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Style, Styling and Lifestyle

As products are often characterized by design historians in terms of their style and certain scholars have written histories of design and architecture in the form of a sequence of styles, this is a term/concept which merits our close attention. Before we can discuss the relationship between style and design history, we must first consider the word's meaning and the role the concept has played in the discourse of art history.

Style and Art History

Style is one of the most important critical concepts deployed by art historians. Indeed at one time – during the foundation period of the discipline – it was regarded by some scholars as the principal object of study. It was the emphasis on styles in art, they thought, which distinguished art history from all other disciplines. In fact, the study of style is not exclusive to art historians: anthropologists, sociologists, archaeologists and subcultural theorists also take an interest in it.

Art historians considered style vital because they thought of it as the outward manifestation of the inner being of a person, social group or an age. If one can understand a style one gains, as it were, direct access to the whole value structure of a foreign culture, a bygone age or a social strata. For example, Nicos Hadjinicolaou describes style as 'a particular form of the overall ideology of a social class'.[1] Actually, he dislikes the word 'style' and proposes to substitute 'visual ideology', that is an ideology made visible. If one can understand the reasons for stylistic change through time, one has also acquired a key to the laws of cultural evolution.

Art historians reasoned that if style was inextricably bound up with a time, a place, a people, then it could be used as a diagnostic tool to date anonymous artefacts, to situate them geographically

and to assign them to specific cultures. For this method to work, a relationship of authenticity between style and society had to be assumed, that is, it was believed that later copies and fakes could always be distinguished from 'the real things' because the former could never exactly reproduce the social and material conditions that gave rise to the originals.

For various reasons, problems of attribution have not preoccupied design historians as much as they have art historians; nevertheless they do occur in certain areas of design. In the field of English furniture, for example, the attribution of an eighteenth-century chair to a famous designer such as Thomas Chippendale can make a tremendous difference to its monetary value and collectability; furniture historians have therefore to cope with the difficulty of distinguishing genuine items from the thousands of spurious ones in existence.[2]

Defining Style

The word 'style' derives from the Latin *stilus*, meaning 'a writing implement', hence the idea of handwriting as the direct expression of individual character. This is surely the origin of the theory of expression which has been so influential in the history of aesthetics; it could also be called 'the signature theory'. The implication here is that one cannot help but reveal oneself in writing and thus handwriting can be used to detect the identity of the author: 'the style is the man'. However, the ability of criminals to forge handwriting throws doubt on this theory.

There is another view of style which can be called 'the rhetorical'. This is the idea that in any complex society various styles of writing and speaking exist and can be learnt or imitated. So style in this sense is very artificial; it is public and social not private and personal. It is also self-conscious not unconscious as in the case of the signature theory. Self-consciousness is particularly evident in the cases of stylization and styling (car styling, hair styling, and so on). Negative connotations are often associated with styling: it is thought of as a final, superficial transformation of an object, as something applied to an object's surface almost as an afterthought, as a kind of packaging.

In such cases an inauthentic relationship is implied between external appearances and inner truth, hence the accusation levelled against some British design in the 1980s: 'all style and no substance'.

Style, in the rhetorical sense, can be viewed as a resource, as a factor in artistic production, in that once a number of styles exist, artists can select which one they wish to use or rework. They can also decide to combine styles to create hybrids. These points become obvious when one considers the cases of stylistic revivals: neo-classicism, Victorian gothic, and so on. And when one considers stylistic borrowings from foreign cultures, for example chinoiserie.

Let us now try to specify the meaning of the term more precisely. Meyer Schapiro, a leading American art historian, has defined style as follows:

> By style is meant the constant form – and sometimes the constant elements, qualities and expression – in the art of an individual or a group – style is, above all, a system of forms ... the description of a style refers to three aspects of art: form elements or motives, form relationships, and qualities (including an all-over quality which we may call 'expression').[3]

This definition emphasizes form and overall expression but says nothing about content. It conforms to the common view that style is concerned with how – the manner or way – something is expressed rather than with what is expressed. Frederick Antal, on the other hand, has argued that every work of art is a specific correlation of form and content.[4] One reason why women's hair was such a popular motif with art nouveau artists was that it lent itself to the exploitation of a favourite form – undulating lines. Judith Genova has also argued that 'style is created by wedding form to content in such a way that the form expresses, that is, metaphorically exemplifies the content.'[5] In the case of a Van Gogh peasant painting, for example, the earth-like colours and plough-like brushmarks reinforce the figurative content of the picture.

The question arises: 'Can designed goods be said to have

content as well as form?' In the case of products with figurative imagery or decorative ornamentation on their surfaces and buildings constructed in the shapes of animals or foodstuffs, the answer is clearly 'yes'. Even in the case of more 'abstract' products such as cars, the style may be designed to 'metaphorically exemplify' such contents as speed or sex. The fact that styles have meanings, that they evoke connotations and associations, suggests that there is always content as well as form or that form itself is a signifying agent. If, for instance, one leaves aside the referent of the London Underground diagram, the saturated colours, sharp edges and geometric arrangement of the lines themselves communicate a set of values - order, clarity, harmony, economy, unity, rationality - which, arguably, are those typical of classicism.

Style is not a concept which can be sensibly applied to a single artefact: it is only valid in respect of artefacts considered as members of groups. To identify an object as belonging to a particular style necessarily implies the existence of other objects with which it has features in common. And the specific character of one style is most clearly seen when it is contrasted with others.

Normally, scholars define a style not by means of contrast but by a checklist of formal or perceptual characteristics. Since any one object may not exhibit all the characteristics of the style in question we can see that the style concept is a kind of *ideal-type* to which concrete examples approximate with varying degrees of precision.

It is sometimes said of a person that she or he 'has style'. This implies there are others who do not. Is it really possible for people not to have style? From the anthropological point of view, everyone has a style because no one can stand outside it. Though it is possible to say that some people have a flamboyant style and others a discreet style, that some are elegant and others inelegant. It is also possible to say that some individuals are extremely style-conscious, while others are careless of their appearance. Given that everyone is subject to style, then a whole society can be analysed in terms of the spectrum of styles from which it is composed.

Some commonly-used style names in the history of art are: animal style, geometric style, Hellenistic, romanesque, gothic, baroque, rococo, Louis XIV, mannerism, Queen Anne, neo-classical, Empire style, art nouveau, international modern. It is clear that different principles govern these names: sometimes they derive from a historical period, sometimes a political leader, sometimes subject matter and sometimes formal characteristics. A style-name such as 'gothic' suggests a unified, homogeneous entity but various subdivisions can occur. Since gothic was an international style, national variants have been identified and these in turn have been further subdivided. English gothic, for example, has been divided into Norman, early English, decorated and perpendicular.

Styles are generally regarded as having life-cycles – birth, youth/maturity/decline and death – and are therefore characterized as 'early', 'middle' and 'late'. Such terms are not always simply descriptive – they can be laden with moral judgements: for example, calling a late style 'decadent'.

Looking back, it has seemed to some observers that there were long periods in history when whole cultures were sufficiently homogeneous as to exhibit a major unitary style, a *Zeitstil* or style of the age. Wölfflin, for instance, noted a unity between the form of gothic dress and gothic architecture: pointed shoes and pointed spires. Other writers went further and claimed to detect a common spirit of the age – *Zeitgeist* – underpinning all the different spheres of social life. One objection to this idea is that it assumes that the various spheres – religion, law, visual arts, philosophy – have all evolved in parallel at the same rate. This seems unlikely except in very small or highly monolithic cultures. We shall return to the issue of *Zeitstil* and *Zeitgeist* shortly.

Is there such a unitary style for our own age? Most would argue 'no' because what we witness is a plurality of styles, a culture of fragments. Some scholars have argued that the great unitary styles of the past are no longer possible because of the ever-increasing complexity of modern society, the differentiation and desire for autonomy manifested by the separate arts. The British art critic Peter Fuller has also pointed to the lack of a

'shared symbolic order' which could serve as the basis for a common style. Our age is typified not only by stylistic diversity but also by stylistic eclecticism. From the vantage point of post-modernism it is clear that the international style of modern architecture and design was the last attempt to forge a universal style, though perhaps a case could also be made for the para-military styles of fascist Italy and Germany.

One person who regretted the absence of a common German style in the early twentieth century was the Prussian civil servant, historian and founder of the Deutscher Werkbund, Hermann Muthesius. In July 1914 at the seventh annual meeting of the Werkbund, he claimed that architects and designers were moving towards standardization and the adoption of common type-forms. It was only by such means, he thought, that German design could achieve 'that universality characteristic of ages of harmonious culture'. According to Gillian Naylor, what Muthesius sought was 'the transcendence rather than the suppression of individuality; the re-establishment of a universal language of form that could be related to German ideals and German culture'.[6] The artist-craftsmen of the Werkbund, it seems, disagreed vehemently with these propositions and responded by celebrating individual creativity.

On the one hand, style is thought of as the expression of an individual and, on the other, as the expression of a social group. How can the two be reconciled? One answer may be supplied by the analogy with language: all English speakers share a common language but there are individual variations - idolects - and regional variations - accents, dialects. In this way we can speak of individual and group variants of a common style.

Is it possible to regard a style as being unique to an individual? The answer must be 'no' because private styles are as impossible as private languages. For example, Picasso's most famous achievement was cubism, a style shared with Braque and Gris. It is only with great difficulty that some cubist paintings by Picasso and Braque can be told apart. Picasso changed his style continually and, furthermore, he often worked in more than one style simultaneously. If we assume that style is the expression of an artist's personality, then to account for these changes we would

have to postulate radical changes of personality. This is absurd. As Genova puts it: 'Artists may change their styles often in a lifetime without our having to assume severe personality changes.'[7] These conclusions undermine the certainty that styles can provide us with a direct way of understanding the psychology of an individual, a nation or social group.

Certainty is also undermined by the ability of people to adopt styles temporarily without deep commitment: fancy dress for a party; the weekend punk; and so forth. Indeed, it can be argued that a style can be a means of constructing a false identity or a means of masking real identity: the affluent person who dresses like a tramp; the bank robber in police uniform. In other words, all sign systems can be used to tell lies as well as the truth. It follows that we cannot simply assume a transparency between appearances and reality.

Generally speaking, style has been less important to design historians than to art historians. The former have often preferred typological histories to stylistic ones. Also, with modern design the importance of style varies according to the objects being scrutinized: it is crucial in dress, where appearance is normally more significant than function, but less important in engineering, where function generally takes precedence over appearance. Early modern design theory assumed - wrongly as it turned out - that the problem of style would be resolved once and for all: the machine aesthetic, technology and principles like 'form follows function' would determine the shape and appearance of buildings and products, as it were, naturally. All the designer had to do was to find the optimum solution to the design problem and the question of style would not arise. Modern designed goods would, in effect, be styleless.

In spite of this, a number of design books discuss buildings and products in terms of style, for example, the several histories of art nouveau, Stephen Bayley's *In Good Shape: Style in Industrial Products 1900 to 1960* (1979) and Peter York's *Style Wars* (1980). If ornament, the decorative arts and crafts such as textiles are considered to be part of design, then two key works of early art history ought to be cited: Gottfried Semper's *Der Stil in den Technischen und Tektonischen Künsten oder Praktische*

Ästhetik (Style in the technical and tectonic arts, or a practical aesthetic) (1860-3) and Alois Riegl's *Stilfragen* (Problems of style) (1893). Unfortunately, neither of these important texts has been translated into English.

Early theorists such as Semper tended to be preoccupied with the origins of styles and their evolution. Since hard evidence about the early phases of human culture was difficult to come by, reconstructions were inevitably speculative. The origins of the different modern arts, Semper contended, were to be found in the material/technical bases of the crafts of earliest times. A classification of materials according to their distinctive natural properties gave rise to the 'technical arts' - textiles, ceramics, carpentry and joinery, masonry and carving - which in turn formed the basis for architecture, sculpture, mosaics, and so on. Once a student of mathematics, Semper devised an algebraic formula to explain style: $\gamma = F(x, y, z, \text{etc.})$ in which 'γ' equals style, 'F' equals function or purpose and 'x, y, z, etc.', equal the various factors - materials, tools, religion, character of the artist, and so forth - whose combination determined the nature of the work in question. Semper believed that while factors varied over time human needs remained much the same, hence function did not alter to the same extent as the factors.[8]

Although Semper's theory included human purposes, it subsequently came to be seen as deterministic and materialist in character. Riegl was critical of it on the grounds that artists and designers have the freedom to work against the natural propensities of materials and techniques if they so wish. The latter were perceived as the friction or resistance against which the *Kunstwollen* (will to art or will to form) had to struggle.[9] Any convincing solution to the problem of the multiple determinants of form and style would, surely, have to take into account the interaction of human desires and the available materials and techniques. And to explain the will of individual artists one would also, presumably, need to go beyond individual psychology to invoke social factors.

Styling

When the characteristics of a style are deliberately exaggerated,

we speak of stylization and styling. A famous example of styling occurred in the American car industry from the late 1920s onwards reaching a climax in the 1950s. The process is described in detail by Alfred Sloan, chairman of General Motors, in his memoir *My Years with General Motors* (1965). A large team of designers was employed by the company, the most famous being Harley Earl. Before the 1920s, car design had been dominated by engineers but once the market became saturated with basic, standard cars, new ways of attracting buyers had to be found. Stylists then became more important than product engineers. While the engines and structures of cars changed relatively slowly, their outward appearances altered more rapidly until, eventually, annual model changes became the norm. Styling was used first to distinguish one line of cars from another and secondly to increase sales by creating a sense of psychological obsolescence, that is, making customers feel that their existing cars were out of date because they were out of style.

Earl and other stylists found that the public was resistant to extreme and abrupt changes of style but if the changes were made step-by-step, year-by-year, then in the end quite radical shifts of form and taste could be achieved. In 1954 Earl remarked: 'My primary purpose for 28 years has been to lengthen and lower the American automobile ... Because my sense of proportion tells me that oblongs are more attractive than squares ...'![10] Earl's personal aesthetic motivation ignores the economic and marketing imperatives governing the process of stylistic innovation and change.

Automobile design no longer indulges in the tactic of annual model changes. Indeed, fashion is out of fashion. Contemporary motor manufacturers, especially European ones such as Daimler-Benz, now emphasize the functionality of their products. The style of their cars evolves slowly so that it is clear successive models belong to the same 'family'; this design principle is called 'vertical model homogeneity'. A sense of stylistic unity is also required across the whole range of cars produced by the company; hence, 'horizontal model homogeneity'. Designers now seek 'image control' so that car styles will not date so rapidly.

What many car manufacturers now aim for are long model

runs with steady refinements such as engineering improvements and accessory upgradings as a means of persuading customers to replace their old cars with new ones every few years. Since petrol has become more expensive, streamlining has made a comeback. This has created a high degree of conformity in the external forms of mass volume cars because once the most functional shapes have been scientifically identified, further stylistic variations are virtually ruled out.

Zeitstil and Zeitgeist

The history of European art has often been presented as a linear sequence in which style succeeded style. It is certainly true that over the centuries there has been a succession of different styles, but the false impression may have been created that only one style existed per age - the *Zeitstil* - and that this style exemplified the spirit of the age: the *Zeitgeist*. Modern scholars, however, argue that in all but the most monolithic of states there have been several styles coexisting at the same time; so, if one wanted to speak about 'spirit' one would have to refer to several spirits of the age.

Zeitgeist is a concept of Hegelian idealist philosophy intended to explain the ideological and stylistic unity of a given period. In fact, by postulating a single common denominator - the spirit - it occludes the complexity and heterogeneity of past ages. Most historians, especially materialist ones, are sceptical of the concept and refuse to use it. Nevertheless, it persists in the more popular writings on the history of design. For example, in the 1986 text *Design Source Book* by Penny Sparke and others, the time-span covered - 1850s to 1980s - is subdivided into a series of mini-ages: 'Arts and Crafts 1850–1900', 'Art Nouveau 1890–1905', 'The Machine Aesthetic 1900–1930', and so on, each of which is prefaced by a pictures-captions double-page spread headed 'Spirit of Arts and Crafts', 'Spirit of Art Nouveau', etc. In this kind of scheme there appears to be a circular or tautological relationship between styles and ages: different styles give rise to different ages, while different ages give rise to different styles. Only where the ages overlap is it acknowledged that several

styles can exist simultaneously. Exceptionally, the final period – 1975 onwards – is recognized as an age of stylistic eclecticism where no one style prevails. Hegelians can always win the argument by claiming that eclecticism reflects the spirit of the age now.

A popular style is likely to be manifested across a wide range of artefacts and one thing which can be said in favour of stylistic histories is that they often seek to encompass more than one medium or art form. In other words, they avoid the tunnel vision which can afflict histories confining themselves to furniture, or painting, and so forth. Bevis Hillier's *The Style of the Century 1900–1980* (1983), for instance, includes examples of posters, paintings, furniture, dress, vehicles, buildings, textiles, pottery, book jackets, pop music and interior decor. In his introduction Hillier argues that humble objects can in fact convey the spirit of the time more effectively than masterpieces. His aim, he declares, has been to illustrate the pervasiveness of style and also to reveal its close relation to modes of life: 'style and lifestyle are indivisible'. The title of Hillier's journalistic book is surely misleading: has the twentieth century only one style? Is it really one civilization with one spirit? At the Museum of Costume in Bath they deal not in the spirits of centuries but in the spirits of years: every year one new outfit of clothes by a contemporary fashion designer is acquired for the collection on the basis that it epitomizes the spirit of the year in question.

What those who make use of the *Zeitgeist* concept fail to recognize is that if such a dominant spirit of the age prevails, there are always dissenting groups and individuals who seek to oppose or undermine it.

A plurality of styles does not necessarily mean they all exist on the same plane of equality: it is possible to identify dominant and subordinate styles. Do styles coexist harmoniously or do they vie with one another for hegemony? The titles of Rudolf Wittkower's and Peter York's books – *Gothic versus Classic*, *Style Wars* – suggest the latter. Of course, styles do not struggle with one another, only people do. Nevertheless, style is a marker of social difference and it is therefore one of the means by which enemies recognize one another – witness the conflicts

between subcultural groups such as mods and rockers, punks and skinheads.

Some histories of art and design – those presenting the subject in terms of a sequence of styles – can also be misleading because they suggest a development in which stylistic change takes place in an autonomous realm, each new style being thought of as a reaction against the preceding one. Such reactions do occur as new generations seek to assert their identities by rejecting the styles of their parents but the link between styles and the people who live them out is frequently overlooked in sequence-type histories. This is the particular value of books about subcultures such as Hebdige's *Subculture: the Meaning of Style* (1979). They locate styles in the lives and habits of particular social groups and consider their social functions: it is argued that styles are symbolic or magical resolutions of conflicts which cannot be solved directly; for example, an expression of strength and aggression by a group with little political or economic power.

In this respect, cultural theorists follow the lead of Marxist art historians such as Antal who argued that the existence of several styles in the same place at the same time could only be explained by the presence of several different social classes or class fractions who felt the need to distinguish themselves from each other.

Designers, at the behest of manufacturers, seek to invent new styles (or refine existing ones) which will appeal to specific market segments. The visible form or 'look' they supply is not simply imposed upon helpless victims – the design may well be based on intensive market research to find out what consumers like and want – but nor is it merely a reflection of existing desires. A successful style involves the convergence of the tastes of both designers and consumers. It is the result of a complex combination of factors, one of which is the current aesthetic situation (this limits what the 'next move' in the style game can be).

In other instances, the impulse towards a new style does not come from the design profession but from the grassroots. The punk style of dress, graphics and rock music, for example, was created in the mid-1970s by disaffected urban youths plus the ex-art school tastemakers Malcolm McLaren, Jamie Reid and

Vivienne Westwood. For a time it successfully resisted incorporation and exploitation by the fashion and record industries. Punk is a good example of a style which permitted individual participants to contribute original elements. In this respect the style's ethos was in accord with the political ideology – anarchism – espoused by most punks.

Style and Social Groups

Perhaps the most difficult theoretical issue concerning style is its relation to the larger social context, to social structures, groups, economic conditions, and so forth. Although the metaphor of reflection – 'style reflects . . .' – is commonly employed, many scholars are unhappy with it because it implies a passive and deterministic relationship. Hebdige's remarks about the punk style and its social setting are useful in this regard because they communicate a sense of the complexity of the relationship:

> Punks seemed to be parodying the alienation and emptiness which have caused sociologists so much concern, realising in a deliberate and wilful fashion the direst predictions of the most scathing social critics, and celebrating in mock-heroic terms the death of community and the collapse of traditional forms of meaning.[11]

> Punks were not only *responding* to increased joblessness, changing moral standards, the rediscovery of poverty, the Depression, etc., they were *dramatising* what had come to be called 'Britain's decline' ... The punks appropriated the rhetoric of crisis ... and translated it into tangible (and visible) forms ...[12]

Hebdige's use of words like 'parodying' and 'dramatising' indicates the knowing, active nature of the punks' relationship to the wider society and to other discourses.

Style is a phenomenon which seems to belong to artefacts (a property of objects). We mostly encounter it in its fixed and finished form; consequently, we may overlook the extent to

which style is made and lived out by particular social groups as one of their ways of communicating and asserting their identity in relation to other social groups.

A clearcut historical example of the relation between design and a social group, design and ideology, was the Shaker furniture produced in New England, Ohio, Kentucky and Indiana between 1790 and 1860. The Shakers were a monastic, puritan Christian sect who valued simplicity, order, cleanliness and fitness for use. Labour and workmanship they regarded as acts of worship. Shaker furniture is noted for its plainness, austerity, grace, practicality, fine craftsmanship and modesty. (Fancy, ornamented articles were condemned as signs of human pride and vanity.) Although individual variations in the forms of the furniture did occur, a common style prevailed. The lives of the Shakers were governed by a communal spirit, hence they opposed private property and discouraged individualism: the names of some Shaker joiners are known but signing pieces was generally frowned upon. Thus Shaker religious values permeated every aspect of daily life including the design of their artefacts. The title of a book about Shaker furniture by E. and F. Andrews puts it in a nutshell: *Religion in Wood* (1966). In the case of the Shakers there appears to have been an organic unity between life and syle. Their way of life has not, however, thrived in the twentieth century; it has dwindled as a result of the influence of the urbanized, mass media, commercial culture of the USA. Meanwhile, the Shakers' furniture has become highly prized by collectors who appreciate it for its historic and aesthetic qualities. In modern America and Europe the concept of lifestyle has taken on a new meaning.

Lifestyle

As we have seen in the case of the Shakers, a visual style can be integral to a way of life. In the past, divisions between ranks and classes tended to be much more sharply defined and cross-class mobility far more restricted than today, so the visual styles associated with particular classes were exclusive and remained unchanged for long periods. (Peter York has remarked: 'Compared

to us, people in the past lived in a style prison.')[13] One cannot comprehend, for example, the appearance and layout of the elaborate country houses built by wealthy Englishmen during the nineteenth century without an understanding of the habits and customs of their owners. Consequently, architectural historians such as Mark Girouard, author of *The Victorian Country House* (1971), and Jill Franklin, author of *The Gentleman's Country House and its Plan, 1835-1914* (1981), find it essential to describe the style of life expected of a Victorian gentleman before turning their attention to the houses themselves. Of course, another way of life entirely was prescribed for the large retinue of servants such houses needed for their upkeep and the design reflected this difference by segregating masters and servants as far as possible.

In recent years the word 'lifestyle' has become extremely popular in the discourses of advertising, journalism and design. While it has the virtue of stressing the link between a style and a way of life, it also implies that this link is no longer organic and unconscious but artificial and self-conscious. The major difference between the past and the present is that lifestyles have become more numerous, varied and, above all, free-floating, that is, they are no longer exclusive to particular classes (or at least not to the same extent). Increased affluence and social mobility has enabled whole sectors of society to purchase lifestyles off the peg. Consumer societies, it is argued, offer a diversity of lifestyles from which people can choose in the same way that they choose between products.

Alvin Toffler's *Future Shock* (1970) contains a perceptive analysis of the phenomenon. His premiss is that there is now a 'value vertigo' brought about by the collapse of traditional, stable value systems; there is also a rapid turnover of values. Since the consensus has fragmented, what remains are pockets or niches of values he calls 'subcults'. Toffler explains how people respond to the new situation as follows:

> Faced with colliding value systems, confronted with a blinding array of new consumer goods, services, educational, occupational and recreational options, the people of the future

> are driven to make choices in a new way. They begin to 'consume' lifestyles the way people of an earlier, less choice-choked time consumed ordinary products.[14]

A lifestyle, Toffler continues, is the means by which individuals signal their identification with particular subcults. Each lifestyle is constructed from a mosaic of items, hence it is a kind of 'superproduct' offering a way of organizing products and ideas. In terms of social function, a lifestyle offers a sense of identity but it is also a device for reducing the anxiety caused by too much choice. Release is likely to be temporary however because 'as we rush toward super-industrialism ... we find people adopting and discarding lifestyles at a rate that would have staggered the members of any previous generation. For the lifestyle itself has become a throwaway item.'[15]

Contemporary sociologists and market researchers take a close interest in lifestyles. Market researchers are particularly interested because they want to understand the behaviour and psychology of social groups better (hence the 'science' of 'psychographics' which seeks a rounded picture of consumers by collocating all kinds of information about them) in order to design and target advertising at appropriate segments of the market. Arnold Mitchell, in his book *The Nine American Lifestyles* (1983), presents a 'VALS' typology (values and lifestyles) of the American adult population based upon responses to a questionnaire completed in 1980. According to his analysis, there are four basic groups and nine lifestyles:

Need-driven groups—11%
  Survivor lifestyle—4%
  Sustainer lifestyle—7%
Outer-directed groups—67%
  Belonger lifestyle—35%
  Emulator lifestyle—10%
  Achiever lifestyle—22%
Inner-directed groups—20%
  I-am-me lifestyle—5%
  Experimental lifestyle—7%

Societally conscious lifestyle–8%
Combined outer- and inner-directed group–2%
Integrated lifestyle–2%[16]

The limited nature of this typology seems to contradict Toffler's scenario of infinite choice. It is also of little value to the design historian because it gives no indication of style preferences in the visual, formal sense. Nevertheless, design historians may be encouraged by this kind of research to study the phenomena of lifestyles much more systematically in the future.

Let us turn now to 'consumer sovereignty', that is, the idea that consumers exercise power by 'voting' with their money.

In their selection of products from the vast range available in developed societies, consumers appear to exercise free will in constructing their different lifestyles. Manufacturers of single products certainly find it difficult to control the 'collage' of goods a person acquires, though more and more they attempt to do so: the fitted kitchen replaces a jumble of different items; interior designers offer co-ordinated decorative schemes; and advertising supplies images promoting goods as part of a whole setting of clothes, cars and houses linked by style and price. Much journalistic advice is also purveyed via newspapers and magazines encouraging people to live in specific ways and the mass media of cinema, TV and pop music offer potent role models. Even 'alternative' lifestyles, as Toffler points out, are marketed by their advocates via lectures, books and press interviews. It would seem that lifestyle is almost as much a consequence of commercial calculation and design as any other product.

Toffler's account suggests that everyone in society can participate equally in the lifestyle game but this overlooks the fact that social groups still differ in their possession of economic and cultural capital. Crudely, the range of choice available to the poor is far more restricted than the range of choice available to the rich. In an article about lifestyle based upon Pierre Bourdieu's sociology of taste, Mike Featherstone considered whether or not the issue of class is still relevant to the new consumer culture. His conclusion was: 'The new conception of lifestyle can best be understood in relation to the habitus of the new petite

bourgeoisie, who, as an expanding class fraction centrally concerned with the production and dissemination of consumer culture imagery and information, is concerned to expand and legitimate its own particular dispositions and lifestyle.'[17] Later he adds: 'It is not a question of the new petite bourgeoisie promoting a particular style, but rather catering for and promoting a general interest in style itself, the nostalgia for past styles, the interest in the latest style, which in an age which itself lacks a distinctive style ... have a fascination, and are subjected to constant interpretation and re-interpretation.'

Featherstone's point about the existence of an obsession with style in the 1980s is borne out by the success of magazines like *The Face* and *iD* and clothes shops such as the Next chain. It is also evident in the copy of many adverts. A writer of a Cadbury Schweppes advert for 'designer chocolates' observed: 'The key to the market lay with that great totem of the 1980s ... style.'[18] Another copywriter, in an advert for expensive cars, vaunted style as the mark of social superiority, as a way of standing out from the crowd. Quite shamelessly this elitism was justified in terms of the new entrepreneurial spirit of the decade. A widening of inequality was also celebrated: 'Style means living in a different world ... the tenor of the times has changed and success is back in fashion, and so is elegance, performance, luxury and refinement ... the stolid egalitarianism of the '60s and '70s is gone, stylish people know that living well is the best revenge.'[19] (Revenge for what? one wonders.)

So, it would seem, the dominant spirit of the present age is not any particular style but a celebration of style as such, the purpose of which is to enforce a distinction between the 'haves' and the 'have nots'.

Style and Fashion

Finally, a note on fashion. Distinguishing between the concepts of style and fashion is somewhat difficult because in everyday use the words are interchangeable: one dictionary defines 'style' as 'a mode of fashion' and 'fashion' as 'a prevailing custom or style of dress'.

A fashion is really a short-lived enthusiasm - a vogue, craze or fad - for something, whereas a style is a form of design with a distinct character. A style may well be fashionable but it can also be unfashionable. A standard light switch has only two possible states: on or off. Similarly, fashion has only two possible conditions: either in or out. Fashions come and go with great speed; there is also a turnover of styles but styles can persist long after being fashionable.

Fashions can refer to many kinds of human behaviour but most often they refer to enthusiasms for particular modes of dress: the fashion industry is the commercial sector devoted to the design, manufacture and selling of clothing for everyday and leisure use. This industry has a vested interest in the dynamic of fashion because a twice-yearly change (autumn and spring collections) ensures constant production and profitability. By regularly introducing new lines, designers outmode existing fashions thereby creating customer dissatisfaction with what they already possess.

Some writers on fashion distinguish it from non or anti-fashion clothes, that is, clothes which ignore the dynamic of constant change.[20] For example, industrial protective clothing designed purely for function and to last as long as possible. Certain 'classic' types of dress - the British city gent's pinstripe suit for instance - resist the cycle of fashion. Such forms of dress are often dubbed 'timeless', though in fact they change by evolving gradually over a number of years.

Since, in the case of clothing, style and fashion are so intimately connected to people's appearance and behaviour, design historians cannot limit themselves to questions of designing and production; they must also address themselves to issues of consumption, reception and taste. Accordingly, it is to these topics that we now turn.

Notes and References

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