

Lecture notes on design and art movements influential to design

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Arts and Crafts

Arts and Crafts began in the second half of the nineteenth-century, led intellectually by the ideas of John Ruskin and William Morris. Arts and crafts designs took inspiration from nature - especially plant forms - which was highly unusual for the time. The movement had a large influence on Art Nouveau, which persevered with ornamentation at a time when they were falling out of fashion.

The legacy of Arts and Crafts survives to this day, with potters, weavers and other handicraft makers choosing traditional methods over mass-production.

It inspired several art and design movements throughout Europe, America, Australia and elsewhere.

John Ruskin (1819-1900) was a painter and critic of art, architecture and society. According to Ruskin, people could not, and should not, take pleasure in an object that had not itself been made with pleasure.

Ruskin considered the role of the artist was to speak 'truth to nature'. His essay *Unto This Last* (1860) critiqued 19th century economy and society, especially the prevailing utilitarianism. Ruskin founded the *Guild of St George* in 1878, which survives to this day. Ruskin critiqued the architecture of his day, and advocated for the preservation of old buildings and natural, open spaces. His campaigning led to the establishment of the National Trust. Ruskin's publication *The Seven Lamps of Architecture* (1849) set out principles for designing buildings, emphasising beauty, culture and truth.

According to Ruskin, the impact of industrialisation would be

“recognised in future meteorological history as one of phenomena hitherto unrecorded in the courses of nature...

For the sky is covered with gray cloud — not rain-cloud, but a dry black veil”

— *The Storm-Cloud of the Nineteenth Century* (1884, pp. 21-22).

Adam Smith, in the *Wealth of Nations* (1776) advocated for the division of labour because it increased production. This idea was taken up by Wedgwood and others who relied on efficiencies to manufacture their products. Ruskin and his associate **William Morris**, and later Karl Marx, considered Smith's division of labour to be demeaning to the worker: Doing just one thing in a job was tedious. Ruskin and Morris were artisans, and the Arts and Crafts movement taught their students a variety of skills.

Morris articulated his vision for the workplace in *Useful Work versus Useless Toil* as “hope of rest, hope of product, hope of pleasure in the work itself” (1891, p. 20). Meaningful work is hard, but should produce something worthwhile that the maker can take pleasure in.

“From the 1860s, Eastern patterns dominated the design of British decorative arts and the first Arts and Crafts Exhibition reflected this passion. Three of the four textile manufacturers involved... all displayed fabrics influenced by Japanese, Indian, Middle or Near Eastern art. Subsequent exhibitions showed a continuation of this trend in textiles and other forms of production. Some designers and manufacturers were more susceptible to foreign patterns than others. The ceramicist William de Morgan favoured Persian colourings and motifs for his pottery and tiles and Lewis F. Day, one of the most commercially successful of decorative designers, used both Japanese and Turkish motifs in his early designs. The textile printer, Thomas Wardle, was particularly interested in Indian patterns”

— *William Morris and the Arts and Crafts movement* (Parry, 1989, p. 11).

The Japanese influence on European art is referred to as **Japonisme**:

“The term is generally said to have been coined by the French critic Philippe Burty in the early 1870s. It described the craze for Japanese art and design that swept France and elsewhere after trade with Japan resumed in the 1850s, the country having been closed to the West since about 1600. The rediscovery of Japanese art and design had an almost incalculable effect on Western art. The development of modern painting from impressionism on was profoundly affected by the flatness, brilliant colour, and high degree of stylisation, combined with realist subject matter, of Japanese woodcut prints”

— *Tate Gallery* (2021).

Mingei

Mingei theory was proposed in the mid-1920s by the philosopher Sōetsu Yanagi (1889-1961), who was later joined by potters Shōji Hamada (1894-1978) and Kanjirō Kawai (1890-1966).

The term refers to ‘folk arts’ such as porcelain, lacquerware and pottery from Japan, Korea and China created since the 16th century.

The theory was originally called *minshū-teki kōgei* (craft with characteristics of the masses) before being shortened to Mingei.

In recent years, there has been a renewed interest in Mingei both in Japan and abroad —There is even a dedicated Mingei museum in California.

Following the isolationist Edo period (1600-1868), from Meiji (1868-1912), and throughout Taishō (1912-1926) and early Shōwa (1926-1989), Japanese products and knowledge were becoming more popular throughout Europe and the western world, through both emigration and cultural exchange.

At the same time, Japanese scholars such as Yanagi were turning to western scholarship, such as the *Arts and Crafts*, to provide a framework for their own ideas, and Japanese philosophers such as Kitarō Nishida (1870-1945) and DT Suzuki (1870-1966) turned to German philosophers such as Edmund Husserl (1859-1938) to provide an underpinning for their own philosophical perspectives on Japanese thought.

The novelist Junichirō Tanizaki (1886-1965) lamented the effect that modernisation had on Japanese culture and arts:

“...what losses we have suffered, in comparison with the Westerner. The Westerner has been able to move forward in ordered steps, while we have met superior civilisation and have had to surrender to it, and we have had to leave a road we have followed for thousands of years. The missteps and inconveniences this has caused have, I think, been many. If we had been left alone we might not be much further now in a material way than we were five hundred years ago...

We distort [Japanese arts] to curry favour for them [with the machines. These machines are the inventions of Westerners, and are, as we might expect, well suited to the Western arts. But precisely on this account they put our own arts at a great disadvantage”

— *In Praise of Shadows* [陰翳礼讃] [*In'ei Raisan*] (1933/1977, pp. 14-15).

Bernard Leach (1887-1979) was a British national born in Hong Kong. He spent several early years in Japan as a child, and returned to Japan as an adult, where he taught western art history and techniques.

He is considered the father of British 'studio pottery', but also studied ceramics in Japan. He was influenced by British Arts and Crafts but was born a generation later.

Leach was a friend and colleague of Yanagi. He translated many of Yanagi's works on Mingei into English.

"I still think that there is probably no country like Japan whose people live in surroundings composed of specially chosen objects... This may be something as simple as shibui or shibumi (simple, subtle, and unobtrusive beauty), a concept which has permeated all levels of Japanese society. It is hard to tell to what extent this simple word has safely guided the Japanese people to the heights and depths of beauty...

Even people of the flashiest sort know in the back of their mind that shibumi is a class above them... It contains something that resides outside of time, a truth that is always new and fresh. It harbours a deep Zen significance"

'The Japanese Perspective' in *The Beauty of Everyday Things* (Yanagi, 1957/2017, pp. 156-157)

Today, craft practices are certified according to Japan's Traditional Industries Law:

- The item must be a craft product.
- The craft product must serve a purpose in everyday life.
- The main production process must be done by hand.
- The production must be done using traditional techniques or methods.
- Traditional raw materials must be the main source of materials for production.
- Artisans conducting production or involved in that production must not be negligible in number in the given area.
- The 伝統マーク "dentou" (traditional) mark is used to indicate products that meet this criteria.

Modern art movements

Art Nouveau followed the Arts and Crafts' preference for nature-inspired motifs and handmade processes. **Art Deco** followed from Art Nouveau, but Art Deco began to embrace machine manufacturing.

A number of early twentieth-century art movements were influential on design, pushing a more geometric approach to forms:

- **Cubists** believed that western art had exhausted attempts at representation, so turned to high levels of geometric abstraction. Dadaists and surrealists were also inspired by Cubism and took art in a more conceptual direction.
- **Futurism**, though a style mostly associated with painting, opposed the existing culture and was obsessed with industrialisation, modernism, speed and machines. It was closely-aligned to Fascism, at least in Italy.
- **Constructivism** grew out of Russian Futurism and was inspired largely by the Russian Revolution of 1917.
- **De Stijl** means 'The style' in Dutch. De Stijl featured strong, simple geometric forms and use of only black, white and primary colours.

Bauhaus

In Germany, the *Deutscher Werkbund* was founded in 1907 and took inspiration from Britain's 'Arts and Crafts'. The Werkbund combined both traditional crafts and industrial mass-production. Ludwig Mies van der Rohe was head of its architectural division. It had a broad range of design interests, including furniture design and architecture.

Although not exclusive to Werkbund, it was around the early 20th century that the term 'designer' began to be used to refer to someone whose knowledge encompassed technological, functional, aesthetic and business aspects.

Some members of Werkbund, such as van Der Rohe, went on to help form the *Bauhaus*. Initially based on Weimer, the head of the Bauhaus designed a new campus for the Bauhaus in Dessau, a town about 80 miles from Berlin. The school was based in Dessau from 1925 until 1932. Hannes Meyer took over from Gropius in 1928, aiming to make design objects affordable for everyone. Meyer's agenda was more radical than Gropius', which raised the ire of the National Socialists.

The National Socialists formed a majority government in 1932 and voted to close down the Bauhaus. A third, privately-owned Bauhaus opened in Berlin with van der Rohe as its director. After numerous disputes with the National Socialists the Bauhaus finally closed in 1933.

Ulm School of Design

The Ulm School of Design (*Hochschule für Gestaltung Ulm*) was a design school based in Ulm, Germany, founded in 1953 by former students of the Bauhaus. Ulm was seen as a continuation of Bauhaus ideals.

Braun and Dieter Rams collaborated with the Ulm school in the development of many of their products. Ulm wasn't just home to product design — like the Bauhaus it also had architecture, crafts and graphic design.

It also became an important contributor to design theory, incorporating psychological and social theories into design work. It took a 'systemic' approach to design rather than an artistic one, which caused friction amongst its faculty.

The *Lufthansa* identity was created by the Ulm school (c. 1950s) which remains unchanged to this day.

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