THE METAMORPHOSIS OF TWENTIETH CENTURY "GOOD DESIGN" TO (INHERENTLY GOOD) INDUSTRIAL DESIGN IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY/

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Abstract. Industrial Design in the contemporary era stems from the vast heritage of the twentieth century; enormous amounts of investigation have been done during this period in order to better define what industrial design actually entails and how it can be better fit to cater the needs of a fast-changing society. It was then, at an almost amorphous, embryonic stage, when schools like Bauhaus tried to implement means of unifying this emerging domain into a rational practice. During the following decades, designers strived to implement appropriate standardizations, given how the main catalyst of these efforts was the ubiquitous need for high quality objects for the masses. These efforts led to one of the main ideological pillars of the late twentieth century legacy – the idea of 'good design' – which eventually became almost a blueprint in the practice of design.

This article dares ask the question: How relevant is it today?

The new century dawned with its own new set of challenges for designers: new types of products and new needs of new generations. These provide the grounds for redefining what Industrial Design ought to implement in its practices, which can entail the metamorphosis of the 'good design' heritage into a broader, more natural approach organically implemented in the design process.

As such, this article proposes to both explore whether or not the 'good' denominator for contemporary Industrial Design is still needed, and also expose its current challenges as distinctive from the ones of the twentieth century. One consideration can be how Industrial Design, given its legacy, is now mature enough for it to no longer need the 'good' denominator – perhaps it has become 'inherently good'. Moreover, perhaps 'bad design' is nowadays a symptom of a disease which exceeds the boundaries of Design, and reaches into societal, economic and cultural scopes, thus alleviating the need for separate denominations.

Introduction. Industrial Design emerged as a rational practice more than a century ago, after arduous disputes about what modernity entails in fields such as architecture and design. Furthermore, industrial design has been subject to vast amounts of research around the 'good' denominator: what is good design, how can it be attained and how can one create the blueprints to ensure the continuation of this practice throughout the decades and be universally implemented. The twentieth century design heritage can be defined by the efforts and results achieved in this sense. Formal unity, parts cohesion, ergonomics, durability and usability are among the main factors which have been discovered to influence 'good design' most. Past century designers have constructed a plethora of intellectual pillars which led to solid standards, shaping the foundation of industrial design today.

However, the twenty-first century has been met with unprecedented challenges which questioned both traditional societal values and industrial design approaches. New types of user-product relationships raised ethical and manufacturing dilemmas as products have become so intertwined with different facets of contemporary living that distinction between necessity and cult is blurred. We are confronted with a shift in product public perception; maintaining normality now implies a certain degree of adherence to popular products, and deviation from said normality can have deeper implications for the consumer. In other words, industrial design has become nowadays highly complex and design thinking is paramount to include in its process broader views in regards to societal movements and reforms, which is, in some sense, incompatible with the aforementioned blueprints of the twentieth century.

This article proposes the removal of 'bad' and 'good' denominators for industrial design as an intellectualised endeavour, deeming it necessary to stray away from twentieth century dogmas and tenets – design is nowadays an evolved phenomenon that has naturally implemented the legacy 'good' practices to its venture up to a certain point, after which these have to be reconsidered.

However, in order to define what these past-century characteristics entail and how they manifest today, the need to unfold certain aspects from design's history is crucial in understanding the current context; this will be done by emphasizing distinctive traits from design's overall trajectory which certain authors and designers deemed to imply good design practices. This will eventually lead to a somewhat cohesive understanding of how design's legacy ultimately morphed design into how it manifests in today's era and how through heritage vast amounts of innovation were realized towards 'inherently good' industrial design.

Meanings and Heritage of Good Design Practices Throughout the Twentieth Century. The dawn of the `machine age`, during the middle to late stages of industrialization in Europe and Northen America, raised ethical and moral questions which hinted at a disjointed view among designers about whether or not machines were a detriment for the applied arts or, rather, an ingenious tool meat to aid the processes of design, manufacture and distribution. One could argue machines, on one hand, broke the socio-economic barriers for the emerging middle-class market, and destroyed true craftsmanship on the other. Even at this embryonic stage of industrial design, the `good` denominator is contested by opposing views of what design should actually be about.

Through machines, manufacturers were able to output products at an unprecedented rate – thousands of products were made in the same time and at the same cost as was the production of only one high-quality object only a few decades before [1], but the target audience for these products was a public eager to accept mediocrity for such commodities. Although William Morris (1834-1896), the standing figure for the Arts & Crafts movement, declared he didn't want "[...] art for a few, any more than education for a few, or freedom for a few" [2] he also stood against the unappealing, machine-made objects, and proceeded to make furniture reserved for only the few who could afford the masterfully hand-crafted furnishings. But while Morris and his disciples disregarded the "evil" machinery, it was architects and designers such as John D. Sedding (1837-1891), Lewis F. Day (1845-1910), Hermann Muthesius (1861-1927), Frank Lloyd Wright (1869-1959) or as Karl Schmidt (1873-1948), amongst

others, who countered the anti-machinery dogma. They saw the potential of the new age and declared how it was up to designers, not the machines, to produce quality products.

The end of the nineteenth century is met with discourses about the removal of ornaments and movements towards form simplifying. Some of William Morris's contemporaries express the need of revoking needless decoration and state the importance of form; architect Louis Sullivan's (1856-1918) often-quoted dictum – "form follows function" – is a testimony of the early onset of twentieth century Modernism. The manifesto for the purification of form will eventually become the leitmotif of modern design, though still subjected to intermediary steps until reaching a stable status quo during early to mid-twentieth century. Early modernity represents the transient period towards the rational movement which will eventually engulf design as a practice.

So far, it is hard to determine the precise boundaries of what 'good design' means. 'Good' could very well entail attentive handiwork but at the same time mean designing for industrially mass-produced goods. 'Good' can be the clean lines of Henri van de Velde's (1863-1924) 'Uccle' chairs of 1894 or the 1910 Typenmobel furniture of German modernists. It was only within a unified practice that `good design` became a quantifiable denominator, albeit subjected to the socio-economic and political frame of the early decades of the twentieth century. The First World War (1914-1918) stimulated more radical approaches to design, which dealt with social meanings of a new age dominated more than ever by machines and new technologies.

'Good design', up until late 1920s, was reflected in the academic reform nascent of the Weimar School – Bauhaus (first opened in 1919). Bauhaus designers advocated for the use of industrial materials, mechanised industrial production and fulfilment of needs through modern housing units, furnishing and appliance models, but in a manner which committed to a less elitist attitude and, through industrial design, focus on genuine public needs. It was during this time Sullivan's "form follows function" reigned supreme, as seen in furniture pieces such as Marcel Breuer's 1925 "Wasilly" chair, Ludwig Mies van der Rohe 1927 "MR" armchair, 1929 "Brno" or "Barcelona" chairs or in the works of German artist Marianne Brandt; in all of these examples design was to be considered 'good' by formal means and through the lens of the respective social framework they were created in.

The interwar period has also witnessed design innovation outside the German Modernist movement; Scandinavia would rise in the industrial design scene as an unmatched force of creativity and subtle sophistication. Northen European designers took an original approach by "steering a middle ground between standardization and efficiency on the one hand and psychological dimensions of modern living on the other" [3]. Warm tones and soft, natural materials are the epicentre of Scandinavian furnishings, creating a sense of closeness and simple familiarity between user and product. They approached design by having standardisation and industrial production intertwine with individuality and the perpetuations of crafts, which subsumed their unique outlook on design. This synthesis of Modernism was expressed in furniture and objects by designers such as Alvar Aalto (1898-1976), Gunnar Asplund (1885-1940), Kaare Klint (1888-1954) or Bruno Mathsson (1907-1988) just to name a few.

'Good design' is expressed in Europe both in bent steel tubes and locally sourced plywood; 'good design' is sincere and also philosophical, made through craft tradition and by industrial mechanical production; it takes into consideration the needs of both the individual, and the mass population through standardisation. These concepts, binary at their emergence, further develop the framework for contemporary advancements in design theory and practice as a unified endeavour.

While Europe was preoccupied with sincerity and means of closing the psychological gaps between modernity, user and products, during the 1930s, in the USA, 'good design' encompassed shell styling of everyday objects, automobiles and trains. Raymond Loewy, Henry Dreyfuss or Norman Bel Geddes were among the revolutionary designers who started the practice of "design consultancy". Having noticed how aesthetically unappealing most of American appliances, cars and commonly used products were [4], Raymond Loewy and his peers took it upon themselves to add a new dimension through a process known as streamlining. Although business was met with unprecedented sales, streamlining was at its core a superfluous subsidiary of the design practice, but it marked the beginning of a much broader design venture and was a pivotal moment in the discourse of what 'good' design means (or even if it can be considered "industrial designing").

Mid-Century Modernism was a post-war revival of optimism and design recentred around the domestic home, on quality products and long-lasting furnishings for a generation who strayed away from past trauma generated by the Second World War. New materials and means of production were entering civil industries and designers challenged modernity with a new set of values. Mid-Century Modern is commonly regarded as being a staple for 'good design', though sociologist Herbert Gans considered mid-century furniture "a treasure trove of progressive upper middle-class culture" [5], thus excluding more universal values.

The 1950s and 60s are dominated by space and atomic iconography and biomorphic (or "vital") shapes revolving around the relatively new domain of ergonomics. Dichotomy was governing all aspects of life and transpired into design as well, which further advanced the discourse about design and its role in society.

Good/Bad Design Dialectic and Contemporary Challenges. The Utility Furniture Advisory Committee, in the UK, was instituted during mid-century to provide standardised items at controlled prices which were hoped to influence popular taste "towards good construction in simple, agreeable designs" [6]. One of their designers - Edwin Clinch - described the furniture as being pure and good. In 1944, the Council of Industrial Design was founded in London to promote the same 'good design' ideas on a national level and consequently sponsored a series of exhibitions - "Britain can Make It" 1946, "Enterprise Scotland" 1947, "Design at Work" 1948 - to gain popular support. Gordon Russell, director of the Council from 1947 to 1960, in writing the exhibition catalogue for "Design at Work", questioned what good design meant and stated principles such as functionality, materials and purpose as rigid characteristics for the denomination [7]. George Nelson, on the other hand, argues that the design process is integrated in the principle of appropriateness and offers harsh criticism of excessively narrow concepts of 'functional' design; the so-called 'good design', as judged by aesthetic standards like those promoted by Edgar Kaufmann Jr., director of MoMA's department of industrial design in 1940, who used the idea of 'good design' as a "weapon against 'styling'" [8] as curator at the Philadelphia Museum of Art, Kathryn B. Hiesinger, put it. Eliot Noyes saw 'good design' as a matter of selective aesthetic preference and Edgar Kaufmann Jr. disregarded commercial success as an indicator for good design, enhancing once again purpose and usability [8].

The 1960s Pluralism showcased how not one single approach to design was to be considered best. Postmodernism came with its new set of philosophies regarding what industrial design meant and renegaded against stereotypical views. Social movements and reforms pushed forward new directions, challenging the governing views about designers' role in society. Postmodernism and the 1970s continued the broad approach in design, but also marked the onset of the famous "10 Principles for Good Design" by designer Dieter Rams, which instilled a certain degree of narrowness to the practice by abiding it to a blueprint-like formula, which continues the twentieth century trend of linear considerations for what makes a design 'good'.

From the digital era of the 1980s emerged new types of products and relationships between user and product. The heightened sense of approachability made technology a natural part of life. The advent of digital devices has come along with a new type of design: user-interfaces/user-experiences, which again raises questions on qualitative denominations of the overall product: although both parts function as a singular entity, good industrial designs can have bad interface designs. Moreso, some authors argue how the very basis of what is meant by 'good design' has to "be placed within

the invented (artificial) logic of the total economy" and how "quality itself becomes a rematerialized ethical value" [9].

In today's age, products have reached an apex of sophistication, but the societal, economic and political landscapes make differentiating 'good' from 'bad' design a complex task. Today's industrial design scene faces new and unprecedented challenges stemming from various directions: highly competitive global markets, sustainability reforms and ethical dilemmas. Designers are faced with social movements and environmental concerns which evolve from one generation to another, demanding a broader approach within the practice, which is incompatible with twentieth century 'good design' formulae.

From a technological standpoint, advancements in the field generate a need for consistent reiterations which in turn lead to a strong sense (artificial or not) of obsolescence among the consumers, which in turn generate vast amounts of electronic waste, no matter how 'good' the products are. However, 'planned obsolescence' is currently being actively fought against [10], although maintaining the social status quo through popular 'flagship' products make it difficult to combat. The process through which designers and engineers went through to create these devices and the materials themselves (increasingly more durable glass types, aluminium frames, scratch resistant plastics) can all be deemed by traditional quantifications as being 'good', whereas the business model leans toward a bad denominator.

Drawing a parallel to classic Darwinism, industrial design has to adapt. Even Dieter Rams' ten principles, although still considered valid, have to be incorporated with a certain degree of restraint, so that contemporary views of, for instance, sincerity, feminism or racial and gender equality, can be inserted into the equation. Raising awareness on including female anthropometrics in her 2021 book, "Das Patriarchat der Dinge: Warum die Welt Frauen Nicht Passt", Rebekka Endler highlights the governing masculine-oriented measurements of everyday objects, which pose – for example in the automobile industry – life-threatening consequences for women [11].

'Good' design narrows the intrinsically meaning of such a vast, multilateral endeavour, as is industrial design and, as contemporary researchers note, "giving form to socially compelling future visions is a specific way for designers to contribute to social justice movements." [12].

Conclusion. 'Good' industrial design is highly contextual as we've come to conclude from the first part of this paper; Victor Margolin states how designers "have not worked with a set of principles and rules that have prescribed the scope of their work.", rather they have invented the subject matter of their profession "as they have gone along." [13]. Design is also a phenomenon which is inherently depended on external factors and context, meaning its permeability is key to its survival. Hence, adapting to new and current challenges is paramount.

Product semantics has greatly changed since the twentieth century. A new vocabulary emerged once the relationship between the public and products metamorphosed into something beyond simple usage. Products are intertwined with increasingly more aspects of our lives, ranging from social status, establishing gender and race equilibrium and equality of opportunity. They have become companions, assistants, objects of comfort and they encompass how we navigate the world in a much more holistic way.

Design has reached a level of maturity which, throughout the long heritage left behind by twentieth century designers, deems it unnecessary to apply qualitative denominators. Industrial design is, by definition, a process in of itself, a phenomenon which starts with a basic, fundamental need; industrial design products represent one of the last steps of the whole endeavour and, as a consequence, are affected by a series of ulterior interventions by distinctive overshadowing economic forces. Thus, one should distance industrial design as a practice from the engulfing overall business umbrella, which can blur the purity within the core practice. Furthermore, if industrial design as an act of conception does not follow a series of fundamental intellectualised steps, the process itself enters a different realm of creation, and strays away from design thinking in the academic sense. This is how one can explain the presence of bad products on the market – cheaply made, imitations or mass-produced inferior objects that are not the first-hand result of design thinking – within an endeavour with such a rich history.

Innovation builds upon the shoulders of history; although twentieth century 'good design' dogmas become increasingly more obsolete, they represent the fundamental steps towards an inherently good design practice which tackles humanistic issues.

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