

# ART HISTORY AND DESIGN IN DIALOGUE: ABUTMENTS AND CONFLUENCES

Edited by Renate Dohmen with Rachael Luck

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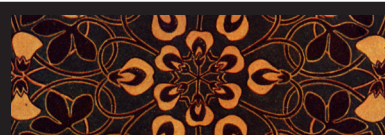


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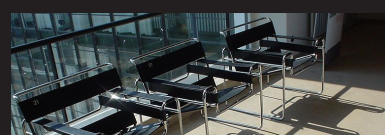
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Banner image: detail of ornaments from embroidered and woven fabrics and decorations on vases exhibited at the Indian Collection of the Great Exhibition, 1851, Owen Jones, 'Indian No.4', in Owen Jones, *The Grammar of Ornament* (1865 edn). (Image credit: Rawpixel – file licensed under the Creative Commons Zero (CC0) license)

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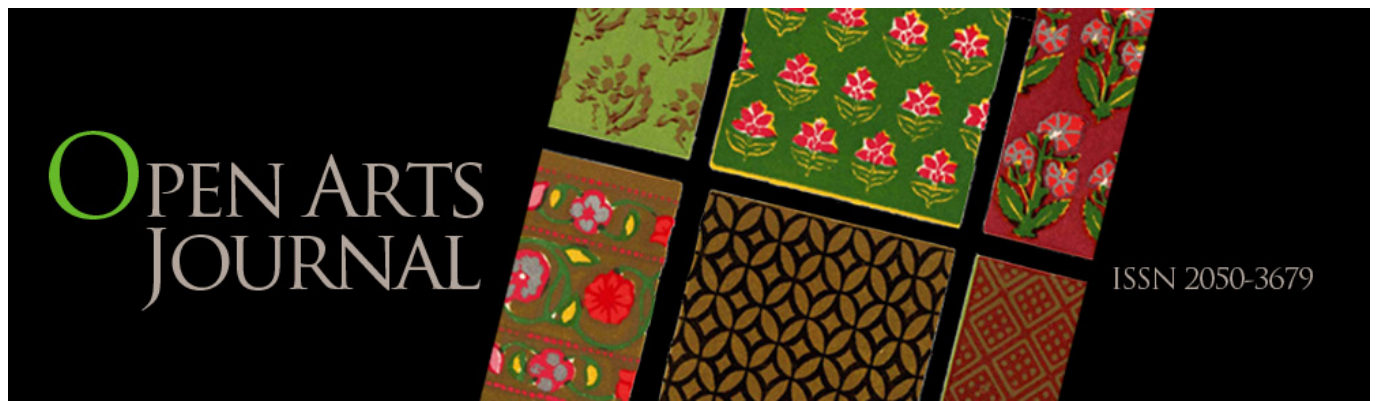
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# INTRODUCTION: ART HISTORY AND DESIGN IN DIALOGUE: ABUTMENTS AND CONFLUENCES

Renate Dohmen

## Abstract

*This special issue stages a cross-disciplinary conversation between art history and design as taught at The Open University (OU) where these subjects are situated in the Humanities and in STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths). The issue's overarching concern is to open a discussion on how a pedagogy for the future can be conceived that rises to the challenge of the climate catastrophe and the project of decoloniality. In so doing it poses the related question: how might the OU harness the pioneering spirit of its founding years, just over 50 years ago, and yet again be a trailblazer of radical innovation in higher education in response to the urgencies of our time?*

*To start this conversation the special issue brings together contributions by art historians and designers. It offers discussions that look back to the early days of teaching art history and design at the University when courses such as A305 History of Architecture and Design 1890–1939 and T262 Man-made Futures were broadcast by the BBC, and takes stock of how the separation of art and design, and the hierarchy between intellectual and manual labour on which this divide is historically based, have been conceived in the Global North. The issue also presents reflections on a recent current collaborative design project in the community, and an experiment in method that entails a photographic interpolation between anthropology and urban design, as well as a roundtable discussion between members of the OU's Art History and Design Departments that brings approaches in their fields into proximity in relation to issues of museum classification, community engagement, co-design and design thinking, FabLabs, colonialism, representation and transnational movements of practices and people. The special issue ends with a rallying call for change by Tony Fry.*

**Keywords:** art history, design, climate crisis, pedagogy, Anthropocene, Open University, decoloniality, modernity/coloniality, hand/mind binary, Western exceptionalism, non-Occidental West, cross-disciplinarity, Dewesternization, Eurocentricity, *disegno*, Vasari, Tony Fry

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## Biographical note

Renate Dohmen is Lecturer in Art History at The Open University. She edited and co-authored *Art and Empire: British India* (Manchester University Press and The Open University, 2018). Her monograph, *Encounters beyond the Gallery: Relational Aesthetics and Cultural Difference* (I.B. Tauris, 2016), examines issues of contemporary art, relational aesthetics and Deleuze-Guattarian thought, anthropology and issues of cultural translation, challenging Eurocentric perceptions and modes of critical address of tribal and folk visual practices. She has published in journals including

the *Journal of Design History*, *Ecumene: A Journal of Cultural Geographies*, *Victorian Literature and Culture* and *South Asian Popular Culture*, and is currently working on a book-length study of nineteenth-century exhibition culture in British India, supported by the Leverhulme Trust, that examines issues of amateurism, gender and race.

# INTRODUCTION: ART HISTORY AND DESIGN IN DIALOGUE: ABUTMENTS AND CONFLUENCES

**Renate Dohmen, The Open University**

The impetus for the special issue is the recent 50-year anniversary of The Open University (OU) founded in 1969 in the UK. Initiated as part of the socially progressive reforms of the Labour Party between 1964 and 1970, the university was initiated as an experiment in distance and adult education with the aim to promote social justice through the development of knowledge and skills. Its mission to be 'open to people, places, methods and ideas' is reflected in the open-access policy for study at the OU as well as the commitment to offer high-quality university education to learners who previously missed out on higher education.

Over the just over 50 years of its existence, the university has proven that open-access higher education is achievable and viable. It, moreover, pioneered innovative, initially broadcast-media-based, and later online methods of delivery, which in turn led to the development of a pedagogy suited to this mode of teaching, facilitating path-breaking approaches. The Open University courses in art history and design, the two disciplines this journal is concerned with, thus brought new impulses to their professional fields and also beyond, as OU teaching units, such as *A305 History of Architecture and Design 1890–1939* and *T262 Man-made Futures*, taught between 1975 and 1982, were broadcast by the BBC. Their content therefore was accessible to the general public as 'the BBC's listeners and spectators made space for higher education in their living rooms, gathering around the television set to receive it like a guest' (Moreno, 2020, p.3). Innovative, media-based methods of dissemination thus have been integral to the delivery of the OU's mission from the start, and while at the outset its programmes turned the general public into a community of learners, OU teaching has since moved to online provision, allowing for a more international and potentially global reach.

A further unique element of higher education at the OU was the creation of foundation courses that provided students with an interdisciplinary basis for their further and more specialized study at the OU. This meant that several departments collaborated to produce entry-level courses that would make

students conversant in the debates of their time while furnishing them with the skills needed to make further academic progress. This structure is still in place and requires academics to collaborate across disciplines and develop the requisite skill set such work requires. It is a tradition this special issue builds on by bringing together perspectives prevalent in the disciplines of art history and design that usually operate in separate spheres. Thus, while the relationship between art history and design is in one sense 'natural' in that design history has been an established part of art history since at least the 1970s, the bringing of these disciplines into close proximity also constitutes an encounter that links the Humanities, the Arts and STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths), providing a rich trans-disciplinary terrain of enquiry.

The aim of the special issue overall is to take stock of the past in order to look to the future and to re-connect with the pioneering spirit of the OU's early beginnings in view of addressing the enormous challenges posed by the educational, societal and political contexts of the present. Top of the agenda here are the interrelated issues of climate change, structural whiteness, the ways in which notions of art and cultural heritage perpetuate ways of thinking and being that foster discrimination and exploitation, as well as the urgent need to develop re-directive 'futuring practices' in design for which the design theorist Tony Fry, a contributor to this special issue in Part 4, proposes the notion of 'sustainment' (Fry, 2009, p.1).

These challenges have in common that they demand that disciplines radically re-evaluate their foundational practices and assumptions, a process that raises too many questions to be addressed here even in summary form. They do, however, constitute the urgent horizon for the contributions to this special issue, which aims to make a contribution towards addressing this larger agenda by exploring the connectivities and differences between the fields of art history and design, which are situated in the Humanities and STEM respectively at the OU, and the worlds they represent. The supposition is that in order to rise to the challenges of the present, joined-up thinking and cross-disciplinary approaches and capabilities are required. As there is also a history of collaborations between them at the OU, this context is seized upon by this special issue as an opportunity to instigate a more comprehensive and cohesive debate, about the connectivities between art history and design, and the implications of the cultures of thought and practice that inhere them.

In this special issue, the histories of art history and design at The Open University are thus placed alongside present collaborations that have occurred

between these fields as well as discussions on themes and issues that constitute a shared concern, such as art education, participation, collaboration, colonialism and transnational flows of people and ideas. This cross-disciplinary encounter between art history and design is undertaken to gain a renewed sense of the OU's unique mission and to generate an enhanced awareness of the exceptional place it occupies in the landscape of higher education in the UK and the responsibility and opportunities this entails.

In order to do so, the special issue offers a three-pronged approach that combines an art historical reflection on what can loosely be framed as fine art versus applied art, art versus industry and art and design from the eighteenth century to the present (Part 1), with the presentation of projects where collaborations have occurred or 'in-betweenness' is in evidence (Part 2). It also offers a bringing-into-relation within the discursive space of the journal, which entails a roundtable discussion between members of both departments around projects that broach issues of coloniality and present-day cultural and educational interactions between the Global North and South (Part 3), as well as the juxtaposition of the pioneering historic contributions of art history and design to their respective fields and the pedagogy of the OU (Part 4). The idea is that the bringing into proximity of art history in this constellation will allow for new vistas and synergies to emerge. The larger question, however, is what the contribution of The Open University might be to developing an conception of higher education for the twenty-first century that responds to these enormous challenges, and what kind of skills will be required by our students, who are mostly adults and employed, to not only further their careers understood in a regular sense, but also to be equipped to respond to the current crisis in ways that facilitate bringing the necessary social transformations.

### **Histories of art and design and the project of decoloniality**

Debates around the Anthropocene have shown that we can no longer frame the climate crisis as an environmental problem that belongs to the sphere of technological solutions with greater environmental friendliness in our life styles thrown in for good measure. We need to recognise that it constitutes a social issue and that a fundamental shift in how we operate is required on all levels of society, with universities called on to fulfil their important role in this transformation. This includes the urgent need for a critical reflection on how the underlying assumptions that inform the curriculum perpetuate the culture

of resource exploitation that characterises the Anthropocene; a term that draws attention to the underlying core issue of how the human relationship with nature is conceived by the globally dominant culture of the Global North.

As the decolonial critic Walter Mignolo has pointed out, the logic of separating nature from humans, culture and society is deeply rooted in the Global North and the notion that 'man' has been given dominion over nature by the Divine creator initiated an extractive, exploitative logic rather than a care-taking one and included non-European humans under the rubric of 'nature' (2011, pp.10–11). It is thus important to acknowledge that the current climate crisis is integrally linked to issues of race, systemic whiteness and histories of colonialism, with the science-culture divide a further binary to be addressed in an effort to forge paths towards a sustainable future. In fact, the sociologist Boaventura de Sousa Santos holds that 'the belief in science as the only valid and exact form of knowledge' constitutes 'one of the most entrenched premises of abyssal thinking today' (2016, p.191), by which he means the multi-coded othering binaries that characterise the culture of the Global North, with mind versus hand a particular concern in this special issue:

This critique chimes with the propositions by the cultural geographers Karen O'Brien and Robin Leichenko who explore the cultural dimensions to climate change and suggest that the coming together of 'multiple perspectives can help to identify and generate new approaches to global challenges' (Leichenko & O'Brien, 2019, p.54). They hold that the way forward is to bring 'together research and insights from the natural sciences, social sciences, and humanities to create new narratives about the relationship to life and the earth' (p.13). As they point out, this approach, moreover, entails the questioning of prevalent assumptions of how different disciplines operate, and the models of thought they take for granted, which requires an exploration of how they are thought in relation to one another. This also entails the recognition that the past can no longer serve as a reliable guide as the *modus operandi* of old is no longer feasible. Different ways forward therefore need to be envisioned that emphasise connection, relationality and collaboration over competition, separation and fragmentation (pp.3, 15).

The underlying concern of this special issue is to bridge the separation of spheres between art and design which is rooted in the differentiation between the fine and applied arts that originated in the Renaissance when the notion of a higher-order visual practice thought to be distinct from artisanal activity

emerged, which argued mental and manual activity as separate and of different value. Thus, while design as we understand it today emerged in twentieth-century practice in response to the industrial revolution, it has its roots in conceptions about visual practice that separated intellectual achievements and manual labour and can be traced, via conceptions of art versus applied art, and art versus industry, to theoretical debates around the Renaissance notion of *disegno*. The dualism that characterises the relationship between the two disciplines is thus integrally linked to core issues that define the conditionality of the Anthropocene as well as to key debates on decoloniality as developed in the following.

As decolonial critiques have pointed out, this hierarchical differential is integral to European culture and was imposed on countries around the globe through colonialism. It thus informs the condition of coloniality, which colonialism left in its wake, in the guise of a pervasive 'grammar of difference' (Cooper & Stoler, 1997, p.3; Hall, 2008, p.203) that builds on this mental/manual divide. A key premise of decolonial methods and approaches is therefore to delink from 'the modern concept of *theory versus praxis*' (Walsh & Mignolo, 2018, p.7, italics in original) and to engage in 'thinking-doing and doing-thinking' (p.9), with strategies to re-envision these relations a central element of decolonial approaches and perspectives, which Santos has proposed as constitutive of 'epistemologies of the South' in his book with the same title. Sousa's important work is full of rich propositions and insights, with the notion of (post)-abyssality among them, that refers to the multiply coded, fundamental divide or abyss that inheres Eurocentric thinking on all levels of which the theory-practice binary is but one exemplification.

A further strand in Santos's discussion is the notion of the 'non-Occidental West', by which he means 'the vast array of conceptions, theories, and arguments though produced in the West by recognized intellectual figures, were discarded, marginalized, or ignored because they did not fit the political objectives of capitalism and colonialism that act as foundation for the construction of the uniqueness and superiority of Western modernity' (2014, p.99). Santos thus suggests the retrieval of the forgotten and repressed traditions within European culture as a strand in the project of decoloniality. He states, for example, that 'the truth is that in the Renaissance there were many different conceptions, some of them swerving substantially from the ones that came to ground the notion of exact knowledge underlying modern science' (p.102) which came to define the modern period. A further element

to be reckoned with is Western exceptionalism, which concealed the influences and continuities between Europe and cultures from other parts of the world or rather claimed and assimilated them without any acknowledgement of their origins. This history is beginning to be addressed in the curriculum of art history at the OU through courses such as A344 *Art and Its Global Histories*, that seeks to trace the transcultural interactions between Europe and the world beyond it from the early modern to the present, demonstrating the rich influences of the worlds beyond Europe on its culture. However, addressing other cultures' influences that have significantly shaped Europe – which means repositioning European culture from the status of 'universal' to 'relative' – is only one step, and probably one of the easier and more straightforward ones, with regard to the perspectives that together conceive what has been proposed as the inter- and pluriversal praxis of decoloniality (Walsh & Mignolo, 2018, p.3). More fundamental approaches to decolonising the curriculum demand further disciplinary self-reflexivity as to the colonial paradigms that inhere professional practice, with colonial referring to the systems of thought, values and assumptions they are based on, and which are more often than not representative of, the 'overall logic of coloniality' (Mignolo, 2018, p.112).

As Mignolo explains, the term coloniality was coined by the Peruvian sociologist Anibal Quijano in the late 1980s and early 1990s, and was further developed by Mignolo who defines it as follows: 'Coloniality names the underlying logic of the foundation and unfolding of Western civilization from the Renaissance to today of which historical colonialisms have been a constitutive, although downplayed, dimension' (2011, p.2). He thus points out that modernity and coloniality are inseparably linked, which is expressed in the compound modernity/coloniality. While modernity stands for the 'narrative that builds Western civilization by celebrating its achievements' (p.3), coloniality stands for its hidden, darker side. In short, '[c]oloniality, in other words, is constitutive of modernity – there is no modernity without coloniality' (p.3).

Mignolo thus highlights the Eurocentricity inherent in the academy, pointing out that 'most of the words/concepts you are using belong to European modern/imperial and vernacular languages and they have been derived from Greek and Latin' while adding that the fact that 'none of the existing civilizational languages at the time (Mandarin, Hindi, Urdu, Persian, Arabic, Russian, etc.) are relevant in any of the disciplinary formations confirms that Eurocentered knowledge asserts itself at the same time that it disqualifies the

vocabulary (and logic) of other knowing praxis and knowledge and belief systems' (2018, p.113). For Mignolo, moreover, the moment when 'the modern matrix (Eurocentrism) became also colonial' occurred when the Eurocentric matrix of the power, premised on a 'rhetoric of modernity, progress, salvation, development' that was based on Greek and Latin categories of thought, authorized 'its promoter and defender to disregard, marginalize, ignore, deprecate, reprove, rebuke, attack all knowledge' all that did not reflect 'the image of its own totality' (p.111).

The project of decoloniality, therefore, as Mignolo highlights, crucially requires Dewesternization, adding that 'Eurocentrism is not a geographical issue, but an epistemic and aesthetic one' and 'fully understanding how it works is a necessary condition for delinking from coloniality' (2018, p.125). To which Santos adds, that it is of central importance to acknowledge and understand the extent to which the global dominance of the European system led to the suppression or marginalization of many other ways of knowing and being, and thus to a great impoverishment and 'a waste of experience that the West not only imposed upon the world by force, but also upon itself' (2014, p102). Returning to the concerns of this special issue, the suggestion thus is that the prevalent divide between fine art and applied art, and art/art history and design in its wake, are informed by the mentality of coloniality and the hierarchy of value it entails. That is, the application of art to concrete life contexts is considered to be of a lower order than the assumedly cerebral and inspiration-based work of fine art thought to be aligned with a higher and purer sphere than the human life world. While it is beyond the scope of the special issue to comprehensively address this history and its relationship to modern design, the three essays in Part I probe how this binary manifested in European art education from the eighteenth century, that is how the distinction between mind and hand upon which the status of art was built during Renaissance, played out over the centuries, while Tony Fry suggests ways for design to become a futural force that revolves around a re-envisioning of design education in Part 4, concluding this special issue with a call to action to revisit the discipline.

It is worth noting that at the time of its inception, the rising notion of fine art was integrally linked to the concept of *disegno*, a term that is generally translated as 'drawing' or 'design' and is commonly understood to reference the mind/hand binary. It constitutes a crucial foundation for the way creative visual practice was conceived in Europe, an understanding that in the wake of European colonialism has gained global traction. Given its historic importance and its pivotal position

for the birth of notions of art and design, in the following, a brief discussion of *disegno* will be offered before the contributions to this special issue will be introduced in more detail. The suggestion is that, while the separation of intellectual activity, creativity and supposedly mere manual skill constitutes a key feature of the relationship between art and design, and is of crucial import for coloniality as further binaries such as civilized/uncivilized are premised on this dichotomy, more recent research has suggested that separation may not have been as categorical at the time of the Renaissance as commonly assumed. The recovery of a fuller conception of *disegno* may thus contribute to the retrieval of obscured strands within European culture as Santos has presented, and can inform a critical review of the assumptions on which these disciplines are based as well as potentially serve as basis for a re-envisioned relationship between art and design.

### **Disegno**

From the fifteenth century *disegno* came to be conceived as the foundation of the three visual practices of painting, sculpture and architecture that rose from their artisanal base in Renaissance Italy and came to be considered as representative of the higher order visual practice of fine art. It also elevated drawing to the status of visual expression of the artist's mind, and hence to a work of art. The notion of *disegno* was, moreover, integral to art education through the founding of the Accademia del Disegno, initiated in 1562–63 in Florence, and recognised as the first art academy. It became foundational for art theory and practice in the Global North, ushering in a paradigm that differentiated the conceptual from manual aspects of visual practice, valuing most highly those skills that could be said to realise intellectual virtues.

The notion is prominently associated with the Tuscan artist and art theorist Giorgio Vasari and his *Lives of the Most Eminent Architects, Sculptors, and Painters* (first edition 1550, second edition 1568) which presents biographical narratives of Italian artists embedded in a developmental theory of art with *disegno* occupying a pivotal place in it.

One of the central tenets in Vasari's fashioning of the figure of the artist in his *Lives* that came to define European art was that creativity and conceptual development were the hallmark of artistic activity, while the manual labour of the artisan supposedly lacked such imagination. The rationale of this argument originates in subjects taught at university at the time, called the liberal arts in Vasari's period, where they were organised in two groups, the *trivium* (grammar, rhetoric and logic) and the *quadrivium* (arithmetic, geometry, music and astronomy). Claims to the status

of art therefore entailed the association of artistic activity with a liberal art, which affirmed art's status as an intellectual activity on a par with these subjects. Approaches to argue this case were creative and varied, endowing *disegno* with a rich panoply of associations linked with the liberal arts which rested on the notion of the divine ideal, with Plato a central point of reference.

Broadly speaking, Platonism differentiated between higher and lower order manifestations of the soul/divinity, which became associated with *disegno*. Neoplatonists understood nature and phenomena perceived through the senses as an imperfect expression of eternal and beautiful forms pre-figured in the Divine mind, with geometry identified as the language of this higher-order world of form which true art was able to emulate and express. The mathematician Luca Pacioli, a close friend of Leonardo's, thus held that God reveals the innermost secrets of nature through ratio and proportion, with drawing proposed as the best way to learn about the latter, and the Portuguese court painter, architect and sculptor Francisco de Holanda maintained in his text *Da pintura antiga* (1548) that 'good painting is nothing but the perfections of God and a recollection of his painting, it is a music and a melody which only the intellect can understand' (quoted in King, 2007, p.68).

As the art of antiquity was understood to be informed by these principles, it was thought that the diligent drawing and study of such works would foster an understanding of the 'rules', or theory of art, and was believed to make one's own inventions inherently better. It is thus not surprising that in the first half of the sixteenth century a fashion for collections of antique sculpture and the practice of drawing antiquities emerged and was promoted as a form of artistic education, an approach that was to persist until the end of the nineteenth century. It is also no coincidence that the first collections of drawings emerge at the time, based on an interest in process that was closely tied to authorship, and the notion that drawings offered a direct insight into the mind of the artist. At the time, this ushered in a move away from the earlier appreciation of the perfection of a finished artistic product, which valued the artist's manual skills and the materials themselves. *Disegno* thus shifts the emphasis to creativity and to the earliest possible moment when the initial thought moved from the artist's mind to a first sketch on paper. It was therefore the skills associated with *disegno* that allowed artists to create art that reflected the divine ideal.

Yet, while the concept enjoyed wide circulation in Italy and beyond at the time, as more recent scholarship has shown, its prevailing understanding is

based on a limited reception of the Vasarian model that revolves around an understanding of *disegno* as either design or drawing only (Stoltz, 2012). Commanding translations of *disegno* as 'design, draughtsmanship, or simply drawing' as in the Penguin Classics edition of *The Lives* translated by George Bull (Vasari, [1568] 1965, p.19, italics in original), or as 'alike to our more general word "design" and the more special term "drawing"' by Louisa S. Macle hose (Vasari, [1568] 1907, p.205) are indicative of a lack of nuance that lead to the overstating of a binary between mind and hand, creative act and manual labour, that was rhetorically argued during the Renaissance yet did not reflect the actual practices on the ground, or certainly was not as clear-cut as its history of reception suggests. Devised as an instrument to argue for the elevated status of fine art in an effort to improve the prestige of some of its practitioners, the far-reaching consequence of this line of argument could not have been foreseen by its proponents. Not only did it come to define the trajectory of European art, but it became foundational for coloniality and the global suppression and exploitation of sections of the population not considered to be engaged in cerebral work.

There is thus a further layer to be unravelled that adds nuance to the understanding of *disegno* which, moreover, has a particular bearing on the theme of this special issue in that it addresses the hierarchical relationship between hand and mind, or execution and conception. The proposition is that even in Vasari's articulation of *disegno*, the subordination of the manual aspect of artistic work was far less cut-and-dried than the rhetoric and more importantly, the historic reception of these ideas, suggests.

Leonardo, for example, upholds the unity of hand and mind in his approach to *disegno*, and emphasises that while painting 'is first in the mind' it nonetheless 'cannot reach perfection without manual operation' (quoted in King, 2007, p.63). This returns us to the question of the omitted 'very long introduction' to Vasari's *The Lives* devoted to the technical aspect of architecture, sculpture and painting. As has been discussed, it is in this introduction, and more specifically in the section *On Painting*, that Vasari comes closest to what one might call a definition of *disegno* as rooted in the idea, perceived by the artist as an inner conception of the mind and rendered visible in the act of artistic execution. In the same section of this text Vasari, however, also offers some thoughts on the relationship between *disegno* and the artistic act of making, stating that

what design needs, when it has derived from the judgement the mental image of anything, is

that the hand, through the study and practice of many years, may be free and apt to draw and to express correctly, with the pen, the silver-point, the charcoal, the chalk, or other instrument, whatever nature has created. For when the intellect puts forth refined and judicious conceptions, the hand which has practised design for many years, exhibits the perfection and excellence of the arts as well as the knowledge of the artist.

(Vasari, ([1568] 1907), p.206)

This passage suggests practice and skill as the reverse of the artistic coin referenced by *disegno*, that is, in the words of the Renaissance scholar Barbara Stoltz, ‘*disegno* unifies both aspects of an artistic act, execution and invention’ (Stoltz, 2012, p.18), since without artistic skill what has been conceived in the mind cannot be communicated and hence appreciated. A point worth considering here is that Stoltz arrived at this understanding through the study of Vasari’s texts on print making and the status and value of prints in relation to drawings, that is source material not considered in the canonical constructions of the Renaissance and of the reception of Vasari.

A further factor to be noted that contributes to the compressed understanding of *disegno* is historiography, in particular German idealism that informed the budding discipline of art history which originated in Germany. The underlying premise was that art was an expression to a higher sphere of ideas which shapes the phenomenal world and that such visual forms gave direct access to the thought or mentalities assumed to define historic periods, also referred to as *Zeitgeist*. This approach, for example, informed the seminal title *Idea: A Concept in Art Theory* (1924) by the influential German historian of Renaissance art Erwin Panofsky, who taught at Princeton and whose books shaped approaches to art history in the USA and the UK where the discipline was little developed at the time.

Idealist approaches to art history thus dominated the field in the German as well as Anglophone spheres of culture and debate until well into the twentieth century, especially in relation to the field of Renaissance art. It is thus not surprising that the aspects of Vasari that resonated with what Bull described as a philosophical approach to fine art based on a divinely implanted *Idea* in the mind of the artist (Vasari, [1568] 1965, p.19) gained such prominence, obscuring other dimensions of *disegno*, notably its association with technique, which is of particular relevance for the special issue and its emphasis on connections between art history and design. As has been developed, the technical side of *disegno* was integral to its conception

as evidenced in Vasari’s delineation of *disegno* as a ‘conception and judgement ... formed in the mind ... which ... when expressed by the hand, is called design [*disegno*’ (Vasari, [1568] 1907, p.205).

The curator and historian of Renaissance art Marta Ajmar has likewise argued for a revision of what she calls the ‘rhetoric promoting a separation between design and execution, mind and body’ which asserts ‘a hierarchy of the arts constructed on the friction between intellectual and corporeal engagement in the making of artefacts’ (2014, p.1). Exploring Renaissance pottery and, crucially, drawing on technical treatises of the time, she argues for what she calls a ‘mechanical’ notion of *disegno*, demonstrating that there was a far greater overlap between the spheres of design and execution, mind and body in Renaissance Italy than is commonly assumed. A fuller understanding of *disegno*, arguably thus is not only of interest to historians of Renaissance art and culture, but, given its pivotal role for the conception of European art based on a divide between fine and applied arts, such a revision clearly has implications for the study of visual culture more broadly conceived.

## Issue overview

Building on the issues raised in the discussion of *disegno* in the above section and its import for art education in the Global North, Part I of the special issue presents three essays that explore the relationship between fine and applied art, drawing and education. The first text is by Emma Barker who considers that drawing as taught at the *Académie Royale* was conceived as a crucial skill for the fine artist in eighteenth-century France but also for artisans who trained in places such as the *École Nationale Supérieure des Arts Décoratifs* (National Higher School in the Decorative Arts) and *École Royale Gratuite de Dessin* (Royal Free Drawing School). She presents that the two terms of *dessein* and *dessin* evolved to differentiate the artistic or applied use of drawing, but also points out that entries on architecture in the *Encyclopédie* suggest a budding conception of design that connects theory and practice, art and industry. She also points out that the notion of the decorative arts was prominent in France and needs to be considered in this context, which stands in contrast to a modern conception of design.

This essay is followed by a discussion by the present author that traces the development of instruction in drawing considered the basis of ‘art for industry’ from the late eighteenth century to the 1880s in Britain. It examines the efforts of the Society for the Encouragement of Arts, Manufactures and Commerce, the classes offered in Mechanics’ Institutes, the approach of the Schools of Design, the first government

initiative seeking to teach drawing for industrial design, the Government Schools of Art which took them over and were run by the designer and bureaucrat extraordinaire Henry Cole, as well as the Female School, which exclusively taught female students. The discussion takes its cue from the general scholarly dismissal of the principles of instruction instituted by Cole, dubbed the South Kensington method, on the grounds that it was utilitarian and inartistic because it focused on elementary geometry rather than figure drawing upheld by the Royal Academy as key to training in the arts. The essay argues that this dismissal overlooks that Cole's art educational method was conceived as an art for the common man envisaged as a modern alternative to the cultural elitism of the uniquely endowed artist-genius. It also presents that its pedagogy was rooted in an aesthetic understanding of science rooted in German natural philosophy, which offered an approach to geometry that diverged from fine art's Platonic ideal and thus broke new ground. The suggestion thus is that the South Kensington method needs to be acknowledged as an alternative tradition in British art education and its contributions be recognised, not least for the facilitation of women's art education in Britain, but also as a precursor to the Bauhaus through its pro-industry stance.

The third essay in this section is by Kim Charnley who considers the relationship between art and design in the twentieth century with a focus on the unstable synthesis of art, craft and design in evidence at the Bauhaus. Charnley reframes the history of the Bauhaus by re-examining the celebration of the machine aesthetic upon which the critical reception of the school is founded. This perspective is exemplified by László Moholy-Nagy in this discussion, and is contrasted with the work of Anni Albers and the role of the weaving workshop all female students at the Bauhaus were assigned to, and which was, until comparatively recently, discussed as an aside to the ones led by big-name male artists. Yet, as Charnley points out, in actual fact Albers was successful in achieving an alternative version of the desired integration of art, craft and design for industry the Bauhaus envisaged yet never quite achieved in its 'machine aesthetic', even though intellectual and manual skills were viewed as interdependent and equally important in principle. Charnley thus exposes the sexism that is now widely recognised in the practice and early reception of the Bauhaus and makes a case for reframing established accounts of the school through more pluralist approaches to design. A key issue in his discussion is that the prevalent critique of the Bauhaus' utopian goal of social transformation

through realisation of the *Gesamtkunstwerk*, and its posited collapse into the logic of capitalist accumulation and consumerism, has not tended to engage with the achievements of artists and designers from the Bauhaus who were women. He concludes his discussion by pointing out that while industrial design defines the school's early reception, this represents only one aspect of a complex utopian engagement between art and technology, concluding with the suggestion that Albers' concept of design provides an alternative understanding of the Bauhaus that can offer an avenue for re-envisaging design in view of the challenges posed by the Anthropocene.

Part 2 of the special issue presents instances of 'in-betweenness' of art history and design. The first essay in this section relates key insight from the collaborative community-led design project *Empowering Design Practices: Historic places of worship as catalysts for connected communities* (EDP) conducted by a group of researchers from The Open University comprised of Katerina Alexiou, Theodore Zamenopoulos and Vera Hale from Design and Susie West from Art History, in collaboration with Sophia de Sousa, Chief Executive at The Glass-House Community Led Design, a national charity that supports communities, organisations and networks to work collaboratively on the design of places and spaces. The project was funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council in the UK between 2014 and 2020, and supported 55 communities of multiple faiths and denominations. It offered training and specialist support to 460 beneficiaries and engaged 1,250 members of the public in design activities.

The EDP project sought to empower communities to tackle the challenges they face when looking to develop historic places of worship in ways that ensure their future sustainability. It explored the processes, resources and environments that help them not only to develop their capabilities to lead such projects but especially to engage in design work. It drew on action research, theories of action and reflective practice and research-by-design to evaluate the impact of types and quantities of support given, with art history contributing work around the requirement for communities to devise statements of significance when bidding for lottery money. In this discussion the authors, who worked collaboratively across disciplines (art history, information technology, heritage management and design) and sectors (academia, public bodies, civil society organisations and the private sector) reflect on the factors that were found to be important for the success of such a project.

In the second essay of Part 2, the Open University research fellow in design, Jan van Duppen presents

a methodological 'in-between' that explores the use of the photography-based research method of the 'shooting script', proposed by the sociologist Charles Suchar, as a structured way of conducting field work and an approach to foster photographic and sociological seeing for researchers in social science and design. Van Duppen conceives his use of photography as an embodied, performed research practice and reflects on the complexities of using photography in research in view of processes and ways of making across design and art history, combining this visual methodology with participant observation and interviews. He draws on the work of the cultural historian Johan Huizinga and the urban designer Quentin Stevens to explore the distinctive spatial patterning found in urban community gardens, allotments as well as in green spaces associated with guerilla gardening, emphasising the ambiguities in spatial boundary-making such practices entail. His text is accompanied by a rich selection of photographs that illustrate the principle of the 'shooting script' and also offer a visual essay or a visual presentation of 'facts' in their own right.

Part 3 of this special issue presents a round-table discussion that revolves around the exhibition *Suits and Saris* staged at New Walk Museum & Art Gallery in Leicester (March–October 2012), to which Amy Jane Barnes from The Open University Art History Department had contributed as freelance researcher, and *La Campana Community FabLab*, an ongoing project located in Monterrey, Mexico, where Nicole Lotz, who teaches design at The Open University, contributes her professional skills and distance-learning expertise as international academic collaborator to the location team in Mexico. They are in conversation with art historians Kim Charnley and the present author, who also takes the role of moderator. The aim of the roundtable was to experiment with ways of engaging in conversation across the Humanities-STEM divide where art history and design are respectively located at The Open University, and to scope potential meeting points between the disciplines, while exploring the differing ways in which disciplinary investments and perspectives shape professional practice. Themes that are explored in this conversation are the transnational flows of people, fashions and ideas that inform both projects, the impact of colonial histories, notions of translation and cultural situatedness as well as the ways in which matters of community engagement, participation and issues of power surfaced in the two projects. The dialogic exploration of these themes was followed by a self-reflexive discussion on methodological differences between the disciplines and concluding thoughts on

what the process of engaging in such cross-disciplinary conversations entails.

The final and fourth part opens with Tim Benton, Professor Emeritus in Art History, reflecting on the rich history of *A305: History of Architecture and Design 1890–1939* which broadcast 24 TV and 32 radio programmes to its students and the general public via the BBC and had a profound impact on the architectural profession. Its radical approach to disseminating knowledge about the history of modern architecture, moreover, secured an astonishing range of afterlives that include its presentation at the Venice Biennale in 1976, the translation of six of the TV programmes into Italian which were shown on Italian national television, and a further presentation at the Venice Biennale in 2014 as part of the Radical Pedagogies exhibit. This was followed by a comprehensive presentation of the course at the Canadian Center for Architecture in Montreal (2017–18) with a second showing at Garagem Sul (Centro Cultural de Belém Foundation) cultural centre in Portugal. The continued interest in the course prompts Benton to ponder why this historic course, which was delivered by distance teaching in the late 1970s and early 1980s, continues to garner such interest in the age of online teaching and of the MOOC (massive open online course). He reflects on the ways *A305* was presented in its afterlives, while also offering a 'behind-the-scenes' perspective on the rationale behind course units, how its teaching elements cohered, the nature of the collaboration between the OU and the BBC, as well as the import of *A305* for the development of the discipline of design history, pointing out that eight of the 24 teaching units, nine of the 32 radio programmes and six of the 24 TV programmes dealt exclusively with the history of design.

This is followed by a reflection by Joaquim Moreno on the import of the OU's trailblazing instituting of the university 'being on air' in view of the development of MOOCs as well as the provision of higher education during the global pandemic, which finds students worldwide receiving their education in their homes yet again, but without the open ethos.

The third essay in this section is by Professor Emeritus in design, Nigel Cross, and the designer Georgina Holden, one of the earliest students of Design at the OU. They discuss the history and import of teaching design 'in the open' for the discipline, and relate that making a virtue of the lack of studio tuition, which traditionally constituted the main vehicle for teaching in the field, and the need to teach design to a broad, non-specialist audience, led to identifying the characteristics of design thinking, pointing out that this occurred long before this concept became more widely

adopted and promoted in the 2000s. As they suggest, the OU's version of design education geared towards new forms of general education in design intended for a much wider audience than the training of design professionals, not only prefigured new forms of design education but also made a significant contribution when design was introduced to general education. The essay also traces the development of design pedagogy at the OU from its early stages of being broadcast by the BBC, to the use of video and audio cassettes, then digital media such as CDs and DVDs and to the present model of an online learning environment, reflecting on the ways in which technological development required changes in pedagogical approaches.

The concluding essay is by the design theorist Tony Fry and rounds off this issue by critically reflecting on the present state of design and its pedagogy. Fry points to the role the OU played in the development of design education and hence also to its present condition of limitation. He highlights the discipline's anthro- and Eurocentricity, its uncritical acceptance of its role as service provider rather than taking a pro-active ethical stance that harnesses design's world-making powers for the futuring of design, and states that in order for design to become futural decisive and transformative leadership is required. He also critiques prevalent approaches in design history which, since breaking away from art history, established itself as independent academic field focused on the object and its histories of style, method or process at the expense of more encompassing and urgent issues. For him, this pre-occupation disavows design's role as a historical actor and shirks design's responsibility for creating a sustainable future, arguing that in order to do so design educators and designers need a far more critical and comprehensive understanding of the worlds in which design arrives and acts. He further suggests that such a move requires the unlearning of the habitus of the designer and, crucially, demands that design education becomes dialogically transdisciplinary, that is, more informed by and influencing other disciplines, a requirement this special issue hopes to have made a contribution to.

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# ART AND DESIGN IN EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY FRANCE: FROM *DESSEIN* TO *DESSIN*

Emma Barker

## Abstract

*This essay seeks to trace the origins of the modern notion of design in eighteenth-century France, with reference to the theory and practice of drawing. It explores the particularity of French terminology in this area, showing how the language evolved so as to distinguish the theoretical term, *dessein*, from the practical one, *dessin*, in contrast to English, in which one word, *design*, covers the entire spectrum from conception to realisation. It also examines how drawing was theorised and illustrated in the pages of the great monument of Enlightenment thinking, the *Encyclopédie*. The suggestion here is that, while the *Encyclopédie* distinguished between an academic model of drawing centred on the human figure and its technical uses by manufacturers in the textile trades, it also hints at a conception of design that bridges the gap between theory and practice, art and industry. This essay further explores how a new concern with teaching drawing to artisans led to the establishment of drawing schools across France. Although these schools have been criticised for failing to equip their students with the skills demanded by manufacturers, their teaching was intended to serve the needs of the luxury trades that constituted the great strength of the French economy and may have succeeded in doing so, at least in the case of the Royal Free Drawing School in Paris. In conclusion, while eighteenth-century France is more usually associated with the decorative arts, as distinct from design, it nevertheless produced highly successful designers, such as Philippe de Lasalle, a leading figure in the Lyons silk industry.*

**Keywords:** art, design, drawing, training, eighteenth-century France, decorative arts

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## Biographical note

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# ART AND DESIGN IN EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY FRANCE: FROM *DESSEIN* TO *DESSIN*

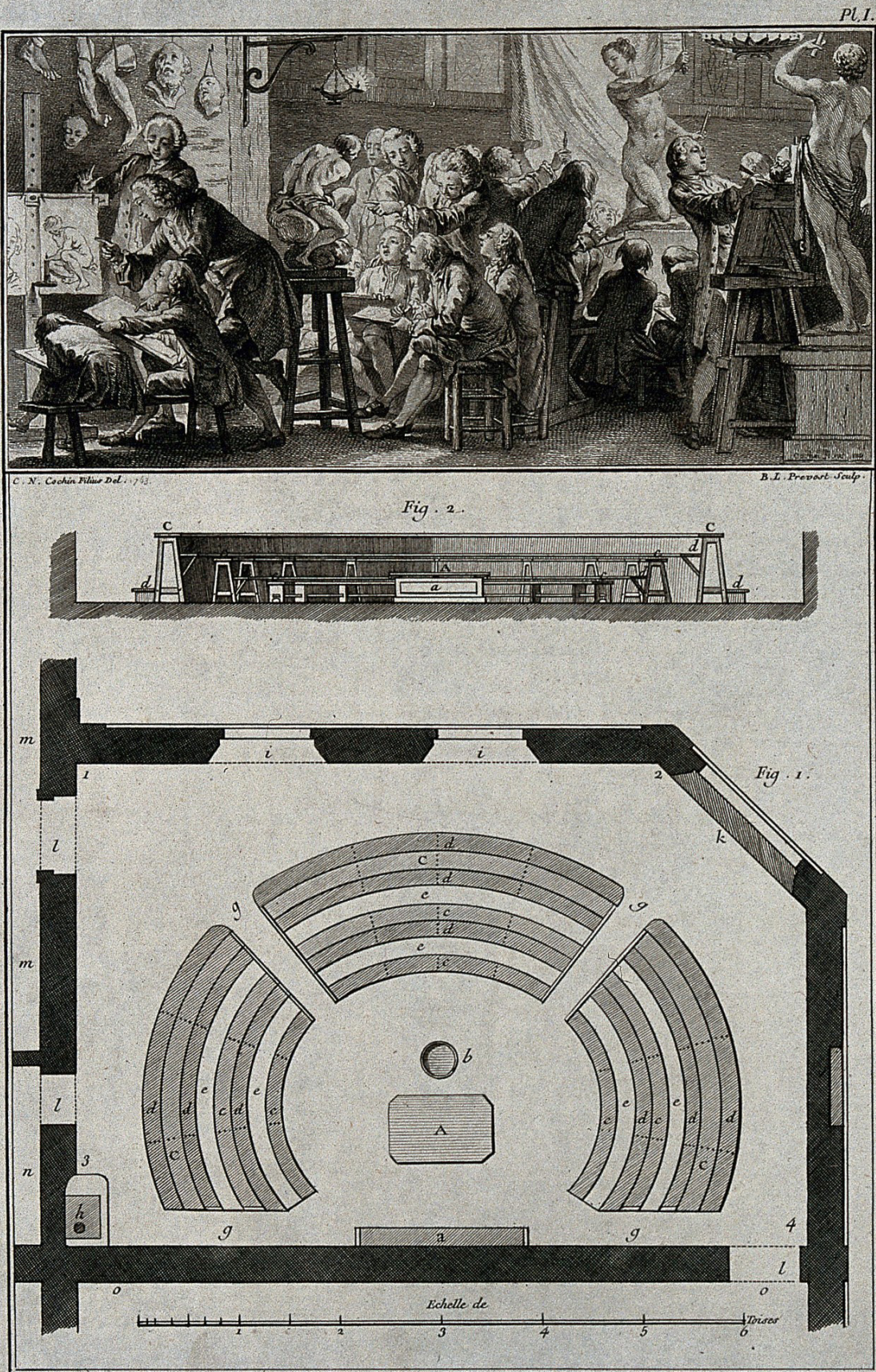
Emma Barker, The Open University

The French language lacks any single term that corresponds to design, as it is now understood in the English-speaking world, with the result that 'le design' has had to be borrowed to fill the lacuna. The word gained currency in France after 1962, when a department of industrial design was established at the *École Nationale Supérieure des Arts Décoratifs* (National Higher School in the Decorative Arts) in Paris. Whereas design, like the cognate Italian word, *disegno*, comprehends both the mental conception of a project and its visual or material realisation, this semantic field is covered in modern French by two distinct terms: *dessein*, which has to do with the mind, and *dessin*, which primarily means a drawing. This short essay explores the specific historical moment, that of France during the second half of the eighteenth century, when this distinction emerged. At the time, drawing was regarded as the crucial basis for achievement in painting, sculpture and architecture, which had first been grouped together in Renaissance Italy under the heading of the three *arti del disegno* (arts of design/drawing) and, by the mid-eighteenth century, had come to be identified as *beaux arts* (fine arts). However, as will be shown here, the ability to draw was increasingly considered to be an indispensable skill not only for practitioners of these prestigious art forms but also for artisans working in industry, above all in textile manufacture, a crucial sector of the French economy. Drawing was thus reconceived during this period in ways that are, in fact, not so far removed from the modern notion of design, associated as it is with product design for industry.

The most important art institution in eighteenth-century France was the *Académie Royale de Peinture et de Sculpture* (Royal Academy of Painting and Sculpture), which was founded in Paris in 1648. The teaching that the *Académie* provided centred on drawing after the human body (male only) in the life class, a practice over which it (at least in theory) exercised a monopoly (Michel, 2018, p.23). Students (all of them male) were only admitted to the life class once they had mastered the basic skills of drawing, which they learned by first copying images of the body, in the form of drawings and prints, and then by drawing sculpted bodies, most

often in the form of plaster casts after antique statues. Contrary to what is often stated, these basic skills were not taught in the *Académie* itself but had to be learned privately from the Academician to whom the student was apprenticed (Michel, 2018, p.243). All three stages of learning how to draw are depicted by the draughtsman, engraver and art theorist Charles-Nicolas Cochin in the first of the plates that illustrate the entry on drawing in the *Encyclopédie, ou Dictionnaire raisonné des arts et des sciences* (1751–72). (This publication will be discussed further below). On the left of the image can be seen young students copying two- and three-dimensional models under the guidance of drawing masters, while, on the right, more advanced students draw independently from the life model; beneath this scene appears a profile and plan of the drawing school, with rows of benches around the table on which the model posed for the life class (Fig. 2.1). Cochin's image testifies to the way in which drawing had been transformed into a rational, orderly practice, incorporated into and supported by the official structures of the French state (Lajer-Burchard, 2017, p.15).

By the mid-eighteenth century, when this image was produced, drawing had largely been stripped of the intellectual connotations of *disegno*, as it was understood in Renaissance Italy. Originally, the equivalent French word, *dessein*, had a similar range of meaning to the Italian one, embracing both the conceptual and the practical. According to the seventeenth-century writer and lexicographer, Antoine Furetière, for example, it signified 'project, enterprise, intention ... also the thought one has in the imagination of the order, layout and construction of a picture, a poem, a book, a building ... also said in painting of those images or pictures without colour' (Furetière, 1690, vol. I, n.p.). *Dessein* was defined in much the same terms in the official dictionary of the French language, the *Dictionnaire de l'Académie française*, when its first edition was published a few years later (*Académie française*, 1694, vol. I, p.322). The word was sometimes spelled without an e and gradually the two spellings took on distinct meanings, with *dessein* being reserved for the conceptual dimension while *dessin* was used to refer to the practice of drawing. The latter usage is described as a 'happy innovation' in a late eighteenth-century dictionary (Féraud, 1787, vol. I, p.750), though it can in fact be traced back to at least 1680, when another dictionary condemned the spelling of *dessein* without an e 'as a term of painting' as an unfounded distinction, introduced by 'certain innovators [*quelques modernes*]' (Richelet, 1680, p.236). *Dessin* as a 'term of art', distinct from *dessein*, did not, however, appear



*Ecole de Dessein.*

Figure 2.1: Benoît-Louis Prévost, after Charles-Nicolas Cochin, View of a drawing school, its plan and elevation, from *Encyclopédie, ou Dictionnaire raisonné des sciences des arts et des métiers*, in *Recueil des Planches*, 1772, vol. 3, 'Dessein', Plate I. Etching. (Image credit: Wellcome Collection. CC BY 4.0)

in the *Dictionnaire de l'Académie française* until its fifth edition (*Académie française*, 1798, vol. I, p.410).

The establishment of this distinction is bound up with the debate between the partisans of *dessein* and those of *coloris* (a term that referred to the use and mixing of colour in painting), which took place in and around the *Académie* towards the end of the seventeenth century. The debate echoed the opposition between *disegno* and *colore*, Florence and Venice, that emerged in Renaissance Italy but, in this case, the opposing sides rallied to the cause of a French painter, Nicolas Poussin, and a Flemish one, Peter Paul Rubens, respectively. The partisans of *dessein*, who included the painter Charles Le Brun, the dominant figure in the *Académie* (and its director from 1683), defended the status of their profession as a liberal (free and intellectual) rather than merely mechanical (material and servile) art by aligning painting with *dessein*, which, for them, as for their Italian predecessors, embraced both theory and practice. The leader of the rival camp, the art theorist Roger de Piles, who was made an honorary member of the *Académie* in 1699, challenged the supremacy of *dessein*, instead characterising *coloris* as the 'soul and ultimate achievement of painting' (de Piles, 1668, p.27; Lichtenstein, 1993, p.147; Heck, 2015, p.3). He explicitly distinguished the broadly conceptual dimension of *dessein* from the specifically pictorial one and made clear that he only accepted the latter meaning (Puttfarcken, 1985, pp.44–5; Lichtenstein, 2014, p.226). For de Piles, in short, *dessein* primarily means draughtsmanship; stripped of its former theoretical aspect, it is essentially a technical skill inculcated through careful training, which served to ensure 'accuracy of the eye and facility of the hand' (de Piles, 1708, p.399). The authoritative position that he had gained in French art world by the early eighteenth century (by which time Le Brun was dead) leaves no doubt that de Piles' theory of art helped to shape the definition of *dessin* as distinct from *dessein*.

Although the latter spelling continued to be used to mean both thinking and drawing, discussions of *dessein* with reference to art tended to be largely practical in scope, with little or no theoretical dimension, during the eighteenth century. In volume 4 of the *Encyclopédie*, for example, an entry on *dessein* in the sense of a plan or intention is followed by the article dealing with the word 'as a term of painting' by Claude-Henri Watelet, a wealthy art lover, who was made an honorary member of the *Académie* in 1754. Watelet defines *dessein* firstly as 'the production that the artist realises with a pencil or a pen' and secondly as 'the art of imitating with lines the shapes that objects present to our eyes' (1754, pp.889–90). After dismissing the

theoretical debate over the relative importance of drawing and colour as completely pointless, he devotes most of the article to explaining the three stages of training in draughtsmanship (drawing after images, after sculpture and after the life model) depicted in the plate already discussed (Fig. 2.1). The *Encyclopédie* also contains several other short articles under the same heading, including five that deal with different aspects of textile manufacture. These define *dessein* in a primarily technical sense, with reference to the point-paper plan for setting up threads on a frame (such as a loom) so as to reproduce a freehand drawing supplied by a *dessinateur* (draughtsman or designer) (Diderot, 1754, p.892). Although all of the plates that appear under the heading of *dessein* concern drawing in relation to painting and sculpture, this technical use of the term is illustrated in other plates in the *Encyclopédie*, such as one accompanying the article 'Silk' (Fig 2.2) (Miller, 2004, p.42).

The range of articles that appear under the heading of *dessein* in the *Encyclopédie* is typical of the commitment to assembling, organising and disseminating knowledge about the arts and science that this publication embodied. Its commitment to these goals was in turn based on a belief in the progress that could be achieved by rational enquiry into every aspect of human endeavour that is typical of the Enlightenment. Exemplary in this respect is the *Encyclopédie* article 'Art', by one of its editors, the philosopher Denis Diderot, who also wrote most of the articles about *dessein* as it was used in textile manufacture. In 'Art', Diderot observes that the long-standing distinction between the liberal and the mechanical arts, based on the opposition between the activity of the mind and that of the hand, 'has had the unfortunate effect of giving a bad name to very worthy and useful people'; it is time, he declares, that artisans were rescued from 'the scorn in which prejudice has held them for so long' (1751, p.714, p.717). The mechanical arts, Diderot argues, not only bring about great social and economic benefits, but also require no less mental application than the liberal arts. The examples of such intelligence at work that he cites include 'the frames of braid-makers, gauze-makers, drapers or silk workers' and 'the projection of a design [*dessein*] on to the threads of a simple and from there on to the threads of a warp' (1751, p.717).<sup>1</sup> As well as challenging the distinction between liberal and mechanical arts, Diderot here moves towards a notion

<sup>1</sup> OED: *simple*, 8: weaving, a: 'Each of a set of weighted lines or cords attached to the harness of a draw loom, which are pulled to work particular parts of the harness in sequence'.

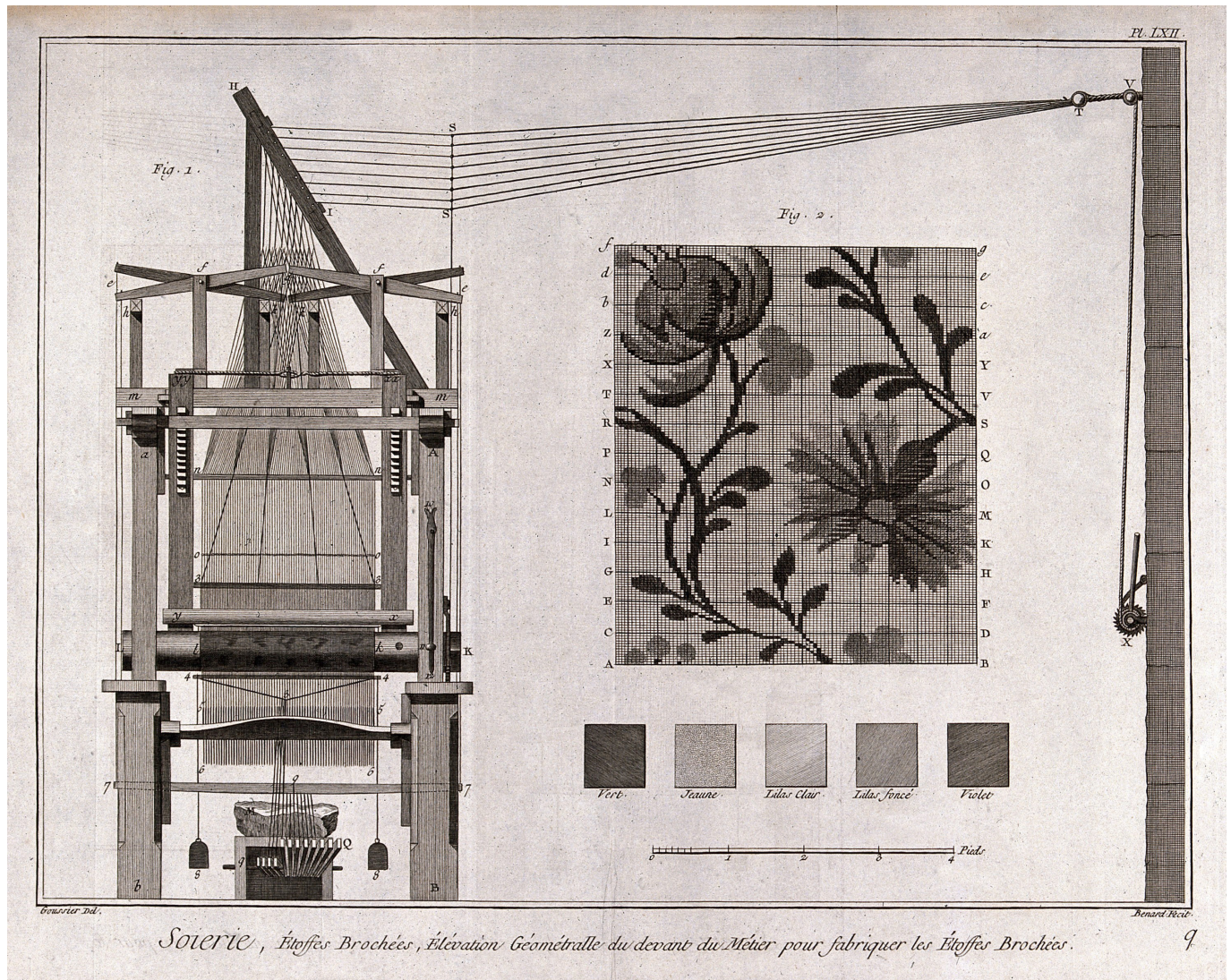


Figure 2.2. R. Benard after L.-J. Goussier, Silk manufacture, brocaded cloth, geometric elevation of the front of the loom and example of a design in five different colours, from *Encyclopédie, Dictionnaire raisonné des sciences des arts et des métiers*, in *Recueil des planches*, 1772, 'Soierie', section 3, Plate LXII, Figures 1 and 2. Engraving. (Image credit: Wellcome Collection. CC BY 4.0)

of design as a mediating term between conceptual activity and material production, without ever quite articulating it.

The nearest that the *Encyclopédie* gets to outlining a notion of design in the sense of drawing for manufacture is in the article on *dessein* in architecture. Its author, Jacques-François Blondel, who not only practised as an architect but also ran his own school of architecture, starts by defining it as 'a geometric or perspectival representation on paper of what one has conceived'. However, he does not restrict himself to discussing its specifically architectural application but adds: 'Drawing does not only concern the architect, because by this name one comprehends in general figure, ornament, civil and military architecture'. Blondel insists that it should play a part in education at all levels of society, including 'that of artisans so that they may advance and distinguish themselves in their profession' (1754, p.891). Arguments in favour of teaching drawing,

particularly to artisans, were increasingly widely made in France at the time on utilitarian grounds, for the sake of the artistic, moral, social and economic benefits that would ensue (Benhamou, 1991; d'Enfert, 2003, pp.31–4; Lahalle, 2006, pp.25–44). Antoine Ferrand de Monthelon, a painter, for example, contended that the establishment of schools of drawing in France would not only improve the quality of the mechanical arts by enhancing the skills of workers, so validating them in their own eyes and those of society, but would also thereby enable French products to compete more effectively, 'both within and outside the kingdom, thereby making trade more flourishing' (1746, p.70). Another commentator suggested, by contrast, that French artisans were falling behind their English counterparts, whose designs offered a model of functionality and simplicity that French artists would do well to emulate in order to return the standards of good taste that had prevailed in the age of Louis XIV

(Leben, 2004, pp.25–6; see also d'Enfert, 2003, pp.35–42).

All such arguments contributed to the foundation of some forty drawing schools in French towns and cities during the second half of the century, with a significant concentration in centres of textile production (d'Enfert, 2003, p.19). Many of these schools were supported by the local authorities or by private benefactors in order to ensure that the training they offered was accessible to the poor (Benhamou, 1993, pp.90–112; d'Enfert, 2003, pp.11–10, pp.31–4; Lahalle, 2006). All of the students attended on a part-time basis, often pursuing their study of drawing alongside an apprenticeship in a trade; a crucial part of the schools' purpose was to foster skills that traditional apprenticeships failed to teach (d'Enfert, 2003, pp.43–4; Lahalle, 2006, pp. 23, 201–2). Although the drawing schools were largely aimed at artisans and workers, the training that they provided did not differ radically from that offered by the *Académie*. The drawing masters were mostly painters with an academic background, like Jean-Baptiste Descamps, who founded one of the earliest such schools in Rouen in 1741 and later wrote a treatise on their utility (Henry-Gobet, 2001). Another was the aforementioned Ferrand de Monthelon, who was recruited by the city of Reims to teach drawing there in 1748 (d'Enfert, 2003, p.39; Lahalle, 2006, p.165). It should be noted that the curriculum did not entirely conform to academic norms; drawing after the life model was only permitted in the few schools affiliated to the *Académie* and reserved to an elite of students aspiring to become artists, whether professional or amateur (Benhamou, 1993, p.95; d'Enfert, 2003 p.60; Lahalle, 2006, p.17, pp.49–50).

However, the training that the drawing schools provided for would-be artisans largely conformed to academic norms insofar as it accorded a central role to the human figure, which was copied from models in the form of prints, drawings or casts. Although the other two elements of drawing mentioned by Blondel in his *Encyclopédie* essay, namely architecture and ornament, also featured in the curriculum, they often did so in a subsidiary way (d'Enfert, 2003, pp.65–6; Lahalle, 2006, p.243). Both provided skills useful to the building trades, but ornament (which included flower drawing) was the element with most direct relevance to the training of artisans, particularly those destined for the textile industry (d'Enfert, 2003, pp.55–6, 74–6). In 1762, for example, a drawing school in Lille explained in its prospectus how the worker would benefit from attending the school: 'he will there draw flowers, fruit, trees, plants, foliage, which produce the most beautiful effect on fabrics and gives them brilliance and taste

... which makes them desirable to our neighbours' (quoted in Lahalle, 2006, pp.76, 220; cf. statements quoted in Lahalle, 2006, pp.67, 71). The importance of a foundation in flower drawing for a career in the textile industry was likewise emphasised in a work of 1765, *Le Dessinateur pour les étoffes d'or, d'argent et de soie*, by a Lyonnais silk designer, Antoine-Nicolas Joubert de l'Hiberdie (Miller, 2004; Scott & Clifford, 2004, p.3).

Nevertheless, the drawing schools' emphasis on freehand drawing skills at the expense of technical training gave rise to criticisms, both at the time and subsequently, that they failed to equip students with the professional skills needed by manufacturers (Lahalle, 2006, pp.288–90; Chisick, 1977, p.53; Benhamou, 1993, p.111; Miller, 1998). Certainly, this type of training gave way during the first half of the nineteenth century to a new geometric method of drawing more closely geared to the requirements of industry (d'Enfert, 2003); it was dubbed, by some exponents at least, *dessin industriel* (Normand, Douliot & Krafft, 1833).<sup>2</sup> However, it would be reductive to characterise drawing as it was taught in eighteenth-century France merely as a staging post on the road that leads to the inevitable invention of design in the modern sense. For one thing, the very terms of the argument involve a certain Anglocentrism, given that, as has already been noted, French lacks a separate word for design as distinct from drawing. Arguably, moreover, identifying design with industrial mass production may make sense in a British context, given Britain's primacy in the 'Industrial Revolution' of the mid-eighteenth to mid-nineteenth century, but less so in the case of France, where, during this period as still to some extent today, the economic advantage lay in relatively small-scale production of luxury goods, most obviously fashion, with a reputation for style and taste (as indicated by the drawing school prospectus quoted in the previous paragraph). Recent scholarship has underlined the importance of fashion and other luxury industries to the rise and triumph of capitalism in France (Sewell, 2010). In any case, as the most detailed studies of eighteenth-century French drawing schools have emphasised, whatever the limitations of the training that they offered, these institutions need to be assessed with reference to the specific artistic, economic, social and cultural context that shaped them (d'Enfert, 2003, pp.35–6, 46–7; Lahalle, 2006, pp.292–4).

2 It has been claimed that the term, *dessinateur industriel*, dates back to the eighteenth century (Benhamou, 1993, p.91). In fact, however, the ultimate source for this statement is a late nineteenth-century work, which refers to one Charles-François Delahaye, who worked in Paris in the 1770s, as being 'what we would call today a *dessinateur industriel*' (Guiffrey, 1886, p.64).

Overall, it can be said that the transformation of *dessein* into *dessin* in France during the eighteenth century involved a significant shift from a theoretical to a practical orientation. Exemplary in this respect is the *École Royale Gratuite de Dessin* (Royal Free Drawing School), which was established in Paris in 1766 (just at the point when the new spelling was being increasingly widely adopted). As its name suggests, the school benefited from royal support; it was funded by special taxes, one of which was levied on the Parisian guilds, whenever a contract was issued for an apprentice or a master received into the guild. The school's founder, Jean-Jacques Bachelier, a painter who had trained at the *Académie* and then worked at the Royal Porcelain Manufactory, endeavoured to ensure that the training equipped students with the skills needed for porcelain manufacture, textile production and other luxury trades based in and around the city (Leben, 1993, 2004). Although the curriculum was divided into the same three branches of drawing as elsewhere, the starting point of the whole programme of study was instruction in the 'elementary principles of geometry', which, according to Bachelier, constituted 'the basis

of every mechanical art' (1792, pp.6–7, 10). No less significant was the strict timetable, with classes taking place in shifts, which reportedly made it possible to accommodate as many as 500 students per day (far more than in other schools); each student had an allocated seat where he would copy prints under glass in locked frames (Fig. 2.3) (Leben, 2004, p.77; Lasalle, 2006, p.121, table 7). The innovative character of Bachelier's enterprise is also attested by his attempt during the 1780s to extend the training to girls (also unprecedented), though the French Revolution seems to have put paid to his plans (Leben, 2004, pp.57–61).

Having gone through many reconfigurations and several changes of name, Bachelier's school (which finally became fully co-educational in 1949) survives today as the *École Nationale Supérieure des Arts Décoratifs*. As with design, the origins of the notion of the 'decorative arts' can be traced back to the eighteenth century, though it was not until 1877 that the term made its appearance in a French dictionary (Lavezzi, 2005, p.175); the school was renamed the same year. By contrast to design, however, the decorative arts are associated with artisanal, pre-



Figure 2.3. *Ecole Gratuite de dessin* classroom in the former Anatomy Theatre of Saint-Côme in the rue des Cordeliers, Paris, probably drawn by an instructor, after 1776. Pencil on paper; 26.5 x 38.4cm. Cabinet de Dessin, Musée Carnavalet, Paris. (Image credit: © Musée Carnavalet/Roger Viollet)

industrial conditions of production, as well as with luxury and ornament as opposed to modernist simplicity and functionalism; when it gained currency around 1900, the term already had a nostalgic quality, looking back to the past, not least to the eighteenth century (Scott, 2005, p. 137). Whereas tensions between the type of instruction provided by the *École Nationale des Arts Décoratifs* (as it was known until 1925) and the demands of manufacturers for a strictly technical training persisted during this later period, the school (which adopted a strictly rational, geometric method of drawing in the 1870s) helped to train a new generation of ‘artist-decorators’ who challenged the routine production of French industry by seeking to imbue their work with a new stylistic unity (Froissart-Pezzone, 2000).<sup>3</sup> This unity is exemplified by art nouveau, which, it may be noted, derived much of its inspiration from the eighteenth-century French style known as the rococo (Silverman, 1989). French investment (both actual and symbolic) in the decorative arts as distinct from design, not just in the late nineteenth century but right up to the 1950s, can no doubt partly be understood as a reaction formation, reflecting France’s economic backwardness by comparison with more industrialised nations such as Germany and its resistance to the rise of international modernism as exemplified by the Bauhaus (Silverman, 1989; Troy 1991; Laurent, 2019). However, as indicated above, it can also be seen as a strategy of playing to the nation’s particular strengths and, moreover, one that embodies an alternative conception of what it means to be modern (Silverman, 1909; Troy, 1991; Lasc, Downey & Taylor, 2015).

In short, seeking the origins of design by considering the case of eighteenth-century France is a somewhat perverse endeavour. Not only does French lack any single word for design, but France in this period is more often associated with another term, the decorative arts, which stands in contrast to design. Nevertheless, the theory and practice of *dessein/ dessin*, as it existed in eighteenth-century France, can perhaps be aligned with the project of elaborating a more nuanced and expansive understanding of design, one that is as much concerned with art as with industry. Such a project was formulated by Jacques Viénot, previously the head of an interior decoration

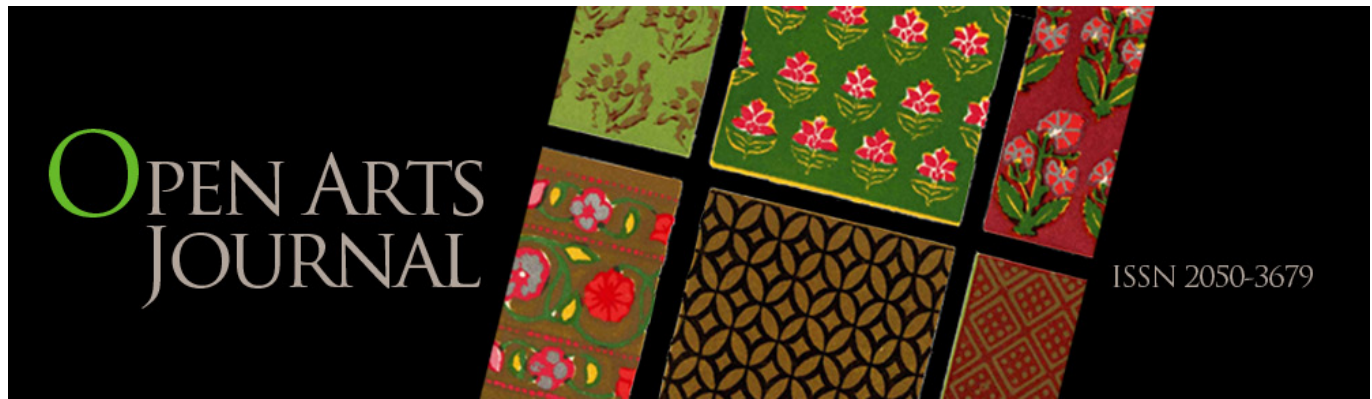
company, who, in 1951, founded an *Institut d’Esthétique Industrielle* (Institute of Industrial Aesthetics) with the aim of promoting a distinctively French approach that married art and commerce, beauty and technology; as the institute’s name suggests, Viénot considered the word ‘design’ to be an intolerable anglicism (Le Boeuf, 2006; Vial, 2017, pp. 13–24). Whether or not this really amounts to a distinctively different approach from design as such may be doubted. Still, as regards the eighteenth century, an emblematic figure would be Philippe de Lasalle (1723–1804), who, as the textile and fashion historian Lesley Ellis Miller has demonstrated (2005), achieved great success in the Lyons silk industry through a self-conscious union of art and commerce; significantly, Lasalle catered both to the demand for high-end, exclusive designs and large-scale production of more day-to-day fabrics and was, moreover, highly adept at marketing his products, not least by highlighting his own role as designer. Moreover, Lasalle’s wide-ranging achievement was recognised as such by his contemporaries, who hailed him as a *dessinateur* (draughtsman/designer), capable of great feats of artistry, as well as an inventor, machinist, manufacturer and businessman.

3 From this, it is clear that geometric methods of drawing were not necessarily better adapted to the demands of industry than an academic or figurative approach. What is at issue here is rather a narrowly instrumental emphasis on technical training as opposed to a commitment to bringing the ideals and standards of fine art to bear on what are variously called the decorative, applied or industrial arts (see also Froissart, 2014).

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# ART, INDUSTRY AND THE LAWS OF NATURE: THE SOUTH KENSINGTON METHOD REVISITED

Renate Dohmen

## Abstract

*This essay examines approaches to art education in Britain from the late eighteenth century to the 1880s. It explores issues of art and industry with an emphasis on the so-called South Kensington method adopted by the Schools of Art and the national curriculum implemented by Henry Cole, Secretary to the Department of Art and Science, which will be considered in relation to the educational provision offered by the Society for the Encouragement of Arts, Manufactures and Commerce, Mechanics' Institutes, the Schools of Design and the Female School. The discussion presents that the prevalent scholarly dismissal of this approach as inartistic, ineffective and commercial obscures its radical departure from elite notions of fine art as well as its quest to foster a modern conception of art for the working man that combined beauty with usefulness, unified art and science and emphasised geometry and ornamentation rather than life drawing as a matter of principle. It presents that the Department of Art and Science's approach to training designers for industry was one of 'manuring the nation' through public art education in elementary drawing and the education of art teachers, which was thought to raise national standards of taste and would thus 'naturally' improve British manufacture and bring forth designers for industry. It moreover suggests that the South Kensington method and its emphasis on line, basic geometric shapes and ornament needs to be examined in relation to the ethos of German natural philosophy, which considered art and science as integrally connected and articulated an aesthetic approach to scientific enquiry that countered the notion of the transcendental ideal. The essay also highlights South Kensington's inadvertent facilitation of women's art education and suggests that it needs to be acknowledged among the precursors to the Bauhaus.*

**Keywords:** South Kensington Method, Henry Cole, art and industry, Mechanics' Institutes, German natural philosophy, Goethe, geometry, ornament, women's art education, Great Exhibition, Society of Arts, Schools of Design, Schools of Art, Female School of Art, Richard Redgrave, William Dyce, Christopher Dresser

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# ART, INDUSTRY AND THE LAWS OF NATURE: THE SOUTH KENSINGTON METHOD REVISITED

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## Introduction

Similar to the situation in eighteenth-century France discussed by Emma Barker in this issue, notions of art, design, drawing and art education were closely intertwined in nineteenth-century Britain and fuelled fierce debates in a field riven with overlapping binaries, such as polite accomplishment versus fine art, art versus industry, culture versus commercialism, and craft versus mechanical production. As the industrial revolution marched on, the terms 'art' and 'industry' became focal points for these controversies, and their understanding was far from static. In fact, as art historians Kate Nichols and Rebecca Wade point out, they were 'used in such varied ways across nineteenth-century culture, that an attempt to give a precise definition of each runs the risk of being misleading and reductive' (2016, p.2). But the issues pertaining to this history extend beyond terminological slipperiness. As Nichols and Wade highlight, the scholarly discussion of art and design in this period has been dominated by anti-industrial voices, stating that 'the legacy of the literature on art and design education predominantly published in the 1960s and 1970s ... positioned Morris and Ruskin as the heroic and prescient figures who rescued design education from industry' (p.13). In *Art versus Industry? New Perspectives on Visual and Industrial Cultures in Nineteenth-Century Britain*, they seek to address this legacy, stating that 'there was a relationship between art and industry in the nineteenth century, not simply a disavowal as has so often been presumed' (p.14 italics in the original).

The present debate builds on the achievements of this book. More specifically, it takes its cue from the observation of the art historian Frances Robertson who holds that historiographic derision has forestalled an even-handed assessment of a good four decades of nineteenth-century British design education under the aegis of the Department of Science and Art (DSA), which was headed by the designer, educator, civil servant and bureaucrat extraordinaire Henry Cole, also referred to as 'King Cole' (Fig. 3.1).

As she points out, this history is heavily 'tinged with the shadow of John Ruskin', who opposed Cole's educational stance, and sides with Ruskin's 'campaigns to redirect the values of art and design education at

the end of the nineteenth century' (Robertson, 2016, p.121). She draws attention to the prevalence of a polemic that 'poured scorn on the methods and aims of the Government Art Schools of Design that held sway between 1837 and the 1880s', which she identifies as a consequence of the pre-occupation with Ruskin in the scholarly literature, and which led to a dismissal of the art education in this period presented as a 'ludicrous episode by a power-crazed Henry Cole' (p.121). She furthermore argues that this created a condition of 'collective blindness', which does 'disservice to the students, artists, designers and teachers of this period' (p.121) and which has, moreover, by and large, sidelined the history of technical drawing, one of her areas of interest and scholarly expertise.

As part of her research on industrial draughtsmen, she draws attention to the prevailing focus on the 'individual creativity of elite engineers' (Robertson, 2016, p.121) and designers in discussions of art and design in nineteenth-century Britain which, as she



Figure 3.1: James Jacques Joseph Tissot, *Mr. Henry Cole, King Cole*, 26 September 1891. Colour lithography, *Vanity Fair* cartoon. (Credit: Private Collection / Look and Learn / Peter Jackson Collection / Bridgeman Images)

points out, misrepresents the field and disavows the agency of them, perpetuating the two systems thinking that dominates the writing of this history. She presents that this view is based on ideology rather than the givens on the ground, stating that, as the working practices of the draughtsmen reveal, art and industry were far from separate at the time (p.126).

Like Robertson, the art historian Imogen Hart also adopts a critical stance with regard to the predominant narratives in the field. She points out that while the history of the Bauhaus acknowledges the Arts and Crafts Movement, the latter's roots in design reform and the design schools/schools of practical art is scarcely acknowledged (2010, p.32). Architectural historian Arindam Dutta, in a similar vein, points out that the contributions to British design education by the Scottish painter William Dyce, who devised the curriculum of the first Schools of Design founded in Britain in the late 1830s, along with the educational efforts of Henry Cole, who took over the oversight of these schools in 1852, tend to be dismissed as 'all-too mechanical' and 'overbearing and perfunctory apparatuses' (2007, p.35). He chastises this deposition as an 'inordinately *culturalist* understanding' (p.35 italics in the original), which he argues is informed by an overreliance on notions of the avant-garde 'as the primary archive of shifting aesthetic sensibilities'; a charge he also applies to discussions of colonial art education rooted in postcolonial studies perspectives (p.35). Dutta holds that this approach overlooks the role of governmentality in the shaping of the modern aesthetic, and points out that while every 'modern survey has had to acknowledge the critical role of the Cole circle and the DSA in the establishment of a modernist aesthetic' this has at best been a reluctant if not dismissive nod in their direction, stating that 'no survey has devoted more than a page or two on the topic' (p.35). He states that this critique not only applies to the history of the DSA, but also to the one of the Bauhaus, which, likewise, is couched in terms of artistic personalities, which obscures an understanding of the '*founding* role of government in establishing the Bauhaus' (p.36 italics in the original). He considers this approach 'a failure at the core of aesthetic thought' (pp.35–6) that speaks to an ongoing reliance on notions of the individual genius; a given that is all the more astonishing since its inherent Eurocentric and masculinist investments have long been unpacked and persuasively critiqued, and, moreover, do not reflect the cultural histories of colonised countries such as India, the focus of his work on South Kensington and colonial art education.

The art historian Ann Bermingham, in a related argument, critiques that the histories of art education

in Victorian Britain neglect the role of the Female School of Art which she argues was a key, if overlooked, influence for the Arts and Crafts Movement and Art Nouveau, while the historian Barbara Whitney Keyser points out that studies of the Victorian design reform movement and of the educational provision offered by the schools of art have utterly neglected the fundamental connection between the 'laws of beauty' articulated in Victorian science which informed the aesthetics of ornament.

A further strand drawn into this discussion of art education in nineteenth century Britain is the contribution of Mechanics' Institutes, which, as the cultural theorist and historian of visual culture Adrian Rifkin has pointed out, 'pioneered the exposure of working people both to works of fine art and to the finest productions of craft and artisanal work, together with machines and tools' (1988, p.95). Yet their history, which falls squarely within the efforts to foster art for industry, has largely been neglected.

This discussion takes its cue from these critiques and seeks to expand prevalent narratives by bringing together strands that have been neglected and/or are usually kept apart as they are deemed to belong to different disciplinary fields and professional interests, such as the history of exhibitions and art education at Mechanics' Institutes, the establishment of the design schools/the schools of art (both at home and in the wider empire), the issue of women's art education, and questions of geometry, science and natural philosophy. It revisits the over-determined binary of art versus industry and argues that the general dismissal of the South Kensington method has not only impeded explorations of the Victorian notions of science it is rooted in, but also led to a neglect of linked histories such as art education at Mechanics' Institutes and women's art education, thus misrepresenting the aesthetic history of this period and disavowing the broad cultural consensus which this paper argues supported the efforts of 'King Cole'.

### **The Society of Arts and the Royal Academy**

This essay contends that nineteenth-century approaches and debates in Britain are rooted in eighteenth-century contexts, which will be briefly outlined in the following. In contrast to the high esteem enjoyed by artists in France, especially if associated with the French academy, artists in early eighteenth-century Britain were considered on a par with artisans, that is, as men 'of skill rather than of intellect' (Carline, 1968, p.49), while foreign artists who had been trained on the Continent were highly regarded and gained lucrative commissions. The reason for this difference in status is generally attributed to the lack of a central

art institution in Britain to raise the profile of art and to offer artists a place to meet and to exhibit. Training in fine art at the time was haphazard and depended on the skills of drawing teachers who roamed the country in search of employment. Some private art schools had also been founded, such as Hogarth's St. Martin's Lane Academy, which had become the prime place for artists to gather and practice life drawing by the middle of the century. But efforts to foster the applied arts were also in evidence in the eighteenth century and the perceived need for good design in manufacture led to the founding of the Society for the Encouragement of Arts, Manufactures and Commerce in 1754, which became the Royal Society of Arts in the nineteenth century. The Society aimed to encourage good design in industry by raising the status and practice of drawing, which was recognised as 'absolutely necessary in many employments, trades and manufactures' and was also considered to be 'of great utility to the public' (Carline, 1968, p.51). The Society initiated public exhibitions of art manufacture, which are considered its 'greatest

contribution ... to art education' (MacDonald, 1970, p.36) and was centrally involved in the planning of the Great Exhibition in 1851 (Bermingham, 2000, p.233).

Rather than instituting a teaching programme, the approach of the Society to fostering the drawing skills of the nation was to hold competitions. In 1758 it began offering prizes for designs for 'weaving, calico-printing, cabinet-making, coachwork, iron and brasswork, china, earthenware', but the public response was underwhelming and by 1778 the Society reduced its competitions to 'subjects normally performed by fine artists, such as drawing, painting, engraving, modelling, and carving' (MacDonald, 2005, p.45). The prizes, importantly, invited both boys and girls to contribute, who were able to compete in two age brackets, one for the under-fourteen-year-olds, and the other for those over fourteen and under seventeen years of age (Fig. 3.2).

Over time a further section was added allowing older students who attended the St. Martin's Lane Academy to participate. They were thus able to



Figure 3.2: English School, *Distribution of Prizes by HRH Prince Albert at the Society of Arts, Adelphi, 10 June 1841*. Engraving. (Private Collection / Look and Learn / Illustrated Papers Collection / Bridgeman Images)

submit life drawings, which is remarkable in the light of developments in the nineteenth century, when the drawing of the human figure was jealously guarded by the Royal Academy (founded in 1768), and the fine and applied arts were kept firmly apart. These competitions became well-established 'within a decade' and constituted the only national forum that fostered what in the widest sense could be called 'art education' until the founding of the Royal Academy which changed the dynamic in the field (Carline, 1968, p.55). Further evidence of the permeability of boundaries in the eighteenth century was the fact that in 1756 prominent artists such as Joshua Reynolds were invited to judge submissions to the competitions of the Society of Arts, and a considerable number of the boys as well as some girls who won prizes proceeded to become professional artists and academicians, such as Richard Cosway, John Flaxman and Mary Moser, who was to become a founding member of the Royal Academy (Carline, 1968, pp.54–6).

A further point to be noted which is often overlooked, is that the Royal Academy, reflecting the general concern with the benefits of art for the public good at the time, shared an emphasis on the utility of art with the Society of Arts. However, whereas the Society of Arts located art's usefulness in relation to manufacture, the Royal Academy couched its service to the nation in terms of the moral uplift history paintings provided, and the civic and national benefit this accrued (Bermingham, 2000, p.78). The Royal Academy's attitude towards the 'common man', however, set it apart from the Society of Arts, as it sought to shore up the status of fine art through exclusivity and social distance to a general public thought to lack an understanding of the principles of art.

Joshua Reynolds, who was the Royal Academy's first president, significantly shaped its agenda, orienting it towards the French academy in that history painting was declared the highest artistic genre, and old masters and classical antiquity were upheld as models to follow. As will be explored, Cole's approach to art and industry, while ostensibly focused on training designers for industry, that is, on the direct commercial application of art through design, equally aimed at the moral uplift of the nation, but sought to do so through an art education aimed at the 'common man' that was rooted in what he understood to be the laws of art and nature open to all rather than an exclusivist high-cultural agenda.

Reynolds, in his lecture delivered on the opening of the Royal Academy in 1769, thus drew a clear line between mercantile aspirations, such as the ones of the Society of Arts, and the 'polite arts' cultivated at the

Royal Academy, stating that an academy needs to be founded on the highest principles, as otherwise 'it can never effect even its own narrow purposes' which will also have a detrimental impact on industry, since if 'it has an origin no higher, not taste can ever be formed in manufactures' (Reynolds, 1891, pp.53–4). Reynolds therefore positions the Royal Academy above and apart from the Society of Arts and its emphasis on the useful arts, stating that 'if the higher arts of design flourish, these inferior ends will be answered of course', implying an 'automatic' infusion of aesthetic sense in the nation's industrial output through the presence of high art (pp.53–4).

This speech in many ways sets the scene for how relations between the fine and applied arts were to unfold in the nineteenth century, with a dominant rhetoric of a separation of spheres, which, on closer inspection, only partially reflected the facts on the ground. For example, when the sculptor John Flaxman



Figure 3.3: John Flaxman, *Apotheosis of Homer vase*, designed c.1785; this example produced c.1870 by Josiah Wedgwood Factory. Jasperware. Dallas Museum of Art, The Barbara and Hensleigh C. Wedgwood Collection, gift of Mrs. Hensleigh C. Wedgwood. (Image courtesy of Dallas Museum of Art)

was appointed Professor of Sculpture in 1810 and delivered a lecture series at the Royal Academy, he dutifully adhered to the ethos Reynolds had sketched out, omitting any mention of his long-standing association with Wedgwood (Irwin, 1991, p.121) (Fig. 3.3).

It is of interest to note that both strands in the dispute over the 'polite' versus the applied arts lay claim to antiquity and the Renaissance, with a particular focus on Raphael. In his discourses, Reynolds, for example, makes reference to Raphael's cartoons, a prized British possession that had been in the Royal Collection since the early seventeenth century, referring to them as 'one of his greatest as well as latest works' (1891, p.291), thereby exclusively focusing on the artistic element of the artist's full-size preparatory designs for the tapestries commissioned by Pope Leo X, without referencing that they were made for application in industry.

Proponents of the useful arts, however, also referred to Raphael, presenting him as a model for the union of all the arts to be emulated. In his *Epoch of the Arts* (1813), the playwright and artist Prince Hoare (1755–1834) pointed out that '[t]he earthenware now known by his name [Urbino majolica] ennobled by beauties before unseen, was sought with avidity, and the tapestry of Flanders gathered splendour from his designs' (quoted in Irwin, 1991, p.228). In 1847 Cole, who was to become a key player of British design education and who was closely involved with the Society of Arts, also drew on the Renaissance as a model for an integrated approach to the arts. Working under the pseudonym Felix Summerly, he created an initiative where he asked painters and sculptors to design a range of ceramic, glass and metal objects for manufacture, with his own Summerly Tea Service among them, which he devised prompted by the prize for a tea service created by the Society of Arts in 1845. Entries were exhibited at the Society's rooms in London, and Cole's tea service won a silver medal, was manufactured by Minton, and proved so popular that it remained in production until 1871. In the publicity brochure for his Summerly Art-Manufacture venture Cole stated his conviction that 'an alliance between fine art and manufacture would promote public taste', arguing that such a move would be conducive 'to the interest of all concerned in the production of art manufactures' (Cole, 1884, p.107). He supported this claim with reference to a list of Renaissance artists who had designed for industry, stating that 'designs for pottery are attributed to Raffaele [sic]' while pointing out that 'Leonardo da Vinci invented necklaces' (p.107). In his approach to elementary education, Cole, moreover, as will be

developed, drew on the understanding that what he considered to be the scientific laws that inhere art and nature also informed the art of antiquity.

In *Fifty Years of Public Work*, Cole states that this exhibition initiated the Society's Annual Art Manufactures Exhibitions, and that it was in turn the precedent the latter set, which was 'expanded by the Prince into the great Exhibition of the Works of Industry of all Nations in 1851' (1884, p.106, see also MacDonald, 2005, p.45). This is an interesting proposition, especially in view of Cole's account of the marked reticence he encountered when seeking to persuade manufacturers to execute such designs. For instance, he relates that he could only persuade Mr. Minton with great difficulty to participate in the Felix Summerly venture, as the latter worried he would be ruined on account of the 'retailers in London, who at this time ruled manufacturers with a rod of iron' (p.105). What persuaded Minton in the end, according to Cole, was the fact that 'Messrs Wedgwoods and Spode had broken down the tyranny of the retailers' (p.105), a comment that offers interesting insights into relations between design reform and art manufacturers at the time.

Yet despite the overwhelming success of the Great Exhibition and its spotlight on art-manufacture as central to national pride and the commercial success of Britain, the submissions for the annual art-workmanship competitions held by the Society, for example for 'chased repoussé, and hammered metalwork, carving, enamel and porcelain painting' (MacDonald, 2005, p.46), continued to be muted. The Society's annual report of 1871 thus stated that 'in spite of the large amount of prizes offered, there is still wanting anything like an adequate response on the part of manufacturers, designers, or workmen' (quoted in MacDonald, 2005, p.46), with the result that these awards were, again, withdrawn.

### Mechanics' Institutes

So far this discussion has considered the Society of Arts and the Royal Academy as the two main players that have shaped the debates and dominate the discussions in the field. A further thread to be added to this narrative is a sector that is often overlooked, namely the parallel trajectory of educational provision in art and design by Mechanics' Institutes. These institutions sprung up in large numbers across Britain in the first half of the nineteenth century, with 700 Mechanics' Institutes in evidence in England and Wales alone by 1851, and prominent institutions in provincial manufacturing towns such as Manchester, Birmingham, Leeds and Glasgow. Initiated by philanthropists, social

reformers and 'the emerging evangelical Christian movements of the Unitarians and Quakers' (Walker, 2017, p.6), they were focused on adult education and continued the work of earlier mutual improvement societies that responded to the need for a better education of the industrial workforce.

Richard Hamilton, President of the Leeds Mechanics' Institute, thus observed in 1845 that the lack of an appropriate education meant that working men were 'unfit for an age in which the marvels to [sic] technology and science were daily more apparent' (Hamilton quoted in Walker, 2017, p.4). These institutions therefore specifically addressed the working classes and fostered 'what was termed working-class self-help and mental improvement' (Walker, 2017, pp.4–5). Apart from offering provision for adults to augment their understanding of rudimentary science, mathematics, English grammar and reading, these institutions also offered public lectures on subjects representative of 'useful' or scientific knowledge, reflecting the popular interest in such topics, which, however, enjoyed less status than the classics at the time, which constituted the main stay of educational provision for the privileged classes (Walker, 2017, p.5). And while aimed at the skilled workman, Mechanics'

Institutes attracted clerks, shop assistants and middle-class women in great numbers, tapping into the desire for self-improvement and social mobility in these sections of society.

Mechanics' Institutes, moreover, also offered drawing classes. In the 1820s and 1830s Leeds, Manchester and Brighton taught landscape, flower and figure drawing, for example (Fawcett, 1974, p.41). And even if their quality varied and depended on the skills of local drawing teachers, it is important to note that they offered the sole access to learn such skills available to artisans and the working classes until the establishment of the Schools of Design, and remained popular even after the advent of the latter (MacDonald, 1970, p.38) (Fig. 3.4).

From the 1840s most Mechanics' Institutes also offered technical and mechanical drawing geared towards engineering. These classes served the interests of workers who were able to earn higher wages if they were versed in technical drawing, as well as the needs of industry, since drawing skills aided the designing of new machines, considerably shortening the time needed to develop them when compared to the traditional approach based on the making of elaborate models (Walker, 2017, p.34).

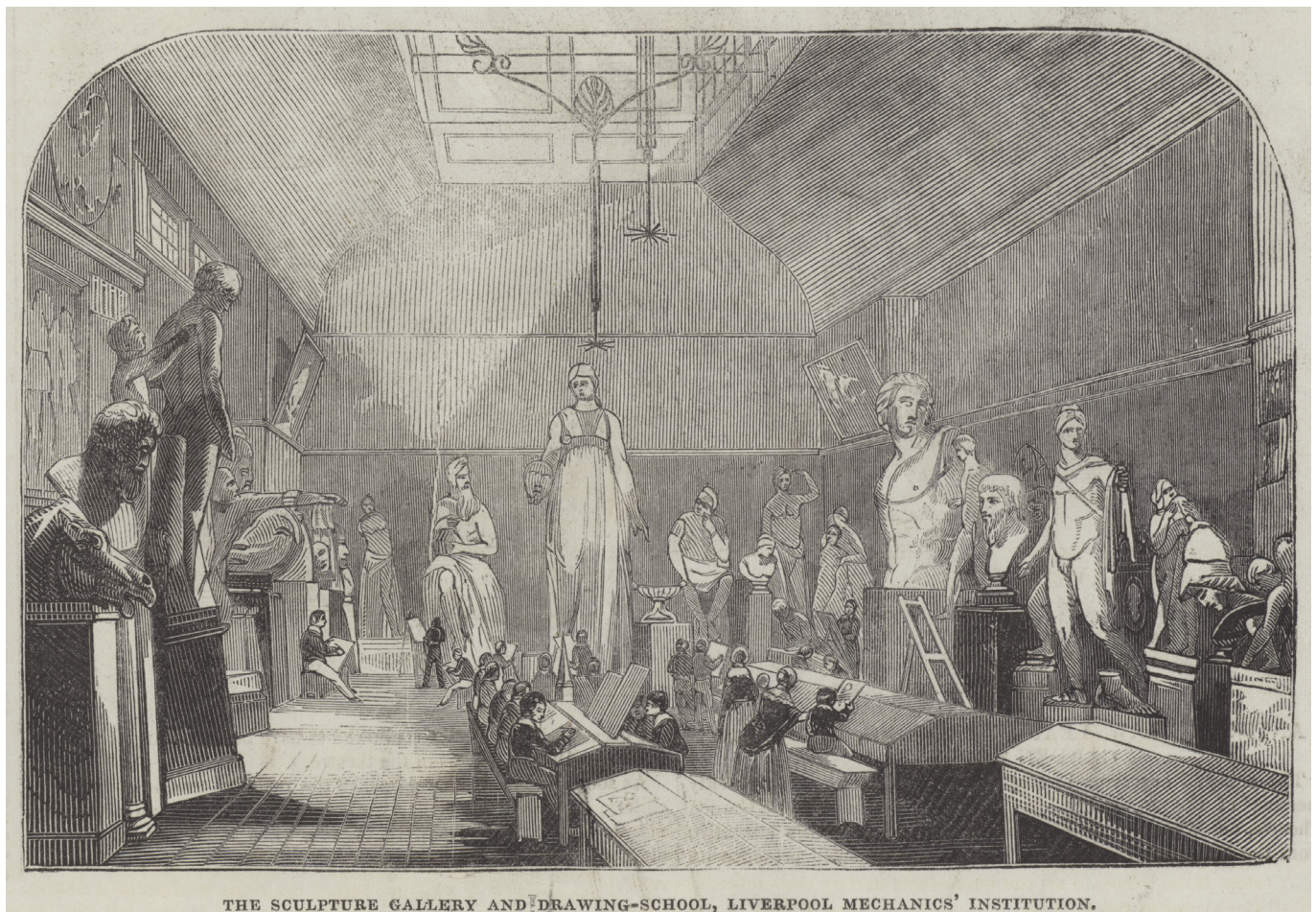


Figure 3.4: English School, *The Sculpture Gallery and Drawing-School, Liverpool Mechanics' Institution*, 19th century. Engraving. (Image credit: Private Collection / Look and Learn / Illustrated Papers Collection / Bridgeman Images)

Apart from offering classes ranging from science to art and literacy, these institutes put on numerous shows that combined the display of art and science, which created and popularised a culture of attending exhibitions among the working classes. An exhibition staged by the Manchester Mechanics' Institute in December 1837, for example, advertised the following displays in the *Manchester Guardian*: 'Works of Fine and Useful Arts, Objects of Natural History and Specimens of British Manufactures' (quoted in Kusamitsu, 1979, p.70). Remarkably, these exhibitions combined 'the fine art gallery, the science museum, the natural history museum' (Kusamitsu, 1979, p.77). The fine art on display originated with local collectors who loaned works to be put on display and artists also sent in their works. In 1840 an exhibition in Leeds thus reportedly received paintings loaned by aristocrats, gentry, merchants, manufacturers, local artists and other collectors, and a committee had the task to select from among works by high calibre artists such as Correggio, Giorgione, Rubens, Rembrandt, Poussin, Reynolds, Turner, Pugin and others (Kusamitsu, 1979, p.82). These exhibitions therefore gave access to fine art to members of the working population in ways that was unprecedented, suggesting that they were 'a springboard for the establishment of the permanent and public fine-art galleries and museums of natural history and science which began to be established from the 1850s' (Kusamitsu, 1979, p.85). Mechanics' Institutes thus pioneered the exposure of artisans and the working classes to art, introducing them to the new museum and exhibition culture that was developing at the time (Rifkin, 1988, p.95).

The mechanical arts at the exhibitions were similarly spectacular and presented canals and lakes created by the mechanics associated with the institutes, allowing model steamships to motor away. They also featured fountains and light houses as well as a large number of working machines, such as miniature steam engines and Jacquard looms, flax spinning frames, embroidery machines, letter- and copper-plate printing presses etc. built expressly for this purpose, which filled the exhibition rooms with considerable noise. The machines at such exhibitions were exceedingly popular and frequently travelled from exhibition to exhibition, often with an attendant worker who operated them who offered live demonstrations of working processes, with specimens made by these model machines sold to the delighted visitors. In 1839, the directors and the president of the Manchester Mechanics' Institute thus, for example, wore waistcoats woven at the exhibition by the silk weaver who demonstrated his art in their exhibition (Kusamitsu, 1979, p.79). By all accounts

these events were great visitor attractions. The Leeds exhibition in 1839, which as the *Leeds Mercury* reported opened in the evening 'between the hours of seven and ten' to allow the working population to attend, found that 'the rooms ... are [so] crowded that they would be almost unbearable', stating that over a period of a week '4811 single tickets have been purchased, and the total number of season tickets bought from the commencement is about 3000', adding that 'most of the latter have been already used many times by their owners, and it is a pleasing fact that no small number of them have been purchased by working men, not only for themselves but (as the tickets are not transferable) for the various members of their families' (*Leeds Mercury*, 1839, p.5).

Such exhibitions, moreover, became destinations of railway excursions, with special trains laid on and 'exchange excursions' organised. In 1840 Mechanics Institutes in Leicester and Nottingham, for example, held their exhibitions at the same time, and 400 visitors from Nottingham arrived in Leicester, with about 1,000 people from Leicester repaying the favour (Kusamitsu, 1979, p.82). This suggests that the provincial exhibitions organised by Mechanics' Institutes constitute key antecedents to the Great Exhibition, pioneering the format the latter adopted. They arguably also ensured its popular success, as they facilitated a taste for attending such exhibitions and for engaging with art and technological innovation amongst members of the working and lower middle classes, who were otherwise locked out of cultural debates due to their lack of education (Walker, 2017, p.42).

Overall, the provincial exhibitions at Mechanics' Institutes were considered a space of 'rational recreation' for skilled workers and the lower middle classes, that is, an engagement in 'respectable', edifying and self-improvement activities social reformers encouraged at the time, in contrast to drinking, gambling or radical political activity considered 'unruly' (Rodrick, 2004, p.15). The success of art instruction at Mechanics' Institutes and the fact that they attracted artisans, which the Schools of Design and Schools of Art failed to do, thus raises questions as to why such efforts by the latter failed to gain traction. A possible contributing factor here may well be the shifting contexts of work for British designers. As the design historian Philip A. Sykas has pointed out, in contrast to French designers, who were largely employed in the luxury trades, British designers worked for a cheap mass market with low margins, which gave little scope for exercising taste, with only a small number of calico printers in a position to meet the expense of creating in-house, original designs. As the nineteenth century

progressed the trend therefore increasingly was to buy in designs from ateliers, with France dominating this market, which may, at least in part, explain the decline in artisanal interest in instruction in design from the second half of the nineteenth century (Sykas, 1998, pp.7–9).

### Schools of Design

The Schools of Design were instituted in the wake of the Parliamentary Select Committee on Arts and Manufactures of 1835–36. It was set up in response to the re-entry of French goods into the British market in 1826 and the perceived French superiority in art manufacture, especially the production of luxury wares, which dominated the discussion of the Select Committee (Rifkin, 1988, p.91). The rationale for founding the schools was to teach artisans the principles of ornamental art, which was thought to ensure the international competitiveness of British manufacture. Their remit was clearly differentiated from the study of fine art, that is, the schools were tasked to 'avoid fine art and devise means to disseminate the techniques and skills of industrial design' (Dutta, 2007, p.2).

In order to decide on the best pedagogic approach to adopt, the Scottish painter and educationist William Dyce was commissioned by the Board of Trade to travel to Europe and evaluate the methods of design education employed on the Continent. On his return he came out in favour of the pedagogy of the German *Gewerbeschulen*, which offered a system of technical education that entailed drawing the outlines of geometrical shapes and simple elements of ornament, classes in maths and physics, workshop-based practice and the study of objects in museums (Wood, 2008, p.166). The French system, which revolved around studies from nature and life drawing at all levels, did not appeal to Dyce, who stated that the students considered themselves to be artists rather than artisans (MacDonald, 1970, pp.79, 81–2). Dyce, who was subsequently appointed to lead this initiative, founded the first School of Design in London in 1837 (renamed Normal Training School of Art in 1857, National Art Training School in 1863, and Royal College of Art in 1897) based on these principles, with a further twenty-one schools added across Britain by 1852. He also established a school to train art teachers in 1841. The curriculum he devised was tiered and consisted of seven stages that progressed from practising drawing straight lines, copying two-dimensional geometric forms, drawing geometric figures in the round, followed by casts of ornaments, studies in colour and finally the human form from the flat and in the round from casts

or from life. The final section taught the history and principles of ornamental design and its application to manufacture.

The schools were, however, not deemed a success, in part because of local politics and conditions, the duplication of provision by the then well-established and popular Mechanics' Institutes, and because the teaching staff were almost exclusively drawn from the membership of the Royal Academy who, for the most part, had neither an interest in industry, nor a sense what teaching drawing for industry might entail.

A lynch pin in this struggle over artistic status was drawing from the human figure which was central to art instruction at the Royal Academy and was claimed as the reserve of fine artists. Academicians thus sought to curb any potential upward social mobility into the echelons of fine art by students attending Schools of Design and decreed that drawing the human figure was not to be the basis of teaching in design schools. In consequence, as the British history painter Benjamin Robert Haydon noted in his diary, 'every Student who entered the school of design should be obliged to *sign a declaration* or to practice either as Historical! – Portrait Painter! – or Landscape Painter!' (quoted in Wood, 2008, p.166, italics in the original). Drawing from the nude, even though it featured in the curriculum, was thus only offered when pressure was applied by students, and was even then 'limited to crafts in which the nude figure frequently occurred, such as arabesque painting, wall paper printing, and metal work' (MacDonald, 1970, p.82). This separation of spheres therefore instituted a two-tier art system that was to define the educational landscape in nineteenth-century Britain. It must be noted, however, that from the South Kensington perspective the supposed superior world of fine art and the School of Arts' separation from it was of little relevance, as its supporters did not conceive of their approach as 'lesser than', but rather as the 'true', modern, scientific and up-to-date approach to art, a fact that is frequently missed in the literature.

Criticism of the schools, however, reached such a point, that in 1847 a Select Committee was called to examine their effectiveness. The reports showed that while around 16,000 students had been recruited, no benefit to industry of the training received could be evidenced (Rifkin, 1988, p.92). Thus, even though Dyce, for example, had sought to introduce a workshop at the school, this, apparently, was not a success. The suggestion was that the young artisans who had enrolled at the school were all too familiar with industrial working practices and wanted to learn life drawing rather than more of what they already had at work (MacDonald, 1970, p.81); a rationale that, however,

does not account for the keen interest in technology, machinery and workshop processes presented in exhibitions organized by Mechanics' Institutes, and is worthy of further exploration.

### Schools of Art

Subsequent to these dissatisfactory findings, Cole was tasked with reforming the Schools of Design and was appointed Secretary of the Department of Practical Art (DPA), a new government department to oversee these schools, after the close of the Great Exhibition in 1852 (Dutta, 2007, p.19). The Department moved to the site purchased with the profits of the Great Exhibition in 1856 and into a building that by the time Cole retired in 1873 had transformed into the South Kensington Museum (later divided into the Victoria and Albert and Science museums), which housed the museum collections of the Central School of Design together with the collection of exhibits from the Great Exhibition.

One of the challenges Cole and his team faced was that the requirements of different sectors of manufacture were highly diverse and tuition needed to be boiled down to a common denominator, with drawing thought to offer this shared ground. A further difficulty was the noted lack of basic facility in drawing among prospective students, which meant that foundational skills needed to be widely taught as part of the strategy and that teachers had to be trained to do so. Cole thus initiated a national system of education to be introduced in elementary schools. He also devised a curriculum for drawing teachers and for educators to teach at the former Schools of Design, now renamed Schools of Practical Art, or Schools of Art for short, with his artistic right-hand man, the genre and landscape painter Richard Redgrave, preparing the necessary teaching manuals and drawing examples to be copied by students (McDonald, 1970, pp.158–60).

In *Fifty Years of Public Work* Cole explains what could be seen as the rationale behind the renaming of the schools as correcting a mistranslation, stating that 'drawing schools in France were called "Écoles de Dessin," which, as is well known, means "Schools of Drawing", and not necessarily "Schools of Design"' (1884, p.281). He also argues the overarching emphasis on drawing rather than design in terms of a long-term strategy to 'naturally' generate designers over time, critiquing a skills-based approach and the expectation that by means of such schools 'designers could suddenly be created' as short-termist and misguided. He thus chastises the idea that 'all to be done was to start Schools of Design, and in them to train students to originate and apply decoration' (p.281) as unrealistic.

As he lays out, his strategy was rather conceived in terms of 'manuring the country with elementary drawing power', arguing that this was the right approach to design education and that 'well developed fruits could be obtained from it' (p.281).

It is worth noting that Ruskin, who was vehemently opposed to Cole's approach to drawing instruction which he considered fundamentally inartistic, and who cast, as has been developed, such a shadow on the history of the Schools of Art, nonetheless expressed what could be seen as a similar pedagogical conviction to Cole. He, for example, advised: 'do not let your anxiety to reach the platter and the cup interfere with your education of the Raphael', adding that what was at stake was to train 'the ablest hands, irrespective of any consideration of economy or facility of production' and then it was up to this 'trained artist to determine how far art can be popularized, or manufacture ennobled' (Ruskin, 1857, p.vii).

Cole's argument for the need of 'manuring' the country was evidently persuasive, since the oversight for his endeavour was moved from the Board of Trade to the jurisdiction of the Council of Education in 1856 (Wood, 2008, p.168). This is perhaps even more surprising since the approach to teaching in the Schools of Art had not fundamentally changed from the instruction meted out at the Schools of Design, except for the expansion of Dyce's seven-tier system to twenty-three stages in the curriculum Cole and his team had devised. Now drawing from nature was only introduced at stage ten, and design only appeared on the syllabus at stage twenty-two, which, according to the art historian Paul Wood, hardly any student reached, as each prior stage had to be completed and certified before the next one could be attempted (Wood, 2008, p.168).

The initial five stages of the training at the Schools of Art were now dedicated to the study of ornament and commenced with linear drawing, the study of perspective and mechanical drawing of architecture, followed by freehand outline drawings of ornament from the flat and in the round and exercises in shading. Stages six to ten were devoted to figure and flower drawing from the flat, from casts and from the nude, followed by seven stages of studying colour, which commenced with the application of colour to ornament. This was followed by a teaching unit on modelling comprising four stages. It will be of interest to note that stage eight encompassed life drawing and stage seventeen modelling from the nude. In reality though, such studies remained controversial, with Schools of Arts, much like their predecessors, only rarely offering such classes, and if so due to pupil

pressure. This reluctance was not only because life drawing 'was viewed by academicians as their essential cultural capital' (Bermingham, 2000, p.231), but also due to Victorian prudishness. In fact, in the early days of the Royal Academy only married men had been permitted to draw from the female nude and it was certainly considered an improper subject of study for working-class men or women to do so (p.230). Holding life-drawing classes at Schools of Art thus required written permission, and even if granted, they were not listed in the official list of classes available to the public.

After the completion of twenty-one stages, students finally reached the 'Design Course' which, curiously, comprised of two stages only. Stage twenty-two returned to the study of ornament, commencing with natural objects 'ornamentally treated, usually botanical', to monochrome and coloured ornamental arrangements frequently presented in a hexagon, and studies of historic ornament drawn or modelled (MacDonald, 1970, pp. 390-91). The final stage called 'applied design' surprisingly was reserved for so-called Master students training in the London school at Marlborough House (later in South Kensington) set to become instructors at the Schools of Art rather than students intending to become designers for industry as one might have expected, and included mechanical drawing, architectural design, surface design as well as lithography, wood engraving and porcelain painting (MacDonald, 1970, pp.388-91). The Schools of Art therefore instituted a system of instruction that differentiated teachers destined to teach at elementary schools and 'Masters' who were to train teachers at all levels; a designation that is a give-away to the medieval ideation that informed the perspective of the Cole circle at least in part. This demonstrates that despite the noted difference there also was a shared outlook that connected Cole's approach to design reform with the ones of Ruskin and Morris.

Overall the curriculum was thus, surprisingly, at no stage geared towards producing designers for industry, but revolved around training a new kind of art teacher who had little in common with the drawing masters of old or the Royal Academicians. A further factor to be considered that is often overlooked in discussions of British art education in the nineteenth century is that many of the Master students, once trained, fanned out across the British empire, spreading the South Kensington system around the globe, with 'textbooks, models, plaster casts, drawing materials and other equipment from the South Kensington depository' (Dutta, 2007, p.27) shipped to India, for example. An example here is John Lockwood Kipling, the father of Rudyard Kipling, who taught for a decade at the

Sir Jamsetjee Jeejeebhoy School of Art (J.J. School of Art) in today's Mumbai from 1865 and later became principal of the Mayo School of Art in Lahore. British art schools in India, however, were not founded to train designers for industry, not even ostensibly, but to instruct Indian artisans to preserve the 'traditional' modes of craft production in India, adding a further twist to this history. The aim was on the whole not successful, however, not only on the grounds of the absurdity and extreme arrogance of the quest, but also since most students at these schools did not come from artisanal backgrounds and decidedly harboured artistic ambitions, some successfully so. Ironically therefore, in the spaces of empire, at a geographical remove from the Royal Academy and its policing of the border between the fine and applied arts, the colonial subaltern achieved the upwards social mobility academicians so feared. Moreover, while the record of the J.J. School of Art in turning out employable artisans is questionable (Parker, 1987, p.133), it successfully churned out drawing teachers who worked in schools across the Bombay Presidency where South Kensington style drawing had been instituted (Burns, 1909, p.636). The phenomenon, which also applied to British settler colonies, gave the South Kensington approach an enormous reach; a factor yet to be more fully developed in the scholarly literature on British art education, given that its consideration, if broached, is mostly developed in relation to the histories of former colonies-turned-nation states at present (Chalmers, 1985, Calhoun, 2015, Dutta, 2007, Kantawala, 2012, Parker 1987).

### **Female School of Art**

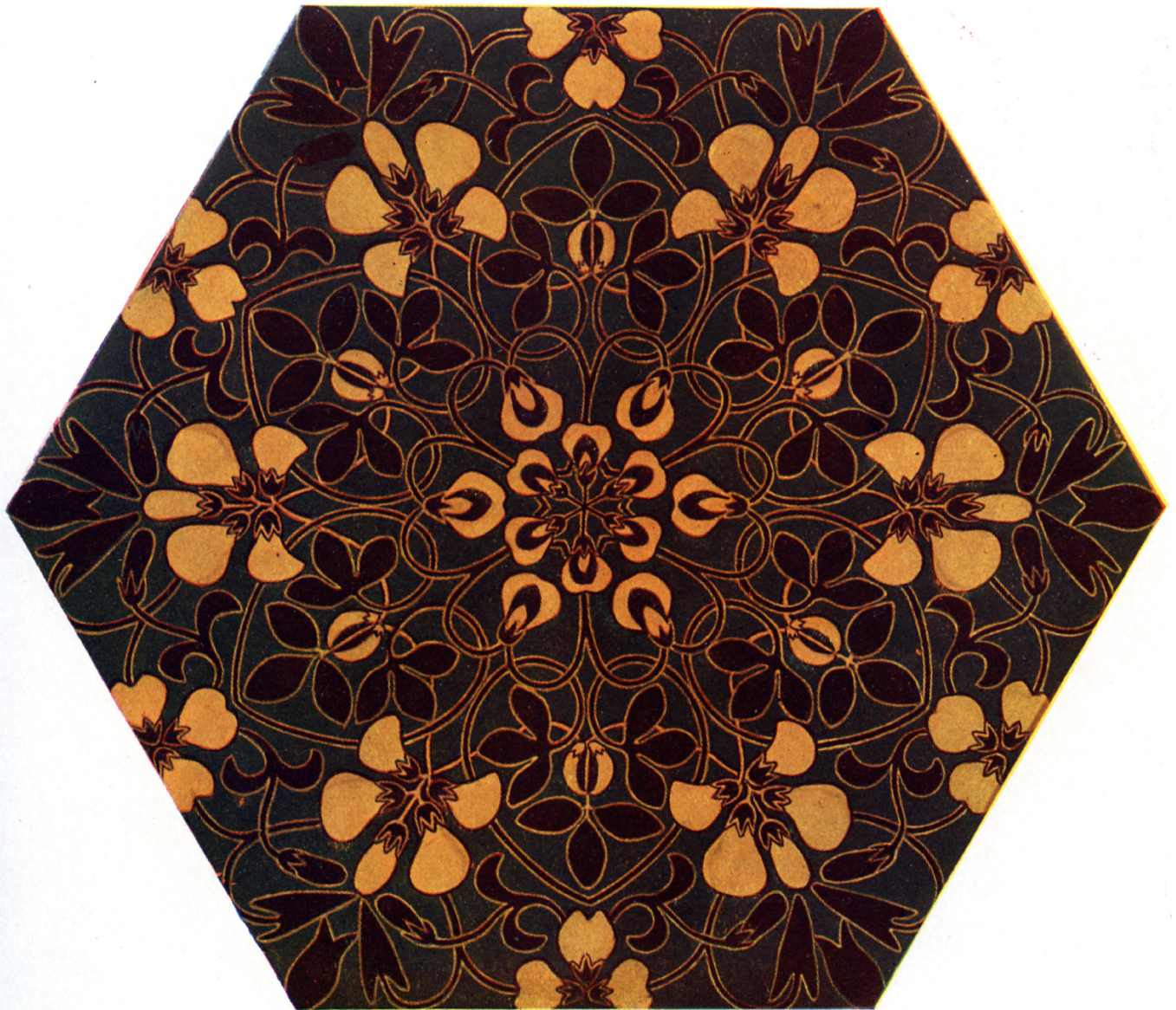
The Female School of Art originated with a class of women in 1841 at the Design School in London, which became a separate school for women when it was moved to a separate building in 1848 and was retained by Cole when he took over in 1852. Women's classes attracted middle-class or high-born women who paid full fees, which made them popular with the schools, as the revenue was needed to supplement their income. They also organized charitable bazaars, which, according to the artist, educator and historian of British art education Stuart MacDonald, 'produced for some Schools more than half their annual income' (1970, p.148), and led to suggestions that they 'bankrolled Cole's design schools' (Bermingham, 2000, p.226). Apart from the commercial motif in offering tuition to women, Cole was evidently invested in women's emancipation and in solving the problem of women's work, to which Schools of Art contributed by offering qualifications 'to the rapidly growing profession of

schoolteachers, many of them women' (*Survey of London*, 1975). It must be noted, however, that their presence at the schools was not uncontroversial, as public education was meant for the poor, and provision for wealthy young women at such schools could be seen as a misappropriation of government funds. Gendered class distinctions, however, supported women's instruction in art, as for gentlewomen in reduced circumstances the vocational practice of art constituted an acceptable form of earning a living. In contrast, gentlemen studying at such schools would have been wholly unacceptable, as art was not a profession deemed fit for men of this class (MacDonald, 1970, p.148).

Unless they were seeking to obtain certification to become art teachers, women were not tied to the national curriculum and readily engaged in free-hand drawing and painting flowers from nature, otherwise reserved for students who had reached stage fourteen

in the national curriculum (Bermingham, 2000, p.225). Some female students, however, did choose to adhere to the national curriculum, such as the well-known Victorian artist and illustrator Kate Greenaway (1846–1901), who completed all its twenty-three stages (Fig. 3.5).

The Female School was popular and had a long waiting list, as only seventy students could be crammed into the building (MacDonald, 1970, p.135). A further point of interest is that by the 1860s, the number of students enrolled in amateur classes for ladies, together with other general students, evidently outnumbered the prospective teachers and artisans enrolled in such schools (Bermingham, 2000, p.226), with the general fee-paying student constituting about 'nine-tenths of the student population during Cole's period of office' (MacDonald, 1970, p.172). This context puts a rather interesting perspective on Cole's professed aim to 'manure' the nation to prepare the ground for national



**Figure 3.5:** Kate Greenaway, *Prize Student-Work*. Drawing. Greenaway made this drawing for one of six tiles as a student aged 17. (Lebrecht History / Bridgeman Images)

artistic development and the 'natural' emergence of designers for industry. It would moreover appear that his policies were successful in unexpected quarters due to the self-funding policy that saw Government Schools of Art open their doors to droves of fee-paying ladies and general students, formerly known as amateurs. Ironically, therefore, it was middle- and upper-class women who were able to straddle the divided art worlds of nineteenth-century Britain, as they were able to train at the Schools of Art normally reserved for men of a lower class, while their gender and class status also allowed for an association with the fine arts, at least in principle, which a percentage of them pursued.

Despite the efforts of the Royal Academy to curb the artistic ambitions of pupils of Government Schools of Art, women thus defied these rules and used them as stepping stones for careers in fine art. Examples here are Laura Herford, the first woman to be admitted to the Royal Academy (Bermingham, 2000, p.226), and Rosa Bonheur, who exhibited at the Royal Academy (MacDonald, 1970, p.173). This was in no small part due to the prevalence of able and well-trained women exerting pressure on the Royal Academy to open their doors, which led to their admittance in the 1860s (Bermingham, 2000, p.226). Yet once accepted as students, they were not allowed to draw the female nude up until 1893, even though they could study the partially draped male nude.

A further point to note is that women at the Schools of Design had already been exceedingly successful, winning nearly all the annual prizes, so that a second tier of prizes had to be introduced just for them to prevent female students scooping them up altogether. They had also outdone other students with the number of designs sold for 'silverware, pottery, chintz, lace, bookbindings, title pages and wood engravings to manufacturers' (MacDonald, 1970, p.135). This trend continued in the Cole era, when women surpassed their peers in finding employment, which Bermingham attributed to the fact that they were not bound to the curriculum (2000, p.225). As she points out, the ability to render floral design was a sought after skill in the British textile industry, and as the national curriculum's emphasis on geometry and copying architectural ornament did not cater for the industry's need, it turned to women and their skills in botanical drawing instead (2000, p.226). For Dyce and Cole this evident success in training designers for industry would, however, not have been gratifying, since they endorsed the design reform view that illusionist botanical design for surface decorations was in bad taste.

## Art, science and the laws of nature

When discussing the history of art and design education in nineteenth-century Britain a curious point to consider is that while French design excellence loomed large in the hearings at the Select Committee in 1835, even reaching 'mythomantic levels' as Rifkin suggests (1988, p.96), and despite the fact that keeping up with France had been the main impetus for founding Britain's design schools, there was a decisive turning away from the successful French model of design education characterised by an emphasis on figure drawing and drawing from nature. This negation of the French approach to art education, moreover, was sustained when the Select Committee in 1847 found the methods adopted by the Schools of Designs to be failing. Cole's regime, furthermore, not only largely continued with the pedagogy Dyce had initiated at the schools, but persisted in doing so for decades, even though the curriculum he instituted likewise did not achieve the stated aim of training designers for employment in industry.

The scholarly literature, while emphasizing the laboriousness of the curriculum as well as its lack of artistic touch, however, tends to be mute on the subject of the surprising longevity of the South Kensington curriculum. There is also scarcely an acknowledgement that for Cole and Co. the notion of fine art was old-fashioned and elitist (Carline, 1968, p.84), nor that they conceived of their approach as a modern version of the unity of art and design during the Middle Ages and the Renaissance adapted to the era of industrial manufacture that entailed a re-envisioned conception of art and of art education (Redgrave, 1890, pp.155–6).

The suggestion is that what has commonly been portrayed as stubborn misguidedness, if not foolhardiness, was in fact a perspective supported by a considerable consensus, as otherwise the South Kensington method, with its emphasis on elementary rather than life drawing, could not have been sustained for such a long period, given its lack of commercial success, the undoubted rigidity with which the national curriculum was implemented as well as the difficulties caused by the 'payments on results' and economic self-sufficiency policies imposed on Government Art Schools.

It is thus interesting to note that Redgrave, in his *Manual of Design*, characterises the French system of instruction in terms of its 'great freedom and ease of execution', which, as he stresses, is achieved at the expense of 'correctness and truth' (1890, p.160). He, moreover, suggests that the South Kensington pedagogy in contrast 'seeks freedom through knowledge attained by careful and precise imitation' and thus

differs from the French system of 'facility and fluency' (p.160) that lacks such foundation, since in France 'no instruction seems to be given in the historic styles of different periods, or in the principles which should guide the application of ornament in the decoration of separate fabrics and objects' (p.161). As he explains, the British approach in contrast aims at a 'fuller sense of the beautiful and the true', which he presents as superior to the charms of French 'facility, readiness, and acquaintance with the fashion of to-day' (p.161).

Redgrave also compares British pedagogy to the German system and argues the British curriculum as a more thorough and consistent rendition of the latter, since it alternates between two- and three dimensional methods that build on one another, that is

first, outlining from flat examples, then from solids and objects; shading from flat examples next has place, then shading from models and casts of ornament; flowers and foliage are drawn from flat examples, then from nature; the figure in outline, or shaded first from flat examples, then from the round, and finally from the living model. (p.162)

He ultimately contrasts the German and the British methods in terms of mechanical versus artistic

approaches to design, arguing the German system produces 'good draughtsmen and modellers, intelligent artisans [sic] skilled to handle the pencil and the modelling tool' while the British model aims to educate 'designers for manufacture' and 'to instil the principles of decorative art' (p.165), citing the fact that every village has its drawing school in evidence of the greater efficacy of the British scheme.

Overall Redgrave argues the excellence of the British training in terms of the 'careful study of ancient ornament' and the 'analysis of foliage and flowers, with a view to the new ornamental forms to be derived from them' and their basis in 'geometrical and other laws' (p.165). As also outlined in Owen Jones' famous *Grammar of Ornament* (1856), the declared aim of the South Kensington method thus is neither to copy historic styles nor to imitate nature, but to understand the latter's underlying principles and to express them in exemplary ornament, which he demonstrates with two sketches that present, as he stresses, a 'mode of analysis' (p.165). He thus contrast a drawing of the sow-thistle 'drawn as it grows' (Fig. 3.6) with the plants flattened elements (Fig. 3.7), stating that in this mode 'the form of the buds, the open blossoms, the seed vessels and the leaves, are examined as new motives for ornament' and are explored in view of 'laws which



Figures 3.6 and 3.7: Richard Redgrave, *Sow-Thistle*, 1890. Woodcut, published in *Manual of Design*, pp.166–7. (Image credit: University of Toronto via archive.org). Redgrave drew these images as indications of the mode of analysis he promoted in his *Manual*, stating that many details and forms could be obtained from this single plant. He also points out that such elements, as well as the careful study of the leaf and of the bracts, offer new and original forms of beauty in ornament.

govern the agreeable distribution of ornamental details, either as to form, colour, quantity, or symmetrical combinations' (p.165).

Redgrave also emphasizes that the training does not end with learning the manual skills of execution, nor with the mental skills of analysis or application of the structural laws of geometry, but states that the 'proper application of ornament to the various materials in which the design is intended to be wrought' (pp.165–6) constitutes the final stage of the training received. He stresses that this element of instruction is 'not followed by Continental decorative artists', and that British design alone maintains the 'true relation between the ornament and the ground' which was 'well understood by the Orientals and by the artists of the Middle Ages' (p.167), yet is overlooked by modern designers as evidenced by the prevalent application of pictorial art to flat surfaces.

What Redgrave is referring to here is the kind of work that was displayed in Marlborough House, when it served as a Museum of Manufacture. Envisaged by Cole as a 'schoolroom for everyone', he sought to instruct the public on matters of taste, that is, good design, by displaying not only approved examples, but also ones to be avoided, which were gathered in the Gallery of False Principles (Thorpe, 2019). The latter was soon dubbed the 'Chamber of Horrors' and it was not long before it was hastily disassembled since the manufacturers of these examples had been named and were not best pleased.

In the satire of the principles laid out by South Kensington commissioned by Charles Dickens for *Household Words*, the visit to the 'Chamber of Horrors' by the fictional character Mr. Crumpet is life changing, though not necessarily in ways that added to his wellbeing, as he realises to his dismay that he is a man of no taste. Dickens has him explain his conversion to the principles of good taste as follows:

I was ashamed of the pattern on my trowsers [sic], for I saw a piece of them hung up as a horror. I dared not pull out my pocket handkerchief while any one was by, lest I should be seen dabbing the perspiration from my forehead with a wreath of coral. I saw it all; when I went home I found that I had been living among horrors up to that hour. The paper in my parlour contains four kinds of birds of paradise, besides bridges and pagodas.

(Worley, 1852, pp.265–6).

While much ridiculed at the time, the endeavour to bring taste 'to the people' entails an effort in levelling social class, as in eighteenth-century Britain concerns with taste had been a privilege of aristocratic as well

as intellectual and professional circles. This changed with Augustus Welby Pugin's *True Principles of Christian or Pointed Architecture* (1841), which introduced the notion that taste and societal values were intricately linked, arguing, for example, that the Gothic style expressed true Christian values and was better suited to British architecture than pagan Neo-classicism. Cole was influenced by Pugin's notion that taste and the idea that good design had a moral dimension that impacted society. In an article in *The Journal of Design and Manufacture*, which he initiated in 1841, Cole thus suggests that whereas the commercial benefit of ornamental design furthers the 'tens of thousands', this is surpassed by 'the moral influence of ornamental art', which 'extends to millions' (quoted in Suga, 2004, p.47). Discussions of taste and their moral undercurrent, moreover, gained wider currency in the nineteenth century due to the industrial revolution and the Great Exhibition in particular, when domestic consumption became a national concern and taste manuals flourished (Suga, 2004, pp. 43–4). Cole's ambition to educate the public in 'good taste' and to emphasise geometry at a time when naturalistic flower patterns were exceedingly popular and equalled commercial success (Suga, 2004, p.46) therefore needs to be acknowledged as an audacious move against the odds and contrary to market interests, which rather rested, as Redgrave put it, on 'the principles of the beautiful and the true' (1890, p.160).

It would, moreover, seem that these ideas were widely shared. Giving evidence to the Select Committee in 1836, Thomas Leverton Donaldson, secretary of the Institute of British Architects, for example, stated that '[g]eometry of course is the foundation of scientific knowledge which is necessary for all workmen, as giving them a greater knowledge of form and delineation' (quoted in Macdonald, 1970, p.121). To which other committee members added that it was also the basis of form in art and in nature (Macdonald, 1970, p.121). Likewise an article in the *Penny Magazine*, published by the Society of Diffusion of Useful Knowledge, which aimed at 'improving' the working classes, equates advancing 'the taste of the people of Great Britain' with 'the decoration of houses... pursued on scientific principles' (*Penny Magazine*, 1836, p.484), stating that doing so will have the added benefit of furnishing employment for local artisans and British industry.

Interestingly, the magazine also trots out antiquity in support of this argument, stating that 'the greatest manufactories of Greece' were 'connected with fine arts' and that 'the artists of Aegina had ... commissions in all parts of the country' (p.484), thus emphasising

that high calibre artists worked for industry in ancient Greece. It lends further support to the approach to art education adopted by Dyce and continued by Cole and Redgrave, by quoting a statement made by David Ramsay Hay, the influential Scottish interior decorator and author of *The Laws of Harmonious Colouring*, a work Redgrave drew on for the colouring element of the national curriculum (Keyser, 1992, p.236). When asked what the best training would be for someone wanting to enter his trade and to improve the taste of the working people, Hay states it to be 'the drawing of large symmetrical figures by hand', and that after sufficient practice in such study the attention of students should be directed towards plants, suggesting that 'grace and elegance of form are to be found in the common dock, the thistle, the fern, or even a stalk of corn or barley' and that this practice should begin 'by studying from large well-developed leaves' (quoted in *Penny Magazine*, 1836, p.484). He moreover adds that this is an art for the people as the 'study of such objects is within the reach of all classes' and, connecting back to antiquity, he states that 'those who thus form their taste, when they come to the study of ornamental remains of Athens or Rome, will find themselves familiar with the source from which such designs are derived' (p.484), by which he means nature.

So how are we to understand the recurring reference to geometry, nature and antiquity in relation to art manufacture, which appears to be advocated as a 'classicism for the common man'? As the art historian Barbara Whitney Keyser has pointed out, design reform was rooted in an 'art-science complex' that connected 'mathematics, science, numerical mysticism and applied sciences ranging from architecture and engineering to machine design' (1998, p.12) and was grounded in German natural philosophy. She points to the German poet Johann Wolfgang von Goethe as a key figure in this regard who articulated an aesthetic approach to science; a perspective that in its nineteenth-century British guise linked art and industry and was central to the South Kensington system of art education, a connection not commonly drawn out in discussions of this method.

In *Metamorphosis of Plants* (1790), Goethe, for example, posited the notion of an archetypal plant (*Urpflanze*), which he came to understand as the underlying pattern of generation that can be intuited through studying the metamorphosis of botanical form. For Goethe, the plant is primarily formed through the leaf and its progressive transformation into stem, flower etc., revealing an underlying schema or law of nature to the student of this process (Steigerwald, 2002, pp.296–7). He, moreover, suggests natural formation

as closely linked to great art, in fact his ideas about plant morphology had been greatly facilitated by the study of the art of antiquity during a sojourn to Rome, where he had concluded that antique 'masterpieces were produced by man in accordance with the same true and natural laws as the masterpieces of nature' (Goethe quoted in Steigerwald, 2002, p.306). For him the organicist laws of nature, which he explored through an embodied understanding of perception and the close observation of natural phenomena, thus differ from the divine ideal of Renaissance Neo-Platonism associated with the dominant understanding of *disegno* discussed in the introduction to this volume. Goethe's position is demonstrated in this exchange with the German dramatist and literary theorist Friedrich Schiller about his notion of the *Urpflanze* [primal plant], with Schiller stating

Das ist keine Erfahrung, das ist eine Idee' ['That is not an experience, it is an idea'] and Goethe responding 'Das kann mir sehr lieb sein, daß ich Ideen habe, ohne es zu wissen, und sie sogar mit Augen sehe' ['That's fine by me that I have ideas without realizing it and that I even see them with my eyes'].

(Goethe and Schiller quoted and translated in Crawford, 2007, p.280)

Goethe therefore posits the body and its mechanisms of perception as affective domain for scientific discovery, an approach that entails an alternative to geometry understood as proportion and expression of a transcendental ideal.

In his essay 'Simple imitation of nature, manner, style' ([1789] 1980), Goethe moreover lays out his critique of what he considers the inferior approach to art of the mannerist who neglects the careful examination of nature and offers a superficial, vacuous and hence insignificant form, making up for lack of observation with artistic expression. Goethe suggests that the highest attainment in art is achieved if it 'succeeds in creating ... a general language' which is accomplished through 'profound and accurate study' in order to capture 'more and more precisely that characteristics of things', suggesting that this approach represents the level of 'style' which is 'equal to the highest achievements of man' (1980, p.22). For him style is thus 'based on the profoundest knowledge, and the essence of things insofar as we can recognize it in visible and tangible form' (p.22). Read through the lens of Redgrave's explanations of form and his rejection of French 'facility' in favour of 'scientific principle' and 'careful and precise imitation', Goethe's text reads like the ur-manual of the South Kensington curriculum.

The endorsement of Goethean notions, however, was far from an isolated phenomenon in Victorian Britain and, for example, informed the practice of advocates of transcendental or philosophical anatomy, a label that, however, is somewhat misleading, as prominent proponents of this approach, such as the anatomists Charles Bell and John Henry Green, who both taught at the Royal College of Surgeons while Green also lectured at the Royal Academy, endorsed the Goethean view of 'expression as variety and the deep structure of organisms as unity' (Keyser, 1998, p.132) rather than the notion of a transcendental ideal.

In its South Kensington rendition, the notion of an aesthetic-scientific discovery of the laws of form in nature, however, was closely linked to ornamentation, with crystals seen as representative of lifeless nature characterized by the straight line, while curvature and spiral shapes were considered integral to organic form. Both elements were thought to be related and based on linearity, since the 'spiral had both the character of the straight line, yet showed progression and continuity' (p.132); a reference that maps perfectly onto the approach taken in the national curriculum where the study of form was based on line and alternates between flatness and roundness in the early stages.

Reflecting this perspective, Keyser perceptively coined the term 'indirect imitation of nature' for the Victorian design reform movement (p.128), which Dutta extends to include the aesthetic ideology promoted by the South Kensington School (2007, p.103). It thus needs to be acknowledged that South Kensington's sidelining of life drawing and the study of the human form in favour of studies of geometry and plant life is underpinned by a radical re-conception of prevalent notions of beauty and utility, which in contrast to the understanding of fine art upheld by the Royal Academy that is characterized by ideal notions of beauty considered to be 'disinterested' and a negative attitude towards the world of commerce, constituted an aesthetics rooted in the lived world. It must also be recognized that this outlook was promoted by influential figures, with Prince Albert among them, who had supported the idea of Schools of Design and Cole's efforts every step of the way and who, unsurprisingly perhaps, subscribed to the notion of the art-science complex, which he had brought with him from Germany. He also had a strong sense of the public's right to direct contact with culture, which challenged the notion of art as the domain of the privileged few (*Survey of London*, 1975, pp.74–96).

A further influence on the South Kensington approach to be recognized is the work of the Swiss educational reformer Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi. He

advocated an education for the poor and developed a pedagogy for nursery children that revolved around drawing parallel and intersecting lines as well as basic shapes such as triangles, circles and squares, advocated as an 'alphabet of forms', to foster the child's 'formative impulse' in a structured approach to teaching (Dutta, 2007, p.92). Pestalozzi argued that if such instruction formed the basis of art education it would foster the talents of the common man, since the absence of such training meant that the development of the 'instinctive feeling of proportion' artists required necessitated them to 'grope in the dark', stating that this skill could thus only be acquired 'by immense exertion and great perseverance', which only 'a few privileged individuals' with sufficient leisure could afford (pp.91–2). Pestalozzi, moreover, held that 'the art of drawing ought to be a universal requirement' on the grounds that 'the faculty for it is universally inherent in the constitution of the human mind' and that it constitutes a 'spontaneous impulse of nature' to be fostered (p.92).

Throwing down the gauntlet to prevalent conceptions of art promoted by the Royal Academy, the designer Christopher Dresser, a former student of Owen Jones and of the London School of Art where he had become a prominent educator, thus emphasized in the first few lines of *Principles of Design*, that his book is 'addressed to working men' (1870, p.v) and was written with the aim to foster their 'art-germs which doubtless lie dormant' (p.vi), stating that '[a]t the very outset we must recognise the fact that the beautiful has a commercial or money value' (p.1). Further underscoring his challenge to the art establishment he exclaims 'Workmen! I am a worker, and a believer in the efficacy of work' (p.4). To which he adds '[o]rnatmentation is in the highest sense of the word a Fine Art; there is no art more noble, none more exalted' and, further undermining the exalted status claimed by the Royal Academy, he adds that ornamentation 'is a fine art, for it embodies and expresses the feelings of the soul of man', declaring 'professors of the art' to be 'for the most part false pretenders' as, since they ignore decoration, they 'cast aside a source of refinement, and deprive themselves of what may induce their elevation in virtue and morals' (p.15).

Considered from this vantage point, the emphasis on line, geometry and ornament in the national curriculum no longer appears inexplicable, absurd and misguided, but can be recognised as connected to what were considered to be laws of nature that, moreover, fostered an inherent human facility; an outlook that constituted a fundamental departure from prevalent conceptions of art as represented by the Royal Academy, which Cole and his circle considered

to be elitist, unscientific and backwards. It would thus appear that Cole's regime was far more principled and radical than it is generally given credit for and was underpinned by a philosophical perspective beyond its much, and often pejoratively cited, utilitarianism and the accusations of a failed agenda of cheap commercialism, judged to be useless rather than useful as claimed.

## Conclusion

British design education for the most part of the nineteenth century charted a unique path, which, drawing on and furthering the efforts of the Society of Arts and the Mechanics Institutes, led to the institution of elementary education in drawing in public schools and the development of the much-maligned South Kensington method.

The prevalent critique of the South Kensington method as inartistic and ineffectual, however, as has been argued, overlooks the radical nature of its endeavour. Driven by a social vision of the 'true' and the 'beautiful' tinged with design reform fervour and the kind of sentiment that also found expression in the Pre-Raphaelite and the Arts and Crafts Movement, it did not endorse the cultural elitism of fine art. It rather constituted a national effort in the improvement of taste and an aesthetic-moral education rooted in German natural philosophy in the guise of an organicist understanding of the formative forces of nature conceived as natural law that underpinned a modern conception of art for the common man, encompassed industry and constituted a novel understanding of aesthetic practice that countered the notion of the individual genius.

This re-envisioned understanding of art, moreover, brought commercial interests and international competition into alignment with the potential to increase workers' wages, while facilitating the aesthetic improvement of domestic environments, fostering of artistic development and the moral uplift of the nation. The instituting of drawing classes in elementary schools in parallel to the training provided in the Schools of Art thus needs to be understood as an effort in the aesthetic 'manuring of the nation', with designing for industry an envisaged benefit further down the line.

The South Kensington method, moreover, arguably had a more profound effect than commonly acknowledged. With its pro-industry stance Cole's national effort in art education for one needs to be recognised as closer in spirit to the Bauhaus than generally acknowledged, or certainly deserves a place on the podium of Bauhaus antecedents alongside Ruskin and the Arts and Crafts Movement. Its importance for fostering women's art education also

needs to be added to the list of its achievements. In fact, as Bermingham posits, the origins of Art Nouveau may well be found in the Female School of Design and the tradition of women's flower drawing and painting rather than 'the work of Pugin, Ruskin and the Pre-Raphaelites' as is commonly assumed (2000, p.226). She also suggests that the Female School may even be of greater significance for Art Nouveau than 'the more familiar influence of the Arts and Crafts Movement' (p.226).

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# ART, DESIGN AND MODERNITY: THE BAUHAUS AND BEYOND

Kim Charnley

## Abstract

*This essay explores the relationship between art and design in the twentieth century through the Bauhaus, the school which established a revolutionary model for modern art and design education between 1919 and 1933. The Bauhaus vision of design is closely identified with a 'machine aesthetic', where the form of an object is governed by its function and adapted to the demands of mass production. The pedagogy of the school, which involved a distinctive and unstable synthesis of art, craft, and design, was inspired by the Gesamtkunstwerk, an idea that was influential among avant-gardes of the early twentieth century, which is usually translated as a synthesis of the arts. This essay explores the utopianism of the Bauhaus, and its relationship to the Gesamtkunstwerk, through a comparison between the ideas of two artist-designers associated with the school: László Moholy-Nagy (1895-1946) and Anni Albers (1899-1994). Although the 'machine aesthetic' of industrial design shaped the reception of the Bauhaus, Albers's work as a weaver, textile artist and textile designer ought to be given equal prominence in evaluation of the school's design ethos. Once it is, established criticisms of the utopianism of the Bauhaus are called into question, because they take their cue from a narrow and selective account of the activities of the school. This essay concludes by sketching some implications of this shift of perspective for contemporary design.*

**Keywords:** Bauhaus, modernist design, Gesamtkunstwerk, utopianism, Anni Albers, László Moholy-Nagy, Jean Baudrillard, Hal Foster, Manfredo Tafuri

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# ART, DESIGN AND MODERNITY: THE BAUHAUS AND BEYOND

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It would be impossible to treat the relationship between art and design in the twentieth century without touching upon the achievement of the Staatliches Bauhaus, better known simply as the Bauhaus (German: 'Building House'). Opened in Weimar in 1919 and closed in 1933, this school established a powerful legend despite its brief period of activity. Indeed, the Bauhaus has a dual legacy: it was a laboratory for the artistic avant-garde, but it is also seen as the birthplace of modernist design. In this essay, the connection between art and design is considered in relationship to what is generally understood to be the utopianism of the Bauhaus.

The modern movement promoted the idea that the arts, design and architecture might catalyse progressive social change. Although this ambition was shaped by diverse intellectual and political influences, one important reference point was the idea of the *Gesamtkunstwerk*, the 'total work of art'. This concept, though it plays a key role in the theory and practice of modernist avant-gardes, is notoriously difficult to define. In outline, it suggests both the blurring of boundaries between art and life and the synthesis of different arts into a unified style or collective project. The precise term was first used by Richard Wagner in the middle of the nineteenth century, though it conveys an enthusiasm for cultural renewal that emerged along with Romanticism in the early nineteenth century (Roberts, 2011). As Lutz Koepnick puts it:

The dream of the *Gesamtkunstwerk* ... figured as a decisive switchboard of various modernist agendas and self-definitions. It illuminates how modernism, by negotiating the dialectics of art and technology, of the aesthetic and the political, of high art and modern mass culture, aspired to couple artistic experimentation to social reform and to reshape the present in the name of a different future.

(Koepnick, 2016, p.274)

The nature of the 'future' that the Bauhaus created has been contentious, however. The aspiration toward total design has been criticised for its elitism, its complicity with consumerism and,

indeed, its megalomania and proximity to totalitarian ideology (Tafuri, 1976; Baudrillard, 1981; Foster, 2002; Roberts, 2011; Tonkinwise, 2014). It is very clear that contemporary design is indebted to the Bauhaus, though this is a mixed accolade in so far as design is 'a cultural phenomenon ... linked to consumption', given that rampant consumerism represents one of the key contributors to climate crisis (Sparke, 2020, p.4).

This essay uses a direct comparison between László Moholy-Nagy (1895-1946), a 'master of form' at the Bauhaus, and Anni Albers (1899-1994), who studied and also taught at the school, to emphasise that a diversity of interpretations of the *Gesamtkunstwerk* existed at the Bauhaus. This point is significant because neglect of female artists and designers in the critical reception of the school has been rectified only comparatively recently (Müller, 2015; Smith, 2014; Otto & Rössler, 2019). The renewed attention to the achievement of Albers, which was celebrated in an exhibition at Tate Modern in 2019, the centenary of the school's founding, provides an opportunity to reassess the social utopianism of the Bauhaus. Both Albers and Moholy-Nagy were artist-designers who took a keen interest in new technological developments, though the emphases of their work are entirely different. In particular, Albers's design philosophy, when compared to Moholy-Nagy's, illustrates the unstable relationship between art, craft and design at the Bauhaus. This comparison will try to show that an emphasis on the machine aesthetic in critical reception of the Bauhaus tends to overshadow the plural approaches to design that existed in the school. The work of a figure like Albers allows a fresh insight into the achievements and the failings of the Bauhaus as a utopian project.

## The Bauhaus: between art and design

The Museum of Modern Art played a key role in forming the reputation of the Bauhaus by identifying the formation of the modernist 'machine aesthetic' with the school. According to this narrative, which emerged in the 1930s, the Bauhaus developed a purist design language based on the principle that 'form follows function'. Thus, the design ethos of the Bauhaus is usually identified with products like Marcel Breuer's chair 'B3', also known as 'The Wassily' because a prototype was owned by Wassily Kandinsky (Fig. 1). In its use of tubular steel, its abstraction from and simplification of the form of an armchair, this object exemplifies a certain ideal of rational design. Clearly, teachers and students at the Bauhaus were also influential in fields including architecture, industrial design, typography, exhibition design, theatrical production, abstract painting and photography. Art and

design existed at the school in a fluid inter-relationship. Among the teachers, known as ‘masters of form’, were the artists Paul Klee (1879-1940), Wassily Kandinsky (1866-1944), László Moholy-Nagy, Johannes Itten (1888-1967) and Oskar Schlemmer (1888-1943). The most famous students of the Bauhaus often went on to teach at the institution and many of them have dual reputations both as designers and artists, reflecting the border-crossing between art and design that Bauhaus pedagogy encouraged. This latter group includes Anni Albers and Josef Albers (1888-1976), Gunta Stölzl (1897-1983), Marianne Brandt (1893-1983) and Marcel Breuer (1902-1981), among others.

Even though the Bauhaus holds such an important position in the canon of modernism, and it has been intensively studied over the best part of a century, it remains enigmatic. In its short period of existence, it seemed to bring together contradictory tendencies and hold them in a dynamic equilibrium. Lucia Moholy, whose photographs of staff and students played a key role in shaping the school’s reception, observed in 1971 that ‘even to the initiated, it could be an idea,

a program, a method, an institute, and/or a building’ (Moholy, 2020, p. 128). These multiple identities were undoubtedly related to the socially transformative utopianism of the Bauhaus. The founder, the architect Walter Gropius (1883–1969), intended the school to unify and renew the arts, which would serve a new architecture and enable new forms of social life. This *Gesamtkunstwerk* ideal shaped the structure of the institution and the trajectory of its development.

There were three directors of the Bauhaus, all of them architects: Walter Gropius was director until 1928; Hannes Meyer (1889–1954) held the directorship between 1928 and 1930 and Ludwig Mies van der Rohe (1886–1969) led the school for its last three years. The Bauhaus moved twice during its relatively short existence; founded in Weimar, it relocated to Dessau in 1926 and then to Berlin in 1932. These changes of location evidence a constant struggle with sceptical and conservative authorities. A laboratory of avant-garde ideas, the Bauhaus existed precariously during a period of political turbulence, coinciding with the Weimar republic and culminating in the rise of Nazism.



Figure 4.1. ‘Wassily’ chair, also known as the Model B3 designed by Marcel Breuer in 1924-25 at the Bauhaus Dessau, Germany. (Image credit: originally posted to Flickr by Lorkan / Creative Commons Attribution 2.0 Generic)

It maintained throughout a tenacious commitment to a utilitarian project: that art should contribute to socially useful ends.

As a pedagogic institution, the Bauhaus drew upon the tradition of progressive education that stressed teaching through practice. It also inherited the ambitions of the design reform movement in Germany, where schools of art and craft had been founded, drawing on the antecedent example of British art education, with the ambition of renewing the arts through the teaching of handicrafts. The Bauhaus was created from two pre-existing institutions, the Weimar Hochschule für bildende Kunst (Academy of Art) and the Kunstgewerbeschule (School of Applied Arts). Gropius considered previous attempts to achieve a synthesis of art and craft to have been pedagogic failures because of their relationship to entrenched academic tradition. The Bauhaus was a radical departure in that Gropius was determined to engage with the avant-garde, but it was rooted in ideas that were part of the design reform movement. In the 1919 'First Proclamation of the Weimar Bauhaus' Gropius writes: 'the new building of the future ... will embrace architecture and sculpture and painting in one unity and ... rise one day toward heaven from the hands of a million workers like the crystal symbol of a new faith' (Gropius, [1919] 1938, p.18).

This excerpt shows something of the intellectual ferment that affected the avant-garde in the aftermath of the First World War. Its imagery is usually said to reflect the utopian ideas of the architect Bruno Taut (1880–1938), who was a key innovator in glass construction, which would become a signature of the International style in architecture. It also makes reference to the gothic ideal as a model for an aesthetic community, inherited from John Ruskin and William Morris: the proclamation was illustrated with a woodcut of a crystal cathedral by Lyonel Feininger (1871–1956). Furthermore, the idea of the crystal as a principle of multi-faceted unity can be traced back to fin-de-siècle esoteric ideas present in the Darmstadt Artists' Colony, a utopian community founded in 1899 by Ernest Ludwig, Grand Duke of Hesse (Tafari and Dal Co, 1976, p.84). The 1919 programme is an unstable synthesis between esotericism and arts and craft utopianism. At this stage the school was, in its ethos, a long way from a machine aesthetic:

Architects, sculptors, painters, we must all turn to the crafts. Art is not a 'profession'. There is no essential difference between the artist and the craftsman. The artist is an exalted craftsman. In rare moments of inspiration, moments beyond the control of his will, the grace of heaven

may cause his work to blossom into art. But proficiency in his craft is essential to every artist. Therein lies a source of creative imagination.

(Gropius, [1919] 1938, p.18)

Gropius refers to the school as a 'new guild of craftsmen' in the next line. Yet, the actual organisation of Bauhaus indicates that it was not envisaged simply as a project of craft revivalism. Although each workshop was assigned a technical specialist, called a 'master of craft', authority resided in the hands of the 'master of form' who oversaw the workshops and were involved in decision-making processes for the school (Wick, 2000, p.36). The 'masters of form' were avant-garde artists as already noted. The institutional structure of the school was calculated, therefore, to assimilate avant-garde perspectives into its pedagogic system, while also equipping students with applied skills. Frankly utopian ideals were combined with the pragmatic aims of vocational education. This combination allowed Gropius latitude to pursue a radical agenda, while also representing the avant-garde school as a renewal of tradition, when this kind of argument was necessary to ensure financial support from conservative state authorities (Wick, 2000, p.56).

This early conception of the Bauhaus would evolve very quickly. In 1923, after increased contact with Russian constructivism the slogan of the Bauhaus became 'Art and Industry: a new unity'. The workshops were reorganised to emphasise engagement with mass production especially after the move to Dessau in 1926, where Gropius designed a new building to house the institution. Increasingly, teaching became explicitly oriented toward functionalist design principles (Wick, 2000, p.70). Under Hannes Meyer and Ludwig Mies van der Rohe the primacy of a technical education in design was re-enforced still further. Even so, pedagogical innovations from the early expressionist-influenced phase of the Bauhaus remained important throughout the school's existence.

Rainer Wick's important study *Teaching at the Bauhaus* is at pains to emphasise that there was no single pedagogic programme that informed the school in all its phases of activity. Wick takes the view that the complexity of the Bauhaus can only be represented by examining in parallel the different, often competing, commitments of its 'masters of form' (Wick, 2000, p.11). Yet, he acknowledges that the most famous and influential pedagogic innovation of the Bauhaus was the preliminary course (*Vorkurs*) established by Johannes Itten in the early years of the school (Wick, 2000, p.93). After Itten left in 1923, the preliminary course was led by László Moholy-Nagy and Josef Albers, who altered

its emphasis, but preserved its essential pedagogic goal, which was the development of the creative individual.

It is necessary to address the preliminary course here because it represents the ideals of the Bauhaus very clearly. It was a compulsory period of study, originally of six months, undertaken by all students who entered the Bauhaus before they were permitted to choose a workshop in which to specialise. Yet, Itten's views on art were a long way from the rationalist and functionalist beliefs that are conventionally thought to have shaped modernist design. As a result, the purpose of the preliminary course went beyond technical instruction:

From the very beginning, my teaching was not directed toward any particular fixed, external goal. The human being itself, as a creature capable of improvement and development, seemed to me to be the task of my pedagogical efforts. Developing the senses, increasing the ability to think and experience spiritually, relaxing and developing the bodily organs and functions – these are the means and paths available to the teacher concerned about education.

(Itten cited in Wick, 2000, p.102)

Although the Bauhaus would become famous because of its purist and seemingly rationalist-functional approach to design, the teaching that a designer like Marcel Breuer experienced was framed by the expressionist ethos indicated in Itten's statement. Though Bauhaus pedagogy was vocational, it was not solely technical: intellectual and manual skills were viewed as interdependent and equally important. This became an important legacy of the Bauhaus after Josef and Anni Albers later taught at Black Mountain College, where a version of the preliminary course was incorporated into a liberal arts college (Grawe, 2002). In this context, it has become famous as a conduit of ideas about assemblage to the neo-avant-garde, to Robert Rauschenberg in particular.

An important tension in the structure of the Bauhaus and its reception is evident in the afterlife of the *Vorkurs*. Whereas the Bauhaus saw individual artistic development as preparation for collective practical study in craft and design, the *Vorkurs* came to be seen as a preparation for artistic practice alone. By contrast, at the Bauhaus principles of abstraction formed a highly theorised basis for all learning, though students would thereafter be required to commit to study in workshops and to demonstrate their technical proficiency in order to graduate. Although exercises based on abstract art were preliminary, they also provided the elements of a language that could unite

the different crafts represented in the workshops. As Oskar Schlemmer observed in notebooks written while he was teaching at the Bauhaus:

One of the emblems of our time is *abstraction*. It functions, on the one hand, to disconnect components from an existing and persisting whole, either to lead them individually *ad absurdum* or to elevate them to their highest potential. On the other hand, abstraction can result in generalization and summation, in the construction in bold outline of a new totality.

(Schlemmer cited in Roberts, 2011, p.5)

The *Gesamtkunstwerk* meant not only creating a new unity of the arts, but also breaking up the prevailing beliefs about art, and it was abstraction that made this possible. It will be useful here to say something about drawing at the Bauhaus in order to clarify the implications of this point. As we have seen in Emma Barker's essay, in seventeenth-century France the change in meaning between *dessein* and *dessin* seemed to announce the emergence of a new technical role for drawing. At this point, the theoretical dimension of drawing, established in debates about design, changed its character as drawing became a practice required by nascent forms of industry. At the Bauhaus, the overall pedagogic structure indicated the primacy of utilitarian goals, but the preliminary course allowed drawing and colour studies to be explored as though autonomously, with the idea that this instruction would help students to identify their innate capacities and break free of any pre-existing stylistic assumptions.

The meaning of design, at least in the early pedagogy of the Bauhaus, was ambiguous. In *The Statutes of the Staatliches Bauhaus* of January 1921, 'instruction in design' was still associated with painting, composition and modelling, whereas 'technical drawing' is listed separately as 'instruction in projection and construction drawing' (Wick, 2000, p.67). 'Design' at this point was identified with elementary studies in composition in two and three dimensions. Indeed, the teaching was highly theorised in its approach to abstraction, as though in the tradition of *disegno* as an intellectualised artistic practice. Wassily Kandinsky and Paul Klee each led specialist courses on drawing and colour instruction in the preliminary course, each providing distinctive and idiosyncratic theories of form and colour.

Though drawing instruction at the Bauhaus involved many traditional elements – including drawing from the figure, from still life and even analysis of the composition of old master paintings – its implications were always intended to reach beyond the practice of drawing itself. For example, Itten's instruction in rhythm

involved physical exercises, because it was deemed important that processes of drawing should be intuited physically as well as visually. Gropius himself considered it important that design should be taught as theory to provide the foundation for a collective ethos:

Thus our pupils' intellectual education proceeded hand in hand with their practical training. Instead of receiving arbitrary and subjective ideas of design they had objective tuition in the basic laws of form and colour, and the primary condition of the elements of each, which enabled them to acquire the necessary mental equipment to give tangible shape to their own creative instincts. Only those who have been taught how to grasp the comprehensive coherence of a larger design, and incorporate original work of their own as an integral part of it, are ripe for active cooperation in building.

(Gropius, 1965, p.78)

This brief and necessarily selective outline of the preliminary course is intended to show that the Bauhaus was in one sense a culmination of the history outlined in the preceding essays. Design was taught through drawing and construction in a way that stimulated intellectual development and sensitivity. Instruction emphasised a reconciliation between

liberal and mechanical arts. The functionalism that has become the hallmark of modernist design, however, was fashioned in an intellectual atmosphere that emphasised a holistic relationship between mind, body and spirit. Furthermore, the development of the individual was also intended to lay the groundwork for new forms of collective endeavour. The wider context in which this total vision contributed to the emergence of modern design may be addressed through a brief discussion of the pre-history of the Bauhaus.

### Gesamtkunstwerk and 'total design'

It has already been noted that the *Gesamtkunstwerk* was a reference point for many avant-garde of the turn of the century. The Deutscher Werkbund, an association of German artists and industrialists founded in 1907, represents an important precursor to the Bauhaus in the history of design in Germany not least because of its initiation of a practice of total design. The origin of modernist design is often traced to the work of one of the founding members of this institution, the architect Peter Behrens. Behrens's work as a consultant to the firm *Allgemeine Elektrizitäts-Gesellschaft* (AEG) in 1907 involved the creation of an integrated identity for the corporation, including the branding, publicity material, products, factory buildings and even the factory clocks (Fig. 4.2). This early example of a fully



Figure 4.2. Peter Behrens. Clock designed for AEG, 1908. (Image credit: Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 3.0 Unported / Photo: Christos Vittoratos)

integrated corporate identity anticipates practices of industrial design that are now commonplace, where the consistency and integration of communication, across different platforms and media, is deemed centrally important. The ensemble that Behrens created for AEG was conceived by him in the spirit of the *Gesamtkunstwerk*. AEG was an electrical engineering monopoly at the leading edge of the technological reorganisation of society, producing everything from electrical turbines to lamps and electric kettles and, without strong competitors, was in a position to innovate (Fig. 4.3).

In one sense, Behrens' work on AEG developed principles laid down by the design reform movement. The AEG turbine factory in Berlin, for example, aimed to overcome the distinction between fine and applied art (Fig. 4.4). Behrens had no time for the Arts and Crafts movement's hostility to the dehumanising effects of industrial work, however. As Jacques Rancière has succinctly observed: 'Behrens and his friends of the Werkbund used Ruskin against Ruskin' (Rancière, 2013, p. 147). The reunification of the arts and crafts meant here the celebration of industry, not its rejection. The total work of art tended to invite analogies between aesthetics and social organisation, with style conceived

as an active principle that might reshape collective experience:

The style of a time does not mean particular forms in one or another art; every form is only one of many symbols of inner life, every art only a part of style. Style, however, is the symbol of feeling in common, of the whole conception of the life of a time in its totality, and it only shows itself in the totality formed by all the arts.

(Behrens cited in Rancière, 2013, p. 149)

Behrens employed many celebrated architects in his practice at the beginning of their careers, including Walter Gropius, Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, and Charles-Édouard Jeanneret, 'Le Corbusier'; thus, two of the three directors of the Bauhaus gained formative experience in his firm. For our purposes, the important issue is that the *Gesamtkunstwerk* was a flexible ideal: it informed Itten's pedagogic focus on the shaping of the whole individual, Gropius's vision of the Bauhaus as a quasi-spiritual community and Behrens's approach to industrial design, where buildings, products and publications, though they are fashioned in ways appropriate to their function, all participate in an integrated identity. Although there are very different



Figure 4.3. Peter Behrens. Three versions of a water kettle designed for AEG, 1.25L, 1L and 0.75L.  
(Image credit: Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 3.0 Unported / Photo: Christos Vittoratos)



Figure 4.4. AEG Turbine Factory, Berlin-Moabit, Germany. Designed by Peter Behrens. Completed in 1909. (Image credit: Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 3.0 Unported / Photo: Doris Anthony)

stakes involved in, for example, the creation of a corporate identity and the practice of emancipatory education, they were deemed to be connected in this formative period for the modern movement through the 'switchboard' of the *Gesamtkunstwerk*, to use David Roberts' metaphor.

### The critique of Bauhaus utopianism

Behren's work for AEG anticipates and perhaps helps to set a trajectory for industrial design in the twentieth century, as the discipline becomes aligned with advertising, branding and public relations. It is perhaps for this reason that the utopianism of the modern movement has since become a lightning rod for critique of modernist design. There exists, first of all, an argument that the ideology of the 'total artwork' was complicit with dangerous political developments. David Roberts argues that the 'total artwork' has an affinity with totalitarianism, noting that the *Gesamtkunstwerk* achieved 'perverted realization' in Nazism, Fascism and Stalinism (Roberts, 2011, p.2). Koepnick, by contrast, cautions against the 'rash answers' that often result when arguments are based on a 'slippage from total

to totalitarian' (Koepnick, 2016, p.274). Although totalitarian governments are usually said to have aestheticized politics, especially by making use of the propaganda power of mass spectacle, Nazi Germany and Stalinist Russia both actively suppressed avant-gardes. It seems more reasonable to argue that the *Gesamtkunstwerk* was susceptible both to progressive and reactionary interpretations and manifestations.

This question of utopianism is not confined to matters of historical interpretation, however; it is still common for progressive design theorists to disidentify with the legacy of modernism because of the perceived flaws in its utopianism. Transition design provides an important example of such a movement in design theory, one that faces head on the 'wicked problems' that face designers now, such as 'climate change, loss of biodiversity, depletion of natural resources, and the widening gap between rich and poor' (Irwin, 2015, p.229). Terry Irwin's account of this programme advances a highly ambitious and sophisticated conception of 'design-led transition' to a more sustainable world. It also involves a critique of design's engagement with consumerism, which is unsparing.

Cameron Tonkinwise, another key theorist of Transition design, includes utopianism under what he terms design's 'disorders', identifying it with 'megalomania':

Both the European origin story [of design], centered around the Bauhaus, and the North American version, as expounded by the Streamliners, argued that modern styles of art derived from new machine forms and materials, when applied to everyday products and environments, could de-traditionalize people, accelerating them into more universal, efficient and rational ways of living. For this reason, everything should be (re)designed: total design.

(Tonkinwise, 2014, n.p.)

Is it the case that the Bauhaus initiated an approach to design that expressed this kind of insensitive instrumental rationality? Even a brief overview of Bauhaus pedagogy gives us cause to doubt that this assessment is entirely fair: as we have seen, the Bauhaus employed an enlightened approach to the relationship between intellect, practice and the body, for example. And yet, Tonkinwise is not alone in making this judgement of the Bauhaus: it is a well-established critical position. The art historian Hal Foster, in his essay 'Design and Crime', accuses design of being a 'perverse reconciliation' of the utopian ideals of modernism, reinterpreted according to 'the spectacular dictates of the culture industry' (Foster, 2002, p.19). The focus of his critique is the transition from the total work of art to total design, where the *Gesamtkunstwerk* is interpreted as a naïve prelude to the manipulative reorganisation of every aspect of human experience.

Foster's argument draws on design and architectural criticism that explores the collapse of modernist utopianism into the logic of capitalist accumulation (Tafuri, 1976; Baudrillard, 1981). Jean Baudrillard's essay 'Design and Environment' provides an important link between this tradition and the reception of the Bauhaus (Baudrillard, 1981; Foster, 2002, p.22). The Bauhaus, Baudrillard argues, was an instigator of a 'revolution of the object' (Baudrillard, 1981 p.185). The functionalism of Bauhaus design introduced a new synthesis between material production and communication. The clarity of this approach, its 'rational Esperanto of design', is framed by Baudrillard as a way-station from the *Gesamtkunstwerk* to an alienating economic rationale and semiotic code of the designed environment:

An 'aesthetic' ensemble is a mechanism without lapses, without fault, in which nothing compromises the interconnection of the

elements and the transparency of the process: the famous absolute *legibility* of signs and messages – the common ideal of all manipulators of codes, whether they be cyberneticians or designers.

(Baudrillard, 1981, p.188)

Baudrillard's argument is perceptive in its identification of the tendency for designed objects to form communicative environments. Clearly, designers associated with the Bauhaus helped to provide the elementary language of this development, alongside other designers and architects of the modern movement. Gropius, after he moved to Harvard Graduate School of Design, also went on to advocate for 'total architecture'. However, Gropius intended his idea to counter what he saw as a destructive imbalance in modernity, 'factors of expediency like high-pressure salesmanship, organizational oversimplification and money making as an end in itself' that impair the individual's capacity to seek and understand the deeper potentialities of life' (Gropius, 1962, p.13).

Admittedly, Gropius's good intentions may be beside the point. Baudrillard is justified in identifying design as a practice through which instrumental rational practices entered a socio-cultural sphere. The architectural theorist Manfredo Tafuri describes the Bauhaus as the 'decantation chamber of the avant-garde' to make a comparable point (Tafuri, 1976, p.111). Like Baudrillard, Tafuri views modernism pessimistically; in his account, the utopianism of the avant-garde merely conditions its audiences to accept more readily the anarchic forces of capitalist development. This is a more historically nuanced assessment than Baudrillard's, benefitting from extensive research into the histories of European architectural modernism (Tafuri and Dal Co, 1976). Tafuri argues that the artists who taught at the Bauhaus unwittingly 'fulfilled the historic task of selecting from all the contributions of the avant-garde by testing them in terms of the needs of productive reality' (Tafuri, 1976, p.111).

There are clearly ambiguities in the utopianism of the Bauhaus. It is not entirely wrong to identify in the project of total design ideas that are, at times, autocratic. Yet, the most progressive and ambitious proposals of the Bauhaus are also connected to the implications of the *Gesamtkunstwerk* ideal. Though it is not possible here to explore this tension in all the detail it demands, it can be briefly treated through a comparison between the ideas of László Moholy-Nagy and Anni Albers, two important exponents of Bauhaus design principles.

### Gesamtkunstwerk in practice

László Moholy-Nagy was a Hungarian artist whose early work was influenced both by Dada and Russian constructivism. His artistic practice spanned activities including photography, montage, typography, graphic design, lighting and industrial design. He joined the Bauhaus in 1923, replacing Itten as the master of form responsible for the *Vorkurs*, as well as being responsible for the Metal workshop. Here, I would like to approach Moholy-Nagy's conception of the *Gesamtkunstwerk* through three works that he created in 1923, which are often known collectively as the *Telephone Pictures*. These three images each show an identical abstract motif, each one a different size, made in enamel (Fig. 4.5). Moholy-Nagy claimed to have dictated the instructions for the pictures over the telephone to sign-makers, likening the conversation to playing 'chess by correspondence' (Moholy-Nagy, 1947, p.79).

The *Telephone Pictures* are usually displayed alongside one another, though they are separately titled as *EMI*, *EM2* and *EM3*. On one level, these works celebrate the authorship at a distance that is part of the routine work of the industrial designer, which Moholy-Nagy saw as a means to extend art's agency. In his theoretical writings, he advocated for what he called the

*Gesamtwerk*, or 'total work'. As Koepnick notes, there is a touch of megalomania in Moholy-Nagy's proclamation from the 1927 publication *Painting Photography Film* of 'a synthesis of all the vital impulses spontaneously forming itself into the all-embracing *Gesamtwerk* (life) which abolishes all isolation, in which all individual accomplishments proceed from a biological necessity and culminate in a universal necessity' (Moholy-Nagy cited in Koepnick, 2016, p.281).

Moholy-Nagy's writings seem to provide some warrant, therefore, for Tonkinwise's claim that Bauhaus design intended a kind of autocratic intervention into everyday life. Moholy-Nagy thought that it would be possible, and advisable, to 'to rewire the physiological and neurological hardware of the modern subject, that is, to reconstruct the sensorial apparatus in such a way that society could be changed from the ground up' (p.282). Everything is not quite as it seems, however. Moholy-Nagy conceived this project as experimental and, most importantly, collective: undertaken in the 'laboratory' spirit of the constructivist-influenced avant-garde. At stake in his pedagogy, and his conception of design, was a vision of humanity's capacity to explore its sensory apparatus and, in so doing, understand shared aesthetic responses. The emancipatory vision of

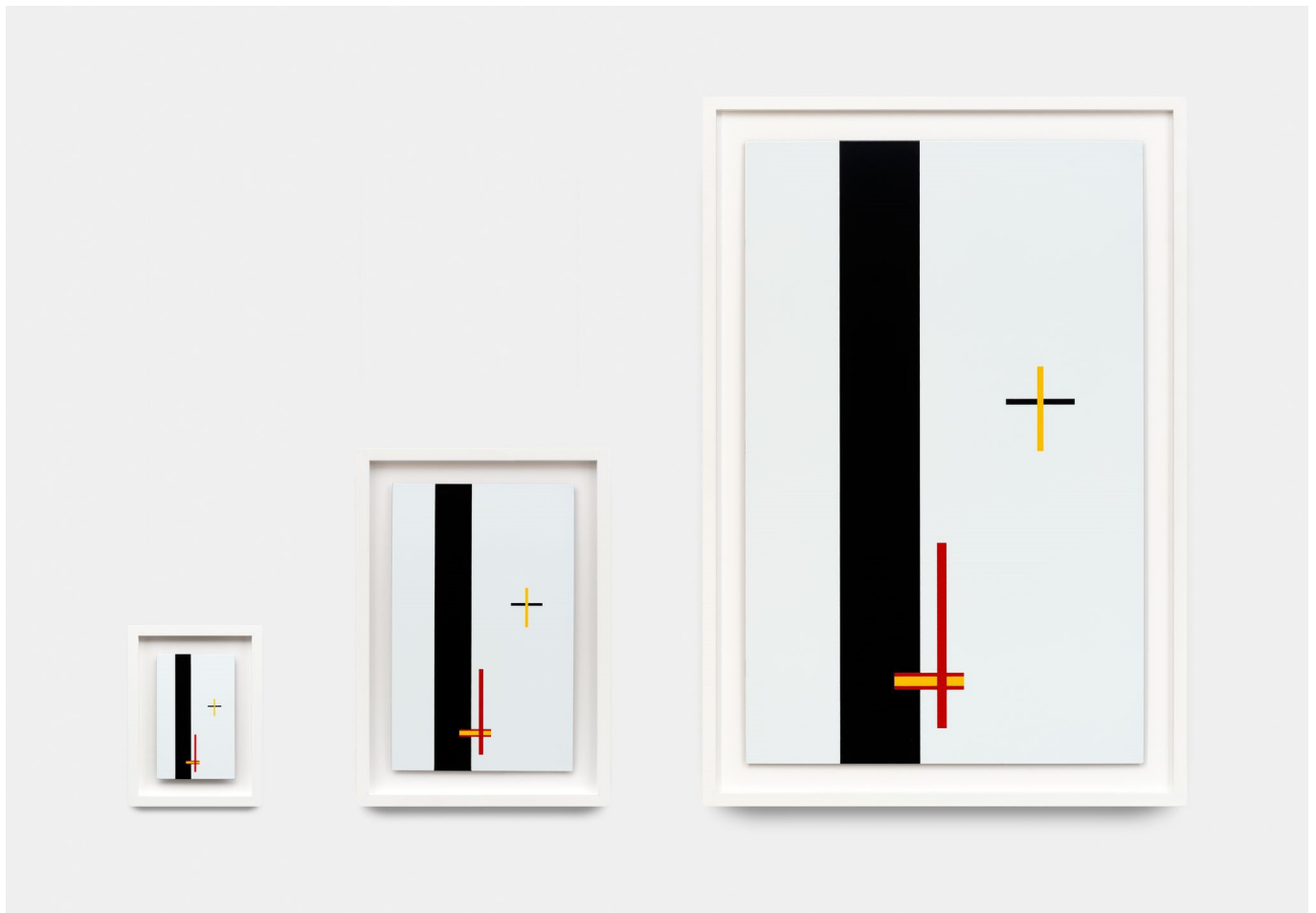


Figure 4.5. László Moholy-Nagy, *Construction in Enamel 1, 2 and 3*, 1923–2012. Enamel on steel. 24 x 15cm, 47.5 x 30cm, 94 x 60cm; 9 1/2 x 5 7/8. Edition of 3 + 2 APs. (Image credit: Courtesy of the Estate of the Artist and Almine Rech)

this project was that it might point toward 'alternative organizations of social space at the level of form, which, in its very changeability, offers the promise of alternative, improved sociality in the future.' (p.283).

From the point of view of the present, it is very difficult to read these implications in EM1, EM2 and EM3, however. A more available reading is that the interaction of standardisation and variable size in these works suggest a range of products, comparable to Behrens' electric kettles (Fig. 4.3). Although Moholy-Nagy regarded these works as experiments in the extension of the agency of the artist, they are now more often interpreted as examples of a deflationary avant-garde strategy, an attack on the mystique invested in easel painting. Indeed, the *Telephone Pictures* are often compared to Duchamp's readymade in this spirit (Roberts, 2007). What EM1, EM2 and EM3 seem to indicate, therefore, is the ambivalence of the encounter between art, design and technology in the Bauhaus, where a utopian project engaged with new technologies, with the aim of turning them to progressive ends.

This project was often hyperbolic. In her memoir of the artist *Moholy-Nagy: Marginal Notes, Documentary Absurdities* Lucia Moholy – who was married to Moholy-Nagy in the 1920s – claims that he simply handed over diagram for EM1, EM2 and EM3 at the counter of an enamel workshop. In this version of events, Moholy-Nagy was struck after the fact by the possibility that he might have ordered the works by telephone (Kaplan, 1993). This story seems to underline, whether or not it is accurate, the speculative character of Moholy-Nagy's utopianism. Yet, it is important to note that this attitude was not exactly naïve; rather, it was a response, in Moholy-Nagy's case, to direct experience of the destructive power of technology in the First World War. Moholy-Nagy knew technology to be capable of wreaking havoc on human beings. This was one of the reasons he was compelled to try to bring it under control.

As the master of form of the metal workshop between 1923 and 1928, Moholy-Nagy played an important role in moving the Bauhaus in the direction of industrial design. Under his guidance, the metal workshop created many prototypes that were sold to industry, bringing significant revenues into the school (Wick, 2000). Even so, when Moholy-Nagy left the Bauhaus in 1928, his letter of resignation cites the increasing demands of technical specialisation as the primary reason for his departure:

As soon as creating an object becomes a speciality, and work becomes trade, the process of education loses all vitality. There must be

room for teaching the basic ideas that keep human content alert and vital. For this we fought and for this we exhausted ourselves. I can no longer keep up with the stronger and stronger tendency toward trade specialisation in the workshops.

(Moholy-Nagy, 1974, p.136)

Although he experimented with authorship at a distance, Moholy-Nagy hated the fragmentation and specialisation of roles which was the reverse of the coin of the complexity of modern manufacturing. Herein is the pathos of Moholy-Nagy's position; he sought emancipatory possibilities in the reorganisation of production that, impersonal and implacable, undermined the humanist basis of his own project.

Anni Albers provides a very different perspective on the *Gesamtkunstwerk*. Though her work also aims for a holistic conception of art and design, it is not rhetorically committed to the emancipatory potential of new technologies. Born Annelise Fleischmann, Anni Albers studied at the Bauhaus from 1923, and married her fellow student Josef Albers in 1925. Though she became a teacher at the school, instructing students of weaving in design theory and eventually acted as director of the weaving workshop, for many decades her distinctive approach to design, and successful career as an artist, did not receive the critical attention that it deserves. Indeed, it might be argued that Albers' approach to design is compelling because it managed to overcome obstacles that were set up by the institution of the Bauhaus itself.

Although permitted to study at the institution, female students were pressured to enter what were considered appropriately feminine workshops on graduation from the preliminary course. Indeed, the numbers of female students were so large that the weaving workshop was set aside as a female-only workshop (Müller, 2015). Walter Gropius encouraged this policy of segregation, seemingly to enforce a distinction between 'feminine' and 'masculine' design practices (Smith, 2014, p.xxvii). This kind of discrimination was obviously not exceptional at the time; however, it does flatly contradict the pedagogic intention of the *Vorkurs*, which was to support individual students to identify and follow their innate dispositions as we have seen. The Bauhaus, despite its utopian rhetoric, was organised along rigidly patriarchal lines.

Even so, the school did create opportunities for female students and exceptional individuals were able to seize them. Marianne Brandt, for example, defied convention to become one of the most celebrated and successful designers in the metal workshop. In the

weaving workshop, the female students took it upon themselves to reinvent the status of their discipline within the institution. At the Weimar Bauhaus Helene Börner, 'master of craft' for the weaving workshop, taught traditional techniques and the 'master of form', Georg Muche, showed little interest in promoting innovation in what he saw as a women's artform (Smith, 2014, p.32). Faced with these obstacles, a gifted student Gunta Stölzl took the initiative to develop new approaches and to teach her fellow students, engaging in material experimentation and initiating new areas of practice such as dyeing. When the Bauhaus moved to Dessau, the weaving workshop was provided with new looms and Stölzl was made the first female junior master after Muche left the school in 1927.

This recognition for Stölzl suggests that, though it was clearly patriarchal, the Bauhaus was at least capable of acknowledging outstanding achievement among female students. The reasons for this openness were at least partly economic. The Bauhaus was always short of money and the experience of Weimar made it clear that financial dependence on regional authorities would leave the institution vulnerable. From early on, the products created in the weaving workshop were able to find ready markets among private clients and manufacturers (Rowland, 1988). Under Muche, but especially under Stölzl, the workshop became one of the most financially successful, bridging between textile art and textile design for industry.

Anni Albers developed her approach to design in this atmosphere of experiment and self-reliance. In her writings on design she argues that direct experimentation on the loom was the best way to overcome the separation of roles between the design and manufacture of textiles, which had become separate processes with the advent of mechanical looms (Smith, 2014). A direct comparison between Albers and Moholy-Nagy presents itself around this point. Whereas Moholy-Nagy's *Telephone Pictures* seem to seek emancipatory potential in the separation of conception and execution, Albers prefers to collapse that distance as far as possible through experimentation on the loom, where material qualities can be directly explored in the design process. This comparison shows the diversity of approaches to design at the Bauhaus. Although industrial design defines the school's early reception, it represents only one aspect of a complex utopian engagement between art and technology.

Albers' design ethos by no means implied the rejection of modern industry. She produced prototypes for mass production throughout her career and, like Stölzl, experimented continually with the properties

of new materials, such as cellophane, to understand their aesthetic and functional characteristics in textiles. But Albers did emphasise tactile engagement and material process as the fulcrum of her artistic and design practice in a way that Moholy-Nagy did not. Indeed, Albers' arguments about the centrality of the loom in her approach to weaving has philosophical implications that allow the comparison to Moholy-Nagy to be extended. Whereas the utopianism of Moholy-Nagy was future-oriented and focused on technological progress, for example, Albers advocated a more nuanced temporality of human technology in her writings. In *On Weaving*, she reflects on the development of the loom:

During the 4,500 years or, in some estimates, 8,000 years that we believe mankind has been weaving, the process itself has been unaffected by the various devices that contributed to speed of execution. We still deal in weaving, as at the time of its beginning, with a rigid set of parallel threads in tension and a mobile one that traverses it at right angles. The main devices, in turn, have not become obsolete, but still form the nucleus of today's weaving instruments.

(Albers, 1965, p.22)

Here technological change is presented not in absolute terms but, rather, it is seen as relative to historical continuities, where some practices cannot be redesigned because they have achieved already their optimal form. For Albers, the weaver revitalises modern industry by reconnecting technological development to pre-historic responses to human needs. While emphasising these connections across time, she also argued that weaving is the closest art to architecture, because it is so intimately involved in problems of construction. In these respects, her ideas may be read almost as an alternative model for the Bauhaus or, at least, one among a number of divergent conceptions of the unification of the arts explored in the school.

## Conclusion

The relationship between art, design and utopianism at the Bauhaus is complex. Whereas the critical reception of the school is founded on the celebration of a machine aesthetic, this is only one among several conceptions of design that were explored in the school. Craft played an important part in the Bauhaus throughout its existence, for example. As the weaving workshop demonstrates, handicraft was not left behind as the school developed an increasingly coherent functionalist design ethos; rather, craft continued to play a key role as a site to explore the interactions of art

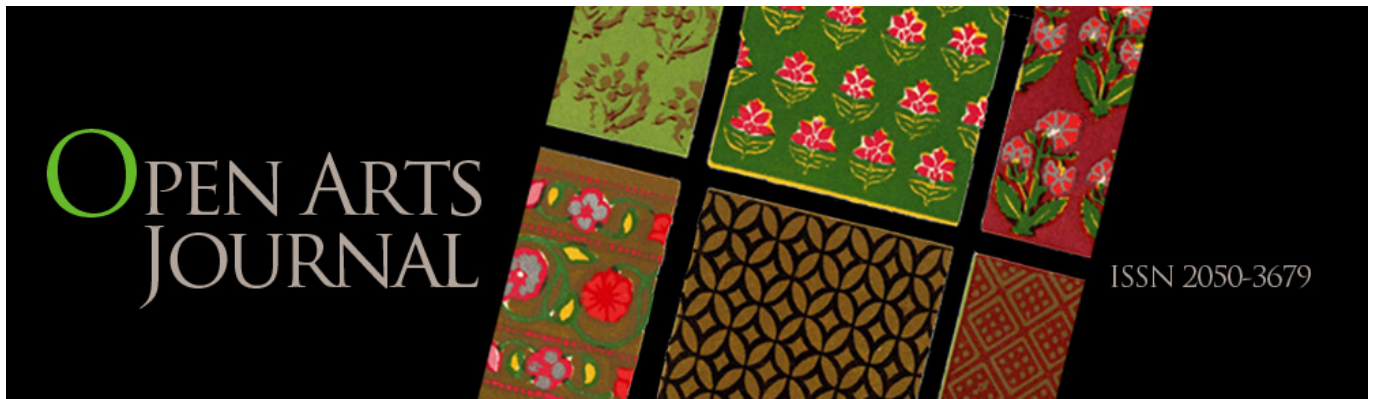
and industry. This point is important, because it makes room for a plural understanding of the role of design in the Bauhaus and of its designers' interactions with art.

Whereas industrial design dominated the canonical period of the critical reception of the Bauhaus, it is now possible to question these established accounts through a more pluralist understanding of design. At the same time, it is also useful to revisit the critique of Bauhaus utopianism, which tended also to take its cue from industrial design and architecture. Although certain proclamations by Bauhaus artists and designers do suggest a megalomaniacal attempt to redesign the world from scratch, this was not the only interpretation of the *Gesamtkunstwerk* that existed within the institution; indeed, even Moholy-Nagy's ideas about the *Gesamtkunstwerk* are not quite as autocratic as they may appear at first reading. The organisational structures of the Bauhaus were patriarchal undoubtedly. Yet, the expansiveness of Bauhaus pedagogy did empower some students to overcome these limitations. Albers's concept of design seems still to be relevant to the urgent task that now confronts the design discipline: to fundamentally alter its own relationship to consumerism and to re-envision the relationship between a fragile environment and the contemporary human world. As designers approach this enormous task, which is perhaps even more ambitious than the horizon that Gropius envisaged for the Bauhaus in 1919, it may be important to hold a nuanced view of the social utopianism of the Bauhaus, which recognised the instability created by a fully technologised world.

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# EMPOWERING DESIGN PRACTICES: EXPLORING RELATIONS BETWEEN ARCHITECTURE, FAITH, SOCIETY AND COMMUNITY

**Katerina Alexiou, Theodore Zamenopoulos, Vera Hale,  
Susie West and Sophia de Sousa**

## Abstract

*This paper presents and discusses some key insights derived from a collaborative research project called Empowering Design Practices. The project brought together a multidisciplinary team of academic and non-academic partners to explore the processes, resources and environments that support community-led design practice in the context of historic places of worship. The paper discusses barriers and opportunities surrounding the development and adaptation of historic places of worship as community hubs, and proposes a set of approaches that can help empower those looking after those places to re-imagine and design the future of their places while respecting complex faith, architectural, societal and community values.*

**Keywords:** community leadership in design, historic places of worship, heritage management, architecture, empowerment, community engagement

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**Biographical notes (continued)**

Dr Susie West is a Senior Lecturer in Art History and Heritage in the Department of Art History at The Open University; previously working as a Senior Properties Historian at English Heritage. She has a strong interest in heritage values within official systems and the public understanding of heritage.

Sophia de Sousa is Chief Executive at The Glass-House Community Led Design and sits on a number of advisory groups and panels promoting design quality and collaborative placemaking. Sophia is an impassioned champion and enabler of community-led, participatory and co-design practice and research, with extensive experience in delivering hands-on training and support to community groups and professionals.

# EMPOWERING DESIGN PRACTICES: EXPLORING RELATIONS BETWEEN ARCHITECTURE, FAITH, SOCIETY AND COMMUNITY

**Katerina Alexiou, Theodore Zamenopoulos, Vera Hale, Susie West (The Open University) and Sophia de Sousa (The Glass-House Community Led Design)**

## Introduction

Places of worship, across different faith groups and denominations, are a valued resource for local communities and society at large. As buildings, they are omnipresent within both urban and rural environments and they have a cultural, social and architectural value that transcends the boundaries of a particular locality and the local faith group. Although the faith association of these buildings might create barriers for people of different faith or non-faith backgrounds, these buildings serve to connect people together through their social action and pastoral care activities. However, many places of worship, particularly historic ones, face maintenance issues and often remain underused and disconnected from civic life.

This paper aims to present and discuss some key insights regarding the barriers and opportunities surrounding the efforts to develop historic places of worship in ways that ensure their sustainability for generations to come. More specifically, the paper is concerned with the processes, resources and environments that empower community groups who are custodians of such buildings to unlock or develop their capabilities to lead projects to adapt and develop their buildings.

The insights are drawn from a research project called *Empowering Design Practices: historic places of worship as catalysts for connected communities* funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council in the UK between 2014 and 2020 under a cross-council initiative to support design research conducted in the context and with the active participation of communities. Further details about the activities and resources discussed in this paper can be found on the project website: [www.empoweringdesign.net](http://www.empoweringdesign.net).

*The context: historic places of worship as community resources*

There are 14,800 listed places of worship, of which over 6% are in Historic England's register of buildings at risk. To better protect these buildings, advisory bodies and funders have started moving away from a model focused exclusively on repairs and restoration of their physical structure, to a model that puts a new emphasis on the long-term use and value of these buildings as community places. In 2009 a government report called 'Church and Faith Buildings: Realising the Potential' set out the potential of places of worship to deliver community services (Government and Church of England, 2009). The report primarily aimed to help faith groups identify sources of funding that could be used to develop their places as community hubs and stressed the importance of providing support particularly with regard to good design, sustainability and funding. This new emphasis brought to the fore the need to understand and support the engagement of the wider community in the design process and the co-production of solutions that will keep historic places of worship at the centre of community life.

A number of toolkits and publications have emerged as a response, to offer support and guidance, particularly around project management, business planning and fundraising, and to help people navigate the complexity of the process (Payne and Withers, 2017; Payne et al, 2017; Rowe, 2009; Walter and Mottram, 2015). Little of this work has focused specifically on design, which is the focus of the Empowering Design Practices project. The project's aim was to explore how people can put their skills, knowledge and resources together to unlock or develop their capacity to engage in design work, and the conditions (physical, technical, social) that enable or hinder their ability to do so.

*The focus of the study: enabling community-led design*

The project is part of a wider research agenda which aims to explore community-led design, its impact, and the conditions that enable it. Community-led design (CLD) constitutes a civic action or practice, where ordinary groups of citizens take leadership in the design and development of their environment, whether buildings, places, services and activities, to serve the interests and needs of their local communities, in an inclusive, democratic and sustainable way (Alexiou et al, 2013). As a practice and field of study, community-led design is associated with a wide range of terms such as 'community architecture', 'community design', 'participatory architecture' or 'participatory planning', which emerged in the early 1960s, as part of the

human and social rights movements in the United States, and as part of widespread community action in Britain against large redevelopments and rehousing programs that were considered a threat to local communities (e.g. Sanoff, 2006; Wates and Knevt, 1987; Zamenopoulos and Alexiou, 2018).

Existing literature in participatory design in the general context of architecture and spatial planning presents a spectrum of creative participatory practices and methods such as visioning workshops, charrettes, or participation games (Sanoff, 2000). Such practices engage communities at various phases in the design process and in various ways and degrees, as documented in special issues published in recent years in Design journals (e.g. Luck, 2018; Binder et al, 2008; Greenbaum and Loi, 2012). While there is considerable emphasis on developing and proposing different programmatic philosophies, principles, approaches, methods or specific tools that could help people to engage in design, there is often little emphasis on how human and community capabilities can be developed in order to enhance the agency of groups to lead design tasks and projects. The project takes a 'capability approach' to community leadership in design by focusing on what communities value doing or being, and on building opportunities (environments and approaches) that enhance their capability to unearth and mobilise their resources to achieve those valued objectives.

### *The research team*

Empowering Design Practices is a cross-disciplinary collaboration which brought together expertise in design, art history and educational technology from the Open University, with the practical skills and expertise of core strategic partner The Glass-House

Community Led Design, as well as partners specialising in historic preservation of faith buildings and heritage management (including Historic England, National Lottery Heritage Fund, and the Historic Religious Building Alliance or HRBA). The design researchers in the team contributed expertise in methods and approaches exploring and supporting community leadership in design. The art history colleagues brought expertise in architectural history and critical heritage studies. Educational technology colleagues offered know-how in the creation of online resources to support collaborative learning. The Glass-House Community Led Design is a national charity that supports communities, organisations and networks to work collaboratively on the design of places and spaces and has many years of experience providing advice and support to community-led design groups. The project also had a number of consultants: Live Works, an initiative led by the Sheffield School of Architecture aiming to support socially-engaged projects in the city, Wright & Wright Architects, a practice with expertise in historic buildings and the facilitation of community-led design, and Becky Payne, an HRBA development officer and freelance consultant undertaking projects on different aspects of sustaining historic places of worship. The project also had an advisory team with experience in heritage management, religious studies and community architecture.

Working collaboratively across disciplines (art history, information technology, heritage management and design) and across sectors (academia, public bodies, civil society organisations and the private sector) is valuable for garnering a holistic perspective of the research question and programme of activities. It is also extremely challenging, because of diverse research traditions, ways of working, terminologies, perspectives

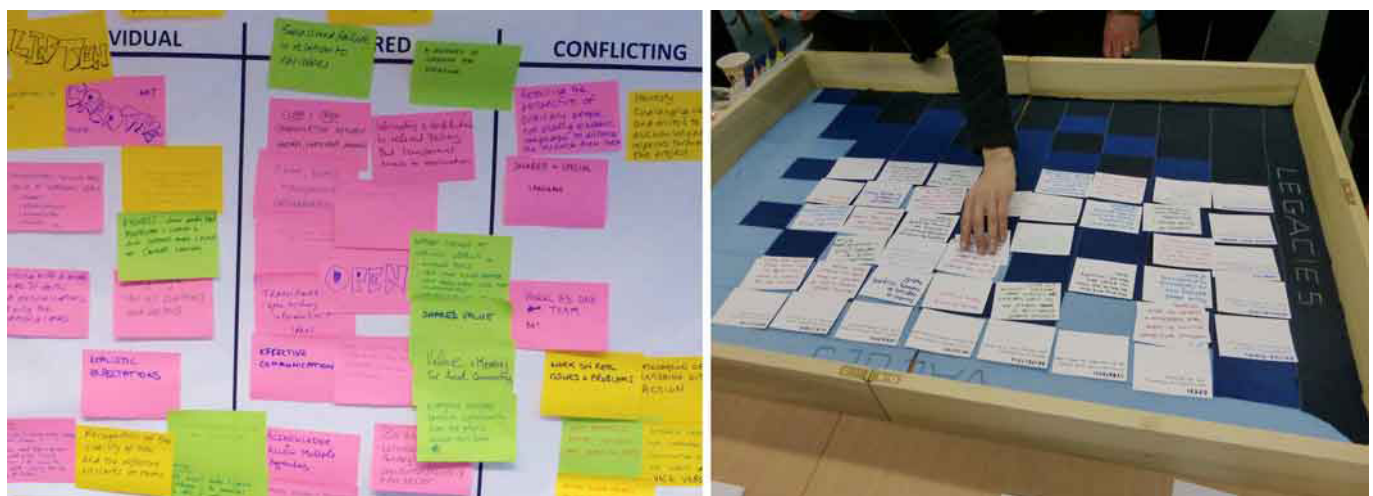


Figure 5.1: Examples of team activities undertaken to facilitate cross-disciplinary and cross-sector collaboration. Left: activity exploring individual, shared and conflicting principles of action, collaboration and success. Right: activity exploring shared values and expected legacies or impacts of the project. Image credit: Empowering Design Practices.

and motivations. From early on in the project, the team made a conscious effort to interrogate differences and commonalities and to work together to establish a common ground. This included explorations of individual and shared research interests and values, principles guiding collaboration, as well as criteria for success (Figure 5.1).

Through these reflective sessions, the project succeeded in establishing a collaborative research practice which valued the participation of all partners and their unique contributions to knowledge.

For example, ostensibly, art history appears to be at complete odds with design: in crude terms, the first is focused on looking at the past, while the second is focused on looking at the future. However the team found common ground in their shared knowledge that in the process of re-imagining a historic building and its place in society, it is important to understand a building's past as embedded in architectural and artistic objects and features as well as in people's memories, rituals and cultural associations and traditions, and to explore how these elements can be brought to bear in any future interventions. Similarly, at a superficial level, one can construe the idea that heritage is about preservation whereas design is about change: the two terms are deemed incompatible. However, through sharing and negotiating ideas, the team developed an understanding of the nuances of both terms and recognised their potential convergence in notions such as change management and sustainability, which see buildings and their meanings as ever changing, negotiated, re-interpreted and adapted in relation to their wider historic environment and changing social and cultural norms and values.

### The research approach

The project aimed to directly engage with groups looking after historic places of worship and the professionals that work with them to explore the human, social and material assets and challenges that enable or hinder their capacity to engage and lead design activities. It also explored the constraints and tensions that arise because of different perceptions of faith, heritage and community as well as the constraints and opportunities that arise in relation to the physical characteristics of building in heritage terms and in terms of sanctity and ritual. Within this exploration, the primary objective was to develop and evaluate different types of support mechanisms, resources and ways of working that could build capacity for design leadership.

To this end, the project adopted a methodological approach which is rooted in two closely interrelated traditions: the tradition of Action Research and

Theories of Action (Friedman and Rogers, 2008) and that of Reflective Practice and Research-by-Design (Schön, 1983; Cross, 2006). These approaches emphasise a process of learning by doing, that is, deriving knowledge through active engagement with a design question or problem, and integrating theory building and testing into everyday practice. More specifically, the project sought to create a 'community of design inquiry' including academic and non-academic partners, as well as people embedded in communities. The aim of this community was to create new practical knowledge through co-design but also new capacities to co-produce knowledge. The project followed a cyclic process where theoretical ideas and previous experiences were used to inform the co-development of hands-on practices that could build capacity for community leadership in design. Subsequent reflection with participants about the conditions underlying this capacity led to a further development of theoretical ideas and practices.

A mix of methods were used such as focus groups, storytelling, facilitated co-design and co-reflection workshops, as well as surveys, questionnaires and interviews. Data were collected through audio and video recording of conversations and interactions between participants, as well as through materials and techniques designed to capture and facilitate reflection on participants' perceptions, ideas and knowledge, such as custom-made cards, mapping toolkits, drawings or models.

### *Research programme and activities delivered*

The project aimed to work with a large number of initiatives involved in adapting historic places of worship for community use, including completed, current and emerging projects at different stages of development. It also sought to engage with different faith groups in projects across the UK that varied in terms of scale, heritage value and management capacity. A programme of research activities was developed in order to explore the value and impact of different types of support, for example the difference between bespoke activities delivered to a place of worship focused on a specific problem, versus activities delivered to a group of places focused on generic themes and capabilities. The programme was also designed to help explore the effects of the quantity of support given, that is the number of activities delivered in different places, as well as their timing. It included a wide spectrum of activities, that ranged from half-day workshops to two-day training programs, site visits and public engagement events (Figure 5.2).



Figure 5.2: A range of EDP activities. From left to right, top: challenges, assets and opportunities themed workshop at London Lumen and design training in Manchester; bottom: prototyping utopias at Utopia Fair in Somerset House and public workshop at Tate Exchange. Image credit: Empowering Design Practices.

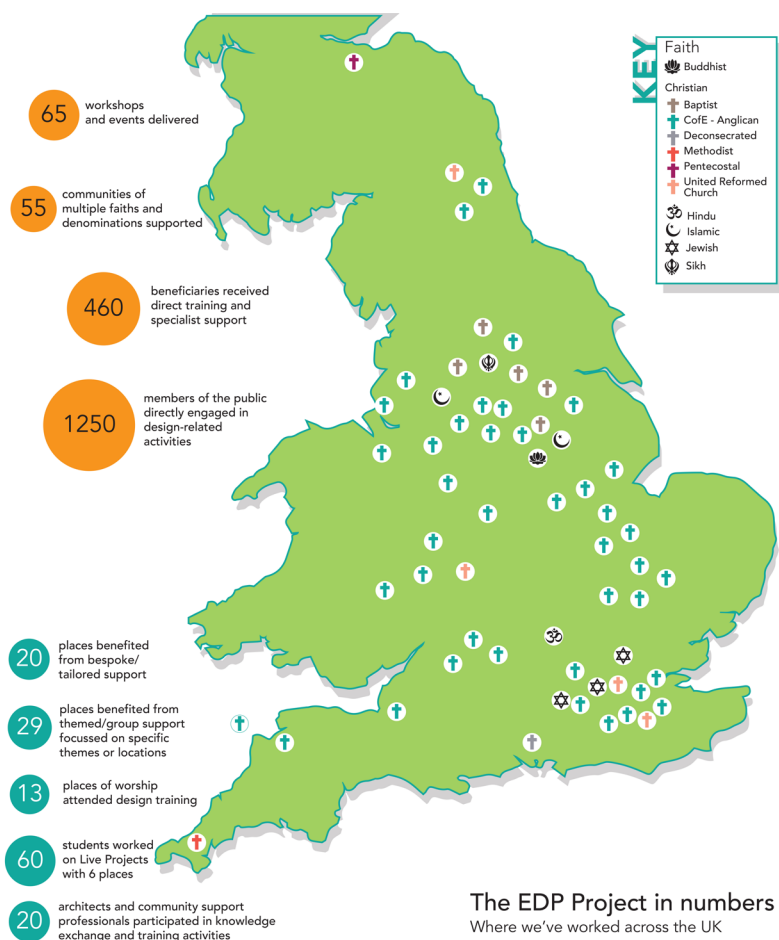


Figure 5.3: Graphic showing the distribution of places of worship the project worked with across the UK, with key information about faith groups and numbers of people involved in activities.

Image credit: Empowering Design Practices.

Activities supported groups to discover and articulate the challenges they faced and to identify their assets and opportunities. They also facilitated learning about design, how to engage communities in decision-making, how to develop a design rationale and shared vision, and how to prototype and test solutions. The project also engaged with students and professionals working in the field such as architects, community development professionals and heritage support officers. To date, the project has provided direct support, training and specialist workshops to over 460 people in over 55 communities across England and interacted with more than 1250 people through design-related public engagement activities (Figure 5.3).

### Exploring community-led design journeys

The first stage of the project involved desk research and a number of visits to completed projects to learn from the journeys. Below we discuss some observations about institutional barriers and present key recommendations for other groups embarking on similar projects.

#### *Establishing the significance of a place*

In the last twenty-five years, the National Lottery Heritage Fund (formerly the Heritage Lottery Fund, from 1994 to 2019) has provided new opportunities for the public to work directly with their local historic buildings. Communities who are bidding for grants for their heritage buildings are however required to write bids 'as if' they had the knowledge and experience previously deployed by heritage sector professionals, as is exemplified in the requirement for statements of significance.

Statements of significance express cultural values associated with a historic building. Heritage professionals have, over the previous 150 years, developed a range of cultural values that classify heritage significance, although the language of these practices has only recently been codified. The 'traditional' values assert a building's historic and aesthetic merit, often through association with historic public figures or named architects/designers. These values have been enshrined in global heritage frameworks across the twentieth century, notably in UNESCO's World Heritage Convention of 1972. Critiques of this narrow definition of significance identified the absence of less public narratives and turned to the validity of local and indigenous cultural identities, particularly in non-western heritage and in settler societies. Additional formal values were introduced through the Burra Charter, created by the Australian National Committee of the International

Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS), an advisory body to UNESCO, in 1979 (now in revised editions). The Burra Charter recognised that 'social or spiritual' contexts could be a formal category of value, incorporating indigenous heritage based on landscapes and living traditions. These new categories, however, also served communities associated with historical places in European contexts who were able to claim heritage value on the basis of their appreciation of the social or spiritual role such spaces play in their lives and traditions. The impact of the Burra Charter on how World Heritage is defined has been immense, leading to the recognition of the indivisibility of communities from their landscapes through the introduction of cultural landscapes as a category in 1992. From this global framework, the need to acknowledge social value has disseminated into national heritage frameworks, including the UK Heritage Lottery.

The Burra Charter therefore has made a significant difference in how communities who seek to care for their historic place of worship make a Heritage Lottery application to cover the capital costs of conservation and alterations. The current application process includes the requirement to say why the heritage in question is 'important to your local area ... who the heritage is important to'. This is the user-friendly version of a statement of significance, working with the wider categories of value introduced in the Burra Charter. Now they are expressed non-prescriptively, with a simple prompt about locality and people, rather than a checklist of the Burra categories (historic, aesthetic, social, scientific). However, for the bidding community, establishing what 'important' actually is still poses a challenge.

Faith communities who worked with the EDP project reported a high level of concern about producing a statement of significance. Working with these groups is an important reminder that the everyday experience of an historic building does not translate into an understanding of the specific architectural and aesthetic qualities of that historic environment relevant for such bids. The groups that the project interacted with were often aware of the ways in which their building might not meet their needs, either spatially, as expressed in the lack of working areas or toilet facilities, or spiritually, exemplified in restrictions around a high altar as a reserved sacred space. These limitations became drivers for change. However, it proved much harder for them to approach buildings from the point of view of professionals who authored listing descriptions of such building, as they did not have access to the technical knowledge and skills required. While this is not surprising, it does mean



Figure 5.4: Workshop at St Luke's Church, Oxford. Image credit: Empowering Design Practices.

that the continued requirement for articulating why a building is 'important' to a broad range of stakeholders, ranging from users, tourists to guardians of the nation's heritage, continues to be a challenge.

#### *Top tips from completed projects*

The team visited eight places where projects to refurbish or adapt a historic faith building had been completed. We selected a mix of places of different faiths and denominations in rural, urban and suburban locations that presented a variable set of design challenges and characteristics in terms of listing and scale of architectural intervention. In each place the team delivered a facilitated workshop inviting members of the original development team and current users of the building to reconstruct a timeline of their project, note key milestones and distil top tips for other groups embarking on a similar journey (Figure 5.4). Below we synthesise the groups' key recommendations into six points. View the eight individual stories at <https://www.empoweringdesign.net/design-project-stories.html>.

Several participating groups spoke of **the importance of having a clear, shared vision** as the foundation for driving a successful project forward. They stressed the need to have a vision underpinned by well-articulated values and objectives and supported by a clear narrative about the 'big picture' before delving into detail. Such a vision not only helped to inform and guide different phases of their projects, it was essential to communicating their projects to others. It also constituted a vital tool in convincing potential funders that the groups were not simply chipping away at niggly problems but had a holistic view of the future of the building and the role it could play in its local community. Finally, having a clear vision was important for devising an effective strategy to get things done – as one participant put it: 'Think big vision to get the small things done'.

Many of the communities we spoke to also emphasised **the importance of leadership** and the need to ensure a good mix of skills within the project team. It was deemed important to have a clear project leader with authority to make decisions as well as working groups that support the overall project by providing leadership and focused work on specific elements of the project.

With regard to community engagement, the groups we liaised with stressed **the importance of getting people involved as early as possible** and taking the time not only to listen and speak to people individually but also directly involve them in the design process. As one community group member commented: 'Engage the community early on and continuously through the project'. A further aspect that was emphasised was the need to keep local people informed to prevent rumours from developing and spreading, and to avoid the building up of negative views that might stop a project in its early stages. In a nutshell, the suggested approach is one of listening and of working together to find a solution, as this will allow a shift from a sense of threat to one of opportunity.

Another point that emerged from discussions with successful projects was that in order to unlock opportunity **it is important to reach out and build partnerships**, to be open to new ideas and dialogue, and to investigate possibilities. One group suggested establishing a liaison group to identify and address anything that might come out of joint working during the process. As one member of such a group stated: 'Build relationships; good relationships are at the heart of transformation'.

A further area that was commented on is the design process. All of the groups that were consulted spoke of the need to identify early on which elements of the project can be executed by the group itself and which require external specialist expertise. They also stressed

**the importance of establishing a good working relationship with their architects**, and of being clear about their own expectations of them. They further emphasised that when developing a design, it is highly advisable to ask the architect to go over all the parameters of the final scheme with the group and to be prepared to challenge anything the group is not happy with.

A further point that emerged with regard to the construction phase was **the commitment to investing in quality, local craftsmanship and to work with local artists**. Groups spoke of choosing the right materials and of thinking beyond essential repairs to the future sustainability of the building. They also highlighted the need to ensure that any changes being suggested respect the heritage, context and values of the building and what it represents both to its worshipping and wider community.

In conclusion, while the historic places of worship we visited had many different starting points and motivators, in the end, all of the projects were about unleashing the potential of these buildings for the benefit of people, both their congregations and wider communities. Many members of such projects, when looking back on their journeys, spoke of the partnerships and friendships that were forged and the role these projects had played in improving the quality of life for local people. The groups saw these projects as far more than updating buildings and understood that they offered a route to fostering social change.

### **Working with live projects: approaches that support community leadership in design**

As discussed, a key objective of the Empowering Design Practices project was to evaluate, develop and use approaches to foster community leadership in design. Following the writings of Richard Couto (2010), a practitioner and scholar in community leadership, we see 'community design leadership' as a form of civic leadership that arises in situations in which communities face challenges or opportunities that require change, adaptation and ultimately the design of something new. Furthermore, we follow Duffy et al (2018) in perceiving the notion of community leadership as 'a set of practices' of a group of people rather than a formal authority or attribute of a group to hold power over others; community leadership is therefore about people taking collective responsibility to act. We thus approached community leadership in design as a set of group practices that are not (only) about the creation of solutions, but mainly about the creation of processes and environments that enable peoples' capabilities to engage in designing. Below

we present a set of four approaches developed with this framework in mind that draw upon observations derived from our work with community groups.

#### *Creating opportunities for building a leadership team*

One important strategy for supporting the development of community-led leadership in design has been the active encouragement of the congregation to create a 'design team' responsible for initiating and championing actions to progress a design project. It is often assumed that a person in a position of authority (such as a vicar, or spiritual leader) would be a natural leader of the design process. However, there are many parties who have an interest and a potential stake in a project to adapt a historic place of worship for community benefit, such as religious leaders, faith bodies, heritage bodies, architects, the worshippers themselves, but also people in the wider community who have an appreciation for the building or use it for a variety of religious or non-religious purposes. These 'actors' do not always have the same interests, aspirations or power to influence the design process. Diverse needs and aspirations therefore need to be negotiated, and power relations need to be rebalanced, to allow everybody to contribute – a goal which may not tally with the leadership resting with one person.

Our approach to facilitating the formation of such leadership teams was to create opportunities and activities where people can work together and shape their working relationships in the process. Simple tasks such as building a physical model of their building or creating a poster to present the team's vision were instrumental in team building.

An example here is a church community that was able to progress their project by means of creating a building group. When the research team first approached the church, the vicar had very specific ideas about the development of the building and was about to appoint an architect to create a plan for the space. We designed and facilitated several activities to support the design process of the group, encouraging the active participation of the wider worshipping community. Activities included a workshop on mapping challenges and opportunities for the building, a heritage day and a workshop enabling the mapping of needs against objectives and design ideas. Through the process the realisation emerged that the needs of the community and building were more complex than originally thought, and a small team of people naturally emerged who took responsibility to steer the project. The vicar, moreover, gradually adopted a mentoring rather than a leading role in the design process. This development was perceived as 'empowering' for both the vicar who

claimed to have found the right level and way to engage in shaping the future of the building, as well as for the members of the team who were able to bring their knowledge, time and passion to the project to move the process forward. As they put it: 'it was such an encouragement at that time to have somebody come in and help us think [about] stakeholder processes and stakeholders, and that actually is still the foundation for that statement of needs document [it] came from that work right at the beginning, which then led in to us kind of getting together as a team'.

*Demystifying design and the process of designing*  
Another important strategy adopted in the project was to provide advice, training and materials to help groups familiarise themselves with the language and practice of design and engage in design thinking: thinking about the form, function and experience of a place and how design changes can influence these elements.

We observed that community groups often felt daunted by the prospect of making design decisions, reporting a lack of understanding of the design process and how to engage with architects and designers. They often considered architects as the experts who



Figure 5.5: Design Training in Manchester and Sheffield. Image credit: Empowering Design Practices.

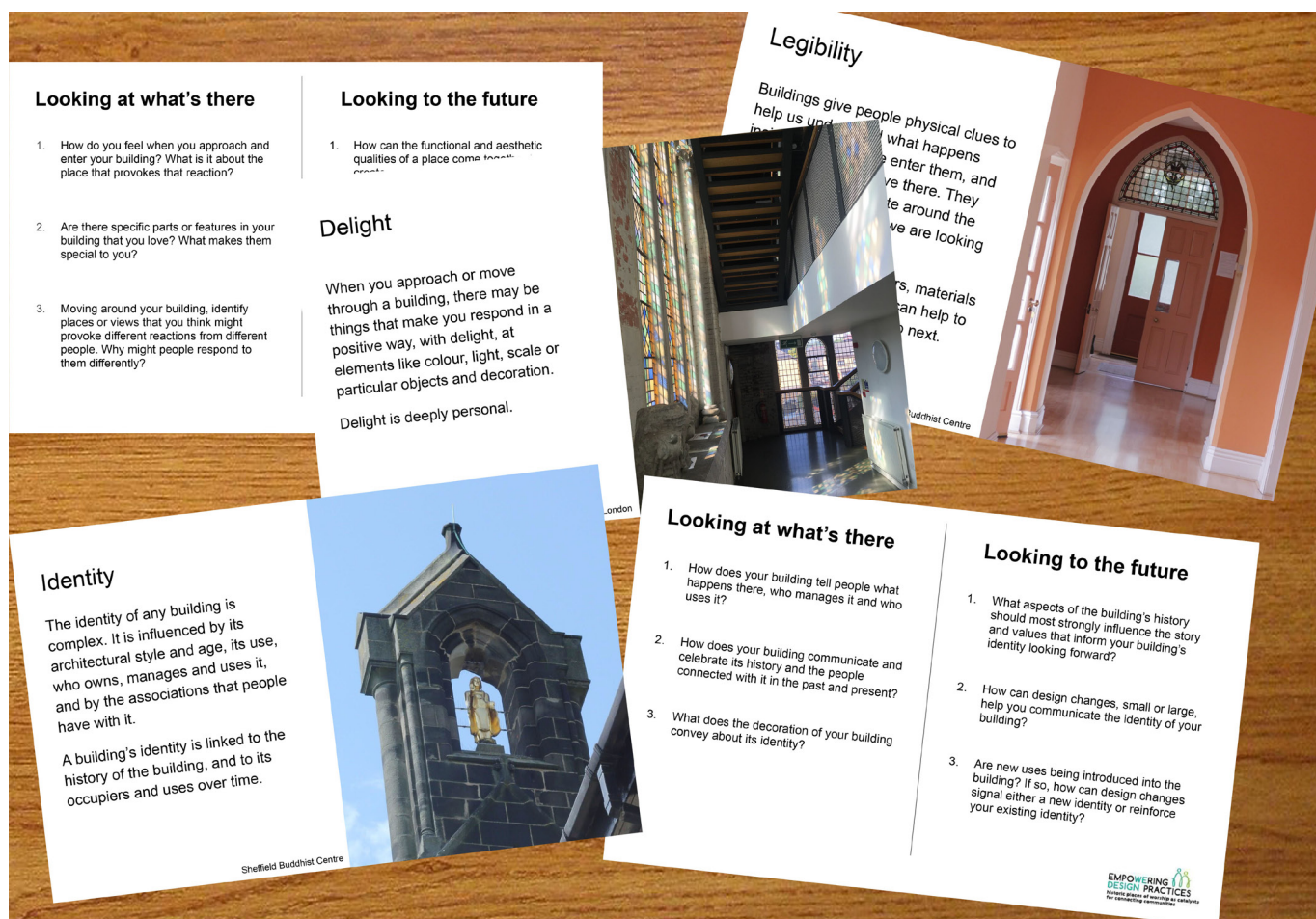


Figure 5.6: Cards developed to explore design themes. Image credit: Empowering Design Practices.

will magically solve their problems. However, people who use and care for buildings hold knowledge and experience that can be extremely valuable in the design process, yet often these remain tacit.

Our approach focused on engaging groups directly with the ‘object’ of design – that is the building and its activities – and help them experience the design process, rather than simply attaining a theoretical understanding of it. To that end, the project organised ‘design training’ workshops (Figure 5.5). These were 2-day intensive workshops based on the Buildings by Design course, developed by the Glass-House Community Led Design, which aimed to help the groups to engage in key elements of a design process such as mapping issues and assets of a place, developing a vision, and defining options using physical models. Other materials and resources developed by the project to help community groups engage with design terms include a website called *Explore Design* (2019b) and a set of cards that help participants explore key design themes such as access, flexibility, legibility and identity. The cards contain prompts and questions that help design teams and users to explore a variety of design solutions and their effect on the fabric, form and function of the building and on peoples’ experience (Figure 5.6).

Participants in the workshops reported that they were transformational. They helped them develop confidence in their own creative and critical skills and delve deeper into the design problem they faced, enabling them to explore alternative solutions as well as the impact of design decisions on the everyday use and feel of their building. Participants often reported that they left the workshops feeling they had gained a focused understanding of the limitations and feasibility of their original ideas and a sense of the wider set of options to consider: ‘[the course was] a helpful catalyst to just get some thinking going again and to actually start to dream a bit bigger than simply replacing what is

already there with something a bit newer and fresher; but thinking more wholeheartedly about actually how are we using this building, what are the spaces might we want to create’.

### *Connecting the dots: developing a shared design rationale*

Supporting groups in developing a shared and well-evidenced rationale for change was integral to their strategy and aims. We noted that while groups have important insider knowledge about how their building works, or have good connections in their community, they often get entangled in the complexity of the details and have difficulty in seeing the bigger picture. The complexity and range of the issues and ideas that a group tries to respond to often leads to fragmented actions and/or a tendency to disengage.

The response of the project team was to support groups in exploring the following three key questions:

- **Why are changes needed?** This question was typically broken down to questions such as: what are the key issues that compromise the aspirations and future of the place? What are the assets in the community and building to be sustained or enhanced for the future?
- **What changes are needed?** This was a question about the ideas that the group had for the future of the place.
- **Who needs to be engaged and how?** This was a question about the people, experts or organisations that need to be engaged in order to develop these ideas and garner more support.

The project developed ways to help groups engage with these questions in a structured way and create a coherent narrative that can be communicated to others, particularly to experts such as architects, development officers, heritage officers and other statutory (faith) bodies who can offer further support (Figure 5.7). One of the key outcomes of applying this



Figure 5.7: Workshop exploring key questions for developing a design rationale. Image credit: Empowering Design Practices.

strategy was that groups were able to engage with the development of a 'statement of needs' and find a renewed sense of conviction and energy to invest in their project.

Building on this work, the project team developed a website called Design Thinking Guide (2019a), which provides a step-to-step guide to the key questions that groups need to engage with to connect the dots and develop a design rationale for change, accompanied by a set of external resources and practical tools.

### *Prototyping ideas and activities*

Finally, an essential approach that the project adopted was to focus on promoting an experimental attitude and encouraging groups to prototype and test ideas about new activities, physical alterations or indeed new partnerships. Prototyping is simply a process of trying out things (activities, partnerships or physical changes) in a much simpler and scaled down way before taking significant or long-term decisions. Examples include testing different materials for flooring using temporary installations or inviting a local business to run a month-long pop-up café.

We found that the fear of the unknown or unfamiliar often held groups back from taking action to progress their project. Introducing new activities or physical alterations in a building can have a big effect in the way a place works and is experienced by people whether from a liturgic perspective, or a historic or communal one. In many cases, groups were also uncertain about the value of developing new collaborations or partnerships that could deliver new activities.

In one of the places that we worked with we facilitated a number of public events to help garner interest in the space and test the feasibility of different ideas (Figure 5.8). One event saw the church open its doors on a Saturday to engage passers-by in ideas about the place. Some 140 people crossed the

threshold within three hours and the church had the opportunity to evaluate its capacity to welcome visitors for community activities outside their Sunday service. At a later stage, the research team helped develop a brief for a community competition, inviting local people and organisations to propose new activities that could be held in the building. We also facilitated an open day where the winners were able to run their activities as taster sessions, helping them as well as the church to explore the possibility of offering such activities on a regular basis.

The feedback received showed that the approach helped the group collect evidence about the potential of the church space in a tangible way and explore their own 'red lines' – the boundaries of what they can or cannot negotiate given their own values, beliefs and preferences, for example with respect to aesthetics or the types of uses or users they can accommodate.

A booklet on 'Testing ideas for your community building' (2020) is available on the project website, alongside other resources helping groups and professionals think about community engagement more broadly and plan their community engagement activities.

### **Final reflections**

As we have seen in the previous sections, through our research we visited and heard the stories of numerous historic places of worship. This showed that these places harbour an abundance of cultural and social assets, such as the religious beliefs and faith values that bring people together in a place of worship, but also the strong ties and social networks they maintain with local people and organisations. The buildings are valued for their history and heritage, as well as for what they represent to the faith community. Nevertheless, we also saw that places of worship face important challenges such as long-term maintenance and financial stability, a



Figure 5.8: Images from engagement activities delivered at the church. Image credit: Empowering Design Practices.

shortage of volunteers and complexities surrounding building restrictions linked to religious, heritage or planning regulations.

We found that projects that successfully transform places of worship require those looking after them to develop their capability and confidence to engage with others (people and organisations in the community, professionals, funders and policy makers) to help them form a vision for building, explore design ideas and understand the challenges involved. Not all the places we encountered were able to progress well with their plans. One of the groups we worked with decided to sell their building; many other groups are still trying to find a way forward. Even though the duration of the project was five years (quite rare for standard research projects), we realised that the development time for such building projects is painstakingly long. This reformulated our own understanding of the potential impact and nature of our contribution as researchers and brought to light the importance of building a network of people who can champion design long after the research funding ends. Transforming a place of worship into a more sustainable community asset requires a holistic approach to the future of the building and its connection to local people, and a greater investment in building design capacity early on in the process.

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# SEEING PATTERNS ON THE GROUND: REFLECTIONS ON FIELD-BASED PHOTOGRAPHY

Jan van Duppen

## Abstract

*This paper reflects on field-based photography practices that are informed by the 'shooting script' approach and its potential for social science and design researchers to analyse urban spaces. By discussing an ethnographic study of allotment, community and guerrilla gardeners in London, it examines the shooting script in conjunction with grounded theory as a way of structuring the use of photography in fieldwork and analysis. The paper critiques the methodological underpinnings of the shooting script and reframes it as a performed embodied practice of documentation, interpretation and translation. Following on, it suggests finding ways to include self-reflections in publications. Dispersed throughout the paper, images and captions provide an insight into the research process and they evidence the potential of this visual methodology – when triangulated with participant observation and interviews – for analysing the distinctive patterning on the ground produced by gardeners and drawing out the ambiguities involved in their spatial boundary-making practices. Furthermore, the paper discusses the implications of moving from analogue to digital photography in fieldwork, and how the navigations between virtual and material technologies consulted during analysis co-constitute research outcomes. It continues by arguing that the notion of a 'script' might be too rigidly interpreted and proposes instead to nurture openness towards the accidental and contingent in fieldwork and analysis.*

**Keywords:** photography; fieldwork; methodology; shooting script; boundaries; allotment, community and guerrilla gardens

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# SEEING PATTERNS ON THE GROUND: REFLECTIONS ON FIELD-BASED PHOTOGRAPHY

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## Introduction

Although photography has become such a ubiquitous part of our lives, the use of the camera in fieldwork sometimes remains unquestioned and academic papers do not always discuss the ways in which images made by researchers play a role in their analysis. The sociologist Charles S. Suchar observed in 1997 that studies often approach field-based photography in ways that are 'casual, informal, or intuitively-based' (Suchar, 1997, p.53). Whilst the introduction of digital cameras and smart phones has dramatically increased access to and use of photography since then, reflexive and structured ways of working with images made during fieldwork remain a rare thing to encounter in the social sciences. In this text, I work critically with the visual method 'shooting script', which was introduced by Suchar as a way of combining the strengths of documentary photography and grounded theory, the latter being a specific methodology that develops theory from qualitative data analysis.

My research into allotment, community and guerrilla gardens as spaces of play and work functions as a vehicle to discuss the potentials and limitations of this particular visual approach. The shooting scripts helped me to see patterns on the ground, and to get a better understanding of the gardeners' boundary-making practices. By reflecting upon this particular visual methodology and my research process, I aim to speak to this special issue's concern with abutments and confluences between the disciplines of art history and design. Photography as a visual medium may be associated with the fine arts, but I discuss it here as a research tool for design, geography and sociology to analyse the social and spatial qualities of cities. I understand photography in this text as an embodied performed research practice, and by attempting to unravel some of the complexities involved in the doings of photography in research, I contribute to this special issue's debate on processes and ways of making across design and art history.

## Sociological seeing

Taking photographs can be part of various research methods for social scientists, and the images made in research encounters can do different sorts of work in producing knowledge. Cultural geographer Gillian Rose has written extensively on visual research methods and her book *Visual Methodologies* (Rose, 2016) is a key reference for scholars in the social sciences. In her discussion on making photographs as part of a research project, Rose suggests that photo-essays may aim to be more analytical or evocative or both, and she recommends that researchers carefully think through the relations between photographs and text. In terms of analytic uses of photo-documentation, Rose foregrounds Suchar's shooting script approach as a systematic way to take photographs in order to provide data for analysis, and highlights its potential for the study of relations between social processes and their visual appearances (Rose, 2016, pp.310–14).

To situate Suchar's shooting script approach further, sociologists Caroline Knowles and Paul Sweetman argue in their edited volume *Picturing the Social Landscape* that Suchar's photographic inventory of gentrification in Amsterdam and Chicago in that same volume (Suchar 2004) offers 'a visual survey and documentation of macro-processes that display the texture of urban social transformation' (Knowles and Sweetman, 2004, p.11). Hence, the shooting scripts' potential, as pointed out by Rose, Knowles and Sweetman, to work with images to systematically analyse urban social transformations made it a relevant research tool for my study into the boundary-making practices of urban gardeners. In this paper, then, the series of images of the physical manifestations of allotment, community and guerrilla garden boundaries in conjunction with their captions form an analytical photo-essay that helps the researcher to see patterns on the ground.

As in every research project the formulation and reworking of key research questions are central to a rigorous research process and Suchar links this explicitly to the practice of photography as part of a research project. The 'shooting script' contains a set of research questions – informed by a theoretical discussion – that shapes and guides the photography in the field; in my research this is related to looking at the boundaries of urban gardens. The shooting script outlines what the researcher is interested in and how s/he is going to document and analyse the visual data. Suchar argues that shooting scripts work as 'guides for photographic and sociological seeing' (1997, p.35). This method advises that the researcher first reads relevant literatures, thinks about possible research themes, and

writes down the kind of images he/she is collecting and how these might contribute to the conceptual discussion. Guided by this initial shooting script based on 'hunches and theories' the researcher then goes into the field to make photos. Once the first sets of images are made and developed, the researcher sits down and goes through the contact sheets, looking at the images, annotating their meaning for the research questions (logging procedure) and, through the open coding process, identifies themes that enable better understanding of the phenomena under scrutiny. Open coding refers to the initial phase of attaching labels, for example 'codes', to passages of text or particular photos to make sense of the data collected so far and to draw relations to the conceptual framework.

The dynamic and iterative research process that Suchar outlines is informed by 'Grounded Theory', an approach from sociology that aims to build theory from data, which involves a similar cycle of theoretical discussions, data collection, open coding, focused coding, and memo writing. It was introduced by Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss (Glaser and Strauss, 1967) and further developed by Strauss and Juliet Corbin in *Basics of Qualitative Research* (Corbin and Strauss, 2008). Instead of developing a refined understanding of symbolic interactions through text, Suchar applies this methodology to images. Throughout the process questions are reformulated, and research sites are revisited for additional photo series (see Figure 6.1 and Figure 6.2). Following the open coding, Suchar suggests

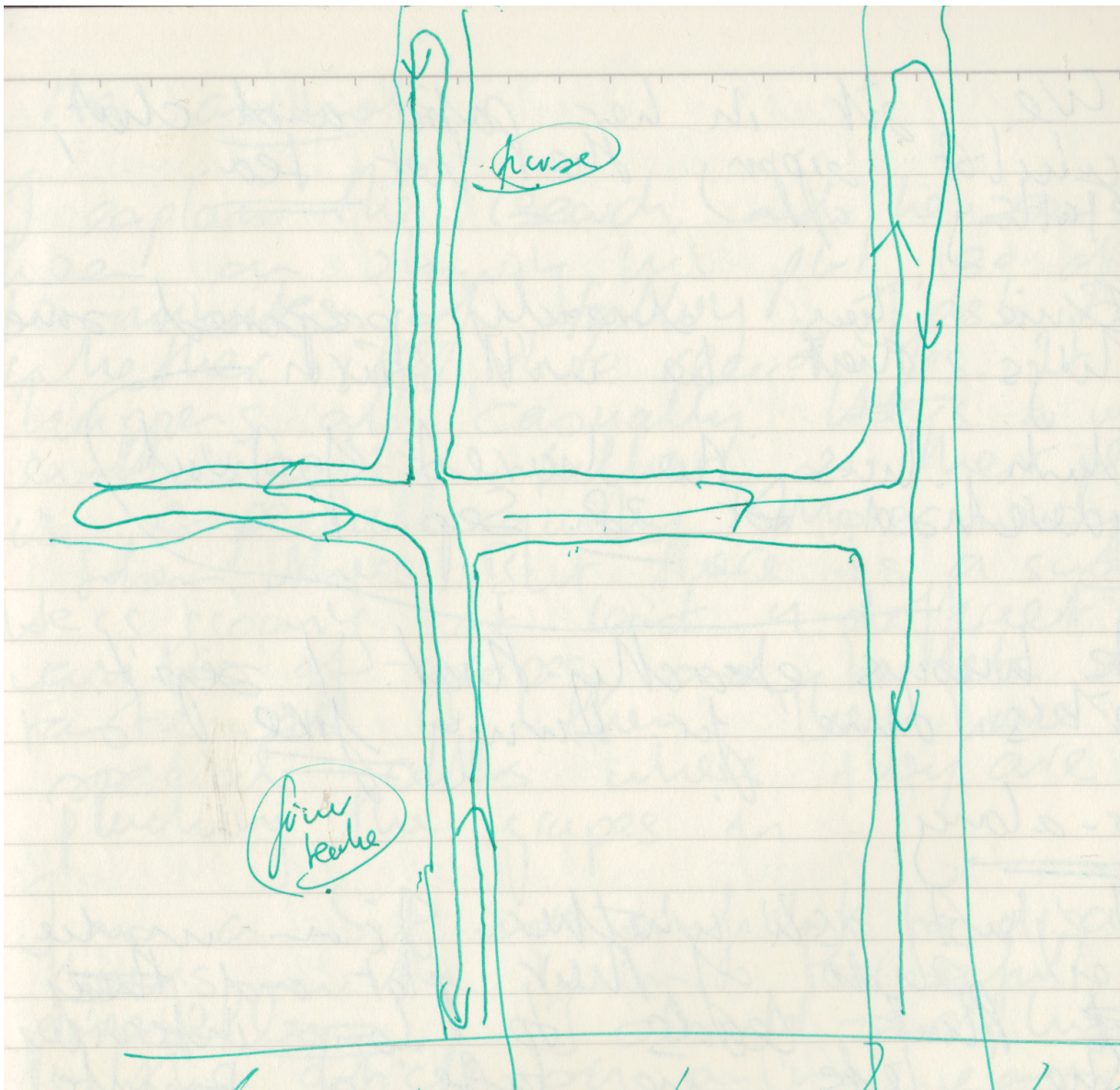


Figure 6.1: Extract from notebook – 'I walked like this...', 2014, paper. (Image credit: Jan van Duppen). Next to this quickly drawn map from the allotment site, I wrote in my fieldnotes: "I've tried to do the shooting script today. I especially put a different lens on last night, so that I would be able to capture more [of the allotment plot] on the image, as it is a wide-angle lens. I need less distance to the 'object'. It's a different experience photographing every third border between the plots. Seeing the rich diversity. I walked like this: ..." This short extract and map illustrate the iterative process of formulating the shooting script, revisiting the fieldwork site, and the choice for particular technologies that might help best to address the research question. This walk resulted in a photo-series of 77 images like the three displayed in Figure 6.2.



Figure 6.2 a–c: *Photo-series Allotment Plot Boundaries*, 2014, digital image. (Photo: Jan van Duppen). This is a selection of three images from a photo-series consisting of 77 images of allotment plot boundaries. Following an initial shooting script at the allotment site, I took a photo of every third plot I passed by whilst walking past all the allotment plots at the site (see map Figure 6.1). I stood on the main path and focused the camera on the right-hand side of the plot. I thereby also captured the neighbouring plot, the path in between the plots and how the border of the main plot runs down to the end. Each single image shows the ‘front’ and ‘side’ of the plot. This produced a series of images that reveal the great diversity of how allotment gardeners mark the borders of their plots. The top image shows how an allotment holder used HERAS fencing to demarcate the boundary of a plot, whilst also repurposing the fence into a structure supporting the growth of their crops. The middle image shows the use of wooden frames for creating a border, and on the right side a container is created out of pallets which holds together a compost heap. On top of the compost, pumpkins can be seen that will be submitted to the allotment community pumpkin growing competition. The bottom image depicts a plot holder that chooses not to make use of any sort of fencing between plots; next to the water basin they created a small DIY structure out of pallets and an old door that holds together a compost heap.





Figure 6.3: Focused coding on contact sheet, 2015, paper, A4. (Image credit: Jan van Duppen).

This A4 sheet provides a snapshot of the focused coding process. From top to bottom, the case studies are allotment, community and guerrilla gardens. This contact sheet has been put together after an initial open coding process, and it helped to detect patterns within case studies and compare across the three gardening practices. The handwritten annotations discuss the different material cultures that can be read from the images, as well as adding information from interviews and participant observation on the spatial negotiations captured in the images.

a phase of focused coding, which involves making connections between the earlier identified categories (see Figure 6.3).

Sociological seeing, according to Suchar, is not solely a visual notion, not something one can just comprehend by perception, but rather an iterative, structured research process that involves an ongoing interaction with the data generated and theories consulted. He urges researchers not to consider it as a 'latent quality', as it requires a 'rigorous application of methodology and the systematic interaction of the analyst with the data' (Suchar, 1997, p.35). Figures 6.1 to 6.3 provide snapshots into such a process. The combined application of shooting scripts and grounded theory allows the researcher to see *sociologically*, it encompasses 'the ability to reveal patterns, features or details in a research setting or topic – such aspects of material culture, subjects' characteristics or behavior, etc. – that are not readily apparent in less acute observations of that reality.' (p.35).

Although I find the shooting script approach very productive for detecting patterns in visual data and developing concepts through analysis, there is a danger that the apparent implicated primacy of the visual in sociological seeing might lead to the misinterpretation that objects of study can be fully knowable or fully captured. This is not to suggest that Suchar argues that the 'truth' is out there waiting to be uncovered by the rigorous researcher. On the contrary, he does hint at knowledge being constructed through a systematic iterative process of data gathering, theory and analysis. However, a more robust approach to the construction of knowledge is offered by Rose who suggests that images are 'prisms that refract what can be seen in quite particular ways', rather than 'transparent windows that allow us to peer into places we would never otherwise see' (Rose, 2008, p.151). Invoking Rose, therefore, I have used the images in this paper to refracture how we might see allotment, community and guerrilla gardens.

At the start of his paper on grounding visual sociology research in shooting scripts, Suchar argues that completed research projects involving photography are often 'presented with scant mention of how such methods were arrived at' (Suchar, 1997, p.33). In his writing he attempts to demystify this and spells out very clearly how he has analysed visual material as part of his study. However, he does not seem to critically reflect on his own role in shaping the research data and results.

As researchers we bring our own preconceptions into a research project. During the research process slippages occur and accidents happen despite our best

efforts to structure our projects coherently. Sociologist John Law writes about how scientists' attempts to clarify concepts that are complex, diffuse and messy 'simply increases the mess' (Law, 2004, p.2). He argues that we should understand methods as 'performative' and productive of realities (p.143).

From this perspective, research methods such as ethnography and photography can be thought of as performed embodied practices of interpretation and translation. Knowledge is produced, transformed, rewritten, and altered by the analytical process of writing field notes and memos, coding images and reading theory.

Thus, instead of asserting that research methodologies produce some sort of objective knowledge isolated from systems of power and history, my work is aligned with anthropology and feminist scholars who argue that knowledge is partial and situated (Haraway, 1991). The anthropologist James Clifford puts it as follows: 'power and history work through them [ethnographic texts], in ways their authors cannot fully control'. He goes on to say, 'ethnographic truths are thus inherently *partial* – committed and incomplete' (Clifford, 2010, p.7). In her discussion of situated knowledges, positionality and self-reflexivity, Rose suggests that we 'inscribe into our research practices some absences and fallibilities while recognizing that the significance of this does not rest entirely in our own hands' (Rose, 1997, p.319). I recognise this concern for reflecting on and writing about the absences and fallibilities created by our research practices in the work of media studies scholar Karin Becker (2000, pp.117–19). Her study of an allotment garden in Sweden not only interrogates the social and spatial practices that produce a distinctive, multi-layered landscape of cultivation, but also discusses the contradictions and interrelations between her own photographic practice, academic journal editors' decisions, and culturally dominant visual representations of allotment sites as spaces of ethnic diversity in Sweden.

In light of my discussion on sociological seeing I suggest that a critical application of the shooting script approach requires an iterative reflective research process that acknowledges the partiality and situatedness of the knowledge produced.

### Looking at boundaries

Suchar's shooting script methodology provided me with a productive departure point for visually interrogating the spatial demarcations of gardens and the ways they are situated in the city. This approach helped me to better understand how and who constructs and



Figures 6.4 a–b: *Photo-series Community Garden Outer Boundaries*, 2013, digital image. (Photo: Jan van Duppen). This photo-series was made at the beginning of the fieldwork and was driven by the ‘shooting script’ to record the outer boundaries of the urban gardens. The top image depicts one of the sides of the community garden site and is taken from the parking lot that borders the garden. The second image shows the ‘back’ of the garden. This gate is only used by the garden managers for occasional deliveries of compost, and the public cannot enter the garden from this site. It is impossible to walk all around the outer edges of the community garden as it borders former warehouses, a construction site, and private parking lots. These images evidence that the garden cannot be easily ‘seen’ from the outside, and despite being located in the midst of a busy district in East London, its site is ‘marginal’, echoing the observations of Stevens (2007, p. 114) that marginal places in the city offer opportunities for play. In fact, the community garden used to be a small piece of wasteland.



Figures 6.5 a–b: *Photo-series Community Garden Inner Boundaries*, 2014, digital image. (Photo: Jan van Duppen). These are two snapshots of a typical Saturday afternoon inside the community garden. The top image represents a garden boundary practice that I also observed at allotment gardens: the use of fences and wires to define an inside and outside and to discipline users of the space. Here, garden volunteers are spanning a thread between poles installed around a new area of plants, whilst garden visitors pass by. The wires are intended to prevent visitors from trampling on the plants. Another manifestation of the minutiae of spatial negotiations within the community garden between volunteers and visitors can be seen in the bottom image, as a volunteer holding a red plastic trunk navigates her way through a hive of activity of visitors socialising and children playing. The volunteer is heading towards the ‘back’ of the garden to collect compost from the compost heap, which is hidden from view by the fully-grown edges of the garden which mainly consists of honeysuckle bushes. The garden managers deliberately refrained from cutting back these bushes in order to create the feel of a secluded green space; this created an area at the back that is less inviting for visitors, for storage that allows for storage space. Again, this image represents a pattern I identify across gardening practices, namely the multiple ways in which plants become actants in creating difference. Gardeners pick and cultivate particular plant species to highlight a boundary between ‘their’ garden and an ‘other’ space.

maintains these boundaries. The formulation of my 'shooting script' was informed by the wider research project's concern with the relations between play and work as enacted in urban gardening practices. Furthermore, the shooting script was embedded in an ethnographic approach that combined photography with participant observations, and interviews. The research tried to reveal the socialities created, values attributed, and spatialities and temporalities produced by allotment, community and guerrilla gardens in cities.

The project reconceptualises urban garden sites as playgrounds *and* places of work and discusses the tensions and contradictions that this renewed understanding brings up. This responds to cultural historian Johan Huizinga, whose influential publication *Homo Ludens*, originally published in 1938, envisioned playgrounds as bounded spaces, set apart from everyday life. He described the distinct qualities of playgrounds using spatial terms such as 'hedged round' 'isolated' and 'hallowed' (Huizinga, 1971, p.10). Almost seventy years later, urban designer Quentin Stevens has developed this aspect of Huizinga's thesis in his book *The Ludic City* (2007), in which Stevens speaks of the importance of boundaries, edges, and marginal secluded sites for play to occur in the city (Stevens, 2007, p.114). Both these authors draw attention to practices of play at the edge zones in cities and encourage sensitivity to the spatial and temporal boundaries of playgrounds. Reflecting these approaches, my ethnographic study of allotment, community and guerrilla gardens in London tried to unpack the spatial boundaries of these sites. The shooting script provided one of the ways to focus in on the construction of the gardens' edges.

Inspired by Suchar's discussion on combining the shooting script and grounded theory, I repeatedly refined my research questions and rewrote my shooting script during the process of data gathering and analysis. The key question I started off with was: 'If boundaries form such an important aspect of the conceptualisation and spatial imagination of the garden and the playground, how does this manifest visually?' (see Figure 6.4). Through repeated field visits, I refined this question further: 'How are borders being made and remade at allotment, community and guerrilla gardens?' to emphasise more clearly the ongoing practices of shaping the gardens' edges. Gradually, I also started to pay more attention in particular to the various demarcations and negotiations within gardens.

Instead of thinking through the outer physical borders of the whole site, I also became interested in the negotiations between allotment gardeners, between community gardener volunteers and visitors (see Figure 6.5), and between guerrilla gardeners and

passers-by. This process of refinement brought to the fore the hive of activity in multiple edge zones. It also made visible diverse material cultures, and highlighted questions of ownership, entitlement and management of the respective garden spaces, and the notion of the individual versus the collective. In the process of making photos-series and iterative attempts at coding and writing memos, I began to understand that these garden boundaries were not impermeable and fixed, but rather porous and always in the process of being made.

### **Moving from analogue to digital photography**

The research tools that we choose and the ways in which we use them play a part in shaping our research outcomes, and for this particular research project I found digital photography the most appropriate technology to use, because of its functionalities and affordability. Suchar, and other early visual sociologists, worked with analogue photography, and my move from analogue to digital photography has had several implications for the application of the shooting script approach. First of all, in an analogue 'world', rolls of film introduce a particular limit to the number of images that can be taken with each film roll, and as research budgets are often constrained for small scale ethnographic studies, purchasing and developing large amounts of film rolls is often not an option. By contrast, the sets of images produced by digital cameras are not limited by the length of the film roll (approximately 36 photos), but rather by the size of the SD-card inside the body of the camera (depending on its settings 1000+ photos). An example of analogue use is Karin Becker's six-year study of an allotment site in Sweden, which produced 900 colour slides and 30 film rolls (Becker, 2000, p.101). By comparison, for this research project, I produced about 3338 images in a two-year fieldwork period. In other words, one year of fieldwork with analogue photography generated approximately 330 images, while digital photography resulted in 1669 images, the latter being about five times as much as the former. Differences in materials and technologies present different challenges. A digital camera, which can produce multiple images, allows the researcher to capture multiple perspectives of the object under investigation; yet it also means there is a much larger data set to analyse. It becomes increasingly important to define the parameters of the visual investigation, in order to maintain a rigorous analytical process. This raised new questions for my research: how much time should I spend analysing each individual image? How should I store and categorise these images?

Following on from these questions, another difference between analogue and digital photography comes to the fore, as ‘contact sheets’ were a common way of getting an overview of the images made and offered a standardised means of sorting and archiving images. The shooting script approach relies heavily on these contact sheets, which enable one to view a series of images in a single moment and to glide one’s fingers over the individual images. It also allows for annotations to be made in the margins. For Suchar (1997), contact sheets were part of the logging procedure, open coding, and the writing of memos. The contact sheets take on a similar importance in Becker’s (2000, p.108) earlier mentioned visual study of a Swedish allotment, where she describes how she and her research partner would use the contact sheets to add detail and comments to their shared field notes. To be clear, Becker’s research practice was not informed by Suchar’s shooting script approach, but the study is mentioned here as it was also conducted with analogue photo cameras and employed contact sheets. With regard to my study, it must also be noted that instead of film and print contact sheet, I initially used virtual contact sheets by means of Adobe Bridge software (see Figure 6.6). The digital interface could be described as an ever changeable ‘contact sheet’, as it can be altered with just

a few mouse clicks. It allows for layering, zooming in and out, assembling and re-assembling, and therefore for multiple opportunities to compare data, and in this study, this was useful for the comparison between different gardening practices (allotment, community and guerrilla).

The software package also facilitates a smooth and expansive open coding process, as individual files can be tagged and untagged with multiple labels. This allowed me to go through the data set several times at different points of the research process and assign labels to images, such as ‘traces of work’, ‘encounters’, ‘inner boundaries’, ‘outer boundaries’ and ‘sage cutting’. It was then easy to regroup these and make new temporary contact sheets, to select only the images labelled ‘inner boundaries’, for example (as displayed in Figure 6.6). The screen interface thus facilitated comparisons across the whole data set, as well as within smaller coded segments. Options to zoom in and out, scroll through, and linger on individual images enhanced the process of putting together this photo-essay in productive and creative ways. In comparison to analogue photography, digital thus offers greater functionality and flexibility and software packages such as Adobe Bridge provide multiple ways of processing and analysing visual data. Different tools and

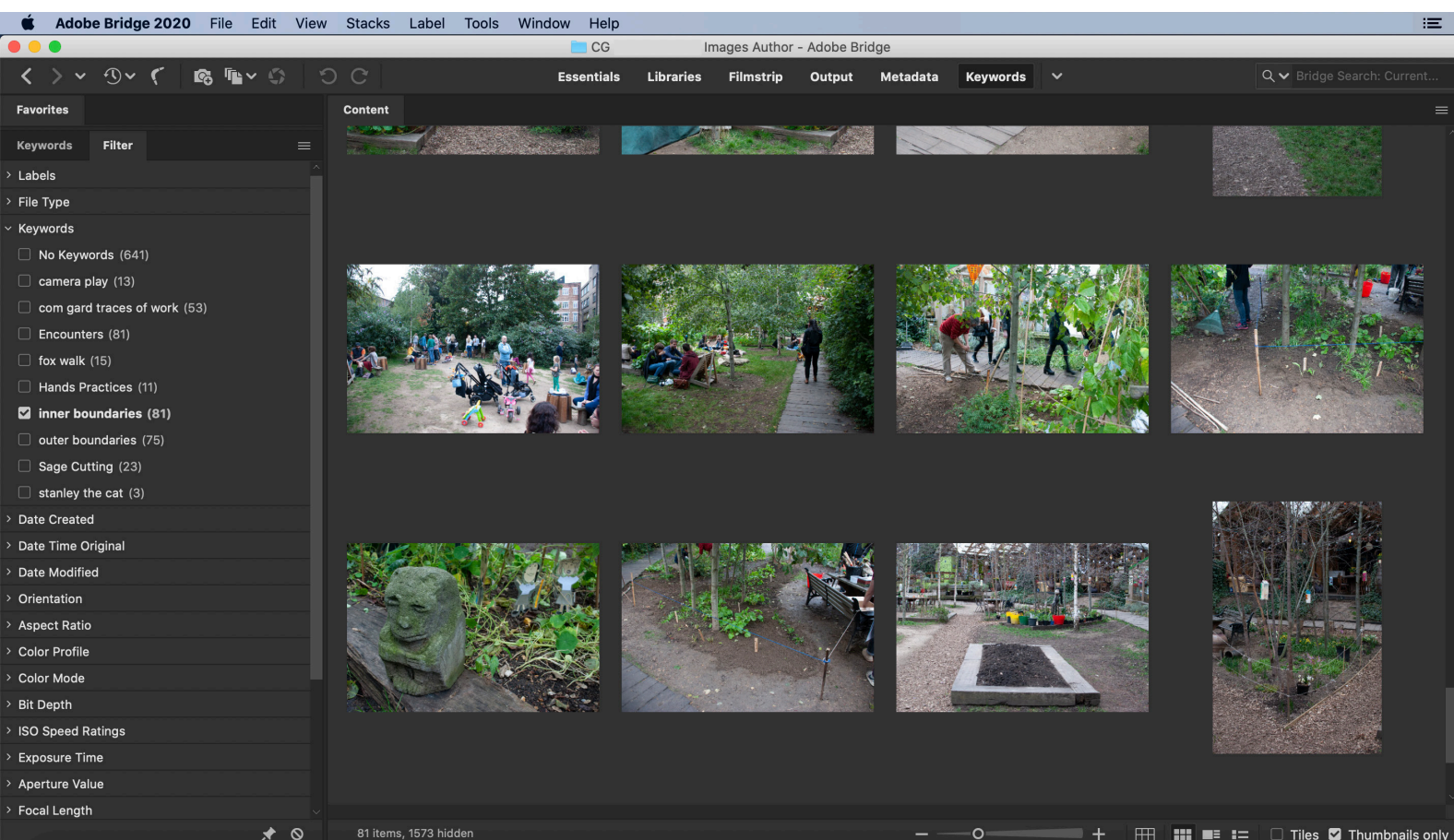


Figure 6.6: Screenshot of the Adobe® Bridge software – Community Garden Images tagged ‘inner boundaries’, 2020, digital image. (Adobe product screenshot(s) reprinted with permission from Adobe)

technologies mediate the ways in which researchers engage with their data; large data sets present particular challenges to researchers.

However, I found that it was more helpful for the *thinking* process to annotate print outs by hand. Adobe Bridge software does not have the functionality to add extensive memos to images, and sometimes the immediacy and embodiment of writing notes by hand is more productive. Thus, as first step, I would tag images in an open coding process in the software package, and from these I would generate contact sheets of these tagged images to facilitate further focused coding, as can be seen in Figure 6.3. In other words, I navigated between virtual and material technologies, deploying paper or digital formats depending on what suited a particular part of the process best.

Thirdly, an important difference between the use of analogue and digital photography in ethnographic studies is digital photography's ability to reveal immediately to research participants the images one has taken. This ability to share in-situ the kinds of photos one is taking can help to build trust between researcher and participants. Furthermore, pictures can be shared more easily with participants. During my fieldwork, I have had multiple instances of such sharing. This is markedly different to developing film and printing photos after the event, and then returning to the field to share these images. Hence, the tools of analysis deployed by the researcher – their functionalities and materialities – also influence research outcomes.

### Going off script

Contrary to my personal experience of doing fieldwork with a photo camera, Suchar's writings on the shooting script lacks an explicit discussion of chance discoveries and the contingencies involved in the research process. Although Suchar underscores the 'flexible character of the shooting script' and sees 'the entire photographic field process as an interactive and conceptually-based enterprise' (Suchar, 1997, p.40), he does not go into great detail. Therefore, I invoke the anthropologist Michael Taussig's book *I Swear I Saw This*, in which the author reflects on drawings in fieldwork notebooks and discusses 'the play of chance in the dialectic of order and disorder' in scrapbooks and notebooks (Taussig, 2011, p.56). He continues by saying:

In my own work, perhaps better thought of as my own life, I can think of discoveries like this that came about through chance. I think of the hard work I have done and even more of all the waiting and boredom as not exactly irrelevant but as nothing more than a necessary prelude

for chance to show its hand. The way I see it, a plan of research is little more than an excuse for the real thing to come along, in much the same way as the anthropologist Vincent Turner<sup>1</sup> [sic] described the value of writing down kinship diagrams as largely an excuse to stop falling asleep on the job and provide a situation in which the real stuff got a chance to emerge.

(Taussig, 2011, p.59)

Bringing the camera to the 'field' and working with the shooting script can produce what Taussig describes as a 'necessary prelude for chance to show its hand'. Rather than applying a rigid interpretation to the notion of 'script' I propose instead to regard it as an 'excuse' to spend time at a fieldwork site and thereby create opportunities to have one's presumptions and preconceptions challenged by encounters with research participants.

In my notebook I have made countless records of how I bumped into allotment gardeners while walking around taking pictures. My photographic practice prompted these gardeners to start a conversation about their allotment plots and in this process I gained valuable new insights and made connections for future interviews. Looking back to Figure 6.1, the lines drawn on the map actually give a false impression of a continuous process of taking pictures; the lines should in fact be interrupted and blurry to better represent the multiple encounters I had with allotment gardeners along the way. The hand-drawn map *accidentally* evidences the dialectic of order and disorder in ethnographic research that Taussig writes about. On the one hand, the map reflects my drive to *order* information, to document exactly how I had been walking around the allotment site. In this little clumsy map drawn in my notebook I tried to be as precise and complete as possible about how I implemented the shooting script. On the other hand, the map does not indicate the multiple encounters I had whilst being in the field – it misses out the *disorder* involved in fieldwork.

Another instance of chance discovery within fieldwork occurred during a guerrilla gardening dig I joined on an autumn Sunday afternoon in South London. Previously, I had been observing and thinking about the construction of spatial boundaries of urban gardens in terms of the placement of objects or signs to demarcate an inside and outside – see for instance the fences between allotment garden plots depicted in Figure 6.2 and the thread spun at the community garden between the path and a freshly planted area

<sup>1</sup> The end notes refer to 'Vincent Crapanzano' rather than 'Vincent Turner', essay 'At the Heart of the Discipline'.



Figure 6.7 a–b: *Photo-series Guerrilla Gardening*, 2014, digital image. (Photo: Jan van Duppen). The top image depicts a row of three raised planters neglected by the local council but looked after by guerrilla gardeners in South London near a busy bus stop. The bottom image shows the rubbish I collected with a guerrilla gardener during an autumn afternoon. On the left is a rubbish bin filled to the brim with litter that we picked up from the three raised planters. On the right a large paper bag can be seen stuffed with garden waste. This recycling bag was brought by the guerrilla gardener and would be collected by the local council.

in Figure 6.5. On this afternoon, however, I was taken by surprise as I found myself helping the guerrilla gardener collect rubbish from a set of three raised planters near a bus stop in South London (see Figure 6.7). We spent at least half the time of the guerrilla garden dig picking up beer and soda cans, bags of crisps, half eaten chicken legs, plastic forks, cigarette lighters and other litter. Once that task was finished, we did some weeding, planted some seedlings and pulled the dead leaves off the irises. This pattern repeated itself in other guerrilla digs I joined, and it made me rethink gardening as a practice in the city. In contrast to my earlier observations at the allotment and community garden regarding the placement of objects and signs, guerrilla gardeners' claims on urban space and the delineation of the boundaries of a guerrilla garden intervention were co-constituted through the removal of objects. Their cultivation practices were thus bound up with the ordering of objects, the collection of litter, an active process of defining what they perceived to be *in* and *out* of the guerrilla garden patch – reminiscent of Mary Douglas' discussion on dirt as 'matter out of place' (James, 1952, p. 129 in Douglas, 2001, p. 165). If I had not conducted participant observations and solely focused on taking pictures, I would not have been able to gain these new insights. It was only because I had put my photo camera aside and joined in the guerrilla gardening practice, that I could start to rethink the construction of garden boundaries. This vignette further exemplifies Taussig's comments about the importance of the accidental and contingent in fieldwork, which encouraged me to go beyond Suchar's shooting script, to be ready to go *off* script.

The vignettes explored in this paper also speak to the notion of presences and absences produced in fieldwork encounters, analysis and writing. First, whilst I observed that my presence with a photo camera at the allotment site instigated multiple encounters with allotment gardeners, I cannot know to what extent I scared people away due to my investigative presence with a camera. It is much harder to account for events that did not unfold in the 'field', which may have been caused by particular gestures made and or technologies used. Secondly, my unplanned temporary abandonment of the camera made it possible to render visible the significance that rubbish collection had for the claim on and cultivation of a guerrilla garden. What falls in and out of the frame then, cannot be fully controlled by the researcher; however, we can acknowledge these limitations, think *beyond* the shooting script, and develop a sensitivity towards the absences and presences created by our work.

## Seeing patterns on the ground

Working critically with Suchar's shooting script approach has helped me to see the distinctive patterns on the ground made and remade by the urban gardeners that I studied in London – as further evidenced in Figures 6.8 to 6.11. What is more, these figures demonstrate the importance of embedding visual methodologies in a wider web of research methods, in this case participant observations and interviews. The triangulation between images, fieldnotes, and interview transcripts enabled me to see distinct patterns on the ground, helped me to tease out the tensions between themes and concepts, and enrich the account of allotment, community and guerrilla gardeners. The images played a pivotal part in this process of triangulation; they did not function as mere illustration of the arguments presented here but were constitutive of it.

Geographer Russell Hitchings has argued that material culture studies have often focused on inert and durable objects, thereby rendering invisible the lively material cultures of gardening (Hitchings, 2006). In his study of private gardens he highlighted the 'creativity' that gardeners enacted in working with the different agencies in the garden; in the delicate interplay between gardeners and the plants. As Suchar suggested (1997, p.35), shooting scripts can be vehicles to study the characteristics of material cultures – he uses the example of his own study of gentrification by photographing changes in housing façades. My research develops Suchar's understanding of the suitability of photography for the study of material culture further by demonstrating the effectiveness of photography for studying the *lively* material cultures of public gardens. I suggest that the shaping of the garden – the 'design' of the garden – involves a continuous process of work and responsiveness to changing conditions. Gardeners improvise, re-use and appropriate materials, cultivate plant growth in-situ, and are informed by embodied knowledge, trial and error, rather than executing blueprints.

Instead of seeing garden spaces as fixed cultural representations, I work with geographer Steve Hinchcliffe's idea of gardens as embodied practiced landscapes (Hinchcliffe, 2002). Moreover, these lively landscapes of doing are, as feminist geographer Robyn Longhurst suggests, 'imbued with multiple, ambiguous and paradoxical meanings' (Longhurst, 2006, p.582). The images presented in this text aim to bring out the distinctive patterning of the ground of allotment, community and guerrilla gardener. I also take inspiration from the work of cultural geographer David Crouch, who has written extensively on allotment landscapes

and cultures (Crouch and Ward, 1997, Crouch, 2003). In a recent publication on gardening, he observed:

In its practice of gender, ethnicity, class, or even age gardening can render distinctive patterning of the ground, shapes in the vegetation, and in the structures used in the process

(Crouch, 2020, p.255).

This distinctiveness in the patterning of the ground – their ambiguities and tensions – come to the fore in Figure 6.8–6.11: in guerrilla gardener Lisa’s inscription of difference made by her choice of plants (Figure 6.8); in allotment gardener Antonio’s artichoke plants’ disruptive co-habitation with foxes (Figure 6.9); in the aesthetic conflict around the re-use of bath tubs at the allotment site (Figure 6.10); and lastly by the signs

drawn by local school children to guard ‘their’ bit of the community garden from unconsidered garden visitors (Figure 6.11). Similar to Becker’s findings at an allotment site in Sweden, fences and borders ‘often stood for aesthetic conflicts amongst the gardeners’ (Becker, 2000, p.113), but I would like to add that these boundary-making practices also reflect a creative process. Unlike popular imaginations of the garden as a space of seclusion, peace and tranquillity, garden spaces can be thought of as sites of contestation and creativity. This photo-series supports the argument that allotment, community and guerrilla gardens are spaces made through the ongoing social and spatial negotiations between gardeners, plants, animals and its urban surroundings – a process that I trace in the multiple boundary-making practices discussed here.



Figure 6.8: Guerrilla Garden South London: Iris plants and Council Planting, 2014, digital image. (Photo: Jan van Duppen). Choosing and cultivating particular plant species in order to create difference, to highlight a boundary, and to claim a space, is also practiced by the guerrilla gardeners that I researched. In several instances, guerrilla gardeners ‘took over’ or simply started to cultivate neglected council planters along the road and in neighbourhoods. This image shows a particular guerrilla intervention in South London (same location as in Figure 6.7). During an interview, guerrilla gardener Lisa, who tends these raised beds, shared her views on her gardening practice and the ways others respond to it: *‘And a lot of people have remarked on the difference between the constrained old fashioned council planting which neighbours [compared to] what I have done. Which is this [the council planting] traditional bedding plants, that have been bred for weather-resistance and long-lasting colour, but no nectar at all. Again, you might as well have plastic flowers. It’s really annoying! (both laugh) It’s also annoying that they are still in flower and, you know, red or purple. And my plants have dried out. But mine are good for the environment, theirs are useless (laughs). Yes, it does look fantastic!’*. This extract reveals that Lisa’s guerrilla gardening practice is informed by her concern for aesthetics and the environment in urban spaces. In this particular instance, Lisa has planted the species ‘Iris actress’, which is known for attracting bees (see foreground of the image) in a raised bed that contains the traditional council bedding plant (see background image), which articulates difference across the planter. According to Lisa this has been noticed by several people passing by.



Figure 6.9: *Allotment Plot Boundary – Row of Artichoke Plants*, 2014, digital image. (Photo: Jan van Duppen). Across all three case studies gardeners not only demarcated ‘their’ garden spaces through the careful placement of artefacts but also by cultivating particular plants in specific locations. The latter is exemplified in this image, which shows a neatly planted row of artichoke plants along the edge of an allotment plot. The artichoke plants are grown to be harvested, yet their linear pattern also produces a ‘green’ boundary between two allotment plots. This not only constitutes a visual distinction but also a very tactile one, as its dangling prickly leaves encroach onto the path. While I was taking pictures, I bumped into allotment gardener Antonio, and we chatted about the artichokes, red and white onions, Borlotti beans, and potatoes he is growing. He also showed me some artichoke plants that were trampled upon by foxes. Next to his plot, situated below the ground just outside the allotment site, two fox families are living. The young cubs had been playing with plastic bags and had run amok across his artichoke plants, leaving behind broken stems and leaves. Antonio looked at me with amusement and said, ‘*you can’t do nothing about the animals*’. Whilst his fellow allotment gardeners respected the boundaries of his plot, these boundaries were not registered by the local foxes.



Figure 6.10: *Allotment Plot Boundary – Make-Shift Structures*, 2014, digital image. (Photo: Jan van Duppen). This image represents a make-shift material culture, a creative ad-hoc repurposing of waste materials that I identified specifically at the allotment site. My analysis of the visual material suggests that not only are pallets re-used by gardeners (see Figure 6.2), but all sorts of material like plastic and glass bottles, cd's, bathtubs, shopping baskets (plastic and metal), piles of paper brochures, washing machines, stoves, fruit baskets, pots and pans, carpets and tapestry. There is a creativity involved in the repurposing of these waste materials. What can be seen at the allotment site are not so much pre-given designs, or finished products, but rather ad-hoc structures made from found and scavenged materials that have functional purposes in gardening practices. More often than not, these improvisations with and repurposing of waste material become distinctive forms of 'self-expression' (Crouch, 2020, p.256). In this particular case, an allotment gardener has repurposed disposed bath tubes as water reservoirs. At the same time as collecting rainwater for watering, the tubs reinforce the boundary between two plots as they are placed along the edges of the plot. This kind of re-purposing of skip materials is not appreciated by all allotment gardeners, as the following extract from a conversation with Paul the allotment site secretary shows: 'I can understand why people want baths on their plots to collect water. But after a while, they just start to collect rubbish. They also look a bit of an eyesore to me. I mean a "nice" plastic bath ... I am into aesthetics as well as practicality'. Paul's comment reveals tensions amongst allotment gardens about what an allotment should look like, and it confirms that the patterns on the ground cannot be solely understood as traces of growing vegetables and fruits.



Figure 6.11: *Community Garden Boundary – Signs made by children, 2014, digital image.* (Photo: Jan van Duppen). One of the ways in which gardeners lay claims on their garden space was by using labels and signs. This tactic – to sometimes gently, sometimes explicitly, ‘own’ a space and delineate difference – is demonstrated by this image of hand-drawn figures at the community garden. The community garden collaborates with a local primary school. The group of pupils that comes in every week have made these small signs out of plasticized paper stuck onto stalks. They pierced these figures into the soil of the raised bed that *they* cultivate in the garden. These signs are staking a claim on the raised bed and they communicate to other visitors that they are gardening there. The colourful hand-drawn figures can be seen as mascots to prevent disruption of the cultivation, gentle claims on territory, whilst also encouraging a sense of ownership for the children who are tending the raised beds every week.

## Reflections

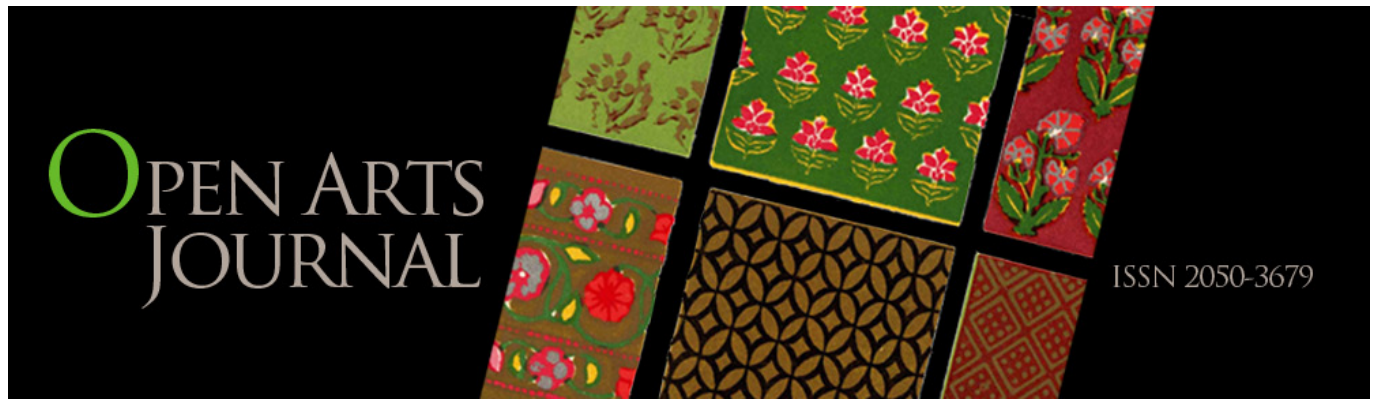
While reflecting on field-based photography I have tried to destabilise rigid and finite definitions and applications of the 'shooting script' and instead have rethought it as a process of performed, embodied practices of interpretation and translation which produces partial truths. Bringing a camera to the 'field' brings up all sorts of complicated questions and challenges for researchers both when 'out there', but perhaps even more so, later, at one's desk. The shooting script combined with grounded theory then provides productive ways of structuring the research process, and it encourages the researcher not simply to use images as illustrations: these visual fragments can become an integral part of formulating an argument and rethinking a concept. I have found this method useful for studying the boundary-making practices of allotment, community and guerrilla gardeners in London, and for reconceptualising gardens as spaces of creativity and contestation. I started to see the patterns on the ground, due to an iterative rigorous process of working with images made in the field in combination with participant observation and interviews.

This methodology seems very apt for the analysis of social and spatial negotiations that shape our urban surroundings and I think its application can be useful for social science and design researchers, especially when triangulated with other methodologies. For this process to be fruitful, though, we have to critically address our selection of particular technologies and the ways in which we use them, as this will co-constitute the research outcomes. This means thinking carefully about the affordances and limitations of the media and technology that we deploy, and inscribing into our publications reflections on for instance the choice for digital versus analogue photography, or the implications of the mixed use of software packages and paper notebooks during analysis. What is more, we must attempt to address the presences and absences produced by our fieldwork, analysis and writing, while being aware of our inability to fully account for it. Finally, using a script should not mean that we cannot divert from it, or become blind to what happens around us while in the field. Instead it can be a tool to spend time in the field, to appear 'busy' while waiting for an important lead to unfold. Nurturing an openness towards the accidental and the contingent during fieldwork is then as important as following the script.

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# COLONIAL HISTORIES, MUSEUM COLLECTIONS, FABLABS AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT: FLOWS OF PRACTICES, CULTURES AND PEOPLE – A ROUNDTABLE

Amy Jane Barnes, Kim Charnley, Renate Dohmen and Nicole Lotz

## Abstract

*This roundtable explores how issues of the local and the global register and are negotiated in the disciplines of art history and design with regard to two projects: Suits and Saris by Amy Jane Barnes (Art History) and La Campana Community FabLab by Nicole Lotz (Design). It seeks to probe what such a transdisciplinary discussion might entail and what the differences and similarities in our approaches might be. The discussion aimed at enriching our practice by stepping out of frames of professional reference and becoming familiar with perspectives and discourses from the related but also distant fields of art history and design respectively, which, moreover, at the Open University are embedded in the humanities and STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths) and therefore inhabit distinctly different vocational worlds.*

*It presents an experiment in bringing the chosen case studies into close proximity to see what would emerge, with process an important element of the discussion. The present format of the roundtable constitutes the culmination of a range of exchanges over a period of time that acquired its present shape as themes began to emerge around which conversations began to cluster. Topics broached include transnational histories and their negotiation, issues of power and representation, forms of community engagement and participation, glocal exchanges and practices of making, as well as methods and approaches.*

**Keywords:** British-Asian fashion, design thinking, colonialism, community engagement, design, art history, museums, FabLab, exhibitions, museum classifications, East-African Asians, co-design, cultural heritage, clothing, digital fabrication, participatory design, Mexico

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## Biographical notes

Amy Jane Barnes is an academic, curator and researcher with wide-reaching interests from Asian art and visual cultures, to museums, their collections and the stories they tell. She has an academic background in art history and museum studies, with a particular interest in how art and design from twentieth-century China is collected, interpreted and displayed in British museums. She has worked in museums as a curator and researcher, and taught art history and museum and heritage studies at several universities. Since November 2019, she has been Staff Tutor in Art History at The Open University. Amy is the author of a monograph, *Museum Representations of Maoist China* (Ashgate/Routledge, 2014), and several edited volumes, most recently *A Museum Studies Approach to Heritage* (Routledge, 2018).

Kim Charnley is Staff Tutor at The Open University. His research specialism is contemporary art with a focus on 'post-object', socially engaged art such as 'social practice', art activism and institutional critique. He is also interested in the intersection between art, design and craft and, especially, the way that avant-gardes have at different times conceived of themselves as collectives. He has published in journals including *Art and the Public Sphere*, *Art Journal*, *Historical Materialism* and *The Large Glass* and contributed an introduction to *Delirium and Resistance: Activist Art and the Crisis of Capitalism*, a collection of essays by the artist and theorist Gregory Sholette (Pluto, 2017). A monograph exploring the role of the collective in contemporary art's politics, titled *Sociopolitical Aesthetics: Art, Crisis, Neoliberalism*, will be published by Bloomsbury in early 2021.

Renate Dohmen is Lecturer in Art History at The Open University. She edited and co-authored *Art and Empire: British India* (Manchester University Press and The Open University, 2018). Her monograph, *Encounters beyond the Gallery: Relational Aesthetics and Cultural Difference* (I.B. Tauris, 2016), examines issues of contemporary art, relational aesthetics and Deleuze-Guattarean thought, anthropology and issues of cultural translation, challenging Eurocentric perceptions and modes of critical address of tribal and folk visual practices. She has published in journals including the *Journal of Design History*, *Ecumene: A Journal of Cultural Geographies*, *Victorian Literature and Culture* and *South Asian Popular Culture*, and is currently working on a book-length study of nineteenth-century exhibition culture in British India supported by the Leverhulme Trust that examines issues of amateurism, gender and race.

Nicole Lotz is Senior Lecturer in Design at The Open University. She is interested in design processes, collaboration and engagement across boundaries and at the margins. She has published multiple articles in journals across the disciplines of design, education and international development. Her work seeks to offer opportunities for disadvantaged communities to engage and persevere through social and communal learning, even in challenging situations. Nic's research is heavily influenced by her upbringing in East Germany, lived experiences in Hong Kong and the UK, and fieldwork carried out in South-East Asia, Africa and Latin America.

# COLONIAL HISTORIES, MUSEUM COLLECTIONS, FABLABS AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT: FLOWS OF PRACTICES, CULTURES AND PEOPLE – A ROUNDTABLE

**Amy Jane Barnes, Kim Charnley, Renate Dohmen and Nicole Lotz (The Open University)**

## Introduction

This essay uses the format of a roundtable discussion among colleagues at The Open University to engage with issues of the local and the global in the disciplines of art history and design. Key antecedents to this experiment were inter-departmental meetings between Art History and Design that were intermittently staged over a number of years and were envisaged as spaces of encounter and exchange. Attendance and participation at these meetings fluctuated, with colleagues giving short introductions to their research projects followed by a Q&A; a format that allowed for some lively debates but only occasionally progressed to more sustained levels of engagement. The enriching cross-disciplinary conversations between Nicole Lotz, one of the discussants of the roundtable, and myself as part of a PhD supervision team that met over several years, also need to be mentioned here, as they, in essence, gave rise to this roundtable.

Another point of reference is my background in studies related to design as part of my professional training and my engagement with practice-based students from fields ranging from fine art to design and architecture in my previous teaching role, which raised questions for me about bridging the divide between practice and theory as well as between art and design, especially with regard to pedagogy.

An aim of our discussion was to examine possible meeting points between the disciplines, to explore how our investments might differ and to consider the ways in which disciplinary perspectives shape our professional engagement. We also realised that such an interrogation required an experimental format to let cross-disciplinary conversations to unfold, and early

iterations of the discussion thus were free-flowing, rhizomatic affairs that allowed themes to emerge.

The discussion that is presented here thus entails a degree of 'shape shifting'. This includes my role, which morphed from moderator to participant over time, blurring the boundaries between an outsider/insider positionality, and the invitation that was extended to Kim Charnley from Art History to join the conversation at a later stage. From the outset, therefore, we sought not only to dialogue with one another, but also to engage self-reflexively with the question of what may be involved in creating such a conversation.

The roundtable's present format thus constitutes the culmination of wide-ranging exchanges that occurred over a period of time in a process characterised by rushes of exchange, pauses and hiatuses, as well as trajectories never brought to fruition. It entailed the working through of difficulties and the, at times, frustrating experience of disciplinary languages being at cross purpose, as well as sudden shifts when the conversation moved from a talking *about* to a conversing *with*, repeatedly cycling between such phases as the conversation evolved and moved on to other topics. The roundtable in its present format thus is the result of a messy, layered process and constitutes a 'fashioned object' much like the ones at the heart of *Suits and Saris* and *La Campana Community FabLab*, the two case studies that served as focal point for the conversation.

*Suits and Saris*, the project Amy Jane Barnes has chosen to discuss stems from her work as freelance researcher and curator for New Walk Museum & Art Gallery in Leicester, when she contributed to the development and execution of the exhibition (March–October 2012). It was part of the East Midlands' 'Dress the World' strand of the Cultural Olympiad and funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF). The exhibition explored the global, historical and contemporary interconnections and interactions between South Asia, East Africa and Britain in the development of British-Asian style and British fashion more widely. Nicole's project *La Campana Community FabLab* is ongoing and located in Monterrey, Mexico. The Higher Education Links programme by the British Council Mexico, which funded this project twice, aims at building international links between Mexican and British higher education institutions. She brings her design and distance-learning expertise to the project as international academic collaborator and adviser to the location team in Mexico.

R.D.

## Roles, situatedness and contexts of involvement

**Renate:** Can we begin with some scene setting about your projects, specifically on the nature of your roles in them?

**Amy:** By the time I joined the exhibition team for *Suits and Saris*, the project was well developed. Much, but not all, of the community participation work, focused around workshops, had already been undertaken by Malika Kraamer, then Curator of World Cultures at New Walk Museum and lead curator on this project, in conjunction with other members of the exhibition development team. Research in Nairobi with East-African Asian-owned sari shops and community groups had also been completed at this stage and, if I remember correctly, the key themes and interpretative approaches had already been set. My role was to help with researching the collections, undertake interviews with community curators and individuals in and around Leicester, write exhibition text and assist with the remaining participatory workshops.

**Nic:** My involvement with *La Campana Community FabLab* was initiated through an invitation by the University Tecnológico de Monterrey to facilitate design workshops in Monterrey, Mexico. In 2018, I gave a keynote and co-facilitated a week-long design-thinking workshop held at the University with academics, students and representatives from underserved communities in the north of Mexico. Community representatives ranged from the blind, visually impaired and ethnic minorities in Mexico to the socio-economically challenged La Campana-Altamira neighbourhood, which is located just opposite to the University campus. This unusual involvement of different stakeholders in an academic workshop was inspired by the requirement of the funder of the Higher Education Links workshop, the British Council Mexico, to disseminate the results of the workshop to a wide academic and non-academic audience. By involving them from the beginning of the project, we transformed dissemination to active participation. And, to explain, design thinking is a process that supports the understanding of problematic situations and stimulates creative responses to change them; a process that is most successful when those who experience these situations are actively involved. The participants of the workshop developed several proposals to address the challenges they experience as marginalised communities.

One proposal that emerged was a community FabLab (Fabrication Laboratories) for the La Campana-

Altamira (FabLab La Campana-Altamira, 2020). The concept was developed further by academics from Tecnológico de Monterrey and local governmental and nongovernmental organisations, who partnered with the academic institution, as Tecnológico de Monterrey has a special mission to support the neighbouring La Campana-Altamira neighbourhood.

A long process of negotiations with the community and writing funding applications took place, in which I was not involved. Once additional funding was secured to test the ideas that had been developed in practice, I was invited back to co-facilitate a further series of co-design workshops with members of the La Campana-Altamira community in 2019. I thus contributed to creating a local community FabLab by engaging the community in learning through making. Further local partners, FabLat Kids and Insitu Social, were tasked to implement the FabLab with the local High School CebTis 99 between 2019 and 2020.

**Renate:** Can you perhaps give us some context about FabLabs and what they entail?

**Nic:** In a nutshell, FabLabs are non-formal educational settings that provide expertise and equipment, such as computers, 3D printers and laser cutters, to enable local digitally enhanced making in collaboration with others. They aim to empower individuals to learn to create objects and devices in response to local or personal needs. FabLabs are closely aligned with the DIY movement, maker culture and the free- and open-source movement. They are interconnected globally and loosely associated with an umbrella organisation, the Fab Foundation. Currently, there are around 1750 local FabLabs that share ideas and solutions across their global networks (see, [FabLab.io](http://FabLab.io)).

## Aims

**Renate:** Thank you – your comments have been really helpful to give a sense of your roles in these projects and of their wider contexts. Could you now tell us about the overarching aims of your projects?

**Amy:** A key perspective that informed the project was that in the development and execution of *Suits and Saris*, we actively avoided presenting one, overarching narrative. We wanted to foreground (and represent) as many voices as possible – although the goal of creating a truly representative exhibition is, in practical terms, unlikely to be achievable when considering a community as diverse as Leicester's South Asian population.

But, with this in mind, our aim was to avoid presenting visitors to the exhibition with a 'neat'

story or chronology, or even a history of British-Asian fashion, as such. Instead, we wanted to actively engage them in thinking about issues around clothing and identity, and how they, the visitors, express their identities through what they wear, regardless of their ethnic background. So, while this was to be an exhibition largely focused on the sartorial choices made by British-Asian communities in Leicester, it aimed to have cross-community relevance. In Leicester, as is likely to be the case in other parts of the country with large South Asian diaspora communities, people from many different backgrounds will own at least one 'South Asian'-style garment, bought, for example, to attend a friend's or colleague's wedding. Many others may have incorporated South Asian influences into their daily dress without being aware of the origins of these, such as the trend for wearing dresses over leggings and trousers (inspired by *salwar kameez*).

Our goal was to cast light on these stylistic influences and foreground the shared experiences of people who have made the super-diverse city of Leicester their home. So, as a result of the stories that

emerged during the research phase, the exhibition and related programming was based around a series of unexpected and interrelated stories that emerged from the original research and the active participation of community curators. These themes explored transnational identities and multiple-migrant experiences as expressed through dress. Visitors to the exhibition encountered multiple voices, perspectives, experiences and interpretations of existing and newly acquired objects in the museum's collection. But we also wanted them to actively think about how they related to the objects on display and the themes explored within the exhibition.

I should also mention here that one part of the exhibition – *Building a Collection* – drew on an existing collection of clothing from Gujarat in India, which had originally been collected in the 1980s in order to represent the cultural heritage of East-African Asians in Leicester in the museum's collections (Fig. 7.1). The decision to collect this material was prompted by members of the community, who expressed concerns that young people were losing touch with their roots.



Figure 7.1 *Building a Collection, Suits and Saris*, New Walk Museum and Art Gallery, Leicester, 2012. (Photo: Amy Jane Barnes)

**Renate:** How about you, Nic? Could you tell us more about the aims of your project?

**Nic:** First of all, picking up on Amy's reference to histories of migration, I wanted to say that the project constitutes an international collaboration between Mexican and British academics and Mexican university students from different disciplines. The aim of the Higher Education Links programme by the Mexican British Council, which funded the project twice, is: 'to collaborate internationally and to gain access to UK expertise' (British Council, 2020). Most other HE Links-funded projects don't involve communities directly, as we did. In addition to focused workshops for Mexican higher education students and academics, this project aimed at a more direct exchange of expertise between UK academics and local Mexican communities. More concretely, the project aimed at reciprocal learning and exchange of expertise. That is, the UK academics 'learnt from lived experiences' in Mexican underserved communities, and the Mexican community participants 'learnt complex concepts through hands-on making' in a multifaceted way. For younger Mexican children it is about the creative application of STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths) knowledge, for young adults it is about developing employability skills, for adults it is about gaining new ideas for a business, for example. For a neighbourhood or community, it is about improving the local environment in collaboration with others. A commonality is that the learning creates opportunities for socio-economic development and it provides avenues for lifting the participants and community out of poverty through the learning of new skills and the gaining of confidence and self-esteem.

Also, it needs to be said that the aim of the British Council Mexico is to support academic institutions to translate their expertise to become regional development drivers for 'economic and societal benefit' (British Council, 2020). The academic institution in this instance is Tecnológico de Monterrey, which endorses a mission of social responsibility and sought to have a direct impact by engaging with members of differently marginalised communities in the north of Mexico as well as governmental or non-governmental institutions who were also directly involved in the project.

**Renate:** As the project seeks to improve the lives of the participants, this raises issues of its larger political contexts, could you give us some further details here perhaps?

**Nic:** When the former Mexican president Felipe Calderón declared the 'Drug War' in 2006, the

neighbourhood of La Campana-Altamira, like many others, became a site of open drug trafficking, cartel conflicts and violence (Durin, 2012). With the peak of violence in 2012, a new policy of de-escalation of cartel and government conflict led to a calming of the situation and the La Campana-Altamira neighbourhood sought a change through open engagement in public life. Several community projects have been initiated in this neighbourhood since, with Tecnológico de Monterrey a partner in many of them, contributing academic expertise and donating equipment, for example.

**Renate:** If I understand this correctly, this is an ongoing, 'live' project?

**Nic:** Yes, I continued to engage with the project remotely during the pandemic and have sought to create hybrid learning spaces to continue to engage with the community virtually. We received some seed funding from The Open University, for example, to test a new, remote making approach. We intend to send maker kits and distance-learning instructions together with networking technologies to La Campana families to continue to engage in remote hands-on learning from their homes. The local networking aims at creating social learning and exchange between families who are stuck in their homes and cannot come together physically in a FabLab.

## Transnational histories and flows

**Renate:** What has emerged so far is that both projects involve inter- and transnational interactions and negotiations. Could you perhaps tell us more about this aspect of your projects, and how it was addressed?

**Amy:** In our case, our community curators were drawn from sari shop owners, elders in the East-African Asian community in both Leicester and Nairobi, the Leicester Arts and Museum Service (LAMS) youth panel and postgraduate students from the School of Museum Studies at the University of Leicester. Discussions were also informed by specialists in advisory roles, to ensure that interpretive approaches were academically sound.

Apart from the high level of community consultation and the direct involvement of community curators in the development phase, perhaps what made *Suits and Saris* somewhat atypical in comparison with similar exhibitions, was the extent to which it engaged with the processes of identity-making through clothing in the contexts of multiple migration and transnationalism (see, Kraamer & Barnes, 2018), with a particular emphasis on the East-African Asian community in Leicester.

**Renate:** How does this compare to the approach taken in your project, Nic? What role did local partners play and how were they selected?

**Nic:** There are several levels of exchange across cultures that impact on my project. There were the Mexican academics, who initiated the project, and who opened a call for participation and used their existing networks to recruit participants and partners. And then, in the second series of co-design workshops, new regional partners joined – a Latin American organisation who promotes the community architecture in low socio-economic settings (Insitu Social), and a children-focused making organisation that promotes learning with digital technologies (FabLat Kids). Both organisations use digital fabrication technologies in marginalised communities in their projects across Latin America.

What is perhaps interesting to note in this context is that while the founders of the organisations are from Columbia, Venezuela and Mexico, they met during a year-long Master's course in Advanced Architecture and Digital Fabrication in Barcelona. Having spent time overseas, they returned to Latin America and brought new influences back home to address resource deficiency in sustainable and innovative local community projects. With their expertise, more community members were involved by directly engaging them in activities on the street, at the market and in the local high school. The focus of the project was less on ensuring academic soundness, as was the case in some aspects of Amy's project, but on re-contextualising and usefully applying academic skills and knowledge in collaboration with a local community.

**Renate:** This brings me to another question – colonialism – which of course looms large as historical context that gave rise to the transnational movements that inform your projects. Could you perhaps speak to how colonial histories perhaps made their presence felt and were reflected in them?

**Amy:** Yes, this is a really important issue that was directly addressed in the exhibition. Colonial histories and relationships between Britain and India were, for example, explored in several sections of the exhibition, including through colonial photography and the popularity of paisley shawls in the Victorian period. And while the section *Building a Collection* was not explicitly about empire, the legacies of colonialism are inherent in the presence of the Gujarati textile collection in a museum in the East Midlands of England, of course. In more subtle ways, too, the collection, which included *chaniya choli* (an outfit comprising a cropped blouse

and skirt), *ghaghara* (long, gathered skirts), printed and tie-dyed shawls, men's and women's wedding outfits, showed this influence in the way in which it had been classified as ethnography on its accession to the museum, rather than as 'fashion', and as an assemblage of 'textiles' rather than of clothing (see Fig. 7.1).

**Renate:** This is a really important point. Such classifications are a direct reference to colonial history where clothing was seen as an ethnographic marker and was used to categorize people. This is evident for example in ethnographic surveys of India such as famously *The People of India: A Series of Photographic Illustrations, with Descriptive Letterpress, of the Races and Tribes of Hindustan*, a multi-volume undertaking (Watson & Kaye, 1874).

It is also worth noting that caste, which was considered a native category and hence an appropriate signifier in the colonial era, became a dominant way to



Figure 7.2: Kesarah Nutni, low caste Hindoo, Allahabad. Photograph from *The People of India* (1874). The same image was used in *The Textile Manufactures and the Costumes of the People of India* by Forbes Watson who was also the key author of the *People of India*. In the latter, the image was used as an example of saris as loom-made 'female cotton attire', and captioned as: 'Shows Cholee or bodice with short sleeve' (Watson & Kaye, 1874, plate V facing p.40). (Image credit: New York Public Library, <https://digitalcollections.nypl.org/items/510d47dd-b1da-a3d9-e040-e00a18064a99>)

categorize the population, which paradoxically led to the loss of fluidity between castes prevalent prior to the arrival of colonialism. Then there were taxonomies of race of course, which, based on supposedly 'scientific' approaches, sought to 'map' human development. This not only involved body measurements but also the taking of photographs considered to be objective tools of scientific enquiry, so ideas of documentation and classification were intricately aligned in the colonial context (Fig. 7.2).

**Amy:** Yes, caste is certainly something that surfaces in the museum context. In the 1980s, when the Gujarati textile collection was assembled and entered the museum, there were clearly concerns and sensitivities around caste as a blanket system of reference. Consequently, although some of the pieces could have been identified as originating from a particular caste community, they were instead categorised within the museum by family name or the village from which they had been acquired (although anyone with the appropriate cultural knowledge would have been able to determine caste from the name and location).

**Renate:** This is really interesting to hear and the fact that the exhibition actively and self-reflectively engaged with these legacies is significant. Was this challenging for the museum? I am asking because colonial legacies often continue to determine the categorisation of objects in museum collections and frequently revolve around perceived notions of cultural authenticity. For instance, how did the museum account for an East-African Asian example; that is a mix of cultural geographies steeped in colonial histories?

**Amy:** I can't speak for the museum, as I was a freelancer brought in to work on the project, rather than an employee who was party to discussions about how to address such issues. But, at around about the same time as *Suits and Saris*, New Walk Museum put on a community co-curated exhibition called *From Kampala to Leicester* (July–September 2012) (see, LCC & Navrang, 2012). This exhibition specifically focused on the experience of expelled Ugandan Asians and featured objects loaned by members of the local community and new commissions made for the exhibition. Later, this temporary exhibition developed into a permanent display at Newarke Houses Museum – the city's social history museum. And so, we can assume that collections (and certainly displays) are now more representative of the lives and experiences of East-African Asians in Leicester than they might have been before 2012.

But, thinking back to the time when we were working on *Suits and Saris*, the Gujarati textile collection (with some cooking utensils, collected in the field at the same time) were, if my memory serves me correctly, the principal assemblage of objects within the museum's holdings identified with the East-African Asian community in the city. And because these had been collected in consultation with the community, they may have had a veneer of 'authenticity' that was augmented by how the textile collection was categorised within the museum. Incidentally, prior to *Suits and Saris*, the collection had only been shown once, not long after it had been collected, in 1988–9. A few items had been used in handling collections and others were on permanent display in the World Cultures Gallery. But the bulk of the collection had not been seen in public since the late 1980s. In storage, a collection isn't representative of anyone!

Returning to the way in which the collection had been organised by family name and village, these were artificial distinctions. By the time the collection was acquired, you were just as likely to see young women in Gujarat wearing, and mixing and matching saris (not a 'traditional' Gujarati item of clothing), *salwar kameez* (once more associated with the Muslim community), t-shirts and jeans, with Gujarati-style clothing (separate blouses and skirts, for example), reserving the heavily embroidered and embellished 'traditional' Gujarati-style wear for special occasions. On speaking with elders in Leicester's East-African Asian community, it became clear that in their youth, too, in Uganda or Kenya or Tanzania, they had also mixed and matched in this way, incorporating wax resist and other East-African influences into their daily wear, alongside some Gujarati-style items (in terms of cut or embroidery motifs). These were often worn interchangeably regardless of the caste community in which they may have originated or the background of the wearer.

This highlighted the problematic way in which the collection had been organised, that is, as an ethnographic collection rather than as 'fashion'. In real life, as opposed to the collection's museum 'life', the people who wore these or similar articles of clothing, didn't necessarily associate them with such-and-such a village or a particular family name. These classifications were an imposition of the 'museumification' process. And so, the *Building a Collection* section of the exhibition sought to give the opportunity to participants and visitors to challenge the effects of the museum and its control over the knowledge attached to objects in collections and how they are interpreted, represented and displayed.

Our research thus emphasised how artificial or rigid distinctions and classifications made by museums in the accession and cataloguing process may inadvertently fix meanings and cultural values, and divorce objects from their uses and the lived experiences of them, as well as the multiple and changing meanings ascribed to them over time.

So, in the section *Building a Collection*, visitors were prompted to think about what museums do, how they change collections, fix meanings and represent source communities, as well as their own local audiences. The introductory text panel to this section of the exhibition drew the visitors' attention to how museums collect and why. We thus introduced the concept of curatorial



Figure 7.3: Ornaments from embroidered and woven fabrics and decorations on vases exhibited at the Indian Collection of the Great Exhibition, 1851, Owen Jones, 'Indian No.4', in Owen Jones, *The Grammar of Ornament* (1865 edn). (Image credit: Rawpixel – file licensed under the Creative Commons Zero (CC0) license)

authority and selection ('museums are not neutral') and how museums can have the effect of essentialising other and marginal experiences within a dominant culture. Quite weighty, philosophical stuff for a temporary exhibition at a local authority museum!

**Renate:** This is a fascinating case study and an important one because it engages with the complex and weighty legacy of exhibitions in the colonial era. The impact of this history can hardly be exaggerated since exhibitions constituted what one could safely call an obsession amongst European nations in the period of high imperialism, with the Great Exhibition initiating this phenomenon in 1851. The representation of empire in these hugely popular public events revolved around the classification of goods and wares, divorced from their contexts of origin as they were, re-contextualised through exhibitions guides, catalogues and lectures, echoing the classification of its peoples already mentioned.

Items of manufacture and raw products thus were assembled, classified, organised, displayed and judged according to their place and mode of production, method of distribution, material or themes, employing European taxonomies and categorisations that were drawn from the disciplines of history, ethnography, archaeology and art history, and in turn also informed them. Moreover, many of the colonial objects displayed in such exhibitions found their way into prominent museums, such as the V&A, for example, and formed the basis of their collections. So empire, exhibitions and museum collections are intricately linked and this is an important legacy that is becoming ever more urgent to address.

And then Indian textiles of course played a key role in articulating the principles of 'good' design that became fundamental to British design education in the nineteenth century. Notable here is Owen Jones' *Grammar of Ornament* ([1856] 1868), which in part drew on design elements of Indian textiles that were incorporated into an overall modern design language for the industrial age (Fig. 7.3). This history has, I presume, a bearing on your project, even though the original collection of textiles the exhibition is based on was collected well past the period of the British empire, in the 1980s?

**Amy:** Undoubtedly these colonial legacies and the long history of the use, interpretation and representation of South Asian textiles in exhibitionary contexts in Britain had an implicit bearing on how this collection was made and classified. Not least the legacy of nineteenth-century ideals of 'good design', with the choice to

collect examples of embroidered and tie-dyed textiles, as opposed to other categories of objects. Curatorial interests, perceived gaps in collections – a whole host of other factors may have come into play in this case. But it bears repeating that the collection was originally made in consultation with the community. The then curator was guided by what the East-African Asian community in Leicester (or at least those members of the community who were consulted) felt would best represent its cultural heritage. Which, for a number of reasons, perhaps including the influence and legacy of colonial representations of South Asian culture, was, at that time, felt to be Gujarati clothing (see Fig. 7.1).

**Renate:** What strikes me about the kind of transnational flows of expertise and instruction that are integral to your project is that one could say that there are parallels with colonial history, certainly with regard to the directionality of these flows. And then there is an overall mission of improvement, which does resonate with the civilizational rhetoric integral certainly to the British colonial project.

What I was thinking of is the fact that British colonial officers and art educators taught Indian artisans in government schools of art and design in the colony about true Indian designs, that is, they instructed the very artisans who had produced these designs for generations, how to create what they considered to be 'authentic' Indian designs; an understanding that was based on the kind of categorizations we have already mentioned which were steeped in European rather than Indian cultural values. In the minds of colonial officials, they were saving India from what they saw as cultural contamination through the colonial encounter.

And just for interest, there is an object lesson in what was considered 'authentic' Indian design on public view in the garden of Hove Museum in Brighton, near the path that leads to the museum entrance – the 'Jaipur Gate', an intricately carved wooden construction (Figs. 7.4–7.6).

It was created for display at the Colonial and Indian Exhibition, South Kensington, 1886, and was designed by the engineer-turned-architect Samuel Swinton Jacob, Executive Engineer to the princely state of Jaipur. It was financed by the Maharaja of Jaipur. The gate eloquently speaks to this history British appropriation and reinvention of traditional Indian designs, as British officials instructed the woodcarvers to decorate the gate with 'traditional' and 'purely Indian' ornaments only, directives which countered Indian decorative traditions that had thrived on adaptation and change, freezing them in time.



Figure 7.4: Scene showing the 'Jaipur Gate' from the 'Colonial and Indian Exhibition: Indian Empire', engraving in *The Illustrated London News*, 17 July 1886. (Image credit: World History Archive/Alamy)



Figure 7.5: The 'Jaipur Gate' in the garden of the Hove Museum in Brighton. (Image credit: George Rex)



Figure 7.6: Wood carvings, 'Jaipur Gate', Brighton/Hove.  
(Photo: Duncan McNicol)

Nic, your project and the nature of your engagement is very different of course, but there have certainly been critiques of design thinking as inherently colonial (Diethelm, 2016). Could you perhaps speak to that?

**Nic:** Yes, FabLabs received the critique that they introduce 'Western technologies' into local communities and underrepresented groups and that this process constitutes a new form of colonisation. Also to say that before I joined the project, I had never been involved in FabLabs or digital fabrication. This approach was entirely introduced by the Mexican hosts and their local collaborators who, moreover, emphasise the educational aspect, and the skills and knowledge that are developed by employing advances in modern technologies in the communities they work with.

As already mentioned, I was invited for my background in using design thinking in STEM education contexts and have been teaching design thinking at The Open University for the last 10 years, employing variations of design-thinking processes across Asia, Africa and Europe. And design thinking of course is a term monopolised by the 'Global North', as it was first used in the United States and the UK. But I would argue that the underlying processes and practices the term describes are fundamentally human – that is, the finding and solving of problems in novel and contextually sensitive ways. This is why I believe I was invited to co-facilitate the design-thinking workshop in collaboration with Mexican academics from the Education and Engineering departments at Tecnológico.

As already mentioned design thinking constitutes a process that entails phases of problem identification and framing, creative ideation and prototyping, and reflective evaluation of proposals and prototypes. While this may sound like a linear, predetermined process, in reality, it is much more messy, holistic and discursive. With careful facilitation, design thinking taps into the creative skills and lived expertise of the local participants in the generation of locally appropriate designs. An underlying assumption is that everyone can be creative by employing processes and approaches (of design thinking) that bring the creative human qualities to the fore.

But colonial legacies certainly did impact on the project, which, however, surfaced in implicit ways that were never directly voiced or addressed as such, and which had mainly to do with how my presence and role in the project was perceived. When I wanted to discuss the pedagogical rationale of the project, I was, for example, misunderstood by some and thought to be a sales representative of digital fabrication technologies. Of course, this could have been due to a process 'lost in translation', as all our conversations were interpreted by a professional translator. The local team also strategically employed my whiteness to secure a better room to house the lab in the school than had initially been allocated, urging me to approach the head teacher with this request which proved successful. The fact that my whiteness generated a more favourable position to negotiate the FabLab location in school thus reveals the continued presence of deeply entrenched structures that hark back to colonial times.

**Renate:** Thanks very much, Nic, for giving us more context about what design thinking entails 'in the field' so to speak, and the ways in which you noted coloniality showing up in your interactions. You also gave us more context about FabLabs which was very helpful for those of us who are not familiar with them, such as most art historians I would imagine, with the notable exception of Kim, who I would like to bring into the conversation at this point. Kim is there anything you would like to add to what has been laid out so far?

**Kim:** Nic, it's very interesting to hear your experience of working with a FabLab and your observations about the kinds of institutional and community collaborations that are involved in this work. I have some familiarity with FabLabs because Plymouth College of Art developed one, a great pedagogic and micro-scale manufacturing resource which students engage with in often highly creative ways. I was also able to attend

talks by the Director of FabLab Barcelona, Tomás Diez, on a couple of occasions at *Making Futures*, the international craft and digital making conference (see, *Making Futures*, 2019).

Also, to say that FabLab Barcelona are involved in some excellent work. I was struck, for example, by their Smart Citizen kit, a simple and cheaply produced 'distributed tool' that is intended to empower citizens to be able to monitor and provide data on air pollution, noise pollution and other indicators in their homes and workplaces (IAAC, n.d.). There is potential in this kind of work to alter the balance of power in democratic decision-making within the urban environment. Yet, from another point of view, some of the claims made for FabLabs are clearly techno-utopian. Diez often speaks of a future where FabLabs will play a central role in what he terms 'distributed production' (2013). In our current global model, centralised manufacturers produce goods, which are shipped around the world to cities; waste products are then shipped in the opposite direction. Distributed production, by contrast, would involve products being made by FabLabs for hyper-localised markets, making use of shared digital networks and assets to create goods and supposedly removing the need for lengthy supply chains.

This is a kind of 'neo-artisanal' image of digital making that seems to reinvent some aspects of the Ruskin-Morris argument. Indeed, these technologies are often framed as a space where design and material practice may interact in a site-specific and collaborative setting that allows for a new kind of interaction between 'making' and 'thinking'. There may be some truth to this. Diez is clearly right that the current organisation of centralised production and global distribution is unsustainable and damaging. But his claims for the potential of the FabLab overlooks exactly the kinds of social and institutional issues that you identify here. In my view, the potential for FabLabs as catalysts for change needs to be examined in relation to the obstacles that emerge in social contexts where these technologies are employed. This would provide a more nuanced debate about the challenges involved in creating the kinds of enormous change required to redress the damage now being done to our eco-system.

**Nic:** Kim, it is great to hear your balanced view of global FabLabs, which Diez also calls the FabCity (Diez, 2016). The FabCity project advocates an open, networked and distributed production. As you say, a key concept of the FabCity is that data (and ideas), not products travel globally. To a degree, I did observe these processes in the FabLab La Campana-Altamira project. Later on I will give an example, in which an

idea and associated data for digital making of a maker cart travelled across the network of collaborators and was produced in and adopted to the local context. My collaborators in Mexico work with Tomás Diez in Barcelona, and they also collaborate closely with another FabLab in Mexico, FabLab Yucatán, who further developed the environmental monitors you have mentioned to be used in local citizen science projects in Merida, Yucatán. I guess a valid critique here remains that by introducing 'colonial technologies' to marginalised communities, the dominant rhetoric of developments through technological advances will be maintained. I guess, a rupture to such dominant forms of ongoing technological colonialism can only be achieved by listening to the dreams of, and engaging deeply with the local communities, and exploring together how to use (or not) the affordances of these technologies to local and communal benefit.

## Community engagement and participation

**Renate:** Thank you Kim and Nic, your discussion leads me to another issue that has emerged for me in this conversation, the one of community engagement and participation which features prominently in both your projects. Could you perhaps give us a sense of what community engagement entailed, and perhaps whether there might have been levels or layers of such engagements, given that such a reference often brackets a range of interactions?

**Amy:** A guiding principle of the Dress the World strand (which is embedded in HLF-funded projects more widely) was to engage directly with community stakeholders (whom we described as 'community curators'), as detailed above, bringing them together with museum practitioners in order to develop exhibitions. The exhibition's constituents had an active role in the evolution of most, if not all aspects of its development: themes and narratives were drawn up during the consultation events and workshops held in Leicester. These events comprised workshops, handling sessions and group and individual interviews. For some participants, this was their first experience of working on the development of an exhibition. For others, this work built upon the consultative work in which they had been involved in the 1980s, that led to the collection of the aforementioned Gujarati textiles. The exhibition emerged from a combination of community engagement, desk-based research, oral histories and interviews.

With regard to this heritage, I should mention that Gujarat was the region of India from which the ancestors of many members of the city's East-African

Asian community migrated to Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania while under British Imperial rule in the nineteenth century, often as indentured labourers. In the late 1960s and into the 1970s, after Africanisation policies and anti-Asian rhetoric fomented hostility against them, many East-African Asians migrated to Britain and other countries in the Commonwealth (many held British passports). In Uganda, Asians were forcibly expelled with just 90 days' notice. In spite of the then City Council's xenophobic, if not outright racist efforts to discourage them, many set up home and started successful businesses in Leicester (see, BBC News, 2012). While a large proportion of East-African Asians may never have lived in Gujarat (or India), it was nevertheless perceived by the community as its ancestral home and the source of East-African Asian culture, language and dress. In particular, the area around Kachchh was identified by the community advisory panel as an area with which many East-African Asian people had ancestral ties and, because it was less industrialised at that time (mid-1980s) than other parts of the state, it was felt to offer up more 'authentic' Gujarati textiles.

Thus, the aim of engaging with this community – from whom the idea for the collection came and for whom it was predominantly made – was to include them in reflecting on what the collection meant to first, second and later generations of Leicester citizens who identify as East-African Asian or as having East-African Asian and/or Gujarati heritage. So, one could say that the *Suits and Saris* project engaged multi-generational members of local communities on a number of levels. They participated in the development of the exhibition (and some of the collections on which it was based), through their collaboration, expertise and familial ties to India, as well as by being visitors to the exhibition, which encouraged them to engage in critical reflection on what this cultural heritage meant to them.

However, such projects involving questions of cultural heritage – what it constitutes and how it is conceived – are complex. Notions of authenticity are inherently problematic, tied up as they are in the legacies of colonialism. In a paper that reflected on our experiences of working on the exhibition, Malika and I noted that 'community advisory groups may not always help museums to grasp complex fluid, generation-specific, and memory-shaped migration histories' and that 'community projects, collection policies and exhibitions, have often been developed on the assumption that cultural heritage is un-problematically bound to migrants' "place of origin" (Kraamer & Barnes, 2018, p.601). There is a tendency in the museum world to assume that historical 'ethnographic'

collections (for want of a better description) will be of interest and relevant to the descendants of their source communities in the global diaspora. Instead, we argued that one cannot and should not make such assumptions. Neither can one individual (or advisory group) speak for everyone in that community. We need to be open about this and acknowledge it, lest we run the risk of essentialising contemporary diasporic communities. For example, some younger participants in the exhibition's development phase – second, possibly third generation British Asians or East-African Asians born in Leicester – didn't necessarily feel that the textile collection, as a whole, had any particular relevance to them, their lives or their cultural identities. Responses from visitors to the exhibition were varied: some commented that the clothing on display was of relevance to older members of the Asian community but not to them; others offered alternative ways of classifying and ordering the collection; some made connections with contemporary fashion trends in India; and others stressed the importance of using the textiles to teach young people in the community about their heritage. Full circle!

What emerged, then, is that we cannot or should not claim that such projects are truly representative. Inevitably, we relied on existing relationships in order to engage (self-selecting) participants. This raised some issues – the business of selling saris and Asian designer clothing is highly competitive, and naturally there are ongoing tensions and contestations between different business owners within the city. We were steered away from some more potentially sensitive themes by museum management, who were, perhaps,

wary of inadvertently attracting controversy and negative criticism. In particular, we were discouraged from openly discussing hair and face coverings in the exhibition. Instead, we approached this important aspect of British Asian fashion through explorations of mothers' and daughters' expectations around dress and fashion (with the goal of dismantling some preconceptions in the minds of the audience), and we displayed some modest outfits made by a fashion-forward, Leicester-based designer, without drawing attention to the 'modest' features of those outfits (full-sleeves, long skirts, turbans and head wraps, etc.).

**Renate:** Nic, I guess the context of your project is quite different as issues of representation or heritage and the histories they entail are not so prominent. And while it also entails multi-migratory histories, the movement ultimately is about a return journey from Europe to countries of origin in the Americas, and of introducing technologies there. Also the aim of community engagement is empowerment, which in a sense probably is part of the mix in *Suits and Saris* as well, but through owning one's culture and heritage rather than acts of making. Would this be a fair characterisation?

**Nic:** Yes, and crucially it was the new partners, the two Latin American organisations FabLab Kids and Insitu Social, who introduced a new meaning to community engagement through the element of empowerment, into the project. Both organisations use digital fabrication to promote community architecture in low socio-economic settings and learning with digital

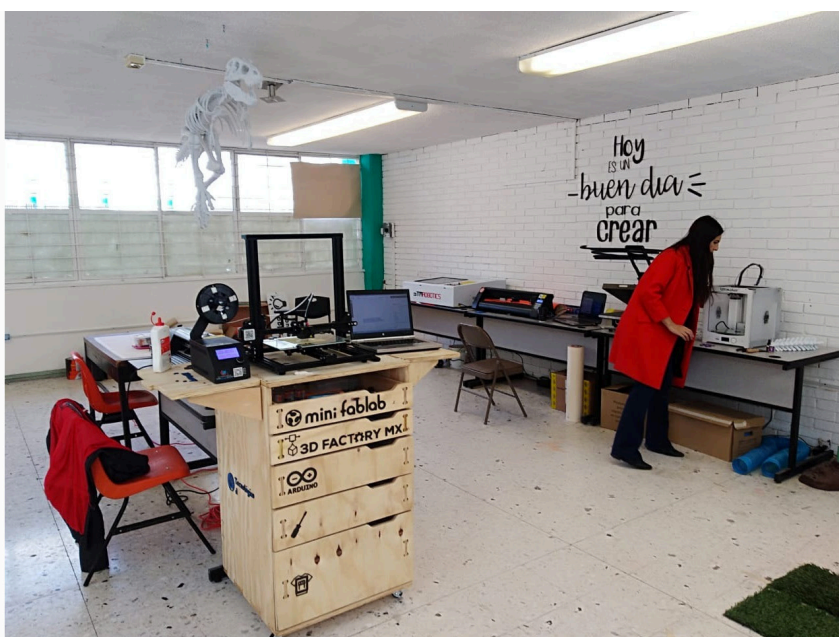


Figure 7.7: Left: Mobile cart developed by FabLab Yucatán for IYEM FabLab supporting teacher training in rural Yucatán and remote Mayan communities. (Image credit: Nicole Lotz). Right: Mobile cart by FabLab Tec de Monterrey for Community FabLab LaCampana. (Image credit: Rafa Machado)

technologies. That is, with their multi-migratory backgrounds and strong networks to other Latin American, US American and European FabLabs, they were able to translate and adapt the potential of digital fabrication technology that has been developed internationally to empower poorer communities locally.

An example of an adaptation of digital fabrication to local contexts was the use of mobile maker carts to house the valuable technology and materials (Fig. 7.7). Maker carts are usually used to transport technology across locations. Through regional collaborations in other projects, the Latin American organisations FabLat Kids and Insitu learned about the use of these mobile carts in remote locations or low socio-economic settings. Usually, the technology in a FabLab is installed permanently in the Lab space. But in this case the community was worried about security if the technologies were stored in the Lab space over night or at weekends, and rightly so, as there were break-ins twice. The mobile cart, which was digitally fabricated by students in the University FabLab at Tecnológico de Monterrey, responded to this as it allowed the technology to be stored securely after use, and hence, was not taken by the burglars. The translation process took the overarching concept of FabLab and adopted it to local realities.

Also, it is important to say that the mobile cart idea was developed in another Mexican community FabLab project, led by FabLab Yucatán and IYEM FabLab in Yucatán. The strong regional and global links between the makers allow to translate global ideas into local adaptations for suitability and to assess successful uses of these adaptations, such as that of a digitally fabricated mobile cart.

It should also be noted that installing the community FabLab in a classroom in a local high school was a compromise that emerged in this long community participation and translation process. The community FabLab thus was not as open to all as was initially imagined.

To show a potential wider use of digital fabrication technologies within the larger community setting, academics and members of Insitu Social interacted with a wider group of participants from the neighbourhood through walks, interviews, workshops and focus groups. The core stage was the co-creation, in which neighbourhood participants from different communities actively co-created the FabLab, the space, activities and roles. During this stage participants set up the room and the equipment, designed and conducted making activities, and negotiated the partnerships, roles and responsibilities of participants and partners.

**Renate:** This leads me to the kinds and levels of the empowerment the project sought to instigate. Could you expand on this perhaps?

**Nic:** Empowerment can be defined in two ways, as power to act more efficiently or to liberate from oppression (Keskinen, 2020, p.30). Here, both forms of desires for empowerment could be observed. The technologies are not introduced for their own sake, but to address the community's needs and problems. Thus, initially no technologies were introduced at all, but the community's problems and dreams were explored. This approach employed a kind of filtering and translation process through the community lens. First we explored with participants what empowerment means to the community. Only then were making activities introduced that addressed the community's desires more effectively involving digital technologies. Let me give you two examples. A desire voiced by high-school students was to learn in a more self-directed way and to just play with technology instead of being told what to learn, which points to empowerment as a liberation from a perceived oppression. Guerrilla gardeners and market stall holders, on the other hand, expressed a desire to clean up local public spaces and use them more effectively. Here is a concrete example, which has also been published (Lotz et al, 2019).

While the visibility of the FabLab was developed through engaging with a wide range of people of the neighbourhood, a bold physical statement was still desired as identified in community consultations (Fig. 7.8). Interviews, observations and community mapping activities of the urban and social context of the area have shown 'unsafe spaces' that facilitate anti-social behaviours (e.g., drug crime and violence, mugging, assault and illegal dumping) but also spaces that the community would simply like to use more or in a different way (e.g., a sports playing field that floods easily).

An ideation workshop with university and high-school students, and their teachers, generated ideas for possible intervention in these unsafe areas through brainstorming concepts based on geometric forms (Thomas et al, 2019). Ideas that were developed ranged from seating furniture and hanging tools for the Sunday market, planters, skate park and parkour objects as well as outdoor games. The geometric shape workshop introduced a further STEM learning aspect, that of how 3D forms can be constructed from a grid.

La Campana park and market exemplifies a problematic situation and unsafe space (Fig. 7.9, left) that has been changed into a preferred, safer space in this concrete-casting process (Fig. 7.9, right). Due to



Figure 7.8: Discussion over a map of unsafe places and places of opportunities for interventions in La Campana-Altamira. Here a participant explains the problem of a dumpster left in a park saying: 'You need to put something else immediately after you take away the dumpster to indicate a change.' (Photo: Nicole Lotz)



Figure 7.9: La Campana park and market. Left: unsafe space due to illegal dumping of trash in public spaces (Photo: Nicole Lotz). Right: restructured public space through digitally fabricated and concrete-cast urban furniture and guerrilla planting (Photo: René Carmona).

a complex inter-neighbourhood relationship involving bribery and cartel activity, a public trash container had been placed illegally in the middle of a park along a river in La Campana. The park is also used for Sunday markets. In collaboration with a guerrilla gardener, the market union and the city government, Tecnológico de Monterrey students, the community FabLab and Insitu Social redesigned the area where the trash container had previously been placed. Insitu Social used a well-tested methodology of co-creation using digital fabrication and concrete casting of design interventions during this stage (Thomas et al, 2019, Lotz et al, 2019). They demonstrated how digital fabrication tools and concrete-casting approaches can achieve large-scale interventions with the community. The use of concrete was a requirement in reducing the likelihood of theft or vandalism. Concrete-cast objects together with new planted trees restructured the space and changed the associated illegal trash dumping behaviour.

**Renate:** What is apparent from your discussion is that technology and digitally enhanced ways of making are envisaged as an agent of change, certainly on an economic level, and are seen to provide solutions to concrete problems. What I also found interesting is your reference to desire in this context, which to me suggests not just a link to the 'magic' of making and of creation, but also to consumption and commodification. The lure of the object, the projections it invites, identities it suggests and gives access to, and the promises it makes could be said to present another point of reference here that has not been mentioned so far; that is, issues that are explored in cultural studies.

Kim, I know you have explored some related issues. Could you come in here perhaps?

**Kim:** It's great to see the intervention in the La Campana market, which I think provides a useful illustration of how design thinking, the FabLab and local community actors might combine to develop transformative interventions in urban space. As I mentioned earlier, Tomás Díez of FabLab Barcelona tends to represent the FabLab movement as an incipient form of a new network of distributed production, which might bring about a new economic model on a global level. Clearly these are grand claims and it's useful to explore them in relation to actual case studies. Problems of cultural difference and power certainly complicate Díez's futurism, as Nic has already observed in relation to the Monterrey project.

A question that emerges here for me is around the design process: the interaction of community

involvement, digital technology and fabrication in this example. The photograph (Fig. 7.9, right) seems to show that the street furniture is created in different shapes, some which seem to have been more obviously 'designed' than others. These objects seem to serve a number of functions simultaneously. On one level, they act as obstacles making it difficult to dump illegally in this location; they also have a decorative dimension, because some are faceted in ways that suggest a digital design process; they might be used as seats perhaps. What role did the participants in the FabLab play here? I'm guessing that they may have created models for the street furniture and perhaps even fabricated moulds. Presumably the concrete casting would have then been done by a specialist. I'm interested to know how this stage of the project interfaced with participants' stated desire just to play with the technology.

I ask this because it seems to me that the relationship between digital competencies and material processes, and the skills involved in making, is of central importance in understanding the potential of FabLabs to act as catalysts for social change. There are critiques of FabLabs, and maker spaces, that they often produce a lot of not-very-useful plastic objects, despite all of the excitement about the transformative potential of digital technology. These limitations seem to be most obvious where FabLabs do not establish relationships with people who have well-developed artisanal skills. The most interesting projects that I have seen are collaborations between craftspeople and digital specialists. Has the Monterrey project developed any relationships to local artisans or small-scale skilled fabricators?

**Nic:** These are good questions, Kim. Different participants in the FabLab project played different roles at different times in the process of designing and fabricating the concrete-cast objects. Briony Thomas, from Leeds University, together with Insitu Social facilitated a workshop that encouraged the exploration of 3D shapes (cut and folded from paper grids) in the ideation process (Thomas et al, 2019). Tecnológico de Monterrey students and CBtis High School students took part in this. Some ideas were further developed by the engineering students and digitally modelled in a software and then with help of the University FabLab and Insitu Social digitally printed as moulds. The concrete casting process in situ was done by a La Campana-Altamira community council member (who is passionate about the cleaning up of the community areas) together with university students (who wanted to explore luminous paint), and was supported by Insitu Social (the concrete casting specialist). The need

to clean up the market area of illegally dumped trash evolved through repeatedly unearthing local desires in community mapping and was further developed throughout all the phases of co-ideation and co-production. Identifying a key player in the community to support the implementation was central to its success.

You asked another interesting question about any relationships to local artisans or small-scale skilled fabricators. When I visited the market, I was surprised by the absolute absence of any local craft or small-scale skilled fabrication. This would have been the natural connection point between the FabLab and the section of the local community that is hard to reach. Most members of the community work in the informal economy and have no time or resources to engage in learning and reskilling. And, in fact, it was discussed in the team as one possible aim of the community FabLab, to support small businesses and entrepreneurial activities while re-connecting to traditional crafts and skill sets. The new project direction, which brings the learning of making and digital fabrication into peoples' homes during lockdown still pursues this goal. Local construction businesses showed an interest in concrete casting, and area social workers with whom we collaborate highlighted that any work should serve female entrepreneurs, such as local seamstresses, who have been hit hardest during the lockdown. We also hope to reach parents of children who were already engaged in the FabLab.

## Power dynamics

**Renate:** A further angle that could perhaps be drawn out some more is how issues of power surfaced and were negotiated in your projects, often in relation to contingencies on the ground I believe? Could you perhaps expand on this?

**Amy:** An important point to mention here is that as a largely, though not exclusively, white curatorial team, working on behalf of an 'authoritative' organisation (for example, a city council-run museum), our privilege undoubtedly had an impact on the development of the exhibition and the level of access we were able to leverage with regards to key individuals within the local community. We were certainly aware of this to an extent; this was manifest in the theoretical approaches we took to problematising and reinterpreting the textile collection in *Building a Collection*. But this is certainly an issue that museums and other collecting/exhibition organisations, typically with overwhelmingly white and middle-class workforces, need to be aware of, especially when building and maintaining

relationships with diverse local and originating communities. Not least with respect to the explicit and implicit barriers that make such institutions 'hard to reach' for non-dominant and minority communities. If I were to become involved in a similar project in the future, I would seek to do more to foreground the voices and experiences of people from more varied and diverse identities during the research, development and writing phases. While the project was collaborative and participatory to a significant degree, the overarching interpretative authority remained with the curatorial team, the museum's management and, in turn, the local authority museum service.

**Renate:** How about you, Nic, is there anything you would like to add here?

**Nic:** I perceived shifts in power dynamics throughout the project. For example, the Latin American organisations were received with an open welcome by the community members, in a mix of curiosity, shyness and excitement. I received a different response from some of the community members on some occasions. I would say that I was seen more as a representative of colonial technologies and as a potential agent for Western exploitation disguised in the form of a donor. Let me give you an example. When I held a focus group with local high-school teachers to try and understand their curriculum and discuss how digital fabrication could be usefully introduced into some subjects they teach, their response was confusing at first. They welcomed the donations of the 3D printer and computers, but they asked about the costs of maintaining the machines and of purchasing filament to print objects. I wanted to discuss learning, they saw the dangers and pitfalls of 'development aid'. Even the idea of collecting discarded PET plastic bottles (that litter the community's streets and parks) and churning them up to produce their own filament was met with suspicion.

As mentioned, I was able to use my position to negotiate a more centrally located classroom to house the FabLab with the head teacher, where the local academics had failed so far, which allowed greater flexibility with regard to the layout of the room. For context, Mexican high schools mainly use 'frontal teaching' in which instructor-led teaching takes place from the front of the classroom, with the learners facing the teacher. This teaching style discourages direct interaction between learners. The FabLab in contrast offered a classroom that, through its layout, facilitated peer- and project-based learning in which the teacher

and learners are free to choose where to sit or stand and teachers act as demonstrators (Fig. 7.10).

I may have just been a catalyst in this instance as several shifts in power dynamics happened after I returned to the UK. Initially, it was hoped that teachers become more involved and organise Lab activities, either extra-curricular or integrated into their curriculum, but the time commitment was a limiting factor for already overworked teachers. Tecnológico de Monterrey community-work students and FabLat kits however continued to organise weekly digital fabrication workshops for different age groups. While these workshops introduced new making projects, ranging from jewellery to perfume and from silicone mould making to 3D charms printing, the students soon started to develop their own projects. One group, for example, designed and printed their own chess set. And a surprising turn in power dynamic was achieved when the high school's night porter became the lab manager. Here, the beginnings of empowerment in the definition of a liberation from perceived oppression (aka teacher-directed learning) can be seen. Having said that, the direct involvement of other members of the La Campana-Altamira community is still a challenge in a FabLab that is located in a high school.

There is also an unequal representation and involvement of the teachers of the high school in which the FabLab is housed. Since the project started during

term break, a wide representation of teachers was not possible and only two teachers took part in the initial co-creation activities. Consequently, when the term started, a full inclusion of the larger teacher body in the FabLab activities was difficult to achieve. Incidentally, this might have had a positive side effect, allowing the high school students to learn in a more self-directed manner.

Further unequal representation in participation was generated by the funder's requirement to engage a large number of Tecnológico de Monterrey students, with the result that some co-design workshops were more imbalanced in terms of how many members from each stakeholder group participated. For example, the original ideas for concrete cast objects were developed by many university students and high school students, but the actual casting of the objects to restructure the market space was driven by just a few students, a concrete-cast specialist and one community member in collaboration with the market union, local government and guerrilla gardeners.

Finally, while the FabLab is used for individual learning projects and community urban-design projects, the aim to develop entrepreneurial ideas to advance the community members' socio-economic status, proved the most difficult to reach. The hope is that through the enculturation of children in the making with digital technologies, a slow change to realise their

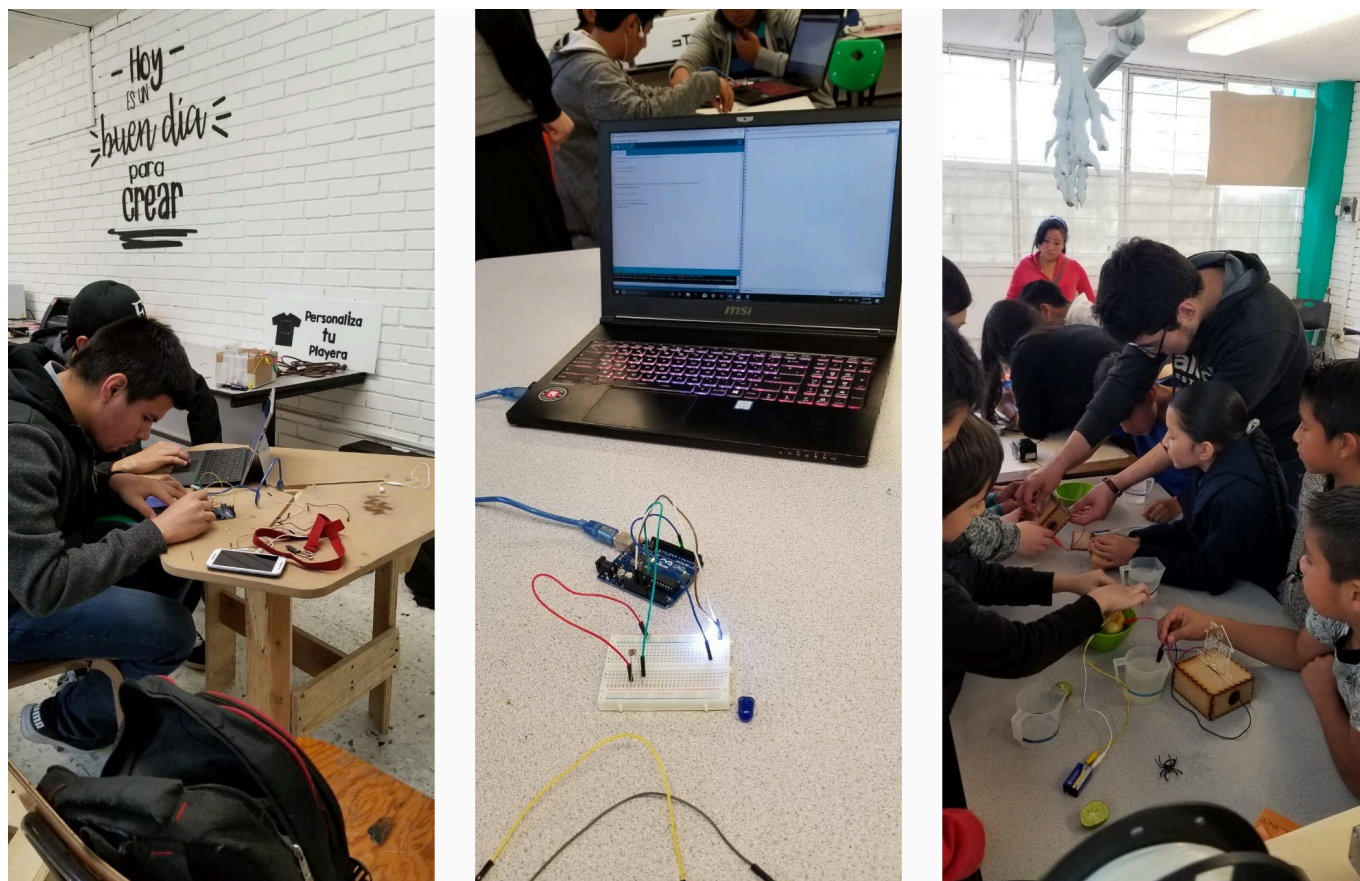


Figure 7.10: FabLab room layout and use in project-based and peer-supported learning. (Image credit: Rafa Machado)

own ideas is set in train. Beyond knowledge and skills, the confidence to follow up on ideas and implement them increases with repeated experiences of successfully completing projects such as the concrete-cast objects for the market, for example.

## Glocal cultures of translation and exchange

**Renate:** A further question I have, Nic, is whether you needed to adapt your approaches to teaching design thinking to the respective cultural locations you found yourself in?

**Nic:** What I found throughout these years, is that the different aspects of design thinking practices and processes speak to different people. I feel that it is important to introduce any process (such as design thinking) or technology (digital fabrication) that may have originated in the 'global north' in a discursive/dialogic way. This requires skilful facilitation, and nimble testing of different approaches to see what is desired and what works in the local setting. A key principle is to encourage playfulness and fun to overcome perceived barriers of status, class or background. It needs to start with observing and inquiring about the community's needs and desires to get to know it, then introducing the possibilities of processes and technologies to help to achieve what they desire. When solution approaches are prototyped often new problems or challenges occur, which makes the design process messy and unpredictable, but also malleable and adaptable to any local context. Most critical is that whatever I ask the community to do, I do too. For example, I sit with participants at the table in making workshops and create my own response. This really helps with overcoming some of the barriers that are created through the spoken language. As mentioned, I am not fluent in Spanish and always needed someone to translate. However, if I was able to speak with objects in my hands and responded to others who talked about objects in their hands, translation was merged with embodied experiences and hence much easier to interpret. I do think that the embodied nature of design thinking is important in facilitating such translation processes.

**Renate:** If I understand you correctly, what from an art-history and cultural-studies point of view would be perceived as a need to acknowledge and negotiate cultural difference is considered much less of an issue if at all with regard to design thinking. Could you perhaps expand on how this relates to the multiple levels of

what one could call the transnational flow entailed in the project?

**Nic:** I understand the transnational connection with my partners as characterised by an eagerness to experiment and learn to adapt to local challenges and problematic situations in a specific place. Every problematic situation is unique and socially constructed in a place, with information, approaches, resources, software etc., not tied to a place but collectively shared by a community, often globally, and enacted through what is referred to as 'legitimate peripheral participation' in the Community of Practice (CoP) (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998). The phrase, 'legitimate peripheral participation', is quite a mouthful. Let me unpick this. Legitimation shapes the ways of belonging to a community. In the FabLab context, makers legitimately participate in the community by (digital) making, and digital making as an approach goes across nations. The concept of peripherality gives importance to a location in participation. The location of the community FabLab La Campana-Altamira, for example, and its connection to other local communities (community council, market, high school) influences what is made in the lab. Hence a CoP, such as the network of FabLabs, is transnationally connected but also localised in a physical space. In the case of the participants in the FabLab La Campana, being part of overlapping transnational CoPs, such as of design thinking, STEM education or FabLabs in my case, as well as being rooted in a locality with overlapping local communities (community council, guerrilla gardener, market, high school), helped the project to reconfigure the use of existing processes and tools (digital fabrication) to develop and implement desired change processes with members of the local community (Karasti et al, 2018). This is called infrastructuring. In infrastructuring, experiences and approaches are shared between key actors of overlapping CoPs and their networks. In the Fab community, global and regional diaspora play a vital role in infrastructuring, as they are locally, regionally and globally connected.

Architects and researchers involved in the FabLab LaCampana from Mexico, Venezuela and Columbia were connected through the Fab Academy and Barcelona FabLab. As a design researcher from the UK, I am part of design thinking and STEM education transnational CoPs that overlap and interact locally with other CoPs. So, increasingly, I also became part of another partnering CoP, that of FabLabs in Mexico and eventually also here in the UK. Interestingly, local participation and co-designing brings globally linked CoPs together.

**Renate:** Amy, how does this compare to the way transnational elements informed your work on *Suits and Saris*?

**Amy:** Transnationalism, understood here as the lived experiences of multiple migrants and their families, was certainly at the heart of the exhibition's narrative structure. But it can also be seen in the processes and contexts in which British Asian fashion has been adapted and translated across national and cultural borders. For example, during the course of the interviews with community elders and sari-shop owners, we learned about the 1970s and '80s fashion for Japanese-made, synthetic saris and the pivotal role of Leicester-based sari-shop owners in their design and popularity. This phenomenon certainly only came about because of the transnational links and multiple migrations that were legacies of the British Empire.

The Japanese sari is a great example of transnationality expressed through clothing. These fashion-forward and easy-to-care-for garments were manufactured in Japan (a leading producer of high quality synthetic materials at that time) and designed in Britain (several Leicester-based businesses led on

this) to appeal to Western-based diaspora communities (making use of fashionable motifs and trends in Western fashion). But they were then gifted to friends and families in East Africa and crucially India, where cheaper, Indian-made versions eventually became readily available. The resulting ubiquity of synthetic saris in the 1980s led to their going out of fashion; they became associated with cheapness and tackiness. In around 2011, while working on the exhibition's development, I found a couple of original Japanese-made saris in the Oxfam Shop in Leicester (stamped on the selvedge with 'Made in Japan', a looked-for mark of quality), which I donated to the museum. In turn, these became part of the exhibition, in the section *Trading Places* (Fig. 7.11), along with several examples loaned by the aunt of a curatorial team member, who also supplied period-style blouses.

Malika Kraamer and I further explored this aspect of our research in a paper published in *Textile History* in 2015 (Barnes & Kraamer) and a book chapter published in 2018 (Kraamer & Barnes). As far as we have been able to determine, our work on Japanese saris is the first to give them focused academic attention. But it's important to note that while this was



Figure 7.11: *Trading Places*, featuring Japanese-made saris. *Suits and Saris*, New Walk Museum and Art Gallery, Leicester, 2012. (Photo: Amy Jane Barnes)

a surprising story to us, as white European curators, it wasn't, of course, to the East-African Asian and South Asian communities we were working with.

## Methods and approaches

**Renate:** I wanted to draw out some aspects of what you presented so far, also in relation to investigating what one might call the discipline-specific contours and how they are perhaps refracted as they meet in this discussion. As a first step, can we home in on the question of method that underpinned your projects? Approaches often rest on underlying assumptions within disciplinary fields and do not necessarily translate across their boundaries, and are therefore worth exploring and making explicit.

**Amy:** I'm not sure disciplinary boundaries apply in the context of this type of exhibition. Or, perhaps they do, and I'm too 'close' to the project to see them? In the context of museum work, I suppose one draws on a number of disciplines and ways of making meaning. I have to admit, it's not something I've reflected on before.

**Renate:** I can see where you are coming from, and I am of course situated somewhat differently in the field. From my vantage point, the ways of working in a museum do reflect what one might call disciplinary procedures and approaches in a wider sense, with (more or less) established ways of doing things which are not static of course. Community engagement constitutes one such element, curation and issues of representation another. Then, information texts and object labels of all sorts need to be written and how these tasks are approached often rest on unspoken agreements, with history as spectral presence. To my mind, there are professional processes or methods specific to museums, which are rightly being challenged at the moment, for example by the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement as you mentioned.

And, yes, the museum sector does generate research, but I presume while there might be an overlap with the kind of work I might be doing, its trajectory may well differ because of the way museum practice is situated. The same could be said with regard to how visual objects are employed in processes of making meaning.

Switching gear somewhat and taking the question of method a bit wider, I wanted to think about what may have emerged in our discussion in terms of confluences and abutments between our fields. What comes to mind is that the demands imposed on a museum through public funding and the need to engage local communities in ways that are seen to be representative

and rehearse notions of cultural authenticity do not apply to Nic's project, and this difference in context naturally has a significant impact on the methods and approaches and, therefore, the project outcomes. A more interesting point to make, perhaps, is that just as in Nic's project you are creating something concrete that is visual, so one could reflect on the role of the curator as creator of a visual object of sorts when looking at it through the lens of Nic's project.

Community engagement is another point of reference where our worlds overlap and where one might therefore explore differences in approach that could prove inspiring for the other discipline. Amy has given us quite a detailed account of the kinds of community engagement her project entailed and the incongruences community participation brought to light. Could you perhaps give us some more context about how participation plays out in design processes as a further and perhaps comparative point of reference?

**Nic:** Co-design, also called 'participatory design', starts with the premise that every participant offers expertise, whether that is disciplinary expertise or through lived experiences. Participants from different backgrounds who have an interest or stake in the project are actively involved in creating changes together. It might be important to note that design in its premise intends to change 'current situations into preferred situations' (Simon, 1996). Change is envisaged as a process that leads to improving an unsatisfactory situation. In participatory design, multiple stakeholders are asked to negotiate what this 'preferred situation' might be. And clearly, different actors will have different views on what they prefer. As discussed above, I believe it is of utmost importance that the change process through design proceeds via visual and tactile representations of preferred situations or the designing of objects, services and systems that lead to 'preferred situations'. Latin America has a strong tradition of participatory design for social change. Alejandro Barranquero, with reference to Paulo Freire's (1970) ground-breaking work in dialogic engagement, describes the Latin American origins of participatory design as '*participative communication*; that is, grassroots projects oriented to articulate means for the visualizing and the representation of communities traditionally submerged in the *culture of silence*' (2011, p. 159, italics in original).

One of the most important aspects in designing with communities is that the problems and ideas the participants come up with are visually and or physically represented. A visual or tactile representation of an idea facilitates thinking, collaboration and

communication between stakeholders and to the wider world. It also allows storing ideas for later use. For example, in the first workshop, participants worked in multidisciplinary teams with a focus on one aspect of marginalisation. A team who worked on the problem of socio-economic empowerment of the La Campana-Altamira community in Monterrey has visually represented their idea of a Community Fablab space with a blue bucket on stilts, symbolising a bell-tower (Fig. 7.12). La Campana means 'the bell' in English, and the team created a prototype of a bell-shaped tower that could be designed to house the FabLab and makerspace in the community.

This shared representation of an idea is known as 'boundary object'. Susan Leigh Star and James R. Griesemer proposed the boundary objects theory in 1989. Boundary objects may have 'different meanings

in different social worlds but their structure is common enough to more than one world to make them recognizable, a means of translation' (p.393). The bell-tower boundary object introduced a coherence across 'intersecting social worlds' (1989, *passim*), those of different expertise. The bell-tower team was composed of residents and social workers from La Campana, as well as students and academics from the university Tecnológico de Monterrey. The bell-tower team's disciplinary expertise covered engineering, education and social work. Representing the team's ideas in one object focused the team and made the idea communicable. This shared representation has then helped to bid for further funding to support the implementation of the idea.

Representing ideas visually and tangibly is a key foundational principle to any design process and



Figure 7.12: Prototype of bell tower, FabLab La Campana, 2018. (Photo: Nicole Lotz)

in any field of design. In co-design, the meaning of this representation is a shared construction by all participants and creators. Co-design processes, and the shared visual and tangible representations that they produce, are particularly important to discuss when we talk about the 'global'. With different languages, disciplines, world views and experiences involved in a project, tangible and visual forms of communication offer a platform of engagement that is more inclusive and opens doors for other participants and partners to join. The visual or tactile representation of ideas allows others to critique the proposals and suggest improvements and new activities. Teams, who work on similar topics or tasks have the opportunity to learn from and with each other. What struck me as special in the Mexican context, was the high level of crafts and making skills with which the ideas were brought to life. Continuing engagement and bringing in different expertise and skills (disciplinary and lived) as needed is important to bring about change.

Returning to the example of the bell-tower community FabLab, the team criticised the invisibility of the La Campana-Altamira community, their socio-economic needs and problems, which denies them the opportunities to learn and change. In their proposal, a FabLab and makerspace for the community were seen as a catalyst for change in which a larger part of the community can be actively involved. The bell tower was envisaged as a landmark building, as a symbol for collective changemaking. Although the bell-tower FabLab building itself was probably never envisaged to be realised, the theme of visibility of the La Campana-Altamira neighbourhood was taken up by the concrete cast market benches and murals that replaced the trash container (see Fig. 7.9).

## Concluding thoughts

**Renate:** We engaged in this discussion to communicate beyond our disciplinary fields to get a sense of the differences of how we practice in relation to what one might refer to, in the widest sense, as the global. We make no claim here of course that the case studies around which the discussion revolves are wholly representative of how we work in our respective fields, yet preoccupations and ways of doing certainly have become evident I think, as well as moments of miscomprehension that needed to be bridged.

What has also transpired for me is the extent to which in art history the medium of engagement is more text-based, and that certain burdens, such as the one of representation, which is prevalent in a

museum context, are not felt as acutely in design. I also confess to a degree of co-creation envy when listening to Nic and the fact that she is seemingly free to run with whatever ideas workshop participants come up with, or this is certainly how it seems, especially when compared to the restriction of working in a museum environment and the many difficult balances that need to be struck in this context.

Lastly, I would like to invite you to reflect on the process these conversations entailed. What have been moments of surprise and interest, noted differences of working as well as similarities perhaps that were difficult or easy to relate to? And what might be take-aways for you from this conversation?

**Amy:** On the surface, these are two very different projects, working in different contexts and with different aims. It isn't particularly easy to compare them or find similarities. I was a researcher based in Leicester, working at a Leicester museum, researching Leicester-based communities, and curating an exhibition aimed at an audience largely comprising Leicester residents. Whereas Nic's project was complicated by different geographies, languages and expectations and assumptions. Had we developed the exhibition with a view to it being hosted in or travelling to Nairobi, for instance, we would undoubtedly have produced a different end-product mindful of a wider audience. And then, there may have been more similarities and congruences with the process of making the FabLab project. That said, both projects offer approaches to achieving similar ends: community participation and engagement.

**Nic:** It was revealing to discover similarities to the challenges to community engagement in both Amy's work in Leicester and my work in Monterrey. Community engagement can never be representative, you will never be able to involve everyone who might be affected by your work. And this is important to recognise and to challenge your methods of engagement. I was taken by Amy's admittance of problems in reaching younger community members with an exhibition of a certain generation's designs' and in my case, reaching older adult generations of La Campana-Altamira with the use of innovative digital fabrication technology in community design interventions.

I think we both observed a global flow of ideas and localised implementations, for example in the Japanese saris or community maker-carts, that carries and translates across contexts. The importance of transnational participants and overlapping communities

of practice that help to translate ideas into a local participatory project cannot be underestimated.

A challenge was stepping out of the neat narratives we create when we describe our own projects and when we tried to respond to each other's work and Renate's and Kim's commentary and questions. From time to time, I felt lost, or couldn't see where the discussion would lead us. The criticality with which a finished project can be discussed (because you had time and space to reflect) is much more difficult to achieve when you talk about a live project. I think this is symptomatic of design practice, but increasingly also in research practice, in that you engage in a project that might create unexpected impact, but have little time to contemplate what mistakes you may have made and how these could be addressed or avoided in a similar project. This conversation offered me a welcome 'step back' and space for reflection on this work in progress. For example, the assumptions we make about what symbolises heritage of a community (a particular fabric or garment) or what symbolises progress and positive change in a marginalised community (digital fabrication) needs to be challenged, not that it is a completely false interpretation, but that it might not be representative of an entire community.

**Amy:** This is a great point. You've had the opportunity here to reflect on an ongoing process, and these discussions can go on to inform future iterations of the FabLab project. In contrast, I began working on *Suits and Saris* a decade ago. The exhibition closed in 2012 and Malika and I published our last article based on the project in 2018. It's not something I'm likely to return to now, aside from this conversation.

The experience of making *Suits and Saris* was not always a happy one and while I am immensely proud of the resulting exhibition, I remember the two years I worked on the project with some ambivalence. The fact that the 'legacy' website was taken down by the City Council not long after the exhibition closed, is emblematic, I think, of an institutional apathy for the innovative work we were trying to do with regards to exposing and deconstructing the effects of the museum on collections and their interpretations.<sup>1</sup> On reflection, this is, perhaps, not so surprising! However, good things did come out of the project, not least a collection of oral histories; the audio recordings and transcripts of the interviews we conducted during the research

<sup>1</sup> While the *Suits and Saris* pages have long since disappeared from the Leicester Museums website, an accompanying magazine developed by youth curators is still available online (S&S, s.l.a.n.). The articles feature images of the exhibition and reflect upon some of its themes.

phase, which have been lodged with the East Midlands Oral History Archive (EMOHA) at the University of Leicester. As a result, the resources available to researchers of the East-African Asian community in Leicester are now so much richer.

**Renate:** Thank you very much Amy, Nic and Kim for engaging in this process which often was quite involved as it proved to be quite a challenge at times to articulate contexts clearly and to ask the kind of questions that would draw them out. From my point of view, statements often pre-supposed a familiarity with a given way of working that turned out to be just that, assumptions that needed further unpacking and explanation, soon to be followed by a further need to offer more context. I also noted that it was only after quite a number of exchanges that a more generative discussion emerged which allowed for drawing out facets of the projects that spoke to one another.

I liken the process to the new connections that can be made through a rehang in a gallery, when images which were, for example, presented in a chronological context, are combined according to a theme, or according to some other principle. For me, seeing familiar images in a different context always allows for aspects to become visible that were not apparent before, opening up new perspectives and making new meanings available. I hope this cross-disciplinary conversation will likewise generate some new insights and perspectives.

But I would like to leave the concluding comments to Kim, who may have further thoughts on the territory that has been covered, and can perhaps also draw out some elements that were not explicitly addressed but are integral to this conversation.

**Kim:** It seems to me that this dialogue has addressed questions that are nested within one another. On one level, we have discussed differences between design and art history, or museum studies as disciplines. On another level, comparison between the two projects demonstrates something about how these disciplines address the legacies of colonialism and the relationship between the local and the global. Thirdly, there is a discussion of methods of community engagement, which are quite different in each of the two projects, though their purposes are comparable.

When following the discussion, I found it useful to reflect on points of similarity and difference between the two projects. Both involve design, though in quite different ways. In *Suits and Saris*, the emphasis falls on the consumption of designed objects – textiles and clothing – which operate within a tradition of

dress to signify cultural identities. The relationship between consumption and identity certainly is a central preoccupation in cultural-studies approaches to design, and I would say that Amy's reflection helpfully points to some challenges involved in discussion of 'identities' in such contexts. There is the risk of imposing implicitly colonial assumptions, or of homogenising a diverse community, as Amy explained. There is also the problem that clothing is so implicated in the lived performance and negotiation of identity that it rarely provides stable meanings. It is difficult to avoid stabilising the meaning of fashion when we display articles of clothing in a museum; in actuality, the objects and their meanings are in circulation and subject to countless modifications and contestations. The same may be said for other categories of designed objects, though with the caveat that design operates with such diverse materials and in such a variety of contexts that it is difficult to generalise.

Whereas *Suits and Saris* might be framed as a study of the consumption of design (though it obviously has more to it than such a crude précis suggests) the central focus of the Monterrey project is the design process, which is introduced into a specific social context through the FabLab and through 'design-thinking' techniques. Here community is envisaged as an interaction with urban space and design as a means of facilitating civic identity. The project also seems to participate in a reinvented and updated discourse of the 'maker', which has flourished over the last decade. It's quite a diverse movement, which is promoted with large claims about a new potential for localised production as I have already mentioned. The maker movement is also sometimes discussed as a means of countering the 'deskilling' which is a damaging side-effect of technological development (Sennett, 2009). This represents something of a return to venerable themes in design reform and design education, linked to the enormous influence of John Ruskin and William Morris and the pedagogy of the Bauhaus. It was interesting to explore, in this context, how digital skills and other making skills interacted.

Despite the differences between the two projects, both have a strong emphasis on the promotion of community and civic identity. *Suits and Saris* emphasises the role that designed objects have in representation and recognition of a community, whereas Nic's project emphasises intervention in urban space and analysis of space as a factor in civic cohesion. The pedagogic concerns shared by both projects seem to be linked to questions of community, too. Learning came up a few times in Amy's discussion in relation to heritage, though this is very tricky terrain as she described very

clearly. The pedagogic dimension of Nic's project is straightforward, in the sense that the FabLab is located in a school, but it also has the ambition to inculcate certain kinds of values and behaviours through opportunities to learn technical skills. This is how I understand the emphasis on entrepreneurialism in the Monterrey project, for example.

In a recent book on what they term 'undesign', Gretchen Coombs, Andrew McNamara and Gavin Sade make an interesting observation about the design-art relationship, in that it 'usually results in dichotomous formulations in which one side or the other is judged to be the bad relation because it lacks something that the other possesses' (2019, p.3). This rings true to me from my experience of working in art-and-design education and of witnessing occasional border disputes between representatives of these disciplines. Two important points of reflection relevant to this point emerge through this roundtable: first, a sense of the disciplinary complexity that exists between art and design. There are not two disciplines but many: alongside fine art and design (which is itself sub-divided in complex ways), we should include art history, museum studies and so on. Second, despite the translation problems that exist between disciplinary languages, there remain fundamental areas of shared concern which allow for productive communication. The problems that arise at the intersection of pedagogy and civic responsibility seem to be related in Amy's and Nic's projects, for example. Given that the history of design is so bound up with questions of pedagogy, this seems an interesting point of contact, where the standpoints taken by design and art history might examine issues that continue to be relevant.

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# A305 HISTORY OF ARCHITECTURE AND DESIGN 1890–1939: FROM 1975 TO THE PRESENT

Tim Benton

## Abstract

*The first third-level art-history course, A305 History of Architecture and Design 1890–1939, at The Open University was originally presented in 1975 and ran for eight years. The course included 24 text Units of 12,000 words each, bound in pairs, 24 TV and 32 radio programmes and featured an eight-week student project. By way of a series of coincidences, the course achieved a wider diffusion. The course was exhibited at the Venice Biennale in 1976, and six of the TV programmes were translated into Italian and shown on Italian national television. The course made a token reappearance in the Radical Pedagogies exhibit at the Biennale of 2014, and this led to a full-scale exhibition at the Canadian Center for Architecture in Montreal (2017–18) with a second showing at Garagem Sul (Centro Cultural de Belém Foundation) cultural centre in Portugal. This article explores the reasons for the interest in the course outside the University and possible lessons it might have for us in the age of the massive open online course (MOOC).*

**Keywords:** A305, architecture, design, film, distance teaching

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## Biographical note

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## A305 HISTORY OF ARCHITECTURE AND DESIGN 1890–1939; FROM 1975 TO THE PRESENT

Tim Benton, *The Open University*

A strange and wonderful thing happened in November 2017. The prestigious Canadian Center for Architecture in Montreal (CCA), founded by Phyllis Lambert, opened an exhibition entirely dedicated to The Open University course *A305 History of Architecture and Design 1890–1939*, first presented in 1975 (Fig. 8.1). Accompanying it was a book *The University Is Now on Air* by the exhibition curator Joaquim Moreno, with a photograph of me aged 27 filming Le Corbusier's Villa Savoye (A305 TV 13) on the cover (Fig. 8.2). The exhibition provided a thorough documentation of the course, including all the printed and media materials, as well as student comments, explanation of the production processes and comments on the relevance of the course at the time and in the present (Fig. 8.3). The exhibition was restaged at Garagem Sul / Centro Cultural de Belém, a cultural centre in Portugal in 2018 (Fig. 8.4).<sup>1</sup>

This trajectory prompts reflection on a number of points. How could a piece of distance teaching of the 1970s seem relevant in the age of the MOOC (massive open online course)? How can the media be best used in teaching? What, if anything, has The Open University to learn today from early examples of its teaching methods? This article aims both to reconstruct something of the history of the course and do it from a contemporary perspective.

The first Open University third-level art-history course – *A305 History of Architecture and Design 1890–1939* – was originally presented in 1975. The course traced the history of the rise of the modern movement in architecture and design from the period of the Arts and Crafts Movement to the International Style. The agreement with the BBC was that they would equip and staff television and radio studios at Alexandra Palace to make programmes for The Open University for an agreed annual fee. The course included 24 TV and 32 radio programmes and featured a student project. There was rigorous assessment (8 tutor-marked assignments (TMAs) and a three-hour exam). Assessment was not of the short-answer kind but in discursive essays or short texts in which students

<sup>1</sup> For a review of this exhibition, see Wright (2019).



Figure 8.1: A305 exhibited at the Canadian Center for Architecture (CCA), Montreal, in the *The University Is Now on Air, Broadcasting Modern Architecture* exhibition, 15 November 2017 – 1 April 2018. (Photo: Tim Benton)



Figure 8.2: Joaquim Moreno, *The University Is Now on Air*, CCA, 2017–18. (Photo: Tim Benton)



Figure 8.3: A305 course materials at *The University Is Now on air* exhibition, CCA, 2017–18. (Photo: Tim Benton)



Figure 8.4: The CCA exhibition *The University is Now on Air*, re-exhibited at Garagem Sul / Centro Cultural de Belém, Portugal, 2018. (Photo: Tim Benton)

were encouraged to develop their own ideas using the material available to them. Students were provided with a surplus of documentary and other material, requiring them not to reproduce teaching content but to explore and select material in response to questions put to them in the TMAs. Students had personal contact with a tutor (as associate lecturers were called then) who carried out teaching in their comments on the TMAs and in other face-to-face or telephonic contacts with the student. There was a summer school at the University of Sussex and a regular schedule of day schools. The first examiners for A305 were Reyner Banham and Joseph Rykwert, two leading architectural historians who already had worldwide reputations. The course was studied by around 500 students per year.

The CCA exhibition was the culmination of a series of curious events. Working backwards in time, the story begins with the exhibition staged at the Venice Biennale in 2014 at which Professor Beatriz Colomina of Princeton University assembled an exhibition of a set of 'radical' experiments in the teaching of architecture (Fig. 8.5). Each of these teaching initiatives was represented by a tear-sheet containing the basic details of the course, a few photographs and a single publication or pamphlet. As Colomina has pointed out in numerous lectures around the world, radical pedagogies was a continuing collaborative project at Princeton University, beginning in 2010, to investigate architectural education in the 1960s and 1970s, at a

time of unrest, protest, revolutionary rhetoric and direct action across the globe (Colomina et al, 2010). Among the hundreds of token representations of these radical, revolutionary and typically off-campus experiences was 'A305 Open University' (Fig. 8.6).

The presence of this document was in turn due to the fact that the course, *A305 History of Architecture and Design 1890–1939*, had been exhibited at the Venice Biennale in the 'Gruppo Scuola' (pedagogical section) in 1976, the period studied by Beatriz Colomina, in the context of violent debates in Italy about the opening of tertiary education to a greater number of students (Fig. 8.7). The decision to open the doors of tertiary education in Italy resulted in the swamping of schools of architecture with ten times the number of students that the schools could handle and stimulated nationwide student protest and debate. The possibility of using distance teaching methods was clearly an option and this made A305 seem highly significant.

The course was presented in Venice like an open book, with the twelve covers of the Units enlarged to frame cubicles where course materials were displayed. Six of the television programmes were dubbed into Italian and presented in the exhibition. They were screened for several years on Italian national television (RAI), thanks to Enzo Scotto Lavina, who worked at RAI and curated the exhibition. He edited the booklet describing the course at the Biennale (Fig. 8.8). As Ripa de Meano explained in the catalogue, experiments



Figure 8.5: Beatrice Colomina and research group, *Radical Pedagogies* exhibition, Venice Biennale, 2014. (Photo: Caroline Maniaque)



Figure 8.6: A305 represented in the *Radical Pedagogies* exhibition, Venice Biennale, 1976. (Photo: Caroline Maniaque)



Figure 8.7: A305 (Units 15–16, 17–18 and 19–20) exhibited at the Venice Biennale, 1976. (Photo: Tim Benton)



Figure 8.8: Enzo Scotto Lavina (ed.), booklet in Italian describing A305 and listing the contents, published for the Venice Biennale, 1976.

were being carried out at the University of Venice to see if the innovations of The Open University could be adapted to Italian conditions.

The 1976 Biennale exhibition was in turn owed to the presence at the OU in 1975 of a young Italian architect, Daniele Doglio, sent to England by the Mondadori publishing company in 1975 to find out about distance-teaching methods that the company hoped to exploit in Italy (Fig. 8.9). Daniele and I got on

well – he spoke good English and I speak reasonable Italian – and we shared an interest in architecture. The result was that on his return he pitched for an exhibition of the course at the Biennale, funded by Mondadori. Two televised press conferences were held at the 1976 Biennale on the topic of architectural education, one with representatives from the ministries and experts in teaching, and one with architects, designers and architectural historians (Fig. 8.10).



Figure 8.9: Daniele Doglio, Tim Benton and Giuseppe Samona at the second press conference at the Venice Biennale, 1976. (Photo: Charlotte Benton)

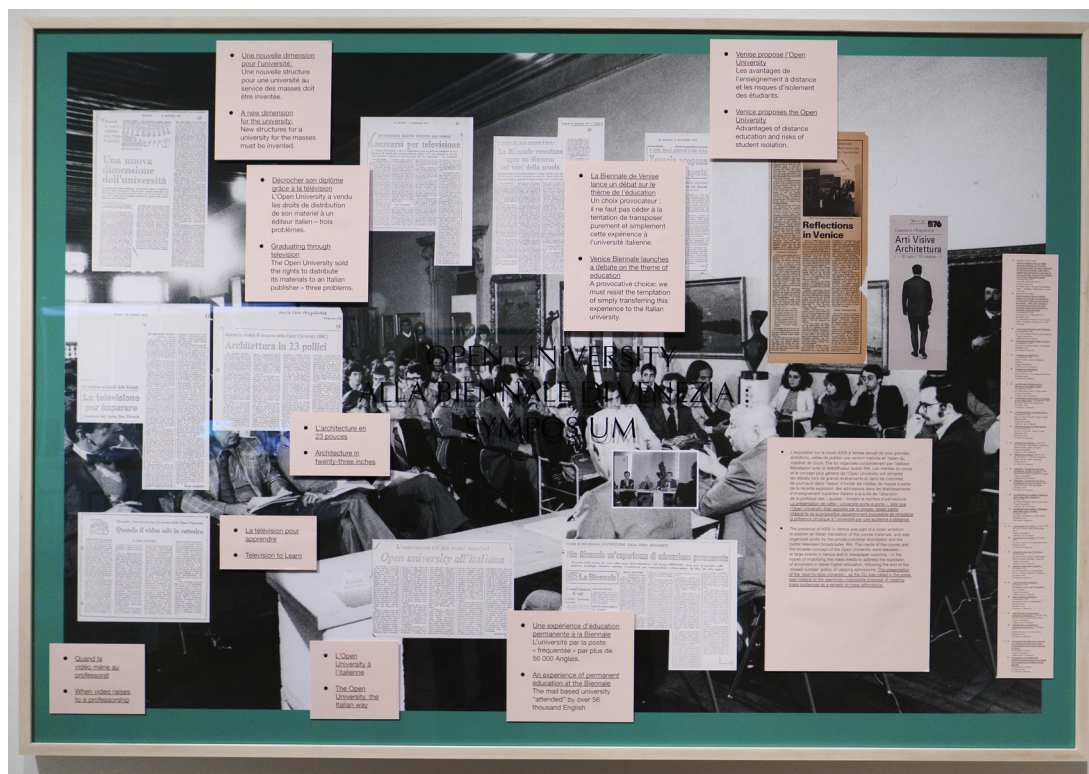


Figure 8.10: Image of a press conference at the Venice Biennale, 1976, presided by the venerable Italian Modernist architect Giuseppe Samona, with Tim Benton on the right, shown at the CCA exhibition. (Photo: Tim Benton)

As can be seen, the circumstances leading to the presentation of A305 in these two 'radical' contexts owed more to the means of presenting the course than to its intellectual content. A305 was not a revolutionary course in its theoretical methodology or its political standpoint. It was produced by an established British university in collaboration with 'Aunty BBC', both of which were not exempt from censorial scrutiny and it was aimed at OU students and the general public rather than rebellious architects. But in its delivery and in some aspects of its teaching practice, A305 was highly innovative. And this is what captured the interest of Joaquim Moreno, a Portuguese researcher at Princeton, who was sent off by Professor Colomina to look into The Open University and A305.

Joaquim's starting point was not the events of the 1970s but rather the crisis of architectural, and other, education in 2014. In particular, he wanted to compare the OU's methods with the spread of MOOCs promoted by Harvard and other universities and increasingly imitated across the globe. He was convinced that most MOOCs failed to deliver effective learning experiences. He became fascinated by the history of the BBC and public education in Britain

from the 1930s through to the 1970s, and he became convinced that The Open University model of distance teaching had a great deal to teach today. His starting point was therefore the use of the media and the intersection between the one-to-one relationship of teacher and student and the one-to-many distribution of public broadcasting. But, as his research deepened, he became increasingly interested in the whole logistical project of The Open University course production and the intellectual content of A305. The book he edited and largely wrote himself is an excellent analysis of the course, the OU in its early years and the cultural context, not without criticisms of the course and its methodology (Moreno, 2018).

Moreno assembled a personal archive that included all the texts and set books, the TV and radio programmes and even the scripts for the programmes. I visited the OU Library with him and helped him with his research, but the exhibition and book were entirely of his making. Joaquim recorded a brief account of his ideas for the CCA website (CCA, 2019).

The exhibition was an admirable example of what Joaquim Moreno called 'MOOCs archaeology'. From 1975 to 1982, the TV and radio programmes for

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BBC2		Wednesday tv	
6.40 am – 7.55 pm <b>Open University</b>	7.45 Colour <b>Pioneers of Photography</b> A series of eight programmes 4. Famous Men and Fair Women Julia Margaret Cameron's Success with the complex wet-collodion process is still one of the peaks in photographic history. Narrator Brian Cox Curator of the Kodak Museum Questions spoken by Joyce Grenfell and Yvonne Gilan Series adviser Aaron Scharf Film cameramen Peter Sargent, Bill Matthews Producer Ann Turner (Next programme: 5 March)	9.0 Colour <b>Top Crown</b> Champions of Crown Green Bowling compete for the BBC2 Masters Trophy. Second Semi-final Fred Hulme (Cheshire) v. Pat Heaney (Derbyshire) After his great win in the quarter- finals Hulme must be favourite for a place in the final. Introduced by Stuart Hall from the green of the Waterloo Hotel, Blackpool. Commentator Harry Rigby Producer Ray Lakeland	
7.55 Closedown			
11.0 am Colour <b>Play School</b> Story: The Hare and the Tortoise, illustrated by Laurence Henry. Presenters Chloe Ashcroft, Fred Harris (Repeated on BBC1 at 4.0 pm)			
11.25 Closedown			
5.0 – 7.5 pm <b>Open University</b>	8.10 Colour <b>Dust</b> A Case History	9.25 Colour <b>The Love School</b> Beata Beatrix by Robin Chapman	
5.0 Open Classroom. 5.25 An Architect at Work. 5.50 Chicago. 6.15 TV as a Source. 6.40 The Necessity for History.			

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**18 FEBRUARY**

THURSDAY tv	
<b>BBC1</b>	
6.40 – 7.30 am (UHF only) <b>Open University</b>	
6.40 Psychosocial Differences: 1. 7.5 An Architect at Work.	
9.5 am <b>For Schools, Colleges</b>	
9.5 Brazil Skyscrapers and Slums (Repeat)	
9.27 It's Your Choice Skills You Need (Repeat)	
9.48 Out of the Past Charles Dickens: 1 (Repeat)	
10.10 Science Workshop Tracks: 2 (Repeat)	
10.32 Scene Britain's Nuclear Defence Narrator Nick Ross Producer Andy Walker	
11.5 – 12.20 Maths-in-a-Box Weight Watchers (Repeat)	
11.30 Search The Welsh Chantists by Harri Webb	

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**22 FEBRUARY**

RADIO 4		Saturday	
<b>Stop the Week with Robert Robinson</b> A personal collection from the week's crop of sense and / or nonsense revealed in informal conversation with Dennis Barker, Dr. Edward de Bono, Benny Green and who knows who else. Musical ideas by Peter Skellern with Nottingham Festival Producer Michael Ember		11.15 News preceded by Weather	
7.0 News		11.30 Closedown	
7.2 <b>Desert Island Discs</b> Valerie Masterson, soprano, discusses with Roy Plomley (in a programme devised by him) the records she would take to a desert island. Producer Ronald Cook (Repeated: Monday 12.27 pm) (Valerie Masterson appears by permission of the English National Opera)		11.45 – 11.48 Inshore forecast	
		9.5 am – 12 noon and 2.0 – 5.0 pm <b>Open university</b>	
		VHF only 9.5 Open Forum. 9.25 Inter-Atomic Force Laws. 9.45 Science. 10.10 Is History Bunk? 10.35 Maths. 11.0 Renaissance and Reformation. 11.20 A Good Education. 11.40 Trials of Paul. 2.0 Decision Making in Britain. 2.20 The Digital Computer. 2.40 What is Crime? 3.0 Mining and the French Revolution. 3.20 Development at Oke Sani. 3.40 What is Design? 4.0 National Income and Economic Policy. 4.20 Decisions on Energy. 4.40 Language and Learning.	

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**16 FEBRUARY**

TUESDAY	
<b>RADIO 3</b>	
Lavatevi presto, written to be inserted in the pasticcio La Circe presented at Esterhazy in 1788. Claes Ahnaja, Aldo Baldin (tenors) Michael Devlin (bass), Lausanne Chamber Orchestra conducted by Antal Dorati (Belgian Radio recording)	
<b>VHF only</b>	
<b>Open University</b> 5.55 am Instruments and their Music. 6.15 The Best Laid Plans. 6.35 – 6.55 Mechanics and Applied Calculus. 11.40 pm Theories of Art: Plato. 12.0 – 12.20 am What is Design?	

• Arrivé en 1982, les cours de l'Open University seront relégués vers des tranches horaires beaucoup moins avantageuses – soit tard le soir et très tôt le matin.

• By 1982, Open University courses would be relegated to much less favourable slots in the late evening and early hours of the morning.

Figure 8.11: Part of a panel in the CCA exhibition showing how The Open University programmes were transmitted in 1975 (left) and 1982 (right). (Photo: Tim Benton)

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A305 were broadcast twice a week, on weekdays and weekends, with audiences of up to 40,000 people. A panel in the exhibition showed the transmission times of the first two A305 TV and radio programmes at the end of February 1975, embedded in the BBC public broadcasting (Fig. 8.11). It also charted the erosion of visibility of OU programmes in BBC scheduling. For example, in 1975 A305 TV I *An architect at work* by Geoffrey Baker was transmitted at 8.55 a.m. on Saturday 15 February and again at 5.25 pm on Wednesday 19 February, on BBC2. By 1982, the times were 9.20 p.m. on Sunday and 7.05 a.m. on Sunday. Radio I *An introduction to design* went from 3.40 p.m. on a Saturday in 1975 to midnight on a Tuesday in 1982. Later, OU programmes were transmitted at night and eventually distributed on cassette and DVD.

Since then, the A305 programmes disappeared, apart from a few bootleg copies, especially in the United States where an enterprising entrepreneur included them among his collection of avant-garde films with which he toured the art and architecture schools. The printed Units (course texts) also went underground, represented here and there in libraries but only intermittently in the statute libraries. The Open University courses float between the ephemeral and publication. This is true of all university courses which live on in the memories and notes of students,

but it is more paradoxical in the case of an organisation that produces tangible teaching materials – books and programmes. Many university lecturers translate their courses into books, but the investment in OU courses was significantly higher than most university courses and contained much material worth conserving, such as archival sources and interviews with important protagonists and historians. For example, A305 included many interviews with architects who were active in the 1930s, as well as the historians and critics who wrote the set books used by the students. The more recent strategy in the Arts Faculty of co-publishing course texts with established publishers and delivering media on DVD or other supports has changed this somewhat. Unfortunately, the BBC does not seem to have conserved the original 16mm film and one-inch ampex tapes, and the historian must work with degraded telecine copies of the programmes.

To view A305 from a contemporary perspective, we can do no worse than follow the trajectory of the exhibition at the CCA. On the CCA website is a filmed tour of the exhibition, called 'Counter-tour: Tim Benton's cut' which fleshes out the brief description below (CCA, 2017a). The exhibition began with a room recording the foundation of the OU and presenting the 24-course Units, bound in pairs (Fig. 8.12). The national organisation of the OU, with its then existing regional



Figure 8.12: The 24 'Units' that constituted the core of A305, in the CCA exhibition (Photo: Tim Benton)

- Higher education today is facing a crisis of access and quality; MOOCs (massive open on-line courses) offer a way to reach wider audiences but also raise questions about who produces knowledge and who is responsible for mass education. *The University Is Now on Air: Broadcasting Modern Architecture* attempts an archaeology of this contemporary situation through a symmetrical inquiry into Open University's televised education, and the history of modern architecture it broadcast in England in the second half of the 1970s, through its third-level course *A305: History of Architecture and Design, 1890–1939*. The course mobilized the convergence of mass media and mass education to broadcast modern architecture to an audience far broader than its enrolled students, reaching BBC primetime evening audiences and the constituents of the architecture culture: practitioners, educators, and students. This overexposure of education in public media transformed both the transmission of knowledge and the knowledge being transmitted, and radically opened up its means of dissemination. The exhibition contrasts A305's historical account of modern architecture with its context in the 1970s, a moment in which architecture itself was in great transformation. It also recreates the shared yet domestic experience of a door-to-door university education directly in the home, and offers insight into the machinery, logistics, and infrastructure required to bring about this educational innovation.

The Open University was a blended system of higher education for adults. It combined radio and TV broadcasts with mail delivered study materials, in-person tutorials, and residential summer sessions on conventional university campuses. It welcomed everybody irrespective of educational background and provided interdisciplinary foundation courses to foster a common denominator of academic preparation across a very diverse student body. The Open University's concept of "openness" contrasts with that of Umberto Eco, as articulated in his *Open Work*, roughly from the same generation. While Eco was interested in ambiguity through a proliferation of meanings, the Open University was interested in opening the doors and walls of higher education and opening up access to knowledge. Broadcasting education, however, implied reducing ambiguity for the sake of effectiveness. This central contrast provides an extraordinary opportunity to analyze the role of mass media and the university in the transformation of architecture culture, and for a close-up on the radical Labourist political and social project of sharing knowledge through open-channel mass media.

Joaquim Moreno

Figure 8.13: Curatorial statement by Joaquim Moreno introducing the CCA exhibition. (Photo: Tim Benton)

centres and study centres was also shown, along with a statement of intent by Joaquim, stressing the role of media in the course (Fig. 8.13). He emphasised:

Higher education today is facing a crisis of access and quality; MOOCs [...] offer a way to reach wider audiences but also raise questions about who produces knowledge and who is responsible for mass education. [...] The course [A305] mobilized the convergence of mass media and mass education to broadcast modern architecture to an audience far broader than

its enrolled students, reaching BBC primetime evening audiences and the constituents of the architecture culture: practitioners, educators and students.<sup>2</sup>

In accordance with the Joaquim's primary interest in the media, the next two rooms presented the 24 TV programmes, sixteen in the first room, eight in the

2 The words are taken from Joaquim Moreno's introductory statement in the exhibition *The University Is Now on Air*, Canadian Center for Architecture, Montreal, 15 November 2017 – 1 April 2018.



Figure 8.14: CCA exhibition, room showing the first sixteen TV programmes (the other eight were in the next room). (Photo: Tim Benton)



Figure 8.15: A305 TVI screened on one of four television sets in the first room of the CCA exhibition. (Photo: Tim Benton)

second. There was a token panel on the wall for each programme, and on each TV set four programmes cycled through continuously (Figs. 8.14 and 8.15). In the four side rooms, the emphasis was on the material history of the course publications, the production site at Walton Hall, the student experience and something of the architectural context in the 1970s, including the crisis in housing and its impact on the course contents below.

Interviews were screened with four of the participants in the course, Nick Levinson (Senior BBC

producer for A305), Tim Benton (course team chair), Stephen Bayley (author of two units and three TV programmes) and Adrian Forty (author of one unit and one radio programme) (CCA, 2017b-e). The first room presented the 'factory' at Walton Hall and the first mailing for A305, including units 1–8 and all the supplementary material (Figs. 8.16 and 8.17). The other rooms focused more on the broadcasting element – TV, radio and radiovision – although space was also allotted to assessment and the project (more on all this later). Despite Joaquim's primary interest in the media the exhibition was scrupulous in showing the essential nature of the printed material and the importance of assessed tuition and examination. The intellectual content of the course was represented by a display of the set books and the key books that influenced the authors at that time.

Joaquim was well aware of the paradox of OU study, the solitary work of the student and the social context of the family and the wider viewing public. He coined the phrase 'Classroom of solitudes' and had this printed over a photograph of a student with her baby about to watch a TV programme (Fig. 8.18). Quotations from student feedback and images of students at work, on the bus or in the home, lined the walls (Fig. 8.19). In the last room, the exhibition pointed to the course team's efforts to relate the housing crisis of the 1970s



Figure 8.16: A305, the first mailing, including Units 1–8, the radiovision booklet, *Documents*, *Images*, the broadcast notes, coloured film strips and supplementary materials. (Photo: Tim Benton)



Figure 8.17: A305 Course anthology, *Form and Function*, Granada, 1975. (Photo: Tim Benton)



Figure 8.18: 'Classroom of solitudes': OU student preparing to watch a television programme, as shown in CCA exhibition. (Photo: Tim Benton)

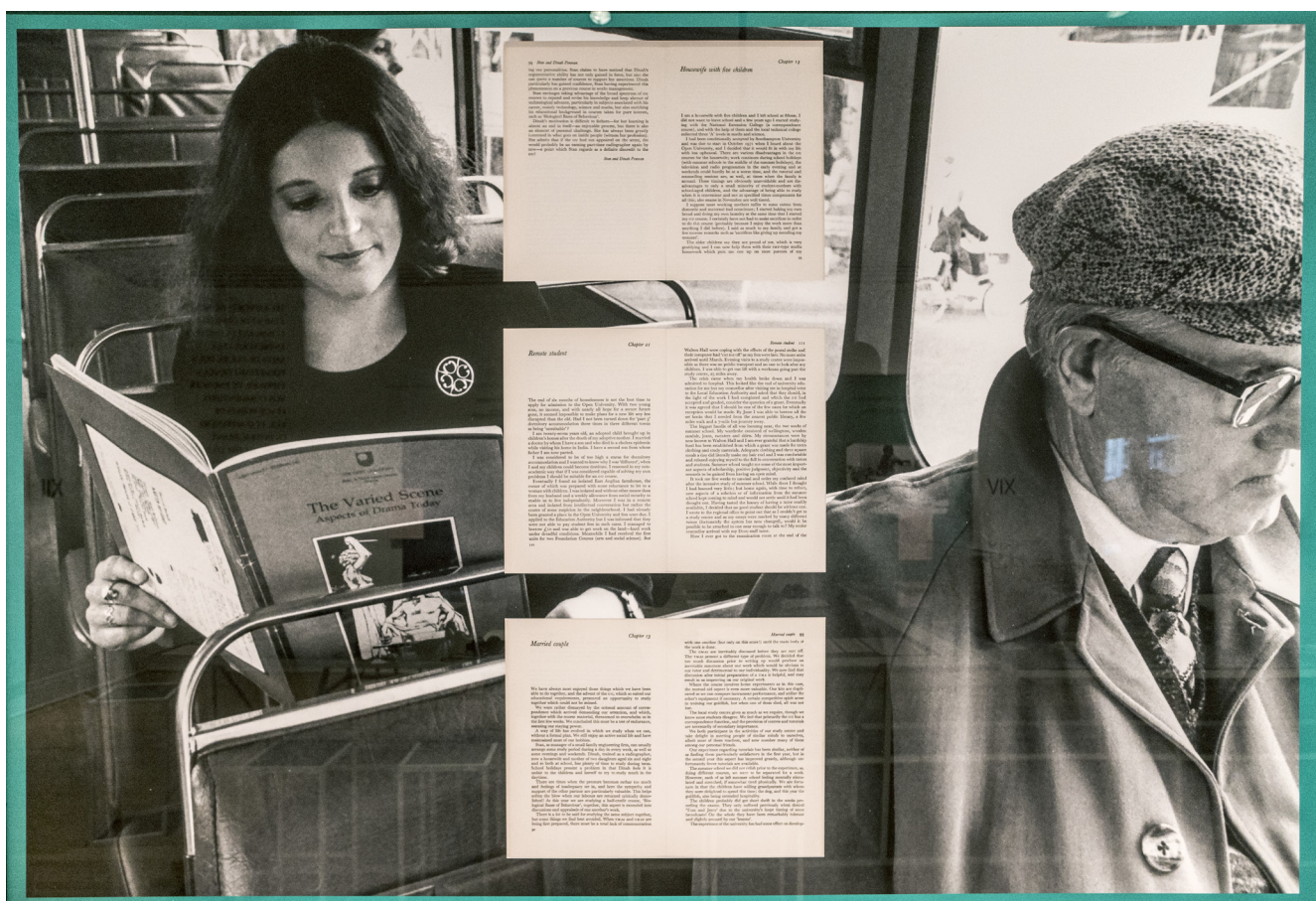


Figure 8.19: Presentation of comments by students on their experience of OU study as shown in CCA exhibition. (Photo: Tim Benton)



Figure 8.20: Final room of the CCA exhibition, showing Units 23 and 24 *The Garden City* and TV 23 (*The semi-detached house*) and TV 14 (*English flats of the thirties*) featuring Quarry Hill flats in Leeds. (Photo: Tim Benton)

with the situation in the 1920s and '30s, for instance in the TV 14 on two English flatted developments of the 1930s and TV 23 on the semi-detached house (Fig. 8.20). Part of TV 14 was a filmed analysis of R.A.H. Livett's Quarry Hill flats in Leeds, a major and controversial housing scheme near the centre of the city, which was demolished in the late 1970s (see also, Benton, 1975b). An A305 student, D. Squire Jones, who was an engineer, wrote his project on the demolition of Quarry Hill. The final TV programme presented housing developments in Britain of the 1960s.

The CCA also hosted lectures and discussions about the course and about the OU. The book *The University is Now on Air* included critical and historical essays by Nick Beech, Laura Carter, Ben Highmore and Joseph Bedford (Moreno, 2018). An occasion to make a direct comparison between the OU and a contemporary MOOC took place at the Graduate School of Design at Harvard University in November 2018, when a workshop was held comparing A305 with a world-famous MOOC, 'The architectural imagination', offered on their edX platform. With a star cast led by Michael Hays, the ten-week course combines some sophisticated discussion and fancy graphics. The course is free, but you can pay for certification. Take-up, particularly in South America, is huge. I was

invited to stress the differences between the OU method and modern MOOCs (however brilliant the content). Although MOOCs courses can stimulate, they cannot match the learning potential of discursive teaching allowing time for reflection and re-reading, discussions with tutors and an invitation to explore open texts and source material. Our basic teaching is carried by printed texts validated by external examiners. Furthermore, more or less sophisticated graphics and some photographs are no replacement for the experience of moving through a building. To take just one example: The AEG turbine hall by Peter Behrens in Berlin is usually presented by one historic black-and-white photograph of the exterior and perhaps one interior view. We filmed it in colour, giving scale to the building and explaining its structure with moving images. We even filmed from the moving gantry recording the sounds and atmosphere of a working industrial plant. It is worth repeating all this at a time when OU provision has changed rather significantly following successive governments' betrayal of the ideal of life-long learning. Withdrawal of government support for higher education, in order to reduce the national debt, meant that fees for Open University courses rose significantly. The resulting diminution of student numbers has threatened the basis of blended teaching

strategies and the high investment required to provide adequate audio-visual teaching materials.

### Chronicle of production of A305

I joined the OU in May 1970 at the age of 25. Before beginning work on A305 in 1972, I had already accumulated some experience of the use of media, contributing three TV and one radio programmes to courses A100 and A201. The Broadcasting and audio-visual sub-committee (BAVSC), responsible for allocating resources to media production, believed that broadcast media should be used on the large population foundation courses, to introduce students to the staff, and for the study of process (things moving). Nick Levinson (Senior Producer) and I encountered some hostility to the idea of investing heavily in media for a single discipline Arts course unlikely to attract more than 500 students. We had to persuade them that although buildings are indeed static, the experience of moving through a building enormously adds to spatial awareness and an understanding of architectural intention. We were fortunate enough to be allotted 24 TV and 32 radio programmes.

The initial course team included myself, Sandra Millikin, Clive Lawless and Ellie Mace (later Chambers) from Institute of Educational Technology (IET), the staff tutor Liz Deighton, Charlotte Benton as research assistant and Lyndsay Gordon as course assistant (as course managers were called then) and the all-important Tony Coulson (picture researcher). The BBC was represented by Nick Levinson (Senior Producer) and Ed Hayward for television and Helen Rapp for radio. Sandra Millikin left after eighteen months and was replaced by Dr Geoffrey Baker, on a two-year secondment from Newcastle University and, after he had to return, Stephen Bayley, who joined the team in the last six months of production. This meant that at any one time, there were only two lecturers and a research assistant writing the material. OU course teams typically include from six to 20 writing members. The 24 A305 Units were 12,000 words long each, and scripts for TV and radio scripts varied from 2,000 to 3,000 words. With such a small writing team, we were always going to have to use consultants. Of the 24 Units, seven were substantially written by invited authors: Reyner Banham (Unit 21), Adrian Forty (Unit 20), William Curtis (Units 17 and 18), Geoffrey Newman (Unit 19), Bridget Wilkins and Stefan Muthesius (Units 5 and 6). Most of these are household names in the fields of architectural and design history. Of the 32 radio programmes, 18 were provided by invited experts, either as scripts or as interviewees and

two of the 24 television programmes were written and presented by consultants. In addition to the 18 Units, the course team also prepared an anthology of texts, *Form and Function* published by Granada (Benton & Benton, 1975), a supplementary volume of texts called *Documents* and three avant-garde picture books, called *Images*.<sup>3</sup> *Form and Function* had an after-life in the United States as a textbook with the title *History of Architecture and Design* where it was used as a sourcebook for many years.

Sandra Millikin is an architectural historian specialising on British architecture. She wrote part of Units 3 and 4 and an unfinished draft on Frank Lloyd Wright. She made three excellent TV programmes, on Mackintosh's Hill House, Frank Lloyd Wright's Robie House and Rudolf Schindler's Lovell Beach House. Dr Geoffrey Baker was a lecturer at the School of Architecture at Newcastle University, a practising architect and historian, whose books on Le Corbusier's design method are well known. He contributed significantly to the Introductory units with a case study of the Paris Opéra by Charles Garnier. The first television programme was on the house he designed for himself and his family and set up one of the themes of the course: house and home. He remodelled and rewrote most of the units on Frank Lloyd Wright. He made a significant impact on the television programmes, writing and presenting five excellent programmes. Stephen Bayley arrived in the last six months of course production, following Geoffrey Baker's return to Newcastle. He wrote a unit on flats in Britain and another on the housing question, which was also a kind of conclusion about the impact of interwar modern architecture on contemporary Britain, and three television programmes. The rest of the course was written by myself and Charlotte Benton who also edited the *Documents* anthology.

The strategy that Nick Levinson and I worked out for the television programmes was to make as many as possible on 16mm film on location. We wanted to recreate as much as possible the experience of actually visiting a building. In the end, the budget only allowed for fourteen filmed programmes on location, while the remaining ten were made in the studio. In 1975, the OU BBC department was located in Alexandra Palace, occupying the studios that had been used in early television experiments in the 1930s. In 2017, the CCA shot some of the interviews used in the exhibition in

3 *Images* included the expressionist manifesto *Ruf zum Bauen* (Arbeitsrat für Kunst, 1920), Walter Gropius's *Internationale Architektur* (1925) and a selection of images from Erich Mendelsohn's *Amerika: Bilderbuch eines Architekten* (1928).

what was left of these studios (Fig. 8.21). These 25-minute studio programmes were recorded in one hour, allowing for virtually no retakes, using pedestal cameras and graphics mounted on boards. This was partly the consequence of the nature of OU BBC budgets. Certain costs, such as the use of the studio, control room and editing suites were considered 'below the line' because they were part of the capital investment at Alexandra Palace. So, a day in the studio, with associated production and editing facilities, was virtually free, as far as the course budget was concerned. 'Above the line' costs, such as travel, copyright and the hiring of local staff for lighting and transportation, had to be paid for in cash.

Outside broadcast monochrome video units were occasionally used, for example in the film on the London Underground (A305 TV19) and for parts of TV1. We were also able to use the studio as a gallery, introducing pieces of furniture that had been exhibited in 1923 at the Bauhaus exhibition in Weimar (TV 8 *The Bauhaus in Weimar*) or, for TV 17 *Wood or metal?*, comparing wooden furniture manufactured by Heal & Sons with tubular steel furniture made by Pel (Fig. 8.22). This programme was made in 1976, by which time the technology had advanced. The studio was converted to colour video, and we were able to insert substantial filmed sequences into studio programmes. A305 TV 17 also featured 'processes' – cutting dovetail joints and



Figure 8.21: The carcass of the OU/BBC television studios at Alexandra Palace, used for some of the CCA interviews. (Photo: Tim Benton)



Figure 8.22: A305 TV 17 *Wood or metal?* Dressing the studio set with furniture by Pel. (OU/BBC film stills)

manufacturing tubular steel chairs (Fig. 8.23). We noted earlier that the BAVSC tended to prefer programmes that illustrated 'process'.

One of our arguments for the use of the moving image in the course was that spatial awareness is only really possible with a changing perspective. Zooming or panning on a photograph or on location can simulate movement and create an impression of progression by effective montage, but only physically tracking the camera on a dolly can reproduce the spatial awareness that comes from a changing perspective. This is a particularly important concept for modern architecture. Le Corbusier referred to moving through

a building as a '*promenade architecturale*' and called on architects to adopt the 'Arab lesson', that architecture can only be fully understood in motion. Unfortunately, persuading BBC cameramen to take their cameras off the tripod and mount it on a track or lightweight dolly was too much, especially in the light of the budgets that were allotted. In most cases, film sequences simulated movement through a building by cutting together a sequence of static shots. OU BBC crews had to travel light, and time on location was strictly limited. The filming of the Villa Savoye in Poissy, South of Paris, was made in three BBC days (Fig. 8.24). That meant starting early on one day, driving to Poissy, via



Figure 8.23: A305 TV 17 *Wood or metal?* Filming the manufacture of a tubular steel chair. (OU/BBC film stills)



Figure 8.24: Part of sequence introducing Le Corbusier's Villa Savoye in A305 TV 13. (OU/BBC film frames)

the ferry, and setting up for the first shot around 2pm. Filming ended on the third day at 12.00 to allow the crew to return. On that shoot, almost every shot was used, including one where a large insect can be seen crawling across the corner of the lens filter. We were able to use movement in this film, shooting from a car as it approached the house and moving up the ramp with the aid of a lightweight dolly. This sequence, which combined shots taken from the roof of a car, tracking shots on a dolly moving up the ramp and tripod views, followed the presenter as he entered and rose through the house. This sequence matched one used by Le Corbusier himself in a film made in 1931 and exemplified what Le Corbusier called the 'promenade architecturale'. I believe that this fluidity of movement impressed viewers and ensured that the film won a

silver medal at the 7<sup>th</sup> Congress of Architectural Films in Madrid in 1976 (Fig. 8.25).

Another of our films that won a medal at a media conference in Padua in 1976 was about the 1920s housing settlements in Berlin (A305 TV9 Berlin Siedlungen). The intemperate weather meant that the crew were happy to shoot several sequences from a moving vehicle (Fig. 8.26).

Close cooperation with the BBC was possible because its producers were members of the course team and participated in the design of the course. The OU/BBC producers were almost all new recruits, selected for their academic qualifications as much as their experience of media production. Nick Levinson had a degree from the Courtauld Institute of Art, for example. The top brass at the BBC, however,



Figure 8.25: Nick Levinson and Tim Benton with the silver medal awarded for TV 13 Villa Savoye in 1976. (Photo: OU press office)



Figure 8.26: Nick Levinson and BBC crew filming the Siemensstadt housing settlement in 1973. (Photo: Tim Benton)

were nervous about the OU BBC department. We won prizes at a quarter of the cost of the Music and Arts department in Television Centre at Shepherd's Bush. They believed that most academics lacked the skills of professional presenters and that our scripts were too boring and technical. There was a tension between academic and infotainment standards that was enshrined in the dual write-off that each programme was subject to: one from the course team and the external examiners and one from the BBC. There were frequent disagreements. Over time, academics were progressively excluded from the OUTV programmes, by replacing scripted programmes by collages of interviews and by dubbing the scripts by professional actors. This was deemed to satisfy the public audience but did not serve the interests of effective teaching.

Nick and I were both critical of the style of arts programme perfected in Lord Kenneth Clark's *Civilisation* series (broadcast between February and May 1969). The format for these was that Clark was filmed in front of a building delivering a short script. These 'to-cameras' were interspersed with excellent filmed sequences with a voice-over. We wanted to use every second of the precious 24 minutes 20 seconds to present the subject of study. Short to-cameras were only used to introduce the aims of the programme and sometimes to sum up. Our approach was to mimic the visit, exploring the exterior before going in through the front door. The student who properly prepared for the programmes would have already learned something about the building and seen all the key names and dates in print. Film allows you not only to show something but also indicate what's important, by zooming or cutting as well as through a commentary. I learned quickly that word and image are in fierce competition when watching a film. The viewer will quickly lose the thread if he or she cannot see the relationship between what they are seeing and what the voice is saying. Editing a good visual documentary is a constant toing and froing between sequences of images – the film cut – and the text. You write a preliminary text or treatment and then shoot to that. You then see an edited roughcut and will have to change your script, sometimes dramatically, to match it. And so on. This process worked well when academics and producers know and trust each other and less well when media production was put out to independent companies. I like to believe that the A305 TV programmes were effective partly because of this good relationship between word and image.

Eighteen of the 32 radio programmes were conceived as 'Radiovision', taking a lead from Sir John Summerson's radio talks on the classical orders,

which had an accompanying illustrated booklet. This in turn drew on the tradition of using essays in *The Listener* to back up radio programmes in the 1930s. We gave students a *Radiovision Booklet* with six pages of illustrations for each programme, and the presenters referred to these illustrations by number. It must have sounded very strange for any drop-in listeners, who tuned in to the radio programmes every Wednesday and Saturday, to hear presenters refer to 'Figure 1 in your Radiovision Booklet'. The radiovision programmes were particularly successful with students.

Compared to the traditional method of teaching architectural history, with lectures illustrated either by stock black-and-white slides or transparencies shot by the author, television allowed an intensity of experience, scale and information that was quite unique. Pevsner was still teaching the Slade lectures at Cambridge in the 1960s with black-and-white glass transparencies taken in the 1920s and '30s. Television programmes are also a challenge to research and film. The camera is very unforgiving. We need to know at every point what the camera is seeing, what has been altered, what has been damaged and so on. It is less easy to hide behind generalisations and one or two black-and-white photographs. Working on a TV programme often developed into research projects because buildings or objects are effectively primary sources – raw data – that have to be interpreted and explained. For example, the programme on modern wooden and tubular steel furniture around 1930 (TV 17 *Wood or metal?*) developed into an exhibition at the Architectural Association and a publication on the British firms Pel and Cox (Sharp et al, 1977) and an article in *The Architectural Review* on the retail store Heal and Son (Benton, 1978). The radiovision programme I made in 1973 on Le Corbusier's drawings for the Villa Savoye developed into a book first published in French 1984 and later revised and reissued in English in 2007. The illustrations for this radiovision programme were reproduced on an A1 sheet (Fig. 8.27).

The University ruled that transmitted media could never be an 'essential' part of the course, and indeed not all students regularly watched or listened to the programmes. We made every effort, however, to integrate the programmes into the teaching material, listing the TV and radio programmes in the course units. For example, the Unit on Le Corbusier, written by William Curtis, refers throughout to the Villa Savoye, which was the subject of a TV programme and a radiovision programme. Research carried out by Ellie Mace for IET proved not only that a significant majority of A305 students found the programmes helpful or



Figure 8.27: The sheet of illustrations for Radiovision 17 (*Villa Savoye* preparatory drawings) and the back cover of Units 17–18, showing the first and executed plans for the Villa Savoye. (Photo: Tim Benton)



Figure 8.28: Coloured film strip supplied with each pair of Units, exhibited at the CCA exhibition. (Photo: Tim Benton)

very helpful but that many of them referred to them in their exams many months after transmission. An underlying reason for this was our introduction of Broadcast Notes, subsequently widely adopted in Arts courses. Printed in two A4 booklets, the notes provided students with an outline, some preparatory work to do before watching or listening, and some revision and additional notes for use immediately afterwards. The idea was that taking notes during a swiftly flowing media presentation is not a good idea, and we were reluctant to use the modern technique of repeating essential points every five minutes. Furthermore, the notes were helpful for students who either missed the programmes or who wanted to revise their content in preparation for the exam at the end of the course.

The course ran from February to October, with a summer school in July. Assessment was a combination of an end-of-term, invigilated, three-hour examination and eight tutor-marked assignments. The texts, bound in pairs of Units, were published in-house and printed by Martin Cadbury for the OU. We went against the University's house style in adopting double column to facilitate the use of in-text plans and diagrams. We opted for thicker than usual paper to avoid see-through. The half-tone plates were printed separately on art board to maximise the quality and then bound into the end of each pair of Units.

Printing half-tone illustrations in colour was considered too expensive but we managed to exploit a peculiarity in the funding model to provide each pair

of Units with a colour-film strip of twelve frames (Fig. 8.28). We were able to do this by applying to the 'Kit fund', intended to provide students of science and technology with equipment and materials. We even supplied students with a fold-out plastic slide-viewer.

A lesson I learned very quickly is that most people have not been taught to read plans. We made a fundamental decision to have every plan in the Units redrawn to the same convention and include a 'Plan-reading guide' on a buff card, including notes on how to find your way round a building and identify the location of photographs from the plan (Fig. 8.29).

We made a controversial decision to include an eight-week student project, in which students would research an actual building and write it up. This counted for three of nine assignments. Students were required to find archival material – images, plans,

## A305 Plan-reading guide

### Walls

- 1 Load-bearing, usually brick or masonry
- 2 Partition wall
- 3 Cavity wall of brick or breeze block usually marked as 1
- 4 Low wall or garden wall outside main building
- 5 Wooden partition
- 6 Movable wooden screen
- 7 Wooden or metal balustrade

### Apertures

- 8 Glass framed by wood and metal from floor up
- 9 Door
- 10 Window set in a wall
- 11 Niche in wall
- 12 Fireplace

### Overhead

- 13 Indicates a change in ceiling level or overhang of upper floors
- 14 Indicates an important structural beam overhead

### Entrances

- 15 Main entrance
- 16 Alternative entrance for servants or to garden
- 17 Fitted furniture – seat, dresser
- 18 Fitted cupboard with double doors

### Roofs

- 19 Projecting roof seen from above (sloping roof)
- 20 As above but flat roof

### Stairs

- 21a Spiral stair (ascending in direction of arrow)
- 21b Straight stairs ascending in direction of arrow
- 22 Stairs down to basement

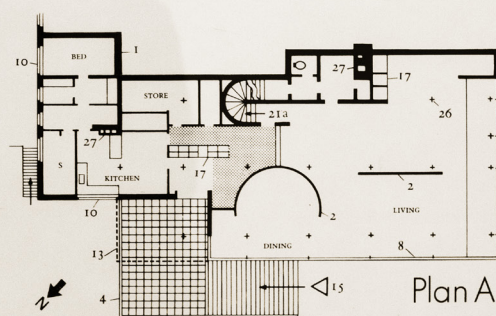
### Circulation

- 23 Indicating areas of circulation in a house (corridors, passages etc.)
- 24 Paved areas on verandas and terraces

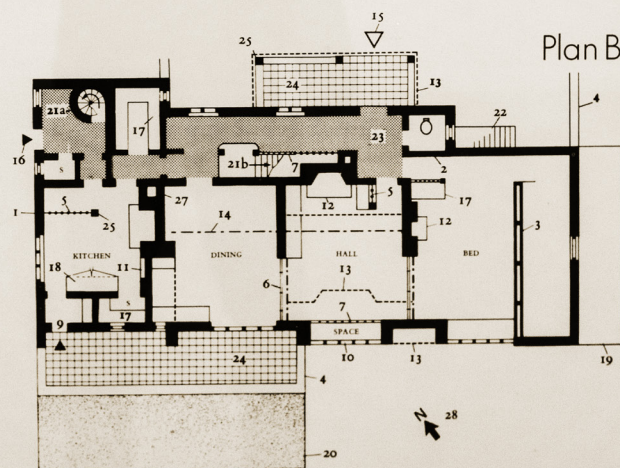
### Supports

- 25 Wood, stone or concrete pillar
- 26 Steel stanchion
- 27 Flue for fire or boiler
- 28 North point

- |               |  |
|---------------|--|
| HALL OR H     | - Hall   |
| LIVING OR LR  | - Living or sitting room or parlour                    |
| DINING OR DR  | - Dining room  |
| BED OR BR     | - Bedroom  |
| DRESSING OR D | - Dressing room  |
| NURSERY OR N  | - Nursery  |
| BATH OR B     | - Bathroom   |
| WASH OR W     | - Wash house (clothes)                                 |
| KIT OR K      | - Kitchen  |
| SC            | - Scullery   |
| WC OR         | - Lavatory   |
| STORE OR S    | - All forms of storage – coats, pantry, linen cupboard |
| SPACE         | - An empty space over a room below                     |



Plan A



Plan B

Figure 8.29: A305 Plan reading guide. (Photo: Tim Benton)

documents – to support their work. This ran against a University doctrine that held that students should be able to complete their studies with what we sent them through the post. Projects were reserved for fourth-level courses. The A305 project was considered by students to be one of the most successful parts of the course. The 5,000-word reports deposited in the RIBA library have proved of interest to scholars, who have found material on little studied buildings and those pulled down or altered since the 1970s.

Many of the TV programmes were case studies of individual buildings, a policy born partly out of necessity, and partly to serve as models for the student project. Two radio programmes took this further, tracking the evolution of a research project on a modern house, 66 Froggnal by Colin Lucas of Connell, Ward and Lucas. In the first of these programmes (A305 RV23), I took a series of photographs of the house and we walked through it asking questions without answers (Fig. 8.30). In the second programme, a week later, some of these questions were answered, with an examination of the building history and the legal disputes resulting from the construction, an analysis of the drawings and interviews with both the client and the architect. This programme was supported by the publication in *Documents* of two original articles about

the house. The programme simulated the kind of work students were expected to carry out for their project.

The teaching strategy of the course was to cover the basic history of modern architecture and design in the first sixteen weeks and then focus on more generic themes, with a general orientation towards Britain, to support students in their project. The two Units on British design (A305 19–20) included one on the electric home by Adrian Forty. The next Units included one on mechanical services by Reyner Banham and one on apartment buildings by Stephen Bayley, concentrating on British examples.

The Units were relatively advanced, in British architectural-history teaching at the time, in making extensive use of untranslated French, German, Italian and Russian source material, much of which was published in English for the first time in *Form and Function* and *Documents*. Although our students were not expected to be able to visit libraries, we provided them with a great deal of archival material and a short list of set books that they were required to read.

The course was also unlike courses in most schools of architecture in devoting considerable attention to design history, following the lead of Nikolaus Pevsner and Reyner Banham. Eight of the 24 Units, nine of the 32 radio programmes and six of the 24 TV programmes



Figure 8.30: Sheet of illustrations accompanying radiovision programme 23 on the house by Colin Lucas, 66 Froggnal, Hampstead, displayed in the CCA exhibition. (Photo: Tim Benton)

dealt exclusively with design history. A strange consequence of this was that many of the tutors for the course were pioneering the research and teaching of design history in the Polytechnics, for example at Middlessex, Brighton and Leicester. Our tutors were mostly lecturers in Universities and Polytechnics who were attracted to teach the course part time, partly to support their role as teachers and partly as a means of contacting other like-minded teachers and researchers. We played a role in initiating the first of a series of design history conferences in 1976 at Newcastle Polytechnic which turned into the Design History Society and its prestigious journal, edited for ten years by Charlotte Benton. In two articles in *Design Issues*, Clive Dilnot (now professor at The New School for Design, Parsons College) devoted several pages to A305 as part of the origins of design history in Britain (1984a, 1984b).

A305 had a week-long summer school, held at the University of Sussex, which was an extremely intense experience for students and staff. Among the summer school tutors were several of the course tutors but also many University and Polytechnic lecturers invigorated by the lively exchanges with other researchers. Many of those who went on to write books and articles on architecture and design taught at the summer school at least once. We always employed at least one practising architect who ran a plan-reading session for those still anxious about interpreting historic plans and elevations. We were able to visit Erich Mendelsohn and Serge Chermayeff's De La Warr pavilion at Bexhill-on-Sea (1933) as well as a number of other modern or Arts and Crafts buildings in the Brighton area. The summer school, like the student self-help groups, was a fertile forum for discussing approaches to the project as well as any difficulties with the course material and it also exposed students to a wide range of different methodologies and viewpoints.

It has to be said that in methodological terms – a keyword of the 1970s – the course was relatively conventional but in the combined effect of the materials it marked a sea-change in the teaching of architectural history. It was conventional to the extent that many of the Units focused on the 'big-name' architects and worked within the conventions of art history at the time, concerned with the formal similarities and differences that identified modern architecture. On the other hand, we also included many subjects not normally covered by histories of modern architecture, such as the traditional architect Edwin Lutyens, Art Deco and popular and social housing.

We had a considerable drop-in audience among architects, both for the media and the texts, and we

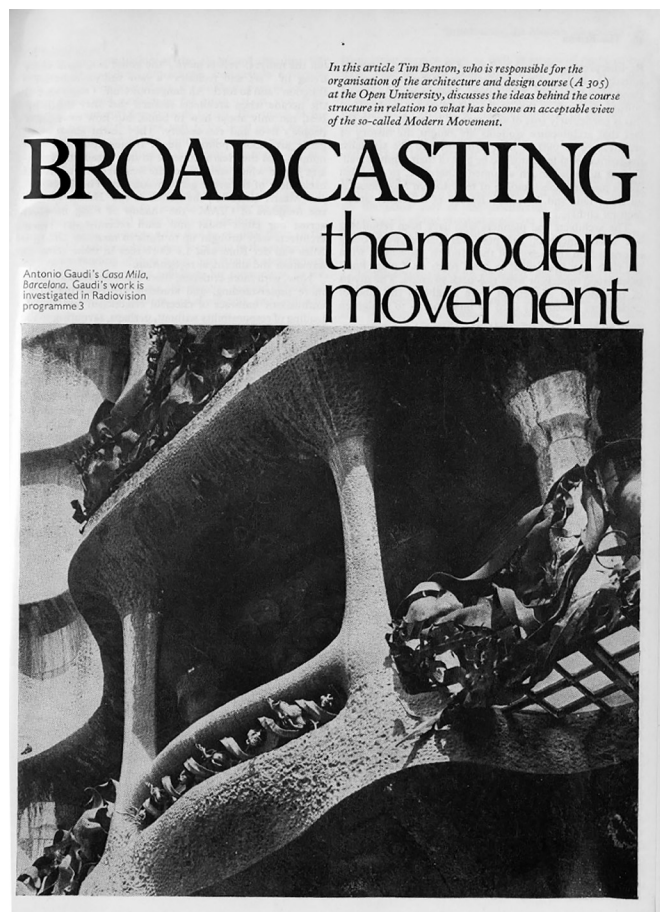


Figure 8.31: Tim Benton, 'Broadcasting the modern movement', *AA Files*, 1975. (Photo: Tim Benton)

encouraged this by publishing articles in *AA Files* and *The Builder* listing the broadcasting schedules (Benton, 1975a) (Fig. 8.31). Debates on the course were held at the RIBA and the Architectural Association. The teaching of architectural and design history in many departments in the UK and in the US were influenced by the course materials, despite its lack of theoretical glamour. The course was conceived as a historical project rather than engaging with current debates, and I believe both approaches are valid.

The starting point for the course was Reyner Banham's *Theory and Design in the First Machine Age*, published in 1960. This book was a set book, along with Pevsner's venerable *Pioneers of the Modern Movement* (later *Design*) (1936) (in its 1960 edition), Hitchcock's *Architecture: Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (1958) and Hitchcock and Johnson's *The International Style* (1932). Another set book was the English edition of Le Corbusier's classic text, published in 1927, as *Towards a New Architecture*. Students had to buy these books, as well as *Form and Function* and a lively market in second-hand books quickly established itself among them. Although the dramatic decline of modernism in architecture was well under way by 1975, accelerated by the collapse of the Ronan Point tower block in

East London in 1968, the course focused on the period 1890–1939. At the end of the course Geoffrey Baker and Stephen Bayley looked at an example of postmodern housing (the Byker wall in Newcastle) and the contemporary crisis in housing.

The permeation of architectural criticism and history by French theory was under way: the semiological tract *Meaning in Architecture* by Charles Jencks and George Baird came out in 1969. Charles Jencks's *Modern Movements in Architecture*, with its semiological dressing, was published in 1973 but Manfredo Tafuri's *Progetto e utopia* (1973) was only translated in 1976 and his modern architecture text books with Francesco Dal Co in 1976. Many of the course tutors were living the postmodernist moment, either as architects or historians, and were also engaged in feminist, semiological and structuralist criticism, which were under-represented in the course. This provided a lively dialogue, as the course progressed, between tutors and central staff and between tutors and students, especially at summer school.

Although the general thrust of the course was biased towards the rise of modern architecture in Europe, Russia and America, the later programmes turned more towards architecture and design in Britain that was not necessarily part of the pure modern movement. We also covered more traditional architecture – Sir Edwin Lutyens, English classicism and art deco, the London Underground and the semi-detached house. We knew that most students would not be able to write about a modern-movement building in their area. Furthermore, we were well aware that most students lived in traditional houses and had broadly traditional taste. We were determined to try to encourage students to express their own views and preferences.

For this reason, as already pointed out, a dominant theme in the course was the house. I was mocked by some architectural critics for asking the question 'What is this like, as a house, to live in?' during the television programme on Le Corbusier's Villa Savoye. But I still think it is a relevant question. The course began with a television programme by Geoffrey Baker showing us round the house he designed for himself and his family outside Newcastle (Fig. 8.32). The programme showed both how an architect works towards a design solution but also how the history of the rise of modernism studied in the course was relevant to contemporary practice. In the first radio programme, I introduced students to Siegfried Giedion's concept of anonymous design in *Mechanization Takes Command* (1947) and asked students to look around and ask if they can identify objects transformed by the development of modern design in the twentieth century.

A key figure in constantly reminding us of the need to see the material from a student's perspective was the staff tutor Liz Deighton. She constantly rapped us on the knuckles for using too much unexplained jargon and dropping too many names. Today, the course texts sometimes read as naïve, because they lack the sprinkling of academic keywords with which we now assert our credentials before our peers. They also included a discursive framework. The flow of information was interrupted by 'exercises' and 'discussions' (Fig. 8.33). Students were asked question about what they had read and encourage to make notes that did not reproduce what had been written but interpret it. There followed short paragraphs that provided plausible responses. I look back with nostalgia to a time when we tried to make learning complex things easier.



Figure 8.32: A305 TV | *What is architecture?* Geoffrey Baker explaining the design of his own house. (OU/BBC film stills)

Look at **Plates 35–41** and **Figures 35 and 38**.

**1 What sort of overall impression do you think the tubular metal furniture exhibited in the 1928 exhibition might have made [Plates 35–9 and Fig. 38]?**

**2 Can you detect the use of any other new materials in any of these pieces?**

• 1 The first point is that the placing of utilitarian pieces like the hospital furniture [**Plate 36**] next to the ‘private’ furniture is indicative of the exhibition organizers’ programme. The connotations of hygiene, durability and versatility, which attracted designers of tubular steel furniture, could be stressed by exhibiting hospital equipment which palpably has, of necessity, these virtues. Secondly, there is an almost aggressive stress on versatility and ingenuity of construction—the opposite of the ‘standard solutions, incapable of further improvement’ which Breuer and others sought. I am thinking of the use of curving tubes and extreme delicacy of the members. Thirdly, the fact that the designers of these pieces came from all over Europe must have been important in supporting the view that tubular steel was more than a mere Bauhaus fad.

2 The use of moulded fibre-board [**Plate 35**] and plywood [**Plates 39 and 41**] was an important portent for the future. Rietveld, in particular, made many experiments with fibre-board chairs around 1927, as Heinz and Bodo Rasch did, with plywood, around 1927–8. After 1930, plywood and laminated boards of different kinds would be used by many designers, notably Alvar Aalto, in Finland, Josef Albers in Germany and Breuer, after his move to Britain (see Radiovision booklet, programme 30). The Bauhaus stool [**Plate 41**] was a comparative late-comer in this field.●

Figure 8.33: Example of ‘exercise’ (in bold) and ‘discussion’, taken from Units 15–16. (Photo: Tim Benton)

A key lesson I learned is that the biggest difficulty for the student of the visual arts is not that they don’t know what you are trying to teach them, but that they don’t see what the more experienced eye sees in a building or artefact. Giving students experience of seeing a building through the eyes of someone who has explored its history, understands the plan and structure and presents it as a commented sequence of moving images should be, I believe, a corner stone of spreading awareness of the importance of architecture and design, especially when diffused to a larger audience. The glory days of high investment in life-long learning are over and the university has adapted to new realities and new methods. The wealth of opportunity and

dangers of the web and online presentation present new opportunities and challenges. But it is perhaps useful to look back to the ‘world we have lost’.

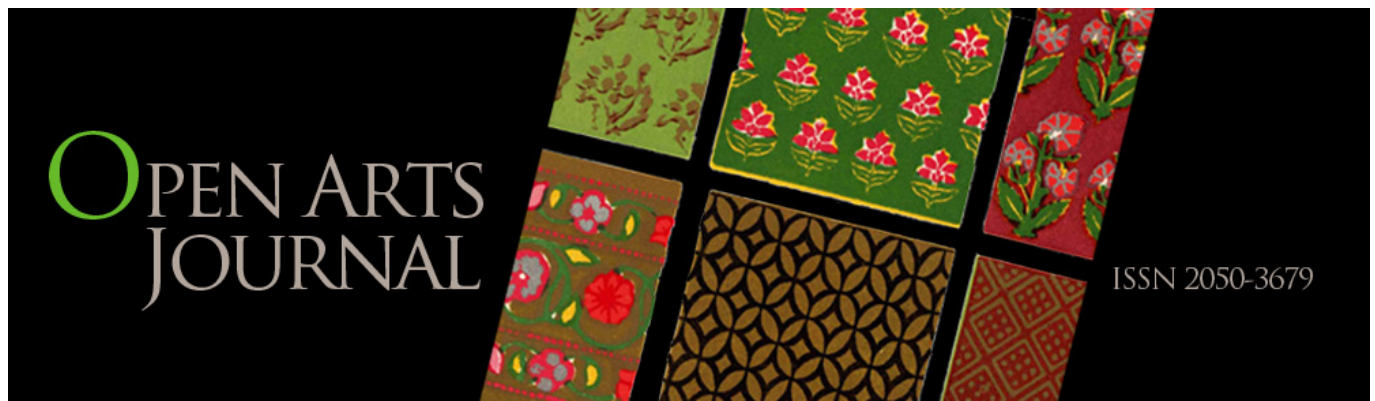
A305 prompts reflection on the advantages and dangers of combining higher education with mass participation. University students have different needs and expectations from those of a mass audience. This created tensions in the 1970s and ’80s and would continue to do so today. Nevertheless, the ability to present undergraduate teaching materials to a wide audience was extremely valuable. Some MOOCs attract wide audiences through the charisma of the people taking part and because they offer an insight into fashionable and prestigious ideas. This is an important role. Deep learning requires something more: the transference of skills that will enable students to find things out for themselves, to interrogate texts and form judgments based on principles of sound verification. This is all the more necessary when public media are full of opinion and uncorroborated statements. Open University courses aimed to do this by providing a surplus of information which students were expected to interrogate and draw their own conclusions. A discursive element was maintained in the texts with exercises and discussions and through the TMAs, prompting student essays and responses from the tutors. The summer school added a priceless ingredient of continual discussion. The first courses of the OU also prompt reflection on current production standards. Academic quality has not diminished and has in some ways been improved through the practice of co-publishing teaching texts, thus achieving wider diffusion of the printed material and a wider academic scrutiny. But as the diffusion of our printed material has somewhat expanded, our media output has shrunk. The Open University’s concerns about copyright has meant that many excellent audio-visual products are distributed through narrow-casting to our students and almost nobody else. Furthermore, the reduction of funding has meant that a production of 24 TV and 32 radio programmes is unthinkable today.

\* I’m grateful for the support of the archivists in the OU Library, and also the help of Elizabeth McKellar (The Open University), in the production of this essay.

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# A305: LOOKING BACK TO LOOK FORWARD

Joaquim Moreno

## Abstract

*This article takes a 'rear-view-mirror' look at the iconic third level Open University course A305: History of Architecture and Design 1890–1939. It asks what we can learn from this course, which was first presented in 1975, ran for eight years and was freely available to the general population since its 24 television and 32 radio programmes were broadcast by the BBC. It considers the contribution that A305 made to the field of architecture and pedagogy in view of the rise of MOOCs (Massive Open Online Courses), the current global pandemic, as well as the supposition that the future of education and learning requires a careful blend of presence and distance. It posits that at a time when remote education gains new currency and urgency, the openness of A305 can be a valuable lesson to explore new scales and new architectures for the learning collective we are trying to reconstitute.*

**Keywords:** learning, collective, remote, broadcast, media, A30: History of Architecture and Design 1890–1939, CCA, Venice Biennale 1976 and 2014, MOOCs, Open University

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## Biographical note

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## A305: LOOKING BACK TO LOOK FORWARD

**Joaquim Moreno, Faculty of  
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The Open University's third level arts course A305 *History of Architecture and Design 1890–1939* enjoyed almost half a century of cultural and social relevance, fueling a persistent debate about its dissemination well beyond the academic circle of its students, involving a rich afterlife and prompting discussion over the possibilities of a future life in a new iteration. The course is a pioneering Open University Arts course from the days when the university used a blended pedagogical system, which combined printed educational material sent out by mail with open channel radio and television broadcasting. Reflecting its method of dissemination, a key feature of the course was that it reached the BBC's general audience as well as architecture professionals, that is practitioners, students and educators, in addition to Open University students. This educational 'excess' through the use of public media and the teaching beyond the regular classroom it entailed, transformed both the transmission of knowledge and the knowledge being transmitted. Given this background, this course offers an extraordinary micro-historical opportunity to study the convergence of mass media, mass education and the history of modern architecture. The openness of A305's educational approach was so radical, in fact, that many attempts were made to recapture it, to bring it to the present; some as recent as the large research project I developed with the Canadian Centre for Architecture (CCA) that encompassed an exhibition and a book titled: *The University is Now on Air: Broadcasting Modern Architecture*, dedicated to the analysis of the radical openness of televised education and to the history of modern architecture it broadcast into English homes in the second half of the 1970s.

The crisis of access and quality of higher education this course was addressing also constitutes a past that is still present, and its traces, remains and leftovers offer a perfect archaeology of remote learning: a pathway to examining those spaces without walls where collective learning, and the interaction between the history of architecture and the time and place of its writing, takes place. Such an archaeology, moreover, could form the foundation on which to build a possible re-enactment of the course that replicates its energy

and performs a migration into a more contemporary media environment.

Through the BBC's broadcast of A305's television programmes modern architecture was being received at home in prime time, like a guest, by the entire family. Thus the course allowed many domestic households to 'visit' and become familiar with notable icons of the modern tradition, such as Corbusier's Villa Savoye and Frank Lloyd Wright's Robie House, and it made them equally conversant with other traditions and lineages, which included, Edwin Lutyens' Deanery Gardens. The course also addressed Design History, discussing the energy and information embodied in anonymous objects, even debating the design features of the technological implements, like radio sets, through which it reached its students. It was also aware of the time of its writing and of the problems its audience faced. What better way to communicate the historical inflection of Modern Architecture in relation to what was then called the Post-Modern than the debates between Modern high-rise apartments and Classicizing suburban semi-detached houses that its students knew very well from their own living conditions? What better object lesson on housing than the students' personal experience? Furthermore, A305 was, in practical terms, a bottom up history workshop, as each student contributed a small monograph on a modern building close to them in what amounted to a large map of other modernities. This attention to the student voice allowed for a real dialogue between tutor and student, prioritising listening attentively to students as well as educating them, and producing a large body of collective research that was deeply engaged with the local context of each student and widely disseminated. Looking back to the entanglement of A305 with its media environment and the anxieties and debates of its time, the format of a more contemporary media environment like MOOCs (Massive Open Online Courses) appeared to be the course's technological upgrade, able to nurture an afterlife of the course.

MOOCs appeared to be the next generation of the media technologies that had torn down the walls of the classroom and had displaced most of the learning to the stream of entertainment outside the cloisters of academia, as Marshall McLuhan pointed out over half a century ago in his article 'Classroom Without Walls' published in the anthology, edited with Edmund Carpenter, *Explorations in Communication* (1960). But, on closer inspection, any thought to utilize MOOCs as a technological infrastructure to re-capture the socio-technical engagement of A305 appears problematic and requires further reflection. The mass audience of a course like A305 and the mass enrolment of a

MOOC are not exactly the same: the synchronous accumulation of unknown and diverse viewers who made up the mass audience of open channel media like television and radio, and the accumulation of asynchronous instances of access in an any-where any-time digital environment are different in nature. The randomness of tuning in or zapping through channels on broadcast media is also structurally different from online browsing, and even more so from search engine-assisted navigation. The principle and practice of openness to people and places meant that course material reached students at home and obliged the other anonymous members of their domestic collectives to watch their education. This is different from the isolated exposure of MOOC-based learning that in most instances is free of charge upon individual registration. The cost of mail-delivered course materials values the circulation of information differently from MOOCs, which attached importance mostly in the certification of attendance. A further point is that the focus on learning and the radical openness of 'speaking to everyone' of the early OU foundation courses, tailored to BBC's general audience and delivering on the promise of a true open access policy that accepts all students irrespective of their academic qualification, is very different from MOOCs, targeted to specialized audiences, and often with a ciphered and jargoned-like discourse, similar to conventional classrooms. So, MOOCs do offer a way of reaching wider audiences, but do not establish the plane of interaction between architecture and society achieved by A305, which encompassed a general audience, a student population and a professional constituency. The comparison highlights these differences, bringing the spaces of A305's life beyond the classroom and its afterlife into high relief.

Increasing this contrast, the discrepancies between the early broadcast-based blended learning environments offered by A305 and the mostly single channel web-based learning environment of MOOCs seem to suggest a charter for a possible future life of A305 with the following elements: a deep engagement with change, innovation and debates of the present, aimed at an audience much wider than its immediate constituency, the bypassing of the academic borders of Art History and the addressing of communities of architecture practice (practitioners, students and educators) as well as a commitment to a continuous exchange without rigid hierarchies between teacher-student and students-teachers and the rootedness in each students local environment.

Yet it is important to notice that, despite its predefined life cycle common to Open University

courses, there were many instances of an afterlife for this course before and after the technological advent of MOOCs. The most recent one is A305's presence on YouTube, where all its TV programmes, now separated from its accompanying booklets, are available anywhere and anytime, thanks to the patient and diligent work of the Canadian Centre for Architecture. But there was also an earlier instance of such a spectral re-appearance, now long ago in 1976, in the context of efforts to create an Italian translation of the course that led to some of its episodes being aired on Italian television and an exhibition at the Venice Biennale of that year. These events, moreover, were recently recovered in the *Radical Pedagogies* exhibition for the Venice Biennale, 38 years later, in 2014. Further research on A305's afterlife uncovered Spanish translations of the booklets and bootlegs of the TV programmes, or as they were called at the time, copies for private use, recorded in a long obsolete media called VHS video tape recording. Such instances of an afterlife, moreover, were not simply centrifugal, as these examples might suggest, but also centripetal, in that they converged to important centres of professional architecture education, like the Architectural Association in Bedford Square, London, where many alumni remember these tapes and booklets being used in class, as study materials. These instances present irrefutable evidence that A305 generated a deep engagement across many terrains and constituted a shared resource, from which much broader collectives and constituencies than its students benefitted and learned. Arguably, it was A305's closeness to the society of its time that allowed the course to seize the opportunity to produce a debate which transcended and transgressed the limits of academia and the all-consuming present of the temporality of media. One of the precious lessons worth replicating in a possible future is the radical attention to the debates of its present and the active empowerment of emerging voices – comparable to the role of working-class communities in the production of social housing – that transformed the architecture of the shared spaces of education, culture and society.

Recent events, in which media-based remote education, invented to overcome distance, was deployed and mobilized to institute distance across the landscape of higher education to prevent contagion, completely reversed established educational vectors. Higher education crisis of access and quality is now played out in unforeseen ways through a new combination of neo-liberal disinvestment and a new 'dematerialization' of education required for public health – and MOOCs appear before us as the answer

to that crisis. However, in these days of a global pandemic, this solution looks like a distant memory stored in an obsolete format, simply a technological process to transmit knowledge, not the infrastructure for collective learning that we so urgently need. A system intended for those left out of the mainstream, remote education, is now being played in reverse, imposing domestic walls on the learning process, and reconstituting the learning collectives as a subset of the general audience.

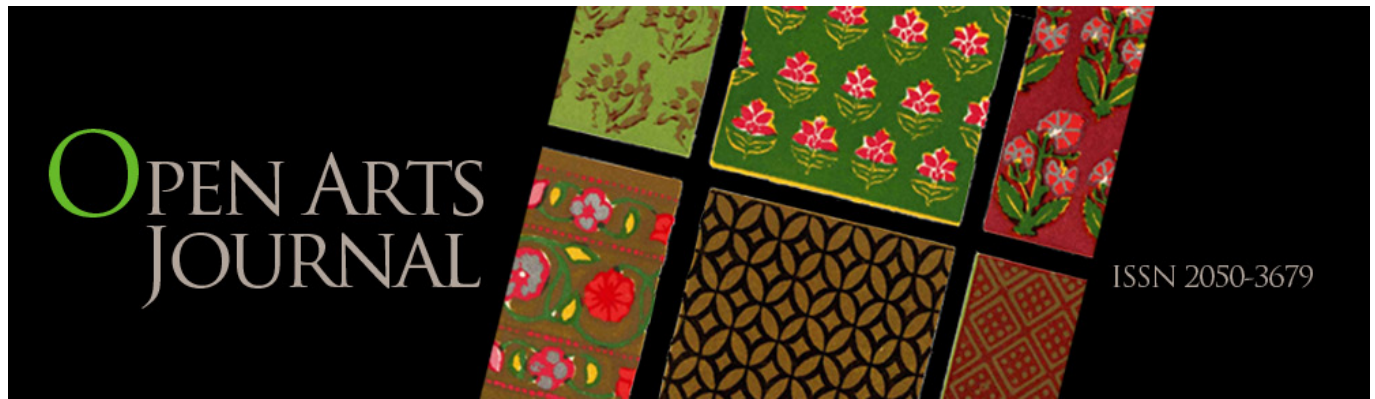
Remote education was radical, it dramatically displaced the root space of learning, replacing the classroom with the living room and creating a space where the general audience and its classroom of synchronized solitudes overlap. Now, with most of the classrooms retreating into the home and confined inside an amalgamation of walls and screens during the lengthy global lockdown, the old 1970s memory of a collective of domestic solitudes dancing to the radio, re-surfaces as a way of being together, of belonging to something across space and time.

Now that most students have had an experience of learning at home, somewhat similar to the one of the early A305 students, and that most faculty learnt the hard way about the challenges of engaging a distant audience that The Open University is so familiar with, the possible lessons of A305 gain a new urgency. In this new rear-view mirror of history, in particular the history of learning, some courses are indeed closer than they appear, and their lessons interest a much wider audience than the one they were intended for. Locked in at home, A305's after image, its pioneering initiative to broadcast modern architecture in print, radio and television, and its reach beyond a student population, is a serious reminder of the OU's famous charter: 'open to people, places, methods, and ideas', which, in the case of A305, became a shared responsibility that spread much wider than the OU, across a proliferating number of students' and educators' shoulders. Traditional faculty labored until recently under the assumption that the learning collective was assembled as a form of seclusion from the global village we inhabit. But this fiction is no longer viable in current conditions. The classroom of solitudes many architecture students learned from A305, how it existed beyond its enrolled students and its locality, and how it was a shared communal resource, is a valuable help to re-inscribe our learning community within our over-exposed public and private spaces with a new openness; without resorting to another form of the cloister and the closed courtyard. 'Technology is the answer, but what is the question?' is the title of a 'canned lecture' by Cedric Price in the Pidgeon Archive

series (1979), recorded on audio tape to be played with a timed carousel for slide projection, emulating the Radiovision format of A305. In a format that is a real descendant of A305, then, this well-known architect, educator and pioneer of the dematerialization of learning and knowledge reminds the constituency of architecture that asking the right questions, especially in a learning environment, is sometimes more important than providing answers and solutions. Learning from this lesson, I believe that one of the most pressing concerns of the present moment is how to reassemble an open learning collective in the new set of socio-technical and spatial relations called provisionally the 'new normal'. Starting a new inquiry in response to this question will require, along with the vocal lecturing educators are used to, a very active listening, a very careful dwelling in and on the thoughts of others. To paraphrase Gordon Pask in a lost TV programme titled *The Experimenters*, this will require learning to learn. It entails a pedagogical commitment to feedback and adjustment, a continuous exchange without rigid hierarchies between teacher-student and students-teachers, as Paulo Freire proposed in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970), as well as a serious commitment to change and innovation. And only close attention to student experience and bottom-up people's histories can lead to the emergence of new voices, new actors, new visions, and new vectors, that allow for those voices which normally do not take up words in the lecture hall or the shared screen to engage in dialogue. Once such a conversation is gathering pace, the challenge will be to modulate its intensity, and to create a suitable rhythm for a new blend of distance and closeness, and the design of new forms of assembly, of celebration and, very importantly, new forms of transgression these conversations may generate.

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# DESIGN EDUCATION IN THE OPEN

Nigel Cross and Georgina Holden

## Abstract

*From its inception in the 1970s the UK Open University faced the challenge of teaching design to students at a distance and with open entry. Teaching design 'in the open' has required creative approaches to aid students in the acquisition of requisite skills, knowledge and values. OU design courses pioneered the teaching of design for a broad, non-specialist audience and in identifying the particular characteristics of design thinking, influencing not only OU students but wider teaching in the higher education sector. These principles have been applied during the development of design education at the OU from printed text and broadcast TV into the use of digital media and the Internet. Over time, technological changes, together with concomitant changes in HE generally, have brought different modes of design education closer together, but the OU continues to pioneer in design pedagogy.*

**Keywords:** design education, design thinking, educational media, open learning

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## Biographical notes

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Georgina Holden was one of the earliest students of Design at the OU. She is now a Senior Lecturer in Design and Innovation at the Open University where she has worked in a variety of roles since 1984. She leads the BA/BSc Design and Innovation programme and has contributed to the development and materials of all of the current core design modules.

# DESIGN EDUCATION IN THE OPEN

**Nigel Cross and Georgina Holden,  
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## Introduction

Since its foundation fifty years ago the UK Open University (OU) has pioneered many innovations in education. Some of the most significant and influential innovations have been in design education, where the OU has not only broken new ground in developing distance learning methods but also created new approaches to design education, and the development of design as an academic discipline. Significant advances in knowledge, developed through education and research at the OU, include breakthroughs in the academic understanding of design as a subject as well as design as a fundamental human activity and a set of skills that can be developed in everyone. In this paper we recount how some of the early experiments in creating an open version of design education still resonate widely today, and how more recent developments with digital media continue to advance design education through new interpretations and approaches.<sup>1</sup>

The Open University was founded in 1969 to provide open-entry, degree level education through the radical innovation of distance teaching, offering the opportunity of home-study higher education for people who had not previously had access to it. Originally conceived as a 'University of the Air' using national BBC television and radio broadcasting, its implementation was primarily through postal delivery of specially written text materials. TV and radio broadcasts were important components but supplementary to the texts. Some face-to-face tutorial support was available across the country and some courses, particularly the first year 'Foundation' courses, required students to attend week-long summer schools for practical group work and other experiential learning activities.

Undergraduate admission to the university has always been completely open, with no entry qualification requirements. This has led to a demographically diverse range of students, significantly different from those of students in conventional universities. In particular, the great majority of OU students study part-time and at home. The number

of students studying with the OU each year is now around 190,000 spread across a full range of academic disciplines. Of these, more than 2000 study the core modules in Design. The average age of OU students, in most disciplines, is around 35 years. Older students can have different personal and social perspectives such as family or employment commitments and bring a depth of experience which can be particularly relevant in project work. This can also influence the style and approach of teaching, for example in the range or type of case studies offered to engage students and in assumptions on how students will respond to the materials.

From the OU's inception, Design was included as a core discipline alongside technological subjects within the Technology faculty (now the STEM faculty). However, OU Design academics have tended to regard their subject as positioned between science and engineering on the one hand and the arts and humanities on the other. Since 2010 the OU has offered a degree programme in Design and Innovation that enables students to combine their studies in the core design modules of *Design thinking* (Stage 1), *Design essentials* (Stage 2) and *Innovation: Designing for change* (Stage 3). Students choose additional complementary subjects in a variety of themes drawn from either the arts, humanities and business or engineering and computing to complete either a BSc or BA degree.

In contrast to design education in traditional universities, where face-to-face lectures, seminars, and studio work are the main vehicles for teaching, for an OU academic the teaching task primarily takes the form of developing sets of integrated teaching materials that need to be pedagogically sound and sufficiently 'future-proofed' for them to be used for a course life of around eight years. These take the form of text and complementary learning materials in a variety of other media, designed to be accessible to a wide range of students. The uniqueness of OU design materials is a direct result of the need explicitly to articulate principles and processes which are largely transmitted through a combination of praxis and a heuristic approach in conventional design education. These novel teaching materials, developed from necessity in the OU, have influenced approaches to design education more widely. Ideas have spread through the growing numbers of alumni, published teaching texts, public broadcasts, online materials, and through the part-time associate lecturer staff, many of whom not only provide the main tutorial support for OU students but also teach in the conventional higher education sector.

The challenging nature of developing an open design education meant that there was a strong

<sup>1</sup> We appreciate the work of all our colleagues, past and present, who contributed to the development of design education in The Open University. We are grateful to Rachael Luck for suggesting, commenting on, and contributing to this paper, and to Renate Dohmen for her reviewing and editing.

and continuing interaction between teaching and research in relation to design at the OU. In particular, the unusual demands of an open learning approach to design education prompted studies into the fundamental nature of design ability and its nurture through education (Cross, 1982, 1990, 2011). The work carried out primarily for OU teaching purposes is also significant, such as the generation of case studies and experiments with new educational media, which has led to research publications and projects. Examples include Robin Roy's studies, originating in work for OU TV programmes that focused on innovation through design, such as James Dyson's bag-less vacuum cleaner and Mark Sanders' folding bicycle (Roy, 1993); and the 'ATELIER-D' research project investigating the ways the traditional design studio model of teaching might be transformed into an online virtual-environment model for distance learning (Hart, Zamenopoulos and Garner, 2011). OU academics have also studied their own innovations in design education for relevance, effectiveness and impact, and published such reports more widely, including on the teaching of creative thinking (Lloyd and Jones, 2013), the use of virtual learning environments and technological interfaces for design teaching (Jones, Lotz and Holden, 2020), and on the broader development of design thinking skills (Garner, 2005).

### **Establishing an open design pedagogy**

Given the remit of the Open University, the first OU Design academics faced the necessity of developing a new concept of design education that was open to everybody and could be taught at a distance. In conventional design education, based on selective entry and orientated to preparing students for professional design practice, the 'signature pedagogy' (Shulman, 2005) relied on project work and studio-based 'atelier' or 'over the drawing board' teaching methods. This pedagogy could not be readily adapted to the distance teaching of the OU. Some form of project work could potentially be fitted into the OU teaching system, although OU students lacked the intensive support – from both tutors and fellow students – that could be provided in conventional education.

The small group of academic staff tasked with creating OU design teaching in 1970 therefore faced the considerable challenge of adapting, changing and developing the traditional pedagogic approach into one fit for distance delivery to a very wide audience. In effect they were redesigning design education and creating a very different version appropriate for the general population, rather than solely for specialist design students.

The staff's emerging radical vision of a design education for everybody was indicated in one of the first OU design teaching texts on the unusual theme of 'Designing as a response to life as a whole'. One of the new Design lecturers, Chris Crickmay, set out the aim of this education as:

The extension of design skills from the specialised areas in which they are traditionally applied by professional designers to life-as-a-whole in which, at present, it is nobody's business to act with imagination and with constructive insight.

(Crickmay and Jones, 1972, p.4)

Project work would not be based on the set endpoint of design for a specific product, as in conventional design education, but would offer the possibility of

... escaping from the inhibiting effect of having specified end-results: the means of this escape is to concentrate not on the endpoint, or purpose, of designing but on its beginning ... This opens up the possibility of unexpected, unforeseeable, and perhaps marvellous, results which could influence not only specific products but the pattern of life as we experience it.

(Crickmay and Jones, 1972, p.4)

It is important to note that, at its inception, the OU did not offer specialised, named degrees, but a single, general degree in which students could choose and combine different subjects. Therefore, OU students of design were not assumed to be following, or seeking, the kind of vocational design education that was provided by schools of professional design such as architecture or industrial design. Rather than vocationally oriented students, OU design students were perceived as being laypeople interested in design and in engaging with social and environmental issues of technology. In response, Nigel Cross outlined a new approach for a design education for laypeople, based on:

- the process of design, rather than its products;
- the socio-technical context of design decision-making, rather than on technical expertise;
- deciding what should be designed, rather than on detailed designing.

He added:

This kind of education needs the development of courses that tend to be about the politics of technical change rather than about the professionalism of maintaining the status quo, about the implications of design rather than the

practice of design, about problem-finding rather than problem-solving, and about designing for yourself rather than for someone else. Many people might not regard such courses as 'design' education at all – but I think it is the kind of design education for laypeople that all of us need.

(Cross, 1979, pp.71–2)

In this respect, early design education in the OU prefigured new forms of design education that were soon to appear elsewhere, with the introduction of design in general education. In the UK, the new school subject of Design began to replace traditional craft and some art education. The high-level goal of this new subject was expressed by Bruce Archer, of the Royal College of Art, London, as '... achieving a level of design awareness in the general community analogous to literacy and numeracy' (Archer, 1979, p.3). This was the formulation of a radical view of design as a third area of education, alongside, and potentially equal with, sciences and humanities. The OU's version of design education thus became a significant contribution, not only to a broader programme of design in general education but also to a new form of general education in design, for a much wider audience than design professionals.

### Early experiments

At first, there was substantial uncertainty within the OU Design group about how to teach design at all through the new distance-learning system of the Open University. The initial problem as it was perceived by the Design academics within the OU in 1970 was that 'the medium is the message' as Marshall McLuhan had claimed (McLuhan, 1964), and the media approach of the OU seemed to regard the student as a mere receiver of pre-packaged knowledge. Such a role is particularly inappropriate in design education; skills and design ability need to be developed and cannot simply be transmitted through a passive communication medium – the student needs to engage actively with the designing and learning processes. The very first attempts at distance-teaching design at the OU therefore were tentative and tended to concentrate on raising design awareness rather than developing design ability.

In consequence, the approach taken in the earliest OU Design learning materials presented the general principles of design rather than a particular design specialism. Attention was placed on the context of design, social and environmental issues of technological change, and on encouraging students to consider broader impacts of design decisions. For example, a television programme made for the Design element

of the first OU *Technology Foundation* course (1972), called 'Design Failures', used examples of failures in urban housing and transport systems design to discuss the varied and sometimes unforeseen impacts of design, and the politics of design decision making. That same programme (called a 'design probe') also addressed the problems of teaching design through a medium such as broadcast television, by making the context of production explicit, which challenged the established practices of BBC TV directors. Thus, the camera view was pulled back from the presenter of the programme to show the studio with its other cameras and operators, microphones, lights, etc., to demonstrate the restrictions of studio-based TV. The presenter, OU lecturer Nigel Cross, then went on to emphasise that learning to design required an active engagement with designing, rather than the passive consumption of a TV programme. At the summer schools for the same *Technology Foundation* course, the student role in the use of TV was reversed and Design students were given then-new portable video recorders to make their own videos. An extract from the 1972 'Design Failures' TV programme can be viewed at [https://www.open.ac.uk/library/digital-archive/clip/clip:T100\\_33\\_01](https://www.open.ac.uk/library/digital-archive/clip/clip:T100_33_01)

Other media experiments were also introduced in teaching materials, such as loose-leaf collections of writings and poster-exhibits, rather than the standard bound books, a pack of stimulus cards to assist design thinking (now a technique widely used in design practice), tutorial material presented on audio-cassettes, and phone-in radio programmes during which students could call in their questions to the lecturers.

### Increasing confidence

After initial contributions to the foundation course in technology, the first full OU Design module was the second-level *Man-made Futures* (first presented in 1975), which laid much of the groundwork for future courses (Figure 10.1). It integrated the development of design thinking skills with elements focusing on broad technological themes of shelter, food and work, and included a set book on *Alternative Technology and the Politics of Technical Change* (Dickson, 1974) alongside a set of readings in society, technology and design (Cross, Elliott and Roy, 1974). This very broad approach reflected then-current issues of the mid-1970s in futures thinking and the 'counter-culture', influenced by writers such as Robert Jungk, Theodore Roszak and Ivan Illich, and perhaps the first proponent and practitioner of 'critical design', Victor Papanek, who famously opened his book *Design for the Real World* with the statement 'There are professions more harmful than industrial design, but only a very few of them'

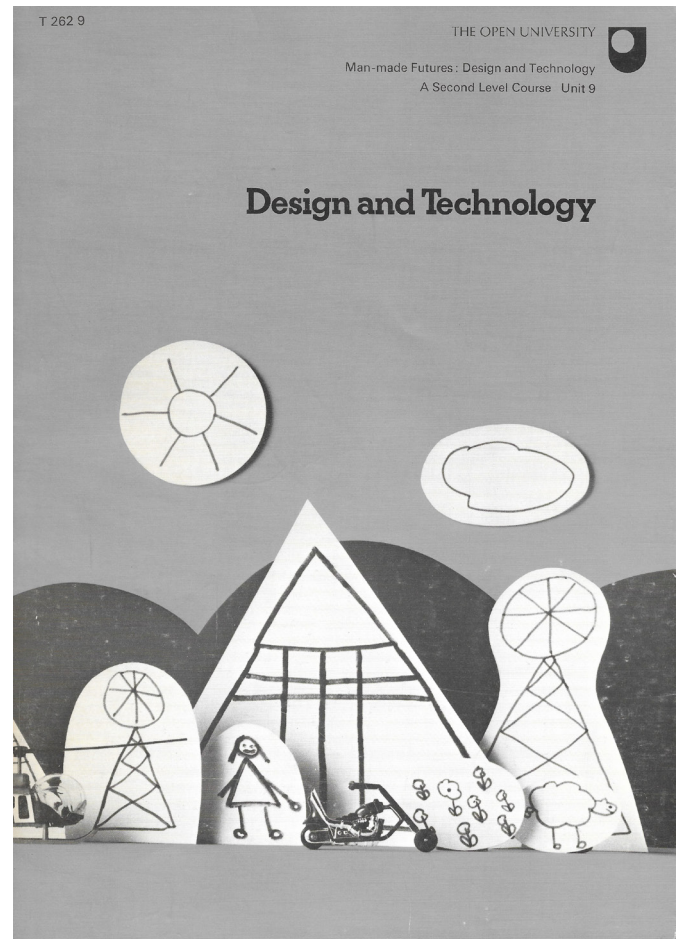
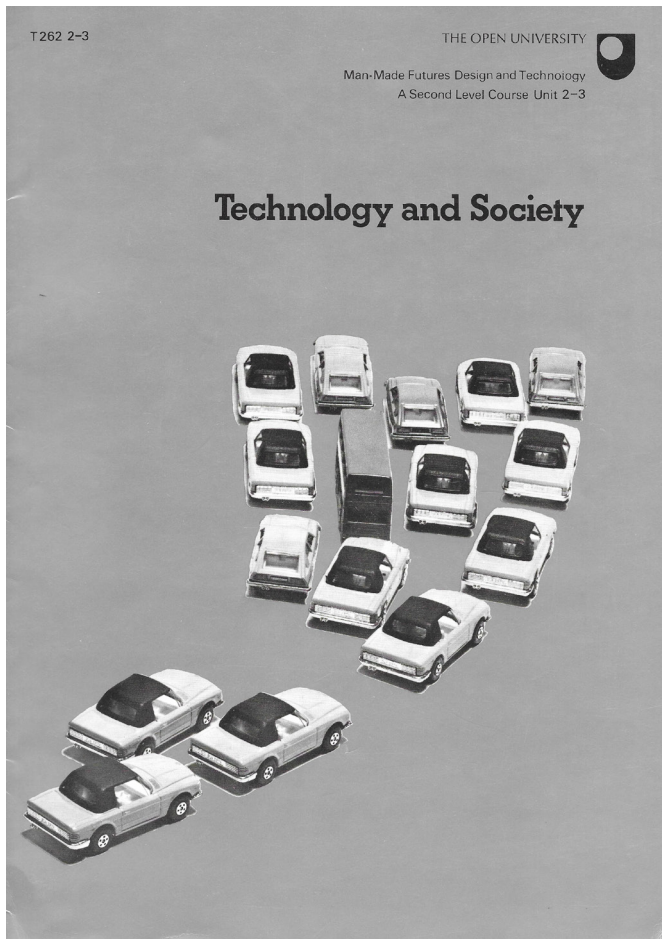


Figure 10.1: Covers from two of the main text units in the *Man-Made Futures* course (1975). The course treated design within broad social and technological contexts. Image credit: The Open University

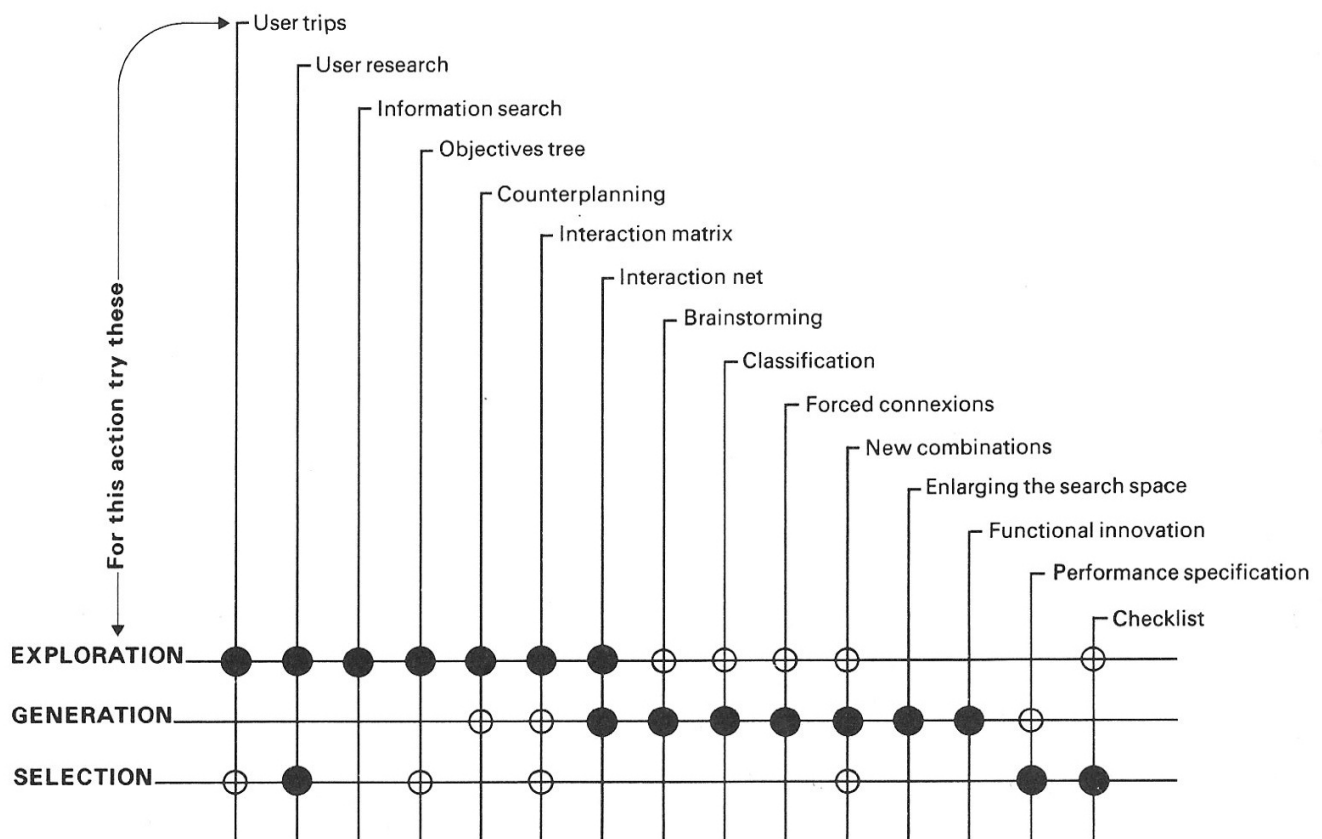


Figure 10.2: A student guidance chart in the *Design Methods Manual*, suggesting how individual methods match with the project stage they may be at: exploring problems, generating solutions, or selecting an appropriate solution. Image credit: The Open University

(Papanek, 1972, Preface). He commented on design education that:

The main trouble with design schools seems to be that they teach too much design and not enough about the social, economic and political environment in which design takes place.

(Papanek, 1972, p.291)

Whereas studio teaching in a conventional design school allows the gradual and often tacit transmission of approach and technique between the expert (tutor) and the apprentice (student), in the distance learning situation there is a need for explicit articulation of approach. Design education 'in the open' necessarily means a transparent approach to teaching and learning. As part of this transparency, the use of systematic design methods (which had only begun to appear in the 1960s) alongside creative thinking methods was seen as a key to design education in the OU. The printed materials for *Man-made Futures* included a 'Design Methods Manual' (Cross and Roy, 1975) that

set out a taxonomy of methods, with descriptions and examples of each, so that students could choose appropriate methods to advance their own, self-chosen design project (Figure 10.2). Another 'Methods Manual' (Cross, 1978) for social and environmental assessment of technology was used in the subsequent third-level module, *Control of Technology*, first presented in 1978. The module title reflected issues of the time and the teaching materials were based on a critical but creative attitude towards technological change.

These manuals presented a variety of methods in 'teach-yourself' formats rather than teaching a specific, set design process. The idea was that – as with other kinds of reference manuals – the student looked up and learned a method, as and when it was relevant to their project work. The use of such a repertoire of methods has continued, in various forms, up to the present day with students on the current Stage 3 module *Innovation: Designing for change* now using an online 'Project Toolkit', which is a repository of design techniques and methods.



Figure 10.3: The Problem Identification Game (PIG), developed for the exploration of self-identified problems at the start of a student project, included game elements such as a board, cards and a die to introduce chance elements into a structured approach to problem clarification. Image credit: The Open University

The skills of problem identification and framing, now regarded as central features of design thinking, were seen as key skills within an open, self-directed version of design education. An early example of materials designed to assist students in the development of these skills was a game sent to students for use in the *Man-made Futures* module. The game-like format for the Problem Identification Game (PIG) was designed to make a conceptually complex task do-able by a novice design student (Figure 10.3). Although it was game-like, with a board, cards and a die, it offered a structured approach to formulating a clear problem statement from within a messy problematic area. Through the refining of problem statements, a student arrived at a starting point for their own self-identified design project, rather than a conventional design project 'brief' prescribed by a tutor.

Innovatory use of TV programmes also featured in the *Man-made Futures* module to support the pedagogical aims of transparency, self-directed learning and reflexivity. For example, one programme demonstrated the approach to playing PIG and the kind of creative, relaxed attitude of mind that was necessary

to its success. In a programme on 'Design Strategies' Nigel Cross demonstrated the skills of using design methods, taking the design of the programme itself as the self-referential topic. That is, he applied design methods to the problem of designing a TV programme on design skills and strategies, demonstrated his own use of the methods, compared strategic analogies for designing, and in these ways articulated and demonstrated design skill to the students (Figure 10.4). An extract from the 1975 'Design Strategies' TV programme can be viewed at [https://www.open.ac.uk/library/digital-archive/clip/clip:T262\\_09\\_01](https://www.open.ac.uk/library/digital-archive/clip/clip:T262_09_01)

Other programmes included documentary films of an alternative technology commune in Wales and a participatory housing renewal project in London. The uses of television were thus based on the medium's strengths in conveying values and demonstrating skills, whereas the use of text was based on its strengths in transmitting knowledge – a differentiated approach to media use that was outlined later by Cross in an article on 'The Nature and Nurture of Design Ability' (Cross, 1990).



Figure 10.4: Lecturer Nigel Cross compares designing to some aspects of a game of football, in a 1975 TV programme on design methods, skills and strategies. Image credit: The Open University

One of the key principles underpinning OU design teaching has been to seek ways to enable experiential learning. In early work this was most fully embodied in the second OU Design module, *Art and Environment* (first presented in 1976), an inter-Faculty experimental course in art and design. This module opened with the theme of 'Having ideas by handling materials', setting a focus for the students on doing and making art, however unconventional, rather than on art products. The module also introduced other themes that were unusual in art and design education at that time, such as feminism, ambient soundscapes and dance. It promoted experiential learning through the use of a 'home kit'. Such kits, mailed to students, contained special returnable items specific to the module and also a mix of consumable materials that might be difficult for those OU students in remote locations to access. Consumables provided for design students included drawing papers and tools, samples of materials and other items to be used for exploration, experimentation and modelling. The *Art and Environment* module also had a summer school, which gained some public notoriety for the performance-art projects that students produced, and sometimes exhibited on the streets of the towns of the school's host universities.

The early OU Design modules also took the pioneering approach of articulating the need for user-centred and participatory design, which were concepts that had begun to emerge in the 1960s. Teaching topics were therefore based on the design of everyday products, on social responsibility and sustainability, and universal inclusive design made for and by everyone. Much of the teaching took the user's point of view, for example in evaluating products for their fitness for use, rather than the professional designer's point of view of them as cultural artefacts that predominated in conventional design education.

Through experimentation and reflection, design education in the Open University began to develop a more confident approach to learning that was not only *about* the principles of design but also included learning the practices of *doing* design, as well as introducing forms of education *through* design (Garner, 2005).

### Developments in delivery methods

From 1972 through to 2010 core teaching was primarily delivered through well-illustrated books written by the academic staff in a one-to-one teaching style, addressing the student directly, and published by the OU. However, the use of image and media has always been seen as crucial in providing additional materials and recognised as being particularly important for students who may be remotely located

or isolated. These other media have always been an important part of the learning strategy and, as technology has developed, the way in which media are used has developed concomitantly.

Initially, teaching texts were supported and supplemented by special television and radio broadcasts, made by the BBC. Broadcast media required the student to rise early or stay up late to view or listen to the programmes during the scheduled OU broadcast times, using accompanying texts that gave a synopsis of the content and provided some further illustrations and study notes. Most programmes were filmed in the studio and were didactic in nature. The Open University still commissions and collaborates with the BBC on broadcast television and radio programmes, although these newer 'flagship' broadcasts are no longer tied to specific teaching modules but rather encompass larger themes such as design and engineering or society and the environment. Some examples with OU design academics acting as consultants include 'The Secret Life of Buildings' (broadcast 2011) and 'The Fifteen Billion Pound Railway' (broadcast 2014, 2017, 2019).

The advent of digital media in the 1980s had a significant impact on teaching delivery and pedagogy. During the transition period from printed and broadcast forms of delivery to the use of the Internet, digital media on disc played a role in preparing the ground. The first impact of digital media was on audio-visual materials, which changed significantly in the mid 1990s as the widespread availability of CD, and later DVD players led to a switch from the use of pre-recorded videos and cassettes to the use of the digital medium.

Digitally recorded media not only enabled the student to view or listen to materials in their own time but also enabled a new approach to be developed towards the navigation, content and presentation of materials, facilitating a more experiential approach to the resources rather than the formal, linear approach that had been the norm imposed by broadcast and taped materials. Presenting teaching resources on DVDs had a profound impact on the way in which students engaged with the materials and heralded the use of the Internet, for example through a navigation system that linked to the audio-visual resources, software and interactive activities contained on the disc. The video materials presented on the DVDs broke with established broadcast programme format, offering short pieces arranged to enable the student to explore case studies according to their own interests. The software supported various aspects of designing, and the interactive exercises were employed to teach

techniques such as creative thinking. The DVDs also contained templates and guidance on aspects of design work, effectively grouping all non-print resources into one place for easy access by the student.

A further turning point in student and staff communication came when domestic use of the Internet became more pervasive. In the 1990s, a client-server piece of software, FirstClass, was introduced into the university and used for email, forums and online conferencing for both students and staff. The FirstClass system was in use for design teaching through to 2009 when the advent of a standardised Moodle Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) meant a changeover to an integrated platform in which email and forum facilities were incorporated. The FirstClass forums made dialogue between students and their tutors possible but, for the first time, the VLE enabled direct online contact between students, and with academic staff.

### Teaching online

The launch of the Open University's bespoke Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) in 2010 marked a major shift in delivery methods, enabling access from any Internet connected device. This advance in the use of technological media led to new delivery paradigms for OU modules. Some blended approaches combining VLE and traditional delivery by text, while others seized the opportunity for the entirely online presentation of teaching materials.

For example, the Stage 2 module *Design Essentials*, adopted a blended approach using print with VLE support. This module lays down many of the fundamental principles of design and has remained primarily in print because the highly illustrated teaching material contains knowledge and exemplars that students can refer to as they progress through their degree. However, the Stage 1 Design module *Design Thinking*, launched in 2010, was among the first in the university to be conceived and created primarily for learning online, marking a significant development in open design education. This was followed in 2014 by the Stage 3 module *Innovation: Designing for change*.

For the Stage 1 and 3 modules, all of the teaching content is delivered online, with audio and video materials integrated into the teaching text. Access to resources, assessment materials and forums is also through the interface, bringing everything together in one site. All content can be retrieved via mobile devices, as well as computers, enabling students to make use of materials wherever they have Internet connection. It is also possible to download offline versions of some of these materials which is important

for some students with limited Internet connectivity. Creating materials for online learning requires a different approach to creating for print or blended learning, and this is a skill that academics have had to develop. The advantage of the online interface is that everything needed for study can be integrated into one learning space. However, text needs to be clear, succinct and broken into manageable pieces of learning, because students relate to online information differently than to printed text, as has been found in student feedback on their module experiences.

The approach adopted for the online environment to teach design at the OU gave special consideration to finding ways to stimulate the development of an online community and create pieces of active learning that had some familiarity to the student, such as polls and interactive animations. However, in designing the early parts of *Design Thinking* the module team identified the need to prime or 'kick-start' the community, as recognised previously by Frank, Kurtz & Levin (2002) and Schadewitz (2009). Kickstarting is seen to be a helpful step in bringing together students from diverse backgrounds and locations. To this end, and to engender engagement and offer a talking point for the community, it was felt that students needed a tangible introduction to the ethos and approach of the teaching. Thus, all students starting *Design Thinking* receive a Welcome Pack, redolent of the home kit for the early *Art and Environment* module. The pack contains various items, which are used to undertake a suite of interesting and creative activities. These items are mainly everyday things: masking tape, a pencil, ruler, paper bag, postcards, a T-shirt and T-shirt transfer paper, and a set of specially designed cards. All items are labelled and presented in a specially designed box to excite the students and to encourage them to look at the mundane in new and interesting ways befitting a student design thinker. The pack is supported by an element on the VLE which sets different activities for each item within the Welcome Pack. Tasks include, for example, generating different uses for the paper bag, drawing a curve using the ruler, and making a 3-D object from masking tape. The excitement generated around the welcome pack stimulates students to engage with one another in the online forums and to post images in the virtual design studio (discussed below). The associate lecturers also offer an introductory day-school which focuses on fun, collaborative, activities to aid the development of community among the students attending.

### OpenDesignStudio

The VLE also offered the opportunity to adopt some features of the paradigm of studio or atelier teaching

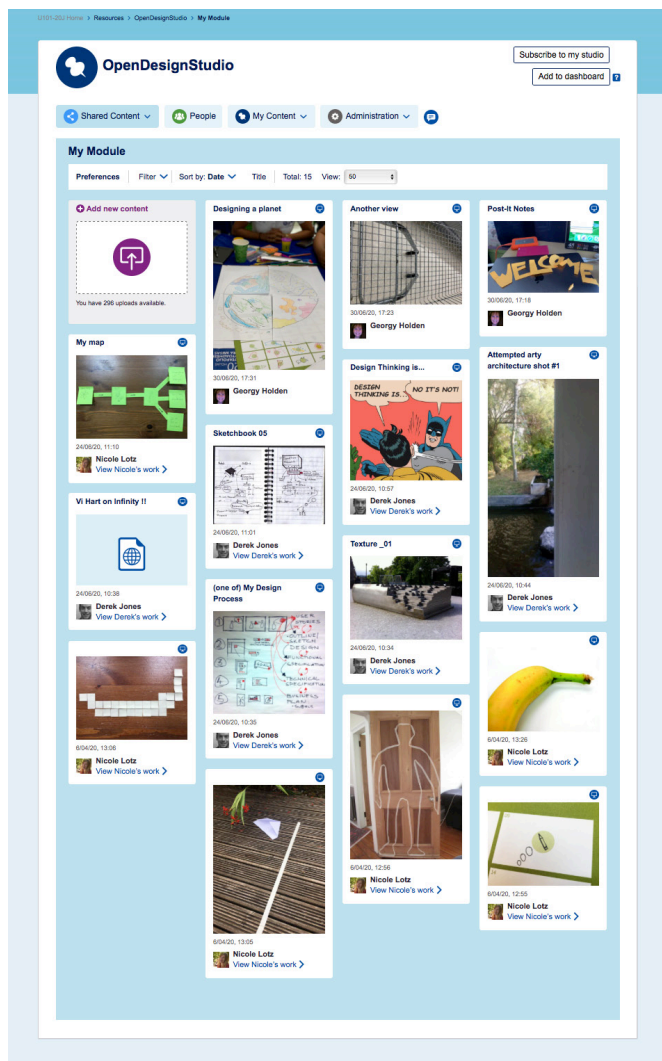
and to adapt it to online educational provision. A valuable feature of studio-based education is the sense of community it engenders, with students able to discuss, compare and contribute to each other's ongoing work.

Significantly, therefore, a major benefit of the online environment for distance design education is that it opened up new potential for communication and collaboration between remotely located students. Thus, the Stage 1 *Design Thinking* module team took up an interface previously created for a short module in *Digital Photography* and developed it into a more sophisticated virtual environment called OpenDesignStudio (ODS). This environment was designed to facilitate design teaching and to provide additional motivation to help students overcome the challenges that they face as remote learners. ODS functions as a protected online space in which students

can present and share their work as they progress through their modules. It has a superficial resemblance, in many respects, to social media interfaces such as Pinterest and Flickr but enables students to communicate in their tutor groups as well as with the whole module. An advantage of ODS is that it allows the upload of a wide range of file types including video, audio, pdf, Internet links, webcam footage and documents in addition to image files (Figures 10.5 and Figure 10.6).

ODS also encourages the student to curate their own work and select what they choose to share, and this act of curation develops the learner's ability to reflect upon and critique their own and others' work. Students may comment on each other's individual posts or, where they exist, sets (groups of uploads on the same topic). Students requiring help or feedback may flag their post as needing this, to draw the attention

(a)



(b)



Figure 10.5: Two views of ODS. (a) The collective module view. (b) Set activity slots ready to be populated.  
Image credit: The Open University

of peers and/or tutors. It has even become possible to present an annual show of student work, as is common in conventional design education (DesignExhibition, 2020).

In some senses, it seems we may have come full circle. In the early years of the OU, specialised studio pedagogy was seen as problematic and inappropriate for the implementation of an open design education, requiring the development of a new pedagogy. That development led to new interpretations of the nature of design and design education, which fed back into and impacted on conventional pedagogy, changing the field of design education. Re-evaluating the field, the studio model of teaching and the signature pedagogy of design education, still has a significant contribution to make, and this was a key factor behind the development of OpenDesignStudio. The physical design studio has traditionally been a place where not only operational learning and skills development takes place, but also where tacit transmission of beliefs, values and attitudes occurs. However, the design studio has changed radically in both education

and practice, due to the influence of computer-based designing and communicating (Crowther, 2013). Today's digital design studio is very different to the classic drawing-board version. Increasingly, with the expansion of the HE sector, conventional design education has also embraced many aspects of open and distance education, expanding its range of student entry, broadening its subject coverage, and conducting seminars and group work with remotely located students. Over the years, therefore, versions of conventional and open design education have begun to blend together, with conventional design education adopting many of the innovations pioneered in design education at the OU and online provision now making the adoption of studio-based approaches available to online learners.

### The wider impact of design education in the Open

Many of the techniques and methods that were pioneered in OU design teaching have since become regular aspects of contemporary professional design

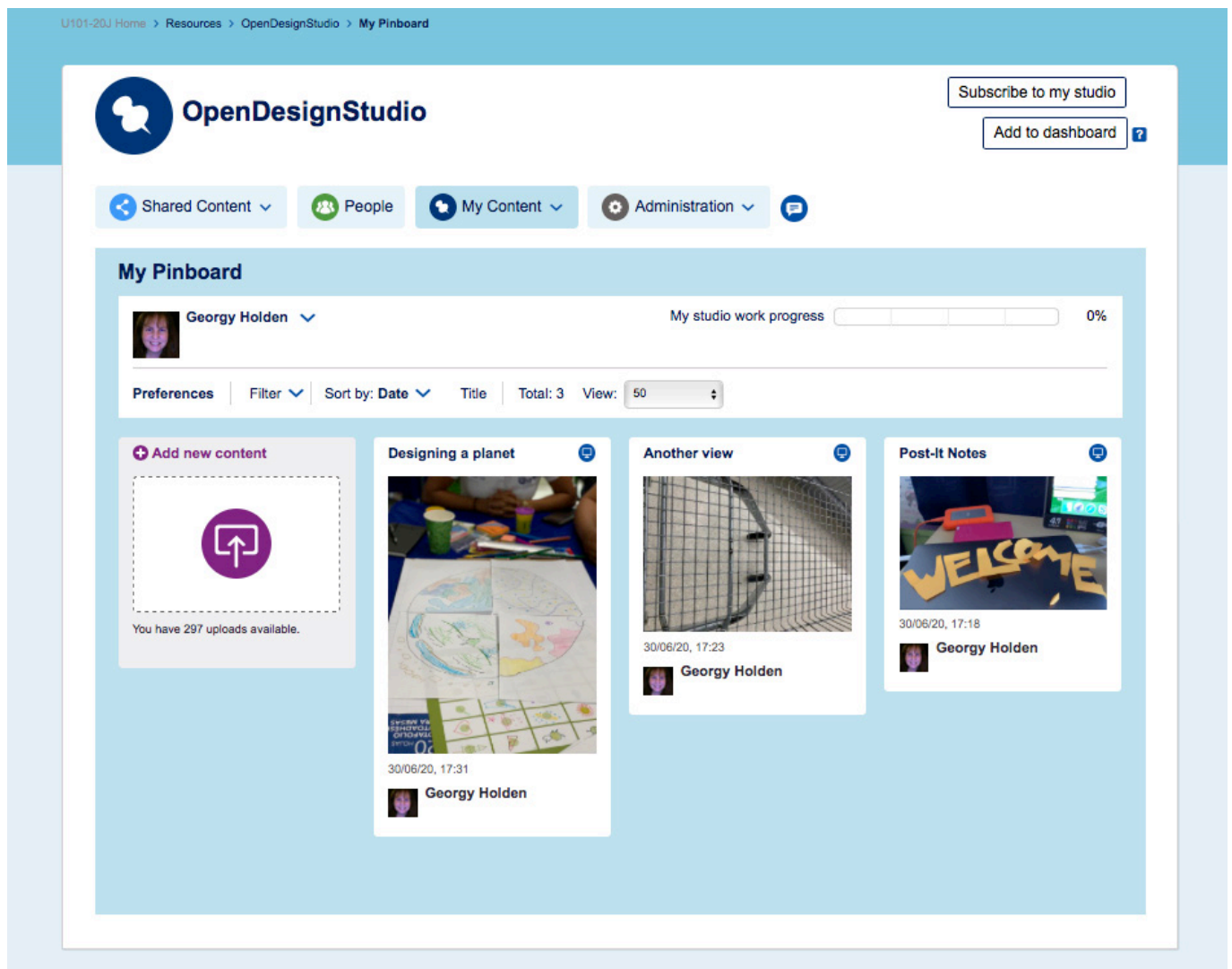


Figure 10.6: An ODS student pinboard for items of interest outside of set activities. Image credit: The Open University

education and practice. This influence has been partly due to the public availability of OU teaching materials, but publications in the design literature by OU design academics have also shaped thinking and discussion about the nature of design practice, research and education over five decades.

The first Professor of Design appointed to the OU in 1970 was J. Christopher Jones, who had just published his influential book *Design Methods: Seeds of Human Futures* (Jones, 1970), which not only presented new approaches to designing but also re-cast design within a broad, socio-technical systems context. He identified the new approaches and methods as having the characteristic of externalising and formalising the thinking that traditionally tended to go on inside designers' heads, and in their preliminary design sketching. These methods not only became adopted in design practice but also meant that learning design could become a more open and transparent process than had hitherto been the case.

An open design education also implied a shift in focus away from instrumental aims of vocational education towards the intrinsic values of learning how to design, such as appropriate forms of cognitive development, non-verbal thought, physical modelling, and skills for resolving ill-defined problems. Nigel Cross has noted that the early OU Design academics were faced with having to establish design as an academic discipline, rather than, or as well as, a professional practice (Cross, 2018). At the beginning of the 1980s Cross (1982) outlined a first view of design as a discipline, based on principles of general education and on research into the activity of designing that was beginning to accumulate at that time. Cross framed this view of design as a discipline based on 'designerly ways of knowing' – a view that became adopted throughout higher education in design:

Just as the other intellectual cultures in the sciences and the arts concentrate on the underlying forms of knowledge peculiar to the scientist or the artist, so we must concentrate on the 'designerly' ways of knowing, thinking and acting.

(Cross, 2001, p.55)

Early work at the OU by Jones, Cross and others was fundamental in identifying and developing key characteristics of design thinking, long before this concept became more widely adopted and promoted in the 2000s. It has spread into current conceptions of design thinking as a general approach to innovation, applicable across other domains such as education and business, and in the resolution of socio-technical issues.

## Conclusion

In the twenty-first century, when the Internet and digital technologies are pervasive, we might easily forget that the delivery of teaching and learning over distance was a system that, in the early 1970s, needed to be invented. The idea that people could be taught how to develop skills as a designer without a physically located design studio was thought impossible. The identification of a subject area and articulation of design as an activity relevant and accessible to everyone, which has shared skills and capabilities in common across the domains of different design fields, was not only novel but also challenging to established subjects and professional practice. That design thinking could be applied broadly across areas of social and technological change was almost unconceivable. Those were some of the challenges that have been addressed and the opportunities that have been taken in the development of design education in the Open University. Grounded in a constructively critical approach to socio-technical innovation, and a synergy between pedagogy and research, it led to the development of design thinking and made a major contribution to how design education is currently practised in the wider field.

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# FUTURING DESIGN EDUCATION FOR A FUTURE

Tony Fry

## Abstract

*For design to realise its potential and meet the needs of a contemporary world in crisis the agenda of design education has to be transformed. This article identifies the origins of design's current condition of limitation as service provision in the development of the teaching of design, specifically at The Open University. It proposes six premises to achieve change that address questions of ethics and restrictive practices. They recommend an expanded and more strategic approach to the form and content of design education, openness to unlearn in order to enable new learning, progressive leadership, and willingness to establish autonomous design practices.*

**Keywords:** education, design, Anthropocene, ethics, unlearning, crisis, change, leadership

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# FUTURING DESIGN EDUCATION FOR A FUTURE

**Tony Fry, University of Tasmania and University of Ibagué, Colombia**

Design education does not have a single or predetermined future. Its form will arrive at the intersection of varied forces in different worldly contexts in which it is already implicated, or which are about to arrive. For example, the still deepening global and relationally complex crisis of unsustainability **indicates** that design *has* to go beyond forms of sustainability that sustain the unsustainable of a hyper-consumptive defuturing global economy. Design, likewise, has to understand its relation to technology in the increasing fragmentation of our 'species being'. What this means, at one extreme, is the abandonment huge number of people displaced by conflict and climate change impacts, while at the other, it marks the rise of modes of the posthuman. Design also has to understand its implication in those activities that contribute to the loss of biodiversity that directly connects to the commencement of the sixth global extinction event (Quammen, 2012). What these three examples indicate is the disjuncture between design education and practice as it now is and how it needs to be. The notion of design for climate change or whatever, is going nowhere.

The imperative is the elevation and remaking of design in the coming decades so that it can contribute to the creation of a future in which our species has a future. The true importance of design screams out to be acknowledged beyond the way it now sees 'itself'.

Acknowledging where design education has come from since the arrival of The Open University in 1969 has a direct relation to where it has gone and in part is still going. In particular, the appointment of John Chris Jones as professor of design in the founding moment of the department, and his work and publications on design methods set a research direction that has continued. Likewise, and overlapping, in the early years Nigel Cross and Robin Roy established a not new, but stronger, relation between design and technology. In a different direction, but also influential was a course addressing the history of architecture and design, with contributions from Tim Benton, Stefan Muthesius, Stephen Bayley, Reyner Banham, and others. This course, retrospectively viewed, added momentum to the rise of design history as an emergent discipline.

So, without question, the OU played an important part in the development of design education as well as its condition of limitation. As such, in advancing the discipline of design it increased a division of knowledge that added to a schism between the study and practice of design and the omnipotent presence in the world as independent futural force beyond the control of the designer and 'the design process'. Another division is that between 'design history' and the agency of design within history. From a contemporary perspective, albeit characterised in a very shorthand way and in common with almost all design education to date, the condition of limitation is that it remains: (i) anthropocentric (human-centred design is its current expression), (ii) Eurocentric (the construction of design in the world via an imposed epistemological characterisation that excludes how other cosmologies understood/understand the propensity to prefigure), and (iii) mostly uncritically bonded to service provision (which predominantly means that so often the most important design decisions are made before the designer arrives on the scene). In the complexity of the world in which we now all live, design and design education, as will be indicated, needs to go beyond these conditions of limitation.

It just so happens that my own history intersects with the history I outlined. My professional career as a designer started in a studio of a film company in London's Soho in 1969 with six years of work experience as a designer, a semester as a visiting designer in a US design school, as well as study and travel in Latin America. A decade later, with a design degree and industry experience, I gained a place at the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, University of Birmingham, to undertake a Master's degree and thereafter a PhD. The five years I spent at the CCCS changed my relation to knowledge, learning, design, and the world. In 1985, a year after graduating, I gained a position as a Lecturer at the Power Institute at Sydney University. I was hired to teach design history and theory. By 1988 I had written and published *Design History Australia*, the first and Eurocentrically critical text on design studies in Australia. Many books have followed, but what I want to make clear is that I have always retained a relation to design practice, working on projects in Australia (as director of the EcoDesign Foundation 1992-2002), the USA, Timor-Leste, Colombia, and Hong Kong. The critical position is indivisibly theoretically, practically, and politically informed.

## Introduction

Design education's plural trajectory in this period in the global North is denoted by an uneven passage from craft education in further education institutions to its induction into higher education and universities, with degrees displacing diplomas. In the UK, the Diploma in Art and Design established in 1960 was replaced by a degree in 1974 awarded by the Council for National Academic Awards. During the same period, art and design schools became incorporated into polytechnics and universities. Initially little changed, but the humanities started to arrive in design education under the aegis of terms like 'general studies', which often included art history and communications studies. By the mid- to late 1970s this started to be displaced by design history, mostly delivered from an art historical perspective. This tension resulted in a break, and design history gaining an independent status. The OU was one of the key actors of this moment, not least by the creation of course on the 'History of Architecture and Design' and the circulation of its course material well beyond the university. Alongside this, 'Design Methods' (directed at 'how-to' design) started to emerge, as did Design Research (directed at design process, design practice and design object function and qualities). Design Studies (the study of the history and theory of design) developed in the early 1980s, as design history methodologically broke away from art history. Bringing design history and theory together, it aimed to elevate itself in its own right as an academic discipline among disciplinary design (communication design, industrial design, interior design, fashion and more). All this happened, with difference, and at different rates, in various parts of the world. The scene was thus set in three respects: an Eurocentric model was globalised, the number of design programmes increased globally, and design as service provision became more professionalised.

## Design education

What has been sketched, very briefly and lacking nuances, is the foundation upon which the status quo of design education has been built. But its future cannot be constituted out of them. This is because multiple critiques are exposing the weaknesses and limits of design education, albeit in its global difference, to adequately and appropriately meet the challenges of the age. These are relationally complex and include a geopolitical reconfiguration of power in the world as well as major enviro-climatic crises stemming from climate change, including conflict and rapid technological change with significant consequences for some groups of our species (Fry, 2020). Played through

design, the professional practice is instrumentally bonded to serving the needs of an economy and provided by design education, and predicated upon growth and unrestrained hyper-consumption that combine to produce material and social impacts that are inherently unsustainable and thus negate the future (Fry, 2009). In this situation a double bind has become clear: the created dependence on this economy produces crises but is appealed to resolve crisis. The example of COVID-19 makes the point. Causally, it has been linked to the relation between loss of biodiversity, rapid urban development, and changes in non-domestic animal behaviour (Quammen, 2012) establishing the condition in which a global pandemic emerged that in turn created a worldwide economic crisis while the revitalisation of the unsustainable economy is posited as the solution.

Design's articulation to serving this economy is not merely a structural problem but equally on ontological one intrinsic to the habitus of almost every designer – which is to say, it is part of a thinking which is taken for granted, and so un-thought. At the most general level, what this means is that the relations and practices of service are simply taken as the reality of the world in which they function. So framed, design education and practice are dislocated from the omnipresence and omnipotence of design. What this means is that design, as the designed, has constituted the historical and contemporary form of the 'world-within-the-world' that our species made and inhabits. Its vast and complex relationality is the consequence of design as integral to artifice (and event – the ongoing designing of the designed) in general and to the conscious practice of designing in the past and present. There is thus a vast gulf between the worldly present of design and the restrictive way in which design created as a division of knowledge **and how it is** practised, taught, presented, viewed, and so often trivialised (especially as characterised as 'style' and 'object'). Consider: no matter who or where we are, our species lives in a world of human fabrication within the world. Neither design education nor practice situates their understanding of design in this complexity. Moreover, all design service provision that receives and acts upon a given brief – which means the most fundamental design decisions are already predetermined. Consequentially, designers act in conditions of ethical disempowerment. While not new, contemporary circumstances have rendered this condition of limitation critical. This is especially evident in the defuturing impetus of unsustainability that is negating the very possibility of life. The announcement that the sixth planetary extinction has now commenced and that life is now

lived in the age of the Anthropocene, are shorthand, if problematic, ways of naming of this moment. We live in the end times – which means that life is lived, by millions of people, who know or feel that life, as it has been known, has no future.

Technology is implicated in this situation in two contradictory ways. It is taken to be the saving power, and as such the means by which the problems that threaten will be solved. Yet, it is deeply implicated in the creation of these problems. The unsustainable arrived, and still arrives, by design and technology (Fry, 2009). But its effects are not just worldly; they impact upon 'us' and further fragment the species. This is to say, the divide between the technologically rich and poor (well beyond a digital divide) is not just a cultural and economic difference but an increasingly an ontological one. The still unfolding debate on the posthuman evidences this, with its exposure that at its most basic, as a species, we are fragmenting (Roden, 2015). The extreme end-times registration of this is 'the Singularity' (a complete giving over to artificial intelligence) and 'planetary abandonment' (see Mars as the desired future).

Obviously, there are very many designers and design educators deeply concerned about 'the state of the world' who attach themselves to a quasi-design politics: sustainable design, design against climate change, transitional design, the decolonisation of design, and so on. But design as it is, lacks the agency, the power, to be a real change agent. For actual transformative change to occur, for design to become futural, the very practice itself has to be changed, as does design education. Naivety has to be made present and then abandoned. There are two qualifications to be made on this statement. It is not made lightly. It comes from a history of working through, and investing in, design 'progressivism' over decades – from design for alternative technology, green/ecodesign, design for sustainability, design and the global South, in projects and education institutions in Europe, the Asia Pacific, and the Americas. My experience has shown me that there is so much more to learn and that making design political is not a choice but essential. Second, such change cannot happen quickly, but the process has to begin now. What follows is very clipped overview of what this could look like.

### **Agenda setting from the outside to the inside**

There are six basic premises of futural design education to be posed, each with a starting point. All of them are modifiable by conjunctural differences – there can be no universal model of design education that flattens cultural and situated difference (which has been

the case with the epistemological colonialism of the Eurocentric export of design education).

*Premise One.* The agenda of design education has to come from the ethical, worldly imperatives as they arrive in the specificity of place. Understanding how to research, and learning how to read the agency of 'design in the world', thus becomes a fundamental educational element. The key point here is that the economic and practice pragmatics of design need to be subordinated to this knowledge. This implies directional changes: designers working commercially need to gain and develop a redirective capability; they, and aspiring designers, need to learn how to acquire the means to become independent, while developing a career that economically sustains them.

*Premise Two.* Disciplinary disobedience has to be a primary feature of design education and practice. The restrictive practice of the discipline and practice is a condition of limitation that has been built over many decades. It is a major obstacle to the advancement of design and needs to be broken. Design's presence in the world is unbounded, the discourse of design negates a recognition of this: design gets reduced to object, style, method, or process. Design gets disengaged from: history (by design history as it disarticulates design as a historical actor), its embedded presence in practices of making (by exclusive specialism), and, from being an integral ontological characteristic of our being (by being claimed as a gift of the gifted). The implication is that design education now needs to become dialogically transdisciplinary, which means being more informed by, and informing, other disciplines.

*Premise Three.* Design education, as already implied, has to be a far more substantial education, and certainly go well beyond what is still dominantly a 'how-to' approach. Currently designers do not learn how to understand design's agency in the world, as world-making. To do this means grasping design is process, not product: everything designed goes on designing – and this directly links to understanding 'design in time' (that is, design in the medium of time and design(ers) acting with strategic knowledge and urgency in the face of defuturing forces). There can be no real design responsibility until this view of design is understood. In this respect, education on the agency of design needs to be seen as absolutely critical and elemental to education at large.

*Premise Four.* Directed unlearning design is a precondition for new learning. As has been suggested for design to gain its now appropriate agency for a planet and species (us) in crisis, it has to be redirected and remade. For this to happen a clearing, an unlearning, of the extant habitus of the designer, and their

understanding of design, has to happen. By implication, this has to start with design educators. Unevenly, this varies between being recognised by a few progressives, and being completely overlooked by the majority. Change threatens, especially when it undercuts the knowledge upon which careers are built. This means a milieu has to be created, transition programmed and support given, in professional development. All this is a design process and project of incremental development over time and in its own right.

*Premise Five.* Transformative design leadership: there are only few leaders of this ilk inside and outside of design who recognise that there is a crisis in design because *design is negatively situated in a planetary and bio-human crisis* (Fry & Nocek, 2020). Leadership in this context is not about directing or guiding design students, educators, or professionals toward a pre-given solution. Rather, it is about enabling 'the concerned' to commence the kind of process outlined. What is recognised here is that this will be a minority, albeit a significant one. Their actual leadership significance will arrive in a still indeterminant moment of breakdown, the signs of which have already arrived. COVID-19 was not an aberrant event but a consequence of worsening conditions reducing biodiversity (Quammen, 2012). The bush fires in Australia in late 2019 and early 2020 that killed over a billion native animals, destroyed 20% of the nation's forests and produced a plume of smoke that encircled the globe was not a one-off event but part of an ongoing pattern, and the crisis of ever-reducing biodiversity is not going to stop. These are but three examples of the much larger environmental and geopolitical crisis that has now predestined breakdown. What is on the other side of this will, in part, be decided by design, and the efficacy of design in this context is being decided now and in the not-too-distant future.

*Premise Six.* Autonomous design and the autonomous designer will be, and need to be, an important part of design education and practice (Escobar, 2017). In short, what this means is communities exercising *design power*, in their own right, and independent designers authoring futural projects of significance that are economically viable. To do this requires new knowledge, skills, and a sensibility that fully comprehends that a paradigmatic transformation of design is inevitable, albeit its form being uncertain. What is clear is that design educators and designers need a far more critical and comprehensive understanding of the worlds in which design arrives and acts, especially in the context of the enormous challenges facing humanity. It is this understanding that directs the transformation of design and designing.

Further elaboration of these six premises will be necessary to fully evaluate them. Defenders of the status quo will recoil from them; progressives will think them over and by degrees embrace them and recognise that they all beg more consideration and development. Ultimately, these premises pose a question to The Open University: will the progressive leadership that made design a domain of study and practice in the past be displayed again by taking design into the uncertain future?

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