

THE GESAMTKUNSTWERK'S POST-MODERN ADAPTATION

The Wagnerian *gesamtkunstwerk* was effectively re-adapted for the post-modern era in Archizoom and Rem Koolhaas' work in *No Stop City* and *Exodus or the Voluntary Prisoners of Architecture* respectively. What drove this re-adaptation for the increasing technological diversification and style eclecticism that has defined post-modern architecture was a contemporary social critique through utopian (or in Koolhaas' case, dystopian) idealism. In these early projects, Archizoom and Koolhaas expressed a mocking distaste for consumerism and modernism, with Archizoom deploying satiric, intentional kitsch and Koolhaas a more bluntly critical approach. Their work's more overt reference to the *gesamtkunstwerk* is in their common goal (through slightly dissimilar approaches) of harmonizing, or idealizing, social relationships, both effectively conveyed through collage.

For Archizoom, designing by "anti-design" was a way of challenging the accepted socioeconomic conditions of the post-modern era through a series of unconventional approaches: "fabricated banality, intentional vulgarity, urban furniture."<sup>1</sup> In *No-Stop City*, we are invited to fantasize about a world devoid of commodity fetishism through the ironic over-saturation of objects. Understanding the inability for design to escape the marketization of objects, Archizoom proposed an infinitely-saturated space with the objects that define a conventional daily existence. This depiction in collage alludes to the *gesamtkunstwerk*'s bourgeois saturation of the interior or a "phantasmagoria of the private interior – often in juxtaposition to the owner's public image or role."<sup>2</sup> In this sense, the objects work as a whole to create the subject who becomes subordinate to the objects. *City*

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<sup>1</sup> AJ Artemel, *Retrospective: Archizoom and No-Stop City*, <http://architizer.com/blog/archizoom-retrospective/>, (August 9, 2013).

<sup>2</sup> Dan Graham, *Art As Design, Design As Art*, 214.

proposes a subject-object role reversal. The subject becomes a resident enclosed *with* objects, as opposed to enclosed *by* objects.

This possession obsession exaggerated in collage elevates the individual out of the production-consumption cycle pervasive in advanced capitalism by allowing the individual infinite choice unencumbered by prearranged social conditions. *City* becomes an “instrument of emancipation, freedom from work”<sup>3</sup> - the subject ironically becoming the master of himself through an infinite expanse of mass-produced urban décor. *City* becomes so saturated it is essentially featureless, the bourgeois interior equivalent of saying nothing by trying to say everything, as Adolf Loos alludes to in the lesson learned from *The Poor Little Rich Man*. Instead of defining the subject the boundless interior of objects in *City* liberate him. In this featurelessness, the individual is free to design the world according to what he dictates – not according to the fictional market values that objects impose. Material relationships are no longer justifications for social relations - Man can pursue more objective value, as opposed to the perceived (market) value provided by objects he has surrounded himself with. In *City*, all needs are already met to open the subject up to further social activity detached from material activity.

*Exodus* proposes the same type of paradoxical freedom by enclosure, not necessarily through objects man possesses, but by delineation through walls. *Exodus'* political statement through vertical boundary, much like the Berlin Wall which served as its precedent, is an isolated yet collective dystopic state. Its relation to the gesamtkunstwerk is implied in its primary function as an organizer of behaviors or moods. Koolhaas considered the Berlin Wall architecture containing power in its “symbolic and psychological effect

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<sup>3</sup> AJ Artemel, *Retrospective: Archizoom and No-Stop City*, <http://architizer.com/blog/archizoom-retrospective/>, (August 9, 2013).

[that] was infinitely more powerful”<sup>4</sup> than the artifact itself by effectively splitting London into Good and Bad halves. *Exodus* becomes an inward escape to new social formation. The wall represents an imposition of a social order based on architectural innovation that is evocative of the social agenda behind Adolf Loos’ Moller House. In reference to the “theatre box”, a panoptic raised seating area, “This spatial-psychological device could also be read in terms of power, regimes of control inside the house.”<sup>5</sup> Though in Moller House the intention wasn’t to create a new urban culture or isolate one, but rather to internalize a predominant urban culture, it nonetheless attempts to manifest the idea of a strategically enclosed interior to provoke specific behaviors. It becomes possible in this case by theatrics, encouraging the subject to look back on his environment as well as creating situations where subjects can be observed without being observed, much in the same way the walls in *Exodus* do psychological work on those who experience it up-close or from a distance.

In terms of the *gesamtkunstwerk*, both projects can be thought of as stages within which the drama of social situations motivated by architecture played themselves out. They are total works of art in their utopian idealism. The idea of everything orchestrated and designed by the individual for the collective for the spiritual optimization of the masses is as paramount to their architectural intentions as it was to Loos’ Moller House. Further, the ideological framework for both projects could stem directly from Wagner’s anticipation for social-political reform in his time as it was once for the Bauhaus, the Russian Avant-Garde or later the Situationist Avant-Garde.

Gropius and the Bauhaus saw the architect as a multi-disciplinary individual undertaking a total curriculum to justify the delivery of the *gesamtkunstwerk* to a client. In a sense, the architect himself must become a total work of art – a practitioner of all that the

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<sup>4</sup> Rem Koolhaas, *Exodus or The Voluntary Prisoners of Architecture*, 5.

<sup>5</sup> Beatriz Colomina, *Interior*, 238.

gesamtkunstwerk demands. *Exodus* and *City* both radically suggest all individuals become architects of their lives as much as their environments. The idea of freeing the individual from the burden of class and the division of labor, the proletariat and bohemian struggle for collective representation in the individual domain, were the central proponents to their numerous social critiques and calls for socialist-oriented agendas. Man truly becomes the interior designer through his liberation for ultimately collective action – “the artist of the future who is not the individual poet [...] but the Volk itself.” The enclosed utopia is a collectivist reunification of the division of labor or a challenge to the specialization inherent in capitalist market activities. In *Exodus*, it is an ironic subordination or “imprisonment” of the individual to common activities. Whereas, in *City*, it is a limitless expanse and collection of subordinate objects that are directed by the individual in pursuit of collective ends.

The gesamtkunstwerk was revived in the post-modern era through Archizoom’s and Koolhaas’ *No-Stop City* and *Exodus* collages. “The real revolution of radical architecture is the revolution of kitsch: mass cultural consumption, pop art, an industrial commercial language.”<sup>6</sup> Absurdism, radicality, the extreme, and the revolution of kitsch are the key elements of their critique on post-modernism while their depictions in collage address post-modern or advanced-capitalist eclecticism. They propose active departures from historical materialism and therefore the relations of production – the separation of Man from manufactured social-material, market-driven conditions. For Koolhaas it was “architectural warfare against undesirable conditions”<sup>7</sup>, whereas for Archizoom “An extreme vision of industrial civilization [...] within which architecture and nature [...] dissolved and

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<sup>6</sup> Andrea Branzi, *No-Stop City*.

<sup>7</sup> Rem Koolhaas, *Exodus or the Voluntary Prisoners of Architecture*, 5.

disappeared.”<sup>8</sup> Both projects propose a radical detachment from the contemporary socioeconomic reality through dystopia and utopia, respectively, and specifically the social relations that developed out of the material reality. The implications for architecture are just as drastic. Following a liberation of the individual from material relations, is the liberation of design. Subsequently, architecture is emancipated from the conditions of material and thus the system; therefore, it becomes subject to the individual as opposed to market forces. The individual dictates his environment. Despite their wholly theoretical position and status as unbuilt speculation, the respective suggestions for hypothetical utopian or dystopian social relations recalls the fundamental ideological underpinnings of the gesamtkunstwerk in a post-modern guise. While it is uncertain that the collages were a conscious decision to deploy the gesamtkunstwerk as a post-modern social critique, their work nevertheless entirely represents a utopian, post-modern re-conceptualization of the total work of art.

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<sup>8</sup> Andrea Branzi, *No-Stop City*, 150.

## **MODERN ARCHITECTURE'S INDUSTRIAL DESIGN PRECEDENTS: THE LOUNGE CHAIR AND THE BARCELONA CHAIR**

The advent of the modern movement introduced opportunities for emerging industrial designers and architects to approach their craft with new standards of design, quality and production previously unseen and vehemently denied among traditional handicraftsmen. It was well understood that despite the efforts of dedicated handicraft enthusiasts like Pugin, Ruskin or Morris, handicraft would either have to compromise or perish beneath the inevitability of mass production and its implications in terms of design – uniformity, availability or abundance, capitalism. Several decades since Frank Lloyd Wright proclaimed the machine as the “destroyer of [the Arts and Crafts Society’s] present ideals and tendencies, their salvation in disguise”<sup>1</sup>, the dominance of machine mass-production turned handicraft’s demise into practical reality. Perhaps this was no more apparent than in the work of Mies van der Rohe whose objective was to align the design of objects and architecture to suit and reflect the perceived needs of contemporary, post-war society and its means of production; i.e. efficient machines. There were, however, individuals such as Charles and Ray Eames who channeled Wright in attempts to retain handicraft’s best characteristics – namely that of individuality or choice – in a time of mass production, which was handicraft’s aforementioned salvation in disguise. The early to mid-20<sup>th</sup> century saw the clearly articulated furniture designs of architect-designer personalities such as Mies and the Eames’ effectively informing the Modernist architecture that housed it and extending one of the most important design principles of the modern movement – the clarity of function. The Eames’ Lounge Chair and Mies’ Barcelona Chair offered functional honesty alluding to the ambitions of the machine age – efficiency and disregard for superfluity, but through their own unique aesthetic, operational and occupational means.

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<sup>1</sup> Frank Lloyd Wright, *The Artist-Designer and the Machine: The Art and Craft of the Machine*, 208

Post-World War II was marked by increases in production and productivity, and consequently a greater inclination towards instant gratification and obsolescence and impatience for longevity. It resulted in further demands for leisure and the cultivation of the individual perceived as being provided by the consumption of goods which were for the first time readily available in mass quantities. In light of this, the Eames' approach to their work involved attention to choice as much as quality, and as advocates of the power of modern industrial technology they sought ways to align choice, an essential outcome of mass production, with the quality expected of handicraft.

The “regenerator of the creative conscience”<sup>2</sup> that Wright dreamt of in terms of the promise of the machine was in reality a nightmare in terms of the choices made available - an apparent lack of design intention for the sake of commercial availability. A mass handicraft, “Eames-aesthetic” compromise was later realized in the very essence of the Eames' Lounge Chair, a smart balance of “machined exclusivity” or the characteristic individuality of a mass-producible object design. Taking the material qualities in woodworking which is commonly associated with handicraft but applying the techniques of machine production was a method of merging “choice”<sup>3</sup> via exclusivity with a potentially reproducible object or design. Such a process can be found in the application of heat and pressure to shape the headrest, backrest and seat which being made of plywood give the impression of handicraft but is clearly machined. The plushness of its leather upholstery and its reclining mode is a nod to the post-war leisure class – the bearers of exclusivity – and the image of leisure is further explicit in function. In its ability to recline and swivel it reflects user preference, a democratic vision or the power of the individual to choose his or

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<sup>2</sup> Frank Lloyd Wright, *The Artist-Designer and the Machine: The Art and Craft of the Machine*, 208

<sup>3</sup> Choice, as provided by the Lounge Chair, is reinterpreted here as the availability of an object as a high-end or niche market object, and therefore not truly mass-produced and widely accessible across income classes but as *mass-producible* high-end designs, expressing exclusive styling reserved for the leisure class rather than common mass-produced styles.

her position. From an architectural standpoint the recline and swivel represent a detachment of the furniture and therefore the user from the architecture and a shift in privilege from the object to the subjectivity and priorities of the user. Its flexibility or adaptability to space and to the user is a statement regarding the dynamic lifestyle of the post-war user and further alludes to a post-war reconfiguration of the relationships between the consumer, product and interior.

Where the Lounge Chair compromises for the sake of choice the Barcelona Chair refuses to compromise for the sake of spiritual integrity. Where the Lounge Chair is dynamic in its mobility, the Barcelona Chair is static in its occupational resistance. In both function and aesthetic the design of the Barcelona Chair reflects pure efficiency but ironically an unchanging state. As a statically-positioned object incapable of the Lounge's swivel or recline it suggests for the user a finite perception of space – a contradictory stance for the consumer of the post-war era who was averse to permanence and more inclined to change, updates or trends. As a luxury, exclusive, object it still proposes choice but in the same sense as the Lounge Chair, setting it apart from mass-produced styles.

Mies' work often operates within a skin and structure condition relegating the interior to an open plan. The Barcelona Chair's role, therefore, is in designating and accentuating the interior – being socially passive, inactive or static. By contrast the Eames' center their work on "inhabited places"<sup>4</sup>, privileging or prioritizing occupation and thereby truly activating a space because of the chair's demand for the user. The distinction here is between "furniture that alighted into space"<sup>5</sup> as opposed to Mies' furniture which merely seem to belong to space – isolated objects with distinct "closed" relationships to the

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<sup>4</sup> Michael Brawne, *Architectural Design: The Wit of Technology* (September 1950), 6

<sup>5</sup> Peter Smithson, *Architectural Design: Just a Few Chairs and a House: An Essay On the Eames-aesthetic* (September 1966), 6

consumer and the interior as opposed to the Eames' furnitures' "open-ended" relationship to the consumer and interior – the ability granted to the user to adjust position. Despite its ironic situation as a static object in a dynamic socio-architectural paradigm where relationships and interactions are in continual motion, the Barcelona Chair aesthetically conforms to the machine aesthetic.

The design ambition for both chairs was to reflect the form or aesthetic of their enclosure as much as the means by which they were produced which perhaps by no coincidence may have been a partial outcome of the perpetuation of the total work of art in modernism. Their designs reiterated what Wright emphasized in the late-19<sup>th</sup> century - a unity of objects with the interior and the architecture. The recline and swivel in the case of the Eames Chair and the lack thereof in the Barcelona Chair thus become socio-architectural statements manifested in industrial objects. Both chairs are thereby bound by the socio-architectural implications they suggest in aesthetic and function. This optimized functional aesthetic, either the Eames-aesthetic or the machine aesthetic, were simultaneous precursors to the modernist architecture they inhabited. The strength in the Eames design was in its consideration of the user by offering flexible positioning. In contrast, Mies' Barcelona Chair was reduced to a marker or designation of space, irrespective of the user, which was not any kind of "weakness" but in essence an aesthetic continuation of modernist functional clarity elaborated in his work such as Farnsworth House or the Barcelona Pavilion for which the chair was designed.

The industrial designer's contributions to the Modern movement in architecture are vastly understated. Over the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century the aesthetic and functional developments of the industrial object served as subtle motivation for architecture that more accurately and spiritually reflected the fundamental principles of Modernism – clarity of function through the clarity of form. Corbusier's philosophical basis for domestic

architecture as “machines for living” were already realized by earlier designs for industrial objects such as tables or chairs – extensions of human ability. As effective symbols of the machine aesthetic and functionality both chairs could qualify as prototypes for architecture seeing as they are essentially architecture at the scale of furniture.

Although it was intended for luxury markets the Lounge Chair had, in aesthetic and by means of production, a handicraft sensibility delivered by machine age technology; i.e. its design could be perceived as a product of handicraft yet is mostly subject to the machine process, much in the same way the Barcelona Chair aesthetically evoked, in clean lines and streamlined form, the techniques of machine production. Both chairs conveyed the machine spirit that architects diligently sought, yet were more efficient in delivering Modernist architectural ambitions in their operation at the *scale of* and *as* furniture as much as in their aesthetically and functionally-driven socio-architectural implication

## HERBERT BAYER AND THE ARCHIGRAPHIC

The Bauhaus' reductive functionalism of clean lines and pure geometries delivered structural, or mechanical, clarity. Their approach, and modernism along with it, was not only a departure from the historicism of pre-Industrial styles but also an attempt to reconcile artistic and design conventions with increasing mass standardization and commercialization. The subsequent growth of corporate organizations delivered goods and services for mass markets and created an opportunity for designers to partake in the aims of commercial enterprise in an attempt to develop a "universal design style as an integrated aspect of society."<sup>1</sup> It was expected that well-designed products in the hands of the masses would naturally transfer the values instilled in the products by their designers to the masses. Following Peter Behrens example with AEG in Germany, industrial and graphic designers applied modernist aesthetic principles to the entirety of the corporate sphere from typography to architecture, but nowhere were those principles more apparent, more deliberate than in marketing, packaging and advertising; i.e. the design of the corporate identity. The potential for graphic design to establish a more cohesive whole in the corporate organization was championed in the '50's by Herbert Bayer, a student of the Weimar Bauhaus and later the head of the Dessau Bauhaus, who by then was a multi-disciplinary designer with experience in graphic and interior design and architecture. A particular fallout of his application of graphic design to the corporate identity involves explicit cross-disciplinary exchange of modernist design principles - clarity of content (legibility), purity of form and minimal use of color (elements of conciseness) - between graphic design and architecture. This was exemplified in graphically dominant corporate products such as publications, advertisements, memos, etc, and, in terms of any

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<sup>1</sup> Philip Meggs, *The Bauhaus and the New Typography*, 311.

architectural output, design exhibitions. This crossover formed the “archigraphic” that was essentially the situation or application of graphic design principles to produce a conflated representation of a simultaneous graphic and architectural concept.

Bayer prioritized elementary forms, lines, and colors, translating and imposing formal and aesthetic techniques or concepts between graphic design and architecture. One such technique was his use of type as a pictorial language. While a history of the graphic in architecture could be traced back to earlier décor and textile patterning or, as Rayner Banham suggests, on cave walls, it was Bayer who in his own time utilized graphics not for separate purposes of either aesthetic or merely carriers of information, but as a dual entity for commercialism and culture. The development of the graphic “typophoto” as outlined by Moholy-Nagy was an “objective integration of word and image to communicate message”<sup>2</sup> Image or icon combine with type as signage trumping form, and in Bayer’s eyes it was the trademark or logo that did this work in the name of the corporation. The logo functions as a pictorial symbol conveying information regarding business ideals as a succinct graphic presentation and is consequently a useful tool for not only completing the objectives demanded by a product but conveying a particular idea about the product and the company itself – an exercise in both functionalism in instantly expressing a literary objective and corporate idealism through a graphic technique.

As a further example his ad work for Container Corporation of America saw text operating as both line and information and therefore as a kind of typophoto. For Bayer, this was graphic design’s attempt “to integrate writing more completely with architecture”<sup>3</sup> and in terms of the archigraphic it was a moment “when letters [became] separate structural units” subsequently creating an “environment built out of visual communications.”<sup>4</sup> The

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<sup>2</sup> Philip Meggs, *The Bauhaus and the New Typography*, 313

<sup>3</sup> Craig Buckley, *Graphic Constructions: The Experimental Typography of Edward Wright*, 171

<sup>4</sup> Craig Buckley, *Graphic Constructions: The Experimental Typography of Edward Wright*, 169

letters designated as “structural units” in combination with the often clear orthogonality or arrangement of elements according to a grid logic channeled in particular Branden Hookway’s concept of Bürolandschaft which “freed itself of the exclusive top-down control and rigid grid of the Open Plan”<sup>5</sup> and may have therefore ironically challenged, in the form of a graphic proposal (advertisement), the corporate American open plan. In *Ugly Duckling of the Office*<sup>6</sup> Bayer establishes a clear centrality and hierarchy only to have it broken by the angled text of Container’s name across the page accepting a logical rule then denying it. The logical arrangement of elements validates the archigraphic - simultaneously utilizing a system of space planning to convey graphical, two-dimensional information. Bayer also potentially foreshadows Hookway’s statement on the freeing of top-down control and Thomas Watson Jr.’s desire for a reorganization of IBM to form a decentralized, hierarchy-less corporate structure or “horizontal management system”<sup>7</sup>. In any case, Bayer’s graphic intentions managed to deploy graphic techniques of spatial representation used in architecture and suggest a potential critique of the corporate interior while serving the needs of Container.

The effectiveness of Bayer’s ad work helped to lay the groundwork for his successors in Container such as John Massey whose graphic design philosophy closely followed - in its simplicity and economy - and built on the success of Bayer. The archigraphic for Bayer, however, found its most tangible expression in the 1930 Werkbund Exhibition in Paris. One found in the exhibition space an architectural agenda through the curated content whose primary goal was that of visual communication - conveying a particular narrative. The organizational intention was not so much about the formation of space or spatial experience as it was about precise placement and orientation of content in the space to deliver an

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<sup>5</sup> Branden Hookway, *Bürolandschaft*, 62

<sup>6</sup> Herbert Bayer, *Ugly Duckling of the Office*, Appendix Image 01

<sup>7</sup> John Harwood, *Eliot Noyes, Paul Rand and the Beginning of the IBM Design Program*, 38

architectural idea – if not of the exhibition hall itself, then of its contents. Through this extended field of vision<sup>8</sup> the content, the graphic, becomes the “communicative cladding”<sup>9</sup> that “collapses the distinction between structure and ornament.”<sup>10</sup> In this case, the graphic saturation via the exhibition’s content becomes an architectural layer contributing to the experience of the space while dissolving it by angling or mirroring content where it was “no longer absolute space and its logic but the energies of the contents of the exhibition and their interaction.”<sup>11</sup> Paralleling Bayer’s exhibition, in Edward Wright’s 1956 exhibition *This Is Tomorrow*, Group One which included Wright himself along with architect Theo Crosby “attempted to symbolize the mechanical environment as a space defined by changeable panels overlaid with graphic material; a reconfigurable space of communication in which it is tempting to see a recurrence of the ambivalence between mark and sign and signal and noise.”<sup>12</sup> Static, disparate objects created an immersive experience through which the content themselves, acting as graphics, operated or achieved the scale of architecture or at the very least an architectural environment. Much like his ads for Container, Bayer’s (and Wright’s) exhibition was archigraphic through strategic, almost architectural, positioning of content and simultaneously through the use of the content itself as a layer of cladding or an image unified by narrative - a “symbiosis’ in which the discreet elements of linguistic structure were understood as unit of construction [...] an experiment in three-dimensional writing.”<sup>13</sup> Bayer not only advanced the archigraphic in his exhibition work, but framed an important development that the Eames’ would later extend themselves to accommodate mass communication or media and the emergence of rapid information-exchange through

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<sup>8</sup> Alex Dorner, *Herbert Bayer As Typographer and Designer of Exhibitions*, 199

<sup>9</sup> Craig Buckley, *Graphic Constructions: The Experimental Typography of Edward Wright*, 175

<sup>10</sup> Mark Wigley, *White Walls, Designer Dresses*, 15

<sup>11</sup> Alex Dorner, *Herbert Bayer As Typographer and Designer of Exhibitions*, 202

<sup>12</sup> Craig Buckley, *Graphic Constructions: The Experimental Typography of Edward Wright*, 181

<sup>13</sup> Craig Buckley, *Graphic Constructions: The Experimental Typography of Edward Wright*, 171

“infographics” – methods of extending subjects’ field of vision and how subjects receive graphic information often through dynamic, electronic media in contrast to Bayer’s analog, static exhibits.

Central to the modernist tendency in graphic design was the translation of the principles of the machine – efficiency, standardization, mass production – into graphic presentation. Clarity, legibility or readability were the qualifications for a design that not only conveyed the aesthetic spirit of the age in design and architecture but also that of the modern corporation whose drive for profit was largely swayed by how well it could identify itself among competitors in increasingly fast-paced and saturated commercial markets. Graphic designers such as Bayer or Edward Wright after him were consequently successful in “giving art a useful obligation” or bringing art out of an autonomous sphere and deploying it in the commercial and social milieu. The archigraphic as a type of architecturally and graphically conflated imagery evoking in part Edward Wright’s calligraphic envelope or a “graphic interlocking, mixture of literal and virtual structure”<sup>14</sup> was the fallout of graphic explorations through type, poster and exhibition design. It appeared to be Bayer who would not only “unite drawing and building”<sup>15</sup>, at least in the sense of his work’s graphical technique, but pioneer the application of architecturally relevant techniques in graphic form to further a cultural-commercial agenda.

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<sup>14</sup> Craig Buckley, *Graphic Constructions: The Experimental Typography of Edward Wright*, 172/3

<sup>15</sup> Timothy Rohan, *Rendering the Surface: Paul Rudolph’s Art and Architecture Building At Yale*, 90

Appendix

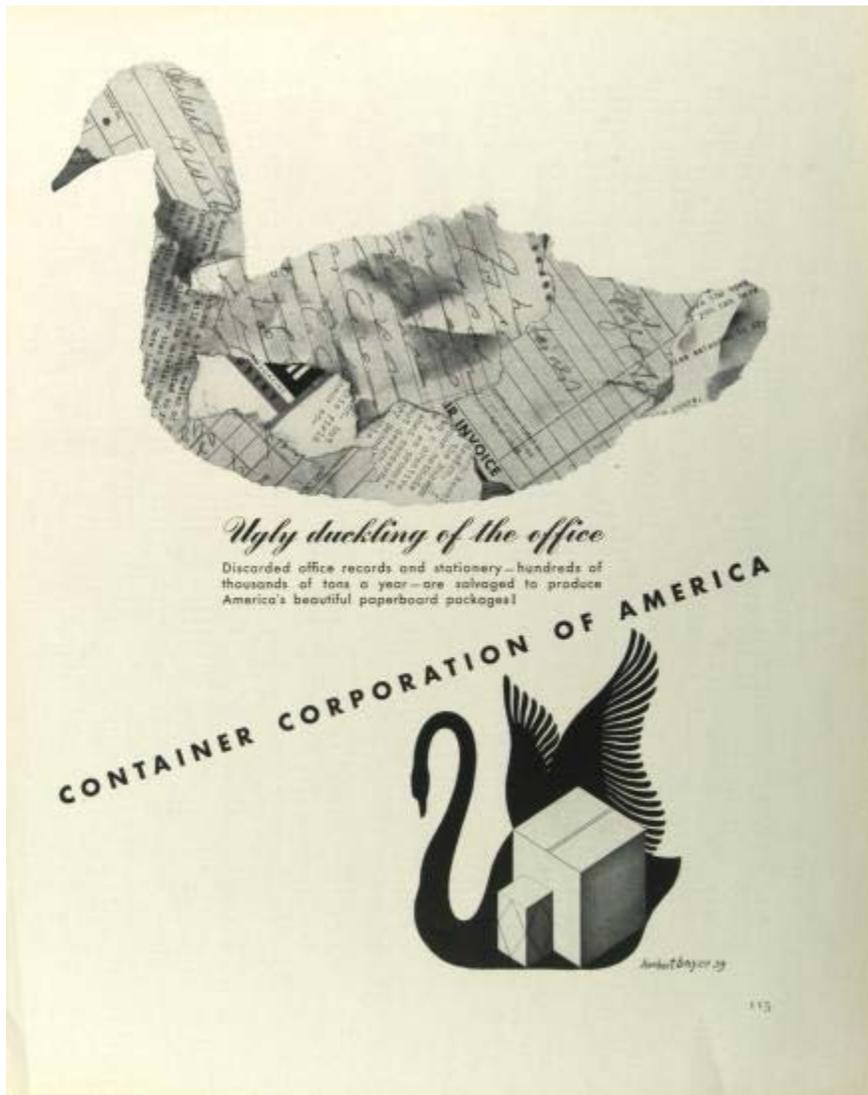


Image 01: Herbert Bayer, *Ugly Duckling of the Office*

## JOHN MASSEY + THE CORPORATE GESAMTKUNSTWERK

John Massey's work for Container Corporation of America may have established his legacy as a renowned Chicago graphic designer, but little is known about the significance of the role itself which he occupied and grew into during his time with Container. A minimalist aesthetic, the origins of which can be traced back to his experiences working with former Container consultant Herbert Bayer and earlier Swiss influences, characterized his work for Container and throughout his career. It was a type of graphic clarity that aligned with Massey's own perceptions on what made effective visual communication and by extension a way of thinking about how the organization should conduct its own internal culture; i.e. with openness and transparency. While often perceived at Container as a type of consultant, namely by his superior-confidant Walter Paepcke whose own beliefs on the importance of the arts and humanities inspired Massey's work, he nevertheless tended to engage the organization beyond the limits of his position or design responsibilities. He was a seemingly isolated figure in the sense that he often communicated and reported directly to Paepcke, working adjacent to him, yet was concurrently active at different levels of the corporate hierarchy according to project needs. In his speech to open the 1977 Aspen International Design Conference, he stated:

*In many ways I am designing an entire company, and that what I do affects how the company perceives itself and how it is perceived by others, and more importantly, how it conducts itself within these perceptions.<sup>1</sup>*

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<sup>1</sup> John Massey, recorded audio. International Design Conference in Aspen Papers [Box 4, Folder 122], Special Collections, University of Illinois at Chicago Library

It seems that the design principles attributed to his work were nearly reflections of how he viewed his working relationships within Container, thereby suggesting a central involvement in the “design” of the corporation. His statement was an admission that loosely embodied a gesamtkunstwerk approach to the emerging modern business organization. In essence he was “giving art a useful obligation” beyond merely an aesthetic and communicative practice in commercial production and was extending it into the realm of corporate culture. Much in the same way that Behrens and AEG or Le Corbusier and L’esprit Nouveau instilled the importance of artistry in commercial practices, Massey went a step further and leveraged his unique position to benefit the company’s image and their general perception towards the importance of an internal design culture. Further, the increasing necessity of design within the corporate culture, in efforts to differentiate from competitors, held implications for the designer in general. Massey’s position as a type of inside-outside designer within Container resembled that of one of his architect-designer contemporaries - Eliot Noyes in IBM. Just as Massey helped to foster a design culture within Container, Noyes in the 1960’s occupied a position as a design authority for IBM. He too was confronted with a seemingly holistic responsibility, reflecting his early-career Bauhaus influences that granted him access to the furthest levels of IBM’s organizational hierarchy. It was Massey’s tenure at Container, however, where it was clear that the role of the designer shifted into a type of independent research position, a platform for an organizational gesamtkunstwerk or total design of the corporation spearheaded by the designer, which may have had a parallel fallout for the role of the architect-designer within the corporation as revealed by Noyes’ own experiences at IBM.

A sense of how Massey perceived his status within Container, thereby suggesting the possibility of a corporate gesamtkunstwerk, can be understood through one of his assignments which exceeded his traditional responsibilities as a graphic designer. On

describing an international project with Container at the time of his Aspen speech Massey revealed how what he expected from the project exceeded his responsibility as a designer and rather required more careful attention to artistic direction. It was “not a visual problem, but a conceptual problem, a communication problem, a strategy problem, but really a design problem if you literally interpret design as it should be interpreted as planning”<sup>2</sup>. Massey was describing a sudden evolution from a designer of graphic information to a type of project designer or planner. The assignment involved no graphic design consultation on his part but rather collaboration with a conceptual writer and cinematographer outside Container, effectively detaching himself from his traditional role, as a graphic design consultant, while suggesting that the designer was more than someone who dealt with the form of a product or an ad detail. His suggestion to interpret design as planning is in itself an admission that the designer needed to extend his role to adapt to the changing demands of a design-centric corporate culture. Further, when the John Massey Design Office was merged into Container upon Massey’s succession to Ralph Eckerstrom as Director of Design, Advertising and Public Relations it marked not only a milestone in his career but also a landmark opportunity for the role of the designer, with the promise that the merger would continue to offer design services to outside clients while serving Container’s requirements. The overlap of private firm and public corporation was a direct acknowledgement, if not coincidental outcome, of the substantial importance of the designer’s contributions to the corporate culture. Moreover, the subsequent renaming of the John Massey Design Office to “Center for Advanced Research in Design” upon its integration into Container validated the designer’s adaptation to a role that demanded more than simply communicating aesthetic concepts; it also meant gaining deeper insight for design projects. As an authority responsible for corporate image, the designer became

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

deliverer of a product requiring a gradient of services thinking about form, color, imagery or aesthetic and a he also became a facilitator determining overall communication needs of a corporation while assembling disciplines, talents and budgets. The designer found himself at the center of corporate activity.

This re-situation of the designer into a role that demanded more research and direction, or planning, and subsequently the organization of a proper design team with access to internal resources, was assumed by Noyes in IBM. In the mid-50's Noyes sought to extend "what Van Doren called the designer's 'sphere of influence' over as many relevant aspects of IBM as possible"<sup>3</sup> through his own firm Eliot Noyes and Associates which "overlapped" with IBM "becoming immanent to the corporation rather than becoming part of it"<sup>4</sup>, just as Massey's merger seemingly attempted with Container over a decade later. Noyes had already confirmed, "I'll work with you, not for you. The only way I can do this job right is to have full access to top management"<sup>5</sup>. Unlike Massey, Noyes denied subordination to corporate superiors, yet demanded a centralized role in which he could communicate design decisions across the organization. This displacement was motivated by his vision that by remaining outside the corporate strata, "never as an employee, always as a consultant"<sup>6</sup> he would be "better able to transform IBM on a structural level by linking its products, spaces, and managerial processes through design"<sup>7</sup>. For Noyes designing for IBM meant not simply a holistic design approach towards its products, but a deliberate and conscious "re-forming [of] the corporate body, literally at the level of the individual member, from the inside out"<sup>8</sup>. Noyes' more deliberate approach to a complete design of the

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<sup>3</sup> John Harwood, *Eliot Noyes, Paul Rand, and the Beginnings of the IBM Design Program*, 48

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> John Harwood, *Eliot Noyes, Paul Rand, and the Beginnings of the IBM Design Program*, 46

<sup>6</sup> Thomas J. Watson, Jr., *Good Design Is Good Business*, 58

<sup>7</sup> John Harwood, *Eliot Noyes, Paul Rand, and the Beginnings of the IBM Design Program*, 47

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., p. 48

corporation may have stemmed from his Bauhaus influence Walter Gropius who sought, through the Bauhaus curriculum and principles, a complete reformation of the artist or designer for the modern age. With Noyes, however, the Bauhaus student was now the corporate employee while the position of the architect, himself, remained as the authority figure. Much like Massey, design would then extend its obligation to the very structure of the corporate organization (in terms of the efficiency of inter-divisional interactions) with the designer and his team having the status within the company as a hybrid internal-external advisory group. Massey and Noyes were essentially positioned for the much larger task of totally designing the corporation itself from products to perception, from the inside out.

The corporate *gesamtkunstwerk* implies a kind of collectivism, in this case a figurative breakdown in hierarchy enabled by the services of the designer, or in Noyes' case the architect-designer. While initially there was little clarity as to where the designer fit in the organizational hierarchy, if at all, when considered within the context of the corporate *gesamtkunstwerk* there can only be one place – as an adjunct position within the center of activity, free within the constraints of corporate strata and corporate culture. In Massey's eyes, designing the corporation was not unlike his approach to graphic projects – it was simply a matter of scale. The same process of facilitating, organizing and optimizing is deployed “except the scale is larger, the input and the problem more complex, and the consequences more crucial”<sup>9</sup>. The corporate *gesamtkunstwerk* then is simply the scaling-up of design operations to instill virtues or principles brought by design into the corporate culture. At IBM Noyes had the vision of improving the whole of IBM by the design of the whole spectrum, from color and typography to architecture – an outwardly explicit

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<sup>9</sup> John Massey, recorded audio. International Design Conference in Aspen Papers [Box 4, Folder 122], Special Collections, University of Illinois at Chicago Library

affirmation of a corporate gesamtkunstwerk - but from a strict position of independent consultant. Noyes was channeling Bauhaus predecessors in his attempt to re-position the architect, himself, as a lead designer (as in the former Bauhaus) but now as part of the modern business organization, and like Massey would extend the range of his responsibilities towards a total design of the corporation – the purpose of which was to “[illuminate] the nature of the company to itself and [stimulate] fresh internal courses of actions” and thereby requiring “some combination of designer, philosopher, historian, educator, lecturer, and business man”<sup>10</sup>; i.e. the new role of the designer.

If “good design can materially help make a good product reach its full potential”<sup>11</sup> it only follows that good design could do the same for a producer. Good design, in other words, is a well-designed business - one with a pervasive design culture led by an equally knowledgeable and transparent authority. When Massey questioned whether the designer is “a leader in molding thought and perceptions within the organization – able to change the directions and destiny of institutions...”<sup>12</sup> it may have been answered incidentally by Noyes at IBM. In any case, perhaps the reason why Massey believed the role of the designer was unclear was because he was busy occupying it. Whether he realized it or not the traditional role of the designer was being subverted by the changing philosophy of Container led by Paepcke - a philosophy attempting to accommodate the arts in a commercial environment. Whether he was convinced that the designer was a type of multi-functional translator of abstract concepts, a researcher or planner, or that the designer was someone who simply opened “a door to one or two people in positions of influence”<sup>13</sup>, Massey’s adaptation to the role helped shed light on the possibility that designers could

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<sup>10</sup> John Harwood, *Eliot Noyes, Paul Rand, and the Beginnings of the IBM Design Program*, 48

<sup>11</sup> Thomas J. Watson, Jr., *Good Design Is Good Business*, 79

<sup>12</sup> John Massey, recorded audio. International Design Conference in Aspen Papers [Box 4, Folder 122], Special Collections, University of Illinois at Chicago Library

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

overstep their traditional boundaries as consultants to become leaders of the corporate domain and establish a design-centric culture.