GLOBAL DESIGN HISTORY

Edited by Glenn Adamson, Giorgio Riello and Sarah Teasley

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Globalism is often discussed using abstract terms, such as 'networks' or 'flows' and usually in relation to recent history. *Global Design History* moves us past this limited view of globalism, broadening our sense of this key term in history and theory.

Individual chapters focus our attention on objects, and the stories they can tell us about cultural interactions on a global scale. They place these concrete things into contexts, such as trade, empire, mediation, and various forms of design practice. Among the varied topics included are:

- the global underpinnings of Renaissance material culture
- the trade of Indian cottons in the eighteenth century
- the Japanese tea ceremony as a case of 'import substitution'
- German design in the context of empire
- handcrafted modernist furniture in Turkey
- Australian fashions employing 'ethnic' motifs
- an experimental UK–Ghanaian design partnership
- Chinese social networking websites
- the international circulation of contemporary architects.

Featuring work from leading design historians and specialists in related disciplines, each chapter is paired with a response, designed to expand the discussion and test the methodologies on offer. An extensive bibliography and resource guide will also aid further research, providing students in particular with a user-friendly model for approaches to global design.

Global Design History will be useful for academics, researchers, upper-level undergraduate and postgraduate students in design history, the history of art and architecture and related subjects such as anthropology, craft studies and cultural geography.

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PREFACE

This volume, which addresses the phenomenon of global interaction in design and history, is itself a product of such interaction. The project had its roots in two sites: the first, a scholarly network collaboratively organized by the University of Warwick, the Victoria and Albert Museum (V&A), and the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford, under the title 'Global Arts'. With funding from the Arts and Humanities Research Council, this series of seminars brought together curators and academics to discuss globalism and material culture in the early modern period.

As is often the case when academics meet to discuss new research horizons, these discussions led naturally to the prospect of a book. It was clear, however, that such an undertaking would need to be extended. It would need to come right up to the present day, and would need to encompass the work of a wider community of scholars. At this point, the project in the UK converged with 'Towards a History of Design in the Global Economy', an exploratory research project focusing on modern and contemporary design and architecture funded by the Florence H. and Eugene E. Myers Charitable Trust Fund at Northwestern University. Events organized at the V&A and the Royal College of Art laid further groundwork for the volume, while the Design History Society generously offered to act as the book's primary sponsor. The Alice Kaplan Institute for the Humanities at Northwestern University provided further support.

The course in the History of Design at the Royal College of Art, run collaboratively with the V&A, has been an ideal base of operations for two of the book's editors. This course is the leading programme in the subject area, and its recent addition of a specialism in Asian Design History (under the leadership of Dr. Christine M. E. Guth) has been an important context for the project. Similarly, it would be impossible to imagine this volume without the support of the Global History and Culture Centre at the University of Warwick, a pioneering undertaking to broaden the methodology of the study of globalism.

The editors would also like to acknowledge the generosity of the contributors to this volume, who have been unstinting with their time, efforts, and expertise. They have allowed their work to be paired up into a call-and-response structure, which makes for good reading but also (potentially) nervousness for the authors involved. We thank them all for entering into the project's spirit of debate and collaboration.

Elizabeth Bisley, a graduate of the RCA/V&A course, ably provided research support for the bibliography and resource guide that appear at the back of this volume. Like everything else about this book, and indeed the project of global design history itself, these are to be taken as indicative rather than comprehensive, and an invitation to further research.

INTRODUCTION

Towards global design history

Sarah Teasley, Giorgio Riello and Glenn Adamson

The past decade has seen an explosion in discourse on 'the global' as a condition, an approach and sometimes a problem. Most visibly, the impact of economic and manufacturing globalization appears daily through the food we consume, the products we buy, and the news that we watch. Media coverage spectacularizes both global trade and anti-globalization activism; in the meantime, the sheer volume of images and products now literally 'beamed' into our daily lives inures us to both globalization's implications and the anti-globalization movement's rhetoric. Simply put, the global has become commonplace.

This double condition – in which people are at once acutely located in global networks yet increasingly dulled to the implications – has shaped the way we both build new networks and respond to changes in existing ones. Thus, while such global scares as terrorism, financial collapse and pandemics remind us precisely how interconnected we have become, and flows of people, information, capital and goods across national and geographical borders accelerate, we see attempts to block movement through immigration controls, tariffs and other trade barriers, browser-blocking software and stricter controls on banking transactions. Within the design world, offshore manufacturing, digital design and manufacturing technologies and automated distribution systems have meant the intensification of transnationally-travelling images and objects, from the latest trends in high-end footwear and avant-garde museum architecture to engine parts, oranges and the lowly kitchen sponge.

This condition inevitably raises political issues: is such global connectivity desirable, even ethical? What kind of system might best manage global flows? Should we privilege optimal efficiency or human rights, and are these two goals inseparable or mutually incompatible? And to what extent can or even should we attempt to design and control the parameters of global interactions? Arguably, right-wing economic free market ideologies and left-wing arguments for market controls might be understood as forms of design in their own right. An explicit assessment of the

politics of the global is not the principal goal of this volume, but each contributor addresses the political implications of design's imbrication in global networks, either directly or indirectly.

As transnational flows become even more recognizably present within daily life, scholars have paid increased attention not only to the politics of globalization, but its other registers as well. Global history has become a recognized area of study, with dedicated journals and research centres. Geographers have been quick to map its effects, and anthropologists and sociologists too have focused their attention on such topics as migrant populations and the impact of global economic and information networks on local life. In design history, the 'global turn' has largely taken the form of an expanded geography, both in topics researched by design historians and in the sites of design historical practice. 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, by expanding the field of vision to include design as it is practised and consumed around the world. Modernist design history's triumphalist narrative of progress emanating from industrializing Europe after 1850 is simply out of date.

One prominent example of this approach in action has been the International Committee on Design History and Studies (ICDHS), a biannual meeting of design historians, theoreticians and practitioners concerned with making connections between design historical work in different national, regional and linguistic communities, and recognizing the multiple sites at which this work is done. The ICDHS first convened in 1999 in Barcelona, and has since met in Havana, Istanbul, Guadalajara, Helsinki, Osaka and Brussels, with participants from five continents. As befits such an international gathering, ICHDS meetings address 'world' themes such as peripheries and metropoles, the rewriting of narratives, and the cartography of design, and have generated new scholarship on what such an expanded and – some would argue – more accurate and even ethical history of design should do.

We should be careful, however: 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, engaging with the nation as a basic unit and then transcending it, 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, as in Anne Gerritsen's essay in this volume, or movement within a particular region as embedded in larger networks, as in Christine Guth's essay.

Is 'the global', then, simply about globalization: about cultural, economic, political and other exchanges and contacts between nations and regions? We are concerned that design history reflects design's appearance around the world, but neither global power networks nor geography itself are necessarily the concern of every chapter in this volume. Similarly, 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. 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, on axes of time as well as space, 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, and only comes into its own through the unexpected challenges, confirmations, elaborations and unsettlings that result from encounter. Such a stance is imperative, we feel, particularly for students now adopting the methods they will use to understand the world through their own research.

Far from an overarching narrative, then, global design history is a sited approach that recognizes the multiplicities and fragmented condition in which we experience and enact design, as part of being in the world. It is the recognition of inter-connectivity, of situation within networks, often of asymmetrical power and exchange. And it can only be written through collaboration. In other words, *Global Design History* is emphatically not an attempt to write a new master narrative. Rather, this book asks three interrelated questions: what might an awareness of design contribute to global history? What might an awareness of the global contribute to the history of design, and to the practice of design itself? And how might increased attention to the global nuances of design practice today challenge and advance the practice of its history?

Models

The contributions included in this volume show the wealth and diversity of focused studies within the developing field of global design history. Our contributors borrow approaches from the social sciences, in particular economics and sociology, from visual and material culture studies, and from the emerging field of global history in the humanities.

Two approaches to global history have been key in recent debates: connections and comparisons. *Connections* are perhaps the easiest way to understand globalism and processes of globalization. Several contributions in this volume show how connections not only contribute to the exchange, trade and circulation of goods or objects; they are themselves shaped by such material artefacts. This demands a 'centre-less' logic for design history, in which the place/space of creation, and the spirit of the 'pioneer' or creative mind, are sidelined in order to privilege the interactive movement of things and ideas, and the processes of cross-fertilization of taste. One might think about the different meanings assumed by a specific object when moving across cultures; or the power of communication for ideas, images, and concepts concerning material or immaterial products, as illustrated by Michael Golec in the case of the American telephone systems of the 1920s.

Communication is a particularly important concept in design history, most readily theorized in terms of codification and de-codification of design specifications, but also by skills and knowledge of productive processes and ideas about artefacts. As

Gerritsen and Guth make clear in their essays, it is not just a matter of highlighting conceptual and material channels of communication, or of demonstrating how medium affects message and vice versa. As theories of communication make clear, connections often happen in an unstructured manner. They are affected by material and social conditions – a hill is easier to cross than a lake, and a friendly government is preferable to an enemy one. Like our image of history itself, lines of communication are malleable entities that are continuously re-cast. Historians like to talk about 'entanglements' not just to underline the human nature of connections, but also their messiness, complexity and impermanence. Such old-fashioned concepts as 'influence' (a hobby-horse in art historical circles) can be revivified through epidemiological metaphors to explain global processes of conception, success, as well as the phenomena of 'bubbling up', diffusion and 'de-fusion' of taste, fashion and design.

In both its theoretical and practical forms, design has embraced the notion of *networks*. While establishing the importance of tracing the movements and agency of individual actors, network analysis links design to forms of professional organizations influenced by modern media of communication. Network theory helps us to understand how knowledge (of any form, from a decorative pattern or method of weaving to an industrial technique or piece of proprietary software) is transmitted across cultures. Symmetries and asymmetries of information – as economists remind us – account for profound differences in design across the globe, even in the present age of so-called cultural homogeneity. Papers in this volume address these issues in various ways. For example, John V. Maciuika's essay on the global networks of the Deutscher Werkbund shows the making and unmaking of specific forms of design networks supported by forms of political power. Christopher Breward focuses on 'fashion cities' to reflect on the role of individual nodes within a globally networked system.

Many connective historical *narratives* focus on questions of progress or modernization. These may combine economic explanations (trade, production, etc.) with cultural aspects (reception, negotiation, refusal, etc.). Conversely, comparative forms of global/world history focus on differences, discontinuities and fractures. Economic historians have contributed to comparative forms of global history through a decade-long debate over the so-called 'great divergence', the idea that the European economy 'industrialized' and society 'modernized' during the eighteenth century, while other parts of the world did not. Within this narrative, the twenty-first-century industrialization of India and China is seen as part of a process of 'convergence'. While potentially compatible with the Eurocentrism that somewhat ironically haunts global history, the problem of why Europe grew rich and Asia did not in the modern period (and the consequent problem of how and why Asia is becoming as rich as Europe now) is indeed an important question for design history, a discipline that has long considered its subject matter central to processes of economic development. In this volume, the contribution by Victor Margolin on India *vis-à-vis* Europe, and John Styles' look at early English importation of Indian cotton textiles, address issues of comparative development and thoughtfully raise the question of what made European design, innovation and associated economic growth, distinctive.

Comparative methodologies are not widely used in design history. This is surprising if one thinks about the wealth of studies on different nations – both in Europe and also, increasingly, outside the borders of the Western world – that have addressed implicitly transnational topics such as the professionalization of design, the emergence of specific stylistic vocabularies, or the cultural embeddedness of design. The juxtaposition and eventual cross-referencing of existing research is one of the areas of great potential for the study both of design and design history. As Basile Zimmermann's paper analysing online social networks in contemporary China shows, this approach can shed light not only on cultural similarities and differences but also on ideas of 'cultural suitability', attitudes to reproduction and copying. Comparisons also help us in understanding forms of hybridism and the borrowing of conceptual and material language, as Gökhan Karakus and his respondent, Edward S. Cooke, Jr., indicate in their discussion of modernism in Turkey.

So how might design history add to these attempts to model the global? What appears distinctive to the field, when compared to other forms of history, is the materiality of its subject matter: the *object*. Objects are both the outcomes and the conveyors of design. The concept of reification (the process of making real) might appear rather crude and old-fashioned in an age when digital creation and communication seem to be separating creativity from materiality. However, several of the essays included here find in the confined, concrete space of the 'designed object' a way to deal with sometimes bewildering geographies and chronologies. For instance, Marta Ajmar-Wollheim and Luca Molà's analysis of the famous Molino ewer, now preserved at the Victoria and Albert Museum in London, presents it as the product of cross-cultural networks of manufacturing. This is one object that captures in its materiality complex relationships of production, taste and meaning that developed in space from Northern Europe (where the main body of the object was made), to Syria/Egypt (where it was inlaid in silver), and Venice (where it was used by the Molino family).

The aspiration of global design history is not to privilege a special class of 'global design objects', those artefacts that represent processes of globalization better than others do. In fact, objects can only ever be local, but they capture in their material folds processes and ideas that are often super-local. The object is therefore never the final topic of research; it is the methodological tool through which innovative forms of research take shape. In her response to Ajmar-Wollheim and Molà, Dana Leibsohn refers to 'difficult objects' that challenge and disrupt established narratives. Curators refer to 'surviving objects' that testify to events and historical processes that other sources cannot reveal. Other essays in this volume, including Peter McNeil's analysis of the collections of Australian designers Easton Pearson, creatively move from the materiality of artefacts to their linguistic valences, zooming in and out to connect the object with large-scale processes or to contextualize specific historical issues within what we might call 'object-scapes'.

The importance given to objects in design history is perhaps second only to the importance given to *people*. Even more than objects, human beings are space- and time-bound. Gerritsen uses ceramics, their Chinese producers and their cosmopolitan

consumers to highlight the relationship between the local and the global and their mutual influence. Tom Barker and Ashley Hall, in their account of a collaborative project between London- and Accra-based design schools, NGOs and governmental organizations, stress the importance of particular personal actions and relations in shaping the course of the project. Recent global history has given great attention to the role of individuals in the attempt both to connect the micro and the macro, and to better understand agency (that is, the question of who decides what). Processes that might appear impersonal and supra-human in nature can be partly grasped through attending to particular life histories – which may or may not be treated as exceptional. Individuals express agency through objects and their design. A design history with global ambitions cannot ignore the role of consumers, and their attraction to ideas such as the 'exotic', the 'ethnic', 'authenticity' and 'origin'. Nor should consumers' capacity to refuse and negotiate design and artefacts be overlooked. Today, as McNeil makes clear, these phenomena are particularly evident in the field of fashion, where diasporic influences, cosmopolitan ideals, and local stereotypes inform not just the ways in which fashion is represented on catwalks or in magazines, but also the choices of consumers around the world.

This brief discussion of models prompts a further question: in a field of subject matter that is for all practical purposes infinite, what sort of priorities might a global history of design set itself? We have already argued that a large-scale story, which tries to explain everything, is unsuitable to a field whose complexity and nuances should be preserved and safeguarded, even highlighted. One of the current pre-occupations is revisionism. Classic interpretations of design as characterized by the double-breasted straitjacket of modernity and industrialization are already being challenged by global approaches. A half-century ago, in *Pioneers of Modern Design* (1936), Nikolaus Pevsner accepted that design was both 'modern' and quintessentially 'industrial', but by doing so placed it within a history that was both European and Eurocentric. A global perspective seriously questions such assumptions, and the grand narrative of design evolution they imply. Furthermore, it more accurately reflects design's actual situation as a globally always-local practice, thus opening doors for history's participation in the present. In this volume, the concept of design is proved to be useful in the study of periods prior to Pevsner's 'modern', and in places where neither modernity nor industrialization are concepts of much heuristic power. However, we should not see the present 'global-mania' as just an occasion for disciplinary reassessment.

Subjects

Where does global design history belong, then? Not only where it might seem most obvious – along the sailing routes of the East India Company, say, or sweatshops in the so-called 'Third World'. Paradoxically, to be concerned with the global is in some ways to think independently of geography. Global design history is not a matter of studying 'hot spots' of exchange; it demands that all design be understood as implicated in a network of mutually relevant, geographically expansive connections.

It is therefore helpful to think about certain characteristic subjects that act as helpful points of entry to the global. Amongst these, one of the most obvious is *exchange*. By this, we mean the simple movement of things in cultural space. Exchange is a term that can be applied not only to commodities intended for the market, but also tools, images, ideas and prototypes. Under this heading can be placed such diverse subtopics as commercial trade, scientific correspondence, the transplanting of plants and animals, and objects carried during migration (both voluntary and enforced). Design history is a unique way to link these disparate phenomena together. As Guth's essay, amongst others, makes clear, focusing on objects permits us to see exchange as a materialized totality, not limited to particular frameworks such as economics, aesthetics, or technology.

Any instance of exchange finds three key variables at work: value, information, and time. When an object moves across a boundary, its value is invariably re-determined – often increased, sometimes reduced, and certainly altered. (One can even argue that 'boundaries' are little more than lines, legal and otherwise, that mark such shifts.) How objects gain, retain, or lose value is partly determined by the information they might carry. How well can objects be read by those who come into contact with them? This depends very much on the things and people involved, but regardless, translatability is one clear advantage that artefacts have over texts. The content they carry, insofar as it is grounded in matters such as function and materiality, travels more easily than information embedded in written language. This is true for historians as well. Anyone who has tried to study the history of exchange archivally, by examining ships' logs and bills of lading for example, will immediately grasp the usefulness of artefacts. Lists of numbers may represent one facet of the trading experience (a narrow definition of value), but they leave much unsaid. Nor is the historian's viewpoint disconnected from that of the consumer. Much of the way that an object's value and information are assessed within the market, both by the sender and the receiver, is a function of time. When an object is novel within a certain context, it may attain value simply through its newness. But precisely because of that unfamiliarity, it may not successfully transmit useful knowledge. The elapse of time may bring understanding, but perhaps also disregard. Value and information thus have a dynamic relation to one another over time.

Moving beyond the central fact of exchange, we might also consider structures that encourage and shape movement. *Empire* and *tourism* are arguably amongst the most important examples. Both are social systems that pave the way for objects and people to travel. They set things and people into motion, and determine their routes. Both obviously incorporate power relations. In the case of empire, one geographical locale exerts control over its colonies or 'margins', thus defining itself as a 'centre'. Tourism is less clear-cut, and can involve a degree of mutuality (Koreans go to France, and vice versa). But within the experience of any given person, the touristic site is rendered into a curiosity, while 'home' is tacitly rendered normative. Designed objects can mediate this dynamic, amplifying or contesting the flow patterns of empire and tourism: from the classical fragments sold to Grand Tourists in the

eighteenth century, to the 'authentically' crafted curios of the nineteenth, to the protest posters and T-shirts of today.

Then there are design phenomena that incorporate the global within themselves. These are structured in the same geographically encompassing fashion that global design history itself aspires to, and are therefore unusually apt subjects for study. First, there are contexts that claim to represent the world objectively, such as *exhibitions* (notably the 'world's fairs' of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries) and *museums* that aspire to a degree of comprehensiveness. Such institutions are attempts to grasp the world, and it is no surprise that historically they have been intimately intertwined with both empire and tourism. While the two would seem to be roughly analogous – the temporary and permanent versions of a single phenomenon – it is worth noting that exhibitions have tended to be more explicitly ideological, whereas museums cloak themselves in a neutrality or objectivity that is in fact a form of 'path dependency'. If a one-off exhibition can nakedly serve the interests of its sponsors, a permanent collection must in some sense constantly reaffirm its own past premises. It takes on its own logic and life. But exhibitions and museums do have in common the effort to miniaturize or edit the world, so that it can be comprehended. In the process, as Dipti Bhagat argues in her study of South African participation in expositions, they 'perform' the prejudices and objectives of their creators. This explicitly global vision, which may be inspiring or dismaying (or both), makes exhibitions and museums ideal candidates for the study of the design historian.

Without any claim to such objectivity, but equally explicit in their global ambition, are *multinational corporations*. In recent years these entities have achieved such prominence within discussions of globalization (and anti-globalization) that they sometimes seem to define the politics of the subject. In this book, relatively little attention is paid to the subject, except as a backdrop to more small-scale or localized design innovation (as in the chapters by Zimmermann, McNeil and Karakus). This was not intentional on the part of the editors, but it does suggest that the role of companies in determining the course of global design has been somewhat overplayed in popular accounts, and points to the persistent power of objects and personal contact. Nevertheless, there is no denying the power and pervasiveness of corporations, and the degree to which they have reconfigured design's impact on culture. Design historians may contribute to an understanding of these complex and ever-changing entities in at least two areas. First, one might look at the way that corporations consciously deploy design, as Golec does in his contribution to the book. Branding, architecture, and even the dress and deportment of employees, might be analysed either in strategic terms, or alternatively in a deconstructivist mode, as chinks in the armour of frictionless capital. Second, the design historian might look comparatively at zones of corporate influence, studying local variations in consumption of supposedly all-pervasive companies like Coca-Cola, McDonald's, Carrefour, Sony, or Disney.

A final subject for global design history is the *designer* her- or himself. As discussed by Jilly Traganou and Lucia Allais, globetrotting architects – the likes of Zaha Hadid or Rem Koolhaas – have emerged as key cultural brokers for the early twenty-first

century. Koolhaas in particular has made globalization both the subject and mechanism of his practice, writing on Lagos as a city of the future, and designing Beijing's CCTV tower as an emblem of Chinese nationalism. Barker and Hall's account documents the movement of young designers, a less 'glamorous' but equally salient example of designers' travel. The history of individual practitioners who refuse to be pinned down in space is much older than the 'superstar' designer or travelling studio, though. Earlier models of transnational practice can be found in the early modern artists who hopped from court to court, offering their services; craftspeople working in the conditions of a diaspora; designers associated with the military; and couturiers, who began using internationalism as a fashionable calling card in the late nineteenth century. There is no doubt, though, that technology has increased the incidence and ease with which design practice becomes global. After all, even the most rudimentary web page is a global artefact.

Conclusion

Global design history might profitably address many other subjects: the recycling of goods; the influence of television, film and websites on taste; the effect of chain stores in retail environments; and many others. Indeed, there are few subjects within design history that would not profit from a global view. Even the most insular design phenomenon takes its meaning partly from what it excludes. In this sense, the present book offers a range of approaches for analysing the history of design in a global context, not in a spirit of comprehensiveness, but in the hopes of spurring further work. The bibliography of global design history resources – archives, organizations, existing research and the like – included with this book is intended as a further springboard for such research.

The book has a simple structure, based on the principle of scholarly exchange. We offer a series of short case studies by a range of specialist design historians, designers and scholars in related disciplines including anthropology, sociology, art and architectural history. The chronological range is wide, from the early modern period to the present day, and so too is the breadth of subject matter. Essays address the whole gamut of design, from relatively traditional areas such as fashion, architecture and products, to new and emerging fields such as interaction and system design. Each chapter is followed by a short response by a scholar with related (but not identical) expertise, intended to focus key themes, to situate the essay within existing scholarly discussion, and to invite further engagement on the part of the reader. In some cases, we have paired specialists in the same area of the world; more often we have brought together researchers working on similar issues from different geographical and sometimes disciplinary bases. The implication here is that global design history cannot be a solo affair. It requires collaboration. In assembling the book, we sought to include contributors who could reflect knowledgeably on the discipline, as well as the specifics of their chosen topic. This has inevitably and rather ironically led to a tilt towards regions where design history is particularly well-established as an academic discipline and area of scholarly research: Europe and

North America. However, we have tried to reflect perspectives from other locations, and have consciously sought to achieve some breadth of geography in the book's coverage – though we make no claims to even-handedness, much less comprehensiveness, in this respect.

Despite the range and quality that we hope to have achieved in this book, global design history is a practice in its very infancy. And while we hope that anyone interested in design history, global history or design practice in a global context will find the volume useful, we are particularly excited for a response from the next generation of researchers and designers: students who are still forming their intellectual paths, and who might define their careers in other ways than area-specific expertise. The expectations that face these emerging researchers are high. Language study, methodological sophistication, and creative empirical research of a high standard are all absolute requirements. This poses real challenges, both to educators and students. We feel strongly however that the effort is not only worthwhile, but absolutely necessary. Since the 1990s, design history's relevance within the humanities and social sciences has been based primarily on an interest in consumption studies, shared by historians, sociologists, economists, and anthropologists. All of these disciplines are now undergoing their own 'global turns'. As was the case with consumption, design history has a crucial contribution to make in such a context. Design may be only one piece of the big puzzle of global history, but it connects other factors in a uniquely lateral way. Go-between; communicative sign; commodity; weapon; souvenir; tool: an artefact can be all of these things, and more. Design has always been a fluid, global affair. It is now time for historians to use our discipline to reflect this fact, and place our own voices in truly, responsibly global discussions.