“Why then the world's mine oyster”: Consumption and Globalization 1851-Now

Grace Lees-Maffei

5417 words

Introduction: Design and Consumption

Consumption is as important to the design process as ideation, production and mediation, but it has not always been proportionately represented in the training of designers, design practice and the discourse surrounding design. Following the enormously influential design education practised at the Bauhaus school of art and design in Germany (1919-1933), design school curricula around the world have promoted studio-based learning through doing as a way of gaining hands-on knowledge and experience of materials and processes in design. This approach has emphasised design as principally concerned with ideation (the process of capturing and developing ideas and innovations) and production.

However, the first self-styled industrial designers working in the US in the 1930s (Sparke 1983) incorporated intelligence from consumer research to streamline their sales curves as much as the consumer goods they styled. While in the US Henry Dreyfuss modelled the measurements and contours of his consumers, Joe and Josephine, in his ergonomic approach (Dreyfuss 1955; 1960), in the UK Independent Group artist Richard Hamilton claimed that designers should not stop at designing goods and services: they should simultaneously design the consumers for those products (Hamilton 1960).

Efforts to integrate consumption and mediation into design curricula have centred upon applying a body of knowledge from marketing and encouraging fledgling designers to engage in market research and user testing, while co-design and participatory design have foregrounded the consumer

(for an example, see Lee 2012). This consumer emphasis is fitted to a situation in which sustainable design is of paramount concern, and the cradle-to-grave life cycle of a designed object or service must consider not only consumption but also post-consumption scenarios (McDonough and Braungart 2002).

Just If designers need to pay attention to consumption, so do scholars of design studies and design history. This chapter examines consumption and globalization as interconnected developments, and reactions to their planetary impact, including sustainable design practices, the anti-consumption movement and local and regional consumption initiatives.

Marketing Consumption

The consumption of designed goods has always been global. Today's global consumption networks have roots in pre-modern and early modern structures such as the 'Silk Road', which enabled the movement of goods and ideas from East Asia via the Middle East to Italy and the rest of Europe, the concerted empire building of the East India Company (f. 1600) and the Dutch East India Company (f. 1602), and the triangular slave trade moving goods, people and raw materials between Europe, Africa and America from the fifteenth to the nineteenth centuries. As goods are moved, so are ideas. The globalization of consumption intensified in the periods of industrial and digital revolution.

The period of technological development known as the 'industrial revolution' enabled the mass production of goods through mechanised manufacture. While the term 'revolution' is apt as a description of the enormous *impact* of industrialisation, it is misleading as a way of describing a lengthy process which has been variously associated with the nineteenth, eighteenth and even the seventeenth centuries (Brewer and Porter 1993: 2). A raft of interconnected innovations attended the more notable introductions of the spinning jenny, flying shuttle, spinning mule and steam

engine. Among these were the infrastructure to support new manufacturing methods from the canal network which transported goods more safely than horse-drawn carts on rudimentary roads, to the railways which collapsed nineteenth century time and space in the UK, the US, India and beyond.

The industrial revolution is said to have been accompanied by a corresponding 'consumer revolution' (Brewer and Porter 1993: 2). If manufactures were able to make designed goods in ever larger numbers, consumers had to be found to buy all those goods. Supply requires demand and vice versa. The relationship between the industrial revolution and the consumer revolution is a point for debate among advocates of the 'Social Construction of Technology' (SCOT), social constructionists, and adherents to technological determinism among others (Bijker, Hughes and Pinch 1987). Arguments about the extent to which technological innovation exists independently of human need, and the extent to which necessity is the mother of invention persist as both innovation and consumerism have grown in the modern period. The development of print culture in the eighteenth century aided the dissemination of new fashions and tastes, based on increased literacy, increased leisure, lower paper and printing costs and improved distribution networks (the latter also facilitated the circulation of consumer goods domestically and internationally). The relatively bare interiors known to even wealthy inhabitants of eighteenth century homes sharply contrast, in retrospect, with the cluttered homes of both Victorian consumers and consumers today, as period homes and period rooms in museums such as the Geffrye Museum of the Home in London show.

A watershed moment in the recognition of the effects of industrialisation and the spread of consumer society on design was prompted by the Great Exhibition, held in London in 1851 (Auerbach and Hoffenberg 2008). [Fig. 1] One of a series of Worlds' Fairs, this gigantic international exhibition displayed the goods of almost thirty nations in a global competition for 'best in show' for design and manufacturing. The Great Exhibition was part of a concerted campaign to promote British design in the face of competition from both the home of luxury,

France, and the apogee of mass manufacture, the US. It showed commentators as diverse as German architect and design theorist, Gottfried Semper, and popular British novelist and editor, Charles Dickens, that mass manufacture had injured design quality (Semper 1852; Clemm 2005). The proceeds of the Exhibition were used to establish to the South Kensington Museum (now the Victoria and Albert Museum). There, a 'Chamber of Horrors' of overly ornamented and illusionistic design, appeared alongside more approved, and restrained, exemplars by which the museum's curators sought to educate consumers and aspirant designers alike.

If manufacturing innovations were one driver of expanded consumption, branding developments were another. The division of human labour which attended mechanised mass production was formalised in strategies such as Fordism and 'Scientific Management', and scientism informed the psychology of branding as well as manufacturing. Branding is ostensibly ancient: both livestock branding and heraldry are considered forerunners of today's brands in terms of their nominal labelling and differentiating functions (Mollerup 1997). For the period of industrialisation, the eighteenth-century ceramics pioneer, Josiah Wedgwood, is noted for his innovations in marketing as much as in manufacture. He actively sought aristocratic and royal patronage and then broadcast his clients' approval; he tailored his product range to changes in fashion, he set up a showroom, and he sold tickets for viewings of his technological masterpiece, a technically excellent loss leader, the Portland vase (McKendrick 1960; Adamson 2014).

Branding proper took a leap forward with the selling of goods in pre-portioned amounts in printed wrappers, rather than as loose quantities, sold by weight in amounts requested by the purchaser. Wrappers provided a space for branding, the creation of a consistent identity and quality assurances. This development extended to a range of goods including groceries and, notably, soap. A prize-winning exhibitor at the Great Exhibition was soap manufacturer A&F Pears. At the *Exposition Universelle de Paris* (1878), Pears exhibited Ruggero Focardi's sculpture 'You Dirty Boy´ and

subsequently had copies made for retail displays. Pears later used John Everett Millais's painting 'A Child's World' (1886) for its soap advertisements such that the image became famous as 'Bubbles'. Other early soap brands include Lever Brothers' 'Sunlight' soap (1884) and stablemate 'Lifebuoy'. In Japan, Kāo was the pre-eminent soap brand (Weisenfeld 2004). These products used familiarity to build consumer confidence. Consumers had preferred to see goods on open display, to know what they were getting. Branded, packaged, goods led to a shift in consumption practices in which wrapped goods were perceived as authentic, safe and hygienic as well as being imbued with the qualities emphasised in the visual and textual branding and advertising messages.

Marketing and advertising developed as industries expressly to stimulate consumption. By 1850, print culture was in full swing: newspapers, magazines and mail order catalogues were all functioning to communicate local, regional and national patterns of consumption to international and global audiences through wide distribution and circulation. Syndication spread messages across nations and internationally. Early advertising techniques ranged from the 'puff'—in which a writer was paid for a story wherein a product was mentioned, as if incidentally—to 'shout louder' type ads where typography was used to give the impression of emphatic persuasion. Psychological understanding informed more sophisticated approaches at the turn of the twentieth century, as advertisers learned to appeal to consumers' dreams and desires rather than simply to their needs (Benjamin and Baker 2004).

Within the period covered by this chapter, the introduction first of radio, then film, TV and, more recently, the World Wide Web as channels for global communication changed advertising strategies. While the BBC's World Service exemplified the soft power of Empire, Hollywood's movie studios continue to send out cinematic visions of the American Dream rooted in consumerism. Television advertisements produced primarily by national and multi-national corporations who could, and can, afford large advertising budgets are accompanied today by the

views of bloggers and vloggers influencing what consumers of an increasing demographic say, buy and do. Communication technologies have been, and continue to be, one of the defining features of consumption and globalization in the period since 1850. The increasing sophistication of advertising has extended to multi-platform campaigns bridging print media, product placement in films, and TV advertising and, more recently to guerrilla advertising strategies as interventions in the urban environment and viral campaigns making use of social media networks.

Mass consumption is based on mass production and vice versa, and the first nation to industrialise—Great Britain—and the pre-eminent consumer society—the USA—have exerted a disproportionate influence across the world. British global influence has been bound up with colonialism, while in the twentieth century, aka the 'American century' (Edwards and Gaonkar 2010: 1; Haskell 1999; Phillips 1999), Americanization really took hold in Europe and elsewhere. Following the Second World War, consumerism. garnered as much anxiety as it did celebration. During the Cold War capitalism and communism fought it out among the homes of East and West. In the so-called 'kitchen debate', Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev and US President Richard Nixon each claimed superior living standards for their communist and capitalist regimes respectively, within the context of a US kitchen at the 1959 American National exhibition in Moscow (Reid 2008). Since the fall of the Iron Curtain, towards the end of the twentieth century, consumerism has become a global pattern in East and West, North and South.

Western consumerism of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries has occurred within a post-industrial context in which countries such as the UK survive as service economies rather than through manufacturing or trading raw materials. Post-industrial consumer societies enjoy goods manufactured off-shore and delivered by the massive shipping containers that depart from Chinese and other East Asian manufacturing centres. A sense among Western consumers of the 1980s that goods 'Made in Taiwan', and more recently, 'Made in China', were of inferior quality has been

replaced by recognition that it is largely economically unviable to manufacture goods using expensive Western labour, so that contemporary consumer goods are typically made in East Asia for consumption in the West and East alike. Contemporary concerns about manufacturing standards, for example surrounding the toxicity of paint used for some children's toys manufactured in China (Lipton and Barboza 2007) has influenced the desirability of local and regional, as opposed to global, chains of production and consumption. This position is allied with various consumer campaigns to buy domestic goods, and more formal export restrictions as well as the legal, economic and political protection of *l'exception culturelle* in France, introduced in 1993 as part of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT)—a forerunner of the World Trade Organisation— in a bid to stem the tide of, first, Americanisation and more recently, globalisation.

Theories of Globalization

Wider debates about globalization, combined with the continuing influence of post-colonial theory, international developments in higher education, and the contemporary focus on sustainability, have all informed the ways in which design, particularly, is understood.

Design historians have largely focused their attention on industrial manufacture, and therefore on the output of Western industrialised nations. This tendency has been the subject of some critique in recent years, influenced by the writings of post-colonialist theorists such as Edward Said, Homi Bhabha and Fernando Ortiz. Said's (1978) model of 'Orientalism' critiqued the Eurocentric pattern of intellectual and cultural history in which an exotic and generalised East (Orient) is imagined in novels, and other cultural artefacts, for consumption in the West (Said 1978). Said's approach has been criticised for its binarism: rather than the West simply exploiting the East, more interaction needs to be recognised, his critics argue. Certainly, design history shows interaction to be a more apt model, as in the transnational and transcultural development of textiles and ceramics, for

example. Homi Bhabha's model of 'hybridity' has been widely influential as an alternative to binaristic thinking about centre and margin (Bhabha 1994) Bhabha's approach allows for a more fluid understanding of identity and a refusal of metanarratives. Similarly, Fernando Ortiz's model of 'transculturation' describes how an object or image acquires new resonance as a result of merging and changing contexts (Ortiz 1995 [1940]).

In our own century, mainstream media and academic discourses across the humanities and social sciences alike have been preoccupied with globalization (Applebaum and Robinson 2005). Where Max Weber used the model of bureaucracy to represent the society within which he wrote (Weber [1947] 1991), sociologist George Ritzer (1993) sees the fast-food restaurant as having become a more representative contemporary paradigm. Ritzer has criticised the increasingly homogenous nature of global culture using the term 'McDonaldization' to denote a reconceptualization of rationalization.

Following design historian Anna Calvera (2005) we can see that the local, regional, national and global exist in complex interrelations with one another in late twentieth century and early twenty-first century consumer markets. Calvera quotes fellow design historian Tevfik Balcioglu as recognising that '"the tacit acceptance of the universal communicative power of design and its multicultural identity does not only support, but also requires a global understanding of the subject"'. Calvera regards this as 'the first time design standards were seen as multicultural, the outcome of a synthetic process resulting from the contribution of many different regions and cultural realities' (Calvera 2005: p. 371). The places in which designs, materials, images, objects, services and other behaviours are produced conditions their characteristics and their reception. This is as true of designs intended to transcend local, regional or national contexts to pursue an international agenda, as it is of 'vernacular' design.

Since Calvera's important articulation, a tendency to examine the history of design using the convenient and time-honoured unit of the national history (Lees-Maffei and Fallan 2013) has all but ceded to a concerted effort to globalize the field in response to the wider economic, political, technological and cultural processes of globalization. Work in design history that has addressed globalization ranges from methodological reflections (Woodham 2005) to analyses of global brands (Huppatz 2005) and recognition that multinational corporations 'like Coca-Cola, McDonald's, Carrefour, Sony or Disney' have 'reconfigured design's impact on culture' (Adamson, Riello and Teasley 2011: 8).

Consumers in the West have available to them (depending on income, of course) a global range of goods that may be consumed simultaneously. In the case of fashionable clothing, a tweed skirt woven by Abraham Moon in Yorkshire, England, may be worn with ugg boots from Australia (or branded UGG Australia boots from California USA) and a tunic made from West African cotton, machine-sewn in China and accessorised with an Italian leather handbag. As well as providing consumers with a range of options through which to express their identities and allegiances, these products enable cultural tourism through consumption rather than travel. Similarly, a typical food court in a UK shopping mall will offer, in close proximity, several Italian options, more than one Japanese restaurant with or without conveyor belt service, a facsimile French bistro, pastiche American diner and so on, in addition to the high street Anglo-Indian restaurant serving the national dish: the hybrid chicken tikka masala. For the indecisive, certain restaurants provide dishes from around the world in one menu (such as that at the supermarket Tesco-owned Giraffe chain) thereby taking culinary tourism to the level of gustatory bricolage.

While national identities have been communicated through the consumption, use and display of designed goods as much as through practices and rituals, we might well ask whether the idea that design from a particular country is recognisable remains a useful model when the contemporary

design process is characterised by global chains of influence and globalised manufacture. Given that design has always been global this more recent globalization is perhaps best understood as an accommodation of the global, national and the local. Global corporations, such as McDonalds, have negotiated market segmentation and differentiation along local, national and regional lines, while designers and 'starchitects' such as Philippe Starck have collaborated internationally, as well as locally, using information and design technologies that transcend space and time. But just as global brands have found success with consumers across the world, whether through consistency or the strategic application of local, national and regional differentiation, so their ubiquity has engendered a desire for products with *authentic* local, regional and national associations.

Against Consumption and Globalization

Consumerism and globalization have attracted extensive criticism. Capitalist consumer societies privilege those people with the capital to invest, as shareholders and owners and other stakeholders, and those with sufficient disposable income to shop recreationally rather than purely for need. Those without capital or disposable income are disadvantaged in consumer societies, and this is true both at the macro level of developing countries and at the micro level of individuals on limited budgets. Following Zygmunt Bauman's analysis of the inequalities of consumerism, Serge Latouche has argued than even the affluent lose in consumer societies, as their consumerist tendencies engender spiritual malaise in place of satisfaction (Baumann 1998; Latouche 1993). However, this critique is not solely the preserve of social theorists; a number of activist groups have been influential in calling attention to the costs and drawbacks of consumption and globalization.

Activism in response to globalization has included the decidedly gentle Slow Food movement. Founded in 1986 in response to a proposed McDonald's fast food restaurant in Rome, the Slow Food movement promotes seasonal, local foods (Slow Food 1989). Slow Food's first international

congress was held in Venice in 1987, and the Slow Food publishing house Slow Food Editore was launched at the same time and international branches followed (Slow Food, N.D.). Campaigning has centred upon ecogastronomy and the availability of food such as raw milk cheeses which have suffered from large retailing methods, practices such as pasteurisation and associated food safety legislation. For design particularly, the Slow movement favours authenticity as a product characteristic (engaging heritage, and the vernacular in design), the maintenance of craft traditions and urban design which promotes public engagement.

Slow Food inspired the Cittàslow movement, founded in Chianti, Tuscany in 1999, which now has member cities and towns around the world including Korea, South Africa and the USA (Cittàslow 2014; also Pink 2007). Following the Slow Food emphasis on localism and low food miles, Cittàslow has promoted wellbeing and public infrastructures so that 'Slow' cities bear comparison with the various 'Liveable City' initiatives in San Francisco, USA and in a consortium of several cities in the UK, for example. They campaign for low-carbon living through improved public transport infrastructures and better siting and distribution of affordable housing, to facilitate a move away from personal car ownership, as well as enhanced healthcare, education and leisure services to support wellbeing.

We might differentiate lifestyle activism and cultural activism: *Adbusters* magazine (f. 1989) is produced by the Adbusters Media Foundation to challenge the enormous number of advertising images circulating in consumer societies. *Adbusters* is known for subversive appropriations of the language and imagery of advertisements following a practice promoted by the Situationist International movement (1957-1972) as 'détournement'. Founded in Canada by Kalle Lasn and Bill Schmalz, *Adbusters* now appears in several international editions. Adbusters Media Foundation promotes direct action such as 'Buy Nothing Day' which was launched in 1992. In the US, Buy Nothing Day is held on the day after Thanksgiving, known as 'Black Friday', one of the busiest

shopping days of the year when seasonal Christmas shopping is supposed to begin in earnest. Adbusters has also promoted the Occupy movement, a global direct action protest movement targeting financial districts and the banking industry with anti-capitalist, anti-consumerist messages (Adbusters 2015). [Fig. 2]. The slogan 'We are the 99%' used by the Occupy movement since 2011 points to the fact that one per cent of the world's population owns a disproportionate amount of the world's wealth, and the other ninety-nine per cent pays the price for that inequality. Occupy was catalysed in part by a long process of capitalist accumulation which has increased wealth inequalities and in part by the recession of 2007, caused by poor banking practices in the US and UK in relation to subprime mortgage sales. This recessionary wave has wreaked a global impact, bankrupting weaker economies such as that of Greece.

Naomi Klein has considered the culture jamming practices of organisations such as Adbusters alongside the work of artists and edgier activists who disdain Adbusters for its quasi-commercial methods such as selling stickers to promote Buy Nothing Day (which were later withdrawn). In this work, Situationist détournement is harnessed to critique of globalization as well as capitalism:

> One of the most popular ways for artists and activists to highlight the inequalities of free-market globalization is by juxtaposing First World icons with Third World scenes: the Marlboro Man in the war-torn rubble of Beirut; an obviously malnourished girl wearing Mickey Mouse glasses; Dynasty playing on a TV set in an African hut; Indonesian students rioting in front of McDonald's arches (Klein, 1999: 298).

Klein notes the way in which advertisers recuperate critical techniques such as these. Diesel's 'Brand O' campaign adopts this strategy of juxtaposition to sell jeans rather than critique multinational corporations such as McDonald's and Nike for unethical business and manufacturing practices. Klein follows Susan Douglas in pointing out that second wave feminism was pre-eminent

in promoting anti-consumerist thinking in the 1960s and 1970s (Klein 1999 cites Douglas 1994: 227).

Klein's book, like so much of the associated criticism, seeks to change the behaviour of consumers as much as marketers and manufacturers. The same twin focus informs sustainable design practices. Just as the industrial 'revolution' had its correlative in the consumer revolution, so green design initiatives are accompanied by the promotion of green consumption principles. *The Good Consumer Guide,* and its offshoot *The Green Consumer Supermarket Guide*, show how reducing consumption, reusing goods, and recycling can help to offset the environmental damage caused by industrialisation (Makower, Elkington and Hailes 1991: 7-58). Sustainable consumption practices have perhaps been more effective in fostering a global sense of responsibility for the wellbeing of our planet than they have for ameliorating the damage sustained by the ozone layer as a result of industrial emissions. Design practice needs to change in order to achieve greater sustainability in the manufacture and consumption of goods and services (Fry 2008; Fuad-Luke 2009). Sustainable design practices span the gamut of human activity and ingenuity, ranging from indoor food farms to meet the global food deficit, to the sharing economy. The latter is gaining credibility as companies such as BMW launch car-sharing services following successful bike-sharing schemes, and as digital technologies enable consumers to rent out their spare rooms using Airbnb, their parking spaces with justpark.com and their services as a taxi driver using Uber.

These latter enterprises point to the increasing extent to which producers and consumers merge in the experience economy, the sharing economy, the wider digital economy and in today's global consumerist societies. Following Alvin Toffler's coinage of the term 'prosumption', Ritzer has pointed out the extent to which consumers are asked to perform functions previously carried out by service providers, from self-service restaurants and supermarkets, to online banking and content delivery within Web 2.0, the read-write web (Ritzer and Jurgenson 2010). Those we still refer to as

consumers are not only making purchasing decisions of their own but also blogging, vlogging and otherwise gaining a voice that may impact upon the production, consumption and mediation of others (Lees-Maffei 2013: 192). For design, we could add consumer manufacturing through desk-top publishing and 3D printing, and the manufacture and sale of designed goods through craft marketplace Etsy, and the resale of 'curated' goods through eBay and Amazon. Craft activists or 'craftivists', hacktivists (computer hackers for a cause), and fixperts who mend things as an expression of ingenuity and as a way of avoiding waste, are just some of the groups, amateur or otherwise, for whom design practice, variously defined, is a channel for political engagement and critique of contemporary consumption within the context of globalization.

Anti-capitalism and anti-western feeling extends to the extremist radical Islamic groups, such as the terrorist organisation al-Qaeda, which attacked the World Trade Center and the Pentagon military headquarters in the US in September 2001 and claims to have attacked the satirical magazine *Charlie Hebdo* in Paris in January 2015. These attacks and the discourses that surround them show how consumption and its ideological correlative, capitalism, are dividing the world as much as uniting it.

The range of critiques of the apparently otherwise unchecked twin processes of consumption and globalization suggests that their future is not assured. The ecological damage wrought by largely unregulated manufacturing and consumption processes provides another compelling argument against the continuance of the double-edged sword of consumption and globalization. Those who practice design, and those who are interested in design, including students and scholars of design studies and design history, have the capacity to aid the current situation through engaging with the politics of consumption and globalization, as activists and engaged stakeholders to influence policy and practice (e.g. Cader 2013; Teasley 2015). In this way, we can respond to the dynamic and profound intersection of globalization and consumption during the past 165 years.

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