

JEFFREY L. MEIKLE, *Twentieth Century Limited. Industrial Design in America, 1925–1939*, Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1979, xii+249 pp., 149 illus. \$17.50.

RAYMOND LOEWY, *Industrial Design*, Woodstock, NY: Overlook Press, 1979, 250 pp., illus. \$45.00.

Ever since the Industrial Revolution, sensitive people such as Ruskin and Morris, and progressive organizations such as the Deutscher Werkbund and the Bauhaus, sought to recover what they perceived as a lost harmony between art and life. The birth of industrial design in the late 1920s in America marks the continuation of this quest, undertaking to create a beauty in accord with our new machine age. Jeffrey Meikle presents an important chapter in this search for unity as he investigates the formative years of industrial design, while Raymond Loewy offers us an intimate look at his career as one of the pioneers of this profession.

Meikle's thesis is that industrial design began as a strictly American profession in the 1930s, a fortuitous marriage of art and industry. Its primary role was to create a harmonious and visually coherent environment "unknown since the industrial revolution" (p. xiii). The foundations of this new profession were not altruistic or utopian, however, but economic. American business needed a way out of the dilemma of overproduction and underconsumption in the late 1920s, and commercial artists and stage and advertising designers abandoned careers "to answer business's anguished call" (p. 38). In doing so, they became our first industrial designers. Although influenced by the European examples of Le Corbusier, Mendelsohn, and the coherent modernism of the Paris fair of 1925, they received most of their direction from American sources. Curators such as John C. Dana and Richard F. Bach set the stage for the machine as a source of aesthetic inspiration upon which the designers were to act. Admen like E. E. Calkins enthusiastically promoted them. Manufacturers applauded their ability to modernize and update products; even Henry Ford joined the ranks of the style-conscious in 1927, when he scrapped his Model T. The designers acted out a drama in which "creative wasting" or "progressive obsolescence" and consumer engineering took the business world by force. They regarded their new role with relish, eventually creating and promoting a streamlined style, suggestive of "frictionless technological progress" (p. 4), and hailed as part of an "American Renaissance" (p. 144).

This interpretation of industrial design clearly follows from the evidence Meikle presents, and there is no question as to the thoroughness of his presentation. *Twentieth Century Limited* is exhaustively researched. Its footnotes and annotated bibliography reveal the breadth of the author's study and will be of great value to any student of American culture

and design of the 1920s and 1930s. He has consulted a wide range of trade journals in advertising, business, engineering, design and architecture, and he has used all the major collections on industrial designers, especially the Norman Bel Geddes collection at the University of Texas. Personal correspondence with the designers, or those who know them well, underscores the author's scholarly commitment to his subject.

Meikle, in this first solid study of the beginnings of industrial design since Martha and Sheldon Cheney's *Art and the Machine* (1936), strongly reaffirms their interpretation of industrial design as cultural expression. Caught up in the movement firsthand, the Cheneys saw industrial design emerging from the two streams of American engineering and (European) abstract art. Meikle, from our present vantage point, rightly stresses the expanded context of the market place in the creation of this new profession. Nevertheless, his assessments reinforce the uncanny clarity of the Cheneys' vision.

The author is at his best when he discusses the individual designers and when he analyzes the philosophical basis for their work. In his third chapter he devotes a section to each of the "big four": Teague, Bel Geddes, Dreyfus, and Loewy. These are marvelous nutshell biographies, capturing the essential character of each man. He also brings valuable insights to the tensions developed in the 1930s, as the Platonic ideal of a single correct form for any product clashed with the mercantile demands of planned obsolescence.

I find Meikle on less firm ground in some of his discussions and interpretations of architecture. Because he sees streamlining as the zenith of industrial design style in the 1930s, he faults the architecture of the Chicago Exposition of 1933–1934 for not achieving this standard: compared to the aerodynamic Goodyear blimp floating above, "the fair's modernistic architecture seems like whistling in the dark" (p. 155). What Meikle does not clarify, however, is that a streamlined style of architecture did not exist in 1928, when the fair was first planned. Originally it was to be a "skyscraper" fair of tall buildings penetrated by suspended roadways. This image was cut down by the Depression, and curved forms (if they had been proposed as an alternative) also would have been rejected as unnecessarily expensive. Moreover, Meikle overlooks many strong architectural contributions of the Chicago Fair, such as the prophetic form and layout of the Chrysler Buildings, the structural daring of the Transportation Dome and the experiments in new sheathing and cladding materials, all of which had an important effect on future architectural developments.

Again, Meikle's discussion of the New York World's Fair of 1939–40 would benefit from a deeper background in architectural history. He searches for a symbol to underscore his analysis of streamlining as emblematic of a social desire for stasis as well as progressive

technological change; he finds this symbol in the Trylon and Perisphere. According to Meikle, the one embodies "limitless flight," the other "controlled stasis." These are interesting interpretations, but Harrison and Fouilhoux merely sought to give these theme buildings an abstract form. The irony of the Trylon and Perisphere is that they were inspired by the forms of late 18th-century French romantic classicism, yet they stood for The World of Tomorrow.

It is curious too that in his otherwise excellent discussion of Bel Geddes' General Motors building for the Fair, Meikle doesn't mention its most obvious aspect: in good industrial design fashion, Bel Geddes gave General Motors a piece of pure packaging—a smooth, contoured silver-grey wrapping around a very complicated interior. This building epitomizes the Fair "as a vast three-dimensional package for the consumerist way of life" (p. 199).

Finally, I am uneasy with Meikle's conclusion that streamlining declined rapidly after 1939 because it was generally perceived as having "totalitarian implications" (p. 187). Though he offers no documentary proof for this, it is an interesting idea, well worth further exploration.

But these are only intermittent lapses in this wide-ranging book which provokes many questions. For instance, can the discovery around 1926 that "color sells" (p. 15) be linked to the development of synchronism? Was industrial design a true form of mass art? Should industrial designers be credited with influencing the successful display and ad techniques which have contributed to the present popularity of our museums? And finally, did industrial designers, by their successes, force architects to compete and become more aesthetically avant-garde, more socially conscious, and more catholic in what they accepted as appropriate architectural commissions? Meikle's book will stimulate the reader to ask many more questions, and, undoubtedly, it will generate new and serious research into the history of industrial design.

Raymond Loewy's *Industrial Design* is perhaps more personally revealing. If the early industrial designers partook of the spirit of social reform and sought to enhance life through art, Raymond Loewy lived (and still lives) a life of total participation and personal fulfillment. To Bel Geddes, Loewy was "more interested in living than designing" (Meikle, p. 62). But his life is one creative design, and his firm's design strategy still incorporates some of the idealistic framework of the 1920s and 1930s (see p. 15).

The book is divided into three sections. The first is an edited conversation between Loewy and publisher Peter Mayer. The second is a personal reminiscence of the high points in Loewy's work, arranged by decades. The third, constituting the bulk of the book, is comprised of illustrations interspersed with descriptive text. These illustrations are organized around

some of Loewy's main designs, from the Gester duplicating machine to the NASA Skylab program. His sketches and drawings of products range from impressionistic suggestions of mere shadow and tone to precise, hard-lined and detailed renderings. Using pen, pencil, chalk and paint, Loewy reveals a technique as varied as his products.

Loewy places his life as well as his art on display. Photographs of the author (and Viola) greeting dignitaries around the world give *Industrial Design* the quality of a glorified scrapbook. This is enhanced by his description of his houses and their geographical settings. Moreover, recollections, such as his meeting with the president of the Pennsylvania Railroad (p. 77), give us a sense of his undaunted temerity as he beards the lions of industry in their dens to emerge, unbloodied, with another design contract.

Unlike *Twentieth Century Limited, Industrial Design* is not a book for historical research. As with many active creators, Loewy is rather cavalier about historical accuracy. For example, his "Evolution Chart of Design—1930" (p. 74) has obviously been altered either in the late 1940s or early 1960s, at least as it pertains to the automobile; and when he applies his ideas of industrial evolution to furniture, goblets and shoes, he has ventured from history into a delightfully imaginative fiction.

These two very different books are valuable contributions to our understanding of industrial design. But we must remain alert to the difference between the artistic commentary of one and the historical analysis of the other. When Loewy looks at the year 1939, he joyfully anticipates the future: "The worst was far from over when World War II started, but things had improved from the dark days of the early Thirties" (p. 52). Meikle, viewing the same year, responds to the future with sadness: "But it is not the world envisioned in the best moments by the founders of the profession" (p. 210). Both books, the intensely personal reflections on a long and successful career, and the broadly conceptual analysis of the early years of a new profession, add a welcome breadth and depth to the literature on industrial design.

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ROBERT L. SWEENEY, *Frank Lloyd Wright. An Annotated Bibliography*, Los Angeles: Hennessey and Ingalls, 1978, xlv+303 pp., 12 illus. \$29.95.

In a way this 300+ page annotated bibliography of writings by and about Frank Lloyd Wright illustrates better than anything else,

how extensive and long-lived has been our fascination with this personage and his architecture. Early in his career Wright borrowed not only Elbert Hubbard's pose—his pork-pie hat, cape, and flowing tie—but also Hubbard's remarkable ability to propagandize himself, so that his image always remained in the public eye. Throughout the decades of the 20th century (and right up to the present moment), the myth and reality of Wright has provided beautiful copy—not only for the popular press ranging from the *Chicago Tribune* and *Colliers*, but for the most elitist and erudite of European and American publications.

Sweeney's patiently assembled bibliography places this record openly on the table for us. Not only are we provided with an extremely useful tool, we are forcefully made aware by the 2,095 entries in this bibliography of how important the writings by and about architecture are in the 20th century. The reality of Wright exists then as much through what has appeared in print (texts and illustrations), as it does in his realized designs.

The success of Wright's adaptation of Elbert Hubbard's super salesmanship is pointedly revealed in this bibliography where one will find only a small handful of negative critiques on Wright. Almost everything else, including of course Wright's own writings, is openly or suggestively eulogistic. If the historian of the future had only these writings to form his appraisal of Wright, he might wonder why this universal genius did not receive all of the major city planning and architectural commissions of the first six decades of this century. There was obviously an appreciable gap between the myth of Wright and the fact of Wright as an architectural practitioner. One would certainly not be aware of this by pursuing the literature.

As to the specifics of Sweeney's volume, it consists of a brief but as always thoughtful foreword by Adolf Placzek; this is followed by an introduction by the author which helps set the stage for the annotated bibliography. The entries are arranged by years, and within each year they are organized under the categories of books and monographs (including museum catalogues); periodical literature follows. Books and monographs are supplemented where appropriate by reviews. Two appendices are included: one devoted to "Taliesin Publications," the other to "Frank Lloyd Wright Buildings Recorded by The Historic American Building Survey." The volume concludes with two very complete indexes: a "Building and Place Index" and a "Name and Title Index."

As Placzek points out, "A bibliography can never be the last word. New material will be traced, discovered and annotated . . ." (p. xii). This reviewer, for example, could not locate a reference under the year 1959, namely, the publication of the *Opening Ceremonies of the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum* (New

York: The Guggenheim Museum) which contains the speeches of a fascinating array of contemporaries—Harry F. Guggenheim, Henry Cabot Lodge, Robert Moses, Robert F. Wagner, and Arthur S. Flemming. Another omission is Linn Ann Cowles's excellent *An Index And Guide To An Autobiography, The 1943 Edition by Frank Lloyd Wright* (Hopkins, Minnesota: Greenwich Design, 1976). To cite these few omissions merely illustrates that some minor and major treasures still remain to be discovered. Such omissions in no way dilute the major contribution which Sweeney has made to our expanded knowledge of Wright and the architect's impact upon the 20th century scene.

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WAYNE ANDREWS, *Pride of the South: A Social History of Southern Architecture*, New York: Atheneum, 1979, 182 pp., 170 illus. \$10.95.

Wayne Andrews' new book offers 170 handsome black and white photographs of buildings of the American South, slightly over half of them not published before. At the reasonable price, this soft-cover, large-format volume is certain to appeal to students and lovers of Southern and American regional architecture. Notes on which buildings are open are useful to the traveler. The photographs alone easily make the book worth the price.

Andrews' rationale for selecting the pictures he did is clearly stated: from his earlier books, he continues his interest in the buildings of the rich. As the title, *Pride of the South*, suggests, and as he indicates in his prologue, Andrews has "chosen to emphasize the extraordinary at the expense of the ordinary," and he has generally omitted the 17th century because "there was not enough prosperity in those years to allow for more than mere building."

The photographs, then, represent imposing buildings of the South—provincial Georgian buildings of Virginia and South Carolina; Jeffersonian classical monuments (together with several related European models); romantic Grecian, Italianate, and Gothic mansions of the antebellum period; towered houses and great hotels of the New South period; and a few modern buildings including works by Wright and Portman. Generally the selection is reasonable, though one misses seeing anything by Latrobe.

To tie the wealth of photographs together, Andrews has sought not to analyze problems of design but to "sketch the scene in which the stage was set; where the money came from is important, and so are the clients who gave the architects their chance." His text brims with