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# Reunification: Design in a Global Context, 1975–2005

Despite German design's traditional wish to have an international outlook, the great differences in the political, cultural, and economic forms of the two German states also resulted in differences in matters of design, and above all, in their practical realization, so that only partial correspondences were possible.<sup>1</sup>

For design in Germany, the years after 1975 were marked by stylistic revivalism and eclecticism on both sides of the political division. In the Federal Republic, this was matched by a boom in museum building and a growing acceptance of design as lifestyle, in common with the situation in other developed economies. At the same time, in the German Democratic Republic, the continuing struggle to satisfy consumer demand remained a priority, while signs of civil dissatisfaction and unrest increased. On both sides of the Wall, Berlin was a site of frenzied building activity. In the West, the *Internationale Bauausstellung* (International Building Exhibition) of 1984 provided an opportunity for international architects to offer housing solutions in areas of the western city, some close to the Wall, in recognition that Berlin was now to be permanently divided. An innovation at this exhibition, which distinguished it from other IBA precedents, *Am Weissenhof* in Stuttgart of 1927 and the *Hansaviertel* building exhibition of 1957, was how by 1984 renovation of existing buildings was combined with commissions to international architects for new works. On the other side of the Wall, in 1988, the urban complex of East Berlin, by then renamed Hauptstadt der DDR, capital of the German Democratic Republic, was inaugurated as an historical as well as a modern city. In acknowledging the potential of modern tourism and leisure, along with the collectivist principles of its earlier urban plan, the schemes for East Berlin and other historic cities such as Dresden, Leipzig and Weimar could be said to have represented a version of state socialist Postmodernism.

Ingo Maurer, 'Bibibibi' lamp  
in porcelain, metal and  
plastic, 1982.

Through such shifts, both East and West Germany recognized the importance of identity and history, as well as continuing to offer competing visions of the future. Derived from separate circumstances, the two traditions unexpectedly collided in 1989, when the Berlin Wall fell. For many, this momentous political event was symptomatic of the power of the individual citizen to force political change in the form of the collapse of a monolithic regime through direct action. Designed goods were therefore central to the recognition of this change, as both symptom and agent.

## The Legacy of Modernism: The Challenge of Postmodernism

The last 30 years of the twentieth century were marked by fundamental challenges in the cultural and philosophical premises of the Western world that questioned Enlightenment principles stemming from the eighteenth century. This had an inevitable impact on the way that German design was to develop. In many respects, through its position on a major political fault line, the debate about a significant break in tradition took on deepest resonance in Germany. The terms Late Modern and Postmodern became a form of shorthand to characterize the different philosophical positions, although they were by no means all-inclusive. As design styles, the Late Modern and the Postmodern coexisted throughout the 1970s to 1990s and should not necessarily be understood to be sequential in chronology. Rather, reflecting different points of view, the former suggested continuity and gradual transformation, while the latter implied a more radical break with the past.

Philosophers and historians were split in their diagnosis of the implications of changing from a technological to an information-based society. One clear challenge in Europe was how the manufacturing base for industrial and technological goods was moving from a concentration in the 'old' established countries to development in Asia under financially competitive circumstances. In this, Germany was no exception, although certain industrial sectors remained buoyant, most notably the automotive industry, with world-leading companies Audi, BMW, Mercedes, Porsche and Volkswagen, all recognized for their combination of innovation in design and technology. The larger question, however, was whether a category shift was identifiable in the economic and technological base of society from high to late capitalism and, if so, what would be the implications for design.

As an advanced industrial state with a prominent intellectual tradition, West Germany figured strongly in debates about Postmodernism. One of the country's leading philosophers, Jürgen Habermas, became a central figure for his diagnosis of the character of late industrialism. Habermas

engaged with what he saw as the transformation of the public sphere through the expansion of consumer society, which, he suggested, led to the inevitable privatization of lifestyles. A crucial question was the exact nature of this transformation. Was it more appropriate to characterize it as late modernity or Postmodernism? The former implied possibilities of continuity across the century, while the latter suggested a fundamental break. Habermas was more open than contemporary French post-structuralists to the idea that the Modernist project could be renewed and, as such, rejected a totalizing idea of the Postmodern. Even if few designers would have read Habermas's own words, his position was influential in these circles because it offered an opportunity to extend rather than break with tradition.<sup>2</sup>

In contrast to the late Modernist position, which looked to the machine and took a production-oriented view of design, organized on the principles of Fordism and industrially organized labour based on standardization, Postmodernism became associated with flexible production methods and new technologies, digital and service industries. These could satisfy more niche-oriented consumption, with an emphasis on design for pleasure contributing to personal identity, rather than as previously design for the public good. At a stylistic level, Postmodernism advocated a return to ornament, symbolism, wit and other associative values, already apparent in much Pop-oriented art and design, in particular stemming from the USA.

To understand the situation of German designers at this point means taking account of the wider change in sensibility across the world. Significantly, it was in writing about architecture, rather than design, that the first definitions of Postmodernism were articulated in an increasingly international arena. In 1966 Robert Venturi and Denise Scott-Brown published *Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture*, which they followed in 1972 with *Learning from Las Vegas*, a book co-written with fellow architect Steven Izenour. These texts, crucial in the formulation of an alternative aesthetic position to the still-dominant architectural formalism, became available in German translation, respectively in 1978 and 1979. Their message to designers was to embrace what had previously been dismissed as vulgar, 'mass' and popular. Instead, their authors enjoyed the linguistic possibilities of built form and argued, for instance, that the commercial strip of American cities was replete with an iconography that offered symbols to inspire architects and designers. Rather than disparaging or dismissing these as kitsch, Venturi advocated their rich meaning as a way to enliven architectural and design discourse, treating buildings and their environments as a field of signification. This linguistic analogy opened up many possibilities for varied forms of design.<sup>3</sup>

Stiletto studios (Frank Schreiner), 'Consumer's Rest' chair, 1983. The chair's resonance came from its combination of humour and implicit criticism of consumer society.

Another important text, translated into German in 1980, was Charles Jencks's *The Language of Postmodern Architecture* (1977). This also argued for the significance of the linguistic and symbolic character of architecture and broke with the Modernist past, which it saw as unnecessarily reductive. Postmodernism became a style defined by its playfulness, with elements such as parody, pastiche and quotation from previous historical styles and deliberate eclecticism brought to the fore. Despite the delay in the full dissemination of their ideas, in many respects design and architectural critics set the agenda in the previous decade for what would happen to design in the 1980s.

The linguistic turn in culture, as it has often been termed, made its impact on a number of different levels of German design. For already established designers, brought up on the principles of Modernism in the 1950s and '60s, this often involved inflecting their designs with a new sensibility. Such was the case, for instance, for Germany's most celebrated lighting designer, Ingo Maurer. Already a successful name when Postmodernism spread across Europe, Maurer's lighting design took off in many fruitful new directions.

This was not only at a theoretical level. Technological developments also contributed to these new paths, such as the invention of the halogen light bulb and the growing sophistication of LEDs (light-emitting diodes), which offered greater freedom of experiment in dematerialized form. These were less bound by the ideas of functional necessity of Modernist dogma. Such technology acted as a catalyst for Maurer to create lighting that crossed boundaries between contemporary art and design, with increased metaphorical sophistication and playfulness, as in 'Bibibibi' of 1982, a table lamp with the iconography of a bird made in porcelain, metal, plaster and feathers.<sup>4</sup>

For designers of the next generation, Postmodern critique also opened possibilities for a renewed engagement with the social potential of design, in part prompted by the Punk movement of the late 1970s and early 1980s. The mix offered a more expanded field in which to challenge accepted cultural boundaries. As part of the *Neue deutsche Welle* (New German Wave), experimental environmental, furniture and industrial design were partners to the music and sound performance of bands such as *Einstürzende Neubauten*, *Abstürzende Brieftauben* and *Rasende Leichenbestatter*. Often happening in a post-industrial setting of disused factories, its imagery was abrasive, embracing the aesthetic properties of demolition and detritus, while flaunting cynicism and introducing a sense of apocalypse. Materials

such as corrugated cardboard, steel, glass, concrete and perforated metal had an improvisatory freshness, often visceral, that demanded a response from the viewer. Stiletto studio in West Berlin, led by Frank Schreiner, became famous for a series of chairs made from supermarket trolleys, begun in 1983. The principle of the chair was to convert a ready-made object into an item of furniture through minor adjustments of craftsmanship but a major re-conceptualization. Significantly, the name 'Consumer's Rest' appeared in the English language. In 1985 the ironically named series *Neue deutsche Gemütlichkeit* (New German Cosiness) included an occasional table, 'TV Dinner' made from a television tube, tubular steel, lamp and sheet glass, and 'Flying Spots', a set of television cabinets filled with living flies. Stiletto's combination of the ready-made with the industrial and electronic was typical of the period.<sup>5</sup>

Stiletto studios (Frank Schreiner), 'Calamari and Shrimp', six-armed ceiling light, designed in 1985.

As in the Weimar period, the prefix *neu* appeared to signal a generational change of attitude. What distinguished the periods was that in the 1920s the young subscribed to the belief that the design could lead to a utopian new society, whereas in the 1980s, at its most extreme, the New Wave engaged with a dystopian vision of critical nihilism and energized excess. As another designer, Siegfried Michail Syniuga, wrote at the time, 'Furniture must be political, radiate eroticism, dissolve religion. Furniture must function not just under your arse, but in your head and in your soul.'<sup>6</sup>

## The Last Days of 'Good Design'

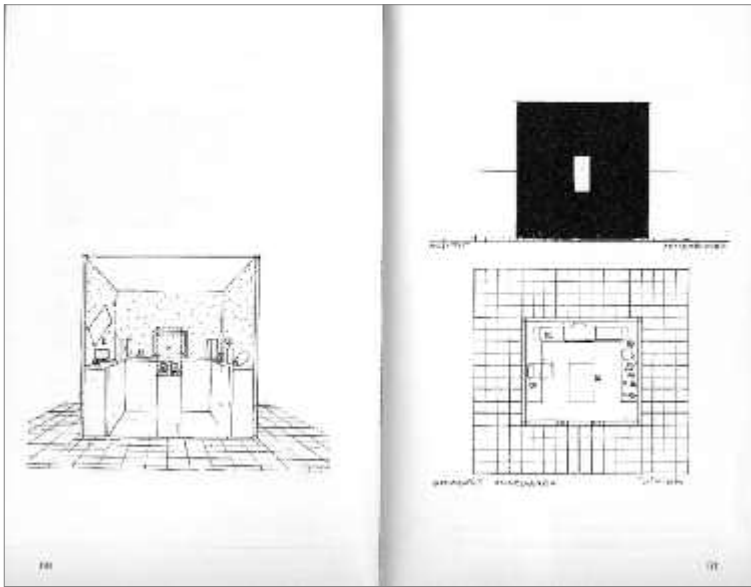
In the late 1970s, however international the agenda, it was questionable whether the position of East or West Germany could be straightforwardly compared with the USA, where much of the debate originated. Both countries had a more sustained public investment in social housing, and public assumptions about patterns of consumer society differed from the American model. Added to this, the legacy of the design reform movement lingered on, proving influential on how many German designers were to negotiate the challenge of Postmodernism.

For West Germany, the destiny of its Rat für Formgebung (Design Council) epitomized the broader tensions that design experienced in the second half of the twentieth century in changes to design outlook. As was discussed in chapter Four, the Rat für Formgebung had taken on the mantle for design promotion previously held by the German Werkbund. Its history paralleled other official councils that were formed to promote design in the post-war period, for example, in Britain, the Netherlands and the Scandinavian countries. When it was agreed by the Bonn parliament to establish the Rat für Formgebung in 1951, Mia Seeger, its first director, led the programme of exhibitions by announcing her goal to establish for the country 'Wertmassstäbe und Formen einer durch den Krieg veränderten kulturellen Identität' (Standards and Forms of a Cultural Identity Changed by War).<sup>7</sup> Symptomatic of the time, Seeger quoted Max Bill on how design should concern itself with everything 'from the spoon to the city' ('vom Löffel bis zur Stadt reichen'). Established in Messel House in the Mathildenhöhe district of Darmstadt, rff projects largely took the form of the promotion of German design through international exhibitions, and the proximity to Frankfurt allowed relations between the trade fairs to develop. West Germany was concerned to adopt the role of good citizen of the wider world and, as part of this initiative, sent abroad examples in exhibition of good industrial design, for example, to Pakistan, Iran and India. In

1962 *Design Center, Stuttgart* opened in the capital of Baden-Württemberg, a city surrounded by industry and commerce, and one of the most thriving federal capitals. Here, selections of the 'best' in all fields of design were displayed for retailers, industrialists and discerning consumers alike. By the mid-1960s, the question facing the Rat für Formgebung was how to develop a more extended understanding of *Gute Form*, while also adapting to alternative values and changed lifestyles of youth culture and popular design. Like Design Councils elsewhere in Europe, the institution directed its energies towards developing an extended advisory relationship with industry, becoming an information centre, advising authorities and governments, and building networks with other design institutions. By 1969 the Berlin-based IDZ – Internationales Design Zentrum – opened as a centre to develop thematic, historical and culturally oriented exhibitions and publications. At the same time, rff introduced the *Bundespreis Gute Form*, an official German design prize intended to promote the 'economic meaning of product design as a competitive factor', clearly signalling the wish to maintain good relations with the government to justify its role. Competitions became thematically oriented, as in 1974, when to address the impact of the worldwide oil crisis, the subject was *Fahrräder und was dazu gehört – umweltfreundliche Individualfahrzeuge* (Bicycles and their Implications – Environmentally Friendly Vehicles), coinciding with a widespread engagement with ecology felt at a popular political level.<sup>8</sup>

Under the director Herbert Ohl, who took on the role from 1973, the rff became a forum for design and technology to provide a context for the education of industrial designers and subject specialists in other design fields under the title *Design-Dialoge Darmstadt*. By the end of the 1980s the Rat für Formgebung had left Darmstadt to take up offices at the Frankfurt Trade Fair, with the encouragement of *Messe Frankfurt* and the regional government of Hesse. In this new setting, director Michael Erlhoff installed thematic exhibitions such as *Ritual und Gegenstand* (Ritual and Object) and *Unternehmenskultur und Stammeskultur* (Employer Culture and Tribal Culture), which took wider social and cultural perspectives on design.

The altered identities and changing roles of the rff reflected wider shifts in design discourse itself, from a preoccupation with taste and aesthetic judgement to a broader, inter-disciplinary approach in which the concept of design embraced social, industrial and ecological concerns. The change was signalled when the *Bundespreis Gute Form* ceased to be awarded in 1985, implying that the concept 'good design', primarily based on aesthetic criteria, was no longer applicable. Nevertheless, in 1992 the design prize was reintroduced as *Bundespreis Produktdesign* with the intention of



Günter Zamp Kelp, drawings for the 'Fetish Room', part of the exhibition *Ritual und Gegenstand* at the Rat für Formgebung in Frankfurt am Main in 1987–8. The room could not be entered but visitors looked on to the assembled objects through a cut-out window.

awarding products that had made an international impact. Themes were not totally prescribed but their criteria included *Gebrauchstäglichkeit* (every-day usefulness) and *Umweltverträglichkeit* (environmental compatibility), along with safety in use.

As Gwendolyn Ristant has written of this time, officially approved design in the Federal Republic was generally associated with following the belief in objective criteria for design selection. German style, she suggested, was 'modest in appearance, functional in use, matter-of-fact, with neat right angles, in white, grey or black, without ornamentation, with no more than precise, technically necessary details: such was the look of those mass products that conformed to the ideal of good design'.<sup>9</sup> Evidence of this, for example, was in how the electrical firm Braun, a company associated with all such design values, received an above-average number of awards in the scheme. Prizes were given to companies in other spheres of production that in the eyes of the judges produced high-quality technical products whose 'design combines functionality and aesthetics'. Selected products for the award in 1996, for instance, included Audi and Porsche automobiles, Lamy pens, the NOBLEX 135 U Panorama camera, the Schindler transparent lift for ease of access to buildings, Blanco Med medical equipment and Rodenstock spectacle frames.<sup>10</sup> To commentators beyond its borders, West German design became synonymous with products of this technologically oriented sphere: a world of domestic appliances, machine tools, cameras, radios,



The award-winning Somatom Spirit CT scanner, 2006, designed by the Munich group Designafairs (Klaus Thormann and Sebastian Maier) for Siemens AG, Medical Solutions was praised for its awareness of patient needs, based on ergonomic studies. Many of its characteristics are associated with high-end German industrial design.



modes of transportation, audio equipment, televisions, articles for the office, furniture systems and information design. Such a characterization, based on a strong record of achievement, was something that designers of the following generations sought to negotiate and at times distance themselves from.

### Anton Stankowski: Modern Graphic Design

In much the way that Peter Behrens or Bruno Paul could be said to have encapsulated design values closely associated with the official institutions of German design discourse early in the twentieth century, a figure such as Anton Stankowski can be seen as a designer emblematic of official values, a 'hero' of modern design later in the century. Interestingly, Stankowski's career connects 1920s functionalism with 1950s and '60s corporate Modernism, and represents a continuation of these ideas into the late twentieth century.<sup>11</sup>

Stankowski came out of the tradition of the new typography. Originally trained as an interior decorator in Düsseldorf, he moved to the Folkwangschule in Essen, where he studied in 1928 to 1929 with Max



Anton Stankowski, poster for the '10th Anniversary of the bank Kreissparkasse Esslingen-Nürtingen', 1984. It showed the designer's characteristic blend of pared-down typography and abstract motifs.

Burchartz, one of the main protagonists of modern graphic design. Stankowski then joined the small graphic design studio *werbe-bau* run by Johannes Canis in Bochum, another landmark in Constructivist-inspired design. The designer then spent the 1930s in Switzerland, where he taught at the Gewerbeschule in Zurich, developing his theories of an abstract, formal language of visual communication while also working for Max Dalang advertising studio. Stankowski continued to experiment through painting: each series of works examined properties of composition and colour theory

that ran parallel to their realization as designs. Testing ideas in black and white as well as through colour exercises, Stankowski was especially interested in the theories of Josef Albers, the Bauhaus-trained designer who by then was teaching at Black Mountain College, North Carolina. Returning to Germany, in the 1950s Stankowski established a successful design studio in Stuttgart, where he attracted many industrial and corporate clients. Drawn to the challenge of industrial graphics, he designed brochures and magazine advertisements for many companies on the engineering end of production. It was in the post-war world of growing corporate companies, large-scale communication industries and international banking that Stankowski's deceptively simple approach, giving visual order to complex organizations, came to prominence. Clients extended to include Süddeutscher Rundfunk, Deutsche Bank, Vissmann and Behr-Möbel. He was made a professor of design by the state of Baden-Württemberg in 1976, and as founder of his own Stankowski Stiftung (foundation) in 1983 and through many publications, his influence became widespread.

Unlike American designers who were his contemporaries, such as Paul Rand and Milton Glaser, Stankowski stayed strictly within the remit of graphic design. If images were to be used, they were either professional photographs or abstract motifs. He did not cross over to incorporate the 'softer', more humorous side of graphic illustration, or the visual puns of image making. In this sense, Stankowski was an uncompromising Modernist who believed in the power of the abstract graphic symbol and reductive typography to communicate a message effectively. Among these designs were the corporate identity for IBM in Germany and the entire information design for the city of West Berlin in 1967–8 and which combined various abstract motifs with the single sans-serif typeface Akzidenz Grotesk. Appropriately for his commitment to international communication, Stankowski's contributions as chair of the visual design committee for the Olympic Games of 1972 in Munich won him widespread recognition.

### Official Design in the Last Years of East Germany

Official design culture in East Germany tended to be organized along similar lines to the Federal Republic, with a design press, albeit much smaller in its quantity of publications, commenting on government-run associations that oversaw its cultural institutions, museums and education, and selection panels and juries who awarded annual prizes for the 'best' in industrial and furniture design, book and poster design, and equivalents in other areas of the applied arts. The intended sphere of influence, however, was



different. If the Federal Republic sought to be both model state in Western Europe and an effective productive economic force worldwide, the East German ambition was to maintain a reputation as leader within the Eastern Bloc in terms of industrial production. In this, design was recognized to be a vital ingredient. To promote its cultural identity, the GDR held a number of events that drew foreign artists, designers and cultural figures to its many exhibitions and award ceremonies.

In 1978, belatedly when compared with Western developments, the *Gutes Design* prize was introduced in the GDR. According to its regulations, it was awarded to makers of ‘outstandingly designed products in GDR manufacturing’. This amounted to recognition by the state of ‘achievements of industry in the area of industrial product design’ for the following criteria:

products that are significant in their design, products that are shown in trade shows or exhibitions in the GDR. The award shall simultaneously promote the application of design in the development and advancement of products as well as influence through export.<sup>12</sup>

Emphasis lay on engineering design, vehicles for public and industrial transport, and office and institutional furnishings rather than consumer items. More than in the West, GDR design awards were part of a culture that acknowledged individual products or design systems that made significant

Reinhard Kranz, street furniture in Neubrandenburg, 1981. The GDR design awards often recognized design that fulfilled social needs.

contributions to the economy or that, at a cultural-political level, symbolized ideals held by the state. This was the case, even when the purchase of selected items was beyond individual consumers' financial means, or, more seriously, unavailable because of material shortages.

### *Neue Werbung* / New Publicity

A further perspective on the changes in official positions towards design can be found in the pages of *Neue Werbung*, the monthly magazine that covered graphic and publication design, illustration, marketing and advertising. In the last years of the GDR, design journalism showed many similarities with the West, but also significant differences.<sup>13</sup> DEWAG, the publishing house that produced *Neue Werbung*, was the largest state-run company and oversaw 'sight agitation and propaganda' in the form of posters, pictures, transparencies, audio tapes and wall-newspapers for transport, factory halls, waiting rooms, stations and political meeting rooms, as well as the press across the entire GDR. The associated design magazine, an internal rather than an external critical voice, covered the fields of publicity for commerce and the state, both in the GDR and countries within the satellite of its political influence. Leipzig, East Berlin and Dresden remained important centres for visitors from the international

Two cover designs for the official GDR graphic and publicity design magazine *Neue Werbung*: April 1970 (left) a cover by Helmut Wengler for the special issue to mark the hundredth birthday of Lenin, and May 1970 (right) a design by Axel Bertram for the 25th anniversary of the 'freeing of Germany from Fascism'.

world of graphic design. Graphic designers, graduates of the Kunsthochschule Berlin-Weissensee, Halle, or the Leipzig Academy, were members of the Verband Bildender Künstler (Association of Applied Artists), which guaranteed that fees for services were strictly enforced. DEWAG was a major employer, as the only 'advertising agency', but designers also worked for the state, for firms, the SED and theatres. The cultural end of graphic design offered the most freedom.

On reviewing a magazine such as *Neue Werbung*, it becomes clear that certain themes predominate. Particular attention was given, for example, to the strong tradition of Polish posters and East European book design. Intended as an international publication, articles appeared bilingually, in German and Russian, the preferred second language. Such a policy might be contrasted with the established Swiss graphic journal *Graphis*, which since 1944 had appeared in French, German and English. Crucially, the languages allowed *Neue Werbung* to be read in countries under Soviet influence, including the People's Republic of China and Cuba, as well as those of the more expected Eastern Bloc. Through *Neue Werbung*, the GDR established itself as a leader in style, publicity and marketing, like the neighbouring Federal Republic, where *novum Gebrauchsgraphik* was a recognized reference point for graphic design internationally. The events covered in the magazine stressed close ties between culture and the Party interests that prompted them, because major party congresses were reported.<sup>14</sup>

Reflecting the mainstream press attention given to the achievements of major GDR production plants, emphasis turned to industrial graphics in the form of brochures, leaflets and information design: these combined the techniques of object photography with the subject of heavy industry. For instance, a promotion campaign in 1978 under the slogan 'Plaste und Elaste aus Schkopau' drew attention to more than 900 chemical products by VEB Chemische Werke Buna, an employer of 30,000 workers and one of the GDR's most important industries. The graphic designs were explained as an 'Arbeitsmittel' – a work medium – and 'objective' and 'informative' trademarks, brochures, posters and advertisements were applauded.<sup>15</sup>

In the less competitive sphere of the graphic arts, including book publishing and poster design for cultural events, greater stylistic flexibility was allowed. Graphic works embraced latter-day versions of Surrealism and Expressionism, as worked through by second- and third-generation artists and designers, particularly in editorial illustration and poster designs for theatre, concerts and exhibitions. In parallel to the lasting importance of Brecht to GDR theatre, photomontage was legitimized in the Party's eyes through the radical Communist associations with Berlin Dada, most par-



Cover design by Jochen Filder for the catalogue *100 Beste Plakate*, Erfurt 1987. Poster design in the GDR was one area that offered a relatively relaxed attitude toward artistic independence.

ticularly John Heartfield, who together with his brother Wieland Herzfelde had returned to the GDR after the war. Posters in the 1970s and '80s, often with small print runs, circulated beyond official channels, and artists used small private galleries as venues for their displays in centres such as Leipzig, Erfurt and Karl Marx Stadt (now Chemnitz).

More controversially for the official line taken on the place of graphic design within a socialist society, occasional articles on the best window displays or the interior design of state-run cafés and restaurants introduced the reader to the more expanded field of environmental graphic design. Indeed, by the mid-1980s the magazine had broadened its emphasis to cover profiles of prominent figures of the first generation of graphic designers, such as Fritz Ehmcke, Julius Gipkens and Edmund Edel, under the heading 'Klassiker deutscher Gebrauchsgraphik' (Classics of German Commercial Graphics). Through this, editorial policy became open to cover the 'heroes' of modern design who were already known to successive generations of Western designers, critics and historians. On one level, this was a further acknowledgement of the broader historicism of the age, yet, importantly, it also signalled in the GDR that 'capitalist age' graphic design could now be considered alongside socialist and Communist designs, since most of the work represented was commercial rather than political graphic design from the *Jugend* and Weimar years.

## The Presence of the Past

In most European situations, Postmodern discourse required a realignment with recent and more distant history of a complex kind. For Germany, the issues were more sensitive than most. In many respects, the post-war years had witnessed the fulfilment of modernity and the strongest cultural continuity was with the years of the Weimar Republic rather than deeper history. Broader historical reference risked raising more complex and controversial associations. In the mid-1980s in the Federal Republic, what was termed the *Historikerstreit* took place among historians and philosophers and this was to have resonance in the GDR as well. Jürgen Habermas, a major protagonist, accused some historians of revisionism, for relativizing crimes of National Socialism while stressing those of Stalinism. At the same time, historical research turned attention to the lives of ordinary German citizens during the Third Reich and their degree of suffering. This struck to the core the question of German national identity. As commentators have indicated, 'In contrast to renewed attempts at reconstituting Germany as a community shaped by destiny (*Schicksalsgemeinschaft*) or as an ethnically or culturally unique nation, Habermas proposed a patriotism based on allegiance to the constitution (*Verfassungspatriotismus*).'<sup>16</sup>

To alleviate the burden of their national history, many German designers turned to the more open international context of design exhibitions and debate. An important landmark for Postmodernism was the first exhibition entirely dedicated to architecture held at the Venice Biennale in 1980. While the exhibition and subsequent critical debate may have focused on architecture, many of its protagonists were equally engaged with the field of design, and the issues would inform both fields in the next few years. The implications were as significant for Germany as Italy and other European countries.

The organizers acknowledged that 'Postmodernism' existed, using the term drawn from the important work of the French philosopher Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (1979), which was translated into German in 1982. Their reluctance to use the term 'Postmodern', choosing instead 'The Presence of the Past' for the title, prompted a debate about the 'return' to history. The architect and critic Paolo Portoghesi contributed the introductory essay, 'The End of Prohibitionism'. His premise was not without controversy. In one instance, Kenneth Frampton, the architectural critic and historian, resigned from the committee, withdrawing his essay because he could not agree with the overarching interpretation of the group of critics and architects. These included Hans Hollein, Rem Koolhaas and OMA, Michael Graves, Jeremy Dixon, Arata Isozaki, Robert Venturi, John Rauch and



Denise Scott-Brown. Portoghesi positioned the project on an ambitious scale. He signalled a break, both with the apparent singularity of the Modernist position and the systematic cataloguing of nineteenth-century eclecticism, until then the strongest viable alternative to modern orthodoxy.

Portoghesi wrote:

The relationship with the history of architecture which the 'post-modern' condition makes possible doesn't need the eclectic method anymore, because it can count on a form of 'disenchantment', on a much greater psychological detachment . . .

History is the 'material' of logical and constructive operations whose only purpose is that of joining the real and the imaginary through the communication mechanisms whose effectiveness can be verified; it is material utilizable for the socialization of aesthetic experience, since it presents sign systems of great conventional value which make it possible to think and make others think through architecture.

And with reference to cultural location and the political implications of his point of view, he went on to suggest: 'In this sense, architecture can once again be returned to the places and regions of the earth without a return to a racial or religious metaphysic.'<sup>17</sup>

Especially important for German architects and designers was the invitation in his last words to draw on history, without the inevitable accusation of invoking a difficult, if not impossible past. For some, including Frampton, Portoghesi's position risked taking architecture beyond the sphere of direct or engaged contexts into a global, nomadic space. This was a point of view echoed more generally in subsequent criticism of Postmodern design. For others, it was liberating. Of all contributors, it was Aldo Rossi, then chair of architectural composition at the Venice University Institute of Architecture, who captured the main tenets of the exhibition and the public imagination with his designs. Rossi exhibited an extension to a cemetery in Modena, a design for a school and an inspiring model and installation, the 'Teatro del mondo', an arrangement of buildings intended to encapsulate history and memory. According to Charles Jencks,

Aldo Rossi was instrumental in turning architects' attention back to the city morphology and the way the city and its monuments form a collective memory.

Street, arcade, piazza, monument – these traditional elements reappeared in his work.<sup>18</sup>

The boundaries between architecture and design in Italy were traditionally very fluid and it was usual for architects to enter various design fields. At the prompting of Alessandro Mendini, the Alessi company in Crusinallo in northern Italy, established in 1921 and until then a relatively small specialist metalwork company commissioning modern design, turned to many of the architects associated with the Venice Biennale to contribute to its design project 'Tea and Coffee Piazza'. The result was a series of silver services that enacted similar narratives to those rehearsed in the architectural drawings at Venice. They were realized on a domestic scale in the form of tea and coffee services, opening up the possibility for design for objects destined for the interior to work as a 'domestic landscape'. The series was arranged as an exhibition by the Austrian architect Hans Hollein in Milan in 1983.<sup>19</sup>

This commission proved a landmark in the history of design and its impact was felt throughout Germany, just as elsewhere. Not necessarily affordable for the everyday consumer, the series nevertheless struck the imagination of design curators to the extent that a considerable number of collections in arts and crafts museums and the new international design museums felt compelled to acquire them. Their collective presence in museums and in the satellite lifestyle design shops that were proliferating around the time signalled a significant step away from the rational, functionalist tradition of design to a new level of symbolism and poetry in objects. In the 1980s, the years that became identified as the 'designer decade', the



In recent years Alessi stores opened in Hamburg, Munich and Cologne, following the design concept that Hani Rashid initially created for their shops in the USA. In the Cologne store, the horizontal display case provided an imaginative setting for the signature 'Tea and Coffee Piazza' range.



Aldo Rossi, apartment block, part of a housing complex built for the Berlin Internationale Bauausstellung, 1984.

word design became a prefix extended to many areas of human activity. The term also entered the German language in the form of *Grafik-design*, *Textil-design* and *Möbel-design*.

In the case of Alessi the group of international designers ranged across Italy, Austria, Germany and the USA. Among the German contributors, Joseph-Paul Kleihues, then professor of architectural theory and planning at the University of Dortmund, became a figure of central importance for the development of West Berlin as the director of the *Internationale Bauausstellung (IBA)*, which culminated in

the opening of the building projects in the city in 1984. The *IBA Neubau* scheme brought in international architects to provide model new housing, among them Aldo Rossi, Rob Krier and Hans Hollein, whose designs reflected a consciousness of the debates about history and context, as rehearsed in Venice. References were made to Berlin's building types drawn from across the domestic, commercial and industrial scene. An interesting aspect of the project was the *Altbau* scheme, which incorporated consultation with German-Turkish residents of the city and led to the restoration and remodelling of previously run-down historical quarters of the city, involving local planners, politicians, community groups and residents in the process. Recognition of history, both in the urban typology of the new build, and in the conscious effort to retain buildings from earlier periods, marked a significant change in approach in the history of building exhibitions.<sup>20</sup>

The Alessi project proved an extremely influential model for other companies to follow. While some, like the ceramic company Rosenthal, had well-established traditions of commissioning designers to contribute to its studio lines, others followed suit. In 1986 several designers were invited by WMF (Württembergische Metallwarenfabrik), a leading manufacture of cooking and tableware aiming to re-position itself within the contemporary design sphere. WMF chose to do this with a series of plastic trays that could be immediately identified by their designer. Signalling this Postmodern moment, they incorporated a characteristic mix of designs inspired by William Morris and *Jugendstil*, as well as more contemporary, fashionable lines.<sup>21</sup>

Despite such commercial engagement with style and ornament, perhaps more than any other country, the critique of Postmodernism struck to the core of the national identity of German design. From the Werkbund, the Bauhaus and Ulm, to the late functionalism of large-scale



housing programmes and city transport systems, even when stereotyped as cold, technocratic or too singular in their design idiom, the underlying principles nevertheless represented a strong sense of continuity that appeared to be under attack. As one commentator, hostile to the Post-modern turn, lamented:

The King Collection was an example of WMF commissioning international designers to develop new studio lines.

Once, at the Bauhaus or the Hochschule für Gestaltung in Ulm, the intention was to develop *the chair, the spoon, the radio, the design for a terrace house, the cell in which to live*, but recently the élite of the profession has come to terms with the fact of developing or disguising objects that become out of date in a short time, instead of objects that can be used for a long time. Here a designer follows the directives of management, in whatever form they may come, in order to support the throw-away economy as the form of business most likely to bring turnover and profit in a saturated market.<sup>22</sup>

In the GDR during the 1980s the impact of Postmodernism was most apparent in a changed attitude towards design for the urban environment rather than in the sphere of product design or everyday consumer goods. An indication of this was the attention given to the renovation of the historical quarters of its cities. In place of the consistent emphasis on the new of the previous decades, especially in housing, industrial plants and social



Albrecht von Bodecker, poster for '750 years anniversary Berlin', 1987. Von Bodecker went on to become Professor and Rektor at the Hochschule für Grafik und Buchkunst in Leipzig.

services, what Florian Urban has called 'neo-historical' GDR, constructed from ready-made components, took hold.<sup>23</sup> For instance, attention was given to surviving nineteenth-century quarters close to the centre of East Berlin, which had been previously overlooked. With the historical fabric virtually untouched since 1945, emphasis turned to refashioning these intact areas through the introduction of symbols of heritage and tradition, including historicist street furniture, street signs, pavements and planting. According to a notional concept of 'Altberlin', reconstructions of the Spandauer Vorstadt and Nikolaiviertel were opened in 1987, revealing eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century town houses intermingled with modern infill, often mixing bars, restaurants and gift shops with offices and residential areas along re-cobbled streets. Such development mirrored moves in heritage culture more generally across the world. In a similar way, in another significant historical quarter of Prenzlauerberg, already a district associated with a cultural milieu, renovations were also undertaken. As an indication of this deeper return to history, the Museum of Berliner Arbeiterleben um 1900, a museum of workers' lives in the city around 1900, opened on 1 May 1987, with an emphasis on telling a Marxist-Leninist history of everyday life (*Alltagsgeschichte*).

Such development in the East was not unique to Berlin; other East German towns and cities with historical quarters were also subject to similar attention. For a regime built on the ideals and principles of workerist production, the re-emphasis on cultural patrimony necessarily implied striking a balance between notions of collective history, educational purpose, privatized consumption and changing class values. The authorities became increasingly sensitized to the potential economic importance of leisure and tourism. Many of the plans were in place for the 750th anniversary of Berlin, celebrated in 1987. The fortieth anniversary of the foundation of the GDR, however, scheduled for November 1989, another important event where the achievements in historical urban reconstruction would be displayed, was never to be fully realized.

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## The Museum Boom

The shift to Postmodernism in the design profession was accompanied by curatorial initiatives to engage with more open-ended definitions of design and its influence. Among the first was an exhibition *Die gewöhnliche Design* (Ordinary Design) held in Darmstadt in 1976 that marked a move away from the overriding concern with 'good form' or status in design. Coinciding with events to mark the 75th anniversary of *Jugendstil*, by then perceived as 'high' design, the exhibition took everyday objects and exposed them to the scrutiny of museum display, breaking away from the usual model of the art museum in which canonical objects were selected for their stylistic significance. In a darkened space with Plexiglass vitrines, everyday objects included an air pump, a plastic bucket, radio batteries, a rail timetable, nylon tights, a milk carton, pencils, a chain, an ice-cream scoop, a pencil sharpener, an aspirin/pain reliever, plastic cutlery and a toilet-roll holder.<sup>24</sup>

The 1980s witnessed a phenomenal growth in the building of museums across the Western world. For some, this overwhelming interest in the past, the documenting and curating of design from earlier times against the backdrop of a post-industrial climate, was a further symptom of Postmodern anxiety about the future. The museums, prominent venues for this re-evaluation, were built to the designs of international architects appointed through competitions and increasingly seen as central to the cultural and economic revival and the landmark identity of cities. One of the first to gain international acclaim as a self-consciously Postmodern project was the



James Stirling's extension to the Staatsgalerie in Stuttgart of 1978 marked the beginning of a postmodern approach to the museum's central role in the cultural rebranding of a German city.

extension to the Staatsgalerie in Stuttgart, undertaken between 1977 and 1984 to the design of the British architect James Stirling. The building drew on references to the distant and more recent past, including Hadrian's Wall and the architecture of Karl Friedrich Schinkel, but it was also assertively contemporary in its juxtaposition of colours and materials. Such pluralism was shocking for those more in tune with the singularity of a Modernist vision. Stuttgart's success in using a signature building to change the fortunes of a city paralleled its immediate precedent, the Pompidou Centre, which opened in Paris in 1977. It provided a new environment in which to view art or spend leisure time and became a model for other major cities such as Cologne, Bremen, Düsseldorf, Hamburg, Munich and Nuremberg, which realized similar projects through substantial cultural funding. One of the most remarkable was the city of Frankfurt am Main, where the riverside was modelled into a museum quarter, involving the renovation of existing museums and the addition of the new ones, among them the new Museum für Kunsthandwerk by the American architect Richard Meier and Oswald Matthias Ungers's Deutsches Architekturmuseum.<sup>25</sup>

Of the specialist design museums in the Federal Republic, two warrant particular attention in offering contrasting perspectives on the question of curating modern design, a central plank of the country's design identity. The first, the Bauhaus Archiv, was an important project that contributed to the continuing legacy of the school and future generations of the design-interested public. Although the original buildings of Weimar and Dessau lay in the East, Gropius, Breuer, Moholy-Nagy and Bayer and other prominent

Ott+Stein (Nicolaus Ott and Bernard Stein), poster for an exhibition on the Bauhaus Metalworkshop held at the Kunsthalle in Weimar in 1992. It depicted Marianne Brandt's design for a silver and ebony teapot, originally designed in 1924, which also carried significance for a generation of postmodern designers.



staff who had emigrated to the USA were instrumental in returning the heritage to West Germany through the bequest of parts of their archives. The original Bauhaus Archiv was founded by Hans Maria Wingler in the Ernst-Ludwig-Haus on the Mathildenhöhe in Darmstadt in 1960. The first major travelling exhibition, *50 Jahre Bauhaus*, supported by the Federal government, was held in 1968. It was in the 1980s and '90s that the full impact of the Archiv's exhibition programme was felt. Following a move to Berlin in 1971, the archive was first installed in historical rooms facing Schloss Charlottenburg before the completion of a purpose-built gallery, library, offices and storage, built to Gropius's own design, opened near the cultural forum in West Berlin in 1979. The research and exhibition programme of the Archiv subsequently enriched the historical knowledge of the teaching and design achievements of its staff and the students in the various workshops of the school, as well as addressing its lasting impact on contemporary design issues. In the meantime, at Dessau, following reunification, circumstances improved for a parallel collection-based exhibition and publication plan to develop at the historic site, while the school buildings and master houses underwent major conservation and restoration under their classification as a World Heritage Site. Together, these initiatives asserted Germany's definitive significance for Modernism.<sup>26</sup>

Another notable museological project that encouraged a more open-ended consideration of contemporary design was the Vitra Museum, which pointed to the future as well as the past. The original Vitra furniture company was established by Willi Fehlbaum in Basel in 1934 and became one of Europe's most important centres for furniture design. The company was founded in Weil am Rhein on the extreme south-west border between Germany and Switzerland. In 1957 Vitra gained the licensing rights from Herman Miller to distribute Charles and Ray Eames and George Nelson furniture in Europe, forming a parallel to Knoll Associates, discussed in chapter Four. From this secure base the commission of contemporary designers began, the first being Werner Pantón's Pantón chair of 1967. The project was a significant force in cultivating a lineage of high design from *Jugendstil* to the Bauhaus and mid-twentieth-century modern to Postmodernism. The company published its aims in 2007:

We are convinced that rooms and interior design have a decisive influence on people's motivation, performance and health. So we have made it our mission to develop furniture and furnishing systems that stimulate, inspire and motivate, while also offering the body comfort, safety and support. In order to attain this goal, we work



The permanent collection of Vitra Design Museum, Weil am Rhein, telling the history of international modern chair design and arranged as a stacked, wall-mounted display.



with renowned designers and a specialized Vitra team. We experiment with new ideas, and are continuously tackling the new challenges of the world of work.<sup>27</sup>

Under Willi Fehlbaum's son, Rolf, the company grew in cultural significance and ambition: on the site at Weil am Rhein two factories designed by the British architect Nicholas Grimshaw were built in 1981 and 1986. The year 1993 saw the realization of the fire station, the first completed building by the Iraqi-born British architect Zaha Hadid, and a conference pavilion by the Japanese architect Tadao Ando. Just as Vitra became an important site for contemporary architecture, it also became active as an international think-tank, running workshops on themes in architecture and design, and, most importantly, in 1989 opening the Vitra Design Museum under the direction of Alexander von Wegesack in a Frank O. Gehry building. This housed part of the extensive permanent Fehlbaum collection of furniture design and formed the base from which to originate ambitious curatorial projects and publications. In terms of the encouragement of contemporary design cultures, since 1987 Vitra Editions promoted ways for internationally acclaimed designers to develop projects, in laboratory conditions, without the consideration of normal market circumstances as restrictions. To compensate for its geographical distance from many of the important urban centres for design,

travelling exhibitions became an important element of the programme, while in 2001 an annexe of the Vitra Design Museum opened in a converted industrial building in Berlin for a short number of years.

If the curatorial projects of design museums in the Federal Republic predominantly engaged with the history and legacy of Modernism, in the GDR, beyond the traditional fine and decorative arts museums, and in keeping with materialist history, emphasis was on understanding everyday life rather than the profession or form of design. On the fall of the Wall, attention continued to be on understanding the GDR's recent past and the lives of ordinary people through exhibitions of political and everyday life in what might be called an archaeology of a political regime. The material culture of everyday life was propelled by political change and a gradual coming to terms with the past 40 years of the regime. In Eisenhüttenstadt, for example, a Dokumentationszentrum Alltagskultur der DDR, a collection of more than 70,000 everyday objects, was drawn on to make exhibitions that combined social, political and aesthetic topics.<sup>28</sup> One curatorial motivation was to counter the prevailing popular nostalgia for the GDR period, *Ostalgie* as it became known, which risked masking by sentiment a more complete understanding of people's actual relations to the material world during the period of the GDR. Another impulse was to correct the view that the history of East German design was simply one of cheap, poor-quality, mass-produced goods, mere pale imitations of goods available in the West. As the curator wrote in the opening text to an exhibition *Die Deutsche Demokratische Republik, 1949–1990*, 'The GDR belongs in the Museum'. The text continued:



Installation of the exhibition *Die Deutsche Demokratische Republik, 1949–1990*, held at the Deutsches Historisches Museum, Berlin in 2007.

a call for objects and reminiscences to prevent the history of the GDR from disappearing was made in June 1990 by the curators of the Deutsches Historisches Museum and the material interpreted in subsequent exhibitions on the cultural and political life in the Museum's programme.<sup>29</sup>

### 'German' Design Responds to the Changed Situation

The fall of the Berlin Wall on 9 November 1989 and the subsequent opening of the border between the entire GDR, the Federal Republic and its East European neighbours were followed by the reunification of Germany on 3 October 1990. For designers in the West, no immediate need to change well-established ways of working were called for, although the expanded geography opened many new opportunities. Life in the design cities of the former Federal Republic offered continuity and also a magnet for new designers to migrate from the eastern zone and beyond. For many Germans, citizens of a configuration of states (*Länder*) within a federal constitution, regional structures were as important as national ones, and the country's membership of the European Union also offered an additional perspective through which to see its 'national' question. Rather than identify oneself as German, one solution was to choose to be defined as a citizen of the new Europe.

The greater initial challenge was therefore in the East, where many of the accepted premises of the earlier design culture were undermined by the introduction of market forces. The choice was whether to adapt totally to Western-style practices or to attempt to retain some of the qualities of a distinctive design culture. A large part of GDR identity was associated with strong political intervention, much discredited through the process of change (*die Wende*) and the exposure of the operations of the Stasi secret police and other forms of censorship. A more positive element, however, was to retain the possibility of design as a cultural activity not solely driven by profit.

The reputation of German design since 1989 and the alternative paths open to its designers will be the focus of the rest of this chapter. As commentaries suggested, since its introduction as a marque, 'Made in Germany' had carried a great deal of significance in the wider world throughout the twentieth century, with expectations of the highest quality of products. Now, in a competitive global market, the country faced a stage of redefinition to embrace two differently evolved design cultures under one heading and to present the unified country in a new light.<sup>30</sup>

## Jil Sander and Eva Gronbach

A strong contrast in approaches to these issues from designers of different generations highlights the opportunities, in this case, from the field of fashion design. While German design in many fields was held in great esteem, as far as fashion was concerned, it had never claimed an equivalent status to Paris, Milan or New York. Force of circumstance did not help; in a decentralized Federal Republic the idea of a leading or single fashion city, following the model of the post-war couture industry, did not fall naturally onto the German political and cultural map. Instead, it was through the projection of fashion brands onto a global context, rather than through a fashion 'locus', that German fashion designers made their mark in the 1980s and '90s.

Pre-eminent in the field of German women's fashion design was Jil Sander. Born in 1943 in Wesselburen near Hamburg, Sander studied textile engineering at Krefeld, one centre for the West German textile industry, before a two-year period in Los Angeles exposed her to patterns of American marketing. On returning, Sander set up a boutique in Hamburg and her own label then followed in 1968. Sander's reputation grew as a designer who had uncompromising expectations for the level of quality in her garments: her designs stood for 'luxurious simplicity'. Aware of the relationship between design and publicity, partly from a short period as a fashion editor on *Petra*, one of Germany's leading fashion magazines, Sander notoriously used her own face to market her perfume range in 1978. Her confidence in bringing her company and personal identity together was shared with her contemporary American counterparts, Donna Karan, Ralph Lauren and Calvin Klein, who were also realizing the importance of the diversification of their brand labels from clothes to beauty products and lifestyle. Through this, Sander took German fashion design to the global centre stage.<sup>31</sup>

It was possible to trace characteristics associated with German design in Sander's approach: she became understood to design for the modern, self-confident woman. Her company's advertising and marketing campaigns often employed highly stylized black-and-white photography with plain backgrounds and stark cropping, which carried associations with the New Objectivity of the 1920s, the subject of an intense revival of interest in the 1990s. Jil Sander's international stores operate as choreographed spaces: the installation of the clothes in predominantly white, expansive interiors, often part of historical buildings in which architectural detail contrasted with the clothes and minimalist shop fittings. The strong awareness

The Jil Sander Autumn/Winter 2006/07 collection, at Milan Fashion Week, February 2006. Sander's designs began to gain attention in the 1980s and are known for their luxurious simplicity.



of the creative boundary between architecture and fashion could be seen as 'German', although there were many parallel resonances between Sander and American and Japanese fashion houses.

In contrast to Jil Sander, whose designs avoided controversial discourse and placed the consumer in an idealized space that suggested a disavowal of materialism that paradoxically only money could buy, was the designer of two generations later, Eva Gronbach, who made her reputation through questioning the relationship between fashion design and identity. The fashion range that established Gronbach's name nationally and internationally in the 2000–1 season was 'Déclaration d'amour à Allemagne' (Declaration of Love for Germany). The campaign hit a nerve with the changed sentiment of optimism for a new Germany and was photographed by Donia Pitsc.<sup>32</sup>

Gronbach took old symbols and put them into a new context. The power of the linguistic sign matched by the integration of icons from German history was given a twist, subtle irony and occasional shock or frisson. This was so in 2003, when 'Mutter, Erde Vater, Land' (Mother, Earth Father, Land), a slogan with inevitably patriotic associations, played with the connotations of words that had strong associations within German history. The clothes continued these references with the emblem of the eagle, the use of the colours yellow, white and red, and black shirts. Other ranges and

Eva Gronbach, 'My New Police Dress Uniform' collection, 2004/5. The energy of Gronbach's designs came from her willingness to embrace street style and to offer diverse cultural meanings for the clothing.





Espresso Machine, XP 5000 series, KRUPS/Groupe SEB, 2004. Konstantin Grcic, head of the well-known Munich-based industrial design group, was commissioned to design a range of coffee-making equipment for the established company Krups. Although manufactured internationally, the products were nonetheless expected to convey 'German' qualities.

slogans included 'My New Police Dress Uniform' for the 2004–5 season, with inscriptions on clothing of 'Willkommen im deutschen Lande', and 'In Honour of Karl Valentin' – the Bavarian comedian, author and film director – in 2007, a collection that was photographed by Iwo Gospodinow.

At a semiotic level, Gronbach allowed her clothes to play with signification, loosening a too rigid identification of design traits to fixed meanings. Instead, what might be understood as the separation of the signifier from the signified allowed the opportunity for the wearer of the clothes to negotiate a more ironic, confrontational and open-ended identity, a strategy commonly employed in popular culture since the 1980s. Representative of the new, post-unification Germany, Gronbach located herself firmly as working in the north-west of Europe. Originally from Cologne, she studied at La Cambre in Brussels and IFM in Paris, before working with several leading designers, including Yohji

Yamamoto and John Galiano. In part, her career of travelling from Germany led to the commission of Eva Gronbach to design the uniforms for the staff on the Thalys, the high-speed trains connecting Germany with Paris, Brussels and Amsterdam. Her label, German Jeans, asserted a connection between Germany and street style: a range that made references to the traditional industrial clothing of coal miners of the Ruhr district in order to suggest that overlooked or underrated areas of German life could be opened to interesting cultural interpretation.

### 'German' design identities

In the field of industrial design, Konstantin Grcic became one of the most successful of his generation to adapt to the requirements of an increasingly international context. He was born in Munich in 1965, but while taking place in part in Germany, his career cannot simply be attributed to one country alone, but rather illustrated the international tendencies of the modern designer. Grcic trained in furniture design at the John Makepeace School for Craftsmen at Parnham, Dorset, and then in design at the Royal

College of Art in London from 1988 to 1990, before returning to found Konstantin Grcic Industrial Design (KGID) in his home city the following year. As a multi-disciplinary design group, KGID developed solutions for lighting, furniture and product design, working for some of Europe's leading design companies. To take an example, Grcic's 'MAYDAY' lamp, a polypropylene portable cone made by the renowned company Flos from 1998, was selected by the Museum of Modern Art in New York and awarded the *Compasso d'Oro*. In 1997 Achille Castiglioni declared him Young Designer of the Year. Grcic's career was therefore an illustration of how systems of recognition and acknowledgement in design operate through a global network of commissions and manufacture, panels and juries, exhibitions and prizes.

Along with ranges of furniture and lighting designs, Grcic's work for the established company Krups raised interesting challenges of design and national identity. Originally a German company founded in 1846, it became a household name beyond German borders for a range of coffee machines and coffee grinders, first introduced in 1961. Krups products were distinctive in their material of die-cast aluminium, in place of the more characteristic plastic used for domestic appliances by other companies at the time. As equipment manufactured to high specification, they consequently incorporated powerful engines that confirmed their reputation. On the strength of his reputation, Grcic was taken on to update the company image through new designs. He commented on the project: 'Krups used to be German. What does it mean to be German? In terms of colours? Sounds? Touch?'<sup>33</sup> He concluded that it was through 'formal codes' that Krups's identity could be retained.

Another designer who has engaged with issues of identity, in this case for many of the country's major organizations and services, Erik Spiekermann is a typographer, designer and professor at the University of the Arts, Bremen. Spiekermann established Metadesign, an independent design group in Berlin, in 1983. In taking on corporate identity and information design systems, Metadesign aimed to challenge the perception that design schemes for major public functions needed to be conformist or, at worst, uninspiring. Together with his wife, Joan Spiekermann, he had set up Fontshop in 1989, which became the first mail-order distributor for digital fonts. From modest beginnings as a small studio, Metadesign grew into an international design agency with successful branches in San Francisco and London, as well as Berlin, until Spiekermann left in 2001, first to establish UDN, United Designers Networks, then Spiekermann Partners in 2007. Spiekermann was one of the most engaged, literate designers of his generation to contribute to the critical discourse on design in the last decades of



Erik Spiekermann and MetaDesign, Gleisdreieck underground station, Berlin, 1993. Following German re-unification, the design programme for the BVG, Berlin Transport Network system, was thoroughly transformed to integrate the city's bus, tram, underground and overhead railway systems through clear, modern signage.



the twentieth century, offering, among other things, measured criticism of the extreme claims being made at the height of Postmodernism, which he published or delivered in lectures internationally. Interestingly, for a city he knew so well, Spiekermann and Metadesign were chosen to redesign the entire BVG transport network signage, which was developed with Rayan Abdullah for reunified Berlin. The Metadesign hallmarks for projects for, among others, Deutsche Post, Deutsche Bahn, Düsseldorf airport signage, Audi and Volkswagen, are explained as a continuation of undogmatic German functionalism.<sup>34</sup>

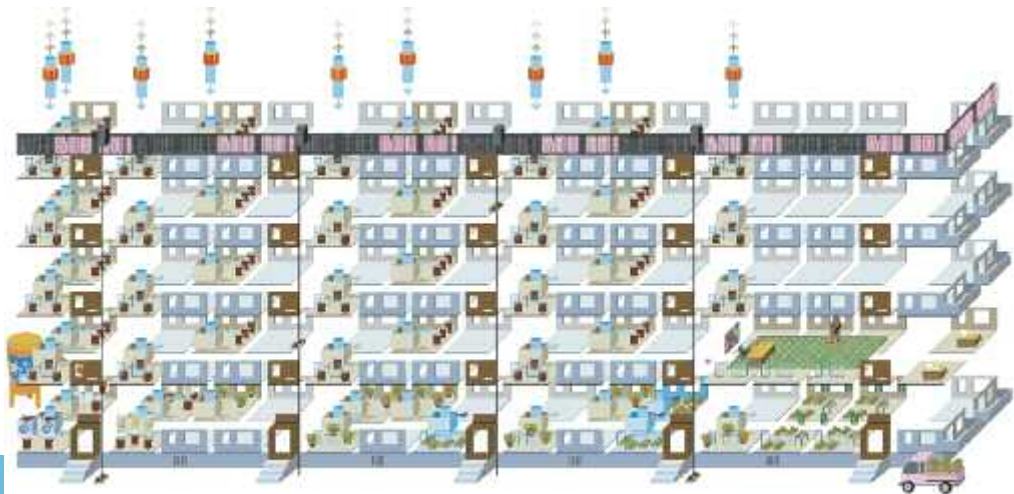
While new generations of designers still engage with local issues, the spectrum of design activity at the beginning of the twenty-first century meant that no single designer could offer the definitive answer to German design. For the provocatively titled series of interviews with designers, 'Was heisst hier, deutsches Design?' (What do you mean by German Design?), Richard Sapper was approached. Born in Germany in 1932, Sapper was most recognized as the creator of the Tizio lamp and the Alessi coffee pot '9090', as well as a further 150 other projects. He started his design career working for Gio Ponti in Milan after studies in Munich in the late 1950s.

Although he was an international figure, Sapper's press coverage continued to suggest that his reputation carried 'national' associations of his country of birth. As an internationally placed designer, Sapper contributed to the profile of German companies from his Italian and Los Angeles studio and office. When asked by *Design Report*, he commented: 'No, for me there is no specific "German" design. Design is global, like the economy.'<sup>35</sup>

Not all designers felt the impulse to enter the international arena. Certainly among younger designers, the challenges of the social situation of Germany suggested new design methods that moved away from the preoccupation with design innovation in an industrial context. *Anschlaege.de*, a young Berlin-based design group, took a name in the form of an online address. *Anschlaege* is one word for placard or advertisement in German, but it can also mean a touch or stroke of a keyboard. They were characteristic of a generation of designers concerned to define design as critique and as a form of social activity. Although formed after reunification, the designers became engaged with the identity and future of German cities in the aftermath of political change and social migration, when unemployment and depopulation led to loss of a sense of place and hope for the future. In the face of this, *Anschlaege.de* strongly felt that designing more products was not an appropriate solution, but they were more interested in interventions using design thinking that prompted responses and action from people.

Two examples serve to illustrate their approach. The ironically named *Kraut* project, run in 2004, took the form of a self-printed newspaper and a kiosk that the group suggested acted as a Speaker's Corner. They arranged a mobile editorial office that travelled across Germany to a total of twenty

The *Bau an!* project of 2004 turned an uninhabited apartment block into a mushroom factory. It marked the group's interest in design as a form of critical intervention while also making an ironic comment on the legacy of design for social need.





The *Bau an!* project of 2004 by the Berlin-based Anschlaege.de.

places. It was made up of writers, artists, architects and a black-and-white photocopier, but, significantly, no journalists. For one week, in each location, the group published a daily edition of *Kraut*. The designers took the editions of the paper that were published between May and October 2004 as a ‘German mood barometer, and a small re-conquest of the public sphere by people beyond belly-button piercing and viewer ratings’.<sup>36</sup>

A second project from 2005, *Bau an!* (Build On!), was also symptomatic of an ‘ethnographic turn’ taking place in design cultures more generally in Europe at the time and was driven by a similar social engagement. It also addressed the lack of prospects for economic recovery in eastern Germany. With *Bau An!* the designers suggested agricultural uses for the empty spaces left by those moving for better prospects, economic migrants of the former GDR. The designers wrote: ‘Together with biologists and economists we examined the case of Gera in Thuringia and discovered: growing mushrooms in an empty apartment tower is viable. Approximately twelve people could live from it. Building on *Bau An!* a workshop for local high school students called ‘14+1 Proposals for Gera’ took place in December of 2005.’<sup>37</sup>

The designers went on to present the ideas drawn from the project in the international exhibition *Shrinking Cities No 2: Intervention*. In the case of Anschlaege.de the designers were not responsible for developing products or solving a manufacturer’s problem. Instead, the designer’s role was interpreted as engaging with the consequences of earlier design. Especially poignant in this was the choice of the Plattenbau, a standard housing type that was an iconic reminder of the design values of the previous system.

- 68 Rinker, *ulmer modelle*, p. 50.
- 69 Brigitte Hausmann, 'Experiment 53/68', in *ibid.*
- 70 Rinker, *ulmer modelle*, p. 47.
- 71 Claude Schnaidt, 'Ulm, 1955–1975', *Archithese* [Niederteufen CH], 15 (1975).
- 72 Rinke, *ulmer modelle*, pp. 31 and 38.
- 73 Hans Magnus Enzensberger, 'Das Lepisbitz der Verbraucher' [1960], in *Einzelheiten 1: Bewusstseins-Industrie* [1962], quoted in *ibid.*, p. 28.
- 74 Rinke, *ulmer modelle*, p. 28.
- 75 Quoted in Hartmut Seeling, *Geschichte der Hochschule für Gestaltung Ulm: ein Beitrag zur Entwicklung ihres Programms und der Arbeiten im Bereich der Visuellen Kommunikation* (Cologne, 1985): 'Die hfg hat die Hoffnung auf eine demokratische Renaissance Westdeutschlands konkretisiert und starb mit ihr.'
- 5 Reunification: Design in a Global Context, 1975–2005
- 1 Michael Erlhoff, *Designed in Germany since 1949*, exh. cat., Rat für Formgebung, Frankfurt am Main (Munich, 1990), Preface.
- 2 Jürgen Habermas, 'Modernity: An Incomplete Project', in Hal Foster, *Postmodern Culture* (London and Sydney, 1985), pp. 3–15. For a more extended discussion of civil society and the public sphere, with specific reference to the Federal Republic of Germany, see Jürgen Habermas, *Towards a Rational Society* [1969] (Cambridge, 1987).
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