

Sep 4th, 9:00 AM

## The Intervention of Criticism into Practice

Barbara Predan

*Academy of Fine Arts and Design, University of Ljubljana, and the Pekinpah Association*

Follow this and additional works at: <https://dl.designresearchsociety.org/learnxdesign>



Part of the [Art and Design Commons](#)

---

### Citation

Predan, B.(2013) The Intervention of Criticism into Practice, in Reitan, J.B., Lloyd, P., Bohemia, E., Nielsen, L.M., Digranes, I., & Lutnæs, E. (eds.), *DRS // Cumulus: Design Learning for Tomorrow*, 14-17 May, Oslo, Norway. <https://doi.org/10.21606/learnxdesign.2013.114>

This Research Paper is brought to you for free and open access by the Conference Proceedings at DRS Digital Library. It has been accepted for inclusion in Learn X Design Conferences by an authorized administrator of DRS Digital Library. For more information, please contact [dl@designresearchsociety.org](mailto:dl@designresearchsociety.org).

## The Intervention of Criticism into Practice

Barbara PREDAN\*

Academy of Fine Arts and Design, University of Ljubljana, and the Pekinpah Association

**Abstract:** *The goal of the present essay is to show that a number of critiques, following in succession from the first efforts to professionalize design, played a key role in the formation of the discipline as we know it today. Such critiques of design, by countering established practices, created gaps in knowledge – created a discontinuity, the consequence of which was the creation of the possibility for a new way of working. What the discipline lacks today, then, is precisely such a critique of this sort: one that would oppose a situation in which design submits itself uncritically to market demands and accepts the universal relativism of social consensus. For the first time in the history of design, it seems that the professionalization of the discipline is increasingly determined by what is supposed to have chiefly produced it (as a side product during the industrial revolution and the division of labour). Similarly for the first time, we in the profession are indifferent to such a situation.*

**Keywords:** *design, critique, emancipation, Anti-Design.*

---

\* Corresponding author: Academy of Fine Arts and Design, Ljubljana | Slovenia | e-mail: [scemulk@gmail.com](mailto:scemulk@gmail.com)

## Gaps in Knowledge

In his book, *What Is a Designer*, Norman Potter writes: “Design at its best has an honourable history; affirmative, questioning, socially and personally committed, seeking to bring things together in good sense. A very large area of this effort has degenerated into managerial eyewash.” (Potter 2002, 162)

Potter’s extremely critical, but very lucid statement cuts into the discipline of design, which over the course of the twentieth century had become lax, uncritical, self-sufficient, and complacent. It had lost that rebellious energy it received in its cradle from the two main critics of the nineteenth century’s expanding industrialization – John Ruskin and William Morris. Similarly, it had lost the fervour of the avant-garde movements that had looked to design as the answer, as a tool for building a better tomorrow. Potter’s critique of the spirit of the discipline seeks to reactivate the ability every designer possesses: the ability to make something. Here I am thinking of the knowledge, the potentiality, we have as designers. This potentiality, in Agamben’s sense of the word (Agamben 1999, 177–184), allows us both theoretically and in practice to change our surroundings, to change our context, if we are unhappy with it. The decision as to whether we will realize this potentiality in practice, however, rests on the shoulders of those who have the knowledge, of those who can. In other words, designers. Simply put, every designer, every day, is confronted with the question: “You have the knowledge. So what will you do?” Not: “What can you do?” For the knowledge you have already puts you in a position of ability, a position of potentiality. The question “What could you do?” therefore becomes “What will you do?”

Reading Potter’s critique, we must not overlook the underlying questions that present themselves to us: What is the origin of such a change? What has led to such a situation in design? Why is there so much resignation among designers? The answer, it seems, we know, for we hear it regularly from the lips of so many designers: we are merely one of the links in the chain, one station on the assembly line of production. But if we are precise, an extremely important one: design, after all, is that interdisciplinary practice that knows how to identify with the user, translate the desires of the client, and exploit current technological developments, and at the same time has the ability to create, in conjunction with this bundle of knowledge, a functional, aesthetically pleasing product that is, if possible, oriented toward sustainability. On the one hand, then, we are co-creators; on the other, merely cogs in a machine. Here it is important to stress that the process of design’s depreciation (to the point of being merely one of the cogs) has been gradual. Throughout the formation and development of the discipline, numerous important figures in the field resisted industry’s latent desire to reduce design to being just another activity in its service. Not least of all, design might be defined, from a narrow perspective, as a side product of the division of labour, as one of the consequences of industrialization. Many, however, disagreed with this description even at the start of the discipline, and many today also reject this statement. The leading figures of the future discipline placed design in a broader social context; they saw it as the element that builds our material culture and thus not only affects our everyday life but also, in practice, manifests our degree of development as a civilization. The fact is that the state of affairs Potter describes came about through a cluster of situations, forces, and changes in society. But this brings us to a much more important question suggested by Potter’s critique, namely: What must the discipline of design do to excavate itself from the apathetic, toothless condition it finds itself in today?

In the present text I construct an answer to this question. I base it on a number of critiques that followed in succession from the first efforts to professionalize the discipline of design; here I am primarily looking for the impact of writings that left a detectable trace in the proverbially pragmatic practice of design. In my text I will show that, by countering established practices, the selected critiques created gaps in knowledge – created a discontinuity, the consequence of which was the creation of the possibility for a new way of working.

In the essay, “What Is Enlightenment?”, the French philosopher Michel Foucault writes about critical reflection, saying: “It has to be conceived as an attitude, an ethos, a philosophical life in which the critique of what we are is at one and the same time the historical analysis of the limits that are imposed on us and an experiment with the possibility of going beyond them”. (Foucault 1984) The search for limits and “the possibility of going beyond them” is common to the critical thinking of Ruskin, Morris, and Adolf Loos, as well as in the writings of the De Stijl movement and, especially, the Italian Anti-Design movement. The Anti-Design movement offered the last real critique in design, and that was over forty years ago. The discipline today, therefore, seems to lack any radical, critical attempt to affect the situation we are witnessing. It lacks a critique that would oppose a situation in which design submits itself uncritically to market demands and accepts the universal relativism of social consensus. For the first time in the history of design, it seems, the professionalization of the discipline is increasingly determined by what was supposed to have chiefly produced it (as a side product in the period of the industrial revolution and the division of labour). Similarly for the first time, we in the profession are indifferent to such a situation.

Frederic Jameson has written that, in modernism, we were still striving to create new worlds, while in postmodernism we are looking for “breaks”. (Jameson 1991, ix) The condition for the very possibility of a break, however, is the creation of a certain distance toward what exists; the existence of a critique, therefore, is essential. This is what creates the possibility for a different way of working and the conditions for an event – the desired break. For the Slovene philosopher Rado Riha, two steps are necessary for us to be able to see revolution: “on the one hand, an act of unconditional resistance; on the other, the concrete demands of concrete struggles for emancipation”. (Riha 2006, 46) The desire to see – “we want the thing we desire” (36) – is, for Riha, the condition for us to begin thinking about a rupture with the given situation. In light of Riha’s thinking, we cannot avoid asking: What in fact do we desire to see in the field of design? What are the concrete demands of the concrete struggles for emancipation? In all of this, the greater part of the discipline does not in fact demand a rupture with the given situation. What is more, most designers have few doubts about the given situation. They accept it as a given, as something self-evident. The utopian striving for the construction of a new world has been replaced by a challenge in the form of market interest, the unending improvement of the existing world. As a result, in the deluge of all that is seemingly new, the task of defining the real problem (in the manner of Louis Sullivan) seems all the more difficult, if not impossible. But defining the impossible is, indeed, the goal of the task we face. In an age when everything seems possible, our aim is to find the point of impossibility. To put it another way, I will try to answer the question: What today is impossible in design?

## Questioning the situation

All the selected critiques are marked by a concern about relationships between design and work and between design and production. They show us that, as early as the mid-nineteenth century, in the emerging discipline of design, Ruskin's critique opened a problem that to a considerable degree defined what design would become, even as it laid the groundwork for how design as a discipline would think. As is well-known, Ruskin, in his writings, demanded of us (and he himself also strived unconditionally for this) that we return to the threshold where we can make a new choice. The search for this threshold takes Ruskin to the Gothic, but we need to interpret this required return to the Gothic in the broadest possible way. The key to understanding Ruskin's turn to the Gothic lies in his attitude toward work. In the Gothic, he finds a Kantian "freedom of thought" (Kant 1784, 120) – the freedom to decide for oneself, which is manifested in the conception and production of a product. This is the freedom that technological reproduction removes from work and excludes from production. This is freedom of thought and expression as the main component of human creativity, which, in Ruskin's view, was last seen in the Gothic period, while all other modern-age production alternatives deprive us of our freedom of thought. Through his lucid recognition of the problem, Ruskin succeeded in raising a question that in fact remains relevant today. Just as Ruskin looked for freedom of thought in work, we too continue to ask ourselves how can a space be opened today where freedom is still possible. In the newly emerging profession of design, Ruskin implanted a need for the profession to continually question its own role and position in society. Here, however, we must also stress that Ruskin was not content merely with offering a critique: his writings provide us with a paradigm for thinking about an alternative to what exists.

If Ruskin offered us the paradigm, William Morris's key contribution to design is that he actually did conceive an alternative. He gave us one of the first utopian visions conceived and created by a designer. In doing so, he caused a rupture in the way the designer's role was considered and understood. For with Morris, the understanding of the designer's place in society is changed: the designer assumes a new role as a builder of society. The trace of Morris's influence comes fully to life in the first half of the twentieth century with the advent of modernism, for this is when design, through its desire to transform the world, actively enters the field of politics; this is a time when designers are filled with optimism, still believing they can build a better world. But there is a difference: if Morris believed that the answer for the future lay in the past, the modernists believed that the new world had not yet been constructed: it still had to be designed.

If Ruskin's and Morris's ideas were anachronistic in their day, Adolf Loos's thinking was, in its core, anticipatory. By proclaiming a culture that was no longer connected with ornament, he made decoration unnecessary. Here Loos saw a solution that was obvious: if you didn't see it, you had been blinded. Through his proclamation of the visible, Loos created a new beginning for work in architecture and design. The collapse of ornament as law occurred in these fields. Consequently, design in the twentieth century was based on a failure – a failure, that, as Loos shows us, turned out to be a success. The success is evident in that fact that we failed to create an ornament for the new century. In the twentieth century, this failure brought to the fore something that was *non-style*: namely, function. The failure of architects and designers at the turn of the twentieth century turned out, through Loos's proclamation, to be an event that

signified the key to change. A change that generated something new and, before that time, inconceivable. And thus what occurred was, in fact, a reversal. What was first considered something negative turned out to be, in retrospect, a positive alternative. It turned out to be an affirmative event that offered a new paradigm.

In design, however, another new paradigm was introduced with the ideas of the Dutch avant-garde movement De Stijl. Unlike everyone else I have mentioned, the De Stijl movement took the side of the machine. In doing so, it brought about a reassessment of values in design, as well as in the definition, understanding, and vocation of the designer. The members of De Stijl believed that by forming a demand for the universal they would finally make the problems of the community the main priority and that the machine was the tool that would allow us to do this. They based their theory on the understanding that everything we make is artificial. We take from the artificial and we are the product of the artificial. On this basis, the De Stijl members saw the key to the next stage of design as the removal of the dominance of the individual aspect. This assertion created a break in the discipline of design. As designers, architects, scientists, and artists, we are building our environment; consequently, as De Stijl reminded us, it was high time we began to build the environment in a way that met the needs of the community to which we all belonged – to build the environment so it would be functional and at the same time provide enough living space for all who live in this artificial world. Gerrit Rietveld concluded his essay “New Functionalism in Dutch Architecture” by saying: “The fact that in our better moments we are more comfortable sitting on a table than in a chair, or the fact that we don’t need a house, table, or chair at all, means that the house of the future (the house for the new generation) cannot and must not aim to conform to the notion of ‘living’ that is now prevalent.” (Rietveld 1932)

Given all that has been said, what happened with the most radical of these critiques – the Anti-Design movement? This movement saw the next stage of design as being the radical rejection of material production, as the desire to find a way of producing that would not be embedded in the market system. It saw the solution in the production of ideas. The inevitable question, then, is: How do you protect ideas from the market system? How do you keep ideas from becoming a commodity? Anti-Design’s safeguard was the void – the user of the void. It was the individual’s task to find their own particular answer to the existing void, to the existing neutral grid. It was the individual’s task to create a new use. And it was the individual’s task to become an active co-participant in the creative process and thus reject the role of consumer as defined by others. Only in this way – according to the Anti-Design movement – only when the individual is the one who freely decides, liberated from the bonds of place, work, and production, would we achieve an earthly paradise free from the pollution of design. (Ambasz 1972, 246–251)

The solution, then, lay in the individual’s way of thinking – the only intangible thing that could not be converted by consumption into a useless fetishism. When we recognized this, we would recognize the aim of design, whose essence was not about creating products, but about creating new uses, encouraging potential new thinking.

From this perspective, despite all the examples discussed so far, Anti-Design placed its position toward design in the most radical light of all. Through its critique of design, architecture, and society as a whole, it sought a way to oppose the official culture in which we found ourselves. It sought an alternative, which it tried to construct on everything that was not the official culture. It sought a point of impossibility in an environment that, at first glance, seemed to be the given context (in Christopher

Alexander's sense of the term) – in other words, a plane that could not be attained but that had to be understood as well as possible and to which the form we controlled had to be adapted as successfully as possible. Twentieth-century design practice showed us that the environment, too, was simply the result of human labour – a result, in other words, that could be changed, corrected, and redefined. And it was with this goal that the Anti-Design movement entered design. Everything around us was artificially generated, from objects and cities all the way to the relationships between people and the things around them. Indeed, it was this particular relationship – between people and objects, between people and the city – that Anti-Design found to be most problematic. All the established relationships – whether moral, aesthetic, or religious – existed solely to take away our freedom. Under the pretence of cultural progress, they limited us, defined us, and at the same time reduced us to being a *creative* consumer. Thus it was all the more necessary to reduce the established degree of culture. Only a *lower* degree of culture would allow for a different kind of relationship, which, although still artificially created, would (as the Anti-Design movement understood it) be based on neutrality. Such neutralization would create a crisis of values – a crisis in the existing relationships – and from this crisis it would be possible to build a new (neutral) social system. The crisis would create a void, which every individual would be able to fill without any predetermined rules and relationships. For the Anti-Design movement, then, the object of design was the void, which was there to encourage the potential that was already there, with the goal of filling the given void. The Italian theorist, architect, and designer Andrea Branzi wrote: "The theory that the void provided the greatest degree of flexibility and liberty was a sort of *tabula rasa* our generation had made, or was trying to make, of all previous experiences, in an attempt to build a new foundation for design and architecture by putting them to a different, alternative use." (Branzi 1984, 80)

But in order to arrive at this, we had to reject everything that shapes our culture – from objects, architecture, and cities, right down to labour itself. With their rejection of labour, the members of the Anti-Design movement were inevitably speeding ahead. Superfluous human labour would sooner or later be replaced by the machine, which doesn't complain or set demands. The elimination of work seemed self-evident with the knowledge that this was precisely what, at the same time, allowed us to return to the development of the intellect. It allowed us to revive that freedom of thought to which design has been returning ever since Ruskin. It allowed us to reflect on a different notion of "living" – which is what Gerrit Rietveld advised us to do more than fifty years ago.

Even so, by the mid-1970s, the main figures in the Anti-Design movement had gradually resigned themselves to the fact that, in practice, design was obviously incapable of playing the revolutionary role they were advocating. Some of them stopped working in design and architecture altogether, while others continued to practice a purified modernism; a third group, however, in the late 1970s, presented their own unique continuation of the Anti-Design ideology. What they presented was the complete opposite of the modernist doctrine: namely, the postmodernist action known as Memphis. Its impact was most tangible in practice, since Memphis succeeded in shaking the modernist foundations of the design profession. Although Memphis was a well-considered action, the market nevertheless perverted its work, turning it (as Agamben would say) into a fetish, which it exploited for its own profit.

What is more, these postmodernist actions (of which the Anti-Design movement was a part) did not lead to a design rooted in the satisfaction of "pure needs", or

better, in the creation of “naked ideas” based on “mere thought” and manifested as a void; what these actions ultimately produced was the designer as author – an author whom capital turns into a status symbol. What happened, in other words, was everything that designers from Morris to Anti-Design had been fighting against in their writings. Design today, even more than in the past, accepts the role as one of the main catalysts of consumption; moreover, design today is openly considered to be the factor that creates that celebrated “added value” in a product. Thus it is designers who create – daily and uncritically – the artificially induced values of objects.

In this perspective, we can more easily understand the resignation expressed by the, in fact, still-working Italian industrial design Enzo Mari. In a lecture at Studio ArtAvangarde in Belgrade in the late 1980s, Mari acknowledged: “The utopia of industrial design has lost the battle. [...] It lost the battle because it tried to realize utopia by means of the system of commerce. [...] Just like other people, we too work on an assembly line. There is no other alternative.” (Denegri 1990, 191–192)

But why, indeed, should we get tangled up in Anti-Design’s “mere thought”? Why does their proposal sound too radical, too unrealistic for both the profession and the public? What happens is that designers and the public collide head-on with the difficulty of comprehending how a thought, an idea, can be something that actually exists. From the perspective of both the profession and the public, what is missing is the act, the processing, the execution of the idea as something real. Mere thinking remains something that is completely intangible and unfinished. Anti-Design’s idea that the proffered void can be filled only by the individual collides with the entrenched understanding (by the profession and the public) that, if we design, then we are also making, creating, drawing up blueprints. In short, we are, in practice, producing the evidence of our own thought. The proffered void, the *tabula rasa*, is the polar opposite of what design was and still is, from the first whetstone to Ford’s assembly line. The meaning of design lies in its materialization, its production. The result of the designer’s thought has always been expressed in a form: the drawing, the blueprint, the product, the service – in that is something real and tangible. But, as the proponents of Anti-Design tell us very clearly, every object we produce, no matter how indispensable, is immediately absorbed in the cycle of consumption. Or as William Morris described this process as early as 1885, the logic of the market (“the profit-grinding system”) means that we all participate in the production of waste, in the production of things that are completely unnecessary and in many cases unusable, and such labour, therefore, “is wasted on all hands”. (Morris 1885) The question, therefore, is still relevant today: How do we design and at the same time remain outside the cycle of consumption? And even more crucially, of course: Can design that remains outside this cycle still be understood as design? Is this that point of impossibility we have been looking for?

This brings us back to the two questions from the introduction: In an age when everything seems possible, how can we find the point of impossibility? And, what in design is impossible?

The answer now seems plain as day; it has been hounding us from the start. The impossible thing for design is to escape its entrenchment (imprisonment) in the system of production. Industrialization created the basis for the professionalization of the discipline and subjugated it with the help of the market system. Industry and the market have together defined the position of the design profession. If design is not entrenched in a market production system (whether small-business or industrial), it seems we cannot even begin to speak of the discipline of design. As the Anti-Design movement tried to tell us, it doesn’t have to be like this. While their proposal for the

elimination of cities, labour, production, and objects may sound too radical in practice, it also offers us an alternative that pushes us toward a new critique of the system – a new upheaval in our thinking about design – a design divorced from material realization. If we move away from the market production system, it may indeed be true that we cannot speak about the discipline as we know it today, but this does not mean we cannot speak about a design that sets this demand. But how, then, can we practice – how can we think about – a design that exists outside the system. How do we respond to this demand?

According to the Slovene philosopher Jelica Šumič Riha, we must distinguish between “two structurally different demands: *the demand ‘to have’* and *the demand ‘to be’*”. In the demand “to have”, we express our lack, and at the same time we address our demand to the Other as a whole. The demand “to be”, however, “requires of the Other nothing that the Other would have and so could give us, nothing that would fall under the category of having, but only the fact that you are, that you exist; it demands a space where you can be, where you can exist”. (Šumič Riha 2007, 90) If in the case of design the demand is “to have”, then we must ask: To whom is this demand addressed? Who, for design, is the Other as a whole? Is it the market production system? This system will survive without design without any serious damage. Still, designers like hearing mantras such as: “Only one company can be the cheapest. All the others must use design.” (Fitch 1998) The Croatian theorist Goroslav Keller, meanwhile, presents the other extreme, asking in his essay “Design for Export”: “Can you imagine all the designers in the world going on strike for an indefinite period? How would you tell? And who would be hurt by it? (Cynics even wonder if this might not be good for society.)” (Keller 1976, 132–134) The successful sales of many poorly designed products speak in favour of Keller’s statement. But if the market production system is not the Other we seek, then we must ask whether this Other might not be designers themselves, i.e. the design profession. Following Šumič Riha’s argument, this is impossible, since “there is no demand that would not include an Other”, even if this Other is, in fact, non-existent. (Šumič Riha 2007, 91) But the non-existent Other is typical of the present age. As Šumič Riha goes on to say: “The politics of emancipation in the era of the non-existent Other faces the task of converting the structural impossibility of the closure of capitalist discourse into a condition for the possibility of the productional new, a condition for the possibility of inventing a new social order.” (94) Here she adds that, if you want to realize the impossible, it is not enough to simply make a statement while discovering that circumstances preclude the impossible. Rather, it is necessary “also to invent, to literally produce, create, the means for ‘processing’ this impossible”. (95)

How do we apply this idea to design? How do we begin the impossible? How do we separate design from the existing system of industrialization so we can address our demand to the non-existent Other? Perhaps the answer is to stop worrying about the demand “to have” and focus on the demand “to be”. Here the role of the Other, although impossible to avoid, is marginalized. The aim of the struggle also changes: with the demand “to be”, what we demand is a space for existence. But here we at once encounter a problem: Does our demand for existence mean that in fact we are saying that, as an independent discipline, we do not exist? For most design theorists and practitioners there is probably no more heretical statement than the answer that now presents itself. Namely, the problem of design is that it does not exist as an independent discipline because it does not have its own space outside the system of production.

By stating this, however, we are in fact repeating the question posed by both Morris and the Anti-Design movement: How should design operate on the plane of the market? And transferring this onto the plane of our reflection: What would happen to design if the market (whether free or regulated by the state) did not exist? Would it find itself in the world of *Mad Max*? Or would it perhaps move toward the possibility of discovering a solution to the problem just posed: namely, *that design does not exist as an independent discipline because it does not have its own space outside the system of production?*

To help us more easily come to terms with this preposterous suggestion, we might turn to the theory of the “ignorant schoolmaster”. As the French philosopher Jacques Rancière writes, we have two methods to choose from: the old method and the method of emancipation. (Rancière 1991, 18) In the old method, the schoolmaster tells us what we have to learn and how we have to understand it. Thus, some other person selects for us the things we are supposed to know, which we then master and, on the basis of what we have mastered, we appear to make progress. Our knowledge remains fragmentary, since we are always in the grip of somebody else who guides us, measuring out for us, dose by dose, the knowledge we still have to master. Once we have learned the measured dose of knowledge, we reach the stage when it can easily be forgotten. For in the old method, we forget in order not to burden our memory with things we don’t need. And, according to Rancière, this is where we find “the genius of the explicators: they attach the creature they have rendered inferior with the strongest chains in the land of stultification – the child’s consciousness of his own superiority.” (22) This is the comfortable position of immaturity: the beaten path is much *easier* to walk, especially under someone else’s guidance.

In the method of emancipation, we relate what we learn to everything else: “The student must see everything for himself, compare and compare, and always respond to a three-part question: What do you see? What do you think about it? What do you make of it? And so on, to infinity.” (23)

Why do I find Rancière’s universal doctrine an interesting basis for design? At present, design is completely entrenched in the old method. The production system and capital make our selections for us, taking on the role of schoolmaster, of the explicator. They measure out for us fragments of knowledge, while the whole, because of its apparent complexity, remains divided between numerous specialists, who each take care of their own little territories. Capital is similarly unequalled when it comes to convincing specialists that they are an irreplaceable, crucial element in the whole; consequently, every element in the system accepts the given situation without any major doubts (or even any sense of resignation). What is more, the system creates various apparent possibilities solely in order to satisfy our need for a choice and provide us with a false sense of authorship. It perverts creative decisions into a situation where we constantly choose among numerous possibilities that only appear to be different from one another. No matter what we choose, it will always be the same; no matter what we choose, the schoolmaster will always be right. The bonds the system creates handicap the potential of the discipline, inasmuch as the system adapts the greater part of design services to fit its own image. In fact, anything *inconsistent*, anything *disconcerting*, is adjusted to the world of the market from the start or integrated into it later (as a new trend).

The method of emancipation, by contrast, makes it possible for us to think about an alternative – an alternative in the discipline of design. To think about a design that will, as an independent discipline, satisfy the demand to be outside the market production

system – a design that will bring us back to recognizing the potential the discipline possesses. This is not, indeed, a question of whether we as a discipline *can* do this, but whether we as a discipline *will* do this. Ruskin, in fact, reminds us of this, when, in the introductory to *Seven Lamps of Architecture*, he relays the words of the artist William Mulready: “Know what you have to do, and do it.” (Ruskin 1880, 1) If one of the designer’s tasks is to “discover and assess” reality (as ICSID’s definition of design puts it), then we must ask ourselves: Do we even see the reality in which design is entrenched? After all, in order to assess reality, we must first be able to see. To see what exists. In the case of design, what the designer sees is a certain discrepancy, a certain discomfort, a certain problem. All of which pushes us toward reflection. And only then, on the basis of both steps – to see something and to think about what is seen – do we come to the third part of Rancière’s question: the step that enables us to make a decision. Or to put it another way, with the knowledge we possess, every individual is aware that they have the potential to do something or not to do something. Thus, each of us is faced, again and again, by the question: What will you do?

**Acknowledgements:** My thanks go to Profs. Jelica Šumič Riha and Jonathan M. Woodham. The English translation is by Rawley Grau. This essay is a shortened version of my doctoral thesis, “Criticism in design: the search for the conditions for a new politics of design emancipation” (2012).

## References

- Agamben, Giorgio. 1999. *Potentialities: Collected essays in philosophy*. Edited by Daniel Heller-Roazen. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Ambasz, Emilio, ed. 1972. *Italy: The new domestic landscape: Achievements and problems of Italian design*. New York and Florence: The Museum of Modern Art in Centro Di.
- Branzi, Andrea. 1984. *The hot house. Italian New Wave design*. London: Thames and Hudson.
- Denegri, Jerko. 1990. “Dvomi sodobnega oblikovalca: med zavračanjem in povezovanjem. Enzo Mari v beograjskem Studiu ArtAvangarde” [The doubts of a contemporary designer: between rejection and connection: Enzo Mari at Belgrade’s Studio Artavangarde]. *Sinteza* (Ljubljana), no. 83–86.
- Fitch, Rodney. 1998. *Insights*. London: Design Council.
- Foucault, Michel. 1984. “What is enlightenment?” <http://foucault.info/documents/whatIsEnlightenment/foucault.whatIsEnlightenment.en.html> (accessed March 2012).
- Jameson, Fredric. 1991. *Postmodernism, or, The cultural logic of late capitalism*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Kant, Immanuel. 1784. “An answer to the question: What is enlightenment?” (1784). In *Groundwork for the metaphysics of morals*. Edited by Lara Denis, translated by Thomas K. Abbott with revisions by Lara Denis. Peterborough, Ontario: Broadview Press, 2005.
- Keller, Goroslav. 1976. “Oblikovanje za izvoz” [Design for export]. *Sinteza* (Ljubljana), no. 36–37.

- Morris, William. 1885. "The manifesto of The Socialist League."  
<http://www.marxists.org/archive/morris/works/1885/manifst1.htm> (accessed July 2010).
- Potter, Norman. 2002. *What is a designer: Things, places, messages*. 4th rev. ed., London: Hyphen Press. (Orig. pub. 1969.)
- Rancière, Jacques. 1991. *The ignorant schoolmaster: Five lessons in intellectual emancipation*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Rietveld, Gerrit. 1932. "New functionalism in Dutch architecture."  
[http://modernistarchitecture.wordpress.com/2010/10/20/gerrit-rietveld-\"new-functionalism-in-dutch-architecture\"-1932](http://modernistarchitecture.wordpress.com/2010/10/20/gerrit-rietveld-\) (accessed August 2011).
- Riha, Rado. 2006. "Kako lahko vidim revolucijo?" [How can revolution be seen?]. *Filozofski vestnik* (Ljubljana) 27 (no. 1).
- Ruskin, John. 1880. *The seven lamps of architecture: With illustrations drawn by the author*. 3rd. ed. Repr. Mineola, N.Y.: Dover, 1989.
- Šumič Riha, Jelica. 2007. "Jetnik Drugega, ki ne obstaja" [Prisoners of the inexistent Other]. *Filozofski vestnik* (Ljubljana) 28 (no. 1).