Introduction

The 1960s in Japan gave rise to what was 'undoubtedly the most creative outburst of anarchistic, subversive and riotous tendencies in the history of modern Japanese culture', as described by Japanese art curator and scholar Alexandra Munro.[1] The events of this decade reached their apogee in 1968, the year marking the centennial of the Meiji restoration and a turning point in postwar Japanese history. That year, Japan became the second largest economy in the world, a feat perceived as near miraculous by both Japanese and foreign economists. Moreover, the new international status of Japan following the 1964 Tokyo Olympics, and in anticipation of Osaka Expo '70, filled many urbanites, members of the civil service, and white-collar workers with a sense of optimism and a strengthened desire to forget, repress, and leave behind the traumas of war. That same year, however, violent counterculture riots initiated by students on university campuses spread throughout Japan, sparking nationwide social protests. The Diet building, the prime minister's office, and the American embassy were surrounded each day by thousands of demonstrators who opposed and challenged Japan's political actions, bringing the country to the verge of a civil revolution.

The tension between these two opposing forces – economic growth based on capitalist ideals, and social protest rooted in the ideology of left-wing movements – was felt throughout the 1960s. This tension constituted one of the forces underlying the radical transformation of Japanese aesthetics and visual culture, and more specifically of Japanese design. Renowned throughout history for its distinct aesthetic properties, Japanese design was transformed, in the 1960s, into a catalyst for the development of commercial companies that flourished under the new economy. By supplying these companies with differentiation, a competitive edge, and added value, design in Japan assimilated the capitalist ideology that was

responsible for its prosperity. At the same time, this period saw the rise of critical and conceptual design or anti-design practices shaped by the new and revolutionary focus on social protest, which undermined the values and norms of both premodern and modern Japanese society. These practices, which were concerned in the 1960s with feminism, the politics of the body, and identity politics, evolved in the 1980s and 1990s to include a concern with the ecology, with anti-consumerist and anti-institutional critiques, and with social otherness. In the case of both capitalist and critical design practices, this period saw a shift from the creation of functional, aesthetically pleasing design objects to ones that communicated a social message. The works of designers active in Tokyo beginning in the 1960s were presented in magazines and exhibitions, creating an enigmatic international aura surrounding the term 'Japanese design'. This aura, which went beyond – and sometimes even countered – the social stance of its creators, continues to surround the work of their contemporary followers.

This book describes the power of design and of a design-based approach (known as Design Thinking) to create and initiate social and cultural systems charged with meaning, using objects to construct new values and social norms that eventually transform patterns of behaviour and thought. In order to explain the aim of these critical design practices and the role of design as a social, cultural, and critical agent, I will examine the activity of their creators and their emerging role as social entrepreneurs shaping a new environment and lifestyle, rather than as service providers. Although considered as popular culture, I will argue that these design projects impacted the construction of power relations and of new paradigms and categories, forming an arena of production that gave rise to the encounter of postmodern aesthetics, critical theories, and the new capitalist order. The exploration of this arena reveals the power of material culture in voicing social criticism, while partaking of the affluent capitalist economy. It also underscores the relations and differences between visual protest and verbal protest.

The social role of design

In contrast to art, which is generally perceived as existing in an autonomous sphere that we observe from a certain distance (and are asked not to touch), design is a creation that we live alongside, and within, in our daily life, as we use everyday objects ranging from our dishes and linens to our books. Unfortunately, however, the term 'design' is often trivialised, misunderstood, and misused. It is usually confused with styling and with decorative, expensive, and superfluous objects such as a conceptual one-off chair or glamorous high-heeled shoes. Design is thus often seen as an indulgence for spoiled customers in developed countries, and is typecast as a seductive ploy that tricks us into buying things of questionable value

– objects that we will soon tire of and abandon, together with the rest of the toxic junk that destroys our ecology.[2] Media philosopher Vilém Flusser argues that the word design occurs in contexts associated with cunning and deceit: 'A designer is a cunning plotter laying his traps.'[3] Yet the design of objects is an inevitable human necessity, and every object created since the dawn of history was designed. Such objects are meant to cater to our everyday physical needs, as well as to serve us in extreme situations such as natural disasters. Moreover, it is important to note that objects not only fulfil our physical needs, but also our emotional needs – embodying our memories of people, places, and events in our lives. Psychologists, meanwhile, often attend to the therapeutic power of objects, such as the 'transitional object' used by young children during their evolution from complete dependence on the mothering figure to relative independence.

Various objects also serve an economic function as commodities that circulate across national borders in the global market, partaking of a political, economic, and social network. Serving to exchange information, ideas, and aesthetic principles, they are thus capable of transforming world views and social orders. The consolidation and preservation of national identity is also often performed by means of objects or a specific style. The Japanese government, for instance, appoints craftspeople to serve as 'national living treasures' who preserve traditional cultural memory by continuing to practise local design techniques. Moreover, as design critic Alice Rawsthorn argues, any design exercise sets out to change something and acts as an agent of change that can help us make sense of what is happening around us and turn it to our advantage. According to Rawsthorn, design can ensure that 'changes of any type – whether they are scientific, technological, cultural, political, economic, social, environmental or behavioural – are introduced to the world in ways that are positive and empowering, rather than inhibiting and destructive'.[4] In other words, design is a powerful vehicle for different social powers.

There are also popular objects that ornament our bodies or homes, and which we seem to treat as merely decorative. Yet these objects are similarly charged with a social function, since they endow us with a personal or social identity and serve as tools for communication, for the construction of individual and class identity, and for the facilitation of social ties. These functions were attended to by Umberto Eco, who redefined the hallowed Modernist principle of 'form follows function' by arguing that the form of the object is not only functional but also symbolic and that it is this symbolic charge that renders the object accessible and desired. Eco thus sought to expand the accepted definition of function, ascribing to the object's symbolic function an importance that is no lesser than that ascribed to its everyday function. The symbolic function, according to Eco, represents the social role of the object – that of enabling and confirming certain social connections and social status, and of validating the decision

to obey certain rules. The decorative character of an object is thus not merely a manifestation of style, but also has the ability to activate its users, to endow them with an identity, to produce new social paradigms and categories, and to catalyse forms of social innovation.[5] Thus, as already noted above, the material structure of the object and its aesthetic, decorative style are both significant for an understanding of its design. Within this introduction, I shall attend to the position of design in terms of both its material and its visual dimensions. As Guy Julier has noted: 'design is more than just the creation of visual artifacts to be used or "read." It is also about the structuring of systems of encounter within the visual and material world.'[6]

Material culture, social norms, and design

Norms, values, and conceptual social categories are invisible yet powerful entities. The sociologist Eva Illouz argues that they exist in every social group, and underlie the behaviour of most people. Even if they are not always conscious, they compel us to act in predictable ways in order to be considered good, honourable, or trustworthy. According to Illouz, 'one of the most puzzling questions sociology tries to answer is: How is it that different people behave in similar and predictable ways even when no one visibly forces them to do so? The answer is simple – through the norms they learn and absorb from their environment.'[7] The norms are usually repeated across a wide variety of social and cultural contexts, and it is this repetition that endows them with power, transforming them into an invisible property of our thinking.

In order to explain how norms shape thoughts and behaviour, Illouz mentions a metaphor offered by the sociologist Ann Swidler:

> We know that while bats fly, they use built-in sensors to locate physical obstacles in space by means of echolocation. These sensors enable them to fly undisturbed in dark caves and avoid the walls, even though they see close to nothing. For human beings, norms are the walls of their environment. They behave and orient themselves based on an implicit sense of these walls – that is, of what is permitted and what is prohibited, of what in our environment is perceived as moral or immoral.[8]

The words 'norms' and 'normal' share a common source: normal, concludes Illouz, is nothing but the name we give to what norms silently dictate.

People do not notice the political and ideological structures underlying their lives, since no one can 'notice' terms such as 'patriarchy', 'ethnic hierarchy', or 'militarism'. We do not see abstract concepts and lack the language needed to understand the invisible forces moving back and forth between the collective and private realms. Our experience thus appears to us to be personal even when it originates from a particular form of social

organisation.[9] The cave described by Swidler creates what the sociologist Pierre Bourdieu calls the 'habitus' in which we live. Bourdieu explains how, in the process of socialisation, children internalise the values and norms of their social world through the order of things, whose silence normalises socialisation and produces the habitus.

In his essay 'The Berber House or the world reversed', Bourdieu demonstrates how the architectural scheme of the house (the characterisation of spatial configurations, the different divisions of the space, and the relation between them) and the characterisation of the objects dispersed throughout the space reflect and dictate social gender roles within and into the interior space of the house. The movement within a formulated material configuration (the designated spaces and various objects) that resonates the ideas and their usage, engenders an unconscious internalisation of body practices as the main means of internalising and reaffirming the habitus.[10]

The conventional understanding of norms views them as enforced by the mechanisms of various institutions (ranging from official mechanisms such as schools, prisons, or fines to informal behaviours such as derision, typecasting, humiliation, or excommunication). Bourdieu shows how the social categories underlying every society are also translated into material objects.[11] Norms and values – both invisible entities – are thus realised through objects or signs, which in turn construct and preserve social values much like social institutions.

This understanding is given expression, for instance, in the sociologist Norbert Elias's study of the social norms invented in the late Middle Ages and early Renaissance, such as the new prohibitions against eating with one's hands, farting or burping in public, and urinating or defecating in the vicinity of others. Elias shows how social changes affect the way that individuals discipline their bodies through the emergence of table manners and the use of eating utensils. For example, he recounts how the fork, which first came into use in court society during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries as a way to pick pieces of food from the common bowl that were then eaten by hand, was adopted for personal use in the seventeenth century. Elias demonstrates that this was not due to a development in hygiene or a prohibition to hold certain foods for health reasons, but rather due to the rise of social concern when in contact with other people. He explains that the fork evolved because people developed an aversion to getting their fingers dirty, or at least to be seen in public with dirty, greasy fingers. A sense of disgust and unease – the product of a long historical development instilled in the body – is what determines which patterns of table behaviour will be considered 'cultural' and which will not. Therefore, the fork is the embodiment of a certain standard of sensitivity and a specific level of distaste that became the norm in the seventeenth century. These new 'accessories of civilization', emphasises Elias, reflect

the gradual progress of the 'threshold of repugnance' and in turn usher in a new standard and norm.[12]

Thus social values, in turn, created new types of objects, such as eating utensils or private bathrooms. Today, however, we no longer view eating utensils or privacy in the bathroom as socially constructed norms, as Dutch design theorist Wim Muller explains: 'cutlery, crockery, table setting, and so on, do not connote by their form only a certain sociocultural meaning of eating together. It's actual interaction with them, they also condition us to the kind of behaviour that is in keeping, including the way we make conversation with each other!'[13]

An additional example is provided by the historian Yuval Noah Harari, who argues that the habitus (which he calls the 'imagined order') exists only in the imagination of individuals, while entertaining close reciprocal relations with the surrounding material culture. Harari makes reference to the modern American 'myth of the individual', according to which every person possesses equal rights, including the right to the pursuit of pleasure to the best of their understanding. This value, Harari claims, acquired a material presence through the country's network of endless asphalt roads and huge private-car industry, which was supposed to enable every American to travel wherever they wanted and whenever they wanted, without depending on others. The car, according to Harari, was a reflection of American individualism rather than of ecological or geographic necessity. The creation of the private car and network of roads, in turn, shaped American living arrangements and the structure of the American market. The proud owner of a Ford Model T thus became accustomed to living in a spacious and isolated private home in the suburbs and to travelling at any time to their workplace in the city centre, to the local shopping centre, or to the beach. [14] The rise of individualism changed not only urban planning but also the interior planning of domestic spaces. One example is the internal division of houses into numerous small rooms that reflect this value, in contrast to medieval homes where many family members slept together in large halls. The modern home, which provides each sibling with a private space for maximum autonomy, shapes the experience of children who cannot help but imagine themselves 'as individuals'.[15] In this manner, the myth of the individual left the realm of the imagination and anchored itself in material reality.

A more radical view of the connection between material history and human consciousness is presented by Jonathan Crary, who has analysed the development of the human sense of vision through his study of the history of ideas. Crary has attended to important technological developments in the field of optics, arguing for their emergence not as part of a linear process of scientific development but rather as a reflection of widespread human beliefs and values at different historical moments. The stereoscope invented in the nineteenth century, for instance, was based on new tech-

niques of representation that replaced the seventeenth-century camera obscura. Whereas the camera obscura posited an objective relationship between the apparatus and the observed object and implied an identity between the object and its representation, the stereoscope, which presents the world subjectively, was invented according to Crary not due to technological developments but rather as a result of a new paradigm of subjectivity that emerged at the time in European society and culture.[16]

Every object thus encodes social values (which are at times unspoken and implicit) and a social discourse that partake of a culturally and historically specific system, even when it is integrated into material culture to the point that we no longer explicitly recognise its underlying ideological charge or the ways in which it constructs our behaviour. Material culture thus serves as a framework (Bourdieu's 'habitus', or Swidler's cave of bats) within which we organise our behaviour and emotions, even though we are not aware of the existence of its conceptual framework or the limits it imposes on our actions and on what we 'instinctually' perceive to be legitimate, worthy, or deserving of pride (or shame). Yet the embodiment of these norms in material forms shapes the individual's behaviour in accordance with the values of the habitus in which they live.

Building on this perception, the sociologist Daniel Miller has shown how consumption in the Western world is not motivated by hedonism, as claimed by certain critical thinkers. Instead, he argues, consumption of the most basic products purchased by women is designed to unify the family or construct social normalcy.[17] The sociologist Bruno Latour, who formulated the Actor-Network Theory, similarly argues that objects not only reflect and present cultural norms and values but also shape human behaviour, much like social norms: 'Each artifact has its script, its "affordance," its potential to take hold of passersby and force them to play roles in its story.'[18] One example he gives is that of a gun – a seemingly neutral and passive object. Yet, according to Latour:

> You are different with gun in hand; the gun is different with you holding it. You are another subject because you hold the gun; the gun is another object because it has entered into a relationship with you. The gun is no longer the gun-in-the-armory or the gun-in-the-drawer or the gun-in-the-pocket, but the gun-in-your-hand, aimed at someone who is screaming. What is true about the subject, the gunman, is as true of the object, of the gun that is held. A good citizen becomes a criminal, a bad guy becomes a worse guy; a silent gun becomes a fired gun, a new gun becomes a used gun, a sporting gun becomes a weapon.[19]

As he further argues:

> The twin mistake of the materialists and the sociologists is to start with essence, those of subjects *or* those of objects. That starting point renders impossible our measurement of the mediating role of techniques. Neither subject nor object (nor their goals) are fixed...You are a different person with

the gun in your hand. Essence is existence and existence is action. If I define you by what you have (the gun), and by the series of associations that you enter into when you use what you have (when you fire the gun) then you are modified by the gun – more so or less so – depending on the weight of the other associations that you carry.[20]

According to Latour, the relations between subject and object create a hybrid actor, which is formed, for instance, by a gun and the person handling it. Describing the objects (which he calls 'actnet', an abbreviation of Actor-Network) as players in a network that gives rise to social behaviour, he argues that the distinction between active subjects and passive objects that exist at their service is obsolete. Another example he offers is that of on-campus speed bumps that force drivers to slow down, changing their goal from 'slow down so as not to endanger students' into 'slow down and protect my car's suspension'.[21] These two goals are far removed from one another. The first appeals to the driver's morality and propensity to abide by the law, while the second appeals to pure egotism and the desire to preserve one's car. Most drivers, according to Latour, respond to egotism and the desire to preserve their car, and thus change their behaviour through the mediation of the speed bump. The change in behaviour that transforms a careless driver into a careful driver is thus achieved by material means that divert goals and create new forms of behaviour: the norm of driving slowly is enforced through the material presence of the speed bumps. In this context, it can thus be said that the most important function of design is to regulate our behaviour. And so we have to understand that what we need to know about design and the different technologies is not how we use them but how they use us.

This understanding of design as a form of regulating behaviour is evident in various fields of design. The branding of clothing, for instance, reiterates certain cultural perceptions about the body, as well as values pertaining to social identity and to late consumer culture. The social definition of clothing as a commodity transforms it into a unit of meaning and endows it with economic, aesthetic, and ideological values. An item of clothing, its cut, and advertising image often determine the consumer's world view concerning the 'right' body structure, which in turn shapes their behaviour. One can similarly think of the development and design of popular objects such as the microwave, the Walkman, or the Cup Noodle. These products have not only served human needs but also shaped a society in which people eat or spend their leisure time alone. Psychoanalysts argue that patients utter different truths when they are sitting in an armchair than when they are lying on a couch. In other words, the therapeutic setting triggers different thought processes in the same person. If we observe an advertisement poster, for instance, we see that it contains a number of values which it seeks to transmit to its viewers, including the economic values of late consumer culture and the social values of its

target audience. Every advertising poster thus encodes the economic, aesthetic, and ideological values underlying the society in which it operates. Marshall McLuhan argues that the fact that United States' advertising budget was often greater than the budget of its education system revealed advertising's tremendous impact on our culture and its existence as a second education system parallel to the public system. McLuhan thus argues: 'We become what we behold. We shape our tools and thereafter our tools shape us.'[22]

Langdon Winner presents the impact and influence of city planning, which is shaped by both explicit and implicit political purposes, on human behaviour. One example he discusses is how Haussmann's broad Parisian boulevards were engineered at Louis Napoleon's direction in order to prevent any recurrence of civilian violence on the streets, of the kind that took place during the revolution of 1848. Winner also shows how Robert Moses, the master builder of New York's roads, parks, bridges, and other public works from 1920 to 1970, used urban design to promote his social biases and racial prejudices. For example, Moses planned extraordinarily low bridges over the parkways in Long Island, with many of the overpasses having as little as nine feet of clearance at the curb. The design of these parkways was aimed at achieving a particular social effect – that of discouraging the presence of buses. White automobile owners of the 'upper' and 'comfortable middle' classes, as Moses called them, were thus free to use the parkways for recreation and commuting. Poor people and blacks, who normally used public transportation, were kept off the roads because the twelve-foot tall buses could not get through the overpasses. This strategy limited the access of racial minorities and low-income groups to Jones Beach, Moses' widely acclaimed public park. Moses further ensured this result by vetoing a proposed extension of the Long Island Railroad to Jones Beach. Although these bridges are an aspect of urban design, they should thus be read as part of American political history rather than of design history. Thus, Winner rightly argues that 'the issues that divide or unite people in society are settled not only in the institutions and practices of politics proper, but also, and less obviously, in tangible arrangements of steel and concrete, wires and transistors, nuts and bolts',[23] concluding that 'artifacts have political qualities'.[24]

Peter-Paul Verbeek presents another dimension of these artefacts' qualities by saying that design and technology mediate our behaviour and our perception and thus raise the question of ethics and morality of design objects, which he calls 'material ethics'. For him, things carry morality because they shape the way people experience their world and organise their existence, regardless of whether or not this is done consciously and intentionally. The ethics of behaviour come in two varieties: consequentialist and deontological. Consequentialist ethics evaluate behaviours exclusively on their consequences. In this case, things are not moral

agents but only moral instrument that incite people to morally right or wrong behaviour. Deontological ethics focus on the moral value of the act itself and the intentions behind it, regardless of the consequences. From a Kantian perspective, the morality of an action depends on whether or not the agent has sought to act in accordance with rational norms. Artefacts, of course, cannot themselves make such an evaluation and their action arises as a result of how they simply steer behaviour.[25] Verbeek's insight shows that design has two types of moral dimensions. First, designed products play a mediating role in the moral consideration of people, and second, the design process can involve moral choices with reference to this mediating role. Hence, the seemingly innocent popular material and visual objects that surround us in fact determine the identity of their users and the manner in which they are used, while actively constructing a social discourse, creating new social norms, and impeding alternative possibilities. As such, they catalyse social, economic, and political forces and influence modes of behaviour and thought. Much like norms, which are invisible entities, the significant social power of objects stems mostly from our lack of attention to their implicit power as influential agents.

This view of objects as social agents endows them with an additional layer of meaning, which enables them to be interpreted in a new way. So, for instance, we understand that a kimono does not only represent a woman's status based on its style and fabric but also dictates a refined gait and small steps, which were once appreciated as feminine. In a similar manner, small shoes deformed the feet of Chinese women for over one thousand years in the name of beauty, while in fact serving to reinforce the norms of a patriarchal hierarchy. One can also see how certain eating utensils, such as chopsticks, dictate a specific manner of cooking, serving, and consuming food.

Another example is the Japanese path (*roji*) typical of Zen gardens, which is habitually described as embodying the aesthetic of Zen Buddhism. The irrational, asymmetrical arrangement of the stones, their simplicity, and their patina, represent the *wabi-sabi* aesthetics that symbolise the arbitrary workings of nature and the passage of time as well as the integration of nature and culture. This intellectual and aesthetic interpretation undoubtedly influenced the designers of these gardens. Yet the act of walking the path in a Zen garden reveals another important dimension of this design. In contrast to a paved path that one walks upon in a direct and rapid manner, with one's eyes focused on the target ahead without observing the path itself, a *roji* path calls for a different kind of walking. Since the stones are ordered randomly, walker must repeatedly lower their heads to prepare for their next step. When they stand upon a stone, they raise their heads to refocus on their target and then look down again. This process slows their forward movement, while controlling their perspective so that each person walking along the path will gaze at countless points calcu-

lated in advance by the garden's designer. The design of the path and the disciplining of the gaze are aimed at presenting the appearance of a new landscape each time the person walks along the same path. The *roji* thus shapes the behaviour of the walker just as the slow bump described by Bruno Latour changes the behaviour of the driver.[26] A more contemporary example can be seen in stadium design in which the football clubs leave no stone unturned in their endless pursuit of wins. This includes taking actions aimed at unnerving the other team before and during matches. Seemingly subtle changes in the design of the opposing team's dressing room can have a meaningful psychological and physical impact. For example, the pre-match team talk with the manager is a crucial part of the preparation for the game. Thus, in the Emirates Stadium in North London the height of the table in the middle of the dressing room was set specially so that anything on it would obscure the manager's head, while the placement of a large wooden drawer in the centre of the room could be construed as a deliberate ploy to prevent the manager from addressing the entire team.[27] Similarly, London's Stamford Bridge stadium holds arguably the most psychologically affecting dressing room in the Premier League. Not only is it smaller than standard dressing rooms, it is also strewn with various obstacles designed to disrupt the visiting team's preparations. In a 2011 article, Jintana Panyaarvudh details different elements in the stadium designed specifically, so it seems, to undermine the visiting teams, including placing clothes hangers too high (forcing players to strain their ankles, arms, and hamstrings), fixing the team manager's board on the back of the dressing room door, which must be kept open at all times as a fire exit, and positioning 'slimming mirrors' near the door, so that the players' last image of themselves before they leave the dressing room is significantly smaller than they are.[28]

Many designers thus use these qualities embedded in artefacts in their design process. Fukasawa Naoto explained in an interview how each chair invites a different type of behaviour.[29] He referred to the American psychologist James Gibson, whose discussion of the term 'affordance' reveals how objects impact human behaviour. Kuramata supported this idea that the design of stairs causes people to ascend them in a certain manner and that closet design causes people to store their belongings in a certain way. Kuramata designed chairs with a backrest that constrains people to remain erect rather than lean back.[30] One can also note the influence of the Hello Kitty character (who has no mouth and whose short limbs do not enable her to move) on women who have understood that in order to be desirable, they ought to behave in a babyish manner. The same goes for Barbie, the stick-thin doll that some researchers believe causes body image problems in the lives of many girls, possibly leading even to anorexia.

Design and visual culture: sign, style, and social identity

Beyond the material structure and physical design of the object, which influence the user's behaviour, its style and status as a visual sign also serve to construct social identity in the context of postmodern consumption. The conception and definition of design as a series of signs goes back to Robert Venturi and Denise Scott Brown's trip to Las Vegas in 1968. This field trip was followed by their book *Learning from Las Vegas*, which presented a new theoretical framework for understanding design. Venturi and Scott Brown's visual semiotic methodology changed the Modernist understanding of design as a primarily functional, ergonomic, and material practice, and gave rise to a conception of design as a visual sign and of style as a social idea.[31] The cultural critic Roland Barthes argued that an item of clothing that is merely functional can only exist outside of culture. The moment such an item is produced, sold, or worn within a social and cultural framework, it becomes a semiotic element, a signifier that points to other signifiers such as concepts, ideas, values, norms, and ideologies.[32] Or, in the words of Umberto Eco, 'I speak through my clothes.'[33]

This conception of the object as sign was also promoted by Baudrillard, who attended to the character of products in late consumer culture in his book *For a Critique of the Political Economy of the Sign*. Baudrillard describes how, with the rise of late consumer culture, objects lost their functional meaning and began to serve as social signs expressed by means of style. These signs serve psychological and social needs, and not merely physical, functional ones. As Baudrillard argues: 'An accurate theory of objects will not be established on a theory of needs and their satisfaction, but upon a theory of social *prestations* and signification.'[34] In order to explain the new consumer culture, Baudrillard deconstructed traditional economic perceptions, highlighting instead the concept of 'sign exchange value' and claiming that: 'Today consumption defines the stage where commodity is immediately produced as a sign, as sign value, and where signs (culture) are produced as commodities.'[35] As he continues, 'An object is not an object of consumption unless it is released from its psychic determinations as symbol; from its functional determinations as instrument; from its commercial determinations as product; and is thus liberated as a sign to be recaptured by the formal logic of fashion, i.e., by the logic of differentiation.'[36]

The 'logic of social differentiation' concerns the way that an individual distinguishes and attains a social position and prestige through the purchase and use of consumer goods. In the new consumer culture created in the 1970s and 1980s, many products of the same category existed side by side. They thus achieved meaning and identity only via their differentiation from similar products, that is, by producing a different 'sign value'. These products have lost their link to their original meaning, function, material

value, and production costs. As a result, the consumer bases the purchase on branding or, in other words, on social information that the brand offers rather than on the product's materiality or functionality. The selection of a particular product from among a wide variety of alternatives thus boils down to the selection of a sign that captures the product's social information and social positioning. Products are positioned against one another as signs against signs, creating new hierarchies and new forms of differentiation among their producers and consumers.

This process of uniting around a unique product that differentiates a person or a group from other people or groups may be described as a type of totemism which, according to Claude Lévi-Strauss, inevitably shapes the structure of human society. Totemism is the human attempt to unite around an object that becomes the sign of the group. The sign provides an identity, inspiration, and strength to its followers, and protects them from the constant threat of dispersion.[37] In late consumer culture, the individual declares affiliation to a group or a subculture via the lifestyle that is expressed in the brand's sign value.

According to Baudrillard, the transformation of objects from functional things to signs of identity was followed by the transformation of the postmodern city into a sphere of codes and signs. The city ceased to be the politico-industrial zone that it was in the nineteenth century – a site of industrial concentration and exploitation devoted to the production and consumption of commodities. Instead, it became a zone of the sign, the media, and the code. Baudrillard thus argues that 'the urban matrix no longer realizes a power (labor power), but a difference (the operation of the sign): metallurgy has become semiurgy.' He describes the city as 'the ghetto of television and advertising, the ghetto of consumers and consumed, of readers read in advanced, encoded decoders of every message … The monopoly of this code, circulating throughout the urban fabric, is the genuine form of social relations.'[38]

The sign value that creates differentiation between similar products builds on an aesthetics and style that refer to specific social information and offer a specific lifestyle.[39] By extension, the principle of social differentiation in postmodern society is also related to aesthetics and style. We typically view taste and style as personal issues and perceive the act of selection as intuitive and subconscious – a gift of nature. However, as Bourdieu argues, taste and style are closely linked to different positions in social space and to the system of dispositions (habitus) characteristic of the different classes.[40] In his words, 'taste classifies, and it classifies the classifier'.[41] Taste and style are thus social and cultural constructions, which are acquired in a manner similar to language. They are the means by which individuals declare their affiliation to a specific class, group, or subculture, and their differentiation from other groups. This understanding transforms the definition of 'style' from a seemingly meaningless form

of decoration into the guardian at the thresholds that separate various groups and categories of social status. This phenomenon can be seen throughout history. In ancient Rome, only those of or above the rank of senator were allowed to wear clothing dyed a particular shade of purple. In Imperial China, only the emperor was permitted to wear yellow. During the Middle Ages, the right to wear specific garments was enshrined in legislation known as the Sumptuary Laws, which became progressively more complex over time, extending even to the consumption of specific foods and the use of household equipment.

These laws, which were passed on religious or moral grounds, were in fact designed to create clear distinctions between different social classes, as well as between genders. In the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, English and French courtiers and aristocrats passed laws forbidding the rising merchant class, which had become increasingly wealthy, from wearing expensive materials such as furs, velvet, and brocades. The courtiers, who were losing their economic capital following the Crusades and their ostentatious lifestyle, sought to impose these laws in order to prevent the merchant class from imitating aristocratic fashions, and thus to preserve their status.[42] By the sixteenth century, the English aristocracy was so perturbed by the growing wealth of the merchant class that King Henry VIII was persuaded to strengthen the Sumptuary Laws. Ermine, sable, and miniver, as well as broad-toed shoes, could only be worn by nobles. No one beneath the rank of knight could wear a silk shirt. Purple was reserved for the king, as was cloth made of gold, although dukes and marquises were also allowed to wear these colours. Newly wealthy Tudor merchants broke these laws, even though they could be stopped on the streets for wearing a forbidden item, which would then be confiscated as a punishment.[43]

Such modes of distinction have become increasingly more democratic given the new consumption possibilities that arose following the Industrial Revolution. Nevertheless, style continues to function as a silent social sign signifying differentiation and belonging to certain groups. The style and material makeup of a given product, as well as its sign value, are thus far from innocent or meaningless. Rather, they construct each product as a cultural unit that contains social information regarding values and norms, and represents a specific lifestyle and status. The term 'style', as the anthropologist Tamar El Or argues, thus unifies the fields of aesthetics, sociology, and anthropology.[44] The discourse on style, which was already initiated by some of the founders of these disciplines, such as the anthropologist Franz Boas and the art historian Ernst Gombrich, continues to this day.[45] The anthropologist Margaret Conkey explains that the field of sociology is concerned with style because: 'Style is part of the means by which humans make sense of their world and with which cultural meanings are always in production.'[46] The anthropologist Martin Wobst offers a comprehensive discussion of this subject, paying attention to the simulta-

neously permissive and repressive power of style. He argues that 'style is what reifies hegemony. But style also reifies resistance, as well as material challenges to hegemony and resistance.'[47]

In his work on cross-cultural stylistic influences and questions of originality and imitation, Wobst offers an in-depth definition of 'style', describing it as a fundamental human characteristic of both the individual and the group: 'Style is that part of our artifactual repertoire that makes us human.'[48] According to Wobst, style enables individuals to make themselves unique in accordance with (and despite) the social order: 'Style is always there by the grace of individuals; individuals cannot easily prevent others from evaluating their talk about group membership also as talk about themselves as individuals (whether or not they want that to happen) ... Thus style always talks loudly about individuals.'[49] Since it materially intervenes between individuals and between individuals and the group, Wobst describes its impact as 'material interferences' or 'material signaling', adding: 'Within this realm of "material interferences", style refers to aspects of form that "talk" or "write" and that are "listened to" or "read." In contrast to artifactual form that interferes with matter or energy, "stylistic form" on artifacts interferes materially with humans.'[50]

In addition to sociologists, scholars of aesthetics such as Giorgio Riello and Peter McNeil, the authors of *Shoes: A History from Sandals to Sneakers*, have discussed how the style of shoes has participated throughout history in the construction of identities and socioeconomic boundaries, attesting to the socioeconomic status, cultural preferences, and sometimes even the sexuality of their wearers.[51] In addition to sociologists and art historians, philosophers since antiquity were also concerned themselves with the concept of style. The aesthetic context of style was already explored by Aristotle and other Classical philosophers and is given expression, for instance, in Longinus's treatise *On the Sublime* or in Horace's *Ars Poetica*.[52] Merleau-Ponty argues that style is a dynamic phenomenon pertaining to human expression. For him it is the initial sketch of meaning, which can be considered to be the essential structure of human existence. In this sense it resembles the Heideggerian existentiale of care (*sorge*), as well as the sociological perception of style as a generator of identity. According to Merleau-Ponty, style is a mixture of subject and object, an intermediate phenomenon that lies between them and that is both passive and active. As such, style is a complex, dynamic structure that unifies one's life through meanings and experiences, while being open to the prospects of one's future and dreams.[53]

These theorists all present style as a powerful tool for identity-building that serves to forge connectivity, create differentiation, and shift the balance of power between social groups. The use of style by certain social groups can thus also acquire a political charge, becoming a 'politics of style' that often creates what Umberto Eco called 'semiotic guerrilla

warfare'.[54] Despite its existence throughout history, this function of style seems to have intensified following the rise in the importance of the sign in postmodern consumer culture. For while Modernism declared itself to be beyond style, insisting on the principle of form following function, the postmodern object did not strive for authenticity or truth, but rather presented itself in advance as a sign 'with an attitude'.[55] As Glen Adamson and Jane Pavitt have noted, for the postmodern movement 'style was everything', leading this period to be equally defined as that of 'the style wars', that is, of competing stylistic narratives.[56] During this period, style and the material embodied in designer products became both political and performative, enabling subcultures and individuals alike to present their attitudes in the public sphere concerning social issues such as gender, class, race, the politics of identity, and social or national affiliations. Dick Hebdige's *Subculture: The Meaning of Style* demonstrates how a specific style can express a subculture's protest against the cultural hegemony. This type of stylistic protest also appeared among groups of young people in Tokyo, who beginning in the 1970s created subcultures consolidated around a stylistic core, such as the *take-no-ko-zoku* or the *kurisutaru-zoku*.

Stylistic variety, in this context, is viewed as a means of externalising both personal and collective emotions and ideologies, since in the process of consumption, consumers are collecting social signs in order to construct their social status, their affiliation to a specific group, their personal identity, and their differentiation from others. As a result, each individual functions as a guidepost saturated with signs that testify to his or her identity, social association, and status. We can also restate this by saying that whenever consumers purchase products, the actual 'product' that is being purchased is identity. As Clammer argues: 'Shopping is not merely the acquisition of things. It is the buying of identity.'[57] Stuart Ewen, who highlighted the blurring of boundaries between products, identity, and personal identity, quotes Robert Lynd, who labelled this phenomenon 'commodity self'.[58]

Baudrillard similarly noted that the new consumer society developing in the 1970s and 1980s was motivated by need and desire. However, in this case the need was not a materialistic one to acquire functional objects but rather a need for differentiation, which is actually a desire for social meaning.[59] In the postmodern era, the need for social and psychological differentiation is stronger than the materialistic need for functional objects, and is thus the primary motivator for late consumer culture and for the way products are designed. Moreover, in this new product/branding culture, need and desire unite to present a new social networking and social psychology in which consumers purchase signs, style, and identity. Accordingly, Baudrillard identified the 'sign exchange value' that is based on style as the currency of the social system in which it was created and used, as a motivating factor, and as a basis for understanding the new

social paradigm. This theory of signs within consumer society provides us with insights on how style and design manufacture needs, desires, and values and play a crucial role in organising contemporary societies around consumer objects, needs, and practices. In order to understand the wide-ranging implications of design for society, one must take into account that objects are not innocent and that humans are simultaneously driven by symbolism and materialism. Both the material makeup and the style of objects thus function as active social agents that impact the social order and shape subjectivity on both a physical and an emotional level.

Critique and critical design

Late consumer culture, which became a central ideology in capitalist countries during the postmodern period, created the concept of a 'personal lifestyle' as a discursive practice – one whose internal logic and meanings are produced by the consumers. Such a practice is thus joyfully embraced by consumers, and operates on the social acceptance of those who are equally oppressed by it. The system of consumer culture promises consumers to assist them in constructing their personal identity through the consumption of variously styled 'designer objects'. These popular objects are viewed by consumers as passive entities that are controlled by their desire, and as part of the natural order of their habitus. Yet in reality, these consumers are helplessly swayed in a wild avalanche of stimuli, signs, codes, and styles that promises to provide them with an identity. Since these products do not provide functional content but rather social information that is relevant for an extremely short period of time, they lead consumers to repeatedly replace the objects symbolising their lifestyle. Most consumers are thus unable to withstand the pressure exerted by this system, or the 'terror' exercised by popular lifestyle brands that shape consumer behaviour. In other words, the liberal insistence on the individual's free agency and on their power to change or impact their personal living conditions is not anchored in reality, since every individual is limited by a network of social relations and structures and surrounded by objects that activate them socially and shape their subjectivity, transforming them to a large extent into an object of social activity rather than a subject or initiator.

This condition calls to mind Michel Foucault's understanding of culture as structured around specific discourses, values, and norms that serve as powerful mechanisms of social and cultural surveillance, and enable powerful social groups to subject and control other groups.[60] These discourses and values are culturally accepted as natural, while in fact embodying the hegemonic norms of the dominant group and policing us to unconsciously conform to 'acceptable' forms of behaviour and thought. Foucault defined this system as oppressive. Similarly, various styles and types of objects perceived as passive are in fact powerfully involved in

shaping and policing our behaviour. One example is clothing cuts that shape the 'right' conception of the female body and accordingly reshape female behaviour, or brands that symbolise our social status and affiliation. Foucault not only exposed the oppressive system underlying these invisible norms but also called for a critique of it. In his eyes, a critique amounts to the presentation of the conditions that enable knowledge and power to change patterns of behaviour and control, reorganising mechanisms of power and disciplines of knowledge. As he argues: 'Critique is the movement by which the subject gives himself the right to question truth on its effects of power and question power on its discourses of truth.'[61] This approach seeks to diverge from, change, or transform existing regimes of power. In Foucault's words: 'Critique will be the art of voluntary in subordination, that of reflected intractability. Critique would essentially insure the desubjugation of the subject in the context of what we would call, in a word, the politics of truth.'[62]

Foucault examined how norms are formed from a genealogical standpoint. He asked how certain conditions transform a certain event into necessary or desired, and above all into a foundational event that reshapes the behavioural patterns of regimes of power.[63] Foucault did not seek a causal connection between knowledge and power, concentrating instead on the moments in which the intersection of knowledge and power renders them invisible, while also producing a discourse, value, or norm that becomes conventionally accepted by all. Foucault defined this modus operandi as an 'effective history' research, which provides an epistemological discussion concerning the production of a certain body of knowledge. In other words, 'effective history' research employs genealogical methodology that traces the creation of different values along history and the way it can be criticised and challenged.[64] Using this practice, he attempts to implement radical and active change in the world that is capable of moving the subject, and to reorganise categories of thought and their relations with one another. A critique thus enables the subject to identify the systems of knowledge upon which power is predicated, to examine their characteristics, and to judge the ways in which they are activated.[65] In the same way, one can examine the power of design and its critique.[66] The term 'critical design' was coined by Anthony Dunne in his 1990 book *Hertzian Tales: Electronic Products, Aesthetic Experience and Critical Design*.[67] This kind of design practice, however, was already initiated in the 1960s and 1970s by Italian radical design groups such as Alchemia and Superstudio, and later by the Memphis Group and by architectural movements such as Archigram in Britain and Metabolism in Japan.[68] These groups protested against the social values and goals of commercial design, in parallel to the social critique theories developed during the same period. One of the challenges of these critical designers was to question what is the meaning of the term 'design'. Particularly, they were trying to change the mean-

ing of 'design' from aesthetic, decorative, or functional object to a social tool. Critical design gave rise to the term 'cultural jams', raising awareness to social concerns and political agendas such as the politics of the body, identity politics, class, race, production relations, and post-colonial identity. Their primary intent was to encourage user's reflections upon a particular discourse and to affect the intellect. Critical designers examined how ideas and ideological power relations were embodied in materials or style and sought to challenge these conventions and to call for new ways of thinking about objects, their use, and their environment. They aimed to increase societal awareness, motivation, and enable action through the design device. They sought to foster change by giving rise to a new conception of reality by means of three processes: the first was the creation of a sensory form of alienation, that is, the definition of new content and a new form that were absent from the existing discourse; the second was the development of social awareness concerning the reasons for this alienation; and the third was raising the consumer's awareness to this new world view.[69] So, for instance, the deconstructive fashion of Rei Kawakubo (discussed in Chapter 3) uses materials and forms (in this case, novel cuts and conventions of fashion photography) to counter the policing of the body by fashion designers and advertisements. In doing so, she gives rise to a critique that parallels the verbal critique concerning the politics of the body, with the aim of developing critical awareness to conceptions of the body. The design of novel types of clothes is meant, according to this designer, to transform women's perceptions of their own bodies, and thus to change their behaviour.

Like critical theory, critical design builds on the post-structuralist thought that developed following the student riots of 1968, which brought both France and Japan to the verge of a civil revolution. Since the student movement in these countries was unable to give rise to a strong political leadership, it withdrew and disintegrated. The French student movement was chased off the streets and went underground, giving rise to the discourse of post-structuralist thought – a product of the mixture of euphoria and disillusionment, liberation and disintegration that characterised the year 1968. Since these revolutions were unable to dismantle the state's power structures, only theories remained. In France, post-structuralism largely remained within the walls of the academy (with the exception of small critical design groups such as Grapus), where it focused on the possibility of undermining structures of language.[70] Elsewhere, such as in Britain, Italy, and Japan, the energy that erupted during the 1960s was channelled into avant-garde art or radical/critical design, since design, as argued by design historian John Heskett, is similar to language in that each is 'a defining characteristic of what it is to be human'.[71] Like language, design is inevitable, and our relationship to it – the degree to which we understand what is being communicated to us and to which we

can express what we think, feel, and desire – has an immense influence in shaping our encounter with the world.[72]

Much like the central idea underlying French critical theory, namely, that the creation of a new language is a prerequisite for the creation of a new social reality, critical design sought to invent a new material and visual language and a new design language in order to create a new reality. The language of design and style sought to shatter the subjects of discourse, values, and social paradigms dictated by capitalist ideology. In doing so, it hoped to do away with the partitions, class structures, theoretical discourses, social orders, and social codes embedded in the object, and to challenge the identity and behaviour of the 'right person' who thinks and says the 'right' things and wears the 'right' clothes. Thus, Matt Malpass argues that 'within design research, critical design practice ignited discussion of design as a method of cultural provocation where some designers and commentators take critical design as a starting point for discussing how social issues and political themes might enter design practice'.[73] Yet in contrast to social theory, which calls for action through words, critical design presents a form of protest that makes use of the power of materials, objects, and images as units of meaning that bring together new social and economic values and a new visual style to critique existing norms, to give rise to new forms of human behaviour, and to create a new habitus. In other words, critical design practice is used as a medium to engage user audiences and provoke debate. It does this by encouraging its audiences to think critically about themes engendered in the design work. Thus, Malpass describes critical design as 'an *affective*, rather than *explanatory* practice in so much as it opens lines of inquiry as opposed to providing answers or solutions to questions or design problems'.[74] Hence, while in mainstream design, the market provides strong incentives for designers to participate in economic systems that are arguably beyond the individual's ability to challenge, critical design includes new practices such as participatory design, co-design, design activism, feminist design, socially responsive design, and transition design. These kinds of design challenge capitalist values and establish an intellectual stance of their own.

This perspective frees objects from their passivity and renders them active, undoing the dichotomy between object and subject and viewing them as jointly active agents within a social network. Critical designers are thus also aware of critical theory, as well as of the material's power to shape values and dictate rules of behaviour. The objects produce new behavioural codes and construct a new reality. Thus, while most designers act in accordance with the dictates of capitalist and late consumer culture, the designers presented in this book see themselves as agents of social change introducing new cultural norms. Yet in contrast to critical theory, which developed in the ivory tower of academia, design-based protest is located in galleries or stores as part of the same consumer culture it seeks

to critique. It does not protest against the capitalist system but rather uses it as a platform to instigate change. Thus, when we observe products that may appear unwearable or useless, or posters that seem to transmit no legible message, the question arises as to whether these are seductive consumer items designed to promote sales or critical objects. The answer, in this case, is both/and. As Adamson and Pavitt argue in their discussion of postmodern aesthetics, this is precisely the dichotomy that character-ised postmodernism in the 1980s: at once exhilarated and critical, centred on both commodities and their critique.[75]

Social behaviours and concepts can be transformed not only through critical products but also through critical thinking about design. In her dis-cussion of 'alpha brands', Rawsthorn discusses two companies that trans-formed the lives of numerous people: the electronics company Braun and the computer company Apple. According to Rawsthorn, the entrepreneurs who founded these companies, Steve Jobs and Erwin Braun, were both decisive leaders that based their companies on new and innovative forms of design, and both were part of the counterculture of their time. Erwin Braun was a member of the subversive anti-Nazi Swingjugend move-ment in Nazi Germany, and Steve Jobs was a member of the geeky-hippy community active in California in the 1970s, with its focus on meditation, veganism, and yoga. Both brought their critical thinking to management, requesting their designers to think 'out of the box' and create products that introduced people to the magic of electronics and computing in an empowering way.[76] In this case, the critical thinking ethos that was trans-lated into products and changed people's behaviour can also be perceived as critical design.

Critical design, Japan and methodology

Recent years have seen a proliferation of historical research on Japanese design, ranging from the work of Japanese scholars such as *Modan Dezain Hihan* (A Critique of Modern Design) by Kashiwagi Hiroshi and *Nihon no Dezain Undō: Indasutoriaru Dezain no Keifu* (Design Movement in Japan: History of Industrial Design) by Izuhara Eiichi to subsequent studies by European scholars, such as Anne Gossot's work on the furniture designer Moriya Nobuo (1893–1927) and Sarah Teasley's work on the furniture designer Kogure Joichi (1881–1943). Additional studies that have offered a critical perspective on this subject include, among others, *Modan Gāru to Shokuminchiteki Kindai* (Modern Girls and Colonial Modernity) by Itō Ruri, Sakamoto Hiroko, and Tani E. Barlow, which examines posters and fash-ion design from the perspective of gender and colonial studies. A critical, postmodern perspective is similarly evident in studies of fashion design such as *Japan Fashion Now* by Valerie Steele, Patricia Mears, Kawamura Yuniya, and Narumi Hiroshi.[77]

While some of these studies reinterpreted modern Japanese design by pointing to implicit gender-related and post-colonial ideologies in the service of prevalent cultural values, only a few of these underscored the social critique expressed by avant-garde Japanese designers, who challenged and defied the dominant values. This book attempts to present the critical social ideas embedded in the postmodern and contemporary aesthetic of specific designers, while placing them in the socioeconomic context of their time. The main working assumption of this book is that Japanese design is not an autonomous sphere that can be examined by focusing on its immanent development, with only cursory acknowledgment of its affinities with external forces such as national, class-based, gender-based, ethnic, and colonial power relations. Thus, this study sees design as a heteronomous sphere that is dependent upon, and constructed through, the values and principles structuring numerous parallel fields.[78] It thus centres not only on designers and popular objects but also on the interrelations between these objects and subjective behaviours shaped by social, political, and economic conceptions. Such a discussion partakes of the post-structuralist critique that has ruptured Modernist sociocultural paradigms by revealing their implicit construction of conceptual categories through binary oppositions (such as nature and culture, reason and emotion, masculinity and femininity, white and black). The deconstruction of these oppressive hierarchies, which had created a cultural ethos based on familiar power relations (the supremacy of Logos, patriarchal thought, or Western culture), led, in turn, to the construction of new social power relations and of multiple types of relationships between different constructs. One of the binary oppositions dismantled in the postmodern era was that between subject and object, which was shaped by the supremacy of the first term over the second. As a result, objects could be extricated from the cultural morass in which they had been caught and rescued from their linguistic and theoretical status as voiceless, passive, and neutral things in the service of human beings. Instead, they came to be viewed as entities capable of activating, stimulating, moving, and constructing human subjects. Such entities evolve through a range of processes: they are created, transformed, degraded, and recycled, surviving or disappearing over time. This theoretical approach presents objects and technological developments as exerting a significant influence and creating new social paradigms. This perspective on material culture, and the desire to probe social concepts and ideologies by means of objects that arose at the turn of the twenty-first century, followed upon the rise of late consumer culture, popular culture, and the culture of brand names and designer objects in the 1980s and 1990s. In contrast to the earlier approach formulated by Clifford Geertz in the 1980s, which saw culture as a form of representation and text-making existing in opposition to 'materiality', the current perspective views material objects as a central and vital element of

cultural interpretation.[79] This renewed interest in the social meanings of material objects represents the 'ontological turn' in the social sciences and an interest in various kinds of material 'beings' known as 'object-oriented ontology'.[80] It has contributed to downplaying the power of the subject as actor and activator and has undermined the cultural supremacy of abstract, conceptual ideas over material objects. In doing so, it has sought to germinate new spheres of understanding – an active cultural ecology with no division between human and inanimate forces.

Following these ideas, this study focuses on the role of design as a social practice and explores how, where, and why objects impact the construction of power relations and the creation of meaningful social systems.[81] In this context, my methodology centres on identifying the mechanisms of action shaped by the aesthetic avant-garde, which formed the basis of the material and visual critiques presented by the designers. To this end, the book combines methodologies employed in the social sciences, which examine social and economic forces, with methodologies centred on aesthetics – thus offering a multi-layered examination of the design object. This methodology also relies on the Actor- Network Theory formulated by the sociologist Bruno Latour and the scholar of science and technology Michel Callon, which views objects as epistemically equal to human subjects.[82] As already mentioned, this theory reveals how the relations between objects and people create a social network that impacts innovation in the fields of design and of scientific and technological inventions and how these innovations, in turn, influence the network.[83] Network theory shapes an interdisciplinary approach that combines the distinct spheres of art, design, sociology, business administration, marketing, and history, allowing for a reading of aesthetics within the social network and in the context of the sociology of consumption. In order to understand the network in which the objects appear, I made use of several methods to collect and analyse the relevant data, including both in-depth interviews with the creators and a semiotic analysis of the objects. In addition, I studied local phenomena addressed by the designers I interviewed, such as rapid economic growth, visual culture, materials, and new technological or social paradigm shifts. These phenomena enabled me to understand the social network in which diverse creators and objects were active, as well as their social impact.

Finally, after exploring the nature of design and its power to create categories and shape new social power relations as well as its research methodology, this book starts by examining the structure of the field and the postmodern socioeconomic system in Japan from the 1970s to the 1990s, including the aesthetic, economic, social, and political forces that shaped it. Chapter 1 describes how the new forces active during this period informed the construction of an aesthetic milieu of 'super designers' who created a new Japanese form of expression, which continues to inform current design practices. I then present the story of different

designers from this aesthetic milieu, who each formulated a critical visual form of expression in a distinct field (graphic design, product design, fashion design, furniture design, and interactive design) and in a different style (ranging from minimalism to deconstruction, queer style, and digital style).[84] Each chapter is devoted to a single designer, company, or studio; yet when seen together as an ensemble, these design projects exceed the limits of products associated with the proper name of any one designer. The following chapters explore the different critical ideas (feminism, ecology, body politics, the politics of identity, and more) that form the unconscious of postmodern design in Japan. I have chosen to present designers working in various fields in order to stress that a critical approach is not related to one particular field. Since these individual design projects differ from one another in terms of their style, medium, and the nature of the protest or critique they offer, I do not aim to present a single and distinct ideological approach, but rather to document the work and world view of diverse designers, as well as the long chain of social and economic institutions to which their work is related. Chapter 2 centres on the advertisement design of Ishioka Eiko and Suzuki Hachirō in the 1970s, which was concerned with feminist, anti-institutional, and ecological themes. Chapter 3 presents the *kawaii* movement and the work of the avant-garde fashion designer Rei Kawakubo, who has been concerned with the politics of the body and of identity since the 1970s. Chapter 4 focuses on the design approach of the lifestyle company Mujirushi Ryohin, which has been using basic design to perform a critique of late capitalism, consumer culture, and branding since the 1980s. Chapter 5 presents the work of the Hironen studio, whose work during the 1980s and 1990s focused on furniture and jewellery design for galleries and presented a critical stance on otherness through a queer and decadent form of visual expression. Finally, Chapter 6 explores contemporary digital design that goes beyond objects through the work of Takram Design Studio, Nosigner, and Wakita Akira, which underscores the blurring of boundaries between object and subject, nature and culture, as well as the creation of a new kind of living environment.

Some of these designers work in Japan's economic centres of power, while others work in independent studios and exhibit in small galleries. As cultural agents active in a range of fields, they present different types of social criticism, which together offer a comprehensive picture of Japanese design culture in the postmodern era. [85]

Notes

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35 *Ibid*., pp. 146–7. Baudrillard explained that: 'Like the sign form, the commodity is a code managing the exchange values ... it is the code which … reduces all symbolic *ambivalence* in order to ground the "rational" circulation of values and their play of exchange in the regulated equivalence of values.' See J. Baudrillard, *Selected Writings* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001), pp. 81–2. (Italics in the original.)

36 Baudrillard, *For a Critique of the Political Economy of the Sign*, pp. 146–7.

37 J. Williamson, *Decoding Advertisements: Ideology and Meaning in Advertising* (New York: Marion Boyars, 1978), pp. 45–50.

38 J. Baudrillard, 'Kool killer or the insurrection of signs', in J. Baudrillard (ed.), *Symbolic Exchange and Death* (London: Sage, 2017 [1976]), pp. 77–8.

39 R. Goldman and S. Papson, *Sign Wars: The Cluttered Landscape of Advertising* (New York: Guilford Press, 1996), pp. 5–8.

40 On the meaning of 'habitus', see R. Jenkins, *Pierre Bourdieu* (London and New York: Routledge, 1992), pp. 74–84. See also M. Sturken and L. Cartwright, *Practices of Looking: An Introduction to Visual Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), pp. 227–8; J. Clammer, *Contemporary Urban Japan: A Sociology of Consumption* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1997), pp. 46–50.

41 P. Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1984), pp. 6, 169–225. Bourdieu argues that 'the producers are led by the logic of competition with other producers and by the specific interests linked to their position. To produce distinct products which meet the different cultural interests' (pp. 230–5). He also addresses distinctions in taste between the upper and lower classes in terms of their attitude to art and cultural consumption (pp. 260–95). Note that Bourdieu is discussing the French social classes. Japanese society does not have the same class distinctions, although it is a hierarchical society, with much importance placed on gaining social status. For example, the Japanese view the value of education in a parallel manner to the cultural capital that Bourdieu speaks of.

42 B. Payne, *The History of Costume: From Ancient Mesopotamia through the Twentieth Century* (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1992 [1965]), p. 308.

43 Rawsthorn, *Hello World*, p. 90.

44 Tamar El Or explores the wide-ranging use of the term 'style' in the disciplines of sociology and art. See T. El Or, *Sandals: The Anthropology of Local Style* (Tel Aviv: Am Oved Publishers, 2014), pp. 40–7 (in Hebrew).

45 The anthropologist Franz Boas described how craftspeople in the tribes he studied produced objects not only for the purpose of survival but also for the purpose of enjoyment and as a means of cultural expression through style. Boas showed how a mechanism of selection and distinction is created in a given culture through stylistic codes and rules that shape the craftsmen's work. See F. Boas, *Primitive Art* (New York: Dover Publication, 2010 [1927]), pp. 156–60. The art historian Ernst Gombrich, meanwhile, explained the connection between the psychology of style and our awareness and response in his book *Art and Illusion*. He explores the divergence of styles worldwide and discusses stylistic changes in the course of

European history, ascribing them to the changing world views of the artists. See E. H. Gombrich, *Art and Illusion: A Study of the Psychology of Pictorial Representation* (London: Phaidon Press, 1977 [1960]). For a literature review of theoretical perspectives on the term 'style', see M. Conkey, 'Style, design and function', in C. Tilly, W. Keane, S. Kuechler, M. Rowlands and P. Spyer (eds), *Handbook of Material Culture* (London: Sage, 2006), pp. 233–372.

46 Conkey, 'Style, design and function', p. 360.

47 M. Wobst, 'Style in archeology', in E. Chilton (ed.), *Material Meanings* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1999), p. 122.

48 *Ibid*., p. 120.

49 *Ibid*., p. 120–1.

50 *Ibid*., p. 120.

51 G. Riello and P. McNeil, *Shoes: A History from Sandals to Sneakers* (Oxford: Berg Publishers, 2011), pp. 3–4, 9.

52 R. Lowth, *Longinus on the Sublime* (Charleston: Nabu Press, 2012); Horace, *Epistles and Ars Poetica* (San Bernadino: Ulan Press, 2012).

53 M. Almog, 'An Inborn Complex: Modalities of Alterity in Merleau-Ponty's Thought' (PhD dissertation, Tel Aviv University, 2013), pp. 231–41.

54 Hebdige, *Subculture*, p. 105.

55 G. Adamson and J. Pavitt, *Postmodernism: Style and Subversion, 1970–1990* (exhibition catalogue) (London: V&A Publishing, 2011), p. 13.

56 *Ibid*., pp. 62–9.

57 Clammer, *Contemporary Urban Japan*, pp. 68–84.

58 S. Ewen, *All Consuming Images: The Politics of Style in Contemporary Culture* (New York: Basic Books, 1999), p. 71.

59 Baudrillard, *The Consumer Society,* pp. 92–6; H. Kashiwagi, 'Post war history in advertising design', in *Advertising History 1950–1990* (exhibition catalogue) (Tokyo: East Japan Railway Culture Foundation, 1993), pp. 14–15 ; Goldman and Papson, *Sign Wars*, pp. 194–7.

60 M. Foucault, *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972–1977* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1980), pp. 109–33; see also M. Foucault, *The History of Sexuality 1: An Introduction* (New York: Vintage Books, 1990), pp. 15–16.

61 M. Foucault, *The Politics of Truth* (New York and Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 1997), p. 32.

62 *Ibid.*

63 Foucault's approach examines the complex and not always reciprocal relations between power, truth, and subjectivity as giving rise to foundational events. He saw norms as formed in the interaction between power and knowledge and examined the behaviour of subjects in relation to diverse mechanisms of knowledge and power. It is worth noting that Foucault did not argue that knowledge is a product of power in the service of the regime, even though in numerous cases we witness the exercise of power vis-à-vis those who lack knowledge. That is, Foucault opposed the reduction of knowledge to power and of power to knowledge, arguing that we must examine the way in which these two axes, knowledge and power, interact at certain historical moments. See L. Friedman, 'The concept of criticism and the critical act', *Bezalel – Journal of Visual & Material Culture*, 2 (2015), http://journal.bezalel.ac.il/archive/3569 (accessed 2 July 2018) (in Hebrew).

64 Postmodern philosophers like Foucault thought that it is impossible to reach a representation of truth, and so it is futile to try to achieve this goal by presenting more historical details. Moreover, they thought that the attempt to do so can be detrimental. Foucault also explored historical events and the transitions between them through the Nietzschean assumption of the existence of effective history (building on Nietzsche's term '*wirkungsgeschichte*'). For Nietzsche, effective history is the history that becomes a 'genealogy', meaning, the transitions between events that

are not necessarily successive or adjacent, but nevertheless form effectiveness from the distance of years and centuries (like the links Nietzsche or Heidegger delineated between mythical events that took place in ancient Greece and the modern era). In the shift from historical research to genealogical research (which Foucault also characterised in the title of his 1969 methodological book *The Archaeology of Knowledge*), Foucault demonstrates the difference between structural research and genealogical research, which sets out to discover answers to questions concerning ideas and ideologies, and less in relation to historical structures that recur in different cultures. Genealogy inquires at what point in time certain terms started to create the possibility to take up positions of power in the discourse and constitute themselves as general 'truths'. These genealogical studies allow Foucault to go back to different source materials that were deemed inadequate by historians before him, in order to understand how institutions and ideologies gained power and legitimacy in certain societies. What purpose did they serve and in whose service? Foucault's method highlights the spheres of discourse, populations or classes that were not included in the historical studies that focused on hegemonic power structures ('history is written by winners'). In the study of the genealogy of psychiatry, and the question of how did the distinction between 'sane' and 'insane' come about, Foucault wished to inquire how this way of labelling represented a 'truth' that excluded and oppressed disenfranchised communities. Foucault argued that 'effective history' not only looks for the knowledge in retrospect that Nietzsche sought out, but also enables him to criticise historians who downplay details that can contradict their perceptions, thus affixing their research in a specific discourse of ideology that is itself subject to power–knowledge tensions. The ideological discourse frames thought and modes of inquiry and in fact predetermines their conclusions. Like other postmodern philosophers, Foucault also disputed the presentation of a historical meta-narrative, since it erases individuality and private wishes in favour of the rule. With that, says Foucault, historical discourse is like demagoguery that celebrates the masses.

65 For more about contemporary critical thinking see I. Rogoff, 'Academy as potentiality', in A. Nollert and I. Rogoff (eds), *A.C.A.D.E.M.Y* (Berlin: Revolver, 2006), pp. 11–18.

66 For more about thinking of design through Foucault's theory see E. Lupton and A. Miller, 'Disciplines of design: Writing with Foucault', in E. Lupton and A. Miller (eds), *Design Writing Research: Writing on Graphic Design* (London: Phaidon, 1996), pp. 66–7.

67 A. Dunne, *Hertzian Tales: Electronic Products, Aesthetic Experience and Critical Design* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2008).

68 For more about the history of critical design see M. Malpass, *Critical Design in Context: History, Theory and Practice* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2017), pp. 17–38.

69 J. Ranciere, *Dissensus: On Politics and Aesthetics* (New York: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2010), p. 142.

70 Grapus was a collective of graphic designers founded in Paris in 1970, following the student revolution of 1968. Grapus designers sought to create critical design by combining the graphic arts and political action.

71 J. Heskett, *Toothpicks & Logos: Design in Everyday Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 9.

72 Rawsthorn, *Hello World*, p. 63.

73 Malpass, *Critical Design in Context*, p. 9.

74 *Ibid*., p. 41. (Italics in the original.)

75 Adamson and Pavitt, *Postmodernism*, p. 70.

76 Rawsthorn, *Hello World*, p. 98.

77 For a literature review of research on Japanese design, see Y. Kikuchi, 'Design histories and design studies in East Asia: Part 1', *Journal of Design History*, 24:3 (2011),

273–9. For a bibliography about Japanese design (in English and Japanese) in the following themes: histories of design in modern and contemporary Japan; 'Japanese design' as a concept; design and government policy; design methods, movements, criticism and theory; craft and industrial arts; design in visual and material culture; media technology and information design; as well as a list of journals published by art and design universities in Japan and a list of design related academic journals, see Y. Tsuji and H. Kikkawa, 'Bibliography of design and society in modern Japan', *Review of Japanese Culture and Society*, 28 (2016), 40–50. Project MUSE, http://muse.jhu.edu/article/668013 (accessed 8 August 2019).

78 In contrast to autonomous principles, whose logic is internal to the field in question (in this case, the field of design), heteronomous principles point to the impact of forces active in other fields of power: politics, the economy, and society, which exist 'outside the field of design', thus revealing its dependence on them.

79 The study of material culture is central today to numerous fields: industrial design, art history, anthropology, archeology, architecture, engineering, STS (science, technology and society), and, most significantly, the discipline of visual culture.

80 The anthropologist Tamar El Or points to the annual conference of the American Anthropological Association, which took place in Chicago in November 2013, as marking the 'ontological turn' in anthropology and the renewed interest in 'being' (see El Or, *Sandals*, pp. 120, 155).

81 The study of the creation and production of objects sees design as integral to social processes, since the creation of an object partakes of the experience of social belonging. Ingold, for instance, explains that the production of objects is based on skill, which is a social capability that involves learning from and imitating others. See T. Ingold, *Making: Anthropology, Archaeology, Art and Architecture* (New York: Routledge, 2013), pp. 1–16. See also T. Ingold, *The Perception of the Environment* (London: Routledge, 2000), pp. 339–61. Other scholars, such as Marchand, note that the production of objects is part of social institutions, such as the institution of apprenticeship. See T. Marchand, 'Knowledge in hand: Exploration of brain, hand and tool', in R. Fardon, O. Harris, T. H. J. Marchand, C. Shore, V. Strang, R. Wilson and M. Nuttall (eds), *The Sage Handbook of Social Anthropology*, Vol. 2 (London: Sage, 2012), pp. 261–72. In addition, the production of objects has a local cultural significance in shaping identity. See O. Goldstein-Gidoni, 'Kimono and the construction of gendered and cultural identities', *Ethnology*, 38:4 (1999), 351–70. See also El Or, *Sandals*, pp. 120, 155.

82 B. Latour, *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), pp. 64–86.

83 For more about the connection between technology and society, see B. Latour, *Science in Action: How to Follow Scientists and Engineers through Society* (Cambridge, MS: Harvard University Press, 1987). See also M. Callon, 'Society in the making: The study of technology as a tool for sociological analysis', in W. E. Bijker, T. Parke, and T. Pinch (eds), *The Social Construction of Technological Systems: New Directions in the Sociology and History of Technology* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1987); and J. Law, 'On power and its tactics: A view from the sociology of science', *The Sociological Review*, 34:1 (1986), 1–38.

84 Architects are an essential part of this milieu, since numerous architects – including Sejima Kazuyo, Itō Toyō, Maki Fumihiko, and Andō Tadao – shaped postmodern Japanese expression, and architecture is often the first point of reference in the literature on postmodernism. However, Japanese architecture during this period is beyond the scope of the current study.

85 The objects discussed throughout the book were all created in Japan during the period in question. Significantly, during this period foreign design companies (such as IDEO) and a range of foreign designers were also active in Japan. Some of them are discussed in this book, since its methodology does not categorise designers

according to their nationality, but rather according to the culture in which the designer acts and the values and norms that he or she communicates. The range of design fields explored in this book offer a comprehensive account of design types in Japan during this period. Additionally, I have attempted to present well-known creators who are included in the canon of this period, alongside voices that have been omitted.