Reviews

APU — Design and Technological Activity. A Framework for assessment, 1987.
Department of Education and Science £2.50.

This report is an interesting, concise and well presented document on the current work of the APU team at Goldsmiths college. It offers much food for thought.

It begins by considering the difficulties of describing Design and Technology. These include the range of subjects under the CDT banner; the differences in aims between industrial and educational Design and the interface of Design and Technology with areas such as science, mathematics etc. There is, however, no mention of the National curriculum and what 'Technology' is to be.

Section two examines the process of Design and Technological activity by referring to a number of models of increasing sophistication. In addition the importance of placing the activity within a context which includes human values is recognised, together with cross curricula aspects, though this is not enlarged upon. Unfortunately there is no reference to a commercial perspective in schools design work, though this may well be due to the need for brevity.

Section three recognises that design is a complex and interactive process in which 'images' are manipulated by various means in order to develop solutions. The importance of a record of thinking — design sheets, models, etc is made, though it would have been useful to emphasise the need for teachers and examiners to be able to 'see' the ideas behind the medium in which they are expressed. There is a danger of rewarding graphical or practical skills when the objective being assessed is the thinking behind them.

Section four looks at the important aspect of content. The case is made that to 'predetermine the knowledge and skills needed to tackle a task is to deny the nature of the activity'. Again we have an apparent contrast between the team and the national curriculum requirements which seem to be leading us back to a content lead subject. This would be a retrograde step.

Section five covers the team's thinking on techniques for assessing Design and Technological activity. This is to be a two pronged approach. A number of children will have GCSE project work assessed in depth but in addition larger numbers of children will be exposed to tests using video and partially worked designs to focus in on certain aspects of a design process. It is to be hoped that the assessment material in the form of video 'contexts' will be expanded beyond the APU activities and offered to schools for normal coursework. In this way the team will have contributed much more to Design and Technology than the direct aims they were set.

H.G. Denton

Towards Post-Modernism — Design Since 1851
Michael Collins
British Museum Publications £8.95.

With a crowded design curriculum, few schools can afford to devote time and resources to an analysis of the design solutions of past societies. Children are encouraged to come to terms with design issues through direct involvement with materials and processes which are focussed onto a contemporary definition of problems. Too often the examination of earlier designers' work is left to the History Department rather than the CDT Department.

However the 1980's has seen a minor explosion in design-related publications and many of these have sought to articulate the influences within our newly design-conscious society. Many of the books have been aimed at the general reader rather than the academic and one or two of these could make an important contribution to any CDT library. Michael Collins' new book 'Towards Post-Modernism — Design Since 1851', may rightly be added to this list.

Ever since Pevsner published his profoundly influential thesis, 'Pioneers of the Modern Movement' in 1936, authors have sought to establish a personal viewpoint for their presentation. Authors such as McCarthy and Sparke have consistently provided knowledgeable, unsensational and emminently readable studies in such books as 'British Design since 1880' and 'Design and Culture'.

Michael Collins, who until 1986 was curator of the Modern Collection at the British Museum, provides a similar examination of design since the middle of the nineteenth century. Sensibly avoiding the re-articulation of the development of the Modern Movement, Collins refers to those nineteenth and twentieth century artists and designers who may be seen to display Post-Modern qualities. That most of these were working before modernism reached any form of maturity provides a great deal of the interest of this book.

'Towards Post Modernism' manages to confer the richness of the period, the international cross-fertilisation that took place, to a much greater degree than many previous authors have managed. All the expected references are there. The book covers work from Arts and Crafts, Art Nouveau, German industrialisation, De Style, Bauhaus, Art Deco, Constructivism, etc., and would provide a good introduction to those new to Studies in Design History.

However, the interest for me lies in the second half of the book. The analysis of the 1950's to 1980's is informative and well written, avoiding the cliches that befall so many other authors of the era. Even allowing for the fact that the references are focussed onto the identification of Post-Modern characteristics, the presentation provides one of the better overviews of the period. The book is thoroughly illustrated many of these in colour and contains a short biography of over 100 influential designers since 1851.

Many institutions of further and higher education will find this book useful. I hope that design departments in schools will also find a way of incorporating resources such as this into their teaching.

S.W. Garner

Office Furniture
Lance Knobel
Unwin Hyman £10.95

Long held beliefs concerning the nature of work are changing for many people. The harsh realities of contemporary society have seen to that. Concepts of the factory, office or even employment have had to be radically re-defined in our post-industrial, post-modernist

environment. Perhaps it is only now that a meaningful perspective can be presented into the nature of this development and change.

Lance Knobel, in *Office Furniture* attempts such a perspective by charting the development of the humble commercial office from its sixteenth century Medici beginnings up to the present day. The book is focussed upon the twentieth century and unearths a number of issues that reflect the rich diversity of this period. It reveals, for example, the limited role that major Modernists had on the average commercial ofice. The effect of Breuer, Le Corbusier and Wright is insignificant besides the enormous influence of Bell's telephone or the standardisation brought about by the typewriter.

The office as status symbol established itself early and is still with us today, often over-riding modern ideas on work organisation or from human factors research. The office environment as envisaged by George Nelson or Charles Eames barely infiltrated the post-war commercial institutions, particularly in Britain. However the worthy exceptions to this promotion of predominantly male egos receive generous coverage.

Many of the factors that have been influential in office design today lie outside of the scope of a book on furniture. Propst's profound reappraisal of work organisation in the 1960's provided a new and more appropriate specification for furniture designers. Furthermore demands for flexibility, the increase in Information Technology, Human Factors research into environmental, territorial and hierarchical structures, and the development of new materials have all inspired changes to the furnishings. Knobel's book lingers on the effects and only whets the appetite for the causes.

Of the future? We are led to believe that the democratisation of the work-place is a major issue. The creation of a 'Community landscape' is all very well so long as communities are seen to be commercially viable. Small 'satellite' business centres and home terminals may well direct the future chapters of office design.

S.W. Garner

The Toolbox Companion. An A-Z to DIY tools, materials and their uses.
Mike Lawrence
Hamlyn £6.95

As the title suggests this book is aimed at the DIY market rather than schools. With simple diagrams it describes basic tools including those for decorating, plumbing, building etc, together with materials. As a simple resource book it certainly has some value for the DIYer. In terms of a school CDT department however, it lacks detail in terms of applications.

Howard Denton

Electrical Appliances
Penny Sparks
Unwin Hyman £10.95 hdbk, £7.95 pbk

A useful source book that should be included in the school library. The early part directly relates the introduction of electrical power, sociological change and the development of appliances.

A chapter is devoted to materials and process developments and its implications on design aesthetics. This aspect could have been developed further and drawings of minor technical changes would have added impact to the importance of those new ideas.

Divided into two parts, the first devoted to 'world' developments in appliance design, the second to activity areas involving appliances is occasionally inclined to be repetitive. It is easy to read and understand, has a large number of quotations from designers and other sources and is well illustrated. Pupils of C.D.T. should find it useful background reading. Teachers could design several study topics for pupil investigation around its various sociological and design content.

A good bibliography and a useful index.

Mike Hall

Designwise
N. McLean and C. Platt
Jonquil Publishing £12.95

Designwise is a 30 page photocopy master intended as the basis for a foundation course in CDT.

Providing it is used intelligently as a part of a course the fact one can photocopy directly will be of great help to hard pressed staff. It is by no means a full documentation for a foundation course and the teacher will need to supplement the material. The language used is quite appropriate for young children and generally the written word is handled sensitively in short paragraphs and well illustrated.

The material is presented in a wire binder which will mean that the left edge of photocopied material will look rather ragged. There is no space dedicated for children to put their name on the sheet, however there is a space at the bottom of each sheet which could be used for this purpose.

Howard Denton