

## The distinctive features of artisanal design and industrial design.

### Las características distintivas del diseño artesanal y el diseño industrial.

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**Resumen:** *Aquí se aborda el tema del diseño, entendido en su sentido más amplio, por lo tanto no solo estético ni exclusivamente técnico-productivo. La intención es privilegiar el punto de vista del "proyecto de diseño" y describir sus connotaciones de implementación tanto en la actividad artesanal como industrial. Luego, está la dicotomía entre artesano y artista, ambos vinculados al factor antrópico del lugar y su "genius loci". Es decir, siempre ha existido esa distinción entre artes y oficios, donde los segundos, propios de la artesanía, requieren una práctica manual como los primeros, pero están dirigidos sobre todo a la fabricación de objetos con funcionalidad intrínseca. La figura del diseñador pone fin a esta distinción. Al final, se proporciona una enunciación de las características distintivas del "diseño industrial".*

**Palabras clave:** diseño industrial, diseñador, artesano, artesanía, bauhaus.

**Abstract:** The theme of design is here addressed, understood in its broadest sense, therefore neither only aesthetic nor exclusively technical-productive. The intent is to privilege the point of view of the "design project" and to describe its connotations of implementation both in the craft and in the industrial activity. Then, there is the dichotomy between craftsman and artist, both linked to the anthropic factor of the place and its 'genius loci'. In other words, there has always been that distinction between arts and crafts, where the latter, typical of craftsmanship, require manual practice like the former, but are aimed above all at the manufacture of objects with intrinsic functionality. The figure of the designer puts an end to this distinction. At last, an enunciation of the distinctive features of "industrial design" is provided.

**Keywords:** industrial design, designer, artisan, craftsmanship, bauhaus.

## THE ARTISAN DESIGN

Before the advent of the industrial revolution, that is, of mass production, the only productive mode for the realization of objects of use, in other words of useful objects, which served for the life of everyday relationship, was only craftsmanship.

For example, a whole series of products, even partially mass-produced, which were considered to be of lower aesthetic value than the "pure" Arts, with their consequent categorization into "Manual Arts", belonged to craftsmanship.

On the other hand, an artist is still an innovator, who does not repeat past formulas, but who uses the manual practices of the Craftsman.

In ancient Greece, aesthetics stood out, in ancient Rome art became celebratory, in the Middle Ages it performed didactic and explanatory functions and in Renaissance developed aesthetic/cognitive values.

The Artist identified himself more and more with a Craftsman, Michelangelo was a painter and sculptor, but also a craftsman/architect and so was Leonardo da Vinci.

And already in 1919 Walter Gropius, first director of the Bauhaus in Weimar, asserted that "The artist is merely an inspired craftsman".

There is, therefore, no qualitative difference between artist and craftsman. The artist is only an "augmented" craftsman.

In the Bauhaus teachers were artists, craftsmen and architects and it is precisely by setting up this forge of intent that Gropius asserted: "Let us create a new guild of craftsmen without the class distinctions that raise an arrogant barrier between craftsman and artist".

Around the middle of the nineteenth century, then, it was attempted to designate as artistic objects also objects of which an aesthetic value was recognized, despite having been produced with industrial systems (industrial art).

Summarizing various definitions, the handicraft work belongs to the person who carries out an activity, both artistic and common, for the production of goods and services, organized mainly with the manual work of his own and of the members of the family (or of a number limited number of workers), without the use of machinery for complete production in series, carried out in a shop, in one's home, in the place intended by the client or in the form of an itinerant or stall.

Therefore, the artisan activity is by its very nature a work that must be "done with the hands" and this even if there is a partial intervention of the machine.

Some works, since ancient times, are carried out with the help of special mechanical equipment, such as the lathe, the drill, the wheel, but it is still the hand of the craftsman that brings the work to completion.



FIGURE 1  
An artisanal producer of Balalaika  
Image taken by the author

What distinguishes the "master craftsman" is mastery, that is, excellent skill in something, field or sector. The term mastery derives from master [lat. Magister], or one who fully knows some discipline, so as to possess it and to be able to teach it to others.

Well, the Universe of artifacts is the main reference for the study of the evolution of human culture.

Another prerogative of artisanal production, as already mentioned, has always been that of the creation of objects of use, that is, products with a limited aesthetic autonomy, but intended for a specific use, which differentiates their classification from that of "objects of Artistic craftsmanship".

## THE INDUSTRIAL DESIGN

Industrial design, on the other hand, is oriented towards the production of objects that are independent of functional and/or artistic problems and that are expressly designed for their execution in series with the support of machines.

In short, the unsolved relationship and dialogue between art, crafts and industry, between spatial form and productive concreteness, make it necessary to overcome the dichotomy between the artistic value of the artifact and the concrete needs of the productive world.

Quite different (from art and crafts) is instead the genesis and function of industrial design, which was born, precisely, in conjunction with the appearance of the Industrial Revolution and which refers to the production of specific objects (and services).

From the etymological point of view, if we are going to investigate the genesis of the verb "to design", from which the word "design" originates, we can appreciate the Latin derivation from "signum", sign, with the prefix "de-", therefore, in a wider meaning, "to design", has the meaning of "conceiving a project, an action plan, a purpose, an intention".

In fact, it is precisely the design action that differentiates the artistic executive or ideational design, from that intended for the realization of an industrial product.

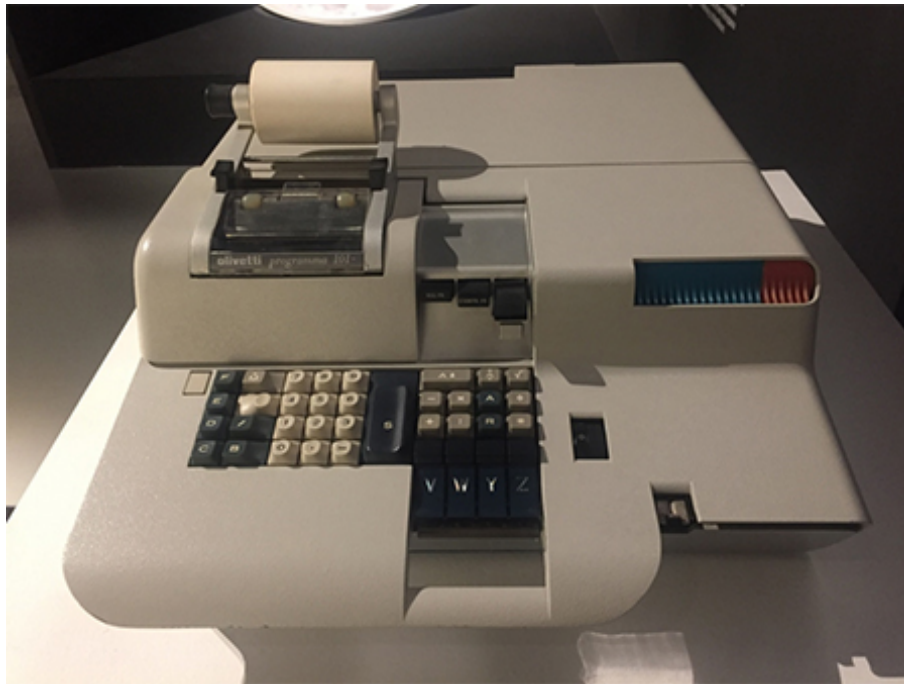


FIGURE 2

The Olivetti P101, known as "Perottina", the first PC in history, designer Mario Bellini, year 1965

Image taken by the author

The designer has the task, not only of conceiving the object to be produced, but also that of "engineering it", that is, to make it suitable for mass production, so, he must provide the manufacturer with executive drawings that, as well as product innovation, shall take into account the characteristics of the production process used too.

The designer must always be an innovator and this both in regards to the product and in those relating to the production process, guaranteeing greater results or benefits and consequently providing social progress.

According to Joseph Schumpeter, innovation can take place in the following forms:

- The introduction of a new good - that is one with which consumers are not yet familiar - or of a new quality of a good (product innovation).
  - The introduction of a new method of production, that is one not yet tested by experience in the branch of manufacture concerned, which need by no means be founded upon a discovery scientifically new, and can also exist in a new way of handling a commodity commercially (process innovation).

Unlike art, which "tries to give shape to a value that escapes into perpetual becoming, but which the artist has foreseen and wants to subtract from history", as Albert Camus asserts, design wants to give shape to things to make them "to live" in a historical and socio-economic context.

Thus, with the advent of design, also the panorama of what were called Applied Arts, or Decorative Arts and, moving from a market of "monopoly" to that of competition, also take hold the issues related to Safety and Quality, expressly requested by the consumer.

In particular, while the Safety requirements are directly regulated by specific laws, in relation to Quality it is possible to objectively verify only the production process, leaving to usability and pleasantness tests (subjective) the examination of the possible satisfaction by the 'user'.

In the latter case it will be a new discipline, Ergonomics, that will equip the designer with a formidable "toolbox", that is, that extra "gear" absolutely necessary to be able to compete successfully in the global market, furthermore minimizing the risks relating to the offer.

## THE DISTINCTIVE CONCEPTS OF INDUSTRIAL DESIGN

In order to identify a possible gnoseological interpretation of the term "Industrial Design", we would refer to the math concept of "Set", which is considered primitive and intuitive, and for which it can be stated, tautologically, that "a set is composed of elements, which belong to that".

As we can immediately understand, it is not so important to seek a definition of "Set", as to determine whether an element belongs to it or not.

The difficulty of providing an unambiguous definition of "Industrial Design" as a "Set" can thus be overcome by specifying the characteristics of industrially produced objects and highlighting whether or not they belong to that set.



FIGURE 3  
FIAT 500, designer Ing. Dante Giacosa, year 1957  
(Image taken by the author)

After all, it can be stated that, in order to consider a product as the result of an industrial design, it must meet the following requirements:

### **I. Be "reproducible in series"**

The design of the industrial product must necessarily provide for its iterability, an indispensable feature for its mass production. Only a seriality study, allows the possibility of reproduction, or iteration in series of the parent model or "standard". Therefore, Industrial Design must, first of all, guarantee the design of a standard model, taking into account both the specific requirements that guarantee excellent reproduction fidelity, and the production process itself. This takes place in product engineering, in the design phase and in that of process engineering, in the production phase.

### **II. Be mechanically produced**



The second requirement of the "industrially" designed object is to be produced exclusively by the machine and, therefore, equipped with special tricks, which allow it to be automatically "treated" by specific equipment.

### **III. Have a certain aesthetic quotient**

Styling became popular in spoken language especially in conjunction with the American Great Depression of 1929, when in the United States it was necessary to resort to any useful gimmick to overcome the crisis of demand. In other words, it was a question of making products that were now obsolete and no longer available to potential buyers more attractive. Thus, the first studies were born, which set themselves the goal of creating and developing new charms and new elegance for objects, regardless of any real technical and functional motivation.

### **IV. Not necessarily having a practical function**

The unnecessary disquisition on whether the industrially made object must have, or not, a practical value, absolutely does not affect the essence of an industrial product. It is for this reason that it is not considered necessary any functional component for an object "belonging" to those conceived with the methodologies of industrial design. Indeed, many times useless objects are expressly designed, such as, for example, ornaments, artistic and decorative objects, so as to be made in series and with the exclusive intervention of machines, which are, to all intents and purposes, to be considered part of this category.

## **CONCLUSIONS:**

We started from the differences elapsing between artist, craftsman and designer and we noticed that the latter is able to summarize the skills of the first two, giving the correct importance to each component of the object to be designed, especially because the final shape of the object designed, both for appeal, for affordance, and for the satisfaction of the fashion of the time, is essential in the purchase decision by the buyer. It should also be noted that, in the third millennium, there has been a shift from mass production to one oriented towards the consumer, who has thus become a "prosumer", also and above all due to the great persuasive power of social media. Here then, is that the designer will have to try to acknowledge the wishes of potential customers 'a priori' and in this he will have the support of a highly innovative discipline, Ergonomics. Finally, a definition of the characteristics of the object to be industrially produced was provided, punctually connoting its specificities.

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