[Leitmotif]

In a present market situation of fast changing trends and a nervous chasing for "killer applications" things themselves tend to disappear in a fog of talk that constantly surrounds them.
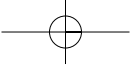
What is visible is a sort of accidental items making advertisement about products yet to be seen. It is as if a loss of memory puts history within brackets promoting an endless stream of mere communication. But there seems to be nothing there to "communicate" about as whatever that could be; it is at all times hidden by the presence of something else, something new. In this communication morass things face the risk of being reduced to the expendable bearers of this or that something else, be it function, brand, accidental beauty or what ever... Design is communication; that may be, but what about and why?

If sustainable design means design that still is bearable and endurable in use as memory returns to construct things as historical things, then design aesthetics can not only relate to things as bearers of specific functional requirements at hand or as pure components of experience production. It must also look beyond narrowly defined concepts of usability and superficial notions of design experience to see the aesthetics of things themselves as becoming products, as becoming this or that...

Design that answers to this call must build on an idea of "form" as an invitation to concern; not form as the bare expression of required functionality, not form as the bare structure of experience in demand, but form inviting us to do "something" that matters, when and where it matters. Form that initiates concern... Aesthetics then has nothing to do with adding a bit of beauty, providing a selling style or superficial pleasure of use; it is all about the logic of expression, the logic of appearance, the way in which things present themselves to us.

We have to look for basic design leitmotifs that lead from us as users to the design objects themselves as those things that invite us to care; to care for their presence in our lives, to care for them in our life worlds. From user requirements, user evaluations, user experience etc. to the way in which focal things form our lives. It is there things "sustain" as we care for them, as we answer their invitation to care. From us as users that have needs, make requirements...to the things themselves that invite us to care... It is a difficult shift to make. As there is nobody else to blame – no user requirements, no user needs, no users etc. – why should we design at all, why not just let things be? The answer to this is that we care for things; we care by design...the aesthetical leitmotif.
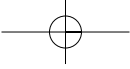
/ Life rather than design /

I am reading ˝De Profundis˝
in a Stockholm garden,
a garden that could be nothing
but European. The house is
 just so down-at-the-heels and
in the garden there is a small
shed, a little pond, and a lawn
that has not been tended to
in any way resembling the art
of gardening. From the other
side of the tin roofs traffic looms
lazily; no horns, just traffic.
This is everyday life, much as
it is lived throughout the world;
nothing fancy, nothing much.
Stockholm is going about its
business, and so am I.

These thoughts on design take life rather than design as their starting point.
They view life as an ultimate design, or design as a life form, or a life dedicated to design as
a form of wisdom, or wisdom itself as a form of design.
These thoughts on design are filled with references that spring from that artistic yet
responsible attitude that shapes our individual and collective experience.
What is purposefully missing from these reflections is all possible theoretical orthodoxy,
every staunch fundamentalism and all tendency to worship design for design's sake. All the
rest however remains, as if design were to be considered an unwitting hinge, a place where
memories, echoes, snapshots of all that matters in life are stored, the cogs of life itself.
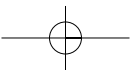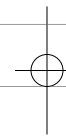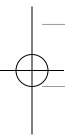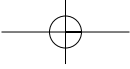
In focus

The consequence of approaching a thing from an evolving self, together with the recognition that it is in memory that things bear upon the self to a larger degree than in perceiving them, is a change of perspective. Since there is no clear borderline between the self and the thing there can no longer be a clear perspective of things. It is as if we got so close to the thing that our ability to focus on its material outer does not work anymore. Like in the diffuse photos of Hiroshi Sugimoto the view of things becomes blurred and affects us no more through their lucidity, but through a diffuse stirring of the body and soul. The thing has entered the self as the self has entered the thing forcing us into a value system of almost a non-perspective where the thing self permeate each other and the value becomes inseparably merged in the permeation of the two. This is the possible sharpness of Sugimoto.

As "users" we are defined as that someone using given things for this or that something. We become components interacting with other things in a complex system. It is as if we forget people, forget that things invite themselves and are invited to become part of someone's life. What is left are somehow just components in a model for empirical studies. We tend to forget to care about real people in the process of designing...so why should they care about the things that come out of such a forgetful design?

The notion of a "user" turns people into objects and invite us to forget all about the existential situations in which things are accepted or not as things in their own right and not just as the provisional and temporary bearers of this or that something else.

If things are not there to open up for this act of acceptance, but rather hide behind advertisements telling us stories about a world of dreams, then why care at all? If there is really nothing there, why should we care about design at all, why not just be content with talking about nothing and anything... The answer must be that we care for people; we care by design...the existential leitmotif. As we answer to those expressional invitations in concern we define the meaningfulness of things; the presence of things. Listening to this invitation, we turn to things. Inviting them to take up a place in our lives, we re-turn. This is the existential choice where we, in an act of acceptance, make things themselves meaningful. Not simply exchangeable placeholders for functionality, but things. Not yesterday's news waiting for a next model to appear, but things. This is the existential choice that sustainability depends on. It is at this point the user disappears, what is left is just real people making choices that matters. The basic duality of the design process; we turn to things as we focus on form, material, expressions, behaviour and we re-turn with something as we focus on use, requirements, functionality, ergonomics. Technical matters versus humanistic, social matters, artistic matters versus economical matters... This duality is of course still present with respect to aesthetical matters versus existential matters; resolving the duality is what makes practice meaningful.

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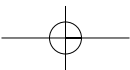
Memorable things

Genius loci, the spirit of the place, provides us with the means of approaching the idea of pleasure. Naturally, the ability to experience pleasure is a gift given to us at birth. However, the concept of knowing pleasure intimately seems to come to us late in life. The ethical question here is one of knowing what is good for me; in a given moment but also in a given place. In addition to this, the ethics of pleasure also relates to the conditions of others involved in the production of the vessel of pleasure – the artefact involved in bringing the pleasure forth.

There is a very practical reason for the understanding of thing's value in memory and not when perceiving them. Most of the time things are not present in terms of being reached by sensory faculties. They are rather present as being remembered, carried in the expanded or condensed memory of the evolving self, permeating the present. A part from just a handful of things perceived actively together in the same moment, the rest of the things constituting for example a home, a wardrobe or a workspace is not perceived, but merely remembered as in a past, or thought of within possibilities for a future moment of the present. As for example with the case of a wardrobe of clothing and wearable accessories it is just a small part of it that one is able to wear on a daily basis. The rest of the wardrobe is behind the doors of the closet or left behind and thus not affect me through their stimuli. Therefore, it is rather as an enduring memory a coexistence of virtualities where the experience of the perceived or imagined thing dwells and bears its agency upon a self. And most often this is so over a period of time significantly longer than when the thing in fact is perceived in an actual present. So is the case with all things standing out through their appearance. But despite the fact that all these things are not reach by sensory faculties, they, or at least a number of these things, are still affecting me. And if one is not able to perceived these things actively, it can only be through the memory of them, or even so the forgetting of them that they affected a self; participating in the making of the subject. For this reason, it is also in memory where one might be able to understand the value of things.
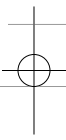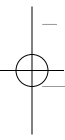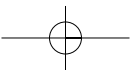
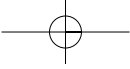**/ Beyond Mr. Walter Benjamin /**

Over the last decades we have witnessed a proliferation of life styles that has never been matched before, new categories of behaviour that seemed to be speaking to us, through the language of the most boundless individuality, of the hedonistic triumph of body design, and objects designed for the designed body... And all this has been fuelled by a limitless will for self-promotion, that has meant that everything has been based on pure appearance.

In actual fact behind all these forms of representation, behind all these infinite sociological segmentations, behind all this proliferation of life styles shoved at us by mass-media what has remained hidden beneath the surface is a model of interpretation and development that tends to do away with all differences: a model in which humanity is believed to be generic and mass-producible. A concept of humanity reduced to an infinite series of standard and standardizing appearances.

Reality has in fact gone beyond Walter Benjamin wildest expectations: machines no longer just produce the "goods" that have replaced those that possessed the unique quality and artistic aura of the hand crafted objects. They have in actual fact gone so far as to reproduce the human being for whom the "goods" are designed.

The system of production of the industrial era has changed into a complex global economic system capable of producing... not just goods, but ... desires, immaterial needs.
And at this point it is the productive system that has become the real leading player in human events. It has created a human essence, a "body" that is capable of consuming no longer in order to satisfy natural needs, but rather to satisfy the requirements of production itself, and thus of the same production system. Man himself has become a product: a body that consumes and consumes itself. And in consuming itself is constantly in need of spare parts. Paraphrasing the title of the famous text by Walter Benjamin "The work of art in the age of mechanical reproduction" the crucial issue today is not so much "art", but "man" in a time of technical reproducibility, seeing as this economic system as a whole is bent on producing consumers that are aware of the fact that consuming consumes and that therefore the need for needs creates a need for maintenance.

[Beyond]

Functionality; things as appliances, the bearers of functionality. Things as tools to accomplish given tasks... If that is all they are – the mere bearers of functionality – then once a given task is accomplished things have no other meaning than lying there waiting to be used again. If that is all they are, why not throw them away as used things?
We can always recycle them...we know what is right at any given moment in history, don't we? A functional definition of things tells us what they are as tools to be used by us. We define the thing as that something which defines someone as a user. We become strangers to each other, the perfect alienation of things, of us – the notion of a "user" has really no meaning in design trying to reach beyond pure functionality.
As we live our lives with things we define what they are through existential definitions; what they are as things present in our lives. Such a definition tells us about the way in which we give things a place in our lives, how they furnish our homes, the way we care about them. What we define here is the thing as becoming something, the thing as an expressional – the bearer of specific expressions in which certain invitations for concern resides, it is a focus on the expressional strength of things as placeholders for meaning. This is design that goes beyond functionality.

Industries such as the fast-food industry are working hard at erasing the loci, replacing the locality with another greatness, the genius of uniting the marketing and distribution systems so as we become residents of some other place in the instant we are consuming the intricately packaged goods of the global chain. Provision is made for the brief moment of the sensation of movement, the consumption of the food is carried out in synchronisation with the rhythm of the music in the loudspeakers. Fast food thus means not only eating fast, but also the quick relocation from one's original loci to a state of flux where the micro-architecture of the packaging becomes a cosmos for a much temporary state of mind; hence the newspaper printed on the paper on the tray.
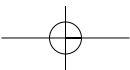
/ The Design of the Body /

Forgotten

The "art of living" has therefore become "art – or better still religion – of consumption". And seeing as the dogma of our consumer system is based on unlimited development, the production of the need to need is in its turn infinite. One therefore must have a long life. As life is short, one must extend the average life of the consumer by suggesting life styles where the identity (conceived as a memory of self that is the custodian of the authenticity of the subject) is no longer the basis of the subject. It is much more effective to base the identity on the "suspension of time" and on the constant changing of appearance.

A proposed identity thus based on the minor eternity of the "always fit" that replaces the absence of future, the absence of Self with a constant and never ending play of alternating appearances, status symbols and life styles.

Having thus abandoned the romantic notion of the *homo faber* who built the Roman aqueducts, the roads, the gothic cathedrals, the silks and the jewels. Going beyond the materialism of the *homo operaius*, meaning the *homo faber* without art (because steam has replaced the energy of his hands) one has now reached the ultimate "fiction": The era that we could call the one of the *homo homini corpus*, whose body itself has become the product.

Singing and screaming we have moved from the times when things and works were required, to the soulless and timeless era of the need to need and the "body person" has been condemned to be an animated thing, surely, but without an individual soul.

Allow me to underline this word: "soul". A word that has been relegated to little more than a purely verbal statement, a third personal neutral, a "something", an "it" that moves a soulless body.
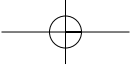
And this is where the great fraud of the presumed "immateriality" of the so called "dream society" is revealed. Where its plan of desires is reduced to a trivial "I need to need". An utterly materialistic outlook, entirely earth-bound, all geared towards the "here and now and right away". A pitiless way of thinking...soulless actually.

The body design and the design for the body person that rules the sky of the *homo corpus* is a positivistic and cruel design, a design that leaves no space for heresy or dissent because everything in it obeys the dogmas of efficiency and mass production.

There is a very fundamental reason why we cannot identify the value of things when having them in front of us. The reason is that the therapeutic agency of things bears more upon duration, time, rather than any other dimension, since it is here in duration the evolving creation of the subject endures.
This implies that it is no longer primary when having things in front of us in space where we are able to find the value of things, but rather when the perception of them has fallen back into memory – into the enduring past of the making of the self which is pushing into the present.
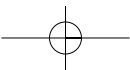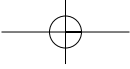
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The fantastic pleasure of taking
delivery of a brand new suit!
Beige tweed, overlaid with a
brightly red square pattern, the
most marvellous waistcoat
I have ever seen. Fittingly
enough, the last minutes were
carried out by a tailor
residing in the attic of one
of the old houses just behind
the Liberty store.
In the fashion of Oscar Wilde,
I must of course live up to
the suit, meaning a certain grace
employed by the suit should
extend to me. But at the same
time, I do think I need to live
a little. The suit hereby
becomes a vessel of pleasure,
carrying in its fabric the idea
of living beautifully.

Husserl wrote his Philosophie der Arithmetik as an attempt to provide a psychological
foundation for arithmetic. In his review of this book Frege wrote: "The constituents of the
thought, and a fortiori things themselves, must be distinguished from the images that
accompany in some mind the act of grasping the thought – images that each man forms of
things." (P. Geach, M. Black (eds), Translations from the Philosphical Writings of Gottlob
Frege, Blackwell 1970).
Some years later Husserl coined the initial phenomenological leitmotif "turn to the object"
("Wende zum Gegenstand."). This "turn to the object" was later on followed by a re-turn "to
the subject" through the so-called "transcendental subjectivity".
In the process of designing we walk around in this subject-object-thing-us-them-we circle
in daily practice; we always design some-thing for some-one. We turn, re-turn and turn
again. A psychological foundation of design practice cannot explain what this turning to the
things themselves means.
To "turn to the object" means we acknowledge that design has its foundation in a rational
constructive practice. It is from this foundation in a rational constructive practice that we
re-turn to the subject; design is always design of something given. If we forget this
foundation we forget the things themselves in the design practice... This is where we go
beyond a psychological foundation of design.

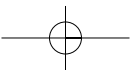**/ A call for reflection /**

Time has come to place design under close scrutiny. Even though coming up with a manifesto of laws and rules that will define criteria of "good design" or "new design" doesn't sound like meaningful. A manifesto on design would be hard to swallow for designers, businessmen and design consumers. One should also bear in mind that from a historical point of view, manifesto's have always contained elements of fundamentalism.
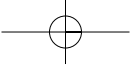
Marx's Communist Manifesto,
Marinetti's Futurist Manifesto,
Breton's Surrealist Manifesto
The Femminist Manifesto.

All manifestos that in the end contained aggressive, revolutionary stances that wished to impose the new as something that rids us of the old.
There is no doubt that there is plenty of confusion nowadays. No certainty. But in order to find a new direction within this disorder we perhaps need even greater disorder, but better arranged, or just more convincing. This statements of purpose have therefore to be considered as a call for reflection rather than a call to arms.

In the morning

Morning after morning he wakes up in the same city, in the same apartment, in the same room, to the same monotone signal. He wakes up on the same mattress, under the same cover, with the head resting on the same pillow. The ceiling above him and the concrete surrounding walls that meet his first struggling gaze are as white as they have ever been and the lamp hanging in its own power cable from the metal hook in the ceiling is hanging calmly as ever. The only thing contrasting the white walls is a black sleeve ending of a shirt jammed by the door on its way into the closet. There it has been for days. And, so has the black sweater been on the wooden floor just beneath him. Still there is something different this morning, even though the office-like chair on wheels has not rolled away over night and the table in the corner has not grown taller or shrunken in size. Also the massive stone windowsill and the ceramic vase without any flowers, just inside the unpolished window are the same. Alongside each side of the window two transparent white curtains cradle by the gentle wind from the little opening in the window that was left open: also that, just like every morning. Still there is something different.
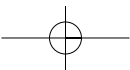
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[Beyond]

I would never dream of me living
anywhere but here. This longing
is a thing of fictional beauty,
of course. But is that not the
most precious of pleasures –
that of being able to live
like in some old book or like
a character from that film?
I am living in London.
I am drinking in this pub.
I am sitting down with my pint
and my constant notebook.
I see my handwriting becoming
ritual, once again. Really,
I am home. Right at the corner,
just by the start of Portobello
Road I might carry on home.

Designing for experience means that things become mere props in the staging of some
play... They become unreal somehow; totally expendable once the show is over. If it is not
the car we design, but the driving experience, what is the car but a vehicle for experience?
We may perhaps care about the experience, but we may easily forget that particular car
itself.
Designing for experience, for user experience, means that we as subjects of experience are
mere spectators to something that somehow happens to us. Our lives turn into theatre. The
experience defines us as visitors in foreign country.
But in the acts of inviting things to become part of our lives we are no spectators, no visitors
in foreign country. Something is wrong here.
We leave a message that resides in the expressions of things... So we design things as
signs? Design is communication... That might be so, but the things we turn to in everyday
life are not signs or media for communication.
As we turn to some things we turn our back to other things. Branding is an interesting
example of this circle; we use the illusion of things to turn our back at things that was never
there.
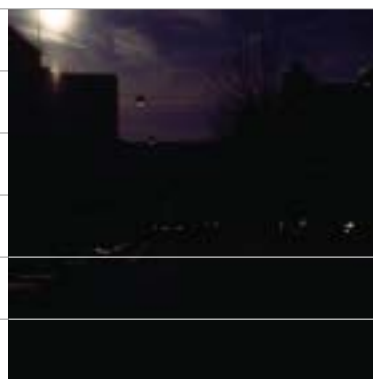
/ Our learned ignorance /

The supermarket

Nikolaus Krebs (that translated into English would read Nicholas Crab), born in 1401 in Cues, near Trier, is undoubtedly the greatest platonic thinker of the Renaissance. As all good Platonists he had a clear idea of the distinction between good and evil, between good and bad, between a good life and a bad life. And he also knew that evil is simply the negation of good. When I say "evil" I should say "not good", when I say "bad" is should say "not good". It is thanks to this ability that today, in this new universalist and localist middle age, his point of view can come to our rescue.

In his most important work *De docta ignorantia*, "Nicholas the Crab" tackles the problem of how man can know the world that surrounds him. And he reaches the conclusion that man will never be able to grasp absolute truth: man can only know relative truths, and these may increase, but never coincide with the absolute.

This principle is astounding because it establishes a dynamic relationship with a point of view regarding the tangible world: a relationship that is valid (though perhaps not absolutely) for everything, from the simplest of objects to the most abstract of ideas.

The glasses with which Cusanus regards the world have two lenses, one that draws things nearer and one that distances them, this is the only way that to this day we can hope to find a true gauge, a fundamental element for evaluation and decision making.

For example we cannot establish in absolute terms what a design for a good life might be, but we can certainly decide what is not design for a good life.

From the comparison between the useful and the useless, between the good and the bad, between what is decent and what is indecent we perhaps can draw close to the truth without ever reaching it. And that's the good thing about it, because only in this way can life, beyond ending, also have an end, an aim.

The rest is fundamentalism, dogmatism, intolerance.

Isn't an everyday supermarket
in its state of artistic
installation a more powerful
problematisation of the age
and suggestion for a future than
most of which dangles on
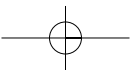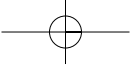the gallery and museum walls
across the world?

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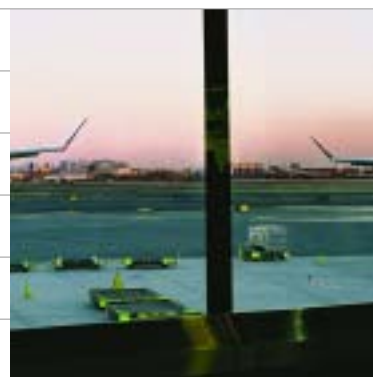
Eating brings lustre to life, bringing romance to everyday rituals; much like writing by hand. It does not have to be perfect; neither the food, nor the handwriting, but I do find some moral in trying to do it nicely. The most simple gesture might become a little act of elevation; an aspiration of being. Writing this, I am starting to connect the jots of my letters to the line of the paper. I remember my teacher at school, when I was a boy, telling me to try to do that. Now, glancing at this page, I understand what she meant by that. Maybe the subtle details of a personality always remain?

That's what design is; acts of defining and constructing the deserts of being. In the midst of all these things people walk by and you can see desolation in their tired eyes; in the middle of some cheerful discussion a sudden moment of silent and that same look returns in their eyes. A silent mistake where it seems as if almost everything is missing... Houses, cars, mobile phones, cities, computers, clothes, food, airplanes, shoes... Why do we build our world, our life worlds this way? Greed, a ruthless hunting for meaning... Is there a logic behind all this or is it just the accidental consequence of a total and complete alienation? It seems necessary to revisit this dark perspective of our designed world from time to time. Design, the actual definitions and constructions of things, tools, houses, machines... Speer certainly understood the power of this practice, putting industrial designers in lead of German arms production during the Second World War – just remember Papanek's warning about the dangers of industrial design; "There are professions more harmful than industrial design, but only a very few of them." (V. Papanek, Design for the Real World, Academy Chicago Publishers, 1984).

This is not only visible in the grand world catastrophes, but constantly present in every day life in all those mundane catastrophes of our lives, in the ways we restless wander about looking for fragments of meaning hidden in the things and constructions that surrounds us. Inherent in these design deserts of being are all those forgotten basic aesthetical leitmotifs of design. It is where basic design choices reduces to mere technical issues; design as the neutral solution to a problem. It is where the so-called tacit knowledge of the practitioner cries out for help; why?

**

Pause.
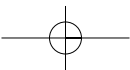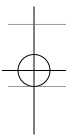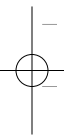
/ Kaleidoscope as a metaphor of beauty /

[Design depression]

The kaleidoscope is an optical device that provides infinite permutations of forms and colours. A marvellous combinatory machine. The marvel of anyone constantly looking at an infinite number of new forms, created by a limited number of elements, in order to look at something beautiful.

The three Greek words that form the English 19th C. neologism are: *kalos* = beautiful; *eidos* = figure; *skopeo* = gaze. This last Greek term, *skopeo*, is also the root of the Italian word *scopo* meaning purpose, aim, objective.
In a kaleidoscope the shapes are many, millions and millions, but for the "scope machine" the object is...beauty.

Just like a kaleidoscope, design can create projects (from the Latin: *projectum* = to throw forward) that have as aim the reflection of beauty.

That's how design works; furnishing us with the expressionals of imprisonment. Humiliation, self-contempt; I thought it was something, but as I look around I see it is nothing or less than nothing. We buy clothes, we dress... We buy furniture, we furnish our homes... And in some rather depressing sense what we do is to furnish ourselves with the expressionals of imprisonment; somebody else is planning our lives, deciding its expressions locking us up in a prison of economical and political plans. We are being reduced to design material; a prerequisite for somebody else's creative work. Affordances; this is supposed to be the possibilities of action that an object offers – or we perceive it offers. In other words what I can afford or what I cannot afford; design is what makes us the some-ones or the no-ones. Affordances is in some sense mostly that scornful smile telling me that I cannot afford it. Or, in case I can afford it, a reflected smile telling somebody else that they cannot afford it.
As designers there is no reason to try to avoid this depressing view of design. It is a thin line to walk, but illusions don't help much in this balancing act. We need critical design research that from time to time can act as the semiotics of design imprisonment.
Designing these expressionals of imprisonment means we forgot, or give up, all about that basic existential design leitmotif.

●●●●●●

/ Diversity /

I would have hoped to be this
moved by this exhibition
I am seeing. But I never would
have thought I would take
it so to my heart. I am shown,
by this painting and photographs,
something I have already
understood. My colours are
shown to me by the truthby which
I approach that which I am
moved by. This is a memory –
that takes place.

The kaleidoscope creates through disruption and refraction.
The metaphor of the kaleidoscope thus suggest the opportunity for designing an infinite number of projects beginning with always the same simple, basic elements.

I see a marvellous shape! And again! And here's another! The shape breaks up in order to form another shape that retains a similarity with the previous one through its very difference.

This is the marvel of looking for an aesthetic/ecstatic purpose.

The ecstasy of beauty looks at the similarities it finds in every small difference.

We now know that diversity is a heritage that must be protected for the sake of everyone's cultural growth. Because diversities communicate, while identities remain dumb.

Today it is essential that we find a constructive way of coexisting, by exchanging information, points of view, attitudes, dreams.

The key word in this regard is "relationship", design for the sake of relationships and not for it's own sake alone, because while ideological dogmatism could make do with strict bureaucratic protocols, the relative nature of relationships requires the free flow of communication.
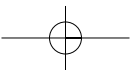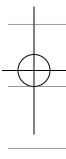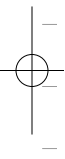
Intuition

The super-intellectual act which the "Dichterdenker" Hans Larsson calls intuitive, or the aesthetic approach to life, in which the researcher or artist in a moment of immediate inspiration experiences the world in its pure and naked gestalt is described as a moment of something shed in light, swiftly and immediate, as a flash that possibly may fade out, instantly after its zenith; as quickly as it lit up it falls back in just the gloom of the light. Here, in moments of greater mindful vigour, the everyday perception of the real, perceptibly constituted of a jumbled body of isolated and scattered things, as if they were at rest, almost a sleep, is preserve and cast in a light of insight which for a moment orders them in a crystalline, organised, clear form of life. What has happened, according to Larsson, is that the mind has reached out over wide open spaces, which it is not strong enough constantly to control. This is why the shed of light is so temporary and passing. What in such a moment has revealed itself to the eye is so multiple and hard to grasp that it afterwards not always, or not at all, can be accounted for or hardly even remembered. "The effect is certain but unlocatable, it does not find its sign, its name; it is sharp and yet lands in a vague zone of myself; it is acute yet muffled, it cries out in silence. Odd contradiction: a floating flash. Nothing surprising, then, if sometimes, despite its clarity, the *punctum* should be revealed only after the fact, when the photograph is no longer in front of me and I think back on it. I may know better a photograph I remember than a photograph I am looking at, as if direct vision oriented its language wrongly, engaging it in an effort of description which will always miss its point of effect, its *punctum*" as Roland Barthes in *Camera Lucida* so accurately puts it.
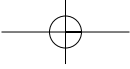
[Design depression]

What design gives us are the given things, somehow as the mere side effects of hidden processes. They are the products we buy, use, dispose of, forget, hide, exchange... And there is always the basic question; why should we care? It is also at this point that it is very tempting to view the question about sustainability as a technical question, a problem that we can solve if we just deal with certain technical issues, follow some scheme that once again plans our lives... But isn't that just the same process all over; design of the big schemes that make our way of life the mere side effects of hidden processes. So why should we care?

What design does is to define the becoming things. It is somehow typical that we find meaning in mundane activities where we, at least fragmentarily, design things, design our way of life.

But this observation does not hint at a possible solution of a problem, at least not a problem in a more rational sense. To see a solvable problem here is more a question of religious belief or political ideology. Not a solvable problem, but rather a more metaphysical and foundational question; why do we keep on living our lives this way? With respect to certain aspects of sustainability this is perhaps a more obvious question today than 200 years ago, but it is not new and it is not a sudden problem we somehow have to solve.

This no to sustainability as a solvable technical problem is not a sign of resignation; it underlines why the aesthetical and existential leitmotifs are central in the design of bearable, endurable things.
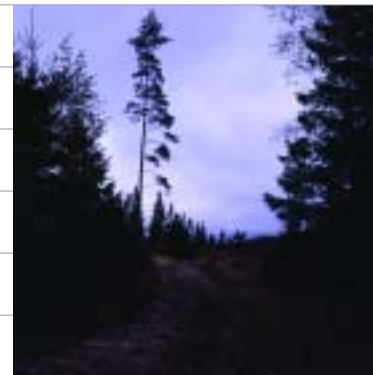
•••••• 								/ Judgement /

I will wear my colours like the flags worn in front of an army.

The composition game played with the shapes in the kaleidoscope is not neutral. There are as it happens combinations that are more successful than others and the assessment through which we establish that one combination is more beautiful, more fascinating or better than another requires considerations that are true for any form of judgement.

A judgement need not be necessarily formulated through words.

Every form of use, purchase or consumption may for example already be considered a non verbal form of judgement.

The subjectivity of "every man to his taste" is the result of a judgement, not of the mechanism that triggers this same assessment.

Tom might find attractive what Dick and Harry find ugly, but the mechanism through which they all reach their opposite conclusions is the same.

They look, they ponder, they compare, they judge, they desire, they use, consume, buy or don't buy.

Taking into consideration any kind of object we may come up with a general principle (for example by establishing that it is attractive, good, useful, innovative, or otherwise, (meaning bad, useless, obsolete and so on); this assessment helps us to construct our way of "appearing", our outer world, as well as our inner world, our way of "being", our view of the world.

The savage

[Design depression]
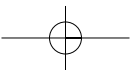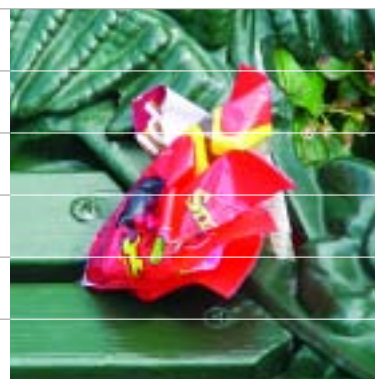
The savage does not support in creating a best of all worlds. It does not necessary identify or address similar problems as the civilised. It does not answer, or only poorly answers, to the addressed problems of the civilised since it is not part of it. The savage is even a burden for the system, just by having to consider its existence from within it. It becomes a bastard and a plague. The savage is subject for argumentation because it does not speak the same language. A savage has just not meticulously and consciously taken the same problems and grammar of the Iconologica's into consideration, as it is not cultivated by the civilised design discourse;

"So you say that the savage is of no value?"

"You should worry!"

We design as we still keep going on. By necessity...as that nervous therapeutic creativity... To do something, rather than nothing; for others, for myself or perhaps just to let time pass. It is simply difficult to do nothing; in that sense design is just what we do as we keep going on as human beings, we constantly make new schemes, define new things, we constantly build and construct... It is only the philosopher left sitting there in a corner wondering about true ontological categories, which just means somebody else has to try to find something to eat for dinner. Was that what Feuerbach saw?

We design that which makes us go on. What is necessary...the idiotic situations we just have to change. Remember Marx famous Feuerbach theses, no XI: "The philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways, what matters is to change it". Is this a call for industrial design and political design to join hands? Or was it just a mistake to understand it that way? ...the history of the joint efforts of industrial design and political design during the 20th century; the deserts of being, the expressionals of imprisonment...

Design to change things for the better; for others, for myself, or just to keep some illusion alive. Everybody talks about design, but you can not run away screaming you're fed up; its like talking itself, what characterises us, for better of for worse, as human beings.
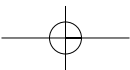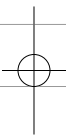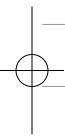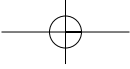
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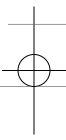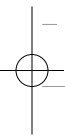
/ Goodness /

I am back at the pub I was in yesterday and I like it today as well. I order a pint of Fuller's London Pride, the bitter I will also remember from these days. The pub is called The Victoria and there is a clock on the wall behind the bar with the text Wm. C. Mansell 1864 painted on the face which is most beautiful with Arabic numbers and simple, iconic, hands. Everyone around the table to right of the door listens to the girl in the corner, and her friend is oh so in love with her.

Like any other device however even thought must steer a course, because if it moves in all directions the capacity for judgment is likely to fall into untold contradictions.

And the course to steer for beauty is also that which is good, and good not just in individual terms, but also in terms of social responsibility.

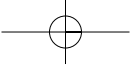I may consider an object desirable, but if this desire leads to social damage then that beauty that attracted me wilts immediately.

Mu

[Sustainable]

Like Mumonkan design is a gateless barrier.

Sustainable; those things being present, changing and not just disappearing...that things change is at least something.
What does it mean to design the things that change?
It is where the word "again" becomes important; that we turn again and again, that we somehow come back again... The mysteries of repetition, that it is there, or here, again. If we do nothing, if nothing changes the notion of sustainability looses its meaning. If we do something, change something or something changes, it possibly entails destruction in some sense, i.e. it might entail that sustainability is at risk.
Where sustainability might be at risk "again" is an invitation that opens up for the presence of things. No questions about use, user requirements, specifications, functionality...just a simple question about the meaning of being here or there again.
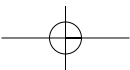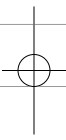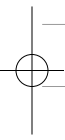
/ Freedom /

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All games have rules one must abide by: ethical rules, social rules, shared rules that guard the portals of the temple of beauty, diversity, judgment and goodness.

The rules of the kaleidoscope are natural rules that differ from those of a program or a manifesto in which one establishes what has to be done.

They are rules that establish what we mustn't do, that lay down good practice principles without in any way fettering the freedom of the project itself.
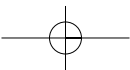
Just like when we drive round any city we are aware that we are not forced to go in any particular direction, but we are warned that that direction is forbidden and it is compulsory to take another one. In the same way the designer has freedom of movement on condition that he abide by a sort of code made up right and wrong ways forward.
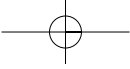
To transgress this code thus becomes an individual choice, a possibility that cannot however become a rule.

In recent times design has all too often taken transgression as a rule and thus the chaos in the design field has become unbearable.

Design shall therefore try and establish a few, clear "NO's!" and a the equivalent number of clear "Yes's!" that will provide a framework within which it may be free.

Every art reaches a high
point – at a given time.
Sometimes right at the outset,
seldom at the end when only
little of the original energy
is left. May I find another seed?
This is the question laid out
by all Prufrocks. It is also
an artist's question. I left
yesterday's exhibition promptly,
just walking out of the last
room without further ado.
I almost immediately wanted to
go back to the first room, to
the striking feeling of the outset.
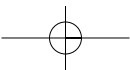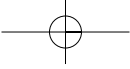At the same time; that which
truly is ought to be left as it is.

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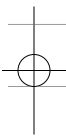
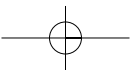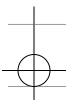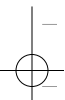**[Sustainable]**

What about spontaneity?

Sustainable; this is it, there is nothing else, we have to care...there is no exchange, no substitution.

What does it mean to design the things for which there is no substitution? Could it be the design object as an original work of art in the old fashioned "modernistic" sense? Or could it perhaps be the thing as a "post-modernistic" contingent contextual event, the thing as something that just passes by? The precious thing we lock up in a museum or the all important unique situated moment of time...what's the difference? It is here we turn away...away from things, nervously focusing on something else.

It is where the word "here" becomes important; we turn and here it is... It is here, it is not passing by. It is not stored away in nervous preservation, it is here. A nature reserve for example is never something here; it is always there somewhere else.

Where sustainability might be at risk "here" is an invitation that opens up for the presence of things. We ask what it means for something to be here. It is here, this is it, and there is no exchange, no substitution.
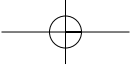
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The shaping of one's life-world consists of a series of decisions – random or carried out in sequence. Much as situated action determines our relation to systems around us when acting as users or operators of given systems, the actions carried out as to construct a believable and likeable world are determined by impulses stemming from existential as well as psychological motives. This leads to artefacts being constructed, rather than deconstructed, as they are being perceived, constantly coming into being by the art of seeing and relating. Seen this way, art becomes a verb, much as the pre-raphaelites constructed their paintings to contain symbolism, but at the same time choosing to adopt the minute and highly realistic depictive details of photographic representation.

/ Colour /

Let's take a look at colour with the eyes of light. Let's break them down, combine them, let's follow the suggestions of our whim or our heart, but let us not forget that the world has its own palette of colours that has a symbolic function: green is the lawn, blue is the sky, deep blue is the night, yellow is the sun overhead veering to orange at sunset, pink are dawn's fingers, red the heart of the hearth, black is the hollow...

Clearly these are just some of the symbolic meanings. But one has to be aware that every colour we are choosing and every colour combination we use must answer for its actions, including extreme ones.

The symbolic significance of colours is very strong and if the happiness of colourfulness exceeds a certain threshold it turns into madness, if the seriousness of black overcomes all, it shrouds all in mourning.

Grey is fine, but if all is grey, no amount of pills will cure your depression.

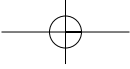White is innocent, but white can upset the mind.

The forest is green but if all is green it means I'm looking at the surgeon lying on the operating table.

The game can go on forever and there are clearly no fixed rules, but the fact remains that every colour carries with it certain qualities and these qualities must be carefully balanced in terms of their meaningfulness and their quantity.

[Sustainability]

Sustainability; where I refuse to be a user of things. Not a user any more, but ref-user. Using things makes them the mere medium, the tools, for doing this or that. If functionality cannot be truly intrinsic to acts of caring about things themselves I prefer sitting here just waiting, refusing. What does it mean to refuse to be a user of things? To dissociate oneself, just walk away...yes, but there is also the true collector that refuse things still answering invitations in acts of caring. And there is waiting...waiting to see if functionality in some non trivial sense is true to that thing. There are lots of old things around that we refuse to be users of, things we inherit, things we just put there as linking objects. Refusing is a sort of dwelling with things that introduces distance; a distance that makes design bearable, endurable. Ref-using things is a way of re-turning; something is missing, something is all too clear, something that introduces that distance between us here and things there, we re-turn in refusal.
"Be" is a key word here; to just let things be, to perhaps return later, to accept a link to the past, to accept waiting as a basic mode of dwelling with things...
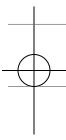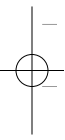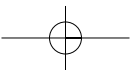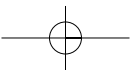
Christmas

The very first impression, the first experience of a thing, its gradual movement towards the present is in a contracted way experienced as a child between Christmas eve and Christmas day. Opening the wrapped gift on Christmas evening - in case it still was a surprise because you did not have the chance to cheat on your parents - the first fumbling and clumsy handling with it holds the first moment of experience of the thing. It is the experience of the beginner. One is not used to the relation to it because it did not exist before. During the whole evening it is still experienced as new. But already next morning, when one is waking up early full of enthusiasm the relation to it is different. It is a night older. It is moments older: it is.

This pub could not be made any better. The same goes for the Café Lux by the railroad station in Milan. And the same goes for the early photography of the Arts and Crafts period. They are what they are; their motifs are put to paper in the purest compositions. That is the way to do it, I feel as I gaze through the viewfinder of my Swedish camera. The square format is important. Technique is not unimportant.

/ The edges /

[Sustainability]
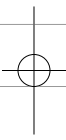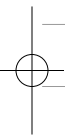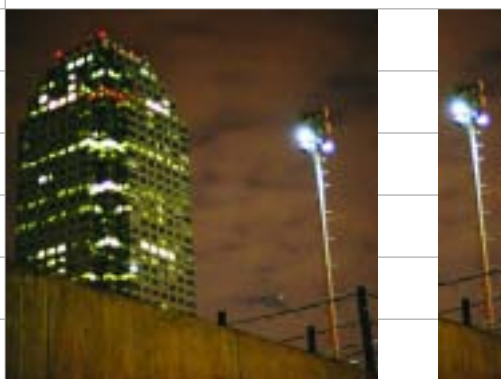
The world, or *mundus* as
the Latins called it, is the square
furrow traced by Romolus
to outline the foundations of the
city, the house, the home.
Interfering with that kind of
regularity, as Remus tried to do,
is not such a trifling matter.

There is no doubt that invention
must always provide the
opportunity for provocation, but
if provocation becomes
overwhelming and my world
loses all its structure and
the "cutting edge" rules over
everything, then I'm in trouble.
It's like too much salt or chilly
pepper in the soup, a skew-whiff
nightmare, Murnau's
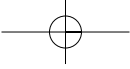expressionism that decks
out the world of Dracula.

An edge is always aggressive,
and the sharper it gets the more
harm it can do.

Looking at the acute angle of
the arrow man always feels
a little like a victim and a prey.

Sustainability; to long for things as true expressionals of being.
That things be-long to me; all my life I have been longing for this thing... It must be precious
things that express being itself this way. What does it mean to be longing for certain things?
Longing for something defines that mysterious "only" which marks the difference between
the actual me and that other me. It somehow be-longs to me, it is only that... Imagining to
be longing for something for years and years and finally as that "only" is resolved things are
gone, out of stock, out of production...
The production cycle machineries make a fool out of me; in the end I simply stop caring. To
long for things looses its meaning if things are being reduced to a sort of catch-and-throw
items having meaning just as bearers of newness, for a short while. If we cannot long for
things what meaning could we possible give to a notion of sustainable design? Things we
long for; it is the things that might make it worth while...at least as long as there is that
"only" making the difference explicit. Only...be here again. There is something profoundly
sustainable about mathematics; the precise and definite expressions of truth. It is really
strange this contact with a purely abstract reality. It is where your faith in intuition is put on
trial. The relation between music, mathematics and design is interesting. There is really
nothing empirical about the basic design process; it is essentially a matter of defining and
constructing. This is also what we do when we compose music and work in mathematics.
In all three aesthetics is, in a profound sense, what guides good work. But what about this
strange contact with an abstract reality that you sense in both music and mathematics?
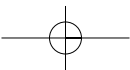Is this what "form", "gestalt" is all about in design?

/ Depth and thickness /

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Depth is often associated with an expanding meaning, while thickness seems to imply the reverse, a kind of wall against which all meaning is lost. A surface that cannot be explored further.

One correction: I now remember that the café by the railroad station in Milan is called Bar Lux. It is important not to try to hard to remember things. It is most difficult, then, to remember them correctly.

Der Weltschmerz

[Tradition]
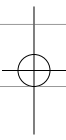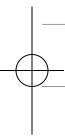
Under a raw concrete ceiling, with its naked scaffolding, in the shallow depth of the basement, under the heavily clouded sky, mingling with the cradling trees towering high, the trancelike rhythm of the heart, pumped through the massive black bases in duet with the swift and volatile tunes, echoing from the silvery treble horns, together with the three feet stroboscopes, cutting time into a flow of exclusive moments, people are gradually surrendering to an endless euphoric flow.

The monotone ambient rhythm that without mercy pierces earth, flesh and blood, taking over the conception of time and space, seems to have an imperceptible origin, an immortal direction, heading for the eternal, constantly striving for the horizon, striving for the completion of a distanced destiny that slowly draws closer only to withdraw again from without reach.

Moment, after moment, hour after hour, day after day, this trancelike act is articulating the pure longing of the culture. Together this collective act holds the distillate of the zeitgeist as if it was a ritual to distillate and accentuate the essence of the body social, revealing its naked will, totally enclosing and permeating each and everyone of the dancers, putting them in a different state of mind. The piercing rhythm, the screaming tones, and the dazzling bright light, to which the movement of the body surrenders, is enforcing a borderless transcendental state, where the ocean of cradling people is moving towards the inevitable collapse in one single whole.

Then, eventually, at a certain point, in a privileged moment, when everyone is dancing on the edge of their capacity, when the border of the self is broken and the self is absorbed and lost in a transcendent being, driven by the DJ behind the black bases and the silvery horns, one experience the emotional state of this collective being, perceiving the world, not as made up by exclusive individualities but as a one pulsating thing, where each and one carries and manifests the image of the other as the collective memory of the act arises between perception and recollection in the evolving, irreversible enduring moment.
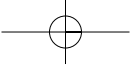
The music of J.S. Bach is still here, very much alive. We keep returning; we go to concerts, we listen over and over again to those recordings. I don't know how may times I have listened to the mass in B minor; in concert halls, in churches, various interpretations, recordings... There is something there that makes us come back, again and again. It is not just a question about subjective judgement, arbitrary contextual influences, it is really something there that sustains and make us return.
How can we prove that? There is of course no such proof; the crux of profound art. But there is on the other hand basic empirical evidence; I really remember how the music of Bach opened a new world and it has, as time elapses, become clear to me that it is something that lasts. If we cannot trust that sort of evidence there seem to be little point in discussing sustainability issues at all. If sustainability has nothing to do with me as I live my life, with what I actually experience, then who cares? There must be something there that makes a difference, something for me to see; it can not just be talk about this or that, it can not just be political dogmas and religious hand waving where sustainability is a mere symbol of something that must be, it is not just a social construction, it is there, it is real... If someone comes along saying "I don't like Bach and especially not the mass in B minor" that is a completely different discussion – this is a matter of opinion. So what is it all about? Bach was considered to be rather conservative by his contemporaries... It is true in some sense; in essence it was an earnest and deep discussion with, and a refinement of, tradition – the tradition of polyphonic composition...sustainable design; the earnest, deep discussion with, and refinement of, tradition. The evidence of this shows itself to us if we just open the window and listen. It is easy enough to close ears and eyes looking for the new that is yet to come. A sincere and profound discussion with the modernistic tradition might be a good example of sustainable design today...
Is this what minimalism is all about? No, that would be to confuse the issues of expression and form. Minimalism can, in some sense, be seen as a discussion with, and refinement of, tradition, but certainly not the modernistic tradition. If not clear elsewhere this is most clear in music where minimalism is an expressional reaction to the formal complexity of Darmstadt modernism.
Postmodernism seems a bit lost here, being a mere negation, a resignation in its total affirmation. There is room for something else...

/ Fabric /

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The warp and weft of a fabric are the characteristics that let the essence of fabrics clothe our lives, become our second skin.
In the same way as the skin is in actual fact the most essential organ of our body (and the first to be produced in the foetus), so the fabric of our world is a structural cornerstone, the material that has the closest relationship to our skin, to the skin of others, to the skin of the constructed environment in which we live.
The nature of fabric, its performance cannot always take second place compared to its design, its cut, its outline, its decoration and decorum.
By choosing one fabric as opposed to another we are making a value judgment, we are showing our respect for man, for the environment, for human creativity.

I find myself starting to become
moved by simple gestures.
I order a plate of chilli con carne
from the bar. I enjoy that kind of
food, but I also enjoy the romantic
reminder it brings, something
that is out of the great outdoors.
The wild west is as intriguing
to me as it was when I was a boy.
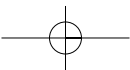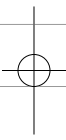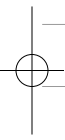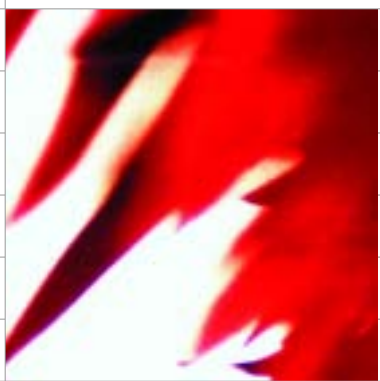
[Tradition]

A sudden change.

Stand back.

Wait.

Watch.

Turn around.

Wait.

Silence.

Change back.

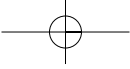Stand back.

Another pause.

Look.

Change.

Tradition rests on a foundation of initial ideas, those once new revolutionary concepts that the tradition focuses on – the idea of polyphonic composition for instance. There is something essential here that sustain, some basic concepts that turns out to provide a foundation for long periods of reflection, refinement…sustainable conceptual design; the new revolutionary ideas that will provide the foundation for a tradition, those ideas, and concepts that a given tradition nourish.

There is a dilemma of time and timing here. It doesn't always seem to be the right time for new revolutionary and sustainable ideas to emerge and it doesn't always seem to be the right time for a discussion with tradition; at times it seems as if we turn to ideas that are not there and try to return to a tradition we can not find any more.

So what does it mean to proclaim that now is the time for this or that, for instance to proclaim there is a need for sustainable design? A utilitarian whish doesn't seem to be enough. To mere acknowledge the presence of a problem doesn't immediately provide what is necessary for more profound solutions.

There seem to be little hope of finding ideas we can turn to or a tradition to return to if we do not make room for them, if we can not find the time to look for them. It certainly doesn't help to close eyes and ears in total focus on the results we somehow imagine we need in order to solve this or that problem; if you think you already know where to find the solution why don't just go and get it?
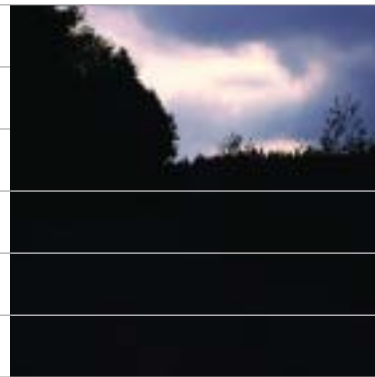
/ Fake /

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We learn to distinguish between harmless falsehoods and harmful lies.

Watch out for fake wood, fake leather, fake stone, fake silk... because if this choice conceals the danger of things alike no longer being in tune with those they resemble then we are performing a swindle, living a lie.

If however there is are ecological reasons for our choice, then the pretence becomes an acceptable role played in the wings of the great theatre of the world.
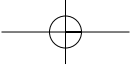
At times the fake is also what propels and celebrates the real, just like fake Louis Vuitton bags made the fortune of the brand.

The small falsehoods rekindle our sense of truth.
While lies confuse us and we get the wrong end of the stick, we call peace war and love death, democracy dictatorship.

There is no possible identity in a world that tolerates lies as a method.

I touch the paper with the tip of my pen and feel the ink forging with the paper. Does one say that? That is what it feels like, nevertheless. The processes of making the pen and making the ink and making the paper and making the notebook are all coming together in a movement that leaves the merging to me, The tools tell me what to do. Why should they not? I rushed through this, did I not? Is that because these things are so out of fashion to speak of nowadays or because this kind of sentimentality has been repeated so many times that it has lost its value? On the other hand, I think that sentimentality has a value, always. Going straight to the heart of the matter can never be wrong. Banal? Yes. But right.
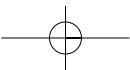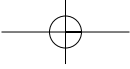
Beyond focus

[Tradition]

There is belief within the industrial design discussion that one is, or at least should be, able to find the value of a thing when having it in front of you: as if one would be able to identify the causes and clues behind its value with in a system. This idea resembles much the ideas of art psychology during the 1970s when it set out to find the difference between an art piece and an art masterpiece in terms of its gestalt; its systematisation of information; its colours and contrast etc. From that point onwards we can also see how this idea has developed into the tools of marketing and advertising, and how it, in these domains, has become a prevailed theory of how to identify successful advertisements and advertising campaigns or emotional qualities in new products through concepts like focus groups, panel discussion and screening. The result is then boiled down into concepts like probability, majority, or tendency in a type of consumer behaviour labelled as identity consumption.

This way of identifying the causes behind the value of things becomes rather problematic if we choose to understand the value of things as being part of a making of a subject that ought to be the foundation in what should be rightfully called identity consumption. In such a therapeutic relation there is no clear borderline between the self and the thing, as the thing becomes no more a tool for the self, than the self becomes a tool for the thing. Thus, there is a difference to be noted – despite the similarities between the concept of identity and difference in regards to a "transitional object" [Donald Winnicott] in relation to a personal self, and the same two concepts in relation to a self on a more social and cultural level. Going from a social to a personal level of a self, a thing of therapeutic quality is sliding into something that not only belongs to, but into something that is an actual permeating element of the self. Therefore the therapeutic thing is the self in itself and not merely something that exists outside the self in the meaning of an object.

There must be allowance for experiments in search of the canonical examples that make the new concepts appear in bright light – the turn...
There must be time and space for the earnest, deep discussions with tradition in search for refinements – the re-turn...
This is plain obvious, isn't it? But where do we find this? When design first of all is seen as a way of adding market value and to deliver somehow before hand ready-made solutions to given problems where is the time for the radical experiments, for the seemingly conservative, slow discussions with tradition?
This is where we must turn our back at things as items answering needs and solving problems and re-turn in refusal; experimental design escaping problems through forgetful thinking. It is here that art and academia must form strong alliances making room for, and guarding, design reflection for its own sake.
There is always a long period of transition between the first revolutionary experiments and the situation where tradition is mature enough for refinement. In between we are left with nourishing ideas, waiting, waiting. So is faith what sustains here? Design faithful to ideas.
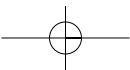
/ Decoration /

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Ornamentation is certainly not a crime, but centuries and styles have been buried by decoration and over-decoration.

When decoration becomes a superficial obsession, the great void, the inability to look at the soul of objects, at their inner qualities prevails. When design no longer designs, but just stirs the porridge of superficial appearance then we are overcome with a sense of sickness. We get confronted with objects and we fall victims of the so aptly named sickliness of over decoration, of supposedly ironic invention.

The same is true of cosmetics when it is entrusted to the superficial and skin deep actions of make up and aesthetic surgery.
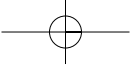
No one who has read Hemingway can be unaffected by how he tells of hanging his old weatherproof on a rack above the café table to take out his notebook and write. One can not stray from the feeling that this is real writing, an act carried out deliberately and accidentally at the same time. Nothing special, just something to do. Around Bouverie Place there are small workshops in the basements and the craftsmen, the electricians, the carpenters come in here with their aprons on to greet the French girl that takes care of the ancient coffee machine. I write a little poem in my notebook:

Evening falls with heavy grace
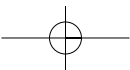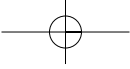
Like me sitting down

At this familiar place.
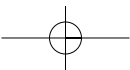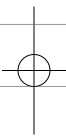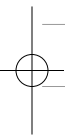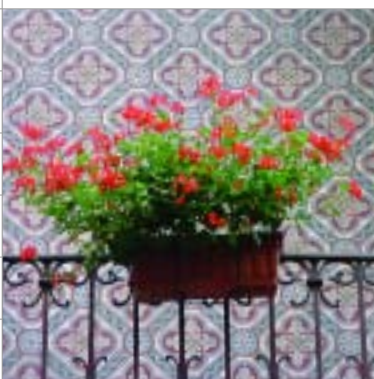
Progress

[Theology]

What means development?
What means sustainability?
What means perfected?
In his criticism of Darwinism
thought, Henri Bergson
recognised an amoeba to have
a greater potential for survival
than a more complex organism.
It embodies more possibilities.
What does this mean to us?

Sustainable design, the basic idea here is of course design for a new way of living, the sustainable way of living; to take the preconditions of living here on earth into consideration in every part of the design process. What does it mean to take all this seriously?
The natural resources are finite, we cannot build a sustainable way of living on the assumption that there always will be yet another oilfield, ore field to be discovered, that there always will be new technical solutions at hand that will provide us with the means to continue our present way of life. The natural environment we live in is given; we cannot change that at will. We have to care. So we simply have to design new types of materials, new types of products, new ways of living, new ways of manufacturing, new means of transportation, a new way of thinking... Why?
Where do we go to find an answer to such a fundamental metaphysical question?
Is this perhaps a question for a theology of sustainability? ...the idea of the "eternal" cycles of nature as a basic religious leitmotif, an idea of nature, the ecological eternal and true form of life...
To merely acknowledge the finite nature of our world doesn't really answer questions about sustainable design, it doesn't even make a call for sustainable design all that clear. There is no trace of the aesthetical leitmotif, of the existential leitmotif in this way of thinking. There is no answer here to those foundational design questions that we have to ask. It is also here that design becomes the powerful tool for the realisation of a political agenda, sustainable design as a component of ecological ideology guided by religious laws...this is where we definitely leave the existential leitmotifs behind obeying something else.
There is a need for critical design here asking questions; why?
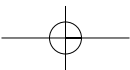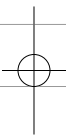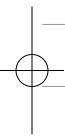
/ Ethnicity /

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The so called "ethnic design" must be handled with care, because culture cannot be created based on a tourist's timetable.
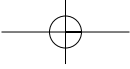
If we truly want to deal with ethnicity we may freely draw on the heritage of different cultures. We might do it for pleasure or necessity, out of interest or for the sake of amusement but on condition that we maintain an awareness of the fact that we are taking advantage of a heritage that is now pooled together for the common good and that our attitude towards these different cultures bears witness to the high regard in which we hold them.

When we use an ethnic motif or a colour scheme out of context we must remember to point the fact out.

We must also be prepared to identify completely with the culture and thus interpret it from within, getting to understand it thoroughly, otherwise what we are tying to express may slip through our fingers, it's meaning lost, like the tattoo on the body of a Maori, inspiring fear and respect, while on the arm of a hooligan it has little more effect than a worrying parody.

My shirt had become ever so slightly frayed at the cuffs, leaving some white threads shining through the repetitive pattern of the Bengal stripe; lavishly blue like something out of an inkpot. In the frays, a special sort of cleanliness resides, I think as the cotton threads dance to the movement of my hands. Not perfection, nor elegance, really. Just a shirt that has been washed over and over.

Poetry

As noted by Hans Larsson in the essay *Intuition* the distrust of the intuitive method and what it might achieve, relates to a certain belief of emotions as belonging to a lower and more primitive form of life that is thought to precede the higher level of the logical and dialectic form of life. Within such a belief dwells the thought that poetry does not describe something real but only its shadow, a belief that a poem wraps things in veils instead of uncovering them: poetry "mystifies instead of shades light". But is it unmistakably so that this dim reality of the poem comes out of a lack in precision? Could it not be so that this obscurity, on the other hand is a sign of precision? And is it not so, that this kind of precision, offered by the poetic, has the greatest affinity with the most banal of life? Poetry as ultimate banality.

When one realises that one can collect as many accounts, and to this add an infinite number of perspectives and still not be able to reach the experience that the presence of the living constitutes, one is most likely to experience the meaning of Henri Bergson's "absolute" in the intuitive method of experiencing the world through its becoming. Thus it is not surprising when those who have reach the intuitive understanding of a phenomenon are being careful in using the unbalanced means of symbolism. This together becomes the reason why this dim veil should not be denied or subject for dismantling; it is there because of two reasons, as Hans Larsson explains. First, it is because we are afterwards not able to retain all that we have seen, which on the other hand in an everyday perspective is the actual dimness. Secondly, because the associations to every richer synthesis grasp so intensely around in the jumbled body that it pulls out in the conscious that which also lies unexamined in the deep.


[Theology]

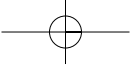Eco-design is also religious design in some sense...

This is not design for a sustainable world in some rational sense, but design for sustainability as religion. A call for designing the housings of true ecological life; to give basic concepts a symbolic gestalt, to design the icons and symbols of ecological worship.

We buy eco-design, wear eco-fashion in acts of faith, view the nuclear plant as a nest of evil and sin – that reckless play with mother nature – and in contrast welcome the wind power station as a symbol of true life and view garbage sorting as sermons of worship.

Sustainable design is then the design of the rituals, basic tools and symbols of ecological faith.

There is a rich flora of such design pretending to be something else, i.e. the answers to a rational call to satisfy pressing needs and to solve urgent problems. The aesthetics of this is certainly questionable.
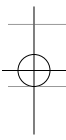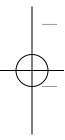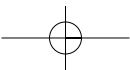
/ Good design /

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A good life is not possible without experimenting a touch of evil and the same is true of good design that must contain at least a touch of bad design.

Just think of a house in which all the objects are lined up like little form-follows-function soldiers, a home where there is no trace of useless knickknacks.
Or think of a world where we are forced to wear the same uniform, practical, plain, yet functional.
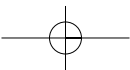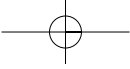Sounds like a nightmare.
If form and function are raised to the level of dogma its precepts pitch into a abysmal uselessness.

By the same token if I have every object designed by a post-modern designer or a joke designer we would end up staring at a nail in the wall in order to savour a hint of peace and beauty. And if every outfit were designed by a late-gothic-contemporary fashion designer, all drapery, velvets and damask fabrics…we would by contrast be driven to mix with nudist sects.

Tolerance and balance, indulgence and coherence are attitudes of the mind and of taste that put us in a position to understand and interpret, both individually and collectively, what is good and what is bad design.

She tends to wear grey, all grey.
She walks through the forest
with leaves twirling by her feet
and she is as grey as the air
when she walks and as a
creature that is just what it is,
nothing more and nothing less,
when she sits down under a tree
to have some coffee from the
thermos flask she keeps in her
bag. She looks awkwardly at
my shirt cuffs, frowning at the
lavishness of the blue colour
of the stripes. I love her clothes.
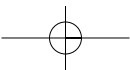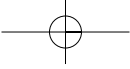I have always thought she never
cared much for mine.
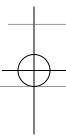
Subject and predicate

[Theology]

The acclaimed value of marketing is recognised not as a predicate of the thing, but a predicate to something else, subject to external forces; meaning that when an image or illusion is created from without the thing – when it is granted the signature – the predicate becomes a predicate belonging to another subject and thus makes up for an incorrect sentence-structure: a tangible error of allusion. Therefore as a value it is rather a matter of coexistence than correlation and connection, since value is first and foremost added to the thing through something external to it and not emerging from the thing itself. The predicate has little to do with the specific subject more than me perceiving its aura of global appearance and the thing at the same time. Thus it is a very fragile and most costly form of value. Why then engage in such a game if one ought to 'cut the costs'?

Radical adaptive design is in a sense what is the opposite of sustainable design as religious design. The idea that there is nothing that lasts, there is no such thing as cycles of nature, there is no such thing as the once and for all definable just way of living, in harmony with nature etc. Things change. We change. Ideas change. Other people decide what is right and wrong. So the only design that will last is the Darwinian design that adopts to change. True sustainable design in this sense must be adaptive design.
As critical design this is not pure nihilism, but design that still manages to ask questions. Is sustainable design perhaps that design which conforms to big plans; design that upholds plans, i.e. make plans sustain? ...distant designing our way of life?
We certainly need these plans, the organisation etc. to form and develop society? This is surely something we need for society to sustain? The idea that we form something that last in this way, something that sustain is a bit strange. Big plans is what at times can suit me, but not something I care for.
Political design is a scary chapter in the history of design. This is where there always seems to have been ample of space and generous allowances for radical experimental design. The idea of a good cause leaves a bad taste behind; design is always design of something given, but what is that and where does it come from? Following the traces of design here through history is certainly depressing and seems to leave no other option than total refutation; forget about plans, forget about solutions... What remains is the no use design, no experience design, the no-design. Is this the point where we leave design for art?
It is as if the no-design is what sustains; plans they change, my no is definite.
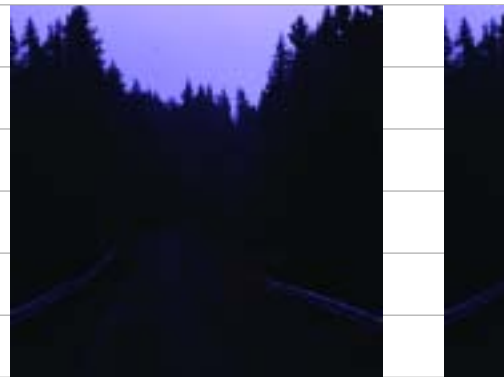
/ The functional design /

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By concentrating on the functional aspects of the object the designer helps the object to express its own nature, it forces it to speak out, to describe itself.

During the days of rationalism the most correct approach was designing of objects that could exploit and communicate as clearly as possible the object's functional purpose.

To some extent, thanks to the work of the form-follows-function designers, the object could state its case, give voice to its identity, find its own place in the world of things.

In actual fact however the modern design of the 50's and 60's that represented the myth of rationality applied to the world of design, produced objects that are now very sought after in antique markets.
So the results of the "titanic" efforts of the 20th C. rationalists are now closeted in collectors cabinets.

The rational approach, when all is said and done, carries with it too much ideology, to much conceptualisation, too many of the prejudices of the well-off post war classes and cannot aspire to supremacy in our post-modern times.
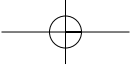
Nowadays functional design is in a difficult situation: the gradual flattening out of expressive possibilities. The oppression of the functional dogma reduces design to stereotypes beyond which there is nothing left beyond pure and simple repetition.

The formal limitations imposed by rationalist worship, the prison represented by so called pure form, have forced designers to provide constantly changing solutions to the same problem, and so functional designers have lost themselves in the bad infinity of the variation on a theme.

Just like all tales, rationality, in order to continue exerting its charm, must therefore turn to the evocative power of the fairy tale, to new issues, to the enchanting power of myth.

Even though I am unable
to sleep, my sheets feel just
about right, the air in my
bedroom cleared from dust;
a result of ferocious cleaning
in the evening. In my closet,
yesterday's shirt hangs neatly
from its hanger, yesterday's
corduroys folded so that they
don't crease. I should be happy,
tired and sleeping. The fact
that I am not brings me to
conclude that something would
have to be wrong. I can not
stop thinking of how beautiful
the apartment above mine
would look with the walls
painted white, a small bench
just to the left of the door.
Longing, belonging.
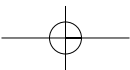
**Everyday things**

[Aesthetics]

Ironically it is the agency and savageness of things themselves that refute the enforced communicative relationship with things, and further questions the systematic and normative force applied to them. The accusation of what a thing is claimed to be has gone so far in the effort of minimising production costs that it hits back through its materiality: myths scrutinised by the inherited resistance of the thing's corpus itself.

When the myth is slowly decaying because the subject is perceived as not to support the predicate – like when love has lost its obscure spell on sensation and one realised the substance closer to what it is in it self as a resting being, not as the image painted by the self as a product of believe; constructed in a system of faith – attention is brought back to the materiality of things, to what is actually there. A head over heal crush and everyday love are two different things. Head over heal is taken care of by marketing, but; "What about the everyday love of things?" as someone once asked.

The regiment is closed down, the buildings, the surroundings stands there waiting for the new to arrive. Why do I feel a bit sad? I really do not care much for the military way of life. I felt the same when that old big school was standing there in its emptiness also waiting for that new to arrive and school wasn't that fun always... That old depot, the doors covered with graffiti...runic characters of times yet to come. I see all those wasted things at the garbage plant and it makes me sad, it is difficult for me to throw away things. Why do things have to change?

The optimistic the-new-world-is-here design seem to avoid this tragic or melancholic aspect of design in use; the metaphysical expressions of design history presence. It is just at this point that the seemingly neutral technical solution to a question about sustainable design tries to avoid the basic aesthetical leitmotif. Architecture is interesting here; it shows clearly why aesthetics is a basic leitmotif for meaningful sustainable design. As soon as we put the more abstract technical solution in the foreground forgetting the more concrete expressions things tend to go wrong. The reason for this is perhaps that we from time to time simply do not pay any attention to this expressional presence of design history. We forget that usability etc is all about expressional logic, i.e. aesthetics.
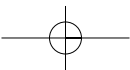
/ Post-modern Suk /

Mature markets are increasingly tending towards the oriental models of the suk and the bazaar. We started off with supermarkets and we ended up with supersuks...and then we say Orientals copy us!

The ideal nodes of exchange in the post-modern era are those places that are already conceptually suited for listing, for cataloguing, those places that have a natural inclination for the virtual online market, where one can find everything and its reverse, where rationality is not even a selling point, where rationalism shall be increasingly less representative (or better still) shall stand out as a surviving specimen that has undergone a severe identity crisis.

The age of multimedia and post-modern communication, just as we have lived it up till now, loves novelty, and cares little whether it is substantial or just apparent. Perhaps one should here begin to be concerned about the life cycles of objects and the tendency for the market to use design as a way of packaging products with a rapidly declining quota of innovation, more ephemeral and subject to the whim of fashion and the inventions of trends.

But let us not forget that "The whole in the whole becomes Nothing" (Cusanus). Every tendency towards arrogant totality thwarts every opportunity of orientation.
The gigantic Mall that surrounds all goods, despite the efforts of designers and communications experts, the products often remain dramatically dumb. Incapable of establishing a personal contact with the purchaser...they are a little fearsome.

In this regard, one should not underestimate the inflationary effect of novelty for novelty's sake that is causing market stagnation, or rather a kind of shopping apathy, accompanied by nostalgic behaviour. Novelty hyped day in day out gives rise to an inflationary effect that brings value back to the old ways, loaded with nostalgia and, occasionally, with prejudice.

A recurrent example of this is the myth of "tradition", the so called good things of the times long gone, seen as evidence of a golden age, the age of the fathers, a kind of magical age capable of stemming the frenzied search for novelty.

[Aesthetics]

There is a road just beside the big motorway. It cuts through the grass and opens up mud and sand as it directs its way through the trees.
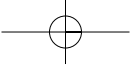
A road leads somewhere, it has a direction. Where were they going? Someone built the road as they were going somewhere.

Roads, streets, alleys, stairs... What resides in these expressions of direction?

As we design and build roads, cars, trains, airplanes, plan traffic systems etc we form the way in which travelling express itself; the forms of travel direction. This is often spoken of as a technical problem of efficient transportation. But then we forget the aesthetics and metaphysics of travel; we forget the expressions and beings of direction occupying ourselves with the technology of transportation.

Why do we travel? Where are we going?

To go somewhere with the intention to return or with an intention to leave something behind, to remember or to forget...
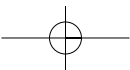
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Consumer

Today, my shoes are from Northampton, my trousers and my shirt are from London, my pullover from Godalming, a Scottish village. I've picked these clothes for myself for various reasons, the foremost of which is that these are not obvious clothes. They are not advertised in the glossies, nor are they especially fashionable. But at the same time; my rejection is a way of expressing cultural codes, I have learnt to master, a culture that I can reject and at the same time exploit in order to gain something from its existence. I wink at the not so innocent bystanders of the corridors and streets of my everdays. But when lying there in bed, naked, just about ready to fall asleep I find myself not able to cope with it anymore. My collection of codes lands on top of my sheets, suffocating me with context.

What reason exists behind the label of 'consumer'? The very invention of the consumer concept seems to me as one of the worst act against human rights. It is not only that it is a label of a limited relation within a limited context, both in time and space, it simultaneously excludes the recognition of all other coexisting relations, relations of which at least one could be described as its complementarity: a non-consumer or producer. Is the consumer concept nothing mere than a collective corporate blame of culture? Is it really something else other than a psychological projection: "It wasn't me man!".

/ The design of needs /

[Aesthetics]

It is clear, from a theoretical point of view, that the result of the designers' work is correct only in so far as it provides a correct interpretation of the consumer's needs filtered and translated by a sure-handed project culture.

This passive, yet professional designer attitude, *someone who gets on with his job and that's it*, today no longer carries much sense, because a large part of the needs are nowadays unreal. Even though they may sound like psychological necessities, it is these very needs that nowadays are artificial.

The post-modern consumer has an absolute need to renew not just the products he buys on the market, but also his or her own consumer motivations, their own needs. If in one instance he/she plumps for the "need" for sobriety, nothing can ensure that a few hours later the same person may not opt for the "need" for bad taste (provided that in this age where kitsch has become an aesthetically dominant aesthetic these kinds of distinctions still make any sense).

At this point there are two ways forward, the consumer oriented designer will try in any case to provide a solution to a real or imaginary demand.

The designer will take on the needs of the consumer, and shall tell himself the tale that the object is "exactly what the consumer desires". At this point he will come up with the form that may best suit this need for air, for cleanliness, light, beauty, relevance, communication, consolation, entertainment and so on.

The market oriented designer on the other hand will be tempted to provoke a need, to trigger a need...actually...to design a need by suggesting desirable uses and lifestyles. Simple, instead of satisfying a need like the consumer-oriented designer does, the marketing designer comes up with the new desire.

In both cases what comes into play at this time is the expressive and poetic ability of the designer.
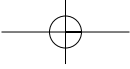
Railings on both sides of the road, an opening to some secret there in the midst of the forest.
They have cut down a lot of trees where one of all these familiar paths used to lead me through the forest. I really don't understand, but there is nothing sad about that; an opening, a promise. Is this an expressional negation to preservation?
What do we need to preserve? This is somehow the wrong question to ask. To need...that is when almost nothing else is left. Do I really need the forest? I don't know, but what I do know is that it means much to me; it is part of how I express my life. It is certainly not a matter of preservation with respect to sustainability in some rational sense, to preserve biological variety per se etc. I care for the forest; this is basically an existential motivation.
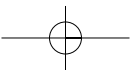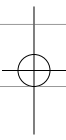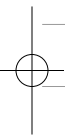
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How the term post modern is so
close to the word post mortem!

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The one who produces it wants to sell it.
The one who buys it does not need it.
The one who uses it does not perceive it.

/ Fashion /

[Aesthetics]

Fashion is a great thing. Fashion innovates, plays down, gives the times their flavour, adds lightness and playfulness to everything.

Fashion delves into the vices and virtues of the times and gives the days, encounters, flirts and ceremony their particular hue.

Fashion dresses and in so doing reveals the characters, the intuitions, the points of view, the opinions.

Fashion is the poetry of fabrics, colours, plots that unravel during the seasons of the year and of life.

Fashion distances death through a continuous ritual of innovation and discovery.

Fashion however runs a dangerous risk when it becomes fashion.

When fashion rather than creating fashion, contemplates fashion in a silly and repetitive way, then it gets stuck and dies of boredom like Narcissus at the spring of Echo.
When it basks in its own light and turns to ice, and all the furrows dug by the tears of time show up on its beautiful cheeks that won't tolerate lamps or lifting.
When fashion goes out of fashion, a fashion designed purely for the runway, designed for news flashes and magazines, fashion then dies in a short winter, but at times it is longer lasting and echoes dumbly.

Fashion can never stop, that is true, but in its furious race it must never lose sight of the kind of happiness to be found in a light-hearted, pointless, unselfconscious gesture.

When fashion is dominated by the ruthless dictates of the market, and emphasis becomes the norm, fashion designers begin to worry and start to think, unaware that fashion is not about thought, but about gesture: tender, aggressive, seductive or forbidding gestures.

Beneath its constantly changing surface, fashion hides a stable essence that concerns the ethos of a people and of a culture. It is therefore no surprise that fashion, in times of globalisation, is unrestrained, boundless and lacking in style.
There is nothing worse that a global fashion, while if there is a quality that makes fashion great it is lightness and origin/ality.

Fashion safeguards traditions, when it reinterprets in its own way the spirit of a community: when it is curious it learns and imports, when it becomes more thoughtful it rediscovers in order to cover and defend.

Fashion is a system of signifiers that as such must keep watch on meaning, otherwise it becomes rhetorical and miles of cloth can be swallowed up by the rhetoric of fashion, whole armies of looms.

Every culture is capable of defending its particular qualities when it's made of good cloth and the thread of invention is not lacking with which to weave new costumes and traditions.
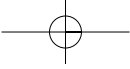
This is a place for waiting, the small gravelled road in front of you with a clear view of a very near horizon. This is where you wait for something to turn up or for someone to return. Waiting is interesting. It is not doing nothing. It is a sign of meaningfulness; it was really worth waiting for.
We pay to little attention to acts of waiting in design. Lets do this or that while waiting... what does that really mean? In waiting is where things really sustain.
No-design is essentially acts of waiting, we wait for the right moment to come; that central moment of choice in the design process. Waiting is what is essential here; to do something, to make a decision is to give up. But it is not nothing. It is waiting.

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Fata Morgana

I drive my car, fast, and get closer and closer to an old dream. Heart of lightness, I think. Ten years ago, that was when I saw her last and I don't know how she looks anymore. I don't know if she is still the girl I fell head over heels for. She, she who played the violin and danced the ballet and spoke to people on the phone in Spanish, French or German and who does her PhD now in Uppsala and nestles into Cuba with a fake passport to write articles for the resistance.
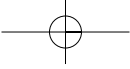
I've driven too fast all the way here and now I'm at her kitchen table with her Cuban rum in a coffee cup. It's not easy to talk here. The rum has had its go among the guests and there is talk of war at the table. I'm very quiet now.

As easy it is to become absorbed in a world of *unworldliness* [Odo Marquard] it is easy to be thrown out of it when another great fata morgana changes the face of the world yet again, giving the thing a totally different role in a totally different story told.

Along with the critical voices raised against the persuasive, constructed and illusionary world, the syntaxes of the market, as a cheap and cynical substituting solution to what personality lacks it can be argued that the corporate competition in illusionism has lead to a gradual fall of the same due to several reasons. First, because they work now in such a great competition to refute each other and are thus urged to fall victim for something that could be expressed as complicated as a bad lie.

On the other hand it is also the transparency in things that witness through its bodily decay over time – or as a gestalt of a limited area – against the immortality in the fata morgana: the brand value – that the self is taken as an illusionary social substitute and salvation for an immortal life. The corpus of a thing hence witnesses about its perishableness and thereby mortifies its predicate as an external, identical and spatial constants of a one self.
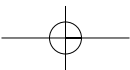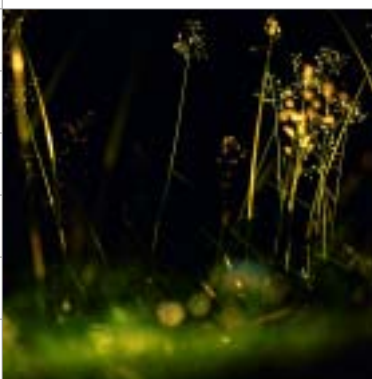
/ The design of designers /

[Aesthetics]

Today the designer finds himself operating in fields that were previously not his own.

Torn away from the protective security of his ancient role (on the edge between craftsman and artist) the industrial designer has shifted from being an industrial designer to a strategic designer. A sort of joker who makes consumer products, marketing culture and information. Today the designer is a designer, but he is also architect, urban planner, fashion designer, manager, marketer, trend-setter, artist, art director…

This jumble of roles, typical of this post-modern age has overrun most professions, however for the designer the phenomenon is more acute and perhaps the time has come to provide the designer with a new and more appropriate status for a profession that includes many others.

Snow, this is certainly not something that will last, but it keeps returning. Nature seems to be full of such secret cycles. Nature is wise, we just have to listen and learn… And we listen and we learn that in the end it all will end; this is simply crazy.
Stern people talk about sustainability and tell us how to live our lives, to learn from nature… They formulate calls for sustainable design. At times it is just as if they were part of a dream talking some strange language. I wake up wondering what on earth that dream was all about.
I can see a child crawling in the snow, enjoying the expressions of snow. Next year the snow comes back, but then it is all history.
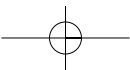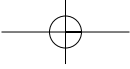
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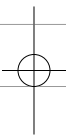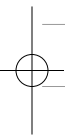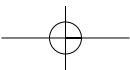
Strangers

It was cold in Uppsala today, so I churned my hands into the pockets of my overcoat and saw it bellow behind me in the reflection in the windows of the stores. I took out a tie and put it round my neck, knotting it carefully, thinking. It's enough. Enough with this. Like we know what to say after ten years. Like nothing has happened and I know her sisters name and when to sit silently and when to giggle. I call her from a café and she says nothing about that which she told me right before I ran out in the street last night. I hear him in the background. Everybody says hello, she says. Say hello to everybody, I say. I have nothing of the coffee in front of me.

We have become strangers to the things. Not only because of a normative language of global marketing, but because the technologies and methods of production – the process where things are coming into being as not just an idea or a design, but the actual materialisation – has faded into the forgotten because of the art of collaborative production and creation is outsourced to places which are pretended not to exist.
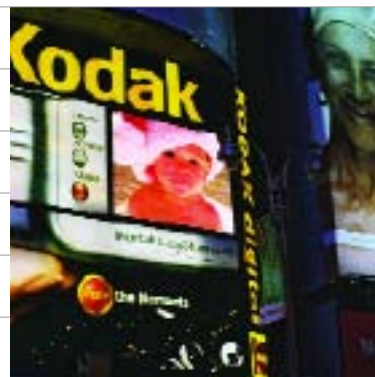
/ The design of relationship /   ••••••

Great importance must finally be attributed to relationship design through communication and the use of the media.
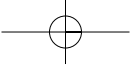
Nowadays it is essential to find a constructive way of co-existing by exchanging information, points of view, attitudes, dreams.

The key word to this end is "relationship", meaning the design for communication and no longer design for design, because while ideological dogmatism could make do with rigid bureaucratic protocols, the relative nature of relationships requires the free flow of information.

It is unthinkable, unless one wants to be relegated to small market niches, that the product can improve if the quality of information doesn't improve with it and whoever designs the communication must be aware o the educational or harmful power he wields.

Stockholm in December. In my hand there is a Campari with orange juice. I am standing in some boutique, or maybe it is a gallery of some sort. A girl stands in front of me, talking, and she keeps adjusting her pill-box hat, a little black thing. Her skirt is short, very short, and it keeps riding up on her thigh. She concentrates on the hat. Outside, in the street, people are smoking and the smoke licks thw windowpane and everything is generally like something out of T.S.Eliot. Am I Prufrock? What is this? I was supposed to write about fashion, but there is nothing to be said of fashion.
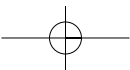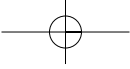
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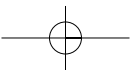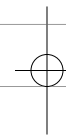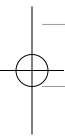
[Existential choices]

The division of man in generalistic categories is not erased by the democratisation of consumption, the perceived classlessness of shopping. Rather, it is underlined by the vulgarity or subtility of buying service, the purchase of a moment of reaction rather than a more ordinary interaction. The concept of service can be seen as a system, at least when it is systemised, of Skinner-esque stimuli and response. This systemised system is manifested in the fast-food chains and in the exchange of power manifested in the fashion brand's stores.

In the car parking, on the motorway, lonely in the alley ... They are almost everywhere, these symbols of modern life; we are constantly on the move, hurrying in this or that direction. Their numbers constantly grow; traffic becomes silly in its expressions... Once a symbol of freedom, now a sign of evil, of a coming catastrophe...
This is certainly not a mere technical problem or a problem of planning. It is probably nothing that we can solve... It is something else. But what?
I drive my own car and I just hate it, the vicious expressions of traffic makes me tired; if this is the true expressions of social life there seem to be little hope of anything but wars... Collective transportation with buses, trains etc don't make me any happier. Walking is nice. Sitting on a stump in the forest is nice. At times you just want to be alone in reflection. So there it is again, the car; a modern stump in a modern forest of technological alienation. Traffic is a dilemma; the car as such is a dilemma... The modern car is often enough designed for a private motorway. There is room for something else here... But what? Engineers they invent, politicians they try to make plans and enforce restrictions at the same time encouraging the engineers to invent yet another catastrophe...afterwards they, the politicians, forget all about who was there cheering and asking for more... Somewhere in all that mess there is a designer taking part and making valuable contributions. Papanek was certainly right in some of his criticism, but there was not much of an answer... Why do we somehow always forget those aesthetical and existential leitmotifs in the processes of invention, design and construction... There are certainly exceptions when people look the other way, but they seems to be just that; exceptions...is craft, art, pure mathematics, poetry what is left or is a concerning design still possible?
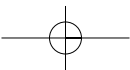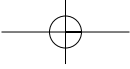
What?

/ The seriousness /

A description is just the beginning of an endless mirror hall as arte povera artist Michelangelo Pistoletto notes. If one stands between two mirrors that are parallel to each other there is, behind and in front, an endless line of our self, similar to the endless answers to the question: what is it? The answer to such a question is always something that we could ask the same question about. Different types of chairs and sculptures put together with different techniques and materials, pieces with different colours, different shapes and different masses and thus differentiated internal structures gives rise to an infinite number of: *What is it?*

Let us not forget a kind of seriousness that is not the negation of joy, but rather the awareness that every rude gesture inflicted on the world is returned to us in the form of a loss of meaning.
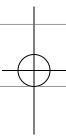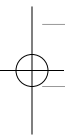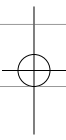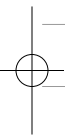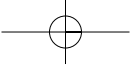
Qualities and quantities

Determined qualities originate in the static, which through their determination is forced to have become, and thereby become conformed in a spatial arrangement. Such qualities are in fact quantities.

An act of balance originates in becoming, since it is in its performative quality a heterogeneous quality between cause and effect. Therefore quality is balance.

That is why determined qualities [quantities] falls under analysis and the balance between their actual volatile beings [quality] falls under intuition.
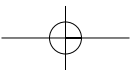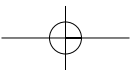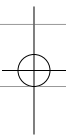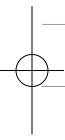
Some notes on this book

This book came about out of sheer frustration. As researchers and lecturers on the subject of design, we are often confronted with the duality of the design discipline. On one hand we have the notion that design is something that can be approached in the same way as any other profession; it is a craft that is taught at design schools and carried out in design studios – to be reflected upon and improved by design researchers. On the other hand we find that design is power; that it contains a multitude of possibilities of obtaining change. To us, this change would inevitably have to be for the better; meaning that we would prefer to see designers as improvers of the world of objects.

There is, however, a great waste land in-between the expectations of designers and the reality of the world of things. Slowly, but surely, we are filling the world with objects. Many of them are well designed, well produced and generally useful. Some are downright dangerous. Many objects that are labelled "design objects" fall into the latter category.
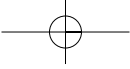
The problem with design is that it is – as a discipline, an art form, a profession and a phenomena – able to solve at least some of the world's problems but to also to cause them. Ecological, social and moral issues are influenced by the things that surround us. Cities, buildings, objects are entities that provide meaningful, or meaningless, experiences in the mental and actual land that is situated in and in between human beings. The sphere of design is therefore both actual and virtual. Therefore, solutions to problems rarely become in reality what they were thought to be in the virtuality of the design studio or the research laboratory. Atomic energy was once a solution to just about everything, including styling problems perceived by designers of vacuum cleaners, but has now become a field of some concern.

We have been to academic gatherings were this issue has been discussed – more often than not by smug academics who claim to possess the formula of the solution of the salvation. More often than not, we have found that this formula consists of another object; a fantastic gadget that will in itself solve this or that problem. This, we do not believe in. To us, problems are rarely caused by objects, but often by people. Bad design is therefore a problem that relates to the psycho-social conditions of ordinary people; who may be designers or users or just people. In fact, we also hold the opinion that the life of objects has philosophical dimensions; meaning that our troubled relationship with things just might be a matter of something deriving from a sphere we know very little about – but might

approach in a way that involves senses derived from our cultural and religious upbringings. It is this complex of questions that we have tried to encompass in this book. In order to make our point, we have opted for a way of writing that is all together personal. We are inviting the reader into something that started out over coffee cups, dinner plates and in the streets of Milan, Cairo, London and a little Swedish town called Borås and ended up as the collection of texts and photographs that is this book.

For those who do find this book exciting, and also for those who object to our texts, we have included the possibility of making one's own notes within the book. Call it a notebook, an open system, a way of playing down some of tedious side-effects of academia. The man behind this idea is Mario Trimachi, owner of the Milanese design studio Fragile, that has been kind enough to lend their conceptual ideas and proper design work to the book. In fact, the conceptual design of the book is also to be regarded as a part of the content. By trying to bring some humour – and practicality for that matter – into the often monotonous world of book design, we are trying to show that there is some sustainable value in trying to do things in a spirit of joy.

This book deals with design as a phenomena of the mind, and a joy of the hand. Our notion of sustainability is one of trying to maintain the dignity of both our mental and actual landscapes. Preservation of resources thus becomes a matter of dealing with oneself and one's immediate affairs in a fashion becoming a gentle gesture devoted to the gentle side of the human being. The reader would not find anything of design methods in this book, and very little of design theory. In fact, there is very little of theory at all – at least not in the academic sense. At the same time, this is a book that deals intricately with the presence of the person within creative acts, a subject rarely covered in academic literature. By merging entries from our respective notebooks with pieces from our respective academic and design work, we will try to include the reader in a discussion that started angrily but ended up in the realm of philosophy. Our respective texts are organised as short pieces, sometimes a full page long, in some other cases just a few words. The reader will become familiar with four distinctly individual voices, thereby becoming something of a listener to something that is not a conversation, but rather some fragments of the imaginations of four people who spend their time pondering on issues concerning design. Imagine, if you will, a fictive world of some beauty or another when reading this book, thereby taking the first step towards making fiction really real. That realness, to us, is the essence of something sustainable.
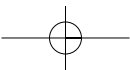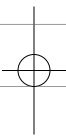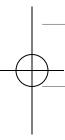
Marcus Bergman is a lecturer at the Swedish School of Textiles. He is also a doctoral candidate in architecture and design theory and a writer on culture, architecture and design.

Simonetta Carbonaro, is professor in Design Management at the Textile School of the University Colleges of Borås, member of the scientific steering committee of Domus Academy in Milan and partner in the German consulting firm Realise.

Lars Hallnäs is professor in Interaction Design at the Swedish School of Textiles, University College of Borås and Guest Lecturer at Department of Computer Science and Engineering, Chalmers University of Technology.

Clemens Thornquist is Head of Fashion at the Swedish School of Textiles, University College of Borås and a researcher in Design Management and design theory and methodology.

Mario Trimarchi is architect and industrial designer, and leads "Fragile", italian studio of design and corporate identity care.