After Pevsner:
problems of a new design history

Felipe Kaizer (ESDI/UERJ, Brasil)
fk@felipekaizer.com

After Pevsner:
problems of a new design history

Abstract: This article analyses core issues on histories of design brought to light after the pioneering work of Nikolaus Pevsner. Among these, economic and materialistic assumptions of social design history stand out, as does the dispute between different approaches within world history of design or global design history. The article investigates the main characteristics of Pevsner's work, the proposal and analysis made by Clive Dilnot for a new design history and of the late development of such research.
Keywords: Social History, Global History, World History

In the universe of research in design there is at least one well-identified orthodoxy: the history of Modern Design launched by Nikolaus Pevsner. It defines the professional activity of design according to a certain style in the arts and a certain professional ethos. More fundamentally, in Pevsner's *Pioneers of Modern Design* we do not find a clear distinction between *design* as a general activity and *Design* (with a capital letter) as a profession, as acknowledged later in time (DILNOT 1996b, p. 233). Such orthodoxy suppresses the complexity and multiplicity of the phenomena that bring about the formation of the professional activity, the style referred to, and the design history and theory, as well. Here, we will seek to identify the main characteristics of Pevsnerian orthodoxy and also of some post-Pevsner histories of design.

We will begin with a brief presentation of Pevsnerian orthodoxy, after which we will discuss Clive Dilnot's analysis on the state of and new proposals of design history in 1984. This will be followed by a comparison between proposals for a world or global design history by, on the one hand, Victor Margolin and, on the other, Glenn Adamson, Giorgio Riello and Sarah Teasley.

1. Pevsnerian orthodoxy

There is a well-formulated orthodoxy in historical research in design. It is the history initially established by Nikolaus Pevsner. In summary, it discusses the founding fathers of Modern Design. Published for the first time in 1936, the history of the *Pioneers of the Modern Movement* is without a shadow of a doubt one of the seminal texts in design research. As Clive Dilnot affirmed: "If design history has an academic antecedent, it is surely Nikolaus Pevsner's *Pioneers of Modern Design*, despite all later criticism" (DILNOT 1996a, p. 217).

However, in this passage from Dilnot we note the change in the book's title – from *Pioneers of the Modern Movement* to *Pioneers of Modern Design* – that took place in 1949, in its second edition. Even so, the work's subtitle remains unchanged: "From William Morris to Walter Gropius." These two facts are telling something. First of all, the change in the title puts forward the correspondence Pevsner makes between the Modern Movement and Modern Design; furthermore, the fact that the subtitle was kept affords us a peek at the intention and structure of the work.

> […] [the] chief aim [of this book] is in fact to prove the new style, the genuine and legitimate style of our century, was achieved by 1914. Morris had started the movement by reviving handicraft as an art worthy of the best men's efforts, the pioneers about 1900 had gone further by discovering the immense, untried possibilities of machine art. The synthesis, in creation as well as in theory, is the work of Walter Gropius […]

Arcos Design. Rio de Janeiro, v. 16, n. 2, Julho 2023, pp. 480-496.

482

> Gropius regards himself as a follower of Ruskin and Morris, of van de Velde, and the Werkbund. So, our circle is complete. The history of artistic theory between 1890 and the First World War proves the assertion on which the present work is based, namely, that the phase between Morris and Gropius is an historical unit. Morris laid the foundation of the modern style; with Gropius its character was ultimately determined. (PEVSNER 2011, p. 26-27)

We may infer, from this passage, that Pevsner's work is programmatic. His aim is to advocate for *the* style of modern times. We suggest that other questions may arise as well.

In the first place, there is a correspondence between the issue of style and that of professional practice. In this sense, the change in the title is significant. The coincidence between a professional and a style characterizes the entire later development, "in creation as well as in theory," of design. With it, Pevsner determines the main object of research in design – that is, the objects produced in an industrial context according to given aesthetic parameters. Pevsner associates these parameters with a certain morality. As Victor Margolin affirms:

> Trained in Germany as an art historian, Pevsner was one of a small group of scholars who sought to identify a distinctive quality of modernity in selected art, architecture, and functional objects of their day. Like many of his German predecessors, he infused his narrative with a high sense of morality. He was concerned with establishing firm grounds for aesthetic discrimination, an enterprise that he expanded from its source in connoisseurship to signify a sense of belonging to one's age. For Pevsner, certain objects were modern and others were not. (MARGOLIN 2002, p. 221)

Secondly, with the correspondence between the Modern Movement and Design, Pevsner determines a conception of design in general. His history expresses the view that certain objects were designed and others were not, according to a "genuine and legitimate style." As suggested, his argument makes no distinction between *design* and *Design*. In this way, the concept of design is subordinate to the practice of certain characters. As a consequence, design is theoretically circumscribed to the universe of the Modern Movement in art. In Dilnot's words, late studies on Modernism in design stem from "the Pevsnerian program of study" (DILNOT 1996a, p. 219).

Thirdly, Pevsner hypostatizes an "historical unit" in which he includes heterogeneous figures and phenomena. This methodological operation involves the postulation of a teleology of historical events – in other words,

of the existence of a final cause intrinsic to the historical process. The idea of unity presupposes beginning and end – in this case, Morris and Gropius, respectively – , such that the final events justify the initial events. At its extreme, this approach leads Pevsner to consider, in Morris, only that which remains in Gropius, and to consider in Gropius, only that which comes from Morris. It may be said to be a case of "lineage studies," as Dilnot calls it (DILNOT 1996b, p. 235). In sum, the historian tends to reduce all of the phenomena before, contemporary to or after his unit to a minimum common denominator – that which is pre-established by the historian himself. Not by chance, "[t]he book ends in triumph" (MARGOLIN 2002, p. 222), as with theological stories or epic poems.

Finally, Pevsner uses a mode of exposition that becomes a model for much of design literature. This mode is the writing of a factual history, according to which names, dates and places are enough to infer a causal chain. This historical writing adapts well to the formation of myths – that is, of extraordinary figures and events that because of their very existence are able to explain their own *raison d'être*, as well as that of those that succeed it. It creates what Dilnot labels "a canonical list of 'important' designs and designers" (DILNOT 1996b, p. 235). Through the exacerbation of the agents to the detriment of their contexts of action, Pevsner erects totem-like figures that resist critique. Having said this, the tag *pioneers* confirms the belief that there was nothing prior to Morris and company. At no point in the book does Pevsner clarify the attribution of this designation to merely a select few, or the supposed "virgin territory" being cleared by them. At the end, a complex historical phenomenon such as design is reduced to an *ex nihilo* creation of a hundred or so exceptional individuals.

For this and other reasons, an orthodoxy consolidates around the Pevsnerian design history beginning in the 1930s. In a succinct formulation, we can say that this orthodoxy is an apologetic and finalistic history written based on the coincidence between morals and aesthetics.

2. A new design history

Beginning in the late 1940s, Pevsner's work witnessed its first revisions and critiques. Among the authors undertaking this enterprise, we may highlight Siegfried Giedion, with his attempt at anonymous history in *Mechanization Takes Command: A Contribution to Anonymous History* in 1948, and Reyner Banham, who complexifies the Pevsnerian historical unit in *Theory and Design in the First Machine Age* in 1960. In 1970, Herwin Schaefer published *The Roots of Modern Design: Functional Tradition in the 19th Century*, in which he provides an alternative vision of functionalism. During the

1980s, other non-orthodox works were added to the list: *American Design Ethic* (1983) and *The American Design Adventure* (1988), by Arthur J. Pulos, *Objects of Desire: Design and Society since 1750* (1986), by Adrian Forty, and *Design in Germany, 1870-1918* (1986), by John Heskett.

It is in this context that in 1984 Clive Dilnot launched a retrospective vision of the achievements and difficulties of a *design history*, in its "institutional and academic form" (DILNOT 1996a, p. 214). His two-part article in the periodical *Design Issues* maps out the field of study, as well as the problems and possibilities of *a new design history*. Dilnot makes an effort to provide a response to the crisis of the Pevsnerian model of making history and of the modern foundations. In his words:

> It was clear by the early 1970s that 'good design' was not a magic talisman. Modernism began to lose its appeal, and problems of design organization, technology, and the relation of design to society and to the economy came to the fore. Also, the question of design's relationship to commerce, markets, and popular taste provoked both practitioners and embryonic historians to re-examine the tenets and assumptions of a Modernist design practice and a history of design that simply reproduced the modernist story or somewhat naively documented the emergence of good design and its institutions. This rethinking of approaches set the stage for the emergence of a new design history. (DILNOT 1996a, p. 220)

Dilnot's article consists of something beyond charting: it's a summons. A new design history is not just another history of the profession. Dilnot openly advocates a *social* conception of design history. Yet, he renews the commitment taken up by Pevsner to deal with the professional design activity (DILNOT 1996a, p. 221). As opposed to Pevsner, however, Dilnot believes that the social dimension of the profession cannot be duly dealt with unless the focus is removed from the Modern Movement and the *milieu* of the avant-garde (226). Thus, Dilnot's commitment with historical investigation of the profession runs up against one of the historical factors that make up design – in other words, the issue of avant-garde aesthetics, allied with a certain professional ethos. Nevertheless, Dilnot's argument does not exclude this factor. For all intents and purposes, the author expresses his confidence in the historical method to deal with paradoxes and conflicts. This confidence protects him from the risk of orthodox discourse.

> History can keep open the *differences* involved. Most important, it can allow differentiation between *designing*, a verb denoting an activity, not necessarily professional, and *design*, a noun referring to a particular profession or a particular class of phenomena. Therefore, the first context for

Arcos Design. Rio de Janeiro, v. 16, n. 2, Julho 2023, pp. 480-496.

485

design understanding is the historical. […] Paradoxically, defining and explaining design and what a designer does are dependent not only on immersion in design practice, but also on the ability to see this practice in both historical and social perspectives. (DILNOT 1996a, p. 215)

Dilnot thus associates the history of the emergence of a professional with the social perspective of his actions. In summary, this new design history is a social history – in other words, a history that does not dismiss the contribution of Modernism, but that emphasizes problems of organization, production and consumption. Thus the author contributes toward a new definition of design: one that accounts for the historical and social dimension of designing.

With this new formulation in hand, Clive Dilnot addresses his critique to continuing the Pevsnerian model.

At present, there is no real discipline of design criticism, but a canonical list of 'important' designs and designers is rapidly being established […] We are seeing this sharp differentiation into 'important' and 'unimportant' design works […] Therefore, the history of design in this sense is approaching a recitation of such 'important' works, with the consequences that the historical processes that gave rise to them are gradually disappearing. The values that the 'important' works possess are increasingly being tacitly accepted as lying outside the realm of history. (DILNOT 1996b, p. 235)

It is worth mentioning that the withdrawal of these values from the domain of history quintessentially constitutes the gesture of canonization. Behind figures considered to be unquestionably significant, orthodoxy shrouds its highly arbitrary stance.

Dilnot also indicates the structure of the new historical research in design. Finally, the approaches suggested by him are aimed at continuing, revising and adding to Pevsner's work. These are: a continuation of the traditional histories of the decorative and minor arts; a focus on Modernism; a focus on issues of design organization; and a focus on the social relations of various kinds of design (DILNOT 1996a, p. 221-228).

With this plan, Dilnot's new history is equivalent to a critical incorporation of the histories prior to Pevsner, as well as of the historical project of Pevsner, Banham and others, in addition to issues related to the *modus operandi* of design in the industrial world and issues related to the position of the professional in a wider context.

3. From social design history to the artificial world

Among the authors who took Clive Dilnot's positions into consideration is Victor Margolin. His work is responsible, among other things, for the expansion of the field described by Dilnot by way of the use of the idea of the *artificial world*. He introduces it through the concepts of *product milieu* and *material culture*, which hails from the field of anthropology.

Margolin advocates the existence of a sphere higher than that of the design socio-historically defined by Pevsner and Dilnot. His defense thereof begins with a direct critique of the main branch of social history, which does not deal directly with socially produced artifacts. Margolin takes as an example one of the eminent figures of social history, the historian Eric Hobsbawm.

> Hobsbawm singles out classes and social groups, modernization and industrialization processes, social movements and other forms of social protest, demography, and "mentalities" […] as key areas where social historians have been working. His list consists of processes, practices, and ideas and omits material objects and images. And yet there is no human activity that is not embedded in material culture. (MARGOLIN 2009, p. 95-96)

The causes of this negligence are not clear. A possible explanation harks back to the Marxist matrix of Hobsbawm's work, responsible for the conception of the cultural aspects in terms of ideology. If confirmed, this matrix removes the concept of material cultural from that of social production, the latter of which is "the analytical base of any historical enquiry into the evolution of human societies" (HOBSBAWM 2011; chapter "The Sense of the Past").

Against this position, Margolin evokes another exponent of social history. Belonging to the French school known as École des Annales, Fernand Braudel is among the first who

> […] identified 'another, shadowy zone, often hard to see for lack of adequate historical documents, lying beneath the market economy: this is that elementary basic activity which went on everywhere and the volume of which is truly fantastic.' Braudel called this zone 'material life' or 'material civilization'. (MARGOLIN 2009, p. 99)

In consonance with this branch of social history, in 1990 Margolin introduced the term *product milieu* to refer to "human-made material and immaterial objects, activities, and services, and complex systems or environments that constitute the domain of the artificial" (2004, 122). Inasmuch as issues of the milieu become central, the design history begins to dwell on "material life" as a whole. In this sense, the word *design* goes on to "denote the conception and planning of these products" (*Ibid.*). In an unexpected way,

Margolin's operation is similar to that of Pevsner: design practice is defined as a function of certain products. But, differently from Pevsner, Margolin is not committed to the figure of the design professional. In actual truth, it is Dilnot who opens the way for this decoupling when he states that "[t]he essential field of design's meaning and import […] is *not* the internal world of the design profession, but the wider social world" (DILNOT 1996b, p. 244).

If in Dilnot we also find the issue of material culture brought up (1996b, 248-249), it is in Margolin that the materiality of social life takes on a sharper outline. He uses the concept to redefine not only the fundamental category of research in design, but also to herald a new field of study.

> Using an enlarged conception of the artificial as the basis for our inquiries, we can thus undertake new investigations of what designing is and how it affects the way we organize possibilities for human action. (MARGOLIN 2002, p. 227-28)

Supporting his arguments on the "domain of the artificial" (2009, 96), Margolin answers Dilnot's call in a radical manner and points toward a new direction for the history begun by Pevsner. Still, of greater interest to us is the problem he poses next – that one of the status of a history of extra-European design. With the exception of a chapter on 19th-Century American engineering and architecture, Pevsner excludes all material development outside Europe from his statement. In an extreme case of Western-centrism, design is thought of, then, as an "European science" according to the use Giulio Carlo Argan makes of the term coined by Edmund Husserl – that is, as a cultural system founded in rationality (ARGAN 1992, p. 507) that culminates with the age of functionalism (263). The crisis of this science soon leads to the crisis of its historiography: following the decline of European Modernism beginning in the 1960s, the orthodox history of design loses much of its sense in the next two decades. Thereafter, the redefinition of the practice of design and of the object of design research became an imposition. This redefinition leads, among other things, to an expansion of the context of action of designers both in geographical and conceptual terms.

4. World history of design and global design history

In a late critique of the orthodox history of design, researcher Sarah A. Lichtman sums up the issue at hand.

> […] the emphasis in history of design surveys remains on Western design and on modern design, with most surveys beginning around 1850. All too often the Great Exhibition (1851, London) serves as a point of

departure […] As Jonathan Woodham has pointed out, in terms of content, little has changed in the 'design historical map' since the establishment of design history as a separate discipline in Britain in the 1970s […] (LICHTMAN, p. 346-47)

Based on this diagnosis, the author considers the urgent need for wider and more inclusive histories and debates. Drawing on the words of historian Christopher Bailey in the *Journal of Design History*, Lichtman acknowledges that "the need to develop a genuinely global field of inquiry has moved beyond being a challenge to becoming a duty" (BAILEY *apud* LICHTMAN, p. 347). Thus, a new global design history could emerge as a result of "the lack of geographic, ethnic, economic and cultural diversity in relation to designers and objects" (LICHTMAN, p. 346).

One of the problems of this new approach to the history research in design has to do with its origins. Margolin pinpoints the roots of a world history in the period following World War II.

> The emergence of world history as an historical practice coincides with momentous changes that took place in the writing of history in general, beginning in the 1960s. As part of the progressive social movements that embraced civil rights, ecology, feminism, and sexual orientation, as well as other causes, historians took a new interest in the lives of ordinary people. (MARGOLIN 2005, p. 236)

Margolin fails to clarify whether his dating refers to the beginning of a wider-reaching historical research or to the emergence of a new object of study. His argument allows both possibilities. The author speaks of a coincidence, which does not mean that progressive social movements or the lives of common people truly constitute a new object of study for historical research. Considering the idea of material culture advocated by the author at a different time, it seems most probable that the object that characterizes world history is culture as a whole, of which design is a part. In this sense, Margolin seeks "to understand how different cultures have provided for their respective material needs" and takes a look at "the history of design from a world perspective," according to which it may be seen that "people of all ethnic backgrounds have been active designers within their own communities, even if they have largely worked outside the orbit of advanced industrialization." (MARGOLIN 2005, p. 235).

There is disagreement, however, as to the emergence and meaning of the first world histories. Glenn Adamson, Giorgio Riello and Sarah Teasley present an alternative origin of the discipline. According to them, a renewed

design history is part of a *global turn* in various different human and social disciplines.

> In design history, the 'global turn' has largely taken the form of an expanded geography [...] This tendency, which often draws inspiration from intellectual movements such as post-colonialism and world history, seeks to correct the dominant, lopsided representation of the history of design as occurring primarily in Western Europe and the United States, particularly in the modern period [...] Modernist design history's triumphalist narrative of progress emanating from industrializing Europe after 1850 is simply out of date. (ADAMSON, RIELLO, and TEASLEY 2011, p. 2)

Adamson, Riello and Teasley diverge from Margolin on other fundamental points as well. Despite their agreement on the proposal of an expanded geography and the questioning of a periodization based on Modernism, the authors fail to find consensus regarding methods and topics.

With regards to methods appropriate to a new history of design, Margolin advocates a research structure based on three premises: on the presence of design in all cultures, on the response of the practice of design to industrial imperatives and on the worldwide expansion of the idea of design following World War II (MARGOLIN 2005, p. 241). On the other hand, Adamson, Riello and Teasley defend a design history based on connections that favor a decentralized logic of the history and on comparisons of national contexts (ADAMSON, RIELLO, and TEASLEY, p. 3-5).

In terms of the central topics of research, Margolin selects nationalism, race and gender issues and the feminist movement (2005, p. 240-241). Adamson, Riello and Teasley, for their part, favor topics indicated by commercial exchange, by the social systems created by the practice of tourism and of imperial control, by the impact of multinational corporations on culture, and by the global circuit of superstar designers (ADAMSON, RIELLO, and TEASLEY, p. 7-9).

However, of all of the divergences between the authors, the most revealing is possibly that about the name of the discipline itself. It has nothing to do with etymological problems, but rather with the assumptions of the research advocated. Inasmuch as it is a matter of concepts, linked to the issue of nomenclature are issues of epistemological order.

Focusing on just one issue of nomenclature, we see that the choice between the terms *world* and *global* is not a simple one. Adamson, Riello and Teasley seek a response to this problem in their basic methodological approaches.

Arcos Design. Rio de Janeiro, v. 16, n. 2, Julho 2023, pp. 480-496.

490

[…] does 'global' mean the same as 'world' or 'transnational'? While 'world' has tended to emphasize areas that might be civilizations or empires through juxtaposition in a comparative approach, and 'transnational' refers to movements across national borders, […] a 'global' approach works with connections and to a lesser extent with comparisons. A 'global' study does not necessarily concern the entire world; rather, it might address the impact of long-distance forces on the local […] in our working definition, 'global design history' is not a world design history, that is to say, an attempt at comprehensively mapping the history of design in all its geographical nooks and crannies. (ADAMSON, RIELLO, and TEASLEY, p. 3-4)

Given that the authors use the term *global* even before discussing their approaches, part of their explanation becomes circular. For all intents and purposes, nothing prevents them from investigating connections and comparisons under the name of a world history. Apparently, the preference for the term *global* is justified only if the term refers to a *whole* and not to the *globe*. In this way it is possible to understand the global dimension of a local history. Yet at stake alongside the name is also the attempt to adopt a more neutral position in relation to the connotations of the term *world history*. Margolin accepts the formulation of a "*world history of design*" (MARGOLIN 2005, p. 235) despite the teleological trait historically bestowed upon *world history*.

This trait shows up when we recall, for example, the distinction made by Immanuel Kant between *Historie* and *Weltgeschichte* – that is, between empirical history and world history, "which to some extent follows an *a priori* rule" (KANT 2003, p. 53). In his attempt to justify the primacy of the term *world* over *global*, Margolin makes the difficulty in specifying the difference between the two histories evident. In his search for a resolution, he mentiones Oswald Spengler and Arnold Toynbee and introduces a third category, that of *ecumenical history*, "whose aim in writing history is to prophesize and anticipate final ends for humankind" (MARGOLIN 2005, p. 236).

Besides the category of ecumenical history, Mazlish posits two other categories of comprehensive historical writing, world history and global history. Though all three refer to the history of the world, Mazlish defines 'world history' as a specific category to differentiate it from ecumenical and global approaches to the subject. Unlike Mazlish's broad vision of world history, his conception of global history is limited specifically to tendencies, beginning in the 1970s, that have led to the present situation of globalization […] Mazlish concedes that the definition of world history is vague […]. (MARGOLIN 2005, p. 236)

The passage is not enough to differentiate between world history and ecumenical history. What's more, the term *ecumenical* is not Mazlish's own: *oikouméne* was a word already used by Herodotus to refer to the world known by Greeks some 400 years before Christ. In this aspect, the Greek historian precedes the use of the world to mean *universal*, *global* or *the world* (CROSSLEY 2008, p. 14-15). Without an unequivocal distinction, the terms *global*, *world*, *ecumenical* and *universal* become interchangeable. Swapping one term for the other, however, has consequences for our understanding.

Despite the nomenclature-related difficulties, world or global history's anchoring point is its methodological principle. As American historian Pamela Kyle Crossley affirms:

> A history department today would not imagine that they could achieve competence in "world," "global," or "universal" history merely by adding more and more historians, each doing the history of a nation or region. […] global history requires a method that is quite different from what is normally used to teach a narrative national or regional history. It is by their methods, more than their facts, that global historians are distinguished from those doing regional or national history. (CROSSLEY, p. 2-3)

It becomes evident that a world history of design is not the accrual of national or regional histories. This does not mean that local histories do not play a decisive role in a wider vision of design. As researchers Grace Lees-Maffei and Kjetil Fallan remind us, the category of nation-state is still useful for research on the culture of design. Indeed, this research takes shape at the intersection between the national and the global (LEES-MAFFEI and FALLAN 2016, 5). Lees-Maffei and Fallan conclude that "while design might be more global than ever before, it is still conditioned by, and in turn informs, its global regional, national and local contexts at once" (1). In this way, the authors reaffirm the importance of the comparative method for the understanding of national histories of design (12).

With regards to the characteristic method of world or global histories as well, they agree with the above observations of Adamson, Riello e Teasley.

> Global design history is not a topic but a methodology, one that acknowledges that design as a practice and product exists wherever there is human activity […] and recognizes the importance of writing histories that introduce the multi-sited and various nature of design practices. Global design history begins from the conviction that knowledge is always fragmentary, partial and provisional […]

Arcos Design. Rio de Janeiro, v. 16, n. 2, Julho 2023, pp. 480-496.

492

> […] In other words, *Global Design History* is emphatically not an attempt to write a new master narrative. (ADAMSON, RIELLO, and TEASLEY, p. 3)

It is with this in mind that we talk of a *world* or *global* history, and not of a *universal* history. Of all of the terms alluded to, *universal* is undoubtedly that which is heaviest with teleological connotations. Derived from the tradition of Judaic Messianism and Christian eschatology, universal history is concerned with uncurtaining the ultimate sense of history. Along these lines, Margolin makes one more critique of Pevsnerian history.

> Pevsner's teleological account of practices that he saw leading up to the Modern Movement is, in its way, a material counterpart of Spengler's or Toynbee's ecumenical history. That is to say, Pevsner had a vision of how the world should be in the future and he marshalled his evidence to support it. (MARGOLIN 2005, p. 236)

5 Final considerations

We hope to help in clarifying the new directions of historical research in design. For all intents and purposes, there is a new design history still in the making. We believe that this history – be it social, world, global or any other – is critically opposed to Pevsnerian history – in other words, to the mere succession of figures and works with apologetic ends.

Moreover, after unveiling the way in which the Pesverian orthodoxy is formed, we must accept the radical contingency of historical processes. Succinctly put, we must remove the pretense of the absolute from ideas, restoring them to the condition of historical phenomena.

Still with regards to orthodoxies, we may dare say that orthodox discourse cannot be fought by way of other normative or totalizing discourses. In situations of effective contraposition to orthodoxy, we find an asymmetry: while orthodoxy condemns all alternatives to its way of thinking, heterodoxy adopts a critical posture in the face of orthodoxy, this acknowledging its existence. Since it does not mimic the dogmatic behavior of orthodoxy, the heterodox position becomes pluralistic. As such, multiple visions flow together in the formation of a heterogeneous epistemological and methodological framework.

That said, we acknowledge the benefit of the divergences regarding the directions being taken by the new design history. We should not try to rectify the fragmentation of historical disciplines. On the contrary, a total history reveals a tendency to see final causes in events. In this regard, the words of Pamela Kyle Crossley on global history seem to us to be right:

> The conundrum that global history has set itself is how to tell a story without a center. It is not certain this can be done. The ultimate global history device, should it be realized, would not be text, or story arc, or an analytical concept. It would more likely be a context spinner, that at one moment can sequence events and statistics from the perspective of a material or device […], or a behavioral concept […] or a natural phenomenon […]. (CROSSLEY, p. 4-5)

Only with an understanding of this "context spinner" can historical research on design be developed. Without the support of an arc of meaning or great historical unity, the researcher is merely left with possible relationships between multiple histories. This multiplicity reflects the multiplicity of problems actually faced by design professionals. Ultimately, this is the factor that encourages researchers in their work. As Dilnot wrote, "[d]esign history arises, in the service of design, as a response to particular practical problems." (DILNOT 1996a, p. 218). The same may be said of Nikolaus Pevsner's initial effort at establishing the foundations of the professional practice. In summary, history is not made in a vacuum, but rather in the midst of present contradictions. It is with this in mind that design historians should remember Lucien Febvre's adage: "No problems, no history."

References

Adamson, Glenn, Giorgio Riello, and Sarah Teasley, eds. 2011. *Global Design History*. Abingdon: Routledge.

Argan, Giulio Carlo. 1992. *Arte moderna*. Translated by Denise Bottmann and Federico Carotti. São Paulo: Companhia das Letras.

Crossley, Pamela Kyle. 2008. *What is Global History?* Cambridge: Polity.

Dilnot, Clive. 1996a. "The State of Design History, Part I: Mapping the Field". In *Design Discourse: History, Theory, Criticism*, edited by Victor Margolin. 5ª ed. Chicago/ London: The University of Chicago Press.

_____. 1996b. "The State of Design History, Part II: Problems and Possibilities". . In *Design Discourse: History, Theory, Criticism*, edited by Victor Margolin. 5ª ed. Chicago/ London: The University of Chicago Press.

Hobsbawm, Eric. 2011. *On History*. London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson. Kindle.

Arcos Design. Rio de Janeiro, v. 16, n. 2, Julho 2023, pp. 480-496.

494

Kant, Immanuel. 2003. "Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Purpose". In *Political Writings*. 2nd edition. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Lees-Maffei, Grace, and Kjetil Fallan. 2016. *Designing Worlds: National Design Histories in an Age of Globalization*. New York: Berghahn Books.

Lichtman, Sarah A. 2009. "Reconsidering the History of Design Survey". *Journal of Design History*, vol. 22, no. 4.

Margolin, Victor. 2002. "Design History and Design Studies". In *The politics of the Artificial: Essays on Design and Design Studies*. Chicago, London: The University of Chicago Press.

_____. 2004. "The product Milieu and Social Action". In *Discovering Design: Explorations in Design Studies*, edited by Richard Buchanan and Victor Margolin. 5th ed. Chicago, London: The University of Chicago Press.

_____. 2005. "A World History of Design and the History of the World". *Journal of Design History*, vol. 18, no. 3.

_____. 2009. "Design in History". *Design Issues*, vol. 25, no. 2.

Pevsner, Nikolaus. 2011. *Pioneers of Modern Design: From William Morris to Walter Gropius*. Bath: Palazzo.

Como referenciar

KAIZER, Felipe. After Pevsner: problems of a new design history. **Arcos Design**, Rio de Janeiro, v. 16, n. 2, pp. 480-496, jul./2023. Disponível em: https://www.e-publicacoes.uerj.br/index.php/arcosdesign.