Eames

The Work of the Office of Charles and Ray Eames
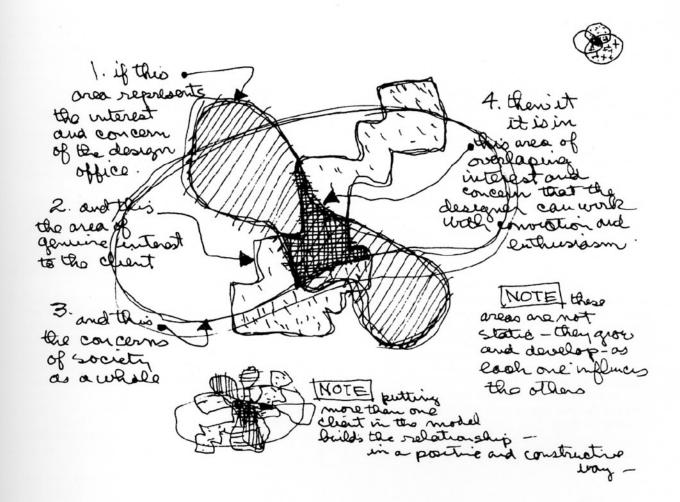
design

John Neuhart   Marilyn Neuhart   Ray Eames

1. if this area represents the interest and concern of the design office.

2. and this the area of genuine interest to the client

3. and this the concerns of society as a whole

4. then it it is in this area of overlapping interest and concern that the designer can work with conviction and enthusiasm.

NOTE these areas are not static — they grow and develop — as each one influences the others

NOTE putting more than one client in the model builds the relationship — in a positive and constructive way —

A diagram of the design process drawn by Charles

A photograph of Charles
taken in 1972 by
Paul Bruhwiler

What Is Design?

The following statement by Charles is an expression of his
approach to the design process. These words, the
accompanying diagram (p. 13), and his answers to the
questions (pp. 14–15) are an explanation of the Eames
philosophy and background material for this record of the
work of the Eames Office.

In a statement sent to Madame L. Amic for the catalog of
the exhibition *What Is Design?* (p. 345), Charles wrote:

In the exhibit, we are trying to show something about a
decision that the designer must make when he starts to
work for a client. We have found it a very helpful
strategy to restrict our own work to subjects that are of
genuine and immediate interest to us—and are of equal
interest to the client. If we were to work on things or in
ways that we knew were not of legitimate concern to
both of us, we probably would not be serving our clients,
or ourselves, very well. Throughout the work for the
various clients, the unifying force is this common
interest, plus a preoccupation with structure which
comes from looking at all problems as architectural
ones. The enclosed diagram also includes a critical and
changing area that represents the concerns of society as
a whole. None of these areas is static. As client and
designer get to know each other, they influence each
other. As society's needs become more apparent, both
client and designer expand their own personal concerns
to meet these needs.

The following questions were asked by Madame Amic and
answered by Charles. The questions and answers were the
conceptual basis of the exhibition *What is Design?* An edited
and slightly changed version of the questions was used as the
basis of the 1972 film *Design Q & A* (p. 388).

Q. What is your definition of "design?"
A. A plan for arranging elements in such a way as to
best accomplish a particular purpose.

Q. Is design an expression of art (an art form)?
A. The design is an expression of the purpose. It may (if
it is good enough) later be judged as art.

Q. Is design a craft for industrial purposes?
A. No—but design may be a solution to some
industrial problems.

Q. What are the boundaries of design?
A. What are the boundaries of problems?

Q. Is design a discipline that concerns itself with
only one part of the environment?
A. No.

Q. Is it a method of general expression?
A. No—it is a method of action.

Q. Is design a creation of an individual?
A. No—because to be realistic one must always
admit the influence of those who have gone before.

Q. ...or a creation of a group?
A. Often.

Q. Is there a design ethic?
A. There are always design constraints and these
usually include an ethic.

Q. Does design imply the idea of products that are
necessarily useful?
A. Yes—even though the use might be very subtle.

Q. Is it able to cooperate in the creation of works
reserved solely for pleasure?
A. Who would say that pleasure is not useful?

Q. Ought form to derive from the analysis of function?
A. The great risk here is that the analysis may not
be complete.

Q. Can the computer substitute for the designer?
A. Probably, in some special cases, but usually the computer is an aid to the designer.

Q. Does design imply industrial manufacture?
A. Some designs do and some do not—depending on the nature of the design and the requirements.

Q. Is design an element of industrial policy?
A. Certainly; as is any other aspect of quality, obvious or subtle, of the product. It seems that anything can be an element in policy.

Q. Ought design to care about lowering costs?
A. A product often becomes more useful if the costs are lowered without harming the quality.

Q. Does the creation of design admit constraint?
A. Design depends largely on constraints.

Q. What constraints?
A. The sum of all constraints. Here is one of the few effective keys to the design problem—the ability of the designer to recognize as many of the constraints as possible—his willingness and enthusiasm for working within these constraints—the constraints of price, of size, of strength, balance, of surface, of time, etc.; each problem has its own peculiar list.

Q. Does design obey laws?
A. Aren't constraints enough?

Q. Are there tendencies and schools in design?
A. Yes, but this is more a human frailty than an ideal.

Q. Ought the final product to bear the trademark of the designer? of the research office?
A. In some cases, one may seem appropriate. In some cases, the other, and certainly in some cases, both.

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)