

**Yves Vincent Grossmann, Von der Berufung zum Beruf: Industriedesigner in Westdeutschland 1959–1990. Gestaltungsaufgaben zwischen Kreativität, Wirtschaft und Politik, Bielefeld (transcript) 2018, 482 S., zahlr. Abb. (Design), ISBN 978-3-8376-4361-9, EUR 49,99**

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When they speak about German design, historians usually refer to three key moments: the foundations of the industrial design field by Peter Behrens when he was appointed creative director by AEG before the First World War; of course, the adventure of the Bauhaus; and finally another short adventure, the one of the Ulm design school (Hochschule für Gestaltung, 1953–1968). In his voluminous book based on his dissertation, Yves Vincent Grossmann strives to explore a continuous and not well known part of the history of German design from 1959 to 1990, which is indirectly connected to the famous Ulm episode. He combines a historical and a design historical approach to analyse the birth and the development of a new professional category: the industrial designers.

Therefore, his explanation is to be considered more as design history rather than history of design, since he deals with economy, politics and social aspects of the non-socialist part of the country at that time, as shows his impressive bibliography. In addition, an important research work has been conducted into various archives while prominent annexes and documentary photos supplement the seriousness of the publication.

The beginning of the industrial design in postwar West Germany is »banal« in a way: the emergence of a consumption market, which put pressure on the brands to innovate and differentiate from each other. First designers took ample benefit of the situation by offering their specific contribution, which is related to an aesthetical functionalism (simplification and creativity of the use, quality and purity of the form) acting on the psychology of the potential client to serve as a commercial and marketing tool. Their successes steadily convinced an increasing number of companies to employ them, until their role became essential and part of the normal production process.

They gathered into associations like the VDID (Verband Deutscher Industrie Designer) created in 1959 and chosen as the starting point of the chronology. Such associations helped them to exchange and to advocate themselves; when more established, they created institutions (e. g., the International Design Zentrum Berlin [IDZ], funded in 1968) to better represent the profession. One may observe this phenomenon in the United States and in England during the interwar and in Japan and other Western European countries during the postwar. However, due to the importance of the destructions (most of German cities and



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factories were destroyed during the Second World War), it started a bit later than in Italy or France, where personalities like Gio Ponti and Jacques Viénot settled the profession about one decade earlier.

Despite the fact that the study is not dealing with objects, the analysis aims to encompass manifold aspects of the problems including organizational theory (the profession and not design itself). The book delivers an original input to the understanding of design in Germany, through the prism of its actors. Even if the Ulm design school members were essential in building the industrial design field in the country and even if German design was somehow already established, the ambition was to set a new vision, which would be independent from the cumbersome legacy of both Bauhaus and Ulm, and clearly connected to common industrial design professional practices throughout the world. For that reason, the VDIID quickly joined the International Council of Societies of Industrial Design (ICSID, recently renamed World Design Organization), founded in 1957.

For that reason too, German industrial designers underwent the same issues and demonstrated a similar evolution as their foreign counterparts: integration of methods based on sciences, sociology, anthropology and product planning in the sixties; counterculture in the late 1960s and early 1970s, followed by the oil crisis; postmodernism in the eighties followed by the computerization of their work. For each of these phases, the author delivers a case study (BASF, Siemens, Rosenthal, and MAN), which considerably underpins and enriches his very documented propos.

Grossmann also examines the socialist views of Gert Selle and the Marxist ones of Wolfgang Haug, which contradicted creative practices linked to consumerism, pushing the industrial designers to elaborate self-reflection. The Design Forum Linz in 1980 and the exhibition conceived by the design critic Volker Fischer at the Frankfurt Museum of Architecture in 1988 put functionalism into question and promoted postmodernist alternatives made of bright colours, emotions, and eclectic forms. It was also a difficult time for the design institutions, which encountered financial shortfalls and were bailed out by private companies. The chronology ends with the reunification of the two German states in 1990, whose designers were nevertheless already in contact during the period under examination.

What could then be the specificity of German design, which is now reflected by the many products churned out by a renowned, powerful, high standard and cutting-edge industry? The real challenge and the specificity of German design appear to be its contribution to changes in an engineer-centred industry toward more diverse thinking and research methods. But looking back at the origins of German design, one might object that the bond between industry, design associations, and public support was already the strength and the accomplishment of the Deutscher Werkbund in the early 20th century. The author demonstrates eventually that design played an even more significant role in the success of the Western German economy between 1959 and 1990.



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