



## THEME

### **Modernisms' locations I:**

"Forging a bridge of understanding"?

The emergence of national and transnational design organisations, 1930–1970

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#### **Panel abstract**

This panel forms part of a series of three panels that coalesce around the theme of 'Modernisms' Locations', and specifically considers the International Council of Societies of Industrial Design (ICSID), the relationship between national and transnational design cultures, and the evolution of models and codes of professional practice during the mid-twentieth century. Dr. Leah Armstrong's paper locates the British Society of Industrial Artists in an international context and shows how the professionalization of design in Britain was shaped through a complex negotiation between the national and the transnational. Tania Messell's paper examines the tensions that surrounded ICSID's establishment, and reveals how cultural internationalism was inextricably linked with Cold War politics and national representation. Finally, Dr. Harriet Atkinson's paper explores Black's role in internationalizing British design cultures by examining the incentives that drove his contribution to ICSID and other design organisations, and its impact on these transnational sites.

#### **Keywords**

Internationalization, design organizations, professionalization, ICSID



## PAPER #1

### **Looking inwards and facing outwards:**

The society of industrial artists 1930–1967

**Leah Armstrong** / University of Applied Arts / Vienna / Austria

#### **Abstract**

The professionalization of design in the twentieth century was an international phenomenon that has often been studied as a series of discrete national histories. This paper explores alternative approaches to accounting for professionalization through a detailed examination of the British design profession in its formative years, cultivated through the establishment of the Society of Industrial Artists (SIA), the first professional body for design in Britain (1930-). Drawing on previously unseen archive material, it locates the SIA's position as a British institution within an international context.

The paper argues that the SIA's Code of Professional Conduct rested upon an interpretation of 'Britishness' borrowed and appropriated from the traditional professions of law and architecture and represented in the figure of the 'gentleman-professional'. Indeed, many of the Society's

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founding members including Milner Gray, Misha Black and FHK Henrion, self-consciously adopted this persona. Importantly however, a significant number of these members, including Black and Henrion, were also Émigrés from Europe. For these designers, the act of 'being seen' to be British was fundamental to performance of professionalism. Black and Henrion also played an active role in establishing international platforms for the SIA, through the establishment of ICSID and ICOGRADA, on which they could project the image of the gentleman designer and export SIA codes of professionalism. Bringing these inward looking and outward facing dynamics into tension, the paper suggests that the professionalization of design in Britain was profoundly shaped through a complex negotiation between the national and transnational.

### Keywords

Britain, Émigré, ICSID, ICOGRADA, Professionalization, Society of Industrial Artists (SIA)

### Biographical Note

Dr Leah Armstrong is Senior Lecturer in the department of Design History and Theory at the University of Applied Arts Vienna. She has previously held research and teaching positions at the University of Brighton, Victoria and Albert Museum in London and the Glasgow School of Art.



### PAPER #2

## Design across borders:

## The establishment of the International Council of Societies of Industrial Design (ICSID), 1953–1960

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### Abstract

The International Council of Societies of Industrial Design (ICSID) was founded by designers from Europe and the United States in 1957 to raise the professional status of designers and establish international standards for the profession, in a period that witnessed the rapid growth of design institutions and professional organisations (Lees-Maffei 2008). However, while a rhetoric of cultural internationalism surrounded its establishment, and its members described its aims as forging a 'bridge of understanding' across borders (Misha Black 1961), frictions surrounded the drafting of its aims and functioning, which resulted from Cold War politics, local agenda, and conflicting design ideologies.

### Keywords

The International Council of Societies of Industrial Design (ICSID), internationalism, design organisations, professionalization

### Introduction

The International Council of Societies of Industrial Design (ICSID) was established by a circle of designers from Europe and the United States in 1957 to raise the status of designers, facilitate communication amongst its members, and raise design standards internationally (1959 Constitution). While the rhetoric of cross-border cooperation surrounded its formation, competing political and cultural agenda met within its ranks, which stifled the organisation's international aims and inner-workings. The first part of the paper will examine how diverging incentives shaped mid-twentieth century international expert networks, followed by a biographical overview of ICSID's cosmopolitan founders, which will highlight their growing involvement in national undertaking in the 1950s. Approaching the organisation through a transnational perspective, which acknowledges that international organisations are 'complexly intermesh-

ing circulatory regimes', shaped by the movements of ideas and individuals between different national and local settings (Kott, 2011, p.446), the examination of the debates that surrounded ICSID's establishment and the drafting of the council's aims and functioning will reveal how ICSID became a central arena for its founders to disseminate ideological influence on the world stage, gain prestige and economic returns in a context shaped by Cold War tensions, the opening of the markets, and competing design ideologies.

### NGOs and the 'one world' rhetoric

The creation of this international design community in 1957, aimed at forging a 'bridge of understanding' across borders (Black, 1961), took place when the Enlightenment concept of "World Citizenship" permeated political and cultural post-war discourses, and international cooperation was regarded as 'the best alternative to the perils of racism, nationalism and nuclear annihilation' (Sluga, 2011, p.223). Cultural exchange was particularly believed to ease international relations and to favour peace preservation during that period, and governmental and non-governmental international organisations multiplied on the shared assumption that cultural questions knew no boundaries (Iriye, 2002). However, scholarship on international expert networks reveals how these sites often witnessed professional rivalries, political propaganda, and attempts to claim recognition both at home and abroad (Rodogno et al., 2014, p.6), whilst their members were often bound to local resources and networks (Kott, 2011). ICSID was similarly devised on idea that cultural exchange could offer an alternative for world politics (Pulos, 1988, p.209), and for its second President, the designer Misha Black, professional bodies are able to engender 'co-operation which eludes politicians, [a task which] those who have held office in ICSID have been aware of from its beginning' (Black, 1969, p.6), whilst ICSID's instigator, Jacques Viénot, stated that design itself was capable of 'favouring international relations' (Viénot, 1953, p.86). However, whilst the rhetoric of international understanding surrounded ICSID's establishment, competing agenda manifested themselves within its ranks, and alliances were rapidly formed, as the council's founding members had diverging ideas of design and how the discipline was to organise itself internationally. This overlap of internationalist discourse and individual imperatives can be examined through the concept of 'rooted cosmopolitanism' which by stressing the fluid character of cosmopolitanism, recognises that whilst individuals can have multiple allegiances and stand in different social circles, they remain 'linked to place' and to the professional and personal experience they experience in these spaces (Tarrow, p.6). Thus in line with the transnational perspective, which reveals the diversity of ideas and individuals that composed international organisations, this concept brings the study of international organisations beyond the primacy of national attachment, whilst highlighting how local attachment and cultural internationalism co-existed, and mutually reinforced each-other.

### The origins of ICSID

For the American designer Arthur Pulos, who joined ICSID in 1961, 'the group that made ICSID happen originally were all very elitist, a very international-minded, very tight little group of about a dozen' (Pulos, 1980). ICSID was mainly instigated by the French entrepreneur and leading design figure Jacques Viénot, the American designer Peter Muller-Munk and the British designer Misha Black, whose aptitude to evolve in cross-cultural settings can be traced back to their upbringings. All three originated from families that evolved in enlightened circles of the middle and the upper-middle class, and while Black had emigrated from Azerbaijan to Britain with his family in 1910, Muller-Munk left Germany in 1926 for the United States on the lookout for work opportunities. Their upbringings in educated circles participated in expanding their horizon, as these included the study of foreign languages, the introduction to foreign culture, and frequent holidays abroad in the case of Viénot (Boniface, 1997, p.12).

Assisted by their diplomatic know-how and multi-lingual skills, ICSID's founders later actively participated to international undertakings in the fields of art and design between the Interwar and 1957, where their paths often intersected. As such, Viénot attended the British Council of Industrial Design's International congress in 1951, where Black presented a paper, and both men spoke at the Aspen conferences in 1956. Müller-Munk on the other hand represented the Society of Industrial Designers (SID) at an international congress held by Viénot in Paris in 1953, and acted as a jury member for the *Signe d'Or* award of the Benelux countries since 1957, where he crossed Black's path in 1959 (Martinez, 2010, p.130). From the late 1940s however, ICSID's founders became increasingly involved in national design organisations, as Viénot founded the *Institut d'Esthétique Industrielle* in 1950, Muller-Munk presided the SID between 1954 and 1955, and Black acted as the President of the SIA (Society of Industrial Artists) between 1954 and 1956. Thus by the time they established ICSID, they had become key figures in national and international design circles, where, as seen next, they promoted conflicting visions of design and of its



Letterhead of the Provisional Liaison Committee, 1956, 09/11/1, ICSID Archive, University of Brighton Design Archives

institutionalisation.

## The professional turn

As reflected in ICSID's first letterhead, on which three design conceptions were displayed: Industrial design, *Esthétique Industrielle* (industrial aesthetics) and *Formgebung* (the act of shaping), the council rapidly saw

the manifestation of different visions of design and of ICSID's line of conduct. For Viénot, who presented the idea of establishing an international design association in 1953 (*Esthétique Industrielle*, 1953, p.4), the creation of such an organisation would assist him in revealing that French designers could contribute 'to the international edifice' of industrial aesthetics (*Esthétique Industrielle*, 1953, p.4), while allowing him to promote the discipline of *esthétique industrielle* (industrial aesthetics) (Le Boeuf, 2006). Viénot had developed the latter in the 1940s by drawing from early twentieth century theories of 'useful beauty', through which he argued for the 'synthesis' of industry and of the arts to construct a modern society (Le Boeuf, 2006, p.50). The organisation Viénot envisioned thus conveyed his broad cultural stance, as for him, such an international alliance was to be of great value 'not only from a business, but also from an artistic, philosophical and social point of view' (Viénot, 1956, p.9), and a few months before ICSID's establishment invited French, Belgian, and Italian societies to push for an organisation interested in the intellectual, philosophical and educational aspects of design (Vago, 1957, p.8). After having received the support of Black and Muller-Munk, Viénot subsequently invited societies to a constitutive meeting in Paris in April 1956, during which an 'International Liaison Committee' was to be established. Reunited were Muller-Munk, Black and Viénot alongside delegates from the French association *Formes Utiles* (Useful Shapes), the French *Chambre Syndicale des Stylistes Industriels* (Trade Association of Industrial Stylists), the West German *Rat für Formgebung* (Design Council), the Italian *Associazione Disegno Industriale* (Industrial Design Association), and the Society of Swedish Industrial Designers, whilst the Indian Institute of Art in Industry and the Japan Industrial Designers' Association were represented by proxies (Viénot, 1956, p.33). The organisation was officially registered on the 28<sup>th</sup> June 1957, and ICSID's first formal meeting held in London the following day. Described by Muller-Munk as a 'fine display of transatlantic community of interest and of unselfish professional cooperation' (Muller-Munk, 1957, p.5), the meeting witnessed his appointment as President and Black as Vice-President, which led the association to be fully oriented towards professional matters. The association's title was indeed changed from the 'International Council of Societies of Industrial Design' to the 'International Council of Societies of Industrial Designers', and the voting system was devised to allot six votes per country, which were to be divided amongst a maximum of three societies. Two categories of membership were furthermore introduced: 'Full Members', which were composed of more than fifty per cent of designers, and 'Associate members', which included mostly state-funded organisations, and whose members were not accorded voting rights (Muller-Munk, 1957).

Preserving the control of ICSID by Full Members was paramount for Muller-Munk, whose country was the only one represented solely by Full Members, the IDI and the American Society of Industrial Designers (ASID) (ICSID membership index, 1959). While the former relented to join ICSID as they considered the expertise level of its members to be too low, Muller-Munk regarded ICSID as a key platform to further the American International Cooperation Administration's (ICA) technical assistance programme, to which he contributed between 1955 and 1960 as part of the country's Cold War containment strategy (Delphia & Stern, 2015, p.121). The American government indeed employed a large amount of American designers for trade fairs and for the ICA's undertakings during the 1950s (Er et al., 2003, p.33), when designers were given 'a new kind of responsibility for [...] formulating America's approach to other nations' as *Industrial Design's* editor Jane Fiske Mitarashi wrote in 1957 (Mitarashi, 1957, p.39). In this context, Muller-Munk embraced his role as political agent, and his commitment transpires in the address he held at the House Foreign Affairs Committee in 1957, in which the designer warned the audience that 'weaker [...] needy nations [have] only two places to look for [technical help]- to the Soviets and to us' (Delphia & Stern, 2015, p.125). In this context, the designer rapidly exploited ICSID's internationalist purposes to gain the support of foreign design circles by inviting the Indian Institute of Art in Industry and the Japan Industrial Designers' Association to join the organisation in 1956 (Black 1956), whose countries at the time witnessed ICA interventions (Pulos, 1988, p.241). Muller-Munk also presented ICSID's establishment as essential, as it would hasten 'the maturity of this young profession' (Muller-Munk, 1957), while he regularly stated that American design expertise represented the ultimate stage of development (Muller-Munk, 1953, p.73). This rhetoric of assistance was furthermore coupled

with Muller-Munk's promotion of design as inextricably linked to ideas of planning and efficient modernity, through which the designer advocated the benefits of cooperation amongst 'democratic countries' (Muller-Munk, 1959, p.2), and by hailing the economic benefits of a unified trade zone, furthered the ICA's ambitions. The designer as such pushed for the creation of an international directory of professionals, of travelling exhibitions, and of documents facilitating international collaborations since 1954 (Viénot, 1954, p.33), initiatives which further reflect the designer's corporate vision of ICSID.

Black, who acted as ICSID's President between 1959 and 1961, similarly expressed the need to keep a professional emphasis within ICSID during the organisation's first official meeting (ICSID Meeting Minutes, 1957, p.11), a position which reflected his repetitive attempts to establish designers as fully-fledged professionals at international design congresses in the 1950s (Blake, 1984, p.9), and his close involvement with the SIA. The latter was established in 1930 to protect the interests of designers and to assist British trade at home and abroad, and after the Second World War, tightened its membership requirements by reserving the association to industrial designers whose products were to be mass-produced (Maguire & Woodham, 1997, p.125). The association mainly envisioned industrial design in line with a British understanding of professionalism, which as the design historian Leah Armstrong writes, was grounded in 'gentlemanly behaviour and self-improvement' in an attempt to place design alongside established professions such as architecture and engineering (Armstrong, 2015, p.15). Thus for Black, designers 'must organise their affairs as competently as architects, engineers, barristers [and] doctors, similarly build their organisations' (Armstrong, 2015, p.15), and by modelling ICSID's first Constitution on that of the SIA's (Blake, 1984, p.7), the designer aimed at propagating his association's vision of professionalization. However, Black's local allegiances were multiple, as the designer was member of the British Council of Industrial Design's Information Committee during his presidency of ICSID, when the latter acted as the patron of the Council's exhibition at the department store Le Bon Marché in Brussels in 1959 (*Esthétique Industrielle*, 1959, p.42). Thus Black actively used ICSID to export the SIA's code of professionalism, while fulfilling British economic interests through the organisation's international outreach, incentives which spurred his pragmatic vision of ICSID.

### **A battlefield of ideologies**

Whilst both Muller-Munk and Black envisioned ICSID as an association dedicated to practical means, eleven societies out of twenty-four had been designated as Associate Members by 1959, and the Anglo-Saxon vision of the organisation was met with the growing opposition of ICSID's remaining members (Black, 1957). As the Italian, Finnish, and French delegates expressed during ICSID's first official meeting, eliminating the voting rights of Associate Member would affect designers within these societies, whose opinions on professional issues would not be taken into account (ICSID Meeting Minutes 1957, p.5). Associate membership furthermore constituted a threat for national representation, as after the Finnish Society of Crafts and Design had been designated as Associate Member, its President Herman Olof Gummerus devised the creation of a second International Council of Design to represent 'propaganda societies' and craft associations. Gummerus' project reflected the society's international ambitions but also its aspiration to represent the country within ICSID, as the President apprehended the fact that the smaller Finnish society Ornamo, voted as Full Member, would have more influence than his society within ICSID (Black, 1960). The Italian Associazione per il Disegno Industriale, on the other hand castigated the Anglo-Saxon approach, as it similarly to Viénot's Institut d'Esthétique Industrielle promulgated a practice that answered economic, but also cultural and social ends, in a period in which the commercial approach of American designers was often condemned in Italian design circles (Fallan, 2013, p.265). This view reflected the main issue for ICSID's delegates, who expressed a growing concern towards ICSID's commercial turn during the meeting (ICSID Meeting Minutes 1957, p.5), and which as seen next, was the more forcefully condemned by Viénot.

While Viénot had been deeply impressed by the status held by designers in the US in the late 1940s, and the French association Formes Utiles regularly condemned his approach as driven by American-inspired aesthetic functionalism (Roulleau, 1998, p.308), the American dominance within ICSID threatened his status and that of industrial aesthetics on the world stage as the design historian Jocelyne Le Boeuf writes (Le Boeuf, 2006, p.56). As such, when the Institut d'Esthétique Industrielle was designated as Associate member in 1959, Viénot immediately retracted its membership and intensified his anti-American discourse alongside an attempt to establish a 'European union of designers' a few months after ICSID's establishment. Presenting his countrymen as the torchbearers of industrial aesthetics, through which they were to 'preserve the prestige of the mind' (Viénot, 1955, p.41), Viénot planned to unite French and European designers 'to bring spiritual values to a disoriented world' and to arrest the expansion of the American design model, which had increasingly become 'the servant of capitalist machinery'

(Viénot, 1957). By brandishing European culture against commerce, Viénot as such re-enacted a discourse that swept over French intellectual circles in the late 1950s, when repeated attempts to restore the 'French grandeur' on the world stage took place, (Kuisel, 1993, p.108), and in so doing attempted once again to place himself at the forefront of international design initiatives, by shifting his discourse to European collaboration.

However, Viénot's project came to an abrupt halt following his death in 1959, and ICSID's membership categories remained throughout the 1960s, while the term 'industrial design' was ratified during ICSID's first General Assembly in 1959, as such asserting the Anglo-Saxon dominance within the organisation. Following ICSID's feud with the Finnish society and the CoID's refusal to join the council due to its Associate Member status, Black however admitted some voting rights to Associate Members during his presidency (Constitution, 1959, p.5), and after Gummerus asked for UNESCO's assistance to create a second design organisation, the international agency decided to support ICSID on the condition that it promoted the social and cultural benefits of design to wider audiences. The council was furthermore to recover its title 'Industrial Council of Societies of Industrial Design' as for UNESCO it represented a more inclusive understanding of design, a change, which after it was ratified at ICSID's second General Assembly in 1961, led Formes Utiles to re-join the organisation, as for its President, René Herbst, the shift 'put the accent on the defence of ideas rather than professional interests' (Herbst, 1963). Thus while ICSID mainly concerned itself with professional matters, such as the drafting of international standards and the definition of industrial design until 1961, the council expanded the range of its concerns throughout the 1960s, a shift also spurred by the rapid entry of societies from developing and Socialist economies, which alongside a more sporadic American involvement in ICSID, diversified the organisation's activities.

## Conclusion

As this paper has revealed, the rhetoric of cross-border cooperation surrounded ICSID's early years, which reflected a wider belief in the pacifying qualities of cultural cooperation and exchange in the post-war period. However, while this internationalist discourse accompanied ICSID's establishment, ICSID's founders rapidly attempted to gain the control over the council's functioning, which became a central platform for the furtherance of national agenda, financial returns, and prestige, in a context in which Cold War imperatives and the opening of the market positioned designers as diplomatic agents in international spheres. The examination of ICSID's founders' incentives through the concept of 'rooted cosmopolitanism' has finally revealed that whilst ICSID's founders primarily acted in accord with local interests, their incentives at times went beyond national allegiance, whilst frictions existed between members representing the same nation, as such highlighting the need to examine ICSID beyond the national framework, in order to shed light on the internationalisation of design in the post-war period.

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### Biographical Note

Tania Messell is a doctoral student researching ICSID's promotional activities (1957-1980) at the University of Brighton, as part of the Internationalising Design History cluster. She previously completed an MA on early French corporate identities at the V&A/RCA History of Design programme.



### PAPER #3

## The 'stateless' designer:

## Misha Black (1910–77) and the internationalisation of design practice

Harriet Atkinson / University of Brighton / Brighton / UK

### Abstract

The career of designer Misha Black (1910-1977) was characterised by his role in internationalising design practice. This was manifest in his design work, as well as through teaching, writing, lectures and in his leadership of design organisations. A Russian émigré to Britain in 1912 - who declared himself 'stateless' on official forms - Black's work was consistently focused towards making a contribution beyond Britain, including official exhibition sections for Seville (1928), New York (1939) and Ceylon (1952); as advisor on industrial design to the governments of Argentina, Brazil and Israel; presenting lectures round the world and writing books which put design in transnational perspective. He set up and led a number of key international groups: as co-founder in 1933 of leftist artists' organisation Artists' International Association and as president (1959-61) of emerging transnational design group ICSID, for example. Alongside leading international design organisations, Black evolved international networks for the practice he co-founded in 1942, Design Research Unit (DRU), while at the same time designing through DRU some of what might be considered the most quintessentially British corporate identities; for British Rail and London Transport, for example. This paper will explore Black's role in internationalising British design cultures, asking to what extent he was motivated by philanthropic concerns and how much by business sense, exploring the sorts of alliances he sought, and analysing the impact of his interventions.

### Keywords

Design organisation, design practice, internationalization, professionalization

### Biographical note

Dr Harriet Atkinson is a design historian whose research interests centre on designers' work within 'official' contexts. Author of *The Festival of Britain: a land and its people* (I.B. Tauris, 2012), she completed her PhD at London's Royal College of Art and teaches history of art and design at the University of Brighton.