Archives, Collections and Curatorship: Virtual Special Issue for the *Journal of Design History*, 2019

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Abstract

Design historians frequently find their interest in a particular subject prompted by archival materials, or begin their research with collections of designed objects supported by online databases. While these are the raw materials, the primary sources of the design historian's work, they are also deserving of attention in their own right. This Virtual Special Issue is comprised of twelve articles drawn from past issues of the Journal of Design History's Archives, Collections and Curatorship section, drawing out key themes and highlighting ongoing dialogues between academic design historians, curators, librarians and archivists. This Introduction seeks to contextualise these within the wider discipline of design history, and to draw connections to scholarship beyond the Journal of Design History itself. Articles under the first heading look at archives, while articles under the second consider collections of objects. The third section turns to the related challenges of presenting design historical research to public audiences. This Virtual Special issue also offers a reminder that as both the processes and products of design move into the digital sphere, it is pertinent to ask what this means for the ways in which design historians, students, and the general public will engage with design history in future.

Keywords: archives—collections—curatorship—cataloguing—digitization— knowledge— pedagogy—heritage—exhibitions

Introduction

The *Journal of Design History* has always welcomed contributions that critically examine the resources on which design historical research is built. Design archives and collections of designed objects have been discussed regularly in the *Archives, Collections, and Curatorship* (AC&C) section of the Journal since the first edition in 1988. Contributors have examined the potential biases, strengths and weaknesses, and historical quirks that have contributed to the development of those resources; others have reflected on the new challenges of collecting, archiving and researching in the digital age. Some have considered the different, yet related challenges of displaying designed objects in public settings. The AC&C section's contribution to the *Journal of Design History* has been to provide a space in which to consider the idea that collections and archives are not neutral or objective, but are the products of traditions of professional decision making, institutional blind-spots and accidental lacunae. Practices of collecting, cataloguing, and display are intimately linked, and all of these inform the project of 'design history' in the wider sense of writing and teaching about designed objects. It is therefore useful to take the opportunity to reflect on the ways in which these collections are not just resources for historians, but also have histories in their own right.

Contents

This Virtual Special Issue brings together twelve articles from the Journal of Design History's Archives Collections and Curatorship section. Articles under the first heading look at 'archives', meaning collections of documents or other kinds of data, while articles under the second heading consider collections of objects. It is recognized that this is to a large extent an arbitrary distinction, but there are differences in the ways in which archivists and curators order their collections which makes this a useful framework for discussion. The third section addresses the different, yet related, challenges of presenting design collections and design historical research to public audiences. This Virtual Special Issue draws out key themes and highlights the ongoing dialogue between academic design historians, curators, librarians and archivists. The articles selected here operate at the intersection of design history with museum studies, archive theory, collection studies and heritage, an area which is gaining increasing attention from design historians.[1]

Articles that appear in the Journal under the AC&C banner are generally shorter than full articles with a word limit of only 4,500 words, rather than 8,000, a decision informed largely by the practical issues of page allocation within the printed version of the Journal. However their relative brevity is no reflection on their quality. Articles in this section shed light on the factors that have influenced the development of a collection, make the case for its strengths and weaknesses, position it within the context of wider scholarship, and provide suggestions for future research. Authors might also discuss the challenges associated with making a collection available to a wider, non-specialist audience. Contributors have used a variety of different methods and approaches over the years, and the priorities and expectations of the Editorial

Board and peer reviewers have also shifted. Indeed a couple of the contributions

included here originally appeared elsewhere in the Journal, either as full articles or in

the reviews section. For these reasons, this selection does not propose that the

Journal has maintained a consistent line of argument over time, but instead attempts

to draw out some recurring themes and preoccupations, namely the process of

collecting, (the acquisition of material whether by conscious or haphazard means); and

the practice of cataloguing (the ordering of this material into systems that aid finding

and organize information), as well as the practices of display. A further concern

running through many of the articles selected here is with the increasing importance of

digital and online resources. Articles have been chosen on the basis that they

illuminate pertinent themes and thus merit re-reading in their own right, and because

they have a relevance to wider debates in the fields of heritage and/or pedagogy.

As a starting point it is useful to remind ourselves of design history's origins as a

teaching subject for studio based students. Collections of designed objects had of

course long been an important part of the education of designers teaching since the

nineteenth century. The South Kensington Museum was the prime example of a

collection developed for the education of 'artisans', and its history has been well

documented.[2] In her work on the Circulation Department of the V&A, for example,

Joanna Weddell argues that the curators of 'Circ' had specific ideas about what they

thought appropriate to collect, based partly on 'secure provenance' and also on a

notion of 'quality', and always with an eye to what would be of interest to audiences

within art schools and regional museums.[3] Other examples of collections developed for

teaching include Manchester Metropolitan University's collection, which originated at

the Manchester Municipal School of Art,[4] and Central St Martins.[5] In institutions such as these there was little distinction between studio and gallery – objects were acquired for hands on study and close examination, and students were expected to learn their craft in imitation of these carefully chosen exemplars.

A change in approach came with the Coldstream report of the 1960s and the subsequent need for the development of 'contextual studies.' As Jonathan Woodham and others have noted, the discipline of design history as we now know it developed within UK polytechnics in the 1970s and 80s.[6] Polytechnics were keen to accumulate resources to bridge the gap between studio and lecture-theatre based learning in order to provide students on studio-based courses with a 'way in' to the more academic aspects of their subjects. Design history's interest in and association with mass production meant many objects could be acquired and accumulated cheaply. The first AC&C contribution in the very first edition of the Journal in 1988 was Hazel Clark's overview of textile collections in UK universities.[7] Clark drew attention to collections that had been developed with students in mind, such as the Constance Howard Textile Study Collection at Goldsmith's College, and the Design Collection at North Staffordshire Polytechnic (later known as the Betty Smithers Collection).[8] She argued that these collections had developed from the need to provide hands-on teaching resources for students, and from a belief in the power of objects to communicate directly with students.

Clark's suggestion was that textile collections within higher education institutions might prove useful to design historians concerned with design history for

its own sake, rather than design history as contextual studies. Her article pointed

rather presciently to a debate which is still ongoing in relation to design collections,

particularly those originating within higher education institutions, namely the question

of whether a collection is valued as a source of inspiration and contextual and haptic

knowledge for studio-based students, or whether it acquires more general historical

significance. In the 1970s and 80s, as Huppatz and Lees Maffei note, design history's

aim was "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."[9] Design

history has now matured into a discipline in its own right, they argue, being no longer a

"service discipline" for contextual studies. This has often meant that collections have

shifted their emphasis too, a point that Charlotte Van Wijk noted in relation to the

Delft Chair collection. This was originally developed for study purposes but

subsequently ceased to be of immediate contemporary relevance to practitioners, and

is now retained for its historic interest.[10] This shift in the status of objects is partly the

result of the paradoxical nature of design collections: objects may be collected because

they are of contemporary relevance to students and can thus be read as 'exemplars' or

aspirational works. However, the passage of time means that collections either acquire

'historic' status and are preserved for more general 'heritage' reasons; or in some cases

are lost altogether.

Design history has matured in recent years to become a wide-ranging discipline

and design historians draw their evidence from any number of sources. Recent articles

in the *Journal of Design History* have drawn on sources as wide ranging as photographs,

diaries, magazine and newspaper articles, government reports and other official documents, as well as designed objects themselves. So it is useful to focus on some of the Archives and Collections that form the basis of much design historical work. Such reflection might be overdue. As Huppatz has noted recently, "design historians in the Journal have had very little direct engagement with methodology: there is surprisingly little reflection on how their research was conducted."[11] Articles in the Journal rarely reflect on the nature of the sources they employ, or the reasons for the survival of certain types of material or archival evidence over others. The AC&C articles provide a useful counterpoint to this approach; generally starting from a specific collection and working outwards. This allows consideration of the kinds of question a particular collection might help us answer, and the further questions its inclusions, exclusions and intellectual structures of organization might raise.

As Huppatz comments, since the 1960s and 70s, historians have become increasingly aware that "what survives from the past in archives, museums, and other collections, is extremely selective."[12] As a result, there is a greater awareness of the kinds of stories that can and cannot be told, or of the need to 'read against the grain' of a collection's purported purposes. It is also useful to be reminded that collections themselves are not static, but have a history of their own. AC&C articles frequently offer an historic perspective on a collection, tracing its development over time. Christine Woods' discussion of the wallpaper collections of the Whitworth and the V&A is an example of this. Others, such as Juliet Ash's article on prison uniforms, offer an analysis that describe a current state of affairs at the time of writing, but which have already - or will ultimately - acquire an historic perspective, as institutions and

circumstances shift. Either way, they are of interest to current readers because they prompt design historians to adopt a more reflective approach to their sources, and to their readings of them.

One of the interesting themes to emerge from a re-reading of AC&C articles is the idea of the differences between different kinds of collections, and the modes of enquiry they therefore demand of researchers. What is the difference between an 'object' and an 'archival record'? We are generally guided by common sense assumptions about this: museums deal with objects; archives deal with paper records and libraries deal with books. Yet this is not just a matter of different kinds of material stuff, but also of different approaches to knowledge and to information. Curators, librarians and archivists are professionally inclined to divide the world up in different ways, and as Helena Robinson points out, there are important conceptual differences between these different "knowledge domains." As she notes:

> …data ('raw data') is anything available to observation or perception, while information is a tangible record of a perception event – the rendering of data into a communicable form. In this way, information can be made physically available, manipulated, stored and exchanged in various ways. However, information is not the same as facts, because its content is always already shaped by the process of perception that identified and recorded it. It follows that collection information originating in libraries, archives or museums already bears the unique imprint of the institution that authored it, being inescapably shaped by the processes and lenses of 'perception' applied through the

practices of each organization. At this point, the subjective role of individual collecting institutions in embedding particular concepts of significance and value within the information created around collections comes to the fore. [13]

These distinctions might be less clear today, as museums, libraries and archives move towards blended services with the goal of serving the public more efficiently and seamlessly. Digital cataloguing has made it easier for institutions to record plural voices and multiple meanings for objects, while online searches have made it easier for people to find them. For design historians this point offers a reminder to take a step back from consideration of the single object or of the ostensible subject or content of a collection, in order to think about how the collection and its associated information might be 'read' as a whole.

1. ARCHIVES

The first group of articles in this section looks at archives, although the term may be felt – by some archivists at least – to have been rather loosely applied. According to one definition, the term 'archive' applies only to business papers, and on those terms only the articles by Jonathan Woodham, Anja Tollenaar and Job Meihuizen would qualify. For the other two, by Matthew Partington, and Frances Joseph, the term 'archive' is applied to collections which do not have physical form; or which convey the idea of a large body of 'raw' material which may be interrogated by the researcher, rather than 'consumed' in curated form. The well-known trope of the historian

'uncovering' something in a 'dusty' archive belies the hidden intellectual labour of sorting and cataloguing and it is something of this effort that is discussed here.

Jonathan Woodham's article about the Design Council Archive at Brighton is a detailed and thoughtful explanation of the kind of material the archive contains, and was an invitation to other researchers to make use of it.[14] Woodham laid the groundwork for subsequent research on the Brighton Archive, including for example, Catherine Moriarty's more detailed exploration of the Council of Industrial Design's photographic archive, and Breakell and Whitworth's research on émigré designers.[15] But rather than simply outlining the Brighton archive's contents, Woodham's piece also raised pertinent points for design historians regarding the decisions about where archives end up, and the importance of cataloguing in structuring knowledge. In particular Woodham pointed to the relationship of the Design Council Archive and other institutions such as the Public Record Office, highlighting the impact this had on the division and classification of records. Decisions about what material to keep and which institution should hold it were partly practical, as Woodham points out, but were also based on value judgements about the relative importance of different kinds of material. An awareness of these decisions, and an ability to understand the implications of the thought processes and inherent biases behind the formation of collections is useful, Woodham suggests, for design historians in using this archive and any other.

Design historians are sometimes engaged in creating the historic record, rather than simply interrogating it. Matthew Partington's article about the National Electronic and Video Archive of the Crafts (NEVAC) is an example of just such a project, which,

"Unlike most archives…produces the vast majority of the material it holds." [16] The project evolved from an interest in the processes of making craft objects, specifically ceramics, and the realization that unless the working processes of craftspeople were recorded on film they would ultimately be lost to future scholars. The project involved interviews with craftspeople totaling hours of video and sound recordings. Once again, this development sprang from a pedagogical impulse, being a response to a "lack of adequate materials for teaching about the crafts in the twentieth century." Partington's article acknowledges the challenges of storage and retrieval represented by a video archive, as well as the accompanying issues of meta-data and keyword-accessibility. Partington's approach has proved enormously fruitful for other aspects of design history. It was part of the beginning of a wider interest in oral history as a methodological tool for design historians, evidenced through the work of Linda Sandino and of Partington himself. [17]

Frances Joseph's article about the New Zealand Design Archive (NZDA) raised interesting questions about what it means to collect and to impose order upon a design collection within a digital space, freed from the usual constraints of the storage of a physical collection. [18] The NZDA was conceived as a collection that brought together records of objects that existed in a variety of public and private sources. As such it was a 'virtual collection' in the sense that its constituent parts were not co-located, but not in the sense that those parts only existed in digital form. Joseph's approach involved "primary research and data gathering," with an emphasis on "the documentation of ephemera and populist artefacts that are often neglected in 'major' design collections of 'historically significant' material." [19] She argued that knowledge is constructed

through the relationships and structures imposed within the database, but that whereas traditional collections were constrained by the metaphors imposed by physical systems (filing cabinets, shelves etc.), the development of computer databases offered the opportunity to construct different connections between objects. Thus it was possible, in her view, to offer ways into knowledge that did not rely on traditional conceptions of 'good design'. This was important in a New Zealand post-colonial, pacific context: the NZDA was an opportunity to construct a resource that challenged traditional Western hierarchies of knowledge, and to subvert the modernist canon.

Frances Joseph effectively set down a marker for New Zealand design history, and her article was cited in Jonathan Woodham's 2005 article as evidence of the growing global maturity and reach of design history. [20] However, as with other design collections, the NZDA grew out of the specific interests of a University department, and was thus subject to the vagaries of funding shortage and changing institutional priorities that have beset countless others. It is interesting to note that the NZDA closed in 2004 as a result of lack of institutional support and following a server failure.[21] Since the collection did not have a physical presence but simply existed within a digital space it was more ephemeral and intangible than other collections, and was thus easier to lose. This example offers a useful reminder that even digital, 'virtual' collections must be maintained financially, usually through the support of large institutions. It is perhaps also a reminder of the precarity of design collections that seek to document the so-called 'ordinary' or 'everyday' aspects of design, since this material does not have high cultural value and may be 'discarded' even after having acquired the status of 'collection.'

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Institutional, and indeed national governmental support was also the focus of Anja

Tollenaar and Job Meihuizen's article on the Dutch National Design Archive.[22] While

not technically falling under the AC&C heading, this article has been included here

because it addresses many of the same issues. The authors argue for the importance of

taking a strategic and considered approach to the preservation of design archives for

the benefit of future generations, and in order to maintain a sense of the 'national

identity' and shared design heritage for the Netherlands. This was prompted by the

realization that the majority of material relating to Dutch design history was dispersed

across personal collections, businesses and various institutions, without an overall plan

for preservation or a consistent means of searching.

Tollenaar and Meihuizen point to the development of a website which pulls all of

these resources together and acts as a kind of 'portal' to further research. "The NDA is

a database that offers an overview of Dutch design archives. It compiles information

about the archives kept either by heritage institutions or by designers, design studios,

producers, design galleries, academies and associations of designers."[23] They note that

this is a task that will never be finished, as the landscape of Dutch design constantly

evolves. For this reason, this is a database that requires active management and

coordination rather than being allowed to 'languish' on the web. They suggest that the

creation of resources or the development of collections is not a one-off activity but an

ongoing process, requiring commitment and investment beyond the initial phase of

establishment.

Resources of this kind clearly have the potential to offer great benefits to design historians, providing access to archives that would otherwise remain hidden. Yet Tollenaar and Meihuizen also raise, albeit in passing, a further question which probably ought to be of greater concern, namely that "there is still a lack of awareness and knowledge about sustainable digital preservation."[24] In other words, 'design' as a practice increasingly takes place in a digital space: the records of today's designers will consist of emails, CAD drawings and digital photographs rather than handwritten correspondence and pencil sketches. Yet it seems that there is little awareness or expertise around the acquisition or preservation of digital records. These are issues which have not yet been addressed within the *Journal of Design History*, and which are only gradually beginning to be discussed elsewhere. They must be addressed with some urgency if we agree with Tollenaar and Meihuizen that it is important to "prevent the loss of important parts of our design memory."

2. COLLECTIONS

This section considers collections of objects, within both large and small institutions. There is a wide literature on collecting within museum studies: Susan Pearce, for example, drew attention to the need to pay attention to the ways in which museum collections were formed, while Russell Belk has written about the motivations of personal (as opposed to institutional) collectors.[25] Here the recurring themes are around the value placed on certain kinds of objects, determining what gets collected. Further, two of the contributions here, by Moira Thunder and Juliet Ash, address questions of how objects are treated – both intellectually and physically – after they

are acquired. Some of these issues are familiar within museum studies and material culture studies.

One example of a group of objects originally accumulated for pedagogical purposes is the Camberwell Collection of Applied Arts, which began as a collection intended to be toured to London Schools by the Inner London Education Authority, "with the aim of encouraging an interest amongst children in designed and crafted artefacts."[26] As Jane Pavitt notes, the choice of objects, and the text panels designed to accompany them, were intended to convey strong messages: "'Good' design implied social responsibility; therefore the object lesson was ethical as well as practical. Craft – the hand-made object – was a reflection of individuality and personal integrity."[27] Pavitt's article is a useful insight into the kinds of objects deemed appropriate to shape the tastes of children, including Scandinavian glass and examples of folk art.

An attention to the underlying assumptions and motivations of curators and museum donors was also the focus for Christine Wood in her discussion of the wallpaper collections at the V&A and the Whitworth Art Gallery in Manchester.[28] Woods' "Object lessons for a Philistine Age" provides a useful outline of the ways in which the collections at both institutions were shaped by certain powerful wallpaper manufacturers. As Woods notes, the survival of wallpaper at all is a surprise to some, since it is "an ephemeral object of fashion, and the often dilapidated condition of old papers and their lack of inherent monetary value make it a poor candidate in the family heirloom stakes."[29] But extensive collections of wallpapers were preserved for the nation and the V&A and the Whitworth Art Gallery in Manchester, and Woods argues

that those donations were shaped by significant figures within the wallpaper industry who were primarily concerned with the preservation of their own 'legacy'. Her contribution is an invitation to consider what might have been deliberately left out of museum collections (the cheap, the everyday, the aesthetically unpleasing) as well as what made it in. Here the implicit pedagogical purpose of museums concerned with design is made clear, since the aim is to educate people towards a better future through preservation of the 'best' of the past.

Taking a slightly different tack, Moira Thunder's article on eighteenth century embroidery draws attention to the work of female designer Margaretta Helm which was catalogued in V&A in such a way as to obscure her connection with it and thus anonymize the work.[30] Thunder's article points out that evidence of historic dress is rare, either in the form of full garments, pattern books, designs or fragments of garments, and has frequently been regarded as less important than evidence of other more 'masculine' forms such as sculpture, metalwork and so on. While not explicitly drawing on the work of feminist design historians such as Cheryl Buckley and others, it is clear that Thunder was influenced by the suggestion that design history has frequently overlooked the work of female designers.[31] More than simply an attempt to rehabilitate Margaretta Helm within the historic record, however, Thunder asks questions about the implicit biases within museum cataloguing systems, and the ways in which they potentially obscure female contribution to the histories of design. Her article questions the conceptual boundaries between design, craft and art, and the ways in which the work of amateur or professional craftspeople is accorded status (or not) within museum collections. For design historians, this is a reminder not to accept

the classificatory systems of museums uncritically: the knowledge they represent is partial, contingent and open to challenge.

Juliet Ash's article about prison uniforms offers a broad overview of the contents of the collections at the Galleries of Justice Museum in Nottingham. The uniforms of prison inmates offer an insight into the way in which the experience of incarceration was constructed in part through the physical materiality of the clothing provided. Ash notes the deliberately unfashionable and cheaply-made nature of the clothing issued to British prisoners before 1970, commenting that:

> "…there is a deliberate denial of contemporaneity commensurate with the prisoners' identity as outsider. These out-of-date uniforms indicate the temporality of the embodiment of punishment – as though time has literally passed by the inmate."[32]

Interestingly, Ash also notes that in contrast to many other museum collections, the prison uniforms may be touched and handled by visitors. This is of course a benefit to dress historians, but is also further evidence perhaps of that the lack of 'respect' accorded to prisoners themselves translates to lower than usual standards of respect for the material evidence associated with them.

3. CURATORSHIP

The term 'curatorship' covers a wide spectrum of meanings, from care of collections to the commissioning of new work.[33] Here the term has been taken to mean the display of objects within public exhibitions, bringing with it a range of considerations that are distinct from - though not unrelated to –the practices of

acquisition and cataloguing that have been the focus so far. Here design history comes into close proximity with the related disciplines of museum studies, heritage studies, and visitor studies, amongst others, making this a wide-ranging and multi-disciplinary area.Recent scholarship within museum studies has pointed to the transformative power of objects in the context of public exhibitions. Sandra Dudley, for example, has drawn attention to the ways in which "objects carry meaning and feeling, the distinctions between objects and persons, particular qualities of the museum as a context for person-object engagements, and the active and embodied role of the museum visitor.[34] Making a similar point within the heritage studies field, LauraJane Smith emphasises the active participation of visitors in the processes of meaning making within museums and heritage sites, arguing that: "heritage is a culturally directed personal and social act of making sense and understanding."[35]

The key difference in articles within this section therefore, is an awareness of the needs and expectations of audiences. Part of the wider context for museums' changing attitude to visitors derived from the political and economic circumstances which saw funding reduced for many from the 1990s onwards. As a result, museums needed to become more visitor-focused in order to achieve ticket income and other revenue. As Ballantyne and Uzzell note, "Over the past 20 years, it's become essential to attract more paying customers through entrance fees of fee-based special exhibitions.[36] At the same time, publications such as Peter Vergo's *The New Museology* argued that museums should no longer place their emphasis on collections, but should instead be concerned with telling the kinds of stories that people wanted to hear.[37] Yet the exhibition medium presents a challenge for design historians /curators

who wish to encourage audiences to critique objects, rather than simply celebrate them. Design museums represent a particular paradox because they include – and wish to critically interrogate – examples of mass culture within a medium more comfortable with high culture. Helen Rees noted this tension when discussing the inclusion of design into museums, asking "Is either the museum or the object transformed? Does the museum become a shopping mall or the designed object turn into a work of art?"[38] Since the early 2000s, museums have increasingly seen their audiences as 'users' or 'co-collaborators', recognizing the public's role as active participants in the creation of knowledge, rather than as passive recipients of it. AC&C articles have not generally tackled this, though Andrea Thabet's review of two exhibitions at the Los Angeles County Museum begins to hint at some of these challenges.

Two of the articles selected here offer an historical perspective on the changing approaches to the display of designed objects, while the other two are reviews of more recent exhibitions. Julia Porter and Sally MacDonald explored the evolution of the Geffrye Museum from a furniture collection developed for the education of local artisans, towards a museum concerned more broadly with histories of the domestic interior and of 'the home'.[39] Their contribution is interesting as it charts the development of thinking about the museum's period rooms and their relationship to modern commerce. As Porter and MacDonald note, "…the modern room [at the Geffrye Museum] was regularly up-dated. Its furnishings were never bought or kept by the museum, but were borrowed in from furnishing firms and clearly it was in their interests to keep this showroom looking smart."[40] We can only speculate on the reaction of visitors to these displays, but as Elise Hodson has noted more recently,

visitors sometimes find it difficult to work out how they are supposed to react: "This simultaneous distance from and engagement with the idea of design as business leaves museum visitors in an ambiguous position to negotiate their own perspectives as spectators, students, and consumers."[41]

Nicolas Maffei explores similar themes in his consideration of influence of museum curator John Cotton Dana on New Jersey's Newark Museum in the 1920s.[42] (Maffei's article was not published under the AC&C banner but has been included here because of its relevance to this discussion). For Dana, the development of a museum of industrial arts was a deeply ethical project, based on his commitment to the moral and educational welfare of the working people of Newark. He also saw it as part of a process of socialization of the populations of Newark's many immigrant communities. Dana was motivated by an impulse similar to that behind that at the Geffrye Museum and the Camberwell Collection, as Maffei notes: "It was hoped that re-educating consumers to appreciate the simple and beautiful, rather than the complex and 'bizarre', would urge them towards a more virtuous and truthful life."[43]

In the above examples, the underlying assumption of curators was in the power of well-designed objects to transform lives. Indeed these were assumptions that underpinned the museum sector as a whole from the mid-nineteenth century. As Geoffrey Crossick has noted, "A balance between industrial design, moral improvement and education was present in provincial museums as the [nineteenth] century drew to a close, blended unevenly into a confident vision of their purpose."[44] The situation is less straightforward now, since notions of 'good design' seem paternalistic, and since

as Crossick also notes, we no longer hold the same conviction about the moral and educational benefits of museum visiting. There is a sense in which those who visit museums have been repositioned; they are 'customers' rather than 'citizens.'

Exhibitions of designed objects now rarely focus on the design of the objects themselves, but tell different, more universally appealing stories. June Freeman's review of the Imperial War Museum's exhibition entitled *Forties Fashion and the New Look* was enthusiastic about the range of objects on show, and the methods by which they were displayed. "Snatches of popular music, film clips, old propaganda films, bits of oral history, documentary photography…put the garments into a social context which gave them meaning."[45] Freeman also noted that the success of that exhibition was perhaps partly attributable to the fact that it was conceived by a marketing specialist rather than a curator, who was thus able to bring an understanding of the kind of thing audiences wanted to see.[46] Freeman's review applauded the IWM's avoidance of too much "historical documentation and scholarship," within the exhibition; her suggestion was not that historical scholarship is unimportant, but only that it a certain level of detail might be more appropriately reserved for a book rather than the exhibition itself.

Andrea Thabet's article is a review of two exhibitions at the Los Angeles County Museum, part of a wider 'Pacific Standard Time' initiative, which aimed to reposition Los Angeles within art and design since the Second World War, and present a challenge to the dominance of New York within this narrative. Thabet drew attention to the importance of funding (the PST initiative was generously supported by the Getty) and

to the potential of museums exhibitions to challenge a long-held sense of inferiority and "reclaim LA's rightful place in the history of design."[47] Her review of the "Californian Design" exhibition was largely favourable, but one of her criticisms concerned the lack of attention to the exclusionary practices within mid-century design industries. As she notes: "Acknowledging the scarcity of designers of colour might have allowed the curators to better articulate who counted as the masses and what the 'good life' meant to whom—and how race and class among design practitioners influenced these concepts."[48] She acknowledges that these issues were more adequately addressed within the accompanying catalogue, but she raises once again the question of how design historians and curators can present exhibitions that are able to attract audiences without compromising their intellectual quality. As she asks:

> …to what extent does the effort to hearken back to a simpler, 'golden era' of California modernism encourage a dangerous oversimplification of social and political unrest at mid-century? [49]

To what extent, we could also ask, should design exhibitions in general challenge their visitors to more than a comfortable 'nostalgic' view of the lifestyles of the past, and how might they accommodate multiple perspectives on the experience of design?

Conclusion

What then might we expect from the AC&C section in future? There are perhaps three key themes to which design historians are increasingly drawn, namely globalization, digitization, and sustainability. Recent work in design history has attempted to expand the discipline's field of vision to encompass non-European

narratives. Examples include Adamson, Riello and Teasley's *Global Design History*, and, more recently, Rebecca Brown's work on India.[50] Might we see more contributions to the Archives Collections and Curatorship section that address collections located in Latin America or Africa, or Asia? Zara Arshad's recent article about the Chinese Design Museum in *Design and Culture* offers a fascinating perspective on the interplay of architecture and collection in that institution, and considers the ways in which ideas about the Bauhaus have been repurposed to meet Chinese political needs. Articles that address similar themes would be welcome in the AC&C section of the Journal of Design History.[51] Within the inevitable constraints of AC&C word-count it would be interesting to hear more about the challenges and opportunities of collecting and displaying design history in different parts of the world. Are there current initiatives that, like the New Zealand Design Archives, are attempting to resist traditional Western hierarchies of knowledge, through practices of acquisition and/or display?

Further questions are raised about the future of design history in relation to digital archives. As Huppatz notes, "Digital collections, particularly useful for the storage of ephemera, photographs and visual evidence, have become increasingly accessible, as have powerful search engines, digital libraries and databases."[52] The Journal would welcome more contributions to the AC&C section from curators, archivists and librarians who are actively archiving the digital records that will be of interest to tomorrow's design historians. What are the thought processes and practicalities behind the compilation of digital repositories (whether of objects, documents, images or video/audio recordings) and the development of metadata and search mechanisms? How are decisions made about which records to make available

online? As researchers are we in danger of assuming that if it doesn't exist online it doesn't exist at all and thus of ceasing to look for it? This point links to the previous one about geographical representation since, as Lara Putnam points out, "Web-based full-text search decouples data from place," making it possible to find new connections between ideas and things without the constraints of geographical location.[53] Putnam points to some of the implications of this for historians in general, but what might it mean for the ways in which design historians work? Contributions from colleagues in the neighbouring fields of information studies, cultural heritage or digital anthropology would perhaps help to bring fresh perspectives or identify points of convergence.

A third preoccupation of recent design history scholarship is around sustainability and ecology, evidenced through, for example, the Design History Society's 2017 conference in Oslo. A concern for the environment is of course relevant to archives and collections too, on a number of levels. It would be interesting to hear more from conservators about the practices of preservation of designed objects made from inherently unstable or unsustainable materials. While on the one hand we are concerned with the proliferation of plastic in our oceans, collections that contain plastics may be concerned with the unpredictable processes of that material's deterioration, some of which present an almost existential threat to the future of those collections. How are today's curators addressing the issues of how to acquire, document, display and preserve objects which may come to be seen as symptomatic of the excesses of post-capitalist consumer society? These three themes point inevitably towards a fourth, namely the political context in which design and design history both take place. This might mean the politics of collecting the otherwise-ephemeral objects

associated with political activism such as protest placards or the 'Pussyhat' acquired by the V&A's Rapid Response Project.[54] It might also mean a much more radical reassessment of what design history and design collections are for, and what we expect of them in a world of increasing political uncertainty.

The AC&C section cannot hope to cover all of the issues; it represents a small contribution to a number of wider debates. Its purpose it perhaps primarily to remind readers of the *Journal of Design History* to pay attention to some of the building blocks of the discipline, in order to raise a kind of methodological awareness more generally. As records become digital, and thus intangible, so too do the products of design practices themselves. Future design is likely to offer far fewer opportunities for engagement with the tangible physical world. What does this mean for the ways in which students, researchers and members of the general public will engage with it and learn about it? As the examples here demonstrate, it is clear that contributions to the AC&C section of the Journal of Design History have often prompted further thought and discussion, either on the subjects represented by collections, or on the methodological challenges implied by the processes of collection, classification and display.

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[1] See for example, Grace Lees Maffei's DProf Heritage at the University of Hertfordshire.

[2] See for example, Anthony Burton, *Vision & Accident: The Story of the Victoria and Albert Museum* (London: V&A Publication, 1999).

[3] Joanna Weddell, "The Ethos of the V&A Circulation Department 1947-1960," in *Design Objects and the Museum*, ed. Liz Farrelly and Joanna Weddell (Bloomsbury Academic, 2016).

[4] John Davies, "'A Most Important and Necessary Thing': An Arts and Crafts Collection in Manchester," *Journal of the Decorative Arts Society* 18 (1994): 15–24.

[5] Sylvia Backemeyer, "The Teaching Examples Collection, Its Foundation and Development," in *Object Lessons: Central Saint Martins Art and Design Archive* (Lund Humphries, 1996).

[6] Jonathan M Woodham, "Designing Design History: From Pevsner to Postmodernism," *Working Papers in Communication Research Archive, Vol 1(1): Digitisation and Knowledge.*, 2001.

[7] Hazel Clark, "Design History Society Textile Collections in British Colleges," *Journal of Design History* 1, no. 1 (1988): 73–74.

[8] https://www.museumsassociation.org/museum-practice/touch/15022013-betty-smithers-design-collection

[9] DJ Huppatz and Grace Lees-Maffei, "Why Design History? A Multi-National Perspective on the State and Purpose of the Field," *Arts and Humanities in Higher Education* 12, no. 2–3 (2010): 311, doi:10.1177/1474022212467601.

[10] Charlotte Van Wijk, "The Delft Chair Collection," *Journal of Design History* 24, no. 1 (2011): 79–84, doi:10.1093/jdh/epq047

[11] D J Huppatz, "Introduction to Methodology : Virtual Special Issue for the Journal of Design History, 2018," *Journal of Design History*, no. June (2018): 1, doi:10.1093/jdh/epy021.

[12] Ibid., 3.

[13] Helena Robinson, "Remembering Things Differently : Museums , Libraries and Archives as Memory Institutions and the Implications for Convergence," *Museum Management and Curatorship* 27, no. 4 (2012): 413–29.

[14] Jonathan M Woodham, "Redesigning a Chapter in the History of British Design : The Design Council Archive at the University of Brighton," *Journal of Design History* 8, no. 3 (1995): 225–29.

[15] Catherine Moriarty, "A Backroom Service," *Journal of Design History* 13, no. 1 (2000): 39–57; Sue Breakell and Lesley Whitworth, "Emigre Designers in the University of Brighton Design Archives," *Journal of Design History* 28, no. 1 (2013): 83–97.

[16] Matthew Partington, "The National Electronic and Video Archive of the Crafts (NEVAC)," *Journal of Design History* 13, no. 2 (2000): 151–59.

[17] Linda Sandino, "Oral Histories and Design: Objects and Subjects," *Journal of Design History* 19, no. 4 (2006): 275–82.

[18] Frances Joseph, "The New Zealand Design Archives: Digital Resource Building and Design History," *Journal of Design History* 14, no. 3 (2001): 227–36.

[19] Ibid., 227.

[20] Jonathan M. Woodham, "Local, National and Global: Redrawing the Design Historical Map," *Journal of Design History* 18, no. 3 (2005): 257–67, doi:10.1093/jdh/epi044.

[21] http://nzdesignhistory.blogspot.co.uk/2014/04/undesigning-history.html#comment-form [accessed 10.09.17]

[22] Anja Tollenaar and Job Meihuizen, "No Future Without a Past: The Dutch National Design Archive (NDA)," *Journal of Design History* 29, no. 3 (2016): 287–95.

[23] Ibid., 291.

[24] Ibid., 293.

[25] Susan Pearce, *Interpreting Objects and Collections* (Routledge, 1994); Russell Belk, *Collecting in a Consumer Society* (London: Routledge, 1995).

[26] Jane Pavitt, "The Camberwell Collection of Applied Arts," *Journal of Design History* 10, no. 2 (1997): 225.

[27] Ibid., 226.

[28] Christine Woods, "'An Object Lesson to a Philistine Age': The Wall Paper Manufacturers' Museum and the Formation of the National Collections," *Journal of Design History* 12, no. 2 (1999): 159–71.

[29] Ibid., 159.

[30] Moira Thunder, "Deserving Attention: Margaretha Helm's Designs for Embroidery in the Eighteenth Century," *Journal of Design History* 23, no. 4 (2010): 409–27.

[31] Cheryl Buckley, "Made in Patriarchy: Toward a Feminist Analysis of Women and Design," *Design Issues* 3, no. 2 (1986): 3–14; Jill Seddon, "Mentioned, but Denied Significance: Women Designers and the 'Professionalisation' of Design in Britain c 1920-1951," *Gender & History* 12, no. 2 (2000): 426–47.

[32] Juliet Ash, "The Prison Uniforms Collection at the Galleries of Justice Museum, Nottingham, UK," *Journal of Design History* 24, no. 2 (2011): 189, doi:10.1093/jdh/epr002.

[33] See for example, Natasha Hoare and Coline Milliard, *The New Curator: Researcher, Commissioner, Keeper, Interpreter, Producer, Collaborator* (London: Laurence King Publishing, 2016).which outlines the many roles expected within contemporary art curatorship; a similar range of skills is required of design curators.

[34] Sandra H Dudley, *Museum Materialities: Objects, Engagements, Interpretations* (Routledge, 2010), 2.

[35] Laurajane Smith, *Uses of Heritage* (Taylor & Francis, Ltd, 2006), 66.

[36] Roy Ballantyne and David Uzzell, "Looking Back and Looking Forward: The Rise of the Visitor-Centered Museum," *Curator: The Museum Journal* 54, no. 1 (2011): 88, doi:10.1111/j.2151-6952.2010.00071.x.

[37] Peter Vergo, *The New Museology* (Reaktion Books Ltd, 1989).

[38] Helen Rees, "The Culture of Consumption: Design Museums as Educators or Taste Makers," in *The Authority of the Consumer*, ed. Russell Keat, Nigel Whiteley, and Nicholas Abercrombie (Routledge, 1994), 156.

[39] Julia Porter and Sally Macdonald, "Fabricating Interiors: Approaches to the History of Domestic Furnishing at the Geffrye Museum," *Journal of Design History* 3, no. 2 (1990): 175–82.

[40] Ibid., 178.

[41] Elise Hodson, "'I Could Have Visited Ikea for Free': Design Museums and a Complicated Relationship with Commerce," in *Exhibiting Craft and Design: Transgressing the White Cube Paradigm, 1930-Present* (Routledge, 2017), 140.

[42] Nicolas Maffei, "John Cotton Dana and the Politics of Exhibiting Industrial Art in the U.S, 1909-1929," *Journal of Design History* 13, no. 4 (2000): 301–17.

[43] Ibid., 312.

[44] Geoffrey Crossick, "Museums, Audiences and Collections: Thinking about Historical Context," *Cultural Trends*, 2018, np, doi:10.1080/09548963.2018.1503787.

[45] June Freeman, "Forties Fasion and the New Look: Exhibition Review," *Journal of Design History* 10, no. 4 (1997): 431.

[46] Ibid., 433.

[47] Andrea Thabet, "The Getty's 'Pacific Standard Time' Initiative: Exhibiting Los Angeles as an Epicentre of Mid-Century Art and Design," *Journal of Design History* 26, no. 2 (2013): 201.

[48] Ibid., 208.

[49] Ibid., 211.

[50] Glenn Adamson, George Riello, and Sarah Teasley, *Global Design History London: Routledge.* (London: Routledge, 2011); Rebecca M Brown, *Displaying Time: The Many Temporalities of the Festival of India* (University of Washington Press, 2017).

[51] Zara Arshad, "Constructing Histories to Shape the Future: China Design Museum," *Design and Culture*, 2017, doi:10.1080/17547075.2017.1365230.

[52] Huppatz, "Introduction to Methodology : Virtual Special Issue for the Journal of Design History, 2018," 12.

[53] Lara Putnam, "The Transnational and the Text-Searchable: Digitized Sources and the Shadows They Cast," *The American Historical Review*, 2016, doi:10.1093/ahr/121.2.377.

[54] https://www.vam.ac.uk/blog/news/pussyhat-acquired-for-rapid-response-collection [accessed 1st November 2018]