Global Denim, edited by Daniel Miller and Sophie Woodward

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attention to many media, *A History of Design* might be useful as a text in art and design schools that offer a diverse field of design and craft-based study; *The Industrialization of Design*, in contrast, would work best in a curriculum in which a focused module of product design history is required, such as in a graduate-level program. But in both cases, supplemental histories would be required to address the lacunae outlined above.

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**Reviewed by Beverly Gordon**

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Anthropologist Daniel Miller, Professor of Material Culture Studies at University College, London, helped found the Global Denim Project, an open-source research consortium designed to focus attention on the “blindingly obvious” everyday issues surrounding the “global garment of our world” (2). The goal was to start a conversation about the meanings of denim in different places, ultimately to demonstrate that, though the denim phenomenon is global in scope, it always plays out in specific, unique ways. Miller states he is turning to clothing, much as Levi-Strauss turned to myth, to get at bigger issues such as the nature of global homogenization and whether there are aspects of modernity that create common responses. Despite its ubiquity, there has been a relative lack of academic attention to denim, especially from social scientists. The Global Denim Project is also attempting to find added value in such collaborative projects, and to provide a model for conceptualizing and conducting future research.

The book is somewhat uneven, given the diversity of its contributors, but there are fascinating individual chapters. Stories about
Brazil focus on quite different issues. Mylene Mizrahi considers how young Brazilian women who attend Rio’s “funk ball” play with their appearance by “creating a bum” with the right jeans, made of stretch fabric. She plays up the interplay of the materiality of the jeans and body. Rosina Pinheiro-Machado is more concerned with the marketing of cheap jeans in Brazilian favelas, and focuses on the vendors and the ways that, in order to survive, they essentially “prostitute” themselves by selling inferior products. She uses denim to make us confront the realities of people in the margins.

Some of the same themes appear in other chapters in different contexts. Materiality is dealt with by Bodil Birkebaek Olesen, who considers the “greening” of blue jeans in North America, for example, and the way the same material has come to take on different connotations over time. The erotic valence of jeans is also addressed by Roberta Sassatelli, who calls them the “most sexualized clothes in Italy” (128). She calls them “culturally thick” items of material culture that can be used to perform identity and seduction, and that paradoxically can be used as both fashion and anti-fashion. Milanese males and females both show their bodies with jeans, Sassatelli claims, but the males show off in them and present their bodies positively, while women use them to hide flaws.

Jeans’ function as identity-markers is also multifaceted. Sophie Woodward, the volume’s co-editor, proposes a “jeanealogy” which can be used as “a tool to think about how denim externalizes and helps negotiate a particular kind of relationship with [jeans]” (154). She examines the way girls in the UK wear their boyfriends’ jeans, using the garments to mediate contradictions between dependency and independence, among other issues. In Germany, Moritz Ege claims, “carrot-cut” jeans are particularly popular with Muslim immigrant youth, and function as a kind of gangster style. There, too, denim is redolent of ambiguity and contradiction. Claire Wilkinson-Weber looks at the way Indians have recently begun “branding” themselves through jeans. College girls are increasingly replacing the **salwar kameez** with jeans (this has shifted the centrality of the tailor), and jeans play a central role in contemporary Bollywood films. The local differences are always significant, however. Miller shows us that jeans are not worn much in the state of Kerala, where different religious and gender norms prevail. The rejection is internal, and contrary to what outsiders might expect, has little to do with the global roles of the garments.

Jeans are particularly ubiquitous in our world; in some countries in 2008, it was estimated that, on average, people wore jeans 3.5 days each week. Often, they function as a default mode for people who don’t know what clothes to wear. The fact that they come in widely divergent price points and multiple styles makes it imperative that researchers resist any easy answers about their meanings. Denim is both the expression and resolution of contradiction, according to Miller (global and individual, general and intimate). At the

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very moment we are confirmed in our desire for singularity, we are wearing the world’s most homogenized garment. The only way we can only deal with jeans’ inherent paradoxes is by taking a dialectical approach (universalism and its negation, and then synthesis). Miller’s conclusion, that material culture studies should be at least as concerned with how objects make people as how people make objects (19), is an important maxim for anyone thinking about design and culture, and this collection of essays effectively does that.

**LA Under the Influence: The Hidden Logic of Urban Property**, by Roger Sherman; foreword by R.E. Somol


**Reviewed by Ole W. Fischer**

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At first glance, Roger Sherman’s book *LA Under the Influence* resembles Robert Venturi, Denise Scott Brown, and Steven Izenour’s *Learning from Las Vegas* (1972). Like Venturi et al., Sherman provides architects with a close look at contemporary urban vernacular phenomena through photography, diagrams, and theoretical models. He also confronts architects with examples and facts that the profession prefers for aesthetic reasons not to see: namely, the messiness of LA suburban parcels. In LA, it is not unusual to see apartments share corner lots with car washes, billboards, parking lots, juice bars, and pet shops, or to witness the surreal meeting of a café house, shoe repair shop, and corporate bank’s glass box with oil rigs, parking lots, improvised layers of landscaping, and through-access to a private house. And lastly, like Venturi et al., he is less interested in presenting the new and fashionable than in directing attention to something obvious yet generally overlooked by the profession: in this case, the influence of property rights on urban form.

However, rather than relying on semiotics as Venturi et al. do, Sherman uses game theory and gerrymandering, among other methods, to bring to light the hidden structuring principles of his case studies. His focus is on the single parcel, the smallest common increment of urban design. “Influence” is key to his perspective, since property rights, Sherman argues, undergird and overshadow architects’ and planners’ traditional focus on clients, zoning, and building codes. Since American law differentiates between various