

Jacques Viénot and the “Esthétique Industrielle” in France (1920–1960)

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I would like to express my gratitude to Henri Viénot, who welcomed me graciously and put at my disposal his personal documents. Henri Viénot took over the management of the agency Technès after the death of his father in 1969 (and up until 1974). He continued the revue *Esthétique industrielle*, which became *Design industrie* in 1965. He also was active in the ICSID, over which he presided between 1971 and 1973, up until the Kyoto Conference, which he organized.

I also would like to thank Silvana Guidet, English teacher at the School of Design Nantes Atlantique, who translated this article.

1 *Esthétique industrielle* 1 (First trimester, 1951).

2 *L'Institut d'Esthétique Industrielle*. The Institute of Industrial Aesthetics was created in 1951. Members included several industrialists and representatives of national, public establishments. Georges Combet, President of Gaz de France; Claudius-Petit, Minister for Reconstruction and Urbanism; Raymond Boisé, Secretary of State for Commerce; Paul Gambin, director of an important company that manufactured machines and tools; as well as many others. These people, along with Jacques Viénot, were the organizers of an international conference on industrial aesthetics in Paris in 1953, held under the auspices of *l'Institut*. The Institute also was the instigator of the label *Beauté-France* in 1953, which later became the label *Janus of Industry* under the responsibility of Anne-Marie Sargueil, current director of *l'Institut Français du Design* (new name given to *l'Institut d'Esthétique Industrielle* in 1984).

Introduction

The circumstances leading to the emergence of French industrial design have remained overshadowed by the general history of modernity. The privileged stance of the furniture creator / designer, and the frequent use of the word design when referring to a style, reflects a cultural tradition which attaches little importance to the mode of production and to the execution of a project. Indeed, French industrial design has long suffered from a lack of recognition because it was not acknowledged as a clearly defined professional activity.

In the fifties, one did not speak of industrial design but of industrial aesthetics, a confusing term which was subject to much controversy. When misunderstood, the term could relegate design to the role of a lesser subcategory of the fine arts. Nevertheless, even though the question of aesthetics comprises a fundamental aspect of industrial design, it belongs to a separate, distinct field of study. Confronted with the principles of mass production and the consumer society, it becomes inseparable from the notion of usage. Subject to social and economic forces, aesthetics implies a collective know-how and effort. The aesthetic families that emerged, carrying the values and belief systems of the time, belonged, as Jacques Viénot claimed, to “an art form dependent on neither fine arts, nor decorative arts, nor on pure technique alone.”¹ Jacques Viénot has been one of the most important mediators in this collective effort. His moral and philosophical engagement in humanizing technology has contributed to creating the industrial framework for a whole new profession.

Jacques Viénot created the Institute of Industrial Aesthetics,² the first trade union of the profession, a magazine which was the union’s voice for more than twenty years, and the first international liaison committee (which later became the International Council of Societies of Industrial Design). He was the instigator of the first specific teachings in the discipline, and he also ran one of the foremost agencies of the fifties, “Technès.” The chronological study presented here analyzes his professional choices, and offers insight into his commitment to the founding theories of modernity and the historical events of the time. The underlying question is that of the significance of the industrial aesthetics project during the reconstruction period after the Second World War, and how it was linked with

projects in other industrialized countries, as well as how it differed from those in other countries.

During a speech in Prague,³ in 1929, Jacques Viénot posed the question: "How will we live tomorrow; that is what must determine all our research." The "law of finality," which he had included in the Industrial Aesthetic chart written in 1953,⁴ permitted the projection of the notion of beauty and good that was attached to objects onto a wider social context. The aim was "to help mankind progress." But what was the role of the designer in this endeavor, and how could he negotiate this role? Tackling the history of industrial design from the point of view of the circumstances in which it emerged, and the programs which shaped the artifacts of the era, involves bringing to light the complex relationships governing the work of the different protagonists; be they industrialists, theorists, or aesthetic industrialists; and regardless of whether they were or were not confronted with the question of distinct creative interpretations.

The impact of design on the environment and the challenge of innovation for companies and for end-users raise a number of questions for professional practices which constantly must be looking for the best compromise between different outlooks. An historical view which sheds light on the maneuvers of the different actors could nourish an understanding of present practices in the profession. This requires putting into perspective each actor's role in the processes and objectives of creation so that one may more accurately determine the role of design.

This vast study remains to be undertaken. In the framework of the present article, I have retained the essential conclusions of my monographic work on Jacques Viénot.⁵ The period prior to the 1950s is only sketched out here, although it could, in itself, constitute a whole field of study.

The Decorative Arts to the Defense of Industrial Aesthetics

By the time Jacques Viénot became the figurehead of "industrial aesthetics" after the Second World War, he already had acquired substantial experience in the decorative arts field. During his time as head of DIM⁶ a leading decoration company in Paris during the 1920s, Viénot met many artists and personalities from various countries. He was in charge of a team of "artistes décorateurs," and not a creator himself. Due to his charismatic personality and untiring efforts, he constantly was coming to the defence of the avant-garde movement alongside his friends from *L'Union des Artistes modernes* (The Union for Modern Artists),⁷ as well as working for *Porza*.⁸ With the international success⁹ of DIM came a more cosmopolitan awareness, which was showcased by the creation of a French branch of the international organization founded in 1928 by the German painter Werneralvo von Alvensleben. *Porza* is mentioned in the very first edition of a revue entitled *Ce temps ci* (*Our Epoch*), which Jacques Viénot created in the same year. He hoped to foster the same enthu-

- 3 Henri Viénot (Jacques's son), archives, Paris.
- 4 Under the Presidency of Jacques Viénot, the members of *l'Institut d'Esthétique Industrielle* were asked to establish a Charter of Industrial Aesthetics. The main rules of this charter were published in volume no. 7 of the *Esthétique Industrielle* revue (Second trimester, 1952).
- 5 I've devoted my monographic research to Jacques Viénot (Master in research, "Histoire et critique des arts," Université de Rennes 2, 2004). The research largely has relied on documents from private archives, Jacques Viénot's many writings, and numerous interviews with Jacques's son, Henri Viénot. The systematic study of the magazines he founded, in particular *Art Présent* (thirteen issues between 1945 and 1950) and *Esthétique Industrielle* (thirty-seven issues between 1951 and his death in 1959), have been valuable sources of information.
- 6 DIM stands for *Décoration Intérieure Moderne* (Modern Interior Decoration), and also for *Décor-Installe-Meuble* (Décor-Installation-Furniture). This company undertook only prestigious orders. An article appearing in *Le décor d'aujourd'hui* (*Décor Today*) in 1953 mentioned that DIM had undertaken the interior decoration for the Queen of Roumania, the Queen of Greece, the Prince of Wales, and the King of Afghanistan. The second volume of the revue *Ce Temps-ci* (*Our Epoch*), created in 1928 by Jacques Viénot, of which twelve volumes would appear between this date and 1931), presented the model of a bedroom for the Queen of Afghanistan which was reminiscent of the sumptuous décors for the film *l'Inhumaine* by Marcel l'Herbier (1923). The décor for this film was carried out partly by the architect Robert Mallet-Stevens and the artist Fernand Léger. The film was a manifesto for modern decorative art.
- 7 In the first part of my monograph, I have outlined the engagements undertaken by Jacques Viénot, and the functioning of his company within the context of the creation of the Union for Modern Artists in 1929, and also in the context of the ideological debates that occurred within the Society of Artists and Decorators. These debates were particularly virulent at the time of the grand "International Exhibition of Decorative and Industrial Arts" in 1925 in Paris.
- 8 This is the name of an international association whose aim was to create, in European countries, establishments called: "Porza Houses." These houses would offer an agreeable place of sojourn, and all necessary work commodities, to all intellectual creators linked to the association. Supported by donations, they would solicit "the generosity of all those interested in its aims." (Chronicle by Jacques Viénot in *Our Epoch* 1 (1928): 20.
- 9 DIM's commercial catalogue shows a waxed mahogany buffet which won a gold medal at the Amsterdam exhibition. Another photo shows a sculpted oak dining suite exhibited at Wiesbaden in 1921. Henri Viénot mentions an exhibition in London in 1928 that Jacques Viénot attended in person with his wife, Henriette. There are no traces left of all this in documents from the time. However, a later article by Jacques Viénot mentions a trip to London in 1927 where, "for the first time, he sees antique furniture made to look recent" by "sandblasting by an antiquarian (...) concerned with new ideas." After having seen this, Viénot concluded that not only modern furniture can benefit from the whiteness of its wood. "Out of yesterday's decorative arts, let us find those of tomorrow." *Art Présent* (*Present Art*) 1 (First trimester, 1945).
- 10 Concerning the role of Paul Desjardins, see *Paul Desjardins et les Décades de Pontigny*, François Chaubet, ed. (Villeneuve-d'Ascq: Presses Universitaires du Septentrion, 1999).
- 11 Henri Viénot mentions his parents' voyages in 1929 to Prague and Berlin, where they met Jacques's brothers, Pierre and Henry Viénot. The year before, Jacques Viénot had traveled to Venice, Bucharest, and Vienna. Henri Viénot says that his mother could not accompany her husband on these trips because she was to give birth to their third child, Marc, in November of that year. In 1930, Viénot went to Portugal "with the perspective of an important deal." Henriette, at this time, wrote to her husband saying "You should not overdo your nervous fatigue, and you are living at a rhythm which is difficult to keep up." The absence of documents, unfortunately, makes it difficult to understand exactly what Jacques Viénot was doing on these trips. All this information comes from Henri Viénot's memories, and from his parents' letters.
- 12 "After contacting Raymond Loewy in 1929 in New York, and once I had returned to France, I was taken to thinking that many French industrialists could take advantage of advice from competent men, who could help them to do better," Jacques Viénot in "Esthétique des formes," *CNOF*, the organization's monthly revue (May 15–16, 1950): 35.
- 13 "Applications pratiques des recherches d'esthétique à l'industrie," *Esthétique industrielle*, Jacques Viénot, ed. (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1952), 101.
- 14 *Nouvelles Brèves*, 1932–1938, private archives. I was lucky to find these collections that constitute the only traces enabling me to reconstruct the history of *Porza*, whose momentum was broken by the Second World War. Many of *Porza's* archives were burned during the war.

- 15 Henriette closely supported her husband in his commitments. She was a modern woman, who spoke several languages, loved sport, attended classes at *l'École du Louvre*, extolled the values of tolerance and despised "bourgeois conventions"; from family archives. Henriette Brunet died at the beginning of the Second World War.
- 16 A dossier compiled when Jacques Viénot was hired by *le Printemps*, specifying that the candidate came from "an honourable family with good relations, with one family member being in Parliament. Having an excellent reputation." The file also stated that Jacques Viénot spoke English and German fluently. *Printemps* archives file no. 45248.
- 17 In my study of Jacques Viénot, I have been able to bring to light the important role he played in the development of the *Primavera* workshop for *Printemps*. This workshop forged his reputation as someone committed to "the democratizing of modern decorative arts" and to the introduction of novelty into the department store's traditional furniture range, defending the introduction of quality, low-priced, modular furniture.
- 18 Viénot founded the Clermont editions in 1945. These editions published the book he wrote on the poster designer Leonetto Cappiello, whose daughter he had married in 1943. Apart from two other monographs on painters, Edouard Goerg by Gaston Diehl (1947) and Moïse Kisling by Georges Charensol (1948), these editions concentrated on the publication of the *Art présent revue* (1945) which, in 1951, became *Esthétique Industrielle*.
- 19 *La République des arts*, Jacques Viénot, ed. (Paris: Horizons de France, 1941).
- 20 *Technica*, a revue edited by *l'Association des Anciens Elèves de l'École centrale lyonnaise* (Old Scholars' Association) no. 308 (September, 1965).
- 21 Paul Souriau, *La beauté rationnelle*, Félix Alcan, ed., Bibliothèque de philosophie contemporaine (Paris, 1904).

siasm in France as existed in other countries for developing "these havens of intelligence and art where creators can meet and exchange for the good of culture and international comprehension." He helped to set up one such haven at L'abbaye de Pontigny in 1931 along with Paul Desjardins¹⁵ who, over a period of thirty years, had assembled intellectuals, men of letters, journalists, and politicians with a view to defending European humanism. The Abbey was a particularly fertile ground for those who aimed to defend Enlightenment thought in the face of totalitarian perils.

The *Porza* adventure began at the same time as the economic crisis of 1929 was hitting the *DIM* company. Viénot undertook many overseas trips to try to combat the problem of its ever-dwindling clientele.¹⁶ After a meeting with Raymond Loewy in New York in 1929,¹⁷ Viénot began thinking about starting up an advisory committee for industrial aesthetics. He presents this idea in an article published in *Esthétique Industrielle* in 1952, in which he outlines how he had clashed at the time with closed-minded industrialists jealously guarding their prerogatives.¹⁸ The advisory committee never was created, and *DIM* gradually ceased activities. A small publicity spot in a liaison bulletin for members of *Porza* called *Nouvelles Brèves*,¹⁹ which Viénot had started in 1932 and which his wife, Henrietta Brunet²⁰ ran, shows that *DIM* still existed in 1933. However, on August 1, of the same year, Viénot was hired by the *Grands Magasins du Printemps*,²¹ where he completed his commercial experience as *conseiller du commerce extérieur ou intérieur*, advisor on external or internal commerce.²² He resigned in 1943, and created his own company.

After having tried his hand at editing art books,¹⁸ and after having prolonged pluridisciplinary exchanges with *Porza* within the revue *Art Présent*, he felt ready to set into motion the ideas laid out in a book he had finished writing in 1939. In *La République des Arts*,¹⁹ he outlined a framework for a specific action plan: *Art du machinisme*.

Industrial Aesthetics and "An Aesthetics Dear to Philosophers"

An article appearing in *Technica*²⁰ in 1965, which highly praised Jacques Viénot's work, expressed the feeling that the term "industrial aesthetics" was somehow clumsy. According to the author of this article, the term was too reminiscent of the philosopher's concept of aesthetics. On the contrary, I would like to stress that aesthetics, as a philosophical discipline, was the keystone to the thought process of this pioneer in industrial design. We are not referring to Kant's model of the aesthetics of "finality without end," but rather to the idea of defending "useful beauty" as defined by Paul Souriau,²¹ whose sources are to be found in ancient tradition. Also encompassed in this vision of aesthetics is the medieval concept, so dear to the pioneers of modernity, which was expressed by Saint Thomas Aquinas:

Ce qui confère cette spécificité du beau, c'est donc sa mise en rapport avec un regard connaissant par laquelle la chose apparaît belle. Et ce détermine l'assentiment du sujet et le plaisir qui en résulte, ce sont les caractéristiques objectives de la chose.²²

- 22 Umberto Eco, *Art et Beauté dans l'esthétique médiévale*, references made to diverse texts by Thomas Aquinas (La Somme 1, 67, 1; I-II, 77, 5 à 3), (Milan, 1997 ed.), (Paris: Grasset, 1997), 151–2.
- 23 *Art présent* 7–8 (1948).
- 24 In this volume of *l'Esthétique industrielle* (No. 7), Jacques Viénot presents all those who contributed to the Charter: the architect Bauer, member of the Administrative council of *l'Institut*; Boutteville, Vice-President of the *Société alsacienne de construction métalliques* (Alsacian Metallic Construction Company); Combet, President of the *Congrès international d'Esthétique industrielle* and Director of *Gaz de France*; Desroches, President, *commission des bancs d'essai* (trials commission) of *l'Institut* and Assistant Director, research and development of the *Compagnie Française Thomson-Houston*; Jacques Dumond, President, exhibition commission, member of the Administrative council of *l'Institut*, and Vice-President of *SAD*; Fourastié, member of the patronage committee of the *Institut* and professor at the *CNAM, Centre National des Arts et Métiers* (National Arts and Trades Center); Fourrier, Director of the department *Témeq* at the Merlin and Gerin Establishments; Friedmann, member of the patronage committee of the *Institut* and a professor at the *CNAM*; Gamin, Treasurer of the *Institut* and Director of the establishments *Gambin and Co.*; Gourdon, President of the *Institut* and delegate director of the establishment *Equipements et Travaux à la Compagnie Electro-mécanique* (Electro-mechanical Works and Equipment Company); François Le Lionnais, engineer; Levantal, secretary for the 1953 Industrial Aesthetics conference and Director of the Company for the Development of Industry for *Gaz de France*; Souriau, philosopher, member of the patronage committee of the *Institut*, Director of *l'Institut d'art et d'archéologie* (Institute for Art and Archaeology) and a professor at the Sorbonne; Pierre Vago, architect and member of the *Institut* council.

The question of “educated eye” leads directly to that of judgment of taste. The problem of defining the criteria for objective beauty is compounded by the problem of what constitutes an accurate judgment of beauty. The questions lead us directly to the classic conflict of reasoning versus heart and truth versus feeling.

La République des Arts, a book published in 1941, opens a vast debate on all these subjects which the theorists of modernity were well versed in. Indeed, this philosophical basis supported the defense of a form of beauty arising from industry. The photographic reports in an article entitled “The Beauty of Technique”²³ pay homage to the beauty of the “machine society” which Le Corbusier, among others, supported. These ideas conflicted with any desire to copy from the past. They merged with artistic research at the beginning of the twentieth century, which sought new tools for representing the world. Both major and minor art forms could join forces in their quest to construct a modern society. Progress for all henceforth would be inseparable from a material environment, the quality of which would be guaranteed by artists who would bring a new know-how to industry—a know-how emanating from a synthesis of technical competence and an ability to capture the beauty in industry.

Industrial Aesthetics and Functional Ethics

The charter of industrial aesthetics drawn up on the initiative of Jacques Viénot by a committee from *L'Institut d'Esthétique Industrielle*, and published in 1952 in their revue *Esthétique Industrielle*,²⁴ stems directly from the philosophy of “useful beauty” mentioned earlier. Despite the fact that a certain number of the charter’s rules agreed with the ideals of functionalism, it was contested by members of the functionalist movement of the time. Max Bill, a member of the Central Committee of the *Schweizerischer Werkbund* and rector of the *Hochschule für Gestaltung* of Ulm, in his address to the first international conference on Industrial Aesthetics organized by the *Institut* in Paris in 1953, stressed the danger of using the expression “aesthetic” in the context of a functionalistic morale. He questioned the significance of choosing to place the conference under the aegis of the sign “I,” as in Industry, encircled by a serpent symbolizing aesthetics. His comment is particularly interesting in that it allows one to nuance the question of ornamentation, whose rejection always is associated with functionalism. Indeed, the ornament can be retained if it is not a superficial addition, but an integral part of the coherence of the

whole object. Max Bill pointed out that certain decorations do not “cheat,” and that the serpent around the “T” somehow committed the Conference to the “symbol which denotes that aesthetics adorns industry”:

It is a starting point, but I do not believe it is one shared by all Conference members, especially not by those who are here to represent idealist associations, such as, if I may say so, the Swiss Werkbund or the German Werkbund.... What interests us most is not industry but man. ...neither form nor function. The basis is need; the needs of man. The functions which are taking shape will be destined to meet the needs of man and, in order to fulfill these needs, there must be unity between the functions which emerge.²⁵

The danger which was felt at the time was that the artist may begin to help “industrialists to decorate their objects, and to begin to shape them without the guarantee that unity of function be achieved.”

The numerous writings of Jacques Viénot, and the energy he put into defending the notion of industrial aesthetics against the Anglo-Saxons at the time of the formation of the ICSID, an international organization launched on his initiative during the Paris Congress on Industrial Aesthetics in 1953, have shown his distrust of those who have made “of beauty, a tactic.”²⁶ In fact, he was particularly distrustful of Americans, but he never hid his admiration for the American sense of commerce. Industrial aesthetics must not be reduced simply to a marketing element (to use modern terminology), but it is an element of marketing. Jacques Viénot shared with Raymond Loewy the certitude that “good taste” does exist, and that a specialist in industrial aesthetics would lead mankind “towards a material, intellectual, and spiritual life.”²⁷ However, as Denis Huisman and Georges Patrix upheld, in response to the “enemies within” represented by André Hermant, there is no reason to begrudge the commercialization of aesthetics.

... Yes, industrial aesthetics does lead to publicity, public relations, productivity, sales figures: in other words, to commerce in its most venal form. But what is wrong with that? As long as the undeniable, positive, aesthetic qualities of a car, a plane, a telephone, or a hydro-electric dam are not the result of piled-on ornamentation ... suffice that the qualities be directly inherent to the object, suffice that the object be successful and accomplished, perfect in its genre and that the shape and form be excellent, well-adapted to, and expressive of, the function.²⁸

Tomás Maldonado, co-director of the *Hochschule für Gestaltung* of Ulm, expressed similar ideas in a lecture to the “Liaison Committee for Industrial Design in the European Common Market”²⁹ in 1963. He stressed the link between the economic value and the cultural value

25 “Base et but de l’esthétique au temps du machinisme,” *Esthétique industrielle* 9 (Second trimester, 1953): 60–63.

26 Conférence de Liège 1954, *Esthétique industrielle* 15 (avril-mai, 1955).

27 See the book written by Raymond Loewy in 1952, *Never Leave Well Enough Alone* (French translation: *La laideur se vend mal* (Paris: ed. Gallimard, coll. Tel, 1990).

28 Georges Patrix and Denis Huisman, *L’Esthétique industrielle* (First publication 1961) (Paris: ed. PUF, coll. Que sais-je? 1971), 51–52.

29 Association created at the initiative of Belgium in February, 1961.

of the industrial product, reiterating some of the arguments put forward at the international conference in Aspen organized in 1956, about the advantage of competition based on an honest practice of design which would not limit itself to "formal novelty," but which would integrate "formal, structural and functional novelty."³⁰

Industrial Aesthetics and Fine Arts

An exhibition on the theme of the object,³¹ which was held at the *Musée des Arts Décoratifs* in Paris in 1962, is mentioned in a bulletin issued by *l'Institut d'Esthétique Industrielle*, where an international conference to be held at UNESCO in June 1963 was announced. Georges Combet, Director of Gaz de France and President of the Institut, regrets, in this bulletin, that "modern-minded artists" are so far removed from the "realities of our industrial civilization." This remark highlights another misunderstanding concerning the notion of industrial aesthetics. Fueled by philosophical ideas which placed emphasis on the spiritual dimension of artistic creation, and the quest to understand the forces at work in the emergence of styles, industrial aesthetics also sought its theoretical basis in a certain history of art as represented by René Huyghe³² and Henri Focillon.³³ The involvement of artistic movements, whose formal research work met with the functionalist ethic, also wove links between art and technique which could lead one to believe that common ground could be found between aesthetic propositions from both the artistic and industrial worlds. Despite Jacques Viénot's claims that industrial aesthetics is an art form "which does not depend on fine arts," as is common when a misunderstanding persists, artists (and here the artists referred to are those who recently had been labeled "the new realists" by the art critic Pierre Restany) were reproached for not "servicing a society whose economic and social imperatives they scorned." This reproach should not have had any founding or reason to be from the point of view of Jacques Viénot's vision of industrial aesthetics. In an article written in 1945, Viénot clearly showed that action taken by some artistic movements, in particular surrealism, exposed "a constant aspect of humanistic preoccupations devoid of insipidness or nonsense," but there was nothing "in this school, which, as we were expecting, could help art to resolve the main problems of the time."³⁴

Industrial Aesthetics and Industrial Design

In his homage to Jacques Viénot,³⁵ the American Peter Muller-Munk, an old friend with whom Viénot worked on the founding of the ICSID, wrote that they both shared a common idea of industrial design as being not just a profession, but a "discipline of reflection." But Muller-Munk also alluded to a disagreement on the question of methods. This disagreement appears as early as the Paris Congress on Industrial Aesthetics in 1953. An article by Muller-Munk published in the Acts of the Congress clearly states the fact that he

30 Bulletin of *l'Institut d'esthétique industrielle*, volume dedicated to the *Comité de liaison pour l'Industrial Design dans les pays du Marché commun* (Liaison Committee for Industrial Design in the Common Market Countries), Bibliothèque des Arts décoratifs (Paris, 1963).

31 *Antagonismes 2, l'Objet*, catalogue, Musée des Arts décoratifs (Paris, 1962).

32 During a meeting at *l'Institut d'Esthétique industrielle*, René Huyghe spoke of "uniting again, and not just in a superficially affected way, the positive conquests which machines afford and the moral conquests which beauty affords." He added, "It would mean putting humanity in a position of having to choose between its material loss or its spiritual loss," and he congratulated the *Institut* members for "having assigned themselves the task of reconciling the two." *Esthétique industrielle* 7 (1952): 17.

33 Jacques Viénot often refers to *La vie des formes* ("The Life of Forms") by Henri Focillon (1943) (Paris: ed. PUF, 1970).

34 "Des tendances de l'art décoratif d'hier, dégageons celles de demain," *Art Présent* 1 (1945).

35 *Esthétique industrielle* 39 (March–April, 1959).

and his colleagues from the Society of Industrial Designers were not interested in the aesthetic construction of a project:

... nor that a specialist approves of our taste. What concerns us most of all is that we have been able to resolve the particular problems of our clients, that we have been able to meet the demands of the product and that we have evaluated the receptiveness of the market accurately. Besides, as you know, we are the market it is the work staff of our industrial clients, the specialists and tradesmen who operate the machines that produce the enormous quantities of our products. We, in our Society, are content with putting into practice the techniques and the finely tuned sensitivities which enable us to get close to the desired sales results. Beauty is indispensable—that is accepted—but what does beauty matter to us if all our production lines are unemployed just so that we can congratulate ourselves on our fine artistic taste.³⁶

The humanism that the American claimed to be attached to, evoking, as did his French colleague, the Renaissance ideal of “universal man,” detached itself from a philosophy linked to value judgment, which only an elite minority would hold the key to. The official definition of design which was finally adopted by ICSID maintained the principle of coherence of form, stemming from a global consideration of an ensemble of constraints inherent to the object, but also dependant on the producer and the consumer:

Industrial design is a creative activity whose aim is to determine the formal qualities of objects produced by industry. These formal qualities concern not only external aspects, but refer mainly to structural and functional elements which impart a coherent unity to the system from the viewpoint of both the producer and the user. Industrial design embraces all aspects of human reality which are conditioned by industrial production. (Tomás Maldonado, ICSID, London, 1959)

This wording has, as its basis, the idea of “honesty” inherent to industrial aesthetic, but it opens out towards other methods of evaluating aesthetic value. The concept of beauty soon would be replaced by interpretation charts conceived by sign theorists using, in a philosophical context, models coming from linguistic studies³⁷ better suited to the development of the consumer society, in which information and communication are omnipresent.

36 “L’esthétique industrielle aux Etats-Unis,” *Esthétique industrielle* spécial 10, 11, and 12 (1964): 73.

37 See the chapter, “Design et sémiotique”: 287–339, Danielle Quarante, *Éléments de Design industriel* (1984), Nouvelle édition Polytechnica (Paris: Economica, 2001).

The shift from industrial aesthetics to industrial design marks the end of the domination of a philosophy which was meant to guarantee the improvement of the conditions of life for mankind. Functionalism was reproached with having forgotten that objects not only had a use value, but also a sign value. It also was reproached for somehow having diminished the notion of human need. This reproach, however, could not apply to industrial aesthetics in that everything was subject to a fundamental requirement—that of beauty. But the references to semantics which have invaded discussions on design are faced with the same difficulties that aesthetics faced with its word play ambiguities on apparent beauty or implied beauty. On a wider scale, a social science role in design conception implies the need for an understanding of what their input to the project is, as one always must be able to clearly distinguish between “cheating effects” and “applied discussions.”

Industrial Aesthetics and the Creation of Models for the Engineer “The field of action before us is immense.”³⁸

In an article entitled *les arts impliqués* (“Implied Arts”), Viénot wrote: “If the supporters of decorative arts and applied arts wish to retain appellations which no longer really correspond to their concerns, then let them.”³⁹ This remark reveals a certain irritation due to endless discussions on the respective roles of industrial creation and applied arts, which he participated in and which he recounts in his *République des Arts*. The enthusiasm of the mobilization for the defense of “constructive art for tomorrow’s France,” as well as the enormous need for equipment of all sorts, gave him the opportunity to commit himself to a pathway that was much less hindered by values attached to the past. Industrial aesthetics must orient itself towards the creation of models for the engineer. The article in *Technica*, previously mentioned, highlights this French specificity which involves placing enormous importance on the value of constructed models in the field of mechanical production. However, Viénot regretted that other “sectors of design (e.g., glassblowing, plaster molding, furniture, and textiles) seemed to be “second relations.” He had a different point of view: he considered that industries already had their model makers. There were those who continued to defend “the artistic trade,” in keeping with a decorative arts *esprit*, and there were the “modernists” who were for the *Formes Utiles* (Useful Forms).⁴⁰ The aim was to concentrate efforts where they were needed most. This procedure corresponded to an evolution within the teaching of applied arts that had been placed under the auspices of “technical education.” It was under this educational body that an industrial aesthetics course was created in 1956. Viénot’s desire for a well-defined industrial aesthetics territory, as well as the difficulty in setting up a recognized tertiary course within the engineering sector, contributed to placing French industrial aestheticians in an uncomfortable situation. The founder of industrial aesthetics had,

38 *Des tendances de l’art décoratif d’hier, dégageons celles de demain*, op. cit.

39 “Les Arts impliqués,” *Esthétique industrielle* 8 (First trimester, 1963): 22.

40 The Association *Formes utiles* (Useful Forms) was created within the framework of UAM in 1949. While the UAM venture ended at the end of the 1950s without having ever regained the energy it mustered before the Second World War, “Useful Forms” begins to play, at this same time, an important role in the diverse domains of home equipment.

nevertheless, other ambitions. He never abandoned the idea that all forms of industrial creation somehow could come together within the *Institut*. The situation was a temporary one, and a very high level of education was envisaged for those who dreamed of one day forming an inter-European pedagogical commission, and of restoring to France *la parole que le monde écoutait jadis* (the dominant world position it once had).⁴¹

The French Rooster Preens His Feathers⁴²

Under a title worthy of Jacques Viénot, *l'Avenir passe par les formes* ("Forms Are the Future"), the November/December 1967 issue of *l'Express* highlighted how the French lagged behind other European Common Market countries. French products were considered as "ugly" and "old-fashioned" when compared to Italian, German, Dutch, and British goods and were perceived as not being able to confront the economic competition.

When Jacques Viénot came to the defense of French industrial aesthetics within the arena of the International Liaison Organization (the organization he had launched at the Paris Conference on Industrial Aesthetics in 1953), he naturally used the *supplement d'âme* (intangible extra) that the Charter's propositions offered. Of course, he also was defending France's position on the world stage. The convictions he had forged within the intellectual environment of *Porza* were based on humanist values open to the world, and France had to play the role of enlightened leader on the world scene in order to spread the values it upheld. Despite declaring, when *l'Institut* was founded, that it was to be even more effective than its English model, the Council of Industrial Design, because it was in the hands of private initiatives, Viénot never ceased to call on and remind the French state authorities of their responsibility toward defending French renown and quality through industrial aesthetics. One of the essay subjects he gave to his students in 1958 was *mobilisation du beau au service de la nation* (mobilization of beauty in the service of the nation).⁴³ The essay correction he proposed, after having thought of all the possible services that could be rendered to a nation that was open to such a mission, ended bitterly as follows:

The fall back to reality is severe.

We are in France where, in the domain dear to us, the powers that be apply the famous adage: We don't care!
And yet ...

41 Open letter to the National Ministry for Education, *Esthétique industrielle* 14 (January–February, 1955).

42 "En prévision du Marché commun, le coq gaulois hérissé ses plumes" and "l'Avenir passe par les formes," *l'Express* (November 27–December 3, 1967): 89.

43 *Esthétique industrielle* 35 (September–October, 1958).

During a visit from the Director of Mechanical and Electrical Industries at the Ministry for Industry and Energy, Viénot said to him:

When my friends and I founded, in 1951, l'Institut d'Esthétique Industrielle, it was with the thought that once we had proven ourselves, the French administration would, as has happened overseas, hurry to recognize, encourage and subsidise us.⁴⁴

Despite the enthusiasm and support of famous national leaders after the War, and the involvement of several industrialists, a report by UNESCO, some extracts of which were published in the issue of *l'Express* mentioned earlier, shows a rather pessimistic situation in the 1960s:

... the public has remained indifferent to design because industrialists propose very few good examples ... and public powers see no need to address the problem. It is symptomatic that the 5th plan not only does not offer any subsidies for design, but does not even mention the activity. One may also note that there is no design section within the National Scientific Research Centre.... The State offers no subsidies to help present quality French productions at international exhibitions. In general, French industrialists do not clearly understand what this discipline can offer them. They tend to confuse design with publicity, and thereby to expect from it an immediate return. This conception renders long-term studies practically impossible....

In all fairness, one must judge the professionals severely. It is their duty to educate the industrialists and to make them understand that design brings that something extra and something more noble than just immediate sales increases.

The article in *l'Express* shows that the report reproaches the profession for being disorganized, and regrets a lack of teaching. Despite *un noyau solide d'industriels à l'esprit ouvert* (a solid core of open-minded industrialists), it still is the *temps du mépris* (time of contempt).⁴⁵ Some pioneers are cited: Henri Viénot, who had taken over the agency *Technès*, and the designers Roger Tallon, Claude Ternat, Denis Fayolle, and Harold Barnett. *Technès* is deemed *une des seules agences françaises dignes de ce nom* (one of the only French agencies worthy of the name). The author of the article adds:

... even before their profession becomes official, it is questioned. They are accused of being the mercenaries and the "daddies" of industry. Used only to renew "brand images" and worried only about increasing the need for consumption. (Raymond Loewy, who so often explained how design could sell, would not be a stranger to this judgment.)

44 *Esthétique industrielle* 21 (April–May, 1956).

45 Expression which the journalist attributes to Georges Patix, an industrial aesthete, and co-author, with Denis Huisman, of *l'Esthétique industrielle, Que sais-je* (1961).

The criticism of the consumer society also comes in the form of "anti-functionalism." Functionalism was accused of not taking into account the emotional expectations of the users, and also of wanting to hide its sellout to economic interests, incompatible with the humanism it tried to display, under the cover of a morale of beauty and good. Not only was industrial aesthetics considered to be too submissive to market forces within the general protest movement of the 1960s, it also was attacked by avant-garde art (such as "pop art," with its references to supermarket culture, comic strips, and publicity), which flouted modernist aesthetes and their attachment to the canons of abstract beauty. Whether the reference is to industrial aesthetics as Jacques Viénot defined it, or functionalism, all of the stress placed on formal and ideological problems has contributed to obscuring the comprehension of design as a creative, methodical procedure upheld by professionals.

Figure 1
Model of the bedroom for the Queen of
Afghanistan, *DIM, Ce Temps-ci* 2 (1928).



Figure 2
"Les Beautés de la Technique,"
cover page, *Art présent* 7-8 (1948).



Figure 3
Esthétique industrielle 10-11-12, special
edition, Congrès de Paris, 1953, cover page.



Figure 4
Jacques Viénot's apartment, rue Michel Ange
in Paris, the original location of the *Technés*
offices in the 1950s, from Henri Viénot's
family photo albums.



Figure 5
Jacques Viénot, in the 1930s,
from Henri Viénot's family photo albums.

Figure 6
Jacques Viénot's country house, built in 1928
in Senlis, Yvelines (outside Paris), from
Henri Viénot's family photo albums.

Figure 7
Jacques Viénot's country house, built in 1928
in Senlis (outside view in the 1930s), from
Henri Viénot's family photo albums.



Figure 8
Report of the Congrès de l'Esthétique industrielle, Paris, 1953, cover page.

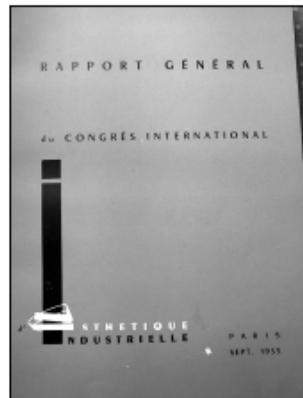


Figure 9
Esthétique industrielle 14, Apparatus for mobile handling and moving of materials, Technès for the Salev Company.

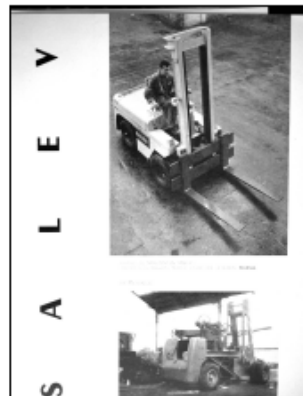


Figure 10
The stand for *Label Beauté France* at the Paris fair, *Esthétique industrielle* 8 (1953). In keeping with the desire to promote French products, *l'Institut* created a French industrial aesthetics award in 1953 entitled *Label Beauté France*. This award was officially ratified on November 13, 1953 by Raymond Boisdé, the then Secretary of State for Commerce. This award still exists today under the name *Janus de l'industrie*. *L'Institut français d'Esthétique industrielle* became *l'Institut français du Design* in 1994. The Institute's current president is Anne-Marie Sargueil.



Figure 11
Advertisement for Technès, *Art présent* 7-8 (1948).



Figure 12
Projects for metal and glass tables by DIM, *Ce Temps-ci* 7 (1930).



Figure 13
Esthétique industrielle 2, cover page, (1951):
 "You have also demonstrated that the plastic arts could find healthy and fruitful inspiration in the 'machinery' world. We, the upholders of industrial beauty, needed just such a demonstration, and this example, nobly given by you, must now be followed, firstly, by yourselves, and then by all those with a feel for man at grips with life to whom you have revealed a truth," (Letter by Jacques Viénot to Fernand Léger, *Esthétique industrielle*, 2 (1951).

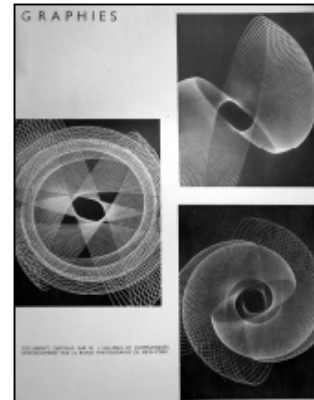


Figure 14
 "Physiographies," document coming from the revue *Photography*, (New York) *Esthétique industrielle* 3 (1951).

Figure 15
 Lamps by Le Chevalier, DIM, *Ce Temps-ci* 3 (1928).

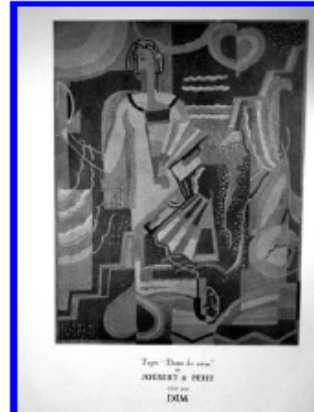
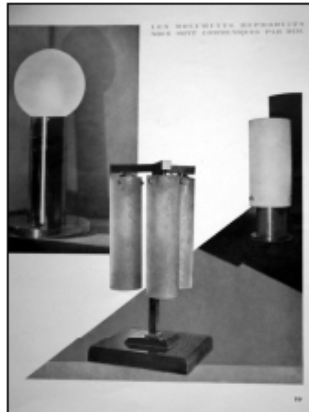


Figure 16
 "Dame de cœur" rug by Joubert and Petit for DIM catalogue (between 1925 and 1930), from Henri Viénot's, private archives. René Joubert and Philippe Petit were two artist/decorators employed by DIM. They often received awards and distinctions at the *Salon de la Société des Artistes décorateurs* in the 1920s.

Figure 17
Esthétique industrielle 15 (1955). Drilling machine *Micax*, *Technés* for the *Gendron Frères* company, Villeurbanne. This product received the *Label Beauté France* award in 1953.



Figure 18
Esthétique industrielle, 3 (1951).
 Photos 1 and 2 show a car designed by M. Paul Arzens, industrial stylist.
 Photo 3 (bottom) shows *Diagnodyne 4B* control stand for radiology apparatus, *Technés* for the *Massiot* company, Courbevoie. Winner of the *Label Beauté France* award in 1953.

Introduction to the Charter

The Industrial Aesthetics Charter and “Useful Beauty”

Under the presidency of Jacques Viénot, a commission composed of members of *l’Institut d’Esthétique industrielle*,—architects, stylists, and philosophers—published in 1952 (revues 7 and 8 of *Esthétique industrielle*) what was the first code of ethics which aimed to codify the practices within a new profession in France.

The laws of the *Charter* are essentially based on the thesis of the philosopher Paul Souriau. In his book *La Beauté rationnelle* (1904), he supported the rationalistic tradition of a “reasonable aesthetics,” which would orient “our tastes towards real beauty.” His chapter on “The Beauty of Organization”¹ stems from the fascination that many leading thinkers of the nineteenth century had for the functional perfection of living organisms. One passage in this chapter leads directly to the “Law of Unity and of Composition” in the *Charter*:

In order to appreciate the physiological beauty of living beings, one must have a knowledge of the interplay of the internal organs, how they reciprocally depend upon each other, how they carry out their essential functions.²

The “Law of Evolution and Relativity” and the “Law of Style” relate to *The Life of Forms*³ by the art historian Henri Focillon to whom Jacques Viénot often referred.

The notion of “implied art” proposed by the philosopher Étienne Souriau⁴ (son of Paul Souriau and member of the commission which instigated the *Charter*), had been the subject of discussion within the *Institut*. Jacques Viénot supported this notion in order to clearly outline the domain in relation to the fields of applied and decorative arts. However, the engineer, François Le Lyonnais, regretted that this debate tended to relegate “decor” to the domain of applied arts in a derogatory manner. Within the applied arts, decor could also be “implied,” that is, not be “tacked on” after. What then is the difference between applied art and implied art?

We have mentioned these debates in order to stress the fact that the Laws of the *Charter* were, in the mind of the *Charter*’s founders, a basis for reflection. In an article addressed to an Italian journalist from the journal *Civiltà delle macchine*,⁵ Jacques Viénot declared he was ready to go even further. He brought up the question of the human and social aspects which had already pre-occupied his team, and requested an international collaboration.

The laws of the *Charter* which were to guide the conception of products and industrial environments seem to us, and are, from another epoch. What is worth noting, however, is the concern for professional ethics which serve the wider community. The tenth Law, “the Law of Hierarchy or of Finality,” raises an ever-valid question: what industrial production “helps mankind to progress”?

1 *La Beauté rationnelle*, op.cit., 375–393. See also chapter “La Beauté du Mouvement,” 395–405, regarding Law number 9.

2 *La Beauté rationnelle*, op.cit., 389.

3 Op. cit.

4 “Passé, Présent, Avenir du problème de l’esthétique industrielle,” 1–27, *Esthétique industrielle* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1952).

5 *Esthétique industrielle*, 38 (January–February, 1959). Article published after the death of Jacques Viénot in January 1959.

The Thirteen Laws of the Industrial Aesthetics Charter

Industrial Aesthetics is the science of beauty in the domain of industrial production. Its domain is that of work places and work atmospheres, means of production and products.

- 1 Law of economy: The cost efficiency of means and of materials (minimum cost price), as long as this does not detract from the product's functional value or quality, is a determining factor of useful beauty.
- 2 Law of aptitude: To the product's use and functional value: only those products which are perfectly adapted to their function (and recognised as technically viable) can be considered to possess industrial beauty. Functional aesthetics implies intimate harmony between function and appearance.
- 3 Law of unity and of composition: To form a harmonious ensemble, the different parts constituting a useful whole must respectively be conceived in relation to one another and in relation to the whole.
- 4 Law of harmony between appearance and use: in a work complying with the laws of industrial aesthetics, there is never conflict, but always harmony between the aesthetic satisfaction felt by an objective admirer and the practical satisfaction felt by a user of the work.
All industrial production generates beauty.
- 5 Law of style: The study of the aesthetic characteristics of a work or of an industrial product must take into consideration the normal period of time to which it must be adapted.
A useful piece of work can only claim to have lasting beauty if it has been conceived without the influence of fashion.
From the aesthetic characteristics of useful works comes a style which expresses their epoch.
- 6 Law of evolution and relativity: Industrial aesthetics is not definitive: it is perpetually evolving.
The beauty of a useful work is a function of the technological advancements used in its creation.
All new techniques require a maturation period before reaching their peak of balanced and typical aesthetic expression.
- 7 Law of taste: Industrial aesthetics is expressed through structure, form, balance of proportions, the line of the work. The choice of materials, presentation details, colours, relate more to taste which must be complementary in keeping with the Law of Economy.

8 Law of satisfaction: The attributes imparting beauty to a work must express themselves in a way that calls upon all our senses: not only sight but also hearing, touch, smell and taste.

9 Law of movement: Machines which are intended for movement (by air, sea, road, rail) find in that movement the essential characteristics of their aesthetics. Further to the law of aptitude to function and the law of harmony between appearance and use, we now add the factor of the work's behaviour within its element (ground, water, air) which will dominate the other judgement factors.

10 Law of hierarchy and finality: Industrial aesthetics cannot fail to take into consideration the finality (final use) of industrially produced works.

A moral hierarchy is naturally established. Those industrial products whose essential objectives contain a noble character and which are destined to help mankind progress or which impact positively on social structures will have a favorable bias. On the other hand, products whose objective is the destruction of humanity will not have the right to claim unreserved admiration.

11 Commercial Law: Industrial aesthetics finds its main application on the commercial market-place. The law of highest possible demand from buyers must not diminish the value of the laws defining industrial aesthetics.

Sales will not be considered a criterium for aesthetic value.

When being considered, sales will bear witness to the equality between the creator and the buyer, regardless of price.

12 Law of integrity: Industrial aesthetics implies integrity and sincerity in the choice of subject and materials.

An industrial piece of work cannot be considered beautiful if it contains any element of deceit or cheating.

Nevertheless all coverings and accessories necessary to the functioning of the work are legitimate as long as they express the object's essential function and do not serve to cover up materials or parts which compromise the use or value of the object.

13 Law of implied arts: Industrial aesthetics involves an input of artistic thought encompassed in the structure of the work.

Far from the more or less arbitrary or artificial decor of applied arts, the arts involved in industrial aesthetics can be considered distinctly implied in the model to be produced forming an osmosis with the technique.