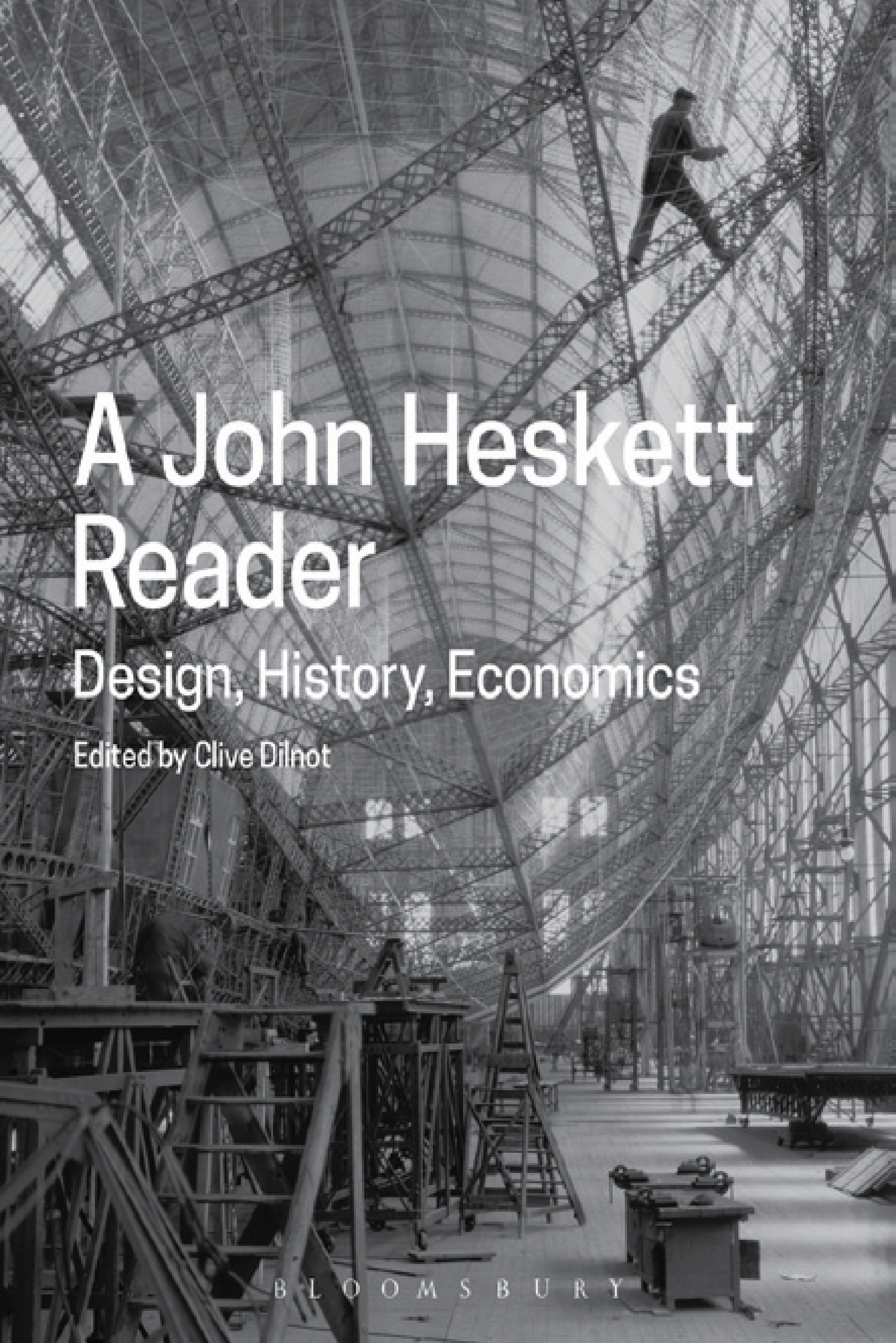
A John Heskett Reader
Design, History, Economics
Edited by Clive Dilnot
BLOOMSBURY

A John Heskett Reader

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Edited and with an Introduction by
Clive Dilnot

With Contributions by
Sharon Helmer Poggenpohl,
Carlos Teixeira and Tore Kristensen

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Sharon Helmer Poggenpohl has taught in notable design programmes: The Hong Kong Polytechnic University, the Institute of Design at the Illinois Institute of Technology in Chicago and the Rhode Island School of Design. Her focus over a long career has been postgraduate design education, both master and PhD, as well as design research. Taking a human-centred position with regard to design, she teaches to help students humanize technology, to learn to work creatively and collaboratively with each other and to prepare them to contribute to building a body of design knowledge. She was a colleague of John Heskett for fifteen years at two institutions. For twenty-six years, she edited and published the international scholarly journal *Visible Language*. She co-edited with Keiichi Sato Design Integrations, Research and Collaboration (Intellect Books, 2009). Currently, she is working on a book tentatively titled *Design Theory-to-go*, while teaching occasionally in Hong Kong.

Carlos Teixeira was recently appointed to a position in the Institute of Design at Illinois Institute of Technology. Until 2015 he was an associate professor in Strategic Design and Management at the School of Design Strategies at Parsons The New School for Design. He has a PhD in design from the Institute of Design, Illinois Institute of Technology. His expertise is revealing the operational logics that guide design practice. His academic research and teaching centres on the application of such logics to processes of open innovation. Carlos Teixeira was a doctoral student of John Heskett from 1998 to 2002 at the Institute of Design, which resulted in his doctoral dissertation 'Design Knowledge and Business Opportunities' in 2002. Under Heskett's supervision and intellectual influence, Teixeira collaborated with Paola Bertola, PhD, currently associate professor at the Politecnico di Milano, but in 2001 a visiting scholar at the Institute of Design, resulting in an article titled 'Design as a Knowledge Agent: How Design as a Knowledge Process is Embedded into Organizations to Foster Innovation,' published in the journal *Design Studies* in 2003.

LIST OF ACRONYMS

ERCO	German Lighting Company
I.D.	International Design (bimonthly design journal)
ID	Institute of Design, Illinois Institute of Technology, Chicago
IDSA	Industrial Designers Society of America
IIT	Illinois Institute of Technology
IJD	International Journal of Design
LSE	London School of Economics
METU	Middle East Technical University, Ankara
MIT	Massachusetts Institute of Technology
OBM	Own Brand Management
ODM	Original Design Manufacturing
OEM	Original Equipment Manufacture
OSM	Original Strategy Management
RCA	Radio Corporation of America
RCA	Royal College of Art
SME	Small Medium Enterprise

Introduction

Clive Dilnot

John Heskett, who died in February 2014, was one of the first serious historians of design in Britain and latterly one of the first economists of design. Between the late 1970s and 2010, he made a series of important contributions to the history of design, to the study of design policy and latterly to the theoretical and applied articulation of the economic value created by design, first in the United Kingdom, then in the United States and, in the last decade of his life, in Hong Kong.

I

Born in Coventry in 1937, his father a merchant seaman, he took a degree in economics, politics and history from the London School of Economics (LSE) in 1960. After a variety of jobs in the UK and Australia in 1967, he secured a lectureship in social and economic history in the Department of History of Art and Design at Coventry Polytechnic.* This was at a moment when art and design education, elevated after 1964 to degree status, was beginning to consider what constituted the necessary historical and theoretical background for studies in the field. While fine art was able to appropriate the long tradition of art history and criticism, no such histories or traditions were available for design. Essentially, much of this history had to be written – and on the social, economic and political components of design almost wholly so. With his background in economic and social history, Heskett was well positioned to begin this work. In the early 1970s he became part of the emerging first generation of historians of design.

It is difficult now to recover the context of this moment. In terms of Britain, there is a work to be written of the institutional and pedagogical developments of the period – and of John Heskett's roles within this.

*Reading #29, 'On Writing,' contains some autobiographical paragraphs that flesh out in interesting ways the details of Heskett's early work in Britain.

Thought in wider terms, and seen retrospectively from a position where design education is undertaken more and more within university contexts, the difficulty is to understand, in both its virtues and vices, the mentality of the 'art school' approach to art and design education, especially at a time when some of the traditional approaches were breaking down, both professionally and institutionally (stand-alone and art-dominated institutions becoming merged into the (then) polytechnic sector and hence, if slowly, into a university discipline). If there was still very little graduate study in design at that time in the UK (save at the Royal College of Art (RCA)), the shift to teaching design as a degree-level subject was not coincidentally linked to the growing professional self-awareness of the design profession. However loosely applied, consistent government support for design since the Second World War had begun to suggest roles for design that considerably went beyond the subaltern and 'applied-art' mentalities of the 1930s and 1940s. While many of the older attitudes persisted – indeed have ever been entirely eradicated (nor perhaps should they be) – a certain confidence in the field meant that design began to demand, even if equivocally, its 'own' study and pedagogy. 'Design History' and the formation of the Design History Society (1977) are the UK markers of this.

But an immediate question that presented itself to those teaching in the art schools was from where did the scholarship and understanding that could underpin such studies come from – especially in a context where there was all but no research funding and indeed, institutionally, at that date a continuing *opposition* to research and where publication was not only *not* demanded but also not necessarily even wanted?

If these were not already sufficient problems to contend with, there was, at the same time, little assistance to be had from the disciplines to which one might look for support – history, and particularly social and economic history; art history and the history of the decorative arts; anthropology and archaeology. History, for example, was at that point an emphatically text-based activity. Art history and the decorative arts wished to have nothing to do with design.

There was Pevsner of course – a far too easily criticized figure – and eccentricities like Geidion's *Mechanization Takes Command* of 1948. There was also, around 1974, the surprisingly successful publication of Victor Papenek's *Design for the Real World*, but as the diversity of these authors and texts reveal, they were like small islands in a much larger uncharted ocean of practice – in both its historical and operational, and, especially at this date, its strategic and policy, aspects.

The change, such as it was in the 1970s, came about through a number of catalysts. One was the growing importance of the image fuelled by factors such as the development of cheap colour printing and the switch to photographically based advertising. The commercial mechanisms of style, youth culture and 'consumption' forced a new attention on the visual realm

and on products in general. Along with the rise to visibility of design as a professional activity in its own right (no longer simply 'applied art'), these developments contributed to an atmosphere in which it was possible to *begin* to treat design and its history with some seriousness. Nonetheless, even as attitudes changed, the resources for creating the serious study of design other than from the models of art history were pitifully thin. They had to be made from scratch and to be successful, that is, to truly engage with the complex actualities of design, they had to be constructed on a different basis.

II

In 1974 *The Times Literary Supplement* published two articles on the state of art history, Joseph Rykwert's 'Art as Things Seen' (whose thrust was precisely to ask about and, to a degree, test the limits of art historical inquiry) and T. J. Clark's much more famous 'The Conditions of Artistic Creation.' Clark nailed his political, and to a degree his methodological, colours to the mast with a quotation from Georg Lukács', 'Reification and the Consciousness of the Proletariat' (1922).

> And yet, as the really important historians of the nineteenth century such as Riegl, Dilthey and Dvorak could not fail to notice, the essence of history lies precisely in the changes undergone by those structural forms which are the focal points of man's interaction with environment at any given moment and which determine the objective nature of both his inner and outer life. But this only becomes objectively possible (and hence can only be adequately comprehended) when the individuality, the uniqueness of an epoch or a historical figure, etc., is grounded in character of these structural forms, when it is discovered and exhibited in them and through them. (*History and Class Consciousness*, p. 153)

Clark's fascination, however, was really only with the first part of the quotation: the identification of art historians as 'real' historians, worrying away, as he puts it, at the central questions – the nature of representation, the structure of artistic production, the processes of social and cultural change. It is this model of the questioning art-historian – who by the depth of the questions he asks becomes de facto a historian per se – that provided for Clark the force of Lukács' quote and the hint of model desperately needed by an art history then slipping into genteel irrelevance. In the process, however, the second, substantive half of the proposition is all but ignored.

But it is just here that the difference between art history and design history becomes sharply evident. For anyone looking at Lukács' quotation through the lens of design, what leaps out is less the 'roll-call of names' that

so fascinated Clark, more the extraordinary statement that Lukács offers us – that the *essence of history lies precisely in the changes undergone by those structural forms which are the focal points of man's interaction with environment at any given moment and which determine the objective nature of both his inner and outer life*.

For design this proposition is immediately and powerfully suggestive. 'Structural forms' that are 'the focal points of man's interaction with his environment' immediately connote those configurations (Simon's 'search for good designs') through which we engage and mediate the world. If in his article Clark all but eschews any discussion of Lukács' proposition, the turn that historians of design like Heskett began to take in the 1970s was that *in effect* (not literally – few design historians, Heskett included, read Lukács at this time) they began to take this proposition, or something very like it, very seriously indeed.

In so doing they were understanding that in industrial society the 'structural forms which are the focal points of man's interaction with environment at any given moment and which determine the objective nature of both his inner and outer life' are, inescapably, designed things.

- They are the 'focal points' of history because they are the mediations of industrialization vis-à-vis the modes of production that largely determine them, and the subjects to whom, nominally at least, they are addressed.
- They represent 'the essence' of our times because the 'structural forms' that 'determine the objective nature of [man's] inner and outer life' increasingly centre on products in the widest sense of this term.
- It is in and through the changes to these 'structural forms' that we can grasp at once the objective and subjective essence of our history and it is in turn through this history – and perhaps in some ways only through this history – that we can begin to understand the continuum and variations of past, present and future.

On this basis, therefore, the history of design opens onto a different kind of history. This is not simply a history of (a minor) professional activity but even when conducted as that it contains, at least in potential, a wider revelatory moment.

For all the limitations now ascribed to him, in the 1930s Pevsner had already in large part recognized this. *Pioneers of Modern Design* contains something of this insight. Post-War, and especially in the late 1950s and early 1960s, it is recognized again, most evidently, in Britain, in the writings of Reyner Banham (coming from architecture and architectural history) and, in a different, but in a way no less significant register, the paintings and projects – *and* the writings one should note – of the artist Richard Hamilton. If 'Pop' had a natural gravitation to industrial and consumer products, this was only intensified by the widening and democratic ethos of

the 1960s and by the increasing visibility of design, not least educationally, where if the old primacy of the fine arts was not unseated, the former at least began to take a seat at the same table.

By the 1970s and1980s, therefore, there begins to be a conviction that a historically grounded study of design had something that it could possibly reveal, *not least to design itself*, then as now notoriously, in the main, an unreflective practice. At the same time it was early recognized (though never in the end sufficiently) that if design offered 'truths' they were of a singularly messy character, that there is no purity in design; that even as one foot seeks autonomy, and even a degree of critical distance, the other is always stuck in commerce or in power. But it was also this involvement with the messiness of life that was part of its appeal – and not least (here hearkening back, if ambiguously, to Morris and Co.) a reason for its political interest. The emancipatory role of products in relieving domestic drudgery was at that point a lived experience, not simply a taken-for-granted ubiquity. The notion of art and design for the masses was not *simply* commodification (though it was not *not* commodification). Design history in this moment (a least in its best forms) attempted to straddle these incommensurable truths.

III

All this has seemed a very long digression away from the life and work of John Heskett, but it is not, because it was out of these conditions and mentalities, even at first in inchoate form, that Heskett began to work as a historian of design in the early 1970s. In 1977, he moved to Sheffield Polytechnic and there began to write seriously on the history of industrial design. His first book, *Industrial Design*, appeared in 1980 and was instantly successful. It provided one of the first accounts of industrial design, seen not as a succession of product forms, but as responses to changes in production methods and the organization of capitalism. Written in his characteristic accessible manner, the book broke firmly with earlier ways of seeing design. This was design understood quite outside of the art-and-design paradigm: it was not the 'art-and-industry' relation that interested Heskett, nor any idea of form as simply an expression of a modern telos. The thrust was rather entirely on design in industry, first as an economic and then as a social, phenomenon. In the same way the book did not confine itself to Britain nor only to the period of 'heroic modernism.' Rather, in a brief but authoritative survey, Heskett mapped the different historical forms that designing for industry took as industrial capitalism developed after 1800, offering chapters, for example, on the American system of manufactures in the nineteenth century and giving some weight to developments in Germany, the whole emphasizing, as was recently said, 'design in production as part of a system of thinking about objects in terms of needs, opportunities, cultural context and values'.[1]

Germany had long been an interest of Heskett's and in the late 1970s and 1980s he wrote extensively on German design. His second book (part of planned trilogy that would have continued to present day) was on the history of German design from 1870 to 1918 (1986) and he published further papers on art and design in Nazi Germany, offending many by flatly refusing the identification that 'good design' belonged only and inherently to the opposition to Hitler. As someone who, as a child, was bombed out three times in Coventry, he had little patience with those who, rather than understanding design in the complex contexts of operation, preferred to see it in simplistic (and empty) moral terms. Indeed, although Heskett was part of the first generation of design historians in Britain, he kept his distance from its institutionalized forms (The Design History Society (1977) and its journal (1979)). He was not happy with the continuing underlying art-historical attitudes in design history, or with what he saw as the lack of intellectual and historical ambition; rather, at a time when, particularly in the north of England, de-industrialization was evident on a daily basis – and with it the question of whether, under the double onslaught of Thatcherism and imports competing simultaneously on price and quality, Britain could continue to possess a significant industrial base – Heskett's interests turned increasingly to the questions of design and economics and design policy.

The shift to economics became emphatic when he left the United Kingdom for the United States in 1988, first to work on a project with the Design Management Institute in Boston, and then after 1989, to teach in the graduate programmes in the Institute of Design at Illinois Institute of Technology (IIT) in Chicago. Here, and then, after 2004, in Hong Kong, he undertook teaching and research on the roles of design in production and more widely in the economy as a whole, examining design policy at national levels in the United States, Europe and, increasingly, Asia. In these contexts Heskett was working as an advocate for design and design policy – and as a sharp critic of its absence in both corporate and national governance. This is given expression in much of the journalism that Heskett undertook in the 1990s, particularly for the now defunct magazine *I-D/International Design*.

In 2002, melding this work with his earlier work on industrial design, he published *A Very Short Introduction to Design* (titled in the first instance at the insistence of the marketing department at Oxford University Press, *Toothpicks and Logos: Design in Everyday Life*). This book stood for him as a kind of manifesto of his beliefs in both the civilizing and economic necessity of design in an industrial world. It is this conjunction of seeing design at once in its economic potential for improving product quality and in its wider cultural role that distinguished the work he produced after 1990. Case Studies on contemporary design policy, for example an exhibition at the Science Museum, London on recent German design (1987), and a book-length study of corporate design policy in Phillips (1989) were augmented by a range of journalism, lectures and presentations that explored design in the

context of hard economic decision-making and in terms of the possibilities of design policies applied at national and corporate levels.

His move to Hong Kong in 2004 brought this work to a head in the form of applied policy at government level. He chaired task forces for the Hong Kong government and the British Design Council and gradually pulled together his understanding of the role of design in economic development, or as Heskett preferred to title it, 'the economic value of design' (or, as he later authored it, 'the role of design in the creation of value'. These developments are discussed extensively below, but it should be said at the beginning that the word 'value' had for Heskett always a double connotation, at once economic and cultural. He felt his task in these years was to argue for the importance of design, not in any simplistic sense but through understanding its complexities and subtleties as a mode of economic and social agency. In this respect he was one of the first historians to consider in a more formal way the relationship between design and economics, extending it to local considerations of policy and looking at it as at once a potential centre of value, an essential component of strategic initiatives and, to a degree, a potential driver of economic success.

It was precisely this ability to hold together these moments that made Heskett in the 1990s and 2000s a valued consultant and advisor to governments on design policy. He had begun involvement with the UK Design Council before he left Britain. By 1990 he was working for a Japanese consultancy and throughout the next decades he was repeatedly invited to speak and advise at institutional and government level in countries as varied (for example) as Mexico, Chile, Finland, Japan, Taiwan and South Africa.

However, he did not entirely neglect history during this period. A commission that did not, sadly, in the end come to fruition, to 'write a world history of design', produced an extended manuscript, *Craft, Commerce and Industry: A Global History of Design* surveying making in the context of production and exchange from the earliest humans through to the present day. Making use of his very extensive travels, especially but not only, in Asia,[2] the manuscript indeed offers a world history of making and one that does not seek to retrospectively impose 'design' values on aretfacture, but as the title suggests tries to grasp the *longue durée* of pre-industrial production, making and exchange of things. At a time when we are beginning to realize the brevity of the industrial moment, this wider perspective has its force.

As a teacher, speaker and writer about design across four decades, Heskett made a considerable contribution to his audiences' understanding of design. Uniting history with concerns for policy, he kept together two perspectives that his successors on both sides seem to have been unable to achieve. Today, we have policy without history ('design research') and history that eschews concerns for practice. Heskett understood the flow between these moments. In the best sense he had a social-democratic belief in design as an agency of

improvement. In a late note he defined design as that capacity which enables us 'to create a world of artifice to meet our needs and give meaning to our lives', and 'to beneficially reshape the world of artifice we have created and inhabit'; all the while acting in itself, as 'a unique characteristic of what defines us as human beings on a par with literature and music'.

At the end of his unpublished book-length ms. *Craft, Commerce and Industry: A History of Design*, he goes further: 'We have in the history of design an astonishingly rich inheritance. What is even more amazing is that with every new-born child the latent potential for similar achievement exists in this incredibly fertile human capability. It is the greatest renewable resource we possess and to acknowledge its creative potential could be the finest legacy we leave for our children and grandchildren.' The risk of bathos in this quotation was calculated. It was the deliberate converse of the fact that looking at design in terms of economics runs the risk of instrumentality. Heskett was aware of this, and on the other side that the approach to the history of designed things that 'innocently' values design often operates merely to the benefit of the antiques trade. The difficulties that a history of design encounters are necessarily of a different nature to those of social history – or art history. The praxiological component; the fact that in design criticism is manifest as affirmation; the necessity to think intervention, all these preclude an approach that differentiates a subject matter from action. To write the history of design is to seek to recover aspects of a capability occluded to itself. One paradox is that, while the impulses that provoked the development of the history of design have faded in the last forty years, objectively the onset of the world-as-artificial has opened again a purpose in the form of the recovery not of the 'value' of design per se but of design as potentially a mode of action in the world, something that has been continually glimpsed, if peripherally, across the industrial period but that is now coming to fuller visibility. The paradox here is that what began in and from industry now finds itself thinking its role at the ending of what we now can see as the (short) industrial period – ending that is, not of course of industry per se, but of the latter as formative in the global economies we are now moving into. The question now to be asked is: What is design in an epoch of the artificial, and what does a history of this capability in this new context have to offer? How does this history help inform our understanding of those structural forms that are today (*pace* Lukács) 'the focal points of man's interaction with environment at any given moment and which determine the objective nature of both his inner and outer life?'

John Heskett's work scarcely touches on these emerging issues. But he was, to repeat, one of the very first historians in his field to both take design seriously as a subject of historical investigation and dare to do what few cultural historians have done, that is, to attempt to think seriously about questions of economic value, both within and without (and by implication beyond) capitalism.

IV

It is a valid criticism of the Reader – and this was made forcefully by one of the reviewers of the draft manuscript – to say that overall the book as it stands, including this introduction, lacks a degree of critical perspective, both in terms of showing how Heskett's work is 'relevant to present and emerging concerns' and to 'offer a stronger critical voice, directing the reader, offering critiques and building on the work Heskett begun'. There is truth to this claim. A discerning reader will notice in a number of the introductory notes to the sections, implicit, sometimes explicit, critical perspectives. But neither this introduction nor the three chapters that introduce the different parts of Part III are *critical* explorations of Heskett's work in the sense delineated above. The reason for this lies in the genesis of the book. I had spoken with John before his death on producing a Reader. His untimely passing and the degree of his illness in the months beforehand made this an impossible project. After he died I took it over, at once as an academic project, but also (this was only a few months after his death in February 2014) as something of a memorial. The aim of the book was to place his work in the public sphere. Indeed, a part of the aim was precisely to stimulate critical debate and discussion – which, to a remarkable extent, design lacks. The reviewer of the ms. was quite right. It is precisely the critical assessment, not just of Heskett's work, but of the fields of design history and design business/economics, that is essential. But this I felt was a separate project to presenting the work. Only with the work back in the public sphere could critical discussion begin. None of this means, of course, that the work evades criticism; far from it. Yet, criticism begins from reading. George Steiner's distinction 'Critic/Reader' applies. The *first* task is to be able to read again the work. It is from that that thought begins.

A note on the selection of the texts

As has already been noted, John Heskett's academic life fell into two distinct periods: his work in England from the late 1960s through to 1989, which focuses on the history of design and particularly the history of industrial design; and his work in America (and then in Hong Kong), from 1989 to 2010, which focuses largely on questions of design policy, design and business and the economics of design. This neat bifurcation does not, in fact, quite hold: Heskett had begun to be interested in questions of design policy and design and business before he left the UK, and from the late 1990s through to around 2006 he was also heavily involved in writing a global history of making. Nonetheless, the distinction is real enough for it to provide the obvious logic for the organization of the Reader.

The Reader thus falls into two main parts, roughly of equal length; the first on history (Part II) and the second on design and business, design policy and design and economics (Part III). Together these account for three-quarters of the texts. They are bracketed in two ways: first, in Part I, by introductions to the three key themes – *design*, *history* and *economics* – which he explored so assiduously and which were the basis of almost everything he wrote. These themes then reappear at the end of the book in a short series of reflections and last words (Parts IV and V) that mediate on these issues and on the trajectories of his life, work and hopes.

The Reader does not, of course, reproduce everything of interest that he wrote. Although the book is larger than first anticipated by the publisher (they have been generous in their support for this venture), there are necessary limits on the size of the volume. Nonetheless, overall, the book aims, within its limits, to present something of the cohesion and force of Heskett's thinking as at once a historian, a design economist and a design thinker. A quick comparison of the list of contents with the provisional bibliography of his published work published as an appendix to this volume will show that the Reader presents a fair sampling of his work. Outside of the four major books (sections of which are included in the Reader), the pieces included here represent just less than half of his significant published output. The aim has been to be comprehensive in the range of material presented but to put stress on work that is now out of print and difficult to find or was previously unpublished. There is particular emphasis too on articles and the pieces in which Heskett's distinctive voice comes through the otherwise sometimes neutral tone of his writing. The selection deploys range too in other senses. No less than seven of the readings are unpublished and these include extracts from his two most important unpublished manuscripts, the book-length *Crafts, Commerce and Industry: A Global History of Design* and the extended seminar 'Design and the Creation of Value' as well as from two of the government reports (for the Hong Kong government and the UK government respectively) that he authored in the last decade of his life.

In other ways too, the readings are deliberately diverse. They range from extracts of books drafted for wide audiences (*Industrial Design* (1980) (#7) and *Design: A Very Short Introduction* (2002/5) (#1) through to academic seminars, lectures and research notes – for example, the important material on the dialectic of economics and design (#3) and the economic value of design (see especially reading #27). In a different vein altogether are some of the results of his research on design in Germany from 1870 to 1945 (readings #11–13), which are more academic in tone; the fruits of an intensive six-month period spent researching in Germany which is the closest Heskett was able to come to a sustained period of research without teaching responsibilities.

By contrast, and as will become apparent especially in Part III, journalism is also important – especially the series of short essays on design and policy and design and business which Heskett wrote for the now defunct US design magazine *I.D.* in the early 1990s (see many of the readings between #14 and #27). These pieces mark a different kind of public engagement from his books, one sharper and more pointed, even impatient with the failings of policy and attitude that they note.

This emphasis on writings where it possible to hear Heskett's very particular voice and take on things is the reason also for the somewhat unusual reproduction of two book reviews, the only published reviews by Heskett I am aware of (#9). They allow a reader who knows something of the history of design and its methodological debates to hear in these comments a sharp evaluation of contrasting approaches to understanding not only the history of design but industrialization per se.

The Reader ends, deliberately, in Parts IV and V ('Reflections' and 'Last Words') with a series of informal talks, each in its own way reflective at once the past, the future and the capacities of design (#27–#30).

There are, of course, missing items. Word limits sadly allowed the reproduction of only one of Heskett's three major chapters in English on art and design in Nazi Germany.[3] Missing also from this collection are some of the more conventional overview chapters on the contextual history of industrial design, and missing too, with the exception of a couple of extracts noted above, is much of the work on government and institutional reports. These last two omissions are deliberate. The overview chapters, as one would expect, are perfectly competent, but they add relatively little to current knowledge. Excellent in their own way, they are essentially limited to the survey role.[4]

The problems involved in the second have already been referred to in the introduction. By their nature, government and institutional reports demand a certain neutrality of tome and an acute ear for the sensibilities of the institution commissioning the work. They tend, therefore, to the anonymous and the dull. Insights, where they exist, are coded and often neutralized. Blandness is inevitable. Heskett's institutional work, sadly, does not escape these conditions. Especially in the Asian context, the real – critical – insights

into the conditions of design and design–business relations in Asia that Heskett developed in more than twenty-five years of travelling to or living in Asia/Hong Kong do not find sufficient echo; only in what is almost the last text in the book (#28) does one get a sense of this.[5]

Missing too from the Reader, edited at a relatively late stage, are Heskett's reflections on the relations of designers and business. These are of two types, schematic and small case studies. The schematic are represented by some of Heskett's journalism in the 1990s which often expresses his double irritation at once with the inability of US companies to see the value of design and of designers to understand their (self-selected) roles within business.[6] The more idiosyncratic, or case studies, and the saddest to cut here to keep the book to manageable length, are on individual designers. Heskett took pleasure, especially in his time in Chicago, in recovering the history of some of the less well-known designers who worked in American industry in the 1920s and 1930s writing, for example, on 'Ivar Jepson: "Mr Sunbeam"' (*I.D.* magazine, 1994) which looks at the career of one of the most unsung and less fashionable of these designers.[7]

Finally, the more complex omissions come from unpublished work. The conditions under which this Reader was put together did not allow a sustained examination of the full archive of Heskett's work. Such exploration as was possible turned up some interesting fragments: readings #6, on the lessons that can be learnt for designing in China today from the study of history, and #29, 'On Writing', were discoveries added to the Reader at a later stage. Other unpublished studies will be published in a second volume, *Design and the Creation of Value*, which will have as its core the extended seminar of the same title, but will include other notes and fragments of Heskett's writing on design and economics. Finally, it is hoped in the longer term to publish the full ms. of *Crafts, Commerce and Industry: A Global History of Design*.

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I would like to pay tribute to the publishers who have generously allowed us to reproduce work in their copyright and also to those who helped in putting this project together. Here, I want to particularly thank F & W Media, the company that now owns the title rights to *I.D.* magazine. No less than six of the readings come from this source, so their support for this project was essential.

But this project was also dependent on the help of a number of people. The book was assembled quickly, essentially from August 2014 to Spring 2015. It was only possible to do this with considerable assistance. Here, I should like to thank my researchers, Komal Sharma, Mikhail Volf and Qionglu Lei, all students on MA Design Studies at Parsons School of Design, and exemplary and highly professional assistants. The later made a superb contribution to the indexing of the book. Various people gave important and essential

advice to the whole project. I would particularly like to mention Christine Tsin, from the School of Design at Hong Kong Polytechnic University, his former assistant and the person who saved the only complete copy of the ms. of *Crafts, Commerce and Industry*; Sharon Helmer Poggenpohl, his ex-colleague from the Institute of Design in Chicago and from Hong Kong, who deftly appraised both the first proposal for the book and a late version of the contents and who has provided a significant introduction to Part III; Suzan Boztepe, a former PhD student of Heskett's at IIT, now a professor at the University of Copenhagen, who gave invaluable advice on the organization of the sections on policy. Finally, Jonathan Woodham, from the University of Brighton, provided a sharp contextual critique of the material and an acute assessment of the value of the work. I am grateful also to two anonymous reviewers of the manuscript for Bloomsbury press – and the strong editorial support for this project from Rebecca Barden, Bloomsbury's acquisitions editor for design.

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Finally, my thanks must go to Pamela Heskett, John's widow, without whose support the project would not have been possible.

Notes

1 There is a useful discussion of Heskett's approach to history in Kjetl Fallon's *Design History: Understanding Theory and Method* (London: Bloomsbury, 2010), see especially, pp. 15–19. For Heskett's own approach to understanding Industrial Design, see the chapter 'Industrial Design,' in *Design History: A Students' Handbook*, ed. Hazel Conway (London: Allen and Unwin, 1987) especially, pp. 111–17 (reproduced below within reading #9). For those interested in the genesis, emphases and orientation of *Industrial Design*, there is a typescript of an interview with John Heskett focusing on the book undertaken at the then Middlesex Polytechnic in 1981. It is hoped to make this interview available on the Web in 2016. The sharp and useful observation on Heskett's work quoted above came in an anonymous review of the book proposal for this Reader.

2 Stemming in part from his long over-land journey 'back-packing' his way back from Australia to England in the late 1960s, Heskett had a life-long fascination with observing and recording national idiosyncrasies and characteristics in design. A favourite instance (referred to in reading #25) was the long-time huge advertisement for Marlboro cigarettes in Hong Kong on the way to the old airport, placed, however, on the side of the Hong Kong mortuary in Kowloon.

3 See also 'Art and Design in Nazi Germany,' *History Workshop Journal*, no. 6 (1978): 139–53; and 'Design in Inter-war Germany,' in *Designing Modernity: The Arts of Reform and Persuasion*, ed. Wendy Kaplan (London and New York: Thames and Hudson and the Wolfsonian Foundation, 1995). In German, see: 'Archaismus und Modernismus im Design im dritten Reich,' in ed. B. Hinz et al. (Giessen: Anabas Verlag, 1979), and 'Design und Kunsthandwerk unter Faschismus.' *Kunstchronik*, no. 1 (1984).

4 See, for example, 'British Industrial Design since 1945,' in *The Cambridge Cultural History of Modern Britain*, Vol. 9, ed. Boris Ford (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989); 'American Design in the 1950s,' in *Raymond Loewy*, catalogue of an exhibition jointly organized by Internationales Design Zentrum, Berlin, the Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam and the Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris. Prestel Verlag, Munich, 1990; 'The Emergence of the Industrial Design Profession in the United States,' in *The Alliance of Art and Industry: Toledo Designs for a Modern America*, ed. Davira S. Taragin (Toledo: Toledo Museum of Art, 2002).

5 The two main reports are: *Shaping the Future: Design for Hong Kong, Report of the Design Education Task Force* (Hong Kong Polytechnic University, 2003) and *Design In Asia: Review of National Design Policies and Business Use of Design in China, South Korea and Taiwan, a* research report commissioned by the Design Council, UK as a contribution to Sir George Cox's report to the UK Government on competitiveness in the United Kingdom, 2005. Short extracts from these reports are included below. Also under this heading the two books Heskett edited for government bodies in Hong Kong: *Design in Hong Kong* (Hong Kong Trade Development Council, 2004);

Very Hong Kong: A Review of Ten Years of Hong Kong Design since the Handover to China, Hong Kong Design Centre and Hong Kong Trade Development Centre.

6 Besides reading #15, whose sub-title, 'Why don't American companies use design more intelligently?' sums up the situation as Heskett saw it in the 1990s, other explorations of this theme are (for example) 'Do designers need public endorsement to contribute to a company's values?,' *I.D.* magazine September/October, pp. 6–7, and 'Can US designers compete?' *I.D*, November/December 1992. Heskett's English language text for a 1994 article 'Trends in Amerikanischen Design,' (Special Design Supplement, *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 29 November, Frankfurt-am-Main, Germany) is also of interest.

7 For another such figure, see 'The Desire for the New: The Context of Brooks Stevens Career,' in *Industrial Strength Design: How Brooks Stevens Shaped Your World*, ed. Glenn Adamson (Milwaukee: Milwaukee Art Museum and Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2003).

PART I

Key Themes

Introduction to the Readings in Part I

Design, history and economics were the three key themes that John Heskett tackled in his work between the late 1960s and 2010. The texts below offer introductions to how Heskett understood the interaction of these terms.

Design was the subject matter of all of his work from 1967 onwards and the more he pursued it the broader became his understanding. From a professional field in the 1970s and1980s, by the end of his life he was seeing it as a fundamental human capacity. His broadening understanding of design is introduced here, appropriately, by the short chapter from 2002 which opens the successful (and still in print) *Design: A Very Short Introduction*. The question mark in the title of this reading indicates that no definitive answer to this question can – or even perhaps should – be given.

But Heskett was trained as, and for forty years professionally acted as, a historian. The second reading, *Commerce or Culture: Industrialization and Design* opens to history and specifically the history of the industrial epoch and of design's roles in that history – the fundamental subject matter of most of Heskett's work. But precisely because one is dealing with design, and hence necessarily as Heskett says, with the future, then history cannot be simply history per se, antiquarianism, the past thought of as simply 'past,' but rather history as a way of looking at, and holding together, past, present and future; history as understanding, with a normative cast and a view to action. The pairs, 'Commerce or Culture'/'Industrialization and Design', stand for the tensions inescapable in design. The historian's function, Heskett implies, is to be articulate concerning them, to tease out their nature and their implications.

Finally, the seminar extract 'Design considered from Standpoint of Economics/Economics from the Standpoint of Design,' comes from the notes to the extended but unpublished seminar 'Design and the Creation of Value,' given to graduate students in Chicago and Hong Kong from the late 1990s to 2010. The essay stands for the central role that economics and economic thought had in his work. Economics and economic history were after all the general subject matter of Heskett's education at the LSE in the 1950s. They were the underlying theme or content of his historical work across the 1980s and after 1990 they become the increasing focus

of his teaching and writing. By the end of his life Heskett is adamant that design cannot be understood without economics – since if nothing else it occurs, professionally at least, only very largely within, and as an integral part of, economic life. But he was equally clear that an economics that could not grasp the contribution of design to the creation of value was inadequate *as* economics. This dialectical play between these positions is caught in this extract.

It should be noted that it is not an accident that this paper formed part of a seminar. If there was a fourth key theme in Heskett's work and life, it was pedagogy: teaching in the high sense of the word, with the necessity of clarity and precision of language that that entails. This sense enters all of his works. Heskett was an academic, but like all those who think about design, he could not but also be concerned with outcomes and by implication with futures. This double concern animates these opening readings. The texts below are, of course, not the only pieces that might be used to illuminate the key themes of his thought, but they are indicative of his life-long struggles to articulate his understandings of 'design, history and economics' across a variety of audiences, from the general public to academics and students, and to create bridges between the study of design and its policy and practice. They provide, therefore, in their diversity a suitable introduction to John Heskett's work and thought.

1

What Is Design?

One of the most curious features of the modern world is the manner in which design has been widely transformed into something banal and inconsequential. In contrast, I want to argue that, if considered seriously and used responsibly, design should be the crucial anvil on which the human environment, in all its detail, is shaped and constructed for the betterment and delight of all.

To suggest that design is a serious matter in that sense, however, is problematic. It runs counter to widespread media coverage assigning it to a lightweight, decorative role of little consequence: fun and entertaining, possibly useful in a marginal manner, maybe profitable in economic sectors dominated by rapid cycles of modishness and redundancy, but of no real substance in basic questions of existence.

Not surprisingly, in the absence of widespread agreement about its significance and value, much confusion surrounds design practice. In some subject areas, authors can assume common ground with readers; in an introduction to architecture or history, for example, although the precise degree of readers' knowledge might vary substantially, a reasonably accurate concept of what constitutes the subject can be relied on. Other subjects, such as nuclear physics, can be so esoteric that no such mutual understanding exists and approaches from first principles become necessary.

Design sits uncomfortably between these two extremes. As a word it is common enough, but it is full of incongruities, has innumerable manifestations and lacks boundaries that give clarity and definition. As a practice, design generates vast quantities of material, much of it ephemeral, only a small proportion of which has enduring quality.

Clearly a substantial body of people exist who know something about design, or are interested in it, but little agreement will probably exist about exactly what is understood by the term. The most obvious reference point

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Chapter I of ***Design: A Very Short Introduction***. Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2005, pp. 2–11. By kind permission of OUP press.

is fields such as fashion, interiors, packaging or cars, in which concepts of form and style are transient and highly variable, dependent upon levels of individual taste in the absence of any fixed canons. These do indeed constitute a significant part of contemporary design practice and are the subject of much commentary and a substantial proportion of advertising expenditure. Other points of emphasis might be on technical practice or on the crafts. Although substantial, however, these are all facets of an underlying totality and the parts should not be mistaken for the whole.

So how can design be understood in a meaningful, holistic sense? Beyond all the confusion created by the froth and bubble of advertising and publicity, beyond the visual pyrotechnics of virtuoso designers seeking stardom, beyond the pronouncements of design gurus and the snake-oil salesmen of lifestyles, lies a simple truth. Design is one of the basic characteristics of what it is to be human and an essential determinant of the quality of human life. It affects everyone in every detail of every aspect of what they do throughout each day. As such, it matters profoundly. Very few aspects of the material environment are incapable of improvement in some significant way by greater attention being paid to their design. Inadequate lighting, machines that are not user-friendly, badly formatted information, are just a few examples of bad design that create cumulative problems and tensions. It is therefore worth asking: if these things are a necessary part of our existence, why are they often done so badly? There is no simple answer. Cost factors are sometimes advanced in justification, but the margin between doing something well or badly can be exceedingly small, and cost factors can in fact be reduced by appropriate design inputs. The use of the term ‘appropriate’ however, is an important qualification. The spectrum of capabilities covered by the term ‘design’ requires that means be carefully adapted to ends. A solution to a practical problem which ignores all aspects of its use can be disastrous, as would, say, medical equipment if it were treated as a vehicle for individual expression of fashionable imagery.

This book is based on a belief that design matters profoundly to us all in innumerable ways and represents an area of huge, underutilized potential in life. It sets out to explore some reasons why this is so and to suggest some possibilities of change. The intention is not to negate any aspect of the spectrum of activity covered by the term ‘design’, but to extend the spectrum of what is understood by the term; examine the breadth of design practice as it affects everyday life in a diversity of cultures. To do so, however, some ground clearing is necessary to cut through the confusion surrounding the subject.

Discussion of design is complicated by an initial problem presented by the word itself. ‘Design’ has so many levels of meaning that it is itself a source of confusion. It is rather like the word ‘love’, the meaning of which radically shifts dependent upon who is using it, to whom it is applied and in what context. Consider, for example, the shifts of meaning when

using the word 'design' in English, illustrated by a seemingly nonsensical sentence:

> 'Design is to design a design to produce a design.'

Yet every use of the word is grammatically correct. The first is a noun indicating a general concept of a field as a whole, as in: 'Design is important to the national economy'. The second is a verb, indicating action or process: 'She is commissioned to design a new kitchen blender'. The third is also a noun, meaning a concept or proposal: 'The design was presented to the client for approval.' The final use is again a noun, indicating a finished product of some kind, the concept made actual: 'The new VW Beetle revives a classic design.'

Further confusion is caused by the wide spectrum of design practice and terminology. Consider, for example, the range of practice included under the rubric of design – to name just a few: craft design, industrial art, commercial art, engineering design, product design, graphic design, fashion design and interactive design. In a weekly series called 'Designer Ireland,' in its Irish Culture section, the Sunday Times of London publishes a brief, well-written analysis of a specific aspect of design. In a six-week period, during August and September 2000, the succession of subjects was: the insignia of the Garda Siochanna, the Irish national police; Louise Kennedy, a fashion designer; the Party Grill stove for outdoor cooking; the packaging for Carrolls Number One, a brand of cigarettes; Costelloe cutlery; and the corporate identity of Ryan Air, a low-cost airline. The range of subjects addressed in the whole series is even more bewildering in its diversity.

To that list can be added activities that appropriate the word 'design' to create an aura of competence, as in: hair design, nail design, floral design and even funeral design. Why not hair engineering, or funeral architecture? Part of the reason why design can be used in this arbitrary manner is that it has never cohered into a unified profession, such as law, medicine or architecture, where a license or similar qualification is required to practice, with standards established and protected by self-regulating institutions, and use of the professional descriptor limited to those who have gained admittance through regulated procedures. Instead, design has splintered into ever-greater subdivisions of practice without any overarching concept or organization, and so can be appropriated by anyone.

Discussion of design on a level that seeks a pattern in such confusion leads in two directions: first, defining generic patterns of activity underlying the proliferation, in order to establish some sense of structure and meaning; secondly, tracing these patterns through history to understand how and why the present confusion exists.

To address the first point: design, stripped to its essence, can be defined as the human capacity to shape and make our environment in ways without precedent in nature, to serve our needs and give meaning to our lives.

Understanding the scale and extent of this capacity can be tested by observing the environment in which anyone may be reading these lines – it might be while browsing in a bookstore, at home, in a library, in an office, on a train and so on. The odds are that almost nothing in that environment will be completely natural – even plants will have been shaped and positioned by human intervention and indeed, their genus may even be a considerable modification of natural forms. The capacity to shape our world has now reached such a pitch that few aspects of the planet are left in pristine condition and on a detailed level, life is entirely conditioned by designed outcomes of one kind or another.

It is perhaps a statement of the obvious, but worth emphasizing, that the forms or structures of the immediate world we inhabit are overwhelmingly the outcome of human design. They are not inevitable or immutable and are open to examination and discussion. Whether executed well or badly (on whatever basis this is judged), designs are not determined by technological processes, social structures or economic systems, or any other objective source. They result from the decisions and choices of human beings. While the influence of context and circumstance may be considerable, the human factor is present in decisions taken at all levels in design practice.

With choice comes responsibility. Choice implies alternatives in how ends can be achieved, for what purposes, and for whose advantage. It means that design is not only about initial decisions or concepts by designers, but also about how these are implemented and by what means we can evaluate their effect or benefit.

The capacity to design, in short, is in innumerable ways at the very core of our existence as a species. No other creatures on the planet have this same capacity. It enables us to construct our habitat in unique ways, without which we would be unable to distinguish civilization from nature. Design matters because, together with language, it is a defining characteristic of what it is to be human, which puts it on a level far beyond the trivial.

This basic capacity can, of course, be manifested in a huge diversity of ways, some of which have become specialized activities in their own right, such as architecture, civil engineering, landscape architecture and fashion design. To give some focus in a short volume, the emphasis here will be on the two and three-dimensional aspects of everyday life – in other words, the objects, communications, environments and systems that surround people at home and at work, at leisure and at prayer, on the streets, in public spaces, and when travelling. Even within this focus, the range is still huge and we need only examine a limited range of examples, rather than attempting a compressed coverage of the whole.

If this human capacity for design is manifested in so many ways, how can we understand this diversity? This brings us back to the second point mentioned above: design's historical development. Design is sometimes explained as a subdivision of art historical narratives emphasizing a neat chronological succession of movements and styles, with new manifestations

replacing what went before. The history of design, however, can be described more appropriately as a process of layering, in which new developments are added over time to what already exists. This layering, moreover, is not just a process of accumulation or aggregation, but a dynamic interaction in which each new innovative stage changes the role, significance and function of what survives. For example, innumerable crafts around the world have been widely displaced by industrial manufactures from their central role in cultures and economies, but have also found new roles, such as providing goods for the tourist trade or supplying the particular global market segment known as Arts and Crafts. Rapid developments in computers and information technology are not only creating exciting new possibilities in interactive design, but are also transforming the ways in which products and services are conceived and produced, in ways that supplement, rather than replace the old.

Neither is it possible to describe a process with an essential pattern followed everywhere. There are significant variations in how the process of change occurs in different societies and also in the specific consequences change entails. Whatever the exact details, however, there is a widespread pattern for what existed before to continue in some form. It is this that helps explain much of the dense and complex texture of design, and the varied modes of practice under the rubric that confronts us today. To ancient crafts and forms that survive and adapt, are continually added new competencies and applications. A great deal of confusion in understanding design, therefore, stems from this pattern of historical evolution. What is confusing, however, can also be regarded as a rich and adaptable resource, provided that a framework exists enabling the diversity to be comprehended.

2

Commerce or Culture: Industrialization and Design

Introduction

In an age of change, there are problems in understanding the nature of what is afoot and what the consequences are. For most people, change is resented as a disruption, challenging the rhythms, beliefs and practices of everyday life. To be accepted, change needs to be presented as 'improvement' or 'betterment', or disguised, slipped into our life by small, incremental stages, using forms and metaphors of what is already familiar – 'the iron horse' to describe the locomotive, or the trashcan symbol on a Macintosh computer.

Over the last two centuries, industrialization has wrought massive change across the globe, not just in patterns of life and work, but also in consciousness of ourselves and our world. In its origins, it aroused a deep, instinctive opposition as time-hallowed beliefs and practices were supplanted or marginalized. Today, similar reactions continue to be generated, from the cosmic sweep of Islamic fundamentalism, to the remnants of Australian aboriginal tribes protesting the desecration of traditional ritual sites for mineral extraction.

While echoes of the Industrial Revolution still reverberate, layered upon them is another level of complexity. The technological changes of our own time represent yet another step-change into a further dimension of possibility. In this situation, looking to the past is, paradoxically, the only means available of understanding what this future might be like. It will not help us accurately predict, there are too many unknown and independent variables for that, but it can help us understand some of the problems and dilemmas involved and define the critical issues of human values at stake.

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