Desma 10
Design Culture - an Introduction

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Modernism in Design

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Design and the Challenges of Modernism

- New cultural motives: speed, scientific discoveries (Einstein's theory of relativity), electric technology, full mechanization, surveillance, urbanization, communication media, new social formations and gender roles.

- Industrialization, commercial capitalism and urban development created new needs for design.

- Graphic design became a tool for catching the eye and marketing designed products as competition increased.

- Billboards served both branding and product differentiation (how to give mass produced products ‘individuality’ and ‘character’?).

- The challenge: how will design be able to match the modern world and contribute to building new social reality?
1900: Search for New Unity

The unity of the arts was a goal. It was often seen as spiritual. Search for the synthesis of the arts manifested itself in the ideology of Synaesthesia (the interchangeability of the senses).

Cosmic, mystical tendencies encountered the modern ‘scientific’ spirit in complex and even paradoxical forms.

The Russian composer Aleksandr Skriabin’s Prometheus, Poem of Fire, (symphony no. 5, 1908-10) combined music with projected color lights produced with a “Chromola,” or light piano.

Alexandr Scriabin’s composition Prometheus anticipated synaesthetic works in “visual music”, “lumia” or color light compositions.
Modernism and Late Romanticism

- The paradox of modernism: it purported to be a total break with the past, but was in many ways associated with the preceding era of Romanticism.

- Modernism inherited the idea of the visionary larger-than-life artist-designer hero (Le Corbusier, Tatlin...)

- Modernism looked for a new unity of the arts, recalling Richard Wagner’s quest for a Total Work of Art (Gesamtkunstwerk) that would be more than a sum of its parts.

Composer Richard Wagner (1813-1883) created enormous operas for the Bayreuth festival in Germany, purporting to unify all the arts.
Art Nouveau (1890s - ca. 1910):
Ornamental Design in the Name of Modernity

- Named (“New Art”) after a design shop in Paris (S. Bing, 1895-). Name was used in the “Pavilion de l’Art Nouveau” at the Exposition Universelle 1900, Paris. Alternative names in different languages: Art Nouveau (France), Jugendstil (Germany), Stile Liberty (Italy), Modernisme (Spain)...

- An effort to create the first truly modern and international design trend, a total aesthetic encompassing all forms of creativity.

- Claimed to be free from “historicism,” dependence of stylistic trends of the past. Still: it was eclectic, influenced by John Ruskin (“turn to nature for inspiration”), William Morris and the Arts and Crafts movement, folk art, Rococo and Baroque, non-Western sources: Japanese design, Islamic ornaments.

- Main characteristic: interest in simulating natural phenomena and ornaments (paradoxical goal for the dawning machine age?).
The Allure of Art Nouveau, TV series by BBC (UK) - worth watching. You can find it from YouTube!
Features of Art Nouveau

Political (powerful in young nation states that tried to assert themselves internationally)

Social (penetrated modern environment from underground to department store)

Cultural (strove for unity of visual arts, embracing both art and design)

Technological (use of industrial materials like wrought iron, glass;

Victor Horta: Tassel House, Brussels
Famous Art Nouveau Designers

- Aubrey Beardsley (1872-98), drawings
- Louis Comfort Tiffany (1848-1933), glassware
- Louis Majorelle (1859-1926), furniture
- Hector Guimard (1867-1942), ironwork (Paris metro)
- Emile Gallé (1846-1904), glassware
- Alphonse Mucha (1860-1939), posters
- Victor Horta (1861-1947), architecture
- Antonio Gaudí y Cornet (1852-1926), architecture
- Henry van de Velde 1863-1957), tableware, interiors
- Charles Rennie Mackintosh (1868-1928), architecture, furniture, interiors; pioneer of the rectilinear style

Charles Rennie Macintosh:
Glasgow School of Art, detail
The masterpiece of Charles Rennie Macintosh, the Library of the Glasgow School of Art (1897-1909), lost in a fire in May 2014.
Audrey Beardsley (1872-98), a British graphic artist and designer, was a huge influence on Art Nouveau, defining its irregular organic lines. His imaginative book illustrations were accused of being decadent and escapist, and overly erotic.

Audrey Beardsley: illustration for Oscar Wilde’s Salome
Emile Gallé:
Bat lamp, c.1900

Curved, irregular shapes recalling natural forms were repeated in all forms of Art Nouveau design, reflecting its ambition to become a “total” design language unifying all forms of design.
A cigar store designed by the Belgian architect, designer and educator **Henry van de Velde** (1863-1957)
Art Nouveau style was also reflected in fonts.

It is important to remember that fonts and typefaces are designed products that reflect the environment in which they were created.

All fonts have a history and they often manifest long and complex design processes.
Henri Van de Velde about the need to reconcile art, design, industry:

“Artist, producer and salesman don’t coincide anymore with the collapse of the crafts system. A new unity must be found by collaboration. Machine must be spiritualized.”

- Van de Velde became the leader of the new Deutsche Werkbund in 1907, an attempt to achieve this goal. This development ultimately led to the Bauhaus, the famous German art and design school.
Antonio Gaudi’s (1852-1926) architecture represented a very personal and extreme form of Art Nouveau.

Many examples of Gaudi’s eccentric work have been preserved in Barcelona, Spain.

Antonio Gaudi: Sagrada Família, Barcelona (1888-), a massive church project still in progress.

http://www.sagradafamilia.cat/
Hector Guimard (1867-1942): entrances to metro stations in Paris. His cast iron ornaments have been characterized as an organic "whiplash" style. Many examples survive.
Was Art Nouveau really so “Modern“?

- “We want it to be modern so that any reminiscence of the past is ruthlessly excluded.“ (Critic Roger Marx about a planned Art Nouveau exhibition, 1907)

-In spite of modern tendencies Art Nouveau was often seen as a decadent and esoteric “fin de siècle“ phenomenon; it was rejected by modernists who supported functionalism and fought against ornamentalism.

- Influenced Art Deco, 1920-30s, and Psychedelic Design in the 1960s.

Louis Comfort Tiffany (1848-1933), Tiffany lamps
Modernism in Design

- Harmonizing design with the modern world: technology, urbanism, speed.

- The machine accepted as the central element of modern life and design.

- Ornamentation should be controlled or eliminated.

- Barriers between art, engineering, design, science should be removed.

- “Form follows function” (Louis Sullivan) as the guideline.

Burnham and Root: The Reliance Building,
“Form Follows Function”
- The most famous slogan of design history

Coined by the American architect Louis Sullivan (1856-1924), a pioneer of modernism, in the late 19th century. Sullivan is known for his office buildings in Chicago.

“It is the pervading law of all things organic, and inorganic, of all things physical and metaphysical, of all things human and all things super-human, of all true manifestations of the head, of the heart, of the soul, that the life is recognizable in its expression, that form ever follows function. This is the law.”
The Modern City as Challenge and Ideal

This photomontage by Paul Citroen, Metropolis, was created at the legendary art and design school Bauhaus in Germany in 1923. It has become a symbol of the early 20th century modern society.

Citroen's photomontage represents an urban environment, a multi-perspectival labyrinth, from which tradition and the cultural forms of the past have been eliminated.

There is no space for nature, and the humans are represented as tiny lilliputian figures.
BAUHAUS 1919-1933

- Radical art and design school, in Weimar, then Dessau, Berlin until closed in 1933.

- Founding director architect Walter Gropius (1883-1969): “The Bauhaus believes the machine to be our modern medium of design and seeks to come to terms with it.” (1923)

- Gropius’ Slogan: “Art and Technology: A New Unity” (1923)

- Teaching ideology: learning by doing, the destruction of previous learning, “the freeing of the mind.”

- Became a stronghold for Constructivism with the arrival of László Moholy-Nagy in 1923.
The Bauhaus building in Dessau, designed by Walter Gropius, embodied the principles rationalist and functionalist modernism.
Moholy-Nagy's most famous creation: “Light-Space Modulator” (Licht-Requisit), circa 1930. Kinetic sculpture powered by a machine.

Machine as an artwork, also meant to create abstract light shows for theatre without human actors. Was designed for the Bauhaus Theatre and featured in Moholy-Nagy's film Lichtspiel Schwarz - Weiss - Grau (1930).
László Moholy-Nagy (1895-1946)

- Visionary artist, designer, theorist, teacher and writer of influential books (*Painting Photography Film*, 1925; *Vision in Motion*, 1946).
Vladimir Tatlin (1885-1953)

- Embodied the idea of the artist-engineer-designer
- Known as the “Soviet Leonardo da Vinci”: stage-sets, a flying-machine (letatlin), clothes, a stove, furniture for mass production, interiors for cafés, magazine layouts, paintings, sculptures...
- Most famous project: *Monument to the Third International*. Never built, but became a symbol of the Soviet culture of the 1920s.

Tatlin in a coat he designed in front of his energy-efficient stove, 1919
Constructivism as Model for Modernist Design

- Born in the Soviet Union after the October revolution (1917), but influenced by Futurism and Suprematism already earlier.

- Effort to harmonize art and design with industrial production; to bring intellectuals and workers together; remove the barriers between art and design.

- "Modern factory at work is the culminating manifestation of our times, surpassing the opera or ballet." (Tatlin)

- Turned into an international style (graphic design), which was adopted elsewhere without any reference to the original ideological position.

Poster by Alexandr Rodchenko
Important Constructivists

- Vladimir Tatlin: workers’ clothing, “Monument to the Third International”

- Aleksandr Rodchenko: photographs, poster designs, multi-functional furniture for workers’ clubs

- Varvara Stepanova: radical clothing and textile designs

- El Lissitsky: “the new typography”

- Liubov Popova: stage design for Meyerhold, “The Magnificent Cuckold” (1922): stage set as an “acting machine”; also textile designs.
Tatlin: Monument to the Third International, begun 1919, never finished (actually a monumental, even ‘cosmic’ machine).
Alexandr Rodchenko: Interior designs for a workers’ club, 1925
El Lissitzky: *Beat the Whites with the Red Wedge*, 1920
El Lissitsky (Russia): constructivist book design, 1923
Rodchenko’s poster for Dziga Vertov’s documentary film *Kino Glaz* (Cinema Eye), 1924.

Vertov’s film *Man with the Movie Camera* (1929) is considered one of the great Constructivist works.
Alexandr Rodchenko: poster design for a Moscow publisher (1924); Lily Brik shouts: “Books!”

This poster has influenced countless other graphic design serving many different purposes from the record cover for Franz Ferdinand to Obama’s campaign posters etc. etc.

It is a good example why we need to know the history to understand design culture!
Herbert Bayer (1900-1985) became one of the most famous designers educated at the Bauhaus. After graduation, became head of the workshop for print and advertising there. Emigrated to the USA in 1938. Died in Montecito, California, in 1985.

Herbert Bayer: design for a newspaper kiosk (1924) and exhibition stand for toothpaste manufacturer.

Herbert Bayer: letterforms and booklet design for Bauhaus, 1925.
Bauhaus gave women chances to enter the design profession, but its impact should not be exaggerated. There was a long way to go...

Marianne Brandt (1893-1983) was the most successful female designer at the Bauhaus. Became the head of the metal workshop in 1928. Designed lamps, ashtrays and teapots.
Marcel Breuer (1902-1982): Vassily armchair, Bauhaus 1925

Woman in Oskar Schlemmer’s theater mask and Lis Beyer’s dress posing in Breyer’s armchair, c. 1926

**Futurism**

- A destructive modernist movement that started in Italy and spread to other countries.

From *The First Manifesto of Futurism*, 1909, written by Filippo Tommaso Marinetti:

“We declare that the splendour of the world has been enriched by a new beauty - the beauty of speed.

A racing car with its bonnet draped exhaust pipes like fire-breathing serpents - a roaring racing car, rattling along like a machine gun, is more beautiful than the winged victory of Samothrace.”

*Nike of Samothrace, Greece,*
*3rd century B.C.E.*
Futurism

- A passionate (paradoxically: romantic?) attack on “passeist” bourgeois society and its values.

- Began in Italy (I manifesto 1909), spread to other countries, like pre-revolutionary Russia. Ideological and aesthetic leader Filippo Tomaso Marinetti (1876-1944), Italian poet. Other central figures: Umberto Boccioni, Antonio Sant’Elia, Giacomo Balla.

- Totalistic goals: replacing existing art and society by futuristic forms. From painting, sculpture and poetry extended to theatre, music (“Art of Noises”), fashion, cinema, architecture, urbanism, radio art, aerial theatre.

- The most radical futurist ideas existed in manifestos, projects and plans rather than as realized creations.

- Veneration of war led Marinetti and other Futurists toward Fascism (another ‘totalistic’ - or totalitarian - solution)
De Stijl

- Movement that was formed around the Dutch magazine **De Stijl** (“The style”), founded 1917.

- **Piet Mondrian**, **Theo van Doensburg**, **J.J.P. Oud**, **Gerrit Rietveld** (Red, Blue and Yellow Chair, 1918), **Rob van t’Hoff** main representatives.

- Based on idealist philosophy; search for a new vision of modern life.

- Towards total geometric abstraction; influenced by theosophism and the idea about the mathematical order of the universe.

- “Back to basics”: line, plane, color; horizontal and vertical lines; colors and non-color; seen as universals.

- Equation between geometric forms and machine production.
Piet Mondrian: Composition, 1929

Gerrit Rietveld: Red, Blue and Yellow Chair, 1918 (De Stijl, Holland)

Gerrit Rietveld: zig zag chair, 1932-33

Gerrit Rietveld: Interior of Villa Schröder, 1924
**Le Corbusier** (a.k.a. Charles-Édouard Jeanneret, 1887-1965)

- Swiss architect, active in France. An “arch-modernist” with extreme ideas and views.

- With Amadée Ozenfant founded Purism = Platonic idealism + mechanization and modernity; journal *Esprit Nouveau* (The New Spirit, 1920-)

- Emphasized function, efficiency, precision, harmony. Hated ornamentation of any kind.

- Book *Vers une architecture* (Towards a New Architecture, 1923) was a radical manifesto for modernist design.

- Designed the *Pavillon de l’Esprit Nouveau* shown at Exposition des Arts Décoratives, Paris (1925): contained mass-produced furniture and other standardized components.
Falsifying the Past in the interest of Modernism. From Le Corbusier: Vers une Architecture, 1923 (Engl. Towards a New Architecture)

Off-the-shelf furniture (including Thonet chairs) was used in the interior.
“A Machine for Living”

- According to Le Corbusier, a house should be a “machine for living” - a perfectly functioning organism for the utilitarian needs of man.
- Industrial buildings used as models for homes (functionality!); portholes, steel railings
- Concrete as material; smooth undecorated surfaces; flat roofs (like factories); free-flowing interior spaces; large expanses of glass.
- Houses should be mass-produced, made by machines; still, most early designs were for rich private clients (paradox?).
Le Corbusier’s Machines for Living and Driving

Le Corbusier was obsessed by the automobile, and insisted that his buildings should be photographed with an automobile in the foreground.

Le Corbusier even designed a car, *Le Voiture Minimum*, but it was never mass-produced. He wanted to mass-produce buildings like producing cars.

La ville Radieuse, 1935

Unité d'Habitation, Marseille, 1952
The Utopian Home in America:  
Buckminster Fuller’s (1895-1983) Dymaxion House (1927, USA)

- Visionary thinker, designer, self-taught engineer

- Dymaxion (dynamic+maximum) House (originally “4-D Utility Unit”), 1927 was not just a “machine for living”, but a complete “model for living”: “housing unit” + “transport unit”.

- Total re-definition of the house, creative and functional use of new materials: duraluminium, rubber, plastic

- The home should be movable, mobile: by zeppelins! It should also be stackable into towers.

- Search for pure forms. 1954 patented for Geodesic Dome. Based on natural polyhedral forms; “like a crystal, a flower, a skeleton”; hundreds built, often at world's fairs.
The Dymaxion House

Buckminster Fuller with the model of the Dymaxion House, 1927

Built around a central aluminum ‘mast’ that contained the household service core.

Inflatable rubber floor suspended from the central mast by metal cables.

Automatic climate control would make sheets and blankets unnecessary!

“Get on with life” room: typewriter, calculator, telephone, dictaphone, television, radio, phonograph, mimeograph; all in one factory-assembled unit.
Installing stacked Dymaxion houses by means of zeppelins
Buckminster Fuller: Dymaxion 3-D map (1927).

Fuller understood that design problems are global, planetary!
Buckminster Fuller: DDU, or Dymaxion Deployment Unit. C. 1941. Based on industrial Grain silos by Butler Manufacturing Corporation. Industrial architecture as model for cheap housing. Used by the US army in WWII.
**Buckminster Fuller: The Geodesic Dome**
- patented the structure in 1954, although was not the original inventor.
- a network of ‘geodesic’ elements derived from nature forms a durable spherical structure.
- Often used in public exhibition architecture.

Montreal Biosphère, orig. the American Pavilion at Expo 1967

Spaceship Earth, Disney's EPCOT Center, Florida
Modern Design Culture in the USA

- **Art Deco** was a post-World War I phenomenon which blossomed in the 1920s. It’s features were exoticism, escapism, luxury, hedonism.

- In the USA pre-Columbian influences (from the stepped shapes from Aztec temples): applied from skyscrapers to radio sets. Art Deco attempted to compensate for the ‘backwardness’ of American design.

- “Jazz Modern” another word for Art Deco: famous example Chrysler Building (NYC, 1928-30, by William van Alen)

- “Zig zag style”: luxury, extravaganza, escapism. Art Deco was a major influence on “atmospheric” movie palaces and Hollywood (in spectacular scenes choreographed by Busby Berkeley for Warner Bros musicals).

- Art Deco style was gradually replaced by machine-influenced stylish aesthetics (evolved into so-called “Machine Age” design).
William Van Alen: Chrysler Building, New York, 1930
Many examples of Art Deco design can be found from Downtown around Broadway and along the Wilshire Blvd in Los Angeles.

The Eastern Columbia Building along Broadway, Downtown Los Angeles (Claud Beelman, 1930)
The Art Deco Movie Palace

Typical product of the art deco era was the movie palace. The extravagant decorations were sometimes accused of stealing attention from the film.

A famous surviving example is The Paramount Theatre, Oakland, California
The Skyscraper Style

A conscious effort to create an ‘American style’

Skyscraper was the symbol of the American civilization, thus it could become a model for design. Vertical forms and piles of “modules” typical.

The skyscraper style was applied to many kinds of items from textiles to cabinets, radios and kitchenware.

Paul Frankl: skyscraper style combination desk and bookcase, ca. 1927
The Television Set as a “Skyscraper”

Early vertical television cabinet. The screen has been placed in a horizontal position and is watched from a mirror.

Designed by John Vassos for RCA, 1939.
Abel Faidy: Armchair, 1927

Van Doren & Rideout: Radio, 1930-33

Skyscraper style pitcher

Joseph Sinel: Scale, 1929
American Modernist Industrial Design

Emerged in the late 1920s. The designer defined as an “artist-technologist” serving industry and marketing.

Motivation: the Wall Street Crash 1929 led to a social and economic crisis. “Re-designing” objects was offered as a solution, to make them again attractive to customers.

Search for a machine age aesthetics, which could be considered as “American aesthetics” (concept ‘The Machine Age’ was influenced by groundbreaking exhibition Machine Art at the Museum of Modern Art, NY, 1934).

American design influenced by European modernism, but in the USA more attention was paid in non-functional traits (‘machine age ornament’). Design slips from “form follows function” to interest in surface effects (which led to another design debate).
Pioneers of American Industrial Design

- **Norman Bel Geddes**: book *Horizons*, 1932 (streamlining); futuristic designs; Futurama for the General Motors Pavilion, New York World's Fair 1939

- **Raymond Loewy**: Gestetner duplicating machine redesign (1929), Coldspot Refrigerator (Sears, Roebuck, 1935); Rocketport of the Future (N.Y.W.F. 1939)

- **Walter Dorwin Teague**: redesigns of Kodak cameras, office machines

- **Henry Dreyfuss**: Redesigns of Bell telephones, tractor designs for John Deere, Democracity (inside the Perisphere, N.Y.W.F., 1939).

Raymond Loewy: Coldspot, 1935
Features of American Industrial Design

- Rejection of European functionalism. Had both a negative effect (intellectual break, isolation from European design) and a positive effect (independence, more room for innovation).

- In the USA design was defended as anti-elitist, as something for the masses.

- Commitment to style: the use of simple shells to hide mechanical complexity; streamlining became “pseudo-functional.”

- Borax style: “flashy, bulbous, modernistic design.”

- Household gadgets with “bulbous” corners, chrome strips, plastic strips.

Henry Dreyfuss: bulbous thermos pitchers, 1935
**Survival Form principle**

“By embodying a familiar pattern in an otherwise wholly new and radical form we can make the unusual acceptable to many people who would otherwise reject it.” (Henry Dreyfuss)

**MAYA principle**

MAYA = Most Advanced Yet Acceptable (Raymond Loewy)
The Industrial Designer as a Machine Age Celebrity

Raymond Loewy on the cover of *Time* (1947). For the first time the designer became a widely recognized cultural hero, an embodiment of the modern era.
Industrial designer’s office by Loewy and Simonson, Contemporary American Industrial Art Exhibition, New York, 1934
The Starting Point was the idea of “Redesign”
The classic case: the Gestetner duplicating machine before and after design treatment by Raymond Loewy (1929)
Walter Dorwin Teague: Redesigned Kodak camera and box, 1930
Streamlining

An idea that symbolizes the American design of the 1930s. Popularized by Norman Bel Geddes in his book *Horizons*, 1932.

**Two basic principles:**

1) ovoid gliding form (“the teardrop”)
2) smooth, continuous surface

Scientific background: research on birds, fishes, teardrops. Goal: finding the form with the least air resistance.

First applied to submarines, airships, aeroplanes (first wind tunnel to test automobile models 1921 at Zeppelin works, Germany; Paul Jaray)

Diagrams by Norman Bel Geddes
The ‘bible’ of streamlined design:
Norman Bel Geddes: *Horizons*,
1932
Conceptual designs by Norman Bel Geddes (from *Horizons*)
Raymond Loewy:
a diagram of the evolution of the automobile, 1934.

The evolution of the automobile is shown to be ‘naturally’ leading toward streamlining as a perfected design principle.
Streamlined Concept Cars

Norman Bel Geddes: rear engined car (1932)

-Buckminster Fuller's Dymaxion car, three-wheeled teardrop design

-The Stout Scarab (1936), the first rear-engined design to appear on the market
The Dymaxion Car

- First prototype demonstrated in 1932. Never mass produced.

- ‘omnidirectional’; front-wheel drive; rear engine and rear steering; aluminum-bedied chrome-molybdenum aircraft steel chassis

- air nostrils, air-conditioning, rear-view periscopes for both front and back seats

- All the running gear, except lower half of the wheels, hidden inside streamlined fuselage.

- Two front wheels were the ‘tractors’; the rear wheel the ‘rudder’
**Early Car Production**

The production of Oldsmobile rose 1901-05 from 600 to 6500

T-model Ford production: 20 000 (1910), 600 000 (1916). By 1927 nearly fifteen million had been produced

Production system perfected at Ford's Highland Park factory in Detroit, 1913-14 (opened in 1910).

Commitment to a single car design made it easy to use single-purpose machine tools. Only slight changes were made until 1927! Finally Ford's strategy was destroyed by competition from General Motors.

Ford models T (version 1926)
and A (1928)
From Fordism to Sloanism

- The impulse for change came from General Motors under CEO Alfred Sloan, who hired Harley T. Earl to lead a new “Art and Color Section” in 1928. In 1938 the “Styling Section” employed 300 people.
- Basic issue: cheapness vs. novelty. This led to styling: frequent changes made to external appearance, less to technical components.
- The idea of “built-in (planned) obsolescence”; aging anticipated in the design. Trading the old model in partial exchange for a new was introduced.
- Styling became closely associated with advertising design. Marketing began dominating the car industry.

Harley T. Earl in a Buick Y-Job
Chrysler Airflow (1934) “You have only to look at a dolphin, a gull, or a greyhound to appreciate the rightness of the tapering, flowing contour of the new Airflow Chrysler.” (advertising text, 1934)
Chrysler Airflow side by side with Pullman Car Corporation’s M10,000 (for Union Pacific), 1934
Airstream Clipper trailer, 1947. The photo was probably staged for marketing purposes...
'Streamlining' French style: Citroen 2 CH, Prototype, 1936
**Volkswagen**

‘Streamlining’ German style: Volkswagen (‘the people’s car’), was introduced by the Nazi leader Adolf Hitler, ca. 1936.
The Apex of Streamlining:
The New York World’s Fair, 1939, “World of Tomorrow

Harrison and Fouilhoux: Trylon and Perisphere, the symbols of the exhibition.
Henry Dreyfuss's Democracity was inside the Perisphere. It was a "garden city of tomorrow," viewed from twin rotating balconies.
General Motors’ Futurama Pavilion was the hit of the New York World’s Fair 1939
Futurama is a classic example of innovative exhibition design, designed by Norman Bel Geddes.
The theme of the pavilion was *Highways and Horizons* (with a reference to Bel Geddes's book *Horizons*, 1932).
A postcard showing the final scene of Futurama
The visitors exited through the same scene, on normal scale - but the cars were current General motors models.
Interpretations of Streamlining

- It was soon inflated as an idea: applied to “short fiction and false teeth, wastebaskets and underwear.”

- Instead of being functional, streamlining became a decorative element, a marketing gimmick.

- Design critics Sheldon and Martha Cheney defended applying streamlining to “oil-burning furnace, pencil sharpener, the typewriter and the electric iron, because these are related to the most conspicuous symbol and inspiration of the age, the airplane” (Sheldon & Martha Cheney: Art and the Machine, 1936)
Raymond Loewy's train design and an electric iron produced by Westinghouse compared (1936).
The Shinkansen bullet train (JR, Japan)
Streamlined turnstile
(John Vassos, c.1932)

Ken Weber: Streamlined armchair, 1934

Streamlined pipes, ca. 1930-40

Raymond Loewy:
Streamlined pencil sharpener, 1933
Raymond Loewy’s pencil sharpener compared with an airplane.
Home designers applied the principles of streamlining and Machine Age aesthetics.

They used materials like aluminum that were familiar from streamlined objects such as airplanes.
Carl Koch: Hurricane House, or a “weather-wane dwelling,” 1935.

Built on circular tracks, the building turns its rounded end into the wind, defying even gale-power forces.
The ATOM BOMB HOUSE
The blast from an atomic bomb would bounce from the external walls, saving the house and the inhabitants (maybe...)


“Streamlining was a form of symbolic packaging, a visual metaphor of aspiration and progress.”

Bevis Hillier