

FROM FETISH TO FASHION: COMMUNICATION AND INSTRUMENTAL AESTHETICS

by

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From Fetish to Fashion: Communication and Instrumental Aesthetics

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ABSTRACT

The thesis is an exploration of the role played by communication in industrial design and the relationship between industrial design and consumer and commercial cultures. Currently, fashion is increasingly a concern in both these cultures. Fashion is understood as more than just the seasonal fluctuations of clothing styles — it is the social process whereby goods and the cultural categories which they communicate are systematically invested with, and divested of, meaning.

The thesis is drawn from and builds upon a critical review of the literature. Leiss, Kline and Jhally's Social Communication in Advertising sets the basic theoretical framework for the study. Following an interdisciplinary approach, this study draws on selected texts by Nietzsche, Heidegger, Benjamin, Geertz, Turner, Douglas, Sahlins and Csikszentmihalyi. Along with articles drawn from the design trade press, literature on industrial design and fashion is also consulted.

In all human societies goods, things or products play important roles in social life. A review of literature on the roles played by products or things in human relations reveals three dimensions of these roles: first, goods or products serve utility, which is itself informed by social meaning; second, things and goods function as media of communication; and third, objects or products provide a material basis for the social construction of reality. The ways in which goods are used in any society are influenced by the given cultural context. This context can be referred to as the "cultural frame for goods." This thesis explores the current cultural frame, which is characterized by fragmented markets and fashion as a means of social identification and differentiation.

Through the acquisition of goods people express their personal social identification and differentiation. In the public sphere goods serve as expressions of personal worth and identity. In the private sphere goods are sought out as metaphors of progress. Increasingly these metaphors of progress are ephemeral and require replacing as new, socially approved metaphors are produced. The thesis argues that under current conditions in advanced market industrial societies cultural production is significantly mediated by the fashion process.

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PREFACE

The initial impulse for the research that grew into this thesis was informed by a personal interest in the place and condition of the "ethnic experience" and traditions in modern affluent market-industrial societies. The interest was organized around the following: If "ethnicity" is a form of internal social difference, then how is the presence of this internal difference patterned and communicated within the broader cultural milieu? Or, more significantly, what kinds of social conditions set out by the dominant cultural configuration have an impact on the way in which "ethnic" communities reproduce themselves and develop? In short — what is the relationship between the larger cultural context and ethnic community with respect to cultural production?

This thesis is focused on the current cultural *context* of "ethnicity" and, by extension, of tradition. The questions that orient the study start from the relationship between cultural production and everyday life.

"From fetish to fashion" describes a transformation in the nature of cultural production and reproduction. Both *fetish* and *fashion* refer to an aspect of the aesthetic dimension. Both also refer to a form of person/thing intermediation. This is to say that both refer to things that "vivify" social relations. The fetish, as a structure, is now subject to fashion, a process.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

This unity of the being of language for which we are looking we shall call the design. The name demands of us that we see the proper character of the being of language with greater clarity. The "sign" in design (Latin *signum*) is related to *secare*, to cut — as in saw, sector, segment. To design is to cut a trace. Most of us know the word "sign" only in its debased meaning — lines on a surface. But we make a design also when we cut a furrow into the soil to open it to seed and growth.

Martin Heidegger.

In a sense, the researches reported, are in aid of constructing an account of the aesthetization of daily life at the level of the material substratum of everyday life — the "world of goods." Goods are given form: and this form is communicative. This is so because goods produced — be it by mechanical reproduction or by hand — are always made with the question "what is it for?" in mind. This can be said as much of "art" as it can be said of an automobile. Art is made to express something, and so are goods. In this sense goods are *like* units of discourse. Goods are made for a purpose, things are said for a purpose. Since goods are material, their messages are available for "reading" through time. As such, goods are the material substrata of the inhabited world, and, being expressive, goods are also a medium of social communication.

In this thesis communication is understood as the circulation of social meaning. As such, communication is made up of three constituents. First, communication is a dynamic *process* of social relations. Communication is also constituted by *structures*, be they various media of communication or institutions through which communication flows. And finally, communication presupposes *cultures*, or organized schemes of knowledge, which facilitate the correlation of the above two constituents.

The media studied below are the objects and things of everyday life, what has been called the "world of goods." In a sense the thesis examines the current usages of things as media of communication, or, put another way, the thesis is concerned with the *communicative* properties of the elements of "material culture."

Communication can be thought of as proceeding in modes. Among such modes one might list an imperative mode (command), an interrogatory mode (questioning), and a pragmatic mode. The latter, often ascribed to news and information, proceeds in a seemingly "matter of fact" way. But being a pragmatic mode it is directed toward some goal or aim all the while appearing to be "neutral." Another mode by which communication can proceed is the affective. This mode would include art as it appeals to the senses *and* the emotions.

These modes can appear in configurations. An example of such a configuration might be a mode that is pragmatically affective. Put another way, a pragmatically affective mode of communication can be described as a practice of an instrumental aesthetics. Instrumental aesthetics implies a practice that stands between two seeming polarities: on the one hand, instrumental reason, pragmatic action, or practical reason, and, on the other hand, the realm of art, aesthetics, or affective communication.

"Instrumental Aesthetics" brings together a number of notions which may clarify the term. The term implies the efforts being made in design of various kinds to make products "user friendly." This suggests such notions as ease of operation, safety, ergonomics, etc. This might be the realm of "human engineering." At the same time "instrumental aesthetics" incorporates notions such as "styling," "cosmeisis" or "ornamentation:" All of these terms suggest an ordering of surfaces and volumes with an eye toward the pleasure of reception and appropriation or use. Styling here refers to the production of goods with their overall appearance in mind. Cosmeisis, like the word *kosmetikos* from which it is derived, suggests ordering, arranging, or skill at either. In either case what is at issue is communication, but communication in the affective mode — this is to say communication which is aimed at an appeal to the emotions and subjective elements of the "receiver."

There is yet another dimension implied in this category and suggested by the term "instrumental." Instrumentality, according to dictionary definitions, implies activity which is aimed at achieving previously set out goals. Instrumentality implies action by design oriented toward an anticipated end.

Taken as a totality, the term seems to imply a practice which, while pursuing some aim, goes about this pursuit through a skillful ordering of parts for the purpose of appeal to subjectivity and the emotions. The exact dimensions of this practice cannot be elaborated at this point, indeed this thesis is an exploration toward research which might render a clearer understanding of this practice, its historical developments

and the roles that it has played in the circulation of social meaning.

The exploration below was born out of an effort to understand the role played by industrial design as a communicative practice. This effort was itself the outcome of another question: How are things made by craft and things made by machine alike? In particular, what is common to they way both set out to "appeal" or to "please"? The category on which the thesis is focused presented itself when I was trying to give a theoretic description for what it was that industrial design practices and cultures actually set out to do. What I believe expands the possibilities of this category is the current work on advertising, which demonstrates that this powerful form of social communication serves more to inform consumers about the meaning of goods than it does to induce or manipulate people into buying goods. Much like industrial design, advertising is concerned with the "aesthetics" of communication. And, much like industrial design, advertising is informed by a goal — to appeal, to make new goods and services meaningful; in short to give them a cultural context. This underscores the possible political dimensions of this study; these are subsumed in a question: What role does affective communication, or more specifically an "instrumental aesthetics" play in the management of social meaning? The other side of the question creates a tension with the first: To what extent does an "instrumental aesthetics" play a role in the necessities in response to which people build a meaningful and inhabitable world?

In order to chart something of what social and historical role might be played by an "instrumental aesthetics" this thesis is focused on two cultural activities and a social process where the two seem to intersect. The study begins with a discussion of the culture of appropriation — consumer culture. Here the dynamics and historical development of this culture are considered. The second activity is industrial design. The historical development of industrial design is considered. The focus then moves to industrial design as a communicative practice. Finally, in the last chapter, cultures of appropriation and fashioning (industrial design) are considered with reference to the current "cultural frame for goods."

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE: THINGS, PRODUCTS AND MEANING.

In this chapter a number of sources which shed light on the role played by things and objects in human relations are considered. Anthropological literature suggests that objects are media of communication. This function is expressed in ritual, in art, and in the ways objects represent categories of culture. The final two discussions in this section open the way to the next section, which deals specifically with the meaning of goods and products in contemporary market industrial societies.

The second section, which can be categorized as social theory, elaborates the anthropological contributions but also expands their scope by suggesting that while consumption practices are cultural they are also historical. This section ends on the thought that under current conditions in market industrial societies goods are media of communication and are chosen by consumers not only for their "performativity" in the sense of "utility," but also for the broader "utility" which incorporates a communicative "performativity".¹ In short, the communicative aspect of goods is shown to be of increasing importance. Also in this section a key concept of this study is elaborated — the cultural frame for goods.

The current cultural frame for goods is shown to be informed by "fashion" and fragmentation of markets. Fashion itself, which forms the nucleus of the final chapter, is shown in the review of literature to be a concern with goods as media for the transmission of signals about social relatedness and differentiation. The key constituents of the fashion process are revealed in the second section as a concern with social status and its articulation through access to scarce or "positional" goods, and access to novelty.

The final section of the review of literature explores three themes which assist in the final analysis of the nexus formed by an intersection of the cultures of appropriation and fashioning. This section, which draws on philosophy and aesthetics, is centered around the relationship between power, aesthetics, the

¹By "performativity" I mean the manner or ways in which something performs, or makes manifest, its utility or functionality. Because goods and many kinds of man-made things are made to be "communicators" in the sense that signification is a concern for the maker or designer, the term "performativity" is useful as it suggests a capacity (both potential and kinetic) for/of performance in the sense in which one talks of the performance inherent in a car, a television or any other mechanical device. This might also be a way of talking about the potential and kinetic capacities of a work of art, a text, or a kitchen utensil such as a specialized device for opening a clam shell or cutting certain patterns in sliced fruit.

nature of things and the management of social meaning.

1. Anthropology

What is common to human societies with respect to the social meaning of goods and the roles the goods play in everyday life? The anthropological literature suggests that things and objects are an amalgam of use and meaning. More: The meanings of these things are derived from the broader context of meanings, from culture.

A number of anthropologists have contributed to the perspective that this thesis sets out to achieve: the role of consumption in human societies and, by extension, the role and meaning of things or products to and in those societies. Of these I shall consider: V. Turner, C. Geertz, M. Douglas and B. Isherwood, and M. Sahlins.

The point of convergence in the anthropological material reviewed centers on the particular role played by culture in human social life. The terms "culture" and "society" are co-illuminating, co-constituents of the lived world. Cultures comprise the limiting horizons for themes and variations in the modes of social life. They are either "webs of significances," as Geertz would have it, or they are "interpretive grids," as Sahlins puts it. Cultures are those structures of ideas and matter which frame the social construction of reality and provide the fields on which the processes that constitute this social reality are played out.

Victor Turner.

The contribution drawn from Victor Turner is at one remove from the realm of everyday life. Turner wrote an introduction to a collection of essays on the role played by celebrations in human societies which was published in conjunction to an exhibition of "celebratory objects" mounted by the Smithsonian Institution. This introduction offers a far ranging discussion on the role of objects in the celebratory frame.

In his discussion Turner points out that objects prepared for and used in celebrations as focii or adjuncts are imbued with the corporate experience of the group which engages in the celebration. The "corporate experience" along with its informing local knowledge is "inscribed" or "in-corporated" into the

objects by makers who themselves are part of both the shared ethos and celebration. The makers may be participants at large or they may be specialists. However, if the celebratory object is to be a "living symbol," (this is to say that the symbol functions according to its etymological definition — as that which brings together what is separated), then the specialist makers must be part of the lived ethos of the celebrating community. The function of such objects is to provide a materialization of ideas, or experiences which can be reached and vivified in the celebratory frame.² Objects are communication media, their content is the ethos and the community: the cultural and social milieu. Turner also offers a number of observations about the lack of such living symbols in current North American societies.

Clifford Geertz

While Clifford Geertz's work focuses on the relationship between situations, symbolic action, and the world in whose context the situations and actions are intelligible; it also offers a number of insights on the meaning of things. Of particular interest to this thesis is his recent discussion of the nature of the work of art.³ Geertz seeks to identify the common elements in the various forms of art practiced by the diversity that is humanity. If there is a commonality, then it is *not* beauty. There is something else that provides a common ground for the activities in which people participate, and which people call "art."

Geertz observes that in all societies there are certain activities that are organized around the thought that ideas can be given material form — audible, visual, and, admitting recourse to neologism, "tactile." To arrive at an account of the significance of art Geertz urges a rethinking of the theoretical approach that considers art as a code to be deciphered. In its place he proposes interpretation. The implication is that not signs but discourses are at question — while binary oppositions and the differential logic of syntax and lexicon tell us a great deal about a "sign," in the work of art we encounter something different — a discourse. In keeping with this paradigm the smallest unit is not a sign but rather a sentence. The sentence always presupposes a world. So also, when encountering the work of art, it is the "tenor of its setting" — the situations and conditions of its origins — that go a long way to account for its "spell."

²Victor Turner's discussion of object as media of communication in Celebration: Studies in Festivity and Ritual. Victor Turner ed. (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1982) pp. 15-6.

³See Clifford Geertz, "Art as a Cultural System" in Local Knowledge: Further Essays in Interpretive Anthropology. (New York: Basic Books, Inc, 1983) pp. 94-121.

Goods, objects, things in the world thus become texts and discourses for interpretation. What is said through them returns the interpreter back to the world.

Mary Douglas and Baron Isherwood.

In The World of Goods M. Douglas and B. Isherwood seek to conduct an anthropology of consumer society. They point out that the social role of goods in all societies is to make the categories of culture manifest and stable.

Starting from the notion that people desire a patterned sequence of events and behaviour from their social relations, Douglas and Isherwood argue that it is exactly in this sphere that goods perform their social function. Goods contribute to this predictable and patterned sequencing of social life. Douglas and Isherwood note that social life is subject to a "drift of meaning" — the facticity of social and cultural categories is eroded by events in the world and the flow of time. ⁴ Objects and goods, by their materiality and brute inertia, help these meanings, as the authors wistfully put it, "stay a while."

The authors state that goods are communicators used in a display and a deployment of social power. Among the social categories that goods "nail down" are social inclusion and exclusion. By means of goods as embodied categories of prestige and power or ability and relatedness, individuals are confirmed or coerced in their status within any given society. Thus goods and access to them are significations on the field of social power.

||
Coined
position
Hollander

Within Douglas' and Isherwood's framework, consumption or the acquisition of goods is a ritual practice. By means of consumption practices the social and cultural reality are reproduced, reaffirmed and renewed. By participating in consumption people participate in the culture itself. This takes on a particularly significant dimension when consumption is viewed as an acquisition and "exchange of names" — brand names, in this case — though this can be extended to an exchange of information about the experiences and services that various products make available. Douglas and Isherwood suggest that talking about goods and comparing their relative worth or efficacy is an aspect of everyday life in a consumer society. This discussion takes the form of a comparison of brand names. Some can compare *Lloyds* and *Radio Shack* and others can discuss the merits of *Bang and Oluffson* over *TEAC*. Exchanging names,

⁴Mary Douglas and Baron Isherwood. The World of Goods: Towards an Anthropology of Consumption. (Harmondsworth, Mdsx.: Penguin Books, 1978) pp. 56-94.

observations on products and their qualities is again on the one hand commerce with the categories of culture, and on the other an expression of one's place in a social hierarchy expressed in terms of inclusion and exclusion.

Marshall Sahlins.

The work of M. Sahlins has a particular bearing on the question of the meaning of things in market industrial societies. For Sahlins there are two questions and both are of interest to this discussion. The first of the issues is the question about the relationship between culture, practical reason and, by extension an objective "utility." Here Sahlins will assert the case that goods or things are always meaningful and useful. Secondly, in his comparative discussion of cultural systems he builds a strong case for the argument that goods or products are media of communication. Production of commodities is at one and the same time production of cultural categories. Here Sahlins will argue that capitalism is not just the rational pursuit for maximization of objective profit, but also, a cultural system.

Sahlins begins his discussion as a critique of Marx. The critique is circular. Sahlins' objections to Marx are based on the confusion in the latter's writing about the significance and role played by culture in human societies. Sahlins notes that there appear to be two "moments" in the Marxian literature. In the first culture is cast as the horizon for human activity. In the second an objective utility appears which exists above and beyond the mediations of culture. Sahlins argues that Marx is wrong in his "second moment." ⁵ There is no such thing as an objective or abstract utility. Utility, insists Sahlins, is not given through the objective qualities of products but rather through the significance of the objective qualities. Significance is to be found in the differential logic of a system of meanings, an "interpretive grid" – culture. Products thus are like the signs in a language. Since culture is a symbolic system, utility is symbolically constituted. Separate objects or products are to be understood as "man speaking to a man through the medium of things."

While significance is in a cultural or a symbolic system, and while Sahlins rejects an "objective" utility, he ultimately reaffirms and expands upon the Marxian contribution. Sahlins observes that in every culture there exists an "organizing core" from which flow the various significations that constitute culture.

⁵Marshall Sahlins Culture and Practical Reason. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976) pp. 126-65.

For market-industrial societies that core is the economy. He notes, "what money is to the west, kinship is to the rest." ⁶ Products, argues Sahlins, are coded to signify social differentiation – usually along the lines of social prestige and power. By acquisition and display of goods social differentiations are simultaneously expressed. There is a social differentiation implied in the contrast between a used Chevrolet and a new BMW.

Sahlins takes this differentiation one step further. To account for the nature of commodity production he reworks the notion of "totemism." "Totemism" describes the social practice of projecting meaningful differentiations onto the world and then re-projecting these seemingly "natural" distinctions back onto people. In so-called primitive societies the components of the natural world serve as the field onto which these differentiations are projected. Hence the potential set is finite, if large. In the case of market-industrial societies the field for projection is potentially infinite. With current industrial capacity the permutations of concrete characteristics of goods and things in the surrounding world is potentially infinite, and therefore so is the potential for totemism. ⁷ Goods, products, commodities are therefore signs or symbols of the group; commodities are media of communication.

Summation

Taken together this anthropological data analysis and interpretation converges on the point that goods are media of communication. Meaning or signification is not to be found in the thing itself but rather in its referentiality. Put another way, meaning is to be derived from the context in which the product is to be found – be it the differential social logic of signs or in the lived context of human society. Of special interest to this thesis are the observations on the role of products as communicators of social differentiation, allegiance and power.

⁶Ibid. pp. 167-70.

⁷Ibid. pp. 170-85.

2. Social Theory

In this section contributions from two sources are considered. They are both characterized by an interdisciplinary approach, and both are based on extensive empirical research projects. In both cases the authors have sought to provide an account of the social role of goods in affluent societies. The first of the two studies was conducted by Mihalyi Csikszentmihalyi and Eugene Rochberg-Halton. The second, based on a theoretical framework set out by William Leiss, was conducted by him in conjunction with Steven Kline and Sut Jhally. The former study set out to enquire into what things meant to people in urban U.S.A. The latter set out to interrogate the social function of advertising – and necessarily dealt with the meaning of goods since this is what advertising is about and for.

Both studies suggest that goods and products are media of communication. In the former study goods are communicators and their content – what makes people cherish them – is human. In the latter case goods are also communication media – their content is social standing and membership in groups.

M. Csikszentmihalyi and E. Rochberg-Halton.

Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton set out to discover which objects in people's homes are cherished and why. They discover that three categories seem to occupy this privileged niche. These are objects which make social relations present, objects which are signs or representatives of the self, and interactive objects or goods. In the first case the cherished object makes felicitous or significant social relations present. Gifts and heirlooms are given as representative objects in this case. The object reminds one of someone else or of a significant social situation. The object is a communicator, the content of its message is the Other. The second category describes objects which serve as representatives of the self, but here the self is understood as a social-self. The good is a sign of a socially positioned self. In this case the good is a sign of social standing or status. Furthermore the goods in this category are signs of a personal "eros." This term is used to suggest a personal attribute of power or one's capacity to affect others. As the discussions below will demonstrate, this eros is strongly reminiscent of the Nietzschean usage of the "will to power" as an eros that permeates life. The last category, that of interactive objects, refers specifically to those goods which can modify a person's flow of consciousness. Here stereos and television sets serve as

examples.⁸

The authors raise a number of issues of interest to the further development in this thesis. First they note that in the lists of cherished objects there exists a marked absence of things that connect persons with broader "systems of meaning" such as systems of political, religious or ethnic affiliations. Secondly, the authors observe, photographs of family and friends comprise the major category of objects which approximate those of wider systems of meanings. Thirdly, Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton privilege the home and family as the primary site where significances are produced. (This seems to contradict Sahlins, for whom the "organizing core" in capitalist societies is understood to be the marketplace or the economy) Fourthly the authors suggest that the meaning of things can be ascribed to the things themselves. This poses a problem. Things are meaningful because they are social, yet they can be meaningful in their own right. Here the authors seem to be suggesting an interpretation of things according to their concrete attributes; in short, they are referring to the possibility of objects understood as texts – in which case the implication is of the significance of industrial design as an "inscription" process. Both of these issues will be addressed below.

In the final analysis goods emerge again as media of communication. The content of the communication are people and their interrelationships.

William Leiss

William Leiss, either alone or in cooperation with Steve Kline and Sut Jhally, has also shown that the meaning of things, goods or products in market industrial societies is intimately tied up with a communicative function.

Leiss begins his project with a question about the possibility of human happiness deriving from the promise of consumer culture — that personal happiness and well being can be acquired through acquisition of goods and services proffered on the marketplace. The plausibility of this promise and claim serve as a point of departure for Leiss' analysis. In order to provide a framework for such a discussion he formulates the notion of a "high intensity market setting." By this is meant a situation wherein a great

⁸M. Csikszentmihalyi and Eugene Rochberg-Halton. The Meaning of Things: Domestic Symbols of the Self. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981) pp. 225-249

number and variety of goods is available to an increasing number of people. In Limits to Satisfaction he concludes that under high intensity consumption conditions consumers are likely to derive neither satisfaction nor dissatisfaction from their efforts to match needs and goods in the marketplace. What consumers are likely to achieve is a mixture of both, an ensemble of satisfaction and dissatisfaction. This is the logical outcome of the nature of the high intensity marketplace. Having acquired a good, one cannot be sure that a better one wasn't available and might not be discovered if one had searched a bit longer. Secondly, given the productive capacity of industrial production, no sooner has one acquired a good when a "new and improved" version of the same good may appear. Additionally, advertising as a significant form of communication constantly suggests that one ought to be dissatisfied with one's current possessions and consumption practices. —

In his most recent work, done in cooperation with Steven Kline and Sut Jhally, Leiss focuses on advertising as a significant form of social communication. Advertising is seen as an important system of information whose purpose is to endow goods and products with social meaning. While advertising is an important system whereby products are rendered meaningful it is not the only system of communication that fulfills this role. Other forms include taste groupings or lifestyles, popular forms of entertainment, peer groups and, specifically of interest to this thesis, industrial design. —

With the division of labour and increasing industrialization the average consumer (having lost the self-sufficiency and "craft knowledge" characterizing more "primitive" societies) knows less and less about the nature of the goods that appear in the marketplace. Furthermore, capitalism undermines older systems of meanings and values which in the past gave persons direction about modes of consumption, the significance of its objects and the meaning of the consumption process as such. Under such conditions goods — which are the materialized didactic categories of culture — lose their surrounding and informing contexts. As Leiss puts it: The communications lines running through goods and our relations with them snap. This rupture occurs as market industrial relations of production and consumption spread.⁹ Something must step in to fill the gap. The something in this case is commercial culture expressed through marketing (its poetics) and advertising (its poetry). Advertising does not generate demand but it does poetize, mythopoetize the ever emerging world of goods. Leiss observes that consumption becomes a

⁹William Leiss, S. Kline and S. Jhally Social Communication in Advertising. (Toronto: Methuen Books, forthcoming, 1985) pp. 492-506.

popular entertainment.

As to the social function of the things themselves Leiss reworks another Marxian contribution — "commodity fetishism." This notion, the fetishism of commodities, would play an important role in much critical literature on consumer practices. Leiss agrees with Marx that goods are fetishized. But, like Sahlins, he notes that this fetishism is a feature common to all human societies. A fetish is something made, this can be derived from the etymology of the word. A fetish provides an embodied representation of the current social conditions and aspirations of any given society. If anything, fetishism of commodities is characterized by its inadequate account of the current social relations in this society.

Goods (here Leiss agrees with the anthropological literature) play a vital role in interpersonal and social relations. Products of human labour vivify these relations. This is because goods are "projective media." Persons project their selves or their self-image, their desires and ambitions onto things and the things then re-project these back to persons.

Because his concern is to understand the current contours of the "person/thing intermediation," Leiss stresses a number of studies on the nature of goods and the roles they play in interpersonal and social relations. Goods as status communicators, "positional goods," are of particular importance. These are goods which by their scarcity express the relative social standing or status of their possessors. In affluent market industrial societies where a certain degree of general affluence has been reached positional goods become increasingly important. Hence the communicative aspect of goods becomes increasingly important. Given the immense productive capacity of capitalism and the generalization of access through economies of scale, these positional goods must be continually produced. This is to say that an artificial scarcity must be produced, because it is their scarcity that gives these goods their capacity to act as receptacles for status distinctions. As various status coded goods are produced they can be quickly and easily produced en masse, hence the necessity of continually identifying and producing new status markers. The implication is on the one hand of the generalization of fashion as a systematized expression of relative social position. On the other hand this process implies an escalating, perhaps a fevered, production of both projective media and the kinds and arrangements of surface onto which their content is projected *to be* reflected back into the social world. Things are utilities but the definition of utility expands to encompass social communication.

Neither advertising nor the surfaces and functions of things are capable of generating meaning – not by themselves. Leiss does however seem to agree with Csikszentmihalyi that the concrete qualities of goods can be a source for meaning. Here again the reference seems to point to the operation of industrial design and the object as some kind of discourse or text. This is corroborated by Leiss' observation that if there were no advertising the "discourse through and about objects" would continue to function even in the high intensity market setting. The "discourse" is, after all, through and about objects. Furthermore, as noted earlier, meaning is derived from various forms of social context, association and differentiation. It also is assigned to objects by means of industrial design.

It is in this context that the totemic quality ascribed to commodities by Sahlins converges with Leiss' work. Leiss accepts the term totemism but his use of it differs from Sahlins'. For Sahlins totemism describes the relationship between people and the world of goods. Unfortunately this seems to be used in an ahistorical manner. In Leiss' work the totemism refers to the current social configuration. While the proposition that goods are media of communication is true — the modes in which they are used as communicators change over time. The cultural contexts set out the parameters for how goods are employed as media of communication. These cultural contexts change over time, and they may still be changing.

The current situation is characterized by a dissemination of fashion and fashion consciousness to an increasing range of goods – both non-durables and durables. The current "cultural frame" for goods is based on lifestyle or taste grouping. Thus the totemism. But, since fashion does play a major role in setting out the dynamics of marketing, industrial design and consumer practices the totemism appears as competitive and relational.

Summation.

A number of ideas emerge from these two sources. The first is that goods derive meaning from their contexts, but these contexts can be worked into or onto goods by means of forms of signification. Not only is meaning given to goods through advertising images but it can also be "in-wrought" into the materiality of goods by the operations of industrial design or art. The current cultural frame for goods and people's interactions with them appears to be informed by increasing fragmentation and fashionization.

Secondly the notion emerges that goods "vivify" interpersonal and social relations. This is to say that goods function as media of communication by which people identify themselves, identify with groups (as in the case of "lifestyles") and differentiate themselves from other social collectivities.

Furthermore, people cherish goods primarily for the social relatedness that these goods make present, or appresent.¹⁰ Relatedness in the current cultural frame is not to larger systems of meaning but rather to smaller groupings or to specific individuals. Goods are also cherished not for their static qualities, but often, for their "performativity" be it as appresentors of relatedness to others or for the pleasant sensations that interaction with these goods produces.

Finally, what is implied is the importance of some sort of an instrumental aesthetics in bodying forth goods as media of communication, and as a kind of management of social meaning.

3. Philosophy.

The last section of the review of literature is focused around the notion that arts, or affective communicative forms, have an impact on human personal and social life. All three thinkers considered here have given accounts of the "performativity" of art, and all have suggested possible links between art and social power. Furthermore, each of the three thinkers has offered insights into appropriation. Nietzsche's observations about possessions and the nature of possessing are particularly useful. Heidegger on the other hand offers an insight into the nature of material things as "gatherings" and suggests modes of appropriation based on this account of the nature of things. Benjamin provides a commentary on the effect on art by mechanical reproduction which sheds some light on both appropriation and its political implications. All three take the historical aspect of human being seriously.

¹⁰This term is used by Schutz in his explorations of the roles played by communication in the social world. Maurice Natanson, who edited the collected papers of Alfred Schutz, uses the following note to explain Schutz's use of the word: "By *appresentation* Husserl (the Schutzian use of the term is based on Husserl's) understands a process of analogy, but this process is in no sense a conclusion by analogy. By it an actual experience refers back to another experience which is not given in actuality and will not be actualized. In other words the appresented does not attain an actual presence. For instance by looking at the obverse of an object the reverse is appresented" See Natanson's remarks in Alfred Schutz The Problem of Social Reality: Collected Papers, Volume I. (Ed. Maurice Natanson. The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1962) p. 125

There is much that Nietzsche's thought could contribute to a discussion of "instrumental aesthetics," and most of it must remain beyond the scope of this thesis. What is of specific interest in this exploration are Nietzsche's thoughts on the relationship between power and the management of social meaning, so also his discussion of possessions and their utility. Before turning to these themes in his thought it is worthwhile to note that this philosopher had foreseen those social dimensions which have, since his time, come to characterize consumer culture and society and the commercial imperative and its culture. These observations will be useful to the discussion of the role of design to both these cultural configurations.

In Daybreak Nietzsche offered an account of the nature of commercial culture which rings true in the present. Here he noted that commerce would become for modern society what the personal contest was for the Greeks, and what war and justice were for the Romans — the soul of society. The essence of this commercial culture he suggested would be the ability of everyone engaged in commerce to appraise the worth of a thing without having made it. The appraisal would be made according to the needs of the consumer. The man of commerce asks the question that sets the parameters for the commercial imperative: "Who and how many will consume this?"

What was significant in Nietzsche's estimation was that this form of appraising would be generalized to all spheres of production. The man of commerce applies the commercial imperative to all spheres:

...he applies it to everything, and thus also to the productions of the arts and sciences, of thinkers, of scholars, artists, statesmen, peoples, parties, of the entire age: of everything he inquires after supply and demand *in order to determine the value of a thing in his own eyes*. This becomes the character of an entire culture, thought through in the minutest and subtlest detail and imprinted in every will and every faculty...¹¹

The man of commerce, and the commercial culture which comes to set out many social parameters, are oriented around the viability of any thing as something to be sold on the market. Marketability becomes a determinant. The implication is that things that cannot be sold are of no value. This is one polarity that emerges in the literature on current design practices. The other is consumer culture, and Nietzsche offers an early and incisive formulation of the key features of the culture of appropriation.

¹¹Friedrich Nietzsche. Daybreak: Thoughts and prejudices of morality. (Trans. R.J. Hollingdale. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press., 1982) p. 106.

In The Gay Science Nietzsche addresses what appears to be an important ingredient of consumer culture. As Leiss has noted, a constituent of consumer culture is the notion that consumers can partake in a grand experimentation with needs and satisfactions. Nietzsche poses the similar observation in the context of "How things will become ever more 'artistic' in Europe." (G.S. No. 356). He writes:

...there have been ages when men had a rigid confidence, a faith in their predestination. With the help of this faith, classes, guilds and hereditary trade privileges managed to erect those monsters of social pyramids that distinguish the Middle Ages. One thing can be adduced to their credit—durability (and duration is a first-rate value on earth).¹²

To this age when social roles were firmly held Nietzsche counterposes a different social climate.

...there are also opposite ages—really democratic—where people give up faith in predetermination—a sort of cocky faith and opposite point of view... these advance more and more into the foreground.... the Athenian Faith.¹³

Here Nietzsche is referring to classical Athens during the period of that city state's greatest expansion and imperial aspirations: a period that ended in the destruction of Athenian might by Sparta and her allies. Nietzsche contends that this same spirit of experimentation that emerged in Athens in the Periclean age, is now the faith of the Americans today "and more and more the European faith as well."

Nietzsche is saying that at his time already there was a spread of the notion that all could have access to everything. Roles would become increasingly interchangeable. People would engage in an experimentation with their own roles. He continues in this vein:

The individual becomes convinced that he can do just about everything and can manage almost any role, and everybody experiments with himself, improvises, makes new experiments, enjoys his experiments; and all nature ceases and becomes art.¹⁴

Nietzsche concludes on the thought that once people become aware of their ability to be actors they become actors. This development, he notes, disadvantages one kind of person — the architects, or builders. Since there is no faith in predestination — no "fixed" sense of inter-relatedness — no criteria can be found by which to set out what and how to build.

Another aspect of Nietzsche's thought that sheds light on the themes to be discussed in this thesis is his analysis of the importance of power in human life. Nietzsche insists that power is manifest in the

¹²F.Nietzsche. The Gay Science. (Trans. W. Kaufmann. New York: Vintage Books, 1974) p. 302-3.

¹³Ibid.

¹⁴Ibid.

feeling of over-abundant life. Power is manifested in "form-giving" acts, but it can also become manifest in acts of destruction. Power can therefore be understood as an "eros." Through a deployment of power individuals give form to the inchoate flow of experience, and it is through the same deployment of power that "utility" is assigned to various aspects of the lived world — things, people, social processes and phenomena.¹⁵

In The Will to Power Nietzsche elaborates the relationship between possessions and power. To be something, he notes, one must have something. To want more is to respond to one of the oldest laws of life: The law of growth and development. He writes:

....those who have possessions are of one mind on one article of faith: "one must possess something in order to be something." But this is the oldest and healthiest of all instincts: I should add, "one must want to have more that one has in order to become more."

For this is the doctrine preached by life to all that has life: the morality of development. To have and to want more — growth, in one word — that is life itself.¹⁶

What is implied here is a *self-assertive* expansion of what one has control or dominion over. This notion of possessions and growth as functions of power and the will to power can be better understood with the aid of a formulation used by Alfred Schutz. In a discussion of the structures of everyday life Schutz has written of the "manipulatory sphere" as the center of an individual's vivid reality, the site where pragmatic motives are realized and projects furthered. He observes:

The manipulatory sphere is the region open to my immediate interference which I can modify either directly by movements of my body or with the help of artificial extensions of my body, that is, by tools and instruments in the broadest sense of this term. The manipulatory zone is that portion of the outer world upon which I can actually act.¹⁷

The Nietzschean formulation of power would connect with an expansion of Schutz's manipulatory sphere in the sense that power and its deployment represent an expansion of this sphere. What is included into the zone over which one has disposition can be called a possession. This applies to things in the sense of objects and it can apply to experiences, to knowledge, and so also to control over people. For example: in an aphorism written at about the same time as the one on possessions quoted above Nietzsche writes:

¹⁵For a discussion of this see F. Nietzsche. On the Genealogy of Morals. (Trans. W. Kaufmann. New York: Vintage Books, 1969) p. 77-78.

¹⁶F. Nietzsche. The Will to Power. Trans. Walter Kaufmann and R. J. Hollingdale. New York: Vintage Books, 1968) p. 77.

¹⁷Alfred Schutz, The Problem of Social Reality: Collected Papers, Volume I. (Ed. Maurice Natanson. The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1962) p. 307.

Our love of our neighbor — is it not a lust for new possessions? And likewise our love of knowledge, of truth, and altogether any lust for what is new? ¹⁸

What emerges in this discussion of possessions is the dimension of novelty. It is not just a question of possession, but also a question of possessing something new, and this is the case not just because of "the law of life" mentioned above. What is at work here is that possessions lose their ability to continue to please, and, bored with them, one begins to search for new possessions. There is one more qualification to this search for new possessions — possessions, notes Nietzsche, become a part of those who possess them. When one tires of a possession one ultimately tires of oneself.

Gradually we become tired of the old, of what we safely possess, and we stretch out our hands again. Even the most beautiful scenery is no longer assured our love after we have lived in it for three months, and some more distant coast attracts our avarice: possessions are generally diminished by possession.

Our pleasure in ourselves tries to maintain itself again and again changing something new into ourselves; that is what possession means.

To become tired of a possession means tiring of ourselves. ¹⁹

Two notions emerge here. The first is that what constitutes a person is in some way bound up with what a person has control over. Possessions, besides being what they are as things or experiences, are transformed into the possessor by the act of appropriation. But, as Nietzsche notes, possessing somehow diminishes the possession. It is now "safely" within the manipulatory sphere; and it no longer presents a *challenge*. The distance which characterized it as something other than the self is now dissipated; with the appropriation comes the loss of the thing's resistance. This reveals the second theme: the notion of the need for a continual renewal of the self by means of a continual refurbishment of the "manipulatory sphere." Because things possessed become an aspect of the self, to tire of one's old possessions is to tire of the self. Or, from another perspective, the self that is reflected back from possessions as "projective media" becomes somehow tarnished, "passe," and needs renewal. Renewal takes the shape of appropriation of new, challenging things that still resist incorporation into the manipulatory sphere.

These observations lead to the discussion of power as the force that assigns utility status to things. Nietzsche rejects the notion of an absolute utility. In his discussion of the nature of punishment and its

¹⁸F. Nietzsche. *Gay Science*. pp. 88–9.

¹⁹Ibid.

role in society and history he contends that "utility" is an assignment given to that which is vanquished by a victorious movement of power. Utility is neither objective nor is it absolute; if anything it is a result. Utility is a result of appropriation by a greater power.

Another related theme is developed in Nietzsche's discussion of the ways changes in taste come about. This discussion is of particular interest to the notions to be developed in the last chapter of this thesis. Nietzsche contends that changes in taste account for the changes in opinion. As for the bases for changes in taste: again, power is at work:

...the change in general taste is more powerful than that of opinions. Opinions, along with all proofs, refutations, and the whole intellectual masquerade, are merely symptoms of the change in taste and most certainly not what they are still supposed to be, its causes.

What changes the general taste? The fact that some individuals who are powerful and influential announce without any shame, *hoc est ridiculum, hoc est absurdum*, in short, the declaration of their taste and nausea; and they enforce it tyrannically. Thus they coerce many, and gradually still more develop a new habit, and eventually all a new need.²⁰

What directs these individuals to these pronouncements, or to their reactions of likes or dislikes?

Nietzsche contends that it is a matter of their physical nature, their "physis."

They have the courage to side with their *physis* and to heed its demands down to the subtlest nuances. Their aesthetic and moral judgements are among these "subtlest nuances" of the physis.²¹

Thus power, and its deployment, function as a means for the management of social meaning. Taste, an aspect of the aesthetic sensibility, seems to play a role in the forms that social meaning acquires. The notion of renewal is also implied in this. For those who do have the power to manage social or community meaning this meaning is part of their manipulatory sphere. They too can tire of it. The changes in taste thus appear as the renewal of community or social meaning, but a renewal "in the interest of some at the expense of whom it may concern," as Nietzsche's contemporary Veblen put it.

The Langs, whose analysis of the fashion process will be discussed in more detail below, put this notion of Nietzsche's this way:

"...with rapid communications...news of the adoption of a new fashion soon spreads and helps to make the new mode familiar: the first few to dress in it are objects of interest and excitement; they are different and strange. Few more follow impelled to be a la mode by the need to assert their difference from those less fashionable....the bandwagon begins to roll... in

²⁰Ibid. p. 106-7.

²¹Ibid.

the end no one can afford to be different....²²

Martin Heidegger

Martin Heidegger's concerns, taken broadly, were oriented around the history of Western metaphysics and ontology. Since the concern was over the historical dimensions of ontology, he often returned to explorations of the substratum of the real world, the realm of things. Heidegger's question was not the "what" of things, but rather, the "how" — the manner whereby things came to be as they are, and the manner they came to be understood to be meaningful in this-or-that way. This distinction between something that "is" in a "concrete" and "factual" way and the relevances and meaning afforded it was given by Heidegger as a distinction between the "ontic" and "ontologic" aspects of a thing. By ontic Heidegger meant the materiality and "factuality" of something — its weight, mass, extension into space etc. When Heidegger refers to the ontologic, he is referring to the meaning given to these aspects of things in and by human societies.

Heidegger's thought is important to this thesis for a number of reasons. First, Heidegger throughout his work continually attempted to address the nature of "things themselves." This is to say that he sought to describe the roles played in human life by things, but to do so starting from the *experience* of things. These attempts were rewarded not by an account of "things themselves" but rather of things as "gatherings." Secondly, Heidegger gave an important account of the distinction between utilities or "equipment" and "works of art." Finally, Heidegger's thought on the nature of things has made an important impact on various design cultures, particularly European ones of the interregnum and those of today.

A discussion of Heidegger's thinking about things can be organized around two excerpts from the corpus of his work: In his meditation "The Thing" he writes:

If we let the thing be present in its thinging from out of the worlding of the world, then we are thinking of the thing as thing. Taking thought in this way, we let ourselves be concerned by the thing's worlding being. Thinking in this way, we are called by the thing as thing. In the strict sense of the German word *bedingt*, we are the be-thinged, the conditioned ones.

²²Kurt Lang and Gladys Lang. "Fashion: Identification and Differentiation in Mass Society." in Dress, Adornment, and the Social Order. (Ed. Mary Ellen Roach and Joanne Bubolz Eicher. New York: John Wiley and Sons, Inc., 1965) p. 328.

We have left behind the presumption of all unconditionedness.²³

He ends the same essay on the following observation.

Men alone as mortals, by dwelling attain to the world as world. Only what conjoins itself out of the world becomes a thing.²⁴

A thing is presented as a verb, and so is the world – the two are somehow interpenetrant. Humans are cast as "mortals," the mode of their being, human being is thought as "dwelling" — and dwelling is thought as habitation alongside things. In this sense Heidegger suggests that men are "be-thinged" or "conditioned."

It has been suggested that Heidegger's thought about the nature of things follows a three part development. While this suggestion is under debate, following the "three stages" will provide a loose framework for the interpretation of Heidegger's explorations and their results.²⁵

In Heidegger's early explorations of the "how" of human being in Being and Time, two kinds of things appear as available to experience. There are things that are available to experience: things that are in the world or the "vorhanden," and, there are the things that one makes use of — the equipment or things "zuhanden"; things "ready-to-hand." Equipment is characterized by its "referentiality." By referentiality Heidegger means that equipment refers to the totality of relations in which, and for which, it exists as equipment.

To arrive at the referentiality of any equipment one need only ask "what is it for?" The "totality of relations" refers to humans. One can ask what a hammer is for. The answer would be "for driving nails." But should the question "to what end" continue to be asked, then human habitation would be revealed as the culmination of a series of referentialities that would encompass nails, boards, saws, plans, designs, and so on.

²³Martin Heidegger Poetry, Language, Thought. (Trans. Albert Hofstadter. New York: Harper Colophon Books, Harper and Row, 1971) p. 181.

²⁴ibid. p. 182.

²⁵Vycinas contends that there are three distinct phases to Heidegger's development — on the other hand Mehta disagrees, and suggests that the development is already implied, and made explicit to some extent in Being and Time. See: Vincent Vycinas. Earth and Gods: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Martin Heidegger. (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1961) For a critical account of this organization see: J.L. Mehta. Martin Heidegger: The Way and the Vision. (Honolulu: The University of Hawaii Press, 1976)

Heidegger notes that normally equipment "disappears" into the totality. The only time that one's attention is drawn to the equipment is when something goes wrong. The equipment is missing, it is broken or unserviceable, or it does not "fit" the task into which it is to be incorporated. In short, for the equipment to do what it is to do it must "withdraw." He writes:

The peculiarity of what is proximally ready-to-hand is that, it must...withdraw in order to be ready-to-hand quite authentically...²⁶

What Heidegger means is that when one is engaged in a task one is directed to the goal of the undertaking. When one is chopping wood one is not thinking of the axe, rather one is directed to the chopping — the impact of the blade on the wood and the results of the impact. One becomes aware of the axe if it is dull and needs sharpening, i.e., when something is amiss with the equipment. In the essay "The Origin of the Work of Art," while discussing a painting by Van Gogh of a pair of peasant shoes, Heidegger again addresses the nature of equipment. He writes:

The equipmental quality of equipment consists in its usefulness. But what this usefulness itself? In conceiving it, do we already conceive along with the equipmental character of equipment? In order to succeed in doing this, must we not look out for useful equipment in its use? The peasant woman wears her shoes in the field. Only here are they what they are. They are all the more genuinely so, the less the peasant woman thinks about the shoes while she is at work, or looks at them at all, or is even aware of them. That is how shoes actually serve. It is this process of the use of equipment that we must actually encounter the character of equipment...²⁷

The nature of equipment is that when in use it all but disappears into the goals or ends to which it is being put. Heidegger is not an idealist; things, especially equipment are material entities — and their concrete features serve as some sort of a determinant to the use to which they can be put. This can be demonstrated with reference to the above example — the hammer. Should the object be to drive nails an orange will not do. The materiality of a hammer, its design according to the law of levers, its iron head, its well-attached and strong wooden handle all serve to make the hammer a reliable piece of equipment for the task at hand.

The equipmental quality of the equipment consists indeed in its usefulness. But this usefulness itself rests in the abundance of an essential being of that equipment. We call it reliability.²⁸

²⁶Ibid. Being and Time. p. 99.

²⁷Ibid. Poetry... p. 33.

²⁸Ibid p. 34

In other words, the materiality, what Heidegger will call "earth" is a grounding for equipment and lends to equipment the latter's usefulness — its "reliability."

Heidegger's exploration is not limited to just equipment. He also inquires into the nature of art. In the same essay he poses the question: "what is the thingly nature of art?" — what is art as a thing? A crucial distinction emerges between equipment and art as things. Of the former he writes:

Because it is determined by usefulness and servicability, equipment takes into its service that of which it consists: the matter. In fabricating equipment — e. g., an axe — stone is used, and used up. It disappears into usefulness. The material is all the better and more suitable the less it resists perishing in the equipmental being of the equipment.²⁹

Something else "takes place" in a work of art. The materiality, "earth" does not disappear. To the contrary something quite the opposite obtains. In the poem word is revealed *as* word, in sculpture stone "stands forth" as stone in all its texture and luster, so too does tone reverberate as tone in music, colour in painting. This explains the "thingly" nature of the work of art, but what is accomplished by the work that goes into the work of art?

The work belongs, as work, uniquely within the realm that is opened up by itself. For the work-being of the work is present in, and only in, such opening up. We said that in the work a happening of truth is at work.³⁰

What then is at work in the work of art?

...Towering up within itself, the work opens up a *world* and keeps it abidingly in force.

To be a work means to set up a world.³¹

What appears are exactly the "concrete" attributes. These concrete attributes are what Heidegger calls earth. But, by means of acting upon earth the world is set forth, for that is what Heidegger believes a work of art is for. The way that a world is set forth is by the "truth" that is "at work in the work."

Truth is at work in the work because of the way the world is revealed — which is through a "striving" relationship with the earth. The striving to create a world in face of the resistance of the concrete attributes of earth (paintings do not paint themselves, a body must learn discipline to create "art" in the sense of something expressive and made) that the truth of the work is revealed. The truth is tied up

²⁹Ibid. p. 46.

³⁰Ibid. p. 41.

³¹Ibid. p. 44.

with a world, but what is a world? Heidegger writes:

The world is the self-disclosing openness of the broad paths of simple and essential decisions in the destiny of an historical people. The earth is the spontaneous forthcoming of that which is continually self-secluding and to that extent sheltering and concealing. World and earth are essentially different from one another and yet never separated. The world grounds itself on the earth, and the earth juts through the world. But the relation between world and earth does not wither away into the empty unity of opposites unconcerned with one another. The world, resting upon the earth, strives to surmount it. As self-opening it cannot endure anything closed. The earth, however, tends always to draw the world into itself and keep it there.

The opposition of world and earth is a striving. ...In essential striving, rather, the opponents raise each other into the self-assertion of their natures. ...In the struggle, each opponent carries the other beyond itself. Thus the striving becomes ever more intense as striving, and more authentically what it is.³²

Thus in the work of art the truth is at work to the extent that human doing is always done in a material world which "juts" as limitation; as *vissitude*, resistance — which must be surmounted. And a world is a world only in time and therefore while a world is fashioned it also withdraws and decays ... it loses its "self-sufficiency" or its "self-standing."

One may encounter something of the "Greek World" amid the ruins at Delphi or Corinth — but the world from which these works of art (architecture) emerged is gone now and is only revealed through the art and one's "reading" of it. The "Greek World" is no more — but the works art in which the "truth" of the Greek historical striving with the earth can be appropriated into this, current and different world. What constitutes a world is human agency — but not human agency alone and in isolation from materiality, from earth.

The world, Heidegger contends, is not a static given, nor is it an "objective" — somehow dissociated from human experience or feeling. The world is a verb:

The *world worlds*, and is more fully in being than the tangible and perceptible realm in which we believe ourselves to be at home. The world is never an object that stands before us and can be seen. World is the ever-nonobjective to which we are subject as long as the paths of birth and death, blessing and curse keep us transported into Being. Wherever those decisions of our history that relate to our very being are made, are taken up and abandoned by us, go unrecognized and are rediscovered by new inquiry, there the world worlds. A stone is worldless. Plant and animal likewise have no world; but they belong to the covert throng of a surrounding into which they are linked. The peasant woman...has a world because she dwells in the overtness of beings, of the things that are. Her equipment, in its reliability, gives to this world a necessity and a nearness of its own. By opening up a world, all things gain in their lingering and hastening, their remoteness and nearness, their scope and limits.³³

³²Ibid. pp. 48-9.

³³Ibid. pp. 44-5.

In this sense the world is also something that resists, that facilitates, that encompasses and that denies. The world then provides the lived and dynamic context for human historical being.

Toward the end of his life Heidegger further developed his thinking about things. In this later period a thing emerged as a "gathering." The notion of thing as gathering is implied in the thinker's earlier explorations of things as art and as equipment. When equipment disappeared into the totality of relations it also appeared as a gathering of those relations. And the work of art, while revealing the "truth" of the striving between earth and world, simultaneously suggested a gathering of the dynamics between work, world and earth. In Heidegger's later work these notions receive another elaboration. No longer thinking about equipment or art, Heidegger explores those "essents" that are often thought as "merely" being there: a bridge, a jug. These explorations render the "fourfold" constitution of things.

The "fourfold" structure of things is discussed in two essays: "What are Poets For?" and "Dwelling, Building, Thinking." At this point Heidegger's language is poetic and compressed. The fourfold that make up things are "mortals," "earth," "sky," and the "gods." The four are co-constituting, neither is genuinely what it is with out the other three. When the four are present in any thing, that is to say when a thing is experienced as the site of the co-constitution of the four, then the thing things.

Heidegger emphasizes "mortality" as a key feature of human being. This thought appears early in Heidegger's work and receives a full technical development in Being and Time. Because humans know death as death, i.e., as that which each must encounter as one's own death — they experience the inevitability of their own finitude. By appropriating the inevitability of their own finitude humans also experience the potential finitude of all other things, the finitude of their world. From this apprehension of one's own finitude and the finitude of the things care emerges. Care, or *besorgen*, contends Heidegger, is the feature that makes humans *human*. In this apprehension men discover the place in their hearts to love what is to be loved and cared for: their fellowmen, children, the absent and the ancestors, the yet unborn. And this caring relation and relatedness expands to encompass the entirety of being. Here man as mortal parts with his self-affirming individuality and encounters the self as moving in time toward an end, but moving in and through a relatedness.

The sky presents a problem. In what way can the sky be said to be a part of a thing? At first glance "sky" seems to imply time — the passing of day and night, the coming and passing of the seasons. Time

does play a significant role in an interpretation of "sky," but this reading does not exhaust the implications Heidegger assigns to the "sky." The broader implication of this metaphor can be developed with the aid of Heidegger's discussion of a bridge in "Dwelling, Building, Thinking."

Heidegger notes that the bridge's pylons can withstand all the conditions that the originate from the sky — be it the gentle flow of the stream or the torrential flow of spring floods. These aspects of the weather cannot be controlled, they can only be anticipated.

There are things over which one has no control, the vicissitudes of life, the unpredictabilities of fortune good or bad. But fortune appears *as* fortune only when events and vicissitudes appear *related to* projects or intentions — then one can say that the turn of events either facilitated, hindered or helped, or forboded ill. Thus the sky appears as the unknown and uncalled-for occurrences and events for which one might prepare but which one is not in power to control. In a sense, the sky represents that to which one must adjust one's "manipulatory sphere," in anticipation of which one must plan.

The earth, discussed above at length, represents the materiality of the environment. The earth is that which must be incorporated into all human striving, and without which human being cannot be.

Finally, perhaps the most problematic of the fourfold — the gods. Again Heidegger provides a clue. He notes that mortals look to the sky for the gods — especially when mortals suffer the inclemency of the weather or the effects of misfortune. Another clue is provided by an exclusion in Heidegger's discourse. Where is culture in the fourfold? To be sure, culture is assumed in the notion of world. Culture does have a place in Heidegger's thought; it appears compressed into the notion of the gods.³⁴

The gods serve a two-fold function in the thinking about the thing. On the one hand they represent a compression of those highlights, archetypes or categories of a culture by which people organize the flow of experience and assign it various significances. The gods emerge as models or cultural categories. In an age of nihilism (much of Heidegger's thought is a sustained discussion with Nietzsche) the poets — by singing of the gods, the artists who create — create not only "mere" works of art but also create culture by which the parameters for social meaning are set. By embodying the value judgements the gods embody

³⁴For a similar interpretation of the gods, but with reference to the role of the gods in poetry, see: Wallace Stevens, "One or Two Things About Poetry" in S. Sears and G. W. Lord eds. *The Discontinuous Universe: Essays on Modern Consciousness*. (New York: Basic Books, 1972)pp. 104-114.

the specifics of culture cast in transcendent and amplified terms. On the other hand, the gods also embody the relatedness of cultural man, world, sky and earth. The gods also reveal man to man *as* man. The gods are revealed in language — and it is in language, argues Heidegger, that the humanity of man is revealed. Language, by ordering reality, carries within it the potential and kinetic elements of culture. Language thus contains an account of the possible *modes*, the "how" of human interrelatedness in and with the world. This "how" which is given in language is again the sphere of the poets who "sing of the gods in a destitute time."

Thus a thing, anything made or anything that is comprised of the co-constituting of the mortals, the earth, sky and the gods. A thing "things" and the world "worlds" to the extent to which the foursome are given over to experience in thing or world.

In Heidegger's thought things are unities of human action, willing, doing and being; culture in the sense of that which provides an account of what is good and bad, what is whole and what is not, what is loved and what is repudiated; materiality as resistance and accommodation; and exigency, the future which emerges as future when there is a project — a future which cannot be known or controlled but can and must be anticipated.

Of particular importance to this thesis is Heidegger's insistence on the necessity to try to think about the "things themselves" even if — or precisely *because* — things are not "themselves." Things are not isolated material substrata, but rather are a unity of human agency, culture, projects and exigencies, and *matter*. When one considers products as media of communication or as fetishes one implies that there is something to the product which has a real effect on human life. In this sense what is being said is that things "thing." And to the extent that things thing the world worlds.

Walter Benjamin.

The significance of Walter Benjamin's thought to this thesis is two-fold. First Benjamin provides an account of the impact of mechanical reproduction on art. Benjamin is referring to art in the sense of "high" art. While the thesis does not deal with such art, the interrelationships between art and design make Benjamin's observations useful; Industrial design is an aspect of an "instrumental aesthetics" and the relationship to art is implied. Secondly, Benjamin's observations about the impact of the dissemination of

art on the "masses" has implications in the discussion of the the culture of appropriation — or, put another way, on the culture of consumption. Benjamin's insistence that the changes in art due to mechanical reproduction should be viewed as carrying progressive and regressive moments is very important for any discussion of consumption in the "mass age."

In Benjamin's view mechanical reproduction on the one hand takes something away from art; art loses its "aura." This is similar to Heidegger's notion that things produced for mass consumption are characterized by their content which is "substitutability" or "ersatz." Where Benjamin and Heidegger differ is in their evaluation of the implication of the "loss of aura." From Benjamin's perspective, while art loses its aura it also becomes accessible to more people. As such it could heighten people's critical reception of art, and thereby politicize art. This is a progressive moment. However, Benjamin is also aware that art in the age of mechanical reproduction can also play a regressive role in that it can distract people from social consciousness. But, even in this distraction, there can be a positive moment in which people learn and adapt to new situations in preparation for action. Art can also be used in an oppressive way — it can be used to mislead people, or direct their energies to destructive ends as is the case with Fascist art. In these ways the power of art as affective communication is stressed and considered from that point of view which refuses a static model, and rather emphasizes the contradictions in events and the significance of historical developments.

Benjamin begins his discussion of the effects of mechanical reproduction on art by noting that there are two ways in which mechanical reproduction changes art. The first way is that the "aura" of a work of art is lost. The second is that mechanical reproduction facilitates a potential for a new, more critical evaluation of art. He writes that with the new technologies, photography and film, "art meets the masses halfway."

Mechanical reproduction necessarily detaches art from its roots in tradition. Art, writes Benjamin, originates in tradition, specifically in cult and in ritual.

[T]he technique of reproduction detaches the reproduced object from the domain of tradition. By making many reproductions it substitutes a plurality of copies for the unique existence. And in permitting the reproduction to meet the beholder or listener in his own particular situation, it reactivates the object reproduced. These two processes lead to tremendous shattering of tradition which is the obverse of the contemporary crisis and renewal of mankind.³⁵

³⁵Walter Benjamin, Illuminations. (Ed. Hannah Arendt. Trans. Larry Zohn. New York:

The crisis and renewal of mankind to which Benjamin is alluding is the crisis of the loss of older systems of meaning and the emergence of new, hopefully liberating systems for meaning and social organization.

The aura of a work of art is a function of a kind of distance between the work and the recipient. Benjamin illustrates what he means here by describing aura as the experience of mountains seen at a distance, or the experience of a shadow cast by a branch on a summer afternoon. Both experiences are absolutely unique and can never be described in their particularity to anyone, nor can they be reproduced. The experiences join mood, time, place and individual: the "moment" is unique.

Prior to the emergence of mechanical reproduction the same obtains in art. The aura that surrounded or emanated from art was a function of a similar type of distance. Benjamin points out that art originates in cult or ritual. As something in the service of cult art need not be accessible to the public for it to possess this aura. Indeed, Benjamin suggests that the work can be kept in a secret place and available only to the viewing or contemplation of a specialist group, such as a priestly class. The implication is that art has the capacity to function as a focus for social energies. But, since the work is in the hands of a group of specialists, it is used by them in their interests.

The other use of art where its aura is emphasized is the sphere of exhibition. Exhibition value is secular but class based. Again, as in the case of cult, the aura of the work is based on its absolute originality, and that it exists as something to which only some have access. Again art appears as a form of communication that serves one group at the expense of a larger group. With the coming of mechanical reproduction art changes its social role, and something in the nature of art itself changes too. These two, cult and exhibition, are the two forms of valuations that are given art before the advent of mechanical reproduction. As regards art after the advent of mechanical reproduction

....its fitness for exhibition increased to such an extent that the quantitative shift between its two poles turned into a qualitative transformation of its nature.³⁶

With mechanical reproduction the exhibition value of a work of art expands. More people can have more access to more art. Now, with photography, radio and film, all varieties of the fine arts, music, theatre are available. The distance implied in the exclusive control of art by a small group evaporates. The

³⁵(cont'd) Schocken Books, 1969) p. 221

³⁶Ibid. p. 225.

qualitative change occurs in the mode in which distance works in art.

The impact of this change is that since there is more access to art everyone can potentially become an expert. While Benjamin is referring specifically to film this can be expanded to cover the arts in general. The more reproductions of paintings are available the more people see them, the more people will become aware of the possibilities of the arts — and more people will be able to function as experts.

Benjamin contends that the generalization of art is desired by the masses. The masses desire to bring everything that is distant closer. There is a desire to overcome uniqueness as uniqueness denotes exclusivity, and the masses want access. With generalized access an increase in critical awareness develops. In other words the familiarity generates a critical stance. This general access then moves art into the realm of political concerns as art is no longer reliant on its "parasitical" relationship with cult. Mechanical reproduction of art thus ushers in a progressive moment; it politicizes art and enables the masses to respond progressively to it. Benjamin writes:

... progressive reaction is characterized by the direct, intimate fusion of visual and emotional enjoyment with the orientation of the expert.³⁷

What is central here is that a distinction between enjoyment and critical ability is achieved and simultaneously fused. Art, to encourage this revolutionary function, must work to distance the viewer or receiver in this way.

Distance again appears but a distance which is different from that which informed the aura of the work of art. The latter was a kind of "mystification," the former a kind of "contestation." What must be overcome is the contemplative mode of reception. Art must be appropriated and evaluated.

This latter point is driven home by Benjamin in the epilogue to the essay. Here he discusses the role of art under Fascism. Here art is appropriated into politics and into war. In the hands of Fascism art becomes an aesthetization of politics: an example of instrumental aesthetics. Art is used to oppress or redirect social energies to destructive ends. Communism, on the other hand, makes art political; but here too an instrumental aesthetics appears, except that the ends are not war and destruction but the reconstruction of the world. In Benjamin's discourse art emerges as a potent political force or device.

³⁷Ibid. p. 234.

Benjamin's reflections on the effect of architecture on the education of people are of particular interest to this thesis. He writes that various art forms come and go

But the human need for shelter is lasting. Architecture has never been idle. Its history is more ancient than that of any other art, and its claim to being a living force has significance in every attempt to comprehend the relationship of the masses to art. Buildings are appropriated in a twofold manner: by use and by perception — or rather, by touch and sight. Such appropriation cannot be understood in terms of the attentive concentration of a tourist before a famous building. On the tactile side there is no counterpart to contemplation on the optical side. Tactile appropriation is accomplished not so much by attention as by habit. As regards architecture, habit determines to a large extent even optical reception. The latter, too, occurs much less through rapt attention than by noticing the object in incidental fashion.³⁸

Here Benjamin is pointing out the importance of architecture as a didactic art form. While Benjamin is referring specifically to architecture his observations can be extended to cover the microarchitecture of everyday life — the world of goods. No less so are Benjamin's observations about the generalization of art applicable to the thesis, for as will be seen below, it is exactly the "artistic" element of the world of goods that has undergone the greatest development since the end of the Second World War.

Benjamin's observations on the operationalization of art as an instrumental aesthetic or a form of affective communication will also play a major role in this thesis.

Summation.

A number of themes drawn from these sources inform the following three chapters below. Benjamin's observations about the generalization of art in the age of mechanical reproduction informs the discussion of consumer culture and the role played by aesthetic considerations within it. Heidegger's discussion of the nature of things as gatherings and the notion that art serves to establish a world will underscore the discussion of the industrial design cultures and concerns. And Nietzsche's discussion of possessions and the desire for renewal, along with his observations of the relationship between power, taste and social signification, will provide a framework for the discussion of fashion.

³⁸*Ibid.* p. 240.

CHAPTER III

CONSUMPTION AS A CREATIVE PRACTICE.

"For of course things are in themselves inert. They come alive in the context of human social interactions, but not merely as passive adjuncts or decorative accompaniments to them; rather, it is as if things themselves are alive and vivify social interactions..."

William Leiss.

1. Culture of Appropriation.

In the broadest sense consumer culture and society are informed by "appropriation."

Appropriation is a useful term because it implies possession. Many possessions are not "consumed" in the sense of being entirely used up: This is the case particularly with "durable" goods — cars, dishwashers, telephones, books, recordings and so on. These things can be used up, but this process takes place over longer durations of time.

There is another dimension to the term "appropriation" that makes it a useful in an effort to account for current consumption practices. Appropriation can also imply the experience of interpretation. This notion is derived from Ricoeur, who suggests that any encounter with a text or "discourse" is to arrive at an "appropriation." The appropriation that is derived from such an encounter with a text enables the reader to experience the meaning of the text as part of his/her own self. The meaning of the text is made "one's own." In this model the meaning of the text sheds light on one's own life and situation. This formulation bears a structural resemblance to Nietzsche's formulation of possession: that the thing possessed becomes a part of what one is — which is why he says that tiring of a possession is tiring of oneself.

In the former case of appropriation the reference is to texts. In the latter the reference is to anything whatsoever. Under current conditions in market industrial societies the two categories coincide. A key feature of capitalist society is the commoditization of increasingly large spheres of human life. Concomitantly, under the division of labour and the commercial imperative goods are designed and produced so that they will appeal. All this only expresses the two sides of industrial design as a concern with "signification — "affective communication"—and a concern with "reliability" or the applicability of the designed thing to the function that it is supposed to serve. In this sense design of various kinds is engaged in an instrumental aesthetics.

Leiss captures the sense of this when he notes that the consumer in capitalist societies is confronted with a vast array of messages (that is, goods designed and presented to be communicators). Put another way one might say that the consumer is confronted by a vast array of texts which are made available (through acquisition) for appropriation. This is what Douglas and Isherwood have in mind when they discuss goods and consumer practices as an exchange of names; comparisons about goods as experiences. What is exchanged are observations about the affective and effective qualities of goods: one hears about what people have tried, liked, disliked, what worked well and what didn't. Here Benjamin's observations about architecture as art are very useful. Reception is both tactile and according to use and at the same time it is perceptual and visual. One makes use of and one sees, or, by extension, one is seen. Affective articulation is an important aspect of design. Like architecture, the world of goods is subject to design and to art. As will be seen in the following chapter, design as a practice is very much in keeping with the definition of art offered by Geertz above — design of objects for everyday use employs social metaphors, and does so self-consciously. The objects of design are "embodied ideas." Designed objects are affectively articulated.

There is yet one more dimension to this "appropriation." Since goods are more readily available, and since there is a greater variety of goods, the "masses" more readily develop a critical appreciation of goods. This attested to by various consumer groupings and the various consumer publications. It also explains the notion that often things are thrown away with much useful life left in them — people become bored of things and seek out new products. Also, new products may hold people's attention for a while, but, as with Heidegger's "equipment," these goods soon merge into the everyday reality. The things get "lost" into the totality, which is what utilities tend to do.

From this perspective it seems that instrumental aesthetics are employed to both "aestheticize" the world of goods, and through the continual innovation which is an important feature of commercial culture, to subvert the appropriation of goods.

2. Promises of the Culture of Consumption.

Consumer culture can be characterized as the cultivation of personal and social expectations around goods and services available through the marketplace. Under current conditions in affluent societies the marketplace assumes a primary role in everyday life. Most people's needs, wants and their satisfactions are mediated through the marketplace.

In the past other institutions played a key role in setting out morals, values and instruction about the meaning of things and human interactions with and through them. Capitalism subverts the role played by these older or "residual" traditions or institutions. Religions, communities, families, and class affiliations continue to generate and manage meaning but are either subordinated to, or are in tension with, the productive or consumptive logics of the industrialized marketplace and its social relations.

Promise of Well-Being.

Consumer culture offers a promise. This is a promise of access to happiness and well being for all; access by means of the marketplace. This promise is carried by media technologies, programmes and institutions of the "cultural dominant" or "hegemonic norm."¹ While messages about consumption and its promises circulate throughout most of the programming of the "mass media," advertising is the format which carries the specifically oriented messages through most of the public media. Much of what is said here about the contours of consumer culture is derived from the way in which consumer culture is represented in advertising.

The promise grounding consumer culture is that everything is accessible or, at least, available if there are adequate resources. The promise suggests that anyone can transcend the particularities of his/her current condition and biography through a creative appropriation and use of goods and services proffered by the market. By appropriation of commodities the past can be transcended; past inadequacies can be rectified, current problems can be ameliorated. This promise appears to be close to the "achievement

¹Hegemony refers to a state of general social dominance wherein an alliance of groups or classes set out the basic social agenda. Jameson writing on contemporary "mass" culture characterizes it as the hegemonic norm, or the cultural dominant. See F. Jameson. "Postmodernism and Consumer Society" The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays on Postmodern Culture (Ed. Hal Foster. Port Townsend: Bay Press, 1983) pp. 111-26.

ideology" which, as Featherstone suggests, pervades the hegemonic norm.

Achievement Ideology.

The achievement ideology, as Featherstone describes it, suggests that an incremental growth in assets and preferred experiences expresses the worth of a person. Furthermore, implied in this ideology is the notion that this worth can be expressed through the "cultivation and stylistic presentation of self and a distinct lifestyle." ² Expression here is meant as a self expression through the medium of goods or commodities assembled into a coded and personal world of goods.

Consumer society is intractably tied to the city. To a great extent, it has been argued, this form of communication by products is an effect of urban anonymity. Urban life, at least in North American cities, has been characterized by its anonymity. Everyday life is made up of fewer sustained encounters and participation in Others' biographies. Encounters are often fleeting and appearances — and the ability to read appearances — are important aspects of much urban life and culture. This theme is developed by the Ewens' in their discussion of fashion, and is underscored by Hannerz's discussions of the fluidity of urban encounters. ³ In urban life often recognition and encounter, association or rejection proceed mediated by expressive appearances.

The expression of the worth of a public self is the degree to which the person has access to resources. The primary form of resources in capitalist societies is money. But this value is hard to communicate as such — for, at base, it is an abstraction. However money can be transformed into various designed and expressive products. These products can then be organized into a commodious and communicative compartmental surround. ⁴

²Michael Featherstone. "Consumer Culture: An Introduction." (*T. C. S.* Vol. 1, No. 3, 1983) pp. 4-10.

³Ulf Hannerz devised an anthropological methodology for studying life in urban settings. The method was based on observation of the roles, relations and situational contexts in which the roles and relations appear. This method is based on a response to the "fluidity" of life in the city. I am indebted to Hannerz's typifications on which, to some extent, my own formulation of the sphere of personal possessions as parts of a "comportmental surround" is based. See Ulf Hannerz. *Exploring the City: Inquiries Toward an Urban Anthropology.* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1980)

⁴By this term is meant the sphere of goods that are immediate to the person and form the personal material environment. They might be broken down into four areas: body, habitation,

Current Practices: Identity and Preference.

The current literature on consumer practices suggests that consumption takes place "under the sign of the group." In this context goods express social status. By status is understood a relative social positioning expressed as identification and differentiation from others. This reflects the current "fragmentation of the market" into taste groupings or lifestyles. Identification, and often entry into such a grouping, is predicated upon the assemblage of a coded comportmental surround which corresponds to the parameters established within these taste groupings. Coding can run through the gambit of products or objects from clothing, adornment, furnishings to places of habitation, recreation and forms and objects of leisure.

Due to the diversity of designed objects and goods and codes, consumption – when buoyed by adequate resources — appears as a "creative" practice. It must be noted that this is a recent phenomenon. In the past only elites engaged in consumption practices that could have been called creative, affectively oriented, or even artistic. With changes in certain aspects of social conditions, particularly the hard won expansion of resource availability and leisure time, the practices associated with these elites have been generalized into broader sections of the population.

In what follows the social history of consumer culture will be explored. First the social setting and larger social and historical dynamics that facilitated this culture's creation will be examined. Secondly the role played by goods in these developments will be discussed.

3. Social History

The Making of Consumer Society

The making of modern consumer society was a complex historical process, and to do anything but set out a schematic treatment would not be possible. The literature is already sizable and rapidly growing as more and more disciplines begin to focus on the role played by the person/thing intermediation in this society.

⁴(cont'd) transportation, and recreation.

Four major historical dynamics converged over the period of approximately two centuries to create the conditions necessary to sustain a consumer society and the culture which informs it. These dynamics were to no small degree co-constituting. Neither industrialization, nor urbanization, nor for that matter improvements in transportation or similar improvement in communication can wholly account for or determine the development of the other three. Therefore the order under which they are considered below is arbitrary.

Industrialization.

From the middle of the 17th century capital, progress in technics and the division of labour paved the way to an industrial or productive capacity such as was never before imaginable. Industrialization required a large, mobile, predictable and reliable work force. Secondly, as productive capacity continued to increase and informed by a maximization logic, the need for large markets grew in tandem with industrial development. A class was necessary to fulfill the productive and consumptive logics generated by marriage of capital and machine.

Urbanization.

The growth of cities provided concentration of market and productive potential. Urban centers also provided a totally unique lifeworld for many of the new-urbanites – many of whom came to the cities from the countryside in search of work. This meant separation from the older material cultures that these people had known in village, rural and agricultural settings. More significantly this led to a separation from the material basis for much of an older cultural structure that was predicated on communities and kinships.

In the urban centres these newly arrived people had to adapt to the productive logic of capitalism. Life for many new urban dwellers meant a loss of self-sufficiency. Schudson reports that in the late 1700s 90% of all clothing was made in the home, but by the late 1800s 80% of all men's clothing was store bought and the women's was usually home made on store bought sewing machines and patterns.⁵

⁵New England tailor Butterick started the "pattern" trade in America in the latter half of the 19th century. see: Stuart Ewen and Elizabeth Ewen. Channels of Desire: Mass Images and the Shaping of American Consciousness. (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1982) pp. 203-8.

Transportation.

Not only did improvements in transportation facilitate an increase in general mobility, but they served to systematize international trade. Better transportation served as a facilitator for emigrations to the new world and greatly helped the expansion of national markets.

Improved transportation opened hitherto isolated communities to new ideas and an increasing circulation of commodities.⁶

Communication.

By the 1700s the press was already making an impact on society.⁷ By the mid 1800s colour images could be produced en masse, and as Ewen's have argued, these images were to play a significant role in the making of consumer culture.⁸ By the 20th century first film, then radio and then television were to expand the range of communication media available to people. Their development also provided a new and vital outlet for the commercial culture that was to begin to flourish concomitantly with the development of the conditions that facilitated growing consumption.

4. Consumption as Cultural Context.

A consumer culture of a sort was well entrenched among first the aristocracy and then, following the "Atlantic Revolution," by the growing numbers of the bourgeoisie.⁹

⁶Sears of Sears Catalogue fame began by working for the railway. The implications of the Sears Catalogue are discussed by: John Heskett, Industrial Design, (Oxford University Press, 1980) pp. 60-2. and, for a fuller and highly pertinent discussion see William Leiss, S. Kline and S. Jhally Social Communication in Advertising, (Toronto: Methuen Books, forthcoming, 1985) pp. 106-12.

⁷A useful discussion of the origins of the daily press and its ties to financing and trade is to be found in: H.A. Innis Empire and Communications, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1972) pp. 146-7.

⁸Ewens, Channels... pp. 169-82.

⁹By "Atlantic Revolution" are meant three revolutions which were to have a substantial, if not a determining impact, on the making of the modern world: the Industrial, American and French Revolutions.

With the Atlantic Revolution the commercial imperative took a larger role in the production of goods which were themselves increasingly in demand. With larger importation of tea and coffee, for example, came an increasing demand for porcelain. With a growing social mobility more people wanted goods that would enable them to present themselves as part of this social mobility. Hence the success of Sheffield plate and similar forms of goods production. It may have been difficult to express one's mobility, and thereby one's worth, with money (it displays poorly and invites certain dangers — robbery, for example), but its translation into goods provided a very adequate medium for expression of one's persona and social identity.

By the last quarter of the 19th century significant changes began to take place in actual buying and selling. Department stores were born and so was "shopping." As Chaney notes, these changes were to have a transformative impact on the dimensions and contours of the public dramaturgy that had characterized urban public life previously.¹⁰

Goods sold by anonymous clerks, who themselves knew little about the goods they were selling, appeared as anonymous commodities. The first department store owners on both sides of the Atlantic realized this and an emphasis was put on store or merchandise display. The early department stores were designed to appear as "palaces of consumption"; in the context of these stores, observes Chaney, the "goods appeared as *goods*." With the department stores, and the changes that were slowly entering the whole sphere of selling, emerged packaging. Goods no longer appeared in bulk, but now were represented in an envelope that was to enhance their significance. Just so, packaging and the graphic arts associated with it would begin to grow in importance at about this period.

The turn of the century also saw the rise of brand-name goods. The world of goods represented an expanding and perhaps perplexing sphere of desire for the new urban dwellers. Leiss et al., Schudson, Ewen and others seem to agree that these people felt dislocated and uncertain. Branded goods, besides playing a crucial role in the conflict over control of the market between producers and distributors, were to provide a certain sense of stability to the world of goods for the new consumers. Schudson has written that the branded good offered people some security in the expanding marketplace.

¹⁰D. Chaney. "The Department Store as Cultural Form" (Theory, Culture and Society Vol. 1, No. 3) pp. 22-32.

Where buying replaced making, then looking replaced doing as a key social action, reading signs replaced following orders as a crucial modern skill. Shorthands for expression and signification became more and more desirable and useful for urbanites; manufacturers exploited the desires of people for social location and identity with the production of "brand name" goods.....

In a mobile society, commercial products with familiar names provide people with some sense of identity and continuity in their lives....¹¹

Overall, increasing energy was given over to the "art of selling." In short a commercial art was being born. For this art to flourish what was needed was a wide market, mass consumption, to which such an art could be directed.

Derealization of Old Traditions

A number of significant changes had to take place before mass consumption could become the setting of everyday life. First there had to be a significant increase in the amount of disposable income available to people. Along with income there had to be an increase in the amount of leisure time. In short more people had to have a greater access to more resources. Secondly older forms of "local knowledge" and traditional codes that emphasized saving and self-sufficiency had to be eradicated or subverted. More significantly, these older "discourses through and about objects" had to be replaced with new ones that were predicated upon consumption and the acquisition of the emerging products of industry. People had to be encouraged to take part in the consumption game.

Ewen has argued that the extension of consumption as a way of life was a direct response on the part of industrialists who sought on the one hand sought to mollify worker unrest and, on the other, to incorporate labour into the productive-consumptive logic of industry. Thus "shorter hours and higher wages" were introduced. Baumann has argued a similar point but he puts it a little differently. Baumann contends that the extension of access to resources was a compensation for the loss of self and bodily control to the machine logic that the labouring masses encountered in the factories. Either way, the upshot is that "consumerism" was a device to offset continual labour unrest.

Ewen argues that in the 1920s commercial culture began to work self-consciously on "individual and community desire." However the impact of movies and the "star" system, the popular press, and the urban landscape — and the role of designed commodities, goods as media of communication — cannot be

¹¹M. Schudson. Advertising, The Uneasy Persuasion: Its Dubious Impact on American Society. (New York: Basic Books, Inc., Publishers., 1984) p. 157.

underplayed. None of this is to suggest some sort of a conspiracy theory. It is however to suggest that under the new conditions that people encountered in urban centres and the workplace they did experience a sense of loss or disjunction from familiar settings and "rules for order." This sense of loss runs throughout the discourse on the making of consumer culture.

5. Adaptation.

Given that objects and things form the substratum for the construction of reality, the new social conditions were characterized by an emergent and novel world of goods. The world and its ontic lifescape were altered. The old basis for social life, both in terms of the means and relations of production and the culture that had grounded these, had begun to disappear ever more quickly. Reality in the new urban centers was marked by anonymity and fluidity. And, as for the goods themselves, these were much like signs divorced from the context that made them comprehensible. Or, following Geertz's discursive model, goods became like sentences that were divorced from a discourse, much like the snippets of conversation one hears when passing through the crowded streets of a city.

Commercial Culture and the Management of Meaning.

The role to be played by commercial art and culture was in the order of the management of meaning. This is the logical conclusion to be drawn from Ewen's work. More than just informing people what to buy, commercial art and culture, both embodied in marketing practices, had to provide a larger discourse about the social construction of reality and its specific relationship to the substratum: to the world of goods.

Leiss *et al* note that with increasing technical innovation things themselves, their purposes and benefits, could no longer be easily ascertained through just the senses. They quote Jackson Lears, who suggests that a sense of "unreality" was experienced by the urban populations in their new urban environment.¹² With the erosion of social group supports for personal identity, he notes, the generation and maintenance of selfhood was to become a lifetime task. Lears ascribes these developments as the origin of the "therapeutic ethos," a variation of achievement ideology, except where the former is a

¹²Leiss *et al.* pp. 102-3.

defensive strategy, the latter is an offensive one. Indeed the therapeutic ethos may well have served as the forerunner to the achievement ideology of the present day. Leiss *et al* write that:

Market economy in the process of becoming predominate unravels and discards not only specific things, habitual routines, and norms but also the integument holding them together, the sense of collective identity or fate.¹³

What held these together, the sense of collective identity and fate, having been subverted, created a void. Something had to step into the void created by the loss of older systems of meaning. This something, as noted earlier, would be, in part, advertising.

Advertising was to play a key role in this process. When the adverting practices of the 1920s are considered, then it is easy to say that advertising played the role of a meta-language described by Lefebvre. Lefebvre has discussed the process whereby older systems of meaning have been lost under the rubric of the "loss of referentials."

...[S]igns derive specific meaning from a context... [F]or there to be a denotative function there must be a referential context which provides a specificity for the sign... "referentials."

These referentials had a logical or commonsensical unity derived from material production (euclidian three-dimensional space, clock time), from the concept of nature, historical memory, the city and the environment or from generally accepted ethics and aesthetics.

However, around the years 1905-10 the referentials broke down one after another under the influence of various pressures (science, technology, social changes). Common sense and reason lost their unity and finally disintegrated; the "common sense" concept of absolute reality disappeared and a new perceptible "real" world was substituted or added to the reality of "well informed" perception, while functional, technical objects took the place of traditional objects. In 1910, in fact, the reign of electricity began with electric lights, electric signals, and objects operated by electricity and this important innovation affected not only industrial production, it invaded everyday life, altering the relation of night and day and the perception of outlines. But this was not by any means the only innovation; there were others perhaps more significant and if we have singled out electricity it is mainly for its symbolic value.¹⁴


Concomitant with this development, argues Lefebvre, came an increase in "meta-language" or language about language, which sought to reinstate the lost referentials. Advertising of this period seems to be consistent with this increase of "metalanguage" — the advertising was made up of a great deal of textual explanation. Today advertising proceeds mainly by images. There has been a shift in the kinds of messages sent out by commercial culture. In Pollay's terms, the shift has been from informational to

¹³Ibid. p. 508

¹⁴Henri Lefebvre. Everyday Life in the Modern World. (Trans. S. Rabinovitch. New York: Torchbooks, Harper and Row, 1971) p. 112.

transformational.¹⁵ What is of particular interest to this thesis is what Leiss *et al.* suggest can be said about the nature of the person/thing intermediation by recourse to the history of advertising.

Cultural Frames for Goods.

 Advertising reveals the historical changes and something of the ways people interact with goods — and they way people interact with each other ~~through~~ the media of goods. This suggests that the "discourse through and about things" is at one and the same time something of a discourse about people. This indicates that the interrelationship between people through their interrelationships with designed objects and goods is not static but given over to historical and social changes.

As the earlier review of literature indicated, goods are media of communication. They have always communicated man's relatedness to the world and Others. But under the conditions that developed concomitantly with the modern world this relatedness was unclear. The messages of advertising reveal the manner that the relatedness of people and things — or, put another way, the manner of things' referentiality — were thought to be. While it can be argued that this "thought to be" refers only to what marketers thought goods to be, it must also be noted that in order to present a good, the presentation had to be contextualized in a manner understandable and acceptable to the people for which it was thus being presented.

Thus in advertising messages are revealed the contours of the cultural frames for goods. This is to say that the forms of relatedness and referentiality are shown. These frames have been shown to move through four periods. While there are significant changes in the articulations of advertising messages, this does not suggest that with the appearance of one the previous forms ceased to be employed. Rather, each form became consolidated around specific ranges of goods and services.¹⁶ Leiss, Kline and Jhally set out four periods in the historical development of advertising messages and the cultural frames for goods that

¹⁵These terms are drawn from R. Pollay who suggests, based on empirical research on advertising formats, that advertising has moved from selling goods and services by extolling their properties (informational) to formats aimed at altering attitudes towards brands, expenditure patterns, lifestyles, and techniques for achieving personal and social success (transformational). See Leiss *et al.* pp. 73-4.

¹⁶This implies an interesting future study: exactly to which kinds of goods did various forms adhere and why: further what can be said about the relevant goods and the meanings ascribed them within society.

these messages imply.

1.

Up until the 1920s North American advertising messages sought to reinforce old values. The tone reflected a reasoned approach to selling. Emphasis was on product integrity and the utility of its features. The object was an embodied metaphor of the wonder of mechanical production and industrial might.

2.

In the 1920s the language of advertising took on a remonstrating tone. The advertising seemed bent on instructing or shaming the potential buyer into a brand loyalty or consumption pattern. The product was represented as an amelioration of public and social ills. With reference to both of the above the product was figured as a symbol of social mobility under the critical gaze of the social Other. Choice was represented as a response to the social judgement implied in the critical gaze of this disembodied Other. The models that represented the products were figured as members of the class that "looked down" on those who were still learning to consume in the "modern way."

Furthermore the product now embodied the operation of a "white magic." Products were the result of a benign and commodious transformation of nature. Through appropriation the self could be acceptably positioned, and the transformed nature could be brought into one's comportmental surround.

3.

The period following the Second World War introduced another frame for goods. Where the previous period was characterized by messages that were representations of a kind of social coercion, the new period was characterized by an invitation to experimentation.¹⁷ The product was now represented as a conduit or talisman for "black magic" by which the inner self could be transformed. The product was thus a medium for a self-completion which empowered the consumer/owner with the capacity to affect Others. Consumption was presented not as a must but as a maybe: maybe this

¹⁷Byron Ferris. "Annals of Design(3). Boom Years: 1948-1973." (Communication Arts. Vol. 27, No. 2, May/June 1985) pp. 28-38.

and maybe that. The consumer was an experimenter, the range of this experimentation was the range of possible products which differed with reference to price, quality and design. The object was poetized as a channel of attributes. The overall cast was homogeneous. The market was homogeneous, and "keeping up with the Joneses" remained a constituent.

4.

The cultural frame for goods changed once again in the mid seventies. The range of choice now expanded to encompass objects designed with references to cultural and social groupings and sub-groupings. As Leiss *et al* put it, consumption was now represented as taking place "under the sign of the group." The object appears as part of the mise-en-scene occupied by the group. In this sense the object is part of a setting for experiences of interpersonal well-being. Or, in Sahlins' terms, the object appears as a group totem.

Messages and Goods

Advertising reveals four distinct cultural orientations to and in the world of goods. In these framings objects appear first as "objects as such." Then the object appears as a marker of a socio-relational symbolism. In the third phase the object becomes a channel, a mechanism or a talisman. And in the fourth, the object is "enveloped in social groupings."

In terms of the products' communicative "performativity" the first phase suggests that communication was within a social, or more specifically, within a class bounded context.

The product preferred was preferred to a limited number of people: essentially an elite. The product, the embodiment of technologic and economic power was a marker for internal social distinction and display. In the second phase the communicative property of the object now extended to a larger set of people: people who were to become included into the emergent logic of the "American System" of production to be discussed in the following chapter. There was an element of a message being "sent down," the modern version of Norbert Elias's discussion of the change in attitudes in the 17th century when numbers of the bourgeoisie undertook to "raise" the cultural level of the labouring masses by taking them under their tutelage.¹⁸ This corresponds to Ewen's observations about the social role of advertising in

¹⁸Norbert Elias. The History of Manners: The Civilizing Process: Volume 1. (Trans. Edmund Jephcott. New York: Pantheon Books, 1978)

the 1920s.

The next period, the "golden age of advertising," the communicative "performativity" of the object, while remaining social, now flows from the consumer and not down at the consumer. The signification, and the dominant vocabulary is homogeneous. In the last phase, the current one, messages which are part of the object's "performativity" flow now in and between groups. The object as a totem represents groups, embodies their corporate ideals, expresses their allegiances and repudiations.

Throughout this century another dynamic was also increasing playing a role in the nature of the person/thing intermediation. This dynamic not only appears in the advertising messages as an actual thematic, but it is implied in the proliferation of the advertising messages as such. This process or dynamic is fashion.

The term fashion is itself a problematic. Writing at the end of the 19th century, T. Veblen provided an analytic account of fashion based on the notion of competitive display and emulation of upper classes by lower ones. What Veblen had not foreseen was that the processes that he was describing would spread throughout the whole of society and encompass much more than clothing and personal accoutrements. His discussion was based on the notion of "invidious distinction" and "emulative display." In Veblen's time, as suggested by the cultural frame for goods discussed earlier, the fashion process referred to the elites. But, as the cultural frames indicate, the process has "trickled down" to a larger sphere of people and goods. As will be shown in the following chapter, this competitive display and expression of social identification and differentiation by images embodied into appearances, would become an increasingly key dynamic in consumer activities. Furthermore, again on the basis of the cultural frames, and the overall literature on consumer society, it appears that where once there was "Fashion" there are now "fashions."

Fashion is itself based on images and appearances. The thesis will return to the role played by appearances in consumer society and the fashion process in following chapters. However, at this point, again based on current research on the social role of advertising, an insight can be gained on the way images work to "infuse" commodities with meaning.

Consumption: Images and Things.

Leiss observes:

...[T]he extensions of "fashion" consciousness and short-range fads to wider and wider classes of goods, even to the associated characteristics of many durables, continuously broadens the realm of what we consume: we consume the images tied to the objects and often discard the latter with much of their technically-useful life intact.¹⁹

This implies that somehow images or, in terms of industrial design, surfaces or appearances, serve in some way to subvert the usefulness of things. The width of a pair of pants, the ornamentation or sculptural articulation of a couch — at a point in time these can subvert the rest of the product's "reliability," or its "performativity" in the socio-communicative sense. The subversion takes place on the social level — by comparing what one has with what others have. This need not necessarily imply that competition alone lies at the heart of this process. But it certainly does imply that people "look around to see what others are doing" when they make selections while structuring their compartmental surrounds. What is of interest then is the way commercial culture makes use of this.

The image or appearance seems to serve a two-fold function. The continual appearance of new images and appearances seems to debase older ones, but at the same time, the very same images and surfaces affirm the relevance and significance of that which emerges as novel, as acceptable, as desirable. Thus, while fashion systematically divests things of social approval, it at one and the same moment invests other things with the very same approval.

Leiss, Kline and Jhally have argued that the role of advertising is to fuse the subjective wants and aspirations of consumers with the concrete and "imputed" features of the commodities available on the market. They note that consumer society rose out of the "ashes" of older "traditional cultures." What characterized these cultures was a relatively fixed understanding of the ways in which people could and

¹⁹William Leiss. "The Icons of the Market Place." (Theory, Culture and Society. Vol. 7, No. 3, 1983) p. 14.

This is poignantly corroborated by Papanek when he provides a comparative list showing the product lifespan in the United States and the "third world." Papanek notes, for example, that primary useful life span of a bicycle is 25 years. The actual use time in the United States is 2 years while in the "Third World" the use life of a bicycle is 75 years. Band powered tools whose life span is set at 10 years serve for 3 years in the United States before they are exchanged or disposed; in the "Third World" they are required to serve 25 years. These, argues Papanek, are examples of North American "Kleenex Culture." See: Victor Papanek. Design for the Real World: Human Ecology and Social Change. (Toronto: Bantam Books, 1973) pp. 50-1.

might go about deriving life satisfaction. In consumer society, however, these understandings no longer were applicable, and the *individual* was set free to interpret needs and their satisfactions through a "grand experimentation" — a grand experimentation oriented toward the marketplace.

Under these conditions no new "fixed" standard for needs or satisfactions was forthcoming. Instead, especially beginning in the 1920s, the commercial culture, through marketing, proffered

...successive waves of associations between persons, products, and images of well-being — dissolving and recreating an endless series of suggestions about the possible routes to happiness and success.²⁰

The way in which these successive waves were proffered was through images. Indeed, following World War II images and "image management" were increasingly recognized by practitioners of commercial culture as important tools for understanding consumer behaviour. The point of understanding consumer behaviour and the management of images was to "fortify" the product. This meant that commercial culture was seeking a way by which to continually invest new products with social meaning. With reference to the product...

...advertising functions to enhance the physical attributes and their relative importance with respect to how the consumer sees him/herself...essentially providing benefits through the image-creation process.²¹

A number of writers have noted the increase in the social role of images in the spread of modernity. Susan Sontag has written that modern came to mean producing and consuming images.²² The Ewens suggest that modern fashion is strictly tied up with the spread of images — their discussion is focused on the production and distribution of commercial chromolithographs as forerunners of modern advertising. And, the discussion of "images" in the "pathological" dimension of fashion below gives *something* of the role played by images in the critique of consumer culture. But, as will also be argued below, while no adequate account of the fashion process could omit something of its pathological dimension, not everything in the fashion process is pathological. This is demonstrable on the basis of what is known about the social role of advertising.

²⁰Leiss *et al.* p. 410.

²¹*Ibid.* p. 412.

²²S. Sontag. "In Plato's Cave." *On Photography* (New York: Delta Books, 1973) pp. 3-26.

Leiss, Kline and Jhally suggest that imagistic modes of communication are based on analogy or allusion — in this the basic unit of imagistic communication is the metaphor. There are two features that characterize metaphor as a form of transmission: a metaphor "unleashes the power of certain fictions to redescribe reality" (here Leiss *et al* are following Ricoeur), and reception of metaphoric articulation is based on comparison. This is made clear by semiotic theory, which points out that the metaphoric axis represents the possible range of signs that can occupy the same point on the metonymic axis of discourse — but not at the same time. The metaphor, as a fiction, in its particularity as a structure, resembles or evokes other aspects of the world. It does so by association, but at the same time the specific metaphoric relation remains; thus while serving as a starting point for association (Ricoeur says that a symbol gives something to think about) the metaphor serves as an invitation for comparison. As suggested by MacDonough below, when perceiving the new mini-vans, one is invited to make a comparison between them and the space-shuttle.²³ Or, in the case of advertising, by placing an image of a celebrity ("loaded" with associational meaning) alongside of a product the viewer is invited to make the comparison and association between the celebrity and the product.

Leiss, Kline and Jhally call information transmitted by means of images "iconic." Data transmitted by iconic information is particularly useful for the process of "fusing" the concrete features of goods and personal subjective experiences because

..iconic information can be absorbed without full conscious awareness, and thus it can affect opinion without being translated into explicit verbal formulations... when a visual image is used as a "memory peg" for the message, a person's retention of the ideas that have been associated with the image is significantly higher than if based on verbal communication alone.

²⁴

Additionally images display two more features that made them particularly useful for "loading" goods with meaning — images attract attention, and imageries used in advertising increase the attention paid to the advertisements — simultaneously, images are a form of communication which leaves a high degree of ambiguity in their reception. This point can be explained with reference to the poetic image which, while not a picture, works in much the same way as an image which is a picture.

²³See MacDonough's discussion pp. 117-8 below

²⁴Ibid.

N. Frye in his discussion of the nature of poetry notes that the poetic image is an amalgam of two "radicals": "opsis" and "melos." Frye calls these structures "radicals" in the sense that they create the basis for poetic articulation. "Melos" refers to music or rhythm. "Opsis" refers to sight and to riddle.²⁵ Frye writes that the rhythm of the poem holds the listener or reader, and the riddling function draws the reader or listener into the meaning being unfolded by the performed text. Thus there is a fusion of a kind of "hypnosis" in that one is drawn in by the flow or affective capacity of the language as music — and there is a kind of visualization as one tries to understand the meaning as it unfolds. As Riffaterre has noted, the unfolding of the meaning is based on "indirection" of the poetic sign.²⁶ In the sign something is given, but it is not given directly. The riddle works in exactly the same manner — something is given to understanding, but given incompletely and one must enter the world to which the riddle alludes if one is to decipher the full portent of the riddle.

Thus in the absence of systems of meaning that provided a "fixed" set of messages about needs and satisfactions, advertising came to fill the role left vacant by older systems. As the history of the person/thing intermediation is developed in the historical development of advertising images, the emphasis moved away from the object itself and towards the psychological benefits to be derived by the consumer. In contemporary advertising, not the object but its promise is articulated. And the promise is aimed at the potential consumer. This shift goes a long way in explaining the fashion process. As Leiss, Kline and Jhally put it:

When utility is rooted in the consumer's psychological state...anything can happen: For then something is useful only in so far as, however, and so long as, one believes this to be the case. But belief in the modern world is a flimsy affair, readily convertible as newer promises circulate. What accompanies this transition from the object to the person, as goods are enveloped in symbols, is the requirement to enlarge the scope and intensity of the total commercial effort in everyday life.

Since consumption is, in part, a form of popular entertainment, the play of symbols in advertising generally is confined to the more superficial levels of psychological processes; but the price for superficiality is that the attention-getting power of most advertising pitches decays in use. The turnover time gets shorter and shorter. Visual imagery is inherently better equipped than is verbal expression — to map and explore the surface features of changing events and to relate them, quite arbitrarily, to products, thanks to the potent inferential

²⁵N. Frye. "Rhythm of Association" Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays. (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1971) pp. 270-81.

²⁶Riffaterre points out that the poetic sign is indirect and makes no effort to match the reality to which it refers except by allusion or "game." See: M. Riffaterre. "The Poem's Significance" Semiotics of Poetry (Bloomington: Indiana University Press., 1984) pp. 1-22.

capacities of metaphor (analogy and association).²⁷

Among other things, an implication of this is that the images are drawn from the "real" world, but that what is drawn on is arbitrarily assigned to goods in an effort to contextualize the latter with reference to subjective feelings: communication in the affective mode. At this level the fetish appears — for a fetish is an adequate account of an aspect of a group's corporate experience. What is not revealed in the advertising is a full account of the social dimensions of production and consumption. What is revealed, or put better, what advertising seeks to reveal, is the relatedness into which the product might fit; and, by extension, the relatedness from which the product emerges *not as produced* but as *conceived or designed*. Put another way

The developed form of commodity fetishism in its consumption aspect...is the magical representation of the social collectivity. It is magical because the object stands in indeterminate relation to the personal activities, interactions, and self transformations that are portrayed in the advertising message.²⁸

But there is yet another magic at work here — that magic is art.

The term fetish derives from a Portuguese term *fetio* meaning "something made." *Fetio* itself derives from the Latin *facere* also meaning "to make."²⁹ The term was used by early explorers to describe the focal objects in venerational practices of the peoples they encountered during their travels, especially in the 15th century. These early explorers saw that the people's who used fetishes believed them to possess a spirit or the capacity to alter circumstances or situations. Given the discussions of Geertz and Turner above these objects can be easily interpreted as "art."

The object is designed, and while it can be exhausted³⁰ more readily than a painting or a sculpture, it remains created with the consumer's affective response in mind. In short, the product is given form so that it *can* be appropriated and incorporated into the individual's world. If that world is one which is constituted by small groups or collectivities, then the role of design, and by extension of applied or

²⁷Leiss *et al* pp. 417-8.

²⁸S. Jhally, A. Kline and W. Leiss. "Magic in the Marketplace: An Empirical Test for Commodity Fetishism." C. J. P. S. T., Vol. IX, No. 3, 1985. p. 20.

²⁹See above discussion of fetishism on p. 13.

³⁰The notion of how the object can be "exhausted" is given a full treatment in Chapter IV. See also the discussion of "utility" on pp. 22-4 below.

commercial art, is to make the thing reflect the salient features of that world.

6. Consumption as Creative Practice.

While capitalism and market relations may have indeed "de-realized" aspects of social reality, commercial culture worked hard to continually realize, perhaps "hyperrealize," the world of goods. The generalization of the consumer way of life, particularly in the "high intensity market setting," would contribute to a situation wherein consumption emerges as a "creative" practice.

While the thought of consumption as a creative practice might appear glib or misdirected, the current social conditions and attendant contours of the person/thing intermediation suggest that this development is the logical outcome of the loss of self-sufficiency, alienation and the proliferation of an designed world of goods.

For a significant portion of the population in advanced market industrial societies a deployment of creative choice is focused on the consumption process. Much of modern industrial and corporate work is boring. Free will rarely enters into the discipline of labour. One does what one is required to do if one wishes to continue to be paid. This applies not just to capitalist social relations but to bureaucratized social structures and much of industrial labour organized according to the logic of the machine. What makes a job desirable is either the degree of self-control afforded to the employee, or the degree to which the job empowers the employee to engage in consumption as a creative practice. And, for consumption to be a creative practice first one must have access to resources. In these societies, money is a good starting point. Given the productive capacity, choice among possible ranges of goods and consumption strategies remains fairly high even for those with more limited access to resources.

This is to suggest that the marketplace offers an increasing diversity of choice to a number of levels of access to resources. Not only are there various levels of retailing and pricing. The recent expansion of re-sale boutiques seems to indicate that diversity is no longer limited to one class. Simultaneously there are levels of re-sale too — from the "antique" dealer for the economic elites to "boutiques" for alternative lifestyle followers, to the "Sally Ann" (Salvation Army) for those who seek out used clothing retailers not in pursuit of style but out of necessity.

7. Consumption and Culture.

The cultural character of the consumption process can be explained with reference to an anthropological recasting of the "high intensity market setting." This not only provides another account but also sets the stage for the discussion of industrial design in the following chapter. Both industrial designer and consumer are involved in a cultural practice — the currency of these practices are goods, which in the following recasting, appear as goods and as categories of culture.

Grant McCracken has studied consumer culture from an anthropological point of view. He begins his discussion by noting that culture—as-such is made up of ways in which societies "parcel up" the flow of experience into categories of "person," "time," "space" and "natural world." He then compares these categories as they are given in affluent societies with the way these categories are given in the rest of the anthropologic record.

What distinguishes the culture as it is conveyed or given a material basis by goods in market industrial societies is that the cultural categories made material by goods are:

1. characterized by indeterminacy; the categories appear as fluid and ambiguous.
2. elective; this suggests that cultural categories are no longer bounded by traditional demands of community and kinship.
3. subject to constant and rapid change; the productive and referential capacities of industry and industrial design facilitate constant change in the appearances and "performativity" of goods.

31

Ambiguity, choice and constant change seem to set the parameters for the performative character of goods, and by extension, of the larger cultural milieu based on the person/thing intermediation. It is against such a backdrop that persons set out to construct a meaningful world of goods.

If, for heuristic purposes, a good or object is thought of as a sign, this process of the increasing diversification of goods can be explained within by an application of a semiotic model. Any sign within a discourse can be understood as appearing at the intersection of two axes which set out the parameters

³¹G. McCracken. "Culture and Consumption : A Theoretical Account of the Structure and Content of the Cultural Meaning of Consumer Goods." Occasional Paper. Part I. (Department of Consumer Studies, University of Guelph., 1985) pp. 8-14.

whereby meaning is assigned to the sign. The first, a horizontal axis or the metonymic, is that axis along which a sign is given its differential meaning. The terms or signs that precede or follow the given sign modify it and locate it in the overall discourse. The example most often given is syntax or sentence. The second axis, the vertical or metaphoric is the associational one. Here the sign can be exchanged for any number of similar or associated signs which can occupy the same intersectional point at the meeting of the two axes — but not at the same time. With reference to goods or objects one might say that a kitchen implement on the metonymic axis is contextualized with differential reference to all other kitchen implements: a food processor as opposed to a juicer as opposed to a pasta making machine. Running along the metaphor axis the implement can be thought of in terms of quality, design, features and so forth. Under current conditions in affluent market industrial societies more and more goods (metonymic) are available in more and more forms (metaphoric). This applies to cars, furniture, clothing, entertainment equipment, and so also to experiences proffered in the marketplace.

Given the diversity of choice along both the metonymic and metaphoric axes on which goods as units of communication can be applied, it is small wonder that the literature suggests that consumer choice is fraught with difficulty. And, given the potential for experimentation with matching needs, wants and possible venues and strategies for satisfaction, small wonder that consumption appears as a creative practice. One can buy a television set, one can spend one's earnings on a "muscle car," one can take yearly holidays with Club Med. One can also buy books, go to learned conferences in distant places, or go to foreign films and collect rare jazz recordings.

When the focus of the discussion returns to the world of goods, and goods ordered into a compartmental surround, then the creative nature of the consumption process emerges full-blown. With an increase of resources one can either consolidate the compartmental surround according to stylistic and qualitative integrity: in short, a consolidation along the metaphoric axis. Or, one can engage in experimentation or a pursuit of authenticity. This as an experimentation along the metonymic axis.

When adequate resources are available then the world of goods can put a poetized cultural gloss on the world of everyday life. And by organizing an expressive, commodious compartmental surround out of the chaos of the high intensity market setting the consumer becomes an artist of sorts. Rendering form onto chaos, assembling diverse parts into an expressive whole, ordering constituents with an eye toward

effect, expressing corporate experience by means of materialized ideals — these describe modern consumption in affluent, market industrial societies. In a world in which, as Lyotard observes the aesthetic question is "what can taken to be art," consumption is becoming a fair candidate.³²

Summation: Consumption and an Aesthetics of Living.

Based on the literature the following seems to emerge. The history of market-industrial societies has witnessed a development wherein "instrumental aesthetics" was first applied to the object, and then to the subject. The process of industrialization brought with it massive disruptions to the way people had previously lived their lives. Industrial labour was not the site of an "instrumental aesthetics," but, as will be seen in the following chapter, an "instrumental aesthetics" was definitely employed in the production of goods. First in the design of the object, then, over the period of a little over 60 years, commercial culture discovered that the subject — the consumer — was also a site for the deployment of an "instrumental aesthetics." The shapes these "instrumental aesthetics" were to take were advertising, design of retailing situations, and increasing diversification of types of products.

Since the consumer is now confronted with a wide range of choices, the ordering of a meaningful world of goods is at once an act of "management" (matching needs and wants with the potential range of choices), and something like an art, in that the object of the exercise is an arrangement of the mise-en-scene wherein one lives and cultivates self and relationships — that is, relatedness. "Fashionalization" of increasing ranges of goods and experiences suggests that things produced are more explicitly coded or designed; this implies that things are made to appear, and to be, discourses of a sort: embodiments of cultural categories which play a role in the formation and mise-en-scenes of groups.

In the following chapter the inquiry sets out a parallel schematic to that of this chapter. While this chapter looked at the culture of appropriation, the following looks at the culture of "fashioning," or the culture of industrial design.

³²This comment appears as part of the polemic on the nature of modern art practices. Lyotard is arguing that that neither "realism" nor "beauty" can set the parameters for the canon that contemporary art must follow. See: J.-F. Lyotard "What is Postmodern?" The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge. (Trans. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi. Theory and History of Literature, Volume 10. Ed. Wlad Godzich and Jochen Schulte-Sasse. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984)

CHAPTER IV

CULTURE OF DESIGN

For some years now the international debate has been open on the question of postmodern. Is the modern project to emancipate mankind from ignorance, awe and poverty by developing and spreading knowledge, the arts and freedoms still a realistic one today, at the end of the 20th century? The answer is doubtful...It is clear however that man's power, from his body to the galaxies, does not cease to grow. But to what purpose?

Modern design is perpetuated, but in a state of uneasiness. Uncertainty generates, by reaction, a desire for security, stability, and identity. This desire assumes a thousand forms: it even hides under the name postmodern! The exhibition through a journey into an impalpable, dematerialized reality that sweeps from suprematism to minimal art, from serial music to holograms, right up to currency and electronic effects, seeks to make the public aware of this contemporary doubt.

Jean-Francois Lyotard.¹

If the intentions of industrial designers are to be taken seriously, then one can say that industrial designers are concerned with "bridging the gap" between man and his system of objects. In this sense industrial designers seek to design "focal things" which are destined for mechanical reproduction. The term "focal" does not appear in the design discourse, but I believe that this is exactly what Branzi implies when he says that the designer, as one part of his social function, seeks to design "definitive" objects for consumers. (The other side of the designer's social function under market-industrial conditions is his/her ability to respond to industry's "constant demand for innovation.")

The term "focal" is derived from Albert Borgmann's recent analysis of the influence of technology on the character of modern life. Borgmann suggests that some things are focal, and so also are some experiences. He derives the term *focal* based on its Latin etymology: In Latin *focus* referred to the fireplace. This was the site of heat and cooking in the home, and notes Borgmann, it was in the fireplace where the domestic gods were believed to live. The fireplace was thus a concrete source of warmth and a "focus" for domestic life and, presumably, domestic well-being. Borgmann writes that marriage vows were taken by the fireplace, and the new-born were introduced into family life by their presentation to the family divinities who "dwelt" in the fireplace. Thus the thing had a function in the sense of "reliability," and the thing had "depth."

A thing is deep if all or most of its physically discernible features are finally significant. Technology takes a shallow view of things and so begins their conversion into resources and devices. Once we look technologically at a pretechnological fireplace, we split off from the

¹From the introduction to an exhibition entitled "Les Immateriaux" held at Pompidou Centre, Paris: March 1985. (*Domus* No. 662, 1985) p. 64.

fullness of its features the function of procuring warmth as solely and finally significant.²

Focal things play a role in focal practices, in a sense they provide an embodiment of the focal practice to which they refer. Borgmann argues that the nature of a focal practice is in that

...such a practice is required to counter technology in its patterned pervasiveness and to guard focal things in their depth and integrity.³

Thus there is a relationship between focal goods and focal practices. However, a focal practice is not just oriented in preserving a focal good *as* a focal good. A focal practice is one where human interrelatedness is reaffirmed; and, in a focal practice those aspects of self that are "finally significant" are revealed to the self — the self is experienced as a self. Borgmann uses cultures of the table and running as two examples of such focal practices. In the case of the former preparation of food with and for others recreates in concrete terms the experience of one's relatedness to them. In the case of the latter, under the exertion of running and pushing oneself "to the limits" the self is revealed in a way that is not normally encountered in the flow of everyday involvement with tasks and projects.

Under current conditions in industrial societies for there to be goods, focal or otherwise, someone has to decide how they are to be — how are they to appear, how ought they work, how ought they interrelate with the user's intentions and operations. This "how" is in no small part the province of industrial design.

1. Industrial Design: Theory and Practice.

According to N. Teymur, design at its broadest is integral to the general network of economic and technological activities that produce goods for consumption:

This basic fact originates from an almost natural (and ontological) pre-condition of life, namely that every man-made object has to be *produced* before it is consumed, perceived, analysed or studied. Design is assigned the task of making decisions on modes of using materials, the forms they will take, the type of functions they will perform and, to a certain extent, the methods of manufacturing/ constructing/making, them. In this sense design

²A. Borgmann. (Technology and the Character of Contemporary Life. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984) p. 191.

³Ibid.

activity is *objectively integrated* in production but apparently marginal to it.⁴

Teymur also argues that design involves many levels and processes — "ideological, institutional, epistemological, and discursive mechanisms," all of which serve to set out the parameters for the practice, the product and the activity. This thesis will touch on all of these aspects briefly. However, the main concern is the cultural and communicative aspects of industrial design, or, industrial design as an "instrumental aesthetics."

Industrial design shares certain features with other disciplines. It is associated with engineering, it also associated with the arts; industrial design is part of a broader sphere — design which includes architecture, interior design, environmental design and so on. This sphere of activity, loosely gathered under "instrumental aesthetics," increasingly touches on almost every aspect of life in modern industrial societies. As Jean Baudrillard observes:

...[E]verything belongs to design, everything springs from it, whether it says so or not: the body is designed, sexuality is designed, political, social, human relations are designed, just as are needs and aspirations etc. This "designed" universe is what properly constitutes the environment.⁵

When the plan or template for an object or an activity is devised with some distance from the means of production, and when the activity or object is conceived of in terms of "mass production," one is specifically dealing with design. The range of everyday materiality alongside of which social relations proceed is today almost exclusively the product of some kind of industrial design.

While design is a cultural practice, and while it is an objective part of those processes whereby things are produced for profit, design is also the attempt to create a better world. A. Mendini, editor of *Domus*, writing in didactic form aimed at a manifesto of new Italian design, puts these sentiments as follows:

Think that objects are also made of flesh... human body is system of objects complete in itself... if man sits on ground whole world beneath him is his chair... important remember millions objects created by man around him are only prosthesis his body and therefore must not hurt him... stop⁶

⁴N. Teymur. "The Materiality of Design." (*Block* Vol. 5, 1981) p. 19.

⁵J. Baudrillard. *For a Critique of the Political Economy of the Sign*. (Trans. Charles Levin. St. Louis, Mo.: Telos Press, 1981) pp. 200-1.

⁶A. Mendini. "Cables to the Designer" (*Domus* No. 655, 1984) p. 57.

Design undertakes to facilitate for more efficient products, it seeks to arrive at better living quarters, it also seeks to provide a "softer," more habitable world. Italian designer and theorist Branzi poses design in the following manner:

...[O]ver the last twenty years there has been a progressive expansion of the theoretical and operative limits of design: light, colour, fashion, materials, decoration and sounds have become the instruments of a new kind of design aimed at the creation of a more habitable metropolis. The cosmetics of reality is no longer considered a diversionary or remissive action, but part of a plan for the transformation of the world.⁷

What seems to be said above is that there are two thrusts that industrial design seeks to unite: the materiality of the world — its devices, equipmentality and so forth — and also the "aesthetic" or symbolic dimension. The historical development of industrial design has taken its practitioners through a number of debates. Design tries to anticipate a world even as it conceiving its materiality: designers have always expressed a keen interest in various utopias and theoretic accounts of how a world ought to be built. For example, Ralph Caplan, editor of *Industrial Design*, offers the following observations about both the role of design theory and the nature of theory he feels will be an aid in industrial design practice.

I believe that the designer's theory ought to be directed toward the use and the user, rather than toward design itself. I don't care whether an interior designer has a theory of design, but I do hope — if he's doing offices — that he's got a theory of work, illuminating how it gets done and by whom. I don't care about an industrial designer's theory of form nearly as much as I do — if she is designing stereo components — about her theory of sound, her theory of indoor recreation. That's what I wish she knew about. That's the kind of theory I hope will inform her vision.⁸

The nature of industrial design theories and practices/applications has always been an area of concern; and, each school of design or movement has sought to provide a blueprint for a world in which the ills of the then current social relations could be ameliorated. With the expansion of the formal capabilities of industrial design — ergonomics, technologies etc. — certain aspects of industrial design practice have been met with success, but not all. For example American design writer Steven Holt observes:

Design strategies....have all striven to fill our gaping need for meaning and psychological content. Thus far, they have all fallen short, for their offer has been as narrow and pigeonholed as their references have been undisciplined.⁹

⁷A. Branzi. (The Hot House: Italian New Wave Design. Trans. C. H. Evans. Boston: M.I.T. Press., 1984) p. 9.

⁸R. Caplan. ("Circumstantial evidence" ID: Magazine of International Design. Vol 32, No. 2, 1985) p. 16.

⁹S. Holt "Depth of Surface." ID: Magazine of International Design. Vol 32, No. 1, 1985. p. 36.

Holt and Branzi both are referring to the role of design as a communicative practice. Industrial design can also be thought of as process of:

...[R]esearches and experiments in aid of finding a point from which a real link between man and his system of objects [can] be forged. ¹⁰

This suggests that while ergonomics and engineering continue to play an important role in industrial design, the role of the designer as a "symbol maker" is increasingly a focus for debate in the realm of design. This function has grown in importance over the last three decades, till now when it occupies the central stage in the discussions within the field. The reason for this is part of the point of the discussion of industrial design below. But, in anticipation, Baudrillard puts it well when he writes:

...[B]eings and things are held as far away as possible...this broken relationship (image of social relations) between man and his environment is the raison d'être and site of design. ¹¹

These two dimensions of industrial design characterize this social practice as as the process of creation, invention, and definition which are separated from the processes of production; and at the same time industrial design appears as a positive critique of reality — in that the designer is essentially a "problem solver." The former definition underscores the developments that typified the division of labour, the latter indicates the essential element of design.

Industrial design undertakes to solve problems (be they inadequate housing, unsafe motor vehicles, or a slump in sales). There is one crucial qualification to all this: Industrial design is oriented to the sphere of mechanical (or industrial) reproduction. As a practice, industrial design provides the conception, plan or model for industrial production. In this sense it produces the "original" or the "template" for the serial production of things. In a concrete sense this is the first moment of the potential realization of a thing, an ontogenic moment. And it seems to be an ontogenic moment informed by an "instrumental aesthetics."

What is of interest to this thesis is the way the communicative aspects of industrial design as an "instrumental aesthetics" have developed over the past century. An inquiry into this historical development, even though only in schematic form, should render some insight into the role played by an "instrumental aesthetics" in consumer society and everyday life.

¹⁰Branzi, p. 11

¹¹Baudrillard. For a Critique... p. 201.

2. Historical Development of Industrial Design

In pre-industrial societies and cultures phenomenal form was given to objects according to traditionally handed-down ideas about craftsmanship, decoration and usages of objects. As P. Fuller has written, ornamentation reflected the commonly held meanings of the society. Peter Fuller provides an insight into the social function of ornamentation prior to industrialization.

Sound ornament has its roots in a society's *shared symbolic order*, and provides the social and material space in which an individual maker can celebrate his subjective joy in labour. Simultaneously it allows him to affirm and extend the collective beliefs and spiritual values of the group. Ornament bears material witness to those individual and social needs of men and women which cannot be reduced to physical necessity. A living, developing stylistic tradition is one of the most important ways which individual subjects reconcile themselves to the brute existence of the social and physical worlds they are constrained to inhabit.

But since the Renaissance, Western societies have been characterized by the break-up of these underlying shared symbolic orders.¹²

Fuller is referring to the ornamental codes that were employed by various rural pre-industrial societies.

With the rise of cities, guilds of craftsmen grew and became the institutions that provided the city folk and especially the elites of those cities with goods. The guilds were also the early teaching institutions where craftsmen were trained. Heskett situates the origins of industrial design with the spread of royal manufactories. Various aristocratic courts through out Europe, at least those which were wealthy enough, established manufactories that would provide them with the objects and products that were deemed necessary to courtly life. These manufactories produced fabrics, cutlery, dishes and table utensils and so forth. Under the patronage of the courts the main emphasis was placed on quality production and "aesthetic" considerations. The produce of these manufactories played a role in the competitive display among the aristocracies.

From the Renaissance the artist and the designer had received the same training. The differences were in the types of things produced. The designer worked natural materials into ornate objects for the sphere of everyday life. Continuing expansion of trade increased the demand for innovation in the design and production of the objects of everyday life. Increasing demand for innovation was met by one of the first indications of an industrial design proper: the appearance in the 1500s of "pattern books." Designers began to compile and make available books which provided illustrations of surface or sculptural

¹²Peter Fuller. "Should Products be Decorated?" (Design No. 416, Aug. 1983) pp. 33-46.

ornamentations which could be applied to various kinds of objects. This heralded two particularly modern phenomena: on the one hand the circulation of images which would act as "templates," on the other an increasing separation of the designer from actual production.

By the 1600s, particularly in France, the state began to intervene into design and production of goods. Within a century the French court undertook as proclaimed intention the conquest of Europe through style. Schools for training fabric designers were opened. The emphasis remained on quality and aesthetics.¹³

The "Atlantic Revolution" of the late 18th century would have a major impact on industrial design, especially on the continent. The industrial, French and American revolutions would contribute to a change in the social climate such that the centre of gravity began to shift from royal or aristocratic patronage to commercial development and the diffusion of the commercial imperative.

3. Commercial Imperatives

The 18th century had witnessed the increasing spread of consumer goods. Major breakthroughs would facilitate the spread of goods by the middle of the 1700s. With the growth of the bourgeoisie and increasing tea and coffee demand for fine table utensils, particularly china-ware, expanded. The delicate porcelain imported from China in the previous century was of a much higher quality than the ceramic products available in Europe — and the import ware had exerted a wide appeal in the courts of the day. The appeal led to a "wave of research" to discover the technical process required to produce this porcelain, and the key breakthrough came in 1709 at the Meissen manufactory that had been established by the Grand Duke of Saxony.¹⁴ Shortly after the development of efficient porcelain production the emphasis on artistic exclusivity (which had required huge subsidies and had characterized production in the manufactories under patronage) declined. The new stress was placed on commercial acceptability. By the 1750s the "toy trade" became very important in Britain. The "toy trade" referred to the production of buttons, clasps and

¹³Royal patronage of a sort would continue into the 1900s as evidenced by the large role played by Prince Albert in the Exhibition of 1849. Industrial design experienced a separate development in England from that of other parts of Europe. The commercial imperative was more pronounced and appeared much sooner there than in, say, France.

¹⁴Heskett p. 12

so forth – goods that augmented the growing production and dissemination of generally accessible cloth. The toy trade was greatly augmented by the development of a commercially viable precious metal plating process known as Sheffield plate. And, since the previous century the growth of the cotton market and cloth production, further integrated the "toy trade" as source for the accessories needed in clothing production.

This period was characterized by an increasing concern with the commercial imperative which was itself expressed by a double emphasis on *cheapness* and *diversity*. Cheapness was facilitated by continual technical and mechanical innovations. Diversity was made possible by recourse to eclecticism; various kinds of revivals, took place along with appropriation of international formal and ornamental vocabularies.¹⁵ Overall the commercial imperative implied an increasing concern with the ability to respond to an expanding market for the objects of industrial production – and, by extension, of industrial design.

4. Modern Design.

A number of influences converge on the making of modern design – aesthetic, technological, cultural and ideological. They cannot be explored here, though they are of great interest to any further work on the communicative properties of goods.

According to design historian Anne Ferebee, modern industrial design was born with the generalization of electricity around the turn of the century in continental Europe.¹⁶ As electricity generalized so did electrical appliances. The new electrical appliances posed an interesting set of problems to industrial design. Here were new devices and potential functions or extensions of the body and senses that were, in a sense, unprecedented in the history of industrial design or the ontic field as such. There were few formal precedents to a telephone, a sewing machine, a typewriter or a cash register. Even the lamp presented a challenge. American architect Louis Sullivan had said before the turn of the 19th century

¹⁵This latter process went hand in hand with the expansion of the western European imperial project. For a discussion of the appropriation process albeit in a different context – that of zoological parks see John Berger's "Why Look at Animals" About Looking (New York: Pantheon Books, 1980) p. 1-26

¹⁶See discussion by Lefebvre, p. 43-4. above.

that "form follows function." This dictum would become the basis for a new theory of how objects ought to be designed. And, to a great extent, given that new devices were emerging, this dictum would provide a starting point for providing form to what was as yet unprecedented.

The dominant design vocabulary of this period — "Victorian" — was an odd mixture of revivals and borrowings. The former, revivals, were characterized by an interest in Gothic and Classical forms; ornamentation drew from classical, Romantic, Baroque and Rococo idioms. The latter — borrowings — were expressed in the keen interest in Egyptian forms, Japanese idioms, Celtic calligraphy etc. The dominant form was the "Picturesque Mode" typified by the "soft curve" of the body of a violin, a corsetted woman, and the Coca-Cola bottle (which was born in this period and is retained by the Coca-Cola Corporation). Eclecticism was the order of the day.

By the 1920s, at least in North America, the landscape of everyday life was increasingly a product of some form of industrial design. The rationalization that was to become a key feature in industrial design, especially under the Bauhaus, was already being applied to factory labour. Industrial design was already being employed in the production of modes of transportation — trains, car interiors, trolleys etc. Interior spaces were being designed: not only those of habitation but also public spaces. So also were kitchen implements and domestic furnishings. Clothing, an area usually dictated by traditions, was also increasingly being "designed."

The interregnum saw more than just the spread of electricity and electrical appliances. There was a generalization of new materials such as plastics. Indeed, at this time, plastics were to receive the "imprint" that would inform their appearance and production till the present. New communications technologies were introduced following their development in the war — radio in particular. With the increased availability of clothing a rudimentary demographic analysis began to develop: it applied not only to sizes, but also to taste and expression.

Stuart and Elizabeth Ewen offer the following example of these early demographic segmentations of the marketplace, here specifically with reference to clothing.

Concerned with developing responsive markets, fashion merchandisers of the twenties began to develop a more refined consumer typology. If the first typology was rooted in sizing, the new typology plumbed the diversity of psyches. Attitudes and approaches to life were sorted out into a manageable bunch of personality types; each was then correlated to a

fashion type.

Bullocks Department Store in Los Angeles "devised a list of personality types which was...fairly representative of work done in this line."¹⁷

The Ewens report that Bullocks had divided its women clients into six categories and began to stock clothing lines which were aimed at expressing these six categories. They were:

1. Romantic — slender, youthful;
2. Statuesque — tall, remote, blonde;
3. Artistic — enigmatic, suggestive of the "foreign";
4. Picturesque — soft outline;
5. Modern —¹⁸
6. Conventional — older, stouter, economical.

The Langs in their discussion of fashion note that the marketers of the 1920s divided the market into "class and mass." Class referred to the wealthy, who could buy almost off-handedly. The mass was everyone less — those just beginning to buy durables. However, as the 20s wore on this attitude began to change and a new, larger market was foreseen and increasingly catered to.¹⁹

Heskett in his study of the early years of American industrial design also points out that a "diversity" of customer taste was already being considered even before the First World War. For example he cites the Montgomery Ward Catalogue of 1895. A variety of clocks were offered. Each clock mechanism was the same, but the cabinets varied. The cabinetries were articulated in the "ornamental clutter" of citations, columns and other architectural features — all variations on the Victorian "Picturesque" mode.

The generalization of goods and appliances was not consistent throughout western Europe or North America. For example, Heskett reports that commodity production and market distribution proceeded under different ideologies in North America and in England. In Britain, appliances were seen as a resolution to the "domestic" problem: Following the War industrial labour was provided as an alternative

¹⁷Stuart and Elizabeth Ewen. Channe!s... p . 230.

¹⁸Note that "modern," like the nascent consumer market itself, was left open-ended.

¹⁹Langs. "Fashion: Identification..." pp. 340-1.

venue for those who would have otherwise taken positions as domestics and servants. Appliances were produced for the middle classes in order to alleviate the housework that women now faced without the help of servants.

Central Europe, which had experienced a degree of wartime destruction and then the brunt of the post-war depression, faced different problems as did the design that was to take shape there. In Germany design had to respond to difficult financial conditions while engaging in reconstruction. Housing was inadequate, production of goods had to be informed by a frugality of means and resources. Simultaneously industrial design was a standing tradition in Germany where general industrial standardization had been undertaken early in the century. Germany had been the second social formation to organize an industrial designers' association, following the example set earlier in the 19th century in Scandinavia. In the United States mass production and the commercial imperative set a different atmosphere wherein a "democratic" distribution of goods and appliances was undertaken. This approach was to become known as the "American System of Production" and it would have far reaching implications for industrial design cultures and practices.

The interregnum saw the development of three quite distinct design strategies. Each strategy, grounded in a specific culture and ideology, took a different approach to fusing the ontic and ontological aspects of their given objects. These strategies can be characterized (perhaps in an oversimplified fashion) as follows: the Bauhaus as the "rational" variant, Futurism as the "expressionist" strategy, and the American system as "styling." ²⁰

What gave these three orientations to design a certain unity was the machine and the new world that it could body-forth. Mechanical reproduction had changed not only the dimensions of social relations, it also introduced its own aesthetic to which each design orientation responded. In short — there was a cultural encounter with the machine and in industrial design this encounter was particularly pronounced and evident.

²⁰This association of the Bauhaus with "rational" design, and Futurism with an "expressionist" imagination is based on Ferebee's central thesis that these two variations fluctuate as dominant design languages throughout the 20th Century. The "American System" is derived from Heskett.

The Machine as Aesthetic.

The technology that had transformed the world, and patterns of work and leisure with it, was now about to introduce its product into the realm of everyday life. The machine as a domestic or personal utility was to have an impact on everyday life: light, warmth, uses of time and space were to be mediated by the appearance of the machine as a personal prosthesis. Radio and the telephone shrank space — one could speak and hear over great distances; electricity would also expand time, as the night was held at bay by the glow of an electric lightbulb. The machine was a promise of comfort, a contribution to a commodious compartmental surround.

Along with the entry of the machine into the life-world also came a sense of disjointedness. How ought the new devices be given phenomenal form: what ought they look like, how ought they work? How ought these new utilities be made to "fit" in a personal world, how ought they "fit" the user's intentions, the user's hand? For example, Mumford reports that Watt's contemporaries wanted industrial machines to produce more noise — as an indication of the machine's productive might.²¹ But, in the compartmental surround and the general micro-geography of everyday life the machine had to relate to the user in different ways. The effort to adapt the machine to the lifescape rendered an entry of a machine aesthetic into everyday life.

The nature of the cultural encounter with the machine is discussed by L. Mumford under the rubric "assimilation of the machine." One of the first areas to be affected by the machine was the realm of the "unique" — a thought already discussed with reference to Benjamin. As Mumford puts it:

The machine devalues rarity; instead of producing a single unique object, it is capable of producing a million others just as good as the master model from which the rest are made...

The machine devalues age: age is another token of rarity, and the machine emphasizes fitness and adaptation. The brand new is stressed over the antique. The machine is authentic when it is slick, smooth, glossy, clean...

The machine devalues archaic taste: for taste in the bourgeois sense is merely another name for pecuniary reputability...²²

²¹L. Mumford Technics and Civilization. (New York: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1934) p. 335.

²²Ibid. pp. 352-53.

Mumford sums this up by noting: "Whatever the politics of a country may be, the machine is a communist." This quality, argues Mumford, is inherent in what is implied by technics.²³ The machine itself, product of the engineer's art, was informed not by "shared symbolic systems" that might refer to the human condition or human history, but rather by the shared symbolic system that enabled humans to expand the domain of what could be brought under control — mathematics and science. These qualities applied to expression rendered a new aesthetic.

Expression through the machine implies the recognition of relatively new esthetic terms: precision, calculation, flawlessness, simplicity, economy.²⁴

Mumford notes that this sort of aesthetic was available to experience before — but access to it had been limited. This special effect — one of repetition — could be seen in "great temples and armies" and now the same aesthetic was entering the everyday world. Mumford suggests that there is as much an aesthetic of unit and series as there is of the "unique and non-repeatable." This new aesthetic placed an emphasis not on prestige but rather on function, function thought with reference to what the machine did and how it did it.

...[T]echnics emphasized the importance of function: in this domain, as Emerson pointed out, the beautiful rests on the foundation of the necessary. This was technics' cultural contribution.²⁵

This latter point along with the notions of economy, repeatability, simplicity, flawlessness etc. bore implications for how the machines for everyday life ought to look — these notions were also to provide the basis for the critique of the machine aesthetic. This notwithstanding, the aim of sound design was

...to remove from the object, every detail, every moulding, every variation of surface — except that which conduces to its effective functioning.²⁶

When functionality is situated in the machine (or appliance) then the "performativity" of the thing is bound up with the degree to which the thing works. It was in this sort of functionality that the machine and its aesthetic was a promise for everyone. Mumford elaborates:

²³By technics, Mumford means a configuration of technologies and the knowledges and practices that inform the uses and application of these technologies.

²⁴Ibid. p. 350.

²⁵Ibid. p. 344.

²⁶Ibid.

There can be no qualitative difference between a poor man's electric electric bulb of a given candle power and a rich man's to indicate their differing pecuniary status in society, although there was an enormous difference between the rush or stinking tallow of the peasant and the wax candles or sperm oil used by the upper classes before the coming of gas and electricity.²⁷

In one way or another industrial designers would attempt to come to grips with both the progressive implications of the machine, and with the machine as a potential cultural model. The machine as a model for "instrumentality" was already being applied in industrial labour, particularly in "Taylorization."²⁸ Now, with the entry of the machine and its fruits into everyday life, the machine also posed a new model for "aesthetics."

5. Design Strategies and Vocabularies.

All the design strategies to develop during the interregnum were interpenetrant. They drew from each other, but each had its own specific focus and ideology as to the manner whereby the world was to be re-made. This can be seen in the architecture that would be inspired by each approach, and so also, by the objects produced. While there is much in the history of the development of these schools that would inform future work in this area, the discussion here will be limited to those aspects which bear directly on design as a communicational practice.

Rational Design.

The Bauhaus school is perhaps the best representative of the "rational" variant of industrial design. The school which flourished 1919-1928 (until it was closed by the Nazis) undertook a wholistic approach to training industrial designers for the demands of rebuilding the world. Because so many new materials and processes were emerging the industrial designer was to be trained by "two masters": an engineer or craftsman and an artist. The approach to design was cast in terms of resolution of problems. Any new design project was approached as a problem which was, in Cartesian fashion, broken down into its component parts. Each of these smaller aspects was analysed, resolved, and then applied to other likewise

²⁷Ibid. p. 355.

²⁸By "Taylorization" is meant the application of behavioural sciences to industrial labour with an eye toward increased efficiency of production. The term is based on the work of F. Taylor who was the first to apply time-motion studies to industrial labour. See: Ewen, "Captains...", pp. 105-6.

resolved aspects until a totality emerged.

Bauhaus, more than any other school of design, took the machine and its functionality, as an inspiration for its design theory and practice. Baudrillard, in a critical vein, captures the basic idea well:

...[T]he formula of the Bauhaus is: for every object there is an objective, determinable *signified* — its function. This is what is called in linguistics the level of *denotation* ... —all the rest is coating, the hell of *connotation*: residue, superfluity, excrescence, ornamentation, uselessness. Kitsch. The thing denoted (functional) is beautiful, the connoted (parasitical) is ugly. ...the thing denoted (objective) is true, the connoted is false (ideological).²⁹

Another sense of this same thought appears in comments by Dieter Rams, chief designer for *Braun*. In an interview published in *Domus* he responds to a question about the nature of his utopia — is it functionalist, poetic or purist?

I have always liked the simple and the pure —which however is also useful and may possess poetry too. I owe a great deal here to my grandfather, who was a carpenter and always refused machines. The greatest care and honest quality were his principles. The important principle in design to my mind is to remove the non-essential in order to bring out the essential. Good design means to me the least possible design. I believe the time is ripe for a return to the simple. I am against all "isms," including "functionalism." Design has to contribute to the functionality of the product, indisputably, but "functional" design certainly does not imply a neglect of aesthetics! An aesthetically balanced and harmonious design based on a rule, on some kind of formal grammar, also gives the product a special usability. I suppose I really see myself more as an engineer of form than as an artist or poet.³⁰

The canon of the Bauhaus repudiated "ornamentation," in its place it explored the textures of the materials of which the thing was made. "Function" as a category seemed to imply the pure "reliability" of the thing as utility. The surfaces of the thing were subordinated to the contents and the constituents. Quality and durability were emphasized. Fashion as a framework for design practice was repudiated.

The impact of the Bauhaus, or more broadly, of rational design on notions of how to construct lifespaces was pronounced. Ferebee shows the contrasts between the "Victorian" idiom and that of the Rational school:

The Victorian home had become an enclosed fortress; the Modern house was open to nature. The Victorian interior was dark and cluttered; the Modern interior was light and sparsely furnished. Victorian furniture had been ponderous; Modern furniture was light. Interest centered on sculptural form, rather than on curved surfaces. Light beamed from invisible sources, and lighting fixtures became, like the chair, highly sculptural. The Victorian house boasted dining-room, pantry, music-room, and library; the Modern home dissolved these rooms into loosely defined areas for play, study and eating. Only the bathroom and kitchen retained their identity as separate rooms. The new designers replaced patterned wall-paper with smooth white walls or with wood, brick or stone in order to maximize the effect of

²⁹Baudrillard. "For a Political...", p. 196.

³⁰"Dieter Rams" — interview. (Alessandro Mendini *Domus* No. 649, 1984) p. 1.

texture, rather than pattern.³¹

Under the tutelage of the Bauhaus industrial design was understood as part of a larger project to reconstitute a better world. This strategy, which in other quarters was known as Modernism (with roots in the Enlightenment), emphasized a unity of endeavour, vocabulary and ideology. The staging ground for the project was architecture. With habitation as a starting point, design approached urban planning and the environment; based on cues derived from the larger habitational sphere impulses flowed which would inform design of the objects for everyday life. If there was to be a cultural moment in design then it was to reflect and express a world incorporated into the ratio. What was functional was beautiful: a dictum that rational design took from the next variant to be considered here – expressionist design.

Expressionist Design.

Futurism, an exponent of expressionist design was an important influence on the teachings at the Bauhaus. While there were shared ideas a different inspiration informed the machine aesthetic that futurism espoused. While the rational school looked to the rational, predictable, efficient aspects of the machine, futurism was fascinated by motion, speed and power that were also part of the mechanical environment and its objects. As dell'Arco puts it: "the plastic expression of an absolute idea — speed."

In the hands and imagination of the Futurists the emphasis was on the communicative and affective aspects of the object. The interest in motion was given material expression by sheathing the object in an "envelope" that was articulated in the tapered lines of a Brancusi sculpture. These were the first examples of "streamlining" that later would engender extremely efficient transportation designs and the "wonderfully wacky" streamlined objects of the everyday world such as juicers and adhesive tape dispensers. With sheathing and streamlining sculptural form was stressed. Transformation was emphasised, as was "expression." The Futurist approach implied fashion. Futurism was the first design approach to suggest that the realm of industrial design should consider and welcome a "throwaway aesthetic."

³¹A. Ferebee. A History of Design From the Victorian Era to the Present: A Survey of Modern Style in Architecture, Interior Design, Industrial Design, Graphic Design and Photography. (New York: Van Nostrand and Reinhold Co., 1970) p. 86.

The "Futurist Adventure" lasted from 1909 (publication of Marinetti's manifesto) to 1919. Many of the Futurists aligned themselves with Italian Fascism — but their programme in culture was hailed "revolutionary" by both Bogdanov in the U. S. S. R. and by Gramsci.³² The canon espoused by Futurism, stressed on the one hand the destruction of the "old world" — the world of tradition and the past, and on the other hand was captivated by a passion to build a new world. The Futurists also foresaw a confluence of art and life. The everyday world was to be aestheticized — and this would lead to a revolution which would liberate people.

"Art," as far as the Futurists were concerned was something of a tool used by some against others. The sphere of popular culture, and commercial culture too, had as much to offer as the sphere of "fine art." Balla, the Futurist who was most interested in design of clothing and domestic furnishings, had once remarked that an exhibition of paintings was less beautiful than a glittering display in a shop window — and that an electric iron was more beautiful than a sculpture. He also contended that a typewriter was more important than wrong kind of architecture.³³ Antonio Sant'Elia — an architect in the group — suggested that what was needed in modern society was an original modernity, "health, elegance and synthetic emotion." In short, the world had to be changed, modernized and made better for people even if emotions had to be synthetic (presumably to match the new emerging synthetic world).

As far as design of objects went, the Futurists had a clear position. Galante, in a manifesto published in 1917, summed up the Futurist canon.

Two things are of prime importance: the material and the use of the "object," I mean everything from a building to a fork. The material must be used exclusively in accordance with its own properties, with respect to its elasticity. Experience and new requirements will teach us what materials to employ for a given thing. The form of the object must be dictated solely by the criteria of good usage and health. If form is dictated by tradition, the consequences are — and will continue to be indefinitely — identical in their general type, just as many of our customs have remained unchanged from ancient civilization right down to the present. Machines, however, in which every part is governed by its own laws, are leading in a new direction and can form novel compositions.³⁴

³²M. F. dell'Arco. "The Futurist Construction of the Universe" Italy: The New Domestic Landscape. Achievements and Problems of Design. (New York: The Museum of Modern Art in collaboration with Centro Di, Florence, 1972) p. 293.

³³Ibid. p. 294.

³⁴Ibid. p 295.

Styling.

Industrial design historian John Heskett associates the "American System" of design with styling. Styling refers to an approach where the surface of objects and products is emphasized. The aesthetics that inform the industrial design vocabulary are based on eclectic referentiality and the commercial imperative provides the impulse. Because the American system was "democratic," the ideological background insisted on a wide distribution of goods (as opposed to the background that informed British production discussed above.) Industrial design design in Europe appeared as an ideological field: This was particularly evident in the rational school's socialist sympathies and the appropriation of the futurist vocabulary by Italian fascism. In the United States a liberalism informed design, a liberalism that presented itself as unideological. The ideology, however, was to be seen in the approach to the product: The emphasis was on product styling, in short, on product "presentation."

American design cannot be subsumed entirely under the rubric of "styling." Indeed at the International Exhibition of 1851 American products were the object of derision because of the obvious disregard for design. The American objects — the Colt .45 repeater and the McCormick Harvester — simultaneously won the respect of the European critical press because of their efficiency and functionality.³⁵ American design was, after all, rooted in the "no-nonsense" vocabulary of its puritan origins. Utility, not surface decoration; practicability, not embellishment had set the patterns of early American furnishings and products. (The Quaker style with its economic use of materials and clean strong lines can serve as an example.) But, by the 1920s the new inspiration was eclecticism, inspired mainly by developments in Europe. European designers and manufacturers were aware of this and were even uneasy about the threat of American copies. Battersby reports that when an international exhibition of glass and rugs was organized in 1930 by the Metropolitan Museum: "France and Sweden, both prominent in these fields, had refused to cooperate for fear of plagiarism."³⁶ Within a decade, however, the situation would change, and American industry would discover styling in the "modernist" idiom.

Styling, as a form of product presentation based on surface detail without great concern over the "integrity" of form and "function," had begun in earnest with the American auto industry in the 1920s.

³⁵Heskett. pp. 51-3.

³⁶M. Battersby. The Decorative Thirties. (New York: Collier Books., 1971) pp. 19-20.

Henry Ford had resisted style changes which his competition were increasingly making use of but soon saw the necessity to respond to the apparent market demand for formal variation tied to annual changes. The differences in the Ford Motor Co. approach is characterized by the differences between the "Model A" of 1927 (an extended buckboard — still similar to the "Model T") and the "V8" that began to pour off the assembly lines in 1933 (which was already inspired by the curved lines of aerodynamic research and styling). By the 1930s American industry, smarting by the drop in consumer sales brought about by the Depression, enlisted the services of industrial designers to restyle their products in an effort to boost sales.

Battersby explains that:

...[I]n spite of the Depression — or because of it — there was a growing taste for modernism, a streamlined expression of the American spirit in glittering chromium plate, mirror and tubular lighting — a realization of a new machine-made world of drive and efficiency, not uninfluenced by the movies and far removed from the harsh realities of economic strains, a reflection of the comparison made in 1933, that "while English interiors are domestic and reticent, the French had an air of feminine luxury and the Germans stark and utilitarian, the American interior was different, had something exhilarating in its use of new forms and was occasionally theatrical."³⁷

Styling was to become a strategy that emphasized the visual aspects of the product. Surfaces were designed to anticipate how the product would make the consumer feel on consumption or appropriation. As MacCannell has noted, the single most important development in product design under capitalist production has been the building in of ambience or feel:

...[I]n the subsequent history of the industrial object, it is just this feature that undergoes the greatest development, transforming the merely industrial world into the modern world: the appeal to the *gourmet* in the processed food — the *fidelity* of the radio.³⁸

The self-espoused function of industrial design within the American system was to boost sales. And, as

³⁷Ibid. p. 21.

Battersby's usage of "Modern" and "Modernism" ought not to be confused with the "Modernism" that was espoused by the Bauhaus — Battersby seems to be referring to a commercial design variant that would encompass two forms — Art Deco and Art Moderne. Sorokin, writing in *Vogue*, gives these two commercial design idioms the following formulations:

1. *Art Deco* — mechanizes the idea of decoration by paring it down, rendering it geometrical, triumph of the straight-edge over the vagaries of nature and the human hand.
2. *Art Moderne* — takes a more metaphorical inspiration. Fascinated by the ethos of Futurism, Moderne infuses its objects with an illusion of speed... "nutty aerodynamic," "giddy, exhilarated and optomistic"

³⁸Deaf MacCannell. The Tourist: A New Theory of the Leisure Class. (New York: Schocken Books, 1976) pp. 20-1.

sales figures were to indicate, this strategy worked.

By 1938 industrial design became a recognized profession with a number of noteworthy practitioners; as Battersby puts it:

Modernism, with a growing emphasis on the machine as a source of inspiration for design and an often exaggerated stress on the dubious virtues of "streamlining" had in the late thirties brought about the emergence of a new figure — the industrial designer. His role became one of vital importance in the long years of the Depression when "styling" became one of the integral featu in sales promotions. A newly styled object or piece of household equipment became something to be acquired as a status symbol and a proof that the owner was unaffected by the Depression — at least until the manufacturerers produced a restyled model which made the previous one old-fashioned and obsolete.³⁹

American industrial designers came to the profession neither from engineering, crafts, nor fine arts as did their counterparts in Europe, but rather they came into industrial design from training and previous work in either store display or stage design; and this may explain something of the "theatricality" in American design referred to earlier by Battersby. Battersby reports that the new "professionals" were well taken care of by industry:

Norman Bell Geddes was said to obtain a flat fee ranging from \$1000 to \$100,000 plus royalties for designing such items as a radio or a gas range; Walter Dorwin Teague, the designer for advertising and interiors worked on a retainer of \$12,000 to \$24,000 and Raymond Loewy could ask sums in a similar range.⁴⁰

What distinguished styling was its appeal to both fashion and to a large and "homogeneous" market. The homogeneity of this market was in fact typified by it being a "mass market" oriented around a growing suburban middle class (known somewhat derisively as the "midcult" in continental design discourse). Fashion, as the seasonal turnover of details and forms, was already implied in the design of cars and soon, especially beginning in the late 40s, to the continual permutation of the formal characteristics of an increasing range of products.

³⁹M. Battersby. pp. 22-3.

Battersby, along with Mumford, reserves the term industrial designer for the people who emerged into the styling profession during the thirties. This is a limited understanding. As the discussions above indicate, industrial design as a practice and a culture involves more than marketing or styling product features.

⁴⁰Ibid. p 23.

6. Mass Consumption.

Following the Second World War consumer society and the promises of consumer culture began to make a significant impact on the everyday world. Credit was being increasingly extended. Production of goods was becoming increasingly diversified. Heskett notes goods were becoming ever more complicated: miniaturization of their internal working parts "made consumer choice fraught with difficulty." One didn't know how a thing worked, nor could one easily assess the degree to which the good would deliver on the promise that its surfaces expressed. Additionally, the technical evolution of the objects of everyday life began to pose certain challenges to the rational school of industrial design which had contended that the internal workings of a thing ought to dictate no small part of the external appearance of the thing.

The American system of design quickly adapted to this growing complexity of goods. The response of the American system is best illustrated by Raymond Loewy's MAYA dictum.⁴¹ The goal for the industrial design was to create interest but at the same time reassure; Loewy's MAYA (most advanced yet acceptable) made room for both needs in the industrial design process. Loewy meant that "survival forms" or features that were aspects of older technologies with which consumers were acquainted ought to be included into emergent technologies regardless of whether they contributed to the functioning of things.

This MAYA principle shared much with the "kitsch" aesthetics.⁴² Kitsch aesthetics, writes Gregotti are recognizable through a number of materialized gestures: the reassuring reduction of all disquieting affect – be it size, articulation, reference. Secondly, kitsch aesthetics often "misquote" – which is to say that things are taken out of context and arbitrarily applied. Kitsch aesthetics are oriented to a concentration on detail and on surfaces.⁴³ The stress on surfaces and emphasis on product presentation, i.e.

⁴¹Heskett, p. 178.

⁴²I am using this term as it is used by Gregotti, see: V. Gregotti. "Kitsch and Architecture." Kitsch: The World of Bad Taste. (Ed. Gillio Dorfles. New York: Universe Books, 1975) pp. 255-77.

⁴³The aesthetics here described bear also a marked resemblance to what Frampton has called the "populist sign":

...[T]he primary vehicle of Populism is the *communicative* or *instrumental* sign. Such a sign seeks to evoke not a critical perception of reality, but rather the sublimation of a desire for a direct experience through the provision of information. Its tactical aim is to attain, as economically as possible, a preconceived level of gratification in behavioristic terms. In this respect, the strong affinity of Populism for the rhetorical

on communication through surfaces, lent itself well to the growth of fashion coding through a range of goods in the compartmental surround. The process first elaborated in clothing and then in the automotive industry in the 20s was now spreading to other items of the everyday lifescape.

These processes — industrial design informed by the commercial imperative and the spread of fashion or styling from "module to module" — were concomitant with the increasing planned or "artificial" obsolescence of goods. These processes and their effects were aspects and embodiments of a phenomenon that Ferebee has described as the "dematerialization of the product."

De-materialization of the Product.

Two features illustrate this paradoxical formulation. From the 1950s onwards products are both increasingly disposable and/or incorporated into systems — technical or aesthetic. In short: disposability—obsolescence and systematic incorporation.

Ferebee writes that from the 50s the industrial designer had to be a "symbol maker" above all other functions.

The modern industrial designer decorates everyday consumer objects in order to express the aspirations of today's culture. This role overrides the designer's other roles: salesman, packager, consumer's representative. (my emphasis) ⁴⁴

While one may be tempted to look askance at such a development it is worth noting that with the increasing miniaturization of internal parts the canons articulated by rational design were being challenged by the "things themselves." No less were these canons, and their perversions at the hands of the "International School," ⁴⁵ being challenged by the consumers too. As Ferebee noted in the 70s, that the lack of ornamentation not only caused an appreciation of form as sculpture, it also suggested that much of

⁴³(cont'd) techniques and imagery of advertising is hardly accidental.

Kenneth Frampton. "Toward a Critical Regionalism: Six Points for an Architecture of Resistance." (The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays on Post-Modern Culture Ed. Hal Foster. Port Townsend: Bay Press, 1983) p. 21.

⁴⁴Ferebee, p. 99.

⁴⁵The International School grew out of the Bauhaus and was characterized by the frugality of Bauhaus expression — but in the service of the "bottom line." In architecture this school moved from the clear curtain-wall, that was to show to the outside what was inside, to the smoked glass that concealed the interior. The International School proved popular with the corporate world, and had been a dominant form in building through the mid-fifties to the mid-seventies.

modern life was dominated by machines. But even as Ferebee was writing this another machine aesthetic was beginning to provide a better articulation of the emergent machine and urban environment.

Ten years previously, in the late fifties, a major change was afoot in clothing design. The "New Look" (attributed to Dior) that had come down from the major couture houses in 1947 was suddenly subverted with a new form that can be typified by the design work of Mary Quant. Much like CoCo Chanel before her, Quant was responding to a change in the social climate of the time: the change was the emergence and growth of a youth market. The aesthetic changes that went along with this change would touch all sectors of commercial culture.

In the graphic design field another change was taking place. The dominant form of graphic design through the 50s and early 60s moved toward simplification of older logos and typefaces. Byron Ferris attributes this to the advent of television and the demand by clients for graphics that could be "read" and understood at a glance. Another influence was the "modernist" aesthetic that was being taught in most design schools — a modernism influenced by the rational variant of design. Designers such as Bealls were leading the way with bold typography, simplicity and photo-montage. The concern was with quick and high visual impact: "effective communication" (this work was reminiscent of Moholy-Nagy's early photographic experiments).⁴⁶ In commercial graphics the norm was called the "Swiss Movement" characterized by pictorial realism and "slick" presentation. Over and against these norms a new idiom appeared — the "Push Pin" style.

The "Push Pin" idea of illustration was to pull any image from the past and build its implications into an assignment, often "dealing in irony, hyperbole and sometimes deliberate nonsense." Push-Pin Studio, in its reaction to the "Swiss Movement," is credited by many in the graphic art field for the revivals of Art Nouveau and Art Deco that were so common in the "underground" graphics of the early and mid-1960s. The best known practitioners of the Push Pin style were Milton Glaser and Seymour Chwast: This style was common in the *Rolling Stone* graphics of the period and a similar form was developed in England by Peter Max.⁴⁷

⁴⁶"Lester Bealls" (Communication Arts No. 179, 1985) pp. 84-98.

⁴⁷Byron Ferris: "Annals of Design (3), Boom Years: 1948-1973" (Communication Arts May/June 1985) pp. 28-37.

Eclecticism was still the norm. Historical reference and street cultures became major sites for stylistic innovation. These references were either drawn from "oppositional" signifying practices or referentialities that had been reworked into an oppositional context. As these forms entered the general market, it must be stressed, they went through yet a second reprocessing – this time through the MAYA canon.⁴⁸

Through the 60s and then into the 70s the social differentiation and production of various markers or "totems" increased the diversity of industrial design practices and the efforts to in-form products in anticipation or in response to the perceptions of consumer praxis. This diversification of production and design, along with an increasingly fragmented market and a seeming appropriation of all design vocabularies into one — that of commercial production and its proclivity for styling and eclectic reference would come together in the mid-seventies under the rubric of postmodern aesthetics. The current activities in design, design cultures and practices are now focused around various aspects of this phenomenon.

Industrial Design in the 1980s: Current Issues.

Even a cursory review of both trade and theoretical industrial design literature reveals that the current issues in design are focused around the role to be played by signification, ornamentation, or cultural reference in the design of objects for everyday life. Concomitant with this is an increasing awareness on the part of designers of the importance of fashion and lifestyle groupings.

One cannot underplay the impact of ergonomics and social research on contemporary design. The literature shows a high degree of concern over the degree to which products are or are not "user friendly." Nor is it fair to say that no attention is paid to product integrity or servicability. All these concerns emerge over and over again in the literature. Yet, the spread of market relations brings all forms of design under commercial imperatives, except perhaps design commissioned by the state – in which case, "bottom line" concerns do not dictate the nature of design, though other determinants are at work.⁴⁹ The trade press

⁴⁸This same process can be seen in the popular music industry, particularly the reworking of "race music" into "cover versions" that would be acceptable in the white midcult context — Pat Boone doing Bo Diddley might serve as an example.

⁴⁹The relationship between the state and industrial design could easily render another thesis — and further work on the communicative and performative aspects of industrially designed

tends to indicate that the current area of interest in all sectors of industrial design is fashion. This no longer refers just to nondurables but is much more widespread.

When it comes to fashion, marketing can be seen as a brake on innovation. Fashion production is concerned with innovation. The coexistence between designer and marketer is not always comfortable or unproblematic. An example of this can be seen in a recent issue *Design*.⁵⁰ The question posed in a feature article dedicated to marketing is — how are designers to understand and make use of marketing? On the one hand, marketing is seen as useful. It is felt that marketers are very good at understanding the cues and images current in the marketplace. Based on this understanding, itself derived from extensive research and polling, marketers are felt to be capable of translating what is known into images that are meaningful and attractive to consumers. In this sense marketing is understood as helpful to a designer.

On the other hand, the writers of the articles note that marketers do not always properly interpret the data that they have collected — and sometimes marketers poll either the wrong groups, or they ask the wrong questions. *Sony's* entry into North American markets with their small portable televisions is given as one example. In the late sixties American market research suggested that consumers were interested in large, cabinet stored television sets. American firms produced these console units, and believed that there was nothing to fear from the appearance of portable television sets. Meanwhile *Sony* had undertaken a different kind of research, what has since been called "qualitative": instead of polling the market with inquiries about what consumers thought they would prefer *Sony* noted the trends in broadcasting which were moving toward an increase in television channels. Based on these developments the Japanese concluded that, given more channels, the *two (or more) TV family* was soon to be a reality in which case the portable television would be desirable.

Sony's success in the marketplace with its micro-electronic entertainment equipment is attributed by that company to the trend-oriented research that they regularly make use of. It was the same sort of research that convinced the Japanese that personal portable stereos would make an impact on the market while American industry believed that component stereos would continue to dominate the market. What *Sony* had seen and noted was the general turn of popular interest to "healthy" lifestyles: and the increasing

⁴⁹(cont'd) objects would have to address the area. See: Heskett, pp. 182-201.

⁵⁰"A Fear of Feedback: Market Research." (*Design* No. 420. December 1983) pp. 31-42.

interest in jogging, hiking, cycling, and activities such as cross-country skiing. These were the people who would consume the "Walkman." *Sony* proved to be right again. And, as in the years in which the Japanese had introduced the portable TV into the North American market, again American industry had to scramble to catch up.

An older version of the same story, but one localized to the American market, was the multi-million dollar ill-fated, much-market-researched "Edsel."⁵¹ Heskett reports that Ford had embarked on a huge research and development project to produce an "ultimate" car. The Edsel, a culmination of all the stylistic trends of the fifties, was Ford's conclusion. Unfortunately for Ford, consumers were no longer interested in fins or plane-nose grills. The derisive connotations of "edsel" in common parlance indicates the success of this research and development venture. The Edsel, while mechanically as sound as other cars of the time, was rejected outright by consumers and cost Ford a sizable price both in investment gone bad, and reputation.

This suggests that the "successful" designer has to be able to *read* a trend as it emerges. Kennedy Fraser, discussing the clothing industry and fashion, notes

Practicable, craftsmanlike, imaginative clothes are worthless if the designer's vision does not correspond to some impulse of [the consumer's] own.⁵²

As Leiss notes, constant innovation is one of the key features of consumer society. Marketing, according to the design trade press, can be an asset — it can also, as the above examples indicate, be a drawback. Because marketers tend to poll the market as it is at any given time, the design trade press suggests that marketers can actually act as a break on innovation. Successful designer/innovators watch other areas of social life for cues from which to draw and develop forms.

The trade press suggests that the major areas to which designers ought to be paying attention are the music industry, all forms of popular culture (film and television in particular), and "the street."⁵³ The

⁵¹This project cost Ford \$250 million in research and development. See Heskett, p. 179.

⁵²K. Fraser. "The Secret Power of Dress," The Fashionable Mind: Reflections on Fashions 1970-1982. Boston: David R. Godine, Publisher, 1985) p. 9

⁵³These interrelationships can be illustrated with reference to the clothing industry. For example — Nolan Miller designs clothing for the film industry and television. He designs for *Love Boat*, *Matt Houston*, and is the "sartorial wizard" of *Dynasty*. Last year Miller inaugurated the *Dynasty Line* of clothing that is sold *pret a porte* throughout clothing stores

latter refers to various subcultural styles that are developed by youth groups. This demonstrates the high degree to which industrial design relies on symbols and idioms that are developed outside its immediate sphere. These sources of idioms, along with the recent development of life styles broadens both the scope for sources of idiom and styling, and the possible range of tastes and predilections expressed through previous choices to which various designed goods can be directed.

Ugo La Pietra, writing in Domus about fashion and furniture, notes the following classifications and significations:

1. Neo-classical objects for the upper-middle class - 40s generation.
2. Neo-modern objects for the avant-garde intellectuals.
3. Objects with residual pop elements for the nostalgic and partly backward intellectual.
4. Post modern objects for the new rich.
5. "Soft objects" for more mod imaginations.
6. Overdecorated objects for the exhibitionists.
7. High-tech objects for the young and "ephemeral" intellectuals.
8. Essential objects for the recent "silent" aristocracy.

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Furthermore, a "postmodern" aesthetic is beginning to permeate the realm of popular culture. Objects are increasingly receiving the touches and detail particularities of an Italian design, which is itself a revival and reworking of the canons set into place by futurism: in short, there seems to be a turn to an

⁵³(cont'd) and now regularly is advertised in Vogue. The clothes themselves are re-workings of the basic Chanel suit and more flamboyant evening wear and lingere. In this way the television programme and the commodities on the shelves become cross-referential. See: "Nolan Miller" — interview Sugar Rautbord. (Andy Warhol's Interview Vol. XIV. No. 9) pp. 146-8.

Another example is the recent discussion of the impact of the film *Amadeus* on fashions. Beckett writing in Vogue feels that the film has done a great deal to popularize the recent trend to "neo-Baroque" dressing and styles which are typified by highly ornamented jewellery, brocades and cuts that simulate the forms of the Baroque. This article draws more parallels between fashion and popular culture, as it is an extended discussion of the relationship between fashion, the music industry and particularly the video-music industry. See: Kathleen Beckett. "A New Groove" (Vogue. Sept. '85) pp. 474-83.

⁵⁴ Ugo La Pietra. "Linee di Moda: Dal Salone Internazionale dle Mobile di Milano 1984." (Domus. No. 657, 1985) p. 53.

expressionist modality in industrial design. And in an odd sense this vocabulary seems to hold true to the canon set by the rational school. Forms produced under this canon are detailed in bright coloured tubing and polychrome, shiny surfaces, and shapes that are reminiscent of wires, resistors and capacitors. The design that is associated with the firm Memphis under Sotsass or Mendini's Alchemia forms do seem to express on the surfaces what constitutes much of the interiority of contemporary objects — coloured wire and the landscape of electrical engineering with its capacitors, resistors, and printed circuitry. However citation is common at all levels of design. Varieties of objects and furnishings are produced from "Ranchero" style with its citations of an American ranch rusticality to the starkness of Minimalism inspired by Rational design.

Similar themes run through the theoretical literature. Since the late 60s the canons of Modernism have been increasingly criticized both in architectural debate and, more broadly, throughout various design spheres. The machine aesthetic that characterized the Modernist project and its attendant rational design has been called "cold and unfriendly."

The Modernist canon called for the development of new forms that Modernists believed were more appropriate to their times — this in opposition to the eclecticism of Victorian design. Modernism therefore advocated a complete break with the past and valued novelty and originality over history and tradition. Along with the repudiation of tradition came a repudiation of ornamentation and decoration and an emphasis on simple forms, clear articulation, purity and rationality. Modernism also rejected local expressions favouring an international or global concept of design. Vernacular and regional articulations were repudiated as being inappropriate to a world informed by the spirit of reason which had to be global. And because Modernists advocated the destruction of the old world that a new more humane and rational world could be built the Modernist ideology contended that the designer knew what was best for people. Often this "superior knowledge" was imposed without much regard for the wants, needs, likes and dislikes of people.

Since the mid-70s these canons are increasingly being rejected and new forms are being explored. The rejection of Modernist design is inspired by a number of forces. According to Jameson, this rejection can be traced to the widespread appropriation of the Modernist project into mainstream culture. It might be added that this is also a reaction to the perversion of the Bauhaus aesthetics in the

"International School" which, under the rubric of ornament-free, functional design was responsible for the overblown curtain-walled megaliths that appear in almost every "major" urban core around the world.

The direction indicated in the current debates suggests a "recovery of human technologies." As Branzi puts it, an effort is being made to forge new links between persons and their systems of objects, to recover a culture of living not yet worn out. Branzi summarizes the sense of the times when he writes:

The present post-industrial model of society reveals a world in which industry has come to an end of its period of heroic growth, characterized by a rationalist and internationalist culture, and in which the homogeneous society of equals has been replaced by an assemblage of minorities, of conflicting groups no longer founded on different productive, economic and social functions but on different cultures, religions and traditions. A world which is seeing the return of culture, the transcendent and the traditional as great historical forces. As a result the myth of reason and egalitarianism, so vital to the whole of modern culture and architecture, has entered a period of crisis. The myth of the unity of all languages and technologies in the project has given way to a "narrative" process of discontinuity and partiality.⁵⁵

Branzi is enunciating some of the features of the current aesthetic climate which is called Postmodern. Theoreticians like Charles Jencks suggest that the Postmodern, while appearing novel and unique, is only a temporary phase — a clearing house which doesn't replace Modernism but rather augments it in an effort to modify it.

Under the "new" canon no single style appears as dominant. There is an active return to history and tradition — this taking the shape of citations and "retro" styles. Ornament and decoration are given free rein. Based on Venturi's discussion of Renaissance architecture, the new canon emphasizes "complexity and contradiction" over the simplicity, purity and rationality of Modernist design. The complexity and contradiction of the new forms involve a confluence of "high" and "low" cultures to facilitate multi-layered reading of forms and structures by audiences of varying sophistication and knowledge. The overall concern is with *meaning* — architecture and design are treated as "languages" by which various statements can be expressed. The canon favours and promotes "intertextuality" — this is to say that the postmodern canon makes use of allusion and commentary whether they implicit or explicit.⁵⁶ Since Postmodern does not supplant Modernism, the latter continues as a design canon though it assumes the

⁵⁵Branzi, p. 9.

⁵⁶Both the discussion of Modernism on the previous page and the discussion of Postmodern aesthetics here are drawn from Charles Walker Art in the Age of Mass Culture (London: Pluto Press, 1983) pp. 80-90.

title "Neomodern" and sets about to rework the canons set by rational design. Indeed there seem to be almost as many design strategies as there are lifestyle groups or taste-cultures, whom these design cultures seek to attract to their "disciplines."

While Peter Fuller, among others, argues that the move to decoration and ornamentation is false, since it does not reflect a commonly held system of values such as that which informed folk-arts of various kinds, few designers seem to be listening. Perhaps this can be explained by the fact that symbols produced in lifestyles and street cultures serve as the main sources for design vocabulary innovations. Thus while Fuller asserts that there is nothing to learn from Las Vegas, industrial design seems to be learning from Las Vegas, the streets of urban centres, popular culture generally, films and the symbols around which various groups gather or the symbols which various groups use in the mise-en-scenes of their association and recreation.⁵⁷

Summation.

This schematic review of the history and current practices of industrial design tends to show that over the past 80 to 100 years the move has been to a self-conscious in-forming of objects with cultural and group markers, signs or cues. Further fashion and fashion consciousness emerge as important issues in the current concern in the industrial design profession. The unity of all languages seems to have dissolved. The human need for ornamentation and signification seems to be increasingly reaffirmed. Industrial design designed by abstract notions of efficiency and utility is being repudiated as inhuman and unresponsive to human needs. While all this seems to bode well there is a disquieting element to it all. While the emphasis is on diversity and a "softer" more responsive world, there is no disputing that all this production continues to flow into the everyday lifescape mediated through the abstract exchanges of the market. The marketplace remains as the great clearing house through which consumers' needs and the products of industrial design all circulate.

⁵⁷Fuller is referring to Robert Venturi's *Learning From Las Vegas* which has become the polemical basis for the confluence of "high" and "low" cultural citations and return to ornamentation that inform much of the Postmodern canon in architecture, the arts in general and industrial design.

CHAPTER V

FROM FETISH TO FASHION

"The word "fashion" (with "fashionable") isn't heard much anymore, and even its successors "trend" and "style" have come to seem a little tasteless and passe. But fashion is everywhere around us just the same. It's wherever political strategies are planned, movies made, books published, art exhibits mounted, critical columns turned out, dances danced, editorial policies formulated, academic theses germinated: wherever people think, speak, or create our shared forms of self expression. Fashion usually is neither named nor noted but is simply the lens through which our society perceives itself and the mold to which it increasingly shapes itself."

Kennedy Fraser

The previous two discussions suggest that fragmentation of the market — i.e. social differentiation into groupings organized by shared taste preferences — and fashion characterize the current cultural frame for goods. Taking industrial design as a kind of "instrumental aesthetics," a question can be posed: what informs industrial design in this cultural frame for goods? How does the influence of commercial culture find expression in the products of industrial design? Or, put another way, what is expressed by industrial design, on the products that are conceived for mechanical reproduction? As was seen above the theoretical concern was to bridge the gap between man and his system of objects. The form this seems to take is not focused so much on objects but rather on expressing *through* objects a process of relatedness and renewal.

There are two levels of abstraction on which one can approach the fashion process. The first, "pedestrian level," involves notions of relatedness and renewal. At the level of objects the relatedness expressed is two-fold: on the one hand, relatedness to user-groups; on the other, relatedness to systems of goods and objects as facilitators. One can belong to a group because one shares their taste in music or a sporting activity, and one can relate to a system of goods as facilitators — one can engage in painting, carpentry, reading; in this case goods facilitate some kind of activity that can direct one outward or can keep one "occupied."

But for the relatedness to be brought under the rubric of fashion, the relatedness has to be taken with reference to the idea of renewal. A crucial characteristic of the fashion process is its capacity to systematically invest and divest goods with social approval. Hence, while the goods are "intermediary" in Leiss' sense, "instrumental" in Czikszenmihalyi's or "focal" in Borgmann's, for them to be part of fashion

goods must in some way express personal, and more often associational, renewal.

At another level of abstraction the fashion process can be thought of as a function of the desire for an expression of personal power. This level *might be* "pathological" or merely "playful." At this level of abstraction the fashion process might describe the expressions of power by association and power by appropriation. In the latter case, power through appropriation can be understood in the sense of extending one's manipulatory sphere (achievement); in the former, power by association can be characterized by association with groups who are perceived to be powerful, or groups that express one's own predilections and therefore make them legitimate for one (totem).

At this second sphere of abstraction fashion would appear as an appropriation and association with "progress." This is consistent with achievement ideology and with the origins of mass fashion which is concomitant with the rise of the bourgeoisie. "Progress" would be understood in this case as a surmounting of past difficulties and inadequacies through acquisition of goods and services; the appropriation of the fruits of the marriage between capital, commerce and machine.

The two levels meet at one equation: expression and experience of personal renewal and relatedness by appropriation and association. In both cases a subject and a collectivity emerge, an identity and a difference. But, in both cases what is crucial is that *association and appropriation be manifested* (easily done in the world of goods).

1. Fashion as Social Pathology

A common critical perspective on fashion holds that fashion is a form of social pathology. The problem with this perspective, as will be discussed at the end of this section, is that it does not pay much heed to the importance of the desire for relatedness or association that are also aspects of people's participation in fashion and its pursuit. While this position offers insights into fashion, it does not provide a complete account — which must include the social character of fashion.

Compensation, Status and the Ornamental Code.

Fashion can be understood as a form of compensation (this is a theme that runs throughout the literature on consumer culture). Fashion can also be understood as an exercise in management of community meaning, a deployment of power — an imposition of taste or an aesthetic. Fashion has also been described as a preoccupation with images that are essentially hollow.]

Compensation

The argument that fashion represents a kind of embodied compensation for the loss of personal autonomy is clearly formulated by Z. Baumann. Baumann argues that with the coming of industrialization and the emergence of capitalist relations of production consumption was proffered as a compensation for the loss of bodily autonomy to the machine and work process. This is very much the same argument offered by the Ewens, who contend that fashion became a surrogate for autonomy in the work place and a distraction from the world of work. What lends this argument credence is that studies suggest that autonomy is an important determinant of people's feelings of well-being and life-satisfaction.

Because it was bodily autonomy that was lost to exploitative relations of production it was the body that required the focus of the compensation. According to Baumann it is here that fashion entered the social picture — as a bodily based form of compensation. Baumann writes that the origins of consumer culture are rooted in a reaction to failed resistance to disciplinary power. He points out that this reaction left three marks on consumption which are all oriented to the body.

The first "mark" was that the body came to be viewed as an object of constant attention. The body is clothed with care, the hair is done with care, the body is attended to with an increasingly diverse range of goods and services, each requiring an apportioning of time and energy: sunbathing, hairdresser, shopping. Each of these imply, according to the argument, an investment of autonomous drilling like that which is imposed by the workplace and the relations of production. The same drill, or repetitive activity, that is encountered at work is then imposed on the self outside work as an aspect of leisure.]

The second "mark" is that the body must continually be kept "fit" to consume ever new sensations and experiences. Baumann notes that the two types of books that seem to continually command the

best-seller list in North America are cook books and diet books. Another genre that rises quickly on these lists is the sex manual, another example that the body is to be constantly trained to function at its best, at its most "affective." The body is made to perspire, to exert itself in the name of health and pleasure. It is kept fit and trim. Fashionalization capitalizes on this by producing new variations on various fitness activities and saturating these activities with goods.

And the third "mark" is that the body and not the person is charged with responsibility for success or failure. This point is well illustrated by Ewen in his discussion of the advertising of the 1920s wherein the consumer was informed that social problems could be ameliorated if the body were made to conform to the norm set out by the advertising. In short, "doing something about one's life" gets translated into "doing something about one's own body." Baumann writes:

...[R]eal problems people experience in their life-in-society tend to be well-nigh automatically, though not without the eager assistance of the advertising media, translated into the need of possessing some purchasable tools of bodily training, bodily adornments or other goods defined first and foremost as extensions of, or adjuncts to, the body. The tremendous pre-occupation with fashion — such a salient characteristic of the consumer era — is the most obvious example (Roland Barthes defined fashion as a discourse *on* and *about* the body).¹

In Baumann's analysis of the the compensatory effect of fashion the fashion process does not appear as a renewal but rather a flight. This argument suggests that rather than renewing the self, fashion provides an elaborate set of disguises within which the self hides from the brutality or the banality of modern relations of production. Fashion becomes a kind of self-imposed discipline by which one reproduces the objective conditions of the social relations of production. And, as a masking, it appears as a flight from a true, social self.

What this account seems to lack is the recognition that there is an authentic dimension in sporting activity, and there is a pleasure in feeling healthy or appearing as a member of a group. Furthermore, much activity that focuses on the body tends to be interpersonal in some way. Games are played with others. And, while there is a turn-over in varieties of activities to which the body can be subordinated they offer potentially new and, in fact, better ways to health or sense of personal well being.

¹Baumann, Zygmunt. "Industrialism, Consumerism and Power." (T.C.S., Volume 1, No. 3, 1983) p. 41.

Fashion can also be cast as a pathological process with reference to the way in which it makes use of scarcity and symbols of status. This aspect of fashion is oriented around the notion of power and the expression of power by either management of community or group meaning, or by display of goods that bespeak association with empowered groups.

The object of participating in the fashion process is to acquire and display or use things, goods and services that function as "positional goods." Positional goods express a person's relative standing in society. By appropriation of these goods one can become as one "appears" to be. The "appearance" is expressed through access to status goods. In their study of the meaning of things, M. Csikszentmihalyi and E. Rochberg-Halton indicate that while status is not a key association made through objects, status does play a major role in why people cherish certain objects. While not a determinant, status is important.

Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton argue that one's position in the social order is an important or an integral part of who one perceives oneself to be. Thus signs of status are important ingredients of the self. They note that in all societies objects are chosen to represent the power of their bearer. This power, or person's capacity to affect others is symbolically expressed. The chosen symbolic objects "point" to a potential reality, and, as is the case with a tribesman's spear or the seventeen year-old's car, these objects may actually help to bring this affective reality about. The symbolic object foreshadows other, possible actualities. As symbolic objects reflect what is *and* what might yet be, these objects become the "models of..." and "models for..." the exercise of power.² Thus symbolic objects as "models for/of," according to Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton, become a "vital force in determining cultural evolution." The nature of this power to affect others is cast by them in terms of "eros" "Eros" in the broadest sense, they note, is a "demonstration that one is alive, that one makes a difference in the world." They suggest that all persons share the ability to use symbolic objects to express "dimly" perceived possibilities for themselves." Symbolic objects then become models for future goals.

²This can be extrapolated to include the use of such objects as reflections of one's group or family too. The Ewens' discussion of fashion at the turn of the century relates how the affluent burger expressed his own financial prowess by lavishing meters of expensive cloth on his wife's body. His own frame, they note, he garbed in the severity of dark colours...but here too the quality and workmanship bespoke access denied the majority of people around the captain of industry.

As for status itself – this is a form of power constituted by respect, consideration and envy of others. Status entails the recognition of the self by others as one who can "set the standards and norms" by which others will act. Status is what turns one into an object of emulation or a "culture hero." As Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton put it, one who has status embodies the goals of culture. Now, an object which is used as a symbol of status "acts as a template embodying these goals." Those who believe in the thing's status "will act accordingly toward it and its owner who possesses the status."

Status is understood by Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton as a control over psychic energy. Those who have status, observe the authors, "can count on the attention and compliance of those who have less." They note that in the animal kingdom submissive animals "look to" dominant animals. Thus status emerges as the capacity to control meaning in one's community.

Of what is status made? Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton list wealth, power, talent, physical prowess. And, of particular interest to this discussion, one can also maintain or gain status by manipulating its symbols to one's own ends. For something to become a status symbol it must possess one or a configuration of four features. Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton include the following: the object may be rare, it may involve much effort to produce it; the object can be aged; it can be expensive; or it can acquire status if it attracts the attention of those who already possess status. An object that is privileged by elites will attract the attention and desire of subordinates. Within this context, the authors suggest that art can be used by one group to bolster control over the psychic energy of another group. This formulation is consistent with Benjamin's discussion of the pre-mechanical uses of art. Only those with power, secular or sacred, had access to art, and this access, to some extent, expressed their status in the community. But, taken further, the implication is that access to art and its uses in social legitimation plays a role in the management of social meaning.

High - low culture

Thus an object coded with an eros in mind can be produced to attract the attention of those who already possess social power or status, or for those who wish to appear that they possess such a social standing.

The Ewens have observed that not "Fashion" but fashions seem to dominate today. This should not be understood as meaning that class distinctions are not to be found in modern fashions. Gillo Dorfles suggests that the "tout est permis" which characterizes the contemporary fashion climate may be a passing

phase. He writes:

What's usually considered "democratization" is more illusion than anything else. ...there's been the advent of the casual style and the temporary and deceiving abandonment of elitist fashion; but this can be viewed as only a brief parenthesis.³

The Langs note that there are distinctions but they are much more subtle:

Upper classes still differentiate themselves but in many subtle ways. Fine materials and workmanship, rather than novelty, have become the true marks of the "fashionable." Novelty in dress has been de-emphasized but fashions in hair styles, furnishings, music and art, houses, recreation and resorts have become more important. Therefore, the realm in which an individual feels subject to the dictates of fashion now seems a more meaningful hallmark of class in the mass society.⁴

They continue that almost every aspect of consumer choice has a significance in fashion expressiveness about the person's class origins and loyalties.

...[I]t has been noted that one can discern from a person's choice of clothes, furniture, salads, games, reading, entertainment, and even "causes" endorsed whether the person is "low," "middle" or "high" brow ...⁵

While a pathological dimension can be seen in this focus on status objects not all objects that are acquired by people are "status" oriented. Borgmann, for example, notes that people do acquire and use things as "focal goods." According to Borgmann some goods are used as facilitators for activities in which people interrelate with each other or activities where the person can encounter aspects of his/her life that provide it with meaning. Borgmann suggests that these goods serve as adjuncts to "focal activities." In much the same way, fashion can be a means of reaffirming relatedness by appropriation of goods which provide a basis for the focal activities of a group.

The Ornamental Code.

A third formulation of the fashion process as pathology is the one that sees fashion as a participation in an empty ornamental code. This perspective points to a "hollowing-out" of meaning as a function of the fashion process. Fashion tends to work on surfaces alone. Here fashion appears not as a flight from the self but rather an armouring of the self (through the comportmental surround) against the vicissitudes of anonymous urban life. On the one hand there is a production and consumption of surface signification,

³"Gillo Dorfles" — interview Ugo La Pietra. (Domus No. 659, 1985) p. 56.

⁴Langs, p. 341.

⁵ibid. p. 343.

on the other there is an armouring of the self.

In her discussion of "The Fashionable Mind" and "Architectural Fashions," fashion critic Kennedy Fraser gives examples of both dimensions of fashion. In the case of the emptying of meaning she gives the example of a stylish young man buying a turn-of-the-century tavern from an unstylish old man, then gutting all of the tavern's old turn-of-the-century furnishings only to hire a designer to refurbish the tavern in turn-of-the-century style with antiques. The point of this exercise is to create an appearance of an "authenticity" which disguises the fact that the actual "authentic" is gone. This same feature is ascribed by MacCannell to much of "ethnicity" which is staged and packaged for the benefit of tourists. He suggests that this is a feature of the spread of modernization: the framing of the pre-modern world within the modern world as a museum exhibit. This same process is described by Baudrillard as the production of simulacra. ⁶

By "simulacra" is meant a representation of reality that either "dissolves reality" or disguises the fact that a reality no longer exists. In the case of the former what is implied is the efficacy of the representation as a means for affecting reality and perhaps directing its unfolding. An example of this might be simulation, or, at the concrete level it might be exemplified by various simulators (flight simulators and so on). In the case of the latter the implication is that what was real has been replaced with a more-than-reasonable facsimile which appears as a replacement for the reality that it has displaced. Fashionalization thrives on just such simulacra: resurrections of various kinds, "retro" styles, and nostalgias, all provide examples of this emptying of the referent and its replacement by an "empty sign." ⁷

The notion of fashion as a means of armouring the self is implicit in the therapeutic ethos discussed above. The self, subject to scrutiny by others acquires objects that are acceptable in social judgement, thereby the self is protected from negative social opinion. Another variation on this theme places the self in the fluid anonymity of the urban landscape. Here relationships are truncated and fleeting. Judgement of others at a distance and a glance is an advantage. Fashion becomes a surface impression management.

⁶J. Baudrillard. Simulations Translated by P. Foss, P. Patton and P. Beitchman. (New York: Foreign Agents Press, 1983) pp. 1-79. and also D. MacCannell. The Tourist: A new Theory of the Leisure Class. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978) pp. 12-16.

⁷This suggests that the sign is "tautological" and refers only to itself. For example — the experience of someone who encounters Chinese calligraphy while not being able to "read" the signs beyond the gestural language of the brush-stroke.

Kennedy Fraser writes:

...[M]odernist, visual architectural fashion is essentially an urban style. It's not just that it is worn in the city...but that it seems a direct attempt to express the urban sensibility, to devise a visual style to match the feeling of living in the setting of the big city.

The feeling this style expresses...is visual more than social: what a person with such-and-such a shape or shadow looks like — or feels as though he or she looked like — in relation to the greater shapes and shadows of the city, the frame formed by the buildings and its streets.⁸

The style Fraser is referring to exhibits features of the "new wave" idiom characterized by its aloofness, a propensity to modernist machine aesthetics: clean lines, textures, sculptural effects and articulations. In this style and the people grouped around it Fraser sees an "overarching contradiction" in contemporary taste — "the hunger for ceremony and ritual."

The triumph of the eye allows these (ceremony and ritual) to be severed from the encumbrance of meaning, dogma, content. The more mysterious, systematic, and even irrational the ritual, the better, as long as it looks good...and it is the look of religion that appeals, more than its dogma.⁹

Fraser goes on to suggest that these new aesthetics are in the service of an "attempt to live out life in an ornamental code." She notes the immense popularity of a touring Kabuki group which played in New York. She suggests that the people who went to see the performances, not knowing much of the genre, were there mainly for the visual effects. She draws a parallel with this Kabuki performance and features of recent fashion shows which employed ceremonial elements, demonstrating "how style took precedence over philosophic content." What appealed, she insists, is the "ordered system of style" similar to the one followed by the Samurai in everything he did — be it "performing the tea ceremony or killing."¹⁰

The "ornamental code" then appears as without its grounding philosophic content, an empty shell which looks good and works well as a kind of armour for the urban self. Under the regimen of fashion this shell must be turned over with the shifts in trends, and these themselves appear to have no content — as her discussion above suggests.

⁸Fraser, pp. 304-5.

⁹Ibid. p. 301.

¹⁰Ibid.

Another variation on this theme of fashion as the production of spectacle or hollow facades is offered in the design press under the rubric "the futile rite." Ugo La Pietra, in his discussion of the spread of fashion to the furnishing's market, develops the notion of fashion as a game, but a game that takes on the form of a frivolous celebration — in short, a "futile rite."¹¹

The futile rite, while still lacking "philosophical content" exhibits the "cheerful proclivity to play the game for its own sake."

...a series of attempts is undertaken by a certain design, which charms fashion in an attempt/effort to contend with it for the terrain of the futile rite... accepted as a game — one called by Rosanna Bossaglia — "a respected rite, but without sacrifice or moral values, emblematic of the aesthetic dimensions of life."¹²

This aesthetic dimension as Fuller has pointed out was lost to a great proportion of the population when capitalist relations of production and industrialization became widespread.

Under nineteenth-century industrial capitalism, less and less social space was left for the full expression of the biologically given aesthetic impulse. For most men and women the aesthetic dimension of work was simply suppressed. In factory production, and later in office work and the service industries, work became simply paid employment, unaccompanied by any expression of significant values or expectation of pleasure.

Thus the aesthetic dimension tended to be shunted towards the margins of life — indeed, for the first time in human history, to stand in opposition to life as it was actually lived and worked.

...[F]or most men and women, brute economic reality and economic necessity impinged too deeply; the space for the aesthetic dimension seemed to be being sealed over altogether.

Indeed it is possible to see the origins of "design" as the attempt to re-insert the aesthetic dimension into the mainstream of productive life — that is, into industry itself.¹³

The implication in what Fuller is saying is that aesthetic sensibilities were focussed on the product not the process of production. Not only was industrial design to attempt to "re-insert" the aesthetic dimension into industry itself, the "re-insertion" was expanded, as the above discussions indicate, into every dimension of everyday life. What Fuller calls the "biological necessity" for an aesthetic dimension, La Pietra, with the aid of Bossaglia, reformulates as the "futile rite."

¹¹La Pietra, p. 53.

¹²Ibid.

¹³Fuller, p. 35.

Given Fuller's observations help wondering just how *futile* a rite this futile rite really is? And, if "game" or "play" describe the fashion process is this a game played in isolation?, is it a nihilistic game?, is it a game staged by commercial culture which uses this game as a ruse to coerce consumers into following its "disciplines" (which is the term that La Pietra uses when discussing the hopes of a designer that the consumers will receive his stylistic offerings as a "discipline" to be followed). The literature on consumer culture and the literature on industrial design suggest that the futile rite is not all that devoid of sacrifice nor is it devoid of content. After all — an assembled appearance or lifestyle does cost money, labour, time and effort. If anything, the game seems to be informed by people's desire for relatedness, and as will be argued presently, people's desire for renewal. And, what is more, there is an aspect to fashion that reveals not an empty play but rather a self-conscious practice whose goal is to display not only relatedness but also oppositional orientations toward the dominant forms.

Analysis of youth cultures by members of the Birmingham School such as D. Hebdige suggests that goods are used not only as armour, but also as a way to subvert "dominant codes." ¹⁴ Quoting Umberto Eco, Hebdige observes that spectacular sartorial codes and styles such as those of the punks were a kind of "semiotic guerilla warfare." What is meant here is that by means of a recontextualization of some goods and their display a visual shock effect can be produced. This suggests that some products serve as focal goods for the given groups, or in Sahlins' terms, these goods serve as totems for group affiliation. These goods and the uses they are put to — be it the safety-pin or the hair that is moussed to stand in an inverted pin-cushion array — are both statements of group affiliation and social difference, critique or repudiation.

As for the thought that the production of simulacra and the concomitant proliferation of various "retro" styles is an indication that there is a loss of history: This may apply to a that segment of the population who through their affluence feel themselves beyond history, but it can hardly be said of the significant proportion of the population who see history (or time) unfolding even if only through the progressive shrinkage of their dollar.

¹⁴D. Hebdige. Subculture: The Meaning of Style. (London: Methuen, 1979) pp. 100-27.

Summation.

Each of the formulations of the fashion process as social pathology, while providing insights into aspects of the process, tend to offer an incomplete account. What seems to be lacking in these accounts are the actual objects and people's interrelations with them. After all, things do grow old and they do wear out and therefore need to be renewed. While compensation, appropriation as expression of power and life in an ornamental code may demonstrate pathological aspects of the fashion process, not all aspects of it are pathological — or so it can be argued, from the position that fashion is a kind of play.

The forms this play can take can be illustrated by using games as metaphors. For example play can take the form of a game of chance, of competition, of imitation and so on. Fashion as a game of chance is expressed in "shopping" as a "popular entertainment." Fashion as competition is what one might do at a gathering of like-minded individuals: a game played within groups, and fashion as a game of imitation can appear as the adherence to a given fashion "discipline" such as a preference which reflects membership in a group and differentiation from others.

These formulations of fashion will be explored below in the discussion of fashion as a social process. For if fashion is a kind of play, or can be explained by recourse to the metaphor of play, then this play is inextricably *social* in its character.

2. Fashion as a Social Process

Kurt and Gladys Lang offer two features of the social character of fashion. One aspect is that fashion can be understood as

...an elementary form of collective behaviour whose compelling power lies in the implicit judgement of an anonymous multitude.¹⁵

The other aspect is that fashion has an objective existence which appears as existing apart from the individual.

Fashion as a social process seems to be organized around competition and a response to life within a collectivity. Both are intimately tied up with an appropriation of novelty. As a social process, fashion

¹⁵Langs, p. 323.

seems to take its modern shape along with the rise of Western European cities and the emergence of the bourgeoisie. (This is not to suggest that fashion did not exist prior to this period nor that it did not play a social role elsewhere)

Broadly speaking, the social history of fashion reveals three general configurations which are at once historically specific and descriptive of the internal dynamics of the fashion process as it appears today. First, fashion appears as a form of in-group competition; secondly the fashion process reveals an inter-group competitive character; and finally the fashion process functions as a form of inter-group signification wherein the competitive character, while still operant, seems to be subsumed to a sense of belonging that a person derives from participating.

The discussion that follows is laid out according to these three distinctions.

In- Group Competition

A fashion process *of a sort* was practiced by various social elites. The encounter between Henry VIII of England and his cousin the King of France on the Field of Cloth of Gold in the first quarter of the 16th century is one cited as one of the first examples of expression of power through "sartorial splendor." That elites have often used goods as a means for communicating their power is well known. Czikszenmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton suggest that prior to modern times chairs were prestige possessions and were used by those with power to demonstrate their position: the common folk availed themselves of stools or benches. Their discussion elaborated above provides an understanding of the role played by the status object in social relations. Benjamin's observations on the origins of art also corroborate this role played by affective goods as indicators of elite status.

By the early 1600s elites did not make use only of things that were handcrafted, but rather also employed machine produced goods as indicators of status. The role of mass reproduction can be illustrated within the context of the West European Aristocracy; perhaps it is here that married to a nascent industrial design the fashion process, or at least some of its key features, emerged into the modern social milieu.

The first example of this can be seen at the time of Louis XIV of France. The "Sun King" took an active interest in all things cultural, among these the production and design in the royal manufactories such as Gobelins (established in 1667). Under Louis' reign, and under the guidance of his finance minister

Jean-Baptiste Colbert (himself the son of a cloth merchant), France undertook to conquer Europe through fashion and taste. ¹⁶ To this end the *Code de Commerce* was established and French cloth production and fabric design — including clothing design — began to make an increasing impact on first the courts and the then broader population. At about the same time the first use of images to spread fashion was introduced — the two "Pandoras."

The Pandoras were dolls, one larger, one smaller. The larger Pandora was fitted with costumes worn at the court and with ball-gowns. The smaller Pandora doll was fitted with day-time costumes. Both were made available to girls in other European courts with the compliments of the French Crown — whether relations with a particular court were good or whether the relations were those of war, the Pandoras made their appearance on an annual basis. The Ewens suggest that Colbert's efforts would render possible the supremacy of French *haute-couture* and fabric design in future years. ¹⁷

The degree to which the French Crown exerted an influence on the design of the time was sizable. In the court of Louis XIV all music was styled after the examples set by Lully (himself an Italian). If a composer didn't follow the stylistic details set by the official court composer then the chances of performance were limited. ¹⁸ A similar control was exerted on the costly and highly prestigious Royal Manufactories where the objects of everyday life were produced for the court. That music and the production of everyday goods are mentioned here in the same context is consistent with the realities of an "artist's" life in the first quarter of the 18th century. Both an accomplished master craftsman (nascent designer) and a accomplished composer merited similar attention and regard. Both were servants in the courts of some sort of ruler, and both served to enhance somewhat the position and the prestige of the ruler.

¹⁶*The Village Voice* recently reported that Nancy Reagan has suggested a fashion exchange with the Soviet Union. Her motives aren't discussed in length but it is suggested that she feels that world peace is more likely if there was some stylistic interaction between the U. S. A. and the U. S. S. R. (Mrs. Reagan believes that the Soviets could learn much from American fashion). The article cites a Mrs. Reagan spokesman who says that fashion is the second largest domestic industry after defence — given the styling and fashion considerations in automobile design (Scitovsky contends that one-quarter of a new car's cost is in the styling: pp. 255-8) the role of played by fashion in domestic production may be true. See: M. Morton. "Style Wars" The Village Voice (Vol 30, No. 32. 1985) p. 39.

¹⁷Ewens, "Channels...", p. 126.

¹⁸D. J. Grout. A History of Western Music. (New York: W.W.Norton and Company, 1980)

The minstrel, a functionary, only played what his lord commanded him to play. As a valet, his body belonged entirely to a lord to whom he owed his labour. If his works were published, he would receive no royalty, nor was he remunerated in any way when others performed his works. A piece in the ideological apparatus, charged with speaking and signifying the glory of the prince — a simulacrum of the ritual — he would compose what the lord ordered him to compose, and the lord had use of and ownership over both musician and music.

The court musician was a manservant, a domestic, an unproductive worker like the cook or huntsman of the prince, reserved for his pleasure, lacking a market outside the court that employed him, even though he sometimes had a sizeable audience.¹⁹

With reference to design — the development of porcelain in the German manufactories added much to the prestige of the courts that produced the fine china goods. The same obtains for fabrics, clothes, jewellery and so on. This is not to suggest that there is an equivalence between the B minor Mass and a porcelain sauce dish — but it is to suggest that both, at least at this time, did share a commonality in that both involved a keen aesthetic sense and were used to enhance the status of those who commissioned the works or the products. Venetian glass spoke as eloquently for Venice as did the ostentatiousness of its sacred and festive music. The difference was that to experience Venice for the music one had to go to Venice; to experience Venice as a center of glass manufacturing and high aesthetic and craft standards one had to be part of the class that could, and did, acquire Venetian glass — the good came to one, one had to go to the music.²⁰

Fashion, seen from this perspective, can be seen as a form of in-group competition. Internally individuals and sub-groups use distinctive goods to signify their rank and prestige.

Inter-Group Competition

Polhemus and Procter argue that a significant aspect of the fashion process is that fashion appears as a theatre for the embodiment of social conflict. Furthermore, Polhemus and Procter, along with the Ewens and the Langs, seem to feel that "fashion" as such is inextricably bound up with the emergence and rise of the bourgeoisie.²¹

¹⁹J. Attali. Noise: The Political Economy of Music. Translated by B. Massumi. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1985) p. 47.

²⁰Ibid. pp. 250-93.

²¹Ted Polhemus and Lynn Procter. Fashion and Anti-Fashion: A Study in the Anthropology of Clothing and Adornment. (London: Thames and Hudson., 1978)

A clear illustration of this dynamic, still predicated on competition, can be provided with reference to two social examples: the first situated in Europe of the 14th – 16th centuries, the other with the signifying practices of various youth cultures. The first demonstrates the aspect of appropriation of goods as an expression of competition for prestige, the latter illustrates the use of goods as a form of competition or opposition around expression of social meaning.

The former case deals with the various kinds of sumptuary legislation that was common at various times and in various places throughout Europe until about the end of the 1500s. Sumptuary legislation, or legislation that established social dress codes, appears in Europe by the latter half of the 14th century. The object of this form of legislation was two-fold. According to the Ewens sumptuary legislation forced a certain "uniformity" on various social levels. What role people played in the society was expressed by what they wore — by how they appeared. However, the Ewens note that this was a secondary function to the attempt by an increasingly threatened aristocracy to curtail the access by the burgers to goods which had in the past been limited to the elites.

In the more elaborate sumptuary pronouncements of the English Court of Elizabeth I the listing of what could be worn by whom and when was detailed. These rulings referred not only to quality and types of fabrics, but also to colours and style of the clothing. However, "indulgences" could be bought for cash. And the wealthy burger, for a fee, could adorn himself and his wife with the splendor of a baron. There was a limit to the degree of indulgence that money could buy. At times when sumptuary legislation was strictly enforced breaking the law could mean a fine or a term of incarceration.²² The sumptuary laws were thus designed to serve as a brake on the signifying practices of a rising class. These laws were resisted, flaunted, reinforced and finally repealed. By the latter part of the 16th century few European nations still enforced or had such legislation on their books; England was the last to repeal these laws, doing so in the first quarter of the 17th century.

In the above example the sumptuary laws were explicit. In the next example the sumptuary code is more implicit and can be characterized as legislation by tradition or custom. In the previous discussion the social conflict was organized around class lines — the conflict below, while still informed by class questions (to some extent), is more organized around generational differentiations: the conflict thus appears to be

²²Ewens, "Channels..." pp. 120–25.

more on the cultural arena.

Another variation on this theme can be seen in the various conscious uses of personal comportment and the use of goods as media of communication by youth and counter-cultures after World War II. Whether the style was that of the "beatniks" of New York's Greenwich Village or the urban style of a young motorcycle-riding Marlon Brando, the use of clothing and adornment was aimed at either contesting given but unlegislated sumptuary codes of the dominant cultural norms, or subverting these codes as an expression of a repudiation of the "philosophical" or "social" content of the dominant styles. The hippies, then later the punks (each arising out of different social conditions and class contexts) were both a form of repudiation of values thought to be traditional and oppressive. What is more, both were a kind of embodiment of that repudiation. At the same time, both forms were a statement of association. The last dimension of the fashion process would then consider this aspect — association, or relatedness.

Inter-Group Communication

The final distinction in the fashion process refers to the experience of relatedness and social differentiation derived by people through the acquisition of goods coded with meanings based on a set of shared understandings or commonly held values expressed by the group. While acquisition of goods coded in this way may be a form of repudiation, at the same time this form may be a kind of affirmation — an affirmation of relatedness to such-and-such a group set apart from the collectivity. The Langs argue that fashion is

...[T]he dual attempt at "identification with" and "differentiation from" others in mass society. ...Persons who one copies are often one's intimate associates, but the collectivity from which one sets himself apart is vaguely conceived and abstract, sometimes designated as square.²³

The Langs base their analysis of the fashion process on the anonymity of life within "mass culture." Deprived of cultural structures that inform the individual about the nature of social relatedness, the individual seeks a social identity — that is to say, a personal or individual identity with reference to the collectivity by means of the appropriation of goods that appear as part of the mise-en-scene of the group with which one shares an affinity. The Langs note that fashion becomes significant as a means of identification and differentiation when social contacts are secondary, fleeting, and relatively anonymous

²³Langs, pp. 339-40.

and when "individuals are only partially integrated in specific associations but react as a part of a larger mass."

Hence individuals are more concerned with appropriateness of their behaviour...and at the same time.... less certain of what is appropriate.

Styles which become fashion — in dress, housing, consumption pattern, art — are short-cuts through which one's place in a large and diffuse status system is easily recognized (even on casual contact).²⁴

The aspect of social status does not disappear. At the same time the notion of being part of a group emerges. Whether it is power by association or relatedness, it is some aspect of referentiality to the collectivity that is apparently expressed and, presumably, experienced.

Individual preferences may be conscious efforts to satisfy one's own aesthetic, intellectual, creative, social, or medical needs; an individual may be pursuing a taste he has developed. But choices are not derived from aesthetic or scientific principles... they express a need for individuation without risk of group disapproval: adopting fashionable attire we identify with a group — by being ahead of others one may stand out internally yet be reaffirming the collective preferences.²⁵

Thus a double dynamic appears to be at work — the need for differentiation both within the group and with the broader collectivity. This is particularly evident in the current trend toward lifestyle groupings discussed above. Choice of goods may be competitive, at the same time the assembly of a compartmental surround appears as an act of overt affiliation, an expression of being part of a group²⁶

MacCannell has written that world-views arise out of "cultural productions" and dissolve into them as well. This formulation has a bearing on the aspect of the fashion process being discussed here. "Cultural productions" are made up of "cultural models," the influences of these models, the media which link the models and influences and the audiences, producers, technicians and distributors that are all in some way involved with the cultural production.

MacCannell begins his discussion by noting that a cultural experience lies at the root of a cultural production. He suggests that the a cultural experience provides people with a "specific belief or feeling through direct, firsthand involvement with some data." The data of cultural experiences are "cultural

²⁴Ibid. p. 339..

²⁵Ibid.

²⁶See La Pietra, p. 83 above.

models" that are

...somewhat fictionalized, idealized or exaggerated models of social life that are in the public domain (in film, fiction, political rhetoric, small talk, comic strips, expositions, etiquette and spectacles).²⁷

For a cultural experience to occur two basic parts must be combined: the model and its influence. The model is some aspect of life, an embodied ideal. The influence refers to the effects that the cultural model exerts — be this discussion of music concerts by enthusiasts, exchanges of knowledge about an athlete's prowess between fans, or the display of various tokens or signs of association with the cultural model. The third element is the medium which brings the two together. The medium, notes MacCannell, must appear disinterested if it is to be efficacious. Goods can fulfill this role, in the sense that a good can be a utility, yet also can be designed to reflect the codes that are generated by the cultural experience. Examples of this might be sporting equipment, clothing, and various kinds of domestic furnishings.

Thus goods would appear as media of communication that express a person's relatedness to a cultural production or a cultural group. In this sense fashion describes people's choice of goods as a mode of association with a particular cultural production or cultural group — be they "folkies," "metal-heads," "bikers," "new silent aristocracy" or the "ephemeral intellectuals."

While this dimension describes a manner of relatedness, it also describes a manner of differentiation. Now that consumers seem to be organized around various kinds of taste preferences often these expressions are taken as just a stylistic articulation. Whether these stylistic forms of association are always political is questionable; what can be said, however, is that many of these preferences and lifestyle groupings do say something about people's predilections and orientations toward sources of satisfaction in modern market industrial life.

Interpretations of Fashion as a Social Process

Veblen provided an early and still salient account of the fashion process, explaining the fashion process by stressing its competitive side. According to Veblen, the basic dynamic of the fashion process was emulation. He observed that possession of wealth conferred honour — this was an "invidious distinction." This meant that one was envied because one could demonstrate that one need not work —

²⁷D. MacCannell. "The Tourist..." p. 23.

one need not engage in "degrading" work which required an exertion of the body. One was also to be envied because one could consume conspicuously — one seemed to have a large "manipulatory zone." For those who were situated lower on the social ladder the goods disported by those above them possessed an appeal as the goods represented the upper echelons of the society. The fashion process was made up of a struggle to accede to the goods—as—communicators—of—prestige that were the province of those with power. Schudson, elaborating Veblen's point argues that fashion "is not traditional expression of social place but a rapidly changing statement of social aspiration." And, following Anne Hollander, Schudson adds:

...[F]ashion emerged as a form of presumption — the desire to imitate and resemble something better, more free, more beautiful and shining, which one could not actually aspire to be.²⁸

As soon as these goods began to become more readily available then the upper classes sought out, and either found or facilitated the production of new goods that would indicate their elevated status.

A second account of the fashion process, suggest Pohlemus and Procter, can derived from Flugel. Flugel differentiated two forms of dress and adornment. There was one category that referred to tradition, and another that referred to fashion. "Tradition" is used here for the lack of a better word since the role played by the first category is not limited to residual or traditional social groupings. Thus Pohlemus and Procter rework this category as "anti-fashion." The "traditional" or "anti-fashion" forms of clothing and adornment are used in ways that vary little over time, but vary a great deal over space. Here an example might be various folk-costumes. Two peasant villages might be a kilometer apart yet in each distinctive forms of clothing and adornment are worn. Simultaneously the cut of the cloth in each village may remain unaltered over many generations. Fashion, on the other hand, varies a great deal through time but the same clothing can be seen worn in much the same way all around the globe.

With reference to goods as media of communication this distinction can be re-worked using H. A. Innis' formulation of media that are spatially or temporally biased.²⁹ If traditional styles are considered in Innis' paradigm then they appear as extending the duration of corporate or social meaning into time.

²⁸Schudson, p. 157.

²⁹I believe that Innis' work on the biases of various media of communication can be fruitfully applied to the issues under discussion here. Future work of this sort might render both useful analytic tools for analysis of the fashion process and might shed light on the continuing development and applicability of the notion of "biases" of communication media. See: H. A. Innis. "The Bias of Communication," and "A Plea for Time" Bias of Communications. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1951)

Simultaneously style used in this way fragments space. Folk costume tends to vary little over time, but can vary a great deal from village to village. Fashion, on the other hand, suggests an extension over space and a fragmentation of time. One can see the same modes worn in various international centers all within a similar period of time yet these modes change at a seasonal rate. This formulation is consistent with the movement of the fashion process as a means of resistance or opposition, and it also describes the strategies that were embodied in the sumptuary legislation of the past. On the one hand there is an effort to brake innovation, on the other there is an effort to promote innovation.

The third aspect of the fashion process can be analysed with reference to a distinction established by Simmel. As reported by the Langs, Simmel's account of the fashion process indicated that at its heart lay the need for union and identification with others, and the need for isolation, for an identity that was somehow "one's own."³⁰ Since the possibility for the creation of a self was to be continually subverted by the turns of commercial culture, the self found identity and differentiation within groups. Again, Schudson encapsulates this view:

Fashion sets a person in social space, linked to and differentiated from social groups. It also located a person in social time — in relation to others, being *avant garde* or au courant or behind the times, and in relation to one's own past, offering an index and symbol of distance one has traveled from past experience and a readiness, or lack of readiness, to encounter something new.

Fashion in dress better than anything else... is a materialized, externalized symbol system that connects people to a social world and individualizes them in those worlds.³¹

Schudson brings two points together — the way fashion locates an individual and set him/her apart and the crucial dimension of novelty. This dimension seems to underscore the entire fashion process. It seems that in all the accounts of the fashion process novelty plays an important role. For there to be fashion there seems to exist a need for a certain "ephemeral" quality to goods. As was said above, fashion is that social process that systematically invests and divests goods of social approval. The next section of the thesis examines the notion of novelty as an aspect of the fashion process.

³⁰Langs, p. 339.

³¹Schudson, pp. 156-7.

3. Appropriation Novelty

Novelty along with notions of appropriation of novelty comprises an important element of the fashion process. The constant emergence of new goods and services seems at one and the same time to present new markers of social relatedness or status, and to empty others, older ones, of their efficacy to represent their owner in the "best possible light." With respect to the fashion process, novelty and its pursuit are not entirely open-ended. There is a rhythm to the turns of fashion. At the simplest level they are seasonal. They also reflect annual changes. And there are broader periods of change such as those characterized by major stylistic shifts in the 1920s, late 40s, and late 50s.³²

Overall a number of key points emerge out of a discussion of the relationship between fashion and novelty: novelty as an index of progress or an increase in "the good"; novelty as stimulation; novelty as a flight from the banality of everyday life. The pursuit of novelty may well be frowned on, yet as Tibor Scitovsky argues, novelty and its inherent stimulation are basic needs of the human personality. Writing in the mid seventies Scitovsky formulated a highly original thesis which described the dynamic of the marketplace as a tension between plutocracy and mob-rule. This thesis was a blend of economics and behavioural psychology which more or less updated Veblen's discussion of fashion.

The significant aspect of Scitovsky's study was that he undertook to account for the operation of taste and demand. His critique of industrial production and subsequent market activity suggested that mass production and the economies of scale limit the possibility of diversity and novelty. He argues that after status, novelty is of central concern for consumers and that this novelty continuously "evaporates." Scitovsky argues that most of the north American man-made environment was built during the age of mass-production and this accounts for its sameness and monotony. People "justly and naturally" desire the stimulation afforded by novelty; the environment and the lifeworld's landscape affords little.

The desire for novelty and stimulation from novelty leads to a high rate turn-over or continual accumulation. But Scitovsky notes that one can demand that people wring every ounce of novelty out of an object or an experience before they turn to the next one *if* there aren't enough such objects or experiences to last a lifetime. However, in the case of mass production, there are many kinds of objects and

³²While the latter changes are very interesting to give them anything other than the briefest treatment is beyond the scope of this thesis.

experiences proffered. Enter the "grand experimentation."

Stimulus satisfaction depends on novelty, yet novelty is quickly used up. Here Scitovsky formulates the second aspect of his thesis – one which is echoed throughout the literature on consumer and commercial cultures and practices. The consumer seeks novelty and the new acquisitions provide this. However the novelty quickly evaporates. The object quickly recedes into the background and melds into the invisibility of comfort or the Heideggerian "zuhanden." It becomes thematic only if something goes wrong. The uniqueness and novelty of things gives their owner satisfaction — but this soon wears thin. The same uniqueness and novelty enhances the enjoyment of others as well as the satisfaction that the owner derives from the other's enjoyment of his/her possession. But, due to the operation of economies of scale, the owner and others continue to encounter the same object (its identical twin) and its power to please diminishes. The object is rejected for another one. The object appears only as identification — the differentiating "performativity" is gone.

Here, under the surface, emerges the theme of flight from the self or the desire to renew oneself in an "au courant" social sense. The flight is a flight from the sameness, from the recurrence and banality of everyday life and one's identification with it. As much as fashion feeds on the desire to express a personal "eros," so also does it feed on this desire to flee or alter the contours of the sameness of everyday life.

Early on in his study of everyday life in the modern world, H. Lefebvre established a distinction between the realm of everyday life and what he termed the modern. The quotidian is humble and solid, he writes, its parts follow each other with such unvarying regularity that it is rarely questioned.

...[I]t is undated and (apparently) insignificant; though it occupies and preoccupies it is practically untellable...

To this Lefebvre counterposes the modern which stands for the brilliant, the paradoxical and the novel.

...[I]t is (apparently) daring and transitory, proclaims its initiative and is acclaimed for it; it is art and aestheticism.³³

Fashion by its continual turn-over and constant appearances of the novel, the new on the landscape of everyday life, materializes this modernity. Not only does the novelty appear on the landscape in various architectural articulations but also in public signs, in fluctuations of the compartmental surrounds, clothing and cars, etc. To be sure the entirety of the everyday landscape does not change *en toto* with every

³³Lefebvre, p. 24.

permutation of fashion. The changes are incremental and supplemental as new elements appear – each in its own right proclaiming a stylistic, hence, a cultural or social "advance." Simultaneously the appearance of novelty subverts the novelty of yesterday and denounces its claim to "the brilliant etc." In one and the same gesture novelty sets forth and proclaims a new "authenticity" or "status marker" while denouncing the previous one: yesterday's. As Fraser notes:

It is fashion's business to manipulate our memories. Fashion is in ceaseless pursuit of things that are about to look familiar and in uneasy flight from things that have just become a bore. Pretending, frenziedly, to market enthusiasm for novelty, in fact it sells disgust for previous modes.³⁴

Scitovsky's discussion of novelty raises two themes: novelty appropriated as a sign of social relatedness, the good as a symbol for progress, and appropriation of novelty as an attempt at renewal. Renewal is understood as a flight from the monotony of everyday life; but renewal, taken with reference to the good as a symbol of progress, also appears as a renewal of the self as a social being who participates in the unfolding "plentitude" of social production. Both forms of renewal are consistent with Nietzsche's observations about possession: tiring of one's possessions as tiring of oneself, and the desire to expand the sphere of one's possessions as a desire to renew the self. When Scitovsky's observations are applied to the "performativity" of things, the implication is that fashionable things either disappear into the totality or their relations — or their content (itself based on novelty as a form of stimulation) seems to evaporate.

To complete this discussion of industrial design as a form of "instrumental aesthetics," and the role played by both in the current cultural frame for goods, what remains to be explored is the relationship between the "evaporation of meaning" from things, and the ways in which the meaning is either "reinserted" in, or somehow imputed to, the objects of industrial design.

4. Design and Appearance

Industrial designers are responsible for the phenomenal form of things that are made by means of mechanical reproduction. This applies to cars, to juicers, to clothing, furnishings, and to experiences of restaurants and menus, hospitals and public offices; to typewriters, telephones, crutches, greeting cards, AM-FM receivers, televisions, vending machines. These things are forms and they possess a content —

³⁴K. Fraser, "The Secret Power of Dress," p. 9.

mechanical, electronic, and social, cultural and psychological. These are all things that make up the modern world. But, what is a thing?

Heidegger suggests that a thing is a unity of human agency (which is informed about its own limitations), of materiality (which both provides elements that fit with other elements in a way that can be reliably applied to certain tasks), projected intentions and the fortune or misfortune that meets them (and which is itself made to appear as fortune or misfortune only with relation to those projected intentions), and of language in the broadest sense of the word. A thing is a complex interrelatedness, it is an essent: it is "real" in the world, and it makes the "world" real.

In "What are Poets For?" Heidegger develops the thought that the role of poets is to evoke the gods. The gods are evoked by language. The gods are also connected to the sky — "sky" understood as fortune and misfortune as these appear out of time, out the flux of experience. Societies and persons make sense out of the flux of experience by means of sets or systems of shared understandings. Culture is used to describe the categories by which sense is made of this "flux" of experience. Culture is made manifest by language. By language poets evoke the gods. The gods are models, compressions or condensations of cultural categories. In this sense they are "cultural models."

Heidegger's essay situates the poets in a destitute time. The time is destitute because the "gods have fled." The unity of things has therefore been altered, something else appears in the place of the gods. He writes:

formerly perceived and used to grant freely of itself, the object-character of technological dominion spreads itself over the earth ever more quickly, ruthlessly, and completely. Not only does it establish all things as producible in the process of production; it also delivers the products of production by means of the market. In self-assertive production, the humanness of man and the thingness of things dissolve into the calculated market value of a market which not only spans the whole earth as a world market, but also, as the will to will, trades in the nature of Being and thus subjects all beings to the trade of calculation that dominates most tenaciously in those areas where there is no need of numbers...³⁵

The dissolution of the humanness of man and the thingness of things has an effect on both, both are objectified. They lose their particularity and interrelatedness and acquire a new referentiality within the sphere of "calculation." Progress as "will to will" (this being a more abstract formulation of "achievement ideology"), takes the place of the gods. Increment, maximization of profits and resources, expansion of the

³⁵Heidegger, "What are Poets For?" pp. 114-5.

"manipulatory sphere" and their embodiments according to cultural models become the fourth element of the unity of things.

Progress, thought as "achievement ideology" is an odd category, because, like fashion, it is a self-consuming process.

As long as man is wholly absorbed in nothing but purposeful self-assertion, not only is he himself unshielded, but so are things, because they have become objects... In this...there also lies a transmutation of things into what is inward and invisible. But this transmutation replaces the frailties of things by the thought-contrived fabrications of calculated objects. These objects are produced to be used up. The more quickly they are used up, the greater becomes the necessity to replace them even more quickly and more readily. What is lasting in the presence of objective things is not their self-subsistence within the world that is their own. What is constant in things produced as objects merely for consumption is; the substitute — *Ersatz*.³⁶

Today's advance is tomorrow's lack of development. Things are produced to be "consumed," what remains constant in them is that tomorrow there will be better things. It is like the young couple who buy a new house and, as they are moving into it, discuss how in five years they will be able to buy a newer, better house on the basis of the equity they have assembled by this investment. According to the promise of consumer culture the thing is not a substitute but rather an improvement. And, when the culture of consumption is taken into another level of abstraction, into the realm of appropriation, then the thing is figured as not only an improvement but as a "focal good," one which will facilitate benefits and renewal for the individual. Yet under the regimen of fashion something wears out in a thing sooner than its material constituents or its "reliability."

Yet, as Benjamin has written, mechanical reproduction while subverting the aura of a work of art — by extension, the "focal" power of thing, brings a new mode of reality and perception with itself. While experimentation may seem futile or wasteful at the same time it enables persons to explore venues for self-realization which were once limited only to elites. Hence, even though fashionization seems to divest things of aura or significance — at one and the same time an "aura" of progress is re-established onto and into things. At the level of design this seems to take place mainly through surfaces and design that is very well aware of the significance of surfaces.

³⁶Ibid. pp129-30.

The overall sense to be derived from the current literature on industrial design is that surfaces and surface signification have become increasingly important. In a recent discussion of surface as an aspect of design practice Steven Holt writes:

In our own, ever more synthetic world, facade, first impression and superficial feeling dominate. We learn by necessity to sort through the barrage of visual and tactile stimuli so that we may decide if, how, when, and where to act.³⁷

What is of interest is what this implies within the design profession where there is a growing awareness of the impact of surfaces as communication.

...[S]urfaces...function as a flag not just for what the object does, but for how it makes us feel (my emphasis). For the designer, it is the idea that may be of greatest importance, for it, more than anything else, captures the spirit of the thing.³⁸

Surfaces are not to be taken as existing at one remove from the objects, it is just that the surfaces or appearances of goods have become liberated from some of the old canons of industrial design – such as an insistence that the surface should express on the outside what the thing is on the inside, or the demand that objects should represent their utility or function. In accordance with what Leiss *et al* say about the importance of images as a bridge between concrete features of things and subjective states of consumers, the notion of utility or functionality is altered. As Holt puts it:

The object does something, while the surface presents it. Objects act, surfaces appear; objects have content, surfaces have meaning; and while objects are more concerned with function, surfaces favour form. The relationship between the two, while often straightforward, is never unself-conscious.³⁹

Reporting on a recent show of Italian furnishings La Pietra gives a similar account of this and an insight into the role industrial design is playing in the fashion process.

Italian design is in fashion. Italian design speaks of a new fashion. ...fashion which contaminates the way of producing, the way of designing, the way of teaching, the way of making culture, the way of communicating the product. By now, it is a well-known fact that industry commits 60–70% of its efforts into communication and that this commitment is destined to increase, to the detriment of production.⁴⁰

³⁷S. Holt. "Depth of Surface." ID: Magazine of International Design. (Vol 32, No. 1, 1985) p. 35.

³⁸Ibid.

³⁹Ibid.

⁴⁰U. La Pietra. "Around the Object." (Domus No. 646, 1984) p. 44.

La Pietra is writing about Italian design; whether the figures he is quoting are representative of all levels and spheres of production is not known; however, given the success of Japanese design and increasing competition in world markets, La Pietra's remarks may catch the mood of the production end of the marketplace. Furthermore, the 80s are not the first period to witness self-conscious design and the efforts to communicate something about the product by means of the thing itself. There was a time when "function" was "in." Caplan (following Eco) offers this example of the lack of success that were obtained by some previous efforts:

During the fifties, Eco argues, "paradoxically, in aiming to make functional objects, designers tried to accentuate the communicative functions of those objects; and instead of producing objects that communicated the way they could be used, they produced objects that communicated the design philosophy. That is the object did not say 'I can be used like this' but rather 'I am a perfect design object.'" Eco takes an example from Italian cutlery. Inspired by the Scandinavians, Italian designers began producing more beautiful forks with short prongs that made the statement "I am a modern fork." They were modern indeed, and we all admired them and showed them in our magazines and museums and gave them awards. But they were of no use for eating pasta, which has a certain vogue in Italy. For pasta you need the anonymously designed long-prong fork, which made the statement: "If you plunge me into a mass of fettucine, I will accept the cargo."⁴¹

Nor is it fair to say that *all* industrial design is preoccupied with fashion nor that all designers approve of the efforts to signify at the expense of adequate concern for the object's functionality or, put another way, at the expense of its potential reliability. For example, when asked for his opinion on the current "spectacular" developments in industrial design, Dieter Rams responds:

I feel ill at ease. Two trends in particular seem to me dangerous: the speed with which experiments are passed off as finished solutions and presented as such to the public; and the massive way in which expressive media are harnessed to arouse emotive stimuli. I have nothing against experiments, but it is not necessary for them to be mass produced and then copied by epigones. And I have nothing against a stimulating and fascinating design, but I would like to declare my opposition to a design which is chiefly concerned with stimuli. Our culture is our abode. And I mean our everyday culture, with the products for which we designers are responsible. A design intended at all costs to be emotive, original, aggressive, and striking leads to alienation and stress.⁴²

Fashion does exert an influence, and the designer, whether he may approve or disapprove, must play the game. This is illustrated by designer Bruce Burdick, a design consultant for the Esprit clothing company. In a recent interview Burdick said:

⁴¹Caplan. p. 14.

⁴²Dieter Rams, p 1.

One never escapes fashion. Its design language moves so rapidly that it's difficult to keep up with. What the Classicists are attempting to do is to preserve the language, assuming that there are some values within it. This, along with the fact that we surround ourselves with things that quite obviously define who we are and what signals we want to give out, is the reason all of us have been able to purchase architect-designed furniture that is not overtly comfortable.⁴³

This suggests that there are spheres that lend themselves better to fashion than others. However, under the rule of the market and its continual "need" for innovation, fashion is being applied to more and more things.

La Pietra suggests that design, having already cultivated sociological, artistic and linguistic aspects into its practice, now introduces "spectacular elements and sophisticated materials...so as always to increase a more diffuse creative practice in consumers." He contends that until recently only the clothing design could boast of having wide "consumer assent." The reasons for this were two fold: On the one hand the clothing design field "allowed itself to practice" — meaning that designers were free to "experiment" with formal and textural features of clothing. On the other side of La Pietra's equation are the consumers who — "don't have too many inhibitions" —and, who are "used to, and accept fashion creations while themselves (the consumers) being creators daily." Mendini in an article entitled "Cables to a Designer" puts this conception of consumer as creator as follows:

Necessary increase mass imagination decrease elite designs. [N]eo and post-modern man is specialist in dillettantism. Everybody infact who looks reflection mirror in morning dresses combs hair is great potriatist and best painter of self stop.⁴⁴

. This implies that people put "themselves" together (i.e. they organize their appearances) in a way that is particular, and if Mendini is to be taken seriously, that particularity is imaginative and creative.

According to La Pietra it is in this way that design "approaches fashion to recover 'participation'." The object of this is to directly interest everyone, hopefully in the "utopia mode", and to "rediscover the ancient role of the "fundamental disciplines" which represent the form of history." The "utopian" moment refers to the ability of the designer to create such objects that do encourage and sustain a more diffuse creativity in the consumer. And the designer must somehow create objects so that their features reflect something of the corporate experience of people. La Pietra turns to a notion that Branzi has formulated as "cosmeisis" of reality. La Pietra writes:

⁴³"Bruce Burdick" — interview A. Hanna and S.Holt. (ID: Magazine of International Design Vol. 32, No. 2, 1985) p. 41.

⁴⁴Mendini, p. 57.

From this perspective one can understand that in recent years many architects and designers have defined "the beauty culture of reality" not as an evasive action but an up-to-date projectual attitude...a *subtle* and *agile* expression for a project to transform the world. ⁴⁵

... presumably suggesting the beautiful *as* the useful and/or beneficial.

Gillo Dorfles is somewhat ambivalent about all this, but suggests that the ephemerality which seems to inform the fashion process has a positive cultural dimension: overall it "edits out" what has no lasting merit. As he puts it, also in an interview:

...[T]his occurs in the "soft mode." .. : so there's a prevalence...of soft over hard. So it's more than logical that this leads to a shortlived ephemerality within single situations (pictorial, design, architectonic, and naturally also literature, music, etc.). I think it's good, too, considering the mediocrity of many contemporary manifestations. Perhaps when we reach a readjustment of our society from an ethical-political-economic point of view we'll also be able to assist in thinning out of the alternation in fashions. ⁴⁶

Dorfles adds...

...[L]et's not feel scandalized if we assist the advent of fashion in the design for industry (crafts throughout all times have been dominated by it); and, on the contrary, let's not feel puritanically offended if fashion (in clothing) approaches an idea of global design. ⁴⁷

While the debate goes on in design, fashion is making an impact, both on the appearances/surfaces of things and on the way the objects of industrial design are presented to the public. The following remarks by La Pietra bear a striking similarity to what Leiss, Kline and Jhally have to say about the way commercial culture "loads" goods with meaning or "fortifies" them with images:

And as for fashion, the "mise-en-scene," i.e. the presentation of the collection, represents a moment full of creativity and ritualism, so this phase of product communication appears to grow in importance in the world of design. Ever-more sophisticated and evocative scenes are being prepared to celebrate the pomp and splendor (industry's economic importance) but above all to "load" the object or objects presented. The object is "set" through the use of many components: from quotations which allude to particular environmental typologies to spectacular scenes, from the quest of sound and lighting effects to the introduction of events (performances, audiovisual video computer, etc.), from the recovery of visual elements (symbols, persons, of importance, etc..) which guarantee the "topicality" and "quality" to complex avant-garde spatial interventions. ⁴⁸

The fashionalization process therefore refers to design in a broad way: Not only are goods designed with

⁴⁵La Pietra, p. 53.

⁴⁶The recent idiom is called the "soft mode" suggesting that objects ought to avoid the "hardness," or the straight edges of modernist design. Dorfles, p 56.

⁴⁷Ibid.

⁴⁸La Pietra, "All Around..." p. 44.

communication in mind, but so also is there presentation informed by the "fashion show format."

Fashion is a social process. What does fashionization mean specifically to industrial design? When dealing with industrial design one is dealing mainly with durables, i. e., many of the things that comprise the compartmental surround. As has been noted before, fashion is a contradictory process as it both invests and divests goods with approval, and it is a means for expressing social identity and difference. And, historically speaking, fashion is tied up with "cosmeisis" — signification, and an embodiment of categories of social power.

These taken together suggest that fashion, when it is an influence on industrial design, directs the latter's activities to the production of "motivated signs" or symbols. The literature on consumer culture and industrial design both seem to suggest that once a certain level of affluence is reached the onus on the production of goods favours communicative "performativity". Industrial design seems thus to be engaged in the production of things that are useful and are symbols — in the sense that a symbol brings together what has been separated, and in the sense that a symbol, like a metaphor, invites comparison. Or, put another way, industrial design is engaged in the production of "motivated signs" in that there are ontic structural parallels between the thing and the other reality to which it refers. A symbol, according to Ricoeur, leads to thought in the sense that it opens venues for associative thinking.⁴⁹ The latter can be explained with reference to the structural relationship between a "muscle car" and the reality of speed and power which it can produce. An example of both of these can be seen in the metaphors employed in by the American auto industry. The following interpretation of the metaphors employed in the design of American cars by designer/writer MacDonough can serve as an example:

It is self-evident that America's cars are as often vehicles for personal and collective fantasy as they are for transportation.

Here is an incomplete but illustrative list of the American automobile industry's attempts to metaphorical life through design.

1. Car like a rich man's carriage. Centered in Europe and America, the car is a coach without horses, the horseless carriage metaphor incarnate. Running boards, coach lanterns, curtains, high, blocky profile, chauffeur in a separate, open-to-the-elements section, hand-made, high-cost status symbol. Car as the exclusive haunt of the rich and famous. Names like The General and Blueboy.
2. Car like a working man's cart. Henry Ford's buckboard with an engine. Simple egalitarian, utilitarian, consistent. No horse, no chaffeur-bin. Put folks on the road, and they'll change the road and America forever. Repercussions like traffic jams and parking problems. Anticipates the station-wagon.
3. Car like an airplane. The terraplane concept. Swept back, long and low, rounded,

⁴⁹Ricoeur, Paul. "Symbol Gives Rise to Thought" in *The Symbolism of Evil*, pp 347-57.

- swelling, streamlined forms (but romantic streamlining, not engineer streamlining). Eventually culminates in the warplane metaphor. Initial stages saw engines fit for airplanes but not for cars (1925 Julian). Dash like a cockpit, fenders like wings. Names of things that fly or move at great speed often attached: Phaeton, Aerocar, Clipper, Torpedo.
4. Car like the shape in a wind tunnel. Spin-off of the airplane metaphor, but more ascetic and restrained. Handmaiden of the wind tunnel. Supposedly the space left over after the wind hits the front of the bumper, actually the space left over after the wind hits the engine block. Names like Esprit or numbers, 500, 800.
 5. Car like a knife. Higher development of the wind tunnel look. More inspired, severe, sexual. In its extreme manifestations, the perpetual Car of the Future. The future always seems to recede, and we got car-like-the-shape-in-the-wind-tunnel instead. Close to achieving the real thing: Lotus. Name as dead giveaway: Excalibur.
 6. Car like a war plane. Embodied in Harley Earl's late 40s and early 50s Cadillacs, the embodiment of GM's love affair with the Lockheed P-38 Lightning. Jayne Mansfield's in the bumper recall twin-prop housings; tailfins recall twin tails on twin fuselages. Caught up in the spirit of victory and post-WW II euphoria. Car as Eldorado, as living room, as pleasure palace. Lots of colors, options, gadgets, speed. Indian colors, European nobility colors, soft sunset colors, exotic locale colors. Customizing as standard. Everyman has his own rich man's carriage. To the victor goes the spoils.
 7. Car like prowess. Phallic, kinky, bold, sleek, smooth, playful, powerful, big in scale or in aspiration. Customized hot-rods by Big Daddy Ed Roth. Fire decal down the side. Red and chrome engine block sticking obscenely from the hood. One of a kind. Also, fifties luxury cars. Smooth, powerful, big. Very custom fitted. Gentlemen's sex: velvet and leather. Also, the Corvette Stingray, any year, red.
 8. Car like a rocket. The 1959 Cadillac, especially, but Buicks, Dodges and Fords as well. Big, big tail fins, super sweptback, long low look, oversize engines, dash like an advanced airplane cockpit, stratosphere eating chrome with George Jetsons details. Pinnacle of self-absorbed innocence, vitality, and marvelous, unselfconscious vulgarity. Giddy with the space age, and a celebration of the wealthiest nation in history.
 9. Car like a fortress, Car like an apology. Defensive and unsure. Mid-seventies. Watergate-Vietnam-Cambodia cynicism. Gas crisis; copycat versions of all European and Japanese cars. New technology designed by government engineers that didn't fit into reshaped compacts. Cars got boxy, pathetic. Pintos. OPEC had our libidos boxed in; cars were part of the problem. Sad decline of spirit. Good Taste as the last refuge of impotence.
 10. Car as lunar module. The 1984 look. Freer, influenced by NASA, dares to be stylish or clumsy with a flair. Vangons, hybrids, sex appeal cars. The Space Shuttle success re-romanticizes space travel. Mini-vans look like they would get great mileage on the moon.⁵⁰

In this listing appear some of the ways in which industrial design attempts to produce objects that are "motivated signs" or symbols. The symbol emerges as association — such as the overt citation in design of the lunar module or space shuttle, which opens to associations of highly calculated daring and achievement. The "motivated sign" appears in the sense of the vehicle not only citing by appearance but, to some extent by "performativity", such as the "sad" Pintos of the OPEC years or the finned sci-fi and self-satisfied gas-guzzlers of the 1950s. In both cases the thing, by its "plentitude," its "reliability" not only

⁵⁰M. McDonough. "Gods in Flight." (ID: Magazine of International Design. Vol. 31, No. 6, 1984) pp. 25-7.

expresses an aspect of reality but in some ways actually helps to bring it about, even if only in collective imagination.

It seems therefore that industrial design joins with advertising and other applied arts or forms of an "instrumental aesthetics" to "infuse" or "inscribe" goods with social meaning. And, as is the case with advertising, industrial design is increasingly focused around expressing goods for the purposes of appropriation thought in terms of relatedness and renewal or power by appropriation and association.

Industrial design thus seems to be engaged in a conscious signification process. The goal is consistent with what Ferebee observes as being the key role of the designer at present: a symbol maker. Whether or not industrial designers actually make symbols is a question beyond the scope of this discussion; however, one thing is certain: The practice and culture of industrial design does work at producing "motivated signs" and the "embodiment" of symbols and metaphors. While they are aware of this role, not all designers believe that there is much depth to it: As Holt puts it:

Paradoxically, while focusing more and more on the creation of highly-charged surfaces and boundaries, design has never been less of a superficial activity than it is today.⁵¹

Caplan suggests that this is true, but does suggest that design can make a contribution to improving the world — not, however, under current conditions.

...Designers at present do not, alas, perform many services that require rigorous education in the traditions of our civilization; nor do they often require the skills of critical thinking. Once we bring the design process to bear on the crucial issues of civilization, then we will need the rigour and the traditional understanding of a liberal arts education. In the meantime, we need to build theory-demanding practices.⁵²

For the moment, it seems that the theory-demanding practice that industrial designers are involved in is fashion, and their role in the deployment of an "instrumental aesthetics."

Summation

Fashion is a social process in which cultural categories are given expression through appropriation of goods which themselves have a symbolic value. The symbolic value of these goods is invested and divested by social or group approval. Seen from two levels of abstraction, fashion can appear as an expression of power by appropriation and association, or it can be seen as a function of the desire for manifest and

⁵¹Holt, p. 36.

⁵²Caplan, p. 16.

experienced relatedness and renewal. Images and appearances lie at its core. Yet things are its currency. In either case, both are facilitated by industrial design which, as an "instrumental aesthetics" seeks to poetize (make meaningful and cultural) the ever-emerging materiality of everyday life. What is circulated as messages through advertising emerges as "real" in the world.

To be sure, the purchase of a good does not bring the mise-en-scene in which it was set in the advertisement. Fraser argues that fashion panders to a "materialism" as a "faith" and implies that industrial design (here, increasingly industrial design as fashion design) contributes to this process.

It is not difficult to resist conversion to this faith when the stereotyped and materialized presentation of a "distinctive" self is made in a clumsily worded advertisement for a mass-produced perfume or some part of a denim uniform. It is more tempting to accept this false self when it is encountered further up the scale of worldliness, when materialism looks more incorporeal and fashions look a lot like ideas. A definition of the self as being fixed by a carapace of possessions sits more cozily if those possessions are thoroughly imbued with intelligence and taste.⁵³

It seems that this is exactly what industrial design strives to achieve — goods characterized by intelligence and taste. This brings up two ideas discussed earlier: an idea about art and an idea about novelty.

Industrial design, probably more than other "applied art," has had to encounter the question about culture and practical reason. Nowhere is there a stronger fusion of the two. Advertising is a calling card, or put another way, it is a cue card. The advertisements tell one about what the product might deliver in the sense of telling one about the world the product might serve to build. It offers cues that seek to inform the "how" of "dwelling." Yet it is the product and the social relations that produce it among which, alongside of which, people actually dwell. Thus, in a very concrete sense the product is real. But, throughout this century, the product has also become a form of art — of sorts.

Scitovsky suggested in 1976 that there was not enough diversity in the marketplace. Fraser's comments about the "upscale" "performativity" of goods dates from the same year. Today there seems to be a diversity of production of styles — at least, that is what all the literature indicates. And there seems to be an accompanying shift in a general aesthetic in "applied art." With the high degree of self-awareness exhibited by industrial design it seems that more goods look like ideas, and the ideas reflect social

⁵³In light of the discussions above, Fraser's use of "materialism" as a "faith" is questionable, however, her observations about goods looking like ideas does ring true. Fraser, p. 152.

groupings. Not that they did not before, it is just that now there seems to be more awareness of this at the general social level. For rational design the question was "what does the thing do?" Today the question has become — "what does it mean?" The corollary question today — "how to express what the thing is supposed to mean?"

"What does all this mean?" asks Dorfles...to which he answers:

That in our epoch people feel the necessity for continuous transformation of our vision of the world.⁵⁴

⁵⁴Dorfles, p. 56.

CONCLUSION

Whereas the new system of commodity production had emptied the social world of the elements that formerly had bound together the activities of social groups, the new system of mass marketing and mass consumption based on it has sought to refill that domain with its own form and content.

The distinctive social form it embodies is the notion that individuals are free to situate themselves in a fluid set of temporary associations that are distinguished from each other by "styles" of appearance, behaviour, and types of activities. The distinctive content is the notion that these associations, based purely on the "elective affinity" of their members, are oriented strongly around products and messages about products.

S. Jhally, S. Kline and W. Leiss.

The thesis and the explorations that led to it were informed by an interest in the manner or dynamic of cultural production in modern, affluent, market-industrial societies. Culture in this thesis was understood as integral moment in the process and structures of social communication. Through these explorations two categories and a question emerged that will create a focus for my own future work — the role of "instrumental aesthetics" in the management of social meaning.

The specific focus of the thesis was the relationship between design, commercial and consumer cultures. Industrial design became a focus on the premise that it, when subsumed to commercial culture, played an important role in the "performativity" of goods — in the way goods would provide a *material* correlate for the social construction of reality.

Goods, or things produced, argued the thesis, are now (and have always been) a form of human cultural and historical expression. Goods, or things produced by human labour, are expressions insofar as they are ex-pressed from out of social relations as if out of a mold. And by virtue of their materiality and their "performativity" goods ex-press certain orientations to the reality they serve to create and modify. This is to say that the production of goods is at one and the same time the production of cultural categories and an ontogenic moment insofar as goods, as things, are real and possess an ontic status.

Fashion appeared as a case study only after the research on industrial design, commercial and consumer cultures had indicated that fashion did play a major role as the dynamic in the contemporary marketplace. My discussion of fashion explored two aspects of this social phenomenon — fashion as a social pathology and fashion as a social process. I concluded this aspect of my inquiry with the observation that fashion provides an embodied "social representation" or metaphor for progress, progress understood

with reference to achievement ideology. This has led me to think that the role of fashion in modern market-industrial societies is that of *celebration*. At one level participation in fashion becomes a sustained "participation" in the expansion of the manipulatory sphere and in the fruits of mechanical reproduction. Fashion, taken as a social institution, is a celebration to the extent that it destroys and simultaneously recovers the old. At the level of everyday life fashion is the logical extension of the Modernist project. But, just as Modernism is no longer in fashion, so there is no more Fashion but rather a proliferation of fashions — the turn-over of goods and experiences that signify social relatedness and differentiation. This research drew my attention to the significance of style and its possible connections to broader questions of culture.

The discussion of design, style and the "performativity" of things (both in terms of *form* and *content*) returned me to the original set of questions — the aesthetization of everyday life and the existence of an "instrumental aesthetics" and the role that it plays in the management of social meaning.

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