

THE AESTHETICS OF DESIGN

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1. Design as problem-solving versus design as fashion

A few years ago, London's Design Museum witnessed an acrimonious dispute. The museum's chairman of trustees, designer-industrialist James Dyson, fell out with its director, Alice Rawsthorn, over her exhibitions policy, and finally resigned in 2004. Rawsthorn, commented Sunday Times correspondent Hugh Pearman, was "a noted fashion aficionado, [who] put on a show of Manolo Blahnik shoes. Snipers cattily remarked that most of them could have come from her own collection. Then she famously decided to mount an exhibition of the 1950s flower arranger Constance Spry, clearing out much of the museum's historic collection to do so. Was that design? It was the last straw for Dyson, which is why he left" (Pearman (accessed 2010)).

The emphasis on fashion, Dyson declared, was "ruining the museum's reputation and betraying its purpose. It's become a style showcase, instead of upholding its mission to encourage serious design, of the manufactured object" (Sudjic, (accessed 2010)). The goal of the Museum, founded by home furnishings magnate Sir Terence Conran in 1989, was to "give a lead to the public on the difference between design as styling and design as intelligent problem-solving", Dyson affirmed (quoted in Rybczynski (2005), p. 49).

Rawsthorn eventually resigned too, and Terence Conran announced the construction of a new, larger museum on a new site. But as Pearman comments, the new Design Museum confronts the perennial problem of what design is:

Design was always a broad church, and it is getting broader. It encompasses three-dimensional product design of the kind that Conran and Dyson are known for, also graphics...engineering, posh frocks, home makeovers, even cookery [and] flower arranging... Unlike architecture, [design] is a trade rather than a profession, [and] requires no particular qualifications to practise...nobody can really speak with authority for all of design (Pearman (accessed 2010)).

In similar vein, Virginia Postrel's recent book, The Substance of Style, argues that design has broadened in influence if not in meaning:

Having spent a century or more focused primarily on other goals – solving manufacturing problems, lowering costs, making goods and services widely available, increasing convenience, saving energy – we are increasingly engaged in making our world special. More people...are drawing pleasure and meaning from the way their persons, places, and things look and feel. Whenever we have the chance, we're adding sensory, emotional appeal to ordinary functions (Postrel (2003), p. 8).

She quotes former president of the Industrial Designers Society of America as saying "We're seeing design creep into everything, everything", while graphic designer Michael Bierut remarks that "There's no such thing as an undesigned graphic object anymore, and there used to be" (pp. 15, 17). Another title, Nigel Whiteley's Design For Society, discusses a "design boom" during the 1980s, with the British design industry growing at 35% growth per year, and with "designer" the new celebrity profession (Whiteley (1993, p. 1)).

I will argue that there is truth in what Postrel and Pearman say, but that it requires qualification and development. They are referring to two distinct trends. The first is the appearance in the last 20 or 30 years of an adjectival use of "designer"; the second, a much earlier process, is the increasingly self-conscious and professionalised status of design that arises with the development of a consumer society. (Pearman calls design a trade but it has many features of a profession.) This section addresses the first trend, and the remainder of the article discusses the second.

My overall thesis is that design exhibits a fundamental duality: solving functional problems, and improving the look or feel of the product through style, decoration and embellishment, are both involved, and hard to separate. Underlying that thesis is a general standpoint about design aesthetics. I believe that there are design classics, such as Henry Dreyfuss's classic black handset for Bell Telephone, or Dieter Rams' austere but very practical clocks and other products for German manufacturers Braun, that are worthy of serious aesthetic attention – even if that attention is not of the order owed to a high artistic classic such as a Rembrandt self-portrait or Mahler symphony. (The contrast between design and high art involves some agonising issues.) The anti-aestheticism of proponents of "material culture" should be rejected. It is of course important to consider, and to study, designed artefacts as commodities or mere material things – but not at the cost of denying the concept of aesthetic value, and of the design classic.

To turn, then, to the development of a new adjectival use. This is expressed in the concept of designer labels, which associates design pre-eminently with fashion. In the popular consciousness, as a result, the notion of design as problem-solving has become overshadowed by the notion of design as style and fashion. Until the 1980s, "designer" described someone like Henry Dreyfuss, creator of the classic black handset for Bell Telephone, or Dieter Rams, whose austere but very practical clocks and other products made a name for German manufacturers Braun. Today, "designer" is more likely to pick out fashion designers such as Ralph Lauren or Giorgio Armani who began as couturiers, but whose designer labels are now associated with exclusive consumer products including clothing, cosmetics, perfume, handbags, luggage and home furnishings. Other designer labels include Gucci, Armani, Calvin Klein, Versace, Louis Vuitton, Dolce and Gabbana, Ralph Lauren, Prada and Chanel. With the post-2008 depression, designer label items appeared in discount stores, and affluent customers were alienated, and sought out new brands. A feedback loop of conspicuous consumption led to the appearance of new designer labels.

Design is now often perceived, like fashion in clothes, as ephemeral by definition. But although there has always been fashion in design, it is not by nature ephemeral. The 1930s fashion for streamlining saw such classic designs as Walter Dorwin Teague's Kodak Brownie, and his service station designs for Texaco. But lowering air- or water-resistance had a practical function in Raymond Loewy's Pennsylvania locomotive design, or in Carl Breer's Chrysler Airflow, which pioneered design advances such as built-in headlights and a concealed trunk. Designer products can

become classic – the Umbra wastepaper basket's fluid shape might be an example – but functional deficiencies may prevent this. "Designer watches" are no more accurate than a Timex, and indeed the Movado is less legible. Some products are design classics despite functional deficiencies. The original Mini was a rust-bucket; Frank Lloyd Wright's houses leaked because of their flat roofs.

Rejecting the simplistic equation of design with fashion and styling, however, does not imply the opposed extreme, that design is essentially problem-solving. This may seem to be what James Dyson does, but I think that his concern is not simply to find solutions to functional problems, but to find elegant solutions – the elegance is not just added on, but is intrinsic to the solving of the problem. Design is thinking about how we can achieve our practical ends with style; the Design Museum is not a Museum of Science or Technology.

There is no sharp dichotomy, therefore, but rather a continuum, between complex and simple problem-solving, or strong and minimal attention to a design problem. The design of Movado watches and Umbra wastepaper baskets is largely styling. In contrast, the design of duct tape and brown paper bags, and – an intriguing example – Pierre Boulanger's unaesthetic but practical Citroën 2CV, is almost pure problem-solving. As Witold Rybczynski explains, the 2CV's large wheels and soft suspension allowed smooth driving over rough roads; lightweight seats could be removed if bulky items were carried, or picnic chairs needed. If the sun-roof was left open in a shower, rubber stoppers under the floor mats could be removed for drainage. The car is neither a particular good nor a particularly bad design, at least in the sense that the Trabant was a bad design. But the creativity of the 2CV design is a matter of ingenuity more than aesthetics.

In fact, it is not simply that there is a continuum between practical and stylistic. The most successful designed objects, whether chairs, cars or office blocks, exhibit an interpenetration of styling and problem-solving. As Rybczynski puts it, "The best-designed objects manage to solve problems with a sense of style" ((2005), p. 51). Problem-solving in design has an ineliminable aesthetic component. The Citroën 2CV, duct tape and brown paper bags, despite their utility and ubiquity, are not design classics; Braun alarm-clocks and Umbra waste-paper baskets are. Design problem-solving is neither a purely cognitive, nor a purely practical matter; it must be appreciable stylistically, that is, aesthetically. To appreciate the Dyson vacuum-cleaner as a design classic, one must see, and experience, how the improved suction-power has been achieved in an aesthetically satisfying way. A limousine car-door has to produce a satisfying click as the door is closed, and much design effort is put into achieving this.

The claim that design contains an ineliminable aesthetic component is open to challenge. It should be agreed that changing the chemical composition of a detergent to make it more efficient does not count as design, even if Proctor and Gamble describe it so. But an extreme interpretation of modernist functionalism – what Ed Winters calls austere as opposed to aesthetic functionalism – regards architecture and design as simply a kind of engineering (Winters (2007), pp. 38-48). Even a moderate critic of design as intrinsically aesthetic may argue as follows: "Isn't the concept of engineering design one thing – and style another? The designer of car brakes, or of cams to alter the ratio at which moving parts rotate, is not necessarily concerned with the look of their design. Whereas a decorator who paints a wall viridian, that was once vermilion, is unconcerned with design-problem-solving".

This line of objection, on my account, faces a dilemma. If there is an aesthetic element, one can talk of design; if there is not, one cannot. People talk of engine-design, and therefore, perhaps, the design of engine-parts. Where the part is obscure and not open to view, it could be argued that there is no aesthetic component, and therefore that the part is not designed. Possibly, however, the fact that engineers see it means that there is a minimal aesthetic component, and therefore design. (The concept of functional beauty – discussed by Parsons and Carlson (2008) – implies that a contrivance that does its intended job well, in virtue of that fact, is valuable aesthetically; but that concept is not simply functional.)

David Pye, with equal validity, contrasts design with invention rather than engineering: "Invention is the process of discovering a principle. Design is the process of applying that principle" – an application that, as I read him, is essentially aesthetic. (Pye (1978), p. 81; see also his (1995)). Consider the famous Dyson cleaners. These are cyclonic rather than vacuum-cleaners; they do not create a vacuum, but act as a spiralling wind tunnel, like a whirlwind. Hence they do not lose power as the void where the material is collected gradually fills up; vacuum-cleaners, in contrast, become less efficient as they fill. (Lack of a bag is not the key idea; there are now vacuum cleaners that do not have bags.) The realisation could have been botched, however – as it would have been if Boulanger, the 2CV designer, had had the idea. When the patent expires, there will be other cyclonic cleaners that implement the concept less elegantly than Dyson. What is distinctive of Dyson products is their synthesis of innovative invention and stylish design – he is an inventor, and a designer.

As consumer products, Dyson cleaners need to be stylish. The Davy Safety-Lamp, which revolutionised coal-mine safety in the early 19th century, was a highly practical, functional item, not a consumer product. Sir Humphry Davy was the inventor, if not the designer; maybe there was no "designer" as such. (Its invention is described vividly in Holmes (2008), Ch. 8.) It would have been inappropriate, for various reasons, to make it a stylish product. However, so ingrained is the human habit of good workmanship, that it was crafted beyond what was necessary for effective functioning. This crafting is what Pye calls, as we will see, "useless work", and it is a crafting that may count as design.

2. Rejecting a consumerist definition of design

Earlier, I cited Postrel's authorities as saying "We're seeing design creep into everything... There's no such thing as an undesigned graphic object anymore". What they mean, I think, is that design is now produced self-consciously by professional designers, with an enhanced status. Harry Beck, who designed the classic London Underground map, was a draughtsman, of lesser status than a "designer" of today.

When did this process begin? The Grove entry commences its discussion of "Design" rather late, around 1800 and the Industrial Revolution:

[With the] move from craft to mass production... the design process became separated from the making stage. This fundamental separation, which meant that a product had to be planned in its entirety before it could be made, gave birth to the modern meaning of design and, subsequently, to the profession of designer.

Grove argues that while Italian disegno and French dessin both meant "drawing", and in the early 19th century design continued to be associated with surface decoration and the use of historical styles, the modern meaning of design makes essential reference to mass production of consumer goods (Grove Dictionary of Art, Vol 8, pp. 801-2; see also Scruton (1979), pp. 23-4 on the appearance in the 19th century of the distinction between architecture and building).

There are two claims or assumptions made by Grove that should be questioned. The first is its consumerist interpretation of "design", according to which, design essentially involves response to a consumer. My thesis, in contrast, denies that "response to a consumer" is part of the concept of design. (Grove in fact goes further and argues that mass production of consumer goods is involved; but even though exclusive clothes for a rich elite are consumer goods, by definition they are not mass-produced.) What is essential to design is the duality of solving functional problems, and improving the look or feel of the product through style, decoration and embellishment. Grove is right to cite "surface decoration" as a meaning of design; this is a distinct sense of "design", and it bears on my duality in being a part of styling, though not its entirety. (Design in this sense – decorative as opposed to structural design is discussed, in relation to abstract painting, in Hamilton (2010 forthcoming).) The finest designed products do not simply apply surface decoration to the solution of a technical or functional problem.

More on these issues shortly. The second claim or assumption that Grove makes is an historical one, simply in beginning its discussion around 1800. When did design appear? Although design as such is not defined in terms of response to consumers, the profession of design clearly is, and is discussed in these terms by Helen Rees (1997). Authorities differ on when this profession originated. Postrel's 20th century dating seems to be supported by Peter Dormer, who argues that "The separation of craft and design is one of the phenomena of late-twentieth-century Western culture...In the visual arts 'I don't want the craft to get in the way of my creativity' is a perfectly meaningful statement" (Dormer ed. (1997), p. 18). However, Dormer may be referring to the radical divorce between craft and design, rather than to the distinction between them that arises with the appearance of the profession of designer. A 19th century dating of the latter is suggested by a contributor to his volume, who cites the Special Committee of the (British) Council of the Government School of Design debating whether "the architect's art, or the art of the designer for manufactures, is truly a prosaic art" compared to the painter's "poetical" art (Greenhalgh (1997), p. 28).

Others argue that professional design goes back to the beginnings of consumer society in the 18th century, which would associate it with other revolutionary developments in the world of the arts at that time, notably Kant's separation of ethical and aesthetic value, and the creation of a modern system of the arts. (These developments are discussed in Hamilton (2007), Ch. 1.) As early as 1735, Bishop Berkeley, in his work of applied economics, The Querist, proposed an "academy of design" in Ireland to help perfect the manufacture of lace, carpets and tapestry. The OED cites this as the first use of "design" to refer to the ability to improve the economic competitiveness of commercial goods through their visual appearance. John Gwyn's "Essay on Design, including proposals for erecting a Public Academy..."(1749), claimed "great pecuniary Advantages, such as ought to engage the Attention of the mere merchant", in his proposal for improving training in the "Art of Design" (quoted in Smith (2000), pp. 118-9, 121). This project was realised finally with the founding of the Victoria and Albert Museum in South Kensington, intended as a repository of decorative art objects to inspire students of

design – improving the competitiveness of British against French goods, by raising their aesthetic level. Wedgwood pottery, influenced by Chinese and Japanese ceramics, is a classic early example of consumer goods of high quality.

A concept of individual taste, as opposed to a homogeneous social taste with little room for individual expression, arose with the development of an early consumer society; its appearance preoccupied writers on aesthetics in the later 18th century. Charles Saumarez Smith argues that in England between 1740 and 1760 the concept of design in relation to a market of manufactured goods appeared, along with an independent profession of designer – developments that would have occurred somewhat earlier in France (Smith (2000), p. 125). He links them with growing awareness of fashion, in particular of its French origins, and recognition that possession of consumer goods could be a statement of personality. (Neil McKendrick's collection The Birth of a Consumer Society discusses this shift in patterns of consumption.) Addison and Steele's Spectator offered advice to a bourgeois public about appropriate attitudes to personal display through possessions; increasing areas of aesthetic activity, including for the first time the domestic environment – furniture and interior decoration visualised as a whole – were regarded as possibilities for projection of personality (Smith (2000), p. 198).

Smith contrasts design as concerning the unified arts of the interior, with the modern, and especially modernist, conception of high art as portable: "At the beginning of the eighteenth century only a few members of the court élite were aware of [how] an interior could be arranged to convey messages about individual character and social status. The language of artefacts...was restricted. During the eighteenth century a much larger section of society began to have access to objects which could convey meaning as signs of consumer choice" ((2000), p. 210). More people wanted to own goods that displayed individual taste, and manufacturers responded.

Was design, then, invented in the 18th century? The term, and perhaps the profession, was. But the kind of work that designers since the 18th century have done, was earlier done in a less professional and self-conscious way by makers of the object in question. Thus one can speak of narrower and broader concepts of design, just as G.E.R. Lloyd distinguishes "narrower" and "broader" views of philosophy, and of science (Lloyd (2009)). A narrower sense of design involves the formulation of plans by a class of designers, separate from producers, and which at some stage became professionalised; these products are manufactured, giving rise to consumerism. A broad sense, in contrast, involves planning in some form, whether or not by plans and professional designers; consumerism is not essential.

This distinction is implicit in Penny Sparke's very sane account:

...within the context of changing production methods [the designer's traditional] role became increasingly isolated from the "making" process, and...crucial as the source of "artistic input". Thus while the designer's function was not, in itself, radically redefined, its definition was hardened and its significance modified dramatically...while the design process itself remained constant, its parameters, within manufacture, became clearer and, in social terms, its application more widespread (Sparke (1991), p. 13).

There are parallels between the divisions of labour of architect-builder, designer-craftsperson/engineer, composer-performer, and perhaps scientist-philosopher. Where the distinction was not expressed in the concepts of the time, all one can say when asked "Were there scientists?" or "Were there designers?" is: perhaps in a

broad sense yes, and in a narrow sense, no. Much philosophical investigation is essentially historicist, in that it must recognise that our concepts are historically conditioned. There is a three-level distinction, between practice, concept, and word or term. A practice of design may exist unconceptualised, and there may be a concept of design but no single term for it yet in use.

Grove may be right in claiming that design in its modern sense originates when the design process became separated from the making stage, therefore, just as musical composition in its modern sense appeared with the modern system of notation and score, with its separation of composer and performer. A rise in status of its practitioners occurred with the appearance of the concepts of a work in art and music, and of a design product in artefacts. But both work and product were present in a broader sense prior to this development.

To return now to the related question of the consumerist interpretation of design. Grove is right to stress the importance of consumer products in the modern concept of design, but mistaken in suggesting that a designed product has to be one made for commercial reasons. To say this is, I believe, to conflate the empirical truth that design often has commercial ends, into the conceptual one that such ends are essential to it. Self-conscious concern with design in manufacturing may postdate the Industrial Revolution, but surely not preferring one object to another on the basis of its appearance. What is new to the era around 1800 is the idea that such preferences can express one's identity. "Consumer", like "design", also has a broad and narrow sense. Where there are markets there are consumers; but only after the Industrial Revolution and the increasing dominance of market capitalism, can one speak of consumerism, in the sense of self-expression through consumer choice. **[though Saumarez Smith says otherwise?]**

Likewise, Smith, and the OED, are wrong to suggest that "the ability to improve the economic competitiveness of commercial goods through their visual appearance" is a meaning of design. It is an application, but not a sense of "design", just as "popular culture" is an application, but not a sense, of "culture" (a claim defended in Hamilton (2009)). An important historical case was the design of ships – at least before the era of multinational arms manufacturers – where design often subserved military effectiveness, as expressed in speed and firepower. There was no commercial imperative here, except relative economy. Architectural plans for a public building, and industrial design, are other important examples. The "consumers" of industrial design are factory-owners and industrialists. Conspicuous consumption in blast-furnaces is unlikely – if an industrialist feels pride in having the biggest furnace, this is most likely because of its profit-making potential. So the historical claim that design begins around 1800 may incline one towards a consumerist interpretation, but does not imply it. This is not to deny that capitalism is crucial to the changing concept of design. The claim is simply that design predates its advent as a world economic system.

To reiterate my overall thesis: design involves a duality of solving functional problems, and improving the look or feel of the product through style, decoration and embellishment. "Response to consumers" is not essential to the concept of design. In its modern sense, design allows for consumerism; but even this sense is not defined in terms of consumerism, but rather in terms of the prevalent separation of design and production, and the resulting professionalisation of design.

We can conclude from the preceding discussion that design in its broad sense is still a quite specialised concept, therefore: preparations of a certain type for ships, buildings, artefacts of certain kinds, and machines. When minstrels made up

songs, and Schubert composed them, neither are said to have designed them. We talk of dress designs, but knitting patterns rather than designs – the former are geometric or visual, the latter algebraic or symbolic. Recipes are not designs, perhaps because they are usually verbal. Designs involve artefacts or constructions where the visual or sonic appearance or feel is important. Explosives, plain paper-bags, duct tape and glues are not (normally) possible objects of design.

It could be argued that although problem-solving, and improving the look or feel of the product, were equally involved in traditional pre-industrial crafts, designs are credited to early potters, body painters or axe chisellers only as a vague reference to their intentions and the fact that the results of their endeavours were deliberate. On this view, William Paley in his *Design Argument for God's existence* did not assume that God drew blueprints – just that he carried out his purposes or designs. He was like a pre-industrial potter or cook, producing by design simply in the sense of meaning to do.

In contrast to more restricted definitions of design that have just been criticised, this definition is more liberal, and requires a careful response. There is no reason why Neolithic artisans would not draw or otherwise represent their projects in some convenient medium, such as in the sand or on wood bark. So it would be wrong to assert confidently that before the 18th century, there was no separation between plan and performance, design and production. It is true nonetheless that explicit plans and blueprints now play a key role in the modern sense of design, according to which it is separable from its implementation; the documents in the designer's briefcase are what we now refer to as designs. Conversely, it is quite possible for design, even in its modern sense – perhaps especially in its modern sense – to be subconscious; a designer might claim something similar to artistic inspiration in creating a successful piece of design, without making blueprints.

In its broader sense, the duality of design involves "care taken over appearance", whether through explicitly formulated plans, or through planning not expressed in a medium separable from the product. (One could say "having the kind of care bestowed on artworks", except that functional artefacts probably came first.) Separable plans and the notated musical score developed for analogous reasons – because the structure had become too complex to be memorised and/or performed or realised by others. Without plans or scores, also, it is difficult or impossible to be original, to challenge traditional tastes or aesthetic norms. However, in contrast to performing music, one can usually stop during the production of functional artefacts in order to reflect.

There may be a deeper underlying issue. Perhaps Grove's claim that design originated in the 18th century rests on an assumption that one cannot speak of genuinely aesthetic intentions prior to this time. This view draws on a common misconception of the aesthetic as a rather specialised response of the aesthete or connoisseur. This is a misconception because anyone can respond aesthetically to anything at all – not only to artefacts such as clothing, but also to qualities of rituals and public ceremonies, gestures, expressions, and so on – and that people have done so since the beginnings of human society. The aesthetic is ubiquitous and quotidian. As Donald Brooks comments, "Aesthetic discrimination and pleasure is probably found in all occupations. The carpenter delights in a good piece of wood, the mechanic appreciates a well-polished cylinder and the farmer a fat pig" (Brooks (1993), pp. 66-7). Aestheticism or art for art's sake – an attitude that developed during the 19th century – is not a necessary condition of the aesthetic attitude. (As Shiner (2001), for instance, seems to assume.) The fact that objects we now regard

as artworks were treated by the ancient world as essentially functional artefacts, does not mean that they were not aesthetically appreciated.

Consider a Greek – or ancient Chinese or Babylonian – craftsman working on a funerary urn. Some may deny that he – it would probably be a "he" – is hoping to elicit a genuinely aesthetic response to the workmanship he is lavishing on the artefact; his aim is rather to appease the vengeful gods, and ensure a peaceful afterlife for the dead person. But why would the craftsman imagine that the gods would be appeased? The obvious answer is "Because he believes that they appreciate beautiful craftsmanship" – an answer that assumes that they, like humans, appreciate beauty, if not for its own sake, and thus have an aesthetic attitude. The work on the funerary vase is not art for art's sake – the creation of a beautifully crafted artefact is not an end in itself – but it is art for morality or religion's sake. Prior to the separation of the aesthetic and ethical values during the 18th century Enlightenment, therefore, the aesthetic must have been at least a genuine instrumental good – in the ancient world, and even in Neolithic production of flint tools or cloaks from animal hides. Writers such as Shiner are therefore wrong to assume that before the modern era, the aesthetic was not recognised as a distinct good at all.

3. "Useless work"

I referred earlier to the human habit of good workmanship, or crafting beyond what is necessary for effective functioning. This crafting is what Pye calls "useless work": "whenever humans design and make a useful thing they invariably expend a good deal of unnecessary and easily avoidable work on it which contributes nothing to its usefulness". Their crafting goes beyond the strictly functional in creating ornament, excellent finish, and so on. The function of an artefact – what it is for – guides its form only to a limited extent, and imposes minimal restrictions on creativity, Pye argues. If one is designing a hook, or a hat, an infinite range of shapes is still available: "the form of designed things is decided by choice or else by chance; but it is never actually entailed by anything whatsoever...". Pye continues:

...'workmanship', 'design for appearance', 'decoration'...are part of the same pattern of behaviour which all men at all times and places have followed: doing useless work on useful things. If we did not behave after this pattern our life would indeed be poor, nasty and brutish.

"The essential bases of good design...are largely useless and, unfortunately, avoidable", he continues. "Probably few people realise how nastily things can be made and still work well enough" (Pye (1978), pp. 12-13, 34, 13). Coat-hooks on a door could be replaced by nails and be nearly as effective; the charmless electricity junction box, by a 1950s Electricity Board, in the street outside Durham University's Philosophy Department, illustrates the avoidability of good design.

Many will regard Pye's concept of "useless work on useful things" as over-paradoxical. It should be stressed that for him, this is valuable work – but is it really "useless"? "Unnecessary and easily avoidable work" may well contribute to the item's usefulness to its owner as a conspicuous consumer – and to its practical usefulness if this display makes the owner noticed and able to gain a coveted official post, for instance. Useless work is socially functional – we are social creatures, and greatly value such work, as Pye recognises. So I will re-label his

concept of "useless work", calling it directly functionless work, work that does not help fulfil the artefact's defining function. The defining function of a table is to place things on and support them, for eating or desk-work; in Buckingham Palace a table may have purely decorative or ceremonial functions, but these are not defining ones if the object counts as a table. A ceremonial sword is still a sword; its jewel-encrusted handle is directly functionless, and indeed if it makes the sword hard to grasp, detracts from its direct or defining function of injuring and killing one's enemies, just as much as having an unsharpened blade would.

There is a beautifully knapped stone axe exhibited in the British Museum, that according to experts is too large to be effective in cutting up meat and so on, and was probably designed as a status symbol. It may be a good status symbol, but though arguably designed, is not a good example of its defining function.

It may be that Pye focusses on too simple a range of examples. In more complex cases, function may dominate aesthetics; or it may be multiple and hard to specify. Consider the complex cases of bathroom fittings: "There are so many technical limitations with WCs and bidets – what with all the S-traps, wall fixtures, drains and other essential bits of plumbing – it's not surprising that most designs...tend to be little more than aesthetic tweaks on a fairly standardised theme" (Iachetti (2010), p. 101). This objection suggests that some qualification of Pye's account may be required.

FN: Pye's concept suggests Kant's important distinction between free and dependent beauty, but it is not possible to debate that difficult question here.

Pye's concept is intended to undermine functionalist accounts of design, expressed in architect Louis Sullivan's influential but essentially imprecise dictum "form follows function" (Sullivan (1988), p. 113, first published 1896). Sullivan and his Bauhaus successors argued that aesthetics must not go against function. Tower Bridge in London, designed by engineer John Wolfe Barry in the late 19th century, seems flagrantly to breach the dictum. The bridge was the first large span of the bascule type – a drawbridge where when one end of a section was lowered, the other was raised. The twin neo-Gothic towers by architect Horace Jones are steel covered in granite, "medieval keeps" harmonising with the nearby Tower of London, and some contemporaries criticised them as a sham that falsified the facts of the structure. However, the difficulty, as writers such as Scruton (1979) and Winters (2007) have stressed, is to give a convincing definition of "function". But that issue is material for another occasion.

4. The function and value of fashion

Finally we turn to the status of fashion itself, and the connection between the preceding account of design, and fashion design in clothes. This is a topic on which philosophers have had little to say. Adam Smith comments that fashion is merely the custom established by those of high rank or character (Smith, The Theory of Moral Sentiments V.1.3). Kant, in his division of the fine arts, sub-divides painting into "the beautiful Portrayal of nature, and...the beautiful arrangement of its products". The latter includes landscape gardening, the decoration of rooms, and "the art of tasteful dressing (with rings, snuffboxes, etc.)". The latter "has no business beyond appealing to the eye, in order to entertain the imagination in free play with ideas, and to engage actively the aesthetic judgement independently of any definite end" (Kant, Critique of Judgment, sec. 51.).

Most fashion design is at the opposite end of the spectrum from problem-solving in Dyson's sense, though there is clothing design for specialised occupations such as astronauts, deep sea divers or crime scene investigators, that owes something to fashion and much to problem-solving. But it would be wrong to assume that in furniture, or fashion, design problems have mostly been solved; with new constraints on material, shape, size and ease of assembly, new design problems arise. Scruton comments in AA that "design is characterised precisely by the instability of the problem, which elusively changes during the course of its attempted solution", e.g. central heating, leading to drying, leading to introduction of humidifiers, leading to complications... why not abandon the project? Circa p. 25 of AA]

Philosophers would, however, presumably recognise that someone concerned only with style, and not with design as problem-solving or high art, has an impoverished aesthetic well-being. But the converse may also be true. Directly functionless work has psychological or social functions, notably self-expression and self-adornment. Tribal antecedents of fashion, involving personal adornment, were essential to tribal identity – every tribe would have its characteristic appearance. With the Neolithic revolution and appearance of agriculture, and the later development of trade, fashion in its modern sense, which involves transience and a search for the new, became possible. When cultures come into contact through trade or conquest, imitation of an alien culture can occur. (Simmel comments on the "widespread predilection for importing fashions from outside" (Simmel (1997), p. 191).

It should be stressed that fashion design is an art at least with lowercase "a" – a practice involving skill or craft whose ends are essentially aesthetic, that is, the enrichment and intensification of experience. And like other arts, fashion oscillates between expression of self and expression of society. One of the most penetrating analyses of this dichotomy is sociologist Georg Simmel's "The Philosophy of Fashion":

...fashion as a universal phenomenon in the history of our species...is the imitation of a given pattern and thus satisfies the need for social adaptation; it leads the individual onto the path that everyone travels...At the same time, and to no less a degree, it satisfies the need for distinction, the tendency towards differentiation, change and individual contrast...

Fashion [operates] the double function of holding a given social circle together and at the same time closing it off from others...not the slightest reason can be found for its creations from the standpoint of an objective, aesthetic or other expediency.

Fashion's "complete indifference...to the material standards of life", Simmel continues, is illustrated by "the arbitrary manner in which it recommends something appropriate in one instance, something abstruse in another, and something materially and aesthetically quite indifferent in a third...fashion is concerned with other motivations, namely solely with formal social ones" (Simmel (1997), pp. 188-90). Simmel would have in mind such arbitrary injunctions as those found in *Vogue*: "Prepare to do away with crisp whites this winter: the new colours are flesh pink, café crème, oyster. The materials are as soft and smooth as the skin itself..." (quoted in Scruton (1983), p. 207). This arbitrariness applies to all conspicuous consumption, and thus much of design.

In traditional societies, clothing has the primary function of marking social status and tribal identity. Modern fashion, in contrast, is often indeterminate as regards social ranking, but still serves as "social discourse". Under capitalism, self-adornment became commodified. Fashion is an industry, and its development – and that of the design industry discussed earlier – parallels the commodified art that succeeded the art of the pre-modern (pre-18th century) era. The process of commodification undermines the autonomy of the practice, in the following way. In the modern era, as Adorno argues, autonomous art develops when artists no longer work for specific patrons in church or court, offering in the market works that embody their own values rather than those of their patrons. Fashion can never be autonomous art. It is design or decorative art that belongs to a genre that is essentially functional, even though its practical function may be moribund – as it is with purely decorative furniture or ceramics, and ceremonial swords. **[CUT for Kennett article: Other artforms, in contrast, are capable of autonomy, but are prevented from attaining it through their existing social function. Examples would be 18th century music for banquets or military pageants, or their 20th century equivalents, political art and mass entertainment. (This is not to deny that all art has indirect social function, as defined in Hamilton (2007), Ch. 6.)]**

Whether a non-autonomous artform is contingently or essentially so – that is, whether it is capable of autonomy – cannot be entirely predicted. But humans would have somehow to lose the need for furniture, or clothing, before such items could become autonomous art. Even when exhibited in a museum, the functional origins of furniture or fashion in clothes are inescapable. Fashion, like furniture, has no option of pure abstraction; it always reflects the form of the body, and depends for its effect on being worn. Portrait painting, sculpture and dance work with the human form, but unlike fashion, do have a possibility of abstraction.

Like sport and popular entertainment, fashion is divided into classic and ephemeral – or as it is more commonly described, the high and the popular. It has its classics (tuxedo, stilettos), and its less commodified avantgarde (haute couture), as well as the most commodified products (Primark, C & A, Wal-Mart). As in the high arts such as music and literature, there is cross-fertilisation between these extremes. Couture is ordinary dressmaking; haute couture, founded in Paris by English dressmaker Charles Worth (1825-95), is a design art where an entire outfit is created by a single artist. As Worth himself saw it: "I am a great artist, I have Delacroix's sense of colour and I compose. An outfit is the equal of a painting" (1895 newspaper interview quoted in Simon (1995), p. 128; see Kelly ed. (1998), "La Haute Couture".)

I have referred to "classic design". But what exactly is "the classic"? The classic contrasts with the ephemeral. It includes high culture – the accumulation of art, literature and humane reflection that has stood the test of time and established a continuing tradition of reference and allusion, and which demands, and best rewards, seriousness and intensity of attention. But it goes beyond high culture in embracing all areas and social locations of artistic endeavour, and valuable artworks in all genres, including popular forms and functional arts. "Classic" means "excellent of its kind", and is eclectic across all cultures, in the anthropological sense of "culture"; "high culture", in contrast, asserts a hierarchy of the arts. (Hamilton (2009) discusses contrasting senses of "culture".)

There is a concept of "classic" that implies a living presence in contemporary culture. The tuxedo and high heels are classics in this sense. All music and art is of an era, and most is only of an era. But some of it endures, creating artistic tradition. I would argue that in fashion, in contrast, there are no traditions, just

changing tastes – though fashion often seems cyclical, suggesting a reversion to past tastes.

Taste in fashion, like taste in any commodified item such as pop music, is mostly non-autonomous – even for conscious or unconscious resisters who wear the fashion of yesterday or of their youth. Adorno's famous culture industry critique remains persuasive. However, Adorno fails to recognise that true fashion does not involve following the herd, but anticipating them. By the time a style becomes popular, the true connoisseur of fashion has moved on. There is a creativity in the wearer's self-expression – a reflective activity, not a purely passive process. True sartorial or artistic individualism goes beyond everyday fashion by perpetually anticipating it, or by being timelessly hip or cool.

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