

TERMINOLOGY OF DESIGN

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Abstract: Somewhat more than a half a century ago the term *design* was used mostly by designers and those who wrote about design. Nowadays, we all know what design is. But do we all interpret the term in the same way? The aim of this paper is to analyse the use of the term *design* in order to contribute to its clearer interpretation. We owe the difference in interpretation of the term *design* to the interdisciplinary nature of design as such. Extreme examples: people from marketing think that the role of design is to sell a product, on the other hand in the industry they look at design as a way to make profit; both of the explications are true, but not enough to define the whole meaning of the term. Also, it would be valuable to describe the term retroactively, that is, in the light of the development of the history and theory of modern design and to name the previous terms which were supposed to denote the activity and results of design. In that way it would be possible to point out the remnants from the past, such as terms that are out dated and wrongly used even today, such as so called *applied arts*, for example. One of the possible ways how to contribute to an acceptable interpretation of the term *design* is to base its explication on the research of the etymology of the numerous meanings of the English word design, which is both a verb and a noun, also material and non-material things. From that point of view, the term *design* is the most appropriate to interpret the wholeness of the meaning of the complex concept of design as a creative activity which implies both the process and the result of that process, the product.

Keywords: the term *design*, etymology, terminology, wrong interpretations, the term *applied arts*

Design is all around. The English word design¹ has become an almost inevitable part of spoken repertoire of our daily communication. What is design? According to Herbert Simon, the author of *The Science of Artificial*,² everything that a man has made since ancient times, as well as in future, is about design. The essential

1 Engleska reč design potiče od latinske reči *disegnare* "obeležiti" i talijanske *designo* dospeviši u engleski preko srednjovekovne francuske reči *desseign* "namena, projekat, dizajn." *Short Oxford Dictionary*; <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/design>.

2 Simon, H. A. *The Science of the Artificial*, 3rd edn. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1996.

and common feature of these works is that they all achieve the aim and serve the purpose of their creation. Far more precise and substance definition of design was given by Gjoko Muratovski of the University of Cincinnati: "Design is about solving everyday problems by overcoming limitations, challenges and constraints in a creative way..."³

Design is both the process and the result. The design phenomenon encompasses the idea of a new product, its carefully planned execution through the process of design, as well as the result of that process in terms of the finished product. This principle remains the same for any type of design; be it a phone, a dress, a glass, a poster, a building, a car, an airplane, a spacecraft, a chair, etc. Namely, it is understood that the scope and content of the components of the design process are adequate and depending on the kind of design.

Etymology of design. To base explication of the term *design* (the English word *design*) is one of the possible ways of how to contribute to its acceptable interpretation. Multiple meanings of the word design in the English language makes it almost irreplaceable when it comes to comprehensive interpretation of complexity of the content of design phenomenon. According to Prosveta English-Serbian Dictionary, the English word design comes with a meaning of a verb: to draw, to sketch, to devise a building plan; as well as a noun: a drawing, a sketch, a building plan. Design could also apply to intangible things: an idea, a conception (of art or literary work), but at the same time it is also used as a verb: to think of, to conceptualize a work of art. Thus, for example, to design a book, depending on the context in which the term is applied, can have two completely different meanings: if a writer is in question, the translation would read to make a conception of a novel; however, if it was a designer, the term design refers to graphic design of a book, etc. The entry of design phenomena applies exclusively to external form: "artistic construction, artistic form/shape, a product of consistent proportions; a picture lacking design; a machine of excellent design".⁴ Indeed, design phenomenon cannot be explained in several words from dictionaries or from practice. The substance of design phenomenon, as well as the essence of any other creative activity, needs to be known, understood and felt.

"Even the simple word design means many different things to different people."⁵ Even more importantly, it is not only about trying to explain the proper meaning of the term design, but to point out its wrong interpretation. Nowadays, of course, we all know what design is. However, there is still a small problem: do we all interpret the term in the same way? Namely, the majority is ready to narrowly define the meaning of the term design. One of the many causes of the unilateral conception of design is to be sought in its interdisciplinary nature, one of the essential features of modern design. Experts from various fields are involved in the development of a new industrial design product: economists, constructors, ergonomists, to name a few. It is not uncommon that some participants, in this integral process, explain the entire design phenomenon exclusively from the perspective of their profession, hence misinterpretation of the term. For example, in the circle of economists we often find that the primary role of design is to achieve the commercial effect of a product. It sometimes goes to the extreme claiming that marketing is not a part of the process of design, but that design is a part of marketing! On the other hand, a manufacturer is interested in the profit of a company, hence the attitude that the only purpose of using design is to maximize the profit, including their understanding of the meaning of the term. The most adequate attitude regarding the meaning of the term

3 Muratovski, Gjoko. *Design for Business*, Volume 2, Intellect /University of Chicago Press.

4 S.Ristić, Ž.Simić i V.Popović, *Enciklopedijski englesko-srpskohrvatski rečnik*, Prosveta 1973.

5 In conversation with Dr. Boyd Davis Stephan, Professor of Theory and History of Design, Royal College of Art, London, May 2019.

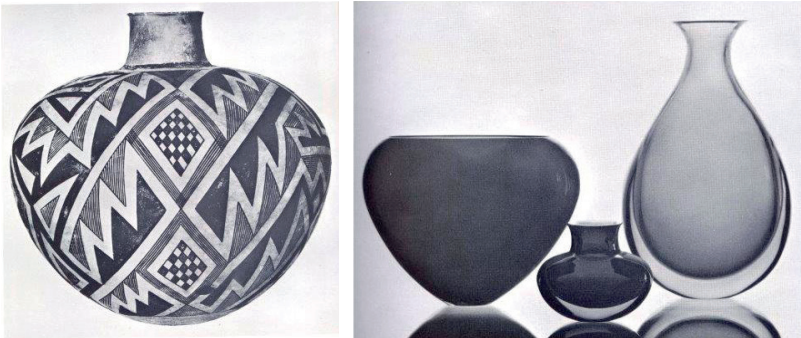


Fig. 1

design is within users. Consumers think integrally about design, in terms of final results; they expect a product to be functional, to be of a good quality, and of an attractive form.

The term design does not only refer to industrial products. The misconception that the term design refers only to industrial products could be explained by the fact that the word design outside the Anglo-Saxon language area has now been used in relation to industrial products. In the English language, however, design is equally applied to denote items produced in manual and industrial production; in short it refers both to mass production and handmade items. For example, a book about the life and work of a famous English artist, philosopher, poet and designer from XIX century, is entitled *William Morris as a Designer*.⁶ And, not only that he was exclusively engaged in the production of unique, craft based design, but he was also one of the explicit critics of machine production. Moreover, the term design also refers to items manufactured before the first industrial revolution (fig. 1). Same, as the term architecture is used for buildings of ancient civilizations, so is the term design applied to everyday objects of the past. Especially since architecture is also one discipline of design, though a special one.

Design is not only a nice form. We agree with Gjoko Muratovski on this: “Yet, for most people, design remains an exotic profession focused on making beautiful things. Aesthetics is a part of design, but design is much more than that.”⁷ Design aesthetics, as one component of the design phenomenon, is created and formed during the process of design and rests on interaction of other components of design. But, the scope, significance and participation of aesthetics in the final result of this process is depending on the kind of design, that is, to what extent the form has priority quality in design of a given product.

The history of the design style of the XIX century was marked by historicism, namely eclecticism. In terminology of design there is also remembrance from the past, such as the outdated and even today wrongly used term of so called applied arts, inherited from the XIX century. Let us look at its origin. The immediate cause of the loss of the basic meaning of the phenomena of design, as well as the term itself, occurs in the early XIX century as a direct consequence of the first industrial revolution, a phenomenon that marks the beginning of change in the modern history, from the agrarian and manual economy to the one dominated by machine production. The first industrial revolution introduced the previously unprecedented possibilities of cheaply manufactured series of products, different purpose, new technical structures and shapes, consumed by far more numerous new mass consumers. In terms of design, under new conditions

6 Watkins, R. *William Morris as a Designer*, Studio Vista, London 1967

7 Muratovski, Gjoko. *Design for Business*, Volume 2, Intellect /University of Chicago Press.

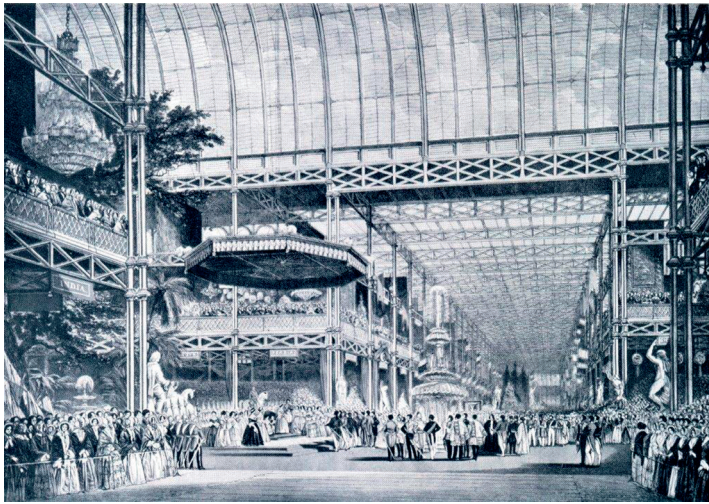


Fig. 2

of mass mechanical production, there was a tremendous development of only material and production components of the process of design. The new situation inevitably required redefinition of other basic components of the process of design: purpose and function, ergonomics, marketing, aesthetics, etc. of a product. Respectively, that imposed detection of their new relevant and corresponding content, different from the one which had been nurtured for centuries in the past, in the craft based design. However, that had neither occurred nor it was possible to happen. The lack of adequate solutions to the components of contemporary design has left room for arbitrary interpretation, which inevitably leads to a decline in product quality. In any case, the most drastic and most obvious example took place in the domain of the aesthetic component of design. That is, as it was necessary to hide the ugliness of the rough mechanism of products made mostly of iron. In practice, the contemporaries of the first industrial revolution solved

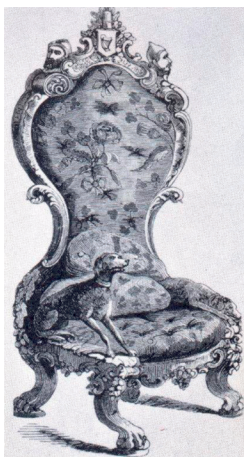


Fig. 3



Fig. 4

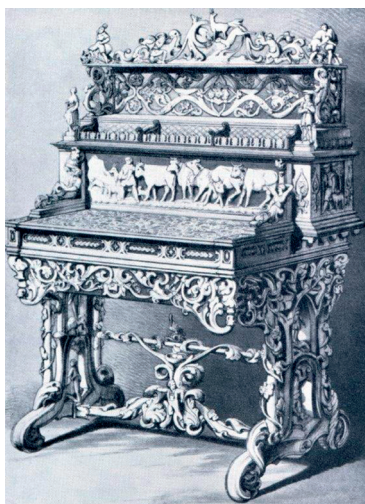


Fig. 5

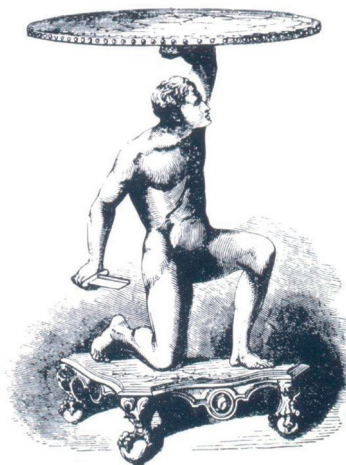


Fig. 6

this problem by imitating decorative styles from the past. These ornaments were, randomly and beyond measure or sense of composition applied to new products, which to vulgarity were unsuccessful copies of the original, what illustrates The Great Exhibition held in London in 1851, (fig. 2, fig. 3, fig. 4, fig. 5). This extremely unacceptable practice was named *applied art*, a term that is still used today. By the way, the term *applied art*, what does it mean? The results of scientific research can be applied in technology, medicine, construction, etc., but art cannot be applied. It is unique. In conclusion, therefore, we suggest renaming Belgrade's two important cultural institutions thus: Museum of Applied Art should read *Museum of Art and Design* and the Faculty of Applied Arts should become *Faculty of Arts and Design*.

ILLUSTRATIONS

1: Pueblo pottery, New Mexico, circa A.D. 1200

Flavio Poli, Blown and molded glass vase, 1960s, by Seguso Vetri d'Arte, Murano

Пueblo керамика, Њу Мексико, око 1200. год

Флавио Поли, ваза од дуваног и ливеног стакла, 1960, Seguso Vetri d'Arte, Мурано

2: The Great Exhibition of 1851, the Opening Ceremony, 1st May 1851

Велика изложба 1851, церемонија отварања, 1. маја 1851. године

3: A. Jonas, Chair, an item from The Great Exhibition 1851

А. Џонас, столица, предмет са велике изложбе 1851.

4: W.T. Loy, Jun. Two knife handles, The Great Exhibition, London 1851

В. Т. Лој јуниор, Две дршке за ножеве, Велика изложба, Лондон 1851.

5: M. L. Wettli, Lady's mechanical escritoire, The Great Exhibition, London 1851

М. Л. Ветли, Женски механички писаћи сто, Велика изложба, Лондон 1851.

6: J. Fletcher, Gladiatorial table, The Great Exhibition, London 1851

Џ. Флечер, Гладијаторски сто, Велика изложба, Лондон 1851.

THE ORIGIN OF PHOTOS

1 from: *The Man-Made Object*, Ed. Gyorgy Kepes, Studio Vista, London 1966
2, 4, 5, 6, from: C. H. Gibbs-Smith, *The Great Exhibition of 1851*, Victoria & Albert Museum, 1950.
3 from: Ferebee, Ann. *History of Design from the Victorian Era to the Present*, VNR 1970.

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ТЕРМИНОЛОГИЈА ДИЗАЈНА

Резиме: Пре нешто више од пола века термин дизајн углавном су користили дизајнери и они који су писали о дизајну. Данас сви знамо шта је то дизајн. Ипак, питање је да ли сви тумачимо овај термин на исти начин? Циљ овог рада је да анализира употребу термина дизајн како би допринео његовој јаснијој интерпретацији. Различитост у тумачењу термина дизајн дугујемо интердисциплинарној природи самог дизајна. Екстремни примери: људи из маркетинга мисле да је улога дизајна да прода производ, с друге стране у индустрији се на дизајн гледа као на начин за остваривање профита; оба објашњења су тачна, али недовољно да би се овај термин у потпуности дефинисао. Такође, било би драгоцено да се термин објасни ретроактивно, то јест у светлу развоја историје и теорије модерног дизајна и да се именују сви претходни термини које је требало да означе активност и резултате дизајна. На тај начин било би могуће истаћи остатке из прошлости, попут термина који су превазиђени и погрешно се користе чак и данас, на пример такозвана примењена уметност. Један од могућих начина да се допринесе прихватањем тумачењу термина дизајн јесте и да се његово објашњење базира на истраживању етимологије бројних значења енглеске речи дизајн, која је истовремено и глагол и именица, уједно и материјална и нематеријална ствар. Са те тачке гледишта, термин дизајн је најадекватнији да би се интерпретирала целовитост значења комплексног концепта дизајна као креативне активности која подразумева и процес и резултат тог процеса – сам производ.

Предлажемо, стога, да се измене називи ових значајних институција културе: Музеј примењене уметности да се назове Музеј уметности и дизајна и да Факултет примењених уметности добије назив, Факултет уметности и дизајна.

Кључне речи: термин дизајн етимологија, погрешно тумачење, термин примењене уметности