Richard S. Latham, FIDSA (1920-1991) Autobiography

This autobiography is in the archives at Syracuse University as a document, and also possibly as an audio tape in the Ray Spilman collection there, as it appears to be a script for verbal delivery at the request of IDSA. Like a time capsule, it describes an interesting turning point in design history, from the acquisitional 50s to the socially conscious 60s, sensitively articulated by Latham and others.

August 1969

This is Dick Latham speaking. I am going to put down to the best of my memory things that happened to me in the early years, as well as my entire career to date, as an industrial designer. My memory is not very good for dates, so I may not get that as straight as it should be. The first time I was ever actually aware that there was such a thing as a practicing industrial designer was in 1940 when I first came to Chicago. Previous to that time, I had studied engineering and about the only thing I knew was that somebody designed products in the automotive companies.

In that year, I found in Chicago, Mies van der Rohe, who had been brought over from Germany to teach architecture at the old Armour Institute, which was located in the attic of the Art Institute. Also found a man by the name of Kurt Eckdahl, who was a Swedish designer and a very vivid personality. I had been studying engineering at college level, but I had always been interested in the arts. My father was a commercial artist, and I knew how to draw and it seemed to me that this might be what I should look into.

Probably the first publication that I ever saw that made me sure that this was what I was looking for was a small book on industrial design published by the Museum of Modern Art sometime in the 1940s. I spent two years at the Art Institute, where I acquired most all of the basic philosophies I have about good design under Eckdahl, but also had a very rewarding experience working under a photographer and designer named Walter Peterhans, a man that Mies had brought from the Bauhaus to teach design.

Design in those years got almost no press at all, and the offices that were in Chicago were very small, I think the Loewy office was a three-man operation, so consequently. I wasn’t aware as I would have been if I had been in New York city, of the importance of design at that time. Being close to Detroit, I was more aware of the design staff of general Motors than anything else, and obviously,

the two big mail order houses, Sears and wards, who had begun to bring designers from general Motors and other places to actually begin a formal practice of industrial design on their products and packages.

In 1942, I got my first job as an industrial designer on the board at the Bureau of Design at Montgomery Ward. The Bureau was managed by Ann Swainson, who, although she has never received a lot of publicity, was one of the first real professional people to employ designers at that time, and did an excellent job. Dave Chapman, for Instance, was just leaving the Bureau to open his own office when I got my first job there, and I believe, as I remember, there were about three or four of us doing product design and an equal number, maybe five or six doing packaging design. Roy Larson ran the packaging group, he later went on to run the Loewy Graphics Office for many, many years.

In spite of the fact that Annie was a swell gal, it was a sweatshop. We punched a clock, and we put in our eight hours with a half an hour off for lunch and you had to draw it right the first time, in other words, everybody learned how to do the mechanical part of the job, or they got thrown out on their head. People like Fred Priess were there. He had worked at Barnes and Reinecke, which was really the largest organized design shop around Chicago up to that time. They did such things as the Toastmaster, for instance. Herb Zeller was there. Herb later became the head of design for Motorola, and has been all these years.

Some of the other guys were Jim Teague, who later became Painter, Teague, and Petertil and Bill Wagner, who became head of design for Warwick Radio in later years. Some of us were juniors and apprentices, but we all worked like the devil was right behind us, and she was. Annie Swainson never let up for a minute. It was the best training I could have had because I learned how to draw in almost every medium, upside down and backwards and I also learned for the first time how to make dimensional product drawings that somebody could build models from.

When the war came along for serious, we all pretty much broke up and left. I went into a model shop business, which was primarily concerned with building prototypes of wartime products. We did work for people like Hallicrafters Radio. We also worked for the ballistic laboratory of Armour Research and we built all kinds of odd-ball military prototypes like the first radar instrument panels, and mockups of the dash cluster for the first jet fighter plane.

I got a lot of very valuable machine shop experience during those years in layout and actually learned to run all the machines in a

precision shop. This is where I first met the Hallicrafter people, and what probably led to my redesigning their line for the post-war years later on, although that was done for the Loewy Office.

As the war started to crank down, many of the offices, including Loewy, realized it was time to get back into business. Loewy sent a man named Franz Wagner to Chicago to reopen the Chicago Office and he began to collect around him designers, as well as packaging and graphics people. For instance, Roy Larson went to work for Loewy then, and stayed with him for the rest of his career. We started by doing model work for that office and in the process found out we were doing quite a lot of design, because it's better done in the model anyway. To make a long story short, I wound up going to work for Franz Wagner and the Loewy Chicago Office about 1945.

What can I say about that era? It was pretty terrific…so much was happening. There was so much design to be done. People coming back from the war were getting back into it, and everybody wanted to do something. It seemed like everywhere we turned we were designing something for the first time. A design shop in my memory, and my memory dates back to that era, was really a sweatshop. We were working on everything from full-sized locomotives and Greyhound buses, and by that I mean full-size working prototypes, to small traffic appliances; all kinds of machines, and all kinds of industrial graphic arts.

That was about the beginning in my memory of an organized approach to so-called Corporate Image. The office went to work on the International harvester account and we were not only doing over all their products, including tractors and harvesters, but repackaging the business, designing a new logotype for the business, and designing all their retail establishments. We did it all.

Another corporation, for instance, was Armour and Company, which consisted of hundreds of small meat packers all with different names and the project was to design one major brand and a symbol that you could put all of these brands under. I don't know how many years that program ran, but there were thousands of packages in that program.

The Greyhound bus we did turned out to be the Sceni-cruiser, which is on the roads today, for which Loewy got a lot of publicity. It was about then that we did the entire Hallicrafter line over. The business was growing and it was a helluva lot of fun. For instance, the Loewy Office, which had been doing Studebaker cars moved out to South Bend, which is very close to Chicago, so consequently, we had all the designers coming and going from South Bend and the Chicago area.

The New York Office was growing. They had accounts like Frigidaire, which I later worked on extensively, and the firm established an office in London, as well as Los Angeles, where we were doing he Lockheed Constellation. In spite of all the talk about design and all the publicity that was being given to it at the time, manufacturers still weren't really too sure what it was all about. I can remember very clearly traveling through Indiana and Ohio going up to Milwaukee, oh let's say covering almost a 500-mile radius around Chicago with Bob Tyler, one of the men who had returned to Loewy from the war. He had decided to stay in Chicago, and we literally pushed doorbells talking to manufacturers.

In some cases we could only get to see the purchasing agent about why they ought to be doing something about designing their products. One typical small manufacturer was McCray Refrigerator in Indiana. This was a commercial refrigerator, the kind we used to see in meat markets, that were always made out of wood. They decided they would do a design program and we set to work and designed the first open, self-service, all metal refrigerator line ever done to the best of my knowledge. This McCray case got to be kind of a classic of its kind, but really it was just typical of what was being done then. I suppose almost any job you touched was a classic of its kind because it was a first time it was being done and on an organized basis and with an intent for good design.

In those ten years from 1945 to 1955, the business was growing so fast that it was really a seven-day-a-week, twelve-hour-a-day job. It was also fun because the organization itself was growing. We were traveling almost everywhere. For instance, along about 1950, we designed a line of chinaware for a Chicago manufacturer and started out to try find manufacturers for this private line, and wound up all the way across the Atlantic in Bavaria. This was the first time I met Philip Rosenthal and I think maybe the first time he became aware of organized design, at least the kind we were doing in this country, and this meeting led to a relationship which has stretched out over 40 years.

It was during that time that the Loewy organization really began to get active because of Bill Snaith in retail store design, and I guess he first time I ever became seriously conscious of the retail selling as it relates to the design business.

In any event, the organization began to break itself down along fairly classic lines. Product design got to be kind of a group within itself, graphics and packaging which later got to be called Corporate Identity got to be a group in itself. Transportation was a separate piece of the pie. Retailing, exhibition and store work was also a

separate piece of the pie. I don't remember the exact numbers, but I think the Loewy organization at that time or right about then, had offices in five cities and more than three hundred people. It may not sound like a lot now, but it was a lot for the time. In Chicago, in 1950 to 1955, we ran an office somewhere in the neighborhood of 75 people.

I had slowly cranked my way up to running the product design group and eventually became Director of Design for the Chicago office. Some of my wildest experiences had to do with working with Loewy personally. They are experiences I really remember most vividly. That Frigidaire account, for instance, which was out in Dayton, Ohio, was where I began to work seriously with the New York people, like Claire Hodgeman and Carl Otto, and of course, Jay Doblin. He was on the board as I was, working side by side we produced a lot of design and shared some wonderful experiences. The Loewy office parties, for instance, should really go down in history as probably the wildest pieces of design ever done through that era.

One of the strongest things that sticks in my mind about that particular time in design (the early 50s) was the transition from rendering to model presentation. When I first got into the business, the presentation technique was really air-brush rendering and everybody knew how to do it so you could reach out and touch it. This got to be a serious limitation though and gradually the product design business began to translate itself into mockups and highly finished pre-models so people could really get a feeling for the product by walking around it.

I guess because of our work in railroads and big ships and the aircraft industry, but maybe most of all because of work with Studebaker in South Bend, a model shop got to be one of the most significant parts of the product design studio. I was doing a lot of traveling in Europe, because of my work at the Rosenthal Studios, and getting to know European designers on a one-to-one personal basis. This made a real difference in my thinking because of the philosophical attitudes they expressed.

About this time, the Museum of Modern Art, especially Edgar Kaufman and the entire new contemporary furniture look of Herman Miller through design by George Nelson and Charlie Eames, also began to have an effect on the public understanding and opinion. I got to know George very well on a personal basis, and it seems to me in reflection that never since has there been so much talk about good contemporary design or maybe even so much of it done, which reminds me of some feelings I have always carried around on that subject.

I guess it was through the old American Society of Industrial Designers that I really began to meet and know the men who were practicing the same art or working at the same job I was. Of course, I knew the local scene well because I began on the board with them, but I had only begun to know men in New York and other parts of he country because of that organization, and I found they were all pretty much of the same philosophy I was. We didn't take ourselves too seriously, but we certainly took what we were doing very seriously, and we were quite concerned about doing good design, but not on a public basis

When I first ran into the so-called Museum of Modern Art establishment, the thing that struck me about them was that they all took themselves very seriously, and really used design to demonstrate who they were. I suppose there is nothing really wrong with this, and it did achieve a lot of publicity in the right places for what I believed in, but probably because of working with the Loewy organization, design to me had always been something with a sense of humor. I don't mean the finished product, I mean the work and the doing of it.

Loewy himself had a fantastic sense of humor, and he liked to attract around himself and liked to travel with and work with people who had the same ability to laugh at himself, not the practical joke kind of thing, just the insights into what makes life pretty funny.. I guess what I am trying to say is that designers that take themselves seriously can sometimes be a drag, but on the other hand, designers who don't take design seriously are always a drag.

To me it has always been a business, or call it a profession, if you like, where you do it and don't talk about it, at least don't make excuses about it. I have always felt a distinct demarcation between the people who do it and the people who talk about it. I used to feel this way about the men who taught design, as a matter of fact, but latterly began to realize that their business was talking about it, and that the way they were talking about it was the only way you could teach it.

The reality of being a part of, or actually managing a large design establishment, is that you pretty much get to know everybody in the business. There have been, I guess, literally hundreds of designers that I have worked with personally, or who have worked for me.

Another part of this reality is that you eventually come to know that you're mostly supporting the business or you are mostly worrying about the operations, or you're mostly concerned with the dollars and cents of the matter and eventually you find that you are really

not doing design anymore of any consequence, which is all right because the younger guys come along and can do it better than you can anyway. But it seems to me that when you spend more time talking with the client abut the bill than you do about the product that you have designed for them, something is wrong.

Another reality, at least in the USA, is that most businesses are oriented toward the agency approach. I guess the advertising business actually established this reality. This business climate began to be pretty obvious in the early 1950s. About 1950 to 1955, I actually began to realize that you had to make a choice between being involved in product design and the development of product or an agency approach, because the agency business had to devote itself more and more to selling the product rather than developing or designing it.

I guess in the end this is what convinced me I should have a business of my own and there were two or three other men in the Loewy organization who I had worked with closely for a lot of years who felt the same way. We wanted to do product design and product development, and we simply felt that we couldn't do it in a large organization, which was more and more devoted to the fine points of selling goods. There wasn't any basic break in philosophy, we parted good friends, as a matter of fact, but that seemed to us at the time the only way to go about being in a business the way we wanted to be in it.

So in 1955, we set up our own shop and called it Latham, Tyler, Jensen; Bob Tyler, who is a licensed architect, had been the Business Manager of the Loewy Chicago office for all those years since the war, and George Jensen, who had been sort of lead product design man was a Dane, who came from the West Coast shortly after the war to join forces.

We searched around in an attempt to try to find out what we were trying to say, or let's say put a handle on what we were trying to say. One phrase or the one heading which seemed to fit what we were talking about was product planning. So we organized our own design shop, which consisted of one coffee pot and four guys, because another lead designer in the Chicago Office, Ted Prisland, who eventually became Director of Design at Litton, came along with us.

A lot of the work we had been doing up to that time, especially with people like United Airlines, where we were working on the entire DC6, DC7, and then the DC8 Series, really was product planning. So we attempted to go into that business as designers. It was a long hard road and one of the things we learned early on was that it

was not the most attractive practice financially, probably because industry was just beginning to understand the so-called corporate image maker, and already were tuned in to the agency approach rather than the one–to-one development approach.

Anyway, we did it and stuck with it, and we have lived long enough to see the term product planning come into common usage in the design world. One point I should make here is that we didn't invent that term. It had been invented as a job title by General Electric, and the Ford Motor Company, I don't know who first, to try to describe the activities of a man, who was not a designer as a matter of fact.

As I have said, we learned very quickly that we had selected a rather obscure and little known specialty side of business, and that most of the established consumers of industrial design were tuned into the other side. But we also learned that if you commit yourself to one single-minded approach you very rapidly start to attract to you or around you those other professionals who believe and want to work the way you do, and in the not too long run, you begin to meet and find that you are attractive to clients who actually want the kind of work that you want to do. In other words, if you really mean it, you will make it, and people find out pretty rapidly whether you really mean it or not. We also found out some other very uncomfortable things.

For instance, if you want to be in product planning, you have got to commit yourself to real engineering, you can't just deal with the aesthetics of the matter, you had to be prepared to make things work. Another aspect of it is that you also had to be prepared to deal with numbers and I mean costs, pro-forma balance sheets, and all the other things that go to plotting return on investment curves because planning is essentially a prediction of the future.

Now by that I don't mean predicting the future, because few people can successfully predict the future, but I mean projecting the art of he possible and predicting what could be done if everybody who knew how to do it set up one task with an objective. This kind of an approach in 1955 very effectively shut the door on the marketing, merchandising, selling relationships that we had and we had to set out to find and open other doors which lead into the planning of product development, engineering development areas.

This wasn't easy to do, and I'm not implying that we were the first designers to do it. I think other designers, notably Henry Dreyfuss, had been trying and successfully working this way for most of their careers. It also didn't lead us away from styling per se because we had developed some kind of reputation, based I'd guess on skill in

certain specific areas. For instance, our new firm immediately went to work with General Electric—Art Becvar and his Major Appliance Group in Louisville. Why? Well I guess because we had spent so much time in the Frigidaire plant in Dayton.

We, of course, went to work for other parts of the General Electric Company one of them being the Consumer Electronics Group, where for years we worked on the classic radio, television, phonograph product lines, which are or have a lot to do with the styling exercise. But even here, we managed to get ourselves retained as planners, as well as designers and accounted for some leading products. The portable television set, per se was one of the products that came from this relationship, and the so-called swing-out speaker and swing-down turntable which set a pattern for small phonographs all through the 1960s came out of this.

We also got ourselves into a lot of other interesting areas such as the fire equipment business for Ansul Chemical, who had been for a long time client of Loewy, and wound up being responsible for the complete design, engineering and execution of prototypes for products as big as full-size fire trucks.

One of the men who helped us along this path was Don McFarland, who joined us about 1960. He is n engineer and had been head of advanced engineering as well as design at General Electric in the small appliance division. He set up shop for LTJ, on the west coast and and in the intervening years came to do quite a lot of development of small electrical appliances and small electrical devices.

We found that we were approached to do styling less and less, and more and more were approached to execute a product or a product plan which the company somehow couldn’t make happen internally. We established an office in Denmark early on that was run by Jakob Jensen, who had apprenticed in Chicago, for European work which had resulted from all the years I spent working there. Although strangely enough, we designed all of Rosenthal’s products in Chicago.

The Rosenthal experience is worth a footnote. Philip Rosenthal, over a long period of about 15 years, very gradually established a design group. These are people from the outside. These people are from all countries, for instance, from Denmark, Bjørn Wiinblad but I’d guess every country is represented that is active in design. Once a year that group gets together in some remote part of the world, primarily the idea being a place they would never go to normally, to meet, discuss philosophy, see the scenery, and in general mix it up and I might say that this has been a strong additive in my

philosophy of design. This business of mixing it up with other professionals and exchanging points of view and having to defend or change a point of view of your own, I think is very important.

For instance, in about 1965, I became President of the International Councils of Societies of Industrial Designers. This, of course, is not a membership of individuals, but a membership of the Societies as such. Its headquarters were in Brussels. It represents about 40 countries and somewhere in the neighborhood of 27,000 designers all over the world. So for the past, I'd guess almost ten years, I have been traveling around he world lecturing in places like Australia, as a guest of the government, meeting with designers in Yugoslavia and Finland, Denmark or Germany, spending time with people like Soloviev, who ha been Commissar of Design for Russia. Finding out how they all think and what they do has had a very serious and direct effect on my own ideas and attitudes about who we are in the United States and what we do. If anything, it has made me realize that we don't spend enough time here in our own country actually thinking about who we are and what we do.

What has become a prominent question in my mind is, "is all this design necessary or literally are all these things necessary?" I've been told that the design staff at General Motors as of 1969 is 1,700 men. I also know as a matter of personal experience that in 1969 let's say the four major television companies will completely restyle their product lines, in effect duplicating each others product, each with its own version of the other company's early American phonograph console all with a good copy of the other competitors version of a portable 11-inch television set. The question that occurs to me is are all of these exact copies of each other necessary, and finally, the question is, "is an Early American television set necessary?'

So as I once found myself turning away from design as a professional skill to be used to plan products for people, I suppose now I find myself turning away from the American industrial idea of more profits through the sale of more things to people, I don't know what I'm turning toward. I found myself recently in a lecture at the University of Montreal saying that I believed that industrialization was in its infancy and that the concentration by industry on the production of more and more things was a manifestation of this infancy, that it is already becoming obvious that there isn't room in our society for all of these things.

It's already becoming obvious by air pollution. It's already becoming obvious by the cost of maintaining an servicing and keeping up all of the so-called modern comforts that come to us through traffic and major appliances. Where do we go? I don't know. I do know that in

the planning business we are concerned with the so-called Open Loop System, and its Interfaces. What do these titles describe? The physical character of systems.

They mean that our present industrial culture, which concentrates on the closed loop system, creates many interfaces. In layman's language the Airline system operated by Unite Airlines is a closed loop. It only takes into account the fact that you get on an airplane, fly somewhere, and get off. At the airport a bus system which operates between the downtown area and the airport is itself also a closed loop. It only takes into account that you want to proceed to and from the downtown area to the airport. Neither of these systems are open ended and they cannot interlock with one another. In other words, the airporter that you got into downtown has arrived at the airport, but cannot be lifted into the body or fuselage of an airplane, you have to change seats. It's the change itself which is the interface and so often in our present society the man who has found himself transported at 600 mph from New York to Chicago; after two martinis and a steak finds himself standing in the rain without an umbrella waiting for an airporter that never arrives.

In terms of "less things" and using the designer in another kind of an industrial society, I refer to something obvious, The Bell Telephone System. This is a system where the customer only owns the handset and he is confronted with a telephone handset that is very small, very durable, and unobtrusive but will transmit or receive a conversation almost anywhere in the world whenever he wants it. This is a description of a system which the individual does not have to account for, support or maintain or own. If LTJ had not pursued the planning philosophy I probably wouldn't be asking myself these kind of questions, but rather concentrating on the next client and all the next things that we should design whether the world needs them or not.

I mentioned that Don McFarland joined our firm and initially opened a shop for LTJ, but what I didn't mention is that Don McFarland owns that shop he opened for LTJ. The same is true of Jakob Jensen in Denmark. Having pursued this kind of professional relationship, we found ourselves to be an organization of working seniors, al of whom are responsible for doing their own thing with their own clients.

Over the years, I have collected the thoughts of other men, and it occurs to me that some of their thoughts might be of interest. These men actually had something to say about design at a particular time and place that I heard and added to my comparative THINK TANK; that has modified my reasoning of and about the design act.

The first voice is that of Dr. Bronofsky, speaking at an Aspen Design Conference in the 1960s.

“I thought this conference a landmark. The reason is quite simple. It is a landmark because it is called, ’Design and Human Values.’ We may take for granted that no one in this conference, whether a designer as you are, or a scientist as Benson or Herb Kotch, and I, is in any doubt that the first half of this century established a tremendously important new outlook on design, and design as function.

Nothing said in this conference is intended to belittle that great achievement. What we’ve learned at the turn of the century is not to deny it but to ask what more is needed and how to expand the concept of functional design, how to go from the inhuman values which surround them.

Now this transition has come at just the time when science, in which I include technology and all the practical things that science helps to do, has become patent as the main organ of change in our society. Science is often pictured as an inhuman activity. It is my business this morning to say once again that exactly this transition from the function to the human value is what every scientists engaged in now as you are.

Throughout the conference, I have often had the sense of people engaged in practical design torn between two loyalties. The loyalty of the pure artist working in the end for himself by his own standards, and the loyalty of a man who realizes that his design reaches at least some hundreds of thousands of people to all of whom he has a responsibility. Now this dilemma of loyalties has been created by science as Latham said over and over again, we live with a machine, we live with technical achievement, we live with a scientific discovery.

There would be no design problem if there were not machine production with the enormous markets to which it caters. When I heard discussions in which people said that they weren’t very creative, but they always went on to say, ‘mediocrity has a place, that the sort of thing we do has a place.’ Now you all know that isn’t at all true. Any good system of ethics knows that the act of appreciation is a separate act of creation.

There is one final value generated by science, which I want to add to this trilogy of change, creation, education, and that’s the real cement, I believe, of this civilization. Not as an American, but as a 20th century civilization, the sense that we have given to all human

beings that they have a right to fulfill themselves because they have the capacity to fulfill themselves. Culture is the sense of every person that they are participating in the life of their times, and their times can go back, but as Roger said, ‘If you think of tradition as part of your culture, then you must remember that tradition is your choice of the past, your incession of the past into your present.’

Now the designer’s problem in this sense is really very simple, and that is that it is often easier to create the illusion of fulfillment than to offer people a real fulfillment. It is really easier to write hard comics than great literature. It’s really easier to write bad books than good books. For one thing, it takes less time and this is what in one of our seminars we expressed by saying that the designer has to choose between handing out something as a drug or as a food. Now the difference between a drug and a food, a drug creates the illusion of well bein and a food really adds to your well being. A bad design creates the illusion of satisfaction usually at the expense of your neighbor’s satisfaction, picking yourself up by making yourself seem not good but just better. About this I would only say one thing, that I am very sorry for drug addicts, but what I should really hate to be is a drug peddler.”

Speaking some very profound thoughts about what we do to and for people; please note I’ve taken the thoughts out of context of the general speech.

Now this is Philip Rosenthal being interviewed on the radio in Chicago.

“Well, it’s a thing that I’ve invented really to explain what we are doing. For instance, a publisher is a man who finds authors, but a good publishing house tries to select the best authors and then publish them and that’s really what we’ve been doing.

We’ve been saying to ourselves now what is wrong with china and glass, this happened about ten years ago. We said there are two things wrong with them. We are trying to imitate the past and that is never right, you can’t imitate another person, you can’t imitate another age, it’s always rather the result of insecurity when people do that. It is a lot of insecurity when somebody tries to be like somebody else, or when a German tries to be like an Englishman, or an American like a Paris Boulevardier. Imitation is always imitation, and it leads nowhere; the great stars of the past for the people who made it, and for the people that lived it, were great stars because they were themselves.

So this was one of the basis of our thinking and the other one was, if we are going to do that then we must get away from factory

craftsmen and hacks making china, vases or glasses or china plates, and we have to get the best artists of our time to tackle this problem, and in doing this and in winning over such wonderful, contemporary artists like Bjorn Wiinblad of Denmark or Tapio Wirkkala, whom we call our Finnish Bear, or Emilio Pucci, who designs clothes as you undoubtedly know, Raymond Loewy in America, or Dick Latham and many others. When we got these people to express themselves and their time in china and glass, we felt that we were being publishers. We are nothing. We are just the people that join up the artistic ability of our time with the consumer who wants something authentic, and we are like the publishing house that is why we express it like that."

Interviewer: Now that you are the first in sales of china, what new worlds do you plan to conquer?

"Well, you know, being first in the sales of china isn't really a goal in itself. The goal of making good and better china and together with our artistic group enriching the field of art in china and of selling it is really a goal in itself. But getting a great artist to work in china and glass and this started very slowly and a lot of people said, well, give the lady what she wants. Our motto was don't give the lady what she wants, but give the lady something good and the start was slow, but by now about 75 percent of what we make is made by these great artists, as we think of them."

Interviewer: How long are you going to be in this country?

" I'm going to be in Chicago for another half hour. As a matter of fact, the whole of the Studio Line, which is the idea of great artists in china started in Chicago, because when I was a very young man and doing the advertising business, I met another young man here in Chicago called Dick Latham, who is now a famous designer and has been in Fortune and designs for General Electric. He really was the first man who inspired me to try for something new. He was th first man that made me feel that it was rather poor that things like china and glass should just be imitations and usually hollow imitations of the past, and that we are living in a wonderful age, and a very real age, and an age of great creativity, and he was the forst chap that inspired me to sort of make the best of our own image. So our adventure somehow started in Chicago. "

I'm glad to hear that from Philip Rosenthal of the great china and crystal industry, Bill Bixby.

As I said somewhere previously in this monologue, I've always felt that the designer should not take himself seriously. He should just take design seriously. This is a collection of quotations put together

really by Jay Doblin. It was designed for an Aspen Conference, and the tape itself was made by myself and by my wife, Mary Ann, who by the way studied design, became a model maker, and knows the profession as well as I do.

From Bertrand Russell—"To the modern man his physical environment is merely a new material. An opportunity for manipulation. It may be that God made the world, but that is no reason why we should not make it over."

From the address by Sir Herbert Reed at the ICSID Venice Conference, 1961—"We have perfected these all-powerful tools that machine and could we but use it with instinctive wisdom the results might exceed in beauty and splendor any monument of the past. What is lacking in our sense or sensibility that makes such an instinctive application impossible? The chain of tradition, the sensibility that coursed along the nerves and veins of countless generations of craftsmen must be made to flow again in the veins of our industrial designers. This is the essential remedy for our generation."

From C.P. Snow, from his "The Two Cultures"—"For of course, one truth is straightforward, industrialization is the only hope of the poor. It's all very well for us sitting pretty to think that material standards of living don't matter all that much. It's all very well for one as a personal choice to reject industrialization, do a modern Walden if you like, and if you go without food, see most of your children die in infancy, despise the comforts of literacy, accept 20 years off your life, then I respect you for the strength of your aesthetic revulsion."

State of the industry report to the Institute of Appliance Manufacturers by President Robert H. Norris—"In today's market there are 105 different electrical appliances needed in the home."

From Don Wallance's "Shaping America's Products"—"Everyday life in America is carried on with a complement of equipment whose quantity, variety, and technical complexity seems to be growing at an accelerating pace. More significant perhaps than this number, variety and novelty of things available for everyday use is the scale on which these things are made and distributed to nearly all levels of the population. The most significant contribution to the growth of democracy made by 20th century America has not been in politics of government but in the widespread distribution of material goods. The Sears Roebuck catalogue might be called the Magna Carta of our civilization and some cynics might add, 'and its Bible, too."

From "The Man in the Middle" by C, Wright Mills—"There are, I suppose, three kinds of obsolescence. One, technological as when

something wears out or something better is produced. Two, artificial, as when something is deliberately designed so that it will wear out and three, status obsolescence, when fashions are created in such a way that consumption brings a disgrace or prestige in accordance with last year''s or this year's model, and along the old struggle for exisytence ther is the added panic for status."

Nikita Krushchev addressing the Communist Party Central Committee, December, 1963---"For the first time in 46 years of Soviet power, the Party and the State can do something about satisfying requirements of the people. Moreover, new products must show better design because it is no longer possible to tolerate Russian consumer goods that look less smart than foreign articles."

From "Creed or Chaos" by Dorothy L. Sayers---"A society in which consumption has to be artificially stimulated in order to keep production going is a society founded on trash and waste and such a society is a house built upon sand."

From Walter Gropius speech in acceptance of Kaufman Award—" You may wonder how the ideas of the Bauhaus can make their way today in the period, which far from being dominated by the artist, does not even reflect the desires of the manufacturer nor for that matter the public demand. It seems completely futile to inject quality into buildings which are created only for their short entertainment value before they are discarded or exchanged for another set of equally ephemeral items. Can we extract ourselves from this merry-go-round and supply the young generation with resilience, the independent judgement, and the moral stamina which would enable them to rise above the cloud of fake values which is smothering us?"

Advertisements from Industrial Design Magazine, September, 1962---"Jewel it to sell it! Glitter makes the glamour and glamour makes the sale! Whether it's for the radio or a razor or any other product, we can supply quickly and in quantity jewels and jewel settings you want for that important final touch of elegance!--Bryer manufacturing Company.

From the "Architecture of Country Houses" by Andrew Jackson Downy—"The truth is undeniable that the beautiful is intrinsically something quite different from the useful. It appeals to a wholly different part f our nature. It requires another portion of our being to receive and enjoy it. A head of grain, one of the most useful of vegetable forms, is not so beautiful as a rose. An ass, one of the most useful of animals is not so beautiful as a gazelle. A cotton mill,

one of the useful of modern structures, is not so beautiful as the temple of Vesta."

From AMA, "Blueprint for an Effective Marketing Program"---"All sound planning starts with a search. This process begins with marketing research, analysis and forecasting to determine who and where the customer is, what he needs, wants, and will buy; where and how he will buy and how much he will pay."

From "Innovation in Marketing" by Theodore Levitt—"Large and small companies hire marketing specialists to find out what the customer wants. The trouble is not that the customer isn't researched enough or that the men at the corporate top aren't smart enough to use the information wisely and creatively, it is rather that all too often neither the researchers nor the corporate bosses really know what it is that they are trying to do."

From "Problems of design" by George Nelson—"The most fundamental means of the designer I would call "integrity" and by this I do not mean the professional code of ethis that urges you not to steal jobs from competitors or the common sense that keeps you from picking your client's pockets. By integrity I mean the ability of a man to decide what is good for him and what is bad. It is an intensely personal matter and it cannot be rationalized intellectually. It rarely involves big decisions, but in shaping a multitude of small ones, it gives direction to the designer as a person and as an artist. In the momentous events whose rate of acceleration is increasing from one day to the next, we can get a picture of an old world in the process of destroying itself and a new one being created; whether the actual birth will be accelerated by loud noises resembling those made by the atom bomb is in an evolutionary sense irrelevant. What is relevant is that all the atomic bombs now in existence can do nothing more than hasten the immense social and moral transformations now taking place all over the world. The choice open to the designer is the part he wishes to play in bringing about what he personally considers a desirable transformation."

POSTSCRIPT, 1990

It isn't often one has the opportunity to be confronted with one's own ideas and opinions which had been documented 20 years previously at the request of your professional society, in this situation, the IDSA. In re-reading a transcript of my own voice, put on tape in 1969, I found my descriptions of my own origins to be as exact and fair as is humanly possible when trying to remember a professional career of 25 years.

More interesting. I discovered I had expressed attitudes about design and professional behavior per se and now had the opportunity of another 20 years of professional experience to compare with those attitudes and opinions. How did I make out? Did my moralizing of that time stand me in good stead?

I believe so. I find I have not changed n y opinion of the fundamental rights and wrongs attendant to the practice of my profession and the succeeding years seem to have demonstrated the inherent problems of “marketing too many” low quality products to ordinary citizens; “ junk food” has become a part of the American language in that time period, and the excesses of high pressure marketing and low quality products and service have come to be understood at every walk of life in the USA today.

On the other hand, the attitudes and beliefs I formed so early in my career, and shared with my business partners seem to have proven successful over time in human friendships as well as shared professional success. With one exception (George Jensen died) all my former partners are still my good friends, and today I have business partnerships or management positions with five individual companies that have been clients for all those 40 years. The rewarding thing is that individuals who founded those companies are also friends, as well as formal business associates today.

Most importantly, I still believe in “GOOD DESIGN” and find even at the theoretical age of retirement, I am called on, and able to ‘DO IT’, in terms of real products, from time to time.

P.P.S.

Mankind is more than a “tool-making animal,” to borrow a scientific phrase. The human animal is able to learn and “think” at a level that transcends the apes and among the benefits of that higher order of brain-use are perceptions and sensations we call BEAUTY and LOVE. These simple words are key indicators of an attempt by human beings to describe an entire order of “feeling” or sensations that occur entirely “inside” the brain, that actually have an effect on our central nervous system.

This human ability to perceive visual, audible or tangible sensations as good, bad, erotic, or revolting feelings, ad infinitum has brought about an entire social and cultural need and demand for Beauty and pleasant, even erotic associations in the character of our tool-making, architecture, or artifacts from clothing to music to jewelry.

Presto, a social need for designers, architects, people who can write literature, from music to poetry, or paint and sculpt, pictures or statuary, because a specific audience, “mankind” needs and wants these things to have a dimension called “beauty” as well as utility.