

REQUIEM FOR DESIGN

Jean Baptiste Auvray
with
Thierry de Beaumont

September 2019

We often realize how much we loved certain people, only after they disappear. This is undoubtedly what happens with design, filled with nostalgia; a kind of melancholy that makes it last in our minds. «It is still here, amongst us» think those who were part of it as well as those who admired this blurry and audacious discipline. RIP? Certainly not. This requiem is mainly a renaissance announcement, a regenerative treatment of living stem cells. «Desseigner»; drawing with a project, a method used since the 17th century to describe the topiary art of the French gardens that was passed on to the English, then in the 60's was carried to the United States by the movements of consumption that it embellished because it corresponds to the human need of surrounding oneself with objects.

These artifacts faithfully reflect the human soul, its desires as well as its destructive impulses towards its congeners or its environment. We are the only ones responsible for this eclipse. Perhaps we have reached the age of reason, let us hope that we have become responsible and respectful, that we will no longer ruin any material, not even plastic. That we will listen to the elderly and rehabilitate their know-how, that we will let the men create - not robots, and that objects will love us as much as we love them. Yes, perhaps... Otherwise this requiem manifesto will not commemorate the design but our species instead.

THIERRY DE BEAUMONT IS AN AUTHOR, A JOURNALIST AND A TEACHER- RESEARCHER

at Camondo school in Paris
after teaching at the ESAD in
Reims from 1996 to 2001.

Co-author of «Dictionnaire du design et des arts appliqués» (*Dictionary of Design and Applied Arts*) in 1996 and of Anne Bony's «Années 90» (*The 90's*), he also published numerous monographs including «Made in Daney» (2008), «Michi Suzuki, Perle d'art» (*Pearl of Art*) (2009), «Philippe Baldwin and Monica Guggisberg, l'Arche de verre» (*The Glass arch*) (2011), «Shark» (2014), and «Quantum of Art» (2017) with the visual artist Ann Grim. Author of «Vegetal design» and «Culinaire design» at Editions Alternatives, he is also a curator, artistic director and a lecturer.

Design is a discipline. This is the first thing I learned when I started my studies as a designer. At that time, we were taught that those who tend to blend their style with the job did not understand anything. However, if there is a contrast between these two definitions then we - as designers - have lost. Design is, and will remain throughout history, the style of an era; the apotheosis of industry as a possibility for economic and social development.

The industry doesn't make us dream anymore;

it has become synonymous with planned obsolescence, relocation or carbon footprint. On the other side of the spectrum, design thinking, or the appropriation of design's principles of reasoning, are applied to sell travels or banking products.

The dream is long gone.

Of course the word will remain.

The designer who is placed somewhere between the marketing brief and the technical design department, integrating big companies' departments, will continue his mission - just like a link in a chain, even after seeing his role melt away. In the automotive industry for example, the designer used to be involved in the strategic thinking of products. Today however, he finds himself drawing over the details of the general forms dictated by customer service. I have never been fond of the recurring debate between marketing and design because I have always considered that a good project was the fruit of the intelligence of both. But, if there ever was a power game between these two visions, then design is the loser.

It was a bad start. A not-so-new profession with non-existent administration, defined by a poorly translated anglicism, and was granted an important place in the industry of the «Trente Glorieuses» (the «thirty glorious» years) before it got «crafted» by skilled and worldly gallery owners.

But the fact that a word becomes a passing trend, hides a deeper evil. Perhaps we should look for those who have overused this word. We turn on our television and come across one of the numerous «decoration» shows, in which every improvised handyman that repaints a palette, is a designer. Let's book a furnished vacation rental, in Tokyo or in Auvergne, made by the same giant of the Swedish design.

All that is "trendy", will one day end up out of style.

Did Modernism consider itself a style, the day before yesterday? No thought or structure can be thought of as contemporary forever when it can only reflect the aesthetic and economic context of its era. The mistake was human and predictable. Design will remain in the collective unconscious as the style of an era - a style worn and glorified by some big names.

Many of us are trying to redefine it today. New «ensemblers»? Too restrictive in my opinion. Space design, interior architecture? The press votes for this approach after having quickly removed all the «design» sections from its summaries.

The constraints have changed. The globalized industry that has grown on the rationalization of manufacturing products in quantity, must make room for the local and independent projects. Of course, it will not disappear, but the economic leverage is moving away from quantity to quality - or qualities, because there are several ones; less environmental footprint, better traceability, more intimacy, uniqueness, customization and - dare I say- honesty. Machine mastery is no longer the only way. Craftsmanship is necessary now more than ever. Contemporary craftsmen who can handle the material as well as the technology. If the term that defines it is gone, our profession lives on and reinvents itself.

Today is the start of an exciting adventure.

However, the recent inveighing on fine arts is not the new Eldorado. The designer will continue to draw in order to create. And after decades of the stigmatization of manual labor, he is happy to see the current attempt in re-enchanting the crafts. But it would be a mistake to consider it the only outlet for creating the objects that surround us. Everything is allowed and possible when you rebuild on a field of ruins. Creativity, sensitivity and everything that is human must express itself freely and respectfully.

Meanwhile technology entered our lives and in just a few years, led its silent revolution. Digital and handmade: these two creative worlds are not in conflict, they complement each other. The digital must be reconciled with the living, the emotional, the «real life». Its raw material comes to life through artists who transform it and play with it. The doors of perception are now open.

Let's go towards the realistic virtuality.

Today, this job - my job, is at an interesting stage of its evolution. After discussing with many colleagues, I was able to point out that there are as many definitions for my job as there are people who practice it. It became clear that naming it was risky.

Let's go back to basics. We practice applied arts. We are artists who sign their creations - their «applied» creations. Applied to a given context, to the request and wish of a customer. Applied to the environmental, economic and social context of our ever-evolving era. Like a reconnection to the source, giving us a new perspective to better face the new challenges that lie ahead.

We are applied artists.

JEAN BAPTISTE AUVRAY IS AN APPLIED ARTIST TO OBJECT AND ARCHITECTURE.

He is also in charge of workshops at HEAD in Geneva and a design professor at Camondo School, Les Arts Décoratifs - Paris, since September 2011.

He spent his childhood in his upholsterer father's workshop, playing with materials: fabric, wood, leather and thread. These years of experimentation gave him a taste for creation and the desire to turn to applied arts.

In 2000, he obtained a DNSEP from ESAD in Reims with an honorable mention.

Then he collaborates with Patrick Join's agency, in the fields of interior furniture and urban furniture, and interior architecture too.

In 2010, Jean-Baptiste Auvray started the Auvray Agency in Paris and Annecy with the aim of combining the most demanding know-how with a sensitive design based on the relationship with the material and the Human. One of his main clients is Van Cleef & Arpels, for whom he designs and develops exhibitions all around the world.

In 2018, he signs the conception and design of the "Discovery & Rediscovery" pavilion in Venice, for Cartier and 20 other prestigious institutions as part of the «Homo Faber» exhibition.

**THE SUMMER
OF 2019
IS AN EXCITING
AND CHALLENGING
PERIOD FOR JEAN
BAPTISTE AUVRAY.
SIMULTANEOUSLY
WITH THE «HERITAGES»
EXHIBITION AND
TO CELEBRATE THE
LAUNCH OF ITS NEW
PARISIAN SITE IN A
PAVILION FROM THE
18TH CENTURY,
THE AUVRAY
AGENCY BECOMES
«FAIRE».**

