

# Why design history? A multi-national perspective on the state and purpose of the field

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## Abstract

This article asks: what is the significance of design history within higher education? It reviews the practice and purpose of design history, in the education of historically aware and critically engaged designers, as an emerging independent discipline, and in terms of what the subject has to offer allied fields such as history, sociology, cultural studies, history of technology, area studies and anthropology. It considers the development and current state of design history as it is taught in the UK and non-Anglophone Europe (including France, Italy, Scandinavia, Spain, Turkey and Greece), in the US, Australia and East Asia. The argument that follows is grounded in recent design historical scholarship, combined with the views of design historians working in the abovementioned countries, in order to provide both a contemporary perspective on current practice and suggestions about possible futures.

## Keywords

design historiography, design history, interdisciplinarity, pedagogy

## What is design history?

Design history, the academic discipline which studies design of the past, is relatively young. The combination of the two terms ‘design’ and ‘history’ suggests a broad field of enquiry – while ‘design’ is a term inclusive enough to be incorporated into almost any field of knowledge, ‘history’ grounds the combination in the humanities, suggesting specific methods and a focus on the past. Design history is a

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catholic and interdisciplinary area of enquiry (its disciplinary status is discussed further below), but in answering the question ‘What is design history?’ we can say that it is the study of designed artefacts, practices and behaviours, and the discourses surrounding these, in order to understand the past, contextualize the present, and map possible trajectories for the future. While historians collect and interpret evidence primarily from documentary, and sometimes from oral sources to create narratives about social, cultural, economic or political life (Harvey, 2009), design historians analyse designed artefacts and practices – that is, the material culture of everyday life and its production, mediation and consumption – to create narratives about the human condition. This distinctive engagement with the artefacts that shape our artificial worlds helps define not only design history’s particular character, but also its contribution to the humanities in general.

In addition to the holistic definition supplied above, there are two distinctions to consider in asking ‘What is design history?’ The first is well worn but still relevant. Walker has usefully distinguished between the history of design and design history. The history of design, as a subject of study within design history, is often considered to begin at the point at which design and manufacture separated as a result of industrialization (Huppatz, 2010; Lees-Maffei and Houze, 2010; Walker, 1989). Design is seen most clearly when it ceases to exist simply as an idea in the maker’s mind, and takes the form of a tangible tool of communication between designer and maker, whether sketch, blueprint, letter, speech act or other verbal description, computer programme, gesture or mime. Design history has therefore dwelt primarily upon the industrial era and has, furthermore, dealt principally with the output of Western industrialized nations at the expense of an adequate analysis of non-Western regions. The second distinction concerns design history delivered as contextual studies for design students, and design history as a discrete academic subject as taught in art history degrees and as researched by design historians. As contextual studies, design history’s aim is the contextualization of students’ design practice through the study of the work of past designers, as well as the investigation of forces that shape design, production and consumption issues, and the impact of design on society. Design history as a discrete academic subject seeks to find out about the past through study of designed objects and design practices. If the broader value of study in the humanities is to help us to understand what it means to be human (British Academy, 2010), then design history’s analysis of designed objects, images and processes is a furtherance of that project.

As a growing field in the 1970s and 1980s, design history was inextricably linked to its initial educational impetus – as context for practice-based design education – and was typically situated within art and design schools. Although British design education was influenced by developments in Germany at the Bauhaus and then at the Hfg Ulm (Betts, 2004; Selle, 1992), as a distinct field of inquiry, design history’s roots lie in the UK, specifically with the events leading to the establishment of the Design History Society in 1977 (Woodham, 2001) and the subsequent development of a critical discourse around design. This included academic conferences, the development of research degree programs such as the History of Design

programme of the Royal College of Art and the Victoria and Albert Museum, launched in 1984, and the foundation of the *Journal of Design History* in 1988. Early developments in design history in the United States include the founding of the Design Forum in 1983 (renamed the Design Studies Forum in 2004) and the 1984 launch of the journal *Design Issues* which, though devoted to a broader range of inquiries and methods, also provided a forum for design history. New York's Bard Graduate Center for Studies in the Decorative Arts, Design, and Culture began offering its specialist graduate programme in 1993. Major museums have also been significant generators of design historical knowledge and scholarship over the past few decades, but these lie outside this article's focus on higher education.

The initial challenge among the first generation of design historians was to distance themselves from 'Pevsnerian and art historical practices of canonization and connoisseurship, and the privileging of the innovative designers, aesthetic form, and zeitgeist' (Whitehouse, 2009: 58). Design historians had an anxious relationship with art history, narrowly defined as focused primarily on aesthetic quality and creative geniuses – the cults of iconic objects and personality – and a fear of being perceived as 'fetishists and idolaters' (Fallan, 2010: 21). As a parallel to histories of art and architecture, design historical survey texts such as John Heskett's *Industrial Design* (1980), Philip B. Meggs' *History of Graphic Design* (1983) and John Pile's *Interior Design* (1988) comprised chronological narratives focused on innovative practitioners, iconic objects, technological progression or period styles. These popular surveys, intended to provide teachers and undergraduate students with a broad historical framework and introduce discipline-specific terminology and themes, were a starting point – as well as introducing precedents, they also introduce the discipline. More recent survey texts allow for the existence of multiple narratives and a more critical approach to the subject matter proper to the discipline. Examples include David Raizman's *History of Modern Design* (2nd edition, 2010), Stephen Eskilson's *Graphic Design: A New History* (2nd edition, 2012) and Clive Edwards' *Interior Design: A Critical Introduction* (2011).

Clive Dilnot's 1984 article in two parts, 'The state of design history', provided a historiography of the 'varieties of design history' at that point, their various methods, objects of inquiry, as well as possible research futures (Dilnot, 1984a, 1984b). While Dilnot noted the limitations of design history's foundations in decorative arts and Pevsnerian modernist architectural histories, Walker, in an another early survey, proposed extending design history's research field from a focus on designers and artefacts by means of a 'Production–Consumption' model (Walker, 1989; Lees-Maffei, 2009). Early monographs such as Forty's *Objects of Desire* (1986) and Sparke's *Introduction to Design and Culture* (1986) had already moved significantly away from an art historical base, situating designed objects in their social, political and economic contexts. Even in its early days, some design historians argued that there should be no singular 'grand narrative' of design but multiple narratives (Dilnot, 1984a, 1984b; Walker, 1989), while Margolin (1992) argued that design history did not yet have a definable set of research methods or subject matter.

As design history developed over the last three decades of the twentieth century, cultural studies exerted a strong influence, as did feminist scholarship (Attfield, 1989; Attfield and Kirkham, 1989; Buckley, 1986). In the US particularly, popular culture studies have provided a home for work on designed objects, as have folklore studies, material culture studies (for example, Schlereth, 1980), and the history of technology, with the latter being represented in the journal *Technology and Culture*. The influence of the history of technology has also been demonstrated outside the US, for example in Paul Atkinson's work on the computer (Atkinson, 2010) and the work of Kjetil Fallan (2010). Design history's formative decades were also characterized by an eclectic borrowing from a diverse range of related studies, particularly continental philosophy, art history, literary studies, cultural anthropology, and various parallel strands of history. Woodham argued that 'interdisciplinary interchange' was a key characteristic of design history, suggesting a lack of clearly defined disciplinary boundaries as a positive rather than negative trait (Woodham, 1995: 37). As a result, multiple frameworks have emerged for situating design in its historical context, including national histories that chronicle design's role in a chronological narrative towards the present within a particular nation-state (Betts, 2004; Buckley, 2007; Crowley, 1992; Fry, 1988; Pulos, 1983, 1988). Other approaches include close analyses of specific materials (Meikle, 1995), particular industries (Błaszczuk, 2002), or political perspectives (Lavin, 2002). However, Fallan argued recently that the 'core concern of most design history' remains 'the materiality of objects' (Fallan, 2010: 33), and he positioned design history within broader material culture studies and advocated the use of methods from anthropology and ethnography, museology, archaeology, and the history of science and technology.

During the last decade or so, the formation of international societies with associated conferences, plus a burgeoning library of research papers and monographs, have indicated a growing confidence in the possibility of a new discipline. These societies include the International Committee for Design History and Design Studies, whose inaugural conference was in 1999, and new national societies such as the Design History Workshop Japan, founded in 2002; the Turkish Design History Society and their bilingual journal, the 4T (*Türkiye Tasarım Tarihi Topluğ'u*), set up in 2006; the Gesellschaft für Designgeschichte in Germany, founded in 2008; and the Associazione italiana storici del design founded in Italy in 2009. The development of design history over the past four decades has paralleled both the design profession's continued elevation in popular consciousness as well as the perception of design's increasingly important role in shaping many aspects of contemporary life, including most recently, sustainability (Fry, 2008; Fuad-Luke, 2009).

With the publication of three key texts in the last two years, design history seems to have reached a certain level of maturity. Lees-Maffei and Houze's 2010 anthology, *The Design History Reader*, surveyed the breadth of the field, its methods and key themes. Fallan's *Design History: Understanding Theory and Method* (2010) analysed method in further depth, while Adamson, Riello and Teasley's *Global*

*Design History* (2011) functioned as a corrective to ‘the dominant, lopsided representation of the history of design as occurring primarily in Western Europe and the United States, particularly in the modern period . . .’ and expanded the breadth of the subject with the compelling idea ‘that all design be understood as implicated in a network of mutually relevant, geographically expansive connections’ (2011: 2, 6). All three books built on existing literature, with *The Design History Reader* providing an account of the development of design history through the selection of extracts of design historical scholarship, *Design History: Understanding Theory and Method* doing the same thing in a narrative account which aims to explicate the theoretical and methodological positions adopted within the discipline and *Global Design History* continuing a project which has been approached piecemeal in articles in the discipline’s major journals, the *Journal of Design History*, *Design Issues*, *The Design Journal* and so on. At present, design history’s scope seems almost overwhelming, capable of stretching temporally from analyses of design, production, trade and consumption in the early modern period (Snodin and Styles, 2001; Styles and Vickery, 2007) to examinations of contemporary design culture (Clarke, 2011; Fry, 2008). Operating at the nexus of designed artefacts, design practitioners, industrial production, mediation and consumption, design history has emerged as a discipline capable of a sophisticated interplay of social, cultural, political and economic forces on design products and processes.

### **Design history, history and material culture**

In a recent essay, Margolin (2009) described the marginal position of design history within history and the humanities in general and noted, too, a lack of interest in material culture among social and cultural historians. With the exception of Ferdinand Braudel and others of the French Annales school, historians have, until recently, shown surprisingly little interest in the objects of everyday life – from buildings and transportation systems to furniture and clothing – as the analysis of artefacts is considered of little consequence compared with significant events, people and ideas. The remarkable and lamentable fact that historians are only now developing an interest in design historical questions and turning to material culture as evidence perhaps exemplifies the logocentric bias in academic study of the past and a concomitant preference for documentary sources. The development of social and cultural history, ‘history from below’, and a commitment by some historians to examine issues of class, gender, race and sexuality, have begun to produce work which is akin to design history in its recognition that designed objects, images and processes are suitable sources for examining the past (Harvey, 2009; Ulrich, 2001).

While design historians have drawn from social science research (typically with disciplines based in qualitative, rather than quantitative, methods), there has been little reciprocal interest, with Molotch (2011) arguing that sociologists have similarly ignored material culture. However, cultural anthropology has recently developed an entire research field devoted to the analysis of everyday objects and their

meanings to people, as has the overlapping field of material culture studies. Anthropologist Daniel Miller's *Material Culture and Mass Consumerism* (1991 [1987]) has been especially influential. The principally anthropological *Journal of Material Culture*, founded in 1996, focuses on interdisciplinary research addressing 'the ways in which artefacts are implicated in the construction, maintenance and transformation of social identities' (Miller and Tilley, 1996: 5). From cultural anthropology, design historians have learned that everyday objects have 'social lives' (Appadurai, 1986) or 'biographies' (Kopytoff, 1986) which shift in status as mass produced objects are consumed by individuals and disseminated and distributed across the globe. Design historians Attfield (2000, 2007) and Clarke (2011) have published across both fields, suggesting that disciplinary boundaries between the social sciences and humanities are not as rigid as many believe.

Drawing upon a range of disciplines including anthropology, cultural studies, art history, archaeology, psychology and sociology, material culture studies aims to understand how artefacts and humans interact. In an introductory text, *Understanding Material Culture*, Woodward explains, 'the term "material culture" emphasises how apparently inanimate things within the environment act on people, and are acted upon by people, for the purposes of carrying out social functions, regulating social relations and giving symbolic meaning to human activity' (Woodward, 2007: 3). Woodward describes material culture studies as a fundamentally 'interdisciplinary and cross-disciplinary inquiry' that utilizes diverse methodologies, from semiotic interpretation to empirical observation studies (2007: 27). It displays the influences of cultural anthropology via Miller, Appadurai, and Douglas and Isherwood's (1996 [1979]) 'world of goods', sociology via Goffman and Bourdieu, and commodity analysis via Marx, Veblen and Simmel. Like cultural anthropology, material culture studies overlaps with design history in its coverage of everyday objects and identity, objects and social discourse, and objects as sites of cultural/political power.

Although useful as an approach to understanding the complexity of everyday objects, cultural anthropology tends to focus on consumption. Similarly, even with its broader base and interdisciplinary approach, material culture studies lacks analysis of how everyday objects were designed by particular persons in a particular place at a particular time, manufactured under certain conditions using specific materials, and shaped by political, economic and social forces even before they were materialized. Furthermore, both fields have displayed little interest in developing an historical perspective on everyday objects – that is, thinking about how contemporary material culture came into being. From a design perspective, such an analysis seems vital in any attempt to implement change for the future – for example, in the recent interest in sustainable design (Fry, 2008; Fuad-Luke, 2009).

## **Design history, the humanities and design education**

Designers draw inspiration from the world around them in ways academia cannot predict. This implies two major ways in which the contextual education of designers can be undertaken. The first is a broad liberal arts education, which

embraces the fact that a product designer may be inspired by cinematography and a fashion designer may take inspiration from linguistics. In this model, students can select subjects within a modular university system, and/or they can be exposed to a broad cultural history curriculum. This approach has the potential to serve two competing ideologies: on the one hand, a liberal arts education allows students the freedom to pursue threads of academic enquiry across the disciplines and engage in learning for its own sake, while, on the other hand, it enables the pursuance of transferable skills within the context of an increasing tendency to view higher education as a functionary of employability. Bassnett (2002: 108) has argued that ‘any programme that gives students the skills they need in today’s world is going to:’

- a. transcend disciplinary boundaries;
- b. acknowledge the skills that students are acquiring in an increasingly diverse school system; and
- c. recognize that interdisciplinarity and interactivity are not just buzz words; they are fundamental concepts that underpin how students think, how they learn and how they will determine their futures.

Bassnett’s position is part of a wider discourse on the continued relevance of the humanities in straitened times. Walker (2009), for example, champions the study of the humanities on the basis that it develops skills of ‘practical reasoning’, Booth promotes ‘integrative learning’ (2011) while Chambers et al. (2002: 9) have described the interface between theory and practice as a defining benefit of studying the arts and humanities: ‘To take either element as primary simplifies the learning objectives and outcomes of a course’ and ‘it is the integration and critical understanding of both elements that is the hallmark of . . . the distinctive structures and values of our domain’. These arguments for studying the humanities are also arguments for a broad liberal arts education, as well as articulating many of the benefits of studying design history as a humanities subject. Thus, the status of design history as a contextualizing discourse, engaging the interface between theory and practice, can be regarded as a valuable benefit (Orr et al., 2004; Roth, 2010).

As well as sharing the advantages common to humanities subjects, design history brings particular benefits for those undertaking a broad humanities education. Castañeda (2009: 50–51) has argued for the interdisciplinary relevance of visual culture:

In this culture of the image (as [art historian T.J.] Mitchell calls it, in contrast to the previous culture of the word), it will be students and scholars of visual products who lead cultural research and discovery. In this light, it is impossible to overestimate the import of the humanistic study of images. The interest in articulating the implications and provocations of images is of course highly relevant for art history, but given its failure to embrace the opportunities that visual culture presents, it is within the

humanities themselves that visual culture needs to be addressed, critiqued, and otherwise evaluated.

We might apply the same argument to the importance of design history and find that it offers even more than visual culture does in terms of transferable and generic skills education. Graduates of design history and design graduates trained in design history as a contextual subject alike should possess a range of broadly applicable analytical and contextual skills, relevant not only to the image, but also to designed objects and systems, indeed to anything and everything that people make.

A second approach to the contextual education of designers is through discrete courses in the history of design and the methodology and historiography of design history. It is this approach that was mandated by a pair of UK government reports in 1960 and 1970 (Lees-Maffei, 2009). They prompted a shift in design education from contextual courses based on the history of art, to the development of design history as a discourse dealing with the history of design, and were clear that a practitioner needs to know the history of her or his discipline. This specialist need is distinguishable from a general liberal arts education. An ironic situation ensues in which design history, as taught, studied and researched in the UK today, is derived from a clearly identified pedagogical need, and yet as a consequence of its provenance, design historians in Britain are made aware, on a daily basis, that their students did not enter higher education to study design history. On the contrary, many students who encounter design history as part of their undergraduate education elected to study design, or one of its constituent fields, *precisely in order to avoid* humanities teaching and the lecture, seminar and essay formats through which it has typically been delivered and assessed.

In their analysis of doctoral students' attitudes to theory and practice, Hockey and Allen-Collinson (2005: 81–82) have identified that: 'Their making, whilst undoubtedly a process open to external influences such as schools of thought and practice, and major figures, was viewed by the students primarily as a privatized process, centred upon the relationship between the individual and the materials with which s/he engaged.' Writing, on the other hand 'was not just an unfamiliar activity but one which reminded students keenly of their lack of acumen and status in a particular area – academic analysis... From the students' perspective, the flow of their making, the creative momentum, was initially impeded, even threatened by engagement with the analytical dimensions of their research' (Hockey and Allen-Collinson, 2005: 84, 87). Yet the idea 'that theory and practice demand different kinds of skills and levels of engagement from design students' has been challenged by Tynan and New (2009: 306), who argue instead that 'those who participate and perform in vocational and academic parts of the programme may have similar kinds of motivation'. And not all students feel the same way about the relationship between theory and practice; some see theory as integral to their studio practice while others see very little connection or benefit at all (Heatly et al., 2005).



The theory/practice split is evident not only in students' approaches to their contextual courses, but also in staff attitudes and in the institutional infrastructure, with separate departments delivering contextual studies (although this latter situation has begun to change as it becomes more usual for design historians teaching in higher education to report to programme leaders for the main studio subject, rather than to leaders of discrete contextual studies departments). Yet the relationship between theory and practice that characterizes the teaching of design history in design programmes is beneficial for students, staff and the host institutions, for three reasons.

- (i) Students gain a deeper understanding of the work of others, of the relationship between theory and practice in general terms as well as specifically in relation to their own practice, in addition to accruing skills, whether transferable or subject-specific, which are valuable to them as practitioners and in the job market.
- (ii) Students' questioning of design history and/or an apparent theory/practice split is good for the field. It gives design historians the opportunity daily to reflect on their own practice as teachers and researchers, thereby bringing currency, relevance and resilience to the field. It means that design historians need continually to justify what we do to the students we teach, to the studio staff with whom we work, and to programme leaders and other academic managers charged with resourcing and budgeting. This process and its effects are partly revealed by the survey undertaken by de la Harpe and Peterson (2009) in characterizing the concerns of academics in art, design and architecture through the topics they address in their scholarly writing. Ryan (2009: 23) has demonstrated how academics might develop more effective contextual programs through an awareness of how students and teachers value cultural studies within art and design programmes, particularly paying attention to the differences between the views of students and teachers.
- (iii) Institutions benefit from the interface of theory and practice in humanities programmes generally, and in design history and design programmes specifically, in that these activities and the relationship between them equip graduates for the workplace. Design history, like the arts and humanities more broadly, can equip students with valuable skills and knowledge from the analytical, critical reading of artefacts, practices and texts, information gathering and evaluation, presentation and communication, to the development of reflective attitudes in relation to the precedents and history of various practices (including theoretical language, key practitioners and artefacts) as well as an understanding of the relationship between design, society and culture (or, in other words, a broader context of practice).

As the *Subject Benchmark Statement* prepared for use in UK higher education put it in 2008, the history of art, architecture and design 'is qualitatively different in its approach from practice-based subjects in art and design on the one hand and

from solely text-based humanities subjects on the other' (Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education, 2008). The skills – subject specific, transferable and generic – taught and potentially acquired in higher education design history courses detailed in the *Benchmark* document include understanding of issues of fundamental historical and contemporary importance, problem-solving, open-mindedness, and skills of communication and synthesis. Design history is commonly understood to be inherently interdisciplinary – it borrows widely, and therefore builds relationships with other areas of the humanities and social sciences. Mainstream history is just one discipline of several to have become increasingly interested in what objects can tell us. So, just as design history learns from other disciplines, so other disciplines can learn from the literature of design history.

### **The current state of design history in higher education**

While design historians are taking steps to globalize their subject of study and the design historical curriculum, the parts of the world within which the study of design history is most developed are currently experiencing the effects of recession. Reduced budgets for higher education have meant that the humanities particularly have needed to defend their practices and purpose more vehemently than in recent decades. We have noted above the pedagogic origins of design history in the UK, and have mentioned a recent trend in UK higher education institutions to move responsibility for the delivery of design history from dedicated departments or clusters to an embedded approach in which design historians work as part of a studio subject team. This strategy is regarded as timely, in a period characterized by global financial difficulties, because it promises economic efficiencies as well as the pedagogical advantages of greater integration of theory and practice. The lecture, seminar and tutorial triumvirate remains the norm despite widespread encouragement for pedagogical innovation and the development of a relevant pedagogical literature. Embedding design history more firmly within the design curriculum carries the potential for delivery methods that deviate in positive ways from this pattern, particularly with pressures for increasing online delivery of courses, as well as an invitation to change assessment tasks from the essay, seminar presentation, slide test and/or reading report to the portfolio, poster session, creative writing, live project and many more.

If design history in the UK has grown out of the studio and back into it again for economic as well as pedagogical reasons, what is the state of design history elsewhere? Brawley, Kelly and Timmins (2009) have shown how marked the international differences in pedagogical theory and practice can be and the importance therefore of comparative appraisals of pedagogic trends. In considering the teaching of design history specifically, we see that the situation in wider Europe is strikingly different from that in the UK, and the continental European countries display many commonalities in relation to the place of design history. Ironically, just as design history is increasingly managed within the studio in the UK, in wider

Europe we see a desire to give design history a more defined, discrete identity, and concrete steps towards achieving that aim.

Design itself has a different profile in France than in other Western countries, with practitioners in multimedia design, for example, presenting themselves as artists rather than designers (email correspondence from T. Putnam to G. Lees-Maffei, 4 December 2011). Sorbonne Professor of Art History and Painting, Stéphane Laurent, has lamented the fact that ‘education on the history of design and decorative arts in France is still embryonic, including the education provided in design schools’ and survey books introduce ‘design for the education of the public, but very few books specialize on the topic and stress questions from the field. In addition, very few periodicals specialize in design, and none focus on research’ (Laurent, 2012: 73, 74). While design history is not prominent in French higher education, it has been introduced indirectly via three routes common to the development of design history in other nations: art history, material culture studies and design practice. As is the case in the USA, for example, in France research in design history has been housed within art history departments. Design theory components in design education provide contexts for, and catalyse, design projects which adopt a critical standpoint in relation to contemporary capitalist institutions and commodified design products. Several notable exponents of design history are also practitioners; in addition to Laurent, for example, Roxanne Jubert is a graphic design historian and a graphic designer, based at the Ecole Nationale Supérieure des Arts Decoratifs (ENSAD) in Paris and the Université Rennes 2. French study of material culture centres upon a network called Matière à Penser, with the Anthropology Department at the Sorbonne a key centre of study (Gowlland, 2011; Putnam, 2011). The work of this group may carry the potential for possible future design historical collaboration.

In Spain, there are currently no dedicated design history courses at BA, MA or PhD level, and design history is only taught as a component of design education. The University of Barcelona is home to a group of design historians, but in general Spanish universities, including architecture schools, are reluctant to offer courses in design history or design studies because they seem to be regarded as unscientific and lacking the status of a discipline. However, in the design schools that emerged in the 1960s, design history was introduced into the curriculum in the 1970s and 1980s. A small, strongly identified group of design history teachers have been working together to deliver design history in this context. They have degrees in art history, or in design and history, art history or philosophy. In the past decade, Spain’s major universities have added MA and PhD pathways in design research to their BA courses in design, thereby enabling postgraduate study of design history. Less frequently, PhD students in Art History submit theses on decorative arts subjects (email correspondence from I. Campi to G. Lees-Maffei, 30 November 2011). Spanish design schools are often privately run through foundations such as those in Barcelona, Eina, Elisava, Massana and Llotja. The teaching is delivered primarily by casual, contract staff, which may partly explain why no design history departments have been established in Spain.

In addition, degrees are subject to extensive national and regional government regulation which has, historically, curtailed the development of new curricula, although this is changing (email correspondence from G. Julier to G. Lees-Maffei, 29 November 2011). The European Education Space is opening up curricula to international influences and it is hoped that an MA in design history or design studies will be launched in due course (email correspondence from I. Campi to G. Lees-Maffei, 30 November 2011). In Portugal, design history is taught as a discrete subject at IADE in Lisbon, and national research council-funded design history projects are taking place there, too.

Design history is primarily taught in Italian higher education as part of design courses, which often have a base in architecture or engineering. Dedicated design degrees, such as the Industrial Design degree at Milan Polytechnic, were only introduced in the 1990s, but now a range of design courses addressing specific fields of design is offered, for example at IUAV (Venice). Design history has typically been delivered by architects or art historians as part of courses which focus on architecture and design, because the two areas are seen as entirely contiguous, but today the pattern is that most of those teaching design history have architecture degrees and are based within Industrial Design departments or courses. Art Academies include programmes in design and sometimes include design history in their curricula, for example in Bologna, and the Faculty of Arts and Design in Venice also offers students the chance to take a mixture of courses across the art and design curriculum, including design history. More recently, broader humanities degrees in cultural and industrial heritage and preservation have also begun to offer design history courses. A discrete identity for design history is emerging, as exemplified by the 2011 establishment of the AIS/Design (Italian Association of Historians of Design), and there is anecdotal evidence that the number of students completing theses in design history is increasing, while an Italian PhD programme in design history is also planned (email correspondence from M. Dalla Mura to G. Lees-Maffei, 30 November, 7 December 2011; email correspondence from D. Prina to G. Lees-Maffei, 30 November, 4 December 2011).

In Greece, design has a complex history, and attempts to modernize and professionalize the activity have not always been successful (Yagou, 2005, 2010). Design is seen as a vocational subject and is therefore taught in technological education institutes (TEIs, comparable to the old polytechnics/new universities in the UK) or private vocational institutions such as AKTO or Vakalo. These institutions also teach the history of art, as does the Athens School of Fine Arts, where architectural history is also delivered. The University of the Aegean (Syros) has an industrial design department, and offers art history and art theory courses. Design history is not taught as a standalone subject, either at undergraduate or postgraduate level. Occasionally, PhD studies in design history are hosted in architecture schools, because architecture is the only design subject taught at university level. As a result, there are very few design historians in Greece, and there is little design historical literature (Yagou, 2011, is a rare example) and, as elsewhere, there is some crossover between design historians and scholars of material culture and

historians of technology (email correspondence from J. Traganou to G. Lees-Maffei, 12 February 2012).

In neighbouring Turkey, standalone design history courses are not the norm. For example, at the Izmir University of Economics, design history is not a single-honours programme of study, but an undergraduate survey course, 'Introduction to the History of Arts and Design', is taught, and graphic designers, for example, are taught a second-year course on the history of graphic design (email correspondence from M. Emmanouil to G. Lees-Maffei, 13 February 2012). Tevfik Balcioglu mentions that design discourse in Turkey suffers from 'a lack of design criticism, a design utopia, a clearly defined design direction, a coherent design identity and a design policy' (Balcioglu, 2009: 265). Industrial design programmes were introduced into Turkish higher education in the 1970s (Bayazit, 2009; Er et al., 2003), the ETMK (the Industrial Designers' Society of Turkey) was founded in 1988 (Hasdoğan, 2009) and in 1995 Turkey was admitted to the EU Customs Union, which stimulated competitiveness and led Turkish manufacturers to engage in design and branding initiatives. As a result of these developments, from the mid 1990s onwards, internal and external interest in Turkish design has grown and has stimulated more recent research examining the history of design in Turkey, mostly under a design research banner. Design history is taught within industrial design degree programmes, and a standalone design history course was pioneered at METU (Middle Eastern Technical University) from 1986. Historically, design history has been studied at PhD level within architecture departments (in which a PhD is essential – see Bayazit, 2004), but Istanbul Technical University's Industrial Product Design department, housed within the faculty of architecture, runs a PhD programme in Design which includes research into design management and design history (email correspondence from T. Balcioglu to G. Lees-Maffei, 27 February 2012).

Scandinavia boasts only one BA in Design Studies at the University of Southern Denmark (with an MA planned) and therefore most design historians working in the region today have usually been trained as art historians. Those who do train as design historians, following a largely independent course of study at institutions such as the Aalto University School of Design (previously, the University of the Arts) in Helsinki, the University of Helsinki, Uppsala University, the aforementioned University of Southern Denmark, the University of Gothenburg and the University of Oslo, often go on to work in museums or design schools. Undergraduate design students encounter survey courses in their first or second year of study, while attempts to integrate contextual design history in other studio programmes have met with mixed success (email correspondence from K. Fallan to G. Lees-Maffei, 29 November 2011). The extent to which this situation will change in future is not clear but, for example, the appointment of a full-time design historian at the research-led University of Oslo is a promising step forward, not least because of the work being done there in creating PhD positions for design historians. New scholarship in Scandinavian design history shows not only the quality of ongoing work, but also a significant programme of future research (Fallan, 2012).

As across much of Europe, design history in the United States was developed almost exclusively within design schools (Margolin, 2002: 129). While the historical survey course remains a mainstay of American design education, Sarah Lichtman notes the recent shift from a teleological narrative approach to history within design education towards other blended history and studio practice models (Lichtman, 2009). At the graduate level, the prominent institutions are Parsons New School of Design in conjunction with the Cooper-Hewitt National Design Museum, which offers an MA in Design History and Decorative Arts, and the Bard Graduate Center, New York, which offers an MA and a PhD programme. However, the majority of design history academics continue to be sourced either from Art or Architectural History programmes or from abroad (email correspondence from V. Margolin to D.J. Huppatz, 16 December 2011). The recent revival of the Design Studies Forum within the College Art Association and founding of a journal, *Design and Culture*, in 2009, as well as Bard Graduate School's newly revised journal *West 86th St: A Journal of Decorative Arts, Design History, and Material Culture* (formerly *Studies in the Decorative Arts*), launched in 2011, suggest a new wave of interest in design history. In closely related fields, the University of Delaware, in conjunction with the Henry Francis du Pont Winterthur Museum, offers both MA and PhD programmes in early American decorative arts from a material culture perspective (Margolin, 2002: 152), and it is also worth noting important contributions from American Studies scholars, and organizations such as the American Studies Association, the Popular Culture Association and the Society for the History of Technology, and their respective journals, *Journal of Popular Culture* and *Technology and Culture*.

Design history is growing in Latin America, as evidenced by the convening, in São Paulo, Brazil, of the 8th International Committee for Design History and Design Studies (ICDHS) Conference in September 2012 (at which an earlier version of this article was presented). A buoyant group of researchers is producing works of design history in both English (Fernandez, 2006) and Brazilian Portuguese (Cardoso, 2005). Optimism about the future growth of design history in Latin America fits the trend outlined above of growth in non-Anglophone European countries.

While Fry (1988) provided the initial impetus for the development of design history in Australia, there are currently no dedicated graduate programmes in design history, and only recently has there been a critical mass of active scholars working within academic institutions. In an educational context, Australian design education has tended to follow UK models, and design history remains for the most part an additional subject within a design practice degree. Despite this, McNeil notes that there seems to be revival of interest in PhD topics in design history, particularly at the University of Technology, Sydney, and the University of New South Wales, also in Sydney (email correspondence from P. McNeil to D.J. Huppatz, 19 December 2011), as well as at Griffith University in Brisbane, and Swinburne University of Technology, Melbourne. There has been some interest in design history within the Art Association of Australia and New Zealand, as well as

the Society of Architectural Historians, Australia and New Zealand annual conferences. A symposium held at Robin Boyd's Walsh St House in Melbourne in December 2011, sponsored by Swinburne University of Technology, brought together several key scholars from around the country with the aim of further developing design history in Australia. In New Zealand, design history is taught at the University of Otago and at UNITEC in Auckland, and the history of New Zealand design is growing (for example Smythe, 2011).

Finally, Yuko Kikuchi has recently written that 'Design Histories and Design Studies in East Asia have been developing steadily, but unfortunately this has not been widely recognized in the UK or in other Euroamerican centres of this field' (Kikuchi, 2011: 273). However, Kikuchi notes that Japan has led the development of design history in East Asia, with, for example, its 'Nihon Dezain Gakkai (The Japan Society for the Science of Design)' having been established in 1954. In Japan, university teaching of design history takes place within various disciplines including art history, aesthetics, history, area studies, English studies, languages, international studies, engineering, architecture, crafts, etc. Some pioneer design historians have specific remits in teaching 'modern design history', for example at Musashino Art University – design history has greater visibility in the art universities (email correspondence from Y. Kikuchi to G. Lees-Maffei, 3 March 2012). While the design history of Hong Kong is more prominent internationally than neighbours such as Taiwan owing to the availability of empirical materials in English, 'writings on the design history and design studies of the Greater China region (the People's Republic of China, Taiwan and Hong Kong) have not emerged yet' (Wong, 2011: 386). Possible reasons include a lack of foundation texts, the methodological challenge of reconciling China's long arts and crafts history with the modern, imported, notion of design, and the undervaluing of design history, both generally and within education: in neither Hong Kong nor Taiwan was it 'believed that the study of design history was a legitimate discipline or a discipline in which one could make a living. In its short design education history, the late-comer, PRC [the People's Republic of China], also valued studio-based design education in terms of the potential for monetary return, rather than design history programmes' (Wong, 2011: 375–376). Uniquely, in China, design history textbooks are available to prepare school students for entrance exams for design programmes within higher education. In the PRC, design history is taught principally to design students through survey courses divided into 'World history' (Western) and 'Design history in China', which extend across 5,000 years. Design history is treated as a research discipline in some elite institutions such as the Academy of Art & Design, Tsinghua University (formerly Central Academy of Arts & Design). In Taiwan, design history is more developed than it is in the PRC because of the influence of the Japanese education system, but Wong is optimistic about the development of Chinese design history following the enormous recent growth of the design industry in the PRC (Wong, 2011, 390) and plans for an MA programme in design history (email correspondence from W.S. Wong to G. Lees-Maffei, 28 February 2012). Although design history is not taught as a standalone subject in

Korea, it is delivered on a limited basis within design programmes and there is some interest in design history within art history and culture studies in Korea (Lee, 2012; email correspondence from Y. Lee to G. Lees-Maffei, 29 February 2012).

### **Conclusion: From service subject to discipline**

Around the world, steps are being taken to consolidate the position of design history within design curricula and strengthen its identity as a discrete subject of study. However, the very conditions which brought forth design history have also been a limiting factor, in that design history has often been regarded as a 'service' subject, meaning that its value has been perceived only in terms of the extent to which it services design education. This structural context has also placed undue emphasis on design history as a subject that is taught rather than researched. However, there is much to be said for fostering the study of design history as a discrete subject at undergraduate and postgraduate levels, because this will raise the bar not only in the outputs produced by design historians but also in the contributions they make to the design curricula, whether directly through their teaching, or indirectly through authoring textbooks and managing educational reform. Design history needs to develop further in disciplinary terms so that it can be more widely recognized as a topic for scholarly research as well as a pedagogical entity. The survey of design history's development provided in the first part of this article provides evidence of a similarly welcome shift from design history focused on a history of styles and a canon of key designers to simultaneously broader and more in-depth analyses which are adequately contextualized and which, for example, add more recent theoretical developments centred upon an interest in mediation to the existing focus on production and consumption. The examination of design history's place within the humanities more broadly, in the middle of this article, has highlighted what the humanities offer in terms of engaging with and contributing to the skills discourse. Given their situation beside practitioners, design historians are uniquely placed to contribute to this effort. And, the European, American, Australian and East Asian snapshots provided above give reason for optimism about the growth of design history from a service subject to a standalone discipline.

However, there is a case to be made for the wider relevance of design history beyond design, into something of relevance to all humanities scholars, and beyond that into something of interest to the general public. The vitality of design history would be well served through the building of bridges between the subject as it exists within higher education and the apparently boundless popular enthusiasm for related phenomena such as heritage, family history and domesticity. The mass media have provided a steady diet of programming for a general audience on design historical subjects such as interior design history (Vickery, 2010), and subjects within which the design historical story is left implicit such as fashion (*Project Catwalk*, for example). We all interact, all the time, with designed objects, images and processes, from the shoes we wear to the motorways we use. The relationship



between designed goods and consumers could hardly be more extensive in Western capitalist society, so design history can legitimately expect, and strive towards, future growth – not least by harnessing popular interest and converting it into an expansion of the discipline.

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