Rules of Unruly Design
Lessons from the history of anti-modernist aesthetics

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THE RULES OF UNRULY DESIGN
This Book has been published in 2011 as Thesis [in Dutch], for obtaining a PhD in Product Design at the University of Twente, Faculty of Engineering Technology. The thesis has been approved by the promoters prof. dr. JW. Drukker and prof. dr. ir. A.O. Eger.
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Unruly (‘always difficult’) design product at the campsite in Brittany – 2008.
Among art historians and design theorists it is bon-ton to start their texts with a quote from someone else.’
Christian Borngraeber in (Borngraeber & Van der Geer 1986: p. 5).

When I once was on holiday in France, a Dutch boy came into the reception of the campsite where we were staying, together with his father. The boy was rather curious and provided with a sharp eye. He asked quite a bit of his father’s attention with remarks like ‘Look Daddy, what a weird door they have here’ and ‘What a weird key’ and ‘What a weird chair’. His father tried to concentrate on signing up at the campground and muttered something unintelligible. After the boy had characterized about half the contents of the room as ‘weird’, his father finally found a logical rebuttal. He choked his son with the wise words: ‘No boy, that is not strange, that is different.’

This incident occurred to me again and again when I was busy with the research for this book. On the one hand, it shows nicely what ‘unruly design’ actually is. Namely the kind of design that is different and therefore can be weird, but what is at least something you do not expect, something that will get you thinking and at best evokes a sense of wonder. On the other hand, it also indicates the power of design in general and aesthetics in particular. The boy thinks of all those objects as weird, while they are also just objects with the same functions as he knows from his environment at home. A chair, a door, or a key, however with a different shape.

Victor Papanek has phrased this wonderfully in his book The Green Imperative: 'It is important to remember that architecture and design are the social arts par excellence. It is possible to avoid theatre and ballet, never to visit museums or galleries, to spurn poetry and literature and to switch off radio concerts. Buildings, settlements and the daily tools of living however, form a web of visual impressions that are inescapable.’ (Papanek 1995: p. 174).

A large part of the research described in this book has actually consisted of thinking, one of the few things for which I had a lot of time during my four and a half years
at the university, driving in the car from Deventer to Enschede and vice versa. Either in the Volvo 480 (Dutch design!) or in the Saab 900 that my father so lovingly refurbished for me. The latter also equipped with the most beautiful seventies alloy rims that exist, because after all you are doing design history.

What I also often thought about during that drive, are the people who helped me to become who I am now ... Like Tom the organiser, Luigi the inspirator, and the other great colleagues from D’Andrea & Evers Design who I can see every day in their office along the highway in Enter. Or, as I drive along the Lochem exit, Peter Cool, my unofficial mentor within the Hollandse Signaalapparaten to whom I owe so much. And of Margot Stilma, who gave me the enthusiasm for research, when I leave the A1 at Hengelo-Noord. Also important is Arthur Eger, who has taken me enthusiastically to the university. Just as my other promoter JW Drukker.

Even more important are my favorite colleagues Maaike and Mieke, who with their presence give me so much job satisfaction that I will always drive enthusiastically towards Enschede. The most important, however, are my parents who, with the technical interest of my father and the creative inspiration of my mother, formed the perfect combination to become a designer. But the utmost important are Anouk, Marit and Heleen; the best three reasons to return cheerfully back to Deventer in the afternoon.

Thank you all and I hope you are satisfied with the result.
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Summary
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1 Introduction

In this book I try to define new practices that can provide the contemporary designer with some guidance when designing products in a postmodern world. The last part of the last century has shown a number of developments that have continually diluted the fixed requirements for the modern product developer. The decline in the popularity of modernism in architecture and functionalism in product design have ensured that a fixed set of ‘do’s’ and ‘don’ts’ no longer seem to be available.

The motto ‘Form Follows Function’, that was elevated to mantra has become less and less significant, which has led to a true proliferation of paraphrases. Designer Hella Jongerius states in the Vitra brochure that her furniture designs are created according to the motto ‘Form Follows Feeling’ (cited in: Vitra 2008: p. 18). Ed van Hinte (Ramakers et al. 2006: p. 157-163) talks about ‘Form Follows Process’ when he discusses the practice of the new generation of conceptual designers (wich Jongerius also belongs to). Maxine Naylor and Ralph Ball (2005) introduce the variant ‘Form Follows Idea’ for their poetry-inspired design practice. The Italian design firm Alessi speaks of ‘Family Follows Fiction’ when they introduce a series of cheerful household products in the market in 1991 (Alessi 1999: p. 105). Professor of Civil Engineering Henry Petroski introduced a variant within the discipline called ‘Form Follows Failure’ (Petroski 1992) and Volker Albus and Volker Fischer (1995) even come up with a whole lot of adaptations in their catalogue accompanying the exhibition 13 nach Memphis, dedicated to product designers who are inspired by the Italian post-

1 The phrase ‘Form Follows Function’ is used for the fist time by the American architect Louis Sullivan in the article The tall office building artistically considered, in 1896 (Heskett 2002: p. 35-36).

In fact, the quote reads ‘form ever follows function’ and Sullivan meant that the function of an object should be visible in its appearance, just like in nature. As an architect, Sullivan was also a designer of fabulous ornaments in the best tradition of art nouveau and art deco (The Art Institute of Chicago 2010). In this respect we may consider the appropriation of the term by the modernists as one of the biggest misunderstandings in the history of design.
D’Adda, Lorenzini, Vigorelli, BDDO (Milan) – ‘New MOTOKRZR K1. Crazy Reflective’ advertisement campaign for Motorola – 2006, the image sells a fashion statement. That the device is a telephone has become a side issue. The principle of advertising with the help of feminine beauty is of course not new [Figure 1.2].

Xanti Schawinski – Advertisement for the Olivetti MP1 typewriter – 1935, Schawinsky – notably a representative of the Bauhaus - was brought to Italy by Adriano Olivetti in order to represent the modernist ideal of ‘progress through technology’ (Kicherer 1990: p. 32).
modernist Memphis group. From ‘Form Follows Motion’ for the flowing lines of the designs by Ron Arad, via ‘Form Follows Utilism’ for the restrained form language of Jasper Morrison, ‘Form Follows Streaming’ with the Australian surfdude Marc Newson and ‘Form Follows Concept’ for the German experimental design collective Ginbande, until ‘Form Follows STARCK’ for the complete individuality of the French designphenomenon.

But what then should the contemporary designer follow this time? When the focus of product design is also shifting. Primary functionality is apparently less important as a distinguishing factor, at the expense of more experience and emotion-oriented product characteristics. (Green 2002: pp. 1-5). Instead of buying ourselves a device for phoning our friends we purchase a lifestyle-product with poetic names like ‘chocolate’ (for the ladies) and ‘razr’ (for the gents). And by the way, they also allow you to call someone [Figure 1.1].

According to the theory of product phases by Eger (2007) products end in a phase that is characterized by individualization and awareness. The primary functionality of products has then crystallized in earlier stages in such a way that it will play an increasingly smaller role in the purchase decision. The valuation of objects in this development is simultaneously increasingly based on the affective, emotional and abstract product values (Desmet 2002; Norman 2004). The importance of these values is at the same time emphasized by the fact that we find individualisation and awareness at the top of the Maslow hierarchy (cited in: Kotler 1988: p. 187). It is about what a product does for your self-worth, what it says about your social status or how it fits with your ethical attitude towards the environment. For example, a product can help you to adopt a certain identity or you can feel good because it is produced in an environmentally friendly way. But what does this mean for the way in which we have to shape products as a designer? Different authors have different ideas about how to design emotionality and affection in products and some even argue that affectivity is not determined by design at all, but only by the meaning the user gives to the object.
Maxine Naylor and Ralph Ball – ‘Generic Keypad’ – 2005, a contemporary electronic product that is designed ‘functionally’, consisting of a keypad and a display. But what is it?

Kunstflug (Charly Hüskes, Hardy Fischer, Harald Hullman and Heiko Bartels) – ‘Electronic Hand Calculator’ – 1987, counting on your fingers electronically; form follows function has led to the disappearance of the product. It consists only of functionality.

Nam June Paik – ‘WatchDog 2’ (detail) – 1997, artwork in which the monitors that are used are packaged in printed circuit boards. Form follows function in the electronics era?
Csikszentmihalyi (2007) states that the user especially becomes attached to objects through the story behind them. For example because you received it from a loved one for your birthday or because it is an heirloom. But this emotion can also be shaped by the story that the user creates. For example because the object always reminds one of ... fill in for yourself. In all cases it seems that the primary functionality is no longer that important and certainly not distinctive. As a result, the mantra of the universal form language, which regarded by the modernist movement as becoming directly from the technical functionality, is also less and less useful. In light of the increased miniaturization and multifunctionality of modern electronics, this paradigm was no longer tenable (Bürdek 1996: pp. 295-312). After all, the form of electronic components hardly has a recognizable link with their function, and at the same time electronics are getting smaller and smaller [Figure 1.3; 1.4; 1.5].

According to Drukker, the fundamental law of ‘form follows function’ – in a literary sense – will thus disappear in the background as a leading principle: ‘This fundamental criterion for a “well-designed product”, which was already under attack on the basis of aesthetic - and not: technological - arguments during the rise of postmodernism in the last quarter of the previous century, will be challenged more and more in the near future, but now for technological reasons.’ (Drukker 2009: p. 15). So the question is: ‘What then can we put in place?’
[1.6] Chinese ‘Moon’ Chair – Design from the Ming period (from 1368 to 1644) – Early 20th century hardwood replica.
1.1 Meaning

1.1 Meaning: ‘a chair to look at the moon’

That the idea of emotionality, affectivity and meaning is not new, and not even something of the last fifteen years, is illustrated by a Chinese design that dates back to the Ming period [Figure 1.6]. This type of chair was exhibited at the 5th Triënnale voor Vormgeving [Triennale for Design] in 2007 at the Koninklijke Musea voor Kunst en Geschiedenis [Royal Museums for Art and History] of Brussels (Valcke et al. 2007). At the exhibition the object was called ‘a chair to look at the moon’. Remarkable, because then the chair is not so much characterized by its function (sitting backwards), as well as by what you are supposed to do with it. Especially the reference to the moon is strong, because by not just calling it an ‘armchair’, this designation opens up a whole series of poetic associations. As a spectator, you involuntarily think of languorous evenings on a veranda, clear nights and twinking stars or even howling werewolves, although the latter is not likely for Chinese people. While dreaming, you might forget that the chair is not very comfortable in the end. However that is an omission that is more common in Chinese (and postmodern) chairs.
adapted from Roozenburg and Eekels (1991: p. 12) – Divergence and convergence in the innovation process.
1.2 Form-giving

If we aim to create some basis for contemporary design practice, it is wise to indicate within which limitations we want to achieve that goal. This book is in essence only about formgiving. By that, however, we mean form giving in the broadest sense, so it is not about determining whether yellow is better than green, or what harmonious proportions are, or what a certain group of people like or dislike. We mean literally form-giving in the sense of casting or materializing an idea in a certain form. Roozenburg and Eekels (1991: pp. 11-13) indicate this phase of the development process with ‘strict development’ [Figure 1.7]. That means: from product idea to a materialized version of the product. The product idea as input of this phase can be seen as an abstract representation of the desired product. Usually in the form of a textual description, sometimes also supported with visualizations of context, atmosphere or target group. In the case of the telephone from the earlier illustration, the description of the abstract product idea could read ‘a mobile phone to keep in contact with friends who also value fashion and cosmetics’.

During the ‘strict development’, which is also called synthesis, a form has to be found to give this idea a concrete material interpretation. In our example this has led to the design of a mobile phone as a shiny piece of jewelry [Figure 1.1].

Form-giving or design in the sense of materializing an idea can be divided into primary and secondary design.
Necker cube – named after the Swiss natural scientist Louis Necker, who first published such an image in 1832. Primarily it is a set of lines on paper, but the spectator can interpret this as a cube. However, that interpretation is subjective, because the cube can be tilted upwards or downwards, or is the shape perhaps a spider in a web?

Display stand for oranges – 1946, it is a collection of curved iron wires, but the object is obviously reminiscent of a Christmas tree.

Protective mask for welders - from the design collection of the Museum of Modern Art in New York - dated as ‘before 1930’ (Antonelli et al. 2003: p. 97). The functionally designed round eye holes and triangular nose protection give the object a characteristic facial expression.
The primary design is a mere description of what the form is (or becomes), like how a CAD system captures a shape in the computer. The secondary design is then the way in which the primary form is interpreted by the spectator or user. One of the best known examples to illustrate this is the Necker cube [Figure 1.8].

With the process of interpretation, the user forms an opinion about the object through associations. This process of signification is also referred to as connotation or semiotics (Muller 1990: pp. 260, 270). The secondary design is therefore not a fixed item, but is filled in by the user. Primary and secondary design aspects always play a role. These associations even apply to products that are not intended to be expressive [Figure 1.9 en 1.10].

The functionality of products can be divided into primary and secondary functionality in a similar way. Where primary functionality stands for the direct functioning of products and secondary functionality stands for - mostly culturally determined - interpretation of the products by user and environment (Muller 1990: pp. 271-276). John Heskett (2002: pp. 33-36) uses the terms ‘utility’ and ‘significance’ for this. Utility then is the extent to which an object can be used for which it is intended. So this is about how things work: a chair is to sit and a coffee machine to make coffee. Although utility and the primary function as a concept of usability are mainly about effectiveness, Heskett argues that there can also be emotions involved. If a phone feels comfortable and the buttons are in the right order, it can be perceived as nice to use. Secondary functionality or significance is about the interpretation of the product by the user and the value or the meaning that he or she assigns to it. With the ‘chair to look at the moon’ this is determined by the possible associations with languorous evenings, clear nights and twinkling stars. The secondary functionality is also determined by the straight and hard appearance and the associated link with discomfort, regardless whether the chair is actually uncomfortable in terms of its primary functionality.

Secondary functionality is determined by the expression of the object on the one hand and the signification
by the user on the other. Adrian Forty (1995: pp. 241-245) argues that this is partly beyond the power of the designer, since he or she can not dictate the interpretation by the individual user. Nevertheless, the designer can certainly influence the secondary functionality by connecting to, for example, general values and shared cultural experiences of the intended user group (Bürdek 1996: pp. 223-232) and this also counts for the other way around: ‘No design works unless it embodies ideas that are held in common by the people for whom the object is intended.’ (Forty 1995: p. 245).

This study therefore concerns design in the sense of the materialization of an idea. This involves the secondary function of design as a driver of the signification by the user. Keeping in mind that this meaning can affect both the primary and the secondary functionality of products.

Because the different terms do not completely coincide, in the rest of the book the dichotomy of Heskett is followed. The term ‘utility’ is translated with the term ‘usability’. The term ‘significance’ is translated as ‘meaning’ in the sense of representing value, or the importance that the user assigns to a certain product.
Pieter Desmet (2002: p. 106) – ‘Basic model of emotions’ – The emotion is generated through a comparison of the stimulus (the product) with norms and values (concern), in the form of an assessment (appraisal). The assessment can take place in different ways, for example on the three levels of Norman.
1.3 Contemporary research

In current research on design and significance, such as the work of Pascalle Govers (2004), Thomas van Rompay (2005), Pieter Desmet (2002) or Donald Norman (2004), the focus is often behavioural. This means that we look from the perspective of the things people do or say. Desmet, for example, draws up a model of the mechanism that provokes an emotional reaction in people when they see (or experience) a product [Figure 1.11]. In other cases, it is argued how the human functions as a ‘system’, as Donald Norman sees a tripartition in the reaction of the human brain to the confrontation with products. At the ‘visceral’ level the most immediate reaction is given. For example, a certain shape is found to be ‘childish’ or very ‘powerful’. The ‘behavioural’ level concerns the use and handling of the product where, for example, aspects play a role as: whether a product is easy to operate, understandable, works well, and feels firm or soft. Norman defines the ‘reflective’ reaction of the brain as the highest level. There the user evaluates a product by means of associations and comparisons with previous experiences and whether or not acquired meanings. For example, a consumer may have an aversion to a certain type of car because her insufferable neighbour is driving around in a similar model.

From these behavioural assessments, it is subsequently demonstrated how ‘people’ react to products or forms. The problem with this approach is of course not only that ‘the human’ does not exist, so that the outcomes are actually only an average indication of how people could

respond (which is generously recognized by the researchers involved), but there is also a shortcoming in the basic idea behind the research design.

Because the behaviour of the so-called average user in relation to products is of course very complex and depends on many factors, usually only one or a limited number of factors are examined simultaneously. The demonstrated ‘average behaviour’ of the user ultimately only covers a single aspect of the overall design (and form perception) of products. Knowledge about a sub-aspect of the product experience is of course a good thing, but unfortunately can not predict much about the product experience as a whole. The user does not respond to a part of a product individually, but to the entire impression it provides to him or her. Different partial design aspects within a product therefore have a multiplicative relationship with each, not additive. In other words: \textit{product experience = colour \times smell \times association x cultural aspects x [...] instead of: colour + smell + [...]}.\footnote{The design of products is in this respect similar to cooking. The chef tries with ingredients and techniques to put down the best possible dish and all the characteristics of the food, the method of preparation, the presentation on the plate and even the design of the cutlery work together to provide the eater a tasty experience. The cook can use the most immaculate ingredients and prepare everything perfectly and serve it in an atmospheric ambience, but if he has added too much salt the whole meal will be spoiled.}

Govers (2004), for example, addresses this problem by starting from an umbrella term for all properties together and linking that to the mirror-principle. The umbrella term that she uses is ‘product personality’. She then states that by designing products with a specific personality (such as ‘happy’ or ‘serious’), they will be appreciated by consumers with a similar personality [Figure 1.12].

Thomas van Rompay (2005), in his \textit{Embodiment in the experience of design}, gives a similar indication, when he states that people, when assessing products, relate the object to their (own) body. A vase that is wide at the top and narrow at the bottom is like a muscular man (and therefore perceived as tough). A vase that is broad at the bottom is like a pregnant woman [Figure 1.13]. General relationships such as long and thin, or short and thick, are also judged by comparison with human dimensions and even more abstract concepts such as ‘openness’ and ‘closedness’ are related to human characteristics. However, van Rompay must unfortunately conclude in his control experiment that it is not very clear whether his ‘method’ helped to design products (in this case smoke
pillars at the train station) that had to express ‘involvement’. According to the evaluation, the control group that had not used the method had designed products that expressed about the same amount of ‘involvement’ (Van Rompay 2005: pp. 138-142).

So, with this type of research, very interesting mechanisms are eventually exposed. However, they will provide little support for the actual design - formgiving in the sense of materializing - of a complete product.
[1.14] Raymond Loewy – ‘S1’ – 1938, Steam engine for the Pennsylvania Railroad corporation. The streamline shapes taken from air and maritime transport were initially used to make objects (such as this train) appear to be faster and more powerful. Later on, however, they were also applied to numerous stationary products like the kitchen appliance in figure 1.15.


1.4  History

One way of looking from a more holistic perspective to design and meaning is by analyzing the history of design: “... denn die Gestalt der Wirklichkeit ist immer reicher als die Linienführung der Grundsätze.” Robert Musil, Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften, I (Chap. 121) (cited in: Lichtenstein et al. 1993: p. 9). We have already seen that taking into account significance and meaning is not new in the example of the ‘chair to look at the moon’, but in the design history, too, there has been a long history of emotion and meaning in product design. For instance in the streamline designs of the 1930s as a metaphor for progress (Lichtenstein et al. 1993; Hanks & Hoy 2005) [Figure 1.14; 1.15; 1.16].

However, the attention paid to this type of product design has long been overshadowed by the emphasis in Europe on the functionalism of the Bauhaus generation and its successors in Ulm [Figure 1.17 and 1.18]. Even still in 1990, the form follows function motto was strongly adhered to in the Industrial Design Engineering program at Delft University of Technology, because this cause-and-effect concept was so well-suited to the form of education of the university that focused on structure, method and process. This culminated in the central textbook Product design; structure and methods (Roozenburg & Eekels 1991). The apparent straightforwardness and objectivity of the form follows function idea matched very well with the pursuit of control and direction of the design process that the institute already envisaged in the early years of its existence. In his speech, Emile

5 Interestingly, the Bauhaus itself once started with an expressionist approach based on the ideas of Johannes Itten, see for this the chapter: Bauhaus Weimar: het expressionistische Bauhaus in: Bauhaus; 1919-1933 (Droste 1990). For a catalogue of expressionist works of this period, see: Experiment Bauhaus (Hahn & Brüning, et al. 1988).

Truijen proposed accepting the office of full professor in Industrial Design at the then named ‘Technische Hogeschool’ in Delft: ‘In contrast to the recent past, in which the industrial design all too often based the functionality of the appearance on elements arising from the visual arts, the design must for the most part be substantiated by the behavioral sciences. [...] On the opposite, the visual arts should, in my opinion, be decoupled from this discipline for the most part’\(^6\) (Truijen 1972: p. 12). This in itself praiseworthy striving for a form of objectivity, however, often led to a form of functionalist linearity, which in the long run was given the character of a tightening straitjacket.

The functionalist hydrofoil design from figure 1.18, for example, is characterized as an object by a beautiful, abstract shape. However, that shape has no association whatsoever with ‘sport’, ‘the human body’, ‘water’, ‘muscle power’, ‘speed’, or any other concept that has to do with the actual use or the use environment of the product. The only emotion that can be linked to this appearance is based on whether this form language of functionalism is attractive or not. While B. Majorick\(^7\) already throws us in his book *Ontwerpen en verwerpen* [*Design and reject*]: ‘This does not alter the fact that functionalism has to die anyway. It is a form language, which goes through an incubation period as any form language, reaches a culmination point and then irrevocably loses its tension and dies, as Focillon has irrefutably demonstrated in his “Vie des Formes”’ (Majorick 1959: p. 208).

However, if functionalism has little to offer with regard to emotionality and significance, it does not make sense in the context of this book to view the design history from this perspective. This study therefore takes an alternative design history as a starting point: the history of unruly design. But in order to define the history of unruly design, we first need to look more closely at functionalism itself.

### 1.4.1 Modernism and functionalism

As stated earlier, in the twentieth century the design world has long been dominated by functionalism, the
design philosophy that was derived at the beginning of that century from modernism in architecture. This movement originated in the Bauhaus, originally based in Weimar, but later moved to Dessau and Berlin (Droste et al. 1999: pp. 14-23). Functionalism has always been strongly influenced by the canonical text of Adolf Loos *Ornament und Verbrechen* [Ornament and crime] (Kieft 1984: p. 13).

In this – by today’s standards quite dated and from a point of view of political correctness plainly dubious – text from 1908, Loos foresees continuous progress in the development of our civilization towards an increasingly pure form: ‘[...] The Papuan tattoos his skin, his boat, his oar, in short, everything that is within his reach. He is no criminal. The modern man who tattoos himself is a criminal or a degenerate. There are prisons where eighty percent of the inmates bear tattoos. [...] But the man of our time who daubs the walls with erotic symbols to satisfy an inner urge is a criminal or a degenerate. [...] With children it is a natural phenomenon: their first artistic expression is to scrawl on the walls erotic symbols. But what is natural to the Papuan and the child is a symptom of degeneration in the modern man. I have made the following observation and have announced it to the world: The evolution of culture is synonymous with the removal of ornament from objects of daily use.’ (cited in: Kieft 1984: p. 13). In other words, the (applied) art as the ultimate expression of civilization will therefore also have to become purer, and thus stripped of every form of ornamentation (‘Ornament’). Every form of decoration is then an obstacle in the progress of civilization and according to Loos, in extreme consequence, a crime (‘Verbrechen’).

This reasoning was at the time in fertile soil because it could be linked to the belief in progress that was fueled by the rapid development of technology as a result of the industrial revolution.8 At the same time, she appealed to a desire of the progressive elite to educate ‘the people’ with ‘cleanliness and regularity’ and the pure ideal of the functional form fitted well with the ideal of “a healthy mind in a healthy body” (Wilk et al. 2006: pp. 250-52), which would then deal with the polluting excesses of
Alexander Rodchenko – ‘Sun-Lovers’ – 1932, under the title of ‘The healthy Body culture’ Christopher Wilk writes: ‘Surprising though it may seem today, organized physical exercise was a feature of leading art schools during the inter-war period.’ (Wilk et al. 2006: p. 272)
modern, capitalist and industrialized society [Figure 1.19]. Through the newly invented means of communication such as radio, telegraphy, film and photography, the ideas about ‘modern aesthetics’ were also rapidly spread around the world (Bekaert 2005: p. 144).

### 1.4.2 Progress and change

In the classic text *The idea of Progress, An inquiry into its origin and growth* by J.B. Bury (1920) the progress thinking that the modernists:functionalists used, was provided with a theoretical basis. At that time the ‘idea of progress’ was not up for discussion: ‘Within the last forty years nearly every civilised country has produced a large literature on social science, in which indefinite Progress is generally assumed as an axiom.’ (Bury 1920: p. 269).

This axiom was rooted in Darwinism, where according to the *Origin of Species* (published in 1859) nature developed *itself* through the principle of ‘survival of the fittest’. By adjusting to the environment and changing circumstances, nature developed towards increasing *complexity*. The proponents of this theory, who saw it primarily as a welcome alternative to the dogmatic vision of the church, were more quickly to explain this increasing complexity also as more advanced and therefore also *better*. This moral version of the theory of evolution was soon explained not only by natural phenomena, but also by cultural phenomena (Kieft 1984: pp. 14-16). Technology and technology development could then contribute to that natural evolution of society: ‘For these creative figures [*amongst whom Le Corbusier en Fernand Léger – WE*], industry, the rationality of the machine and advanced technology were key elements in the construction of utopia.’ (Wilk et al. 2006: p. 33).

The modernists thus found that the development of culture had to take an example of the development of technology. Le Corbusier himself stated in his *Vers Une Architecture* published in 1923 that a house should be ‘a machine for living in’ (Le Corbusier 2008: p. 161).

The ‘idea of progress’ remained the guiding principle in both culture and science for a long time. The dominant view was that man, through new developments, learned...
more and more about nature and about himself, bringing civilization as a whole closer to the truth. However, the asymmetry theory of philosopher of science Karl Popper has made a big breach in this linear belief in progress. According to Popper, there is no such thing as ‘the truth’ that can be scientifically developed. According to him, a scientific theory is abstract by nature and can therefore only indirectly be tested by looking at the results of that theory. In this way, however, it is only possible to prove scientifically that something is not true. A theory that for example says that ‘all functionalist designs are rectangular’, according to Popper can only be proved by looking at the consequences of the theory. This means that all possible functionalist designs must be determined to be rectangular. This is obviously a huge amount of work, but even fundamentally impossible since we are never able to establish that we actually covered all functional designs in our hypothetical research. However, it is easy to refute the theory by finding only one functionalistic product that has a circular shape.

The asymmetric aspect of this negative approach lies in the fact that, by falsifying an increasing number of assumptions, we are not able to prove a single theory right, but in principle we can still get a bit closer to a remaining set of scientific theories that could be accepted as true. There is deliberately stated getting closer, because according to this scientific view we will never be able to say with certainty that we have reached the final stage. Every next set of theories is, as it were, ‘more true’ than the previous one and in this sense only for the time being.

From a contemporary perspective, Popper emerged from this negative method of scientific progress as the philosopher of science of the modernists par excellence. By rejecting everything that is not functional (to falsify so to speak), the modernists hoped to develop an ever better product. This principle has also become known as the design variant of the philosophy of science principle of Ockham’s Razor: we cut off everything that does not have to do with the functioning of the product.

Thomas Kuhn (1996), however, demonstrated in 1962, with his publication *The Structure of Scientific Revoluti-
that the community of scientists is usually not at all concerned with debunking their own theories and thus developing them further, but would rather do precisely the opposite. People tend to work within their own familiar context, in which every knowledge that is not in keeping with the set of generally accepted theories is initially treated with the utmost criticality. According to Kuhn, a certain status quo always prevails in this way, which is only endangered if more and more phenomena are observed that can not be reconciled with the existing theories. The status quo will only be broken if these so-called anomalies have reached a certain critical mass, after which a ‘scientific revolution’ takes place which helps a new, generally accepted set of theories in the saddle. Mostly referred to as a ‘paradigm shift’. Generally, with this concept the idea of progress was sent to the scrap heap. After all, there was no longer any guarantee in this approach that a new theory would be better than the old one. The only criterion was that the new theory fitted better with the contemporary scientific reality than the old one.

Feyerabend (1975) later introduced the definitive step in putting the principle of progress to the test in his *Against Method; Outline of an anarchistic theory of knowledge*: ‘Without a fixed ideology, or the introduction of religious tendencies, the only approach which does not inhibit progress (using whichever definition one sees fit) is “anything goes”.’ According to Feyerabend, theoretical anarchism was more human than a strict system of scientific norms and values (Feyerabend 1975: pp. 17–22). The latter would only impede the creativity to make new discoveries, while at the same time Feyerabend leaves the reader free to fill in his own idea of progress. Feyerabend himself explicitly talks about the progress of science (in the sense of discovering and discovering more) and not about progress for society as a whole like the modernists had in mind.

This anarchistic attitude would then become the motto of a new generation of designers who, analogous to Feyerabend and Kuhn, set up as a group of revolutionaries who wanted to overthrow the established modernist order. As we shall see later, these postmodernists took
[1.20] Marcel Breuer – Chair model B5 – 1926-1927, a strict geometry and minimal material use for the function of 'sitting'. The maximum transparency of the design was motivated by socialist politics and served to preserve as much space as possible within the small workers' housing. (Wilk et al. 2006: p. 229).

the cultural meaning of products as the starting point for their designs.

1.4.3 **Towards a new paradigm**

If modernism / functionalism is identified with the ‘idea of progress’, then postmodernism is the cultural personification of the Feyerabendian ‘anything goes’. The disadvantage of the latter is that it does not generate any basis for the design practice: after all, everything is possible. Modernism / functionalism included a fixed number of do’s and don’ts that formed a clear description of the underlying design philosophy: ‘Modernism came to be interpreted as a style (a set of forms, motifs and habits of mind) and as a dogma (a set of rules and principles) and it was as such that it was handed down to the next generation in the 1930’s’ (Wilk et al. 2006: p. 154).

Critics have often put aside such a set of design rules as a style in a narrow sense, namely that functionalism only presupposes a certain form language. But it also relates to the way of designing: the vision and the goal that the designer has in mind. In this sense, it can not only provide a basis for developing the design of new objects in a certain form language, but also a guideline for the development of new products as a whole. In the present study, an impetus is given to generate additional design rules based on historical developments for the design practice after modernism, as a starting point for a new paradigm. Entirely in postmodern style, the outcome of this study is probably not really a set of clear rules, but with the right eye we will, as can be seen from the following, certainly be able to distinguish a number of regularities.

1.4.4 **History, Cultural history and history of ideas**

The history of the design can be regarded as cultural history and is therefore not primarily about events and dates, but about the interpretation of reality by the people who come into contact with that culture, live in it and shape it (Jordanova 2000; Burke 2008). Cultural history is about mental processes, which means that you
[1.22] Huib Hoste – Cupboard for house ‘Geerardijn’ in Bruges – 1927, a wooden chest that is designed by a modernist architect (Bekaert 2005: pp. 153-155). The remarkable surface division can be attributed to the close ties that Hoste maintained with De Stijl.

[1.23] Marcel Breuer – Broom cupboard – 1929, a steel locker, developed according to the principles modernism (Droste et al. 1999: p. 98).

can interpret it as a history of ideas (Grafton 2006). The history of unruly design thus becomes the history of unruly design ideas. The implications of this approach will be clarified in an example, in which equivalent ‘modernist’ and ‘postmodernist’ designs are compared.

If you randomly put a design from the modernist movement alongside an equivalent design by a representative of the unruly postmodernists, this seems like a world of difference [Figure 1.20 and 1.21]. The chair by Marcel Breuer is strictly geometric and contains no more than a seat, a backrest and a few tubes to support the two. Stringency in material and use of form shines from the design. The chair of the Japanese designer Masonori Umeda, prominent member of the postmodernist Memphis group, has instead been exuberantly shaped like a flower.

On the other hand, you can find examples where the designs of the traditional modernists and the unruly postmodernists are very similar in terms of appearance [Figure 1.23 and 1.24], or where the so-called modernist designs even seem to be much more exuberant than the postmodernist [Figure 1.22]. The cabinets from Breuer and Aldo Cibic are both sleekly geometric in structure and smoothly finished. They are also both visually interesting by a sophisticated plan division. The cabinet of the Belgian modernist Huib Hoste can even be described as cheerful.

For the dedicated observer - for example the design historian - the distinction lies in the slightly tilted box in the upper right corner of the Cibic cabinet. Such frivolity would be unthinkable within modernism, in which the dictatorship of orthogonality ruled. Therefore, in order to make the differences between the two movements really clear, it is more convenient to look at the ideas underlying the designs, instead of merely analyzing the aesthetics. In other words; the design vision from which the objects originated, because: ‘After all, design is a problem solving activity, based on a particular principled belief.’ (Crouwel 2008: p. 122).

For the functionalist modernists (or modernist functionalists), a rational approach in design was very impor-
The Rietveld Chair was originally executed in dark wood. It was only painted in the famous primary colors in 1923, after Rietveld had come into contact with the other members of De Stijl. The idea was to make the structure even better visible (Simon Thomas 2008: p. 71). The latter apparently as a result of a suggestion by the painter Theo van Doesburg (Radice 1984: p. 121).

Maxine Naylor and Ralph Ball – ‘Rietveld Chair’ – 2005, the repetition of the chair emphasizes the inherent structure of the design.
tant. According to the now familiar form follows function paradigm, the appearance of a product should relate directly to its functioning (Drukker 2007). In practice oftenly the design also had to refer to the way it was produced (Wilk et al. 2006: pp.154-156). All this without superfluous frills, because according to inspirator Adolf Loos, ornament was a ‘crime’, which went against the desired development in the direction of an ever purer and more developed culture (Joris et al. 1984).

Therefore the designs of the modernists always refer to themselves (their function, structure or manufacture (Venturi et al. 1977; Jencks 1984)) and not to the world around them. For an overview of the design rules of the modernists, see table 1.1.

The well-known chair by Rietveld is then a superior example of a modernist design, because the structure of the chair is so beautifully made visible [Figure 1.25]. The different parts that are needed for ‘sitting’ (backrest, seat and armrests) can be easily deciphered.

### Design rules of Modernism / Functionalism

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rule</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>A well-designed product is designed according to scientific research and scientific insights.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>A well-designed product is transparent and clear in its functionality (‘Form Follows Function’) and therefore minimalist in its design (Ockam’s razor).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Aesthetic experience is universally based on mathematical laws. Products must adhere to a mathematical or abstracted organic form language.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>There is such a thing as an &quot;ideal type&quot; of each product. This can be approached better and better over time by designing on the basis of the latest scientific insights and by using the latest technology (the progress hypothesis).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>In essence, all people are equal. An ideal product is therefore ideal for everyone.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>Mass production is the solution to bring good products within reach of the large mass of the population: a designer will therefore never work for an exclusive or elitist client base.</td>
</tr>
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[Table 1.1] Humanist modernism and functionalism: the in-separable ties between science ethics and scientific aesthetics. Adapted from: (Drukker 2007).
Aldo Cibic – 'Andy', 'Sandy' and 'Louis' – 1987, lacquered wooden furniture with the simple and robust shaping of toys.
This is even more clear when we look at the adaptation by Maxine Naylor and Ralph Ball [Figure 1.26]. According to the designers: ‘Mixing Rietveld’s abstraction with more concrete domestic cultural associations relating to chairs might produce ideas like this. Other layers of information and meaning are added and the conceptual austerity of Rietveld’s original teeters on the edge of the cosy domesticity of the three-piece suite.’ (Naylor & Ball 2005: p. 51).

Because the structured design of the Rietveld chair is so in contrast with the association of conviviality that a three-seater sofa evokes, the converted Rietveld becomes an intriguing object that flawlessly exposes the substantive problem of the classical conception of form follows function. After all, what is functional about a three-seater sofa that is not cozy?

The postmodern flower chair by Masonori Umeda is more or less the opposite of the Rietveld chair. The ‘I Fiori’ does not refer to ‘itself’ nor to the structure of sitting. As a result, the chair can also be less unequivocally multiplied to a three-seater sofa, but with its flower shape it has the promise of softness, freshness, security or any other characteristic that could be connected to a blooming flower.

Seen in this light, the ‘playful’ asymmetrical layout of the broom cupboard by Marcel Breuer from figure 1.22 can also be explained simply from the perspective of functionality. Somewhere there must be enough height in the cupboard to accommodate the broomstick.

The playful layout of the Aldo Cibic cabinet is really meant to be playful, including the oblique placed cavity in the top right corner as a little postmodernist wink. If you then place the cabinet next to other Cibic designs [Figure 1.27], it is striking that a clear reference to toys has been made by carefully adjusting the proportions of the objects. The seeming clarity of the designs therefore arises from the characteristic of toys that these are often a simplification of reality. The simple shapes thus come from a cultural meaning and not from a design guideline that states that the object to be shaped must be as clear and simple as possible in itself.
1.5 Meaning

1.5 Meaning and meaning

Now that it becomes clear that the designs in this argument will be judged and cited for their intention, or for the underlying meaning that the designer tries to convey with his or her design, it is necessary to understand the concept of meaning in the context of design further. From the example of Aldo Cibic’s furniture it became clear that the meaning of an object does not always lie in the object itself, but can also refer to an element outside the object. Although this concept stems from design theory from the seventies and eighties of the twentieth century, it is best illustrated with a famous painting by René Magritte from 1928: *Ceci n’est pas une pipe* [Figure 1.28].

The painting says ‘this is not a pipe’ because it is an *image* of a pipe. In other words; the painting is a *symbol* for a pipe and therefore only a reference to a real pipe. This principle forms the basis of semiotics, which was introduced in the design discipline with the theory of product language, developed in Germany in the nineteen seventies (Bürdek 1996: pp 235–236). Semiotics in turn elaborates on semantics, the theory of the meaning of words. It should be clear that the word ‘pipe’ is the same kind of *symbol* as the drawing by Magritte, namely a reference to a real pipe. The tricky thing about the concept of meaning, however, is that the symbol for the pipe, whether it is a word, a picture or a 3D model, only becomes *meaningful* if the viewer knows what a pipe really *is*. The meaning of the symbol is only filled in by the viewer, regardless of the meaning that the maker / donor
of the symbol *means* by it. In other words, there is only an unequivocal meaning if the sender and recipient of a symbol have a common frame of reference.

This notion of a shared frame of reference is the basis for the theory of social semiotics that is elaborated by Hodge en Kress (1988), amongst others. They argue that the analysis of symbols and the corresponding meanings - which is the subject of semiotics - must always be done in the context of social relations and processes (Hodge and Kress 1988: p. 1-2).

If the meaning of a symbol, or design, arises only through the interpretation of the viewer, the intention of the maker can only be communicated in the correct way if the maker and the spectator have the same association with the symbol. That is, as both maker and spectator have learned the meaning in the same social context. In fact, we are then back at the assumption of Adrian Forty: ‘No design works unless it embodies ideas that are held in common by the people for whom the object is intended.’ (Forty 1995: p. 245). This means that Aldo Cibic can only make his furniture look like toys if his audience has the same idea about toys - that they are a simplification of reality. The point is therefore that the spectator has the same frame of reference for the interpretation of the idea of the design. If Cibic would place his cupboards in a different social context - one in which his audience, for example, thinks that toys are cheap, screaming and inferior - his designs take on a different meaning. If the furniture of Cibic is placed in a Franciscan monastery, the cupboards can even receive a religious charge. The simple forms will then be associated with asceticism and restraint, instead of with simple toys. By changing the context of a symbol, it is thus possible to change the meaning of the symbol for the viewer. This phenomenon is called *transformation* in socio-cultural studies (Thwaites et al. 1994: pp. 61-65).

If at any moment there is a joint frame of reference, there can also be consciously played with meanings. Magritte provides the better example again. In the painting *Sleutel der Dromen [Key of Dreams]* he gives the viewer an alternative meaning for things in a variant of old-fashioned primary school reading cards (Figure 11).
René Magritte – ‘La cle des songes’ (Key of dreams) – 1930, the painter actively directs the interpretation of the images: an egg is a tree, a shoe is the moon, a glass is a thunderstorm, et cetera.
For example, the image of a candle states ‘the ceiling’, which then provokes an alienating effect within the viewer because most of us have learned from the common frame of reference that an image of a candle refers to a candle, and not to a ceiling. The alienation is even doubled, because the candle could also be a metaphor for sociability and romance, which is not exactly the case with a ceiling.

With the ‘Andries’ candle holder by Marcel Wanders the same mechanism is at work [Figure 1.30]. For the somewhat culturally developed western man, the object is a candleholder with the shape of a wine glass that has been turned upside down. This makes the candleholder special because from the common frame of reference the wine glass is seen as an object for drinking and not for holding a candle. The more consensus there is about the common meaning of the familiar object, the greater the alienating effect.12

Without the frame of reference of the wineglass as a cultural object, the candle holder can only be seen as a functionally sophisticated shape, with a stable base against falling over and a handy platform for collecting dripping paraffin. What makes the design even more interesting in this example is that the common frame of reference also plays at different levels. For the real connoisseur of Dutch design history the name ‘Andries’ refers to glass designer Andries Copier, who specifically designed this shape of the archetypal wineglass in 1930 for the famous Leerdam glass factory. The same layered meaning arises in the aforementioned example of the transformed Rietveld chair by Naylor and Ball from figure 1.26. By presenting the chair together with a three-seater bench, the image refers to a typical living room arrangement of seating furniture. That arrangement again refers to a kind of ‘homely cosiness’ where the strict geometric thing is actually ridiculed.

As stated earlier, these examples make it clear once again that the fundamental adage of functionalism, namely that the appearance of a product is directly and un-equivocally determined by its functionality, is in fact an enormous limitation of the function of that appearance.
1.5 Meaning
1.6 Conclusion

1.6 Conclusion: how we define unruly design

For our history of unruly design, the starting point is therefore, as explained in section 1.4.4, the vision of the designer from which the objects are designed. If we combine this starting point with Kuhn’s philosophy of science, as explained in section 1.4.2 and within the historical framework that limits this research, this means that following from now on:

The catalogue of unruly designed products consists of all those objects that have been designed from the perspective of undermining the existing design paradigm of functionality.

In this way, the Italian design groups Memphis and Alchymia fall within this framework, because they clearly displayed this vision, sometimes even before there was actually one product on the market. Alessandro Guerriero named the first exhibition of a new batch of Italian designers in his Studio Alchymia in Milan even teasingly ‘Bau•haus’ [Figure 1.31]. In 1985 Alessandro Mendini, as one of those designers, writes about this in his ‘Alchymia Manifesto’: ‘For Alchimia,\textsuperscript{13} objects must be both “normal” and “abnormal”.\textsuperscript{14} Their ordinariness makes them flow together into everyday reality and into the need for humdrum standardization, whilst their exceptional character removes them from habit and connects them with the need for the unexpected and the accidental, for difference and transgression.’ (cited in: Sato 1988: p. 7).

In this study we are therefore going look for the regularity behind the irregular design practice; looking, as it

\textsuperscript{13} In literature, both ‘Alchymia’ and ‘Alchimia’ are used. In the text the original Italian spelling as ‘Alchymia’ is maintained. However, in citations where the (international) variant ‘Alchimia’ is stated, this spelling is kept unchanged.

\textsuperscript{14} Compare with the ‘Andries’ candle holder by Marcel Wanders from chapter 1.5: the shape of the wine glass is normal and familiar, while the wine glass used as a candle holder is at the same time abnormal.
were, at the straight line in the history of designs that contrast with the straight lines. In this way we hopefully get a little more insight into what you have to do, to express emotionality and meaning in contemporary product design. Again according to Majorick (1959: p. 208): ‘One gradually gets the feeling that we have already bowed too deeply for the machine and that the complete person with his capriciousness, his feeling for the irrational, for the game, et cetera no longer comes into his own.’

The human being and his cultural context appear to be crucial for the correct interpretation of the unruly designed object. Because in relation to the Popper-Kuhn-Feyerabend triad from section 1.4.2 and the perspective of the history of ideas as outlined in section 1.4.4 we can state that, as an object within modernism was characterized as a collection of functionalities - the proverbial machine of Le Corbusier\textsuperscript{14} -, within postmodernism an object must be regarded as a collection of meanings. In chapters two to five, about the unruly design history, the how and why of this transition will be discussed further. In chapter six, the meaning of this transition for design practice is then explained.

The central research question in the underlying treatise is eventually twofold. On the one hand, this book deals with the meaning of postmodernism for design:

*How did unruly design evolve since the rise of postmodernism and what influence did it have on industrial design?*

On the other hand, this book deals with design methodology. After all, it is about what we can ‘put in place’ for the form follows function motto in a literal sense. We ultimately want to know how you could use the insights from the previous question as a designer, that is:

*How can we fruitfully apply the results of the history of unruly designs in contemporary design practice?*

\textsuperscript{14} See paragraph 1.4.2, preceding.
2 **Postmodernism as counter-movement**

In the early 1970s, technological optimism, which was still the result of the positivist but also oppressive reconstruction years, abruptly ended with the publication of *The Limits to Growth* by Dennis Meadows\(^{16}\) and the simultaneous outbreak of the energy crisis (Drukker & van Velzen 2010: pp. 2-5). The belief in progress that was based on a rock-solid trust in the continuous development of new technology that would meet all social needs was brought to an end (Erlhoff et al. 1990: p. 13). Postmodernism, which began as a somewhat obscure movement in autonomous art in the late 1960s (O’Doherty 1971: p. 19), eventually evolved through a variety of social and political movements into an all-embracing feature of our Western capitalist culture (Jameson 1991). Within design this translated into a counter-movement that effectively denounced the modernist form follows function and the corresponding ‘Less is More’ (Drukker 2007). The best known groups were Alchymia (Sato 1988) and Memphis (Horn 1986, Labaco et al. 2006) from Italy. In Germany the postmodernist movement was called ‘Neue Design’ (Erlhoff et al. 1990; Bürdek 1996), a movement that was also related to the English punk (Huygen 1989).

The problem with the loss of functionalism as a guiding design principle, however, was that what was put in its place by the postmodernists did not seem to be a serious alternative. In this book however, it will become clear that despite the initial skepticism, the ideas of the postmodernists eventually turned out to be more successful

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\(^{16}\) *Original title: The Limits to Growth: a Global Challenge,* commissioned by the Club of Rome and published in 1972. The Club of Rome is a private foundation founded in 1968 by scientists, politicians and journalists out of concern for human existence in the future.
[2.1] Martine Bedin – ‘Super Lamp’ – 1981. With its exposed light bulbs this lamp was not really homely. But with its cheerful appearance, the object created an unusual association with toys and perhaps even a kind of pet.

[2.2] Ettore Sottsass – ‘Carlton’ cabinet – 1981. Because the cabinet with its slanted planks was not very functional as a bookcase, Sottsass called his design a ‘room divider’. The ‘cabinet’ was the center piece of the first Memphis collection. The totem pole-like structure is attributed to Sottsass’s contact with non-Western cultures (Bellati 1993: p. 17; Labaco et al. 2006: p. 49).
2.1 Postmodernism

The breakthrough of postmodernism in product design actually came quite late. To be precise: on September 18th, 1981 in the Arc ‘74 gallery in Milan,\(^{17}\) with the opening of the first exhibition of the group of designers that formed around sixty-four-year-old Ettore Sottsass and had named itself Memphis. With, according to the art director of the group and publicist Barbara Radice: ‘thirty-one pieces of furniture, three clocks, ten lamps, eleven ceramics, and twenty-five hundred people’ (Radice 1984: p. 26).

This collection of items, including the ‘Carlton’ cabinet by Ettore Sottsass and the ‘Superlamp’ by Martine Bedin [Figure 2.1 and 2.2], but also lesser-known objects such as the ‘Plaza’ boudoir by Michael Graves and the ‘Hilton’ tea trolley by Javier Mariscal [Figure 2.3 and 2.4], hit as a bomb as it is called. The objects were all equally exuberant in their aesthetics, with a cheerful color palette and wild combinations of shapes. Art critic Richard Horn (1986: p. 19) wrote with an English feeling for understatement: ‘The furniture and lamps in this first collection were striking, to say the least.’

The publicity surrounding the event, effectively coordinated by the aforementioned Barbara Radice, was enormous (Labaco et al. 2006: p. 12). The imaginative title ‘Memphis’ was, according to tradition, borrowed from a song that was played during a founding meeting at Ettore Sottsass’s house. Radice writes; ‘There was a Bob Dylan record on, “Stuck Inside of Mobile with the Mem-

\(^{17}\) Actually Alchymia had already come out earlier with her Bau-haus exhibition (see figure 1.30). Alchymia, however, was not so successful in the media and actually failed to introduce its designs in the market (Bellati 1993: p. 17). More on this topic in paragraph 2.2, following next.
[2.3] Javier Mariscal – ‘Hilton’ trolley – 1981. The Spaniard Mariscal was asked by Ettore Sottsass to take part in the Memphis collection in response to his comic-style ‘Duplex’ bar stool, designed in 1980 for the interior of the club of the same name in Valencia (Ketterer Kunst 2008). In this tea trolley it is mainly the extra rear wheels that give the whole a comical look, due to the confusion that arises over the accompanying associations: on the one hand a transparent and therefore light product and on the other hand a heavy six-axle truck. Also in this product, Mariscal applied a visual language derived from comic-strips with the oblique placement of the uprights that suggest speed.

[2.4] Michael Graves – ‘Plaza’ dressing table – 1981. At the first Memphis exhibition, the extravagant design of American designer Graves was a strange duck, with his emphatic reference to the American Art Deco style of the twenties (Meikle 2005: p. 175). The object seems mainly intended to let yourself imagine you are a contemporary version of a celebrity from the silent movie era.
2.1 Postmodernism

The Memphis designs primarily impressed the design elite, because the collection focused on a wealthy public, through pricing and international distribution via design galleries\(^\text{19}\) [Figure 2.5]. This elitist character was initially not the intention of the designers, who had even included in the founding statute of the group that all designs should be suitable for serial production of ‘if necessary 20,000 pieces’ [Ettore Sottsass (cited in: Hofstede et al. 1989: p. 8)] ‘because we did not want to be equated with “artists”.’

The former director of the Italian lamp company Artemide, Ernesto Gismondi, was prepared by the group to take over the commercial management. With his network and financial resources, he was an important factor in the creation and dissemination of the Memphis designs (Radice 1984, Hofstede et al. 1989). The design, construction and manner of presentation of the designs made the products in a certain sense into art objects after all. In any case provided with certain characteristics of works of art. Gismondi says about this: ‘For the actual distribution of Memphis it must be understood that the products could only be sold to a limited public who adheres to a certain culture and has certain economic possibilities.’ [... because] ‘a product can not be made in series just because the designer thinks it is possible’ (Hofstede et al. 1989: p. 11). Moreover, it is of course a form of elitism when, as a consumer, purchase a ‘bookcase’ in which you can not actually store books. You are only able do this if you already have another bookcase to file them.

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\(^{18}\) Kitsch is according to the dictionary: ‘art, decorative objects, or design considered by many people to be ugly, without style, or false but enjoyed by other people, often because they are funny’ [Cambridge Dictionary 2017] and is associated with baroque, cliché, neo-styles and fake objects.

\(^{19}\) In the Netherlands for instance in Galerie Copi at the Prinsenstraat in Den Haag [The Hague] (Hofstede et al. 1989: pp. 8-9).
The central figure of the group, Sottsass, stated that the big difference between an art object and design was for him, that there was a context around it: ‘[...] that you have to design an entire environment or rather that you have to work for an environment. The artist, on the other hand, is working on the completion of a work of art, which in itself is finished’ (Hofstede et al. 1989: p. 8).

The question is, however, whether this was successfully applied in the collection. Most objects had a rather compelling form language, which required a modest and reserved environment. Gismondi says: ‘There are only two houses that are exclusively furnished by Memphis objects and they both belong to Lagerfeld: one of our most important customers in the initial phase. After one has spent three minutes there, one wants to shoot oneself in the head.’ (Hofstede et al. 1989: pp. 11-12) [Figure 2.6 and 2.7].

Ettore Sottsass himself later was not in favor of too many Memphis objects together in one room (Sottsass et al. 1988: p. 94) and Richard Horn, in his book on the movement, also gave a cautious interior advice: ‘Memphis’ 1981 collection included Martine Bedin’s little “Super” lamp [...], which looks a bit like an electric porcupine [Figure 2.1]. This lamp will not provide much light; however, in a sparsely furnished room with lots of floor space, it might be kept on the floor as a design objet.’ (Horn 1986: p. 32)

All in all, the designs of the Memphis group were therefore extravagant, expensive, rare and not very functional. The fact that it was not possible to make the Memphis designs everyday objects for a large audience does not, however, mean that they did not succeed in reaching a large audience through all media attention for the movement, including various exhibitions20 and publications. In this way, the group ensured the definitive introduction of a more figurative, visual and user-oriented design. From that time, form-giving also focused on the users emotion, rather than just on the intrinsic structure of the object itself. This approach has been followed ever since, although the specific form language of the Memphis group (bright colors, decorative patterns and excessive use of geometric forms21) after being copied a

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20 Also in the Netherlands: in 1984 the exhibition Memphis was organised in Museum Kruithuis den Bosch (Joris et al. 1984). In 1989 the Groninger Museum had a retrospective titled Memphis; 1981-1988 (Hofstede et al. 1989).

21 Summarized as such by design historian Penny Sparke (Labaco et al. 2006: p. 12).

lot,\textsuperscript{22} quickly became out of fashion again. This was also the idea of the designers themselves. Radice summarizes it as: ‘Memphis never feared fashion, being a fashion, or going out of fashion. [...] I quote from my introduction to the catalogue, the statement that perhaps caused the greatest uproar at the time of the presentation in 1981: “We are all sure that Memphis furniture will soon go out of style.”’ (Radice 1984: pp. 185-186).

At the end of the nineties Memphis was already history, while the mainstream was not even used to the new exuberance. An art critic spoke of the ambivalence of the general public to all this novelty, following a retrospective of Mendini in 1989 in Ghent: ‘Our reservations about this exhibition should not withhold the exhibition itself from being very strange and certainly worthwhile to go see.’ (De Wilde 1989).

\textsuperscript{22} Richard Horn writes as early as in 1986 that; ‘The Memphis “look”, [...], will remain, as is abundantly evident from the way affordable nonelitist Memphis-like designs have started entering the market.’ (Horn 1986: p. 29).
[2.8] Robert Venturi – ‘Road Scene from God’s Own Junkyard’ – 1964/1972, seen from inside a car the advertising sign is more important than the building itself. Adopted by Venturi from: Peter Blake, God’s Own Junkyard (1979: p. 124).

[2.10] Robert Venturi – Advertising for Caesar’s Palace in Las Vegas – 1972, ‘The sign is more important than the architecture. [...] The sign at the front is vulgar extravaganza, the building at the back a modest necessity.’ (Venturi et al. 1977: p. 13).

2.2 The preamble

As mentioned, the postmodern breakthrough in the design discipline came pretty late in 1981. The revolutions that led to the rise of postmodernism mainly took place in the 1970s and the publication of Robert Venturi’s *Learning from Las Vegas* in 1972 and Charles Jencks’ *The language of Post-Modern architecture* in 1977 had already introduced the new view on designing in architecture much earlier. Moreover, in 1971 Brian O’Doherty wrote in his editorial introduction to the influential art magazine *Art in America*: ‘Now that the modernist era (1848-1969?) is over, [...] we speak of postmodernism’ (O’Doherty 1971: p. 19).

However, O’Doherty did not want to give a clear definition of postmodernism at the time, despite the promising title of his piece (*What is post-modernism?):* ‘Though it is our diagnosis for what surrounds us, one never hears it defined. Perhaps there is an unconscious agreement to withhold a definition, partly because everyone’s definition will expose the confusion the word is designed to cover.’ (O’Doherty 1971: p. 19).

He did, however, argue that modernism itself had mainly degenerated into a movement that had made definite frameworks about how art should be made (i.e. process related) in order to be modern art. Postmodernism then implies a lack or denial of these processes of ‘good taste’. However, without that O’Doherty was aware of it, this is in my opinion, a fairly good definition of postmodernism, as is evident from the conclusion of the introduction chapter: *The catalogue of unruly designed products*
‘Sometimes the building is the sign: the duck store in the shape of a duck, called “The Long Island Duckling”, is sculptural symbol and architectural shelter.’ (Venturi et al. 1977: p. 13).

consists of all those objects that have been designed from the perspective of undermining the existing design paradigm of functionalism.

Unruly design is therefore mainly anything that previously was not allowed by functionalism. According to the same line of argument, one can say that postmodern design can be anything, as long as it is not modernistic (Drukker 2007). This view, however, creates a void and a lack of grip that at that moment still urged for a new interpretation.

In the publication *Learning from Las Vegas*, the American architect Robert Venturi started with a cultural interpretation of the concept, in his case focused on architecture. As the title aptly indicates, Venturi argued that we as designers should be more aware of the virtues of popular culture. In his argument Las Vegas, with its many, emphatically present and instantly recognisable advertising signs, served as an example for this new vision of design [Figure 2.8 - 2.11].

The direct recognisability had to provide architecture with more expressiveness for the user. So: no abstract modernist buildings that refer mainly to *themselves*, but rather a direct form of signification by making use of recognizable symbols, references to history, or references to an ‘indigenous’ architecture. Venturi called this ‘vernacular design’. According to Venturi, ‘beautiful’ old cities like Rome were also not based on a tight system and are of course full of symbolism and ornamentation. In its most extreme form, this system of direct meaning produced even products that only consisted of a symbol. Venturi shows in his book the example of the ‘Long Island Duckling’: a snack bar selling fried duck, literally built in the shape of a duck [Figure 2.12].

It should be clear that these kinds of examples belong exactly to what was called kitsch in that time, especially by functionalists. Nonetheless, Venturi’s plea for an external - from outside the object itself - and consumer-oriented symbolism touched a nerve, and in the Netherlands too it emerged in the debate about good design (Simon Thomas 2008: pp. 179-186). Commissioned by


the Stichting Industriële Vormgeving [Industrial Design Foundation] in Amsterdam, in the same year Simon Mari Pruys published a study on the question ‘what industrial design is or should be’. From a biological-evolutionary conception of design he came to the conclusion that man has a kind of inborn preference for recognisability: ‘In short, if it is clear that design as the most fundamental principle has the aim of adaptation, first the physical and then the psychical, with the aim of equilibrium, stability, harmony and the absence of (in) tension, then it has also become clear on what primordial basis the preferences for kitsch and antiques are based “(Pruys 1972: p. 18). According to Pruys, product design served the convenience of the human being: nostalgia is inevitably handy from an evolutionary point of view, because then the user does not have to make any (mental) effort to ‘interpret’ an object. The recognisability of ‘The Long Island Duckling’ is in that vision a very good design: no one will have to make any significant effort to realize that this is about ducks. Seen in this way, the preference for kitsch and antiques that Pruys talks about is essentially the same as the preference for vernacular design in the vision of Venturi.23

In 1977, in addition to Venturi, Charles Jencks published The language of Post-Modern architecture, containing the theory of ‘dual coding’.24 With this theory he argued that a postmodern building is a postmodern building if it has a double symbolic function. In that case the building not only refers to itself as a building, but also to other things outside itself, which should give it more meaning for the viewer or user (Jencks 1984: pp. 5-8). As an example he used the Portland Building in Chicago by architect Michael Graves [Figure 2.13]. The building that houses the municipal services derives its stately appearance from a couple of adorned ornaments that resemble Greek pillars and, although it is not made of brick, it is still executed in typical stone colors. The layered green base also refers to the impressive staircases of an old stock exchange building. All these are clearly external meanings, which do not refer to the construction or the actual use of materials in the building itself.

Applied in this way, there is of course a high risk of creating a ludicrous situation, something similar to the

23 Ironically in this respect, Pruys himself was an orthodox modernist.

24 Jencks uses both the terms ‘dual-coding’ and ‘double-coding’ mixed up.
[2.16] Rem Koolhaas and Zoe Zenghelis – ‘The City of the Captive Globe’ design drawing – 1972, in the design of a fictional city, all types of styles are incorporated by reference to well-known works of art. The buildings are placed on a pedestal like statues.


[2.18] Alessandro Mendini – ‘Redesigning Gerit Rietveld’ – 1978, symbol of modernistic design remodelled into a symbol of a ‘design religion’. The combination of two very recognizable symbols - the zig-zag chair itself and the cross - also accounts for recognition and alienation at the same time. An additional layer of meaning is added because the cross can evoke the association with pews, which, much like the zig-zag chair, are designed implicitly as a spartan way of sitting.

[2.19] Alessandro Mendini – ‘Redesigning Gio Ponti’ – 1978, from the series ‘Redesigning the Modern Movement; Irony for Great Work’ for Studio Alchymia. The cheerfully waving flags make the superleggera not only visually lighter, but also ‘light-footed’. At the same time, the ‘useless’ additions are at odds with the functionalist taboo on ornamentation.
2.2 Preamble

Long-Island Duckling that Venturi cites. Jencks is aware of the dangers: ‘Underlying much of what I have been saying so far is the notion of the cliché – the fact that the architectural language, like the spoken one, must use known units of meaning.’ (Jencks 1984: p. 52). By advocating working with clearly identifiable meanings, he is aware that the cliché is lurking [Figure 2.14]. Jencks, however, undermines his own theory, because you can not be in favor of recognisability and at the same time against the cliché. After all the cliché does not mean anything other than an excessive form of recognisability. This way of working with recognisable meanings, however, had to ensure a better communication with the public. Something that according to Jencks the modernist architecture was (eventually) not able to.

Now it should be clear that the design avant-garde could not just start to design ‘antiques’, ‘folk art’ and ‘kitsch’ to communicate with the public. That would actually be no more than reactionary conservatism. The recognisability that Pruys, Venturi and Jencks talked about had to be applied or called upon in another - more interesting - way. A less direct example of recognisability in architecture than the ‘Face House’ of Kazumasa Yamashita is the fictional city of Rem Koolhaas and Zoe Zenghelis [Figure 2.16]. Here the recognisability is also duplicated, but not in the manner of Jenck’s theory. Koolhaas and Zenghelis have created a kind of internal tension in the whole because of the literal combination of two different worlds that do not directly relate to each other - architecture and works of art. This makes the objects recognizable and yet alienating at the same time, just like the wine glass-as-candle holder by Marcel Wanders.25

In addition to the introduction of the innovative aspect of direct meaning, it was of course also necessary to ‘settle’ with the modernists. After all, postmodernism was deliberately all that modernism was not. The Italian designer Alessandro Mendini did this humorously in his series ‘Redesigning the Modern Movement; Irony for Great Work’ in 1978. Together with the adapted ‘Superleggera’ by Giò Ponti [Figure 2.19], the Rietveld chair in the series is (perhaps unintentionally) a strong statement [Figure 2.18]. Through the addition of the religious con-

25 See chapter 1.5, figure 1.30, preceding.
Alessandro Mendini – ‘Poltronova di Proust’ (Proust’s new lounge chair) – 1978, the recognizable shape of a Louis-Quinze armchair is accompanied by an equally recognizable impressionistic pointilism motif. Because the two ‘recognizables’ normally have nothing to do with each other, an alienating effect arises. The chair is still for sale as a re-edition with the Italian furniture maker Cappelini.

Alessandro Mendini – ‘Kandissi’ sofa – 1978, exhibited in the Palazzo dei Diamanti in Ferrara, where Sottsass and Branzi also presented. Later the sofa was also part of the ‘bau∙haus’ exhibition at Studio Alchymia in 1979.

Alchimia – ‘Banal Object’ – 1980, Alessandro Mendini exhibited together with Franco Raggi, Daniela Puppa and Paola Navone a whole series of this kind of ‘stuffed up’ everyday objects at the Venice Biennale. The interaction between the pointy additions and the curved shape of the original object - a citrus press - suggests a cockscomb or the spiny back of a dragon. The control arm of the device becomes literally an arm (or a paw) through this association with humans or animals.
2.2 Preamble

Notation of the cross it has become a sharp comment on the modern movement. Because of the strict design principles, this movement had merely evolved into a dogmatic ‘design-religion’ (Drukker 2007). The other objects in the series were more straightforward when it comes to adaptation, for example a plastic chair by Joe Colombo was provided with drip-painting following the example of Jackson Pollock’s artworks. Mendini created the series for an exhibition by Studio Alchymia, which was founded in 1976 by Sandro Guerriero in Milan. Originally a graphic design agency, Alchymia was best known in 1978 for its role as exhibition space annex gallery for the local design avant-garde, which also included Ettore Sottsass, Andrea Branzi and Michele De Lucchi (Sato 1988).

Around the same time Mendini made a number of designs that were based on, according to Mendini himself, research into the visual language of ‘kitsch’ and ‘banality’ (Radice 1984: p. 24). In his research, Mendini tried to enliven everyday objects with ornamentation, in order to accentuate the banality (in the sense of everyday life) of the objects and thereby to put their supposed seriousness into perspective (Branzi 1984: pp. 122-126). [Figure 2.20]. The most striking results of the kitch research were the ‘Proust’ armchair and the ‘Kandissi’ sofa, which were exhibited several times [Figure 2.21 and 2.22]. The armchair is again the best known, probably because its archetypal Louis Quinze-style shape is most clearly recognizable.

Ultimately, the concept of ‘kitsch’ is of course problematic in combination with postmodern design. After all, according to the motto ‘anything goes’, everything is possible, including ‘art, decorative objects, or design considered by many people to be ugly, without style, or false’. The explicit value judgment in the term kitsch, in the sense that it is the opposite of a good design as the functionalists put it, is no longer tenable. The greatest legacy of Mendini and associates is therefore, that they have made the use of recognizable neo-styles - which until then have been called kitsch - salofähig. Olivier Boissière describes it as: ‘a laboratory [...] for objects and micro-environments, [...] a kind of perpetual fire of aesthetic agitation where, under the stamp of ‘banal’,

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26 See also the poster for this exhibition in chapter 1.6 (Figure 1.31), preceding.
27 See also paragraph 1.4.4, table 1.1, preceding.
28 The rest of the series contained adaptations of the well-known high backed ‘Hillhouse’ chair by Charles Rennie Mackintosh, the bentwood café chair by Michael Thonet, the tubular steel ‘Wassily’ chair by Marcel Breuer and the plastic stacking chair ‘Universale’ by Joe Colombo (Sato 1988: pp. 197-198).
29 The substantive ‘research’ is maybe overrated, however this study of form could nowadays be characterised as ‘research through design’ (Frayling 1993).
Michele de Lucchi – ‘Girmi’ series of household appliances – 1979, wooden prototypes produced for the Milan triennial (Radice 1984: p. 22). The geometric shapes are arranged and coloured in such a way that the devices – just like the furniture pieces of Aldo Cibic – do remind of toys.

Philips – Iron HD1207 – 1976, example of excellent Dutch design from the catalogue accompanying the exhibition ‘Design from the Netherlands | Design aus den Niederlanden’ in 1980. The exhibition was organised for promoting Dutch design abroad and was curated by Gijs Bakker (!) (Bakker 1980: p. 46).
folk culture and kitsch were encapsulated’ (Bellati 1993: p. 17)

That the form language of the designs of the members of Alchymia, even without neo-influence, clashed with the prevailing late-modernistic design conceptions of the industry, is clearly visible when we compare the experimental designs for household appliances of Michele De Lucchi with a mainstream model of the same era [Figure 2.23 - 2.25]. In the prototypes of De Lucchi, the abstract geometric forms, which the modernists normally used, are applied in such a way that the whole is more reminiscent of a happy children’s fantasy world. The fan can even be interpreted as a flower in a jar. Here, too, the meaning of the aesthetics is directed externally and the primary functionality comes second place. The flower fan will never even work in this form because the blue disk will prevent the flow of air along the propellor.

Despite the innovative ideas, however, Alchymia as a design collective was quickly eclipsed by the later Memphis group (Horn 1986: p.19). Sottsass left Alchymia in 1980 out of dissatisfaction with the course of Guerriero, who only had an eye for exhibitions, happenings and the accompanying cultural polemic (Burney 1991: p. 141), and was not interested in the next step: the production of the designs (Radice 1984: p. 25). Michele De Lucchi and Andrea Branzi would follow Sottsass later. Mendini stayed with Alchymia and from 1980 onwards also played an important role in the attention for postmodern design as editor-in-chief of the Italian Design magazine Domus [Figure 2.26]. He saw his work as an editor as an extension of the work as a designer: ‘My job is to create a tool for thinking, and this is also the job of a magazine. Fragments, words, memories, encounters – ... they can all be objects.’ (Sato 1988: p. 206) [Figure 2.27]. Not much later he would also play an important role in the dissemination of the postmodern vision as an advisor to the Italian company Alessi.32

30 See paragraph 1.4.4, preceding.
31 See chapter 4.1, following next; later Gijs Bakker would play a decisive role in the development of unruly design as one of the initiators of Droog Design.
32 See chapter 3.1 and paragraph 3.2.2, following next.
Alchymia – project ‘Occhiomagico’ Cover Design for Domus magazine – 1983, displaying a design for a ‘jumpsuit’ by Cinzia Ruggeri from the ‘Statue of Liberty’ series: ‘Ruggeri’s dress designs make use of new expressive technologies: […] The ‘Statue of Liberty’ garment included micro-ventilators inserted into the dress so that the sleeves puff out.’ (Branzi 1984: p. 95). The Domus magazine was – with Mendini in the role of editor-in-chief – a grateful platform for the dissemination of the wildest postmodern ideas.
2.2 Preamble
Herman Waldenburg – ‘Früchteschale’ (Fruit bowl) – 1986, the reuse of cheap clothes hangers dictates the shape of the object that is meant as a luxurious showpiece.


Stiletto Studio’s – ‘Consumer’s rest No.11’ – 1983-1986, transformed supermarket cart, sandblasted and varnished to get a golden effect. Produced in 1986, however the prototype was already developed in 1983. The cheap, ubiquitous supermarket trolley was seen as a symbol of the buying power of the masses. In combination with the luxurious appearance of the gold finish, the object should make the people aware of the - in left-wing eyes - ‘unbridled consumerism’.

Herman Waldenburg – ‘Früchteschale’ (Fruit bowl) – 1986, the reuse of cheap clothes hangers dictates the shape of the object that is meant as a luxurious showpiece.
2.3 **Neue Design and Punk**

In Germany, the counter-movement, even a bit later than in Italy, did not start until the mid-1980s with the so-called ‘Neue Design’, which showed affinity with English *punk*. The Neue Design was at the same time much more a political-social movement than its Italian counterpart. Memphis had a strong positive message; design had to be done ‘for the people’ and less directly at the service of the companies most designers worked for (Hofstede et al. 1989: pp. 8-9). The designs of Sottsass cs. therefore offered a cheerful visual language and a positive view of the (post-) modern interior. The designs from the German school of that time were especially opposed to the mass consumption and were thus more a response to the warnings of the Club of Rome in *limits to growth* than their Italian colleagues. Much work was done with the reuse of materials, cheap materials and direct quotations from consumerism. One of the best-known examples is the converted supermarket trolley from Stiletto Studios [Figure 2.28]. But the designs by, for example, Herman Waldenburg, Ulrike Holthofer and Axel Kufus follow the same pattern [Figure 2.29 and 2.30].

The supermarket trolley design got a lot of imitation in the rooms of socially aware students at the time. Often supplemented with a second-hand car seat according to the concept of the ‘Rover Chair’ by Ron Arad, who was a representative of the English punk-design movement. Stiletto also made an interesting cutlery set, made of reinforcing steel as used in concrete [Figure 2.31].

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33 See figure 2.41, following next.


(re) use of cheap (waste) materials was a theme that had already popped up in the German design landscape earlier. In 1974, a group of designers at the Hochschule für Gestaltung in Offenbach developed a first series of designs based on ‘recycling’ under the name des-in (Bürdek 1996: pp. 56-57). The most appealing design of the collection was the ‘Tire Sofa’ by Jochen Gros [Figure 2.32]. That this way of dealing with waste could not make a serious contribution to the eco-problem, however, became clear soon (Erlhoff et al. 1990). The representatives of the Neue Design therefore used the principle not so much as an environmentally-friendly alternative, but as social criticism. In this way, the meaning of the objects for the user and society also took center stage. Just like with the other postmodern design groups in Italy, the functionality of the objects became second.

If Stiletto’s supermarket chair is a comment on mass consumption, the ‘Kumpel II’ table by Axel Stumpf is a commentary on the relation of the elite versus the labour movement [Figure 2.33]. The luxurious and fragile glass top of the coffee table is supported by picks that symbolize the hard workers at the bottom of society. ‘Kumpel’ stands for a miner. In the 1980s this was a tricky issue in Germany with the violent kidnapping actions of the ultra-left-wing Rote Armee Fraction - self-proclaimed advocates of the workers’ society - and the labour unrest surrounding the closure of most mines still fresh in the memory.

Axel Stumpf called the direct combination of recognisable objects from different contexts a form of ‘collage making’: ‘Ich habe eine Variation der cut-up-Methode entwickelt, die ich cut-to-gather nenne: Ein Möbel oder Möbelteil – von mir selbst oder von einem anderen – wird zerteilt und mit einem anderen Möbelteil verbunden – die beiden oder mehrere Möbelteile werden zusammen ‘geschnitten’. Die cut-to-gather-Methode bereichert die Gestaltung um die Möglichkeit der Rückblende [Flashback – WE], wie sie im Film benutzt wird & gestattet es dem Designer, sich auf seiner Zeitspur vor & zurück zu bewegen. (Borngraeber & Van der Geer 1986: p. 23). Gwendolyn Ristant added to this; “This is one of the keynotes of “New Design”, the presentation of familiar things in an unfamiliar light, so that irrita-
[2.34] Kunstflug (Charly Hüskes, Hardy Fischer, Harald Hullman and Heiko Bartels) – Hocker ‘Max Schrill’ – 1989, designed for the student housing at the Strathclyde University in Glasgow.


tion will allow us to gain a new experience of objects.’ (Erlhoff et al. 1990: p. 209). This practice of presenting recognizable forms in a different context was one to one comparable with the working methods of the Italian designers from Memphis and Alchymia. At the same time, the Neue Design was not only a ‘different’ presentation of well-known objects, but also one big set against functionalism, the dominant movement that had been invented in Germany itself and in that time had its strictest representatives at the Hochschule für Gestaltung in Ulm. This is clear - but also a bit bland - in the design ‘Max Schril’ by design collective Kunstflug, a pastiche on the famous hocker that was designed in 1954 by Max Bill, Hans Gugelot and Paul Hildinger for the same Hochschule [Figure 2.34 en 2.35].

The redesign of the hocker by Kunstflug with the different style quotes, similar to the work of Axel Stumpf as a sort of collage of arbitrary parts that are glued together, show that the original design of Bill and associates was not at all a pure materialization of the function, but rather a choice for a certain style. Thomas Hauffe explains: ‘Formal war der ‘Umbau’ des ‘Ulmer Hockers’ ein gewollter ästhetischer Bruch, praktisch aber stellte er eine funktionale Optimierung dar. Durch diese Umkehrung sollte gezeigt werden, daß beim ursprünglichen ‘Ulmer Hocker’ die Funktionalität dem ästhetischen Gestaltungswille nachgeordnet war.’ (Hauffe 1994: p. 72). The design of Kunstflug thus had to show that the shape of the Ulmer Hocker did not stem directly from the function fulfillment. The shape of the Ulmer Hocker should then be seen as the materialization of the idea of the functionality of the hocker: with a minimum of resources (also including visual resources) providing a stool with multiple functions as a seating object, a lectern and a book carrier. According to Hauffe, the choice for this visually spartan solution dictated the use and not the other way around. After all, you could only sit on the hard seat for a short time and you had to walk very carefully if you were carrying your books, otherwise your stuff would directly fall on the floor. This reversal was of course against the sore leg of the functionalists, who were really convinced that their design coincided directly with the functioning of their products. And if that was not the case, then at least with the production

[2.38] Andreas Brandolini – ‘Living Room’ – 1987, installation as exhibited that year at the art manifestation Documenta 8 in Kassel. Interior objects from Neue Design presented as art. In the left corner we can see the ‘Pony Express’ television set.


[2.38] The facade of design gallery ‘Weinand’, at the Wieland-strasse, close to the Kurfürstendamm in Berlin in 1985. The bullet holes were real impacts of an armed robbery in the windows of a former bank (Hauffe 1994). Note the unusable chair at the front left of the shop window, later we will see this idea again.

[2.39] Andreas Brandolini – ‘Living Room’ – 1987, installation as exhibited that year at the art manifestation Documenta 8 in Kassel. Interior objects from Neue Design presented as art. In the left corner we can see the ‘Pony Express’ television set.

2.3 Neue Design and Punk

In the meantime, *Neue Design* did not seek inspiration in function or production method, but based its creations on finds from the street or otherwise previously unknown sources. In this way, the designs became in a sense more like ‘storytellers’, or even better ‘story recal-lers’. An example of such a story recaller is the ‘Pony Express’ by Andreas Brandolini, a television table that refers to the spaghetti-westerns that can be watched on the television that it should carry [Figure 2.36]. Or the lamp by Gabriel Kornreich that refers to nature and the role of the sun with its artificial flowers and arc-shaped fluorescent tube [Figure 2.37]. To reinforce the narrative effect, the thing was given the ominous title ‘Lichtkranz für die Ewigkeit’ [Nimbus for eternity]. With these designs, it is no longer a matter of being able to do something with the product, but of the product doing something with you. Kornreich himself says about this: ‘letztenlich sollen meine Entwürfe den Menschen in irgend einer Weise berühren.’ (Borngraeber & Van der Geer 1986: p. 12).

The consequence of this view is that products became more and more artefacts, and as with the Memphis group, the ‘design gallery’ played an important role in the dissemination of the ideas of Neue Design. In this case especially the *Wienand* gallery in Berlin [Figure 2.38]. Christian Borngraeber also places this development in a broader international context: ‘Working with prototypes, orginals in smaller series is not only typical of German avant-garde design. [...] Furniture, fashion and art craft are made in small workshops today. In some large cities you will find the corresponding shop type: the design gal- lery. [...] In Berlin, since autumn 1985, the design gallery Herbert Jakob Weinand exists. His storefront, which can be seen from the Kurfürstendamm, consists of safety glass shelled with bullets. The hurried passer-by remains standing, is first confused and then fascinated.’ (Borngraeber & Van der Geer 1986: pp. 4-5).

In this way not only the designs themselves were ‘story-tellers’, but the environment in which they were presented also shaped a part of the web of meanings that the...
Ron Arad – 'Concrete Stereo' – 1985, included in the collection of Museum Boijmans van Beuningen in Rotterdam. The raw concrete was a reaction to the conventional black box design of electronic equipment [Figure 2.44].

Ron Arad – 'Rover' two-seater – 1981, this is the two-seat version of the famous 'Rover Chair', built around existing car seats. The design became known to the general public when it was later used as a prop in the popular BBC car program Top Gear.


Ron Arad – 'Concrete Stereo' – 1985, included in the collection of Museum Boijmans van Beuningen in Rotterdam. The raw concrete was a reaction to the conventional black box design of electronic equipment [Figure 2.44].
user could associate with the products. The link with art has since been strengthened by the presentation of these objects on the five-yearly Documenta in Kassel, and Gwendolyn Ristant writes in 1990: "the presentation of this different kind of design at the 1987 “Documenta 8”, the world’s largest and most famous art show, caused a sensation [...] and] New design groups emerged (Bellefast, Pentagon, Ginbande, Stiletto, Möbel Perdu, Berliner Design-Werkstatt, Berliner Zimmer, etc.)’ (Erlhoff et al. 1990: p. 208), [Figure 2.39 – 2.41].

In England, in the meantime, Ron Arad did something similar by putting a car seat on a tubular frame and casting a stereo installation in concrete [Figure 2.42 and 2.43]. After completing his studies in architecture, Arad wanted to rebell against the mainstream black-box design of that time, which was even applied by the design-conscious Italian Olivetti corporation [Figure 2.44]. Although it is presented in a postmodern manner as a work of art on a pedestal, the object itself is mainly a smooth black box, despite the fact that Olivetti wanted to focus more explicitly on the consumer with a less ‘technical’ design. In one of the numerous books on the corporate design of the firm it cited: ‘It is a field of products in which there is an increasing market among private consumers, for the home office of the future. [...] While the products remained technically refined, they as a consequence required a more consumer-oriented design stance.’ (Kicherer 1990: p. 109).

Just like Arad, Daniel Weil challenged the common design practice with his inadequate electronics products in which the various components were visible on the outside [Figure 2.45] (Dormer 1990: p. 29). This approach provided Weil a lot of attention in media and museums, but hardly any orders from the British industry (McDermott 1987: p. 114).

Around the same time, Arad started his own shop in 1983 in order to sell his designs. The shop was called One-off and located in a trendy neighborhood in London (Huygen 1989: p. 133). Just like the gallery Wienand in Berlin a kind of design-gallery, where also work of kindred spirits was shown [Figure 2.46].
Mario Bellini – Olivetti ET compact 60 – 1985, a portable electronic typewriter for Olivetti. Representative of the black box design against which Ron Arad rebelled.

Ron Arad – ‘One-Off-Shop’ – interior of Arad’s own version of the design gallery, from 1983 to 1989 located in London’s Covent Garden district.

Daniel Weil – ‘Morbid Clock’ – 1982, just like Ron Arad’s Concrete Stereo, a commentary on the anonymity of mainstream electronic equipment.
Frederique Huygen analyzed the English design culture at the end of the period: ‘In my opinion, tradition is the pivot of British culture, including the counter-reactions to this tradition, expressed in shocking or humorous eccentricity. Precisely because the tradition is so strong, the counter-reactions are so intense. The British design moves between two extreme poles: tradition and eccentricism. According to Peter York,34 the main specialties of Britain are punk and pomp.’ (Huygen 1989: p. 32) [Figure 2.47 – 2.50].


[2.49] Jamie Reid – ‘God save the queen’ record sleeve for Virgin Records – 1977, the recalcitrant punk band Sex Pistols was the mouthpiece of the ‘No future’ generation at the end of the seventies. The cover of the single, which was released during the silver jubilee of Queen Elizabeth, pokes fun at the pomp and splendor of the English royals.

2.4 Conclusion

2.4 Postmodernisme is not a full-fledged successor yet

All these unruly design activities led to a lot of new insights, such as the importance of recognisability, the possibilities of the reuse of materials and the revaluation of the phenomenon of decoration. In the end, however, the counter-movement went down like a ‘stuck-up style’, analogous to the ‘downfall’ of the damned functionalism, which it had caused itself. Ed van Hinte describes it in his book about Richard Hutten: ‘[…] In the early days of functionalism […] the emphasis was on constraints as well, because there simply was no clear predefined image of, for instance, what a purely functional chair should look like. Form evolved from the demand for a comfortable body support and simple technology. When it did become clear, as functional design matured, functionalism gradually turned into a style with certain aesthetic rules, just one style among many others. This always seems to be authenticity’s destiny.’ (Van Hinte 2002: p. 200). Thus the postmodernists were also accused of being no more than a certain form language: a style, among many others. The exuberance of the design with which the designers had set themselves against functionalism was in the long run seen as something superficial, a trick, which made postmodern designs only look more and more like their postmodern brothers and sisters.

This reproach is not entirely justified after all, since we have seen in section 2.2 that the postmodernists and their kindred spirits from *Neue Design* and *punk* have certainly produced a new vision of design. The products of the unruly designers from this period have, as it were,
Alessandro Mendini – ‘Renault Super 5’ – 1985, the design is lively and original, but has little to do with the underlying car. A critic observes: ‘the emergence of a style on which we can easily stick the label Mannerism. [...] The added decoration no longer seems to arise logically from the basic design of the object, but leads a second life independently of its wearer. We saw something similar earlier in the 19th century. The entire object comes across as ‘artificial’ (De Wilde 1989).
turned the design inside out. Due to their activities, the cultural significance of the product for its environment became more important than the intrinsic function of the object itself. Moreover, by making visible the importance of this cultural significance, they have ensured an important relativization of the dogmatic functionalist design canon. In the elaboration of this attack on functionalism, however, the original use function of the objects remained rather underexposed, in for example the Carlton ‘room divider’ of Ettore Sottsass. As a result, postmodern design was not exactly embraced by the established industry, and this vision of design was merely limited to objects from the world of applied art: tables, chairs, lamps, dishes and related domestic objects. At the same time, this strengthened the idea of superficiality.

The problem with superficiality is adequately phrased by Ghislaine Kieft: ‘A problem for modernism was to be ‘speechless’ in their designs [...] For Sottsass and his peers the problem is, it seems to me, not so much to talk, but also to be eloquent, that is, to provide us with powerful, significant, concise images; metaphors that can convince us, and that transcend mere irony.’ (Kieft 1984: p. 26). Peter Zec at the same time sighs about the Neue Design: ‘Wir ersetzen immer das alte Dogma durch ein neues Dogma.’ (Hauffe 1994: p. 150). Nonetheless, exactly the Neue Design would become an important source of inspiration for the next generation of unruly designers who would be known in the nineties under the name of ‘Droog Design’ (Ramakers 1993: pp. 44-47).

‘Anything goes’ as a nihilistic successor to the dogmatic modernist design religion (Drukker 2007) seemed all in all a hardly tempting perspective, but turned out to be there to stay, because, as Gwendolyn Ristant rightly remarked; ‘The discussion of the eighties [...] has led to a broader notion of design. It has now become common, not only among young designers, to think about design in conceptual terms.’ (Erlhoff et al. 1990: p. 207). Exactly that conceptual thinking we will find again later, taking a central role.
[3.1] Aldo Rossi – Coffee and Tea service for Alessi – 1983, Rossi emphasized the ritual aspect of tea making and tea drinking by storing the objects as religious relics in a temple-shaped chest. According to Alberto Alessi, the end result looked more like a building than tableware (Mendini et al. 1983: p. 5).
3 Unruliness becomes mainstream

In the period from 1985 to about 1995 the ideas of postmodernism were incorporated in a part of the established - read: industrial - design practice and the emotionality also became increasingly prominent in everyday product design. Especially the Alessi company played an important role in this, by hiring postmodernists like Andrea Branzi, Philippe Starck and Stefano Giovannoni (Gabra-Liddell et al. 1996; Alessi 1999). The cheerful products from the ‘Family Follows Fiction’ series eventually unleashed a real craze of products based on comic-like characters or abstracted animals. The company Philips also ensured, thanks to the new head designer Stefano Marzano and the work of Robert Blaich (Bürdek 1996: pp. 235-236), that the new signification ended up not only in the standard design objects such as fruit trays, chairs and crockery, but also in electrical appliances.
Michael Graves – Kettle – 1985, Graves placed a flute in the shape of a bird on the spout. A form of ornamentation that refers directly to classical architecture, but also to the function of the product itself.
3.1 **Alessi and Starck**

The Italian family business Alessi already had a long tradition of working with artists and famous designers when, at the instigation of Alberto Alessi and Alessandro Mendini, postmodernism was finally won with the ‘Tea & Coffee Piazza’ project. According to an idea from Mendini, eleven prominent architects were invited in 1980 to freely develop a tea and/or coffee service in the studios of Alessi in Crusinallo in northern Italy. The results were produced in a limited edition and were presented internationally in two design galleries in October 1983: the Chiesa di San Carpoforo/Centro Internazionale di Brera in Milan and the Max Protetch Gallery in New York. Alberto Alessi was delighted with the results, despite the atypical outcomes for that time: ‘From it [the project] Alessi certainly emerges enriched as regards design and mass production too. It does not matter if some of these coffee-pots look more like buildings than coffee-pots...’ (Mendini et al. 1983: p. 5) [Figure 3.1].

As a direct consequence, the project resulted in collaboration with Michael Graves. This collaboration became one of Alessi’s greatest successes, after earlier adventures with artists turned out to lead nowhere. The whistling kettle designed by architect Michael Graves for Alessi was immediately embraced by the public, thanks to the clear design and anecdotal familiarity of the singing bird [Figure 3.2]. The kettle became the best selling object of the firm with more than two million pieces sold within twenty years (Graves & Associates 2008). With this, Michael Graves and Alberto Alessi, according to Daniel

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35 This was even before the first presentation of Memphis in Milan(!), however, had already been active in postmodern design with Alchymia since 1979. The final presentation of the silverware was two years later than the first Memphis exhibition of ‘competitor’ Sottsass (see chapter 2, preceding).

36 Later, Alberto Alessi (2008) referred to this collaboration with Salvador Dalí in a somewhat amused way, having ordered a large quantity of steel fishing hooks for the artist’s project. The ingenious and slightly megalomaniac dadaist product idea of the artist was, however, called off by Carlo Alessi (Alessi 1999). Later on Alberto asked several designers in vain to come up with a suitable destination for fifty thousand fishing hooks.

[3.4] Philippe Starck – ‘Hot Bertaa’ – 1988, designed and released at the same time as the Juicy Salif, but unlike the latter, not a great success commercially.
Weil, had already surpassed postmodernism: ‘It is not Post-Modernism [sic]; the communication aspects are rather related to Pop Art. [...] Graves’ kettle is probably the only object that people outside the design world can immediately recognize and understand’ (Gabla-Liddell et al., 1996: p.142). This corresponds with the vision of Csikszentmihaly (2007). He argues after all that the appreciation of objects by their owners is mainly determined by the meaning they attach to them. A positive meaning indicates a positive attitude towards the product and with the expressly cheerful flute on the spout, the kettle of Graves and Alessi can easily be provided with a positive meaning through direct association. Pop Art or not, the kettle was in any case the first product design of a real postmodernist that was not reserved for a small elite or recalcitrant avant-garde, as was the case with the furniture of Memphis, Alchymia and the Neue Design.

Alberto Alessi himself indicated the strategy of the company then (and still today) as the ‘borderline principle’ (Alessi 2008). This means that as a design-oriented company you always have to operate on the edge of what is acceptable and what is not. The outspoken form language of the postmodernists in 1988 was in any case something that was not always acceptable to everyone. In the vision of Alessi many companies, however, back off from the edge in order to limit the risk. This then results in great uniformity because everyone moves towards the middle of the circle. According to this principle, which is very similar to the ‘Most Advanced, Yet Acceptable’ by Raymond Loewy (1951), Alessi later invited another controversial designer for a next design classic; the ‘Juicy Salif’ by Philippe Starck [Figure 3.3].

This design resulted from an exchange program (Project Solférino) with a number of French designers via the Centre de Création Industrielle of the Beaubourg in Paris (Gabla-Liddell et al. 1996). In the end, two of Philippe Starck’s designs were the only results of the project that were realized: the Juicy Salif and the ‘Hot Bertaa’ [Figure 3.4]. Starck and Alessi initially got a lot of criticism of their products because they would not be functional. This criticism was legitimate, because squeezing oranges

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37 This shows similarity with the appraisal-theory of Desmet (2002), see chapter 1.3, preceding.

38 Raymond Loewy also recalls in his autobiography: ‘People are very open-minded about new things - so long as they are exactly like the old ones’. (Loewy 1951: p. 279).

39 Together with Philippe Starck also Jean Nouvel, Nemo (studio), Christian de Portzamparc and Charlotte Perriand. The project was organised in cooperation with François Burkhardt.
[3.6] Philippe Starck – Design sketch for ‘Juicy Salif’ – 1988, here the rotating movement of pressing the fruit is also incorporated into the design.

[3.5] Cover of Tintin’s episode ‘Rocket to the Moon’ - Hergé - 1953, inspiration for and at the same time recognition with the Juicy Salif by Philippe Starck.
with the Juicy Salif was not an undivided pleasure. Criticism later reached a climax when the company Alessi released a ‘special edition’ from which the gilding could not handle (sour!) Orange juice and therefore made the device literally unusable. Starck later defended himself a bit easily by stretching the concept of functionality and saying that he had not designed his citrus press to make orange juice on Sunday mornings at all, but rather as a ‘conversation piece’ (Norman 2004: p. 112).

Also the Hot Bertaa could not be used. Filling the boiler through the handle required an incredibly large sink and when the water was boiling, you would burn your hands on the hot aluminum. Unlike the Hot Bertaa, the ‘unusable’ Juicy Salif has become - and still remains - very popular, probably because of the appeal of the citrus press as an ‘object’. This touches on the core of the value of unruly design, because apparently there is a mechanism that ensures that despite the lack of functionality of these products in terms of usability, it is still worthwhile to the user to own them. An important role in this respect is played by the fact that the design, in particular through the similarity with a Tintin rocket, in the same manner as the whistling bird of Graves’s kettle, provides a pleasant association for the user (Lloyd & Snelders 2001) [Figure 3.5]. The consumer therefore does not use the ability of the citrus press to make juice, because that is hardly the case. Instead, the attractiveness for the user lies in the invitation of the shape of the object to evoke associations. We must therefore again not see the object as a function-fulfiller, but rather as a meaning-provider.

Peter Lloyd and Dirk Snelders (2001) also state that precisely because of this ‘clumsiness’ of the design, the consumer has to ‘discover’ and develop a new way of use, as it were. The user must adopt a way to ‘deal with’ the shortcomings of the object, and then ‘overcome’ them so to speak. Because the user has to make more effort, there would be a closer bond with the object, about the same way as with lovers of oldtimers, where the intrinsic unreliability of the old car eventually becomes a source of joy if it does work. Precisely by being forced to put some effort in it, the experience becomes more valuable.

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40 I remember my mother, when she was trying to make fresh orange juice on a Sunday morning, put the appliance in the sink because the juice was spouting in all directions and the thing was too high to be able to put the fruit on the fruit to be squeezed. There was also a plastic tea strainer very inelegantly placed on top of the designer glassware to catch the orange pits that flowed freely along the press.

41 In 2001 already 550,000 units were sold, with a stable number of 50,000 a year since the introduction in 1990 (Lloyd & Snelders 2001).

42 This principle intuitively feels good, but if it is implemented consistently it creates a strange situation. In the extreme case, according to Lloyd and Snelders, a consumer should therefore have a preference for the most unusable design. It is more likely that the reversed mechanism is the case here: if a consumer has already built up a close relationship with a product at an earlier stage, a certain clumsiness will be experienced as ‘charming’ and thus contribute to the specific product experience. Conversely, there seems to be no causal relationship: clumsiness in use will not necessarily lead to a better connection with the product.
[3.7] Stefano Giovaninni and Guido Venturini – ‘Girotondo’ dish – 1989, the Girotondo project was the first in which Alessi applied the reference to figurines on a large scale. This ‘anthropomorphism’ again contrasted strongly with the abstract form language of the functionalists.

[3.8] Mickey Mouse phone with moving head and arms, ringing with five different texts in Mickey’s ‘original voice’ — Anonymous design.⁴³
Producer Alberto Alessi himself attributes the appearance of the citrus press to the inspiration from a meal with octopus in an Italian pizzeria (Norman 2004: pp. 112-113). Lloyd and Snelders (2001) show convincingly that it was ultimately the combination of inspiration from the environment (squid and the squeezing of a lemon) and Philippe Starck’s private interest in science fiction, which led to the design. In an earlier design sketch, Starck had also incorporated the rotating movement of pressing the fruit into the cup, which made the object also look like a cone of whipped cream [Figure 3.6].

The same cheerful recognisability as with the Juicy Salif in relation to the Tintin rocket, also spoke of the objects that Alessi brought onto the market some time later in the project ‘Girotondo’. The designers of this series, Stefano Giovaninni and Guido Venturini, were very consciously looking for this recognisability: ‘The original plan for the Girotondo series for Alessi consisted of a series of objects that were decorated with a row of cut out figures. This plan meant an elimination, or better still, a reduction of the design of the object to an absolute minimum, where everything depended on an iconographic and figurative element that everyone can recognise’ (Gabra-Liddell et al. 1996: p. 121) [Figure 3.7].

The designers phrase it in a very complex way, but it is the same as making a dinner plate recognizable by painting a Delft blue windmill at the center. Because everyone recognizes the mill as a ‘figurative element’, the design of the plate itself can then be restricted to a standard shape that is familiar to everyone: which is the ‘reduction of design’ that Giovaninni and Venturini are talking about.

Giovaninni and Venturini, however, continue: ‘The figures resemble the dolls that children cut out of paper. The idea was to use stainless steel as if it were paper: the little figures form a circle, as if they were doing a girotondo hand in hand and with each other holding the objects on the scale together.’ (Gabra-Liddell et al. 1996: p. 121). The actual renewal must be sought in the use of puppets as recognizable element and the joy that was associated with this anthropomorphic reference,

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43 There is, however, an American patent in the name of George Donald Perkins and Donald Albert Winton of the American Telecommunications Corporation of California, dated October 24, 1978 [no. 250.023], which describes the design of this phone.
[3.9] Riccardo Dalisi – prototypes for the project ‘Neapolitan CoffeeMaker’ from Alessi – 1981, an early study where the anthropomorphic design is applied at Alessi’s workshops.

[3.10] Riccardo Dalisi – prototype for the project ‘Neapolitan CoffeeMaker’ from Alessi – 1981, the reference to a character is also clearly used here, but only covers a part of the object.

[3.11; 3.12] Riccardo Dalisi – ‘Neapolitan CoffeeMaker’ – 1987, as it was finally put on the market without anthropomorphic references. In a later design of a coffee grinder the figurative aspect reappeared with Dalisi [Figure 3.13].
together with the cheerfulness that speaks from the nursery rhyme. A form of recognition which during the heyday of functionalism was only reserved for cultural expressions, which within that paradigm were referred to as kitsch, such as a telephone in the shape of Mickey Mouse [Figure 3.8].

This unconcerned cheerfulness also contrasted sharply with the strict principles of functionalism. According to the design theory of the functionalists, aesthetic experience was universally based on mathematical laws, so that products had to comply with a mathematical or abstracted organic design language (Drukker 2007). Figuration - and certainly anthropomorphic figuration - was, just like decoration, taboo.

For the company Alessi, however, working with figures was a logical step in the development of the company. In the project ‘Neapolitan Coffeemaker’, Ricardo Dalisi had already made a large number of prototypes for a coffee percolator with the appearance of little men and also others with partial references to figurines and animals [Figure 3.9 and 3.10]: ‘The research on the Neapolitan coffee machine, which started in 1979 and officially ended in 1987, was the longest research in the history of the company. An extensive socio-anthropological overview was started about how the coffee machine was used and what the image of coffee was in the small villages of the Neapolitan hinterland. Then, in addition to many pages of text and drawings, many prototypes were made (eventually 200), all of which differed from each other, all of which worked and all of which were made of tin.’ (Gabra-Liddell et al. 1996: p. 57) Strangely enough, the Neapolitan Coffeemaker which was finally brought to market in 1987, although strongly iconic in shape, did not have any reference to a figurine at all. [Figure 3.11 en 3.12].

The Girotondo project, which eventually was based on dolls, was conceived in 1988 and put into production in 1989. In 1994 the collection was further expanded with a whole series of products [45] with the same cut out figure. The company Alessi later showed a savvy side by selling the punched out dolls as a keychain. In the egg cups belonging to the series, the company Alessi incorporated

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44 A ‘girotondo’ is a children’s song with a circle dance, similar to ‘Here We Go Round the Mulberry Bush’

45 Decorative household products; from fruit bowls and paper baskets til napkin rings.
Riccardo Dalisi – Coffee grinder from the ‘Twerigi’ collection for Alessi – 1990, this time with figurative elements, but more in the form of decoration - like with the little bird on Michael Graves’ whistling kettle - and not in the shape of the whole object.

Stefano Giovaninni and Guido Venturini – ‘Girotondo’ egg cup – 1989, partially executed in plastic.

Guido Venturini – ‘Gino Zucchino’ sugar bowl – 1993, one of the first products of the ‘Family Follows Fiction’ collection of Alessi, to be completely made of plastic.

‘Gino Zucchino is a sugar bowl, but so popular within Alessi that he has become a kind of garden gnome,’ says Alberto Alessi (1999: p. 117).
plastic in a prominent way for the first time [Figure 3.14]. According to the designers, the use of the plastic resulted from practical considerations: because of the flexibility of the plastic, eggs of different sizes would fit in (Gabra-Liddell et al. 1996: pp. 120-121). Later on, however, this use of cheap plastic as a basic material would mainly mark the beginning of a whole series of plastic products which, due to their more favorable pricing, reached a much larger audience than their metal predecessors; the ‘Family Follows Fiction’ collection [Figure 3.15]. In line with the classic Theory of the Leisure Class by Veblen (1889; reissue 1994), the objects that were first reserved to a wealthy elite came within reach of a broader audience due to an increased affordability. In this way, a simple design choice ultimately contributed to the further ‘democratization’ of the underlying postmodern design principle.

All objects from this ‘Family Follows Fiction’ series, which was introduced in 1993, were based on the same concept as in the Girotondo collection: ‘A strong figurative sign that would appeal to the memory by archetypal communication’ (Gabra-Liddell et al. 1996: p.121). New in this series was that the figurative element was no longer just a decorative addition to the object, but covered the entire product. Just as with the studies of Dalisi for the Neapolitan Coffeemaker, the whole object became a character. The mentioned ‘archetypal communication’ with the use of a simple and recognizable figure [Figure 3.7 and 3.16] was subsequently successfully applied by several other manufacturers. In particular, the German company Koziol launched a whole stream of products on the basis of figurines and animals (Koziol 2007) [Figure 3.17 and 3.18].

That the concept was not new at the time can be seen in the ‘Town and Country’ tableware that ceramist Eva Zeisel designed already in 1947 [Figure 3.19 and 3.20]. Especially the salt and pepper set had a distinctive character as a duo, in which the bigger salt spreader seems to bend over almost paternal towards the smaller pepper spreader.

Ultimately, the entire anthropomorphic design concept was used so often (also by the company Alessi itself) that
[3.17] Koziol – ‘Sharky’ clothespins – 1991, the sharks bit their teeth on the laundry. After the commercial success of Alessi’s Family Follows Fiction collection, the figurative designs from other manufacturers also attracted more attention, such as this early anthropomorphic design by Koziol.

[3.18] Koziol – ‘Tweety’ dishwashing brush – 1996, just as with the shark-shaped clothespins, a physical component or character trait forms the connection between the meaning and function of the object. In the same way, for example, the tail of a squirrel was used in a sweeper and can, and the teeth of a beaver were associated with peeling mandarins.


[3.20] Eva Zeisel – ‘Town and Country’ dinnerware – 1947, according to Cheryl Buckley: ‘In what Zeisel called a “playful search for beauty,” she developed a modernist aesthetic that challenged the functionalist straitjacket of Bauhaus modernism by drawing on a plethora of sources, […] Her witty and stylish designs were intended to bring joy to their users.’ (Kirkham et al. 2000: p. 355).
the initially fresh idea became a cliché, with the result that it had lost most of its power of expression already at the end of the nineties.
Philips – ‘Roller Radio’ (in the back) and successor ‘Roller II’ sound machine – 1986 and 1987, the design was a result of the introduction of the theory of product language at Philips, that was developed in Germany in the seventies.

Philips – ‘Moving Sound’ affiche – 1987, besides the roller radio, the walkman also had a notable design in the shape of a slice of pie. However, here it was less clear which other product was intended to be associated with it.


Philips – French ‘Moving Sound’ campaign – 1987, instead of the association with the motorcycle, typical French clichés are used: the character dressed as can-can dancer attracts attention with the two loudspeakers as a substitution for her breasts.
The Philips company also played an important role in the ‘democratization’ of the ideas of the postmodernists. In the nineties the company made a transition from a technological innovation-oriented company to a more design-driven brand. This break with the past was ushered in in the eighties, when Philips was looking for a more appealing style for its products. The American designer Robert I. Blaich became interested in the theory of product language, which he introduced at Philips as director of the design department in Eindhoven (Bürdek 1996: pp. 235-236). This led towards the end of the eighties to the ‘Moving Sound’ series, a number of products with a prominent style that should better appeal to young people (Bekooy et al. 1991: p.186) [Figure 3.22]. Especially the ‘Roller Radio’ was an innovative design, derived from the shapes of a motorcycle.

In France the punk movement (especially an English phenomenon) had never been so successful, so there the marketing campaign received a different look. The typical Oh-la-la atmosphere of the imagery, however, caused the association with the motorcycle to be lost [Figure 3.24].

The combination of clear language and bright colors in the design of the moving sound objects was part of a larger movement, which was inspired by the exuberance of the Memphis movement. This style was already applied earlier, for example by competitor Sony [Figure 3.25 and 3.26]. What was new, however, was the direct recogni-
Philips – Colour TV – 1990, ‘In a striking housing, equipped with a remote control, timer and memory for 40 channel presets, with a 37 cm display tube’ (Bekooy et al. 1991: p. 187).

Philips – ‘Bazooka’ – 1988-1989, the successor to the Roller Radio in the moving sound series. The shape and name refer to the usual shoulder placement of such portable radios at that time (Muller 1990: p. 298). Due to the somewhat aggressive connotation, the product did not stay in the assortment for a long time.

Audio Technica – AT-727 ‘Sound Burger’ portable record player – 1984, pay attention to the corresponding advertising material; in the imagery the device is compared with a crocodile. This way of anthropomorphic reference would be later, with unruly design, also incorporated in the product appearance itself.

Sony Transound Ghettoblaster – FM/AM Stereo Cassette Recorder – 1985, the competitors of Philips also used the appealing colors and clear forms of postmodernism. The design does not have the semantic references of the moving sound series, but builds on the robust appearance of professional sound equipment. The slanted speakers especially refer to the sound monitors of pop groups placed at the frontside of the stage.

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tion of the shapes of the motorcycle, and later also the accompanying helmet. All according to the ideas of the theory of product language that was in its turn inspired by semantics [Figure 3.27]. With the successor to the Roller Radio, the principle was applied again, including a significant product name to emphasize the concept [Figure 3.28].

In 1991 Philips released a series of products under the ominous name ‘the Collection’. This prestigious title had to shine in the first instance on the centenary of the company in that same year (Bekooy et al. 1991: p. 7). Most striking in the series was the CD player, with its layered structure and stand-alone column. Although it was abstract in shape, it nevertheless looked inspired by postmodern architecture [Figure 3.29]. According to Robert Blaich, from then on the design of the products was the most important for Philips: ‘a company’s products are the most important thing it has to say about itself.’ (Marzano 2005: p. 332).

For the first time in the history of the company, products from different divisions at Philips were designed in one overarching project in order to contribute to the strategic goals of the entire Philips group. According to Italian designer Stefano Marzano this was an important milestone: ‘The brainchild of Robert Blaich, the Collection was initially conceived as a product to mark the Philips centenary. Ultimately, its legacy has more to do with its status as the first global, design driven, cross-product range.’ (Marzano 2005: p. 330). For the first time, therefore, the design of the products rather than the technology used was the starting point in the development of the product portfolio.

This was a major break with the firm’s past, which up to then had been especially presented itself with its technological innovations and the associated technical appearance of the products [Figure 3.30 and 3.31]. Bekooy writes about the previous period (the eighties): ‘In television, Philips defends its leading market position successfully by constantly bringing new developments to the market. [...] Under the name ‘Matchline’ a modular system is brought to market with matching units. Digital
[3.29] Robert Blaich – Personal CD player with cordless headphones and remote control – 1991, the object looks more like a scale model for a building than an electronic device. This association is probably due to the popularity of the ideas of architect Rem Koolhaas at the time. It can also be seen as a follow-up of the Tea & Coffee Piazza project by Alessi and Mendini.


[3.31] Philips – ‘Explorer’ Camcorder with associated English advertisement – 1988, the camcorders were suitable for VHS-C cassettes and ‘equipped with a very light-sensitive imaging IC’ (Bekooy et al. 1991: p. 184). The design of the cameras is inspired by professional equipment, to give the user the feeling that he or she is a real film director. The James Bond-like action and the vaguely visible female face in the background reinforce this association.
technology improves image quality, ease of use and possibilities.' (Bekooy et al. 1991: p. 191)

The switch towards a product development strategy that focused on the meaning of the designs got even more body when Marzano became the new leader of the design department of Philips in the early nineties. In order to give the company, which was still predominantly renowned for its innovative technology, a more appealing image through the design of its products, Marzano brought in a number of Italian colleagues (Marzano 2005: p. 117-119). First in a series of workshops on the theme of television (La Bottega dell’Arte) and later through a collaboration with the company Alessi. From then on, not only the Philips products would be clearly different, but according to those involved it also became a lot hipper to work for the firm as a designer (De Ligny 2008).

46 See figure 2.16, chapter 2.2, preceding.

47 See figure 3.1, chapter 3.1, preceding.
[3.32] Alessandro Mendini – Design sketches for a television – 1993, a drawing in typical Memphis style: with bright colors, a busy pattern and a shape that refers to (classical) architecture.

[3.33; 3.34] Alessandro Mendini – ‘Here’s Looking At You Kid’ television – 1993, if the television is switched off, it becomes a make-up mirror. The second layer gives extra functionality in terms of usability and meaning. The name of the design refers to popular culture: ‘Here’s looking at you kid’ is a famous phrase from the film classic ‘Casablanca’ from 1942.

[3.35] Alessandro Mendini – ‘Here’s Looking At You Kid’ television – 1993, the television set is turned upside down and has become a static interior object, more or less like a vase or a sculpture.
3.2 Philips

3.2.1 La Bottega dell’Arte

In a series of workshops, designers from Philips worked in 1993 under the direction of Alessandro Mendini, Andrea Branzi and Stefano Marzano himself on ‘the television set of the future’ [Figure 3.32].

According to Marzano, the collaboration was very successful: ‘The workshops offered young designers (all from Philips) an opportunity to express their vision of the future of the medium in the design of the next generation of televisions. They did not allow themselves to be tempted into wild science-fiction fantasies. They have on the contrary accepted the limitations of the technology of today - or at least, from tomorrow morning. Their designs, all starting from a portable television of a single size, are incredibly varied.’ (Marzano et al. 1995: p. 10).

The workshop led by Alessandro Mendini was entitled ‘The television as magic lantern’. This theme is beautifully represented in a television design where the cathode ray tube is covered by a mirror [Figure 3.33 and 3.34]. This gives the screen an extra layering and enables you to switch between fiction and reality (your own reflection). When you had finished watching television, you could turn the device upside down, so that it was no longer a product, but rather a decorative object. [Figure 3.35].

Apart from the fact that the transformation into decorative object gives the television set another layer of meaning, the direct manipulation of the television housing
[3.36] Living room with television in the fifties, here the television is a piece of furniture, just like a couch or a closet.

is also a new form of dealing with the product. After all,
the television was originally a piece of furniture [Figure
3.36], in the old days even provided with a wooden cabi-
net with, if possible, a sliding door in front of it. Turning
the device upside down has, just like the mirror, the
same function as the old-fashioned door: concealing the
‘ugly’ cathode ray tube from the eye.

The design thus explicitly focused on the interaction
that the user had with the object. In fact, in the project,
the technology was only discussed in the background.
The emotional connection with the product always
stood first. According to Mendini, that was exactly the
most important thing at that stage of the development of
the product category of televisions: ‘When we consider
its technical and functional validity as fixed, a design ob-
ject nowadays only becomes fascinating and meaningful
when it is capable of sympathetic mental, spiritual and

This idea by Mendini is perfectly in line with Eger’s
theory of product phases (2007). The designer argued
here without knowing that the product ‘television’ had
reached the phase of ‘awareness’. The sympathetic aspect
mentioned by Mendini was clearly expressed in the
design by Benny Leong, which he created during the
workshop. In his version of the television set of the near
future you could sit on the carpet next to the appliance
and use the electronics in the carpet to operate the de-
vice. The convivial interaction makes it an early precu-
sor of electronic products as friendly pets [Figure 3.37].

The workshop led by Stefano Marzano was called ‘First
steps in the age of the soul’. Marzano was particularly
delighted with the organizational structure of the work-
shops: ‘One important aspect of the workshops was the
context in which they were held. They were experimen-
tal in the sense that they combined the often comple-
mentary knowledge and strengths of a large industrial
producer and small, specialized design studios.’ (Marzano
et al. 1995: p. 10), adding to that: ‘A second important
aspect of the workshops were their intention. In the
workshops the designers worked as ‘Apprentices’ under
the guidance of older, more experienced colleagues - the
Graham Hinde – ‘Game of cat and mouse’ – 1993, Hinde presented the television in the form of a character, just like Alessi did before with their kitchen accessories.

Khodi Feiz – ‘Early Bird’ television system – 1993, in the design of Feiz the anthropomorphic reference comes to the fore again: in the shape of the camera that is inspired by the faint statement ‘look at the bird’.

Khodi Feiz – Design sketch for the little camera of the ‘Early Bird’ television system – 1993, the signifying effect of the bird shape is the same as with the whistling kettle that Michael Graves designed for Alessi.48
Masters’. The Masters determined the theme of the workshops and provided practical help and stimulation. This particular method represented something of what was common in the art workshops in Florence during the Renaissance. There, the master and apprentice learned in mutual cooperation how to ask questions, to dare, to imagine and to feel, and then to present their findings in an elaborate form. By analogy, the workshops were given the name La Bottega dell’Arte - The Art studio.’ (Marzano et al. 1995: pp. 10-11). The work in the master-apprentice relationship was something that already happened to become fashionable again in post-modern Italy at the time: ‘I have traveled from Florence to Milan to study with a great master [Sottsass - WE]. As Giotto did with Cimabue,’ says Marco Zanuso (cited in Bellati 1993: p. 162). The funny thing is, of course, that this also strongly resembles the practice in the Bauhaus studios of the nineteen twenties and thirties (Herzogenrath et al. 1980), which was the great modernist opposite of the Italian postmodern school.

One of the results of the workshop by Marzano was the television system ‘Early Birds’ by Khodi Feiz, with in its appearance an anthropomorphic reference that we have seen earlier with the Alessi firm49 [Figure 3.38 en 3.39].

Feiz also speaks about his design in terms of feelings and interactions: ‘It is a living television. Always turned on, it discreetly disappears into the background if we do not feel like it, and it emerges when we want company.’ (Marzano et al. 1995: p. 112). Graham Hinde continues in his design ‘Game of Cat and Mouse’ [Figure 3.40] with the ‘personification’ of the object and with fostering the relation with the user: ‘Many domestic appliances today are lifeless chunks of technology; bought, used and discarded, often without being missed. We want to create more affection between user and product. I have tried to achieve this by bringing an element of personality, warmth and life into the device through associations with the cat and the mouse, two animals with a high universal homeliness value.’ (Marzano et al. 1995: p. 118). With this, Hinde applies the same principle as Venturini and Alessi did with the ‘Gino Zuchino’ sugar bowl, which Alberto so adequately typecasted as a garden gnome [see figure 3.15 en 3.16].

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48 See figure 3.2, preceding.
49 See chapter 3.1, preceding.

[3.42] Lacides Marquez – ‘Information desk’ – 1993, the television is more or less hidden as a casual passerby in another piece of furniture.

[3.43; 3.44] Francis Chu – ‘The secret little site of the artist’ television – 1993, the poetic title cannot hide the fact that Chu has just dressed the television as a postmodern totem pole, modeled after Ettore Sottsass [Figure 3.45].
The third workshop was led by Andrea Branzi, also a well-known name from the Italian postmodern movement and the most theoretically oriented of the three (Burkhardt & Morozzi 1996). Branzi’s workshop entitled ‘Towards a post-television society’ mainly explored the place that the television could occupy in the future household: ‘Contrary to the opinion of many sociologists, I do not believe that television has ever changed the organization of our households. She may have changed our behavior, our culture and even our physiology, but not the houses in which we live. Television has become a part of domestic life, but has remained an inconvenient guest, a presence that is not counted on. [...] This means that the television has never become the hearth or totem; it has been given a place next to the hearth, has been added to other totems.’ Andrea Branzi (cited in: Marzano et al. 1995: pp. 62-63) [Figure 3.41]. This illustrates again the elitist attitude of the postmodernists, while in the average working class family the television was, and still is, of course the center of the living room [Figure 3.36].

The designs realized within Branzi’s workshop therefore also dealt with the interaction between the television set and its surroundings. It is striking that the television was assigned a less prominent place in the household. The designs by Lacides Marquez and Francis Chu ‘hide’ the cathode ray tube more or less [Figure 3.42; 3.43; 3.44]. Marquez camouflaged his television with a table, so that it could find a place anywhere in the house. This is in addition to Branzi’s idea of television as a more or less ‘uninvited guest’, who had never been able to acquire the same central place as the fireplace.

In his creations, designer Francis Chu eventually also made the clearest use of the form language of the postmodernists. At the workshop directed by Stefano Marzano, his television set was designed in the shape of a totem pole, like the cupboards of Ettore Sottsass [Figure 3.45]. In his design ‘Pleasure on the Track’ at the workshop of Alessandro Mendini, Chu made an object with a simplified shape and thick legs and weird proportions that is very reminiscent of the toy-like furniture by Aldo Cibic, mentioned in chapter 1 [Figure 3.46 and 1.27].

Although Marzano was delighted with the diversity of the designs (Marzano et al. 1995: p. 10), the workshop results all follow the same pattern. The television is made more personal by the emphasis on the interaction with the user and is stripped of its technological association by the softer design. What is also striking about the entire project, but rather typical of the anti-technological attitude of postmodernists, is the total absence of the new flat-screen technology. From this omission, using the product phase theory of Eger (2007), it may be explained why the ideas from the workshop ultimately found little entrance, at least not in the product television. With his comment on ‘sympathetic spiritual and ritual values’ (Awareness!), Mendini placed the television at the end of the evolutionary development of the product group. But due to the emergence of a new technology, the product group has been technologically ‘innovated’ and was reset, as it were. It therefore restarted its development in the ‘job fulfillment’ phase. In which, with the introduction of new technology, a technological image that emphasizes the innovativeness is more obvious. The consequence was that the idea of the personification of the television from the workshop did not end up on the market at all. Also the prediction of Marzano that the television would go together with the computer has not been realized: ‘Who picked up who is hard to say. But when they met at the side of the electronic highway, they knew they were meant for each other. Television and computer, two kids looking for a new life in a new century...’ (Marzano 2005: p. 672).

The computer eventually remained ‘independent’ for a long time, and in the form of the internet, it eventually took over all the interactive functions that emerged in the project. In this light, the title of the accompanying publication Television at the crossroads (Marzano et al. 1995) can be interpreted ironically: Philips took the wrong turn. The more emotional interaction between user and product that was developed in the Bottega dell’Arte project was later extensively worked out in the ‘Vision of the Future’ project from 1996. In this extensive program Philips designers explored all sorts of product

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51 When I joined the research and development department of the Hollandse Signaalapparaten (currently Thales) at the end of 1995, we already applied the first commercially available (still very expensive) units of flat screen monitors with LCD technology for the experimental set-up of command centers.
Philips – ‘Vision of the Future’ – 1996, bedside table with videophone, interactive mirror and pillow-shaped loudspeaker. The ‘Vision of the Future’ program led to this kind of product studies with a human-oriented, soft appearance, where many references were made to archetypal non-electronic products.

groups for possibilities to renew the links between arte-
fact and user through advanced capabilities, powered by
electronics and a sympathetic design (Baxter et al. 1996:
pp. 17-19) [Figure 3.47 en 3.48].

### 3.2 Philips
[3.49] Philips-Alessi – Coffee maker, Citrus press, Toaster and Kettle – 1994, the round, interlocking shapes of the coffee machine evoke the same associations as the pepper and salt set by Eva Zeisel.

[3.50] Stefano Marzano, Alessandro Mendini and Alberto Alessi with the complete line of products.

[3.51] Philips-Alessi – Design sketches from the workshop – 1994, the form influences of early postmodernism are clearly recognizable, such as a variation on Michael Graves’ kettle at the bottom right.
3.2 Philips

3.2.2 Philips-Alessi

Very satisfied with the collaboration with the Italians, Marzano started a strategic alliance. This time with the company Alessi, which, as described in chapter 3.1, already had a good reputation in ‘emotional’ products at that time. According to Marzano, the collaboration with Alessi could help the company: ‘Alessi - renowned as a high-design company, but with no experience of electrical appliances. Philips - renowned as technology company, but not as a high-end brand ‘(Marzano 2005: p.191). In the end, the series of kitchen appliances, developed under the guidance of Alessandro Mendini, was indeed one of the great innovators in the design of electrical appliances in the kitchen [Figure 3.49 and 3.50]. This made the combination of companies one of the first to create the connection between more complex devices and the new emotional approach towards products. With this, unruly design finally entered a product domain outside of the usual design items of traditional applied art.

Stefano Marzano had set up the collaboration with Alessi in the same way as in the La Bottega dell’Arte-project: ‘Philips designers, product managers, marketers and engineers attended a week-long workshop at Noordwijk with Stefano Marzano, Alberto Alessi, Kees Bruinstroop and Alessandro Mendini, consultant to the project. The workshop analyzed the present domestic environment and current lifestyle trends in western society. They concluded that as the kitchen had become automated it had also became dehumanized.’ (Marzano 2005: p. 242).

52 See also figure 1.12, chapter 1.3, preceding.
53 See figure 3.19, chapter 3.1, preceding.
54 See figure 3.2, chapter 3.1, preceding.
55 The department manager Household Appliances at Philips.
Promotional material for the introduction of the Philips-Alessi line in 1994 (Simon Thomas 2008: p. 210). In this cheerful advertising, anthropomorphism is also embraced: all the depicted objects have become characters, including the citrus press.


Philips – image from the annual report of the company of 1998, the accompanying text refers to the new Philips products in the form of characters. The ‘Bob’ kettle and the previously released ‘Billy’ stick blender are called ‘kitchen friends’ (Philips 1998: p. 23).

Philips HR1340 – ‘Billy’, stick blender design from the ‘post-Phillips-Alessi era’. The personification of objects that we saw at Alessi also returns here in the naming of the products: ‘Billy’ is a proper name, while products that are designed form functionalist ideals always have an anonymous ‘scientific’ name. Think for instance of the Braun ‘Phonosuper Sk5’ record player (also known as ‘Snow whites coffin’) or the Philips ‘HD1207’ iron from figure 2.25.
So in this second collaboration it was again about the relation between the user and the product, which should become more ‘human’. In the sketches that were made during the workshop, the form influences of postmodernism and the friendly visual language of the Bottega dell’Arte project are clearly recognizable [Figure 3.51].

In the final design that was eventually attributed to Alessandro Mendini, the ‘humanization’ was executed successfully. The design of the orange-red coffeemaker is more reminiscent of a stocky cat than of an electrical appliance. More or less the kitchen appliance can be seen as a cozy pet sitting on the counter top [Figure 3.49]. Philips further elaborated on this by regularly presenting the appliances as characters in their advertising material [Figure 3.52].

The relationship with postmodernism was further expressed when the product line was launched on 27 September 1994 in the Groninger Museum, the postmodern art temple of the Netherlands (Marzano 2005: pp. 236-238) [Figure 3.52]. Mendini was the chief architect of this building, where he brought together various designers and architects, just as he did with the partnerships in the Philips project, the earlier Bottega dell’Arte and also the Coffee Piazza project with Alessi. (Kolsteren et al. 2002: pp. 4-6).

However, the successful Philips-Alessi product line (Bürdek 1996: p.133) was faced with technical defects. After a few years, the heating elements of the coffee machines went down massively due to calcification. This relatively quick failure did not fit well with a fairly pricey series of products and the whole was soon removed from the market. The citrus press and the blender that was added to the line later were sold for some longer time. 56 Despite this demise, the series of devices had definitely made a lasting impression and the influence of the project is clearly recognizable in the subsequent Philips products [Figure 3.54 and 3.55]. The softer shapes can even be found in many other product designs from the end of the nineties.

56 At my parents, the coffeemaker that was bought at the time is now standing in the showcase as a design collector’s item. That this is not completely exaggerated, I discovered in the summer of 2009 on the Brocante market in Deventer, where the devices were offered as ‘vintage’ for far above the original retail price. Reason perhaps to put the kettle and toaster that are still in use (although now several times repaired) next to it.
Elle Wonen – Cover and editorial – autumn/winter 1991, the first edition of this mainstream style magazine. Headed by the title ‘the latest living trends in telegram\textsuperscript{57} style’ we find an Alessi coffee grinder by Ricardo Dalisi,\textsuperscript{58} a postmodern sofa, an unnecessarily decorated rattan garden chair and a cupboard by Minke Voorthuizen with bird figures in the spirit of Michael Graves’ bird kettle\textsuperscript{59} for Alessi. The depicted carpet with an image of a ‘leopard skin rug-as-a-carpet’ is similar in meaning to the painting \textit{Ceci-n’est-pas-un-pipe} by René Magritte.\textsuperscript{60}
3.3 Conclusion: formerly unruly design has become mainstream

In the early nineties, the former unruliness had become more or less commonplace: the living trends eventually seemed to be dominated by postmodern designs [Figure 3.56]. Andrea Branzi was delighted in 1993 with his cooperation with the industry, but at the same time somewhat embittered because it had taken such a long time: ‘[...] all these developments were given the name new design in the eighties. [...] With the exception of a few isolated cases, these new possibilities did not get through to most of the important industrial organizations. These companies, which had cultural prejudices against such alternatives, went all the way in perfecting and specializing existing product types and rejected advanced experiments with aspects that were considered too innovative’ (Marzano et al. 1995: p. 150). And that is probably the most important conclusion we can take from this period; that it all took so long. However, that is partly, as we saw in the previous chapter, also the fault of the postmodernists themselves because they initially heralded the nihilistic ‘anything goes’. Under the adage ‘everything is possible, as long as it is not functionalistic’, the usability of postmodern product designs was often lost sight of. As a result, it took a while before the established industry saw the value of the underlying message - a truly user-oriented design - and found a way to link it to the functionality of its own products.

In addition, Olivier Boissière writes in 1993 about postmodernism in industrial design: ‘Memphis wanted to renew the language of shapes and colors and give
Philippe Starck – ‘Excalibur’ – 1995, toilet brush from the company Heller. The user would ‘experience’ the annoying job in a different way because the brush was designed like a sword. The name of the product also adds an extra layer to the meaning of the object, just as with the ‘Andries’ candle holder by Marcel Wanders.61
priority to the ‘personality’ of the object’ (Bellati 1993: p. 25). However, in the application of the ideas of the ‘new design’ to products in the nineties, not only the personality of the object is central, but ultimately it is about the interaction between two ‘personalities’; that of the object and that of the user. Philippe Starck had also seen this right. After having made a large number of designs of products that were usable after all, he stated: ‘If we had to, we could clean a toilet with a branch of a tree or an old brush – but we prefer something perhaps a little more interesting. A good object, I think, not only does the job, but also contains some humour and love. A good object renders its service with grace.’ (Sweet 1999: p. 15) [Figure 3.57].

With this, the experience has acquired a definitive place in industrial design. From then on it was no longer enough if a product fulfilled its function; the user also had to experience a certain form of pleasure, or at least keep a memory of it, to be meaningful. Stretching the concept of functionality, as Starck did in defense of his citrus press design, proved to be a very good move, as Michael Erlhoff had already pointed out in 1990: ‘[...] in other words, design does not have to compensate for the technical shortcomings of the products (which they since no longer have62), but rather for the psychological shortcomings of human beings or of society itself. Nowadays, beholders or users demand of objects that they display qualities they cannot possibly have: identity, individuality, the meaning of life, the fulfillment of the widest range of wishes and cravings. The concept of function has suddenly undergone boundless expansion.’ (Erlhoff et al. 1990: p. 13).

The influence of the postmodernists eventually creates something that we can call ‘augmented functionalism’. A functionalism- plus, where not only attention is paid to the usability of products, but where most of all the meaningfulness for the user determines the success. The design is no longer restricted to being derived from the functionality and structure of the product (this principle was no longer tenable for the new generation of electronic products) but also linked to an appealing story for the intended consumer. The examples from Philips, Alessi and Starck have shown that the ‘communication

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61 See figure 1.30, chapter 1.5, preceding.

62 This was not always the case for the products from unruly design. Think for example of the unusable citrus press by Starck and the faltering coffeemaker from Philips-Alessi. Evidently, compensating for psychological shortcomings was still partly at the expense of other aspects of the design.
with the user’ advocated by Venturi and Jencks is also possible without completely losing sight of the functionality - in the form of usability, sustainability and affordability - of the products to be designed.

3.3 Conclusion
[4.1] Invitation for the very first presentation of ‘Droog Design’ – Milaan – 1993, in cooperation with the Dutch furniture producer Pastoe. The Italian postmodernist and design theorist Andrea Branzi was asked for the opening ceremony: ‘In his speech he labels the products ‘protestantism’. It is not clear whether he means this in a positive or a negative sense.’ (Ramakers et al. 2006: p. 167).
4 The emergence of so-called ideas-design

In the period of about 1990 to 2000 - overlapping with the period described in the previous chapter - the emotional approach from the unruly postmodernist product designs of the 1980s was increasingly related to the functionality of products. This resulted in interesting combinations of recognizable meanings and, for example, new materials, or combinations of new technologies and cultural expressions. The products from this movement usually did not excel by functional usability, but rather by the clarity of the underlying idea. This is therefore called ideas-design, or even more often ‘conceptual design’. Dutch designers played an important role in this development with the Droog label (Teunissen & Van Zijl 2000: pp. 14-21; Simon Thomas 2008: pp. 215-220).
[4.2] Tejo Remy – ‘Chest of Drawers’ – 1991, included in the design collection of the Museum of Modern Art in New York. The separate parts of the cupboard make the object directly recognizable as a cupboard. On the other hand, the design as whole does not look similar to any commonplace cupboard.
4.1 Conceptual design

In the early nineties Gijs Bakker and Renny Ramakers started a project to encourage young, talented Dutch designers. The duo introduced a label called ‘Droog Design’ which introduced itself internationally with a show at the Salone del Mobile in Milan in 1993 (Simon Thomas 2008: pp. 215-217) [Figure 4.1].

Among the designers who contributed to the label in the early years were Peter van der Jagt, Tejo Remy, Arnout Visser, Piet Hein Eek and Gijs Bakker himself. In order to be able to process the considerable interest in the initiative and at the same time give the project a more stable basis, Bakker and Ramakers subsequently started a foundation of the same name in 1994 (Van Zijl 1997: p. 12). With Droog Design, Ramakers eventually placed herself at the center of a movement of new designers that she had already predicted in the late 1980s. In 1987 she wrote in the reference work Holland in Vorm, that belonged to a series of exhibitions about Dutch post-war industrial design: ‘The 1980’s have now produced a new generation of designers. Influenced by developments in architecture and by the Italian design groups Memphis and Alchimia, they are positioning themselves as artists more than ever before. Expressive qualities are for them the essence of design as well. But they are not production-oriented. The end product is simply the implementation of an idea.’ (Staal et al. 1987: p. 224).

Within a few years, Droog Design became world-famous with contributions from, among others, Marcel Wanders
[4.3] Tejo Remy – ‘Chest of Drawers’ – 1991, every instance of the cupboard has a different composition because different drawers are used as a starting point. In this copy, a wine rack is also included. In the background of the picture a ‘Heatwave’ concrete radiator by Joris Laarman is visible (see also chapter 6, figure 6.70).
and Jurgen Bey. At the beginning of the new century the label became more or less normative for a broader stream of ‘Dutch Design’, characterized by Ingeborg de Roode, curator of industrial design at the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam, as: ‘playful, conceptual and socially critical’ (Powilleit & Quax 2008: p. 4).

Viewed from the perspective of the history of ideas, the products from this early period are mainly simple, humorous and self-explanatory. Especially the latter contributes to the great appreciation by fellow designers and art critics, even though this appreciation was difficult to attain before the coming-out of the Droog label. For example, it took Richard Hutten two years to complete his graduation project at the Design Academy in Eindhoven because few people were enthusiastic about his ‘designing of concepts’ (van Hinte 2002: p. 26).

Simple, humorous and self-explanatory is in any case applicable to the ‘Chest of Drawers’ by Tejo Remy. Moreover, it is precisely what it says to be: a cabinet with drawers [Figure 4.2]. The design is not particularly attractive and one can rightly wonder whether it is actually functional. In any case, it is not very efficient as a cupboard. But it is recognizable at a glance and the viewer will not easily forget the object. The recognisability is further accentuated by the naming, which can be seen as a reverse version of the work of Magritte from chapter 1.5. There the opposite was established with images of directly recognizable objects where alienation was evoked by saying: ‘this is actually something else’ [Figure 1.28 and 1.29]. Remy on the contrary argues with his alienating object that ‘it is a cupboard with drawers’, with which he extends the user’s existing image of what a ‘chest of drawers’ is, by saying as it were: ‘this is also a chest of drawers’.

According to Aaron Betsky, the author of the book False Flat; Why Dutch Design is so Good, the stack of drawers is even a bit of a model for all the cupboards that are available, because through the different drawers the object refers to just as many different furniture styles: ‘The result looks happenstance, and may not be the most logical chest of drawers, but it becomes a microcosm
[4.4] Marcel Wanders – ‘Set Up Shades’ lamp – 1989, just as literally as the ‘pile of drawers’ by Tejo Remy, this is a ‘pile of lamp-shades’.


of all chests one has seen, stripped of the constraint the
designer usually puts on such a piece of furniture by choosing one style for a frame.’ (Betsky & Eeuwens 2004: p. 172). Finally, it is also a very personal cupboard, because no collection of second hand drawers is the same and the owner of the cupboard can decide how to arrange the drawers him- or herself. You can of course also add drawers yourself to further strengthen the bond with the object. Designer Remy also produced a copy at the request of letter designer Gerard Unger, in which the drawers are grouped around a television set. (Teunissen & Van Zijl 2000: p. 109). There is also a version with a wine rack between the drawers (Ramakers et al. 2006: p. 61) [Figure 4.3].

The same absolute recognisability is achieved with the ‘Set Up Shades’ lamp by Marcel Wanders, built from standard lampshades [Figure 4.4]. The typical basic shape of the caps works like a kind of archetype and at the same time the repetition of the shape makes for an interesting product structure. Which we also see with the related ‘Hollywood’ lamps from Matteo Thun from the same year, with which we at the same time see an interesting bridge between the representatives from the previous and the new period [Figure 4.5]. The lamps are a late work by Thun, who collaborated with Ettore Sottsass in the eighties and was also part of the Memphis group. The ‘Set Up Shades’, on the other hand, is an early work by Wanders, which in the nineties would become a prominent representative of conceptual design (Joris et al. 1999: pp. 8-9). Wanders also stated that, like many designers from the Neue Design and Punk movement, he wanted to oppose to the consumer society: ‘In which everything has to be young, smooth and perfect.’ (Teunissen & Van Zijl 2000: p. 168). In that light, the repetition of the lampshades can also be seen as an ironic reference to standardization (Joris et al. 1999: p. 9).

Another interesting conceptual design is the letter scale ‘Archimedes’ by Arnout Visser [Figure 4.6]. Just as with the designs by Remy and Wanders, the naming is again enlightening here, because the product is obviously based on the principle of water displacement, known as the Archimedes’ principle.
[4.7] Peter van der Jagt – ‘Bottoms-up’ doorbell – 1993, the name again refers to the meaning of the object, in this case with the wine glasses that are placed upside down.  

[4.8] Gijs Bakker – Coffee maker prototype – 1980-1982, In this postmodern design, which was deliberately designed to distinguish itself from the abundant competition (Boelen 2010: p. 36), it is precisely the coffee-making process that is very visible.
An addition to the works by Wanders and Remy, however, is that herewith not the image of the object is indicated, but the actual functioning of the product. By placing a letter on top of the object, the upper cylinder is pushed downwards and the liquid level rises, which can then be read on the scale. Because of this principle, despite the fact that the thing does not look like a common letter scale at all, it can still be recognizable for every user.

A similar way of self-explanation of the functioning of the product can be found in the ‘Bottoms-up’ doorbell by Peter van der Jagt [Figure 4.7]. Everyone knows that crystal glasses make a nice sound when you tap them. This principle even directly refers to the concept of ‘attracting attention’, which in principle is also the function of a doorbell. At an official dinner it is customary to tap the glass with a spoon to draw the attention before a speech. By using this principle explicitly in a doorbell, the object becomes recognizable for every user, regardless of culture or background. What makes the design even stronger is that they are two real glasses. So not two shapes that make you think of glasses, but glasses from which you - if they were not upside down on the ceiling - could just drink wine. And although the shape of the object does not at all resemble the restricted form language propagated by the functionalists, this design indeed refers to a kind of universal language, in the sense that the effect of the product can be read directly from the design. This is then not a formal design language in the sense of a certain style, but rather a product language that can be directly understood. The object is literally telling something, so to speak. Van der Jagt also says in connection with the design: ‘These ideas all came from my conviction that designs - products - should speak for themselves.’ (Van Tilborg 2010: p. 41).

This ambiguous attitude towards the functionalist ideal of form follows function is also visible in the coffee machine designed by Gijs Bakker in the early 1980s [Figure 4.8]. On the one hand, the design is postmodernistic in form language and choice of colour. On the other hand, the process of brewing coffee can be follo-
[4.9] Dick van Hoff — ‘Stop’ mengkraan — 1996, just like the doorbell of Peter van der Jagt, the working principle of the object is clearly visible. In addition to that, as is with the doorbell, standard parts were used to increase the recognisability (Teunissen & Van Zijl 2000: p. 54).

[4.10] Maxine Naylor and Ralph Ball – ‘Coffee Table Book Table’ – 1997-1998, the design is actually a word play joke: ‘This table takes its form and concept from the symbiotic relationship between design and books on design. […] The books are all copies of the international Design Yearbook built up year by year… each successive edition renders the previous one redundant in an inaccessible archive.’ (Naylor & Ball 2005: p. 31).

[4.11] Maxine Naylor and Ralph Ball – ‘The Complete History of Shelf Supports’ – 1997-1998, literal unruliness: ‘the shelf is supported by the books instead of the other way around. The concept is taken further by the fact that the titles of the books indicate that the shelf is being supported not by mere books but by every type of shelf support that ever existed.’ (Naylor & Ball 2005: p. 31).
4.1 Conceptual design

Wed very clearly. The liquid starts from the transparent water reservoir, flows through the tubes to the heating element and then through the spout, which is bent like a kitchen tap, through the funnel-shaped ‘processor’ into the archetypal jug. In a similar way, in the ‘Stop’ faucet by Dick van Hoff the mixing of cold and warm water was made visible in the subtle coming together of the two tubes [Figure 4.9]. In this way, the designs of the conceptual designers are much clearer in the communication of their function than many of their functionalist predecessors.

As with the ‘chair to look at the moon’ from the introduction, it is this clarity in the meaning of the object, which makes you forgive the designers that the products are in some ways not practical at all. For example, Van der Jagt’s door bell is rather difficult to clean, especially when the glass is mounted upside down at the ceiling of the entrance hall.64

Another similarity with the ‘chair to look at the moon’ is dealing with the naming of the objects. With the conceptual designers, the name is often an addition to the meaning of the product, such as in the ‘Chest of Drawers’ by Tejo Remy. This clarification of the meaning often also has a second meaning, as in the ‘Bottoms-up’ doorbell by van der Jagt. Maxine Naylor and Ralph Ball have further elaborated this in their poetry-inspired design practice (Naylor & Ball 2005: p. 27). Just like the ‘Chest of Drawers’ owes tribute to Magritte’s ‘Ceci n’est pas un pipe’,65 the coffee-table-book table achieves a kind of Droste effect: the table is made of the books that are meant to be placed on it. When the design itself is shown in the book again, the circle is complete [Figure 4.10].

In their design proposal for a bookshelf support the name is also the starting point for the design and not the other way around. The name holds a similar layered meaning as with the ‘Andries’ candle holder by Marcel Wanders from chapter 1.5 [Figure 4.11]. With the same ambiguity, they also fooled the functionalists by materializing the phenomenon of the ‘stackable chair’ in a contradictory way [Figure 4.12]. Two other designs that explicitly address the forgivingness of the practically-

64 This mounting upside down has cost me once a whole afternoon because of clumsy construction of the mounting bracket. And another afternoon when we moved. On the other hand, then I was eventually able to clean the glasses in between. For the sake of fairness however, it should be mentioned that later versions of the ‘Bottoms-up’ doorbell are provided with an extra bracket that makes the glasses detachable.

65 See chapter 1.5, preceding.
[4.13] Marcel Wanders – ‘Knotted Chair’ – 1995, the chair is feather light because of the modern material, but also recognizable by the old-fashioned knotting technique that determines the shape.

4.1 Conceptual design

A minded user are the ‘Knotted Chair’ of Marcel Wanders and the ‘Tree trunk Bench’ by Jurgen Bey. These objects - which are intended to sit on - are in fact quite uncomfortable. If you even have the opportunity to sit on it, because most of the copies are exhibited in design museums and art collections. From the point of view of meaning, however, the ‘Knotted Chair’ is an interesting example of a combination of ‘old’ and ‘new’; innovative and yet familiar [Figure 4.13]. Making a shape by knotting rope (macramé, lace, fishnets, etc.) is a very old technique and therefore recognizable. By combining this with high-tech material and a modern production process (the rope is woven from aramid, around a carbon fiber core and then soaked in resin to retain its shape), the old craft is renewed as it were.

The ‘Tree Trunk Bench’ was designed for the park of the seventeenth-century estate ‘Oranienbaum’ in Germany. Bey combined the natural character of the park in the form of a sawn-down tree with a number of bronze counterfeits of the backrests of antique furniture from the mansion [Figure 4.14].

With this approach, the result is not a comfortable park bench, but rather an object that is a wonderful combination of all aspects of its environment [Figure 4.15 and 4.16]. Not only the natural and the artificial are represented, but also the historical background of the estate and the idea of the park layout as ‘nature-made-by-man’ is visible in the composition of the sawn tree trunk and the bronze railings. Teunissen and Van Zijl are therefore delighted to write: ‘It is just as if the design, with its natural and fairytale appearance, always existed’ (Teunissen & Van Zijl 2000: p. 35). Inadvertently they are right in two ways, because Bey’s design is very similar to the ‘Conoid’ bench by George Nakashima. [Figure 4.17].

These examples show that the break with the past was not as radical as the unruly designers themselves often suggested. There is rather a subtle shift of perspective, where the functionality of the designs was accomplished with new resources, materials and techniques. This resulted not so much in radical new products - it remained just tables, chairs and benches - but it did result in new combinations of meanings. This is also what Kuhn (1996: 66) Note that here, too, the conceptual designers play the game with the literal naming.

[4.16] Schloß Oranienbaum: ‘The castle of Oranienbaum, surrounded by a big landscape garden, was built by a Dutch princess of Oranje Nassau in the 17th century. Eager to preserve this Dutch-German cultural heritage for future generations, the Dutch government decided in 1997 to contribute to its restoration. This is based on a concept delivered by the local Cultural Foundation Dessau Wörlitz that is focusing on restoration, revival and innovation. For the latter two they asked Droog to cooperate.’ (Droog Design 1999).

[4.17] George Nakashima – ‘Conoid’ bench – 1960s, Nakashima was an idiosyncratic designer who was renown in the 1960s in the United States. This unique example of a wooden bench was sold in 2006 at an auction of contemporary design at Sotheby’s New York, for 120,000 USD (Sotheby’s 2008).
p.111) ultimately claimed: the paradigm changes often seem more extreme than they really are. More often there is rather a change of viewpoint; revealing a new interpretation of the old familiar phenomena.

Richard Hutten

Richard Hutten is seen nowadays, after a difficult start, as one of the most important pioneers of conceptual design. Ed van Hinte writes: ‘Designing concepts was still quite uncommon in the beginning of the nineties. It took Hutten two years to graduate because of that.’ (Van Hinte 2002: p. 26). Hutten eventually graduated from the Design Academy in Eindhoven with his ‘table’ project. From the basic idea (concept) of what a table is, namely a top, four beams and four legs, he designed a complete ‘shelter’ by manipulating these three basic components [Figure 4.18]. A low table becomes a stool and an even lower table becomes a bed. A very large table defines the space. By constructing these new products, simply by manipulating the mutual relationships of a standard table, surprising objects are created in such a way that they are still very recognizable.

The strength of Hutten’s design is that with his maximally recognizable and maximally simplified forms he is still able to make visually interesting arrangements, as is clear when he performs the same trick with a standard sideboard [Figure 4.19]. He himself calls this extreme clarity ‘No sign of Design’ (Van Hinte 2002: pp. 6-7). That is nonsense, of course, because every recognizable form language is a form of design. However, the funny thing is that this perspective does have something of the views of the modernists, who after all also strived for a minimalistic form language that was maximally recognizable. The modernists did this, however, via the primary functional and mechanical way, while Hutten accom-

[4.21] Ginbande – ‘KinderMöbel’ – 1991, existing furniture is, as it were, disassembled and put together in a different way. A principle that reminds of construction toys.
plishes this along a cultural path by linking up with the archetype that users associate with the product category. Hutten also developed a series of hybrid products from a mix of ‘chairs’ and ‘tables’. The series was called ‘Things’ and especially ‘Thing 7’ shows striking resemblance to Jurgen Bey’s ‘Tree Trunk Bench’ due to the seemingly random arrangement of backrests [Figure 4.20].

With an anecdote told by Hutten, Ed van Hinte shows how the recognizable manipulations also lead to new forms of use: “At a furniture exhibition the designer observed the use of […] Thing 7, […] where two obvious parents were conferring about the show, sitting next to each other. Their daughter was obviously bored stiff, pouting and angrily leaning against the remaining backrest, some six feet away. It was instant drama and Hutten loved every second of it.” (Van Hinte 2002: p. 6).

On top of the resemblance with the Tree Trunk Bench, Hutten’s project is also reminiscent of the set of children’s furniture by design collective Ginbande, representatives of the German Neue Design, which is in a similar manner intended to provoke new ways of ‘sitting’ (Albus et al. 1995: p. 58) [Figure 4.21].

Hutten lets his designs emerge from the limitation of the recognizable; the archetypal chair, cupboard or table. Through the manipulation of existing relationships, however, new unsuspected functions emerge. Like with ‘Thing 7’, which involuntarily represented the mutual relationships in a small family. This form of signification is also visible in the table project: the low table will only become a bed if you are actually going to sleep on it. Otherwise it will remain just a low table. Hutten states: ‘Function is what determines meaning, and use provides the context within which meaning can evolve.’ (Van Hinte 2002: p. 51).

It is precisely through the use of the products that the meaning of the objects is further filled in. And because the objects are designed with very general and indifferent shapes, not by a specific styling or design language. Hutten eventually lets the user determine how the design actually functions (or does not function). In this,

Richard Hutten – The ‘Sexy Relaxy’ chair in ‘use’ – This is the later rotation-moulded version of the chair with a light inside from 2004. The original design dates from 2001 and was made of polyester. It was designed on request with the theme ‘relax, clean and sexy’, for the company E&Y from Tokyo: ‘Hutten found inspiration in Sharon Stone showing her most private spot to the policemen interrogating her in ‘Basic Instinct’. He decided to use her posture, legs apart just a bit, and the sterility of her white home to define the form and the colour of the chair.’ (Van Hinte 2002: p. 76).
he links up with the ‘usability’ idea of philosopher of technology Don Ihde in which the functioning of products is determined by the interaction between user and object. Ihde states: ‘If technologies were only objects, totally separate from human action, they would be no more than rubbish laying in the corner. Once they have been included in the praxis, one can no longer speak of technologies’ in themselves’ but only of the active, relational pair of human-technology’ (cited in: Verbeek 2000: p. 134). In this view the object just provides ‘propositions’ that can be filled in by the user in ‘the use’ (what Ihde calls ‘the praxis’), or as Hutten himself says; ‘I am not a designer in the sense that I solve problems, I create possibilities’ (Hutten 2008).

This approach to functionality is nowadays quoted more often, but what Hutten adds is that it does not seem to interest him very much how people use his products in advance. Hutten even made a project out of that, resulting in the publication Richard Hutten; Works in Use (Hutten et al. 2006). For this book Hutten asked owners of his products to send him photos of situations in which they ‘use’ the products. In this way, Hutten would be able to see afterwards how his designs were actually used. This resulted in a lot of original usage situations, with forms of use for which the products do not seem to be intended [Figure 4.22], but also forms of use for which the products were intended [Figure 4.23 en 4.24].

[4.25; 4.26] Jurgen Bey – ‘do-add/Short leg’ – 2000, pictured on the cover of the presentation book for do create. With the logo designed by Kessels-kramer, where the ‘o’ was replaced by a fingerprint to symbolize the contribution of the consumer (Van der Zanden & Ramakers 2000).

4.3 Do-Create

The approach to functionality, as embraced by Huten was implemented to the extreme by a number of conceptual designers in the ‘do create’ project. Here the starting point was not only that the user determines how the object will function, the intention was even that the user had to add something to the object himself, before the object could function at all. The most illustrative example of this was provided by Jurgen Bey with his ‘Short Leg’ handicapped chair [Figure 4.25 en 4.26].

Do-Create was a collaborative project of Droog Design and the advertising agency Kesselskramer, which had designed the do-concept in 1996 for a potential client. The assignment did not carry through, after which the advertising agency went on with the idea by itself. ‘Do’ was conceived as a brand: ‘we brainstormed for other applications for ‘do’, making a radical change to the traditional process by first establishing a brand and then adding products much further down the road. This was the beginning of do.’ (Kesselskramer 2000: p. 41). Kesselskramer then worked with various parties to develop the concept further, as doing together was the basic idea behind the brand (Kessels & Whisnand 2006: pp. 15-26). With the ‘do create’ project, for the first time also physical products were designed for the brand and the results of the collaboration were presented in 2000 at the International Furniture Fair in Milan. In the publications with the project, produced by Kesselskramer, the designs were accompanied by comic book-like instructional drawings by illustrator Stang [Figure 4.27].
[4.28] Frank Tjepkema and Peter van der Jagt – ‘do break’ – 2000. By throwing the porcelain vase with its rubber lining ‘broken’, it gets a personally influenced individual decoration: ‘to ensure a special end-design as created by the owner.’ (Kessels & Whisnand 2006: p. 29).

[4.29] Djoke de Jong – ‘Curtain with pattern print’ – 1993, the fabric with pre-printed sewing pattern was just like the Tejo Remy cabinet as inspiration for the ‘do create’ project (Van der Zanden & Ramakers 2000: p. 2).
In addition to the incomplete chair by Jurgen Bey, among other things, a shiny metal cube was presented by designer Marijn van der Poll. It had to be beaten with a sledgehammer to give it the shape of a chair. The user’s participation was also evoked with a vase by Frank Tjepkema and Peter van der Jagt that should be broken: a layer of rubber on the inside of the vase kept the broken parts together, so that for every vase a unique shard pattern could arise [Figure 4.28].

The collaboration between Kesselskramer and Droog Design was actually a logical continuation of earlier designs of the Droog label. With the ‘Chest of drawers’ cupboard by Tejo Remy the input of the user was also desired to give the cabinet a personal interpretation and in 1993 Djoke de Jong made several designs for the label where the user was invited to become actively involved (Teunissen & Van Zijl 2000: pp. 72-73). Her ‘Drawing table’ was a straightforward table design that was covered from top to toe with blackboard paint, so that the user could decorate it himself. She also printed a sewing pattern on curtain fabric, where the lines functioned simultaneously as decoration and as an invitation to the owner to reuse the material (Ramakers et al. 2006: p. 33) [Figure 4.29].

The do create concept was then further elaborated by Kesselskramer in various collaborations and workshops. Results were published in the book One hundred and one things to do (Kessels & Whisnand 2006), which included the ‘do screw’ project from the French design collective 5.5 Designers [Figure 4.30; 4.31].

The striking thing about the entire project is that the participation of the user is in all cases aimed at strengthening the emotional bond between user and product. In none of the designs the input of the consumer is used to improve functionality in the sense of usability. In a number of cases this usability is demonstrably lower, as in the ‘Short leg’ chair by Jurgen Bey which was accompanied by the instruction: ‘use books or magazines to prop up the leg and suddenly you have a mini library and chair combination.’ (Van der Zanden & Ramakers 2000: p. 21). This makes the chair-library combination

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67 See figure 4.2 and 4.3, chapter 4.1, preceding.
5.5 Designers – ‘do screw’ – 2006, project for Kesselskramer’s publication *One hundred and one things to do* (Kessels & Whisnand 2006). The intention was to supplement the cutlery with handles from the user’s own environment. The designers themselves already gave some inspiration.
unique and personal, but the chair and the books can no longer be used at the same time. It is also almost impossible to hammer a comfortable chair from the metal cube by Marijn van der Poll. The obvious possibility of increasing the usability of the chair through the consumer’s own contribution, by allowing him to fit the chair with his or her own body or a preferred sitting posture, is totally ignored.

The user participation was thus entirely focused on increasing the significance, or in other words; the value of the meaning of the objects. For example, with the ‘do break’ the user was called upon to reinforce the personal bond even further by throwing the vase at a special moment in time: ‘The ‘do break’ vase will become even more your own, if you throw it after a particularly heated argument, or after you’ve had an especially bad day. Destruction has never been so satisfying.’ (Van der Zanden & Ramakers 2000: p. 18). Conceptual design therefore, in which the thoughts that the product evokes are more important than the actual use.
The conceptual design and the related ‘shaping of an idea’ received more and more international attention in the 1990s. Several of the Droog designs are now world famous and for that reason included in leading museum collections (Antonelli et al. 2003: p. 276, Betsky & Eeuwens 2004: pp. 172-174), or as critics say: especially in museum collections (Simon Thomas 2008: p. 220). As successors to the great Italian postmodernists like Ettore Sottsass and Alessandro Mendini, the Dutch designers were unquestionably part of a new generation of personally successful designers. The worldwide acclaim for the ‘Dutch Design’ movement as a whole was initially based on the breakthrough of just a couple of Dutch designers such as the aforementioned Richard Hutten, Marcel Wanders and Jurgen Bey. However, designers like Hella Jongerius and Maarten Baas were also propelled by the momentum of Droog Design.

The design practice of these designers is often referred to as ‘author-driven’ design, in which the designer himself is the most important element in the realization and the assessment and/or appreciation of the design. There is even a kind of reversal principle in this personal success; first the designer is known for his or her special designs and later the designs become ‘special’ due to the designer’s fame. Or as a Dutch design critic put it adequately: ‘A design by Philippe Starck that can not be recognized as such makes no sense. That does not sell.’ (Weyel 2007: p. 66). This recognisability does not necessarily have to be in the design of the object itself, but can even be limi-
[4.32] Pierre Cardin – 'International Cigarette' – 1982, Cardin lent his name to a countless number of products, with great success: ‘When the modestly Swiss tobacco company FJ. Burrus made a bid for export sales in 1982, it opted for a licensing deal with Cardin, rather than spending the huge sums needed to create a new world brand. […] During 1987 the company sold ten million packs of ‘Cardin’ cigarettes, producing the man himself an income of $225,000 a year.’ (Sudjic 1989: p. 61).
ted to just the association with the name of the famous designer. In the 1980s, fashion designer Pierre Cardin, who became famous in the seventies, lent his name to all kinds of products that had nothing to do with his own creations: ‘Other Cardin products range from clocks to deodorants. Even Cardin has lost track of exactly how many there are. [...] “Even we don’t know all the products we license,” Eduard Saint Bris, Cardin’s director of licensing, was once incautious enough to admit to *The New York Times.*’ (Sudjic 1989: p. 61) [Figure 4.32].

Putnam and Poynor also wrote earlier about the Juicy Salif\(^{68}\) citrus press by Starck: ‘what one is buying, of course, is ... a little piece of Philippe Starck’ (quoted in: Lloyd & Snelders 2001). Alessandro Mendini once pushed the concept to its limits by manning a very small stand at the Salone del Mobile [Milan Furniture Fair], in which he signed imitation Louis-Vuitton bags, which he had just acquired from the street vendors on the square in front of the building, and sold them with considerable price difference.

However, the industrial-oriented design practice at many companies and design agencies can be characterized as demand-driven design, where the design effort is used to solve the problem of a customer or user. These two approaches to design are, as Verbrugge has shown, fundamentally different (Verbrugge 2008). A design agency that designs the Senseo coffee maker for Philips, for example, tries to develop reliable technology, a pleasant shape, a cheap production method and a simple use. All this in the service of Philips and the end user to easily make a nice cup of coffee. Richard Hutten, on the other hand, looks at how he can make an interesting product from the limitation of a number of ingredients or a production technique and then sees how the user deals with it (or not) later on.

Because the industry-oriented design practice is driven by customer demand, it is characterized by deadlines and budgets. To be able to comply with this, the work is structured with methods and processes and in order to avoid risk, decisions are guided by marketing, user research, brand identity, briefings, reviews and lists of requirements. Within author driven design, one has to rely

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\(^{68}\) See chapter 3.1, preceding.

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<tr>
<th>Demand driven</th>
<th>Author driven</th>
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<td>Style of the client</td>
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<td>Makes inherent</td>
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<td>Guided by marketing and communication</td>
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<td>Structured by processes and methods</td>
<td>Dependent on creative finds</td>
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<td>‘Invisible’ design</td>
<td>Fashionable and showy</td>
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[Table 4.1] Characteristics of Demand driven and Author driven design, according to Verbrugge (2008).
practically on the talent and fame of the designer. Like Andreas Brandolini has a tip for fellow designers: ‘Eine Arbeit so lange liegen lassen, bis eine elegante Lösung sich von selbst anbietet.’

(Ching 2007: p. 10), or when Philippe Starck explains: ‘When I design, I am both very slow and very fast. Ideas can take up to 30 years to mature, but when I came to draw them they never take more than three minutes to complete. After that it becomes boring.’ (Sweet 1999: p. 22).

Even if the designer works in commissioned design practice, the personality of the designer comes first. Richard Hutten (2008), for example, told at a meeting of the Dutch Royal Institute of Engineers (KIVI-Niria, Round 60) that he himself does not look for customers, but that the clients come to him. When asked what his client actually demanded when he designed the ‘Table Sofa’ for Sawaya and Moroni, he literally said: ‘They asked for a Richard Hutten’ [Figure 4.33].

A comprehensible characterization of both versions of the design practice was formulated by Jeroen Verbrugge (2008) at a meeting of the same Royal Institute of Engineers [Table 4.1].

Yet another difference between the two categories is the cultural and economic significance. For example, Philips - demand driven design - manufactures twelve million anonymous shavers a year at very low costs. At the same time, the famous ‘Chest of Drawers’ by Tejo Remy for Droog Design is regarded as a great success with the sale of just over 100 copies in fifteen years. However, each for the dizzying amount of 16,600 euros per stack of second hand drawers (Elzinga 2007). In this way, the added value of design is not always the same. In the case of Philips, the added value is mainly quantitative: due to a balanced design, many copies of a product are sold. In the case of author driven designs, the added value is rather qualitative: few are made and sold, but the price is relatively high.

Nonetheless, several designers talk about a lack of financial benefit from their activities for Droog Design in the nineties (Van Zijl 1997: pp. 8-12) and Simon Thomas also writes in her overview of a hundred years of design in the Netherlands that substantial commercial results were not coming through (Simon Thomas 2008: p. 220).
Therefore little has changed since the 1980s, when we saw the same with the elitist nature of the Memphis movement\(^{70}\) and Gwendolyn Ristant writes about the Neue Design: ‘The focus on New Design belies the fact that, viewed quantitatively, this represents but a tiny segment of the broad range of design available, and its commercial importance is negligible compared with “classical” industrial design.’ (Erlhoff et al. 1990: p. 209).

A final contradiction in the two approaches is how they deal with technology. Demand driven design is usually aimed at applying the latest technological developments to make products better, faster, smaller or cheaper. The author driven design practice, however, relies heavily on the knowledge and skills of the designers themselves. Therefore, because the training of these designers often relies heavily on craft skills, the resulting practice is also often anti-technological in nature. (Drukker & Van Velzen 2010: pp. 8-9).

The most remarkable results are therefore achieved when the best practices of both worlds are combined (Eggink 2009). Marcel Wanders, for example, designed his ‘Knotted Chair’ when he was experimenting at the Faculty of Aerospace Engineering from Delft University of Technology at the invitation of Droog Design (Teunissen & Van Zijl 2000: p. 168). In 2008, Wanders also works together with design agency FLEX/theINNOVATIONLAB® to be able to incorporate more knowledge about industrial production and realization in his design projects (Verbrugge 2008).

On the other hand, demand driven design practice can be stimulated to maximize creativity and freedom of expression within (or just outside) the boundaries of the client’s briefing. If the ‘Knotted Chair’ were designed from a conventional ‘List of Requirements’, then the first requirement would have been ‘that the chair should sit properly’. The same is the case, for example, with the ‘Bottoms-up’\(^{71}\) doorbell by Peter van der Jagt. If, according to the list of requirements, the bell should have been ‘easy to clean’, we would never have experienced that inspiring aha-erlebnis (ding-dong!), which the object now evokes.

\(^{70}\) See chapter 2.1, preceding.

\(^{71}\) See figure 4.7, chapter 4.1, preceding.
4.5 Conclusion

4.5 Conclusion: conceptual design has a future

The conceptual design can be seen as a further development of the postmodernist perspective from the eighties. If postmodernism could still be set aside as a movement in which the meaning of objects was expressed purely in the design, in the ‘ideas design’ from the nineties a link is made between the meaning of the shape of the object and the functionality of the product itself. The wine glasses of Peter van der Jagt’s doorbell are, after all, both meaningful and functional, something which was also present in the narrative designs of the Neue Design. In the ‘Wagenheberregal’ by Wolfgang Laubersheimer for example, support for the shelves is very figuratively provided by car jacks. The metaphor of the support function of the jacks is even strengthened by the fact that the cabinet becomes adjustable [Figure 4.33]. We already saw before that Arnout Visser let form and function coincide in the Archimedes letter scales. Later, for Droog Design, he also made a design for plates that could be heated in the microwave using conductive paint. The paint is applied in a recognizable pattern and is therefore at the same time functional, decorative and informative [Figure 4.35].

Parallel to the development of the demand driven, functionalist design, from the author driven design practice something emerges that we can call ‘augmented postmodernism’. Postmodernism plus, where the signifying design characteristics also have a functional meaning. In other words, in this way the utility and significance of objects are effectively interwoven.

72 See chapter 2.3, preceding.
With this combination of functional and meaningful elements, the conceptual design described in this chapter is ultimately a more complete alternative to the functionalist form follows function than the postmodern motto ‘anything goes’. In augmented postmodernism, there is no longer the dilemma of the opposition between functionality or meaning, because it has become functionality and meaning. From there it is only the question whether - and if so how - this approach from the sphere of author driven design can be transferred to demand driven design practice, in order to give meaning more presence within the industrial design discipline. Which means; not only in the limited arsenal of furniture, jewelery and tableware, but also in the design of MRI scanners, aircraft interiors and dry offset cup printing machines, to name a few random examples.

But before we continue with that, it is time for a short intermezzo. To show that postmodernists and conceptual designers, in their critique of functionalism, applied exactly the same principles as a group of artists who already propagated a radically different design paradigm at the time when early functionalism just started to emerge.
[5.1] Cartoon – 1936, in that time the functionalist/modernist design has already penetrated popular culture, just like postmodernism in the nineties. Here it is featured in a cartoon from a book with the title ‘How to live in a flat’ (Huygen 1989: p. 117).
5

Surrealism

5 Modernism, functionalism and surrealism

Functionalism, to which the several generations of unruly designers opposed, was rooted in the rise of modernism at the beginning of the twentieth century. The Bauhaus founded in 1919 and the Dutch De Stijl movement played an important role in this (Hahn et al. 1988, Droste 1990, Antonelli et al., 2003). The Bauhaus was founded by Walter Gropius in Weimar, and moved to Dessau in 1925. From 1930 it was led by architect Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, first in Dessau and from 1932 in Berlin until the forced closure by the Nazis in 1933 (Herzogenrath et al. al. 1980: pp. 26-27). With this closure, the Nazis reached rather the opposite effect of their intentions. Precisely because of the advancing national socialism, many of the artists, designers and architects working at the Bauhaus fled Germany and the ideas of the modernists were spread around the world. With the result that, as Peter Hahn puts it: ‘All in all, this little art school, which only functioned for fourteen years and had to change its location several times before finally being forced to close under political pressure, was astonishingly influential.’ (Droste et al. 1999: p. 7) [Figure 5.1].

The rise of modernism was, however, flanked by a movement that had nothing up with the reserved form language that accompanied the new ideology:73 surrealism. Her supporters already opposed the advancing mechanization of the environment and the accompanying simplifying system thinking of the modernists in the 1930s. This anti-technological attitude of the surrealists is later reflected in both the postmodernist movement in

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73 See paragraph 1.4.1 and 1.4.4, [Table 1.1], preceding.
[5.2] Man Ray – ‘Cadeau’ – 1921, the transformation of the original object seems a prelude to the wine glass-as-candle holder design by Marcel Wanders from chapter 1.5.7. Similarly, the meaning of the object is only interesting if you know that the object shown was originally an iron. Through this association the absurdity of the studs becomes clear. Without linking to that original function, there is no meaning left, just as with the candle holder.

[5.3] Meret Oppenheim – ‘Breakfast in fur’ – 1936: ‘Object, as it was named first, was created for the Exposition surréaliste d’objets, which was held at the Charles Ratton gallery in May 1936, where it immediately became the archetype of the surreal object. Breton renamed it Le déjeuner en fourrure (breakfast in fur), which reminded of the scandalous connotations of female sexuality associated with Édouard Manet’s Le Déjeuner sur l’Herbe (1863) and the sexual fetishism which was implied by paraphrasing the title of Leopold Ritter von Sacher-Masoch’s Venus im Pelz (La Vénus à la fourrure) from 1870.’ (Wood & Te Duits 2007: p. 24).
Simultaneously with the emergence of modernism and functionalism, the Surrealists went directly against the abstracting ideas of the followers of the Bauhaus. The surrealists were mainly regarded as artists which created paintings and sculptures. However, the movement also produced products such as furniture and jewelry, which for that time, show a remarkable perspective on the design of objects. Like Alchymia in 1985, this group also had a leading manifesto, in this case written by the poet André Breton. In the manifesto he presented the dream world as a superior source of inspiration above (rational) reality: ‘SURREALISM is based on the belief in the superior reality of certain forms of association heretofore neglected, in the omnipotence of the dream, and in the disinterested play of thought. It leads to the permanent destruction of all other psychic mechanisms and to its substitution for them in the solution of the principal problems of life.’ (Breton 1924; cited in: Waldberg 1971: pp. 66-75).

With this ‘play of thought’ and the associated ‘neglected association’, the surrealists were in the first place responsible for connecting different sources of inspiration to form unexpected, uncomfortable, unusable and often also unpleasant objects. Man Ray for instance, glued little nails on the base of an iron in his object named ‘Cadeau’ ['present'] [Figure 5.2]. With the addition of these everyday items, the function of the appliance as an iron is rather turned inside out. Instead of smoothness it can only achieve the opposite, and at the same time an
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5.1 Surreal

unintended secondary function as a torture tool is emphasized. That last, unpleasant association is once again carried through to the absurdity by calling it a ‘present’.

Kindred spirit Meret Oppenheim covered a cup and saucer with fur, so that the cup is no longer functioning as tableware, but becomes an ‘object’. [Figure 5.3]. Unusable, but cuddly and titillating when you think of the tickle on your lips when you would unexpectedly put it on your mouth anyway (Wood & Te Duits 2007: p. 22-25). Like with Man Ray’s present, the recognisability of the original product is the basis for the cultural significance. Mildred Constantine and Arthur Drexler already emphasized this in the exhibition catalogue of ‘the Object Transformed’ in the Museum of Modern Art in New York in 1966: ‘Meret Oppenheim’s cup, plate, and spoon covered with fur, and Man Ray’s tack-studded iron, force on us physical associations of singular incompatibility. The effectiveness of these objects depends [...] on our recognizing the originals within the transformation’ (Constantine & Drexler 1966: p. 7).

Besides Oppenheim and Man Ray, Salvador Dalí was also a master of making strange combinations that, as with the cup and saucer by Meret Oppenheim, were often accompanied by sexual connotations. His telephone with horn in the shape of a lobster is one of the best known surreal objects [Figure 5.4]. If there is any doubt about the meaning of the lobster, then the title of the work – Aphrodisiac Telephone – will help. Dalí referred to his design as a device to call your lover or your mistress and Ghislaine Wood adds: ‘Dalí also had ideas for other phones, such as an Aphrodisiac Telephone that was mounted on the back of a living tortoise. [...] A final bizarre proposal was a sabot-covered telephone for the boudoirs of sirens, with ermine placed on the turntable to protect the fingernails (Wood & Te Duits 2007: p. 105).

Apart from the use of fur and lobsters, the surrealists also composed objects with all other kinds of body parts. This anthropomorphism is for instance clearly visible in the ‘chair with armrests’ by Dalí and Edward James, where Oppenheim’s ‘table with bird feet’ can be called an ‘ornithomorphic’ variant [Figure 5.6 and 5.7]. Both designs are in essence precursors of the later postmodern


[5.10] Leonor Fini – ‘Corset Chair’ – 1939, was presented at an exhibition of decorative art organized by the painter Fini herself in the contemporary Parisian Drouin Gallery, alongside works of Salvador Dalí and Meret Oppenheim, amongst others (Wood & Te Duits 2007: p. 16).

[5.11] Isamu Noguchi – ‘Radio Nurse Speaker’ – 1937, the sculptor Noguchi made with this bakelite intercom speaker for the Zenith Radio Corporation (Rychlak 2010) one of the few designs in which the anthropomorphic style of the surrealists was incorporated into a truly modern technological product.
Just as with the unruly designers of the eighties and nineties, this was for the surrealists an apparent way to stand up against the design principles of the functionalists.

Salvador Dalí took the principle further and transformed the lips of Mae West into the famous red couch, and later also turned them into a capital brooch [Figure 5.8 and 5.9]. Dali considered it his merit to offer a human alternative to the increasing ‘mechanization’ of society, that was inspired by the functionalists and modernists: ‘I am very proud because in 1928, at the height of the functionalist and practical anatomy, and in the midst of the most sardonic of scepticisms, I predicted the imminence of the round and salivant muscles of Mae West, to which secondary biological thoughts do attach themselves most terribly.’ (Dalí 1934; cited in: Fanés et al. 2005: pp. 20-22). In the work of Dali, but also in the work of other surrealists, we therefore find many emphatic references to the female body. Often also in an indirect way, such as with the corselet chair by Leonor Fini, who uses the association with feminine clothing instead of the female body itself [Figure 5.10]. Even in one of the few designs where the anthropomorphism of the surrealists was incorporated into a technological mass produced product, the feminine theme is present [Figure 5.11].

On the other hand, the luxury brooch with pearls and rubies from Dalí also illustrates the elitist nature of most surrealist objects, which, just like the Memphis furniture, were only accessible to a limited audience. Moreover, just as with the postmodernists of Memphis, Alchymia and the Neue Design, the surrealistic objects were sold exclusively in exclusive galleries [Figure 5.12]. The elitist character was also enhanced by the close ties of the surrealists with the equally exclusive world of haute couture (Wilcox 2001: p. 9; Wood & Te Duits 2007: pp. 11-15) [Figure 5.13; 5.14; 5.15].

In particular, Elsa Schiaparelli managed to create a typically surrealistic alienating effect (Baudot 2001: pp. 64-65). Although she stayed closer to home with her associations than the other artists: she moved shoes to the head and stuck fingernails on a glove [Figure 5.16; 5.17].

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5.1 Surreal

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77 The painting ‘Mae West’s face which may be used as a surrealist apartment’ from 1934-35, see figure 6.43, following next.

78 See chapter 3.1, preceding.
Galerie Ratton – Paris – 1936, image of an exhibition of surreal objects, in full: *Exhibition surréaliste d’objets mathématiques naturels trouvés et interprétés mobiles irrationels objets d’Amérique et d’Océanie*, rue de Marignan 14, Paris, May 22-31, 1936. Werner Spies emphasized the importance of this exhibition: ‘The exhibition at Galerie Charles Ratton demonstrated the authority with which objects had begun to establish a place for themselves alongside paintings and drawings.’ (Bhattacharya-Stettler et al. 2007: p. 21).


The latter is in its turn related to the fur project of Meret Oppenheim, which besides the famous cup and saucer also consisted of a fur bracelet and fur gloves (Bhattacharya-Stettler et al. 2007: pp. 152-153) [Figure 5.18].

n contrast to what the often grotesque and bizarre end results suggests, the design principle used by the surrealists in all these projects is not very complicated: one takes an object and extracts it from its familiar context by linking it to something completely different. Just like how the strangest things come together in dreams.

After all, the dream world was the source of inspiration for the surrealists and André Breton himself explained: ‘I envisage nothing less than the objectification of the activity of dreaming, its transfer into reality.’ (cited in: Bhattacharya-Stettler et al. 2007: p. 21). Breton consciously stimulated the creation of surprising combinations by making various disciplines within the artists’ group work together: ‘Breton had a preference for interpersonal activities in which both writers and artists could participate. These included protocols of dreams, spiritistic sessions, “automatic writing,” and practices like cadavre exquis79. Thanks to such activities [...], borderlines between established genres and techniques were transcended.’ (Bhattacharya-Stettler et al. 2007: pp. 21-22). The surprising combinations ultimately result in a process of transposition or transformation. Because an object is removed from its environment, the original object receives a new meaning and therefore becomes a different object.

Foreman Breton had not failed to notice the fact that according to this design principle it was quite simple to make a ‘surrealistic object’, and he feared imitation: ‘We would like to draw a strict dividing line between what is essentially surreal and what tries to go for it, for publicity reasons or whatever. Ideally, every authentic surreal object should immediately be identifiable by some distinctive external sign. Man Ray was thinking of a kind of stamp or seal ... that would be included somewhere in the poem, the book, the drawing, the canvas, the sculpture or the new construction ... an impenetrable and indelible mark, something like: “This is a surrealistic object”, as said by André Breton in his “Surrealistic situ-

79 A cadavre exquis is a poem where the next line of poetry is always written by someone else while he does not know the previous sentences. Usually one word is passed in order to connect the lines. Cadavre exquis can be translated as ‘Exquisite corpse’.


[5.19] Man Ray – ‘Coat Stand’ – 1920/1975, ‘Man Ray also provided images for surrealist magazines such as Minotaure and for Breton’s publications such as l’Amour fou (1937) and for fashion magazines Vogue and Harper’s Bazaar. [...] His images of the deconstructed and idolized female body would have a huge influence and would contribute to the development of a fashion photo style that would often be pursued.’ (Wood & Te Duits 2007: pp. 11-12).

The distribution of a kind of stamp of ‘good surrealistic taste’ was of course no salutary way. Breton erroneously assumed in this proposal that making a surreal object according to this simple ‘recipe’ also automatically leads to a good surrealistic object. However, making a good surrealist object is not as easy as it seems in practice, because not every strange combination of random sources or every previously unknown change of context is by definition interesting. Ultimately, it is the talent, the attention, the creativity, or perhaps the perseverance of the individual artist who determines the quality of the final result. Here we are dealing with the same phenomenon of ‘eloquence’ (Kieft 1984: p. 26) that played a part in the practice of the postmodernists in chapter 2.4. A good surrealistic object makes the observer think with a well-chosen combination of sources, and often feels a little uncomfortable in the first place [Figure 5.19].

The quality of the transformation determines the quality of the object. After all, that quality lies in the new meaning that is linked to the transformed object. Ghislaine Wood illustrates this on the basis of an object by Robert Gober from 1992: ‘If you look closely, you will see that the imprint of the children’s foot in black male hair adorns the insole. This virgin white shoe of wax, also indebted to Magritte, has as great an explosive charge as the explicitly sexually loaded photographs of Bellmer’s dolls from the thirties. It makes clear at a glance that the legacy of surrealism is still not only in the unexpected but also in the unacceptable’ (Wood & Te Duits 2007: p. 203) [Figure 5.20; 5.21; 5.22].

The meaning is evoked by the associations that are forced upon the observer by the novel combination of artefacts. You could also formulate the quality as the extent to which the transformed object walks off with the associations of the observer. After all, the ‘black male hair’ that Ghislaine Wood recalls is pure projection; the object evokes the darkest thoughts of the critic herself. The better surrealist work of art thus prepares the associations, which are filled in by the viewer himself. This interpretation is done as described in chapter 1.5 on the


[5.22] Hans Bellmer – ‘La Poupée’ – 1934, the doll has lost her innocence by photographing it in a seductive pose. The effect is enhanced by the imperfection of the exposed body.

[5.23] Philippe Starck – ‘Teddy Bear Band’ – 1998, the teddy bear has lost his innocence because of his physical imperfection. The arms, which convert into the bodies of animals that would be friends in the normal world of children, are reminiscent of genetic manipulation.
basis of the frame of reference of the observer. Without the social fear of pedophilia, Gober’s shoe would not be an interesting work of art, just as Marcel Wanders’ candle holder would not be an interesting design without the famous wine glass by Andries Copier.\textsuperscript{80}

Eventually, unruly design is to a large extent indebted to surrealism in this way. Even the aspect of the ‘unacceptable’, as evoked by the surrealist objects is reflected in the later unruly design. For example visible in the ‘Teddy bear band’ soft toy designed by Philippe Starck for the French company Moulin Roty. The intriguing ‘genetically engineered’ toy character can no longer be automatically accepted as an innocent children’s friend [Figure 5.23].

\textsuperscript{80} See chapter 1.5, figure 1.30, preceding.
[5.24] Marcel Breuer – Nesting tables – 1925-1927, the design ideals of the functionalists were in line with the possibilities of the industry to produce efficiently.

5.2 Conclusion: postmodernism was not a new invention

The passion for exuberance, the enthusiasm for engagement and the love for external symbolism of the surrealists contrasted just as strongly with the ascetic form language of the functionalists as postmodernism would do half a century later. The surrealists, however, unlike the postmodernists, have played no significant role in product design.

Surrealists ultimately played a marginal role in product design because of their elitist and anti-technological attitude. As a result, their rich, figurative design language did not match the possibilities of modern industry at the time. Conceptual designer Marcel Wanders formulates in a plastic way: ‘Before that time people had furniture with beautiful twisted legs, carvings, cherubs upon them. But then there came an industry that could saw a plank and bend a tube, and not so much more’ (cited in: Veen 2008: p. 16) [Figure 5.24].

Before the rise of functionalism, decoration, figuration and a complex design language were very common. The view that this all had no function and therefore had to be abolished, was actually an exception in the history of design. Andrea Branzi wrote already in 1984: ‘The applied arts of the last century [the 19th century! - WE] were full of signs and quotations, of metaphors and ornament. But they disappeared at the beginning of this century, suffocated by the unitary hypothesis of the Bauhaus with its insistence on the oneness of arts and
The arrangement of existing objects that scanned and printed again determined the shape of the ‘Pig Bracelet’ from figure 5.26.

Ted Noten – ‘Pig Bracelet’ – 2010, ‘What could the audience gape at? To the Pig-bracelet and ring by Ted Noten for example, which are surprising in form and production process: from the arrangement of a scooter inner tube, a piggy bank found on Marketplace and a pearl necklace, a three-dimensional scan and subsequently strongly reduced copies were made.’ (Mechelen 2009: p. 28) [Figure 5.27].
techniques, with architecture, as the most important and most general instrument of control, acting as a defender of a possible unity of purpose.’ (Branzi 1984: p. 147).

Here the Bauhaus is presented as a suffocating force, which smothered all richness of form in its functionalist ideology of progress.

Nowadays, however, we can have almost everything made by the computer [Figure 5.25]. The question then is what we do with these possibilities as a designer.

A recent example that shows the possibilities offered by the new production techniques is the project ‘Haunted by 36 women’ by the unruly jewelery designer Ted Noten. The designer used the shape of existing objects by scanning them with a computer and then having them printed out in plastic in various combinations and on scale (Baar et al. 2009: pp. 44-45) [Figure 5.26 en 5.27].

In this way existing shapes are, as it were, sampled, as has been customary in music and graphic design for some time. The result can be placed in a long tradition that runs from Duchamp’s readymade urinal from the 1930s, through the ‘collages’ of Axel Stumpf\(^{81}\) and the wineglass objects of Peter van der Jagt and Marcel Wanders\(^{82}\) from the nineties.

The latter illustrates once again that surrealism has more or less laid the foundations for a design principle that is presently current again, and that can be summarized as: when something known is placed in a different context, something new is formed. New associations will provide new meanings that are evoked by turning the frame of reference of the user upside down. This principle is very simple for those who see it, but the quality of the object that is (re)produced with the help of this principle is ultimately a matter of talent of the designer.

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\(^{81}\) See chapter 2.3 and figure 2.33, preceding.

\(^{82}\) See chapter 1.5, figure 1.30 and chapter 4.1, figure 4.7, preceding.


[6.4] Jurgen Bey – ‘Tree Trunk Bench’ – 1999, for the sake of fairness it must be said that the park bench of Bey, in contrast to the benches by Nakashima and Branzi, is made up of bronze casts of the original wooden backrests (Teunissen & Van Zijl 2000: p. 35).
In what way can we now learn from a short century of unruly designs? In this study we were not only looking for clarity about the notion of ‘meaning’ in design, but also for clarity in the designer’s ability to get started with the insights gained.

A starting point is is provided by the fact that we have seen in the course of our story that many designers refer to each other and that some products are even heavily ‘based on’ previous creations. Most striking are the ‘direct’ copies, such as the benches that George Nakashima, Andrea Branzi and Jurgen Bey, each in a different decade, made from a combination of raw wood and ‘cultivated’ wood [Figure 6.1- 6.4]. In all three cases the designers went for the contrast between the rough, irregularly shaped wood and the smoothly machined wood. In doing so they created a metaphor for the relation between ‘nature’ and ‘culture’ respectively (Teunissen & Van Zijl 2000: p. 35; Sotheby’s 2008; Kester 2009: p. 33).

It is not so interesting in this case whether the designers deliberately acted upon each other or not. Sometimes it is more interesting to see that designers, unconsciously or not, elaborate on each other’s idea and take it a step further. In 1975 for example, Alessandro Mendini set fire to a chair [Figure 6.5]. In 2002, Maarten Baas did the same, but did not let the chair burn off completely. Instead he preserved the half-burned chair with resin and upholstered it again (Baas & Den Herder 2009). The special material appearance that arose from this process

[6.6] Maarten Baas – ‘Smoke Chair / Gaudi Chair’ – 2004, after the original Smoke Chair from 2002 [Figure 6.7] the designer also set fire to other classic designs; amongst others a Zigzag chair by Rietveld and the ‘Calvet’ by Gaudi that is pictured here.

produced a new design classic and made the shortly graduated designer instantly famous. [Figure 6.6 en 6.7].

The principle becomes even clearer if we compare one and the same design approach over the years. Viewed at a higher level of abstraction, objects that seem less similar to each other than the benches of Nakashima, Branzi and Bey can also be very closely related. A nice example are the costume designs of Salvador Dalí, Alessandro Mendini and the design duo KEUPR/vanBENTM that are all totally different in appearance [Figure 6.8 – 6.11]. Viewed superficially they seem to have only the ‘absurd’ in common.

Nonetheless, they share the same idea in their approach to materializing that absurdity. In all three designs, the same principle is applied; clothing is made special by combining it with something that at first glance is not clothing at all. Surrealist Dalí starts from kitchen utensils (completed with a cloud), postmodernist Mendini starts from furniture and Dutch designers Michiel Keuper and Francisco van Benthem alienate a costume in the same way by adding a plane, including a runway. The latter design is at the same time conceptually similar to the seagown dress by Marcel Rochas [Figure 6.12].

In this way, unruly design is indeed subject to certain rules: a certain way of working as it were. If something is done in a certain way, it is reproducible as a process. And if it is reproducible as a process, it comes apart from the idea of the unruly designer as an autonomous artist, whose creativity is unique and inimitable. This means that in principle everyone can design unruly, if he or she follows the process. Although the results will not always be interesting, because after all, the cliché is lurking. Consider the remark about ‘eloquence’ of Ghislaine Kieft from the conclusion of chapter two about postmodernism: ‘For Sottsass and his peers the problem is, it seems to me, not so much to talk, but also to be eloquent, that is, to provide us with powerful, significant, concise images; metaphors that can convince us, and that transcend mere irony.’ (Kieft 1984: p. 26).
[6.8] Maurice Henry or Salvador Dalí – ‘Mannequin Surréaliste’ – 1938, for the Exposition internationale du Surréalisme, which premiered in January 1938 in the Beaux-Arts Gallery in Paris, shop window dolls were handed out to the participating artists to dress according to their own views. Here the doll which was dressed by Dalí featuring in a photograph by Man Ray, according to Baudot (2001: p. 76). Pfeiffer however, ascribes this design to Maurice Henry (Pfeiffer 2011: p. 65).


[6.11] Alessandro Mendini – ‘Costume Interior’ or ‘Dress Furniture’ – 1982, this project was part of a performance in the showroom of the mildly controversial couture house Fiorucci in Milan. The performance was entitled Furniture as Clothing (Sato 1988: p. 78).

6 Basics
6.1 Communication

6.1 Design as a means of communication

In the first chapter of this book I stated that we can view the history of unruly design as a history of ideas, where the main criterion is the idea or the vision, from which the designer has developed his or her object. Here it became clear that the vision of the unruly designer is mainly focused on determining the meaning which the object should signify and not so much on the practical function of the object itself. ‘Design as a cultural phenomenon’ is then also characterized as a way to convey ideas. For a clear view of the consequences of the observations from the previous section, it makes sense to consider ‘the activity of designing’ as a form of communication, as presented in the model by Crilly et al. (2004) in Figure 6.14.

In this model the product functions as a ‘transmitter’ of the message of the designers (‘design team’) to the ‘receiving’ consumer. The consumer picks up the ‘message’ via the senses and translates it for himself into his own meaning (‘cognition’), an accompanying emotion (‘affect’) and a certain ‘behavior’. In the introduction chapter, we have found that a lot of research in the field of design and emotions does not provide a basis for the actual design of products. This is because the research presented is all concerned with the right-hand side of the model; the interpretation and processing of the meaning of a design by the user. For example, Desmet’s model of product emotion explains how the consumer makes a certain judgment of a product by interpreting the stimulus - cognition - and comparing it with his own
values and norms, which results in a certain appraisal of the product, which in Crilly’s model is called ‘affect’.

This tells us nothing however, about how the ‘transmitter’ should be shaped to have the desired effect. The following paragraphs therefore deal with the left-hand side of the model: what can the designer do to have his product ‘broadcast’ the - desired - meaning?

Jurgen Bey, for example, combined in our aforementioned example of the ‘Tree Trunk Bench’ a tree stump and a number of classic chair backs into a park bench (transmitter) to say something about the relationship between nature and culture.83 On the right side of the model it is then the consumer who is confronted with this hybrid object. From the common frame of reference, the consumer then recognizes the chair backs (cognition) and sits down on the tree stump (behavior). The unsuspecting passers-by can then enjoy this or not (affect), depending on their own requirements and wishes. The passer-by, for example, can judge negatively if the person finds that the bank is not comfortable, or judge positively if one is touched by the tension between the rough tree trunk and the refined backrests.

In the remainder of this chapter, this judgment will play no further role. Instead it will be specifically about the methodology of designing the messages-to-be-transmitted. Various design critics though - judging from their frame of reference84 - really loved the park bench by Bey (Teunissen & Van Zijl 2000: p. 35; Betsky & Eeuwens 2004: p. 129).

83 See also chapter 4.1, preceding.

thirty young architects and designers [...] were asked to fulfil the following conditions:

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Condition</th>
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<tr>
<td>to make the function seem ambiguous</td>
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<tr>
<td>to design the image of the object and not its function</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>to put together parts that do not match</td>
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<tr>
<td>to create a general feeling of calm</td>
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<tr>
<td>to change slightly the expected dimensions</td>
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<tr>
<td>to introduce an unexpected element</td>
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<tr>
<td>objects should not be grotesque</td>
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<tr>
<td>to create a feeling of science-fiction suspense</td>
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<tr>
<td>to avoid all Post-Modern features</td>
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<tr>
<td>objects should not be whimsical</td>
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<tr>
<td>to include industrial features in each object</td>
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<tr>
<td>to use soft colours (white, grey, silver, pink, light blue, etc.)</td>
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<tr>
<td>to incorporate soft parts whenever possible</td>
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<tr>
<td>not to overuse decorative additions (three-dimensional [...])</td>
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<tr>
<td>to incorporate both shiny and matt parts</td>
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<td>to avoid pointed corners</td>
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6.2 Design rules

6.2 Unruly design rules

From the idea about the similarities in the often identical ideas that form the basis of differently designed objects, as expressed in the introduction of this chapter, it is now possible to construct a classification of the artefacts from all the unruly design movements covered in this historical study. The starting point is therefore always the way in which the designers have materialized their ideas in the designs. In the context of the objective of this study, which is to provide the designer with some basis for the design process, a limited number of classes was chosen, each of them representing a specific approach.

We start from a totally random layout of Alessandro Mendini himself, with which the maestro has given inspiration for such a classification in a project for Alchymia called ‘Natural Objects’. In this project from 1982, a group of thirty young architects and designers was asked to design objects ‘that would enable modern man to enjoy sophisticated home comforts.’ (Sato 1988: p. 30). The participants in this project were then asked to take into account a whole list of starting points [Table 6.1]. Apart from the fact that the list is quite long for a handy overview of design rules and contradicts itself a few times, the level of abstraction of the different starting points also differs considerably. For example, to make the function seem ambiguous relates to an entire object, while to avoid pointed corners is at a very detailed level. It should therefore be little surprise that the designs based on Mendini’s ‘list of requirements’ had a distinctly hybrid character [Figure 6.15].

85 To me it seems hard to combine ‘a general feeling of calm’ with ‘a feeling of science-fiction suspense’, especially if an object ‘should not be whimsical’ (capricious). From this it becomes clear that the list of instructions itself is also an ironic commentary on functionalism: due to the inconsistency the phenomenon ‘list of requirements’ is being ridiculed.


On the other hand, we see a starting point such as *to put together parts that do not match* incorporated in designs from different periods of the unruly design history. The designs by Franco Raggi, Oscar Dominguez and Hella Jongerius, for example, are all characterized by an alienating combination of elements [Figure 6.16 - 6.18]. Think also of the different ‘tortuous-tree-trunk-and-straight-plank’ combinations as mentioned earlier in the introduction of this chapter.

The interpretation of these starting points is therefore, just as with the designs to be analyzed, about what idea lies behind the instruction. For example, the starting point *to incorporate soft parts whenever possible* can be made more general when we consider that this instruction by Mendini is probably based on the idea that most household appliances, what the project was more or less about, at that time used hard materials. If we take this underlying idea to a higher level of abstraction, we can then interpret the instruction as a call for uncommon material use *per se*.

By comparing more than five hundred designs from the different periods and design movements treated in this study, we can ultimately identify a number of groups of product designs that have been designed from a comparable perspective. After all, this study was about the underlying idea and not necessarily about the appearance of the designs. After a number of iterations, a classification has been made with five categories, which will be presented in the following paragraphs as five unruly design rules.86

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86 ‘Rule’ should not be interpreted as a norm or standard, but rather as a ‘rule of thumb’ or something to follow voluntarily.
[6.19] Salvador Dalí – ‘Vénus de Milo aux Tiroirs’ – 1936/1964. ‘The statue [...] in the vision of Dalí, had to be executed in white painted bronze, so when “[…] somebody would want to take it up, he would be surprised while it would be much heavier than expected.” (Wood & Te Duits 2007: p. 94).


[6.21] On this publicity image for the Memphis group, in Umeda’s bed/boxing ring combination, are ‘hanging’ from left to right: Aldo Cibic, Andrea Branzi, Michele De Lucchi, Marco Zanini, Nathalie du Pasquier, George J. Sowden, Martine Bedin, Matteo Thun and ‘founding father’ Ettore Sottsass.
6.2 Design rules

6.2.1 Unruly rule 1: combining different interest domains

This principle is a generalization of the instruction *put together parts that do not match* from the Mendini workshop. In this method, the basic product (for example a bookcase) is combined with an item (such as a car-jack) coming from another environment (the garage, in this example of the ‘Wagenheberregal’ from chapter 2.3, preceding). This is a very strong signifying principle because the confrontation of the two domains almost compels the user to think about the associations that are evoked by the individual parts. In the case of unruly design, this principle is mainly about the combination of unexpected things. The latter can be regarded as an ‘invention’ of the surrealists, applied with great success by the postmodernists and recently ‘rediscovered’ by the conceptual designers: ‘... entirely in accordance with the sentence so admired and often quoted by the Surrealists from the prose poem *Les Chants de Maldoror* (1868-1869) by Comte de Lautréamont. “He was [...] as beautiful as the chance encounter between a sewing machine and an umbrella on the dissecting table!”’ (Wood & Te Duits 2007: p. 194).

The ‘Venus de Milo’ that was transformed by Salvador Dalí in collaboration with Marcel Duchamp was primarily intended to de-mystify the symbol of beauty (Wood & Te Duits 2007: p. 94) [Figure 6.19]. However, with this object the user also has the same experience as with the ‘Chest of Drawers’ by Tejo Remy. See chapter 4.1, preceding. Items are no longer stored in the anonymous ‘third drawer from above’, but

[6.23; 6.24] Kazuyo Sejima and Ryue Nishizawa – ‘Coffee Piazza’ – 2003, in the reprise of the Tea & Coffee Piazza project by Alessi, Sejima and Nishizawa use the metaphor of the fruit bowl to present their tea and coffee service as a convivial set (a lot friendlier and closer to home than the aircraft carrier of Hans Hollein).

[6.25; 6.26] Tom Kovac – Service and design sketch for the Coffee Piazza project – 2003, Kovac uses a special form of the domain combination rule by using images of sound waves to create new shapes for the service.
in the stomach or the leg or the head of the object. As a result, the items are given a recognizable place of their own, which makes them both more special and easier to find.\textsuperscript{88} Dalí and Duchamp transform through this combination of famous sculpture and banal storage furniture both the sculpture and the idea of storage into a new form. On the one hand, the sculpture is stripped of its esoteric beauty by presenting it as a utensil, and on the other hand, the idea of ‘storage’ acquires something of a magical timelessness by casting it in the form of a classical sculpture. The same effect occurs with the aforementioned wheelbarrow by Oscar Dominguez, in which the luxuriously padded upholstery takes the object out of the rural context, as it were, and makes it ‘salonfähig’. While at the same time, the wheelbarrow makes an ironic statement of the bourgeois luxury of the ‘chaise-longue’ [Figure 6.18].

With this design rule, it is therefore important to ensure that the two domains ‘say’ something about each other through a clever combination of strange things; commenting on each other or complementing each other. For example, the bed in the form of a boxing ring by Masanori Umeda turns out to be a pleasantly separated corner to ‘hang’ with your friends, but at the same time this idea renders some friction because a boxing ring is always the scene of battle [Figure 6.20 en 6.21].

The same tension arises at Hans Hollein’s coffee service in the form of an aircraft carrier [Figure 6.22]. An aircraft carrier in real life also serves as a stand for things, just like a tray. Only in the case of the aircraft carrier these things are planes instead of pots. On the other hand, it is strange, of course, to carry out the peaceful ceremony of serving tea or coffee with war gear. For the same ‘Tea & Coffee Piazza’ project as for which Hans Hollein designed his aircraft carrier coffee service, Aldo Rossi made the design shown in Chapter 3 in the form of a little glass house. The architect used the symbol of a temple to emphasize the ceremonial aspect of serving tea [Figure 3.1].

In a reprise of the project in 2003, several designers and architects were again asked to design a tea or coffee

\textsuperscript{88} Besides the fact that, of course, no one would even think of actually storing something in this priceless work of art from a series of five. With Dalí it is more about the underlying idea than about making a real piece of furniture. With Tejo Remy, the cabinet is also actually - although partly - intended as a utensil.


[6.30] Masonori Umeda – ‘Rose Chair’ – 1991, een op en top ‘romantische’ stoel. Uit dezelfde serie als de ‘I Fiori’ uit paragraph 1.4.4 [Figure 1.21].
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The combination of clothing and furniture shown in the introduction of this chapter in Alessandro Mendini’s ‘Furniture Clothing’ project was also followed upon in the ‘Architectural Fashion’ series by Cinzia Ruggeri: ‘A costume is a space constructed around a body as a small architectural object.’ (Sato 1988: p.153) [Figure 6.27]. However, the combination of clothing and architecture was again based on an idea by surrealist De Chirico from 1929. The combination proved itself effective already at the time: ‘The Chirico’s costumes transformed the dancers into moving sculptures. A Parisian critic remarked that they were like sculptures that came to life for one night.’ (Wood & Te Duits 2007: p. 61) [Figure 6.28].

The unruly design rule is visible with all kinds of different product types. For example, postmodernist Yutaka Hikosawa combined a product for children with an egg to emphasize the idea of protection and birth [Figure 6.29], and Masonori Umeda made furniture romantic by combining seats with flowers [Figure 6.30]. In addition to the coffee services, we also see the combination of domains reappear at Alessi in the designs of other products, such as a toothpick holder by Andrea Branzi which combines ‘dining’ with ballet [Figure 6.31].

In the conceptual design of the nineties new combinations of domains arise that seem to have nothing to do with each other at first sight. The nice thing is that with these designs it often succeeds not only to comment, but also to add something in a functional sense. In chapter four we have already seen that this is an essential further development of the postmodern perspective and an

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89 See figure 6.10 and 6.11, preceding.

90 See also figure 1.21 in paragraph 1.4.4, preceding.
important difference with the designs described above. A sound example of this form of augmented postmodernism is Peter van der Jagt’s previously mentioned doorbell,\textsuperscript{91} in which the wine glasses not only have a symbolic meaning, but also actually generate the specific sound [Figure 4.7].

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\textsuperscript{91} See chapter 4.1, preceding.
[6.32; 6.33] The resemblance of Philippe Starck’s ‘Juicy Salif’ with the de Tintin rocket (see also chapter 3.1).


6.2 Design rules

6.2.2 Unruly rule 2; use inspiration from popular culture

In addition to combining domains, we often see the postmodern design idiom bringing together so-called ‘higher’ and ‘lower’ culture. Images from popular films and television series, cartoon characters and nursery rhymes are used to make designs recognizable. In chapter 3.1 we have already seen that Philippe Starck got inspiration from the Tintin rocket and that Stefano Giovaninni and Guido Venturini based their project on the Italian version of ‘Here We Go Round the Mulberry Bush’ [Figure 6.32; 6.33; 6.34].

In the Philips\textsuperscript{92} television project that was led by the postmodernists, some of the designs referred to Mickey Mouse [Figure 6.35; 6.36]. And also in earlier postmodernist designs we find this reference, like with the ‘Wink’ by Japanese designer Toshiyuki Kita for Memphis and a dinner chair by Spaniard Javier Mariscal [Figure 6.38 - 6.40]. In a similar way Richard Hutten based his ‘Sexy Relaxy’ chair on a scene from the film ‘Basic Instinct’.\textsuperscript{93}

The ‘Wink’ chair by Kita is actually more interesting than the later ‘Garriris’ design by Mariscal. As was the case with the conceptual designers, Kita made a combination of functionality and meaning: with the ear-shaped additions, a reference is made to popular culture, which at the same time contributes to the usability of the chair.

But of course this principle had also been applied before, as can be seen in the famous bench-in-the-form-of-a-

\textsuperscript{92} See paragraph 3.2.1, preceding.

\textsuperscript{93} See chapter 4.2, preceding.
Toshiyuki Kita – ‘Wink’ lounge chair – 1980, 'Still working from the Italian style concept, Kita designed this chair, which was brought into production by Cassina in Milan. With his associations with Mickey Mouse he refers to pop culture, which has had such a great influence on Japanese design' (Sparke 1988: p. 126). The chair is still in production at Cassina and is now hip again in a version with fabric designs by Marimekko [Figure 6.40].

Marimekko – 2006, a recent version of the original design by Kita from 1980, in a merry floral design typical of Marimekko.
mouth by Salvador Dalí and Edward James [Figure 6.42]. This sofa was made in response to a painting by Dalí, which in turn was inspired by the film diva Mae West (Fanés et al. 2005: pp. 117-118) [Figure 6.41].

Robert Venturi and Denise Scott-Brown (1977) advocated this ‘inspiration from popular context’ already in *Learning from Las Vegas* and called it ‘vernacular’ design, which can also be translated as ‘indigenous’ design. Charles Jencks (1984) later even proposed the most literal form of symbolism as an example [Figure 6.45]. In the later Tea & Coffee Piazza\textsuperscript{94} project of Alessi, Jencks himself designed a service consisting of rather kitschy Ionic columns. [Figure 6.43 and 6.44].

This design rule, based on icons from popular culture, is interesting because it is in fact a kind of reversal of the principle of ‘descending cultural goods’. This is the phenomenon known from the history of design that new cultural goods are first reserved to the elite, but later increasingly penetrate into society and thereby ‘descend’ to the ‘ordinary people’ as it were. This is also described in the aforementioned *Theory of the Leisure Class* by Thorstein Veblen (1899, reissue 1994).\textsuperscript{95} In this text, Veblen explains that the privileges of the rich are always copied, pursued and eventually incorporated by the lower classes, after which the elite must look for new ways to differentiate themselves. At the time when Veblen wrote the book, the rich let staff work for them, so that they could surrender themselves to leisure activities such as hunting and horse racing, hence the term ‘Leisure Class’. The superlative of this was surrounding yourself with people who did not even work for you: ‘profiteers’ who merely served as an entourage.

Nowadays, the elite is more or less distinguished by superfluous luxury goods and an allegedly refined taste. However, due to economic growth, goods are becoming cheaper and cheaper, and will eventually fall within the reach of the middle class. Just think of the SUV - first available only in the form of an expensive Range Rover - which was ‘democratized’ by the arrival of the Kia Sorento, available for the prize of a small family car.\textsuperscript{96} Exceptions to the rule are the so-called ‘socially rising
[6.41] Salvador Dalí – ‘Mae West’s face which may be used as a surrealist apartment’ – 1934-1935, Dalí later actually used the painted face as a surrealist appartment: “In 1974, he turned the image into a reality with the aid of the architect Oscar Tusquets: one of the rooms in the Theatre-Museum in Figueres houses the apartment based on the head of the explosive sex symbol. (Fanés et al. 2005: p. 117-118).


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cultural goods’, with as best known example the jeans in the sixties. With the principle of inspiration from popular culture, the cultural world of the masses is therefore made available and made acceptable to the elite.

Lloyd and Snelders (2001) argue in this respect that Philippe Starck’s inspiration for the Juicy Salif was partly due to the designer’s personal fascination with science-fiction stories. This designing from one’s own interest or private background is related to a part of the SCOT theory of Bijker (1999), in which SCOT stands for the Social Construction Of Technology. In his book Of Bicycles, Bakelites, and Bulbs; Towards a Theory of Socio-technical Change Bijker argues that the development of technology is based on different sociological processes. In his story about the development of Bakelite by the Belgian inventor Baekeland, he shows how innovations are ‘steered’ by the environment and background of the actual developers. Bijker refers to this particular frame of reference as a ‘technological frame’.

In unruly design we see a similar mechanism, in which the steering from the ‘technological frame’ is replaced by the steering of a socio-cultural frame of reference. Javier Mariscal initially engaged in the drawing of comic strips (Albus et al. 1995: p. 101) and designer Damien O’Sullivan developed his Solar Lampion from a fascination with solar cells, as O’Sullivan’s father was responsible for the development of solar panels for satellites as a designer at the European Space Agency (ESA) (O’Sullivan 2009).

According to this vision, Leo Hendrik Baekeland was ultimately able to come up with his revolutionary Bakelite material because he was even part of two distinctive ‘technological frames’. By combining ideas from different social groups; the developers of celluloid on the one hand and the developers of photographic paper on the other hand, the chemist came to an achievement that the competition from within the individual groups failed (Bijker 1999). The Japanese designer Toshiyuki Kita, from the previously mentioned ‘Wink’ chair, is also an illustrative example in this respect. Originally from Japan, in 1979 he also settled part-time in Milan to focus

[6.47] Masanori Umeda – ‘Ginza’ cupboard from the Memphis collection – 1982, inspired by Japanese toy robots and Anime figures [Figure 6.52] and executed in the typical Memphis style with laminate finishing.

[6.48] Peter van der Jagt – Handheld drill – 1993, Van der Jagt made this drill with the shape of a futuristic laser gun as part of his graduation project at the Design Academy in Eindhoven, together with the Bottoms-up doorbell (Van Tilborg 2010: p. 41). The device could also be classified within unruly design rule number four; make use of ready modes, because the housing is made of an existing gun toy.

[6.49] ‘Gear Robot’ – nineteen sixties – manufactured by Horikawa in Japan. Japan was the largest supplier of science fiction toys at the time. This copy is an exemplary model, made of ‘tin plate & plastic, battery operated, walks at two speeds, moving arms, turning gears & lights in chest.’ (Emchowicz & Nunneley 1999: p. 25).
more on the Western market. He adhered to his Japanese studio, so that he found himself in two different ‘environments’, just as in the example of Baekeland. The ‘Wink chair’ is therefore seen as a nice symbiosis of the organic, multifunctional approach from the east and the technical innovation and Pop Art from the west (Schriemer et al. 2009).

The steering from the personal frame of reference is also visible in a playful cabinet designed by Masanori Umeda for Memphis [Figure 6.47]. The Japanese based his figurative cupboard on popular symbols from his own cultural environment (Sparke 1988: p 126). Therefore his cabinet looks like a robot [Figure 6.49], while the cabinets of colleague Ettore Sottsass looked like totem poles [Figure 2.2 en 3.45].

Finally, we also see this design rule again within conceptual design [Figure 6.48]. Here too, the signifying component of the design rule coincides to an increasing extent with the functional component: that Peter van der Jagt’s do it yourself machine takes the form of an over-decorated laser gun, does not detract much from the usability. Construction jobs will never be the same with this device.

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101 See also paragraph 6.2.5, following next.

102 See also chapter 4.1, preceding.

103 See paragraph 6.2.4, following next.
Salvador Dalí – ‘Dream of Venus’ – 1939, photographed (color slide) by Eric Schaal. At the world exhibition in New York, dominated by mechanization and streamlining, this dream pavilion by Dalí rather stands out: ‘Only the violence and duration of your hardened dream, [would be able] to resist the hideous mechanical civilisation.’ (Dalí 1939, cited in: Fanés et al. 2005: p. 185). Form complexity as a counterweight against the abstracted modernist society.

Le Corbusier104 – ‘A Contemporary City for Three Million Inhabitants’, gouache on Canson paper – 1922. Rarely a metropolis looked as peaceful and tidy as in this modernist utopia: ‘Le Corbusier’s Contemporary City (Ville Contemporaine), exhibited at the Salon d’Automne of 1922, presented his vision of an ideal urban environment with every modern facility. His plan sought to remedy all the problems of contemporary cities (lack of light, space and greenery) and to incorporate new modes of transportation, abolish congestion, improve circulation and increase population density.’ (Wilk et al. 2006: p. 68).

Renaat Braem – ‘Linear city’ – 1934, modern life had to become professional and efficient; the linear city as an example of ultimate straightness. To reinforce their images of progress, the modernists also provided their design sketches with typical modernist emblems such as zeppelins, airplanes and sports cars. (Bekaert 2005: p. 145).
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6.2.3 Unruly rule 3; incorporate form complexity

This principle basically consists of opposing to the urge for simplification and abstraction that resulted from the ban on ornamentation maintained by the functionalists. The complexity can manifest itself in three different ways: as decoration, in the form of anti-abstraction (or figuration) and as form complexity.

Form complexity already arose with the surrealists who, with the dreamworld as a source of inspiration, actually strove for chaos and alienation (Krauss & Livingston 1985: p. 15, Wood & Te Duits 2007: pp. 19-25). This is most evident in the ‘Dream of Venus’ pavilion designed by Salvador Dalí, which was built in 1939 for the world exhibition in New York [Figure 6.50]. With this pavilion Dalí wanted to set itself off against the exhibition environment that was dominated by technology, streamline and functionalism (Fanés et al. 2005: pp. 185-187).

In general Dalí wanted to use his designs to offer an imaginative counterweight to the increasing rationalization and mechanization of society (Fanés et al. 2005: pp. 117-118). On the contrary, in 1923, contemporary Le Corbusier\(^\text{104}\) had been enthusiastic about the achievements of the machine age, in which he saw tremendous opportunities to bring about order; ‘Relying on calculations, engineers use geometric forms, satisfying our eyes through geometry and our minds through mathematics; their works are on the way to great art.’ (Le Corbusier 2008: p. 100). The functionalists therefore frequently made visions of a highly organized and clean society [Fi-
Archizoom – ‘No-stop City’ – 1970, pastiche on the urban idealism of the modernists. The functionalist building was repeated infinitely through a series of mirrors: ‘Criticism of the Modern Movement was also and above all expressed by taking Rationalism to an extreme, with the intention of exposing the underlying contradictions of the movement.’ (Branzi 1984:p.74).

Michael Graves – ‘Plaza’ dressing table for Memphis – 1981, the object is constructed as an exuberant skyscraper with plastic handles for WMF; just like Michael Graves did with the ‘Plaza’ dressing table, Thun reinterpreted classical motifs.


Javier Mariscal – ‘Duplex’ bar stool – 1980, a cheerful stool with three different legs: an unprecedented ‘waste of form’, according to one of the basic principles of functionalism: Ockham’s Razor.
Important in this respect is that modernism, after Adolf Loos’s famous manifestation of *Ornament und Verbrechen*,\(^{106}\) not only banned decoration, but generally aspired to an ascetic form language, reinforced by the principle of Ockham’s razor; anything that is not strictly necessary should be eliminated. Thus modernism also ‘banned’ a rich form language that could intrinsically be part of the object. The result was, in the long run, a visual limitation that you could consider deadly boring. Robert Venturi’s paraphrase ‘less is a bore’ (Venturi 1977: p. 17) is well-known, but Ghislaine Kieft expresses it more subtly in her essay *Modernisme en Post-Modernisme* [Modernism and Postmodernism] in 1984: ‘In itself there is of course little objection to such a willful limitation of form language. But it is like a conversation with few words and one subject: you are soon running out of things to say.’\(^{107}\) (Joris et al. 1984: p. 19).

In the exuberant designs of Memphis and Alchymia, this limitation of form language was frequently criticized. In the bar stool by Javier Mariscal the principle of Ockham’s Razor is explicitly circumvented by fitting three different legs [Figure 6.54]. Michael Graves and Matteo Thun recalled the richness of form from before functionalism [Figure 6.55 and 6.56].

The passion for form complexity eventually became an important characteristic of the designs of the postmodernists [Figure 6.57 and 6.58]. This unruly design rule, together with combining different interest domains, appears also prominently in the second episode of the ‘Tea & Coffee Piazza’ project by Alessandro Mendini and Alessi\(^{108}\) from 2003 [Figure 6.59].

Later, too, many unruly designs are full of classic references and complex compositions, in which forms are often literally ‘quoted’ or ‘sampled’ [Figure 6.61]. In his design of the Tree Trunk Bench, Jurgen Bey also made no effort to simplify or abstract his sources of inspiration [Figure 6.60]. And this extreme form of figuration is also visible in postmodernist designs [Figure 6.62].

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\(^{106}\) See also paragraph 1.4.1, preceding.

\(^{107}\) Kieft compares designs here again with language, which is in line with the communicative aspect of objects, which became so important within postmodernism.

\(^{108}\) See chapter 3.1, preceding.
Will Alsop – ‘Coffee Piazza’, for Alessi – 2003, Alsop merely does the same as Peter Shire did in the eighties.


Michele De Lucchi – design sketches for HiFi sets – 1981, abundancy in form and color that was very characteristic of Memphis.

Jurgen Bey – ‘Tree Trunk Bench’ – 1999, the shapes that construct the bench are literally ‘quoted’ or ‘sampled’.

Paul Beckman – wall unit – 1986, the separate elements of the furniture do not refer symbolically to the source of inspiration, but are simply incorporated directly, as a kind of collage.
In the original Tea & Coffee Piazza project from 1983, Stanley Tigerman did something similar when he pasted body parts onto the crockery to bring about different functions and simultaneously portray them. In this way, the form and function fell together again and the strong figuration (or anti-abstraction) of the functional parts makes the references clear in an alienating way. The concept of form follows function is thus refilled by expanding it with ‘form follows meaning’ [Figure 6.63; 6.64; 6.65]. Whether the usability is substantially helped with all this, is questionable, but the significance is undoubtedly increased.

The anti-abstracting passion for form complexity of Jurgen Bey and Stanley Tigerman is not necessarily the same as decorating, because the figurative forms are indeed part of the ‘construction’ of the object. The resulting rich form language thus arises from the functionality of the product. After all, Robert Venturi proposed in response to his plea for ‘vernacular design’: ‘It is now time to revaluate the once-horrifying statement of John Ruskin\textsuperscript{109} that architecture is the decoration of construction, but we should append the warning of Pugin\textsuperscript{110}: It is all right to decorate construction but never construct decoration.’ (Venturi et al. 1977: pp. 162-163). Following the examples from the history of unruly design we could now say that decoration is not forbidden, if only it has a meaningful function within the product.

Within unruly designs from the 1980s, this coincidence of decoration and function was usually not yet the case [Figure 6.66]. However, in chapter four we have seen that this has become increasingly common among the products of the conceptual designers. In the speaker set by Marcel Wanders and the table by Gijs Bakker, for example, the decorative pattern is really incorporated in the fulfillment of the function [Figure 6.67; 6.68; 6.69].

Design critic Denise Gonzales Crisp even invented a term for this approach, where the decoration or the so-called form complexity is linked to the functioning of the object: ‘Decorational’ (Gonzales Crisp 2009: pp. 35-38). Another example that illustrates this very well is the ‘Heatwave’ radiator by Joris Laarman [Figure 6.70].
Robert Venturi – Earring – 1982-1986, Venturi purposely gave the earring a figurative shape: ‘I used architectural elements and I liked the idea of representing something. My jewelry is the miniature of something else. It is against the abstract approach’ (Radice 1987: p. 106).

Stanley Tigerman – ‘Coffee Piazza’ – 1983, prototypes for the project of Alessi with extremely figurative execution of handle and spout. In figure 6.65 the resulting service is pictured.

Stanley Tigerman – ‘Coffee Piazza’ – 1983, prototypes for the project of Alessi with extremely figurative execution of handle and spout. In figure 6.65 the resulting service is pictured.

Alchymia – Design for the decoration of a Renault 5 – 1989, at the time the horror for every modernist designer; decoration that has nothing to do with the underlying product.

Stanley Tigerman – ‘Coffee Piazza’ – 1983, the jugs are ‘pulled by the hair’ and they pour from their mouth. The tray is already lifted you by an imaginary person from under the table.
In this design, the form complexity is in a sense even superior to the so-called functionally designed modernist design radiators with straight tubes, since a large surface area is mandatory for an optimal heat dissipation, which is a natural occurrence with the lavish Rococo shapes.

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109 John Ruskin (1819-1900) English art critic and engaged essayist, influential as a writer of essays on art and architecture in the Victorian era.

110 Augustus Welby Northmore Pugin (1812–1852) English design theorist and architect of neo-gothic churches.
[6.67] Marcel Wanders – ‘Egg’ speaker – 2005, voor Holland Electro. Part of the ‘Pandora’ speaker system from figure 6.68. The decoration of the object simultaneously has a function as a grid for the loudspeaker and thus becomes an integral part of the functionality of the product. Yet the objects were apparently not found decorative enough, because in the accompanying marketing campaign every product was consistently portrayed in the company of animals.


[6.69] Gijs Bakker – ‘Fruit table with holes’ – 1993, the size of the holes follows the distribution of forces in the different parts of the table; at the places where the forces are smaller, more material has been removed by means of larger holes. ‘The holes are strategically placed to make the table light in shape and weight. [...] form, function and decoration coincide in this design.’ (Boelen 2010: p. 38).

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[6.71] Galerie Ratton – Paris – 1936, with the bottle rack of Marcel Duchamp displayed as an artwork in the showcase.

[6.72] Bottle rack of the same model that Marcel Duchamp 'elevated' to become an artwork in 1914, here in 2006 still in use at a French farm near Autun.


[6.74] Axel Stumpf – ‘Früchtenschale’ [Fruit bowl] – 1984, a kitchen sieve transformed into a fruit bowl. The context does not change, but the function does. Within conceptual design this motif reappears when Arnout Visser presents a fruit bowl on wheels at the Droog exhibition in Milan in 1993, with the glass part of a washing machine door as the starting point [see figure 6.78] (Ramakers 1993: p. 47).

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6.2.4 Unruly rule 4; make use of readymades

Marcel Duchamp is generally considered to have been the first to present a work of art based on a ‘found’ object. In art history, such an artwork has since been called a ready-made, or an objet-trouvé in French. After Duchamp exhibited his urinal and bottle rack [Figure 6.71; 6.72; 6.126] there have been many examples in art history of works that were constructed with the help of found objects. After the direct transformation of the urinal into an art object (something that was later ‘reinvented’ by Andy Warhol, when he put Brillo boxes in the museum [Figure 6.73]), there have been figured out countless other variants of the principle.

The Brillo boxes from Warhol and the bottle rack from Duchamp are ready-mades where the found objects remain physically the same, but the context in which they are placed changes. Because of this change of context, the objects acquire a new function (as an artwork) from the new environment (the art gallery).

Within unruly design we see the use of existing objects in the structure of a product design so often applied that we can speak of a separate design rule. In the unruly product designs from the Neue Design in Germany, the punk in England and the Italian postmodernists, there are a number of variants on the same basic principle. In some cases, the function of the found object remains the same in the new application, like with the ‘Rover’ bench by Ron Arad [Figure 6.75]. In other cases, the function changes, but the context stays the same [Figure 6.74].

111 The French term is often used because the surrealist movement was led by the French poet André Breton (Krauss & Livingston 1985).


[6.80] Japer Morrison – ‘Flower Pot Table’ – 1983, the downward increasing size of the stacked flowerpots provides the table with a stable base.

In addition, the direct ‘elevation’ of the found objects has evolved into a kind of transformation or combination of objets trouvés. The objects are thereby distorted, merged or adapted to the needs of their new function or new context. The most well-known example is the adapted supermarket trolley by Stiletto Studio [Figure 6.76 en 6.79].

The combination of existing objects can be regarded as a sort of collage technique, which is of course ultimately indebted to the famous bull head of Picasso [Figure 6.77]. Picasso himself was in turn influenced by the works of the surrealists for a long period (Besnard-Bernadac 1987: p. 114).

Even with the conceptual designers of the nineties existing objects are often the starting point of the design. The fruit bowl by Arnout Visser, based on the glass of the door of a washing machine, is even directly comparable with the Früchtenschale by Axel Stumpf from 1984 [Figure 6.78 and 6.75]. As previously shown, around the same time Marcel Wanders stacked existing lampshades into a standing lamp [Figure 6.81]. The repetition of objects provided an extension of the ready-made concept, whereby the resulting effect is further enhanced by the slow decrease of the light intensity. As we have constantly seen in the history of unruly design, this method was not really new either. Jasper Morrison already stacked a series of flower pots in 1983 to form a table, with the decreasing size of the pots as a meaningful element in the design [Figure 6.80].

Conceptual designer Jurgen Bey used the ready-made principle of course in his Tree Trunk Bench, but he also applied the principle in a more special way. In the ‘Kokon’ project, together with Jan Konings, he did not transform existing objects by repeating them, but by packing them and thereby merging the individual shapes together [Figure 6.82 and 6.84]. The resulting shapes were very intriguing however, this was again something that, as we have always seen with the unruly design rules, was already done in the art world before [Figure 6.83 and 6.85].

112 See chapter 4.1, preceding.
Jurgen Bey – ‘Kokon’ table/chair – 1997, similar to the fur-covered cup and saucer by Meret Oppenheim. By packing it in another material it gets a new emotional charge and in this case new shapes arise (but it remains recognizable, as in the chair by Les Levine from figure 6.83).

Les Levine – ‘Untitled’ – 1965, Captains chair covered in thermoplastic sheet. Showcased at the exhibition The Object Transformed in the Museum of Modern Art in New York, from June 28th until August 21st, 1966. In the caption: ‘The transformation of these three objects [the caption also refers to two other chairs – WE] is brought about by covering them with an extraneous material which destroys their usefulness but presumably preserves the objects themselves.’ (Constantine & Drexler 1966: p. 8).

Jurgen Bey and Jan Konings – ‘Kokon’ chairs – 1997-1999, part of the collection of Droog Design: “I can’t come up with anything new; I only regroup what is already there”, says Jurgen Bey’ (Betsky & Eeuwens 2004: p. 129). A chair that was packed in such a way was already seen in 1985 in the design gallery Weinand in Berlin [Figure 2.38].

Bazilebustamante (Bernard Bazile and Jean-Marc Bustamante) – table – 1985, a combination of objets trouvés with alienating effect, just as with the chair by Les Levine evoked by a combination of recognisability and uselessness.
That packaging and merging of existing objects can also be considered the principle behind Tejo Remy’s ‘Chest of Drawers’ [Figure 6.86]. In this way we see different forms of transformation and combination again and again in unruly design, where the strength lies in the recognisability of the used objects. The original function of the transformed or combined object provides the often alienating association, as in the wine glasses that Peter van der Jagt used in his ‘Bottoms-up’ doorbell.\textsuperscript{117}

Jurgen Bey made another special way of transformation with his ‘Lamp Shade Shade’ [Figure 6.88]. The semi-transparent mirror cover gives an existing chandelier a sleek appearance and provides an exciting layering effect. Well considered, this transformation is an elitist variation on the apple-green painting of an old chair from the thrift store, a principle that has also been used more often in unruly design [Figure 6.87 and 6.89].

Dutch designer Piet Hein Eek goes one step further with the upgrading transformation process by incorporating existing and discarded doors in different cabinets [Figure 6.90]. The doors give each cabinet its own character: ‘The weathered material and the former application of each door tell their own story [...] They have been included as a source of inspiration in the final cabinet, so that the design choices are transparent and comprehensible.’ (Fraser et al. 2007: p. 44). The door becomes the base of the cupboard and at the same time the cupboard becomes a podium for the door. In this way, taking a found object as the starting point and basing the rest of your design on this artefact is a principle that is at least again much older than postmodernism. As it was already applied by the Italian brothers Achille and Pier Giacomo Castiglioni in 1955 [Figure 6.91].

The stool-with-tractor-seat by the Castiglioni brothers is also a kind of combination ready-made. The tractor seat has not been abstracted, but has been taken into the design literally. On the other hand, the seat is only a part of the stool. So it is no longer a pure ready-made, however, the feeling of direct recognition is the same. This direct recognisability also played an important role in the design rule \textit{incorporate form complexity} and was

\textsuperscript{113} See chapter 5.1, Figure 5.3, preceding.

\textsuperscript{114} See chapter 4.1 and paragraph 6.2.3, preceding.
[6.86] Tejo Remy – ‘Chest of Drawers’ – 1991, a transformation and combination ready-made at the same time. The various second-hand drawers together form the cupboard. The transformation is in the newly made casing around each drawer that ensures a degree of unity in the object.115

[6.88] Jurgen Bey – Lamp ‘Shade Shade’ – 1999, originally designed for the Droog collection with the conical shape of an archetypal lampshade. Around 2010 it became a commercial success within the Moooi label of Marcel Wanders (with the straight cilindrical shape visible in figure 6.89).

[6.87] Alessandro Mendini – ‘Furniture of no Return’ – 1978, Mendini painted different cabinets from the 1940s with wild patterns. Something you would call pimping nowadays. Later, the ‘Proust’ chair came out of this.116

[6.89] Jurgen Bey – ‘St Petersburg’ chairs – 2003, for the ‘the Dutch Room’ project in St Petersburg (when celebrating the 300th anniversary of the city) antique chairs were covered with polyester and printed with a floral pattern. A straight version of the ‘Shade Shade’ hangs from the ceiling.
also seen in the already discussed doorbell by Peter van der Jagt.

In this design rule, building designs using existing objects is the common denominator, whether these objects are transformed or combined and whether they cover the entire product or just one part. The underlying principle can also be found in a chandelier by Rody Graumans, the aforementioned coffee table by Axel Stumpf and a comparable coffee table by Maxineaylor and Ralph Ball [Figure 6.92; 6.93; 6.94]. In addition, Gijs Bakker, one of the driving forces behind the Dutch conceptual design of the nineties as co-founder of Droog Design, already used the design rule in his ‘Umbrella lamp’ [Figure 6.95]. All these objects are always built around literally adopted and therefore recognizable shapes.

A final unruly addition to this design rule is the one that is visible in the ‘do-Create’ project of advertising agency Kesselskramer,119 where the consumer himself is invited to work with ready-mades. [Figure 6.96].

115 See also chapter 4.1, preceding.
116 See chapter 2.2, preceding.
117 See chapter 4.1, preceding.
[6.90] Piet Hein Eek – ‘Church window cabinet’ – 1994, part of a larger project in which a series of divergent second-hand doors led to different cabinet designs. The series of cabinets was created from 1992 and was presented in 1996 in the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam.

[6.91] Achille and Pier Giacomo Castiglioni – ‘Mezzadro’ stool – 1955, postmodern design avant la lettre by the Castiglioni brothers. Functionalistic in its minimal structure, but built around a tractor seat as an ‘objet trouvé’. The brothers had also previously conceived a stool with a bicycle saddle as a seat.

[6.92] Rody Graumans – lamp ‘85 bulbs’ – 1993, the whole shape of the chandelier is cleverly built around standard parts. In particular, the sphere of cornices creates an intriguing functional ornament.

6.2 Design rules

118 See chapter 2.3, preceding.

119 See chapter 4.3, preceding.
Maxine Naylor and Ralph Ball – 'Transparent table' – 1997, a composite ready-made that, just like Bey's park bench, is metaphorically very clever: 'The legs – glass cleaning bottles – support and maintain the glass top. Glass tops are often a pretext for the display of legs. Here the legs ensure their own visibility. Mr Muscle is the 'clear' choice for the cleaning bottle brand because of the name's implied supporting leg strength.' (Naylor & Ball 2005: p. 67).

Gijs Bakker – 'Umbrella lamp' – 1983, just like with the 'Mezzadro', the ready-made object forms the basis of the design.

5.5 Designers – 'do screw' – 2006, the threaded cutlery and glass had to be provided with a handle or stem by the consumer himself.
Meret Oppenheim – ‘Squirrel’ – 1969, an adaptation of her famous fur-lined cup and saucer (see figure 5.3), where the fur handle not only suggests a completely different grasping experience, but also makes the whole thing look like a squirrel.

Des-in (Jochen Gros) – ‘Tire Sofa’ – 1974, here the deviant use of materials originated in the first instance from the idea of reusing material. The special appearance that was created with this then for a long time symbolized ecologically sound design, although the actual contribution to the environment is often debatable (Bürdek 1996: p. 57).


Ron Arad – ‘Concrete Stereo’ – 1985, ironical comment on the usual black box designs of contemporary electronic equipment.
6.2 Design rules

6.2.5 Unruly rule 5; make use of uncommon material

The last unruly design rule is the most straightforward: make an object of a material of which it is normally never made. The unusual material is preferably a tacky material, but extremely expensive is also a good possibility. In particular Droog Design has become big by applying this principle, but we also saw this strategy with the surrealists before [Figure 6.97]. We see the variant of ordinary and inexpensive use of materials mainly in punk and Neue Design from the 1980s, mostly in line with the first ideas about recycling and environmental friendliness that started with the German design collective Des-in [Figure 6.98 and 6.99].

The principle is similar to the other unruly design rules because it also makes use of the recognisability of the material and the alienation that results from the change of the context. This change of context is visible in the designs of Ron Arad, Heinz Landes and Stiletto, for example, where a rough concrete and the corresponding reinforcing steel bars are transposed from the construction site to the living room. [Figure 6.100; 6.101; 6.104].

The most interesting is this design principle if the unusual material use not only comments on the meaning of the design, but also carries a functional component. We see this principle of augmented postmodernism in the ‘Knotted Chair’ by Marcel Wanders,120 for example, where the knotted aramid fiber not only contains a surprising reference to the macrame of the seventies, but also makes the chair very light in construction.

120 See chapter 4.1, preceding.

[6.102] Nathalie du Pasquier – ‘Coral’ chest – part of the Memphis collection from 1984, executed in metal and patterned laminate [see also Figure 6.105].


[6.105] Ettore Sottsass and Christoph Radl – ABET Decorative Laminates – 1979-1983, the exuberant patterns became one of the most important style characteristics of the Memphis group. Except for laminate, the patterns were also used in graphic work [Figure 6.104] and in carpet designs for de Poortere (Sottsass et al. 1988: p. 64).

We see the same effect in the decorative Memphis furniture from the eighties, where the frequent use of laminate not only gave the possibility for the application of bright decors, but also made the furniture wear-resistant [Figure 6.102; 6.103]. The use of the ‘cheap’ laminate, often with wild patterns, had become part of the Memphis trademark (Radice 1984, Horn 1986) [Figure 6.105]. Manufacturer ABET then made clever use of this effect to upgrade their laminate from a cheap finishing material into a sexy design item [Figure 6.106], although the company also worked with postmodern designers before [Figure 6.107].

The functional aspect of the unusual material use is not always intended by the designer, but can lead to new insights. In the case of Ron Arad’s *Concrete Stereo*, we see the material use that was originally intended as ironic commentary applied in a new functional way in the ‘Concrete’ record player of high-end manufacturer Thorens [Figure 6.108].

The starting point is always that due to the different material use the end result is also different than with related products made from a common material. After all, the deviating material also has deviating properties which then impose different requirements on the manner of production, or provide new freedom of form, or on the contrary new constructive restrictions. Apart from the Marcel Wanders chair, we also see this strongly at the felt washbasin by Dick van Hoff and the cabinets of Jeanine Keizer and Piet Hein Eek partly built in porcelain [Figure 6.109 and 6.110]. Van Hoff’s washbasin plays with the contrast between hard and soft and is, like so many unruly designs, indebted to the arts: in this case the pop art objects by Claes Oldenburg from the sixties [Figure 6.111]. Daniel Weil also uses this metaphor when he packs radio components in a bag to make the electronics visible [Figure 6.112]. This last design also makes the ambiguous attitude of unruly design vis-à-vis functionality visible again. The soft housing is not very functional because it hardly offers any protection for the rather vulnerable electronics inside. On the other hand, the radio in this way invites to new forms of human-product interaction; the radio can simply be folded...


[6.109] Dick van Hoff – washbasin for Droog Design in impregnated felt – 1996, the alienating effect lies in the use of a soft material for something that is always hard. The shape of the object remains close to the ‘original’: ‘Van Hoff wants to design in a way that keeps as closely as possible to the function and to the production process. An object should remain recognisable for the user.’ (Teunissen & Van Zijl 2000: p. 54).

6.2 Design rules

double when it does not fit in the bag or in the pocket of a jacket.

In most cases, the unusual use of materials acts as a trigger for a deeper meaning of the object. Daniel Weil did this with his radio literally by exposing the inside of the device. The designers of the Neue Design fabricated a more figurative commentary on the ‘slick’ consumer society with the use of cheap concrete and waste material [Figure 6.113]. The laminate in the Memphis collection was mainly about the decorative possibilities of the brightly colored laminate, but it was also the intention to make the cheap material (compared to real wood and leather) presentable, as in socially acceptable (Radice 1984: p. 35-36).

In the conceptual design of the nineties, cheap material use often became part of the environmentally friendly image of the products [Figure 6.115; 6.116; 6.17]. Usually the cheap material was not reflected in the price of the objects, which were often made in small series and sold as art objects in design galleries.122

In many cases the object also gets a touch of authenticity or uniqueness due to its unruly use of materials. For example with the Richard Hutten chairs, which individually become slightly different each time due to the low-tech production process associated with the material [Figure 6.119]. Or with Alessandro Mendini’s coffee pot which seems to have been thrown out of a solid piece of wood by a forest worker with endless devotion [Figure 6.118]. The latter has even been literally the case with this prototype for Alessi’s Coffee Piazza demonstration project (Mendini et al. 2003: p. 183). This authenticity effect is also apparent in the scrap wood cabinets of conceptual designer Piet Hein Eek, and this effect was even more important for the designer than the frequently mentioned aspect of environmental friendliness123 (Fraser et al. 2007: pp. 11-12) [Figure 6.120].

The unusual material use can also be in the detail. Hella Jongerius for instance used the principle only in the connection parts of her ceramics [Figure 6.121 and 6.122], however with still the same effect. In all cases, these designs are not so much about the functional properties of

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121 ‘Glasnost’ refers to the then innovative political strategy of Soviet leader Michael Gorbachev which was focused on more ‘transparency’.

122 Just like with their predecessors from Memphis, Alchymia, the Neue Design and the surrealists. See also chapter 2.1 and chapter 4.3, preceding.

123 Which was also questionable. The commercial success of Eek’s practice has led in particular to the fact that the prices of reclaimed wood have risen considerably, because the reuse of wooden construction material was already common practice in building projects.
Jeanine Keizer and Piet Hein Eek—‘Pillar-Cupboards’—1995, ceramic elements made by Jeanine Keizer form the backbone of bookcases from the studio of Piet Hein Eek. The elements automatically become decorative because of the material, which reminds more of flower vases than construction parts.

Claes Oldenburg—‘Soft Washstand (ghost version)’—1965, During the heyday of the Popart, all kinds of contemporary artefacts were transformed into art objects. Oldenburg recreated a whole series of homely objects in flaccid versions, including a complete drum set (Livingstone et al. 1994: p. 108).

Daniel Weil—radio—1981, the soft version of the usual shiny black electronics housing also served as a means to show the components.

Volker Albus—‘Römerberg’ seating objects—1987-1988, here the unruly rule has been extended to an entire study into robust and industrial materials. The point of departure—presenting the materials in a different, alienating context—and its effect are related to the earlier ‘I Sassi’ [Figure 6.114].

Piero Gilardi—‘I Sassi’ [the Rocks]—1967, seating objects made out of polyurethane, produced from 1967 till 1976 by the Italian firm Gufram.
the material, but about the associations that the material evokes. This also follows the observation that in case of unruly design the product should not be seen as a bundle of functionalities, but rather as a collection of meanings.

6.2 Design rules
[6.115] Tejo Remy – ‘Rag Chair’ for Droog Design – 1991, the Tire Sofa revisited, although rags were no longer used here. The recycling of material was only suggested (Drukker 2007). Postmodernism at the top, therefore, if the execution form of the original idea is only symbolic.

[6.116] Andreas Möller – ‘Boll Box’ for Droog Design – 1994, perhaps the ultimate cheap material; a package of dried manure. The advantage is that the flower bulb can be planted with packaging and all. ‘The idea is to sell the Dutch manure surplus to tourists’ (Ramaekers et al. 2006: p. 106).


6.2 Design rules

124 See figure 6.99, preceding.

125 A reprise of the influential Tea & Coffee Piazza project of 1983. See also chapter 3.1, preceding.
[6.120] Piet Hein Eek – ‘Sloophoutenkasten’ [Scrap wood cupboards] – 1990, the first work by Piet Hein Eek, made for his final exam at the Design Academy in Eindhoven. It was later included in Droog Design’s first presentation in Milan. The scrap wood gives the relatively straightforward cabinets an authentically lived appearance. But that was not always well understood: ‘The Piet Hein Eek sideboard on the mezzanine elicited the spontaneous reaction: “Why does not anyone finish this cupboard?” (Eigen Huis & Interieur 2006).

[6.121] Hella Jongerius – ‘Fragile Bottles’ – 2000, the bottles consist of a glass part and ceramic part, not so strange in itself, but they are held together by packaging tape (saying ‘fragile’).

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126 In 1993, See chapter 4.1, preceding.
The functionality as a doorbell has been worked out in a clumsy way; a large object that is difficult to assemble, difficult to clean and very fragile. However, the meaning and significance of the two crystal glasses in terms of recognisability is enormous.
6.3 Characteristics

6.3 Two common characteristics

Considering the foregoing, we can see that there are two aspects that characterize unruly design in general and the five unruly design rules in particular. These aspects, with which unruly design explicitly distinguishes itself from its functionally oriented counterparts, can be formulated as, firstly;

*Functionality is not the same as usability.*

and secondly;

*When placing something known in a different context, something new is formed.*

6.3.1 Functionality is not the same as usability

In chapter 2.1 we already saw that Ettore Sottsass made a bookcase where you can hardly shelve your books\(^{127}\) and Philippe Starck designed a citrus press with which you can not make orange juice.\(^{128}\) Sottas and Starck solved this by naming their work respectively ‘room divider’ and ‘conversation piece’. In other words, the designs were not meant to be a ‘bookcase’ nor a ‘citrus press’.\(^{129}\) In fact, they must be seen as ‘communication means’,\(^{130}\) disguised as a bookcase and a citrus press. The primary function of the object is no longer ‘being usable as’ a certain product, but ‘communicating’ a certain meaning. The utility factor of the objects is apparently minimized in favor of a high significance [Figure 6.123].

In the introduction (chapter 1.2 Form-giving) we have

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\(^{127}\) See chapter 2.1, preceding.

\(^{128}\) See chapter 3.1, preceding.

\(^{129}\) To be honest, it must be said that Starck probably thought up his ‘conversation piece’ story only after the criticism of the usefulness of his object persisted.

\(^{130}\) In the sense of Crilly’s communication framework: the object as a messenger between ‘designer intent’ and ‘consumer response’. See chapter 6.2, preceding.
‘Riders round a corner on Penny Farthing bicycles at the National Championships in Evandale Tasmania February 2008’ – The Penny farthing was pre-eminently suited to show the courage of the rider, and not so much as a means of transport.
already found that the concept of functionality, as explained by modernism as ‘functional usability’, has become too limited for the design practice in a post-modern society. By using again the SCOT theory from Bijker (1999), we can now give a new interpretation to this. In his book *Of Bicycles, Bakelites, and Bulbs; Toward a Theory of Sociotechnical Change* Bijker unfolds a theory about the ‘Social Construction of Technology’ on the basis of a number of historical case studies. In this he uses the concept of ‘Relevant Social Group’, which means that new developments are not always ‘functional’ for everyone, but only for a limited group of people with the same characteristics that are receptive to the innovation in question. For example, he shows that the initially quite awkward and dangerous Penny Farthing - the bicycle with a very large, directly driven front wheel - could have existed for a long time because it gave its sporting riders the opportunity to hang out the tough man [Figure 6.124]. The previously-designed safety-bike with chain drive only became popular later when it turned out to be a welcome alternative for women and elderly - other social groups in terms of SCOT theory - to be able to participate in the new mobility.

In that sense, you can say that a chair that you cannot sit on can be functional, because it may function as a work of art for a relevant social group (or as a way of showing that one has ‘good taste’ or even so ‘has a lot of money to spend’). Functionality must therefore always be seen from the perspective of the relevant user group. This is in line with the vision of Forty, which in 1986 in his book *Objects of Desire* concludes: ‘No design works unless it embodies ideas that are held in common by the people for whom the object is intended.’ (Forty 1995: p. 245). Forty sees the role of the designer in this as - literally - shaping the ideas and associations already present in the cultural capital of society: ‘design turns ideas about the world and social relations into the form of physical objects.’ (Forty 1995: p. 245). And before that: ‘any painting, film, book or building contains ideas about the nature of the world, ideas which exist in other minds apart from that of the artist, author or designer, but which are mediated through his or her ability to conceive a form or means of representation.’ (Forty 1995: p. 243).
With the aforementioned objects from Sottsass and Starck and with almost all other unruly designs that have emerged in this study, the same is true. Despite the fact that because of the unruliness the primary use function comes under pressure, the secondary function as a meaning generator for a relevant user group is important enough to compensate for this. At the time of the breakthrough of postmodernism, people could still be cynical about this: ‘With these [Memphis-tables – WE] we enter the realm pinpointed by English design historian Penny Sparke, in which semiuseless furniture meets the needs of no one but “rich pop stars and fashion designers who can afford to indulge in their fantasies”’ (Sparke 1983, cited. in: Horn 1986: p. 60) [Figure 6.125].

In the meantime, however, we have achieved a degree of prosperity in our Western society, which means that almost everyone can live their fantasies. By seeing the functionality of a product not only limited to the usability of the object, but intentionally broadening it, the unruly designers have helped to fulfill those fantasies.

6.3.2 When placing something known in a different context, something new is formed

We have learned from the surrealists and conceptual designers that an object gets a different meaning if the context is changed. Werner Spies states following the objects of Meret Oppenheim: ‘The operations to which Oppenheim subjected things arose the viewer’s suspicion, sharpened his hermeneutic senses. The short-circuiting of logic that occurred when incompatible things and concepts were brought together supplied the energy for the emotional vision which Surrealism attempted to set free.’ (Bhattacharya-Stettler et al. 2007: p. 22). Gwendolyn Ristant makes it even clearer on the occasion of the German Neue Design from the eighties: ‘This is one of the keynotes of “New Design”, the presentation of familiar things in an un-familiar light, so that irritation will allow us to gain a new experience of objects.’ (Erlhoff et al. 1990: p. 209). Especially note the word ‘irritation’, that hints at the limited usability of the Neue Design products. However can be interpreted in this statement

Danto argues in *The Transfiguration of the Common-place* from the readymades by Marcel Duchamp and Andy Warhol, that by bringing ‘everyday objects’\(^{131}\) into the museum, they share their characteristics with the artworks from their new environment (Danto 1981: pp. 92–96). In this way, the objects are distinguished from their counterparts in the supermarket, although they are physically in no way different from each other. By placing the objects in a different context, the objects themselves change because they are looked at in a different way and because of this they are also judged differently. The habits, associations, norms and values of the ‘art world’ are projected onto the ‘Fountain’ and the ‘Brillo Box’, while at the same time the associations evoked by urinals and packaging boxes are projected onto the art world: ‘As a work of art, the Brillo Box does more than insist that it is a brillo box under surprising metaphoric attributes. It does what works of art have always done – externalizing a way of viewing the world, expressing the interior of a cultural period, offering itself as a mirror to catch the conscience of our kings.’(Danto 1981: p. 208) [Figure 6.126].

By placing everyday objects in a new context, we are taught to look at the things in a new way. The new context can not only be provided by a complete environment, but also partly by other objects, as we have seen in the designs of composite readymades. The doormat with a singing bird by Denis Santachiara for example [Figure 6.127], gives the user both a new awareness of the bird he is suddenly so emphatically confronted with, and a new view of the doormat. The latter is transformed from rather anonymous object into an active object by the addition of the bird. The user is made aware of the actions at the entrance; cleaning your shoes becomes an ‘experience’.

Mildred Constantine and Arthur Drexler already noted: ‘The emotional content we associate with any object depends on more than the object alone. Hidden associations may be revealed when one object is related to another, or otherwise taken out of its familiar context,

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\(^{131}\) Danto calls these ‘common-place objects.’

\(^{132}\) See paragraph 6.1.4, preceding.
Wouter Eggink and JW Drukker – Pastische on ‘La trahison des images’ (1928-1929) by René Magritte – 2010, Magritte wrote ‘this is not a pipe’ because the painting is an image of a pipe. But also the depicted object itself is not a pipe; in the context shown it is a ‘mouth candlestick’!
or when even a single detail is removed or altered. If the resulting visual metaphor is sufficiently powerful, even the most ubiquitous artifact may be transformed into an object of emotional rather than practical utility’. (Constantine & Drexler 1966: p. 6).

The power of the recognisability of things ultimately lies not in the things themselves, but in the meaning of the objects *in the context in which they are placed*. Looking back, we can say that René Magritte was absolutely right when he painted a pipe and wrote ‘Ceci n’est pas un pipe’. We now know, however, that this is not only because it is an *image* of a pipe, but also because the *object itself* is only a pipe if it is *used as a pipe* [Figure 6.128].
Maxine Naylor and Ralph Ball – ‘Stack of One’, prototype – 2003, experimental ‘chair’ from the publication *Form Follows Idea; An introduction to Design Poetics*. The project was initially titled ‘The Incomplete History of Stacking Chairs’ (Naylor & Ball 2005: p. 99).

All in all, this is an exemplary unruly design: the composite readymade (design rule 4) is made up of recognizable elements, it contrasts with the uniformity of the modernistic chairs from which it is composed, and is not functional in the sense of usability, since one cannot sit on it.

Charles and Ray Eames – ‘Lounge Chair’ – 1956, as a design classic nowadays the archetype of the comfortable chair.
6.4 Conclusion

It is appropriate to quote Michael Erlhoff again here: ‘in other words, design does not have to compensate for the technical shortcomings of the products (which they since no longer have), but rather for the psychological shortcomings of human beings or of society itself. Nowadays, beholders or users demand of objects that they display qualities they cannot possibly have: identity, individuality, the meaning of life, the fulfillment of the widest range of wishes and cravings. The concept of function has suddenly undergone boundless expansion.’ (Erlhoff et al. 1990: p. 13).

If we connect this principle with Csikszentmihalyi (2007), quoted in the introduction, who states that the emotional bond with products is not determined by the product itself, but by the meaning that the user/owner gives to it, you can conclude that when you are designing a product, you must therefore ensure that the object ‘facilitates’ these private meanings, as it were. The design must allow the user to connect a meaning to the object; in order to be able to fulfil ‘the widest range of wishes and cravings’. To elaborate this idea, we need to deepen our insight in human-product relationships. Peter Paul Verbeek (2000) writes that a product itself always partly determines how the product is viewed and that in a certain sense the product itself also determines how it is used. He calls the latter ‘scripting’. The product contains, as it were, a story of its own that enables - or even forces - the user to use it in a certain way. For example, the internal script of a speed bump forces the
[6.131] Rober Venturi – ‘the Village’ – 1988, tea and coffee service for the American company Swid Powell. ‘The milk jug is a small palazzo from Florence or Venice. The sugar bowl is a simple cottage. The coffee pot is a Tuscan torre, as can still be seen in San Gimignano.’


(Kolsteren et al. 1998: p. 28).
Motorist to drive slowly. To a lesser extent, a product can encourage specific use (Verbeek calls this invitation) or prevent certain use (inhibition). For example, binoculars make it possible to see more because it enlarges reality and gets objects closer (invitation), but at the same time has the effect that you have less overview because it literally generates a kind of tunnel vision. The binoculars, therefore, works against having overview (inhibition). Most scripts contain such a pair of opposing effects. The speed bump prevents you from driving too fast, but can also encourage you to buy a bigger car (the much accursed SUV). A map has the opposite pair of effects of binoculars; you gain a nice overview but you do not see any details anymore. The internal script of a product thus also determines how we view reality. A lazy chair invites us to hang out, but makes it difficult to eat decently at the table [Figure 6.129]. And a postmodern chair may be sometimes difficult to sit on, but makes it easier to laugh or to wonder [Figure 6.130].

Exactly these last two aspects are examples of the elements we were looking for for contemporary product design, in which, as stated in the introduction, the primary function fulfillment has become less and less important as a distinguishing factor.

In 1977 Charles Jencks, following up on Venturi’s plea for new symbolism from Learning from Las Vegas (Venturi et al. 1977), introduced the concept of ‘double coding’ to allow the modern designer of the time to ‘communicate with the user’ again (see chapter 2.2). The use of recognizable motifs from popular culture and history had to give the viewer points of reference to better ‘read’ the new designs (Jencks 1984: pp. 154-164). Venturi himself pointed the way with many postmodern architectural projects, but also with symbolically executed products such as his porcelain coffee and tea service called ‘the Village’ [Figure 6.131].

However, unruly design has always shown itself to be a master in applying recognizable motifs to make the spectator look; whether it concerns the strange combinations of the surrealists, the new decorative drive of Alchymia, the cheerful objects of the Memphis group,
Mattheo Thun – ‘Columbina Superba’ teapot – 1982, a toy-like object on high legs.


Jurgen Bey – ‘Gardening Bench’ – 1999, just like the ‘Tree Trunk Bench’ designed for the park of the Oranienbaum estate. Benches are compressed from compost from the park using a special mold. After a while, the bench would fall apart again to serve as nutrition for the vegetation in the park.

Mattia Di Rosa – ‘Carlo, the Ghost from the Bottle’ – 1994, a set of two caps for closing wine bottles from the ‘Family Follows Fiction’ series by Alessi.
the consciously styled junk of the Neue Design, the charming characters of Alessi or the unusual materials of the Droog Designers [Figure 6.132 – 6.137].

The five unruly design rules distilled from the different design styles provide insight into the way designers can apply these thoughts, associations and combinations in practice. In this way one can consider the five rules to be a toolkit for designing meaningful objects in a post-modern society. Because, to cite postmodern designer Denis Santachiara: “The more tricks the magician knows, the better he will be able to raise the illusion and amazement” (Bellati 1993: p. 125).

134 See chapter 2.3, preceding.
135 See chapter 4.1 and 6.0, preceding.
Summary

This book is an attempt to develop rules that can provide guidance for the contemporary product designer in a postmodern society. Somewhere at the end of the 20th century, the focus of product design has shifted from primarily offering functionality, towards experience and emotion driven product characteristics. According to the theory of product phases, the design of mature product types will end in a phase characterized by extended segmentation, individualization or awareness. In these states the affective, emotional, and abstract product values become more important. Within this development, the usability, or utility factor of products becomes less important, in favour of their significance, or the meaning they represent. At the same time, according to French philosopher of culture Baudrillard, the image of the product becomes more important than the product itself.

All together it has become clear that the central idea of the functionalists, that ‘Form Follows Function’ cannot play its central role in the development of aesthetics anymore, especially in combination with the increased importance of ‘visually anonymous’ electronics and information technology. When we can no longer infer the design of the product from its instrumental function, the contemporary designer has to look for other practices for the materialization of his or her ideas. To be able to look at design in a holistic way, this research tries to find those practices by analysis of recent design history.

Design history in the preceding period has been dominated by the contradiction between modernism and postmodernism. While modernism (or functionalism) is associated with the ‘idea of progress’, postmodernism is associated with the cultural counterpart of ‘anything goes’ (after Paul Feyerabend: ‘the only principle which does not inhibit progress is anything goes’ [...] ). But this nihilistic motto does not provide much guidance for design practice: anything is possible. This research however, is an attempt to provide a new set
of design rules for design practice, after modernism: a starting point -and no more than that- for a new paradigm.

This research presents a part of design history as so-called ‘unruly design’. Unruly because of the dissident designs, as if they were rowing up the dominant functionalist stream. Design history in this context is considered as cultural history and can therefore be interpreted as a history of ideas. The history of unruly designs thus will be a history of unruly design ideas. When we combine this perspective with the philosophy of science paradigm of Kuhn, this means that, within the historical boundaries of this research project:

*The set of unruly designs is defined as: all objects that are designed with the intention to undermine the existing design-paradigm of the functionalists.*

The most well-known groups in unruly design history were Alchimya and Memphis from Italy. In Germany the ‘anti-modernist’ movement was called ‘Neue Design’, which showed resemblance with the English Punk. Later, the Alessi firm and Philippe Starck played a major role in developing the postmodernist design approach further. Then, new recalcitrant designers altered their strategy. The Netherlands played an important role in this so-called ‘conceptual design’ with the Droog label, making the author-driven design approach of designers like Marcel Wanders and Tejo Remy world-famous. In the end, the postmodernist perspective on product design, characterizing products by their meaning instead of their functionality, was already explored by the Surrealists, who wanted their dream world objects to be an alternative for the machine-like world view of the modernists.

Common research about design history on this subject is mostly limited to the role of design meaning. From applicable literature, a frame of reference about the role of design meaning was made in order to compare postmodern designs over several decades. From this comparison the analysis was shifted to a design method perspective, and then it showed that there is just a limited set of design principles that stands at the base of somewhat all of this unruly design. This research thus presents a particular part of design history as a means of how to implement postmodern meaning into designs. This is illustrated by the product communication model of Crilly et al., where the design of a product acts as a transmitter for the designer’s intent at the one side, steering the consumer’s response on the other. The deconstruction of unruly design in this research concentrates on the input side of the model, supporting ways to materialize the designers’ design intent.

Placed in cultural context the historical survey has lead to a ‘history of unruly design ideas’ that formed the basis for identifying five common unruly design practices, bringing unity in this diverse field. Then it showed that, despite their unruliness, from a design method perspective
most of the researched designs are very alike. This means that everyone can make unruly designs, as long as the process is followed. However, the results will not be automatically interesting.

The five common design ‘rules’ though, are fairly simple: combine different interest domains; use inspiration from popular culture; incorporate form-complexity; make use of ready-mades, or; make use of uncommon material. In all cases, the designs have two common characteristics. The first one says that ‘functionality is not the same as usability’.

Philippe Starck stated for instance, when he was confronted with critique on his Juicy Salif, that he did not design a malfunctioning juicer, but a “conversation piece”. Memphis leader Ettore Sottsass called his inefficient Carlton bookcase a “room divider”. These objects were not primarily intended to be a bookcase or a juicer: they are objects to communicate a meaning, disguised as a bookcase and a juicer. The primary function of “making juice” and “storing books” is sacrificed for the ability to communicate an idea. In other words: the utility of the objects is minimized in favour of their significance.

Secondly and more important is the influence of context. When objects are placed in a different context, they will change in themselves. They do not change physically, but they change because they are looked at differently and therefore also judged differently. By placing commonplace objects in an alternative context, we are taught to look at them in a new way.

Unruly designs are not particularly interesting for their ability to be used satisfactory, but for their ability to facilitate a process of meaning forming for the user. In this process the designs will elicit emotions by deriving meaning from a new context. This new context can be provided by a new environment, as with the first three design rules, but also partly by other objects, as is visible with the so-called composed ready-mades (design rule four). In the end, the new context can also be provided by the object itself, through the use of an uncommon material (design rule five). The other way around, the object is ultimately defined by that context. The famous drawing by René Magritte that says ‘ceci n’est pas une pipe’ (this is not a pipe) appears to be true in two different ways: the depicted object is not a pipe because it is an image of a pipe, but also because the depicted object is only then a pipe, when it is used as a pipe!

Eventually, the identification of the five rules of unruly design supports designers to understand the implementation of meaning into demand driven design practice, and therefore extends the possibilities for making meaningful objects.
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This book is in the first place about design history, however also about design practice. Through the analysis of well-known conceptual design movements like Memphis, Droog Design and surrealism the book creates new structures for designing meaningful objects in a postmodern world. By adapting a method perspective on the unruly part of design history, a contemporary alternative is presented for the dogmatic design rules of the modernist movement. Five ‘unruly’ design rules provide inspiration for the contemporary designer to play the game with associations and associated meanings in their design practice.

The Rules of Unruly Design is meant for people who are interested in the history of design and for designers in practice. Especially those that are interested in aesthetics and meaning.

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