



History of Modern Design

David Raizman

History of Modern Design

Graphics and Products since the Industrial Revolution



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Preface

The material and methodology for this book were developed over eight years of teaching a course entitled *History of Modern Design* in the College of Media Arts & Design at Drexel University, and almost twenty years of general undergraduate art history teaching experience. During these past eight years it has been rewarding to hear students reflect upon everyday objects in relation to the values and attitudes of their time, to consider the complex interplay of technological, commercial, social, and esthetic considerations that deepen our understanding of their beauty and the range of their meanings.

One of the persistent difficulties in offering this course over the years has been the issue of a textbook. History of fine art courses are far more common than those in the history of design, and there is no shortage of art-history texts to provide images and narrative to accompany general and more specialized courses relating to a variety of periods and movements. Yet despite the many colleges and universities that educate professional industrial, interior, graphic, merchandising, textile, and fashion designers, I found in my teaching that no introductory text served the needs of a course that integrated material from a broad range of specialized design fields over the past three centuries. Rather than being limited to a single area like graphic design or industrial design, the present survey covers the history of these fields in relation to one another and the common themes they share, whether technology, production, consumption, or reform.

At first I relied upon a list of reserve readings, and in time supplemented these with my own outlines for lecture notes available through the university's computing services center. Subsequently I received a grant from the university to create a website that allowed an appropriate format to be developed for the presentation of a combination of text links and images for study and student preparation. Putting these notes into book form has been for me a formidable task. The required reading, travel, and study took me far from my own original training in the art of medieval Spain, requiring substantial historical perspective to provide a context for studying the objects and a desire to follow through with combining perspectives from both

consumption and production for each chapter. In the course of writing and re-writing, I tried to organize the material both chronologically and thematically. Briefly stated, the themes are:

SPECIALIZATION AND THE TECHNOLOGY OF MATERIALS
AND PRODUCTION
REFORM AND THE ROLE OF STANDARDS FOR DESIGN
THE EQUALITY OF THE ARTS
DESIGN FOR MECHANIZED PRODUCTION
"GOOD" DESIGN AND POPULAR CULTURE
PLURALISM AND DESIGN

In preparing this *History of Modern Design* I have benefited from a number of previous studies, beginning with most students' (of my generation anyway) introduction to modern design history, Sir Nikolaus Pevsner's *Pioneers of Modern Design*, and including more recent titles such as Penny Sparke's *An Introduction to Design and Culture in the Twentieth Century* (1986), Adrian Forty's *Objects of Desire* (1986), and Richard Woodham's *Twentieth-Century Design* (1997). There is also the excellent series of books by a range of specialists published by Oxford University Press. These include a number of volumes devoted to period styles (*Arts and Crafts*, *Art Nouveau*, *Art Deco*, *Bauhaus*, for example), as well as John Heskett's excellent *Industrial Design* (1980). Also, Phillip Meggs's *History of Graphic Design* is a most informative survey of that material with a strong emphasis in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

As I began teaching the history of modern design, I found myself drawn to the period rooms and decorative arts galleries of museums rather than to their more crowded painting and sculpture galleries. As a result I've been pleased to observe, in my adopted city of Philadelphia, that the Philadelphia Museum of Art has redesigned its galleries to merge fine with decorative art in a way which can only aid in the appreciation of our subject. It is also encouraging to note the recent increase in art-historical journals that have devoted issues to the applied arts, and those monographs that have done much to promote interest in the history of design. It is necessary to mention a few of the latter, as

they greatly aided in formulating many of the sections for the individual chapters that follow: Nancy Troy's *Modernism and the Decorative Arts in France. Art Nouveau to Le Corbusier*, the Guggenheim Museum's massive catalogue for *The Great Utopia. The Russian and Soviet Avant-garde, 1915–1932* exhibition, the American Craft Museum's catalogues for their series of exhibitions on domestic design entitled *The Ideal Home* beginning with the period from 1890–1910, and Debora Silverman's *Art Nouveau in Fin-de-Siècle France: Politics, Psychology, and Style*. Many of these books incorporate ideas drawn from a significant literature on the study of consumption, stemming less from art history than from social anthropology and the field of popular and mass culture.

Aside from those mentioned above, a number of exhibitions and their accompanying catalogues introduced me to a wide range of material that has been incorporated into this text. These include *German Graphic Design* (2001), *Godwin* (2000), and *Swedish Glass* (1997) at the Bard Graduate School in New York; *Henry Dreyfuss* at the Cooper Hewitt (1998), the traveling collection of chairs and other furniture from the Vitra Museum in Switzerland (1999–2000) at the Allentown Museum and the Cooper Hewitt; *Mackintosh* (1994) and *American Modernism* (2000) at the Metropolitan Museum of Art (1994); the *Aluminum by Design* exhibition at the Carnegie Museum in Pittsburgh and the Cooper Hewitt (2000–2001); the *Art in Rome in the Eighteenth Century* exhibition in Philadelphia (2000); *Will Price* at the small Arthur Ross Gallery in the Fine Arts Library at the University of Pennsylvania; and the extensive *Art Nouveau* exhibition at the Victoria and Albert Museum in London and the National Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C. (2000).

Recent monographs stemming from renewed interest in A. W. N. Pugin, Christopher Dresser, Russel Wright, C. R. Mackintosh and others are filling gaps in our knowledge and bringing new material to light, including the publication of primary source material and a wide range of visual material: they are among the numerous healthy signs of growing public and scholarly interest in an area with wide-ranging appeal to students, artists and designers, art historians, and collectors. Great Britain remains most active in the field of design history, through a variety of conferences, the *Journal of Design History*, the Design Research Society and its on-line publication *Design Research News* (DRN), and the number of courses offered at colleges and universities. Finally, the journal *Design Issues* not only contributes articles on the methods of designers but also frequently offers historical perspectives and reviews. It is my hope that the approach to this introductory text will be viewed as

balanced and tolerant, and that the analyses will promote appreciation and suggest the synthesis of description and a framework based upon the interconnections of social, commercial, esthetic, and technological perspectives on design. In addition, as a teacher I have always enjoyed the challenge of comparing works of art from different or even successive time periods that share formal or ideological similarities. I am happy for the students in the College of Media Arts & Design who have made the study of design history part of their education and hope that what they have learned will in some way be incorporated into the contributions they are certain to make to their chosen design professions.

NOVEMBER, 2002
PHILADELPHIA, PA

Acknowledgments

This volume appears as a result of the support and encouragement of many individuals and institutions. From the outset I want to acknowledge my dissertation advisor at the University of Pittsburgh, now Professor Emeritus John Williams, who has remained a mentor, friend, and a supporter of a direction in my research that strayed far from the subject of medieval Spain that we continue to share. I also want to thank another faculty member at my alma mater, Professor David Wilkins, for actively supporting the project through his contacts at Prentice Hall when the manuscript was first submitted for review. David also taught the very first art history course I took as a freshman in 1969, encouraged me to major in the discipline, and made me feel welcome and valued as a student in the Fine Arts Department.

The teaching and administrative positions I have held at Drexel University in Philadelphia have made it possible for me to research and write this introductory volume on the history of modern design. I am grateful to my former dean, J. Michael Adams, for supporting my participation in our London Study Abroad program during the winter term 1999. I also wish to thank my current Dean, Jonathan Estrin, and former Provost, Richard Astro, for taking into account the importance of this project in assigning my teaching and administrative load during the 2000–2001 academic year, and for supporting a critical sabbatical leave during the 2002–2003 academic year.

The most substantial debt I owe for this book is to my students at Drexel University, who have listened and contributed to the trial-and-error presentation of its ideas over a period of more than eight years. The choice of material, its organization, and the framework for presenting that material have all have taken shape in the context of the classroom term-by-term over several years. Testing new approaches, introducing new examples, and revising content and assignments have been a constant challenge, and I have learned much from students' thoughtful responses, essays, and evaluations while preparing the text and illustrations. Observing the creative work of our students as a guest at critiques continues to be a great source of satisfaction, for it permits me to see that the future of design will remain in able hands and imaginative, engaging minds.

Having so many professional designers as colleagues in the College of Media Arts & Design at Drexel University is indeed a blessing, and has stimulated the progress of this book in a number of ways. I have benefited from their expertise in ways too numerous to mention, from casual conversations in hallways and offices, to attending critiques, to specific requests for specialized information. John Langdon and Mark Willie of the Media Arts Department, along with Peter Bartscherer of the Design & Imaging Studio deserve special mention for sharing their knowledge with me on issues related to graphic design and typography, and John also kindly provided several of the line drawings for typefaces and logos that appear among the illustrations. Paul Runyon and Mike Froio provided considerable photographic assistance. I want to thank the staff of the University's Hagerty Library for their help with ordering books, access to archival material, and especially with procuring a substantial amount of interlibrary loan material. It is not possible here to name them all, but their dedication and research assistance in general have been invaluable. Ed Laudenslager of Armstrong & Yoder Printing took an afternoon of his time to walk me through the company printing facilities so that I might gain a first-hand understanding of the modern process of image and text reproduction and color presses. Old friends Betty and John Reilly were living in London when I taught there during the winter 1999 and their kindness and hospitality helped to make that stay especially memorable, along with John Pearson of the Foundation for International Education who arranged so many

museum visits for our class. My brother, Dr. Richard Raizman, invited me to accompany him on two trips to Paris while I was at work on this book. I appreciated his patience during endless tours of period rooms and furnishings in one collection after another, graciously followed by relaxing meals and long walks without any particular agenda. A special thanks is due Professor Nancy Troy of the University of Southern California for commenting on an early draft of what is now the first two parts of this study in 1996, with recommendations to include more vernacular material and introduce other perspectives that I have tied to take to heart. I am also grateful to the anonymous reviewers who suggested areas for improvement and expansion to the original manuscript and the much-enlarged revision that went to press.

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I want to thank my wife, Lucy, and children Becky and Josh, for their patience over a period lasting several years. Visiting buildings and examples of design in museums, collections, historic houses, even flea markets and fairs, has been a part of virtually every family excursion and vacation over the past decade, and my own itineraries and preoccupations at leisure, home, and at the university have frequently taken precedence over the wishes of my family. Now my children are too old to want to go to Disneyworld with their parents. Sorry kids.

Finally I'd like to thank my parents, Albert and Adele Raizman, for allowing me to find and pursue my own interests and inclinations as a student. Rather than offering advice or direction, they permitted me to study what I found stimulating and satisfying, and for this I'm most grateful.

PHILADELPHIA,
SPRING 2003

Introduction

What is Design?

Whether in relation to fashion, software, information, or an array of household products, the term *design* regularly enters our vocabulary to describe some of the most common aspects of our everyday experience. As used throughout this book, the definition of *design* acknowledges two primary meanings found in the *Oxford English Dictionary*. The first refers to the elements of a work of art and an awareness of the order and arrangement of those elements. In this sense the *design* of a writing table (as illustrated, for instance, in figures 1.6, 8.8, or 16.3) consists of the size and proportion of its individual parts, the textures, grains, colors, or other characteristics of the materials used, the motifs or patterns, if any, used in its decoration, and the overall contrasts or harmonies among these various elements. Thus an analysis of design may reveal the intricacies or ease of construction, address issues of use such as durability, efficiency, or convenience, consider the exploration and transformation of materials, and the relative complexity or simplicity of the arrangement of forms.

Defined in this manner *design* is common to all of the visual arts, both fine and applied, and indeed the same sorts of criteria may be analyzed with respect to a wide variety of objects, from paintings and sculptures to engravings, the front-page of a website, or an electric toaster, each based at least in part upon a range of choices or possibilities within a given medium or production technique in relation to an intended audience or viewer. Also linked to this meaning of the term are the series of foundation courses entitled *Design* that are generally required of College and university students majoring in the visual arts in the United States and abroad. Versatility is often a theme in such courses, where students analyze and manipulate basic abstract elements like shapes, colors, textures, and patterns common to a wide range of media in both fine as well as in applied art.

A second broad meaning of *design* refers to the conception for the completed form of an object, often a sketch, model, or set of instructions that is a preliminary stage in the process that leads to a finished product. In some cases artists or craftsmen

execute their own designs. In other cases they experiment directly with materials and processes in the creation of prototypes that are produced or modified for production. In still other cases, for instance when we purchase a pair of *designer* jeans, we presume that this article of clothing, while the result of methods of mechanized and specialized mass production, represents in some way the distinctive creative flair of the designer. As in the first meaning, the conceptual stage in the development of a finished work is common to all of the visual arts: after all, preliminary sketches precede the completion of many kinds of objects; indeed, acknowledging this meaning of *design* within a broad range of artistic activities that involve the interaction between ideas and the manipulation of materials remains essential to an understanding of the term.

What Makes Design “Modern”

For most historians an increasing separation between *design* as conception, and the subsequent production of that design, is critical for an historical understanding of the term in its specifically modern context. In this view modern design is the result of acceleration in the division of labor and the introduction of mechanized production during the nineteenth century. A number of authors have equated these emerging circumstances with the development of an international style in the twentieth century embodying the dictum “form follows function”. Other writers stress that modern design emerged as part of a capitalist economic system that placed control of expanding production in the hands of industrialists and manufacturers and that frequently determined particular approaches to design as well as new techniques of marketing and advertising in order to stimulate consumption. In the latter view the modern context for *design*, while implying a continuing relationship with the visual arts broadly defined, tends to concentrate upon mass-produced goods and printed materials included under the label of decorative art, applied art, industrial art, and graphic art rather than upon fine arts, where designing and making are more frequently