

Q What is the relation of design to the world of fashion (current trends)?
A The objects of fashion have usually been designed with the particular constraints of fashion in mind.

Q Is design ephemeral?
A Some needs are ephemeral. Most designs are ephemeral.

Q Ought it to tend towards the ephemeral or towards permanence?
A Those needs and designs that have a more universal quality will tend toward permanence.

Q To whom does design address itself: to the greatest number (the masses)? to the specialists or the enlightened amateur? to a privileged social class?
A To the need.

Q Can public action aid the advancement of design?
A The proper public action can advance most anything.

Q After having answered all these questions, do you feel you have been able to practice the profession of 'design' under satisfactory conditions, or even optimum conditions?
A Yes.

Q Have you been forced to accept compromises?
A I have never been forced to accept compromises but I have willingly accepted constraints.

Q What do you feel is the primary condition for the practice of design and its propagation?
A Recognition of need.

Q What is the future of design?
(No answer)

These questions by Madame L. Amic and answers by Charles Eames were the conceptual basis of the exhibition *What is Design?* (1972). An edited and slightly changed version of the questions was used as the basis of the 1972 film *Design Q & A*.

Charles Eames, 'What is Design?' (1972) *Eames Design*, ed. Charles Meier (London: Thames & Hudson, 1989) 14-15.

Mark Wigley Whatever Happened to Total Design?//1998

What does 'total design' mean today? What does it mean, let's say, after postmodernism? Not so long ago, the expression was part of the basic vocabulary of architects, teachers and critics. Yet it is remarkably absent from contemporary debates and seems to play no role in schools today. What happened?

Exploding architecture

Total design has two meanings: first, what might be called the implosion of design, the focusing of design inward on a single intense point; second, what might be called the explosion of design, the expansion of design out to touch every possible point in the world. In either case, the architect is in control, centralizing, orchestrating, dominating. Total design is a fantasy about control, about architecture as control.

Implosive design takes over a space, subjecting every detail, every surface, to an over-arching vision. The architect supervises, if not designs, everything: structure, furniture, wallpaper, carpets, door knobs, light fittings, dinnerware, clothes and flower arrangements. The result is a space with no gaps, no cracks, no openings onto other possibilities, other worlds. The paradigm of this approach is the domestic interior completely detached from the chaotic pluralism of the world. A whole generation of remarkable architects — including Bruno Taut, Louis Sullivan, Frank Lloyd Wright, Josef Hoffmann, Josef Maria Olbrich, Charles Rennie Mackintosh, Hendrik Berlage, Peter Behrens and Henry van der Velde — produced hyper-interiors that enveloped their occupants in a single, seamless multi-media garment. Inspired by Richard Wagner's mid-nineteenth-century concept of the 'total work of art', in which different artforms would collaborate to produce a singular experience, these designers were eager to place the architect at the centre of the process: the architect would orchestrate the overall theatrical effect. Collaborative organizations of artists such as the Vienna Secession carried out an architectural mission; they would implode design to create environments with an extraordinary density of sensuous effect.

The idea of explosive design haunts us in the legacy of Walter Gropius and his concept of 'total architecture', in which the architect is authorized to design everything, from the teaspoon to the city. Architecture is understood to be everywhere. Indeed, it is argued that the influence of the architect has to be felt at every scale or society would go terribly wrong. This point of view produced an extraordinary legacy. Architects have roamed the world, leaving their mark

on every tree, lamp post and fire hydrant. They all have their city plans, furniture, wallpaper, clothes and coffee pots. Many have cars. Some have ships. From the train designed by Gropius and Adolf Meyer to the aeroplane and automatic washing machine of Rudolf Schindler, the twentieth-century architect admits no limit. Following the lead of organizations like the Deutscher Werkbund and the English Design and Industries Association, men and women trained as architects defined and dominated the field of industrial design as it emerged early in this century. This fantasy is still very much alive. These days, the teaspoon doesn't seem small enough and the city doesn't seem large enough. Students don't hesitate to develop projects on the architecture of the microchip or on networks for interplanetary transportation.

These two concepts of total design have played a major role in the formation of twentieth-century architectural discourse. Both are responses to industrialization. Implosive design is usually understood as a form of resistance, if not the last stand. Architecture gathers all its resources in one sacred place where architects collaborate with other artists to produce an image of such intensity that it blocks out the increasingly industrialized world. In contrast, those who explode architecture out into every corner of the world embrace the new age of standardization.

The line between the romantic idea of resistance to industrialization through the design of hand-crafted, one-off environments, and the equally romantic idea of embracing progressive machine-age reproduction, is drawn many times in the standard history books. For example, it is often drawn between two schools, or rather two directorships of the same school: Henry van der Velde's leadership of the Weimar School of Arts and Crafts, and Gropius' programme for that same school, renamed the Bauhaus when he became its head in 1919. The Bauhaus developed mass-reproducible designs, the production and licensing of which literally funded some of its day-to-day operations. Hence the factory aesthetic of the school's Dessau building, designed by Gropius and Meyer in 1925-26.

Less obviously, however, this embrace of industrialization begins with what might be called an explosion of the designer. Not only are objects designed, mass-produced and disseminated; the designer himself or herself is designed as a product, to be manufactured and distributed. The Bauhaus produced designers and exported them around the world. The vast glass walls of the Dessau building which, in Gropius' words, 'dematerialize' the line between inside and outside, suggest this immanent launching outward of both students and their designs. Even the teaching within the studios was a product. Gropius said that he only felt free to resign in 1928 because the success of the Bauhaus was finally established through the appointments of its graduates to teaching posts in foreign countries and through the adoption of its curriculum internationally.

Yet the line between the two attitudes — and this is true of most lines that are drawn insistently — is finally not so clear. It is, in fact, mythological, a reassuring fantasy invented despite the existence of a dense and nuanced archive of historical evidence. Explosion cannot easily be separated from implosion. For a start, the Bauhaus was itself explicitly conceived as a 'total work of art' in Wagner's sense, a glorious 'building' produced by a singular implosion of different disciplines, resources and pedagogical techniques. Gropius never stopped searching for what he called the 'oneness of a common idea' around which artists of every kind could be gathered in a grand collaboration. His rhetoric is characterized by terms like 'coordination', 'incorporation', 'welding', 'synthesis', 'cooperation', 'unified', 'collective', 'interwoven', 'integrate', and so on. Here is a typical remark of his, from the 1923 essay 'The Theory and Organization of the Bauhaus': 'A real unity can be achieved only by coherent restatement of the formal theme by repetition of its integral properties in all parts of the whole.' The institutional space of this singular idea is even a domestic interior. The Bauhaus factory presented itself as a family scene, complete with snapshots of sleeping, eating and playing; this 'family' image was reinforced by subsequent histories that describe the internal squabbles. At the nexus of the explosion of architecture is an implosion in which every detail of a domestic space is supposedly governed by a single idea.

If the explosive factory school was a total art work, then the implosive hyper-interior can be equally understood as a kind of factory. Consider Olbrich's Secession Exhibition Building of 1898. The project symbolizes the quest for the total work of art. Its design involved the collaboration of Gustav Klimt, Koloman Moser, Josef Hoffmann, Othmar Schimkowitz, Georg Klimpt and Ludwig Hevesi. Olbrich, like his teachers, was very much under the spell of Richard Wagner. As a student, he often dreamed up architectural spaces to match scenes from Wagner's operas. The Secession Building looks like a temple, a sacred space of art whose gleaming white surfaces serve to detach it from the profane surrounding city. It was presented and received as such. Beyond its monumental entrance and lobby beneath the gilded-laurel dome, however, lies a large, undifferentiated space, lit by huge industrial skylights, with only three windows, usually screened off, high up on one side wall. The world is thus blocked out, intensifying the implosion of artistic energy. Through the device of moveable walls, the interior space accommodated any kind of exhibition. Over one hundred Secession exhibitions were held there, each of which was considered a total work of art composed of sculptures, fabrics, wallpapers, carpets, friezes, music, etc. Architects like Olbrich, Hoffmann, Behrens and Plečnik designed the exhibitions in collaboration with the artists. In this way, the building works as a kind of machine for producing unique environments.

Every surface seen by the visitors, including the floor covering, was added each time. Even the skylights would be screened off with a suspended horizontal translucent surface that completed the sense of detachment from the outside world, veiling the temporally and spatially defined skyscape in favour of an even generic light. There are no photographs in the archives showing the skylights from below. Indeed, there are no photographs showing the interior before or after an exhibition is installed, which is remarkable given that the revolutionary building is credited with establishing the form of the modern art museum. In a sense, the famous building has no interior. The sense of interior is produced by each exhibition. The interior is literally imported. The layout constantly changed. In a remarkable innovation, the plan of most of the first 65 exhibitions (up until 1922) appeared as the frontispieces of the respective catalogues. The first thing to be put on display was the flexibility of the interior. The outside context of Vienna does not appear and the status of the building is transformed into a schematic shell. If a section of the building was not used for a particular exhibition it would simply be blacked out as irrelevant. The building's overall geometry is usually clear but sometimes even that is disguised as if the exhibition layout has been carved out of a black mass. Symptomatically, the three side windows were usually drawn in exactly the same way as the three false windows marked on the façade of the opposite side. They do not act as a threshold between interior and exterior. Light was only allowed to come through them on the rare occasions when the shape of the window could be modified to appear as part of the overall design of a particular room. Even then, a translucent curtain prevented a connection to the outside. To enter the building is each time to enter a new world, an idealized world that is meant to challenge and overcome the exterior. The building never acts as a frame for an artwork.

Much of the art presented in the building was sold but so too was the decoration: collectors would literally buy the walls. This absence of a firm distinction between the frame and the artifacts being framed is, of course, the whole point of the total work of art. The building is a factory for the production of total works of art, works that then move out into the world. Designs tested in the temple-factory as singular installations become the prototypes for mass production in the workshops. In another sense, the building is a kind of theatre, a windowless box within which an endless array of different sets can be assembled; the aesthetic plays staged therein isolate themselves from the world, but they do so precisely to exert an influence upon the world.

Implosion and explosion are therefore bound together; in fact, the link between them is crucial. The hyper-interior has an explosive intensity. The sarcasm of the best-known critical attacks on such spaces, like that of Adolf Loos (which would soon be echoed by Le Corbusier), thinly masks the fear of being

overwhelmed by both the decorative excess and the absolute uniformity of style. For their critics, these spaces produce a claustrophobic sense of 'suffocating' pressure. It is precisely this intensity that produces the blast that disseminates architecture out through time and space. The modern architect's obsession with breaking down the barriers between inside and outside can be reread in these terms; it is part of the dynamic between implosion and explosion. Architects build up steam, as it were, in the domestic interior, break down the walls, and then explode their designs out into the landscape in small fragments — thus they move from designing everything in a single work of architecture to adding a trace of architecture to everything.

Consider another obvious example: Frank Lloyd Wright. Look at how he over-determines his early domestic interiors, even lowering the ceilings to produce a kind of claustrophobic pressure in which his total environments press themselves against you. His boxes are then exploded and the relentless design work bursts out of its domestic confinement, heads across the garden to the street, then down the road to configure the neighborhood and, eventually, with Broadacre City, slides across the entire continent in a single vast project. From the absence of windows in the Secession Building to the vast walls of glass in the Dessau Bauhaus, this inward- then outward-movement is repeated in the career of architect after architect and can, like any explosion, be restaged on a small scale in a single project.

This pyrotechnic operation, which dominates twentieth-century architecture, is not the destruction of the interior but rather its expansion out into the street and across the planet. The planet is transformed into a single interior, which needs design. All architecture becomes interior design.

Radioactive fusion

The explosive dissemination of architecture is a form of radiation. It was understood as such, as can be seen, for example, in one of Gropius' first speeches to the Bauhaus in July 1919. Describing the school, he announces that 'Art must finally find its crystalline expression in a great total work of art. And this great total work of art, this cathedral of the future, will then shine with its abundance of light into the smallest objects of everyday life.' This passage draws on the expressionist rhetoric of the manifesto for the Berlin Workers Council on Art that Gropius, along with Bruno Taut, prepared just before coming to the Bauhaus. Lionel Feininger's famous expressionist etching of the Bauhaus for the school's programme, like Taut's drawings of his Stadtkrone fantasy, shows the bright light radiating in every direction from a crystalline interior. Ultimately that radiance becomes the radiation of both designers and designs out from an explosively intense interior.

The same radiance can be seen in the etching of the Sommerfeld House that Gropius and other Bauhaus artists assembled in 1920–21. The house's all-enveloping interior of carved wood, hanging tapestries, etc., is usually associated with the expressionist pre-history of the school, but this kind of one-off environment remained a crucial part of the Bauhaus mission to disseminate the architect and architectural design as industrial products. A year after the house was finished, Johannes Ippen demanded that the school either produce unique objects or fully enter the 'outside world' of mass production. Gropius responded that the two approaches to design should exist side by side in a 'fusion'. Exactly the same kind of intensity of the Sommerfeld interior can be seen in the theatre productions that paralleled the most industrialized years of the institution and that were monumentalized in Gropius' 1927 design for a 'Total Theatre'. His redefinition and expansion of the role of the architect presupposes a relentless trajectory from the details of the private house to the nation and beyond; here, from *The New Architecture and the Bauhaus* of 1935:

My idea of the architect as a coordinator — whose business it is to unify the various formal, technical, social and economic problems that arise in connection with building — inevitably led me on step by step from the study of the function of the house to that of the street; from the street to the town; and finally to the still vaster implications of regional and national planning. I believe that the New Architecture is destined to dominate a far more comprehensive sphere than building means today; and that from the investigation of its details we shall advance towards an ever-wider and profounder conception of design as one great cognate whole.

To think again about the relationship between architecture and the design arts we have to rethink the dynamic between the isolated hyper-interior and its explosion across the wider landscape. It is precisely in this dynamic that the contemporary status of architecture and the design arts was renegotiated. This rethinking would then force us to reexamine the standard accounts of our prehistory. The most obvious starting point would be Nikolaus Pevsner's 1936 *Pioneers of the Modern Movement*, an initially unsuccessful book that became a hit only when re-edited and symptomatically retitled *Pioneers of Modern Design* for the 1948 Museum of Modern Art edition.

Pevsner draws a straight line from mid-nineteenth-century design reform through to Gropius, insisting that modern architecture developed from the design arts. This is a strategic history: it describes how architects took over the revised concept of design in their efforts to conquer the world, literally following the passage of the word 'design' from the English reform movement to the German modernist debates. Yet Pevsner's own use of the terms 'architecture'

and 'design' is ambiguous. He argues that modern architecture is design — nothing but design at a large scale — extrapolating early discussions of the details of domestic wallpaper to ideas about the overall organization of a city. At the same time, however, Pevsner repeatedly differentiates between architecture and design in ways that seem at odds with his larger argument. We have since become used to separating these words (e.g., the Museum of Modern Art's infamous 'Department of Architecture and Design') as if we know what these two terms mean. Pevsner's book, which is still something of a bible and can even be found in some airport book shops, should have made the distinction problematic.

When Henry-Russell Hitchcock and Philip Johnson made their respective suggestions to Pevsner on how to modify the original 1936 edition, Johnson confidentially questioned Pevsner's evaluation of Gropius' importance, insisting that Gropius was incapable of designing anything. But Pevsner stood his ground, as if he understood, at some level, that what gets designed in Gropius' hands is an institutional structure. Gropius effectively turned design into a form of management, with the architect as 'coordinator'. The supremacy of the architect in total design, whether implosive or explosive, becomes that of the manager. Paradoxically, this form of control was underscored by the absence, at the Bauhaus, of an official 'department of architecture' for a long time even though the school was run by an architect, understood itself as a form of architecture, saw all forms of art as forms of building, and presented architecture as its endpoint — architecture was running the show without actually being presented as such. Even more symptomatic of all this is the fact that Gropius couldn't draw. This was no tragedy, of course. A number of famous architects do not draw. It might even be considered a virtue today in some circles. And although Gropius wrote letters to his family describing the difficulty of surviving in Peter Behrens' office with such a liability, he soon discovered that his own strength lay in collaborations. Before he designed objects, he designed relationships, partnerships with Adolf Meyer, J. Schmidt, Maxwell Fry, Marcel Breuer, Pietro Belluschi, and so on.

None of this is so very modern. The idea of architecture as a form of management dates at least to Vitruvius and to the idea that the architect needs to know a little something about everything. The figure of the architect became established as the organizer of domains about which he or she doesn't necessarily have expertise. Aesthetic management is obviously a part of this, but not necessarily a particularly important part. This concept of architecture as management informs the whole history of the discipline, and shows no sign of going away. On the contrary, the proliferation of different architectures through the 1960s and 70s, in the wake of always-frustrated attempts to unify modernism, can be understood as a proliferation of different theories of

management. And if you look closely at each of these theories, you find the dream of total design very close to the surface.

Buckminster Fuller, for example, insisted that design was nothing more than resource management. He believed that the architect had to be a 'comprehensive designer' capable of operating at any scale. Not by chance was the first article on Fuller by his first biographer entitled 'Total Design'. Fuller's mission was to transform the planet into a single art work. Obviously the ecological movement, which Fuller did much to stimulate, equated design and management. A not-so-close reading of classic texts of the movement like Ian McHarg's 1969 *Design With Nature* reveals a totalizing aesthetic ambition. Ecological architecture must fit seamlessly into the grand total design. On the technological front, the engineer Ove Arup's concept of 'total architecture' called for engineers to collaborate with architects to produce works of art by operating at every scale on every building system in terms of the architect's singular aesthetic vision. Environmental control packages, for example, should be organized by the same vision that oversaw the composition of the door frames. Much of the megastructural tradition promoted the idea of 'total planning'. Think of Superstudio's *Continuous Monument* project of 1969, which they described as 'a single piece of architecture to be extended over the whole world ... an architectural model for total urbanization' that marches sublimely across the surface of the planet.

Clearly, the dream of the total work of art did not fade in modernism's wake. On the contrary, all of the issues raised by architects and theorists of recent generations that seem, at first, to signal the end of the idea of the total work of art turn out to be, on closer look, red herrings that thinly disguise the traditional totalizing ambitions of the architect.

Fresh herrings

Consider 'flexibility', the idea of an architecture that could assume any particular arrangement. Most flexible projects turn out to have inflexible aesthetic agendas. Or, more precisely, flexibility is itself a singular aesthetic. Look at the 1958 'Industrialized House' project by George Nelson, an architect who became famous as an industrial designer. The house is conceived as an industrial design product, a system of parts that can be infinitely rearranged. But Nelson never published more than one arrangement of the house, which included detailed color images of the model's interior, complete with wall hangings, carpet, and dinnerware. At the very moment that he announces that the architect should provide only a framework for change, Nelson installs a total work of art. Likewise, Christopher Alexander's 1977 *A Pattern Language* installs a singular aesthetic regime in the guise of a set of innocent building blocks that seem

capable of infinite rearrangement. The last of these 253 'patterns' is an attack on 'total design'. The hypocrisy of the attack is evident in the final lines that instruct the reader to hang personal things on walls rather than follow the dictates of designers. A designer claiming a total vision dictates that the totalizing instincts of all other designers should be resisted. The apparent flexibility of his system actually integrates all design into a transnational and 'timeless' aesthetic pattern that can only be perceived by the master architect/manager. With systems theory, cybernetics, semiotics and fractal geometry, the number of ways of absorbing difference into a singular structure continues to grow and to act as the totalizing architect's best friend.

This is even the case with the most radical challenge to architecture's totalizing mechanisms of control, that was launched in the mid-1950s by the Situationists. Their strategies for activist disruption in streets and publications attempted to destabilize and fragment the unity of the city, opening it up to free-ranging unpredictable effects. They fetishized the residual micro-climates that subvert the official order and do not show up in traditional plans or urban theory. Ever since their first leaflets, they mercilessly harassed modern architecture and in 1958, with Constant's *New Babylon*, started to develop a counter proposal, an architectural project for a city with no definable limits or shape whose myriad micro spaces would continually change in every way at every scale according to the ever fluctuating desires of its occupants. But this undefinable and unknowable architecture of infinite flexibility, a city that is precisely not designed by its designer, restores the very totality it challenges. At the end of 1960, Constant concluded his lecture on the project by insisting that 'In essence it is the realization of an old dream, a dream that figures in all tendencies, all movements, all endeavors in the history of art this century, and which, in its simplest form, one could refer to by its Wagnerian name: *das Gesamtkunstwerk*, the total work of art.' The designer relinquishes authority at one level only to recover it at another. The absence of design becomes the new grand design.

Think, too, of the different discourses about the absence of the architect. Bernard Rudofsky's bestseller, *Architecture Without Architects*, based on his 1964 exhibition at MoMA, would seem to defeat the master designer by drawing attention to that which remains untouched by the architect. But Rudofsky's opening paragraph describes his work as providing a 'total picture' of planetary architecture of great value to the designer. The architecture he shows usually bleeds off the edge of the frame of each photograph to convey the sense of a seamless environment, an endless fabric escaping the object fetishism of the architect. Images from a multitude of countries are assembled in one book to construct the total picture — a mosaic of patterns that date back to antiquity and

thus transcend the purview of any one designer. The use of contemporary technology or 'design' objects by non-architects is carefully excluded from the image to produce the sense of an immaculate, timeless environment. And more remarkably, the seminal essays by Roland Barthes and Michel Foucault on the 'death of the author' have recently been used to authorize the work of a few signature designers. In a comic turn, rival authors have competed for the right to announce the death of the author.

Similarly, the postmodernist discourse about pluralism, multiplicity and heterogeneity is inevitably used as an excuse for singularity. Robert Venturi's call for 'complexity and contradiction' is surprisingly intolerant of alternative positions. The proponents of 'critical regionalism' see the same architectural qualities everywhere rather than the unique site-specific differences they advocate. Such pluralist arguments are used as cover for a particular aesthetic. And the architects who talk about chaos, absence, fragmentation and indeterminacy usually work very hard to assure that you know that a particular design is theirs by using recognizable — signature — shapes and colours. Once again, arguments about the impossibility of 'the total image' are employed in fact to produce precisely such an image — a signed image that fosters brand loyalty.

With the OMA entry to the 1987 Melun-Sénart competition, Rem Koolhaas took as the starting point the increasing impossibility of totalizing urban visions in the face of the unpredictable and overwhelmingly complex forces of the market. Rather than design a city by allocating zones for particular kinds of form or function, the project simply provides zones where the usual 'uncontrollable, almost cancerous chaotic growth' would occur and zones where such building is prohibited. The traditional figure of the architect is restricted to a few of these 'islands' that float within a chaotic sea of unrestrained development. The urban designer's only role is to define the thin lines between the two kinds of zone. Despite this apparent 'surrender' of the architect in favour of a 'formless' city, the resulting pattern produces a seamless overall picture, a routinely totalizing vision of a carefully rendered bucolic landscape that passes over the horizon and over the edges of the drawings.

Architects who say, 'I don't think I can or should control the whole environment', are usually, in fact, claiming control. Rather than simply accepting any interference to their vision that might occur, they insist upon indeterminacy or incompleteness to regain control of those zones that elude them. They label them as danger or pleasure zones — red light districts, in a sense. And, of course, red light districts are never all that dangerous; usually they are highly regulated and predictable. If you study the work of these architects, you will find no gaps. Every potential gap is labelled 'gap' and thereby brought back into line. Incompletion is an aesthetic. It is a design choice, and a good choice for many

designers. Much of the pleasure that we take in some architects' work comes from that choice. Indeed, presenting an aesthetic of incompleteness requires a lot of expertise. It's probably harder to construct than the effect of completion.

Obviously there is a difference between providing a rough framework for individual variation and designing the client's slippers to match the carpets that match the chairs that match the wallpaper that matches the room that swallowed the fly. But the difference is not that one is more totalizing than the other. Look at how the architects of incompleteness, pluralism and contradiction drag us all into their own homes — typically in the pages of *Architectural Digest*, the contemporary reference work on total design, or the equivalent pages of fashion magazines. One by one, the postmodern architects walk us through their immaculate and ever-so-precisely lit and photographed domestic spaces, pausing to celebrate their books, pets, furniture, clothes and artworks. Robert Venturi and Denise Scott Brown take time out from decorating sheds to discuss the frieze on the walls of their precisely calibrated dining room. Peter Eisenman puts chaos theory on hold while describing the view from his cottage in Princeton. The architects whose philosophy seems to call for an end to total design present their private spaces as temples to such design. Somehow these totalizing images legitimate the dissemination of supposedly non-totalizing design and theory. Once again, an intense implosion of the domestic interior is used to trigger an explosive dispersal of architecture. The ever-increasing physical and intellectual mobility of the architect, the frequent flyer between countries and disciplines, is somehow nailed down in the very public display of his or her fixed 'private' interior.

Total theory

What follows from all this is that the expression 'total design' is extremely misleading. Design is either design or it is not, the way pregnancy used to be. There is no such thing as non-totalizing design. All design is total design. This was already established in the sixteenth century when design was made the centre of architectural training. Take, for example, the promotion of architecture into the academic ranks with its admission to Vasari's 1563 *Accademia del Disegno*, an institution that unified the arts around the concept of design. Design, the drawing that embodies an idea, was understood as the magic mechanism by which the practical world of architecture could aspire to the theoretical level of gentlemanly scholarship. Design is always a matter of theory. Design is not a thing in the world. It's a theoretical reading of the world. Or, more precisely, it is the gesture in which theory is identified in the material world. To point to design is to point to theory. The model, of course, is the supposedly immaculate theory embodied in the immaculate design of the cosmos by the 'Divine Architect', as Vasari puts it. The

architect's claim to fame was precisely the totalizing capacity of design. The default pretension of the architect is to capture the grandest scale of order.

This idea was faithfully adhered to at the Bauhaus with its so-called 'laws of design'. These laws — the centre of the training, the first thing to be learned after one walked through the door — were a series of totalizing claims about form. If design is the bridge between the immaterial world of ideas and the material world of objects, then a theory is required to control that relationship. A set of structural rules maintains the integrity of the bridge. Gropius called for 'sound theoretical instruction in the laws of design', insisting that such a 'theoretic basis' is the essential prerequisite for collective work on total architecture, the 'solid foundation' for unity. The theory was taught first by Johannes Itten and then by László Moholy-Nagy, whose first biography by Sibyl Moholy-Nagy (with a preface by Gropius) is symptomatically subtitled *Experiment in Totality*. Design presupposes totalizing theory. It is not by chance that Pevsner's *Pioneers of Modern Design* begins with a whole chapter on 'Theories of Art from Morris to Gropius'. Even the interpretation of particular objects that follows begins with the analysis of wallpaper and carpet patterns by the *Journal of Design and Manufacture*, which was started in 1849 by the group that gravitated around Henry Cole in London. The *Journal* was first and foremost a journal of theory. The preface to its first issue announced that it would offer 'something like a systematic attempt to establish recognized principles'. In doing so, it was attempting to improve the various Schools of Design that had been founded in response to an 1836 government decree that such principles should be established. Strong design presupposes strong theory. Design is, as it were, the appearance of theory.

If design is always totalizing and involves the mystique of theory, then the question of the fate of total design becomes the question of total theory. This is especially true if we want to discuss the relationship between the professional expertise of what we have up to now called the architect and that of the designer. After all, theory is itself an art work, something designed. Theorists such as Vitruvius and Alberti insist that the ordering and structure of their respective treatises match that which they prescribe for buildings. Likewise, Pevsner understood his invention of the idea of the 'modern movement' as a construction job, the centrepiece of a total design. He followed this a year later with a book on industrial art in England and continued by writing countless essays on design and launching a campaign on the subject as editor of the *Architectural Review*. Pevsner assumes the role of intellectual manager, exploiting the managerial pretensions embedded within the German art historical tradition to which he was closely tied. This tied him also to Gropius. The idea of history and theory as management is linked to the idea of design as

management. It now seems inevitable that Gropius brought another such manager, Sigfried Giedion, to the GSD.

But what did postmodernism do to total theory? An answer might begin with the obvious figure, Mr Postmodernism himself, Charles Jencks — an underestimated figure. Jencks' account of postmodernism evolved from a critique of Pevsner, who was his intellectual grandfather in so far as his dissertation adviser was Reyner Banham, whose own dissertation adviser was Pevsner. Instead of killing the father, then, he attempts to kill the grandfather — which is probably more difficult. Jencks' dissertation was published in 1973 as *Modern Movements in Architecture* — the plural 'movements' was a response to Pevsner's singular account. It begins by criticizing that account, footnoting Pevsner's final remark that the modern style was totalitarian¹, before going on to reject all such 'unified', 'single strand', 'all-embracing' theory in favour of 'a series of discontinuous movements', a 'photo-strip' account. Yet Jencks' pluralist manifesto is no less managerial in tone, no less an obsessive survey of the scene that places everything within a single picture. The photo-strip is itself a single image.

Perhaps the clearest example of this is the chart with which Jencks begins the main body of his argument. It positions every architect and tendency in a system of evolutionary branches. Thus, while insisting on the impossibility of producing a single, totalizing image of modern architecture or even postmodern architecture, Jencks proceeds to produce such an image and even to encourage the reader to use it as a guide to the following text. The chart is an 'evolutionary tree' in the tradition of Banister Fletcher's famous frontispiece to *A History of Architecture on the Comparative Method*, although Jencks rejects Fletcher's hierarchy by having his chart lie on its side and giving the different strands equal value. There are no gaps, no radical discontinuities. Everything eventually flows into everything else. All architects and architectures are genetically related and 'cross-fertilize' promiscuously. Discontinuities exist for a while but eventually the separate strands are rejoined. Jencks keeps on producing such charts, rearranging the positions of each element but never altering the basic kind of diagram. An interesting history emerges from a comparison of the progressive remapping of architecture in the different charts. What remains striking, though, is their overall look. The lava-lamp aesthetic of the first chart published in 1970 gives way to hard-edged diagonals in the books on postmodernism, which in turn give way to horizontal bands. The chart is a stylish interior in which everything can be seamlessly placed. The latest fold-out version even includes a mugshot of each architect and one of their designs. The history of architecture can be captured in a single glance. This is nothing but design, total design.

Furthermore, in the grand tradition of total design, the theorist of pluralism and the discontinuous universe repeatedly invites us into his domestic interior,

using a series of articles, special magazine issues and books to reveal the hyper-designed details of his own 'thematic house'. Most recently, in the October 1997 *Architectural Digest*, he shows us a new total work of art: his house and garden in Scotland. Yet again, a leading disseminator of the idea of the impossibility of a singular, totalizing image somehow organizes that claim around the image of a hyper-interior. His countless publications explode, as it were, out from this space, their inconsistencies somehow stitched together by its obsessive coherence.

Indeed, the global infrastructure of publications works hard to construct a continuous, gapless surface. The dream of total design has moved into the media. The explosive radiance of the interior bursting out of itself and leaving all those little fragments of design and designers across the landscape is first, after all, a radiance of the media. Returning to the early examples of total design described above, one can see this already in the publications of the Vienna Secession, which mass-produced countless immaculate photographs of one-off, hand-crafted total interiors, sending them out into the very world which those interiors seemingly reject. Likewise, Moholy-Nagy's designs for the famous series of Bauhaus publications provided an overall look, a totalizing space in which the diversity of mass-produced objects could be inserted. Exhibitions have the same totalizing effect. Heterogeneous objects succumb to a single overarching aesthetic regime by being located within a uniformly designed exhibition space. Likewise, the display of architecture in museums, books, and so on. If architecture has been exploded in fragments across the planet, numerous devices exist for compacting it back into an interior.

The joys of frustration

The most remarkable thing about this relentless drive towards total design through the pulsating rhythms of implosions and explosions is its constant failure. If all design is total design, then the totalizing dream is always frustrated. The architect remains a marginal figure who doesn't enjoy the respect shown today to the design artist — whether landscape designer, interior designer, furniture designer or industrial designer. Some kind of inverse relationship exists between the huge scale of architects' fantasies and the smallness of the responsibility they are given. The architect's claim on the whole world is somehow grounded in an ambivalent social status. The architect is the speculator par excellence, an obsessive dreamer. In no other discipline are the general claims bigger, the fetishism of minute details more obsessive. Architecture is first and foremost a discourse, mobilized by the concept of design that is constantly invoked but rarely examined. In examining it here, one might even want to celebrate the frustration of the architect, a frustration that does not abate even when his or her dream is realized. The more one studies the

totalizing images and narratives, the more one discovers parts of the architecture, the publication or the history, that have escaped or slipped the grip of those who so resolutely frame and present them. Indeed, the wonderful thing about architecture is how it so easily escapes the people who produce it. The seemingly continuous surface is always riddled with gaps, twists and complications. Total design is everywhere, yet seductively elusive.

Mark Wigley, 'Whatever Happened to Total Design?', *Harvard Design Magazine*, no. 5 (Summer, 1998). Based on a paper given at the Fall 1997 GSD Architecture Department colloquium on The Design Arts and Architecture.