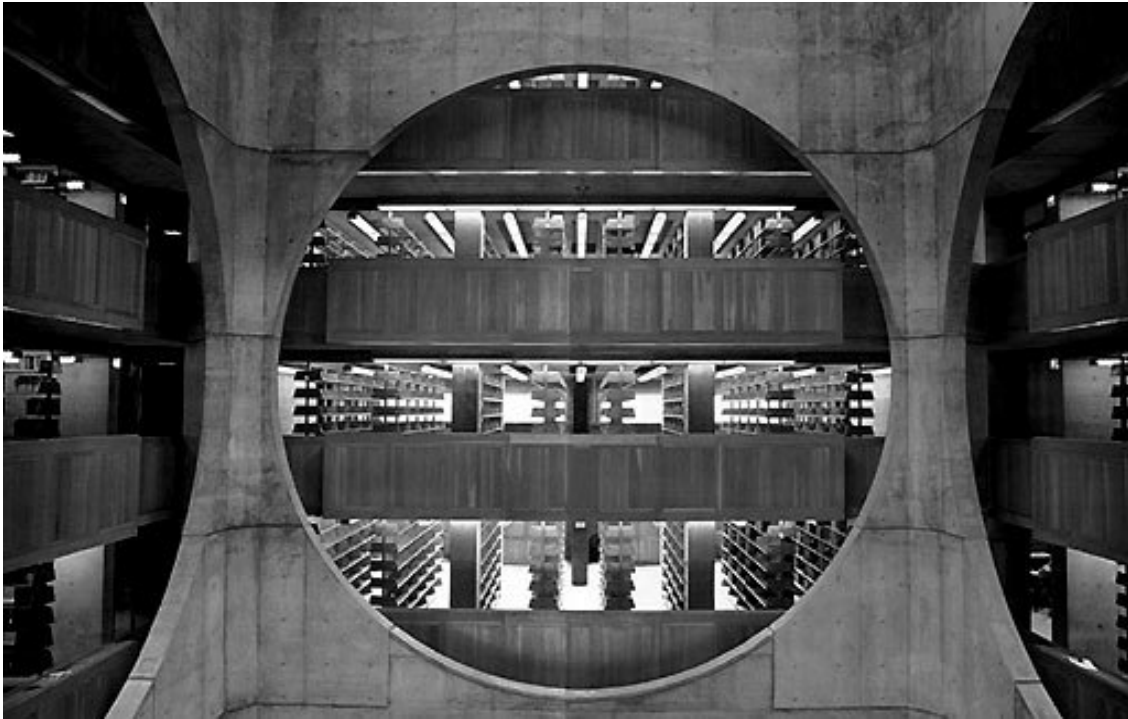


CLASSROOM-PROVEN LESSON PLANS

Architecture

AND THE RULES OF GOOD DESIGN

by Tom Durwood



Louis Kahn's Exeter Library (1971)

To the Teacher

My cadets love architecture and design. They will follow that interest into writing three or four essays per semester on related topics.

Here are a dozen short assignments introducing the students to the idea of design, along with the scaffolding for a four-week class debate (and research paper) on architects. Some students will know a lot more than others about this, and the topic expands into all kinds of areas. Several of the teaching seminars I have attended mention design as one of the critical skills our students need to understand for their careers.

These exercises can start as in-class discussions, then extend to in-class writing, and then extend again as homework. If you ask them to go home and look at how their bathroom is designed, you are accomplishing something. The real paydirt (for me) is assigning them each to do a report on a specific architect or designer. This is a massive, month-long commitment, but it has enlivened my English 102 class for four semesters.

Design is everywhere. Students notice the primacy of design immediately in any Apple product, and they quickly extend it to cars and video games. The trick is to capture their interest and let them express it in well-structured essays.

-- Tom Durwood



Radio/phonograph (1959) by Dieter Rams

A BRIEF EXERCISE IN

Observation

NOW THAT YOU THINK ABOUT IT

What is your favorite building?

Why do you like it so much?

What is the worst building you have ever seen or been in? Why was it so bad?

What is your theory of architecture? What four elements make a structure good or bad?

YOU LIKE PARTS OF THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT

My Favorite Places

THIS IS DUE IN TWENTY MINUTES

Now that I think about it, there are several places I have been in my life that really stand out – places where I feel comfortable, or even inspired, places I like spending time. Here is my description of those spaces and **the reasons why I like them:**

MY FAVORITE PRIVATE SPACE (home, friend's house, etc.)

MY FAVORITE PUBLIC SPACE (park, government building, church, airport, subway station, sports stadium, etc.)

MY FAVORITE COMMERCIAL SPACE (store, restaurant, mall, theater)

Possible elements contributing to your liking this space:

- Light
- Proportions
- Design or floor plan
- Colors
- Materials

- Sound
- Nature
- A structure's relation to its context
- Symmetry
- Spirituality or philosophy
- Who built it
- That the space fits its function
- Simplicity
- Geometry, volume
- Class, social theory

RE-THINKING PUBLIC SPACES

Maya Lin's Monument

In 1972, Maya Lin won a contest to build a memorial for the Vietnam War. Her design was controversial and, in the end, a great success – one of the most-visited, most-imitated monuments of modern times.

Here is part of her philosophy:

I felt that as a culture we were extremely youth-oriented and not willing or able to accept death or dying as a part of life. The rites of mourning, which in more primitive and older cultures were very much a part of life, have been suppressed in our modern times. In the design of the memorial, a fundamental goal was to be honest about death, since we must accept that loss in order to begin to overcome it. The pain of the loss will always be there, it will always hurt, but we must acknowledge the death in order to move on.

ASSIGNMENT

Please visit these sites and answer two questions:

<http://www.mayalin.com/>

<https://www.britannica.com/topic/The-Motherland-Calls>

<https://weburbanist.com/2011/07/29/postmodern-monuments-20-worthy-architectural-memorials/>

- 1) Compare Maya Lin's Vietnam memorial to the Stlasingrad memorial statue? Which is "better"? Why?
- 2) Of all those listed, which is your favorite monument? Why? What is the purpose of a monument – for whom is it designed?

THE SOMEWHAT TRAGIC STORY OF VICTOR GRUEN

Shopping Centers: Good or Evil?

Assignment: please read the following article on Victor Gruen, who invented the shopping mall. Answer these questions:

1. Should Victor Gruen ever have invented the shopping mall?
2. What has changed – why are these now failing?
3. What is your "third place"?
4. Go to www.deadmalls.com and recommend three ways to reinvent shopping malls.

The Father of the American Shopping Mall Hated What He Created

Anne Quito July 17, 2015

The shopping mall is dead. The shopping mall is alive. The shopping mall is reborn.

As sociologists and urban planners debate the relevance of these classic American brick-and-mortar shopping spaces in the era of e-commerce and Amazon Prime Day, a group of architecture enthusiasts will gather this weekend to celebrate the birthday of Victor Gruen, the man known as “father of the modern shopping mall,” and the first annual Gruen Day.

In the invitation to the event, on July 18 at the Bay Area Fair Center mall in a suburb of San Francisco, California, organizers Tim Hwang and Avery Trufelman of the Bay Area Infrastructure Observatory challenged the notion that malls were a bad idea from the beginning. “While it’s easy nowadays to dismiss enclosed shopping centers as boring eyesores, Gruen Day celebrates the important role they were originally intended to play in civic life,” they explain.

Hwang and Trufelman point to Gruen’s role in creating what sociologists call a “third place” — safe, neutral public spaces outside of one’s home or work that, in Gruen’s words, “provide the needed place and opportunity for participation in modern community life that the ancient Greek Agora, the Medieval Market Place and our own Town Squares provided in the past.”

HIGH HOPES

While online shopping has usurped the primacy of the suburban shopping center as the venue for commerce in the US, in Asia and many pockets around the globe, these climate-controlled megastructures still remain thriving hubs for commercial and cultural activities.

Today shopping malls are seen as culprits in the rise of American car culture and the decline of walkable downtowns. But the inspiration for the shopping mall is in fact the town center of Vienna. Gruen, an Austrian Jewish architect born Viktor David Grünbaum, immigrated to New York with \$8 in his pocket, and when he designed the first enclosed shopping centers in the mid-1950s, he envisioned a communal gathering like the one he knew back home, with a lively mix of commerce, art and entertainment.

Gruen's grand shopping complex, the 800,000-square-foot (74,000-square-meter) Southdale Center in Edina, Minnesota, had fountains, an aviary, and even a large art installation by the prominent mid-century artist Harry Bertoia. A socialist who hated cars ("Their threat to human life and health is just as great as the exposed sewer," he once said), Gruen designed the development with long promenades and parking lots purposely built far away to encourage walking. In drawing Southdale's original plan, Gruen imagined a medical center, schools and residences, not just a parade of glitzy stores.

When it opened in 1956, Southdale was seen as the most exciting idea in urban development.

AN IDEA BACKFIRES

Since then over 1,200 shopping centers have sprouted up across the US. But Gruen never imagined that these mega-structures he had envisioned as town plazas would contribute to the suburban sprawl that he despised, and to the demise of the urban high street.

"I am often called the father of the shopping mall," he once said. "I would like to take this opportunity to disclaim paternity once and for all. I refuse to pay alimony to those bastard developments. They destroyed our cities."

In a movement that begun in 2000, hundreds of "dead malls" or "graveyard shopping centers" (pdf) across the US have been transformed into mixed-use neighborhood spaces, much as Gruen had hoped.

In Hickory Hollow Mall in Nashville, Tennessee, the former site of a JC Penney is now a library and the Dillard's department store is now a satellite campus for Nashville State Community College. Nearby, the Vanderbilt University Medical Center took over the entire second level of the 100 Oaks Mall. The city hall in Voorhees, New Jersey relocated to the sleepy Echelon Mall and in Arizona, a once vacant Fiesta Mall Macy's, is being converted to office spaces.

INFORMATION SHEET: BASICS OF INDUSTRIAL DESIGN

Jonathan Ive, Dieter Ram and Industrial Design

At this moment, highly intelligent men and women are meeting in conference rooms around the country scrutinizing the slope of the handle on

a detergent container. They know that if a consumer sees and feels that the handle fits her hand well, and that the detergent bottle as a whole reflects the proper values of cleanliness, modesty, and economy then she will buy it. If not, she will buy *Tide*.

Industrial design is all around us. We use it a hundred times every day.

Why does Nike look so different from Adidas? Starbucks from Dunkin' Donuts? What different philosophies do the lines of a Mustang and a Volvo communicate to us? At first, products were designed by instinct, or practicality. Aesthetics (how pretty a thing looks) have changed as materials and manufacturing methods have changed.

Three highlights of industrial design might be the Olivetti typewriter (good), the Ford Edsel (bad), and the Bic double-edged razor blade (you decide). Today, industrial design embraces both applied science and applied art. There are schools of design as well as research methods to determine what design features please certain consumers.

Dieter Ram

A brilliant German designer named Dieter Ram produced some of the most-admired products of the post-World War II era, when industrial design really escalated. Search his name under "google images" and you'll see why.

Jonathan Ive and Apple

In his parents' garage, Steve Jobs famously kept telling the Woz that the Mac looked ugly, and to make it smaller and prettier and easier to use. He kept saying it for several decades, and now we have the iPad. Much of Apple's success can be attributed to a designer named Jonathan Ives, whom Steve Jobs plucked from the company basement to design the iMac.

When you watch one of the documentaries on Sir Jonathan (yes, he was knighted for his designs), you begin to see that design is not just referring to the outward shape of the object but to every single one of its functions and all its inner mechanics. Design is what dictates every decision, largest to