

Introduction

As diverse as the articles in this issue may seem, they share a common theme—innovation, which they explore and analyze in different ways. The opening article by Jack Ingram, Elizabeth Shove, and Matthew Watson seeks to broaden the possibilities for thinking about design by considering theories from related fields, notably anthropology and science and technology studies (STS). The authors' focus is on how products enter the social milieu, a process they divide into six categories that range from the acquisition of single new objects to the ways that things become configured into what they call "domains of consumption."

The authors relate their model of product innovation and use to a wide range of scholarly sources, arguing that the role of products in society has been little studied in comparison to the process of designing itself. Their aim is to introduce a general theoretical model of relations between humans and objects rather than account for the complex cultural factors that must be considered in individual situations.

The specifics of two particular cultural situations are the subject of Javier Gimeno Martínez's article on how women designers were invited to contribute to a competition for cooking utensils that Alessi sponsored in Italy and how two female curators organized an exhibition of contemporary furniture in Spain. Martínez complicates more general notions of culture by closely examining the gender politics of the two events. In both cases, women were working in traditionally patriarchal cultures where they made impressive contributions but did not have equal footing with men. Read in relation to the opening article by Ingram, Shove, and Watson, Martínez's account helps us to understand how competitions and exhibitions contribute to a climate that influences the way products are introduced to the market and received by consumers.

Emmanuel Bankole Ojo continues the cultural theme in his discussion of how the design and production of traditional hand woven fabrics called *Aso-oke*, driven by the demands of cultural and economic modernization, are changing in western Nigeria. Ojo describes the shift from a group of local craft cultures, each with its own methods and characteristics, to computer-driven production for international markets. Among the values at stake in this shift is the retention of traditional symbols and motifs within a new process that relies on advanced computerized methods of transferring patterns to cloth.

Whereas Ingram, Shove, and Watson look to anthropology and science and technology studies to enhance and deepen theories of design practice, Jennifer Whyte considers theories of evolution as a way to better understand the development of new products and their social reception. She claims that such theories are better at explaining “longer-term changes across design families” but may be less useful in clarifying “design practices within particular projects.” She makes the point that designers work in the realm of the artificial rather than the natural; hence theories of evolution must be approached cautiously. But she finds precedents in economic and technology theory for adopting concepts from evolution and argues that design too, may benefit from evolutionary theory if it is applied appropriately.

Gökhan Ersan’s close reading of the conflicts behind the introduction of a new emblem for the city of Ankara addresses the debates about modernization in Turkey based on a clash between secular and Islamist ideologies. Ersan skillfully deconstructs the Ankara emblem as he explains why its visual elements carry such a high emotional charge. If Ojo recounts a successful attempt in Nigeria to synthesize traditional and contemporary values in the production of textiles, Ersan, by contrast, describes how the design of a graphic emblem in Turkey can invoke contrasting attitudes towards modernization that are difficult to reconcile.

The theme of innovation is also evident in the document we are publishing in this issue—the introduction and conclusion of Swiss architect Le Corbusier’s 1912 study of German decorative arts. Commissioned to undertake the study by the École d’Art in La Chaux-de-Fonds, his hometown, Le Corbusier analyzed the reasons why the Germans came to terms with industrialization more successfully than the French. He noted the paradox of France’s leadership in the fine arts but argued that the Germans were better organized to create a successful industrial culture.

Robert Swinehart’s review of a small book about Lester Beall portrays his subject as one of the first American graphic designers to adopt the techniques devised by artists and designers of the European avant-garde, while Raiford Guins’ photo essay documents the small mosaics based on cutting-edge video game characters that the French artist known as “Invader” creates at unexpected sites in Los Angeles.

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