

“Fashions of the Future”: Fashion, Gender, and the Professionalization of Industrial Design

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Introduction

“Come to the World’s Fair and go back a Woman of Tomorrow.” This invitation, from American *Vogue* editor Edna Woolman-Chase, was made in a letter addressed to her readers in the February 1939 issue of *Vogue* magazine.¹ The issue, a collaboration between the World’s Fair press department and *Vogue*, was dedicated entirely to the theme of the New York World’s Fair, which would open on April 30, 1939.² It also was the second in a long-running series of “Americana” February issues and consisted of photospreads, fashion editorials, and a striking cover design by artist Witold Gordon, who used images of the Trylon and Perisphere “to make a new crown of Liberty for the World of Tomorrow.”³ Approximately half the issue’s editorial content served to directly promote the Fair’s main exhibitions and spectacles, while the remainder formed a patriotic celebration of American style, taste, and fashion. In this way, American *Vogue* turned toward and represented the “new nationalism” that emerged after the First World War, according to Alison Matthews-David.⁴

“Fashions of the Future” was the leading fashion editorial feature in the magazine, spread across 21 pages, and it constituted a major promotional coup for the Fair and for the individual designers represented in it.⁵ It was the first time *Vogue* had directly addressed industrial design and the role of the industrial designer—a relatively new working identity in a formative stage of professionalization. The feature presented the predictions of nine “important names on the roster of American Industrial Designers.” These designers each submitted a written description of their predictions, which were then interpreted by artist and fashion photographer Anton Bruehl in a striking series of color plates (see Figures 1 and 2). In addition, the designers were afforded generous editorial space to expand on their predictions, alongside a professional “headshot” image and a summary of their professional achievements. The commercial effect of the feature was extended through a *Vogue*/Pathé film (for international distribution), in which models displayed the outfits to the voice of a humorous narrator.⁶ The feature was “performed” in a live show for the public at the

1 Edna Woolman-Chase, “Come to the World’s Fair and Go Back a Woman of Tomorrow,” *Vogue* (February 1, 1939), n.p.

2 The fair ran from April 30, 1939, until October 27, 1940.

3 The “Americana” theme was established in February 1938, to “define a unique, original, American aesthetic identity,” and it became a “solid, continuing tradition” for the magazine, according to Änne Söll. Änne Söll “Pollock in *Vogue*: American Fashion and Avant Garde in Cecil Beaton’s 1951 Photographs,” *Fashion Theory* 13, no. 1 (2009): 34.

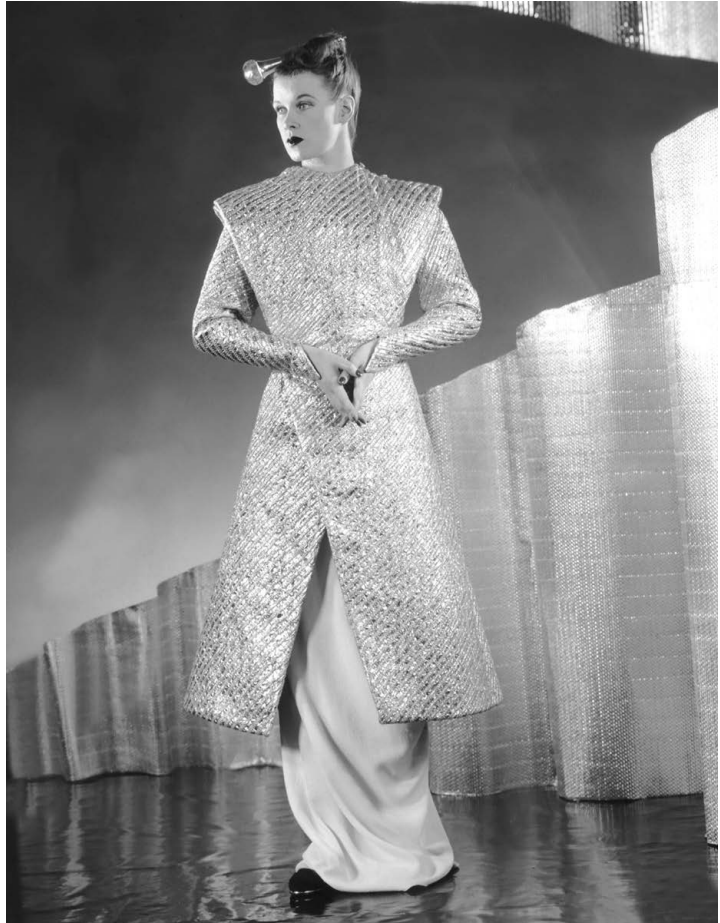
4 Alison Matthews-David, “Vogue’s New World: American Fashionability and the Politics of Style,” *Fashion Theory* 10, no. 1 (2006): 14.

5 “Fashions of the Future” was the title given to the feature on page 71 of the original magazine. However, the table of contents describes the feature in two separate parts: “Designing Men,” on page 71 and “Portfolio of American Designers,” on pages 72–81. These distinct headings do not appear within the article itself. Furthermore, parts of the article also appear to have been assigned different headings within the digitized version of the magazine (e.g., “Radically New Dress System for Future Women Prophesies Donald Deskey,” <https://archive.vogue.com/article/19390201193> (accessed April 23, 2020)). For clarity, I refer to the entire feature in this article as “Fashions of the Future,” and all titles and page numbers have been taken from the original magazine, consulted at the Thomas J. Watson Library, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

6 “Eve AD. 2000,” British Pathé archive, <https://www.britishpathe.com/video/eve-ad-2000> (accessed April 20, 2020).

Figure 1

Original photograph of aluminum foil coat created by Russel Wright. Photo by Anton Bruehl. © *Vogue*, Condé Nast.



Terrace Club, an exclusive restaurant at the Fair. The designers' outfits also were "made up" by department stores, including Saks Fifth Avenue, and put on display in shop windows for the duration of the Fair. This direct collaboration between *Vogue* and U.S. retail underscores the fashion magazine's direct function as a cultural agent in the consumer economy.⁷

The relationship between fashion and industrial design, as professions or discursive fields, has rarely been examined from a historical perspective. This article explores the dynamics between the two at a pivotal moment in U.S. cultural history before the outbreak of the Second World War. It argues that *Vogue* provided industrial designers with the opportunity to exploit the cultural distance between fashion and industrial design as discursive fields, contrasting the professional, masculine status of the industrial designer against the feminine, fashion reader to draw a clear, gendered boundary between professional and non-professional, producer and consumer. *Vogue* offered industrial designers the ideal platform on which to connect with women, a target audience of Franklin Delano Roosevelt's New Deal propaganda, in the stimulation of consumer spending. In this way, the

7 Hazel Hahn writes about feminized consumption and fashion magazines in "Fashion Discourses in Fashion Magazines and Madame de Girardin's *Lettres parisiennes* in July-Monarchy France (1830–48)," *Fashion Theory* 9, no. 2 (2005): 211–14.

Figure 2

Original photograph, nearly nude evening dress designed by Walter Dorwin Teague, Photo by Anton Bruehl. © *Vogue*, Condé Nast.



professionalization of design was constituted through an interaction with and dependence on the female consumer in ways that have not yet been fully addressed by design historians.

Fashioning Professionalization

A robust field of history and theory now supports the study of fashion media as a tool in the dynamics of power and representation. In particular, sociologist Agnès Rocamora developed a theory of “fashion media discourse” to interrogate the discursive interactions between fashion and other fields.⁸ Although magazines, including *Vogue*, have been studied to examine the representation of fields such as art and sculpture, notably few efforts have addressed interactions between fashion and industrial design, and fewer still the subject of professionalization.⁹ In a co-edited volume titled *Fashioning Professionals* (2018), Leah Armstrong and Felice McDowell presented the term “fashioning” as a conceptual tool through which to examine the discursive co-construction of professional identities in the creative industries.¹⁰ This reading of fashion in its verbal form is useful when examining the role that *Vogue* played in representing industrial designers to its readership.

8 Agnes Rocamora, *Fashioning the City: Paris, Fashion and the Media* (London: Bloomsbury, 2009).

9 Söll, “Pollock in Vogue”; Adam Geczy and Vicki Karaminas (eds.), *Fashion and Art* (London: Berg, 2012).

10 Leah Armstrong and Felice McDowell, “Introduction,” *Fashioning Professionals: Identity and Representation at Work in the Creative Industries*, ed. Leah Armstrong and Felice McDowell (London: Bloomsbury, 2018), 14.

The cooperation between *Vogue* and the World's Fair was an influential one. American *Vogue* was bought by Condé Nast in 1909 and adapted from a weekly New York magazine to become "an authoritative voice on fashion" that "set the tone for America's upper class women of the East Coast."¹¹ Attracting the magazine's influential, affluent female readership was an important promotional opportunity for the World's Fair and for the new profession of industrial design. Roland Marchand argues that designers were highly conscious of the need to engage with feminine interests and concerns. They frequently identified the visitor to their World's Fair exhibits as "she" and, by the 1930s, habitually identified the American consumer as female.¹² The relationship between industrial designers and housewives, or what industrial designer Brooks Stevens called "Mrs. America," was crucial to the industrial designers' role in stimulating consumer spending in household products.¹³ Stevens noted in a speech to members of the American Institute of Electrical Engineers in May 1956 that, "as the machine age invaded the home, the housewife had to be appealed to."¹⁴ In a series of slides prepared by the (then-named) Society of Industrial Designers (SID), the image of the industrial designer explaining his work to the housewife was one of the first presented.¹⁵

Fashion historian Christopher Breward has examined how fashion magazines drew a gendered line between public and private spheres. Drawing on Hall and Davidoff's influential work, he argues that the fashion magazine mediated the distance between the producer (male) and consumer (female), through language and imagery that reinforced the distinction between the domestic feminine sphere and the public masculine world.¹⁶ The editorial features that frame the February issue of *Vogue* convey pessimistic conservatism about the role of women in public life. Fashion Features editor Allene Tomley wrote an article titled, "A World We'll Never See," predicting that although women would not be limited to the domestic world of cooking and housework, she saw in the future "no more women in politics than ever, no more women geniuses than ever. They will be getting their triumphs by the old inefficient, but effective route through their husbands and their sons."¹⁷ Resigning herself and her reader to the inevitability of patriarchy, Tomley presents a vision of the world in which men define authority, taste, and expertise. As Breward states, fashion magazines were read almost entirely by women, but "women's magazines were still operating within a paternalistic superstructure."¹⁸ This view is emphasized in the preface to Tomley's article, in which she explains that her piece draws on the thoughts of male "professional forward-thinkers Frank Lloyd Wright, Georges Duchamel, Patrick Geddes, Le Corbusier, Lewis Mumford, Buckminster Fuller, Hugh Ferriss,

11 Söll, "Pollock in Vogue," 31.

12 Roland Marchand, *Creating the Corporate Soul* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1998), 281.

13 Brooks Stevens, "Planned Obsolescence in the Home Appliance" (speech at the Seventh Annual Appliance Technical Conference of the American Institute of Electrical Engineers, Wisconsin Hotel, Milwaukee, WI, May 15, 1956), box 63, folder 2, Industrial Designers Society of America archive, Syracuse Library Special Collections.

14 Ibid.

15 The slides were prepared for promotional lectures in art schools and business by the SID's members. See Russel Wright, Untitled and undated lecture, Russel Wright archive, Art School Lectures, box 38, folder 2, Syracuse University Library Special Collections.

16 Christopher Breward, "Femininity and Consumption: The Problem of the Late Nineteenth-Century Fashion Journal," *Journal of Design History* 7, no. 2 (1994): 71–89. Catherine Hall and Leonore Davidoff, *Family Fortunes: Men and Women of the English Middle Class 1780-1850* (London: Routledge, 1987).

17 Allene Tomley, "A World We'll Never See," *Vogue* (February 1, 1939), 91.

18 Breward, "Femininity and Consumption" (1994), 81.

Ebenezer Howard, A. M. Low, Henry Dreyfuss, Kropotkin and the Earl of Birkenhead.”¹⁹ It is pertinent to note the high proportion of architects and designers in this list; these forms of expertise gained cultural ascendancy in the rise of the “machine age.” Through Tomley’s article and the “Fashions of the Future,” *Vogue* participated in a public dialogue about professionalism and industrial design, in which the gendered power dynamics of masculine production and feminized consumption were reproduced.

A New Profession

The feminization of consumer culture occurred in parallel to professionalization and consequently helped to shape an uneven distribution of power across design disciplines. Professionalization can be broadly defined as the process by which an occupation gains professional status in society. The most common trajectory to professional status involves university accreditation as a point of entry and the institution of professional organizations that impose ethical codes to regulate professional behavior and establish boundaries around the profession as “systems of closure.”²⁰ By the middle of the twentieth century, through the establishment of professional design organizations across Europe and the United States, design could be said to have achieved something of a “semi-professional status.”²¹ However, in 1939, industrial design was still an obscure and unknown occupation for the majority of the population.

At this time, a group of designers, led by Walter Dorwin Teague and including Egmont Arens, Henry Dreyfuss, and Raymond Loewy (each featured in the *Vogue* issue), was involved in a coordinated effort to establish the legal status of industrial designers as professionals in the state of New York, so that they would be exempt from exceptional taxes applied to unincorporated self-employed persons.²² In April 1941 Teague successfully won this case, officially establishing the identity of industrial designer as a professional, along with architects and lawyers. This group of designers would go on to establish the SID in New York in 1944 as the first U.S. design organization with exclusively professionalizing aims.²³ Professionalization was in motion at the time of the New York World’s Fair; and lines were beginning to be drawn between the professional and the non-professional.

Arguably, this obscurity and anonymity afforded aspiring industrial designers greater flexibility in directing how they were seen, understood, and valued by different groups—a key feature of professionalization, according to sociologist Geoffrey Millerson.²⁴ This flexibility was used to great effect by the “leading men” invited to contribute to the *Vogue* issue: Egmont Arens, Donald Deskey, Henry Dreyfuss, Raymond Loewy, Joseph B. Platt, Gilbert

- 19 Tomley, “A World We’ll Never See,” *Vogue* (February 1, 1939), 90.
- 20 See Geoffrey Millerson, *The Qualifying Associations* (London: Routledge, 1964), 10; see also Gary Beegan and Paul Atkinson, “Professionalism, Amateurism and the Boundaries of Design,” *Journal of Design History* 21, no. 4 (2008): 305–13.
- 21 Leah Armstrong, “A New Image for a New Profession: Self-Image and Representation in the Professionalization of Design, 1945–1960,” *Journal of Consumer Culture* 19, no. 1 (2019), 104–24. Ellen Mazur Thompson also writes about the “ambivalence” and “ambiguity” of design within the process of professionalization in the United States in Ellen Mazur Thompson, *The Origins of Graphic Design in America 1870–1920* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press 1997), 85–104.
- 22 *Matter of Teague v. Graves*, 261 App. Div. 652 (N.Y. App. Div. 1941) <https://case-text.com/case/matter-of-teague-v-graves> (accessed April 15, 2020).
- 23 Previous design organizations formed to represent designers included the American Union of Decorative Artists and Craftsmen (c.1928) and American Designers Institute (ADI) (c.1937). However, the SID was the first professional body with a formal code of conduct and restricted terms of membership, modeled on the professional bodies of architecture and engineering. In 1955 the SID was renamed the American Society of Industrial Design (ASID), and in 1965 it merged with the Industrial Designers Institute (IDI) and the Industrial Design Education Association (IDEA) to form the Industrial Designers Society of America (IDSA).
- 24 Millerson, *The Qualifying Associations*, 158–59.

Rohde, George Sakier, Walter Dorwin Teague, and Russel Wright. These names have been recorded in design history as the “pioneers” of the profession who worked on the exhibits for the New York World’s Fair.²⁵ They also formed the group officially selected and promoted by the Fair’s Publicity Office.²⁶ The men were well-acquainted as a group in New York and were heavily invested in the promotion of industrial design as a profession. They co-organized and presented a series of lectures at the New York University School of Architecture and Allied Arts in October 1940 as self-pronounced “outstanding leaders of the profession.”²⁷ Four of the men—Dreyfuss, Sakier, Loewy, and Teague—also featured in an influential article in *Fortune* magazine. Penned by the designer George Nelson in February 1934, the article was designed to promote the industrial designer’s expertise to both industry and business.²⁸

Without the formal support of government or, at this stage, any well-defined professional organization, industrial design consultants depended almost entirely on self-promotion to raise the status of their practice and to attract the attention of industry. Many industrial designers established public relations as a priority activity within their consultancy practices. Their efforts included publishing books to define the practice of industrial design and to sell its value as a profession to the American public; interviews with newspapers and magazines; exhibition programming; and, later, cameo performances on television and radio.²⁹ Several of the designers featured in the February issue of *Vogue* were well-connected within the magazine industry, having previously worked as art directors on publications, including *House and Garden* and *Vanity Fair*, or as illustrators in fashion media, including at *Vogue* magazine.³⁰ Teague and Loewy perhaps ran the slickest PR operation, using carefully crafted, memorable slogans to pithily describe their expertise on anything “from lipsticks to locomotives” (Loewy) or “from a matchstick to a city” (Teague). These signature descriptions were used to describe their work in their personal autobiographies, in book publications, and throughout press coverage of the era, including in the *Vogue* feature.

The New York World’s Fair publicity office had set the theme of “the future” long in advance of the Fair’s opening, and this theme provided the overall narrative framework for *Vogue*’s special issue. The future held a vivid currency in the political and economic context of the United States in 1939, with the impending outbreak of war in Europe and a deep economic depression. The New York World’s Fair has been considered a method of propaganda for Roosevelt’s New Deal, which promised economic growth predicated on government and consumer spending.³¹ The designers involved in its execution were consequently heralded as the protagonists of change. In 1947, design consultant

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- 25 See, e.g., Caroll Gantz, *Founders of American Industrial Design* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2014); and Jeffrey Meikle, *Twentieth Century Limited* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press: 2001).
- 26 “Eight Great Shows,” World’s Fair 1939 press release, Egmont Arens Archive, Syracuse University Library Special Collections.
- 27 “Symposium on Industrial Design, Thursdays beginning Oct. 10, 1940,” NYU School of Architecture and Allied Arts, Brochure, IDSA 187 Scrapbook, Syracuse University Library Special Collections.
- 28 George Nelson, “Both Fish and Fowl,” *Fortune* (February 1934): 40–98.
- 29 See, e.g., Walter Dorwin Teague, *Design This Day: The Technique of Order in the Machine Age* (Harcourt: Brace and Co, 1940); Raymond Loewy, *Never Leave Well Enough Alone* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1951); and Henry Dreyfuss, *Designing for People* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1955).
- 30 Joseph B. Platt was Decorator at *House and Garden* at the time of the *Vogue* article. Egmont Arens was Art Director at *Vanity Fair*, and *Raymond Loewy* had contributed illustrations to *Vogue* magazine at the beginning of his career.
- 31 Marchand, *Creating the Corporate Soul*, 292.

Gordon Lippincott stated that the industrial design profession was engineered to make the public “look forward to change” driven by obsolescence, the “keynote of new prosperity” which would address “the major problem of stimulating the urge to buy.”³² As Marchand observes, the industrial design consultant became the mediator between corporations and the U.S. public—a new professional charged specifically with the task of bringing a “humanizing and reassuring corporate image” for major American manufacturers.³³

Ironically, *Vogue* editor Woolman-Chase remembers this time as one of “frightful apprehension and indecision.”³⁴ However, in a tone of forced optimism, her opening letter in the magazine successfully ties together the themes of femininity, the World’s Fair, and the future:

The New York World’s Fair is going to give feminine America a great lift. We’ll respond to all its challenges and promises. For it’s typically feminine to love the future. Change and things-to-come are the kind of tonic that whets our appetite for living.³⁵

As a profession predicated on the notion of obsolescence and change, designers were regularly characterized in the media as “forecasters” and “future-makers,” but this depiction was rarely the self-image they sought to project of their own profession.³⁶ Indeed, the decision to cast industrial designers in this role did not come from the Fair’s publicity office or from the designers, but from the *Vogue* editorial team. According to Woolman-Chase’s autobiography, Managing Editor Jessica Daves came up with the “amusing idea” to ask industrial designers to make the predictions.³⁷ As Woolman-Chase’s amusement indicates, fashion and femininity occupied very different cultural and social spaces from that of industrial design, a field dominated by men.³⁸

Given the relative obscurity of industrial designers for the American public and their somewhat disproportionate presence in the magazine, the article was prefaced with an explanatory note.³⁹ In the preface, the reader was provided with a dramatized telephone conversation between the magazine and the Fair, in which the “Fair” asks “*Vogue*” to invite “the Designers who create the Fashions of To-Day to give you their ideas about the Fashions of Tomorrow.”⁴⁰ The magazine responds as follows:

We doubt whether they will want to do that.... They live too much in the present; their sensitivity is delicately attuned to the fleeting changes in the scenery of To-day. Their genius lies in the quick response to the fluctuations of contemporary taste, not in forecasting the fashionable weather for thousands of years ahead.⁴¹

32 Gordon Lippincott, *Design for Business* (Chicago: Paul Theobald, 1947), 14.

33 Marchand, *Creating the Corporate Soul*, 276.

34 Edna Woolman-Chase, *Always in Vogue* (New York: Doubleday, 1954), 266.

35 Woolman-Chase, “Come to the World’s Fair,” n.p.

36 The SID’s first Code of Conduct, published upon its institution in 1944, stated, “[The Designer] shall refrain from making forecasts or prophecies for publication or publicity, graphic or written, unless they are the result of thorough research and analysis of a specific design problem. IDSA archive, box 62, Syracuse University.

37 Woolman-Chase, *Always in Vogue*, 265.

38 Although some women practiced as industrial designers, the Society of Industrial Designers included no female founding members, and they received very little press attention by comparison. See Jacqueline M. Atkins and Pat Kirkham, *Women Designers in the USA: Diversity and Difference* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2000).

39 The author of this introduction is not credited in the magazine but matches Woolman-Chase’s account of this episode exactly in her autobiography, suggesting she may have written it.

40 “Fashions of the Future,” *Vogue* (February 1, 1939), 71.

41 Ibid.

The idea that the fashion designer's sensitivities are more "delicately attuned" and "fleeting," in contrast to the industrial designer's more robust, long-term forecasting skills, reflects the representational rhetoric that has defined the two practices. The characterizations underpin an enduring stereotype of fashion as a superficial, feminine interest and industrial design as a scientifically informed, masculine expertise. This representational bias worked to the advantage of the industrial design profession—an industry that was frequently accused of being superficial, based on stylish fad and a commitment to obsolescence.⁴² Industrial designers resented the classification of industrial design as "styling," which was "somewhat in the class of dress designers," as one designer revealingly put it at the time.⁴³ By presenting industrial design as being in dramatic contrast with fashion, *Vogue* thus gave industrial designers an opportunity to appear in an expert and dignified manner, thus furthering their aim of being seen by the public as professionals alongside architects and engineers.

"Fashions of the Future" produced a highly flattering portrait of the industrial profession, conveying what Cheryl Buckley has referred to as the "concept of the designer as 'auteur'—an omnipotent, god-like, heroic figure who took a place in the history of pioneering individuals (inevitably men)."⁴⁴ The *Vogue* article defined the industrial designer's role as follows:

...the men who shape our destinies and our kitchen sinks, streamline our telephones and our sky-scrapers, men who brought surrealism to the Department Stores and the be-Thyloned Perisphere to Long Island. They know about the problems, the dreams, the realities that the future has in store for us. They are trained to think ahead: they know tomorrow like they know their own streamlined pockets. We will offer them the hospitality of our pages and let them have some fun with the clothes of tomorrow.⁴⁵

This language, in which the designers are invited to "have some fun," puts a clear distance between fashion and industrial design as culturally valued practices. *Vogue's* description of the designer's role flatteringly mirrored traits that were self-ascribed by designers and used in promotional literature for the profession at the time. The statement that industrial designers were "trained to think ahead" gives the impression of scientific training and expertise that was a critical component of the way in which the industrial design profession sought to present itself. However, in reality, educational training for the industrial designer was at an emergent

42 The SID (founded in 1944) was especially sensitive to this representation of the designer, emphasizing the need for "dignified publicity" that would establish designers as having a status similar to that of architecture and engineering, as discussed at the 1946 annual meeting. Minutes of the Society of Industrial Designers Annual Meeting, October 15, 1946, IDSA Archive, Syracuse University Library Special Collections.

43 Jean Reinecke, Minutes of the Society of Industrial Designers Annual Meeting, October 12–14, 1949, IDSA Archive, Syracuse University Library Special Collections.

44 Cheryl Buckley, "Made in Patriarchy II: Researching (or Re-Searching) Women and Design," *Design Issues* 36, no. 1 (Winter 2020): 21.

45 "Fashions of the Future," 71.

- 46 The first industrial design course was established at the Carnegie Institute of Technology in 1934. Moholy Nagy's Institute of Design at the Illinois Institute of Technology was set up in 1944.
- 47 Sally Swing, "Industrial Design: A Profession," *The Career News* 13, no.1 (February 1954), n.p., IDSA Archive, Syracuse University Library Special Collections.
- 48 In the 1941 court case, *Teague v. Graves*, the lawyers defending the New York Tax Office decision pointedly remarked that Teague's formal education "consisted of a high school course followed by three and one-half years' training in the Art Students' League... nor has he had any extensive course of specialized instruction and study in a given field of science." See *Teague v. Graves*, 261 App. Div. 652 (N.Y. App. Div. 1941). Raymond Loewy proudly declares his self-tutored status in his autobiography. See Raymond Loewy, *Never Leave Well Enough Alone* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1951), 59–60.
- 49 SID Code of Conduct (1944), IDSA Archive, Syracuse University Library Special Collections.
- 50 Cheryl Buckley, "Made in Patriarchy: Towards a Feminist Analysis of Women and Design," *Design Issues* 3, no. 2, (Autumn 1986), 3–14; and Judith Attfield and Pat Kirkham, *A View from the Interior: Feminism, Women and Design* (Toronto: Women's Press, 1989).
- 51 Yasuko Suga, Reimann School, *A Design Diaspora* (London: Artmonsky Arts, 2013); and Alice Twemlow, "Women of the Bauhaus," Frieze Website (September 3, 2018), <https://frieze.com/article/women-bauhaus> (accessed April 15, 2020).
- 52 Angela McRobbie, *British Fashion Design: Rag Trade or Image Industry?* (London: Routledge, 1998).
- 53 "Designing Men" is the title given to page 71 of the article in the table of contents for the magazine, although this title does not appear within the article itself.
- 54 Design historian Phyllis Ross claims that this request was a calculated strategy to "stand out" from the other designers and attract further publicity. See Phyllis Ross, *Gilbert Rohde: Modern Design for Living* (Yale: Yale University Press, 2009). As she points out, Rohde was allotted a page more of editorial space than the

stage in the United States.⁴⁶ A promotional article by the SID in 1954 estimated that "200 college students complete training in the field each year."⁴⁷ The majority of the designers featured in the *Vogue* article had come through architecture, engineering, advertising, marketing, and illustration, while several, including Loewy and Teague had virtually no specialized training at all.⁴⁸

Fashion's non-professional status, in the eyes of the industrial designer, was confirmed in 1944, when the SID officially excluded fashion designers from membership, formally encoding the relationship between patriarchy, professionalization, and industrial design in its first Code of Conduct.⁴⁹ The so-called "founding fathers" of the design profession in the United States tried to establish an exclusionary culture of professionalism—modeled on the older professions of architecture, law, and engineering—through which to command an expertise and authority equivalent to the status of the traditional professions. The discourse of modernism perpetuated gender-based perceptions about traditionally female-dominated practices, including ceramics, interiors, textiles, and fashion.⁵⁰ Fashion and industrial design continued to follow divergent trajectories of professionalization in the twentieth century in the United States and in other industrialized nations. The attitudes of designers, architects, and teachers at the (seemingly) socially progressive schools of modern design in Europe—the Reimann School and the Bauhaus—confirm the gender bias that delineated fashion as a feminine, amateur field.⁵¹ As Angela McRobbie has argued, this relegation had lasting implications for the structure of work in fashion and contributed to the precarious position that its (mainly female) workers have experienced.⁵²

"Designing Men" in *Vogue*

The nine "designing men"⁵³ whose proposals appear in U.S. *Vogue* present an alternative rationale for dressing, imagined according to the masculine logics of the machine age. Fashion is dismissed in favor of a new set of values: function, order, control, and innovation. Some of their statements read as parody of an industrial designer's view of fashion. For example, Donald Deskey described how women would wear a "system of clothes units," revealing an understanding of the role of dress rationalized to the extreme. Gilbert Rohde specially requested that he submit his proposal for the "man of tomorrow" (not the woman) and based his proposal on the principles of the rational dress movement of the inter-war period.⁵⁴ The techniques and skills of the fashion industry were dismissed by each designer, as they instead sought to convey their

mastery over modern industrial production. Under their direction, materials and fabrics would be “blown” or “rolled out like cellophane.”⁵⁵ For Loewy, “stitching would be replaced with [a] cementing or moulding process.”⁵⁶ Fashion would thus be defeated by the masculine genius of industrial design.

In approaching the “problem” of how to dress the “woman of tomorrow,” the industrial designers tried to find a “solution” that would work outside the fashion system. Their readiness to dismiss the value of fashion and the fashion cycle can also be understood in the wider context of the modernist design discourse, which viewed fashion with suspicion.⁵⁷ The work of nineteenth century artist and critic Horatio Greenough is regularly cited as an influence on the formation of functionalist industrial design principles in the early twentieth century.⁵⁸ In particular, Greenough’s essay, “Form and Function: Remarks on Art, Design and Architecture,” is held by many American modernist architecture and design educators as a visionary text.⁵⁹ In it, he critiques the role of fashion in relation to progress, stating, “I regard the Fashion as the instinctive effort of the stationary to pass itself off for progress. Its embellishment exhibits the rhythm of organization, without the capacity for action.... [Fashion] is a flutterer in the sunshine of superfluity.”⁶⁰ Perhaps an even more pertinent reference is the work of architect and designer Bernard Rudofsky, whose landmark exhibition, “Are Clothes Modern?,” opened at the Museum of Modern Art in New York (MoMA) in 1944. Framed specifically as an exhibition to explore dress, and not fashion, Rudofsky used industrial design research methods, including a “scientific” x-ray dissection of male tailoring, to deliberately critique the fashion system.⁶¹ He firmly advocated a rationalized dress system “to modernize and mitigate waste and decrease labour required,” claiming that “clothing should be cloth itself.”⁶²

This rational approach to dress is visually represented in the striking color plates produced by artist and photographer Anton Bruehl for the *Vogue* magazine. The use of the color plate, an illustrative medium in which women were conventionally painted as “functional, generic features, while the dresses are featured in minute detail,” allowed for maximum attention on the texture and innovation of the fabrics and materials for each outfit.⁶³ This approach amplified the promotional effect for the manufacturers and corporations on display, while also conveying a modernized, rational reading of dress. The plates interpret the designer’s predictions in a theatrical style, with many of the women appearing against a backdrop of what appears to be a stage set, dramatically setting the scene for the opening of the World’s Fair. Together, they presented an image of the future that is classical, angular, and clearly influenced by the futurism artistic movement of the early twentieth century (again, see Figures 1 and 2).

other designers in which to elaborate upon his design. For more on the rational dress movement, see Joanna Bourke, “The Great Male Renunciation: Men’s Dress Reform in Inter-War Britain,” *Journal of Design History* 9, no 1 (1996): 23–33.

- 55 Walter Dorwin Teague, “Fashions of the Future,” 143.
- 56 Raymond Loewy, “Fashions of the Future,” 141.
- 57 Jonathan Woodham, referring to attitudes to fashion held by figures within the British Council of Industrial Design (1944-), cited in Felice McDowell, “Old Glossies and New Histories: Fashion, Dress and Historical Space,” *Fashion Theory* 20, no. 3, (2016): 310.
- 58 Arthur J. Pulos, handwritten research notes for *The American Design Adventure* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1990). Arthur J. Pulos archive, Smithsonian Archives.
- 59 Horatio Greenough, *Form and Function: Remarks on Art, Design and Architecture* (University of California Press, 1957).
- 60 Greenough, *Form and Function*, 131–35.
- 61 Bernard Rudofsky, *Are Clothes Modern?*, exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art, New York, November 28, 1944–March 4, 1945. The press release promoting the exhibition stated that it was “in no sense a fashion show,” https://www.moma.org/documents/moma_press-release_325448.pdf (accessed April 13, 2020).
- 62 Bernard Rudofsky, exhibition catalogue, *Are Clothes Modern?* (New York: Theobald, 1947).
- 63 Hahn, “Fashion Discourses in Fashion Magazines,” 220.

The decision to visually depict the designers' descriptions through the medium of the color plate further fitted the promotional purpose of the piece because they were conventionally accompanied by credits listing the designers, stylists, and dress-makers.⁶⁴ In this case, the credits also listed the manufacturer of the materials for the dress, whose exhibits were featured at the New York World's Fair, and the department store that made each costume for the window display promotion. Russel Wright's "aluminum foil coat," made from gilded aluminum foil, showcases the work of one of his major clients, Reynolds Metals (see Figure 1). Teague's "nearly nude evening dress," stripped away the value of dress and adornment completely, allowing him to make the bold claim that materials would simply be draped over women's bodies (see Figure 2). "These materials," he added, "will be of chemical origin and will be either transparent or translucent," with an individual life of their own.⁶⁵ The materials, cellophane and Lucite, were manufactured by Du Pont, for whom Teague had designed the exhibit at the New York World's Fair. The classic stiletto heel shoes depart little from conventional contemporary fashion, except that they are executed through industrial design engineering and made of Lucite.

Many of the designers incorporated key themes from the New York World's Fair in their predictions. Air conditioning, a recent invention, was a major feature of many of the World's Fairs, and the New York World's Fair was no exception.⁶⁶ Deskey put it at the forefront of his prediction:

Tomorrow's woman will live in an air-conditioned universe. She will get up in the morning in a conditioned apartment, take a conditioned car, pneumatic tube, or stratosphere plane to a conditioned office in a conditioned city.⁶⁷

For these designers, air-conditioning was an instrument through which the environment and nature could be controlled and managed. Rohde imagined that men of the future would live in an "air-conditioned solo-suit."⁶⁸ Teague stated that "with universal heating and air-conditioning, clothing will not be expected to keep women warm or cool."⁶⁹ Electricity and electric lighting were also major themes at the World's Fair, and almost all of the designers incorporated an element of electricity in their proposals.⁷⁰ Joseph Platt presented an "electrically heated coat for tomorrow," in a fabric described as "hypothetically woven with a fine wire that carries heat, generated by condensed batteries housed in the battery pockets on the front of the coat."⁷¹ George Sakier incorporated "Accesso-craft beryllium wires [to] carry warming and cooling omega waves" throughout his suit.⁷² Technological advance, led by the expertise of the industrial designer and in collusion with corporate

64 Ibid., 220.

65 Teague, "Fashions of the Future," 143. Teague's drapery also bears considerable resemblance to the vision of the "future dress" offered by Rudofsky in the MoMA exhibition, *Are Clothes Modern?*

66 Haleema Shah, "The Unexpected History of the Air Conditioner," *Smithsonian Magazine* (June 24, 2019), <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/smithsonian-institution/unexpected-history-air-conditioner-180972108/> (accessed April 30, 2020).

67 Donald Deskey, "Fashions of the Future," 137.

68 Gilbert Rohde, "Fashions of the Future," 138.

69 Teague, "Fashions of the Future," 143.

70 Sarah Rovang, "Envisioning the Future of Modern Farming: The Electrified Farm at the 1939 New York World's Fair," *Journal of Architectural Historians* 74, no. 2 (June 2015): 201.

71 Joseph B. Platt, "Fashions of the Future," 146.

72 George Sakier, "Fashions of the Future," 144.

industry, would render seasonality, an essential feature of the fashion industry, utterly superfluous. Industrial design, not fashion, would offer America progress.

Conclusion

As sociologists David Wang and Ali O’Ilhan theorized in *Design Issues* in 2010, the profession of industrial design is held together by a “sociological wrapping” constituted and performed through consumer choices that include fashion and interior decoration.⁷³ The February 1939 issue of U.S. *Vogue* is a revealing source through which to “unwrap” the image of the industrial design profession and to initiate a discussion about the gendered relationship between fashion and industrial design as sites of cultural production, identity, and work.

Fashion media functioned as a promotional platform for the design profession in multiple ways and with ever more pervasive use throughout the twentieth century. By mid-century, magazines predominantly read by women, with titles like *Homes & Gardens*, *Tatler*, and *Harper’s Bazaar*, elevated the visibility and status of the designer in the eyes of the consumer. This material is familiar to any historian who has accessed designers’ personal archives, in which press cuttings—compiled by a designer’s press department or by the designers themselves—were assiduously documented and preserved. This rich and largely untapped source material includes an array of varying types and styles of mediation. These materials include “advertorial” features, in which their status as so-called “taste-leaders” was used to directly sell a specific product or lifestyle; personality profiles and interviews; and “At Home with...” photospreads, where the aspirational “designer lifestyle” was displayed and glamorized for the reader.⁷⁴ Fashion magazines are thus a highly visible and potent site through which to examine the designer’s position as a cultural intermediary or “middle man” between industrialist and consumer.⁷⁵

This article has focused on the fashioning of industrial design as a profession and argued that fashion media has been overlooked as a forum for professionalizing discourse by design historians. However, it also offers insights into the cultural production of fashion as a discursive field. Fashion has long held an exceptional status that is unique from and distinctive to other disciplines, including industrial design. Gender bias has persisted for both disciplines well into the post-industrial age. The teaching of the history and practice of fashion and industrial design still draws on different theoretical and methodological traditions in most countries. The historical tensions between fashion and industrial design also present challenging questions for museums of art and

73 David Wang and Ali O’Ilhan, “Holding Creativity Together: A Sociological Theory of the Design Professions,” *Design Issues* 25, no. 1 (Winter 2009): 5–21.

74 See Leah Armstrong, “Working from Home: Fashioning the Professional Designer in Britain,” in Guy Julier et al., *Design Culture: Objects and Approaches* (London: Bloomsbury, 2019) 131–44.

75 C. Wright Mills, “Man in the Middle,” *Industrial Design* (November 1958): 70–75.

design that hold fashion within their collections, including the Victoria and Albert Museum, London (V&A).⁷⁶ In 2017 MoMA staged a provocative exhibition, *Items: Is Fashion Modern?*, which asserted the need to reassess the contemporary relationship between fashion and design in a museum no longer bound to the strictures of modernism. The exhibition and the reviews, critiques, and debates that it generated revealed the powerful agency of fashion in the production of meaning and identity in design. As curators of the exhibition Paola Antonelli and Michelle Millar Fisher state “[f]ashion... is a contested and thus incredibly rich term to mine in relationship to ideas of the eternal and the fleeting in design.”⁷⁷

The February 1939 issue of U.S. *Vogue* put industrial design in dialogue with fashion, femininity, and the future at a formative moment for the professionalization of design and for the rise of consumer culture in the United States. Examining the fashioning of the industrial designer in this context reveals the gendered dynamics of professionalization that have upheld professional identity and hierarchical division between design disciplines for decades. As a platform on which to view the co-construction of image, self-presentation, and identity, fashion media prove to be valuable sources in the study of professionalization, past and present.

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76 The uneasy relationship between fashion and industrial design was broached in a Design Culture Salon at the V&A in 2014. See Leah Armstrong, “Where Do Fashion Cycles and Design Culture Meet?” V&A Blog (November 20, 2014), <https://www.vam.ac.uk/blog/projects/fashion-cycles-and-design-culture> (accessed April 13, 2020).

77 Paola Antonelli and Michelle Millar Fisher, “Announcing *Items: Is Fashion Modern?*” April 5, 2016, https://www.moma.org/explore/inside_out/2016/04/05/announcing-items-is-fashion-modern/?_ga=2.118076810.2039156770.1586523976-416467729.1586264848 (accessed April 13, 2020).