

Book Reviews

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World History of Design (2 volume set), by Victor Margolin (London: Bloomsbury, 2015), ISBN 9781472569288; Vol. 1, 591 pages; Vol. 2, 947 pages; illustrated, hardcover (2 vols. \$695/£450).

Victor Margolin's *World History of Design* comprises two substantial volumes collectively containing 716 black and white illustrations and 161 color ones. Volume 1 is titled "Prehistoric Times to World War I," and Volume 2 is titled "World War I to World War II." The two volumes overlap, with the final three chapters of Volume 1 dealing with the period from 1900 to 1918, and the first chapter of Volume 2 examining design in the United States from 1905 to 1928. A third volume also is planned, to result in a trilogy. While pre-history, by definition, suffers from a lack of sources, the same cannot be said of the period between the "earliest civilizations" and WWI. Therefore, to understand why a 40-year period should occupy almost twice the number of pages as a period of thousands of years requires some knowledge of design history and some knowledge of the *World History of Design's* author.

Design historians have tended to adopt the period in which design and manufacture separated as the starting point for the history of design as a discrete activity. Work in design history has therefore extended back as far as the eighteenth, seventeenth, and sixteenth centuries, but it rarely goes much further. This perspective is changing, however. Just as design historians have extended the field geographically, with new research into non-Western histories of design and new approaches to the existing terrain, so also have they worked to extend the field temporally, with research into the early modern and medieval periods (e.g., the Renaissance and Early Modern Masters Degree at the Victoria and Albert Museum and Royal College of Art, London). This latter extension has been aided by the recent enthusiasm for material culture as source material among historians. However, design historical examinations of the pre-industrial period are still emerging, which helps to explain the geographical and temporal range of Margolin's

World History. Indeed, Margolin contends, with reference to Fernand Braudel, that an extended chronology for the history of design is necessary as a way of recognizing design and its histories in certain non-Western contexts. In his general introduction, Margolin writes of the need to meet the methodological challenge of his project with a pluralistic definition of design. If design is understood principally as a product of industry, then the regions that have been industrialized later, or in a way that does not reflect the Western pattern, are at risk of being seen as having no history. Therefore, design historians have to reconceptualize their models of design in pursuing global design history.

Another key to understanding the apparently disproportionate emphasis on the period 1905–1945 resides in Margolin's own scholarly preoccupations, as exemplified in his edited book, *Propaganda: The Art of Persuasion, WWII* (1976) and his PhD dissertation, "The Transformation of Vision: Alexander Rodchenko, El Lissitzky, and László Moholy-Nagy as Graphic Designers, 1917–1933" (1981), published in 1997 as *The Struggle for Utopia: Rodchenko, Lissitzky, Moholy-Nagy, 1917–1946*. While parts of Volume 1 examine a period largely outside of Margolin's expertise, the time period studied in Volume 2 sits firmly within his specialist knowledge. Margolin refers to his *World History of Design* as "a personal excursus"; it is likely to be regarded as his legacy project, the big book by which he will be remembered.

Why would anyone set out singlehandedly to write a history of design that extends the usual time-scale bounded by the period of industrialization back to prehistory *and* that extends the usual single-nation or regional studies to encompass design around the globe? I question the premise not because the book is not needed—indeed, it is a work welcomed for its chronological and geographical ambition—but rather because, having decided that such a wide-ranging book should exist, would not the logical next step have been to compile an editorial team and a phalanx of contributors? As the design history survey has expanded from the relatively focused early textbooks to this century's more encompassing ones, so their authorship has become a more freighted question. The benefits of a work by a single author, such as that under review, or David

Raizman's *History of Modern Design* (second edition 2010), include a consistent voice and narrative continuity. These benefits must be set against the benefits of a group effort, such as Pat Kirkham and Susan Weber's edited *History of Design: Decorative Arts and Material Culture, 1400–2000* (2013), which might be summarized as providing expertise and greater evenness of coverage. In choosing the former approach, Margolin sought to apply the knowledge he has developed over a career examining design and its histories and, furthermore, to benefit intellectually from his enormous quest. It presents a formidable challenge.

In evaluating Margolin's book, this reviewer meets several challenges of her own. Putting aside the relatively minor challenge of reviewing in *Design Issues* a key work by one of this journal's founding editors (Margolin remains on the editorial board a generation later), a second challenge is found in the provisional status of any review of the first two volumes of a trilogy. As I read Volumes 1 and 2, and wrote this review, I continually wondered about what the third volume will say. Perhaps the arrival of Volume 3 will occasion another round of book reviews, this time covering the entire trilogy. Furthermore I am conscious that my mode of reading for the purposes of review is at odds with the approach to the text that its intended readers will be likely to take. Although examining the text as a whole would benefit readers, they are less likely to read from cover to cover and instead will dip in to the text to follow up on specific leads, chase particular questions, and seek specific contexts. After all, the book is priced for the library market at \$695/£450—a cost that will deter most individual buyers—which might cause *World History of Design* to be seen as a reference book rather than a loan item. Finally, a conscientious reviewer must humbly recognize her or his inadequacy for the task: How can one reviewer judge the competence of this work in representing the history of design with such spatial and temporal breadth?

My answer is to ask another question: How might this text be useful to the readers of *Design Issues*? *World History of Design* can certainly be used in teaching, perhaps more than in research, because it is most valuable as an introductory resource, particularly when used alongside other similar

resources. Teachers seeking to grow their curricula both geographically and temporally will find it particularly useful. Because the volumes (and especially Volume 1) are very clearly organized in an arrangement that manages to be simultaneously chronological and geographical, asking questions of them is easy, such as "What was happening elsewhere at the time addressed in my lecture?" or "What happened in the period before the one that my teaching session addresses?" and to integrate the findings accordingly. For instance, students and teachers alike might read the comprehensive survey of "The Age of Exhibitions: Great Britain" and seek more international contexts in the following chapters, including "The Age of Exhibitions: Europe Outside Great Britain," "The United States 1840–1900," "Canada, Australia, and New Zealand 1300–1900," and "Colonies and Pre-Industrial Nations in Asia and Africa." Synthetic chapters, such as "Protoindustrialization in Diverse Regions 1750–1900," assist in this task. This arrangement offers a major benefit.

Volume 2, which deals with a much shorter period, has a principally geographical arrangement, so that readers interested in German design, for example, can read both Chapter 20, "Weimar Germany 1918–1933" and Chapter 27, "Italy, Germany, the Soviet Union, and Portugal 1922–1940" to trace the historical development of German design and to understand it within its comparative context. Although explicit comparisons are provided in these two chapters covering Germany, the reader also can examine further comparative contexts in the chapter, "Western and Southern Europe 1900–1939," which examines design of the period in the Netherlands, Belgium, and Switzerland, Spain and Greece.

This *World History of Design* also might be useful as a bibliographic resource. The general introduction emphasizes the breadth of source material. Each chapter closes with a "bibliographic essay" (ranging from a short paragraph to longer essays) and bibliographic listings divided according to medium (books, chapters, articles, and Internet). Sometimes the listings are very concise: The bibliographic essay for Chapter 2 of the first volume ("The Earliest Civilizations 7000 BCE–900 BCE") is simply a short paragraph that refers to Wikipedia and Encyclopaedia Britannica Online, as well as a handful of books and

articles. Elsewhere, the lists of resources identified are much more extensive—for example, Chapter 28 of Volume 2 (“The United States 1917–1941”) offers a bibliographic essay and bibliography that is 19 pages long. Thus, prospective users of the bibliographies should note the variations in their extent and comprehensiveness and should also attend to the publication dates of the sources listed. For example, Chapter 1 makes use of no resources published after 2000, while subsequent chapters list books published in the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s alongside more recent material. Questions were raised for this reviewer as to whether such “classics” might have been eclipsed by subsequently published authoritative sources. For example, of the 16 items in the bibliography for Chapter 3, only 2 were published in the twenty-first century. Although newer works do not always supersede the value of older ones, this reviewer finds a reasonable representation of newer works paramount in generating a helpful bibliography. Margolin might have done more signposting in this monumental text to flag key facts and concepts for each chapter, and to provide cross-references to others. In addition, although the volumes offer much to inform the development of a global history of design and a postcolonial design history (e.g., the way in which weapon design facilitated colonial subjugation), the emphasis is on the facts about who designed what and where, rather than on the overarching themes that have animated design history in recent decades, such as mobility and domesticity, which is mentioned both in relation to the Commonwealth countries—Canada, Australia, and New Zealand (Chapter 31)—and obliquely via discussions of domestic goods in Germany, France, and the United States.

However, I have never found that commenting on what is not included in such compendious texts to be a useful critical approach. In the small space allotted to this review, I cannot respond more than I already have to individual chapters. However, the work as a whole delivers sound syntheses of existing scholarship, and the format enables Margolin to make connections between the design of one place and time, and another. *World History of Design* should be accepted as a success on its own terms.

Kalle Lyytinen

Unrelenting Innovation: How to Build a Culture for Market Dominance by Gerard J. Tellis (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2013), ISBN 978111835 2403; 332 pages, illustrated, hard/softcover, \$26.95.

Thousands of books and articles have been written about innovation over the past two decades. Google search for “innovation” gives about 407 million search results while “management” gives about 2.5 billion and “design” about 4.460 billion. Design still dominates management, and they both dominate innovation, but innovation still receives a respectful number. The number of articles and interest in innovation also has been increasing as technological change has accelerated, globalization has advanced, and changes in consumer preferences have shifted fast, or as the legitimacy and efficiency of governments have become increasingly questioned. To survive, managers, technology advocates, designers, and consumers believe they must come up with something significantly new and different at a faster pace—and thus we witness the quest for unrelenting innovation, as Gerard J. Tellis’ book is titled.

Given the flood of articles and books on innovation—which anybody can witness just by looking at the book stands dedicated to business and management topics in airports—the first question we might ask is why anyone should read Tellis’ book, instead of the many others available. My answer to this question is that the book is worth reading, and it deserves to be read by design and management scholars. As are the majority of books dedicated to managers, this one is well written and easy going, so that one can easily read it over a weekend without much intellectual effort. In this regard it probably is little better than many of the other books in the same genre. Still, readability, or lack of it, is not a real deal breaker for my choice of texts. Many times books written about innovation are worth reading because they offer something truly new or innovative (pun intended). (Note that most books of this type make such claims but only very few actually deliver!) Examples of books that do deliver are Rogers’s *Diffusion of*