INDEPENDENT INQUIRY

Parallels between design

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Design upbringing

In order to understand my design philosophy, I have looked at what interests and inspires me now and what did so in the past. I had an upbringing built upon art and design, which drove me to have an interest in multiple design fields. This meant that all sorts of art and design would interest me in the future, from product design to fashion to architecture to automotive design. I then looked at the appropriate design language and those who created it, to set the foundation for my own design philosophy. Through this process I will conclude what I need to do to achieve my desired results.

Since as long as I can remember, I have been taken to art and design exhibitions and workshops by my mother. This drew out my creativity and got me drawing from a very young age. If I would lean into a certain type of art or design, she would fuel this passion by taking me to art galleries such as the Royal Academy of Art, Saatchi Gallery , the V&A Museum , TATE Modern and the Miro Museum in Barcelona. I have lived 10 minutes from TATE Britain my whole life, so I would go there frequently.

I also had an interest in how things are put together from a young age which, combined with a passion for drawing, pushed me towards architecture. At this stage I was only 10 years old, however I attended architectural workshops in London , Paris , Madrid and Barcelona. I also got to speak to Richard Rogers when attending his RA architectural workshop and saw some of his work.

For example, the Barajas Airport in Madrid had a profound impact on me and the direction I wanted to take. All this meant art was always in the curriculum for me, anytime I could choose to do art in school, I would.

When I was 16, I chose to do a practical placement in the field at an architectural firm called Farrells, despite having meanwhile developed a bigger passion for cars. During my time there I had to design a common area for a small construction site next to Paddington Green. However, given my passion for the construction and design of things I was only moved further towards automotive design.

Additionally, because of this architectural influence, I was also always choosing to do physics when I could, right up until A level. Given the performance combined with the beauty which certain cars possess, I was only pulled further into it.

The other field of significant influence on my design philosophy is fashion design because it is a broader field, without time, trait or technology constraints. I was also led towards clothes in 6th form through my passion for music due to the now tightknit link between fashion, music and modern culture.

Lyrics and the overwhelming sense of style that comes with a musical artist led me towards an interest in specific higher end brands which were trying to create a spectacle in their shows and art in the clothes. This interest grew and I started making clothes which would express my own ideas. Fashion design also seemed to be a good way into understanding and being part of how someone represents themselves, what they think and what they might advertise.

Fashion and automotive design are the fields I am continuing with now and where my main design influences come from, combined with the art in my early life. I developed a multi-faceted approach to design as I don't look at a problem or object in one way but several, which means I draw unorthodox inspiration from other fields.

For example, the shut lines of a car could also be the way a garment falls on someone's body. To help understand my design philosophy better, I need to investigate the designs I like, to see what they have in common and what guides their designers. I also need to see what philosophies make great pieces of design and what draws me to them, regardless of the field.

Beginning with my influence from automotive design; my favourite cars are German cars that were in production from the late 1980s to the end of the 1990s. However. there are some German cars that are outside of this trend, including the Mercedes 190e Cosworth and, particularly, the styling of the G-wagons of this time. Other cars from this era include the BMW E30 and E36, M3s and the E30 8 series. Finally, my favourite cars of all are the end of the air cooled 911 era, specifically the 964, followed by the 993.

Most of these cars feature a sleek, aggressive, sharp and almost boxy design showing a consistent style from that time and era. Whether from regulation or trends, the design influence from this time was ideal for the production of these icons. To understand this design language, I first need to know what was going on in the industry at this time and in the period leading up to it.

BMW under Luthe

BMW was headed up by the chief designer at that time, Claus Luthe, who ran the BMW design team from 1976 until 1990. He oversaw the design of my favourite BMWs, the E30, M3 and the E31 8 series.

Luthe had previously worked on designing buses, on redesigning Fiats for the German market and then for a company called NSU, which specialised in using rotary engines. Luthes BMW design language can first be seen in NSU's Ro80, a rotary powered saloon which has a very streamlined design, with long flowing lines creating what was one of the most aerodynamic cars of the time, with some models having a drag coefficient as low as 0.34. Although this was not popular at the time, manufacturers would follow the design later, creating much sleeker, aerodynamically sound cars.

Unfortunately, due to the high strain of the rotary engines, the Ro80 would break at a low milage, which led to a recall of many models and irreparable damage to the company name, which would eventually be bought out by Volkswagen.

VW then made Luthe Audis chief of design where he produced his most notable work before BMW ; the Audi A 50 and A 70. All this meant that people were expecting him to radicalise BMW design when he got there.

However, he did not, instead choosing to innovate the pre-existing designs. [1]

In an interview with BMW car, Luthe explains: ‘’ We do not have to create models that are radically different from the ones they replace, the important thing to keep in mind is to make sure there is continuity from the old model to the new model.’’

(Barchetta, 2019)

To further understand what made the 1980s BMW design language so iconic and impactful, I need to look at what led to it, and, more specifically, who. The head of BMW design before Luthe was Paul Bracq, who pioneered a boxier, utilitarian shape at Mercedes. This is clearly visible with the adaptation of the W114 from its predecessor, the W110. Bracq achieved this by tucking the side lights into the body and squaring out the front of the car, as well as removing ornamental elements, so creating a sleeker car that prioritises a single line. [2]

Mercedes then continued with this aesthetic into the future models, even in the 190e. After this, applying his more aerodynamic shape and utilitarian design at BMW, Bracq designed the E21 3 series, E23 7 series, E24 6 Series and the E12 5 series. He left the company in 1974.

Luthe then chose to innovate the pre-existing design language by creating a wider looking and sharper boxier shape, whilst following Bracq’s philosophy of streamlining and reduction. He did this by integrating the indicators into the front bumper guard and placing the licence plate between the rear lights. The lines on the side of the car are also reduced to a less prominent feature compared to the 3 series and 5 series before. Applying this design language created a boxier, more aggressive shape for the BMWs of the time, whilst they were actually getting rounder, therefore improving aerodynamic efficiency. The epitome of this design was the culmination of the E30, the M3.

Luthe also worked on the E31 8 series, another one of my favourites from the era, which was one of the first cars to be shaped with CAD to achieve low drag. This Lead to the 8 series being one of the most aerodynamic cars at the time. The car achieved a drag coefficient of 0.29, which is visible in the design with its pop-up headlights, especially aerodynamically designed mirrors and tucking the wind shield wipers under the bonnet. [3]

Additionally, the car is clearly inspired by the already extremely sleek 1972 turbo concept, also designed by Paul Bracq, with the small kidney grill and long flattened front bumper to achieve an almost doorstop like shape. All these aero focused features were blended perfectly with further styling tweaks such as the car’s front bumpers’ large panel gap mimicking the deformation zone of the turbo concept and continuing down the side of the car. The 8 series also borrows its wide rear fender flair from the E30 M3. Additionally, car also has no B pillar, meaning that the roof line and shoulder flow in the same direction, creating smooth, unimpeded lines which in turn make a very pretty car whilst maintaining speed.

My love for this specific M3 and 8 series show that I aesthetically gravitate towards the combined design language of Bracq and Luthe, which produces sleek and seemingly rounded shapes with concise DRGs and a utilitarian look as whole, However, philosophically I like refinement and re-working of design. This idea of reiteration and refinement can similarly be seen across fashion design with the recycling of seasons and trends. However, one designer who specifically bases their philosophy off redesign is Virgil Abloh.

Virgil Abloh

Virgil started his career in architecture before eventually moving onto fashion with his first brand Pyrex which eventually evolved into Off-white. He also won the LVMH Prize and would eventually

end his career becoming creative director of Louis Vuitton until his death. As well as this, he worked on some of the most coveted collaborations in recent history with Nike, Ikea and Mercedes designing a NASCAR-inspired g-wagon and an off-road Maybach. Despite Virgil's work having a large impact on me and what I thought I might be capable of making, I also chose to look at Virgil because he has a very simple design philosophy, the 3% rule, despite having a complex and layered personal brand.

Virgil believes that you only have to change something 3% different from its original form to create something new. He explains: ''We exist off the backs of many other things and iterations before us.'' (agostinho079, 2020)

Therefore, he justifies this lazy design concept, saying "I'm only interested in editing something 3% from its original form."

He explains further holding an Air Force 1, an instrumental shoe, in his first Nike collab, saying that he did not want or need another shoe, but instead chose to edit this one, similarly to Luthe.

Although this philosophy can cause potential issues around allegations of copying existing work and trademark and design infringement, it can also allow people to see pre-existing products in a different way. For example, the ''Off-White'' logo is very similar to the Glasgow Airport logo, which is itself a take on the St Andrews cross. This is a clear example of an old idea slightly adapted to suit the new; or the 3 % rule. Virgil received criticism due to similarity. However, given his philosophy, the design is not surprising. I don't necessarily agree with the 3% rule, but it is extremely effective if you aim to create new products or just refresh them at a fast rate and it is proven to be very popular. [4]

Leaning into your influences can work well to an extent and the 3% rule works particularly well in a field like fashion design, where recycling and trends dictate the cyclical direction the field goes in. However, in a field like automotive design, this does not work because you cannot look to the past to deal with new and contemporary challenges. An automotive manufacturer must look 20 to 30 years into the future whilst maintaining and developing the essence of the brand to create a successful car design, whilst a fashion brand can reference itself to create something that looks cohesive year after year.

I think that a lot of Virgil's ideas come from seeing something and trying to imitate it for a different purpose. This resonates with me because I switch between fields to create new designs all the time. This philosophy of less being more is used to create by replicating and reusing designs. This is brought forward in the ''Off-White'' name itself, which is a "Compromise between two similar or dissimilar notions," according to the brand. In this case, intending to bridge the gap between streetwear and high fashion operating in this grey area – ''off white''. This balancing act dictates the brand aesthetic from clothes to shows; telling you whether a garment is ready or needs to be higher quality to stay in balance between the two extremes all the way down to the music or choreography of a show.

An early example of less being more to create this balance is Virgil's Off-White winter 2019 show, in which he used a green screen showing videos of a structure, whilst models in American football helmets walked across it, creating an interesting and unseen type of referencing and a fairly simple but striking show. [5]

Virgil reiterates his belief in compromise and comparison at a Harvard core studio lecture, when he describes one of the steps in his design process: "Off White is a shorthand pseudonym to remind me

that I am always just comparing two things, whether they're super dissimilar or they are actually the same,'' (TheHarvardGSD, 2017)

Virgil continued to make striking shows, with my favourite show, the 2020 spring summer Louis Vuitton menswear show. Choosing to use a Paris Street with a few extra elements and letting the surrounding architecture do the work and the clothes stand out instead of being overwhelmed, shows less is more in its simplest form.

I think working consistently in different strands of design may not always come together, but at a certain point they complement each other. Whether this is Virgil blending streetwear and high fashion with his architectural background to create a brand with patterns and graphics derived from urban signage, buildings and structures, or myself trying to maintain a creative balance between fashion and automotive design, switching between fields constantly when creating something means that you can find inspiration from anything, no matter how big or small. Furthermore, the use of overlapping and comparing fields nurtures a compromise in design which makes for some interesting ideas. [6]

911 iterations

Another design that is born from compromise is the Porsche 911. There are various different designers responsible for the many iterations of 911s. However, it started with the 1963 901, which was later renamed as the 911, in 1965, as a replacement for the Porsche 365. 911s have come a long way since then, but I am specifically interested in the 964 and my favourite, the 993. The 964 was designed by Benjamin Dimson before he got to work on the 964. He was assigned to designing the front end of the 928, opting for twin slot air intakes and an integrated fog lamp design.

His design was chosen by senior designers at Porsche, and they liked it so much it ended up being the face of Porsche in the 1980s. Dimson also wanted to ''bring back the aerodynamic homogeneity that the 365 had," taking this inspiration from the 365 resulted in cleaner lines and integrated bumpers.

After his work on the 928, he was appointed lead designer on the 959, where more of his design language is visible. However, a lot of Dimson's design language was formed by restrictions. As Dimson says, ''Porsche sells performance, design is secondary to that.'' [7]

Since the 959 was made to be a 4WD car capable of doing 200 mph, Dimson explains ''Aerodynamics played a very critical control, for the car , especially for the design." Therefore, Dimson had to balance performance and style similarly to Virgil balancing aesthetics.

Air flow played a big role in design for Dimson as it did for Bracq and Luthe. However, this time it was out of necessity. "Aerodynamics almost dictated the design development of the car; from the front end to the fenders to the air intakes, even the rear spoiler was integrated into the rear fenders to be more aerodynamic," as said by Dimson. This meant that "Aerodynamics had to be spot on to keep the car from taking off," he added. With help from wind tunnel testing and the 928s styling ques in the front, the 959 became one of the most desirable Porsches to this day, achieving the same speed and stability as the rival Ferraris of the day, whilst maintaining the technological comforts and amenities we are used to now. (9WERKSTV, 2020)

With the 964, Dimson intended to make changes to the basic architecture of the 911 and introduce a softer side silhouette to the 911 in reference to the 365's aerodynamic shape, by moving away from the flat shape of the fenders. This meant more aerodynamic efficiency and lower headlights.

However, like the 959, the 964's design language was also dominated by challenges and as a result; Dimson considers it ''more of a half step to the 993.'' He explains that they were always over budget, even on the 928, so the 993 is really what they were aiming to create with the 964, but they had to compromise.

Other than financial restrictions, there were also technological limitations. For example, engines were getting larger and more powerful whilst still being air cooled, leading to cooling challenges. Consequently, ''engineering challenges translated into design challenges," as Dimson puts it, with the 993 and 964 being the last air-cooled models.

Another restriction was the safety regulations of the time, which meant an elongated front and rear end was necessary to allow for 5 mph crumple zones without damaging the main structure of the car. Making faster and more powerful cars also requires better lighting however at the time they only had halogen lights. Therefore, to achieve the necessary lighting, a larger reflector is needed, which means extra space is required for the light tube, making a more extenuated shape. Parallels can be drawn between Virgil's idea of creating a medium between two extremes and Dimson's design being dictated by having to bridge performance and beauty.

A lot of Dimson's design choices are influenced by necessity and aerodynamic efficiency, as well as the choice to build on Porsche's pre-existing history rather than coming up with completely new designs. Therefore, although his design language aims for softer curves and a rounder shape in general, the design of the car is mainly dictated by the technological requirements. Dimson's design philosophy also extends to the package of the car. He said that a "sports car should be a well-tailored suit," referring to the 964, not a loose jacket like the 911s of today. Wanting a tighter package makes sense considering he had to work around engineering constraints at Porsche his whole career.

After the 964 came the 993, designed by Tony Hatter, who joined Porsche in 1986. He first worked on graphics for racing cars and the rear bumper for the 911 turbo. However, during the release of the Porsche 989, a lot of the Porsche design team were needed, leaving the next iteration of 911 to be worked on by a much smaller team with little to no direction on design from higher ups ''as long as the wheels fitted into the wheel wells,'' according to Hatter. [8]

He then managed to lead this design and was eventually the only person working on the car, meaning he had a free reign on his design, unlike his predecessor Dimson. He led the next generation 911, building further on the 911 platform and continuing to create a smoother but more aggressive shape. Hatter explains that producing the next iteration of the 911 is a ''tightrope walk": you cannot stray too far away from the previous model, but must also add something new.

Hatter's goal with the 993 was to balance the front and rear end and to extend the fenders out as much as possible to create a coke bottle body shape. Hatter's design language aims for balance similarly to Luthe, Dimson and Virgil, to find the medium between replication and reiteration, but also in shape, by trying to create a more symmetrical car than the 964 by evening out the shape. Hatter's language was also affected by a changing time, whether it was making the last air cooled 911 or designing in a time where there was a move from sketching and clay modelling to CAD.

Designing the GT1 is an early example of CAD in Hatter's design. Unlike Luthe's work on the E31 8 series using CAD to reduce drag, Hatter used CAD as it was the quickest way to get a design from a sketch to reality. This tight time frame also meant the car did not change much from the original design when it ended up at Le Mans.

Another project Hatter worked on that had a large impact on me is the Carrera GT, which is particularly special to me because I had a yellow model of it as a child, therefore it was my introduction to Porsche. Hatter was tasked with getting the Carrera GT show car into a production model, faced with a tight budget and many engineering restrictions. A major issue was air cooling at the back of the car. The air cooling had to be moved to the front end due to the engine already being at the back, which meant the front end of the car was significantly widened to allow for cooling to the rear. Other than the engineering adjustments, a roof had to be added to the car. However, Hatter's additions and solutions to issues ended up creating a very pretty car. [9]

Like a lot of 911 designers. Hatter's design language once again lends to doing something the same but different. He says that "you have to know when to say stop '' and the ''clay model must go into the measuring room." (9WERKSTV, 2021)

The balance of innovating from the old whilst evolving enough to create a big enough jump from the previous model is something every 911 designer must do well. Continuing the brand ethos is a skill that is similarly required in fashion. Although Virgil's philosophy is clear in trying to show comparison, a more similar ideal in fashion to Dimson and Hatter's intentions of development whilst upholding Porsche design language is the ability that Martin Margiela has to maintain the essence of the Margiela brand.

Margiela language

The Margiela brand's ability to maintain its character and language consistently and clearly for over 34 years, and long after Martin Margiela's death, makes the Margiela design language one of the most noticeable yet understated in fashion to this day. Although the house was founded a long time ago, the Margiela philosophy has stayed the same, creating new products whilst preserving the strong identity of the brand.

As said by the OTB Group, who now own Margiela: ''The Maison celebrates unconventional aesthetics and embraces the philosophy that fashion is an artistic expression rather than a cult for personality." (OTB Companies, 2017)

This DNA is shown consistently through the clothes and was physically done by Margiela by staying anonymous. The idea of anonymity is also maintained through the brand's shows, with Margiela obscuring or concealing models' faces. [10]

This anonymity can also be seen in the Margiela logo, which is simply the numbers 0 to 23, with each number representing a type of clothes or collection and circle over the corresponding category of the item. For example, 0 is the artisanal collection for men and women, while 11 is accessories. This philosophy is further shown by the way the label itself is sewn on the inside as a removable tag, so you can only see the four stitches on the outside. However, similarly to Margiela's choice to stay in the shadows, these four stitches only made the brand more popular and eventually became infamous and just as recognisable as any big brands prints or bright logos. [11]

Margiela's material aesthetic also aims to show art within the garment, by using forward-thinking textiles and techniques, allowing the garment to have areas which show the actual deconstruction or construction process. This design language is shown in the final product consistently, from the beginning of Margiela up until today.

A recent example is the fisherman coat from the Spring 2022 collection, which is a wool coat with fishing flies attached to the coat which is lined in a see-through net, giving the appearance that the coat has been caught. Going further into the Margiela style, the lining on the outside of the coat continues into the inside, exposing the internal structure of the inside of the coat, allowing you to

see the process involved in making the garment. The Margiela design criteria refers to this type of revealing lining as anonymity of the lining, further examples of this are the lining of a garment printed on the outside or the actual lining coming out of the garment itself. [12]

The Margiela brand consistently shows their design language just as well today under the current director, John Galliano. He has a few criteria he looks to achieve when creating within the Margiela brand: anonymity of the lining, prints with a purpose, a genderless garment, sustainability, and a wet look. The genderless and wet or baggy look of a garment also helps to create a more hidden look, by obscuring the shape of the body which lends into the idea of anonymity. Repeating these elements allows the House to release different designs, sustaining the brand's strength into the future. Comparably, Off White replicates or references design to make something new and Porsche modernises past designs to move forward to the next generation.

Conclusions

Although there are huge differences between fashion and automotive design, Margiela, Galliano, Dimson, Hatter, Luthe and Virgil all possess the ability to steadily evolve and repeat their individual language to create a product that is synonymous with its predecessor. Whether making a 911 look like a 911 or a Margiela garment look like Margiela without the tag, or Virgil's 3% rule of editing a pre-existing object to reinvent a product; all these designers share a common ideal of building on ideas from the past to create the future. However, they all have different ways of achieving this. The culmination of approaches and influences from both fields builds my philosophy.

Differentiating the influence between the fields, the automotive designers I have looked at all share some similarities in their design languages, the first of which is a focus on aerodynamic design. Additionally, a simple and minimalist shape combined with a reduction of elements to create sleek a design and an integration of external elements to create a better flow.

In contrast, the fashion designers I have investigated differ, where Virgil aims to create less with more by making something simple but striking, Margiela and Galliano use a recipe of multiple elements to create a consistent aesthetic.

The influence from the automotive design language I have covered in my own work results in flow of air in my designs playing a major roll in guiding the shape and an overall fast looking form, like Luthe or Dimson. These sleek forms are already visible in my own work, with my second-year alias project, which solely focuses on aerodynamics to produce sustainability.

This meant the car had large air gaps allowing the actual cockpit to have a literal tear drop shape. Additionally, integration of a simple DRG, similarly to Bracq, is something I intend to include, but this can be tough to blend with the overall shape of the car. Comparatively, in fashion design, I lean into a simple and striking design like Virgil's, using block colours and shapes to extenuate the body whilst conserving a consistent aesthetic using the same fit and durable materials, as well as hiding the construction of the garment without using lining similarly to Margiela.

Therefore, my own design philosophy is to create using balance and compromise. Finding a new medium between sustainability and beauty or efficiency and quality by blending design strands to build a wider and more varied perspective generating unorthodox ideas.

Using varied inspiration to create new ideas maintains a consistently different design language that is born out of comparison.

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