

# The Enthusiast's Eye: The Value of Unsanctioned Knowledge in Design Historical Scholarship

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**ABSTRACT** If design history research relies solely on institutionalized documentation and academic scholarship – that is, sanctioned knowledge – not only will its purview be limited to a very narrow segment of design culture, it will also lose out on a vast array of sources to valuable knowledge about our material environment produced by amateurs, collectors, and enthusiasts – what we in this article define as “unsanctioned knowledge.” Because of its dissociation with professional institutions and academic protocols and their – albeit admittedly utopian, but nonetheless upheld – ideals of objectivity, this type of knowledge is typically considered fundamentally subjective in nature



and therefore of little or no relevance and value to academic scholarship. In this article, we argue that, to the contrary, design historical scholarship has much to gain from engaging more seriously with the unsanctioned knowledge represented by the enthusiast's eye.

KEYWORDS: enthusiasts, amateurs, collecting, knowledge, historiography

### Introduction

Drivers of the utility Land Rover (known as the “Defender” since 1990) often wave at each other when they pass. This is unusual in modern motoring and there is a protocol, of course; drivers of Defenders owned by the Army, farmers or the electricity board, etc., rarely acknowledge each other based simply on the vehicle they happen to be driving. However, private individual owners of the Land Rover Defender usually wave. Why? Is it because the first group (soldiers, farmers, and contractors) see the Land Rover as purely work-horse, a tool to get the job done? The second group differ, as they have been motivated in some way to spend their own money to buy a capable but rather thirsty, noisy, and slow vehicle. Nevertheless, they seem to be saying with a simple hand gesture to a fellow Land Rover owner, “I get it too” (interview with Roger Crathorne, Head of Technical Communications at Land Rover and an engineer at the company since 1964, August 7, 2009). Although the evidence is anecdotal, there is, it seems, a desire to acknowledge their enthusiasm with likeminded strangers (Figure 1).



Figure 1

Land Rover etiquette: spoof instructional sticker produced by Norsk Land Rover-klubb. Paul 's collection.

Membership of this community also often entails substantial knowledge, both artefactual and contextual, of the shared object of affection (Sudjic 2008: 61–2). Such observable manifestations of enthusiasm are highly revealing of the significance of subjective engagement, emotional attachment, and “unsanctioned” knowledge in design culture, and should therefore warrant the attention of design historians.

Much of our reaction to design as users and consumers is subjective. This ranges from the active dislike of particular designs (“this chair is uncomfortable,” “that’s an ugly car”), through invisibility (“did you notice the cutlery you used to eat your dinner last night?”), to vague preferences (“I prefer the green one”), and onto dedicated enthusiasm for particular artefacts (“The Spitfire is an iconic aircraft”) (Hazell 2013). A network of interests exists in relation to the interpretation of materiality starting with the designers themselves through to users, and at times design historians and other academics. These groups exhibit differently nuanced behavior in relation to their engagement in design, its implementation, consumption, and history.

Designers are often extremely enthusiastic about what they do. There is a strong sense amongst graphic designers, for example, that if they are not excited about their latest design they are not doing their job properly (Hazell 2014). The level of enthusiasm the resulting designs instill in their users, on the other hand, varies greatly. At times people interact with things without realizing they have done so; other times design awareness is more conscious, ranging from dislike or annoyance to satisfaction or pleasure (Norman 1998; 2004; Keyte 2013). Occasionally however, these same users will become aware of an artefact as something that triggers or represents experiences or emotions. This can manifest itself as an affection or appreciation of a particular piece of design through to what might be described as “full-blown enthusiasm” or perhaps even as “object fetishism” (Oddy 2013). Predicting such responses, though, is difficult, as product experience is both culturally contingent and individual: “A user brings to the moment of interaction all his/her prior experiences and expectations, as well as, for example, his/her emotions and feelings, values, and physical characteristics” (Nurkka et al. 2009: 450). In other words, emotional responses to products are subjective, and elicited by a range of different properties of the product – not just its appearance. Designing for enthusiasm has therefore become something of a holy grail in design research (Desmet 2004: 8).

Designers and users, then, seem both able and willing to accept enthusiasm into their understanding of material culture. Design historians, on the other hand, are much more reluctant to do so as it appears counter to the scholarly traditions of striving for an objective view. Although the historicist mantra of describing the past “*wie es eigentlich gewesen*” (as it actually was) is long discarded as an elusive utopian ambition, the academic world’s quest for credibility has cast a spell of suspicion on everything subjective. Not only might this

push the understanding of enthusiasm as a category of consumer behavior into the background of design historical scholarship; it also conceals the fact that most design historians are enthusiasts themselves. What we choose to study, and how we go about that task, is – to varying degrees, of course – guided by our subjective preferences, responses, and experiences, at times amounting to full-blown enthusiasm for our subject matter and object of study.

Enthusiasm is defined as being passionate about something, making it only a small step to the original sense of the *amateur* as a lover of something. This etymological excursion might go a long way in explaining why there has been so little enthusiasm for enthusiasm in academic design history: being an enthusiast is dangerously close to being an amateur (in the more pejorative, contemporary meaning of the word). For a discipline still having to legitimize its status as professional practice (Fallan 2013a), the fear of being associated with amateurism is quite understandable. The realm of love and passion is intimately linked to the personal, to the private, thus fortifying the dichotomy between the objective and the subjective, between the professional and the amateur/enthusiast.

However, design historians' fear of amateurism and enthusiasm in their own historical practice seems to be stronger than when they are studying the practice of design itself. There has in recent research in design history been a significant interest in the role of amateur knowledge and skills in the sphere of design practice (Atkinson 2006; Shove et al. 2007: 41–67; Beegan et al. 2008; Jackson 2010), yet no work has been conducted on the role of amateur knowledge in the sphere of design history. This article seeks to address this lacuna, arguing for a more self-reflexive understanding of “unsanctioned” forms of historical knowledge and their potential contribution to the writing of academic design history.

### **Unsanctioned Knowledge**

As part of his critical examinations of society's power structures, Michel Foucault introduced the concept “subjugated knowledges” as a means to acknowledge and mine the riches of those kinds of experiences and expertise that have been suppressed and ignored by the authorities and by authorized accounts: “by subjugated knowledges one should understand ... a whole set of knowledges that have been disqualified as inadequate to their task or insufficiently elaborated: naive knowledges, located low down on the hierarchy, beneath the required level of cognition or scientificity.” Arguing that this realm of experience and expertise has significant critical potential, Foucault elaborates on what he describes as:

low-ranking knowledges, ... unqualified, even directly disqualified knowledges ... which involve what I would call a popular knowledge [*le savoir des gens*] though it is far from being a general commonsense knowledge, but is on the contrary a

particular, local, regional knowledge, a differential knowledge incapable of unanimity. (1980: 82)

As in Foucault's examples, drawn from his seminal histories of madness, sexuality, and punishment, the kind of knowledge we have identified and termed the "enthusiast's eye" is popular, non-academic, unauthoritative, particular in scope and dispersed. However, describing it as "subjugated" would be an exaggeration. Therefore, we propose the related, but moderated term: "unsanctioned knowledge."

Significantly, Foucault makes a case for combining subjugated knowledge with erudite knowledge as a key component in a methodology for exploring a more multivocal and polyvalent past. In fact, it is the very union of these two realms of knowledge that he terms *genealogy* (Foucault 1980: 83). This latter term is notoriously difficult to define, and the mode of historical inquiry associated with it is controversial. However, its basic tenet, that combining sanctioned with unsanctioned knowledge will lead to improved historical understanding, is useful here.

### **Historian Enthusiasts and Enthusiast Historians**

There are (at least) four ways the enthusiast's eye engages with design history: (1) occasionally, the enthusiast is also a professional historian – or vice versa, (2) more commonly, the enthusiast becomes an amateur historian of their object or field of interest, (3) the enthusiast collects/organizes source material (objects and/or textual/visual material) for use by professional historians and (4) the enthusiast can act as informant for professional historians using oral history methods and thereby provide an additional experiential knowledge base.

When the enthusiast and the professional historian are one and the same, a merger of the sanctioned knowledge of academic scholarship and the unsanctioned knowledge of enthusiast practices is neatly facilitated. In the case of the Land Rover, for example (which has a sizable and enthusiastic following), the enthusiast movement has led the way in uncovering details of the very earliest vehicles built from April 1948. These minutiae may initially seem to only interest the dedicated enthusiast, however, if the enthusiast is also a design historian, the significance of such details can be assessed in relation to other evidence applied to broader themes, such as how legends build up around some artefacts.

For instance, a key phrase that repeatedly appears with regard to early Land Rover models is that they were regarded as temporary stopgap products by the manufacturer. Sixty-five years later, the shift from stopgap to automotive icon can be seen as an heroic struggle befitting of this dependable and plucky British vehicle (Robson 1976: 11). However, this popularly accepted "fact" about the vehicle seemed to contradict contemporary Rover company minutes, which

discuss large-scale interest in the vehicle before it had reached production in 1948. Painstaking research by a member of the Land Rover Series 1 Club, using the original engineering drawings held in the company archive, revealed that the bulkhead between the cab and engine (a structural component in the Land Rover) was soon moved away from a fabricated construction to a pressed steel design requiring a large and expensive press tool (Bishop 2011: 85–8). This speeded the means of construction but would only payback over the longer term – not consistent with the notion of the car as a temporary stopgap. This apparently tiny detail may only be one small example of how the enthusiast’s research can help the design historian in reaching broader conclusions. But such details can be missed if the historian is not engaging with enthusiasts whether as an “outsider” or as enthusiast him or herself.

As noted above, some enthusiasts – often in the capacity of collectors – produce literature on the subject of their enthusiasm. Such accounts can be voluminous, and painstakingly detailed, and accuracy is a prime virtue. To give one example of such a taxonomic publication, the two volume *Bentley Specials and Special Bentleys* stretches to well over 1200 pages and sets out to list all known modified Bentley motor cars from the vintage period to the modern day (Roberts 1990; 2003). A brief history is given for each of the many hundreds of individual vehicles as well a photograph, chassis number, modifications carried out, any racing pedigree and the name of the owner at the time of writing. Such detailed and highly focused literature is not unusual however, with similar publications produced by clubs and individual enthusiasts. Although much of this work would not meet the standards and conventions of academic literature – for example, because it is normally little concerned with empirical contextualization or with theoretical positions and methodological concerns – it can nevertheless have scholarly value. This is especially the case when researching the history of objects and object-types outside the canons and conventions of design history, where both secondary literature and documentary evidence may be scarce (see Fallan 2012).

Occasionally, though, the identities of the historian enthusiast and the enthusiast historian overlap, or converge. An interesting case in point is Mario Praz, Parisian collector of books, art, furniture, etc. turned amateur scholar. His publications are still considered seminal works in the history of interior decoration, much because of his deeply subjective approach. Tellingly, Praz’s autobiography is titled *The House of Life*, and in conflating his enthusiasm and life “Praz acted like a curator,” but one who “was creating a space to actually inhabit, not just exhibit” (Riegler 2013: 135). According to Shax Riegler, Praz thus serves as an example of why “Over the past two decades many scholars have been looking to collectors for insights into how the act of forming and displaying a collection can shape the gathering and transmission of knowledge” (p. 135).

The lack of engagement with literature from “the other camp” is mutual, though. Collector-enthusiasts rarely read texts written for an academic audience:

Collectors are mainly collecting as a form of escapism, the last thing they want to do in their free time is read heavyweight theoretical discourse about the meta-context of what they collect, in the main they want to acquire more and ‘better’ objects and use literature that facilitates this process. (Oddy 2013)

Furthermore, academic artefactual knowledge is unlikely to be legitimized amongst enthusiasts as they rarely have the same level of detailed connoisseurial and experiential knowledge of the object they are analyzing (Adamson 2013: 35). Responding to Wiebe Bijker’s influential study of the development of the rear-driven bicycle as an exception to the collector historians’ general disinterest in academic literature (Bijker 1997: 19–100), Nicholas Oddy explored this issue further:

Its reception was negative, principally because Bijker had made the heinous mistake (to collector historians at least) of being factually inaccurate in his history of the machines themselves ..., thus discrediting the rest of the content, no matter how impressive its theorising was. Rather ironically, Bijker had become a victim of the linear, technologically led histories he set out to question. (2013)

This is not an argument for design historians to necessarily become enthusiasts for the artefacts being studied, however; the default criticism of subjectivity in historical scholarship could be wheeled out against such a position. The interesting point in this case is rather the at times impressive rigidity of the unsanctioned knowledge produced by enthusiasts. In addition, there is a lesson to be learned about the perils of making assumptions about, for example, details of an object’s construction – perils which can be avoided through direct personal experience (Meikle 1998: 193–4). So, if not full-blown enthusiasts, design historians can still benefit significantly from subjective experience, informed by the knowledge produced by collector historians and other enthusiasts.

### **Enthusiasts as Curators and Informants**

Although written accounts represent a significant form of unsanctioned knowledge, other forms of information are even more prevalent amongst enthusiasts, particularly artefactual and oral sources. Through their active and personal engagement with historical artefacts, enthusiasts become custodians of history. Their activities are sometimes so organized as to aspire to sanctioned forms of knowledge, as in the case of museums set up and run by enthusiast



**Figure 2**

From the exhibition hall at the Oslo Tramway Museum, an institution run entirely by enthusiasts. Photo: Kjetil Fallan.

associations, which may be hard for the casual visitor to distinguish from conventional professional museums (Figure 2).

Enthusiasts thus take on the roles of curators, conservationists, and archivists. The collections and archives held in such institutions can be as valuable to professional historians as those held in their official sister institutions; even more so at times, as these enthusiasts' museums are normally more specialized and dedicated to material only sparsely represented in professional museums (see Fallan 2012; Morris 2013). Occasionally, the two spheres meet, as when private collectors donate their collections to professional museums – a situation that may highlight discrepancies between the unsanctioned knowledge and values of the enthusiast collector and the sanctioned knowledge and professional ethos of the historian curator.

Without establishing a museum, most enthusiasts and collectors are still eager to share their knowledge and materials in various ways. Many participate in fairs, meetings, and other events. Some are more than happy to open up their homes and workshops to likeminded people, be they amateurs or professional historians. In recent years online discussion forums and social media have become invaluable sources of enthusiast knowledge. Tracking down the exact production year of a specific bicycle took about five minutes with the help of an enthusiast Facebook group (Fallan 2013b). Different modes of enthusiast knowledge sometimes converge on specific project of great design historical interest. One recent example is an exhibition on the DBS Kombi mini-bicycle at the Oslo School of Architecture and Design in 2011, curated by art historian and Kombi enthusiast Hans-Henrik Egede-Nissen. The exhibited bicycles came from the comprehensive collection of the collector, enthusiast, amateur



**Figure 3**

From an exhibition on the DBS Kombi mini-bicycle at the Oslo School of Architecture and Design in 2011. Photo: Geir A. Rybakken Ørslien.

historian, and seasoned bicycle repairman Einar Bowitz (Figure 3). Bowitz has on previous occasions collaborated on bicycle exhibitions with the Norwegian Museum of Science and Technology and the Norwegian Road Museum, contributing both his collection and his knowledge whilst campaigning for the establishing of a bicycle museum as a permanent home for his life's work.

Enthusiast collectors may also be considered de facto curators of design history, further complicating the relations between the professional and the amateur, between the sanctioned and the unsanctioned. Combining personal enthusiasm and business acumen with a sense of cultural heritage work, the entrepreneurs behind the Oslo retro coffee and cocktail bar-cum-vintage design store Fuglen ("The Bird") (Figure 4) recently teamed up with Norway's premier auction house, Blomqvist, to set up the sales exhibition *Norwegian Icons: Important Norwegian Design from the Era 1940–1975*. This commercial context makes the event distinctly different from a similar exhibition organized by a conventional museum, for instance. Nevertheless, with a stated ambition of "rais[ing] international awareness of Norway's significant contribution to the Scandinavian Mid-Century period, alongside that of Denmark, Sweden and Finland" (Linder 2013: 15), the initiative was warmly welcomed by the governmentally funded institution charged with the promotion of Norwegian design, the Norwegian Centre for Design and Architecture, and subsequently shown in Tokyo and New York.

Whereas the above example goes a long way in moving enthusiast knowledge into the official, public discourse of design history, collectors can also take on the role of curators in private settings. In her research on the role of collecting "kiwiana" in the cultivation



**Figure 4**

The coffee and cocktail bar-cum-vintage design store Fuglen in Oslo. The retro furniture enthusiasts-entrepreneurs behind this establishment formed themselves as official curators of design history with the exhibition Norwegian Icons. Photo: Norwegian Design Council (Creative Commons).

of New Zealand national identity, Claudia Bell interviewed collectors of Crown Lynn ceramics. These mundane products are considered iconic of the nation's industrial heritage and relics of a recent past when New Zealand had a relatively self-sufficient consumer goods industry, and Bell argues that the widespread collecting of these artefacts is an attempt at preserving this legacy: "Each of these collectors truly saw themselves as actively contributing to the preservation of the material history of a nation. Their own 'subjective sentiments' harmonized strongly with received collective memories" (Bell 2013: 56). These enthusiasts can thus be considered as amateur curators of design history – or "guardians of national artifacts" in Bell's words – effectively moving this otherwise official, public, and professional capacity into the sphere of the personal, particular, popular, and nostalgic.

Beyond their role as curators, enthusiasts also make valuable informants because of their detailed knowledge. Of course, their very enthusiasm is a methodological challenge to the historian, as it may make them particularly prone to promoting a specific version of the events – but this problem is by no means restricted to enthusiasts (Sandino 2006: 278). In interviews with enthusiasts, for instance, there is the ever present danger they will "spin off" at a tangent from the question asked as they revel in the opportunity to not only discuss the object of their affection, but also demonstrate their depth of knowledge which has now apparently been legitimized by interest from an historian. However, as Linda Sandino has noted

of the use of oral sources, “fidelity and subjectivity should be seen as complementary rather than as oppositional” (Sandino 2013: 7). An enthusiast “spinning off” can lead to new discoveries, making it important for a historian to consider carefully when to let the enthusiasts expand  when to rein them in. It is crucial to acknowledge, though, that oral history, “interviews are locally managed occasions of interaction in which participants collaboratively construct meaning” (Oak 2006: 346).

Even if one's informants are not full-blown enthusiasts in the most dedicated form, a certain level of enthusiasm for the topic at hand – both on the part of the interviewer and the interviewee – is often indispensable when conducting oral history. Siv Ringdal's ethnological study, of how temporary work migration from a small Norwegian rural town to New York during the greater part of the twentieth century created an exotic enclave of “Americana astray,” relied heavily on her personal experience with this phenomenon from her upbringing and family. Furthermore, her research would hardly be possible without the widespread pride, nostalgia, and enthusiasm for this heritage throughout the local community (Ringdal 2014). This enthusiasm for the topic, and by extension the likely detailed knowledge of it on the part of the historian, can greatly improve communication with the amateur enthusiast as trust is developed when the interviewee accepts the historian as having “real” knowledge of the artefact or event in question. This can lead to aspects of the story, which might otherwise go unnoticed, being identified, and woven into the historical narrative as the historian considers both the macro *and* the micro perspectives.

### **The Enthusiast's Eye: A Multifocal Lens**

Of the many modes of enthusiasts' knowledge, the most characteristic is probably what Oddy calls “[the] experiential knowledge of collecting and its methodologies acquired through ownership of the things” (Oddy 2013). Through its connection to ownership, the “enthusiast's eye” is usually located in the parallel world of “hobbies and interests” where many spend considerable time and money, and though unpaid and without obligation, often feel highly motivated and deeply engaged in a particular pastime. Are there, therefore, characteristics particular to some artefacts that mean an inanimate object can become a fascination to some? And what might this tell us about material culture as viewed through the enthusiast's eye?

Collecting rare, unusual, and original examples of artefacts is often of prime virtue to enthusiasts where not only does the ownership of such an object endow status in the particular enthusiast community, but also the very difficulty of obtaining such items increases the sense of reward once found. This form of connoisseurship amongst enthusiasts is likely to be rejected by design historians due to its subjectivity and selectivity. However, the desire for the rare is an

aspect of material culture worthy of academic study due to its effect on the ontology of objects (Adamson 2013: 37).

The professional ethos and analytical conventions of historical scholarship can make it difficult to put aside potential prejudices about the nature of enthusiasm, but doing just that is necessary if we are to better understand material culture. If we are too quick to link the “enthusiast” to ideas of “celebration” or irrelevant “niche interests” design historians ignore factors that can help explain the cultural resonance of some artefacts in relation to others, and underestimate the value of archival material held in private collections that can be rich sources for design historical research.

Equally important, though, is the self-reflexive lesson to be learned: acknowledging that one’s own research, at least initially, might be driven by enthusiasm for a topic may mean we need to reappraise the word and examine its merits rather than pretend that our enthusiasms do not influence our research or that enthusiasts do not have something to offer the academic study of material culture.

Enthusiasms, or the examination of other people’s or group’s enthusiasms, can provide an alternative starting point for research that from the outset acknowledges the complex personal relationship we have with objects.

The assumption that enthusiasts, collectors, and amateur historians are dilettantes with no real commitment or structured knowledge leads professional historians to neglect a useful resource for their research. Historians have often underestimated enthusiasts and what they reveal, sometimes unwittingly, about material culture. The enthusiast can make the transparent visible by selectively highlighting examples of material culture, and as a by-product of their personal interest, encourage academics to re-evaluate the significance of certain artefacts. Enthusiasts, and one’s personal enthusiasms, can flag-up areas of potential research that design historians might at first consider unworthy of examination. As historians we are likely to discount individual eccentric collectors of the mundane such as traffic cones or tea cosies. However, if there is an observable, or even measurable, clustering of subjective personal opinions this pattern or phenomenon may be both significant and revealing if examined. It is not so much a matter of subscribing to “the wisdom of the crowd” – an approach an academic is likely to resist – but rather of being aware that a group or an enthusiastic individual may highlight an aspect of material culture previously ignored or undervalued by historians, which therefore provides a useful starting point for new research.

For example, one might examine 3D printing and the growing communities of online enthusiasts who are sharing data files of virtual objects that can now be made physical using the new technology. This technology has the potential to significantly change our relationship with material culture in much the same as way the Internet has changed our relationship with information. These enthusiast groups,

though currently niche, highlight this emerging shift in our interaction with materiality in a *concentrated* form. The design historian can then look for historic parallels in the democratization of design to better explain the emerging phenomenon and its possible consequences (Knott 2013).

### Enthusiasms and Experiences

Direct experience of, or interaction with, an artefact leads to a different and often more profound understanding of the object. It is rather a cliché but the Chinese proverb, “What I hear I forget, what I see I remember, what I do I understand” goes some way to explaining the advantage of this direct interaction. Experimental archaeologists have long known this and regularly reconstruct historical artefacts or whole environments to better understand their use and limitations. Likewise, anthropologists will immerse themselves in an environment or culture for long periods for similar reasons. Even historians of technology and of design have pointed out how the value of “hands-on” experiential knowledge to historical scholarship has been gravely underestimated (Walker 1989: 5; Corn 1996). Yet few design historians spend extended periods of time using the artefact they are studying, despite the relatively easy access to many of these items (Fallan 2013b: 67).

Interacting with the artefact is usually fundamental to the enthusiast, however. For example, for many classic and vintage car enthusiasts it is not enough to only study the vehicle and its history. They want to own it, use it, and experience how the artefact *feels* in use (Figure 5).



**Figure 5**

A Land Rover Defender on the overland trail in central Algeria, 2010. The type of experiential knowledge that comes from such expeditions is essential to fully appreciate the phenomenological, social, and cultural significance of this design historical artefact. Paul Hazell's collection.

As Oddy points out, though, “of all the approaches to objects that can be had from collector/enthusiasts, this is the most problematic for the academic to engage with on the same level because it is so personal and subjective” (2013). We would do well to overcome this reluctance, however, because such visceral interaction, though subjective and hard to define, can be a starting point for understanding the characteristics of an emotive artefact beyond the theoretical and can inform our understanding of why a design ultimately carries its particular value complexes.

This use of an historic artefact can also lead to a change in the way it is perceived. The object moves out of potential obsolescence or from being perceived as a static museum piece, to become an object inhabiting the world *now* and our understanding or perception of it changes as a result. For instance, in an interview, a senior designer at Land Rover described the Defender, with not a little irony, as: “a classic car you can buy new!” (interview with Peter Crowley-Palmer, Senior Designer at Jaguar Land Rover, January 3, 2012).

To take a much older automotive artefact, an Edwardian car, and see it used on a modern road at an event such as the annual London to Brighton Veteran Car Run in the south of England, shifts ones thinking about the place of such a vehicle in history. The exposure of the occupants to the elements, the smile or grimace on their face depending on the weather conditions, the slowness (or sometimes surprising speed), the smell, the noise, all challenge the bystanders’ received understanding of “vintage.” This expanding of one’s perception to embrace the subjective can also be experienced by the design historian if they interact with an artefact directly. The “presence of the past” is all around. A fascinating example can be found in Milan, where 200 of the 500 “*tipo 28*” trams built in 1927–30 are still in operation. Stepping into an eighty-five-year-old tram in the midst of contemporary city life is an exercise in historical awareness to historians and non-historians alike – even to passengers who are not tram *cognoscenti*, and constitutes one of many examples of what David Edgerton has called “the shock of the old” (Edgerton 2006). Such enthusiastic experience may then prompt new questions and lines of investigation into material culture.

### Engaging with Enthusiasts

Viewing material culture through the enthusiast’s eye may provide a new or additional perspective to the design historian. Enthusiasts can, however, be highly selective both with regard to historic periods as well as the particular artefacts with which they engage, even if their interests are diverse and their knowledge often considerable. For example, some individuals who enthuse about a very particular type of artefact, such as a specific car. Others focus on a range of related artefacts, from valve radios to old garden implements. The borders of an enthusiast’s interests may be affected by many factors: budget, availability of examples, background, etc. This means the

expertise individuals and enthusiast groups hold, and the artefacts they enthuse about, are often a mosaic of specialist interests. These constituent pieces may contain vast amounts of detail and archival material but often other pieces required to construct the overall picture are missing altogether. The enthusiast may be unaware, or downplay, the significance of these missing pieces and wish to expand their narrative for a given artefact further than the evidence can support.

This is where and why Foucault's insistence on the union of unsanctioned and sanctioned knowledge becomes crucial. The professional historian's contextual understanding, theoretical references, methodological repertoire, and source criticism is essential in guiding the focus of the enthusiast's eye, thereby sanctioning unsanctioned knowledge.

## Conclusion

There is still only a small and rather scattered collection of research relating to design and the enthusiast (and the word is seldom mentioned specifically). However, the recent claim that "Historians should not shun subjectivity and personal experience, but rather investigate its methodological and historiographical potential" (Fallan 2013b: 82) allows ample space for further exploration of what the enthusiast's eye can contribute to design historical scholarship.

Increased interest in the interplay between enthusiasts and artefacts is emerging, whether design historians using their own enthusiasms as starting points or exploring the foci of special interest groups. There is also an increased willingness to critically evaluate commonly used, but subjective, terms such as "iconic," "classic," and "enthusiast" in an academic setting (Olsen 2010: 15–16; Lees-Maffei 2014). Most designers are trained to consider the user perspective in their work. Correspondingly, historians are increasingly interested in "how users matter" (Oudshoorn and Pinch 2003). Therefore, if the enthusiast is a user of historic artefacts, perhaps the time is right for design historians to incorporate these forms of subjective user experiences into their analyses and grapple with the consequences as an additional means of understanding our complex relationship with material culture.

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