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The Collaborative Roles of the Designer, the Marketer, and the Consumer in Determining What is Good Design

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Abstract

The past view of the artist or designer as a uniquely talented visionary whose own references are mainly internal has migrated to that of communicator. With respect to product design, we are in the midst of a move to a much more consumer-oriented practice by which the needs of the consumer and her or his response to products in the midst of the design process are solicited and factored into the whole process much more assiduously than ever before. The flow of communication between designer and consumer has transformed from a largely one-way process (from artist to receiver) to a much more interactive process involving the marketer as intermediary. This change includes a shift from the traditional modes of marketing communications, characterized as a one-way flow of information from sender to receiver, to a collaboration between the marketer and consumers. This feedback from the marketing research process concerning the usefulness and acceptance of various designs is now a well-established, micro-level feedback loop. In the following we propose an additional, macro-level loop that also feeds back to the designer and also influences the creative process. Though it may be a latent process, and less deliberate, it contributes to the designer's sensibilities in a manner that may not be so apparent to the designer. This loop is mediated by consumer feedback once again, though not by individual responses to market researchers deliberately made to designers during the design process, or by their individual purchases, but by collective consumption and usage patterns. Those products, packages, and advertising imageries that prove popular proliferate into our world to serve as visual background to our daily lives. In the following, we examine the role of each player in detail.

Introduction

The past view of the artist or designer as a uniquely talented visionary whose own references are mainly internal has migrated to that of communicator. With respect to product design, we are in the midst of a move to a much more consumer-oriented practice by which the needs of the consumer and her or his response to products in the midst of the design process are solicited and factored into the whole process much more assiduously than ever before. The flow of communication between designer and consumer has transformed from a largely one-way process (from artist to receiver) to a much more interactive process involving the marketer as intermediary.

This change includes a shift from the traditional modes of marketing communications, characterized as a one-way flow of information from sender to receiver, to a collaboration between the marketer and consumers. With respect to promotion, a more concerted effort is now being made to solicit feedback from consumers in the form of marketing research, aided tremendously by new electronic technologies, to ensure effective communication as well as the design of products that meet consumer needs. This feedback from the marketing research process concerning the usefulness and acceptance of various designs is now a well-established, micro-level feedback loop (lower half of **Figure 1**).

Click for larger view

Figure 1.
Conceptual Model.

In the following we propose an additional, macro-level loop that also feeds back to the designer and also influences the creative process. Though it may be a latent process, and less deliberate, it contributes to the designer's sensibilities in a manner that may not be so apparent to the designer (upper half of **Figure 1**).

This loop is mediated by consumer feedback once again, though not by individual responses to market researchers deliberately made to designers during the design process, or by their individual purchases, but by collective consumption and usage patterns. Those products, packages, and advertising imageries that prove popular proliferate into our world to serve as visual background to our daily lives. And these images subsequently determine the visual norms, conventions, and the iconography of our daily existence, that which becomes visually usual, familiar, and "right" to us. Thus, by the introduction of novel and surprising visual design and the social process it engenders, our idea of what the world looks like, and should look like, and our idea of the usual and the normal, changes. And, so, too, must our idea of what is good design change as well.

Designers' sensibilities are as defined by these collective designed elements as are the rest of ours, not just during their waking hours but in all the rest of their life experiences. These influences too feed into their design choices, which are then filtered back into the marketplace, and through the marketplace into our world at home and in our public spaces and through our media. And all this is then cycled back to the designer as a revised and evolved set of visual standards and conventions to feed into their designer sensibilities, and so on, in an endless cycle, and the appearance of our total world then changes and evolves through our days, years, and decades. Now we take a closer look at each player in this process.

The Designer

To put this shift in marketplace terms, the designer's role today has moved away from an aesthetic equivalent of the industrially based notion called the "production orientation." This refers to the tendency for producers to become so myopically involved in factors of production to achieve efficiencies that they lose sight of consumers and their needs.[1] From the 1960s through the 1990s, the factors of bland industrial production largely controlled the design aesthetics of products mass-marketed in the United States.[2] (Though not a product per se, the Walmart logo circa 1968–1981, shown at the bottom of **Figure 2**, reveals this basic design orientation, one that is intentionally pedestrian.)[3]

Click for larger view

Figure 2.
Target and Walmart logos. Note that the text attached to the above Target logo features design for everyone as its salient attribute, in contrast to Walmart's new logo as of 2008, which features price and living better as its salient features, a more utilitarian theme. Note too that Walmart, perhaps in response to Target's design challenge, is moving towards a more premium and refined image with its current logo, which features a star. In contrast, the 1992–2008 logo featured a hyphen, and the visuals of the 1968–1981 logo were plain and sober, with the product message of simply low price.

Today the role of the designer can be described by the notion of "consumer orientation," which refers to the express effort to always consider the final user and that user's needs as foremost.[4] According to Weintraub:

> Production and consumption comprise complementary aspects of art's cultural course. On the production side, artists transform the private zones of their imagination, insights, knowledge, emotions, and intuitions into forms that are transmittable to others. On the consumption side, viewers not only have the option of purchasing works of art, they also consume art each time they delight in it, learn from it, and identify with

> it, or reject it, criticize it, and condemn it. Without the crucial linkage between the creator and recipient, art is stuck in a state of pure potential, like a battery that is fully charged but not in service. As a result, the artistic process really doesn't culminate until a recipient tunes into a work's power and receives its charge.[5]

The new wisdom is that the right design comes from the brand community.[5] In order to practice consumer orientation, a firm must sufficiently understand its target customers' current and future needs through the continuous organization-wide generation of information, accompanied by appropriate responses.[6] For example, through its focus on design, Target has developed true, relevant points of distinction to differentiate it from other discount retailers. The company communicates to its customers a sense of style and taste that meets their need for a hip, creative alternative to Walmart,[7] as evidenced by the page from Target's Web site shown in **Figure 3**. Though this page projects a rather sophisticated and cosmopolitan image, which could be off-putting to some, the words with the logo are intended to be inclusive, informing the viewer that high design is for everyone.

Click for larger view

Figure 3.
Image from Target's Web site.

A visual example of the difference in emphasis between the two companies with respect to the design attribute can be seen by comparing the pharmaceutical ads for Target and Walmart shown in **Figures 4** and **5**. Target's ClearRx™ prescription drug packaging was designed by Deborah Adler after a long process of researching and observing final users' difficulties with existing packaging.[8] Perhaps underscoring Target's design-based differentiation strategy even further is recent evidence that Walmart is moving in this same direction (in marketing vernacular, a "me-too" strategy). For example, as shown in **Figure 4**, Walmart has recently revamped its store logo, softening and refining its impact, incorporating a subtle circular element that is perhaps intended to be reminiscent of Target's circular target logo. Notice too with both these examples how Target relies more heavily on its distinctive visuals to carry not only its meaning (i.e., "Design for All") but its identity as well, using far less text than Walmart.

Click for larger view

Figure 4.
Target pharmaceutical ad.

Click for larger view

Figure 5.
Walmart pharmaceutical ad.

The great designer is still viewed as an artist with a special gift, though no longer one who works in isolation with reference to no audience, guided only by her or his own sensibilities to the exclusion of the wants and needs of others. Rather, the current aesthetic dictates that all artistic work be of a communal nature, the joint activity of a number of people cooperating in both a product's production and consumption,[9] with the designer as artist playing an essential but contributory rather than exclusive role. The general expectation remains that the superior designer should produce distinct and unique, as well as functional, objects and styles. The ability of the designer to build entertaining and engaging visual experience into utilitarian products provides a means of gaining comparative advantage. A good example of an artist who is also a successful designer of functional goods that also reflect his particular sensibilities, and also lends them great distinction, was the Japanese-American sculptor Isamu Noguchi; examples of his work are shown in **Figures 6** and **7**. A hallmark of high design remains the ability of the designer to surprise and delight the viewer with novel sights and images, which are ostensibly the reasons we like and value art and design—it is fun. These distinctive appearances are expected to set the work of a particular designer apart from the work of other designers, as well as from the visual conventions of our habitual world.

Click for larger view

Figure 6.
Noguchi Akari light sculpture.

Click for larger view

Figure 7.
Noguchi sculpture.

Design is no longer seen as a characteristic qualitatively different from other, functional, beneficial attributes the designed object provides to the user. Rather, it is now viewed as a part of that bundle. And, just as all other beneficial attributes may be used to differentiate a brand, design too may serve to differentiate the product it represents, but not exclusively in the traditional sense in which good design is seen to elevate a brand above its more pedestrian, merely functional (and therefore inferior) alternatives. In that case, good design aspires to an elite, prestige status intended for a separate, exclusive audience. Rather, in this new paradigm, design provides a particular appeal to a broad segment of consumers now "allowed" to appreciate it as well as to see it as a beneficial, utilitarian attribute. As noted above, retailers like Target are taking advantage of this new aesthetic by creating a unique and defensible marketing position by making the high design of day-to-day objects a salient product attribute and associating themselves with it.

In this mode, the functionality of designed objects and/or the communications role of designed images serve as a constraint against which the designer must work.[10] For example, a coffee pot must have a handle, or an automobile must have headroom or a compartment to hold the engine, or an aesthetically eye-catching and entertaining ad must also connect to the brand as well as be sufficiently memorable to affect purchase behavior in the store.

The Marketing/Advertising Process

It is by dint of the marketing process and strategy that the design is conveyed to the consumer. In other words, marketing and advertising provide the background context within which the consumer processes the design. The marketing and advertising process is a matter of creating a whole offering. In addition to the traditional marketing mix, a whole offering would include all the associations and meanings designed into sustained and ever-changing advertising strategies that then carry over to signify the brands themselves.

For example, Burberry's well-known and traditional plaid design serves as both a company and brand identifier and distinguishes its many products from those of other fashion designers and makers in the eyes of the consumer. In fact, Burberry uses its tartan in all forms of contact with the consumer, from store design to logo design to Web page design.[11] But most importantly, it conveys a meaning that has shifted dramatically over time (since 1856) from hardy functional trench coats, to traditional British family and countryside lifestyle associations, to wealth and status symbolism, to, more recently and perhaps ironically, a far broader array of cultural, subcultural, pop and hip fashion meanings. For example, their newest fragrance is called The Beat (**Figure 8**) and is described as expressing "dishevelled elegance."[12] Today, Burberry is an internationally recognized luxury brand with product lines including timepieces, eyewear, jewelry, and shoes, as well as men's, women's, and children's wear. This shift, which follows the changing tastes of the market, is in line with the Burberry company philosophy of "Prorsum" ("forwards").[13]

Click for larger view

Figure 8.
Burberry fragrance ad.

Within the whole process, design becomes an attribute of the product and a part of the meaning created and communicated by the advertising process.[14] In this sense, the marketing strategy the marketer conceives and implements will also play a role in determining good design because commercial design is presented to users in the context of this strategy and may interact with it, thereby mediating its reception and acceptance by the consumer as well as its meaning to the consumer. The final design, therefore, must include considerations beyond a designer's desire for self-expression and creativity, such as being consonant with the rest of the marketing strategy and accounting for possible resolution to consumer problems.[15]

Because the objective of design is to create high satisfaction for targeted consumers, it must blend and balance creatively what have been called the key elements of the design mix: performance, quality, durability, appearance, and cost.[16] For example, if marketing research shows that targeted consumers want an affordable toaster that exhibits decent workmanship and heats up fast with a minimum number of problems, the design process and appearance of the product must be integrated into this final offering.

People's taste in design is diverse and eclectic.[17] It is often true that marketers charge designers with developing products that appeal to specific market segments or homogeneous groups in terms of consumer characteristics, needs, and behaviors that are distinct subsets of whole product markets.[18] With respect to design, there could be, for example, three different types of consumer segments in terms of processing the design attribute, as illustrated by the vacuum cleaners shown in below. All three vacuum cleaners have been equally carefully designed; it is just that they are each intended for different segments defined by their design preferences. Some consumers would be consciously concerned with design; others with innovative design; and still others relatively unconcerned with design at all.

For those who are concerned with design, marketers would say that design, as a needs-benefit attribute, is salient for that consumer or consumer segment. In any case, consumers possibly trade-off design with other product benefit attributes when selecting a brand for purchase. A vacuum targeting this designer-oriented group could be the one in the Target ad shown in **Figure 9**.

Click for larger view

Figure 9.
Vacuum for the Conspicuously Designy.

There is a second consumer set who are anti-design. This group finds highly designed objects and images a pretension or a contrivance and unrepresentative of who they are and how they live. Such consumers would presumably prefer products that are, if not unattractive, simply not overly self-consciously designed. They would prefer products that are more conventional in appearance, do not call attention to themselves due to their distinctive or surprising appearance, are more in line with the traditional visual conventions for that product category, and are simply designed to look like what they are supposed to be—in other words, no surprises. An example of a product targeting the anti-design group could be the basic industrial vacuum shown in **Figure 10**, highly designed in its own way, but certainly in an unprepossessing manner. It is to be noted that products of this visual type are no less designed by a designer than products of any other visual type; they are simply designed according to another set of visual standards for a consumer set whose sensibilities are different from those consumers who lionize distinctive or cutting-edge design.

Click for larger view

Figure 10.
Vacuum for the Anti-designy.

A third consumer set would be one for whom design or appearance is not a salient product feature. Rather, other product features are of greater concern. This set cares more for practical features (e.g., price or functionality) regardless of appearance. One could then argue that a well-designed product targeting this group ought to appear to be simply what it is: well-designed, perhaps even neat and tidy, but easily identifiable, familiar, and reassuring. An example of a product targeting this group could be the Miele vacuum cleaner shown in **Figure 11**. This is not to say that design does not affect their choices; rather, it's that the appeal of design would be latent, if appealing at all. For each of these three consumer groups, we may argue that design may affect choice, but in a very different manner, just as design fits into the entire marketing mix in a very different place, depending on who is being targeted.

Click for larger view

Figure 11.
Vacuum for the Functionally Oriented.

The Consumer

As argued in the previous section, the consumer is buying the whole marketing offering, not just product design. The consumer makes purchases on the basis of many dimensions, including performance or benefit attributes, especially those communicated clearly and effectively. Users may trade off those brands they consider to be the best looking to acquire greater levels of other functional attributes provided by a brand alternative they consider to be less attractive in appearance.[19] Consequently, these consumers also play a role in arbitrating the design process because it is in this broader, functional context that a consumer encounters and considers the design aspects of a product.

Consumers' different aesthetic responses to design are key components in the consumption experience.[20] Visualization of the designed product by the final user is mediated by advertising and the rest of the marketing mix. But, ultimately, the consumer's experience is her or his own. It can be fairly stated that consumers, by dint of what they buy, or, more properly, by dint of what they buy the most, will determine those designs that become most ubiquitous in our world. Those designs not purchased may play a role, perhaps a negative role, in this process. Those products advertised heavily also play a greater role due to their extensive social exposure in the media, whether or not they are commercially successful. Certain designs would then contribute most to those appearance elements that, through a repetitive, habitual process, come to form the appearance of our world.

Society

In other words, design—the product of the professional designer filtered through commercial channels and framed by the marketing process—if commercially viable, spills out into society and comes to form a large part of the visual background for our visual lives. That spilling-out means that we are eventually conditioned to see those commercial designs, through the consumption process, as our visual landscape. It might be said that commercial design ultimately forms the conventions and expectations by which we visually process all new objects. And, in turn, it is by this process that we come to recognize new visual stimuli as either novel or conventional. Subsequently, we come to pronounce these new objects to be "good" ("artful") and relevant (we can see the deviation from the norm and that deviation conforms to our desires and expectations) to ourselves and our lives.

So too are professional designers affected. Traditionally, designers and artists looked to themselves to satisfy their own sensibilities and viewed themselves as the main determinants of what the rest of us see and believe to be visually exciting and compelling. But even high artists have had to deal with the structural facts of an economic society and had to market their works in order to gain success as artists.[21] Designers, regardless of their zeal for independent thought and design, are also affected by the appearance of the world around them. Consequently, over time, designers' sensitivities are changed along with all of ours. And even though the designer's overriding goal may be always to achieve new and surprising designs and a departure from the visual norm, the machinations of the social visual process described above require that the designer's notions of what constitutes novel visual appearance change over time. This process may be apparent to the designer, or may be latent, just as the changing appearance of our world over time, that evolves, ebbs, and flows with fads and fashion, may be apparent or latent to the consumer.

Therefore, this process suggests that no individual or set of individuals is the arbiter of design, or good design, but that good design is a social collaborative process in which we all have a hand, in a big feedback loop. We are all visually informed by the world around us, and reinformed by the world as it evolves visually. Art historians often point out that artists and designers are products of their times. The visual norms and conventions extant in the world become the visual conventions and context within which the artist and designer work and to which they choose to conform or not in their work.

We therefore argue that all these parties—the designer, the marketer, the advertiser, and the consumer, and society as a whole—contribute to our collective notions of what is good design in our time. In other words, it is the collaboration we have with our designated arbiters of taste played out in a social process that connects all of us in a web of visual communication that determines such things. The system itself—that loop by which a designer's creations may be proliferated out into the world to subsequently contribute to visual contexts and forms—ultimately comes back to influence the designer in his or her work and provides points of reference by which he or she will seek to conform to or depart from established visual conventions. Over time, these loops become spiral, such that designers *can* be products of their times and visual conventions can change and evolve. And it is from examining these spirals that trends, styles, fads, and fashion may be understood.

For example, it was consumers not a part of Burberry's traditional target segments that started spontaneously to use its products in an altogether surprising and subversive manner to create a new fashion niche for Burberry. This trend was generated in the marketplace and traveled back to Burberry, who capitalized by hiring new designers to accommodate and to expand this trend. This process was not unlike hippies' use of the American flag for clothing or costume during the 1960s, thus commandeering the flag to represent their protest rather than their patriotism.

Discussion

Having presented our model of the user-driven, social design process and its players, we are now ready to consider further the dynamic relationships between them. Whereas in 1943, the year Ayn Rand's *The Fountainhead* was published, the designer considered a design only as good as the designer's experience of it,[22] we can say today that the designer herself or himself considers that the design is only as good as the consumer's experience of it.[23] For example, as Target states on its Web site, "When we talk about our dedication to good design, we don't just mean how something looks, but also how it satisfies a need, how it simplifies your life, and how it makes you feel."[24]

The Relationship Between the Marketing/Advertising Process and the Consumer

A more interactive media environment has given consumers more power in the communication process with marketers. The longstanding one-way communication model (in which information flowed primarily from the marketer toward the consumer) that has heretofore been the cornerstone of the marketing communication process is no longer valid. In fact, recent evidence suggests the arrow going back to the marketer from the consumer is now the stronger one. For example, a growing number of marketers are using computer software applications to scan consumer-generated media (CGM)—a category that includes various social interaction and networking outlets such as chat groups, consumer e-mails, personal Web sites and pages, message boards, and electronic forums—to hear what is being said online about products and ad campaigns.[25] "CGM delivers high-impact, targeted ad impressions well outside the scope of conversation among 'familiars,' a big reason it bears an important distinction from word of mouth. Most important, CGM leaves a digital trail. It's highly measurable, allowing advertisers to gauge brand equity, reputation, and message effectiveness in real time."[26]

Recently, another way to tap into the consumer's creativity has been through jingle, slogan, television commercial, logo design, and even product design contests. For example, in celebration of the 40th anniversary of the iconic best-selling hamburger, McDonald's hosted a "Big Mac Chant Off" on MySpace.com, in which contestants wrote their own songs using the words from the 1970s Big Mac slogan, "Two all beef patties, special sauce, lettuce, cheese, pickles, onions, on a sesame-seed bun." Nearly 1,000 songs were submitted, and the public was invited to vote. The winner gets his or her song featured in a McDonald's commercial.[27] Another example is the 1800 Tequila bottle design contest. Aspiring artists are encouraged to give their art a new venue by designing a bottle and entering it for a chance to win $10,000 and appear in a national advertising campaign.[28] This phenomenon has gotten so big that in 2007 *Advertising Age* named the consumer the Advertising Agency of the Year.[29] Moreover, *Time* magazine picked consumer-generated content as having a bigger impact on society than world politics.[30]

At a recent advertisers' convention, A.G. Lafley, chief of Procter & Gamble, and Stephen F. Quinn, vice president of marketing at Walmart, spoke of letting their consumers control marketing.[31] According to Lafley, "The power is with the consumer. Marketers and retailers are struggling to keep up with her. Procter (& Gamble) has long dictated how shoppers should perceive its products. Today, we're on a learning journey together with the consumer, watching customers choosing when to tune in and when to tune out advertising with technology like digital video recorders and satellite radio. Consumers are beginning in a very real sense to own our brands and participate in their creation. We need to begin to learn to let go and embrace trends like commercials created by consumers and online communities built around favorite products." Adds Lafley: "Today, the customer is in charge, and whoever is best at putting the customer in charge makes all the money."

It is the viral nature of consumer-generated information that makes the path back to the marketer so important. The fastest-growing media is the one consumers create and share among themselves. Consumers trust that media, and it presents long-lasting sources of influence. That media is often inspired by relevant product or service experiences and is frequently archived online for access by consumers as well as those who influence the marketplace. Estimates are that more than 1.4 billion electronic consumer comments are archived on the Internet, and that number is growing 30 percent annually. Listening to and leveraging such media may well be the most important source of competitive advantage for companies and brands today.[32]

The design-based equivalent of consumer-generated content is when consumers alter commercially designed products to suit their own individual sensibilities, as a form of personal expression or group identity. A classic example of this is Harley-Davidson owners who began customizing their own bikes, creating unique appearances that project a personal style and identity. Harley-Davidson took note of this grassroots design movement and began changing the style of their bikes in response, as well as facilitating the process by providing a line of customizing accessories. This strategic shift was (and still is) led by Willie G. Davidson, chief styling officer for the company. Harley-Davidson will now custom paint and design new bikes coming off the assembly line (**Figure 12**).[33] The trends and designs observed at the numerous motorcycle shows provide continuous valuable input to Harley-Davidson designers, who are described on the Web site as "true artists in action" involved in "a creative process and invention of a new look." The company clearly understands the relationship between design and meaning of their brand to consumers, and states, "We believe that the machine you sit on can tell the world exactly where you stand."

Click for larger view

Figure 12.
Harley-Davidson web page featuring its custom vehicle operations.

The Relationship Between the Designer and the Marketing/Advertising Process

Traditionally, past research has tended to overlook the impact of the marketing/advertising-design interaction.[34] But recent, more robust communication between these parties has resulted in a bottom-line improvement for those firms emphasizing product design.[35] For example, a simple symbol, a red and white bull's-eye target, identifies, distinguishes, and symbolizes Target stores. Target's focus on design is also highly integrated across its merchandise, store display, signage, advertising, and all other promotional forms. Target's success in pioneering design consciousness for a much broader segment of consumers than ever before is evident in its slogan, "Making great design available to everyone every day."[36] This egalitarian approach both acknowledges and creates design as a salient feature for many, and has established Target as a successful competitor against the ubiquitous Walmart. This evidence supports the notion that the traditional, introspective designer also now looks outward to marketplace factors and beyond mere appearance to also consider utility, communicated via the marketer, to gain design inspiration.

The Relationship between the Designer and the Consumer

In addition to consumer interaction mediated by the marketer/advertiser, the contemporary designer also interacts directly with the consumer. "User-oriented design," referring to a design process that focuses on a deep understanding of the user or consumer (a process that parallels the activities of the contemporary, consumer-oriented marketer), "transforms a bundle of technology with an ability to provide functionality [the product] into a product that people desire to interact with, and from which they derive benefits."[37] User-oriented design suggests an interaction in which the arrow going back from the consumer is perhaps the more robust and important. It is also a design process that is more grounded and comprehensive and more in touch with design challenges. This type of design process also perhaps has a greater influence on the establishment of society's visual conventions.

The Future

Implications for Designers

It is clear from our review that the perspective and orientation of designers has changed greatly since the middle of the twentieth century, turning from an introspective orientation with an emphasis on aesthetics and the unique object as museum piece to an outward, socially aware and concerned orientation in which the design process incorporates far more than appearance and brings the needs and concerns of the user to the fore. In this respect, the concerns and outlook of the designer have come closer to those of the marketer and consumer. For example, in applied areas such as medicine and accident management, the latest focus on design as an iterative process that has at its core the interaction of end-users with the technological artifacts shows much promise. This design process is a type of participatory, socio-technical innovation acknowledging the social constructivist nature of consumers' influence on the material world.[38] An ongoing example is Microsoft's new product, Surface™. It is an interactive, touch-sensitive, table-top computer and display screen that allows users to manipulate digital content from other wireless devices (such as laptops, cell phones, or cameras) without the need for cords, a mouse, or a keyboard. It allows multiple points of user interaction on the same screen (see **Figure 13**). The product is currently offered only for commercial users, such as for hospitality applications. For example, a specially designed bar-shaped Surface ™ is currently being used at the iBar at the Rio All-Suite Hotel & Casino in Las Vegas, where customers can order from an interactive menu, move music from their cell phones to their iPods, and send e-mails or instant messages with the touch of a hand and simple gestures. Microsoft is letting clients use customized versions of the product in order to see the myriad applications Surface™ has to offer, receiving feedback, and allowing third-party software to be created that genuinely meets user-specific needs.[39]

Click for larger view

Figure 13.
Microsoft Surface™.

Implications for Marketers and Advertisers

Today's process- and socially-oriented designer is now a far more sympathetic partner to the marketer, someone with whom she or he can interact much more readily in the design of products that will not only look great, but will also meld appearance and functionality to a far more satisfying degree in the eyes of the consumer segments for whom they are intended. The illusive "cool factor" that such offerings attain comes from the intimate connections that certain brands can make with consumers through design for the senses, such that well-designed products have real personality that set them apart from the cookie-cutter standardization of many products in the marketplace.[40] Design has become a critical attribute for distinguishing the brand, not only from the competitor, but also from former versions of itself, relevant not only to designers of products, but also to designers of images. For example, Apple is not only improving the features of iPod® nano, but changing the design to a curved, futuristic look and expanding the colors available (to nine choices) in its new nano-chromatic line (see **Figure 14**).[41]

Click for larger view

Figure 14.
iPod nano-chromatic line.

Implications for the Visual World

The many new robust and direct communication routes between the rather more like-minded partners in design indicated in the model along with other market trends and conditions—fragmentation, globalization, clutter, attention scarcity, and acceleration of communications through advancing electronic media—are likely causing visual cycles to be ever shorter. A feature of our model is its ability to explain the evolution over time of visual conventions, as exemplified by such social and commercial phenomena as trends, fads, and fashions—all time-dependent visual effects. For example, the tail fins of classic 1950s American automobiles, a prime example of which is shown in **Figure 15**, started, proliferated, and grew in size to the point of extreme conspicuousness and ostentation, then diminished and receded, and finally disappeared altogether, all in an evolutionary manner over a period of a few years.

Click for larger view

Figure 15.
Tail fins of a 1950s era Cadillac.

With the introduction of the many new forms of digital media proliferating in the world (forms that are primarily visually based), the pace of the evolution of style and appearance should only increase and take interesting new turns. The social visual processes we describe herein should therefore only become more pertinent in the future.

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30. Lev Grossman, "Time's Person of the Year: You," *Time*, December 13, 2006, cover story.

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39. Microsoft Surface ™, **http://www.microsoft.com/surface/product.html**.

40. Gobé, *emotional branding.*

41. Apple, **http://www.apple.com/ipodnano**.

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The Collaborative Roles of the Designer, the Marketer, and the Consumer in Determining What is Good Design

Lawrence L. Garber Jr.
Eva M. Hyatt
Ünal Ö. Boya

Return to Text

Figure 1.
Conceptual Model.

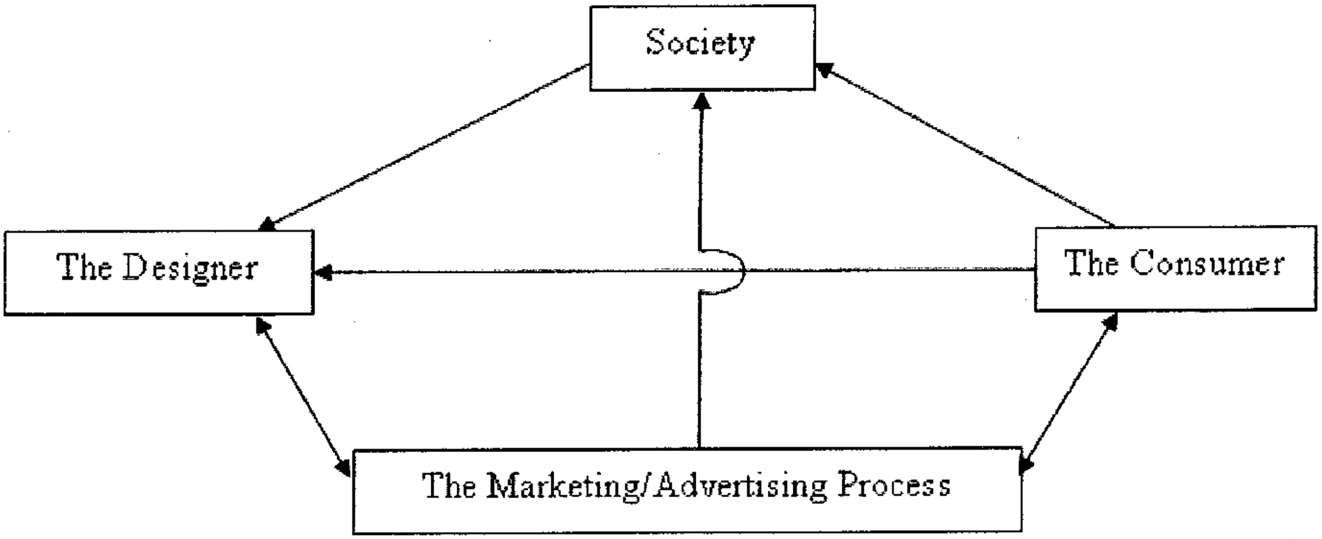
Society
The Designer
The Consumer
The Marketing/Advertising Process

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Figure 2.
Target and Walmart logos. Note that the text attached to the above Target logo features design for everyone as its salient attribute, in contrast to Walmart's new logo as of 2008, which features price and living better as its salient features, a more utilitarian theme. Note too that Walmart, perhaps in response to Target's design challenge, is moving towards a more premium and refined image with its current logo, which features a star. In contrast, the 1992–2008 logo featured a hyphen, and the visuals of the 1968–1981 logo were plain and sober, with the product message of simply low price.

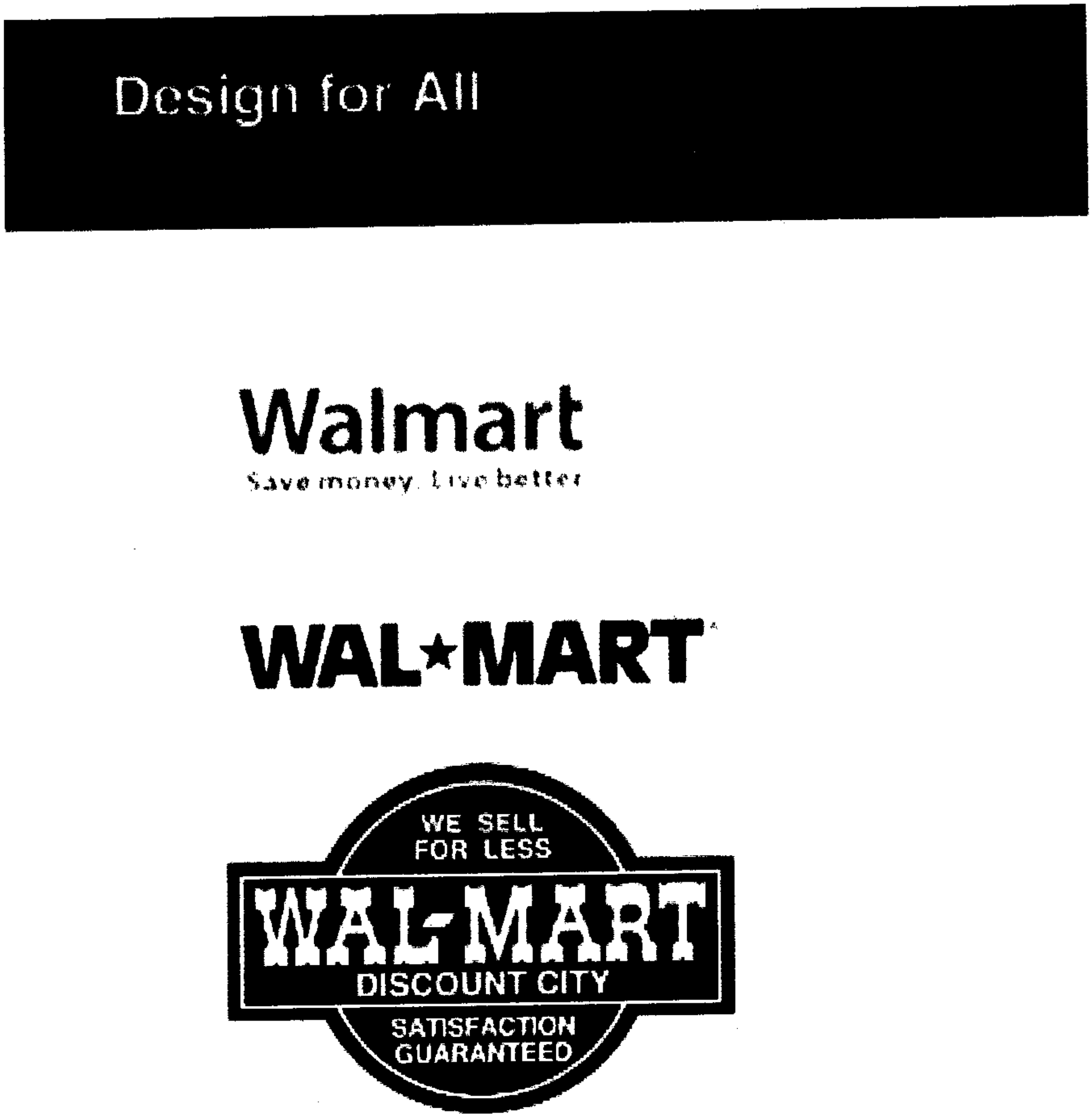
Design for All
Walmart
Save money. Live better.
WAL★MART
WE SELL
FOR LESS
WAL-MART
DISCOUNT CITY
SATISFACTION
GUARANTEED

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Figure 3.
Image from Target's Web site.

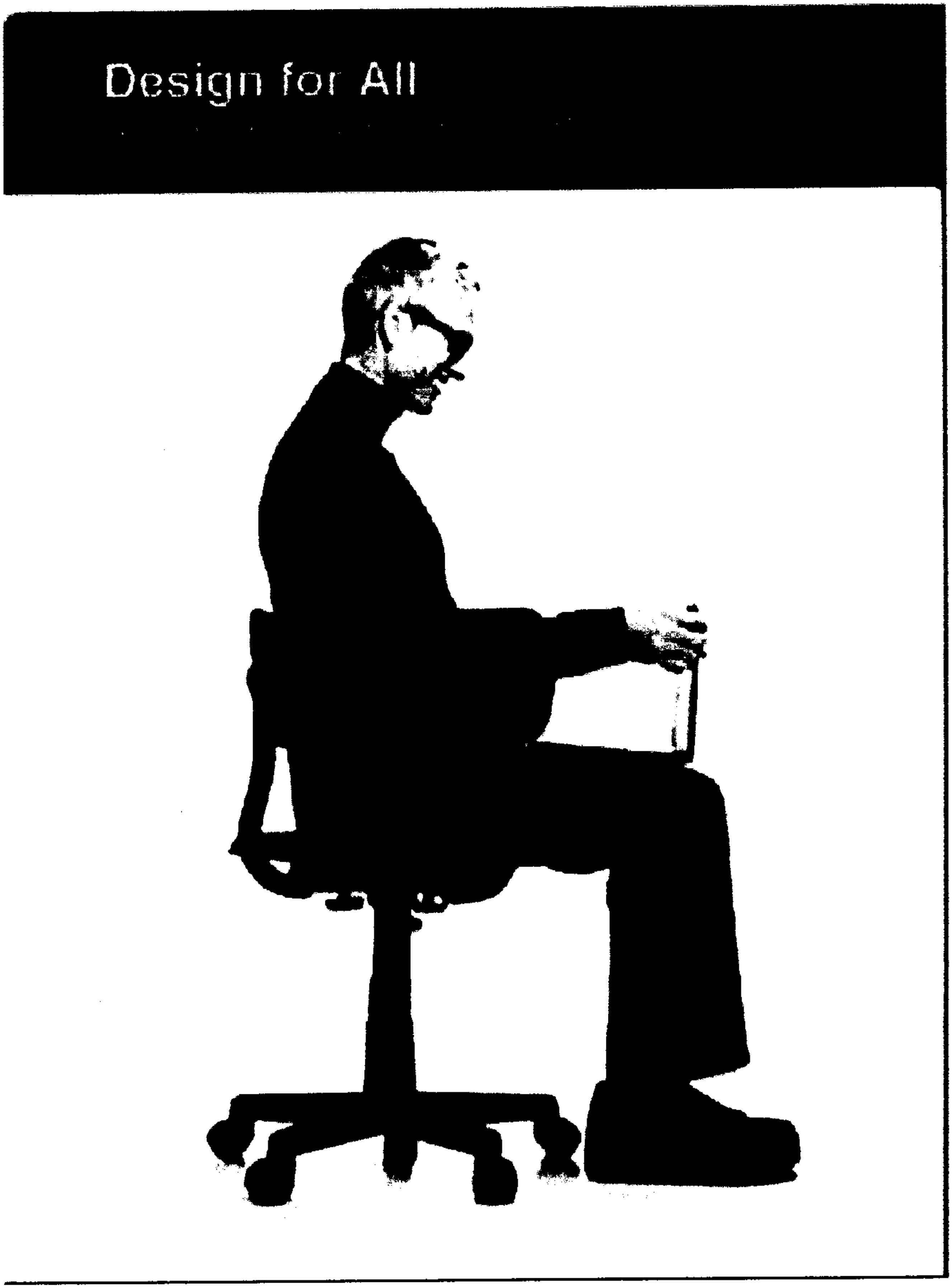
Design for All

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Figure 4.
Target pharmaceutical ad.

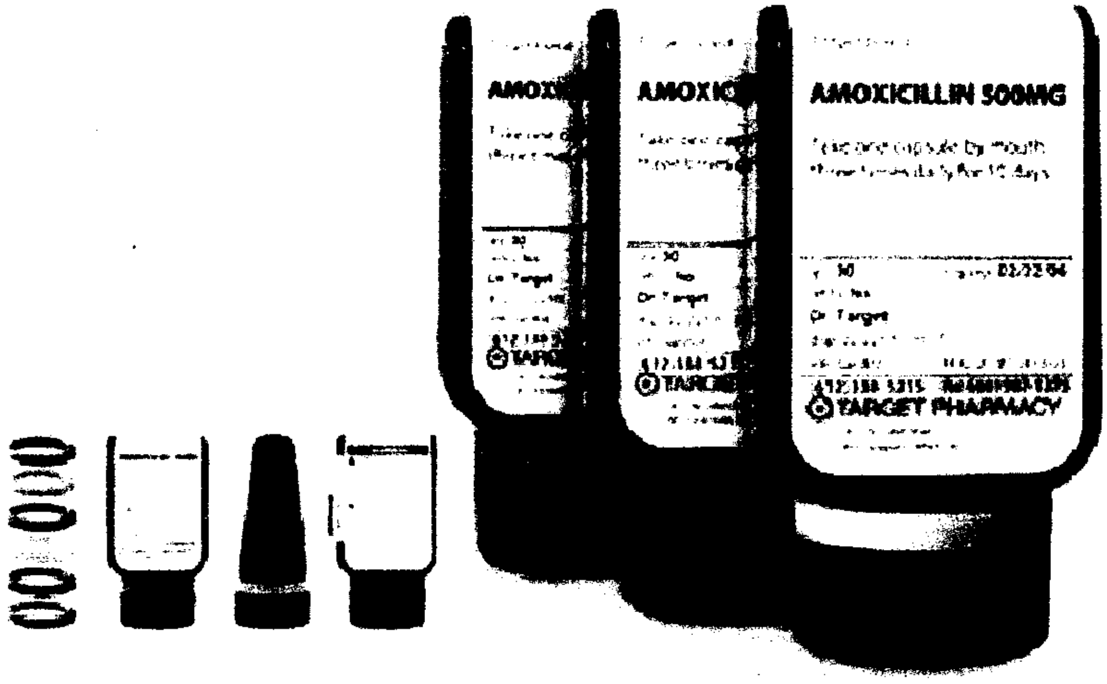

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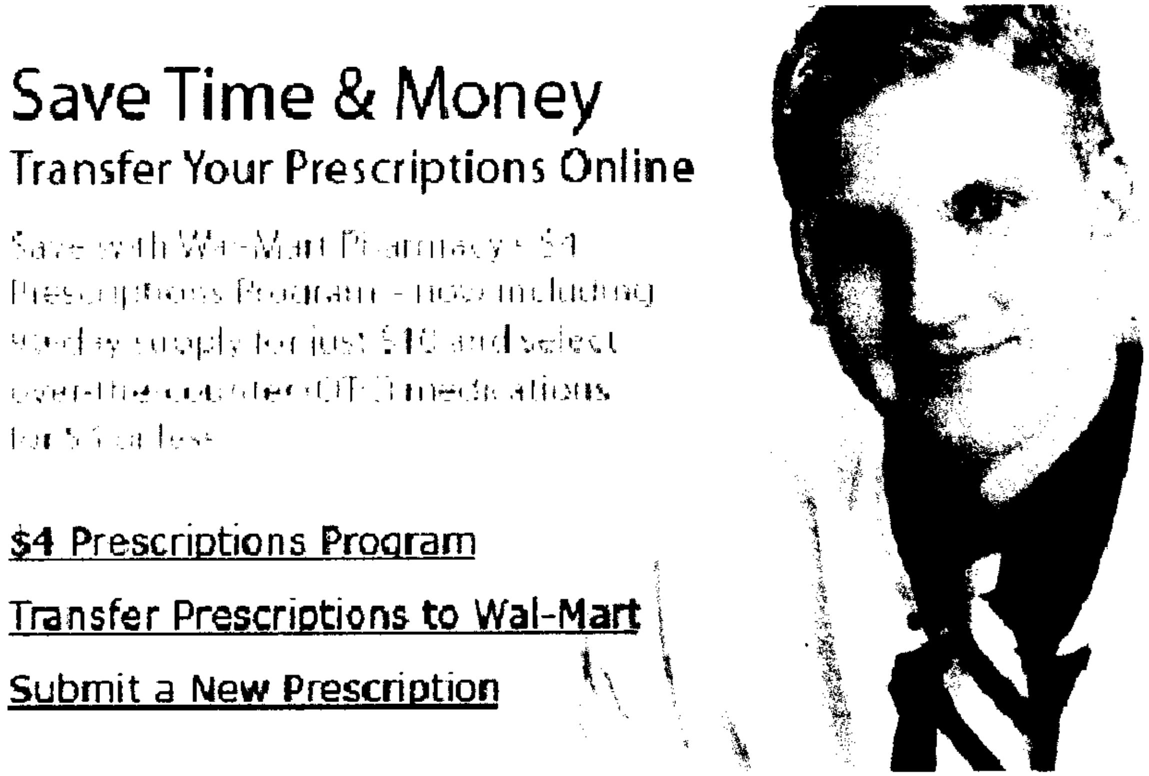
Figure 5.
Walmart pharmaceutical ad.



Save Time & Money

Transfer Your Prescriptions Online

Save with Wal-Mart Pharmacy's $4 Prescriptions Program - now including 90-day supply for just $10 and select over-the-counter (OTC) medications for $4 or less

$4 Prescriptions Program

Transfer Prescriptions to Wal-Mart

Submit a New Prescription

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Figure 6.
Noguchi Akari light sculpture.

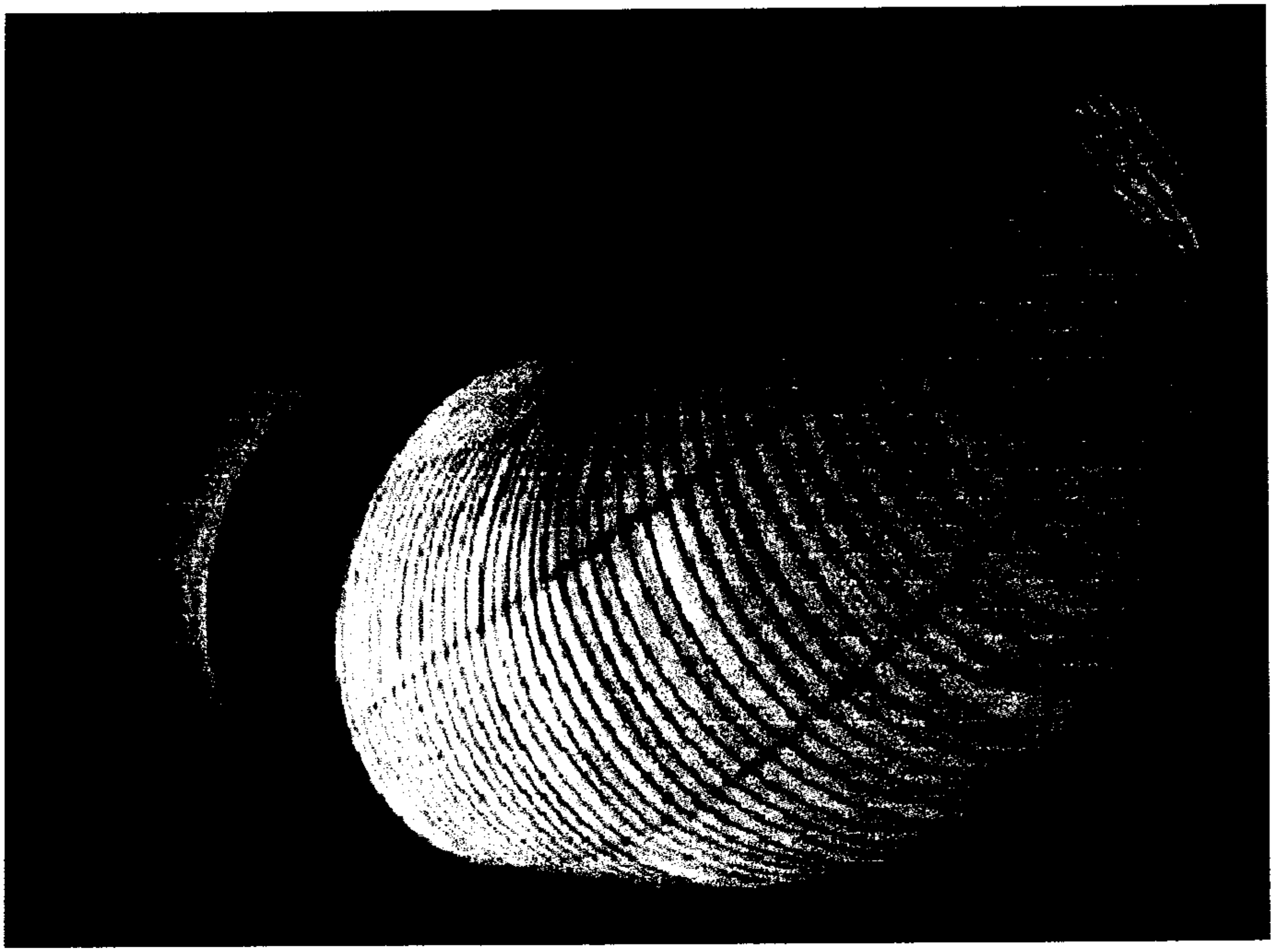

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Figure 7.
Noguchi sculpture.

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Figure 9.
Vacuum for the Conspicuously Designy.

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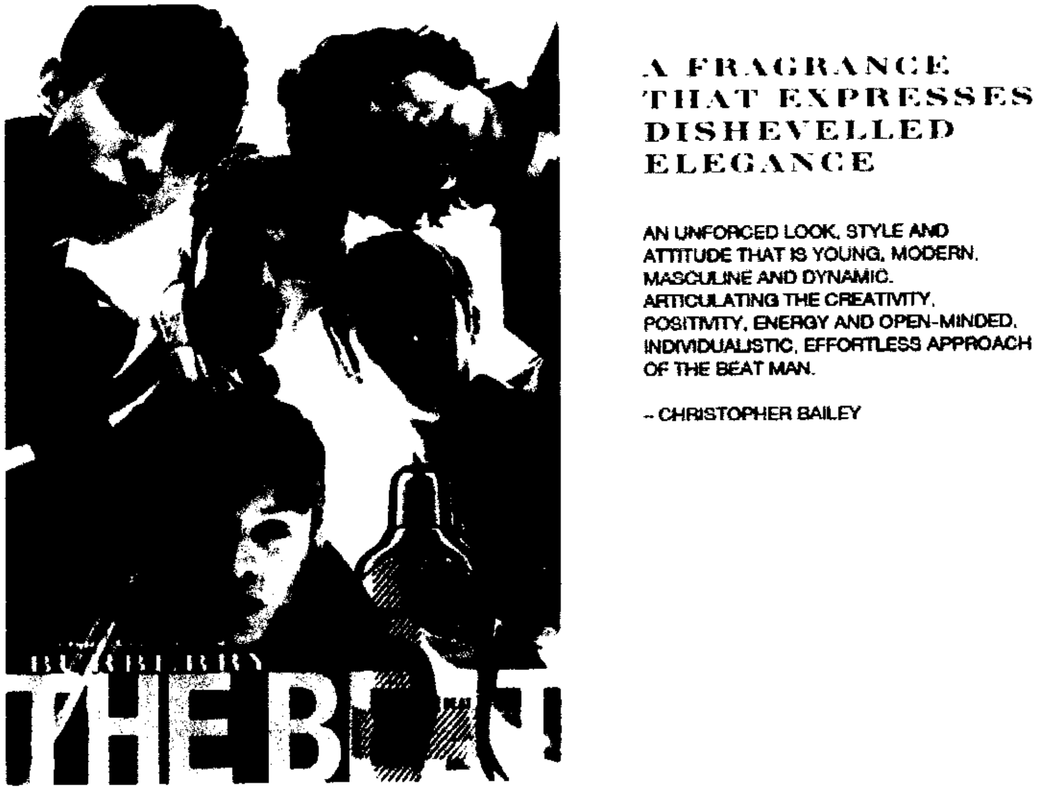
Figure 8.
Burberry fragrance ad.



A FRAGRANCE THAT EXPRESSES DISHEVELLED ELEGANCE

AN UNFORCED LOOK, STYLE AND ATTITUDE THAT IS YOUNG, MODERN, MASCULINE AND DYNAMIC. ARTICULATING THE CREATIVITY, POSITIVITY, ENERGY AND OPEN-MINDED, INDIVIDUALISTIC, EFFORTLESS APPROACH OF THE BEAT MAN.

– CHRISTOPHER BAILEY

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Figure 10.
Vacuum for the Anti-designy.

Heavy

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Figure 11.
Vacuum for the Functionally Oriented.

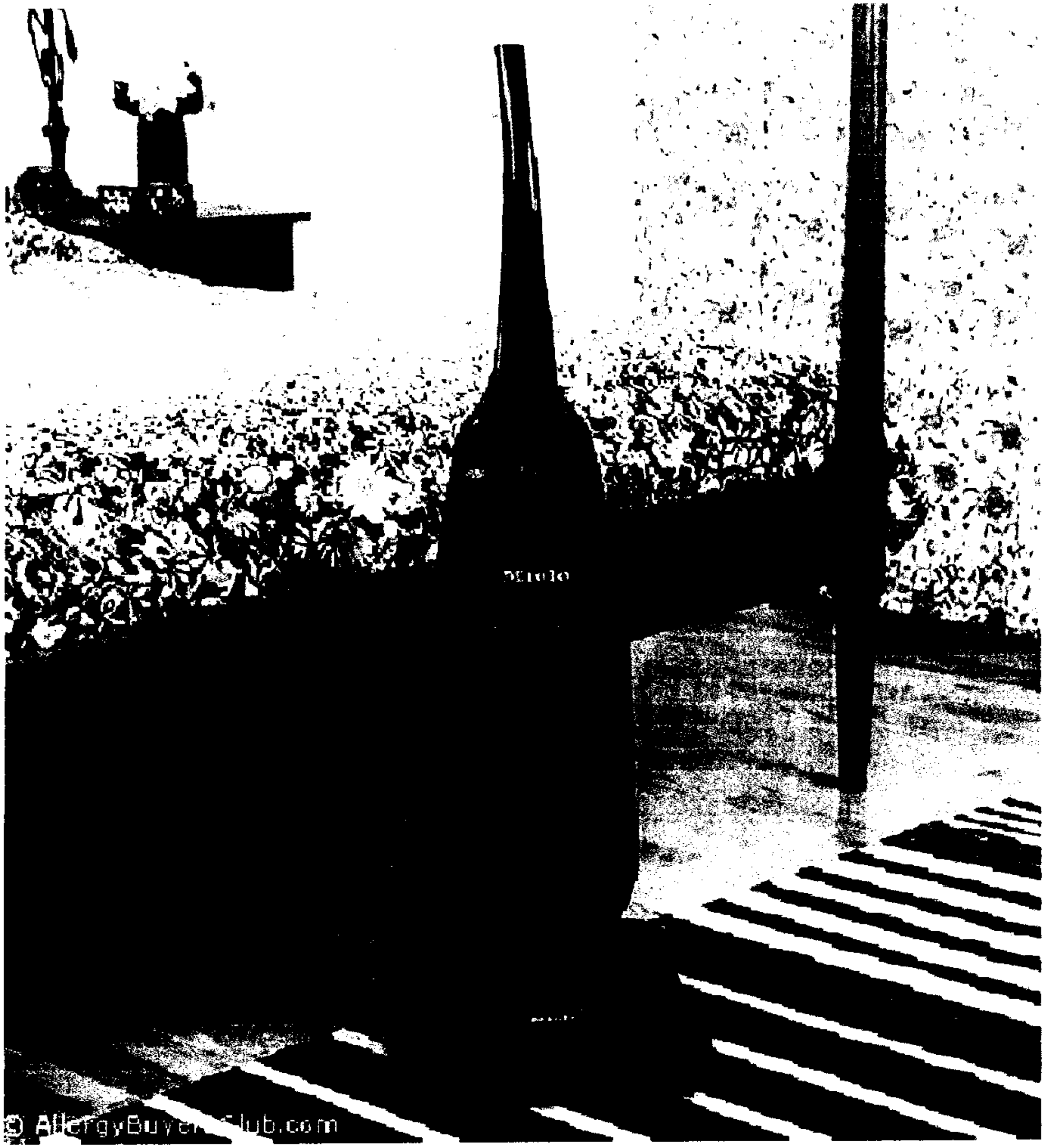
Miele
© AllergyBuyersClub.com

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Figure 12.
Harley-Davidson web page featuring its custom vehicle operations.

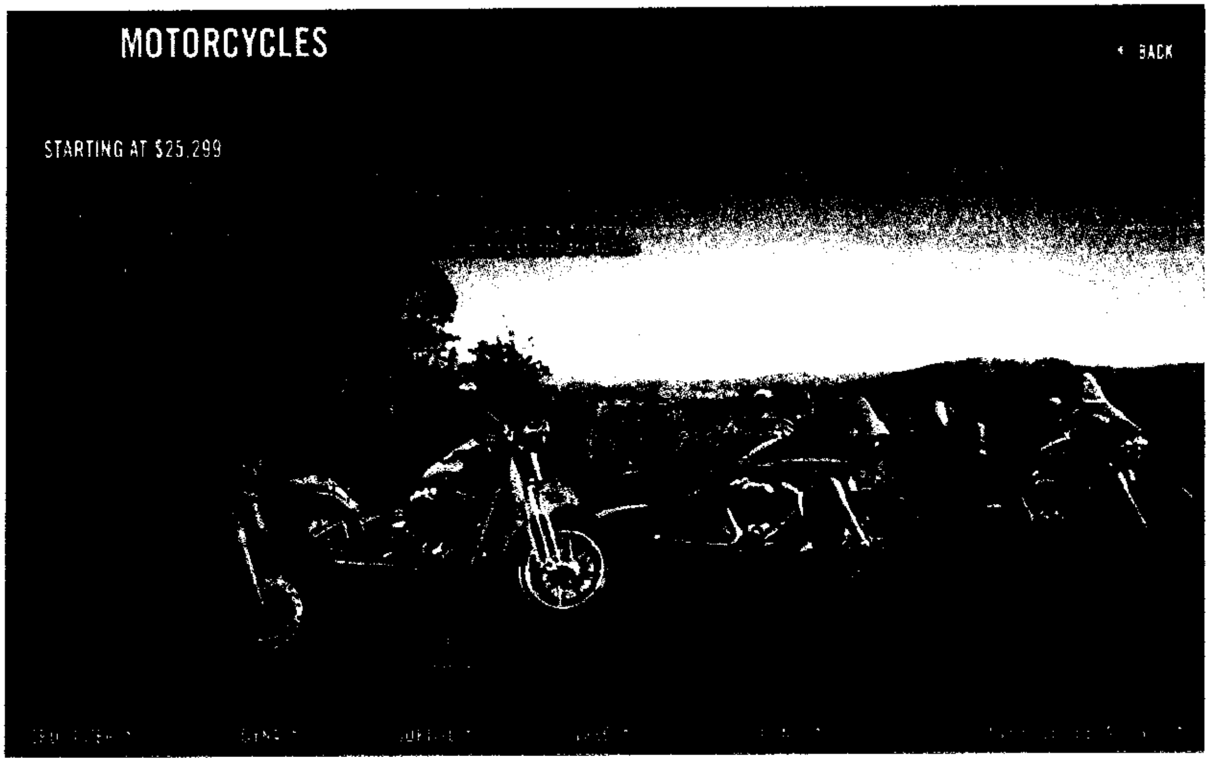

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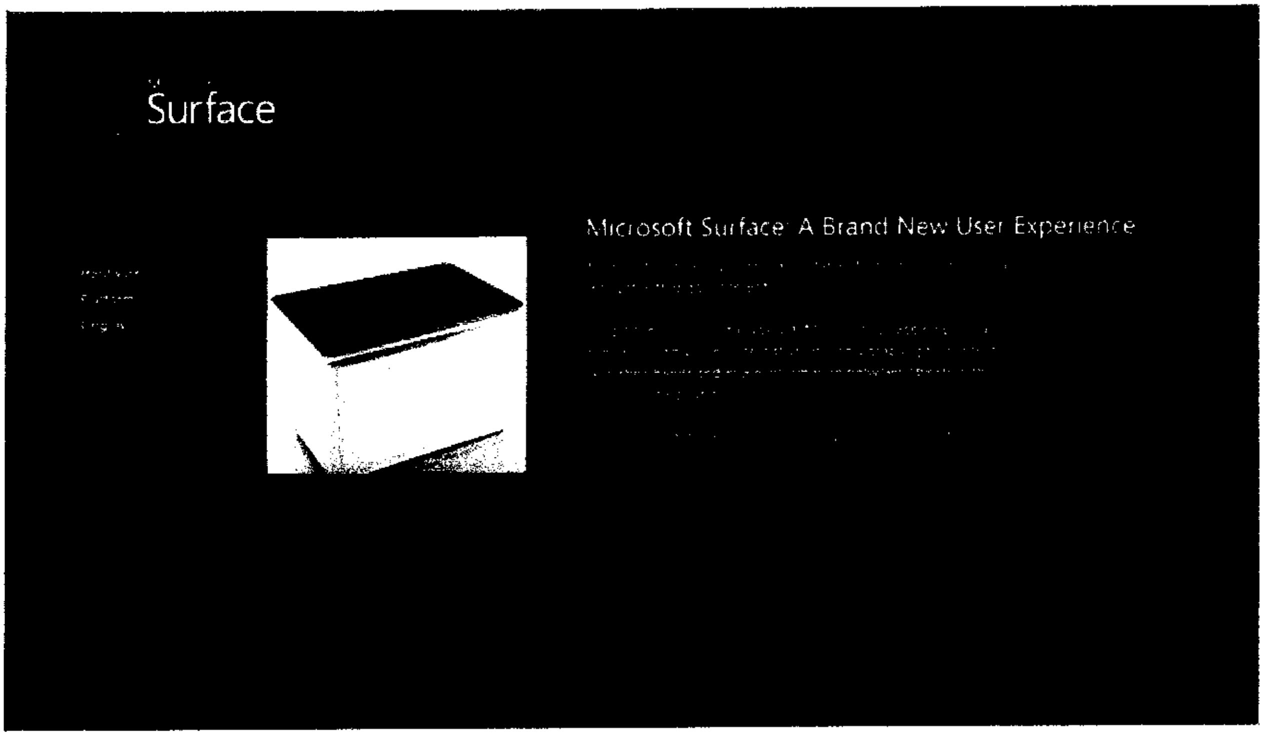
Figure 13.
Microsoft Surface™.



Surface

Microsoft Surface: A Brand New User Experience

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Figure 14.
iPod nano-chromatic line.

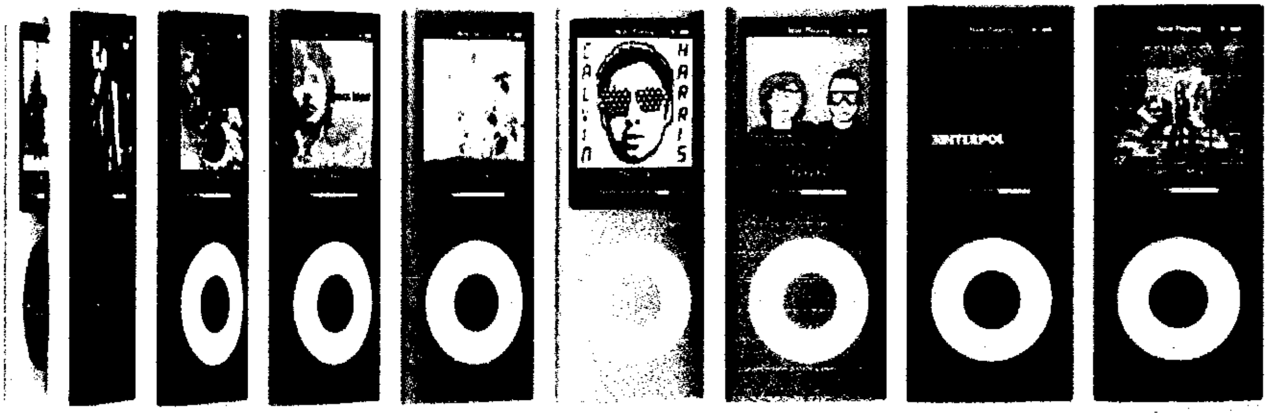

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Figure 15.
Tail fins of a 1950s era Cadillac.