

THE IDEAL OF HANDICRAFTS AND THE MODERN DESIGN FORMATION: COINCIDENCES AND FAILURES

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INTRODUCTION

Many analysts of the History of Art and Industrial Design have at times tried to give 'shape' and form to the idea of functionality and aesthetics that have characterized the utilitarian objects from the appearance of mankind till now. Almost always, however aptly, their research efforts have not reached but one conclusion: that the interpretation of the industrial design as it was understood so far had deep its roots in the concept of the traditional handicrafts' ideal.

So although the concepts of craftsmanship and industrial design are fundamentally different, nevertheless, it would be remiss to ignore the strong relationship between each other over the course of history. There is no doubt that the craft has been always a genuine poetic element, a precursor for the message of progress and reform power that design has induced during the Industrial Revolution, it being for centuries an intimate, traditional way of producing utilitarian objects in such domains as pottery, jewelry, furniture, construction, textiles, metalwork, even bookbinding and the manufacture of toys. On the other hand, design has always been the conception and planning of the artificial, that broad domain of human made products which includes material objects, visual and verbal communications, organized activities and services, and complex systems and environments for living, working, playing, and learning. According to the above, this paper aims at supporting the strong relationship between craft and design by documenting it with the use of both historical examples and the identification of their common elements.

A HISTORICAL APPROACH

Before proceeding further, the intrusive observation of G. Dorfler, the modern Italian design historian, to clarify the general concept of craftsmanship in its relationship with the 'fine arts' in western societies

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1. The *guilds* were usually composed of smaller workshops of associated crafts from the same town who banded together into larger groups for their own protection and prosperity. They operated on a Master, Journeyman and Apprentice system where the master would take on apprentices to train them in the skills of his craft. Before that, the medieval economy of the Central and Western Europe was mainly based upon feudalism and it was the development of *guilds* that changed it into an economy based on the 'mass' production of goods, consumerism and trade.

from the Renaissance until the beginning of the Industrial Revolution, would be enlightening. Therefore, apart from the functionality of the artifacts of the already stated sectors, as a 'series' of utilitarian objects, the aesthetic value was rather of an inferior quality compared to the quality of the items of 'net art'. As part of the aesthetic artifacts were even then intimately connected with their functional importance, particularly those addressed to the highest, economically vigorous sections of society, the *handworker* ('artist' of 'mass production' of his time), accustomed to the idea of poverty and demand for items for either use or decoration, borrowed the style, glamour, color or form of objects belonging to the realm of 'high art' (Dorfles, 1988, 41). The latter included painting, sculpture and architecture, some elements of which are reflected from time to time not only on the surface or in the form of a ceramic vase, a piece of cloth, a plate, but also in mosaic design motifs and in the working of the alabaster or the leather, thus upgrading it to the pantheon of humility and defiance, as they were devoid of any special self-luminous and decorative style.

On the contrary, from the most fundamental truths of history concerning the evolution of craft activities in Europe is what takes us up to the productive side of the medieval times, where art and design were a single system of aesthetics and functionality, which used to find application in workshops, not always tailored for the production of each item (Banham & Harris, 1984, 4). Nevertheless, the union of these workshops widely known as *guilds* was a number of groups of artists, architects, and craftsmen who formed an alliance to maintain high standards of workmanship, regulate trade and competition, and protect the secrets of their crafts. At those times handicrafts reached their highest standards not only aesthetically and technically but also in terms of production mainly because they were based both on the truth of materials and the ideal working conditions (Jovinelly & Netelkos, 2007, 5) (Figure 1) (1).

Referring to the 'contemptuous value' of the artifacts of past centuries, especially in the Renaissance and Baroque era and even in the early Victorian England, Dorfles (1988, 43-45) maintains that, in most cases, their 'applied' nature was undermined by aesthetics, as they were nothing more than fakes of past forms of art or crafts, rather than developing innovative line morphology according to the needs of their actual era. This is precisely where John Ruskin and William Morris focused their struggle which began

Figure 1. Shoemaking Guild in Medieval Central Europe, engraving, 1200 A.D.

Figure 2. Pine chest decorated with silver leaf and painted with various types of varnishes according to the medieval ideal, Morris, Marshall, Faulkner & Co., England, 1862.



during the mid Victorian period in England to give artifact again its own style, character and an overall aesthetic independence unleashed by the numerous bad imitations of past patterns, on the grounds that this could bring a victory over industrial art. They both feared that industrialization was destroying the environment in which traditional skills and crafts could prosper, as machine production had taken the pride, skill and design out of the quality of goods being manufactured. They strongly believed that hand crafted objects were superior to those made by machine and that the rural craftsman had a better lifestyle than those who slaved in the urban mills and factories. They were also convinced that the general decline of artistic standards brought on by industrialization was linked to the nation's social and moral decline. The Arts and Crafts Movement, that is their inspired way of producing 'pure, hand-made objects', was mainly formed into various crafts guilds trying to recreate the dignified working environment that existed in the medieval crafts guilds (Tsoumas, 2005, 153-155) **(Figure 2)**. Generally speaking though, the Arts and Crafts Movement, although was not able to ensure the economic value of crafts, yet constituted a modern and perhaps political power which through ingenuity rather than conservatism, managed to pave the way to the revival of crafts as a significant form of art in Victorian England. (Adamson, 2010, 2). However, the ambiguous effects of this newfangled artisan philosophy found application in the both artistic and imaginative Art Nouveau Movement which dominated the European decorative arts scene of the fin de siècle. In this case the handicraft ideal began fatally to coexist with the strong technological / industrial culture of the era and the result of this union was merely the production of an extensive range of new functional objects and architectural elements which were nevertheless quite burdened aesthetically. But was it an easy task to achieve? The recent history in the field of European handicrafts had highlighted the inability of historicism to invent not only new forms of aesthetics, but also to suggest or even to tolerate new ways of production. Within this context, we observe that the relationship between handicrafts and technology seems to have been defined more by a spirit of rejection and non-creative reaction, rather than a desire for coexistence. However, it was Art Nouveau ideal that managed to bring about the ultimate reconciliation between traditional expectations of handicrafts and the modern face of technology, as these two poles of production were so far proved to be of a rather irreconcilable nature (Sembach, 2002, 8-9). In spite of the fact that the Art Nouveau Movement was short-lived and did not consciously focus on the preparation of the ground for the reception of the upcoming Modernist Movement, it actually seems to have gained a prominent place in the history of Decorative Arts as it constituted the powerful proclamation of the end of a romantic era whose craft was the emblem (Amaya, 1966, 8).

So during the twentieth century machines which started creating products faster and cheaper and in much greater quantity undermined the role of both handloom and handicrafts which ceased to constitute essential everyday items. However at the same time this fact enabled artists to express themselves more freely employing creativity and imagination.

The renaissance of craftsmanship that occurred after the Second World War was a result of fundamental changes in the educational system of the western world countries that created the conditions for a positive reassessment of artifacts. Particularly important in the formation and dissemination of the aesthetic and technical standards as well as in the encouragement of the new crafts movements was the upgraded role of the

2. Decorative arts museums and mainly folk museums across the world, constituted a significant source of influence on a large part of societies in terms of making them understand and appreciate the national character of their countries through the acquisition, preservation and exhibition of artifacts related to each country's folk life. The postwar generations from South Korea to Argentina came in touch for first time of their lives with some different and particularly exciting ways of production which were based on handicrafts principles. Many people were inspired by this and started reviving these traditional crafts not only as a new form of touristic source profit, but also, in many cases as a new, traditional way of life.

folk, craft and decorative arts museums which inspired many individuals to revive the craft ideal of the past (Andrikopoulou, 1999, 10) (2).

The logic behind such an effort was obvious suffice it to think that in all times, cultures and civilizations of the world, handmade products have always had a special and distinctive character, it being not only formalistic, but also aesthetic. Suffice it to compare one amphora of the Mycenaean period with an equivalent one of the Minoan period or another of the Etruscans or the Incas, to realize the magnitude of their cultural specificity (Naylor, 1990, 96-98).

FUNDAMENTAL DIFFERENCES AND SIMILARITIES

In modern times one of the key differences in the well known relation between design and crafts is that in the case of handicrafts the manufacturing process from conception to execution is undertaken either by an individual or a small group of people. In other words, it is deprived of the required division of labor between designers and manufacturers, something which happens throughout the course of industrial production.

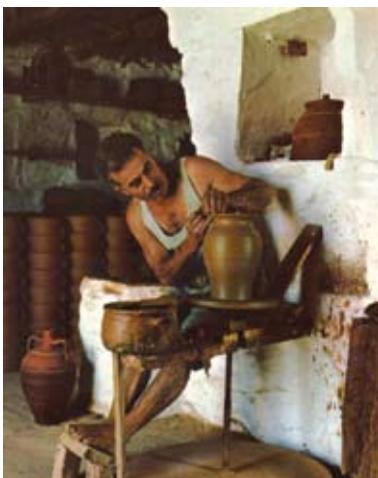
The specialized creator was necessarily responsible not only for the manufacturing complexity of his project, but also for the financial support of his enterprise. For example, every small business that owes its existence to a single person is extremely demanding in terms of economic and production processes. Furthermore, the responsibilities of not only the design and construction, but also of the distribution and advertising as well as of running the accounting keeping of firm, should be taken into account to properly assess the role of the craftsman who often becomes the subject of misunderstanding given that he can be characterized from simplistic to insignificant. All this, of course, contradict the current position of industrial production where this kind of problems are solved automatically with the above solution of division of labor (skill of human potential for any form of responsibility for the efficiently running a business) and using state-of-the-art machines providing high speed and high production quality (Smith, 1981, 31-33).

Another important difference between these concepts is derived at first etymologically from the manual activity: anything that has acquired its status from the 'hand', no matter whether the end result has affected many times a machine. Throughout history, short-range mechanical interventions, such as the wheel of the potter, the carpenter's lathe, the furnace of the blacksmith or the loom of weavers used to compel the creative ability of the craftsman, who nonetheless had the last word over the final image of his work (Figure 3).

That was the reason why the reproducibility of absolutely identical objects in a corresponding way was rather limited as the 'handmade' factor did not allow it. In the case of industrially produced items, any corresponding potential is unlikely since everything has been calculated with the mathematical accuracy of the machines. But an accidental derogation of the original model in the range of products is likely to disturb the balance of production perfection and would allow us to talk about 'mistakes', about 'fabrication errors' and 'defective parts', which in the case of craftsman would be not only fair but also expected.

The above mentioned lack of reproducibility of absolutely identical objects handicrafts 'feature' can be partially attributed to the concept

Figure 3. Pottery handicraft, Sifnos island, Greece, 1965



3. In engineering design there are many cases when several improvisation techniques are used to generate technical design solutions (improvisation can be often used as a random idea generator).

of improvisation which has helped the craftsman to invent, through history, new thought patterns, new practices, new structures or even symbols, and possibly new ways to perform. Of course, this invention cycle happened most effectively when the craftsman had had a thorough instinctive and technical knowledge of the necessary skills and concerns within the particular improvised domain each time. Therefore one could assume that such a profoundly historical concept as improvisation was impossible to be found and applied in 'less liberated' areas, such as design. However, Richard Sennett's words (2008, 236) "Improvisation is a user's craft. It draws on the metamorphoses of type-form over time", can totally controvert the above statement. More specifically, it suggests new ways of interpreting the concept of improvisation in every area of the creative industry including design, as it can provide the user of a product with the freedom to decide for its final use. We can't ignore the fact that the past few years have witnessed a large scale research which has been focusing on the ability of the concept of improvisation to create new perspectives that can be very important to designers such as creative collaboration, fostering innovation, supporting spontaneity, learning through error, and even presenting ideas. This is why nowadays the skills of improvisation are successfully applied in popular design fields such as computer game and sound design, instrument design and even weapon and engineering design (3).

Although the societies of many developed countries of Southern Europe, the Balkans and Asia - including Turkey - seem to depend to a large extent on the great achievements of technology, they retain strong cultural and religious enclaves where old customs and traditions are of generally great value. In this case, craft remains a living cell of cultural reference as it is directly affiliated with significant concepts such as religion, tradition and customs. Therefore handiworks which serve these areas residents' cultural needs remain highly important (and for this reason inalienable) both in terms of materials and of the way they are manufactured. Typical example of this is the work of the Turkish calligrapher Mahmud Öncü perhaps the most important representative of contemporary Ottoman calligraphy in modern Turkey (Glassie, 2002, 114). Öncü's multi-faceted work, which depicts sayings from the Koran in Arabic lettering, is not exclusively associated with the monumental calligraphic work for mosques as it includes a vast variety of portable calligraphic compositions on specially treated paper (marbling paper) which constitute religious objects that are inextricably woven with the modern Turkish society's cultural identity. Of course, as the religious calligraphy continues to constitute a strictly traditional form of handicrafts in modern Turkey, its replacement by any mechanical or technological means is entirely out of question.

It would be also reasonable to point out the practical impossibility of craftsman to act as a key player of mass production items similar to that of large industrial units which have very valuable technological as well as technical equipment. Besides, one of the biggest differences between craft and industry is also that related to the change in production rate (Walker, 1983, 37). It is historically proven that every era and the corresponding culture are governed by their own laws of both market and aesthetics, which today allow us to say that less industrial and technologically advanced countries in the world increasingly rely on manual production which, in turn, appear to play a particularly important role in the Third World countries (Figure 4).

4. Much of African culture places great emphasis on music, rituals and appearance. This is why most of its crafts have to do with the construction of musical instruments, ebony, wood or brass carvings, cane baskets, jewelry and clothing. In particular African jewelry and also genuine mud cloth with hand-painted designs made according to the old, traditional methods which have been passed down for many centuries are two of the most popular kinds of crafts which Africa is famed for. The touristic industry of countries such as Kenya, Zimbabwe or Mauritius allows the exploitation of local crafts as they are considered one of the most important sources of income.

Figure 4. Crafts from African artisans, Kenya, 1990

Figure 5. Rolls-Royce is supposed to be one of the most luxurious and expensive cars of the world as some of its parts are said to be handmade.

Their handicrafts, therefore, continue to play an important role in their economy, but some of them can also play the significant role of 'special items' aimed at the luxury goods' markets in the West. This coincidence brings the third world countries close to the advanced ones since the handicrafts produced by the poor but skilful and highly trained workforce of the former, are luxury items for sale in the markets of the latter, with the pseudo seal of 'ethnic' 'luxurious' or 'souvenir' (Walker, 1983, 39, 40) (4).

The need for industry to manufacture its first production models, (or even some parts of many otherwise industrialized products) which in a very large proportion are made 'by hand', could be regarded not only as coincidental, but perhaps also as a case of dependence of design upon craftsmanship. For example, specific car company factories such as the Italian Lamborghini, the British Rolls-Royce, the Swedish Koenigsegg or the German Wiesmann produce either partially handmade or modified from the original car brands which, though, are mainly addressed to the rich. However, except these particularly widely known and extremely expensive cars, handcrafted luxury cars can also be designed and made in Malaysia by a small factory on the outskirts of Kuala Lumpur. Bufori company (or Bufori Motor Car Luxury Vehicles) produces relatively less expensive cars which are still in high demand in Asia and the Middle East, with customers willing to wait up to two years for their order (Raghu, 2012). This constitutes one more fact that leaves us no other option but to admit, implicitly, craft as 'the mother of a genuine, progressive and imaginative child of design' (Figure 5).

Today our audio-visual environment, even the fields of touch, of smell, and taste, are bombarded with a mathematically increasing intake of objects produced with the most modern forms of milling. The school, home, public buildings, the workplace, the streets, media and the transportation and communication systems, offices and shops keep formatting the most comprehensive landscape of civilization and cultural growth that earmarks the idea of evolution. A huge combination of symbols and concepts, semantic objects, aesthetic and functional analyzes, arranges our interpersonal relationship and contact with current world affairs. It is not surprising that in contrast to what happened in the past the terrible precision production machinery prevents us from accepting the design of products as a result of creative inventiveness, and, in general, the personality of their creators.



CONCLUSION

All the more so, if we take into account the political, social, and commercial - economic processes and influences which a creator is subjected to – but also the options of available materials and machines as well as the aesthetic imperatives of our time, then not only is the above claim applied, but it is now certain that the exact nature of the term design is vague and varies and it is therefore extremely difficult to be defined precisely. That is to say, it could consist of a sole idea of some inventive designer or of a group decision with multiple designers or be the result of a social research or even the settled expert judgment based upon an extensive technological material. It is therefore clear that design cannot be seen without taking into account all the above versions as an exclusively utilitarian object of a certain aesthetic morphology, since all the above external factors militate, by a high proportion, for its existence in a particular place, time, society which they subsequently integrate as an integral part of them which it characterizes or even symbolizes (Heskett, 1985, 8,9). However one might easily wonder: Supposing crafts are of no major importance in developed countries why do they insist on existing and thriving? How have crafts people managed to survive in some particular societies which may as well belong both to the developing and developed world? What is the incentive that makes not only crafts people create new objects but also consumers want to buy them even today? What can the significance of man-made objects be in their every day practical use, but also in traditional, religious and cultural ceremonies? And according to this what elements do the terms of *daily use*, *practicality*, *function* and *ritual* have in common? (Lueckenhausen, 2012). Looking at the present situation of modern crafts in western societies and notwithstanding the foregoing facts, we can easily detect that there is still a considerable bias towards consumer artifacts, although this is certainly less powerful than the corresponding manufactured items.

The revival of craftsmanship, is now free from the tendency of imitation and the seal of autonomy and authenticity, in modern societies and at the same time enjoys a sky-high rise as a result of the reaction against the 'cheap', the 'ordinary', the 'synthetic', 'the plasticized' and 'impersonal' of similar products, of machinery. Perhaps the more expensive attract the interest because they meet the personal expectations of a big part of consumers which not only have the financial standing, but also the desire to be distanced from the mass and ordered style introduced by the industrial trends of our times (Walker, 1983, 41). The current position of the crafts discovers, from within its polemic with design, a separate formula of aesthetic-social values including the truth on authentic materials, the desire for the natural/ecological production method, the respect to the skills of the craftsmen and the admiration for imagination and the idea-conceiving genius of the artist.

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Anahtar Sözcükler: El sanatları; tasarım; seri üretim; tarih; üçüncü dünya ülkeleri.

EL SANATLARI İDEALİ VE MODERN TASARIMIN OLUŞUMU

Bu araştırma günümüzde modern tasarım olarak adlandırılan kavramın el sanatları kavramıyla yakından ilişkisini incelemektedir. Esas amacı, yalnızca kuramsal olarak değil, aynı zamanda karanlık Orta Çağdan günümüze uzanan bir dizi anahtar tarihsel örnekten hareket ederek el sanatlarının, Batı toplumlarında başarıya ulaşan endüstriyel tasarımın temelini oluşturduğunu göstermektir. Bu göz ardı edilemeyecek ilişkinin gelişimindeki önemli dönüm noktası 19. yüzyıl İngiltere'sidir. Çünkü bu dönem Sanayi Devrimi'ni içermesi yanı sıra Morris ve Ruskin'in hiç de gerçekçi olmayan biçimde inandıkları gibi Orta Çağa özgü yöntemlerle nesnelerin yeniden tasarlandığı dönemdir. Daha sonra, Avrupa'da, Modernizmin kitle üretiminden önce uygulamalı sanatlarda el sanatlarının son umudu olan Art Nouveau ile birlikte Üçüncü Dünya ülkelerinin elle yapılan üretimleri günümüzde hala önemli ve ayrı kalan söz konusu iki kavramın benzerliklerini ve farklılıklarını işaret eder.

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