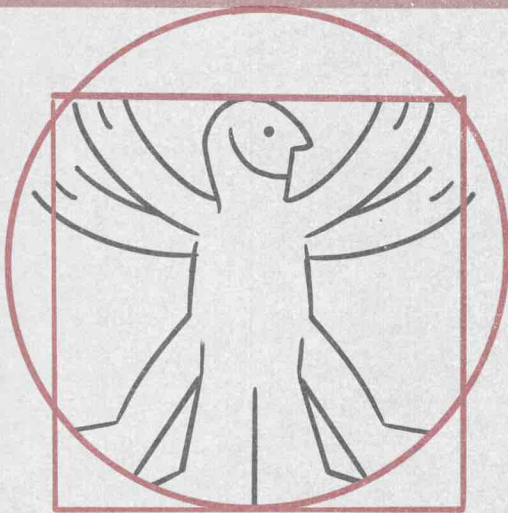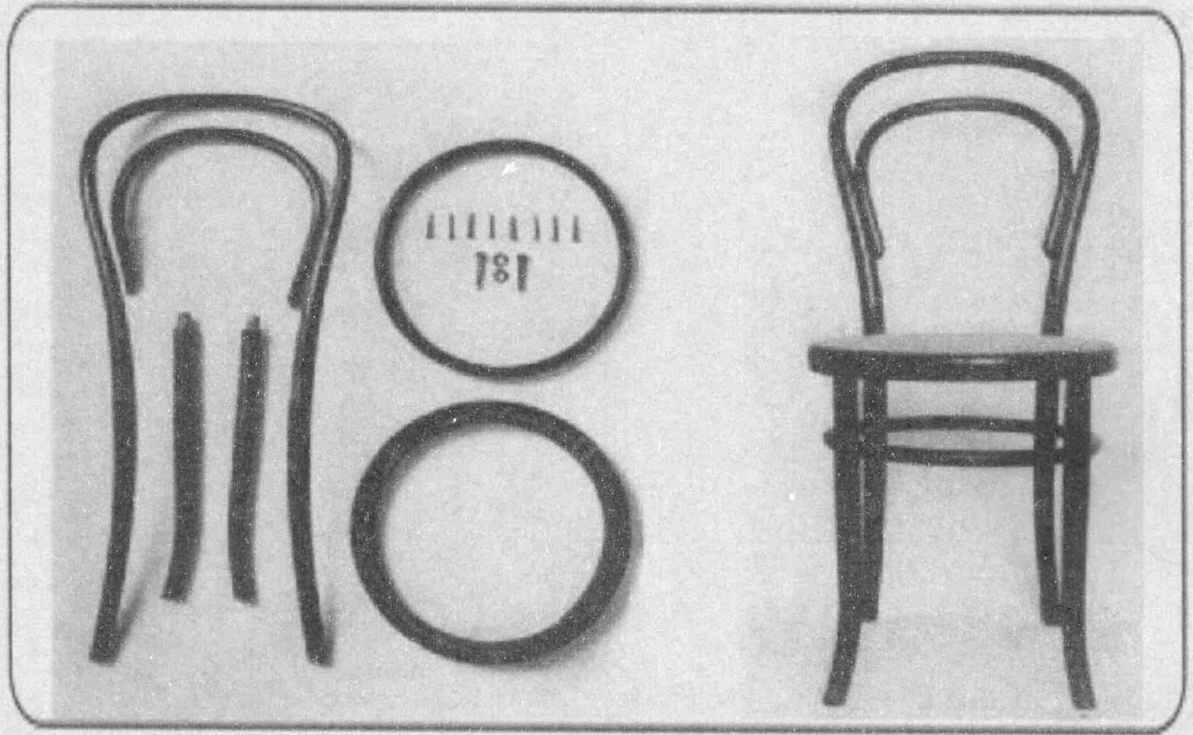# Industrialization

AND

design's
standardization

IKEA Restaurant and Café 9.00am - 9.30pm

IKEA

Emma RAMSTEIN

Chair no. 14

Chair no. 14 (Michael Thonet, 1959) meets a large need: robust, handy and cheap, it presents itself in the form of a kit to be assembled by customers. It was the first mass produced chair and it's the IKEA's ancestor. This chair symbolizes the beginning of **industrialization.** With technological and technical advances (bending method) the production will be simplified: there will be less pieces and ornaments. The object should be functional because they wanted to respond to needs: that's a technical and rationalist idea. They were looking for **efficiency:** the chair production takes place in Czechoslovakia. Each employee is assigned a task that he will repeat again and again: this is the principle of the production line due to fordism and taylorism. Exported internationally, this chair became a standard that revolutionized design.

Michel Thonet's chair and more broadly industrialization makes wonder about a sort of standardization that appears.

By considering Chair n°14 we will wonder about the consequences of industrialization on design by observing the case of IKEA. Then, we will observe that some designers seek to free themselves from standards.
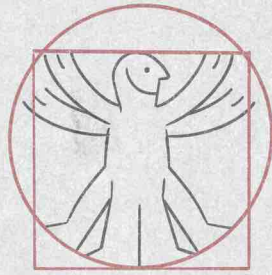
In the 1930s, **Brecht and Suhrkamp** made the observation of a "cultural industry": according to them the reflexion of a product will be based on its marketing over its tenor. This verdict increases with globalization and the rise of digital techniques. It affects each form or art (literature, music, radio…). Globalization leads to a phenomenon of cultural standardization or "acculturization". We can notably observe this phenomenon in digital art. This smoothing is due to conformism and to the relationship with the public. A **"cultural industry"** appears with industrialization. The leisure society brings a logic of consumption and the search for profits from which follows marketing which looks for seducing the masses. Industries want to reach an extremely large consumer public that leads to a content standardization: they offer a product that can seduce everybody without age or sex barriers. For Morin it's an industrialization of the mind: mass media transmit uniform values which creating a unity and a mass culture. It follows cultural goods: with benefits appear new arts and creative techniques.

Meanwhile, **Walter Benjamin** wonders about the **"loss of aura"** (the latter as the unique phenomenon of a distance however close it may be). According to him, mechanization brought structural changes: after crafts is the industry. It changes the way we create and consume art: before a work of art was unique. Know the mechanical production (which is the ability to recreate an artwork in an infinity of copies) represents something new. These artworks are lacking in one element: its presence in time and space. A work of art is unique evidenced by physical changes. Reproducible artwork lacks authenticity. The desire to bring the works closer to the public has harmed their aura.

INDUSTRIALIZATION

design standards [di'zīn ,stan·dərdz] (design engineering)
Generally accepted uniform procedures, dimensions, materials, or
parts that directly affect the design of a product or facility.
*(McGraw-Hill Dictionary of Scientific & Technical Terms, 6E, Copyright © 2003
by The McGraw-Hill Companies, Inc.)*

Standards are created to make production as efficient as possible with information on sizes, patterns or colors. Standards and industrialization enable producing similar products quickly and in large quantities. **IKEA** responds to universal needs without worrying about the specificities of each client. We therefore have a production of uniform furniture, modular with interchangeable parts.

This standardization can be seen through its graphic charter: their notices are standardized. We will take as an example the **Billy shelf** from IKEA (Gillis Lundgren, 1979). With a view to efficiency it is delivered in kit form. The assembly must therefore be feasible at home and by anyone (a user manual accompanies the product to explain its assembly). The document is presented with a minimalist graphic design. On the cover we can read the name of the product, a wired representation of the library and the IKEA logo. The following pages show the different stages of furniture assembly with simple and visual representations to make understanding accessible to everyone.

IKEA plays ironically with its ultra-conformed aesthetic as during the lockdown. The brand has published sanitary consignments in the style of their assembly instructions (McCann Tel-Aviv). This manual uses the graphic codes of IKEA by presenting in a few schemas the principles of the lockdown: do not open the door, have a key, a lock and a huge stock of toilet paper. The firm also offered during the confinement a catalog of games for children in the form of a printable PDF.

The **Super Normal** exhibition (Jasper Morrison, 2006, Tokyo) questions the need for originality. The artist presents about fifty objects from industry, whose main quality is functionalism. An asset which, according to him, is lacking in design objects which are made to "occupy the media surface...".
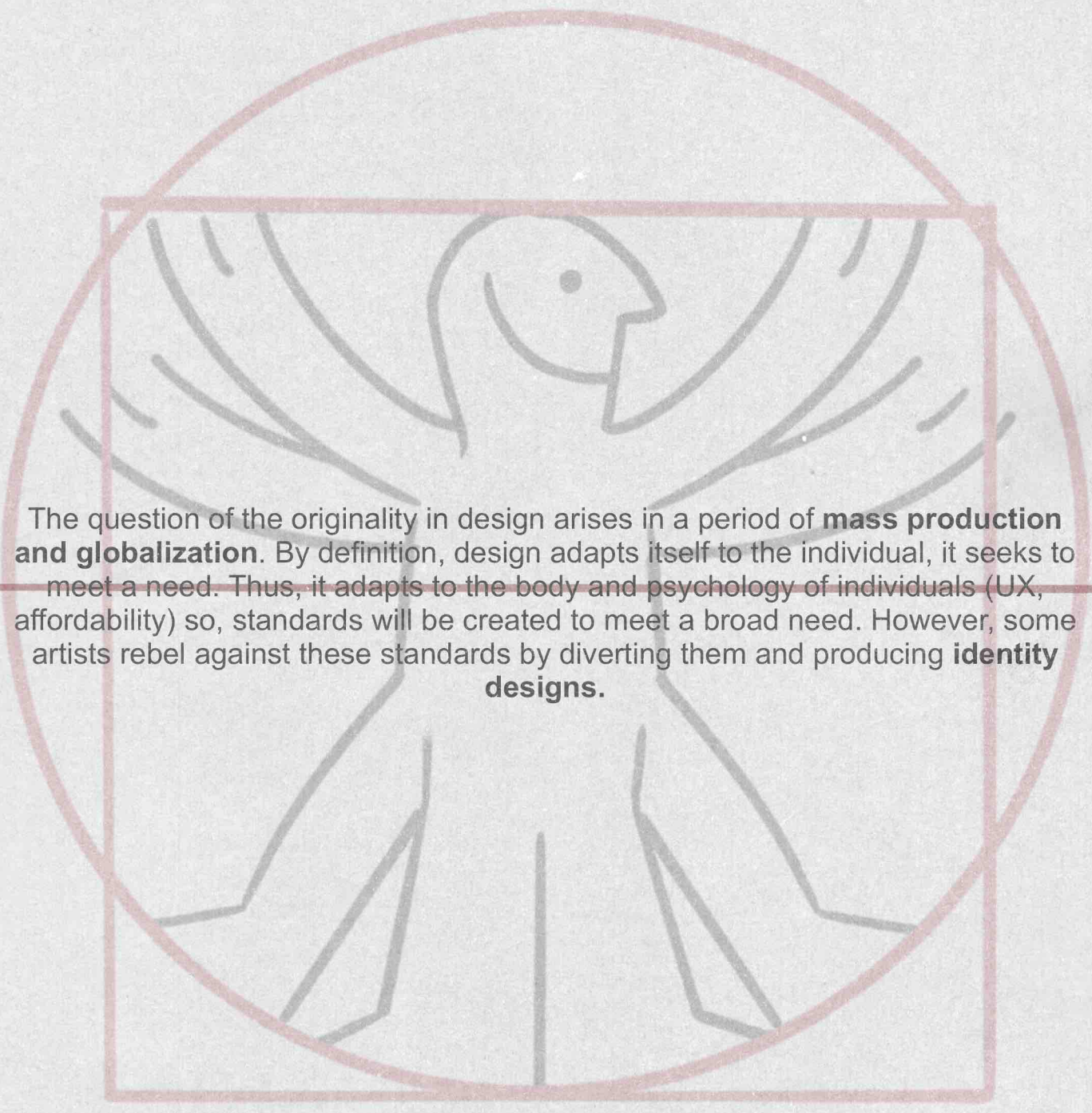
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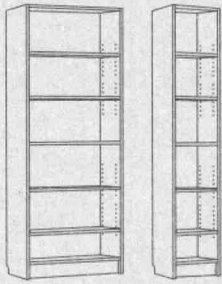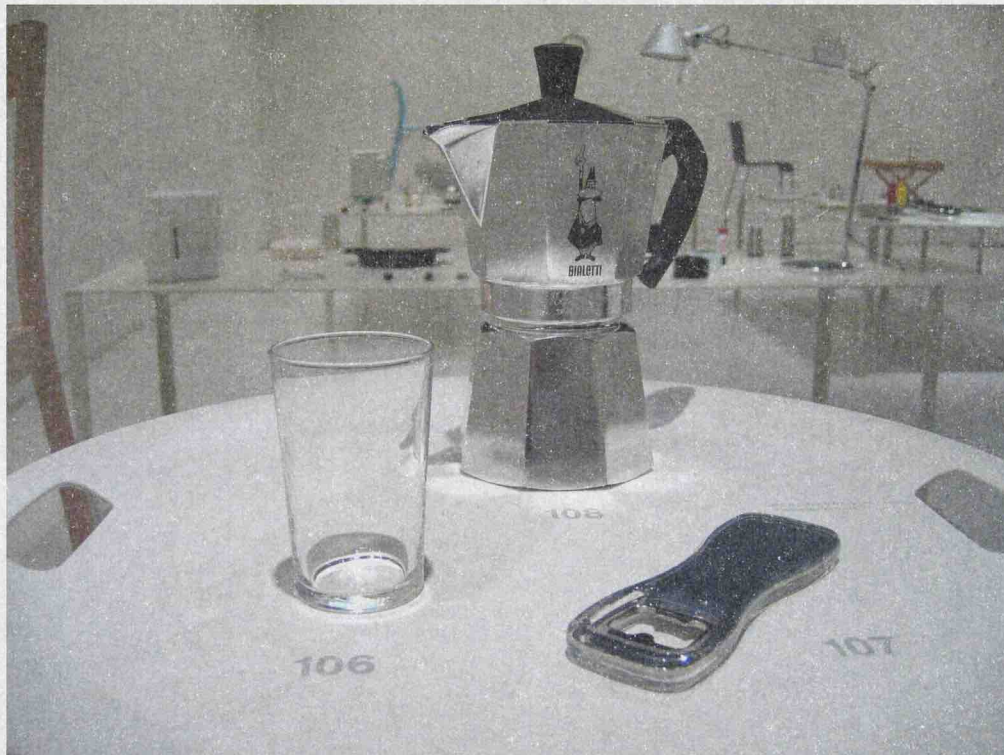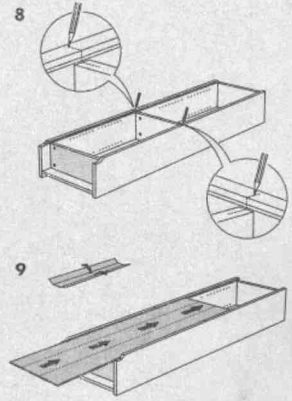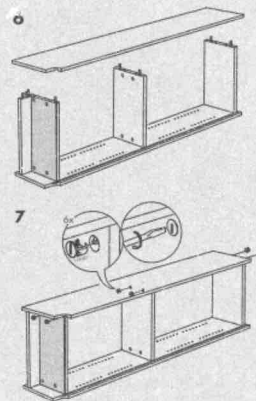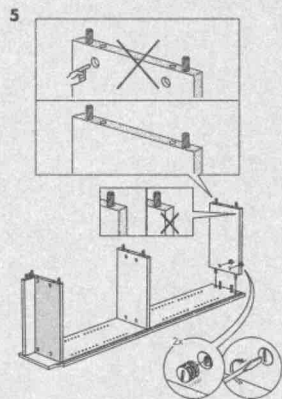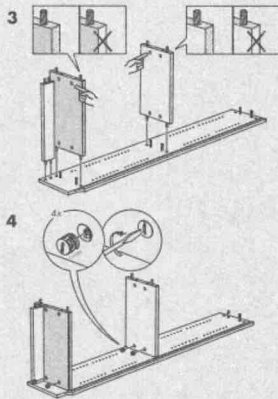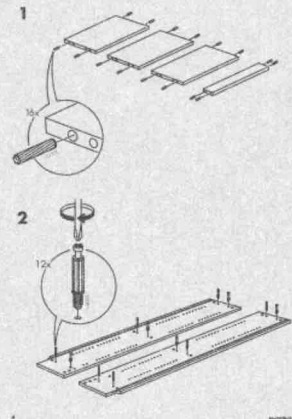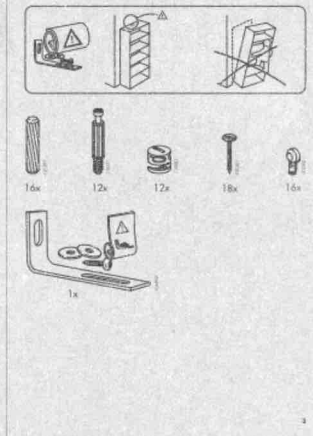
EMANCIPATION

Some artists seek to emancipate themselves from norms, they want to **"learn to unlearn ordinary gestures"**. Eliane Fedrigo explains that this involves learning differently/ looking at the world from another perspective.
Carl Clerkin joins this philosophy with humor. In his exhibition *The Other Way* he presents an assortment of fantastical assemblages of everyday objects such as brooms, buckets and bicycle wheels, modified and combined.
During the 1980s, Europe saw the appearance of post-modernist groups that rejected mass design: they wanted an **identity design**. Thus they will reject the "good design" of the 70s (with modular furniture and beige shades) and will use asymmetrical colors and shapes as with the *Carlton shelf* (Ettore Sottsass, 1980).

The question of the originality in design arises in a period of **mass production and globalization**. By definition, design adapts itself to the individual, it seeks to meet a need. Thus, it adapts to the body and psychology of individuals (UX, affordability) so, standards will be created to meet a broad need. However, some artists rebel against these standards by diverting them and producing **identity designs.**