

Finish the Design

Preface 2023-12-18

The following sections describe where I have been coming from fairly well and where I think I must go next - not as well.

On the whole, this paper is still a jumble of ideas.

I will be adding to this paper and clarifying the text over time.

Fingers crossed: one day it all makes sense.

Introduction

This is the first of three papers that I am writing to help me think through the next phase of my life. The three papers are:

- **Finishing the Design** ~ the need for a clean break ~ the pivot ~ the "from" and the "To"
- **The Final Design** ~ the nuts and bolts of the who, what, when, where and why it can be done
- **Designing the Cash Flow** ~ how to pay for it all ~ how to benefit from it all

The gist is that I plan to make a major re-jig of the things in my life so that I take a hand-on role in the management of my legacy.

This first paper is about a pivot: a major change of focus in a life. It is as much of a manifesto as it is a plan. It is to encourage me to make a clean break with the past and to move on to a new phase of my life.

The pivot is about me changing the way I think and live. I can imagine that it feels as if I am entering some kind of religious order.

Of course, there is always the question: What happens after "The Final Design"? I have no idea. I am not going to worry about that now.

The "From" part: A change of focus

I have been a designer all my life. Perhaps this was my first "design":

Around 1950 or 1951 in Paris, I was given a goldfish. What I remember is that I placed the fish was in a small spherical bowl on my bedside table a bit closer to me than the lamp. I named the goldfish "Tulip". I was 3 or 4 years old. I made something happen for someone that was not me. In some way I was trying to give pleasure. I never forget it.

In the appendix below I list some of the things I designed and made as a child and young adult.

By my late twenties I understood that I was a designer. This is not to say that I was a designer in the sense of creating objects of beauty. I was not. I was a designer in the sense that I was always designing something - usually a simple but "designed" solution to serve a current need. See the appendix "College Years: London ~ 1971-1981" below for a list of some of the things I designed and made.

In 1978 my father died and left me \$75,000. And that opened a realm of possibilities that my four-thousand-pound annual salary as an architect working for a tenant worker cooperative in London did not.

I began to "grok" the idea of "designing" my life. I began to see that I could design my life in the same way that I design a building or a piece of furniture. I could step outside my body and imagine my life as a design problem. I could imagine a solution and then work to make it happen.

Unconsidered or unintended consequences

- Designers are not regular people
- I was kind of clueless as a team player
- Asperger-like qualities to my thinking
- I was not a good listener << AI added this

- I was not a good communicator << AI added this

Some results of this new way of thinking

From this came the idea that I should take a sabbatical every ten years. This led to my glorious failure to Swim the English Channel in 1980.

And that in turn led me to another important insight: I am not an Englishman. So with my new wife Isabelle, we flew off with two one-way tickets to live in Hong Kong. For the first year, we shared a tiny apartment with my friend Robbie and I continued commissioning furniture

- Wanted to build "skyscrapers" ie new buildings not just rehab

The legacy commences

Then in 1982, my wonderful Auntie B died and left me a good amount of money. We now had enough money to buy an apartment. Which we did and I immediately started to redesign and rebuild it. I also started to commission furniture and other things. But the other aspect of Auntie's legacy were numerous pieces of furniture, paintings, jewelry and more each of which was already well known to me as I visited her every year in her home in Princeton, New Jersey. So each item of the legacy was already a part of my life.

Auntie B's legacy along with my mother's and two grandmothers' legacies quite transformed my life.

For over forty years I have been protecting and preserving the legacy inherited. The mission was to keep it say and make all this beauty available to future generations. I was now a custodian of a legacy that I had not designed and that I could not sell and that I had to pass on to my children.

Do you know what happens when all the paintings on the walls are ones you cannot sell? You stop commissioning new paintings? The joy of designing is cancelled.

The whole legacy thing becomes a burden. To make things even worse, I have been planning or allowing, in essence, to pass this burden on to my children.

Unintended consequences

I joked about brilliant, imaginative, creative tech peeps lining in old-timey mansions. Guess what? It was exactly what I was doing.

Finish the design

It's time for a clean break.

It's time to finish the design.

I want my children to have the freedom to design their own lives. I want them to be free to make their own mistakes. I want them to be free to make their own successes. Especially without carrying the burden of my legacy.

I want all the things I have inherited and collected to be loved and appreciated as much as I have loved and appreciated them.

There are two "wants" here. One is to finish the design of my life. The other is to finish the design of my legacy.

Let us call this project "The Final Design".

Appendix 1: Changes to be made

I thoroughly enjoy complex things. I enjoy the challenge of making them work. I enjoy the challenge of making them beautiful. I particularly enjoy the challenge of making complex things simple.

The following are thoughts that come to mind as I think about The Final Design. They are very much a work in progress.

Radical Simplification ~ (The vision?)

- As Thoreau said: "simplicity, simplicity, simplicity."
- Live like a monk
- Simple aphorisms only
- Have 100 things only
- Bring one thing in, take one thing out
- I care therefore I am

Do not do list ~ (The Mission?)

- No more saying "yes, can do"
- No more offering to help or show
- Do not become involved in other people's projects
- Do not start new projects
- Do not offer to go out even for a cup of coffee
- No trips of any length
- Drop out of all groups, projects, committees, etc.
- Stop developing software

Remember ~ (Values?)

- Document everything
- Share with everybody and anybody
- Stay home a lot
- Walk for the sake of walking
- What is remembered lives

The next paper in this series, The Final Design, goes into greater detail about the changes.

Appendix 2: Things Theo can make and do

I have made, crafted and designed things all my life. I am trying to list as many as possible here. Every time I come back to this page I add more things.

Everything here has brought me some pleasure and satisfaction.

I am not sure what I am trying to say here. Perhaps:

- Proving to myself that I can design and make things
- That this is a special skill, talent or even a personality type

Elementary School Years

- Drawing, drawing, drawing. Never a representation of something in the real world. Always from my imagination.
- Maps of Robinson Crusoe's island
- Side views of JEEPs designed for picnics
- Side views of battleships
- Side views of WWII bombers
- Camp Wintucket on Martha's Vineyard ~ summer camp making things every day
- On the beach: Building sand castles, things for balls to roll down, canals
- In the garden: forts, tree houses,
- Indoors: structures using wooden blocks, Lincoln Logs, Tinker Toys, Erector Sets, Legos, plastic models of planes and boats and any other construction kit I could get my hands on.
- Building dams in rivers

Middle School Years 1959 - 1961

All of the above, plus:

- Whittling with a Swiss Army knife: whaling rowboats, teddy bears, mustard spoons. totem poles
- Assembling Heathkits with a soldering iron
- Building 6' x 4' rabbit hutch
- Assembling model catamarans based on cigar tubes, rubber bands, twigs, and pieces of cigar boxes

- Tiny boats with rubber band motors
- Paper airplanes and helicopters, knot tying, origami,
- Chancery Cursive calligraphy

High School Years 1961-1966

- All academia, reading thrillers and science fiction.
- Almost no crafting apart from the odd art class projects

College Year: Syracuse University 1966 - 1971

- Drawing of a motorcycle using a match stick dipped in ink
- Photography, darkroom, printing, enlarging, developing
- Building two very complicated beds
- Very short career designing kites

Starting sophomore year, I was an architecture student - creating not very good designs 24/7.

College Years: London ~ 1971-1981

Apart from the I did in the architectural practices I worked for, I very much progressed in my design skills.

- Unfinished mural
- Buckminster Fuller tensegrity structures ~
<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tensegrity>
- All manner of beds, tables, bookcases, shelves, cupboards, desks

At the same time started commissioning others to make things for me.

- Attache case
- Carpets
- Table and cupboard
- Three life size angels suspend in the middle of the four story stairwell of the house in London
- A racing bike for one handed people

RJ Lattimore & Associates ~ 1971-1973

- Several Truman Pubs refurbishments

- Royal Army Officers Mess in Cyprus

Building Design Partnership

- Redevelopment of an opera house in Lisbon

Solon Housing Association

- 90+ rehab projects
- 1 listed building rehab
- 1 new build

Hong Kong 1981-1991

Personal projects

- 65 Wong Nai Chong Road: complete rehab of our apartment

Variety of architecture projects for YRM

- 12 metro stations
- TaiTam housing project
- 25 story Dairy Farm

Variety of Desktop Publishing projects

- HKVC Journal
- HKMUG Journal
- Magazine articles
- The CAD-Asia Handbook

Variety of CAD/ CAM projects for Autodesk

- CAD course for Hong Kong Productivity Council
- Innumerable demos

Mill Valley ~ Autodesk ~ 1991-2001

- Designed AutoAD Release 14 and AutoCAD LT: changed the way the worlds designs from the drawing board to the computer

Home Projects

- Garden Fence
- Deck

- Paper on "The Redwood Forest"
- The "Laughing and Singing Club" Song Book and other publications

San Francisco 2001-

- Many 6' x 3' paper plots
- Drawing of the Day
- Innumerable websites and online demos
- Much can (and will) be added here

Skills

Skills are, perhaps, a kind of design. Here are some of the skills I have acquired over the years.

- Tying all sorts of knots
- Clucking sound with tongue
- Sneering
- Making spinning tops using the inside of a slice of French bread
- Making whistles out of blades of grass, acorns, bottle caps, two hands
- Fly fishing
- Swimming long distances under water

One-handed skills

- Opening the pistachio,
- Opening a Babybel cheese
- Spinning a coin
- Lighting a match from a matchbook

Influences

- Whole Earth Catalog
- Byte Magazine

Questions to daughters

- Did you learn anything new in reading this?
- Does any of this resonate with aspects of your creativity?
- What do you think of the idea of "designing" your life?
- What do you think of the idea of "designing" your legacy?
- What do you think of the idea of "designing" your cash flow?
- Will it actually be possible for me to pivot my life?