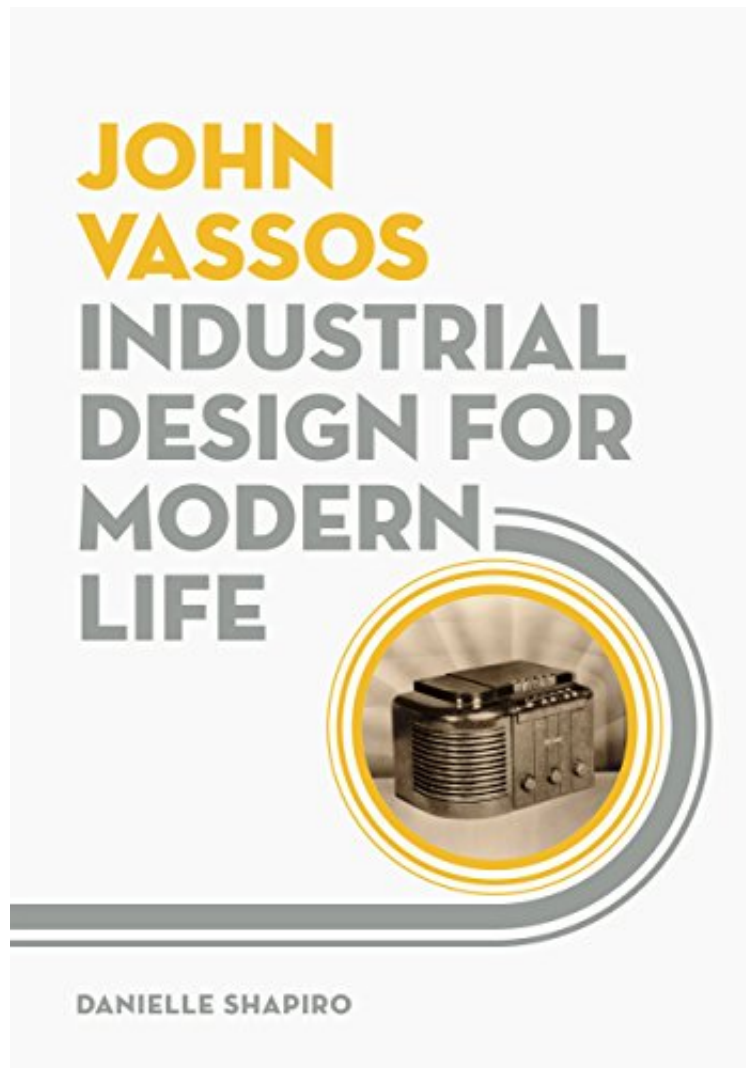


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## John Vassos: Industrial Design for Modern Life

*Danielle Shapiro*

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**Danielle Shapiro : John Vassos: Industrial Design for Modern Life** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised John Vassos: Industrial Design for Modern Life:

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Accessible and intellectually engagingBy Eugene V. ResnickShapiro has written an accessible and intellectually engaging account of John Vassos's life and career. The work is fascinating in its depiction of a creative, progressive, artistic spirit who navigated his way through corporate America to become the chief in-house designer for RCA. Vassos was able to combine a modernist aesthetic with a deeply-felt humanity, resulting in products that were both stylistically of-the-moment as well as eminently functional (Think Apple in the middle decades of the 20th century). Shapiro captures Vassos's growth, his influences and his impact. This book will especially be of interest to those interested in design, art, and style, cultural history, economic history, and the

development and impact of 20th century modernism.1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. You can't escape John Vassos' importance. By Regina Minniss One of the best obscure books about a man we all know. Without Danielle Shapiro's book we wouldn't have known that we knew John Vassos. This is the only book about him. Certainly a man of his time, but not of ours, even though his designs are still with us. You can't escape his importance.1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Vassos as a window into 1930's modernism By J. Cooper I came at this with some trepidation, because I generally don't like biographies. They're too detailed, and I get bored. But I'm interested in 1930's design, and Shapiro (the author) is a design historian, so I took a chance. Whelp, this is just what a biography should be: a window into history. Shapiro is the guide, Vassos is the path, and we're shown a fabulous tour on modernization in the 1930's "...streamlined objects reflected the utopian social values of the era, particularly a desire to speed effortlessly into the future and away from the Great Depression." on changing gender norms "Following the 1920's, the novel concept of the living room suggested an increasingly unisex home [...] modern design provided a solution to the domesticity-as-feminine problem." on the acculturation of mass media into the American home "There was some confusion about what would actually be on television in the 1930s. One RCA publicity brochure for the TRK-12 showed an elegantly dressed woman gently fondling the dial. On the last page of the brochure, the same woman appeared on a television screen. [...] It is clear that marketing people were unsure..."

What should a television look like? How should a dial on a radio feel to the touch? These were questions John Vassos asked when the Radio Corporation of America (RCA) asked him to design the first mass-produced television receiver, the TRK-12, which had its spectacular premier at the 1939 New York World's Fair. Vassos emigrated from Greece and arrived in the United States in 1918. His career spans the evolution of central forms of mass media in the twentieth century and offers a template for understanding their success. This is Vassos's legacy—shaping the way we interact with our media technologies. Other industrial designers may be more celebrated, but none were more focused on making radio and television attractive and accessible to millions of Americans. In *John Vassos: Industrial Design for Modern Life*, Danielle Shapiro is the first to examine the life and work of RCA's key consultant designer through the rise of radio and television and into the computer era. Vassos conceived a vision for the look of new technologies still with us today. A founder of the Industrial Designers Society of America, he was instrumental in the development of a self-conscious industrial design profession during the late 1920s and 1930s and into the postwar period. Drawing on unpublished records and correspondence, Shapiro creates a portrait of a designer whose early artistic work in books like *Phobia* and *Contempo* critiqued the commercialization of modern life but whose later design work sought to accommodate it. Replete with rich behind-the-product stories of America's design culture in the 1930s through the 1950s, this volume also chronicles the emergence of what was to become the nation's largest media company and provides a fascinating glimpse into its early corporate culture. In our current era of watching TV on an iPod or a smartphone, Shapiro stimulates broad discussions of the meaning of technological design for mass media in daily life.

"Danielle Shapiro makes a convincing case for John Vassos's formerly unheralded, but highly significant, early contributions to the field now known as user interface (UI) design. The chapters about Vassos's design of knobs, dials, displays, and casings for RCA radios and studio recording machinery are especially illuminating. Furthermore, the book is beautifully written; the illustrations, almost all 'new', are aptly chosen; and the footnotes are a rich source of information not only about Vassos but also about twentieth-century design in general."—Carma Gorman, The University of Texas at Austin "John Vassos is a complex portrait of an artist and designer whose early illustration work criticized the tempo and commercialism of modern life but whose later design work took for granted those same qualities and attempted to accommodate people to them."—Jeffrey L. Meikle, University of Texas at Austin "In the first complete picture of John Vassos, Danielle Shapiro definitively captures an industrial designer of the first rank."—Russell Flinchum, North Carolina State University "John Vassos energized the flow of products, people, and media with his streamlined designs for everything from kitchen appliances to turnstiles and radios. Danielle Shapiro has created an original portrait of this important designer and this key period in American design and popular culture."—Ellen Lupton, senior curator of contemporary design at Cooper Hewitt, Smithsonian Design Museum