

# Pevsner's Research Methods and Contributions to Modernist Design

Weiwei Shao

Academy of Art, Soochow University, Suzhou, Jiangsu, 215000, China

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**Abstract:** Pevsner's research on the modern design movement is regarded as a classic of modern design theory research. Its research method has a framework system that belongs to the study of art history theory. Through its excellent research works, we can sort out a clear and distinguishable the theoretical clues are given, and historical evaluations are given for their research characteristics.

## 1. Introduction

The western design theory community will generally publish the pioneers of modern design of “pioneers of modern design” published by pevsner in 1936, “pioneers of modern design,” from william morris to walter gropius. (from william morris to walter gropius) is regarded as a classic in the history of modern design, and the clues about the modernist movement traverse among them. Nicholas pevsner is also regarded as “the father of the discipline of design history”. The book “pioneers of modern movement” made a preliminary exploration of the basic trajectory of modern design movement, and for the first time revealed the main features of modernist design around the concept of “design”.

Comparatively speaking, the two monographs of “Pioneers of Modern Design” and “The Source of Modern Architecture and Design” both use time as a clue to carry out longitudinal narratives. “Bauhaus” and “Decorative Art Movement” basically cover the whole process of “modernist design” from incubation to development. Such a historical style that uses vertical time clues and horizontal style to become the master, has been controversial today. Because the linear figures depict the representative figures (including genres and groups) that are closely related to the birth and development of modern design, not so much to explain the evolution of modern design as it is to be a elite of the modernist movement. This is what Mr. Gen pointed out in the article “Building the History of Chinese Design History in the World Design History”-“Reappearing the Elite View of” Appropriating the Framework of Art History ““. ① This concept of elite reflects Pevsner's personal fascination with the pioneers of the modernist movement from an emotional and intellectual perspective, as well as his respect for functionalism and rational values. Generally speaking, Pevsner's research methods and characteristics of modernist design include:

## 2. History and Cycle

The modernist movement described by Pevsner is step-by-step, traceable, full of innovation, and also carries certain historical characteristics of “periodic imitation”. Whether it is an elite individual or the overall development of the modernist movement, it is bound to undergo a process of eclecticism to subversion. This historicist look is clear at a glance. In his thesis, even the title of the book is full of cyclical hints-from The chaos alternated between old and new in the Morris period, and the boundaries to the Gropius period were clear. The modernist design movement established by Gropius is exactly the continuation of Ruskin, Morris, Van de Wilde, and the German Manufacturing Alliance. The time clues constitute a certain progression. The type of motion trajectory, completes a specific event in a specific cycle in an imperceptible manner. This is obviously the keynote of the historical cycle theory in Hegel's western philosophy tradition, and it is also the basic literacy of the early generation of design researchers-the academic ability trained under the framework of German traditional art history.

However, Pevsner's historicist tone is also mixed with some dialectical ideas. He emphasizes that

modernist history follows established objective laws, but also believes that the results to be followed can be passed through historical events and inductions like natural science. Experience to predict the future. In this way, the modernist movement studied by Pevsner has a character style that reflects the spirit of the times and can lead the future.

### **3. Conflicts and Rivalry**

A term often found in “Pioneers of Modern Design”-”spirit of the times”, this “Hegel” style is considered to be the core driving force of history and civilization. Pevsner makes good use of this term. He believes that history is driven by the “kinetics”, “schema” and “rules” of Hegel's Superman. The goal of historians is to explore the interweaving of style formation. The power of collision, and the kind of impetus that all art forms and cultural expressions depend on to survive, and then advance civilization. However, this idea will have an absolute result, which is a response to Hegel's absolute spirit. Pevsner needed a dialectical way to clear the relationship, thanks to his early education, and his teacher Wilhelm Pinder also acknowledged Hegel's superpersonal, technical The force of the era of forced advancement can promote the evolution of social history, but it can be interpreted as a dialectical result of the collision of multiple forces, that is, a number of contradictions and oppositions that “exist simultaneously but do not occur at the same time”. We can feel this dialectical “spirit of the times” in the book “Pioneers of Modern Design”. Pevsner cleverly juxtaposed a series of contradictions and confrontations in the modern design movement, making it flexible and effective. Constitution. For example, he reproduces the decisive contradictions between Morris' life and his doctrine; Mutheus's fierce debate with Van de Wilde; engineering technicians are unaware of social contradictions, and Gropius is compatible and inclusive Mechanization and social responsibility, etc.

### **4. Social Concepts and Consensus of the Times**

Pevsner determined that the “spirit of the times” in the modernist movement should take ideas first or emphasize “concept leaders”, and show the specific period of time from the end of the 19th century to the beginning of the 20th century through consideration of historical details and cultural pulse. Specific cultural dimension of the world-a general historical fragment of the mind or spirit synthesis, a universal social concept and a consensus of the times. In summarizing the pioneers of modern design, Pevsner defines whether it is compliant with the spirit of the time by “avoiding the machine” and further evaluates whether the pioneers have progressive or negative significance of the times: “The true pioneers of the modern movement are Those who have supported machine art from the beginning. “② It is with the historical measurement of machine art that modern design has gone through the waves of various logistics groups in the early days and finally became the mainstream concept. Therefore, Pai has devoted much attention to both the arts and crafts movement of 1851 and the engineering technology of the 19th century. Because the former is a response to the artistic crisis, the latter is the soil on which new buildings grow. After the outbreak of the First World War, the framework of the modernist movement was roughly formed. After a lot of exploration and the dominant position occupied after the Second World War, the machine aesthetics finally came into being.

Pevsner's other coherent and important concept is the discourse on the relationship between art and society, that is, the definition of the concept of social democracy. Pevsner affirmed that modern pioneers upheld this concept of social democracy and considered it to be a product of the times and society of Geistesgeschichte (spirit and ideas), which is different from Marxist art historian Arnold Hauser The “material and structural” connection between the artistic superstructure and the social foundation, Pevsner does not agree with the “shallow materialism” in the interpretation of Marxist history. He believes that it is not economic and social forces, but ideas and collectives. Your mental state precedes the event and causes change. Pevsner determined that the reason why Morris “... was the true prophet of the twentieth century and was called the father of” Modern Movement “. We owe him the following achievements: an ordinary person The house once again became a valuable

object of the architect's design thinking, and a chair or a vase once again became a place where the artist's imagination can be used. “③ As an inheritance of this concept-Gropius based on collectivism and The theory and practice of social democracy are progressive and ideal.

## 5. Hero History and Elite Arguments

The modernist movement in Pevsner's treatise is a product of historicism, but in this “history”, the role of elites and heroes is huge, that is to say, the historical shaping of the modernist movement is a series of famous or well-known comments Home, artist, designer (group genre) succeeded in succession. The study of elite figures has always been a way of arguing for scholars who believe in the history of heroes. The famous scholar Gombrich has compared Pevsner's research methods and believes that Pevsner is a combination of Michelangelo, Da · Finch and others exchanged with Morris, Gropius and others. In fact, in Pevsner's writings, he did mention these notable “characters” and made some hints. In art history, Michelangelo and Da Vinci are outstanding representatives of the Renaissance. By analogy, the pioneers of modernist design are outstanding representatives of “Design Renaissance”. They are related to the “spirit of the times” and are the times and The tide of style is the executor of innovation power. However, these representatives were selected very carefully and would not be selected without “performance.” William Morris was selected because “Morris was the first artist (but not the first thinker, because Ruskin walked ahead of him), recognizing the centuries since the Renaissance, especially from industry In the years since the revolution, the social foundation of a book has been erratic and rotten. “④ Adolf Rose was selected because he pointed out:” The lower the standard of a nation, the more decoration it uses. It is annoying. Discovering beauty from the shape without relying on decoration is the goal that human beings seek. “⑤ Frank Lloyd Wright was selected because” Wright ’s belief in machines is very Strong, so he foresaw that craftsmen might be saved from courtesy to machine learning. “The German Manufacturing Alliance was selected because” the establishment of the German Manufacturing Alliance marked a new recognition from society to individual experiments Style takes the most important step. “⑥ Walter Gropius was selected because:” Gropius sees himself as Ruskin and Morris, Van de Wilde, and followers of the German Confederation. So our circle is complete ... Morris lays the foundation for modern style, and through Gropius, its characteristics ultimately Established. “At this point, Pevsner associates the spirit of the times with the objective spirit of idealism and applies it completely to the research system of the modernist design movement.

In the 1930s, Pevsner and the creators of modernist design had a situation of “both falling into the sky”. In 1933, Pevsner was fired by the Nazis due to racial issues. In the same year, the Bauhaus was closed by the Nazis and modernists were expelled. In 1934, Walter Gropius joined the British and engaged in the industrialization of construction. Research, while Pevsner is engaged in modern industrial design and the “sociology of art” he advocates, and is committed to the in-depth dissemination of modernist design practices and concepts. “Pioneer of the Modern Movement” is against this background. With a firm idea of “modernism” and thinking of modern movements that follow the trend, it shows the world, and therefore Pevsner is considered as “mainstream and classic” Lay a foundation for a modernist design research framework. His tireless classics have helped us realize that modernism is not a periodical and abrupt aesthetic phenomenon or trend segment, but a process of elite dedication and conceptual change. This recognition is still important for today ’s design research and theoretical development. The impact is profound.

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