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## THE NEW LIBERAL ART OF TECHNOLOGICAL CULTURE: 1990 TO 2000

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Today, interior designers find themselves working quite differently than in the past. Richard Buchanan, head of the department of design at Carnegie Mellon University, goes so far as to suggest that since 1995 the design industry has experienced a revolution. He maintains, in fact, that, like the culture itself, design has evolved to become the “new liberal art of technological culture.”

Traditionally, the liberal arts have comprised the humanities, the social and natural sciences, and mathematics. The liberal arts are distinguished by a set of disciplines such as grammar, logic, and rhetoric that have the ability to create bridges to areas of specialization such as the basic sciences and medicine, which have their own, sometimes arcane, vocabularies.

To design spaces well, interior designers, like anthropologists, must continuously cross back and forth among many different corporate cultures and terrains of knowledge. In this sense, design is a liberal art that connects discrete areas of knowledge to all other elements of the culture. This is increasingly evident in design firms that have moved into strategic planning and other highly specialized areas of the design process. These firms are successful because before they even begin to conceive a design, they study workers in the workplace. The designers in these firms are organizational behaviorists whose solutions reflect the way people actually do their work.

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## CONCLUSION

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Since the early twentieth century, American designers have been concerned primarily with visual symbols and artifacts. The current information revolution, however, has shifted the designer’s focus away from the exclusively visual and toward the interaction of people with each other and the spaces they jointly occupy. A new definition of symbol and artifact acquires mean-

ing only in the relationships people create with the things and the spaces around them.

The relevance of Frederick Taylor's theories ended with the last century. As the third millennium begins, the machine and the linear assembly line no longer work as metaphors for the organization. The accurate metaphor now—fragile, robust, and continually changing all at once—is the human brain itself.

Today, successful design firms are embracing the brain-as-metaphor and taking a holistic and nonlinear approach to the process of providing design services. Today, effective design demands collaboration, along with the integration of ideas from participants at all levels of an organization. Only the people involved in it are fully able to interpret the rigors of the work process; they are, in fact, part of the design team and play a crucial role in interpreting how best to address the changing requirements of their own workplace.

Recently there has been increased emphasis on an improved value system for the design industry—a system that encourages designers to create problem-specific solutions for each design project. At the same time, interior designers are in a position to help their clients maintain a balance between their business and operational goals, particularly as they relate to an organization's financial, functional, and cultural climate.

Individuals and organizations around the globe are in transition from the traditional economy, based solely on tangible products and assets and the physical constraints of space and time, to a new, knowledge-based economy whose foundation is intellectual capital, including human beings and technologies that are willing and able to work anywhere, "24/7/365," to create a unique body of knowledge for themselves or their organization. This shift is occurring rapidly, and competitive pressure threatens to replace quality with speed. It is imperative, however, that the people who inhabit organizational environments take the time to perform better. Likewise, organizations must build time into the production cycle of knowledge-based products. Only high-quality information will reach the widest possible global audience and, ultimately, have the broadest influence.

Interior designers' professional competence today, and in the future, depends on their full participation in the information revolution. Designers must consider learning a lifelong enterprise and transform what they know into a deep