

## 40 Years On: the Domain of Design History – Looking Back Looking Forward

### Conference Abstracts

#### *A305: A real adventure in multimedia*

**Tim Benton, Open University & Nick Levinson, ex-BBC**

Education is a mixture of transmission – of knowledge, language and example – and interactivity. At the Open University we were always encouraged to replace the word ‘teaching’ by ‘learning’ and to think as much about skills as about knowledge. The course ‘A305 History of Architecture and Design 1890-1939’ was the first third level course in the history of art at the Open University. It was planned, written, filmed and compiled between 1972 and 1975. Its aim was both to give students an understanding of what the modern movement in architecture and design was about, but also to give them the skills to analyse and interpret works of architecture and design.

In this session, Tim Benton (course team chair of A305) and Nick Levinson (Series Producer) will discuss some of the challenges and opportunities presented by teaching the history of architecture and design in a distance learning context. The course provided an almost unequalled richness of media support: 24 television programmes transmitted twice a week on BBC2 and 32 radio programmes (also transmitted twice on the BBC), of which 16 employed illustrations, published in a Radiovision Booklet. The strategies and themes of the course and its position in relation to architecture and design history in the 1970s will also be discussed.

#### *A305: The radical pedagogy of televised education*

**Joaquim Moreno, Autonomous University of Lisbon**

The Open University’s course A305 ‘History of Architecture and Design 1890-1939’ was exhibited at Ca’Pesaro’s Museum of Modern Art as part of the Venice Biennale of 1976. The museum displayed the radical operation of moving from the transmission of education to the broadcasting of education, from the transmission of specific messages to specific persons to the broadcasting of varied messages to a general public. This new mediation between social

institutions and technologies like radio and television, and erudite and spectacular institutions like the Biennale, was a clear symptom of radical transformations of both the techno/cultural ensemble and higher education.

In an over-exposed world, aware of the radical transformations operated by what Debord called spectacle and Raymond Williams, in a softer way, called the rising exposure to dramatic simulation, A305 was expanding its pedagogical strategies through the conceptual operation of going beyond the frame and proposing other *ways of seeing* and engendering a new classroom of solitudes. It was bypassing the public experience of school and inventing it for a new audience. And these transformations were displayed in real time at the museum. It is important to debate today these new/old ways of seeing and these new/old spaces of learning.

### *Dodging the Canons and seeking 'relevance' in the 'Real World'.*

#### **Barry Curtis, Royal College of Art**

After 1968 staff teaching in art colleges and the polytechnics were confronted by students who often used the term 'relevance' to describe their intellectual needs and who convincingly argued that 'Fine Art' was a questionable category and that its students represented a numerically minor constituency compared with the larger number of designers. The rise of 'cultural studies', an interest in period styles and new developments in film and media theory challenged the assumptions of conventional courses on 'Art History'. This talk reflects on the situation at the beginning of the 1970's when a number of key texts became available and teaching staff turned their attention to devising a syllabus that flattened hierarchies of aesthetic value and adopted a more anthropological, structural and semiotic approach. Design History offered ways of meeting the demands for a more timely way of recognising the values of the everyday and generic, as well as investigating the potent appeal of 'period style' and making political interventions in the making and uses of 'things'.

### *Design History enters the Museum*

#### **John Styles, University of Hertfordshire**

The V&A/RCA M.A. Course in the History of Design received its initial cohort of students in 1981. It was the first free-standing postgraduate programme in the subject, one that re-united two institutions – the Royal College of Art and the Victoria and Albert Museum – with a

shared Victorian origin. Design History was a novelty at both, but it was to the Museum that the new subject posed the greater challenge. At the V&A in the early 1980s suspicion of the mass-produced, the demotic and the everyday ran deep. Many at the V&A greeted the V&A/RCA M.A Course with apprehension. Despite this mistrust, Design History changed the V&A for the better and, in the process, was changed for the better itself.

***Tracing the Vicissitudes of Architectural History: From the 1980s to Now***

**Elizabeth Darling, Oxford Brookes University**

This paper traces a critical look at the journey that architectural history has taken since the early 1980s. Its starting point is the creation of the MSc in Architectural History: 'The History of Modern Architecture' degree at the Bartlett School of Architecture (UCL). Here, for the first time, was an academic course devoted solely to training architectural historians in architectural history; not as part of an Art History MA or a professional degree programme. In many respects it marked a watershed in the academic study of the discipline, and, in its initial incarnation (its first fifteen years or so) it certainly shaped how the subject was to be studied (and taught) for at least two generations.

But was this positive shift in the practice of the discipline in some respects a false dawn? Here the paper turns to a consideration of the realities of being an architectural historian - Bartlett graduate or not - since the 1980s. It will touch on matters such as where architectural history might be studied and how this has affected the development of the discipline; where architectural history can be practised and again the implications this has for the discipline; as well tracing shifting ideas on what should constitute the discipline's purview. These issues will be discussed bearing in mind that, unlike in Art History and the more recent Design History, it remains almost impossible to take a full undergraduate degree in Architectural History.

The paper concludes with brief survey of the contemporary state of the discipline, at once more fragmented and challenged than ever (especially with the so-called material turn in many of the historical and literary disciplines) but also, with growing numbers of doctoral students, perhaps more than ever before, in a strong position to propel the discipline into a brighter future.

***'The love that dare not speak its name.' Complexity and contradiction in the conservation of modern architecture – from Pevsner to Po-Mo***

**Dr Julian Holder, University of Salford.**

This paper looks at how A305 built a wider audience for modern architecture and design beyond the academy and in so doing led to calls for the listing of modern architecture. Arguing against the so-called 'Antiquarian prejudice' the very idea of conservation – attacked as 'pickling in aspic' – being applied to the 'monuments of modernism' was anathema to many. Ironically such hostility was as true of the Modernist camp as it was traditional conservationists at the time. And what was to be conserved – spaces or fabric? Monuments or the everyday?

There was increasing debate, and division, in both camps with many preferring 'preservation by record' in order to save Modernism as a 'living language' rather than submit to a more conservative fabric fetish. Situated within the discourses of Post-Modernity gave these debates added significance. Central to the development of a new paradigm in conservation was a committee headed by Nikolaus Pevsner, the foundation of new types of amenity society begun by the Thirties Society (now better known as the Twentieth Century Society) and DoCoMoMo which put pressure on the Listing system.

***The Politics of Making: critical craft writing from the 1970s***

**Tanya Harrod, Independent Scholar**

In 1971 the Crafts Advisory Committee (CAC, from 1979 known as the Crafts Council) was established with government funding in order to support innovative British studio craft. Writing on the studio crafts (mostly appearing in the CAC and Crafts Council publications) operated outside the academy. At that point the relatively new discipline of design history paid little attention to handwork and craft. By the 1980s design history had begun to privilege consumption over production and the image of a canny, creative consumer became the subject of intensive research. Interest in production and the politics of work correspondingly diminished. This paper argues that more recently a broad-based craft perspective has given design history a fresh engagement with production on a local and global level. This paper

looks back to a vision of craft proposed in David Pye's seminal book *The Nature and Art of Workmanship* (1968) and forward to the important conference *Obscure Objects of Desire? Reviewing the Crafts in the Twentieth Century* held at the University of East Anglia in 1997 followed by the publication of this author's *The Crafts in Britain in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century* (1999). The paper ends looking at informal writing and events concerned with 'making' as opposed to studio craft and examines the expanded remit of the *Journal of Modern Craft* founded in 2008.

### ***Design History on Display***

**Jane Pavitt, Royal College of Art**

What has been the impact of design history upon the making of exhibitions? There is arguably a difference between museum exhibitions which deal with specific aspects of the history of design (whether monograph, period, or style) and those which also take a specifically 'design history' approach to research and curating, applying the kinds of questions, contexts and methodologies employed by the design historian. In research and teaching, design history has challenged judgements of taste, value and status applied to objects in museums (and to designers and movements in the museum canon). But how far has it informed the development of new curatorial approaches and subjects? Does much of design history's subject matter still reside outside of the curatorial field? This paper will consider a few design exhibitions from the last forty years, exploring their impact upon the discipline, and vice versa.

### ***Design History at the Design Museum; perfect fit or culture clash?***

Liz Farrelly, Brighton University

When the Design Museum opened at Shad Thames in the summer of 1989, with Stephen Bayley as Chief Executive (his preferred title), it promised to be a new type of museum. Financed by "design guru" Terence Conran and housed in an (at first glance) modernist icon, the future looked bright. By the end of the year, though, Bayley had departed, and, as Conran's empire crumbled the museum's financial security was under threat. Previously announced plans were scaled back and the museum struggled for over a decade to stabilize funding and fulfil its initial promise. This paper examines how the museum was perceived by a particular audience, through examining two articles from academic journals – Barbara

Usherwood writing in *Design Issues* (1991) and Deborah Sugg Ryan in *Home Cultures* (2005) – which voiced both expectation and disappointment.

Now, after a decade of “reinvention”, as the museum gears up to relocate and triple in size, its archives are being organized (for the first time) and made available for study, providing an opportunity to contextualize both articles with documentation revealing the museum’s original aims and the pragmatic approach of then director, Alice Rawsthorn. This paper aims to question perceptions of the Design Museum at this notable moment of progress.

***Art School, University, Museum and Public Sphere: Finding a space for Design History in the UK today***

**Chris Breward, Edinburgh College of Art, Edinburgh University**

Drawing on personal experience, this presentation will reflect on developments in the study and reception of design history across the educational and cultural sector in contemporary Britain. Whilst a cross-disciplinary 'material turn' in the humanities and social sciences has supported a vibrant context in which 'things' have taken central stage, the presence of design history as a discrete approach has arguably been subsumed in art and design schools by shifts towards societal and ethical interests and away from an engagement with historical practices and contexts. At the same time publishers, producers and curators have provided new contexts in which the field of design history has been opened up to widening audiences.

In a funding climate where impact and outreach are prioritized, and a professional and teaching context in which multi-faceted disciplinary skills are valued, what are the implications for the development and visibility of design historical work? How might the more multi-faceted nature of design as an object of study be harnessed to ensure both rigour and vibrancy in a sustainable future for the discipline?

***Design History in The USA: Past And Present***

**Pat Kirkham and Catherine Whalen**

This paper begins by briefly outlining US conceptions of design and its study between about 1830 and 1950 through the perspectives of art and art history, applied arts and industrial design, the social history of technology, and American exceptionalism. We then discuss how the Museum of Modern Art, most notably curator Edgar Kauffman, constructed a canon of Modernist design. In tandem, we consider alternative approaches taken by the likes of

Charles Montgomery, a dealer turned curator and scholar, to the study and teaching of what was called American decorative arts at institutions such as the Winterthur Museum and Yale University from the 1950s through the 1970s.

We go on to discuss how US "design history" takes place in many different scholarly contexts (that often don't go by that title). In particular, we consider the impact of Cultural Studies approaches: pluralism, multiculturalism, the global, the personal, the amateur, gender/sexuality, class, and race. We outline (overlapping) approaches to design history within multiple academic disciplines from Art and Architectural History to Material Culture Studies, Museums Studies, and Film and Media Studies. We end by indicating the shifting trajectories of specialist Masters and Doctoral programs, and point to other developments likely to be influential in the future.

***From Euro-American to Global Perspectives: a Design Historical Journey***

**Jonathan M Woodham, University of Brighton**

Design history has existed for more than 40 years as a specialist academic discipline and throughout the period there have been a significant number of definitions and re-definitions of the discipline and its relationship with other disciplinary fields. For the first twenty years of design history's evolution its geographical and cultural scope was largely confined to a comparatively small number of European countries and the USA. Such selectivity remains today, as is clear from the number of countries involved in Europe in proportion to the amount of related design historical activity: there are 28 countries in the EU and 50 countries in the wider geographic formation of Europe.

In response to a growing interest in the wider cultural and political geography of design history the *Journal of Design History* (JDH) has published an increasing number of articles and texts that embrace this expanding horizon over the past two decades. Furthermore, in 2010, the Design History Society joined with the International Conference for Design History and Design Studies (ICDHS, established in Barcelona in 1999) to participate in a joint conference in Brussels (2010), followed by the DHS Annual Conferences in Barcelona (2011), Ahmedabad (2013) and San Francisco (2015).

Such shifts in strategic direction were perhaps a response to other historical initiatives that recognised the significance of global perspectives, such as Globalising Art, Architecture and Design History (GLAADH) that commenced its three-year funded programme in 2001. Although perhaps failing to achieve its objectives, it nonetheless captured something in the ether and was followed a little later by the 2007-09 AHRC Strategic Network Award entitled *Global Arts: East and West* with the University of Warwick, the Ashmolean Museum and V&A as partners. Possibly of greater impact was the establishment of the International Conference of Design History and Design Studies (ICDHS) established in Barcelona in 1999 with a conference entitled *Historiar des de la Perifèria, Historia I Histories del Disseny*. Since 1999 more than 1000 papers from almost 50 countries have been presented at ICDHS Conferences which, since 2002, have operated on a Biennial basis with the 10<sup>th</sup> ICDHS to be held in Taipei, the designated World Capital of Design in 2016.