

DESIGN FOR THE REAL WORLD

Victor Papanek makes a distinction between what is accidental and what is design. *Design is the conscious effort to impose meaningful order* and although nature is aesthetic, it lacks the *conscious intention* behind what is called design.

This notion assumes the human to be at the center of the universe, staking claim not only to making design but also to the sole enjoyment of consciousness. How do we know what constitutes conscious intention?

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The concept of what works well will of necessity look well, has been the lame excuse for all the sterile, operating-room-like furniture and implements of the twenties and thirties...the first reaction on encountering such a table is to lie down on it and have your appendix extracted. Nothing about the table says: "Dine off me".

The designer's intent manifests itself in arrangement: symmetrical and asymmetrical. Symmetry offers a solution that is easy to understand and asymmetry requires a higher level of sophistication and greater participation on the part of the viewer. Where ambiguity thrives, in the *threshold cases* between the two, uneasiness is felt.

Design must be meaningful. The way in which design fulfills its purpose is its function. Papanek introduces the model of the *function complex* where the interrelationship of method, use, need, *telesis*, association, and aesthetics (and later intuition) are explained.

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The automobile gives us a typical case history of seventy years of the perversion of design for use.

The *method* is the interaction of tools, process and materials used honestly, not to make something into what it is not. *Use* often *perverts* design. It adjusts to the changing ways a thing is used by society. *Need* is often neglected by the designer, since economic, psychological, technological, intellectual and spiritual needs are more difficult to address and less profitable. Instead, *wants* are fashioned for us, to which design responds. *Telesis* is the deliberate and appropriate utilization of a process. *Association* makes use of our psychological conditioning – the way in which we prefer one thing over another. For Papanek, abstract values are communicated universally. *Aesthetics* are a tool that help to shape form and color into arrangements that please. *Elegance* emerges from the reduction of the complex to the simple, as we near perfection.

Mythologies.
Roland Barthes

Papanek makes reference to our search as a society for identity and security through role-playing. The mythologies of our society reflect the conflict of our search. Structuralism provided a approach for deciphering the code of such mythologies. This kind of investigation makes the distinction between our wants and our real needs (economic, psychological, spiritual, technological and intellectual).

I think structuralism's approach is appropriate, although countered by the sceptical world today that does not assume a singularity to answers. In our age of insecurity, the mythologies that are built up to soothe us are prevalent. For example, as I was flipping through the paper, I caught sight of an ad for camouflage clothing. It struck me as a significant sign of our times that there were so many different varieties. The individual search for security and identity reflects the national search. It is a

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search based, in my opinion, upon a militaristic language and simplistic assumptions about right and wrong..

As we discussed the factors that shape our world in connection with Moholy-Nagy's answers, Sandy asked: How are you inspired by Iraq?

In order to design for the real world – a world shaped by factors like the war in Iraq, I start to align myself with Lyotard's postmodern assessment of our times: knowledge is a commodity equated with power; and with Papanek's appeal for: design that addresses complexity. I consider the question what is knowledge and who decides? a philosophical need – to add to Papanek's list of needs. This exploration takes place on the threshold between symmetry and asymmetry, where ambiguity thrives – a place where uneasiness is felt.