1975(?)

1.1.2.1.

Dieter Rams Speech on

22.9.75

"The Designer's Contribution to Company Success ".

Rams Archiv

Ladies and Gentlemen,

When I was asked to address you on the question :
"Can design contribute to the success of a company ?"
I realized, of course, that this is a highly intricate and involved subject.

To help you - and myself - I tried to split this enormous complex in to three basic parts :

1) Definitions and pre-requisites of good design

2) Qualification and education of designers

3) What does the future mean for entrepreneurs and designers ?

So let me attempt to give you my ideas on :

Can design contribute to the success of a company ?
From my experience with two companies which are incontestibly successful I may say : Yes - design can contribute to the success of a company.

The following presentation is to explain this more specifically :
Under which pre-requisites,
in which way,
to what kind of success.

One word on how the presentation is conceived : I am not a design theoretician and I do not intend to lecture theoretically on the question raised by the subject. I speak to you, Ladies and Gentlemen, as entrepreneurs who quite practically weigh the opportunities and problems inherent in a commitment to good design. I answer as if you had personally asked me as a fairly experienced designer : Is good design worthwhile ?

I do not want to interrupt the presentation by showing slides - although sometimes perhaps a slide could illustrate more effectively what I have in mind. At the end of my presentation I'd like to give you a survey on the products that I have designed either with the design team at Braun or on my own for Vitsoe.

For twenty years I have worked solely for these two companies and quite deliberately so. Why, you will understand I trust in the course of my speech. In 1955 Braun had a staff of slightly less than 2000 and sales of 50.5 million DM and today a staff of 9000 and sales totalling 653 million DM. 1975

Vitsoe was founded in 1959 as a result of a component-part furniture program which I had designed in 1957. Thus Vitsoe started from scratch with the designs I later generated and today has a staff of 50 and sales of 6 million DM.

Ladies and Gentlemen, design is a popular subject and it seems to me it is becoming more and more topical.

Small wonder - in the face of increasing competition in individual markets, design is often the only product differentiation which is really discernible for the buyer.

But quite apart from that fact there is too much discussion on design with highly divergent concepts on what is good and what is bad design, and upon the role which it plays.

I will start by defining these concepts somewhat more precisely and tangibly as I see them and in the light of my own experience.

DEFINITIONS

What is meant by success ?

"Immediate economic success."

For good design represents a real "appreciation", it enhances the value of a product, it is a genuine accomplishment of which the company should be proud and which is honoured by the buyer. (Admittedly, the buyer sometimes fails to recognize good design as much as technical quality is offered - let us say - in a wrong way, at the wrong time or at the wrong price !)

"Long-term boost to the reputation of a company."

Tasteful, discriminating, personalized design is an entrepreneurial accomplishment which is particularly eye-catching. A company differentiates itself thereby and raises its image disproportionately. It acquires a profile of its own and gains in credibility. This success we have had at Braun to an extent that sometimes it all embarasses one as an insider. The benefits of gaining attention and goodwill among the buying public cannot be expressed easily in monetary terms, but they are undeniable, nevertheless.

And finally : Isn't it also a success if you have the certainty of having done something well ?

What is product design ?

Product design is the organisation of the total configuration of a product (form, surface, colour, labeling) what we term in German overall "Gestalt" - namely the way in which the product fulfils most efficiently the intended purpose. Moreover, at the same time, its overall design should meet the physical requirements and conditions under which the product is manufactured and launched on the market.

A designer who wants to fulfil this task may not conceive himself as an artist who is merely dressing up the product by providing the last-minute garment tailored to the aesthetic criteria of taste.

We could rather say the designer is a Gestalt-engineer. From the various elements - predetermined requirements and specifications provided by engineering, production, marketing etc. - he synthesized the concrete product. His work is largely rational, meaning that the formal decisions are rationalizable, verifiable and ultimately logically conclusive.

It is already apparent that design is a performance which can hardly be rendered by someone outside the company. And it becomes also obvious that the designer should not be the last link in the chain :

That is, everything is ready and now we need somebody at the double who can design an attractive casing. That is no design - that is packaging technology and a poor one at that.

The designer who takes his job seriously and who is taken seriously by the company must be integrated responsibly into the development of a product from the very beginning. And he must also have the necessary expertise, the experience and professional competence in order to cooperate competently with other experts involved in the development of the product. Let's come to one of the most important questions - the one where always too much personal preference and individual taste comes into play :

What is good design ?

There are - I feel - yardsticks for the quality of design which are well founded and go far beyond the rating of "I really like it" or "this is very attractively designed, isn't it."

The most important criteria for good design are basically beyond questioning : Function and performance in use - functional quality - technical feasibility and aesthetic quality.

First of all function and performance

Every industrial product serves a specific purpose. It is used. People don't buy it merely to look at it but it has to fulfil certain functions.

And it must be designed in such a way that the various requirements resulting from its use are best met.
The more intensive and demanding the use, the clearer are the demands to be met by design. Perhaps that sounds too much like common sense. But when you look around in this environment of 1975 you will discover a plethora of products whose ultimate shape is not explained by any functional requirement. Often you are very lucky indeed if their design is not obstructing the use to which they are put.

Now strict functionality has fallen into disrepute in recent years. - Perhaps rightly so in a way. - Because all too often it was determined too narrowly, too puritanically which function the product was to fulfil. People's needs are more highly diversified than designers were sometimes ready to admit or often allowed to concede.

A durable consumer good is to fulfil psychological functions as well - it is to be inviting to be used, and to fit harmoniously into the personal environment of its user ...

A practical usable design must be developed every time anew and from the very beginning. One must experience the reality of using the product - listening to music, shaving, sitting in a chair. A designer must understand the wishes, the expectations, the demands of the user.

He must know the practical possibilities of technology and production. He must have some intuition for the market place, what it would condone and what - bluntly said - would amount to mere trickery and deceit.

I often read about other designers and myself that our creations exhibit a personal style. I for one consider that almost an insult. I do not intend to imprint my own style on the products - whatever that may be. I would be glad, however, if the products for which I was responsible could not be denied charisma or poise. In fact I consider it a very important function of the things with which we live. It helps not only to recognize interrelationships between things, but also to reach them more reasily.

Feasibility

That is the next yardstick for the quality of design - briefly touched upon already :
In his design effort the designer must realistically consider the concrete conditions under which a product is manufactured and utilize all inherent possibilities.

Within a pre-determined budget with available material, the present state of the art, pregiven time allowance and the existing competitive situation, he must always attain the optimum.
If the designer is "strong" - imaginative, competent, patient, industrious, optimistic ... - he can of course do a lot in order to change or to improve the conditions imposed on him. In fact, at Braun, we have repeatedly initiated the development of a new production technique - for the very purpose of improving the conditions for an acceptable design solution. But by and large we must operate within a clearly outlined frame - the frame of what is feasible.

Aesthetic quality

Undoubtedly it is here where we have most controversies.
These are not characteristics which I deem important as a result of my subjective taste but characteristics which derive their importance from the realities of the circumstances under which a product is used or enjoyed.
The design of an industrial product is aesthetic if it is honest, balanced, simple, careful, and unobtrusively neutral.

Design is not merely and certainly not exclusively - to feast the eye like a work of art or to decorate but rather to demonstrate an unobtrusive neutral aesthetic quality is also an aspect of the utility of a product.

It is difficult, strenuous, energy-consuming to live with objects, to be surrounded by objects which are off-balance,-obtrusive, confusingly complicated or dishonest.

I believe that the product should play second role in the relationship user versus product ; that it should not permanently vie for attention, that it should leave the man freedom, the leeway for his own self-ascertion, as individuality.

Man, however, has a need for beautiful things. This need is a fact. It is true there are no longer any generally recognized aesthetic norms.

But many of our tests have corroborated that basically more people are discriminating and are sensitive to aesthetic quality. Yet this perception is often covered, is often buried under lack of consideration, inattentiveness, distorted taste and external persuasion.

Most designers are reluctant to speak about the aesthetic quality of a shape simply because it calls for a trained taste to hold your own in this field.
These rational, irrefutable arguments, for example, that most should comprehend will not suffice when arguing with tasteless or uninformed criticism.

The often whimsical , uncommitted taste of many decision-makers in a company is often a burden for the designer. On the other hand the uncommitted taste of the buyer is also a great temptation for many companies. There are few things that can be exploited more easily and more profitably than bad taste. The design of many products is unmistakably dominated by the speculation on the buyer's weakness.

This may be successful over a short term and yet does not constitute success. It is not in our interest to live and work in a society which is geared to nothing but the cynical exploitation of other people's weaknesses.

PRE-REQUISITES :

Good design requires that certain pre-requisites are fulfilled. A simple notion of what is good design is of as little use as the mere decision to manufacture products with good design. Good design is a general accomplishment of a company and in this respect is comparable to progressive technology and high manufacturing quality.

As a rule no large investments are necessary for good design. On the contrary, it can often help to save some.

And yet it costs a company something to create the precondition for good design. It is here like elsewhere : Nothing generates nothing. To find and keep good designers is still the least problem. Although really good designers, as in any other area of the business are few and far between.

I think that the question : "What conditions are needed for a good design service ? is really the key question for an entrepreneur.

WHICH KIND OF PRODUCTS

Theoretically, there are no products which are more, or less, appropriate for good design. Everything that is produced and used should be designed with some degree of attention.

And the demands, expectations and also the experience of the user differ visàvis different products.

Thus it is worthwhile for an entrepreneur to analyse precisely, from case to case, how pronounced the needs, the demands, the expectations and also the experiences of the consumers are regarding good design.

CORPORATE CONCEPT

To take design seriously means invariably a shift of emphasis, breaking out of the well-trodden path used by companies that produce the conventional, and the run of the mill products.

When some twenty-five years ago Braun presented for the first time the products designed according to the new concept, then under the guidance of Dr.Fritz Eichler an important dealer said : " With your products you will go bust in a few months." The man was wrong. But he surely had the right feeling for the dimension of the change that was involved.

The decision to try to generate good design must therefore be a company-wide decision, a management decision. That means, it cannot be the designers of the design department that imposes it and who are made ultimately responsible.

It must be an integral part of the fundamental objectives of the company, it must be in conformity with all other objectives of the company and finally it must be underpinned by a specific organization and decision-making structure of the company.

Thus design policy has a similar, or the same, relevance as product policy, pricing policy and the fundamental strategy of the company :
Here nothing can and nothing may be left to chance. Here nothing not even in the long-term can be developed if the key decision-makers of the company are indifferent or even opposed to its design policy.

Once again Braun provides a good example. As a matter of fact the company of that time really said : Neck or nothing. Anything we knew until then about product design was thrown overboard. The success of the company is also explained by the fact that this determination became perceptible to the user, and so strengthened the credibility of the company and its array of new products.

Whether a company demonstrates that it takes things seriously or not - that is really decisive point for the interested shopper, the buyer, the user of its products.
As an entrepreneur, you should only venture into a commitment to good design if it is a serious and long-term decision, and one to which you will stick.

And as an entrepreneur you can only stick to this decision in the long run if the chief executive is convinced that the products by their very design are objectively, verifiably superior.

To make things clearer, you should just imagine that we don't speak about design but for example about innovative technical ability.
What applies there is equally true for design - a hundred percent.
Innovative technical ability is for a company a real tangible benefit and achievement - which is not the result of chance but the result of deliberate and purposeful long-term efforts.

Only if you view designers as mere product cosmeticians who putter around a little bit with shapes in order to make them more pleasing - its is only then that the work of the designer is less promising than that of development engineers for example.

THE ROLE OF DESIGNERS IN A COMPANY

If you want to obtain good design you must give the designer an opportunity to generate good design. And that means right from the beginning.he must be able to cooperate in the development of a product.

This authority must be clearly defined and laid down in the organization structure. You may not expect that the designer will manage to bring about what no other department of an industrial corporation will ever achieve : that is, to be able to influence spontaneously without backing from the top with the work of others and to achieve this in all cases.

Normally at Braun things do not always run without any problems either but the principle is relatively simple. The Design Department has the backing of the chief executive and the designer is recognized by the various departments as a competent partner. It is well established that the technical operations cooperate with us right from the generation of the first product idea.

The next question is : Who decides in matters of design ?
It is unrealistic to expect that an entrepreneur leaves the decision solely with the designer (although many young designers dream of it). Too much depends on the design of a product. And firstly : one must admit ! - also designers are fallible. On the other hand : It would be unjust to burden a decision on the designer which affects the entire company.

The question is an explosive one, because the appraisal of design work in a company often is made in an environment of subjective preferences and dislikes.

Codetermination, Ladies and Gentlemen, is not a matter of longwinded discussions. You can quarrel intensively and tenaciously about the overall impression of a design, about a lot of details - even about the functional qualities.

And who decides then ? On the strength of which professional authority ? According to which yardstick ?

Don't expect an easy answer from me. Here is the point where we have the much quoted responsibility of top management, in weighing the risks to a company. Above all, top management must be able to rely on the professional competence of its staff - the technicians, the salesmen, the designers. This reliance means that their views, opinions, convictions must be taken seriously, since the specialists cannot each take a decision, all by themselves. The ultimate choice must lie at the top, but it will be taken with a sense of commitment to the policies I have described.

In practical terms things work like this in my company. The designers prepare the ground for decision to a large extent, and also strongly limit the possible leeway of choice in a decision.

Top management does not receive all "possible" designs for a product, but rather "controlled" alternatives which correspond more or less to what the designer deems appropriate. The top management cannot go to a drawing board or compose models. They can only accept, influence, reject.
Quite honestly, I must say in my opinion many a good design has been stopped in its tracks in those twenty years during which I have worked for Braun. Many a good solution for an individual feature was not implemented, sometimes rightly so, but occasionally for mere subjective reasons.
And I must also say that, basically I do not consider that to have any other result would to be either reasonable and or realistic!

It is good if at the top management level professional and competent decisions on design are taken - good for the company, good for the designer.

It is good if design has a man among top management who takes their interests seriously and is competent.

It is good if designers fight tenaciously for their conviction -
and are allowed and encouraged to do so.

PREGIVEN INPUT TO DESIGN

As designers we do not work in a vacuum. We must take into account a multitude of pregiven input data of all types. Conditions, commitments, demands, wishes, suggestions, vetos ..., which come from all the other departments and staff members within the company who, like us, are involved in the development of new products.

It is obvious that these complex input data we receive can sometimes make or break our solution.

If the input data are unimaginative, vague, devoid of any substance - then the designer is left to his own wits. That sometimes leaves him a certain freedom which usually ends, however, once he has a solution discussed. (Then the people who previously had no idea on what the product should look like now know very precisely that for heaven's sake it may not look like that !)

For a product whose engineering concept is imperfect and badly thought out, we can't make a convincing, usable design. We cannot develop any innovations if marketing and sales are only preoccupied with our competitors.

Finally, of course, all our concepts will go into cold storage if production is not capable of implementing our proposals, through technical or financial constraints.

Let me touch upon a number of more general and certainly somewhat subjective experiences which I have made in the course of years. The most essential : Although most areas from their very assignment should work rationally and to the point - and always claim to do so - the level in this respect is usually lower than people outside of industry are inclined to believe.

The keen competition in our economy, and the permanent compulsion of companies to be successful, should really mobilize the whole potential of available possibilities in order to find an objective foundation for our planning, and to leave decisions not to mere chance or to personal likes and dislikes.

I think a gradual toning down to an objective level for decision making, the - let us call it - "scientification" of work would be a great opportunity and could make corporations much more efficient than they are today.
For all too often, conflicts are rarely discussed rationally but - on account of this pressure to be successful - are rather decided emotionally.

I do realize that many decisions cannot be brought down entirely to an objective level because there are many factors that come into play which cannot or not yet be assessed in an objective way.

Here we must improvise. Although I have often cursed improvisation in my professional life it has one advantage : It exacts precise considerations, it exacts economical thinking.

A further problem area with which a designer is confronted - usually much too late - is in relation to production and production engineering.
Here in my experience an irrationality of many corporations is that they often tend to overestimate their own efficiency.

Here, the compulsion to be successful often leads to wishful thinking. Planning and decision-making is sometimes too optimistic, and this can lead into serious problems of production engineering with new products.

What can be handled in terms of production technology should not be a matter of personal discretion. Here we should come to realities before production in large series of a new product is started.

The company must be aware of any technological limitations under which it operates and be in full control of the entire production sequence.

So far, I have dealt with the definitions and pre-requisites of good design.
Let me now turn to the second part, namely on the qualification and education of designers.

QUALIFICATIONS AND EDUCATION OF DESIGNERS

Commonly only one pre-requisite is mentioned for good design :
The designer himself - his special qualifications and his methods.

When a journalist wants to find out why it is the Braun company that produces well designed appliances, he usually concentrates entirely on us, the designers.

Are we the ones who perform this accomplishment ? Are we particularly gifted ? Particularly inspired ? From where do we get our brainwaves ? When and how and how often ? Are we better trained than others ? Do we have a special stratagem that is so sophisticated that it yields better results than from other designers ? Do we have a special knack or trick ?
All this is somewhat naive. I hope I have made my point already. Yet on the other hand it is also justified to consider the designer himself and his qualification as one of the most important pre-requisites for the generation of good design.

For Book only :

Insert after Page 15

We spoke about the role of the designer in a company. Let me add something :

How about the basic tasks of a product designer ?

Let us discuss this question somewhat more in detail what is really the task of a designer.

Because only if we see this task in the proper perspective we will understand why a designer needs certain pre-requisites.

I've said the designer organizes the shape of a product. His task thus should be to develop the overall shape of a product from scratch.

That also implies : It is not in the first place his task to develop the external shape of products whose basic shape has already been laid down by others.

Yet this as a rule is considered to be the task of a designer. The designer, it is thought, dresses a product - like a tailor dresses people. You receive a watch, a car, a typewriter, which basically is already a cut and dried product only lacking the type of skin exterior which the designer has to put around the product as elegantly as possible.

Let's assume that this is the case. Then you have to ask which process, whose performance brings the basic shape into being ?

If we visualize for a moment common products like for example a machine to produce moulds then it seems first of all as if the basic shape is quite simply determined by technical necessities. The design engineer who conceives the product determines already largely its ultimate appearance simply because it just cannot look any different if it is to function well.

There is something true in this opinion and something wrong.

The truth of the matter : Most of the time, there are necessities which can and should already be taken into consideration during the construction and design of the product.

The design engineer who organizes the preliminary shape of products is in this respect already a designer.
I consider him a professional colleague. There are certainly design engineers with an obvious talent of developing shapes which represent an optimum of technical possibilities and are at the same time usable.

Those design engineers who have developed good basic shapes of planes, cars, cameras etc., and have remained anonymous in their role as designers, certainly deserve our respect.

The fallacy is to assume that the shape of products is the automatic result of engineering necessities :
Many things are a mere convention. Seemly rigid because nobody has ever made a serious attempt to develop another more useful basic shape.

That there is room for change we have experienced repeatedly - more frequently today than in the past.

You can rest assured that the accepted basic shape of our most conventional products will strongly change in years to come.

Equally in new product ranges we'll arrive at shapes that are unusual. These changes will be prompted and facilitated by new technologies.

Yet also by the work of designers. However, it is work by designers who are free to work under relatively favourable conditions, and let us not forget - since it has never been explored in its full potential - by deliberately organized and improved cooperation between engineering, design engineering and design. From the very inception - and this time I mean starting already during the professional training of these people.

Now which qualifications must a good designer have ?

It is easy to draw up a long list of characteristics - which however would hardly differ from the characteristics that skilled experts in other fields must also have.

The designer should be intelligent and quick on the uptake - since he has to grasp new technical interdependencies. He should be technically minded, he should be critical, sensible, realistic. He should be gifted for team work - because today only in exceptional cases can good design come into being without team work.

But he should also be patient, balanced, optimistic, perserving. For the solution of these tasks especially in the area of design of technical consumer durables requires a great deal of stamina.

And finally he should have the characteristics which seem to be most obvious for a designer : Sense, a flair for proportions and colours. Sensitive feeling. And, last but by no means least, dexterity and craftsmanship.

Any designer has all these characteristics to a greater or lesser extent. They are necessary for his daily work. Thus I take them for granted. And yet - the qualification of a truly good designer in my conviction is found somewhere else.

Let's try to find the really innovative feature of design achievements which are generally rated to be particularly good or exemplary.

Let's take Braun again because it is closest to me.

In 1955 the company launched the newly designed appliances on the market. They differed very perceptibly from the supply of our competitives. How did they differ ? What was the specific accomplishment of the designers working for Braun ?

Not that individually they had done a better job than their colleagues. This was not primarily a matter of surfaces, proportions and colours.

I feel the achievement that brought Braun acclaim was first of all quite unambiguously an intellectual achievement that is to rid ourselves of a seemingly immutable at least generally accepted design pattern.
The achievement was to break and overcome this deeply entrenched, unimaginative, timid concept of design and arrive at a new design approach.

First of all we tried to reappraise and better understand which type of appliances people really need. And then what they should look like. We permanently asked : Must it be like this ? Ourselves and others. Mainly of course the salesmen, the technicians.

A good designer must come to terms with these questions. Incessently, consistently, thoroughly : For each and every task he has to solve - and beyond the mere summation of tasks.

He need not shout it from the roof tops. He need not establish any explicit theories. After all he is designer and no sociologist, psychologist, cultural historian or philosopher. Yet if he has no idea of what was elaborated in these areas, he feels neither interested in what happens around him nor tries to absorb and comprehend as much as possible of it - then hélàs - he is not a good designer.

Strictly speaking I believe that nobody who is involved in shaping and moulding our environment - and all of us in industry do so to a large extent - may indulge in self-righteous indifference visàvis the intellectual discussions and evolutions of our age.

Routine, insipid accomodation and resignation to the controlling influence of others will not ensure progress in design, at best stagnation. A designer is not a custodian, a filing clerk, no dignitary either who only wants to maintain and expand his sphere of domination.

He must be able to think independently.

Three things can be concluded from this :

1. The chief executives must respect the independent thinking of their designers.
   Allow them the necessary time for that.

2. Challenge to the designer.
   The designer must be fully involved right from the inception of the product development up to the production in series. I've mentioned that already.
   A cleverly method for the development of design will never suffice. You would only continue along the well beaten tracks but not make any progress. It is not the methods of design work that are decisively important and guarantee good results. Of course, I do not want to insinuate any benefit of a confused, disorganized, chaotic way.

Let me cite the Braun example again : our strategy as designers is to take all conditions, all input data, all requirements of design and production engineering seriously but n o t to accept any as definite without reservations.

In our practical work, we always immediately test our designs in all stages of development with three-dimensional models.
Since : the final result is to be a three-dimensional object. With sketches and renderings - dramatic as they may be - we would only deceive ourselves and others.

This also includes that whereever possible only such designs are to be decided upon - which are perfectly elaborated, often ready to be used. All provisional, unfinished, unrealistic models suffer from the fact that some things remain open or unproperly prepared.

3. The third conclusion is : The training of designers. I think it is concentrated too directly on product design. You try to work "close to reality", but don't achieve it. In this way the students certainly learn quite a bit. But do they really learn to think critically, actively, independently ?

We should be equally sceptical if the education is shifted in the direction of "theory-oriented planning". This we observe specifically at some universities which want to exude a scientific flair often connected with the intention of having nothing in common with ordinary design. Admittedly two extreme situations.

It is certainly necessary to be more broadly and profoundly informed about the ideas our civilization has brought forth and the ideas that it could further develop and change. A few courses on philosophy, psychology, sociology, technology in the widest sense are certainly desirable but more often than not lead to confusion and to interminable discussions which at best train the linguistic skills.

So that a designer can reach a stage that for example he can talk seriously to a sociologist or a logistics expert and could learn from him by whichever way it is achieved.

In Western Germany we have now eight different design curriculae : Industrial design, product design, object design, textile design, fashion design, commercial art design, visual communication and interior decorating, all with arbitrary foci and without clear-cut distinctions. On balance - to put it mildly - chaotic.

One feels inclined to recognize a casual relationship with the most frequently encountered mediocre design results.

Are there opportunities for change ? I do think so.

We must arrive at more reasonable concentrations.

We should separate chaff from design. Furthermore, for example, no difference should be made either between architecture and design. The methods of an industrial designer have long ceased to differ from the methods of an architect, especially if - and this is a must for the future - we think of industrial fabricated buildings, - to pick one example only.

The signal points must be switched more explicitly already during the education. In both cases this will only be possible if tied to a technical university. How shall they later practise interdisciplinary work if they didn't succeed in doing it during their education or only succeeded among students of the same term and the same technical discipline ?

Now a word on the curriculum for product designers directly :
I know that quite often students have to sit through the entire length of the course up to graduation even though their skills and talents would warrant an earlier specialization.

In a good design team we need people of equal calibre specifically trained and cooperating for model building, product graphics and precise drawings. They don't exist. You must train them on the job provided you find applicants.

I admit all these were more questions than answers. Yet I do not speak to you as a professor of design but from a real life situation as a man in charge of a design team.

This carries us to the last part : the future.

WHAT DOES THE FUTURE MEAN FOR ENTREPRENEURS AND DESIGNERS ?

This problem, I think, is equally important for a chief executive as is the question of the probably development in the field of data processing or the raw material supply.

In order to ventue a long-term forecast you must ask questions :

1. Which is, in essence, the driving force, the prime mover which could bring about further development in design ?

2. And which are the dominating overall conditions under which this development will presumably occur ?

Both questions are linked with each other so closely that I would like to answer them together :

Now as before I think that the most effective impetus for further development of design are the needs of men. Genuine needs cannot be manipulated, suppressed or only formally satisfied in the long run. I feel that men need other things than these offered today and that sooner or later we have to come to a change of our product supply, and hence to a further development and change in design.

For I'm convinced that a vast range of needs has neither been recognized nor clearly been articulated and has not yet been taken seriously by industry.

So far we haye concentrated too much on the - let us say - classical needs of men. Here we do a lot - and too much that is not needed.

We have too much concentrated on the individual, at best a family and their needs. Because they are the classical buyers and can articulate their genuine or imagined needs more clearly and more insistently.

This classical product repertoir has developed throughout many centuries and highly been expanded. It does not cover the entire range of what men alone or as a group need, want, wish.

Even for these products we have not yet reached the ultimate touch of design, neither in technology nor in design have we reached a stage of perfection.
Always again we achieve objective improvements.
New technologies, new materials, new manufacturing methods provide a continuous impetus to design to open up new possibilities.

It is only recently that we have turned fairly energetically to the field of ergonomics. Sustained progress is to be expected even though relatively slowly because ergonomically correct design requires much experience and much basic work.

A great deal of work is to be done in the field of psychology : the functions which things which surround us fulfil.
One example : In an unappointed room you feel different, you think different than in one that is crammed ; in a derelict landscape differently than in an orderly or natural one.

One of the major future tasks of industry will thus be to find out what we also - and perhaps more urgently - need without being offered so far.
These products will be different, more complex than the ones to which we are accustomed. Undoubtedly the designer in his function as a link between technology and ultimate user will have to play an even more important role.
Even if we assume that we know this fairly clearly, we still know preciously little about the multiple effects that our environment has on us as individuals and on society.

We are about to destroy our biosphere and start getting afraid of poisoning, disease, asphyxiate.
But which effects have high voltage pylons, skyscrapers, super-highways, satelite cities, streetlighting, parking lots, elevators on our psyche, on our interhuman relations ?

It is known that the occupants of masses of concrete buildings tend to have depressions. But who investigates all those things purposively ? Is any research carried out here ? Who after all takes things seriously ?

I could imagine that people of subsequent centuries will get goose pimples when they think of all the thoughtlessness with which we today litter our apartments, our cities, our scenery with a chaos of assorted junk of every description. Which fatalistic inertia we have visàvis the effects of things. Think of all these impositions we endure of which we are only half aware.

We at Braun try to consider that we only know little about the psychotropic effects of things. We try to design our products deliberately neutral and unobtrusive. They don't impose their presence, they don't vie for center-stage, they dominate us less than most other products of this type.

But that is only a small beginning.
Sporadically and too divergently we can see the tasks with which men as the designers of the world - and this includes product engineers - are confronted.

In a first approximation we see how these tasks can be solved. That is in global terms with the same intensive joint effort with which we have pursued the technification, the industrialization and the destruction-machinery of the world.

Well - up to this point the reasoning is fairly easy. These insights have already found approval in some quarters. But as history demonstrates development follows less often good insights and noble exhortations than grim realities.

Now I think, however, that there is a series of more or less grim realities which exact a volte-face, a re-appraisal, more vigorous efforts with a view to moulding our environment.

1. The increasing and irreversible compoundings of all systems - communication, trade, transport, finance, production technology, entertainment, education - you name it.
Everywhere it becomes more and more apparent that there are no discrete individual actions, nothing that can be isolated, nothing without effect. Everything is enmeshed, everything is interdependent. This leads to the objective coercion to think over more thoroughly what you do, why you do it, how you do it. Unless we want to risk the collapse of the entire system none of the blunders may occur with which we can just get away for single products for individual use.

2. The increasing and equally irreversible shortage of our resources : Raw materials, energy, food, space.
It leads already today to increasing cost pressure, a limitation of our leeway, and thus the compulsion to rationalize.

And since good design in reality is nothing but the organization of the shape of product as a result of reasonable, rational considerations the repercussions of this shortage on design are already perceptible.
The times of unimaginative design that could only flourish under an unimaginative production for an unimaginative consumption draws to an end.

Is it really coming to an end ? Don't many people still buy cheap junk instead of useful longlived quality products ?
Right : It is a long-term development. As long as there are still niches for waste and lack of imagination, buyers weaknesses will be cynically exploited. Yet this does not change the trend of development. For a consumer durable products and enterprises - like an airport or a power plant - can you imagine planned obsolescence ?
There we have already reached the limits of our recently acquired, and so poorly utilized affluence.

Difficult as it may be for all concerned in such cases we have to pull our senses together and try to attain maximum quality because we cannot afford to build the same large-scale project twice in one generation.

3. The changing awareness of the individual and of the general public .

That is also a process that is irreversible. We learn as individuals and in groups. We start to comprehend and grasp the development around us. I would like to leave aside the inherent opportunities and other problems that might arise from this in the future.

At any rate : The increasing disenchantment, vigilance and common sense of the consumer is a process heading in a clear-cut direction. Apparently the pendulum does not swing back into the other direction.

Surely, in many departments and in many companies designers who take their task seriously are still considered "proselytes".

But good design is real. All of us have an interest in better, more usable products. And we have to capitalize on this interest. Sooner or later, more or less intensively - but never less than in this very moment.

Can good design contribute to the success of a company ?

Yes, because in the long run it does not contribute to the success of a company to work against the interests of the people for whom it ultimately lives.
And these are not the shareholders, nor the management and definitely not the trade - but the buyer, the ultimate consumer, the man.

September 22, 1975
Rams / Uthe