Desma 10 Fall 2010

Design Culture - an Introduction
Notebook No. 5

Meeting 6, October 29, 2010

Design, Consumers, Corporations
The Power of Branding

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Planned Obsolescence

- A concept proposed by Bernard London in 1932, as a solution to fight the Great Depression. Every product should be labeled with an expiration date, and not used after that (or a tax imposed)!

- Artificial shortening of the lifespan of consumer commodities. Retailing expert Victor Labow (1955): “We need things consumed, burned up, worn out, replaced, and discarded at an ever increasing pace.”

- Can be achieved in different ways: models can be planned to be replaced regularly (the styling of cars at General Motors), although the basic function remains much the same.

- Graphic design and marketing strategies can be used to manipulate consumers’ tastes (including the viral use of the Internet: blogs, youtube, twitter) to embrace novelty and impermanence. Peer pressure; fear of being “outdated”.

- The Design of disposable and throw-away objects (huge field!)

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‘Built-in’ Obsolescence

- Obsolescence can be deliberately ‘built-into’ the design object. The design process consists not only about creating good and durable products, but also its opposite: product that function only for a certain length of time (patent period!) and then break down.

- Built-in obsolescence is part of the total production cost, and can be charged from the customer as part of the retain price (a paradox?)

- Built-in obsolescence is also related with limiting the consumer possibilities of changing / repairing / re-functionalizing the device. Examples: new computer models and operating systems don’t run earlier software; devices designed as “Black Boxes”: 
not to opened by the customer. IPod or even laptop batteries cannot be changed (at least by the owner); plastic covers that a glued shut and break if forced open.

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For more, check this book:

Giles Slade: Made to Break, Technology and Obsolescence in America (Harvard University Press, 2006)

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Design and Universal Entropy

- Entropy refers to the tendency toward chaos and disorder (derived from laws of thermodynamics); “all falls apart.”

- All designed and constructed things deteriorate gradually, and require maintenance and servicing. Read Alan Weissman’s book The World Without Us (http://www.worldwithoutus.com/)

- Built-in obsolescence vs. “graceful aging” - huge difference!

- The concept “Designed Deterioration” has been suggested for products meant to age gracefully. “A beaten, worn, scratched Rimowa (suitcase) ... is actually a point of pride.” (Khoi Vinh: “Designed Deterioration,” http://www.subtraction.com/2007/07/16/designed-det).

- Are scratches and dents on a laptop a source of pride and satisfaction (something that personalize it, give it character), or just annoying?

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“Brand”

- According to Naomi Klein (No Logo, 2001) since the mid-1980s, corporations primarily produce brands, not products.

- For Klein, this reversed the principle of the classic American economy, “the basic and irreversible function of an industrial economy is the making of things.” (Fortune magazine, 1938).

- However, since the late 19th century the brand - embodied in the corporate logo - has been used to affect and channel consumer desires and expectations.

Brand is graphic and advertising design for the mind of the consumer, just like many forms of industrial design are for the body.
Brand concentrates ideological, economic, and social power into a semiotic sign. This sign is meant to be omnipresent.

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The Birth of Branding: selling things with Slogans around an Image

Example: Quaker Oats

-As mass production and marketing grew, the need to identify the product with a “brand” became urgent.

-In 1882 Henry P. Crowell opened first automated oatmeal factory: product had a tiny market. He decided to ship it in graphically attractive containers.

-Crowell adopted marketing tricks: contests, box-premiums. Brand-name recognition was enforced.

-1888 Crowell’s company merged with the large American Cereal Company that had used the quaker image. New company renamed 1901 as The Quaker Oats Company.

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Peter Behrens (1868-1940)

Pioneer of corporate design, became artistic advisor for AEG (Allgemeine Elektrizitäts Gesellschaft, Germany) in 1907.

First task: to design new logo.

Created pioneering standardized and rationalized products: electric kettles with interchangeable parts, electric clocks, etc. Everything had to be associated with “AEG”.

Peter Behrens was occupied with all forms of design, including graphic design and fonts, and objects of industrial design.

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Design Everywhere

-Design has to be present in everything: “from a lipstick to a steamship, from a paperclip to a locomotive, from an ash-tray to a model industrial community”.

“Design is one of the gears in a train that also includes management, sales promotion, advertising, engineering and research.”

(Harold van Doren and Walter Dorwin Teague: Design This Day, 1940)
The Consumer as the Product of Design

According to design historian Bevis Hillier, design is not just about creating products. It is also about "designing a consumer for the product"...

"Human personalities are shaped by social conditions, from ideals of family life and norms of gender behavior to the economic opportunities available to people based on their cultural identities. The self is, to some degree, a manufactured object, a social product."

(Ellen Lupton)

Corporate Identity and Consumerism

- Important direction in design particularly after the Second World War.

- A corporation has to have a uniform design appearance extending to all its manifestations. (Pioneered by Behrens at AEG...)

- All products by a corporation must have a recognizable identity from micro to macro level.

- Some pioneers: Braun, Olivetti, IBM...

Some Classics of Corporate Design


-Eliot Noyes: worked with Gropius and Marcel Breuer in the 1930s, director of industrial design at MOMA. Became design consultant at IBM in 1956. Re-designed IBM’s corporate identity: pervaded everything from buildings to graphic design and products. Design linked to technical innovations (Selectric Typewriter, 1961). Invited Paul Rand to work on the graphic identity.

-Olivetti: an early pioneer in corporate design; star designers in 1950s and 60s: Ettore Sottsass, Mario Bellini: “exercising ‘yoga’ on design: stripping from it every attribute, sex-appeal, deception.”
Braun Design

- Braun company (Germany) a pioneer in corporate design.
- New aesthetics for domestic kitchen appliances in the 1950s.
- Domestic gadgets must be visually distinct from office or factory equipment
- Austere, simple style: ‘timeless’, immediately recognizable

Dieter Rams: “Omit the Unimportant”

- “One of the most significant design principles is to omit the unimportant in order to emphasize the important. Good design means as little design as possible.”

- “Every manufactured item sends out signals to the mind or emotions. These signals - strong or weak, wanted or unwanted, clear or hidden - create feelings. But the most important factor is whether the item can communicate its use.”

- “Much design today is modish sensation and the rapid change of fashion outdates products quickly. For me there is only one way: discipline.”

IBM Logo and Think sign, 1956 by Paul Rand

“Ideas do not need to be esoteric to be original or exciting”.

Eye Bee M - packaging design by Paul Rand for IBM, early 1970s, was an effort to modify IBM’s strict corporate image to be more in line with the times.

Paul Rand 1961: “The key to good design is taking the essence of something that is already there and enhancing its meaning by putting it into a form everyone can identify with.”

Enduring Brands - Enduring Designs

The Moka Express coffeemaker was first designed in the 1930s by Alfonso Bialetti. It is made in cast aluminum with a plastic handle. It continues to be manufactured by Alberto Bialetti, Alfonso’s grandson.
Instant Brand Recognition: Kikkoman soy sauce bottle. Designed in 1961 by Kenji Ekuan / GK Design consultancy)

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Redesigning corporate identity; the Lucas identity program by Pentagram (1970s) as an example.

The Risks of Rebranding: The GAP Controversy (2010)
- Rebranding a company is very expensive, and sometimes it may be useless.
- Brand-attachment by the consumers may be strong, and lead to revolts. Recently the redesign of the GAP logo led to protest that forced the company to re-adopt its old logo.

check: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jEojV_gq9fQ&feature=related

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What’s Behind the Brand?

Watch the Film Food Inc. on YouTube!
You will never think about brands and food products the same way again!

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lyagLY1Nem8

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Excursion: Designing a Global Culinary Phenomenon: The Rotating Sushi Bar

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Sushi - background

- Word sushi derives from suppashì (“sour”)
- Original ‘proto-sushi’ was fish preserved in salted rice; it may have originated in South-East Asia.
- In the 16th century in Japan people began to eat also the rice used to pickle the fish.

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The Origins of modern sushi
In the early 19th century Yohei Hanaya began selling “Edo-mae nigiri” from his street stall in Edo (Tokyo). Pieces of fish were placed on top of lumps of vinegar-soaked rice. Sushi was made on the spot and eaten immediately: huge success!

Sushi was born as fast food for (male) workers, but its popularity spread soon. Upscale restaurants serving Osaka-style boxed sushi existed already in the Edo era.

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Sushi - background:
20th century

- Sushi toppings developed constantly; not only fish was used; experimentation typical.

- Forms such as maki (rolls wrapped in seaweed) became popular.

- Sushi existed on various levels from cheap fast food to expensive restaurants. Rare at homes, mostly delivered by caterers on special occasions.

- In 1939 an edict forced closure of street stalls in Tokyo, which led to the development of the sushi bar. Clients stood by the counter, but this was soon reversed: clients took seats and the sushi chef was now standing.

- Efforts to industrialize and ‘streamline’ the production of sushi. Refrigerators and new means of transportation gradually meant that fish no longer had to be from local waters and was eaten raw (instead of being pickled).

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The rotating sushi bar

- a technological system in its own right, yet it is also a cogwheel in a broader global sushi economy, a complex network that makes dead fish fly around the world.

- Kaiten-zushi, or the rotating sushi bar, will be investigated as a site that is both contemporary and a manifestation of historical modalities of the human / machine relationship.

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The Rotating sushi bar, characteristics

- Kaiten-zushi is a regulated environment, an ‘eating machine’ aiming to incorporate customers in its workings.

- Maximum efficiency and “turnover” (rotation of clients - originally standing like at street stalls) as goals.
- Highly developed time and spending management system (polar opposite: up-scale sushi restaurants)

- Adjusted to the cycles of mobility in the Japanese everyday life (trains, escalators, moving walkways, sidewalks); sushi bar offers a brief pause, but the conveyor belt keeps the client in pace with the everyday ‘rhythm.’

- Appeals both to businessmen during the lunch hour, to families with children, and students as an easy, fast and inexpensive option.
- All rotating sushi bars are not identical!

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The modalities of human / machine relations at kaiten-zushi

Mechanization
The regulation of the workers’ motions to supply food to the conveyor; the use of a continuous conveyor belt for distribution and delivery; the regulation of the visitors’ movements and habits?

- Carefully calculated speed of the conveyor belt is essential (early standard: 8 cm/sec).

Fast rotating sushi bar:
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S5zd08Grw10

Shinkansen sushi:
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EUglCCkc_Wg

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Automation

- Automating the production and delivery of sushi. The use of ‘sushi robots’ both at rotating sushi bars and at the production facilities of sushi catering companies.

Assembly lines today... How do they differ from their predecessors?

Since the 1950s, factory assembly lines have been ‘fully automated’ with computer-controlled industrial robots.

How does this affect the role of the worker?
Has the worker been liberated or displaced by the machine?

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Examples of sushi robots in action

Barrel sushi robot
Robot sushi, analysis

- In the production of catering sushi automation has been adopted only partly. It is mostly limited to rice-related operations (creating the rice ball; laying rice on nori; closing and even cutting maki).

- The fish is selected, cut, and placed on the rice by a human. Reasons: fish cutting is hard to automate, because there are many types of fish; each fish is different, and different body parts are used.

The relationship between the fish-layer and the sushi-robot resembles that between the worker and the assembly line in a mechanized factory.

- The role of the fish-layer differs from that of the sushi chef in a kaiten-zushi, who has more opportunities to decide one’s movements and operational choices.

Social interaction

- Common between members of a group visiting a kaiten-zushi together. In addition to the counter seating, some rotating sushi bars offer tables flanking the conveyor belt. These are popular among families with small children, who are usually seated at the end further end. As at home, selecting sushi and pouring tea performed by the parents.

- Rare between strangers (as at Pachinko parlors). Interaction between the client and the chef sometimes possible (like in traditional sushi bars): the conveyor system can be overridden by shouting one’s order (at Sushizanmai, for example).

In Kura-zushi or Hamazushi the human presence of the staff has been nearly completely eliminated, much like at Pachinko Parlors...

Full automatic restaurant s’Baggers in Nuremberg

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KNrxMjMu2U8

Suzumo corporate video
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rlUzMNOKsiI

Suzumo Maki sushi robot
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hlEjy2LM57M&feature=related

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