

# Amateur Craft as a Differential Practice

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## **Abstract**

This doctoral dissertation provides a theoretical examination of amateur craft as a differential practice. Concepts drawn from an inter-disciplinary source base are used to define, characterise and elucidate features of amateur craft practice that have long been presumed superfluous and opposite to valorised 'professional' practice. I investigate the attraction, motivation and complexities that lie behind this widespread, yet largely understudied, phenomenon of modern culture. Studies of everyday life, social history, aesthetics, material culture, art criticism and craft theory help conceptualise the position of the amateur, and case studies from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries – including the paint-by-number mania in 1950s USA, suburban chicken keeping, and amateur railway modelling – serve to substantiate the theoretical claims made.

The thesis is not comprehensive in its coverage of either a specific craft medium or a particular chronology or geography. Instead the thesis is divided into three thematic chapters: amateur surface intervention, amateur space, and amateur time. These chapters reveal some of the unexpected consequences of subjecting amateur practice to serious study. The examples demonstrate how amateur craft practice is differential within capitalism, dependant on its structures while simultaneously stretching, refracting, and quietly subverting them. As a reprieve or a supplement to an individual's primary occupation, the constrained freedom of amateur craft practice fulfils an essential role within modern life, providing a temporary moment of autonomous control over labour-power in which the world can be shaped anew.

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**Author's Declaration**

During the period of registered study in which this thesis was prepared the author has not been registered for any other academic award or qualification. The material included in this thesis has not been submitted wholly or in part for any academic award or qualification other than that for which it is now submitted.

Stephen Knott  
November 2011

## Introduction

There is a charm about the fact that one has succeeded in accomplishing some object, or overturning some obstacles by oneself, alone and unaided. [...]

In mechanics for example, an amateur likes to show, as a rule, that he can chuck a rough piece of stuff in the lathe and shape it off into a rod, an oval, or a ball, as the case may be; and when the job is done he loves to turn around and let you see the results, and tell you at the same time that he learnt the art himself – from a book perhaps. He may tell you, too, that he is on an office stool all day, and has never been in a shop all his life, and as far as he can see at present is never likely to be so. [...]

He has picked up fragments from papers and books, or scraps from other sources, and these he has put together arranged them in his mind, tested some with his hands and considering the difficulties he has had to surmount by his own resources, has no doubt succeeded with tolerable success.

‘Amateurs’ *Design and Work* (19 February 1881), p. 141.

This editorial written for the self-help journal *Design and Work* (1876-1881) describes characteristics of honourable work, yet all the conditions conventionally associated with labour are absent: there is no compulsion to undertake the activity, no financial remuneration, and the object made is distinctly unnecessary. This is the seeming superfluity of amateur craft practice. Doubtless the description of the mechanic’s exhibition of technical skill as ‘art’ would be contested by artists, scholars and theoreticians, as there is a clear lack of originality and self-critical attention; the maker failing to adopt the much vaunted disinterested detachment from his work through his desire to show off. The demonstration of labour-power would not interest many Marxist scholars either, as the work is devoid of overt political content and can easily be seen as anachronistic and a mere illusion of autonomy within an alienating capitalist structure. Many would consider the amateur mechanic’s work unimportant, not worthy of critical attention and certainly not significant enough to merit an entire doctoral thesis.

I aim to contest this dismissive set of assumptions, and demonstrate how amateur practice has made a vital and important contribution to the material

culture of the modern world, and remains the freest, most autonomous form of making within capitalism. Under no financial obligation, amateur craft practice allows an individual to pursue an activity for the love of it alone, without the pressure of deadlines or the need to please one's patron. Nineteenth century philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer praised these attributes, stating that it was from the amateur 'and not from wage-earners, that the greatest things have always come', lamenting the 'greediness' of engaging in a task out of necessity<sup>1</sup>.

Schopenhauer's idealism can be read as a remnant of a previous era of enlightenment where autonomy was thought possible, far removed from the alienation considered by Karl Marx to epitomise the growth of capitalism in the nineteenth century, where both an individual's means of life, desires and activity were ruled over by an 'inhuman power'<sup>2</sup>. Marx perceptively recognised the power of capitalism that operated above the level of individual consciousness, and his thought influenced subsequent generations of scholars, including German sociologist Max Weber who claimed that capitalism and its ideological bedfellow, economic rationalism, had pervaded all spheres of culture in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and curtailed the possibility of genuine freedom<sup>3</sup>. Yet, the story of modern amateurism is about the continuation of autonomous action within the constraints of capitalism. Amateur craft practitioners negotiate limitations of skill, space and time that arise from inhabiting a system that is geared toward productivity, motivated by the desire to temporarily control their own labour.

In this thesis I argue that amateur craft practice is differential within capitalism, following Henri Lefebvre's conceptualisation of difference<sup>4</sup>;

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<sup>1</sup> Arthur Schopenhauer, 'On Various Subjects' *Essays and Aphorisms* trans. by R J Hollingdale (London: Penguin, 1970) p. 227.

<sup>2</sup> Karl Marx, *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts* in Erich Fromm ed. *Marx's Concept of Man* trans. by T B Bottomore (New York: Ungar Pub. Co., 1961), p. 151.

<sup>3</sup> German sociologist Max Weber in his seminal work *The Spirit of Capitalism*, described capitalism as the 'vast cosmos into which a person is born. It simply exists, to each person, as a factually unalterable casing in which he or she must live.' Weber argues that capitalism in the modern world is transformed into a spirit (one to which Protestantism is particularly attuned) and is not reduced to the description of economic forces but spreads into all aspects of life in which 'competence and proficiency in a vocational calling' is key. Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism with Other Writings on the Rise of the West* trans. by Stephen Kalberg (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), p. 73. See also Harvey Goldman, *Max Weber and Thomas Mann: Calling and the Shaping of the Self* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), p. 25.

<sup>4</sup> Lefebvre's concept of difference does not depend on the 'new' or original that so dominates our perception of artistic or poetic production but on the body's and nature's inherent ability to produce

inherently limited by dependence on the routines of everyday life that are underpinned by the division of labour, productivity and the accumulation of capital, yet simultaneously constituting a spatial-temporal zone in which these structures can be stretched, quietly subverted, and exaggerated. The amateur's limitations demand attention, as it is from this constrained freedom that alternative experiences of everyday life emerge. For example, the stereotypical amateur painter using paint in tubes exposes the reliance on readymade materials within all artistic culture and creating a home workshop tailored to individual need is a model of hyper-efficiency, a system of management that would make any company boss envious. Concentration on the means rather than the ends of production leads to human experiences of joy and play that are closest to resembling the utopian dream of unalienated labour. So often overlooked, amateur craft practice is more complex, innovative, unexpected, roguish, humorous and elusive than its use as a cover-all term for inadequacy and shoddy work (amateurishness)<sup>5</sup>.

Craft in this context is understood as a process, the actuality of labour when it takes place in the social world, which involves the mediation of individual skill, tacit knowledge, tools and materials, and networks of production that are culturally determined. I do not restrict the idea of craft to a discrete set of media, understand it as oppositional to fine art or design, or use it to describe the perfect symbiosis between head and hand in making – an essentialist definition that dominates understanding of the term<sup>6</sup>. Focus on the amateur opens up an expanded field of craft practice, and the notion of the capitalist bricoleur – a re-working of Claude Levi-Strauss's term to describe making

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difference unconsciously within limiting structures: for example the difference of every leaf 'produced *within* the realms of the tree form, which is of course circumscribed by its own limiting conditions'. Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space* trans. by Donald Nicholson-Smith (Oxford: Blackwell, 2009), pp. 395-397.

<sup>5</sup> James Lukin, a late nineteenth-century writer of manuals on amateur mechanics, observed that the phrase 'It's only an amateur's work' had long been seen as a 'slur'. James Lukin, 'Amateur and Professional Work Contrasted' *Amateur Work* 2 (1882), p. 447. The term 'amateurish' is widely used today to denote these same pejorative connotations. For example see Peter Conrad's (Guardian art critic) use of the term to describe Damian Hirst's painterly skill: Peter Conrad, 'Damian Hirst: No Love Lost, Blue Paintings' *Guardian* (18 October 2009).

<sup>6</sup> In this respect I follow writers that link craft to processes and contexts of production, and those who adopt anthropological and critical approaches to the crafted object who use craft 'as a way of thinking through practices of all kinds, as stated by Glenn Adamson, *Thinking through craft* (Oxford: Berg, 2007), p. 7. See also Linda Sandino, 'Craft for crafts sake' in Jeremy Aynsley & K Forde eds. *Design and the modern magazine* (Manchester: University of Manchester Press, 2008), Sue Rowley ed. *Craft and contemporary theory* (St Leonards, Australian: Allen & Unwin, 1997) and David Pye, *The Nature and Art of Workmanship* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968). For more of a critique of the essentialist understanding of craft adopted by thinkers who follow either the legacies of Arts and Crafts movement or Heideggerian ontology see chapter two pp. 113-119 and chapter three pp. 188-193.

from that which is to hand, updated to the conditions of mass production and consumption<sup>7</sup> – is particularly appropriate.

The capitalist bricoleur, like the mechanic described above, makes use of the ‘fragments’ and ‘scraps’ of modern culture – the commercially available tools, materials, external advice and readymades that have already passed through various networks of exchange – and is reliant on them to re-construct the world in a different register. The final outputs might not be akin to the things made by the Arts and Crafts or Studio Pottery movements and could display limitations of technical skill, but nonetheless they constitute a particularly middle class crafted reply to the routines of everyday life; a life that breeds more familiarity with the ‘office stool’ than the workshop. I build on an emerging body of literature that challenges the presumption of the consumers’ passivity in the face of Western capitalism<sup>8</sup> – an assessment reflected in Guy Debord’s *The Society of the Spectacle* and Jean Baudrillard’s *The Consumer Society* – and demonstrate how middle classes have long shaped their environment and played a major role in constructing notions of art, labour, value and creativity.

A fundamental question asked throughout the thesis is why individuals who had access to free time decided to continue working in their leisure hours. Explanations usually fall into two camps: either amateur craft practice is seen as a therapeutic escape from dehumanising conditions of work; or as evidence of individual subjugation to a prevailing ideology of productivity where excess capacity is channelled towards useful pursuits. In this thesis I aim to tread a middle ground arguing that the anachronistic, aestheticised practice of amateur craft represents a displacement that allows an individual temporary control over their own labour-power. This does not constitute a withdrawal

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<sup>7</sup> Claude Levi-Strauss, *The Savage Mind* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1974), p. 17. See also Victor Buchli, ‘On Bricolage’ in Glenn Adamson and Jane Pavitt eds. *Postmodernism: Style and Subversion, 1970-1990* (London: V&A Publishing, 2011), pp. 112-115.

<sup>8</sup> Many scholars within consumer studies, anthropology and social history have recently paid attention to the producing consumer. In particular see Steven Gelber, *Hobbies: Leisure and the Culture of Work in America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), pp. 10-11, and Judith Attfield, *Wild Things: The Material Culture of Everyday Life* (Oxford: Berg, 2000), p. 48. See also Arjun Appadurai ed. *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in a Cultural Perspective* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986); Danny Miller, *Home Possessions: Material Culture Behind Closed Doors* (Oxford: Berg, 2001); Nicky Gregson and Louise Crewe, *Second-Hand Cultures* (Oxford and New York: Berg, 2003); Paul Atkinson, ‘Do It Yourself: Democracy and Design’ and other articles in the *Journal of Design History* special issue ‘Democracy and Design’ *Journal of Design History* 19:1 (Spring 2006); Laura Tiersten, *Marianne in the Market: Envisioning Consumer Society in Fin-de-Siècle France* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991).

from the social world, but an extension of its values on an individual scale. The amateur mechanic above, for example, chimes values of Victorian self-reliance.

My research explores the unexpected consequences of subjecting amateur practice to philosophical, aesthetic and historical investigation. When Andy Warhol went to the theatre, he stated that he was not interested in watching professional actors who do the same thing every day. He preferred the amateurs: ‘whatever they do never really comes off, so therefore it can’t be phoney [...] you can never tell what they will do next’<sup>9</sup>. Throughout the thesis amateur craft practitioners are centre stage, and like their thespian counterparts, their honesty, mistakes and unpredictability, makes for a captivating show.

### *History of a Definition*

Amateur practice has not always required scholarly defence. In the early modern era definitions of the word were consistent with its Latin root – ‘amare’ (to love) – and it was associated with virtuous voluntary activities undertaken for their own sake. Its disassociation from need rendered amateur practice a symbolic expression of a gentleman’s ability to spare resources of time and money (as well as those of his female spouse and dependents who undertook various accomplishments)<sup>10</sup>. Cultural cachet was assigned to knowledge of a particular arena of practice but not necessarily to standards of excellence in actual production, some gentlemen even going to the extent of deliberately suppressing skill for fear of too closely mirroring professional standards that were tied to need<sup>11</sup>. The Industrial Revolution disrupted these

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<sup>9</sup> Andy Warhol, *The Philosophy of Andy Warhol: From A to B and Back Again* (London: Penguin, 2007), p. 82.

<sup>10</sup> Kim Sloan and Ann Bermingham give examples of how gentlemen pursued a range of activities from drawing, collecting, travel writing and scientific discovery to employ excess time in ‘noble’ activities that might secure cultural cachet in court. Ann Bermingham, *Learning to Draw: Studies in the Cultural History of a Polite and Useful Art* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2000) and Kim Sloan, *A Noble Art: Amateur Artists and Drawing Masters c.1600-1800* (London: British Museum Press, 2000). In regard to female accomplishments and their role in ‘backing up’ the social status and wealth of the gentleman see Ann Bermingham, ‘Aesthetics of Ignorance: The Accomplished Woman in the Culture of Connoisseurship’ *The Oxford Art Journal* 16:2 (1993) and Roszika Parker, *The Subversive Stitch: Embroidery and the Making of the Feminine* (London: Woman’s Press, 1984), p. 60.

<sup>11</sup> Sloan, p. 103. The author also gives another example of how Charles I’s nephew Prince Rupert and John Evelyn purposefully withheld a design for a more effective printmaking technology from commercial popularisation so it could be ‘refined’ by men who had the financial ability to resist its crude and eager dissemination. *Ibid*, p. 14.



long-held conventions. Amateurism was no longer just a pursuit to fill the idle time of the aristocracy. Assisted by the expansion of an infrastructure that supplied tools and materials at lower costs from the late eighteenth century onwards, amateurs threatened to match the skills of professionals, who were already struggling to defend the technical worth of their labour against the mechanical power of steam and the accelerating division of labour.

As a result of these changes, the word ‘amateur’ started to be tied to technique and making, rather than mere curiosity or a love of acquisition<sup>12</sup>. Instead of distancing themselves from professional quality, middle class individuals, now with better access to tools, materials and free time, wanted to excel in their voluntary pursuits and gain social and economic advantage from them. Higher standards of amateur skill sowed the seeds for an imposed division between professional and amateur practice – for example in the accessible medium of watercolours<sup>13</sup> – and pejorative definitions of the word ‘amateur’ were used by artisans, craftsmen and artists to defend against the threat of skill equivalence. Throughout the nineteenth century expertise, skill, and excellence were tied to monetary remuneration within a ‘profession’, with the amateur reduced to a dabbler or dilettante<sup>14</sup>.

This dichotomisation of labour introduced heterogeneous social groups to the sphere of amateur craft: the unpaid aristocratic virtuosos are joined by a vast array of amateur makers – women at home, children learning an art, tourists capturing a scene through watercolour, and throughout the nineteenth century an increasing number of workers wanting to fill spare time with useful and enjoyable practices. Access to infrastructures of artistic supply meant that individuals hitherto barred from making could pick up a brush, saw or instruction manual.

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<sup>12</sup> Sloan, p. 7.

<sup>13</sup> For more on watercolours as an eighteenth century amateur pursuit see Sloan, pp. 147-151. Alison Smith also notes how accessible the medium was at this time in her introduction to her catalog that accompanied the Tate Britain Exhibition ‘Watercolour’. Alison Smith, *Watercolour* (London: Tate, 2011), p. 9.

<sup>14</sup> For example, in the field of nineteenth century paleontology and the discovery of dinosaurs the work of Gideon Mantell, a Sussex doctor who first found and identified parts of the iguanodon in his free time, was discredited (particularly after his death) by fellow scientist Richard Owen, who could be described as professionalising the practice of science, creating a direct lineage between himself and French scientist Georges Cuvier and securing major public projects to propound his version of events such as the Crystal Palace Dinosaur Park and the National History Museum. Deborah Cadbury, *The Dinosaur Hunters: A Story of Scientific Rivalry and the Discovery of the Prehistoric World* (London: Fourth Estate, 2001), pp. 292 and 296.

Despite this patriarchal notions of skill remained and amateur output was routinely marginalised, particularly the work of women. Even William Morris, who advocated forms of hand craftsmanship and the maxim of integrating art into life in the late nineteenth century, ignored the diversity of female amateur craft practice that surrounded him<sup>15</sup>. The Arts and Crafts movement mainly focused on rigid aesthetic codes inspired by the past rather than celebrating the skills of the capitalist bricoleur.

The priority given to theorisation in this thesis does not allow for an in-depth discussion of the role amateur craft practice had long played as a dominant form of female labour – one that constituted a family’s ‘evidence of gentility, because good breeding requires time, application, and expense’ as noted by Thorstein Veblen<sup>16</sup>. Neither do I provide detailed accounts of histories of the home. Instead I look at how both men and women were attracted to the freedoms and experiences that amateur craft offered, which were similar regardless of whether the practice was ‘soft’ or ‘hard’, to use design historian Clive Edwards’s terminology<sup>17</sup>. I illustrate comparable motivations that lie behind the practice of late nineteenth-century suburban chicken keeping in chapter two, and deploy post-war feminist scholarship in chapter three to show how the superfluity conventionally associated with female crafts can be harnessed to enrich our understanding of amateur craft as close to the everyday, ‘a revolution staged in the least conscious domain of culture’<sup>18</sup>, as Glenn Adamson states.

The thesis also focuses on the middle classes: the moment when amateur craft practice is characterised by heterogeneity, when diverse social groups have access to free time and tools of production. Equivalence of access to these resources contributes to the flattening of class difference, and reflects the growth of the middle class in the West during the nineteenth century, a paradigm where, as Marx famously describes, ‘all that is solid melts into air,

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<sup>15</sup> Jennifer Harris, *William Morris revisited: questioning the legacy* (London: Crafts Council, 1996) p. 54.

<sup>16</sup> Thorstein Veblen, *Conspicuous Consumption* (London: Penguin, 2005), p. 26. Deborah Silverman studies how the resurgence of female interest in decorative arts in 1890s Parisian apartments was perceived to be an emulation of aristocratic amateur pursuits. Silverman D, *Art nouveau in fin-de-siècle France*. Berkeley: University of California Press (1989), pp. 159-171.

<sup>17</sup> Clive Edwards, ‘Home is Where the Art is: Women, Handicrafts and Home Improvements 1750-1900’ *Journal of Design History* 19:1 (2006)

<sup>18</sup> Glenn Adamson, ‘The Spectacle of the Everyday’ in Laurie Newell, *Out of the Ordinary: Spectacular Craft* (London: Victoria & Albert Museum), p. 15.

all that is holy is profaned, and all man is at last compelled to face with sober sense his real conditions of life, and his relations with his kind'<sup>19</sup>.

The amateur craft practitioner attempts to make experience 'solid' once more through making within the disruptive temporal environment of modernity. One might mock the superfluity of their efforts but the diverse examples of amateur craft practice below attest to both the popularity and widespread dissemination of this phenomenon. Amateur craft practice invites us to extend our understanding of middle class mentalities, in particular the importance of labour, productivity, therapy and diversion to this emergent social group.

### *Method*

Amateur practice has a peculiar historiography. Although there are countless amateur writers and medium-specific publications intended for amateur audiences, there are very few scholarly works that deal with the subject as a broad social phenomenon. With its focus on patterns of human behaviour most existing work derives from the discipline of sociology, in particular the sub-discipline of leisure studies. The most extensive analysis to date was compiled by American sociologist Robert Stebbins who interviewed amateur and professional practitioners across different vocations in the 1970s and 1980s. He proposed a model whereby 'serious' amateurs could be distinguished from the mere hobbyist on account of their perseverance, skill, training, and greater levels of determination; sometimes even deriving profit from their activities<sup>20</sup>. As this suggests, Stebbins helpfully problematises the simple work-leisure dichotomy, but as his concern is to provide an overarching model with amateurs reduced to different types, he simply creates a series of more specific stereotypes in between these binary poles based on an ascending scale of seriousness. Paul Atkinson similarly attempts

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<sup>19</sup> Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *The Communist Manifesto* trans. by S Moore (London: Penguin, 1967), p. 83.

<sup>20</sup> Robert Stebbins, *Amateurs, Professionals and Serious Leisure* (Montreal and London: McGill Queen's University Press, 1992), p. 5.

to classify amateur phenomena, creating four categories of do-it-yourself (DIY) practice (pro-active, reactive, essential and lifestyle DIY)<sup>21</sup>.

These sociological approaches succumb to the tendency to undermine the inherently elusiveness of complex practices, but also fail to recognise both the oscillation of practices between ‘amateur’ and ‘professional’ at any given time, and how amateur practice exposes the overlap between characteristics thought to epitomise these oppositional terms. For example, in chapter two, I demonstrate how Taylorist discourses of efficiency and productivity so often thought to exemplify professional standardisation have their roots in the late nineteenth-century professionalisation of amateur space. The compartmentalisation of typologies of amateur and professional practice fails to adequately reflect the dynamism of amateur practice.

A methodology appropriate to the study of amateur craft practice must be more fluid, flexible, resistant to social stereotype, and aware of the contexts of its marginalisation. The work of cultural theorists who analyse and engage with the philosophy of the supplemental proves particularly useful: whether within the realm of aesthetics, as is the case with Jacques Derrida (*The Truth in Painting*), or in broader analysis of modern society, as epitomised by Weimer theorists of the inter-war era such as Siegfried Kracauer (*The Mass Ornament*), Theodor Adorno (*The Culture Industry*) and Walter Benjamin (‘The Work of Art in the Age of Technological Reproduction’ and ‘Author as Producer’). Theories of everyday life are also particularly appropriate. This scholarly trajectory examines the mediation of broad supra-individual structures within the haphazard, irrational and unquantifiable realm of the everyday: Gaston Bachelard (*The Poetics of Space*) and Michel de Certeau (*The Practice of Everyday Life*) emphasise the poetic resistances of the everyday and Sigmund Freud probes at the psychoanalytic archaeology that lingers beneath the veneer of civilisation (*The Psychopathology of Everyday Life*). However, Lefebvre’s notion of differential space is the most relevant in the context of this thesis as it describes practices that depart from the structures of everyday life, while

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<sup>21</sup> Paul Atkinson, ‘Do It Yourself: Democracy and Design’ special issue of *Journal of Design History* 19:1 (2006) pp. 1-4. An earlier example of this attempt to classify different groups of amateurs can be seen in Albert Roland’s division between ‘craftsmen-hobbyists’, ‘handymen’ and ‘do-it-yourselfers proper’, Albert Roland ‘Do-It-Yourself: A Walden for the Millions?’ *American Quarterly* 10:2 (1958), pp. 154-165.

simultaneously and inherently relying on them (*The Production of Space, Rhythmanalysis*).

These thinkers, along with recent scholars such as Ben Highmore (*Everyday Life and Cultural Theory*) and Joe Moran (*Queuing for Beginners*) – who also have an interest in the minutiae of everyday culture – provide the theoretical tools for the thesis. They help negotiate the limitations of evidence demonstrating ways in which novels and literature, oral history, psychology and aesthetic theory can be used to bring attention to supplemental arenas of culture. Within design history Judith Attfield's *Wild Things* provides a blueprint for situating marginalised and ignored subjects and objects at the heart of this discipline, challenging what she presumes is the Ruskinian core of 'good' design that continues to define the boundaries of the subject<sup>22</sup>.

This thesis is not speculative throughout: there is a consistent attempt to substantiate theoretical arguments with historical examples of amateur practice. The link to practice is critical in understanding the amateur as the capitalist bricoleur – as a maker of culture rather than an abstract conceptual category. Thus theories of labour (Hannah Arendt's *The Human Condition* and Karl Marx's *Capital*), social history, and material culture that directly refer to the output, production methods and the experience of the amateur are key. Although attention to amateur craft practice is rare within the broader purview of these disciplines, some contemporary scholars have looked into the phenomenon in the context of their own medium specific expertise. In film, Patricia Zimmerman and Bernhard Rieger explain how improved technology throughout the twentieth century allowed amateurs to create their own home movie fantasies<sup>23</sup>; in music, Aram Sinnreich explains the twenty-first century expansion of configurable culture and its invitation to part-time musicians to produce music from their bedroom<sup>24</sup>; and in literature, Daniel Harney at the University of Toronto is undertaking a PhD on early twentieth century scholarly figures who contested the association between modernism

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<sup>22</sup> Attfield, pp. 5-6.

<sup>23</sup> See Bernhard Rieger, 'Fantasy as Social Practice: The Rise of Amateur Film', chapter seven of Bernhard Rieger, *Technology and the Culture of Modernity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), pp. 194-222. Patricia Zimmerman, *Reel Families: A Social History of Amateur Film* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995).

<sup>24</sup> Aram Sinnreich, *Mashed Up: Music, Technology, and the Rise of Configurable Culture* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2010).

and professionalism in various emerging university disciplines, such as English literature and anthropology<sup>25</sup>.

A recent trend within studies of consumer culture – to focus on the consumer as a proactive agent within networks of consumption – has indirectly brought attention to amateur making via the concept of ‘craft consumption’<sup>26</sup> and similar terms. This is particularly accentuated in the light of sophisticated technologies – such as the 3D printer, blogs, social media, and a culture of online participation and civilian journalism – that promise to decentralise production to the home and disseminate critical power to the hands of non-experts. This has attracted praise from authors who predict a new age of democratic access<sup>27</sup> as well as critique from those less optimistic about amateur participation<sup>28</sup>, hyperbolic extremes that this thesis aims to navigate.

Steven Gelber’s monograph *Hobbies* rehearses many of the themes of this thesis. He argues that productive leisure in America from the mid nineteenth century onwards, constituted a ‘disguised affirmation’ of the work ethic. He states:

Without rejecting the way that hobbies may have functioned as a form of resistance, a careful analysis of the historical record upholds the conclusions that can be drawn from the social science literature: hobbies developed as a way to integrate the isolated home with the ideology of the workplace.<sup>29</sup>

Although Gelber usefully identifies characteristics that freely float between the dichotomy of work and leisure, my approach differs in key areas. For example, instead of the ‘historical record’ backing up conclusions from the social sciences (on which Gelber heavily relies), I show how they contribute to

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<sup>25</sup> Daniel Harney organised a panel at the Modernist Studies Association entitled ‘Modernism, Amateurism and Specialisation’ which gives information about his PhD project. Daniel Harney, ‘Modernism, Amateurism and Specialisation’ *Modernist Studies Association 12<sup>th</sup> Annual Conference* (University of Victoria, Canada, 11-14 November 2010) <http://www.msa12program.com/archives/144> [accessed 19 October 2011].

<sup>26</sup> Colin Campbell, ‘The Craft Consumer: Culture, Craft and Consumption in the Postmodern Era’ *Journal of Consumer Culture* 5:1 (March 2005).

<sup>27</sup> For example Charles Leadbeater, *We Think* (London: Profile Books, 2009); Clay Shirky, *Cognitive Surplus: Creativity and Generosity in a Connected Age* (London: Penguin, 2010); David Gauntlett, *Making is Connecting: The Social Meaning of Creativity from DIY and Knitting to Youtube and Web 2.0* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2011)

<sup>28</sup> Andrew Keen, *The Cult of the Amateur: How Today’s Internet is Killing Our Culture* (London: Nicholas Brealey Publishing, 2008)

<sup>29</sup> Gelber, p. 20.

a more complex and ambiguous picture of amateur practice that defies gender, class and skill stereotypes, and encourages a more speculative, theoretical approach: hobbies are more than just a ‘disguised affirmation’ of work. Critically, Gelber focuses on how characteristics of the work ethic – hard work and productivity – are simply transposed into leisure time pursuits, rather than outlining how differential amateur practice subtly refracts these attributes (in the citation above the ‘home’ as a discreet category simply becomes more work-like). In this thesis I demonstrate the cross-fertilisation of work and leisure, professional and amateur that contributes to a dialectical understanding of amateur practice as a spatial-temporal zone where definitions of work, productivity, aesthetics, play and labour are continually negotiated.

Material evidence of amateur craft activity is scarce within archives and museum collections due to an institutional tendency to concentrate on professional production<sup>30</sup>. However, the lack of amateur objects in collections and museums cannot be blamed on institutional bias alone. Amateur craft practice is often ephemeral and short-lived due to the use of improvised techniques and poor materials. Moreover, amateur objects circulate in underground networks of culture that evade sustained attention: they are passed on as gifts, kept as personal keepsakes or mementos, rendered invisible through their passage into everyday life like various tasks of home maintenance, or destined for the bin, as with the aspirant handyman’s botched spice rack. Recent works within material culture (such as Arjun Appadurai’s *The Social Life of Things* and Nicky Gregson and Louise Crewe’s *Second-hand Cultures*) have elucidated these unglamorous ‘destinations’ in which many objects find themselves, helping us understand the networks of value to which they belong.

Despite the lack of representation of amateur objects within museums and archives, evidence of amateur craft practice is everywhere. Amateur societies,

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<sup>30</sup> Professionalism increasingly becoming tied up with the notion of a canon of art and design history from the nineteenth century onwards. Although the antiquarian and collector remained an important amateur trope, their role as arbiters of aesthetic taste was supplanted by increasingly self-critical and self-promoting professional artists, critics and art dealers (dealer-critic system as in France). Iain Pears, *The Discovery of Painting: The Growth of Interest in the Arts in England 1680-1768* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1998), p. 108.

from knitting circles to Sunday painting groups, provide an instant point of access for any anthropological study or oral history on amateur craft (a method adopted in my analysis of railway modelling in the third chapter). In addition, there are the countless magazines, newspaper supplements and medium-specific how-to literature that are replenished each season, providing each time the most up-to-date way of cooking, making a shelf, modelling, painting, etc<sup>31</sup>.

It is this infrastructure that instructs, equips and advises the amateur that constitutes the primary source base for this thesis – the manuals, journals, product advertisements, technologies and devices that facilitate practice – as well as critical responses to amateur making. One must be aware that this analytical method always takes place at one step removed from actual experience as Grace Lees-Maffei has stated in relation to manuals, which she reads as fictions rather than direct evidence of amateur practice<sup>32</sup>. Yet this distance helpfully avoids over-emphasising the power of amateur subjectivity. For example, at first glance the late nineteenth-century self-help journals *Design and Work* (1876-1881) and *Amateur Work* (1881-1891) seem to provide amateurs with an open platform to communicate their ideas: ‘Wrinkles for Amateurs’ and ‘Notes and Queries’ sections allowed individuals to seek counsel from other readers, and gave suggestions on how to engage in practice as diverse as cleaning white fur<sup>33</sup> to constructing one’s own tennis court<sup>34</sup>. Nevertheless, editors moderated amateur expression in their effort to perpetuate values of middle class self-reliance, which in the context of *Amateur Work* meant the explicit exclusion of women<sup>35</sup>.

A focus on the infrastructure of amateur craft practice elucidates the meeting point between individual autonomous activity and limiting societal

<sup>31</sup> Glenn Adamson, *The Craft Reader* (Oxford: Berg, 2010), pp. 9-10.

<sup>32</sup> Grace Lees-Maffei, ‘Introduction. Studying Advice: Historiography, Methodology, Commentary, Bibliography’ *Journal of Design History* 16:1 (2003).

<sup>33</sup> ‘M.G.B’, ‘How to Clean White Fur’ *Design and Work* 2 (1876), p. 20.

<sup>34</sup> *Amateur Work* 5 (1886), p. 134.

<sup>35</sup> An editorial in the journal in 1886 stated that *Amateur Work* was a ‘man’s magazine, written by men for men’. Editor, *Amateur Work* 5 (1886), p. 44. Claire Bishop critiques Walter Benjamin’s optimistic assessment of letters pages in newspapers and magazines that he believed positioned the reader-as-collaborator. In relation to her argument on how much control the artist remains in installation art over the subjects that are invited to participate she draws attention to the editorial control that remains, despite new techniques and technology that make sophisticated interaction possible. Claire Bishop, *Installation Art: A Critical History* (London: Tate Publishing, 2005), p. 127.



structures, in line with my argument that amateur craft practice is inherently constrained, mediated and socialised.

### *Structure*

This thesis does not aim to give a comprehensive account of amateur practice within a specific craft medium; neither does it constitute a history of a specific period of amateurism. Instead I aim to construct a theory of amateur practice within modernity that is substantiated by historical case studies within specific fields of practice drawn from 1850 onwards.

The thesis is divided into three parts, each one situating amateur craft practice in a different dimensional context: amateur surface intervention (2D), amateur space (3D) and amateur time (4D). The chapters are further divided into three sections. Firstly, I establish each chapter's conceptual terrain using an inter-disciplinary, theoretical source base, for example how one might define amateur space; then I provide a historical grounding for these ideas within the broad chronological parameters of modernity. Finally, case studies in each chapter provide an opportunity to apply the theoretical constructs to various amateur craft mediums in specific geographic and chronological contexts. The practices covered – overglaze china decoration, paint-by-number paintings, suburban chicken keeping, tool management and railway modelling – are deliberately selected to emphasise the expanded definition of craft that I am seeking to elicit. They fall outside of traditional craft mediums. Their presumed superfluity, marginality and impurity illustrates notions of craft that are closer to amateur practice: the dependence on tools, kits and materials, the importance of social and cultural contexts, and the ad hoc processes of the capitalist bricoleur.

The first chapter includes amateur surface intervention in the story of modern art history. My analysis problematises the expectation that there is a gulf between aesthetic depth seen in canonised art and kitsch and decorative surfaces, and situates the amateur as a key figure in the development of modern art, involved in the re-configuration of artistic skill at the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Once a combination of post-modern

aesthetic theory and material culture has freed the surface from its marginal position, the chapter accounts for the development of an infrastructure of artistic supply – conceptualised as bases, carriers and arbiters – that grew in the nineteenth century and allowed amateurs to imitate artistic labour.

The ‘arrival’ of amateur practice changed the course of modern artistic production. Firstly, demystification of surface intervention compelled artists to distinguish the exclusivity of their skill, as their audience was increasingly aware of how things were made<sup>36</sup>. Secondly, the amateur’s dependence on other labourers who made the collapsible paint in tubes, pre-stretched canvases and authors who penned advice manuals, exposes the dispersed authorship inherent to all two-dimensional artistic production and the reduction of the artist’s labour to finishing off. In the context of art’s democratisation the artist can no longer be considered an autonomous genius, but a savvy manager of surface layers. Case studies on the introduction of vitrifiable porcelain paints<sup>37</sup> by Parisian chemist Alphonse Lacroix in the 1870s and the 1950s craze for paint-by-number kits in America provide opportunities to assess how amateur practice played a role in changing the way the surface was conceptualised and represented in modern art.

In the second chapter I introduce in greater depth the hypothesis that amateur craft practice is the differential space within capitalism, drawing on Lefebvre’s work *The Production of Space*. Whereas the shed, home workshop and garden are all amateur places, space is a more abstract concept and according to De Certeau ‘exists when one takes into consideration vectors of direction, velocities and time variables’<sup>38</sup>. The emphasis on space in the chapter thus foregrounds the act of shaping the world – amateur labour – that due to its inherent non-necessity represents a hiatus within capitalist structures. However, amateur space is not fully antagonistic, as one might

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<sup>36</sup> John Roberts refers to the increasing equivalence of skill between artist and amateur in the modern era as both have access to ‘collective intellect and shared labour’ and artistic skill is no longer tied with notions of autonomy, genius or innateness. John Roberts, *The Intangibilities of Form* (London: Verso, 2007), p. 155.

<sup>37</sup> Vitrifiable porcelain paints constitute a mixture of pigment and oils to create a substance that can be fired on to porcelain in the process of firing.

<sup>38</sup> Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* trans. by Steven Rendall (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), p. 117.

expect, but rehearses the ideologies drawn from its presumed opposites while subtly refracting them in the process.

One important illustration of this relationship, covered in depth, is the nineteenth-century 'professionalisation' of amateur labour. The Victorian work ethic celebrated productivity and efficiency, and these qualities pervaded amateur practice and prompted an expansion in activities deemed morally useful. However these prevailing ideologies are constantly mediated through amateur practice in unusual and unpredictable ways, leading to forms of productivity and labour organisation that are often overlooked. Through the examples of late nineteenth and early twentieth-century suburban chicken keeping and forms of amateur tool organisation, I aim to bring attention to forms of management and production that stretch conventional expectations, including the surprising hyper-efficiency that derives from the constraints on an amateur's time and resources. As in the first chapter, later examples drawn from the post-war American boom in do-it-yourself practice represents an intensification of characteristics of amateur craft practice evident in an earlier moment of nineteenth century modernity.

The third chapter, on amateur time, provides a number of explanations as to why individuals voluntarily carry on labouring in their free time. Starting with a critique of Adorno's notion that free time is essentially unfree, I argue that despite its dependence on capitalism's structures, amateur craft practice, leads to experiences of joy, play, autonomy and sociability that take place regardless of the thing being made. The constrained freedom of amateur craft practice facilitates a partial and temporary escape, which I explain with reference to Frederick Jameson's conceptualisation of utopia and demonstrate through the example of amateur railway modellers who build miniaturised, highly detailed and complex alternative universes. Interspersed throughout everyday life whilst simultaneously relating to it differentially, amateur time grants the individual autonomy over his or her own labour alienation.

A final string of miniature case studies demonstrates the interest in amateur craft practice among contemporary artists, designers and craftspeople, keen to harness its expressive and creative potential. Their inclusion in a thesis that

primarily uses historical evidence reflects the curiosity with which amateur practice is still regarded as a spatial-temporal zone of practice in which enthusiasm and autonomy reign. Assuming the position of the amateur (either consciously or not) and adopting methodologies pertinent to the amateur as capitalist bricoleur seem evermore prescient strategies for contemporary practitioners given current contexts of production where the demand for tangible, quantifiable output has pushed alternative experiences of labour – in which love, pointlessness, play and experimentation all have a role – to the margins.

This critical assessment of the contemporary relevance of amateur craft practice derives, in part, from time spent during the PhD in the studio environments of the Royal College of Art. The appendices describe the two main projects I was involved with during my time in the art school and reflect the collaborate nature of this research. In addition, the letter to the Rector in appendix one suggests, in a convoluted fashion, that amateur practice needs to maintain its ambiguous position in relation to institutional structures.

These supplemental projects might not conveniently marry with the bulk of the PhD research – they are intended to demonstrate how theorisation of amateur craft practice is amorphous enough to be applied to wider issues of artistic education, inter-disciplinarity, tooling, autonomy, intention and skill. The transfer of methodologies and concepts from the theoretical to the practical might not always be successful, yet this risk aligns the quest for originality in research with the experimentalism and unpredictability often evident in amateur practice. What is certain is that the opportunity to explore ideas within different disciplinary and non-disciplinary contexts is relevant to the study of amateur practice and has encouraged the broad-ranging, theoretical, non-linear, and thematic approaches that I adopt in the writing.

A reference in an 1876 manual on the practice of stained glass by little-known French artist Charles des Granges demonstrates the longevity of artistic interest in amateurs as a productive force within modern culture. Des

Granges was not typical though; he resisted marginalising the amateur like many other authors and claimed that:

The amateur is the soul of art. An art without amateurs neither prospers nor progresses [...] The arts that have amateurs will never wither away.<sup>39</sup>

Can the amateur be situated as the saviour of art, a way to ensure its vibrancy, dynamism and renewal? And if amateurism is so important why has it been consistently overlooked in capitalist culture? From the constrained position of amateur craft practice, how can the amateur hope to perform the messianic role that Des Granges described? Through analysis of the forgotten, the mundane, the inexpert and obvious, this thesis provides answers to such questions, explaining how and why amateur craft practice has become so essential to the experience of modern life.

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<sup>39</sup> 'L'amateur est l'âme d'un art! Un art qui n'a pas d'amateurs ne progresse ni ne prospère [...] Les arts qui ont des amateurs; ils ne déperiront jamais'. Charles Des Granges, *Le vitrail dans l'appartement: Conseils pour pratiquer la peinture sur verre. Pour le comprendre et pour la juger* (Paris: Bibliothèque de l'amateur, 1876), pp. 13-14.

## Chapter One: Amateur surface intervention

In the comic novel by George and Weedon Grossmith *The Diary of a Nobody* (1892) the lower middle class protagonist, Charles Pooter, engages in a spot of amateur surface intervention, the physical manipulation of the two-dimensional plane through the application of red enamel paint. Pooter covers a variety of household objects with this red coating including flower-pots, the servant's wash-stand, a chest of drawers, the spines of his Shakespeare plays, a coal scuttle and the family bath, much to the annoyance of his wife who criticises this 'new fangled craze'. The infatuation with the red enamel paint comes to a comic end, however, when Pooter prepares a hot bath to alleviate a headache that had developed while applying the substance, stripping off the recently applied red layer on to his body, giving him the appearance of a 'second Marat'<sup>1</sup>.

Pooter's naivety and lack of expertise might appear to epitomise dominant preconceptions of the unimportance of amateur surface intervention: a misguided, mimetic act of decoration, personalisation or ornamentation, reflecting a lack of technical capability and the superficiality of middlebrow taste. Nevertheless, Pooter's failed attempt to embellish his household hints at an ignored modern phenomenon with roots in the nineteenth century: the expansion of an infrastructure of tools and materials that made it possible for individuals to modify objects after the initial process of commodity exchange. Although ingloriously used, the enamel paints that the Grossmiths insert into their narrative references the democratisation of supplies that allowed consumers a certain degree of creative autonomy and the potential to exercise their own taste. As more people understood how art was made through their own practice, the paradigms of artistic judgement and reception inevitably changed<sup>2</sup>. Particularly important in the context of this chapter is the ease by which amateurs could participate in artistic processes, imitating dominant forms of pictorial depiction. As inherently unique and creative endeavours,

<sup>1</sup> George and Weedon Grossmith, *Diary of a Nobody* (London: Penguin, 1965), pp. 42-45.

<sup>2</sup> Glenn Adamson, when recounting the popularity of the 1969 American craft exhibition *Objects: USA*, speculates 'How many people in *Objects: USA*'s record-breaking crowds came because they were interested in crafts as a progressive art form, and how many came because they saw a connection to things they'd done (or would have liked to do) at home?' Glenn Adamson, 'Gatherings: Creating the Studio Craft Movement' chapter two of Jeannine Falino ed. *Crafting Modernism: Midcentury American Art and Design* (New York: Abrams, forthcoming), p. 45.

surface interventions demonstrated the amateur's proactive engagement with objects and the will to incorporate them into a uniquely individualised sphere.

This chapter seeks to etch the amateur surface intervener into narratives of modern art history, which demands three successive conceptual moves. First, the surface has to be theorised as an isolated, contested zone of material and metaphorical manipulation. Its status as a mere conduit through which meaning and depth is expressed needs to be challenged. Using an interdisciplinary source base – drawing from Derrida's assault on the expectation of art's autonomy, and recent material culture theory – the surface is shown to contain multiple depths. The mid nineteenth-century controversy within French Salon art over whether or not to apply a *fini* (a final layer of varnish) and responses to the ubiquity of photographic smoothness are examples from the past that reflect the key role material manipulation of the surface has played in the assignation of aesthetic and cultural value.

The second section investigates the *things* that facilitate surface intervention: the variety of tools such as pre-stretched canvases, pre-mixed paint and handbooks, codified here under the headings bases, carriers and arbiters. The ability of the amateur to become surface intervener and unravel the mystery of artistic production is predicated on the accessibility of these tools and materials. Thus, the tone becomes historical as I assess how art supply firms in the nineteenth century such as Winsor & Newton or LeFranc et Cie marketed their wares to a heterogeneous array of artists, middle class hobbyists, and anyone else with time and money on their hands. Far from constituting exhaustive company histories, the attempt is to assess the reception of these commercially supplied artistic materials, how they simplified various practices of surface intervention and, consequently, how they were implicated in the evolving dialectics of de- and re-skilling in artistic practice.

Given this equivalence of access to tools, John Roberts argues that the amateur is:

... a new kind of artist lying in waiting, the artist who will be born out of general social technique's erosion of the division between professional and non-professional artist. The amateur on the "way up" and the professional artist on the "way down" meet under the auspices of deskilling.<sup>3</sup>

The final part of the chapter assesses whether Roberts' pulley metaphor, which describes a meeting between an elevated level of social technique signalled by improved amateur skill and the artist's declining monopoly over technical mastery, can be historically substantiated. With an assault on their skills from manual and mechanical reproduction<sup>4</sup>, artists from the mid nineteenth-century onwards increasingly embedded their material production in an 'internalised' philosophical language giving their craft 'a reprieve', according to Thierry de Duve, 'an avant-garde strategy devised by artists who were aware that they could no longer compete technically or economically with industry'<sup>5</sup>. Many artists masked the increasing impotence of their own skill with the development of a conceptual language, a characteristic of the emerging avant-garde. All the while non-artists were improving; the alchemy of the artistic surface was deconstructed and subdivided into a series of specific tasks, severely undermining the work's autonomy. Armed with a manual and a paintbox, anyone could imitate the 'making' part of art, compelling artists to ask questions as to what constitutes the boundaries of their practice – socially, aesthetically, physically and philosophically.

Furthermore, the amateur's role, like the artist in the era of pre-mixed paints and commercially available canvases, becomes confined to finishing off: marking, signing, decorating, in short adding the final layer to an object produced by the labour of others. This foregrounds the 'non-artist as

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<sup>3</sup> John Roberts, *The Intangibilities of Form: Skill and Deskilling in Art After the Readymade* (London: Verso, 2007), p. 159.

<sup>4</sup> Amateur practice can tentatively be included under Walter Benjamin's definition of manual reproduction that he chiefly associates with forgery, defined against the processes of technical reproduction (photography and film) that subject an image to replication through autonomous, pure technical form. The amateur manual reproducer by contrast reproduces the original as another hand-made original, using similar tools and materials of the artist to achieve this. Walter Benjamin, 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction' in Walter Benjamin *Illuminations*, trans. by Harry Zorn (London: Pimlico, 1999), p. 214.

<sup>5</sup> Thierry de Duve, 'The Readymade and the Tube of Paint' *Artforum* 24:8 (April 1986), p. 116.



collaborator'<sup>6</sup>, according to Roberts, a dependency obfuscated by most artists but exposed by others, including Marcel Duchamp whose work *Fountain* (1917) provocatively laid bare these new relationships. The hyper self-reflexivity of the avant-garde follows a completely different trajectory to the mimetic tendencies of most amateur surface intervention, which challenges Roberts' claim of equivalence, but both artists and amateurs are similarly reliant on the labour of others. Thus, surface intervention is reduced to finishing off or the material application of the outermost layer, in the case of Duchamp, scrawling the pseudonym 'R Mutt' on the front of a urinal.

Two specific case studies elucidate this impact of amateur practice on conditions of artistic production and aesthetics, chronologically situated on either side of Duchamp's use of unassisted readymades. The first case study assesses how the porcelain paint technologies of Paris-based chemist Alphonse Lacroix, introduced in the throes of post-1870 French decorative art reform, popularised overglaze ceramic decoration and how established ceramic practitioners, such as Ernest Chaplet, responded. In addition to specialists who were revising hierarchies of skill within the medium, from the 1890s Maurice Denis and other Nabis artists started to use ceramic forms and other decorative arts media as blank canvases for their artistic expression. Their carefree departure from painting on canvas (their area of expertise) was wrapped up in sophisticated aesthetic language that celebrated flatness, but they could not completely mask the lack of technical competence in their appropriation of other media. Like the ceramic decorators using Lacroix's paints, their labour was confined to imbuing depth into the surface whilst relying on bases made by others.

The second case study assesses the impact of arguably the most accessible art medium of the twentieth century: paint-by-number kits that were commercially produced in the USA from the early 1950s. As a complete invitation to art with all the tools and materials within one kit, paint-by-number was often derided for its apparent simplicity. Unsurprisingly, the kits attracted criticism from the art press, but hostile reception not only overlooked the complexity of paint-by-number kits and the artistic education

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<sup>6</sup> Roberts, 160-1.

it provided, but how they inherently fragmented the process of painting. Their aim to make painting as simple as 1-2-3 meant instruction had to be heavily didactic and the amateur's reliance on this guidance of other labourers unavoidably showed through in the final product. As with the hesitant, inexpert and mimetic overglaze porcelain decorations made with Lacroix's paints, paint-by-number surface intervention exposed a repressed truth about art in general: its reliance on the non-artistic labour of others and the reduction of the artists role to application of the outermost layer, an exposure that Andy Warhol was at least partially aware of when he appropriated paint-by-number for his *Do It Yourself Series* of 1962.

### The philosophy of the surface

Even what is called *ornamentation* (*parerga*), i.e. what is only an adjunct, and not an intrinsic constituent in the complete representation of the object, in augmenting the delight of taste does so only by means of its form. Thus it is with the frames of pictures, or the drapery on statues, or the colonnades of palaces. But if the ornamentation does not itself enter into the composition of the beautiful form – if it is introduced like a gold frame merely to win approval for the picture by means of its charm – it is then called *finery* and takes away from genuine beauty.<sup>7</sup>

Emmanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgement* (1790), p. 57.

Alongside frames, draperies and colonnades, the surface can fall under Kant's definition of *parerga*, or adjuncts to art; representative of the intermediate zone between the form of an object and the field of subjective experience, at best extrinsic to the work of art, but with the capability of despoiling 'genuine' beauty. Surface effects that please or gratify through their evocation of the senses mar the authenticity of the subject's autonomy, which Kant argues is necessary for uninhibited aesthetic judgement and recognition of genuine beauty<sup>8</sup>. The philosopher's construction of the autonomous aesthetic judgement that privileges 'design' or 'form' marks the theoretical

<sup>7</sup> Emmanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgment* trans. by James Creed Meredith (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), p. 57.

<sup>8</sup> Kant argues that an autonomous subjective aesthetic allows the individual to construct their own judgment based on their 'liking' of a represented object, *in and of itself*, rather than its ability to represent something. This links aesthetic critique to a sentiment or an abstract concept, rather than the material existence of the artwork itself. Kant, p. 43.

marginalisation of the surface, a critical trajectory continued in the twentieth century by Adolf Loos' assault on surface ornamentation<sup>9</sup> and by Clement Greenberg's art criticism.

Greenberg's marginalisation of the surface as 'kitsch'<sup>10</sup> – dependent, popular and facile – was arguably more difficult because the abstract paintings he encoded with aesthetic depth, such as Jackson Pollock's "all-over" work, bore a close resemblance to the flat two-dimensionality of wallpaper<sup>11</sup>. This elevation of Pollock's flat surface compared to the flatness of advertisements, wallpaper or, indeed, amateur surface interventions, has much to do with the development of an internalised progressive language of an artistic avant-garde that I explore in greater detail below. For now, Greenberg's adherence to Kantian notions of aesthetic autonomy can be taken to represent the persistence of the assumption that compared to form, or depth, surface only serves to augment, distract, placate, conceal or deceive the innocent autonomous subject who is striving to assure his distance from the 'mere' representation of an object.

In an attempt to foreground the potential of the surface as a mobile site of meaning, its relationship to both exterior and interior elements of the artwork must be problematised. Critiquing Kant's assumptions of what is 'intrinsic' to art, and therefore what also is extrinsic, Derrida situates the parergon in a more fluid position as a shifting boundary between interior and exterior. He asks why the garment or colonnade constitutes a parergon:

It is not because they are detached but on the contrary because they are more difficult to detach and above all because without them, without their quasi-detachment, the lack on the inside of the work would appear; or (which amounts to the same thing for a lack) would not

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<sup>9</sup> The marginalisation of ornamented surfaces in Western culture adopts a polemical edge with the rise of architectural modernism of the early twentieth century that privileged the 'removal of ornamentation from objects of everyday use' as stated by Adolf Loos in *Ornament and Crime*. Loos equates decoration with a pre-modern Papuan or childish degeneracy and states that he would always prefer a plain gingerbread man rather than one shaped like a heart. Adolf Loos, 'Ornament and Crime' [1908] in Adolf Loos, *Ornament and Crime: Selected Essays* trans. by Michael Mitchell (California: Ariadne Press, 1998), pp. 167-169.

<sup>10</sup> Clement Greenberg, 'Avant-garde and Kitsch' [1939], in Clement Greenberg, *The Collected Essays and Criticism* (Chicago and London: Chicago University Press, 1986), p. 12.

<sup>11</sup> Elissa Auther explains how Greenberg thought Pollock was able 'to wrench from the decorative the flat, all-over surface and use it in the service of high art'. Elissa Auther, 'Wallpaper, the Decorative, and Contemporary Installation Art' in Maria Elena Buszek ed. *Extra/Ordinary: Craft in Contemporary Art* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2011), p. 121.

appear.<sup>12</sup>

The parergon, or the supplementary adjunct, defines the interior meaning of an object through the linguistic construction of a binary opposition. However, instead of only stating how the interior is more clearly understood by what it is not, Derrida points to the parergon's *quasi* detachment, situating its meaning within both exterior and interior contexts. He describes the parergon as 'standing out'<sup>13</sup>, showing how this intermediary space can be conceptualised independently, between exterior and interior but merging with both, with the fluidity that destabilises the status of any boundary fixing device, like a picture frame. This encourages a more mobile use of the term. The invitation is to consider the parergon as an abstract entity that is manifest through certain objects, but not tied to them<sup>14</sup>: in the deconstruction of a painting – from its material grounds, painterly marks, varnish, framing, placement in a room, position within networks as commodity of exchange and architectural setting – the parergon negotiates throughout, constructing the interior-exterior binary by virtue of its quasi detached role.

Derrida attributes dynamism to the parergon – it does not have a fixed boundary – and this can be applied to the surface. However, he does limit the conceptual mobility of the parergon. Attention to material manifestations of the surface in anthropology demonstrates the inextricable link between surface and depth, suggesting that the surface is not quasi-detached but amalgamated and embroiled. The surface physically clings to objects, determining their entire meaning.

This material dimension to Derrida's critique of the subject-object dichotomy is manifest in seminal works of material culture that show how 'an object cannot be properly grasped independently of how it relates to the body and indeed to its underlying area'<sup>15</sup>. However, while such works have shown the

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<sup>12</sup> Jacques Derrida, *The Truth in Painting* trans. by Geoff Bennington and Ian McLeod (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1987), p. 59.

<sup>13</sup> Derrida, p. 61.

<sup>14</sup> Derrida alerts us to the possibility of the frame's actual existence at the same time as he points to its fluidity in what seems to be a contradictory statement 'There is a frame, but the frame does not exist', the ambiguity as to the frame's status as a linguistic construction serves to prove its mobility as a boundary marking device. Ibid, p. 81.

<sup>15</sup> Quote from Carl Knapett 'Photographs, Skeuomorphs and Marionettes'. *Journal of Material Culture*, 7:1 (2002), p. 99. Many other works of anthropology challenge the resilience of a subject-object dichotomy,

interconnectivity of objects to personal subjectivity and social relations, most fail to isolate the particular role of the surface as the site of this dynamism.

Exceptions include Grant McCracken's essay on pre eighteenth-century patina, Celeste Olalquiaga's study on nineteenth-century perceptions of dusty surfaces and a chapter in Alfred Gell's *Art and Agency* devoted to surface decoration in Iatmul lime containers. In the works of McCracken and Olalquiaga the surface is conceptualised as a fixed entity that means something in a particular given historical moment: the former uncomplicatedly deploying Pierre Bourdieu and Thorstein Veblen to equate patina with reductive and static concepts of eighteenth-century strategies of distinction<sup>16</sup>; the latter viewing dust as akin to her construction of kitsch as 'a failed commodity that continually speaks of all it has ceased to be'<sup>17</sup>.

Olalquiaga poetically evokes dust's position as the debris of a previous era's aura which transforms the surface from a previously ignored, uncomplicated and transparent zone in between material existence and subjective perception, to a clouded window, denoting historicity and the last remnant of tradition in the context of industrial reproduction. These examples helpfully isolate the surface as a terrain worthy of anthropological study. Gell contributed to scholarship in this field through his examination of the mesmeric potentiality in abstract, patterned surfaces of lime-containers, to captivate audiences and alert them to the agency of their owner<sup>18</sup>.

Nevertheless further analysis of surface as an active site of meaning helps build on McCracken and Olalquiaga's analysis, introducing the importance of material manipulation of surface effect. In McCracken's examples he

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following Latour's critique in *We Have Never Been Modern* to show how agency is scattered across networks. Bruno Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern* trans. by Catherine Porter (New York and London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1993); Arjun Appadurai ed., *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in a Cultural Perspective* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986); Alfred Gell, *Art and Agency: An Anthropological Theory* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1998). Miller is among anthropologists who chart the modern subject's expression through choices of consumption, Danny Miller ed., *Home Possessions: Material Culture Behind Closed Doors* (Oxford: Berg, 2001).

<sup>16</sup> Grant McCracken, 'Ever Dearer In Our Thoughts' in *Culture and Consumption: New Approaches to the Symbolic Character of Consumer Goods and Activities* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988), pp. 31-43.

<sup>17</sup> Celeste Olalquiaga, *Artificial Kingdom: On the Kitsch Experience* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002), p. 28. For a discussion of dust as a mediation between object and subject in the nineteenth-century see pp. 90-94.

<sup>18</sup> The case study of Iatmul lime-containers is a part of chapter six 'The critique of the index', which examines the cognitive complexity of the pattern in trapping the viewer as 'a pleasurable frustration' in Gell, *Art and agency*, pp 73-95.

overlooks how fashion continually re-appropriates patina in new social-historic circumstances, and dust was never a static surface effect as shown by the nineteenth-century phenomenon of traders and amateurs deliberately manipulating the surfaces of furniture and *object d'art* to lend such products the vaunted badge of historicity<sup>19</sup>. Victoria Kelley's studies on nineteenth-century cleaning products sets a standard for exploring the complexity that arises from material manipulation of the surface. She demonstrates how patina and other signs of age and wear are continually maintained and regulated through different strategies of cleaning, dusting and polishing. Those in possession of 'wealthy taste' regulated the surface decline of antiques in response to the glossiness of mass produced industrial goods. Yet this intervention was socially specific. Such an approach would not make sense in poorer communities 'in which objects that showed their age did so in ways that undermined their value'<sup>20</sup>. Kelley uncovers the competitiveness of taste that arises out of managing the surface through material intervention. The author J G Ballard playfully evokes this attitude in *Millennium People*, when one character praises the new invention of spray-on-mud in an aerosol can: 'An effective way of impressing people in the office car park on Monday mornings. A quick spray on the wheels and your colleagues will think of rose pergolas and thatched cottages'<sup>21</sup>. Ballard here parodies middle class sensitivities to surface, in which an added layer can completely transform the meaning of an object and lend it social and cultural cachet. Surface mediation is both materially and metaphorically loaded: choices as to whether to keep something clean or not, or the decision to regulate patina, demonstrate how the surface is the vehicle through which depth is articulated.

### **The artistic surface**

The surface is akin to Derrida's mobile construction of the parergon, but recognising the *materiality* of this liminal space is key to building a philosophy

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<sup>19</sup> Manuel Charpy, 'Patina and Bourgeoisie: Appearances of the Past in Nineteenth-Century Paris' in Victoria Kelley and Glenn Adamson eds. *Surface Tensions* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, forthcoming).

<sup>20</sup> Victoria Kelley, 'Housekeeping: Shine, Polish, Gloss and Glaze as Surface Strategies in the Domestic Interior' in Deirdre McMahon and Janet Myers eds. *Material Possessions: The Objects and Textures Of Everyday Life in Imperial Britain* (Athens: University of Ohio Press, forthcoming)

<sup>21</sup> John G Ballard, *Millennium People* (London: Harper Perennial, 2008), p. 93.

of the surface. Examples above show the ways in which the surface can entirely constitute an object's meaning rather than merely being superficial, with metaphorical depth dependent on the nature of material surface intervention. The same conditions apply to the artistic surface. However, with the exception of research on surface analysis for the purposes of conservation and preservation<sup>22</sup>, discourses of art history have largely forgotten the importance of the surface, merely situating this zone as a conduit to biographical, formalist, semiotic or socio-historical study. This is particularly surprising given that artists from the nineteenth century onwards used the surface as their main weapon to distinguish their production from the ubiquitous smoothness of mechanical printing procedures, offering artists a way to mitigate the increasingly defunct role of the surface as representation alone.

For mid nineteenth-century artists, like Eugène Delacroix and Jean-Baptiste-Camille Corot (and subsequently the 'Impressionist' artists) the surface played a role in aesthetics beyond just assisting the spectator's journey to greater symbolic depth. These artists presented the *ébauché* – the preparatory painted sketch – as a finished artwork in its own right. They defied the Davidean Academic pedagogy of the time that perceived the flattening of a composition through a final layer of varnish as testament of artistic skill<sup>23</sup>. For art historian Albert Boime this shift represented:

[The] displacement of distinct phases: the germinal experiment and the final execution took place on the canvas simultaneously – no intermediate stage between impulse and act hampered the final expression<sup>24</sup>.

This displacement, positioning the *ébauché* as a completed work, was

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<sup>22</sup> There is a whole branch of art history that interrogates the material history of art products, often quite technical, that helps museums understand how to conserve objects, but also work looks at the socio-economic circumstances of the introduction of an art material, such as Martin Kemp, *Science of Art: Optical Themes in Western Art from Brunelleschi to Seurat* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990); John Gage, *Colour in Art* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2006); Trevor Lamb and Janine Bourriau eds. *Colour: Art and Science* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995); Vojtěch Jirat-Wasiutynski, *Technique and Meaning in the Paintings of Paul Gauguin* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000); Marjorie Wieseman, *A Closer Look: Deceptions and Discoveries* (London: National Gallery, 2010). Rita Jones refutes claims of the sub-discipline's 'ancillary' character in the introduction to Stephen Hackney ed. *Paint and Purpose: A Study of Technique in British Art* (London: Tate Gallery, 1999), p. 9.

<sup>23</sup> Charles Rosen and Henri Zerner, 'The Ideology of the Licked Surface' in *Romanticism and Realism: The Mythology of Nineteenth Century Art* (London: Faber, 1984), pp. 222-223.

<sup>24</sup> Albert Boime, *The Academy and French Painting in the Nineteenth Century* (London: Phaidon, 1971), p. 87.

controversial not because it demonstrated a lack of talent but because it aroused incredulity due to its incompleteness<sup>25</sup>. The surface was at the centre of the debate. Many critics equated such paintings to unfinished, facile, feminine daubs but Baudelaire read the same surface as masculine, full of vigour and raw, equating the academic application of the *fini* with the femininity of domestic polishing<sup>26</sup>.

Treatment of the outermost layer became essential for designating authorship within the new commercial art market of the nineteenth century and could signal rejection of artistic conventions. The surface was open to different strategies of material intervention and could, in itself, be employed as a mark designating authorship and individuality. The type of material surface intervention could form an artist's signature style, described by Ulrich Lehmann (after Baudelaire) as a 'poncif', a 'recognisable formal trait that distinguishes the artist's output from works by other artists competing in the market'<sup>27</sup>. The 'poncif' operates between the artist's own clichéd subjectivity, the aesthetic calling card that signals authorship, and the demonstration of these features in any given context. Drawing attention to the materiality of the surface – exposing facture – not only signalled a challenge to technical definitions of what a painting should be, but ensured that the artist's skill remained sacrosanct in a new commercial environment where mechanical printing procedures could replicate the varnished smoothness of academic painting with ease.

The metaphorical depth of material marks was particularly important given the ascendancy of the flat, photographic finish. The expansion of photography in the late nineteenth century meant that the material surface intervention with which it was associated – smoothness – was pejoratively received, unfavourably compared to the authenticity associated with the gestural style common to Impressionism. This is brilliantly evoked in a passage of Marcel Proust's *Remembrance of Things Past* where the narrator recalls his mother's

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<sup>25</sup> Prominent nineteenth-century art critic Étienne-Jean Delécluze was not critical of Delacroix's talent as the sketches demonstrate artistic competence, but he laments the painter for the fact that his composition is not 'finished properly' cited in Boime, p. 89.

<sup>26</sup> Anthea Callen, *The Art of Impressionism* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2000), p. 12.

<sup>27</sup> Ulrich Lehmann, 'The Trademark Tracey Emin' in Mandy Merch and Chris Townsend eds. *The Art of Tracey Emin* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2002), p. 60. Boime notes the increasing individuality expressed in mid nineteenth-century French painting expressed through spontaneity. Boime, p. 166.



opinions on the photographs in his room.

She would have liked me to have in my room photographs of ancient buildings or of beautiful places. But at the moment of buying them, and for all that the subject of the picture has an aesthetic value of its own, she would find that the vulgarity and utility has too prominent a part in them, through the mechanical nature of their reproduction by photography. She attempted by a subterfuge, if not to eliminate altogether their commercial banality, at least to minimise it, to substitute for the bulk of it what was art still, to introduce, as it might be, several “thicknesses” of art; instead of photographs of Chartres Cathedral, of the Fountains of St-Cloud, or of Vesuvius she would inquire of Swann whether some great painter had not made pictures of them, and preferred to give me photographs of “Chartres Cathedral” after Corot, of the “Fountains of St-Cloud” after Hubert Robert, and of “Vesuvius” after Turner, which were a stage higher in the scale of art.<sup>28</sup>

Although still a photograph, the higher cachet is attributed to ‘Chartres Cathedral after Corot’ on account of the ‘thicknesses’ suggested in the photograph. As mechanical reproduction begins to monopolise the surface as a representational site, the mode of representation becomes the means by which artists express autonomy over their work – again a manifestation of an individual’s *poncif* – and this subsequently becomes the marker of aesthetic judgement.

The materiality of a painterly mark indicates ‘correct’ (if middlebrow) taste as it demonstrates the individual’s comprehension of art as something beyond mere representation. Bourdieu’s analysis would highlight how the liking of a textured surface reflects a resistance to the homogeneity of photographic flatness; a higher, legitimate ‘aesthetic disposition’ that values the ability of the artwork to point to its own form and historical development<sup>29</sup>. Yet his sociological model does not relate to the subject’s visceral experience, the captivation of the artist’s mark or ‘*poncif*’, which many amateurs tried to imitate in the late nineteenth century through touching up old photographs with oil and watercolour paint<sup>30</sup>.

<sup>28</sup> Marcel Proust, *Swann’s Way: Remembrance of Things Past* trans. by C K Scott Moncrieff (London: Chatto & Windus, 1922), pp. 51-2.

<sup>29</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste* trans. by Richard Nice (New York and London: Routledge, 2007), pp. 3-4.

<sup>30</sup> Manuals for touching up photos in the late nineteenth-century include Klary C, *L’art de retoucher en noir les épreuves positives sur papier* (Gauthier-Villars: Paris, 1888); Simons A, *Traité pratique de photo-*

I explore how amateurs deploy poncif, or the mark of the hand, below. The approaches of mid nineteenth-century artists to academic *fini* and the texture of the photographic surface have merely demonstrated that the artistic surface can be rescued from expectations of its superfluity. The conceptualisation of the surface as containing metaphorical depth through the material interventions taking place on its outermost layers is essential to this chapter's attempt to insert amateur drawing, painting and decoration into accounts of Western art history. It is an example of the Derridean flip, the repositioning of the marginal and supplementary to the centre. Equally reduced to material surfaces, both recognised works of art and amateur productions can be subject to anthropological investigations that look into how the surface layers were put together, how the practitioner achieved such effects through varying levels of skill, reliance on tools, materials and technologies. The social and cultural contexts in which surface intervention took place will also be examined, as well as the subsequent reception and impact on aesthetics.

The reduction of two-dimensional artwork, amateur and otherwise, to surface materiality draws attention to the processes of labour that go into making each layer. This craft-centred anthropological approach, however, is only appropriate to an analysis of amateur surface intervention and its impact on art history after amateurs have levels of access to tools and materials that allow them to have a go at replicating the labour of the artist. Therefore attention should be devoted to the things that allow the amateur at least a partial, imperfect or miniaturised experience of artistic production. The historical context for the emergence of such objects is nineteenth-century Britain and France. Yet before the historical analysis commences it is necessary to explore these 'things' in more depth.

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*miniature, photo-peinture et photo-aquarelle* (Gauthier-Villars: Paris, 1888) and Lefebvre C T, *Guide de peinture-coloriste, comprenant l'enluminage des gravures et lithographies, le coloris du daguerréotype, des vues sur verre pour stéréoscope et la retouche de la photographie à l'aquarelle et à l'huile* (Paris, 1876). Thomas Crow shows how hand-made photographs demonstrate the fusion between manual and technological reproduction rather than the exclusive domain of the latter. Thomas Crow, 'Hand-Made Photographs and Homeless Representation' *October* 62 (Autumn 1992), pp. 123-32.

### **The 'things' needed for amateur surface intervention**

All surface intervention requires three different categories of mediating agents – bases, carriers and arbiters. Each classification represents a constitutive part of the production process involved in surface intervention.

'Bases' are the objects that provide the blank surface on which the amateur operates, such as paper, pre-primed canvases and sketchbooks. They constitute the very foundation of a work, yet themselves are already a result of a series of productive procedures.

'Carriers' are the tools and kits that provide the vehicle through which practice takes place. They are the mark-making objects that contain metamorphic qualities – objects whose *raison d'être* is to transform the blank, non-figurative base into objects imbued with creative enterprise, such as pens, paintbrushes, paint in tubes, as well as paint-boxes and art kits which represent the collection of these objects, complete *invitations* to art in convenient carry cases.

'Arbiters' are objects, external to the materiality of a work, that shape the way in which the surface is manipulated. This is manifest textually in manuals and 'how-to' books, which inform the amateur of techniques, standards of taste and histories of style. Arbiters range from simple didactic pamphlets for the beginner to large tomes on the history of a specific medium. In addition to such literary support, there are also material aids, such as perspective devices, that assist the amateur in bypassing complex procedures of artistic production. (These two means of arbitration exist interdependently: the handbook often provides instruction for use of a device.)

The use of bases, carriers and arbiters is common to all art, regardless of chronology or geography. However, as mentioned above, the nineteenth

century witnessed their increasing availability to heterogeneous groups of amateurs and artists. Art supply firms like Ackermann, Winsor & Newton and Reeves and Son in Britain and LeFranc et Cie and Bourgeois Ainé in France, harnessed technical and chemical developments to widen access to art materials, often specifically targeted at amateur audiences<sup>31</sup>. These materials and tools encouraged the amateur to become a capitalist bricoleur (as outlined in the introduction): active, productive agents in the quickly changing circuits of modern consumption and production that took away the alchemy formerly at the centre of artistic practice.

Analysis of the commercial introduction of tools and materials to an audience previously barred access to such products must resist capitulation to technological determinism: greater access to new technology and materials did not change conditions of artistic production on its own. Instead, the impact of any technological development was uneven and depended on contexts of use. Despite an infrastructure that helped amateurs to practice, there were still considerable limitations: poor quality bases, carriers and arbiters, insufficient technical information; inadequacies of skill; and the broader social-cultural factors that marginalised amateur's efforts. Therefore it is the *use* of the tool that determines whether a work is framed as 'amateur', 'professional' or 'artistic', or as something that occupies an amorphous terrain between these definitions.

With this emphasis on the provision, use and impact of the things needed for surface intervention, the interconnectivity between amateurs and artists is elucidated in its full complexity, helping to challenge the limiting fiction of a clear divide between professional and amateur artist. Below I attempt to outline the circulation of new tools and materials within an environment of disseminated access and assess how each object is implicated in the dialectics of de- and re-skilling in artistic production.

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<sup>31</sup> The following authors claim that the main market for such firms were the emerging group of amateurs: Callen, p. 3; Kimberly Schenck, 'Crayon, Paper and Print' in *Essence of Line: French Drawings from Ingres to Degas* Jay Fisher and David Becker D eds. (London: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2005), p. 58; David Bomford, *Impressionism* (London: National Gallery in association with Yale University Press, 1990), p. 40.

### **Bases: the blank surface**

Bases provide the surface on which amateur dreams can unfold. The prepared canvas or blank page is a raw material, but in the context of the nineteenth century and beyond it already constituted a readymade that had passed through multiple stages of production. Before the industrialisation of art supply firms, bases were prepared by apprentices or colourmen employed by artists to undertake a wide range of preparatory practices, such as canvas stretching and priming, mixing colours, cleaning brushes and preparing the pencils, palettes, easels and other tools<sup>32</sup>.

From the late eighteenth century the barriers that had previously protected craft skills and apprenticeship learning were fundamentally challenged, both by the abolition of the guilds and free market policies ushered in after the French Revolution. As in many other industries<sup>33</sup> merchant capitalists started to co-ordinate the production of readymade art supplies, breaking down the process of producing one item into a series of less complex tasks. As with Adam Smith's famous example of the division of labour in pin manufacturing<sup>34</sup>, from the early nineteenth century canvases were being produced by labour that was subdivided between a set of discrete tasks, rather than one apprentice or colourman being in control of making the entire object. Benefitting from economies of scale, bases could thus be produced in increasing quantity and at ever diminishing costs, widening access to surface intervention.

The early nineteenth century witnessed significant growth in the commercial provision of art supplies, with a plethora of small traders from the eighteenth century developing into larger companies, such as LeFranc & Cie, Reeves and Sons and Winsor & Newton. These firms harnessed processes of mechanisation by setting up large, out-of-town factories with retail outlets in urban areas<sup>35</sup> and among the many products they sold, were an array of bases,

<sup>32</sup> R D Harley, *Artists Pigments c1600-1835* (London: Butterworth Scientific, 1982), p. 41.

<sup>33</sup> See Roger Magraw, *A History of the French Working Class Volume 1: The Age of the Artisan Revolution* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992), p. 14.

<sup>34</sup> Adam Smith, *The Wealth of Nations* (London: Penguin, 1970) pp. 109-110.

<sup>35</sup> For a celebratory, progressive account of Winsor and Newton's wielding of mechanisation see supplementary catalogue to Henry R Robertson, *The Art of Etching Explained and Illustrated: With Remarks on the Allied Processes of Drypoint, Mezzotint, and Aquatint* (London: Winsor & Newton, 1883), p. 3.

prepared and ready for use. For example Winsor & Newton and Reeves and Sons sold ‘prepared’ canvas in rolls, as well as a selection of pre-stretched, framed canvases from the 1830s<sup>36</sup> (figure 1). LeFranc et Cie and Bourgeois Ainé also marketed similar products, meaning that use of the self-primed canvases by French artists in the 1840s was ‘the exception rather than the rule’<sup>37</sup>. The commercial availability of prepared canvases might not have entirely stamped out traditional forms of production – artist’s continued to prepare their own canvases and a niche market for canvases produced by artisanal labour persists to the day – but from the nineteenth century this process was no longer essential to the artist’s craft. The very fact that well-known nineteenth-century artists Camille Pissarro and Berthe Morisot used prepared canvases<sup>38</sup> highlights the ubiquity of this readymade form and how its use signalled the re-configuration of artistic labour away from preparing the base.

In other instances entirely new bases were introduced to the market harnessing newly available chemical knowledge, such as the specifically designed drawing paper produced in Britain from the late eighteenth century. New ‘wove’ paper was designed by James Whatman, replacing the ‘laid’ technique which involved setting paper pulp on a wire sieve, its grid showing through in the final sheet of paper. Whatman’s paper provided a uniform surface without such imperfections and watermarks, and could better absorb watercolour paint<sup>39</sup>. The standardisation of paper production from the nineteenth century further improved quality, but as Peter Bower states, certain artists bemoaned the fact that they no longer were supplied with papers specific to their wants<sup>40</sup>. The standardised production of this ‘drawing

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<sup>36</sup> Leslie Carlyle, *The Artist’s Assistant: Oil Painting Instruction Manuals and Handbooks in Britain 1800 – 1900* (London: Archetype publications, 2001), pp. 185-6. For examples in art supply firms’ catalogues see ‘Geo Rowney & Co’s Catalogue’ supplement to Alfred Clint, *A Guide to Oil Painting* (London: Geo Rowney & Co., 1855), pp. 56-57; Winsor & Newton supplement to Henry Murray, *The Art of Portrait Painting in Oil Colours, With Observations on Setting and Painting the Figure* (London: Winsor and Newton, 1851), pp. 2-3; ‘J Barnard’s Catalogue’ advertises a range of blank drawing boards, supplement to A N Rintoul, *A Guide to Painting Photographic Portraits in Watercolours* (London: J Barnard, 1855) p. 6; ‘Reeves & Sons Artist Color Manufacturers’ supplement to Henry Warren, *Painting in Watercolours* (London: Reeves & Sons, 1856) pp. 28-30.

<sup>37</sup> Bomford, p. 44.

<sup>38</sup> Callen, p. 67.

<sup>39</sup> Nicola Moorby, ‘Water + Colour: Explaining the Medium’ in Alison Smith ed. *Watercolour* (London: Tate, 2011), pp. 25-6.

<sup>40</sup> Peter Bower, ‘The Evolution and Development of “Drawing Papers” and the Effect of This Development on Watercolour Artists, 1750 – 1850’ in *The Oxford Papers: Proceedings of The British Association of Paper Historians Fourth Annual Conference held at St. Edmund Hall, Oxford* Peter Bower ed. (London: The Association of Paper Historians, 1996), p. 63.

## PREPARED CANVASES ON WEDGED FRAMES.



## Portrait Sizes.

Inches.	Each. s. d.	Each. s. d.	Each. s. d.
8 × 6 . . . . .	0 9	3 ft. 8 × 2 ft. 10, Small	
10 „ 8 . . . . .	1 0	half-length . . . . .	9 6
12 „ 10 . . . . .	1 3	4 ft. 2 × 3 ft. 4, Half-length	13 6
14 „ 12 . . . . .	1 6	4 ft. 8 × 3 ft. 8, Bishop's	
18 „ 14 . . . . .	2 0	half-length . . . . .	17 0
20 „ 16 . . . . .	2 3	7 ft. 4 × 4 ft. 4, Small	
21 „ 17 . . . . .	2 6	whole length . . . . .	36 0
24 „ 20, Head Size . . . . .	3 0	7 ft. 10 × 4 ft. 10, Whole	
30 „ 25, Three quarter		length . . . . .	42 0
size . . . . .	4 6	8 ft. 10 × 5 ft. 10,	
36 „ 28, Kitcat . . . . .	6 0	Bishop's whole length . . . . .	56 0

Wedged Frames with *hinges*, 12s. extra.

## Landscape Sizes.

Inches.	Each. s. d.	Inches	Each. s. d.	Inches.	Each. s. d.
9 × 6	0 10	15 × 11	1 8	22 × 16	2 6
10 „ 7	0 11	16 „ 12	1 10	24 „ 18	3 0
12 „ 8	1 0	17 „ 13	2 0	27 „ 20	3 8
12 „ 9	1 2	18 „ 12	2 0	30 „ 20	4 2
13 „ 9	1 4	19 „ 13	2 2	36 „ 24	5 0
14 „ 10	1 6	21 „ 14	2 4		

Frames covered with Ticken or Roman Cloth at proportionate Prices.

Figure 1: A selection of prepared canvases from a Winsor & Newton catalogue (1873).

paper' reflects both technical development but also the demand from artists and amateurs for the provision of an easy-to-use blank surface which imagination and invention could play upon. As a result, the procedure by which the surface arrives, previously the domain of colourmen producing idiosyncratic exemplars, was obscured or forgotten, ancillary to the production of 'proper' art. Prepared surfaces were just there, ready and waiting.

### **Carriers: action on the surface**

Surface intervention always necessitates making a mark, applying line and colour to the blank base before you. Carriers, the goods that make material intervention possible, take two forms: the substances that facilitate the impression of creative faculties, such as ink, pencils and paints – made from a mixture of pigment and a binding substance (or 'vehicle') that secures 'the permanent anchorage of the coating to the surface on which it is applied'<sup>41</sup> – and the units that accommodate these items as prepared invitations to art, such as paintboxes and art kits.

Accessibility to prepared oil paint was limited up until the mid nineteenth-century as preparing colour, like making bases, was the preserve of the apprentices or colourmen pursuing their own irregular procedures<sup>42</sup>. The process of binding pigment to a vehicle for effective adhesion to a surface required specific training, but in the watercolour medium this process was simpler because of the easy accessibility of water as a vehicle. This explains why there was a degree of provision of watercolour within Britain by the late eighteenth century with manufacturers stamping their brand on to watercolour cakes or pans and situating them within decorative boxes for amateur use. However, it was the nineteenth century when 'extensive commercialisation of the medium'<sup>43</sup> took place, corresponding with the expansion of art supply firms, as explained above.

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<sup>41</sup> Roy Osborne, *Lights and Pigments: Colour Principles for Artists* (London: J Murray, 1980), p. 63.

<sup>42</sup> Carlyle, p. 147.

<sup>43</sup> Moorby, p. 23.



The growth of these companies was aided by the invention of collapsible metallic tubes, patented in London in 1841 by American John G Rand. Although pre-mixed oil paint did exist before this date, packaged in pig's bladders<sup>44</sup>, mixtures were susceptible to dry or spoil in contact with heat or moisture, problems eradicated by the airtight and portable metallic tubes. By the 1850s this technology was widely advertised in the catalogues of art supply firms<sup>45</sup> (see figure 2), marking a key moment in improving access to surface intervention.

Collapsible tubes of paint also prompted an expansion in the number of paintboxes manufactured by art supply firms, joining the plethora of watercolour paintboxes already on the market. Paintboxes were entire invitations to art, containing all the basic elements needed for artistic practice in an ergonomic, portable and inexpensive form. In his manual *The Art of Landscape Painting* (1855), Henry Murray advises beginners that:

The most convenient and advantageous mode of proceeding will be, to obtain from any respectable dealer one of the usual tin oil-painting boxes, fitted completely with the necessary articles. It will contain beside colours, a set of brushes – comprising hog-hair, sable and badger brushes, a palette, a knife, port-crayons, chalk, oil, and varnish.<sup>46</sup>

Paintboxes not only contained the most important carrier – the colours that were needed to make a mark – but everything else. Paintboxes were produced in ever-increasing quantity from the 1850s with smaller, more convenient and cheaper models introduced, such as the Japanned tin paintbox (figure 3): eleven million of these were sold in the first twenty years of production, which started in 1853<sup>47</sup>. These were far more attractive as an invitation to art

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<sup>44</sup> Bomford, p. 39.

<sup>45</sup> Adverts for collapsible metallic tubes of paint first appeared in trade magazines from the 1850s and as supplementary price lists in the back of art advice manuals published by large firms such as Winsor & Newton and LeFranc et Cie. For example see 'Winsor & Newton's List of Materials for Oil Painting' supplement to Murray *The Art of Portrait Painting*, pp. 4-5; a similar supplement also advertises these oils in Henry Murray, *Artistic Anatomy of the Human Figure* (London: Winsor and Newton, 1853), p. 12. Moist watercolours in tubes were also sold as shown in Winsor and Newton's catalogue supplement in Charles William Day, *The Art of Miniature Painting, Comprising Instructions Necessary for the Acquirement of that Art* (London: Winsor & Newton, 1852), pp. 12-13. See also paints produced in metallic tubes by the firm Geo Rowney & Co of Rathbourne Place, London supplement to Clint, *A Guide*, p. 55, and Reeves and Sons 'Reeves & Sons Artist Color Manufacturers' supplement to Warren, *Painting in Watercolours* pp. 18.

LeFranc et Cie' supplement to Johan Georges Vibert, *La science de la peinture* (Paris, 1891), pp. 7-8.

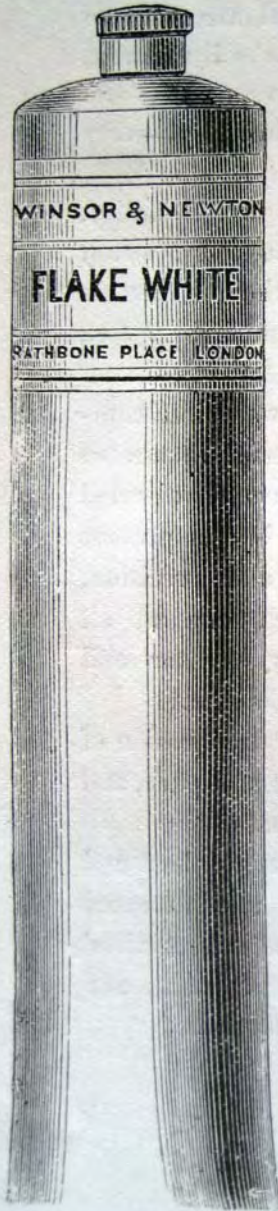
<sup>46</sup> Winsor & Newton, *The Art of Landscape Painting* (London: Winsor and Newton, 1855), p. 1.

<sup>47</sup> Moorby, p. 24.

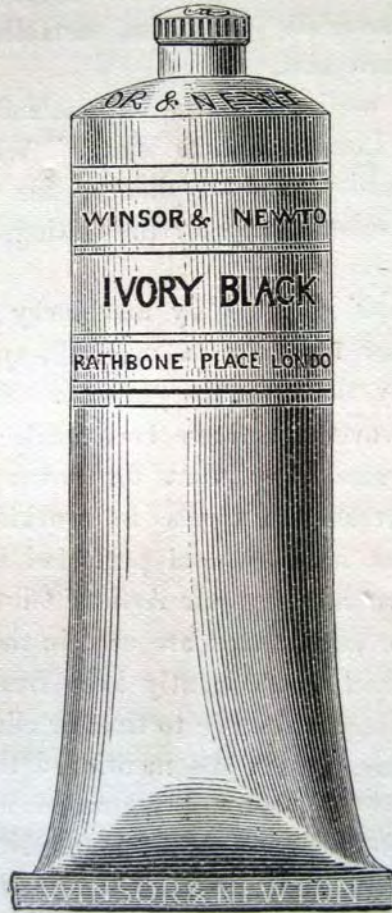
WINSOR & NEWTON'S  
FINELY PREPARED OIL COLOURS,

ILLUSTRATIONS.

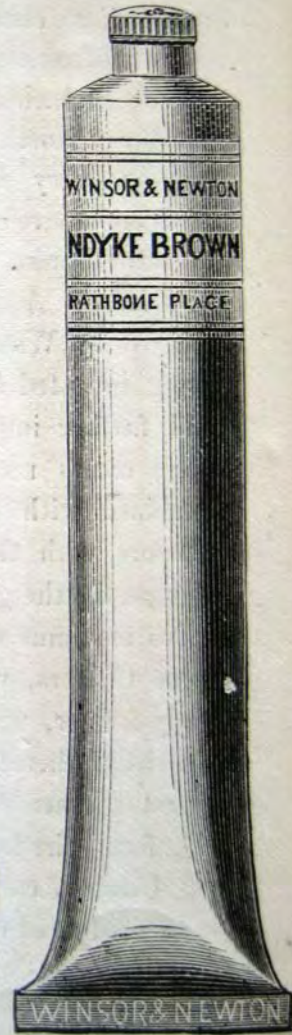
(SIZES of the Tubes.)



Quadruple (4 inch) Tube



Treble (4 inch) Tube.



Double (4 inch) Tube.

Figure 2: Oil paint in collapsible metal tubes from a Winsor & Newton catalogue (1873).

WINSOR AND NEWTON'S  
JAPANNED TIN THUMB-HOLE BOXES,  
Fitted with Moist Water Colours in Half Pans.

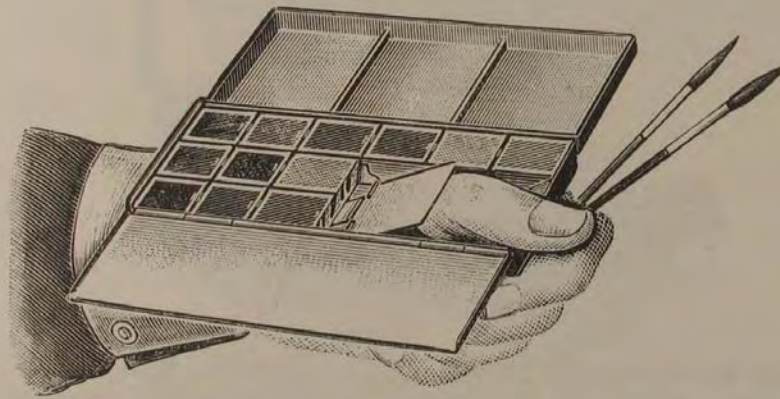


Illustration of No. 11 Box.

Figure 3: 'Japanned Tin Thumb-Hole Boxes' from a Winsor & Newton catalogue (1885).

than their cumbersome, heavy forebears<sup>48</sup>.

The new accessibility and portability of artistic materials from the 1850s has often been seen as a causal factor in the development of plein air, Impressionist practice<sup>49</sup>. This argument makes sense: portable paints allowed artists to paint directly from nature and compete with photography, previously 'a technical impossibility' according to Thierry De Duve<sup>50</sup>. De Duve places the tube of paint in the centre of his analysis of the development of an avant-garde tradition, which offsets the declining importance of craft as a barometer of a painter's skill with the development of an internalised language: for the Impressionists this involved the 'industrialisation' of the painter's hand through the fragmentation of the image, a bitmap which only manifests itself pictorially in the spectator's eye<sup>51</sup>.

De Duve's argument that tubes of paint are readymades helpfully backdates the concept beyond Duchamp's urinals and snow shovels; I will return to this idea later. However his assertion of a direct link between the introduction of new technology and the practices of ambitious artists not only overlooks how Impressionists continued to do most of their painting within the confines of the studio<sup>52</sup>, but how amateur artists constituted the main market for pre-mixed paint and other art supplies. As Anthea Callen states, plein air painting had a 'greater immediate impact on the amateur than on the professional painter', a claim substantiated by advertising material that stresses how collapsible tubes lacked odour, making them suitable for domestic use and drawing room leisure<sup>53</sup>. Amateur reception of art supplies needs to be placed alongside the professional artistic response to these new products. This reception was uneven, each product entered complex hierarchies of use. The avant-garde tradition was not solely a direct response to new technologies, but a reaction to the wider amelioration of skill among amateur practitioners with access to these products.

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<sup>48</sup> Armand Cassagne, *Traité de l'aquarelle* (Paris, 1886), p. 3.

<sup>49</sup> Waldemar Januszczak's recent BBC television series epitomises this technologically determined argument. *The Impressionists: Painting and Revolution* (BBC Two, first broadcast 16 July – 6 August, 2011).

<sup>50</sup> De Duve, 'The Readymade', p. 115.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 116.

<sup>52</sup> Bomford, p. 129.

<sup>53</sup> Callen, pp. 3-4.

The claim that readily available tubes of paint had a greater impact in the hands of amateurs than as the carrier of choice in the Impressionist's trousseau is strengthened by the fact that established artists often decided to patronise trusted colourmen using traditional methods; people like Père Tanguy, who supplied many of the Impressionists artists<sup>54</sup>. Jean-François Millet, Paul Gauguin, James McNeill Whistler, Vincent Van Gogh and Armand Guillaumin were known to have used commercially manufactured paint in tubes, but only during times of financial duress, when nothing else was available, or in the case of Gauguin when he was still a Sunday painter<sup>55</sup>. There were grave concerns about the quality of commercially produced paints. French artist and pedagogue Johan Georges Vibert lamented their invention as an example of the 'pacotille' (shoddy goods) of amateur equipment<sup>56</sup>. Chief among Vibert's complaints, however, was not the technical inadequacy of commercially produced paint in tubes but the decline in the artist's technical knowledge that their introduction had ushered in. Fellow educationalist and writer, Karl Robert in *Traité pratique de la peinture à l'huile* (1891) echoes Vibert's concern:

The colour merchants and makers of chemical products have stamped out the primary job of painters for he buys his oils without worrying about the grave consequences of such unforgivable carelessness. Such disillusion and mistrust results from the use of this new material, and what hopelessness awaits the artist when he sees each day his work, the fruit of his hard labour and pain, become little by little subject to the damage of time.<sup>57</sup>

Vibert proposes regulatory measures to counter this demise in the artist's technical knowledge: listing the chemical composition of paints on the packaging of tubes and proposing a centralised *Société des Artistes Françaises* that would grant a seal of approval to products tested by an in-house chemist<sup>58</sup>. It also probably explains the appearance of Gabriel Déneux's small

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<sup>54</sup> Schenck, p. 58.

<sup>55</sup> Callen, p. 98. Cornelia Peres, *A Closer Look: Technical and Art-Historical Studies on Works by Van Gogh and Gauguin* (Waanders: Zwolle, 1991), p. 30. For information about Gauguin's use of tools see Jirat-Wasiutynski V, p. 19.

<sup>56</sup> Vibert, p. 12.

<sup>57</sup> "L'industrie des marchands et des fabricants de produits chimiques a supprimé ce travail préliminaire et le peintre achète ses couleurs et son huile sans souci des conséquences graves de son impardonnable incurie. Que de désillusions, que de mécomptes ont suivi ce nouvel état et quel désespoir attend l'artiste quand il voit chaque jour son tableau, fait de tant de labeur, de tant de peines, devenir peu à peu proie du temps". Karl Robert, *Traité pratique de la peinture à l'huile. Paysage* (Paris, 1891), pp. 34-5.

<sup>58</sup> The proposed regulatory system would elect practitioners from sculpture, architecture, painting and



pamphlet *Un procédé de peinture inaltérable. La peinture à l'encaustique* (1890) in which the author praises the 'happy' times of Pericles and Egyptian portraiture 'where there was no awareness of oils paints, varnishes and siccatives, where colour was still not yet falsified'<sup>59</sup>, where pigment heated in wax would immediately dry on the surface and remain permanent. In the late nineteenth century there was a fear in certain quarters that the commercial provision of oil paint would threaten the integrity of surface application.

Authors like Vibert, Robert and Déneux attempted to convince artists that they should pay attention to the chemical composition of commercially produced paints and sought to revive the pre nineteenth-century notion that artists should acquire a technical understanding of their own production. Yet their assertions mostly fell on deaf ears, for although artists might not have directly used commercially produced paints, as I explained above, by the late nineteenth century they certainly no longer considered the skill of grinding paints to be an integral part of their practice.

The re-configuration of artistic skill was an indirect consequence of the commercial provision of paint in tubes. Artists rarely chose to use the products supplied by Winsor & Newton and LeFranc et Cie, but their accessibility meant that previous forms of preparation, manual grinding and mixing, was no longer considered a socially valued artistic skill.

Commercially produced paintboxes perhaps provide a greater indication of amateur involvement in the artistic process because they contain everything needed for practice, are inexpensive, portable and often small. For example, Winsor & Newton and Reeves & Sons catalogues show a range of tinned paintboxes sold on the basis of their portability, suitable for *plein air* practice, containing 10-12 blocks or watercolour 'cakes' with enough room for a brush

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other disciplines to regulate colour manufacturing and would disseminate scientific papers and articles concerning chemical composition of paints, in addition to these regulatory measures I have described above. Vibert, pp. 100-107. LeFranc et Cie, Vibert's recommended paint supply firm already carried the chemical composition of its products on its tubes, as seen in their 1894 catalogue. 'Notice' on first page of Lefranc & Cie *Fabrique de couleurs & vernis: couleurs fines et material pour la peinture à l'huile, l'aquarelle, la gouache, la pastel, le dessin, la photo-miniature, dorure et articles divers* (Nancy: Maurice, 1894).

<sup>59</sup> Gabriel Déneux, *Un procédé de peinture inaltérable. La peinture à l'encaustique* (Paris, 1890), p. 9. This revival of an ancient medium is also the subject of an 1884 publication by Henry Cros and Charles Henry which describes the history and a brief explanation of the tools and practices of the craft Henry Cros and Charles Henry, *L'encaustique et les autres procédés de peinture chez les anciens: histoire et technique* (Paris: J Rouam, 1884).

and space for mixing (figure 3). In addition, catalogues provided a range of boxes classified as 'Tourist', 'Pocket' and 'Compact', the former two styles available for less than a pound<sup>60</sup>. Armand Cassagne's *Traité de l'aquarelle* wrote about these small paintboxes, complaining that certain manufacturers

... made an excessive quantity of these small boxes, the largest among them the size of two fingers squared, others with the dimensions of a five franc coin; these are charming playthings, but offer nothing to the serious practitioner.<sup>61</sup>

Smaller paintboxes, as shown in figure 4, severely restricted the amount of colours that could be transported, thus limiting what the artist could depict. This reduction of art to a discrete set of colour options, exaggerated in the case of an amateur painter with a 'charming plaything', reflects the aesthetic doctrine of the Impressionists, according to De Duve, 'the act of painting as a series of choices within a standardised logic of colours'<sup>62</sup>. This coheres with De Duve's overall claim that after the invention of the tube of paint all art is reduced to making through choosing, artists merely selecting what readymade paints should be mixed together. Again, De Duve's analysis convincingly describes the narrowing of the artist's skill, encouraging the perception that there is equivalence between the artist faced with the reduced options of carriers made by art supply firms and the novice presented with a basic palette of colours in his or her first paintbox. However, within these constraints that artists and amateurs were subjected to, there was room for considerable manoeuvre and differentiation between types of use.

Paintbox design accommodated individuality, inherently inviting post-purchase re-organisation and customisation. One feature of Winsor & Newton's paintboxes introduced in an 1885 catalogue was the 'New Patent Spring' technology that allowed the removal, replacement and re-arrangement of colour blocks through use of 'V' springs in each compartment (figure 5).

<sup>60</sup> Supplement to Murray, *The Art of Portrait Painting*, p. 6.

<sup>61</sup> '...ont fabriqué des quantités innombrables de ces petites boîtes, les unes grandes comme deux doigts et presque carrées, d'autres ayant les dimensions d'une pièce de cinq francs; ce sont de charmants joujoux, mais qui n'offrent rien de sérieux pour l'étude'. Cassagne, p. 7.

<sup>62</sup> De Duve, 'The Readymade', p. 116.

LEFRANC & C<sup>IE</sup> \* PARIS

**BOITE POCHETTE OVALE**

EN MÉTAL VERNI

Garnie de couleurs moites extra-fines pour l'aquarelle



N° 263. POCHETTE OVALE.

Reference			fr.	c.	
263		<b>BOITE POCHETTE ovale, 12 cases, couleurs moites extra-fines.....</b>	<i>La pièce</i>		7 25
264		<b>La même, vide.....</b>	—		5 75

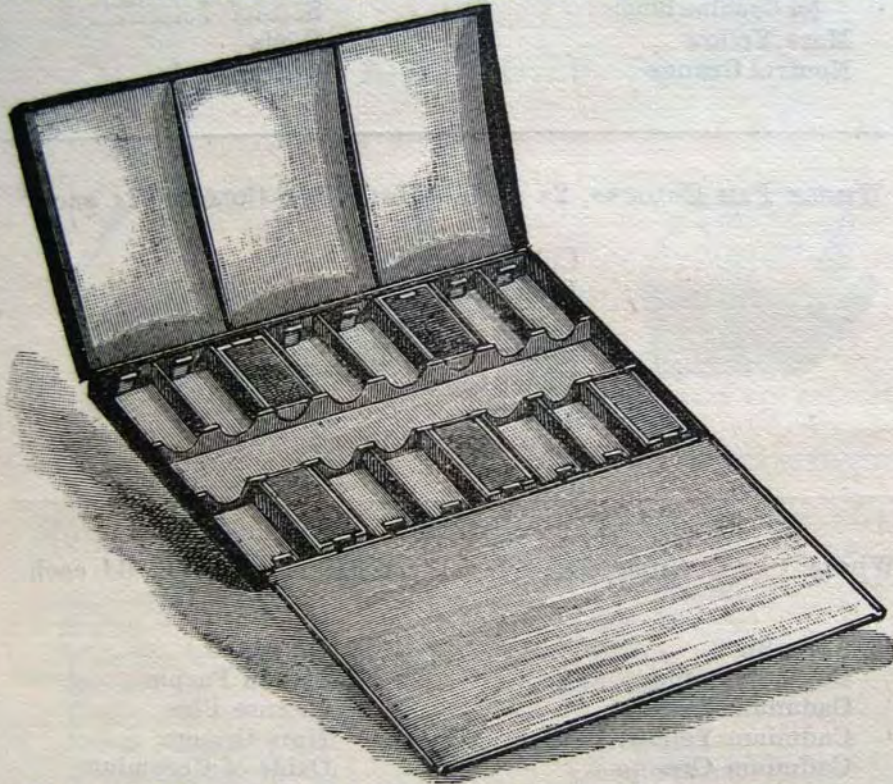
Même composition que la *boite-pochette* RÉF. : 489

Figure 4: 'Boitte Pochette Ovale'. An example of the reduced dimensions of paintboxes available in the late nineteenth century from a LeFranc et Cie catalogue (1891).



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WINSOR & NEWTON'S  
"NEW PATENT SPRING"  
JAPANNED TIN BOXES,  
FITTED WITH  
MOIST WATER COLOURS, IN WHOLE PANS.



Messrs. WINSOR & NEWTON, Limited, have much pleasure in introducing this **NEW BOX** to contain **MOIST WATER COLOURS**, which they have confidently brought out as a valuable improvement and gain to both Artist and Amateur.

The Pans of Colours are placed in these boxes *without any trouble whatever, and they are readily moved from one position to another at pleasure.* They are secured by the employment of a V spring at one end or side of the partitions of the Box, as shown in the illustration. They are firmly held; and thus the inconvenience of fixing the colours into the Box with a cement is removed, as well as the trouble incident to *replenishing* a Box constructed on the old plan.

Messrs. WINSOR & NEWTON, Limited, have secured Letters Patent for this Box for Great Britain, the principal Countries of Europe, and for the United States of America.

Figure 5: 'New Patent Spring' paintbox technology from a Winsor & Newton catalogue (1885).

**"EXTRA HANDSOME" BOXES.**



12 Cake French Polished Mahogany "Extra Handsome"	£	s.	d.
Box with first class fittings . . . . .	3	10	0

Figure 6: 'Extra Handsome' paintbox from a Winsor & Newton catalogue (1860).





Figure 7: Joseph Mallord William Turner, *Travelling Watercolour Case* (c.1820-1840).

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The creation of a colour palette specific to each user exemplifies the self-manipulation of commercially produced paintboxes after initial purchase. As Murray states 'It is very rare to find two painters working with precisely the same colours and tints'<sup>63</sup>. The infinite array of colour combinations for watercolour or oil practice is evident from the manuals, each suggesting a different palette dependent on medium or subject<sup>64</sup>. Choosing one's colours is an example of post-purchase individualisation of an object, but this is far from an unbridled, Nietzschean moment of autonomous agency: the paintbox owner is limited by the design of the paintbox. Individual choice is exercised within clearly demarcated boundaries.

The design of the paintbox, allowing infinite variations within a pre-arranged readymade form, is a material metaphor for the constrained freedom of artistic expression that both amateur and professional are subject to, a motif that runs throughout this thesis. The reduced options with which most amateur surface interveners would be familiar bring to light colour limitations that more established artists would have to contend with. However, paintbox design and other constraints that resulted from industrialisation still permitted significant differentiation. This is shown by a comparison between the paintbox of British artist Joseph Mallord William Turner and products available in the Winsor & Newton catalogues.

In addition to the small, portable paintboxes, Winsor & Newton manufactured larger, more expensive and conspicuous objects that not only facilitated art, but are advertised as art objects in their own right. The models 'Lock and Drawer', 'Superior Large Caddy Lid, Brass Bound' and 'Extra Handsome' all had the same basic materials and range of colours within them, the price differing solely because of the amount of extra compartments, drawers, accoutrements and fittings and whether the boxes were made in Spanish mahogany and French polished (figure 6). By comparison, one of Turner's paintboxes, exhibited as a part of the Tate's Museum's 2011 *Watercolour* exhibition, was quickly put together, made from a Royal

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<sup>63</sup> Murray, *The Art of Portrait Painting* p. 10.

<sup>64</sup> For example in Murray's manual 12 colours are suggested for the beginner in oils with later lessons suggesting more than 20 colours, and specific advice on how to mix the right colours for skies, clouds, rocks, flesh tints and other subjects Murray, *The Art of Portrait Painting*, pp. 11-12 and 20-26. Cassagne's opinion is that twenty colours are enough for a masterpiece, Cassagne, p. 5.

Academy of Art dinner invitation card, the watercolour cakes amassed within a loose construction that is simple and unfussy, an example of an artist making do with the materials that are to hand (figure 7). Winsor & Newton's more elaborate products show how the toolbox has become an item of conspicuous consumption in its own right, whereas Turner's paintbox is a speedy construction that demonstrates little concern for embellishment and decoration.

We could class the paintbox as a miniaturised, reduced version of art, following Susan Stewart's argument that miniaturisation interiorises bourgeois material culture through containment and the obscuration of predominant modes of production<sup>65</sup>. The paintbox does represent a reduced form of artistic production with various parts of making an image separated into the different compartments: the reduced range of colours, the mixing palette, the requisite diluters and brushes. However, the reduced dimensions of art still facilitate some form of artistic production. Unlike the other objects that Stewart analyses – the doll's house, the model, the souvenir or the toy – the paintbox invites its user to create individual narratives based on physical engagement. There is an expanded range of choice in both the purchase and self-construction of paintboxes – for all artists, amateur or otherwise – that allow the practitioner the possibility to break from these miniaturised confines through artistic labour. Nevertheless, the democratic impulse of the paintbox does not signal parity between various forms of artistic production because differentiation unavoidably results from how the tools are used.

### **Arbiters: how to do it**

The final thing required to fulfil surface intervention is a way of conceptualising the artistic plane. If all art was reduced to choosing from a limited set of options as De Duve stated, then arbiters reflect the infinite gamut of options within this constraint, from selection of method, choice of

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<sup>65</sup> Stewart argues that miniaturisation is an 'antithetical mode of production' producing something by the hand, or artisanal labour to stand in for what the original lacks. In capitalism the hand-made miniature obscures the alienation of labour, specialisation and the sense of dislocation from or inability to contend with the original object. Susan Stewart, *On Longing: Narratives on the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection* (London: John Hopkins University Press, 1984), pp. 57 and 68.

image, technique, colour and aesthetic standards. In the nineteenth century this advice was communicated through an abundant supply of handbooks, manuals and treatises, instructing or suggesting ‘how to do it’ to diverse audiences of amateurs pegged at different levels of technical ability, from juvenile simplicity to encyclopaedic, academic tomes. Alongside textual arbitration, mechanisms external to the work of art helped construct what was to be represented.

### *Textual arbiters*

Henry Peacham’s guidebooks on gentlemanly conduct, *The Art of Drawing With the Pen* in 1606 and *The Compleat Gentleman* in 1622, are early examples of textual arbitration that seek to encourage and guide artistic practice, and they demonstrate all the hallmarks that are integral to this literary genre. The layout is based on methodical and simple explanation of various procedures, leaving no doubt in the mind of the reader as to how to *do* something (drawing is taught through a series of lessons, starting with shapes, lines and basic forms, on to later chapters that deal with portraiture, anatomy, shading, how to deal with landscapes or drapery, and how to mix colours correctly<sup>66</sup>). The language employed in the manual is deliberately uncomplicated, Peacham explaining that his work is ‘fit for the capacity of the young learner’<sup>67</sup>, and simple explanation also aids the experienced practitioner in need of reference.

The assumption is that Peacham’s manual, like all manuals, is a neutral account of how to engage in something, but the pedagogic language clouds real societal, aesthetic and political judgements that are being espoused by authors who are communicating a ‘better way’ of doing something. For example, Peacham seeks to legitimise his advice in the introduction to *The Art of Drawing*, stating that it is more trustworthy than anything provided by the ‘shops’<sup>68</sup>. In her analysis of late-nineteenth century interior decoration

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<sup>66</sup> Harry Peacham, *The Art of Drawing with a Pen, and Limning in Watercolours... with the True Manner of Paiting Upon Glasse, the Order of Making your Furnace, Annealing, etc.* (London: R Braddock for W Jones, 1606). See also Harry Peacham, *The Compleat Gentleman: Fashioning Him Absolute in the Most Necessary and Commendable Qualities Concerning Minde or Bodie, etc.* (London: F Constable, 1622)

<sup>67</sup> Peacham, *The Art of Drawing*, Introduction.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

manuals, Penny Sparke argued that they can be put into two contrasting discursive categories, the first following Charles Eastlake's patriarchal and pejorative 'hints' to women to improve their taste, the second reflecting the reformist zeal to modernise domestic conditions in which the woman of the house plays a prominent (sometimes professional) role<sup>69</sup>. What is clear from Peacham's comment and Sparke's work is that the manual subtly disseminates political, aesthetic and social messages, and is not a solely an account of how to do something.

From the late eighteenth century onwards, an increasing number of manuals addressed a diverse range of amateur identities beyond Peacham's seventeenth-century gentleman, including women, children, students and other occasional labourers. In this context the manual had to arbitrate in the midst of the blurring distinctions between amateur and professional by fulfilling two contradictory functions: provide information on how to correctly practice a certain skill, but at the same time stipulate conditions that reify norms of artistic production to defend against vulgarisation. As might be expected, critics and authors of manuals use their 'assets', such as their knowledge of historically validated procedures, to draw distinctions between genuine and poor quality production. This fits with Bourdieu's notion of symbolic distinction. However, in the context of the amateur surface intervener who engages in production, the questions of 'how something is made?' and 'what is it made with?' became important new ways to compete for the 'exclusive appropriation of legitimate cultural goods and the associated symbolic profits'<sup>70</sup>. And once a differentiated mass of makers of varying skill levels have access to how-to instruction, the politics and aesthetics of taste becomes very difficult to regulate. Through a brief analysis of watercolour manuals in the early nineteenth-century I hope to see how manual authors negotiated this challenging task.

One strategy of differentiation was to implement a hierarchy of cachet based

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<sup>69</sup> Penny Sparke, 'Furnishing the Aesthetic Interior: Manuals and Theories' in Stephen Galloway and Lynn Orr eds. *The Cult of Beauty: the Aesthetic Movement 1860-1900* (London: V&A Publishing, 2011) pp. 124-133. See also Emma Ferry, "'Decorators May Be Compared To Doctors': An Analysis of Rhoda and Agness Garrett's *Suggestion For House Decoration in Painting, Woodblock and Furniture* (1896)' and Penny Sparke, 'The "Ideal" and the "Real" Interior in Elsie de Wolfe's "The House in Good Taste" of 1873' *Journal of Design History* 16.1 (2003).

<sup>70</sup> Bourdieu, p. 176.

on the subject depicted: for example, painting still life in watercolour had less potential than landscapes to convey artistic skill, because of its mimetic nature<sup>71</sup>. Epitomising this hierarchy are the manuals of George Brookshaw, who in the 1810s introduced treatises on painting flowers, fruits and birds specifically targeted at young women. The author promises the female readership that they are 'sooner to arrive at perfection than men' because their faculties are more attuned to 'exact' representation and depiction of detail<sup>72</sup>. Imitative tendencies are aligned with the female practitioner who is marginalised through her assumed inability to comprehend perspective and express an original interpretation of nature. Arbiters of taste commend the skill of flower painting, whilst at the same time belittling it as a feminine genre. A hierarchy of artistic credibility was a way to channel the skills of the female amateur towards genres that were marginalised and associated with the domestic, helping to 'remasculinise the public sphere of high art'<sup>73</sup>.

If Brookshaw explicitly stated the remit of his manual, defining a specific branch of practice as feminine and undertaken for amusement only, most manuals were aimed at the upwardly mobile 'learner', a progressive archetype with no theoretical limit to achievement. According to these manuals, the learner was distinguished from those who only wanted amusement by levels of patience and hard work. Authors stated that first attempts at a new skill were rarely perfect and that competent practitioners overcame failures through repetition of a task<sup>74</sup>. Hard work and perseverance

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<sup>71</sup> Couleru's genre hierarchy, with landscapes elevated as 'varied' and 'wonderful' due to their closeness to nature and still life animals belittled because of ease of composition. Couleru *Cours elementaire de coloris et d'aquarelle* (Paris, 1856), pp. 5-6. Francis Nicholson states that talent cannot be fully expressed in subjects such as 'scoured pots and pans' or a 'man eating oysters'. Francis Nicholson, *The Practice of Drawing and Painting Landscape from Nature in Water-colours Exemplified in a Series of Instructions... Including Elements of Perspective... With Observations on the Study of Nature... and Various Other Matters Relative to the Arts* (London, 1823), p. 52.

<sup>72</sup> George Brookshaw, *A New Treatise of Flower Painting, Or, Every Lady her Own Drawing Master: Containing Familiar and Easy Instructions for Acquiring a Perfect Knowledge of Drawing Flowers with Accuracy and Taste*. (London: Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme and Brown, 1818), pp. 2-3. The author also wrote a series of other manuals in this era for women painters, including *Groups of Flowers, Drawn and Accurately Coloured After Nature, with Full Directions for the Young Artist, Designed as a Companion to the Treatise on Flower Painting* (London: Thomas McLean, 1819).

<sup>73</sup> Ann Bermingham, *Learning to Draw: Studies in the Cultural History of a Polite and Useful Art* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2000), p. 129.

<sup>74</sup> Couleru advocates keeping the first attempts at drawing sketches for watercolours as a point of comparison for later, more successful efforts, Couleru, p. 7; Dibdin's *Progressive Lessons* states that success is reliant on the 'preserving industry of the student' and if lacking 'no instruction, however well-directed, can enable any one to become even a tolerable amateur', Thomas Colman Dibdin, *A Guide to Water Colour Painting. Being a Series of Progressive Lessons* (London: Reeves and Sons, 1859), p. 1; Clark cites Gilpin who states that it is a sign of 'genius' to be dissatisfied with first efforts. John Clark, *The Amateur's Assistant: Or, a Series of Instructions in Sketching from Nature* (London: printed for Samuel Leigh, 1826), p. 11.



was necessary in the pursuit of proficiency in watercolour, as Nicholson notes: 'By doing quickly he will never learn to do well, by doing well he may learn to do quickly'<sup>75</sup>. This acquisition of skill and experience depended on the availability of time and only the most devoted, or financially secure, could afford to allocate the necessary resources. The lack of free time was a social barrier to practice.

The most compelling way in which manuals accommodated the paradox of disseminating information, yet maintaining conventional notions of artistic excellence, was by insisting on standards of aesthetic beauty, a conveniently elusive standard of judgement. As Joshua Reynolds, cited in John Clark's *The Amateur's Assistant*, states:

When the arts were in their infancy, the power of merely drawing the likeness of any object was considered as one of its greatest efforts: the common people, ignorant of the principles of art, talk the same language even to this day; but when it was found that every man could be taught to do this merely by the observance of certain precepts, the name of genius thus shifted its application, and was given only to those who *added* the peculiar expression, grace, or dignity, or in short, such qualities and excellences, the production of which could not then be taught by any known and promulgated rules.<sup>76</sup>

These words, placed in the manual's introduction, inform the amateur that even if he or she masters the skill of watercolour, there is still some intangible extra quality to art that is required for true excellence. The 'learner' has to express something beyond mere representation: as Nicholson notes, one must perfect the skills of a practice before subverting or re-inventing them<sup>77</sup>. By propagating the idea that the true artist has skills that cannot be contained by words or rules alone, arbiters of taste can maintain a distance between aesthetic excellence, which is privy to a small number freed from the rubric of instruction and valorised by arbiters of taste like Joshua Reynolds, and technique, which can be understood by growing numbers of amateur practitioners.

A brief survey of these watercolour manuals demonstrates the limitations of

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<sup>75</sup> Nicholson, pp. 32-33.

<sup>76</sup> Clark, pp. 1-2.

<sup>77</sup> Nicholson, p. 45.

this literary genre's ability to provide comprehensive explanations of practice due to the inherent limitation of words in describing physical processes. On the whole, manuals are 'ideological texts' not direct accounts of actual practice, but rather suggestions, a disconnect between text and tacit knowledge recognised by design historian Grace Lees-Maffei<sup>78</sup>. Developing skill required the practitioner to make interventions, overcome errors and seek advice from more experienced individuals, rather than rely on the manual alone. The limitation of the manual as a vessel for the provision of knowledge is a central theme of Flaubert's novel *Bouvard et Pécuchet*, where the title characters continually and desperately attempt to seek mastery of various disciplines from gardening, exercise, anatomy, religion and ethics through the use of guidebooks. In a comedic parody of bourgeois notions of knowledge Flaubert's protagonists fail to excel in any of their innumerable endeavours because they rely too heavily on the constant presence of a manual and its proscriptive explanations, leaving them disillusioned with received information and its impossibility of arriving at a 'correct' answer<sup>79</sup>.

Manual authors were aware of this inherent weakness of their 'how-to' publications, explicitly alerting their audiences that their advice could not provide all the answers, providing a pre-emptive warning against *Bouvard and Pécuchet*-style obsession for truth. For example, Rowbotham concedes in his 1855 treaty on sketching that 'the power of painting a picture is not to be acquired from books alone'<sup>80</sup>, and in the task of mixing colour, Dibdin encourages procedures that depart from his advice, stating that the practitioner should 'not strictly be confined to [...] any other formula of colours, but use any pigment or combination of pigments which appear to work better'<sup>81</sup>. Textual arbiters, due to their distance from direct processes of making, are pliable in their arbitration, their authors aware that their readers need to at some point put the book down and get on with it.

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<sup>78</sup> Grace Lees-Maffei, 'Introduction. Studying Advice: Historiography, Methodology, Commentary, Bibliography' *Journal of Design History* 16:1 (2003), p. 5.

<sup>79</sup> For example, in their pursuit of horticulture and landscaping Bouvard and Pécuchet notice that different manuals contradict each other and the couple give up on religious ideologies when realising how the universe is impenetrable to human knowledge. Gustave Flaubert, *Bouvard and Pécuchet* trans. by A J Krailsheimer (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1976), pp. 47 and 205.

<sup>80</sup> Thomas Leeson Rowbotham, *The Art of Sketching From Nature* (London: Winsor & Newton, 1851), p. 47.

<sup>81</sup> Dibdin, p. 1.,

At first glance, the intentions of the manual seem neutral, fulfilling the function of telling the reader ‘what to do’ and corresponding with Peter Dormer’s concept of education as the ‘honest’ development of skill and the gradual accumulation of tacit knowledge through practice<sup>82</sup>. Manuals also have a clear democratic aspect, used by both amateur and recognised artist alike<sup>83</sup>, but as the analysis above has indicated, the nature of dispensing advice is imbued with symbolic meaning. Even when a practitioner has the skill to overcome the difficulty of hard work, the elusiveness of representing beauty remains ambiguous enough for critics to separate works of merit from those of mere technical proficiency. The manual negotiates this porous terrain between amateur and professional identities, allowing upward mobility for practitioners through explanation of skills and processes, but constantly reminding readers of the barriers that prevent all from being ‘genuine’ artists.

*Mechanical arbiters: providing a shortcut*

Though equipped with a certain degree of know-how, mass amateurism also depended on the fragmentation of complex tasks by mechanical arbiters, devices that made it easy to engage in surface intervention. Among the many products and contraptions that deconstruct a task for the amateur, my analysis will focus on those that make it easier to compose a scene, reducing the depiction of nature into comprehensible and manageable portions.

In artistic production, the general presumption would hold usage of mechanical arbiters as more befitting of the amateur than the autonomous ‘gifted’ artist<sup>84</sup>. When the technical arbiters are incorporated into the narrative of art history they usually serve to augment the standing of famous masters. For example, David Hockney’s study on the use of the camera obscura and camera lucida weaves the discourse of technological development unimaginatively within the narrative of the great artists who managed to

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<sup>82</sup> Peter Dormer, *The Art of the Maker*. (London: Thames & Hudson, 1994) pp. 41-43.

<sup>83</sup> Deborah Silvermann, ‘Weaving Painting: Religious and Social Origins of Vincent Van Gogh’s Pictorial Labour’ in *Rediscovering History: Culture, Politics and the Psyche* Michael Roth ed. (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1994) pp. 149 – 151. Christopher Gray, *Sculpture and Ceramics of Paul Gauguin* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1963), p. 27.

<sup>84</sup> Kim Sloan, *A Noble Art: Amateur Artists and Drawing Masters c1600-1800* (London: British Museum Press, 2000), p. 174.

wield the power of such devices<sup>85</sup>. There is limited concern to examine the social specificity of the introduction of new technology and how it impacted the wider sphere of artistic production outside the works of canonical figures. The work of Hockney and Martin Kemp's influential book *The Science of Art* draw attention to how all artists use mechanical arbiters, but while fine artists claim a degree of autonomous control over the implements being used, the amateur is presumed to be more dependent on its instruction, much like the manual. In the following analysis on arbiters that frame nature in some way I test the stability of this boundary, suggesting a greater degree of crossover between 'artistic', 'amateur' and 'correct' use of mechanical arbiters.

Mechanical ordering of nature has long been an aspect of artistic practice. Kemp charts the use of astrolabes, mirrors and rods used by Renaissance architects to triangulate nature and Leonardo da Vinci's net and glass method which positioned subjects within a framed grid rendering perspective visible on a two-dimensional plane<sup>86</sup>. In essence, these devices amounted to the first artificial eye, the translation of the viewed object into another, usually more comprehensible, medium. However, long before nineteenth-century concerns about the proliferation of poor imitations, da Vinci noticed the threat that optical devices posed to original invention and thus repudiated this form of mechanical reliance:

There are some who look at things produced by nature through glass, or other surfaces or transparent veils. They trace outlines on the surface of a transparent medium... But such an invention is to be condemned in those who do not know how to portray things without it, nor to reason without nature in their minds... They are always poor and mean in every invention and in the composition of narratives, which is the final aim of this science.<sup>87</sup>

Tracing, mirrors, glass and optical devices were considered a hindrance to the artistic process if the user was unable to practice without it. If use of a mechanical arbiter masked the practitioner's lack of skill then it served to deceive the viewer and was testament to the work's artificiality.

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<sup>85</sup> David Hockney, *Secret Knowledge: Rediscovering the Lost Techniques of the Old Masters*. (London: Thames & Hudson, 2001), p. 14.

<sup>86</sup> Kemp, pp. 168-9.

<sup>87</sup> Leonardo da Vinci quoted in Kemp, p. 163.

There was a proliferation of devices in the late eighteenth century that made it easier for artists, whether amateur or otherwise, to break down, frame, and copy an image from nature. One device that was particularly popular among landscape artists wishing to depict a scene of nature was the Claude Glass, a black mirror that miniaturised the scene of nature through a darkened convex lens that enclosed the subject within a frame, retrospectively named after the famous French landscape artist Claude Lorrain<sup>88</sup>. The mirror was portable and reduced the glare of luminous features in order to enhance the visibility of middle tones (figure 8). William Gilpin's use of the device to transform nature into a succession of picturesque scenes encouraged wider use by artists and amateur tourists wanting to capture moments from their various excursions<sup>89</sup>.

The Claude Glass enabled a reduction, framing and possession of nature, creating a pastoral illusion<sup>90</sup>, and imposing an artificial mediation between the subject and the object. But this reliance, that presumably would have reduced an artist's skill in the context of eighteenth-century aestheticism, could be offset: its status as a mediator of nature depended on whether it was considered an optical, or rather an intellectual aid, as Gilpin noted<sup>91</sup>. If the Claude Glass was used to copy nature through direct optical translation, then it played a more direct role as mechanical arbiter, in between the subject and the object of depiction; if it was just a guide, then the artist's subjective intention was not inhibited. The fact that the device transposed 'reality into a more melodious key'<sup>92</sup> meant that its use often fell into the category of a suggestive intellectual aid, not reproducing nature directly. Its general acceptance as a valid mediation of nature among artists in the late eighteenth century depended on theories of perception in which mirrors were considered to be honest mediators between the individual subject and objective reality<sup>93</sup>.

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<sup>88</sup> Arnaud Maillet, *The Claude Glass: Use and Meaning of the Black Mirror in Western Art* trans. by Jeff Fort (New York: Zone, 2009), p. 27.

<sup>89</sup> On the eighteenth-century amateur audience for the Claude Glass see Sloan, p. 175; Kemp, p. 199; and Maillet, p. 20.

<sup>90</sup> Leo Marx, *Machine in the Garden: Technology and the Pastoral Ideal in America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1964), p. 89.

<sup>91</sup> Maillet, pp. 100-101.

<sup>92</sup> Kemp, p. 199.

<sup>93</sup> Maillet, p. 143.

395. Claude Glass, Edinburgh, National Museums of Scotland.



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Figure 8: An eighteenth century Claude Glass.

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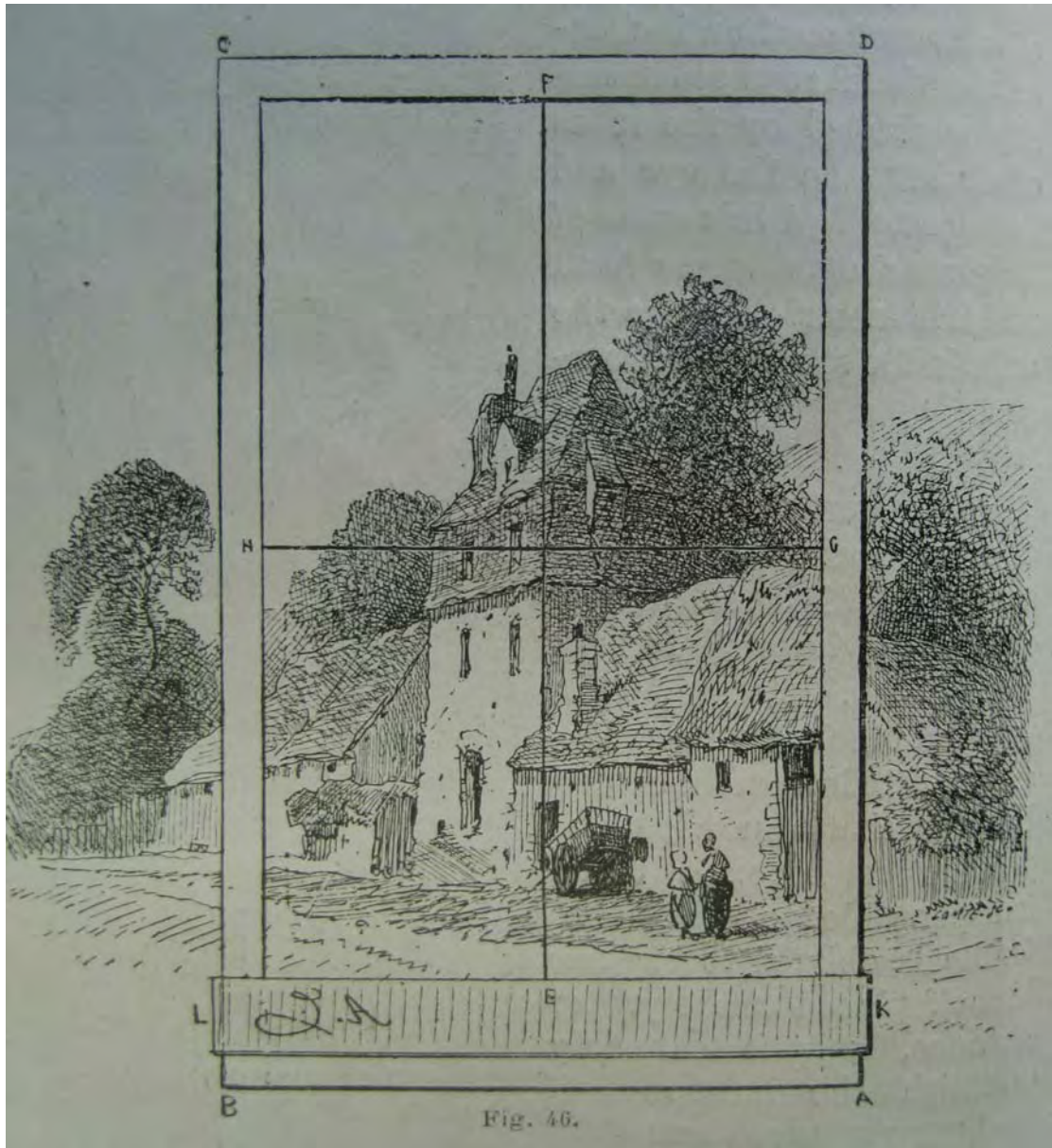


Figure 9: Fragmenting a scene: one of Amand Cassagne's perspective devices (1886).

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The devaluation of the Claude Glass as an artistic tool chimed with shifting attitudes to visual perception in the early nineteenth century. Jonathan Crary outlines how from the 1830s onwards there was increasing epistemological uncertainty over the nature of vision. Experiments showed how the eye could trick and deceive<sup>94</sup>, and Arnaud Maillet suggests that Ruskin's concept of the 'innocent eye', which applauded direct optical experience as containing more 'truth' than filtration through a device<sup>95</sup>, reflected the new paradigm of optical perception in which the Claude Glass did not play a part. It is no surprise that Ruskin's optical tool of choice was a magnifying glass, augmenting images rather than reflecting them.

By the mid nineteenth century, the number of different devices mentioned in manuals that explicitly translated a scene of nature to a two-dimensional image grew. Amateur artists were given guidance in understanding perspective in manuals<sup>96</sup> and specialised devices increased the ease by which these lessons could be learnt. The minor French artist who wrote several artistic manuals, Armand Cassagne, was one of the proponents for democratising the rules of perspective, writing in 1886:

Today, the understanding of perspective is infinitely more widespread than in previous centuries: the unchanging principles of this science have been sufficiently simplified so as to be accessible to beginners.<sup>97</sup>

To achieve the democratisation of this skill Cassagne recommended the use of perspective frames, including the 'perspectoscope' and the 'cadre-isolateur' – a portable grid device to break down the viewed image<sup>98</sup>. Cassagne's instruments, an example of which is given in figure 9, required very little training to understand and could be simply made by the amateur artist from easily accessible material. Compared with the Claude Glass, which merely reflects nature in softened tone and line, Cassagne's perspectival aids reduced and segmented nature to composite parts, rendering the outline of the subject

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<sup>94</sup> Jonathan Crary, *Suspensions of Perception: Attention, Spectacle and Modern Culture* (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London: MIT Press, 1999), p. 12.

<sup>95</sup> Maillet, p. 147.

<sup>96</sup> Clark, 'Sketching on Nature' chapter, pp. 1-41. Nicholson, pp. 1-10.

<sup>97</sup> 'Aujourd'hui, la connaissance de la perspective est infiniment plus répandue que dans les siècles passés; l'application des principes immuables de cette science a été suffisamment simplifiée pour devenir rapidement accessible aux débutants'. Armand Cassagne, *Guide de la nature chez toi, suite aux modèles à silhouette* (Paris, 1886), p. 19.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid*, p. 19.



into a series of lines<sup>99</sup>. Cassagne disseminated these educational techniques and urged the use of mechanical arbiters in a series of exercise books for beginners to be used by teachers and even fathers who were encouraged to nurture the artistic talent of their children<sup>100</sup>.

Any mechanical arbiter can be implicated in both amateur and professional procedures of artistic production. For example, Van Gogh followed the advice of Cassagne's manuals to build his own perspective frames in an imagined affinity to the artisanal trades of the past<sup>101</sup>. However, as access to devices like the *cadre-isolateur* became widespread in the nineteenth century, linear perspective and the mystery of depiction was democratized and decentralized into the bourgeois home. Even if individuals did not directly use Cassagne's perspective aids, they were becoming increasingly familiar within conventions of artistic practice.

Arbitration through perspective devices, fragmenting a scene into bite-size chunks, demystified the process of depiction allowing a diverse range of amateurs the chance to produce technically proficient drawings. The perspective devices and countless sequential guides that led an aspirant artist through the process of building up an image, from original outline to finite detail<sup>102</sup>, can be seen as part of the pre-history of the paint-by-number kit which provided a ready-to-paint image that removed all these preparatory stages, as I explore below.

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<sup>99</sup> Cassagne's progressive lessons came in a series of twelve volumes and was later translated in English as *Drawing for the Million*. Armand Cassagne, *Dessin pour tous. Méthode Cassagne. Cahiers d'exercices progressifs* (Paris, 1862).

<sup>100</sup> Cassagne, *Dessin pour tous*, introduction.

<sup>101</sup> Silvermann, 'Weaving Painting', p. 155.

<sup>102</sup> Among the many examples of books that provide this detailed walkthrough of building up an image see Dibdin's *Guide*, Cassagne's, *Dessin pour tous*, and John Burnet, *Practical Hints on Portrait Painting: Illustrated by Examples from the Works of Van Dyck and Other Masters* (London: J S Virtue, 1860).

### **The impact of amateur surface intervention and the dialectics of re-skilling**

By the second half of the nineteenth century, commercial provision of bases, carriers and arbiters dispelled the mystery associated with artistic labour. If, as Alfred Gell argues, captivation through technological enchantment constitutes 'the primordial level of artistic agency'<sup>103</sup> with the astonished viewer of a work unable to reconcile his or her own productive capabilities with that of the artist, how did artists respond when audiences not only started to attain greater critical acumen, but also technical expertise that derived from their own use of similar tools and materials previously the exclusive domain of artists?

The two case studies below provide an opportunity to more fully integrate the phenomenon of amateur surface intervention in to the story of modern art through specific political, social and aesthetic contexts: how the porcelain paints of Alphonse Lacroix were received and what impact they had in the context of late nineteenth-century French ceramics and decorative arts, and the effect of the commercial introduction of paint-by-number kits in the 1950s. Although chronologically and geographically distinct, both examples involve the introduction of newly available bases, carriers and arbiters within the comparable contexts of broad encouragement of the arts: the elevation of French artistic production in the light of cheap imports and the humiliation of defeat in the Franco-Prussian War, and popular encouragement to spend free time engaged in a healthy, therapeutic activity in an environment of post-war American consumerism. More important however, is how both examples demonstrate the changing role of the material surface as a signifier of artistic skill and the impact that presumably unimportant amateur practices had on wider dynamics of artistic production.

With this emphasis on the dynamics of skill in artistic production, reference to Duchamp's unassisted readymades is inevitable. De Duve situates

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<sup>103</sup> Gell, *Art and Agency*, p. 69.

Duchamp's work at the end of a narrative of the ever-diminishing role played by the hand in the course of modern art once faced with the inexorable force of industrialisation, and his analysis is convincing. He explains how Duchamp's work resolutely exposes the shift from art as a discrete series of craft skills, to the development of a self-critical theoretical language, echoing the veneration avant-garde theoretician Peter Bürger reserves for the French artist. Although De Duve gives a much fuller account of the history leading up to Duchamp's readymade<sup>104</sup>, they both highlight how the artist's unassisted readymades represent an endpoint, a rupture in paradigms of artistic production, the exposure of art's utter reliance on praxis<sup>105</sup>: the institutional foundations on which artistic production depended.

However, these classic accounts of the avant-garde overlook the continued and important role the surface plays as the material indicator of conceptual content. In other words, the work of the artist is not entirely emptied of all *métier* in the developing conditions of late nineteenth and early twentieth-century modernism as De Duve expected<sup>106</sup>. Duchamp's work does not divorce technical, physical skill from art, but instead demonstrates that the labour of the artist is reduced to the application of the outermost layer: in the case of the work *Fountain*, the signature 'R Mutt' that distinguishes his work from the vast number of identical and industrially produced urinals. John Roberts understands the importance of Duchamp's readymade as constituting 'a qualitative break in the *technik* of art' but stresses how it is part of a continuing narrative of artistic dependence on the 'labour of others'<sup>107</sup>, the artist adding aesthetic gloss to existing readymade forms. No longer expected to express depth through complex material technique, the artist becomes a surface intervener in much the same way as the increasingly competent amateur-artist.

Here is the point of equivalence: both amateur and artist in the modern era add the outermost layer to readymade forms made by the 'labour of others'. As De Duve mentions with reference to Duchamp, art in this context is all

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<sup>104</sup> See De Duve, 'The Readymade and the Tube of Paint'.

<sup>105</sup> Bürger, *Theory of the Avant-garde*, p. 51.

<sup>106</sup> Thierry De Duve, *Kant After Duchamp*. (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London: MIT Press, 1996), p. 166.

<sup>107</sup> Roberts, p. 52.

about choosing how to manipulate readymade media – which tube of paint should be mixed with another<sup>108</sup>. But although similar options might be set before both amateur and artist alike, the decisions on how to construct the surface continued to differentiate the skill of the artist from other surface interveners. The artist is still required to do something and confront the declining impotence of his labour with new conceptual strategies, materially enacted, such as the pursuit of technical difficulty, employment of a symbolic language, or like Duchamp, the exposure of art as dependent on commercially produced readymades. Skills continually reconfigured continue to prevent parity between artists and able amateurs and besides this, amateur practice is also beset by constraints of time and space, as I explain in subsequent chapters. Still, the amateur's exposure of the centrality of the readymade in modern material culture demonstrates the importance of this issue beyond Duchamp's seminal work<sup>109</sup>.

### **The ceramic paint products of Parisian chemist Alphonse Lacroix, 1870-1900**

From the 1870s Parisian chemist Alphonse Lacroix developed a series of vitrifiable paints that allowed users to add overglaze designs onto ceramics and glass. The development of Lacroix's products is an example of widening access to tools – from the production of pigments in the early 1870s that still required considerable skill on the part of the practitioner to mix paints in the right constituency, to the vitrifiable pencils in the 1880s that rendered the process of decorating glass as easy as putting pen to paper (figure 10). The products, available internationally through agents in London and New York<sup>110</sup>, simplified the process of ceramic decoration, formerly the preserve of

<sup>108</sup> De Duve, 'The Readymade', p. 113.

<sup>109</sup> In addition to the case studies, art historian John Welchman also finds precedents for Duchamp's readymades in the 'made-ready, pre-issued and re-circulated' commodity culture of the nineteenth century, looking at dictionaries, photography, as well as Flaubert's evocation of the proliferation of 'received ideas' in his novel *Bouvard et Pécuchet*. John C Welchman, *Art after Appropriation: Essays on Art in the 1990s* (Australia: G + B Arts International, 2001), pp. 4-6.

<sup>110</sup> George Ward Nichols states that Lacroix's colours are available in the US for the use of amateurs and professional pottery decorators and states his products are available through LeChertier, Barbe & Co in Regents Street, London. George Ward Nichols, *Pottery: How It Is Made, Its Shape and Decoration: Practical Instructions for Painting on Porcelain and All Kinds of Pottery With Vitrifiable and Common Oil Colours*. (New York: Putnam, 1878), p. 38. Jules Loebnitz reports that Lacroix's products are available in England, Japan, USA, Russia, Germany and Belgium Jules Loebnitz, *Rapports du jury internationale: classe 20, céramique* part of Alfred Picard ed. *Exposition universelle internationale de 1889 à Paris* (Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 1891), p. 121. Also in London the store Howell & James on Regents Street ran competitions for amateur china painters. Arthur Coysh, *British Art Pottery* (Newton Abbot: David and Charles, 1976),

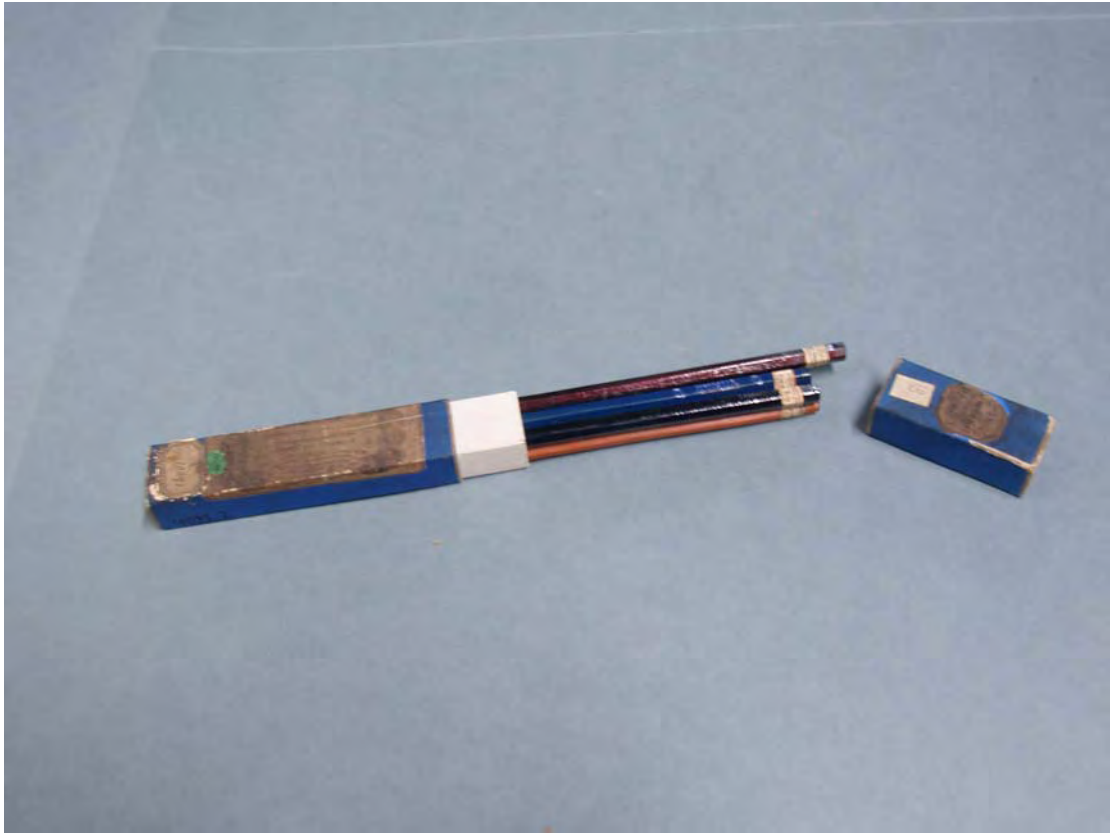


Figure 10: A. Lacroix's 'Crayons Vitriables' (1884).

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specialised artists within the confines of the factory or workshop.

The development of Lacroix's vitrifiable paint products emerged during a period of broad institutional support of decorative arts and crafts in France after the economic and social ravages of war and internal strife. Saint-Juirs in an article for the *Révue des Arts Décoratifs* in 1881 established an explicit link between declining aesthetic standards and economic woes, and questioned whether Paris could legitimately claim to be the capital of taste when it was flooded with German and American imports<sup>111</sup>. Official bodies like *Société d'Encouragement à l'Art et l'Industrie* and *Union Centrale des Arts Décoratifs*, with its mouthpiece *Révue des Arts Décoratifs*, sought to encourage high artistic standards in French industry in an effort to improve general economic health and reduce the quantity of poor quality imports<sup>112</sup>. The first edition of the journal issued a clarion call to all manufacturers of the industrial and decorative arts, calling on makers to remember the glorious traditions and high standards of French production of the past<sup>113</sup>. Pedagogic texts, treatises and manuals assisted in the task to re-direct French production towards these goals<sup>114</sup>.

It is within this context of artisanal reform within France that the figure of the *amateur-artiste* emerged. Use of the term *amateur* in France at this time primarily described the connoisseur or collector who pursued his or her love

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p. 28.

<sup>111</sup> Saint-Juirs in an article entitled 'Un danger' warns of the increase in imports of artistic goods, rising from 25 million francs in 1859 to 147 million francs in 1880, *Révue des Arts Décoratifs* (1881), pp. 79-80. The threat of imports was also noted in Loebnitz, pp. 22-3. Stéphane Laurent in his work on applied arts education refers to post-Commune economic downturn as a 'crise fatale' Stéphane Laurent, *Les arts appliqués en France: genèse d'un enseignement* (Paris: Éditions du C.T.H.S, 1999), p. 199.

<sup>112</sup> A large body of secondary literature has treated the institutional encouragement for the applied arts from 1870-1890 in France. Brunhammer provides a history of the *Union Centrale des Arts Décoratifs* from its founding in 1864 in Yvonne Brunhammer, *Le beau dans l'utile: un musée pour les arts décoratifs* (Paris: Gallimard, 1992). For detailed discussion of debates surrounding late nineteenth-century design education, both its structure and means of implementation in light of the tension to maintain standards yet effectively incorporate mechanisation see Laurent, *Les arts appliqués en France*. Reference to free libraries founded to promulgate 'good' design for workers and consumers, including the Bibliothèque Forney, see Leona Auslunder, *Taste and Power: Furnishing Modern France*. (Berkeley and London: University of California Press, 1996), pp. 357-362. The effect of encouragement of the applied arts on late nineteenth and early twentieth-century visual modernism, particularly in relation to Art Nouveau and Bing's fusion of modern interpretations of French tradition see Nancy Troy, *Modernism and the Decorative Arts in France* (Yale: Yale University Press, 1991); and Deborah Silvermann, *Art Nouveau in Fin-de-siècle France: Politics, Psychology and Style* (London and Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989).

<sup>113</sup> De Noirment, 'Préface: revue de l'exposition de 1880' *Révue des arts décoratifs* (Paris: 1880), p. 1.

<sup>114</sup> Marius Vachon, *La crise industrielle et artistique en France et en Europe*. (Paris: Librairie illustré, 1886); Alexandre Auguste Phillipe Charles Blanc, *Grammaire des arts du dessin: Architecture, sculpture, peinture, jardins, gravure, etc.* (Paris, 1867); Eugène Emmanuel Viollet-le-duc *Histoire d'un dessinateur. Comment on apprend à dessiner* (Paris, 1879).

of objects through research and acquisition. The amateur-collector was able to detect objects of high aesthetic merit and demonstrate ‘correct’ and ‘fine’ taste, and was assisted in this task by a plethora of literature, such as Auguste Demmin’s *Guide de l’Amateur de Faïences et Porcelains*, which outlined the standards of taste and acquisition in the field of collecting ceramics that any self-respecting collector should abide by; critically, that collecting should be done out of love for the artworks rather than for financial gain<sup>115</sup>. This definition of the amateur as collector remains prominent in France to the present day<sup>116</sup> and is primarily associated with preservation and acquisition, rather than making.

However, in late nineteenth-century France, definitions of ‘amateur’ practice widened to include heterogeneous groups of makers within various decorative art and craft mediums<sup>117</sup>. When Charles des Granges stated in an 1876 treaty that ‘an art without amateurs neither progresses or prospers’<sup>118</sup> he is referring to both amateur-collectors sharpening their skills of judgement as well as *amateur-artistes*. Auguste Chauvigné’s treaty on porcelain decoration provides further evidence of this dual identity of the amateur, the first part of his book satiating the amateur-collector’s thirst for historical knowledge, the second part addressing the amateur maker, laying out the basic rules of practice<sup>119</sup>. He uses the word amateur in both contexts showing how French consumers were not only encouraged to be ambassadors of fine taste, but were occasionally invited to unleash the ‘born artist’ that was latent inside of them<sup>120</sup>, an evocation of France’s reputation for artisanal excellence that was

<sup>115</sup> Auguste Frédéric Demmin, *Guide de l’amateur de faïences et porcelains, poterie, terres cuites, peinture sur lave et émaux* (Paris: Vve J. Renouard, 1863), p. 20. Demmin also wrote a guidebook for amateur collectors of armour and weapons and other encyclopaedic works on the plastic arts. See Auguste Frédéric Demmin, *Guide des amateurs d’armes et armures anciennes par ordre chronologique depuis les temps les plus reculés jusqu’à nos jours : encyclopédie d’armurerie avec monogrammes* (Paris: Vve J. Renouard, 1869) and *Encyclopédie historique, archéologique, biographique, chronologique et monogrammatique des beaux-arts plastiques, architecture et mosaïque, céramique, sculpture, peinture et gravure* (Paris: Jouvet et Cie, 1880).

<sup>116</sup> Martin Parr was described as an amateur, in the French literature to refer to his collecting of mass market ephemera and curiosities. *Planète Parr* Exhibiton. Jeu de Paume (Paris, 30 June – 27 September 2009).

<sup>117</sup> For more on the rise of the amateur maker in the late nineteenth-century see chapter two.

<sup>118</sup> Charles des Granges, *Le vitrail dans l’appartement: Conseils pour pratiquer la peinture sur verre. Pour le comprendre et pour la juger* (Paris: Bibliothèque de l’amateur, 1876), pp. 13-14.

<sup>119</sup> Auguste A Chauvigné, *Traité de décoration sur porcelain et faïence* (Tours: P Bouserez) see p. 8 for use of amateur in the context of collecting and pp. 48 and 57 for its employment to describe the amateur maker. Similarly Ris-paquot’s written oeuvre merges the boundary between the knowledge acquisition of the amateur antiquarian and the amateur practitioner by inviting those amateurs with the leisure time to hand to engage in practice. For an example see Oscar Ris-paquot *Le peinture céramiste amateur ou l’art d’imiter faïences* (Abbeville and Paris, 1883) Avant-propos.

<sup>120</sup> H Saucré, *Le dessin à la peinture vitrifiables accessibles à tous pour la décoration des vitraux d’intérieur* (Paris: A Lacroix, 1894), pp. 50-51.

leant on by design reform movements, as well as art supply firms to sell their wares. It is within this context that the amateur maker more sharply comes into focus.

### **Lacroix's bases, carriers and arbiters**

Maison Lacroix, the firm Lacroix founded in the early 1870s in Paris, enticed mixed audiences of *amateur-artistes* with the prospect of decorating ceramic forms with overglaze decoration that could be fired at low temperatures ('au petit feu'). As with all amateur surface interventions, bases, carriers and arbiters were needed to facilitate practice. The first Lacroix products were carriers, powdered pigments introduced into the market in the early 1870s (figure 11). These products still required the ceramic painter to mix correct proportions of oil and suitable adherents into the mixture, and although guidebooks explained this process, a high degree of expertise was needed to discern the fusibility levels of each colour to control the way they altered in the process of firing<sup>121</sup>. With the chemist's invention of *couleurs en tubes* and *crayons vitrifiables* (figure 10) in the late 1870s and early 1880s, this difficulty was removed and the user could instead focus on what pattern or image to depict.

For the *amateur-artiste* engaging in overglaze ceramic decoration the availability of bases was key, due to the fact that producing a pot, vase, plate, or other ceramic surface was far beyond the abilities and resources of the typical amateur; processes of selecting clay and firing in the kiln at high heats were well beyond the technical capacity of anything other than the factory or workshop. However, ceramic blanks, ready-moulded, fired, and glazed, ready for a practitioner's surface intervention were available commercially, as shown by Lacroix's price lists, inserted in the back of instruction manuals<sup>122</sup>.

<sup>121</sup> The difficulty of the firing process was noted by several authors Madame Delphine de Cool, *Traité de peintures vitrifiables sur porcelaine dure et porcelaine tendre sur émail genre Limoges, émail ou gravé, faïence grand feu sur émail et sous émail* (Paris: E Dentu, 1890), p.13; Oscar Edmond Ris-paquot, *Traité pratique de peinture sur faïence et porcelaine à l'usage des débutants* (Paris: Renouard, 1891), pp. 56-7; Martial Gabelle, *Peinture sur porcelaine et faïence fine. Méthode nouvelle pour cuire chez soi les peintures vitrifiables sans frais et sans installation spéciale* (Paris: printed in Rennes, 1881), p. 24; Chauvigné, p. 57.

<sup>122</sup> Baroness E Delamardelle, *Leçons pratiques de peinture vitrifiable sur porcelaine dure, pâte tendre, faïence, émail* (Paris, 1877), p. 71; Édouard Germain, 'Conseils pratiques: peinture sur porcelaine et sur faïence' *Révue des arts décoratifs* (1882-3) p. 382. In the English translation of Lacroix's treatise on using vitrifiable colours the author mentions that plain tiles can be procured from Minton Taylor's in 206 Great Portland Street, London. Alphonse Lacroix, *Practical Instructions for Painting on China* (London: Lechertier, Barbe & Co), p. 24.





Figure 11: A palette of A. Lacroix's 32 principle colours for ceramic painting in powdered form (1881).

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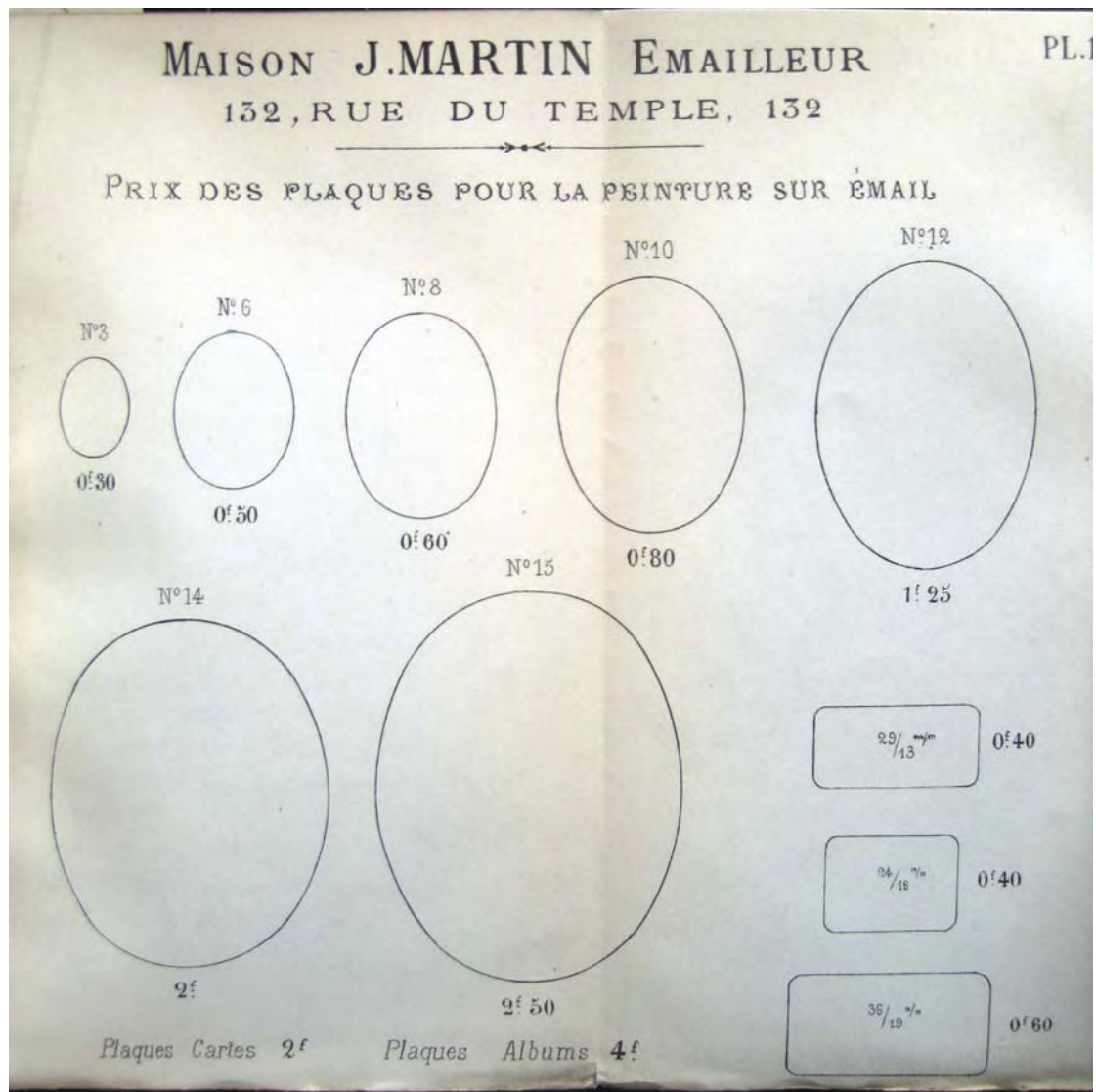


Figure 12: A selection of ceramic blanks suitable for enamel painting, available from Maison J Martin, Paris (1886).

Le pyro-fixateur, nous dit M. A. Lacroix, est dans son\_ensemble une boîte ou coffre oblong en fer et en

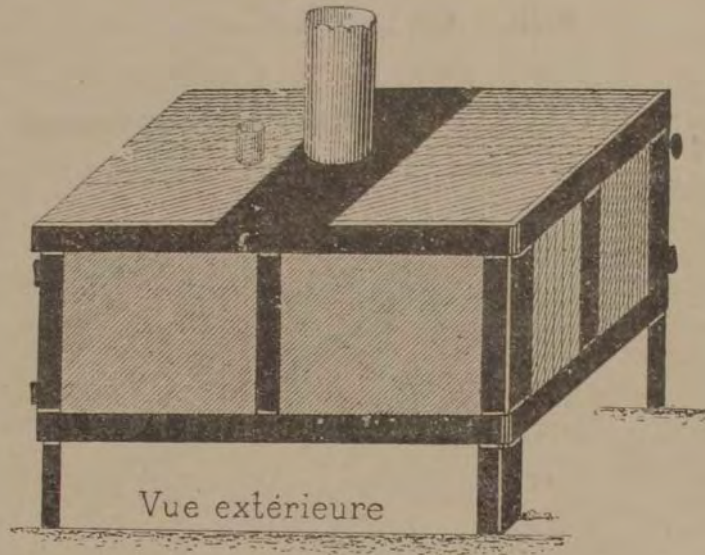


Fig. 11.

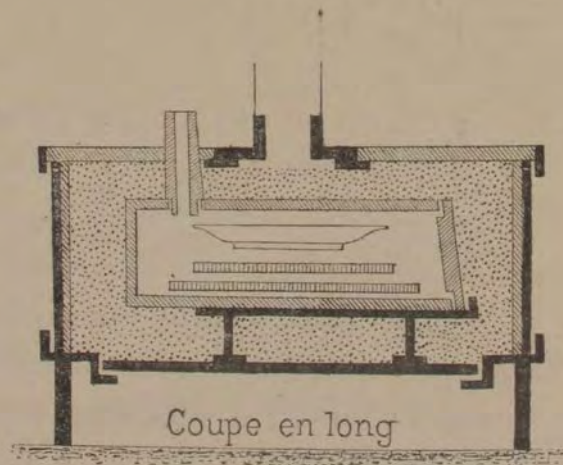


Fig. 12.

Figure 13: The 'Pyro-fixateur Lacroix' (1884).

In his treaty Oscar Ris-paquot recommends the readymade ceramic blanks of M J Martin, who sold a variety of moulds including plaques, dishes, vases, candy boxes, ewers and bottles 'all at a fair price'<sup>123</sup> (figure 12).

Kiln firing was needed to adhere surface decoration to the base beneath and thus mechanical arbiters were critical to facilitating occasional amateur practice. For the production of ceramic moulds larger kilns reaching temperatures of up to 1,200° were required, but the temperatures required for fixing Lacroix's vitrifiable paints to a pre-glazed surface was much lower. However, firing continued to cause amateurs difficulty, both on account of the expertise needed to set the correct temperature – Martial Gabelle noted how amateur designs could flake, blacken or change colour if heat levels were wrong or paint applied too thickly<sup>124</sup> – and the inaccessibility of kilns. A number of solutions were suggested, ranging from Gabelle's claim that ordinary stoves could be used to fire porcelain decorations<sup>125</sup> to recommendations from Lacroix, Chauvigné and Louis Cellière to travel to use kilns opened up to the public by willing professional practitioners<sup>126</sup>.

By the early 1880s Lacroix proposed a new solution – the Pyro-fixateur Lacroix (figure 13). This was a relatively inexpensive, portable and easy to use home-based kiln that could reach the required firing temperatures without omitting an unpleasant odour<sup>127</sup>. Ten years after its invention Saucré applauds

<sup>123</sup> Oscar Edmond Ris-paquot, *Guide pratique de peintre émailleur amateur ou l'art d'imiter les émaux anciens et d'exécuter les émaux modernes* (Abbeville, 1886), pp. 66-7. Chauvigné recommended the fine blank stoneware from the Creil & Montereau ceramic centre as particularly suitable to Lacroix's vitrifiable enamels due to the predictability of colour change during the stages of repeated firing, and brilliance of final effect, Chauvigné, pp. 41 and 68.

<sup>124</sup> Gabelle states that colours can fade if not fired enough or flake if paint is applied too thickly. 'Grésillement' is another problem whereby bubbles appear in the painted surface as oil escapes from layers of paint that are too thick and haven't been left to dry for long enough before application of the next layer. Gabelle, *Peinture sur porcelaine*, pp. 17-18.

<sup>125</sup> Gabelle proposes firing solutions based on use of domestic stoves. Gabelle, *Peinture sur porcelaine*, pp. 26-39, and the earlier publication Martial Gabelle, *Procédé simple pour cuire chez soi, sans moufle, les peintures vitrifiables* (Paris, 1876).

<sup>126</sup> Lacroix recommends Parisian ateliers where different ceramic items can be fired Alphonse Lacroix, *Des couleurs vitrifiables et de leur emploi pour la peinture sur porcelaine, faïence, vitraux* (Paris: A Lacroix, 1872), pp. 2 and 31. In the city of Tours, Chauvigné provides a similar service. Chauvigné, p. 69. Louis Cellière recommends his Maison Centrale de Céramique for firing. Louis Cellière, *Traité élémentaire de peinture en céramique* (Paris, 1883), p. 123.

<sup>127</sup> Measuring 48cm long, 34cm wide and 30cm the Pyro-Fixateur Lacroix was a small kiln composed of a firing chamber where the fuel would be placed and burnt, within which an interior block (or moufle) containing works to be fired, would be placed. Moufles were specific to the type of product that was being fired and were essential not to overload the as this would block airflow, increase humidity and spoil designs. *Dessin vitrifiables: Le Pyro-fixateur Lacroix: Nouvel appareil breveté pour la cuisson automatique des dessins en couleurs vitrifiables par A Lacroix, chimiste à Paris.* Paris, Musée des Arts et Métiers (MAM), inventory number 10069.

the innovation:

The detailed and difficult operation that is the firing process is completely removed by the invention of the Pyro-Fixateur Lacroix, a portable machine of limited dimensions, sufficient for an artist or an amateur and including just the right quantity of fuel necessary for a successful firing, which occurs automatically without any monitoring.<sup>128</sup>

In addition to its compact size and ease of use the Pyro-fixateur, due to its automatic heating process<sup>129</sup>, required less supervision. Repeated firings made it possible for amateur-artistes to amend their designs, adding layer upon layer, in a manner comparable to using watercolours or oil on canvas. Lacroix also provided an after-sales service, promising to replace broken parts of the Pyro-fixateur for a small fee<sup>130</sup>. The object was marketable; it provided a shortcut for consumers whose lack, whether in regards to money, skill or time, could be concealed from view.

Many manuals, pamphlets and treatises – the textual arbiters – enthusiastically praised the ability of Lacroix's products to simplify production procedures in decorating ceramics, enamels and glass, advocating practice as an enchanting pastime. Some literature, including material from the chemist himself, was clearly promotional, the cachet associated with French artistic goods used to advertise his products. Not that Lacroix had to rely on France's esteemed history in decorative arts production alone: in a pamphlet produced by Lacroix in 1872 there are several pages of recommendations from leading ceramicists, including assurances of quality from the chief chemist at Sèvres, Alphonse Salvetat, and M. E. Dumas of the *Société d'Encouragement d'Industrie Nationale*, as well as a selection of not so famous practitioners<sup>131</sup>.

<sup>128</sup> 'Cette operation miniteuse et difficile de la conduite du feu est complètement supprimé par l'invention du Pyro-Fixateur Lacroix, appareil portatif de dimensions restreinte, suffisant pour un artist ou un amateur et renfermant tout juste la quantité de combustible nécessaire à une bonne cuisson qui s'effectue automatiquement sans moindre surveillance'. Saucré, pp. 50-51.

<sup>129</sup> The automated cooking process was made possible by selecting the correct quantity and type of fuel before cooking started. The fuel had to be consistent with what one was firing – charcoal was the material required for enamels, coal for porcelain – and because firing material was placed in the machine before firing and covered there is no need to add more fuel, and cooking is automatic. *Dessin vitrifiables*, MAM, 10069.

<sup>130</sup> Ris-paquot, *Guide pratique*, p. 208.

<sup>131</sup> Alongside Dumas and Salvetat other lesser known artists also recommend Lacroix's paints include Fragonnard of Sèvres, Riottot, Ch. Houry, George Claudius Lavergne and Émile Bourrières. Lacroix, *Des couleurs vitrifiables*, pp. 16-27.

In addition to self-promotion, many other authors of ceramic decoration manuals recommended the chemist's products. Baroness Delamardelle, Rispaquet, des Granges, Saucré and Gabelle all have Lacroix's full price list in the back of their publications, and refer to his range of colours throughout their work<sup>132</sup>. They also situated Lacroix's products within the wider context of French decorative art reform, Delamardelle in 1877 describing how they were a part of a prophetic vision of a nation unified by artistic production: 'Art has never caused civil wars and always enriches our beautiful France'<sup>133</sup>. Lacroix utilised this rhetoric to widen his potential audience, selling his products with historical aplomb, including within his audience both the 'novice or the experienced' practitioner, the 'copyist or creator'<sup>134</sup> in an attempt to maximise sales by excluding no one. Frédéric-Auguste-Antoine Goupil-Fesquet also perpetuated an image of access celebrating Lacroix for freeing the amateur and artist from unnecessary toil:

Amateurs and artists are reassured and can rejoice: from now on they are spared of their longstanding worry, thanks to the ingenious invention of colours in tubes.<sup>135</sup>

Manuals instructed, advertised, celebrated and informed, doing more than just informing the reader how to use a discrete range of tools and materials. Yet reception was not unanimously positive.

### Reception of Lacroix's products

Like any object that popularises a medium and removes barriers to practice, Lacroix's vitrifiable porcelain products were subjected to heavy criticism. Ceramicist Louis Cellière, claimed that that 'all sincere practitioners' would refuse to use Lacroix's *couleurs en tube*<sup>136</sup>, a criticism that at first glance seems

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<sup>132</sup> Delamardelle, Gabelle, des Granges, Saucré and Rispaquet all advertise Lacroix's wares.

<sup>133</sup> 'La culture de l'art n'a jamais produit de guère civiles et a toujours enrichi notre belle France'. Delamardelle, p. 10.

<sup>134</sup> Lacroix, *Dessin vitrifiables*, MAM, 10069, p. 2.

<sup>135</sup> 'Les amateurs et les artistes se rassurent et se réjouissant; de long ennuis leur sont désormais épargnés, grâce à l'ingénieuse invention des Couleurs en tubes'

Frédéric-Auguste-Antoine Goupil-Fesquet, introduction to Delamardelle, p. 3. Goupil-Fesquet also states how the vitrifiable paints in tubes are made for the 'millions'. Lacroix, *Des couleurs vitrifiables*, p. 18.

<sup>136</sup> Cellière, p. 9.



to affirm Bourdieu's characterisation of 'better placed groups', who maintain their cultural cachet by 'rejecting what is generic, i.e. common, "easy" and immediately accessible' and the reduction of aesthetics to 'palpable pleasure or sensual desire'<sup>137</sup>. Strategies of dichotomous separation between 'legitimate' production through historically sanctioned procedures and the imitative, domestic, often female amateur who is dependent on commercially available tools and materials were common<sup>138</sup>, but they were voiced in terms of materiality, not explicit discussions of symbolic cultural capital. Bourdieu's assumption of the fixedness of an object's agency<sup>139</sup> does not account for this more complex reception of goods that can be shaped and imbued with new meanings after initial purchase.

There was much critique of Lacroix's products based on their technical flaws. Édouard Garnier, who worked for the Sèvres museum and was the ceramic expert for *Musée des Arts Décoratifs*, manual author Karl Robert, and Cellière, all claimed that the *couleurs en tube* were liable to dry quickly and fare badly in comparison to the longer process of mixing powdered colour with an oil-based vehicle which they felt allowed greater control over production<sup>140</sup>. Although Lacroix's paints were unsurprisingly criticised for their technical limitations, overall reception was generally more ambiguous. This is most acutely highlighted in Jules Loebnitz's report on ceramics produced for the 1889 *Exposition Universale*. The author devotes a significant portion of his introductory comments to lamenting the plague of shoddy production that blindly imitates historical styles which Lacroix's products were embroiled in, only to later commend the chemist's industrially produced colours for their brilliance and competitive price<sup>141</sup>. Clearly Lacroix's products could be a part of the wider effort to renew the French decorative arts, but this depended on how they were used and whether their limitations were knowingly negotiated.

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<sup>137</sup> Bourdieu, p. 32.

<sup>138</sup> Émile Bourry, *Traité des industries céramiques* (Paris, 1897), p. 429.

<sup>139</sup> Gell provides a brief critique of Bourdieu in Gell A, *Art and Agency*, 8, and 'The Technology of Enchantment and the Enchantment of Technology' in Jeremy Coote and Anthony Shelton eds. *Anthropology, Art and Aesthetics* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1992), pp. 42 and 49.

<sup>140</sup> Germain, p. 60. Karl Robert, *La fusain sur faïence. Petit guide des peintures vitrifiables en grisaille pour servir d'études préparatoires aux peintures vitrifiables en general* (Paris, 1879), pp. 9-10. Cellière, pp. 13-14.

<sup>141</sup> Loebnitz, p. 121.

Lacroix's products were particularly useful in the arena of restoration. Stained glass practitioners George Claudius Lavergne and Émile Bourières both recommended the vitrifiable paints for touching up old glass works, the latter stating that restoring Renaissance windows using Lacroix's paint can fool the connoisseurs<sup>142</sup>. Books by Ris-paquot and Thiaucourt provided simple instruction on how to restore ceramic works to their former glory, disseminating secrets about how to clean works, select the appropriate adherent for reassembly and re-make parts that had broken off, in an effort to defend the ceramic enthusiast against the practices of dubious antique merchants who unskilfully restored works by covering joins with layers of dust or dirt<sup>143</sup>. Both authors also urge the amateur-collector to maintain the health of their collection through practical action – cleaning, repairing and painting with vitrifiable colours – which Ris-paquot considered an art form<sup>144</sup>. In this instance, the practical application of vitrifiable colour serves the interest of preserving the quality of collections, showing how Lacroix's technologies aided restoration.

Regardless of how one used Lacroix's porcelain paints, firing remained the chief difficulty. Problems during firing constituted a significant barrier to achieving satisfactory results in porcelain decoration and thus control of this stage of production demonstrated advanced levels of skill, the ceramicist Chauvigné going as far to suggest that mastery of firing processes constituted a 'purely artistic goal'<sup>145</sup>. In encouraging proficiency in firing Ris-paquot produced sample plates of how Lacroix's colours appeared before and after firing (figure 14), but urged readers to produce their own samples applicable to the particular needs of their practice<sup>146</sup>. Lacroix provides as much information as possible to guide practitioners through the process of firing, rendering it as predictable as possible, but as craft theorist Jo Dahn has pointed out, there is a 'fundamental kind of alchemy' in the transfer of raw material to a cooked final product in ceramics, both in the firing of clay and

<sup>142</sup> George Cladius Lavergne and Emile Bourières in Lacroix, *Des couleurs vitrifiables*, pp. 22 and 24.

<sup>143</sup> Oscar Edmond Ris-paquot, *Manière de restaurer soi-meme les faïences, porcelaines, cristaux, marbes, terres cuites, grès etc.* (Amiens, 1876), p. 8. P Thiaucourt, *Essai sur l'art de restaurer les faïences, porcelaines* (Paris, 1865).

<sup>144</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

<sup>145</sup> Chauvigné, p. 57. Opinion shared by Gabelle, *Peinture sur porcelaine*, p. 5.

<sup>146</sup> Lacroix, *Des couleurs vitrifiables*, p. 3.



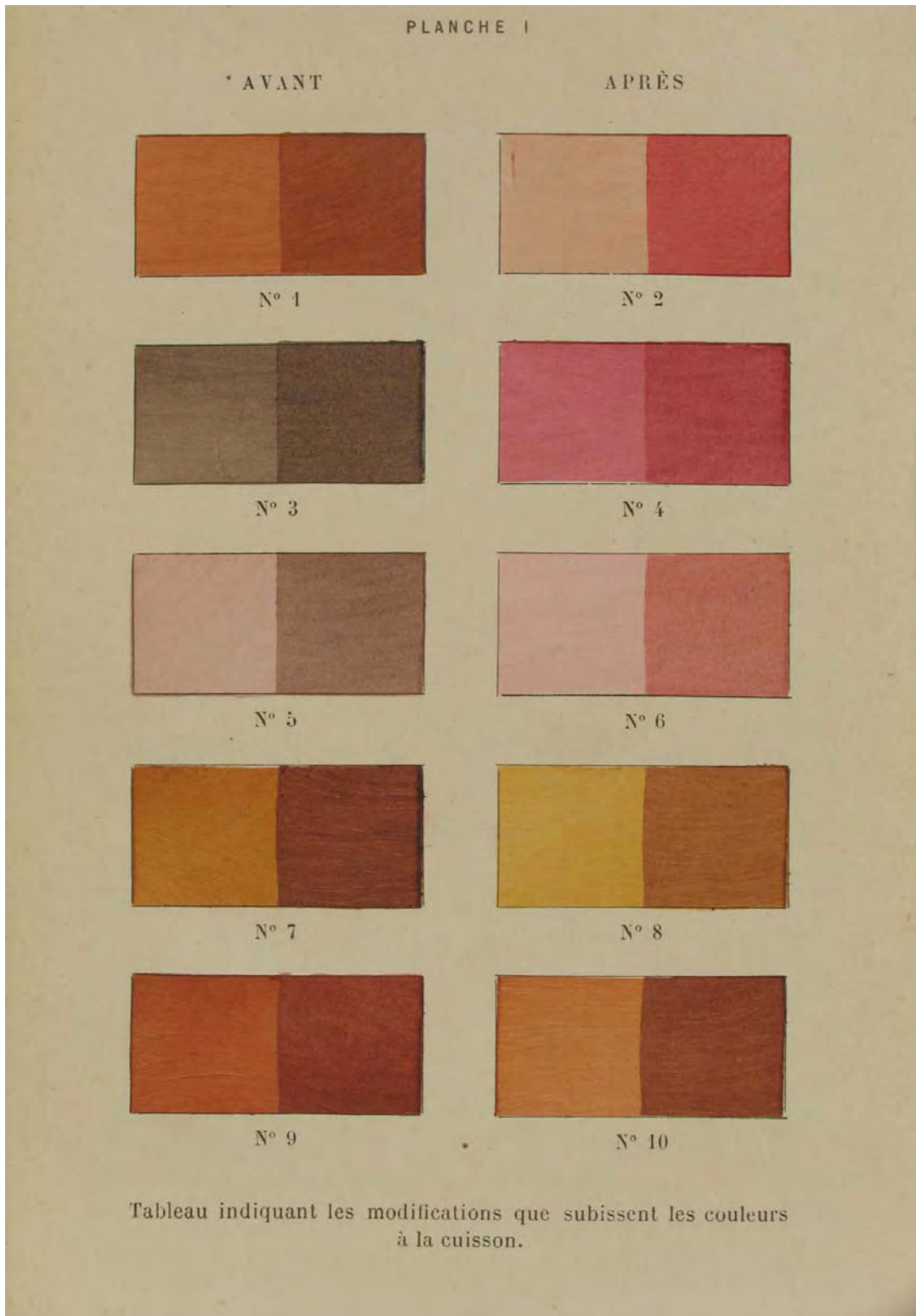


Figure 14: Ris-paquot's guide of how Lacroix's vitrifiable colours change in the firing process (1891).

glazes<sup>147</sup>. Regardless of whether a practitioner relied on Lacroix's products and the Pyro-fixateur or not, there is a mystery and uncertainty that continues to be attached with the firing process.

One would expect that the introduction of the Pyro-fixateur would announce the loss of skill in the arena of firing ceramic decoration, but the opposite is true. Instead of relying on others to fire their designs *amateur-artistes* now had a much closer relationship with their craft, able to build up layers of decoration through repeated firings, augmenting technical proficiencies and levels of control over this unpredictable process. The Pyro-fixateur, like all of Lacroix's other products, assisted the fruition of tacit knowledge and constituted a form of craft education that brought the potential of producing ceramics to a diffuse mass of people. On occasion Lacroix's porcelain paints were described by critics as a cheap gimmick that unfairly promised their user's a level of unobtainable artistic skill but as the analysis above has shown his products were used in a variety of different contexts. Critical reception is dynamic, and there were various uses of chemist's products that were deemed legitimate. These rules are not solely dependent on judging the finished appearance of a piece where Bourdieu's concept of mastery of taste might apply, but on the consumer's productive relationship with the object. The consumer as maker, using mass produced objects as vehicles of artistic expression, alters the basis of late nineteenth art reception.

### **Artist-amateur encounters**

The temptation to marginalise Lacroix's products as an inconsequential commercial development should not divert attention from the impact they had on wider conditions of artistic production. For a start, amateur ceramic decorators provided a source of income for established practitioners who provided advice and services targeted at amateur makers. But the general amelioration of social technique, which the amateur ceramic decorator was part, also prompted the development of innovative ceramic form in the late

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<sup>147</sup> Jo Dahn, 'Elastic/expanding: contemporary conceptual ceramics' in Maria Elena Buszek ed. *Extra/Ordinary: Craft and Contemporary Art* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2011), p. 159.

nineteenth century. Moreover, the trend among French fine artists from the mid 1880s onwards to use decorative art mediums as blank canvases for their expressive touch, meant the trained artist was confronted with similar productive realities to the ceramic decorator who wanted to transform and personalise their blank, dull, ceramics: applying the outermost, decorative layer to pre-made bases, relying on paint technologies produced by other hands. The encounters between amateurs and artists demonstrate the porous terrain between such definitional constellations and helps demonstrate how Lacroix's paints can be inserted into the narrative of late nineteenth century art history.

The assumption that amateur and professional ceramic decorators had their own self-contained markets with no interaction is clearly a false one. Their inter-dependence is shown by the way in which established ceramic practitioners came to rely on amateurs for financial sustenance, not only in terms of pandering to their tastes to sell their wares, but also through the production of manuals and the running of evening classes that guided amateur makers. Manual authors Baroness Delamardelle, Cellière, Maruthin Picard and Delphine de Cool were all qualified teachers of ceramic decoration. Delamardelle ran evening classes designed to instruct the uninitiated<sup>148</sup> and Picard's work outlined a new method of teaching porcelain painting to amateurs, dedicating his work to a cherished student, Madame la Comtesse de Pré<sup>149</sup>. Evening schools dedicated to ceramic education thrived in late nineteenth-century Paris and prompted a positive response from decorative art reformer Jules Loebnitz who praised their ability to contribute to female education, commending them as a satisfying leisure pursuit and a 'resource for the future'<sup>150</sup>. Practitioners also opened up their studios for the benefit of amateur makers. Cellière opened up his atelier, which he referred to as the *Maison Centrale de Céramique*, where amateurs were not only able to use his large kiln on scheduled days for firing, but acquire decorative patterns, models and literature concerning ceramic decoration<sup>151</sup>.

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<sup>148</sup> Delamardelle, pp. 15 and 11.

<sup>149</sup> Mathurin Picard, *Nouveau traité de peinture sur porcelaine et sur faïence* (Paris, 1893), Dedication.

<sup>150</sup> Loebnitz, p. 113.

<sup>151</sup> Cellière, p. 123.

The lack of first hand evidence of amateurs' individual experience of the facilities open to them epitomises a difficulty in historical examination of amateur making. However, analysis of the infrastructure that supported amateur porcelain decoration shows how professional practitioners harnessed the popularity of the medium to disseminate their experience and specialist knowledge to supplement their income. The broader popularity of porcelain decoration created an environment where amateur and professional had the opportunity to meet, challenging the definitional boundaries that set them apart.

This infrastructure of ceramic decoration in urban centres also gave amateurs the opportunity to move into 'professional' networks where they could sell their work. In late nineteenth-century France there was widespread demand for hand-painted ceramic products fuelled by Japanese imports, evident in Félix Braquemond's development of an individual, free-flowing decorative technique that became very popular. This ceramic boom<sup>152</sup> created a demand for non-repeatable, hand-painted ceramic decoration. The manufacturing centres of Creil and Montereau and Longwy responded, supplying hand-decorated forms to the Grand Depot of E Bourgeois in Paris who stocked a range of porcelain, stoneware and *services de table*<sup>153</sup>. To satisfy this demand ceramic manufacturing centres adopted procedures similar to those espoused in the treatises on amateur porcelain practice. Decorators would paint subjects on readymade ceramic bases, producing designs that projected outward from the two-dimensional surface with no final glaze to 'flatten' the composition<sup>154</sup>. Reflective of the demand for textured surfaces that was starting to grip middlebrow taste, these ceramic decorations were mostly produced by people working within workshops but there is some evidence to suggest that some decorators worked within their own home. These workers were known colloquially as 'chambrelans'<sup>155</sup> because of the domestic nature of their

<sup>152</sup> Evidence of ceramic boom: in 1873 20 million pieces of porcelain were produced in comparison to 2 million in 1800 Charles de Mourges Frères, *Guide du visiteur à la manufacture de Sèvres* (Paris, 1874), p. 11.

<sup>153</sup> Dreyfus talks about how Longwy was involved with providing materials for the Parisian ceramic boom from the late 1860s to the end of the century. Dominique Dreyfus, *Faïence de Longwy* (Paris: Massin, 1992), p. 37. Adverts for E Bourgeois appeared in catalogues of the collections of the Musée des Arts Décoratifs. See *Catalogue des photographies : céramique, verrerie, meubles, tissus, broderies, orfèvrerie, bijouterie, dessins, etc : Musée des Arts décoratifs, Musées français et étrangers, expositions modernes et rétrospectives, collections privées. Premier fascicule* (Paris: Palais de l'industrie, 1891).

<sup>154</sup> Dreyfus, p. 50.

<sup>155</sup> See Pierre Larousse, *Grand dictionnaire universel du dix-neuvième siècle: français, géographique, mythologie, bibliographique* (Paris: Administration du grand dictionnaire universel, 1866-77), p. 879. Late nineteenth-

practice, and evidence of their existence is suggested by the profusion of unsigned decorative ceramic work in the late nineteenth century. As French ceramic historian Dominique Dreyfus states:

Furthermore, young girls of well-to-do families frequently devoted themselves to academic painting on faïence, giving us pieces of uneven workmanship. These factors explain the profusion of non-identifiable signatures that have been unearthed.<sup>156</sup>

Unsigned material is an example of domestically produced hand-made products being made within a dispersed network of production. These practitioners might have used Lacroix's products in processes that come closer to fulfilling David Pye's definition of craftsmanship where 'the quality of the result is continually at risk'<sup>157</sup>; the flaws and skills of the practitioner clearly manifest. The popularity of this purposefully naïve style among the growing middle classes created a market for this type of product that occasionally involved the amateur practitioner. Amateurs in this context might not have authored their work or their authorship might not have been recognised, but their production had the potential to enter networks of commodity exchange.

### Technical and conceptual enchantment

Already the reader might think that analysis above over-emphasises the impact of Lacroix's products. However, as a part of the wider growth of *amateur-artistes* in late nineteenth-century France, Lacroix's products played a role in the emergence of ceramics as a modern 'aestheticised' art form, both among established ceramicists like Théodore Deck, Ernest Chaplet and Auguste Delaherche who introduced sculpture and experimental under the

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century French journalist and literary figure Jules Claretie also mentions the phenomenon of *chambrelans* as part-time workers making fancy goods of Paris (*l'article de Paris*) such as tapestries, buttons, playthings, lace and sequined paper and gilded jewellery. Jules Claretie, *Le troisième dessous* (Paris: Fayard Frères, 1900), p. 175. A group called 'La Collectivité des Céramistes Chambrelans de Limoges' exhibited ceramic works at the world fairs in 1889 and 1900 in Paris, 1893 in Chicago and 1897 in Brussels, receiving subsidies from the Haut-Vienne regional government, in which Limoges is situated, for these trips, see *Rapport et délibérations: conseil général de la Haut-Vienne présenté par M Eugène Sée* (Limoges, 1892), p. 346.

<sup>156</sup> 'En outre, il était fréquent que les jeunes filles de bonne famille s'adonnent à la peinture académique sur faïence; et cela nous donne des pièces de factures inégales. Ces éléments expliquent la profusion des signatures non identifiables relevées'. Dreyfus, p. 52.

<sup>157</sup> David Pye, *The Nature and Art of Workmanship* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968), p. 4.

glaze decoration into ceramic practice<sup>158</sup>, and fine artists who from the 1880s started to use ceramics as a medium for their artistic expression. Such changes derived from the need for artists to preserve their skill in an increasingly competitive commercial landscape, of which manual amateur production was a part. To achieve this, art needed constant renewal, as Loebnitz stated in 1889:

Makers have their particular theories and methods whose value is justified by commercial results. To change these theories and methods, the need for the new must impose itself imperiously.<sup>159</sup>

Novelty was key for the artist, a way to distinguish their skills from the broad improvement of social technique which continually de-mystified artistic labour.

*Pushing technique: Ernest Chaplet and André Métthey*

Loebnitz implies in his analysis of ceramic production that technology, technique and skill must continue to astound by its novelty in order to merit artistic designation. This corresponds with Alfred Gell's conceptualisation of the artist as the 'occult technician' who, in the eyes of society, creates works that deserve accreditation due to their disturbance of the spectator's 'normal sense of self-possession'<sup>160</sup>. The autonomous technical replication of form associated with photography, printing and mass production is often seen as the major threat to the enchantment of artistic processes, but it is perhaps more significantly challenged by the infrastructure of amateur practice that furnishes consumer-spectators with the knowledge of 'how it was done'. Either way, even by the 1850s Alphonse Salvétat and Alexandre Brogniart, (esteemed chemist and head of Sèvres from 1800-47) claimed there were no secrets left in the porcelain arts<sup>161</sup>, a situation that was only accentuated by Lacroix's products. This demystification prompted trained ceramic practitioners to adopt new strategies that demonstrated their mastery of the medium, out of reach of the broad swathe of imitative practice. Deliberate

<sup>158</sup> Marielle Ernould-Gandouet, *La céramique en France au xixe siècle* (Paris: Gründ, 1969), p. 21.

<sup>159</sup> Loebnitz, p. 11.

<sup>160</sup> Gell, 'The Enchantment of Technology', p. 49.

<sup>161</sup> 'Aujourd'hui on peut dire qu'il n'y a plus des secrets' Adolphe Romain, *Manuels-Roret. Nouveau manuel complet de la peinture sur verre, sur porcelaine, et sur émail* (Paris: Encyclopédie Roret, 1883), p. 164.

employment of more difficult or arbitrary procedures defended the cachet of the trained ceramicist's labour.

Ernest Chaplet (1835-1909) was one late nineteenth-century French ceramicist that reified his technique through the adoption of novel production procedures. Chaplet's 'barbotine' technique of the 1870s, in which three-dimensional decoration was produced using moulds and liquid clay (slip) initially constituted a significant innovation but was quickly exploited as a commercial process, which Loebnitz claimed diluted the merit of Chaplet's discovery<sup>162</sup>. In response to this, and the prevalence of overglaze decoration facilitated by Lacroix, Chaplet specialised in underglaze decoration. This technique required higher kiln temperatures and greater studio resources, but also the skill of applying the right colour and managing the firing process: figure 15 gives an example of how Chaplet even incorporated unconventional material in this process to achieve a more mesmerising effect. Clearly this type of process presented 'almost insurmountable difficulties' for the skills of anyone other than highly trained 'artists'<sup>163</sup>. Chaplet's experimentation with glaze and form and abandonment of representational depiction generated greater levels of risk and feedback because glazes move during the firing process<sup>164</sup>. Through experimentation Chaplet assured his position as an artist who could still enchant and astound the viewer, going beneath the surface to change the entire appearance of his works that were appreciated for their difficulty.

If Chaplet's techniques of ceramic decoration were valued for their difficulty, André Métthey's experimentations of the late 1890s and 1900s showed how highly individualised production techniques could also act as a barometer of rarefied artistic skill. His methods were unconventional and idiosyncratic. He made his own pots from local clays around Paris<sup>165</sup>. In regard to colour, Métthey was completely contemptuous of contemporary commercial

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<sup>162</sup> Loebnitz, p. 31.

<sup>163</sup> Chauvigné, p. 61. Chaplet's success in achieving the effects in porcelain shown in figure ... was the main reason, according to Jean d'Albis, for Chaplet's standing as one of the greatest potters of the nineteenth century. Jean d'Albis, *Ernest Chaplet: 1835-1909* (Paris: Les Presses de la Connaissance, 1976), p. 14.

<sup>164</sup> Contemporary craft writer Joshua G Stein notes the difficulty of under the glaze firing techniques in Joshua G Stein, 'Speculative Artisanry: The Expanding Scale of Craft Within Architecture' *Journal of Modern Craft* 4:1 (March 2011), p. 50.

<sup>165</sup> Henri Clouzot, *André Métthey: décorateur et céramiciste* (Paris, 1923), p. 3.

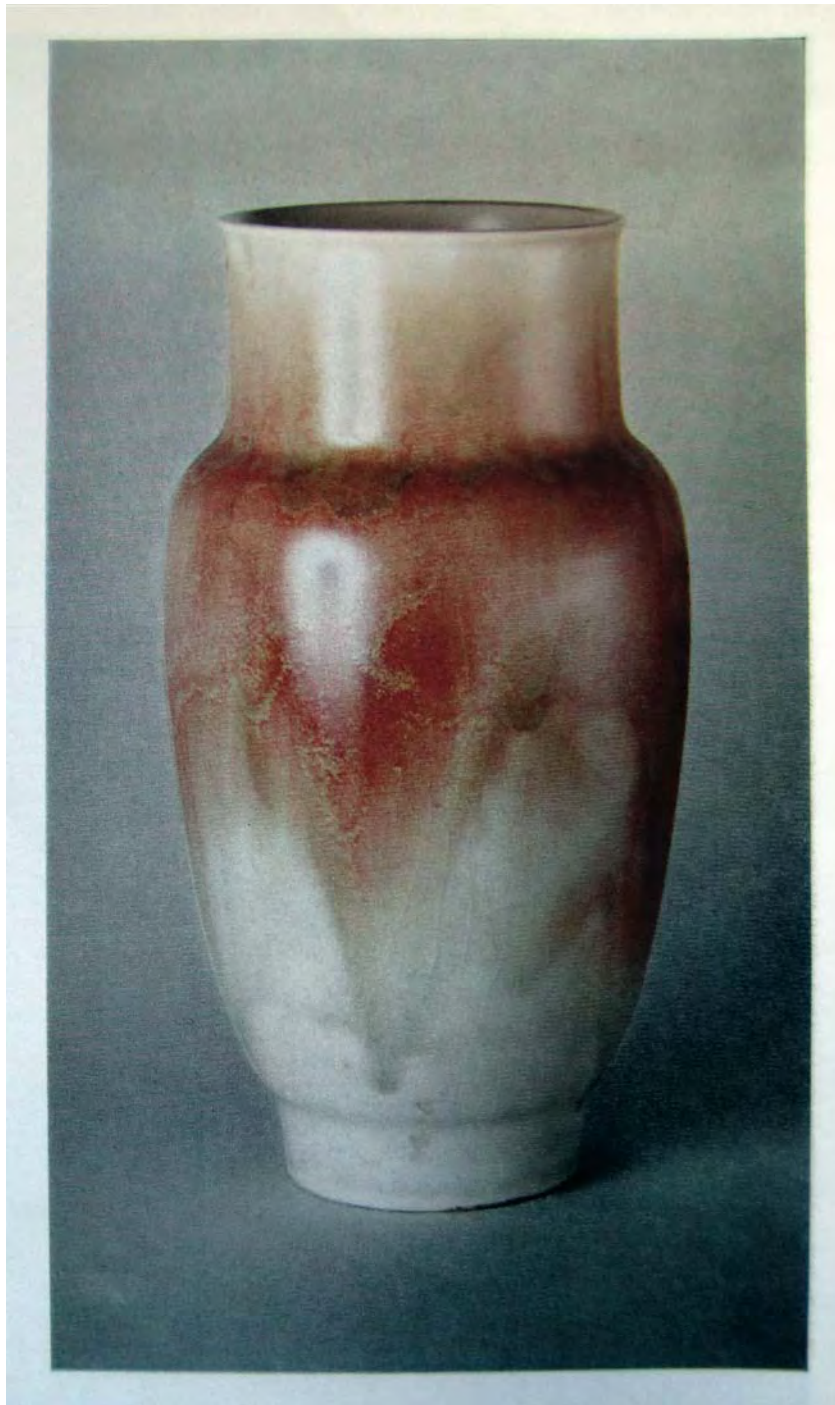


Figure 15: An Ernest Chaplet vase demonstrating the effects of beef blood enamelled in porcelain (1886).

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provision for ceramic decoration<sup>166</sup>, instead working hard to produce his own palette, which received its most public exhibition during his collaboration with Fauve artists for the 1907 show at Salon d'Automne, organised by the art dealer Ambroise Vollard. Métthey sought a reprieve from improving social technique through direct, haphazard and obsessive interaction with material. He rejected convention through self-instruction, and aided by a Roret manual built his own kilns and used an unusual mix of materials in processes of production that were impossible to copy and shrouded in secrecy, reviving the alchemy associated with preparing colour and grounds<sup>167</sup>. A decade or so later Séraphine de Senlis, a French cleaner who painted in her spare time, similarly followed her own unique procedure for preparing colours and, like Métthey, managed to enchant a critical audience: the art collector and critic Wilhelm Uhde patronised and promoted her as one of his 'primitive masters'<sup>168</sup>. The attraction of her paintings demonstrates the power of technological enchantment as a strategy within artistic practice that is not confined to educated artists familiar with artistic convention.

Techniques employed by Chaplet and Métthey demonstrate the potential of continual re-enchantment despite a proliferation of manual and technical reproduction. Their strategy of adopting unique, individual procedures also had an impact on the production at Sèvres. Under pressure from France's parliament, the new director Alexandre Sandier introduced a range of reforms in 1897 that included a cessation of imitating established styles, the banning of 'au petit feu' decoration, less attention on chemical research and more involvement from artists outside the factory who were employed to introduce innovative methods<sup>169</sup>. These changes at the heart of the traditional centre of ceramics demonstrate how there was clear attempt to inscribe 'art', or individuality, into the medium: it was more important to know whether a work was made by Chaplet, Delaherche or Deck, with the manufacturing

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<sup>166</sup> Espagnet, 'André Métthey et les Fauves' *La revue de céramique et du verre* (November – December, 1984), p. 20. See also *La céramique fauve: André Métthey et les peintres* (Nice: Musée Matisse; Paris: Réunion des musées nationaux, 1996), p. 63.

<sup>167</sup> Clouzot, pp. 5-6.

<sup>168</sup> For the story of Séraphine de Senlis, and accounts of her completely secret methods of producing paintings, as well as her rejection of the high quality paints supplied by Uhde, see Wilhelm Uhde, *Five Primitive Masters* trans. by Ralph Thompson (New York: Arno Press, 1969), pp. 92-94.

<sup>169</sup> Lechevallier-Chevignard, introduction to Alexandre Sandier, *Les cartons de la Manufacture Nationale de Sèvres. Époque moderne* (Paris: Massin, 1910), p. 3. The banning of 'au petit feu' decoration was explained in museum literature in the Musée Nationale de la Céramique.

centre relegated to the second tier in the signing of a piece<sup>170</sup>. There was a new attitude to authorship, a new paradigm for ceramic production where the attribution of 'art' kept valorised, technically complex works distinct from the production achieved by general social technique: Lacroix's legion of amateur decorators and commercial mass production.

*The turn to the decorative in 1890s French art*

While the late nineteenth century was an era of intense activity among prominent ceramic practitioners, there was an accompanying trend that involved collaboration between ceramic practitioners and fine artists. The artist turned ceramic decorator was a direct response to Maurice Denis' promulgations in his manifesto entitled 'La définition de la néo-traditionisme', written on behalf of Nabis artists in 1890, in which he enthusiastically proclaimed that imaginative expression and emotion were the key components of artistic practice rather than any basis in technical skill<sup>171</sup>. Consequently any medium was a valid means of expressing artistic 'truth', a surface to be colonised by artistic expression. Mediums explored included the painting of screens (reflecting the vogue for Japanese style), large interior walls, stained-glass windows, theatre sets, woodblocks, fans and ceramics. The Nabis artists were stylistically tolerant, interested in abstraction and formal elements such as line, colour and light<sup>172</sup>.

This turn to decorative art mediums as conduits for artistic expression amongst painters trained in fine art clearly demonstrates the changing relationship between artistic labour and material technique. In Bürger's theory of the avant-garde, the Nabis artists' cross-disciplinarity would be cited as an example of art's increasing detachment from praxis in the late nineteenth century, pursuing its own autonomy, a 'full unfolding' of

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<sup>170</sup> Edgar Pélichet, *La céramique art nouveau* (Lausanne: Les Éditions de Grand Port, 1976), p. 12. Ernould-Gandouet, p. 21. Loebnitz describes Chaplet as an artist, as well as extending this accreditation to other praised ceramicists in the 1889 Exposition Universale. Loebnitz, p. 12. Métthey is commended for his artistic attributes. Clouzot, pp. 7-8.

<sup>171</sup> Maurice Denis, 'Definition of neo-traditionalism'. [*Art et critique*, 1890] in *Theories 1890-1910. Du symbolisme et de Gauguin vers un nouvel ordre classique* (Paris, 1912), p. 12.

<sup>172</sup> George L Mauner, *The Nabis: Their History and Their Art 1888-1896* (New York: Garland, 1978), pp. 3 and 10-11. For more on the decorative turn of Nabis artists see Gloria Groom, *Beyond the Easel: Decorative Painting by Bonnard, Vuillard, Denis and Roussel, 1890-1930* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2001), p. 35. Denis, p. 10. Troy, p. 2.

aestheticism, which the historical avant-garde (with Marcel Duchamp its prime exponent) responds to in the 1910s and 20s by exposing art's reliance on authorship and institutional context<sup>173</sup>. Yet this free travel between mediums, solely guided by the impetus to express artistic spirit, constitutes a radical re-deployment of artistic skill to 'decoration'; in other words, the artist's labour is confined to application of the outermost surface layer on forms made by the hands of others.

A parallel can be drawn between this trend and the amateur surface interveners using Lacroix's porcelain paints. There is a similar need to rely on bases and carriers produced by other labourers to bypass difficult processes of production in which the artist is not skilled: the Nabis relied on stained glass maker Louis Comfort Tiffany to decorate the windows of Samuel Bing's *Maison de l'Art Nouveau*<sup>174</sup>; Denis relied on specialists to bring his wallpaper designs into being<sup>175</sup>; and Fauve artists were free in their exploration of ceramic decoration through Métthey's provision of colours<sup>176</sup>. Evidence of the reliance on the labour of others might appear to substantiate Roberts' comment earlier that amateur and artist meet under the 'auspices of deskilling'. The artist is not required to demonstrate deep technical knowledge of processes of making and, like the amateur, intervenes at the surface level, adding the aesthetic polish. However, Roberts' suggestion of equivalence in material skill should not mask qualitative differences: the artists in the 1890s relied on bases and carriers made by experts within their respective fields – Métthey instead of Lacroix – and critically artists developed an aesthetic language to accompany their new painterly experimentations on the surface.

The Nabis and then the Fauve artists relied on aesthetic discourse to give their surface interventions critical weight. De Duve sees the development of programmatic aesthetic criteria as a 'relentless endeavour to justify that these things manufactured by the Modern painter be called paintings in their own

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<sup>173</sup> Peter Bürger, *Theory of the Avant-garde* trans. by Michael Shaw (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), p. 17.

<sup>174</sup> Herwin Schaefer, 'Tiffany's Fame in Europe' *The Art Bulletin* 44: 4 (December 1962), p. 315.

<sup>175</sup> Mauner, p. 162.

<sup>176</sup> Tamara Preaud and Serge Gautier argue that the freedom from conventions of painterly depiction was attractive to artists who could experiment with the new medium. In Espagnet, p. 22.

right'<sup>177</sup>, not so much offering an explanation to a critical public, but to themselves as practitioners negotiating the shifting terrain of modern artistic production. In the case of the Nabis, with Denis their principle spokesperson, the exposition of surface flatness and the essential two-dimensionality of all painting was the discursive calling card. As Denis famously proclaimed:

A picture – before being a battle horse, a nude woman, or some anecdote – is essentially a plain surface covered with colours assembled in a certain order.<sup>178</sup>

Denis' radical words appear to anticipate the moves toward greater abstraction in artistic practice at the turn of the century, but it is important to remember that his celebration of surface flatness in artistic representation was a call for a revival of the classical imagination, epitomised by the popular murals of Pierre Puvis de Chavannes, that had been stamped out by the 'mensonge naturaliste' of their Impressionist forebears<sup>179</sup>. Denis wanted to replace a previous aesthetic discourse with another based on neo-traditionalism, and later on Fauve artists, inspired by Gauguin's trips to Tahiti and Polynesia, instigated another discursive renewal and became increasingly interested in the 'primitive' aesthetic, celebrating the naïve, the non-Western and what they saw as spontaneous expression.

Despite this increasing importance of language in modern art, and Denis' own contestations, the material labour of the artist was not rendered an empty signifier but was instead confined to the narrower field of 'finishing off', the application and management of surfaces, and the key task of marking authorship. Denis, like the other Nabis, made sure his interventions on different surfaces marked his individuality, his 'poncif'. This artistic openness to multiple mediums proved financially successful as the Nabis secured the patronage of major art critics, musicians and politicians, not just for paintings on canvas but decorative art projects such as mural painting and ceramic decoration: the art critic and founder of the art journal *La Revue Blanche*, Thadée Natanson, patronised Denis, Pierre Bonnard and Édouard Vuillard to

<sup>177</sup> De Duve, 'The readymade', p. 112.

<sup>178</sup> 'Se rappeler qu'un tableau – avant d'être un cheval de bataille, une femme nue, ou une quelconque anecdote – est essentiellement une surface plane recouverte de couleurs en un certain ordre assemblées' Denis, 'Définition de néo-traditionalisme', 1. Translation taken from Groom, p. 17.

<sup>179</sup> Denis, p. 12. Mauner, p. 8.

decorate his house and salon with painted panels to create an artistic ambiance<sup>180</sup>; Vuillard and Denis designed theatre sets and concert programmes for Lugné-Poe's avant-garde Théâtre Libre<sup>181</sup>; and several artists, including Toulouse-Lautrec, exploited the new culture of advertising, giving their flat, surface, decorative depictions extra clout in an age of disseminated commercial patronage.

The Nabis' aesthetic interest in 'freedom of action and movement'<sup>182</sup> helped secure patronage in a competitive art market. Faced with increasing commercialisation of the art market and competition from photography, the turn to the decorative was a way for artists to both challenge conventions whilst still continuing to mark the autonomy of their work through 'poncif'. Changes to artistic production in the late nineteenth century cannot be divorced from this increasingly commercialised art market, particularly in the light of the declining influence of academy-centred control from the early 1880s<sup>183</sup>. The material surface in this context became essential as a brand denoting artistic subjectivity<sup>184</sup>.

Regardless of the commercial intentions, or otherwise, of artists who explored the aesthetic of surface flatness, their turn to the decorative from the 1890s unavoidably exposed the artist's lack of technical skill in whatever medium was used as a blank canvas for their creativity. For example, Métthey was noted as saying that the Fauve artists, with whom he collaborated, could not completely mask their lack of technical expertise with their artistic talent<sup>185</sup>. Similarly, Gauguin's ceramic work produced during his time working for

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<sup>180</sup> Groom, p. 35. See also Annette Leduc Beaulieu and Brooks Beaulieu, 'The Thadée Natanson Panels: A Vuillard Decoration for S Bing's Masion de l'Art Nouveau' 1:2 *Nineteenth Century Art Worldwide: A Journal of Nineteenth Century Visual Culture* (Autumn 2002) <http://www.19thc-artworldwide.org/index.php/autumn02/260-the-thadee-natanson-panels-a-vuillard-decoration-for-s-bings-maison-de-lart-nouveau> [accessed 4 September 2011].

<sup>181</sup> Mauner, p. 63.

<sup>182</sup> Mauner, p. 199.

<sup>183</sup> Patricia Mainardi, *The End of the Salon: Art and the State in the Early Third Republic* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 136.

<sup>184</sup> John House demonstrates how the Impressionists saw their construction of plein air myth as a part of their challenge to the conventions of fine art. The author reminds us that Impressionist practice was a rebellious gesture within the traditions of 'high art', this was the intention of the surface 'effect' which was intended to be provocative. John House, *Impressionism: Paint and Politics* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2004), pp. 145 and 213-4. For the impact and importance of patronage for Impressionist artists see Harrison and Alice White, *Canvases and Careers: Institutional Change in the French Painting World* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1965), p. 119 and Callen, p.13.

<sup>185</sup> Ellen Oppler, *Fauvism Reexamined* (New York: Garland, 1976), p. 141.

Chaplet from 1886-87, showed more 'soul' than 'clay'<sup>186</sup> according to a critic of the day, his roughly hewn forms not judged alongside other ceramic forms but as the work of an inspired artist (figure 16). Technical imperfection in this instance provided the perfect platform to explore the notion of primitivism that was increasingly in vogue among artists. Gauguin's lack of technical skill in ceramics was useful in depicting and celebrating naivety<sup>187</sup>.

Gauguin's ceramic works have unsurprisingly been celebrated as a part of the artist's well-known oeuvre, but were such works 'without any real predecessors' as art critics Richard Brettell and Anne-Birgitte Fonsmark claim<sup>188</sup>? Clearly, the expression of naïve skill does not just have its precedent in the primitive expression of the chronologically and geographically externalised 'other' – a parallel Gauguin was seeking to encourage – but critically, in the more proximate phenomenon of amateur imperfection. The unfinished look of many artworks from Impressionism onwards, including Gauguin's unusual ceramics, unveiled the structures that go into making a piece of art. These structures were increasingly familiar to amateur practitioners in the nineteenth century with easy access to commercially available bases, carriers and arbiters that demystified artistic production. The difference was that amateur imperfection was not deliberately put forward as finished – an aesthetic provocation that celebrated the expressive content of naivety – but was a part of a process of trial and error and skill acquisition, a failure to be overcome.

This transferral of artistic skill to different media in the late nineteenth century exposed the artist as the one who creatively manipulates the outermost layer. It is a fragmentation of labour that amateur surface intervention highlights, although in a mostly unintentional manner as amateurs both rely on, and draw comfort from readymade products, and rarely mark an aesthetic detachment from them.

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<sup>186</sup> Albert Aurier review of Gauguin's ceramic work in *La plume* (September 1891). Quoted in Carole Andéani, *Les céramiques de Gauguin* (Paris: Éditions de l'amateur, 2003), p. 152.

<sup>187</sup> Critics of the time Triston Klingsor and Louis Vauxcelles explained that the abstract tendencies of Fauve artists were better expressed on ceramic form rather than on the two dimensions of the canvas. Oppler, p. 140. Ceramic forms also offered Fauve artists an escape from the constraints of the canvas. *La céramique fauve*, p. 10.

<sup>188</sup> Richard Brettell and Anne-Birgitte Fonsmark, *Gauguin and Impressionism*. (New Haven and London: Yale University Press in association with Kimbell Art Museum, Forth Worth, 2005), 286.



Figure 16: Paul Gauguin, *Pot* (1895).

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In the course of this case study on the development, use and impact of Lacroix's porcelain paints I have attempted to demonstrate how the shifting base of artistic production and changing attitudes to artistic skill in the late nineteenth century had as much to do with the improving technique of amateurs, as the wider issues of commercialisation and mass production. Together these pressures threatened the foundations of artistic labour. Within the discrete field of ceramic production and in analysis of artists who turned to the decorative in the 1890s, the impact of amateur surface interveners is evident. Artists found new ways to distinguish their skills from what could be achieved by amateurs, pursuing new means of technical and theoretical enchantment, trying to secure their position as modern society's magicians mainly through a constantly evolving aesthetic discourse. In the process of re-configuring what constituted artistic skill, artists could not paper over the cracks: their reliance on other labourers and the reduction of their labour to finishing off was exposed. If Duchamp explicitly brought these conditions of artistic production to light, it was the heterogeneous array of amateurs with access to an infrastructure of art supplies who first raised the question that was to have a strong bearing on the story of Western art history.

### **Paint-by-number kits in America, 1950-1962**

As the quintessential 'invitation to art' the commercial expansion of paint-by-number kits in 1950s USA represents an apogee in the narrative of widening access to artistic materials. All the things that were needed for surface intervention were available in one easy-to-understand, inexpensive art kit: readymade canvas board (or rolled canvas) provided the base, the small capsules of paint and cheap brushes were the carriers, and crucially the arbitration was not provided through the suggestive means of the manual but through the more rigid guidelines of an outlined image printed on the canvas, with numbered segments representing blocks of colour that corresponded with the colours in the capsules (figure 17). This was a development from the paintbox, which left the difficult decision about what to depict in the hands of





Figure 17: Ballet Dancers "1-2-3" Oil Painting Set. Craft Master Palmer Paint Inc (1953).



Figure 18: Trade show demonstrator (c. 1953).

the painter. There were earlier incarnations of paint-by-number kits<sup>189</sup>, but their commercial expansion took place in the 1950s when companies like Palmer Paint produced kits in large quantities, reducing art to a series of processes to the extent that an amateur painter could produce an original copy each time. As the advertisement in figure 18 states, “Anyone can do it”, a claim that retailers’ thought would be better made by the live demonstration of a housewife filling in a kit<sup>190</sup>.

Unsurprisingly, critical reception of paint-by-number kits in the 1950s was hostile. A New York art educator, Robert Kaupelis stated:

These kits cannot be considered as art for they are totally lacking in esthetic, expressive and creative qualities essential to artistic endeavour.<sup>191</sup>

Criticism from the artistic establishment echoed the dominant aesthetic critique of the day, a tone set by Clement Greenberg. The way in which paint-by-number ‘uses as its raw material the debased and academicized simulacra of genuine culture’<sup>192</sup> relegates the kit-form as ‘kitsch’, reliant and dependant, according to Greenberg’s strict categorisations, rather than expressing the autonomy of the self-critical artwork. The paint-by-number merely stimulated interest with its predictable, sugary images of idyllic pastoral scenes, popular biblical stories and cutesy images of domesticated animals: it was all too easy compared to the indifferent, contemplative distance needed to appreciate valorised avant-garde production. Despite a resurgence of popularity of paint-by-number after their decline in the late 1960s and 1970s, and wider public awareness of this kit-form in the light of the major exhibition held at the Smithsonian National Museum of American History in 2001<sup>193</sup>, the Greenbergian critique has stuck. Indeed, the renewed interest in recent years has backed up Greenberg’s initial marginalisation of paint-by-number by

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<sup>189</sup> Louis Gelber in 1917 made a simple paint-by-number sketch of a girl with a duck. Lawrence Rinder, ‘Paint-by-number’ *Nest Magazine: A Quarterly Of Interiors* (Spring 2001), p. 169. Dan Robbins, *Whatever Happened To Paint-by-numbers: A Humorous Personal Account Of What It Took To Make Anyone An ‘Artist’* (Delavan, Wisconsin: Possum Hill Press, 1997), p. 24.

<sup>190</sup> In chapter two I discuss female engagements in household craft that are often represented as filling in someone else’s pattern, ‘The aesthetics of the workstation’.

<sup>191</sup> ‘Art World Battles’ *The Grand Rapids Herald*. Grand Rapids, Michigan (June 13, 1954).

<sup>192</sup> Greenberg, p. 17.

<sup>193</sup> William Bird, *Paint by Number: The How-to Craze that Swept the Nation* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2001). See also website for the exhibition: <http://americanhistory.si.edu/paint/introduction.html> [accessed 4 September 2011]

ascribing vintage canvases value on account of their epitomisation of 1950s American kitsch.

Out of all the scholars, journalists and artists that have commented upon paint-by-number, from wholehearted admiration to downright derision, only one individual seriously attempts to insert the medium into the story of Western art history. Michael O'Donoghue (1940-1994) was an American writer (the first head writer of *Saturday Night Live*) and performer but also a paint-by-number aficionado, collector and co-organiser of the first gallery exhibition of paint-by-number held at the Bridgewater/Lustberg gallery in SoHo, New York, in 1993. His posthumously published article on paint-by-number in 2001 makes a sustained attempt to extend analytical reception of the medium beyond its denigration or celebration as a piece of 1950s pop culture. Due to the brevity of the article format he was unable to elaborate on the various provocations he made, but his key arguments provide a structure for analysis below, which similarly attempts to inscribe paint-by-number into the history of Western art, as a demonstration of the impact of amateur surface intervention on wider conditions of artistic production.

His article makes three key claims. Firstly, he explained that paint-by-number was a 'frontal assault on elitism'<sup>194</sup>, a democratic challenge to conventions of artistic education that allowed everyone a chance to participate in producing works of art. O'Donoghue then elaborates on paint-by-number's status as 'assembly-line' art, which instead of lamenting, like other writers and critics, he celebrates through its ability to expose the realities of mass production in much the same manner as Duchamp's readymades. The rigid lines of the paint-by-number canvas reveal their commercial origins as O'Donoghue mentions, but his assumption of paint-by-number as assembly-line art can be developed further through a deeper assessment of surface intervention in this context. Although the paint-by-number designer sets the pattern, the individual painter is responsible for finishing it off, adding personal touches and colour to the mass-produced object. The paint-by-number image exposes its reliance on the labour of others that contributes to building up the layers of the image and also show how the artist's material labour is confined to

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<sup>194</sup> O'Donoghue, p. 172.

finishing off, adding the outermost layer in much the same fashion as Duchamp's scrawl of 'R Mutt' on *Fountain*.

O'Donoghue also explained how the paint-by-number phenomenon was:

... a potent and unique movement with clear historical antecedents and an obvious impact on subsequent movements<sup>195</sup>

Ranking among the antecedents he places major artists – Renoir, Monet, Vlammnick and many more – all of whom express an interest in optical fusion of separate blocks of colour. In addition, Denis, Gauguin, and other Nabis artists need to be included in this group because of their interest in surface flatness, as the previous case study has shown. However, the emphasis here is on the 'subsequent', and in particular Andy Warhol's *Do It Yourself Series* of 1962 in which the artist directly depicts paint-by-number. In this work Warhol offers more than just a 'deadpan spin' on a popular art form as O'Donoghue states<sup>196</sup>. His interaction with the medium offers an alternative narrative of image superfluity in which the audience – as amateur surface interveners – can take part, whilst at the same time highlighting the reduction of artist's material labour to finishing off.

### **A democratic art form**

The paint-by-number kit epitomised accessibility to art, and reflected the particularly American model of participatory consumerism of the 1950s in which individuals were invited not just to exercise taste in the acquisition of goods but spend their free time to do-it-themselves<sup>197</sup>. The American social historian Karal Ann Marling describes the self-building practices as a means of negotiating the standardisation of professional life through physical labour, describing how 'DIYism ... was the last refuge for the exercise of control and competence in a world run by the bosses and bureaucrats'<sup>198</sup>. This do-it-

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<sup>195</sup> O'Donoghue, p. 172.

<sup>196</sup> O'Donoghue, p. 172.

<sup>197</sup> Bird, *Paint-by-Number*, p. 3.

<sup>198</sup> Marling writes a chapter that situates the paint-by-number medium in the wider context of post-war leisure directed towards morally fulfilling and socially acceptable practice. Chapter 2, 'Hyphenated culture' in Karal Ann Marling, *As Seen on TV: Visual Culture in Everyday Life in the 50s* (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London: Harvard University Press, 1994), pp. 50-85. Albert Roland in a 1958 article

yourself art chimed with notions of American self-reliance and productivity that was defined by a resistance to idleness, a refutation of passive consumerism and a need to counter-balance professional life with useful tasks. American psychologist and marketing expert Ernest Dichter noticed this new post-war consumer trend with reference to products that left something for the consumer to do, stating in his 1964 *Handbook of Consumer Motivation* that:

A sculpture, a painting, or a poster is better if it is somewhat incomplete, if the onlooker is invited to fill in, to do his own creative sentence completion.<sup>199</sup>

The paint-by-number kit is a perfect example of a product that is left slightly incomplete, encouraging the individual consumer to participate and complete the kit in the way they saw fit. This democratisation of art, with the tools handed over to a differentiated mass of consumers, meant the American consumer was able to paint in imitation of well-known artists, producing something to hang above the mantelpiece. The artistic role models, however, were not the representatives of the New York avant-garde art scene but other Sunday painters like Winston Churchill and the American president Dwight Eisenhower, as well as American 'folk' artists like Grandma Moses and the ever-popular Norman Rockwell<sup>200</sup>. This was a popularisation of art that did not disseminate the image of the romantic artist suffering for his work or the heady theoretical abstraction of much modern art, but instead positioned art as a therapeutic pastime, a way to exercise a different set of 'mental muscles' according to Churchill in his book *Painting As A Pastime*, a means of distracting an individual from his primary occupation, in his case, the affairs of state<sup>201</sup>. Eisenhower popularised the paint-by-number medium by giving canvases to his cabinet and allegedly sought help from a professional artist in

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for American Quarterly describes do-it-yourself hobbies as a way of 'freeing people from guilt feelings about their abundant leisure', Albert Roland 'Do-It-Yourself: A Walden for the Millions?' *American Quarterly* 10:2 (1958), p. 158.

<sup>199</sup> Ernest Dichter, *Handbook of Consumer Motivation. The Psychology of the World of Objects* (New York: McGraw Hill Book Co, 1964), p. 449. The consumer trend for self-expression through some form of craft activity reflected the wider post-war support of craft in America that was 'expressly intended to safeguard individualism' rather than having an explicitly economic imperative as in Italy or Japan. See Adamson, 'Gatherings: Creating the Studio Craft Movement', p. 22.

<sup>200</sup> David Smith explains how for amateurs in the 1950s 'it was far more rewarding to imitate Norman Rockwell than Jackson Pollock'. David Smith, *Money For Art: The Tangled Web of Art and Politics in American Democracy* (Chicago: Ivan R Dee, 2008), p. 44.

<sup>201</sup> Winston Churchill, *Painting as a Past-time* (London: Odhams Press, 1948), p. 17.

preparing the images he wanted to paint, providing an outline for him to 'fill in', paint-by-numbers style<sup>202</sup>. This philosophy of proactive amusement chimed with the broader context of American consumerism, amateur painting offering a cathartic 'safe' release of tension from one's everyday reality<sup>203</sup>.

Although paint-by-number is similar to countless other 1950s consumer products that left some form of customisation or labour for the individual to undertake – from self-fitted kitchens to convenience food – the paint-by-number kit invited the consumer into the more complex terrain of artistic production. The conveniently packaged tools and materials ceded enough productive power for the kit to become educationally useful, especially for individuals who had little or no other means of artistic education. Many paint-by-number painters in the 1950s recall how this cheap, accessible art form constituted their chief experience of art<sup>204</sup>, Carol Belland explaining how her father's painstaking labour on an Emmett Kelly portrait was the only 'art' to be found in her home<sup>205</sup>. Another paint-by-number practitioner describes the more desperate contexts of her paint-by-number education, recalling how her drug and alcohol dependent parents were initially unwilling to buy her a kit. After she had bought the kit herself they then refused to buy linseed oil for her to keep the paints from drying. Determined to finish she glued on the dried pieces of paint to the canvas and gave the finished picture to her grandparents<sup>206</sup>.

This tale of courage is a particular example of the broader educational impact of paint-by-number kits. The kit provided the first step to something greater – for this woman paint-by-number encouraged a greater interest in art at school – and her eventual employment as an artist matches the story of others whose profession in art practice derives from earlier interaction with the medium<sup>207</sup>.

<sup>202</sup> O'Donoghue, p. 172. Marling, p. 66.

<sup>203</sup> I cover this relationship between free time and everyday reality more fully in the third chapter on amateur time.

<sup>204</sup> Contributors to the Smithsonian's 'Post-a-Reminiscence' blog on the website set up to accompany William Bird's 2001-02 show *By the Numbers: Accounting for Taste in the 1950s*. Shirley Bumbalough (14 June 2001), Barbara (22 April 2002), Carol W. Elliott (7 April 2001), Loren Blakeslee (23 April 2001) Reatha Wilkins (19 February 2002), Betsy Holzgraf (24 August 2001).

<sup>205</sup> Carol Belland, 'Post-a-Reminiscence' (15 May 2001).

<sup>206</sup> Anonymous, 'Post-a-Reminiscence' (30 April 2001). Bird also refers to this story with an interview in *Cabinet* magazine. Sasha Archibald, David Serlin and William Bird, 'By The Numbers: An Interview with William L Bird Jr' *Cabinet* 15 (2004).

<sup>207</sup> The following contributor's to the Smithsonian's 'Post-a-Reminiscence' website explain how paint-by-numbers has ultimately led to professional careers in art and art education. Marsha Rogers (29 June

The story might be exceptional, conforming to the 'rags to riches' trope in American popular literature, but viewing paint-by-number as the 'first stage' in a teleological development of skill, leading to school, university education and success in the market, constitutes a defence of the medium – a way to refute claims of the medium's essential pointlessness and superficiality<sup>208</sup>.

Paint-by-number enticed the consumer through a simple promise: that he or she would be able to produce something that looked good hung up on the wall. Yet in the course of mimicking the labour of the artist in this miniaturised, constrained form, the consumer became familiar with painterly surface intervention, which had significant consequences for both the person engaged in such activity and wider artistic production. As Peter Skolnik observed, although the ability to purchase fine art remained difficult, 'now anyone could come home with a genuine DIY-ketchup-bottle-squirt-paint-cardboard creation. And anything became art in the 'happening'<sup>209</sup>. Empowered through the interaction with the physicality (or craft) of artistic production, the paint-by-number practitioner has more ammunition to counter and compete with aesthetic expectations of cultural elites. The practice confuses expectations of established hierarchies of taste, for example the boastful tone of the successful businessman who while aware of the presumed 'philistinism' associated with paint-by-numbers still proudly proclaims his artistic empowerment through the medium<sup>210</sup>. It is no surprise then that the democratic potential of the paint-by-number was described as an 'affront to elitism', as O'Donoghue states: the resolute claims of it not being art shown to be an upper middle class strategy to 'rough up the legitimate aspiration of middle lower-class hobbyists'<sup>211</sup>.

### **Applying the outermost layer: paint-by-number as the fragmentation of the artistic image and the amateur's role**

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2001) Kathryn L. Bergstrom (10 April 2001), Julie Hulvey (5 May 2001), Reatha Wilkins (19 February 2002). Wilkins' work of can be seen on Saatchi's online catalogue: <http://www.saatchionline.com/art/view/artist/96851/art/1085380>.

<sup>208</sup> Bird praises the democratic associations of paint-by-number in increasing the accessibility to the oil and acrylic paint mediums. Archibald, 'By the Numbers: An Interview'.

<sup>209</sup> Peter Skolnik, *Fads: America's Craves, Fevers and Fancies, from the 1890's to the 1970's* (New York: Crowell, 1978), pp. 160-1.

<sup>210</sup> Anonymous, Post-a-Reminiscence, (16 February 2005).

<sup>211</sup> Bird, *Paint by Number*, p. 17.



Hostile critical reception often overlooked the material depth of the paint-by-number surface associating its flatness with processes of mass printing. As Elizabeth Moeller Geiken of the Davenport Municipal Art Museum stated:

Those numbered paintings evade artistic development completely [...] A person might as well stamp a pattern on a canvas and call it their own piece of work.<sup>212</sup>

Geiken's association between paint-by-number and mechanical processes suggests equivalence between stamping and painting, a parity that is not manifest in practice because each kit was completed by hand. Yet the association with mass production is hard to avoid. Even the sympathetic O'Donoghue described paint-by-number as 'assembly-line French Impressionism' in his effort to ally its mechanical look with the artistic movements that brought painting into the industrial age – Cubism, Futurism and Dada<sup>213</sup>. In the analysis below I accept O'Donoghue's claim that paint-by-number effectively exposes modern realities of artistic production, but these realities are different from the classic view of assembly-line manufacture he sets out. As paint-by-number sets are individually completed they are more in line with Walter Benjamin's qualification of manual reproduction, rather than the technological reproduction of photography, and thus highlight the continued importance of individual material surface intervention. However, this mark of the hand in paint-by-number kits cannot efface the painter's reliance on other authors. In fact this dependence is laid bare: the outline beneath the final surface, in particular, shows through in the completed picture, referencing the paint-by-number kit's commercial, pre-planned origins. The paint-by-number practitioner has the same job as the modern artist, confined to producing the outermost layer.

Geiken's claim of the medium's mechanistic nature can be contested from the point of view of its early commercial production, when manufacturing processes were particularly haphazard. The success of Palmer Paint's Craftmaster kits in the early 1950s was not dependent on sophisticated machinery but the ingenuity of the both the company boss, Max Klein, and

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<sup>212</sup> 'Art World Battles over Numbers Racket' *Sunday Democrat and Times* (March 28, 1954).

<sup>213</sup> O'Donoghue, p. 172.

the employees, including the young designer Dan Robbins, who first mooted the idea of making paint-by-number kits. Robbins describes the laborious process of making the first paint-by-number kit, which depended on making preliminary sketches, painting the subject from a limited range of paints, tracing its outline and numbering it on clear film, to then finally testing the colour combinations on canvas<sup>214</sup>; sequential processes of making as shown in figure 19. To tailor these processes to the demands of mass production required further ingenuity that was prone to error. Paints were mixed using a combination of shop floor science and human judgement; the first paint capsules were made out of plastic pill capsules; and Max Klein invented a 'Rube Goldberg paint filling machine' to mechanise the process of inserting the correct paint into correctly numbered pots, an improvised machine that depended on the dexterity of the female worker to operate it<sup>215</sup>. On one occasion, in the haste to secure a large order from retailer Kresge, palettes for one kit, *The Fisherman*, were put in *The Bullfighter* kit and vice versa, leading to a wide recall and losses for the company<sup>216</sup>.

In the early years, processes of manufacture were far from concrete as the Kresge fiasco demonstrates. The production of paint-by-number initially depended on the ingenuity, creativity, perseverance and hard work of its producers. Before the kit entered the hands of the countless consumer artists, it had already gone through various stages of production that involved individual guile and a less than certain relationship with the tools being used.

Another approach that is helpful in challenging the reductive association between paint-by-number and pure mechanical process is craft theorist David Pye's distinction between the workmanship of risk and the workmanship of certainty, a dichotomy Pye uses to understand craft production. Pye makes his distinction clear through a comparison between handwriting and printing, with the latter process removing risks associated with the former through the preparation of jigs and other tools that ensure a predictable output each time.

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<sup>214</sup> Robbins describes the process as 'a painstakingly arduous task'. Robbins, pp. 48-50.

<sup>215</sup> Robbins recalls Willie's 'Finger system' that involved 'smooshing' together different colours of wet paint to achieve comparable colours to Robbins' samples. For more on the production process of early paint-by-number see Dan Robbins, chapter five 'Getting Ready' and chapter seven 'First Test Run' in *Whatever happened*, pp. 35-51 and 67-75.

<sup>216</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 78-79.



Figure 19: Preparation sketches, samples and test runs for the kit *Flight South*. Palmer Pann Corp (1955).

There are continued risks in printing as Pye argues, but ‘the N’s will never look like the U’s’<sup>217</sup>. The paint-by-number kit might appear to assure a predictable outcome each time, as Geiken claimed, but clearly the paint-by-number’s readymade outline image, prepared paints and paintbrush constituted a permeable jig that is weak in its attempt to impose certainty. The individual who adds the final layer is free to contravene the kit’s outline, which is only ever a loose suggestion.

Many of the paint-by-number practitioners of the 1950s did follow their own rules and William Bird suggests that it is the attitude to ‘going over the lines’ that marks the moment when amateur hobbyist becomes artist:

The real art began at the moment the hobbyist ignored outlines to blend adjacent colours, added or dropped detail, or elaborated upon a theme.<sup>218</sup>

Paint-by-number practitioner Raetha Wilkins did disobey the rules: she was so despondent at the prospect of producing the equine subject as specified by the instructions that she decided to paint her own composition in the same ‘horse colours’<sup>219</sup>. Other practitioners also chose to disobey the rules<sup>220</sup>, relishing in the opportunity to direct brushstrokes themselves, resulting in different effects. Bird describes this rebellion as the moment where ‘real art began’, conforming to longstanding codes of aesthetic judgment that prioritise autonomous decision-making as a barometer for creativity, evident in a nineteenth-century Roret watercolour manual for example, that sets a division between the ‘artist’ who can go over his prepared sketch in paint due to the fluency of his artistic skill, and novices who should follow the outlines of their prepared sketch<sup>221</sup>.

However, even if the rules are strictly adhered to, each paint-by-number cannot fail to be a unique copy due to the inherent idiosyncrasy of the hand. This claim is substantiated by analysis of identical paint-by-number canvases,

<sup>217</sup> David Pye, *The Nature and Art of Workmanship* in Glenn Adamson ed. *The Craft Reader* (Oxford: Berg, 2010), p. 342.

<sup>218</sup> Bird, *Paint-by-number*, p. 17.

<sup>219</sup> Reatha Wilkins, ‘Post-a-Reminiscence’ (19 February 2002).

<sup>220</sup> Linda Beason, ‘Post-a-Reminiscence’ (4 June 2001), Kathryn L. Bergstrom (10 April 2001).

<sup>221</sup> P-D, *Elève de Wanspendonck et Redouté, Nouveau manuel complet theorique et pratique de peinture a l’aquarelle* (Paris: Manuels-Roret, 1850), p. 46.

as shown in figure 20. Two paint-by-number paintings of the same 1969 Craft Master kit *Old Sadface* demonstrate the diversity that arises even if individuals follow exactly the same rules. There is no attempt in these paintings to ‘go over the lines’, to obviously rebel against the constraints of the kit. Nevertheless, upon each individual’s completion of the kit variety emerges: the colours are mixed differently, put into different places, the face of the clown has varying degrees of sadness because of different approaches to painting the smile. On perusing Trey Speegle’s collection of paint-by-number in his Brooklyn house, art critic Lawrence Rinder also commented on the inherent uniqueness of each paint-by-number image, despite the same underlying base:

One version of the classic, full length portrait *Pinkie* possesses all the elegance and allure of Sir Thomas Lawrence’s original, while in another, the poor maiden’s lipstick looks as if it had been applied with an automobile buffer<sup>222</sup>.

Instead of suppressing individuality, paint-by-number actually accentuates difference between one maker and the next. Perhaps the most self-conscious means of ascribing individual authorship to the paint-by-number canvas is to author it, as shown in the version of *Old Sadface* that is signed ‘Lynn’ (figure 21). This signature is a self-conscious act of ownership, an example of a person subtly wresting authorial control from all the labour that took place underneath the outermost layer. We could stop at the conclusion that these marks merely reflect the behaviour of the creative capitalist consumer taking charge of his or her own ‘sentence completion’, as Dichter stated, an example of mass individualisation. Yet paint-by-number will always have limited value as a conduit of personal pride because of the clear evidence of other authors in its completion. Instead, the authorial mark bears a strong resemblance to Duchamp’s signature ‘R Mutt’ on his work *Fountain*. Lynn’s signature is clearly less self-conscious than Duchamp’s playful provocation of signing a urinal and its submission to an open art competition, yet it demonstrates a similar point about the state of modern artistic production: the artist’s reliance on other labourers, the skill levels of general social

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<sup>222</sup> Lawrence Rinder, Introduction to ‘Paint-by-Number’ *Nest* (Spring 2001), p. 169.



Figure 20: Two examples of the Craft Master kit *Old Sadface* (1969).

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Figure 21: Detail showing the signature 'Lynn' in the Craft Master kit *Old Sadface* (1969).

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technique<sup>223</sup>, and the reduction of their role to that of 'finishing off'. The heavily guided nature of the paint-by-number highlights the fragmentation of the artistic process in a way that is clearer than the smooth, three dimensionality of an industrially produced urinal: the efforts of other labourers behind the eventual surface brush strokes of the amateur surface intervener cannot fail to stand out.

Critics were right to draw comparisons between paint-by-number and prevailing conditions of production, but their blanket marginalisation of the medium as non-art did not encourage an in-depth understanding of the content of this relationship. Paint-by-number was about the depiction of a 'collective viewpoint rather than a personal one'<sup>224</sup> as O'Donoghue mentions, but it is a viewpoint that arises out of the reciprocal relationship between individual authorship and the tools, materials and advice provided by capitalism's infrastructure. The labour of the paint-by-number practitioner – what Pye would call the workmanship of risk – is layered on top of material designed, organised and created by other authors, people similar to Dan Robbins and Max Klein. This reciprocal and dependent relationship situates the amateur surface intervener as the one who 'finishes off' someone else's plan, not resulting in conformity as one might expect, but plurality, primarily because any individual's relationship with the brush, paint and lines is inherently unique. The paint-by-number kit brought the material processes of art to an amorphous mass, both inviting the individual to play a proactive role in the emerging world of image superfluity and at the same time elucidating the fragmentation of authorship taking place within all art.

### **Andy Warhol's *Do It Yourself Series* (1962): paint-by-number as art**

Throughout his artistic career, Warhol made every effort to deny the notion there was any great depth to his work<sup>225</sup>. His early work made use of the slick

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<sup>223</sup> Roberts, p. 98.

<sup>224</sup> O'Donoghue, p. 172.

<sup>225</sup> Andy Warhol is famous for saying 'If you want to know about Andy Warhol, just look at the surface of my paintings and films and me, there I am. There's nothing behind it'. Gretchen Berg, 'Andy Warhol: My True Story' *The East Village Other* (November 1, 1966) in Kenneth Goldsmith ed. *I'll Be Your Mirror: the Selected Andy Warhol Interviews 1962-1987* (New York: Carroll & Graf, 2004), p. 90.



imagery of billboard advertising; he and his collaborators in the 'Factory' years used silk-screen techniques to produce portraits of celebrities in high quantities; he showed especial interest in the notion of celebrity in which superficiality is patently manifest; and he paraded the quintessential surface medium – wallpaper – as fine art when he covered a room in the Leo Castelli Gallery in New York with cow wallpaper (1966)<sup>226</sup>. Critics have rightly identified Warhol's dedication to the superficial surface as a challenge to conventions of artistic production that confronts notions of autonomous authorship, originality and modern aesthetics:

By erasing himself from his creations minimizing the artist's responsibility, the significance of talent, and the value of originality, Warhol challenged what art is supposed to be and how one is to experience it.<sup>227</sup>

Warhol's authorship was equivalent to that of a brand, much like Coke, the ubiquity of which he much admired<sup>228</sup> and his own developing celebrity status in the 1960s was used to facilitate his work's smooth passage into networks of capitalist exchange.

Warhol's *Do It Yourself Series* of 1962 can easily be read into this narrative (figure 22), his use of the paint-by-number an early experiment of withdrawing himself from the process of original conception, relying on others to come up with the design, which he merely fills in. Completed just months before the famous *32 Campbell's Soup Cans* that announced Warhol's focus on static depiction of the capitalist commodity, the *Do It Yourself Series* has been interpreted as the last gasp of Warhol the painter trying to remove himself from the process of painting. Heiner Bastian argues that the series represents the logical endpoint of painting<sup>229</sup>. The one essay fully devoted to analysing the overlooked *Do It Yourself Series*, by Meredith Schiff, comes to a similar conclusion situating the work as the 'turning point', marking a shift from his early work when Warhol still deployed his skills as a painter, to later

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<sup>226</sup> See Author, pp. 115-130.

<sup>227</sup> Alan R Pratt ed., *The Critical Response to Andy Warhol* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1997), xxii.

<sup>228</sup> Andy Warhol, *The Philosophy of Andy Warhol: From A to B and Back Again* (London: Penguin, 2007), p. 101.

<sup>229</sup> Heiner Bastian ed., *Andy Warhol: Retrospective* (London: Tate Publishing, 2001), p. 24. See also 'Modern' chapter *Adbusters* 88 <https://www.adbusters.org/magazine/88> [accessed 6 September 2010]



Figure 22: Andy Warhol *Do It Yourself (Landscape)* (1962).



Figure 23: Andy Warhol *Do It Yourself (Violin)* (1962).

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attempts to radically remove authorship from his work<sup>230</sup>.

Such analyses situate the series as part of Warhol's radical oeuvre, his march towards greater distance from the autonomous expression of Kantian aesthetics. Yet this reading is based on the assumption, contested above, that paint-by-number kits do entirely remove skill from painting. Warhol's homage to paint-by-number is more complex than merely offering up a symbol of American participatory art to a contemplative art audience. Instead he draws attention to his own role as a surface intervener involved with manipulating and applying the outermost material layer, highlighting the inherent depth in the paint-by-number surface. Warhol simultaneously situates paint-by-number as a prime metaphor for the conditions of modern artistic production – defined by the impossibility of autonomous authorship and the reliance on other labourers organised according to commercial paradigm – whilst exposing how the artist's skills is still required in the production of the outermost layer. How one 'finishes' the paint-by-number is what marks Warhol's work from the endless number of examples hidden away in US thrift stores and on ebay listings. There is still a reduced role for artistic autonomy: *how* one fills in the pre-arranged pattern, *how* one manipulates the bases, carriers and arbiters whilst exposing one's reliance on them.

In the *Do It Yourself Series* Warhol did not merely reproduce existing paint-by-number compositions at a larger scale. In an interview with David Bourdon, Warhol does claim the paint-by-number works are exact copies, but Bourdon reminds the artist that 'it is impossible to make an exact copy of any painting [...] The copyist can't help but add a new element, a new emphasis'<sup>231</sup>. Bourdon's questions suggest that pure irreproducibility was beyond Warhol's grasp, but this was not a major concern for the artist who always subjected found objects to a process of transformation, often using silkscreen techniques. As Arthur Danto stated, Warhol emphasises a point through reproduction, for example bringing to light the human tragedy of a car crash

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<sup>230</sup> Meredith Schiff, 'I Think Everybody Should Be Like Everybody Else: The Hidden Significance of the Andy Warhol *Do It Yourself Series* of 1962' (unpublished master's thesis, University of Cincinnati, 2002), p. 2.

<sup>231</sup> David Bourdon, 'Warhol interviews Bourdon' [1962-3] in Goldsmith, *I'll Be Your Mirror*, p. 8.

by extracting a documentary image from a newspaper and turning it into a painting of a repeated image<sup>232</sup>. It would be a mistake to presume that the paint-by-number works were ‘an exact replica of the actual merchandise’<sup>233</sup>. Warhol made several amendments to the Venus Paradise kits that formed a base for the work: he used paint instead of crayon (for which the kits were intended), left large sections of the paint-by-number blank, exposed the outline and numbered sections, printed letters over completed sections of colour and used Letraset methods – the commercial means of applying type to surface<sup>234</sup>. Compared to many of the devoted paint-by-number practitioners of the 1950s Warhol took many shortcuts, Patrick Smith commenting that dutifully completing the paint-by-number as intended by the Venus Paradise designers would have been ‘too much trouble for Warhol’<sup>235</sup>, their unfinished status evidence of his boredom<sup>236</sup>.

This attention to small details helps illustrate the fact that Warhol was not completely removed from the production of these paintings: there are little hints, minute flourishes that demonstrate how Warhol is still involved in the application of the outermost layer. As Danto stated, ‘with Warhol there are no accidents’<sup>237</sup>, and the reproduction of the Venus Paradise kits accentuated features that were not so apparent in the original. For example, the half-completed canvases, the incorrect placement of certain colours<sup>238</sup>, and the indifference to following the rules distinguishes Warhol’s surface intervention. Instead of depicting conventional notions of artistic subjectivity, like the many paint-by-number practitioners of the 1950s who went over the line, Warhol’s casual, witty approach highlights the material status of the paint-by-number kit as someone else’s design.

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<sup>232</sup> Arthur Danto, *Beyond the Brillo Box: The Visual Arts in Post-Historical Perspective* (Berkeley and London: University of California Press, 1992), p. 66.

<sup>233</sup> Schiff, p.12.

<sup>234</sup> Georg Frei and Neil Printz, *The Andy Warhol Catalogue Raisonné* (London: Phaidon, 2002), p. 169.

<sup>235</sup> Patrick Smith, *Warhol: Conversations About the Artist* (London: UMI Research Press, 1988), p. 60.

<sup>236</sup> Bourdon, p. 8.

<sup>237</sup> Danto, p.134.

<sup>238</sup> Warhol manipulated the colour of these works. In the *Do It Yourself (Seascape)* the section numbered ‘18’ should actually be ‘6’ if the Venus Paradise kits colour instructions were adhered to, ‘Navy Blue’, not the smoky grey that clearly changes the intended appearance of this sky. Analysis of this painting can be found in Frei and Printz, p. 169, and a list of the original colour-number combinations of the Venus Paradise kits can be found at a WetCanvas forums thread entitled ‘Venus Paradise Pencils’ started by “alleypond”, <http://www.wetcanvas.com/forums/showthread.php?t=228997> [accessed 12 October 2011]

The tension between Warhol's subjective agency as the artist, and Venus Paradise's lingering authorial voice that resides in the layers of production underneath Warhol's intervention is best shown by *Do It Yourself (Violin)* (figure 23). Warhol completes certain sections in crayon – referencing the medium of the original Venus Paradise kits – which then butts up against Warhol's own method of painting flat blocks of colour, whilst at the same time leaving much of the kit unfinished<sup>239</sup>. In the same canvas Warhol explicitly presents the archaeology of the paint-by-number kit and its many layers, with authorship distributed between the different layers, from the original makers of the kit to Warhol's own interventions. Warhol exposes the depth in two-dimensional surface, effectively suggesting equivalence between an inexpert paint-by-number practitioner and the artist who are both engaged in adding the outermost layer to increasingly accessible bases, carriers and arbiters, made by the hands of other labourers.

O'Donoghue proclaims that out of all the art movements of the twentieth century:

Only Paint-by-Number remains timeless, enduring, still cranking out those pictures of saucer-eyed kittens tangled in yarn and clipper ships slicing through twee light-tinged seas.<sup>240</sup>

Throughout this analysis I have sought to qualify O'Donoghue's polemical assertions, assessing whether his enthusiastic effort to incorporate paint-by-number in the history of modern Western art can be historically substantiated. In his article he does revel in the marginality of paint-by-number, on occasion veering toward hyperbole. Yet, the paint-by-number craze and its appropriation by Warhol in the early 1960s does signal the culmination of the two main narratives followed throughout this chapter: the history of widening access to an infrastructure of bases, carriers and arbiters, and the increasingly prominent impact the readymade plays in modern paradigms of artistic production, which significantly alter notions of what constitutes artistic skill. Amateur surface intervention, a flat, expressive layer

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<sup>239</sup> Frei and Printz, p. 174.

<sup>240</sup> O'Donoghue, p. 170.

on top of a productive base of disseminated authorship, is the lens through which these repressed truths about artistic production can be exposed: a continuity that runs through the 'ismism' of canonical Western art.

## Conclusion

The position that an epoch occupies in the historical process can be determined more strikingly from an analysis of its inconspicuous surface level expressions than from that epoch's judgements about itself [...] Conversely, knowledge of the state of things depends on the interpretation of these surface level expressions.<sup>241</sup>

Siegfried Kracauer, 'The Mass Ornament' (1925)

With his interest in synchronised dancers, tourism, photography, film, sport, and other arenas of popular entertainment, Siegfried Kracauer, Weimar-era sociologist, journalist and philosopher, brought attention to marginalised cultural forms and deemed their analysis essential to understanding the culture of modernity. For Kracauer 'surface level expressions' referred to the often forgotten veneer of everyday life and his location of essence within surface phenomena sets a precedent for this chapter's effort to incorporate the amateur surface intervener into histories of modern art.

The growing infrastructure of art supply from the nineteenth century onwards – the commercial provision of bases, carriers and arbiters – facilitated and encouraged the non-expert to become surface intervener and embellish as they saw fit. Despite the pervasive concerns regarding the quality of these products and their (mis)use, alongside the overall fear of degradation in the light of rapid industrialisation, these commercially supplied products brought processes of art within the reach of a diverse audience. In Gell's anthropological theory of aesthetics, the art object encapsulates an entire nexus of social relations, with subjective 'agency', or distributed personhood, disseminated throughout: 'an agent is defined as the

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<sup>241</sup> Siegfried Kracauer, 'The Mass Ornament' in Siegfried Kracauer *The Mass Ornament: Weimar Essays* trans. by Thomas Levin (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London: Harvard University Press, 1995), p. 75.

one who has the capacity to initiate causal events in his/her vicinity<sup>242</sup>. Amateurs clearly impart a sense of productive agency in their 'vicinity'; whether through tracing, sketching, oil painting, pottery painting or filling in a paint-by-number kit, there is undoubtedly a sense of individual expression on the surface.

Gell's conception of a network, in which the amateur's productive agency can be inserted, also highlights the reliance of amateur surface intervention on other objects and labourers within the productive network: John G Rand who invented paint in tubes, Lacroix's porcelain paint supplies, Dan Robbins' invention and development of the paint-by-number, and the words of countless manuals offering various forms of advice. It is this dependence that conversely offers a way of writing the amateur into the annals of art history, exposing the repressed truth that all art in the modern era is dependent on the labour of others, with the artist, like the amateur, confined to adding the outermost layer to a fragmented network of production underneath. Qualitative differences in the type of surface intervention do remain; artists have adopted a variety of approaches to mediate these changing conditions of artistic production in which the surface is key. Yet because the amateur's labour is rendered transparent by its technical or conceptual naivety<sup>243</sup> (not-quite-right-ness), it also exposes the multiple processes that contribute to the construction of the artistic surface. This evidence of painting's demystification reminds us that the artist's skill is still needed in the application of the outermost layer.

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<sup>242</sup> Gell, *Art and Agency*, p. 18.

<sup>243</sup> Ralph Rugoff, *Amateurs* Grace Kook-Anderson and Claire Fitzsimmons eds. (San Francisco: California College of the Arts, 2008), p. 11.



## Chapter Two: Amateur space

### The philosophy of amateur space

Space is often characterised by its essentialist, physical character: a vacuum, gap, or void, when a vector moves upward from a two-dimensional form. This motion is analogously represented in Edwin Abbott's 1884 novella *Flatland*, in which the author creates a universe of two dimensional polygons where perception is governed by the depth of line: subjects, whether triangle, square or pentagon, can recognise each other by assessing how their line recedes in the two dimensional plane. A knowledgeable priest is represented by a many-sided polygon and triangles represent the lowest social class. In the story a 'respectable' square is visited by a sphere from Spaceland who shows him three dimensionality by mathematically explaining the logical possibility of moving upwards, rather than merely north, south, east or west<sup>1</sup>.

Abbott's fictive account of inter-dimensional transfer seems to present a coherent definition of space: it is that which describes the duplication of terminal points of a flat shape to become a three dimensional object with internal materiality. Physical notions of space dominate scientific understanding, a specific area of knowledge that falls under the purview of the architect, town planner or builder as the professional makers and shapers of space.

However, space is not purely a mathematical reality. In Abbott's novel there are several other registers of space including the socio-cultural space of late Victorian Britain with its patriarchal hierarchy, the gendered spaces that each sex was expected to occupy, and the mathematical determinism that underpins the novel reflects the abstract space of scientific rationalism. Although Abbott's novel seems to clarify what space means by analogising mathematics and physics, the text both consciously and unconsciously presents multiple spaces that occupy the terrains of subjectivity, abstract cognition, historicity, poetics and social relations.

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<sup>1</sup> Edwin Abbott, *Flatland: A Romance of Many Dimensions* [1884] (New York: Dover Publications, 1992), p. 59.

There is a dichotomous tradition in modern Western thought of dividing space between the phenomenological-social – the realm of the sensual, experienced and lived – and the conceptual-mental – where humans are able to abstract their ideas into realms that cannot be directly perceived. Each side of this dichotomy maps on to further stereotypical oppositions: the conceptual is male, public, rational and scientific; the phenomenological is female, private, irrational, poetic and closer to the everyday. The French philosopher Henri Lefebvre avoids these generalisations and takes these bifurcations as the starting point of his attempt to construct a theory of social space and challenges the assumption of an ‘abyss’ between abstract knowledge on one hand and physical, experiential and social forms on the other. In the context of the ‘science of space’ as applied to urban planning, he laments that:

When codes worked up from literary texts are applied to spaces [...] we remain, as may easily be shown, on the purely descriptive level. Any attempt to use such codes as a means of deciphering social space must surely reduce that space itself to the status of a *message*, and the inhabiting of it to the status of a *reading*.<sup>2</sup>

Application of ‘codes’ dreamed up from texts empty space of its social content. The codes used by town planning to establish that a deprived inner city neighbourhood needs regeneration may be reliant on methodologies based on scientific measurement – architectural surveys, interviews with residents, incidents of criminal offence, etc. – but Lefebvre shows how such processes, typical of the technical and bureaucratic paradigm, reduce space to a ‘message’, constituting one reading among others. Lefebvre wanted to depart from the notion of space as a concept that is objectively ‘out there’ and able to be measured, confirming entrenched Western traditions of a subject-object dichotomy. His argument is that scientific methodology has created an extra-ideological space (‘in an admirably unconscious manner’<sup>3</sup>) that neuters social space, establishing a persuasive means of ordering knowledge. Lefebvre’s lifelong project was to challenge this assumption and demonstrate how space is socially produced.

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<sup>2</sup> Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space* trans. by David Nicholson-Smith (Oxford: Blackwell, 2009), p. 7.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid*, p. 6.

Returning to the fictional, mathematical world of *Flatland*, Lefebvre would point to the social-cultural construction of a system of mathematical rationality that creates then describes the void, gap or vacuum, questioning the assumption that ‘empty space is prior to whatever ends up filling it’<sup>4</sup>. Whereas mathematical-scientific principles seek to create languages that restrict the volatility and chaos of the void, theories of the production of social space attempt to unleash the full potential of experience in its dazzling array of forms.

Lefebvre’s conceptualisation of space is integral to this chapter. We might expect an analysis of amateur space to primarily focus on the garage, workshop, greenhouse or garden. Whilst these sites will indeed be discussed in the chapter, what is crucial is how they cohere and correspond with the broader production of amateur space in opposition and in adherence to other spaces of Western capitalism – most notably professional space and the space of everyday life. Amateur space relies on these other sites, but in a fashion that is beyond mere antagonism. It constitutes slack capacity within highly structured systems of capitalism, facilitating a degree of autonomy, albeit limited. Provisionally, we might argue that amateur space can only ever be quasi-subversive due to this reliance on the structures of capitalist production.

The chapter starts with an attempt to conceptualise amateur space that incorporates its supplemental and reliant status. Methodologies drawn from theorists of everyday life – Michel de Certeau, Sigmund Freud and Gaston Bachelard – are sympathetic to the poetic, psychological, sensual and irrational aspects of spatial relationships in everyday life, but Lefebvre’s emphasis on how space is produced provides a more robust framework, particularly given that production is what distinguishes amateur craft practice. Lefebvre’s work also prompts a discussion of amateur labour, which is incorporated within, yet somehow distinct from, everyday life. Amateur

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid, p. 15. See also Michel de Certeau’s distinction between ‘place’ and ‘space’, the former relating to a location, the latter category taking into account the ‘vectors of direction, velocities and time variables’. Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* trans. by Steven Rendall (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), p. 117.

labour does provide an opportunity to shape the world but the restricted and miniaturised spatial confines of such engagement distorts the forms of productivity that result. Marx, and subsequent twentieth century scholars who build on his analysis like Hannah Arendt, disregarded these alternative forms of productivity and lamented the spuriousness of objects made by amateur hands. Yet a more sympathetic approach to both the conditions and procedures of amateur making highlight both parallels and curious diversions from the structures of labour organisation and management typical of modern capitalism.

This overlap is particularly prevalent in the phenomenon of 'professional amateurism' that had its origins in nineteenth century self-reliance, advocated by British and American laissez-faire liberals like Samuel Smiles and Ralph Waldo Emerson. Their encouragement for all space to be infused with a productive ethos in order to fend off idleness and sloth, provided the political ideology that underpinned the calls for middle class engagement in amateur carpentry, self-repair, home maintenance, and decoration. An overview of this nineteenth century phenomenon is followed by case studies on suburban chicken keeping in Britain between 1870 and 1920, and the organisation of amateur workshops through tool racks and tool walls in both Britain and America. These provide further examples of how self-reliance pervaded middle class society, resulting in forms of production that mirrored dominant labour relations of Western capitalism, even on occasion anticipating them.

Amateur labour, a key subject in this chapter, has both spatial and temporal properties and it is worth clarifying how I seek to disentangle these often-conjoined notions for the purposes of this thesis. The second chapter's prime focus is on amateur methods of production and how they simultaneously relate to, and depart from, normative models of production. The third chapter moves on from notions of productivity and output to concentrate on the experiential aspect of being an amateur labourer, the alternative temporal modalities that arise from practice, such as 'switching off', obsession, or 'killing time'. Broadly speaking, labour in amateur time relates to phenomenological experience, whilst labour in amateur space, on which I now will focus, is contingent upon production methods and what is

produced. The chapter's relationship to chapter one is more obvious, replicating the motion of the square that moves upwards in Abbott's *Flatland*, moving from aesthetic judgement and reception of material marks, to the social and political space that is inhabited in the course of amateur making.

### **Carving out amateur space from everyday life**

A key methodological concern is how to articulate a theory of amateur space, keeping in mind Lefebvre's call to fuse mental and sensory realms.

Disciplines in the humanities, social sciences and arts are not immune from the reductive ordering of space and often imitate methodologies familiar to the techno-bureaucratic paradigm. Recent work in to the emerging sub-discipline of everyday life, including the important writings of cultural theorist Ben Highmore, has attempted to move away from meta-narratives that condense multifarious experiences into recognisable social movements, major figures, art historical canons and their accompanying theories. Yet, simply treating marginal subjects to similar discursive treatment is too simplistic. Everyday life is not merely descriptive, but compels its followers to adopt different methodologies to try and access the most ephemeral of experiences. As Ben Highmore notes:

... the everyday might be more productively grasped if the propriety of discourses is refused.<sup>5</sup>

The problem with histories and accounts of everyday life is that they seek to describe, or provide with a persuasive discourse, spaces that are inherently evasive, thus annulling the very 'everydayness' that renders the subject worthy of attention in the first place. Commentators often position the everyday as an 'object', making claims for it under the banner of 'gender', 'race', 'the domestic' or 'nation'. But everyday life is more of a *problematic* than a discrete entity: it offers its advocates the chance to bypass existing realms of discourse but with the significant difficulty of not surrendering to the 'propriety of discourses'.

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<sup>5</sup> Ben Highmore, *Everyday Life and Cultural Theory: An Introduction* (London: Routledge, 2002), p. 21.

Everyday life has attracted scholarly attention throughout the twentieth century. Highmore, in his book *Everyday Life and Cultural Theory*, has divided the literature into two categories<sup>6</sup>. The first group, including Georg Simmel and Walter Benjamin, attempted a 'productive hold' on modernity through the 'imaginative fiction' of everyday life, a critical approach continued today by scholars like Joe Moran who describe and politicise the most mundane experiences – having breakfast, queuing and office architecture<sup>7</sup>. Highmore's second group, including French thinkers Henri Lefebvre and Michel de Certeau accept everyday life more as a problematic. As my intention is to examine how theories of everyday life can inform a conceptualisation of amateur space my focus is on the latter thinkers who respond to the methodological problems, rather than focusing on the impressionistic fascination of everyday detail and its politics.

The space of everyday life, like amateur space, is like old, dried paper that threatens to fragment as soon as it is touched. So how have established thinkers conceptualised this sensitive terrain? Gaston Bachelard's methodology involved abandoning scientific and rational analysis altogether in his 1958 work *The Poetics of Space*. Bachelard advocates a geographic psychology that invests the concept of the home and its spaces with poetic potential: 'You don't live in houses positively but with all the partiality of the imagination'<sup>8</sup>. Bachelard constructs a philosophy of poetry that suggests coherence between the psyche of the human mind and the home. In the context of amateur space, which often (but not exclusively) overlaps domestic space, his work could be deployed to highlight the poetic power of amateur making: he infuses cleaning and waxing with poetic quality and talks of boxes as inherently signalling the 'need for secrecy'<sup>9</sup>. As an emancipatory framework that attributes poetry to domestic space, Bachelard's poetic trajectories draw attention to forgotten acts of the everyday; a research methodology that is particularly useful when empirical information is scarce.

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<sup>6</sup> Highmore, *Everyday Life and Cultural Theory*, p. 32.

<sup>7</sup> Joe Moran, *Reading the Everyday* (London: Routledge, 2005), pp. 12-13. See also Joe Moran, *Queuing For Beginners: The Story of Daily Life From Breakfast to Bedtime* (London: Profile, 2007).

<sup>8</sup> Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space* (Oregon: Beacon Press, 1994), xxxvii.

<sup>9</sup> 'When a poet rubs a piece of furniture – even vicariously – when he puts a little wax on his table with the woolen cloth that lends warmth to everything it touches, he creates a new object; he increases the object's dignity', Bachelard, p. 67 and see p. 81 for a description of boxes as reflecting a need for secrecy.

Bachelard's work also references Sigmund Freud who thinks about the everyday that lurks and murmurs underneath the civilised veneer<sup>10</sup>. Highmore applies the psychoanalytic model to the everyday: the unconscious, like the everyday, exists behind dominant discourses and derives from concrete experience and is not 'made up'<sup>11</sup>. However, drawing a parallel between Freud's cryptology of dreams and the everyday results in countless possible narratives, which although creative, disturbing or beautiful, are overly elemental and do not reflect the totality of everyday life. In the case of Bachelard, is the happy household always a 'flourishing nest', is the wardrobe a 'centre of order', do locks always conceal something hidden? The poetical is present in the everyday but studying the rhetoric of the daydream is not enough to establish a comprehensive concept of amateur space. Each poetic image, as Bachelard admits, suggests no cultural past or future. To search for space purely in the poetic or in the literary text, Lefebvre states that you will 'find it everywhere, and in every guise, enclosed, described, projected, dreamt of, speculated about'<sup>12</sup>.

Prioritising the poetic expression of everyday space too readily accentuates the freedom of language to operate outside of space. Lefebvre grapples with this problem by asking the question of whether language exists before, after, or during the construction of social space:

... perhaps the "logicalness" intrinsic to articulated language operated from the start as a spatiality capable of bringing order to the qualitative chaos (the practico-social realm) presented by the perception of things.<sup>13</sup>

Lefebvre explains how the use of language emerged through the complete overlap of a demand for order and the existence of the thing in the field of perception, what he calls the 'practico-social realm'. Neither is given precedence in the emergence of a spatial-linguistic construct that does not forget how language is inherently tied to the sensory. The task of a theory of space is thus to analyse these codes in any given context, and resist

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<sup>10</sup> Freud's approach in the *Psychopathology of Everyday Life* was to identify the common mundane slips, mistakes and forgetfulness of habitual human behavior that unearths layers of meaning underneath civilisation's veil. Sigmund Freud, *The Psychopathology of Everyday Life* Bell trans. by Anthea Bell (London: Penguin, 2002).

<sup>11</sup> Highmore, *Everyday Life and Cultural Theory*, p. 171.

<sup>12</sup> Lefebvre, *Production of space*, p. 14.

<sup>13</sup> Lefebvre, p. 17.

temptations to reduce space to a sign, symbol, linguistic construction or a physical site alone. Poetic articulations of space are valuable but are only part of the way towards an effective theory of amateur space. Instead, much depends on socio-economic conditions that surround such poetics, requisite infrastructure and the conditions of modernity that accompany emergent, heterogeneous amateur practice from the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.

Lefebvre and De Certeau both recognise the underbelly of myth, hysteria and irrationality that marks the phenomenological experience of everyday life in contrast to top-heavy discourses of abstract rationality. Both attempt to grasp the 'unreadable' that forever eludes 'analysis or interpretation'<sup>14</sup>, yet their means of encapsulating this experience differs. De Certeau draws his examples from everyday phenomenological experience, what he describes as strategies and tactics. The former is an expression of a definitive power structure, the latter constitutes the 'art of the weak' as epitomised by De Certeau's well-known phrase *la perruque*, the idea of working within work, such as 'a cabinetmaker's "borrowing" a lathe to make a piece of furniture for his living room'<sup>15</sup>. De Certeau's example of 'antidiscipline' could feasibly be an example in Lefebvre's work as a space of everyday resistance, but De Certeau imbues such activity with a sense of conscious, overt political resistance: "'putting one over" the established order on its home ground'<sup>16</sup>. For De Certeau *la perruque* develops into a polemic, an underground network of diversionary practice against the bosses, which overlooks the closer links between the everyday and compliance. Moreover, his focus on tactics of resistance drawn from the social world is primarily read through 'an inventive language that will register the inventiveness of the everyday'<sup>17</sup>. De Certeau's reliance on language as the space to register the antidiscipline demonstrates closer affinities to Bachelard's idea of poesis, and once again heavily relies on a *rhetorical* articulation of everyday experience.

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<sup>14</sup> Moran, *Reading the everyday*, p. 23.

<sup>15</sup> De Certeau, p. 25.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid*, p. 26.

<sup>17</sup> Highmore, *Everyday life*, pp. 153-54.



To avoid locating amateur space in poetics alone, Lefebvre's assertion that space is both social, and is *produced*, is key. Space's social character, rather than its existence as an objective fact, is clearly articulated in Lefebvre's distinction between 'true space' and 'the truth of space'. 'True' space (or abstract space), epitomised by geometry or the ideal functioning of a bourgeois techno-bureaucratic state, attempts to 'reduce differences to induced difference: that is, to differences internally acceptable to a set of "systems" which are planned as such'<sup>18</sup>. 'True' space serves to neuter any genuine differential aspects that challenge its authority by reducing them to something that is 'internally acceptable'. The 'truth of space' seeks to examine 'true space' as a part of a social structure that attempts to order chaos and the unpredictability of everyday experience to rational systems. Political opposition and counter-discursive strategies might seem to offer alternative spatial relationships, but instead reify the existing means of producing space by palletising difference to something that serves processes of self-renovation and regeneration. This Hegelian-Marxist construct reveals the flexibility and sophistication of bourgeois production that is able to subsume social space into the presumed 'rationality' of abstract space.

For Lefebvre only everyday life represents 'differential' space, the so-called 'enemy within the gates'<sup>19</sup>, which resists being ensconced into the illusory binary between powerful authority and the equally powerful antithetical counter-cultural position. The theorist provides two examples of how this differential space is manifest in everyday life. The first involves local resistance to central authorities, like protesting against the imposition of a highway that runs through a neighbourhood. The second is the resistance inherent in the act of leisure:

The space of leisure *tends* – but is no more than a tendency, a tension, a transgression of users in search of a way forward – to surmount divisions: the divisions between the social and the mental, the divisions between sensory and intellectual, and also the divisions between the everyday and the out-of-the ordinary (festival).<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Lefebvre, p. 396.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid, p. 354.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid, p. 385.

Lefebvre is aware of the inherent susceptibility of leisure to succumb to capitalist relations of production, however it is also a crucial site of transgression, providing the slack space that can be occupied by diverse, self-directed activities. Carnivals and festivals are examples of differential space, containing no obvious revolutionary potential as they are usually organised under the auspices of bourgeois power. They derive from the everyday whilst temporarily departing from it completely. This is what Highmore refers to as a 'countermodel of cultural production and desire'<sup>21</sup>.

Amateur space can be positioned as a differential space within Lefebvre's schema – a means, drawn from everyday life, of bringing unity to that which abstract space partitions and breaks up. However, amateur space has neither the quasi-political nature of localism nor the passivity of leisure. Instead there is a direct and inherent productivity to amateur space. Production is shown to be central to Lefebvre's thesis, as shown in the passage where he compares Hegel's conceptualisation of an absolute spirit operating beyond the tangible and material, with Marx's contention that such philosophy is romantic idealism and should be replaced with a materialist understanding:

The formal relationships which allow separate actions to form a coherent whole cannot be detached from the material preconditions of individual and collective activity; and this holds true whether the aim is to move a rock, to hunt game, or to make simple or complex object.<sup>22</sup>

Lefebvre's contention is that social space is formed from multiple interconnected relationships in which 'material preconditions' play a vital role. His approach reminds us that the rhetorical construction of space – language, semiotics and poetry – is rooted in a material paradigm. Amateur craft practice can be poetically described or related to the realm of abstract space – just think of the wistful description of a declining handicraft, or the geometric diagrams of a man designing a shed for his garden – but what lies behind both of these conceptualisations is a broader social space that is defined by production, bringing notions of labour-power to the fore. Within amateur space something is always produced. The meta-negotiation of the subject-object dichotomy and the position of the individual within political,

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<sup>21</sup> Highmore, *Everyday life and cultural theory*, p. 122.

<sup>22</sup> Lefebvre, p. p. 71.

social and cultural environments, takes place under the overarching guise of production.

Discussion of Lefebvre's conceptualisation of 'differential' space has provided a methodology of understanding amateur space within everyday life, but further exploration of how this slack space is occupied by production demands an examination of amateur labour.

### **Amateur labour**

Amateur labour constitutes a productive inhabitation of differential space and is defined by the inherent 'non-necessity' of its happening. This corresponds with Karl Marx's notion of 'surplus-labour', labour-power that produces more than is needed for elemental subsistence 'which, for the capitalist, has all the charms of a creation out of nothing'<sup>23</sup>. Surplus-labour existed in pre-modern societies but the division of labour that both Marx and Adam Smith described, exponentially increased the productivity of labour-power from the late eighteenth century onwards<sup>24</sup>. Marx explains how this excess productivity was channelled according to the interests of capital accumulation that sought ever more nuanced ways of dividing labour to produce commodities whose exchange value exceeded 'the sum of the values of the commodities used in its production'<sup>25</sup>, whilst at the same time ensuring labour-power's distance from control over the means of production. However, less has been said about the excess productivity exercised during amateur labour.

Marx makes very few direct references to amateur labour. He used the word 'amateur' in an 1871 letter to New York socialist Friedrich Bolte to describe and condemn various socialist sects that were threatening the unity of the International, the body set up in 1864 to consolidate left-wing groups in a worldwide working class movement. This letter reflects tensions within the

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<sup>23</sup> Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critical Analysis of Capitalist Production* trans. by Samuel Moore and Edward Aveling (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1970), p. 209.

<sup>24</sup> The division of labour is explained through the example of pin manufacture in Adam Smith, *The Wealth of Nations* (London: Penguin, 1970) pp. 109-110.

<sup>25</sup> Marx, *Capital*, p. 181.

International at the time and in his critique Marx labelled the rogue socialist sects as ‘amateur experiments’, as well as denouncing the Russian libertarian intellectual Mikhail Bakunin who opposed Marx’s authoritarian political opinions, as ‘a man devoid of theoretical knowledge’<sup>26</sup>. In this usage Marx aligns the word ‘amateur’ with disorganised, ramshackle sectarian groups who did not know what they were doing in contrast to Marx’s ‘professionalised’ doctrine, backed up by his scientific method of historical materialism.

Marx’s use of the word amateur to pejoratively describe a political opponent seems to conform to expectations of its relative unimportance in his wider theories of human labour – a distraction from the macro-level socio-economic convulsions of different classes. However, subsequent scholarship has brought the ambiguities of amateur labour to light, as well as its relationship to Marx’s own proclamations. Hannah Arendt’s *The Human Condition* sets out to build on and question Marx’s presumptions about labour, work and productivity. Central to her theory is the classification of labour into two types: the *animale laborans* who is occupied with the endless satiation of everyday needs, or the labour of the body and the man who makes – the *homo faber*. The basis of Arendt’s critique of Marx is that he does not distinguish between these concepts in his modern theory of labour. She states:

The ideals of *homo faber*, the fabricator of the world, which are permanence, stability, and durability, have been sacrificed to abundance, the ideal of the *animale laborans*. We live in a labourer’s society because only labouring, with its inherent fertility, is likely to bring about abundance; and we have changed work into labouring, broken it up into minute particles...<sup>27</sup>

Arendt questions modern man’s subjugation to the ‘theoretical glorification of labour’ without making a distinction between work – allied to the *homo faber* – and working – the biological repetition of the *animale laborans*:

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<sup>26</sup> Karl Marx ‘Marx to Friedrich Bolte in New York’ [23 November 1871] trans. by Donna Torr in *Marx and Engels Correspondence* (International Publishers, 1968) [http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1871/letters/71\\_11\\_23.htm](http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1871/letters/71_11_23.htm) [accessed 9 September 2011]

<sup>27</sup> Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1958), p. 126.

Unlike the productivity of work, which adds new objects to the human artifice, the productivity of labour power produces objects only incidentally and is primarily concerned with the means of its own reproduction [...] It can be used for the reproduction of more than one life process, but never “produces” anything but life.<sup>28</sup>

For Arendt, the increase in labour-power’s productivity does not add to the ‘human artifice’ or the fruition of a utopian world of unalienated labour that Marx depicted in *The German Ideology*<sup>29</sup>, but merely ensures future means of subsistence in an endless cycle of consuming one’s production and reproduction. She justifies her thesis by claiming that increasing levels of free time available in the twentieth century merely contributed to the proliferation of ‘those strictly private and essentially wordless activities we now call hobbies’<sup>30</sup>. She continues:

... The spare time of the *animale laborans* is never spent in anything but consumption, and the more time left to him, the greedier and more craving his appetites. That these appetites become more sophisticated, so that this consumption is no longer restricted to necessities but, on the contrary, mainly concentrates on the superfluities of life.<sup>31</sup>

The ‘worldless’ activities of hobbyist or amateur contain no potential to add to the human artifice according to Arendt, failing to nourish man’s intellectual and physical capabilities as Marx expected. Her pessimism chimes with critiques of mass culture by the Frankfurt School, as well as thinkers who attest to the essentialism of the self-reflexive, skilful *homo faber* who is able to transcend banality and demonstrate capabilities that the amateur labourer falls far short of. Arendt’s celebration of the *homo faber*, echoes a Heideggerian infatuation with the truth inherent in materials, where a crafted jug has a certain ‘thingness’ that ‘stands forth’ from absence, presiding over the process by which it was made and attesting to its telluric qualities<sup>32</sup>. Frampton, in a more recent deployment of this Heideggerian notion of object as being, refers to the theoretical and material solidity of architectural entities:

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<sup>28</sup> Arendt, p. 88.

<sup>29</sup> Karl Marx, ‘The German Ideology’ from *Karl Marx: Selected Writings* McLellan ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 185.

<sup>30</sup> Arendt, pp. 117-8. See also Thorstein Veblen, *Conspicuous Consumption* (London: Penguin, 2005), p. 22.

<sup>31</sup> Arendt, p. 133.

<sup>32</sup> Martin Heidegger ‘The Thing’ originally delivered as a lecture to the Bayerischen Akademie der Schönen Künste [1950] in Glenn Adamson, *The Craft Reader* (Oxford and New York: Berg, 2010), p. 406.

One may assert that a building is ontological rather than representational in character and that built form is a presence rather than something standing in for absence. In Martin Heidegger's terminology we may think of it as a 'thing' rather than a "sign".<sup>33</sup>

This adulation of the spiritual essence of 'thingness' counters the idea that the perceived world is merely a set of symbols, and accredits any practitioner who shapes and 'brings forth' presence, the title of the authentic *homo faber*, the honest, skilful and 'true to materials' craftsman who combines the head and hand to respectfully treat materials in the world<sup>34</sup>. The problem with these essentialist readings, which mirror John Ruskin and William Morris's view of craftsmanship, is that they possess an overbearing sense of what constitutes an 'authentic' shaping of the world. This orientation to 'thingness' props up a hierarchy of skill that ostracises the amateur labourer<sup>35</sup>.

In the course of the third chapter I challenge this object-centred critique of amateur labour by accounting for the qualitative temporal differences that arise from continuing to work in free time and temporarily being one's own boss, where output is subservient to the experience of making in itself. However, this chapter questions Arendt's assumption of a resolute division between the *homo faber* and *animale laborans* that has shaped contemporary understanding of craft's necessary essence<sup>36</sup>, and challenges her expectation that amateur labour lacks productive potential and merely provides an opportunity for '...daily exhaustion to keep the capacity for consumption intact'<sup>37</sup>. As a part of everyday life – the cyclical repetition of the *animale laborans* – amateur labour *does* have the potential to be productive and add to the human artifice: scholars have hitherto simply failed to register the non-conventional forms of productivity and output that characterises amateur craft practice.

As shown in chapter one amateur labour is reliant on the commodities that facilitate making. Such objects – like readymade canvases and instruction manuals – would not find their way into the toolkit of the *homo faber*,

<sup>33</sup> Kenneth Frampton, *Rappel a l'ordre* in Adamson, *The Craft Reader*, p. 411.

<sup>34</sup> Richard Sennett, *The Craftsman* (London: Allen Lane, 2008), p. 178.

<sup>35</sup> Jennifer Harris, *William Morris Revisited: Questioning the Legacy* (London: Crafts Council, 1996), p. 54.

<sup>36</sup> Richard Sennett who upholds this assumption of craft as the practice of the *homo faber* was a student of Arendt's and he refers to her influence in the introduction to *The Craftsman*. Sennett, pp. 6-7.

<sup>37</sup> Arendt, p. 131.

according to Arendt's definition: they are tools that only help an individual occupy and colonise free time whilst serving the interests of capital. Amateur production would certainly not conform to Ruskin's prescriptions on how to combat the degradation of work in the nineteenth century: 'never' encourage manufacture beyond what is necessary, copy, or 'demand an exact finish for its own sake', the critic pronounced<sup>38</sup>. On all three counts amateur labour often fails, yet the inability to cohere to Ruskin's standards of craft does not mean that the amateur labourer fails to be true to the essence of process and materials. The difference is that the processes and materials used are part of, and respond to, the world of fast-paced, unbridled capitalism where authenticity is a contested marker of quality production. These provisions allow widespread access to an experience of shaping the world at least in a partial way, and something is produced even if it is imperfect, unreflective or banal. To invigorate a theory of amateur space, a more fluid and nuanced treatment of amateur labour is needed, one that resists marginalising its output as superfluous.

Essential to this endeavour is the refutation of Arendt's clear-cut distinction between the purity of work (the shaped product in the world) and the slavery of enacted labour (trapped within to the biological life process of production-consumption)<sup>39</sup>. Instead, there is a more dialectical relationship between the glorification of the labour process and productive work. Amateur labour is consumptive, yet crucially provides an opportunity for the unleashing of the *homo faber*, even if such interactions lack the purity that Heidegger, Arendt and Richard Sennett would preserve for direct, 'honest' engagement with the raw material. Amateur labour is constantly limited by the things that facilitate its practice – commercially produced bases, carriers and arbiters – but this reliance does not negate the potential for amateurs to make a genuine addition to the human artifice.

Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's model of the cross-fertilisation of 'smooth' and 'striated' space provides a conceptual precedent for the dialectical interaction between spatial constructions that are conventionally thought of

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<sup>38</sup> John Ruskin, *Nature of the Gothic* (London: George Allen, 1892), p. 15.

<sup>39</sup> Arendt, p. 7.

as distinctly unique. As such their work helps challenge Arendt's division between *homo faber* and *animale laborans* and contributes to a more complex and flexible understanding of amateur labour. They argue that the 'smooth' and 'striated':

... only exist in mixture: smooth space is constantly being translated, transversed into striated space; striated space is constantly being reversed, returned to a smooth space. In the first case, one organizes even the desert; in the second the desert gains and grows; and the two can happen simultaneously. But the de facto mixes do not preclude a de jure, or abstract, distinction between the two spaces.<sup>40</sup>

The 'nomadic' smooth and 'sedentary' striated spaces are formally different, but this does not mean mixtures between the two are impossible. Deleuze and Guattari uphold a division between the 'smooth' dimensionless, directionless felt and the woven warp and weft structure of 'striated' fabric, and in maritime measurement a difference between the attempt to determine the sea's geography through longitude and latitude and more local, phenomenological methods based on the wind, noise and sound of the sea. Yet striated and smooth space produce each other: 'two non-symmetrical movements, one of which striates the smooth, and one of which reimparts smooth space on the basis of the striated.'<sup>41</sup>

A similar co-dependence and confluence of spaces is apparent in amateur labour. Building a shelf requires materials, tools, maybe even an instructional diagram, all of which demonstrate the fixedness, solidity and the grid of striated space. This then requires the labour-power and hands-on skill of the practitioner to assemble: smooth space that is subordinate to a range of itinerant trajectories inherent to practice. In the process of constructing the shelf, amateur labour – reflecting the qualities of the capitalist bricoleur – is both reliant on the commodities that derive from the striated space of capitalism, yet facilitates the smooth action of individual labour that is infinitely various.

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<sup>40</sup> Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* trans. by Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), pp. 474-5.

<sup>41</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, p. 480.



Amateur labour should not be reduced to Arendt's classification of the *animale laborans* but is dialectically related to other notions of labour in modern capitalism, sharing the traits of Deleuze and Guattari's notion of 'mixture'. And there is no end, no resolution: Deleuze and Guattari avoid claiming that either smooth or striated are 'liberatory' in any sense (the temptation would be to suggest fluid 'smooth' space is a way of escaping modern capitalism's striations). Striated and smooth, *animal laborans* and *homo faber*: these are not discrete categories, and each serve to produce the other in a dialectical relationship.

The key idea is that amateur space is dependent on capitalist structures, offering no escape, often replicating its forms of organisation and mimicking its aesthetic codes. Yet differential characteristics are manifest in the way these normative frameworks are refracted in the 'mixture' of amateur space. Amateur space is not just the clear opposite of 'professional' space, characterised by regularised and standardised systems of organisation. As shown below, the efficiency, profitability, and innovation of voluntarily undertaken labour feeds into the structuring of professional spaces. The entrenched polarity between amateur and professional space, dating from the early nineteenth century onwards, has served to mask their strong affiliations.

These abstracted methods of dichotomous separation reduce the 'real space' of the everyday into a system that attempts to 'induce minimal difference'<sup>42</sup>, according to Lefebvre. Amateur labour inherently operates outside this tendency to contain phenomena through reductive dichotomisation. This is why Lefebvre's qualification of differential space is so useful. It adequately describes both the departure of amateur space from everyday life as well as its unavoidable connections. Amateur space is differential within capitalism and amateur labour produces this space.

Throughout the chapter the words of seminal theorists that have famously framed the paradigm of modernity are used – Hannah Arendt, Frederick Winslow Taylor, Harry Braverman, Siegfried Kracauer, William Morris and Karl Marx – in order to understand a concept which very few of these authors

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<sup>42</sup> Lefebvre, p. 398.

talk about explicitly: amateur space. This porous boundary between the terms amateur and professional is most explicitly shown in the course of the 'professionalisation' of amateur space, a late nineteenth-century historical development to which I will now turn.

### **The late nineteenth century 'professionalisation' of amateur practice**

In the second half of the nineteenth century the burgeoning middle classes were increasingly encouraged to augment their levels of education and self-reliance. As Francis Chilton-Young mentioned in his self-help manual *Everyman His Own Mechanic*:

The changes that have gradually come over things during the years that have passed since the great exhibition of 1851 have rendered men far more inclined to regard and consider the signs of their times than they were wont to do during the first half of the present nineteenth century, and anyone who will do this earnestly and searchingly cannot but come to the conclusion that the field of a man's knowledge must be far wider, his education far more general, his self-reliance far stronger and the power to help himself far greater than was either thought to be necessary some fifty years ago or even less.<sup>43</sup>

For Chilton-Young this 'wider', 'more general' education includes work that conventionally fell within the remit of the artisanal trades:

Yes reader, mend your broken chairs and crippled furniture; put fresh panes of glass into your broken windows; do your own repairs as far as practicable, make your own garden plants and appliances.<sup>44</sup>

Chilton-Young advocated the need for self-reliant men to combat pressures of modernisation – mass production, larger firms, rural depopulation, business fraud and an increasingly politicised working class demanding higher wages. The phenomenon of amateur labour challenges expectations that the Victorian home was only a site of everyday domestic routines, leisure or

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<sup>43</sup> Francis Chilton-Young, *Everyman His Own Mechanic: A Complete and Comprehensive Guide to Every Description of Constructive and Decorative Work that May Be Done By the Amateur Artisan, At Home and in the Colonies* (London and New York: Ward, Lock & Co, 1886), p. 1.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid*, p. 4.

sentimentalised aesthetic display, as argued by John Tosh<sup>45</sup>. Tosh does not pay attention to the way in which Victorian ideals of sentimentality and domesticity were taught through physical labour, thus overlooking the pervasiveness of the self-reliant ideology that originated with Samuel Smiles, whose mid nineteenth-century bestseller *Self-Help* was a direct inspiration for Chilton-Young's handyman publications.

*Self-Help* was a book that championed the honour, virtue and merits of one's own labour and intellect rather than relying on external bodies, such as the state or paid labourers. Smiles' book became hugely popular in the second half of the nineteenth century<sup>46</sup>, espousing a politics of minimal state intervention in line with John Stuart Mill's liberalism whereby:

Even the best institution can give man no active help. Perhaps the most they can do is to leave him free to develop himself and improve his individual condition.<sup>47</sup>

For Smiles, society should be made up of individuals who use their common sense, hard work and motivation to overcome problems and excel in the world, relying on that which is within rather than without<sup>48</sup>. The American transcendentalist Ralph Waldo Emerson in his 1841 book *Self-Reliance* had set a precedent for this anti-statist political philosophy but his tone was more aggressive situating the state as a 'conspiracy against manhood', a threat to trusting one's own emotions and physical capabilities that should be rejected altogether<sup>49</sup>. Smiles' work is understandably less inflammatory given the centralisation of political, economical and social life of Britain at the time (compared with America), but he does advocate the idea that things are better when done under one's own volition through processes of self-education. The book includes multiple tales of successful, self-reliant men in the various

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<sup>45</sup> Tosh claims that in the Victorian era the house was 'by and large' not a productive unit and was constructed as a sentimental and emotional realm. John Tosh, *A Man's Place: Masculinity and the Middle Class Home in Victorian England* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1999), p. 13.

<sup>46</sup> 20,000 copies were sold in the first year (1859), increasing to 150,000 by 1889 and 250,000 by 1900. Asa Briggs introduction to Samuel Smiles, *Self-Help: With Illustrations of Conduct and Perseverance* (London: John Murray) p. 7.

<sup>47</sup> Samuel Smiles, *Self-Help: With Illustrations of Conduct and Perseverance* (London: IEA Health and Welfare Unit, 1996), p. 2.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid*, p. 2.

<sup>49</sup> Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Self-Reliance* (Massachusetts: Elizabeth Towne, 1916), pp. 10-13. Strong echoes of this thought evident in the work of Henry Thoreau, one of Emerson's disciples. Henry Thoreau, *Walden: Or, Life in the Woods* (London: Folio Society, 2001), pp. 56-57.

branches of science, politics and the arts, allowing middle class readers to imagine themselves in the same light as the young Michael Faraday, William Shakespeare or Bernard Palissy, who had to overcome obstacles and failures in their course of their successful lives.

There is a clear socio-political edge to both Chilton-Young and Smiles' writings, aimed at marginalising working or labouring classes through middle class self-reliance. It is no surprise that many self-help manuals address their readers as 'gentleman', part of their attempt to convince middle classes that their 'refinement' as 'men of education' should not be at odds with the ability to pick up tools and undertake manual labour oneself<sup>50</sup>. Asa Briggs noted how Smiles' work and the culture of self-reliance was an attempt to re-define the word 'gentleman', severing connotations with ideas of superfluity, rank and inherited wealth, and emphasising moral worth<sup>51</sup>. As 'gentleman' was re-defined, purged of excess, so too was amateur practice, which became more closely aligned with 'improvement', 'professional' or 'study'.

This willingness to undertake manual work avoided the need for middle classes to rely on external labourers who, according to many authors of the day, were liable to be lazy and likely to eke out as much money as possible from the simplest of tasks through underworking<sup>52</sup>. Phillis Browne advised her female audience that 'paid labourers almost always disappoint those who trust them'<sup>53</sup>, and the opening entries of George and Weedon Grossmith's *The Diary Of A Nobody* comically recount the difficulties the hapless protagonist, Mr Pooter, has with the labourers he employs – particularly the painter and decorator Mr Putley, who manages to 'talk over' Mr Pooter, convincing him to consent to an expensive and expansive decorative scheme<sup>54</sup>.

The marginalisation of hired hands is a recurrent theme of late nineteenth-century how-to literature, regardless of the gender of the target audience.

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<sup>50</sup> Ellis Davidson, *Amateur House Carpenter* (London: Chapman & Hall, 1875), ix.

<sup>51</sup> Briggs, p. 30.

<sup>52</sup> Chilton-Young, p. 4.

<sup>53</sup> Phillis Browne, *What Girls Can Do: A Book for Mothers and Daughters* (London: Cassell & Co, 1880), pp. 256-7.

<sup>54</sup> George and Weedon Grossmith, *The Diary of a Nobody* (London: Penguin Books, 1965), p. 27.

Chilton-Young went as far to criticise mechanics and labourers for appropriating the term 'working man' for themselves, contesting the stereotype of the mechanical and physical impotence of white-collar professions<sup>55</sup>. This perhaps reflects the middle class guilt that derives from having physically undemanding jobs and a sense of alienation from one's body, reflected in Smiles' exaggerated stories of individual accomplishment. He and other authors of the time stressed the dignity of amateur gentlemanly work: even if you did not actually pick up the tools oneself, by knowing about how something was done you could keep a careful watch on the people you had employed<sup>56</sup>.

This emphasis on productivity in the late nineteenth century in turn altered the way in which the word amateur was defined. The 1881 edition of *Design and Work* reflects this definitional re-configuration, stating that there was no reason why the amateur

... should remain the "careless whistling boy", careless alike of himself and his vocation, but become the skilful mechanic, and in every sense of the word the "professional amateur"<sup>57</sup>.

An editorial that appeared in the journal later in the year further characterised this new trope of the 'professional amateur' stating that 'the entire kingdom of amateurism' was not exclusively populated by those whose attention passed from one fad to another, but also included 'many hard working students who set themselves to accomplish one thing at a time, and overcome its difficulties first, ere they attempt to plunge into the mazes of another'<sup>58</sup>. In the late nineteenth century diligent, serious and hard-working middle class individuals, spending free time on productive tasks, formed a prominent group within this 'kingdom of amateurism'.

This mixing of the terms professional and amateur in the early 1880s constitutes evidence of the blurred boundary between professional and

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<sup>55</sup> Chilton-Young, pp. 13-14. Davidson also revives the spirit of the gentlemanly amateur stating that their knowledge of science often means their production excels that of the artisan, p. 100.

<sup>56</sup> Browne, pp. 256-7. Davidson, x.

<sup>57</sup> 'Amateurs' *Design and Work* 251 (19 February 1881), p. 142. Other works that stress avoidance of wastefulness and purposeless activity in line with this idea of the 'professional amateur' include John Black, *Saxon's Everyday Guide to Carpentry* (London: W R Russell & Co, 1898), preface.

<sup>58</sup> 'Amateur Inventors' *Design and Work* 264 (21 May 1881), p. 401.

amateur space. Amateur practice became allied with the notion of a self-directed, persevering, hard-working student, the 'professional amateur'. This form of committed practice is imbued with all the virtues of a Smilesian conception of self-reliance<sup>59</sup>. So thorough was the imperative of self-reliance that professionals also benefitted. For example, one professional tradesman, 'F.M.' from Dover, wrote to the Smiles-influenced journal *Amateur Work* stating that the journal's articles proved useful for his work, allowing him to make things himself rather than relying on cheap, poor quality substitutes<sup>60</sup>. The editor, Chilton-Young, was keen to emphasise his journal's worth to professionals in his reply to this letter<sup>61</sup>. The professional handyman's commendation of *Amateur Work* epitomises the overlap between designations of amateur and professional. Both amateurs and professionals were 'professionalising', finding ways of increasing efficiency and building up the knowledge and expertise to better survive in the middle class world of the nineteenth century.

This encouragement of self-reliance accords with capitalist notions of entrepreneurship, efficiency, profit maximisation and saving money: it is no surprise Marxist historian Eric Hobsbawm claimed that Smiles 'hymned the virtues of capitalism'<sup>62</sup>. Embedded within the moral worth of self-help were the clear financial returns that result from not hiring external labourers. As Chilton-Young mentioned in 1886:

... you shall find yourself in pocket at the end of the year merely through resorting to self-help.<sup>63</sup>

'F.M.' also commented on the economic sense of self-help, describing the savings he made after following certain articles' instruction:

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<sup>59</sup> '...that nothing creditable can be accomplished without application and diligence. The student must not be daunted by difficulties but conquer them by patience and perseverance' Smiles, *Self-help*, preface to the 1866 edition.

<sup>60</sup> F.M. 'A Tradesman Opinion Of *Amateur Work*' in 'Notes and Queries' *Amateur Work* 5 (London: Ward, Lock and Co, 1886), p. 94. James Lukin another contributor to *Amateur Work* also comments on the use of the journal for professional practitioners. James Lukin 'Amateur and Professional Work Contrasted' *Amateur Work* 2 (1882), p. 445.

<sup>61</sup> See editor's response, *ibid*, p 94.

<sup>62</sup> Eric Hobsbawm, *Age of Revolution: 1789-1848* (London: Abacus, 1962), p. 228.

<sup>63</sup> Chilton-Young, p. 4.

Your paper has I reckon saved me about £1 for each number. I mention one case. Through the articles “Gilding on glass” I was enabled to paint my own fascia in gold, measuring 25 feet by 2 ½ feet, at a cost of £6 10s. It took me thirteen days to do and the lowest estimate I could get for the same thing was £18 10s.<sup>64</sup>

As with more recent booms in do-it-yourself home improvement projects<sup>65</sup>, there was a clear economic rationale that underpinned domestic labour. This Victorian work ethic prioritised notions of efficiency, productivity and financial prudence that began to pervade all spaces, amateur and professional alike: equipping the individual to survive more effectively – socially, economically, politically and morally – in the everyday life of modern capitalism.

The increasing ‘professionalisation’ of amateur space in the late nineteenth century leads us to an unexpected comparison with the intensified standardisation and regularisation of professional space in the work of Frederick Winslow Taylor’s *Principles of Scientific Management* (1911). At first glance, Taylor’s seminal work concerning productivity and efficiency in the factory seem at odds with amateur labour. He advocates a shift from systems of labour organisation based on encouraging individual worker initiative through incentives, to management rooted in the scientific method: the ‘one best method and best implement can only be discovered or developed through a scientific study and analysis of all the methods in use’<sup>66</sup>. Taylor is thought to epitomise the removal of obstructions to the free-flowing functioning of production, but as I have demonstrated through analysis of late nineteenth-century self-reliance, these systematic means of organisation extended beyond the professional arena. Indeed, it is precisely the competitiveness of the self-reliant mentality that Taylor co-opts for his own theories of scientific management.

He cites the example of the American baseball player or the English cricketer who ‘strain every nerve to secure victory’ in order to avoid being branded as

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<sup>64</sup> F.M. ‘A Tradesman Opinion’, p. 94.

<sup>65</sup> Albert Roland explains that the boom in post-war do-it-yourself in America was largely driven by a desire to save money. Albert Roland ‘Do-It-Yourself: A Walden for the Million?’ *American Quarterly* 10:2 (1958), p. 155.

<sup>66</sup> Frederick Winslow Taylor, *The Principles of Scientific Management* (London: Harper and Row, 1974), p. 25.

a 'quitter'<sup>67</sup>. Similarly, Taylor recognised the importance of harnessing individual motivation for the pursuit of greater efficiency explaining how one of his subjects of analysis – a non-skilled worker called 'Schmidt' – walked to and from work at the same pace because he was keen to complete a day's work and return to making his garden wall at home<sup>68</sup>. Both examples demonstrate the productivity, determination, willingness and moral character that were demonstrated in work undertaken outside the regulated, market-driven realm of 'professional' space. The former shows the will to succeed in competitive sports that Taylor wants to map on to work practices, with the same label of 'quitter' being assigned to those who do not work hard. The latter shows how Schmidt's 'garden wall', which was constructed outside of work hours, drives him to come to work and leave work with the same enthusiasm. The work ethic often thought to be typical of professional space, derives from the amateur ethos of self-reliance. A few decades on, Siegfried Kracauer hints at this relationship when he explained how it was the 'humane foundations of Taylorism' that ensured its spread as a dominant form of management and labour organisation<sup>69</sup>.

### **Why the 'professional amateur' is not a 'professional'**

Further examination of the link between Taylor's theses and amateur space will be analysed in case studies below. But in the context of this historical overview of the 'professionalisation' of amateur space one could conclude that the Victorian work ethic completely eroded the division between amateur and professional under the broad banner of efficiency and optimum productivity. However, this would be a conflation too far and would equate amateur work too simply with the conventional conditions of labour within wider capitalist structures. Despite the links between amateur practice and notions of nineteenth century middle class efficiency, amateur space is still 'differential' within the structures of capitalism with inherent idiosyncrasies that derive from its supplemental position.

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<sup>67</sup> Ibid, p. 13.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid, p. 43.

<sup>69</sup> Siegfried Kracauer, 'Travel and Dance' in Siegfried Kracauer, *The Mass Ornament: Weimar Essays* trans. by Thomas Y Levin (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London: Harvard University Press, 1995), p. 70.



The case studies on amateur chicken keeping and tool organisation aim to elucidate some of the non-conventional forms of productivity that arise from the amateur practice. For a start the amateur practitioner, often with a lack of training, can patently be unproductive, error-prone and time wasting, and produce objects that are put straight in the dustbin. Often to rely on hired hands is the most efficient and productive way of constructing something or putting to right a cracked ceiling or broken boiler: there are clear limits to the amateur's productivity.

More important, however, are the dialectics of function and ornament that underpin forms of productivity in amateur space. Amateur space is not entirely ornamental or superfluous as shown by the emergence of the 'professional amateur', with writers from the mid nineteenth century onwards urging people to channel excess productivity toward specifically useful tasks. Neither is amateur labour fully productive: the essential non-necessity of its happening presents a difficulty for anyone trying to justify its practice on these grounds alone. Amateur labour sits between these notions of utility and superfluity and instead demonstrates characteristics that Siegfried Kracauer observed in the mass ornament of synchronised dance.

In Kracauer's essay 'The Mass Ornament' the parallel he draws between the hands of the factory worker and the legs of the Tiller Girls, a group of synchronised dancers, is perhaps the most resonant image. But his description of the Tiller girls does not announce the subjugation of culture to the mathematical precision of the machine. Instead he states that:

Viewed from the perspective of reason, the mass ornament reveals itself as a mythological cult that is masquerading in the garb of abstraction.<sup>70</sup>

Instead of celebrating technological, abstract forms of ordering social behaviour and society, the mass ornament is evidence of the persistence of mythology and 'uncontrolled nature' in modern culture; the 'rational and

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<sup>70</sup> Siegfried Kracauer, 'The Mass Ornament' in Kracauer, p. 83.

empty form of the cult<sup>71</sup> all the more appealing to wide audiences through its apparent submission to a rational abstract ethos.

As Kracauer identifies the irrational myth that lies at the heart of capitalism's so-called rationality, so we can identify the subjective and aesthetic desire that lies at the heart of the 'professionalisation' of amateur labour. Echoing Kracauer, one could state that viewed from the perspective of its optional status, amateur labour reveals itself as the pursuit of personal desires, will and fancy that is masquerading in the garb of function. What is familiar to both these cultural forms – the mass ornament and amateur labour – is that they both testify to the increasing redundancy of the function-ornament dichotomy. Instead modern leisure that includes the practice of private hobbies is characterised by the 'ornamentization of function and the functionalization of ornament'<sup>72</sup>, as cultural theorist and translator of Kracauer's work Thomas Levin has stated.

Production that occupies amateur space is neither functional-useful nor ornamental-superfluous alone, but represents the conflation of these classifications. Their mixture also clearly brings into focus the emergence of a middle class ideology that celebrates efficiency, views idleness with scepticism, and attempts to make superfluous activities useful in some way, either through claims of their direct utility, their role in a process of knowledge acquisition, or through making output marketable in some way. This is demonstrated by late nineteenth-century amateur rail modellers who defended their hobby as a way to understand the way steam engines work<sup>73</sup>. Yet the negotiation of functionality and superfluity is inherent to all craft practice that has the potential to serve some use without ever losing its essential non-necessity. Just think of an individual subscribing to a chair-making course: sophisticated methods of production render the knowledge of this skill anachronistic, superfluous, given that plenty of other people could

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<sup>71</sup> Ibid, p. 84.

<sup>72</sup> Thomas Y Levin, 'Introduction' to Kracauer, *The Mass Ornament*, p. 18. Charles and Ray Eames also charted this terrain between (modernist) function and (non-modernist) ornament proposing deploying term 'Functioning decoration' to describe their collection and presentation of toys and well-crafted objects from everyday life within their modern interior. See Pat Kirkham, 'Objects and Functioning Decoration' chapter four in Pat Kirkham *Charles and Ray Eames: Designers of the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1995), pp. 143-199.

<sup>73</sup> See chapter three.

make a chair much quicker and to a much higher standard. Yet skills learnt and engagement with making serve some function in better arming the individual to operate within capitalism's structures.

The unique position of amateur space, the idiosyncrasies that mark it as differential, is better exposed by overlapping 'amateur' with neighbouring terms such as 'professional' or 'student', rather than continuing to epitomise amateur practitioners as 'outside' the system. Amateur space is a zone of critical thinking, acquisition of skill, and appropriation of material, that is freer than most forms of labour organisation yet at the same time does not constitute a blatant 'threat' to the interests of capital. The challenge of this chapter is to demonstrate how amateur space is a permeable category *within* capitalist production, and examine how it draws off and feeds normative modes of operation whilst essentially demonstrating unique characteristics.

Case studies in this chapter are selected to emphasise amateur practice as the 'differential' space within capitalism, situated within its structures but inherently subversive, with a small 's'. The central question concerns the unique characteristics of amateur production, and how the dialectics of functionality and superfluity are continually negotiated, as mentioned above.

Carpentry, or woodworking, provides a good example of purposive amateur practice because it was often undertaken with a specific goal in mind. In the late nineteenth century the self-help journals such as *Design and Work* (1876-1881), *Amateur Work* (1881-1891) edited by Chilton-Young, and the *Illustrated Carpenter and Builder* (1877-1971) show the growing reach of what we could describe as 'do-it-yourself' practice – inventing, repairing, tinkering, model-making, building, home improvement and maintenance (figure 1). However, these practices were more likely to be described under the broad umbrella of 'amateur carpentry' or 'amateur mechanics'; 'do-it-yourself' was a later post-war term that does not appear in literature from this era<sup>74</sup>. These journals

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<sup>74</sup> Most existing studies on this subject locate the practice of 'do-it-yourself' in the environment of post-war affluence rather than seeing its roots in late nineteenth century middle class self-reliance a feature of the historiography noted by Paul Atkinson in his special issue of the *Journal of Design History*. See Paul Atkinson, 'Do It Yourself: Democracy and Design' special issue of *Journal of Design History* 19:1 (2006) pp. 1-8; Karal Ann Marling, *As Seen on TV: Visual Culture in Everyday Life in the 50s* (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London: Harvard University Press, 1994); Elizabeth Shove et al., *The Design of*

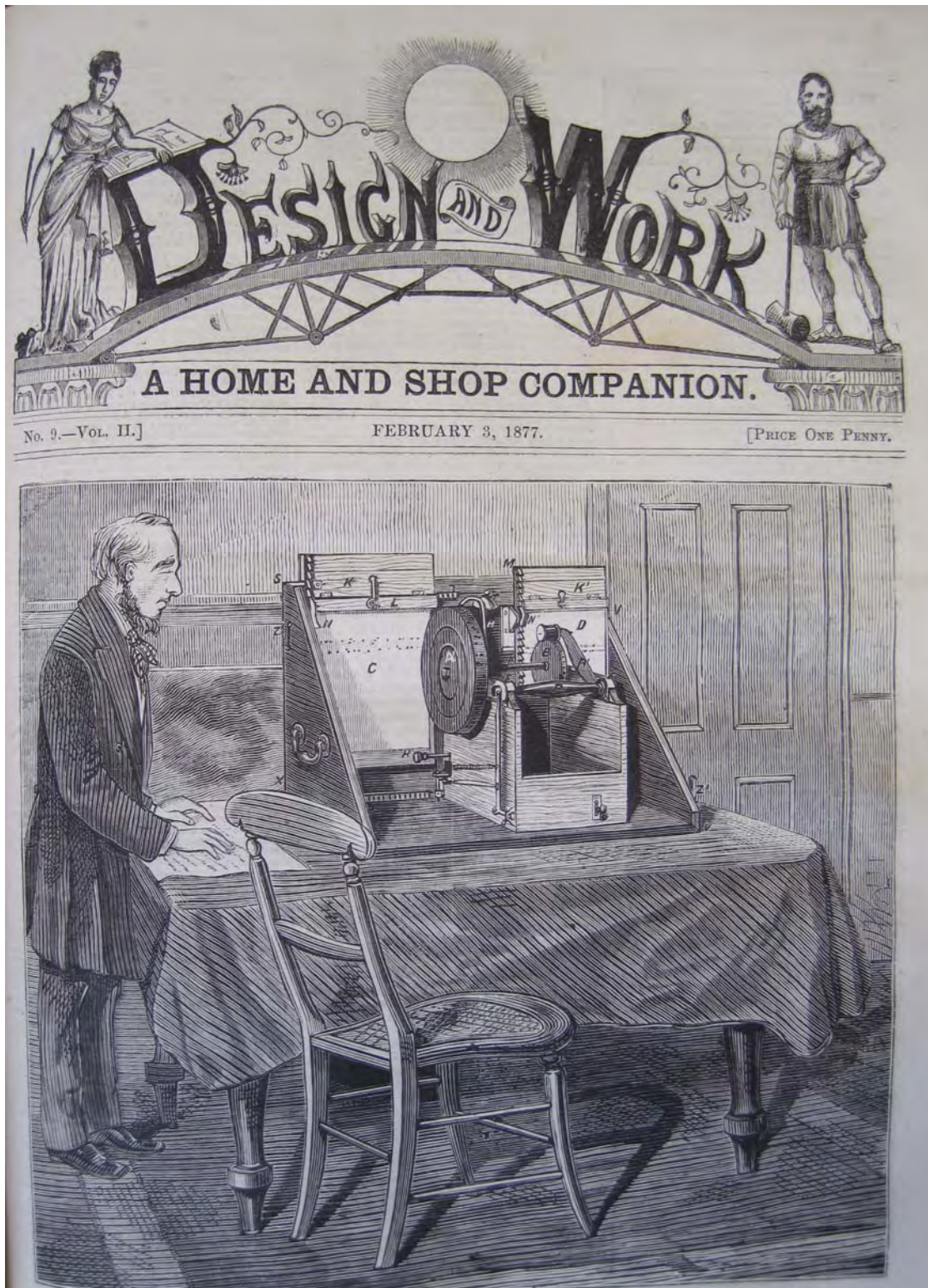


Figure 1: Front cover of *Design and Work: A Home and Shop Companion* showing a writing machine for the blind (1877).

mentioned above give countless examples of various crafts that the amateur was invited to practice, including the building of desks, conservatories, chairs, rustic garden furniture, organs, house plumbing, and shelving units for entire libraries. All enable something to happen after the initial making has taken place.

Out of these many different crafts, I have decided to focus on the construction of suburban, backyard chicken coops. Crafting poultry units facilitated the 'non-craft' practice of keeping a brood of chicken, yet unlike working on a static decorative object, chicken coops were explicitly constructed with a view to future production and required considered attention and planning in order to function. Chicken keeping contravenes this expectation that amateur space is non-productive. The egg, itself a metaphor for bringing forth life, is produced over and over again and to achieve this continual production chicken houses and runs had to dictate and direct the unpredictable behaviour of domesticated birds towards an 'end goal'. In the context of the late nineteenth and early twentieth-century shortages in egg production, this mostly meant contributing to household food supply and generating small profits from any excess supply.

These two reasons – the importance of management, and the ease of making small profits in the late nineteenth century – qualify suburban poultry keeping as an instance in which amateur space was not confined to the passive occupation of leisure time or the production of essentially useless things alone. Instead, in this case the occupation of amateur space required diligent management in quasi-imitation of the structures employed by firms. The chair, table, musical instrument or shelving unit built through amateur labour also requires levels of diligence, standards of management and a determination to achieve an 'end goal' comparable to chicken keeping. Yet the fact that chickens require constant management and produce an easily sellable product means that interactions with markets and imitations of normative capitalist practice are more explicit, thus helping to recover amateur practice from the isolated position it is so often occupies.

In the second case study I demonstrate the connection between amateur organisation of tools for domestic carpentry and comparable systems in retail, workshop and other non-amateur settings. The tool rack and the tool wall are the central focus. This permits me to focus on the way in which the organisation and pre-arrangement of the amateur's workstation has a bearing on the way labour is subsequently deployed. Decisions pertaining to the placement of tools are unique to each maker but they are also dependant on wider cultural expectations on how space is ordered. For example, why are toolboxes so popular and why are they often easy to collapse and put away? There is an absence of 'craft' here, if we adopt conventional definitions of the word based on making, but there is an intervention based on arrangement and positioning. A pile of tools mixed together in a box is different to their systematic placement on a tool wall, or their presentation in retail spaces, despite the non-changing materiality of the tool. The chronological parameters for this case study span from earlier incarnations of tool organisation in late nineteenth-century manuals (coinciding with early uses of the term 'professional amateur') to the invention of perforated hardboard (pegboard) in post-war America, an artificial hardboard that had pre-drilled holes arranged in a grid structure, which provided an automatic organisational framework<sup>75</sup>.

The goal in both case studies is to demonstrate the closeness of amateur practice to notions of productivity, effective management, sensible storage and record keeping – principles that are mostly affiliated with Taylorism<sup>76</sup> – while maintaining that amateur space remains differential within capitalism. Amateur practice is not identical to conventional forms of production: notions of productivity are instead stretched. For example, the endless digression typical of idiosyncratic amateur methods provides the space for innovation and experimentation, and perhaps more surprisingly limitations on amateur resources encouraged forms of hyper-productivity whereby tool organisation was perfectly tailored to the individual amateur (if the right tool for the job

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<sup>75</sup> Lewis Edwin Akers, *Particle Board and Hardboard* (Oxford: Pergamon, 1966), p. 162. Like all hardboard, perforated hardboard was made by exploding and compressing woodchip and is distinguished from particleboard due to the use of inherent adhesive properties of the wood pulp itself. Information from Food and Agricultural Organisation conference of the UN 1954 in Akers, p. 125.

<sup>76</sup> Taylor, p. 38.

was not to hand then it would not be done). Differential forms of productivity signal both the strong links with the everyday while subtly departing from its structures in unexpected ways.



## Poultry keeping 1870-1920

In his painting *An English Autumn Afternoon* (1852-55) the Victorian artist Ford Madox Brown defied the artistic conventions of his day by depicting a scene of everyday life – the view from his back-garden in the London suburb of Hampstead<sup>77</sup> (figure 2). His picture does not merely illustrate a pastoral idyll just out of reach of London's inexorable growth, but two examples of amateur labour that were to grow in popularity throughout the latter half of the nineteenth century: pigeon-keeping, symbolised by the pigeon house in the foreground, and keeping chicken in the backyard, as shown on the lower left side of the painting (see detail). The walled-in chicken coop is clearly not the main subject of the picture. However, this supplemental position, also accentuated in the painting by its representation as a female activity, should not draw attention away from the growth and popularity of suburban chicken keeping among middle class women and men from the mid nineteenth century onwards, as demonstrated by the plethora of manuals, treatises and other publications targeted at the amateur poultry keeper<sup>78</sup>. Chicken keeping played a key role in the construction of the suburban idyll linked to the idea of effective, productive stewardship of land, and the activity continues to play a role in negotiating meanings of suburbia today (see chapter three 'Chicken and Egg'). As American scholar Susan Merrill Squier has stated, in her book *Poultry Science, Chicken Culture*, 'chickens are good to think with'<sup>79</sup>.

Late nineteenth and early twentieth-century suburban chicken coop construction provides an effective example of the purposive nature of amateur space. The outbreak of the First World War, falling within the chronological parameters of this case study, clearly encouraged the drive to use land productively<sup>80</sup>. However, effective management of the land, in quasi-imitation of professional equivalents, did not just occur during periods of wartime austerity, but during periods of relative affluence. Effective

<sup>77</sup> Andrew Saint, 'Introduction' *London Suburbs* (London: Merrell Holberton Publishers, 1999), p. 10.

<sup>78</sup> Lewis Wright, *Illustrated Book of Poultry* (London: Cassell & Co, 1880); William Powell Owen, *An Income From Backyard Fowls! The Working Man's Vade Mecum* (London: Poultry Press, 1911); Elizabeth Watts, *The Poultry Yard* (London: Routledge & Sons, 1893); Lewis Wright, *The Practical Poultry Keeper* (London: Cassell & Co, 1899). This last book was in its 20<sup>th</sup> edition by 1899, demonstrating its popularity.

<sup>79</sup> Susan Merrill Squier, *Poultry Science, Chicken Culture: A Partial Alphabet* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2011), p. 4.

<sup>80</sup> Fred Hobs, *Backyard Poultry Keeping* (London: Merrit and Hatcher, 1920), p. 45.





Figure 2: Ford Madox Brown, *An English Autumn Afternoon* (1852-4) and detail of the bottom left hand corner depicting suburban chicken keeping.

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stewardship was always essential to keeping chickens on a confined run due to the regularity of maintenance tasks. Manuals stressed the need for routine feeding and a total cleaning of droppings between two and three times a week<sup>81</sup>. Chicken keepers could not completely turn away from some degree of planning: idealised and pastoral notions of chicken keeping required hard work. This inability of the amateur chicken keeper to oppose standardised modes of capitalist organisation outright, demonstrates the chapter-wide thesis that amateur space is closer to normative space than we might expect, yet at the same time retains its differential characteristics.

One key element of this differential quality of amateur chicken keeping is the way in which the division of labour is 'miniaturised'. The multitude of tasks in chicken keeping – building a house and run, cleaning, collecting eggs, preparation for exhibition – compel the suburban chicken keeper to be 'more or less a Jack-of-all-trades' according to one author<sup>82</sup>, undertaking several different tasks and allocating resources in much the same way as a good manager. In this instance, amateur space becomes a type of training ground for principles of good management, providing lessons for how to be efficient and effective in salaried contexts. This ability to exercise control over the labour process could be read as the diffusion of Taylor's ideas of scientific management in to everyday life: Taylor did not limit his claims of scientific management to professional contexts alone, stating there is a 'science for each element of a man's work'<sup>83</sup>. The late nineteenth century chicken keeper needed jobs to be undertaken by other labourers – domestic servants, dependents, paid workers – which necessitated decisions to be taken as to what task suited which labourer. This amateur craft was not solitary but required management and delegation.

Despite imitation of the efficient processes common to commercial agricultural farms and capitalist management, amateur space only ever verges on total capitulation to these principles due to the fact that labour-

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<sup>81</sup> Wright, *Illustrated Book of Poultry*, p. 3; Watts, p. 4; William Powell Owen, *An Income From Backyard Fowls*, pp. 70-2; Davidson, p. 132; Browne, pp. 279-281.

<sup>82</sup> Thomas Edward Brown, *Home Made Poultry Appliances* (London: A Pearson, 1921), p. 13.

<sup>83</sup> Taylor, p. 36.

power retains in the hands of the worker, rather than external capitalist<sup>84</sup>. Chicken keepers were often managers of labour, but it was miniaturised, confined to the ordering of the domestic economy. This miniaturisation grants chicken keeping its differential qualities, the diversion from normative modes of production under the banner of efficiency and keeping a good home. For example, the extreme attention to minute details evident in the keeping of fancy chicken to be exhibited at agricultural fairs, the aestheticisation of the productive hen, and the ambivalent attitudes towards making a profit from such endeavours, show just a few diversions that amateur chicken keeping takes, all of which will be explored in greater detail below.

## Context

The confusion as to what precisely constituted amateur suburban chicken keeping in 1870 justifies the rationale for starting the case study on this date. In the immediate aftermath of the ban on cock fighting in 1848, chicken keeping was entrenched between two classes of fowl breeders, ‘those who rear them for the convenience of having a few chicken at hand to kill, and a few hens on the goodness of whose eggs they can depend; and those whose only object is to increase their stock as fast as possible as a matter of business, and solely for gain and profit’<sup>85</sup>. From 1870 an increasing number of publications and cheap pamphlets targeted the middle ground – addressed to the suburban chicken keeper – to instruct and advise how to make chicken coops, manage a smallholding and potentially make a profit. The interest was burgeoning for two reasons. Firstly, the gains of keeping hens on confined runs no longer outweighed the costs, with egg output covering the expenses of building a run, with the potential to undercut the prices in grocery stores<sup>86</sup>. This was due to the dual effects of urbanisation: the reduction of the number of rural agricultural smallholdings, and rising demand for eggs and meat.

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<sup>84</sup> Harry Braverman, *Labour and Monopoly Capital: The Degradation of Work in the Twentieth Century* (New York and London: Monthly Review Press, 1974), p. 58.

<sup>85</sup> Edmund Saul Dixon, *Ornamental and Domestic Poultry: Their History and Their Management*. Reprinted from the “*Gardener’s Chronicle*” (London, 1848), p. 207.

<sup>86</sup> John Henry Walsh, *The Economical Housekeeper: Being Practical Advice for Brewing, Preserving and Pickling at Home, To Which are Added Directions for the Management of the Dairy, Poultry-yard, Laundry and Cellar* (London: Routledge & Co, 1857), p. 263. Wright, *The Practical Poultry Keeper*, p. 41.

These conditions increased British dependence on imports<sup>87</sup> and added extra impetus to keeping hens in a confined suburban area.

Secondly, by 1870, the infrastructure that had previously been in place to breed poultry for cock-fighting had been redirected towards rearing hens for exhibition, commonly known as pursuit of the ‘fancy’. The practice was already starting to establish itself in the 1850s<sup>88</sup>, but from 1870 it experienced its ‘heyday’ amongst backyarders according to retrospective reflections of several poultry authors<sup>89</sup>. This re-configuration of poultry production in the United Kingdom away from cock fighting towards breeding for exhibition and keeping hens in a confined area provides the backdrop for the growing popularity of suburban amateur poultry keeping at this time.

### **The space of the chicken coop**

The smallest land area required for the rearing of poultry is cited by most authors of chicken advice and management manuals of this period as between 4 to 6 feet square and 5 to 6 foot high for the house, with an extended separate ‘run’ (10 to 20 feet long and 4 to 8 feet wide)<sup>90</sup>. These dimensions could be accommodated within the confines of most late-nineteenth century suburban gardens, and it is this modern space that came to define the practice. In no source is the link between poultry rearing, amateurism and suburbia more explicit than in Chilton-Young’s manual *Every Man His Own Mechanic*, where he describes how to construct the ‘Amateur Suburban Fowl House’ – a do-it-yourself chicken coop construction (figure 3). In his ‘how-to’ instructions he advises his audience of amateur carpenters to use the boundaries of the suburban backyard to act as the back wall of a 6 to 7 foot

<sup>87</sup> Wright provides figures that prove the rise of French egg imports from £278,422 of imports in 1856 to £1,265,484 in 1871. Wright, *Illustrated book of poultry*, 89. William Bernhard Tegetmeier, *Poultry For The Table and Market Versus Fancy Fowls. With an Exposition of the Fallacies of Poultry Farming* (London: H Cox, 1893), p. 59.

<sup>88</sup> Evidence of infrastructural provision for breeding hens and local groups devoted to the judging of poultry can be seen in *A Directory to the Principal Exhibitors of Poultry, Pigeons and Rabbits by an Essex Amateur* (Colchester, 1859).

<sup>89</sup> Brown introduction to Sidney Lewer, *The World’s Poultry Congress. Handbook and Souvenir of the British Section* (London: The Feathered World, 1921), p. 11. Watts, p. 29.

<sup>90</sup> Wright, *The Illustrated Book of Poultry*, p. 1. Davidson, pp. 129 and 131. L B Collier, *Poultry Appliances and How to Make Them* (London: Poultry Press, 1921), p. 49. Hobs, p. 7. H Francklin, *Utility Fowl Houses and Appliances* (London: Dawbarn & Ward, 1903), pp. 3-4. ‘Amateur Woodworker’, ‘Combined Chicken and Pigeon House’, in the ‘Wrinkles for Amateurs’ section *Amateur Work* 2 (1882), p. 6.

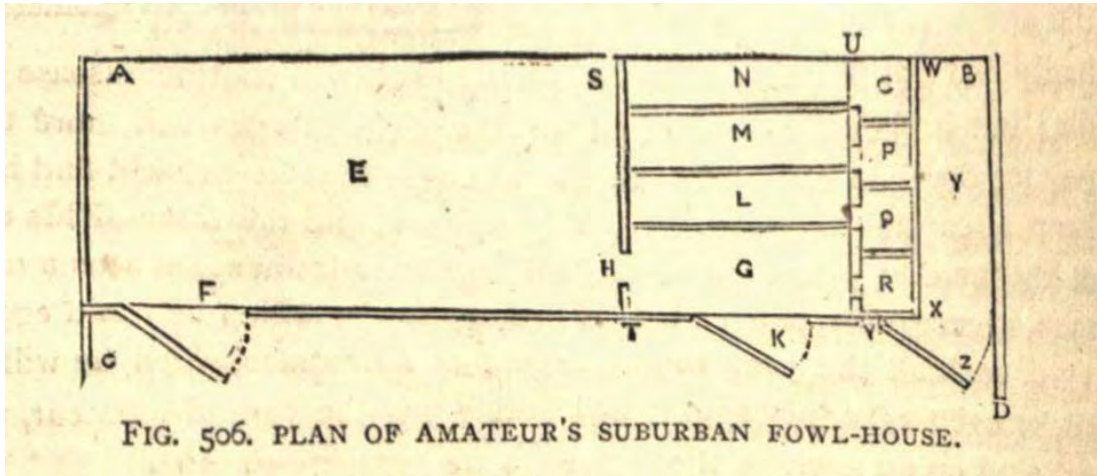


FIG. 506. PLAN OF AMATEUR'S SUBURBAN FOWL-HOUSE.

Figure 3: Francis Chilton-Young's plan for an 'Amateur Suburban Fowl House' (1886).

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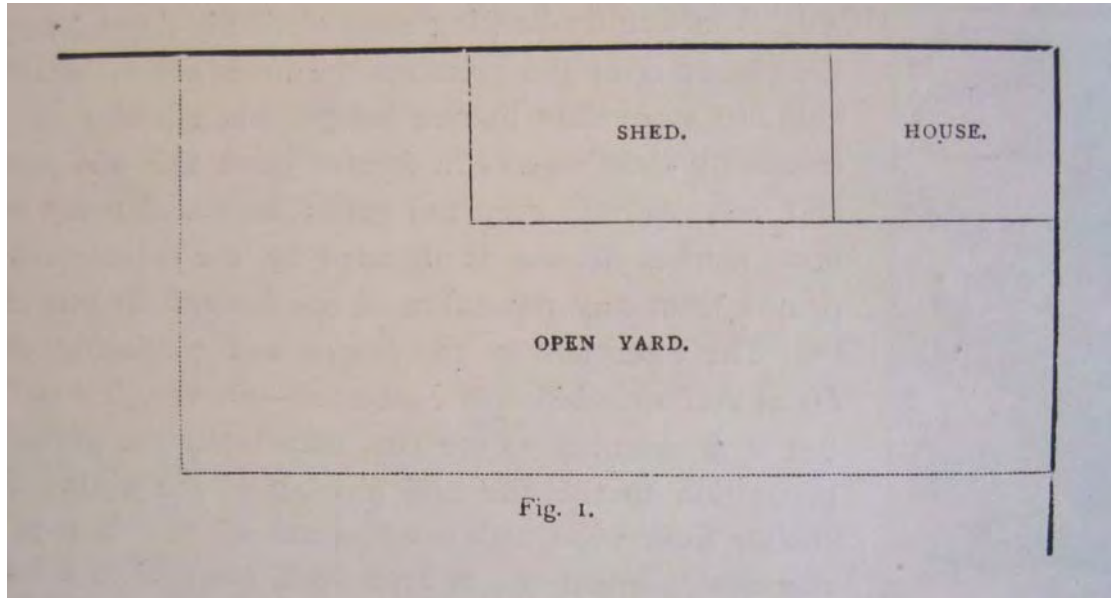


Figure 4: Lewis Wright's simple layout for a backyard chicken run (1880).

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by

**UNDERGROUND**

Figure 5: Stanislaus S Longley, *Gardening by Underground* (1933).

**Movable Fowl House.** **Nest of Twelve Laying or Hatching Boxes.** **Cheap Game-Proof and Chicken Murdles.**  
 For enclosing CHICKENS, BANTAMS, BRAHMAS, C-CHICKS, DUCKS, OR RABBITS. **No. 180.**





**CASH PRICES.**  
 No. 14 4 ft. square .. £2 15s. 6d.  
 No. 13 3 ft. " .. £2 10s. 6d.  
 No. 12 2 ft. " .. £2 15s. 6d.  
 If mounted on wheels, 10s. extra.

**No. 60a. Patent Chicken Nursery or Bantam House.**



**CASH PRICE, 25s. each. Two Carriage Paid.**

**No. 20. Range of Improved Poultry Yards.**



**PRICES ON APPLICATION.**

**No. 45a. Fattening Pen.**



**CASH PRICE, for four Fowls, £3 10s.**

**No. 64. Hatching and Nest Box.**



**REGISTERED COPYRIGHT. CASH PRICE, Lime-whited inside, 3s. 6d. each.**

**No. 68. New Portable Coop with Run Combined.**  
 For GAME, CHICKENS, RABBITS. CAT PROOF, RAT PROOF, AND SPARROW PROOF.



**REGISTERED COOP. CASH PRICE, 13s. each; larger size for fifty young Ducks, 30s.**

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**Houses made to Fanciers' Own Designs.**

*No Fees.*

**No. 205—COMPOSITE LEAN TO POULTRY HOUSE AND COVERED RUN.** Size 1, 4 ft. by 4 ft., run 8 ft. long, £4 10s. Size 2, 5 ft. by 5 ft., run 12 ft. long, £5 10s. Size 3, 6 ft. by 6 ft., run 15 ft. long, £7 10s.

*Carriage Paid.*

**Any other size to order.**



**Best Materials and Workmanship.**

*Estimates Free.*

**No. 167—SPAX ROOF POULTRY HOUSE AND COVERED RUN.** Size 1, 3 ft. by 3 ft., run 4 ft. long, £3 15s. Size 2, 3 ft. by 3 ft., run 6 ft. long, £4 15s. Size 3, 3 ft. by 3 ft., run 8 ft. long, £5 10s.

**Houses, Pens, Coops, and Runs of every description.**



**Houses made to Fanciers' own Designs.**

*Estimates Free.*

**No. 211—NEW COMBINED POULTRY AND PIGS HOUSE. Price, £7 15s.**

**FULL ILLUSTRATED CATALOGUE POST FREE.**

**WRINCH & SONS, IPSWICH & LONDON.**

Figure 6: Boulton and Paul and Wrinch and Sons advertisements for readymade poultry units (1893).



deep chicken house, to which is added the façade, a roof and internal fittings<sup>91</sup>. The physical space of the chicken coop relied on the structure of the suburban plot, a material relationship that provides an apt metaphor for the intimate relationship between keeping hens on confined runs, and the wider space of suburbia (figure 4).

The growth of suburbia at the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth century has been attributed to the attraction of a pastoral ideal; far away from the poor sanitation, disease, noise, industry and proximity of individuals within the city centre, yet still within reach of its labour opportunities through improved transport links<sup>92</sup>. The suburban garden played its part in this dichotomous construction, setting the 'distinction between public and private spheres' with the areas out front used for display and the backyard used for vegetables and relaxation<sup>93</sup>. Barson hints at the productive potential of the back garden as a place for growing vegetables, but not enough scholarly attention has been devoted to the suburban garden as a site of amateur work, reflective of a tendency to forget that a pastoral idyll needs to be maintained during free time. By paying heed to this phenomenon we can start to more fully understand the aestheticisation of suburban labouring in the garden, as shown for example in Stanislaus S Longley's 1933 London Underground poster depicting a city worker's joy in mowing one's lawn (figure 5), a mentality also evident in suburban chicken keeping, as one prominent author of late nineteenth-century practical poultry manuals Lewis Wright stated:

It has been a great gratification to observe the immense increase of this kind of domestic poultry keeping [for eggs] during the last 20 years, as seen especially from any railway, in the small London suburban gardens.<sup>94</sup>

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<sup>91</sup> Chilton-Young, *Every Man His Own Mechanic*, p. 466.

<sup>92</sup> Susie Barson, 'Infinite Variety in Brick and Stucco, 1840-1914' chapter in Saint ed. *London Suburbs*, pp. 64-65; David A Reeder, *Suburbanity and the Victorian City* (Leicester: Victorian Studies Centre, 1980), pp. 3-4; H J Dyos, *Victorian Suburb: A Study of Camberwell* (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1966), p. 22. For an account of growth of suburbia and its relationship to the emerging movement of studio craft see Lily Crowther, 'Et in Suburbia Ego: A Cultural Geography of Craft in the London Suburbs' *Journal of Modern Craft* 3:2 (2010), pp. 143-159.

<sup>93</sup> Barson, p. 93.

<sup>94</sup> Wright, *The Practical Poultry Keeper*, p. 41.

The poetic image of spotting chicken coops from the train carriage perfectly encapsulates how chicken keeping was a part of suburbia's pastoral ideal. The green patch of land attached to each home<sup>95</sup> was not just a garden for decoration or ornament but was a place of work, a 'backyard' in which 'backyarders'<sup>96</sup> worked productively to produce a specific end that was aesthetically appreciated.

Keeping hens on confined runs is an example of the suburban garden as a productive space. An emerging body of literature has started to challenge the notion that the garden was just an idealised representation of static nature in the early modern period, using manuals as primary source material to examine how forms of husbandry – keeping a herb garden, managing woodland, and creating fish ponds and rabbit warrens – was seen as a virtuous activity that occupied the spare time of gentlemen desiring an escape from public, city life<sup>97</sup>. By the late nineteenth century the proliferation of suburban households with gardens meant more could manage their land themselves and engage in husbandry, albeit within a miniaturised realm. Throughout the rest of the case study I will employ the term 'backyard' instead of 'garden' to account for the potential productivity of this space, following the terminology that poultry manual authors of this era also used.

The suburban backyard provided the necessary blank canvas in which chicken units could be constructed. Readymade chicken coops were available for keepers unwilling to make a coop themselves from firms like Boulton and Paul and Wrinch and Sons (figure 6)<sup>98</sup>. These units provided a shortcut for practitioners but many manual authors deemed them unsuitable because of their expense and their multiple design flaws: thinness of material, impermanence and draughtiness<sup>99</sup>. Manuals on chicken keeping insisted that

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<sup>95</sup> An indication of the garden's spatial relationship to the home is indicated by streetmaps in Dyos' analysis of Camberwell. Dyos, pp. 102 and 108.

<sup>96</sup> J Roach, *Eggs at a Profit Everyday of the Year: Showing How It Has Been Done By a Backyarder* (London: J Roach, 1918), p. 1.

<sup>97</sup> For the emergence of 'hands-on' gentlemanly husbandry in the early modern period and how the garden was likened to a field and became a site of pleasurable production see introduction to Michael Leslie and Timothy Raylor ed., *Culture and Cultivation in Early Modern England: Writing and the Land* (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1992); Katrina Ramsey, 'Inside and Outside the Seventeenth Century Garden' (unpublished Master's thesis, Royal College of Art, 2008).

<sup>98</sup> Wright mentions how readymade houses are sold by many manufacturers as cheaply as 25 shillings for four foot square. Wright, *The Practical Poultry Keeper*, p. 5.

<sup>99</sup> Brown, *Home Made Appliances*, p. 15. Francklin, p. 1.

amateur carpenters could build their own chicken coops and runs out of timber for half the cost of a pre-fabricated readymade<sup>100</sup>. Constructing one's own chicken house also meant that it could be tailored to the immediate environment, taking into account specific spatial irregularities.

There were three main features that were judged essential in designing a chicken coop: it should face south-southwest, both to catch the sun and to shield it against cold northerly winds<sup>101</sup>; they should be designed with good ventilation<sup>102</sup>; and should facilitate easy access to all areas to assist regular cleaning. Poor sanitation and draughty houses would result in sickly hens that were unproductive<sup>103</sup>.

To make cleaning operations easier within the house, it was often suggested that the chicken coop had to be detachable, including perches and floor areas:

Cleanliness must also be observed in matters of housing. The internal fittings of the house such as the perches, nest boxes, etc, should be movable so that they can be removed and scrubbed with water and soap regularly. The perches should be washed down with warm water and carbolic soap at reasonable intervals.<sup>104</sup>

The cheapest and most immediate means of constructing a chicken coop that adhered to this brief was to re-appropriate other materials. This could involve converting an out-building in the backyard, or using everyday items of packaging, such as wooden egg and orange boxes from grocery stores. With

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<sup>100</sup> Although the prices for chicken houses cited by manuals differed throughout the period, the home made chicken shed and run is often said to cost half of that of a readymade equivalent, Collier, pp. 49-54. Brown, *Home Made Appliances*, p. 9. 'Amateur Woodworker', 'Combined chicken and pigeon house', p. 11. Francklin, p. 1.

<sup>101</sup> Powell-Owen, *An Income From Backyard Fowls*, p. 4. Watson ed., *Amateur Poultry Keeping* (London: Poultry Press, 1919), p. 5. Brown, *Home Made Appliances*, p. 39. Hobs, p. 7. Browne, p. 276.

<sup>102</sup> To provide good ventilation 'Amateur Woodworker' suggested in *Amateur Work* the construction of crowns to go on top of the house, 'Amateur Woodworker', p. 7. Other authors recommend lifting the unit from the topsoil of the garden that was liable to get damp and rot: Hobs, pp. 11 and 41, Wright, *Illustrated book of poultry*, p. 3. Watson, *Amateur Poultry Keeping*, p. 5.

<sup>103</sup> All the manuals refer to the need to keep clean and well-ventilated conditions for the inmates. See Tegetmeier, *Poultry For The Table*, p. 101. Powell-Owen, *An Income From Backyard Fowls*, p. 7. Davidson, p. 129. Watson, *Amateur Poultry Keeping*, p. 7. Wright, *The Practical Poultry Keeper*, pp. 1-2. Anne de Salis, *New Laid Eggs. Hints for Amateur Poultry-Rearers* (London and New York: Longman, Green & Co, 1892), p. 6. Editor Poultry-Keeping, *Poultry and Rabbits for the Backyard* (London: Garden Life Press, 1918), p. 6. G.P., *The Lady Housekeeper's Poultry Yard: Its Pleasure and Profit* (London: George Routledge and Sons, 1868), p. 25. Edwards, *How the French Make Fowls Pay* (London, 1871), p. 9. Watts, p. 5.

<sup>104</sup> Watson ed. *How to Feed Hens for Egg Production* (London: Poultry Press, 1919), p. 38. For more references for the need for portable fittings see also Powell-Owen, *An Income From Backyard Fowls*, pp. 4 and 10. De Salis, pp. 2-3. 'Amateur Woodworker', p. 10.

nothing more than a few nails these could be transformed into nest boxes<sup>105</sup>.

One 'backyarder' who adopted this direct approach was J Roach from Kensington, London, who wrote in 1918 that 'almost any old shed can be used for poultry'. He used a coal shed but he also anecdotally recalled times in his youth when he kept chicken in a barrel and they were still able to lay<sup>106</sup>.

Chickens clearly did not require sumptuous quarters, as long as they had dry, well-ventilated and clean accommodation. Wright observed in the 1880s how chicken were even being kept on flat roof spaces<sup>107</sup>.

Nonetheless, most manuals encouraged the amateur carpenter to adopt a structured approach, rather than informal assemblage<sup>108</sup>. Manuals targeted at the amateur carpenter by Ellis Davidson, Chilton-Young, Wright and Francklin give fuller instructions. These followed the model of using lengths of timber to create a frame connected using butt, tongue-and-groove and various types of halving joints (figure 7). Tongue-and-grooved match lining weatherboarding or wooden panels were then attached to this frame with chicken wire frames used as windows for the house.

Even at this level of basic design, advice on chicken coop construction was varied. As shown in the first chapter arbiters subtly reflect bias and present a partial account of practice, never exactly replicating tacit knowledge, a limitation which manual authors writing on chicken coop construction were patently aware of<sup>109</sup>. The manual was not resolutely obeyed, but provided a framework of models and advice that assisted the backyarder. Like artists who wrote self-help treatises on the rules of perspective, manual authors often had direct first-hand experience, in this case working on backyard chicken coops<sup>110</sup>. The words of Roach reflects a particularly 'bottom-up'

<sup>105</sup> Watson, *Amateur Poultry Keeping*, pp. 4-6. Roach, p. 4. Powell-Owen *An Income From Backyard Fowls*, p. 4. One amateur correspondent even advised using broomsticks for perches. Hoc Signo, Comment in 'Notes and Queries' section of *Design and Work* 3 (29 September 1877), p. 398.

<sup>106</sup> Roach, 2-3. 'C.S.S' sketches a design for a cheap henhouse in response to a query from an amateur '1843: Fowls' House' *Design and Work* 2 (24 March 24 1877), p. 260.

<sup>107</sup> Wright refers to the determination of amateur poultry keepers who kept chickens on flat roofs in the high of the poultry keeping 'mania'. Wright, *Illustrated Book of Poultry*, p. 20.

<sup>108</sup> Francklin directly criticised the informal methods like those suggested by Roach, Francklin, p. 2.

<sup>109</sup> 'In the gardens attached to suburban dwellings it is not always possible to fix up the house and run in the manner described by the leading works on poultry. This need not prevent anyone from keeping a few birds, for it is astonishing how well fowls will do even under the most disadvantageous surroundings', Watson, *Amateur poultry keeping*, p. 3.

<sup>110</sup> Authors who refer to their direct experience with working with backyard hens include Ellis Davidson, Anne de Salis and Lewis Wright. Davidson, p. 135; De Salis, v; Joseph Batty, *Lewis Wright and his Poultry* (Midhurst, West Sussex: Northbrook Publishing, 2001), p. 1.

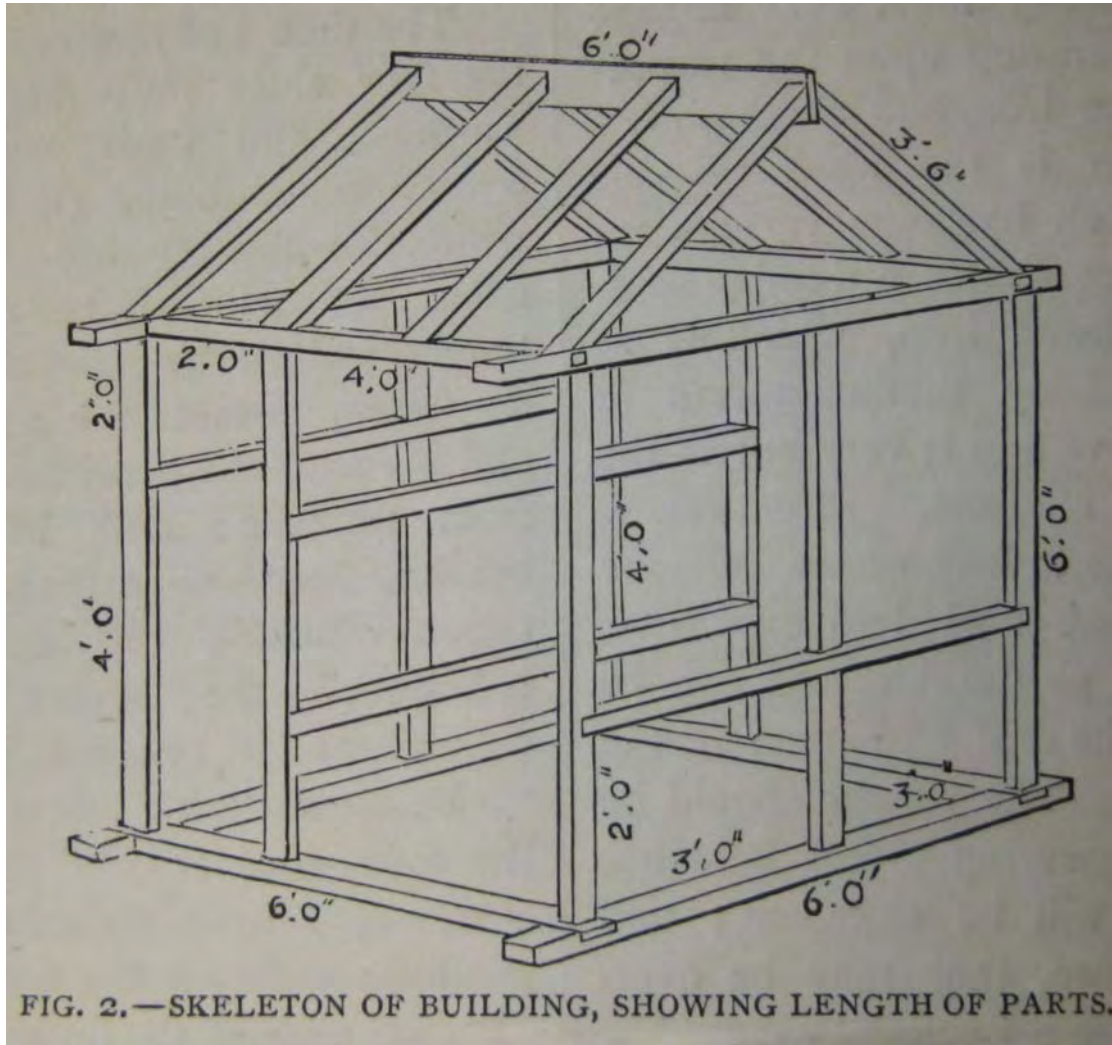


Figure 7: A suggestion for a timber-framed shell for a chicken house in 'Wrinkles for Amateurs' section of *Amateur Work* (1882).

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approach as instead of making small ventilation crowns on top of the chicken house as other authors advised he brazenly admitted to merely boring holes in the top ends of his wall panels, cutting extra holes if he felt the conditions when he went in the house were hot and smelly, adding, with a hint of contempt, 'I never studied the question of so many cubic feet of air space for each bird'<sup>111</sup>.

Roach's pamphlet is a good example of how authors of poultry manuals often had considerable experience of operating a backyard coop themselves and tried to pass on tacit advice through uncomplicated instruction. These authors often possessed a level of authority and they sought to profit from disseminating their advice through advertising their own inventions or the products of other companies<sup>112</sup>. Their attempt to make money from their hobby through publishing inexpensive manuals reflects the self-generating momentum of the backyard poultry movement and how amateurs were often writing for other amateurs, committing their knowledge to paper.

### **Management of the chicken coop**

The defining characteristic of amateur space is how it provides arenas in which future activity takes place. The chicken coop provides the framework within which one can rear chicken for egg laying, exhibition or selective breeding. Effective construction of a chicken coop relied on the one-off skills of amateur carpentry, whereas its maintenance demanded regular attention that was sometimes beyond the resources of one individual. The amateur chicken keeper often had to implement a division of labour to complete the many tasks involved in the activity, informally employing other members of the family, domestic servants and paid outsiders. If such resources were

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<sup>111</sup> Roach, p. 3. Examples of amateur inventions submitted to the journal *Amateur Work* also attest to the 'bottom-up' nature of advice. For an example see *Amateur Woodworker*, pp. 6-11.

<sup>112</sup> Many manuals were vehicles for firms to advertise chicken house equipment, feed, medicines and information of where to buy stock. Roach does not encourage amateurs to use different 'spices' to get chickens to lay more but unabashedly publicises the medicine 'Hensfit' as the only solution if chickens are ill or not laying well. Large adverts also appear on the front and back cover. Roach, p. 10. Hobs encourages the backyard poultry keeper to attempt breeding of chicken using an incubator and other equipment that he has devised as a backyarder himself and now sells to interested parties. He also provides day old chicks, brooders, sitting hens to incubate eggs, in fact anything 'mentioned in this book that the backyarder cannot get conveniently', Hobs, p. 35.

lacking the keeper had to perform the necessary daily tasks individually, requiring a similar degree of planning, organisation, and management of resources.

The question of 'who does what' in the keeping of poultry in suburban yards provides an opportunity to elaborate on the role of men and women in this amateur practice. In line with the stereotypes of pre-enfranchisement gender roles and the concept of Victorian male patriarchy, one might expect domestic labouring on chicken coops to be broadly in line with the 'sexually polarised way' in which the household was organised, accrediting the man with the more physical 'hard' job of building the coop with tools and materials, leaving the everyday 'soft' maintenance of the dwelling to wives or dependents<sup>113</sup>. However, the phenomenon of suburban chicken keeping reveals subtler permutations of Victorian gender roles.

Advice manuals with sections on chicken house construction were mainly targeted at male amateur carpenters<sup>114</sup>. Yet this was not an example of attributing a highly skilled job to a male audience. The chicken house afforded the male amateur carpenter the opportunity to test his skills on a project that, even if it failed completely, would not result in grievous calamity. Davidson stated that making a dwelling for animals is a good starting point 'even though he [the amateur] may not yet have acquired the power of making a good mortise joint'<sup>115</sup>. Constructing a chicken coop was positioned as a form of carpentry suited to the enthusiastic novice, a thing to make before attempting more 'important' works, according to Davidson, such

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<sup>113</sup> Clive Edwards establishes a division between 'soft' do-it-yourself activities of women in the late nineteenth century, mainly confined to the realms of decoration, and the 'hard' equivalents undertaken by men, such as building furniture. Clive Edwards, 'Home is Where the Art is: Women, Handicrafts and Home Improvements 1750-1900' *Journal of Design History* 19:1 (2006), p. 19. Similarly, Steven Gelber argues that tool use was divided between the genders with men's 'heavy' tools and materials (wood and metal) distinguished from the female handicrafts (textiles), Steven Gelber, *Hobbies: Leisure and the Culture of Work in America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), p. 180. John Tosh states how manliness and manhood were bound up with notions of physicality in opposition to the private, 'feminine', domestic space, particularly in relation to late Victorian interest in sport, Tosh, pp. 111-2, 188-9.

<sup>114</sup> Davidson refers to his audience as 'gentlemen' or 'men of education' in his book *Amateur House Carpenter*, especially the introduction. And further evidence of the male orientation of amateur carpentry is in the following titles. Powell-Owen *An Income From Backyard Fowls*, Francis Chilton-Young, *Everyman His Own Mechanic* as well as the 1880s journal he edited *Amateur Work* that explicitly targets male amateurs. See Chilton-Young's particularly recalcitrant response to 'E.D.'s letter 'Amateur Work, Its Nature', *Amateur Work* 5 (1886), p. 44.

<sup>115</sup> Davidson, p. 127.

as a desk, table and chair – which were presumably elevated to a higher status due to the greater consequences of failure, and the levels of difficulty.

An amateur did not require intimate knowledge of complicated wooden joints to attempt chicken house construction; use of a hammer and nail was enough. Francklin was notably casual on this point: ‘whether this can be best obtained by mortising or halving will depend on the skill of the constructor and therefore no special directions will be given subsequently on this matter’<sup>116</sup>. Perhaps because of this ease and lack of importance, the chicken coop also offered women the opportunity to learn and utilise certain carpentry skills: Wright stated that he knew certain ‘blooming damsels... who could perform incredible feats’<sup>117</sup> in the realm of poultry production and maintenance.

There is limited evidence that women engaged specifically in chicken house construction, even Wright implies that these ‘blooming damsels’ might have had the resources to employ other labourers. Nevertheless, there are many accounts of successful female involvement in backyard production, potentially providing an outlet of feminine enterprise within the domestic sphere. Miss Edwards was one poultry enthusiast, who rose to prominence and won many prizes in the early 1900s, having only started with 20 hens in her country cottage that she moved into in the 1890s<sup>118</sup>. Other famous female poultry figures included Lady Gwyder who in 1880 had the largest farm of exhibition hens in the whole of Britain at Stoke Park in Ipswich<sup>119</sup>, and Mrs O’Grady from Cork in Ireland who managed to breed 100,000 chickens a year on an acre of land<sup>120</sup>. These prominent women perhaps had occasion to try their hand at constructing units in the course of maintaining a coop or yard, but they were more likely to be involved in management, probably

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<sup>116</sup> Francklin, p. 3.

<sup>117</sup> Wright, *Illustrated Book of Poultry*, p. 1.

<sup>118</sup> Watson ed. *Poultry Press Annual* (London: Poultry Press, 1919), p. 111.

<sup>119</sup> Wright, *Illustrated Book of Poultry*, p. 9.

<sup>120</sup> Mrs George O’ Grady, *100,000 Chickens a Year on an Acre of Land. My System of Rearing Table Chickens by Mrs O’Grady* (London: Poultry Press, 1919). The Poultry Press annual gives a list of the opportunities available to women in poultry keeping including the possibility of running a successful business. *Poultry Press Annual 1910-11*, p. 111.



possessing the 'how-to' knowledge related to construction but leaving the actual building to male associates and labourers<sup>121</sup>.

These examples of women managers in the poultry world are exceptional cases, yet their stories reflect the potential of women to make effective managers of poultry smallholdings, either for breeding, preparing for exhibition or utility, or all of the above. Browne mentioned in her manual that women could exercise their skills of delegation, supervision and participation in the course of poultry keeping, adding that skills required to assemble a chicken house could be obviated by purchasing readymade units and directing the labour of others<sup>122</sup>. Management, supervision, using the mind as well as the hand, constituted the main requirement for effective poultry keeping, regardless of gender. Perhaps the skills associated with chicken keeping can easily be categorised as 'linked with the everyday, the commercial and aesthetically impure'<sup>123</sup>, fitting Penny Sparke's argument that domestic activities were gendered, but the entrepreneurship linked to chicken keeping demonstrates its more public, non-domestic dimensions, which were accessible to both men and women.

Critical to learning the cross-gendered skill of good management was how to organise and/or undertake regular manual labour. Regardless of the intention behind keeping a chicken run, the manager had to delegate, mimicking the behaviour of bosses. Edith Park in her manual *Farming For Ladies* recommends hiring a sharp, willing and able boy for £10 a year; a useful assistant, 'provided the "boss" be he man or woman, possesses the required knowledge, and can see at a glance that things are being done as they should be'<sup>124</sup>. The hiring of specialist assistants to carry out the daily tasks of cleaning and ensuring a regular supply of food was more common to the country farmer than the suburban amateur<sup>125</sup>, but in the latter context

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<sup>121</sup> O'Grady's enterprise started when her husband and one other labourer built a house with space for 1000 table birds. Ibid, p. 3.

<sup>122</sup> Browne mentions that once the chicken coop had been built women could definitely manage poultry keeping from this point onwards. Browne, p. 274. Other manuals directed at female amateur chicken keepers include Watts, *The Poultry Yard*, Barbara Elrington Fergusson Arbuthnott, *The Henwife* (Edinburgh: T C Jack, 1870) and Edith Park, *Farming for Ladies* (London: Vinton & Co, 1907). Flora Guest, *Every Woman's Book of Poultry* (London: Poultry World, 1916).

<sup>123</sup> Sparke, ix.

<sup>124</sup> Park, p. 7.

<sup>125</sup> Arbuthnott employs 'poultry attendants' to work on the 'daily routine' of keeping hens but insists they must inspire the manager's confidence. Arbuthnott, p. 29.

dependents and domestic servants could be deployed. The domestic servant was ideally placed to re-use the green waste from a kitchen to make chicken meal, to clean using the dustpan, and perform an array of tasks pertaining to the maintenance of a coop<sup>126</sup>.

Yet, advice literature was quick to warn of the dangers of relying on domestic servants alone. As Anne de Salis states:

I feel sure that if gentlewomen, young or old, were to look after fowls themselves – not trust entirely to servants or paid dependents – and kept good laying breeds ... there would be no cry of 'My fowls are not attempting to lay.'<sup>127</sup>

The clear message was that individuals should take it upon themselves to manage effectively. A need that was particularly acute if a chicken keeper was breeding fancy hens, as a mistake in the diet or neglect of cleaning duties had greater consequences. This prompted William Powell-Owen's advice to chicken fanciers: 'Always depend on yourself. Never trust others to do what you should do yourself'<sup>128</sup>.

This advice reflects the importance of good management in keeping chicken. One had to be committed, persevere and be willing to employ every spare half hour in maintaining the coop. This voluntarily undertaken 'leisure' activity compelled its practitioners to become soft capitalists.

Assisting this self-reliance of amateur chicken keepers were the various devices and technologies that allowed them to undertake tasks more easily. Ellen Lupton refers to a similar process of 'substituting the privately contracted servant for the privately purchased product'<sup>129</sup> in the context of new kitchen and bathroom technologies of the early twentieth century. Technical inventions, such as the 'foster mother' that made incubation and hatching of hens much simpler, were available commercially at this time

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<sup>126</sup> For example, Browne advised the female keeper of hens to ask the kitchen maid to deliver and regularly replenish the chicken's dust bath from the domestic fireplace or stove, a duty that helped protect the fowls from vermin. Browne, p. 280.

<sup>127</sup> De Salis, vi. Similar concerns are expressed about domestic servant's capability for this job in Wright, *The Practical Poultry Keeper*, p. 23.

<sup>128</sup> Powell-Owen, *An Income From Backyard Fowls*, p. 13.

<sup>129</sup> Ellen Lupton and J Abbott Miller, *The Bathroom, The Kitchen, and the Aesthetics of Waste: A Process of Elimination* (Cambridge, Massachusetts and New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1992), p. 15.

(figure 8) but making mechanisms oneself adapted to one's own need required a higher degree of management. Inventions in the realm of chicken keeping ranged from devices that assured the readiness of chicken feed for the morning meal<sup>130</sup> to inventions to protect against the threat of egg-napping, such as the security egg box – a modified box secured by a lock and key mechanism<sup>131</sup> – and an electric circuit with a bell alarm, proposed by one amateur in *Design and Work* to help a fellow backyarder 'Will'o-the-wisp' who was having problems with his neighbour, who had 'difficulty in distinguishing the difference betwixt "mine and thine" with respect to poultry, especially in winter time'<sup>132</sup>.

Installing security measures in one's suburban poultry unit is evidence of self-reliant proactive management that demonstrates the extent that people were willing to go to protect the fruits of their labour. Management of a coop was dependent on hard work, use of technical assistance and critically, the internal or external management of labour and delegation of tasks that mirrored forms of organisation common to larger firms.

### **Profitable but not commercial**

Effective management of a chicken coop was an educative process that taught practitioners (and children who witnessed such practice) 'a useful and instructive lesson' according to Lady Arbuthnott (a.k.a the 'henwife'), instilling 'regularity, tidiness and perseverance'<sup>133</sup>. Once again good stewardship and effective management is here imbued with social and moral values that were admired by prominent Victorian thinkers, not least Samuel Smiles. Yet Arbuthnott goes on to describe chicken keeping as more than just a 'harmless amusement': the cultivation of 'home pleasure' is aligned with

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<sup>130</sup> De Salis cites an example of a device that would release food at the sound of an alarm De Salis A, p. 9, and Watson suggested the use of a 'Hay Box' to keep the prepared food warm overnight, Watson, *How to Feed Hens*, p. 58.

<sup>131</sup> Design submitted to *Amateur Work* by Hassard in 1882. Hassard, 'The security egg box'. *Amateur Work* 2 (1882), p. 282.

<sup>132</sup> "Will'o the wisp", 'Item 1446: Detector Battery' Notes & Queries section of *Design and Work* (3 February, 1877), p. 134. Wright noticed that 'otherwise honest people' were prone to stealing eggs and hens suggesting the pervasion of this petty crime Wright, *The Illustrated Book of Poultry*, p. 34. See also Arbuthnott, p. 29.

<sup>133</sup> Arbuthnott, p. 272.

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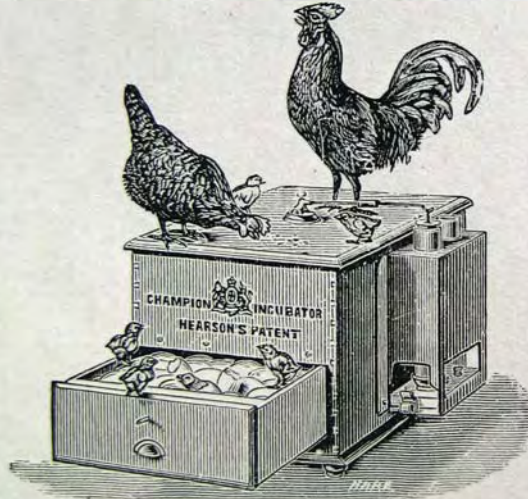
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Figure 8: Advertisement for Hearson's 'Champion Incubator' (1893).

wider ethos of celebrating productivity and profitability, re-enforcing predominant paradigms of capitalist organisation<sup>134</sup>. Rather than retracting from the moral value of the amateur activity (as would have been the case for early modern gentleman amateurs<sup>135</sup>), profitability, or the potential of making profit, increased a hobby's moral and social standing in the Victorian mind. The seventeenth century 'culture of improvement' as Leslie calls it, had developed into a late nineteenth-century mentality of self-help<sup>136</sup>.

Presuming a base level of effective management, manual authors insisted that coops on confined runs could return a level of profit due to the national annual shortage of winter eggs<sup>137</sup>. One easy way to maximise the profitability of a brood was to hatch chicken or buy them at a young age during springtime, so that they would lay in the winter, when egg prices increased<sup>138</sup>. By this simple act of scheduling the backyard chicken keeper could contribute to winter egg production and thus generate a profitable return.

Some authors attempted to quantify this moment when chicken coops on confined runs became profitable<sup>139</sup>, but Edwards adopts a more generic stance:

Fowls should be looked upon as mere machines for converting one material of smaller value into one of greater value.<sup>140</sup>

Edwards reduces the chicken to a productive unit, whose eggs, meat, feathers and excrement could all enter realms of market exchange and contribute to a profitable enterprise, obtaining as much output from each hen as possible<sup>141</sup>.

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<sup>134</sup> *Ibid*, p. 272.

<sup>135</sup> Gentlemen amateurs in the early modern period defined their practice in explicit opposition to the need to earn money through selling a service or product. Iain Pears, *The Discovery of Painting: The Growth of Interest in the Arts in England 1680-1768* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press), p. 108.

<sup>136</sup> Leslie, p. 7. For a discussion of the connection between agriculture and the 'civilised' man with reference to the work of philosopher John Locke, see Squier, pp. 9-10.

<sup>137</sup> Prominent poultry manual author Powell-Owen stated that this shortage 'always' provided 'a good market' Powell-Owen, *An Income From Backyard Fowls* preface

<sup>138</sup> Roach, pp. 15-16. See also, Edwards, p. 11.

<sup>139</sup> Johnstone states that 30 fowls in land larger than a quarter of an acre would produce income that would exceed the food bill. E B Johnstone, *The ABC of Poultry: A Reference Work for Amateur Fancier and Professional on Poultry-Keeping* (London: Sir Isaac Pitman and Sons, 1906), pp. 130-1.

<sup>140</sup> Edwards, p. 5.

<sup>141</sup> G.P mentions how the desire for good meat drives production in the poultry yard and states how feathers can be made use of and sold. In G.P, p. 82-84.

This conceptualisation of the chicken as a machine aligned the business-minded chicken keeper with the commercial farmer: for both the objective was to reduce waste and maximise gain<sup>142</sup>. Manual authors insisted that this unsentimental, profit-generating mentality could permeate all suburban chicken keeping, through sensible timing – ensuring chicken are mature and laying before the winter egg shortages – and disposing of chicken past their prime once the cost of keeping them alive had become inversely proportional to their output<sup>143</sup>. Adverts in poultry manuals provided products such as Poultry World's 'Recorditte' poultry calendar – 'the cleverest egg recording card ever'<sup>144</sup> – helped document output and overheads, which some manuals specifically encouraged<sup>145</sup>. In addition, advocates of profitable backyard practice stated that any excess capacity should be filled: the available space should maintain the largest number of chicken possible. Edwards and Powell-Owen complained that suburban chicken keepers often only had five or six hens in units that could hold two-dozen without any additional capital investment and labour<sup>146</sup>. These different methods all aim to increase the productivity of amateur units, in a similar vein to Taylor's principles of scientific management. Each element of the amateur's capital is subjugated to an abstraction, which determines whether it detracts or generates more output.

This management of a backyard coop resulted in levels of production that competed with larger farms, reflecting a situation in which smaller poultry units were often equally as productive as their larger equivalents<sup>147</sup>. By 1921 intensive commercial units for chicken rearing and egg production were being introduced but Powell-Owen still insists 'that the small poultry-keepers

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<sup>142</sup> Watts discourages her readers to add ornamental details to the chicken coop. Watts, p. 6. Another example of overly sentimental behavior is how many chicken keepers could not bring themselves to exterminate sick, or non-laying fowls. De Salis gives instructions of how to kill a hen but admits her inability to kill fowls due to her own attachment to the 'poor things'. De Salis, pp. 64-5, Powell-Owen, *An Income From Backyard Fowls*, p. 78-9.

<sup>143</sup> Powell Owen, *An Income From Backyard Fowls*, pp. 78-9. Edwards, p. 15. Tegetmeier, *Poultry for the Table*, p. 102. Wright, *Illustrated Book of Poultry*, p. 20. Watson, *Amateur Poultry Keeping*, p. 10.

<sup>144</sup> Adverts in the back of the pamphlet by Watson ed. *How to feed hens*.

<sup>145</sup> Edwards, p. 7. William Powell-Owen, *Poultry Keeping on Money Making Lines: With a Special Chapter for Ex Service Men "Poultry-Farming as a Profession"* (London: Newnes, 1921), p. 164.

<sup>146</sup> Edwards, p. 16. Powell-Owen, *Poultry Keeping* p. 242.

<sup>147</sup> Tegetmeier bemoaned the general public's opinion that the continental Europe was able to provide cheaper eggs due to the existence of large farms, when in reality cheaper prices of eggs were the result of the profitable management in the thousands of smallholdings. Tegetmeier, *Poultry for Table*, p. 91.

are the real power in the poultry industry'<sup>148</sup>. This explains why there was such a large push to encourage small poultry businesses. There were local networks of exchange that the suburban chicken keeper could benefit from such as recycling the household waste of a street for feed<sup>149</sup>.

Despite this evidence of a backyard mentality that adopts the rigour of regularised scientific management akin to commercial production, with amateur chicken keepers sometimes finding a wider market for their products, 'backyard' profitability was qualitatively different from commercial agriculture. One key distinction is the contrasting attitudes to the division of labour that are articulated by the Marxist historian Harry Braverman. In reference to Smith's account of pin-making he states that 'not only are the operations separated from each other but they are assigned to different workers', adding that being a capitalist involves first breaking up 'the process' and then the 'dismemberment' of the worker as well<sup>150</sup>.

In the context of suburban chicken keeping the amateur has to demonstrate characteristics of a manager, breaking down a task into 'operations' and sometimes deploying external labour to help out. Yet, crucially Braverman's second qualification of the capitalist cannot be so readily mapped to amateur chicken keepers for they often did not go as far to 'dismember' the worker as well. This is the crucial point at which suburban chicken keeping resists overt commercialisation. There is a division of labour in management, but it is informal, idiosyncratic and if subject to regularisation and compulsion it is only for a limited time period, or in a miniaturised way. There was a need for backyarders to be *partial* capitalists given the multiple operations and occasional delegation of tasks to different workers, but this never reached the degrees witnessed in commercial organisation.

Many amateur chicken keepers went on to become successful businessmen and women: the backyard suburban coop was the first step in many

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<sup>148</sup> Powell-Owen, *Poultry Keeping*, p. 242. Other writers also claim that poultry smallholdings made vital contributions to national egg and meat supply. Tegetmeier, *Poultry for the Table*, p. 91.

<sup>149</sup> Hobs stated how his backyard coop eggs could undercut the prices of the grocery store as he was able to rely on his customers' household waste of for green stuff, bread and bones that he used for feed. Hobs, pp. 43-46.

<sup>150</sup> Braverman, pp. 77-8. See also Ruskin, *Nature of gothic*, pp. 14-15.

individuals careers in poultry, including manual authors Hobs, Wright and Arbuthnott. As the editor of the journal 'Poultry-keeping' stated in 1918:

It is astonishing how many people, who begin by keeping a few birds, develop into extensive poultry keepers, and I know from some cases where, from a hobby, it has become a most lucrative business.<sup>151</sup>

The hobbyist-to-businessman narrative shows how initially supplemental forms of income can come to dominate. In this context it is possible to see amateur chicken practice as a state that a 'successful' keeper passes through in his or her early career. However, inclination to practice more profitably is not automatically synonymous with eventual commercial success because, in keeping with the late Victorian work ethic, chicken keepers did not necessarily want the money that came with profit, but rather the satisfaction of being effective managers of resources that the generation of profit indicated. The paradigm of Victorian self-reliance incorporated profit into non-commercial realms of human practice: even the presumed antithesis of amateurism can be absorbed into its psychological texture<sup>152</sup>.

### Utility or fancy, or both

Among the diverse array of individuals who kept chicken in their back garden, there were a number of backyard fanciers who bred and reared chickens for exhibition in local and regional agricultural fairs. Sumpter Priddy defines 'fancy' as a spontaneous, whimsical style in his monograph on early nineteenth century American decorative arts; its purpose 'was not to guide deliberative action but rather whip the mind into dynamic and volatile impressions'<sup>153</sup>. The style was elaborate, delightful, a spectacle, opposite to the drudgery of plain, rational utility. Adopting the same stylistic dichotomy as Priddy, one could classify amateur chicken fanciers in opposition to those who kept and bred chicken for functional utility: fancy chicken breeding was

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<sup>151</sup> *Poultry and Rabbits for the Backyard*, p. 11.

<sup>152</sup> In a similar exposition of contradictions at the heart of the Victorian mentality, Deborah Cohen discusses on the reconciliation of heightened Victorian morality with increased material wealth that came with the abundance of modern capitalism see Deborah Cohen, *Household Gods: the British and their Possessions* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2006).

<sup>153</sup> Sumpter Priddy, *American Fancy: Exuberance in the Arts 1790-1840* (Milwaukee: Chipstone Foundation, 2004), xxxix.



unproductive, superfluous, exaggerated and unnecessary compared to the potential productivity and profitability of keeping hens for egg laying in the backyard. Authors of poultry manuals often followed this divide but the analysis below seeks to get beyond this dichotomous understanding and expose the overlapping of function and ornament that takes place in amateur space through chicken keeping, as I showed above with reference to Kracauer.

The history of fancy hen keeping has its roots in the illegality of cock-fighting from 1848 that forced an entire infrastructure of chicken keeping to shift trajectory: from breeding hens to fight to rearing them for exhibition. In the course of this transferral a plethora of new recruits started keeping chickens, many of whom practiced from suburban backyards in their free time. Powell-Owen addresses an audience of 'backyard fanciers' in the first section of his manual *An Income From Backyard Fowls*, claiming that since mid-century, backyarders had joined this pursuit in 'countless numbers' and often won high honours in major agricultural shows<sup>154</sup>. The number of books that provided information about how to keep specific breeds also attests to this broad interest<sup>155</sup>, as does the wider infrastructure of local poultry clubs, fanciers' associations, and specialist products provided by commercial outlets<sup>156</sup>. Wright's *Illustrated Book of Poultry* was one particularly popular book on the subject that included elaborate colour plates of various breeds (figure 9) and information on the 'standards' of exhibition. After its initial publication in 1881, a further 20 editions were released reaching circulation figures of 80,000 by the end of the decade, to much critical acclaim<sup>157</sup>.

<sup>154</sup> Powell-Owen, *An Income From Backyard Fowls*, p. 12 and Powell-Owen, *Poultry Keeping*, p. 14.

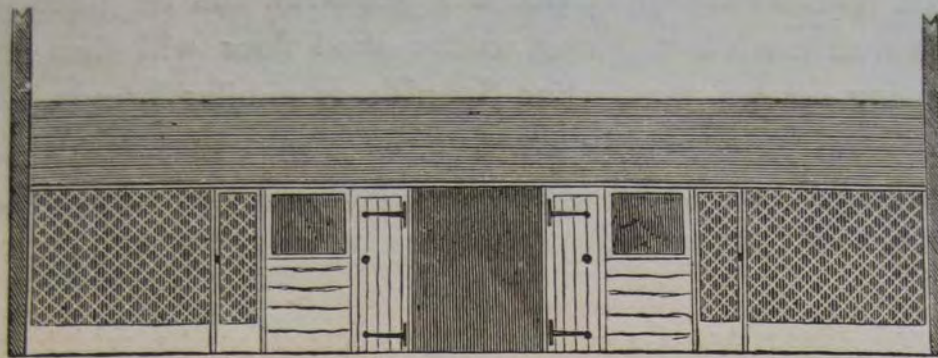
<sup>155</sup> Tegetmeier refers to the rise of fancy in the 40 years preceding the publication of his book in 1892 with particular reference to the 'Cochin mania' – a craze for the breeding of a certain type of small exhibition chicken, Tegetmeier, *Poultry for the Table*, pp. 1 and 14. Many publications focused on one breed of exhibition hen including Arthur Ellet, *Modern Wyandottes: How to Breed, Manage and Exhibit* (London: Poultry Press, 1919); G Scott, *The Rhode Island Red* (London: Poultry Press, 1919), William Powell-Owen, *Rhode Island Red* (London: Poultry Club, 1921). Wright, *The Illustrated Book of Poultry*, Arbuthnott, *The Henwife*.

<sup>156</sup> For information of poultry clubs see *Poultry Annual*, p. 188 and Arbuthnott, xx. By the late 1910s William Powell-Owen had set up a 'Poultry bureau' in Hampstead, London that disseminated advice and practical information to budding fanciers. Powell-Owen also alerts his readers to Mr A J Pain's lectures on poultry keeping in his 'famous' training centre in Bedford. See Powell-Owen *Poultry Keeping*, pp. 199 and 120-1 respectively.

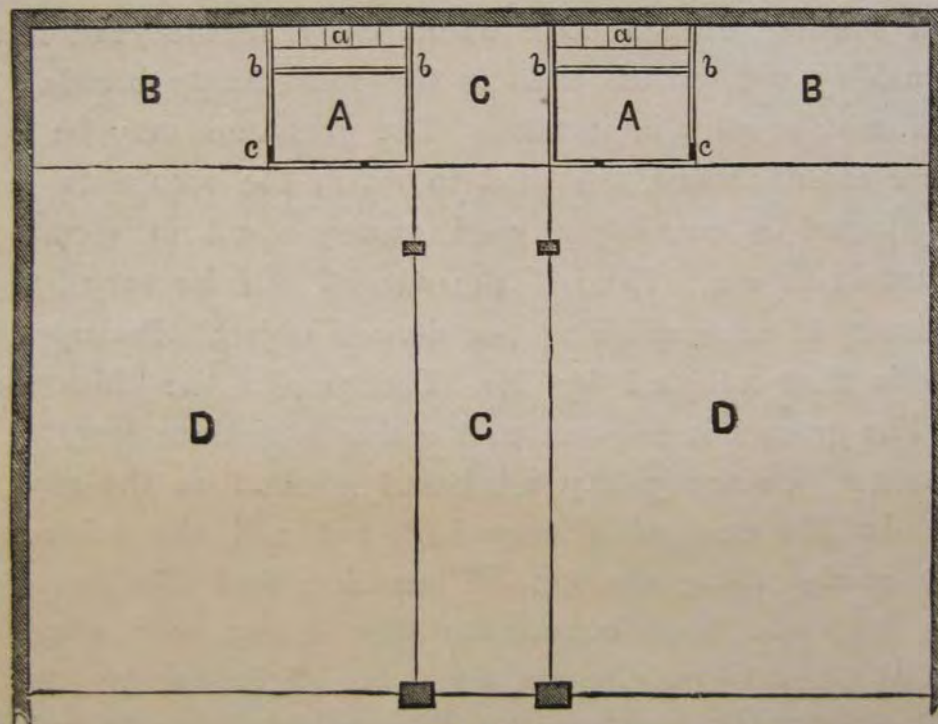
<sup>157</sup> Batty writes a brief biography of Wright in his book also refers to a letter written to Wright in 1901 on behalf of leading poultry authorities, attesting to his invaluable work in the field. Batty, pp. 5-9. For literature that disseminated 'standards' of examination for poultry see Wright, *Illustrated Book of Poultry*, (1880), William Bernhard Tegetmeier, *The Standards of Excellence In Exhibition Poultry, To Which is Added the American Standard* (London, 1874).



Figure 9: J W Ludlow, *Mr E Tudman's Partridge Cochin Cock 'Talbot'* (1880).  
One example of the many handsome plates in Lewis Wright's *Illustrated Book of Poultry*.



ELEVATION



PLAN



SCALE

Fig. 5.

- |     |                                |     |                           |
|-----|--------------------------------|-----|---------------------------|
| A A | Roosting and Laying Houses.    | a a | Nests.                    |
| B B | Fenced-in Covered Runs.        | b b | Perches.                  |
| C C | Shed and Run for Sitting Hens. | c c | Holes for Fowls to enter. |
| D D | Grass Runs.                    |     |                           |

Figure 10: Plan of Tudman's Yard (1880).



To practice fancy chicken keeping required more space to house extra units: a special house for hens to incubate eggs for hatching, a place for the newly born chick to go, a pen for cocks, and areas where adult chicken could be prepared for show. These spaces of isolation needed to be built in to the chicken coop though they could be a 'rough, temporary structure'<sup>158</sup>. The skills needed to construct these extra units were well within the abilities of the backyarder. For selective breeding chicken needed to be further isolated from each other and special areas were also required to prepare fowls for exhibition, a process that included feeding the selected chicken by hand from up high, encouraging the bird to show off 'the smart and shapely appearance' of his feathers as he reaches up for the food; prodding the animal with a stick, imitating the actions of judges in the shows and fairs so the chicken gets used to it; and discussing 'his good points aloud, so that he will grow accustomed to the buzz that is going on the whole day long at a show'<sup>159</sup>.

E Tudman's yard in Whitchurch in Wright's *Illustrated Book of Poultry* was an ideal model for keeping chicken for 'fancy' breeding and exhibition (figure 10). Although Tudman's yard was suitably fit for purpose, the ease and cheapness of constructing a hatching box demonstrates how fancy breeding *could* be pursued on a limited scale: Hobs' simple three-foot sectioned-off extension to a run was sufficient<sup>160</sup>. Backyard fanciers had the ability to imitate the spaces of the larger farms, like Tudman's, but with the economy of space the backyarder had to be particularly adept at managing the limited resources and demonstrate higher levels of commitment.

The breeding and preening of exhibition birds appears to more fully epitomise an amateur hobby, done for amusement and enjoyment alone. This is certainly the opinion of Arbuthnott who stated that:

Should the farmer be an exhibitor, he must of course, submit to some expense in carrying out his hobby. High feeding must then be *the rule*<sup>161</sup>.

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<sup>158</sup> Hassard, pp. 282-3.

<sup>159</sup> Powell-Owen, *An Income From Backyard Fowls*, p. 20. Ellet, p. 19.

<sup>160</sup> Hobs, p. 12.

<sup>161</sup> Arbuthnott, p. 57.

According to Arbuthnott a fancier should expect to put more money into the pursuit than he or she received back, adhering to an eighteenth century view of an aesthetically accomplished occupation of time that has little consideration for functionality of profit. In this sense the ‘hobby’ of fancy chicken keeping could be considered the opposite of running a coop to contribute to household provision. Indeed, Thorstein Veblen situated ‘fancy-bred animals’ as an example of a leisure activity that contributed to the ‘non-productive consumption of time’ and was ‘evidence of pecuniary ability to afford a life of idleness’<sup>162</sup>. Veblen’s 1899 work *The Theory of The Leisure Class* positioned leisure activities as symbols of status; evidence of his much used phrase ‘conspicuous consumption’. Cultivation of manners, learning redundant languages, undertaking household art, and fancy breeding all were signs that attested to the ability of its practitioners to spare excess time, energy and income on inessential tasks. Presenting an effective analogy Arbuthnott stated that:

... a modern prize-bird almost merits the character which a Parisian waiter gave of a melon, when asked to pronounce whether it was a fruit or a vegetable. “Gentlemen”, said he, “a melon is neither; it is a work of art”<sup>163</sup>.

Arbuthnott’s description of an equivalence between fancy hens and fine French fruit seems to show how the activity was an end in itself, close to the fin de siècle dictum of *l’art pour l’art* and Veblen’s concept of conspicuous consumption. The detailed drawings of various chicken breeds in Wright’s *Illustrated Book of Poultry* by artist J W Ludlow (figure 9) provides further evidence of this aestheticisation of fancy hens.

Prominent among the works that criticised this aesthetic prioritisation in chicken keeping was Tegetmeier’s 1892 work *Poultry for the Table and Market Versus Fancy Fowls*, which argued that amateurs who kept fowls in suburban plots should do so with the chief intention to supply eggs<sup>164</sup>. He considered fancy chicken breeding and rearing as an inversion of Darwinian natural

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<sup>162</sup> Veblen, pp. 21-22.

<sup>163</sup> Arbuthnott, xviii.

<sup>164</sup> Tegetmeier, *Poultry for the Table*, preface.

selection where chicken were not bred to provide man with more usable commodity, but to 'go into the extremes', not even with a 'standard of beauty' in mind, with the sole aim to 'prove the extent to which living organisms are variable under the influence of artificial rather than natural selection'<sup>165</sup>. The result was the rearing of 'useless' breeds like the Cochins<sup>166</sup> and Brahams, and Sultan Fowls that were primarily bred 'exhibition-ready', unable to see their food properly when eating due to the cultivation of large feather bearding that obscured their vision<sup>167</sup> (figure 11). For Tegetmeier this was not only unproductive; it was decadent folly and morally abhorrent.

Tegetmeier's black and white distinction between utility and fancy fowls can be likened to Veblen's broader division between productive labour and conspicuous leisure activities. However, this dichotomous understanding encourages a reductionist reading of fancy chicken keeping that too readily assumes its superfluity and fails to see the connections with utility chicken keeping. Although fancy chicken keeping might have had the air of pointlessness it was a practice that required significant levels of commitment and management; it was a highly constructed expression of whimsy. From the late nineteenth century onwards ornament had become functionalised; a hobby's enjoyment depended on a set of rules that facilitated competition and gave practice an end goal. This coincides with the ornamentalisation of function: the aestheticisation of productivity and work for its own sake that I illustrated earlier with references to Kracauer and Wright's gaze over an idyll of suburban industry from the confines of a passing train.

Fancy chicken keeping encouraged its practitioners to be competitive, disciplined and motivated. The fancy fowl was not just an aesthetic object but also a demonstration of its keepers' own industry, a conspicuous sign of their labour. Winning medals at an agricultural fair did not reflect an abandonment of the idea of achieving a 'return' for one's fowls, but instead a reconfiguration of what this 'return' constituted. Instead of being based on

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<sup>165</sup> Ibid, p. 3. Other authors shared Tegetmeier's strictly utilitarian viewpoint including Park, p. 21.

<sup>166</sup> Cochins were a type of chicken breed introduced from China to Britain in 1849 that were subject to a 'wild orgy' of poultry breeding due to their aesthetic qualities. Brown introduction to Lewer, p. 10.

<sup>167</sup> Tegetmeier, *Poultry for the Table*, pp. 3-4.



Figure 11: J W Ludlow, *Sultan Fowls* (1880).

the production of tangible commodities such as eggs, the fancier received gratification in receiving a medal.

The drive to compete encouraged chicken fanciers to attempt more elaborate methods of crossbreeding that may have produced excessive and bizarre results, but such activities also prompted a mentality of innovation, experimentation and research. Fancy chicken keeping demonstrated the characteristics of early modern gentleman husbandry, whereby experimentation with selective breeding and novel land rotation systems offset the landowner's boredom with producing grain that easily made a profit<sup>168</sup>. Conversely, the seemingly aesthetic distraction could provide an experimental space that resulted in future productive gains. The extent to which suburban backyard chicken keeping constituted a site of experimentation for advances in poultry production is open to question, although some manual authors do emphasise these qualities<sup>169</sup>. This potential 'productivity' of distraction can be mapped on to amateur space in general and demonstrates another unexpected 'differential' characteristic, a feature that is elucidated when definitions of amateurism extend beyond its presumed whimsical unimportance.

In addition to implicitly familiarising its practitioners with an understanding of capitalist competition and the benefits of experimentation, fancy chicken keeping also generated its own market in which enthusiasts could participate<sup>170</sup>. As social historian Ross McKibbin has stated 'most hobbies however private, usually involved some public display and this was unquestionably exploited by the commercial salesmen of hobby perquisites'<sup>171</sup>. Although there were companies that did target poultry exhibitors, commercial salesmen were as likely to be former or current fanciers. This is one of the more explicit links between fanciers and the market.

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<sup>168</sup> Leslie, p. 29.

<sup>169</sup> Watson encourages amateurs to 'experiment' with different diets for the hens 'until he discovers that which produces the best results'. Watson, *How to Feed Hens*, p. 54.

<sup>170</sup> Powell-Owen states that the eggs of prize winning fowls and particularly day-old chicks can make a sizable profit and advises fanciers to advertise such products in local papers for maximum gain. Powell-Owen, *Poultry Keeping*, pp. 16 and 21.

<sup>171</sup> Ross McKibbin, *The Ideologies of Class* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), p. 163.



Late nineteenth and early twentieth chicken keeping is hard to place in a rigid dichotomous schema between utilitarian, egg producing chicken and decadent, *l'art pour l'art* fancy equivalents. The mere fact that a fowl can do both at the same time<sup>172</sup> and the mixing of fancy and utilitarian hens in the same coop<sup>173</sup> contravenes this understanding. Backyard fanciers *could* make a profit and backyard utilitarians *could* keep chicken for aesthetic reasons.

Rather than being a dichotomy that makes sense of amateur poultry keeping, the divisions between fancy and utility constitute different styles of participation that clearly overlap. Rearing fowls for exhibition would often mean running the backyard coop with rigorous efficiency and the productive backyard had an aesthetic appeal. Many manifestations of poultry keeping were likely to incorporate elements that could be described as either fancy or utilitarian, either simultaneously, or at different times in an amateur's career. Underneath the multitude of choices for amateurs was the sense that chicken keeping was a practice that helped them develop skills they could use in other situations, and contributed both implicitly and explicitly to a greater understanding of modern capitalism. Whether this derived from inventing new breeds that required commitment and determination, or effectively managing external labour to ensure a healthy and productive coop of laying hens, chicken keeping familiarised its practitioners with the ethos of rigorous and efficient management.

The encouragement of chicken keeping in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century was just one example of a socially useful occupation of newly emergent leisure time. As author Elizabeth Watts, author of *The Poultry Yard*, stated in 1893:

... that undoubted advance in wealth and leisure, which has permeated all sections of the community, and the need for relief from the cares and turmoils of daily labour or business, find its satisfaction in this direction [in suburban poultry keeping]. Hence we see the man

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<sup>172</sup> The Black Minorca was dubbed the 'working man's fowl' by Powell-Owen on account of its ability to live long, suitability for confined runs, and the fact it performed well on the show bench and in the nest box Powell Owen, *An Income From Backyard Fowls*, pp. 15-17. For another account of the Black Minorca's versatility see Watts, p. 87. For further information about popularity of productive hens generated from their appearance in fancy exhibitions see Lewer, p. 15.

<sup>173</sup> Powell-Owen also recommends the 'mixing' together of utility and fancy hens, Powell-Owen, *Poultry Keeping*, p. 15.

of profession or of business, the artisan or the clerk equally in the pursuit with those who are sleeping partners in our great industrial army.<sup>174</sup>

Despite its reputation for alienating the worker, capitalist labour organisation also offered a space for voluntarily chosen amateur activities and suburban chicken keeping was one of these, open to a diverse array of practitioners from different social groups. I have argued that amateur space is heterogeneous, complex and should not be reductively classified as the neutral distraction from the drudgery of labouring. Key are the links to the spaces of everyday life, one's existence as part of the 'industrial army' as Watts states.

Yet, amateur space also has a differential quality that arises from its similarity to the everyday: it involved effective management, yet the ability to employ convoluted production processes as shown in the invention of the egg-napping protection devices; stewardship of the land in imitation of early modern husbandry; the aim to be profitable while resisting commerciality; reception of general advice yet applying it to one's own local environment. Far from being a passive occupation of free time, amateur chicken keeping has an elastic relationship with other experiences of everyday life, performing the dual function of providing a space of suspension from normative capitalist alienation, whilst at the same time making sure working that takes place is productive and can be applied in the pursuit of one's overall vocation. Resourcefulness, the ability to experiment, the management of domestic labour, the separation of tasks in a miniaturised form of the division of labour, are all abilities that can be transferred on to the terrain of other modern spaces, enabling the amateur to better prosper within capitalist society.

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<sup>174</sup> Watts, p. 40.

### **Amateur methods of tool organisation: tool racks and tool walls**

The chapter wide hypothesis is to qualify amateur space as something that is differential according to Lefebvrian schematics: it exists as a space within capitalism but provides an opportunity to negotiate and proactively respond to overriding structures through localised labour. My analysis of suburban chicken keeping particularly emphasised the way in which amateur labour not only generated crafted objects like the henhouse, but how these objects then provided the arena for further working. Constructing gave the amateur a trial run in playing the role of the capitalist manager.

My second case study on tool organisation has a greater emphasis on the affective relationship between the organisation of tools and amateur labour. Analysis does not focus on the end product, for example the henhouse, but the way in which tools and materials are organised and the impact of their placement on the labour that occurs thereafter. A tool's context is important: consider the differences between the systematic organisation of tools on a garage wall, their placement in a window display space or their occupation of a small box under the stairs of a small suburban house. The decisions concerning the organisation of workshops and the placements of tools are subject to the whims of any individual maker and the contextual limitations are infinitely variable according to each amateur's own specific bench, desk or garage and the activity being undertaken. However, underpinning such choices are broader systems of management that again reflect prevailing attitudes within modern capitalism in regards to organisation and tool management.

Underlying systems of tool arrangement predicated on order and sequential placement, proposed by manuals, advertising material and the general presumption of its neutrality, were geared toward improving the efficiency of an individual's operations whether in 'amateur', 'professional', 'domestic' or 'retail' spaces. The interrelationship between tools and productive labouring was recognised by Taylor in his 1911 study *Principles of Scientific Management* in the context of honing the workers body towards ever-greater productivity through models of efficiency-inducing management. However amateur tool

organisation showed a proclivity towards efficiency even before Taylor devised his influential thesis. The limitations to the amateur's resources compelled them to be as efficient as possible, and tool organisation was an important way to achieve this.

This argument, explored in greater depth below, is another example of the differentiability of amateur space, which demonstrates qualities of the interior other. The supplemental character of amateur space and the fact that it is inhabited by voluntarily undertaken labour renders the space differential: invisible, malleable, portable and personal. Yet, perhaps surprisingly, amateur practice can also be a model of efficiency accentuating features that are presumed to be the domain of opposite spatial categories.

The chronological parameters of this analysis range from late nineteenth century tool organisation within amateur carpentry in Britain, to the invention and use of pegboard in post-war America. Rather than approaching each chronological and geographical context separately, I employ a thematic structure based on salient characteristics of amateur tool organisation that demonstrate similarities and differences to comparable systems in retail, workshop and other non-amateur settings. The effort is to continue the chapter-wide hypothesis that amateur space is differential *within* normative structures of capitalism, confirming aspects of a prevailing middle class psyche through its similarities to other spaces, whilst consistently stretching its boundaries.

In a similar vein to the paint-by-number case study, the intention is to demonstrate how mid twentieth-century amateurism represents an intensification and exaggeration of features existing in an earlier moment of modernity<sup>175</sup>. The evolution from the simple tool rack to a whole garage fitted with pegboard walls highlights how the concept of systematic arrangement, urged by manual authors in the late nineteenth century, is extrapolated to a point where an entire architectural realm, and not just a wall, is made into a method of tool organisation that is not only affordable, but completely

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<sup>175</sup> See footnote 71 concerning the expectation within the historiography that DIY had its origins in the context of post-war affluence.

readymade<sup>176</sup>. In the course of this analysis I will be sensitive to the contextual differences between the primary source materials whilst elucidating the continuities that characterise amateur tool organisation between these dates.

The focus on the organisation of carpentry or ‘handyman’ tools is apt in the context of this chapter given the large number of tools and materials inherent to the practice that demanded some form of management. It also seems appropriate to start analysis with the late nineteenth century, because of the dramatic expansion in the amount of literature targeted at the amateur that invariably started with a ‘What You Will Need’ or ‘Tools Required’ section, demonstrating the centrality of tool provision and organisation in the undertaking of various crafts. In the field of amateur carpentry, manuals gave instruction on how to construct domestic centres of work (both readymade and self-build)<sup>177</sup>. One of the workbench designs publicised in the journal *Amateur Work*, the ‘German Carpenters Bench’ sold by the firm Messrs. R. Melhuish and Sons of Fetter Lane (figure 12), was described by Chilton-Young as suitable for the ‘professional joiner and amateur woodworker’ alike<sup>178</sup>, direct evidence of the conflation of professional and amateur that was taking place in this era and determining approaches to tool organisation and storage.

### **The malleability and invisibility of amateur tool organisation**

Due to the supplemental nature of amateur practice, it often has to be malleable enough to ‘fit around’ other commitments. In terms of physical space for tool organisation, this often means that the materials and tools have to appear to disappear, or at least be stored in an unobtrusive manner. This characteristic is epitomised by the portability of certain crafts such as knitting and needlecraft, which were rarely allotted a permanent place within the home. Seen as a part of domestic female labour, the location in which these activities took place were not fixed according to ‘the frozen space of

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<sup>176</sup> For more information about tool organisation in the early twentieth century and earlier examples of comprehensive units for tool storage, including all-in-one workbench units see Gelber, pp. 209-211.

<sup>177</sup> For late nineteenth century instructions on how to build workbenches see, for example, Black, pp. 37-8. Chilton-Young, *Everyman His Own Mechanic*, 199-206.

<sup>178</sup> Chilton-Young, ‘Notes on Novelties’, *Amateur Work* (1881), p. 428.

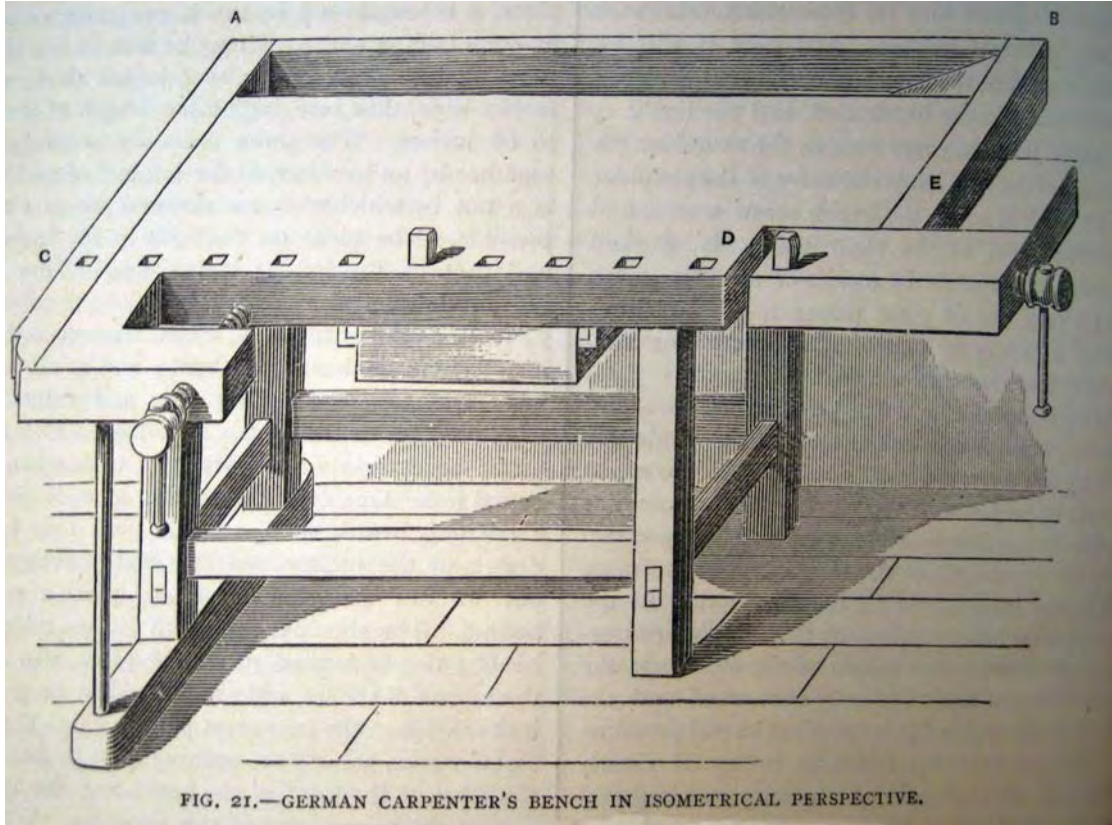
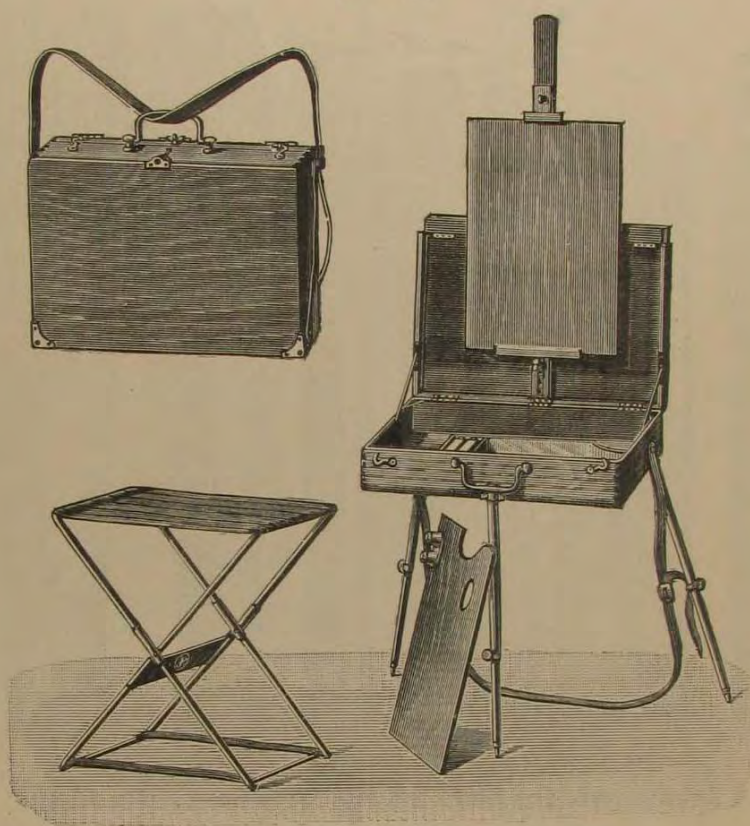


Figure 12: *German Carpenters Bench in Isometric Perspective*  
Sold by Messrs. R. Melhuish and Sons (1881).

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LEFRANC & C<sup>IE</sup> \* PARIS

BOITE DE CAMPAGNE LAZERGES  
AVEC COURROIE  
(BREVETÉE)



N° 891

Reference				fr. c.
891	Boite toile de 5, portrait 38×29, en noyer verni	La pièce		50 »
892	— 5, paysage 38×27	—		50 »
893	— 6, — 44×29	—		55 »

Ces boites contiennent :

1 garniture complète en fer-blanc, flacons, godet à palette vis cuivre, 1 palette en noyer, 2 panneaux acajou, 1 chevalet, 1 pliant monture cuivre et acier, 3 pieds mobiles à rallonges en cuivre et une courroie tenue à deux boutons qui permet de la porter en sautoir ou sur le dos comme un sac de campagne.

*Le pliant avec ou sans sac, le jeu de 3 pieds, le chevalet, la courroie et ses boutons se vendent séparément (Voir pages 40, 49, 56, 57).*

Figure 13: The portable and transportable 'Boite de Campagne Lazerges' from a LeFranc et Cie catalogue (1891).



patriarchal mythology', with a room exclusively devoted to specific gendered tasks as Cheryl Buckley states, but instead took place within a 'fragmented place'<sup>179</sup> where tasks of maintenance, repair, decoration, and sometimes even paid work, happen in the same space. This lack of a permanent home for many examples of amateur craft is a reflection of the inherent non-necessity of such practices in relation to everyday life.

Buckley's concept of the 'fragmented place' of amateur labour usefully dismantles the idea that specific domestic activities were confined to a certain room or area, common in histories of the modern home, and in turn explains why amateur tools are so often portable and easy to put away. For example ceramic decoration in the late nineteenth century rarely had an allotted space within the home, manuals recommending that a portable easel and arm rest on a normal household table would be sufficient<sup>180</sup>. Amateur painters too were well furnished with easily transportable kits, perhaps the most complete example being LeFranc et Cie's 'Boite de Campagne Lazerges' which contained a wood panel, palette, seat and easel, all in a large bag (figure 13). These boxes, like other portable and collapsible amateur tools, could be easily stored in middle class homes; they suggested that leisure could be easily accommodated within the limited space available. Such tools are evidence of the occasional character of amateur labour, something impermanent and transitory that can be bought out in the weekends and opened up. The portable, invisible tool suggests an interest in a certain practice, but an interest that is supplementary to other parts of life: it is important not to be too devoted.

In the context of the late nineteenth century, one would expect amateur carpentry to occur within a permanent location in the home, due to both the processes inherent to the craft that require more space – the manipulation of large pieces of wood, use of dangerous, bulky tools and the need to leave projects half complete – and the gender associations of the activity. This might

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<sup>179</sup> Cheryl Buckley, 'On the Margins' in Burman ed., p. 57. Buckley uses oral testimonies to show how it is impossible to confine sewing to one particular place, pp. 59-63.

<sup>180</sup> A simple table was all that was needed for porcelain decoration according to Chauvigné, *Traité de décoration sur porcelain et faïence* (Tours: P Bouserez), p. 42. Saucré advises using a mobile, collapsible easel and arm rest. Saucré, *Le dessin à la peinture vitrifiables accessibles à tous pour la décoration des vitraux d'intérieur* (Paris: A Lacroix, 1894), pp. 9-10).



seem to articulate a key gender divide with the 'expressive' qualities of handyman or carpentry practices requiring more space than the ephemeral handicrafts<sup>181</sup>. However, carpentry benches were often sold on their ability to be concealed and transformed, possessing the same malleability and invisibility of tools needed for so-called 'softer' labours.

For example, the German workbench shown in figure 12 was easy to take apart, with the top and stands all-collapsible, meaning it could easily be tucked away<sup>182</sup>. In Leo Parsey's step-by-step instructions on the tools required for amateur wood-carving, published in *Amateur Work* in 1881, the author also comments upon the ability for the amateur's workstation to temporarily disappear stating that his design of a wood-carver's workbench could easily be covered to look like an 'ordinary table'; adding that a standard household table would suffice for carpentry if resources were even more restricted<sup>183</sup>.

In the context of post-war America, space was less of an issue due to the large size of garages, basements and sheds<sup>184</sup>. Pegboard was advertised in the 1950s as the material that could potentially order these large amounts of space. However, pegboard also proved useful for Americans living in the city; the material was used to make malleable units for tool organisation that disappeared or transformed into other structures. As in the late nineteenth century, limitations on space did not necessarily discourage practice. As Manners put it, 'Remarkable things have been done only with a closet in a crowded apartment'<sup>185</sup>. Sam Brown's work *Planning Your Own Home Workshop* provided readers with an ingenious suggestion to spatial limitations, giving instructions as to how to build a workshop that transforms into a couch, with all the space needed for necessary tools:

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<sup>181</sup> Roszika Parker, *The Subversive Stitch: Embroidery and the Making of the Feminine* (London: Woman's Press, 1984), p. 38. Sparke, p. 29.

<sup>182</sup> Chilton-Young, 'Notes on Novelties', *Amateur Work* (1881), p. 429.

<sup>183</sup> Leo Parsey, 'Wood-Carving for Amateurs' *Amateur Work* (1881), p. 276.

<sup>184</sup> An manual of 1911 written by architects 'for the class of owner who desires a well developed building which will be an ornament for his place as well as a mere housing for his machine' (p. 1) gives instruction as to how to build suburban and country garage, ranging from utilitarian units to whole quarters for chauffeur accommodation. *Garages, Country and Suburban: A Series of Authoritative Articles on the Structural Features of the Private Garage and Its Equipment* (New York: The American Architect, 1911). Gelber, p. 250. There is a conspicuous absence of discussion about the garage in *Autopia* the comprehensive monograph on the car's impact on twentieth century life. Peter Wollen and Joe Kerr, *Autopia: Cars and Culture* (London: Reaktion, 2002).

<sup>185</sup> David Manners, *How to Plan and Build Your Workshop* (New York: Arco Publishing Co, 1955), p. 8.

Even in a small city apartment, a homeshop is perfectly possible! And not by the usual expedient of trying to carry on craftsmanship using the kitchen table as a workbench and having to put everything away at every meal. Instead you can have a portable, self-contained and practically complete workshop that folds up to become a usable studio couch.<sup>186</sup> (figure 14)

Brown's cunning device provided an adequate space in which domestic amateur carpentry could flourish without getting in the way of other household tasks. This sofa workshop attempted to confine do-it-yourself activity to a separate realm in order to reduce its interference with other domestic spaces, epitomising the phrase 'hidden in plain sight': one can see the sofa, but its true properties remain concealed from view until it is opened or when its use as a chair is accompanied by the jingle-jangle of loose tools. This phrase has also been used to characterise the marginalisation of the female embroidery worker in the context of patriarchal dominance within in the home. The woman could be seen but the expressive content of her work and organisation was hidden from public attention<sup>187</sup>. Brown's sofa workshop, as well as a plethora of other fold away tool boxes and workstations on wheels<sup>188</sup>, demonstrates how the character of 'putting away' or concealing one's tools was infused with expressive potential in the 1950s: the impromptu and creative transformation of an apartment to a handyman's workshop demonstrating the resourcefulness, efficiency and guile of a keen amateur.

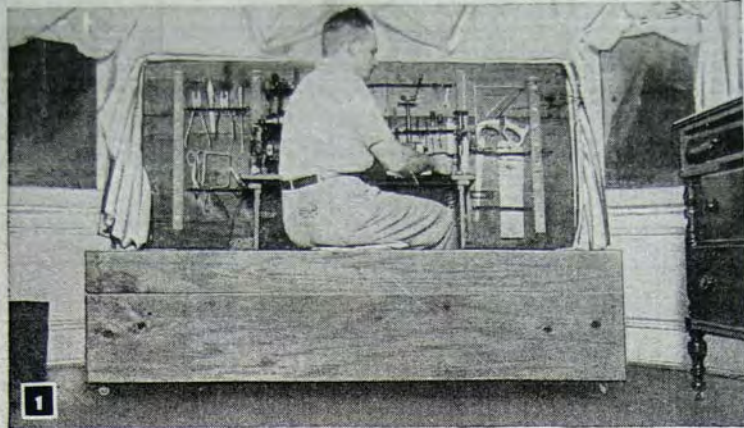
The marginal role that amateur practice occupied in everyday life was reflected in the limited physical space granted to such activities and the transformable, collapsible, concealable workstation responded to this need, regardless of the activity undertaken. The portable and invisible workstation fits around other commitments, expressing its differential status within everyday life in much the same way as Lefebvre's construction of the carnival. This association alerts us to the potential productivity that emerges from mobility, evident in Brown's workshop sofa and in the toolkits of female embroiderers throughout the centuries. The impermanent, concealed and

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<sup>186</sup> Sam Brown, *Planning Your Own Home Workshop* (Chicago: Popular Mechanics Press, 1949), pp. 48-9.

<sup>187</sup> Parker, p. 16.

<sup>188</sup> David Manners, *Home Improvements You Can Do* (Greenwich, Connecticut: Fawcett Publications (1959), p. 64. Brown gives instructions on how to build a tool rack that folds into a wall and attach wheels to workshop units. Brown, *Planning*, pp. 91 and 47 respectively.

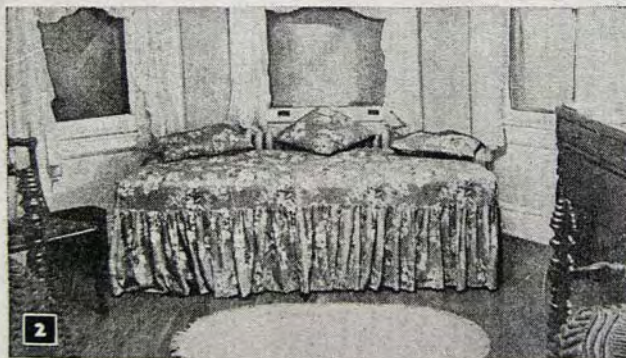


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**E**VEN in a small city apartment, a home-shop is perfectly possible! And not by the usual expedient of trying to carry on craftsmanship using the kitchen table as a workbench and having to put everything away at every meal. Instead, you can have a portable, self-contained and practically complete workshop that folds up to become a usable studio couch!

Not only does it solve the problem of a place to work with everything in place, but it can be transformed quickly into a comfortable and attractive studio couch by simply closing the cover as shown in Fig. 2. There's really nothing to be afraid of. Fig. 4 will give you a good idea of the construction which amounts to making a box with a hinged cover and upholstering it with a mattress.



No one would suspect that this studio couch houses a complete "workshop." Just lift the cover and presto!—there it is all before you—everything in readiness to begin work. No time is wasted putting things away.

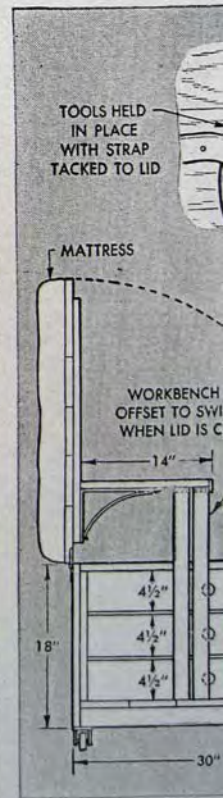


Figure 14: A sofa that transforms into a home workstation, in Sam Brown *Planning Your Own Home Workshop* (1955).

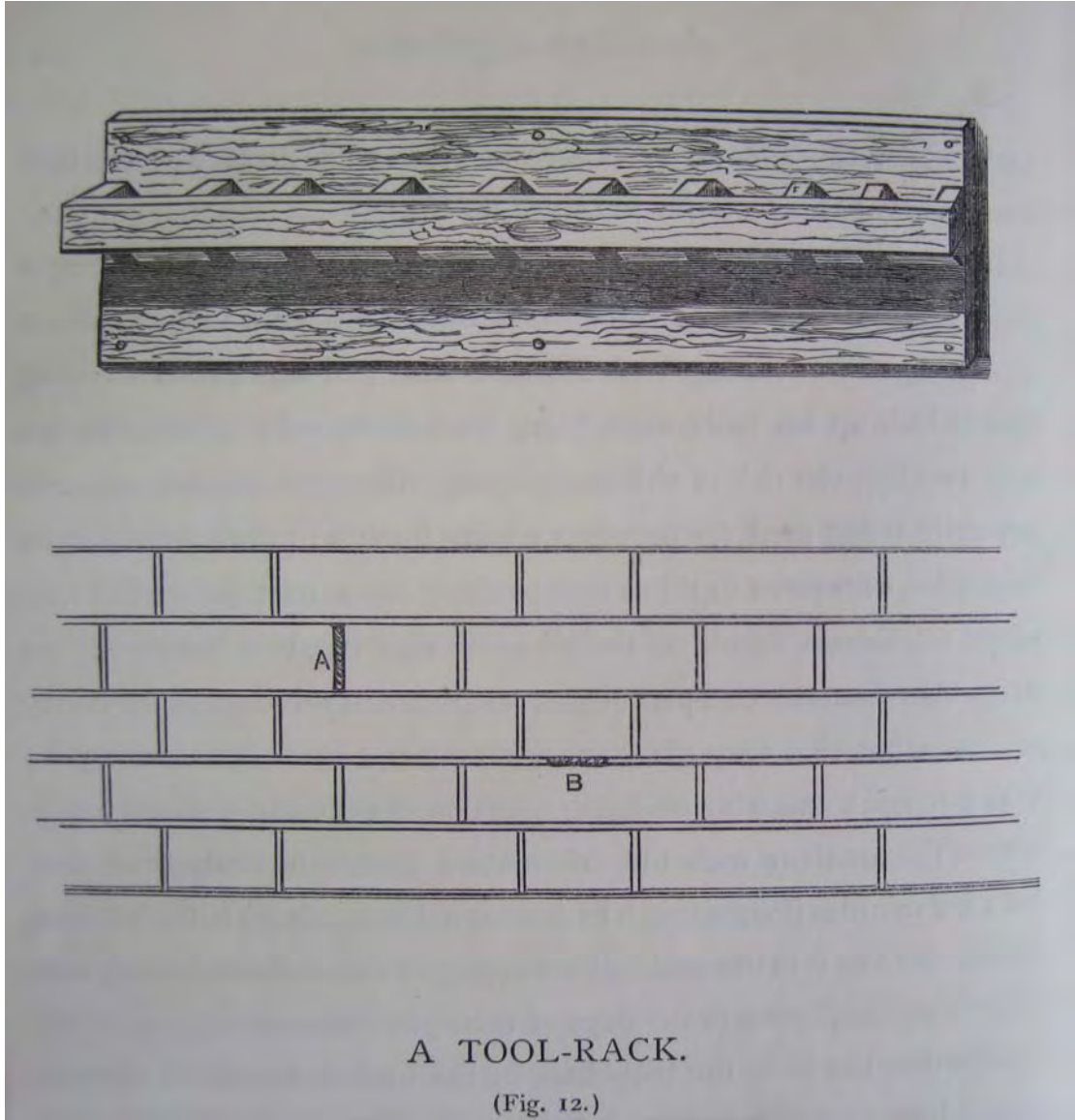


Figure 15: A tool rack in Ellis Davidson, *Amateur House Carpenter* (1875).

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convertible workstations are conduits of expression that allow the amateur practitioner to temporarily become the *homo faber*: productive in their own mobile and idiosyncratic way.

### **Everything in its right place: security**

The toolbox is another example of a portable, concealable workstation that also imposed a degree of tool organisation. Davidson and Chilton-Young gave instructions how to build toolboxes<sup>189</sup>, insisting that compartments were needed to contain specific materials or facilitate easy access. Like the paintbox, the toolbox miniaturises processes of labour, establishing a tool order, with a view to encourage productivity. However, as I covered paintboxes in depth in the first chapter, the focus here is on the *exterior* compartmentalisation of tool racks and tool walls that similarly allowed for individual responses within a pre-given framework.

The most obvious rationale for keeping tools in some kind of order was that it helped the amateur undertake a task more effectively. Put simply, toolboxes and the exterior space of the workshop were arranged so as to best accompany the task at hand. This is manifest in the common connection between practice and the state of a workman's tools: the proverb that 'a good workman is known by his tools' was particularly relevant to late nineteenth century amateurs. As Black states in *Saxon's Everyday Guide to Carpentry* (1898):

The good workman obtains "good" tools in the first instance, and then by constant care keeps them in a state of "goodness" that he has never occasion to row with them. He does not keep plane, iron or chisel in such a condition that it turns round and barks at him, and he has to "cuss" it in return.<sup>190</sup>

Maintaining tools required essential surface interventions such as polishing, sharpening, grinding and cleaning. Yet a tool's 'state of goodness' also depended on the arrangement and storage. Davidson's explanation for why it

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<sup>189</sup> Chilton-Young, *Everyman His Own Mechanic*, pp. 403-6. Davidson, pp. 38-41.

<sup>190</sup> Black, p. 31.



was important to build a tool rack, like the one shown in figure 15, seems obvious:

If each set of tools is kept at a particular part of the rack, it will save much time, for the eye will soon become accustomed to the positions, and will at once seek the tool required in its right place, instead of being compelled to travel along the entire rack.<sup>191</sup>

Within reach, easily accessible, and allowing tools to be organised according to size, the tool rack clearly makes practical sense. If an amateur was attempting to make a chair, to have the tools clearly displayed and within reach rather than cluttered on the floor would ease construction as well as ensure safety. Davidson advised that a lock and key mechanism should also be added to all tool cupboards in order to prevent the likelihood of injury to curious infants or clumsy adults<sup>192</sup>. Tools strewn across a floor in a disordered fashion clearly presented an obvious hazard in the domestic environment.

However, making a tool rack in the manner that Davidson suggested was not merely rational, neutral or safe. Storing one's own tools suggests a relationship to personal property, a desire to protect them from potential theft or misuse. Davidson bemoans the tool abuse that ensued if tools were not adequately safeguarded:

... and who, on being questioned as to some missing tool favour the amateur with the information that it has only been used for a few minutes (long enough to destroy a dozen chisels) in the kitchen; or that the axe is in the coal cellar, the proper coal-hammer having been "lost long" ago even in the days of their predecessors.<sup>193</sup>

Davidson's words recall his experiences with domestic servants who managed to find and use tools for functions for which they were not intended. The damage to chisels or axes constituted the undesirable consequences that resulted from the inappropriate storage and protection of tools. More than being just a safety precaution, the locked doors of tool cabinets reflected a personal relationship between an amateur and his or her

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<sup>191</sup> Davidson, p. 26.

<sup>192</sup> Davidson, p. 27.

<sup>193</sup> Davidson, p. 27. The editors of *Design and Work* positioned tool abuse as one sign of an unpractical 'bumptious amateur' who fails to take advice from others and vainly triumphs his own abilities. 'Amateurs' *Design and Work*, pp. 141-2.

range of tools. There was a desire to protect the integrity and condition of a tool kit, because outside agents might not only use the tool incorrectly but were not responsible for their upkeep. For domestic servants, the tool was needed only for the immediate task it had to perform. For the amateur, the tool was selected, arranged and maintained with idiosyncratic or long-term use in view and was more likely to be cherished for this reason. This need to prevent accessibility to tools was more acute for an amateur within a domestic workshop than workers in a more conventional professional environment, due to proximity of servants and others who might be unskilled in tool use and care.

The need to keep tools safely stowed away that is manifest in late nineteenth century manuals is mirrored by post-war US handyman literature<sup>194</sup>. However, the practice of tracing an outline of one's tool on to the workshop wall demonstrated a heightened degree of possessiveness that surpassed the need to merely keep tools safe. Manners provided instructions as to how to complete this simple process using pencil and paint, noting that the effects are equally as effective on pegboard<sup>195</sup>. A succession of outlined tools made it easier to ascertain whether something was missing or lent out (a feature within amateur workshops that is similar to strategies of retail stocktaking that I cover in more detail below). The outline encouraged the sense of possession over tools, even when they were not there, suggesting a certain degree of obsession beyond convenience and notions of personal property. Like Davidson's accounts of how his tools were incorrectly used by domestic servants, the tool outline suggests a degree of possessiveness common to amateurs who have personal subjectivity invested in their tools. Once again amateur space is shown to stretch functional relationships between man and object into the differential category, the idiosyncratic narratives associated with amateur tools not making them work any better but nonetheless altering the way in which they are used.

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<sup>194</sup> Manners, *Home Improvements*, p. 65.

<sup>195</sup> Manners, *How to Plan*, p. 46.

### Everything in its right place: efficiency

Tool racks and pegboard were intended to ensure safe storage but were also designed as timesaving devices for the amateur maker. Given the lack of accountability to any paymaster, a concern to economise on time loss and be efficient might have seemed irrelevant in amateur practice. On most occasions however this is not the case. As Davidson notes:

[The] amateur has want of time and annoyance of missing, misplaced, or inconveniently stored tools deters activity.<sup>196</sup>

As outlined in the beginning of the chapter, amateur work never has to be done and it therefore occupies a supplemental role in modern capitalism. It is therefore significant that tools and materials were organised in a manner that made them as easy as possible to access without obstacle. As Davidson mentions, the inability to organise tools effectively ‘deters activity’ suggesting that amateur space needs to be even more organised than professional equivalents in order for any activity to take place. A contracted labourer would not have the option of being discouraged from undertaking a given task just because a tool rack was not organised correctly; they would have to complete tasks regardless. Conversely, amateur workstations are often more ordered, ergonomic, rationalised and well-planned than one would expect because the failure to plan workstations effectively would be sufficient enough to entirely discourage amateur practice.

Decades after Davidson’s urge to encourage effective organisation, pegboard fulfilled the same function of displaying tools within an easily accessible grid and allowing jobs to be undertaken without hindrance. The pre-drilled structure and simple means of fastening tools with hooks or pegs meant that pegboard automatically made walls into ‘prefinished’ tool racks<sup>197</sup>. David Manners was particularly adamant that tools organisation should aim for efficiency:

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<sup>196</sup> Davidson, p. 27.

<sup>197</sup> Advert for Masonite’s pegboard stress its ‘prefinished’ nature. *Popular Mechanics* (October 1962), p. 219 and *Popular Science* (October 1962), p. 191, (November 1962). David Manners commends pegboard as an effective means of storage. Manners, *How to Plan*, p. 14.



What sense is there wasting half an hour looking for a particular nail or a mislaid tool? [...] Make the shop as efficient as a good kitchen, and it will pay off by saving you time, sparing your nerves.<sup>198</sup>

Although rooted in the individualistic desire to limit stress and annoyance whilst undertaking amateur labour, the organisation of workshops, putatively to save frustrations, leads to a particular type of hyper-management whereby the space is specifically tailored to the needs of the practicing individual. With its roots in nineteenth century middle class self-reliance that encouraged amateurs to organise space as efficiently as possible, rational organisation of the workshop urged by authors like Davidson and Chilton-Young pre-dates the famous motion studies included in Taylor's *Principles of Scientific Management* (1911). In his work Taylor attempts to 'professionalise' systems of management with the attempt to iron out inefficient practices, habits, even singular, aberrant bodily movements. He quotes the example of one of his fellow labour reformers Frank Gilbreth in the 'rationalisation' of the process of bricklaying:

He developed the exact position which each of the feet of the bricklayer should occupy with relation to the wall, the mortar box, and the pile of bricks, and so made it unnecessary for him to take a step or two toward the pile of bricks and back again each time a brick is laid.<sup>199</sup>

This motion study is directed towards ensuring the best bodily position for bricklaying, for the purposes of increasing productivity. This paragon of 'professional' labour organisation actually derives from the phenomenon of Victorian self-reliance that compelled amateurs to be as efficient as possible with their time, but for a different reason: because there was not much of it to spare. With the constraints of time deriving from its supplementary status within everyday life, the amateur had to easily and quickly assume positions of readiness in relation to tools: poor workstations would stultify any pet project. Amateur workstations had to be comfortable to inhabit, as the late nineteenth century French author of porcelain decoration manuals Delamardelle advised:

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<sup>198</sup> Manners, *How to Plan*, p. 5.

<sup>199</sup> Taylor, p. 77.

The work being long and meticulous demands that the body is at ease and above all that the stomach does not suffer from bad posture.<sup>200</sup>

The issue of comfort provides another opportunity to stress the differential status of amateur space. Amateur efficiency derived from a voluntary desire to fashion surroundings to their liking: amateur workshops were attractive because they were self-organised and provided a site of labour that was close to the comforts of the domestic environment, as Chilton-Young commented<sup>201</sup>. Efficiency that resulted from keeping tools and materials within reach derived not purely from the mere spatial proximity that Taylor was measuring, but from the differential status of amateur space. In other words, Taylor did not fully recognise that efficiency was not just an issue of scientific space and distances, but social space. The amateur labourer who had self-fashioned his own workstation was likely to be more efficient compared to those who were subjected to the imposition of external rules based on scientifically optimal conditions. The way in which amateur space is arranged has a more acute relationship to the labour that takes place thereafter: efficiency derives from the individual's ability to have a closer, more autonomous relationship with their tools. The professional ethos that Taylor's work came to exemplify did not prioritise the import of this individual comfort and thus came to be associated strongly with worker alienation, from Harry Braverman's critique onwards<sup>202</sup>.

### **Consuming one's own tool organisation: amateur and retail space**

The means of organising tools and materials within retail space at the turn of the century mirrored the strategies of organisation employed by judicious amateurs in their workshops, thus providing evidence of the pervasion of strategies of efficient organisation in advance of Taylor's influential thesis. Both spaces were worked to exaggerate the availability and ease of use to the user/consumer.

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<sup>200</sup> Baroness Delamardelle, *Leçons pratiques de peinture vitrifiable sur porcelaine dure, pâte tendre, faïence, émail* (Paris, 1877) p. 14.

<sup>201</sup> Chilton-Young, pp. 192 and 18 respectively.

<sup>202</sup> Braverman, p. 36.

In the late nineteenth century the ironmongery store was the principal site for the purchase of supplies and tools for tradesmen as well as the amateur enthusiast engaging in do-it-yourself activity<sup>203</sup>. *The Complete Ironmonger* (1895), written by G A Hardy, dispensed advice to store managers urging effective compartmentalisation and organisation in a manner similar to amateur carpentry manuals. He stated that the appearance of goods is improved 'when all of one kind are kept together', adding that 'the test of good arrangement is that the salesman can find goods easily, and thus serve the customers expediently'<sup>204</sup>. Hardy gives numerous tips to store managers: such as urging them to keep their stock on show to impress customers, categorising similar object or material types and keeping them together, replenishing window displays frequently, and placing goods within easily navigable display cabinets. This advice constitutes an alternative retail strategy to department store organisation. Rather than overwhelm the consumer with spectacle, hoping that in the confusion the individual will be more likely to consume<sup>205</sup>, the systematic management advised by Hardy with its outward presentation of available stock that alerts the shopkeeper when any particular item is running out<sup>206</sup>, appeals to an audience that values efficiency, appropriate for the selling of fittings, tools and materials.

Amateur and retail organisation of tools was similar: the former with the intention of encouraging practice, the latter out of a desire to sell stock. Underpinning the choices of both the ironmonger and the amateur carpenter was the need to organise space effectively with an emphasis on availability and an appealing aesthetic of 'work-readiness'. Tool rack organisation differed from store management in that the amateur did not have to appeal to a broad range of consumers. However, one could argue that various manuals' models of the 'ideal' tool rack positioned the amateur maker as the consumer of their own organisation, attracted by the conspicuousness of perfectly

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<sup>203</sup> Cecil Meadows, *The Victorian Ironmonger* (Princes Risborough: Shire, 2000), p. 16.

<sup>204</sup> G A Hardy, *The Complete Ironmonger* (London: Offices of 'The Ironmonger', 1900), pp. 27-8. See also *The Ironmonger's Workshop* (London: Offices of 'The Ironmonger', 1904), pp. 161-4.

<sup>205</sup> Rosalind Williams particularly draws attention to the particular logic of spectacle within the department store, opening up access to commodities on display whilst dazzling consumers with luxury. Rosalind Williams, *Dream Worlds: Mass Consumption in Late Nineteenth Century France* (Berkeley and London: University of California Press, 1982), p. 72. Émile Zola, *The Ladies Paradise* (London: Hutchinson & Co, 1895) pp. 1-4.

<sup>206</sup> Hardy, p. 38.

ordered tools, inviting the possibility of work without the absolute necessity of it having to happen.

This phenomenon is more overt in the tool organisation of post-war American home workshops. For example, Manners proscriptively advised his readers to take an inventory of essential tools, discard any that were deemed unnecessary and draw on experience from past projects to predict which tools would be necessary for the future: 'Put a price beside each item you'll have to buy...'<sup>207</sup>. Manners' description of the amateur maker is comparable to the store manager keenly aware of his stock. In a similar vein, the strategy of outlining workshop tools provided an automatic inventory for amateur workshops without the need to go through storage cupboards: this system of organisation immediately indicated tool absence. This lack could be filled by finding a tool if it was lost, stolen or lent, or through future consumption.

Outlining tools as a form of workshop management accentuated absence and thus explicitly incited the amateur to replace lost tools through consumption. Although the amateur has a greater sense of tool possession through this form of arrangement, there was still the suggestion to keep 'filling in' the space by continuing to take inventories and going through processes of ordering and re-ordering. The thoroughly organised tool wall indicated absence so readily that it conversely accelerates consumption because of its perpetual 'unfinishedness' rather than generating a sense of a completion. This sense of lack was exacerbated by post-war advertisements that exaggerated the extent of plenty in the ideal construction of a fully kitted-out workstation, an example of the emerging aesthetics of efficiency – a subject to which I will now turn.

### **The aesthetics of the workstation**

So far analysis has focused on the importance of tool management in regards to how it helps the worker carry out a job more effectively and how these strategies impacted upon, and were impacted by, spatial relationships in

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<sup>207</sup> Manners, *How to Plan*, p. 6.

other locations, such as the factory or retail space. But emptied of any functional concerns, the beauty of tool organisation as an entity in itself was one reason for its appeal amongst amateurs. As Manners stated in the context of pegboard lined workshops:

... an orderly arrangement of good tools is a joy to behold.<sup>208</sup>

The aesthetic appeal of order was accentuated in the Masonite Corporation's advertisement of its new range of Presto Pegboard, which appeared in various editions of *Popular Mechanics* and *Popular Science* in the early 1960s (figure 16). The company had developed a range of hardboards since its founder, William H Mason, patented a particular process of exploding and steaming woodchip into panels<sup>209</sup>. Patterns of holes could be easily drilled into the wood because there was no grain. In the Presto advertisements, the modern solution for tool organisation was favourably presented against past models of 'cramped, old-fashioned mess' and offered the promise of transforming rooms into neat and tidy units that were 'eye-pleasing', 'attractive' and 'handsome' with a 'tracery' design<sup>210</sup>.

The allure of a workshop with perfectly new tools, attractively arranged in a systematic display, evokes the aesthetic wonder of regulated order that Siegfried Kracauer observed in mass synchronised dance. In *The Mass Ornament*, Kracauer describes the de-sexualisation of the American Tiller girls that accompanies their subjugation to a rationalised, symmetrical, linear choreography, demonstrating how their performance reflects contemporaneous capitalist realities<sup>211</sup>. The dance dispassionately reflects a demand for 'calculability' and the 'abstractness' of modern capitalist thinking as a subject for audience contemplation. It also constitutes a situation where the mass ornament, of which audience and performers are both part, assumes an authority beyond individual subjectivity:

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<sup>208</sup> Manners, *How to Plan*, p. 45.

<sup>209</sup> Akers, p. 136.

<sup>210</sup> See adverts for Presto Pegboard in *Popular Science* 181:4 (October 1962), p. 191; 181:5 (November 1962), p. 29; 183:3 (September 1963), p. 3; and *Popular Mechanics* 118:4 (October 1962), p. 219; 118: 5 (November 1962), p. 219.

<sup>211</sup> Kracauer, p. 79.

CRAMPED, OLD-FASHIONED MESS...?



Organize your garage with  
**PRESTO PEG-BOARD**

Figure 16: Masonite Corp Advertisement (1962).

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The human figure enlisted in the mass ornament has begun the *exodus* from lush organic splendour and the constitution of individuality toward the realm of anonymity to which it relinquishes itself when it stands in truth and when the knowledge radiating from the basis of man dissolves the contours of visible natural form.<sup>212</sup>

Kracauer's analysis of how the dancing girls' bodies lose their visible natural form and become subsumed into a rationalised unity, can be mapped on to the woman ordering the shelf in the Masonite advert. She loses her organic composition, accentuated by her floating position above the ground, and dissolves into the rationalised grid system. She becomes the transparent and anonymous operator rather than a subjective agent, much like the telephone operator in Hollywood films of the era.

Beyond the figure, the grid in itself possesses characteristics of the mass ornament, rendering space calculable. Although thought to epitomise the modern, Rosalind Krauss echoes Kracauer's words, explaining the mythical potential of the grid on account of its ability to convince onlookers of its grounding in pure rationality whilst remaining an aesthetic construct<sup>213</sup>. Krauss explores the exposition of the concealed internal dynamic of the grid as myth in De Stijl artist Piet Mondrian's paintings, but like Kracauer her arguments are surprisingly relevant in this analysis of the Masonite pegboard advert. The order of the garage has the guise of rationality, neutrality, as if this systematic form of organisation is the uncontested method of how garages *ought* to be organised absent of any aesthetic partiality. However, the opposite is the case. The organisation is aesthetic, and the apparent neutrality only serves to accentuate this. It is no surprise that the dishevelled pre-pegboard garage mess is a drawing, whereas the solution achieved by Masonite's product is presented in the form of a photograph, increasing its 'truth' claim through the medium's presumed ability to be a more accurate representation of reality.

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<sup>212</sup> Ibid, p. 83.

<sup>213</sup> Rosalind Krauss, *Grids: Format and Image in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Pace Gallery, 1980), p. 3. Henri Lefebvre in his critique of abstract space also explains that the rationality of the grid is not 'above reproach' explaining how as it space it desires to eliminate contradictions 'to reduce the dialectical to the logical'. Lefebvre, p. 367.

Kracauer and Krauss problematise the presumed neutrality of the grid by showing that it has an autonomous aesthetic appeal that exerts a 'mythical' power over those who look upon it, much in the same way as the discovery of perspective in early modern art. In the context of post-war America the aesthetic appeal of an ordered workshop mirrored the extent of order in modern kitchens and bathrooms that emerged as 'a surreal conflation of the organic and the mechanical: its seamless skins are fluidly curved yet impervious to dirt and moisture', according to Ellen Lupton<sup>214</sup>. Masonite's image of a pegboard garage crucially allies domestic aesthetics with the 'workshop' that has to be managed to cohere with rigorous standards illustrated in magazines and advertisements, constituting 'a laxative for hastening the flow of goods through the economy'<sup>215</sup>. Lupton convincingly argues that streamlining in kitchen and bathroom design reduced these room's functions to a series of knowable choreographic steps that help guard against the perils of dust and improve efficiency along Taylorist lines, the woman of the house making sure the correct units were bought, placed within the kitchen and maintained to a high standard. Underneath all these modifications is the idea that the domestic spaces of the kitchen and the home workshop tried to eliminate what they treated, to sanitise cluttered, unhealthy interiors, considered hallmarks of Victorian living<sup>216</sup>: in the context of the kitchen the dirt and moisture of food preparation, in the garage the sweat, failure and mess of a functioning workshop.

The garage kitted out with Presto Pegboard, with the tools placed in a delicate symmetry, suggested the inexhaustible potential of domestic labour. The advertisement appropriates the allure of 'work-readiness': the latent energy inherent in tools themselves and the fact that all these tools *could* be employed in a multitude of domestic labours. These are features that attempted to evoke the imagination of the consumer and constitute a peculiar aesthetic predicated on ability to store and to organise. The advertisement does not depict a workstation that shows obvious signs of labour or human activity, like the drawing in the oval frame of the garage in a pre-pegboard state of

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<sup>214</sup> Lupton, p. 2.

<sup>215</sup> Lupton, p. 5.

<sup>216</sup> Lupton, p. 67. Sparke states that the science of housekeeping was informed by a concern over germs and poor hygiene that were thought to prosper in cluttered households. Sparke, p. 29.



mess, but instead a streamlined absence of messy work. The woman in the advertisement is not deploying her labour to make something, modify, clean or repair, but rather to organise and manage a vast array of consumer goods in an attractive, ordered pattern. The inherently fluid, tacit and unpredictable processes that each tool suggests is mapped on to a grid and turned into an aesthetic of work. Taylor's principles of scientific management applied to the garage reduces it to an aesthetic of 'work-readiness' or an indication that work *has* taken place but has subsequently been finished and cleaned up, with the tools that performed the process put back into their correct place within a rational grid structure.

The affective relationship between tool organisation, labour and aesthetics prompts a reminder that there is flexibility within the pre-arranged systems of tool organisation. Critically, notions of toolbox space productivity are exclusive to every individual practitioner and do not completely capitulate to abstract supra-human models. For example Brown encouraged practitioners to build quirky little devices, using discarded car pistons to hold nails and building a sectional rack for small parts, which swivel and are arranged according to the specific needs of an individual's practice<sup>217</sup>: tools are made and tailored to the body of any one maker and there is infinite uniqueness.

In addition there is the continuity of mess in relation to the home workshop. After giving detailed proscriptions on how to organise a workshop according to the same logic manifest in the Presto Pegboard advertisement above, Brown states:

Usually it takes three years for the average crafter to acquire a full setup of the needed tools. By that time you know your tools and you know what you want – remodelling and rearranging come easy. And you may never get above the slap-happy stage with tools scattered haphazardly and junk everywhere. Some of the best, most enjoyable and most productive homeshops in the country would never take a blue ribbon in a picture contest.<sup>218</sup>

Brown's observation that some workshops never get beyond the 'slap-happy' stage and remain disordered contests the notion that amateur makers

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<sup>217</sup> Brown, *Planning*, p. 90.

<sup>218</sup> Brown, *Planning*, p. 43.

followed advice word for word or replicated images in advertisements. The productivity of ordered mess and the enjoyment of inhabiting it reflect a challenge to assertions that the domestic sphere was subjugated by principles of scientific management. This idea that haphazard production procedures might encourage productivity is one that is not interrogated in detail in this analysis, what we might consider the smooth space of actual practice, in comparison to the striations of pictorial depictions of amateur labour, to use Deleuze and Guattari's language. My focus on the striations is deliberate as the experience of how the amateur behaviourally operates within the grid falls under the purview of the following chapter. In this chapter the concern has been to analyse the aesthetics of the grid and how it subtly disseminates dominant notions of labour organisation within the domestic workshop and other, non-amateur spaces.

Individual subjective agency can of course be exercised within the structures of the grid<sup>219</sup>, whether imposed or self-fashioned. Creating mess, not following didactic advice and following one's own rules demonstrates the inherent flexibility inherent to amateur space. Yet this individual action constitutes a mediation of meta-structures, such as Taylor's principles of scientific management, through the course of everyday practice/labour. As this background grid is often lost beneath the presumption that amateur practice is inherently individualistic and subjective – a resolutely alternative site of proactive individual agency and an antidote to the de-skilling going on in the world<sup>220</sup> – the attempt in this chapter has been to show its links to the everyday and the conditions of capitalist existence that dominate. However, if the grid is a part of an aesthetic in which the rational and calculable takes centre stage, its appropriation by amateur practitioners constitutes its miniaturisation and thus a form of quasi-control. There is a greater degree of flexibility for amateurs to operate within the confines of the grid than Kracauer imagined, even within the most categorical organisational system.

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<sup>219</sup> Tag Gronberg critiques Penny Sparke's argument that women lose their agency in the modern space of streamlined kitchens, stating that individuals can find agency within this presumed 'de-aestheticised' space. Tag Gronberg, 'The Gendered Object: As Long As It's Pink: The Sexual Politics of Taste' *Journal of Design History* 11:3 (1998), pp. 263-65.

<sup>220</sup> Recent examples include Matthew Crawford, *The Case for Working With Your Hands: Or Why Office Work is Bad for Us and Fixing Things Feels Good* (London: Viking, 2009), pp. 1-4. Andrew Jackson, 'Constructing at Home: The Experience of the Amateur Maker', *Journal of Design and Culture* 2:1 (March 2010).

The amateur maker constructing a tool wall or buying Masonite is the manager of his own de-cluttering aesthetic, existing both within the grid, and outside as its operator.

## Conclusion

Evidence of amateur work taking place within the home from the late nineteenth century onwards, of which both suburban chicken keeping and domestic tool organisation were a part, might suggest a revival of a proto-industrial model of production, a term used to describe the 'coexistence' of productive domestic work and the reproduction of the family before late eighteenth century mass mechanisation<sup>221</sup>. If as McKeon argues, the gendered spaces of 'public' productive labour and 'private' domestic marriage become entrenched by the beginning of the modern period<sup>222</sup> then the phenomenon of amateurism represents their renewed conflation, with both men and women undertaking work within the home that is neither purely devoted to general subsistence (as characterised by Arendt's *animale laborans*) nor to the explicitly functional goal of creating objects for market exchange, nor to the construction of art that would be considered by Arendt as contributing to the human artifice.

Amateur space blurs so many of the divisions that lie at the heart of prominent conceptualisations of modernity: function-ornament, leisure-work, labour-idleness, professional-amateur. As such, amateur space shares similar characteristics to other spatial categories. In the context of the broader social movement of Victorian self-reliance, amateur carpentry, household repair and maintenance provided an opportunity for individuals to engage in productive activities, equipping them to better survive in the broader contexts of late capitalism. Yet amateur space is also differential and departs from the behaviours that underpin everyday life, constituting a refraction of its structures rather than a reflection. The striated space of the grid, standardisation and discourses of efficient organisation that constrain labour-power in modern capitalism might have proven too strong to dislodge altogether, but in amateur space the individual can navigate and consider such structures from a quasi-detached location.

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<sup>221</sup> Michael McKeon, *The Secret History of Domesticity* (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 2005), p. 174. See also Tosh, pp. 14-16.

<sup>222</sup> McKeon, p. 180.

Throughout the chapter I have shown the alternative forms of productivity that arise from this refraction. From the idiosyncratic processes of preparing exhibition hens; the creation of functional, well managed poultry units where profitability is a minor concern; the portability and invisibility of locations of production that can be easily put away; and crucially, the accentuated efficiency that comes from creating a comfortable, relaxing workstation completely tailored to individual need. Conversely an analysis of these alternative forms of productivity does not confirm presumptions of the superfluity, non-necessity, naivety or marginality of amateur space but highlight its importance in assessing and defining notions of labour, work, motivation and efficiency in modern capitalism. In particular, amateur labour, in the context of proactive self-reliance and do-it-yourself, demonstrates the conflation of function and ornament that has come to epitomise conditions of mass consumerism that persist to the day.

## Chapter Three: Amateur time

### The philosophy of amateur time

The hobby was often simply an extension of ordinary paid work routine with the crucial modification that routine was replaced by autonomy and choice.<sup>1</sup>

Ross McKibbin, *Ideologies of Class* (1990), p. 160.

Amateur time is inextricably tied to the notion of 'free' time, defined as the time notionally set aside from the obligation to work. Central to this experience, as described above by social historian Ross McKibbin, is the individual freedom to decide how time is spent. Time floats free of production: whereas the last two chapters had a focus on the end result and practice of amateur craft, this chapter analyses the experiential qualities 'in-and-of-itself' that arise from its undertaking. The substantive result of amateur craft practice is often subservient to the experience of doing, as trainspotter John Stretton describes:

For me the over-riding joy of trainspotting [...] is the peace at the lineside. For some it is fishing, reading or even a Hamlet cigar! But put me at the side of the railway line and I am happy. Almost, there is no need for an actual train, the place is therapeutic enough.<sup>2</sup>

Although the practices Stretton mentions – trainspotting, fishing, cigar smoking and reading – lack the more explicit engagement with material evident in the craft practices covered by this dissertation so far, the lack of need for an 'actual train' shows how the enjoyment of trainspotting as an amateur activity does not depend on the material thing that underpins the practice. The experience of time, in this case the therapeutic benefits of being close to the railway, is prioritised over the end result (a notebook containing a checklist of all the trains that pass).

Why are time and resources spent on amateur craft? Answering this question could lead to an overview of individual accounts of uplifting experiences and

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<sup>1</sup> Ross McKibbin, *The Ideologies of Class* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), p. 160.

<sup>2</sup> John Stretton, *Thirty Years of Trainspotting* (Paddock Wood: Unicorn, 1990), p. 9.

therapeutic benefits offered by amateur time. However, as the McKibbin states above, hobbies – the activities that occupy amateur time – are often ‘simply an extension’ of everyday work routine. Theodor Adorno was alert to the clingy co-dependence between free and work time, showing how the ‘otherness’ of amateur time – whether therapeutic, politically subversive or physical in character – is a condition of its unfreedom. With this critical perspective in mind this chapter assesses whether freedom is possible in amateur time, and what the character of this freedom might be. There are distinctive temporal characteristics that distinguish amateur time: even if exactly the same production procedures used under the conditions of salaried work are replicated in amateur practice, temporal differences arise from the amateur’s notional freedom and the essential non-necessity of its happening. Amateur time is an extension of other temporal modes, echoing the relational aspect of amateur space, but there is the chance for individuals to dictate the pace and conditions of labour’s exploitation, creating a personal, miniaturised utopia that is nonetheless limited by its temporary status and dependence.

After the conceptualisation of the constrained freedom of amateur time I seek to demonstrate the alternative temporal experiences that emerge from voluntarily undertaken labour through a case study on amateur railway modelling. Analysis of the hobby provides an opportunity to expand on propositions made in opening parts of the chapter, concerning amateur time’s relational status, its utopian leanings and the different ways it stretches normative temporal structures.

The final part of the chapter assesses the relevance of amateur time in contemporary art, craft and design practice. A succession of miniature case studies, which return to subjects treated in the thesis so far, demonstrates how amateur practice already constitutes a prominent feature in contemporary discussions about skill, craft, procedures of making, appropriation and tooling. The section outlines what might be learnt from empathetic observation of amateur experience; assesses the artistic projects that employ, evoke or recycle the products of amateur labour; and concludes with a polemic on why contemporary art and design practice should take heed of amateur experience in light of art’s every increasing democratisation.

## Is free time free?

A key theoretical tension that helps us frame amateur time is whether it can be characterised as permitting genuine freedom. Amateur practice takes place in 'free' time, the time outside salaried labour, where Marx states the labourer feels 'at home', in stark contrast to the alienation suffered when he is compelled to make objects that satisfy others' needs<sup>3</sup>. There is a domestic, hobby-like quality to Marx's vision of a utopia of freely undertaken labour<sup>4</sup>. Once the necessity of human subsistence was taken care of by socialised forms of labour organisation, an individual could:

...hunt in the morning, fish in the afternoon, rear cattle in the evening, criticise after dinner, just as I have a mind, without ever becoming a hunter, fisherman, cowherd or critic.<sup>5</sup>

Marx was optimistic about the fate of the labouring man (later termed by Hannah Arendt as the *animale laborans*), suggesting in *The German Ideology* that once freed from the pressure of subsistence the energies previously spent working would be directed towards 'higher goals'. As discussed in the last chapter, Arendt and thinkers who follow her trajectory see no evidence that substantiated this optimistic viewpoint because amateur production appeared facile, imitative and superfluous, merely a way of spending time meaninglessly. Yet perhaps this ignores the possibility of authentic temporal freedom through amateur activity: Arendt too quickly ties the quality of temporal experience with the need to produce things that, in her eyes, are genuine, valorised additions to the human artifice. The account of the trainspotter above shows how an individual might produce things of little significance, and even openly admit that fact, but the experiences that arise from such inane production could nonetheless be akin to boundless freedom. This is the question though: how free is this freedom and what is its inherent nature?

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<sup>3</sup> Karl Marx, *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts* in Erich Fromm ed. *Marx's Concept of Man* trans. by T B Bottomore (New York: Ungar Pub. Co., 1961), p. 98.

<sup>4</sup> Noted by Ian Carter, *British Railway Enthusiasm* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2008), p. 264.

<sup>5</sup> Karl Marx, 'The German Ideology' from David McLellan ed. *Karl Marx: Selected Writings* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 185.



Theodor Adorno's provocative assertion that 'free time is shackled to its opposite'<sup>6</sup> constitutes an approximate equivalent to Arendt's thesis in the temporal dimension: in the process of succumbing to the cyclical biological necessity for endless production and consumption, the *animale laborans* spends free time engaging in activity that ensures further entrapment rather than a release from conditions of capitalism.

Free time depends on the totality of social conditions, which continues to hold people under its spell. Neither in work nor in their consciousness do people dispose genuine freedom over themselves.<sup>7</sup>

Adorno echoes Marx's thoughts on alienation as being ruled over by a totalising inhuman power<sup>8</sup>, but he directs his critique specifically against those leisure activities that are presumed to be free. Going to the gym, visiting the Eiffel tower, making a shed in the garden, and the entire gamut of possible uses of free time all in some way serve the interest of capital, fuel a market, or make a commodity out of the things that have been developed for that particular activity. The particular sophistication of late capitalism, according to Adorno, is its ability to neuter the increased amounts of free time made possible by increased productivity, by convincing individuals that they are in control of how this excess time is used whereas in fact their desires, wants and longings are shaped by the institutional and social expectations underpinned by capitalist production. He adds that free time is only given once the imaginations of workers are sufficiently quashed, rendering them incapable of using this time effectively. This results in boredom, the continuation of bodily labour through competitive sports that ensures the ongoing fitness of workers, or the facile pursuit of the commodity fetish (he cites the example of women going on holiday to get a tan rather than be with their fellow man)<sup>9</sup>.

It is within this context that Adorno criticises hobbies as an engagement with mindless infatuations that exist 'in order to kill the time' that he resolutely

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<sup>6</sup> Theodor Adorno, 'Free Time' in Theodor Adorno, *The Culture Industry: Selected Essays on Mass Culture* (London: Routledge, 1991), p. 162.

<sup>7</sup> Adorno, p. 162.

<sup>8</sup> Marx, *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts*, p. 151.

<sup>9</sup> Adorno, p. 165.

distances himself from ('I have no hobby')<sup>10</sup>. Adorno, as a theorist, takes his work very seriously and refutes the conventional work-leisure bifurcation by insisting that everything he does fits in with his overall vocation<sup>11</sup>. In contrast, the hobby industry, like the leisure industry, is positioned as the 'continuation of the forms of profit-oriented social life'<sup>12</sup>. Instead of leading to a possible utopia, amateur labour taking place in free time confirms the capitalist colonisation of all aspects of life. Even when there is no compulsion to work, the labourer voluntarily carries on working, mimicking the alienated conditions of capitalist work.

Despite Adorno's scepticism he does suggest that society 'cannot have it all its own way' in free time, hinting at the possibility of some form of release from capitalist structures. Yet this enlightenment in free time depends on what he refers to as 'maturity' (Mundigkeit), a specific ability to critique, through exacting erudition, the illusory nature of capitalism's edifice: his example, the self-critical reflection on how spectators 'consumed and accepted' Princess Beatrix of Holland's televised wedding whilst not quite believing in what they saw<sup>13</sup>. Adorno is clearly sceptical that amateur makers can reach such levels of criticality:

What they [amateurs – Freizeitler] create has something superfluous about it. This superfluousness makes known the inferior quality of the product, which in turn vitiates any pleasure taken in its production.<sup>14</sup>

Adorno's standard of maturity privileges his own conception of freedom as the self-realisation of existence within the negative dialectics of capitalism, all the while bemoaning the way in which people spend their free time. Adorno's analysis, like Arendt's, too heavily weighs on the material thing produced at the end of amateur production rather than the different experiences of time that take place in the course of adopting and carrying out certain production

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid, p. 163.

<sup>11</sup> Henricks discusses how in Marx's utopia every human must be as productive as possible in every aspect of existence, thereby refuting the idea between leisure and work, and the concept that there is a time to work at a lower productivity. Adorno's clear objection to a work-leisure dichotomy and insistence on his productivity seems to reflect this Marxist scholarly trend. Thomas Henricks, *Play Reconsidered: Sociological Perspectives on Human Expression* (Urbana, Illinois, University of Illinois Press, 2006), p. 35.

<sup>12</sup> Adorno, p. 164.

<sup>13</sup> Adorno, p. 170.

<sup>14</sup> Adorno, p. 167.

processes. Pleasure arises in amateur practice *despite* the ‘inferior’, slavish imitation of pre-given styles; indeed, in railway modelling the accuracy of the copy often is the barometer by which success and gratification is measured. Adorno might lament the spuriousness of hobbies based on the material content that is generated by them, but this spuriousness, marginality and political irrelevance can produce alternative temporalities within structures of modernity. Investigation of amateur time demands a departure from judging the quality or content of amateur production and a consideration of the alternative temporal experiences that arise in the course of making.

There is a temptation to disagree with Adorno outright and state that free time *is* free, a temporal experience that contains empowering, liberating features. Utopian speculations linked to amateur time will be analysed in detail below, but Adorno’s identification of the constraints of free time – how it is governed by commercial interest and chimes with the values of the dominant capitalist paradigm – is critical in my attempt to conceptualise the bounded freedom of amateur time. Other twentieth-century Marxist scholars also recognise the limitations of freedom within capitalism: for example, Braverman’s assessment of autonomy within the workplace where management ‘deliberately leaves insignificant matters open to choice’<sup>15</sup> can be analogised to free time, where individual selection of one’s hobbies is an unimportant choice that merely gives the illusion of control. Jean Baudrillard also claimed the ‘ideology of freedom is the weak point in our Western rationality, including Marxism’<sup>16</sup>. These scholars, influenced by Marx, help critique overly optimistic assessments of amateur time. But they fail to recognise how reduced, permitted freedom does allow the individual to temporarily take control of the manner in which time is spent. Alternative experiences of time (time-states) can thus emerge that stretch, exaggerate or highlight everyday reality: invention, critical thought and play.

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<sup>15</sup> Harry Braverman, *Labour and Monopoly Capital: The Degradation of Work in the Twentieth Century* (New York and London: Monthly Review Press, 1974), p. 39.

<sup>16</sup> Jean Baudrillard, *Mirror of Production* trans. by Mark Poster (St Louis: Telos Press), p. 104.

## Play

Chief among the alternative temporal modalities generated by amateur practice is the experience of play. One would expect that amateur time surely involves play, given the voluntary nature of its undertaking and the expectation that humans would seek to fill excess time with enjoyable, pleasurable tasks. Yet interrogation of the notion of play within the discipline of sociology helps elucidate its more complex relationship with amateur practice. Critical to an understanding of play is Johan Huizinga's four key qualifications set out in his 1950 work *Homo Ludens*. He states that play is voluntary; essentially superfluous because it can stop at any time; is not 'real' or 'ordinary', in that it requires its participants to 'play along' or 'pretend'; and is limited to specifically ordained times and spaces, such as the playground or moments of recreation during the working week<sup>17</sup>. Huizinga distances play from the concept of a pure child-like innocence towards a more nuanced understanding of play as embedded in culture. Even in the purest acts of child play is bounded by rules, and Huizinga emphasises the centrality of play as a social function:

It adorns life, amplifies it, and is to that extent a necessity both for the individual – as a life function – and for society by reason of the meaning it contains, its significance, its expressive value, its spiritual and social associations...<sup>18</sup>

In many respects, Huizinga's concept of play shares affinities with Lefebvre's celebration of the carnival as an interruption to everyday life that seems to depart from its foundations only to affirm the everyday more powerfully. Carnival and play both suspend and rely upon the structures of everyday life, therefore not constituting a radically alternative oppositional temporality. As Huizinga states, play is:

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<sup>17</sup> Johan Huizinga, *Homo Ludens* trans. by R F C Hull (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1949), pp. 7-10. Eighteenth century German philosopher Friedrich Schiller also espoused a theory of the play-drive, which he thought derived from reciprocal action between the sense-drive, describing subjective experience, and the form-drive, describing the finite forms of nature. Friedrich Schiller, *On the Aesthetics of Man* trans. by Elizabeth Wilkinson and L A Willoughby (Oxford: Clarendon, 1967), p. 97.

<sup>18</sup> Huizinga, p. 9.

... an *intermezzo*, and *interlude* in our daily lives. As a regularly recurring relaxation, however, it becomes the accompaniment, the complement, in fact an integral part of life in general.<sup>19</sup>

For Huizinga, music fulfils the essence of play, alongside dance and other elements of medieval court culture, which he felt had waned in the modern era. Lefebvre also used musical metaphors in his lifelong effort to determine a methodology appropriate to locating the freedom and wonder manifest in everyday life, whilst being aware of the very real limitations which everyday life operates under. In his last work, Lefebvre constructed a methodology called 'rhythmanalysis', which involved the metaphorical translation of the various activities inherent to everyday life into musical 'presences' each with a particular rhythm that possesses its own interior logic as well as the ability to co-exist with multiple surrounding harmonies<sup>20</sup>. The disciple of this new science, the 'rhythmanalyst', is able to discern the coexistence of multiple rhythms, both social and biological, and read the harmonies that result. The carnival, according to Lefebvre, is the point in which these rhythms coalesce.

Huizinga and Lefebvre use these musical metaphors to foreground a temporal modality within which play and differentiability can be situated without breaking or interrupting the dominant harmony of everyday life. Both thinkers are attracted by the notion of alternative temporal experience (play and the carnival) that is bounded by rules but is never the same twice, thus providing an opportunity for individuals to deconstruct the world – the mechanics of social, political and economic reality – only to recreate them again. Henricks, in his monograph on play, emphasises this feature:

To play fully and imaginatively is to step sideways into another reality, between the cracks of ordinary life... Like wilful children, they unscrew reality or rub it into their bodies or toss it across the room. Things are dismantled and built anew.<sup>21</sup>

Henricks perhaps overstates the alterity of the 'cracks' between ordinary life – the parallel universe of play – in comparison to the subtlety of Lefebvre and

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<sup>19</sup> Huizinga, p. 9.

<sup>20</sup> Henri Lefebvre, *Rhythmanalysis: Space, Time, and Everyday Life* trans. by Stuart Eldon and Gerald Moore (London and New York: Continuum, 2004), pp. 19-23.

<sup>21</sup> Henricks, p. 1.

Huizinga, but he grasps the importance of the reconstruction that is inherent to play.

### *Homo ludens and homo faber*

Play, as conceived by Huizinga, conveniently maps on to Lefebvre's notion of differential space, and seems to reflect the experience of amateur craft: both are voluntary types of performance, bound to various spatial parameters where its practice is permitted, and are superfluous compared to other practices of everyday life. However, Huizinga resolutely denies that there is any play in the practice of plastic arts:

[the artist's] inspiration may be free and vehement when he "conceives", but in its execution it is always subject to the skill and proficiency of the forming hand.<sup>22</sup>

Huizinga highlights the key difference between play and the type of practice that involves an explicit relationship to matter. The plastic arts through their construction transform a free, potentially playful ideal, and pin it down to a material reality. The production of objects is inherently bound to the material world and hierarchies of skill, and therefore runs counter to Huizinga's expectation that play should have an 'unreal' quality.

Earlier theorist of play Friederich Schiller did not confine play to the immaterial, commenting upon the play-drive inherently on view when lifeless marble is carved into 'living form'<sup>23</sup>. However, Huizinga's separation of play from the objecthood inherent to the plastic arts conforms to the expectation that play purely occupies the realm of immaterial human interaction, whereas craft, or the making of things, solely involves the relationship between man and object. This serves to create an abyss between constructions of the *homo ludens* and the *homo faber*. Yet amateur time often incorporates elements from both of these human behaviours, as well as from the experiences of the *animale laborans*, constrained by cycles of capitalist

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<sup>22</sup> Huizinga, p. 166.

<sup>23</sup> Schiller, p. 101.

consumption and production that follow the exigencies of the biological body. Accounting for the complexity of amateur experience of time requires that we examine how these instincts interconnect and map on to each other. Key is the idea that play constitutes an alternative temporality within the everyday (not against it) that is bound by cultural and social rules, which individuals can voluntarily move in and out of, as well as modify and adapt. The making that takes place in this temporal zone leads to temporary and differential experiences of time.

The main conceptual barrier to elaborating upon this nuanced and complex construction of amateur time is the assumption that free time *is* genuinely free, a complete reversal of Adorno's proposition which I started with. A prominent strand of craft discourse, running through the writing of John Ruskin, William Morris, Martin Heidegger, Hannah Arendt and more recently Richard Sennett, does suggest that the practice of craft can lead to an unalienated, atemporal relationship between man and objects. Although these thinkers clearly exclude amateur craft from such relationships as practice that is more associated with the dependence of the *animale laborans* – trapped by ever-same, repeated daily experience – their writing has encouraged a perception that all forms of craft have the potential to lead to a utopian atemporal experience, a critical trajectory that gets in the way of understanding amateur time in all its complexity.

### **Critique of the atemporal construction of amateur time**

Nowhere is this notion of craft's atemporal status more clear than in the following words of mid nineteenth-century American transcendentalist, Henry J Thoreau, who in his monograph recalling his experience of living for two years, two months and two days in the woods of Concord, Massachusetts, stated:

...into a perfect work time does not enter<sup>24</sup>.

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<sup>24</sup> Henry Thoreau, *Walden: Or, Life in the Woods* (London, Folio Society, 2009), p. 262.

Thoreau encapsulates the expectation that perfect craftsmanship exists outside time; a romantic, pastoral association with making that is at the heart of constructions of the *homo faber*. This presumed atemporality of craft practice has become a feature of much craft discourse and ensures craft's continuing affiliation with some sort of antithetical standpoint, political and aesthetic. Rid of the regularised time and complexity of the modern world, symbolised by the clock, targets and consciousness of the hours of the working day, the expectation is that craft allows a 'simpler', 'more authentic' experience, closer to the uncomplicated relationship between humans and nature, akin to a child-like pre-civilisation innocence.

Recent craft theory has challenged these dominant pastoral, nostalgic and romanticised expectations that are placed on craft<sup>25</sup>, yet making is still often described by amateurs as relating to some form of retroactive or progressive utopian mode, either recalling a pristine past or contributing to a reformed 'brave new' future. However, it is important to avoid capitulation to such programmatic idealistic associations of the *homo faber* when assessing amateur temporal experience. Amateur time is not atemporal, but instead exists within the structures of modern capitalism that generate excess temporal modalities, which can give vent to underlying, everyday utopian impulses. Frederic Jameson's conceptualisation of utopia as an impulse 'finding its way to the surface in a variety of covert expressions and practices'<sup>26</sup> is more helpful. Instead of conforming to Thomas More's first qualification of utopia as the realisation of a political or ideological programme, Jameson elaborates on More's second characterisation that stresses the pervasiveness of a utopian drive in culture that depends on, and feeds back into, existing social reality. Jameson's analysis focuses on how science fiction novels perform this role, but his conceptualisation of a limited utopia is relevant to analyses of amateur time because he critiques the notion of utopia's atemporality. Like the science fiction novel, experiences of amateur time are bounded by social, cultural and economic (temporal) contingency whilst also fostering 'covert expressions';

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<sup>25</sup> The editorial of the summer volume of the 2010 *Journal of Modern Craft* explains that the expectation of the rootedness of craft is 'badly in need of revision'. *Journal of Modern Craft* 3:2 (July 2010), pp. 133-6. See also Glenn Adamson, *The Craft Reader* (London: Berg, 2010), pp. 135-6. Tom Crook, 'Craft and the Dialogics of Modernity: the Arts and Crafts Movement in Late Victorian and Early Edwardian England' *Journal of Modern Craft* 2:1 (2009). Glenn Adamson, *Thinking Through Craft* (Oxford: Berg, 2007), pp. 103-137.

<sup>26</sup> Frederic Jameson, *Archaeologies of the Future* (London: Verso, 2005), p. 3.



the alternative experiences of amateur time that I seek to portray in their full richness below.

This analysis of amateur time adopts Jameson's model of a temporally constrained utopia and identifies the varied, surprising and unusual ways the 'covert' utopian impulses surface in experiences of amateur time. Before greater exploration of these alternative amateur time-states, further critique of the atemporality associated with deployment of free time is required. The first addresses the assumption that by taking part in a voluntarily undertaken activity an individual can reach moments of atemporal release from structures of everyday life, described as 'flow' by the well-known psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi. The second critique challenges polemical use of 'amateurism' as a byword for the prospect of unalienated labour, part of certain contemporary designers' effort to make sense of new productive paradigms. Utopian speculation can all too easily be read into activities that occupy free time, but accepting this presumption of craft's atemporality would only serve to flatten the complex reality of amateur temporal experience.

### *Utopia in a moment*

At first glance Csikszentmihalyi's concept of 'flow', an 'autotelic experience' of immersion, appears particularly helpful in considering the experience of amateur time:

"Flow" is the way people describe their state of mind when consciousness is harmoniously ordered, and they want to pursue whatever they are doing for its own sake.<sup>27</sup>

Csikszentmihalyi attempts to grasp those moments of production when 'nothing else seems to matter', when the wind 'whips' through the hair of the sailor<sup>28</sup>. Flow seems the perfect way in which to conceptualise the alternative temporality of amateur practice, the moments when an amateur becomes so

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<sup>27</sup> Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, *Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience* (New York: Harper and Row, 1990), p. 6. Jon Kay also deploys Csikszentmihalyi's notion of 'flow' in an effort to explain a state of happiness. John Kay, *Obliquity: Why Our Goals Are Best Achieved Indirectly* (London: Profile Books, 2010).

<sup>28</sup> Csikszentmihalyi, pp. 3-4.

devoted to his freely undertaken task that time flies and the tea that has been prepared becomes cold: a liberation from capitalist time and its schedules. However, Csikszentmihalyi's 'autotelic experience' of flow subtly disseminates dominant Taylorist notions of time under the guise of this presumed atemporal detachment: in order to achieve the meaningful benefits of flow, time has to be ordered through the imposition of rules and objectives that allow individuals to strive, achieve and start again, operating in much the same way as productivity targets in the modern workplace. For example, Csikszentmihalyi explains that 'mowing the lawn or waiting in a dentist's office can become enjoyable provided one restructures the activity by providing goals'<sup>29</sup>, suggesting that the only way to inject time with meaning is to subject it to miniature, goal-driven teleologies; a competitive temporal model. His insistence on the desirability of 'optimal experience', when the distraction of information and external factors (what he terms 'psychic entropy') are removed<sup>30</sup>, echoes the prioritisation of securing individual isolation and autonomy from the external social world in achieving a sense of happiness. This is an existential philosophy purged of Sartrean self-doubt and acknowledgement of the social that simply serves to reinforce dominant paradigms of capitalist temporality.

Clearly this goal-driven temporal modality is witnessed in amateur practice, particularly in modern sports. It is no surprise that Csikszentmihalyi cites examples from sports and physical exertion to substantiate his concept of flow<sup>31</sup>. Sports are akin to play, offering a parallel universe, but in the modern era they do not disrupt normative temporal modalities but serve to amplify them. The disorder of sporting activity is bounded by a framework – the rules, regulations and competitions – that facilitates the 'enjoyable and controlled de-controlling of emotions'<sup>32</sup>, and, as Henricks explains in his application of Max Weber's principles of modern bureaucratisation, 'playful energy' is channelled into contests that 'seem consistent with the spirit of an economically competitive society'<sup>33</sup>. For all the presumed escapism of sport – the chance for physical exertion, play, camaraderie – there is a clear extension

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid, p. 51.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid, p. 39.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid, pp. 40-42 and 48.

<sup>32</sup> Henricks, p. 103.

<sup>33</sup> Henricks, p. 97. See also Adorno, 'Free Time', 168.

of the same temporal parameters that define everyday life: the 'sportization'<sup>34</sup> of time as Henricks states.

Csikszentmihalyi's concept of 'flow' epitomises the 'sportization' of time, which he deploys in his proselytising mission to improve the human lot, effectively attempting to infuse free time with the same competitive spirit that grooms successful workers. Even if the evening jog in the park seems utterly removed from office-based work, there are psychological, social and cultural links. The dream-like 'autotelic' of flow provides only a limited explanation of amateur experience that complies more with textbook example than the actuality of amateur time's plurality; it is just one temporal modality among others and cannot claim atemporal status.

*The programmatic utopia of unalienated labour*

For anyone who still remembers Karl Marx's sketch of full communism's Utopia, the amateur railway life-world looks remarkably like that dream of unalienated labour.<sup>35</sup>

Ian Carter, *British Railway Enthusiasm* (2008), p. 264.

If Csikszentmihalyi's notion of 'flow' reflects the seductive notion of achieving an individual and isolated atemporal experience through amateur practice, the utopia of unalienated labour demonstrates the attraction of a broader, social atemporality. Notional freedom from top-down structures, the voluntary nature of practice and sensitivity to local environments, has meant amateur time is often charged with programmatic utopian political potential, a vehicle through which to express a critical discursive position, whether feminist, traditionalist or environmentalist.

Ever alert to the utopian possibilities of unalienated labour, many practitioners in the fields of art, craft and design have been drawn to the presumed freedom offered by amateur time, particularly given the exhaustion of other utopian possibilities. This has led to over-optimistic appropriations of

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<sup>34</sup> Henricks, p. 104.

<sup>35</sup> Carter, p. 264.

amateurism; amateur time is associated with necessarily antagonistic positions that have more to do with the programmatic intentions of the artist than the nuances of amateur practice itself. As John Roberts has noted:

The artist claims to be an amateur or identifies with the amateurish only insofar as he or she does not want to be seen as a particular kind of professional.<sup>36</sup>

In many instances it is the unattractiveness of the term 'professional', tied to connotations of conformity, a lack of inventiveness, and doing things 'by the book', that leads artists and designers to appropriate amateurism, believing it to be representative of unalienated labour.

One example of this use of amateurism to signify a strongly discursive critical position is shown in the programme 'Masters of Amateurism', run from autumn 2009 by the Amsterdam-based Platform for Design and Fashion, Premsula. The project managers Roel Klaassen and Bart Heerdink outlined their goals in a conference on digital design held at Harvard University in April 2009:

We would like to argue that design as we know it has ceased to exist. As digital technology has matured and found its way into design practice, so has the public. People have begun resisting being mere bystanders and consumers of marketing messages and pre-chewed messages [...] In taking a share of design practice, amateurs are challenging the position of design professionals.<sup>37</sup>

Klaassen and Heerdink's prophesy of the end of 'design as we know it' is reflective of common utopian trend according to Jameson: a 'combination of closure and system, in the name of autonomy and self-sufficiency'<sup>38</sup>.

Throughout the paper Klassen and Heerdink over-emphasise the autonomy of the amateur, positing this figure within narratives of 1960s counter-cultural subversion, DIY, punk and 'hacker' movements and confusing the term with

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<sup>36</sup> John Roberts, 'The Amateur's Retort' in Ralph Rugoff, *Amateurs* Grace Kook-Anderson and Claire Fitzsimmons eds. (San Francisco: California College of the Arts, 2008), p. 21.

<sup>37</sup> Roel Klassen and Bart Heerdink, 'The Fall and Rise of the Amateur', paper for the *Second International Conference on Critical Digital*. Harvard Graduate School, Cambridge: Massachusetts (17-19 April 2009), <http://isites.harvard.edu/fs/docs/icb.topic559475.files/CDC2.Proceedings.pdf> [accessed 11 August 2011] pp. 203-4. Amateurism's marginalisation has also been questioned in the light of the 2008 financial crisis that was seen as a failure of professionalism, Gert Staal, 'Pure Amateurism' *Premsula* [www.premsula.org/sbeos/doc/file.php?nid=1210](http://www.premsula.org/sbeos/doc/file.php?nid=1210) [accessed 11 August 2011]

<sup>38</sup> Jameson, p. 5.

the medieval artisan<sup>39</sup>. The intent is to marry amateur practice with the political agency of movements that operate on the ‘fringes of the mainstream’ but this results in the reductive categorisation of ‘amateur’ with creative re-use, political action, independence and Papanek-style ‘real world’ local manufacture.

The ease by which amateurism can be loaded with overt discursive power is demonstrated in the way that designer Joost Smiers and writer Aram Sinnreich, two contributors to the Masters of Amateurism series, use the term to mark a critique of commercial methods of intellectual property. The two thinkers give persuasive definitions of the term ‘amateur’, but then use it to propound a critique of copyright: the demand is for the disbandment of copyright and a ‘level playing field’ for all creative practitioners<sup>40</sup>. Copyright might be a subject relevant to many amateurs in that it commercialises any form of creative human expression, but this intellectual critique is unlikely to be shared by amateur practitioners who are more likely to conform to conventions of authorial recognition. Sinnreich, Smiers and other contributors to Premsela’s Masters of Amateurism series demonstrate the tendency to define amateur as necessarily having overt, subversive, and self-reflexive political content. This hope for amateur time is best summarised by Falk Lehmann, who said:

There’s a lot of power in this amateurism thing.<sup>41</sup>

There is a sense that amateur time is an inspiring terrain for creative practitioners to colonise, but these demonstratively discursive definitions instead show that amateur time is pliable enough to serve multiple political ends. These designers’ use of the term ‘amateur’ or ‘amateurism’ seems a way

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<sup>39</sup> Klaassen and Heerdink argue that professional is allied with the ‘upper class’ whereas skilled amateurism was the preserve of craftsman working within the guild system whereas the reverse is true. In a feudal society only the ‘upper classes’ could afford the freedom of spare time and surplus labour to produce things that were not strictly *needed* – all inherent characteristics of amateur practice. Klassen and Heerdink, p. 206.

<sup>40</sup> Joost Smiers and Mareike Van Schijndel, *Imagine There Is No Copyright And No Cultural Conglomerations Too: An Essay* trans. by Rosalind Buck (Amsterdam: Institute of Network Cultures, 2009), p. 5. Aram Sinnreich and Joost Smiers are interviewed here ‘Re-mix Speaker Interviews’ *Re-mix Symposium* part of the 2010-11 *Masters of Amateurism* series. [http://www.premsele.org/en/peoples-republic\\_1/re-mix\\_1/](http://www.premsele.org/en/peoples-republic_1/re-mix_1/) [accessed 11 August 2011]. See also Aram Sinnreich, *Mashed Up: Music, Technology, and the Rise of Configurable Culture*. (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2010).

<sup>41</sup> Falk Lehmann a.k.a Akut, ‘Akut Video Portrait’ part of Premsela’s 2010-11 *Masters of Amateurism* series [http://www.premsele.org/en/peoples-republic\\_1/falk-lehmann\\_1/](http://www.premsele.org/en/peoples-republic_1/falk-lehmann_1/) [accessed 11 August 2011]

for them re-enchant practice, encouraged by the dissemination and accessibility of digital intuitive apparatus like the i-Pad or Nintendo Wii's drawing tablet, three-dimensional printers<sup>42</sup>, and the vast amount of products and goods that appear to outsource creativity to the hands of an inexperienced audience. Premsele's interest in amateurism seems driven by a desire to understand the designer's role in the context of mass individualisation facilitated by technological advances, rather than amateur practice itself.

As noted above, Ian Carter states that the amateur railway modelling world 'looks remarkably like' Marx's dream of communist utopia, suggesting similarity between these two experiences of time, not equivalence. Key differences do remain. Amateur time can include both the competitive temporal modality suggested by Csikszentmihalyi, and the political purposefulness expected by many of the participants of Premsele's programme, but the inherent plurality of amateur experience cannot be reduced to these two theoretical trajectories. Amateur time often lacks discursive power, is more discrete, weak, temporary and dependent, closer to Jameson's understanding of utopian constructions: 'an aberrant by-product...its possibility dependent on the momentary formation of a kind of eddy or self-contained backwater'<sup>43</sup>. Amateur time has this elusive quality that derives from its relational status to other temporal modalities. Amateur time does not offer an escape to a utopian otherworldly zone – the Marxist atemporal dream of non-alienated labour – or a political solution to the unfreedom of modern capitalism, but the possibility for temporary control of one's own labour alienation. Utopianism in amateur time is constrained, but it is these limitations that ensure its differential status, as I seek to demonstrate in the following analysis.

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<sup>42</sup> Stacey Jo Scott, 'At-home 3D Printing and the Return of a Craft Utopia: Part 1 and 2'. *Journal of Modern Craft* website (September 2010) <http://journalofmoderncraft.com/responses/at-home-3d-printing-and-the-return-of-a-craft-utopia-part-1> [accessed 11 August 2011]

<sup>43</sup> Jameson, p. 15.

## Feminism and amateurism

Feminist writing from the 1970s onwards was alert to the naivety of simply celebrating amateur creativity, cautious to frame amateur practice within a celebratory patriarchal paradigm<sup>44</sup>. Lucy Lippard, for example, wanted to question the pejorative associations attached to popular hobby books, exclaiming:

The shared or published pattern [of embroidery kits] forms some kind of armature for painstaking handwork and for freedom of expression within a framework as the underlying grid does in contemporary painting.<sup>45</sup>

Lippard urged female artists to reconnect with the amateur emphasis on making and resist the more typical route of marginalising this strand of practice. In *The Subversive Stitch*, Roszika Parker argued that embroidery was a site of feminine self-expression over the course of many centuries despite the patriarchal and social-cultural expectations from without that determined the framework in which the craft operated<sup>46</sup>. Rita Felski is another scholar who contributed to this historical revision<sup>47</sup>, which, for example, has prompted greater historical attention to the role women played in nineteenth century Arts and Crafts movements, and their role in design reform movements<sup>48</sup>. Parker, Lippard and Felski help us valorise amateur craft without ignoring the very real limitations and social-political circumstances of its production: the permitted forms had to be used to signal resistance to them. Their work has been crucial in re-evaluating amateur craft production,

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<sup>44</sup> An example of the wilfully antagonistic standpoint that some feminist scholars have adopted is seen in Freida Johles Forman ed. *Taking Our Time: Feminist Perspectives on Temporality* (Permagon, 1989).

<sup>45</sup> Lucy Lippard, 'Making Something From Nothing (Toward a Definition of Women's 'Hobby Art')' *Heresies* 4 [1978] in Adamson, *Craft reader*, p. 487.

<sup>46</sup> Although the woman as an domestic embroiderer conformed to patriarchal expectations between the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries Parker talks about the 'secondary gains [women] accrued from absolute conformity to the feminine ideal', namely the quiet subversion of home decoration, recycling and re-use. Roszika Parker, *The Subversive Stitch: Embroidery and the Making of the Feminine* (London: Woman's Press, 1984), p. 13.

<sup>47</sup> Rita Felski, *Doing Time: Feminist Theory and Postmodern Culture* (New York and London: New York University Press, 2000), p. 3.

<sup>48</sup> Historical studies on women's role in the late nineteenth century design movement include Emma Ferry, 'Decorators May Be Compared To Doctors': An Analysis of Rhoda and Agnes Garrett's Suggestion for House Decoration (1876)' in Grace Lees-Maffei and R House eds. *Design History Reader* (Oxford: Berg, 2010); Anne Anderson, 'Queen Victoria's Daughter and the Tide of Fashionable Female Philanthropy'. *Women's History Magazine* 41 (June 2002), 10-15; Anthea Callen, *Angel in the Studio: Women in the Arts and Crafts Movement, 1870-1914* (London: Astragal Books, 1979); Janice Helland and Bridget Elliott eds., *Women Artists and the Decorative Arts, 1880-1935: The Gender of Ornament* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003).

but as explained above there is a danger of imbuing amateur practice with too much discursive power. The temporal experience of amateur craft is ambiguous; equally about the absence of discursive power and experiences that lie outside personal narrative, self-reflexive understanding of one's craft and the obvious political statement that so strongly characterise recent craftivist movements, knitting circles, and Stitch and Bitch groups<sup>49</sup>.

Parker and Lippard's reference to the embroidery pattern book effectively illustrates the complex quietness of amateur time. This codified pattern operates in a similar way to the paint-by-number kit in that it attempts to completely determine each stage of the production process. In the completion of the kit, however, personal narratives and psychologies, political messages and signs can be read which indicate something about the agency of the maker and his or her skills. Yet, in the course of following the kit, there are also moments where one simply copies the instruction, where self-conscious thought diminishes and subjective agency becomes increasingly thin.

The danger of trying to valorise or defend amateur craft too much is that you risk ignoring this quietness, invisibility, and its propensity not to be listened to, shown, or conceptualised. Crucially, amateur craft can signal an individual's wilful subjugation into alienating conditions of work. Georges Perec's metaphor of the puzzle-solver in the introduction of his book *Life: A User's Manual* is useful: here the puzzle is not only completely determined by the puzzle design, just as the embroiderer is confined by her pattern, but each act that joins one piece to another both involves skill yet becomes invisible in relation to its ongoing completion<sup>50</sup>. This metaphor is helpful in describing how a proactive craft practice – in regards to the puzzle, the union of hand and head in putting together one piece with another – can be channelled into a completely determined activity.

The heavily guided processes of paint-by-number, embroidery kits or puzzles would certainly not meet Adorno's qualifications of maturity and its

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<sup>49</sup> See Betsy Greer, 'Craftivist History' and Kirsty Robertson 'Rebellious Doilies and Subversive Stitches: Writing a Craftivist History' in Maria Elena Buszek ed. *Extra/ordinary: craft and contemporary art* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2011), pp. 175-83 and 184-203. Debbie Stoller, *Son of a Stitch 'n Bitch: 45 Projects to Knit & Crochet for Men* (New York: Workman, 2007).

<sup>50</sup> Georges Perec, *Life: A User's Manual* trans. by David Bellos (London: Harvill, 1988), xv.



undertaking is often described (by those who practice) as killing time. This 'killing' of time seems to epitomise alienation: time is emptied of any content and the amateur craft practitioner (the killer) at this moment accepts the status quo, replete with its constraints, limitations, political imperfections and contradictions, making only very faint impressions on perceptions of everyday life – both individual and societal. However, this near invisibility and voluntary decision to carry on labouring is not necessarily exploitative. In fact, American author Alice Walker celebrates this invisibility in her 1984 book *In Search of our Mother's Gardens*:

I notice that it is only when my mother is working in her flowers that she is radiant, almost to the point of being invisible – except as Creator: hand and eye. She is involved in work her soul must have.<sup>51</sup>

Walker's example of her mother helps describe an alternative temporal modality of making with very limited self-reflexion that must be key in any analysis of amateur time. The subject at this moment is the furthest away from the discursive power that Parker and Lippard rightly attribute as a feature of amateur craft, but even in this seemingly vacuous situation she is still engaged in a process that involves skill and making – like the joining of one piece of the jigsaw to another. This quiet temporal experience is often not reflected in retrospective analysis because of the tendency to 'read into' and 'give a name for' phenomena that are inherently elusive, but the fact that amateur time often represents wilful subjugation to alienating conditions of work reflects one of the differential temporal modalities that arise from amateur practice.

Theories of everyday life again prove useful to conceptualise this weak discursive realm, particularly the work of Lefebvre. Although certain feminist scholars have not always been receptive to Lefebvre's notion of the everyday<sup>52</sup>, his work provides the methodological tools to codify temporal experiences that are prone to quietness, disappearance and dependence.

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<sup>51</sup> Alice Walker, *In Search Of Our Mothers' Gardens* (London: Women's Press, 1984), p. 241.

<sup>52</sup> Laurie Langbauer and Rita Felski claim that the everyday has become consistent with a certain political stance that follows Henri Lefebvre and Michel de Certeau's failure to seriously consider the position of women. Laurie Langbauer, *Novels of Everyday Life: The Series in English Fiction 1850-1930* (Ithaca, New York and London: Cornell University Press, 1999), pp. 4 and 13. Felski, pp. 80-83.

In *Rhythmanalysis* Lefebvre presents the truism that  $A=A$ , but does not see this as plain equivalence as we might expect, but a demonstration of difference in repetition: the second 'A' is different for being second in the order of A's. He concludes:

Not only does repetition *not* exclude differences, it also gives birth to them; it produces them.<sup>53</sup>

Lefebvre's conclusion that difference can happen within a model of repetition, the combination of cyclical and linear time that 'interfere with each other constantly'<sup>54</sup> helps further our understanding of amateur time and chimes with Felski's proposition that 'repetition can signal resistance as well as enslavement'<sup>55</sup>. Amateur experience is often far more imitative, reliant, and devoid of subversive political content than many of its advocates care to admit. However, this repetition involved in following a pattern still 'gives birth' to difference but it is a difference that only makes the weakest incursions into the discursive realm.

Amateur time might appear to be a temporal zone where criticisms of capitalism, commercialisation and patriarchal hegemonies are common, or where powerful subjective agency is expressed, but its practice is often less ideological and less utopian. This slippage between utopian possibility and actuality will be kept in mind as I analyse the craft of railway modelling, and in my overview of the tensions, misappropriations and complexities of specific artist's use and exploitation of amateur time-states. For the moment however, the status of amateur time can be described as partially utopian at best. It is not the time in which a complete escape from a disenchanted capitalist world is possible, but the chance to temporarily control the means of one's own labour exploitation. Like play, amateur time is temporary, constrained and reliant on wider societal structures; it is an impermanent temporal displacement.

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<sup>53</sup> Lefebvre, *Rhythmanalysis*, p. 7.

<sup>54</sup> Lefebvre, *Rhythmanalysis*, p. 8.

<sup>55</sup> Felski, p. 84.

### **Amateur time as displacement: ‘the busman’s holiday’**

In conceptualising amateur time the idea of displacement proves more useful than notions discussed above: Adorno’s expectation that only hyper self-reflexivity can inject free time with potency, Arendt’s valorisation of the *homo faber*, Csikzentmihalyi’s emphasis on ‘sportization’, and the multiple contemporary commentators on craft who too readily follow William Morris and valorise the hand-made *in opposition to* forms of modern machine-based production. The sole thing that unites amateur craft’s temporality is displacement, which grasps the inherently strong relationship to the structures that define and pace everyday life, yet offers some level of departure from it. This limited temporal freedom arises from the fact that amateurs control the conditions of their own alienation for a while – the individual choosing to engage in work of his or her own devising.

However, as I have argued throughout the chapter so far this control of one’s labour does not represent full autonomy for the individual. As Baudrillard stated, this passage to presumed autonomy is analogous to the slave ‘who has become his own master, since the master slave couple is internalised in the same individual without ceasing to function in an alienated structure’<sup>56</sup>. Resolutely distanced from the autonomous associations attached to being in control of one’s labour, Baudrillard’s model of the artisan negotiating a position within an ‘alienated structure’ is relevant to an analysis of amateur time: amateur practitioners are beset with multiple constraints – legalities, cultural expectations, financial resources – and function within an ‘alienated structure’. Yet, amateur time is still the freest temporality available allowing some form of suspension of normative temporal conditions. Amateur labour might on the surface merely appear to signal the continuation of work in free time but it is through the displacement of work that differentiation emerges.

This displaced condition is aptly described by the phrase ‘busman’s holiday’, which describes the situation when an individual spends holiday or ‘free’ time engaged in a similar activity to his work<sup>57</sup>. The phrase originates from

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<sup>56</sup> Baudrillard, p. 104.

<sup>57</sup> Lesley Brown (editor-in-chief) *New Shorter Oxford English Dictionary* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), p 312. In a slight inversion of the definition Ian Milligan in his book *Busman’s holiday* describes

the idea of a bus driver spending his holiday on a coach trip, but it is pertinent to all professions: professional musicians who compose independently or play a different instrument in their free time, businessmen making deals on the golf course, politicians extending their influence by accepting holiday invitations from foreign statesmen, a whole range of ways of spending time that has a tie to one's everyday vocation. However connected an individual might be to replicating that which he does in his everyday vocation, the busman's holiday represents some kind of temporal suspension. Analysis of a hypothetical busman on a holiday might reveal a number of different experiences outside a mere continuation of sensations experienced whilst working to the normal timetable. For example a busman riding a tour bus might derive great pleasure by seeing someone else do his job and delight in the passivity of being a passenger with someone else in control, or he might criticise and bemoan the drivers lack of skill. Another scenario might situate the driver as driving the bus himself as he would whilst at work but with the difference that he is free from having to observe a timetable, a set route, health and safety standards, perhaps driving his own heritage bus or transporting friends to a holiday destination.

The busman's holiday describes the state of displacement inherent to amateur time whilst maintaining a link to one's other everyday experiences. An individual does not completely 'switch off' in free time, as we might presume, but continues to engage with the skills, tools, and mentalities that are familiar to vocational practice. Once again the comparison to Jameson's description of the science fiction novel is useful; amateur time is similarly 'momentarily beyond the reach of the social', politically powerless, but nevertheless a zone 'in which new wish images of the social can be elaborated and experimented on'<sup>58</sup>, similar to Lefebvre's notion of the carnival. The displaced condition of amateur time facilitates multiple alternative temporalities that constitute an elaboration, exaggeration and extension of normative experience, which subsequently feed back into social reality. I aim to account for some of these

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how during his long periods of time off as an offshore engineer he developed a career as a coach driver, using this secondary profession to pursue his interest in travelling. Ian Milligan, *Busman's Holiday* (Enstone: Writersworld, 2005), pp. 2-3. McKibben reflects this attitude in his comment on post-war British hobbies when he states that 'the hobby of many carpenters and painters was carpentry and painting'. McKibben, p. 160.

<sup>58</sup> Jameson, p. 16.

differential time-states in the course of the case study that follows on amateur railway modelling.

### **Amateur railway modelling**

[The train] is the embodiment of the age, an instrument of power, speed, noise, fire, iron, smoke – at once testament to the will of man rising over natural obstacles, and, yet, confined by its iron rails to a pre-determined path, it suggests a new sort of fate.

Leo Marx, *Machine in the Garden* (1964), p.191.

In no other product of industrialisation is man's relationship with technology so ambiguous. Leo Marx gives countless literary examples of how writers since the arrival of locomotives have been both sceptical of the train's Promethean power in setting and regulating the pace of modern life, while welcoming its ability to be part of the 'middle landscape', the idealistic balance between technology and nature. Thoreau during his self-sufficient isolation in the woods at Walden, clearly revels in the distance from all forms of industrialisation but concedes his dependence on the railway track as a pathway to the nearby village, unavoidably linking him to the society he attempts to turn away from<sup>59</sup>.

Like Thoreau, countless amateurs attempt to cut all ties to social and economic reality in an effort to exercise their own autonomy and experience the 'hard touch of things'<sup>60</sup>, but they similarly cannot sever the direct links that connect them back to the structures of capitalism that they have sought to efface. In no hobby is this clearer than in amateur railway modelling, where the very subject of the amateur's attention is the prime symbol of virile modernity, the machine that introduced regularised notions of time and contributed to worldwide economic expansion. The attraction of setting model locomotives within a miniature landscape might seem to just confirm the train's introduction into popular notions of a pastoral idyll, yet the motivations for pursuing the hobby are more complex. The railway model is

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<sup>59</sup> Thoreau, p. 92.

<sup>60</sup> Albert Roland 'Do-It-Yourself: A Walden for the Million?' *American Quarterly* 10:2 (1958), p. 163.

the epitome of a constrained utopia, a vehicle through which subjective desire and technical skill manifest themselves, which is nonetheless beset on all sides by various structuring mechanisms that separate the hobby from play. And these structures are self-imposed. Modellers wilfully pursue difficult tasks and are less concerned about how long it might take to finish, instead prioritising the experiences of time whilst making.

These structures represent an extension of everyday reality, showing how amateur time is a relational temporal zone that generates alternative experiences. In this case study I aim to describe the alternative time-states that arise from crafting one's own universe, elaborating on the themes discussed in the introduction. However, firstly I account for the history of railway modelling – rooted in the acquisition and demonstration of mechanical skill – and the dialectics of superfluity and functionality that are essential to understanding this hobby.

### **Neither prototypes nor toys: the origins of railway modelling**

The history of railway modelling has its roots in the more explicitly productive activity of using locomotive models as prototypes. Miniaturised scale engines were used to experiment, invent and understand the technical mechanisms of their prospective, real-sized equivalents without considerable expense. It was through a model of a fire engine given to him by Professor Anderson of Glasgow College that James Watt was able to develop the steam engine, a fact that modellers have subsequently used to draw attention to the potential usefulness of their endeavours. In one of the earliest manuals on building model locomotives, the 1888 book *Model Engine-making*, John Pocock speculated:

Who can say but that the model-maker of to-day may be a second James Watt to-morrow?<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> John Pocock, *Model Engine-Making* (London: Swan Sonnenschein and Co, 1888), p. 1. For an echo of this defence of making models of trains see Carter, *British rail enthusiasm*, pp. 192-3.

The notion of 'productive amusement'<sup>62</sup> was often used to describe emerging late nineteenth-century enthusiasm for building model locomotives. The phrase accentuates the useful skills that can be learnt from modelling steam engines that foster a better understanding of the real thing and greater expertise in the wider field of technical know-how. Journals like *Amateur Work* (1881-1891), *Design and Work* (1876-1877) and *Model Engineer and Amateur Electrician* (1898-1902 and continuing as *The Model Engineer and Electrician* 1903-1924) encouraged the late Victorian, primarily male, audience to engage in household repair, building, ornamentation and amateur mechanics, which the emerging hobby of constructing model locomotives was part. Building a model locomotive demanded high levels of competence, and involved the construction of scale working steam engines, complete with boiler, piston, cylinders and wheels and axles. Often these were 'scratch-built' which meant that they were entirely constructed by hand, through the use of found or purchased materials, or built from kits provided by various manufacturers<sup>63</sup>.

During the late nineteenth century, there was a societal expectation to deploy free time in the pursuit of a productive goal, as shown chapter two's analysis of the 'professional amateur' reflecting the strong work ethic of the time, seemingly chiming with Adorno's thesis that 'free time is nothing more than the shadowy continuation of labour'<sup>64</sup>. However, as explained above, it is the 'shadowy' translation of labour from normative conditions that ensures amateur time's differential status, and late nineteenth-century railway modelling was saved from being just a continuation from work by the fact

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<sup>62</sup> The notion of 'instructive amusement' was used in one of the earliest retailers of model trains called Stevens's Model Dockyard. See the introduction of *A Catalogue of Model Ships, Engines, Boilers, Fittings, Instructive and Scientific Amusements* (London: Stevens's Model Dockyard, 1914). John Pocock, author of the first serial explaining how to build a steam engine also stresses the didactic benefits of the hobby, Pocock, p. 99. William Tennant, 'Introductory note' in Henry Greenly, *The Model Locomotive: Its Design and Construction* (London: Percival Marshall & Co, 1904), iv and p. 8. Sir Gilbert Cloughton former chairman of London and North Western Railway is cited by Greenly to have said that his toy train in his youth 'proved of use' in his later career. Henry Greenly, *TTR Permanent Way Manual... Layout and Operation of the Trix Twin OO Gauge Model Railway* (London: Trix, 1937), p. 9. See also Martin Evans, *Model Engineering* (London: Pitman, 1977), p. 2.

<sup>63</sup> Early kits comprised of readymade castings made by London-based companies Britannia Company, A.A Dorrington, John Bateman and Lucas & Davies mentioned in the 'Answers to Notes and Queries' section of *Amateur work* 4 (London and New York: Ward, Lock & Co, 1885) pp. 205-6, 307, 358, 401, 453. These same firms are also recommended in the earlier publication *Design and Work: A Home and Shop Companion* 1 (London: George Purkess, September 16, 1876), p. 298.

<sup>64</sup> Adorno, p. 168.

that model trains were also material and metaphorical expressions of superfluity, with similarities to toy trains and readymade models.

In the late nineteenth century, the toy train had a relationship with the 'real thing' that did not extend beyond mimicking appearance and simple simulation of the basic forward and backward motion of a train<sup>65</sup>. As the century drew to a close, however, commercially produced, readymade model trains were becoming increasingly sophisticated. Firms in Europe started to produce a variety of live steam and clockwork models, most notably Radiguet in France; Stevens Model Dockyard and former official modeller for the British admiralty, Clyde Model Dockyard, in Britain; and Althof Bergmann, Schoenner, Bing and Märklin in Germany<sup>66</sup>. This expansion of a market for pre-made models and all-in-one starter kits that were increasingly targeted at children from the early twentieth century, brought the technical sophistication of making models to an increasingly broad audience. The enthusiast modelling trains had to make sure their endeavours were distinguished from the trivial activity of just playing with toys.

Indeed, the comparison between modelling trains and 'playing with toys' has long caused consternation among practitioners. Arthur C Hide in an 1885 step-by-step instruction for *Amateur Work* about how to build model yachts insists that making a model steam engine is:

... as scientific and amusing a hobby combining both in and out-door pleasure, as can be found. "So there" as the tender sex has it.<sup>67</sup>

Hide's querulous defence suggests that modelling was subject to claims of its unimportance, despite the technical mastery and engineering knowledge that was required then and still defines the hobby today. Claims of the hobby's pointlessness and its association with juvenile play have been hard to shake. As recently as December 2010, John Humphreys on Radio Four's *Today*

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<sup>65</sup> Ellis Davidson captured the simplicity of the toy train construction in his 1878 book for 'boy joiners' stating that the counterweight toy train model he advises young carpenters to build is only a 'general representation, as you cannot expect to make a proper working model for this purpose, and therefore, the mere idea conveyed by the engine... will suffice', Ellis Davidson, *The Boy Joiner and Model Maker* (London: Cassell Peter & Galpin, 1875), p. 163.

<sup>66</sup> Allen Levy, *A Century of Model Trains* (London: New Cavendish, 1986), p. 7.

<sup>67</sup> A Hide, 'Model Yachts: How to Design and Build Them' *Amateur Work* 4 (1885), pp. 4-6, 52-55, 97-99, 166-170.



programme reiterated this common pejorative assumption of the hobby's juvenile associations in an interview with enthusiast Peter Snow, exclaiming "... this is a child's paradise but you are a grown man". The journalist then repeats this assumption when he interviews the president of the Model Railway Club, Tim Watson<sup>68</sup>. Current enthusiasts, it seems, have a difficult time convincing others that they do not just watch Thomas the Tank Engine go round and round a track.

Like many other amateur practices, modelling trains is an activity caught in the dialectics of usefulness and superfluity, as shown by the case study on amateur chicken keeping that had both fancy and utilitarian aspects. The model train, which is neither a toy nor an explicitly useful prototype, is a material metaphor for the entanglement of the *homo ludens* and the *homo faber*. This unclear status of the object reflects the complexity of the temporal conditions in which it was produced. The technical difficulties that modellers willingly pursue demonstrate how they do more than just play around, but they are equally not infusing time with pure productivity, nor do they wish just to create a static superfluous decoration: the model has to work. These tensions played an important part in defining the emerging division between the sister disciplines of railway modelling and model engineering, which I explain below. Yet railway modelling provides another example of the oscillation of amateur practice between the trajectories of ornament and function, superfluity and need, explored in the previous chapter and brilliantly evoked in the Charles and Ray Eames film *Toccata for Toy Trains* (1957).

### **Model engineering or railway modelling?**

For the late nineteenth-century amateur model rail enthusiast the model had to perform in a way that distinguished it from toys, or from readymade models. There were two key means of ensuring this distinction: deriving satisfaction from building a steam engine and ensuring its operability, or

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<sup>68</sup> John Humphreys, 'Peter Snow shows John Humphreys his Model Railway' *Today* (BBC Radio 4, first broadcast on 3 December 2010) [http://news.bbc.co.uk/today/hi/today/newsid\\_9251000/9251362.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/today/hi/today/newsid_9251000/9251362.stm) [accessed 17 August 2011]

attention to accurate scale modelling – the difference that lies at the heart of the separation between the related disciplines of model engineering and railway modelling.

John Pocock in 1888 stressed the importance of ensuring operability, stating:

... the most simple form of steam locomotive must not be despised by the amateur worker; for although it is not like the slide valve locomotive, an actual model of a full sized engine, its construction will give some good practice in fitting, while it may be finished in far shorter time than the more complicated slide-valve locomotive.<sup>69</sup>

For Pocock, building a simple model steam locomotive (shown in figure 1) allowed the maker to quickly grasp the essential mechanical features of model steam engine construction, urging amateurs to follow his instruction that made use of Lucas & Davies' readymade castings<sup>70</sup>.

However, not all agreed with Pocock's approach. A reader of Pocock's serial in *Amateur Work* with the location sign-off 'Stadt Dresden', wrote a letter to the publication in 1886 exclaiming that it was an 'extraordinary statement' that miniatures don't always have to be to scale, continuing:

Here [in Germany] unless an exact and precise miniature is made, one would be only throwing away time and material. I have always understood that the best models are those copied precisely from a full sized engine...<sup>71</sup>

This debate between precision scale and operability was repeated with renewed vigour in the summer of 1903 in *The Model Engineer and Amateur Electrician*, a publication set up by Percival Marshall<sup>72</sup> in 1898 that had become the mouthpiece of the Society of Model Engineers after it was formed in the

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<sup>69</sup> Pocock, p. 30.

<sup>70</sup> If effective operability was the chief goal readymade castings made by firms like Robert A Lee and Lucas & Davies the task easier. See Robert A Lee advert inside cover of Pocock, *Model engine making*. Paul Hasluck states that there were kits on the market that only required a screwdriver to assemble them. Paul Hasluck, *The Model Engineers' Handybook* (London: Crossby Lockwood and Co, 1889), p. 21.

<sup>71</sup> 'Stadt Dresden', *Amateur Work*, 5 (1886), p. 526.

<sup>72</sup> Percival Marshall was an avid writer of handbooks on electricity, telegraphy and metalwork, often targeted at amateur enthusiasts. See Percival Marshall, *The Beginner's Guide To the Lathe* (London: The Model Engineer Series, 1904). Percival Marshall, *Induction Coils for Amateurs: How to Make and Use Them* (London: The Model Engineer Series, 1902) and other work for the Model Engineer Series. For more on the early history of the Society of Model Engineers see Eric Ball, *100 Years of Model Engineering: A History of the Society of Model and Experimental Engineers* (London: Society of Model & Experimental Engineers, 1997), pp. 1-23.

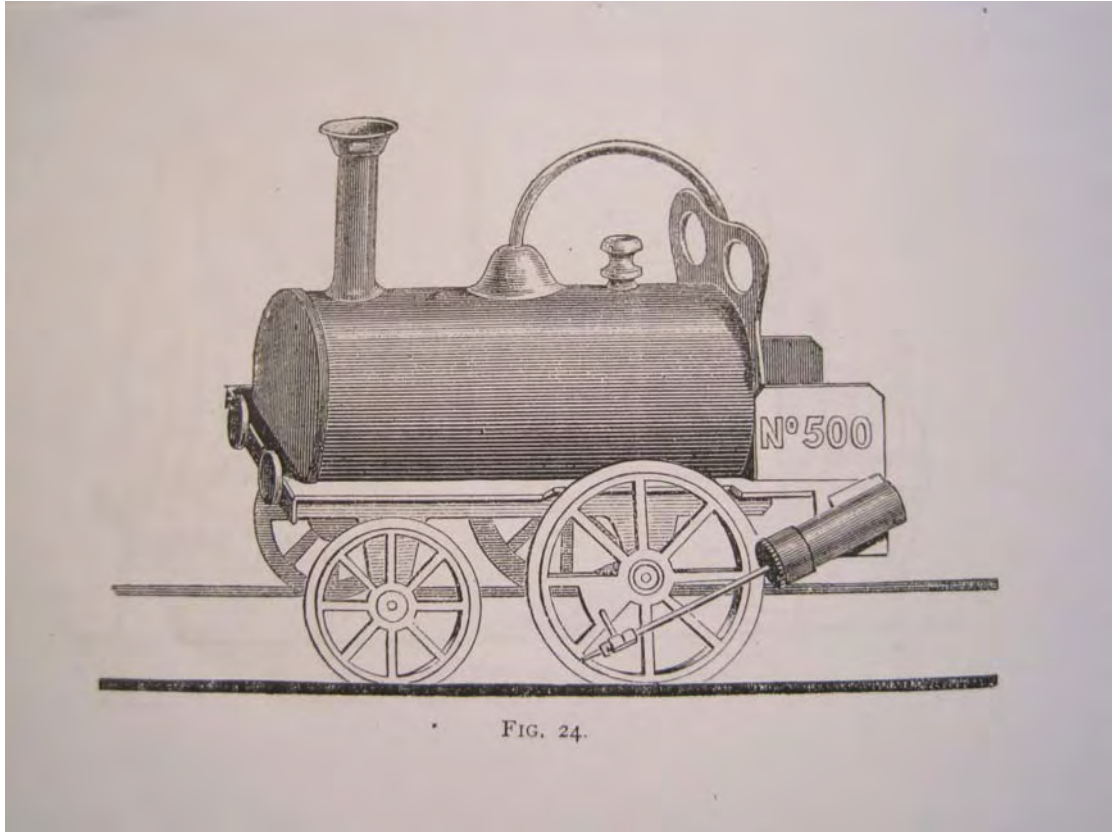


Figure 1: Simple single cylinder oscillating model steam engine in John Pocock *Model Engine Making* (1888).

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same year. In an editorial of July 16<sup>th</sup>, it was announced that the Society of Model Engineers was planning to issue a scale-gauge standard that would attempt to coherently define the measurements for accurate scale modelling, both for the convenience of modellers and for the commercial firms that were seeking to supply model rail enthusiasts<sup>73</sup>. This need was particularly acute for those working in the smaller scales, a growing arm of the hobby because of most practitioners' spatial limitations.

Most readers responded in a pliant manner, echoing Pocock's common sense approach and agreeing that with the equipment available at the time it was very hard to produce any degree of scale accuracy with a gauge below 3½ inches, 'the smallest permissible gauge for a scale *working* model'<sup>74</sup>. This meant that if the distance between the wheels was less than 3½ inches, all the components that ensure operability (boiler, cylinders, axles and other interior mechanisms) would not be able to fit in the model to scale, a problem exacerbated by the small British loading gauges compared to Continental and American equivalents. Henry Greenly, a frequent contributor and major figure within the modelling world at this time, accepted the difficulty of precision scale detail and incorporated a tolerance for scale error when proposing his scale-gauge standards in December 1903<sup>75</sup>. Greenly wanted to encourage his audience of model locomotive makers to try and be as accurate as possible but he did not allow this concern to take precedence over 'making it work'. To fit in the internal components of a locomotive to ensure it ran well, Greenly suggested that 'a little widening' in the gauge was advantageous, adding that the reader could make the prominent parts of the model locomotive to scale, such as the boiler, 'letting the width between the rails come what will!'<sup>76</sup>. Other contributors to the journal's scale-gauge debate were happy with this degree of looseness<sup>77</sup>.

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<sup>73</sup> Editorial 'Scale and Gauge Standards' *The Model Engineer and Electrician* 9: 116 (London: Dawbarn & Ward Ltd, 16 July 1903), p. 71. For a history of the gauge standards of international railways as they developed, including an explanation for Britain's smaller loading gauges see Douglas Puffert, *Tracks Across Continents, Paths Through History: The Economic Dynamics of Standardization in Railway Gauge* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2009).

<sup>74</sup> Harold Soper, *The Model Engineer* 9: 121 (20 August 1903).

<sup>75</sup> Greenly, 'Scale and Gauge Standards' *The Model Engineer* 9: 140 (31 December 1903), p. 641.

<sup>76</sup> Greenly, *The Model Locomotive*, p. 18.

<sup>77</sup> Readers who wrote letters to the publication under the title 'Scale and gauge standards' in *The Model Engineer* with a similar opinion include E L Pearce, H A Bennett, 9:121 (20 August 1903), pp. 188-89; F K Cobb, 9:122 (August 27, 1903), p. 210; Geo Loudon 9: 126 (23 September 1903), p. 369.

Greenly was also alert to the other aspect of the hobby that would not be tolerant of this error, stating some practitioners ‘...care not one whit whether the model they are making will turn out a practical efficient steam engine, the construction to a given scale being the principle pleasure they derive from the task’<sup>78</sup>. Geo Winteringham and J G Solis, were among those who prioritised precision scale, echoing the criticism of ‘Stadt Dresden’ above<sup>79</sup>.

The division between model engineering and railway modelling was concretised in the adoption of Greenly’s scale-gauge, with live steam models (gauge 1 and above) becoming the domain of model engineering and smaller gauges (gauge O and below) defining railway modelling, concerned with appearance and setting the scale modelled train within the parameters of a wider landscape. The following analysis focuses on the latter discipline because of the closer associations with the notion of superfluity or non-functionality, with modellers continually having to reconcile their hobby with the increasing sophistication of commercial models, something model engineers did not need to contend with so much due to the decline of pre-made models produced at gauge ‘O’ and above from the 1930s.

The chief problem for the emerging discipline of railway modelling was the degree of scale inaccuracy of Greenly’s 1903 compromise. Greenly’s system catered to the demand of most modellers of that time who made replica steam engines and needed more leeway to fit their components between the rails, not taking account for the later development of smaller electric and clockwork motors. Unlike continental or American equivalents<sup>80</sup>, scale-gauge standards were not readjusted in the light of new technology as many manufacturers of model trains such as Märklin and Bing in Germany and Bassett Lowke and Hornby in the UK had adopted the erroneous ‘O’ gauge as their manufacturing standard from the early twentieth century onward. Inaccuracy further came to define readymade models at lower scales when new lines of Hornby-Dublo model trains in 1938 adopted the incorrect ‘OO’ gauge, a

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<sup>78</sup> Greenly, *Model Locomotive*, p. 7.

<sup>79</sup> Geo Winteringham, *The Model Engineer* 9: 130 (22 October 1903), p. 389. Another reader J G Solis also urged a strict adherence to scale. *The Model Engineer* 9: 125 (17 September 1903), p. 284-5.

<sup>80</sup> The American National Model Railroad Association was set up in 1935 and the European body MOROP in 1954. For more information on the NMRA see <http://www.nmra.org/standards/standards.html> [accessed 17 August 2011], and for MOROP <http://www.morop.org/en/idf/index.html> [accessed 17 August 2011].

model size that easily fitted within the confines of domestic space that came to dominate the post-war UK model train market<sup>81</sup>. Models at these incorrect gauges thus became associated with commercially produced models that were mostly marketed at a juvenile audience<sup>82</sup>.

The inaccuracy of the 'OO' gauge and the association with readymades, with its roots in Greenly's compromise, 'bedevils the hobby to the present day'<sup>83</sup>, as Clive White explains in his history of the Model Railway Club. However, this error has played a major part in defining railway modelling: modellers continue to find ingenious, creative and idiosyncratic ways of distinguishing what they do from what is readily available on the shelf. Idiosyncrasy and plurality of practice is encouraged in Britain in particular because of the geometrically fallible standards, reflecting the playful element of amateur time, yet there is still a need for a specific framework that gives the modeller a structure to follow or respond critically to.

One broad framework that has come to define the railway modelling hobby is the insistence on precise scale modelling, known as 'finescale': without this accuracy modellers would make locomotives that constitute only an approximate equivalent of genuine locomotives, a roughness that veered dangerously close to the blatant inaccuracy of toys. The gauges 'EM' and 'P4', introduced by self-constituted special interest societies in 1955 and 1966 respectively, reflect this desire among many modellers to disassociate themselves with erroneous gauges that are too closely allied with mass manufacture.

Another way railway modellers used to distinguish their practice was to prioritise the environment within which smaller scale trains were set. Layouts became increasingly complex with impressive pioneering examples, such as John Ahern's 'Madder Valley'<sup>84</sup>, dating from the late 1930s. In addition to

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<sup>81</sup> Chris Graebe, *The Hornby Gauge O System* (London: New Cavandish, 1985), p. 64-5.

<sup>82</sup> Levy, p. 79.

<sup>83</sup> Clive White, "The Model Railway Club "First 100"". *The Model Railway Club Bulletin* 454 (May-June 2010), p. 4.

<sup>84</sup> The railway layout can still be seen on specific days throughout the year at Pendon Museum - <http://www.pendonmuseum.com/about/madder.php>. [accessed 17 August 2011] For a sample of articles by Ahern on scenic modelling see *Model Railway News*, 16 (London: Percival Marshall & Co, 1940), pp. 115-118, 210-212; *Model Railway News* 17 (1941), pp. 2-4, 28-30, 86-88, 172-75.

prioritising the scenic layout, train modellers started to stress the importance of replicating the temporal context of a train's operation: making sure that there is a structured timetable that your locomotives work to<sup>85</sup>. Timetabling became a marker of a quality layout, something more complex than merely placing a train on a track, pressing the 'on' button and watching a locomotive go round in a circle.

The ambivalent attitude railway modellers take toward scale-gauge standards, both depending on its structures yet wilfully departing from it, reflects the mediation that takes place between infinite subjective expression – the individual using amateur time to do what they want – and the drive towards collective and social accreditation that attributes meaning to their making. Complete departure from the rules invites comparisons to infantile play, whereas complete adherence suggests a heightened degree of seriousness that appears inappropriate when applied to the production of models with limited functionality. The brief history of railway modelling not only provides the contextual background but elucidates the in-between temporal experience of amateurs, caught between play and making, that acts as a springboard for more detailed analysis of the alternative time-states evident in railway modelling.

### **Experiences of time in amateur railway modelling**

Like all amateur practice, railway modelling is not carried out solely out of a desire to make a specific object. In many instances the material basis for a freely chosen activity acts as a conduit to experiences of time that are attractive because they offer something different to the cycles of modern everyday life. Within railway modelling it is perhaps nostalgia that constitutes the main alternative time-state that practitioners seek through their models, a conclusion backed up by the vast amount of literature, festivals and tourism devoted to railway enthusiasm. Yet there are other, less expected experiential aspects associated with railway modelling: from the notion of incompleteness to accelerating time's pace through miniaturisation, as

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<sup>85</sup> Greenly, *TTR Permanent Way Manual*.

I show below. The case study elucidates how the permitted, yet limited, freedom of amateur time can stretch everyday reality in unexpected ways.

### **The never-ending story: the unimportance of finishing in railway modelling**

Building model railways is an amateur activity that consumes vast amounts of time, either in the process of scratch-building scale model locomotives, or designing, planning, constructing and maintaining vast layouts. Dr J Bradbury's model of a locomotive named COMO is an early example of the meticulousness of building from scratch. By 1899 the model had consumed 13,000 hours of Bradbury's time with nuts, bolts and rivets all hand made, with the tender taking a further 5,000 hours to complete<sup>86</sup>. Similarly, within the field of laying out scenic environments in which model trains run, projects go on for many years. An overview of the Model Railway Club's post-war layouts demonstrates the time required to complete these complex projects: 'The Longbridge, Brampton Sands and Calshot Railway' (1962-78), 16 years; 'Thame' (1975-88), 13 years; 'Happisburgh' (1985-present) 25 years; and Copenhagen Fields (1984-present), 26 years<sup>87</sup>.

The last of these layouts, Copenhagen Fields, is a 2mm to the foot finescale model of the northern approach to London's Kings Cross Station during the inter-war period, an 'area of outstanding unnatural beauty' according to Tim Watson<sup>88</sup> (figure 2). The model is meticulously detailed. Firstly, the 2mm finescale gauge standard allows a more accurate portrayal of the real thing than more readily available, yet inaccurate, commercially produced 'N' gauge products. Also, because the model is of an urban scene there are extraordinarily minute details, such as an accurately positioned Caledonian Road Underground Station line underneath the top layer of the model, retail outlets within which individual products can be seen (everything from bouquets of flowers to lumps of meat – see figure 8), farmers leading their livestock to the local meat market that did exist in 'real life' during the inter-

<sup>86</sup> Ball, p. 5.

<sup>87</sup> Clive White and members of the Model Railway Club, 'MRC Layouts' in *100 Years of the MRC: The 100 Year History of the Oldest Model Railway Club in the World. British Railway Modelling supplement* (2010), p. 9-16.

<sup>88</sup> Tim Watson, *Model Railway Club Bulletin* 458 (January-February 2011), p. 4.





Figure 2: *Copenhagen Fields*, The Model Railway Club (2009).

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war period, churches, pubs, tiny models of people involved in their own static drama, not to mention the several streets of terraced housing, all hand-made. Even the cast of the Ealing comedy *The Ladykillers* (1950) are depicted, as this area was where much of the shooting for the film took place. Despite a large team, the model remains unfinished with progress continuing at a 'glacial rate' according to Watson<sup>89</sup>, with something new added every time the model is exhibited. There is no concern among the modellers of Copenhagen Fields to finish the project: when asked when the model will be complete Watson is vague, merely stating 'sometime'<sup>90</sup>.

Similarly, modellers often have a variety of different projects that are left half-finished or are completed at different speeds: it is not always a case of finishing one thing and going on to the next. In the Model Engineering Exhibition 2010 held in Sandown Park, Chairman of the Society of Model and Experimental Engineers Mike Chrisp had three of his models on show. The oldest was a half-completed model of the *Lion*, the locomotive star of the film *The Titfield Thunderbolt* (1953), that Chrisp built in his youth. Later on in life, and without finishing the first *Lion*, Chrisp wanted to make a more accurate scale model and tracked down the original *Lion* that he found at the Mersey Docks. Chrisp took many photos with the intention of designing a model of this find, but then another project distracted him. He recalls the shift of direction:

I thought I better knock up something in the meantime, so there was a designer who was writing for *The Model Engineer*, a designer called Martin Evans and he produced a design for a loco, a simple tank engine, a five inch gauge tank engine, and I thought "I'll make one of those". Well that's not finished either. So... yeah, we've all got unfinished projects...<sup>91</sup>

The hobbyist's time is free from the limitations of deadlines and targets and consequently projects can go on for years with retirement the only time that a

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<sup>89</sup> Ibid, p. 7. The 'glacial' pace of railway modelling is also remarked upon by critic Michael Ned Holte upon seeing Jean-Pierre Gorin's 1986 film *Routine Pleasures*, which charts the activities of a railway modelling group in San Diego. Michael Ned Holte, 'Termite Tracks: Routine Pleasures and the Paradoxes of Collectivity' *Afterall* 22 (Autumn 2009), p. 99.

<sup>90</sup> Tim Watson, 'Copenhagen Fields: Frequently Asked Questions' *Model Railway Club* website <http://themodelrailwayclub.org/CopenhagenFields.aspx> [accessed 17 August 2011]

<sup>91</sup> Interview with Mike Chrisp, Chairman of the Society of Model and Experimental Engineers (Sandown Park, 11 December 2010).

modeller can 'at long last ... use the time between nine to five to do some *actual* modelling'<sup>92</sup> according to Norman Simmons. This suggestion that modellers have to wait for retirement suggests the *longue durée* of this craft activity.

The nonchalant attitude to the notion of completion, the irreproducibility of most things that are created and the communal nature of producing model railway layouts demonstrates a resistance to the expectations of capitalist production that demand an endpoint, a temporal moment which signals the object's introduction to commodity exchange. The market's means of attributing value cannot remunerate every hour of crafting the model layout, as the maker was not concerned to be productive in each hour of work. Moreover, the works are incredibly difficult to store<sup>93</sup>, there is dispersed authorship, willingly acknowledged, and then there is the pejorative assumption that links railway modelling with 'playing with trains' that prejudices audience reception. The amateur maker's adoption of idiosyncratic and slow production procedures, particularly exaggerated in the case of constructing Copenhagen Fields, creates a situation that the market cannot bear.

The resistance to market conditions might seem to align railway modelling with Helen Carnac's account of 'slowing down life's pace'<sup>94</sup> through a slow, craft revolution. Indeed, a common complaint among craftspeople is that the market fails to recognise the value of slow, idiosyncratic and risky production procedures. Yet there is a difference: the advocates of the slow revolution are attempting to locate a niche demand for their products – they ultimately want to engage with the market – whereas railway modellers are much less concerned with explicitly ethical economic positions. With the railway modeller there is too much labour taking place for the market to manage, severing the link between labour and value in capitalist production. The incredibly detailed models are vacuums for labour, like a black hole

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<sup>92</sup> Norman Simmons, *How To Go Railway Modelling* (Cambridge: Stephens, 1980), p. 10.

<sup>93</sup> Copenhagen Fields is made from several pieces of baseboard that are carried to exhibition in a 35cwt Luton headed van. Tim Watson, 'Copenhagen Fields' *Model Railway Club Bulletin* 458 (2011), p. 6.

<sup>94</sup> Carnac H, 'The Concept' described on the website *Making a Slow Revolution* <http://makingaslowrevolution.wordpress.com/about/opportunities/> [accessed 18 August 2011]

consuming hours of making in endless digression, endless play with materials, endless experimentation and endless execution.

### **The partial utopia of the railway model**

The small scale of model train layouts situates the maker, or the operator of the model as a God-like figure looking over all activities within view. As the pioneer of scenic railway modelling John Ahern stated in 1947:

... increasing numbers of people are discovering an outlet for their creative powers in constructing not just a model railway, as the term was usually understood 20 years ago, but something approaching a miniature make-believe world of their own.<sup>95</sup>

The image of an operator running his layout like an omnipresent controller can be seen today at model railway exhibitions that take place throughout the UK every weekend, when a head emerges from behind an immaculately detailed railway layout (figure 3)<sup>96</sup>. This exercise of control constitutes one of the chief pleasures that derive from railway modelling. As John Snow explained in response to John Humphreys' question as to why he engages with railway modelling:

Because I can sit there like the fat controller on my little control panel and I can send hundreds of people around the world on my trains...<sup>97</sup>

An obvious comparison is with architects making and then looking over, detailed models of future or past projects, as immortalised in the *New York Times* photograph of Le Corbusier overlooking his *Ville Radieuse* (figure 4). Adnan Morshed's essay sheds light on this aestheticisation of aerial vision in modernity through his study of American architect Norman Bel Geddes's 1939 Futurama spectacle at New York's World Fair – a scaled down, modelled

<sup>95</sup> John Ahern, *Miniature Building Construction: An Architectural Guide for Modellers* (London: Percival Marshall & Co., 1947), v.

<sup>96</sup> This phenomenon was also captured on television when James May visited Pendon Museum, to see the detailed model of an imagined Great Western branch line called 'Dartmoor Scene' for his BBC serial 'Toy Stories'. After witnessing an unplanned train collision there is a moment of temporary confusion among the Pendon staff until, as May puts it, 'the head of God appears over the horizon' to restore order. James May, *James May's Toy Stories: Episode Six - Hornby* (BBC Two, first broadcast on 25 December 2009).

<sup>97</sup> Peter Snow, 'Peter Snow shows John Humphreys his model railway'.



Figure 3: The God-like controller of the model *Ogden Fold*, made by the South Hants Model Railway Club, surveys the scene from above the horizon. St Albans Model Railway Exhibition (2011).

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Figure 4: Le Corbusier's omniscient hand pointing over a model of *La ville radieuse* (1964).

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realisation of the city of tomorrow with elevated walkways and skyscrapers seen through glass from an aerial vantage point. Morshed's essay focuses on the aestheticisation of the aerial view in the 1930s that allowed the modern city planner, like Bel Geddes and Le Corbusier, to filter 'the messy world below into a utopian simplicity, affording him the illusion that he could first impose a neat physical order'<sup>98</sup>. The aerial view was laden with the enlightenment desire for visual clarity and hopes of bringing reason to the chaos of cities and was popularised among a wide public through spectacles like Bel Geddes's Futurama, science fiction novels, and superhero comics that became increasingly popular in the 1930s. Morshed explains how the spectator of the Futurama show was temporarily granted superhuman omniscience, a point made by Umberto Eco in his analysis of Superman's broad appeal:

In an industrial society, however, where man becomes a number in the realm of organisation which has usurped his decision-making role, he has no means of production and is thus deprived power to describe. Individual strength, if it is not exerted in sports activities is left abased when confronted with the strength of the machines which determines man's very movements. In such a society the positive hero must embody to an unthinkable degree the power demands that the average citizen can nurture but cannot satisfy.<sup>99</sup>

This statement might overstress both the ability and desire for industrial society to reduce man to 'a number in the realm of organisation', but it does explain the attraction of powers that Superman possesses. The abilities of Superman can easily be imagined, both conceptually with the inherent desirability of the all-seeing eye, and in its partial realisation in the spectator experience of ascension within the Futurama exhibition, other spectacles like the Eiffel Tower<sup>100</sup>, or air travel. Similar to Superman and the city planner, the railway modeller is also granted the temporal and spatial suspension that aerial mastery offers, but how does the deployment of this power differ?

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<sup>98</sup> Adnan Morshed, 'The Aesthetics of Ascension in Norman Bel Geddes's Futurama' *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 63:1 (March 2004), p. 91. See also Rem Koolhaas, *Delirious New York: A Retroactive Manifesto for Manhattan* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1978).

<sup>99</sup> Umberto Eco, 'The Myth of the Superman' in Umberto Eco, *The Role of the Reader: Exploration in the Semiotics of Texts* (Bloomington and London: Indiana University Press, 1979), p. 107.

<sup>100</sup> See Kimberley Chandler, 'The Eiffel Tower and the Ferris Wheel: Transfixed Immobility and the Performance of the Modern in the Late Nineteenth Century' (unpublished Master's thesis, Royal College of Art, 2009).

First of all the architect's relationship to the model is more demanding than that of the railway modeller: the architect's model works to visualise the probable appearance of the 'real thing' either to satisfy the clients' need for a visual representation or to illuminate technical properties that might require alteration. Of course, as Morshed explains, there is an ideological drive to this visualisation in the context of an aggressively positivism, but there clearly is a prosaic functionality to this type of model as well. The weight of responsibility on the model is at its height when planning cities, like the developments in Manhattan in the 1930s, which Rem Koolhaas describes<sup>101</sup>. Models remain an inexpensive way of visualising and resolving problems that might occur in building units that will exist in the real world, from architecture, to design of major exhibitions<sup>102</sup>.

The God-like status of the amateur railway modeller is utterly different. The railway layout can be a model 'in-and-of-itself' rather than a model for application, situating it closer to the dynamics of a painting than the prototypical qualities of architectural models to which it bears a closer material resemblance. The lack of economic demand placed on the model railway layout in contrast to the architectural model or engineering prototype, means that the maker can play with the narrative, subvert and invent it, exercising the creative freedom granted by amateur time. The modeller has no need to put forward a solution or solve urban problems as Le Corbusier or Bel Geddes did. With a complete freedom that is denied to architectural modellers who are tied in some way to the prospect that their universe will be built, the railway modeller follows his own will and imagination. In a peculiar twist the railway modeller is, in theory, the freest of those with the God-like view, the anarchist of the cast that includes the aviator, the architect and Superman. Could we go so far as to say that the railway modeller is the closest realisation of Nietzsche's *übermensch*, reaching the goal of 'self-overcoming'?

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<sup>101</sup> Koolhaas, p. 155.

<sup>102</sup> Glenn Adamson talks of the use of models in planning the Postmodernism show at the Victoria and Albert Museum. Glenn Adamson, 'Designing Postmodernism, Part 2: The Model' *From Sketch to Product* blog (Victoria and Albert Museum, January 2011) <http://www.vam.ac.uk/things-to-do/blogs/sketch-product/designing-postmodernism-part-2-model> [accessed 18 August 2011]



That is your entire will, you wisest men, it is a will to power; and that is so even when you talk of good and evil and of the assessment of values.

You want to create the world before which you can kneel: this is your ultimate hope and intoxication.<sup>103</sup>

Clearly not. The modeller's God-like control is only a temporary affair that sits alongside a variety of less Nietzschean activities and, like Superman who changes back into the journalist Clark Kent, the modeller returns to an everyday persona. Even though the modeller is theoretically free from responsibility, he is subject to multiple self-imposed constraints in practice. Models are copies of real life railway geographies that typically are drawn from the past and do not represent the expression of either infantile liberated expression or a self-overcoming. On the contrary the amateur modeller seeks to impose a structure that gives the parallel world a meaningful narrative that typically relies on the persistence of lived experience, memory or history. Play of the imagination is tempered by the expectation that the miniature universe should be based on something that exists or has existed – a particularly popular subject is the golden age of steam in Britain. Presented with the spatial-temporal flux of the modeller seeks structure, and often this regulatory mechanism is drawn from the past.

## Nostalgia

Why shouldn't the person – if he wants to – let it pander to his old-fashioned outdated ideas and let him enjoy his backward looking sentiment?

Norman Simmons, *How To Go Railway Modelling* (1979), p. 37.

The reason often given for the popularity of railway modelling is that it is a nostalgic act: an attempt by the modeller to relive a previous joyous encounter with railways. A previous childhood encounter with the railways is usually the source – whether in the form of a Hornby train set or a visit to a heritage steam route – arousing an adult's interest in remaking that engine or

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<sup>103</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zathustra* trans. by R J Hollingdale (London: Penguin Books, 2003), p. 136.

scene<sup>104</sup>. David Crossley, current head of the Chiltern Model Rail Association, states that modellers tend to recreate the landscape of their childhood, suggesting that trends in what is depicted adhere to the age of the modellers: the pre-war layouts depicted the 'big four' railway companies formed by the 1922 Groupings Act<sup>105</sup>, shifting to modelling the last days of steam in the late 1950s, finally progressing onto diesels 'because that is all they [the new generation of modellers] can remember'<sup>106</sup>. This argument of a generational shift in model railway layouts is not concrete; many modellers work on layouts that do not correspond to the time of their first interaction with steam, but it is a fair generalisation that hints at the impetus to evoke childhood encounters.

Miniaturisation is a means by which to evoke this nostalgic sentiment, according to Susan Stewart, who explains through her example of the doll's house how the miniature serves to bring former times to life while simultaneously blocking historicity, or the passing of time, in the same way as a museum conversely annuls the historicity of an object when it is placed behind glass. Modellers often depict scenes that relate to their past encounters with the railways, which they seek to depict in a fixed temporal register, 'reminding one of the past pleasures or perhaps things coveted but never possessed'<sup>107</sup>. Yet, Stewart reminds us, this attempt to monumentalise and compartmentalise history and subject it to one's own conception or ordering procedure seeks to make static a temporal moment that 'never existed except as narrative' which 'constantly threatens to reproduce itself as a felt lack'<sup>108</sup>. In line with Stewart's analysis, even with a perfect representation of a former image, immortalisation through the model will only temporarily abate the unceasing longing for that which is lost.

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<sup>104</sup> Interview with Mike Chrisp. Hornby has proved particularly adept at marketing their trains to evoke this nostalgic sentiment. Peter Randall, *The Story of Gauge O Hornby Trains* (London: Cranbourn Press Ltd, 1975) p. 21-2 and see Richard Lines, *The Art of Hornby: Sixty Years of Model Railway Literature* (Kingswood: Kay & Ward, 1983).

<sup>105</sup> Great Western Railway, London Midland and Scottish, London and North East Railway, Southern Railway were the companies formed from this act.

<sup>106</sup> Interview with David Crossley, Exhibition Manager of the Chiltern Model Railway Association (St Albans, 15 January 2011).

<sup>107</sup> Tony Stanford, *A Short History of Triang Railways* (Cranbourn Press, 1979), Introduction.

<sup>108</sup> Stewart, *On Longing*, p. 23.

## Suppositional histories and geographies

Whilst it is true that modellers do venerate the past, both through their choices in what to represent and their production methods, the temporal control railway modelling offers does not always result in the expression of a static nostalgic sentiment. For example the historical nature of many layouts could reflect the importance of being thorough, making sure that depiction accords with historical reality. Railway layouts are preceded by in-depth historical research to ascertain the models that were running on a line, the buildings that existed in the time depicted, as well as road and rail plans, so much so that Chairman of the Model Railway Club Leslie Bevis-Smith described the potential for a model railway layout to be a 'historical document'<sup>109</sup>. This is certainly apparent when viewing most layouts at model railway exhibitions, but the clock is not always set to the bygone age of steam. Farkham, made and run by the Mickelover Model Railway Group is set to the summer of 1990 when England lost to West Germany in the World Cup, depicting how despite this great national event 'life goes on as normal'<sup>110</sup> (figure 5). The railway modellers become specialists in specific slices of local history in order to provide an historical framework for their modelling activities.

Railway modelling is defined by the need to prescribe some form of temporal rigidity to give the model more depth than a toy, but the method by which this is done and the reasons that govern such decisions are loose, flexible and idiosyncratic. Historical research is not a straitjacket that constricts modellers, but rather provides source material for inspiration and a creative re-animation of the past, with modellers constructing their own suppositional geographies and narratives. There is room for blatant inaccuracy: station names are made up, towns are granted stations in the model world that were never afforded them in real life and there are multiple subversions and digressions. This tendency to rely on the historical record to substantiate a layout whilst at the same time freely moulding the past to construct an appealing narrative is reflective of the control a modeller has over his

<sup>109</sup> Interview with Leslie Bevis Smith, Chairman of the Model Railway Club (9 December 2010).

<sup>110</sup> Mickelover Model Railway Group, 'Farkham' *St Albans Model Railway Exhibition 2011 Programme* (Chiltern Model Railways Association, 2011), p. 39.



Figure 5: *Farkham*, Mickleover Model Railway Group. St Albans Model Railway Exhibition (2011).

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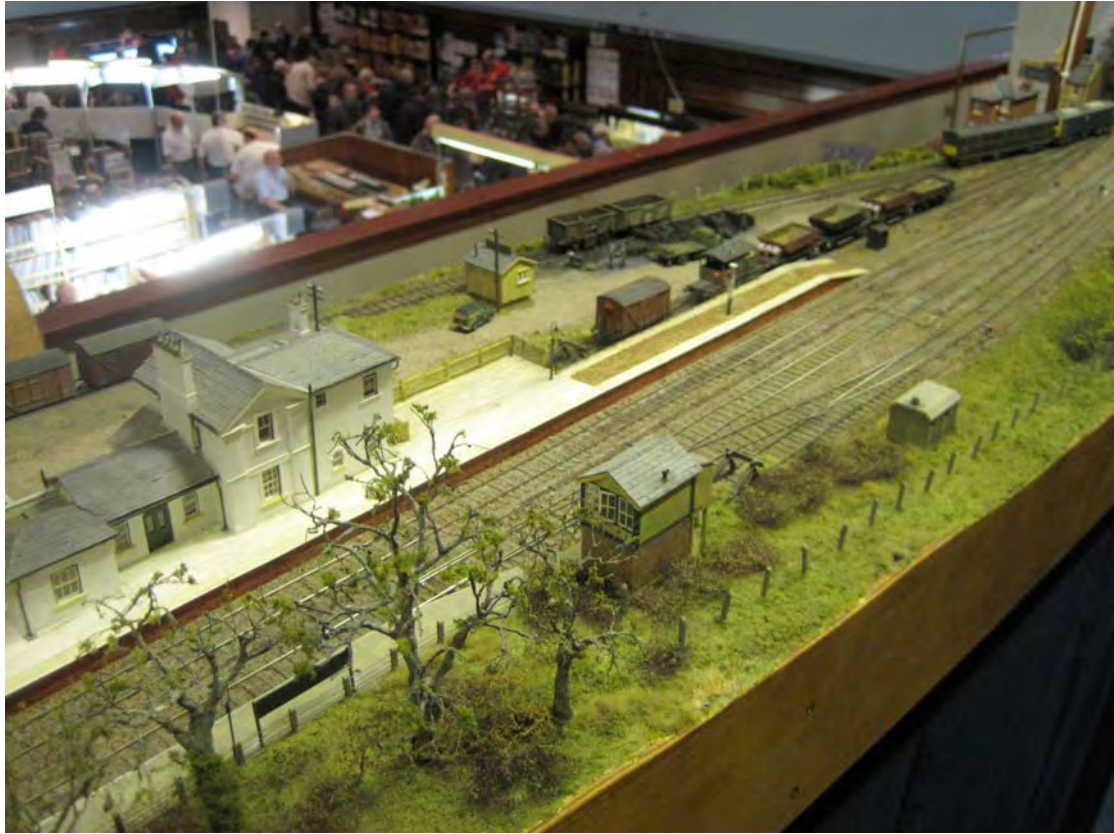


Figure 6: *Whatlington* Peter Bossom. St Albans Model Railway Exhibition (2011).

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Figure 7: Replica of the real-life Stonegate station positioned within Peter Bossom's fictional railway model of *Whatlington*.  
St Albans Model Railway Exhibition (2011).

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Figure 8: Detail from *Copenhagen Fields* showing a Modern Dentistry named after lead modeller Tim Watson (left corner).  
The Model Railway Club (c. 2010).

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miniature universe and his ability to bend the rules within a wider framework of broader historic accuracy.

In his description of his model Whatlington (figure 6), Peter Bossom describes how the narrative he created for his own layout is common practice within the hobby:

When it suits them, modellers rewrite history and/or geography to create plausible settings and this model is no different. Whatlington – with an ‘h’ – does exist, near Battle in East Sussex, but in order to create a station and make it a plausible ‘might have been’ the village has become a small country town and distances to the surrounding villages etc. have been increased by just a few miles.<sup>111</sup>

Bossom’s Whatlington is a creative, yet informative, fiction. He changes a real-life road junction ‘Hoath Hill’ into a small village in his railway model narrative with a rail connection to Whatlington, a rail link that although has never existed does draw attention to the real life operation of a gypsum mine in the area operated by the Sub Wealden Gypsum Company since 1876<sup>112</sup>. There is a curious blend of fact and fiction on show here: Whatlington station has never existed but the London-Hastings mainline does pass through the village; the village has grown to become a town in the model; and the station building is a scale replica of Stonegate station, which exists as a real-life passenger station two stops further north along the line (figure 7).

The phrase Bossom uses, ‘a plausible might have been’, which modellers of the South Hants Model Railway Club also use to describe their ‘S’ gauge model Ogden Fold<sup>113</sup>, encapsulates the elastic relationship of the railway modeller to historical and geographical parameters, stretching normative temporal and spatial restrictions without collapsing into to unordered chaos. Representation is still tied to recognisable histories and geographies and despite the twisting of reality, railway layouts still effectively visualise a general picture of the past: in the Copenhagen Fields layout models of farmers cajoling livestock across the streets of London inform the audience of

<sup>111</sup> Peter Bossom, ‘Whatlington’. *St Albans Model Railway Exhibition*, p. 54.

<sup>112</sup> ‘Places of Interest: Gypsum Mine’ *The Parish of Mountfield* website, <http://www.mountfield.org.uk/page30.htm> [accessed 5 September 2011].

<sup>113</sup> South Hants Model Railway Club, ‘Ogden Fold’. *St Albans Model Railway Exhibition*, p. 24.



a former meat market in the area and the Whatlington model raises awareness of local mineralogy. But within the guiding principles of geographic and historic contextualisation, the modeller is granted freedom to personalise the layout.

These subversions of historical narrative often reflect a light humour that pervades the hobby. For example, there are whimsical televisual references in many layouts including Ian Allington's depiction of a rail yard that features in the American television serial *Starsky and Hutch*; drunken revellers outside a pub in Grahame Hedges's 'Stoney Lane Depot'<sup>114</sup>, a common depiction in urban scene layouts; the insertion of modellers' names in the layout as seen in the Model Railway Club's 'Copenhagen Fields' (lead modeller Tim Watson has a 'Modern Dentistry' named after him – figure 8)<sup>115</sup>; as well as the more frivolous and bawdy scenes on show at Hamburg's *Miniatur Wunderland*, reflective of tendency in Germany within the hobby towards depicting absurdities<sup>116</sup>. Reality is putty in the modellers' hands and this humour and twisting of historical narrative represents the hobby's departure from being purely imitative. Ahern recognised this, explaining how the freedom to shape the temporal and spatial register of a model railway allows a practitioner to conceive of a 'countryside' in a similar vein to a painter, producing 'imaginative work to so high a level as to be worthy to rank as a work of creative art.'<sup>117</sup>

### Right on time

Out of the many structures that are imposed in the realisation of a model layout perhaps the most rigorous is setting a specific timetable for one's model trains. Made easier by increasing availability of commercially produced track from the 1920s, and encouraged by Greenly in the 1930s, by

<sup>114</sup> For details of these layouts see *St Albans Model Railway Exhibition* pp. 20-21 and 46-47 respectively.

<sup>115</sup> See 'Copenhagen Fields - Model Railway' Youtube video clip of *Model Town* series 1:13 (Discovery Channel: first broadcast on 24 July 2004)

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EN6o6nanDRY&feature=related> [accessed 5 September 2011].

<sup>116</sup> See Roger Boyes, 'Sex and Violence as Life With Model Trains Goes Off the Rails' *The Times* (8 February 8 2007) <http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/world/europe/article1350239.ece> [accessed 5 September 2011].

<sup>117</sup> John Ahern, letter in response to Longridge's article 'Railway Modelling as an Art' in 'Our Mailbag' section of *Model Railway News* 17: 201 (September 1941), p. 144.

mid century setting a timetable was a barometer by which to judge accomplished model layouts:

A model railway which does not work in the way that it is intended to lacks 9/10ths of its fascination and if, on the other hand, it is operated in an aimless, unrailwaylike manner, it also entirely fails in its object.<sup>118</sup>

Greenly's urge to avoid operating model layouts in an 'unrailwaylike manner', epitomised by the child that merely sets up a track and presses the 'on' button, reflected the author's continuing prioritisation on ensuring effective operation of model railways in the context of increasing provision of readymade parts. For Greenly, 'fascination' depended on running trains in close approximation to their real-life equivalents. By closely aligning the operation of a model railway to the labour of a signaller, the amateur is able to manipulate time's organisation, an ordering of the temporal conditions of the layout that is neither purely nostalgic, or haphazard, but highly structured.

In no case study in the history of twentieth century railway modelling is this punctilious attention to timetabling more apparent than the case of Norman Eagles's track layout 'The Sherwood Section of the L.M.S.'<sup>119</sup>. By 1928, when Eagles was a teenager, he had tired of ready-to-run circle layouts and first indulged in his passion for planning timetables. Throughout the late 20s and 30s he developed a clockwork-operated 'O' gauge model railway with multiple stations loosely based on the landscape and towns of 'Robin Hood' country near Nottingham, which was to incorporate more and more sophisticated modelling and scratch-built locomotives as the layout developed throughout the middle decades of the century. However, for Eagles, timetabling was the chief preoccupation, which he exercised in his professional work for London's bus system. Eagles set the date of his model at 1947, writing separate timetables for each station in this fictitious slice of the English countryside, even running a 24-hour timetable during his later life when the layout occupied an entire shed in the garden of his family home at Saunderton, Buckinghamshire. The scale model needed 'scaled-down' time

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<sup>118</sup> Greenly H, *TTR Permanent Way*, p. 54.

<sup>119</sup> Information about Norman Eagles gathered from a lecture by Leslie Bevis-Smith 'Sherwood Section of the LMS' (13 January 2011).

and a clock on the wall sped up by four times set the pace, ensuring a difficult task for the operators. As one visitor recalled, 'Heaven help you if were even a little bit late or hadn't wound the clockwork motor up enough!'<sup>120</sup>. Eagles's interest in time management was so acute that he would deliberately introduce chaos into his system, such as closing a line for essential maintenance works on a collapsing bridge or running a special excursions train, so that he could effect a prepared emergency timetable and test 'single track' operation.

Eagles's strict timetable required a team of nine operators. Visitors who were invited to operate signal boxes at one of the smaller, quieter stations described even one morning of participation as exhausting: 'it was not like operating a model railway but it was like operating a small railway'<sup>121</sup>. The focus on time within Eagles's Sherwood layout would require levels of attentiveness that would have matched or even exceeded the temporal exigencies of professional labour. This intention to run things according to a self-imposed methodical rhythm is far from just being nostalgic. It represents a thoroughly efficient parallel universe where trains operate efficiently as they should, according to a pre-arranged timetable. Humphreys wryly made this point in his interview with Peter Snow, when he joked that only Snow's trains in his attic were running to schedule, on an early December day where the UK railway infrastructure had been crippled by heavy snowfall<sup>122</sup>. As the world is subject to the chaotic forces of natural environment, social activity and multiple contingent factors, the railway modeller creates an alternative time-space where things can work properly, as they would in the blueprint.

Granted the power of being master of one's own universe, the railway modeller imposes certain self-imposed structures in the course of construction and operation of a personal utopia. The overpowering nostalgia that pervades much railway enthusiasm should not blind us to the dynamism of the other experiences that result from building and maintaining a layout, manifest in the traces of personal humour, mild subversions of geographical and

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<sup>120</sup> Mike Hughes 'Norman Eagles' thread on ModelGeeks.com forum (25 June 2004). <http://www.modelgeeks.com/Uwe/Forum.aspx/uk-rail/1485/Norman-Eagles> [accessed 5 September 2011]

<sup>121</sup> Visitor of Eagles's layout, quoted by Bevis-Smith, 'Sherwood Section of the LMS'.

<sup>122</sup> Jon Humphreys, 'Peter Snow shows John Humphreys his model railway'.

historical contexts and visions of perfect operability. The examples given above show the ways in which modellers control and determine the miniature world they created, but as hinted at by the story of Norman Eagles's layout, the pursuit of such exacting goals can be incredibly demanding, often requiring levels of devotion that threaten to destabilise this control.

## Obsession

... how far could one go in the pursuit of the true detail?<sup>123</sup>

Neil Young, 'Routine Pleasures' (2007).

Jean-Pierre Gorin asks this question in the course of making *Routine Pleasures* (1986), a film in which the French director pays homage to a railway modelling group in San Diego, USA. Like Gorin, any outsider to the hobby can be overwhelmed by the extent of detail enthusiasts go to in order to ensure accuracy. Precision goes beyond merely ensuring the correct scale-gauge standard; finescale replication of locomotive wheels and the curves on the track, precise historical accuracy and constructing detailed models without the help of pre-made parts are other ways in which the model can achieve greater accuracy. The hobby can be exceedingly difficult if such standards are followed, requiring a level of single focus that is akin to obsession.

The desire to be accurate is, of course, understandable: enthusiasts want models to demonstrate their advanced technical and artistic skills. On becoming aware of the scale inaccuracy of 'OO' models<sup>124</sup> when returning to the hobby in his thirties, David Crossley said to himself:

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<sup>123</sup> Neil Young, 'Routine Pleasures' part of the thread 'Vienna '07: Pt 1: Masterpieces: 'Casting a Glance (2007) and Routine Pleasures (1986)' on *Neil Young's Film Lounge* website <http://www.jigsawlounge.co.uk/film/reviews/vienna-07-pt1-masterpieces-casting-a-glance-2007-and-routine-pleasures-1986/> [accessed 5 September 2011].

<sup>124</sup> The 'OO' gauge standard creates a width between the rails of 16.5mm that is 2.33mm off the scale standard of 18.83. The EM gauge gains greater scale accuracy by widening the gauge to 18.2 but P4 is the most accurate achieving the 18.83 standard gauge track at the 4mm to the foot scale standard.

... Hang on, 'OO', 16 and a half mm gauge, but it should be 18.83. It's at least an eighth out. Is that sensible? Does that make sense? Can I actually, with my own feeling about the whole thing, do that?<sup>125</sup>

A child that is given a Hornby kit as a Christmas present is not likely to be concerned with the degree of inaccuracy of the model: on the surface it appears and behaves like a train. The modeller, however, wants to do more than fritter away time and money in the production of an inaccurate scale model, thus explaining Crossley's crisis of conscience above. However, the pursuit of utter precision can be a difficult affair. During a visit to the Model Railway Club I saw someone converting 'OO' gauge track to the more accurate 'EM' gauge, which prompted a discussion on scale-gauge standards. One member joked about the 'P4' standard (which is more precise than 'EM') as being the 'S&M wing of the hobby' adding 'if they can't be modelling in 'P4', they are usually standing under a cold shower beating themselves with sticks'<sup>126</sup>. This quip hints at the wilful suffering undertaken by railway modellers who deliberately pursue difficulty. When under no specific obligation to work, they set themselves tasks that are more and more challenging and time consuming as if stretching the extent of their competences and patience. Being master of one's model universe is not plain sailing.

Lennard Davis's social and cultural history of obsession is useful in this context. He resists classing obsession as a clinical condition strictly apart from 'normal' behaviour, a scientific division that would unfairly characterise certain types of amateur devotion as akin to some form of medical disorder. Davis considers other analytical and historical methodologies outside clinical assignation and Freudian psychotherapy, directing attention to the longevity of the monomaniacal tendency within Western culture from the early modern period, showing how focusing too much on one thing is a human affliction shown in medical treatises, early scientific enquiries and literature from William Godwin's *Caleb Williams* to Gustave Flaubert's *Bouvard et Pécuchet*. Critical is Davis' qualification that the state of obsession demonstrates 'both an awareness of obsessive symptoms and an inability to stop the

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<sup>125</sup> Interview with David Crossley.

<sup>126</sup> Conversation overheard during visit to the Model Railway Club (9 December 2010).

symptoms'<sup>127</sup>, capturing this fluid dialectic between control over one's behaviour and its temporary abandonment once transfixed by the object of one's obsession. This is a definition of obsession that is applicable to the amateur railway modeller (and other amateur practitioners). Modellers are aware of the relative superfluity of their arduous attempt to achieve perfect accuracy, but when pursuing their hobby it is the goal that obfuscates all others. As Davis suggests: 'Could we perhaps see obsession at the visible end of a regulatory mechanism gone wrong?'<sup>128</sup>

The high attention to detail can be a consequence of this internally generated competition to achieve a certain standard. David Crossley is often bewildered by the extraordinary amount of detail that he sees at exhibitions, speculating that some modellers spend large portions of daily available free time in the workshop, leaving hardly enough time for tea<sup>129</sup>. Steven Gelber, in his monograph on American hobbies, recalls the story of an obsessed San Antonio railroader in the 1940s who allegedly spent \$80,000 on a massive model layout, filling his house with spare track and spending his family's food budget on supplies<sup>130</sup>. When the man refused to give up his hobby his wife unsurprisingly left him. Here is a clear example of how obsession can lead to the detriment of other everyday tasks and an individual's relationships with others.

The obsessive degrees of focus that can be witnessed in railway modelling share parallels with the work of some artists who have been consumed by their output to the detriment of their own sanity, including André Métthey's compulsive attempt to produce a novel palette of colours and ceramic bases as mentioned earlier. This image of the mentally deranged artist was extensively depicted in Émile Zola's novel *L'oeuvre*<sup>131</sup> and is also exemplified by the beat artist Jay Defeo, whose monumental work *The Rose* (1958-65) – after continued painting, scratching and re-painting over the course of eight years – eventually reached a weight of 2000 (US) pounds, causing storage

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<sup>127</sup> Davis Lennard, *Obsession: A History* (Chicago and London: Chicago University Press, 2008), p. 38.

<sup>128</sup> Lennard, p. 14.

<sup>129</sup> Interview with David Crossley.

<sup>130</sup> Steven Gelber, *Hobbies: Leisure and the Culture of Work in America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), p. 234.

<sup>131</sup> Émile Zola, *The Masterpiece* trans. by Thomas Walton (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

problems with the paint falling off the canvas in a process of self-destruction<sup>132</sup>. Even the sober message of self-reliance espoused by Francis Chilton-Young in the late nineteenth century has obsessive traits: in *Everyman His Own Mechanic* he suggests that amateurs create time for their crafts by stealing ‘a few hours from the night’<sup>133</sup>. The notion of the obsessed amateur has a long history stretching back to Chilton-Young’s readers, whose dynamo machines allowed them to indulge their craft passions well into the night.

All these cases of monomania clearly differ in extent – Defeo’s gargantuan painting is an extreme example – but they do serve to contest Richard Sennett’s claim that negative obsession does not afflict the craftsman. Sennett explains how ‘craft routines relieve stress by providing a steady rhythm of work’ conforming to the expectation that making with one’s hands leads to an atemporal experience; similar to Csikszentmihalyi’s notion of ‘flow’, which Andrew Jackson has drawn on in his recent analysis of amateur makers<sup>134</sup>. This emphasis on the ‘rewarding flow like states’ romanticises the benefits of amateur craft, without consideration of negative consequences of obsession, such as the isolation it fosters and the danger of losing sight of the consequences of one’s own activity.

There is an inherent impulse to obsession in all amateur practice derives from the fact that there is no compulsion to carry on working in free time: the amateur maker has to have high levels of motivation. Given that obsession plays a much broader and pervasive role in amateur practice, Sennett’s dichotomy between negative and positive obsession seems overly reductive. With reference to a comparison between Adolf Loos’ ‘good’ Villa Moller and the ‘bad’ house Ludwig Wittgenstein designed in Vienna, Sennett states that the good craftsman adapts to circumstance, makes use of the contingency of working with specific materials, avoids pursuing one problem relentlessly, resists showing off skills for its own sake, and knows when to stop<sup>135</sup>. If judged according to these parameters of ‘good’ craftsmanship, railway

<sup>132</sup> Davis, p. 195. See also Jane Green and Leah Levy eds. *Jay Defeo and the Rose* (Berkeley and London: University of California Press, 2003).

<sup>133</sup> Chilton-Young, p. 8.

<sup>134</sup> Andrew Jackson in his analysis of amateur makers argues that they access states of ‘flow’ where there is a palpable loss of consciousness of time and space. Andrew Jackson, ‘The Amateur Maker’ *Design and Culture* 2: 1, March 2010), pp. 19-21.

<sup>135</sup> Richard Sennett, *The Craftsman* (London: Allen Lane, 2008), p. 262.

modelling falls short particularly because the practice is often so committed to the single goal of accurate scale detail and does not know when to stop, as shown in the case of Copenhagen Fields. This does not necessarily mean such practice is obsessive.

Negative obsession does not derive from a particular attitude to materials as Sennett expects but an attitude to time. The figure of the railway modeller working away in the isolation of the workshop is akin to Mary Shelley's construction of the mad doctor in *Frankenstein* and can come close to forms of highly exploited labour apparent in more conventional work environments, perhaps developing into something that is even more destructive for the amateur, because at least the workaholic has social pressures that regulate their practice – deadlines, the requirement to work with others and employment law. This example of an amateur becoming consumed by the task in hand is an exaggeration of healthy or socialised forms of obsession that derive from the individual's freedom in amateur time to temporarily control the conditions of their own labour alienation. However, this danger is offset by the inherent sociability of amateur practice and the fact that amateur time is supplementary; both regulatory mechanisms that monomaniacal trajectories do threaten to disrupt.

Examples of extreme obsession should not cloud the fact that obsessive characteristics are integral to all amateur craft practice. Thus, evidence of obsession in amateur practice is less 'a regulatory mechanism gone wrong', as Davis states, which suggests that negative obsession can clearly be identified, and more a regulatory mechanism that is stretched with objects that result from amateur labour not cohering with dominant means of assigning value in modern capitalism. For example, regulatory mechanisms of employment – such as the deadline – can be stretched by amateur time: Copenhagen Fields goes on and on, Eagles creates a timetable of extreme efficiency, and collaborative authorship of models challenge capitalist forms of authorial nomination. This metaphor of elasticity is appropriate to amateur time, capturing both its dependence on other temporal modalities, yet inherently stretching them, resulting in the multiple differential experiences that I have set out in the course of this chapter that include exaggerated obsession.



## Sociability

The examples mentioned above demonstrate the psychological imbalance that can result if the notion of autotelic 'flow' is overly prioritised, a conclusion as relevant to many other craft practices as it is in railway modelling. Social association lessens these problems of obsession. Throughout the history of railway modelling self-constituted clubs have encouraged knowledge sharing and the meeting of like-minded people; providing facilities that allow members to run and test models, attend lectures, and engage in large-scale projects that cannot easily fit within the confines of the home. There is also a degree of devolved localism within the organisation of railway modelling groups, with informal ties between larger clubs like the Model Railway Club and associations like the Chiltern Model Rail Association and smaller groups. Clubs are often made up of various individuals attracted by different aspects of the hobby, from those who enjoy modelling landscapes, those who prefer to operate the layouts, to those who are more interested in the history of railways<sup>136</sup>. My research has not been extensive enough to attempt a thorough anthropology of railway modelling societies, but the existence of clubs shows that time spent railway modelling is rarely just an isolated or solitary affair. The description of railway modelling as a 'model collective'<sup>137</sup> in the words of one observer is quite justified.

In addition to these broader structures of support for the railway modeller there is also an inherent sociability that derives from communicating these visions of a parallel universe. The railway modeller is an illusion maker, with scenery at the centre of the discipline. Ahern's book *Miniature Landscape Modelling* underlines this approach:

Now scenic modelling should be a comparatively light-hearted business and a bolder and broader approach is indicated; it is the general effect of the whole which matters and not the accuracy and precision of any detail.<sup>138</sup>

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<sup>136</sup> Interview with Leslie Bevis Smith.

<sup>137</sup> Ned Holte, p. 104.

<sup>138</sup> John Ahern, *Miniature Landscape Modelling* (London: Percival Marshall, 1951), vii.

This focus on how the detail fits within the context of the overall picture saves the craft from being reduced to the obsessive pursuit of scale detail alone and closer to a holistic art, poetically expressed by Michael Longridge, editor of the *Model Railway Club Bulletin*, in the 1950s:

In the same way that every painter has his own methods and style when reproducing a tree on canvas, so modellers are able to exercise their judgement, not only on individual items but on the “picture” as a whole.<sup>139</sup>

For Longridge, the presence or absence of detail is not the priority, rather a sense of balance should be achieved in the attempt to create a ‘general picture’, or in other words to communicate a narrative of some sort. The processes that are used to achieve this might include proportionally reducing the scale of a model at the back of a layout to create the illusion of depth, as is the case with Copenhagen Fields<sup>140</sup>; replicating the experience of viewing a train in the city by placing trees and buildings at the front of a layout ‘to break up direct lines of sight between the viewer and the trains’ as seen in the layout ‘Farkham’<sup>141</sup>; weathering buildings to give the illusion of age; and the additional framing given by appending historical information gathered during the course of researching for a layout.

The reason for stressing these links to the painter and the notion of ‘illusion making’ is to emphasise the importance of communication: railway modelling is not exclusively about detail, despite the prevalence of discussions about scale-gauge standards seen in the model railway press, but is concerned with creating narratives of alternative model universes. This reflects the collective impulse at the core of illusion making. As Jameson explains, in the attempt to materialise the utopian impulse individuals rely upon aesthetic parerga, common rhetoric, and established symbolic forms, which render the dream image communicable to others. The expression of the individual ego, primal wish fulfilment, threatens to sink ‘to a rather private activity that needs to be disguised at all costs’ and instead must depend on the supplemental to lend

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<sup>139</sup> Michael Longridge, ‘Editorial’ *Model Railway Club Bulletin* 36 (October 1957). Longridge also argues that railway modelling should be seen as an art in much the same way as photography. See Michael Longridge, ‘Railway Modelling as an Art’. *Model Railway News* 17:1999 (July 1941), p. 210.

<sup>140</sup> Watson, ‘MRC classic layouts’, p. 7.

<sup>141</sup> Mickelover Model Railway Group, p. 39.

the expression coherence<sup>142</sup>. Jameson's explanation of the collective will at the source of utopian expression reflects the interconnected nature of attempts to build an alternative temporality, a constraint that amateur railway modellers accept through their wilful subjugation to frameworks that structure their practice – the imitation of a former time, setting a timetable, depicting a suppositional geographies – all which stretch reality. In the course of constructing an illusion, the aesthetic is no longer a 'secondary hobby but rather goes around behind creation to identify the very sources of reality'<sup>143</sup>. The alternative time-states that abound in the practice of amateur railway modelling bend, twist, and quietly feed back, into social reality. Amateur time is relational, but its closeness to the dominant temporality is where the experience of alternative time-states derives from.

These diversions, or alternative experiences of time are to be found in all examples of individually, autonomously chosen craft. They provide opportunities to fashion a utopian world that remains an inherently social form of expression<sup>144</sup>: time-states instilled with the desire for control, nostalgic reflection, humour, the productive ethos, skill development, and obsession. Given this mélange of different motivations it would seem presumptuous to settle on any broader definition of the experience of amateur time. However, French sociologist Georges Friedmann in his book *Anatomy of Work* furnishes us with appropriate terminology. In opposition to work, which Friedmann (perhaps rather simply) characterises as some form of oppression, leisure is described as a 'reply', a compensatory response to what is lacking during the working hours<sup>145</sup>. The relativism of this approach is helpful when considering the vast spectrum of amateur craft practice. Amateur time often provides the experiences that are lacking in other parts of life, whatever that might be. Friedmann's concept also foregrounds the conversational relationship between amateur time and other time-states: there is no great divide between these two experiences as shown, for example, by the vast number of railway

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<sup>142</sup> Jameson, p. 47.

<sup>143</sup> Jameson, p. 44.

<sup>144</sup> Bernhard Rieger studies the desire that amateurs have to create 'social fantasies in their private domain' in the arena of early British and German amateur cinematography in the 1920s and 1930s. Bernhard Rieger, 'Fantasy as Social Practice: The Rise of Amateur Film', chapter seven of Bernhard Rieger, *Technology and the Culture of Modernity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), p. 194.

<sup>145</sup> Georges Friedmann, *The Anatomy of Work: The Implications of Specialisation* trans. by Wyatt Rawson (New York: Free Press of Glencoe, 1964), pp. 110-111.

modellers who work or who have worked on the railways and in associated industries<sup>146</sup>.

Friedmann follows other Frankfurt School thinkers in his belief that leisure is more likely to lead to debasement rather than enrichment<sup>147</sup>. However, free time allows the individual control over temporal and spatial structures, albeit for a limited time frame. With this muted power, the individual can craft a universe in some form of 'reply' to conditions of work. Utopia is only realised through some part-time, miniaturised form, within the confines of an infrastructure that ceaselessly commodifies leisure. The concept of the busman's holiday explored in the introduction is again helpful: on a coach holiday the bus driver can sit back and enjoy someone else doing his work, deriving pleasure from his passive position. Yet in the context of amateur craft practice I have shown that given the freedom of choice, the bus driver might still want to drive. It is just that in his own time he might want to drive a different route, order others around, or, in other words, be the master of his own exploitation.

### **Application of amateur time in contemporary art and design practice**

The case study on railway modellers has shown both the variety and complexity of experiences of amateur time and, despite being tied to a particular medium, has elucidated broader features of the amateur temporal mode, in particular, its partial, weak, miniaturised and relational utopianism. Amateur time is supplementary to other temporal modalities (due to its non-essential status) and thus is constrained and compressed, finding its material analogue in the foldable, transformable and portable workstations that many amateurs use, which have to be put away when more pressing everyday activities take over<sup>148</sup>.

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<sup>146</sup> 'Many model railway club members spend weekends as volunteer workers on preserved lines. Many professional railwaymen also devote much time to running preserved railways working alongside these amateurs'. Carter, p. 6. The following member profiles in the *Model Railway Club Bulletin* also demonstrate the connection between railway modelling and professional work on the railways. David Burleigh and Keith Castell's obituary 'Alain Swain' and 'MRC Member Profile 14: Keith Castell' *MRC Bulletin* 453 (March / April 2010), pp. 6-7 and p. 5; 'MRC Member Profile 18: Ian Lamb' *MRC Bulletin* 457 (November / December 2010), p.12. This point is also made by Steven Gelber. Gelber, p. 48.

<sup>147</sup> Friedmann, p. 158.

<sup>148</sup> See chapter two 'The malleability and invisibility of amateur tool organisation'.

The relational quality of amateur time needs to be kept in mind when assessing the utopian hopes – whether they be romantic, nostalgic, political or progressive – that are often pinned to this amorphous temporal modality. Amateurs themselves are prone to accentuating the utopian aspects of their practice. T W Pinnock, a mid-century amateur model engineer and professional lawyer painted a rosy picture of the purposelessness of his hobby, where all ‘are truly amateurs, in it for the love of the game’<sup>149</sup>, an assessment which veers toward surrendering the complexity of amateur practice to the myth of unproblematic cohesion and affiliation with a faultless social nirvana. Given such proclamations, and the etymological connection between the word amateur and love for an activity, it is no surprise that many artists have looked upon amateur practice with big, hopeful eyes. Artists might not want to be associated with the lack of expertise that often is thought to define amateur practice, but the alternative temporal structures of amateur time and the expectation of the presumed freedom it offers from the mechanisms that regulate daily capitalist life, has often proven attractive.

Earlier I demonstrated how problems with the appropriation of amateurism arose when the constraints, limitations and weaknesses of amateur practice were ignored. Feminist discourse and the theories of Henri Lefebvre were used to critique this over-politicisation of amateur time, evident in Premsele’s ‘Masters of Amateurism’ series, by demonstrating how amateur practice can be situated within a nuanced temporal structure that attributes agency to amateur making while also acknowledging its marginality, modesty and relational status.

A final succession of miniature case studies below explore contemporary artists’ appropriation of amateur experience in more detail, building on analysis above to examine how practitioners have reconciled, managed, theorised and justified their interactions with amateurs and the fruits of their labour. This strategy is fraught with problems: a temporal variant of the contested relationship between modern artists and the readymade (or found objects) that has been the subject of art historical attention ever since

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<sup>149</sup> T W Pinnock quoted in Ball, p. 2.

Duchamp's readymades of the 1910s. In a recent work on the appropriation of readymades and found objects in the 1980s and 1990s, John C Welchman criticises artists who use readymades without enough regard to the social and aesthetic contexts from whence they were wrenched. His particular target was the work of the Young British Artists who he sees as staging 'the denouement of appropriation [...] a surrender to the ineffable nearness of signs remorselessly cut out and abstracted from their popular cultural contexts'<sup>150</sup>. At the heart of Welchman's critique is how artists use readymades as if they were just another material like paint, merely an uncomplicated, neutral conduit for subjective artistic expression; current artists effectively chiming the earlier appropriation of decorative art mediums in the 1890s by Maurice Denis and his fellow Nabis artists. This forgets how 'the gesture of taking always results in the relocation of a context (whether national, ethnic, gendered or class-based)'<sup>151</sup>.

This strand of art criticism provides a conceptual framework to understand and critically evaluate artistic appropriations of amateur experience. Does the relocation of amateur experience to artistic practice and museum display pay heed to the contexts and complexities of amateur time that I outlined in the railway modelling case study and in other chapters of the thesis? Do artists get more than they bargain for in the citation and appropriation of amateur experience? John Roberts in *The Intangibilities of Form* convincingly argues that Duchamp's use of readymades did manage to unleash the complexities of their original production, exposing the dynamics of material and non-material labour in modern art and the artist's relationship with social technique. According to Roberts *Fountain* showed how art 'was perhaps closer to the making of non-artistic things than aesthetic discourse allowed'<sup>152</sup>. Does appropriation of amateur time expose similar truths about artistic production?

The rest of this chapter aims to bring attention to artistic appropriations of amateur time that demonstrate this Duchampian sensitivity and self-reflexive

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<sup>150</sup> John C Welchman, *Art after Appropriation: Essays on Art in the 1990s* (Australia: G + B Arts International, 2001), p. 39.

<sup>151</sup> Welchman, p. 36.

<sup>152</sup> Roberts, *The Intangibilities of Form: Skill and Deskilling in Art After the Readymade* (London: Verso, 2007), p. 63.

awareness of the potential problems that are imported once amateur experience is sought or invoked. What is critical is whether the untidy and complex social realities of amateur production that I have explored throughout the thesis are unpacked, or whether they are flattened; whether artists are able to highlight the social life of the object being used and its transitions through different realms of value that encourages a reassessment of relationships between artists, non-artists and the socio-economic systems on which they rely, or whether amateur experience is bulldozed by artists or uncomfortably positioned within existing norms of artistic authorship, production, discourse and judgement<sup>153</sup>.

Appropriation of amateurism is not just a new 'artistic strategy on the block', it has lurked in the shadows of art practice since the nineteenth century, as explained in the first chapter. In the contemporary context however, when technological developments increasingly put skills and materials in the hands of informally trained amateurs, the assault on disciplinary boundaries based on specialism has reached an advanced stage. In light of this increased relevance of amateur practice, Duchamp's reminder that appropriation is never vacant of context, and the ongoing conversation he initiated about the role of material and immaterial labour in artistic practice is particularly relevant.

The miniature case studies that follow are drawn from arenas of amateur practice discussed in the dissertation so far: pottery decoration, paint-by-numbers, chicken keeping and tool management. Artists working within these arenas have similarly been interested in the complexities and rough edges of amateur experience, keen to rescue this phenomenon from marginality but equally sensitive to both the history, psychology and philosophy that emerges from this differentiated temporal realm. Such

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<sup>153</sup> For an example of this comparison in the use of found objects see Welchman's comparison between Mike Kelley's 'hands-on' interaction with 'dirty and smelly' soft toys in *Arena #7* (1990) – in which the artist places them around a white blanket on the floor – and Haim Steinbach's 'hands-off' elevation of similar found teddybears to iconic status through their neutral display in *basics* (1986). Welchman, pp. 42-45. Steinbach's detached position in his use of readymades is also criticised by Glenn Adamson who comments on his inability to 'insert himself into the world of shifting values' when depicting commodities of everyday life, in contrast with the more emotive approaches of Andy Warhol. Glenn Adamson, 'The Real Thing' in *Ai Weiwei: Dropping the Urn Ceramic Works, 5000 BCE – 2010 CE* Gregg Moore and Richard Torchia eds. (Glenside, Pennsylvania: Published on the occasion of *Ai Weiwei: Dropping the Urn Ceramic Works, 5000 BCE – 2010 CE* Arcadia University Art Gallery), p. 53.

attentiveness will help avoid the capitulation of this lesser known terrain to a new 'ism' (amateurism), or at least encourage a degree of sensitivity when using the term. Appropriating facets of amateur labour and productivity is no simple case of external inspiration or outsourcing, and introduces new challenges.

### **Railing against the norm: collective community ceramics**

One straightforward way for artists to incorporate amateur production into their work is by directly employing amateur labour. Enlisting amateur labour has to be distinguished from the related and much wider sphere of participatory spectatorship in which the gallery goer is invited to be a part of the work – what Claire Bishop calls 'activated spectatorship', where the artist involves the viewer in a 'politicised aesthetic practice'<sup>154</sup>. Examples include Rirkrit Tiravanija's creation of spaces for eating and socialising, the invitation for spectators to take away parts of Felix Gonzalez Torres's various works, and Clare Twomey's works *Consciousness/Conscious* (2001-4) and *Trophy* (2006) in which the audience contributed to each work's completion through physical interaction. Participatory spectatorship has the tendency to only exert minor demands on its contributors in the creation of experience in which the artist-as-producer retains significant levels of control and authorship. This is perhaps why Nicolas Bourriaud's notion of relational aesthetics, often used to describe this type of practice – the 'deemphasis of the actual object in favour of the activity surrounding it'<sup>155</sup>, as described by Paula Owen – has become 'stiff from overuse'<sup>156</sup> according to Glenn Adamson.

Seeking and employing amateur labour is distinguished by the extent of pre-organisation, the depth of direct communication between the artist and amateur, and the very real potential for amateurs to threaten the overall coherence of an artistic project through their labour. Collaborations between

<sup>154</sup> Claire Bishop, *Installation Art: A Critical History* (London: Tate Publishing, 2005), p.102.

<sup>155</sup> Paula Owen, 'Fabrication and Encounter: When Content is a Verb' in Buszek, *Extra/Ordinary*, p. 84.

<sup>156</sup> Glenn Adamson, essay for 'We Work In A Fragile Material: We Built This City' exhibition (London: Sixpm Project Space, 23-27 April 2009). Claire Bishop critiques Bourriaud's notion of relational aesthetics for its presumption that dialogue is necessarily democratic and worthwhile 'for its own sake', positioning the work of Spanish artist Santiago Sierra as highlighting how social space is not automatically harmonious but 'riven with social and legal exclusions'. Bishop, pp. 116-123.



artist and amateur have greater potential to better expose the social experience of making something in partnership, and could inject Bourriaud's notion of relational aesthetics with a new lease of life.

Jeremy Deller's project, *The Battle of Orgreave* (2001), is one example. The non-expert participation he sought involved asking residents of the former mining town of Orgreave to re-enact the infamous 1984 miners' strike. As it was up to participants how far they took their role as miner or policeman in the charade, the project had the potential to spill out of Deller's control<sup>157</sup>. Deller's role in the work has been compared to that of a choreographer, orchestrating his participants<sup>158</sup>. This analogy is apt. Deller sets the general framework but cedes control to a specific set of individuals who are given freedom to decide how his overall plan is carried out. Throughout there is an ongoing negotiation between bringing to light the expressive power of amateur involvement that he deliberately enlists, and maintaining some sort of editorial control. Once amateur labour is sought and we move away from the narrow terrain of participatory spectatorship a whole set of issues start to unravel; in the case of *The Battle of Orgreave*, how amateurs start to fully believe in the role-play and the extent to which they create their own event outside of Deller's control.

Judy Chicago took a famously heavy-handed role in her appropriation of volunteer labour in her seminal feminist work *The Dinner Party*. She demanded long hours from her workforce, but more crucially retained complete control over design decisions for the large number of porcelain and embroidery pieces that were produced, leading to 'unfortunate simplification' in some of the imagery<sup>159</sup>, according to Laura Meyer. Chicago's decision to vet the multifarious expressions of her many collaborators reflected her 'serious' desire to create a unified feminist expression, which contrasted with the earlier, more haphazard, collaborative project *Womanhouse* that temporarily

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<sup>157</sup> Deller talked of both the delight and anxiety of ceding control to an unpredictable public in his projects during a lecture he gave at the Royal College of Art. Jeremy Deller, 'On the Agency of Individuals', lecture given as a part of the 'Freedom/Constraint' lecture series for the Critical and Historical Studies programme, Royal College of Art (9 February 2011).

<sup>158</sup> Roberts, 'The amateur's retort', p. 20.

<sup>159</sup> Laura Meyer, 'From Finish Fetish to Feminism: Judy Chicago's "Dinner Party" in California Art History' in Amelia Jones, *Sexual Politics* (Los Angeles: UCLA at the Armand Hammer Museum of Art and Cultural Center in association with University of California Press, Berkeley, 1996), p. 69.

transformed a suburban home in Los Angeles with a demolition order, into a feminist art school: 'the quintessential example of Feminist art staged at the margins, with normative standards of quality held in contempt'<sup>160</sup>. In the *Dinner Party* the inclusion of banal, imperfect or domestic designs would have threatened Chicago's overall aim and she restricted the expression of amateur labour, even though she heavily depended on their output. If artists do employ amateur labour the entire gamut of possible outcomes has to be tolerated, or at least accounted for in some way.

Margaret and Christine Wertheim's inclusion of Evelyn Hardin's 'most god-awful things you've ever seen' in their collaborative *Hyperbolic Crochet Reef Project* – which sought amateur labour to bring hand-made form to mathematical space – is a good example of a flexible approach in dealing with amateur collaboration<sup>161</sup>. The Wertheim sisters did not edit out this 'crazy, feral work' despite its incongruity. Omission of the unpredictable, bizarre and idiosyncratic – represented by Hardin's contributions – would have reflected the artists' unwillingness to yield to any disturbances or variations to their open-call project.

Like the work of Deller and the Wertheim sisters the Ulverston *Railings* project (2009-ongoing), directly employs the skills of amateur labour, in an effort to decorate a series of railings in a particularly creative Cumbrian town<sup>162</sup> with guerrilla pottery (figure 9). This community-orientated project, a 'light-hearted poke at society'<sup>163</sup>, similarly exposes the unpredictability of working with amateur labour with its reliant, fragile, stubborn and humble characteristics leading to unexpected trajectories of making and display that convey a certain vulnerability.

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<sup>160</sup> Adamson, *Thinking Through Craft*, p.157. For more on Adamson's comparison between *Womanhouse* and *The Dinner Party* see pp. 154-159. For more on Chicago's selection and use of china painting in the *Dinner Party* see Amelia Jones, 'The "Sexual Politics" of the "Dinner Party": a critical context' in Jones, *Sexual Politics*, p. 88. For more information about the *Womanhouse* project see Norma Broude and Mary Garrard eds. *The Power of Feminist Art: Emergence, Impact and Triumph of Feminist Art* (New York: Harry N Abrams, 1994), pp. 48-64.

<sup>161</sup> Maria Elena Buszek, 'Crochet and the cosmos: an interview with Margaret Wertheim' in Buszek, *Extraordinary*, p. 289.

<sup>162</sup> For many years now Ulverston has attracted creative people like John Fox and Sue Gill in the 70s, the people who founded Welfare State International (<http://www.welfare-state.org/pages/john.htm>) and led to the building of The Lantern House in Ulverston, their former home (<http://www.lanternhouse.org/>).

<sup>163</sup> Geoff Dellow, 'Off-centre' *Ceramics Review* 247 (Jan/Feb 2011), p. 82. My thanks goes to Geoff Dellow for obliging me information about the *Railings* project. Telephone conversation with Geoff Dellow on 25 July 2011.



Figure 9: *The Railings*, Gill Banks, Ulverston (2011).

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Figure 10: Detail of *The Railings*, Gill Banks, Ulverston (2011).

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Figure 11: Restoration of a vandalised horse shaped decoration that formed a part of *The Railings*, Gill Banks, Ulverston (2010).

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The artist-as-choreographer for the *Railings* project, Geoff Dellow, is not a professional maker but learnt the craft of pottery in his free time, initially in evening classes at Oakland in California while he was a chemical engineer for Shell in the 1970s. He bought a simple kiln and a potter's wheel, developing his interest to such an extent that when he returned to Ulverston in the early 2000s he devoted enough space in his new house for a substantial pottery studio. A combination of both a large kiln, the acquisition of a ton of clay sold cheaply by a closing down mine, and an interest in community art education, led Dellow to initiate a series of workshops to make an open-air gallery of terracotta ware on the railings in front of a beck in the town called Gill Banks. Family groups, children, retirees and many tourists passing through the picturesque town, have all contributed to work so far which is made up of depictions of fish, faces, flowers of various kinds, insects, dolphins, as well as some more abstract designs (figure 10).

Here, ceramic decoration has leapt out of the private domain of overglaze decoration to the embellishment of a public space. Like the late-nineteenth-century middle-class pottery decorators whose practice I described earlier, participants in the railings project also needed bases, carriers and arbiters. Many companies have helped provide materials for Dellow's project<sup>164</sup>, but the preparation of bases chiefly fell on the amateur potter's shoulders. Dellow prepares the clay and also attempts to remove his public's fear of the blank canvas by providing templates; a key part of the process according to Dellow in that it enabled participants to build work from a recognizable image, a 'security' that mitigates a lack of confidence<sup>165</sup>. The dependence of amateur labour is shown here: there is a need for pre-made and prepared materials and tools to compensate for limitations of skill and experience.

Before the firing process, two holes are bored into each item allowing them to be installed and taken down with ease. Once in the public domain the terracotta ware pays homage to the many makers involved, but the works are

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<sup>164</sup> North-West Evening Mail 'All Fired Up For Pottery Making' (9 April 2010) <http://www.nwemail.co.uk/news/ulverston/all-fired-up-for-pottery-making-1.693861?referrerPath=news/ulverston> [accessed 24 July 2011].

<sup>165</sup> Telephone conversation with Geoff Dellow.

also exposed both to the natural elements and to the destructive capabilities of others, making them incredibly fragile. Dellow, in his article for *Ceramics Review*, describes this 'everyone-can-do-it people pottery' as a 'far cry from the fine art and way out pottery that finds its pride of place regularly in *Ceramics Review*'<sup>166</sup> and one marker of its distance from London's design and craft scene is the extent of the pottery's exposure. The decorations were frequently subject to vandals' attention in the first few months of their appearance, particularly as the area was popular for late night drinking among the youths of the town, Dellow recalling: 'one night we had about half the pots broken in a massive orgy of destruction'<sup>167</sup>. Displaying in public, without the security of the gallery walls, is inherently risky. A somewhat more provincial example of art vandalism comparable to Ai WeiWei's dropping of the ancient Chinese Urn or the Chapman brother's defacement of Goya sketches, this destruction, although not desired, lays bare the violence of various elements of the community. Craft is at the centre of bringing to light a social problem. As Adamson notes in relation to a bevy of paintball gun violence in an installation by Swedish craft collective We Work In A Fragile Material (which I examine in a later case study below): 'Craft's fragility is in its very ability to pull people together and hold them still – a gesture that is both life-affirming and constraining'<sup>168</sup>.

The stubborn response to this destructive behaviour is an example of how a community is held captive, if only for a temporary moment, by the fragility of craft. Rather than verbally react to the destruction, Dellow patiently picked up the broken pieces of damaged ware and stuck them together using the adhesive Araldite. Broken pigs and horses were returned to the railings and in this more fragile condition have since remained intact<sup>169</sup>. This demonstration of patience, reconstructing fragments of terracotta ware that essentially hold very limited value, is an example of Dellow's perseverance and willingness to pour time and resources into a project and confront a problematic social issue. The rogue elements of the community, openly and

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<sup>166</sup> Dellow, 'Off-centre', p. 82.

<sup>167</sup> Geoff Dellow, 'Why Are They Still There' tab on *The Railings, Ulverston* website <http://www.myulverston.co.uk/railings/> [Date accessed 24 July 2011].

<sup>168</sup> Glenn Adamson, 'Ready Aim... Fire?' in *Tumult – dialog om ett konstnätverk i rörelse* Agneta Linton, Christina Zetterlund and Malin Grumstedt eds. (Gustavsberg: Gustavbergs Konsthall, 2009) p. 168.

<sup>169</sup> Dellow explained that vandals' interest might have waned because they have become part of the 'familiar furniture' of the town. Dellow, 'Why Are They Still There'.

publically exposed through the acts of vandalism, prompt the quiet persistence of amateurs like Dellow willing to put Humpty Dumpty back together again (figure 11).

Moreover the destruction, as well as the theft of more desirable designs<sup>170</sup>, fails to deter continued production because the output is considered to be less important than the experience of making. As Dellow states:

My enjoyment comes from meeting and sharing ideas and making with others. If items survive any time; this is a bonus.<sup>171</sup>

The *Railings* project seems to fit perfectly with Bourriaud's notion of relational aesthetics with the surrounding activity – in this case socialising through making and sharing ideas – taking priority over the end product. It is not the result that is valued but the process of making and their role as a part of a community project. Similarly, the candle holders made for Halloween walks organised by Dellow and other local residents were more important for the community event they animated through dramatic light effects than they were as works in their own right. Individual authors might have made the holders but their final role is not as a vessel of authorship but as a part of a wider festival. The artist-choreographer rarely demonstrates such a relaxed attitude to final output, even in attempts to invite proactive spectatorship among gallery goers.

The success of the project in communicating the complexities of using amateur labour has depended on Dellow's explicit refusal to edit out any of the designs as well as his deep sense of connection to the area in which the project is run. His interventions are limited to providing the materials and tools for non-experts to express themselves through making terracotta forms, with Araldite used to fix any breakages caused in the kiln and on the street. These blanks provide the base for individual creativity, which Dellow films

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<sup>170</sup> Dellow explains how a spike candle holder made by 'Paul' was stolen because it looked so good. Geoff Dellow, 'More Candle Holders for Halloween in Ulverston' Youtube video (25 October 2009) [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gVnJ6pVquDQ&feature=player\\_embedded](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gVnJ6pVquDQ&feature=player_embedded) [accessed 5 September 2011]

<sup>171</sup> Geoff Dellow, 'Pottery Project in the Gill' from Geoff Dellow's blogsite *Discussing Topics To Do With Ulverston* (31 July 2009). <http://geoffdellow.blogspot.com/search/label/pottery?updated-max=2009-12-19T19%3A48%3A00Z&max-results=20> [accessed 5 September 2011]



with obsessive fairness in his series of Youtube videos<sup>172</sup>. Individual creativity is given fair representation under the overarching auspices of the community project, but it is the process that is more important for its authors than output. In this case 'under the radar' communal pottery reflected both local social tensions through the fragility of the terracotta, the desire to embellish a public space, as well as the position of craft in the creation of a festival, celebratory atmosphere. Clay is shown once more to be the great leveller.

### **Intervening-by-number: appropriation of amateur surface intervention**

Artists have proven particularly adept at re-contextualising and re-deploying lost, cast-off examples of amateur expression. Authorless, and seemingly insignificant, it is no surprise that these objects, found in boot sales, charity shops and thrift stores are often treated like putty in the artists' hands. They are defenceless to the manipulations and modifications of the artist. As art historian Dario Gamboni has stated:

...recognised artists have felt no qualms about damaging or destroying objects whose value was impaired by anonymity, seriality or low status, such as paintings purchased at flea markets and overpainted by Asger Jorn from the late 1950s onwards<sup>173</sup>.

The manipulation of amateur material is particularly evident in artists' appropriation of completed paint-by-number paintings that were found in thrift stores in ever increasing number after the decline in their popularity in the 1960s and 70s. Their ubiquity, low price, authorlessness, and the lack of copyright restrictions rendered them perfect for appropriation. But how does the artist acknowledge the former life of the work and the reliance on amateur labour? Welchman shows how artists in the late twentieth century have proved adept at conflating 'taking' and 'making', especially 'when the scene of re-presentation is claimed as "subversive" or "undecidable"', adding, 'the

<sup>172</sup> Geoff Dellow, 'Detailed Record of Over 100 Spike Lights' from Geoff Dellow's blogsite *Discussing Topics To Do With Ulverston* (26 October 2009)

<http://geoffdellow.blogspot.com/search/label/pottery?updated-max=2009-12-19T19%3A48%3A00Z&max-results=20> [accessed 5 September 2011]

<sup>173</sup> Dario Gamboni, 'Ai Weiwei: Portrait of the Artist as Iconoclast' in Moore and Torchia eds. *Dropping the Urn*, p.85

violence of the cut is accompanied by the aggravated wound of separation<sup>174</sup>. Given the kitsch, Camp associations of paint-by-number ('it's good *because* it is awful<sup>175</sup>) and the incredulity aroused among trained artists in regards to the 'weird' banality of subject's selected – from sad clown, to fluffy kitten to oriental social scenes – it is not surprising they have often found a second life within artists' studios.

Materially altering paint-by-number is an overt example of what Welchman refers to as 'the violence of the cut'. Chicago-based artist Don Baum in the late 1980s and Trey Speegle in the 1990s used paint-by-number paintings as material in their own compositions: the former inserting them into collages as well as the walls in his miniature house sculptures, turning our 'disdain for such banal material into wonder<sup>176</sup> according to Sue Taylor; the latter by using silkscreen, collage and painting techniques with Ruscha-like boldness to combine use of the medium with his other interest in words and aphorisms (figure 12). In both instances the paint-by-number canvases are turned upside-down, spliced, cut and pasted into arrangements that defy their original intention, with little effort expended in understanding the original contexts of their production. In the case of Speegle there is conscious effort to suppress these original features of the paint-by-number. He states:

I'm like the actress with the big boobs and blonde hair who gets some attention and then wants to be taken seriously. She got you interested in the big boobs and now she is like, "Don't look at my boobs... eyes up here!" The paint by numbers might be a hook but the work isn't *really* about them so much ... it's about transforming them and saying something different than was originally intended<sup>177</sup>.

Following Speegle's analogy (and setting aside the sexism of the remark), the paint-by-number has the same immediate seduction as a large breasted blonde, a seduction that Speegle wants his viewers to overcome in order to appreciate his own modifications and intellectual message. However, the paint-by-number 'hook' constitutes too strong a lure, its format (the outlined image, the segmented blocks of colour, the banal imagery) attracting viewers

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<sup>174</sup> Welchman, p. 24.

<sup>175</sup> Susan Sontag, Notes on "Camp" in Susan Sontag *Against Interpretation* (London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1967), p. 292.

<sup>176</sup> Sue Taylor, 'Don Baum: Domus' (Madison, Wisconsin: Madison Art Center, 1988).

<sup>177</sup> Thelma Adams, 'Context, Content and Intention: An Interview With Trey Speegle' in *Trey Speegle: What Are You Waiting For?* Cheryl Hazan Gallery (March-April, 2008)  
<http://www.treyspeegle.com/catalogue/FINALcatalog72.pdf> [accessed 31 August 2011]



Figure 12: Trey Speegle *Can You Imagine* (2008).

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more than Speegle's various interventions. As argued in the first chapter paint-by-number exposes and deconstructs the surface layering that occurs in all painting, attracting through the invitation it offers to the viewer to think about productively interacting with the image's fabrication. In a more recent interview Speegle acknowledges how paint-by-number, unlike most paintings, democratically reveals its sources<sup>178</sup>: the 'architecture', or more fittingly, the archaeology of the painted image. However, there is a tension between Speegle's own authorship, the past interventions undertaken by other labourers, and the paint-by-number format in itself, which is not clearly reconciled. Because paint-by-number already contains the labour of others its demands to be treated with the same reverence Duchamp extended to his readymades.

As material manipulation of the paint-by-number surface always constitutes some form of violence, in danger of obscuring their intrinsic complexity, display of paint-by-number in the museum or gallery might suggest a more sympathetic treatment of the medium as an art object in its own right. Since the growth of interest in collecting paint-by-number from the 1980s, there have been many exhibitions in America devoted to the medium. The 'first ever' exhibition fully devoted to the medium, *The Fortieth Anniversary of Paint-By-Number Paintings*, which Speegle co-curated with Michael O'Donoghue, took place at the Bridgewater/Lustberg Gallery in SoHo, New York in 1992 and attracted much interest<sup>179</sup>. Equally popular was the 2001-02 exhibition at the Smithsonian National Museum of American History curated by William Bird entitled, *Paint-By-Number: Accounting for Taste in 1950s America*, which set the kits within a socio-historic context. These well-known exhibitions reflect the wider interest in these eminently collectible forms of vintage Americana, particularly popular among baby boomers nostalgically recalling their childhood interactions with the kits<sup>180</sup>.

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<sup>178</sup> Trey Speegle, 'Artist Interview: Trey Speegle' *Artlog* (8 March 2011) <http://artlog.com/posts/26-artist-interview-trey-speegle> [accessed 1 September 2011]

<sup>179</sup> The show was popular, drawing a crowd of 1,000 people on its first night. Mary Daniels, 'Count On It: Who Would Have Ever Thought Those Paint-by-numbers Compositions Would Reach Art Gallery Status?' *Chicago Tribune* (September 12, 1993).

<sup>180</sup> Selected newspaper coverage of this collecting boom include V E Gehrt, 'By The Numbers: Dan Robbins Helped Generations of Americans Put a Piece of His and Their Creativity on the Living Room Wall' *Chicago Tribune*, (January 1, 1995). Lynn Van Matre, 'Another Brush With Fame: Fifty Years After Paint-by-numbers Kits Emerged, Nostalgia Over the Fad is Colouring Pop Culture', *Chicago Tribune* (January 18, 1999).

Whereas Baum and Speegle could be accused of subjecting paint-by-number to too much material alteration, in danger of degrading this amateur form to the status of a raw material, their display within the rarefied contexts of the gallery or museum arguably does not intervene enough. Through presumably neutral placement within the gallery walls, the paint-by-number is afforded the same treatment as a work of fine art, which once again belies the original contexts of production. Hanging the paint-by-number in a similar fashion to a work intended for gallery display threatens to undermine the dynamism of this amateur surface intervention.

The paint-by-number revival has mostly served to firmly categorise the medium as kitsch with economic and cultural value placed in its 'non-art' status, celebrated within the hallowed space of the gallery for the extent of its difference from institutionally validated art. This same process is evident and exaggerated in Jim Shaw's display of amateur art in *Thrift Store Paintings*, shown in 2000 at London's Institute of Contemporary Arts<sup>181</sup>. Although Shaw put the 'continual conceptual inventiveness' of amateur work on show, according to art critic Julian Stallabrass, he also pushed the collection 'away from its origins and towards the art elite'<sup>182</sup>. Reduced to organising and re-naming the canvases, the restraint of Shaw's intervention accentuated the paintings' displacement from their original contexts. The particular features of these canvases – the naivety and innocence of unusual technique, the unconventional materials used and bizarre choices of subject matter – were projected forward as patently "other", for digestion by the artist and the art audience who were flattered for their ability to appreciate the eccentricity of these unusual paintings. The inadequacies of these amateur paintings are highlighted by being presented in the same neutral, formal way as conventional paintings, threatening to efface the complex identity of the amateur artist through the 'insistence on their native genius'<sup>183</sup>.

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<sup>181</sup> Matthew Higgs ed., *Thrift Store Paintings: A Primer* (London: Institute of Contemporary Arts, 2000).

<sup>182</sup> Julian Stallabrass, 'Thrift Store Paintings' *New Statesman* (16 October, 2000), pp. 42-3.

[http://www.courtauld.ac.uk/people/stallabrass\\_julian/PDF/Shaw.pdf](http://www.courtauld.ac.uk/people/stallabrass_julian/PDF/Shaw.pdf) [accessed 5 September 2011]

<sup>183</sup> Adamson, *Thinking Through Craft*, p. 139.

There is a lack of empathy for the displaced status of these works, what Susan Sontag might describe as the affectation of the Camp aesthetic that is aware of its own status as kitsch, silly, faddish, rather than pure Camp that 'is always naïve', passionate, serious and uninhibited<sup>184</sup>. Conceptual naivety and inadequate skills are subtly mocked by these paintings' 'discovery' and promotion to the walls of the art gallery, and their previous status as a gift, decoration, a way to fend off idleness, or a 'first step' in the development of artistic skill, is overlooked. All the while Shaw strengthens the rigid and outdated dichotomies between amateur and professional, high and low, insider and outsider. With the amateur paintings easily designated as 'other' in the same manner as outsider art, Shaw reifies the professionalism of art 'and its new identity categories ... practicing the overlapping professional roles of dealer-collector, curator and artist-producer to perfection'<sup>185</sup>.

Appropriation of paint-by-number seems, then, to be caught between heavy-handed intervention that subjugates the medium to the status of raw material; and the hands-off approach of simply hanging works in the gallery, which conversely serves to confirm the marginalisation of the medium as 'kitsch' or 'outsider' art. A negotiation of these opposing tendencies that limit our understanding of the paint-by-number is suggested in Jeff McMillan's use of the medium in *The Possibility of an Island* exhibited at the PEER Gallery in 2009 (figure 13). In the work McMillan organises a large number of paint-by-number landscapes, which depict snow-capped mountains, waterfalls, birch, tundra and even a few deer, into one amorphous mass, spanning two walls to create an installation that evokes the traditions of landscape painting in North America. McMillan confines his intervention to arrangement, reversing some canvases or placing them upside down, avoiding the more aggressive material alterations of Speegle and Baum, and his own earlier experiments of dipping found paintings in industrial paint (*Perla* 2003).

The result is a single installation comprised of multiple units that can be observed and examined as individual paintings, much like a photomosaic. McMillan manages to both retain the individuality of each paint-by-number

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<sup>184</sup> Sontag, p. 282.

<sup>185</sup> Neal Brown, 'A Noble Art / Jim Shaw' *Frieze* 57 (March 2001)  
[http://www.frieze.com/issue/review/a\\_noble\\_art\\_jim\\_shaw/](http://www.frieze.com/issue/review/a_noble_art_jim_shaw/) [accessed 1 September 2011]



Figure 13: Jeff McMillan *The Possibility of an Island* (2009), installation at PEER, London.

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painting while stopping short of cruelly presenting them in the same manner as most gallery art, with a white border or frame, which would only serve to highlight their deficiencies and re-enforce their 'otherness'. As art critic Richard Noble states:

Each image is the product of a significant expenditure of labour, and would seem to have a certain claim on our respect because of this. Yet at the same time they are very similar and banal as individual paintings, reflecting the fact that they originated in a process of mass production.<sup>186</sup>

Noble highlights the collaborative nature of McMillan's work. The artist saves the embarrassment that would doubtless arise from presenting each canvas as a work in its own right, by overlapping the edges and blurring the distinction between one painting and another. Such subtleties reflect what Noble refers to as McMillan's proposition of 'painting as anthropology'<sup>187</sup>. The way the canvases are positioned in McMillan's work accentuates their former life as individually completed, hand-painted canvases, filled out from patterns designed by commercial firms mass-producing inexpensive art kits for profit. This alerts us to the humanity of the signs of artistic aspiration and endeavour inherent in each painting, large or small, while at the same time demonstrating the ease by which a painted image can be made through the paint-by-number process, inviting the viewer to imagine how they would fill in the gaps.

McMillan succeeds in treating his readymade object with great sensitivity alerting us to the complexity of the painted surfaces he appropriates and his own surface intervention as the artist who organises and arranges all the paintings. Key to this is the self-conscious reflection of the artist's role in appropriating the readymade – the processes of taking as making – characteristic of the work of Duchamp, Warhol and more recently Ai Weiwei. If the latter artist was able to 'direct our attention to the entire world of value that has been constructed around ancient objects' through his inscription of the Coca-Cola logo over Ming and Han dynasty ware, as Glenn Adamson has mentioned<sup>188</sup>, McMillan has similarly alerted us to the 'world of value' in the

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<sup>186</sup> Noble R, 'Painting By Other Means' Catalogue for *Jeff McMillan The Possibility of an Island* (London: PEER Gallery, 2009).

<sup>187</sup> Ibid.

<sup>188</sup> Adamson, *Dropping the Urn*, p. 52.



paint-by-number. His intervention exposes the anthropology of the surface layers: from being completed and hung above a 1950s mantelpiece, being revived as second-hand kitsch to becoming a part of a contemporary art installation.

### Chickens and eggs, a complicated story

Out of the examples of amateur practice covered in this thesis, suburban/urban chicken keeping is perhaps the most fashionable at the time of writing. The burgeoning ranks of chicken keepers – half a million in number in March 2011 according to the Radio 4 documentary ‘Atilla the Hen’<sup>189</sup> – attracted by the prospect of a productive pet have propelled the activity into the media limelight. One prominent advocate, New Yorker journalist Susan Orlean, explains how ‘chickens seem to be a perfect convergence of the economic, environmental, gastronomic, and emotional matters of the moment’<sup>190</sup>, demonstrating how their multi-functionality endears them as much to twenty-first century suburbanites as to their nineteenth century forebears. Similarly in the UK, the trend has attracted media interest<sup>191</sup> and formed part of a 2010 BBC reality television re-enactment of 1970s self-sufficiency, called *Giles and Sue Live The Good Life*.

The difference with the current revival, according to dungaree-adorned Sue Perkins, is that keeping chickens has become an ‘upper middle class accoutrement’<sup>192</sup>, part of a swathe of environmentally aware eco-consumerism in which green credentials are traded as signs of social status. While Perkins overlooks how backyard chicken keeping has long played a role as a sign of social status and aesthetic taste (as Veblen noted in 1899), her words reflect the popularity of poultry as an aesthetic choice with some functional benefit –

<sup>189</sup> Natalie Haynes, ‘Atilla the Hen’ (BBC Radio 4, first broadcast on 29 March 2011). An article in the trade magazine for poultry farmers claims there is 2-3 million backyard chicken in the United Kingdom. ‘Surge in Backyard Flocks’ *Ranger* (September 2011), p. 23.

<sup>190</sup> Susan Orlean, ‘The It Bird: The Return of the Backyard Chicken’ *New Yorker* (28 September 2000). Tesco sales of hen houses have increased by 180% in three years, prompting an expansion in their range, the company citing the attraction of self-sufficiency as a reason for the increase in sales. ‘Surge in Backyard Flocks’, p. 25.

<sup>191</sup> Lucy Siegle, ‘Fresh way of life sweeps suburbia’ *The Observer* (7 November 2004); Amy Iggulden, ‘Chic Coops to House Urban Chickens’ *The Guardian* (10 April 2004); Lewis Smith, ‘Urban Hen Coop for the Designer Chic’ *The Times* (10 April 2004).

<sup>192</sup> Sue Perkins, *Giles and Sue Live the Good Life* (BBC Two, first broadcast on 8 November 2010)

a little slice of the rural idyll available within the confines of the suburban back garden. Some designers have sought to exploit this demand, most notably Omlet that was formed by a group of graduating Royal College of Art students in April 2004, who developed a range of plastic, portable and ergonomic chicken hutches under the brand name 'Eglu'. The marketing for Omlet's ready-to-use units (sold with readymade hens if needed) plays down their bother, such as noise and smell, and emphasises the social cachet in having chicken, stating: 'The first your neighbours will know of your pet is when you invite them round for a quiche and tell them proudly that you made it with your own home-grown eggs'<sup>193</sup>. Chicken keeping's entrenchment as a prominent niche within the fashionable market for eco-consumption is confirmed when a sculptural henhouse called the 'Nogg' made from English-grown Cedar wood can sell for £1,950 (figure 14).

These chick [sic] readymade houses seek to flatten the irregularities and quirks that arise from making a hen house from scratch. The designs facilitate the quick and easy passage to the pastoral-aesthetic ideal of fresh eggs from free-range hens: the end product is celebrated while the process of getting there and the necessity for everyday maintenance is downplayed. Besides contradicting the green message for simplicity and reuse – chickens do not care what structure they are put in as long as its dry, warm and well ventilated<sup>194</sup> – the creation of these easier-to-use, fashionable readymades encourages a distance between the amateur and the production process. By contrast, artist Simon Starling's interactions with chicken in the work *Burn Time* (2000) draws direct attention to the production process in chicken keeping (figure 15), exaggerating the often convoluted paths of production rather than the slick, finished image that the Eglu and Nogg designs perpetuate. Starling's evocation of complexity, circularity and idiosyncrasy in producing *Burn Time* can be compared to the same features evident in the personal, quirky and convoluted journeys of much amateur production.

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<sup>193</sup> [http://www.omlet.co.uk/products\\_services/products\\_services.php?view=Eglu%20Classic](http://www.omlet.co.uk/products_services/products_services.php?view=Eglu%20Classic) (accessed 5<sup>th</sup> July 2011)

<sup>194</sup> As noted by one blog response to the 'Nogg' house. 'Shane', response to the "'The Nogg' – a modern chicken coop' *Contemporist* website (28 September 2010) <http://www.contemporist.com/2010/09/27/the-nogg-a-modern-chicken-coop/> [accessed 8 July 2011]



Figure 14: The Eglu and the Nogg (2011).

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Figure 15: Simon Starling *Burn Time* (2000).

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Following his signature strategy – ‘the very simple model of unpacking something, and then tweaking it a little bit’<sup>195</sup> – Starling situated a classic item of Bauhaus design, the Wilhelm Wagenfeld egg coddler of 1922, at the heart of an investigative history of production. Working down the production line from the egg coddler, Starling built his own chicken house, accommodating hens that would provide eggs for the coddler. Not content to simply use an Eglu or any other readymade suburban chicken unit, Starling’s hen house was a scale model of the Ostertorwache building in Bremen built in 1829 by F.M. Stamm, a former prison incorporated into the city’s town wall that was converted to the Wilhelm Wagenfeld Museum in the late 1990s. He built the neo-classical henhouse from wood picked up from skips near his studio in Dundee and installed the house at Stronchullin Farm in Strone, Scotland, between 31 July – 22 October 2000. After the chickens furnished Starling with fresh eggs, the artist assembled a stove in the Camden Arts Centre made from discarded bricks from the building, on which he cooked the eggs in the Wagenfeld coddler, using the same timbers that previously provided the chicken their accommodation, as fuel<sup>196</sup>. The exhibition ran from 10 November 2000 to 14 January 2001, travelling to John Hansard Gallery in Southampton and the neugerriemschneider in Berlin.

Like many other works by Starling, *Burn Time* is a back-projection of the production process, fragmented and put on view. The materials for making the work were brought to light through their re-use, particularly through their consumption as fuel in the final presentation of the piece, a similar strategy to the one deployed in *Blue Boat Back* (1997) and *Kakteenhaus* (2002). This inversion of the production process is highlighted by the deliberate selection of an inefficient and farcical production process that offer multiple interpretive pathways through Starling’s work. For example, Juliana Engberg points to the association between the Ostertorwache’s role as a modern prison that sought to organise nineteenth century felons according to new methods of surveillance and management, and the contemporaneous economic

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<sup>195</sup> Simon Starling, interview with Phillip Kaiser *Cuttings* Phillip Kaiser ed. (Portchester: Art Books International, 2005), p. 2.

<sup>196</sup> Simon Starling, *Back to Front* (London: Camden Arts Centre and John Hansard Gallery, 2000)

imperative to develop a poultry industry that depends on the same drive to institutionalise and standardise<sup>197</sup>.

Critical analyses amount to a celebration of Starling's ability to tell a fascinating story through making. In this respect his narratives, evoked through the deliberately eccentric production procedures, are redolent of much amateur practice. Amateurs have their own convoluted, inefficient and superfluous processes of production that reflect their subjectivity and freedom from the obligation to produce a defined output. Starling's interaction with chicken house construction is clearly infused with the self-reflexivity, wit, and historical research that mark him apart from the average amateur chicken keeper. He undertakes the project as an artist intending to show his work in the gallery context and probably would never buy an Eglu (unless to take it apart and let us know where it is made). However, as Katrina Brown states, Starling demonstrates 'an empathy for known but not experienced distant sources'<sup>198</sup> in his work, in the case of *Burn Time* pursuing the project with the same playful enthusiasm for making that is central to much amateur practice. This limitless curiosity might have earned him the nickname the 'nutty professor' within the popular art press<sup>199</sup>, but it is a madness that many amateurs express through their own pet projects.

As Starling used rudimentary techniques to cobble together recycled materials to create the chicken house in *Burn Time*, it is no surprise that the final output has been described as 'professionally amateur'<sup>200</sup>. Francis McKee deploys this phrase to account for Starling's adept and expert (i.e. professional) use of improvised techniques most commonly associated with the amateur, in order to foreground all the ingredients and mixes that are required in the production of objects. However, this definition of the

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<sup>197</sup> Juliana Engberg, 'Simon Starling: Apprentice of the Sun' in Starling, *Back to Front*, p. 52-53. ; Francis McKee writes of a collapse of 'historical time through its reanimation of various events' in *Burn Time*. Francis McKee, 'Chicken or Egg?' *Frieze* 56 (Jan-Feb 2001)

[http://www.frieze.com/issue/article/chicken\\_or\\_egg/](http://www.frieze.com/issue/article/chicken_or_egg/) [accessed 5 September 2011]

<sup>198</sup> Katrina Brown, 'Djungle Dwelling' in Simon Starling, *Djungle* (Dundee: Dundee Contemporary Arts, 2002), p. 57.

<sup>199</sup> See Nigel Reynolds, 'Forget Painting, Turner Prize Is Awarded To An Old Boatshed' *The Telegraph* (6 December 2005) <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/1504837/Forget-painting-Turner-Prize-is-awarded-to-an-old-boatshed.html> [accessed 1 September 2011] Andrew Downie, 'Art for a Topsy-Turvy World' *The Sunday Times* (3 October 2004)

<http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/uk/scotland/article489014.ece> [accessed 1 September 2011]

<sup>200</sup> McKee, 'Chicken or egg?'

‘professionally amateur’ is based on an artist’s clever appropriation of a presumed quality of amateur practice – the rough and ready, use-whatever-there-is-to-hand mentality of the capitalist bricoleur – and is not viewed from the opposite angle: the perspective of the amateur who aspires to professional standards. Whilst McKee positions Starling as the professional looking down on a variety of amateur practice that he dips into from the perspective of the expert, Brown places Starling on an equal footing with amateurs: ‘the self-taught experimental scientist guided as much by feeling, intuition, instinct, visual stimuli and a not inconsiderable degree of pleasure’<sup>201</sup>. Starling’s general interest in the ways things are made – the means of production – echoes the amateur’s own emphasis on processes of making rather than eventual utility. This results in the circuitous, haphazard pathways of production that both Starling and the curious amateur take.

This is not to say that utility is unimportant for Starling or amateur practice in general. As I outlined in the second chapter, the ‘professional amateur’ describes a trait of the proactive, emergent middle classes in the nineteenth century, suspicious of idleness and wanting to use their free time productively. Utility and functionality provide the amateur with a pretext to delve into the social lives of objects, learn about their meaning and how they were made – functionalising ornament and ornamenting function. In a similar way, Starling’s output – the gallery installation – grants the leeway for the artist to research and discover new things. Amateur practice needs to start with and retain a similar local and self-defined functionality, which acts as a smokescreen to mask its wider economic non-necessity and the convoluted, inefficient production processes that are often pursued. Amateur use of slack time and space to understand a production process relates to achieving a greater degree of self-sufficiency. However superfluous its form or circuitous in its realisation, amateur practice can always relate back to this broader socio-economic mentality. And while amateurs mostly confine their rebuilding of the world to private, domestic contexts, Starling accentuates his status as a dabbler, a jack-of-all-trades, by thrusting this same productive curiosity into the realm of the art gallery.

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<sup>201</sup> Brown, p. 23.

As a consequence, Starling does more to highlight the unusual dialectics of function and ornament in amateur chicken keeping in *Burn Time* than the various array of kooky, designed henhouses. Whereas the plastic Eglus reflect a trend to see amateur chicken keepers as just another passive market that needs the designer's helpful intervention, Starling's *Burn Time* references the amateur drive to fragment and re-build anew in endless convoluted configurations, proving in the process that chicken can live in a basic wooden scale model of a German museum. The reference is to the amateur's prioritisation of process over end product, but the functional output – the egg – continues to play an important role in anchoring practice within prominent social, economic and cultural paradigms of value. In the famous conundrum, it is definitely the egg that comes first for the amateur, but it is what follows that is of most interest.

### **From bodge to botch**

Specialisation in contemporary artistic practice is prevalent despite the increasing transferability of skills between one corpus of knowledge and another. Artistic education in most British schools and colleges is medium specific, with disciplinary boundaries continuing to play a vital role in structuring practice. A certain mastery over a limited set of tools and materials that results from specialisation perhaps explains why certain artists have looked upon the freedom of an amateur's relationship with tools, materials and processes with a mixture of gentle nostalgia, envy and a sense of loss.

The 'beginner's stage' – the first interactions with the tools and materials of a particular discipline – can be a joyous experience, easy to look upon with same wonder as a child's first drawing. There is a palpable naivety to the amateur limited by skill alone that is often absent in professional practice where there is an obligation to reach deadlines for agreed remuneration. This reverie of the freedom of non-professional practice is central to former cricketer Ed Smith's program to preserve traces of that first 'amateur' interaction in any given sport, to counter the 'professional orthodoxy' defined



by gym programmes, dieting schedules and extensive analysis of performance<sup>202</sup>. In the realm of acquiring craft skills it is similarly tempting to romanticise the innocence of former stages of learning.

The contemporary artist like the professional sportsman cannot genuinely return to a former stage of learning. Once skills are learnt they cannot be unlearned in a process of reversed education. However, the experience of the naïve amateur at the first stage of learning can be partially appropriated by professional practitioners through the process of temporary abandonment of the set of tools that defines their specialism, in preference for those of another in which the artist is not familiar. This intentional diversion of practice could be described containing the qualities of Michel Foucault's heterotopia of the mirror, cementing the reality of a person looking into the mirror through the unreal virtual non-place of the reflection<sup>203</sup>. For the artist, learning new skills might provide this mirror: the occupation of an alternative spatial-temporal zone from which the constraints of disciplinary specialism can be viewed, understood, challenged and renewed.

A recent example of this assumption of a different tool order was the *Bodging Milano* project (2010-ongoing): a collaboration between nine metropolitan designers<sup>204</sup> and Gudrun Leitz's green woodwork chair making course that she runs at Clissett Wood in the depths of the Herefordshire countryside (figure 16). The project originated in 2009 when one of the participants Chris Eckersley attended the week-long course, after being invited to add a modern twist to the traditional Windsor chair by Dave Green, founder of the furniture company Sitting Firm. A year later Eckersley returned with eight other designers from London all ready to abandon the digital interfaces, smooth surfaces and geometric exactitude of their studios in exchange for hand tools and manually powered pole lathes made from locally gathered wood, all collated underneath a large canvas-roofed workshop (figure 17). One of the participants, Rory Dodd of design agency Designerblock, provided the

<sup>202</sup> Ed Smith, 'Are We Too Professional?' *Intelligent Life* (Winter 2009), p. 126. See also Ed Smith, 'Amateur Hour' *Spectator* (26 March 2011), p. 24; and Ed Smith 'Is Professionalism Killing Sport' for *Inside Sport* (BBC Two first broadcast on 21 September 2010).

<sup>203</sup> Michel Foucault, 'Of Other Spaces' in Roland Ritter and Bernd Knaller-Vlay eds. *Other Spaces: The Affair of the Heterotopia* (Graz: Haus der Architektur, 1998), p. 28.

<sup>204</sup> Designers involved were: Amos Merchant, Carl Clerkin, William Warren, Gareth Neal, Gitta Gschwendtner, Chris Eckersley, Rory Dodd, Suzanne Barnes and Dave Green.

participants with a specific goal: the chairs that resulted from the workshop would be immediately shipped to Italy and displayed as a part of the Milan furniture fair.

With the pressure of producing chairs for a prestigious international design fair looming over the makers throughout the week, these designers' interaction with the course differed considerably from the experiences of Leitz's normal clientele. Since 1994, Leitz has offered a variety of greenwood craft courses of varying complexity, pitching them as holidays suitable for 'novices, amateurs and experienced craftspeople'<sup>205</sup>. Leitz's courses appeal to a wide demand for a therapeutic, pastoral ideal, unplugged from the complexity, noise and pressures of urban life, joining a long list of craft retreats from William Morris' Kelmscott Manor in the nineteenth century to summer courses held every year at West Dean in Sussex<sup>206</sup>.

Like the diverse range of previous participants in the workshops the metropolitan designers had to learn new skills: riving the locally sourced wood; using drawknives and shaving horses; and enduring the difficulty of manually powering a pole lathe (figure 18). This was a skills holiday, but the designers' ambition to reach a standard of perfection had to be negotiated with the difficulty of confronting the material by hand. Amos Merchant, talking to *Crafts* magazine editor Grant Gibson explained how the bowed wood that was going to form the back of his chair needed to be changed to the rocker and vice versa: 'It's really about being flexible ... You're using live materials and it's got its own ideas'<sup>207</sup>. The idea of the material breaking free from the subjugation normally imposed on it by the conventional certainty of workshop production, conforms to David Pye's qualification of craft as closer to the workmanship of risk, something Gibson mentions. And here, one could argue, is the central regenerative trajectory of the Bodger project: greater sympathy for the hand-made, imperfect, and on-the-spot design that directly responds to the material being shaped. This experience has the potential, as

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<sup>205</sup> 'Green Woodwork Courses With Gudrun Leitz'. Homepage for Gudrun Leitz's Green woodwork courses <http://www.greenwoodwork.co.uk/index.html> [Accessed: 18 July 2011]

<sup>206</sup> For more on the affiliation between craft and the pastoral see chapter four of Adamson G, *The Craft Reader*, pp. 103-137.

<sup>207</sup> Grant Gibson, 'The Bodger's Parade' *Crafts* 224 (May/June 2010), p. 41.



Figure 16: Participants of *Bodging Milano* with their handmade greenwood chairs (2010).

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Figure 17: Gudrun Leitz's outdoor workshop in Clissett Wood, Herefordshire (2010).

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Figure 18: Suzanne Barnes, Rory Dodd and Gareth Neal using manually powered pole lathes.  
Part of *Bodging Milano* (2010).

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Figure 19: Gudrun Leitz assists Carl Clerkin with the construction of his greenwood chair. Part of *Bodging Milano* (2010).

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Gareth Neal and Amos Merchant mentioned<sup>208</sup>, to transform practice when the designers return to their workshops and once again have full mastery over their materials.

At the start of the week long course Leitz stressed the need to welcome imperfection as a sign of authenticity: she stated 'history hasn't been sanded away and eradicated'<sup>209</sup>. The process of sanding, which produces the ubiquitous smoothness so common to modern furniture design, is worth focusing on, as the technique was strictly not in keeping with green woodwork methods as it obscures the natural grain of the wood<sup>210</sup>. Thus its use was a barometer by which to assess the commitment of each designer's submission to the different tool order. As shown by the video on the *Bodging Milano* website and Gibson's article, use of sandpaper and glue were increasingly used as the designers pushed to finish the chairs for transportation to Italy<sup>211</sup>. There was seriousness to this tool holiday, in the sense that although the tools and context of production were completely different there was the similar pressure of meeting an exhibition deadline.

For the bodgers there was delight, surprise and real interest in using a different set of tools and working out in the open, an example of how the enthusiasm to acquire new skills, a prominent dimension of amateur experience, can be used as a strategy to advance professional practice. However, the pre-determined output of exhibiting in Milan and the level of expertise and pre-knowledge in furniture design each designer brought to the course distinguishes the *Bodging Milano* project from Leitz's normal students: Leitz's expertise was constantly in demand<sup>212</sup> like a teacher pushed by over-achieving students (figure 19). Among the designers there was limited tolerance for error as they worked towards perfection in an unavoidable atmosphere of competition. The reconvening of *Bodging Milano* after the Milan fair in Dave Green's furniture making factory to make production models of their 'one-off' asymmetrical, roughly hewn designs from Clissett wood,

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<sup>208</sup> Ibid, p. 41.

<sup>209</sup> Ibid, p. 38.

<sup>210</sup> Stephen Knott, 'Bodging Milano' website for *The Journal of Modern Craft* <http://journalofmoderncraft.com/articles/bodging-milano-by-stephen-knott> [accessed: 18 July 2011]

<sup>211</sup> Knott, 'Bodging Milano' and Gibson, 'The Bodger's parade'. 'Clissett Wood Video' on the *Bodging Milano* website, <http://www.bodgingmilano.co.uk/section482851.html> [accessed 18 July 2011]

<sup>212</sup> Knott, 'Bodging Milano'.

reflects the explicit re-absorption of the amateur-like experience of learning new skills, back into professional practice<sup>213</sup>.

The designers who participated in the *Bodging Milano* project follow the well-trodden path of reinvigorating practice through collaboration with practitioners from other fields. The practice was well established in the late nineteenth century: William Morris was helped by Dante Gabriel Rossetti in the painting of *La Belle Iseult* (1858); Paul Gauguin collaborated with Ernest Chaplet in the creation of ceramic forms; Nabis artists worked with the Tiffany company to create stained-glass windows in the mid 1890s; and M  tthey furnished Fauve artists with colours to paint vibrant decoration on ceramics. Both parties in these collaborations, in which we can include *Bodging Milano*, cannot be defined as amateur; the artist-designer simply re-deploys skill from one area to another to refresh their practice. However, there is an asymmetry of skill, with one side usually offsetting the lack of skill of the other through some form of tuition. And this replicates the experience of amateurs faced with new tools and materials who are reliant on others for instruction, as demonstrated by *Bodging Milano*'s 'V&A Broomstick Bodge' where William Warren and Gareth Neal helped inexperienced gallery goers at one of the museum's Friday Lates make furniture from broom handles and plywood<sup>214</sup>.

The work of the Swedish collaborative group – We Work In A Fragile Material – similarly explores the dynamics of temporarily working with unfamiliar tools, materials and procedures in a holiday-like manner. The collective, founded in 2003, is formed of nine individual practitioners who attended Konstfack, a College of Art and Design in Stockholm. There is no grand manifesto that unites the broad scope of projects undertaken by the collective – from exhibitions that encourage public participation, the construction of a giant troll in New York, parodying Kylie Minogue's music video 'Slow', to playing a giant game of paintball in a three-dimensional grid

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<sup>213</sup> This development of the project was known as the 'Cov Bodge', named as such because Dave Green's factory is situated near to Coventry. *Bodging Milano* website, <http://www.bodgingmilano.co.uk/section482362.html> [accessed 18 July 2011]

<sup>214</sup> 'V&A Broomstick Bodge' *Bodging Milano* website <http://www.bodgingmilano.co.uk/section483925.html> [accessed 18 July 2011]



in Gustavsbergs Kontshall, a contemporary craft gallery near Stockholm<sup>215</sup> – simply a desire to ‘be seen as a complement to the traditional arts and craft scene’, ‘expanding’ aesthetic norms, and providing an reprieve from each individual’s own practice<sup>216</sup>. Adamson cites Pontus Lindvall, who describes the group as ‘nine very smart people on vacation from their own cleverness’<sup>217</sup>.

Unlike the Bodgers, the collective’s use of new tools, materials and techniques is not intended to hone each member’s craft skills but instead provide a form of release from individual practice. There is a degree of freedom offered by the collective nature of the enterprise: each individual is not required to authorise production and thus can pursue a form of skill acquisition that contrasts remarkably with valorised methods of learning craft as epitomised by the tuition Peter Dormer received in *The Art of the Maker*<sup>218</sup>. The approach is less about returning to school, more like playing the fool.

This was particularly obvious in the 2009 show in London entitled *We Built This City* in which the collective worked with papier mâché to create a temporary bulbous, webbed structure, with mess strewn across the gallery floor (figure 20). The Bodgers went to Clissett Wood to learn new processes in traditional woodworking to create individual, permanent objects; *We Work In A Fragile Material* took time out to be silly, child-like and crafted as a collective. They countered essentialist notions of rarefied craft procedures and challenged traditional perceptions of the position of craft in ‘larger, more market-orientated scenes’ of America and Britain that are liable to defend craft as a ‘serious business’<sup>219</sup> saturated with the nostalgic, anti-industrial legacy of the Arts and Crafts movement.

Both projects attempt to reinvigorate professional practice through a tool holiday, to release the pressures that build up from over-familiarity. Yet, the

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<sup>215</sup> For more information on these projects see David Sokol, ‘We Work in a Fragile Material’ *American Crafts* (Apr-May 2009), 34-5; and the collective’s website <http://www.weworkinafragilematerial.com> [accessed 18 July 2011]

<sup>216</sup> Homepage of *We Work In A Fragile Material*’s website. <http://www.weworkinafragilematerial.com> [accessed 18 July 2011]

<sup>217</sup> Adamson, ‘We Work In A Fragile Material: We built this city’.

<sup>218</sup> Peter Dormer, ‘Chapter Three: Learning a Craft’ in *The Art of the Maker* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1994) pp. 41-47.

<sup>219</sup> Glenn Adamson, ‘Fragile’s State of Mind’ *Crafts* 219 (Jul-Aug 2009), p. 61.



Figure 20: Detail from *We Built This City* by We Work in a Fragile Material collective (2009).

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Swedish collective let off steam within the context of collaborative authorship, resulting in the adoption of riskier, more playful and farcical attitudes to making, as each individual is free from the expectation to authorise their production. Consequently the final output matters less to *We Work In A Fragile Material*. The fragmented sculpture they built in London was thrown away within a week of its construction and the ragdoll troll in New York was left in an alleyway next to rubbish bins<sup>220</sup>. With the lack of pressure to produce a defined output the artists are free to play around, at liberty to test their understanding with tools, invite failure and make without having the necessity of demonstrating learning<sup>221</sup>. This approach contrasts with the Bodgers' escapade in the woods that was structured according to a specific end that amplified the pressure placed upon this interaction with new tools, materials and processes.

The comparison between the Bodgers group and *We Work In A Fragile Material* elucidates two approaches to adopting a different tool order, both of which draw from contrasting trajectories of learning, familiar to amateurs. The first places a premium on the acquisition of certain skills, using specific tools and historically validated procedures to create a permanent, durable, presumably authentic object. This is the more pervasive account of amateur learning, promulgated by crafts institutions, how-to books and popular media stereotypes. An amateur adopting this approach is likely not to be impressed with the whimsical and absurd trajectories of *We Work In A Fragile Material*. But the Swedish group are far closer to expressing the more anarchic relationship between amateurs and tools, where the individual is free to experiment with tools and play the fool, which has the potential to result in invention, discovery, error and joy. Neither is more or less amateur than the other: from the specific, structured instruction needed to bodge, to the improvised, slipshod characteristic of the botch, both these relationships to tooling are evident in amateur practice.

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<sup>220</sup> 'Happy Campers' (New York, 20-23 May 2006). <http://www.weworkinafragilematerial.com> [accessed 18 July 2011]

<sup>221</sup> In an interview with Christina Zetterlund, *We Work In A Fragile Material* explicitly claim their aversion to providing a specific education. Christina Zetterlund, 'We Work In A Fragile Material: Interview' in *Tumult*, p. 139.

Although the notion of a group of designer-artists having a break from 'their own cleverness' might strike us as luxurious, predicated on an affluence not available to all, the strategy of temporarily diverting practice has proved regenerative for many artists, a tactic that mitigates the exhaustion and disillusionment that could potentially derive from over-specialisation. The away day mentality mirrors the social reality of amateur practice: a temporary displacement of time and space resulting in experiences that feed back into everyday life.

### **The busman's holiday manifesto**

For there is no prison that does not have its chinks. So even in a system that tries to exploit every last fraction of your time, you discover that with proper organisation the moment will come when the marvellous holiday of a few seconds opens up before you and you can even take three steps backward and forward, or scratch your stomach or hum something: 'Pompety pom...' and assuming the foreman isn't around to bother you, there'll be time, between one operation and the next, to say a couple of words to a workmate.<sup>222</sup>

Italo Calvino, *The Workshop Hen* (2009), p. 45.

The Italian writer Italo Calvino succinctly explains the potential for individual autonomy even within the most regimented structures of everyday life in his short story about a security guard who decides to keep a hen in the disused courtyards of the factory in which he works. His words echo Adorno's presumption that capitalist regulation of time severely restricts individual autonomy, but highlights how everyday activities usually considered unimportant – humming, taking strides backward and forward and chatting with a co-worker – offer a degree of worker empowerment. Throughout the chapter I have shown that amateur practice shares the characteristics of these momentary diversionary gestures that Calvino describes; expression that derives from the constrained freedoms within capitalism's structures.

In the analysis of amateur railway modelling I showed the plurality of experience that derives from temporarily having control of one's own labour:

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<sup>222</sup> Italo Calvino, *The Workshop Hen* trans. by Tim Parks (London: Penguin Books, 2009), p. 45.

modellers choose to impose historical, technical and temporal structures on their practice, simultaneously accentuating the links between this occupation of free time and other experiences of everyday life, but also the qualitative differences that makes their experiences unique. Despite the constraints inherent to amateur time, self-imposed and otherwise, there is still potential for the expression of utopian impulses that both stretch and inform existing social reality, amateur time operating in a similar manner to Jameson's conceptualisation of science fiction. As shown in the miniature case studies above, curious artists, designers and craftspeople have been drawn to this alternative temporality, exploring its unpredictable, roguish, anarchic, weak, quiet, idiosyncratic, playful, regenerative, socially orientated and politically ambiguous qualities.

What unites and underpins the plurality, complexity and richness of amateur experience is its relational status. Amateur time constitutes a reply to other temporal experiences of everyday life as Friedmann stated, not an escape, but a stretching of its structures. Thus, in order to access this temporal realm of partial utopianism one needs to *alternate* (occur in turn repeatedly) between different tasks, rather pursue the *alternative* (available as another opportunity) and make use of the time 'when the foreman isn't around to bother you'. This is the busman's holiday manifesto, a call for permanent part-timeism.

This is similar to what nineteenth century philosopher Charles Fourier referred to as the butterfly passion: a description of the human need for variety reflected by the maxim that 'the liveliest pleasures become insipid if others do not promptly succeed them'<sup>223</sup>. Fourier illustrates his example with reference to fine dining, whose luxury and enjoyment depends on its temporary appearance in routines of the everyday, and he continually asserts the importance of frequent relief from primary occupations, even going as far as to stating that an activity can not be pursued profitably if it lasts longer than two hours without a break<sup>224</sup>.

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<sup>223</sup> Charles Fourier, *Passions of the Human Soul: Volume II*, trans. by Rev J R Morell (London: 1851), p. 31.

<sup>224</sup> *Ibid*, p. 34.

Fourier's radical suggestions, which Jameson also refers to<sup>225</sup>, contrasts with the specialisation and pursuit of a single vocation that had come to define the organisation of labour in Western capitalism at least, and the attendant notion that mastery of a particular skill, requiring extensive resources of time (10,000 hours according to Sennett<sup>226</sup>), should be socially valued in and of itself. What Fourier and Jameson realised is that commitment to a single task, even if you love doing it, needs to be offset by frequent, temporary releases, through play and deploying one's labour in a different context. What is key is that these two temporal states interact and feed into each other, Adorno's insistence of the lack of a division between work and leisure needs to be accepted. However, in the subsumption of one's labour to the alternative structures of amateur time, differential experiences that arise from control over one's own labour alienation can emerge that help guard against monomania: the perils of voluntarily pursued obsession, and the exploitation of labour under more conventional systems of Taylorist production. To continue the musical metaphor that I introduced in the opening of this chapter, the melodies of amateur time have to be laid on top of the dominant harmonies of everyday life and they only make music when joined.

Amateur time cannot exist in isolation. The optimism of Aram Sinnreich, who wishes that the whole world be 'composed of amateurs' pursuing activities out of love alone<sup>227</sup>, needs to be qualified, for amateur time only gains content through its mutual relationship with other temporal experiences. The flexibility of individual labour, its ability to carry out dual or multiple functions under different structures of employment – whether they be self-imposed or controlled by institutions or corporations – needs to be accepted.

This manifesto of labour diversification is not an attack on specialisation and the social value placed on the mastery of a skill. There have been many examples of artists, highly specialised within their field of practice, who excelled in areas outside their primary vocation. French artist Jean Auguste Dominique Ingres was a concert violinist and the phrase 'Violin d'Ingres' –

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<sup>225</sup> Jameson, p. 249.

<sup>226</sup> Sennett, p. 247.

<sup>227</sup> Aram Sinnreich, 'Re-mix Speaker Interviews' *Re-mix Symposium* part of the 2010-11 *Masters of Amateuism* series [http://www.premisela.org/en/peoples-republic\\_1/re-mix\\_1/](http://www.premisela.org/en/peoples-republic_1/re-mix_1/) [accessed 6 September 2011]

deriving from the title of a Man Ray painting in which he transformed a photograph of a nude woman's back through the addition of painted 'f' holes – has become a term to describe a supplemental activity in which one excels, blurring the boundary between primary and secondary occupation. For example, Métthey developed his glazes and colours during his time as a sculptor at the piano manufacturing company Pleyel<sup>228</sup>, and when the nineteenth century French romantic novelist Victor Hugo's small watercolour paintings and sketches attracted critical attention in the 1910s, the dynamics of the 'Violin d'Ingres' were again at the fore. Art historian Henri Focillon went as far as to say that Hugo's painted art was more unique than his well-known literary oeuvre<sup>229</sup>. However, what was essential to Hugo was the frequent and miniature distractions painting offered him. In a letter to Charles Baudelaire in 1860 he stated of his painted art:

It keeps me amused between two verses.<sup>230</sup>

The 'Violin d'Ingres' is an intensified version of the busman's holiday whereby the individual excels in activities taking place both in and outside amateur time. However, both phrases accentuate the importance of harnessing labour-power to multiple ends and the need to withdraw from one structure of labour deployment to another.

To learn from amateur practice, the artist (or any other individual) should aim to continually deflect practice by directing his labour through multiple channels, some of which should exist outside the institutional sphere. Of course this already happens. Many artists, designers and craftspeople have jobs within art education and supplement their income through lecturing, writing, private tuition, and a variety of voluntary and social activities, a diversification of artist's labour that Lippard was alert to in the 1970s<sup>231</sup>. The

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<sup>228</sup> Henri Clouzot, , *André Métthey: décorateur et céramiciste* (Paris, 1923), p. 2.

<sup>229</sup> *Les Misérables* and *The Hunchback of Notre-Dame* are among Victor Hugo's well-known novels. For Focillon's critique see Henri Focillon, *Technique et sentiment: études sur l'art moderne* (Paris, 1952), p. 43.

<sup>230</sup> Marie-Laure Prévost 'The techniques of a poet-Draftsman' in Florian Rodari ed. *Shadows of a Hand: The Drawings of Victor Hugo* (New York and London: The Drawing Center in association with Merrell Holberton Publishers, 1998), p. 31.

<sup>231</sup> Julia Bryant-Wilson, *Art Workers: Radical Practice in the Vietnam War Era* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009), p. 127.

result is that the artist's primary labour is confined to the day off, weekend or spare time: the alternate temporal modality known as amateur time.



### **Conclusion: *homo dividens et refactans***

In my effort to define and conceptualise amateur craft practice I have referred to Latin terms used by theorists to substantiate their hypotheses concerning the human condition (*homo faber*, *animale laborans* and *homo ludens*). For the conclusion I propose an alternative classification that reflects the drive toward amateur activity, the *homo dividens et refactans*: the man who divides and remakes.

The first part of this characterisation reflects the inherent attribute within amateur practice to apportion a specific time and place for an activity: an ability to divide resources between two or more endeavours. Divided labour is complementary, and like Charles Fourier's butterfly passion, reflects the multi-interested individual adept at transferring skills from one task to another with each one benefitting from their mutual undertaking.

Amateur practice dialogically relates to other contexts in which labour is deployed. Lefebvre's notion of differential space has proved useful throughout the thesis in this regard. It challenges the notion that the proactive use of leisure chimes with capitalism's cultural hegemony, as Theodor Adorno and Steven Gelber expected<sup>1</sup>, and instead shows how amateur practice is dependent on capitalist production while facilitating some kind of divergence from it, a relaxing 'change from the daily grind'<sup>2</sup> according to 1950s handyman manual writer David Manners.

Division is a concept analogous to that of differential space, as both relate to a broader whole even if that whole is not immediately recognisable from the perspective of the divided parts. This goes some way to explaining the self-justifying rationale of amateurs and professionals focused on their own particular sphere of activity, who often overlook the wider structures on which their passions depend.

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<sup>1</sup> Steven Gelber, *Hobbies: Leisure and the Culture of Work in America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), p. 296.

<sup>2</sup> David Manners, *How to Plan and Build Your Workshop* (New York: Arco Publishing Co, 1955), p. 5.

Labour divided between different styles of work has similarities to the division of labour. My analysis in chapter two demonstrated how management and the division of resources of time and material were important to amateur practice. However, we must distinguish the division of labour displaced from its natural habitat. Normally the division of labour suggests a separation between discrete tasks managed for the purposes of profit maximisation, whereas for the *homo dividens* there are strong connections between the different arenas of work. Chicken keepers, for example, could embellish, decorate and pursue idiosyncratic forms of productivity without affecting their standard of living. After all, most amateur practitioners had other vocations. The *homo dividens* organises the multiple arenas of labour-power's exertion, and those that are freed from necessity offer the potential to control one's own alienation. This is true of all amateur craft practice, from artists 'taking a break from their own cleverness' to the housebound wives of strict Victorian husbands who constructed patchwork quilts from cut-offs and scraps. Both activities relate to a form of more overt labour alienation from which amateur craft practice provides a temporary release.

The *homo dividens* does not merely divide in two. If Kracauer's reference to the 'double existence' of reality, split between work and leisure, was relevant to the Weimar era<sup>3</sup>, contemporary society can be described as being further divided, following the extent of fragmentation evident in the paint-by-number canvas.

This introduces the other element of this human characterisation: the *homo refactans*. Once time, space and surface have been divided and subdivided, in order to facilitate amateur practice, the individual has a degree of autonomy in how material is shaped anew – the impressionistic brushstroke or signature on a paint-by-number canvas. The prefix 're-' is essential here, because as argued throughout the thesis the amateur's bases, carriers and arbiters are all drawn from a capitalist infrastructure where material has been brought into

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<sup>3</sup> Siegfried Kracauer, 'Travel and Dance' in *The Mass Ornament: Weimar Essays* trans. by Thomas Y Levin (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London: Harvard University Press, 1995), p. 71.

existence by other hands. This distinguishes the *homo refactans* from the *homo faber*.

Describing the amateur as a *homo faber* would over-emphasise the extent of originality evident in amateur production and encourage the perception that making is a purely individualistic act, which conforms to Richard Sennett's expectation that 'humans are skilled makers of a place for themselves in the world'<sup>4</sup>. Amateur craft practice does provide an outlet for individuality, but its expressive content is limited. Rather than making one's own place, as Sennett implies, the amateur craft practitioner is finishing off the making of others. Amateur remaking relies on entire networks of production: the kit form, in particular, exemplifies the fact that making is less an autonomous relationship between man and maker, and more an accumulation of different nodes within a network, as explored in Alfred Gell's anthropological approach to artistic production<sup>5</sup>.

The process of amateur remaking falls in between the conceptions of the *homo faber* and the *homo ludens*. The amateur does not play according to Johan Huizinga; instead he or she builds the world, but not in the explicitly productive sense as expected by Hannah Arendt or Adorno. This making is imbued with many of the qualities of play, and this helps us depart from essentialist definitions of craft that ignore the deceptions, craftiness, laziness, shortcuts and craftiness that abound in practice<sup>6</sup>. What is key is that the *homo dividens et refactans* builds from that which is to hand, employing the skills of the capitalist bricoleur, and benefits from the freedom from necessity: the ability to rebuild the world in a different register.

This definition of craft that departs from essentialist notions of the *homo faber* and instead illuminates the maker's position within complex, connected, and commercial cultures of material availability and overproduction, is one way in which the methodologies developed in this study can contribute to further research within craft theory. The thesis also draws attention to the productive

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<sup>4</sup> Richard Sennett, *The Craftsman* (London: Allen Lane, 2008), p.13.

<sup>5</sup> Alfred Gell, *Art and Agency: An Anthropological Theory* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1998), p. 7.

<sup>6</sup> Huizinga welcomed the trickery, cheating and gambling that takes place as a part of play's operation. Johan Huizinga, *Homo Ludens* trans. by R F C Hull (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1949), p. 18.

dimension of everyday life, adding to work (both historical and anthropological) that conceptualises the individual as negotiating material culture through the prism of personal expression. The investigation above as to the possible motivations behind this proactive occupation of amateur time is particularly topical given the potential productive power of the bases, carriers and arbiters now at our disposal. The critical apparatus I have deployed in this thesis – in particular Lefebvre’s notion of differential space and the idea of constrained utopianism – can help navigate the complex terrain of user participation, subjecting phenomena as diverse as citizen journalism, the de-centralisation of technology to the domestic sphere, and the politics of unpaid labour to critical and empathetic analysis.

Within art history and aesthetic discourse I have only touched on the dynamics between amateur and artistic production within finite chronological periods. Further research could investigate the mediating role of commercial art, in between amateur and avant-garde expression; the dynamics and contrasting psychologies demonstrable in ‘outsider art’ of children and the mentally ill<sup>7</sup> and the amateur insider who mostly strives to achieve standards of technical competence; as well as specific instances of amateur-artist encounters in various historic contexts.

Every field has its own amateurs. I hope the inter-disciplinary methodologies employed in this thesis will encourage broader introspection within disciplinary specialism: both an historical awareness of how amateurs have been marginalised and excluded in the course of professionalising a field (in which the establishment of university courses and scientific positivism of the nineteenth century has played a part), and what methodologies and experiences are lost or sidelined through this exclusion of the amateur. The amateur’s position within each field is discipline-specific and further studies within practices not covered in this thesis – particularly history, archaeology, writing, drama, performance and music – could explore the exclusionary tendencies of professionalisation and whether the amateur attributes of

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<sup>7</sup> Colin Rhodes defines outsider artists as those that are defined as fundamentally different from the audiences to which their work is exposed and are dysfunctional in respect to parameters of normality. Colin Rhodes, *Outsider Art: Spontaneous Alternatives* (London: Thames and Hudson, London and New York, 2000), p. 7.

constrained autonomy, play, idiosyncrasy, experimentation and unpredictability, have a role in the development of disciplinary specialism and knowledge.

In this thesis I have developed theoretical tools to think about the content of amateur craft practice and its position within everyday life that can be applied to various temporal, geographical, and medium-specific contexts. Georges Perec's metaphor of puzzle-solving in *Life: A User's Manual*, for example, describes a craft process that is completely dependent on a designer's overall plan, yet nonetheless involves proactive reconstruction that involves skill, guile, experience and contingency<sup>8</sup>. Perec's description of the puzzle-solver simultaneously reflects dialectics of freedom and constraint inherent to amateur practice, analogous to experiences of carnival and play that I have explored above.

The notional autonomy of the amateur craft practitioner, as the *homo dividens et refactans*, prompts a consideration as to what motivates this form of behaviour. We could refer to this compulsion to carry on labouring as an attempt to reach some kind of higher goal, or in the words of Harvey Goldman, a 'calling'. Goldman's term derives from his reading of Max Weber, and the influence of the German sociologist is evident when he states:

The calling is not primarily a source of self-satisfaction or the satisfaction of craftsmanly desires, nor is it seen as the fulfilment of talents or of satisfying involvement with an activity they love. Instead, it serves the need of self-definition, self-justification and identity through devotion to the higher ideal of service.<sup>9</sup>

I cite this passage because it questions the individualistic associations attached to craft; it is not about the unfurling of subjective desire but the negotiation of the constraints of modern capitalism. Central to Goldman's claim is that 'self-definition' and 'self-justification' do not derive directly from what one makes but from the supra individual notion of 'service'. This raises a question that has been nascent throughout the thesis and provides a

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<sup>8</sup> Georges Perec, *Life: A User's Manual* trans. by David Bellos (London: Harvill, 1988), xv.

<sup>9</sup> Harvey Goldman, *Max Weber and Thomas Mann: Calling and the Shaping of the Self* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), p. 110.

convenient ending point: what ideology and values, political or otherwise, does the amateur serve?

For amateurs, the idea of service seems to contradict the fundamental principles of freedom and voluntariness. Bernhard Rieger's study on amateur cinematography in inter-war Germany notes the demise of amateur associations within this medium as soon as the National Socialists started to strictly regulate the practice and re-orient it towards propaganda, driving away 'those amateurs who pursued camera work to escape from the pressures of everyday life into a world of private fantasies'<sup>10</sup>. Once amateur practice is regulated by authorities or used as a banner for a particular ideology its fundamental association with voluntariness is affected. Even the non-specific, vague backing of voluntary and self-reliant activity at the heart of the current British Prime Minister's 'big society' policy has met with disapproval among community activists who keep their distance from the Government's political agenda<sup>11</sup>, and the idea's association with the drive to cut public spending<sup>12</sup>.

Choice within the limitations of free time is critical to amateur craft practice. Labour undertaken in spare time is more than just a false consciousness. Amateur practice offers individuals the chance to play out nostalgic fantasies, express a particular aesthetic, decorate according to their whim and manage the world around them.

The ideologies of the amateur are ambiguous, they are rooted in personal dreams and fantasies, yet unavoidably relate to broader structures of social and labour organisation. Moreover, amateur practice is relatively apolitical. As Albert Roland stated in his 1958 article on the mid-century do-it-yourself boom in America:

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<sup>10</sup> Bernhard Rieger, 'Fantasy as Social Practice: The Rise of Amateur Film', chapter seven of Bernhard Rieger, *Technology and the Culture of Modernity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), p. 222.

<sup>11</sup> For example, *Newsnight* journalist Stephen Smith interviewed Jess Steele, director of Locality 'UK's leading network for community-led organisations' who stated that "It's not really David Cameron's Big Society". 'Citizen Smith Joins Big Society Boot Camp' *Newsnight* (BBC Two, first broadcast on 31 March 2011), <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/programmes/newsnight/9428285.stm> [accessed 23 October 2011].

<sup>12</sup> Editorial, 'Big Society: Losing the Argument' *The Guardian* (8 February 2011), <http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2011/feb/08/big-society-editorial> [accessed 23 October 2011].

Their refusal to get involved – however frustrating to political activists and impatient liberals – may be a healthy protest against society's ever increasing demands for participation.<sup>13</sup>

Non-participation is rarely mooted as a barometer of agency within capitalist modernity: ideologies, causes and movements occupy the headlines, while amateur craft practitioners are compliant. They pay their taxes and happily make use of bases, carriers and arbiters to create a 'personal Walden'. Nevertheless, however individualistic the notion of a 'personal Walden' might initially appear, there is a wider social critique inherent to an amateur's vision of an alternative world. The amateur craft practitioner expresses how he or she thinks the world ought to be, particularly how labour-power should be exercised within such a world. It is this constrained and politically ambiguous personal utopia that perhaps amateurs serve, finding their labour valorised in some way. And there is always a hint of refusal when individuals take control of tools, materials and time and equip themselves as mini-capitalists.

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<sup>13</sup> Albert Roland 'Do-It-Yourself: A Walden for the Million?' *American Quarterly* 10:2 (1958), p. 164.

**Appendix One**  
**Letter to Paul Thompson: Amateurism at the Royal College of Art**



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14<sup>th</sup> November 2011

Dr Paul Thompson  
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Dear Paul Thompson

### **Amateurism at the Royal College of Art**

My name is Stephen Knott and I am an AHRC-funded collaborative PhD student at the Royal College of Art/Victoria and Albert Museum in the process of submitting my thesis entitled 'Amateur craft practice in modernity'. Throughout the thesis I have worked between the Goldsmithing, Silversmithing, Metalwork and Jewellery, and History of Design departments, under the supervision of both Glenn Adamson and Hans Stofer.

Although the methodology is chiefly theoretical and historical, in the second year (Autumn 2009) of the PhD, and as part of the collaboration, I dropped my tools as a researcher (mainly my laptop) and participated in GSM&J's first term brief, *Overcoat*, which culminated in an exhibition in Nijmegen in the Netherlands. In the second term of the academic year I responded to the call for participants for Department 21, subsequently engaging in discussions, events and projects that were a part of this experiment in interdisciplinarity.

These experiences gave me the opportunity to expand my investigation into amateurism: what did students think about amateur practice and what was its role within art and design education at the College?

Many students' views remained rooted in pejorative definitions of the term: the presumption that amateurism is linked to poor skill, shoddy production and naivety; something far removed from the seriousness of artistic production they were engaged with. This reflects an established tendency to categorise types of practice that has long structured art education: art-craft relations, medium-specific means of organising departments, and the difference between art and non-art.

This negative conceptualisation of amateur practice overlooks the etymology of the word. *Amare*, the Latin root for the term, means 'to love', indicating a passion or enthusiasm for a subject independently pursued that is not dependent on financial return. As illustrated in my research the supplemental, voluntary status of amateur practice leads to alternative experiences of making within modernity, allowing a maker to play the fool, learn a new skill and spend uneconomical amounts on time on one task. Amateur practice can lead to obsession, but equally could result in the next great innovation. It offers a particular kind of constrained freedom: temporary control over the conditions of one's own labour-power.

I'm happy to report to you that amateurism is widespread throughout the Royal College of Art. Department 21, AcrossRCA, Sustain RCA, the Student Union and a whole variety of student-run services all provide diversionary practices that help distract students, only for their efforts to be redoubled when they return to their own discipline. In addition, the College-wide lectures and open workshops, such as the Life Drawing Classes, Photoshop and printmaking courses, all provide an avenue into other areas of interest that prompt unexpected trajectories of learning.

Your willingness to support Department 21 and the radical, critical and diversionary space it created deserves praise. Innovation and creativity derive from these supplemental activities and the College should continue to support these events, even if they are poorly attended or seem superfluous to the College's mission statement to prepare students for successful artistic careers. As I stated in Department 21's final publication, art practice needs 'a space to get away and reflect on one's main vocation, like dipping into a well-heated swimming pool and doing a few lengths, only to towel off and continue with one's labours afterwards.'

During Department 21 I organised a research seminar on the concept of 'amateurism'. Of all the various definitions that were discussed I was most struck by designer Fabio Franz's comment that Department 21 was 'definitely amateur... but it is getting more professional'. At the midway point of Department 21's tenure of the Stevens Building this comment reflected the increased pressure on the project's founders to maintain the space, update the

website, run discussions, and come up with tangible outcomes that could be assessed according to conventional standards of judgement and examination.

Department 21 was impervious to conventional forms of assessment, as shown by the flummoxed faces of the Conran Prize judges who were invited by Department 21 founder Bianca Elzenbaumer, not to look at one product or work but a whole courtyard space which Department 21 had converted into a workshop and meeting place during the 2010 graduate show. What the judges were looking at was a manifestation of the space every artist needs, a space to explore ideas and engage in voluntary labour under no obligation. Within the professional context of the graduate show, this was the closest thing to an amateur space: a space to reflect, breath, contemplate, and participate.

So how should the College preserve its amateurism? Instead of writing a long list of suggestions about how students can learn more directly from amateurism, I will instead mention the consequences of suppressing amateur activity. To do this, I will call on Italian writer and philosopher Italo Calvino's short story, *The Workshop Hen*.

In Calvino's story a factory security guard keeps a hen within the workplace, a welcome distraction for the workers who are caught up in the daily routines that are typical of industrial production. The attention bestowed on the hen by various workers arouses the suspicion of a spy working on behalf of the factory management, who presumes that the hen is used to send secret messages between union representatives as it roams around the factory. Having been pronounced guilty, the hen is brought before the security chief and although nothing is found to incriminate the bird the paranoid authorities decide to kill it. In the last line of the story Calvino describes how the company owner 'heard the hen's death wail in his office and sensed it boded ill.'

The hen's position within the story is analogous to the role of amateurism within art, craft and design practice. It is the interesting diversion, the whimsical, fanciful, superfluous and supplementary activity that makes work enjoyable and meaningful. In the story the hen's execution signals the oppression of the factory owners and the end of the small amount of freedom and pleasure that was tied into the working day. It is damaging when such practices are quashed whether by the factory authorities in Calvino's story, or by any other institution that decides to stamp out activities and amusements that are not explicitly productive.

It may seem like a strange request, but I'd like to ask you to make sure that the College avoids 'killing the hen'. Amateurism must continue to flourish within art education. The drive for specialist, professionalised knowledge should not be pursued at the expense of that which is half-baked, experimental, risky, humorous, pointless, not explicitly functional, or

unusual. Equally, the College should not be renamed the Royal College of Amateurism, as the power and potential of amateur craft practice lies in its relational status to other occupations.

Yours sincerely

Stephen Knott  
PhD candidate Royal College of Art/Victoria and Albert Museum

## **Appendix Two** **Theoretician Becomes Maker**

*A report on a term spent in the Goldsmithing, Silversmithing, Metalwork and Jewellery Department of the Royal College of Art*

### **Brief**

In the autumn term of 2009, at the beginning of the second year of my PhD and as part of my Royal College of Art/Victoria and Albert Museum collaborative, AHRC-funded, PhD studentship, I participated in the GSM&J project *Overcoat*, which involved producing works for a show that opened on the 13<sup>th</sup> December in Nijmegen, the Netherlands. The brief was to use the overcoat as a system of display, allowing each student to interpret this as he or she desired.

### **Plan/Hypothesis**

My initial response to the brief was to try and incorporate terminology that I had developed during the previous year of my research, particularly the notion of the kit or the manual. I wanted to do this by making a kit that would allow a lay public to make their own overcoat and chart the process through a blog that would record my experiences of making a kit. I soon realised that making a kit of a coat was too complicated. Instead, I decided to focus on making a kit of a wooden coat hanger, something on which the overcoat as a 'system of display' inherently relies upon.

The blog became a key part of the research project. This self-reflexive account of changing decisions highlighted the things that constituted barriers to making a kit for the non-expert. For example, the need to operate a sewing machine in the construction of an overcoat required a level of existing knowledge that was not only beyond my technical abilities but would limit the potential audience.

From noting these experiences the ultimate aim was to produce a self-reflexive manual. I was not able to write a manual about skills I knew nothing about, and in the field of making objects my expertise is very limited. Therefore, I had to write a manual on manuals and kits – as these are my areas of specialism – and in the process of making a kit I hoped to clarify how this was done.

### **Method-materials-making**

In the course of making a wooden coat hanger kit, I realised that there are essential tasks that are required to make a kit out of something. These fundamental stages include deconstructing the thing you want to make a kit of, analysis of the materials used in the making of the thing (figure 1); experimentation as to the best method of making bearing in mind the potential audience of lay amateurs (figure 2 and figure 3); how to design the kit and write instructions that would summarise tactile processes into pared down language (figure 4); and finally testing the kit on selected recipients (figure 5). The question of how readymade you make a kit becomes crucial in determining what audience you intend to reach.

The blog I set up ([www.rcabynumbers.wordpress.com](http://www.rcabynumbers.wordpress.com)) charted the process of making kits for coat hangers and noting down my experiences helped me understand what I needed to remember if I were to produce a manual on kitmaking.

### **Output**

I made ten ‘make your own coat hanger’ kits with the help of graphic designer Kimberley Chandler who produced the packaging that transformed the object into a kit rather than looking like a mere bag full of items. These kits contained minimal instruction that allowed the maker to pursue his or her own methods and tools (figure 4 and figure 6).

The kits were finished in late November and then given to eight different MA students in the GSM&J department, with two uncompleted kits held back for display purposes. The students followed the pared down instruction on the kit, which included the visual template of a photographed coat hanger, and from their own methods, tools and skills, produced coat hangers of varying styles in different time frames. Critical to the process was taking a profile of the maker when giving them a kit and asking them questions about the process, including photographs of the tools used and final product once they had finished (for examples see figure 7 and figure 8).

Six coat hangers built from the kit were finished before the set-up and opening of the department's show in Nijmegen. I hung these coat hangers on a long piece of string next to an example of an unopened kit. Together I aimed that they would communicate a process by which various authors' responses to the kit were apparent (figure 9).

### **Evaluation of experience**

The purpose of this document is to evaluate this term's experience in the context of my PhD and the broader issue of collaborative, theoretical work in art education.

#### *Kit specific evaluation*

The results of giving the coat hanger kit to various GSM&J students confirmed that a certain number of essential tools were needed to make the product. All participants used pencil and measuring equipment and, crucially, a cutting instrument to make incisions into the wood. Most used a band saw for this labour but chisels and handsaws were used too (David Roux-Fouillet gouged out his coat hanger with an improvised metal tool – see figure 7). Smoothing tools such as sanders, files and rasps were also key, as well as tools which bent the metal wire into a hook shape, such as pliers.



Figure 1: Deconstructing the coat hanger. *Coat hanger* project (2009).

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Figure 2: Test coat hanger with comments on shape. *Coat hanger* project (2009).

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Figure 3: Testing the cutting and shaping of two different types of wood. *Coat hanger* project (2009).

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Figure 4: Simple pared down instruction for coat hanger construction. *Coat hanger* project (2009).



Figure 5: Grant McCaig (GSM&J MA student 2009-2011) with his coat hanger kit. *Coat hanger* project (2009).

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Figure 6: Seven handmade coat hanger kits. *Coat hanger* project (2009).

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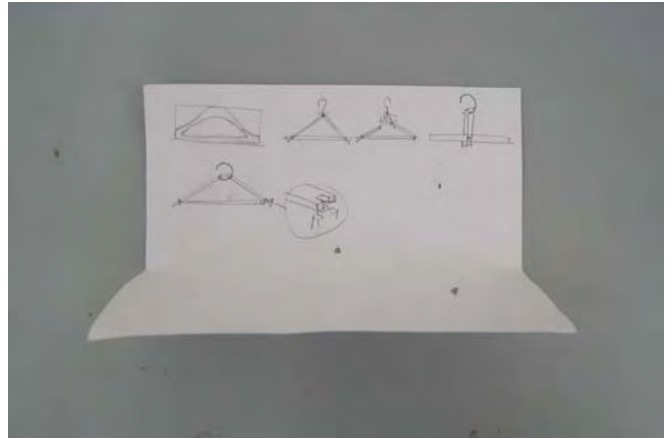


Figure 7: Coat hanger made by David Roux-Fouillet (GSM&J MA student 2009-2011), including tools used (bottom left) and preliminary sketches (bottom right). *Coat hanger* project (2009).

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Figure 8: Coat hanger made by Kathryn Hinton (GSM&J MPhil student 2008-2010), including manual tools used (bottom left) and electric drill (bottom right). *Coat hanger* project (2009).

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Figure 9: Display of completed coat hangers in *Overcoat*, Galerie Marzee, Nijmegen, Netherlands.  
*Coat hanger* project (2009).

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If I were to develop the kit into one that would be easier for laymen to complete I would mark out an outline of the shape of coat hanger to be cut on the wood. I would devise a type of joint that would make it easier for amateurs to assemble the two arms of the coat hanger together (such as a dowelled joint) perhaps leaving space for a hole in which to place the wire hook. The tools would include a cutting tool and a smoothing tool. The cutting tool would be able to cut the wood and the shaping tool used to mould it. The wire hook could be bent using pliers and remain attached to the body of the hanger by splitting the bottom end of the wire.

An important question asked at the end of each maker's experience was whether there were any faults with the kit. Most pointed to the fact that the smooth sculptural shoulders that were shown on the photograph were not achievable with the wood provided (this was a deliberate comment on the fact that the image on the front of a kit never corresponds to what can be achieved). There were also complaints about lack of nails to attach trouser dowel to hanger and other issues relating to the impossible dimensions.

By concentrating on kitmaking I realised how artistic production is heavily dependent on the labour of others. In the process of this project – bringing together the kit materials and issuing kits to the makers – I was more like the organiser of the labour of other authors, rather than a maker myself.

Observing traits within the phenomenon of amateurism for myself helped, even if it was experienced within the self-conscious context of PhD study. The development of intuition, learning how to use tools in your own way, botching jobs, not quite going by the manual in the attempt to speed up the boring bits of making (preparation) to get to the more interesting parts (finishing), and gradually feeling a growing sense of pride in your own work, are all features of the learning process that I studied in historical example but now have partially experienced first-hand.

*Effect on research methods*

The project to spend a term in the GSM&J department helped me pursue different methods of communicating my research. As amateurs themselves often start from square one with no skills it made sense for my method to reflect this, abandoning the skills and tools of my trade – which is writing – and transferring them to skills of making. My methodology for this term mirrored the content of my study.

However, it is important to stress that my institutional position within the college prevented me from assuming the position of most amateurs, as I had the technical and creative advice of bona fide practitioners as well as theoretical ideas about the concept of amateurism. However, my unfamiliarity and lack of skill was of a similar ilk.

The initial steps to make a wooden coat hanger kit were not entirely productive. I naturally erred towards a methodology that I am comfortable with: literary based research. Library catalogues led me to past manuals from the early twentieth century (part of the Sloyd educational system that originated in Finland), and the internet led me to coat hanger manufacturing companies and Youtube videos as to how a hanger is made in an attempt to get the definitive answer on how to construct a coat hanger in order to get everything right before I started. I tried to become an expert in making a coat hanger, first time, before picking up any tool. In addition, I drew many sketches of coat hangers I found in my wardrobe, again staying in the relatively comfortable arena of sketching designs on paper.

The amount of non-physical preparation before I picked up a tool or bit of material is testament to the nervousness I felt in starting to make. I felt a fear of error, even in the simplest of task, or being looked upon as a fool and incompetent at the bench and completely out of place, despite the welcome and encouragement from people within the department. There was a fear in testing out the tools but then more relief and glee when tools and materials worked in the way you wanted them to. This initial procrastination, over-research and incessant note taking during the process of making reflects the general tendency to stay within the parameters of one's discipline (in my case,

writing and research), and the difficulty of genuine collaborative, interdisciplinary work.

*Assessment of the collaborative nature of the project*

Roland Barthes defined interdisciplinarity as follows:

Interdisciplinary activity, today so highly valued in research, cannot be achieved by the simple confrontation of specialized branches of knowledge; the interdisciplinary is not a comfortable affair: it begins *effectively* (and not by the simple utterance of pious hope) when the solidarity of the old disciplines breaks down – perhaps even violently, through the shocks of fashion – to the advantage of a new object, a new language...<sup>1</sup>

Barthes' words warn the 'collaborative' or 'inter-disciplinary' theoretician of the danger of claiming this label by just pulling disciplines together around a specific subject, rather than creating ownerless objects through porous methodologies that are liable to change.

In the context of my research amateur practice perhaps constitutes the new object, which finds its home in the margins of the other disciplines. And rather than study amateurism from a removed standpoint as the *subject* of study, like I did for the first year of the PhD, the experiences during this term introduced the concept of amateur (or 'inexpert', 'de-skill') as a *method*. The challenge for me was to leave my laptop at home and go into the department without the comfort of reverting to writing, without surrounding myself with the expertise that I had built up during my education. It was difficult to accept a position of naivety and inexperience, even ordering some wood from the timber yard and 'getting on' became problematic.

Beyond the institutional benefits of joining departments together through collaborative research projects, this method of study prompts the practitioner to welcome the position of inexpertise. In practice, this means abandoning the tools, spaces and methods that are familiar in order to genuinely position oneself at an early stage of learning.

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<sup>1</sup> Roland Barthes, 'From Work to Text' in *The Rustle of Language* trans. by Richard Howard (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), p. 56.

The placement of theorists in making departments of the RCA and collaborative research, where more time is devoted to adopting the methodologies of other disciplines, should be encouraged. Given a term away from your particular specialism encourages unpredictable results, prevents over-specialisation, forces the practitioner to consider alternative solutions to any given problem, and allows the researcher the potential to explore non-textual means of communication.

In my case, being involved in the *Overcoat* project was an experience that would have been unlikely in most theory based PhDs. Throughout the term the principle of collaboration and adopting different methodologies seemed to fuse with the subject of my work: amateurism. The project also remains incomplete in the sense that I am still interested in writing a manual about kitmaking ('How to make a kit'), informed by my experience of making the coat hanger kit.

#### *Attitude towards practitioners and critique*

This term was an opportunity to talk more with makers by inhabiting their space. I joined the *Overcoat* crit, attended other events that were run in the department and also ran an afternoon seminar on the short story entitled *Overcoat* written by the Russian writer Nikolai Gogol in response to the autumn term brief.

Being in the presence of makers this term affected my attitudes to aesthetic reception and critique. Sharing their space naturally increases one's empathy, but equally – and especially in the context of the RCA – I feel more insistent that makers theorise and contextualise their practice more.

Some practitioners who I talked to lamented the language of criticism for judging applied arts, which still seems rooted in whether their work is categorised as art or craft, and the long-held distinction between non-material idea, and actual making. These distinctions are at the crux of my research and

arriving at an argument that the makers themselves can engage with might expand the debate.

### **Appendix Three** **Collaboration-by-number**

*A report on the collaborative paint-by-number project developed in participation with Department 21 at the Royal College of Art*

#### **Context**

In the autumn term of 2009, during my time within the GSM&J department, a group of students announced the launch of a new interdisciplinary project at the Royal College of Art, to start in January 2010. The project, which had developed from cross-departmental workshops during AcrossRCA and negotiations with the new rector Paul Thompson, was to be called Department 21: the twenty-first department of the College made up from members of all the others. Space for the experimental project became temporarily available in the Stevens Building on the Kensington site after the painting students had moved to another building within the College. The project ran from January to February 2010 but since has continued to grow. Department 21 was represented in the College's graduation shows of 2010 and 2011, and a permanent workstation was put aside for the project in Autumn 2010, located on the top floor of the renovated Stevens Building.

The goal was to challenge traditional structures of learning determined by departmental agendas. As stated in the introduction to the Department 21 booklet that was published in June 2010:

We wanted to create a challenging, inclusive, radical and productive environment towards new models of education<sup>1</sup>.

In December 2009 there was a call for applicants to inhabit the temporary workspace in the Stevens Building and given my interest in interdisciplinarity, collaboration, and the work I was doing in GSM&J, as well as my attendance of various preliminary discussions about the project, I decided to apply. I was given a permanent workstation within the space and from January 2010 I started to get more fully involved in the project. I helped set up the space, became involved in discussions about the project's goals and

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<sup>1</sup> Editors, *Department 21* (London, 2010), p. 1.

directions, attended events and used the space as my main workstation. I was involved in the opening, in which chairs needed for the space were made from the materials left behind by the departed painting students; a GSM&J workshop where we made contraptions for a dinner party; a pottery workshop; an architecture workshop; as well as a focused debate among researchers at the College on amateurism that I organised in late January<sup>2</sup>.

### **Paint-by-number: the idea**

In addition to these events and discussions I wanted to undertake a project with paint-by-number kits, continuing my exploration and interest in kit forms that had developed over the course of research during the previous year. The paint-by-number kit is the quintessential collaborative object. It is a kit that is designed and manufactured by other labourers and it extensively fragments the image, accentuating the painter's role as adding the final layer to a readymade form. The paint-by-number painting is an object of shared authorship, not belonging to the company who made the kit, the painter who follows the instruction, or to the person who uses them in an art school project.

The plan was simple. I wanted to give thirty paint-by-number kits to participants of Department 21 with the simple instruction that they should complete the kit. The kit that I chose was an image of Times Square produced by the arts supply and stationary firm Reeves (figure 1). Individual efforts would then be placed together in a grid both to emphasise the craft inherent to each paint-by-number canvas, as a unique copy, but also the sameness of the readymade base.

The project was part financed by Department 21, who contributed £60 towards the purchase of the kits. Other funding came from my materials budget.

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<sup>2</sup> For a full audio recording of the event see the blog of the Dialogues in Design series (a postgraduate seminar series set up by students from the RCA/V&A History of Design department) <http://dialoguesindesign.wordpress.com/extra/january-28th-2010-amateurism/>

## **Process**

The initial target was to have the paint-by-number paintings ready to bring together before Department 21's tenure in the Stevens Building came to an end in mid-February 2010. However, by this time no one had completed the kit. After showing an initial interest in the project many participants of Department 21 decided to return the kit unopened because they did not have enough spare time. A few kits were lost. As the number of participants started to dwindle I began to invite friends, family and other researchers to paint a canvas themselves, widening participation beyond Department 21.

Despite enthusiasm and commitment to painting the canvases, by May 2010 I had only received two or three that were complete. I then decided to set a deadline on 28 June 2010 when all the paint-by-number canvases had to be returned regardless of their state of completion. The project would culminate in a paint-by-number workshop on the day of the deadline, to be part of Department 21's programme of events during the RCA Graduate show in 2010, which gave those who had not finished a chance to come in and paint in a workshop environment (figure 2). In the afternoon I organised a discussion with Glenn Adamson, entitled 'De-skilling in amateur art, craft and design practice' (figure 3). In addition there was a paint-by-number canvas that was left in the space throughout the week of the show with the public invited to contribute. By the end of the workshop, thirteen canvases had been added to the few that I received before the deadline.

## **Output**

At the end of the project I received eighteen paint-by-number canvases back from participants. Some canvases strongly resembled the image on the front of the kit, some had hardly been painted at all, some contravened the paint-by-number outlines completely, and many of them demonstrated impressionistic technique and idiosyncratic colour combinations.



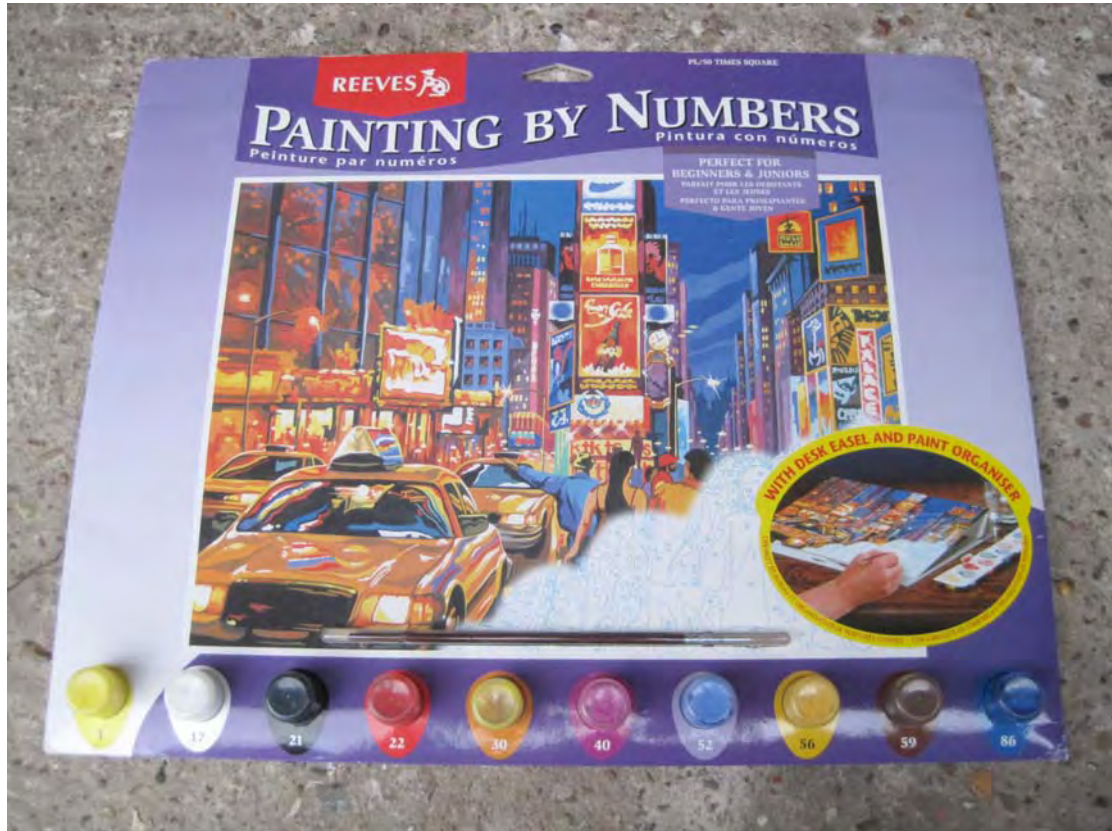


Figure 1: Reeves paint-by-number kit of Times Square (PL50). *Paint-by-number* project (2010).

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Figure 2: 'Filling in the Blanks: Amateuism By Numbers' paint-by-number workshop held on 28 June 2010, part of Department 21 at Show 2, Royal College of Art. *Paint-by-number* project (2010).

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Figure 3: 'De-skilling in amateur art, craft and design practice' talk during the paint-by-number workshop held on 28 June 2010, part of Department 21 at Show 2, Royal College of Art. *Paint-by-number* project (2010).

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Figure 4: 'Unique Copies' paint-by-number paintings on display at *Research RCA: New Knowledge* (October 2010).  
*Paint-by-number* project (2010).

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Figure 5: 'Unique Copies' paint-by-number paintings on display at *Research RCA: New Knowledge* (October 2010).  
*Paint-by-number* project (2010).

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In Autumn 2010 I selected sixteen out of these eighteen canvases to produce a 4x4 grid of paint-by-number works, as a part of the inaugural research exhibition at the Royal College of Art, *Research RCA: New Knowledge* (figure 4 and figure 5). Their display in this manner was meant to accentuate both their similarity as the same image, but also the diversity that arises from being completed by different authors. A handout listing the various painters who produced the work, with their institutional/departmental affiliation, helped highlight the individuality of the work within the grid structure.

## **Evaluation of experience**

### *Kit specific evaluation*

The participants involved in the project had many complaints about the weaknesses of the paint-by-number kit. Paul Scattergood, a student on the printmaking course at the College bemoaned the inadequacy of the cheaply made paintbrush that limited the amount of control over what was depicted. He also complained of the 'shoddy paint' that dried quickly and had a tendency to blur into the same colour if mixed with other colours. Other participants also noted the inadequacy of the material, which hindered the possibility of achieving a likeness to the image on the front of the box.

As well as frustrations with the material, many of the project participants' felt constrained by the kit's lines that proscribed what should be depicted. For many, this represented the reduction of painting to filling in the blanks, akin to a mechanical act where artistic subjectivity is severely restricted. Most participants felt the kit robbed them of the joy of making a painting and contravened the presumption that the task would be enjoyable.

This sense of irritation reflects both the audience who were asked to participate (mainly researchers and students with a heightened sense of self-awareness) and the high levels of discipline that is required if the kit's instructions are rigidly followed. When I completed the kit 'by the book', following every line and adhering to every colour combination, it took me

eight hours. The exacting nature of the instruction tried the patience of many of the participants. At least half of those involved were delighted when I took the kit away, as if a burden was removed from their shoulders but others responded well to the restrictive discipline, stating how it allowed them to relax through repetitive movements and semi-conscious painting.

For Steve Brown, a fellow collaborative PhD student in the Ceramics department, the kit was initially frustrating to complete. Like many of the other participants he complained of the overbearing limitations and the strict rules. But then he started to copy the image on the front of the box without following the step-by-step instruction. Once he had departed from the kit's structure, 'creativity returned to the process', stating that 'working within a defined matrix was quite therapeutic, allowing creativity without thinking about the overall composition'<sup>3</sup>. As a printmaker this negotiation of personal subjectivity, 'small creative choices', within broader limiting boundaries was appealing, and it is this mediation of structure with individual gesture that I was trying to present when I displayed the paint-by-number in a grid at the Research exhibition. It seems to be a metaphor that is relevant to amateur and artist alike.

#### *Relevance to research*

The paint-by-number project helped me explore the notion of individual autonomy in artistic production: how individuals within an art school context dealt with limitations of such magnitude and how they reconciled their own (heightened) sense of authorship with the parameters of the kit. In short, the project can be seen as an experiment that set out to see how individuals responded to the idea of shared authorship and filling out someone else's design, and how they make the painting their own through specific surface interventions.

Brown's assessment of the task was particularly interesting, describing the phenomenon of limited creative autonomy within broader constrictions. This description of the experience of painting a paint-by-number is analogous to

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<sup>3</sup> Steve Brown, email entitled 'paint-by-number' sent on the (part) completion of his canvas (1 July 2010).

the position of the artist within modern artistic production, who is reliant on the bases, carriers and arbiters made by other hands, whilst mediating of these structures through individual action (see chapter one).

Brown's experience suggests that the kit's effectiveness as an introduction to art is predicated on not following the rules. Instead of rigidly adhering to the suggested step-by-step instruction that confuse and overwhelm the painter, the kit encourages rule breaking, or the expression of individual choice on top of foundational structures.

#### *Assessment of the collaborative nature of the project*

The paint-by-number project was inherently collaborative, involving the labour of several different people. It represented both collaborative and single authorship, in that individuals responded to the heavily guided framework in a unique manner. Rather than signaling the loss of skill or 'dumbing down', the inherent differences of each canvas suggest the potential for delight and creativity in manual reproduction and copying. Also, the popularity of paint-by-number as an accessible art form was shown during the workshop held in June 2010, with members of the public keen to fill in the blanks.

Collaborating with students within the College proved more difficult than expected. Of the initial set of people who I asked to participate in Department 21 only a few were able to return a completed canvas. Many of those who handed back an unopened kit, or lost the kit, explained that they simply did not have the time spare to complete a kit, reflecting the plethora of other distractions for a student at the Royal College of Art.

Many students were receptive to the idea, but once a certain amount of labour was required (for no pay, or other immediate reward) that perhaps proved more arduous than expected they were willing to drop out. This is understandable given their large workload.

This is a criticism that can be extended beyond the paint-by-number project to the wider experience of Department 21. Many of those involved were happy



to drop in on the space during the two months of its operation, attend the events, discussions, meet people, and join the spectacular dinners and parties (figure 6) but most of the work of organising, promoting and managing the space fell on a committed team of no more than ten people who initially got together to propose the idea in the first place. This core team then came together at the end of the project to organise and coordinate the publication, as well as the string of events that accompanied the presence in *Show 2*. Many of the meetings held – from subjects as diverse as alternative art education, the future of research at the College and interdisciplinary practice were engaging and intriguing, but there was a feeling as one left the meeting that people would carry on with their conventional forms of artistic practice. Disciplinary specialism would survive, mostly unharmed, and the collaborative object seemed just out of reach.

The paint-by-number kit – the quintessential amateur art form – facilitated an exploration of issues related to skill, collaboration and artistic labour within the confines of the College. The arguments and terminology developed in this thesis has proved useful when considering these questions.



Figure 6: One of the many delicious dinners at Department 21, Royal College of Art (January 2010).

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## Chapter One: Amateur Surface Intervention

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