

On the Telling of stories



Bezalel Academy of Art
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How this thing came about:

First IDO is Lurking and thinking in IDFORUM.

Then he writes in and says would I be interested in doing a two week session in Israel.

November 1999, I am in Delft and writing up the proposal he has to show to the Bezalel committee. 'Why don't we try something different this time?' Like Meda is Okay but the other can be from India.

INDIA!!!

Dear student,

This is in the nature of a provocation. It gives you the boundaries of what we could be talking about.

The Body and Story Telling

As we sit around talking we believe that we share similar ideas about design. We may differ in small ways, but when we talk of generalities we believe we will be saying the same things. Sitting around has acquired a new meaning in these e-days. All sorts of people have begun to join the sittings. The loudest would be those that speak for an honest good design. They may soon pull out their notes and show us Dieter Rams' 10 principles of good design.

Note 1: Dostevsky thought he could explore the good. Having previously dealt with evil in Crime and Punishment. He wrote about this person, good in all respects, all situations. He called the book about him The Idiot.

Note 2: The student asks the Guru; 'what is God?'. The Guru replies; 'who is asking?'.
Also:

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- 1) Dieter Rams' principles of good design look too much like 'principles of good appliance design'.
- 2) Elsewhere Starck, Giovannoni and others talk of how desirable vulgarity and kitsch are. And they generally design simple objects for the home, or furniture.
- 3) The Design Council (UK) for years publishes material on design to educate everyone about the correct meaning of design. They look like they have borrowed liberally from engineering and management books.

So what is happening?

Everyone is looking at objects and talking about what they consider well designed objects. So a well designed object, has behind it the correct way to do design. This “The Right Way” should be common to all designers. They may differ in superficial ways.

So what is wrong with this? Or why do I have a different take on this issue?

Note 3: For one, design that is preoccupied with the object makes common issue with either the emerging body of knowledge called manufacturing science (easy to manufacture) or marketing theories (sells in large numbers). And locks itself inside the world of the manufacturer.

Note 4: For another, design that is problematizing the theories of past designers, radical design, locks itself into constructing a contemporary history. How we would like to be seen from the future.

Note 5: Both positions are irrelevant if we focus our perspective from a distant location. An alien civilisation looking at this one on earth would see a bizarre situation: of insulated groupings of professionals on one side and the world of people on the other.



The World of People

Note 6: An artist presents his vivisection of a horse in a New York gallery, Eric Burden in his work crucifixion has himself nailed to the roof of a Volkswagon, Yves Klien jumps of the 3rd floor of a building. All these are defiant gestures against and about a real world.

Note 7: Arnold Schwarznegger drives a Hummer (he owns five more of them), Marty Feldman pays an unheard of sum of money for a famous persons undergarments at an auction.

When Mary Douglas, the culture theorist, asks the question 'why do people buy goods?', she isn't content with the, 'they need them'. She is looking for a reason that explains this behaviour in all cultures, all societies (both tribal and urban, primitive and modern) all over the world. And Baudrillard goes on to classify objects as functional (as in box beds in interiors), non functional (antiques and collectables) and meta functional (gizmos and gadgets). Design of the electronic packaging variety (TVs and Computers) is squeezed into the category of the meta functional (or dysfunctional).

Alessi's success can be explained as it being the largest maker of collectables. But then isn't all design meant for collections and private museums? Isn't the home a private museum, for a display of cultivated taste? Isn't it all about having the most collectable objects?

The Collectable Object

The most collectable objects, antiques come with a ready-made story. A slice of history, an incident, an event. But they will stand mute (sardonically?) while the owner excitedly recounts the story. He is the interpreter, the narrator, and most often quite willing to do focused research to sharpen his story. The object has to be the moon rock, the fragment of the Berlin wall, the palimpsest.

Maybe then good design is a story well told. So we could get together and talk about the way of telling stories. And tell a few of our own.

The calendar

Mon Slide show (1 hr) Exploring stories and alien societies

Tue Slide show (1 hr) Proposing stories

Wed Slide show (1 hr) Visualizing the story

Thu Constructing the Object

Mon Preparing a presentation Presentation and Critique

Scanning and CD





Cold nights in the Army
We sit around the upturned electric heater
Heating bread, coffee
Ya my mother had a cast iron stove
She would put orange peels
On the hot flat surface
My childhood, orange peel smell
The TV destroys us, makes the living room
Axial, unidirectional
Lets banish the TV
A circular, camp fire object
Centered in the living room
No furniture, knees touching
Warm, sharing, affection
Smiles all around

The group of six make a prototype
Working!!
With parts from heaters and the dome
From the tandoor (!)
And they serve the class
Hot bread and coffee



Men are such pigs
They sit with their friends
in front of the TV for a soccer game
Sunflower seeds in paper packets
clutched between their thighs
Spitting out the the skins
Onto the newspaper on the floor
90 minutes of adrenaline
Match ends: They get up
And just leave, for the pub
The women have to come in to clean up the
mess



So a table with a trough for the seeds
The top sloping to a garbage bag
They can spit on the table or
Make contests to spit into the bag



7 girls
A scale model is made
Everyone laughs when they present



You guest arrives early
She wants to help out
'Go sit at the table, and
make the salad'
All the guest sit and chop
and
fill up the salad bowls
And then the structure is
made up
A carousel
With a traditional top mast

5 of them
Lots of arguments
Memories from childhood festivals



The Samovar

'I remember the clinking of ice
In the whisky glass, as my father
Rocked me to sleep'
hot water is a must in every staff room.
Why not a samovar
Like folded hands
You kneel to pick up the cup
The floor

Paper Model
Mixed group



We fought
But we knew we wanted to do something on
Coffee
The Israeli coffee
The camping kit is to be
Domesticated
You coffee maker at home

The war torn group
CAD Model

On the last day:
The class sits around and talks about what they liked,
what they learnt, and
how unexpected the experience was.
How to be Israeli is to be confronted with the question –
are we more European or more Middle Eastern.
And how the exercise answers the question.
Proud to be what we are, Israeli and local.
And liking all things Israeli.



And it gets very emotional.
Its thank you's all around.
And then it is time for me to tell them
About themselves
The Israeli Student
The fascinating intensity
Design is serious business
Sholi working in the Bakery every night to
Put himself thru design school
How I stopped speaking on the first day
Seeing unsmiling intent faces
'Was something the matter?'
No virgins in this classroom
35 students and more coming in
I was a curiosity then mysterious
Representing India
Where they had all spent years
Bumming, slumming out
Washing out their army years
And then to get another India
No mystry about the Milanese designer
But this
And all this ...





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