The State of Design History, Part I: Mapping the Field

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The State of Design History

PART 1: MAPPING THE FIELD

Introduction

The history of design as one aspect of a more general rise in the study and practice of design is an important and rapidly developing area of design studies. In Britain, it has a firm institutional base in the highly developed system of degree and subdegree design education. In the United States, acknowledgement of the important pedagogic role of design history and the enthusiam of some studio design instructors is leading to similar developments, despite some initial recognition problems from bodies such as the College Art Association.

There is also considerable professional awareness in the United States of the need for histories of the various design professions. In East and West Germany and Italy, design history is emerging more as a cultural-historical critique of design's role within industrial culture than as a pedagogic tool or as a provider of historical perspectives on the growing maturation of the design professions.

These developments coincide with a general rise of interest in design issues in the major industrial nations. Business is now acknowledging design as a significant agent in corporate development, governments increasingly see design as a resource to aid industrial regeneration, and the academic world is reluctantly beginning to consider design and its issues as a significant area of study.

Design history has developed substantially during the past few decades, and its awareness permeates discussion on design matters. In current design debates, most positions are informed by notions of history.[1] There is thus some value in giving a topography of the "methodological, political, social, and design theoretical positions"[2] that underlie current design historical work.

Such a survey and critical assessment can facilitate design history's development as a discipline in its own right. They can achieve this goal by exploring the problems of method and definition that have recently come to the fore. Equally essential is the need to consider design history in the wider academic context: What is the relationship between design history and other areas of study and inquiry? To use the most obvious example, what is its

1) The most obvious example of history's relation to practice is in architecture. The confusion surrounding the demise of Modernism and the rise of varieties of Post-Modernism have all been accompanied by feverish historical writing. Special issues of *Architectural Design* illustrate the current use of history.

2) Letter from Victor Margolin to the author setting out the brief for this article, July 1983.

relationship to art history? Also, what is its relationship to history in general and to the specialist histories of technology, economy, and business that impinge on the subject? If there remain unresolved issues, one way of exploring them is through a survey of current work.

However, these questions are predicated on the overall relationship between the history of design, design history[3] as a specific academic subject, the wider field of design studies,[4] and design practice. In particular, the tripartite relationship between history, understanding, and practice is of central importance to design as a whole. Understanding such problems as the lack of a clear philosophical or methodological basis for design following the collapse of Modernism, design's social role,[5] or the role of esthetics in design cannot be adequately understood or solved in practice without historical study.[6]

This leads to another question: To what extent can history contribute to the understanding of what design is and what the designer does, and to what extent can history make that understanding public? Despite the evident (to designers) centrality of design in twentieth-century society, that importance is still not publicy understood. The paradoxical postion design finds itself in is neatly summed up in the introductory paragraph to Penny Sparke's recent study, *Consultant Design: The History and Practice of the Designer in Industry.* According to Sparke, "[if] the word *designer* has finally infiltrated the vocabulary of everyday life such that American commercials extol the virtues of *designer jeans*, Vidal Sassoon proudly refers to himself as a *hair designer*, and the French and Italians have absorbed the word directly into their own languages," a corollary of this situation is that neither *design* nor *designer* are well-understood concepts. "Attempts to define [a designer's] role are usually, however, vague, confused, and ill informed: Nobody seems to know what he does other than to imbue products with added desireability."[7]

This misconception might not be so worrisome if the level of concern were simply hair styles or designer jeans,[8] but it is not. We are becoming more and more a *designed* and a *designing* society. As Thomas Hughes, the American historian, has noted, "Whereas once technological systems, especially the largest, evolved, now more and more and larger and larger ones are designed, constructed, and managed by man."[9] Nor is this phenomenon only technological. It is also cultural. This is Arthur Pulos's argument in the very first paragraph of his recent book, *American Design Ethic: A History of Industrial Design.* "Design is the indispensible leavening of the American way of life. It emerged with the need of the colonists to transform the wilderness into a secure haven and expanded as a natural component of the industrial revolution in the New World. The United States was in all likelihood the first nation to be designed — to come into being as a deliberate consequence of

3) The history of design should not be confused with its present institutional and academic form, design history. The latter by no means encompasses all of what the former might eventually become.

4) As in the work of the British Design Research Society and its journal, *Design Studies.*

5) See Clive Dilnot, "Design as a Socially Significant Activity," *Design Studies* 3 (July 1982): 139-46.

6) For a critical assessment of this problem, see Tony Fry, "Design History: A Debate?" *Block* 5 (1981): 14-18. For an argument which states that history must relate to practice, see Joseph Rykwert, "Art as Things Seen," *Times Literary Supplement* (May 29, 1974). The article is addressed to art historians, but has considerable impact for design historians.

7) Penny Sparke, *Consultant Design: The History and Practice of the Designer in Industry* (London: Pembridge Press, 1983), 1.

8) This is not to say that these are irrelevant areas. See Dick Hebdige, *Subculture: The Meaning of Style* (London: Methuen, 1981).

9) Thomas Hughes, "The Order of the Technological World,: *History of Technology* 5 (1980): 1. Hughes's argument for a systems-organizational perspective on technological history is of considerable interest to design historians. (Suzette Worden brought this article to the author's attention.)

the actions of men who recognized a problem and resolved it with the greatest benefit to the whole. America did not just happen: It was designed."[10]

Pulos' somewhat purple prose and celebratory instinct (which are manifested to an even greater extent throughout the rest of the preface and, indeed, throughout the book as a whole)[11] should not be allowed to obscure the potential importance of this argument. If Hughes and Pulos are even partly right, then design has an importance that society in general and the academic world in particular have traditionally been loath to grant it.

Clearly then, both understanding of design and its public communication are not only necessary professional demands, but also urgent *social* needs. But the points that Pulos and Hughes make also implicitly call into question the context in which we should think about design. For example, the notion of a journal such as DESIGN ISSUES implies an arena of debate about design — its future, its history, its role. But what should the context for such debates be, the design world as we understand it, as it might be, or as it once was? Or, should the context be society as a whole? Context depends on definition, which in turn depends on context. The process is circular: The way one segment of the problem is defined determines the answer for the other.[12]

Discussion of future roles for design cannot take place either in an historical vacuum (where merely Utopian ideals are put forward rather than concretely realizable projects) or in a context where present practices dominate so that no other kinds of practice can ever be contemplated. However, attempts have always been made to evade history, to pretend it is of no significance, and to eradicate the idea of other possibilities. Historians, "notorious for their abilities to shirk fundamental issues,"[13] have participated in this as much as anyone. In the case of design, they have made repeated efforts to collapse historically different and precise forms of designing into a single system, usually one dominant at the time the history was written.[14]

However, it is precisely a careful study of history that can prevent this. History can keep open the *differences* involved. Most important, it can allow differentiation between *designing*, a verb denoting an activity, not necessarily professional, and *design*, a noun referring to a particular profession or a particular class of phenomena. Therefore, the first context for design understanding is the historical. Design thereby can be understood in toto by making the *varieties* of design historically credible. Paradoxically, defining and explaining design and what a designer does are dependent not only on immersion in design practice, but also on the ability to see this practice in both historical and social perspectives.[15]

There is another reason for carefully exploring the history of design. An exploration of the field demands that at least some account be given as to why a history of design has taken so long to form.

10) Arthur Pulos, *American Design Ethic: A History of Industrial Design* (Cambridge: M.I.T. Press, 1983), 1.

11) See the review of the Pulos's book by John Heskett in this issue of *Design Issues*.

12) More than anything else, this conundrum illustrates the significance of the concepts that are used. This is not to say that real problems in design practice or design understanding can be reduced to a question of terms. But in most cases, terms, and especially the assumed meanings given to them, are part of the problem. This observation also applies to problems in history.

13) Judith Hook, *The Baroque Age in England* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1976), 7.

14) The point comes from a fascinating essay by Stephen Yeo, "State and Anti-State: Reflections on Social Forms and Struggles from 1830," in *Capitalism, State Formation and Marxist Theory*, edited by Phillip Corrigan (London: Quartet Books, 1980), 111-14.

This process, in turn, uncovers the way design has been perceived within the Western industrial societies. The most striking feature is that the academic world has cared little for the study of design.[16] Consciousness of design, not in the sense of *self-consciousness,* but of developed conscious historical and theoretical understanding,[17] has played a negligible role in academic research or study and within design practice. The exception has been architecture.

Some explanations may be useful. The cultures of the major industrial societies are all characterized by a profound ambivalence over the role and value of technology, goods, and images in creating or forming their "civilizations." Two attitudes are characteristics. In Britain and Germany, some of the most powerful cultural criticism has been written *against* technology, materialism, and goods and consumption.

However, elsewhere in Europe, and in the United States, almost the converse attitude has emerged: an exaltation of technology's powers and its *objectivity* (the purity of technology untouched by human desires and wants) as well as its *autonomy* (technology as a material but not a social activity). The effect of hypostatizing technology has been to expel the "empire of things" from the world of culture and to maintain and strengthen the division between industry and culture, work and family, and technology and design that occurred in the nineteenth century.[18] For, as a further consequence of this historical development, thinking is freed from any need to concern itself with doing (hereon presumed to be a socially neutral technical activity) and doing is divorced from any concern with cultural matters.[19]

Discouraged from pursuing the kind of self-reflection characteristic of the humanities and sociohistorical sciences and of science itself, neither technology[20] nor design has pursued the historical, cultural, or philosophical-analytical study of itself. The near impossibility of analytically separating designing from making until at least the onset of the Industrial Revolution, along with the lack of a profession (until recently) rather than a craft of designing, and the total lack of an articulation of design as a practical, cognitive activity in its own right, have all contributed to ensuring a very low status for designing and design within the value systems of industrial societies.[21]

However, this status is being challenged in a number of ways. The greater professionalism of designers is one way. Another is the founding of journals such as DESIGN ISSUES, which also represents the recognition of design as a complex and important activity worthy of study and research. Yet, because history has recently become a main channel for the more academic exploration of design, questions of the formation of designs history and intellectual organization are important. This development must also be understood as a whole. For example, a history of design's relationship with the academic world would tell volumes about the nature of academic

15) It is significant that the Open University's design discipline has used this approach to make design and technology issues comprehensible to students. See, for example, David Walker and Nigel Cross, *Design: The Man-Made Object*, Units 33 and 34 of course T100, The Man-Made World: A Foundation Course (London: The Open University Press, 1976), 53-63, and Nigel Cross, *Design and Technology*, Unit 9 of course T262, Man-Made Futures: Design and Technology (London: The Open University Press, 1975), 9-25.

16) One pertinent example will do. Raymond Williams, a highly respected English cultural critic, is the author of *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society* (London: Fontana, 1976). Amongst the 110 or so terms discussed in the section "The Significant Binding Words in Certain Activities," page 13, *design* and *technology* are notable for their absence.

17) The difference between the two is important. Self-consciousness has been common in avant-garde designing since 1851. However, like this approach to design, theory and study have been largely subjective polemical activities, not at all substitutes for the more careful consideration of design that needs to take place. For an argument worth careful consideration, but whose conclusions the author cannot agree with, see Roger Scroton, *Aesthetics of Architecture* (London: Methuen, 1979), especially the introduction and chapter 1.

18) To what do we owe the origins of this division out of which first architecture and then design emerged as professions? It seems to me that understanding this development in the fullest sense is a precondition for comprehending the position of design today.

19) In relation to current design practice, see Clive Dilnot, "Thinking about Design," *Designer* (October 1983).

20) The situation in technology is now being redeemed. Serious historical work has been going on for more than twenty-five years, and there has been important and encouraging growth in technology policy and technology-society studies. A very significant critical strand to this work, whether from an ecological point of view as in the work of E. H. Schumacher, or from a more directly political viewpoint, has emerged. See, for example, Hillary Wainwright and Dave Elliott, *The Lucas Struggle* (London: Allison and Busby, 1982); David Dickson, *Alternative Technology* (London: Fontana, 1974); Phil Slater, editor, *Outlines of a Critique of Technology* (London: Ink Links, 1980); and Mike Cooley, *Architect or Bee* (Slough: Langely Technical Services, 1979).

priorities, how the design field has considered itself in the past, and the forms of interaction between how a practice pictures itself and the ways that it organizes as a profession or activity. The result would be to throw considerable light on the questions of how design operates in, is formed by, and is perceived by society.

A survey of what is now happening in design history ought at least to raise issues discussed here. Therefore, this article surveys design history today. Inasmuch as it is written from a British perspective, the emphasis is on events in Great Britain.

21) A significant measure of academic status is given by the almost complete lack of postgraduate education and study in the design field compared with almost any other subject or discipline studied at a degree level. In Britain there are social science, and engineering research councils, but no design research council and no research funds.

The emergence of design history

Before 1939, there were two or three areas of design historical activity, with the exception of architecture.[22] One area was the history of the decorative arts. Largely constituted as a branch of the history of monumental architecture, especially of great houses, it included the histories of interior or garden design and the contents and furnishings of rooms. It also included the provenance — creating histories of all those objects, that is, furniture, glassware, ceramics, silver, and so forth, collected in museums, preserved in the country houses, and, above all, sold through the antiques trade and the sales room. The histories of the decorative arts are intimately related to the history of art in this area.[23] Because the histories of the decorative arts are oriented to the needs of the sales rooms as the most vital and vigorous consumers of their work, they have accomplished important achievements in detailed research. But they lacked a concept and a comprehension of design.[24] As will be discussed, the act of *designing* is the missing thread throughout the histories of the decorative arts, almost without exception.

22) What is the different significance of history and study between architecture and design? A study that focused on this issue could provide a whole range of insights into what differentiates the practices of architecture and design in a conceptual sense.

23) In retrospect, it seems that design history's problem with art history was less the way the latter imposed its methodology on design history and more the fact that design history kept art history's methods but renounced its intellectual core, thus depriving itself of the means to give significance to the form of the things it dealt with. The histories of the decorative arts, with some exceptions, have already anticipated design history in this.

24) When historically does society begin to recognize consciously that things are *designed* rather than that they simply are? This seems to be a fundamental problem. It is the difference between design as a necessary but barely acknowledged moment of human praxis and "design" as the conscious aperception and acceptance of this fact. But when and why does the latter occur?

By contrast, the second embryonic form of design history, building on art and architectural history, elevated design to the highest principle. If design history has an academic antecedent, it is surely Nikolaus Pevsner's *Pioneers of Modern Design*, despite all later criticisms.[25] First published in 1936, it is animated by two powerfully linked ideas. First, design is of great importance and significance in the modern world. Second, precisely because of this, the *form* that designing takes in this emerging world is of social and ontological importance; so, too, is its history. History establishes a tradition and, therefore, a coherence to an activity. And, for Modernism ("the style of the Fagus Works and the Cologne model factory"),[26] which existed then only on the margins of English and American design and was already beset by what Pevsner called the Jazz style or *Moderne* designing, history or *tradition building* was in this sense a vital polemical component in winning the battle for the acceptance of a true modern design.

25) Nikolaus Pevsner, *Pioneers of Modern Design* (London: Faber and Faber, 1936).

26) Pevsner, *Pioneers*, 18.

History also supported Pevsner's parallel fight for the recovery of a unified design principle and practice. For Pevsner, history elucidated, through the exploration of design, the relation of designed things and design attitudes to society. Scarcely formulated in

his writings to any explicit theoretical extent, the conviction of the import and subtlety[27] of this relationship animates almost every sentence Pevsner wrote.[28]

History as polemic in the service of a design principle, or even history for use as functional to collecting, has lost much of its respectability or has taken on the new form of history as celebration. But the quasiscientific detachment to which historians now sometimes pretend, was, before 1939, ruled out of court, at least for "design history" (for what possible market could there have been for it?). Design history in relation to a purpose was the only possible history. Nor was or is it necessarily a bad thing. There is evidence of its benefits in one of the other areas of design history that existed before 1939. The revolutions in typographic practice initiated by William Morris's re-establishment of the Jensonian typefaces in the 1880s, the subsequent rise in America and Europe of the Private Press movement, and the work on scripts by Edward Johnston and Eric Gill, produced by the 1920s, an international typographic movement of great sensibility and a deep concern for typographic history. Stanley Morison in England, Daniel Berkeley Updike in the United States, and a host of others concerned themselves with typographic history.[29] It remained largely internal to the discipline, although out of it came books like the popular *500 Years of Printing*, by S.H. Steinberg.[30]

However, even in graphic design, the efforts and achievement of these typographers and historians are too little recognized,[31] indicating something about the nature of design history in relation to design practice. Design history arises, in the service of design, as a response to particular practical problems. It does not arise artificially, simply for the sake of itself. Once the problem is solved, through the assistance of history, interest in the subject tends to die down again. This tendency prompts the question, what is implied by the current simultaneous rise of a need for history on all design fronts? And, will the answer explain the otherwise puzzling absence of design history between 1936 and the late 1960s?

The reasons for this absence are many. Modernism's rampant success in colonizing both the British and American architectural establishments after 1945, undoubtedly helped by Pevsner and Siegfried Giedion,[32] was not perfectly repeated in design. When product design, in particular, took on the Modernist ethic, it did not need the historical and intellectual weight that was a necessary precondition for adaptation by architecture. The critical arguments such as those developed in Herbert Read's *Art and Industry* were of more impact.

The same remained generally true in graphic design. Except for specialist areas, notably typography[33] and illustration, history seemed to be irrelevant for a discipline in the process of forming itself and attempting to escape the historic limitations of arts-and-crafts attitudes and its commercial art background.

27) This is in sharp contrast to the poor caricature of Pevsner's work recently drawn in David Watkin, *Morality in Architecture* (London: Oxford University Press, 1978).

28) It certainly fires *Pioneers* and guides the series of biographical and critical articles Pevsner wrote in the late 1930s and 1940s. Many of these articles are usefully collected in Nikolaus Pevsner, *Studies in Art, Architecture, and Design*, vols. 1 and 2 (London: Thames and Hudson, 1976).

29) Stanley Morison, Daniel Berkeley Updike, and Beatrice Warde are among the most important members of this group. Anthony Coulson's *Bibliography of Design in Britain, 1881-1970* has a list of major works. See also the following journals: *Ars Typographica*, 1918-1934, *Fleuron*, 1923-1930, *Signature*, 1935-1940 and 1946-1954, and *Alphabet and Image*, 1946-1948.

30) Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1955 . See also Lucien Febre and Henri-Jean Martins, *The Coming of the Book* (London: NLB, 1976).

31) The English tradition has continued with works by Michael Twyman, John Lewis, and Herbert Spencer, among others. See the work in the new typography journal *Typos*, published by the London College of Printing. But is the impulse comparable?

32) Giedion's influence on Modernism has been frequently commented on. Less discussed because more problematic is the influence of Giedion's *Mechanisation Takes Command* (London: Oxford University Press, 1948). In some ways, it would seem that this curious work has never been fully assimilated into design history.

Conditions were not propitious for the emergence of design history. A rampant anti-intellectualism, combined with a hierarchical dominance of the fine arts, the history of art, and the idea of "culture" in the art and design schools, served to make discussions of design in any historical sense more or less impossible. But if the emergence of the history of design remains to be studied,[34] there is little doubt that the present need to understand the historical coming to be of design and to acquire a broader historical perspective, has its roots in academic discussions and in the complex and often contradictory developments that occurred in both design and popular culture in the 1950s and 1960s. During this period, design came of age; it emerged into public consciousness in a way very different from that of the 1930s and 1940s. The consumer revolutions of the post-war period, the institutionalization of design, the expansion of art and design education, and the explosion of youth and pop cultures, all served in different ways to highlight design and styling skills and to emphasize the new significance of the look or style of things. Along with the explosion in the sheer quantity of images, especially photographic ones, that the average person was exposed to, these developments made goods and images a part of popular culture in a new way. The effects of advertising and design styling combined to make "things" less things in themselves and more totems, or images or fetishes of other things.[35] And the curious situation that has arisen now is that, amongst the values expressed or represented by the design of things, are those of "design" and "style" themselves. Design itself gradually became a fetish or a value.

This cultural identification with things also marked an acceptance of industrial culture. Beginning in 1952 with the exhibition of Victorian and Edwardian decorative arts at the Victoria and Albert Museum, a gradual revival of interest occurred in the objects and history of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The Victorian Society was founded in England in 1957, the Society for the History of Technology in America in 1958. The decade also brought the beginnings of industrial archeology and a general popular obsession with the previously despised Victorian Age.

Pevsner's *Pioneers of Modern Design* was revised and re-issued in 1960, and in the same year, Reyner Banham's *Theory and Design in the First Machine Age* was published. Banham's book marked the beginning of a period of intensive study of Modernism and its origins, which meant that the Pevsnerian program of study was at last taken seriously. In addition, the research that subsequently emerged departed somewhat from the Pevsnerian model. Although still architectural in character, the new writings on late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century design widened to include additional designers and explored design proper rather than architecture alone. The effect was to push the study of design away from the purity of progresssion that Pevsner had given it. However, the radical

33) The exceptions as it were prove the rule. The 1950s saw the Swiss school of typographers attempt to establish their scheme of rational design in part by reclaiming the functional heritage of the 1920s. See, for example, Karl Gerstner and Markus Kutter, *Die Neue Graphik (The New Graphic Art)* (Teufen: Arthur Niggli, 1959). But history was here wholly functional to the design enterprise.

34) There is, however, a useful account of these developments in Pauline Madge's review of John Heskett's "Industrial Design," Design Analysis and Design History," *Information Design Journal* 3/1 (1982): 23-29.

35) See, for example, the collected articles of Reyner Banham, *Design by Choice*, edited by Penny Sparke (London: Academy Editions, 1980).

approach of these writings should not be exaggerated. At this level, the emerging design history still fit easily into the traditional forms of art and architectural history writing. Pevsner's book treats painting seriously, and is written in terms of "great men." In fact, it is on individuals that the early design history was based.

This approach was not necessarily counter to the interest of the emerging design professions. The codification of professional design education in Britain in the early 1960s was accompanied by the enhanced status of designers and design. In that context, design histories that further developed the role of professional designers and design institutions were welcomed initially. However, this kind of history, severely limited from a design perspective, was still heavily oriented to architecture, fine art, and notions of what good design is. Thus, by the late 1960s and early 1970s, considerable pressure was coming from the design education field, particularly graphics and industrial design, to develop a design history that was not based as much on fine art and architecture. To what extent did this reflect the design profession's own awareness of problems in design? It was clear by the early 1970s that "good design" was not a magic talisman. Modernism began to lose its appeal, and problems of design organization, technology, and the relation of design to society and to the economy came to the fore. Also, the question of design's relationship to commerce, markets, and popular taste provoked both practitioners and embryonic historians to re-examine the tenets and assumptions of a Modernist design practice and a history of design that simply reproduced the modernist story or somewhat naively documented the emergence of good design and its institutions. This rethinking of approaches set the stage for the emergence of a new design history.

The forms and varieties of design history

In the absence of a real tradition of design history as previously discussed, what form could a new design history take? The form it did take was considerably influenced by the educational and professional context in which, in Britain at least, it emerged. However, the important point to note regarding the design history in this phase, approximately 1970 to 1980, is that mostly art historians entered the field.

The coherence of a design historical attitude was both slow in forming and not bound by any rigid framework or set of texts. (In that respect, even *Pioneers* has not dominantly imposed its values on present design history.) On the contrary, with the laudable aim of keeping the discipline open and relativistic, there was a notable reluctance to specify objects and subjects of study or to consider what the role of this history might be.

The major consequence of this almost accidental emergence of a history of design is that design history, in the sense of a single, organized discipline with defined aims and objects, *does not exist.*

It is thus bafflingly difficult to survey or define design history in its present state. At best, one can say that, without explicit definition or statement, the new design history is formed around four linked principles and four related absences. The principles are as follows:

- Design history is the study of the history of professional design activity.
- It is not the activity itself that forms the first layer of attention of historians, but the results of that activity: designed objects and images. (This emphasis is justified on a number of esthetic and archeological grounds, as well as on the premise that design is a practical activity that results in a new thing or image.)
- An equally natural orientation was added to design in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.
- Design history emphasizes individual designers. Explicitly or implicitly, they are the focus of the majority of design history written and taught today.

The absences, by contrast, are less specific, but equally present in the way the discipline operates:

- There is little explicit consideration of aims, methods, or roles of design history in relation to its actual or potential audiences.
- There is little consideration of design history's origins, except in an educational and institutional sense.
- There is a general lack of historical, methodological, or critical self-reflection. Whereas self-reflection might at the very least engender clear statements of position or clarification of aims, the ad hoc nature of most design history means that is is very difficult to define social, theoretical, or methodolocial presuppositions. This not not to say they do not exist.

Differences of emphasis and orientation in design historical work certainly exist. These can be classified as four general traditions or approaches; however, it is important to note that these are only general attitudes or tendencies, not schools to which historians ally themselves, nor are they necessarily exclusive categories. Many historians of design cross some or all of these boundaries in the course of their work.

In addition, there are four areas of work in design history that can be set out as follows:

1. A continuation of the traditional histories of the decorative and minor arts as applied to the subject matter of design, decoration, and ephemera of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. As the recent past has become of more concern to design historians, museum directors, collectors, and designers, there has also been a natural tendency to extend to the decorative arts of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries the kind of scholastic attention

that, prior to 1945, was confined almost exclusively to works of the eighteenth century and earlier. This has taken a number of forms. The most dominant at present is the encounter with the world of mass culture (the break is approximately 1925). There, the orientation of the studies has shifted to a whimsical conception of popular taste and to a concern with what might be called junk antiques. Typical products of the recent histories of this genre are the enthusiastic studies of early Art Deco products, histories of fashion, and popular books on ephemera, such as Bevis Hillier's *Austerity Binge*.

What links all of these works is the patent problem of attempting to discuss issues of twentieth-century decoration within the traditional terms of the "high" decorative arts. There is nothing on the taste of the industrial period to compare with Hugh Honour's marvelous book *Neo-Classicism* or Judith Hook's *The Baroque in England*. Nor is there anything on the decorative functions of things to match Michael Baxandall's *Limewood Sculptors of Southern Germany*. This is partly due to the seriousness with which the subject is approached. Decoration in the twentieth century is not considered to have the same weight or meaning as Mannerism in the sixteenth century.

This lacuna is also due to a shift in conditions in the industrial period, a shift that has not yet been adequately explored. The central issues in terms of the decorative (and one must ask whether that term can even apply to twentieth century phenomena) now are issues of style, taste, and fashion. Indeed, it is precisely works that deal centrally with these concepts that best support the attempt to write a serious history of the meaning of decorative style in the twentieth century.

The same facts probably explain why the more successful recent histories of nineteenth- and twentieth-century decorative arts have been written about those areas to which these strictures least apply. Histories of furniture, for example, can be written with relatively less break from the traditions and formats of decorative history, particularly if they concentrate on fashionable designer furniture by borrowing ideas and methods from mainstream history, or begin to explore company histories. This has its limits, of course. The most fascinating work on Wedgewood is undoubtedly that by Neil McKendrick, the economic historian.[36] However, the integration of McKendrick's work into a more complete design history of Wedgewood still awaits its author. This in turn poses the question noted earlier. If Wedgewood is considered solely under the rubric of the decorative, could such an integration of esthetic and economic histories take place? Is not the precondition for this integration the abandonment of the decorative as a term useful for comprehending decoration even in the twentieth century?

Yet the tradition of writing decorative history survives. Its ability to elucidate the precise provenance of an object is in considerable

36) See Neil McKendrick, editor, *The Birth of a Consumer Society* (London: Europa, 1982), 100-46.

demand by the sales rooms, the antiques trade, and the new museums that emphasize nineteenth- and twentieth-century collections. What this tradition can give in terms of developing an understanding of design and decoration in the twentieth century remains to be seen.

Considered from this point of view, does the history of the decorative have any role in design history or design understanding? Two developments suggest a tentative yes. The first is in the area of craft history. Opinions differ sharply as to the position of the crafts in relation to a concept such as design. However, during the next few years a history that takes a more serious view of the decorative, esthetic *function* of craft objects will emerge. At present, the history of the design crafts area is a problem for practitioners. There is a need to construct histories of design crafts that either avoid the excesses of recent decorative histories or assimilate them into an overall model of the development of industrial design.

The origins of such a history very likely lie in the recent work undertaken on William Morris, the Arts and Crafts Movement, and Art Nouveau. This work has been concerned with augmenting the lineage of Modernism that was first set out in Pevsner's *Pioneers*. The concerns of those who have labored to rediscover designers such as Christopher Dresser were similar. It is also noticeable that such histories are in many cases inspired as much by the decorative and visual qualities of the objects themselves as by the desire to explore the conditions that gave rise to these objects. Therefore, both works and histories can be considered as celebrations of a slightly different set of values, even if they are read as proto-Modernist.

Are these then decorative histories? Probably not. Although they arise in many cases from an esthetic or stylistic impulse or from a concern with the complex ethics of arts and crafts designing, their general development is toward an increasing examination of the social conditions in which this work was produced and its connection to theories of life and human relations.[37] There is also a move toward more detailed explorations of the design and craft processes involved. On both counts, this history sharply separates itself from much decorative history and identifies with the approaches described in the third and fourth categories.

37) See, for example, the shifts of focus from Gillian Naylor, *Arts and Crafts Movement* (London: Studio Vista, 1971), to Lionel Lambourne, *Utopian Craftsmen: The Arts and Crafts Movement from Cotswolds to Chicago* (London: Astragal Books, 1980).

2. A focus on Modernism. The fascination with William Morris and Arts and Crafts values is almost a Pevsnerian trademark. Later studies of Modernism, beginning with Banham's 1960 revisions on architectural history in *Theory and Design in the First Machine Age,* have stressed the period after 1900, the less immediately central aspects of the European avant-garde (Italy, Expressionism, De Stijl), and technology (electricity and building services). Important, too, is the question of housing. In British design history, study of these areas and the attempted integration of architecture and design into a single history of Modernism has been greatly stimulated by

the work of Tim Benton. He and his Open University course team have developed what must be the single most important work of design history to have emerged in Britain; that is, the Open University's third-level course on the history of modern architecture and design from 1890 to 1939. It is a remarkable piece of work, consisting of twenty-four course units organized in sixteen course books and covering most aspects of Modernist history between Art Nouveau and the onset of World War II. Because the Open University teaches through radio and television, each course unit has accompanying radio-vision or television programs.[38] Considerable emphasis is placed on working from primary sources. The course is therefore much more than a rehash of existing theories and histories of Modernism.[39] In fact, it attempts a massive broadening of that history, although critics have not yet recognized this. In the process, the course raises extremely important questions vis-a-vis the relations of design to architectural history and the relation of the history of design to the history of Modernism.

The course originated in 1972 as a major effort of the History of Art Department and was planned from the beginning to cover architecture and design in roughly equal proportions. The selected topic, effectively the rise of modern architecture and design in the first half of the twentieth century, continued the strong interest already evidenced in architectural history, but also emphasized design as a necessary and, theoretically at least, equal element. However, as far as architecture was concerned, the course could form a critical re-assessment of Modernist history, but with respect to design, the date of the original preparatory work for the course (1972) alone indicates that in its new research it *preceded* the main rise in design history. In that case, it is hardly surprising that architecture supplies the thread; design is considered, almost by necessity, as an extension of architecture. For example, the major "heroes" of the course are architect-designers such as Henry Van de Velde, Mart Stam, and Gerrit Rietveld. In that sense and in its general concentration on the development of the work of individual designers across their careers and across a range of conditions, it follows and also modifies the Pevsnerian tradition. Pevsnerian also is the emphasis on stylistic analysis. However, the course departs from the straightjackets of Modernist histories. The introduction contains a design case study on Norman Bel Geddes, and the course includes units on British design and the electric home, the garden cities movement, and mechanical services. Organizing the course made evident at least two of the problems of doing design history. Although the primary research (for example, into the archives of Heals, the London furniture store) disclosed archives and materials from which a design history could be developed, this abundance of potential material also disclosed the lack of a conceptual framework within which to make sense of it all. Unlike design, architecture has well-developed schemes of interpretation. Much of the history of

38) One of the most interesting developments offered by the Open University courses is the use of video and television to illuminate architecture in particular. The possibilities of this in relation to design history ought to be a subject of investigation. What other subject could benefit from video more than design history?

39) Although, in Italy, the course was taken very seriously. It was exhibited as part of the 1976 Venice Biennale. Six of the programs were shown on main-channel Italian television, attracting an audience of approximately 300,000 and considerable critical debate. (Information provided by Tim Benton.)

architecture is concerned with the understanding of the building itself. By analyzing the building through plans, site photographs (often taken by the researcher himself) and building documentation, the wider import of the design solution is perceived. In design history, this is much more difficult to do. The kind of information (for example, detailed scale drawings) on which so much architectural history is based is often lacking in design. Where drawings do exist, the lack of systematic conventions for interpretation renders them much more difficult to use than conventionalized architectural drawings.[40]

40) From a conversation with Tim Benton, Summer 1983.

But there is a second problem. Information is relevant in terms of what things are. If nothing else, the *tradition* of architecture establishes a certain role for buildings and the built environment. What do designed objects or images stand for? Are they also cultural icons or indexes of a complex process of production and consumption of commodities? How are they to be understood if we cannot define what they are? For Pevsner this was not a problem. In *Pioneers,* a smooth and easy elision exists between artifacts and architecture. (The plethora of architect-designers in the twentieth century seems to bear out Pevsner's approach.) The incorporation of design into the course was not so easily achieved. Its adoption threatened to disrupt the coherence of the Modernist history. Tim Benton's opinion now is that much of what was separated from the main historical-Modernist stream, for example, the electric home unit, should have been more fully integrated into the main historical scheme, even though this would have made the "heroic" Modernist history much more complex and equivocal.[41] The problems of trying to integrate very diverse phenomena into a narrative history that until that point had established a wonderful simplicity prevented this from happening.

41) From a conversation with Tim Benton, Summer 1983.

This point implies that the history of Modernism, which had been primarily an architectural history, cannot remain unaltered by the incorporation of the history of design. This leads to the development of a more complex and rounded Modernist history. The ideological and esthetic or theoretical history as an avant-garde phenomenon is united with a broader history of social and industrial developments. In addition, the focus shifts from Modernism per se to the unraveling of its *meaning* and *function* in the present phase of capitalist development. This is accomplished by combining the self-conscious Modernist developments with the more anonymous developments in technique, industrial production, and consumerism.

In practice this has begun to happen, first, with the emerging interest in the period since 1945, but more notably in the attention being given to American design. A contradiction lurking in Pevsner's *Pioneers* was the advocacy of design for the machine and, hence, for mass design, combined with an abhorrence of the realities of mass designing in the modern world. As a counterpoint to

Pevsner's history and European work in general, Penny Sparke in Britain and Jeffrey Meikle and Arthur Pulos in the United States are asserting the validity of American design contributions, particularly the American system of manufactures and the development of professional design consultants in the 1930s.[42]

These histories constitute more than patriotic flag waving. They are highly relevant to the debate over Modernism, because they challenge the notion of what it is to be modern. For Pevsner this meant to have a self-conscious awareness of design's social role and its progression toward a rational universalism. Indeed, one was modern to the extent that one was aware of the significance of design *as an ideal.* For Americans, to be modern in the esthetic or design theoretical sense is acceptable, but of more import is to be modern in the economic and technological sense, to be in tune with the most progressive developments of American capitalism. Pevsner, on the other hand, would have the social possibilities of technology and rationalism freed from the limitations and distorting mechanisms of the market.

If the modern is to be defined in this new way, then the study of it requires a new orientation. The focus must shift away from Modernism in the European sense, as it does in the studies referred to above. Attention must turn to issues of design organization, and to the relation of design to the wider manufacturing and consuming process, as well as to economics for evidence that can account for these kinds of design developments. Once the designer is considered to be working in society at large rather than within the milieu of the avant-garde, then the arena of investigation must shift from institutional study to the question of the design profession itself. Questions of "its formation, its function, and the legal and structural limitations upon it" then become central.[43]

3. A focus on issues of design organization. The third area of work in recent history is design organization. "Proper" design history begins with such issues because no matter how diverse the subject, design organization deals with the changed situation of designing in the industrial world. If there is a clear thread at all discernible in the history of design in industrial societies, it is that design in the process of production has become separated from the act of making and, therefore, has increasingly become a process of conceiving rather than realizing form. Whereas it was once sufficient to link the precise evolution of a craft-designed object to a particular socio-technical complex (for example, the workshop and its context as described in George Sturt's autobiographical study *The Wheelwright's Shop*)[44] and then more precisely to the close interaction of material, process, hand-skill, and adaptable patterns and conventions that between them actually realized the object in industrial production, this is no longer possible. Simple coherence is "fragmented, and the complexity of conception and making is exposed by its subdivision

42) The works of Pulos and Sparke have already been mentioned. Meikle's work is *Twentieth Century Limited: Industrial Design in America, 1925-1939* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1979). The subject is now a highly fashionable one for design historians. However, concentration on the most overt designers (Loewy and so forth) is likely to distort considerably the wider understanding of the commercial role of design in the United States in the 1930s and its relation to the U.S. economy and society.

43) Jonathan Woodham, *The Industrial Designer and the Public* (London: Pembridge Press, 1983).

44) George Sturt, *The Wheelwright's Shop* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1923).

into a series of specialized activities. These processes are interlinked, but in relationships often remote and impersonal,"[45] having to do not only with design questions, but also increasingly with those of company corporate policy and political or legal matters. Hence history needs to explore this arena and Penny Sparke's argument arises: "If there is a nucleus at the center of the design hsitory complex, then this approximates to it, providing essential material for any wider historical discussion of design."[46]

45) John Heskett, *Industrial Design* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1980), 7.

46) Penny Sparke, "Design History: Fad or Function? Some Afterthoughts," *Design History Society Newsletter* 3 (December 1978).

In practice, design organization is the core concern of works as chronologically and methodologically diverse as John Heskett's *Industrial Design,* Jonathan Woodham's *The Industrial Designer and the Public,* and Penny Sparke's *Consultant Design.* Justification exists for the argument that this is the core that provides essential material for other studies. Natural extensions of this relation lead either to technological and industrial histories, to institutional studies, or to studies of the consumer or the design purchasing and design-affected public. In specific cases, design organization is also a subject that social and economic historians have become interested in, unsurprisingly as it is quintessentially a socioeconomic relationship that is *relatively* unmediated by design esthetic or design theoretical issue.

The intervention of socioeconomic historians into design history should serve as a reminder that although Penny Sparke's argument contains an important truth, it also contains the possibility of distorting the relationships involved in designing. The conditions surrounding the emergence of a designed object or a particular kind of designing involve complex social relations. The fact that these relations are frequently described *only* in design terms obscures their social or socioeconomic aspects. To what extent, then, does the design organizational approach limit the explanations of designed phenomena to what can be explained from within design?

The problem was summed up by Jon Bird in an early paper for the Design History Society: "To separate the history, criticism, and evaluation of cultural objects from the total social, cultural, and economic conditions of the society that contains them is to isolate a set of factors present in the designed object — factors that can broadly be categorized as esthetic — while simultaneously ignoring the fact [that] the designer is a member of a social group and thus comes under specific social and economic conditions, shares certain values and beliefs, and, in the widest sense of the term, represents in his or her work an ideological position. No designer working today can, if he bothers to think about it, maintain a professional attitude that does not at some point become contiguous with one or more aspects of the economic and political basis of Western capitalism. Even the most extreme conceptualist deals in "commodities" that possess an exchange value. Thus, the products of the designer as either enforcing commodity fetishism, or, as in the case of people like Papanek, opposing capitalist production techniques with

methods superficially more sympathetic to specific cultural contexts, are all expressing an ideology that should be the critic's or historian's function to uncover, so far as it is possible, through analysis of the object as a cultural fact in a complex series of interrelated meanings and significations."[47]

47) Jon Bird, "Art and Design as a Sign System," in *Leisure in the Twentieth Century* (London: Design Council, 1978), 86-91.

Bird argues that the immediate context of design production or reception is not a wide enough perspective from which to understand design. Although emphasis on this context might disclose why a particular design rather than another came into being, concentrating on this issue alone prevents understanding of the wider context of meaning and production and of the role and functioning of design in Western capitalism. Furthermore, if objects and images as the forms of design and its practice are aspects of capitalism, then design loses its neutrality. Bird would argue that it is difficult to deal just with design and far more necessary to examine critically the ideological role that design and designers perform. However, the concepts and the practices of design cannot be accepted without criticism. The issue, then, is not beginning with "design" and working from there, but "bracketing out" major concepts. For example, rather than accepting design as a given, an attempt is made instead to understand how and why design has developed and whose interests it serves. Bird argues that only from this perspective can the complex functions of design be understood.

4. A focus on the social relations of various kinds of design. The fourth area of work has assumed Bird's essential points and is a natural outgrowth of the focus on issues of design organization. The more design and designing are studied, the more important a broad context becomes. The distinction among the four areas is more on the degree to which context is viewed as a tool for critical examination of concepts and practices than on the question of context per se. John Heskett's book *Industrial Design* deals with both the organizational and social strands of history writing, but his work on Germany, although emphasizing visual and organizational factors equally, is more critical in orientation. In particular, Heskett has shattered the myth of a symbiotic relationship between good design and democratic social formations. Through detailed research he has shown that equating good design only with the Bauhaus, the Weimar Republic, and the social and industrial structure of the Federal Republic of Germany, is historically untenable, as is the identification of only bad design with the Nazis and the German Democratic Republic. By showing that the Bauhaus design ethic continued into the Nazi period in the work of Wilhelm Wagenfeld and by demonstrating that the simple equations of design values and social formations (Weimar always equals modern, progress, and the rational; Nazism always equals reaction, the *Volk*, and the irrational) are mistaken, Heskett implies the need for a fundamental re-assessment of the relation of societies to types of design practice.

He also asserts the need for a complex of modes, performing specific functions and responding to a particular set of circumstances rather than a single mode of designing as characterizing a period.[48]

Heskett's historical approach and Bird's more theoretical one raise the central question of design's role and functioning in industrial capitalism. This vital issue surprisingly has had little direct expression. Yet it has been touched upon implicitly in most of the histories that fall within the first three areas of design history and it has been called for repeatedly by several professionals involved in design organization. Although design's role and functioning in industrial capitalism might be the real subject matter of the books by Sparke and Woodham since this relationship fundamentally underpins the particular relations they are concerned with, neither discusses the issue in any detail.

However, design historical and analytical developments in Europe have directly confronted this issue. For example, Wolfgang Fritz Haug has developed a theory of commodity esthetics (Warenästhetik) from a Marxist perspective. By differentiating between production (identified with needs) and consumption (defined as artificially created wants) and by exploring the imagery of products and advertisements and their role in capitalist production and consumption, the theory addresses the role of design in commodity production. Gert Selle has formulated a theory of design as an expression of social relations from a comparable perspective.[49]

Both Haug's and Selle's work relate to the more general social and political aspects of art, architecture and design as manifested through the collective work of the Ulmer Verein für Kunstwissenschaft, the left-wing West German association of art and architectural historians that has been stimulating and focusing work on the sociopolitical aspects of architecture and design. This group sees the forms of art, architecture, and design as being produced within capitalism, but conversely playing a significant ideological role in capitalist culture. This group's work is directly comparable to work being produced in East Germany. In *Das Bauhaus in Weimar*, Karl-Heinz Hüter has written a detailed study of the specific economic and political conditions in Weimar and Thuringia in the early 1920s and their relation to the Bauhaus. British and American scholars are used to attacks on the left-wing or totalitarian aspects of functionalism but Hüter and Lothar Kühne reject this view, contending that the Bauhaus and 1920s Modernism are products of a phase of the capitalist economy. Kühne argues for what he regards as a genuine functionalism in *Gegenstand und Raum, (Objects and Space)* a discussion of the esthetics of architecture and practical everyday objects. Based on a detailed examination of the relation between forms of work and property relations and the design of esthetic and technical objects, he sees objects as necessarily integrated into changing social, technical, and property relations. He also emphatically rejects the determination of form by

48) See John Heskett, "Modernism and Archaicism in Design in the Third Reich," *Block* 3 (1980), and "Art and Design in Nazi Germany," *History Workshop* 6 (1979).

49) Gert Selle, *Ideologie und Utopie des Designs* (Köln: DuMont, 1968), and *Die Geschichte des Design s in Deutschland von 1870 bis heute* (Köln: DuMont, 1978).

monetary relations, as in capitalism, instead preferring a design practice based on real needs.

The issue of real needs has come under scrutiny in the more critical French tradition. The sociologist Jean Baudrillard has been interested in objects and their place in capitalist structures for a long time. Continuing the semiotic perspective, Baudrillard makes an incisive analysis of design's socioeconomic role in late capitalism and adopts a cultural approach in his attempt to break with some of the illusions of functionalism. Baudrillard's drawback is that his jargon-ridden prose is not always clear and his critique is not as grounded in history as it might be.[50]

50) Jean Baudrillard, *For a Critique of the Political Economy of the Sign* (St. Louis: Telos Press, 1981), especially chapters 1, 3, 7, and 10.

Italian design history perhaps is even more cultural than social. Related to the dominance of high-level quasi-Marxist architectural history and criticism, design history and criticism in Italy attempt to grasp the difficult connection of designed material to sociocultural forms and relations. This approach is the thrust of the highly developed, theoretical essays in two exhibition catalogs: *Italy: The New Domestic Landscape*,[51] and *Italian Re-evolution: Design in Italian Society in the Eighties*.[52] The position is made abundantly clear in the editorial foreword to *Album*, the recent design annual edited by Mario Bellini: "If 'design' means the planning of everything connected to our built physical environment, it would be sufficient to start from this banal statement (linguistically obvious, but historically still controversial) to produce a magazine that had not yet perhaps been produced. Industrial production exists, for example, of cutlery or tables; with the discipline of Industrial Design, its related schools, profession, and industrial design journals. Interiors exist, for example dining rooms, the discipline of Interior Design, the interior designer's profession and the related schools, magazines, etc. But when we eat, work in the office, or travel by car, are we the 'inhabitants' of an architecture, are we 'users' of equipment and furniture, or are we 'characters' on a stage set for us? Or are we not, rather, the participants in a rite that has its places, its tools, its furnishings and vestments, in short, its complex culture."[53]

51) Emilio Ambasz, editor, *Italy: The New Domestic Landscape* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1972).

52) Piero Sartogo, editor *Italian Re-Evolution: Design in Italian Society in the Eighties* (La Jolla, CA: La Jolla Museum of Contemporary Art, 1982).

53) Mario Bellini, editor, *Album 1* (Milan: Electa, 1982).

The emphasis on cultural aspects of design meaning, which is the real thrust of these essays, rather than design production or reception, connects Italian work to some of the new English design history, which falls on the axis between the Birmingham Center for Contemporary Cultural Studies and a group at Middlesex Polytechnic that produces the journal *Block* and runs one of the two main British Master of Arts courses in design history. The primary emphasis of this work is the study of representations, which owes its origins to the semiotic cultural criticism pioneered by Roland Barthes.

Semiotics has made considerable inroads into British and American cultural studies in fields such as literary and film criticism. In its developed forms, it is very important in media and photographic

image analysis. However, the thrust of the Middlesex-Birmingham work (by Lisa Tickner, Jon Bird, John Walker, Tony Fry, Phil Goodall, and Dick Hebdige) has been to use a variety of sophisticated theoretical approaches to move away from the analysis of purely graphic imagery toward analysis of material and popular culture. This shift has brought them into the field of design history. Dick Hebdige, beginning with his work on subcultures, has increasingly moved toward the study of their material elements. In a series of essays in *Block*, he has explored such issues as popular taste between 1935 and 1962,[54] the significance of the motor scooter in the style and life-style of the "Mods,"[55] and Pop style.[56] These essays have been written from the important perspective that "social relations and processes are then appropriated by individuals only through the forms in which they are represented to those individuals."[57] By forms he means designed material forms, as well as forms of ideas and ideologies.

54) Dick Hebdige, "Towards a Cartography of Taste, 1935-1962," *Block* 4 (1981): 39-56.

55) Dick Hebdige, "Object as Image: The Italian Scooter Cycle," *Block* 5 (1981): 44-64.

56) Dick Hebdige, "In Poor Taste," *Block* 8 (1983): 54-68.

57) Hebdige, *Subculture*, 13.

Phil Goodall has analyzed the role of design in determining gender relations in a similar way, and Tony Fry, with a background as a cultural theorist and professional designer, has written sharp critiques of design history[58] and a very detailed case-study analysis of the Olivetti Lexicon 80 typewriter, which is considered as "a designed commodity formed at the fusion of three design object areas... product as form, product as representation, and typewriter as commodified labor process... (the whole) addressed in the economic and cultural setting of corporate capitalism."[59]

58) Fry, "Design History: A Debate?" 14-18. See also his review of J. Meikle's *Twentieth Century Limited*, in *Radical Science Journal* 10 (1980): 182-85.

59) Tony Fry, "Unpacking the Typewriter," *Block* 7 (1982): 36-47.

This approach is as much analytic as historical for the very good reason that to grasp the effects of designing or the possible efficacy of a designed object or image, it is necessary to understand rather than take for granted what designing as an activity is and what it achieves. However, the understanding is necessarily formal, as well. There is an interesting relationship between the asking of the question why (for example, why does this image exist, and why is a particular designed object famous?) and the immediate necessity to answer it partly by means of a functional and contextual analysis and partly by uncovering the objects or the images own workings.

The analysis of objects or images understood as cultural icons was Barthes's method in *Mythologies* and in his later studies. John Walker has undertaken an excellent analysis of the London Underground Map, which has potentially wide applicability. In a model of an analytical approach to understanding designed phenomena, Walker historically locates the emergence of the map within the context of the expansion and modernization of London transportation, explains the complex of functions that the map was intended to fill and those that it currently fills, and relates visual form and organization to the range of functions it performs by tabulating its visual elements.

60) John Walker, "The London Transport Diagram," *Icographic* 9/10 (1979).

The virtue of Walker's method of analysis is that it demystifies design and designing. It therefore stands at the opposite pole from

the work previously mentioned in this article that increases the mystique of design and designer. The effect of the approach mentioned earlier is to marginalize design; design becomes a special activity applied only to certain phenomena. The effect of Walker's approach is to recover design as a process comprehensible by all because it is related to experiences everyone undertakes. Whereas the earlier approach exalts design as a creative activity undertaken only by magnificently talented individuals, but denies that design has wider social efficacy or ideological import, Walker reverses this proposition, too. Design, he suggests, is fundamentally an ordinary activity.

In a study of a photograph taken by Margaret Bourke-White, Walker shows the extent to which the photograph is given meaning by the potential "contents" embodied in its organization by the photographer's actions.[61] However, he also shows that this is done in the context of the editorial process in which that particular photograph was selected and not a related one by the same photographer. This kind of work leads to an increased appreciation of the power of designed images, objects, and buildings to express and determine behavioral roles. *Express, determine,* and *behavioral* are all inadequate terms. They are the continuing legacy of theoretical traditions that analytically and socially oriented histories are still struggling against.

61) John Walker, "Teaching Art History," *Block* 1 (1979): 2-7.

Dick Hebdige's work, particularly *Subculture: The Meaning of Style*, deals marginally with conventional design history, but is at the center of the relation of material culture, images, and forms of representation to social relations and processes. So, too, is the emerging feminist analysis of design. The feminist analysis is particularly important to architectural history and criticism, especially in the United States, and to the analysis of images in the mass media, ranging from the study of cosmetics packaging to visual pornography. In addition, feminist design history possesses the supreme virtue of refusing the distinction between design and social life that characterizes so much design thinking, practice, and historical work. Purists who reject feminist design history on the grounds that it is insufficiently concerned with design are ignoring one of its important aspects. It is precisely the feminist analysis that relates the design of things intimately and concretely to the ways in which objects and images affect us. This should not be surprising; after all, it is the place in people's lives that design in general would claim for itself.

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