

Select **one design** you have studied.

With reference to this one design, explain the:

- *style*
- *fitness for purpose*
- *impact of social, cultural and/or other influences.*

10

- **Style in 'Wassily Chair' (1925)**

'Wassily Chair' was designed by Marcel Breuer in 1925. It is a perfect example of Bauhaus style and represents the school's ideas of modernism, simplicity and advances in manufacture. The Bauhaus was a school of Art and Design founded in Weimar, Germany and its style is very recognisable. The Bauhaus was so influential; it is considered a movement in design history. The simplistic aesthetic and the manufacture process is what represents the Bauhaus style. The chair was the first of its kind to use tubular steel and was inspired by bicycle handlebars. The steel is manufactured by machine and therefore each section can be mass produced and later assembled. The style can be discussed with reference to its structure. It is exposed and transparent, with no need for springs and upholstery and the use of rectangular fabric panels gives a very slick, minimally decorated and modern aesthetic. The chair is very geometric in style with very few curves apart from the curved steel edges. The steel is very polished in silver with the reflective surface contrasting well with the matt black strips of fabric. The overall elegance of the design is due to its unfussiness, minimalism and adds sophistication. You could imagine it in stylish professional office or minimal apartment.



- **Fitness for Purpose in 'Wassily Chair' (1925)**

The overall fitness for purpose depends greatly on the fabrication of the 'Wassily Chair'. Tubular steel is very strong but also can distort slightly to absorb the weight of the sitter. The leather strips move to the shape of the body, also supporting the sitter's weight. The fabric can stretch and bend with the body to add comfort but remain strong. The leather is supported by the structure like a swing providing softness without the need for foam or springs to clutter the overall aesthetic. The shiny surfaces of the metal and the leather makes it very hygienic and easy to clean, maintain and preserve. Breuer's design is very simplistic and became even more streamlined and refined with 'The Cesca' designed in 1928. Breuer's 'Wassily Chair' is very consistent with chairs in everyday use today. Chairs that can be stacked for storage and produced cheaply on a mass scale have continued to make Breuer's designs relevant today and variations can be seen in classrooms and offices across the world.

- **Influence of social, cultural and/or other factors on 'Wassily Chair'**

Historical events *and* technology have always been linked to the development of design. Advances in technology had a direct influence on machine made products like Breuer's chair. The invention of the steam engine in 1765 promoted a massive change in society. The industrial revolution resulted in the age of 'the machine' and subsequently, the development of *modernism*. The initial influence on the 'Wassily Chair' in 1925 would be the development of the construction process. At this time, design incorporated and developed mass production. This took on a new meaning during World War One in the manufacture of vehicles and weapons and therefore supported function over aesthetic. Many important movements in design history took place between the First and Second World Wars. The design I have studied, finds influences in two movements in particular, 'The Bauhaus' and 'Art Deco'. Marcel Breuer's 'Wassily Chair' was produced and influenced by the Bauhaus. The Bauhaus was founded in Weimar, Germany and was a school of Art and Design. Breuer's chair is a perfect example of the simplification of shape and form. The Bauhaus promoted the idea of square/cube, triangle/cone and circle/sphere informing and influencing design. The straight lines and geometric shapes in the chair are influenced by the Bauhaus' ideals. Although the school had set out to unify the arts, it later put more importance on designing for mass production which was financially practical and the school's slogan read, 'Art into Industry'. At the time Breuer was completing his chair design, the school moved location to Dessau in, where its founder, Walter Gropius, designed the building. It epitomised the use of ground-breaking materials and design. Breuer was inspired by bicycle handlebars for the strong and flexible structure of his chair. The use of tubular steel linked with the school's ideas and promoted machine made and mass produced products. This was a time of great improvements in industry and fabrication and designers were free to develop their modernist inventions.

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Style in 'Nord Express' (1927)

One of the most successful graphic designers in history is Adolphe Mouron, who worked under the pseudonym A.M. Cassandre. His work demonstrates the characteristics of Art Deco, which took its name from the 1925 exposition des arts decoratifs in Paris. Like Art Nouveau, Art Deco sustained the style of companies using commercial posters as an art-form in itself. The theme of luxury lifestyles is prevalent in the work, 'Nord Express', designed in 1927. There are also elements of Bauhaus ideals in its mass production and the simplification of shape and form. 'Nord Express' characterises the style of Art Deco in which a high speed train is depicted in a stylised way. This modernist approach puts the simplified train in the foreground creating diagonals of perspective and decoration. The simple lines exaggerate the movement of the train and convey the forward motion and speed of the transportation. He also uses capital letters to make the text more legible but represent the grand and strong subject matter. It demonstrates the use of simplified, basic geometry, consisting of cylinders and circles, fragmented and distorted. Both the style and subject matter of Cassandre's designs epitomised the wealth, glamour and mass produced fashion of the time. Cassandre noted that,

'A poster, unlike a painting...is meant to be a mass produced object...like a fountain pen or automobile. Like them, it is designed to answer certain strictly material needs. It must have a commercial fashion.'



Fitness for Purpose in 'Nord Express' (1927)

The limited colour palette would have been a style choice but also a practical implication of cheaper printing techniques. It is fit for purpose in promoting travel and glamour linked with Hollywood, music and popular culture. The ships themselves, the movie theatres, fashion, radios, clocks, all promoted this indistinguishable style with exaggerated poster designs featuring zigzags, circles and diagonal lines and patterns. This visual approach links with Bauhaus ideals but is different in the way it promotes a glamorous and stylish lifestyle for the elite in society in the Art Deco era. Posters of this kind would be placed in newspapers and displayed in streets to catch the attention of potential consumers. The striking and simplified layout would make it stand out and could be recognised at a glance to fulfil its purpose as a marketing tool.

Influence of social, cultural and/or other factors on 'Nord Express'

The greatest influence on Cassandre's 'Nord Express' poster was mass production and technology. However, not all designers at this time agreed with the theories of the Bauhaus in terms of its purist style based on clean, bare surfaces. The Bauhaus considered it appropriate for a better life and believed in reliable industrial production for efficient living. Art Deco reasserted the traditions of handicraft but this poster in particular was influenced by a privileged society, not necessarily the mass consumer. 'Nord Express' referenced styles such as Art Nouveau in using quality materials and he was inspired by contemporary painting. He used stencils and an airbrush to create the image of the fast moving train referencing abstract art such as Cubism and Futurism. Another major influence on Art Deco and Cassandre's poster was the discovery of Tutankhamen's tomb in Egypt in 1922. The use of vertical and horizontal lines in Egyptian Art is evident in the 'Nord Express' image. The use of gold and other metallic surfaces can also be seen in Art Deco designs. The use of pattern and geometric decoration sets it firmly in fashionable Art Deco and echoed the aesthetic in other design mediums of the time such as architecture and interior design. There is grand, idealised and powerful imagery in 'Nord Express' which is inspired by the glamorous lifestyles and fast travel of the 1920's. There were many contradictions in society at this time as the Wall Street crash in 1929 (financial centre of New York and of international significance) led to the great depression and economic hardship and widespread poverty. Art Deco continued to be fashionable into the 1930's with the aesthetic of 'Nord Express' continuing to promote fashionable modernism and function. This developed into a more simplified and less decorative style thereafter. The start of world war two and post-war period saw design change again but with lasting influences from Art Deco and particularly the Bauhaus style in our current design world. Art Deco is constantly revived in fashion, film and architecture and both movements are excellent examples of timeless design.