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# Oxford

DICTIONARY OF

# MODERN

# DESIGN

# 牛津现代设计词典



上海外语教育出版社

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Oxford Dictionary of

# Modern Design

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Jonathan M. Woodham

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# Acknowledgements

Having been nearly 30 years I would like to thank colleagues in Britain and around the world who have offered advice, friendly criticism, and comradeship during that time. Over that period I have taught countless students, many of whom have made a strong impression, offered interesting ideas, and asked awkward but important questions. Some now chair committees on which I sit; others have become successful academics, researchers, and writers, from whom I have learnt a great deal. I would also like to thank friends at the University of Brighton who have done more than most to shape, develop, and support design historical studies. I hope they will all be interested in this dictionary and see it as a useful addition to the literature of design.

[MW]

Brighton, 2004

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*Brighton, 2004*

JMW



# Introduction

Writing a dictionary of modern design has been a challenging enterprise, given the changing nuances of the words 'design' and 'designer' over the past century and a half, the period covered by this volume. Now, in the early 21st century, even these words have become so pervasive in everyday language that their meanings have become dissipated. In addition to terms such as 'designer labels' and 'designer clothes' that emerged in the 1960s, other descriptors that entered common parlance in the 1980s, such as 'designer water', 'designer drugs', and 'designer stubble', began to render the word 'designer' less meaningful.

So how do we find a definition of design? Design is present in all aspects of daily life. It is involved with the world of work, in terms of environment, dress codes, equipment, and furnishing, even the processes and sequencing of work itself. It pervades every aspect of the domestic landscape, in decor, furniture, fittings, and appliances. In the world of leisure, too, design may relate to clothing, accessories, and equipment—whether skis, skateboards, tennis racquets, toys, theme park rides, or even outboard motors—as well as to the wider environment of cinemas, restaurants, fitness centres, or shopping malls. Design is also an integral ingredient in the form, function, and appearance of all kinds of transport, public, or private. It influences the appearance of everything encountered during the course of a day, ranging from the layout of newspapers, books, and magazines to the allure of advertising, packaging, and other ephemera.

Such a focus on 'design' in the vocabulary is evident also in the media—advertising, the increasing range of design-oriented publications and awards, television programmes, and the emerging prevalence of designer celebrities—and reinforced by the growing number of museums and collections devoted to design. That most major museums that collect and exhibit modern design present a very similar narrative reflects the fact that design has become an increasingly global commodity. The late 20th-century industry of museum and collection making gave rise to the establishment in 1989 of the Design Museum, London; in 1991 of the permanent collection of the Centre de Création Industrielle (CCI), Paris; and in 1999 of the Museu do Design, Lisbon.

Corporate enterprises have also been part of this, for example the Vitra Museum, inaugurated in 1989, and the Piaggio Museum, in 2000. In their own ways all of these collections perpetuate certain design mythologies, endorsing particular views of the ways in which design may be predicated upon celebrated designers, notable objects, or the singular aesthetic and cultural contributions that the individual corporations have made.

Although many collections of 19th-century design offer a richer diet of national perspectives and complexities than many of their 20th-century counterparts, in the 19th century itself many museums of design and the decorative arts were concerned with ideas of improving taste. Highly influential on the formation of a number of other major European and Scandinavian museums in the second half of the 19th century, the Victoria and Albert Museum in London had its mid-century origins in the Museum of Manufactures established by Henry Cole. The core collection of the latter was centred on objects purchased from the Great Exhibition of 1851 with the aid of a government grant. There was a gallery devoted to the display of 'Examples of False Principles in Decoration' that epitomized the outlook of the design reform movement, seeking to improve the taste of artisans, manufacturers, and the public. Notions of 'improvement' and 'false principles' of design also underpinned Nikolaus Pevsner's *Pioneers of the Modern Movement: From William Morris to Walter Gropius*, first published in 1936 but later substantially revised and enlarged and retitled *Pioneers of Modern Design*. This line of thinking was what informed the 'Good Design' philosophy of a number of organizations and awards. Such ideas were embodied in the aims of the Council of Industrial Design in Britain (established 1944), the Rat für Formgebung (Design Council, established in 1953) in Germany, and the Industrial Design Council of Australia (established 1960). This ethos also pervaded the outlook of the Rinascente and Bijenkorf department stores in Italy and Holland respectively, and the Museum of Modern Art, New York (established 1929).

Like many contemporary museum displays much of the writing and exhibiting of design over the past two decades in particular has centred on narratives of design success, divorced from many of the wider social, political, cultural, economic, and technological circumstances in which it is manufactured, marketed, and consumed. The design press often played a leading role in generating such an outlook, generally acting both as shop window and information exchange for the design

profession. Its attitude to views that deviated from an orthodoxy emphasizing the significance of individual designers, design movements, and organizations was often hostile. For example, when Adrian Forty published his seminal *Objects of Desire: Design and Society 1750-1930* in 1986 it received a number of harsh reviews in the design press, including one in the often more open-minded British periodical *Blueprint*, whose reviewer was not only unhappy with Forty's dismissal of the 'widespread assumption that individuals are the masters of their own will and destiny' but also with the fact that 'Le Corbusier is scarcely mentioned; Loos, Voysey, the Werkbund and Art Nouveau not at all'. Such a view seemed to suggest that a history of design that had at its core social, economic, technological, and cultural change as constituent elements of the world in which design is conceived, manufactured, marketed, and, most importantly, consumed was not appropriate unless liberally populated with 'names'.

The history of design as an academic discipline recognized by the establishment of specialist degree courses and the publication of significant scholarly research has had a comparatively short life. This may be compared to many other disciplines in the arts and humanities, even in relation to one of the history of design's closest family disciplines, art history. The impetus for the emergence of the history of design in Britain in the 1960s stemmed from a national requirement that all courses in practical design disciplines in higher education should devote 20 per cent of their time to historical and complementary studies. Those involved in teaching the history of design as part of this new curriculum structure had few readily available texts to call upon and were themselves often either graduates in the history of art or other arts and humanities disciplines with little training in the visual arts. Traditional art history at the time was still largely rooted in the principles of artistic 'pioneers' from Giotto to Cézanne, masters and pupils, styles and their transmission, art movements and, to a lesser extent, wider concerns such as patronage. Many of the available publications relating to the historical fields of design activity were written by connoisseurs or specialist museum curators, and were neither accessible nor appropriate for study in schools of art and design. Furthermore, they rarely focused upon the immediate past and were thus generally less appealing to students immersed in contemporary practice. As a result Pevsner's well-illustrated and well-written *Pioneers of Modern Design* seemed an attractive starting point. However, despite a degree

of contextualization of social and technological change, his account centred on the artistic creativity of well-known designers or 'pioneers' in the shift away from the 'false principles' of ornament, so derided by the design reformers of the latter half of the 19th century. This led inevitably towards the establishment of Modernism, an outlook firmly rooted in the spirit of the 20th century, its new technologies, materials, and abstract forms. By the 1960s, when the seeds of design history were being sown in British higher education, many of the tenets of Modernism were also being challenged on several fronts.

In the later 1950s, for example, the influential Hochschule für Gestaltung (College of Design, HfG) at Ulm, a post-Second World War German counterbalance to the Bauhaus of the interwar years directed by Walter Gropius from 1919 to 1928, marked a shift away from prevalent notions of the primacy of the individual creative designer or 'pioneer'. Furthermore, the extent to which individual designers were able to resolve problems in a period of increasing complexity and rapid social and technological change was being questioned. At the HfG, under the influence of Tomás Maldonado and others, there was a distinct move away from the traditional curricular emphasis on *making* towards a more scientific and analytical approach to design. Students would spend up to 50 per cent of their time studying other, design-related, subjects, such as social anthropology, cultural history, and statistical analysis. The implications of the 'scientific operationalism' of the HfG were taken up by the emerging Design Methods movement and also reflected in design management approaches in the 1960s.

Modernism came under siege through the writings of the French sociologist Roland Barthes, writer and academic Umberto Eco, historian and cultural theorist Gillo Dorfles, and architect designer Robert Venturi, all of whom looked to explore the realities of a richer visual syntax that drew upon popular culture as one of the major ingredients of Postmodernism. In Italy those associated with the progressive Anti-Design and Radical Design movements also sought to energize what its participants saw as the increasing social and cultural impoverishment of design, whilst in Britain the sheer exuberance and ephemeral nature of Pop did much to undermine the orthodoxy of Modernism. Fordism, a mainstay of capitalist enterprise since the early years of the 20th century when Henry Ford introduced moving assembly lines, was also in decline as many industrial, production-based economies inclined towards more service-based, post-industrial alternatives.

Large-scale Fordist production runs for homogeneous mass-consumer markets were replaced by more flexible modes of manufacture that catered more effectively for the increasingly varied demands of a pluralist, Postmodern society where consumer choice, rather than manufacturing dictate, became increasingly significant. Against such a backdrop it is perhaps understandable that in the period following the establishment of the first specialist free-standing degree courses in design history in Britain in the mid-1970s there was a tendency to contest substance, ingredients, and methods relating to the history of design. However, by 1987, when the *Journal of Design History* was launched, potential links were seen with other disciplines that explored material culture. These included anthropology, architectural history, art history, business history, craft history, cultural studies, design management studies, economic and social history, history of science and technology, and sociology.

Although the discipline of design history became more adventurous in its range of interdisciplinary thinking and exploration of the ways in which it could afford rich insights into other fields, one of its other characteristics in the later 20th and early 21st centuries was its comparatively limited geographical embrace. Given that much of mainstream history of design has been centred on the products of the industrial process (and thus focused on the industrialized world) this is understandable, although there is still much to be learnt about design in many of the under-represented subcontinents, regions, and countries such as South America, India, China, and the Pacific Rim. The heavy European and North American concentration of much design historical publication and research has given impetus to a number of international initiatives that set out to redress the balance. This began in 1999 with an international conference in Barcelona entitled *Historiar desde la periferia, historia i historias del disseny* that sought to develop the profile of the subject in the Spanish-speaking world. A second conference was held in Havana, Cuba, in the following year, with a third in Istanbul in 2002. The latter, entitled *Mind the Map: Design History beyond Boundaries*, attracted contributions from many other countries not generally included in design historical and design studies. Papers relating to design activity and history in 27 countries were presented at this conference. In October 2003 the Design History Workshop Japan and its journal *Design History Japan* was launched, further disseminating design



historical research, pedagogy, and publication in new geographical arenas.

It is clearly impossible to include all facets of design over the 150 years that this dictionary addresses, although a considerable effort has been made to reflect the disciplinary richness of the history of design. The vast majority of entries relate to mass-produced goods, designers and manufacturers, critics and theorists, although key entries relating to fields such as graphics and clothing design have also been included. Given the way in which design impinges on all aspects of everyday life, as indicated at the beginning of this introduction, it is inevitable that hard choices have been made, with some entries included at the expense of others. A balance has been struck between the various constituencies outlined in this essay. These range from the generally linear narratives of museum collections and the cultural celebration inherent in the majority of media representations of design to the more inclusive coverage in contemporary design historical thinking and practice. This volume's scope is broader than that customarily attempted in previous dictionaries of design. The profile of design as a significant reflection of popular culture has been considered alongside other aspects of the discipline that have impacted upon, and continue to impact upon, everyday life, as well as to cover adequately 'designer culture'.

Something of this may be indicated by reference to the coverage of a number of letters of the alphabet. 'M', for example, includes such entries as Charles Rennie Mackintosh, William Morris, Jasper Morrison, and Alphonse Mucha, but also McDonald's, Mercedes-Benz, Moskovitch, Marimekko, Matsushita, Meccano, and the Munich Vereinigte Werkstätten für Kunst im Handwerk. Other aspects are reflected in the inclusion of the Mainichi Design Prize, Modernism, the Museum of Modern Art, New York, Tomás Maldonado, and Marshall McLuhan. I have made considerable efforts to extend the geographical, as well as the subject, range of the dictionary although this has proved difficult given the paucity of available material in several fields. However, there are optimistic signs for the future. Indications are that the position will change as the history of design is taken up positively as a subject for research, publication, and curriculum development in an increasing number of countries. I hope that this dictionary will help further to stimulate such work.

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