



University
of Southampton

Geographers and commodities

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Introduction

commodity chains →

circuits, networks, assemblages

- “...greater intellectual credibility and growing currency within the social sciences” (Jackson *et al.* 2006, 140)

Introduction

- “what comprises a distinctly geographical perspective on [commodity chain] issues?” (Pritchard 2006, 325)
- imaginative geographies & commodity stories
- furniture design & national imaginaries



Furniture design & national imaginaries

“National cultures construct identities by producing meanings about ‘the nation’ about which we can identify; these are contained in the stories which are told about it, memories which connect its present with its past and images which are constructed of it” (Stuart Hall, 1992, 293)

- the discursive construction of national design identities = *national imaginaries*



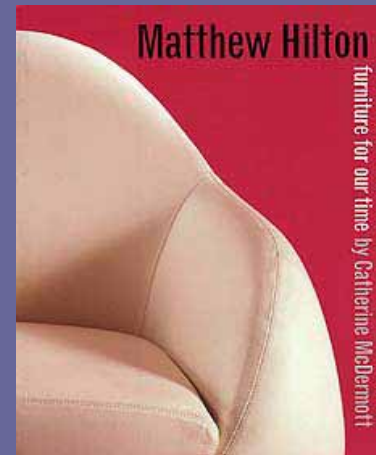
Furniture design & national imaginaries

- existing focus on commodities at global &/or local scales
 - global: 'hybrid aesthetic';
reshaping of meaning through global flows
 - local: distinctive design cultures emerge within local milieu
- but furniture design often a nationally-identified activity

Designers as national heroes

- 'hero designer'
 - reinforced in education: design canons
 - underscored in consumption: 'design classics'
 - design as an individual activity
 - architect as hero and genius
- most often located in relation to the nation

"Matthew Hilton is a British furniture designer whose work has helped shape the contemporary domestic interior of the late twentieth century. In the mid 1980s he was one of a group of designers including Tom Dixon, Jasper Morrison and Ron Arad who were producing some of the first British furniture of international significance since the 1960s" (Geffrye Museum Catalogue, 2000)



Designers as national heroes

“Leading British designers such as Jasper Morrison, Ron Arad and Ross Lovegrove are highly revered internationally, and regularly collaborate with major European furniture and lighting companies, such as Magis, Vitra, Flos, Cappellini and Kartell. Waiting in the wings are the global design superstars of the future, a younger generation of designers including Tord Boontje, El Ultimo Grito and the Azumis, many of whom are foreign-born, but British-trained and UK-based. The furniture and furnishings store Habitat, under the creative direction of design maverick Tom Dixon, produces ground-breaking, affordable products by gifted young designers.

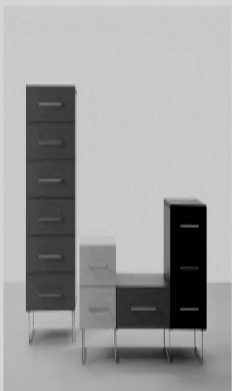
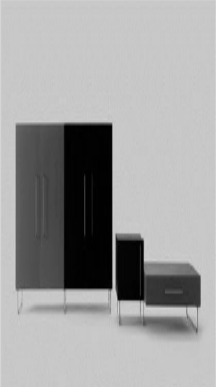
(www.britishcouncil.org)



National hierarchies

- UK vs. Canada
- UK/Canada vs. Italy (or vs. Scandinavia)

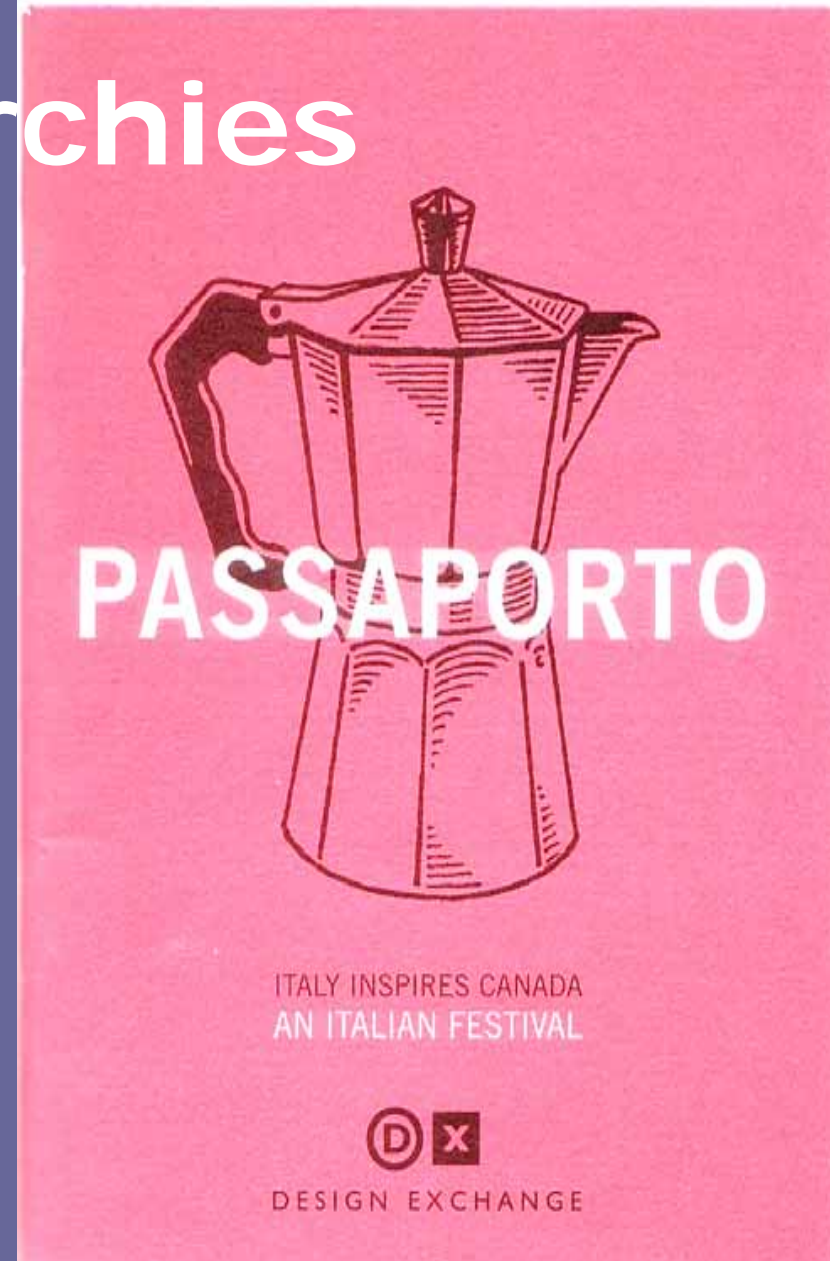
"Italy have a tremendous tradition of craftsmanship don't they, with all their furniture and it hasn't been destroyed by [deindustrialisation] so I should imagine a lot of those people are family-run businesses that have been going for generations and they take a real pride in what they are doing and they love to see it in a exhibition and people actually go along and have a look at it." (furniture designer-maker, UK)



National hierarchies

- “Italy is known around the world for the excellent design of its consumer goods and represents an ideal model of how design can increase a country’s competitiveness and economic independence...”

Gusto: Italy inspires Canada
29 June to 31 August 1999
Design Exchange, Toronto



National hierarchies

-the Design Exchange has a show going on presently and they sent something out and asked me if I was working on any projects that I could say were directly inspired by Italy.... Bloody hell. I mean, that was like, excuse me, that's everything I'm against. Like the Canadian Design Exchange, why don't you just do ... a show on really good Canadian design?

(furniture designer, Toronto)



Conclusions

- role of the *nation* in the construction of imaginative geographies
 - place & differentiating advantage?
 - durability of perceptions about (e.g.) national hierarchies
 - possibilities for recasting?
 - local vs. national imaginaries?