Design Promotion in New Zealand: Historical Perspectives on the 2003 Design Taskforce Report

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In May 2003, fifteen years after the third Labour government abolished New Zealand's state-funded design promotion organisation, the New Zealand Industrial Design Council (NZIDC), a Labour-dominated coalition government published, as part of its "Growth and Innovation Framework" (GIF) policy, a "new strategic vision for the economy" entitled *Success by Design: Design Makes First World Economies.*[1] The report embodied the deliberations of a "Design Taskforce" formed in May 2002 under the aegis of Industry New Zealand, the successor bureaucratic body to the Department of Industries and Commerce, the branch of government that, some twenty seven years earlier, had sponsored the formation of the NZIDC.[2] The Taskforce's principal term of reference was to suggest ways of "raising an awareness of design as a key enabler for industry". And among its other remits it was charged to develop "an understanding of what 'partnership' means between government and industry, and the extent and nature of potential government involvement in the industry."

As Jonathan Woodham has demonstrated in an analysis of the relations between government and the British design promotion organisation, the Council of Industrial Design (CoID), a revisiting of the role of design, its links with industry and business and its interaction with the state is no new thing; what happened with design promotion in Britain immediately following World War Two anticipated to a remarkable degree the role allotted to design in the Blair Labour government's "Cool Britannia" campaign.[3] Yet, in its quest to be seen as pioneering new frontiers and raising fresh and relevant issues, the Taskforce preferred neither to allow that it was treading the same paths that had been mapped in New Zealand over forty years previously nor recognise that these very matters had been the subject of intense discussion at governmental level since, at least, the 1830s.[4]

In addressing its ministerial instructions, the Taskforce defined its objective as "to achieve three things: more New Zealand businesses achieving sustainable export success; a more capable business-savvy design profession; greater international recognition of New Zealand design."[5] Underlying these overt goals was the tacit assumption that the state had a role to play in promoting design—both as a "driver" of the resulting strategy and as the primary funding source—although not as an *active* participant in what the Taskforce seems to have understood as the design process. In pursuing these objectives the Taskforce was, in effect, re-addressing the discourse that had led to the formation of the NZIDC in 1967 although the existence of an historical dimension to New Zealand design was barely recognised in the report and ignored in those documents on which it was based.[6] Previous efforts by the New Zealand state to promote design were disregarded as were the implications of the market-based rationale that had prompted its earlier decision to withdraw from institutionalised design promotion. In an extraordinary denial of history, the Taskforce contended that the absence of a history of design in New Zealand was a positive attribute in that the country's design capability benefited from "a fresh perspective unencumbered by tradition (remote yet internationally aware)", that "there's a fresh 'Pacific' perspective that helps define us" and that "we tend to carry less 'baggage'

1. *Success by Design: Design Makes First World Economies.* Wellington: Industry New Zealand. 2003.
2. The Design Taskforce comprised: Ray Labone (chair), a 'brand identity consultant'; Richard Cuttfield, then an executive director of a private investment company; Mary Davy, a creative director at a 'branding agency'; Neville Findlay, a designer for a fashion retail company; Professor Simon Fraser, head of the School of Design at Victoria University of Wellington; Peter Haythornthwaite, a designer and CEO; Michael James, then head of the School of Design at Unitec; Bina Klose, a designer at a now defunct design consultancy; Jeremy Moon, managing director of a clothing company; Rick Wells, managing director of an office seating manufacturer; Henare Walmsley, a registered architect then of the New Zealand office of an international design consultancy; Professor Leong Yap, then senior vice president at the private Lim Kok Wing University, Malaysia; and Professor John Raine, then professor of mechanical engineering and pro vice-chancellor (enterprise & international) at the University of Canterbury. The Taskforce was set up at the direction of Jim Anderton, deputy prime minister and minister of economic development in the Labour-Alliance coalition government (1999–2002). Between 1969 and 1970 Anderton was export manager at UEB Textiles, one of the leading corporate participants in the NZIDC strategy. The criteria used to select the members of the Taskforce remains unclear although it is notable that while at least eight of its thirteen members identified themselves as having been trained in various branches of design there was a tendency evident for them to stress their executive credentials. Industry New Zealand, for whom the report was written, was reorganised as a crown entity, New Zealand Trade and Enterprise (NZTE) in 2003.
3. J. Woodham, 'Design and the state: post-war horizons and pre-millenial aspirations', in *Utility Reassessed: The Role of Ethics in the Practice of Design*, ed. by J. Attfield. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999. pp.244–260.
4. The United Kingdom House of Commons established a

from the past than in some countries."[7]

While asserting the undesirability of history in an understanding of design in New Zealand, the Taskforce did treat with what it described as "New Zealand's design heritage" in a note contained in a Glossary of Terms in Appendix Two of the report. The entry was telling for its cultural insensitivity: "The New Zealand Maori designed and made many elegant and functional implements for cultivation, war games, and transport, etc." And the accuracy of its cursory historical claims was equally moot: "By the early 60's (*sic*) there were two organisations representing New Zealand's practicing designers along with the AAAA (*sic*)" and "By the late 1960's (*sic*) the NZIDC was formed through the support of the government, industry and the NZSID". The second "organisation representing New Zealand's practicing designers" was, presumably, the Christchurch-based Design Association of New Zealand, which declared categorically that it was not a practitioner body; and while there were some twenty or so members of the Auckland-based New Zealand Society of Industrial Designers—what the acronym NZSID stood for—in the "early 60's", it spent much of 1963 actively lobbying against the formation of the NZIDC, an initiative of the Department of Industries and Commerce; it is unclear what the AAAA was, or is.

Sources

Success by Design drew its data substantially from two reports: one commissioned by Industry New Zealand from the New Zealand Institute of Economic Research (NZIER), *Building a Case for Added Value Through Design*; the other, commissioned by the Taskforce from a consultancy firm Innovation & Systems in association with Noel Brown and Janice Burns, was entitled *integrate!* (*sic*) *a Critical Look at the Interface Between Business and Design*.[8] Neither of these reports made reference to design theory or history: the NZIER report, prepared by a statistician Mark Walton, based its definition of design on guidelines apparently provided by the Taskforce; and its understanding of local design conditions was drawn from a cursory reading of a glossy commercial publication, the *Urbis Design Annual* 2002; its measures of design efficacy were derived from the World Economic Forum's *Global Competitiveness Report 2001–2002*. The Innovation & Systems report evolved from "a web-based survey [...] sent directly to 300 companies as well as to 14 'hub' organisations that had agreed to forward it to their members." This was supplemented by "one to one" interviews with twenty CEO/GMs from "a range of different organisations [...] most could be described as 'manufacturers'." However, significant failures occurred in the design of the survey: problems were identified subsequently amongst respondents as to what "design" meant and this, combined with a low level of response to the questionnaire—only 86 responses were received—prompted Innovation & Systems to state that they could not "draw sound conclusions about how design is perceived and used [by business]." Further distortions were evident: while 47 per cent of the 86 respondents were involved in manufacturing, 18.6 per cent of respondents were from what was identified non-specifically as the "creative sector" while 21 per cent emanated from the service sector;

select committee "to inquire into the means of extending a Knowledge of the Arts and the Principles of design among the People (especially the Manufacturing Population)" in 1835; its report, published in 1836, catalysed the formation of art schools throughout Britain and its colonies. The first state-sponsored body in the United Kingdom with a specific remit to promote design was the British Institute of Industrial Art, formed in 1919; this semi-official body was succeeded in 1934 by the official Council for Art and Industry, which, in turn, was replaced in 1944 by the Council of Industrial Design; the latter survives as the Design Council, a name it adopted in 1972.

5. *Success by Design*. p.5.
6. The New Zealand Industrial Design Council was established in 1967 under the terms of the Industrial Design Act, 1966. Its existence resulted from the work of an industrial design study group formed in April 1958 within the Department of Industries and Commerce by its then permanent secretary Dr W. B. Sutch. The council was abolished in 1988 when, following a review by the Treasury, the Department of Trade and Industry and the State Services Commission, its governing act was repealed and residual functions derogated to Telarc, an organisation which now describes itself as "the national authority for accrediting laboratories, inspection bodies and radiology services". The earliest example of the New Zealand state funding design promotion activities seems to have occurred with a Department of Internal Affairs annual grant of £100 made to the Wellington-based Architectural Association Inc in respect of the *New Zealand Design Review* (1948–54); the withdrawal of the grant prompted the closure of the journal.
7. *Success by Design*. p.26; p.4.
8. M. Walton, *Building a Case for Added Value Through Design: Report to Industry New Zealand*. Wellington: NZ Institute of Economic Research, 2003, i; N. Brown and J. Burns, *integrate! A Critical Look at the Interface Between Business and Design*. Commissioned by Design Industry taskforce. [Wellington]: Innovation & Systems, 2002. p.2.

and while 24 per cent of respondents were based in Wellington, a mere 15 per cent were from Auckland, the country's principal manufacturing and service centre.

Understanding the impact of design on the production and consumption of commodities and services has historically been difficult to calibrate for any number of reasons, not least the inability of statistics to rationalise consumer choice but this dilemma was, like history, dismissed in the deliberations of the Taskforce which, ultimately, predicated its findings on flawed statistical data and shallow empirical observations to argue the economic benefits to be derived from the employment of design. Even so, this focus on economic advantages was a revisiting of the earlier discourse: the first issue of the NZIDC's journal *Designscape*, published in February 1969, carried an article by the economist Geoff Datson, "Industrial Design is Good Economics".[9] Datson, who had been a key player in the Department of Industries and Commerce study group established in 1958 to investigate the possibility of forming a design promotion organisation in New Zealand, asserted somewhat more convincingly that "Industrial design is wholly economic in nature, and is a matter of planning, since its essence is to use limited economic resources to give the maximum satisfaction, in short and long terms." The Taskforce's economic rationale could well have benefited from a reading of Datson's paper which, while rooted in Keynesian economic theory, had the benefit of being the result of sustained research and adherence to coherent and clearly articulated economic methodologies.

The Taskforce's refutation of history and its associated discipline of theory had the appearance of deliberate purpose in that it served to disengage it from being seen to promote the idea of state involvement in what it implied was the preserve of private enterprise while simultaneously demanding state subsidy for these activities. This neo-liberal stance must properly be viewed in light of the phenomenon identified by Anne Else as occurring in New Zealand in the 1980s and 1990s which she describes as "a widespread and deliberate political attempt to reshape [...] 'the presence of the past' in this country, in order to serve contemporary political ends."[10] This ideologically driven absence of historical perspective also concealed the economic reality that no design promotion activity has been able to function without the financial and administrative support provided by the state either in New Zealand or overseas.

Defining Design

The inability of the Taskforce's target audience—New Zealand business—to understand its "disciplinary" definition of design or how its adoption might affect production is neither a new thing nor is this incomprehension restricted to the business sector. The first attempt to enshrine a definition of design into New Zealand law occurred in 1953 with the Designs Act; it had been lifted without amendment from the British 1949 Registered Designs Act. As a part of the state's attempt to develop an export driven design strategy, the same definition was employed by legal draughtmen in the Industrial Design Bill submitted to Parliament in 1966. This posited design as meaning:

9. G. Datson, 'Industrial Design is Good Economics', *Designscape*, 1. February 1969. [pp.6:1–4].
10. A. Else, 'History lessons: the public history you get when you're not getting any public history', in *Going Public: the Changing Face of New Zealand History*, ed. by B. Dalley and J. Phillips. Auckland: Auckland University Press, 2001. pp.123–140, 135.
11. New Zealand. Parliament. House of Representatives, *New Zealand Parliamentary Debates*, 346. 1966. p.8.
12. New Zealand. Parliament. House of Representatives, *New Zealand Parliamentary Debates*, 348. 1966. pp.2139–2140. The designer Michael Smythe has claimed the revision was the result of agitation by students enrolled in the industrial design course at Wellington Polytechnic. M. Smythe, pers. com. August, 2005.
13. 'Glossary of Terms', in *Success by Design*. [p.82].
14. M. Bruce and J. Bessant, *Design in Business: Strategic Innovation Through Design*. London: Pearson Educational, 2002. pp.19–20.
15. 'Glossary of Terms', in *Success by Design*. [p.82].

> **Features of shape, configuration, pattern or ornament intended to be applied to any article by any industrial process or means, being features which in the finished article appeal to the eye or assist in the function which the article has to perform.**[11]

This production-focussed definition was amended three months later by one that more accurately reflected the research undertaken by the Department of Industries and Commerce study group driving the legislation: "'Industrial design' means the practice of planning the properties, or the presentation, of the products of industry with the object of improving their quality, utility and appearance".[12] Nearly forty years later the Taskforce would frame its definition of design in similarly general, production-driven terms, while couching it in the aspirational (albeit ungrammatical) rhetoric of business consultancies as being "a creative and integrative process". Design it declared "is a methodology (a way of thinking) that guides the synthesis, technology, scientific and commercial disciplines to produce unique and superior products, services and communications."[13] This assertion seems to have been derived from fundamental misreading of definitions of "design as process" provided by a number of product development textbooks, notably one of the Taskforce's more occluded—albeit credible—sources, a textbook directed at British MBA students, *Design in Business* edited by Professor Margaret Bruce (University of Manchester, Institute of Science and Technology) and Professor John Bessant (University of Brighton, Centre for Research in Innovation Management) and published by the *Financial Times*/Prentice Hall in 2002.[14] Bruce and Bessant's work focussed on an emerging area of practice for design consultants, service design, an activity that investigates the role of design in management practice and theory. Drawing again on Bruce and Bessant who, in turn, were quoting the populist "design commentator" Stephen Bayley's assertion that "design is intrinsically linked with taste", the Taskforce then provided a definition of "aesthetics"—apparently something to do with its definition of design "as a creative and integrative process"—which related it to "issues of beauty and good taste. A product described as aesthetic is one that is considered a 'handsome' design."[15] The Taskforce's confused definition and its odd aesthetic qualifier assume a priori that the primary function of design is to enhance things, to make them "unique and superior"; in doing so it deflates the diachronic nature of the many processes involved in design and, significantly, while privileging production and marketing, eliminates from the model any significant role for those whom things are produced, the consumer.

Over the past century, thinking about design has been more than just the preserve of design practitioners, if indeed it ever was. Design has been postulated as a scientific discipline, viewed as a branch of economics, practiced as a tool of advertising and marketing, analysed anthropologically, historicised and theorised. Numerous models of the design process have been proposed which take into account the various roles embodied and reflected in the procedures by which commodities and services are designed, manufactured,

Success by Design: Design Makes First World Economies. Wellington: Industry New Zealand, 2003. [cover].

mediated, distributed and consumed. Nonetheless, the Taskforce relied on a simplistic model of design that not only ignored any significant role for the consumer but also failed to address in any significant manner issues of distribution and mediation. The consumer's role, as implied in *Success by Design*, was one of passive acceptance: "Design capability is about employing vision, process, creativity and technical skill to develop products, services and brands that capture the imagination of customers throughout the world."[16] In this paradigm, "the customer"—who presumably encompasses both client and consumer—is identified as an "end-user" who exists merely to be "excited". For the Taskforce, the consumer "experience" was seen as the end product of "design enabled value generation".[17] This narrow, production- driven model of design reverberates with the unrecognised historical perception of the New Zealand market as comprising reflexive consumers of commodities, supine participants in a trade of commodities identified by a metropolitan elite of designers and "design-enabled" businesses. This condescending view of the New Zealand domestic market sits at odds with the Taskforce's hopes of an internationalised consumer base for the commodities and services produced by those it identifies as "Questors: businesses with aspirations to succeed internationally as exporters".[18]

Design and the State

The Taskforce identified the state's primary role in its proposed strategy as providing the necessary funds for its implementation. The state would "provide funding to establish and implement the priority (*sic*) inform and enable initiatives during the first five years support and fund the establishment of an independent executive design agency over the longer term".[19] In October 2003 the *New Zealand Herald* reported that:

> **The Government had decided to meet each of the Taskforce's recommendations. That meant spending $12.5 million over four years [...] The only difference between the Government's response to the taskforce and the wish list itself is the money being spent—the Taskforce had asked for $18 million over five years.**[20]

As noted above, in terms of both funding source and the institutional profile it proposed, the implementation of the Taskforces's outline strategy differed little from that expounded by the Department of Industries and Commerce in the mid 1960s. If anything, in funding terms it was less successful: the department had sought and following negotiations with the Treasury received initial per annum funding of $28,000; the Taskforce obtained sixty nine per cent of what it sought. Moreover, and despite reservations that the administrative template adopted for the NZIDC was inappropriate to the New Zealand condition, it had been tested with quantifiable success in Britain and was notionally subject to Parliamentary oversight. The "independent executive design agency" proposed by the Taskforce would have no such system of checks and balances.

Equally, where the NZIDC relied predominantly on CoID precedents in its attempts to articulate a mission, the Taskforce asserted that its strategic references had been taken from a survey under-

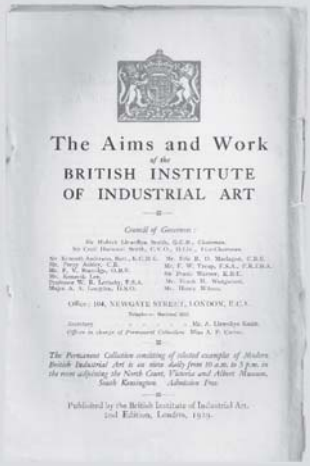
16. Ibid. p.14.
17. Ibid. p.21.
18. Ibid. p.9.
19. Ibid. p.51.
20. P. Oliver, 'Wish List Comes True for Design Taskforce', *New Zealand Herald*. 17 October 2003. p.C3.
21. T. Davis, *Innovation and Growth: a Global Perspective*. [London]: PricewaterhouseCoopers, [2000]. The report is not available publicly.
22. *Success by Design*. p.25. The Fitch reference was taken unacknowledged from the NZIER report which cited it as: "H. Aldersley-Williams, 'When Good Design Pays Dividends', http://www.bluegoose.co.uk/resources/resa.htm." This un-dated reference has not been accessible since at least October 2003. Bluegoose is a London-based "communications consultancy".
23. Ibid. p.40; *The Aims and Work of the British Institute of Industrial Art*, 2nd edition. London: BIIA, 1929. pp.2–3.24.
24. 'Industrial Design', *New Zealand Manufacturer*, 20:4. February 1968. pp.65–67.
25. T. Fry, *Design History Australia*. Sydney: Hale & Iremonger, 1988. p.54.

taken by the British arm of the financial consultancy PricewaterhouseCoopers along with uncited studies by two British design consultancies, Fitch and the Design Innovation Group; similarly, the Bruce and Bessant text was co-sponsored by the British Design Council.[21] Without recognising any sense of irony that might have been involved in resurrecting this neo-colonial dependency or any appreciation that the conditions under which design is viewed in the United Kingdom are significantly different from those obtaining in New Zealand, the Taskforce observed approvingly that "the UK Design Council adopted the Fitch approach and in 1999 applied it to six hypothetical funds comprised of British design-embracing firms."[22] Yet despite its corporate gloss, the specifics of the Taskforce strategy uncannily echoed those of the NZIDC as well as those of the earlier British design promotion organisations. The Taskforce's aim of instituting "a communications programme pushing the virtues of good design to business" was not far differentiated from the British Institute of Industrial Art's objective from 1919 of promoting "closer co-operation among [...] designers, craftsmen, manufacturers, buyers, sellers [and] ultimate purchasers" for the "purpose of maintaining and raising the standard of design and craftsmanship in British Industries."[23] It was also reflected in the central activity of the NZIDC in 1968 "to promote design initially and principally with the small manufacturing units around the country".[24] The Taskforce's intent of "holding a conference of design and business leaders" was an activity undertaken by both design councils from their inception, as was the Taskforce's aim of "starting an audit/mentoring programme to help businesses improve their design capability"; the NZIDC provided businesses with field advisory, product evaluation and designer services.

Even with its focus on production and marketing, the Taskforce disregarded the issue of location, presumably on the assumption that free trade should be viewed as a given in the global marketplace. It appeared that the Taskforce's concept of design in New Zealand was that it was a local inflection of what it saw as a universal model, albeit one unencumbered by the baggage of history. But as Tony Fry observes:

> **From such perspectives design fades as just a style, and the appropriation of style trivialises the project out of which it was generated. Such decontextualisation reduces design simply to the management of appearances and diminishes the prospect of the rise of a local self aware and critical practice.**[25]

By failing to address the vital and abiding connection between trade policy and design, the Taskforce was, in effect, trivialising its own recommendations. Again, this approach appears to reflect a stance that prefers that the state be eliminated from the preferred neo-liberal model of the design process. But history suggests that since their tentative establishment in the latter part of the nineteenth century, New Zealand manufacturing industries have sought and received trade protection measures and financial support from the state in order to compete successfully against comparable industries in both the domestic and overseas markets. Yet, as the first chairman of the NZIDC, Philip Proctor, who happened to be chairman of


The Aims and Work
of the
BRITISH INSTITUTE
OF INDUSTRIAL ART

The Aims and Work of the British Institute of Industrial Art. London: BIIA, 1929. [cover].

Dunlop New Zealand Ltd and a former president of the New Zealand Manufacturers' Federation, observed in a paper delivered to the 1963 Export Development Conference:

> **New Zealand industries [...] must expect to face strong competition from the older industrialised countries, in their attempts to break into the export markets. And no matter how generous the tax concessions the government may offer to induce producers to export, success will not follow unless—as we have seen—the article is of good quality, and thus, well-designed.**[26]

Nonetheless, the export-driven, design-supported, manufacturing push heralded by the 1963 conference collapsed in the early 1980s as the Treasury, driven by the ideological fervour of the free market persuaded politicians to abolish the country's trade barriers, halt state-subsidised research and promotion and reign in export subsidies and tax concessions. Designed or not, New Zealand's manufactured export trade suffered a significant collapse without the benefit of state support.

Design for Export

The Taskforce argued that: "The primary focus of the Design Taskforce strategy is the integration of design into businesses with aspirations to succeed internationally as exporters".[27] This aim was reinforced in the preface to its findings with the somewhat truistic observation that:

> **With this task we are up against some formidable competitors—sophisticated global businesses with ingeniously designed products, compelling brands and cost efficiencies that are difficult to match. These businesses and countries that breed (*sic*) them have not achieved their success by chance. Many of the higher performing countries have succeeded by design.**[28]

In its pairing of design and business, of what it perceived as aesthetics and efficiency in the face of overseas competition, the Taskforce returned unwittingly to the ideas more clearly and purposefully enunciated by Bill Sutch, permanent secretary of the Department of Industries and Commerce from 1957 to 1965, in a speech he delivered at the 1960 Industrial Development Conference:

> **Manufacturing development should be in a short time export development. That is why New Zealand should set its face against its manufactures being allotted only the New Zealand market by associates abroad. This means scrupulous and insistent attention in fine detail, to costs, efficiency and management, design, quality and research. Though good quality is being attained by existing industries, these things are not exactly those for which New Zealand is famous. We do not have the Danish and Swiss advantage of being in Europe, with its traditions, literature, science, research, technology, philosophy, art, scholarship and attitude to work.**[29]

Sutch recognised the reality that design was a relatively small part in a complex web of economic and political factors, a perception that the Taskforce occluded in favour of an overly weighted perception of the role that design plays in the export trade. It might plausibly be argued that

26. P. Proctor, 'Industrial Design for Export, Background Paper 9', in *Report: Export Development Conference June* 1963. Wellington: Department of Industries and Commerce, 1963. 1–6, p.5.
27. *Success by Design.* p.32.
28. Ibid. p.4.
29. W. Sutch, 'Programme for growth', in *Industrial Development Conference.* Wellington: Department of Industries and Commerce, 1960. 1–29, p.27.
30. *Success by Design.* p.59.
31. Letter from W. B. Sutch to T. Wegener-Clausen, 7 March 1962, Archives New Zealand (ANZ), IC W1926 57/1/6 vol. 2.
32. *Success by Design.* p.4.

the New Zealand state's earlier foray into design promotion failed in part due to an ultimately unjustifiable belief that the application of "design" would prove to be the exporters' panacea: the difficulty lay in what was understood by design. While the establishment of the NZIDC was ultimately countenanced through the political support of the National party's minister for overseas trade, John Marshall, as part of the trade promotion strategy National had inherited from the previous Labour administration. In the process of ideological translocation, the complex and nuanced understanding of the design process that had characterised the Department of Industries and Commerce investigation was simplified into a matter of aesthetics; its focus was on the design of presentation and packaging, on branding and marketing rather than a long string process involving manufacturing, distribution, mediation and consumption.

Scandinavia Revisited

Underpinning the Taskforce's strategy document were a series of case studies identified through the aspirational and somewhat contradictory exhortation: "a business will become a global brand by taking the lead in design, not by following others". The first case study pinpointed Finland generally and the mobile telephone manufacturer Nokia specifically. Finland, the report declared, "has truly integrated design with business to become a global leader", while Nokia "has become the industry benchmark for handset design, primarily due to its philosophy that handsets are a stylish fashion accessory."[30]

It should come as no surprise to learn that Scandinavian industry has long been hailed as an exemplar for New Zealand enterprise, a stance grounded on a perception that most Scandinavian countries have comparatively small populations, and, until recently, had predominantly agricultural economies with historically low levels of industrialisation. In New Zealand during the 1950s and 60s, Sutch ardently promoted the view that design was one of the key factors in Scandinavian industrial success, going so far as to observe to the departing Danish Chargé d'Affaires that "Denmark must be one of the examples which New Zealand must follow if it is to develop as a mature nation with a continuing good living standard."[31] Nonetheless, in the aftermath of Sutch's enforced resignation, the design development paradigm that New Zealand ultimately pursued was one modelled crudely on British precedents rather than those of Scandinavia.

The Taskforce likewise proposed a Scandinavian model for developing a design-focussed strategy for "[...] New Zealand industry in general" arguing that "We need look no further than Finland for evidence of this [design-driven success]. A country with a population similar to New Zealand has produced world-beating products from companies such as Nokia."[32] This reductive and formal assessment was supported by an equally superficial 'case study' and while identifying one element of a wide ranging Finnish national design policy, the analysis provided of the case was little more than a covetous glance at the success of the Nokia design studios rather than an attempt to render an understanding of the embedded elements of the design process

Success by Design: Design Makes First World Economies. Vellington: Industry New Zealand, 2003. p.58.

that prevailed in Finland at the time these products were developed.[33] Thus in the Taskforce's assessment, the complex design cultures that have evolved in Scandinavia during the post-industrial period are, in effect, reduced to a commercial decision by the Nokia Corporation to employ design as a component part in the development of a particular product type, a mobile telephone. Over a century of government strategies to foster and encourage design are effectively identified by the Taskforce with a single moment that Pekka Korvenmaa has noted was "a new ingredient from the Anglo-American scene [which] entered the discussion concerning the incorporation of design into business: design management. This was seen as the tool enabling design to permeate corporate strategies and to become operative via managerial practices at all levels of a company's actions."[34] Nonetheless, by 2001, as Korvenmaa observed, this "success" was "showing signs of increasing stagnation in parallel with fluctuations in the global economy".

Aftermath

If it disregarded its own history and failed to convey any sense of understanding the theoretical processes underpinning design, then the Taskforce equally failed to convey the nature of the relationship between design and business, despite it being in thrall to the textbooks of marketing and business administration academics. In a befuddled resonance of the past it highlighted the CoID's 1947 slogan "Good design is good for business" but attributed it mistakenly to "THOMAS WATSON JR, IBM CEO, LATE 1950'S (*sic*)".[35] The allegedly positive nature of a connection between design and business was highlighted by the report's designers, DNA design, whose gimmicky 'deconstructed' cover was based on a mock equation: (COMMERCIAL) SUCCESS=BUSINESS +**DESIGN**: Design Makes First World Economics. Yet, like the design councils in the United Kingdom, Australia and New Zealand and despite its use of marketing methodologies based on empirical data, the Taskforce was unable to quantify the benefits that accrue from the use of design other than in the broadest sense. The use of anecdotal case studies, while a salient feature of business school textbooks, merely echoed the employment of the same device by numerous earlier writers on design including John Gloag in a 1947 booklet, produced for the Scottish Committee of the CoID, appropriately titled *Good Design Good Business*.

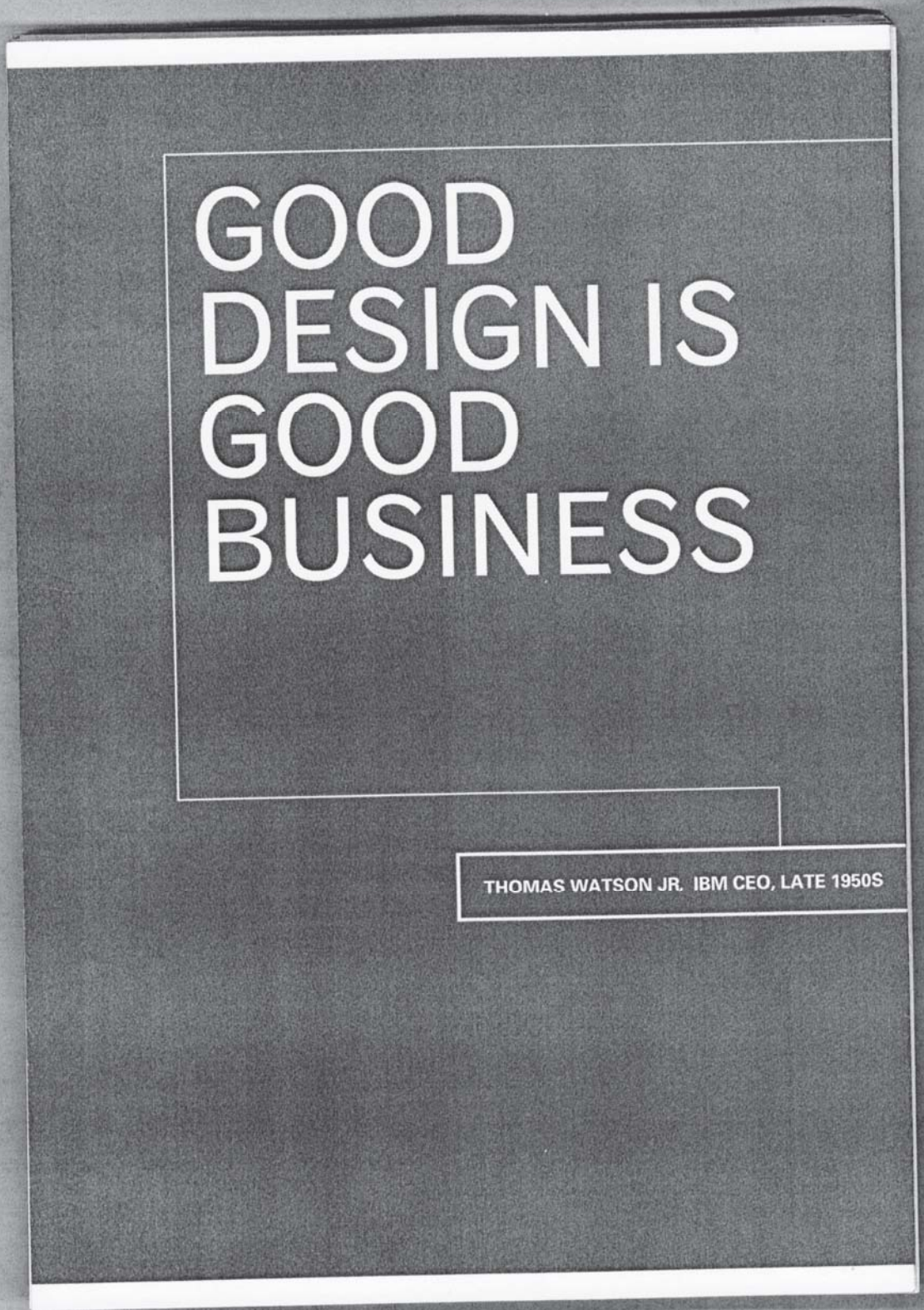
Design promotion bodies have been trying to convince business of the benefits of design since the 1750s when the Royal Society for the encouragement of Arts, Manufactures and Commerce was established in London to "embolden enterprise, enlarge science, refine art, improve our manufactures and extend our commerce". But as John Grey, a vice president of the Design and Industries Association, observed in 1947:

> **Before the war, when attempting to persuade the unconverted manufacturer or business man to take an interest in design one was usually met with the question: "Does it pay?". The answer [...] was not quite so easy to substantiate. Although [one] could reel off the names of a large number of firms [...] who**

33. The Finnish National Technology Agency (TEKES) Industrial Design Technology programme was a part of the larger "Design 2005" strategy evolved by the Finnish Ministries of Education and Trade, the Finnish National Fund for Research and Development (SITRA), the Finnish Arts Council, the Finnish Society of Arts and Crafts and the University of Art and Design Helsinki (UIAH). See: Finland. Ministry of Education and Arts Council of Finland, *Design 2005! Government Decision-in-Principle on Finnish Design Policy*. Helsinki: Ministry of Education, 2000.
34. P. Korvenmaa, 'Rhetoric and Action: Design Policies in Finland at the Beginning of the Third Millennia', *Scandinavian Journal of Design History*, 11. 2001. p.9.
35. J. Gloag, *Good Design Good Business*. Edinburgh: Scottish Committee of the Council for Industrial Design, 1947.

Left:
Good Design Good Business.
By John Gloag.
Edinburgh: Scottish Committee of the Council for Industrial Design, 1947. [cover].

Right:
Success by Design: Design Makes First World Economies.
Wellington: Industry New Zealand, 2003. [p.8].


GOOD
DESIGN IS
GOOD
BUSINESS
THOMAS WATSON JR. IBM CEO, LATE 1950S

had built up great reputations and businesses founded on high standards of design in their productions, it was just as easy for the business man to quote an even larger number to whom design was a closed book.[36]

Despite adopting the neologisms of marketing and business administration and articulating what it conceived to be the language of business, the immediate impact of Success by design on New Zealand businessmen was limited. Soon after the launch of the report, the *New Zealand Herald* reported that "fifty top business executives" had dismissed the government's attempt to promote economic development through design "as little better than a public relations stunt [that will] do nothing for the economy beyond supporting another raft of consultants."[37]

Following publication of *Success by Design* the Ministry for Economic Development prepared a response to the findings of the Taskforce based not only on the report but also on a series of consultations with the "Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet, Treasury, Ministry of Research, Science and Technology, Department of Labour, Ministry for Culture and Heritage, Ministry of Education, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Te Puni Kōkiri, New Zealand Trade and Enterprise and the Tertiary Education Commission". Having stripped out the inflated rhetoric of aspirational business, the ministry observed that the Design Taskforce's recommendations differed from those prepared by the three other GIF taskforces in that it was "directed at New Zealand businesses generally [...] rather than the design industry specifically [...] Design is positioned as a general purpose enabling capability, which can deliver sustainable competitive advantage for New Zealand business by driving innovation to create highly differentiated products directed at international niche markets."[38] This recognition of the Taskforce's assertion that design is a different terrain might suggest why the ministry, while recognising the underlying rationale of the Taskforce's recommendations of making design more central to the activities of New Zealand business, was prepared to ignore one of the salient principles of state-funded agencies, that of arms-length governance. In doing so it failed to differentiate between the business of design promotion and the design of business promotion. However, following Cabinet approval in October 2003, an implementation team, branded Better by Design was established in 2004 to act as a "catalyst" and "to deliver the recommended programmes to export-focussed businesses and the design community". Its activities are focussed on connecting "leading business experts and design practitioners" with "ambitious companies" and it delivers these through a "design integration programme", "leadership conferences" and educational seminars aimed at businesses and academics.[39]

It would perhaps be too easy to see the Taskforce's report as yet another instance of the free market deploying the financial resources of the state to ensure its continuing viability; a minor if uncanny foretaste of what would occur in the banking sector some five years later. Equally, it would be glib to accept the cynical observation regarding "another raft of consultants" made by

the anonymous businessman in the *New Zealand Herald* article notwithstanding, for example, the action of two members of the Taskforce in forming one of the three "accredited consultancies" that undertake "design audits" for Better by Design. Unfortunately, though, it is difficult to quantify the success of this latest state-sponsored design promotion strategy. While the Better by Design 'programme' is not backward in flaunting its claims to success its reporting mechanisms are obscure, presumably from a need to respect commercial confidentiality. Certainly there is no indication that the Better by Design 'hotline' has been ringing red since it opened for business in 2005.[40] The programme's website currently lists eighteen "New Zealand companies well on the way to becoming design integrated and even more successful" but the results are heavily qualified. For example, Cambridge Clothing, a company that has been manufacturing clothing for the New Zealand market for 130 years, "is New Zealand's foremost menswear designer, manufacturer, wholesaler and retailer" which "employs a design team focused (*sic*) on innovation" even though "some of its manufacturing has been relocated offshore to China" and its sales are aimed primarily at the domestic market. Claims as to the role of design in encouraging the growth of export earnings also seem a little hyperbolic in the instance of Les Mills International, a company that "creates group exercise-to-music programmes for use in licensed health and fitness facilities and distributes them to the clubs through a network of international agents. As at May 2008 the programs were being offered in 12,000 facilities in over 70 countries, with 5 million participants weekly."[41] These "design enabled" companies presumably count among the "at least 50 existing businesses made internationally competitive through design leadership, generating and additional $500m per year in export earnings" that the Taskforce identified as its primary objective for the first five years of the strategy.[42]

Inevitably the question must be raised as to whether the Taskforce report was ultimately about addressing the future of design in New Zealand's business culture, or was it another marketing and branding strategy dreamed up in a simulated business school exercise? Was it about the promotion of design or the expansion of enterprise; if the latter, was the model of design adopted by the Taskforce the most appropriate for the task? One of the notable hiatuses in *Success by Design* was the consumer. It is recognition of this absence that reveals the flawed theoretical foundation upon which the edifice of the Design Taskforce report was assembled and, again, it has historical precedent. It is a simple fact that the majority of manufactured commodities consumed in New Zealand are and have always been produced elsewhere; and until relatively recently, New Zealand consumers were constrained as to what commodities and services they could acquire through import restrictions and, more significantly, the activities of a cabal of importers and distributors representing overseas manufacturers who were not only able to determine availability but were in the extraordinary position of being able to influence both government policy and what might best be described as public taste. Coupled with this

36. J. Grey, *The Design and Industries Association*. Booklet no 5. London: DIA, 1947. p.3.
37. J. Eagles, 'Business Leaders Give Thumbs Down for Government's Hands-on', *New Zealand Herald*. 29 September 2003. p.C1.
38. New Zealand. Office of the Minister for Economic Development, *Response to GIF Taskforces: Paper 5: Design*. [2003], § 12. http://www.med.govt.nz/templates/ContentTopicSummary____565.aspx (accessed 8.1.2010). The other taskforces covered information and communications technology, biotechnology and screen production.
39. Better by Design, 'About Us', http://www.betterbydesign.org.nz/about-better-by-design (accessed 11.1.2010).
40. *How Can Design Add Value to Your Business*. Auckland: Better by Design, [2005]. p.[15].
41. Better by Design, 'Inspiring companies', http://www.betterbydesign.org.nz/news-and-resources/inspiring-companies (accessed 11.1.2010).
42. *Success by Design*. p.9.

Left:
Success by Design: Design Makes First World Economies.
Wellington: Industry New Zealand, 2003. [preliminary pages].

provincial remove was a national culture that regarded issues of design as being of distinctly secondary significance; design education, for example, was viewed as the exclusive preserve of would be practitioners, a status sustained not only in the report but by the activities of Better by Design. Yet it was the involvement of consumers and an active awareness of their understanding of design that was one of the salient characteristics of what probably the most successful design promotion programme to date, a body formally established in 1907, the *Deutscher Werkbund*. As Frederic Schwartz points out, the members of the *Werkbund*:

> **[...] were aware that they were producing for a capitalist economy, that their products were the result of the division of labour, that they would first be seen after they had made their way through the system of commodity distribution and exchange, by subjects whose understanding was determined by the simple fact they were consumers. And they knew by bitter experience that form was transformed during its lengthy path from producer to consumer. In their effort to understand their own work, they needed to think far beyond the category of 'industry'.**[43]

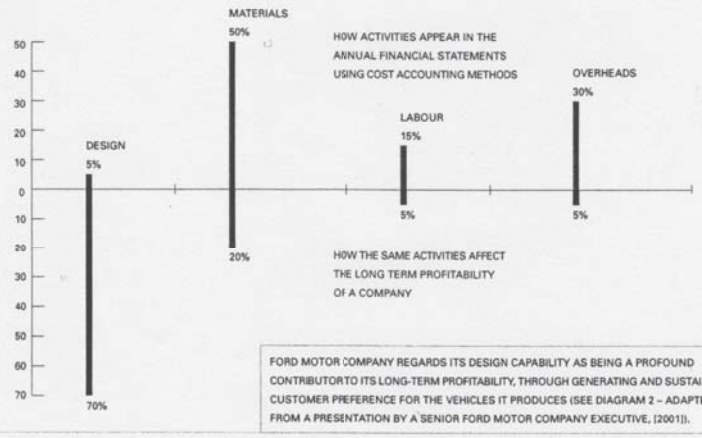
It was this ability of the members of the *Werkbund* to project their work as designers, businessmen, industrialists and theorists beyond the immediate, beyond narrow commercial and professional considerations, that enabled their success. Closer to home, it might be observed that one of the contributing factors in the demise of the NZIDC was it lost sight of the idea that design promotion is not only about convincing businessmen of the value of design and designers about the importance of business but also it is about forming and developing consumer habits. From the late 1970s *Designscape*, the NZIDC's primary public profile, transformed from an informative discussion forum for design-related activities—albeit a pale imitation of the CoID's *Design* magazine—into a banal trade publication vaguely aimed at production engineers and designers. While the *Werkbund* may not have catalysed production of the sort of "stylish fashion accessory" so appealing to the Taskforce, its members—who included designers of the stature of Walter Gropius, Henri van de Velde and Peter Behrens—did both inaugurate the modern movement and invest the idea of design with a level of credibility so absent from *Success by Design*.

43. F. Schwartz, *The Werkbund: Design Theory and Mass Culture Before the First World War*. London: Yale University Press, 1996. p.9.

Right:
Success by Design: Design Makes First World Economies. Wellington: Industry New Zealand, 2003. [p.19].

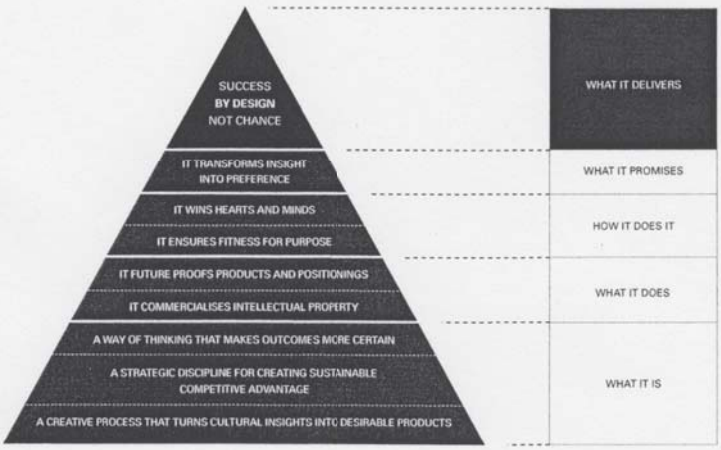
Overleaf:
Designscape 38. Wellington: New Zealand Industrial Design Council, 1971. [cover].
Designscape 36. Wellington: New Zealand Industrial Design Council, 1972. [cover].
Designscape 54. Wellington: New Zealand Industrial Design Council, 1973. [cover].

DIAGRAM: 02	FORD MOTOR COMPANY DESIGN COST/PROFITABILITY MODEL



FORD MOTOR COMPANY REGARDS ITS DESIGN CAPABILITY AS BEING A PROFOUND CONTRIBUTOR TO ITS LONG-TERM PROFITABILITY, THROUGH GENERATING AND SUSTAINING CUSTOMER PREFERENCE FOR THE VEHICLES IT PRODUCES (SEE DIAGRAM 2 – ADAPTED FROM A PRESENTATION BY A SENIOR FORD MOTOR COMPANY EXECUTIVE, [2001]).

DIAGRAM: 03	DESIGN VALUE PROPOSITION



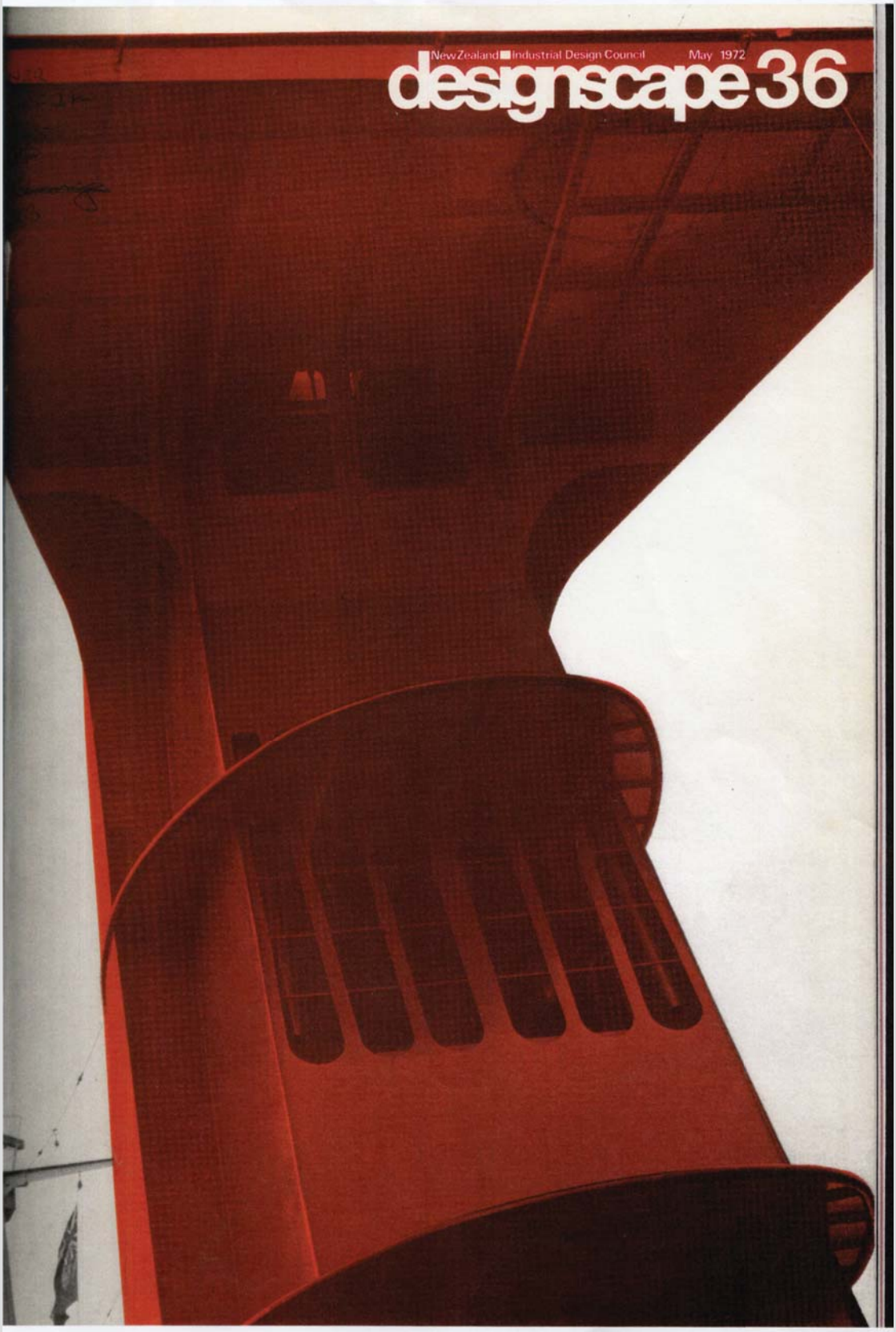
New Zealand Industrial Design Council July 19?1

designscape 38

FACES OF DESIGN
PILES OF GOOD CARPET
AUCKLAND'S LEADING TOWERS

New Zealand Industrial Design Council May 1972

designscape 36



New Zealand Industrial Design Council December 1973

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