

DESIGN AS OUTCOME

BRIAN MICKLETHWAIT

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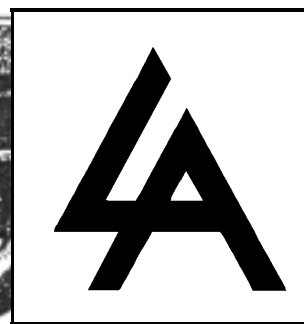
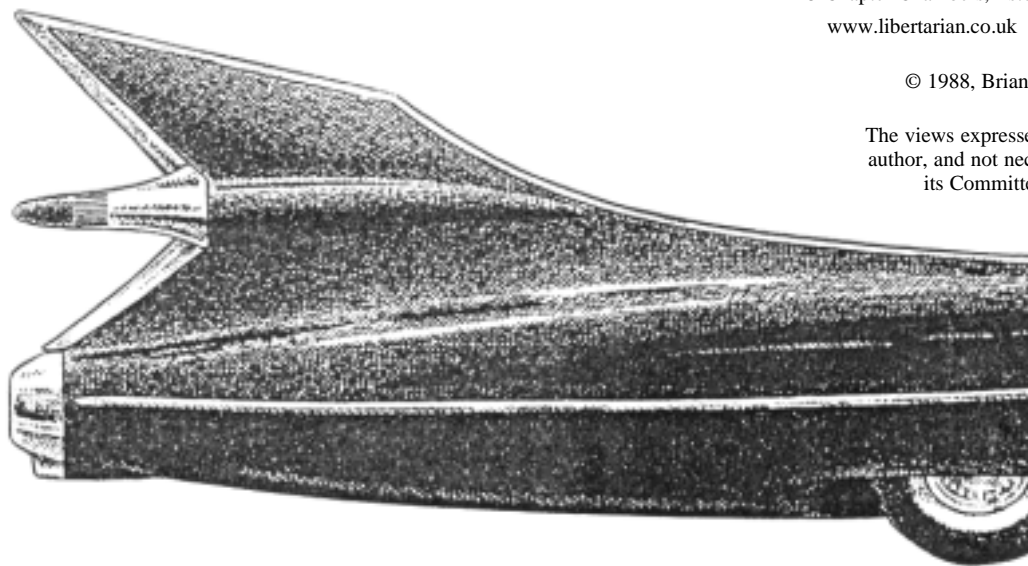
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FOR LIFE, LIBERTY AND PROPERTY

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BRIAN MICKLETHWAIT

Chapter Six of Hayek's *Studies in Philosophy, Politics and Economics* is called "The Results of Human Action but not of Human Design". This phrase captures one of the central ideas of liberalism, and especially of the Hayek-dominated liberal revival. Institutions are not *designs* only; they are also *outcomes*. Human actions have unintended as well as intended consequences. However, using the word "design" in this way is misleading, about design.

Neither Hayek nor his followers have been trying to say much about design. They have merely been using a widely held but false idea about design to say something profoundly true and important about human society. What the Hayekians are saying about society is so true and so important that it may seem churlish to focus instead upon what they are merely assuming about design. But I make no apology for this, because design, like the economy and like society, is also Hayekian. Design, like institution making, is *also* a matter of unpredicted outcomes as well as of actions towards preordained ends. (I am not a Hayek scholar, but suspect that Hayek himself must be excluded from these criticisms. I invite comment from Hayek experts.)

Hayekians say that processes such as "designing" a legal system or "planning" an economy are fundamentally different from designing a steam turbine or planning a house. What they are getting at with these contrasts is that legal or economic systems cannot simply spring, fully formed, from the minds of legal or economic dictators, and this is a truth which the twentieth century cannot be told too often. But many of the Hayekian observations about legal positivism and central economic planning apply also to steam turbines and houses. You can't "design" or "plan" *them* like that either. Successful plans for *houses* don't fly fully grown from the brows of genius creators, any more than successful economic plans do. Designing a steam turbine and designing a legal system are in fact rather similar enterprises. Legal systems are very difficult to design, and so are steam turbines.

I don't blame the Hayekians for this mistake. Most of them are ignorant about design, but ignorance is emphatically not a phenomenon which Hayekians can be accused of ignoring. The entire Hayekian critique of central economic planning is based on the inevitable ignorance of would-be planners. In order to understand the true nature of design, and why it is actually rather like central economic planning, one must have at one's disposal knowledge of what designing is like which is not necessarily very easy to come by. Ideally, one should have had some practical experience of design, and, equally important, one must know that design is what one was doing. For ironically, many people design things (such as the interiors of kitchens, bookshelves, gadgets for the car or the garden, office filing systems, and so forth) but, having a false idea of what design is, don't realise that design is what they were doing. Real designers, they continue to imagine, do something quite different. It's like that man who'd been speaking prose all his life, without knowing it.

There is also the difficulty that even if one has experienced a particular activity, one may still have a wrong idea of its

nature. (In other circumstances this phenomenon is called "false consciousness".) I don't mean by this that a good designer may really be a bad designer. I mean merely that *being* a designer and making true statements *about* being a designer are not the same thing. Hayekians will at once recognise this as the difference between explicit or systematic knowledge and "tacit" knowledge, and will be murmuring also the name of Michael Polanyi. To possess tacit knowledge without ever having turned it into the explicit variety is just one more example of how one may be ignorant.

GUESSING AND HOPING

My most sustained experience of design is that during the last few years I have been the graphic designer for the Libertarian Alliance. With the exception of *Free Life* and one or two other items, all the graphic products of the LA in the last few years have been designed by me. Now I'm not making any great claims for these designs - not here anyway. In my opinion, they have been more than adequate for the job in hand. But whether you share my good opinion of these efforts or not, they definitely are designs. There is also the convenience that this essay will itself - I hope - be published by the Libertarian Alliance, and that therefore most of its early readers will know at once which designs I am talking about. Very probably, the object that you are now reading is another of my design efforts. I hope you like it.

One rather obvious thing that I have never got round to doing is any kind of training in graphic design. I did some designing of theatrical posters and flyers while at university, but only in a very crude and self taught way, and I remain ignorant of many of the conventions of "real" graphic design. But I am nervous about committing myself to an expensive course of training that might prove worthless. I do other things besides design leaflets for the LA - things which I am reluctant to interrupt.

Because I have had more time and less spending money than the average sort of designer, my LA leaflets have tended to resemble things done by students, because students also have more time than money. But my feeling has been that a certain amateur quirkiness is no bad thing. It communicates that - poor and inexpert as we libertarians evidently are - we at least mean the things we say and are not just saying them for the money that somebody is paying us (a sneer aimed at many pro-capitalist propagandists). And having established this style I thought it best to stick to it. In political propaganda an unchanged style, even if rather unsatisfactory as a "design", smacks of confidence. You find your first readers, and from then on they find you, and pass the word on. Chopping and changing confuses your regulars, and suggests also a certain intellectual fickleness.

Notice how very *uncertain* the design process is. I have a "feeling" about what might or might not be effective, but I can't be sure. Perhaps if I had done things differently, the LA would by now have become far more successful. Design takes place in a fog of ignorance. It is not like doing a crossword puzzle. There is no fixed body of questions to be answered, and even after you have finished the job you sel-

dom know exactly how good your chosen answers have been. Much depends on what you decided were the questions.

To begin with, the main problem that I faced was to make the text fit the paper, which meant two sides of A4, or, later on, a convenient multiple thereof. (This is a fine example of deciding rather arbitrarily what the question is.) Making something that might stretch to two and a half sides instead fit onto only two sides was very obviously useful. Making an easy two sides shrink down to a cramped one and a half was unnecessary. There was a trade-off between the desire to keep the text large enough to be read, and the cost in money and inconvenience of going beyond two sides onto four, or from four to eight. (Six sides - that is either three sheets of A4 or one A3 plus one A4 - is not a satisfactory arrangement. Beyond the single A4 I use only multiples of A3.)

My chosen technique to begin with was to type everything out, photoreduce it - that is to say, make photocopies of reduced size - and glue it all onto paper. The resulting artwork was then photocopied again, or, if a long run was required, offset litho printed.

Each leaflet demanded a decision about text column width. How long should the lines of typing be? How severely should the text be photo-reduced, in order to get it all onto the page? This could, I suppose, have been exactly calculated, but, it seemed to me, that would have been too time consuming. By the time I'd been through all of that I could have done the typing, so to begin with I guessed, because - with luck - guessing would be quicker. I chose what seemed like a good width for the typing. I did the photoreducing in such a way that it was the right width, and then stuck the photoreduced text onto the pages, hoping that there would be a gap at the top that was neither too small nor too large. There were some frustrations while I learned to judge the length of each piece and hence how wide the text for each article would need to be to fit it all in, but on the whole, this rather haphazard procedure worked.

Replacing the typewriter with a personal computer hooked up to a printer made it easier to go on guessing like this about the column width, because now a wrong guess was far less time consuming. If at first the text didn't fit sensibly, it could be typed again with a different column width, without too much further trouble. Far from making things more systematic, the computer actually enabled me to go on being casual about things, that is, to *postpone* decisions.

TRYING TO DECIDE THINGS BEFOREHAND

Throughout my early fumbblings in LA leaflet design I was in the simultaneous grip of two conflicting "models" of what I was doing, one good and the other bad. To begin with, at the self-conscious level of thinking, I assumed that designing leaflets meant deciding first how they must look and then making them turn out like that.

The "design as pre-decision" approach sounds rational enough. I would start by reading the text to be laid out, and deciding at that point, before doing anything more, how it ought to look. Is it a piece about anarchism? It should have a picture of an anarchist. Is it about democracy? There should be a picture of a ballot paper. Is the writer well-known? There should be a picture of him. Perhaps decor at the bottom of the page would be nice, as well as at the top. And so on. That seems like a sensible way to go about things, doesn't it? It did to me, for a time.

But it slowly dawned on me that the time I was spending on preliminary "design" was time wasted. The reality of what was happening was that the "design" of each leaflet was not decided until I knew the exact space I had left at the top to fill. With each new leaflet I would start by unleashing the "design as pre-decision" process, find that it didn't work, and then willy-nilly switch over to "design as outcome", and only then get the job done.

With the "design as outcome" system, the procedure is first to stick down the text, starting at the end of the leaflet and then filling up the columns as if pouring the text into a row of bottles. The time to be "designing" the leaflet is when I have filled page 2, or in the case of a 4 page leaflet, pages 4, 3 and 2 (in that order). I then have a page full of bits and bobs to arrange on the front. There is the title. There is the necessary clutch of LA information about editors, series title, the series number, and so forth. There is the remaining text. And if any space remains there is the possibility of some "graphics".

I have learned not to bother about being "creative" when starting the job, but simply to get started. Print out the text, get it reduced and start sticking it down! Get on with it! (Procrastination has always been a problem with me.) Only when the finishing tape beckons do I pause to consider "artistic" matters. That is when I need to resist the temptation to just finish the job off any old how, and instead exert myself creatively. That is when to be agonising about the lettering style, to be searching through old magazines for a super-nice picture. Once I actually redid the lettering on the front of a leaflet, after several dozen copies had already been photocopied. I'm not that fussy about lettering, but the first version of the lettering, although perfectly legible, seemed to me not good enough.

Even the final design push can become excessively time consuming, if one becomes too gripped by decisions and not open enough to mere outcomes. When it comes to choosing pictures to go with the title, in those cases where there is space for a picture, I have learned not to be too picky. My rule is to find *something* that will look good, but not to have too fixed an idea of what, until I find it. I recall how I put a little picture on top of a leaflet about science fiction. It came from the front cover of a science fiction book that happened to be at hand, in the second hand shelves of the bookshop where I worked. Had this picture not been available I would have found something else. Or I would have made the lettering of the title bigger, or I'd have had a picture of the author, or something. What I did *not* do was decide that I wanted a picture exactly like the one I ended up with, and then go searching for it for hour after hour. A different book in the second hand shelves would have meant a different looking leaflet.

I'm describing how quick I was about this SF leaflet, but this quickness only occurred because of previous experiences of extreme unquickness, involving days of searching for the "ideal" picture that would be "perfect" but which was in reality unobtainable.

These LA leaflets, then, have been *outcomes* of a design *process*. To be sure, I have exercised a definite judicial or "veto" power over the process, at all stages. A certain outcome may be rejected - as with that unsatisfactory lettering - and the decision taken to go on seeking a better outcome. But - and this is my crucial point - when I embark on one of these designs I have only a very vague idea of how the final result is going to look.

In colloquial terms, I learned not to jump my fences until I got to them.

Maybe some onlookers to this seemingly haphazard process would consider that to fail to finalise everything beforehand is some kind of dereliction of the designer's duty. Yet I am convinced that such a procedure is simply not what being a good designer typically means.

NOT MY DOING

The above discussion nicely illuminates a perhaps puzzling and even repulsive fact about designers, which is their frequent displays of - to the outsider - quite appalling boastfulness, or, if things go badly, irresponsibility.

But look at it from my point of view. If I am following the "design as outcome" procedure, the design is not "my" design. It is itself. It merely "turns out" good, or bad. If the former, then I am perfectly entitled to join in the applause, to share all the pleasure at how well the design has turned out. I am not saying how clever I myself am, whatever onlookers may think. I am merely observing how clever the design itself is, an entirely different thing. I am often almost as surprised by the outcome as everyone else. On the other hand, just as I feel that success is not of my direct doing, neither is failure. If the design turns out badly, that is the fault of the design, not me. To blame a designer for a bad design is like automatically blaming the judge for a shoddy verdict served up to him by the jury.

Why do designers constantly say that their creations have a "life of their own"? Quite simply, it is because designs *do* have a life of their own.

STRATEGIES FOR HANDLING IGNORANCE

Let me put all of this in terms of knowledge. The designer does not know everything about the job he faces. He does not, to revert to the crossword analogy, have all the clues in front of him. Nor can he ever be sure that he has got any particular clue right, the way you usually can with crosswords. He merely makes a succession of design decisions, each on the basis of very different and very incomplete knowledge, and he hopes that these decisions will later turn out okay and that he won't have to retrace too many of his steps. Earlier decisions create the design environment within which later decisions have to be made.

The typical design decision involves compromise, one of the variables often being time spent finishing the design. I guessed the column width of my text, because (I also guessed) it would be too laborious to decide the column width by seemingly more exact methods, which would have involved much counting and calculating, which itself might have gone wrong. Economists will recognise such dilemmas at once, for they analyse them under such headings as the "economics of information".

Because one designs in such a fog of ignorance, one is constantly on the look-out for recipes that will minimise risk, while nevertheless allowing the design process to proceed.

A common risk-reducing strategy is to break the total design down into sub-units or subsystems, which can be designed separately and well, in the knowledge that the resulting subsystem will usually fit into the total design. Jet engines are designed as a distinct project from the design of jet aeroplanes. Loudspeakers are designed separately from the rest of the hi-fi kit. Bricks are designed by different people to those who design houses.

Another risk reducer is only to introduce one innovation at a time, innovation being an inherently risky process. All the effort can then go into getting the new (risky) element right, while all other aspects of the design are treated very conservatively. The new element may derange other elements in the design anyway, so the job of handling the non-innovative subsystems may still be difficult, even if you are playing almost everything as safely as you can. The results of following the "innovation on all fronts" strategy can be such disasters as the notorious "advanced" passenger train, and, even more famously, Concorde. The ideologists of the modern movement in architecture made one of their biggest errors when they turned their backs on this attitude.

The principle that one should innovate only with one aspect of a design at a time leads directly to the notion that designs *evolve*, of a design *tradition*. One of the most ancient design techniques is simply to copy a design that has already proved its value, adapting it as little as is necessary to the new situation. (The magnificent tradition of English domestic architecture is a particularly fine example of this, or was until it was wrecked by doctrinaire modernists. See my *Freedom, Order and Architecture*, Cultural Notes No. 3.)

The bigger and less easily duplicated an object is, the less one should take risks when designing it. Mass production goes well with radicalism, for only successful radicalism need be mass produced. A daring new design for a chair which turns out badly is no huge disaster. However, a daring - that is, innovative on many fronts - design for an ocean going liner, a city hospital or major airport is an act of extreme unwisdom. In our time, of these three types of man-made mega-object, only hospitals have been designed by "radical" designers. The results have not been happy.

One innovation in my LA design work I attempted some while ago was simply to try to do the job faster. I did that by changing nothing in the system *except* the speed with which I followed it. This piece of writing began as - among other things - part of that project, for it enabled me to distil some good "explicit" knowledge about what I'd been doing, to replace the bad explicit pseudo-knowledge - the false consciousness - that had formerly enmeshed me.

Almost all good designers seem to specialise (a principle wisely followed by the would-be owners and operators of airports and ships when they choose their designers). After one has wrestled with the design of the same kind of thing again and again one accumulates a mass of experience, which it makes sense to go on using. One sees which early decisions are good, and which ought to have been made differently or postponed to a later stage in the design process. The notion that there is an abstract thing called "design" which applies to all items big and small, cheap and expensive, useful and beautiful, one-off and mass-produced, seems to me dangerous. You could say that this entire essay is my attempt to generalise from my particular experience, and to arrive thereby at just such a general understanding of design, but I feel sure that had I been a jet engine designer or a software designer or a "proper" graphic designer, my generalisations about "design" would have been very different.

MYSTERY AT THE MARGIN

Here is an example of a peculiarly Hayekian item of knowledge which I have acquired in recent years. Many of my earlier leaflet designs put the text almost to the edge of the A4 sheet, with hardly any margin. The "graphics" often went to the edge and beyond. These designs were repro-

duced without any apparent difficulty, at the copy shop. But then we got our own photocopier, and I started finding that if asked to copy things too close to the edge of the sheet, on both sides, the machine became recalcitrant. One side from edge to edge was fine, but to do both sides was suddenly to be faced with blotches of vagueness. This, I noticed, could be cured by having bigger margins.

Now here's the Hayekian bit. *I don't know why this happens.* I have asked the sellers and maintainers of the photocopier, but they are reluctant to discuss the imperfections of their equipment, and for all I know are ignorant of the answer themselves. So, a good Hayekian, I follow my rule (wide margins) without knowing why I must, merely *that* I must. (In this particular respect I used to be proud of being the only one in step.) Remember Hayek's criticism of the Bloomsbury Set's demand to know why a rule exists before they would follow it.

Perhaps I could find out why the machine behaves like this. But how long would that take? My ignorance is not merely a matter of not knowing why this effect happens. I also do not know how long it would take me to correct my ignorance, nor do I know whether it would do me any good. Maybe not. So why bother? I just follow the rule.

I am also becoming uncomfortably aware of why graphic designers prefer to lay their designs out on cardboard rather than on paper. I have tried to get cardboard, but have so far found suitable local supplies tricky, and so have not bothered. But alas, no matter how hard you try to glue paper to paper without the surface wobbling up and down, wobble it will, if not also stuck to relentlessly flat cardboard. Result: text on the final leaflets also wobbles from time to time. Maybe it's time I did do a course in graphic design, so that I could learn all the folk-lore things I now don't know.

The Bloomsbury mentality - demanding to know the reason for a rule before respecting it - is part of air we breath in this intellectually befouled century. Merely reading a book about how one should treat blind tradition with respect is not enough. To experience the full force of Hayek's point, you have to experience the force of tradition itself, by breaking one and feeling the pain. As an untrained graphic designer, that is, a graphic designer who has not had the traditions handed down to him by the tribal elders, I am learning about the virtues of tradition the hard way.

RULES

In general, my self conscious effort to understand what I can about what I do is itself an attempt to assemble rules. Rules like: make a start! And: at the end, slow down! Play it straight until the final "creative" surge, but then try to be really creative, i.e. different, because I want my readers to know at once that they *haven't* seen this latest one.

If there's a lot of space for the title use thin, black lettering. If there's only a little space, use small but thicker lettering. But if there's only a tiny space, use thick white-on-black lettering, which really shows up. (White-on-black is harder to do, but is often worth the effort.)

Put the title to the top left rather than top right, because it will then be visible when the leaflets are in overlapping display.

Don't skimp on the preliminary graphic photocopying which produces the photoreduced text for the artwork. "Saving" copies at this stage is a false economy. And so on. *Rules.*

Many of these rules of mine are to do with *time*. Knowing when to press ahead and when to pause and consider is a sure sign of an experienced designer.

A fairly rigid application of such rules may, in particular instances, make difficulties. But if you evolve good rules and stick to them, you come out ahead. (Compare this with the Hayekian defence of the "freedom rule", which can often mean apparently awful injustices in particular cases but which is still worth sticking to.)

ASK THE USERS

If design didn't take place in a fog of ignorance, there'd be no such thing as technological development. For what is "development", if not the process of thinning out the fog a little? But how *long* (time, again) should the development stage be prolonged? How "good" is a design? (I read recently that a particular feature of the British disease has been an inability to *stop* designing, and simply to go ahead and build the wretched thing. Result: a manufacturing process deranged by an infuriating succession of badly digested "design improvements". Apparently the ill-fated Nimrod aerial early warning project was especially bedevilled by this problem. The winning American design was less "advanced". This was because, at a certain intelligently chosen if inevitably controversial moment, the American design bosses simply brought down the axe on any further "improvements" and said: that's it, that's what we build.)

One of the best ways to find out quickly what else ought to be done to your design is to ask your customers. Thus, a routine method for both improving and speeding up the design process is the rule of getting the product out, somehow, into the hands of the punters, so that you can then get some feedback. Will it work? What will they use it for? Will they obey your rules for using it, and if not does it matter? Once again, we have here a rule about how and when to *hurry*, in this case the hurry being to produce some kind of functioning prototype for the customers to react to. The best-selling American business writer Tom Peters, in such books as *In Search of Excellence* and *A Passion For Excellence*, has focussed especially on this behaviour pattern in the best American corporations. Bad corporations rely on unwieldy and hideously prolonged research programmes, run by people with delusions of eventual unaided omniscience.

In the case of LA leaflets, one of the major design decisions embodied in them is the decision to make them into separate leaflets in the first place, rather than to gather them together and issue them in the form of a periodical. With the leaflets I get lots of "design completions". This keeps my desk clear, gives my ego more frequent massage, and provides more feedback. (If I want to amaze people with a big surge of output, there's nothing to stop me doing this by simply producing a big surge of leaflets.)

The single leaflet method enables the users to pick out the leaflets which they like best, while not encumbering themselves with the ones they don't want. Such choices can be revealing, and surprising. They also save paper. Individual leaflets can be targeted at particular customers. Having our own photocopier means that we can respond to popular demand with little bursts of printed product, small but frequent, as and when each particular leaflet runs out. Having a photocopier which can do small runs cheaply enables agonising decisions about long print runs to be avoided altogether. Errors can be corrected as and when they are spotted. This in its turn permits "prototypes" to be rushed into print (be-

cause errors are less of a catastrophe) and enables the whole system to be speeded up still more.

We are now collecting the single sheet leaflets together into larger publications, if only because this enables us to economise on display space. This was not a type of LA product we anticipated when the leaflets started, and is yet another example of a design outcome.

THE SOLITARY FALLACY

An objection to seeing design in these Hayekian terms, as a game of “time and ignorance” (to quote the title of a recent book on Austrian Economics), might be that human society involves many people, whereas design is a solitary occupation, and hence that the ordering of society is an order of magnitude more complex.

But once one realises the true circumstances of the typical designer the analytical distinction between the solitary designer and a great crowd of mutually ignorant members of a design team (or, to put it in Austrian Economese, mutually ignorant economic actors) just melts away. Design is a *succession* of decisions, not just one, and the “knowledge environment” of each decision is quite different for that of previous and subsequent decisions. The Brian Micklethwait who decided to print out that Science Fiction article with a column width of 45 characters was, from the point of view of the immediate knowledge being used, a different Brian Micklethwait to the one who a day or two later was deciding how to do the heading at the top of the article, after the text had all been pasted up. Brian-One knew one set of things, and had one sort of problem. Brian-One then solved that problem, and forgot it. Brian-Two had a quite different set of facts to work with, of which Brian-One had known almost nothing, and Brian-Two then solved that problem. It would in fact have been quite reasonable for these two Brians to have been two genuinely different people. The same rules that designers must have in order to keep a grip on their own solitary work, make it possible for the design job to be shared. The task of “organising oneself” is very similar to the task of organising a team of different people, because from the knowledge point of view the designer *is* a team of different people.

I hope it is clear by now that the points I’ve been making about leaflet design apply to virtually all “creative” processes, whether it is composing symphonies, cooking, managing a multinational corporation, designing cars, making musical films, whatever. All such activities are engulfed in vast fogbanks of ignorance, and one is constantly entangled in the unpredictable consequences of one’s own previous decisions. To those who may consider that making all this fuss about a few leaflets is a bit beside the point, I’d reply that if even the laying out of something so trivial and straightforward as a leaflet is an activity fraught with complexity and Hayekian ignorance-minimising strategies, how much *more* true must this be of designing houses and steam turbines. And indeed, although having little direct experience of such mega-design activity everything I’ve read and learned about what happens during it tells me that what I’ve said about leaflets applies to that also, only more so.

During the writing of this piece, I became the proud operator of a “desktop publishing” system. You’re probably reading a “desktop” version of this piece now. One of the questions I brought to this new system was: would the ideas in this piece about my old - relatively hand-done - design procedure still apply with the new machines? The answer is that al-

though many of the details are different, exactly the same broad principles do apply, and if anything even more so.

The design process is much quicker than it was, but it is still a process. I still start at the end and work my way back to the beginning. I am still surprised by what finally emerges from the printer after I’ve had one of my sessions at the keyboard.

Interestingly, the desktop publishing software that I use (for the benefit of fellow computer freaks it’s called “Ventura”) involves the concept of the “style sheet”. And what does the concept of the style sheet make possible? Answer: the process of copying a successful design, and merely *adapting* that design to fit another publication.

TEAMWORK AND ART

Whereas some types of designer are quite used to working in teams, others like to indulge in the romantic cliché of the “solitary” designer, the “lonely” artist.

But the various “arts” (such as novel writing and symphonic composition) are just rather long lasting and fixed specialisations within creative teams. The best classical music composers almost all worked closely with orchestras, and have usually been top flight conductors and instrumentalists themselves. Writers can learn much from their agents, publishers, editors and readers, and often are agents, publishers, editors and (of course, always) readers. Shakespeare was a professional actor, at a time when the idea of a separate “play” (as distinct from its performance) was scarcely understood.

Genuine social isolation between so-called “artists” and those who ought to be their collaborators is, I’d say, a very bad sign, suggesting decadence if not actual senescence of the art form in question. The emphatically undecadent art of pop music involves intensely close cooperation between “artists” and recording technicians, agents, concert promoters and so on. I see it as a sign of creative vigour when an art form is surrounded (as pop music is) by confusion about who exactly is doing or did do what.

And as for me, I also cooperate. I too am a reasonably smoothly functioning subsystem within someone else’s “design”. The Libertarian Alliance itself is a “design”, supervised by its chief designer Chris Tame. Over the last few years I have had the pleasure of watching Chris learning to let *his* design be an “outcome”, rather than him expecting it all to turn out exactly as he originally envisaged it, not just in the way that he has been willing to use what I’ve been offering, but in his willingness to respond to the LA’s environment generally.

THE FALLACY OF SELF EXPRESSION

That I have evolved some good rules for doing my LA design work has made me easier to work with. The idea that teamwork and individual creativity are in automatic opposition to one another is simply wrong.

A phrase one frequently hears nowadays in connection with matters of art and design is “self expression”. This notion has been especially prominent in what is called “progressive” education. Many people have become uneasy about this idea, without knowing quite why. The idea of individual, purposive action is plainly essential; this is what education should be all about. But “self expression” has an atmosphere of arbitrariness and permissiveness about it.

The whole thrust of what I’ve been saying is that design (or for that matter “art”, “creativity”, or whatever you prefer -

it's largely conventional which word is used for which activity) means getting the design into some kind of shape *outside* of the mind of the designer. I get my leaflet designs going by getting some *thing* into existence, outside of my mere self. From then onwards I am not trying to express *myself*, I am enabling the leaflet to express *itself*. My designing "self", I have explained, fragments into a succession of different selves. We're back to the it-has-a-life-of-its-own experience referred to earlier.

Too often, the demand by the artist for "self expression" is associated with the inappropriate imposition of the "design as pre-decision" model. The shape into which all else must fit is announced, and any suggestions that the final result should give a little in the light of the vicissitudes of the design "journey" are interpreted by the designer as a threat to his own "self". "Art" is another word used in this kind of way. "Self expression" and "art" both become verbal masks for the crude and inappropriate exercise of power. The "designer" feels that he must retain "control" of the design, that is, make it conform to his original "vision".

But what one must actually do when designing is, at the right moment, to *relinquish* control, to push the design off on its own journey, and from then on let *it* decide what you (or others) must do for it next, and what you (or others) must do to finish it. It does not express you. You (and others) serve it.

Hayek's friend Sir Karl Popper has written illuminatingly of the dangers of the idea of self expression. It was from Popper that I first encountered the then amazing notion that self expression might be a bad idea. Popper goes as far as to say that the realisation, by the early Greeks, that they ought to separate their mere "selves" from their products - Popper deals mostly with scientific theories but the same principle applies also to designs - was one of mankind's greatest intellectual advances.

DETROIT

I've recently read a book about design in the business world, by Christopher Lorenz, called *The Design Dimension*. This book is an interesting contrast to the essay you have now nearly finished reading, because Lorenz is concerned to establish the managerial clout of designers in circumstances where they had hitherto been subservient. That is, he is arguing that an already established tradition of "design as outcome" ought to be *replaced* by something nearer to the "design as pre-decision" procedure.

Lorenz focuses particularly on the American motor industry, until recently a classic case of "design as outcome". What would happen in the years of Detroit's supremacy was that the engineers would design the cars, from the inside out, so to speak, and then the "designers" would encase the cars in annually updated metallic wrapping. Just like me, these persons would impose a superficial individuality upon a basically very repetitious product. The Detroit engineers were like the LA's writers, while the Detroit stylists were doing the same thing as I do when "styling" the LA's leaflets. The Detroit stylists would no more instruct the engineers concerning their engines and suspension systems than a graphic designer would tell a writer about writing.

However, a few years ago, Detroit decided that their designers would have to become more important. A new type of consumer was demanding "better designed" cars. Also, fuel economy considerations were making the external shape of the cars a central issue, rather than an afterthought. What

followed, if the Lorenz description of what happen at Ford is anything to go by, amounted to a corporate cultural revolution. "Design as outcome", at any rate as far as outside appearances were concerned, was replaced by "design as pre-decision".

The equivalent switch by the LA might be if we decided that from now on all LA leaflets had to have exactly the same number of words in them, or a multiple of that number. (Those noted mass producers of romantic fiction, Mills and Boon, have a rule that all their stories must have exactly the same number of pages.)

Meanwhile, has Detroit design become less "Hayekian"? Only in a very superficial way. The initial decision is now different, but it is just as risky, just as much a judgment in an uncertain knowledge environment. In the old days the engineers did their stuff, and assumed that the stylists would be able to make the resulting assemblage look like a car, a task which eventually proved impossible. Now the "designers" are deciding the overall shape of the car, to which the engineers have to conform. But this too is a risk. Will the engineers be able to fit their stuff into the pre-ordained shapes supplied by the designers? The new kind of Detroit product still abounds with "outcomes", even if you now have to open up the bonnet to see them. These consist of the cunning new ways to fit everything together, hitherto not demanded. Since the "designers" are involved in all of that stuff as well, the design is batted back and forth from designers to engineers to designers until the thing is right. The danger of the old system was that the assemblage of engineering components would become too unwieldy, as eventually it did. The danger of the new regime is that the design process, far from being any kind of one-off announcement, will on the contrary become too prolonged. The economics of - i.e. scarcity of - mere money is not a big problem in Detroit design departments, but the economics of time still applies with a vengeance.

HOW WILL THIS TURN OUT?

This is a fascinating subject concerning which I could happily ramble on indefinitely, but writing also has its trade-offs, involving such perishable items as the attention span of the reader. Maybe after the early readers have read this, I will decide to revamp it. Perhaps if we send Hayek a copy, he himself will have something to say about this essay, and permit us to print his comments in a later edition of it. This is not all that far fetched. One of Hayek's most endearing qualities is his great interest in the expertise of other experts besides expert academics. He apparently likes to spend long hours cross examining such persons as game wardens and taxi drivers concerning the tricks of their trades, thereby enriching his understanding of other people's knowledge, even if it is rather haltingly expressed (i.e. tacit). So why should he not be equally respectful when confronted by the wisdoms of a pamphleteer?

But meanwhile I'll call a halt to the writing of this. I have learned from bitter experience not to use my dual capacity as writer and designer of my own pieces of LA writing as an excuse to combine the writing and design stages. It will be wiser for me, when designing this, to treat this as just another piece of LA writing, to be accommodated in the usual way into the space available.

I still don't know exactly how this will end up looking. Only time will tell.