



# Writing Visual Culture

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Volume

8.0

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### Series Editor

Dr Grace Lees-Maffei, University of Hertfordshire

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## Abstracts

### 8.1 'Design History at 40'

2017 marked the 40th anniversary of the Design History Society, founded in England in 1977, and the 30th volume year of the Society's journal, the Journal of Design History. To celebrate this double anniversary, the Journal's Editorial Board and the Society's Trustees agreed to dedicate a strand of the Society's annual conference to new work that reflected on the history of the subject and showcased new approaches to design history. Grace Lees-Maffei conceived of and convened that strand. Nine papers were presented in the anniversary strand at the conference 'Making and Unmaking the Environment' held at the University of Oslo in September 2017, convened by Kjetil Fallan. Seven of those papers are published as Volume 8 of Writing Visual Culture.

The papers in this volume reflect on design history's past and current status and consider the subject's neighbouring fields including cultural studies (see the article by Ben Highmore) and Design Research (read Søren Rosenbak's article). National design histories remain a core preoccupation in the field. The articles by Joana Meroz, Trond Klevgaard, Freddie Floré and Javier Gimeno Martínez, Meret Ernst and Sorcha O'Brien understand design and its histories within, and beyond, the frame of the national in various ways.

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## 8.2 'Design History, Cultural Studies, and the Emergence of the Pop Connoisseurs'

The institutionalisation and growth of design history within higher education institutions in the UK coincided with the growth of cultural studies (the 1970s and 1980s marking periods of ascendancy and consolidation). Indeed, both cultural studies and design history often shared the same institutional spaces: the arena of contextual studies within art colleges and art schools that predominantly taught practical art and design degrees. While design history and cultural studies might often seem at odds in terms of political objectives and pedagogic strategies, their shared energies become clearer when seen from the perspective of the much larger histories of changing 'structures of knowledge': both fields have sought to open up a space between investigations of authored activity (for instance political history, literary criticism and art history) and anonymous or amorphous activity (sociology, anthropology, economics); both fields have championed an approach to everyday life and to 'new' social and cultural agents.

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## 8.3 'Histories of Design Research Failures'

Design Research Failures is a design research project that facilitates conversation, reflection and action around the question: "In what way has Design Research failed in the last 50 years?" In this article, the project is further discussed as a potential vehicle for making and unmaking design history in various ways. As a call for action for design historians to engage in this exploration, two examples of such possible engagements are included, one by Kaisu Savola and another by Ben Highmore.

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#### 8.4 'Towards a Post-Anthropocentric 'Political Context' in Design Historiography'

*Context stinks* – Rem Koolhaas

That design artefacts and practices ought to be understood in terms of their 'contexts' has become a moot point in design scholarship. Yet, what exactly design's contexts are, what role design plays in their making, and how to study the relationship between the two are still topics in need of elaboration. This paper contributes to these debates by contextualizing the changes in the notion of 'context' in design historiography and by proposing a 'new materialist' understanding of the relationship between design and its contexts beyond anthropocentrism. In the 1980s, design historians seeking to bypass the 'art historical' approach to design turned to the idea that design's social contexts provide insights into its meanings. This strategy has contributed towards the 'de-essentialization' of design as autonomous object. Yet, it has also introduced a problematic anthropocentric perspective on the relationship between design and its contexts, implying as it does that design artefacts are passive vessels whose arbitrary meanings are inscribed by its social contexts. In contrast, 'new materialism' views things not as reflections of social relations, but as their cocreators. This perspective thus entails examining how the materiality of design creates its own contexts, contexts that do not necessarily coincide with those of established—read: human—geographies or temporalities. This approach thus rethinks afresh the relations between design and its contexts beyond anthropocentrism. I focus on the Dutch situation as a case of this problematic and tie it in with broader debates in design historiography.

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### 8.5 'Writing About New Typography from The Margins: Problems and Approaches'

My PhD research into New Typography in Scandinavia is taken as a starting point for a methodological discussion on how to approach histories of Modernism in neglected geographies. Discussions in design history around centre-periphery relations are revisited, and the idea of networks and the rhizome are introduced. I argue that networks provide a model for thinking both about the exchanges made possible through formalised organisational structures, and for thinking about those taking place through the nonhierarchical and fluid relationships formed between protagonists. Domestication is preferred to 'influence' as a way of thinking about how ideas as styles travel. Accordingly, I maintain that Scandinavian printers did not accept the teachings of the avant-garde unthinkingly, but instead consciously modified New Typography to suit their own aims and cultural preferences. The importance of understanding the professional context in which ideas were spread and work designed is also stressed. In conclusion, I argue that the different contexts and aims of the avant-garde and the printing trade need to be considered when assessing particular examples. Alternatives to criteria like 'originality' and visual interest need to be found in order for them to be judged on their own merit.

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### 8.6 'Making Room for Design History in Belgium'

In Belgium industrial design officially gained recognition relatively late. The national government recognised the potential of the 'new' discipline around 1955. The first proper training in industrial design arrived in 1957 in Belgium with the Section d'esthétique industrielle at the La Cambre school and it took until 1964 until the Brussels Design Centre was established. In the meantime things have changed. In the context of the federalisation of the 1990s design became an item of regional economic politics, resulting in such institutions as Design Vlaanderen (Design Flanders). In the early 21st century the former Ghent Museum of Decorative Arts (founded in the early 20th century) changed its name in Design museum Ghent. While these and other developments demonstrate the official acceptance of design as a full-blown cultural discipline, the related discipline of design history is still 'under construction'. This article makes a first tentative attempt at reflecting on the design history research in Belgian academia of the 21st century, on the role of transnational research communities in the emancipation of design history in Belgium and on the question where to go from here.

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### 8.7 'Learning from History – But How? Design history and the practice-based education system at Swiss Universities of Applied Sciences (UAS)'

Despite the richness of its history of design and design education, design history has no academic affiliation in Switzerland, even today. There is no chair of design history anywhere: not at traditional universities, not at the two Federal Institutes of Technology, or at the newly founded Universities of Applied Sciences (UAS). In 1995, the period of vocational education at traditional schools of arts and crafts starting in the late 19th century ended by law. Ever since, all universities have formed part of a standardized education system following the Bologna reform. The curricula were shortened from five years vocational training at Art School to three years at UAS. This created a situation in which curricula should not appear to be professionally instrumental. Courses in history are compulsory in all design curricula even if they're not backed up by design studies. Although UAS have to conduct research by law, many of them have missed out on researching the history of their own disciplines so far. Hence the question which historiographical approaches (Fallan, 2010) could not only meet the demands of a practice based education, but also enrich the discourse of neighbouring disciplines is open to debate. This debate takes place in networks linking academia with independent experts, practitioners, and researchers. Hence, Switzerland can serve as an example to show why, where, and how design historiography should be implemented as a field of study in a predominantly practice based education system.

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### 8.8 “Made in Ireland”? National Narratives and Hybrid Identities in Irish Design History’

In 2010, the author reposted an image of the IQ lamp on Facebook from the Kilkenny Design collection held at the National Irish Visual Arts Library in Dublin, which sparked a discussion amongst Scandinavian and Irish design historians about the inclusion of the lamp within the respective canons of Scandinavian and Irish design. This lamp was designed in 1973 by Danish packaging and product designer Holger Strøm during his time working for Kilkenny Design, and this article will consider its positioning within the canons of both Irish and Scandinavian design, as well as that of the washing machines and vacuum cleaners produced by a factory opened in Wicklow by the Dutch company FAM in 1957. The article considers the possibility of creating hybrid categories of national identity for designed objects that sit outside the simple narratives of objects that were designed, manufactured and sold within a single national context.

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#### Referees for Vol. 8

Prof Grace Lees-Maffei, University of Hertfordshire, UK

Prof Kjetil Fallan, University of Oslo, Norway.

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**Grace Lees-Maffei, University of Hertfordshire**

### **Celebrating Design History at 40, and the Journal of Design History at 30**

In 2017, the Design History Society (DHS) celebrated its 40th anniversary. At the same time, the Society's journal, the Journal of Design History, published its 30th annual volume. Rather than reflecting on these landmarks with reference to canonical or well-known work from the past, the DHS agreed to mark these occasions through a call for new work which examines design history, past, present and future. Following an open call for papers and double-blind peer review, this work was presented in a dedicated anniversary strand at the Society's annual conference, Making and Unmaking the Environment, convened by Prof Kjetil Fallan from 7th-9th September at the University of Oslo in Norway. The conference formed a suitable occasion on which to mark these important milestones. The conference theme, Making and Unmaking the Environment, allowed space for reports on new studies of the development and trajectory of the field. The anniversary strand comprised three panels, each with three presentations. Of the nine papers presented in Oslo, seven have been developed as articles in this volume of Writing Visual Culture using feedback received at the conference and editorially.

**New Approaches to Design History** Our first article, 'Design History, Cultural Studies, and the Emergence of the Pop Connoisseurs', sees Professor Ben Highmore (University of Sussex, UK) recuperating connoisseurship for design history. Connoisseurship has been associated with art history and the decorative arts, but it has a function within contemporary design history, Highmore argues. His examination is comparative: he understands design history through reference to the neighbouring field of cultural studies and a tension between criticism and connoisseurship is persistent in Highmore's article.

The second article continues the exploration of design history through its neighbouring fields, turning this time from cultural studies to design research, or design studies. Søren Rosenbak of Umeå Institute of Design, Umeå University, Sweden, reports on his project Design Research Failures, and asks what design historians might have to contribute to this work. As well as inviting reflection on the interactions and interfaces of design history and design research, Rosenbak's article invites examination of the relationship between success and failure. Rosenbak's questions seem to assume that design research has failed as a field, but the conference audience in Oslo were keen to recommend reflection on its successes as well. After all, Henry Petroski's work has examined design failures for what they might contribute to future design successes (Petroski 1992, 2006).



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We turn next to 'Towards a Post-Anthropocentric 'Political Context' in Design Historiography' by Joana Ozorio de Almeida Meroz (Leiden University, Netherlands). In this article, Meroz seeks to move design history beyond regarding politics as a human affair, to capture the workings of a broader notion of politics and its sites including, especially, the political agency of materials and things.

Meroz examines some ways in which artefacts play active roles in the construction of national design canons. Constructivist histories of national design have tended to view artefacts as the passive and arbitrary outcomes of social categories and discursive conventions. Meroz proposes, on the contrary, that as some objects are isolated from the rest as 'design objects' they achieve an elevated 'object position' (to use Fernando Domínguez Rubio's term) and enter into contact with different regimes of meaning (international cultural politics, export programmes, education, art museums, the media). In these contexts, the material characteristics of design artefacts tangibly enable and restrict the political production and transnational circulation of certain narratives of design and of national identity.

For example, although in the late 1980s industrial design was discursively designated by the Dutch government as representative of design from the Netherlands globally, its material and visual characteristics (weight, scale, subdued aesthetics) sometimes made its international dissemination difficult and prevented it from representing Dutch design in the world's museums and design centres. Meroz shows in her PhD thesis, *Transnational Material Politics: Constructions of Dutch Design, 1970-2012*, that this physical failure in occupying the object position of Dutch design meant that industrial design did not come to be enduringly associated with Dutch design and was ultimately largely erased from its historiography. The construction of national design canons is not only discursive and social but also partly, if fundamentally, a material question. For Meroz, the relationships between people and things, and things natural and man-made, were salient and productive points of tension.

In 'Writing About New Typography from The Margins: Problems and Approaches', Trond Klevgaard of Westerdals Oslo School of Arts, Communication and Technology, shares his PhD research into New Typography in Scandinavia through a methodological reflection on how modernism in design resonates differently in different regions, and how it has been negotiated and adapted. Klevgaard considers key theoretical tools such as the notions of centre and periphery, networks, domestication, and the rhizome. Klevgaard shows how Scandinavian printers modified New Typography to match their own professional contexts.

Next, two articles express concern about the lack of a strong and distributed national base for design history, in Belgium and Switzerland respectively, and how this might impact on the development of design history in those nations. Dr Fredie Floré (University of Leuven) and Dr



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Javier Gimeno Martínez (Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam) present jointly their call for 'Making Room for Design History in Belgium' through a review of historiographic efforts in museums and higher education institutions. They call for a joint master's degree in design history as a sound basis for future development of the subject in Belgium. In 'Learning from History – But How? Design history and the practice-based education system at Swiss Universities of Applied Sciences (UAS)'. Meret Ernst of HGK FHNW, also calls for an expansion of design history in art and design higher education. Switzerland has a rich history of design and design education. Yet, design history lacks any academic affiliation there, with no chair in design studies at Switzerland's universities, or at the Swiss Federal Institutes of Technology, or the newly founded Universities of Applied Sciences (UAS). What, then, does design history mean in this practice-based context? Ernst provides one answer with her analysis of how the present lack of a national base might impact the emergence of design history in Switzerland. Reflecting on the past of the past is an instructive way to understand not only the history of design, and the history of design history, but also to better understand the present. How can we learn from history?

In 1995, the period of vocational education at traditional schools of arts and crafts, which had begun towards the end of the 19th century, was ended by law. A standardized education system was enacted with the Bologna reform of 1999 and established across the EU by 2011. The five years of vocational training provided by the art schools was reduced to three years for a BA at Switzerland's Universities of Applied Sciences. This condensed the curriculum and courses which were not clearly professionally instrumental came under pressure. Nevertheless, courses in history are compulsory in all design curricula. Moreover, Universities of Applied Sciences have to conduct research by law. Why, then, have many of them missed out on researching the history of their own disciplines? More historiographical work is needed to meet the demands of practice-based education, and enrich the discourse of neighbouring disciplines. Relevant debates abound in new networks linking academics with independent experts, practitioners, and researchers. In this way, Switzerland may serve as an example of why, where, and how design historiography should be implemented as a field of study, Ernst argues, even in a predominantly practice based education system.

Our last article continues the examination of the complex ways in which national identity is formed around designed objects, particularly the increasing number which have not been designed, manufactured and sold all in one country. 'Made in Ireland'? National Narratives and Hybrid Identities in Irish Design History' by Dr Sorcha O'Brien (Kingston University) interrogates the formation of the Irish national canon. O'Brien offers two case studies, the first of which is the IQ Lamp designed by Danish designer Holger Strom for Kilkenny Design Workshops in 1973.



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This lamp has been presented as part of the canons of both Irish and Scandinavian design and we may see it, therefore, as an instructive example of mediation in ascribing national identity in design. O'Brien's second case study is the lesser-known example of the Fam washing machine, designed in the Netherlands in the 1950s and manufactured and sold in Ireland as an example of Joana Meroz and Javier Gimeno Martínez' 'expanded domain' of Dutch design practice. She concludes that there is a need for greater recognition of hyphenated identities, such as Dutch-Irish, in the consideration of national identity in design history.

### Conclusion

We are continuously constructing design history, as we continue to research and write about the history of design. The articles included in this volume of *Writing Visual Culture* offer a variety of methodological foci for the field. And the majority of them show, too, that the geography of design history remains critically important as a focus for the development of the field. This work demonstrates how the field's preoccupation with national identities is understood in relation to local, regional and global contexts in ways that are sensitive to temporal as well as geographical specificity, and the complex ways in which the local, the national and the global intersect with the past, the present and the future to enrich the field and promise much more to come.

### Acknowledgements

Thanks to the authors whose work is showcased in this volume of WVC; to the speakers in the anniversary strand at the Design History Society conference at the University of Oslo, September 2017 and to the conference convenor, Prof Kjetil Fallan; to colleagues at the University of Hertfordshire, Katharine Collins and Caroline Munklinde.



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Grace Lees-Maffei 'Design History at 40'  
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**Professor Ben Highmore, University of Sussex**

What follows is an initial attempt to locate the emergence of design history within a much larger account of what Immanuel Wallerstein calls, rather grandly, ‘world systems analysis’ (Wallerstein 2004). The point here is that when we move away from an ‘internal’ account of design history, one that sees it as emerging when specific actors form associations or establish specific design history courses and degrees, then other patterns can emerge. But this also means de-emphasizing the autonomy of design history, and for a marginal discipline this can sometimes seem counter-intuitive. My claim is not that my provisional and sketchy account of design history is more worthwhile than the more familiar accounts that have retold design history’s beginnings within the teaching of contextual studies within British art and design education in the late 1960s through to the late 1970s. It is simply that it allows various commonalities to become visible that could, if developed, forge some links and some shared interests across design history, media studies, cultural studies, art and architectural history, film studies and so on. My wager, at this initial stage, is that the partial surrender of an autonomous history could be worth the gain of possible intellectual connections. Of course, in a sector (of higher education institutions), where disciplinary fields are regularly and routinely asked to launch defensive and protective fronts as they compete against each other for scarce resources and jobs, such an intellectual project may seem naïve or even flirting with disaster.

My hypothesis is that a new configuration of connoisseurialism (one aimed at popular and mass-produced cultural forms, rather than at unique authorial statements) links the emergence of a series of disciplinary fields, which ironically have connoisseurialism (in a previous configuration) in their sights as antagonists. This hypothesis also suggests that we seek to understand the general conditions of possibility that allow this emergence to occur. This is not something I was able to fully address in what follows. A fuller rendering of this argument would need to be able to see the conjunctural relations between a new postwar social mobility, the affordances of a new era of mass communication (particularly in relation to television), and general levels of affluence in the 1960s and 70s. A case study for seeing these elements coalescing in interesting ways would be the emergence of the Open University in Britain in 1969. But that is for another day.

I’ve always been intrigued by the tonal similarities between two texts that in their own specific ways announce the modern, postwar projects of design history and cultural studies. The two texts are Reyner Banham’s ‘The Atavism of the Short-Distance Mini-Cyclist’ from 1964 and Raymond Williams’ ‘Culture is Ordinary’ from 1958 (Banham 1964; Williams 1987 [1958]: 3-14). The former could be seen as a rallying cry for design history and criticism; the latter a manifesto for cultural

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studies. They both mine the same territory in terms of class and culture. The story they tell is one of social mobility in the early postwar period, of workingclass boys becoming 'scholarship boys' and ending up with PhDs. Such mobility offers them a perspective not simply to critique the intellectual hegemony of what Williams calls 'the selective tradition' of consecrated, elite culture, but also the sentimentalism that is often the result when the academy does attempt to take into consideration popular tastes (which were often grasped as the folksy tastes of a bygone era). Both writers insist on the importance of dealing with a current actuality of mass-production, of mass media forms, of North American cultural forms, and doing this while maintaining a left-wing set of commitments towards progressive thinking, and class identity.

This cursory recognition of similarities across the two disciplines suggests that it would be worth looking at design history and cultural studies, not as two distinct fields, but as aligned projects that are part of a much larger shift in knowledge production, shaped by varied historical forces. It would mean enquiring about the determining factors that allowed people like Banham and Williams, but also other writers including many of the women who were active in both design and cultural studies, to open up a rift in the academy that might allow non-sanctified objects into the intellectual conversation. This would mean – I think – taking 'design history' away from a narrative that repeats pragmatic and theoretical adjustments to teaching within art schools after the various Coldstream reports and recommendations in Higher Education within England and Wales.

I want to do this by offering a counter-narrative to the one that usually undergirds the story of the emergence of design history and cultural studies. In this I want to suggest that design history and cultural studies emerge as disciplines that deploy a form of connoisseurial attention to objects not usually accorded such attention. I realise this flies in the face of nearly all the narratives that explain what characterises both design history and cultural studies, which is the way that they set out precisely to abandon the values of connoisseurialism. Much, of course, will depend on how we describe the connoisseurial.

Let me just give you a couple of examples of how the connoisseurial – in one guise – is used to stand in for all that a putative design history, emerging in the 1970s might set itself against. This is Jon Bird describing the situation in Middlesex Polytechnic as it established 'art and design history courses, a new cultural studies and MA design history degree' in the 1970s: 'we wished to be actively involved in the rapidly developing specialism of design history by specifically resisting tendencies to reproduce the descriptive and historiographical categories of bourgeois art history' (Bird 1986: 33). Bird goes on to explain what bourgeois





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art history is or was: it signifies ‘the historical development of a discipline of connoisseurship which in its distinctive forms valorizes the individual (male) artist, the masterpiece, and the idealized Nation-State, as the dominant and appropriate objects of study’ (Bird 1986: 39, n. 5). A similar origin story is supplied by Fran Hannah and Tim Putnam in their Block article ‘Taking Stock in Design History’ from 1980. They quote Bridget Wilkins when she suggests that the sort of history of design that links ‘art deco’ to De Stijl or constructivism, is not ‘Design History’ but ‘applied art connoisseurship’. While they recognise that ‘the connoisseurial method’ ‘knows the periodisation of design criteria intimately’, they also insist that it is blind to the way that it ‘operates within boundaries of current social cachet and market valuation which it does not need or want to see’ (Hannah and Putnam 1996 [1980]).

There are two things that are worth saying at this point. Firstly, that at exactly the same time that ‘Design History’ is identifying itself as ‘not [bourgeois] art history’, so too are a significant faction of art historians. Thus, design history and the so-called ‘new art history’ are co-terminus (in the UK the Association of Art Historians [recently rebranded as the Association for Art History] is established in 1974, and the Design History Society in 1977). And co-terminus with this are other ‘new’ (inter)disciplinary initiatives such as cultural studies and film studies which purposefully reject a straightforwardly evaluative version of aesthetic attention. So, the anti-connoisseurship of design history, allows us to recognise a general trend amongst forms of historical and critical endeavour (aimed at films, industrial and domestic design, TV and newspapers, and so on). Such research fields have had previous incarnations, but ones that were often the province of amateur historians and existed outside of the academy and often avoided theoretical self-reflexivity. The second thing worth saying is that the description of connoisseurship as besotted with individual genius and an expensive cannon of art is both historically accurate (as it existed in the postwar period) and fundamentally misconceived. This needs some explanation.

The image of connoisseurship as a central antagonist, which as we have seen underwrites the desire for design history (and a similar set of references could be used for describing the emergence of cultural studies) and can be seen to determine the way that these new disciplines fashion themselves as oppositional, is of a tired, self-satisfied, pompous connoisseurialism, with one foot in the grand auction houses of Europe and America and the other firmly wedged under the high tables of prestigious universities. This image had an actuality to it that is best captured by first person testimony. This is the art historian Robert Rosenblum remembering his graduate experience at New York University’s Institute of Fine Arts:

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*My graduate training in the 1950s at the Institute of Fine Arts was often marked by the mysteries of attribution, usually supported by the discernment of quality, another word that evoked initiation into a cult. I vividly recall seminars in which we gazed silently at Italian paintings and drawings in order to determine their authorship. The ambience was often like a spiritualist seance in which the ghost of Giotto or Giulio Romano might be conjured up to claim authorship or denounce an imposter. [...] John Pope-Hennessy, known for papal infallibility in attributions, was heard explaining impatiently to a puzzled beginner, 'It's not by Francesco di Giorgio because it's not by Francesco di Giorgio'. [...] The familiar phrases 'So-and-so has an eye' or 'So-and-so has no eye' speak for the exclusivity of this society of connoisseurs (Rosenblum 2005: 3).*

In the 1970s this was the sort of image that sprang to mind when people mentioned connoisseurship and it is an image that is still in circulation. As Richard Neer has suggested, any attempt to resuscitate connoisseurialism as an activity would hardly benefit from the welcoming embrace of self-declared connoisseurs. My argument, however, is not that connoisseurialism should be resuscitated. My intention is simply to observe how a new kind of connoisseurialism can be seen at work in design history and cultural studies. Indeed, it would be by observing this that these disciplines might want to recognise some general similarities across disciplines, as well as, perhaps, limiting the amount of effort that is put into connoisseurialism, albeit under names like 'genre study' and so forth. What remains clear is that we need a different understanding of connoisseurialism (one not possessed by the ghosts of John Pope-Hennessy and others) if we are going to see a version of it at work in design history, cultural studies, film studies, and other cognate disciplines.

To see connoisseurialism at work in archaeology sees attribution fulfilling other kinds of duties than establishing if a painting is worth millions because it is by Rubens or a few thousand because it is simply in the style of Rubens. The simple definition of connoisseurship as 'the attribution of artifacts to particular hands, or times, or places' (Neer 2005: 1) looks very different if an attribution is being made about which region a Victorian needlepoint sampler is from, or if a film belongs to film noir or another film cycle. Looked at from across disciplines and within a much larger historical purview, we could say that connoisseurship emerged as a solution to a specific set of problems. And it emerges not just in what we now call art history, but in museums of antiquarianism, in archaeology, and in the auction house. The greatest period of connoisseurship was the later nineteenth century and early twentieth century and the main proponents were often concerned with the medieval period (or earlier archaeological periods). It was a response to the fact that many of the artefacts of the ancient and early modern world were anonymous, or had been misattributed,



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had lost any connection with a place of origin (as they had been pillaged, sold, and sold again). In this, the first aspect of connoisseurship is not to decree value but to try and establish a site of production.

Richard Neer, an art historian specialising in Classical Athenian vase painting argues that: 'When the archaeologist classifies a newly excavated potsherd as Naxian Geometric or al-Ubaid ware, she is using connoisseurial method: determining origin on the basis of style. Connoisseurship differs from ordinary pottery sorting only in degree, not in kind' (Neer 2003: 3). For Neer connoisseurialism of one kind or another (and stripped of its attachment to authorship) is fundamental to any act of scholarship that categorises the world and then mobilises those categories as evidence of culture. So, we could say that a connoisseurial perspective isn't significantly tied to the question of value and quality. Indeed, the questions it is most curious about are more fundamentally taxonomical: what kind of a thing is this? What kind of activity produced it? How do we group it with things that are like it?

It is perhaps no wonder that the endless deliberation of whether a painting is by Rubens or not, and seeing this as the pinnacle of an approach to art, could feel so decadent and so entitled by the postwar period. A connoisseurial perspective aimed at authorship isn't particularly attuned to a culture where everything is already 'attributed'. In a world where the style of a painter is often recognisable at a hundred yards, the idea of a connoisseur deliberating for hours over seemingly incidental marks so as to say who it is by might seem both extravagant and anachronistic. Indeed, Harold Rosenberg suggested that sometimes modern styles (he was writing in the 1950s) are an extended signature. We recognise a painting by Pollock, for instance, when we enter the room. Of course, in a banal sense, connoisseurialism might be useful in the auction houses when trying to authenticate a Pollock or a Chagall (though the provenance documents would also receive a form of connoisseurial attention) but we don't need to it to distinguish between a Pollock and a Chagall. Or between a Pollock and a Robert Motherwell. But learning that such paintings are called 'abstract expressionism', and being attuned to their energies could also fit under the capacious umbrella that Neer gives to connoisseurialism.

For Richard Neer connoisseurship is a fundamental activity of recognition:

*everything that counts as evidence for human activity in the distant past—derives from some form of connoisseurship in that it is connoisseurs who identify the evidence as such. [...] Many of the attributions involved in this degree-zero connoisseurship are so basic as to remain tacit. For example, the seemingly obvious distinction between man-made artifacts and natural things involves a tacit attribution. When an excavator throws away what she perceives to be pebbles and saves what she perceives to be artifacts,*



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*she is making a connoisseurial judgment: in the broadest possible sense, the artifacts are those things she sees as being in the style of humans (Neer 2005: 5).*

For Neer this means that connoisseurialism is the basic ingredient of any investigation of human culture. For him it is a form of attention that overcomes a fake distinction between formalism and historicism. But we could say that the connoisseurial method is likely to be misused during a period where so-called high art is perhaps 'over-attributed'. What does it do when it hasn't got to arbitrate between fakes and originals, when it hasn't got to 'place' an anonymous shard of pottery? In one sense, it then becomes the 'eye' that claims this Cezanne is exquisite, or that this an antique Queen Anne chair rather than a replica.

And this is where my argument comes back to the 'co-terminus' emergence of cultural studies, film studies and design history (along with a 'new art history'). They can be seen as responding to a moment when the connoisseurial curiosity is again aimed at fundamentals of attribution, taxonomy and expertise. Take, for instance, a film. Who is it 'by'? Why would we give it the name of a director when a play is given the authorial name of the writer? So, something like 'auteur theory', which suggests that an 'auteur' could be found in the cinematographer, or the lighting designer is clearly a connoisseurial response to the collective endeavour of Hollywood. So, we could say that an 'educational' project of attending to industrial and domestic design, of attending to 'industrial' entertainment through mass media (film, radio, TV, magazines, etc.), as well as an anthropological approach to modern society all appeared in rough synchronicity as a multipronged response to a shared situation. Many of the significant design historians that started publishing at the end of the 1970s and early 80s were involved with the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies in Birmingham (as has been noted by Grace Lees-Maffei 2009: 361 ff.), which suggests that similar kinds of methodological sensitivities were at work in both fields.

But 'an attention to the new conditions of design' is much bigger than a bit of cultural studies and a bit of art history. We can see it, for instance, in the work of the Independent Group and in various global Pop Artists and Photorealists who often take 'mod cons' (modern conveniences), cars, new urban scenes, forms of mediation (like TV) as their insistent object of attention. If we want to get a sense of how 'connoisseurialism' emerged as a newly energised focus, which was also newly resistant to elite high culture, then we need to recognise a new connoisseurial problematic that had as its object the taxonomical problem of a new mass industrial culture. We could, for instance, look at a book by Stuart Hall and Paddy Whannel, aimed at teachers, called *The Popular Arts*, and published in 1964. Hall and Whannel suggest that the drive that undergirds their project is twofold.



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They are social changes. One is the revolution in communications. We could also see this more broadly as a revolution in production – the production of things, knowledge, entertainment. Radio, for instance, relies on new electronic and plastics industries as well as new ways of producing and disseminating music and other forms of entertainment. The other is a revolution in consumption. This is Whannel and Hall:

*The second is a more recent development and can be identified, not so much with the industrial revolution as a whole, but rather with one particular phase of that revolution – the phase of high consumption and increased leisure which has become a feature of some societies in the middle of this century. During this phase a widespread change in attitudes and style reveals itself among the younger generation – a change which reflects itself partly their enhanced economic status and partly the changing design of social values in the society as a whole (Hall and Whannel 1964: 20).*

In recognising ‘a younger generation’ who might be more finely attuned to the nuances of mass culture, Hall and Whannel are noticing that connoisseurial authority is shifting. In Thomas Crow’s recent Paul Mellon Lectures, titled ‘Searching for the Young Soul Rebels: Style, Music, and Art in London 1956-1969’, he describes the natty dressed, modern Jazz loving ‘mods’ as connoisseurs of entertainment and style: clothes, music, scooters, are their specialist topics, the objects of their expertise. For Banham, it was the fan and mass cultural aficionado who were the new pop-connoisseurs. Such connoisseurialism required being media savvy: to be ‘skilled in the use of the medium’ was to be ‘trained to extract every subtlety, marginal meaning, overtone or technical nicety from any of the mass media. A Pop Art connoisseur, as opposed to a fine art connoisseur. The opposition, however, is only one of taste, otherwise the training required to become a connoisseur is the same’ (Banham 1981 [1963]: 94). When Banham names something as ‘Pop art’ he is not referring to the artworks associated with Warhol, but with the commercial culture associated with Hollywood, Coca-Cola, and comics.

But connoisseurial curiosity (rather than connoisseurial complacency) isn’t – as I’ve been at pains to point out – aimed primarily at reshuffling the pack of values, it is also aimed fundamentally at the taxonomical problematic of ‘what is this’ and ‘how do we attend to it’? If a previous connoisseurial curiosity suggested that you should look away from the most obvious stylistic elements to look at fingernails and ears, then a rebooted connoisseurialism aimed at ‘mass culture’ was similarly tasked with finding the most productive form of attention.



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I don't have much time to explore this but we could also look at Lawrence Alloway and 'The Arts and the Mass Media' [1958] and 'The Long Front of Culture' [1959] and see this work as fundamentally puzzling a new connoisseurial curiosity. This, for instance, is from 'The Arts and the Mass Media: 'The repetitive and overlapping structure of modern entertainment works in two ways: 1. It permits marginal attention to suffice for those spectators who like to talk, neck, parade; 2. It satisfies, for the absorbed spectator, the desire for intense participation which leads to a careful discrimination of nuances in the action' (Alloway 2006 [1958]: 57). The essay was first published in 1958. Here Alloway is suggesting that a new connoisseurial curiosity that is aimed at mass-culture wouldn't necessarily be characterised by inordinate amounts of concentrated attention, but something much lighter, more dispersed, and more capacious in its reach. Thomas Crow's sense of the new connoisseurs in the streets of London in the late 50s, informs the connoisseurial curiosity as it fashions itself into pedagogic puzzles that will call themselves 'cultural studies', 'film studies', 'design history', 'fashion studies', and so on. The way to study these things might not be the 'disembodied cool contemplation', but as 'fans' who are likely to spot the nuances of lighting in b-movie psychological dramas, or who might feel it all rushing by in the way that Raymond Williams describes TV.

The new connoisseurial curiosity, I want to suggest, is still with us, and indeed it is even more problematic today in our digital era. What I want to suggest is that it is worth making this curiosity a subject of attention. It is an unfinished problematic: how do we attend to our mass produced, mass-consumed, industrial, electronic world?



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**Søren Rosenbak, Umeå Institute of Design, Umeå University, Sweden.**

**'In what way has Design Research failed in the last 50 years?'**

This is the central question posed by Design Research Failures (DRF), a design research project that started out as a successful response to the Design Research Society's (DRS) 50th Anniversary call for projects that 'further our understanding of the origins of design research as well as the role that the DRS has played in its development'. After taking the format of an interactive exhibition at DRS2016, DRF developed into an online conversation platform at <https://designresearchfailures.com/>. The project has also had a presence at RTD2017 (Edinburgh, March 22-24) and PhD by Design 2017 (Sheffield, April 3-4), and has further been presented at NERD, New Experimental Research in Design (Braunschweig, June 15-16) and DHS2017 (Oslo, September 7-9). Finally, on November 23, 2017, the first spin-off satellite DRF event was held as part of the Public Innovation Week (La Semaine de l'Innovation Publique) in Nantes, as a way to engage local stakeholders in reflecting on the way in which the approach of designing policies and public action has failed.

In the frame of DRF, addressing failures is not about reflecting on 'why didn't we?' but instead taking a shortcut towards 'why don't we?' In this sense, the project is about nothing less than anticipating and co-creating the future of the design discipline. However, while every response to the central question posed is constructively forward facing, it is also deeply rooted in design history. Just like each response effectively challenges our notions of what constitutes failure and in reverse success, so does it confront us with our historical understanding of the design discipline.

One of the key objectives for DRF is to continue to facilitate an inclusive, open-ended conversation characterized by fruitful dissensus, rather than aiming for a single conclusive answer (this is how design research has failed in the last 50 years). In this pursuit design research is embraced in its entirety and diversity: across gender, age, race, geography, politics, religion, institutions (or lack thereof), academia + industry + third sector. A part of this goal also concerns involving voices from the many different corners of design research. From a design research perspective, design history is one such corner, and it is positive to note existing DRF responses with a distinct design historical angle (such as Danah Abdulla's response: "It has failed to acknowledge design's role in colonialism" (2017)), along with responses from design historians, such as Alison Clarke (2016).

However, other forms of possible engagement between the field of design history and DRF exist beyond this most immediate connection. At a recent design research conference, a colleague suggested that each DRF response could act as the basis for a design research PhD call/position





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(in particular practice-based, addressing the research question through practice (Frayling 1993; Koskinen et al. 2011)). To this I would add that each response too could act as a lens for the making/unmaking of design histories. These two potentials are of course interrelated. For the PhD student in design (or we could say the design researcher), each response offers a sense of urgency coming from within the discipline, and consequently a design space ripe for critical action. To illustrate this point with the example of Danah Abdulla's response above, the PhD student could e.g. be faced with the task of prototyping a decolonized design practice. For the design historian, it appears to me that each response offers a possibility to explore how we got to this point (addressing both the issue at hand and its identification as a failure). Sticking with the example of Danah Abdulla, this could be a matter of exploring design's role in colonialism, as well as the lack of acknowledgement and critical reflection on this dynamic from within design. While some of the issues brought forth through such studies might already have been adequately covered in design history, there might too be novel design histories to be explored. Further, even with significant scholarship on a certain topic, it might be interesting to reflect on whether the findings have adequately been fed back to design practice, design research, and society at large. In this case, DRF could offer a possibility to connect the already existing dots.

Of course, one could also look at the entire project as a designed unfolding discourse, and consequently study data such as the chronology in responses being submitted, the emerging gravity around certain issues and topics, and new responses that effectively counter existing ones. To this one could add comments on responses posted on the DRF site, analytics from social media, and of course all sorts of analyses of the traffic on the DRF site (demography, site usage etc.), coupled with the material from the various DRF exhibitions and workshops, to end up with some sort of x-ray of an unfolding design discourse, a sort of history in the making. In her article "'Make Us More Useful to Society!': The Scandinavian Design Students' Organization (SDO) and Socially Responsible Design, 1967–1973", Ida Kamilla Lie writes:

*As emphasized by Guy Julier (2015: 154), "design activism and social design must ... be regarded as representing discursive moments that are bound to their historical circumstances." The SDO's activities in the late 1960s constituted such a "moment," providing what we may call a window of opportunity for the development of social awareness within Nordic design discourse, as well as for enthusiastic experimentation with collective, collaborative design methods (Lie 2016: 355).*



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To me, the 50-year anniversary of the DRS—standing at a turning point simultaneously looking towards the past and the future—is in a sense symptomatic of the larger design research field. Responding to this moment in time, DRF is about designing a space for collective disciplinary introspection, a self-reflective pause, in order to anticipate and cocreate the future. I’m very curious how design historians would engage in this specific moment, whether it presents an opportunity for direct engagement or a subject of study, and if the project somehow resonates with the current issues in design history, as experienced at the 40-year anniversary of the DHS.

Design historians have an incredibly valuable perspective to add to the question of how design research has failed, and my hope is that DRF in turn offers an interesting, alternative lens for the making of new histories as well as the unmaking of established ones, with the potential of bringing new perspectives to the fore. Below are two examples, first Kaisu Savola responding to an anonymous DRF response from PhD by Design 2017 and second, Ben Highmore responding to Jeremy Myerson’s Pre-DRS2016 DRF response. My hope is that these initial examples will inspire more future engagements between DRF and design history.



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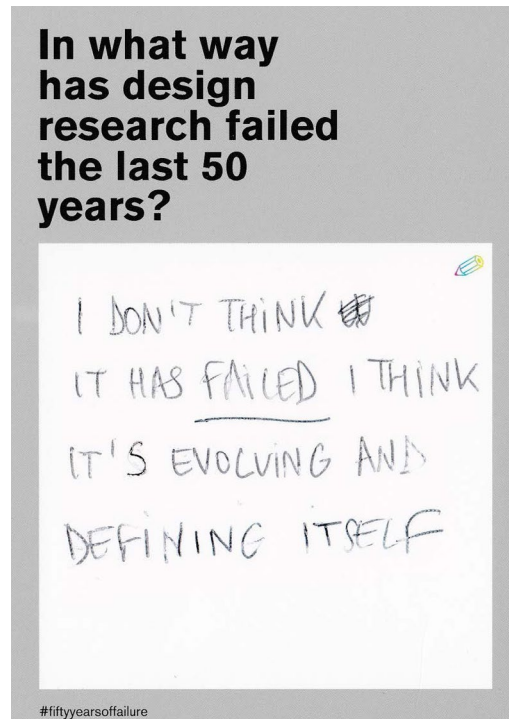


Figure 1 – Anonymous DRF response from PhD by Design 2017. Graphic design by Marije de Haas, handwriting by anonymous conference participant. Copyright by Søren Rosenbak.

Contribution by Kaisu Savola, PhD Candidate, Department of Design, Aalto University School of Arts, Design. Responding to an anonymous DRF response from PhD by Design 2017:

*I DON'T THINK IT HAS FAILED I THINK IT'S EVOLVING AND DEFINING ITSELF.*

I chose this statement not because I agree or disagree with it but because it made me realize how impossible it is to think of history in terms of successes and failures only.

Success to some means failure to others, and the other way around.

For example, the history of contemporary consumer culture is full of successful businesses producing successful products while failing to take care of the environment or distribute wealth equally. I'm not sure if it is the historian's place to decide what is a success and what is a failure to begin with. The most interesting thing for a historian is to discover the system that produces and allows for these so-called successes and failures.

The system needs to be understood before it can be changed.



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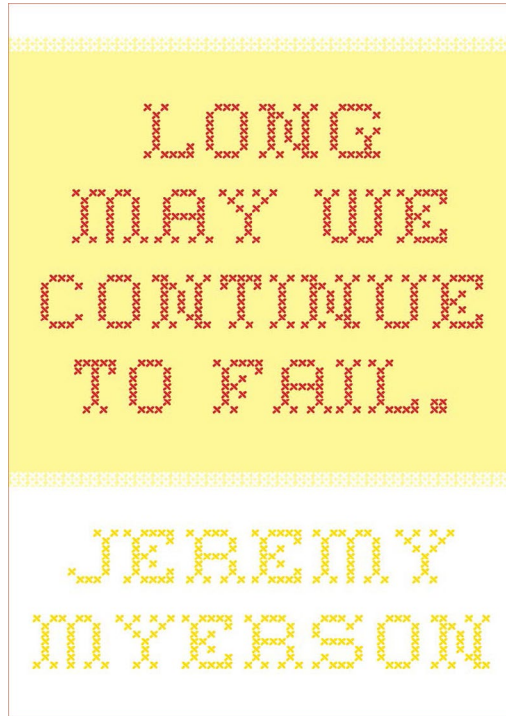


Figure 2 – DRF response by Jeremy Myerson. Graphic design by Marije de Haas.

Copyright by Søren Rosenbak.

*Contribution by Ben Highmore, Professor of Cultural Studies (Media and Film, Centre for Material Digital Culture) and Reader in Media Studies (Centre for Photography and Visual Culture), University of Sussex. Responding to Jeremy Myerson, Helen Hamlyn Professor of Design, Royal College of Art & Director of The WORKTECH Academy, Unwired Ventures Ltd.: Long may we continue to fail.*

I have almost zero experience of anything that is officially named as ‘design research’ (I examined a PhD on the topic at the RCA – it was about ‘design research’). So, I’ll have to take your word for it that ‘failure’ has been its fate. I’m intrigued by Jeremy Myerson’s response. My response is probably somewhat tangential.

As a teenager, I worshipped at the altar of Samuel Beckett: ‘birth was the death of him’. For Beckett success was never a quest: fail again, fail better. Beckett was good at managing expectations. It makes you wonder what could success be, apart from something monstrously inhuman. If life is made of death and mess, of fragile relations that are maintained for a time and then lost, if entropy is the only true philosophy of nature, then ‘success’ would be an attempt to halt life itself.



## 8.3

### Histories of Design Research Failures

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I've always been intrigued by experiments in social life: collectives, communes, cooperatives, experiments in education, of medicine and health (the Peckham Experiment). These projects often burn brightly for a decade or so and then are either drawn back in the mainstream or disappear. They are seen to fail. We are constantly told that are social worlds are failures (multiculturalism, 1968, welfare socialism). Where are our examples of success? Perhaps today we need to rethink how we measure success and failure, and think about the qualities we would like from our failures.

Perhaps the only way forward is to gird your loins and not treat 'failure' as failure. Social experimental design (of forms of life) may only ever fail. Don't try and succeed, just try and fail better.

Søren Rosenbak 'Histories of Design Research Failures'  
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**Joana Ozorio de Almeida Meroz, Leiden University, Netherlands.**

Dutch design historiography has often been criticized for following the 'art historical template' (Huygen 2007: 430, Simon Thomas 2008: 8, Meihuizen and Tollenaar 2016). This critique entails an understanding of design as an autonomous aesthetic phenomenon situated in a context-less vacuum (Fallan 2010: 4-15). In fact, however, as early as the 1950s, Dutch design historians resisted this framework in search for a contextual understanding of design.

The first attempts contextualized design from the Netherlands in terms of the Dutch nation, understood as an entity made up by a homogeneous group of people that share a common culture, ancestry, language and religion. Exemplary of this approach is Jaffé's 1956 study of De Stijl 1917-1931 (Jaffé 2008 (1956)). There, Jaffé rejects the art historical 'descriptive cataloguing of phenomena' in favour of understanding 'the artist's work' as 'principally a social activity' (Jaffé 2008 (1956): 2). Crucially, however, Jaffé, understands this 'social activity' to be De Stijl's 'national entourage' and 'its inherent traditions' (Jaffé 2008 (1956): 3).

It was not long before Dutch design historians rejected this reductive essentialist approach to the nation as inadequate for understanding design. For this reason, some of them turned to social, political and economic contexts to understand the country's design instead. However, these studies have tended to assume those contexts as coterminous with the state, here meaning a self-governing, politically defined territory. The first study on Dutch design to position its topic in terms of social contexts was Holland in vorm: Dutch Design 1945-1987 (Staal and Wolters 1987). Significantly, however, Holland in vorm limited the analysis of those contexts to dynamics endogenous to the Netherlands; for example, by looking at Dutch professional design organizations, Dutch design education, and domestic aspects of post-industrialization. Holland in vorm thereby implicitly positions the state as the most relevant explanatory context for design, where the state is understood as a spatially fixed entity limited to the Netherlands' political territory and that develops according to its own internal dynamics independently from external influences.

Social science scholars call the tendency to limit the explanation of phenomena to the horizon of the nation-state 'methodological nationalism' (about methodological nationalism, see: Wimmer and Glick Schiller 2003, Chernilo 2006, 2007, 2011, Amelina et al. 2012). One of methodological nationalism's key shortcomings is that it omits the fact that the formation of nation-states is deeply entangled with transnational developments. Therefore, fundamental to transcending the methodological nationalism inherent to studies that contextualize design in terms of the nation or



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the state has been, what I call, a 'social constructivist approach' to the nation-state. Starting in the 1980s, social constructivist theorists of nationalism (e.g. Edensor 2002, Anderson 2006, Billig 2010, Hobsbawm and Ranger 2010) started arguing that rather than natural and perennial entities, nation-states are relatively recent cultural constructs, 'imagined communities' that came into being as a result of nineteenth century nation-building processes. Increasingly since the end of the 20th century, some design historians started adopting, even if implicitly, social constructivist perspectives in their studies of national design (by way of example and without any aim at comprehensiveness: Fry 1988, Sparke 1988, Narotzky 2009, Taylor 2010, Fallan 2012, Lees-Maffei and Fallan 2013, Yagou 2013).

I would argue that this had two significant ramifications for the study of national design. The first is a focus on the role of transnational dynamics in shaping national design canons. Building on social constructivist theorists of nationalism, some design historians started examining national design canons as political constructions, which is to say, as products of political nation-building efforts rather than as natural embodiments of the nation (again by way of example and without aiming at comprehensiveness: Julier 1996, Gimeno Martínez 2006, 2007, Korvenmaa 2012, Bártolo 2014, Jerlei 2014, Serulus 2016). For many of them, this meant examining how the political construction of national design canons happens not only 'from within' (= methodological nationalism) but is also deeply entangled in developments that transcend country borders. This social constructivist approach has certainly contributed towards the necessary 'de-essentialization' of design as autonomous object. Yet – and this is the second ramification of a social constructivist perspectives for the study of national design – it has also covertly introduced a problematic and tenacious anthropocentric understanding of politics design's context.

Classical political philosophy conceives of politics as a separate domain of life where explicitly 'political' activities take place in official institutions and procedures: the state, political parties, policy documents etc. (Latour 2007). Significantly, this view assumes that the source of power is located in humans – so much so, that, from Aristotle to Hannah Arendt, classical political philosophy has held that participating in political life even entails one's disentanglement from 'the world of things' (Pocock 1998 (1992)). This is therefore to imagine politics as a distinctively social realm and as humans' sole prerogative; when the material appears in these accounts, they play a wholly subordinate function (Schouten 2013). In that humans are positioned at the centre of meaning and action, political philosophy can be characterised as anthropocentric.

I would argue that many social constructivist design historical accounts portray politics in terms of classical political philosophies. In these studies, 'politics' has also often been understood as





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happening within the realm of 'officially political' institutions, with the state emerging as a privileged actor. Accordingly, authors have examined how state discourses – such as design policies, institutes, centres, publications and exhibitions – have contributed to the creation of national design canons.

This political model can thus likewise be said to be anthropocentric. This may sound contradictory given design history's focus on design, or in other words, material artefacts. Yet, an anthropocentric approach to politics implies a view of design artefacts as the passive 'props and resources for the [human] performance' of national identity where their materiality is understood to be, well, immaterial to the creation of the symbolic meanings of national design canons (Griswold, Mangione, and McDonnell 2013: 345). To put it differently, all political agency to create, maintain and disseminate national design is allocated to humans with materials emerging as 'passive surface[s] upon which social forces act and impart meaning' (Domínguez Rubio 2014: 618). In sum, to say that national design historiography is anthropocentric does not imply that it lacks objects but rather that these appear as the mute objects of human politics.

This human-centred imagination of politics has come under fire by new materialist scholarship on political thought. I use the term 'new materialism' here to refer to a shared sensibility among scholars who hold that instead of acting as the passive products of social forces, materials and things actively participate in the shaping of meaning, cultural forms and social relations and that their agency therefore also needs to be accounted for to understand political reality (Joyce and Bennett 2010). To new materialist scholars, the Anthropocene demonstrates the impossibility of defining a clearly delineated human realm. They argue that, rather than standing outside a nature that can be dominated, the Anthropocene reveals that humanity exists in symbiotic relations with a global nature from which it cannot be distinguished; as political scientist Antoine Bousquet puts it: 'We are merely a particular manifestation of a wider material continuum in which we are deeply entangled' (Bousquet 2012: 3).

For this reason, new materialists hold that reality is inherently 'hybrid' rather than composed of humans and non-humans as two distinct spheres (Latour 1993). This understanding replaces the notion of culture as comprising only humans and the notion of the natural, material world as strictly non-human with a notion of a hybrid ontology, which is to say, as comprising both subjects and objects. To be precise, this hybrid reality implies that no a priori distinctions can be made between different types of being. Thus, the emphasis is not on the interaction between essentially distinct spheres of culture (humans) and nature (non-humans), but rather on transcending binarism altogether by recognizing an ontology that is, as sociologist John Law has called it, inherently messy, impure and heterogeneous (Law 2010 (2004)).



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I would like to argue that this new materialist recognition of the entanglements between humans and nature has deep implications for a design historical anthropocentric understanding of politics. Commentators have frequently seized on the new materialist 'flattened out' perspective as proof of its apolitical orientation (for overviews of this critique, see: Berker 2006, Harman 2014). But this is based on a misunderstanding. New materialism holds that all entities are ontologically equal. Consequently, no distinctions can be made in advance concerning their relevance to a given situation based on their 'nature'; for example, that the state is automatically more relevant to understanding the construction of national design than a country's climate or a pedestal's colour and shape. What new materialism does not say, however, is that they are all thereby equally strong (Harman 2014: viii-ix, 18). Indeed, for new materialism, which actors are decisive and which are inconsequential in the construction of national design is a matter of empirical investigation. These investigations need first of all to be open to the possibility that some unexpected things (volume, weight, plasticity, surface area) may acquire significant political capacities rather than deciding in advance that this is the sole entitlement of human discourses and institutions.

In fact, it is precisely this new materialist 'flattening out' that enables the circumvention of anthropocentrism and articulation of a post-anthropocentric concept of politics. Crucially, the conceptualization of reality as hybrid eliminates humanity as a distinct and delimited sphere that politics can be restricted to. Instead, it proposes a flattened space where anything can in principle acquire political capacities. Accordingly, new materialism views politics as thoroughly distributed between people and things. New materialism thus moves away from an anthropocentric politics towards a post-anthropocentric political model.

What are the implications for design history? I would argue that adopting a new materialist model of politics requires design history to fundamentally move beyond an understanding of politics as a human affair since it implies that design history's restriction of its investigation of politics to social institutions and discourses is inadequate for capturing the workings of a much more complex and scattered political reality. Accepting this basic premise has two closely related corollaries:

First, broadening the notion of politics and its sites. Rather than confined to human actors, discourses and institutions, political agency is dispersed, moving across a range of different, not necessarily human, actors. This means that, rather than confined to 'political' locations and procedures, politics occurs in a variety of sites and practices (as I examine in my PhD thesis: a country's climate, an artefact's visual and material characteristics, the design of a pedestal, global transportation systems) (Ozorio de Almeida Meroz 2018).

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Second, broadening the focus of analysis to the political agency of materials and things. Transnational design historians have examined national design as a form of material condensation of social processes. To put it differently, they have focused on how (transnational) cultural, economic and political structures shape materials into design objects and practices. In contrast, new materialism is concerned with how materials and things not only passively register but can also actively influence the creation of shared meanings and cultural products – such as national design. This shift in focus requires design scholarship to broaden its attention from how human politics can structure design artefacts to the diverse roles that a range of materials, physical settings and infrastructures play in enabling and constraining some things in occupying the symbolic object position of national design.

In conclusion, I argue that a new materialist model of politics can contribute to a postanthropocentric understanding of the transnational construction of national design by enabling design historians to expand their understanding of social and discursive factors in the transnational production of national design with an understanding of the material factors involved in this production.



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# 8.4

## Towards a Post-Anthropocentric 'Political Context' in Design Historiography

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Joana Ozorio de Almeida Meroz 'Post-Anthropocentric "Political Context"'  
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### From the Margins

The following deals with some of the problems encountered and approaches adopted in writing my PhD thesis on New Typography in Scandinavia at the Royal College of Art in London.

The three countries Denmark, Norway and Sweden are not usually associated with this movement. Instead, New Typography is commonly described as the work of a small group of Central and Eastern-European avant-garde artists which in 1925 was introduced to the German printing trade in 1925 by the special issue of *Typographische Mitteilungen* [Typographic Messages] titled 'elementare typographie' [elemental typography] and edited by Jan Tschichold (1902–74).

Whilst New Typography was a minor concern amongst Scandinavian avant-garde artists, it is possible to find stray examples in the literature on little magazines (Holmberg, 1987; Brooker et al, 2013) or on literary or political groups (Bredsdorff 1982; Thing, 1993; Harsløf 1997; Jelsbak 2006; Svedjedal 2011). However, it should be noted that because the texts in which these examples feature are written primarily from literary or political perspectives, the typography itself is typically only dealt with in passing. Conversely, although New Typography arguably had a much greater impact on commercial printing in the three countries, it is poorly described in the literature focusing on this area of graphic production. Indeed, an initial literature survey revealed only two articles dealing specifically with this topic, by Magdalena Gram (2006) and Torbjørn Eng (1998) respectively. In other words, my research has dealt with marginality both in terms of Scandinavia's position to Central-European Modernism, and in terms of my topic's place in the literature. The problems discussed below all relate to this marginal status. The first concerns the lack of secondary sources. The second deals with how one might think about the relationship between centre and periphery, particularly in terms of understanding how ideas and styles spread across international borders. The third relates to the second, but concerns itself with how one might evaluate what could be classified as derivative work. Lastly, some of the ways in which the 'wild' New Typography of the avant-garde was domesticated by the printing trade in Scandinavia will be discussed.

### Problem 1: A Lack of Secondary Sources

The first problem encountered was a lack of secondary sources. The approach taken in order to overcome this was informed by Gram's and Eng's articles, both of which had turned to trade journals as primary source material. Of course, this approach is not new. For instance, it was suggested already in Clive Dilnot's seminal article 'The State of Design History' that trade journals could be used to 'to map the changing values, ideas, and beliefs expressed or communicated in text and graphic layout', and thereby to 'map the history of the professions' (1984, 19).





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However, in my case I found the approach particularly apt. Although Tschichold's work in promoting New Typography to a printing trade audience through the special issue of *Typographische Mitteilungen* and subsequent publications is well documented, little critical attention has been devoted to how this was interpreted by the graphic trades. I therefore decided to build upon Gram's and Eng's work by performing an exhaustive survey of New Typography's coverage in Scandinavian printing journals, and to focus more closely on the New Typography of printers than on that of the avant-garde. In turn, the journals surveyed informed the decision to frame the research using the transnational parameter 'Scandinavia'. It soon became clear that journals were published and read across the Scandinavian borders. For instance, *Grafisk Revy* [Graphic Revue, 1930-36], was published jointly by the Danish, Norwegian and Swedish compositors' unions, articles appeared in any of the three languages, and the publication explicitly proclaimed itself part of a Scandinavianist tradition (Wessel, 1931).

### Problem 2: Scandinavia and the Centre

Through the focus on trade journals, I was also presented with a way of approaching the second problem: how to think about the relationship between centre and periphery – and then particularly how to understand the spread of ideas and styles. Maurizio Scudiero has observed that the journals of the international avant-garde were drawn to each other 'spontaneously, following the activities of the groups and their artists', and by the common need to exchange resources like texts and stereotypes (2012, 165–66). Trade journals also needed to exchange resources. However, their ties were not so much spontaneous creations, as they were extensions of the pre-established networks underpinning organisations like the International Congress of Master Printers and International Secretariat of Printers. Trade journals formed what Ellen Mazur Thomson has called 'professional communication networks', which she has argued served to define the professions 'to themselves and to others' (1997, 37). Reflecting each profession's culture and relationship to particular reproduction technologies, they formed nodes in a series of discreet, international, professional networks. They were more likely to report on developments within their respective fields abroad than those taking place in related fields at home. For instance, printing journals maintained a knowing silence on the typography of local avant-garde publications like Georg Pauli's (1855–1935) *flamman* [the flame, 1917–21] and D.N.S.S.'s *Pressen* [The Press, 1922–24]. Only after German type specimens started making use of New Typography did they start showing interest. Similarly, the advertising trade press, which predominantly addressed lay-out men and looked to American ideas of scientific advertising, took little interest in Modernist commercial art prior to the publication of *The Studio's Modern Publicity* 1930 and *Mise en Page* (1931). The advertising journals' lack of coverage was remarkable given the high level of interest shown in New Typography by the printing trade press in the intervening years.



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The choice to downplay the national category in favour of a focus on language, journal networks and professional culture was further underpinned by ideas formulated around networks in a broader sense by other design and art historians. Anna Calvera's thoughts on the local, regional, national and global provided a point of departure. Seeking to break down the binary relationship of centre and periphery she proposed a structure where 'the geography of design becomes a crossroads, a puzzle of relationships and exchanges' (Calvera 2005, 375). I also turned to some of Hubert van den Berg's texts on the avantgarde in the Nordic countries. He argues that the practice of writing art history within national frameworks has hindered our understanding the avant-garde's 'supernational' nature, which enabled the rapid exchange of styles, texts and ideas across borders (van den Berg 2000). Drawing upon the rhizome, the image of thought informing the complex structure of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's book *Mille plateaux* [A Thousand Plateaus, 1980, tr. 1987], van den Berg considers the avant-garde to be a fluctuating, omni-directional, self-organising, non-hierarchical malleable structure without an organised point of entry or exit which met its limits 'not only in Turkey or in Georgia on the Caucasus, in Norwegian Lapland, in Finland, in Santiago de Chile or Fukuoka, but also in Berlin, Paris, New York and Moscow; not only in the difference between the work of different artists, but also - virtually without exception - within the work of each avant-garde artist' (2007, 347). As opposed to the centre-periphery model, this network was characterised by flow rather than hierarchy, no 'mere' historiographical projection', but an entity which can be mapped through 'demonstrable data': like the collaborations manifest in publications and exhibitions, the memberships of organisations, through correspondence and so on (van den Berg 2007, 343). That ideas and styles travelled both to and from Scandinavia is clear, for instance in Tschichold's own work. Whilst his manifesto undoubtedly was the key point of reference informing Scandinavian printers' discussions about New Typography, his ideas were in turn informed by the work of a wide-ranging avant-garde network which included the Danish group D.N.S.S. As Torben Jelsbak has identified, *Die neue Typographie* (1928) contains references both to their pamphlet *Aktiv Reklame* [Active Advertisement, 1924] and broadsheet *Pressen* (2006, 122).

### Problem 3: Judging the Work in Question

The third problem concerned how to evaluate work created in the 'periphery'. One reason the centre-periphery model has been seen as unsatisfactory, particularly amongst those working on histories of Modernism, is that its hierarchical structure combined with the avantgarde's emphasis on new form can lead to a line of argument which stipulates that the innovation taking place at the centre is original and significant whereas the periphery's interpretations of the same are derivative and consequentially of little interest. For this reason, Jeff Werner has questioned the usefulness of transposing international narratives to Swedish art history, claiming it always leaves Swedish Modernist work looking 'like a pale cousin from the countryside' when compared to international counterparts (2002, 99).



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In dealing with this problem I turned to domestication, which has been positioned by Roger Silverstone (1992, 2006) and others writing in the field of media and technology studies as an alternative to diffusion, the dominant theory of how technologies are taken up and spread. Diffusion, first theorised by Everett M. Rogers in 1962, focuses on innovation. It argues that technologies are either 'adopted' or 'rejected' on the basis of the innovativeness of a range of adopter types spanning from the venturesome, through the early and late adopters, down to the laggards—and whether or not the innovation in question succeeds in reaching critical mass (Rogers 2003, 282–285, 343–344). In contrast, domestication focuses on use, and how technologies are taken up and modified by users to suit their needs, preferences, abilities and circumstances. Whilst originally limited to studies of the household environment, the applications of domestication soon expanded to the wider field of Everyday Life (Lie and Sørensen 1996, 13). Kjetil Fallan then argued for its use as a design historical method, and then not only to study products, objects and technologies, but also theories, systems, beliefs and ideas (2010, 99). Recently, Julia Meer has used domestication specifically to argue that the German printing trade did not simply 'accept New Typography's validity' as claimed in *Die neue Typographie* (Tschichold 2006, 61), but that it actively took it up as part of their educational programme, modifying and adapting it in the process (Meer 2015). Such modifications were deemed necessary because the 'wild' New Typography of the avant-garde was considered ill-suited to the demands and restrictions of professional printing practice. Nevertheless, printers in Scandinavia, as in Germany, identified New Typography as a means by which the printing trade could increase its competitiveness against rival trades, and by which individual compositors could gain new skills and thereby remain employable in an increasingly mechanized workplace.

### Domestication of New Typography in Scandinavia

In Scandinavia, New Typography was domesticated in a variety of ways. In order to structure what might otherwise appear a disparate set of tactics I have therefore made use of three 'modes', or strategies, proposed by Jeffrey Meikle as a 'tentative typology' of how modernity was domesticated in the United States (1995, 165). The first of these sees modernity placed 'in a historical continuum linking past, present, and future' (Meikle 1995, 143–44). This allowed it to be seen as part of a gradual evolution rather than a violent rupture. So, whilst Tschichold in his well-known manifesto of elemental typography (1925, tr. 2007) positioned the use of photography and photomontage over hand illustration, sans-serif over serif and blackletter type, *kleinschreibung* over standard German orthography, and asymmetrical over symmetrical composition as part of a decisive break between New and Old, Scandinavian printers were instead eager to point to historical, and if possible, domestic points of reference. For instance, Anders Billow (1890–1964) emphasized the 19th century origins of the sans serif (1930, 34–35). In Denmark, Hans Christian



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Andersen's (1805–1875) bed screen and scrap books were held up as domestic precursors of photomontage (Slomann 1930, 7), and earlier consistent use of lower case was identified in the work of Martin Petersen (1863–1935) (S-z 1934, 16–17). Several voices, amongst them Emil Selmar's, drew attention to the asymmetric compositions of the Artistic Printing period (1927). The historical continuum was further emphasized through the use of the term 'Functionalism'. In the run-up to the Stockholm Exhibition 1930 'Functionalist Typography' had been taken up as a synonym for New Typography. This new name enabled a shift in debate, from evaluations of Tschichold's teachings to personal and often 'commonsensical' expressions of what Functionalism 'really' meant in typography. As a result, those with traditionalist sympathies were able to promote traditional practices and aesthetics as part of a Functional, and therefore purportedly progressive, typography. This was particularly the case for the design of books.

Meikle's second mode limits modernity to discrete zones, outside of which the world remains 'timelessly whole and reassuringly traditional' (1995, 143–44). In my case, this applies particularly to photomontage. In mainstream advertising, book cover and poster design usage was limited prior to 1935. In Sweden and Norway in particular, this allowed the medium to retain its revolutionary connotations, connotations which were knowingly exploited by the Social Democratic parties' women's and youth groups in an effort to connect with groups of voters more inclined to hold a positive view of the Soviet Union than the population at large would. In Denmark, the publications of radical group Monde also made extensive use of photomontage in their publications. More generally, Viggo Hansen (later known as Viggo Hasnæs, dates unknown) and others argued that New Typography should be limited to jobbing print and not for the setting of books (1928).

The third mode relies on the incorporation of Modernist icons into the user's own environment, an act which neutralises its threatening, unfamiliar, aspects. This was the trickiest one of the three for me, perhaps because of its focus on icons, by which Meikle referred to things like a toy Zeppelin, a souvenir ashtray from the 1928 Empire Exhibition in Glasgow, or items of commercial art featuring illustrations of streamlined planes and trains. Whilst Tschichold's special issue certainly can be regarded as a Modernist icon inserted in into the printing trade environment, further examples can be found if we shift the focus from icons specifically to other tactics which allowed Modernism to co-exist, or even merge, with existing practice: Following German architect Richard Herre (1885–1956), Hasnæs stressed that New Typography should not be seen as a replacement of the 'old', but a 'new variation' to be used alongside it (1930). Viktor Peterson (unknown–1945) amalgamated Tschichold's principles with Rudolf Engel-Hardt's (1886–1968) older guidelines for using the golden section in composition to create a variation called 'constructive design'. Hugo Lagerström (1873–



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1956) identified that Tschichold had deemed Mediæval Antikva permissible for setting continuous text, as no fully satisfactory sans serif had yet been developed for this purpose, and proposed a 'modified form' in which faces like Baskerville, Walbaum and Bodoni were acceptable, as they were also 'impersonal' and 'more constructed than "written by hand"' (1928, 435).

Domestication offers a way of assessing the New Typography of printers in a way which avoids their portrayal as 'pale cousin[s] from the countryside', when compared to that of the avant-garde. If made on aesthetic grounds, or on the basis of innovativeness, comparisons between the two seem to me not only unfair, but more importantly of limited value. If one does not take into account that the printing trade's version of New Typography was created with a different purpose, under different circumstances and under different constraints, such comparisons can only offer a limited understanding of the respective works' merits. The adaptations made to New Typography by the trade were not accidental, but underpinned by rational and coherent arguments. Clearly, its practitioners were active participants and not limited to the binary, diffusionist choice of 'adopting' or 'rejecting'. Whilst their aim was often to reconcile New Typography with existing practice, it does not necessarily follow that this was borne out of Conservatism. Indeed, it can be seen as an active effort to adapt and include aspects of New Typography optimally. It is, in my view, important to remember that the printers themselves believed they were improving New Typography, not watering it down. To extend Jeff Werner's metaphor, one might ask if the work of the Scandinavian printing trade appears pale because it is from the countryside (i.e. the periphery), or because it is a cousin (i.e. a relation, but not a direct descendent)? I would argue for the latter.

### Conclusion

Although it may not transpire from this paper, I too am fascinated by the typographic work of the avant-garde. However, I do not believe we should be bound by its own conception of what New Typography was. Through the choice of trade journals as primary sources, and by claiming the New Typography of printers a legitimate area of study, I have attempted to open up the term and arrive at a more diverse, possibly even inclusive, definition of what New Typography was to a greater community of people. By focusing on networks, be they the fluid structures of the avant-garde or the more formally organised journal networks of the graphic trades, I have sought to uncover a history of New Typography which is not delineated by borders, but by language and culture.

Consequentially, I have come to think of centre and periphery relations as independent of geography and the categories local, regional and national. As Hubert van den Berg argued, the avant-garde's limits were found not only at Europe's outskirts and beyond, but in urban centres



## 8.5

### Writing About New Typography from The Margins: Problems and Approaches

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like Berlin and Paris – and even in the careers of individual artists. That the commercial application of avant-garde ideas and styles were not spread uniformly either, nation by nation, but through a set of discreet professional networks can be seen from how Scandinavian practitioners were more likely to consult books and journals published by respective trades abroad than those published by competing trades at home.

Although further research needs to be undertaken in order to assess journals published elsewhere, I do not believe the Scandinavian practitioners to be exceptional in terms of viewing themselves as part of larger, international, professional cultures. Therefore, I also believe that this paper's model of discrete sets of networks is transferrable to other geographic and national contexts, and that it there may help foster a more nuanced understanding of how ideas and styles travel across borders, between languages and between professional cultures. Moreover, it is hoped that the approaches described above can assist the pursuit of such a project. For scholars working in geographies neglected by mainstream design history, or where specialised domestic secondary literature is sparse, trade journals can provide possible fertile material for research. In dealing with engrained art historical notions of the original and the derivative, domestication offers a conceptual framework which can help shift the historian's attention from innovation and aesthetic judgement to use. Freed from the avant-garde's emphasis on the new, the work of interpreting international currents in peripheral locales or contexts can be recast as creative acts.

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Trond Klevgaard 'New Typography from The Margins'  
Writing Visual Culture 8 (2017)



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**Fredie Floré, KU Leuven, Belgium and Javier Gimeno Martínez, VU Amsterdam, Netherlands**

### Introduction

In Belgium, industrial design gained official recognition relatively late. The national government recognised the potential of the 'new' discipline around 1955. Proper training in industrial design only arrived in 1957 in Belgium with the Section d'esthétique industrielle at the La Cambre school (originally initiated in 1954 as a 240-hour course) followed by the Section d'esthétique industrielle at the Institut Saint-Luc in Liège of 1962 (originally initiated in 1958 as a non-autonomous course), the course in Product development at the Nationaal Hoger Instituut voor Bouwkunst en Stedebouw in Antwerp (1967) and the course Industriële Vormgeving at the Stedelijk Hoger Instituut voor Visuele Communicatie en Vormgeving in Genk (1969) (Laurent 2004: 45, 49-51; Design in België 1940/84, n.p.). The Brussels Design Centre was established in 1964.

In the meantime, things have changed. In the context of the federalisation of the 1990s, design became an issue of regional economic politics, resulting in such institutions as Design Vlaanderen (Design Flanders). In the early 21st century the former Ghent Museum of Decorative Arts (founded in 1903) changed its name in Design museum Ghent. While these and other developments demonstrate the official acceptance of design as a full-blown cultural discipline, the related discipline of design history is still 'under construction.'

This does not mean that the historiography of design in Belgium started from scratch in the last few decades. Early historiography both in Belgium and abroad chiefly studied wellknown episodes of Belgian design such as art nouveau and its representatives, especially Victor Horta and Henry Van de Velde. Furthermore, especially the above-mentioned Design Museum Ghent and other institutions such as the Provincial Departments for the Crafts (founded around 1946) have contributed with their exhibitions to the development of a design historiography. Also trade fairs and institutions such as the Brussels Design Centre facilitated historical overviews, launching publications to celebrate their anniversaries.

In the past few decades, inspired by international developments in design history, a handful of Belgian scholars contributed to the discipline within the context of academia. However, to realise this work they had to make room within other disciplinary fields such as architectural history, art history or the history of interior architecture. While this trajectory of emancipation is not uncommon, it is still far from finalised within the Belgian context.



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### Early design historiography

As noted above, early historiography of design in Belgium chiefly studied well-known episodes of Belgian design such as art nouveau and its representatives, especially Victor Horta and Henry Van de Velde, whose work is also included in Nikolaus Pevsner's *Pioneers of the Modern Movement* (Pevsner 1936). Van de Velde was first studied primarily as an architect in Karl Ernst Osthaus' book *Van de Velde: Leben und Schaffen des Künstlers* within the monographs series 'Die Neue Baukunst' (Osthaus 1920). His buildings and interiors were analysed in length. His book covers, silver and ceramic sets were shown with little commentary (Osthaus 1920: 142-152). [Fig. 1]

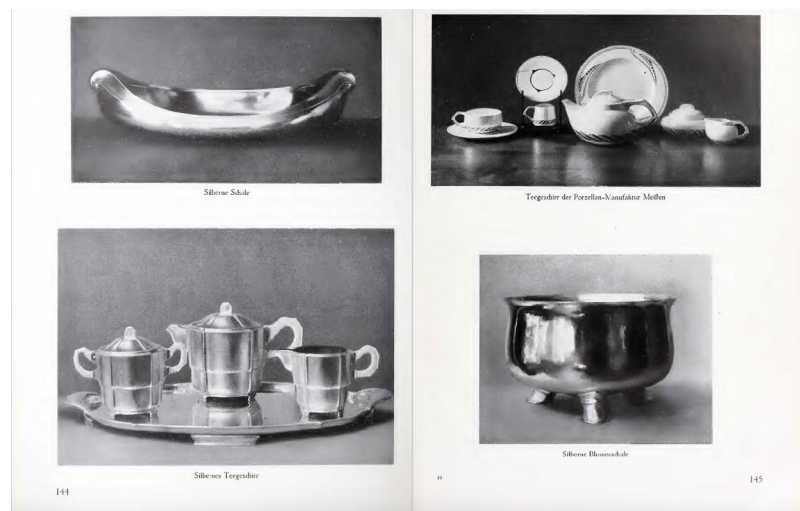


Figure 1 - Osthaus, Karl Ernst. 1920. *Van de Velde: Leben und Schaffen des Künstlers*. Hagen: Folkwang: 144-145.

Van de Velde's architecture was also the main topic of Maurice Casteels' book of 1932 with photographs of his buildings between 1925 and 1931. This time, the book was considerably thinner but published in Belgium (Casteels 1932). Important monographs on both Horta and Van de Velde were published in 1958 and 1959 respectively. Both were included in the series 'Belgische Kunstmonografieën'. The former was written by art historian Robert Delevoy and the latter by playwright Herman Teirlinck (Delevoy 1958; Teirlinck 1959). Both authors were directors of the Institut Supérieur des Arts Décoratifs in La Cambre. Teirlinck followed Van de Velde and was director between 1936 and 1950 and Delevoy, who lectured at the school since 1946, was director between 1965 and 1979.

Also, the earlier mentioned Ghent Museum of Decorative Arts and other institutions such as the Provinciale Diensten voor Kunstambachten (Provincial Departments for the Crafts), founded around 1946, contributed with their exhibitions to the development of a design historiography. For example, in September 1956 the East Flanders Provincial Department for Crafts organized an exhibition



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on 'Contemporary East-Flemish Crafts' at the Ghent Museum for Decorative Arts ('Oostvlaamse Kunstambachten te Gent' 1956: 3). Two years later the West Flanders Provincial Department for Crafts organised the exhibition 'Creative Crafts in West-Flanders' at its own exhibition gallery in Bruges. The exhibition displayed glass, ceramics, metal, bookbinding and textiles ('Bestendig Expositiecentrum voor toegepaste kunst te Brugge geopend' 1958: 3-4). The provincial departments were charged with the promotion of the crafts, which at that time included the already mentioned disciplines, but also photography, film and architecture, something that would seem out of place in our current understanding of the term 'crafts'.

However, it must be noted that rather than developing a historical revision, the exhibitions of the provincial departments first and foremost aimed at promoting the activity of craftsmen. This attitude contrasts with the situation in the Netherlands, where a first overview of Dutch applied artists between 1884 and 1909, written by Karel Sluyterman, was published in 1909 to celebrate the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Association Arti et Industriae. A second survey was published twenty years later written by textile designer Jo de Jong. It provided a short history of the applied arts of the Netherlands between 1890 and 1929 and was likewise commissioned to mark the twenty-fifth anniversary of a professional society of applied artists: the Dutch Society for Trades and Applied Arts (Meroz and Gimeno- Martínez 2016: 215).

From the 1970s onwards in Belgium also trade fairs and institutions such as the Brussels Design Centre facilitated historical overviews, launching publications to celebrate their anniversaries. For example, Frans Defour's 1977 book on the history of furniture in Belgium ranged from the 13th to the 20th century and was written to commemorate the 40th anniversary of the Brussels Furniture Trade Fair. The same author published a continuation in 1979, this time dealing only with the 20th century. In this last book, Defour develops his personal interpretation of design made in Belgium stating that '[c]ontemporary Belgian design is practical, as it should be. It is free of bright colours; it is straight-lined and has a sobriety of an object from everyday life, free of superficialities' (Defour 1979, 180). He classified Belgian designers into four categories: designers, furniture designers (meubelontwerper), interior architects (binnenhuisarchitect) and anti-designers. Rather predictably, for him the last category had a very negative connotation. According to the author, the anti-designers 'grant furniture the status of sculpture or object for admiration, an object without a specific functionality' (Defour 1979, 179). This emerging diversity within design was nonetheless incorporated in this and subsequent accounts.



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The twentieth anniversary of the Brussels Design Centre in 1984 similarly occasioned a historical approach to recent design, this time embodied in what was initially planned as permanent exhibition on Belgian design since 1940 for the opening of the Brussels Museum of Modern Art. The catalogue pointed out that 'industrial design in general has only recently been experienced as a cultural phenomenon', which makes this introduction in the museum symptomatic of a wider cultural recognition for design (Design in België 1940/84, n.p.). Conversely, in the Netherlands Pieter Brattinga had published his book *Industrial Design in the Netherlands* in 1964 and by the late 1970s the study of industrial design had entered academia with remarkable studies such as Elinoor Bergvelt's publication on the Stichting Goed Wonen (Good Living Foundation) (Bergvelt 1979). Conversely, the accompanying catalogue of the Brussels exhibition was not more than a 46-page booklet, remarkable nevertheless in its attempt to create a history of recent industrial design. It elaborated a timeline of the main developments related to industrial design internationally, starting in 1850, and linked it to the main events in Belgium. Unlike Defour's books, there was no substantial reflection but rather a list of events. Its scope extended beyond furniture to embrace seven categories including architecture and furniture, ceramics and glass, textile and wallpaper, technical products, transport, sport and graphics. It initiated a canon of industrial design in Belgium that was clearly dictated by the Design Centre annual selection of products and the award-winners of the Golden Signet. Thus, this catalogue included some 30 objects including technical products such as the milking machine of Fabrique National d'Armes de Guerre (1948), Roger Tallon's turning lathe 'Gallic 16' (1959), and Philippe Neerman's metro wagons for Brussels (1969-1973), along with Willy van der Meeren armchair in tube (1950), Charles Dethier's 'Ove' lamp (1968) [Fig. 2] and Pieter de Bruyne's 'Double chair' (1974), which was characterized in the catalogue as a 'sculpture-furniture' (Design in België 1940/84, n.p.).

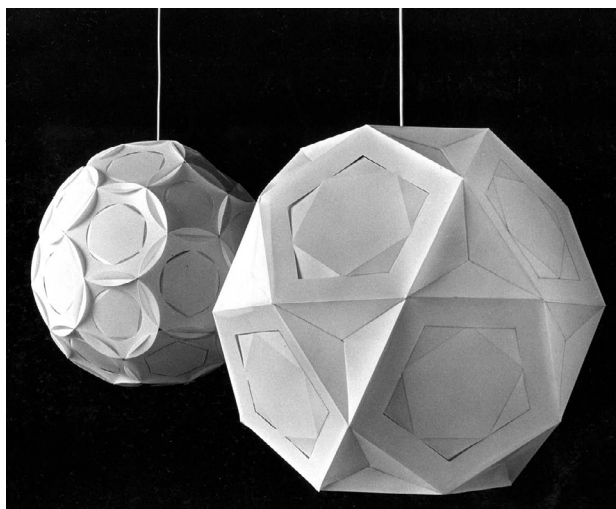


Figure 2 - Charles Dethier's 'Ove' lamp (1968) © Charles Déthier.



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### Making Room for Design History in Belgium

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In 1994 the 14th Biennial 'Interieur' exhibition in Kortrijk showed an exhibition entitled 'Design Made in Belgium 1900-1994.' It provided an overview of national production from the beginning of the century, generating that historiographic reflexion that had been present for furniture but less so for industrial design (Bekaert et al. 1994). The exhibition catalogue incorporated the Design Centre canon and echoing the 1984 selection, it included the usual sections of furniture, lighting, accessories, objects, and textiles, as well as a section on graphic design and transport. [Fig. 3] Nevertheless, if the 1984 selection had a predominantly technical character, this one reflected the selection criteria of the 'Interieur' fair, which more inclined towards aesthetic excellence rather than technical improvements.



*Figure 3 - View of the exhibition 'Design Made in Belgium 1900-1994' (1994) displaying a sofa, chairs and a cupboard in the foreground by designer Huib Hoste (1881-1957)  
©Interieur Foundation.*





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### Entering academia

So when and how did design history enter Belgian academia? Let us first sketch a quick picture of the existing Belgian universities. Belgium counts five Flemish and six Francophone universities: Université de Liège, Université de Namur, Université de Mons, Université Saint- Louis, Université Catholique de Louvain, Université Libre de Bruxelles, Vrije Universiteit Brussel, KU Leuven University, Ghent University, University of Antwerp and Hasselt University. In the course of the 20th century several of these universities devoted scholarly attention to the history of crafts, applied arts and design. For example, an interesting pioneering personality is Adelbert Van de Walle (1922-2006), an art historian and architect who was appointed as a researcher in 1951, and as professor art history and archaeology at Ghent University in 1961. [Fig. 4] While a considerable part of his research focused on urban archaeology and medieval heritage, he also developed a keen interest in the history of furniture design, crafts and, later, industrial design. This translated into his professional career. From 1951 to 1974 he combined his work at the university with a job as director of the Ghent Museum of Decorative Arts, where he launched a (for Belgium) new exhibition formula, titled the 'National Salon for Modern Social Furniture': an aesthetically controlled furniture fair located in the museum building (Floré 2004, 451-454).



Figure 4 - Prof. Adelbert van de Walle in *De Standaard*, 28 April, 1981.



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In the course of the 20th century scholarly research at Flemish and Francophone universities has produced a considerable amount of studies of the crafts or design production from a rich diversity of artists and architects, including Victor Horta, Henry Van de Velde, Willy Van Der Meeren, Pieter De Bruyne, etc. Not surprisingly, the contexts in which these studies were produced was predominantly those of art or architectural history. Over time this situation has not changed much. While in Britain, in the late 1970s, the Design History Society was founded and in the following decades different methodologies for approaching design history were being developed and discussed (Fallan 2010, 5), in Belgium the discipline remained a rather small niche of art and architectural history, without a postgraduate or master's degree of its own.

However, this does not imply that there have been no significant developments in the field of design history in Belgium. In fact, in the past few decades, inspired by the activities of the Design History Society and the International Conferences on Design History and Studies, a handful of scholars have been exploring different strategies of addressing design history within the context of academia in Belgium. They have done so by making room for design history within other disciplinary fields such as architectural history, art history or the history of interior architecture, as mentioned above. The universities involved have been predominantly Flemish: Ghent University, University of Antwerp, KU Leuven University, Hasselt University, and Vrije Universiteit Brussel. The faculties or departments involved include those of art history, engineering and architecture and design sciences. Since 2000, explorations in design history resulted in several PhDs, of which the content has been discussed in national and international fora and of which the quality has been broadly recognised. Yet, the emancipation of the discipline within the Belgian context is still far from complete. There is no master or PhD program in design history. The FWO – the Flemish section of the national research fund – now recognises design as part of the subcategory 'architecture and design', but while the website explains this subcategory also includes architectural history, no mention is made of design history.

Given the fragmented nature of the practice of design history in Belgium, design historians in Belgium have felt the need to invest or participate in trans-university events or collaborations. In the past ten years several initiatives have been undertaken which facilitated moments of contact and exchange. For example, from 2009 to 2012 the several design historians in Belgium collaborated on an educational project funded by the KU Leuven association aiming at the development of a Dutch-language reader in design theory, history and criticism. In 2010 a joint conference of the Design History Society and the International Conferences on Design History and Design Studies was organised in Brussels and Belgian design scholars of different universities and schools were invited





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to co-chair a series of strands. [Fig. 5] In 2017, colleagues from Ghent University took the initiative to redevelop a Dutch language journal on the history of interiors into a journal on the history of interiors and design, titled *Tijdschrift voor Interieurgeschiedenis en Design*. The editorial board was renewed and currently also includes several specialists in design and fashion history.



*Figure 5 - 'Design and Craft: A History of Convergences and Divergences', a joint conference of the Design History Society and the International Committee for Design History and Design Studies, Brussels, 2010. Photograph courtesy of the authors.*

### Conclusions

We hope it is clear by now that the community of design historians in Belgium – if we can call it a community – is a group of strongly motivated individuals operating within different related disciplinary fields within the context of a series of universities and, some of them, outside these universities. At the moment, on a national or regional level, there is no longterm overarching structure or foundation that systematically brings scholars together or promotes the discipline in Belgium, such as the *Stichting Designgeschiedenis* (Design History Foundation) in the Netherlands. Collaborations are mostly of an ad hoc and temporary nature and are largely based on personal contacts or friendships.

This situation is not a priori a bad one. The absence of a national or regional research foundation or structure stimulates each one of us to search for creative solutions and to actively participate in international or transnational networks and events. Meanwhile, within the context of our universities we are continuously challenged – and again: this is not a bad thing – to articulate or negotiate a place for design history as a valuable ally of a related, more consolidated discipline, be it art history, architectural history or the history of interior architecture.



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The downside of this situation is that it is vulnerable. Without proper nationally or regionally embedded stimuli we believe the continuation or development of design history in Belgian academia is uncertain. The question is what kind of stimulus does this small but complex country with eleven universities need? In our opinion, the model of an interuniversity master's degree would be worthwhile investigating. The successful MA in gender and diversity – a collaboration between the five Flemish universities – could be studied as an example. In any case the professional and personal contacts for exploring such an option are there. Wouldn't it be a beautiful way of making but also consolidating room for design history in Belgium?



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**Meret Ernst, HGK FHNW**

### Introduction

Graphic design put Switzerland on the international design map (Hollis 2006). By the 1950s Swiss designers had developed a uniquely clear graphic language which, in Richard Hollis's eyes, matched the country's reputation for efficiency and precision. Appearing not just in posters but in advertisements, brochures and books, *Neue Grafik* or *Swiss Style*, as it became known, was respected internationally for its formal discipline, and for its teachability to which this style lends itself perfectly. The underlying method – closely linked to constructivist-concrete art, especially at the so-called Zurich school – was based on constructive principles as the grid. Exercises developed by graphic designers like Josef Müller-Brockmann for their teaching were soon disseminated internationally. The importance of teaching was also discussed in journals like the influential *Neue Grafik* at that time (Hollis 2006: 210-211; Hofmann 2016: 337-345).

Design teaching and design historiography are closely linked in Switzerland, because design history has traditionally been affiliated with art schools rather than academic universities. As difficult as this situation can be, it also has its advantages. How can design historiography profit from design history in a practice-based context? Could such a partnership even contribute to general historiography, by considering design as part of the 'third culture of knowledge' (Mareis 2011)? And if so, what would be necessary to accomplish this task?



## Learning from History – But How?

### Design history and the practice-based education system at Swiss Universities of Applied Sciences (UAS)

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#### I. Situation: Research

Graphic design may well be the best-researched design field in Switzerland. Nonetheless, literature on graphic design and typography in Switzerland has so far tended to be associated with issues of authorship and patronage, and it has been characterized by thematic and geographic restrictions, as Lzicar and Fornari point out in their reader *Mapping Graphic Design History* (Lzicar and Fornari 2016: 9). [Fig. 1] As a result, a number of questions remain unanswered. For instance: what roles have education systems played in the formation of Swiss graphic design? This leads to another, methodologically tricky question: how to reconstruct actual teaching and/or its underlying, often unwritten teaching methodology, and how to correlate with the practice of ex-students? Also open to question is the definition of the topic in a broader sense. The history of graphic design was long defined through a rather narrow geographical focus on the German-speaking part of Switzerland, and through a focus on classical graphic production, leaving out the visual design of everyday objects such as tourist souvenirs.

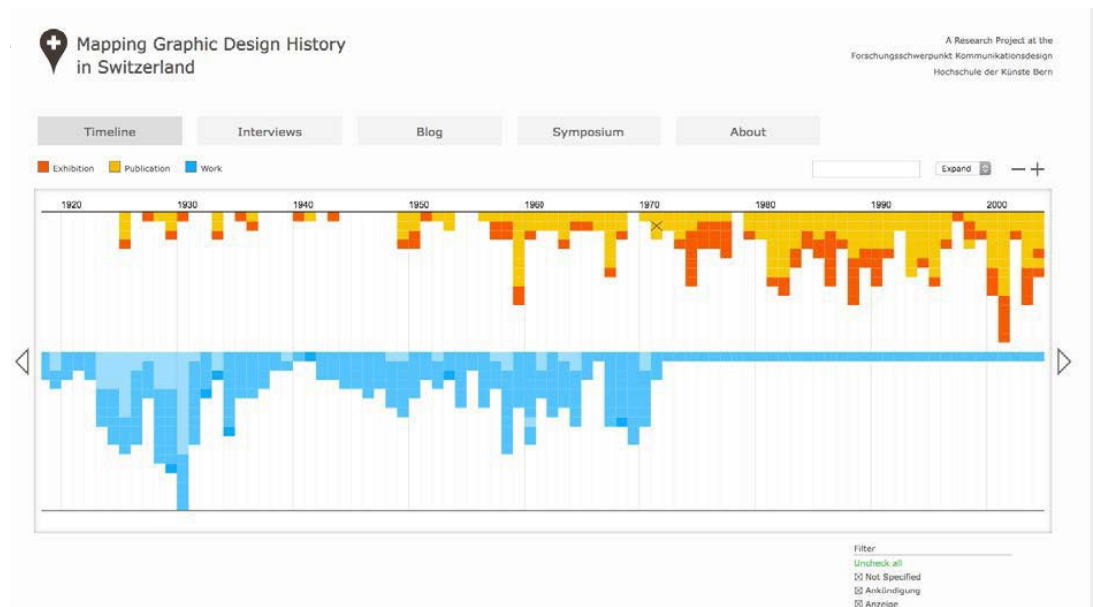


Figure 1 - Research Project, *Mapping Graphic Design History in Switzerland*  
<http://mappingswissgraphicdesignhistory.ch/>



## Learning from History – But How?

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Lzicar and Fornari want to foster a scholarly discussion on theoretical and methodological approaches, making them accessible to students, teachers, and researchers, as well as to professional graphic designers and a broader public (Lzicar and Fornari 2016: 10). This is reflected in the structure of their reader, which focusses on education, on issues of professional graphic design, and on archiving and disseminating – e.g. on the production and mediation of historical discourse in design culture (Lzicar and Fornari 2016: 12). The reader [Fig. 2], based on a reference tool and database developed through extensive research into the writing of modern graphic design history in Switzerland served as a preliminary study for a joint research programme supported by the National Science Foundation (SNSF). In *Swiss Graphic Design and Typography Revisited*, researchers from seven Swiss universities investigate the role and status of graphic design. The three-year project began in October 2016 as the biggest research collaboration established in the design field since the National Science Foundation began its activities in 1952. The project represents an exception, especially in terms of funding and joint research. [Fig. 3]

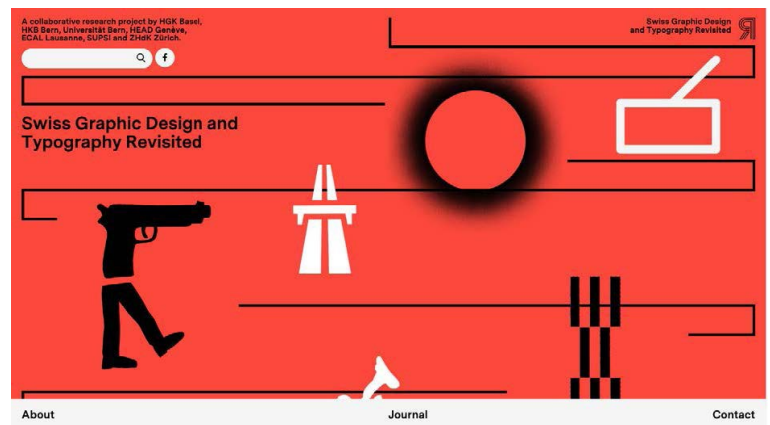
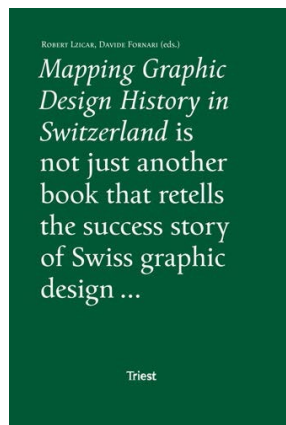


Figure 2 - Robert Lzicar, Davide Fornari, eds. 2016. *Mapping Graphic Design History in Switzerland*. Zurich: Triest Verlag.

Figure 3 - Research Project, *Swiss Graphic Design and Typography Revisited*  
<http://www.sgdtr.ch/>





## Learning from History – But How?

### Design history and the practice-based education system at Swiss Universities of Applied Sciences (UAS)

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There are, however, other research projects on Swiss design history at UAS, such as Design – Material – Display, a project on the prestige shoe manufacturer Bally, carried out at Zurich University of the Arts ZHdK. [Fig. 4] It explores the design and economic challenges faced by the shoe industry between 1930 and 1950, and examines how the diversification of clothing brought about by industrialization extended to footwear products. The project's scope is based on a cultural history of design, embracing production, mediation, and consumption, and the analysis poses complex questions. For example: What was the role of designers in industrial shoe production, at a time when neither the term 'designer' nor professional training for industrial designers existed in Switzerland? How are economic decisions and fashion developments interlinked? The authors also deal with issues of material scarcity, in particular of leather during the Second World War, analysing how this scarcity led to technical and design innovations, and how they were commodified. The principal aim is to gain an exemplary and comprehensive insight into an industry that developed between 1930 and 1950 into a form that persists to this day.



Figure 4 - Research Project, Design – Material – Zeigen. Schuhe am Beispiel des Schweizer Unternehmens Bally, 1930-1950, ZHdK  
<https://www.zhdk.ch/en/researchproject/432975>



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### Learning from History – But How? Design history and the practice-based education system at Swiss Universities of Applied Sciences (UAS)

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To name a further example, a research group of historians at Lucerne School of Art and Design HSLU has analysed the rise, fall and heritage of the silk industry, through written, visual and material sources. Using corporate archives as their research base, they employ methodologies of economic, social and cultural history, complementing archival documents with oral history interviews. What makes this project remarkable is the fact that it also uses insights and synergies derived from the applied research project Silk Memory, which resulted in a complex online database for research and design tool containing more than 3000 entries on fabrics, patterns, producers, and designers. [Fig. 5] Historians profit from the knowledge of textile designers, and vice versa, be it issues pertaining to the history or taxonomy of production techniques, or the evaluation of their aesthetic possibilities. Similar to experimental archaeology, experts reconstruct production techniques to assess their potential more precisely. Moreover, the project is linked to the Chair for History of Technology at ETH Zurich, and profits from discussing methodological approaches for a new history of technology while offering insights for design students.

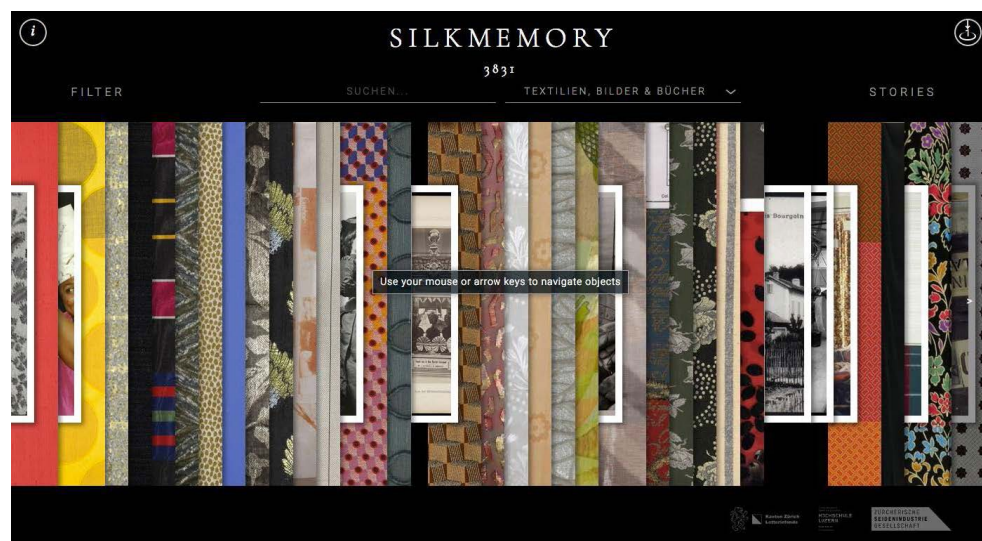


Figure 5 - Database of Research Project, Silk Memory. HSLU Design & Kunst  
<https://www.silkmemory.ch/>

All three projects explore objects of research linked to Switzerland. Do they inscribe themselves in a tradition of 'national' design historiography? Only in terms of subject matter: this would be the tentative answer. It is difficult to be more specific, as there are hardly any studies on Swiss design historiography and its underlying discourses, although important voices have contributed to the field – such as Sigfried Giedion, Stanislaus von Moos, Arthur Rüegg and Claude Lichtenstein, to name just a few. The lack of thorough research is even more apparent when it comes to specific design fields like industrial design, or more recent fields like media, interaction, or game design.



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#### II. Institutional framework

This lack of historiographical studies has to do with the institutional framework of academic research. Design history has no academic affiliation in Switzerland, even today. There is no chair of design history anywhere in Switzerland: not at traditional universities, not at the two Federal Institutes of Technology, or at the newly-founded Universities of Applied Sciences (UAS).

In 1995, the Swiss law regulating applied sciences education was revised (Ernst 2015: 358). Three years later, seven Universities of Applied Sciences were founded on the basis of this reform. They all offer courses of study in design. The reform ended the period of vocational education at traditional arts and crafts schools, which had sprung up all over Europe in the latter third of the 19th century. UAS are now on an equal footing with traditional universities, yet different. The commotion surrounding what was soon to be decried as ‘academisation’ belied the fact that the reform in design training led to a real wave of development, and to redefining educational practices. It fuelled the discussion about design teaching. How to define and teach the specific knowledge required in professional practice? As a craft or as a science? In the workshop or in the studio? Should it be understood as vocational or academic?

The shortening of curricula from five years of art college to three years of university was due to new state funding schemes. It put pressure on teaching content, especially on areas deemed not to be instrumental to professional activities, such as design history. Although courses in design history are compulsory in all design curricula, design history is not – or at least not sufficiently – backed up by historical research at UAS. Although they are considered equal to academic universities, UAS still cannot provide graduate education for their own junior academics. A third cycle is not yet within reach for them, for several reasons:

resistance within educational policy; the reluctance of regular universities eager to maintain the sole right to award doctoral degrees; and uncertainty surrounding definitions of design research. In the meantime, design universities have established joint PhD programmes with partner universities abroad. The complaint about the lack of historical research in design is twofold. On the one hand, who is supposed to do it, when design curricula terminate with a master’s degree? On the other hand, how to do it in order to position design as both a field of academic research and a distinct, self-reflective practice?

Institutionalised as UAS, design universities are required by law to conduct so-called applied research. They have succeeded in building up the necessary structures, resources and funding. Pure research remains the preserve of traditional universities. Nonetheless, design universities have



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had to organise their own basic research in areas neglected by traditional universities, and they have founded several institutes of design theory that fulfill an important task. However, with few exceptions, these institutes have missed out on researching the history of their own field.

This specific institutional framework determines which historiographical approaches could best fit in a practice-based education system. How can we prevent design history as a field of academic study from getting a ‘strangely instrumental and legitimatizing flair’, as Fallan (Fallan 2010: 25) put it when he criticised Dilnot’s approach (Dilnot 1984: 3-20)? How can we avoid the common pitfalls of instrumentalising design history as a resource for designers, and reducing it to the status of a quick Google image search?

#### III. Teaching: Cases

Teaching plays a decisive role at UAS. Courses in design history are offered at introductory as well as advanced levels across all design disciplines. Most of them are developed to engage with and reflect upon emergent practices and discourses, and to trace them back to their origins.

In this respect, design history is a means to form a better understanding of the present and the future of design. Design students are eager to know what will be coming. They are a bit less interested in what has been. But design has never been a greenfield strategy; it always runs into already-occupied and regulated terrain.

Teaching methods are manifold, but one approach that many would support is to empower students to obtain an active understanding of how history interacts with creative processes in general, and of design history in particular. Or, as Meikle put it: ‘[...] a historical approach can indeed illuminate contemporary issues without directly addressing them [...]’ (Meikle, 1995: 74).

Coming from a variety of academic and design-related backgrounds, most of us follow a more or less constructivist approach to teaching, as was made clear in an open discussion in ‘Netzwerk Designgeschichte’. This informal network brings together design history teachers, designers, researchers, and publicists in Switzerland and was founded 2016 following an essay published in the magazine Hochparterre (Ernst 2016: 3).

Paola De Martin’s background as a textile designer is decisive for how she conceives herself now as a design historian (De Martin 2017). As a practitioner she felt that the general attitude of designers towards design objects was marked by a great proximity. She found this attitude very problematic in the 1990s, not just because it reproduced existing power relationships but,



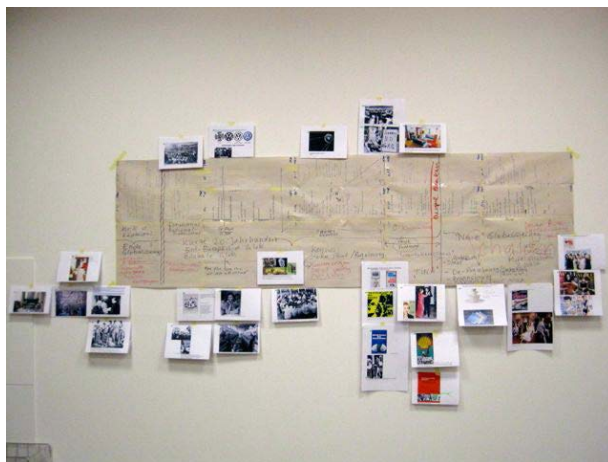
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above all, because it did so without reflecting them. Reflection needs distance. This is the reason why, after all, she studied history, and even more, why she teaches history to design students today.

Besides creating parallel timelines of design, social, and political history since 1750 with her students, De Martin uses graphic illustrations from sociological literature representing inequality in Switzerland from 1900 until today. She draws them on sheets of paper, so that students can walk on them. She puts pictures of her own family on them and talks about visible and invisible changes in lifestyle related to social mobility. [Fig. 6] The students do the same, discussing questions like: how to describe a family's lifestyle? Does it depict poor, rich, or middle class taste? Skilled or unskilled design knowledge? Inherited or hard-won taste? How is social up- and downward mobility reflected? How do differences in legal status, in race and gender matter for aesthetic choices? And finally, how to connect these insights with daily routines as practitioners?



*Figure 6 - Paola de Martin relies on constructivist approaches in teaching design history to design students. Photo credit: Paola de Martin.*

De Martin's aim is not to impart encyclopaedic, normative or positive knowledge, but rather to implement social practices: sober and open debates, engaged and shared reflections about the designerly creation of value, be it aesthetic or economic. Along the way, she also outlines the historical chances and socio-economic limitations of creation processes. Her proposal is connected with her research project at ETH Zurich, in which she examines the career, lifestyle, and design practice of designers coming from an educationally deprived social background since the 1970s. She adopts an empirical approach to close a gap in Swiss design history: the investigation of design practice based on class as a category of difference. Drawing on methods of oral history and other sources, her work focuses on the social mobility of designers from educationally weaker backgrounds. How do they evolve from being consumers of popular culture into producers of high design culture?



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Sociologist Franziska Nyffenegger does not teach design history as such. However, she has noticed that each of her design theory lessons leads to historical questions sooner or later (Nyffenegger 2017). Students do tend to have a rather narrow knowledge of general history and historiographic methodology, although they are required to hold a university entrance diploma (A-level exam) to enter a UAS. Empowering students to understand what history is all about and to explain the specificity of design history is therefore crucial.

Nyffenegger tries out constructivist approaches in her course for second-semester industrial design students at ZHdK. She asks students to draw anything that crosses their mind when they hear the terms 'Bauhaus' or 'functionalism' before discussing related texts. Such exercises help to deconstruct clichés in a medium familiar to students, namely drawing. Combined with texts, this leads them – on a methodological level – to scrutinise the role of conceptual history. As a basic reflection in methodology, it improves their understanding of how conceptual thinking is intertwined with practice, and vice versa.



*Figure 7 - Interest in material knowledge informs the teaching of Franziska Müller-Reissmann, Head of Material Archive at Zurich University of the Arts Photo credit: ZHdK, Betty Fleck.*

Franziska Müller-Reissmann heads the Material Archive at ZHdK and teaches design history (Müller-Reissmann 2017). Her interest lies in material knowledge. There has been an explicit education about, with, and through materials since at least the 18th century. This approach propagated materials as a condition for understanding the world, though its history and objects are little-known. And yet, knowledge of materials is in high demand among designers and the industry. Students learn to apply materials with respect to a specific task, but less about the history and politics of materials. Müller-Reissmann emphasises the historical constructedness of material discourses, such as the discourse about sustainability. She investigates how materials are embedded in a global cycle of raw material extraction, product manufacturing, distribution to and use by consumers, and disposal. In scrutinising





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materials with respect to resource scarcity, ecosystems and recycling, she brings students to examine not only the historical dimension of materials and material semantics, but also underlying social conditions of this cycle, including a critical approach towards marketing mechanisms as greenwashing, towards the pitfalls of mass consumption, and the politics of attribution of value. [Fig. 7]



*Figure 8 - Alexandra Midal combines practice-based projects as 'Re-Think the Eames' with historical insight. Photo credit: HEAD – Genève 2013, Sandra Pointet et Baptiste Coulon.*

Alexandra Midal at Geneva University of Art and Design (HEAD) asserts that at the forefront of her educational model 'is the goal of acquainting students with historical figures', (Midal 2013: 27). This may sound like a traditional art-historical masters approach. But by combining it with practice-based projects, she manages to go much further, as demonstrated in the homage to Charles and Ray Eames her MA students presented at the Milan Furniture Fair in 2013. For Re-Think the Eames, students made a film based on the powerful universe of the Eames's complete works, and analysed their Think Theater presented at the 1964 World's Fair in New York. [Fig. 8] As the designers intended, the students restaged the limits of the brain's ability to visualise and comprehend. The result was shown on 12-meter angled screens hung on both sides of the space, projecting two films simultaneously. For Midal, this project illustrated her goal: 'to teach designers who are fully conscious of their discipline's complex origins, and capable of honouring them while re-appropriating or bypassing them' (Midal 2013: 27). In addition, the installation opened up new, synchronic ways of analysing the Eames's photographic archive.



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#### IV. Conclusion: Teaching and its role for practice-based design historiography

These few examples are all critical of linear narratives, of a canon, and of reducing design history to designers and objects. The examples mentioned here combine research and teaching, and bring designers-to-be to consider the history of their own field as a resource – not only as a direct contribution to the design process, but as a means of self-reflection. This differs from a direct functionalist approach, a ‘presentist orientation’, or normativism, as Meikle (1995: 73) interprets Victor Margolin’s and Adrian Forty’s approaches. In order to achieve this goal, this approach has to rely on a constructive, creative, designerly way of teaching design history.

How effective this new didactics of design history will be for design historiography remains to be seen. What do designers bring to the academic field? For now, we can only provide a provisional reply. Designers may lack historiographic methodology. But they are experts on design processes, placing into perspective the inherent connectedness of this discipline with technology, society, culture, and economics. They may not only spur design historians to more critically analyse descriptions of past design processes, but also lead them to ask questions about this process, and analyse its inherent tacit knowledge. I suggest that such an approach may even also lend itself to historiography in general.



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Sorcha O'Brien, Kingston University London

### Introduction

In 2010, I reposted an image of the IQ lamp on Facebook from the Kilkenny Design collection held at the National Irish Visual Arts Library in Dublin [Fig. 1], which sparked a discussion amongst Scandinavian and Irish design historians about the inclusion of the lamp within the respective canons of Scandinavian and Irish design. This lamp was designed in 1973 by Danish packaging and product designer Holger Strøm during his time working for Kilkenny Design, and this article will consider its positioning within the canons of both Irish and Scandinavian design, as well as that of the washing machines and vacuum cleaners produced by a factory opened in Wicklow by the Dutch company FAM in 1957. The article considers the possibility of creating hybrid categories of national identity for designed objects that sit outside the simple narratives of objects that were designed, manufactured and sold within a single national context.

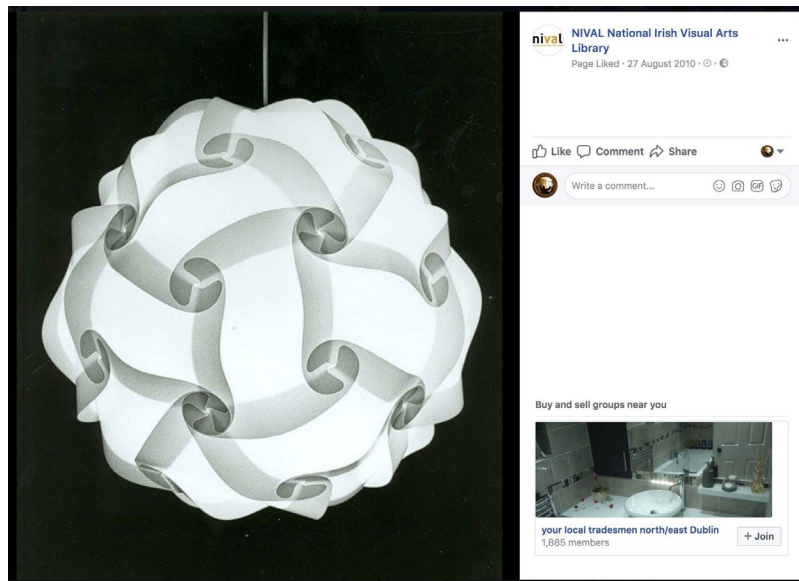


Figure 1 – Post about the IQ Lamp on the National Visual Arts Library Facebook page, 2010. Copyright permission NIVAL and Martin Chaffer.



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### Irish Modern Design and the Scandinavian Report

The established narrative of Irish modern design has been largely tied to the 'Scandinavian Report', an analysis of Irish design industry and training by a group of eminent Scandinavian designers of Irish design and craft. This report was commissioned by Coras Trachtála Teo (CTT), the Irish Trade Board, which had been founded in 1959 to market Irish goods abroad. Kaj Franck, Erik Herlow, Gunnar B. Petersen, Erik Sorensen, and Åke Huldt visited Ireland in 1961 to carry out their research and it was published in 1962, and the accepted narrative runs that this resulted in the setting up of the Kilkenny Design Workshops, which brought modern design, or possibly just design, to Ireland (Marchant and Addis 1985).

Kilkenny Design was initially staffed by a number of British, German and Scandinavian designers, working with Irish colleagues, apprentices and manufacturers, with products promoted as Irish. This national narrative is reinforced by articles by John Turpin and Paul Caffrey in the 1990s, as well as in the introduction to the report itself, which Paul Hogan, an Irish graduate employed by CTT as secretary to the Group, identifies as being written by William H. Walsh (Turpin 1986, Caffrey 1998, Scandinavian Design Group 1962: xi, Hogan 2005: 1-3). This introduction states that 'it was natural to turn to the Scandinavians' for help with developing Irish design, demonstrating the unselfconscious search for inspiration from Scandinavia in Ireland of the early 1960s (Scandinavian Design Group 1962: xi). However, Walker pointed out that this narrative writes out the role of Thomas Bodkin and the early Arts Council in promoting ideas about design in the earlier parts of the century, and Hogan later emphasised the role of Walsh in developing the design section of CTT and then spearheading the setting up of Kilkenny Design itself (Walker 2013, Hogan 2005: 1-3).

The IQ Lamp This narrative also manages to appropriate the intentional policy of importing design expertise to the country as part of a 'natural' process, something which is still being presented as part of the promotional narrative about Irish design. This is still in evidence in Irish magazines, where *Image*, a glossy lifestyle magazine, recently included the IQ Lamp with its selection of Irish Design classics (Hanley, Meade, and Phelan 2017). The Crafts Council of Ireland's display at the 2013 London Design Festival also name-checked Strøm as the designer, with the IQ Lamp presented as 'born in Ireland', a conveniently fuzzy way of glossing over its multi-valent beginnings and fitting it into the Irish narrative (Mulrooney 2013: 3).



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Figure 2 – The IQ Light assembled and in kit format, 2017. CC BY-NC-ND 4.0, The IQ Light Company.

Figure 3 – The IQ Light on display at Royal Copenhagen shop, Copenhagen, 2017. CC BY-NC-ND 4.0, The IQ Light Company.

Originally manufactured and sold in Irish shops by KDW spin-off company Kilkenny Illuminations, the IQ Lamp was design by Strøm as a ready-to-assemble kit in a flat pack format, with different versions supplying different numbers of the basic interlocking shapes required to create a number of spherical lamp designs [Fig. 2] (Butler 1973, 1973b, 11, Walker 1973). It was even incorporated into Irish language discourse, with an article in *Inniu* only referring to it in terms of its Kilkenny origin (1973a). The IQ Lamp was re-issued by Strøm in 2000 as 'a unique piece of original Danish design' and sold through a website presented in English and Japanese, which gives some idea of the target market outside of Denmark (Strøm 2017a). The reissued lamp also won the Danish Design award in 2001 and displayed alongside other 'Scandinavian design classics' in Royal Copenhagen's ship in Copenhagen [Fig. 3], which presents the conundrum that same product can be at once 'Irish' and 'Danish' through different lenses, as well as having a local identity as being from Kilkenny (Strøm 2017b: 1974).



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### National Identity

In the context of these shifting identities, the idea of the national canon continues to have relevance, but it is vitally important for design historians to look at how we can unpick the accepted narratives of national identity. This is particularly important in a world where national divisions increasingly don't work as neat divisions of national 'character' any more, as products are designed in one country, manufactured in another, and designers and manufacturers are from either country or possibly a third one entirely. Design history is currently expanding out of the Anglo-centric and Western European world, exemplified by work of the ICDHS and increased publication in English on East Asia, Latin America and Turkey, as well as publications in Spanish and Japanese (ICDHS 2017: 47-67, Lee and Kikuchi 2014: 323-34, Lara-Betancourt 2016: 241-58, Gürel 2009, Kirkham and Weber 2013, Fernandez Garcia 2012).

*In design history, the 'global turn' has largely taken the form of an expanded geography, both in topics researched by design historians and in the sites of design historical practice. This tendency, which often draws inspiration from intellectual movements such as post-colonialism and world history, seeks to correct the dominant, lopsided representation of the history of design as occurring primarily in Western Europe and the United States, particularly in the modern period, by expanding the field of vision to include design as it is practiced and consumed around the world (Adamson, Riello, and Teasley 2011: 2).*

But what is the European or North American design historian to do in this scenario? The answer seems to increasingly be to go back and look at the narrative of your own canon, take a look at what narratives are at play and look at what objects, people and ideas are or were challenging that. This has already commenced in Dutch and Scandinavian contexts, and this article is attempting to think through the Irish context (Meroz and Gimeno-Martínez 2016: 213-77, Fallan 2012). Irish design history has been around for a while, but with a relative paucity of publications, the majority of which are focused on the work of individuals such as Harry Clarke or Eileen Gray (despite having spent most of her working life in France), the Arts and Crafts Movement and the modernism of Kilkenny Design (Gordon Bowe 2014, Larmour 1992, Gordon Bowe 2015, Marchant and Addis 1985, Quinn 2005, Adam 2000, Goff 2014). Only a small number of recent publications address the relationship between modernity and national identity in Ireland, with the issues of more recent decades yet to be tackled in detail (King and Sisson 2011, O'Brien 2017, King 2011b). This is the narrative that we need to complicate, the world of the famous named designer and the famous design company, and Ireland, Design and Visual Culture has been the first step to challenging this narrative, including articles on technology, borders, and national promotion at home and abroad, including an article by Linda King on Dutch graphic designers advertising Ireland with Aer Lingus posters (King 2011a). This book is an intentional study of modernity in

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Ireland, bracketed by the foundation of the state and the start of the Celtic Tiger, which writes against the dominant narrative that Ireland was never modern, with a predominantly verbal culture.

### Irish National Identity

It is important to point out here that Irish national identity is not in itself a stable one, as the political history of Ireland, the Irish Free State, the Republic of Ireland, Éire, Northern Ireland and that non-existent entity 'Southern Ireland' have overlapped and competed throughout the 20th century, where the continued contested territory of 'the North' and competing claims of political legitimacy have spawned an entire industry of academic and not-so-academic writing about Irish national identity for decades. Irish history has already had its own revisionist debate, with a 'vigorous and at times vicious' debate sparked by the Troubles in Northern Ireland in the late 1960s finally running out of steam in the 1990s with the IRA ceasefire and the rise of the Celtic Tiger (Boyce and O'Day 1996). This revisionist position, including historians such as Roy Foster and Cormac Ó'Grada developed an intentional decoupling of Irish historical writing from the overtly nationalist positions, not without controversy (Foster 1988, Ó'Grada 1994, Brown 1985, Lee 1989). It has left recent scholarship on Irish design history with a healthy awareness of the idea that 'national canons can operate to reproduce the hegemony of the nation-state' (Meroz and Gimeno-Martínez 2016: 219).

Post-colonial theory has played a central role in conceptualising Irish history in recent years, particularly in Irish Studies, the Irish-American hybrid which mostly studies Irish literature and occasionally theatre and film (Bartlett et al. 1988, King and Sisson 2014, 56- 83). While this has direct resonance for the study of the colonial period up until 1922 and directly afterwards, as well as overtly political areas such as political graphics and the continuing issues surrounding Northern Ireland, I would question its usefulness in considering later time periods in the Republic, as well as areas such as product design, interiors and fashion (Swan 2011: 133-47). There is a tendency to overstate the relationship with Britain as the defining factor in Irish identity, closely followed with the United States of America, downplaying the existing and continuing relationships with different European countries, and indeed the EEC and the EU.

Possibly the most useful conceptualisation of the multiple competing ideas of national identity comes from Caoilfhionn ní Bheacháin, considering the 'ghost' Republic that existed after the creation of the Irish Free State in 1922, where multiple versions of the state existed simultaneously in imaginings of different political groupings, which did not correspond to either the ideal nation, or indeed the actually existing state (Ní Bheacháin 2007, ní Bheacháin 2012, Anderson 1991). These multiple myths of Ireland have their own descendants today, and allow for a more nuanced reading of Irish national identity as something contingent, contested and continuously updated and performed.





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## Dutch-Irish Design?

Verenigde FAM-Fabrieken was a Dutch product design company which had existed from the mid-1940s, selling washing machines and vacuum cleaners to both national and export markets. It was run by one Ale Kouperus until his death in 1966, with a main factory in Maarssen, close to Utrecht, and advertised its products in both Dutch and Dutch colonial newspapers (Brouwer 1968: 47, 1966: 6, 1950: 5, 1961b: 3). Again, these are promoted in the domestic market as 'de allerbeste stofzuiger in Nederland!' or 'the very best vacuum cleaner in the Netherlands' [Fig. 4], at a time when the country was a small open economy influenced by some American business methods, with Philips as the dominant appliance company, one of a number of cartels and agreements that dominated Dutch manufacturing (Poortman 1950, Sluyterman 2013).



Figure 4 –FAM vacuum cleaners advertised in the Maxwell catalogue, 1950s.

Image permission Jan Poortman ([www.pa3esy.com](http://www.pa3esy.com))

What brings FAM out into what Meroz and Gimeno-Martínez call 'the expanded field' of Dutch design and into the Irish myth was the setting up of an Irish company Couper Works in mid-1957, with capital of 50,000 Irish pounds, and numbers of Irish assembly staff sent to the Netherlands to train (1960: 13, Dáil Éireann 1960: 57, Meroz and Gimeno- Martínez 2016). The factory was managed by Dr M. Baradi, who was married to Kouperus' oldest daughter (1966: 6, 1960: 13). Couper Works was one of ten companies which were enticed to set up in Ireland in 1956 and



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1957 by the IDA, the Industrial Development Authority set up in 1949 to bring foreign investment into Ireland (Barry and O'Fathartaigh 2015: 476). The IDA was working with the idea of 'import substitution', encouraged by Sean Lemass, who was Tánaiste and Minister for Industry and Commerce intermittently throughout the 1950s. The idea of 'industrialisation by invitation' was adopted in 1956 and still forms the basis of Ireland's low corporate tax regime today, and has politically been seen as a forerunner of the trade liberalisation of the 1960s championed by Lemass and TK Whitaker's Programmes for Economic Expansion (Barry and O'Fathartaigh 2015: 460-61). A later Dutch newspaper article with his sons after Couperus' death gives an alternative narrative, stating that the Irish factory was started in response to the Suez Crisis of 1956, as their father was concerned that the Netherlands could be invaded by the Russians, giving a geo-political impetus to the enterprise, as well as the possibility of ensuring that his Egyptian son-in-law was remote from possible conflict (Brouwer 1968: 49).



Figure 5 – FAM advertisement, *Irish Press*, May 22 1959, p.9.

With thanks to Irish Newspaper Archives and The Irish Press.

FAM brand washing machines and vacuum cleaners were advertised throughout the late 1950s in Ireland as economic and efficient appliances and as symbols of modernity, with newspaper advertisements continually mentioning the Irish roots of the brand, using straplines such as 'These famous appliances are Irish-built at Wicklow for Irish homes' [Fig. 5] (1958: 4, 1959: 9, 1964b: 14,



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1964c). While they may not have used overt symbols of Irish nationality such as shamrocks and tricolours, they assert the Irishness of the brand, conflating the idea of Irish-built rather than Dutch, which is not mentioned here at all. This Dutch-Irish factory, possibly run by a Dutch-Egyptian, produced an appliance brand that was increasingly promoted as Irish to a mythic level during the 1960s, when the factory was wholly appropriated as Irish, exporting 'Irish washing machines' to Austria (1961a: 6). FAM was included in the CTT Irish stands in the 1964 and 1965 International Hardware Trades Exhibition in London, alongside Waterford Ironfounders, Arklow Pottery and Carrigaline Pottery (1964a: 11, 1965: 10). The naturalisation of these Dutch designed appliances as 'Irish' is completed when they featured in an Irish language newsreel from 1962, covering the Ideal Homes exhibition in the Mansion House in Dublin (Irish Film Institute Gael Linn Collection 2017).

### Conclusion

In the case of FAM washing machines and vacuum cleaners, the existence of Couper Works complicates the narrative of modern design in Ireland before Kilkenny as either not existing or being purely about imports. While the appliances seem to be actually designed in the Netherlands and, in some ways, could therefore be classed as 'an expanded Dutch design', if the frequency and range of the advertisements are to be believed, the Irish company enjoyed a longer and more fruitful existence than the Dutch one, which stopped advertising in the early 1960s. As Teilmann-Lock commented on the myth of Danish Design, the design, manufacturing, advertising and use of products in different countries and by people of different nationalities complicates the easy identification of products as 'Irish' or 'Danish' or 'Scandinavian', although the incorporation of products into these national myths continues to happen, often prompted by crossing of national boundaries (Teilmann-Lock 2016, 159-61). Rather than retreating into default positions of national origin, would it be possible to be both at once, unpicking the need to be part of one or other national narrative – for a product to have a hyphenated Danish-Irish or Dutch-Irish identity? This is part of what thinking about the particular situation of Irish national identity can bring to the debate, dealing with the problematic of defining Irishness when you don't even know what Irish is. There is an argument for being porous on the borders, both the physical one with the North of Ireland and the UK (soon to be outside the EU), but also the transnational flows of people, objects and ideas that created overlapping and layered identities (Lara-Betancourt 2016: 243-44).

Irish design history cannot be understood in isolation, as, along with all other national histories it needs to recognise the importance of trade networks and the transnational movement of people. These networks and mobilities operate as a set of relationships that may be controlled by national laws and policies, but which operate at the level of the company and the individual, and decisions





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are made at these levels as much as at the political one. My conclusion is that there is no definitive Ireland, but a hybrid one, which can be lots of overlapping things at once: it can be local to Kilkenny or Dublin, it can follow the political boundaries of the state, or the multiple positions of Northern Irish identity, to be queer or straight, to be feminist, Catholic or agnostic, techy or crafty, to be an emigrant to the UK or further afield or an immigrant from Poland or China, to be at once European as well as Irish, all of which influence national identity just as much as geography, climate, religion or social structure (Thunder 2017).

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