or social impact of the objects created by designers. Despite the prevalence of this line of inquiry in the discourse, current usage tends toward uncritical and uninformed usage because of a separation of the terminology from the historical context in which this conversation developed. The purpose of this investigation, then, is not to segment terms into "right" or "proper" definitions, but to apply a critical historical lens to the vocabulary of goodness as it has been used in the larger design discourse since 1870 in order to better understand the state of current discussions of value and to inform paths of future inquiry.

In order to do so, this investigation developed a framework by which to understand the ways in which goodness has been contextualized over the last 150 years. This historical context does not limit us to a historicist approach to design, and it not presented as an essentialist or teleological marker of things to come. Instead, knowledge of the historical

context and various uses of a term makes us better educated practitioners of design who are more capable of combating the individualistic fallacy of the enlightened genius. Through a fuller knowledge of the critical historical context in which our field's vocabulary developed, we can better understand notions of creativity that position designers as expert guides through networks of information and meaning.

This framework of goodness has never been developed in relation to the critical understanding of design discourse's vocabulary, and this investigation of goodness exists as a first step in the development of this larger vocabulary of design. As a relatively new discipline, graphic design is still actively involved in debating terminology central to the field. Despite its youth, the history of graphic design shares common ground with other fields of design, allowing for a an interdisciplinary historical approach to a broader discourse that had already been developed prior to the creation of the term graphic design. This history allows for graphic design discourse to be positioned as a branch of the larger design discourse enriching its past and providing fertile ground for further development of concepts shared by similar practitioners of design. The four parts of this network of meaning rely on the knowledge of these previously established conversations and their connection to design discourse. In this way, we can see the conversation as it develops as a philosophical concept of goodness, an assumed and imposed view of form and function, a predominantly commercial aim and a social activity and responsibility. These four phases of the development of the concept of goodness mark the boundaries for this investigation.

This framework has been developed because the imprecise and uncritical use of the vocabulary of our discourse has limited our understanding of our field's place within the larger culture. In 1949, György Kepes wrote that "it seems, therefore, appropriate to begin

by asking questions, by examining fundamental terms that we generally assume have a clear meaning."[266] The same holds merit for this investigation. The disregard for the critical language of our discipline does not just flatten the work and expression of diverse designers into monolithic periods or movements, but also serves to reduce design discourse's role in the experiences and material production of a newly industrialized world. Through an inclusive understanding of this vocabulary, one which accepts multiple contexts of meaning as equally valid, commonality can be found and themes can be understood. The discussion of goodness is near-universal within the prevalent Western design discourse of the past 150 years, but the ways in which this concept played out in particular communities under particular points of view is not.

While some have argued that design exists as a solely creative and individual pursuit, as practitioners of design we are remiss if we work within an intellectual vacuum or ignore that descriptions and critiques of our work rely on the meaning carried by language through description. Ignoring this undermines the power of our work to communicate to and connect with others. Designers of all varieties work within a particular culture that conforms to certain ideological principles that provide the context for how objects and ideas are presented and understood. Understanding this cultural context, including its philosophical and contextual past, is central to our ability to communicate ideas about it to others, including the general public.

"Design educators have maintained a focus upon students and to a lesser degree professional designers, while ignoring the need to educate the larger society – the general public, the business community, governmental decision makers- to the value of graphic

[266] Kepes, 99.

design," Phil Meggs said in a lecture presented at the Universidad de las Americas Puebla in 1994.[267] As a part of design education, he proposed, is the necessity to educate individuals outside of the profession of its value, something that largely goes unrecognized despite the extreme dependence of culture on the material objects conceived of by designers. "When historically does society begin to recognize consciously that things are designed rather than that they are?" Clive Dilnot asked in 1984.[268] Within the context of these ideas, it is not enough that designers merely practice, but there is an imperative to understand and communicate the value of that practice within society. This education, aside from informing practice from within the field, would serve the needs of a society in general that does not fully understand the impact or value of design.

It may seem a residue of a different time, but our past is as much a part of how we understand our culture and society as current events or conversations. Despite the distrust of historical precedent seen in several expressions of modernism, this past is integral to how we position value and goodness as a qualifier of our work as designers. The complexity and depth of our cultural surroundings has come about through the past and the present mingling together. Intellectual threads tie us together in the present and extend their reach into the past, providing foundation for future pursuits. It is through a fuller understanding of this historical conversation that we become better communicators and designers. We cannot know the ways in which we may use the terms and concepts

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[267] Phil Meggs "Methods and Philosophies in Design History Research," Lecture presented at the Universidad de las Americas Puebla, Cholula, Puebla, Mexico (February 28, 1994), in *Meggs,* ed. Rob Carter, Libby Meggs and Sandra Wheeler (Hoboken: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2008), 223.

[268] Clive Dilnot "The State of Design History, Part I," *Design Issues,* Vol. 1, No. 1, (Spring, 1984).

surrounding ideas of good and goodness without first knowing the ways in which they have been used in the past. "The evolution of graphic design history over the past quarter-century has generated a series of viewpoints and philosophies that don't replace the earlier views or render them obsolete," Meggs said. "Rather, they have added new levels of complexity and meaning."[269] By understanding this past and realizing its role in our present conversations, the discourse of design is bolstered through a richness and pluralism that strengthens the study of graphic design history as well as its application to design practice.

As a philosophical concept, the discussion of goodness has been a part of discourse since before recorded history. This conversation within design discourse had already been developed and had undergone significant changes of focus before graphic design emerged as a specific discipline to engage with concepts of value at stake in the work of designers. Plato, Aristotle, G.E. Moore and Ludwig Wittgenstein all wrote about concepts of value or goodness and how these concepts help us to understand the world around us. For Plato, goodness was the highest ideal toward which we must struggle in order to have any hope of a just society. Its position in the hierarchy of a good society was paramount, conceived of as the most noble and absolute goal of an individual or society. For Aristotle, goodness was a very real part of the world around us not merely an idealized aim, and if we lived our life well, we could perceive it with our senses and come to a greater knowledge of its place and role in society. Goodness, in this view, was an obtainable quality but only through extreme dedication and work. For Moore, goodness was such a central and irreducible concept to

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[269] Philip B. Meggs and Alston W. Purvis, *Meggs' History of Graphic Design,* 4th Edition (Hoboken: John Wiley and Sons, Inc.), 219.

humankind that even proposing a definition would lead to an illogical discussion; instead, he advocated for a deeper reflection upon the words we use and how we attach meaning to them. For Moore, goodness was an objective reality, but the contexts in which we define goodness are subjective, can change and require specific attention to understand. For Wittgenstein, words were not dependent upon definitions or objective truths, rather they require situations or context to be fully understood; the words we use are not the object in question, but rather the characteristics of their usage and begin the discussion about their meanings.

While each of these philosophers differ in their ideas about goodness and its place within society, this limited timeline illustrates the struggle with and development of this concept and how it relates to society. It also shows the concept of goodness as an important and active part of Western philosophy. This line of philosophical inquiry continues to weave itself through history and has not reached a final point; instead, these differences expose a network of meaning that deepens as the conversation persists and incorporates new viewpoints. Where these four philosophers find agreement is in the idea that the words we employ are of no small importance and their study and debate deserve our attention. Language and communication provide commonalities and connection between individuals, objects and ideas. They weave connecting strands that provide a means of expressing the value of our work and our ideas. The usage of goodness in design literature has been ubiquitous and varied, with disparate usages running counter to one another. For the sake of clarity and the continued exploration of design's role within society and culture it is of utmost importance that we deeply consider the language that represents the

meaning and value of our work. These philosophers provide four contexts for understanding its usage that can be used as lenses by which to evaluate our work.

Following the Industrial Revolution, the concept of goodness emerges from the philosophical conversation and is included within the larger design discourse. Because of the proximity of many of its nations, the sociopolitical climates of Western Europe in the early twentieth century shared similarities in their response to modernity. Design discourse, as seen in various expressions of modernism in Europe, developed goodness as an assumed and imposed set of values that were elevated in order to craft an idealized society. This utopian aim of these expressions of modernism saw design as the path forward, the way in which the old world could be cast aside in exchange for a bright future. This future, led by designers and holding concepts of goodness as central to their work, would rely on new forms, new materials and new modes of production.

In this way, the objects, buildings and spaces created by designers in the early twentieth century were carriers of philosophical ideas, experiments into the possibilities of new materials and industrial processes and promises of a new future. The rise of manufacturing may have played a large role in shaping design fields in the early decades of the 1900s, but its role would expand even further as manufacturing became central to the work of designers following World War II, prompting renewed interest in questioning design's value within a changing world as well as the value of a designer's contribution to an ever-increasing industrialized existence. This change was evident to many design practitioners, and the central struggle of their work shows their interest in reconciling the work of artists and designers with the increasing ability and societal preference to produce cost-effective, mass-produced objects. Philosopher L.P. Jacks, believed that "industrial

civilization must find a means of ending the divorce between its industry and its 'culture' or perish."[270] This attitude was common during this period as a holdover of earlier ideas embodied by the Arts and Crafts movement and early reactions to modernity. This "divorce" was the separation of "high" from "low," from the designers and those in charge of production.

The Crystal Palace, William Morris, Frank Lloyd Wright and the Bauhaus serve as examples of the ways in which particular modernisms engaged with culture in the areas of ideas of individual creation and creators, technology's central role in modernity and the understanding of the dialogue between form and function. These four expressions of modernism maintained an elevated, and at times assumed enlightened, position of design authority over the common man and society. The ideas developed were not developed in connection with individuals, but in supposed service to society; the artists and designers actively engaging these conversations were not working for the individual, but on behalf of humankind.

While each expression of modernism upheld its own reasoning or philosophies in these areas as paramount, each was informed by the larger context of design that was developing during this time. This cultural conversation incorporated new ideas, struggled with established concepts and developed new ways of understanding the world through art and design. As the century progressed, this conversation would increase and provide fertile ground for a distinctly American modernism to emerge following the rise of totalitarianism in Western Europe.

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[270] Lawrence Pearsall Jacks, *Responsibility and Culture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1925).

In the United States, during a period of public distrust of German culture, the dominant expression of modernism was modernistic and relied on mass produced embellishments and streamlining and quickly incorporated commercial success as a benchmark for understanding goodness. Just as had been expressed earlier in Europe, the uninformed adornment of designed objects for the sake of sales was seen as detrimental to a public ignorant of the effects of bad form or bad design upon their lives. The objects that surrounded an individual in their everyday life, it was believed, created a context that was beneficial or detrimental depending on the nature of the objects themselves.

Working against this American preference and in the same tradition as English museums, the newly formed Museum of Modern Art in New York took on the role of educating the public as to proper design preference. MoMA became a tastemaker and forged a path to bring design education to American households through exposure to good design. This crusade began as an interest in machine made design and grew into a larger program of industrial design, a first for an American museum. This program was marked by a deep relationship with scholars of modernism, particularly Nikolaus Pevsner, in which MoMA helped to craft the canon and timeline of modernism and its role in art and design, which positioned American modernism as the logical outgrowth and continuation of work done in Europe during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century.[271] As a trained artist and having experience in retail sales through his father's Pittsburgh department store, Kaufmann, Jr., spearheaded this effort through what would become known as the Good Design program and later the Department of Architecture and Industrial Design in an effort to inform the American public on the proper forms of machine made design. The

[271] Sunwoo, 79.

program's aim was to incorporate ideas of good design into the American home through an intimate relationship with designers and manufacturers. This relationship would assure that goodness would be directly associated with form.

Kaufmann, Jr.'s time as an art student in Europe and apprentice at Frank Lloyd Wright's Taliesin afforded him exposure to expression of modernism that become a part of American design sentiment following the shuttering of the Bauhaus in 1933 and the subsequent emigration of a stable of its Masters to the United States. While the program exposed many Americans to the formal qualities of modernism as developed in the Bauhaus, the separation of the philosophical underpinnings from the objects' form resulted in the commercial success of form regardless of function.

By 1954, as the *Good Design* showcases and exhibitions were circulating in their final installment, a less prominent current in design practice was beginning to gain momentum. While Edgar Kaufmann, Jr., and the rest of the *Good Design* organizers "used visual excellence as [design's] sole criteria,"[272] others were seeking a more utilitarian role for objects in the lives of everyday people. The *Good Design* program had accomplished its original goal of bringing modern design into the homes of average Americans, but it had also promoted the production of a fantastic number of new objects, regardless of value, utility or function. Industrial designer Harold Van Doren did not hide his contempt for the program's "pretty ashtrays" and "$60 salad bowls" in a letter to fellow designer W.D. Teague.[273] For Van Doren, the program erred on several accounts including its "pitifully

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[272] Riley and Eigen, 175.

[273] H. Van Doren letter to W.D. Teague, 27 November, 1950, Walter Dorwin Teague Papers.

inadequate selection" that served no purpose other than reforming shopping habits to something resembling more refined, modern taste.

While the Museum of Modern Art may have helped propel design to new heights of professional and artistic acceptance, the museum was proving itself "incapable of coming to grips with the realities of design in everyday life."[274] The objects held fast to stylistic similarity, but this similarity ignored function to such a degree that many of the objects had become little more than museum pieces, which now felt at home in suburban American homes. The social idealism of the museum had spread goodness through educating the American public on what was and was not acceptable modern form, at least by MoMA's definition, elevating the average American individual's knowledge of design; but it had not prioritized design's role in utility or function in everyday life. Where MoMA had succeeded in creating a canon for mid-century modernism, it failed in its ability to reach the public it claimed to serve. Amidst the chairs, dining sets, flatware and desks, the *Good Design* program lost track of an important factor in design: the people who use it.

By the end of MoMA's Good Design program, designers in many fields were questioning the way in which design was produced and calling for a deeper recognition of the social responsibility of design and the role of the user in the work of a designer. Increased manufacturing created space for designers to question whether their role was more detrimental to society in large than it has earlier been. Henry Dreyfuss, in response to a lack of universality in product development, released *Designing for People* in 1955, which called into question the manner in which individual designs developed. With the individual

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[274] H. Van Doren letter to W.D. Teague, 27 November, 1950, Walter Dorwin Teague Papers.

as his central focus, Dreyfuss called for a greater knowledge of an object's end user and a greater dependence on research for illuminating the design process. In this way, the overarching aim of good design remained the benefit of society, but in the second half of the twentieth century, it would be accomplished through a connection to the material world and a commitment to the needs of people, not through a dependence on proper form.

Dreyfuss believed the value of an object was in how well it performed or worked for an individual, on the strength of its function as well as the success of its form. In this way, the binary of form and function that had been debated by various expressions of modernism changed. Form and function still held a central role in the discussion of design, but the binary had given way to a more interdependent relationship: neither form nor function was prioritized over the other, instead, both served as measuring sticks, helping to evaluate the goodness or usefulness of an object.

By the time Eliot Noyes joined IBM as their Director of Design, the concept of comprehensive design had already begun to develop. This concept of design hinged on the belief that all parts of a system work together and, therefore, all parts require equal design attention. Noyes applied this way of thinking to the spaces, materials, objects and processes used at IBM's main offices incorporating graphic, industrial, interior and industrial design into his work. Goodness was no longer confined to an individual object as Kaufmann, Jr., saw it, but was once again – just as in William Morris' philosophy – a product of collective work of design.

As these same ideas were being integrated and developed at Braun through the work of Dieter Rams, other considerations became central to design as well. With an explosive growth in commercial sales following World War II, much of the United States

and Western Europe were experiencing a glut of new products. Rams' focus was on comprehensive design but also moved to include ideas of ecology and sustainability. The responsibility of design was still to create beauty, but it also included a responsibility to the resources design depended on. Goodness was now understood to include responsibility toward nature and the world around us.

Victor Papanek believed ecology to be of paramount importance to designers as well, but strongly advocated for individuals as the central focus of designers no matter their specific branch of practice. For too long, Papanek argued, commercial interests had fueled a systematic ignorance of groups outside of mainstream, middle class buyers. Objects and products have not been directed outside of this bubble, and millions of individuals were excluded because of it. Papanek inserted these outliers into the conversation of design and called for the recognition of all people as equally important and valid in the design process. His focus on people was not just on them as potential consumers, it was also on individuals as partners in design. Goodness was not just form, commercial success or attention to all people groups, it was also understood as the inclusion of individuals in the research process as designers sought to discover true problems that were plaguing an ever-increasing industrial society of the 1970s and 1980s.

Papanek's claims are a large part of the current discussion of good design, and will, no doubt, be a part of the conversations as it develops in the future. The objects we make do define our lives as the curators at MoMA understood in the 1930s, but the current conversation offers a slight reorientation of what this definition accomplishes. "What does design do?" Victor Margolin asked in his 2002 book *The Politics of the Artificial.* "It collaborates actively and proactively in the social construction of meaning." Designers not

only have a responsibility to their present time, but also to the future their work creates. Despite the disagreement with its claim that design and the industrial commodity complex are inextricably intertwined, social design shares much with philosophies of modernism. Social design is an idealistic pursuit at its core: we design in response to the needs of the world, to better the world we are in and to create the future we desire. In short, design allows for utopia, but only if it is inclusive of and connected to the communities in which we live.

As a social activity, the role of the designer extends beyond being a maker of objects into new territories of creative direction. Through current activities in social design, emerging methodologies in design thinking and process-based design and an increased interest in interdisciplinary approaches to design pedagogy and practice, the conversation of goodness will continue to develop and enlarge the network of meaning established in this investigation. These three areas implicitly and explicitly use goodness as a gauge for the work done by designers, continuing to stress the importance of our knowledge of value with our discipline. As designers, we create the material objects that will define our spaces and our cultures; it is our responsibility to create with care, not neglecting to thinking critically about our place in history as well as role in the future.

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Vita

Garreth Carrington Blackwell was born November 9th, 1982 in Lynn Haven, Florida to Gary and Linda Blackwell.

In 2005 he graduated Summa Cum Laude and was awarded a B.A. in Journalism from the University of Mississippi in Oxford, Mississippi. While studying at the University of Mississippi, he received the Carrier Scholarship and was a member of the Sally McDonnell-Barksdale Honors College where he pursued a senior thesis on the development and design of magazines.

In 2007, Blackwell earned an M.A. degree in Journalism from the University of Mississippi in Oxford, Mississippi for his thesis *Going Against the Flow: Entrepreneurial Niche Publishing.* While working toward this degree he was named an Honors Scholar by the University of Mississippi.

As he wrote and revised his doctoral dissertation, Blackwell was awarded a Virginia Commonwealth University Doctoral Assistantship, a College of Humanities and Sciences Humanities Fellowship, a VCUarts Graduate Research Grant for research at MoMA, and a VCUarts Adjunct Faculty Research Grant for training through IDEO.

At the University of Mississippi from 2007 to 2011 and Virginia Commonwealth University from 2012 to 2017, Blackwell taught design courses within journalism, communications, advertising, graphic design and creative entrepreneurship. His courses focus on historically based practices within contemporary design and their application to entrepreneurship. In addition, he has worked with AIGA Richmond to develop student programming for Richmond-area design students since 2012. He is the co-author of *Design Your Own Magazine* and the co-editor of *The Roads of Broken Dreams,* a publication exploring the shrinking communities of the Mississippi Delta that was awarded the Robert F. Kennedy Award in 2011. In 2017 he was hired as faculty in the Center for the Creative Economy at VCUarts where he teaches design thinking and creative entrepreneurship.

Garreth Blackwell, his wife Callie, their daughter Penny and their two dogs reside in central Virginia.