Coals in the Bath

Design Reform and The British Working Class, 1937 - 1947

Christine Olivia Atha

The Royal College of Art, London

April 2013

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the Royal College of Art for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

This text represents the submission for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy at the Royal College of Art. This copy has been supplied for the purpose of research for private study, on the understanding that it is copyrighted material, and that no quotation from the thesis may be published without proper acknowledgement.

Abstract

In this study *mobilising taste in the lower classes* is the focal point. From the late1930s onwards this issue appears to have been of paramount importance to UK government and industry alike, and placed emphasis on *improvement through design* in a way that recalled and perpetuated 19th century philanthropic approaches. This was exemplified in exhibitions, leaflets, publications and reports such as “Design in Everyday Things”, “The Things We See” series, “The Value of Good Design” and the “Design Quiz”. Critical examination of these documents reveals the aesthetic and social assumptions that underpinned the promotional and interpellative literature of design reform in its address to ‘the indiscriminating public’ and provide a supplementary account of British design in the period under review that emphasises its class dimensions and national assumptions.

This research intends to look in detail at class perceptions and relationships with design. More specifically this interpretation looks at the social project embodied in government agency approaches to taste and the aspirations it held for the aesthetic education of the working class. This is an exploration and critical analysis of specific, period determined promotions of quality in design as instruments for social and ethical engineering. The thesis examines the discursive strategies of a number of initiatives intended to bring examples of design and its products to a public perceived to be in need of enlightenment, improvement and incorporation in particular economic and social trends. Much of the visual and textual output around design of this period pointed to a rebuilding of the social order through improved taste and aesthetics much of which was to be experienced in the home.

A critique of the language of value judgments contained in this literature provides a specific view of design and the aesthetics not only of the object, but also as a reflection of the self. It implies graded criteria used to construct judgments

situated in the aesthetic, ethical/moral, material and social categories. These provide evidence for a demonstrable point of view and construction of a particular narrative to *seeing* and *comprehending* taste, situated within a framework of class cultures and social identity. Essentially this engages design from an analysis of reception of meaning, aesthetic construction and socio-political intention, and specifically understanding the ‘understanding’ of design. The overarching rationale is to understand how design has been mediated, and to what perceived ends at particular historical conjunctures.

Contents

List of illustrations

Fig. 14 Letter from Anthony Bertram, October 18, 1946 Penguin Archive Materials, DM1107/S22

Fig. 15 Outline attached to letter from Anthony Bertram, October 18, 1946 Penguin Archive Materials, DM1107/S22

Fig. 16 Postscript to Letter from Anthony Bertram, October 18, 1946 Penguin Archive Materials, DM1107/S22

Fig. 17 Memo from A.S.B Glover re Anthony Bertram's redraft of Design, November 8, 1946

Fig. 18 'Life in Britain Today - A Typical British Recreation Centre', illustration by C.W. Bacon (London: Central Office of Information, 1947)

Fig. 19 Nikolaus Pevsner, *Visual Pleasures from Everyday Things* (London: Batsford, 1946), front cover

Fig. 20 Alan Jarvis, *The Things We See: Indoors and Out* (London: Penguin, 1946), inside front cover

Fig. 21 Bookshop, 'Britain Can Make It' exhibition, Victoria and Albert Museum, London, 1946, showing copies of *The Things We See: Indoors and Out,* Alan Jarvis (bottom left-hand side)

Fig. 22 Alan Jarvis, *The Things We See: Indoors and Out,* Alan Jarvis (London: Penguin, 1946), front cover

Fig. 23 Alan Jarvis, *The Things We See: Indoors and Out,* Alan Jarvis (London: Penguin, 1946), p. 17

Fig. 24 *The Things We See: Indoors and Out,* Alan Jarvis (London: Penguin, 1946), pp.30-31

Fig. 25 *The Things We See - No 3: Furniture*, Gordon Russell (London, Penguin, 1947), front cover

Fig. 26 Gordon Russell, *How to Buy Furniture* (London: HMSO for the Council for Industrial Design, 1947), front cover

Fig. 27 Gordon Russell, *How to buy Furniture* (London: HMSO for the Council for Industrial Design, 1947), p.27

Fig. 28 Gordon Russell, *How to buy Furniture* (London: HMSO for the Council for Industrial Design, 1947), p19

Fig. 29 'Vicky', 'If Only the Wrong People Didn't Breed', *News Chronicle*, Tuesday, March 30, 1943

Fig. 30 Sign, *First Feathers Youth Club*, Kensal House, London. Author's photograph

Fig. 31 *Our Towns: a Close-Up. A Study Made During 1939 - 1942,* Women's Group on Public Welfare, Hygiene Committee (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1943), front cover

Fig. 32 William Ernest Brown, *Changing Britain – No 2: The Struggle for Democracy,* (Bournville: Cadbury Bros., 1944), pp.34, 35

Fig. 33 (left) *Britain, by Mass Observation:* the book arranged and written by Charles Madge and Tom Harrisson (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1939), front cover; (right) *First Year's Work, 1937-1938, by Mass Observation,* ed. Charles Madge and Tom Harrisson (London: Mass Observation, 1938), front cover

Fig. 34 Members of the public being interviewed at the 'Britain Can Make It' exhibition at the Victoria & Albert Museum, London, 1946

Fig.35 *Design Quiz* (London: Council of Industrial Design, 1946), front cover; inside pages

Fig. 36 *Design Quiz*, (London: Council of Industrial Design, 1946), inside pages

Fig. 37 Living/dining room settings designed by Phoebe de Syllas, 'Register Your Choice' exhibition (Design and Industries Association), Charing Cross underground station, 1953

Fig. 38 Kenneth Clark, *What is Good Taste?* Verbatim record of programme broadcast on ATV, 1 December 1958 (London: Associated Television, 1958)

Fig. 39 Gordon Russell and Alan Jarvis, *How to Furnish Your Home* (London: Newman Neame, 1953), front cover (left); Dennis Chapman, *The Home and Social Status* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1955), front cover (right)

Fig. 40 Gordon Russell and Alan Jarvis, *How to Furnish Your Home* (London: Newman Neame, 1953)

Fig. 41 *Accident or Design?*, booklet, (London: Council of Industrial Design, 1956), cover and reverse

Fig. 42 *Life In Britain Today:* A Typical City Thoroughfare, illustration by Grace Lydia Golden,1946

Fig. 43 Chapman, *The Home and Social Status,* Table 69

Fig. 44 [PHOTO, woman, 1956; Hotpoint advertisement, 1956]

Fig. 45 [PHOTO, family, pylon, 1956]

Fig. 46 John Bratby, *The Toilet,* 1955 (left); John Bratby, *Still Life with Chip Frier,* 1954 (right) [Tate Gallery, T06777 and T00104]

Fig. 47 Great British Class Survey, BBC 2013 [https://ssl.bbc.co.uk/labuk/experiments/class/ [accessed 1 March, 2013]]

Preface

Fig. 1 The author, 1959

There are advantages and disadvantages to writing from one's own experience. The auto-ethnographical mode can add depth to information, and detail experiences in unique ways. But it is the subjectivity that it reveals that can also be its downfall. In examples such as *Estates*, by Lynsey Hanley,[1] and *The Likes of Us*, by Michael Collins,[2] the story is told from first-hand experience and yet it is still held firmly in an objective frame.

My own experiences of design in everyday domestic circumstances and in estate life inform this project directly. This is a complex story of the careful collections of objects and souvenirs displayed on the mantelpiece; remnants of Utility furniture around the house well into the 1960s; the hire purchase of all domestic goods;

[1] Lynsey Hanley, *Estates: an Intimate History (*London: Granta, 2007)
[2] Collins, Michael, *The Likes of Us : a Biography of the White Working Class* (London: Granta, 2004)
[2] Collins, Michael, 1980, *The Likes of Us : a Biography of the White Working Class* [accessed: 15 February 2013] http://www.likesofus.co.uk/

trophies brought home from ten-pin bowling competitions (one such example being a very early and enormous Polaroid camera clad in a leather case); the new ‘three piece suite’ arriving just in time for Christmas; visits to the Co-Op; buying Penguin books from Boots the Chemist; Woolworth’s plastic hair brush sets for Christmas; my sister’s and brother’s ‘estate lives’ and the police, and our overall family dynamic. Conscious expression of our family values and our taste were carried in green glass swans, red glass tumblers, the wallpaper and, inevitably, the carpet.

All of this ignited in me an interest that has had a lasting effect and found its way into the work here and my other research examining the state of affairs in contemporary public housing. When I was a child the front door-painting ritual was for me a rather unique form of entertainment and excitement. I can’t remember now how frequently or infrequently this occurred, possibly every five years or so, but I do remember that discovering what colour our front door, at 25 Silk Mill Gardens, would eventually be painted was an elaborate process. I would run up to the top of the road on the council estate where we lived and carefully count off the number of colours being used and the order in which they were repeated on each house, and from that point it was simple to calculate the colour we would eventually be given. No choices here, just a simple allocation.

The Silk Mill that our road was named after had long since ceased operation. There was something rather ironic about this. There was a distinct consciousness of industrial history in the name however slight that may have been, but at the same time something deeply parodic about it too. All traces of the mill had entirely disappeared from the landscape, but for the mill-pond. This remained as a lure and mysterious remnant of a rich local industrial past in textiles manufacturing and dyeing. I almost drowned there when I was three years old. Feckless siblings allowed me to explore unsupervised the exotic surface pattern of oily residue and bubbles of soap scum that rose from the effluent that poured into it from the nearby soap works. The employment and

textiles history long since evaporated into the new council estate. With its Working Men's club, parade of shops, nearby bus terminus and Co-Op van visiting once a week it epitomized the culture of new council estates.

Behaving ourselves

Exerting control over one's environment through simple conveniences such as the selection of a door colour was a luxury not afforded to residents in council properties, since tenants could not in any way alter or change the fabric of their homes. This included painting the exterior doors and windows. Interior decoration was expected, but again without any changes to the space, or to fittings and fixtures. This was a particularly difficult prohibition in these the early days of D.I.Y. It would be possible to find many builders, plasterers, plumbers, electrician and the like among the residents on the estate, and yet none of them would be able to make legitimate use of their trades in their own homes.

Many tenants did of course make surreptitious alterations and additions that could be easily removed and which caused no lasting damage to the fabric of their houses. My father and brother both plumbers and carpenters made fabulous use of their skills. In our house, a special room divider was built to create a living room and a sort of dining room-cum-study area from the single large downstairs room so common in council properties. I had passed the eleven-plus examination and become a 'grammar school girl'. I had homework, a new phenomenon in the house where I lived with my four siblings. This vitrine was created to allow some separation from the hubbub of TV and family life, still visible, and audible through the louvred glass windows.

Carte blanche to make alterations would only be achieved after my parents and many others had bought their council houses under the 'Right to Buy' legislation

introduced during the Thatcher administration in 1980.[3] After this, a free-for-all of individual expression ensued. Not surprisingly, changing the front door of the house was the most popular way to demonstrate to the world, and to your neighbours, that you were now an 'owner-occupier'; but it was also an important statement of liberation from the regimen of the housing authorities.

The proliferation of different styles – some made in wood, some in plastics or laminates, with windowpanes, often faux 1930s 'sunburst', or without – was testimony to the desire for individuality in design. In fact the popularity of 1930s 'homely' motifs was predominant followed closely by Georgian styles, and then by 'Victorian country cottage'. Our own back door was exchanged for a 'stable-door' style, with a top half that could be opened separately. Revisiting our nineteenth-century peasant artisan past no doubt.

These innovations catalogued the rampant self-expression of an identity repressed for so long by local government regulations. The blossoming of design and taste that this exposed was astonishing in its range and complexity. The subsequent addition of anti-theft grills and window railings rather ruined the effect, although it did fully demonstrate the continuing newfound affluence of the working class.

It was during this period that we also witnessed the sudden decline of the working classes instigated by the Thatcher government's Housing Act and perpetuated through housing policy, legislation to limit the power and authority of the trades unions and the erosion of the social position of the working class. The disempowerment of the working class through the destruction of its traditional institutions and industries, recreations and employment can be viewed as a direct parallel to the transformation that occurred during the Industrial Revolution and in the Victorian period.

---

[3] The Housing Act, 1980, http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1980/51 [accessed 15 February 2013]

Paradoxically, the 'right to buy', introduced to council tenants as a way to finally own and take part in the property market, was one of the most divisive and destructive instruments of the Thatcher government. It fractured communities and introduced distinct boundaries around taste, ownership and improvement. In addition, it created yet more opportunities to wrest control from local government and place a new burden on the hapless tenant-turned-owner. The invidious long-term consequences of this legislation resulted in a predictable effect on the quality of life and outcome for many tenants.[4] However, it is impossible to deny that this was also an opportunity for individual expression of identity. The combined effects of the publishing revolution, the growth of educational television and eventually lifestyle programmes led to new values and aspirations. New areas of analysis emerged once again and the anthropological investigations of class behaviour and distinctions conducted during the 1950s were revived and revitalized.

As one of Richard Hoggart's 'declassed' uprooted and anxious,[5] I am keen to employ first-hand accounts as research sources to illuminate the value of these in the formation of our critical understanding of design and working class taste. The literature of design reform is used in conjunction with this in order to elucidate the good taste that it sought to construct in the working class. There was no question that the working class residents on the estate where I lived understood what taste was. In fact they constructed elaborate monuments to the notion in their homes and gardens. That it did not always coincide with received notions of fashion, respectable taste or popular culture made it all the more intriguing.

The recent resurgence of interest in class in Britain is partly due to very recent political changes and partly cultural, as one might expect. [6] The fact that the

---

[4] Colin Jones and Alan Murie, *The Right to Buy: Analysis & Evaluation of a Housing Policy* (London: Blackwell, 2006), 238

[5] Richard Hoggart, *The Uses of Literacy: Aspects of Working-class Life* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1957)

[6] The election of the UK Conservative/Liberal Democrat coalition government, 2010

working class has become an interesting and necessary topic of debate again, in ways we have not experienced for a considerable period of time, provides a propitious and not entirely unexpected moment for this study to appear. That the debate revolves once again around their feckless nature is disappointing though not in the least bit surprising. The Welfare Reform Bill of 2012 and proposed changes affecting benefits for the unemployed and disabled is sadly reminiscent of Victorian attitudes to the working class population.

Recent critical writing,[7] newspaper reports,[8] radio[9] and television broadcast accounts of class[10] as a subject, and especially a recently commissioned BBC research project, *The Great British Class Survey* [11] have all shown that there is a re-growth of interest in the area, and in particular in the white working class experience in Britain. Clearly the constitution of the government by a significant number of Old Etonians has also had some effect on the general mood. Class is a daily component of the Government's agenda, but our expectation that they will comprehend its complexity is misplaced as ever.

Far from going away then, class, and the understanding that we have of class divisions around taste, is still with us as an ever-present reminder of the larger cultural project of which it has been a part for the last eighty years or so. Even more perplexing is that this project is a continuation of its Victorian predecessors' attempts at the very same thing. Class is contentious again and, as this study aims to demonstrate, has always been so. For me this interest in class, regardless of its newfound implications in contemporary political culture, is one that is very personal in nature and has always been contentious. It is for this

---

[7] Gary Day, *Class* (London, Routledge, 2001); John Kirk, *Class, Culture and Social Change: On the Trail of the Working Class*, London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007); John Kirk, *The British Working Class in the Twentieth Century: Film, Literature and Television* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2003)
[8] Roy Hattersley, 'The Equality Delusion', *Guardian*, 24 January 2009.
[9] Sarfraz Mansour, *Whatever Happened to the Working Class?*: 'From Engels to Oasis', 'A Taste of Money', 'From Heroes to Zeroes', BBC Radio 4, broadcast February 18 - March 4, 2009,
[10] *Is White Working class Britain Becoming Invisible?* BBC television, White Season, broadcast March 7- 14 2008; *Video Nation,* BBC 2 television, broadcast March 3, 2008.
[11] *The Great British Class Survey,* BBC Class Questionnaire, 2011, designed by *Professor Mike Savage, University of York and Professor Fiona Devine, University of Manchester.*

reason that some of the background to this discussion comes from an auto-ethnographical examination of the postwar working class domestic condition as much as it does from conventional research methods and resources.

Acknowledgements

I would like to acknowledge the help and support of a number of people.

First and foremost I thank my supervisors. My supervisor at the Royal College of Art, Barry Curtis and my supervisor in Chicago, Victor Margolin, for their extraordinary support and guidance. I consider myself to have been blessed with two supervisors of such wisdom and erudition. My tutorials with both were an inspiration. Each kept me to the path and criticized with care. Each shared my enthusiasm for the project. I am indebted to them for showing such care and for sharing their vast experience and knowledge so generously.

I am also grateful to my friends and colleagues who helped with personal support and guidance during some difficult times. They will understand my meaning here.

So much of this work depended on archival sources. I thank the staff of the Penguin Books Archive in Special Collections at Bristol University, the staff of the Design Council Archive at Brighton University for their very generous assistance, the Royal Society of Arts Library and of course the staff of the Royal College of Art Library.

AUTHOR'S DECLARATION

During the period of registered study in which this thesis was prepared the author has not been registered for any other academic award or qualification. The material included in this thesis has not been submitted wholly or in part for any academic award or qualification other than that for which it is now submitted.

Signature_____ Date_____

Preface

Fig. 1 The author, 1959

There are advantages and disadvantages to writing from one's own experience. The auto-ethnographical mode can add depth to information, and detail experiences in unique ways. But it is the subjectivity that it reveals that can also be its downfall. In examples such as *Estates*, by Lynsey Hanley,[1] and *The Likes of Us*, by Michael Collins,[2] the story is told from first-hand experience and yet it is still held firmly in an objective frame.

My own experiences of design in everyday domestic circumstances and in estate life inform this project directly. This is a complex story of the careful collections of objects and souvenirs displayed on the mantelpiece; remnants of Utility furniture around the house well into the 1960s; the hire purchase of all domestic goods;

[1] Lynsey Hanley, *Estates: an Intimate History (*London: Granta, 2007)
[2] Collins, Michael, *The Likes of Us : a Biography of the White Working Class* (London: Granta, 2004)

trophies brought home from ten-pin bowling competitions (one such example being a very early and enormous Polaroid camera clad in a leather case); the new ‘three piece suite’ arriving just in time for Christmas; visits to the Co-Op; buying Penguin books from Boots the Chemist; Woolworth’s plastic hair brush sets for Christmas; my sister’s and brother’s ‘estate lives’ and the police, and our overall family dynamic. Conscious expression of our family values and our taste were carried in green glass swans, red glass tumblers, the wallpaper and, inevitably, the carpet.

All of this ignited in me an interest that has had a lasting effect and found its way into the work here and my other research examining the state of affairs in contemporary public housing. When I was a child the front door-painting ritual was for me a rather unique form of entertainment and excitement. I can’t remember now how frequently or infrequently this occurred, possibly every five years or so, but I do remember that discovering what colour our front door, at 25 Silk Mill Gardens, would eventually be painted was an elaborate process. I would run up to the top of the road on the council estate where we lived and carefully count off the number of colours being used and the order in which they were repeated on each house, and from that point it was simple to calculate the colour we would eventually be given. No choices here, just a simple allocation.

The Silk Mill that our road was named after had long since ceased operation. There was something rather ironic about this. There was a distinct consciousness of industrial history in the name however slight that may have been, but at the same time something deeply parodic about it too. All traces of the mill had entirely disappeared from the landscape, but for the mill-pond. This remained as a lure and mysterious remnant of a rich local industrial past in textiles manufacturing and dyeing. I almost drowned there when I was three years old. Feckless siblings allowed me to explore unsupervised the exotic surface pattern of oily residue and bubbles of soap scum that rose from the effluent that poured into it from the nearby soap works. The employment and

textiles history long since evaporated into the new council estate. With its Working Men's club, parade of shops, nearby bus terminus and Co-Op van visiting once a week it epitomized the culture of new council estates.

Behaving ourselves

Exerting control over one's environment through simple conveniences such as the selection of a door colour was a luxury not afforded to residents in council properties, since tenants could not in any way alter or change the fabric of their homes. This included painting the exterior doors and windows. Interior decoration was expected, but again without any changes to the space, or to fittings and fixtures. This was a particularly difficult prohibition in these the early days of D.I.Y. It would be possible to find many builders, plasterers, plumbers, electrician and the like among the residents on the estate, and yet none of them would be able to make legitimate use of their trades in their own homes.

Many tenants did of course make surreptitious alterations and additions that could be easily removed and which caused no lasting damage to the fabric of their houses. My father and brother both plumbers and carpenters made fabulous use of their skills. In our house, a special room divider was built to create a living room and a sort of dining room-cum-study area from the single large downstairs room so common in council properties. I had passed the eleven-plus examination and become a 'grammar school girl'. I had homework, a new phenomenon in the house where I lived with my four siblings. This vitrine was created to allow some separation from the hubbub of TV and family life, still visible, and audible through the louvred glass windows.

Carte blanche to make alterations would only be achieved after my parents and many others had bought their council houses under the 'Right to Buy' legislation introduced during the Thatcher administration in 1980.[3] After this, a free-for-all of

[3] The Housing Act, 1980, http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1980/51 [accessed 15 February 2013]

individual expression ensued. Not surprisingly, changing the front door of the house was the most popular way to demonstrate to the world, and to your neighbours, that you were now an ‘owner-occupier’; but it was also an important statement of liberation from the regimen of the housing authorities.

The proliferation of different styles – some made in wood, some in plastics or laminates, with windowpanes, often faux 1930s ‘sunburst’, or without – was testimony to the desire for individuality in design. In fact the popularity of 1930s ‘homely’ motifs was predominant followed closely by Georgian styles, and then by ‘Victorian country cottage’. Our own back door was exchanged for a ‘stable-door’ style, with a top half that could be opened separately. Revisiting our nineteenth-century peasant artisan past no doubt.

These innovations catalogued the rampant self-expression of an identity repressed for so long by local government regulations. The blossoming of design and taste that this exposed was astonishing in its range and complexity. The subsequent addition of anti-theft grills and window railings rather ruined the effect, although it did fully demonstrate the continuing newfound affluence of the working class.

It was during this period that we also witnessed the sudden decline of the working classes instigated by the Thatcher government’s Housing Act and perpetuated through housing policy, legislation to limit the power and authority of the trades unions and the erosion of the social position of the working class. The disempowerment of the working class through the destruction of its traditional institutions and industries, recreations and employment can be viewed as a direct parallel to the transformation that occurred during the Industrial Revolution and in the Victorian period.

Paradoxically, the ‘right to buy’, introduced to council tenants as a way to finally own and take part in the property market, was one of the most divisive and

destructive instruments of the Thatcher government. It fractured communities and introduced distinct boundaries around taste, ownership and improvement. In addition, it created yet more opportunities to wrest control from local government and place a new burden on the hapless tenant-turned-owner. The invidious long-term consequences of this legislation resulted in a predictable effect on the quality of life and outcome for many tenants.[4] However, it is impossible to deny that this was also an opportunity for individual expression of identity. The combined effects of the publishing revolution, the growth of educational television and eventually lifestyle programmes led to new values and aspirations. New areas of analysis emerged once again and the anthropological investigations of class behaviour and distinctions conducted during the 1950s were revived and revitalized.

As one of Richard Hoggart's 'declassed' uprooted and anxious,[5] I am keen to employ first-hand accounts as research sources to illuminate the value of these in the formation of our critical understanding of design and working class taste. The literature of design reform is used in conjunction with this in order to elucidate the good taste that it sought to construct in the working class. There was no question that the working class residents on the estate where I lived understood what taste was. In fact they constructed elaborate monuments to the notion in their homes and gardens. That it did not always coincide with received notions of fashion, respectable taste or popular culture made it all the more intriguing.

The recent resurgence of interest in class in Britain is partly due to very recent political changes and partly cultural, as one might expect. [6] The fact that the working class has become an interesting and necessary topic of debate again, in ways we have not experienced for a considerable period of time, provides a

[4] Colin Jones and Alan Murie, *The Right to Buy: Analysis & Evaluation of a Housing Policy* (London: Blackwell, 2006), 238
[5] Richard Hoggart, *The Uses of Literacy: Aspects of Working-class Life* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1957)
[6] The election of the UK Conservative/Liberal Democrat coalition government, 2010

propitious and not entirely unexpected moment for this study to appear. That the debate revolves once again around their feckless nature is disappointing though not in the least bit surprising. The Welfare Reform Bill of 2012 and proposed changes affecting benefits for the unemployed and disabled is sadly reminiscent of Victorian attitudes to the working class population.

Recent critical writing,[7] newspaper reports,[8] radio[9] and television broadcast accounts of class[10] as a subject, and especially a recently commissioned BBC research project, *The Great British Class Survey* [11] have all shown that there is a re-growth of interest in the area, and in particular in the white working class experience in Britain. Clearly the constitution of the government by a significant number of Old Etonians has also had some effect on the general mood. Class is a daily component of the Government's agenda, but our expectation that they will comprehend its complexity is misplaced as ever.

Far from going away then, class, and the understanding that we have of class divisions around taste, is still with us as an ever-present reminder of the larger cultural project of which it has been a part for the last eighty years or so. Even more perplexing is that this project is a continuation of its Victorian predecessors' attempts at the very same thing. Class is contentious again and, as this study aims to demonstrate, has always been so. For me this interest in class, regardless of its newfound implications in contemporary political culture, is one that is very personal in nature and has always been contentious. It is for this reason that some of the background to this discussion comes from an auto-

[7] Gary Day, *Class* (London, Routledge, 2001); John Kirk, *Class, Culture and Social Change: On the Trail of the Working Class*, London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007); John Kirk, *The British Working Class in the Twentieth Century: Film, Literature and Television* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2003)
[8] Roy Hattersley, 'The Equality Delusion', *Guardian*, 24 January 2009.
[9] Sarfraz Mansour, *Whatever Happened to the Working Class?*: 'From Engels to Oasis', 'A Taste of Money', 'From Heroes to Zeroes', BBC Radio 4, broadcast February 18 - March 4, 2009,
[10] *Is White Working class Britain Becoming Invisible?* BBC television, White Season, broadcast March 7- 14 2008; *Video Nation,* BBC 2 television, broadcast March 3, 2008.
[11] *The Great British Class Survey,* BBC Class Questionnaire, 2011, designed by *Professor Mike Savage, University of York and Professor Fiona Devine, University of Manchester.*

ethnographical examination of the postwar working class domestic condition as much as it does from conventional research methods and resources.

Introduction

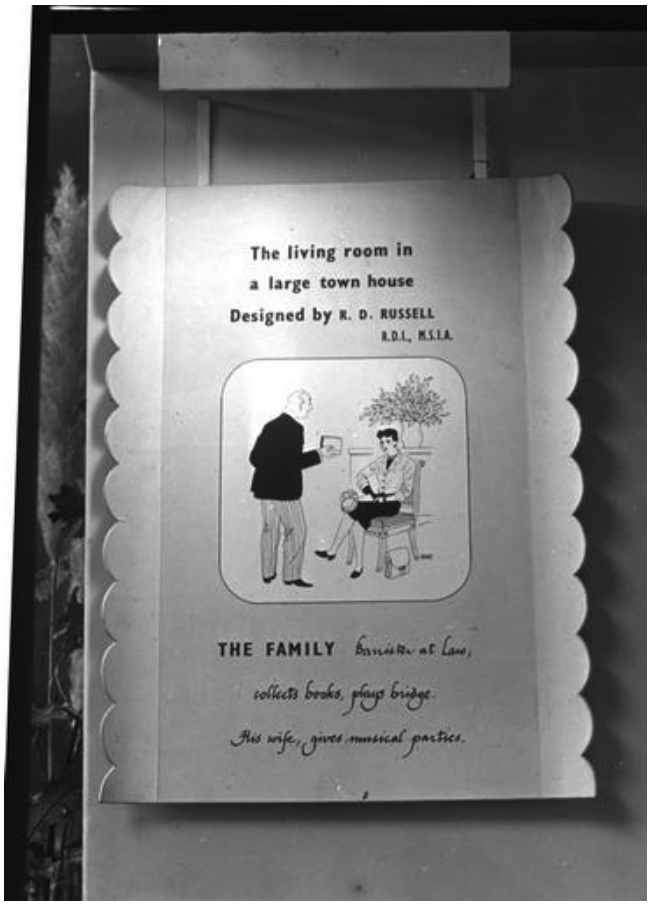


Fig.2 Exhibition signage accompanying the living room in a large town house designed by R.D Russell: one of the examples of Furnished Rooms at the 'Britain Can Make It' exhibition, 1946. 'THE FAMILY barrister at Law, collects books, plays bridge, his wife gives musical parties'. Texts by John Betjeman and drawings by Nicolas Bentley.

Taste and the Working Class

It is tempting to say that the subjects of good taste and the working class have been considered mutually exclusive for much of the last 150 years. Indeed, the apprehension with which the conjunction of the working classes and matters of taste have been viewed has given them an almost incendiary feeling in British culture. There was a gradual demise of the campaigns around 'good taste' in the

1930s and 1940s eventually giving way to those in favour of less restrictive and more permissive models of taste and appreciation of the 1950s and the 1960s. The relentless pursuit of ‘good taste’ in connection with the modes of mass consumption and mass production in relation to working class society has been a source of continual interest, occupying the upper classes and upper middle classes since the mid-nineteenth century. This anxiety about working class ignorance and fear of social ‘faux pas’ is exhibited in much of this literature, both in allusions to the problem of sham, fake and ersatz forms and in descriptions of disgust or embarrassment in the face of poor taste. It is also present in other forms of popular entertainment, and comedy in particular, as a repressed desire to better oneself while risking exposure for the working class social climber one actually was.

It is for this reason that the investigation of the inflection of taste, and the steady, drip-fed ideology of ‘good taste’ in particular when directed at the working classes is of such great interest. This is not to say that the lower middle classes or middle classes were not subject to the same pressures. However, that taste is located within a specific class structure is exemplified in the design reform research materials - the literature, exhibitions, films, television and radio broadcasts - and the same materials also show the continued attempts at social engineering, education and the infantilisation of the working classes.

The proposition in this research is that class is a valuable and worthwhile mechanism for re-working this field of interest and debate, for all that it is unstable, insecure and under permanent revision. This is timely and relevant research as it also relates to current political positions and attitudes to social justice, urban regeneration and social restructuring. The subject of class-consciousness and its relationship to class distinctions in Britain has, it seems, found a new voice and a particularly fertile period once more.

The Literature of Design Reform and the Formation of Working Class Taste

This investigation asks for re-examination and reconsideration of the position adopted in relation to the working class in a design reform literature predisposed to viewing them in much the same way that nineteenth-century reformers had seen them. Sometimes disguised, but more often not, the depth of anxiety surrounding class politics and issues of class identity betrays a deep distrust and fear of the social changes brought about through increased industrial activity and the postwar consumer cultures that developed as a result.

The literature of design reform aimed to establish a modernist discourse surrounding the home life and domestic circumstances of the working class that was to be instrumental in forming their new identity. Although the ideas, implications, and consequences are very wide-ranging, this thesis centres on a design reform project at a particular time, and the interpretation is derived from the evidence of this debate.

In this presentation of working class taste concerns and predilections it will be important to register what is simply a matter of personal idiosyncrasy and culture, what is symptomatic of a meeting point between British working class identity, morality and ethics in design, and some formulation of the design and consumption agenda in relation to socially re-forming and industrially re-making the British working class. This discussion straddles the years between 1937 and 1948, and starts from the characterization in the literature of design reform of a working class society that is disempowered, disabled and subjugated by poor taste and a lack of aesthetic capability.

This examination of the literature of design reform aims to unravel the complex sets of relationships, etiquettes and ethical injunctions established between the working class consumer and his or her domestic surroundings at very different times – in the inter-war and then the postwar years – and when new

opportunities to engage with consumption and to expand both social mobility and taste presented themselves.

The question remains, were the working classes the victims or the beneficiaries of complex and contradictory discourses around status and class, taste and equality. In making working class identity and re-forming the working classes the literature of design reform, and the Modernist convictions it espoused, set out a discourse the critical analysis of which reveals a desire for the construction of a new social context and a new working class persona. The important new role the working class would need to play in transforming British industry and society demanded this changed persona. In this study the origin of the desire for this particular persona as an *aesthetic citizen* is also investigated.

The relationship between standards of taste in working class society and the terminology employed in these texts is key. As we examine the discourses that were created and were responsible for cultivating certain sets of social conditions and structures we are instantly aware of the contexts within which design would become a tool for change. When these texts were utilized in specific social contexts we might have expected the emergence of the desired identity to be expressed through design in their material surroundings. The distribution of working class newspapers and the uses of other forms of educational materials, and indeed the general incidence of learning and reading amongst the working class, were in stark contrast to the nature of the literature produced for their visual education. This literature was the narrativization of the desire for a specific form of lived experience of a socially specific group.

The design reformer's argument was not only directed at the working classes but also tended to include by inference if not directly the parvenu lower middle class. The working class may have been identified, indeed were constantly referred to, in the missives of the design reformers but there was an indirect and more universal address within them too that might not have been apparent at first

glance. The lower middle class was 'uncivilized' in different ways hovering as they did between two echelons in society. This thesis concentrates on the attempts made to correct working class taste during the period 1937 – 1948. The discussion also extends beyond these dates in certain places to accommodate the essential background to the Design Reform project. The primary sources for the research are the books, pamphlets, exhibition materials and guides published between 1937 and 1948 that constitute the literature of design reform. There are also letters and object evidence from the same period that relate to this discourse, and finally the materials obtained from research subjects and auto-ethnographical investigation.

We begin in 1937 when key examples of the literature, and indeed other manifestations of its messages are published and conclude in 1948 as a new set of views of working class life begin to find currency. During the years between 1937 and 1948 we see the development of a substantial body of literature at once critical of the working class and their inborn crude character, while at the same time proposing the potential for transformation under its aegis. It is my contention that the publications in this period form a relatively coherent discourse, although not the only one, around approaches to modifying taste amongst the working classes.

Working class taste was always a problem. The very idea seemed to represent an insoluble puzzle, with the discrepancies between the desired goal of good taste and the innate incapability of the working classes to achieve such a goal seemingly too far apart to be reconciled. In addition the dominance within the discourses of 'good taste' in particular effectively closed off any other avenues to achieving refined sensibilities, even basic appreciation. As Jules Lubbock points out the ideal situation would be that of the wartime Utility Scheme and "state approved designs" thus circumventing working class taste altogether.[1] If the literature of design reform was to be believed then there was to be one view

[1] Jules Lubbock, The Tyranny of Taste, (London, Yale University Press, 1995) 314

alone on taste and a strict path to be followed in developing the necessary capacity for appreciation of things of good taste.

The working classes represent a particular kind of problem and yet extraordinary potentiality in this period. The rise and visibility of Modernism, developments in broadcasting and social documentary, a popular front and the growth of welfarism seemed to create a new atmosphere around the working classes. At the same time the convergence of the emerging forces of class resistance and a loss of deference to ruling elites coupled with the confrontation of old intellectual notions of working class society, conspired to provide the most propitious moment to effect real social change.

This is a story of the ambitions of a loosely articulated network of writers and, interestingly, very few designers, determined to refine taste through exhibitions and *written* accounts and of what taste was. A group mostly privately educated and (with the exceptions of Gordon Russell and Nikolaus Pevsner) very probably Oxbridge graduates, these authors typify the background of those writers keen to change not simply the taste but also the attitudes of the masses. The main protagonists presented here are Anthony Bertram, John Gloag, Alan Jarvis, Nikolaus Pevsner and Gordon Russell. These, the authors of the texts and broadcasts included in this study, represent a group of the voices that championed a particular version of Modernism in design in Britain variously as a method of civilizing, ordering and cleaning up the working class and, more importantly, redefining taste and aesthetics for a very general public. The impetus for design reform in the 1930s seems to stem most directly from the slum clearances and consequences of rehousing large portions of the working class population. What seems to motivate people like Bertram, Gloag and Pevsner is their overwhelming belief in the social benefits of Modernism and in their fervent desire to be rid of the iniquities of poor taste. The effect of this was that it substantially mediated the working class experience of modernity from 1937 to 1948.

Inter-war Britain and Government Policy

We shall see that the push for socioeconomic and sociocultural engineering, as it was represented in the texts and images that will be examined here derived its impetus from the need to provide employment and grow industrial production, build social housing and promote domestic consumption. The working class suffered more than most through the years of the Depression in the 1930s. This is vividly described and documented in J.B Priestley's *English Journey.* This account of a journey around the British Isles in 1933 provides insights into the state of the country still in the throws of the economic slump. Priestley draws a comparison between Victorian England and the England he observes in 1933 seeing little discernable difference:

> The less fortunate classes were very unlucky indeed in that England. They had some sort of security, which is more than many of them have now, but it was a security of monstrously long hours of work, miserable wages, and surroundings in which they lived like black-beetles at the back of a disused kitchen stove. Many of their descendants are still living in those surroundings, but few people now have the impudence to tell them to be resigned and even thankful there, to toil in humble diligence before their Maker and for His chosen children, the debenture-holders. Whether they were better off in this England than the one before, the pre industrial one, is a question that I admitted I could not answer. [2]

Andrew August provides detailed statistics that show that the mass unemployment and loss of traditional industries was devastating the north while the new lighter industries took over:

> Far reaching effects such as the loss of export markets and the fiscal impact of war spending continued to shape the inter-war economy. Yet following the dislocation of war and the downturn in 1920 – 1, the British economy grew at a solid pace in the inter-war period. Healthy sectors increased their importance in the British labour market. Automobile manufacture employed 227,000 in 1920 and more than double that – 516,000 – in 1938. Building workers accounted for slightly over one-tenth of the workforce in 1920, but these trades employed 1.3 million, over 15

[2] J.B. Priestley, *English Journey,* (London: The Folio Society, 1997), 323

per cent of all workers, in 1338. On the other hand, cotton employment plummeted from 621,500 in 1912 to 393,000 in 1938 and coal mining declined from 1,2 million in 1920 to 702,000 18 years later. Despite the growth of new industries persistent widespread unemployment throughout the period devastated many working class families. [3]

The Conservative government in power in the late 1930s was certainly under threat from Labour inroads into their vote, but as August states:

Though the inter-war period saw a dramatic increase in support for the Labour Party, working class consciousness still did not generate a unified position in national politics…..working class voters helped the Conservatives earn the largest share of the vote at each general election and remain in government alone or in coalitions for all but three years between 1915 and 1939. [4]

In his introduction to *Labour and the Left in the 1930s*, Ben Pimlott sums up the atmosphere around the political situation at the time perfectly:

Two great national anxieties, mass unemployment and the threat of war, dominated British politics in the 1930s and preoccupied British politicians, who failed to provide an answer for either of them. It was the 'Red Decade' – the decade of Auden, Spender and Cornford, of *Love on the Dole* and *The Road to Wigan Pier*. It was the decade of the Jarrow March, the International Brigade and the Left Book Club, of Fabian schools, mass rallies and demonstrations. Yet it was a decade in which the impact of the entire British Left on practical problems and immediate events was virtually nil. No major national policy or decision, from the formation of Ramsay MacDonald's first National Government in August 1931 to the declaration of war eight years later, was made or prevented by anything any politician on the left said, wrote or did.[5]

Why did these authors feel both qualified, and at the same time compelled, to compose these texts? And how were they affiliated to the network of institutions dedicated to the same cause? They represented the continuation of the Left leaning philanthropic tradition that had persisted since the Victorian period

[3] Andrew August, *The British Working Class*, (Harlow: Pearson Longman, 2007), 192
[4] Ibid., 235

[5] Ben Pimlott, *Labour and the Left in the 1930s,* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977)

dedicated to the reformation of the working class. Each of our authors was closely connected to the British establishment through their education and background, and employed by key arts institutions and journals responsible for influencing the design reform agenda.

It is the confluence of these institutions and individuals, so many and so various, which establishes the character of the design reformer and the nature of this model of design reform. Through the evidence provided in these texts and from first-hand accounts we are able to view the proposed re-forming of the working class from a group 'disabled' by their ineptitude in matters of taste and their 'crude' senses into one that is critically enabled in the very complex sphere of taste and aesthetics.[6] Simon Watney shows us the source of this view of the working class as inferior through his descriptions of Clive Bells' affirmation of the role of the ruling class in *Civilisation* from1927, aspects of which chime perfectly with the views of our design reformers:

> Bell concluded his personal manifesto with an unambiguous call for a ruling symposium of like-minded aesthete-intellectuals, imposing its own 'thought and feeling' on a populace so sunk in the dim consciousness of merely practical vision that they could supposedly neither think nor feel for themselves.

Each of their individual voices is heard in this narrative, and each of the authors succeeds in constructing a different story about the benefits of good taste. Their uses of the text and image relationship is also worthy of some simple investigation, as illustrations play a significant role in delivering meaning in this literature and benefited hugely from the wartime communication strategies adopted by the Ministry of Information. The entire proposition of the literature of design reform was in encouraging the working class to *read* about taste. As this narrative unfolds it is punctuated by the personal stories of the authors of these texts, and in the case of Anthony Bertram particular personal changes that had a deep influence on his writing. This goes part of the way to explain some of the

[6] Anthony Bertram, *Design in Everyday Things* (London, British Broadcasting Corporation, 1937), 5

reasons for their ardent promulgation of taste and aesthetic clarity. Each of these authors is important, too, in terms of their own class-consciousness.

Individual Motivations and a Shared Campaign

Nikolaus Pevsner, a recent immigrant to England who trod his own path from suspicion to acceptance, displayed no little confusion about the British class system in the process:

> One of the reasons why England has been late in adopting this international style is the fact that more contrasts between classes are still in existence in this country than in those which are leading the Modern Movement.[7]

Pevsner arrived as a Jewish refugee from Germany in 1933, after making two previous visits, and was still very definitely outside the British class debate. Stephen Games asserts that the fact that this debate was still alien to him, and to his experience of design and Modernism, was to stand him in good stead when it came to his study *An Enquiry into Industrial Art In England*.[8] Coming from outside Britain, Pevsner would talk about design as a metaphor for other widespread notions about the British.

His concern with design was much more to do with the realm of class and existence, and not necessarily design criticism. Pevsner's experiences of British class structures were epitomized by a simple encounter with a swimming pool:

> Oh heavens, how English!...It is for the lower classes, I suppose….A large pool between good trees – long, deep, good for swimming. But no grass verge, in this land of grass and lawns, just wooden duckboards and antediluvian changing cubicles – about 100 for men and 30 for women – none of our wonderful changing cabins. And hardly more than a 100 people there, despite the marvelous weather…and this is *the* pool…I'd like to know who on earth among the upper classes

[7] Nikolaus Pevsner, *An Inquiry into Industrial Art in England* (Cambridge: Macmillan, 1937), 201
[8] Stephen Games, *Pevsner: the Early Life : Germany and Ar*t (London: Continuum, 2010) , 204

would ever use this pool. Repulsive, really – is this the country I want to come to?[9]

Susie Harries points out that Pevsner seemed unaware of the closure of the majority of German swimming pools to Jews since 1933. Real industry based investigation and socio-economic research was to be his chief interest in the work he conducted for *Industrial Art In England*, in spite of the fact that he had little knowledge of the field. Pevsner held his efforts up as solid research, and went to some trouble to discover the truth of English manufacturing and tastes, whereas he refers to Noel Carrington's and John Gloag's works rather archly in *Industrial Art In England* as 'lighter reading':

In Mr Carrington's book the lightness has something of champagne, Mr Gloag offers clear and refreshing water. [10]

Timothy Mowl gives a clear account of Pevsner's movement through the design and architectural literary establishment in Britain, his gradual assimilation into the British cultural milieu, the realm of design criticism and *Architectural Review* in particular. By 1936 he had begun writing about all aspect of design for the publication:

Nikolaus was commissioned and responded eagerly with no less that seven articles in one year. First in April 1936 came Pevsner on 'Carpets', then 'Furnishing Fabrics' in June, followed by 'Gas and Electric Fittings, 'Fires and Lighting Fixtures' and, a little nearer to his real goal 'Architectural Metalwork'.[11]

The Canadian Alan Jarvis arrived in Britain as a Rhodes scholar: he eventually became a protégé of Sir Stafford Cripps, and through Cripps found his way on to the Council of Industrial Design in 1945.[12] Jarvis's first large-scale project was the *'Britain Can Make It'* exhibition, and the accompanying text, *The Things We*

[9] Susie Harries, *Nikolaus Pevsner: the Life*,(London: Chatto and Windus, 2011), 164
[10] Pevsner, *Industrial Art in England* , 173
[11] Timothy Mowl, *Stylistic Cold Wars, Betjeman versus Pevsner,* (London: Faber and Faber, 2011) 93
[12] Andrew Horrall, *Bringing Art to Life: a Biography of Alan Jarvis*, (Montreal: McGill-Queen's Press, 2009) 142

See Indoors and Out, was to be the first in a series of eighteen that he commissioned to be produced by Penguin in conjunction with the Council of Industrial Design. Andrew Horrall's account of his life speaks of the role he took in the development of the design reform agenda in Britain and subsequently when he returned to Canada. He was to implement similar ideas, including a television programme and regular newspaper articles, all bearing the same title, *The Things We See*, from 1960 to 1961, but these met with little success. [13]

Anthony Bertram and John Gloag were part of a group of writers and critics with a considerable Arts and Crafts pedigree representing the British design establishment's chief concerns: taste, class and quality. Gordon Russell was distinguished in this group, as the only designer amidst a plethora of historians and classicists. Examination of Bertram's and Gloag's texts will show that notions of Platonic beauty, the sublime effects of design on the individual and the transformatory aspects of good taste were central to each of their arguments. Gordon Russell, on the other hand, would concentrate on the far more pragmatic aspects of the everyday physical aspects of the object with his precise accounts of its finish, construction and desired appearance in the home setting.

We shall see how each of these authors expressed a particular view of the purposes and potential of design. Shared agendas, associations and connections allowed them to build a degree of consensus around the necessity for good taste in design in the working class consumer. However, their very different personal goals and concerns meant that their voices came from many sides of the debate, although all were ultimately directed at the same working class target. Political, industrial, social and economic agendas were all present in this discussion, as might be expected. However, the consistent theme shared by each of these characters was their wholehearted agreement on the execrable nature of working class taste and its effect on design, designers and industrial production. Within the discussion the allusions to eugenics were never very far away either. The

[13] ibid.,p.326

responsibility for all that was bogus,[14] malformed, mongrel[15] and uncivilized[16] was placed firmly at the door of the working class, with the retail profession coming in at a close second. Housing and furnishing the home was quite simply a useful mechanism by which to discuss clean living and worthwhile work.

Modernism Championed as 'Ordering' the Working Class

Modernism, as it came to be expressed by Anthony Bertram, John Gloag, Nikolaus Pevsner, Alan Jarvis and Gordon Russell, reflected a public discourse that was intent on linking taste with industrial progress and profit, and taste with social order as expressed in personal hygiene and improvement. The diversity and range of institutional and establishment players who were recruited to the task under scrutiny here is wide in scope. We must attempt to isolate some strands of the project to demonstrate how they are tied to and interwoven with other socio-economic concerns.

Not surprisingly, many institutions played a prominent role in this campaign around design. Institutions such as the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) commissioned broadcasts about design and modernism, as a part of the Reithian project dedicated to education and enlightenment, from John Gloag in 1933, *Design in Modern Life,* (1933) and *Design in Industry*, (1934) and Anthony Bertram in 1937 *Design in Everyday Things*, 1937.[17] The newly formed Penguin Books developed liaisons with the BBC and the Council of Industrial Design, themselves in their infancy, in the production of materials that promulgated design. Anthony Bertram's *Design in Everyday Things* BBC broadcasts became *Design*, published by Penguin in 1938. At the same time, government departments such as the Board of Trade, the Central Office of Information and

[14] Anthony Bertram, *Design* (London: Penguin, 1938), 112.
[15] Nikolaus Pevsner, *Visual Pleasure from Everyday Things* (London: Batsford; Council for Visual Education 1946),18.
[16] Bertram, *Design*, 86.
[17] John Gloag, *Design in Modern Life,* 1933; John Gloag;,*Design in Industry,* 1934; Anthony Bertram, *Design in Everyday Things*, 1937. BBC WAC Archives.

other institutional agencies soon began to collaborate in the production of literature, exhibitions, films and advertisements dedicated to transforming taste.

Anthony Bertram and Design Ideals

Of all the writers under discussion here it is Anthony Bertram's texts *The House: a Machine for Living In*, published in 1935, *Design in Daily Life* from 1937 and *Design,* published by Penguin in 1938, that most clearly represent a body of literature that was categorical about the necessity to transform taste, and in doing so transform society. It is also possible to position all these texts, but especially those by Anthony Bertram, within the bigger picture of socio-cultural developments in Britain in the 1930s.

Aside from the straightforward art-historical monographs Bertram wrote about artists such as Picasso and Paul Nash, his output of other work was huge, and included a series of odd historical novels and philosophical reflections. In books such as *They Came to the Castle* (1932*), Men Adrift* (1935), *The King Sees Red* (1936), *Bright Defiler* (1940) and *The Pleasures Of Poverty: An Argument and an Anthology (*1950) he combines all aspects of sociopolitical discourse, neatly intertwining this with exciting plot-lines. Add to this his travel writing and we arrive at a singular set of texts.

For him, all is about class and taste and Anthony Bertram labels not simply the objects and but their consumers vulgar and contemptible:

> The vulgar mind admires dexterity and richness for their own sakes; it prefers to pay twopence for a badly coloured version of what looks better penny plain. ……..it is not fit to adorn a Bayswater drawing room with drums from the Solomon Islands; it is not necessary; the ladies of Bayswater do not play drums. I wish I could go on: I find English houses inexhaustibly amusing: it amuses me to observe them and write about them.[18]

[18] Anthony Bertram, *The House: A Machine for Living In* (London: A & C Black,1935), 87

There is something familiar here in tone to the works of Evelyn Waugh, a contemporary of Bertram. Anthony Bertram's slightly obsessive desire to remake the working class fits a little too closely within a eugenics framework. This allegiance to social cleansing was not unusual, even among socialist thinkers during the 1930s. Indeed, Bertram's central problem, before we reach his works on design, is with the social structures and less-than-healthy lifestyles of the lower classes. He expressed these views very clearly in *The House: a Machine for Living In*, which first appeared in 1935. The eugenics debate had been attached to the working class long before this, but both fascist and socialist political ideologies crept uncomfortably close to suggesting 'cleansing' the working class in the UK, as publications and political debate would show during this period. Anthony Bertram was a writer who betrayed philosophical beliefs, social ideals and ideology in almost all his writing and yet revealed a complicated understanding of the European political situation, something not all that unusual in writers of his generation. He seems to have been aroused by Germany in the 1930s, not unlike many of his social background during this period, and the promise of Modernism it exhibited. It is perhaps also significant that in Bertram's extensive travel writing on Germany and Austria he reflects upon socioeconomic and impending political change with both admiration and confused contempt.

In *Pavements and Peaks: Impressions of Travel in Germany and Austria*, published in1933, speaking of the wonders of Vienna and its dignified Baroque palaces, and the history that represented, he speculates:

> We must turn away from this glamour: we must look forward. Yes but what to? More bowler hats and conferences and financial bungling? More claptrap liberty with a vote for every fool and the greatest fools in high places? More talk of Geneva and more work in the armament factories? More hypocrisy and cynicism? Yes I want to look forward: I want to see, not old men patching the broken sun, but a new sun rising. Where am I to look? Perhaps to the East, where suns have a habit of rising: perhaps in Russia something is coming to birth that will be as great or greater than the heritage of Augustus. Or perhaps it is Mussolini and Hitler who will show us the new way.[19]

[19] Anthony Bertram, *Pavement and Peaks*, (London: Chapman and Hall, 1933), 40

Presumably these were references to the Disarmament Conference and to politicians like Halifax and Baldwin in the Conservative Government. He seemed to have equal disdain for Labour politicians. In Chapter 3, 'Modern Germany', he observes that:

The bodies of young Germany are slim and golden-brown and muscular: they are fine machines, and well cared for. In the baths and stadiums of the cities, over all natural lakes and rivers, you may see them. And when you see them beside the bodies of old Germany, you realize what Germany has won. These beautiful bodies are the soldiers of modernism. In England too I think the new soldiers are stirring. We also have a war to fight against the dark lingering forces of Puritanism, against the stuffy authority of old men, against the hopeless sentimentality of frock coated liberalism – which is now called labour – and against a militarism, less strong than old Germany's, but still a danger – a danger to which, it looks at the moment as if Germany has succumbed [20]

We will return to Anthony Bertram in much more depth later, as he is central to this discourse, but should remark on his 1946 publication *The Enemies of Design*, published by the Design and Industries Association as Leaflet No.3, in this context before we do so.

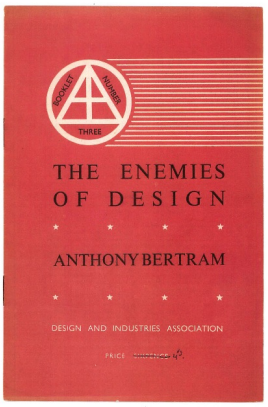


Fig.3: Cover, *The Enemies of Design*, Anthony Bertram, 1946

[20] ibid., 70

A most unusual publication, consisting of a mere six pages, it uses as its starting point the same categories of identification taken from a wartime pamphlet issued to the armed forces, entitled 'Know your Enemy'.

> Now that that enemy has been destroyed, we can forget its badges and markings; but now, while we have the habit, is the moment to note those of what enemies still face us in other fields.[21]

We will also discover later that in the second edition of Bertram's *The House: a Machine for Living In*, re-titled as simply *The House* and published in 1945, he was to retract some key statements from many parts of the text, and removed altogether the reference to Le Corbusier on the title page:

> I have incorporated revisions of writing, but I have left revisions of ideas in the open confessional of dated footnotes and the *Comments 1944* grouped at the end. The most significant change I have made is to suppress the original subtitle – " A Machine for Living in" – and the relative quotation from Le Corbusier on the title page……I prefer now to quote a sonnet of Rilke's as a counterblast.

Anxious Dwelling and Eugenics

The consistent themes of *fear* and of *anxiety* about the state of working class taste, and widespread concerns about a disordered and indiscriminating public, is a central focus of this research and is revealed in its guises as social housing policy, as guides to self-improvement, as ethical and moral education, as quasi-eugenic policies, as social reform, as mysophobia and as simple prejudice. Disgust at the *sight* of dirt was understandable perhaps, but disgust at the *idea* of dirt seemed to demonstrate a deep-seated pathological fear.

In this atmosphere apparently innocuous social interventions were not entirely without purpose dedicated as they were to the creation of a better, cleaner individual and the prevention of the over-breeding of less desirable persons.

[21] Bertram, *The Enemies of Design*, (London: Design and Industries Association, 1946), 3

Attitudes to eugenics and the achievement of a new utopia were inexorably linked to class in the British context during the 1930s. During this period we see this exemplified in the work of writers such as Aldous Huxley, made manifest in his *Brave New World*.[22] Not slow to criticize, authors like Huxley represented a group of British establishment figures for whom the working class were a constant source of problems, and yet whom they also viewed with some concern:

> About 99.5% of the entire population of the planet are as stupid and philistine...as the great masses of the English. The important thing, it seems to me, is not to attack the 99.5%...but to try to see that the 0.5% survives, keeps its quality up to the highest possible level, and, if possible, dominates the rest. The imbecility of the 99.5% is appalling—but after all, what else can you expect? [23]

These attitudes linked the nineteenth-century reformers with their modern counterparts.[24] H.G Wells' manifestation of this in works such as *The Time Machine*, within which the principles of social Darwinism prevail, expressed his view that:

> It is in the sterilization of failures, and not in the selection of successes for breeding, that the possibility of an improvement of the human stock lies.[25]

Moreover, eugenics may have been closer to the surface in the literature of design reform and in the reformers themselves than we might have hoped or suspected. In the inter-war years in Britain the agenda that the design reformers served held strong similarities to that of the social reformers, many of whom had a foot in each camp. Works produced by writers such as J.B Priestley during the 1930s, for example *English Journey* with its depiction of the 'common people', rather romanticized the working class plight and pointed to their struggle to work

---

[22] Joanne Woiak, 'Designing a Brave New World: Eugenics, Politics, and Fiction', *The Public Historian*, Vol. 29:3 (2007):105-129.
[23] 1. Aldous Huxley to J. Glyn Roberts, July 19, 1933, L. J. Roberts and J. Glyn Roberts Papers, National Library of Wales. Quoted in David Bradshaw, 'Introduction', in: *The Hidden Huxley: Contempt and Compassion for the Masses 1920–36* (London: Faber and Faber, 1994).
[24] Patrick Parrinder, 'Eugenics and Utopia: Sexual Selection from Galton to Morris', *Utopian Studies,* 8:2, (1997):1-12; Donald Mackenzie, 'Eugenics in Britain', *Social Studies of Science,* 6 (1976) 499-532
[25] William Brown, Andrew C. Fabian, *Darwin,* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010) 105

their way up through society. A sense of anxiety about growing affluence coupled with the demise of domestic servant culture had the unhappy effect of creating a view of the working class as difficult and ambitious above their station.

Class Distinction: Pride and Prejudice, a Very British Condition

During the course of this discussion we will witness the problem of British design and social reformers in the period between 1937 and 1948 clinging to something resembling Ruskinian tradition and yet anxious to institute socio-economic innovation on a grand scale. The zeal of the nineteenth-century reformers, of Ruskin and Morris, was never far from their minds. Pevsner admits this:

> A pressed glass bowl trying to look like crystal, a machine made coal-scuttle trying to look hand-beaten – all that is immoral. So are sham materials and sham technique. I admit that this principle cannot be pushed to its extreme. If we wanted to be really orthodox we ought to condemn all so called crystal glass (as Ruskin did) because it is not true crystal.[26]

However, in their twentieth-century model the project of Modernism was equated with the assertion of new forms of quality and self-worth. The twin forces of material culture and social renewal working in tandem and progressing towards a 'New Jerusalem' of sorts, a social project that had been underway in Britain for some considerable time, epitomized this.[27]

This ambitious project for the reconstitution of working class identity and taste seemed to flounder a little between the wars in a wash of Modernist rhetoric, social upheaval and economic uncertainty. Liberal political stances on the nature of a new society and the reconstitution of class culture through slum clearance and new town developments were all well and good in theory, but were unable to find an appropriate mode of public address and sufficiently broad political ownership. The consciousness of the growing disaffection the working classes

---

[26] Pevsner, *Industrial Art,* 11

[27] Mark Swenarton, *Building the New Jerusalem; Architecture, Housing and Politics 1900-1930* (Bracknell: IHS BRE Press, 2008),

had developed after World War I for 'knowing their place' in British society made these attempts by Modernist reformers to improve their lot in life as a re-formed *demos* seem even more shallow.

During this period there were of course some notable attempts made to transform the situation of the working class and their domestic circumstances, although some of the motives for these experiments might have been questionable.[28] Elizabeth Denby was more than practical in her interpretation of the European model of *existenzminimum*[29] for the design of Kensal House. New ideas borrowed from the Frankfurt kitchen, which was essentially about efficiency, not simply hygiene, led her to the conception of a cleaner space. Her concentration on cleanliness is consistent with the infantilisation of the working classes, and rewrites the working class identity through the use of Modernist rhetoric. Later, in the second in the series of twelve lectures given at the RSA in 1942, 'Using Space to Advantage', Denby, the author of *Europe Re-housed*, made the following remarks:

> It is not for us to blame them, but in the new homes and towns we build we have to allow for low standards of conduct. I think it is wrong to give *new* homes to families who are dirty and shiftless; slum people - for slum people are not the same as slum areas - should be put into old re-conditioned houses. If they really want a new home they will soon bustle round and get themselves fit for one, particularly if it is so pleasant, so easy and inexpensive to run that it is worth making the effort.[30]

With the onset of World War II the final phase of the social transition was set in motion, with postwar conditions leaving the door open for a radical re-formation. In the years between 1939 and 1946 much discussion was devoted to the surprising opportunities World War II presented for a complete restructuring of sensibilities amongst the British public, and the RSA debates were typical of this.

---

[28] Elizabeth Denby and Maxwell Fry, Gas Light and Coke Company, Kensal House experiment, 1938
[29] Elizabeth Denby,,*Europe Re-housed*, (London: Allen and Unwin, 1938)
[30] Elizabeth Denby, RSA Lecture 2*, Using Space to Advantage*, December 10, 1941, RSA Papers, RSA Library and Archive.

Although, ironically the impact of the war on our commentators and on Anthony Bertram in particular, didn't make for more convinced Modernists.

We must of course note that to a great extent the working classes themselves composed working class culture. It was not fabricated or manufactured for them, but constituted of very varied interests and by a certain degree of resistance to imposed values. In many ways this made their social mores more or less impenetrable to the outside observer. Cultural and social attitudes formed from labour traditions and work occupations, agrarian backgrounds and industrial contexts, familial ties and associations, figured strongly in the composition of working class material cultures.

The Mass Observation (MO) unit, set up under Tom Harrison and Charles Madge in 1937 to observe all aspects of British culture and society, quickly found evidence of this. The work of the Mass Observation teams with working class communities in all parts of the UK was indicative of a desire to know better the culture that constituted British experiences of everyday life. As Nick Hubble has indicated MO was instrumental in establishing the relationship between socioeconomic research and Government policies of all kinds.[31] Specific projects based in working class towns in the North of England brought forth evidences of rich material cultures and complex social structures. Armed with this knowledge, specific social interventions could be formulated to accommodate the needs of the working class.

[31] Nick Hubble,*Mass Observation and Everyday Life: Culture, History, Theory* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006)

Taste Defined

In this study the affiliations, convivial associations and relationships of its constituents characterize class. Fundamentally, working class taste is not bad taste it is simply working class taste. It is just as varied and idiosyncratic as taste among other social groups, subject to the same variations that come with locality: North or South, urban or rural. [32] So the experience of class is governed by the everyday contexts in which it is encountered and the subsequent effect it has upon the individual. Moreover, the patterns of power relationships in social and cultural institutions, in political science and Government that prescribe class positions are born out of an inadequate and unrepresentative set of social structures. The evolution of the working class and the development of its internal dynamics are not carried in these structures but cultivated and matured by social change and development inspired by knowledge of this identity.

To be conscious of class is not to adhere to a form of socio-cultural structuring but to acknowledge that there can be a difference, which is perceptible and distinguishable, between the different elements within society. The issues of access to education, travel and exposure to the unfamiliar can also be seen as gateways to certain cultural epiphanies. Social formation is often best viewed through the evidence of 'civilization' that is based on artifacts. Indeed many cultural investigations begin and end with the examination and interrogation of the artifact. Is it possible that it is this reason alone that was the cause of so much perturbation during the period under examination? The evidence provided by artifacts brings taste and aesthetics into close relationship with one another in social formation. The literature of design reform frequently resorts to a form of 'character assassination' in relation to the everyday object landscape of the working classes, seeking every opportunity to banish their 'bits and pieces'[33] to cupboards – out of sight and out of mind. Not that this was without problems.

[32] Richard Hoggart, *The Uses of Literacy: Aspects of Working Class Life* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1957)
[33] Anthony Bertram, *Design in Everyday Things* (London, British Broadcasting Corporation, 1937), 5

Working class taste, while not at all universal and homogeneous in character, was nevertheless quite prescriptive in nature. Observations of the over-ornamented and patterned, of fripperies and meretricious products that constituted the landscape of the working class home and its decoration, were insensitive to the meaningful narratives that these represented. Different valencies of meaning, some partly inherited, were inscribed within the object landscape.

It is also clear that the socio-political dynamic of the British class structure was under scrutiny in the period from 1930 to 1960. If society had begun to lack a kind of coherence in the lower echelons in the inter-war period then this had provoked some anxiety at the upper levels. E.P. Thompson's intense exploration of the constitution of the working class clearly shows that the challenges from the radical reorganization of industrial culture in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries were still felt in the form of a continuing struggle to identify, maintain and develop a working class identity in the twentieth century that had cohesion, despite the fact that it had coalesced around principles derived from social upheaval. The new democratic and grassroots movements nurtured in this mess of labour and domestic disturbance were routes to new social organization. [34]

Essentially this debate is founded in issues of political economy. The Malthusian approach to the working class was alive and well in the literature of design reform.[35] Political economy aided the formation of this view of the working class condition, with the comprehension of the working class as a group, or rather a *corpus*, substantially informed by their relationship to shifts in patterns of labour, manufacturing and industrial outputs, set against population increases and social construction.

[34] E.P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*, New York: Vintage,1963,
[35] T.R. Malthus, *An Essay on the Principle of Population*, ed. by Geoffrey Gilbert (Oxford: Oxford University Press,, 2008)

Romantic visions of this labour and industry, of poor hygiene and disease, morally dissolute conditions and behaviour, all the stuff of Victorian novels, also played a substantial part in forming the view of British working class identity. Victorian accounts such as those by Charles Dickens, George Gissing and Henry Mayhew focused on the dubious qualities of bodily and moral dysfunction and breakdown, admittedly for very different reasons and from a variety of perspectives.[36]

However, the slumming instinct was never very far from the surface in these texts. Vicarious and voyeuristic at the core, there are hints of this curiosity about working class social conditions in all these texts. Representation of working class character in the romantic 'slum fiction' novels of the nineteenth century is that of one alive to all forms of delinquency and brutality, while being oblivious to, and therefore perpetuating, the squalor around them. Works by Victorian authors such as Dickens and Gissing sentimentalized labour and extolled the virtues of exhaustion and physical depletion as moral and sanitary, unequivocally noble suffering, while also pointing to the iniquity of their situation.[37]

In the works of the authors under discussion here – Bertram, Pevsner and Jarvis – the same set of conditions around the state of the body and the home forms an essential part of their discourse. This British tradition might be seen inevitably to go back to Ruskin and discourses on taste from A.W. Pugin to William Morris to William Lethaby.[38] Each viewed the problem of growing mass production and industrialization as ultimately damaging to working class sensibilities already subject to the humiliations of urban life, a loss of their rural habitat and habits, and the social harmony of bucolic splendour.

---

[36] George Gissing, *The Nether World* and Henry Mayhew, *London Labour and the London Poor*; Charles Dickens, *Our Mutual Friend, Little Dorrit, Hard Times*

[37] Catherine Gallagher, *The Body Economic: Life, Death and Sensation in Political Economy and the Victorian Novel*, 2006 (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006).

[38] A. W. Pugin, *Contrasts*, 1836; Ruskin: *The Stones of Venice*, 1853; *The Crown of Wild Olive*, 1866. Morris: *News from Nowhere*,1890; W.R. Lethaby: *Architecture, Mysticism, and Myth,* 1892

While this discussion is not about Pugin, Ruskin, and Morris per se, it is about demonstrating that Britain was unique in this relationship between design and moral qualities, and emphatic about the connection between the industrialization process and morality. The working class was perceived as incapable of sophisticated understanding and was seen as unable to employ taste without firm direction and purposeful education. The insistence on the view of goodness as moral, and in particular good taste as moral education, was also in part directed at awakening the slumbering sensibilities of the working classes and creating within them an energetic response composed of both the *physical* and the *intellectual*. It is a very British condition that links our twentieth century protagonists together through their understanding of the moral necessity for taste, and the unusual confluence of politics with religion, health and wellbeing. The messages inscribed in these texts, as they relate to physical and mental health, relay concerns for pure bodies and minds. Nineteenth century reformers may have set the tone, but what was their relation to these twentieth century reformers, and how was it carried forward?

Class Anxieties and 'Britain Can Make It'

The *'Britain Can Make It '*(BCMI) exhibition in 1946 is significant in the discourse around taste and working class culture. As Penny Sparke and Jonathan Woodham have shown in their detailed analysis of the dual purposes of the exhibition as an instrument for increasing overseas trade and for encouraging consumption, BCMI was a targeted and deeply paternalistic attempt at directing the working class toward good taste.[39]

[39] Patrick Joseph Maguire, and Jonathan M. Woodham, *Design and Cultural Politics in Postwar Britain: the 'Britain Can Make It' Exhibition of 1946,* 1998 (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1988); Penny Sparke, *Did Britain Make it?: British Design in Context, 1946-86,* 1986 (London: Design Council,)

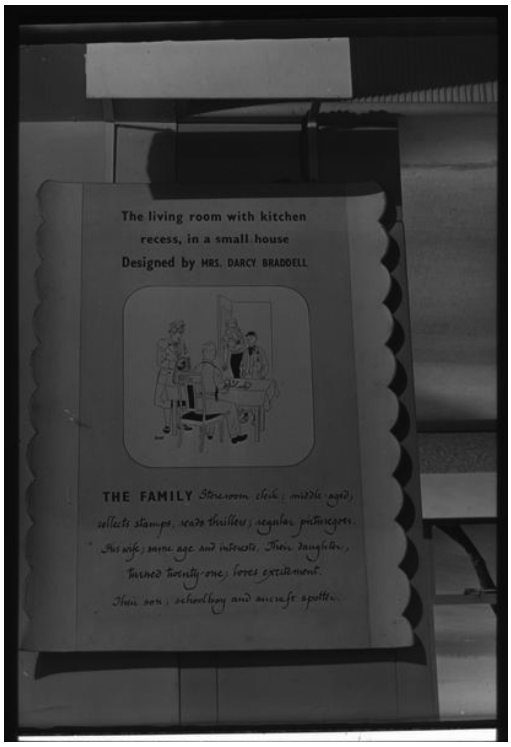


Fig. 4 Signage for the living room with kitchen recess in a small house designed by Mrs Darcy Braddell: one of the Furnished Rooms at the 'Britain Can Make It' Exhibition, 1946. "THE FAMILY Storeroom clerk, middle-aged, collects stamps, reads thrillers, regular picturegoer. His wife, same age and interests. Their daughter turned twenty-one, loves excitement. Their son, schoolboy and aircraft spotter." Text by John Betjeman, drawings by Nicolas Bentley.

Mary Schoeser points out that the titles for the rooms in the exhibition were changed at the last minute from those that spoke directly of class status to the more ambiguous general description:

The original categories of working class, middle class, luxury and Scottish give an insight into the lives of those on the committees and represent one of the last occasions on which the paternalism and class concepts of the COID were so clearly revealed.[40]

Both Sparke and Woodham acknowledge the contrived nature of the exhibition's messages and the good taste agenda epitomized in the *Good Design* movement that permeated the entire exhibition. Judy Attfield has explored the Utility

[40] Mary Schoeser *Fabrics for Everyman and for the Elite* in Patrick Joseph Maguire, and Jonathan M. Woodham, Eds.,*Design and Cultural Politics in Postwar Britain: the 'Britain Can Make It' Exhibition of 1946,* 1998 (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1988) 81

Furniture component of the exhibition in depth and with emphasis on its role in the reconstruction period after the war. However, the literature of design reform although referred to as significant has not attracted enough attention in this discussion.

If the books and leaflets that constituted the literature of design reform were to do their job then they would need to be supplemented at every opportunity with exhibitions that were to drive home the message even more clearly. The constitution of the desired working class home in exhibitions and frequent expositions of goods and furnishings once again reiterated the Victorian model of tableau displays from which we might learn. These were however crucially transformed by new discourses and protocols of public address derived from wartime experience and the British documentary film movement. Every opportunity to demonstrate by example would be taken, and the 'Britain Can Make It' exhibition was no exception and in fact was typical of this tendency towards inculcation. It was, in addition, the boldest manifestation of the other obsession of government – the surveillance of the British working classes and their social mores. The involvement of Mass Observation in the BCMI is referred to later in the text.

Mrs. Darcy Braddell, designer of a furnished room for the 'Britain Can Make It' exhibition described as 'Living room with kitchen recess in a small house for a storeroom clerk', Fig 4 above, expressed her views on the working class home and its design in many forums and in many modes. She was closely linked to the group of writers under discussion here through her work as a designer and her public pronouncements on design for the working classes. As part of their coterie she was another voice adding to the shared perception of the homes of the working class in Britain before, during and after World War II. It meant class distinctions, even if she was reluctant to admit it. In the fifth of a series of twelve lectures given at the Royal Society of Arts in 1942, entitled 'Common Sense In Furniture Design', she refers to the Council for Art and Industry that had been

tasked with, amongst other things, an analysis of ‘The working class home: its furnishing and equipment’:

In 1937 I served on a Committee under the Chairmanship of Frank Pick……
…….He realised the urgency of this problem, and our task was to furnish, at a minimum cost, a working class home (at the last lecture in this series I remember hearing Mr. Gloag take exception to this manner of cataloguing the standard of a house - I agree with him, it is distasteful - but at the moment I can find no better substitute for it).[41]

John Gloag, who had been the Chair of the previous lecture, had commented:

We are living in the middle of a new industrial revolution, as yet unacknowledged, in which hundreds of new materials are appearing, clamouring for independent use and for partnership with other materials and we must strive to achieve a better world. In that better world I hope we shall not adopt the old world classifications and talk about working class houses. There is a touch of pauperisation about that phrase which is resented very much by the people who live in those houses and by many other people also. Let us describe the houses in terms of their accommodation, and then we shall get a true view of whether they are fit for anybody to live in.[42]

This apparent concern on the part of John Gloag for the lot of the working class was mixed with an almost inevitable acceptance of the class divisions that would play a part in what had become the task on everyone’s mind, that of rebuilding the homes of Britain and the taste of British working class society while saving us all from the horrors of the domestic interior furnished with faux antiques and, worse still, the ‘over-decorated muck’ the working class was still so intent on buying:

Again, there were, before the war (and there may be still, for all I know) manufacturers who ran two companies, one of which produced exaggerated, over- decorated "muck," and out of that company they made a very good living. The second company produced really well-designed and well-executed furniture, suited for its purpose and pleasing to the eye of those with a sense of judgment, but that company usually had to be subsidised from the one that produced the "muck."

[41] Mrs Darcy Braddell, RSA Lecture 5, Common Sense in Furniture Design, February 11, 1942, RSA Papers, RSA Library and Archive
[42] ibid,

That process also went on in the retail trade. I knew one well-known retail furniture dealer who ran a section for simple, neat, modem furniture, which did not pay him at all, and his store was kept going on the "muck."[43]

The strength of language here is a clear indication of the perpetuation of a familiar view of working class life and being.

Inherent Good Taste

Try as they might to avoid saying it outright, the design establishment, through its literature and exhibitions, consistently reinforced the view that design was a disposition segregated by class. That taste was an attribute of good breeding and social status was understood and frequently made explicit in this literature. The exhibition vehicle was used extensively to promote and project, through living space reconstructions, the extraordinary benefits of design in constructing working class lives, while at the same time pointing to the significant points of differentiation in how that might be achieved.

In the 'Britain Can Make It' exhibition we can see evidence of a new domestic narrative for the working class. In two examples of interpretation which were used as signage in the 'Britain Can Make It' exhibition in 1946, (see Fig.2 and Fig. 4 above), we see clear and potent descriptions of the class character written by John Betjeman, both the upper and lower middle classes, and the working classes, attached to the object and domestic scene. In a sign for the home of an upper working class family the legend reads:

The living room with kitchen recess in a small house designed by Mrs Darcy Braddell:
"THE FAMILY Storeroom clerk, middle-aged, collects stamps, reads thrillers, regular picturegoer. His wife, same age and interests. Their daughter turned twenty-one, loves excitement. Their son, schoolboy and aircraft spotter."

[43] Mr. E. H. Pinto, Assistant Director of Design (Timber Economy), Ministry of Works and Buildings speaking in response to Darcy Braddell, in RSA Lecture 5, Common Sense in Furniture Design, February 11, 1942, Papers, RSA Library and Archive

The other, for the room of an upper middle-class family reads:

The living room in a large town house designed by R.D Russell:
"THE FAMILY barrister at Law, collects books, plays bridge, his wife gives musical parties"

To deny that there was a class agenda attached to this exhibition, or indeed to any of these works, would seem to be somewhat redundant. The 'Britain Can Make It' exhibition was closely documented by members of the Mass Observation unit, who were themselves making detailed and varied anthropological analyses of the ordinary British individual in all manner of contexts.[44] They mapped in detail the class of visitors who attended the exhibition, providing ample data to give both government and design luminaries alike, pause for thought. Without doubt a most significant statistical analysis and extraordinary collection of data on taste and the working class, the Mass Observation teams' findings were to prove to be a revelation:

The most widely represented class was very definitely the artisan working class. Only 1 in 200 said that they thought the exhibition was bad. A dock worker's wife expressed approval of the plastic kitchen cabinets because she thought "They do keep the mice out.".[45]

Much detailed analysis has been written about the 'Britain Can Make It' exhibition and its intentions as we have already discovered,[46] and suffice it to say that the exposition of design culture that this exhibition represented became a standard in the presentation of British design both at home and abroad. The Council of Industrial Design's (COID) view of this is seen in remarks made in this report from March 1946, referring to the benefits of staging an exhibition of this kind:

Council propaganda is therefore aimed at raising the public to a state of alert sensibility and giving it a lead - not by pressing particular dogmas on it but first by studying its actual

[44] See publications from 1937 – 1950, Mass Observation Unit; Hubble, *Mass Observation and Everyday Life*:
[45] Mass Observation Report for the BCMI exhibition, 1946, Design Council Archives, Brighton University
[46] Jonathan Woodham, Dr Patrick Maguire, *Design & Popular Politics in the Postwar Period: The 'Britain Can Make It'Exhibition 1946*, (Leicester University Press,1997).

circumstances and needs, second by explaining the principles of *good design* from the consumer's point of view, and third by affording plenty of opportunity for it to see all kinds of good things, and get the idea for itself.[47]

While the "alert sensibility" of the British public was something to be hoped for it was far from being a reality. The somnambulistic character of the British consumer, still recovering from the strictures of war is evident in the slightly exasperated tone of these remarks. In addition the notion of an alert British public was a contradiction in terms for many at the Council. The COID understood that reviving their interest in consumption might be difficult but the issue of their *sensibility* was more important. Would consumers identify with and actually recognize objects of good taste, well designed and consistent with the *good design* mantra? Without examples and texts to guide them they may not. More to the point without images to guide them they could be hopelessly lost. So the exhibition culture was directed to exemplary displays that imprinted themselves on the working class psyche and encouraged their ideational capacities so they might get the idea for themselves.

Unfortunately, when left to 'get the idea for itself' they, the public, would so often get entirely the wrong idea that the necessity for intervention became clear. Left to their own devices the working classes would purchase the same aesthetically valueless items. In many cases they would even revert to second-hand furnishings and fall back on the comfort of their grandparents' 'bits and pieces'. Inherent good taste in the upper classes would be evident in their inherited material wealth and family traditions, whereas the hand-me-downs of the working class represented an ongoing problem of tastelessness and sentimentality. The hostility that this aroused in the design community and in Government in 1946 was reminiscent of that we shall see displayed by Octavia Hill and her fellow nineteenth-century slum workers detailed in Chapter One. This choice in types of furnishing was unhygienic, ugly and disorganized, much like the working classes themselves.

[47] Council of Industrial Design Annual Report, March 1946. Design Council Archive, Brighton Univeristy

In a Class of their Own

If good taste was to be recognized as a feature of the civilized person, then the civilization process was to begin by determining the character of the working class persona. Those characteristics that made the working class wholesome, good-hearted and honest were to be converted into sensitive, educated and moral qualities. The zealous approach to transforming the tastes of such a large population at home is as much an indication of the colonial fervour for cultural domination and segregation abroad. The segregation of tastes in class terms is also the partitioning of design and desire.

The clarity of expression around this in terms of class allows the separation of goods and distinction of taste that we have come to recognize as taste making. To segregate the working class was to put distance between them and the upper and middle classes and to maintain the necessity for this division in goods. The working class was a class of its own, made by themselves for their own understanding and consumption but widely scorned by the design establishment, who failed to see its value.

More significant, though, in this discussion is the specific place the class agenda held in the works of all our authors. Where does this issue of moralizing about design begin? That the working class might desire to assume the mode of life of the middle and upper classes and aspire to their tastes was an assumption made without any real investigation of evidence to the contrary. It seems to be a cultural phenomenon unique to the British establishment. In many ways this story comes out of the uniqueness of British industrial culture.

Structure of the Debate

The British Industrial Revolution has been hailed as the birthplace of industrial culture, but is also the site of a conversion of the peasantry into industrial beings now subject to new rhythms, moral imperatives and discipline brought about with the abandonment of their agrarian society and culture. This is examined in Chapter One in detail. *The Original Working Class* as a definable and identifiable group with all its characteristics of taste and artisanal origins is examined in depth. The influence of industrial change and growth on working class identity, their aesthetic education and subsequent assimilation into consumer culture is placed alongside the Victorian missionary efforts to persuade them to notions of good taste and clean living.

Chapter Two is dedicated to an examination of the pre-war position and the literature of design reform in particular. The authors, their forms of expression and social context are the focus with the idiosyncrasies of the texts themselves adding substantial evidence to the discussion.

Postwar Britain and the manufacturing of a new working class persona are interrogated in Chapter Three. The proliferation of design advice is set against the burgeoning New Town developments and postwar economic situation, with the ‘Britain Can Make It’ exhibition and the expansion of commodity culture as a source for these newly conceived working class interiors.

Finally, Chapter Four examines the ‘dirty’ aesthetics of the working class and their troubled dirty persona with a discussion of the perceived lack of both moral substance and physical hygiene as the focus.

Chapter One The Original Working Class

The Centre of Attention

The British working class, as a specific and identifiable group in society, has had much written about it and this has been typified by publication of studies such as *The Common People* by G. D. H. Cole and Raymond Postgate and E.P. Thompson's *The Making of the English Working Class.* There has also been a considerable amount of time in many forums devoted to debating the value of the aesthetic education of the working class. In many ways the aesthetic life of the working classes has been a perennial project, with successive social and political agencies concerned to put right their miscreant taste in order to improve their everyday experiences and habitat.

The mystery here perhaps is why this universal project was perpetuated despite its failures, and to what end it was even begun. That is not to say that this type of education was solely directed at the working class, as the middle class and the 'nouveau riche' were also occasional targets. Aesthetic education could also be seen as part of a wider social engineering project subsequently defined by such initiatives as the 1944 Education Act and with that the new inclusivity of secondary education, the gradual expansion of universities and the extension of education for leisure.

In the discussion here it is not simply the literature of design reform that is the focus, but also the many exhibitions that were organized to promote design and to espouse a specific view of taste. Of these, although separated by some ninety-five years, the 1851 Great Exhibition and the 'Britain Can Make It' exhibition of 1946, established a clear direction, and a narrative route set out between them to improve and encourage the development of good taste. Two of the greatest demonstrations of exhibition culture in the service of social engineering these are also two examples of exhibitions as didactic instruments that will be referred to in the course of this discussion, and will form some of the significant parts of the

debate which exists around the promotion of good taste to the British working classes through exposition.

The didactic nature of the social projects devised to inculcate taste and discrimination in the working classes, undertaken at various points in both the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, might lead one to believe that these projects were intent on more than a seemingly simple philanthropic purpose. The creation of a working class cognoscente seems something of a contradiction in terms, and, furthermore, the repeated attempts to refine the rough-and-ready character of the working class hardly seem worth the effort.

The original artisan and the artisanal culture becomes the focus of public address through literature and exhibitions and of aesthetic education when this is directed towards the working class. It is this original working individual or artisan we seek, then, in order to grasp the state of affairs that surround their education and their subsequent transformation from uncouth and uncivilized to tasteful and capable of reasoned argument. The aesthetic citizen is born, the citizen who is aesthetically capable and yet still compliant with the demos as a whole, the citizen who is the disciplined and selective purchaser, and finally the citizen who is part of a ‘discriminating’ working class public.

Addressing 'the Artisan': the Working Classes Seen Through Their Artisanal Cultural Origins

The initial development of the recognizable artisanal aspects of the working class in the 1820s and 1830s provide us with a picture of a highly structured social order and a respect for skilled and talented individuals within the workforce, and a clear distinction, or ‘pecking order’, to these skills. Far from being uncivilized or unruly, these artisanal cultures were made up of groups in trades and other occupations that were both respected and respectable within their own society. Furthermore, there was a clear form of entertainment and culture attached to

these groups, giving them definition. However, as Day[48] has argued recently, as Richard Hoggart [49] had earlier, the destruction of their own culture in favour of a burgeoning consumer culture and an industrial society, triggered the gradual decay in values and beliefs that were eventually replaced by new ideals more consistent with a nascent consumer society.

Furthermore, Day establishes that there is a tangible difference between what he and others have characterized as the 'respectable' and the 'rough'. This is a key notion within this research. The rough and coarse in the working class character remains as a motif throughout the nineteenth century and continues to be a reference point of real significance throughout the twentieth century. In fact, the 'uncivilized' and the 'common', the 'uncouth' and the 'vulgar' is the chosen nomenclature for the working classes in many of the texts that will be examined. In these texts the terms rough, vulgar and uncivilized are applied directly to both the objects they discuss and the people who consume them. The civilization process was to be the conversion to beauty, dignity and self-possession. Imposing self-discipline was part of the process of industrial revolution. In many ways this could also be seen as subservience to the institutional view. Maintaining control of the working classes through moral restraint is an active motif in all forms of aesthetic education.

As popular in the 1940s as it was in the 1840s, making the working classes well mannered, well behaved and most of all respectful of their place within society was a goal sought and missed many times. The express desire of the middle classes, and the favourite pastime of the upper classes, converting the taste of the working classes was also to become a political obsession for successive governments where they saw this as a mechanism for increasing consumption. If this passion for raising the standards of appreciation of the finer things in life were to succeed then it would be achieved by inscribing it within both

[48] Gary Day, *Class*, (London: Routledge, 2001)
[49] Richard Hoggart, *The Uses of Literacy: Aspects of Working Class Life* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1957)

manufactured goods and within social structures, and in particular within the person and their habitat. The links that this was to forge between the moral and economic, the beautiful and utilitarian, lived and prospered as an orthodoxy to be encouraged in the living arrangements of the working classes from the Victorian period well into the 1950s, and were centred around hygiene, control of the body and the eradication of *dirtiness*. There were distinctly eugenic tones to some of this, as we shall see, with an emphasis on dirtiness.

The initial starting-point for this work was the context of urban regeneration and the massive nationwide implementation of projects intended to transform UK neighbourhoods blighted by unemployment, crime, poor housing and poverty. How familiar this is. We might well be describing the situation at the end of the nineteenth century, and indeed the index of deprivation shows that little has changed in the intervening years.[50] That design would be the instrument of change is the Victorian conception born of Malthusian notions of political economy and social engineering. The poor and working classes are thus confirmed as a part of the industrial mechanism.

Urban Cultures

The necessity of converting the working classes to an urban orthodoxy, and for them to relinquish their own character in favour of an industrial culture, was critical if they were to integrate and adapt to the changes to their landscape. The physical transformation experienced across the country, and the presence of Blake's 'dark satanic mills', may have offered new subjects for Romantic painting but it left little of the landscape untouched by industry. The growth of mill towns and new urban centres brought with it congregations of workers and their

[50] Laura Vaughan,"The Spatial Form of Poverty in Charles Booth's London", in: *The Spatial Syntax of Urban Segregation*, ed. Laura Vaughan, 231 - 250. (Amsterdam; London: Elsevier, 2007), 231-250; Laura Vaughan et al., "Space and Exclusion: Does Urban Morphology Play a Part in Social Deprivation?" (2005), *Area* 37 (2005): 402–412.

families. No longer engaged in craft-based work in the home, the workforce thus displaced is visible and measurable as a new set of artisans with an entirely different set of trades and skills. Interestingly, the differences between the mill towns set up by the likes of Titus Salt and the shocking slums of the city perhaps deserve some interrogation here, too. There are significant social imperatives inherent in the development of Saltaire (1853) that, although paternalistic in both construction and essence, still outshone the dreadful consequences of 'going it alone' in the new urban conurbations.[51] Almost utopian, these housing communities were located within reach of healthcare, education and recreation more in tune with the populace. While Salt may have had a singular vision, his fellow industrialists and mill owners soon understood the value of a philanthropic approach to labour. Model communities sprang up in the UK, Europe and the USA. Chief amongst these in England were Bournville (1879)[52] and Port Sunlight (1888)[53]; each shared the intention of providing humane accommodation. Respect for the nature of the working person was established in these communities in a way that was not evident in other initiatives concentrated in the urban slums.

As urban development in both the North and South of England had expanded, so had the poverty that came in the wake of industrial culture. In 1851 over half of the British population lived in cities. The move from an agrarian culture to an urban and industrial one brought with it the loss of the artisanal community and culture. The emphasis on the folkloric in agrarian cultures was replaced by city entertainments, and the civilisation of the city-dweller was completed by the abandonment of the old traditions and pastimes and their replacement with new diversions such as museums and exhibition visits.

However, it is perhaps ironic to note that in the work carried out by the philanthropic and aesthetic missionaries in working class visual education we see

[51] Tristram Hunt, *Building Jerusalem: The Rise and Fall of the Victorian City*, (London: Phoenix, 2005),301
[52] Ibid.,314
[53] Ibid.,315

a preponderance of images of the countryside, the bucolic and rural subjects, such as wildlife, flora and fauna. Such insistence on the value of these subjects in ameliorating the effects of city life overlooked the value of the culture of those that had inhabited them. Furthermore it perpetuated the romantic and sentimental view of the artisan and agrarian life.

The growth of centres of employment such as London, Manchester and Liverpool saw the mass movement of populations away from the land and into the factories and docks. The East End of London, for example, became awash with poverty and deprivation in the second half of the nineteenth century and therefore as 'uncivilised' as its colonial counterparts. This area of London became synonymous with Africa under the rule of Empire, and led to comparisons of the population with 'savages' and 'barbarians'. Any previous descriptions of 'colourful street types', identified as the nomenclature for the hard-working East-Ender and his comrades by Day[54], was soon replaced by the notion of the feckless and abandoned working class. This change of perception was brought about through the combination of intense scrutiny and exposure for the purposes of raw political manoeuvering, and ever more shocking revelations of working class life retold by the increasing East End missionary forces.
In addition the attempts to understand their culture, portrayed in the works of Dickens, Gissing and Mayhew, also inadvertently exposed them to criticism. Even more significant is the fact that the working classes then become characterized as complicit in their own degradation. Day's assessment of the effects of city life on the working classes shows that they are subdued by economic decline at one and the same moment that they are assimilated as consumers. Missionaries worked in the East End at the end of the nineteenth century with as much purpose and zeal as did their equivalents in the colonies, conscious of the effects of poverty and hunger, unemployment and criminal activity on the working class population.

[54] Gary Day, *Class*, (London: Routledge, 2001) 144

Slum workers maintained an indifference to the improvement of the working class population and their accommodation, except in terms proscribed by the middle and upper classes. From the mid- to late nineteenth century the practice of 'slumming' was a very popular middle-class and upper-class activity and entertainment, although the two groups chose to engage with this differently. Slumming in the urban environment was for many an opportunity to observe the poor and degraded at close quarters. Thrilling and terrifying in the same measure, this was a very popular entertainment both during the day and at night, and featured frequently in cartoons of the period, pointing to the vacuous nature of middle-class amusements. The practice of slumming grew in proportion to the growth of the city slums.

As the century progressed the necessity to engage with the growth of poverty became clear, and the means of doing this was split into a number of philanthropic approaches. However, the activity of slumming soon became demarcated in its own right. The 'casual slummer'[55] observing the degradation of the poor might be entertained by it, but felt little impulse to act to change the circumstances of the working class. If anything, they were actually excited by the experience. In direct contrast to this, the missionary aesthete[56] would marshal forces to tackle the misery of the working class, but with stern measures of control. There was little in between these two positions, although journalists were known to go 'undercover' in the slums to gain access to the reality of the poor person's daily experience. Slumming could be taken to extraordinary lengths. Maltz, in her book *British Aestheticism and the Urban Working Classes,1870 – 1900*, tells us about the experiences of a number of slummers. Aestheticism of this kind was popular amongst the middle class whose guilt and 'shamed sympathy' drew them to the East End and to lives of pseudo degradation. The dirt and disorder of the slums was strangely irresistible to the middle and upper classes that found repulsion and release amongst their fetid streets. Maltz

[55] Diana Maltz, *British Aestheticism and the Urban Working Classes, 1870 – 1900* (Basingstoke; New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006),88
[56] Ibid.,141

recounts the experiences of Henry Nevinson, a well-known figure who became both slum settler and slum journalist thus setting himself apart from the *casual* slummer:

In his autobiography, Nevinson is therefore careful to distinguish the sensationalist curiosity and frivolity of occasional slummers from the motives of settlers like himself. ….later in a moving passage he confesses to a strong 'attraction of repulsion', adding, 'during those years my shamed sympathy with working people became an irresistible torment, so that I could hardly bear to live in the ordinary comfort of my surroundings. Many of us felt the same'.[57]

Perhaps the best known of all amongst the slummers was Stephen Hobhouse, a nephew of the renowned philanthropist and social reformer Beatrice Webb, who set up home in Hoxton and lived there for eight years:

As he claimed in his autobiography 'I was living in an utterly false paradise, as a guilty sharer in the corporate sin of my class.' In a telling social experiment, Hobhouse substitutes his family furnishings with neighbourhood purchases "in order to test the wearing quality of the type of furniture commonly bought in local shops by young couples setting up house". It is as if he is playing at poverty. He even imitates his neighbours in using a newspaper instead of a tablecloth, but adds 'However, I soon gave this up with other ascetic habits which seemed rather affectations'. Hobhouse is self-conscious enough to see that he is performing and to be ashamed of it.[58]

Ironically, the more reports of this kind appeared in the press the more the slums became popular as destinations for 'aesthetic tourists'. This activity, in turn, began to offer extremely vivid subject matter to popular novelists of the period, thus perpetuating the practices of slumming through their readership. This resulted in a set of somewhat sentimental and often picturesque depictions of the trials and tribulations of working class life. This romanticisation of working class labour was especially popular with depictions of the rough, dirty body and the sweated brow of the working class feeding upper-class fantasies and vicarious pleasures.

[57] Ibid., 94
[58] Ibid.,95

Reconfiguring the Artisan Culture

The loss of their traditional employment and culture and its replacement with city industries is at the heart of much of this debate. The reconfiguration of the artisan class into a labouring, factory-hand lower class is a transformation of massive proportions. To complete this all that was required was a more formal aesthetic education that would enable more ardent participation in the industrial consumer cultures the working class were complicit in manufacturing. The segmentation of the working class itself into upper and lower echelons enabled this part of the education project to find some considerable foothold within Victorian culture, where self-improvement was a massively influential force within the aspiring working classes who sought to successfully individuate themselves. As the upper working class tried in vain to imitate the lower middle class, so the lower working class struggled to see the use of aesthetic education in the face of the significantly more pressing issue of day-to-day survival. This increasing division within the working classes precipitates a loss of its artisan culture, a loss of its identity and reconfiguration of its social situation.
As Day indicates:

> By the end of the century, then, working class culture was largely conservative and its entertainments, no longer self-generated but commercially provided, reinforced class boundaries which were at the same time disappearing with the advent of consumerism.[59]

In overview, there is a clearly defined and growing working class that impresses itself upon the culture of the day as both an economic force and a potentially unruly society, a new market for goods and at the same time a consumer of gaudy mass-production, an intellect of some worth and still morally reprobate. Whatever the origins of the artisan may have been, they were deeply eroded by the industrial society in which they participated. The working people of the pre-mechanized production era had, it seems, a set of values and traditions, cultural

[59] Day,152

institutions and social networks that was at best disrupted and at worst destroyed by the insertion of the factory, mass manufacture and sweated labour. The loss of the hand-made and crafted cultures, while not without their problems, proves to be a loss, also, of the cultural heritage they contained. Invaluable accounts of the daily routines of craft production such as *The Wheelwright's Shop* by George Sturt bring to life the complex social and economic structure of the lived craft tradition, its techniques and its community. Most recently Christopher Frayling's reference to Sturt in *On Craftsmanship* brings to light the contribution the text still continues to make to our understanding of contemporary craft production.[60] It would be a mistake then to assume that the industrialization of manufacturing industries is solely responsible for the decline and fall of the artisan class. It is perhaps more accurate to say that it simply helped along the speed of their decline.

Even more disconcerting at this time is the division that was created between country and city. This is also interesting also inasmuch as it was as significant as an issue in the progress towards a consumer identity in the 1840s as it was to become during the 1940s. For in fact the growth of the town and country divide, brought about by increasing urbanisation and the industrial culture of the nineteenth century, presents us with difficult issues relating to the representation of the real identity of the working class and the artisan in this period.

E. P. Thompson, in *The Making of the English Working Class,* allows us this initial insight into the construction that we know and recognise:

> We shall see that there were great differences of degree concealed within the term, "artisan", from the prosperous master-craftsman, employing labour on his own account and independent of any masters, to the sweated garret labourers.[61]

[60] Christopher Frayling, *On Craftsmanship*, (London: Oberon Books, 2011) 24

[61] Thompson, 234

It is important to differentiate even more clearly at this early stage between the urban and rural working classes. Class differences between the rural working populations, the industrial manufacturing contingent and the artisan classes were pronounced. It was not unusual for the city-dweller to look down on his or her country counterparts. For the purpose of the argument set forward here it is significant. The working classes under discussion here are those of the cities and towns rather than those of the remnant agricultural community in late nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century Britain. This is to make distinctions evident between artisan classes and the subsequent stratification of the working class in industrial culture.

Stratification of the Working Class

Far from the country bumpkin presented in cartoons of the period in satirical publications such as *Punch*, rural artisans were in fact leading relatively productive lives with some social prestige, a far remove from their town and city counterparts. The artisans of the countryside were very different from those in the city. Their identity in the country and county town is one of relative prestige, and we are perhaps alarmed to discover that the artisan there is in fact careful and discriminating. As Thompson indicates:

> Many of these rural craftsmen were better educated and more versatile and felt themselves to be a “cut above” the urban workers - weavers, stockingers or miners – with whom they came into contact when they came to the towns.[62]

The radical transformation of the working class identity through their various types of labour speaks of the concentration on the dehumanizing effects of industrialization and commodification that deprives them of their original community and any cohesive view of their culture. This new urban working class needed new diversions and ‘civilisation’ in the ways of the city. The various

[62] Thompson, 235

identities of the working class in the city, we can now see, are separated into skilled occupations as 'artisans' and struggling to live as 'labourers' or, most particularly, factory 'hands'. This, along with the rapid expansion of the city, is well enough documented for us to be clear in making the distinction between their relative lives and social conditions. New urban forms of labour successfully redefined terms of employment, leaving them open to further abuse. The unstructured conditions of employment and pay would become responsible for impoverished groups of itinerant workers.

There is a clear distinction between the city-dwelling 'educated intellectual' working class and their rural counterparts and lower-class labourer. The politicised working class was different again from the 'hands', and the politicised working class is differentiated within its own ranks in its turn. If there was an elite within the working class then it was composed of those workers most skilled and most able to represent themselves as an economic force.

Thompson clarifies this elitism within the ranks of the artisan classes:

> It is sometimes supposed that the phenomenon of a " labour aristocracy" was coincident with the skilled trade unionism of the 1850s and 1860s – or was even the consequence of imperialism. But in fact there is both an old and a new elite of labour to be found in the years 1800- 1850.[63]

In this separation between the country and the city we also see further distinction made between the relative prospects for each group. As the nineteenth century progressed, divisions became greater still. The effect of life in the city was to further demarcate the working classes and their status into either skilled artisan or unskilled labourer. Many commented on the subsequent decline of the unskilled into poverty and desperation but it is Henry Mayhew who most vividly describes this.[64] That the labouring portion of the working class was subject to social breakdown was dramatically represented in Gustave Doré's lithographs of

[63] Thompson, 237
[64] Mayhew, H, *London Labour and the London Poor,* 382

scenes from London's bleak, poverty-stricken underworld in the 1870s.[65] *The Problems of Poverty*, by John A. Hobson, summed up most clearly the scale of this issue in London and beyond:

> there is every reason to believe that the extent and nature of poverty does not widely differ in all large centres of population. [66]

This was also present in both the literature of the day and the accounts of various philanthropic associations. In Dickens' *Hard Times* and *Bleak House* this was demonstrated by the tragic occupations and lives of the working poor. *Life and Labour of the People in London*, by Charles Booth, ably described the appalling conditions that existed in London and beyond, but also, through his connections with Henrietta Barnett and Ella Pycroft, detailed the precise living arrangements of many in tenements throughout the East End.

The iniquity and inequality of late nineteenth-century working class existence became the focus of a great deal of attention and of a large number of social interventions, each determined to change the lot of the working person. In fact the growth of tenements, the gradual eradication of street crime and the increase in employment had contributed to some considerable change in prospects. However, it is the continuation of projects that were devoted to achieving transformation through aesthetic intervention that are of interest here. In the face of so much social disturbance and deprivation, how could it be considered feasible that the alteration of taste might effect such a significant change as to be beneficial to those in impoverished circumstances? As Stedman Jones has indicated what was noticeable to the Victorian reformer was that the working class had continued to develop and to cement its own culture despite the desperate conditions of daily life and it did so in spite of the interventions of the

[65] Blanchard Jerrold, *London: a Pilgrimage*, illustrations by Gustave Doré (London: 1872)

[66] John Atkinson. Hobson, *Problems of Poverty: an Enquiry into the Industrial Conditions of the Poor* (London: Methuen, 1891), 6

philanthropist.[67] If things were to go the way the middle class reformers wished them to go then they must continue with their work on aesthetics and working class sensibilities.

Exposure to beautiful things, and to the morally superior sentiments that they contained and represented, was to furnish the conduit into the soul of the working person. The moral improvement of the individual was to be at the centre of these projects, and this provided a much-needed outlet for the moral teaching and aesthetic excursions so much appreciated by the upper classes and their middle-class followers. These bands of eager educationalists were to realise a mission that combined all the most significant causes of the day.

"Corrupting Public Taste" and the necessity for aesthetic education

The issue of morality was central to Ruskin's work, and the morals of all, not just the working classes, were a clear concern. However, the working classes were to be dealt with first and foremost:

> Taste is not only a part and index of morality, it is the only morality. The first, and last, and closest trial question to any living creature is "What do you like?" Tell me what you like, I'll tell you what you are.[68]

The terror that was inspired in the upper classes by an unruly, out-of-control and crazed working class was best illustrated in Ruskin's admonition to manufacturers in his lecture 'Modern Manufacture and Design', delivered in Bradford in March 1859:

> But whatever happens to you, this at least is certain, that the whole of your life will have been spent in corrupting public taste and encouraging public extravagance. Every preference you won

[67] Gareth Stedman Jones, *Languages of Class,* (Cambridge University Press, 1983)
[68] John Ruskin, John David Rosenberg, *The Genius of John Ruskin: Selection from His Writings,* (London: Routledge, 1979) 274

by gaudiness must have been based on the purchaser's vanity: every demand you have created by novelty has fostered in the consumer a habit of discontent.[69]

This uncivilized and 'corrupt' mass was subject to fluctuations in temperament, and the effects upon them of poorly-glazed objects, mass-produced for their excitement rather than their 'appreciation' or aesthetic enlightenment, could only be seen as degrading. Indeed, the fact that they may be out of control, and lose hold of their senses, sits at the heart of this debate. The 'senseless', crude and common person was incapable of a clear understanding of anything other than stimulus that excited without control, a control that came from the civilization process undergone in the education of the senses. Coming to understand the senses and perception of beauty as an accomplishment associated with refinement was promoted as one of the virtues characterising both the middle class person and the educated individual.

The lack of education afforded to the artisan, and the cost of such an education, is also given a considerable amount of attention during the nineteenth century. The Victoria and Albert Museum, along with a large and growing number of art schools of the same period, offered education to all social classes at times conducive to their attendance and at prices appropriate to their means. Education in art and the principles of beauty was a central concern in the curriculum of these schools. The appreciation of classical harmony and proportion was accompanied by skills in carving and metalworking. The infantilisation of the working class through an appeal to its artisan nature, an appeal that stresses that it is good with its hands, was a view much favoured in Victorian literature, polemic and political theory.

The conflicting goals within this education project become clearer here, and this was apparent in the need to keep the working class low and yet raise them up at one and the same time. In appealing to the finer sentiments we might see an

[69] John Ruskin, Christine Roth, *The Two Paths* (Parlor Press: 2004) 66

improved and skilled artisan, but at the possible cost of losing their loyalty to the social position to which they formerly belonged. Limiting the realm of success was the only choice, then, and in doing so, thereby prevented any advantage or personal advancement that might serve to change their life chances, segregation was the logical choice:

The segregation of studies was further enforced by the Department of Science and Art's rigorous system of examination and inspection, which effectively prevented individual teachers and schools from deviating too much from the established norms. At the Lambeth School, where John Sparkes introduced a regime of applied technical instruction around 1860, a unique collaboration with Doulton's manufactory for the production of "art-pottery" received no encouragement from the Department of Science and Art, despite the high level of commercial success achieved by the new Doulton ware, a large proportion of which was designed and executed by Sparkes and his students. In fact, the Department's increasingly vocal opposition to workshop instruction after the late 1860s, on the grounds that it constituted a subsidy to particular trades and industries, hindered the initiation and maintenance of experiments of this type.[70]

This is a recurrent theme in the realm of aesthetic education. Classes at the Victoria and Albert Museum, in particular, were not always the success that the schools of the museum might have hoped them to be, and they eventually became distinctly divisive:

In terms of classroom practice, the existence of four distinct syllabuses meant that participants were pigeonholed from the start. Students could not simply pick and choose among courses, as these were offered at different times of day, often in distinct locations and at widely divergent fees. This practical subdivision of efforts into several echelons was further enshrined in the Department's stated policy that it would only subsidize advanced training in the central schools of science and art, mainly in London. Despite protestations from the various branch and provincial schools, from masters, and even from Parliament, the principle of maintaining a multi-tiered system, with differentiated levels of instruction, was steadfastly preserved even after the administrative reforms of 1863–65. As time wore on, the division between day and evening

[70] R.C. Denis, (1997) 'Teaching by Example: Education and the Formation of South Kensington's Museums' in: *A Grand Design: The Art of the Victoria and Albert Museum,* ed. M. Baker and B. Richardson (London: V & A Publications, 1997), http://www.vam.ac.uk/vastatic/microsites/1159_grand_design/essay-teaching-by-example_new.html accessed 12.09.10

classes widened into something of a gulf, to the extent that they often had little in common besides sharing the same building. Working artisans entertained virtually no hope of pursuing full-time studies, of following the complete syllabus, of achieving, and, therefore, of qualifying for National Scholarships which, after 1863, functioned as the principal route to the advanced study of design at the newly reorganized National Art Training School in South Kensington.[71]

If aesthetic education was being promoted to the working classes it was in the hope that this might affect their demeanour and physical hygiene as much as it was to ultimately affect their purchasing habits. The more discriminating the purchaser, the better the goods they demanded would need to be. Improvement in their own position was not a priority, and certainly their social mobility was not expected or encouraged. However, the natural consequence of this education process was that it would indeed lead to social aspiration and personal growth. In many ways it would become the ultimate expression of discontent as those thus educated become aware of the discrepancies in their experience and their expectations. Representations of this in novels throughout the Victorian and Edwardian period show the lower middle class is just as acutely aware of their situation as the working class. The inability to transcend their class boundaries despite the civilising effects of aesthetic education and appreciation are the ultimate truth of a situation that can only have a dismal outcome.[72]

This is a consistent theme, also, in the discussion of the necessity for 'good things', 'good design' and 'doing good'. In this it was an encouragement towards an aesthetic way of life and existence that placed beauty, and things of beauty, at the very centre of the daily round. It shares some of the ambitions for a utopian experience of the kind espoused later in the century by Ebenezer Howard, who sought to reunify the town and country, and as such the artisan, with their original identity and position. That social division and economic circumstance should make this impractical was also fairly typical of the reformers' lack of

[71] ibid.,

[72] See character of Leonard Bast in Howards End by E.M Forster, 1910 and Jude Fawley in Jude the Obscure by Thomas Hardy, 1895.

understanding of the scale of the problems they attempted to address. Very few working class individuals could afford to participate in the experiment.

The evils that obtained in both the town and country, as represented in Howard's diagram 'The Three Magnets', and the social consequences of the new urban centres, would not be undone by the garden city but would provide an alternative society. As Howard puts it:

The end I now venture to set before the people of this country and other countries is no less noble and adequate than this, that they should forthwith gird themselves to the task of building up clusters of beautiful home-towns, each zoned by gardens, for those who now dwell in crowded slum-infested cities. [73]

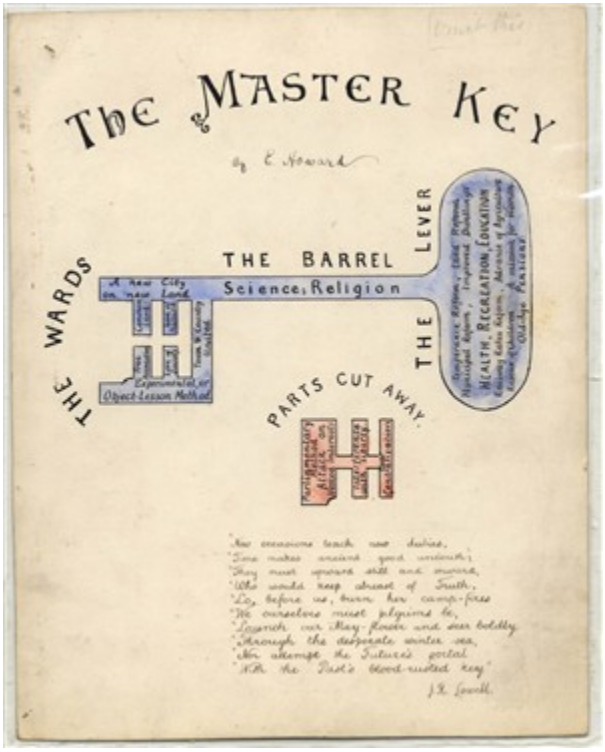


Fig.5 The Master Key, Ebenezer Howard, Hertfordshire Archives and Local Studies

The establishment of the garden city movement as a response to the indignities of the industrialized city, and the attempts at a utopian model of bucolic

[73] Ebenezer Howard, *Garden Cities of To-morrow* (London: S.Sonnenschein, 1902), 128

splendour, was to fall foul of other, less enlightened, views of the civilization. The prejudice that this garden city movement attracted was only too typical of that attracted by the Aesthetic movement. In fact the inhabitants of the garden city experiments were labelled variously as vegetarians and homosexuals in an attempt at locating them outside contemporary society and within the realms of the misguided and lunatic fringe. Notions of what constituted good taste and good behaviour were just as stringent for the upper and middle class as for the working class.

This must not be confused with the aspirations of the Aesthetic movement however, which also attempted a certain ‘return to nature’ in its attitudes. Being in touch with a primitive urge was not desirable unless you were already civilized enough to control the sentiment. Indeed, aesthetic missionaries of the late nineteenth century struggled to comprehend the singular nature of working class responses to their attempts at civilization. They repeatedly questioned the ‘nature’ of their pupils and their capacity to benefit from the bounty disposed from their benefactors. What hope for our working class aspirants denied a complete aesthetic education and yet criticized for their lack of taste? In making new communities the aesthetic missionaries would attempt to recreate the rural idyll many times, and in many different guises.

The Victorians and Philanthropic Attitudes to Social Improvement

The efforts of these Victorian philanthropists can be seen at their most pronounced through the aesthetic missionary movement in London and the efforts at ‘doing good’ to educate the nineteenth-century working class public. In her book *British Aestheticism and the Urban Working Classes 1870 – 1900* Diana Maltz describes in detail the efforts made to transform the taste of the working class and the lengths to which members of these various philanthropic groups would go to achieve this goal. Their homes were to be the pastoral enclave within which a group of dedicated reformers would insist on aesthetic

standards aimed at containing and corralling, both morally and physically, the urban poor. The aesthetic missionary movement would impose models of behavior through the organization of their domestic habitat. Referring to and re-appraising the work of well-known philanthropist Octavia Hill, Maltz states:

> Spurred on by her belief in personal relations between visitors and the poor, she maintained a myopic view of tenement reform. By favouring small cottages over large blocks, Hill ignored the enormous demand for workers housing. She declared 'a third rate cottage with a small garden, or even a back yard, is better for a working man than that best tenement that the London County Council can build.' Yet that third-rate cottage lacked an indoor toilet the new flats could provide; surely the pastoral domesticity Hill envisioned in the small cottage was a fantasy.[74]

More probably this maintained an appropriate relationship between the poor and the philanthropist, and bestowed all the benefits of the 'faux rural' context. Once again we should ask the question 'to what end?', and in this particular instance that seems clear. The elevation of the sensibility of the working class was to bring them to a place of real civilization. Once they had arrived at this place it would be the beginning of a well-tempered and morally well-behaved society that posed no fear of threat to their middle-class benefactors. The extent of this benefaction was entirely limited through the somewhat contradictory lack of overall charity towards the working classes frequently demonstrated by the philanthropic:

> One can read Hill's haughtiness towards her tenants in the didactic mosaic inscriptions she commissioned for them. Could any workingman read the inscription at Freshwater Place - ' Every House is Built by Some Man, but He that Built All Things is God' – without reflecting that he himself had contributed to its upkeep for extra pay? [75]

This highlights the true perception of the feckless, untrustworthy and ultimately undeserving working classes. Maltz points to this in Hill's work:

---

[74] Maltz, 54.
[75] Ibid., 61

Though she provided workingmen with reading rooms for their improvement, she made no demand on their behalf for the leisure that could come only through work-legislation. She valued her tenants' health, yet insisted that each wife and mother was responsible for her family's diet and so fought against state provision of school lunches for poor children.[76]

Like it or not, the philanthropists' mission was direction to a specific taste in objects, domestic display and particular ranges of colour and materials used as a method of bringing the cultivated to the common. This project was to be achieved through the physical arrangement of homes and the introduction to culture and cultivation of aesthetic sensitivity in daily life, thus ensuring that they remain subject to the moral and aesthetic influence of the benefactor. Suggesting appropriately bright colour schemes against the dullness of the house, and hoping for the displays of flowers or plants in the home, whether real or wax, was the start of the gentrification of the working class interior, completed by the additions of china tea set and mantel. This in turn should prove to be sufficiently uplifting to the soul to bring the common to cultivation.

Would more sophisticated pleasures perhaps breed more sophisticated tastes? Where might they be exposed to more objects of note and cultivation? It was with this in mind that the museum and its potential were fully assimilated into working class experience as the method of choice to instruct and imbue, and to occupy what little time they had to themselves for recreation or amusement. The last brick in the foundation of a civilized life was to be the appropriation of the leisure time of the working class. So hard come by it could be so easily wasted in meaningless entertainments unless it was redirected to worthwhile and beneficial activities.

The Uses and Abuses of Museums for Enlightenment

The museum was to play a very significant role in the overall development of the tastes of the working classes throughout the nineteenth and the twentieth

[76] Maltz, 65.

centuries, and continues to do so well in the twenty-first. The hope for transformation through immersion and exposure to good things in the museum is as vital an element in constructing the experience of visitors today as it was for the Victorians. There may be more sophisticated construction of that experience in the contemporary museum, but it owes much to its predecessor. In the presentation of examples of classical statuary alongside paintings of contemporary subjects the museum aimed to show the visitor the wealth and stability of tradition at the same time as highlighting the prevailing taste of the day. The preoccupations of the museum centered on relaying information about the works in such a way as to reinforce the power of the culture it represented in order to bring the working classes into line with its intentions. This is not as distant as we might like to think from contemporary interpretation within museums. Captions are at pains to speak to all audiences in a tone of interpretation that includes and educates while not patronising, with the latter issue perhaps the only significant difference.

The industrialists responsible for founding museums in the cities and industrial towns across Britain were more than a little aware of the bitter irony they represented to the working classes upon whose labour they were constructed. Andrew McClellan, in his essay in *Art and Its Publics*,[77] states clearly how much the museum was understood by government and industry alike as a social instrument. The hope was that the masses would parade through the institutions and acquire not simply taste and moral understanding from the works on display but a sense of order and decorum from the ways in which they were presented to the public. This would be achieved from exposure to the objects on display and from close acquaintance with their fellow visitors, generally from the middle class. Unfortunately this was not always to be the case, as some of the working classes who frequented these places became known for their unsavoury appearance and foul odours as much as for their inability to comprehend the meaning of the

[77] Andrew McClellan, 'A Brief History of the Art Museum Public' in: *Art and Its Publics: Museum Studies at the Millennium*, ed. Andrew McClellan (Oxford, Wiley-Blackwell, 2003) 13

subject matter contained within the works. In some ways this echoed the situation of the museum founders and donors who wished to prove themselves knowledgeable about works of art and disprove any accusations of philistinism that might attach to the typical Victorian industrialist.

It may be useful here to look at the origins and intentions of the Victoria and Albert Museum as a scholarly museum and repository of taste. The establishment view of the Victoria and Albert Museum as both a site of education and of the promotion of taste is clearly referred to in the many and various accounts of its development and remit. Derived in part from the Great Exhibition of 1851, the Victoria and Albert Museum continued to be at the centre of much of the activity of bringing culture and goods to the attention of the British public throughout the latter part of the nineteenth century. In this way it continued the valuable work of the exhibition and furthermore the exposition of mass-produced goods to the very people who had, in fact, produced them, the manufacturing working classes. It also clarified the distinctions between classes, within both the working class and middle class. The segmentation and stratification of all classes into upper, middle and lower was a continual theme in social structuring and restructuring during the industrial revolution. The aims the museum had for educating the working classes were noticeably different from those it had for the middle classes. The working class would be brought into line and as previously stated would abandon their former pastimes for these new educational diversions. This is evidenced in the function of the museum as a bourgeois institution. It is as Tony Bennett points out:

A history, then, of the formation of a new public and its inscription in new relations of power and knowledge. But a history accompanied by a parallel one aimed at the destruction of earlier traditions of popular exhibition and the publics they implied and produced. In Britain, this took the form, *inter alia,* of a concerted attack on popular fairs owing to their association with riot, carnival, and, in their side- shows, the display of monstrosities and curiosities which, no longer enjoying elite patronage, were now perceived as impediments to the rationalizing influence of the

restructured exhibitionary complex.[78]

Awareness of the differences within the working classes, and between them and the middle classes was keen. This is seen very clearly in the example of the visitors to the Great Exhibition in 1851. The hope was that middle-class and working class visitors would be kept to separate days by virtue of the different admission charges. In fact, the actual circumstances of their meeting are documented and represented as being fairly amicable:

> Although the Crystal Palace was ostensibly open to all, a basic charge of a shilling prevented a considerable section of British society from attending. Fear of the mob also led to a Hyde Park ban on the vendors who were typically associated with festivals and popular events. Alcohol was forbidden on the site, and police had strategic vantage points from which they could monitor the crowds. Nonetheless, the Exhibition enjoyed a richer social mix than any previous event of such a high cultural order. Contemporary reports tell of trains packed with agricultural laborers in quaint attire led to Hyde Park by their clergymen, Midlands factory workers given leave to glimpse the products of their manufacture displayed in glory, and even peasants who walked across the country to visit the Great Exhibition.[79]

Parallels can be made here with the nature of the attendance at the 'Britain Can Make It' exhibition in 1946. Clearly the Victoria and Albert Museum led the way in setting the tone for educating the masses though exposure to fine things. But perhaps more importantly it sets the tone for the rest of the century through the social institutions that it represents. The comments made in the Council of Industrial Design's publications during the 1930s and 1940s referring to the 'uncivilized' working classes would not seem out of place in the Victorian context, as both were informed by the same set of intellectual premises. The form of classical education that was the starting point for so much of this instruction and encouragement to enlightenment was sadly lost on the working class. The precepts of beauty and the sentiments contained within the notion of

---

[78] Tony Bennett, "The Exhibitionary Complex." *Culture/Power/History: A Reader in Contemporary Social Theory* 127 (1994).

[79] Peter Trippi, 'Industrial Arts and the Exhibition Ideal', in: *A Grand Design: The Art of the Victoria and Albert Museum,* . http://www.vam.ac.uk/vastatic/microsites/1159_grand_design/essay-industrial_new.html accessed 12.09.10

contemplation are difficult to situate in common culture. Indeed, they were difficult enough to form within middle-class cultures, but for different reasons.

Aesthetic education was just as much a feature of middle-class life as it was for the working classes, but to different ends. As Maltz points out, when referring to the education of the aspiring lower middle-class aesthete and their educators from the upper middle class, tensions arose between them when the deficiencies and inadequacies of their pupils seemed to be impossible to overcome. Ultimately, within the established hierarchies of taste and deference, class will out:

> They were very trying, some of these early students: young ladies whose affectations when 'seeking cultivation' made one long to shake them; prigs who quoted Browning on all occasions; excellent persons whose little learning made them mad- with conceit; pretentious youths who patronized all who had not read the few books they had perused, and who killed by bad manners the belief that education made equality.[80]

We would also be mistaken if we were to interpret the efforts of prominent philanthropists as always being well meaning or well intentioned, as Maltz reminds us:

> Henrietta Barnett uses the occasion of working class attendance at the gallery (St Jude's, which eventually develops into the Whitechapel) to critique a nation that permits poverty and to gently satirise the uneducated poor. She interjects her own readings, not merely of the paintings but of their spectators, at key conclusive moments.[81]

The benevolence of Barnett is tarnished by the fact that she frequently poked fun at the mannerisms and customs of the poor in her care, and by her profound dislike for their inactivity. In addition she infers the innate nature of taste. The 'watchers', an early version of the gallery invigilator employed by Barnett, allayed

[80] Henrietta Barnett, quoted in Maltz, 80.
[81] Maltz, 72.

fears of any bad behaviour in the galleries by the working class, and, in acting as guides for the visitor:

> often made all the difference between an intelligent visit and a listless ten-minutes' stare.[82]

Class difference in intellectual pursuits was an intriguing problem. While the working class intellectual constituency was growing, the middle-class intellectual was disputing the relevance of aesthetic education. The working class educated intellectual who was frequently driven by political enlightenment was in opposition to his middle-class counterpart driven by the fashion for certain goods and fads, or indeed certain popular opinions. Satirists represented the working and middle classes equally in cartoons that dealt with the latest trends in fashion or the foolishness of certain fashionable ideas. Chief amongst these were characterizations of the aesthete, be they upper or lower class. Many commented on the apparent lack of understanding displayed in the middle class, although ignorance was not taken to imply a lack of civilisation in their case. It was looked upon as laziness, foppish arrogance or lassitude, all sentiments appropriate to the decadent upper middle class. Amongst the lower classes it was clear that a lack of aesthetic education bred incivility, and this in turn produced churlish ungratefulness.

The aesthetic education project saw little change in attitude in the period from the end of the nineteenth century to the inter-war years. In the period before World War II there was much to comment on in relation to the social projects in hand, with Government anxious to resolve social decay and disparities, deal with the issues of substandard housing and address unemployment. This was tackled through a number of interventions in the name of good design, good taste, cleanliness and order.

[82] Henrietta Barnett, quoted in Maltz, 72.

The same mantra has been repeated in each century. The Council of Industrial Design, as an instrument of government policy in post-war Britain, can be seen as carrying on the work of the nineteenth-century Aesthetic missionaries and perpetuating the class divide.

Postwar Britain: Manufacturing the New Working Class

If we turn now to 1946, and look in some detail at the British post-war situation through the development of new housing and new consumer products, we are struck by the emphasis on, and the revival of, the taste project. It is as if the war had presented a timely opportunity to begin the Victorian education process once again in earnest, and to seek better inroads into changing working class culture. The possible potential for social engineering was high on the post-war agenda, and the population was ripe for influence and development. This was a very large working class population. As Peter Hennessy indicates:

In 1921 the British working classes (as defined on an occupational basis by the government's Registrar General) made up 78.29 per cent of the population. By 1931 it was slightly down to 78.07. By 1951 it had fallen to 72.19 per cent. But with population growth this still amounted to over 36 million people, much as it had been twenty years earlier. In other words the working classes remained, by a substantial margin, the bulk of the British people. [83]

It is in this climate that institutional bodies such as the Council of Industrial Design set about reforming the public, and brought to their attention the severity of the situation and the desire for prompt action in the case of changing standards of design. One of these was the 'urgent national problem' that Gordon Russell identified, and this applied not just to the design standards within industry but also to the buying public. As he points out:

Certainly a minority of the public was interested in getting better designs, but it had to be admitted that most people buy what they are used to and distrust change.[84]

[83] Peter Hennessy, *Having it so Good: Britain in the Fifties* (London: Allen Lane, 2006), 65
[84] Gordon Russell, in *The Problem of Raising Design Standards in Industry* [leaflet], (London: Council of Industrial Design, c.1958)

This was most definitely the case with the initiatives that surrounded 'good design'. Jonathan Woodham has offered well-documented proof of this in the form of a 'good design' initiative that involved the Council of Industrial Design and the Co-operative Wholesale Society.[85]

The burden of good taste in design was to be placed on the working classes at every opportunity, and promoted to them in every way possible and available. So much so, in fact, that many films and television series featured British design during the next few years, as this seemed the most appropriate vehicle through which to communicate to the British public. Even their 'harmless entertainments' were to be harnessed to the cause:

A working liaison has been established with Odeon Ltd. One result may in due course appear as an appropriate use of the best British Industrial Design in the interior settings of feature films.[86]

That the 'good' in *Good Design* was to be an effective discipline and moral lesson for the working classes was once again an echo of the education to which their forebears had been subjected. The attempts to subdue 'violent appeal' in poorly designed objects, to 'calm the anger of the untrained' and to deal with 'urgent national problems' imply a degree of hysteria. We can only guess at how good design was to be utilized in the working class home and what consequences were avoided as a result of ugly or uncivilized furniture not being purchased. This rally to arms coincided with a clear direction to the many occupants of the 'New Jerusalems' that were springing up nationwide, and not just the replacing of bombed-out areas but the entire communities that were being improved and overhauled. There is a fundamental contradiction here though; fostering 'independent' good taste and values is good but only within the acknowledged canon. There could be no real independence as this simply led to pretentions and deviating from the norm.

---

[85] Judy Attfield, *Utility Reassessed: The Role of Ethics in the Practice of Design* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2001) 39 - 57

[86] Design Council Archive, University of Brighton, *Council of Industrial Design Annual Report, 1945/46,* Section "Reading the Public", 21

The rapid growth of council estates all over the country, and the replacement of the old housing stock with newly-built housing, may have reformed community but did not help in any way with the discarding of old habits. Utility furniture was still very much in evidence in these new homes, and would be for many more years. A key feature in almost every domestic interior, it was a constant reminder of government control and came to stand for both frugality and disdain.

The Utility Furniture scheme could be viewed as a timely intervention and opportunity, as it represented an attack on this tendency, filled a useful wartime role and dealt artfully with both promoting and justifying good design. The sanitisation of the working class home through the introduction of no-nonsense, unadorned furniture would cleanse it of all frippery and instill moral hygiene. The scheme straddles the most significant years here, from 1942 – 1952, and encompasses a number of significant approaches to problem of aesthetic education. The scheme formalised government control, and this was an opportunity for design and social reform not to be missed. Utility furniture as it was presented in the 'Britain Can Make It' exhibition focused on its manufacture and showed detailed sections of its construction. This emphasis on the crafted elements within addressed the artisan nature within the malleable working class.

Many key writers of the post-war period were recruited to the task of dissuading the indiscriminating public from their wayward path. Chief amongst them were Anthony Betram, Nikolaus Pevsner, John Gloag and Gordon Russell. We will come to know them later, in detail and by their tone of address, but suffice it to say at this point in the discussion that Pevsner's curious admonition to the British public against the artificiality of electric fires seems to echo brilliantly his Victorian forebears:

An electric fire that by means of ingeniously devised wheels within wheels tries to look like a flickering coal may at the first moment deceive and at the second amuse. After that it bores and

then disgusts as a mongrel: Ersatz for real coal, and without the polished machine-like slickness of the modern electric fire.[87]

Vulgarity was personified in many forms, and being 'jazzed up' was an expression Pevsner and others used to describe the sensation and appearance of unbearable designs. Objects of derision neither fish nor fowl, neither one thing nor the other, these might result in a 'violent' appeal.

We might not wish to speculate about these effects on the working classes already given to being insensible and crude. However, what is more important in this discussion is the extent of the large output of books, leaflets and periodicals that accompany the aesthetic education project. During these years Penguin and other publishers produced texts in collaboration with the Council of Industrial Design, and the BBC and ATV published books and leaflets to accompany radio and television series and promote design to the British public. This forms the substance of the next chapter.

If the working classes were to become new model citizens then they must have the taste to match. Persuading them to it was an uphill task. It may well have been much the same for the middle and upper classes too as ideas on taste evolved. Richard Hoggart is clear about the non-participatory nature of the working classes though:

The working classes have a strong natural ability to survive change by adapting or assimilating what they want in the new and ignoring the rest. [88]

Perhaps it was this intransigence that necessitated the production of so much political propaganda around design and its consumption.

[87] Nikolaus Pevsner,*Visual Pleasures from Everyday Things* (London: Batsford; Council for Visual Education, 1946), 17-18
[88] Hoggart, 17

Chapter Two Public Address

Design and the 'Indiscriminating Public'

This chapter provides an analysis of key texts and their reception and distribution. The sample of publications examined here consists of *Design in Daily Life*, 1937, *Design in Everyday Things*, 1937 and *Design*, 1938, all by Anthony Bertram; *Visual Pleasures from Everyday Things*, 1946, by Nikolaus Pevsner and examples from *The Things We See* series from 1946 to 1948 by Alan Jarvis, Lionel Brett and Gordon Russell. These key texts are representative of the design and social ideology promoted during this period and as such they embody the dominant principles at work within them.

Critical examination of these documents reveals the aesthetic and social assumptions that underpinned the promotional and interpellative literature of design reform in its address to this 'indiscriminating public'.[89] Ordinarily we might not necessarily regard class considerations to be useful as an indicator of a particular viewpoint. However, in this reappraisal of the pre- and postwar position, and in re-reading these pamphlets and booklets, books and guides, government directives and marketing literature, the presentation of the class motif is clearly apparent. The reformation of the working class is read into and through the materials under consideration here.

In the period under scrutiny, 1937 – 1948, the direction to a specific taste was exemplified in the many exhibitions, leaflets, books and publications produced during these years. The authors called upon to write these texts were drawn from a group of critics and commentators, designers and architects closely affiliated with the British establishment, political scene, and nascent design and

[89] *The Value of Good Design: a Report on the Scottish Design Congress, 1954*, ed. Alister Maynard, (Edinburgh: Council of Industrial Design, Scottish Committee, 1954)

broadcasting institutions. Chief amongst them were Anthony Bertram, Nikolaus Pevsner and Gordon Russell, who represented each of these constituencies. We will come to know them better later, in more detail, by their mode of address and by their own individual concerns.

From the mid-1930s onwards this charge upon the working classes to change their taste appears to have been of paramount importance, and placed emphasis on self-improvement through design in a way that recalls many of the nineteenth century philanthropic projects. That the ‘good’ in good taste was to be an effective discipline and moral lesson for the working classes was an echo of the education to which their Victorian forebears had been subjected. It is possible to draw an analogy between the design reformers of the nineteenth century, Charles Eastlake and John Ruskin in particular, and those of the twentieth. The design reformers of pre-war Britain - Anthony Bertram, Alan Jarvis, and Nikolaus Pevsner - differed from their nineteenth century predecessors only very slightly. Their beliefs coincided around the moral purposes of design, and in the case of Anthony Bertram in his particular care for cleanliness and hygiene. Whereas Nikolaus Pevsner shared anxieties about the overall quality of design production both Alan Jarvis and Anthony Bertram held to the belief that taste would be central to personal renewal.

In fact in the period just before World War II many of the problems that had been of concern in the nineteenth century were again at issue, with Government anxious to resolve social decay and disparities, tackle the issues of substandard housing and overcrowding and deal with the dreadful consequences of unemployment. The modernist discourse around social housing and the poor, the working class and labour, renegotiated the vestiges of the Victorian philanthropic projects and re-defined the role of design and design reform in what was to be a period of immense social change.

That Tone of Voice: Anthony Bertram and 'inscribing' Modernism

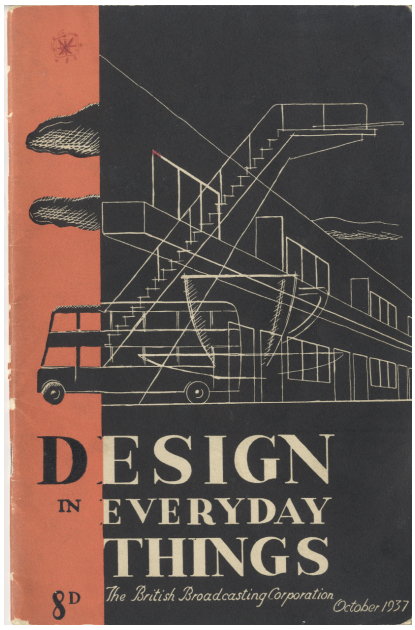


Fig.6. Anthony Bertram (1937), *Design in Everyday Things*

In the autumn of 1937 the BBC broadcast a series of talks by Anthony Bertram, *Design in Everyday Things*, which was accompanied by a publication that served as an educational tool as well as a guide to the broadcasts. Its didactic purposes were quite clear. It drew on community concerns gathered through prior visits and consultation, and emphasized discussion of key concepts with knowledgeable partners drawn from industry, local government and the retail sector, formed into discussion groups. In his introduction to *Design in Everyday Things* Bertram states that

> These talks will be concerned with design as it affects people of incomes below £8 per week – that is the vast majority of our countrymen.[90]

To say that those on incomes of less than £8 per week were the vast majority in Britain at this time was something of an understatement, as many were living on considerably less. Indeed, as we have learned already, the lowest-paid were the

[90] Bertram, *Design in Everyday Things*, 1

biggest element in Britain at this time, as the population consisted of a very large working class component.

Attaining a deeper understanding and appreciation of the benefits of well-designed goods and housing might have been the intention of *Design in Everyday Things*, but concerns about the way design affected the lowest paid in the country might have been better directed. The issue of new housing and home furnishing featured prominently in the booklet, and the broadcasts seem as though they were intended to address the changing face of Britain at this time. Unfortunately, what were not changing in step with this were the distribution of wealth and the re-organization of housing, public housing in particular. Peter Hennessy's assessment of this state of affairs looks to the works of R. H. Tawney written at the time to illustrate the inequity of this social system. In a work from 1935 (subsequently updated in 1950), Tawney asserts that:

……common persons, i.e. about four-fifths of the nation, have not the same right to a good life as a privileged minority……It is noxious to the individual soul, for it is the parent both of insolence - never so insolent as when so blandly un-selfconscious – and of servility. It is noxious to society, for it destroys the possibility of a common culture, and makes the struggle of classes a national institution.[91]

Chosen as one of the leading commentators on British architecture and art, Bertram seems to have had the best of intentions for the broadcasts, and this is made clear in the booklet. Educating the undiscriminating British public and transforming their taste was the goal, and if it were to be achieved then considerable efforts must be made. Moreover, Bertram understood that while education in the principles of taste was to be critical to success, promoting design would be a task fraught with difficulties. Although not entirely removed from the difficulties of the working class and the issues surrounding poverty and unemployment, he displayed a Victorian philanthropic attitude with his dim view of the average person, or 'general public'.

[91] Hennessy, 64

Here Bertram echoes colonial attitudes in some rather suspect notions of bringing the barbarian or savage under control, and appears to align social status with aesthetic capacity:

> The anger of the untrained must be braved. It is simply not true that everyone is born with the capacity to judge design.[92]

Bertram was of course not alone in this idea and he echoes the view from the Bloomsbury group and Roger Fry in particular that the ability to appreciate, and to 'see' clearly was limited to certain classes. As an art historian Bertram was of course familiar with this position. As Simon Watney describes it in his piece *The Connoisseur as Gourmet:*

> It should be clear that these four modes of seeing[93] correspond, in Fry's mind, to four distinct types of people. As such, they embody a kind of aesthetic eugenics, against which any appeals to education would have seemed pointless. In this sense Fry evacuated the Romantic tradition of its last notional traces of the idea of 'improvement' through art. Modernism is set free from all social obligations whatsoever….But even before his death in 1934, a younger generation had begun to question the validity of a theory of aesthetic response in which the public is portrayed not simply as a tasteless biologically inferior mass, but as *irredeemably* so.[94]

Where Bertram differed was in his belief that the visionless most certainly could be educated to see, in essence the broken soul could be mended. So what hope was there here for the possibility of finding some kind of 'common culture'? If not the working class, then who was born with this capacity to judge design? In tackling this as an issue of working class taste Bertram identifies the central problem as one of novelty very much as Ruskin had in the nineteenth century, and for very much the same reasons:

---

[92] Bertram, *Design in Everyday Things*, 3
[93] These were: Practical vision or everyday seeing; Curiosity vision; Aesthetic or disinterested vision; Creative vision.
[94] Simon Watney, *The Connoisseur as Gourmet* in Formations of Pleasure, (London: Routledge,1983), 73

Half our goods today are in fancy dress. But surely the honest and reasonable thing is for the whole shape of the object to proclaim rather than hide its purpose. It is a stupid snobbery that decks out some simple object of common use with the ornament of luxury. [95]

It appears that the working class was made responsible for the continued production and consumption of goods that were at their very core the epitome of bad taste and bad design. All roads led back to them, through their apparent insistence on over-embellishment and ornate decorative touches. Bertram's statement betrays his own intellectual adherence to Platonic principles and notions of beauty in true form and also expresses something of the position Pevsner held in relation to manufactured items. But it also points to a more difficult suggestion that the truly luxurious object should be deliberately out of the reach of the masses, and should remain so as it was naturally the right of the connoisseur.

The real purpose of the object was to overtly indicate its function, and in so many cases of the mass-produced product this was not the case. Bertram's response to what he perceived as the iniquities of mass-produced, overly ornamented goods, viewed as the staple elements of so many working class homes, was clearly directed not simply at the ill educated, but also at the uncouth:

Another piece of dishonesty. Look at the stamped ornament on cheap furniture. Only a very crude eye could mistake it for carving, but that is what its shapes feebly imitate. [96]

Unfortunately 'the very crude eye' of the working class when cast over cheap furniture is incapable of discerning good ornament from bad, but more importantly does not distinguish details in the quality of manufacture or craftsmanship, a sentiment Bertram shared with his Victorian predecessor Charles Eastlake.

[95] Bertram, *Design in Everyday Things*, 5
[96] ibid., 5

Bertram describes Eastlake as a Victorian reformer:

In 1869 Charles Eastlake, an architect and designer, published a book called *Hints on Household Taste,* which he claimed to be the first publication on design 'in a manner sufficiently practical and familiar to ensure the attention of the general public'. 'To ensure'….how optimistic those Victorian reformers were. Since then there has been a crescendo of such books…..And yet most of the abuses Eastlake complains of survive and the very word 'design' is a mystery to the common man, almost a clique-word.[97]

In this respect we might also say that Bertram's 'crude eye' echoes Fry's description of vision. This eye seeks imitation rather than the original version, as it has no capacity to judge pure design. Bertram's description of what he refers to as 'good ornament' and the form of the beautiful object suggests again the problematic nature of the coarse and uncultivated working class, used only to bad stamped ornament. He returns to Eastlake:

'The faculty of distinguishing good from bad design in the familiar objects of domestic life is a faculty which most educated people – and especially women - conceive they possess. How it has been acquired, few would be able to explain.' That remains as true today as when Eastlake wrote it, except that we can cut out the word 'educated'.[98]

Bertram's use of analogy in his writing seems to indicate that he is keen to provide something that his working class readers might recognize. But he is also a keen advocate of his Victorian forebears and of Eastlake's good sense in direction to taste:

Are there then rules of taste, standards of beauty, tests of art? To some extent yes. At least there are guiding principles. At least certain signposts and danger signals can be set up, certain blind roads indicated. To begin with we can learn to distinguish between art and beauty or, if you prefer it, between artistic and natural beauty. They are too commonly confused. Hence what Eastlake calls 'the silly representations of vegetable life' on our walls. It is satisfactory to quote a Victorian on these matters. We are not so new-fangled in our ideas, after all.

[97] Ibid., 1
[98] Ibid., 3

This Victorian opprobrium persists in Bertram. Here he conjures up images of the working class Sunday outing to church and clothes kept for such special occasions, while at the same time placing them next to slightly disparaging references to the habit of bodily embellishment. Each comparison belittles their preference for decoration:

good ornament is only possible today in relatively expensive goods - the sort of things we use in our best clothes…….form…..can be quite sufficiently beautiful without trappings and trinkets, make-up and tattooing. [99]

This image of the tattooed body and overly made-up face occurs in later texts, used as an indication of something corrupt and decadent in both Britain and America. The loose morals and illiberal bodily behaviour that it indicated seemed to be read as symptomatic of working class life and habits founded in the nineteenth century once more and is also strongly reminiscent of Adolf Loos' *Ornament and Crime*. [100]

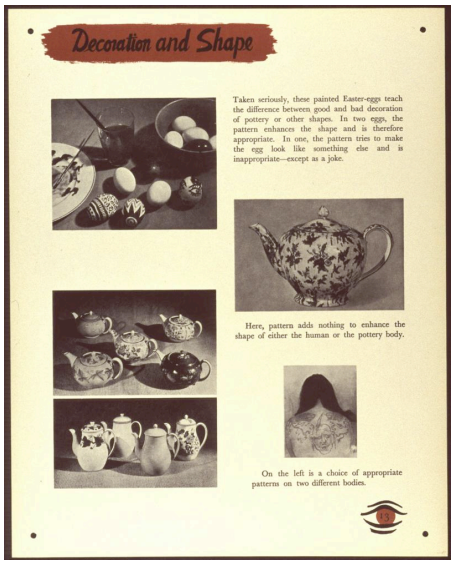


Fig.7 *The Things We See Indoors and Out*, London, Penguin, 1946

[99] ibid., 6
[100] Adolf Loos, *Ornament and Crime,* 1908

The message is clear. ‘Good ornament’ is out of reach of most, and they should content themselves with the solid goodness of form unadorned. In describing the nature of the desirable object one cannot help but feel that Bertram is actually describing the nature of the desirable working class persona at the same time. Remaking the working class in the image of the dignified honest form would not be a simple case of their visual reawakening but a form of spiritual healing and bodily wholeness achieved through the nature of the honest thing. If we were able to repair taste then we would create a society that would demand good things as a matter of course. In the process we might also repair and heal other social ills. But whose interests would be served here, those of the establishment or those of the working class themselves? Surely this was the purpose of the well-designed and pure form. He continues to develop this theme:

But how are we to arrive at the happy state of affairs, which so obviously doesn’t exist to-day, in which these everyday things are efficient, honest and beautiful in form?.....A man who has been long crippled must learn to walk again: it is no use for him to protest that he could walk once years ago without advice or support. Education, then, and only education, can heal this social crippledom. [101]

Bertram seems to be never too far way from his Victorian predecessors. Healing, education and subsequent redemption form the essence of his approach but are only too familiar as the basis of Victorian philanthropic projects. In *Design in Daily Life*, Bertram quotes extensively from Plato in justifying the nature of beauty, wholeness and moral integrity and begins with this quotation supplying as it does the message of his text and his own notions of social order and function:

Are not the excellence, beauty and correctness of every manufactured article, or living creature, or action, to be tried only by a reference to the purpose intended in their construction, or in their natural constitution?[102]

[101] Bertram, *Design in Everyday Things*, 6
[102] Plato’s Republic, Book X, quoted in in Bertram, *Design in Daily Life,* 6

Equally, in Bertram's reading of industrial history in Section Three of the book *The Useful Arts: Yesterday and Today* he emphasises the power of the industrial revolution in its social effects and the transformation of the concepts of both labour and production. While he is at pains to point out that the culprits in what he portrays as a rather corrupt endeavour sit at each end of the social scale, and is equally critical in his description of their roles, he reserves some special recriminatory remarks for the masses who produced and consumed under a banner heading, *The New Social Order*:

But these disgusting results of mechanical mass production would never have taken place but for social changes. The machine is not liable to produce vulgarity on its own any more than the chisel or the hand-loom. But if the man directing it and the consumer of its products are vulgar then it can satisfy them on an unprecedented scale and spread their corruption with unprecedented speed.[103]

The newest elements within the social reordering of society were seen in the form of the nouveau riche capitalist factory owners, elevated from their industry origins into the new aristocracy. At the bottom of the scale now were the ever more diminished proletariat, dragged lower and lower by the mechanical mass-production methods that they now supervised, losing their basic artisanal character to the machine in the process. Surprisingly, perhaps, the contamination of the very upper levels of the social scale was also brought about by industrial expansion, the mechanical process of production, the distractions of colonial power, unparalleled trade opportunities, profits from slavery, mineral exploitation and land acquisition:

It might have been expected that one class, the aristocracy, would keep its head in this upheaval and, through its cultural awareness, keep some control of machine production. But the aristocracy had no time for such a service. It was fighting for its life. As the new uneducated capitalist class menaced the tradition of culture, so it menaced the very existence of the only class that had that tradition as part of its *intellectual* (Bertram's italics) equipment.[104]

[103] Bertram, *Design in Daily Life*, 55
[104] Ibid.,59

The traditions of the cultures surrounding manufacture might have been under attack in the factories of Britain from this parvenu class of self-made men, but it was also under an assault of a quite different kind in the many municipal museums and libraries springing up in the industrial centres of the North and the Midlands, and in the South. Here philanthropic ventures aimed to expose the working class to a culture and tradition that might educate through an appreciation of antiquity. In the founding and equipping of these institutions for the benefit of the working class not only was a new chapter in aesthetic education begun but also a new process of education through objects was underway. The growth of museum education and its uses has been examined in detail in Chapter One. However, Bertram's text is clear about both the direction and the relationship between social change and mechanization, and insists that the modern era fully appreciates this:

> The machine can produce more beautiful objects at lower cost than any hand process. Why should the human race not profit by that? The machine belongs to the present and the future. It is time we gave up looking to the past. [105]

The conclusion is that the honest, purposeful object is the face of the future, where all is efficient and has material integrity as a reflection of the social construct it inhabits and sustains. Dishonest objects are therefore the corollary of this and represent the worst of all worlds. In bemoaning the loss of the crafted object in favour of the 'disgusting results of mechanical mass production', Bertram also seems to acknowledge somewhat the loss of the artisanal culture that had been at the heart of the working class. The transformation of this group from noble labourer to consumers of shoddy manufactured items brings with it further disgust and, in addition, distrust. Nowhere is this better illustrated than in the case of electrical goods pretending to belong to another order of objects altogether.

[105] ibid.,63

‘Honesty’ and ‘dishonesty’ as attributes in electric light fittings and electric heaters imbue the object with characteristics we might see reflected in the consumer themself. Intriguing illustrations indicate the nature of these objects. Here, Bertram takes issue with the ‘falsehoods’ of the ubiquitous electric heater:

I have seen bad imitations of wrought iron basket fires, filled with bad imitations of coal or logs, and fitted with an electric *light.* (Bertram’s italics) These queer and elaborate falsehoods are proudly labelled ‘no heat’. Here surely are the very depths. It is bad enough when an electric fire tries to look like a coal or log fire, but what of an electric light that tries to look like a fire? [106]

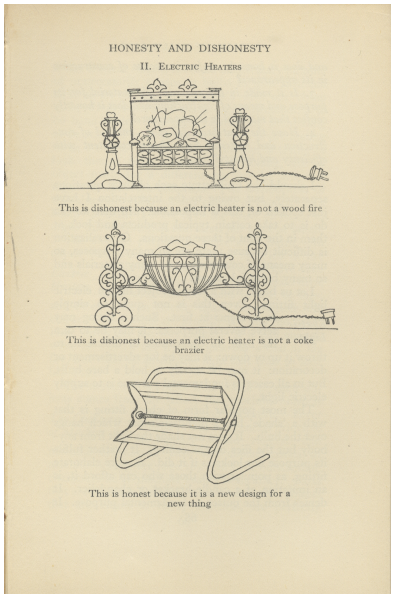


Fig. 8 Anthony Bertram, *Design in Daily Life* (1937), ‘Honesty and Dishonesty in electric heaters’, 67

Interestingly, perhaps, this was the style of ‘flickering’ heater deemed most popular by retailers in Pevsner’s survey *Industrial Art in England,*[107] and, although relatively expensive, still accounted for between 75 and 90 per cent of sales. The discussion of dishonest design of this kind uses as its focus those goods most likely to be found in the majority of homes. This epidemic of bad taste was definitely not confined solely to the working class home, but it might appear in this literature that they were still the majority in terms of their need for re-education. It may well have been the case that those addressed by these

[106] ibid.,69
[107] Pevsner, *An Inquiry into Industrial Art in England*, 26

texts included in their potential audience the lower middle class and middle classes, but the identification of the addressee was almost certainly carefully focused on the working person.

Reforming the Nation: the Pre-War period

Anthony Bertram and Nikolaus Pevsner, both keen proponents of modernist values, best communicate the anxiety, and what can only be described as occasional slight hysteria, felt in the face of the Herculean task of relaying the messages of taste and aesthetic appreciation to the 'indiscriminating' British public. The dissemination of Modernism may have been the primary aim, but it was delivered in a variety of ways by different design reformers, reflecting the considerable differences in their ideological positions. Bertram and Pevsner used their broadcasts and publications to set out and disseminate widely an aesthetic education manifesto for a consumer perceived by them, rightly or wrongly, to be intent on resisting its benefits. The anxiety attached to the selection of domestic goods, and in particular avoiding the selection of the wrong type of goods, was manifest in a clear direction to choose modern, clean and functional exemplars. The open disparagement of articles of furniture and objects consistently portrayed as dishonest, disfigured and 'lumpen' provided additional direction to the decent and respectable, and to what was most appropriate socially.

The BBC and Design Reform

In achieving the goal of widespread aesthetic reform, public organizations such as the BBC played a vital role, both in broadcasting to the nation on radio and television and in publishing articles that dealt with design in everyday life in their own popular magazine *The Listener*. BBC Radio played a significant role in the design reform campaign.

As Scannell and Cardiff relate the development of radio broadcasting they state:

Aesthetics and politics came together in radio, as elsewhere, under the pressure of the times to register the issues of the day for a newly democratized society. Here the influences of contemporary Modernism in the arts and cinema shaped developments. [108]

Under the direction of Hilda Matheson and Charles Siepmann the BBC talks department established a well earned a reputation for high quality content and speakers. Programmes such as *S.O.S.* and *Other People's Houses* both of which examined unemployment and the slums broadcast in 1933, and *Time to Spare* in 1934, were in the vanguard of the new socially aware series of talks that the department promoted. The arts and design were popular subjects for programmes and many concentrated on the home. John Gloag, Noel Carrington and Anthony Bertram were amongst those who regularly contributed articles on design to the magazine *The Listener*, and made radio and television broadcasts. John Gloag's television appearances were varied and covered a wide range of design issues, with titles such as *'Sitting Pretty: chairs and the clothes that went with them'* and *'The Modern House'* a discussion on *'the tendencies in modern architectural design'* with Serge Chermayeff. [109] Gloag was also a regular chairman of popular radio discussion panels, most notably the series *Men Talking,* broadcast in 1937. Unfortunately the intention of *Men Talking*, to appeal to the working class listener, wasn't so easily achieved as they might have anticipated:

The series designed at first for the unemployed, gave rise to objections from its audience. A listening group in Morecambe, for instance, complained that, in a discussion on education, all the speakers appeared to belong to the same minority group and evidently did not have children in state schools. The producer admitted that 'this question of working classes is very difficult indeed.'….Gloag, the regular chairman, 'was astonished when I told him about the storm of protest about the middle class atmosphere of the discussion. At first he was suspicious that this was due to what he called "the inverted snobbery of left wing intellectuals", but I persuaded him

[108] Paddy Scannell and David Cardiff, *A Social History of British Broadcasting, Volume 1, 1922 – 1939, Serving the Nation,* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991), 34
[109] Radio Times Television Supplements: December 1936; January 1939.

that there was much more to it than this and that we must in the next few talks at any rate, have an unlettered voice.' The BBC's Leeds Education Officer reported that the next broadcast did appear to have 'the common touch' which the previous one had so lamentably lacked, but some of the regular contributors now began to complain that the quality of the conversation was suffering as a result. [110]

Gloag and Bertram were chosen to make broadcasts on design most likely because of their position within the design establishment and their previous output of books on the subject: Gloag's *English Furniture* (1934), *Industrial Art Explained* (1934) and *Design in Modern Life* (1934), and Bertram's *The House: a machine for living In* (1935) and *Design in Daily Life* (1937).

Anthony Bertram's BBC radio series, *Design in Everyday Things* (1937) was an early experiment in community consultation and combined a discussion group initiative while being concurrent with a Design and Industries Association travelling exhibition. The subjects covered by the series of twelve talks ranged from the home to the workplace and places of recreation and public buildings to town and country planning, and were all based on prior consultation with the public. At the request of the BBC Bertram had visited forty towns to discuss design in detail with citizens of all types and professions. Prior to his making the tour of Great Britain a broadcast plea for letters and for invitations to him to speak about design garnered a massive response. An isotype based on the letters received shows graphically where most interest lay and where the requests had originated. At the top of the list of concerns *Furnishings and Equipment of the House*, followed by *Housing*, were clear favourites. Discussion groups were formed for each talk and group leaders were directed to ask the questions contained in the booklet.

[110] Paddy Scannell and David Cardiff, *A Social History of British Broadcasting, Volume 1, 1922 – 1939, Serving the Nation,* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991), 171- 2

The first talk, *What does the Public Want?,* was broadcast on 4 October 1937 at 8pm, and of the two questions that were suggested as topics for the discussion groups the second had a distinctly leading tone:

2. Why do you think people buy imitation goods – electric fires that flicker, things made in a plastic material treated to look like wood? Isn't such design dishonest? And is veneer an example of this?[111]

In the sixth talk in the series, on 8 November 1937, the topic for discussion was *Housing the Workers.* The preamble to the discussion is laden with statistics and some very useful figures:

Nearly 1,500,000 houses, built since the war, have been subsidized by the State. It has cost well over 175,000,000. On slum clearance alone since 1930 1,200,000 has been paid by the Exchequer; but about 25,000 people are leaving the slums every month. Are these vast sums being well used?[112]

Of the three suggested questions for group discussion after the broadcast, the second is perhaps most revealing:

2. If you have any members who live on municipal estates, ask what points they particularly like and dislike.[113]

The series had a mixed reception, but Bertram seems disingenuous in his later response to reactions to its didactic nature:

A few correspondents and one radio critic in a popular paper indignantly suggested that under my apparently mild exterior I had sinister *educational* (Bertram's italics) motives.[114]

The 'radio critic in a popular paper' may well have been Collie Knox whose column *Collie Knox Calling,* appeared in the Daily Mail.

[111] Bertram, *Design in Everyday Things*, 8
[112] ibid.10
[113] ibid.10
[114] Bertram, *Design*, 52

The purpose of the broadcasts had been stated clearly enough in the accompanying booklet, and education was stressed as the main purpose of the BBC Talks department output. Perhaps he bridled at the *type* of education that had been implied. In Bertram's own descriptions of the problem his broadcasts set out to remedy was quite clear. The disorganized and dysfunctional families that were occupants of homes furnished by those 'crippled' by their bad taste and in need of rescue would be redeemed by aesthetic education. It's not difficult to see that this might have been received as patronising.

Penguin and the Pre-war Literature of Design Reform - *Design*

Penguin books established in 1935 by Allen Lane, began publishing books in 1936 and caught the same wave of social change that the BBC was so keen to engage. Penguin was intent on publishing a range of books for the widest possible audience. This imprint was to be low in price and high in content encompassing all subject areas. The popularity of Penguin and their offering was immediately confirmed. Penguin sales had reached 3 million by July 1936, and had a turnover of £75,000 in the first year of business. Penguin's interest in art, design and architecture led to a stream of titles throughout the 1930s and 1940s, and in particular series such as the Pelican History of Art by authors such as Anthony Blunt, Nikolaus Pevsner and John Summerson. [115]

Penguin offered the mechanism for reaching a large reading audience and publishing with the company enabled the work begun through Bertram's BBC radio broadcasts to continue:

> It is encouraging that the enterprising management of the Penguins has decided to co-operate with the Design and Industries Association in a book of this nature.[116]

[115] Penguin Archive materials, Sales statistics Planning, Design, and Art (E/0703); 0560/Z Pelican History of Art, DM1107/Z1-52
[116] Bertram, *Design*, viii

In *Design*, published in 1938 as a Pelican Special, and based on his series of broadcasts *Design in Everyday Things*, Bertram sets out even more clearly his fundamental belief in the power of design to civilize:

All design is everybody's business. I would go so far as to say that design in its widest sense really means civilization. [117]

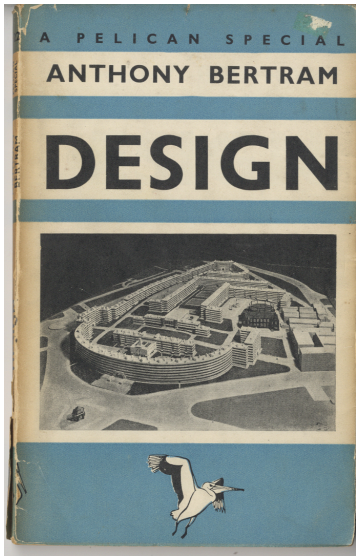


Fig.9 *Design* 1938 front cover

This book epitomized that sentiment, which was also clearly expressed in a foreword by Lord Sempill, the chairman of the Design and Industries Association. Calling for education in the principles of design and an understanding of design in everyday life, the thrust of the message was civilization through an appreciation of beauty and the achievement of a 'whole life' by the same means. It was, however, still a far cry from culture or cultivation, something reserved for Bertram's intellectual classes.

Penguin were keen to sustain the book, and the stream of correspondence between Edward Young, the editor at Penguin handling the first set of revisions to the book, and the author reveal a friendly relationship and considerable efforts to find precisely the right content. The detailed descriptions of illustrations and

[117] Ibid., 32

layout contained in these letters are a tribute to the clear and well-thought-through message the book hoped to relay. They also reveal a lighter side and some very clear insights into the literary life of the time. In a letter from Anthony Bertram dated 12 December 1938 to Young at Penguin, after some banter about familiar names for one another (Bertram asks " do you prefer Eddie, Ed, Edward or are you usually called Snooks or Poppet? ", to which Young replies that "Ted suits me perfectly well, thanks very much.") Young responds to the long list of instructions it contains thus:

Dear Tony
This morning is one of those mornings after a good party, so I have been unable to bring my brilliant brain to bear on the complicated letter, covering two pages, which I received from you this morning. When I have sobered up a bit better I will examine this with great care and attention and let you know if there is anything not clear.[118]

The book was arranged much as the broadcasts had been. The most interesting aspects are found in Chapters 3 and 5. In his opening statements in Chapter 3 of *Design* Bertram revisits his theme from the broadcasts *Housing the Workers in England* and makes it very clear that he supports decent homes for all, discussing good neighbourhood development and the necessity for decent infrastructure systems as providing a basis for sound living. It is also evident that he holds to a particular view of who might be most irritated by the fact that it was the re-housed working class who were the recipients of the overall civilizing influences of architecture:

But if that is too philosophical and speculative a reason for taking an interest in working class housing, there are always your pockets to consider. The tax-payer is investing in this housing. Surely it is of interest to him to know how his money is spent. Every neighbourhood is affected by council building. Surely it is of interest to know whether that is for good or bad.[119]

[118] Letter from Edward Young to Anthony Bertram, December 15, 1938, Penguin Archive Materials, DM1107/S22
[119] Bertram, *Design,* 32

If there was concern over wasting taxpayers' money on re-housing the poorer elements of British society, Bertram attempts to put our minds at rest by refuting claims about their domestic practices and defending the uncivilized working class family and their right to a new council home:

> Bathrooms are always supplied, of course, and I hope nobody still thinks coals are kept in them. That is one of the silliest lies. I have never seen a case of misuse, and what is more, I have heard of none from all the experts I have talked to. It is a wicked legend that must have grown up from one or two cases.[120]

The home, the domestic sphere, the realm of habitation of the working class, is presented as a place somewhat demoralized and dejected in this literature. Bertram used his descriptions of domestic circumstances in *Design* as a vehicle to develop this thesis and he is often scathing about the quality of furniture found in most homes. He develops his argument on a room-by-room basis and suggests possible remedies. If design were to be the 'civilizing' influence he felt it to be, then it would be felt and transmitted through its products. It is stressed that the rational and beautiful life, the modernist ideal, was not that of 'instinct and accident'.

This is the essential problem in both Bertram's and Pevsner's portrayals of the working class domestic domain. They appear to find it difficult to identify even one redeeming aspect of the working class home as it had been constructed. This is in spite of a fascination with the working class for their artisan origins, their leisure activities and entertainments, their social traditions and conventions. Bertram asserts the disorder of the over-decorated in all the sentimental paraphernalia and memorabilia on display, missing the significance and meaning that resides in those same objects. Removal of all extraneous and superfluous objects is strongly recommended, as disorder rules in the form of miscellaneous objects and decoration, and worse still dirt is suspected, if not actually seen, in workaday furnishings.

---

[120] ibid.,38

The destructive and intrusive tendencies of the 'slumming' philanthropists of the Victorian period seem to be paralleled here, reinvented and reinvigorated in Bertram's close examination of the working class interior, portrayed as one that is overly ornate, inevitably dirty and furnished with the hallmark of bad taste, dark hair carpets, a concern that he shared with Pevsner. As he tours the working class home he analyses each space and examines it for traces of dirt. In Bertram's discussion of the housing for workers – 'most people' in England – he elaborates on the subject of picture rails and other decorative features such as friezes and dados, and identifies two important points:

Most people do not perhaps realize the importance of the old problem of picture rails which not only collect dust but also harbour vermin.[121]

and,

There is case for a dado where the husband had a dirty job or there are children. The lower part of the wall may have to be dark, but we can still keep the upper part white. [122]

The dominance of white, and the insistence on the purity of the white-walled room, promotes the Corbusian dogma that Bertram espoused at this time. Appreciation of architectural features such as picture rails and dados must be left to others and other types of residence. Furthermore, suggestions made about patterns being perhaps pleasant or functional in some way are met with suspicion, and in this case directly refuted:

When I was broadcasting I had a letter from a man who said that he liked pattered Indian carpets "because they are easy to keep clean". What he meant, of course, was that they do not *show* the dirt; which is rather an unhygienic confusion of thought. [123]

[121] Ibid.,38
[122] Ibid.,70
[123] Ibid.,68

A liking for Indian carpets revealed that the owner displayed an "unhygienic confusion of thought" by mistaking their pattern for camouflaged dirt; many more possible dangers lay in objects. In Chapter 5, *In The House*, we find ourselves in the living room, where Bertram proscribes the nature of the decorative elements, and in doing so clearly describes one of the features of many working class homes, the display of assorted objects:

> We want to avoid clutter – objects that serve no purpose. We can get most of the beauty we want in useful things, instead of adding a lot of ornaments and display cabinets and whatnots and bric-a-brac. [124]

'Bric-a-brac' and 'whatnots' were the substance of much working class culture, whereas the equivalent 'clutter' of the upper class consisted of objects of virtue and beauty, mementos (not fairground souvenirs) and trophies brought home from the Grand Tour. Bertram's desire for the eradication of ornaments from display had also been a favourite theme of the nineteenth century socialites working in the slums of London, where objects, and even paintings or illustrations hung on walls, were said to attract dirt and disease. Presumably useful things would not, by virtue of their usefulness. When we enter the kitchen this becomes clearer:

> It is obvious that this is where the most careful and expert planning is necessary. It is the engine of the house. If there is a muddle there will be dirt and wasted work….open dressers are barbarous. Dust must collect on them, or unnecessary work must be done to prevent it. [125]

The reference to dirt, again, and 'wasted work' offer a rather jaundiced view of the ordinary household. Bertram's admiration for the most efficient of dwellings, the 'Machine for Living In',[126] could also be home to the feckless, unemployed and unworthy, and it is perhaps this lackadaisical nature of the 'ordinary' person

---

[124] Ibid.,74
[125] Ibid.,76
[126] Bertram, *The House: a Machine for Living in: a Summary of the Art and Science of Homemaking Considered Functionally* (London: A&C Black, 1935)

that is essentially the problem. If they were better read and better informed things may well be different:

…the ordinary laymen never seems to think of reading the architectural papers, though he is an ardent reader of the motoring papers. [127]

More broadly, the lack of interest in, and lack of uses for, design in the home is described rather harshly as deeply uncivilized and animal:

I have already suggested that, in a very wide meaning of the word, we may almost identify design with civilisation. ……. A life without design in this sense is an animal life, the life of instinct and accident. [128]

He concludes that Modernism will bring some resolution to these problems and eradicate poorly designed goods, but only in the intelligent consumer:

…because, however bad things may still be, however much shoddy, vulgar, bogus and meretricious stuff may still be on the market, however difficult it may be to create an intelligent demand for good design and good quality rather than showiness and cheapness, I am convinced that the tide has turned… [129]

The life of 'instinct and accident' best described that lived and occupied by the unintelligent working class obsessed with cheap, novelty goods and given to excessive showiness, rather than gentle flair or flamboyance. Coupled with wasteful, uncontrolled behaviour it would thus be in the kitchen, which was the 'engine of the house', that we would reform their existence. The hope for Modernism in the home was in its creation of a taxonomy of labour and time, and with the kitchen as its focal point it would recreate the notoriously cluttered working class domestic context in its own image. The removal of family activity from the kitchen and the suggested imposition of clean, clutter-free enclosed cabinets displaced objects, bric-a-brac, novelty items and mementos from dirty

[127] Bertram, *Design*, 86
[128] Ibid., 98
[129] Ibid.112

shelves to the confines of sanitary storage. In addition, the change in the configuration of the domestic space and gradual elimination of the structure of two downstairs rooms in council housing, and with it the culture of the 'front parlour' reserved for special occasions so familiar from the back-to-back house, reordered working class behaviour. Indeed, the reconstitution of the house was such a detailed and extensive subject that Bertram fights shy of taking it on, preferring instead to state that:

I have not the space here to discuss the interior planning and equipment of dwellings.[130]

By the time we get to the bedroom in the house we have found another of Bertram's main culprits again – dirt:

When we step out with bare feet onto the white rug, we feel beautifully safe; which we never do with black hair or all over patterns in dark shades. It is not that we suspect houses of being dirty but we like to *see* that they are clean.[131]

One feels it may be precisely the dirt in houses that so troubled Bertram and his peers. It was a fact of slum existence and a persistent feature of an industrial life. It was a national concern, and carried with it the veiled reference to whether or not re-housing would change the innately dirty character of the working class sufficiently to prevent them from reducing their new accommodation to a slum once more.

Design seems to have been very popular in its initial stages, with 31,000 copies sold by January 1939, around about 43,000 by March 1939 and a reprint called for in May 1939.[132] Correspondence in the Penguin archive reveals materials that closely catalogue the story of *Design* and Bertram's relationship with Penguin. Penguin published *Design* in 1938 and was contemplating a revised version early

[130] Ibid.,38
[131] Ibid.,76
[132] Letters from Edward Young to Anthony Bertram 3 January, 28 March, 12 May 1939, Penguin Archive Materials, DM1107/S22

in 1939. In a letter dated 3rd January 1939 to Anthony Bertram, discussing typefaces and revisions to the text, Edward Young again provides us with a glimpse into the nature of the discussion at the time displaying both humour and candour:

As far as Gills Sans being the rage, as far as I am aware it was the rage at least four or five years ago. Just because a type became popular and fashionable I see no reason why it should necessarily be criticised for that. For once fashion seems to me to have hit on an intrinsically good design. However, I sympathise with your correspondent in resenting the ubiquity of Eric Gill. Would you like me to alter these typographical points in the next printing? I don't mind myself but if it will keep you and your fierce correspondents happy, it shall be done. We shan't be reprinting this yet. The sales which I promised to let you know about are to date approximately 31,000.[133]

Letters between Young and Bertram in March 1939 indicate falling sales figures:

"Design" has been slowing up a bit lately and is selling only a 1000 a week. We still have about 7,000 left, so it will be a couple of months before we reprint.[134]

However, by May that same year they began reprinting *Design*, and sent Bertram two copies on 19 June 1939. The war would intervene in any further progress with *Design*. Captain Anthony Bertram, as he became, would not be shy about requesting books for soldiers in his command. When war broke out Captain Anthony Bertram was stationed at Brancepeth Castle, near Durham, from where he wrote to Allen Lane at Penguin on 24 April 1941, asking for a few copies of *Design* for the libraries there and any other Penguins that could be spared; as he put it in a handwritten addition to his letter: 'we develop the habit of shameless begging in the army'. The reply from Allen Lane on 30 March 1941 was to the point about wartime conditions and yet extremely encouraging at the same time:

Unfortunately, we have no stock of DESIGN. We had a few hundred due from the printers but they have been unable to trace them. Our total print to date has been 75,000, and I honestly don't

[133] Letter from Edward Young to Anthony Bertram, 3 January 1939. DM1107/S22 - Editorial correspondence with Anthony Bertram, 1938-1949.
[134] Letter from Edward Young to Anthony Bertram, 28 March 1939. DM1107/S22 - Editorial correspondence with Anthony Bertram, 1938-1949.

feel that it should go out of print. In the event of a reprint, what alterations, if any, do you think should be made? I am sending herewith a few books which I hope may be of use.[135]

The war not only intervened in the reprint of *Design* but the events of the war, and more significantly postwar changes, made a distinct impact on Bertram's views on design and his feelings towards redrafting the book. Everything was about to change.

Anthony Bertram and Everyday Britain

It is useful perhaps at this point to pause to examine in more depth the works of Anthony Bertram and his position within this writing milieu.

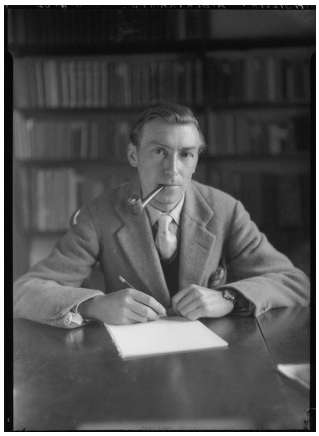


Fig. 10: Photograph of Anthony Bertram, 8 June 1932, NPG

It is probably true to say that, for one person who visits a museum or gallery, a thousand enter a shop to buy a cup and saucer; hence the immense importance of giving a right direction to the taste of boys and girls while they are still at school is evident, and we hope that the problem will be faced in the public, secondary and elementary schools of making the understanding and enjoyment of beautiful things an essential part of the day-to-day life of the school. [136]

This view of the necessity to begin early in 'the right direction' to taste in everyday items such as cups and saucers, expressed in the Gorrell Report of

[135] Letter for Allen Lane to Anthony Bertram, 30 April 1941. Penguin Archive Materials, DM1107/S22
[136] The Gorrell Report, 1932

1932, sums up to a great extent the taste education projects that were beginning to find a foothold in Britain in the 1930s. A key feature of social engineering, the push towards a new social construction would hinge on the appreciation of everyday goods and their design.

With this in mind it is possible to position Anthony Bertram, his books and broadcasts, within the much bigger picture of didactic projects and socio-cultural development. This section deals with the political beliefs and views held by Anthony Bertram as revealed through letters written to him from a number of individuals and reviews of his works. As was the manner of writers during the thirties, Anthony Bertram's output of works covered all manner of styles and forms. Travel writing was completed alongside novels, art criticism and magazine articles. An interest in socialism and possible membership of the Communist party and talk of revolution was also not unusual at this time.[137] This frequently found its way into works. His novels *Men Adrift* (1935) and *The King Sees Red* (1936) both tackled the politics of the day and the inequalities inherent in society.

Bertram's *Men Adrift* published by Chapman and Hall in 1935 was an experimental novel and had as one of its many plot lines the murder of a Communist Party member. The review in *Labour Monthly* was less than flattering and somewhat dismissive of Anthony Bertram's aspiration to represent the working classes:

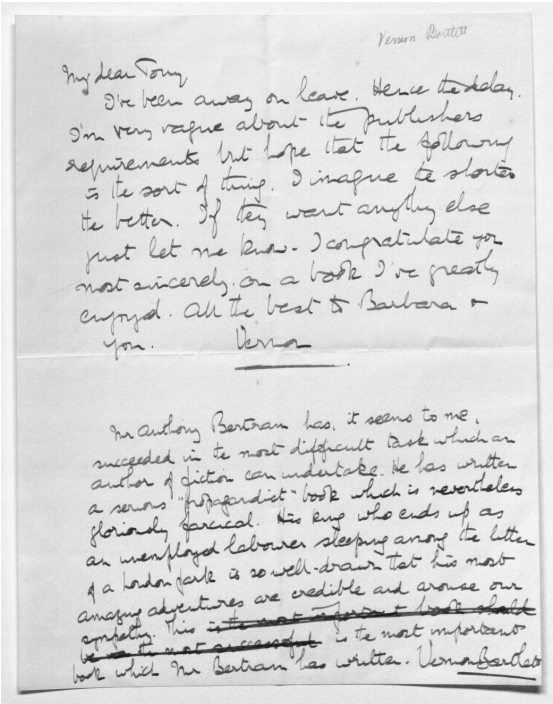
WANTED A SIGN POST.
Man (sic) Adrift. Anthony Bertram. Chapman & Hall. pp. 323. 7s. 6d.

HERE is an intellectual who, unable to live in the clouds and write of airy nothings any longer, has become so conscious of the misery, injustice, and exploitation going on around him, that he not only believes that he must write what he sees, but that the subject matter must affect the form of the novel. It is an interesting experiment, but it is at present only an experiment.

[137] Samuel Hynes, *The Auden Generation:Literature and Politics in England in the 1930s,* (London:Faber, 1976), 197

We are presented with a cross section of life to-day, but there is too large an assortment of characters, the whole thing is too disconnected and the characters are not at all representative, being almost entirely the cranks, and odd men out. One cannot grumble that a book en- titled Men Adrift gives only a picture of a society that is lost, aimless and hopeless.
There is not one episode in the book that gives any suggestion that the author has any faith in the power and strength of the working class or that he has any knowledge of the new life of purpose that can be built up when capitalist exploitation and injustice are abolished.
While the writer cannot see this, he will certainly remain adrift, as much as any of his characters, and his writing will certainly not be a true reflection of the world as it is to-day. DG[138]

If this work was a reappraisal of society and an expression of solidarity with the working classes it had fallen well short of the mark, but it was nevertheless still a useful demonstration of this new form of writing. His friend journalist Vernon Bartlett, who was to become a key figure in British politics, wrote the publishers endorsement for *The King Sees Red*, referred to here in a letter to the author:


Vernon Bartlett

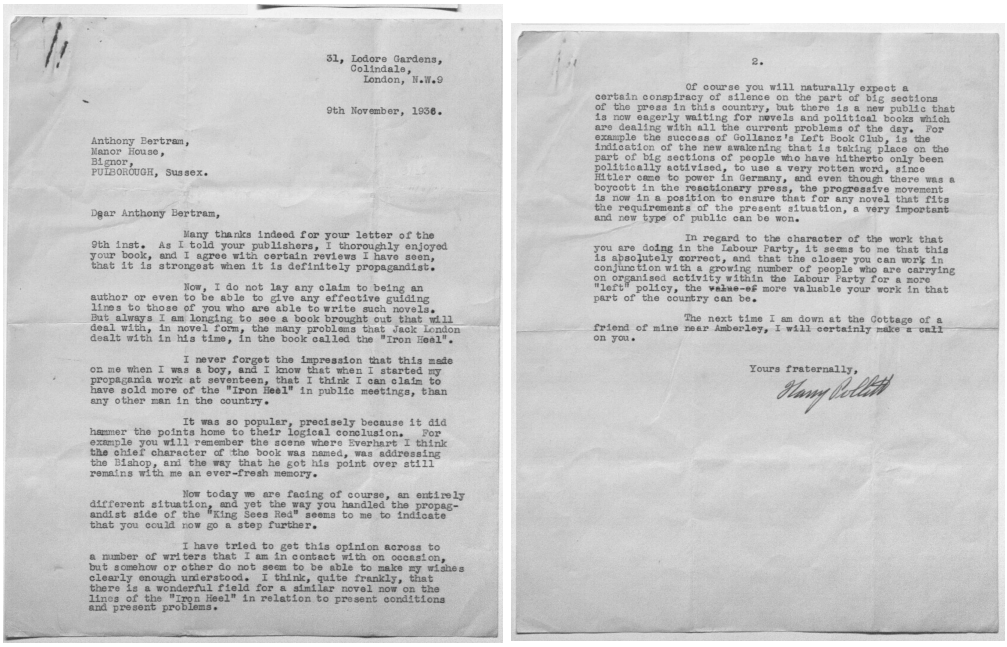
My dear Tony
I've been away on leave. Hence the delay.
I'm very vague about the publishers
requirements but hope that the following
is the sort of thing. I imagine the shorter
the better. If they want anything else
just let me know. I congratulate you
most sincerely on a book I've greatly
enjoyed. All the best to Barbara &
you. Vernon

Mr Anthony Bertram has, it seems to me,
succeeded in the most difficult task which an
author of fiction can undertake. He has written
a serious "propagandist" book which is nevertheless
gloriously farcical. His King who ends up as
an unemployed labourer sleeping among the litter
of a London park is so well-drawn that his most
amusing adventures are credible and arouse our
sympathy. This ~~is not a book that should~~
~~be the most successful~~ is the most important
book which Mr Bertram has written. Vernon Bartlett

Fig. 11 Letter from Vernon Bartlett to Anthony Bertram, ca.1936, bMS Eng (5) 1387, *83M-69, Houghton Library, Harvard University, USA

[138] *The Labour Monthly*, Vol. 18, No. 4, April 1936, Pg 254

The King Sees Red was given a much better reception not least from Harry Pollitt, general secretary of the Communist Party of Great Britain 1929 to 1939, who praised its “propagandist side” in a letter to the author:



31, Lodore Gardens,
Collndale,
London, N.W.9

9th November, 1936.

Anthony Bertram,
Manor House,
Bignor,
PULBOROUGH, Sussex.

Dear Anthony Bertram,

Many thanks indeed for your letter of the 9th inst. As I told your publishers, I thoroughly enjoyed your book, and I agree with certain reviews I have seen, that it is strongest when it is definitely propagandist.

Now, I do not lay any claim to being an author or even to be able to give any effective guiding lines to those of you who are able to write such novels. But always I am longing to see a book brought out that will deal with, in novel form, the many problems that Jack London dealt with in his time, in the book called the "Iron Heel".

I never forget the impression that this made on me when I was a boy, and I know that when I started my propaganda work at seventeen, that I think I can claim to have sold more of the "Iron Heel" in public meetings, than any other man in the country.

It was so popular, precisely because it did hammer the points home to their logical conclusion. For example you will remember the scene where Everhart I think the chief character of the book was named, was addressing the Bishop, and the way that he got his point over still remains with me an ever-fresh memory.

Now today we are facing of course, an entirely different situation, and yet the way you handled the propagandist side of the "King Sees Red" seems to me to indicate that you could now go a step further.

I have tried to get this opinion across to a number of writers that I am in contact with on occasion, but somehow or other do not seem to be able to make my wishes clearly enough understood. I think, quite frankly, that there is a wonderful field for a similar novel now on the lines of the "Iron Heel" in relation to present conditions and present problems.

2.

Of course you will naturally expect a certain conspiracy of silence on the part of big sections of the press in this country, but there is a new public that is now eagerly waiting for novels and political books which are dealing with all the current problems of the day. For example the success of Gollancz's Left Book Club, is the indication of the new awakening that is taking place on the part of big sections of people who have hitherto only been politically activised, to use a very rotten word, since Hitler came to power in Germany, and even though there was a boycott in the reactionary press, the progressive movement is now in a position to ensure that for any novel that fits the requirements of the present situation, a very important and new type of public can be won.

In regard to the character of the work that you are doing in the Labour Party, it seems to me that this is absolutely correct, and that the closer you can work in conjunction with a growing number of people who are carrying on organised activity within the Labour Party for a more "left" policy, the ~~wider~~ more valuable your work in that part of the country can be.

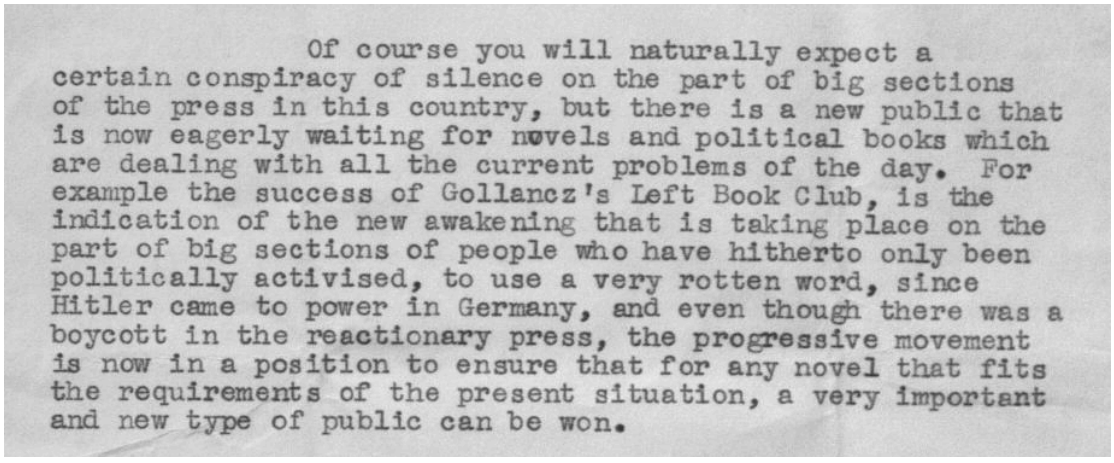
The next time I am down at the Cottage of a friend of mine near Amberley, I will certainly make a call on you.

Yours fraternally,

Harry Pollitt

Fig. 12 Letter from Harry Pollitt to Anthony Bertram, 1936, bMS Eng (54) 1387, *83M-69, Houghton Library, Harvard University, USA (Front and back)

Pollitt identifies the key imperative in the political novels of the 1930s:



Of course you will naturally expect a certain conspiracy of silence on the part of big sections of the press in this country, but there is a new public that is now eagerly waiting for novels and political books which are dealing with all the current problems of the day. For example the success of Gollancz's Left Book Club, is the indication of the new awakening that is taking place on the part of big sections of people who have hitherto only been politically activised, to use a very rotten word, since Hitler came to power in Germany, and even though there was a boycott in the reactionary press, the progressive movement is now in a position to ensure that for any novel that fits the requirements of the present situation, a very important and new type of public can be won.

Fig. 13 Letter from Harry Pollitt to Anthony Bertram, 1936, bMS Eng (54) 1387, *83M-69, Houghton Library, Harvard University, USA (Back)

Bertram and the 'Romance' of Design Reform Literature

The expression of the 'goodness' within design was essentially a romantic notion and philosophical project aimed at the rehabilitation of simple forms. Anthony Bertram was also one of the key proponents of design and its connections to more spiritual ways of life, and this was at the centre of his perception of design. At the same time as he was producing his books and radio broadcasts on design he was writing somewhat sentimental accounts of the struggles in working class life.

In the literary interpretations of the working class condition that abounded during the thirties, as they had in the nineteenth, the terrible conditions in which they lived were often romanticized and this was a distinct feature of Bertram's works. In *Men Adrift* Bertram gives this somewhat lurid description of the wife of poor Bert Greenway:

> Bert looked at his wife's open mouth and saw that there were little foam-flecks in the corners and wondered whether if he tried to wipe them off it would wake her. She'd been took bad that sudden, working in the morning as cheerful as you'd wish when he looked in for his dinner and then at dusk when he was stabling the horses, little Eileen had come down to say mother was took bad, mother was lying on the kitchen floor and couldn't speak.[139]

These attempts at copying working class patterns of speech and the representation of the working life of the protagonists are somewhat sentimental. If there were kind words for the proletariat there were also callous words for the owners of the "bijou baronial" [140] who were on the increase now and were responsible for driving taste down, and who were at the same time blamed for their parvenu aspirations. Anxiety abounded about the gradual awakening of working class culture and then of course their comparative wealth.

---

[139] Anthony Bertram, *Men Adrift*, (London: Chapman and Hall, 1935) 142
[140] Anthony Bertram, *Design* (Harmondsworth: Penguin,1938), 16

The representation of both the rising working class and the lower middle classes betrays an anxiety about the pollution of taste values. In *Bright Defiler* published a little later in 1940 the publisher's jacket notes provide this exciting account of what was to come of our main protagonist as we follow his trajectory that commences with the Bloody Sunday Riots in 1887:

In his upward progress from a small grocer's shop to an authoritative position in high finance, he sacrifices everyone who stands in his way. [141]

The output of novels, broadcasts, even a radio play in 1940[142], was typical of the period. What was perhaps not so typical were the complex changes wrought on Bertram's personal life by his experiences during the war.

The changes to Anthony Bertram's *Design*

If things were changing socially and politically at the end of the 1940s and start of the 1950s, Bertram's redraft of *Design* and his proposal for a more ethical approach signalled a change in attitude towards this literature too. The burgeoning new identity of the working classes was now slowly becoming inscribed in new forms of film and literature, books and goods. This was not the same society as that of 1938. Bertram, now in post at the British Council in Paris, wrote to A.B. Fairclough, editor at Penguin, on 27 July 1946:

'There is another complication. My views really need revising in view of war-time & postwar developments & the more I have discussed these matters with architects & designers the less happy I have felt about a re-hash at long distance. Again I have heard of the forthcoming "Britain Can Make It" & I think I should see that before plunging.[143]

His re-drafted version of *Design* would be more concerned with a spiritual approach to the subject. This had also been the case with second edition of

[141] Anthony Bertram, *Bright Defiler*, (London: Chapman and Hall, 1940)
[142] Radio play, *A Hat for the Camel,* 1940
[143] Letter to A.B Fairclough Penguin editor, 27 July 1946. Penguin Archive Materials, DM1107/S22

Bertram's *The House: a Machine for Living In*, re-titled as simply *The House* and re-published in 1945. Both books in their new forms were testament to an entirely different approach. The additional section in the new version of *The House* was entitled *Comments 1944.* It detailed page-by-page changes not just in attitude but belief:

I do not you understand wish to modify in the slightest degree my attack on the bogus Tudor or anything else bogus. But I am trying to understand these phenomena better and I do now believe that they have deeper causes than "the bankruptcy of taste." There are even perhaps, political and economic causes – the revolt of the individual against being a cog in a huge brand-new impersonal machine.[144]

Having decried the use of wardrobes and chest of drawers as "obsolete" and blaming their persistence on either "inertia or poverty" and recommending wholeheartedly the use of fitted furniture he now proclaimed:

This is going too far. If we have wardrobes and chest-of-drawers that are beautiful objects, we are not going to discard them for fitted cupboards. We simply are not.[145]

Bertram's reversal of opinion and his confessional style continue to the last statements in the new edition:

I prefer, in this dark interim, to be less cocksure than I was in 1935….I have no longer the confidence even to guess at what the little man will want, or myself to face with equanimity the nomadic or mechanized futures I so glibly and cold bloodedly prophesied in those last two paragraphs. In writing this book, I see now, I omitted on great human need – the need for sentiment. It is a waste of time to set reason up against that….I am sorry if my comments and quotations have thrown a spanner in the works. But things *aren't* going smoothly….[146]

There is sadness in this statement that underlines the changes he was experiencing as he found himself turning to God following the death of a son.

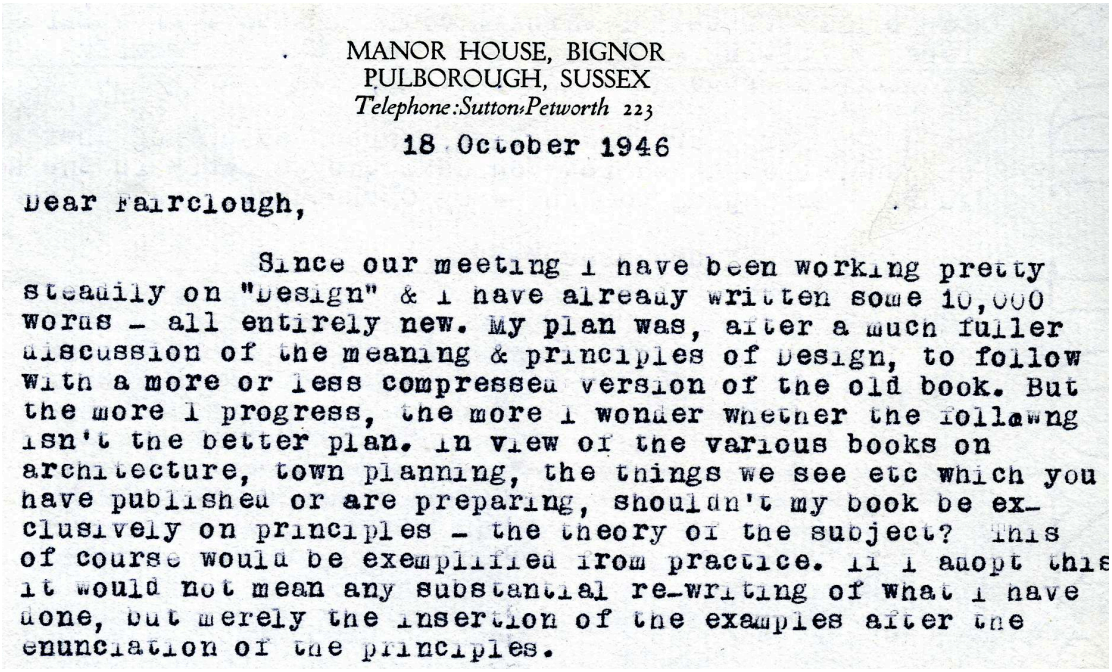
---

[144] Anthony Bertram, *The House* (London: A & C Black,1945), 109
[145] ibid., 111
[146] ibid., 111

Both he and his wife embraced Catholicism again in 1947, his wife as a convert. A letter from his friend the artist John Armstrong circa 1950- 51 drew attention to the significance of this:

I was most interested to hear that you had returned to the bosom of the church, followed by Barbara. Few of my near relatives have “gone over” and I have several times trembled at the brink but never been blessed with sufficient faith.”[147]

The changes to *Design* were much more significant and seemed to come from a deeper understanding of the human condition, something not appreciated by his publisher. Bertram’s extensive overhaul of *Design* took it into completely new territory. He wished to change the title, the thrust of the text and concentrate on theory and principles of design.



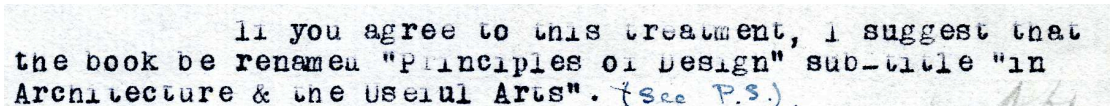
MANOR HOUSE, BIGNOR
PULBOROUGH, SUSSEX
Telephone: Sutton Petworth 223

18 October 1946

Dear Fairclough,

Since our meeting I have been working pretty steadily on "Design" & I have already written some 10,000 words - all entirely new. My plan was, after a much fuller discussion of the meaning & principles of design, to follow with a more or less compressed version of the old book. But the more I progress, the more I wonder whether the following isn't the better plan. In view of the various books on architecture, town planning, the things we see etc which you have published or are preparing, shouldn't my book be exclusively on principles - the theory of the subject? This of course would be exemplified from practice. If I adopt this it would not mean any substantial re-writing of what I have done, but merely the insertion of the examples after the enunciation of the principles.

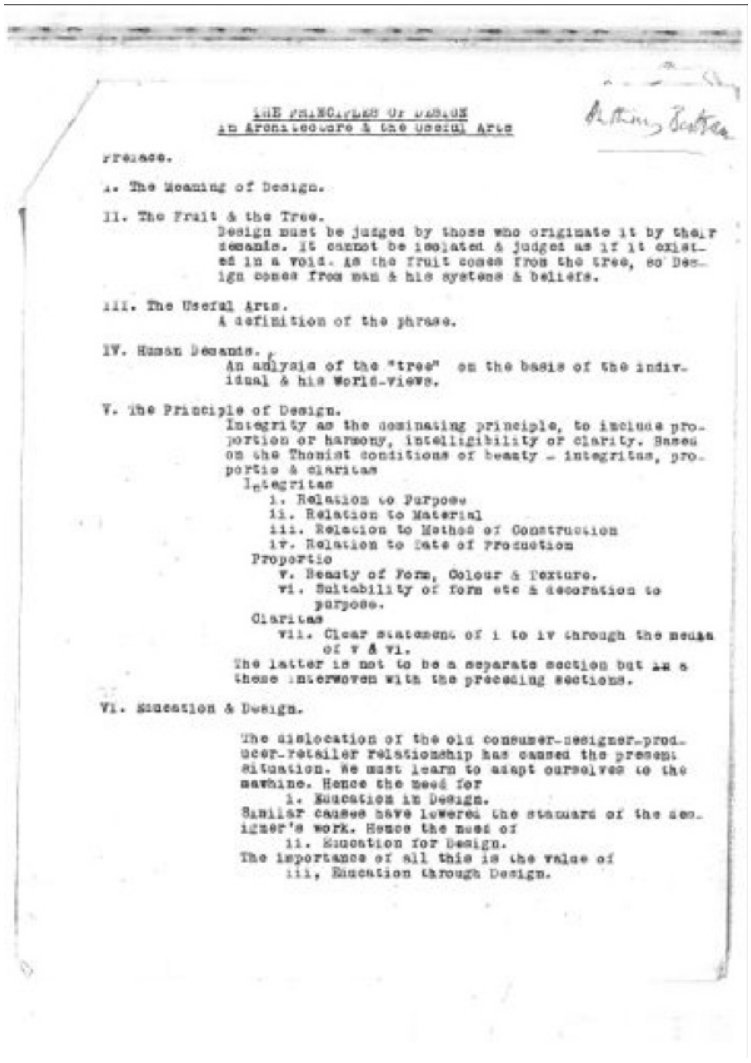
147 Letter from John Armstrong to Anthony Bertram, ca.1950 – 51 bMS Eng (3) 1951, *83M-69, Houghton Library, Harvard University, USA



If you agree to this treatment, I suggest that the book be renamed "Principles of Design" sub-title "in Architecture & the Useful Arts". (See P.S.)

Fig. 14 Letter from Anthony Bertram, October 18, 1946 Penguin Archive Materials, DM1107/S22

Bertram's new outline for Design bore no resemblance to its previous incarnation. The text was to be renamed *The Principles of Design in Architecture and the Useful Arts* and was entirely different in focus and in intention.



THE PRINCIPLES OF DESIGN
in Architecture & the Useful Arts

Anthony Bertram

Preface.

I. The Meaning of Design.

II. The Fruit & the Tree.
Design must be judged by those who originate it by their demands. It cannot be isolated & judged as if it existed in a void. As the fruit comes from the tree, so Design comes from man & his systems & beliefs.

III. The Useful Arts.
A definition of the phrase.

IV. Human Demands.
An analysis of the "tree" on the basis of the individual & his World-Views.

V. The Principle of Design.
Integrity as the dominating principle, to include proportion or harmony, intelligibility or clarity. Based on the Thomist conditions of beauty - integritas, proportio & claritas
Integritas
i. Relation to Purpose
ii. Relation to Material
iii. Relation to Method of Construction
iv. Relation to Date of Production
Proportio
v. Beauty of Form, Colour & Texture.
vi. Suitability of form etc & decoration to purpose.
Claritas
vii. Clear statement of i to iv through the means of v & vi.
The latter is not to be a separate section but as a theme interwoven with the preceding sections.

VI. Education & Design.

The dislocation of the old consumer-designer-producer-retailer relationship has caused the present situation. We must learn to adapt ourselves to the machine. Hence the need for
i. Education in Design.
Similar causes have lowered the standard of the designer's work. Hence the need of
ii. Education for Design.
The importance of all this is the value of
iii. Education through Design.

Fig. 15 Outline attached to letter from Anthony Bertram, October 18, 1946 Penguin Archive Materials, DM1107/S22

Now divided into six sections the text dealt with *The Meaning of Design, The Fruit & the Tree, The Useful Arts, Human Demands, The Principle of Design* and *Education and Design*. Section two entitled *The Fruit & the Tree* was indicative of this change of direction:

Design must be judged by those who originate it by their demands. It cannot be isolated & judged as if it existed in a void. As the fruit comes from the tree, so Design comes from man & his systems & beliefs.[148]

Section four brought *Human Demands* to the fore:

An analysis of the "tree" on the basis of the individual & his world-views.[149]

But it is in section five *The Principle of Design* that we see the central thrust of the new *Design*:

Integrity as the dominating principle, to include proportion or harmony, intelligibility or clarity. Based on the Thomist conditions of beauty – integritas, proportion & claritas.[150]

Thomism was of course the philosophy inspired by Saint Thomas Aquinas. We know that Bertram was in the process of preparing for recommitment to the Catholic faith at this time. It is this mention of Thomism that sows seeds of doubt at Penguin. The final section six *Education and Design* repeats a now familiar mantra:

The dislocation of the old consumer – designer – producer – retailer relationship has caused the present situation. We must learn to adapt ourselves to the machine. Hence the need for

i. Education in Design.

Similar causes have lowered the standard of the designer's work. Hence the need of

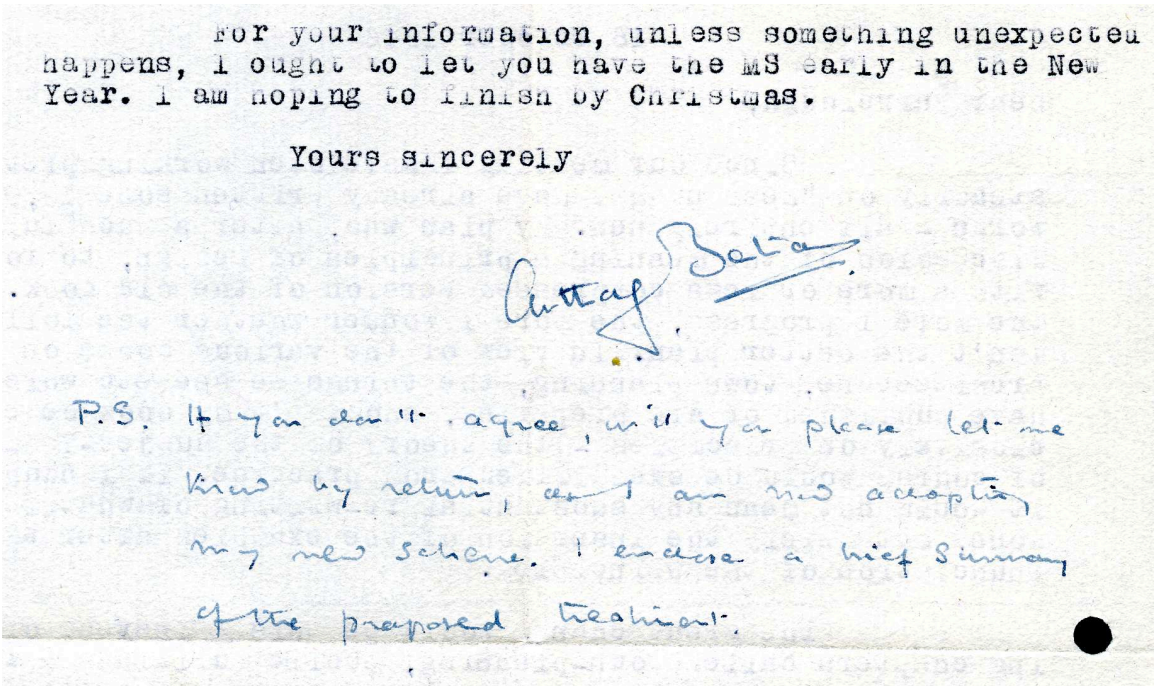
ii. Education for Design.

[148] Outline attached to letter from Anthony Bertram, October 18, 1946 Penguin Archive Materials, DM1107/S22
[149] Ibid.
[150] Ibid.

The importance of all this is the value of

iii. Education through Design.[151]

A hand written postscript to his letter of October 18, 1946 shows Bertram's enthusiasm for the project and for his new direction:


For your information, unless something unexpected happens, I ought to let you have the MS early in the New Year. I am hoping to finish by Christmas.

Yours sincerely

Anthony Bertram

P.S. If you don't agree, will you please let me know by return, as I am now adopting my new scheme. I enclose a brief summary of the proposed treatment.

Fig. 16 Letter from Anthony Bertram, October 18, 1946 Penguin Archive Materials, DM1107/S22

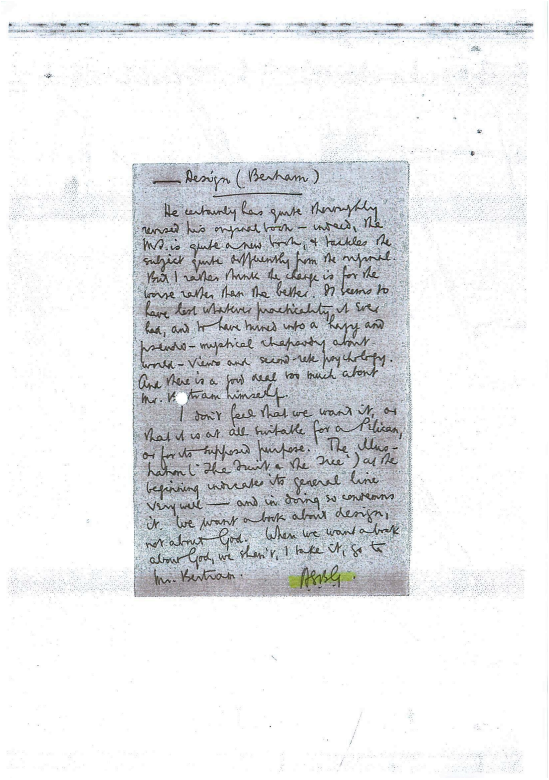
The postscript reads:

P.S. If you don't agree, will you please let me know by return, as I am now adopting my new scheme. I enclose a brief summary of the proposed treatment.[152]

Penguin didn't agree to the new direction for the text. Copious amounts of correspondence between Bertram and Penguin ultimately achieved nothing and the revised book was never published much to his disappointment. Its new bias towards Thomism, the spiritual and the sense of good in the world did not appeal to Penguin and its editor A.S.B. Glover.

[151] Ibid.
[152] Ibid.

The final comment on the revised edition belongs to Glover and is in a hand written note attached to an internal memo where he writes:


— Design (Bertram)

He certainly has quite thoroughly revised his original text – indeed, the MS. is quite a new book, & tackles the subject quite differently from the original. But I rather think the change is for the worse rather than the better. It seems to have lost whatever practicality it ever had, and to have turned into a hazy and pseudo-mystical rhapsody about world-views and second-rate psychology. And there is a good deal too much about Mr. Bertram himself.

I don't feel that we want it, or that it is at all suitable for a Pelican, or for its supposed purpose. The illustrations ('The Fruit and The Tree') at the beginning indicates its general line very well — and in doing so condemns it. We want a book about design, not about God. When we want a book about God, we shan't, I take it, go to Mr. Bertram.

Fig. 17 Memo from A.S.B Glover re Anthony Bertram's redraft of Design, November 8, 1946

He certainly has quite thoroughly revised his original text – indeed the MS is quite a new book, & tackles the subject quite differently from the original. But I rather think the change is for the worse rather than the better. It seems to have lost whatever practicality it ever had, and to have turned into a hazy and pseudo-mystical rhapsody about world-views and second-rate psychology. And there is a good deal too much about Mr. Bertram himself.

I don't feel that we want it, or that it is at all suitable as a Pelican, or for its supposed purpose. The illustrations ('The Fruit and The Tree') at the beginning indicates its general line very well – and in doing so condemns it. We want a book about design, not about God. When we want a book about God, we shan't, I take it, go to Mr. Bertram.[153]

[153] Memo from A.S.B Glover re Anthony Bertram's redraft of Design, November 8, 1946 Penguin Archive Materials, DM1107/S22

This episode reveals something of the nature of design reform literature and of the concentration upon the central arguments within it – those of improving taste, changing home life and styles and increasing discontent as a spur to increasing sales of new goods. Where sales were concerned there were always unanswered questions of taste hovering around the outputs of British manufacturers and these were to be addressed in full by an astonishing piece of happenstance. When Nikolaus Pevsner found himself without sufficient work or income to live he turned to friends for help and support little expecting that it would come in the form of research at the University of Birmingham's Commerce department.

The Popular Taste: Pevsner, Carpets and Corruption

Prior to World War II the situation of industrially manufactured and mass-consumed goods had been assessed by Nikolaus Pevsner in his book *An Inquiry into Industrial Art in England,* published in 1937. This set out the issues clearly enough. This detailed investigation of British manufacturers, retailers and consumers leads to the somewhat predictable conclusion that the culprits were all three, in a form of misguided collusion against the forces of Modernism: a situation, which Pevsner points out, that would not be found in much of Central Europe. This keenly-observed account of British social mores arrives at the conclusion that:

> Here we are faced, not with the conviction that the majority of the people would not buy better design, but with the highly objectionable tendency to prevent people from getting it, in order to keep it exclusive to one class.[154]

Pevsner joins the debate around the improvement of taste as a 'public duty'. He finds much to praise in the 'democratic' designs available in Woolworths, and equally finds much to fault in the habits of retailers given to encouraging a propensity in customers for showy goods. His concerns to encourage and

[154] Pevsner, *An Inquiry into Industrial Art in England*, *39*

persuade, rather than harangue, a wavering but pliable public were more prominent than Bertram's:

To abuse or ridicule any nostalgia for ornamentation can only deter people from studying the modern style and from trying to appreciate it.[155]

The working class's engagement with design might be achieved if they could see its benefits in enabling a happier, less destructive life and as a cure for:

The degrading, debasing effect of dingy factories, dirty streets and dark dwellings on those who are forced to spend their lives amongst them.[156]

He also acknowledged and understood the plight of the working classes, inherited from the social strictures of the nineteenth century, and the necessity to improve their situation, although this in itself is heavily reminiscent of the nineteenth-century philanthropist's view of the 'lower orders' in its use of language and slightly condescending tone:

In fact these horrors would scarcely have arisen, had not the industrial development of the 19th century deprived the poorer classes of so much joy in life. A splendour which reality does not concede is brought into our humble surroundings by meretricious industrial products, which achieve in permanence some of the elating effect that for a few hours is bestowed upon us by the Hollywood heroes' fantastic mode of life in the pictures.[157]

This description of the working class as overpowered and overwhelmed by the opiate affects of those popular but 'meretricious' goods suggests subjugation by poor design while at one and the same time being made insensible to anything better. No mention here, though, of any of the innocent pleasures that these same 'meretricious' goods might have brought into, by implication, joyless lives. The working class are therefore in essence first subjected to the adverse affects

[155] Ibid., 10
[156] Ibid.,11
[157] Ibid.,11

of their lack of taste and then condemned to their moral degradation through the shoddy goods that they can't help but choose:

Looked at from this point of view, the question of design is a social question, it is an integral part of *the* social question of our time. To fight against the shoddy design of those goods by which most of our fellow men are surrounded becomes a moral duty.[158]

'Carpets of dark hair'

There could be no better example of 'shoddy design', it seems, than that offered by carpets. As a vehicle for expressing all that was wrong with taste and as a mechanism for lambasting the working class as dirty they were without rival. The fact was, though, that patterned carpets in dark shades were the most universally popular and ubiquitous, rather confusingly, in both middle-class and working class homes. Not only that, they were without doubt almost entirely of poor design. Pevsner had found this in his surveys of manufacturers and retailers:

My main problem here was this: Why are modern carpets in England so appallingly bad in design?[159]

We might at first wonder about the aesthetic capabilities of such an erudite scholar being applied to carpets, but in fact there was much to say about them that corresponded rather well with the problematic elements within painting at the time.

He continues:

The dominant patterns for the last eight or nine years have been derived from a deplorably misunderstood Continental cubism, the prevailing colours being a brown, a blatant orange and, in more recent years, a grass-green no less blatant.[160]

---

[158] Ibid.,11
[159] Pevsner, *An Inquiry into Industrial Art in England,58*
[160] Ibid.,63

Pevsner's extensive, and some might say exhaustive, discussions with manufacturers and retailers of such carpets revealed in them a rather surprising and ill-concealed contempt for their own products and, by implication, the consumers who bought them. Bemused by the popularity of these bad designs, and at a loss to imagine who might be purchasing their goods, manufacturers and retailers exclaimed surprise at their continued success in selling them. Curiously, and with an obvious fascination, Pevsner quotes them at considerable length:

> One man spoke of the modern "bastard stuff" which he has to turn out: …….and a third said in a forlorn way: "I wish you could tell me who the people are who buy my stuff. I have never been in a house with carpets like that." There was also a fourth director whose expressions in front of his products varied between "hideous", "horrible", "beastly" and "nasty", and a fifth who seemed to get a perverse joy and self-tormenting pride out of displaying his worst best-sellers. I still remember the sound of his: "Now look at this, isn't it a brute?"[161]

Were these displays of horror at the goods they were selling for the benefit of the enquirer – or did they reveal a more profound distaste? Was class, in fact, at the heart of these observations of 'having never been in a house with carpets like that', and, furthermore, was it actually thoroughly embedded in the culture of exclusivity that surrounded retail environments? Class-consciousness in Britain was obvious to Pevsner, and he sees exclusivity in styling as symptomatic of its existence, but he also uses it as an argument for more acceptance of the Modern movement. We might wish to question, therefore, whether this was actually not a class issue but rather an aesthetic one:

> Therefore a style of our age must be an unexclusive style, and its merits must be collective merits not distinguishing one individual or one class.[162]

The rich texture of working class life is at best overlooked and at worst dismissed in these books, the focus of which might be seen at times as more probably the

[161] Ibid.,64-65
[162] Ibid., 201

lower middle class. Anthony Bertram had made many references to the aspirations of this group, using their dress and their housing as a particular emblem of this, the essence of which was:

the bijou baronial and Tudoristic……an exceedingly bad shot at looking like a stone castle built for the wicked uncle in a pantomime…… If the owner were logical he would wear cheap tin armour or the hodden grey. In fact he wears a cap and a reach-me-down and maybe a bowler hat on Sundays, because he is neither a knight nor a villain, but Mr. Smith of "Osocosy". [163]

Intriguingly, Bertram's own domestic situation was the subject of some amusement when, in a letter sent to his home, Edward Young, the editor in charge of *Design*, comments on his address:

Dear Bertram, I thought you lived in a cottage. What's this Manor House? [164]

However, this perception of the aesthetics of material culture privileged a view seen through the filter of fine art and connoisseurship. These texts take design and its objects apart and reconstruct them as a perfect new whole based on the philosophical and political ideologies of reform, and through this process invest their forms with the qualities of beauty and sensitivity, of tastefulness and moderation so much sought in the working class themselves.

We can only speculate about the motivations of the design reformers themselves. What is evident in this literature is that a confluence of interwar social and political upheaval, concerns about the gradual erosion of British culture in favour of an insidious American influence and the gradual but steady social progress of the working class conspired to produce an anxious and unsettled atmosphere around taste. If Bertram, Pevsner and Russell had anything in common it was their heartfelt desire to encourage the appreciation of beautiful things. What we might wish to question is their mode of address.

---

[163] Bertram, *Design*, 16
[164] Letter from Edward Young to Anthony Bertram, 17 October,1938, Penguin Archive Materials, DM1107/S22

Chapter Three Postwar Britain: Manufacturing the New Working Class

New Towns, New Taste: "new type of citizen"

Now, after the war, we would build the New Jerusalem. In the rebuilding process there lay many opportunities for change and development of the potential occupants of the New Towns. What was at stake here, politically and socially? New policies directed at the reformation of the built environment of the British working class would be embodied in housing and the creation of a new 'person', with the concomitant taste. At the same time these policies would create a new domestic culture, and aim to discard at least some of the old ways. Government would also seek to create change in civic cultures and reconstruct the demos:

> Our towns must be beautiful. Here is a grand chance for the revival or creation of a new architecture. The monotony of the interwar housing estate must not be repeated. We must develop in those who live in the towns, an appreciation of beauty. I am a firm believer in the cultural and spiritual interest of beauty. The new towns can be experiments in design as well as in living. They must be so laid out that there is ready access to the countryside for all. This combination of town and country is vital. Lack of it is perhaps the biggest curse of the present-day town dweller. I believe that if all these conditions are satisfied, we may well produce in the new towns a new type of citizen, a healthy, self-respecting, dignified person with a sense of beauty, culture and civic pride. Cicero said: "A man's dignity is enhanced by the home he lives in."[165]

Cicero may or may not have been the ideal choice as exemplar of the benefits of social organization in the years after World War II, where the potential for social engineering was high on the postwar agenda and the population was ripe for influence and development. The rapid growth of council estates all over the country, the development of New Towns and the replacement of the old housing stock may have reformed communities but did not substantially help to discard old habits or produce the "new type of citizen, a healthy, self-respecting, dignified

[165] HANSARD 8 May 1946, Commons Sitting, ORDERS OF THE DAY, NEW TOWNS BILL HC Deb 08 May 1946 vol 422 cc1072-184 1072

person with a sense of beauty, culture and civic pride". If we look at the British postwar situation through the development of new housing and new consumer products we are struck by the emphasis on, and the revival of, the taste project. The introduction of the New Towns Bill in parliament on 8 May 1946 by Lewis Silkin, Minister for Town and Country Planning, emphasized the way in which design would civilize. He does at least begin by recognizing the depth and significance of working class culture:

> It is a remarkable thing that friendliness, neighbourliness, comradeship, and the spirit of helpfulness—all these things are only seen in the villages and in the slums. The spirit of the slums is indeed remarkable. If there is trouble, ill health or any of the many misfortunes that befall people living in those conditions, the neighbours are eager to come to the rescue, to take charge of a child or look after the household while the mother is in hospital. A hundred and one neighbourly jobs that need to be done, are done. But when the slums are cleared, and the people transferred to a new housing estate, all this friendliness and neighbourliness seems to disappear, and families become isolated units, each contained within the fortress of the new council house, and nothing seems to get them closer together. Our aim must be to combine in the new town this friendly spirit of the former slum, with the vastly improved health conditions of the new estate, but it must be a broadened spirit embracing all classes of society. The former slum dweller, or dweller in the poorer part of a town, has a good deal to learn from those better off, and vice versa.[166]

He concluded his speech:

> In the long run, the new towns will be judged by the kind of citizens they produce, by whether they create this spirit of friendship, neighbourliness and comradeship. That will be the real test, and that will be my objective so long as I have any responsibility for these new towns. [167]

This view of the transforming and reforming aspects of New Towns was founded in a widely shared belief that the perceived social disorder of the slums would be replaced with newly ignited civic pride, family order and new initiative in the residents in their new environments.

[166] Ibid.
[167] Ibid.

Posters produced for the promotion of New Towns and life in postwar Britain, distributed both at home and abroad interestingly, alluded to both the green and pleasant land we were creating for the working class and to the burgeoning economy.

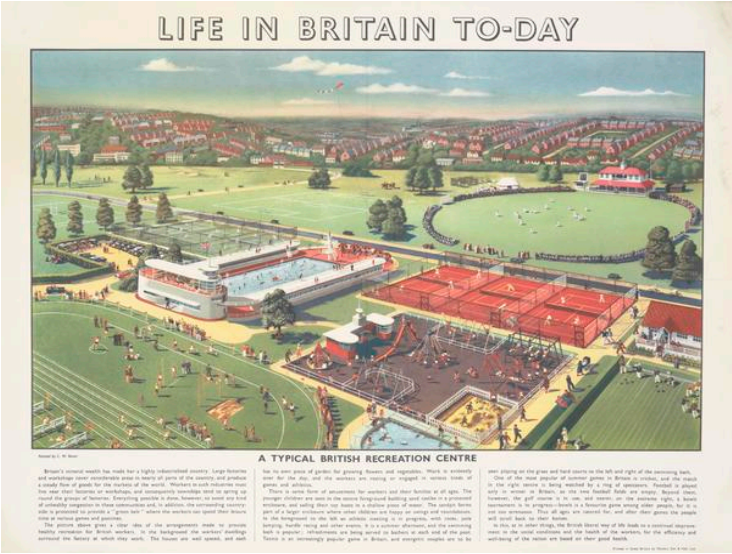


Fig. 18 Life in Britain Today - A Typical British Recreation Centre, illustration by C.W. Bacon, Central Office of Information, 1947

The accompanying text for the illustration reads:

Britain's mineral wealth has made her a highly industrialised country. Large factories and workshops cover considerable areas in nearly all parts of the country, and produce a steady flow of goods for the markets of the world. Workers in such industries must live near their factories or workshops, and consequently townships tend to spring up round the groups of factories. Everything possible is done, however, to avoid any kind of unhealthy congestion in these communities and, in addition, the surrounding countryside is protected to provide a 'green belt' where workers can spend their leisure time at various games and pastimes. The picture above gives a clear idea of the arrangements made to provide healthy recreation for British workers. In the background the workers' dwellings surround the factory at which they work. The houses are well spaced, and each has its own piece of garden for growing flowers and vegetables. Work is evidently over for the day, and the workers are resting or engaged in various kinds of games and athletics. Thus all ages are catered for, and after their games the people will stroll back to their homes. In this, as in other things, the British liberal way of life leads to a continual improvement in

the social conditions and the health of the workers, for the efficiency and well-being of the nation are based on their good health.[168]

If the working classes were to become new model citizens then they must have the taste to match. Persuading them to it was an uphill task. Richard Hoggart describes the nature of the working classes in this respect:

There may be some prophetic truth about 'the vast anonymous masses with their thoroughly dulled responses'. But so far working class people are by no means as badly affected as that sentence suggests, because with a large part of themselves they are just 'not there', are living elsewhere, living intuitively, habitually, verbally, drawing on myth, aphorism and ritual…….In so far as they have been affected by modern conditions, they have been affected along lines on which their older traditions made them most open and undefended.[169]

A new type of citizen may well have been the ambition, but more often than not the same citizen emerged, warts and all, their poor taste still intact and the education process once more set in progress to meet a public oblivious to the message of the modern. The newly-wed, setting up home for the first time, would all too often follow tradition, albeit with the creeping influence of Hollywood beginning to show itself, in spite of pressure from retailers and the offer of hire purchase, which became the route to ownership for many, both middle-class and working-class, in the years both before and following the war:

But though the furniture calls itself modern and may use new materials, it must embody the same assumptions as to the furnishing of a "really homely" room as the older things, bought by the customer's grandparents.[170]

This perhaps accounts for the persistence of furniture types denounced and decried by all our authors, and the role that complicity between the retailer and purchaser played in prolonging the enduring popularity certain goods. If the

[168] *Life In Britain Today: a Typical British Recreation Centre* (London: Central Office of Information, 1947). Part of the 'Life in Britain Today' poster series. A Persian text version, Hebrew language version, an Arabic language version and an English language version were produced.
[169] Hoggart, *The Uses of Literacy*, 18
[170] Ibid.,17

Modernist project had failed to capture the imagination of the working class before World War II, then afterwards the chance re-presented itself with new-found opportunities to inculcate a generation deprived of goods and hungry to make a new nation.

In Nikolaus Pevsner's *Visual Pleasures From Everyday Things*, subtitled *An Attempt to Establish Criteria by Which the Aesthetic Qualities of Design can be Judged*, published by the Council for Visual Education in 1946, we find he had equally high-minded goals for design, and the text was deliberately aimed at educators.

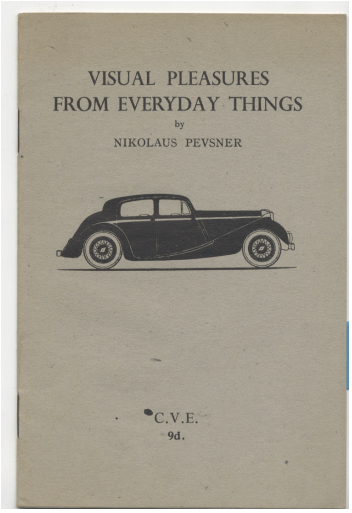


Fig. 19 *Visual Pleasures From Everyday Things*, Nikolaus Pevsner, 1946

In the foreword by Herbert Read, dated August 1945, we learn that:

> In Great Britain there is a growing awareness of the importance of *design*: it is perhaps a reflection of the more general realization that some sort of *order* must be introduced into our chaotic civilisation.[171]

The words 'design' and 'order' were both italicized in the text for added emphasis. Clearly the necessity for order, and the use of design in achieving this,

[171] Pevsner, *Visual Pleasures from Everyday Things*, 2

was of the utmost importance in postwar Britain, as the rebuilding process, both socially and physically, was underway. However, the restructuring of the postwar environment was to be made with an intention to beauty. The pamphlet was directed at:

….all who are concerned in laying the aesthetic foundations of our future society.[172]

Read continues:

Some of us who possess a more metaphysical turn of mind would say that a good society is not possible unless there is in that society a general sense of beauty. [173]

'Those of a more metaphysical turn of mind' may possibly refer to the classically educated. This was, after all, the most obvious difference between the class of the writers engaged in the production of this design literature and that of the supposed readers. This was perhaps most significant in the first instance as, whether they were conscious of this or not, they asserted a tone of voice that located them firmly in what to all intents and purposes considered itself the ruling class, however we may choose to define that group. The authors engaged in the production of the literature of design reform were composed of what might appear to be some sort of British design establishment; but, as Anthony Sampson points out in his book *Anatomy Of Britain*, notions of a coherent ruling class or establishment are inherently difficult to define:

The rulers are not at all close-knit or united. They are not so much in the centre of a solar system as in a cluster of interlocking circles, each one largely preoccupied with its own professionalism and expertise, and touching the others only at one edge.[174]

The tone of voice that the authors stressed was consistent with their educational backgrounds and their own social status rather than that of the audience whom they were ostensibly setting out to address. They employed frequent references

[172] Ibid.
[173] Ibid.
[174] Sampson, Anthony (1962) *Anatomy of Britain* (London, Hodder & Stoughton, 1962), 624

to Socrates, Plato and Aristotle as a reflection of their own education in the understanding of beauty, taste and aesthetics. However, this did nothing to assist in the understanding of the subject matter for those less well educated, and was more an emblem of the views they wished their readers to be capable of adopting. If they were to lay 'the aesthetic foundations of our future society', as Read had hoped, then the British design establishment must first clarify what that entailed. Careful analysis of the fabric of material culture would perhaps focus attention more clearly, and hopefully amplify the desired message.

Visual Pleasures from Everyday Things

Pevsner's curious admonition to the British public against the artificiality of electric fires in *Visual Pleasures from Everyday Things* not only echoes Bertram, but also ably demonstrates what the metaphysical turn of mind makes of the inauthentic. We are first drawn into the object of deceit and disgust and then saved by the Modernist exemplar:

> An electric fire that by means of ingeniously devised wheels within wheels tries to look like a flickering coal may at the first moment deceive and at the second amuse. After that it bores and then disgusts as a mongrel: Ersatz for real coal, and without the polished machine-like slickness of the modern electric fire. [175]

This choice of words perhaps reflects some latent issues here, with the terms 'mongrel' and 'disgusting' too easily transferred onto the owners of such items, while 'ersatz for real' seems to sum up the absolute poverty of these false objects mischievously misrepresenting themselves as real, and therefore truthful. The vulgarity of novelty appears again and again as it had in Bertram's writing, and is personified in many forms. Being 'jazzed up' was an expression very much of its time used by Pevsner and others in these contexts to describe the 'sensational', and the appearance of what are perceived therefore as 'unbearable' designs. Negative associations with jazz and the culture associated with it in England

[175] Pevsner, *Visual Pleasures from Everyday Things*,18

during the 1930s raised the spectre of racism and homophobia in their wake. Louche behaviour, as described in the works of novelists such as Evelyn Waugh and his American counterparts, was often associated with the sensational and unbridled aspects of jazz performers.

Bertram had used similar scorn in *Design* in 1938 in a diatribe against what he describes as the 'Modernistic' builder:

> And then, because genuine modern architecture is too severe for his degenerate taste, he jazzes things up a bit. Vague and ignorant ideas about cubism suggest to him all sorts of loathsome jagged zig-zagging meaningless ornaments and the result is just the old thing in a new fancy-dress.[176]

Meanwhile, Pevsner goes on to explain his problems with the jazzed up and the inauthentic:

> What is wrong with them is that their appeal is so violent as to become unbearable after a short time, unless, which is worse, one's senses get so blunted by it as to refuse to react……On the whole it can be said that the more drab our workaday lives, the more kick we need, but even there the same kind of difference remains as between a whiskey when you feel like it and a continuous state of dipsomania. [177]

These allusions to workaday lives in need of some sort of kick, and comparisons with a lack of self-control and intoxication leading to senselessness were overt references to a working class apparently already given to being insensible and crude through their habit of purchasing items of such violent appeal. Clearly those who did not lead drab lives were free to be as excessive as they wished to be as they were more able to stay in control despite the effects. We can only guess at what consequences were anticipated as a result of ugly or uncivilized furniture *not* being purchased for the working class home. Less intoxicating interiors perhaps?

---

[176] Bertram, *Design*, 64
[177] Pevsner, *Visual Pleasures from Everyday Things*, 18

So who were those who would be charged with this responsibility of laying down the aesthetic foundations upon which the New Jerusalem would be built? This future society would be educated in a sense of beauty and in the form of consumer goods that emphasised not simply the Modernist sensibility but the new industrial moment of postwar Britain.

The Council of Industrial Design stepped up its activities to take on a more assertive role in the promotion and marketing of design. Alan Jarvis would be the person to recognize that one of the most significant features of their approach to this task would be the use of exhibitions, wall-charts and especially publications as demonstrations of the ethos of modern design. Publications had a very significant role to play in bringing the message about design to the British public.

Remaking the New Commodity Culture

Domestic consumer goods available in postwar Britain were severely limited, of course, but the revitalizing of the economy through them would be of paramount importance for two quite separate reasons. The ‘Britain Can Make It’ exhibition in 1946 stood as testimony to this, with its remit as a vehicle for marketing and promoting the British design industry through its products, firstly abroad for their trade potential and secondly at home as a demonstration of the shape of things to come both socio-economically and socio-culturally. The impulse to buy goods was going to be difficult to re-ignite in the wake of wartime rationing, but the urge to buy only those goods that were well designed was to be of primary importance in achieving the transformation of the postwar British home. This task was to be an even more difficult one when it was attached to the reinvention of the British public’s taste. Poor design might perpetuate unwelcome associations with ‘popular taste’ and ‘makeshift’ cultures and worse still that might resurrect ‘volkisch’ tendencies in the working class: a kind of craft design for the people or worse still something folkloric in nature.

Here, then, in the postwar period there was an opportunity to change the direction of taste once and for all with, in effect, something of a *tabula rasa* achieved through mass bombing, the strictures of rationing and the willingness of the new consumer to re-dedicate themselves to purchasing goods. If the Modernist project were to be effective in the reinvented working class home it would eradicate decoration and frippery entirely. It was here that the new broadcast mediums really came into their element. In the attempts that were made by the postwar British film and television industries as they broadcast programmes dedicated to documenting British life, culture and the arts and 'good taste' in particular, the emphasis was on renewing the nation, rebuilding British life and refreshing its culture of consumption. This was a brave new world of possibilities.

The modernist insistence on clean lines and smooth unadorned form appeared to seek to eliminate the overly ornate and decorated from the average working class home and expunge along with it any trace of the residual bitter taste it had left behind. However, this particular reading of the idea of 'modern' and the interpretation of Modernism owes much to the British tendency towards over-decoration in the first place. All this was a far cry from the simplicity of Scandinavian design and the more measured understanding of craft in design. Working class taste in the 1940s was still strongly associated with novelty, much as it had been by Ruskin in the nineteenth century, who had warned even then of the problems of 'establishing the habit of discontent' within consumers through mass-produced gaudy objects that emphasized the ornate and over-embellished, the crudely decorated and grotesque in form.

Somewhat paradoxically, re-invigorating the habit of discontent was an essential feature of the postwar situation. But, clearly, *managing* this dissatisfaction and discontent was to be the order of the day if the ultimate goal was to be achieved. The dissatisfaction of those visitor's who lined up to view new and previously unavailable commodities at the 'Britain Can Make It' exhibition, when they

discovered that these would not be available for some time in British retail outlets, simply reinforced an already jaundiced view of manufacturing and distribution. A debate in the House of Commons in October 1946 was devoted to discussing the possibility of sending the 'Britain Can Make It' exhibition on tour around the provinces, and perhaps even across the border to Scotland. This would prove not be possible because of the prohibitive cost of such a venture, despite the enormous interest shown in the exhibition at its London venue, the Victoria and Albert Museum. The exhibition had served as an overseas trade vehicle. With so much of the consumer goods produced destined to be sent abroad, the exhibition had considerable propaganda value and might have been even more useful in promoting productivity, as this exchange from the debate demonstrates:

Major Tufton Beamish:

Is the Right Hon. and learned Gentleman aware that this Exhibition is described as the "Britain Can't Get It" Exhibition, and that much greater incentive to production would be provided if he would make more goods available to the home market?

Sir Stafford Cripps:

I think it is only so described by the very ignorant. [178]

Party politics aside, it might be prudent at this point to remember that those same individuals involved in the revival of a manufacturing base and increasing productivity in Britain were of course also the consumers of those self-same products. A more realistic, and possibly more enlightened, approach showed itself in a debate a month later, on 5 November 1946, about postwar levels of productivity and investment in manufacturing, and the effects of this on home and overseas trade:

In every industrial town, every street should be filled with posters explaining the need for the export drive. It could be done in a series of posters which would explain the situation in a way that would come home to everybody, making it clear beyond any possible mistake. There could be a poster showing the relation between our imports and exports together with overseas investments

[178] 'Britain Can Make It' exhibition, HC Deb 28 October 1946 vol 428 cc262-4 262

before the war…….. The people just do not understand these rows of figures, noughts, percentages and so on, which are quoted by Ministers, unless they are explained in very simple terms. I think the remarkable success of the "Britain Can Make It" Exhibition is confirmation of my argument. The public have taken a very keen interest in that exhibition because there is something which can be understood easily, something which is on view showing what is being produced and which the workers will get soon. I am sorry that the President of the Board of Trade did not feel able to take that exhibition on tour, even if only in part, to provincial centres. But having made it clear to everyone exactly why it is necessary to work harder, the central problem still remains. It is impossible to increase the labour force by 75 per cent. Consequently, new methods of production resulting in increased output must be introduced. [179]

The rather hectoring tone of the 'men from the ministries', emphatic about increasing production in the face of a nation exhausted by wartime strictures, must have felt distinctly propaganda-like and reminiscent of Soviet-style polemic. They would struggle to convince the British public of the efficacy of these measures, and if this state of affairs was to exist for some time then the literature of design reform must fill the temporary gap between supply and demand and seize the opportunity to influence with equal vigour.

Penguin and the Literature of Design Reform after World War II

In the series *The Things We See*, published by Penguin from 1946 to 1948, we find examples of the literature that the Council of Industrial Design used as its major instrument of education. The series covered housing, furniture and objects of all kinds, and was a publishing collaboration between Penguin and the Council.

[179] Mr. Woodrow Wyatt (Birmingham, Aston), HOME AND OVERSEAS TRADE HC Deb 05 November 1946 vol 428 cc1231-345 1231

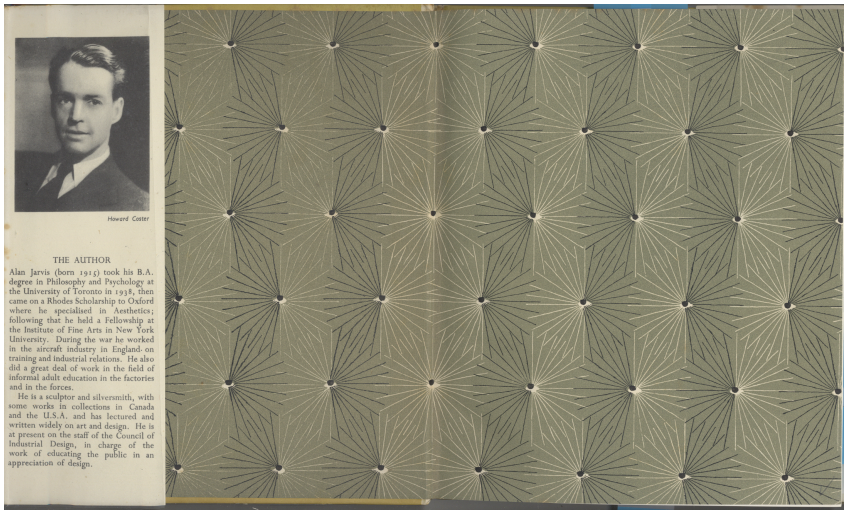


Fig. 20 Inside front cover *The Things We See Indoors and Out,* Alan Jarvis, London, Penquin, 1946

Alan Jarvis, the author of *The Things We See Indoors and Out*, the first in the series, was referred to on the front inside cover thus, his use of the term 'appreciation' not unconnected with his background in art history and aesthetics:

'At present on the staff of the Council of Industrial Design, in charge of the work of educating the public in an appreciation of design.' [180]

As Public Relations Manager of the Council of Industrial Design the task of "educating the public" was a deliberately bold claim on Jarvis's part for a bold political project. Educating the British public in "an appreciation of design" of course presumed the urgent need for such an initiative in the postwar climate of consumption. *The Things We See Indoors and Out* was rushed into print so that it would be on sale during the 'Britain Can Make It' exhibition in 1946. The text sold well, with repeated demand for stock and supplies. In the absence of exhibition leaflets, which were reserved for trade representatives, it filled a useful gap.

[180] Jarvis, Alan,*The Things We See Indoors and Out* (London, Penquin, 1946)

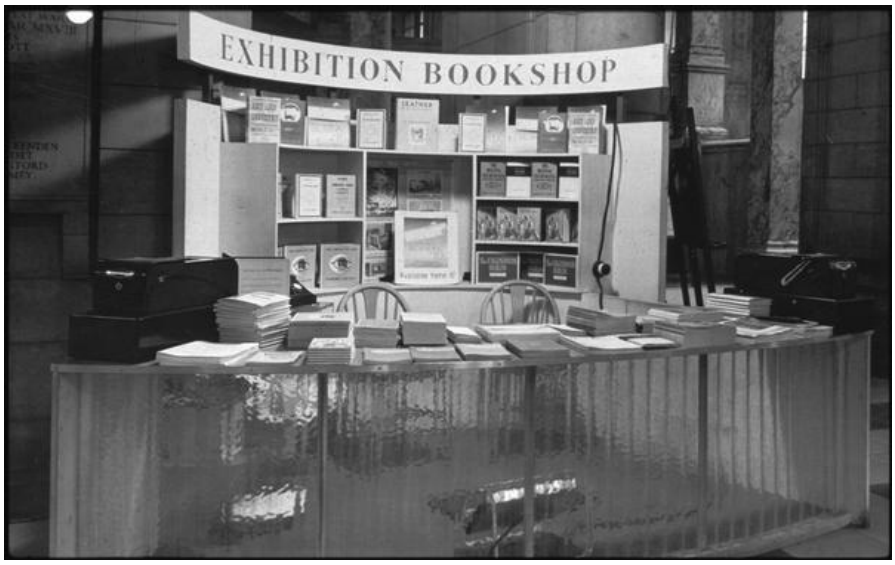


Fig. 21 The Bookshop at the 'Britain Can Make it' exhibition, showing copies of *The Things We See* , bottom left-hand side

"Seeing is Believing"[181]: Social and Class Discourse in Language

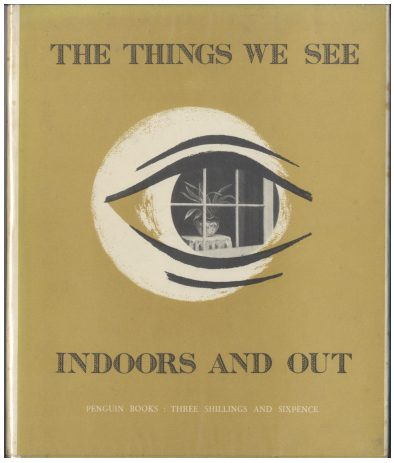


Fig.22 Cover, *The Things We See Indoors and Out*, Alan Jarvis, 1946

At the outset *The Things We See* series had a very clear remit, and once again we return to the 'eye', and in this instance 'fresh critical eyes'. In a memorandum relating to the scope of the series the full range of titles and authors are detailed and the overall purpose of the texts is identified:

The aim of the authors in this series is to encourage us to look at the objects of everyday life with fresh critical eyes. Thus while increasing our own daily pleasure we also become better able to

[181] ibid, 3

create surroundings that will give us permanent pleasure. To achieve this in the furnishing and equipment of our homes, we must buy with discrimination and so prove to the designers, who set the machines to work, that we are no longer bound by habit or indifference to accept whatever is offered.[182]

In correspondence between Gordon Russell and A.B.R. Fairclough, series editor at Penguin, dated 7January 1946, the overall intention of the series of books becomes very clear:

The title of the series will be something like THE THINGS WE SEE. It is intended that it should arouse people's interest in industrial design and supply them with conversational arguments, but without too obviously disclosing any didactic purpose. [183]

The Things We See series was conceived of as picture books for adults, to all intents and purposes. The inside front cover of *The Things We See Indoors and Out* emphasizes this in a note 'To The Reader':

This is not a book of words illustrated by pictures – it is a book of pictures with a verbal commentary. If the reader spends three-quarters of his time studying the pictures and one-quarter reading the accompanying text, he will fulfil the author's intentions.[184]

The seemingly child-oriented appearance of the book seems to infantilise the reader and their ability to make taste distinctions. In the section entitled 'Words and Pictures' the emphasis in the text is on the use of images as metaphors for the forms in furniture. The text points to a number of examples of furnishings illustrated by photographs that are then juxtaposed with comparisons from the natural world to deliver the message more clearly. A hippopotamus, a greyhound, a toad, a pelican, a bear and a clipped poodle are set alongside their furnishing counterparts in order to demonstrate ornament, clumsiness, heaviness or grace.

[182] Memo prepared by A.B.R. Fairclough, Penguin editor of the series, Penguin Archive Materials, DM1107/E0703/E1-7
[183] Letter to Gordon Russell at the Board of Trade from A.B.R. Fairclough, Penguin editor of the series, Penguin Archive Materials, DM1107/E0703/E1-7
[184] Jarvis, *The Things We See Indoors and Out*, 2

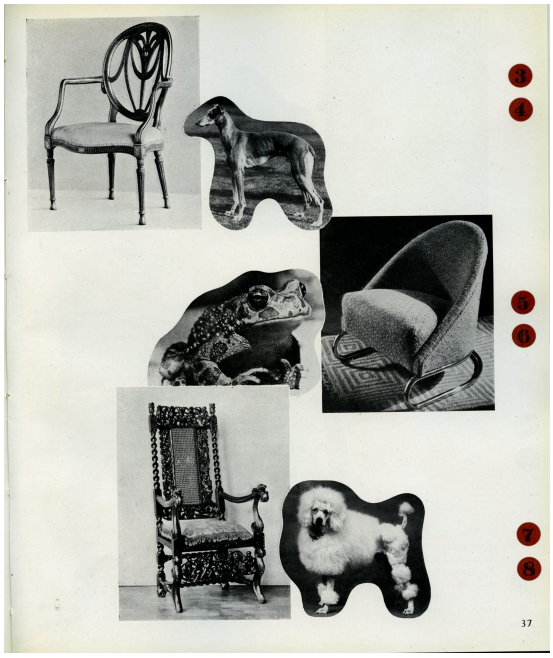


Fig. 23 *The Things We See Indoors and Out*, Alan Jarvis, Penguin 1946

'Understanding the visual arts has always been hampered by the problem of words…….Words are not the same as things. Understanding must be reinforced by the seeing eye. If, as a result of the combination of picture and words, our reaction is " Yes, I *see* what you mean", the book has served its purpose. We will understand design better, and make our judgements of taste more clearly if we *picture* these analogies as well as verbalise them'[185]

Here another reference to seeing meaning and clarity of vision through 'the seeing eye' recalls Corbusier's *Eyes That Do Not See*. The analogies that the photographs are used to indicate, and the critique one might imagine they imply, are, somewhat confusingly, disavowed in the text. So although the illustrations form the structuring of the argument in the text, this disclaimer leaves the reader in something of a quandary. The structured use of language as an intellectual activity is synonymous with taste here. In order to grasp the issue of taste itself then the discourses that surround taste needed to be introduced in such a way as to bridge the perceived intellectual gap between the working classes and those versed in aesthetics – 'the philosophy of beauty'[186].

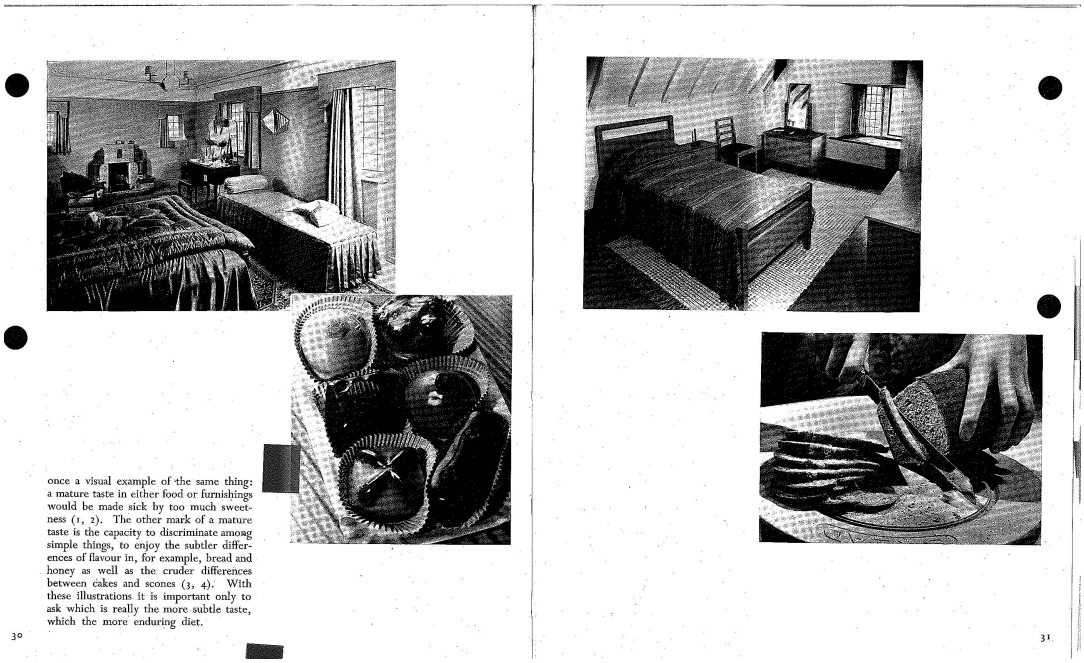
[185] Ibid.,36
[186] Ibid.,36

The taste project necessitated the development of a language that might be useful and constructive in delineating more clearly some of the most fundamental aspects of aesthetics without actually using that nomenclature. So allusions to soccer, popular culture and pastimes may have seemed a natural route to take in establishing a rapport with the reader around their culture and traditions. However, the paradox here is that those self-same popular cultural activities, the social and economic circumstances they represented and the innate taste that they so clearly demonstrated were completely at odds with the design reformers' goals. How ironic that the very things that were associated with the more problematic aspects of working class taste were used to draw them into a project dedicated to changing them.[187]

Rather interestingly, especially in postwar Britain where the effects of rationing were still being felt well into the 1950s, the conjunction in the text of taste and appetite, descriptions of food and eating, wholesome and unwholesome diets and palates, were viewed as a route to the most effective demonstrations of 'discrimination and refinement'.[188] It seems insensitive to make comparisons of this kind in a text directed at a population that had endured some very lean years indeed and were still enduring rationing of basic staples and restrictions on all manner of commodities.[189] It is in the disparagement of immature taste that the message is loudest in this text, in spite of the fact that 'gorging on sweets' had not been possible for many years:

'We know the childish impulse to gorge on sweets and we recognize at once a visual example of the same things. A mature taste in either food or furnishings would be made sick by too much sweetness.' [190]

[187] Ibid.,27
[188] ibid.,29
[189] Kynaston, David (2007) *Austerity Britain 1945 – 51* (London, Bloomsbury,2007), 19
Items still rationed in 1945-46 included meat, butter, lard, margarine, sugar, tea, cheese, jam, eggs, sweets, soup and clothes.
[190] Jarvis, *The Things We See Indoors and Out*, 30



once a visual example of the same thing: a mature taste in either food or furnishings would be made sick by too much sweetness (1, 2). The other mark of a mature taste is the capacity to discriminate among simple things, to enjoy the subtler differences of flavour in, for example, bread and honey as well as the cruder differences between cakes and scones (3, 4). With these illustrations it is important only to ask which is really the more subtle taste, which the more enduring diet.

30

31

Fig. 24 *The Things We See Indoors and Out*, Alan Jarvis, Penguin, 1946

'Mature taste' would also recognize the place of something 'sweet' or 'savoury' in a more mature discourse around food and consumption, just as that referred to in Simon Watney's *The Connoisseur as Gourmet*. [191] Watney quotes Clive Bell's assertion that taste in food was linked inexorably to taste in all other things, and this hangover from the Bloomsbury Group is evident in much of this literature.

Castigating consumers in this way for their willfulness and lack of self-control reminds us once again of those texts produced in 1930s Britain disparaging the senseless and aesthetically untrained working class. It is often difficult to know from the texts how closely linked they were with the economic constraints of the period. The nation in recovery was one of increased manufacturing and productivity drives, a new nation of renewed energy in foreign markets and export potentials, a nation in a post-colonial moment rediscovering itself and its industrial identity. And yet this literature of aesthetic reform still seems to insist on

[191] Simon Watney, *The Connoisseur as Gourmet* in Formations of Pleasure, (London: Routledge,1983), 77

a pre-war view of the consuming public. The blame is once again repeatedly placed squarely on their shoulders, for demanding tasteless goods:

If the public buy shoddy, ill-designed or ugly things the manufacturers will continue to make them. ……The debasement of quality in mass-produced goods lies not in the machine or mass-production process, but with ourselves.[192]

It is doubtful that the author Alan Jarvis included himself in the all-encompassing 'ourselves', as the distinction made between the writers and the readers of these texts was quite clear.

Gordon Russell was to prepare *The Things We See – No 3: Furniture*. In a more informal letter dating from 28 February 1946, addressed to Russell at his home, Penguin editor A.B.R. Fairclough reveals more of his thoughts on their purpose:

Dear Gordon,
Many thanks for allowing yourself to be "pumped" for advice, to such an extent, last night.…… illustrations of bad furniture, contemporary and earlier, would help considerably in putting across the message and encouraging criticism of present-day domestic surroundings. Having aroused the public's dissatisfaction with their present furniture, I think it is important to tell them what prospects they have of remedying it. I imagine you know the answer to this as well as anyone.[193]

This theme of arousing the dissatisfaction of the public with their existing domestic circumstances continued throughout the series, and was linked to government objectives that were to promote consumption and a change in attitudes to modern design. Clearly Gordon Russell did know how the public might remedy their dissatisfaction with their existing furniture, and as the designer of the wartime Utility Furniture Scheme he also had a considerable investment in what he saw as an important social experiment in achieving just that.[194]

---

[192] Ibid.,34 - 35
[193] Letter to Gordon Russell at the Board of Trade from A.B.R. Fairclough 28th February 1946, Penguin editor of the series, Penguin Archive Materials, DM1107/E0703/E1-7
[194] Gordon Russell, *The Things We See – No 3: Furniture* (London, Penquin, 1947) 50

Gordon Russell and Postwar Utility

The Utility Furniture Scheme filled an important wartime role and dealt artfully with both promoting and justifying good design. But it could also be viewed as a timely intervention and opportunity for the sanitization of the working class home through the introduction of no-nonsense, unadorned furniture that would cleanse it of all frippery and instill moral hygiene, and as something to render them sensible. If it could be continued postwar it might provide the mechanism for a state controlled cleansing of working class environments and what's more the perfect New Town interior. Gordon Russell's continued involvement in the scheme and in the production of design texts, were a clear indication of his commitment to improving design standards and taste in design.

The Utility Furniture Scheme straddled the years from 1942 to 1952, and encompassed a number of significant approaches to the problem of aesthetic education. The scheme also formalized government control, and this was an opportunity for design and social reform not to be missed. Utility furniture, as it was presented in the 'Britain Can Make It' exhibition in 1946, focused on its manufacture and showed detailed sections of the construction of parts of the furniture.

This emphasis on the crafted elements addressed the artisan nature associated with the malleable working class, for whom furniture was built to last, and was therefore inherently 'well made'. This emphasis was also very much in evidence in the two books on furniture produced by Gordon Russell.[195] In postwar Britain Utility furniture was still commonplace in the new council estate homes, and would be for many more years. A key feature in almost every domestic interior, it was a constant reminder of government control and came to stand for both frugality and disdain rather than the values of careful craftsmanship and honesty

[195] Russell, *The Things We See – No 3: Furniture*; Gordon Russell;,*How to Buy Furniture* (London, HMSO, 1947)

and integrity in materials that Russell had perhaps intended. Fairclough's letter to Russell concludes on a note that provides a unique insight into the complexity of social workings in Britain at this time:

As the window cleaner said today, "This utility furniture isn't so bad. It's no oil painting, but my sister's just got a room….." Here is a copy of the Odyssey: no acknowledgement required, please. Yours ever,[196]

The Things We See – No 3: Furniture featured a section on Utility furniture, as might be expected, and in the book Russell was very probably justly proud of 'a remarkable social experiment in the furniture field',[197] and of the longer-term effects that he hoped the Utility scheme might have upon the furniture industry. Although he stated that he had no wish to exert permanent government control over the fabrication and design in any of the consumer goods manufacturing industries, he was at least interested in the freedom the Utility Scheme had provided the designer and the furniture trade to design for all aspects of life in Britain without the constraints of the market or the interference of the retailers being felt.

As Judy Attfield observes:

There was an awareness among the critics of popular taste that once the instruments of enforcement could not be relied upon any longer, they would have to muster their best powers of persuasion to convert the public to choose plain, honest design and desist from the attractive seductions of the decorative. The interim period between the end of the war and before the Utility Scheme was finally revoked in 1952, saw how the design reformers sought to put their ideas into action and commence the process of persuasion while they still held some power through regulation.[198]

[196] Letter to Gordon Russell at Kingcombe, Campden. from ABR Fairclough, Penguin Editor of the series, Penguin Archive Materials, DM1107/E0703/E1-7
[197] Russell, *The Things We See: No 3, Furniture*, 50
[198] Judy Attfield, Freedom of Design in *Utility Reassessed: The Role of Ethics in the Practice of Design* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002)

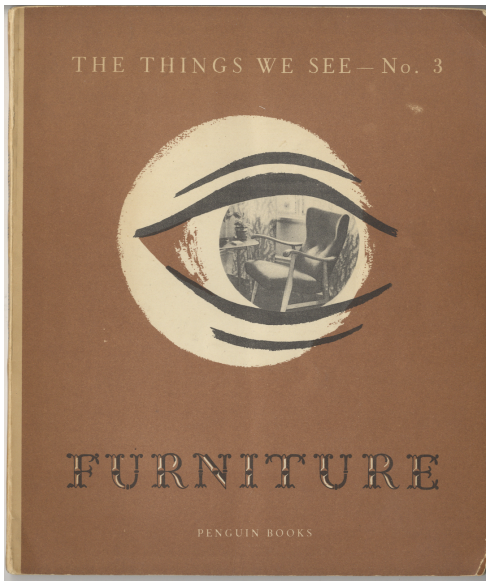


Fig. 25 *The Things We See - No 3: Furniture*, Gordon Russell, 1947

As a designer, Russell is separated from the other authors in the series through his very different approach to the message. Gordon Russell's voice in the texts is distinguished by its emphasis on the processes of making and production, on the materials and materiality of furniture, on how furniture is designed and how to care for it. He also placed particular emphasis on the works of contemporary Danish and Swedish designers and manufacturers that were growing in popularity at that time in Britain. The book featured the flat-pack unit furniture of Elias Svedberg produced by Nordiska Kompaniet in Stockholm and other works by Danish designers Carl Malmsten and Fritz Hansen. He included much of the work of British manufacturers such as Heals, Jack Pritchard's Isokon furniture and works by Marcel Breuer for P.E. Gane. A letter from Crofton Gane dated 8 October 1946, in reply to a request from Penguin for photographs for Russell's book, produced a letter in return that provides a remarkable insight into conditions in postwar Britain:

In reply to your letter of the 4th we shall be happy to co-operate in any way we can. We are however hampered by the destruction of our premises and studios, including photographs, by enemy action in 1940, and of course no new furniture has been designed and made by us since, owing to the Government's limitations.

The letter has an intriguing postscript:

P.S. Whilst I am writing I would like to refer to the list of "The Things We See" books. It has fallen to my lot to do some talking on the subject to which these refer, namely "The Discriminating Eye". Is it possible to secure some of these booklets which so rarely seem to appear at the local Booksellers, for with the aid of an epidiascope an attractive and pointed lecture can be given.[199]

The question of distribution of the texts might yet go unanswered, as although the Penguin records detail commissioning and production there is little mention of distribution.

Prevention is Better than Cure

As the literature of design reform continued its mission to educate the consumer and their taste, books like *How to Buy Furniture* by Gordon Russell, published by the Council of Industrial Design in 1947[200], would act as essential guides to the complexity of the consumption process. They would of course also illustrate the common pitfalls.

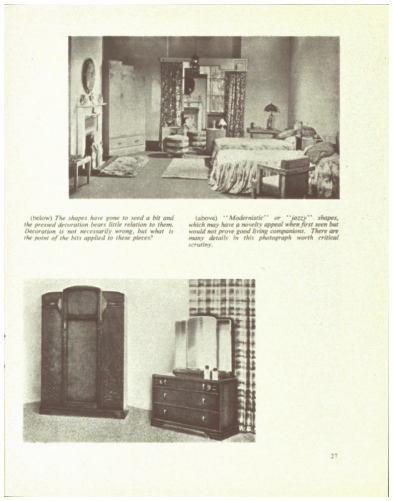


Fig. 26 Gordon Russell, *How to Buy Furniture*, 1947; Fig. 27 *How to buy Furniture* Gordon Russell, 1947, p.27

[199] Letter from Crofton Gane to Messrs Penguin Books Ltd, October 8th 1946, Penguin Archive Materials, DM1107/E0703/E1-7
[200] Russell, *How to Buy Furniture*

Gordon Russell's guide to buying furniture would allow navigation of the postwar domestic landscape, and would direct the reader's taste and faculties of appreciation. For many readers, however, there would be certain challenging aspects of their consumer habits that they would still need to overcome. As the author of the Utility Furniture Scheme during the war Russell was keen to continue the work of the utility taste project and its promotion into peacetime. *How to Buy Furniture* featured a series of pages dedicated to examples of utility products with clear instructions about the benefits of these forms of furnishing. It also stressed the problems with older styles, or novelty items.

On page twenty-seven the captions read:

(above) "Modernistic" or "jazzy" shapes, which may have a novelty appeal when first seen but would not prove good living companions. There are many details in this photograph worth critical scrutiny. (below) The shapes have gone to seed a bit and the pressed decoration bears little relation to them. Decoration is not necessarily wrong, but what is the point of the bits applied to these pieces?

Pointless 'bits' of decoration on 'pieces' of furniture that have 'gone to seed a bit' and may even be family hand-me-downs would be conspicuously out of place. As for the 'many details in this photograph worth critical scrutiny', it was the 'novelty appeal' that would be responsible for creating unsuitable living conditions. He despised the poorly-sprayed finish and the use of bad veneers which was commonplace in the furniture industry, and the book acted quite literally as a hands-on guide to buying the best:

First of all look at the finish. Look to see if the polish shows a surface rather like orange peel. This means that has been sprayed from a spray gun and left. Does the polish thicken in the corners of panels? This is due to slapdash workmanship.[201]

The book was a pragmatic guide to purchasing the best possible furniture and using it within the home to good effect. It featured sections on making furniture,

[201] Russell, *How to Buy Furniture*,

and reproduced detailed diagrams and specification drawings as well as illustrations of jointing and construction methods and techniques. The section on new materials was illustrated by Ernest Race's metal unit furniture.

Perhaps the most unusual feature of *How to Buy Furniture* was its inclusion of sections on second-hand furniture and antique furniture, both of which were treated as pariahs in other books, producing as they did connotations of misplaced connoisseurship, or worse, grandparents' 'bits and pieces'. The new homes and domestic circumstances of the new citizen would not be furnished in this way. Show homes and exhibitions showed sleek interiors and modern furnishings, not pseudo-Victorian fakes. Care and attention to detail when purchasing for these new surroundings would be important, and Utility furniture could be a useful standby especially when value for money was an issue. Anxious to continue the 'remarkable social experiment' well into peacetime, Russell continued to promote it at every opportunity. Moreover, the proliferation of 'Modernistic' designs that used inelegant materials and forms gave him good reason:

Fig. 28 *How to buy Furniture* Gordon Russell, 1947, p19

As a rule simple shapes are more satisfying for articles produced in large quantities by machine. And isn't chromium plate and black glass rather unpleasantly combined here? [202]

In the second book in the series, *The Things We See – No 2: Houses*, Lionel Brett was commissioned to write about the design of modern houses. Once again Fairclough's editorial correspondence leaves us in little doubt about both the poetic and the pragmatic intentions behind the book:

Several other volumes are planned, and it is felt that the one on housing should come out with the first numbers published. The aim of the series is to stimulate the critical interest of a wide public in the things around them. The general title of the series will probably be "The Things We See". There is obviously great scope in the very important subject of housing for making comparisons of good and bad, somewhat on the lines of pre-war publications by the Ministry of Health and C.P.R.E, though perhaps in a somewhat more lively form of presentation. The first printing will probably be 50,000 and the published price 2/6d, size of page 81/2" x 7".[203]

It might have been better perhaps to concentrate on architecture from the layperson's perspective, as this book seems to miss the point of the accessibility the series had hoped for. The author, Lionel Brett, had some misgivings himself about where to pitch the discussion and who his audience was to be. His letter to A.B.R. Fairclough on 26 April1946 shows some doubts:

I enclose the first draft of my little book on houses. I would very much appreciate your advice on the following points.
1. If you feel that the opening paragraphs are are *(sic)* unnecessarily facetious, please say so. I am less happy about the introduction than about the rest of the book.
3. The general approach. Does it presuppose too much knowledge? (I hope not, as there are points in it I am anxious to make). [204]

[202] Ibid.,18
[203] Letter to The Hon. Lionel Brett from ABR Fairclough, January 18th, 1946, Penguin Editor of the series, Penguin Archive Materials, DM1107/E0703/E1-7
[204] Letter from The Hon. Lionel Brett to ABR Fairclough, April 26th, 1946, Penguin Editor of the series, Penguin Archive Materials, DM1107/E0703/E1-7

Lionel Brett may have intended his book to be for 'a wide public', as Penguin wished, but it does not seem that way from the general tone of the text and in this piece of advice provided to 'the novice':

The trouble is it takes the trained eye to distinguish the modern from the Modernistic. With earlier styles it was easy: the genuine was old, the fake was new. The novice is advised to look for *Simplicity* and for the time being to treat *Smartness, Streamline* and *Luxury* (Brett's italics) with suspicion.[205]

Lacking in sophistication, and unable to appreciate anything that the trained eye would instantly recognize, the general public were always characterised as in need of constant attention and direction in this literature. The working classes are seemingly reduced in this literature, and the dismissal of their culture and taste as crude, uncivilized and unformed continued as themes used to characterize them and the things they surrounded themselves with throughout these works. The promotion of simplicity above smartness, the streamlined or luxury, points once again to a distinct and very narrow view of Modernism and the mistrust of the 'Modernistic' interloper by those in a position to tell the difference.

Richard Hoggart's much later assessment of this type of working class domestic interior is perhaps closer to the truth, engaging as it does with the whole environment as a reflection of a way of life:

Though it may seem muddled and sprawling, the design can be seen, ensured by an unsophisticated and unconscious but still strong sense of what a home is for. [206]

It is in this nomenclature and lexicon of terms developed to address the working class that we find the real meaning and significance of the aesthetic education project. The terms dishonest, vulgar, common, coarse, cheap, insensitive, uncivilized, ugly, violent, jazzed up, disgusting, mongrel, falsehood, distrust, bogus, sham, novelty, and inappropriate all appear frequently in these texts. The

[205] Brett, Lionel *The Things We See – No 2: Houses*, (London, Penguin,1947),15
[206] Hoggart, *The Uses of Literacy,* 23

constant criticism of the working classes for their uncivilized domestic demeanour, hapless preferences and tastes, and the suppression of their culture of objects and display, reveals thinly-veiled contempt, but the attempts to subdue 'violent appeal' in poorly-designed objects (Pevsner), and to 'calm the anger of the untrained' (Bertram), also imply an interesting degree of hysteria on the part of the authors.

It may not have been the case that these statements were directed to intentionally criticize, and the targets of these observations are very often confused, with the lower middle class and the working class equally the focus, but the effect is still one of a bruising lesson well learnt.

'Reading' Modernism and The Language of Value Judgements

If the expectation had been that Modernism would repair and reconstruct working class sensibility and infuse order into their haphazard existence, then this was never realized. Perhaps its most significant failure was the fatal flaw of decoration: the uses of decoration and ornament in very specific objects, and in patterns and textiles being so deeply inscribed in working class culture and structures. If the literature promoting Modernism as a panacea for all that ailed the British working class's taste limitations was to accomplish this shift in sensibility it must rely on anxiety and concerns with taste to accelerate the change in direction. How was this to be achieved? All efforts to re-establish consumption shared an attitude that signalled the dominance of Modernism as a philosophy of both form and social recuperation. All the exhibitions, show homes and literature concentrated on this clean ordered interior, at the expense of the 'homely'. However disorganized and dishevelled it may have appeared to be it the working class home was a solid cultural repository for the collective consciousness that the working class maintained through 'being at home'.

The literature of design reform was dedicated to establishing a set of principles through which design could be understood and interpreted. It was a literature that was emphatic about 'looking around', maintaining vigilance and awareness about design. Within these texts a series of recurring themes, such as dirt and cleanliness, simplicity and order, efficiency and civilization, reveal the deeper anxieties that existed in British society. It also pointed to a deeper lack of understanding and awareness of working class social conditions: the family kinship structures and presence of extended family in one dwelling.

Essentially the argument here seeks to engage good taste in design from an analysis of aesthetic construction and socio-political intention, specifically understanding the 'understanding' of design as presented in design publications. The overarching rationale is to understand how design had been mediated, and to what perceived ends at particular historical conjunctures, and to develop an overview relating to the promotion and reception of design to an 'indiscriminating public'. Many previous studies have emphasized the essential nature of the consumption of design, the reconstruction of postwar industry and the physical environment, the austerity of the period and its social effects, notably Attfield, Darling, Hornsey, Sparke, Maguire and Woodham. [207] In this chapter the methods for mobilising taste in the working classes in both the pre- and postwar climate and the tone in the mode of address in the literature of design reform has been the focal point. A critique of the language of value judgments provides a specific view of design and the aesthetics not only of the object but also of the self, and implies criteria used to construct judgements situated in the aesthetic, moral, material and social categories.

[207] Attfield, Judy, *Utility Reassessed: The Role of Ethics in the Practice of Design* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002)*;* Hornsey, Richard, *The Spiv and the Architect: Unruly Life in Postwar London* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010); Maguire, Patrick Joseph and Jonathan M. Woodham, Eds., (1998) *Design and Cultural Politics in Postwar Britain: the 'Britain Can Make It' Exhibition of 1946* (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1988); Sparke, Penny, *Did Britain Make it?: British Design in Context, 1946-86,* (London: Design Council, 1986)

This provides evidence for a demonstrable point of view and construction of a particular narrative to seeing and comprehending taste within these texts. When this is situated within a framework of class cultures and social identity it provides us with an account of British design that is emphatic about its inherent class dimensions and the assumptions that were made about the structure of taste in the working class.

The language of value judgements as it is constructed here is a reminder of the change in approach from a pre- to a postwar population, displaced and uprooted and in need of assurance, but still ready for reconstruction and all that this might entail. In short, this was a new opportunity for design reform. As such, this chapter has traced the course of these repeated attempts at 'civilizing' the working class through exemplars of the literature produced by British political agencies and institutions from 1937 to 1948 that were more properly part of an attempt at a rather perverse democratization, and which often addressed the working classes directly through their *artisanal* roots. Class or perceived social status, income or lack of it, social aspiration and key political and economic imperatives all played a part in composing these messages, and in the tone of voice employed in addressing the general public. Connecting the working class to good taste was no simple task, and this body of literature struggled to find both a tone of voice and a nomenclature that could do the job most effectively. In doing so it revealed, either deliberately or inadvertently, its true view of the working classes and their tastes. It would be difficult on the one hand to celebrate interest in the traditions and culture of the working classes represented, as it most often was, by the working men's club and the pub, domestic displays of seaside holiday mementos and fairground prizes and quaint clothing traditions, and on the other to reproach the working classes for not having sufficiently sophisticated taste. Even the work done by the Mass Observation unit served to inform and, up to a point, reinforce the divisions in taste between the working, middle and upper classes. The inscrutable working class was examined and studied through all their social activities and domestic habits, some of which were

carefully transposed into popular entertainment. It was perhaps through these sources that the reformers of the upper and middle class arrived at their impressions of the working class persona.

It is tempting to think that the assertion of a particular taste might be part of a much bigger plan, and the curious nature of these repeated attempts at civilization might lead one to the inevitable conclusion that the projects were more properly part of another major social engineering scheme and reformation of the disorderly conduct of the working classes as a whole, the results of which we have yet to see fully realised, so persistent were they.

The working class, formerly often referred to as ‘the lower orders’, was the focus of a concerted effort at improving the overall construction of taste in Britain through reading about design. This was an attempt at establishing a universal view of beauty hitherto only understood, known and appreciated by the educated upper classes. Although, having stated this, the fact that there was already a very diverse range of tastes and preferences within the middle and upper classes made the task somewhat more complicated. Comprehending that which was good taste or poor taste might be significantly complicated by the complex social mores of an expanding and upwardly mobile upper middle class with its nouveau riche and parvenu elements, and the growth of an upper working class or lower middle class component made up largely of a growing population of ‘Wellsian clerks’:

…Orwell’s and Priestley’s faith in common culture seems idealistic and almost naïve but their views would not have seemed absurd between 1939 and 1945, or in the socially optimistic years of the postwar Labour government: Penguin would benefit from, and cater to this new constituency, and if Lane’s own tastes were instinctively middlebrow, the proliferation, over the years ahead, of Pelicans, Penguin Poets, *Penguin New Writing*, Penguin Modern Painters and

the rest would appeal as much to the highbrow literati as to the Wellsian clerks who so excited their disdain.[208]

The assertion of Modernist principles and the growing 'modern' sensibility towards design in the intellectual classes, portrayed most notably in Osbert Lancaster's satirical cartoons, might have been a reflection of the changing tastes of the middle classes, but they also demonstrated the widening gaps in taste between the Modernist sympathisers and the ordinary man in the street, or the 'little man', in both the pre-war and postwar period. The fact was that the working classes continued to resist this perpetual imposition of self-improvement, and secure in their own beliefs continued to decorate and furnish their homes, purchase objects and goods and read and engage with entertainments of all kinds, without regard for this education.

Dirt and Disorder: Taste and Anxiety in the Working Class Home

It is clear when one interrogates approaches to the aesthetic education of the working class through a closer analysis of didactic design literature that there is an insistence on the need to be aware of one's duty to 'honest and reasonable things'. These are goods that proclaim their virtue through their form, their careful lines, their honest fabrication and lack of decoration, their clean modern profile and ultimately their embodiment of great integrity. This literature stresses a re-education process that is only partly developed. The conversion of an entire class to an unadorned and virtuous environment is just the start of the transformation sought through modern design goods. We may also see other things at work here, in much the same way as we did in Victorian Britain, where the 'conversion' would be more than a simple matter of altering taste, but would be moral as well, if at all possible. The persistence of text and the power of the word in achieving these goals recall this bible-thumping and missionary zeal.

---

[208] Jeremy Lewis, *Penguin Special: The Life and Times of Allen Lane*, (Penguin Books, 2006) 85

Anxieties about the moral health of the masses could be usefully compared to their tastes in furniture, as the former might be perceived as being very clearly displayed in the latter. The sanitization of the working class home through the introduction of no-nonsense and unadorned modern furniture can be situated in the context of moral hygiene, social reform and postwar politics. Reformation of the postwar economy would itself depend on a distinct change in consumer habits. That the perceived, and real, intransigence of the working class consumer in postwar Britain necessitated the production of considerable amounts of aesthetic and political propaganda around design and its consumption is remarkable in itself in this respect. Resistance to changes in their taste and its expression in the domestic sphere was part and parcel of the careful grip the working classes maintained over their cultural preferences and their manifestation. Indeed, attempts to investigate and gain insights into the construction of the working class interior speculate about the dubious value of 'frippery' and 'superfluous' ornament and decoration in instilling a sense of self within the home and its occupants. The intense pleasure and satisfaction supplied by over-embellished surroundings to occupants of the working class home would persist, and with it the equally intense unease felt towards its almost degenerate condition by the design reformers. It was some time before any attempts were made to interpret and understand the true value of these interiors to their occupants. In fact, the study of the intrinsic values and messages of the domestic culture of the working classes during the 1950s would become a rich and dynamic source of material for investigation, providing some key insights into the development and maintenance of community in the coming years. Works by Dennis Chapman *The Home and Social Status* (1955), *Family and Kinship in East London* (1957) and *Family and Class in a London Suburb* (1960) both by Peter Willmott and Michael Young and *The Uses of Literacy* by Richard Hoggart (1957) all contributed to the constitution of this critical field of enquiry. We will return to this theme and its inscription into the interpretation of working class life in more detail later in the text.

The replacement of old slum housing stocks with newly-built government housing in the form of council estates and New Towns may have been intent on reforming the social context, but it did nothing to reform or discard the ‘unhygienic’, ‘ugly’, ‘dishonest’ and ‘disorganized’ working class domestic circumstance. It may have been the intention that over the course of time these new and improved home conditions would have an effect, almost by osmosis, and even that the slum mentality would dwindle away as a result of increased exposure to New Town environments and modern fitted interiors. If the ‘dirty’ conditions associated with slum life were to be eradicated once and for all then the postwar working class interior would have to be thoroughly cleansed through a deeper understanding of, and training in, the principles of good taste. If this aesthetic project were to succeed then it would do so by inscribing the desired taste not only within their habitat but also within working class social structures themselves.

Sadly this would not be possible in many cases. The wherewithal to fully exploit the potential within their new environments was entirely limited by the continued problems of precarious employment and high prices. The limits on purchasing denied access to those new design items that may have fitted with the overall demeanour of these new surroundings. Those items of furniture and domestic implements that might have confirmed the modern clean space were well out if reach of the working class.

These texts straddle the years from 1937 to 1948 and as such engaged with some of the ramifications of the inter-war period of recession and renewal, the development in the postwar period of a proto-consumer culture and the accompanying changes in British social conditions enabled through a newly-assembled welfare state and the restructured, socially engineered housing development of the New Town. This period also epitomized some of the most radical attempts at restructuring the class system in Britain, and the effects of this felt in the 1960s and 1970s, were demonstrated in the emergence of a clearer independent identity in working class life and tastes.

These texts represent the anxious attempts made by various political agencies to correct and civilize working class taste and produce a ‘discriminating’ working class public. Instruction in the principles of taste was to be critical to the success of this campaign to raise standards, and was described as potentially dangerous when it involved working in close proximity to the ‘angry’ and ‘uncivilized’, the ‘common’, ‘uncouth’ and ‘vulgar’ working class consumer. Allowing the consumer to ‘get the idea for themselves’ through constant exposure to tasteful goods of fine quality and excellent materials would calm and soothe these barbaric tendencies.

Goodness is Next to Cleanliness

From its inception in this period the *Good Design* project engendered an atmosphere of anxiety and discontent amongst its various proponents. On the one side the arbiters of good taste in the numerous agencies tasked with delivering government policies and intentions fretted about the scale of the aesthetic project they were undertaking. Speculating about the most effective mechanisms for communicating with the consuming public while at the same time building bridges with the consumer goods and building industries, those responsible for implementing change trod an uneasy path between the needs of the nation and their own misgivings about the aesthetic capacities of its citizenry. This was in turn felt by a doubtful public, led to be equally distrustful of their capacity in these matters by a literature that seemed to stress the primary problems with decoration, novelty, display and cheap goods as being those of both their class and their physical disposition.

On the other side the protestations from the retail trades and manufacturers about the predisposition to bad taste amongst the majority of the British consumer public in both the pre- and postwar periods led to many working party reports and investigations into the best methods to achieve the elusive goal of

increased demand for, and consumption of, the well-designed object. In these endeavours to inculcate taste into an often less than compliant public we see the respective governments of the day at times anxious and confused, occasionally benign and paternalistic, generally resigned but nevertheless determined to transform the reluctant working class subject into a creature of good taste. Encouraging taste and discrimination in this way would lead to self-doubt in the consumer as they struggled to determine the true 'value' in modern furnishings and attempted to participate fully in consumer culture through broadcast seminars, exhibitions of new goods and a literature that was emphatic about clean lines.

Anxiety about their taste raised doubts about the integrity of the working class *self*, doubts about aesthetic decisions raised further anxieties and recriminations about the inequalities of aesthetic education, and these finally confirmed deep anxiety about the quality of the working class home and domestic realm. An exploration and analysis of the literature of design reform and mediation in the period 1937-1948 reveals a clear direction to a sense of dissatisfaction, uneasy relationships with decisions about taste and general disillusionment with material goods and their design. It was through this literature that the British government's message of environmental refurbishment and material renewal was delivered, but this was set alongside another narrative that proclaimed the need for social renewal and a re-engineered class structure.

The focus of this discussion was once again, as it had been in the nineteenth century, centered on the management of the working class home, its décor and its furnishing. The home, as the new front line of engagement with the consuming public, was the most promising realm through which to make contact with the sensibility of the working classes, and subsequently to exert influence. The various types of design literature made available to the public attempted to connect ideas of self-worth with the most fundamental notions of Modernism, and to provide clear exemplars of the results of this conjunction. The many styles of

publications produced, from simple paperback books to more specific pamphlets, employed a diverse range of approaches in language and textual construction and were the output of equally disparate organizations and government bodies. All in all they stand as a remarkable attempt at a cohesive expression of aesthetic clarity to an audience of wildly different backgrounds and ambitions, albeit one held together by one common factor, that of their class.

Exhibition Culture and Exhibiting Cultures

Before we leave this section it is important to touch briefly on the Festival of Britain in 1951. This was of course a significant example of design 'exhibitionism' and another attempt much like the 'Britain Can Make It' exhibition to corral the cultural attitudes and taste of the country. Held as a beacon of hope in the postwar era, it was construed by many to be another desultory attempt at persuading the working class to another view of their postwar world. If design was to be an instrument in social restructuring, then this was its showcase. As a 'tonic to the nation' it took up where the 'Britain Can Make It' exhibition had left off. Richard Hornsey in his book the *The Spiv and The Architect* raises the issues of the mode of address and the physical design of the Festival, and the attempts to inveigle the working classes into participating in postwar citizenship and social reconstruction:

Such exhibition sites provided a distilled experience of affiliatory citizenship, because the visitor became part of a localized collective that enacted in microcosm the larger national community invoked in the displays.[209]

Hornsey refers to Gavin and Lowe and their assessment of the exhibition:

In terms of the London of the post-war forties and early fifties [the spiv and the architect] are not obvious "opponents", certainly did not confront each other directly, but within the rhetoric of planning and reconstruction, within the promise of a brave new world, environmentalism poses

[209] Richard Hornsey, *The Spiv and the Architect: Unruly Life in Postwar London* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010), 15

these two figures at opposite extremes.[210]

In the Festival of Britain guide to design Gordon Russell emphasized the role of the British public in developing taste in his piece 'Design in Industry Today and Tomorrow'. He places the responsibility for obtaining high standards of design firmly on the public's shoulders, as if their co-operation, or possibly the lack of it, were the driving force of change:

After all, one can hardly expect to get a high standard of design unless there is a critical and appreciative public.[211]

John Gloag's contribution to the Festival of Britain guide in the section, *Furniture Design in Britain,* was equally dismissive. Commenting on the manufacturers of furniture he sets out descriptions of the three groups responsible for producing goods. Of these it is the third that is the problem devoid as it is of "artist-craftsmen", "consultants" and "competent industrial designers". They are the creators of:

3. Furniture produced in factories by manufacturers who copy, adapt, or merely caricature traditional or contemporary styles and models.[212]

The use of the term 'caricature' is potent here introducing as it does yet another reference to the dishonest and unwholesome aspect of taste in furniture. Gloag praises the wartime Utility scheme as many had, since the control it exerted over taste allowed something of a respite from the design decisions of the working class and the impact of their purchasing habits. This respite was to be short lived:

….the original Utility scheme set a high standard. Quite naturally there was a reaction from the

[210] Block: 1985/6 1 pp53-69: "Designing desire; planning, power and the Festival of Britain" by Owen Gavin & Andy Lowe in Richard Hornsey, *The Spiv and the Architect: Unruly Life in Postwar London* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010), 16
[211] Gordon Russell, 'Design in Industry Today and Tomorrow', in: *Design in the Festival: Illustrating a Selection of Well-deigned British Goods,* ed. Gordon Russell, (London: HMSO, 1951), 11
[212] John Gloag, "Furniture Design in Britian", in: *Design in the Festival: Illustrating a Selection of Well-deigned British Goods,* ed. Gordon Russell, (London: HMSO, 1951), 13

austerity associated with utility models; and many manufacturers, whose work comes into the third group have, since it was possible to return to freedom of design within the Utility scheme, also returned to many of the repellent extravagances of the nineteen-thirties – a retrogressive step that is encouraged by many retailers who believe well-designed articles are unlikely to sell. Acting upon the assumption that neither Queen Anne, Chippendale, Hepplewhite nor Sheraton is dead, manufacturers of this third group are responsible for innumerable parodies of antique furniture. [213]

Once again a conspiracy to mediocrity is assumed to exist amongst the retailers and salesmen and their working class customers. Gloag's references to Chippendale and "parodies of antique furniture" raise the unhappy spectacle of working class homes adored again with cheap and nasty, overly bulky and hideously dark objects that were inherently tasteless. Presumably this critique of the public as lacking in skills of appreciation and critical faculties was one shared by many in government.

Russell was concerned to develop the public's taste, but in a clearly controlled direction and with predictable outcomes as his Utility furniture had demonstrated. His faith in design and designers was a reflection of the crisis in taste he identified in the British working classes. This was an optimistic assessment of the role of design in society, and his faith in the power of designers to change it was testament to the authority they held or were given by Government. The influential role of architecture and design in the social realm, and in the reconstitution of the working class environment in postwar Britain, was felt in almost every area of public life. It was not until some years later, when a reassessment of this overhaul was made, that we discover major disparities in the experience of the effects of good taste on design. The working classes were not to be trusted to make design decisions for themselves, but the decisions made on their behalf lacked any insight into the life of the working individual.

[213] Ibid., 14

Too Little, Too Late: Our "Indiscriminating Public"

By 1954 the battle was still not won, despite the best efforts of the Design and Industries Association, the Council of Industrial Design, the Council for Visual Education, the Royal Society of Arts, various Government ministries and trade organizations. Even the introduction to the proceedings of the Scottish Design Congress in Edinburgh in 1954, published by the Council of Industrial Design's Scottish Committee, which set out the premise for the discussion of design at the Congress, has an air of defeat about it:

In these days when so many things we use in our daily life, and so much of what surrounds us in the home, the office, the factory or the street is mass produced and subject to increasing standardization, it is particularly important to prevent what is ugly or inconvenient from being reproduced a million times. [214]

This was the opening speech made by the Right Honourable Alexander Douglas-Home (Lord Home), Minister of State for Scotland, addressing the delegates, who were drawn from all aspects of the design, industrial and retail community. Lord Home was at great pains to address the issue of mass production and goes on to condemn the taste of the British public, as paraphrased and reported by the editor of the congress proceedings, Alister Maynard:

and he went on, in the particular case of some domestic products, to add "…….and having been reproduced millions of times, to prevent them from being adopted by an indiscriminating public and installed in their homes as the hallmark of respectability and culture."[215]

This anxiety about the loss of respectability and culture might more properly be the recognition of the gradual demise of a specific group in the middle class and the growth of a new social order "an indiscriminating public" within the masses. Rather then openly encouraging a new attitude to consumption, the better way

[214] *The Value of Good Design: a Report on the Scottish Design Congress, 1954*, ed. Alister Maynard, (Edinburgh: Council of Industrial Design, Scottish Committee, 1954), 5
[215] Ibid., 5

was to create dissatisfaction with their present lives, condemn their taste and once again *foster discontent*:

> Lord Home therefore felt that it was the duty of all who could do so "…….. to foster a discontent among the people so that they are no longer willing to live and to work with tools and instruments, furnishings or clothing, and so on, which are not of the best possible design, and, having fostered the discontent, then more positively to put in their way and allow them to see goods of high quality, of utility and of beauty, at a price comparable to those things which they have been accustomed to buy." [216]

With the public still in postwar recovery, anxious and disorientated they would be encouraged to be discontented with their domestic circumstances in the vain hope that they would seek out "goods of high quality, of utility and of beauty". The barrage of exhibitions, leaflets and books had apparently made little impact on the working class. The blight on their lives and the after effects of the war had been seen as opportunities for further cleansing of their environments with the hoped for continuation of Utility aesthetics. Perhaps most disappointing of all was the fact that their taste remained ridiculed, their aesthetic abilities unacknowledged and their perceptions of quality perceived as dubious until there was a major shift in understanding of the working class home.

[216] ibid., 5

Chapter Four The 'Dirty' Aesthetics of the Working Class

Fig. 29 Cartoon Image: Vicky, 'If Only the Wrong People Didn't Breed', *News Chronicle*, Tuesday, March 30, 1943

The Lessons of *The Road to Wigan Pier* and *Our Towns: A Close-Up*

If the general view of the working classes in the literature of design reform was overtly mysophobic it might very well have been reinforced by two quite separate sources that contrived to expose, however unintentionally, the problems of dirt and disorder in the working class home. Taken together there could be little doubt that each of these accounts, one *The Road to Wigan Pier* from 1937 and the other based on evidence taken from evacuation experiences *Our Towns: A Close-Up 1939 – 1942,* stood as two unfortunate landmarks in a period where the working class were under intense scrutiny, and where their social mores were also subject to question. Making the journey from slum dwellings to newly built homes would depend on developing clean lives and clean morals in the working class.

However, if the evidence was to be believed, the working class character was inherently dirty, somewhat amorphous in nature and generally disordered. George Orwell's analysis of the working class interior in *The Road to Wigan Pier* in 1937 was of one that was irredeemably gloomy, fetid and appallingly overcrowded with less than clean occupants. This was subsequently substantiated by the evidence unwittingly exposed by the evacuation of large sections of the working class population at the start of World War II.

Orwell's somewhat obsessive desire to paint a warts and all picture of the trials of daily life in the slums, described an interior of dirt and foul odours, disordered and chaotic with inhabitants struggling to keep everyday life together. Living in slum conditions was also a constant battle with a plague of pests and diseases. *The Road to Wigan Pier* sits uncomfortably next to Bertram's equally dirt obsessed *Design in Everyday Things* (1937) and *Design* (1938). Bertram's insistence on the clean white interior, pest free spaces now purged of dado rails and the horror of patterned carpets is so very far removed from the day to day experiences of slum life described by Orwell.

In *Design*, written by Bertram in 1938 but based on *Design in Everyday Things*, the commentary seemed overly concerned with the many possibilities of places for dirt to hide in working class homes. But he also implies that their occupants are inherently 'dirty' by virtue of their dull senses and admiration of dishonest form in things. Chapter Three in *Design* is devoted to the discussion of 'Housing the Workers in England'. The new town developments to which slum occupants were in process of being removed might not actually be an improvement. Bertram first sets about describing the ailments of local authorities and our expectations of them:

> We must begin by asking a very big question. Is it the duty of housing authorities to provide anything more than houses? Should they try to make communities? [217]

[217] Bertram, *Design*,, 33

The absence of provision of churches, pubs, cinemas and shops on new council housing estates produced problems both social and architectural, and here he springs to the defense of tenants subjected to such policies:

The result is a fringe of shoddy private enterprise round the estates. Another city takes the same attitude only to pubs. We shall not stop drinking by that method if that was the horrible idea. On the contrary. The longer walk to the pub a man has, the more he is inclined to make a night of it. In most progressive cities sites for community centres and even buildings for them are being provided.[218]

His initial discussion focuses on the roles and responsibilities of local authorities for making good homes:

The progressive view about providing sites or buildings for social activities is that the housing authorities are not only responsible for houses, but also for making the life in those houses pleasant, for making them homes.[219]

His praise in this respect for the almost universally acknowledged model dwelling epitomized by Kensal House in west London knows no bounds, especially in the realm of collaboration through design: ‘There were six consultants, including a woman.’ This was, of course, Elizabeth Denby. Her involvement had been key to the social provision and planning aspects of the project. Kensal House exemplified a new social construct and where better to demonstrate this than in all manner of innovation in hygiene and recreations:

Each flat is equipped with a loudspeaker and programmes are received on a central instrument and supplied like light. Each flat is fitted with linoleum. [not the suspect “carpets of dark hair“ Bertram so disliked]. There are two clubrooms, one for juniors, and one for adults; workrooms for carpentry, boot repairing, sewing; a stage and library.[220]

[218] ibid.,33
[219] ibid.,34
[220] ibid.,37

Fig. 30 Sign from the *First Feathers Youth Club* at Kensal House. Author's collection.

If Bertram was clear about the plight of the new estate dweller, he was not always so sympathetic to their way of life. While understanding their needs in the provision of appropriate facilities for cleanliness and hygiene, the analysis soon turned to opportunities for dirtiness, as we have already seen in his references to dado rails and picture rails as places to collect dirt and harbour vermin. These architectural embellishments, traditionally the resting-places of displays of china or the support for hanging prints of paintings, were deemed unnecessary in the working class home, where they could be guaranteed to attract dirt.

Further discussion of the state of affairs within the average home was detailed in Chapter Five, 'In the House'. At least here Bertram was willing to admit the need for some acceptance of the fact that the typical working class employment may perhaps be dirtier than that of their middle-class counterparts – they may have a 'dirty job' – and that the needs of children may be pertinent.

Harbouring Vermin

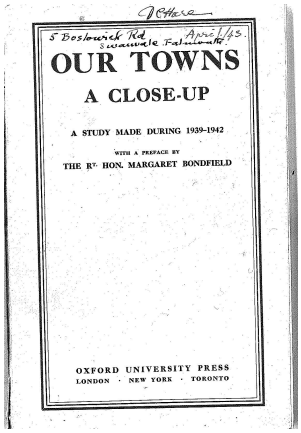


Fig. 31 *Our Towns: a Close-Up. A Study Made During 1939 - 1942,* front cover

Our Towns: a Close-Up: A Study Made During 1939 - 1942, a report by the Women's Group on Public Welfare, published in 1943, described in detail the terrible personal conditions of the men, women and children evacuated from major cities across Britain to the safer areas of the countryside's rural towns and villages. Although clearly not a piece of design reform literature per se*,* it set in motion a debate and set of actions that would soon draw the design reformers to its heart. Almost inevitably Dickensian in flavour, and in spite of the very well-intentioned purpose of its authors, this study revealed in awful detail the uncivilized behaviour and unacceptable standards of personal hygiene and comportment prevalent in the urban dwelling working class. A newspaper article in the *News Chronicle* from Tuesday 30 March 1943 was headed 'This Is A National Disgrace', and showed a cartoon by 'Vicky' (Victor Weisz) to one side of the headline, with the caption 'If only the wrong people didn't breed', and a sub-header that proclaimed:

Evacuation has shown that our industrial cities harbour millions of lost souls living below the most elementary standards of decency. These people can no longer be forgotten.[221]

[221] *News Chronicle*, Tuesday, March 30, 1943

Readers were warned that they must have a stout stomach if they were to tackle the report, and, despite acknowledging the veracity of the complaints of the scandalized countryside residents who gave shelter to the evacuees, the article was clear that the real blame for all this squalor lay in the:

"below standard" lives these people are forced to live.[222]

Not everyone was inclined to be this forgiving, as the series of lectures given at the Royal Society of Arts in 1942 and discussed here already have shown.

A New Approach to the Working Class Home

In fact many of the texts examined here overlooked the daily tribulations of a working class society: that families consisted of many generations under one roof, and indeed that children were present in the home and that there may be many of them. Much of this seemed for the most part to have escaped the attention of our authors. This was pointed out in a key paper given to the Council of Industrial Design's Furniture Design conference held at the Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA) in July 1949. This paper signalled a wholly different perception and understanding of the working classes and their homes.

The paper in question was *Families, Their Needs and Preferences in the Home* by Dennis Chapman, later published alongside other research in *The Home and Social Status* in 1955, a significant publication we shall return to in this discussion. In the paper we see the very first statements of support for a working class culture and for the need to understand the functions of the working class home as unique and particular. It is in reference to the issue of the development of working class family home, though, that his remarks have resonance for this discussion. Dennis Chapman was a sociologist who had been involved with Mass Observation and the Wartime Social Survey in the 1930s and 1940s.

[222] *Ibid.*

Chapman acknowledged the vital role that the aesthetic interests of the family play in making choices about furniture. Whereas the notion of the existence of any aesthetic capability at all in the working classes had been central to the discussion in the texts we have been examining, here for the first time he states that these aesthetic capabilities are being used, and also frequently derailed by salesmen anxious to shift interest to goods they considered more suitable. He is specific about this in terms of the expression of these abilities:

……thus decisions will frequently be "irrational" from the outside point of view and the decision which appears best from the housewife's point of view will rarely fulfil the criterion of Gordon Russell, for example, who suggests that a housewife should say to herself when viewing something new, "would it be suitable in my house? Would it work?" It is generally based on factors infinitely more complex than this somewhat naïve appraisal.[223]

In the section that deals with 'The Development of New Emotional Needs within the Family', Chapman's analysis of 51 parlours in working class homes reveals with stunning clarity of observation the real life and real needs of the working classes in their homes. Of the decorative elements in the home he states that

…….many of its contents are possessions which have a symbolic or ritual value. There will be vases and ornaments which are commemorative purchases made on the honeymoon or other holidays. These ornaments are often difficult to appreciate aesthetically or from the point of view of utility, and there is an obvious field of anthropological investigation here awaiting study. [224]

This prescient statement was of course entirely the case, and Chapman laid down the foundations for the research that would follow and indeed for contemporary Material Culture studies. Chapman states clearly that the obsessive discussion of the functional aspects of the home, and in particular the views on housework as a chore and as 'evil' within the context of texts and debates, overlooked one important aspect of working class life. Household

[223] Dennis Chapman, *Families, Their Needs and Preferences in the Home*, Council of Industrial Design Furniture Design Conference, Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA), July 1949, *24*
[224] ibid., 25

routine and domestic work was a source of great satisfaction to many, and Chapman goes on to say that this practice aided the overall emotional health of the family.[225] Once again ahead of the field, Chapman points to the use of designed objects in daily use as a source of status:

……it is perhaps of some significance that one manufacturer of pressure cookers and kitchen knives has named them "Prestige".[226]

In Chapman's research there is also a unique assessment of the growing aesthetic capabilities of the working class housewife, and specifically the expression of emotional needs and 'romantic interest', as it is expressed in the bedroom. His clear assessment of the resistance to built-in cupboards and wardrobes rests on accepting that these are not rational but emotional decisions. Thus forcing a three-piece bedroom suite into a room already equipped with built-in furniture produces overcrowding but satisfies an emotional need. Chapman encourages the designer and architect to understand the complexity of the home and equally accept that 'elements of fantasy' are at work in the *emotional* choices made about furnishing. He might also perhaps be exerting a plea to see the working class as real people with emotional needs, rather than as a problem to be solved. As he observes, with somewhat dry wit:

He (the designer) should recognize that affection is something to be valued and encouraged and that the function of furniture in this situation is not to provide an occasion for the appreciation of the relations between rectangles of different sizes in different planes, or even the qualities of uninterrupted surfaces, but should be designed to contribute to the sense of occasion in the marriage.

Chapman deals with the needs of children separately. His precision in observing the child's place within the complex arrangement of the home strays into the

[225] ibid., 30
[226] ibid., 30

'dirty' territory but in this case with a comprehensive understanding of the facts of the cramped space of the living areas:

Speaking generally, however, when the baby has out-grown the period of complete dependence on the mother it has to adapt itself as best it can to adult furnishing and to live and play in a room designed mainly around adult functions. Thus there is frequent conflict between the parent and the child over dirt and damage to linoleum, carpets and polished furniture.[227]

His sympathetic understanding of the emotional needs of the adults and the children in small council houses are well conveyed. In a sideways comment on the authors in the design reform texts under examination here Chapman goes back to *The Things We See – Furniture* by Gordon Russell and *The Things We See – Houses* by Lionel Brett to point out their complete lack of understanding of the working class environment in spite of, *or perhaps because of*, their own rather different circumstances. In the case of Gordon Russell:

I was shocked to discover that although he has four children, the only place where anything to do with children occurs in his volume is where he shows us an engraving of a cradle from the Great Exhibition of 1851, in order, I imagine, to amuse.[228]

One might assume that if this book on furniture did not provide the necessary information, then the volume dedicated to housing by Lionel Brett might. However, Chapman's equally arch comment makes it clear that this too had missed the mark by a considerable way:

Mr. Lionel Brett also has four children, and we find once again that the only reference to the child in his book is the appearance in the photograph of a London penthouse of a child's chair, toy motor, a trolley and a teddy bear.[229]

In essence, both books had woefully misunderstood the needs of the working class, their homes and their furnishings. But more specifically they had perhaps

[227] ibid.,27
[228] ibid.,27
[229] ibid.,27

never had them in mind to begin with. Had they known of, or even visited, the average working class home, as Chapman had, they might perhaps have written very different texts. Gordon Russell's inclusion of the engraving of the cradle from the 1851 Great Exhibition was used to illustrate the growth of machine-made objects that imitated hand-carving, and he spoke rather disapprovingly of the objects made for mass-consumption for the burgeoning artisan market at the end of the nineteenth century. Also, while the penthouse in Lionel Brett's book spoke of the 'pleasures of roof gardens' and of open-air spaces in general, his text acknowledged only that our towns perhaps remained too 'sooty' for them to be widely used.

Chapman's final comments in the paper focus upon the activities of furniture salesmen and their concentration on novelty rather than design, and the work of the Council of Industrial Design through the Penguin series *The Things We See,* which he observes is 'aimed too high'. He praises the room settings exhibited in the 'Britain Can Make It' exhibition as a good influence and useful in depicting real room sizes in small homes. Chapman also points out that Penguin's *The Things We See* books could only really be appreciated by those with a university education and that the illustrations in them showed interiors that could only be achieved by those in the higher income bracket.

Poor social housing, coupled with urban decay and the effects of the war, seemed a long way from the thoughts of Penguin's authors, and since the extent of the true nature of the problems with working class housing had been exposed in 1943 these texts looked even more out of touch, ill judged and ill informed than Chapman's assessment in 1949 had indicated. If these 'below standard' lives were to be changed for the better then the removal of large swathes of substandard housing must continue and be replaced with new, modern homes. As wartime bombing raids effectively demolished these problem areas of London and the regions, this issue of re-housing took on a new urgency.

The Royal Society Critique

Transition from the culture of wartime restriction to postwar abundance would be accompanied by another parallel project of education in domestic hygiene and civilization, starting with the re-equipment and re-design of the home and of its occupants. Discussions were already underway during the war years and planning was in hand for the postwar recovery.

We have already heard about the debates held as part of the Royal Society of Arts (RSA) lectures on *The Postwar Home; Its interior and Equipment* in 1942, which focused on the apparent opportunity the postwar home presented for a complete 'regeneration' of the working classes themselves through 'Using Space to Advantage', 'Adaptation of Design to Standardization and Mass Production' and 'Common Sense in Furniture Design'.

In the second in the series of twelve lectures, 'Using Space to Advantage', Elizabeth Denby, the author of *Europe Re-housed*, had referred to the issues of hygiene raised by the condition of the evacuees that had been exposed by evacuation:

> It is our job to see that our generation is given the best possible chance for regeneration. Anyone who read the debate in the House of Commons on evacuation must have had a feeling of shame that in Britain there were so many hundreds of adults as well as children whose uncivilized behaviour was substantiated from many different quarters.[230]

Clearly this struck a chord with many present, and a member of the audience, Edgar Bywater, Housing Manager for Walsall Borough Council, asked Denby:

> Are we satisfied that the people for whom we have to cater are really up to such a domestic standard as to be able fully to enjoy and understand those ideals which Miss Denby has put

[230] Elizabeth Denby, RSA Lecture 2*, Using Space to Advantage*, December 10, 1941, RSA Papers, RSA Library and Archive

forward today, and which, I think, are the ideals of most of us? My work is in one of the largest industrial centres of the Midlands, where a large percentage of the houses are verminous and where it is the practice of many tenants to find the week's rent by pawning some article on the morning of rent day.[231]

Public events such as the RSA lecture series epitomized the discussions afoot dedicated to cleaning up working class life. But they were also a glimpse of the other forces preparing the working class for postwar prosperity and their democratic duties and responsibilities. Complaints about the behaviour of tenants and their overall demeanour would be repeated frequently at these meetings. The revelations exposed by evacuation simply added fuel to the fire.

In the fifth of a series of twelve lectures on *The Post War Home: Its Interior and Equipment* , chaired by Gordon Russell, Mrs Darcy Braddell expounded on the benefits of fitted furniture at great length under the title 'Common Sense in Furniture Design'.

Common sense would mean that fitted furniture would prevail in all areas of the new homes built after the war, and with this the domestic interior space would be finally purged of all superfluous, oversized furniture. Darcy Braddell was a self-proclaimed designer, not of furniture but of interiors. Her knowledge of design extended to this and to what she referred to as domestic planning. She concerned herself with low-rental houses, as she saw an inevitable postwar rise in their numbers and an opportunity not to be overlooked to make some serious inroads into the domestic arrangements of the working class.

What an opportunity, then, has arisen for the solution of part of this general problem of the furnishing of the low-rental house! [232]

In addition, the new streamlined conditions would also achieve that long sought-after goal of regulating behaviour within the home, and with it the expulsion of the

[231] ibid.,
[232] Mrs Darcy Braddell, RSA Lecture 5, Common Sense in Furniture Design, February 11, 1942, RSA Papers, RSA Library and Archive

less desirable items bought by the working classes and the introduction of the purely functional:

To name another instance of snobbery - this time on the part of the public, the “three-piece suite” is bought by many who can ill afford it, more for the mark of social prestige which its possession confers, than for whatever use they may hope to get out of it. [233]

Chapman comments later upon the ubiquity of the three-piece suite in the working class home. It is his observation of the need for this to be considered as a status issue in the furnishing of both the bedroom and the parlour that is in marked difference to that of Braddell:

Although function enters into the decision to purchase many 3-piece suites, pianos and occasional tables, and carpets, social status is, without doubt, the main consideration.[234]

In denying the working class any aesthetic sensibilities of their own, and regarding their need for objects that conveyed status as unnecessary, the thrust of these texts was persistently about cleaning out all the less than satisfactory clutter they accrued. In direct contrast to this, Chapman was the first to acknowledge the idiosyncrasies and importance of the arrangement of the working class home:

The arrangement of furniture, ornaments, pictures, window draping and domestic equipment against a background of walls and wallpaper or structural details of the home, and the planned manipulation of lighting is a most important folk art of our culture.[235]

Far from trying to purge it of all traces of character, this home was to be celebrated and left uninterrupted or disturbed. In Braddell’s ideal home, now without large pieces of furniture upon which the working classes lavished far too much money all that would be left to manipulate in the clean living spaces would be coloured fabrics. As she put it in her lecture:

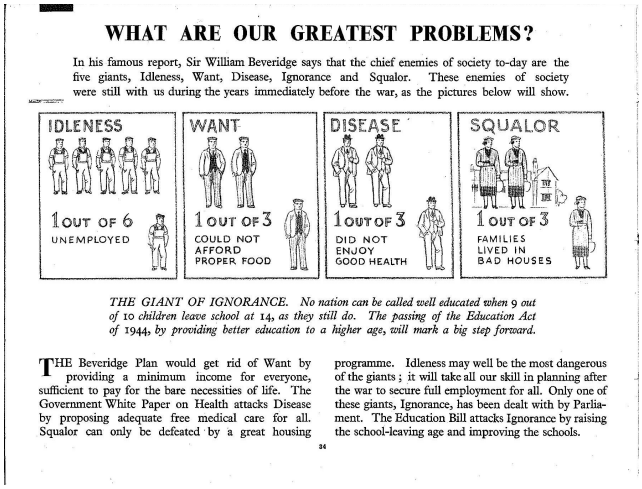
Some people may argue that so much built-in furniture will make for monotony and lack of

[233] ibid.,
[234] Chapman, *Families, Their Needs and Preferences in the Home, 29*
[235] Chapman, *Families, Their Needs and Preferences in the Home, 30*

individuality in the home, but I do not think this need be the case. Colour schemes and fabrics alone afford much scope for personal taste, and, with the need for most of the big, and many of the expensive pieces of furniture satisfied, the householder will have even' greater freedom in the choice of the smaller ones. ……One reason why I am in favour of built-in furniture is that we can exercise more control in that sphere than we can with loose furniture.[236]

Exercising control of the working class through the regulation of their home environment was just one response to the opportunities being presented by the war and its after-effects. As the war progressed, its effects were more and more far-reaching, as was the exposure of the working class and their domestic arrangements. The volatile political landscape, coupled with the transformation in circumstances of the bulk of the British population, meant that serious changes were looming for their day-to-day lives.

Changing Britain



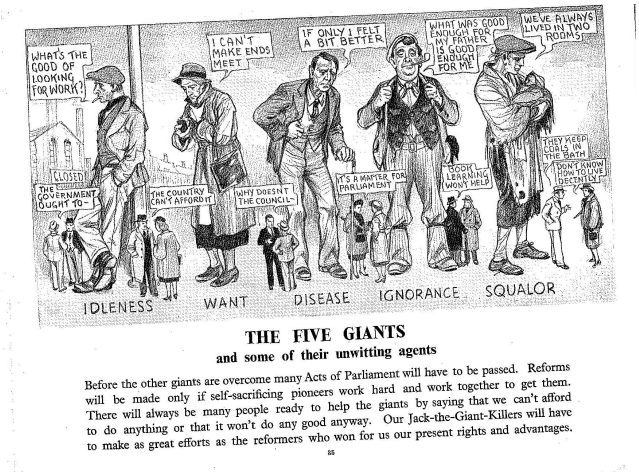
WHAT ARE OUR GREATEST PROBLEMS?

In his famous report, Sir William Beveridge says that the chief enemies of society to-day are the five giants, Idleness, Want, Disease, Ignorance and Squalor. These enemies of society were still with us during the years immediately before the war, as the pictures below will show.

THE GIANT OF IGNORANCE. No nation can be called well educated when 9 out of 10 children leave school at 14, as they still do. The passing of the Education Act of 1944, by providing better education to a higher age, will mark a big step forward.

THE Beveridge Plan would get rid of Want by providing a minimum income for everyone, sufficient to pay for the bare necessities of life. The Government White Paper on Health attacks Disease by proposing adequate free medical care for all. Squalor can only be defeated by a great housing programme. Idleness may well be the most dangerous of the giants; it will take all our skill in planning after the war to secure full employment for all. Only one of these giants, Ignorance, has been dealt with by Parliament. The Education Bill attacks Ignorance by raising the school-leaving age and improving the schools.

[236] Mrs Darcy Braddell, RSA Lecture 5, Common Sense in Furniture Design, February 11, 1942, RSA Papers, RSA Library and Archive



THE FIVE GIANTS

and some of their unwitting agents

Before the other giants are overcome many Acts of Parliament will have to be passed. Reforms will be made only if self-sacrificing pioneers work hard and work together to get them. There will always be many people ready to help the giants by saying that we can't afford to do anything or that it won't do any good anyway. Our Jack-the-Giant-Killers will have to make as great efforts as the reformers who won for us our present rights and advantages.

Fig. 32 *Changing Britain – No 2 The Struggle for Democracy pages 34,35*

Changing Britain – No 2, The Struggle for Democracy, published by Cadbury Brothers Limited, Bournville, in 1944 was one of a series of publications outlining social change in the UK and the postwar challenges this would present. The usual devices of illustration and diagrammatic representation were employed to communicate important issues to the general public.

In this volume we have tried to show – again using the visual method – the main causes and results of the broadening basis of government and of the sphere of government action.

Although published in 1944, the depiction of the working class in this publication was still closely allied in style to Victorian satirical representations of a feckless slum population. *Squalor* is shown as a female figure dressed in rags holding a child and under the disapproving gaze of the middle class couple who comment:

They keep coals in the bath. They don't know how to live decently.

Unsurprisingly, the general tone was one of gentle encouragement, as this was a book dedicated to the effecting of change and engagement with the democratic process. The working class public needed to be animated and prompted into action if they were to comprehend that this very necessary legislation was to be passed that could ultimately alter their day-to-day circumstances. Again, not

strictly a piece of design reform literature it utilizes some of the same visual methods to communicate with its audience and to encourage their participation in political change. This participatory political experience was not at all familiar to many of the British public, hence the need for the booklet promoting involvement. They were very much more used to voicing their day-to-day experiences and views of daily life through surveys and consultation. However it was possible that they did not have any knowledge of the potential uses for their survey opinions and information.

The Voice of the People: Exercises in Consultation

It was certainly the norm in Britain in the 1930s and 1940s to scrutinize and to ask the general public questions about their daily life, at almost every available opportunity and about a bewildering array of topics. Whether it was in the form of specific studies or the Government's Social Survey, general questionnaires or quizzes at exhibitions, or in Mass Observation reports, the working class population was frequently utilized as a source of considerable amounts of information while at the same time being the subject of intense investigation itself.

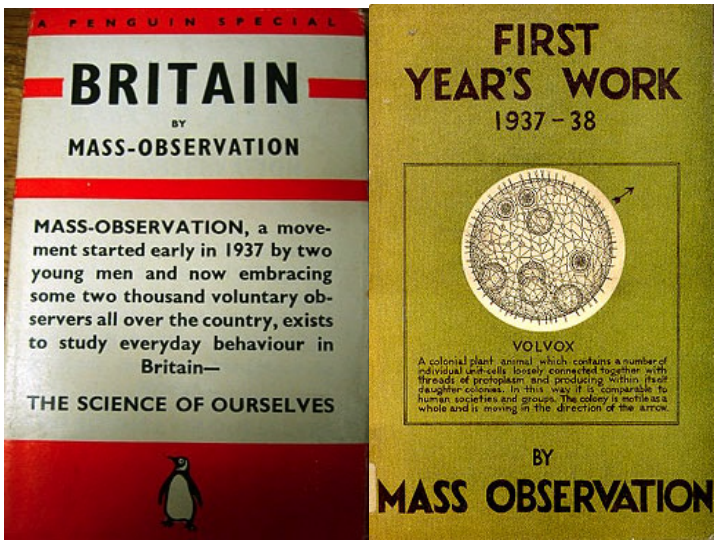


Fig. 33 Charles Madge, Tom Harrison, *Britain By Mass Observation*, (Harmonsworth: Penguin Books, 1939) and Mass Observation, *First Year's Work 1937 – 38,* (London: Lindsay Drummond)

Mass Observation reports from 1937 onwards had detailed the day-to-day experiences of the British public, and in some particular cases, such as the 'Worktown Project' based on the inhabitants of Bolton, the specific experiences of the working classes in one location. These anthropological investigations and enquiries painted a picture of the working class and their social mores in all their aspects. Many of the techniques used by the observers were not dissimilar to those of the traditional anthropologist, and certainly included blending in with the background in terms of clothing and behaviour.

Thorough cataloguing of everyday experiences demanded evidence be gleaned from the most unlikely sources, such as the secret listening of the 'overheards' as well as interview testimony, and photographic evidence all gathered together into Mass Observation reports as various as 'May the Twelfth: Mass Observation Day Surveys' in 1937; 'Britain by Mass Observation', in 1939; 'War Begins at Home' in 1940; 'The Pub and the People: A Worktown Study' in 1943; 'People's Homes' in 1943, and 'Puzzled People: A Study in Popular Attitudes to Religion, Ethics, Progress & Politics in a London Borough' in 1947.

While the evidence provided by the activities of the Mass Observation project might have been intended to enlighten government and inform industry of the public's shifting attitudes towards economic and social change, it was to be most useful in indicating their feelings about their daily experiences of design, their taste and their aesthetics.

Mass Observation at the 'Britain Can Make It' Exhibition

Mass Observation entered the realms of design reform when it became involved in the 'Britain Can Make It' exhibition in 1946. Mass Observation, questioning visitors on entering and on leaving, hoped to document change 'as it happened' and to test the effects of the exhibition on those most likely to be persuaded to its message – the working classes.

Fig. 34 Members of the public being interviewed at the 'Britain Can Make It' exhibition at the Victoria & Albert Museum in London in 1946.

The most significant details of the Mass Observation statistics were contained in their analysis of the lower working class, referred to more particularly here as the 'artisan working class'. Questioning about the impact of the exhibition on taste revealed that the message had found its mark:

> The most widely represented class was very definitely the artisan working class. Unskilled workers were far more definite in their answers and the majority of them volunteered the information that their ideas or tastes definitely had been altered.[237]

This was a somewhat disingenuous statement given that the working classes were the precise audiences that the exhibition hoped to influence. But the exhibition also hoped to change and educate the tastes of visitors as they made their way progressively through the exhibits. By employing these many vehicles of consultation the British government hoped to create a true picture of working class sensibilities and tastes, and also, of course, their prejudices. As Sparke *et al* have already shown the message about the economic miracle, so sought after in the production and consumption of goods, and one that would only be

[237] Mass Observation Unit, 'Britain Can Make It' exhibition interviews, 1946, Design Council Archive

achieved through major increases in industrial outputs, could be successfully communicated and joined, in part, to the design reform campaign. [238]

Design Quiz, a small booklet that accompanied the 'Britain Can Make It' exhibition, was another test of good taste masquerading as an entertaining diversion. Instructions for its use consisted of didactic messages coupled with notions of time spent playfully challenging 'The Experts':

The point in a Design Quiz is partly that it is practice in wise and discriminating shopping and partly because we can, in a book like this, get the benefit of other more expert opinions than we can in a busy shop even when shop assistants are most helpful. In trying your wits against the design experts you will not only have some fun, but you will gain some handy shopping tips as well. [239]

That the public needed 'practice in wise and discriminating shopping' is without doubt: they had been deprived of a world of goods during the austerity-driven war years and the subsequent years of recovery.

Fig. 35 *Design Quiz*,,1946, Council of Industrial Design

[238] Penny Sparke, *Did Britain Make it?: British Design in Context, 1946-86,* (London: Design Council, 1986); Maguire, Patrick Joseph and Jonathan M. Woodham, Eds., (1998) *Design and Cultural Politics in Postwar Britain: the 'Britain Can Make It' Exhibition of 1946* (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1988)
[239] *Design Quiz,* pg 2, 1946, Council of Industrial Design

In joining the *Design Quiz* to the exhibition the necessary blend of wise shopping habits and good taste would be achieved. While the quiz wished to inculcate in patrician form the message about good taste, it did so wearing its heart on its sleeve with the panel of 'experts' called upon to verify the correct answers. The experts consisted of well-known war artist and illustrator Barnett Freedman, Hugh Casson, lecturer and architect, already a key figure of the British establishment, and soon to be appointed director of architecture for the Festival of Britain, and Mrs. Mary Harrison, simply identified as "A Housewife". Of the value of the opinions of the experts, readers were told that

> There is plenty of room to dispute about taste which always is and should be personal. But there are some things the experts do agree about. Honesty is one. Always they reject a design which imitates something else, electric fires which imitate coal fires, wood which imitates marble, inexpensive things which try to look rich by wearing a lot of fancy decoration, just as we all dislike showy people.[240]

This reference to 'honesty' and to the dislike of 'showy people' is linked here, as in so many of these texts, with the dishonesty of imitation, and the lack of authenticity in both *people* and *materials* of a certain type. The *things* that tried to look rich by over-adornment were of course people, not just electric heaters. The anxiety about *showy people* brings up the excesses of Hollywood, music hall entertainments and spivs. Your preferences in objects then would reflect something of your character and your innate goodness, or perhaps not. Testing your wits against the experts would also be a test of your moral fibre.

[240] Ibid.,.,3

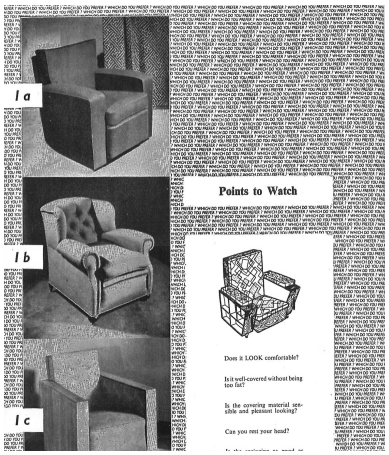


Fig. 36 *Design Quiz*,,1946, Council of Industrial Design

The Social Survey and its Uses

This investigation of the everyday life and attitudes of working people was reinforced by the necessity for information on all aspects of the daily routines endured by them throughout the war years and then beyond that into the postwar reconstruction period. It was through the Wartime Social Survey, begun in 1941 by the National Institute of Economic and Social Research and continued by the Government's Ministry of Information, a source of considerable amounts of information about the opinions and social conditions of the British public, that detailed insights were provided into the gaps in their economic education, their shopping and cooking habits and a great deal more besides. As we have heard Dennis Chapman had been involved in the work of both Mass Observation and the Wartime Social Survey.

The Wartime Social Survey reports, issued between 1941 and 1948, covered such widely differing topics as *Ministry of Information Films and the Public*, *The Kitchen Front Broadcast Programme* and *Foundation Garments*, all published in 1941. In 1942, *Feeding of Young Workers 14–18 Years of Age in Factories*, a *Manufactured Food Enquiry*, *Sanitary Towels* and an *Investigation into*

Household Cooking habits for certain vegetables.[241] In 1943 there was *Cakes – Buying and Baking*, and *Sound in Dwellings*[242], and *Education and the People*[243] in 1945. After the war, *Domestic Crockery Survey* [244], *Some Factors Affecting the Design of Small Dwellings* [245], *Shopping Hours* [246] and *The British Household* were some of the reports produced in 1947. The *Survey of Knowledge and the Opinion about the Economic Situation (*10 Reports) [247] and *Economic Publicity Surveys* of 1948, formed the basis of much postwar economic campaigning.[248]

The Social Survey was a window onto the world of the British public, seen in glorious detail and with their subsequent education, re-training and enlightenment in mind. Design reform and aesthetic education would be delivered through the vehicles of choice - the exhibition, poster campaigns and books. The British Government's continual and extensive information campaign of exhibitions and posters communicating the economic facts of life to the general public was a matter of some significance in the formation of the postwar climate around industry and production. The mention of the success of the British information campaign in discussions in the US Congress was of particular importance. Critics of the postwar economic strategy were to be more readily placated, perhaps, if their American counterparts demonstrated respect for the campaigns that were designed to get the cooperation of the public in all matters economic and industrial. It was the Social Survey, an invaluable source of material for Government industry and production campaigns, which would reveal the necessity for formal education of the British public in 'economic complexities'. Success in these campaigns was vital to Britain's social and industrial future, as this lengthy exchange between Herbert Morrison and Brendan Bracken in the House of Commons in May 1949 showed:

---

[241] *60 Years Of Social Survey, 1941–2001*, (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 2001).G Wagner, A H Reynolds 1942
[242] ibid., D Chapman 1943
[243] ibid., L Moss 1945
[244] ibid., D Ginburgh1947
[245] ibid., P G Gray 1947
[246] ibid., D Ginburgh1947
[247] ibid., H D Willcock 1948
[248] ibid., G K Evens 1948

Mr. Morrison

The Social Survey revealed an alarming lack of knowledge earlier on about the matters to which I referred. There is nothing surprising about that. I am not sure what percentage of hon. Members could have got through an examination about some of the economic complexities upon which they are now well informed. I do not say that in any partisan spirit. Indeed, heaven knows how many very prominent people would have come through. It was vital to educate the nation about the facts of these matters in order that the nation should consciously co-operate to the end we have in view. This process of economic education has paid the nation handsomely. That is my belief. If it had not been for this we might have had more industrial disputes, we might have had less industrial effort and we might have had less co-operation to common economic ends than we have had. It is not only I who say this, but two distinguished Americans say it too. Remember, these would not be biased because, as anybody who knows the United States and the attitude of Congress would agree, they are profoundly suspicious, even more than the right hon. Member for Bournemouth—

Mr. Bracken indicated dissent.

Mr. Morrison

—profoundly antagonistic and suspicious in principle of all Government information activities. This is what was said by Mr. Finletter in some evidence he gave before the Senate committee: "The Treasury itself, under Sir Stafford Cripps, is carrying on a vigorous campaign and a very effective campaign of information to the British people not only about the Marshall Plan but about the whole economy of Britain. Britain is plastered with posters pointing out the economic facts of life. There are exhibits in the subways. There are movies, and very good movies, too, showing what the problems are, some of them in Walt Disney form, and so forth. Extremely interesting." "This is being brought to the people to the maximum extent possible." He went on to say, being asked by Senator Wiley this question: "You mean the facts delineated in your charts are given to the people in unvarnished language and not in the shape of propaganda?" "MR. FINLETTER: Yes, sir, I have no hesitation in saying that these facts are being given unvarnished and not in any attempt—as far as I can make out—no real political attempt to tell anything except the brutal facts. I think the attitude is that this is a peacetime battle of Britain and that the only way to get the people of Britain to win is to let them know what it is all about." "They publish a White Paper, for example, and they popularise it and put out a pamphlet to explain in pictures and whatnot, what the White Paper has said." Not only has Mr. Finletter said that, but a still higher authority in the work of E.R.P., namely, Mr. Hoffman, the administrator in charge of the European Aid Administration, has said this in a public declaration: "I thought I knew something about informational activities. I want to say that having spent the morning with the Economic Information

Unit, having learned something of their plans to try and impress all the people of Great Britain with the importance of productivity, I think, to a certain extent, we in America are amateurs. In other words, when it comes to resourcefulness and ingenuity, I take off my hat to … his organisation." They are not gentlemen calculated to be biased in favour of this sort of thing, and I earnestly believe that they are right."[249]

Criticism of the government campaigns and Central Office of Information (COI) activities was widespread. Earlier in the same debate there were recriminations about government spending in the area of public consultation, and aspersions cast over certain aspects of the filmmaking activities of the COI in particular:

Mr. David Renton:

We have to ask ourselves whether it is part of the welfare of the State that we should spend public money teaching people how to run their homes. On page 20 there is another film, the title of which is "Good Taste in Furnishing a Home." Good taste varies. There is no absolute standard, and I hope that this film does not try to establish one. We have to ask ourselves, bearing in mind the state of our finances and the development of our society, Is it necessary? And the answer to this question, as to all the others, is obviously that it is not necessary, and a lot of public money could be saved if these films were not produced.

Such was the difference in outlook at this time, that a film dedicated to good taste in the home is viewed with the suspicion it deserves in stark contrast to the BBC television and radio broadcasts by Bertram and Gloag some ten years earlier. It is difficult to know at this distance though the reasons for this. Government meddling with taste in this way and homogenizing households could prevent the necessary class distinctions that prevailed remaining visible. Pamphlets, another tool of communication favoured by the Government, also became the target of criticism both for their intentions and for the mechanism employed to render information to the masses such as the "cartoons by eminent cartoonists". As David Renton indicated, the message might have been more easily, and perhaps better, delivered through slightly more conventional texts of instruction:

[249] CENTRAL OFFICE OF INFORMATION, Mr Herbert Morrison, Commons, May 23, 1949. Hansard, vol 465 cc 963-1017.

I should like to make a few remarks on the pamphlet about the Economic Survey. This also was not necessary. It is a most interesting little pamphlet, and I have learned a certain amount from it. It was obviously very expensive to produce: it is highly illustrated; and there are lots of good diagrams and cartoons by eminent cartoonists. One of the cartoons shows a gentleman walking a tight rope, another an official followed by a bull and a third, an egg divided into four different parts. The assumption underlying this pamphlet is that the ungodly can be made better people if they are made to read the Bible and the Prayer Book. Perhaps that can be done if they buy the Bible and the Prayer Book.[250]

The proselytizing nature of this literature and its film counterparts clearly did not escape the attention of those less enamoured of the Government's project and its intentions.

The Great British Public Exhibited

Confidence in the cooperation of the general public with the campaign to manufacture and buy more goods was indeed boosted by the fact that 'Britain is plastered with posters pointing out the economic facts of life. There are exhibits in the subways.' Posters and exhibitions were the preferred vehicle for communicating with the British public throughout the war years and beyond. 'Exhibits in the subways' was most probably a reference to the 'Homes for London' exhibition held in February 1949 in Charing Cross tube station. There were others that year, too: notably the London County Council 'Housing Exhibition' at County Hall, London, in May 1949.

Previous exhibitions, such as those organized for the Central Office of Information, extolled the virtues of British industry and institutions. The 'Register Your Choice' exhibition in 1953, once again in Charing Cross tube station, was the subject of yet another Mass Observation report. The working classes were once again identified as the target of criticism. Given the choice between a

[250] CENTRAL OFFICE OF INFORMATION, Mr. Herbert Morrison, Commons, May 23, 1949, Hansard, Vol 465 cc963-1017,

living/dining room decorated in 'the "contemporary" style' or that furnished and decorated with 'popular items in current production' it was not hard to see why the public might choose the latter:

It seems evident that as yet many people- probably most - judge furniture in terms of its apparent comfort and solidity, and distrust the capacity of contemporary styles to provide these advantages too. …..There is much failure even to appreciate the aesthetic attractions of contemporary styles, much emotional resistance to this unfamiliar manner, much tendency to withdraw into the security of the familiar…..[251]

Fig. 37 Composite image showing the two living/dining room settings designed by Phoebe de Syllas, in the 'Register Your Choice' exhibition, 1953. Top: current production, bottom: contemporary style.

'Emotional resistance' is exactly what it was, and, as Richard Hoggart would observe some years later, was a product of fundamental class differences in the understanding of the home and domestic functions. His description of the domestic space of the working class was exactly that which raised anxiety and opprobrium amongst design reformers:

The living room is the warm heart of the family and therefore often slightly stuffy to a middle-class visitor. It is not a social centre but a family centre.[252]

[251] David Kynaston, *Family Britain 1951-1957*: *Tales of a New Jerusalem* (London; New York: Bloomsbury, 2009) 667
[252] Hoggart, *The Uses of Literacy,* 18

The ‘family centre’ of the working class home would not correspond to the modernist model, neither would it demonstrate the lightness of touch and clean, new materials of the contemporary form. It would continue to assert its identity through ‘popular items in current production’, however heavy, overstuffed and over-embellished they may have been. Emotional resistance to the contemporary style was also resistance to forced changes to social organization and living arrangements brought about by relocation to new housing estates.

Familiarity Breeds Contempt

The design reform literature, the exhibitions and broadcasts sanctioned by Government, public institutions and establishment stalwarts were all very powerful features of the postwar design landscape. The fact that there was ‘much tendency to withdraw into the security of the familiar…..’[253] was borne out by continued investigations on the part of the Council of Industrial Design into the reasons behind such actions. In the same way that Nikolaus Pevsner had made meticulous investigations of poorly designed patterned carpets and those who sold and purchased them, so too did the Council of Industrial Design attempt to solve the riddle of the relationships between customers, designed goods for sale and the quality of ‘familiar’ design. The tastes of the masses were once again under scrutiny.

The report from the Scottish Design Congress, organized by the Scottish Committee of the Council of Industrial Design, published in 1954 as *The Value of Good Design*, was emphatic in its views about the problems with taste and tradition that afflicted the general public. Sadly the remedies were not particularly inspiring, and neither did they demonstrate any special trust in the capabilities of the average person. Sebastian Earl, joint managing director of Selfridges at the time, commented:

[253] Kynaston, *Family Britain 1951-1957*, 667

Shopkeepers selling to the masses are limited to their highest Common Denominator. While we should be anxious to give our customers the opportunity of showing their preferences for the most advanced designs which are likely in our detached judgment to prove acceptable, we cannot dictate to our public, nor can we rush them.

Earl continued his theme and targeted his comments more precisely:

In the lower income groups they as often as not prefer the article that the professional designer, and even the bourgeois shopkeeper as the go-between, regard as badly designed, functionally clumsy, over-ornamented and downright hideous.[254]

In his experiences of furniture retailing, and of selling what he described as bulbous bestialities,[255] he was adamant that 'all this ugliness continues to be bought apparently willingly, perhaps eagerly', and Earl was perhaps closer to the mark than most when he claimed to see the true value and meaning of the choices made by the 'untutored mind' of the working class:

Whatever we may think of them, there is a certain cosy sham opulence about them that to the untutored mind suggests solid value and assurance, and compensates for four years of darkness and doodle-bugs.[256]

The eager consumption of all this ugliness could be explained away by the effects of the fear of imminent annihilation. What is more, this 'sham opulence' would be compensation enough for their having survived the war, and sufficient for their 'untutored' needs.

Design and the Penetration of Working Class Consciousness Through Television and Film

Sebastian Earl shared a widely held view that television could prove to be as influential in educating and changing taste in the1950s as sound broadcasting

[254] *The Value of Good Design*, 19
[255] ibid.,19
[256] ibid.,20

had been in the 1930s. Anthony Bertram's radio and John Gloag's television broadcasts and their messages about design would be amplified by the growing popularity of the television medium, reaching a bigger and potentially more diverse audience. The role that television would take in the dissemination of the good design message in the 1950s was not to be underestimated.

Both Mr. Earl *(Managing Director of Selfridges at this time)* and Sir Colin Anderson (*Director of Anderson, Green & Co. Ltd*) underlined the important part that sound broadcasting had played in widening the appreciation of music, drama and literature, and both foresaw equal, of not greater opportunities for Television to stimulate a far more critical visual appreciation, and to speed up the rate at which the public will not only accept but demand new designs.[257]

How right they were. Anthony Bertram's patrician approach and tone of address would be adopted by broadcasters and the series of programmes made by Kenneth Clark entitled, *Is Art Necessary?*, broadcast in 1958, was typical of the new output of a burgeoning television industry. Incidentally, this was closely accompanied by the postwar rise and subsequent demise of the social documentary film that captured the day-to-day ordinary British experience. They made strange bedfellows. One was intent on radical alterations to the taste of the masses and the other equally dedicated to the preservation and documentation of the values, customs and beliefs of the last surviving vestiges of working class labour, politics and culture.[258] This sort of cheek by jowl relationship was not unusual. Films made to point to the problems and desperate plight of working class life like *Housing Problems* and *Enough to Eat* by E.H. Anstey had been made in 1935 and 1936 respectively, shortly before Bertram's broadcasts for BBC radio that pushed for clean new homes and responsible tenants.

The GPO, or Crown Film Unit as it became, documentary film accounts of British life by directors such as Humphrey Jennings had been important evidence of this, and film output during and immediately after the war, although restricted,

[257] Ibid., 11
[258] Patrick Russell and James Taylor, *Shadows of Progress: Documentary Film in Postwar Britain* (London: , Palgrave Macmillan, 2010).

had still tackled issues of sensitivity in working class culture. Jennings' *London Can Take It!* (1940), and *A Diary for Timothy* (1945) were both typical of the output of film materials cinemagoers became familiar with seeing alongside the Pathé News newsreels. *It Always Rains on Sunday* (1947), the film adapted and directed by Robert Hamer, was to be more indicative of postwar cinema offerings determined to show working class culture in its gritty form.

In the case of the television education programme and the accompanying booklet which was a necessary appendage to the project, however, the tone may have appeared to be gentler in nature but it still contained a patrician message. The television series *Is Art Necessary?,* was broadcast by Associated Television Limited from 1958 to 1959, with some eleven episodes. The programme entitled *What is Good Taste?*, was shown on 1 December 1958, and the accompanying leaflet was published as a verbatim account of the programme. It would allow the reader to digest further the content in the comfort of their own surroundings, and share in the pleasure already experienced by an estimated 3,000,000 viewers.[259]

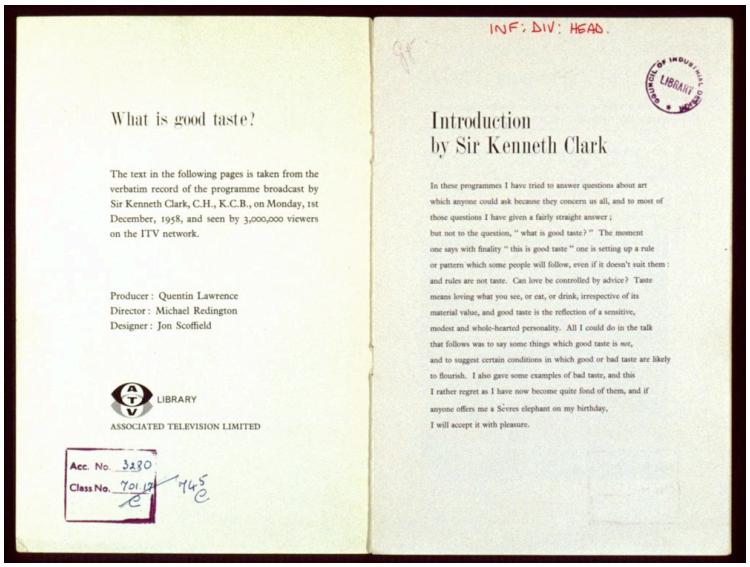


Fig. 38 Kenneth Clark, *What is Good Taste?* from the *Is Art Necessary?"* series

[259] Jonathan Woodham, *Britishness in Design, Material Culture and Popular Artefacts: From Empire to New Labour* in: Tomlinson, Alan and Woodham, Jonathan, Eds., Image, Power and Space: Volume 11: Studies in Consumption and Identity, (Meyer & Meyer Verlag, 2008), 145

In his introduction Clark states that ‘good taste is the reflection of a sensitive, modest and whole-hearted personality’, and in addition, ‘rules are not taste’, the significance of which becomes more and more apparent when he examines the contents of the room in which the broadcast is set, noting:

> Very simple shapes, very pale colour, furniture perched on rather thin legs. All very straight and simple. One has the feeling that if a large heavy man came in and sat down suddenly, the furniture would collapse. Or if one opened a bottle of stout….it would make a terrible mess.

An unusual combination here, then, of the message of the broadcasters as a cajoling encouragement to better things, with odd allusions to the lumbering form of “a large heavy man” and an indiscriminately opened foaming “bottle of stout” indicating the potential for insensitivity and disorder in a less than “whole-hearted personality”.

Reconsidering Class and Identity: British Social Re-construction in the 1950s

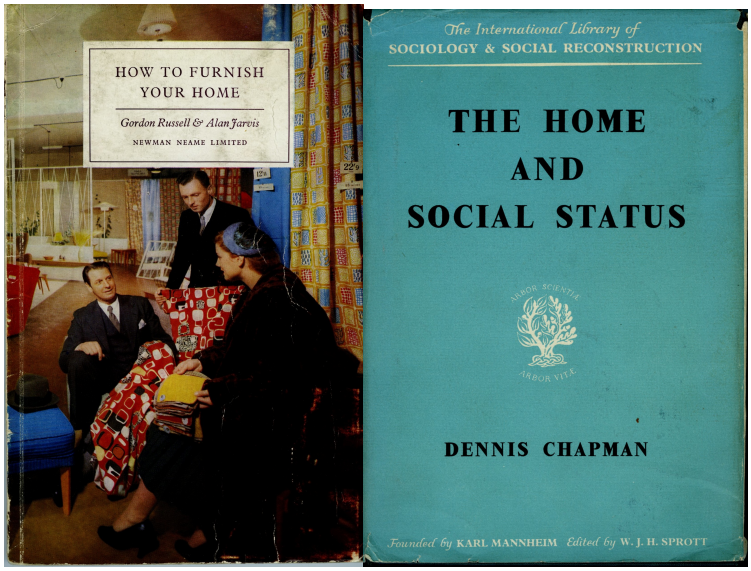


Fig. 39 *How to furnish your Home,* by Gordon Russell and Alan Jarvis, published in 1953 and *The Home and Social Status,* by Dennis Chapman, published in 1955

The female fur-coated customer in the Mid Century Department at John Lewis (pictured here on the cover of *How to Furnish your Home*) was in stark contrast to those populating *The Home and Social Status* by Dennis Chapman, 'the study of the life of the family in the home'. Concentration on improving the faltering economy in Britain, the continuing postwar austerity of the 1950s and the emergence of a new working class sensibility all pointed to a set of political imperatives that looked outward for impetus and validation. As the relocation of families to newly built housing estates continued it would become the first demonstration of the effects of these campaigns and policies. Opposing sensibilities in the perception and reading of the working class home during these years raised the important question of contradictory approaches to class identity and sensitivity to class cultures.

The representation of the family structure, and the domestic circumstances that surrounded it, is placed in two quite different spheres of investigation in each of these texts. *How to Furnish your Home*, by Gordon Russell and Alan Jarvis, published in 1953, and *The Home and Social Status* by Dennis Chapman, published in1955, both examined the domestic circumstance and decoration. In one the celebration of homemaking, shopping and making the most of what you have with style is the focus of concern, while the other is a concrete account and detailed illustration of the sophisticated culture and structure of the working class population.

How to Furnish your Home featured *Part One: How to Buy Furniture* by Gordon Russell and *Part Two: How to make the Most of What You Have* by Alan Jarvis. Gordon Russell never waste an opportunity to speak of the quality of the materials used to produce furniture or of the techniques employed in their manufacture. Once again here Russell concentrates on the construction and finish of furniture giving detailed descriptions of these techniques. Photographs of *cut on the quarter planks* or *a section of five ply veneer* were amongst the illustrations in *How to Furnish your Home.* Knowing how furniture was made was

essential to choosing good examples. The admirable qualities of simple construction embodied by Utility furniture were a key element of the 'Britain Can Make It' exhibition. Russell extols the virtues of the Utility experiment as he calls it, but now postwar things had taken a definite turn for the worse:

> When design control ended, the furniture trade, with some very notable exceptions, decided not to consolidate its wartime gains, but to return to 1939 post haste. The results of this policy – or rather lack of policy – have been disturbing. But there are already signs that the reaction from squiggles and junk may be even more severe than the reaction from Utility. [260]

More mention was made of the necessity to possess this knowledge of materials and the unscrupulous salesmen who knew nothing of this and could barely distinguish one wood from another. Russell also warns us to avoid purchasing anything from 'flash Alf', instead ensuring we go to a reputable dealer. Armed with this information we might be certain of the quality of the goods even in the uncontrolled postwar market.

In Part Two Alan Jarvis focused on the new couple setting up home, and upon 'thoughtful teamwork'. As always, the photographs of room settings used in the book were from expensive retailers and manufacturers such as Heal's, Liberty & Co, Hille and Gordon Russell's own firm. Alan Jarvis provides invaluable shopping tips and budgeting advice in a very practical guide. Commenting on the young couple and their life together planning their first home, he emphasises not just teamwork but 'shopping confidence'.

[260] Gordon Russell in *How to Furnish Your Home* (London: Newman Neame, 1953), unpaginated

Fig. 40 The couple featured in the text *How to Furnish your Home* must work together in the home: ‘the basic requirement is thoughtful teamwork’, *How to furnish your Home,* Gordon Russell and Alan Jarvis, 1953

Russell opens the door to the experimentation with antiques when he advocates a single “well made” piece as a feature in a room. Jarvis takes this one stage further and “junk shop furniture” is purchased, cut up into numerous new pieces and given a coat of paint and a “new look”. Rather bohemian in appearance, these hybrid forms are acceptable as “most Victorian pieces were well made”:

These pieces made seven pieces of furniture. The tall table 7s made two coffee tables; the chair and the pedestal cost 23s, the sideboard and mirror £2 10s and the bow table 10s.

Jarvis suggests that we are rarely able to truly start from scratch when designing a home. Coping with the integration of things that have been inherited, wedding gifts and those items brought to the marital home from “setting up home on our own” could cause problems. This presupposes a number of social conditions and indeed a certain class position. It certainly did not chime with the working class experience of multiple occupancy or with the design choices common in their homes.

The Uses of Literacy and the Domestic Interior

The portrayal of the working class domestic interior and way of life in British working class society and culture of the 1950s in texts such as *The Uses of Literacy* was somewhat out of step with the desired changes to British taste that were expected to be brought about through the literature of design reform. As Richard Hoggart observes:

'Inside, the aspidistra has gone in favour of the ragged-country-lad-eating-cherries and the little-girl-coyly-holding-her-skirt, or the big-girl-in-a-picture-hat-holding-two-Borzois or a single Alsatian.'[261]

The aesthetic education of the working classes that the Government sought to implement with its design education programmes and publications during the 1940s and 1950s was much more reminiscent of Victorian philanthropic gestures towards aesthetic education and the work of both 'aesthetic missionaries' and the Victoria & Albert Museum in educating the 'lower orders' and their sensibilities.

If *The Home and Social Status* worked to reclaim the differences in aesthetics and taste amongst the working class, then *The Uses of Literacy* worked equally hard to transcribe their meaning. With this change in direction within the literature surrounding taste and class a new aesthetic citizen could be brought into being. As Dennis Chapman explained in his paper *Families, Their Needs and Preferences in the Home*:

..but if an objective appraisal of a number of homes is made, as was done in the case of our parlour study, it is found that in each room if the observer will stand in the appropriate position with the correct orientation he will know that no arrangement of furniture, plants, ornaments, bowls or curtains is accidental.[262]

[261] Hoggart, *The Uses of Literacy* 19

[262] Dennis Chapman, *Families, Their Needs and Preferences in the Home*, Council of Industrial Design Furniture Design Conference, Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA), July 1949, 17

Purposeful decisions, then, were being made in the home, with careful arrangement of what might have appeared to be the *wrong furniture*:

But though the furniture calls itself modern and may use new materials, it must embody the same assumptions as to the furnishing of a “really homely” room as the older things bought by the customers’ grandparents……It is a cluttered and congested setting, a burrow deeply away from the outside world. [263]

The *Aesthetic Citizen* and Democratization of Taste

Postwar social reconstruction was not simply significant but vitally important, and implicit in this was the reconstruction and social engineering of the family and home life. Had the tone of the literature of design reform begun to lighten?

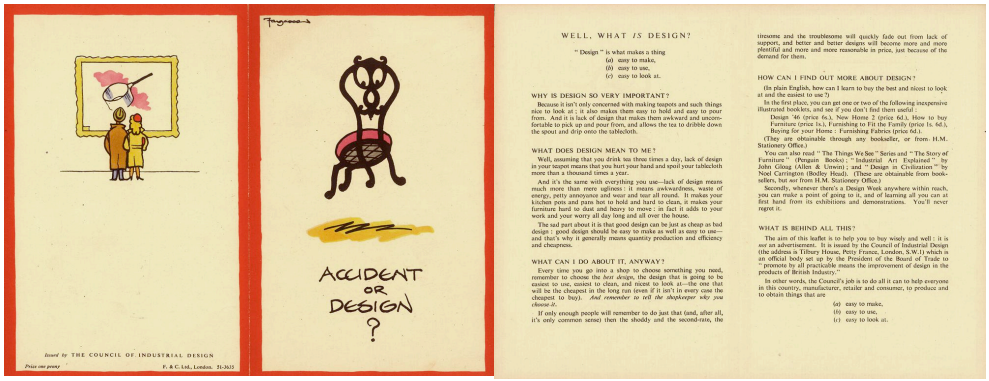


Fig. 41 *Accident or Design? 'Well, what is Design?'*, Council of Industrial Design booklet, 1956

The humorous cover illustrations on the front and back of *Accident or Design?* at least seem to allow some flexibility in view of decisions as to what design might be which were left up in the air for interrogation, rather than defined and then promulgated.

263 Ibid., 20

Talking to Your *Self*

The interpretation of ethnographic accounts of experiences of domestic space and working class environments has been successfully linked to research where the subjectivity of taste and class are paramount. Within that experience is inscribed a 'self', made up of personal recollection that may also be strongly influenced by memory and emotion. This is perhaps because we experience material culture, and design in particular, as a testament to our individual histories, and as a reflection of our social status and taste at any given moment. This is certainly demonstrated in the evidence provided by both Chapman and Hoggart. However accurate and reliable oral testimony, and the histories that it conveys, may be it still reveals a more lucid account of 'class-conscious' experiences of design.

Drawing on ethnographic sources, oral history accounts of design exhibitions and the Mass Observation archives utilizes materials that may better illuminate the value of first-hand accounts in the formation of our critical reception of design and its relationship to class. These eyewitness accounts and recollections provide a better understanding of the design reform project as it was actually experienced, and put the literature in context. Works in the literature of design reform summed up an approach to homemaking that was somewhat divorced from the realities of everyday life, in spite of its protestations to the contrary. These works were at odds with the growing new aesthetic sensibilities that surrounded the burgeoning working class. In recalling the1950s in Britain it is easy to forget that the country was even then still in recovery mode, and in many senses just beginning to understand the full impact of the war from which it had only just emerged. Social upheaval and changing circumstances brought new challenges, as did the re-making of domestic culture and the reform of housing.

Council Estate Life: The House of the Future?

Mass migration to new homes built in postwar Britain brought with it new social structures and a restructuring of the internal dynamics of working class life. Local authorities had rigorous policies relating to those who would be moved into, and subsequently stay in, newly constructed council properties. Pride in one's home and careful preservation of the domestic domain paid dividends when it came to these decisions, and those who made them paid attention to detail:

> We moved in in 1956 from a previous council house in Meanwood. We were not the average "estate sort" My diligence with my home and children (you lot) was in my favour when they came to see if I could have a brand new house! They indeed inspected the beds! Good job the coats were not on that day.[264]

Not being the 'average estate sort' was an indication of the pecking order already inherent in working class society. The individuals identified in *Our Towns: A Close-Up* as feckless and dirty slum estate dwellers were proof enough that there were those who were struggling with basic hygiene. If the images of dirt and disorder lived on from Orwell's *Road to Wigan Pier* then it was in such symbols as coats laid on the beds to stay warm at night. Working class estate life was one formed from tenuous relationships to labour and economic instability. Old housing stock, poorly maintained and badly heated, may have resulted in the use of coats as blankets, but it was no more than that. However, in terms of the profile of prospective tenants for new housing being drawn up it was significant and a possible indicator of slovenly habits.

The 'never-never' and the Shaping of the Domestic Sphere: Sales Not Souls

The shape of the new homes built after the war was driven forward by the limitless potential for a new life and the awkward realities of the limited financial means available to achieve such a life. The push to sell furniture and household

[264] Interview with Subject 1, the author's mother, conducted December 2010

goods in postwar Britain far outweighed any other considerations for the well being of the average working class citizen, and more especially their ability to pay for these goods. This illustration from the series *Life In Britain Today*[265] shows a busting high street packed with commuters and shoppers:

Fig. 42 *Life In Britain Today:* A Typical City Thoroughfare, illustration by Grace Lydia Golden,1946

The accompanying text reads:

Shoppers throng the pavements, and to these shoppers the stores and small-traders offer a wide variety of goods from well-stocked counters. The shops vie with each other in their window displays, for window dressing is an advanced and acknowledged art - the art of attracting customers. The bulk of the shoppers live in the residential suburbs outside the busy city, but - travelling by speedy electric Underground trains - they can easily reach the city's main shopping and entertainment centre.

This portrayal of the consumer and consumption, the most important aspect of the relationship to design, identifies a key issue in the presentation of goods for purchase that the design reformers could do little to change or control. The displays of so many goods were not as perfect as the manufacturers might wish and were not necessarily consistent with their chosen message. Whereas Heals

[265] *Life In Britain Today:* A Typical City Thoroughfare (London: Central Office of Information, 1947). Part of the 'Life in Britain Today' poster series. A Persian text version, Hebrew language version, an Arabic language version and an English language version were produced.

and Liberty & Co may dress their stores and windows lavishly the working class emporiums were less obliging. Hoggart's detailed account of these show rooms strikes a chord:

At first glance these are surely the most hideously tasteless of all modern shops. Every known value in decoration has been discarded: there is no evident deign or pattern; the colours fight with one another; anything new is thrown in simply because it is new. There is strip-lighting together with imitation chandelier lighting; plastics, wood and glass are all glued and stuck and blown together; notice after blazing notice winks, glows and blushes luminously. Hardly a homely setting.[266]

Although the 'make do and mend' mentality was never far away in the working class home, the larger domestic spaces of the new housing estates were 'filled up' and shaped by what was available, not necessarily what was desired. In the following accounts of moving into a new home utility furniture and parents' cast-offs were still in evidence, but were now accompanied by fresh purchases from the 'hire purchase' shop and the so called 'never-never' payment schemes:

The hire purchase we took on was 2/6 per week from Wigfalls. I remember telling the kids to go up the stairs in bare feet. This was of course because we did not have stair carpet. The same thing in the "lounge": NO carpet, or much else for that matter. This is where Wigfalls [hire purchase shop] came in as bit by bit we "got on". I know that because of the fact that we all had more space to fill we were able to expand our ideas. I also remember us having a Club Cheque for one shilling a week over 20 weeks, which the agent came to the house to collect on Fridays. This was for our clothing. [267]

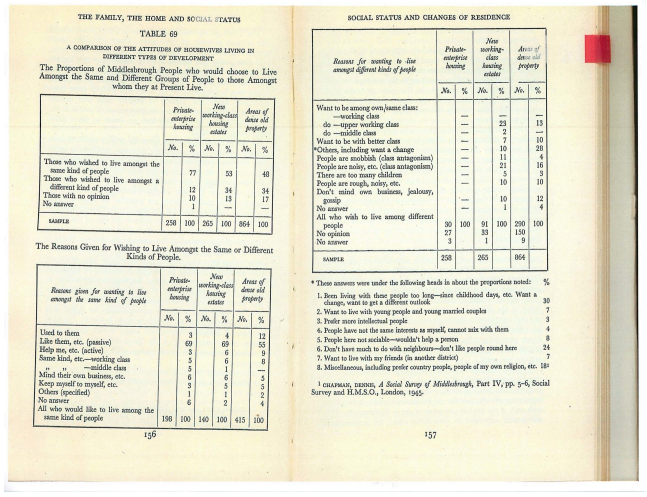
Having to 'expand our ideas' was to be hoped for, but it had to be in the general direction of good taste and improved demeanour. New spaces to fill demanded new forms of furnishing, and this in turn would come about through the shared experiences of tenants mixed together in new social combinations. A desire for new social structures of integrated slum dwellers and non-slum dwellers, alluded

[266] Richard Hoggart, *The Uses of Literacy: Aspects of Working Class Life* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1957) 76
[267] Interview with Subject 1, the author's mother, conducted December 2010

to by Silkin in the New Towns bill of 1945, was subsequently documented in Chapman's 1955 *The Home and Social Status*.[268]

Chapman's work in *The Home and Social Status* clearly outlined the problematic relationships that were formed by social engineering and mixing income levels, even within the working class itself. His study *A Social Survey of Middlesbrough* formed the source of research data in this area. There was a distinction made between respectable working class people and slum clearance types. Social cohesion would be slow to come about in some areas where local housing authorities tried to mix those fresh from the slum clearance properties with those from less despicable circumstances. Slow to materialize and difficult to engineer, social integration would take time and considerable effort on the part of tenants flung together in social cocktails more by accident than by design:

The idea of estates was to integrate us all. We suffered badly because of our four beds: it was suggested we were "slum clearance" This was actually happening, as the council re-housed many people from the old back-to-backs and much older properties to a new estate just built.[269]



THE FAMILY, THE HOME AND SOCIAL STATUS

TABLE 69

A COMPARISON OF THE ATTITUDES OF HOUSEWIVES LIVING IN DIFFERENT TYPES OF DEVELOPMENT

The Proportions of Middlesbrough People who would choose to Live Amongst the Same and Different Groups of People to those Amongst whom they at Present Live.

	Private-enterprise housing		New working-class housing estates		Areas of dense old property	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Those who wished to live amongst the same kind of people		77		53		48
Those who wished to live amongst a different kind of people		12		34		34
Those with no opinion		10		13		17
No answer		1		—		—
SAMPLE	258	100	265	100	864	100

The Reasons Given for Wishing to Live Amongst the Same or Different Kinds of People.

Reasons given for wanting to live amongst the same kind of people	Private-enterprise housing		New working-class housing estates		Areas of dense old property	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Used to them		3		4		12
Like them, etc. (passive)		69		69		55
Help me, etc. (active)		3		6		9
Same kind, etc.—working class		5		6		8
" " —middle class		5		1		—
Mind their own business, etc.		6		6		5
Keep myself to myself, etc.		3		3		5
Others (specified)		1		1		2
No answer		6		2		4
All who would like to live among the same kind of people	198	100	140	100	415	100

156

SOCIAL STATUS AND CHANGES OF RESIDENCE

Reasons for wanting to live amongst different kinds of people	Private-enterprise housing		New working-class housing estates		Areas of dense old property	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Want to be among own/same class:						
—working class		—		—		—
do —upper working class		—		23		13
do —middle class		—		2		—
Want to be with better class		—		7		10
*Others, including want a change		—		10		28
People are snobbish (class antagonism)		—		11		4
People are noisy, etc. (class antagonism)		—		21		16
There are too many children		—		5		3
People are rough, noisy, etc.		—		10		10
Don't mind own business, jealousy, gossip		—		10		12
No answer		—		1		4
All who wish to live among different people	30	100	91	100	290	100
No opinion	27		33		150	
No answer	3		1		9	
SAMPLE	258		265		864	

* These answers were under the following heads in about the proportions noted: %

1. Born living with these people too long—since childhood days, etc. Want a change, want to get a different outlook 30
2. Want to live with young people and young married couples 7
3. Prefer more intellectual people 3
4. People have not the same interests as myself, cannot mix with them 4
5. People here not sociable—wouldn't help a person 8
6. Don't have much to do with neighbours—don't like people round here 24
7. Want to live with my friends (in another district) 7
8. Miscellaneous, including prefer country people, people of my own religion, etc. 13

[1] CHAPMAN, DENNIS, *A Social Survey of Middlesbrough*, Part IV, pp. 5-6, Social Survey and H.M.S.O., London, 1945.

157

Fig. 43 Chapman, *The Home and Social Status,* Table 69

[268] Dennis Chapman, *The Home and Social Status* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1955)
[269] Ibid.,.

The equipment and specification of the new properties was indeed a dream come true. Indoor toilets and a separate bathroom were luxurious standards, as was the ‘Sayco’ boiler providing heat and hot water.

Fig. 44 Subject One outside the new house, 1956 and Advertisement for Hotpoint washing machine, 1956

With the house being brand-new it was a dream come true. Four bedrooms, a huge living room, a superb kitchen with its “Sayco” boiler in the corner and a Belfast sink. Remember baths in it and getting dried on the draining board?[270]

A ‘Hotpoint’ washing machine would be added to complete the kitchen facilities and aspirations to a new, cleaner life. Chapman makes little mention of the kitchen or its equipment, having deliberately excluded it from his study.

It was at one point considered possible that the furnishing and equipment of the kitchen might offer an alternative basis for the assessment of social status. Much of the advertising relating to refrigerators and heat-storage solid fuel cookers makes an appeal to sentiments associated with social status, and in articles and illustrations in the home magazines these items are often presented as an essential accoutrement of high status.[271]

[270] Interview with Subject 1, the author’s mother, conducted December 2010
[271] Chapman, *The Home and Social Status,*115 -117

Fig. 45 Subject One outside the new house, 1956

Grateful for the smallest of improvements they overlooked any shortcomings in their immediate environment.

Grandma said “You aren’t taking this, it’s too dangerous”, which of course was because of the pylon at the top of the garden, which I don’t remember seeing. I was so excited – with the house being brand-new it was a dream come true.[272]

The provision of outdoor space, as an extension of the domestic space and as an area to grow vegetables, was also important in the development of the family unit, but it had a more significant role to play, as Chapman notes, in providing flowers to decorate the house, and in developing the wife’s aesthetic interests.[273]

New Aesthetic Sensibilities: *Everything* and the Kitchen Sink

Parallels can be found during this period between the representations of the vulgar and crude in the subject matter of the ‘Kitchen Sink’ school of painters, plays such as *Look Back in Anger* by John Osborne and the material published by the Council of Industrial Design to educate the British working class. Were they not all in some way a moral compass for events occurring in the postwar

[272] Interview with Subject 1, the author’s mother, conducted December 2010
[273] Chapman, *The Home and Social Status*, 49

reconstruction project and the re-establishment of the class debate in the British social sphere?

Britain, Abundance and Democracy

The specific aesthetic of working class life was portrayed extensively in films, stage plays, literature and painting in the latter part of the 1950s and early 1960s. In novels of the period we see the struggle to comprehend and convey the complexity of the many faces of this new class identity. The growing independence of the consumer, the relative wealth of the working class, their spending power and the need for their labour, are all resonant of the ambitions for the industrial economy of the nineteenth century: in essence, a situation that is never fully resolved. This new working class, exemplified in John Osborne's *Look Back in Anger* (1956), John Braine's *Room at the Top* (1957) and Stan Barstow's *A Kind of Loving* (1960), is restless, anxious and resentful. The offer of the consumer society, now so easily within reach, still does not reform or alter substantially the social schema.

This growing sensitivity to, and description of, working class aggravation and irritation at its own frustrated attempts at self-improvement is seen vividly here, and demonstrates the aesthetic of the working class more honestly than the material published by the Council of Industrial Design to educate the British working class.

Each of the works cited shows the dark shadow of anger and resentment, ambition and social climbing, acceptance and defeatism, all of which feature centrally in the continuing definition of the working classes. The nature of the working classes, and the divisions between the 'respectable' and the 'rough', are still very much in evidence. Their coarse and uncultivated character is set within a social paradigm that shows vestiges of the Victorian structures it was supposed to have eradicated. The working class live in crowded spaces with ugly, old

furniture, or they aspire to live in middle-class homes with central heating and a contemporary style, or, worst of all, they are upper working class or lower middle-class, struggling to recreate through imitation the style of their social superiors.

If *The Home and Social Status* had begun to capture in more detail the social mores of the postwar working class home, then here once again was a vivid portrait of the actuality of domestic life and habits in this portrayal of the working class domestic interior and way of life. The design reform programmes, films, exhibitions and publications produced during the1940s and throughout the 1950s proved yet again to be out of touch with the realities of working class existence. In opposition to these there is a distinctly different take on the social project seen in the work of the Kitchen Sink artists, who included John Bratby, Jack Smith and Edward Middleditch, which had its roots in the traditions of social realism.

Fig. 46 John Bratby, *The Toilet*, 1955, and *Still life with Chip Frier*, 1954.

In works such as *Still Life with Chip Frier*, 1954, and *The Toilet*, 1955, John Bratby alludes to the domestic circumstances of the working classes and the coarseness of their existence. However, Bratby's interior betrays something of his middle-class position in its bohemian rush-seated chairs, silver teapot and

delicate glassware jostling for position amongst the typical materials of the still-life construction – kitchen implements, everyday packaging and commodities.

If E.P. Thompson identified the artisan character of the nineteenth century, then Richard Hoggart allows us to recognize the new working class sensibility brought about by the political, health and education reforms of the mid-twentieth century. On the one hand we have the advent of the grammar school, the scholarship girl or boy, the 'anxious and uprooted', and on the other the confident worker, symbolic of empowered labour, served by mass culture and shown as a *subject* within mass-entertainment mediums. Here then lies the dilemma. The manifestation of working class culture was no longer confined. It was to be celebrated and revealed in all its diverse forms as worthy of attention. The resonance of this new working class identity was felt in drama, writing and music of the 1950s and 1960s and inspired a change in approach to the coarse, rough nature of working class identity.

In this the new era of industrial prosperity and consumer economics we see a new insistence on the working class as the powerhouse of society, not unlike the situation in 1851 but informed by a more clearly-defined culture. Freed to find its own sensibilities and values afresh, without the limiting constraints of the old servile economy, relatively prosperous working classmen and women defined culture and social value once more. There would be problems, too, as the uprooted and the anxious working classes, defined by Hoggart as those who became 'declassed' by virtue of winning scholarships to grammar schools, struggled with their own culture, fitting neither the working class they came from or the middle class they had ostensibly joined. Hoggart is brutal in his portrayal of them:

> They own the Penguin selection from Eliot, as well as some other Penguins and Pelicans……they probably own a copy of the Pelican edition of Freud's *Psychopathology of Everyday Life*.[274]

[274] Hoggart, *The Uses of Literacy*, 239

The Emergence of the *Underclass* Once Again

We turn a corner in the late 1950s and early 1960s, at which point working class sensibilities become admirable and in many ways rather fashionable. In images of 'swinging London' through to the *I'm Backing Britain* campaign (1968), in fashion centres such as Carnaby Street and the Kings Road in Chelsea, and in films such as *Blow Up* (1966) and *Up the Junction* (1968) the working class are reinstated as an energetic cultural force, observed in terms of their uniqueness within a society playing with class identity and upward mobility. However, other films made during the 1960s, such as *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* (1960), *A Taste of Honey* (1961), *This Sporting Life* (1963), *Cathy Come Home* (1966), *Poor Cow* (1967) and *Kes* (1969) told a very different story, echoing the tribulations of the nineteenth-century working class adrift in an urban consumer society they were both unused to and unable to participate in. It is here, in a new type of literature, that we became aware of the reemergence of an underclass in British society, the ramifications of which are still felt today. In the underclass of the late 1960s and early 1970s we should read the reinstatement of the urban underworlds pictured by Hogarth and Doré, an urban environment of crime, poverty and substance abuse comparable with any present day inner-city council estate.

As the social mechanisms of working class continued to be exposed in such varied arenas as literature and film, both documentary and fictional, so too did the specifics of their cultural predilections and taste. The combined effects of castigation and celebration confused once more the perception of the working class and their domestic spaces. Within the space of thirty years the working class went from being first reviled as dirty and disordered, without taste and lacking moral fibre, then courted as the new model citizens with bright and productive future lives centrally involved in building a green and pleasant land, until they were finally celebrated as a distinct and unique culture.

More serious issues of social engineering and organization gradually superseded the reformation of the working class and their taste as a social undertaking. The projects begun during the postwar period in the construction of new town societies gave way to further housing initiatives. These would be the poorly built high-rise block developments destined to be the undoing of much of the social cohesion of those working class tenants forced into occupation through rehousing policies. The divisive policy of 'right to buy' undid the last remnants of community on many council estates and paradoxically drove taste back out unto the open once more. Highly visible and deeply expressive demonstrations of working class taste asserted themselves again in a wholehearted desire for individuation.

The final piece of this class puzzle falls into place with the most recent representation of the cultural and design tastes of the working classes in the *Great British Class Survey.*[275] A BBC research project in conjunction with two major universities it is dedicated to fully understanding whether class is still significant through a number of questions. It also uses composite images of various family groups to represent to help identify a cross-section of working class family types in Britain today. The participants in the survey must click on the image that most closely resembles their own family.

Fig. 47 Family Groups, *Great British Class Survey*, BBC, 2011

[275] BBC, *Great British Class Survey*, 2011- https://ssl.bbc.co.uk/labuk/experiments/class/ [accessed 26 February 2013], by Mike Savage of the University of York and Fiona Devine of the University of Manchester,

Conclusion

A Matter of Taste

In attempting to draw this discussion to a conclusion it is difficult to know what to say about the consequences of the design reform projects detailed in the text. What would have happened had the British working class public paid no attention to the campaign contained in the literature of design reform? The urgency with which the projects were pursued in each period, the language of the reformers, their disappointed tone, and the barely concealed contempt for their target audience all lead to the conclusion that this was a lost cause form the outset. In the event to all intents and purposes the British public refused to participate in the desired way although still keenly aware of how taste was changing around them and because of them. In paying no attention to the design reformer's propaganda around taste the working classes developed and sustained a singular set of characteristics that were by no means homogenous and that came to epitomize their class. Spurred on by more serious considerations in daily life than their taste they invented for themselves a persistent state of class conditions that contained within it recognizable working class motifs and attitudes. The conservation of their culture was an unspoken task expressed in their everyday design choices, subject to change from one generation to another and influenced by social movement within and without their own group.

The Original Working Class and The Loss of Artisanal Culture

Recognising the transformation of the original working class from an agrarian, artisanal culture into an urban industrial context is to also understand how far they had travelled in terms of their values from their original conception of daily life and domesticity to their new municipal context. As we have seen radical social restructuring was necessary among the working class to join the nineteenth century industrial city and to participate in urban culture. In doing so

the working class found themselves in the worst of all worlds in terms of employment - and frequent unemployment - poor remuneration, third rate housing and malnutrition.

It would also be unrealistic to imagine that this state of affairs may not have existed in the rural environment they had deserted for the city. But in the shift from the country to the city we see many aspects of working class culture reconstituted but without its central binding ethos. The undignified attentions of the missionary aesthetes and slumming Victorian middle class simply highlighted their desperate loss of culture. Victorian reformers chose to bring the working class up to their standards through education and inculcation with little respect for their traditions. Philanthropic projects designed to assist in the assimilation into city life also cleansed the population of its prior class convictions, recreations and domestic arrangements.

Bad Attitudes: the 'Indiscriminating Public'

The authors whose work has ben featured here, Bertram, Gloag, Pevsner and Russell, held firmly to their conviction that the poor taste of the working class was one of the chief reasons for the failure of any improvement in British design culture. This recriminatory attitude towards the working class 'indiscriminating public' demonstrated here by the literature of design reform, its originators and its authors, during the years from 1937 to 1948 was closely aligned to the political thrust of the period. This turbulent period encompassed the socioeconomic effects of two world wars, the final years of decline of the British Empire, the loss and subsequent redevelopment of world trade and a housing rebuilding project of huge proportions. Looked at in these terms it is perhaps easier to recognize the necessity for the design reform campaign or at least to see its rationale, but this in no way justifies its methods or its tone of address.

The economic slump of the 1930s posed significant problems to the working classes in Britain and these were not dissimilar to those experienced in the Great Depression across the rest of the industrialized world. However, in Britain it exposed even greater discrepancies between the classes, the haves and have-nots, and between the working class North and predominately middle class South. The economic impacts on manufacturing and heavy industries were borne by the working class. While the light industries may have prospered in the South and fed a burgeoning consumer culture with small household items, the traditional northern manufacturing base of textiles and clothing was cut back to the bone and in serious decline.[276] The overall effects of design culture in the thirties, and of Modernism as an expression of that, were not those of the brave new world but of further polarization. W.H Auden's poem *Letter to Byron* highlights the shameful irony of this 'progress':

We're entering now the Eotechnic Phase
Thanks to the Grid and all these new alloys;
That is, at least, what Lewis Mumford says
A world of Aertex underwear for boys,
Huge plate-glass windows, walls absorbing noise,
Where the smoke nuisance is utterly abated
And all the furniture is chromium-plated.

Well, you might think so if you went to Surrey
And stayed for week-ends with the well-to--do,
Your car too fast, too personal your worry
To look too closely at the wheeling view.
But in the north it simply isn't true.
To those who live in Warrington or Wigan,
It's not a white lie, it's a whacking big 'un.[277]

---

[276] Juliet Gardiner, *The Thirties: An Intimate History of Britain,* (London: Harper Press, 2011)

[277] *Longer Contemporary Poems* (London: Penguin Books, 1966)

Taste considerations were far from the minds of the working class poor during the years of depression as one might expect. Yet the insistence of Government bodies and organisations on pursuing reform projects remained unabated. The more that British institutions pressed the issue the worse the gulf between them and their proposed audience became. But then there was very little consideration for the audience who seem to have been underestimated and misunderstood.

The working classes were readers of all types of materials. Reading for pleasure and improvement through literature, history, science and philosophy had been a mainstay of working class culture since the nineteenth century and this was further enabled through publishers such as *Penguin*. *Penguin* had intended their books to reach a wide audience at their inception and they certainly did. But whether the working class constituency of their audience was quite as extensive as they might have hoped is debatable.[278] Penguin certainly attracted an audience of readers from the working classes but it was not necessarily for texts on design and home decoration. *The Things We See* series and the other outputs of the Council of Industrial Design were so dour in nature, so plainly dictatorial and without empathy for typical working class homes or incomes that it is unlikely their readership numbered many from the working class. They would no doubt have featured in many public library collections however. The presentation and tone of these texts were not that of the magazine and reading them could very probably have been perceived as frivolous, and in Hoggart's terms 'getting above yourself'. Reading newspapers and hobby magazines was widespread and this in all likelihood more than satisfied the readers desire for education in matters of design and home improvement.

[278] Richard Hoggart, *The Uses of Literacy: Aspects of Working Class Life* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1957) 247

Manufacturing a New Working Class

It has been demonstrated here that these ardent design reformers would persist in their belief that the inculcation of good taste and moral sensibilities would be a cure for much that ailed the working class, if only they would comply. In 1946 the new approach to social improvement and taste showed up clearly in the Governments attempts to educate and instill a sense of good taste in the working classes. But how was *design* to achieve this? The function of design within government policy in postwar society was to direct the uncivilized towards the pure aesthetic, that of the good and the worthy. Just as long as it was not an aesthetic that was of *their own making*. Education through the arts and the appreciation of art was already well understood as an approach to re-sensitizing the working class persona and soothing the savage within.

What role was *design* appreciation to take in this if it were not to be in focusing on the improvement of domestic circumstances in new homes in New Towns for new citizens? They must be reformed citizens and not the dirty occupants of slum dwellings. Appreciation of the modern interior and its clean composition would in turn lead to the clean individual. Personal hygiene and improved morality would emanate from the new homes in New Towns. The dirt and disorder once synonymous with the denizens of city slums was purged. Postwar Britain could no longer afford to be associated with the infested, unhygienic homes of the troubled masses.

When the postwar Government set out to reinstate the housing stock lost during the war and put manufacturing on its feet again it also began the re-statement of social values and the aesthetic education of the British public. It achieved this through a planned strategy of publications, broadcasting, exhibitions and design events:

Over six years, this (Attlee 1945 - 51) administration made over 500 films, ran upwards of 30

advertising campaigns each year, organised over 100,000 lectures nationwide, set up over 170 exhibitions and published numerous pamphlets and books (particularly on economic information). No former Government of the United Kingdom had allocated so great a proportion of its resources to the tasks of informing and cajoling its citizens.[279]

Local housing programmes from 1946 onwards were actively used to promulgate the purposes of design to the public, while festivals and exhibitions were used to showcase design as a tool for social ambition and transformation. In fact the promulgation of good taste in design has been in use since 1945 in much of government policy. In addition we also find significant segmentation taking place within these discussions of the audiences for design. In the Report of the Scottish Committee of the Council of Industrial Design (COID), working in co-operation with government in the re-establishment of consumption in the UK, they stated that:

In order to demonstrate to the public the potentiality of the goods at present available, exhibition of completely furnished pre-fabricated houses have been arranged by us and held in Edinburgh and Glasgow.

Their audiences were identified and segmented by class:

The second and larger group of adults are the uninitiated- those who follow the custom of their group and believe that they "know what they like". There is no point in exaggerating the amount of interest they at present feel in design, or minimising the difficulty of raising their critical awareness.

If their critical awareness was so poor, how was the citizen to participate in design? This is the question about design reform that most have tended to avoid.

---

[279] Martin Moore, *The Origins of Modern Spin: Democratic Government and the Media in Britain 1945-51,* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006) 7

Design is seen as a largely subjective judgment and worse than that, actually more than anything it is perceived to be about taste and therefore inevitably about class and status. If the working classes were to participate in design and in developing the discourses around design, style and the home without guidance then there might be unforeseen consequences. There would be an impact on demand for certain types of goods and not necessarily the right types of goods. Subject to the whims of retailers working class customers could be easily led in the wrong direction if it were not for the intervention of design reformers. There is a distinctly dim view taken of both retailers and customers in the discourse around taste in British design during this period.

The Aesthetics of the Working Class

Finally, the recognition that there was indeed a definite working class culture and that its traits were distinct and discernible would be a turning point in the approach to understanding how working class taste was expressed. The early work of Mass Observation, the research conducted by Dennis Chapman and others identified the aesthetics of daily life in the working class home revealing a complicated and intricate system of taste.

How then would we tackle the issue of design in everyday life effectively? How would we make a definition of good taste in design that was workable and practical? Whereas the government and other design organizations put good taste in design at the centre of things, those experiencing it had little or no point of reference for what made it so crucial. ‘Capacity building’ was then and is still the order of the day now. The capacity building that would be accomplished through the literature of design reform would translate into production and purchasing, and the subsequent rebuilding of the British economy and its social fabric. This attitude to improvement through design contained in the literature of design reform survived until the end of the twentieth century and continues to

exist in many forms in the twenty-first and is at its most prominent amongst Government regeneration schemes. Capacity building as it exists today is full of self-empowerment and self-identity issues and we still see the same mantra of self-improvement spoken through good taste in design in many government directives.[280]

The concentration upon rewriting community identity through the decimation of industry and social organizations that might have protected and preserved it has been a key feature of the planned reorganization of the working class life for much of the last century. This had been apparent since the 1930s and was an objective buried deep in the design reformers project. The rebuilding and regeneration of the working class environment, housing estates and individual dwellings during the last eighty years or so has been synonymous with the reworking of class identity. If improvement was to be made to daily life through the acquisition of good things and through habitation of good environments then it was along specified lines and in ways that were first and foremost beneficial to the economy, to Government and to industry alike. Any changes and real improvements to the quality of life of the working class have sadly always been secondary to these considerations.

[280] ODPM, (2004) *Community involvement in planning: The Governments Objectives,* London and ODPM, (2005) *Planning Policy Statement 1, The Government's Objectives for the Planning System*,

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Primary Sources

Published material

Bertram, Anthony, *Bright Defiler*, (London: Chapman and Hall, 1940)

————, *Design in Daily Life* (London: Methuen, 1937)

————, *Design in Everyday Things* (London: BBC, 1937)

————, *Design* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1938)

————, *The Enemies of Design* (London: Design and Industries Association, 1947)

————, *The House: a Machine for Living in: a Summary of the Art and Science of Homemaking Considered Functionally* (London: A&C Black, 1935)

————, *The House* (London: A & C Black, 1945)

————, *Men Adrift*, (London: Chapman and Hall, 1935)

————, *Pavement and Peaks*, (London: Chapman and Hall, 1933)

————, *The Pleasures of Poverty,* (London: Hollis & Carter, 1950)

————, *They Came to The Castle*, (London: Chapman and Hall, 1931)

————, *Three Meet,* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1932)

Braddell, Darcy, Mrs. Lecture, Royal Society of Arts, 1942, RSA Papers

————, Royal Society of Arts Lecture 5, *Common Sense in Furniture Design,* February 11, 1942, RSA Papers

Brett, Lionel, *The Things We See – No 2: Houses*, (London: Penguin, 1947)

Carrington, Noel, *The Shape of Things,* (London: Nicholson and Watson Ltd, 1939)

Chapman, Dennis, *Families, Their Needs and Preferences in the Home*, Council of Industrial Design Furniture Design Conference, Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA), July 1949,

————, *The Home and Social Status* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1955)

Chermayeff, Serge, *Design and the Public Good: Selected Writings 1930 – 1980,* (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1982)

Denby, Elizabeth, *Europe Re-housed*, (London: Allen and Unwin, 1938)

Denby , Elizabeth, Lecture, Royal Society of Arts, *Using Space to Advantage*, December 10, 1941, (London: RSA Papers)

————, Lecture, Royal Society of Arts, 1942, (London: RSA Papers)

Design in the Festival: Illustrating a Selection of Well-designed Goods in Production in Festival Year 1951 (London: HMSO for the Council of Industrial Design, 1951)

Design Quiz (London: Council of Industrial Design, 1946)

Dickens, Charles, *Hard Times* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1861-2)

————, *Little Dorrit* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1867-9)

————, *Our Mutual Friend* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1976)

Eastlake, Charles, *Hints on household taste in furniture, upholstery, and other details* (London: Longmans, Green, 1878)

Education for the consumer: Art in Elementary and Secondary School Education (London: HMSO, 1935)

Farr, Michael Austin Lines, *Design in British industry: A mid-century survey* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1955)

Furnishing to Fit The Family (London: HMSO for Council of Industrial Design, 1947)

Gissing, George, *The Nether World* (London: Smith, Elder, 1889)

Gloag, John, *Design in Modern Life* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1934)

————, *The English Tradition in Design* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1946)

Hobson, John Atkinson, *Problems of Poverty: an Enquiry into the Industrial Conditions of the Poor* (London: Methuen, 1891)

Hoffman, Philip Christopher, *They Also Serve: The Story of the Shop Worker,* (London: Porcupine, 1949)

Howard, Ebenezer, *Garden Cities of Tomorrow*, (London: Swan Sonnenschein, 1902)

Jarvis, Alan, *The Things We See Indoors and Out* (London, Penquin, 1946)

Jerrold, Blanchard, *London: a Pilgrimage*, illustrations by Gustave Doré (London, 1872)

Lethaby, W.R., *Architecture, Mysticism, and Myth* (London, 1892)

Mass Observation Unit, 'Britain Can Make It' exhibition interviews, 1946, Design Council Archive

Mayhew, Henry, *London Labour and the London Poor* (London: Griffin, 1861-2)

Morris, William, *News from Nowhere* (London: Kelmscott Press, 1892)

National Statistics, *60 Years Of Social Survey, 1941–2001* (Norwich: HMSO, 2001).

News Chronicle, Tuesday, March 30, 1943

New Home, (London: HMSO for Council of Industrial Design, 1946)

Our Towns A Close-Up, A Study Made During 1939 – 1942 (London: Oxford University Press, 1943)

Pevsner, Nikolaus, *An Inquiry into Industrial Art in England* (Cambridge: Macmillan, 1937)

————, *Visual Pleasures from Everyday Things: An Attempt to Establish Criteria by which the Aesthetic Qualities of Design Can be Judged* (London: Batsford, 1946)

The Problem of Raising Design Standards in Industry [leaflet], (London: Council of Industrial Design, c.1958)

Pugin, A.W., *Contrasts*, (London, 1836)

Read, Herbert, *The Practice of Design,* (London: Lund Humphries, 1946)

Ruskin, John, *The Crown of Wild Olive: three lectures on work, traffic and war* (London, 1864)

————, The Stones of Venice, (London: Smith, Elder, 1851-1853)

Russell, Gordon, and Alan Jarvis, *How to Furnish Your Home* (London: Newman Neame, 1953)

Russell, Gordon [et al.], The Faculty of Royal Designers for Industry Presents the Story of Design at Work (London: Royal Society of Arts and the Council of Industrial Design, 1948)

————, *How to Buy Furniture,* (London: HMSO for the Council for Industrial Design, 1947)

————, *The Things We See – No 3: Furniture* (London, Penguin, 1947)

————, 'What is Good Design?' *Design,* 1 (1949)

The Value of Good Design: a Report on the Scottish Design Congress, 1954, ed. Alister Maynard, (Edinburgh: Council of Industrial Design, Scottish Committee, 1954)

The Working-Class Home: Its Furnishing and Equipment (London: Council for Art and Industry, 1937)

Correspondence

Letters from others to Anthony Bertram, Houghton Library, Harvard College Library, Harvard University

Letter from John Armstrong to Anthony Bertram, ca.1936, bMS Eng (3) 1951, *83M-69, Houghton Library, Harvard

Letter from Harry Pollitt to Anthony Bertram, 1936 – 37, bMS Eng (3) 1951, *83M-69, Houghton Library, Harvard

Penguin Archive Materials

Letter from Edward Young to Anthony Bertram, 17 October, 1938, Penguin Archive Materials, DM1107/S22

Letter from Edward Young to Anthony Bertram, December 15, 1938, Penguin Archive Materials, DM1107/S22

Letters from Edward Young to Anthony Bertram 3 January, 28 March, 12 May 1939, Penguin Archive Materials, DM1107/S22

Letter from Edward Young to Anthony Bertram, 3 January 1939. DM1107/S22 - Editorial correspondence with Anthony Bertram, 1938-1949

Letter from Edward Young to Anthony Bertram, 28 March 1939, Penguin Archive Materials, DM1107/S22

Letter from Allen Lane to Anthony Bertram, 30 April 1941. Penguin Archive Materials, DM1107/S22

Letter to A.B. Fairclough, Penguin series editor, 27 July 1946. Penguin Archive Materials, DM1107/S22

Letter from Anthony Bertram, October 18, 1946 Penguin Archive Materials, DM1107/S22

Memo from A.S.B Glover re Anthony Bertram's redraft of Design, November 8, 1946 Penguin Archive Materials, DM1107/S22

Memo prepared by A.B.R. Fairclough, Penguin series editor, Penguin Archive Materials, DM1107/E0703/E1-7

Letter to Gordon Russell at the Board of Trade from A.B.R. Fairclough, Penguin series editor, Penguin Archive Materials, DM1107/E0703/E1-7

Letter to Gordon Russell at the Board of Trade from A.B.R. Fairclough 28th February 1946, Penguin editor of the series, Penguin Archive Materials, DM1107/E0703/E1-7

Letter to Gordon Russell at Kingcombe, Campden. from A.B.R. Fairclough, Penguin series editor, Penguin Archive Materials, DM1107/E0703/E1-7

Letter from Crofton Gane to Messrs Penguin Books Ltd, 8 October1946, Penguin Archive Materials, DM1107/E0703/E1-7

Letter to The Hon. Lionel Brett from A.B.R. Fairclough, January 18th, 1946, Penguin series editor, Penguin Archive Materials, DM1107/E0703/E1-7

Letter from The Hon. Lionel Brett to A.B.R. Fairclough, April 26th, 1946, Penguin series editor, Penguin Archive Materials, DM1107/E0703/E1-7

Parliamentary papers

Commons Sitting, ORDERS OF THE DAY, NEW TOWNS BILL HC Deb 8 May 1946 Hansard, vol 422 cc1072-184 1072

'Britain Can Make It' exhibition, HC Debate 28 October 1946, Hansard, vol 428 cc262-4 262

Wyatt, Woodrow (Birmingham, Aston), HOME AND OVERSEAS TRADE HC Deb 05 November 1946, Hansard, vol 428 cc1231-345 1231

Morrison, Herbert, HC Debate, May 23, 1949. Hansard, vol 465 cc 963-1017.

Morrison, Herbert, HC Debate, May 23, 1949, Hansard, vol 465 cc963-1017

Department of Housing: The Housing Act, 1980, http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1980/51 [accessed 15 February 2013]

Gorell, John Gorell Barnes, Sir,Baron: *Art and Industry* : *Report of the Committee Appointed by the Board of Trade under the Chairmanship of Lord Gorell on the Production and Exhibition of Articles of Good Design and Everyday Use* (The Gorell Report), (London: HMSO,1932)

Secondary Sources

Books and Journals

Addison, Paul, *The Road to 1945: British Politics and the Second World War* (London: Cape, 1975)

Anderson, Lindsay [et al.], *Declaration,* ed. Tom Maschler (London: MacGibbon & Kee, 1957)

Attfield, Judy, *Utility Reassessed: The Role of Ethics in the Practice of Design* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002)

————, *Wild Things: The Material Culture of Everyday Life*, (Oxford: Berg, 2000)

Auerbach, Jeffrey A., *The Great Exhibition of 1851: A Nation on Display*, (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1999)

August, Andrew *The British Working Class*, (Harlow: Pearson Longman, 2007)
Barnett, Corelli, *The Lost Victory: British Dreams, British Realities; 1945-1950* (London: Macmillan, 1995)

Bennett, Tony, "The Exhibitionary Complex." in *Culture/Power/History: A Reader in Contemporary Social Theory*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994)

Black, Lawrence and Hugh Pemberton, eds., *An Affluent Society?: Britain's Post-War 'Golden Age' Revisited*, (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing, 2004)

Bourdieu, Pierre, *Distinction*: *a Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* (1979) (London: Routledge, 1992)

Bradbury, Malcolm, *The Social Context of Modern English Literature* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1971)

Bradshaw, David, 'Introduction', in: *The Hidden Huxley: Contempt and Compassion for the Masses 1920–36*, ed. David Bradshaw, (London: Faber and Faber, 1994)

Brown, William, Fabian, Andrew C., *Darwin,* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010)

Burke, Peter, *History and Social Theory* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2005)

Cardiff, David, Scannell, Paddy, *The Social History of British Broadcasting,* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991)

Carey, John, *The Intellectuals and the Masses: Pride and Prejudice among the Literary Intelligentsia, 1880-1939* (London: Faber, 1992)

Carstairs, G. Morris, *This Island Now: the Surge of Social Change in the Twentieth Century (the Reith Lectures, 1962)* (London: Hogarth Press, 1963)

Clive, John Leonard, Susan Pedersen and Peter Mandler eds., *After the Victorians: Private Conscience and Public Duty in Modern Britain:* Essays in Memory of John Clive (London: Routledge, 1994)

Cohen, Deborah, *Household Gods: the British and their Possessions* (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2006)

Collins, Michael, *The Likes of Us: a Biography of the White Working Class* (London: Granta, 2004)

Coulson, Anthony J., *A Bibliography of Design in Britain, 1851-1970* (London: Design Council, 1979)

Darling, Elizabeth, *Re-Forming Britain*, (London: Routledge, 2007)

Day, Gary, *Class* (London: Routledge, 2001)

De Certeau, Michel, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1984)

De Vries, Jan, *The Industrious Revolution,* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008)

Denis, R.C., 'Teaching by Example: Education and the Formation of South Kensington's Museums' in: *A Grand Design: The Art of the Victoria and Albert Museum,* ed. Malcolm Baker and Brenda Richardson (London: V & A Publications, 1997)

Douglas, Mary, *Thought Styles: Critical Essays On Good Taste*, (London: Sage, 1996)

Eagleton, Terry, *Literary Theory: An Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996)

Edwards, Clive, *Turning Houses Into Homes: A History of the Retailing and Consumption of Domestic Furnishings* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005)

Frayling, Christopher, *On Craftsmanship*, (London: Oberon Books, 2011)

Fox, Pamela, *Class Fictions: Shame and Resistance in the British Working Class Novel* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1994)

Fyvel, Tosco R., *Intellectuals Today: Problems in a Changing Society* (New York: Schocken Books, 1968)

Gallagher, Catherine, *The Body Economic: Life, Death and Sensation in Political Economy and the Victorian Novel*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006)

Games, Stephen, *Pevsner: the Early Life: Germany and Ar*t (London: Continuum, 2010)

Gardiner, Juliet, *The Thirties: An Intimate History of Britain,* (London: Harper Press, 2011)

Garfield, Simon, *Our Hidden Lives: The Remarkable Diaries Of Post-War Britain* (London: Random House, 2005)

The Great British Class Survey 2011, ed. *Mike Savage and Fiona Devine, BBC, https://ssl.bbc.co.uk/labuk/experiments/class/ [accessed 27 February 2013]*

Green, Martin Burgess, *A Mirror for Anglo-Saxons: a Discovery of America, a Rediscovery of England*
(New York: Harper, 1960)

Greenberg, Reesa, and Bruce W. Ferguson, eds., *Thinking About Exhibitions*, (London: Routledge, 1996)

Harries, Susie, *Nikolaus Pevsner: the Life* (London: Chatto and Windus, 2011),

Hatherley, Owen, *A Guide to the New Ruins of Great Britain* (London: Verso, 2011)

————, *Militant Modernism* (London: Zero Books, 2009)

Hanley, Lynsey, *Estates: an Intimate History* (London: Granta, 2007)

Hattersley, Roy, 'The Equality Delusion', *Guardian*, 24 January 2009

Hennessy, Peter*, Having It So Good: Britain in the Fifties* (London: Penguin, 2007)

————, *Never Again: Britain, 1945-1951* (London: Vintage, 1993)

Hewison, Robert, *Under Siege: Literary Life in London, 1939-1945* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1977)

Highmore, Ben*, 'Bitter After Taste: Affect, Food and Social Aesthetics'* in *The Affect Theory Reader*, eds. Melissa Gregg and Gregory J. Seigworth (Duke University Press, 2010)

Hobsbawm, E.J., *Industry and Empire: From 1750 to the Present Day* (London, Penguin, 1999)

Hoggart, Richard, *The Uses of Literacy: Aspects of Working Class Life,* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1957)

Hornsey, Richard, *The Spiv and the Architect: Unruly Life in Postwar London* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010)

Horrall, Andrew, *Bringing Art to Life: a Biography of Alan Jarvis* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's Press, 2009)

Hubble, Nick, *Mass Observation and Everyday Life: Culture, History, Theory* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006)

Hunt, Tristram, *Building Jerusalem: the rise and fall of the Victorian city* (London: Macmillan, 2005)
Hynes, Samuel, *The Auden Generation: Literature and Politics in England in the 1930s,* (London: Faber, 1976)

Jameson, Frederic, *Formations of Pleasure,* (London: Routledge,1983)

Jeremiah, David, *Architecture and Design For the Family in Britain*, *1900-1970* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000)

Jones, Colin and Alan Murie, *The Right to Buy: Analysis & Evaluation of a Housing Policy* (London: Blackwell, 2006)

Keating, P. J., *The Working Classes in Victorian Fiction* (London, Routledge, 1971)

Kirk, John, *The British Working Class in the Twentieth Century: Film, Literature and Television* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2003)

————, *Class, Culture and Social Change: On the Trail of the Working Class*, (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007)

Kynaston, David, *Austerity Britain, 1945-1948: A World to Build,* (London: Bloomsbury, 2008)

————, *Austerity Britain, 1945-1951: Tales of a New Jerusalem* (London: Bloomsbury, 2008)

————, *Family Britain, 1951-1957* (London: Bloomsbury, 2010)

Lawrence, Jon, *Speaking for the People: Party, Language and Popular Politics in England, 1867-1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002)

Leapman, Michael, *The World for a Shilling: How the Great Exhibition of 1851 Shaped a Nation* (London: Headline, 2001)

Lewis, Jeremy, *Penguin Special,* The Life and Times of Allen Lane(London: Penguin Books, 2006)

Lewis, John, *The Left Book Club: An Historical Record* (London: Gollancz, 1970)

Lubbock, Jules, *The Tyranny of Taste: the Politics of Architecture and Design in Britain 1550-1960*, (New Haven, CT : Yale University Press, 1995)

McClellan, Andrew, *Art and Its Publics: Museum Studies at the Millennium* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2003)

Macdonald, Stuart, *The History and Philosophy of Art Education* (Cambridge: Lutterworth, 2004)

Mackenzie, Donald, 'Eugenics in Britain', *Social Studies of Science,* 6 (1976) 499-532

Maguire, Patrick Joseph and Jonathan M. Woodham, Eds., (1998) *Design and Cultural Politics in Postwar Britain: the 'Britain Can Make It' Exhibition of 1946* (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1988)

Malthus, T.R., *An Essay on the Principle of Population*, ed. by Geoffrey Gilbert (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008)

Maltz, Diana, *British Aestheticism and the Urban Working Classes, 1870-1900 : Beauty for the People*, (Basingstoke; London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006)

Massey, Anne. *Hollywood Beyond the Screen: Design and Material Culture* (Oxford: Berg, 2000)

Millar, Robert, *The Affluent Sheep* (London: Longmans, 1963)

Miller, Daniel, ed., *Home Possessions: Material Culture Behind Closed Doors* (Oxford: Berg, 2001)

————, *Material Culture and Mass Consumption*. (Oxford: Blackwell, 1987)

————, *Theory and Issues in the Study of Consumption (Consumption: Critical Concepts in the Social Sciences,* Vol. 1) (London: Routledge, 2001)

Moore, Martin, *The Origins of Modern Spin: Democratic Government and the Media in Britain 1945-51* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007)

Morgan, Kenneth O., *Labour in Power* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984)

Mount, Ferdinand, *Mind the Gap: The New Class Divide in Britain* (London: Short Books, 2004)

Parrinder, Patrick, 'Eugenics and Utopia: Sexual Selection from Galton to Morris', *Utopian Studies,* 8:2, (1997):1-12

Pimlott, Ben *Labour and the Left in the 1930s,* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977)

Priestley, J.B, *English Journey,* (London: The Folio Society, 1997)

Pugh, Martin, *The Making of Modern British Politics, 1867-1945* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002)

Rancière, Jacques, *The Politics of Aesthetics* (London: Continuum, 2006)

Romans, Mervyn, *Histories of Art and Design Education: Collected Essays* (Bristol: Portland, 2005)

Rose, Jonathan, *The Intellectual Life of the British Working Classes* (New Haven, CT; London: Yale University Press, 2001)

Ruskin, John, Rosenberg, John David, *The Genius of John Ruskin: Selection from His Writings,* (London: Routledge, 1979)

Russell, Patrick, and James Taylor, *Shadows of Progress: Documentary Film in Post-war Britain* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010).

Ryle, Martin H. and Jenny Bourne Taylor, *George Gissing: Voices of the Unclassed* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005)

Sampson, Anthony, *Anatomy of Britain* (London, Hodder & Stoughton, 1962)

Sparke, Penny, *An Introduction to Design and Culture in the Twentieth Century*, (London: Allen & Unwin, 1986)

Sparke, Penny, *Did Britain Make it?: British Design in Context, 1946-86,* (London: Design Council, 1986)

Sparke, Penny, *Designing the Modern Interior: From the Victorians to Today*, (London: Berg, 2009)

Stedman Jones, Gareth, *Languages of Class,* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983)

Sturt, George, *The Wheelwright's Shop,* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1958)

Swenarton, Mark, *Building the New Jerusalem; Architecture, Housing and Politics 1900-1930* (Bracknell: IHS BRE Press, 2008)

Thompson, E.P, *The Making of the English Working Class,* (New York: Vintage, 1963)

Trippi, Peter, 'Industrial Arts and the Exhibition Ideal', in: *A Grand Design: The Art of the Victoria and Albert Museum*, ed. Malcolm Baker and Brenda Richardson, (New York: Harry Abrams, 1997), 79-88

Vaughan, Laura, 'The Spatial Form of Poverty in Charles Booth's London', in: *The Spatial Syntax of Urban Segregation*, ed. Laura Vaughan (Amsterdam; London: Elsevier, 2007), 231-250

——— [et al.], 'Space and Exclusion: Does Urban Morphology Play a Part in Social Deprivation?' *Area*, 37 (2005): 402–412

Vincent, David (1991) *Poor Citizens: The State and the Poor in Twentieth Century Britain* (New York; London: Longman, 1991)

Woiak, Joanne, 'Designing a Brave New World: Eugenics, Politics, and Fiction', *The Public Historian*, Vol. 29:3 (2007):105-129

Woodham, Jonathan, *Twentieth-Century Design* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997)

Woodham, Jonathan *Britishness in Design, Material Culture and Popular Artefacts: From Empire to New Labour* in: Tomlinson, Alan and Woodham, Jonathan, Eds., Image, Power and Space: Volume 11: Studies in Consumption and Identity, (Meyer & Meyer Verlag, 2008)

Young, Michael, *The Rise of the Meritocracy,* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1961)

Young, Michael and Willmott, Peter, *Family and Kinship in East London,* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1962)

Television/Radio

White season, BBC television, broadcast March 7- 14 2008

Video Nation, BBC 2, broadcast March 3, 2008

Whatever Happened to the Working Class?, presented by Sarfraz Mansour ('From Engels to Oasis', 'A Taste of Money', 'From Heroes to Zeroes'), BBC Radio 4, broadcast February 18 - March 4, 2009