

The suggestion for an article based on a personal view of the past ten years in design education came at an opportune moment. Having just completed work on the *Design in General Education* project at the Royal College of Art, and having just begun to research a new exhibition – on the evolution of engineering drawing – for the Welsh Arts Council, I was in the right frame of mind to look again at my motivations. Certainly with educational activities, a design practice and historical research all going on at the same time, the pattern did not immediately suggest coherence. It didn't even look well designed! How is it that I find no difficulty in maintaining a continuing commitment to, for example, art and design or fashion and technology, when to many people, particularly perhaps to specialist subject teachers, they obviously seem poles apart? I tried to give an answer to this rather sharp question in talks I gave to arts teachers at the ILEA's Cockpit Theatre in London and to design teachers at the NADE Conference at Eaton Hall in Retford. The present article is based on an expansion of those talks.

What I am setting out to do is to restate some of those arguments in favour of design education that have struck me as being truly fundamental. To put this into the form of a personal narrative means going back twenty rather than ten years but I hope the longer perspective will be useful. What I find particularly interesting is that the arguments which seemed powerful then still seem powerful now. It still appears to me that in order to understand and evaluate the content and methods of design education we have first to understand and evaluate the radical changes which have transformed communication and construction and the attitudes of people to them. Once this has been done, there are likely to be a great variety of valid ways of bringing such concerns into the forum of general education.

I was one of those students who went to art school quite soon after the end of the second world war. I was thus in one of the first such groups to contain substantial numbers of working and lower middle class people. I also went at the moment when youth became important in commerce and culture. It is hardly surprising, therefore, that it was contacts across old and entrenched class barriers and the impact of mass culture that made the most effective first dents in my ideas about art, craft, design and culture. They affected my attitude towards the idea that culture was something which necessarily travelled only in one direction. Together with the rest of my generation, I began to question whether or not painting and sculpture really did deserve their exalted position. We begin to ask what else might be vivid and significant.

It simply was not possible for us to accept that a study of architectural styles, art movements and schools of industrial design would reveal the real nature of the present and its cultural problems. We asked where, in such a scheme, could be fitted the artefacts which actually provided the majority of us with our visual experience? We meant city streets,

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suburban gardens, railway trains, aircraft, comic books, posters and cartoon films. Where could be fitted the powerful media that continued to influence our behaviour and taste? We meant photography, printing, cinema and television. We looked for a context in which these things would be valued and evaluated.

In the circumstances, the appearance of pop art was no accident. Pop art was really an attempt to bring the style and content of painting and sculpture into some kind of realistic contact with the day-to-day experiences of the artists. It embodied those aspects of contemporary material culture which excited them, and which seemed to give opportunities for the creation of works of art.

In a letter to the architects, Alison and Peter Smithson, written in 1957, Richard Hamilton set out the criteria necessary for pop art. These were that it should be:

Popular	(designed for a mass audience)
Transient	(short-term solution)
Expendable	(easily forgotten)
Low Cost	
Mass Produced	
Young	(aimed at youth)
Witty	
Sexy	
Gimmicky	
Glamorous	
Big Business	

Hamilton was proposing that artists should abide by these criteria, but the criteria themselves came from his analysis of the mass media and mass production. They were a brilliant characterisation of some of its most extraordinary products. But I found myself wondering: where had these criteria come from? how had they developed? why was it that they were in such complete opposition to the traditional criteria which had evolved since the Renaissance?

As I think we can all now recognise, pop art turned out to embody a very partial view of twentieth century style. Behind its glamour there were other traditions, equally ignored by conventional criticism, but just as vivid in people's lives. In 1957, when Hamilton was writing, London still presented the face of a nineteenth century city: the great provincial centres even more so. Similar towns covered Europe and housed the American industrial revolution. These were the dark places of ugliness and exploitation which Lewis Mumford castigated collectively as Coketown. He called them insensate, and could see no good in them. To me they were endlessly fascinating.

My long walks all over London at this time were part of a struggle to understand something important about industrial cities which my own class background prevented me from seeing. I grasped easily that the environment could affect people: what I recognised much less clearly was that they in their turn could affect it, and that culturally and socially this was often the more decisive influence. Nothing had prepared me for the idea that the working class themselves had, in response to social and economic pressures, created a worthwhile culture of their own.

In Britain, in 1957, this was amazingly unknown territory. Francis Klingender's *Art and the Industrial Revolution* had already appeared (in 1947) but it was not yet properly recognised as a great pioneering work. In any case, it presented a view of how painting and sculpture reacted to the industrial revolution, not of how popular art developed in the new urban and industrial world. Its subject matter was revolutionary: for example, it once again joined together technology and culture; but its perspective was essentially conservative. It continued to give to painters, sculptors, engineers and scientists, the aristocratic role of being the originators of culture. What I was trying to understand was the part that the mass of people could play, and had played, in the development and nature of the modern world.

Although there was a coherent tradition of concern and reporting going right back to Mayhew's book on early industrial London and beyond, its significance, in the fifties, appeared faded. There was no real sense of an unfolding cultural continuity with those aspects of the past. The emphasis of reform had shifted from the great social issues of the post-war Labour Government to the problems of peace and nuclear disarmament. With temporary full employment and an expanding economy, there was perhaps the feeling that a good many battles had been won, and with that went, apparently, a lack of interest in the cultural milieu where the political war over industrialisation had been fought.

So this was a rather unpromising background. But for me, the really significant thing about 1957, was the appearance of Richard Hoggart's book *The Uses of Literacy*. Methodologically the book was inspiring. Perhaps for the first time in contemporary criticism the function of art was looked at through the eyes and experience of the 'consumer'. This was an approach well adapted to fit Hoggart's material,

and one of its most dramatic effects was to open up for discussion a vast new area of production that had previously been beyond the critical pale. Here there was an obvious parallel with the achievements of pop art, but Hoggart was far more catholic in understanding, and quite unfettered by pop art's concern with one small facet of twentieth century style. It was at this point that I was able to decide that my interest lay less in using popular imagery as the subject matter for works of art, than in trying to understand the sources and nature of popular imagery itself.

From 1963, there was a change of emphasis. For a while I was working for the Society of Industrial Artists and Designers; then I became involved – at Hornsey – in the development of design studies as a part of general education; and later still I worked on the methods for articulating complex design problems like those involved in hospital building research and evaluation. In each of these situations I was much concerned with the 'correct' understanding of design.

It began to be clear that the discipline was frequently being interpreted in the wrong terms. Although it was true that design schools had developed from art schools, the nature of the connection between art and design appeared less and less coherent in the courses and teaching provided by these institutions. Both kinds of course seemed to be missing what for me had become the key issue – that the really important context for both was provided by the impact of technology. The social and economic upheavals brought about by the industrial revolution towered above every other consideration. Today this seems even more clear, and far more urgent. It was this approach that I began to attempt to develop in my design practice and in education.

Inevitably I began to be interested in the developing work of those people who called themselves 'design methodologists' and who concerned themselves principally with the concepts and techniques used in designing. I was impressed by the analysis that Christopher Alexander applied to assumptions in architecture: by the work of Bruce Archer's research unit at the Royal College of Art; and by Christopher Jones who was then working at the University of Manchester Institute of Science and Technology.

All through the sixties, Jones hammered away at the inadequacy of our ideas about designing. He pointed to their lack of realism. He said that they were a failure. He showed how they excluded the user from serious consideration and participation. Significantly, he concentrated on a set of problems that had little to do with the normal content of 'design appreciation' and nothing at all to do with conventional art criticism. Most important of all, he showed, again and again, that design problems were at least as much social and ethical as they were aesthetic or technical.

There seemed to me to be a clear chain of reasoning linking the new methods – which were

intended to be rational and accessible – to the demand for participation in design decision making, and from that to the development of design activity in schools.

By about 1968, I began to think that there was the possibility that a synthesis could be made between 'Hoggart' style cultural analysis and the new design approaches. After all, both put a new emphasis on the importance of the consumer or user. It was an important possibility because I had begun to see that, in a society based on mass production, design was at least as important culturally as it was physically. It embodied and communicated ideas quite as much as it provided functions and services.

It was the Welsh Arts Council that gave the opportunity for the approach to be tried out. Peter Jones, the Director for Art, and the Art Committee, supported a series of four exhibitions on the theme of *Art and Society*. The exhibitions had quite obvious links with the approach that Hoggart had initiated in *The Uses of Literacy*. They fully accepted a sociological concept of culture; they assumed that politics and economics were important in any understanding of art; and they looked at art in terms of its use. A good deal of 'art' they included – perhaps the majority of it – was actually the result of design activities of various kinds.

This is how I attempted to justify the method of presentation in a recent book¹ based on the series:

It is conspicuous that we have no valid model for understanding the workings of our own culture. (My purpose) ... is to try to see why this is, and to suggest – in primitive form – a few of the types of analysis that may be helpful in improving the situation ...

The most obvious and immediate difficulty lies in the tenor and orientation of traditional criticism. Art critics of all kinds are still most at home in discussing a situation in which individual artists are trying to innovate on the basis of a pre-existing body of work. Even film critics take up a position of this kind, in direct defiance of the realities of the medium they are evaluating. All this accords with the idea – born in the Renaissance – of the artist as a promethean hero able to see in a way radically different from other men. It is also an idea with its roots in an aristocratic concept of culture ...

(But) the visual arts have been ... involved in the industrial revolution. Engineers and designers have taken over, from artist/architects like Palladio or Wren, the task of providing the world with everyday surroundings, and their assumptions and methods are totally different from those of traditional building and craftsmanship. A concern with housing as a social responsibility, for example, is not an absolute novelty, but what is new is the entwining of aesthetic vision with public cost, social policy and bureaucratic management.

In the same sense, traditional criticism breaks

down completely if it is used as a yardstick to measure cinema, or television or the design of a newspaper like the Daily Mirror. In these media, conglomerate commercial forces are at work on items produced by groups of people for mass consumption. In art, the means of production and dissemination are unparalleled ...

The point at issue is one of method. Quite difficult changes of emphasis are involved. Traditional criticism springs from an attempt, first, to define art and the goals of art, and then to arrange individual artists or schools in a coherent scheme around the central definition. In such a picture the audience, and its social conditions or religious beliefs, do not assume any great importance because the whole aim of the criticism is to pinpoint what the work 'really' means and to fix this meaning permanently into the hierarchy of the critical structure. In this interpretation, the problem of art remains static. In the new picture, the constant redrawing of the problem and its ingredients are of the essence. Also, the audience, in a time of ideological and technological change, assumes an active rather than a passive role in determining the meaning and life of any particular work.

During the past three or four years I have been once again much concerned with design education, but also, more and more with the concept of public participation in relation to design. The interaction of these two interests has crystallised in my mind two disturbing aspects of design as practiced since 1945. First, that the design professions have failed to find effective means of making real whatever social idealism has fired society in the past thirty crucial years. And, second, that because of its origins and present nature, design is peculiarly impervious to the very idea of participation. For educationists these facts provide a tremendous challenge.

There is not space here to build up the argument which supports this thesis in any depth. But this is how I see the framework in which the designer operates and by which his freedom of action is constrained:²

But then, who is it that decides what it is that designers design? Obviously, it is the same people who, almost without meaning to, are making the decisions that lead to work being the boring drudgery that it so often is. It is only those with economic or political power who have access to the skills that designers can put at their disposal. A society based on the division of labour is the perfect milieu for the professional. The modern industrial world provides the ideal platform on which the designer can perform as a successful specialist. In such a setting, design is naturally aligned with technology and the behavioural sciences. It is seen essentially as an operational means of making changes. The designer appears as an efficient problem solver resolving the world's

1. Baynes, Ken. *Art in Society*. London, Lund Humphries.

2. Baynes, Ken. *About Design*. London, the Design Council.

environmental ills. His context, like that of business or economics or psychiatry, is the busy world of making and doing. The ethics involved are those of intervention and control; of more or less benign paternalism.

I find that I have to concentrate on this background of social change because it is the motive power that has given substance and meaning to my own interest in design education. I do not believe that you can, in any real sense, wrench such an activity free from its society. For me, the social context comes first. It is the given resource with which we have to work.

So it is the background of industrialisation, the pressure of change, the problem of technology, the moral dilemmas peculiar to mass democracy that have led me to believe that an experience of design is an essential part of general education. But I also believe that any relevant form of art or craft education will have to cope with the same background in one way or another, the more so because such a vast range of popular imagery is now produced in ways which are more like design than art and because traditional craft is no longer the principal means by which man provides for his physical and environmental needs. Design has not invalidated art or craft, but its methods now hold the centre of the stage in construction and communication. For me, in any case, the whole distinction is hopelessly blurred and I see much more clearly the problem that art, craft and design share. That is: how to cope with the transformation of culture by technology and the role of the individual in mass society.

It seems to me that two great cataclysms have swept over society, obliterating and destroying the accepted meanings of words like art, culture, craft and design. These are: the continuing struggle for a more free and egalitarian society; and the invasion by technology of every form of production, communication and entertainment. Although these two forces have sometimes pulled in the same direction, they do also have inbuilt and maybe absolute antipathies. In particular, technological industry demands centralisation and planning, while freedom and equality demand decentralisation and the sharing of power.

For teachers in the future these perspectives are likely to prove crucial. Whatever anyone else concerned with art, design, culture and craft may think or do, those of us in education have to confront some of the harshness of contemporary society. In particular, I think, we have to take seriously the dilemma posed to designers and teachers alike by the alienating, senseless and boring character of much present-day industrial work. This is something which William Morris saw clearly but here I would like to quote briefly from E.F. Shumacher, author of *Small is Beautiful*:

It might be said that it is the ideal of the employer to have production without employees, and the ideal of the employee to have income

without work. The question is: can the pursuit of these two ideals, undertaken with the marvellous ingenuity of modern science and technology, lead to anything but total alienation and final breakdown?

And it is the job of teachers to prepare children to adapt to such a world or to hope that a saner, more articulate generation may want to change it? Because design is about the future and about the role of technology in the future, this is a dilemma which teachers of art, craft and design will have to face. Designers will have to face it too. I believe that the attempt to find a workable answer will be at the top of the design education agenda for the *next* twenty years and that inevitably the attempt to find an answer will bring design education from the periphery of educational debate to the centre.