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ANDREW IAN WELCH

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CONTEMPORARY PROCESSES AND HISTORICAL PRECEDENTS FOR HANDMADE CRAFTS PRACTICE IN THE CONTEXT OF TECHNOLOGICAL CHANGE.

Abstract

This research explores the notions and values attached to the idea of the handmade object. Taking the form of an exhibition of jewellery exhibited at the ANU School of Art Gallery from June 24 to 30, 2010, the study comprises the outcome of the Studio Practice component, together with an Exegesis outlining the results of exploration into the creative potential of combining digital technologies with hand-making, and the Dissertation, which comprises 33% of the Thesis, examining the influence of particular values associated with the handmade object and how this influence has led to a continuous reevaluation of what it means to make something by hand.

Declaration of Originality

I hereby declare that the thesis here presented is the outcome of the research project undertaken during my candidacy, that I am the sole author unless otherwise indicated, and that I have fully documented the source of ideas, references, quotations and paraphrases attributable to other authors.

A blue ink handwritten signature, appearing to be 'Andrew Ian Welch', written over a horizontal dotted line.

Andrew Ian Welch

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Introduction: the persistence of the ethical object

The distinction between the handmade object and the object of mass production was forged as a result of the Industrial Revolution, when new modes of manufacture displaced the model of the ubiquitous artisan craftsman. In the nineteenth and much of the twentieth century, this has been as much an ideological distinction as it is an economic one.

Augustus Welby Northmore Pugin (1 March 1812 – 14 September 1852) and John Ruskin (8 February 1819 – 20 January 1900) were among the first to challenge these new modes of manufacture and fought a rearguard action against what they saw as the evils of the factory system. In his treatise on the failings of the Neo Classical style, *Contrasts*, Pugin argued that the style, typical of the architecture of the emerging modern industrial landscape, was inferior to medieval architecture.¹ John Ruskin took up Pugin's argument, and in his famous attack on the classical tradition in *The Stones of Venice* Ruskin pitched Gothic against the Neo Classical style as a critique of the factory system.² For Ruskin art should communicate truth and it revealed the artist's whole moral outlook. In contrast to the Christian architecture of medieval England, Ruskin characterised Classical ornament as pagan. Ruskin's Gothic represented an indigenous, vernacular ornament created by free Christian artisans, for whom imperfection was both noble, because it demonstrated the labourers' capacity for free expression, and because it represented the vitality of the living organism, or as Ruskin says "It is the sign of life in a mortal body, that is to say, of a state of progress and change".³

Ruskin argued that the working conditions of classical times made slaves of the artisan.⁴ This is Ruskin's parable about how the conditions of the factory system and the division of labour that was a feature of mass production disengaged the

¹ Augustus Welby Northmore Pugin, *Contrasts*, 2nd ed. [reprinted] / with an introduction by H. R. Hitchcock ed. (Leicester: Leicester U.P., 1973).

² John Ruskin, *The Stones of Venice* (London: Faber, 1981).

³ ———, "The Nature of Gothic," in *The Stones of Venice*, ed. Jan Morris (London: Faber, 1981). P 121.

⁴ *Ibid.* p 120.

artist from the creative integrity of making something from beginning to end. For Ruskin the use of the classical architectural style in modern times was,

Pagan in its origin, proud and unholy in its revival... an architecture invented, as it seems, to make plagiarists of its architects, slaves of its workmen, and sybarites of its inhabitants; an architecture in which intellect is idle, invention impossible, but in which all luxury is gratified and all insolence fortified; - the first thing we have to do is to cast it out, and shake the dust of it from our feet for ever.⁵

Ruskin's mix of aesthetics and morality had a profound influence on William Morris and the Arts and Crafts Movement. Morris built on Ruskin's ideas to include the idea of the dignity of labour; that the process of making has worth and should be reflected in the object itself; and the idea of truth to materials. In Arts and Crafts philosophies, these qualities begin to take on ethical values that were invested equally between the maker, the object and the person who consumes the object.

The term "ethical object" is derived from Tillyard's and others examination of the Arts and Crafts Movement and is used in this dissertation to describe the constellation of values that begin to attach themselves to the idea of the handmade from the time of the Arts and Crafts movement.⁶ These ideas were to become highly influential in the history of the studio crafts movement and design, and their echoes can still be heard today. This dissertation addresses three moments in the history of this influence.

Chapter one examines the origins of the idea of the handmade in the social and technological changes of the British industrial revolution. The effect of these developments was to galvanise ideas about how objects are best manufactured and how the emerging factory system influenced both the quality of the object produced and the quality of life of the workers. Using Wedgwood and Morris as

⁵Ruskin, *The Stones of Venice*. p 234.

⁶ S. K Tillyard, *The Impact of Modernism, 1900-1920: Early Modernism and the Arts and Crafts Movement in Edwardian England* (London ; New York: Routledge, 1988).

case studies, chapter one examines the conflicting ideas about the production of craft in the nineteenth century.

Morris and Wedgwood provide contrasting examples of what was happening to manufacturing during the nineteenth century. Wedgwood's aim was to rationalize the factory process and eliminate the potential for individual workers to influence the outcome of production. He did this by adopting a scientific approach to investigating new ways of achieving consistency in mass production. The focus of Wedgwood's interest was the recreation of classical antiquities, which became both a vehicle for his technical innovations and a way of catering for a demand for objects in the Neo Classical style.

Morris on the other hand sought to reinstate the artisanal system of manufacture with an emphasis on dignity of labour. For Morris, restoring control over the manufacture of objects back to the individual artisan would restore dignity back to the labourer and invest a moral value in the object that was missing in objects produced by mass production. This is the genesis of the ethical object as the object becomes imbued with these qualities and transferred to the user of the object.

Ultimately the Arts and Crafts Movement popularized the qualities of the handmade and the look or style was taken up by British department stores such as Liberty as a way of marketing their wares to middle class consumers. At the upper level only the wealthy could afford Morris' furnishings and ironically these wealthy patrons were the merchants and industrialists who have made their fortunes thanks to the industrial revolution. A surviving reminder of these enlightened industrialists is the home of paint manufacturer Theodore Mander, Wightwick Manor, where the style of Morris and Co. was recreated to demonstrate Morris' idea that it was a matter of social conscience that the objects of everyday use should be valued.

Chapter two examines the influence of the Arts and Crafts Movement on the potter Bernard Leach and subsequently Leach's influence on the studio crafts movement in the period following the Second World War. Leach's ideas, outlined in his book, *A Potter's Book* profoundly influenced the studio pottery movement

and in turn the development of the postwar studio crafts movement.⁷ Leach's philosophy developed as a result of his experience of Eastern culture as a young artist and can be seen as a synthesis of Arts and Crafts ideas with Zen Buddhism and traditional Japanese approaches to vessel making. Leach's Japanese colleagues found Ruskin and Morris' ideas sympathetic to Japanese traditions of craftsmanship and Leach was able to co-opt Ruskin and Morris' ideas in a variety of ways. The dynamic relationship between Leach and his Japanese colleagues was a complex inter-cultural exchange at a time when Japan had only recently become opened up to the West and Japanese artists were demonstrating a desire to engage with Western ideas.

The chapter reinforces the way in which Arts and Crafts ideas are taken up at times of profound social and cultural change. Beginning with the birth of the handmade object at the time of the Industrial Revolution, Arts and Crafts ideas are taken up by Leach during the interwar period, they gain renewed interest in the 1960s and early 1970s with a counterculture movement looking for alternatives to the mainstream. Arts and Crafts ideas are currently undergoing a further period of change during the political, social and technological turmoil of the digital age.

Chapter three examines the idea of the handmade in the post-machine age. New technologies such as additive manufacture, also known as rapid prototyping, mean that objects can be created on a computer and made without the intervention of the human hand. The dichotomy between factory and studio is breaking down as craftspeople use processes that do not rely on the hand of the maker to create their objects, and mass production techniques are able to imitate the visual and tactile qualities of the handmade object.

As the boundaries between mass production and craft production become blurred, where does this leave the notion of the handmade object? This chapter outlines a range of theoretical responses to the relationship between craft and these new technologies by discussing two exhibitions in the context of these

⁷ Bernard Leach, *A Potter's Book* (London: Faber, 1976).

ideas. These exhibitions, *Freestyle: new Australian design for living* and *Smart Works: design and the handmade*, represent a significant survey of Australian makers who put an emphasis on the material engagement of hand making. In the case of *Freestyle* and *Smart Works*, these exhibitions also examine how contemporary crafts people are engaging with new technologies and connecting with smart industries.⁸ These industries are, thanks to new technologies, flexible enough to offer their services to link with small studio production or able to take on the manufacturing for craftspeople operating as designer makers. The chapter looks at these ideas through an examination of the practice of *Freestyle* and *Smart Works* participants metalsmith Robert Foster and furniture maker Jon Goulder.

Parameters of the study

The influence of the Arts and Crafts Movement was far-reaching. The movement's ideas about truth to materials and honesty of construction were central to the development of the machine aesthetic and functionalism, profoundly influencing European modern design from the early twentieth century to the 1970s, however the scope of this dissertation with its focus on the influence of the Arts and Crafts Movement on the studio crafts movement has meant that I have not dealt with this aspect of the legacy of the Arts and Crafts Movement.

Likewise the place of the amateur in craft production is another issue that is not expanded on, an issue that had an influence on the success of the Arts and Crafts Movement as a popular movement, and arguably was integral to its downfall as a commercially viable approach to production.

Where possible I have attempted to use gender-neutral language, however this is not strictly adhered to where the words are being used in a particular historical or cultural context. This is the case, for example, in the use of Yanagi's term 'The Unknown Craftsman'. Where possible the word artisan is substituted for the somewhat clumsy gender-neutral term 'craftsperson'

⁸ Grace Cochrane, ed., *Smart Works: Design and the Handmade* (Sydney: Powerhouse Publishing, 2007). p 14.

Chapter one: the birth of craft and the ethical object

Chapter introduction

In preindustrial times craft was simply how things were made. During the British industrial revolution craft lost its primary role as a method of production and the idea of the handmade object as an artifact in its own right was born. As factory production began to take hold as the dominant method of manufacture a new discourse emerged that argued for a meaningful role for the handmade in the economy of objects. One category of object that emerged from this discussion about how objects are made is the ethical object, an idea that has its genesis in the way John Ruskin's critique of the factory linked aesthetics, morality and economics.⁹

In this discourse the tensions between the mass-produced object and the handmade were played out in the contrast of the use of different ornamental styles. Ruskin's argument was shaped by the particular qualities he saw in the Gothic style of architecture and he argued that handmade objects could be invested with the moral values he associated with hand making. For Ruskin the division of labour of the factory system marginalised the value of individual labour and he saw this reflected in the character of manufactured objects. In his examination of the Gothic use of materials, use of process, and the autonomy of the artist Ruskin found a counterpoint in the Neoclassical style. Ruskin's critique of the Neoclassical style was a critique of the use of the style by manufacturers like the potter Josiah Wedgwood and of Wedgwood's factory system. Ruskin's quarrel with Neoclassicism is played out in his book *The Stones of Venice* and comes into particular focus in the chapter *On The Nature of Gothic* as he outlines his argument that the distinctive character of the Gothic is a reflection of the hearts and minds of the Gothic artisan builders.¹⁰

Wedgwood saw the Neoclassical style as a way of giving his product an overall consistency of design and, more importantly, he recognised that it was a style

⁹ Tillyard, *The Impact of Modernism, 1900-1920: Early Modernism and the Arts and Crafts Movement in Edwardian England*. p 49.

¹⁰ Jan Morris, "Introduction," in *The Stones of Venice*, ed. Jan Morris (London: Faber, 1981). p 26.

that would appeal to his customer's taste.¹¹ Wedgwood's success as a manufacturer was due to his innovative use of materials and the way he rationalised each step of the pottery making process but the success of his product in the market place can be attributed to his choice of the Neoclassical style. Both Neoclassical theorists and proponents of the Gothic style believed that objects had a 'moral force' and could exert a positive influence on society.¹² Ruskin's ideas about the Gothic however, with their emphasis on the value of labour, influenced those looking for alternatives to the division of labour and mechanisation of the factory system and who found inspiration in his nostalgic vision of medieval times.¹³

During the Victorian period advances in technology both assisted and spurred on the development of scientific method. Science as a discipline as we know it today began to emerge. Improvements in the construction of scientific tools such as telescopes (and microscopes) led to advances in knowledge of the natural sciences and demand from industry for improvements in production through better information about coal and steel drove developments in geology and metallurgy. As the scientists of the Victorian era grew to understand the nature of the earth and the universe, so too their concept of the place of God in this new scheme of things changed. Moreover, this shift in understanding of the world challenged the very existence of God.

A crisis of confidence in personal religious belief becomes a common thread amongst key figures in art and science in these times. Architect Augustus Pugin who influenced Ruskin and championed Gothic architecture in the design of his churches, converted to Catholicism. Ruskin, brought up in a strict Evangelical Christian family, suffered a change in attitude toward the end of his career that nearly broke him physically and emotionally, and the designer William Morris who would put Ruskin's ideas into practice, gave up the priesthood for a career in architecture and adopted Socialism as a vocation. All adopted a humanist

¹¹ Adrian Forty, *Objects of Desire: Design and Society, 1750-1980* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1986).

¹² Edward Lucie-Smith, 1933-, *The Story of Craft: The Craftman's Role in Society* (Oxford: Phaidon, 1981). p 192, 207.

¹³ Morris, "Introduction." p 30.

approach to their work and socialism emerged as a way for many in Victorian times to deal with issues such as child labour, women's rights, factory labour conditions, and environmental issues. When William Morris decided with his friend Edward Burne-Jones that they would embark on a 'life of art' instead of taking Holy Orders, Morris was reflecting a change in Victorian society as science began to loosen its ties with theology.¹⁴

The industrial revolution

England in the early nineteenth century was a society going through a period of social turbulence, change and uncertainty on its way to becoming a world power built on the back of developments in industrial methods and the maritime supremacy of the British fleet.¹⁵ The British success in acquiring wealth and resources as a result of its acquisition of its colonies combined with advances in science and technology created the conditions that meant Britain was positioned to take advantage of what would become an industrial revolution. The British Empire was poised to become the 'workshop of the world' and had the ships and control of navigation routes that would enable it to transport its production around the globe.¹⁶

The industrial revolution can also be seen as a watershed moment for craft and ideas about handmade production. British society was coming to terms with the impact of the industrial revolution on the landscape and on the lives of all social classes. Gradually the factory system emerged as the dominant method of production to satisfy increased demand for manufactured products locally and abroad. The textiles industry became a model for factory organization with mechanisation and division of labour greatly improving production efficiency. Coal was harnessed to power the new factories and allowed factories to be situated away from water as a source of power. Advances in metallurgy improved the production of iron and steel further fuelling industrial growth. With the rise of the factory as the centre for production the nature of work was

¹⁴ Charlotte Fiell, *William Morris, 1834-1896* (Köln: Taschen, 1999). p 20.

¹⁵ Jan Morris, *Heaven's Command: An Imperial Progress* The Pax Britannica Trilogy (London: Faber and Faber, 1998). p 22.

¹⁶ *Ibid.* p 23.

reshaped and craft was marginalized as a method of production. The industrial revolution might be viewed as the time of the birth of craft in the modern sense of the word as technology began to challenge and supplant the skill of the artisan.

It was no accident that the ideas about the handmade of the Arts and Crafts Movement came out of Britain at this time. At the beginning of the industrial revolution rural crafts had existed alongside factory production. As imports from the colonies increased, rural craft production in Britain came under pressure from cheap imported handcrafts pushing traditional craftspeople out of work while at the same time stimulating the need for mechanisation of local production in order to compete with these imports.¹⁷ Improvements in agricultural production were able to support an expanding population that began to concentrate in urban areas. Workers moved from employment in agriculture to look for work in emerging factory industries such as the textiles industry.

In the transition to an industrial age artists and object makers responded in different ways to the emergence of the factory system and the beginnings of mass consumption. The industrial revolution made the life of the object more complicated. Objects could be mass-produced or handmade and each approach offered a possible future for the preindustrial crafts. Mass production was on one hand an opportunity for the creation of wealth by making more goods available to more consumers, while on the other hand, in its infancy factory production resulted in poorly designed and manufactured goods that critics such as Ruskin and Morris saw as a symptom of a lack of respect for the value of individual labour. Out of this state of flux contemporary industrial design and the crafts movement emerged as separate identities.¹⁸ The result was that the factory approach would continue on as a model for industrial capitalism¹⁹ for a further two hundred years, and the ideas of Ruskin, given form by Morris and the Arts and Crafts Movement would have limited commercial success but would go on to

¹⁷ Lucie-Smith, *The Story of Craft: The Craftman's Role in Society*. p 67

¹⁸ *Ibid.* p 208.

¹⁹ Sarah Richards, *Eighteenth-Century Ceramics: Products for a Civilised Society* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999). p 29.

shape the way the crafts would exist in modern times. Ultimately both the factory system and the studio crafts would be challenged by the shifting ground of the technological age.

Josiah Wedgwood

Lucie-Smith describes the potter Josiah Wedgwood as a key figure in the story of what was happening to craft in the late eighteenth century.²⁰ Wedgwood came from a family of craft potters and started his career as an apprentice under his elder brother.²¹ After his apprenticeship with his brother and a short partnership with two other potters Wedgwood became a partner in the pottery of Thomas Whieldon in Stoke-on-Trent in Staffordshire.

At this time Staffordshire had emerged as the main pottery centre in Britain as it had an abundance of clay suitable for making pottery and coal to fire the kilns.²² Reilly describes Wedgwood's new business partner Whieldon as "one of the most creative potters in Britain" and suggests that there was probably nobody else who could have introduced him to the techniques that were transforming pottery as a craft into an industry.²³ When Wedgwood joined Whieldon in 1754 Reilly points out that there was no reason why Whieldon might want to take on a business partner and it follows that Wedgwood must have acquired a reputation for his creative talent and business acumen in order to be taken into partnership by the already successful Whieldon.²⁴

By the time Wedgwood left the partnership with Whieldon in 1759 to start his own pottery, considerable changes were taking place in English potteries. The increase in the population at this time and the new fashion of drinking tea, which required the use of ceramic cups, contributed to an increase in demand for pottery both in Britain and to supply an expanding number of colonies.²⁵

²⁰ Lucie-Smith, *The Story of Craft: The Craftman's Role in Society*. p 192 – 193.

²¹ Robin Reilly, *Josiah Wedgwood 1730-1795* (London: Macmillan, 1992). p 3.

²² Geoffrey Wills, *Wedgwood* (London: Spring Books, 1988). p 9.

²³ Reilly, *Josiah Wedgwood 1730-1795* p 8.

²⁴ *Ibid.* p 18.

²⁵ Forty, *Objects of Desire: Design and Society, 1750-1980*. p 18.

At a time when producers using traditional hand making techniques were having difficulty competing with imported goods, Wedgwood introduced many of the methods and processes of mass production to pottery that were to become typical of factory production. These innovations streamlined the production of pottery by introducing methods that reduced the skill required to achieve a consistent result for each step of the process or broke the process down to further, simpler steps that again required less skilled labour. Keenly interested in discovering new techniques, Wedgwood's approach reflected the development of the scientific method of the day. For example, frustrated by the problems of judging the temperature of his kilns, a key to the successful firing of his innovations, Wedgwood invented a pyrometer based on his calculations of the shrinkage of clay cylinders.²⁶

During his time with Whieldon, Wedgwood had worked with William Greatbatch who started as an apprentice and developed a talent as a designer. It can be assumed that his exposure to Greatbatch's talent for new shapes and patterns gave Wedgwood an appreciation of the value of using a designer as part of the production process in a pottery, and when Wedgwood left Whieldon to start his own pottery, Wills says Greatbatch left with him.²⁷

Wedgwood added the designer to his factory system as part of his aim of standardizing the production of his pottery. The designer, called a modeller in Wedgwood's time, created the master pattern that was reproduced in plaster-of-Paris moulds. The introduction of a design stage in the production process was an important step for Staffordshire pottery in the transition from a craft industry to a factory industry.²⁸ This additional stage - the introduction of industrial design - provided a model or archetype for each item to be mass-produced in order to eliminate idiosyncratic variation of individual craftsmen involved in the production process. While Wedgwood saw any stage in his design process where the individual craftsperson could have input as a potential danger to his aim of

²⁶ Reilly, *Josiah Wedgwood 1730-1795* P 314. Prior to 1782 there was no method to measure accurately the temperature of a pottery kiln above a temperature of about 360 degrees C. p 313.

²⁷ Wills, *Wedgwood*. p 18.

²⁸ Forty, *Objects of Desire: Design and Society, 1750-1980*. p 34.

producing a consistent product, this idiosyncratic variation was of course precisely what Ruskin valued in his medieval archetype of the Gothic artisan.

Introducing a design stage to pottery production was not as simple as assigning a potter to the task of coming up with a model for the next production run.

Wedgwood now had to find artists who could design in styles that would appeal to the taste of his customers and he recognised that his customers' taste differed considerably from the taste of his local workforce. Wedgwood had to look for modellers from outside the local pottery industry as he had difficulty with local modellers who found it hard to break away from designing in the way they had been taught and because as Forty says, these "provincial craftsmen from the working class" were unfamiliar with the fashionable styles of the time.²⁹ Forty also notes that Wedgwood found the artistic independence of the imported artist-modellers disruptive of the discipline and standards of work he was trying to enforce.

This reinforced Wedgwood's resolve to commission designs from freelance artists from outside his pottery rather than directly employ them at his pottery.³⁰ When Wedgwood introduced the design stage to his factory system he effectively disconnected the artisan from the process of making. This disconnection of the artist from the process was central to Ruskin's critique of the factory system and was an issue that would be taken up later by the Arts and Crafts Movement in their argument about the importance of the autonomy of the artist.

Wedgwood and the Neoclassical style

Wedgwood's use of the Neoclassical style in his pottery is tied up with his relationship with friend, associate and eventual business partner Thomas Bentley, a pottery merchant who exported to the British colonies of America and the West Indies.³¹ In 1764 Bentley established a firm in Liverpool selling and exporting ceramics including Wedgwood wares and in 1769 Wedgwood and

²⁹ Ibid. p 35.

³⁰ Ibid. p 36.

³¹ Ibid. p 22.

Bentley went into partnership to produce ornamental wares.³² The partnership was a practical arrangement that meant Bentley's firm became Wedgwood's agent, managing his sales and shipments of clay, while Wedgwood in return acted as an agent to purchase pottery that he was unable to supply from his own factory.³³

This partnership effectively gave Wedgwood's pottery a financial return from the success of his competitors and at the same time ensured that Wedgwood continued to be represented in the marketplace by Bentley's firm. The relationship also gave Bentley direct influence on the design of the products that Wedgwood's factory would make for his firm to sell. Under this arrangement Wedgwood's factory would continue to produce products for everyday use and the Wedgwood Bentley partnership would focus on an emerging market for ornamental pottery.

Wedgwood's friendship and business partnership with Bentley brought new social connections as well as a cultured advisor who would be an invaluable guide to the changes in fashion taking place in Europe.³⁴ Bentley had recognised a market for Neoclassical styled ornaments for contemporary furnishing at a time when it was becoming fashionable to decorate domestic interiors with furnishings and furniture that referenced the antique. With genuine antique sculptures and vases in short supply, Forty credits Bentley with being the first to see that the Neoclassical style that had not previously been applied to pottery might be suitable inspiration for the production of ornamental ceramics.³⁵ This combination of ceramics and Neoclassical style under Wedgwood and Bentley led to new designs for familiar objects and a new range of products suitable for embellishment of Neoclassical interiors.³⁶ Forty says Wedgwood's adoption of the Neoclassical style transformed him from successful potter into a leader of avant-garde taste.³⁷ See *figure 1*, Wedgwood's *Homer vase*, a blue jasper

³² Reilly, *Josiah Wedgwood 1730-1795* p 62.

³³ *Ibid.* p 63.

³⁴ Forty, *Objects of Desire: Design and Society, 1750-1980*. p 22.

³⁵ *Ibid.* p 23.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ *Ibid.*

stoneware work, typical of Wedgwood's application of the Neoclassical style to decorative objects.

To demonstrate taste in the eighteenth century was to show an appreciation for the latest fashionable style.³⁸ Taste was also linked to social standing in the hierarchy of social classes and reflected in the ability to appreciate and articulate views on classical sculpture.³⁹ Reference to classical themes represented a return to truth and purity in art that reflected the intellectual authority of classical studies of ancient Greece and Rome. Anyone educated at the time would have been schooled with Greek and Latin texts and educated young men of the nineteenth century and later, young well-to-do English women, would also have been exposed to classical antiquities on the popular rite of passage into English high society, the grand tour.⁴⁰

Accompanied by a guide or tutor, the grand tour would visit significant cities and cultural places of Europe, in order that the tourist immerse themselves in works of classical antiquity and the Renaissance. An important destination would have been a pilgrimage to the archaeological dig at the site of the recently rediscovered Roman towns of Herculaneum and Pompeii. Collecting classical antiques was an important part of the grand tour and collections were handed down through aristocratic families.

Wedgwood's customers were comfortable with objects in the classical style and the taste for consumer goods that made reference to the antique was to become popular with a growing merchant class who aspired to aristocratic taste.⁴¹ However, while objects in the Neoclassical style had much appeal to the middle and upper classes whose self-identity was linked to their taste in fashionable consumer goods, ultimately, the success of using the Neoclassical style to reach this market was tied to winning aristocratic approval. Wedgwood and Bentley like other manufacturers feted the nobility with gifts of their wares but Richards

³⁸ Richards, *Eighteenth-Century Ceramics: Products for a Civilised Society*. p 38

³⁹ *Ibid.* p 204

⁴⁰ Lucie-Smith p 192

⁴¹ Richards, *Eighteenth-Century Ceramics: Products for a Civilised Society*. Richards gives Wedgwood credit for spreading the popularity of ceramics in the neoclassical style 'outside elite circles'. p 204

says Wedgwood was more successful than his contemporaries in gaining the interest of the nobility because he used his aristocratic contacts to gain access to their collections of classical antiques to study and replicate.⁴²

Wedgwood was very interested in reviving the techniques used to produce classical antiques and had tested pieces of ancient pottery with his pyrometer to discover the temperatures used to fire ancient works. However, new technical innovations by Wedgwood that mimicked antique techniques were described as the rediscovery of ancient technique in order to preserve the aim of those using the Neoclassical style, that of improving on the antique rather than the creation of a copy. By entering into what Richards calls a “flattering collaboration” with the wealthy owners of antique works Wedgwood was both confirming the good taste of the owners of these antique collections and gaining authenticity for his technical innovations.⁴³

The Portland Vase

Perhaps the best known of Wedgwood’s classical recreations is his replica of the Portland Vase, a first century BC Roman cameo glass vase named after one of its owners, the 3rd Duke of Portland.⁴⁴ Wedgwood spent four years duplicating the vase in jasperware and made a number of different versions. See *figure 2*.

The Roman Portland Vase is an interesting ancient artifact with a rich history. Its origins demonstrate the virtuosity of ancient Roman glass blowing techniques and the limited success of modern attempts to replicate the vessel reinforce this. It is also remarkable that it still exists in modern times considering its provenance. The vase was damaged and repaired in antiquity, collected by nobility in renaissance times, passed on as wealthy family heirloom and damaged again in modern times.⁴⁵

⁴² Ibid. p 38

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ The Portland vase is so ingrained into the Wedgwood myth that an outline image of the vase is incorporated in the modern Wedgwood backstamp.

http://www.wedgwoodmuseum.org.uk/learning/discovery_packs/2179/pack/2184/chapter/2342 accessed Friday, November 13, 2009.

⁴⁵ Reilly, *Josiah Wedgwood 1730-1795* P 327.

Comparing the original Roman glass vase with one of the first (black) jasper versions made by Wedgwood illustrates Wedgwood's fear that his jasper bas-relief might not emulate the subtlety of the original cameo-glass, was well founded.⁴⁶ Wedgwood had set himself quite a task; even in a photograph it is evident that the cameo work of the original is exceptional. In contrast, the figures in the mythological scenes rendered in bas-relief on Wedgwood's Portland Vase lack the athletic liveliness of the original. Of course Wedgwood's technique to replicate the light and shade of the cameo-glass using a thin black wash over the white jasper ware was always going to be a difficult way to emulate the transparency of glass.⁴⁷

Wedgwood saw success in creating objects that looked as if they came from another time. His most famous technical innovations, the black basalt and jasper ceramic bodies that he invented, were aimed at capturing the style of ancient artifacts that were originally made of glass, metal or stone. Wedgwood's perfect materials also left no indication of the artisan's touch.

Ruskin on the other hand, saw the Neoclassical style as opposite to an honest approach to making objects. For Ruskin the honest approach was one that valued the idiosyncratic input of the individual craftsman. This craftsman, in Ruskin's mind, was a person who was connected to the materials and skills of their craft by the desire to show their respect for God. Ruskin saw these values in the vernacular architecture of Britain, architecture known as the Gothic style.

Ruskin's Gothic as a critique of Neoclassicism

Wedgwood embraced the possibilities inherent in the division of labour and his mass production techniques coupled with a style that drew its inspiration from the ancient classics was an important element to his commercial and artistic success. For Wedgwood objects in the Neoclassical style were a marketing opportunity and key to meeting the expectations of popular taste of the time.

⁴⁶ Ibid. p 319.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

Ruskin on the other hand observed that the division of labour that was part of the factory system disconnected the worker from the creative process of crafting objects and therefore from the virtue inherent in honest labour. Ruskin's critique of the Neoclassical style is an allegory in which the rationalism imposed by the Neoclassical style on the individual craftsman mirrors the way the division of labour of the factory system disconnects the individual craftsman from the making process. For Ruskin the Neoclassical pursuit of perfection required that building workers, and by analogy, factory workers, become virtual slaves with the result that their work will be of a lower standard rather than the work of the free worker. Ruskin puts it this way in "The Nature of Gothic",

It seems a fantastic paradox, but it is nevertheless a most important truth, that no Architecture can be truly noble which is *not* imperfect. And this is easily demonstrable. For since the architect cannot execute the whole with his own hands, he must either make slaves of his workmen in the old Greek, and present English fashion, and level his work to a slave's capacities, which is to degrade it; or else he must take his workmen as he finds them, and let them show their weakness together with their strength, which will involve the Gothic imperfection, but render the whole work as noble as the intellect of the age can make it.⁴⁸

Ruskin was strongly influenced by Pugin's ideas and he expanded on Pugin's argument adapting it to architecture as a whole. Ruskin pitched Gothic against Neoclassicism and contrasted the Gothic reverence for nature and natural forms, the same moral truths Ruskin sought in art, with what he saw as the morally empty repressive standardisation of classical architecture. Ruskin's Gothic was an aesthetic of imperfection in contrast to the aesthetic of Neoclassicism, which was about perfection. Neoclassicism was about appearance and surface while the Gothic could embody man's love of God. For Ruskin, Gothic represented spirituality and morality, both in terms of the way in which a thing was made and

⁴⁸ Ruskin, "The Nature of Gothic." p 120 - 121.

the way in which it was used. In Ruskin's aesthetic the idea of the ethical object begins to emerge.

Ruskin observed qualities in British vernacular architecture that had evolved from the use of local materials and methods of building that reflected the local environment. In other words, a true British architecture, exemplified particularly in Gothic architecture, was rooted in local culture. For Ruskin this architecture had a savageness that reflected the harsh climate and the pragmatism of the labour that toiled in the tough conditions. While this savageness or crudeness was the very quality cited by supporters of the classical style in their criticism of the Gothic, Ruskin says it caused him an emotional response akin to his experiences of the sublime beauty of the natural world.⁴⁹

For Ruskin the noble character of the Gothic was underpinned by serious religious commitment.⁵⁰ Ruskin argued that the interpretation of Gothic style relied on appreciating that the artisans who worked on the building were able to express their religious conviction in their individual contribution to the construction and materials of a building. It was important that the touch of the individual, working with others as a community, was evident. In other words, the roughness of Gothic architecture was evidence of the artisan's labour and demonstrated that they were fully engaged with the process of making an object that in a pious way showed the artisan's love of God. This was in contrast to the Neoclassical ideal of perfection where the hand of the maker and the intrinsic quality of the materials were disguised in order to create a surface or illusion. Ruskin saw this pursuit of perfection as the designer setting themselves up as God. Building on Pugin's argument that Gothic was the true expression of humankind's love of God and that Neoclassicism represented a pagan way of worship, Ruskin had tied aesthetics to morality and would have a lasting influence on the way critics of the factory system were to view the issue from now on.

⁴⁹ Robert. Hewison, *John Ruskin: The Argument of the Eye* (London: Thames And Hudson, 1976). p 16.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

Ruskin and Pugin

Ruskin's theories about Gothic architecture owed a great deal to Augustus Welby Northmore Pugin, English architect, designer, and design theorist, now best remembered for his work in the Gothic Revival style, particularly churches and the Palace of Westminster. Pugin had already argued that Gothic architecture applied to the design of churches was the true Christian form of architecture.⁵¹ He attacked the influence of Classical architecture in his book *Contrasts*, in which he set up medieval society as an ideal, in contrast to modern secular culture.⁵² In his book, Pugin set out to prove that the Gothic style of architecture was the only one appropriate for a Christian country to adopt. Classical architecture, he argued, was irredeemably pagan and unsuited to express Christian social values. Pugin's problem with the Neoclassical stems from his awareness of the origins of the popular Neoclassical style of architecture of the time were based on the symmetry, perspective and values of the formal classical temple architecture of the Ancient Greeks and Romans. This style of architecture was made popular through the study of buildings designed by the Venetian architect Andrea Palladio (1508–1580). For Pugin, Palladio's ideals were too pagan for Protestant and Anglo-Catholic worship.

Pugin also rallied against the artifice of the Victorian taste for decoration by arguing for architecture where the smallest detail served a purpose and the choice of construction methods depended on the materials used. Fitness for purpose was one of Pugin's arguments and was central to his ideas that he had published as his three rules for architecture, "structural honesty, originality in design, and use of regional materials or character".⁵³ Pugin's ideas about honesty and structural truth in domestic architecture were a reaction to what he saw as the falseness of stylistic revivals. While Pugin was somewhat of a lone voice at

⁵¹ Phoebe B Stanton, *Pugin* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1971).

⁵² *Ibid.* p 243.

⁵³ Elizabeth Cumming, *The Arts and Crafts Movement*, World of Art (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1991). p 32.

the time in expressing these ideas, Pevsner points out that these ideas were a direct continuation of French seventeenth and eighteenth century rationalism.⁵⁴

During the time when responses to both increasing industrialisation and the beginnings of mass consumption were evolving, Lucie-Smith describes Pugin as the point when contemporary industrial design and the crafts movement as separate identities began to emerge with Ruskin as the “true prophet” of the crafts movement.⁵⁵ The Gothic for Pugin was a moral force that could reform the confused mix of styles being used to produce the factory production of the day. Whilst both the Gothic and Neoclassicism had been used to invest contemporary objects with meaning it was Ruskin’s interpretation of the Gothic artisan that would strike a chord with William Morris, and the Arts and Crafts Movement, who would put his ideas into practice.

William Morris and the Arts and Crafts Movement

If William Morris and the members of the Arts and Crafts Movement were concerned with the working conditions of those who laboured in the coalmines and factories, their fears were well founded. While the industrial revolution had brought wealth for the emerging industrial class the working conditions for their factory workers were difficult, dangerous and poorly paid. Children as young as six years old worked 13-hour days in dangerous situations in cotton mills simply in return for their board and lodging.⁵⁶ In addition to their working conditions, unregulated expansion of industry and the workhouses that had sprung up to house the workers brought with it the dangers of disease with the life expectancy of workers living in the slums in centres of industry being significantly shorter than for people living in rural areas.⁵⁷ The encroachment of workhouses into the genteel urban centres was also an issue for the landed gentry who also had residences in the city as industrialisation began to have a visual (and malodorous) impact on the landscape.

⁵⁴ Nikolaus Pevsner, *The Sources of Modern Architecture and Design* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1968). p 9.

⁵⁵ Lucie-Smith, *The Story of Craft: The Craftman’s Role in Society*. p 208.

⁵⁶ F. D. (Francis Donald) Klingender, *Art and the Industrial Revolution* (London: Paladin, 1972). p 98.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.* p 143.

For Morris the working conditions of the new factory system paid no respect to the individual artisan and their skill, and this explained why the production from these factories was in his view poorly designed and made.⁵⁸ While Morris was among the early socialists who had concerns for the working conditions of factory workers, his main interest lay in reforming the way objects were made in order to restore “a new and positive moral value” to everyday objects.⁵⁹ For the Arts and Crafts Movement machine-made products were dishonest, both in retaining the forms and ornament associated with the craft traditions they had displaced and because mechanisation had replaced the experience of crafting with mechanical work. While Morris was committed to reviving artisanship and traditional methods he did however reconcile the use of mechanisation in the production of his designs. Morris’ socialist leanings allowed him to identify that it was capitalism rather than machinery that was the problem with industrialisation.⁶⁰ Morris & Co. used machines to relieve the monotony of production where the quality and aesthetic outcome could be maintained, and indeed when a pragmatic approach to business was required.

At the centre of the Arts and Crafts aesthetic was the desire to reunite the artist and artisan. The replacement of the individual craftsman went to the heart of all that was bad with the factory system and it was this separation they felt stood in the way of quality production. The division of labour inherent in the factory system had disengaged the craftsman from the making process. The solution to this for the Arts and Crafts Movement was to give back control of the process to the craftsman who would now find pleasure in making which would result in good work.⁶¹ Craft production could recreate the situation where the designer, the person who decided what a product should look like, was also the maker of

⁵⁸ Nikolaus Pevsner, *Pioneers of Modern Design: From William Morris to Walter Gropius* (Ringwood, Vic: Penguin, 1975). p 45.

⁵⁹ Tillyard, *The Impact of Modernism, 1900-1920: Early Modernism and the Arts and Crafts Movement in Edwardian England*. p 9.

⁶⁰ Forty, *Objects of Desire: Design and Society, 1750-1980*. p 61.

⁶¹ Tillyard, *The Impact of Modernism, 1900-1920: Early Modernism and the Arts and Crafts Movement in Edwardian England*. p 1.

the object. The effect of reuniting art and craft would be to influence taste and elevate the position of the craftsman in society.⁶²

For the Arts and Crafts Movement the return of the craftsman to a position of control over the making process took on a moral dimension. The goal of craft production was the well-made thing, and working with this goal in mind could invest both the maker and the product with moral value. This moral value could also extend to the consumer. The feeling of moral well-being that could be gained by engaged in handicraft was tied up in ideas about moral worth and self improvement as the Arts and Crafts Movement elevated the craft object, particularly for amateur producers, from the product of a pastime to art-object. Makers and consumers could feel that they were participating in a virtuous way of life.⁶³ The Arts and Crafts movement added a further moral distinction between hand-made and factory production with the association of handicraft and a rural way of life, and with it, the association of the factory and the machine with the city. The rural way of life was associated with spontaneity and expressiveness and conversely the city - and machine - based life was rigid and inhumane.⁶⁴

Nature as a source of inspiration

The driving force for Morris was the potential for reform of the design of objects of everyday use that was afforded the designer maker. Embracing Ruskin's ideas about labour and in particular his argument that honest labour be valued as it once was, Morris set about to learn the hand skills of the crafts in order that as a designer he might gain a better understanding of the materials he would be using. Morris combined this with a desire to inform his designs with natural beauty in a way that was consistent with Ruskin's aesthetic that drew on nature without attempting to imitate it. Morris' success is not only in his desire to understand the craft processes used in making the objects he designed but in his skill as a pattern designer. His way of using nature as inspiration would have a lasting influence on craft's approach to design. Pevsner describes Morris as

⁶² Ibid. p 10.

⁶³ Ibid. p 9.

⁶⁴ Ibid. p 16.

succeeding better than anyone before or after in achieving a balance between nature and style, between the flatness required for textiles and faithful interpretation of flowers and leaves.⁶⁵

The anonymous craftsperson

Morris' desire to return to a preindustrial way of working that drew on a romantic medieval ideal informed many of the furniture designs produced by Morris and Co. The influence of the vernacular, local and traditional designs have become a lasting legacy of Arts and Crafts ideals. An example of this influence is one of the most recognisable and popular works by Morris and Co. a chair that has come to be known as the *Morris chair*, even when copied by other designers.⁶⁶ See *figure 3*.

The construction of the *Morris chair* is honest and unencumbered by any decoration that might disguise the method of its manufacture and is a good example of the Arts and Crafts idea of truth to materials. Compared to furniture of the Victorian period this chair is purposeful and functional. The design of the chair clearly shows the structure of the chair, the upholstery does not hide the ebonized wood, and the upholstery is there for a purpose, at the points where the sitter comes in contact with the chair. Rather than hiding the mechanism for adjusting the back of the chair, the turned knob and corresponding holes make its function obvious. The chair's design, while attributed to Webb, is clearly based on the sort of designs that would have been produced in traditional cottage workshops of the time. Webb's turned finials and 'string of beads' details point to a medieval craft influence.⁶⁷ Like much of the design of Morris and Co. these visual references pay homage to the anonymous craftsperson of Ruskin's medieval Gothic ideal.

The example of the Morris chair, *Adjustable-back chair*, in the Art Gallery of South Australia is upholstered in *Bird*, a woven wool fabric designed by William Morris.

⁶⁵ Ibid. p 27.

⁶⁶ Christopher Menz, *Morris & Co.* (Adelaide: Art Gallery of South Australia, 2002). p 87.

⁶⁷ Isabelle Anscombe, *Arts & Crafts in Britain and America* (London: Academy Editions, 1978). Anscombe describes the 'solidity' of 'Webb's mediaevalising manner'. p 63

This fabric demonstrates his knowledge of the technical properties of textiles that enabled him to take advantage of self patterned woven fabrics.⁶⁸ The fabric reinforces Morris' belief that the designer should have an intimate understanding of the process in order to design for that process. While *Bird* is a woven fabric, this kind of fabric, damask, has an embroidered effect reflecting Morris' earliest craft interest in embroidery. Morris' skill with pattern is the key to his idea that wallpapers and textile designs, tapestries, carpets and woven fabrics could all be used to visually link the furniture and the room together.

The William Morris integrated interior

Morris' lasting legacy is the idea of the house and its contents as a wholly integrated work of art. In the Morris interior the furniture, wall coverings, cutlery etc were drawn together by a unified design language and by the commitment to making based on traditional handmade techniques. An important step in the development of Morris' interior design ideas is the house he commissioned Webb to design for his family home. Morris had known Webb from his time as apprentice to the architect G.E. Street who had been an early influence on both men. Street was particularly experienced in the traditional building crafts and believed in an interdisciplinary approach to architecture where the architect had practical understanding of the crafts used in building construction such as blacksmithing and stained glass.⁶⁹ The house designed by Webb was Morris' first home and a chance for Morris to put into action his ideas stimulated by his desire to furnish his rooms in London with his own designs. As well as designing the building that would become known as the Red House, Webb designed many of the interior fittings and furniture. Morris and his friends contributed murals, embroidered wall hangings and utensils, and Morris also designed the garden.

The Red House

The Red House took its name from the use of exposed red brick. Pevsner describes the Red House as "daring in many ways" pointing in particular to the

⁶⁸ Menz, *Morris & Co.* p 43.

⁶⁹ Cumming, *The Arts and Crafts Movement.* p 15.

red brick, without a coat of stucco, and the way that the outside of the building reflected the interior construction.⁷⁰ For Pevsner the most revolutionary detail, and one that he says was the most forward looking, was the fireplace with its lack of period decoration and the visual cues to its function in the plain brick courses that are horizontal where the logs are laid and vertical where the smoke rises.⁷¹ The Red House was the impetus for Morris to launch into business as provider of furniture and objects for the interior that would harmonize building, interior and everyday domestic objects. Morris' aim was to reform the Victorian style of the time, which was to decorate with an eclectic collection of objects of all styles, and his integrated interior can be seen as the precursor to the modern interior.

Wightwick Manor

An important surviving domestic building of the Victorian era is Wightwick Manor. Built for paint manufacturer Theodore Mander between 1887 and 1889 and designed by Architect Edward Ould, Wightwick is not strictly an Arts and Crafts building as its design does not follow the arts and crafts principle of truth to materials, in particular its use of timber framing as a veneer over the brick construction is an imitation of the vernacular style of the area.⁷² Wightwick Manor is however, an important example of the influence Morris had on prosperous upper middleclass families. While Morris and Co. did not undertake the interior design of Wightwick Manor it is decorated with Morris wallpapers fabrics, furniture and fittings that the Manders would have chosen themselves from Morris' store, or from catalogues.⁷³ The drawing room for instance follows Morris and Co.'s own practice of using a panelled dado with a Morris pattern above and a molded plaster frieze and ceiling while the furnishing also followed William Morris' practice of mixing his own work with antique furniture, old tapestries, and oriental rugs and porcelain.⁷⁴ The Manor features a variety of tiles

⁷⁰ Pevsner, *The Sources of Modern Architecture and Design*. p 9.

⁷¹ *Ibid.* p 23.

⁷² Stephen Ponder, "The Morris and De Morgan Collections at Wightwick Manor," *Journal of the William Morris Society* VIII, no. 2, Spring (1987). p 2.

⁷³ *Ibid.* p 2.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

by Morris' friend potter William De Morgan. The library contains books typical of the period and also volumes from Morris' Kelmscott press.⁷⁵ Ponder points out that Wightwick Manor is richly decorated in a manner typical of Morris and Co's early style and is different from the lighter and simpler style of later Morris and Co.⁷⁶

The recreation of Morris' design philosophy at Wightwick Manor reflects the owner's deep knowledge and respect for the ideas of Ruskin and Morris. Ponder says Theodore Mander had read Ruskin and points out that a quotation from *Modern Painters* is carved in the panelling above the Drawing Room fireplace.⁷⁷ The enlightened industrialists and progressive aristocrats, like Mander, who had benefited from their participation in the industrial revolution were keen to demonstrate Morris' idea that it was a matter of social conscience that the objects of everyday use should be valued.⁷⁸ Their knowledge of Ruskin reinforced this. In particular Ruskin had argued in *The Seven Lamps of Architecture* that architecture could have a positive effect on the human spirit.⁷⁹ In the chapter "The Lamp of Memory", Ruskin casts the connoisseurship involved in the creation of Morris' home beautiful as a moral duty, a duty that Ruskin says is, "to build our dwellings with care, and patience, and fondness".⁸⁰ For Ruskin, "Our God is a household God, as well as a heavenly one; He has an altar in every man's dwelling".⁸¹

It is easy to see how an educated middle class with new wealth from industrial enterprises perhaps wanted to distance themselves from the social and environmental problems that the source of their wealth brought with it. One way to do this that was consistent with these Victorian middle class values was to return to a rural setting and practice Ruskin and Morris' ideas of living an

⁷⁵ Ibid. p 6.

⁷⁶ Ibid. p 4.

⁷⁷ Ibid. p 2.

⁷⁸ Pevsner, *The Sources of Modern Architecture and Design*. p 28.

⁷⁹ John Ruskin, *The Seven Lamps of Architecture*, ed. introduction by Andrew Saint, National Trust Classics (London: Century, 1988). p 8.

⁸⁰ Ibid. p 181.

⁸¹ Ibid.

honorable and contented life, surrounded by objects that demonstrate the conduct of a virtuous life.

By the time Wightwick Manor was fitted out the Arts and Crafts 'style' had become fashionable and objects created in this style were being made using factory methods for the new department stores such as Liberty, Waring and Gillow, and Heal's ("Heal and Son Ltd").⁸² Ironically, this paralleled in many respects Wedgwood's earlier exploitation of the middle class vogue for Neoclassical objects as a way to demonstrate their newly acquired education and taste.

The decline of the Arts and Crafts Movement

For its founding members, the Arts and Crafts Movement's commercial success was to be short lived and the period of greatest prosperity for the movement was between 1890 and 1905. Morris' disciple Charles Robert Ashbee for example, who had set up his own Guild and School of Handicraft in 1888, went out of business in 1907.⁸³ The decline of the Arts and Crafts Movement came at a time when growth in incomes of the middle class began to slow while competition from amateur producers and high costs of production for professional practitioners made Arts and Crafts objects less desirable. A changing focus for social reformers also meant that those involved in Arts and Crafts began to see politics and handcraft as separate activities.⁸⁴

In spite of the Movement's short-lived success as an alternative to factory production, the influence of Arts and Crafts Movement ideals live on in twentieth century craft. Indeed, Greenhalgh credits the Arts and Crafts Movement with bringing together the ideological and intellectual underpinnings that form the concept of craft as it has existed throughout the twentieth century.⁸⁵

⁸² Tillyard, *The Impact of Modernism, 1900-1920: Early Modernism and the Arts and Crafts Movement in Edwardian England*. p 11.

⁸³ Ibid. p 3.

⁸⁴ Ibid. p 39

⁸⁵ Paul Greenhalgh, "The History of Craft," in *The Culture of Craft: Status and Future*, ed. Peter Dormer (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997). p 25.

Toward the end of the popularity of the Arts and Crafts Movement a reassessment of the factory system had begun, assisted by the newly emerging profession of the industrial designer. While the Arts and Crafts Movement had been unable to sustain its success it did however influence groups in other European countries who would take up what they saw as the challenge of integrating the arts with industry. Pevsner notes that after Morris' death ideas that formed the beginnings of the Modern Movement, informed by Morris' ideas, moved to the Continent and the United States, and that Germany became a centre of progress. Pevsner credits Otto Wagner, Adolf Loos, Louis Sullivan, Frank Lloyd Wright and Henri van de Velde as the first architects to admire the machine and to understand its essential character.⁸⁶

Chapter conclusion

In spite of Morris' success in reforming the design of the domestic interior, critics of the Arts and Crafts Movement point out that while the movements' aim was to distance itself from the eclectic design of industrial production of the time there are few visual qualities that could be called typical of the Arts and Crafts style. The artist-craftsperson of the movement drew on inspiration from different eras and cultures, and in this way the style of the Arts and Crafts movement differed little from other design of the time.⁸⁷ However, the lasting influence of the Arts and Crafts Movement, and one that would be carried into modern times by the studio crafts movement would be the values tied up in the ideas of truth to materials, the vernacular, the anonymous craftsperson and nature as a source of inspiration, ideas linked to the notion of the ethical object.

Morris' ideal of a holistic approach to design and manufacture, with its focus on attempting to understand, and challenge the aesthetic, social and environmental context for making objects, would be taken on by the studio crafts.⁸⁸ Morris brought a conscious critique of local methods and the social history of the countryside based on first hand study and collaboration with traditional crafts.

⁸⁶ Pevsner, *Pioneers of Modern Design: From William Morris to Walter Gropius* p 27.

⁸⁷ Alan Crawford, "The Arts and Crafts Movement in Context," in *The Decorative Arts in the Victorian Period*, ed. Susan M Wright (London: Society of Antiquaries of London, 1989). p 95.

⁸⁸ Fiell, *William Morris, 1834-1896*. Fiell calls this 'his greatest legacy'. p 52.

While his idea of a return to a rural existence and handcraft as an alternative to factory production persists, it is his ideas of the supremacy of utility over luxury, of the moral responsibility of designers and manufacturers to produce objects of quality, and of the use of design as a democratic tool for social change that would also inspire the foundation of craft-based workshops such as the Wiener Werkstätte, the Deutsche Werkbund and the Bauhaus.⁸⁹

In the next chapter I will trace the ways in which the values of the Arts and Crafts Movement are carried through into the practice of the studio crafts in the twentieth century, focusing on Bernard Leach's influence on ceramic practice through *A Potters Book*, which was to have a profound influence on the studio crafts movement in the period following the Second World War and into contemporary times.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

Chapter two: craft in the twentieth century

Chapter introduction

The philosophies of the Arts and Crafts Movement have proved extraordinarily flexible, versatile and influential. Not only were aspects of Morris' ideas adapted by the Modern Movement as a foundation for a new aesthetic governed by the machine, but the influence of the Arts and Crafts Movement on art education ensured that these ideas formed a new generation of early twentieth century artists and educators as well. This fact alone would be enough to explain the way in which the values associated with hand making have formed the core business of the studio craft movement for much of the twentieth century. However, certain ideas at the heart of Arts and Crafts philosophies lent themselves to reworking and reinvention in ways that made them freshly relevant to successive generations of artisans. Ideas about truth to materials, the vernacular, the anonymous craftsperson and nature as a source of inspiration were able to be co-opted across cultures and for a variety of purposes.

This chapter explores the way in which these ideas, which form such an important aspect of Arts and Crafts philosophies, were co-opted and adapted by Bernard Leach in his influential text *A Potter's Book*.⁹⁰ This book influenced a generation of potters in the period between its publication in 1940 and the early 1970s, and the popularity of pottery at both an amateur and professional level during this period ensured that it was one of the most vigorous and prolific practices in the emerging studio crafts movement. In this chapter, I will investigate the way in which Leach and his Japanese associates brought Arts and Crafts philosophies into a dynamic engagement with Zen Buddhism and the traditions of Japanese pottery making in a complex intercultural exchange.

As Watson points out Leach was not the first studio potter nor the first influenced by mediaeval British earthenware or oriental stoneware but his contribution to pottery as a studio craft was "his powerful proselytising for

⁹⁰ Leach, *A Potter's Book*.

pottery as an ethical craft”.⁹¹ To paraphrase Watson, Leach’s ethical potters were self-sufficient artisans who dug their own clay, fired with wood rather than gas and made useful wares for a local community.⁹² Leach contrasted his functional and handmade wares with both mass-produced ceramics and the art-craft pot. The art-craft pot with its aspirations of acceptance in the art world alongside painting and sculpture, was an idea that emerged alongside Leach’s utilitarian approach to potting. The art-craft pot was a work where function is set aside as primary criterion allowing the utilitarian object to be sold for its aesthetic value.⁹³

In his study of the influence of Bernard Leach on Australian ceramics, Damon Moon says that the opinions and attitudes in *A Potter’s Book* “were formed in a different world to the one in which we now live”.⁹⁴ As Moon points out Leach’s career starts with his art school days in Edwardian times and finishes in the 1980s. Leach was well aware of the ideas of William Morris and it is clear his philosophy is strongly influenced by Ruskin’s ideas. Leach’s criteria for a good pot resonates with Ruskin’s ideas of the Gothic cathedral, grounded in the toil of the anonymous craftsperson using local materials and drawing on nature for inspiration. As with Ruskin’s cathedral, imperfection signals a lack of ego and an understanding that the spirit of the maker is embedded in the object.

It would be simplistic however to view Leach as a direct conduit between the crafts of the twentieth century and Ruskin and the Arts and Crafts Movement of the nineteenth century. It was Leach’s discovery of pottery as his medium of artistic expression and learning the craft in Japan that would colour his interpretation of Arts and Crafts values.

⁹¹ Oliver Watson, *Studio Pottery: Twentieth Century British Ceramics in the Victoria and Albert Museum Collection*, 1st paperback ed. ed. (London: Phaidon in association with the Victoria and Albert Museum, 1993). p 18.

⁹² Ibid. p 25.

⁹³ Peter Dormer, *The Meanings of Modern Design: Towards the Twenty-First Century* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1990). p 148.

⁹⁴ Damon Moon, *In the Beginning Was the Word: Bernard Leach and Australian Studio Pottery from 1940-1964* (2006). p xv. Unpublished PhD thesis.

Specifically, what Leach brought to the problem, as he saw it, of the separation of head, heart and hand, was his experience of traditional Japanese pottery and the selfless humility of Zen Buddhism.⁹⁵

Leach developed his interpretation of Morris' Arts and Crafts values during his time as an artist in Japan. This interpretation was as much informed by his knowledge of Morris and the Arts and Crafts Movement as it was by the application of Morris' ideas to traditional Japanese crafts by his Japanese collaborators. These values were augmented and supported by references to the aesthetics of Zen Buddhism and to the unassuming peasant pottery favored for use in the traditional Japanese tea ceremony. Leach's introduction to the traditional pottery technique of Raku brought Arts and Crafts philosophies into a dynamic engagement with Zen Buddhism and the traditions of Japanese pottery making, in a complex intercultural exchange. Leach was able to connect these Eastern ideals, in particular the role of handmaking, the idea of the anonymous craftsman and the integration of the handmade object into everyday life, with the values of the Arts and Crafts Movement. Leach's experience in Japan was central to the development of the ideas he would later espouse in his book, *A Pottery Book*, and it is this experience and the development of his relationships with the artists and thinkers that he met in Japan that is examined in the next section of this chapter.

Bernard Leach in Japan

In his autobiography, *Beyond East and West: Memoirs, Portraits, and Essays*, Bernard Leach makes much of the inevitability of his career as an artist and his return to the East to further his interest in Eastern art.⁹⁶ Leach was born to British expatriates in Hong Kong in 1887, and he lived in both Hong Kong and Japan until he was ten years old when he was sent to England to attend Beaumont Jesuit College in Windsor. Leach emphasises in his memoirs the influence of his colonial upbringing in the East as an only child and the effect of

⁹⁵ Watson, *Studio Pottery: Twentieth Century British Ceramics in the Victoria and Albert Museum Collection*. p 15.

⁹⁶ Bernard Leach, *Beyond East and West: Memoirs, Portraits, and Essays* (London: Faber and Faber, 1985).

his early schooling at Beaumont, both of which he believed had an effect on his whole life. At the London School of Art Leach had met a young Japanese student, Kotaro Takamura, who was able to give him an introduction to his father, a sculptor in the Imperial household and in 1909 Leach sailed for Japan, complete with his etching press and a plan to earn a living teaching etching.

Leach and the Shirakaba

Arriving in Japan, Leach soon established himself within a community of intellectuals hungry for information about the Western art world. Interest in Western art was great, yet the Japanese at this time had little exposure to contemporary examples apart from occasional exhibitions and images reprinted in magazines. With his connection to the Western art world and a great but somewhat naive self confidence, Leach launched himself as writer, lecturer and teacher and was soon part of a group of Japanese art cognoscenti known as the Shirakaba or the 'White Birch' movement. The Shirakaba were a small group of affluent artists, intellectuals and poets and Leach describes their aim as the absorption of Western culture and the search for truth and beauty in art.⁹⁷ Members of the Shirakaba opposed militarism and aristocratic feudalism and followed Tolstoy's principles of non-violent resistance and individualism.⁹⁸

Leach had much in common with the members of the Shirakaba and he was to have an important influence over how the members of the Shirakaba were to interpret Western art. British potter and critic Edmund de Waal describes the members of the Shirakaba as, "privileged young men of the same mould as Leach: passionate, discursive and often enthusiastically muddled".⁹⁹ Interestingly, echoing Morris' concerns with the effects of the industrial revolution, de Waal points out that the Shirakaba saw themselves as a counterbalance to Japan's version of the industrial revolution in the period between 1868 and 1912, the

⁹⁷ Ibid. p 74.

⁹⁸ Yuko Kikuchi, "The Myth of Yanagi's Originality: The Formation of 'Mingei' Theory in Its Social and Historical Context," *Journal of Design History* 7, no. 4 (1994). p 249.

⁹⁹ Edmund de Waal, *Bernard Leach* (London: Tate Gallery Publishing, 1997). p 9.

Meiji Era, when Japan was opened up to the West and experienced rapid modernisation.¹⁰⁰

Of the members of the Shirakaba, two were to have a profound and lasting influence on Leach. These were Sōetsu Yanagi (1889-1961), and Tomimoto Kenkichi.¹⁰¹ Sōetsu Yanagi encouraged Leach's philosophical ambitions and was to become a kind of co-conspirator in the development of Leach's ideas on what makes a good pot, a quality that Leach believed was tied to the character of the potter. Tomimoto Kenkichi on the other hand was a practicing artist whose skills Leach admired, and whom de Waal says "opened the door to his growth as an artist".¹⁰²

Sōetsu Yanagi

Leach describes Yanagi as the central figure in the Shirakaba movement, a Japanese philosopher who would become a lifelong friend of Leach and go on to found the mingei (folk craft) movement in Japan in the late nineteen-twenties and nineteen-thirties.¹⁰³ Yanagi was the author of *The unknown craftsman: a Japanese insight into beauty*, which Leach later translated into English, a book that was Yanagi's interpretation of the Japanese way of viewing and appreciating art and beauty in everyday crafts.¹⁰⁴ Yanagi's book was to become an influential work from its first release in English in 1972. In the book Yanagi outlines the criteria of mingei art and crafts in the following terms: they must be made by anonymous crafts people, produced by hand in quantity, inexpensive, used by the masses, functional in daily life and representative of the region in which they were produced. Yanagi's formulation of his mingei theory was based on his observations of handmade objects designed for everyday use that he had seen in Korea and China as well as in Japan, and he used Buddhist analogies and terminology to explain his ideas.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Sōetsu Yanagi is sometimes also referred to as Muneyoshi Yanagi, the pronunciation from Chinese characters being Sōetsu. Leach, *Beyond East and West: Memoirs, Portraits, and Essays*. p 86.

¹⁰² de Waal, *Bernard Leach*. p 10.

¹⁰³ Leach, *Beyond East and West: Memoirs, Portraits, and Essays*. p 75.

¹⁰⁴ Muneyoshi Yanagi, *The Unknown Craftsman: A Japanese Insight into Beauty*, trans. Bernard Leach (Tokyo ; [Palo Alto, Calif.]: Kodansha International, 1972).

Tomimoto Kenkichi

The Shirakaba were most likely introduced to the ideas of Morris and Ruskin by Tomimoto Kenkichi who had studied architecture and interior design at the Tokyo School of Fine Arts before travelling to Britain where he studied stained glass and sketched metalwork, glass and ceramics at the Victoria and Albert Museum. It should be noted however, that Japanese artists would have been familiar with the ideas of the British Arts and Crafts Movement well before the Shirakaba began to adopt and modify them to their own use. Yuko Kikuchi says Morris' ideas were first introduced in Japan during the late 1880s and that Tomimoto Kenkichi wrote the first extensive biographical article in Japanese on Morris in 1912.¹⁰⁵

Kikuchi also notes that the Japan Alpine Club was established in 1905 and introduced mountaineering as a recreation in Japan.¹⁰⁶ This is perhaps a reflection of the influence on the Japanese cognoscenti of the Victorian English fascination with nature and their introduction to Ruskin's aesthetics. Leach spent time with his family rock-climbing in the mountains of Hakone, which provided inspiration for his graphic work at the time.¹⁰⁷ Leach was to be influenced by the ideas of Morris and Ruskin and the Arts and Crafts Movement over his entire career and on his return to England in the nineteen-twenties was elected to the William Morris' Arts and Crafts Society and became a member of the Red Rose Guild in Manchester.¹⁰⁸ It could be speculated that in joining the William Morris' Arts and Crafts Society and the Red Rose Guild, Leach was positioning himself within the English art scene as an artist-craftsperson and expert on William Morris.

Leach's introduction to ceramics

Early in his stay in Japan Leach attended a party with Tomimoto Kenkichi where he was introduced to the low-fired earthenware ceramics known as Raku, a

¹⁰⁵ Kikuchi, "The Myth of Yanagi's Originality: The Formation of 'Mingei' Theory in Its Social and Historical Context." p 254.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ de Waal, *Bernard Leach*. p 9.

¹⁰⁸ Leach, *Beyond East and West: Memoirs, Portraits, and Essays*. p 145 – 146. Leach describes the Red Rose Guild as 'the northern branch of Morris's counter-industrial movement' p 146.

ritualistic event that de Waal describes as something practiced with friends in the way educated circles in Edwardian England might practice watercolour or music, and an activity less about making pots than decorating a surface with colour.¹⁰⁹ This idea clearly appealed to Leach as a decorative art and inspired by his exposure to Raku, pottery was to become his main artistic preoccupation for the rest of his career.

A few months after the Raku party Leach asked his friends to help him find a teacher in order to further his interest in pottery. Leach was introduced to the elderly artist-potter Urano Shigekichi, known by the title Kenzan VI with whom he began to learn traditional pottery methods. With Tomimoto Kenkichi initially as interpreter and later as a fellow student, Leach started a kind of apprenticeship or, as he describes it "I began to learn my alphabet of clay".¹¹⁰ Kenzan VI's approach to teaching seems very much in the tradition of learning by repetition and by watching the Master.

Leach returns to Britain with Shoji Hamada

In 1920 after twelve years in the East and at a time when he was enjoying considerable success in Japan, Leach decided to return to England. On his return to England, and with the support of his financial backer, Mrs Frances Horne, who wanted to include a potter at the St Ives Handicraft Guild, Leach set up his pottery at St Ives in Cornwall, the site of a large artists colony that was once a fishing village.¹¹¹ Marion Whybrow, author of several books on the artists of Cornwall, says the colony had "flourished since the 1880s and was one of the foremost colonies in Britain".¹¹² Included in Leach's plans for his pottery was a young graduate in ceramic glaze chemistry from the Ceramics Institute in Kyoto called Shoji Hamada who Leach had met toward the end of his time in Japan.¹¹³

¹⁰⁹ de Waal, *Bernard Leach*. p 12.

¹¹⁰ Leach, *Beyond East and West: Memoirs, Portraits, and Essays*. p 57.

¹¹¹ Marion Whybrow, *The Leach Legacy: The St. Ives Pottery and Its Influence* (Bristol: Sansom & Company, 1996). p 7.

¹¹² *Ibid.* p 7.

¹¹³ de Waal, *Bernard Leach*. p 24.

For Hamada the opportunity to travel to England offered an escape from a mundane career as a traditional potter in Japan, while for Leach taking Hamada to St Ives, with, of course, permission from Mrs Horne, was to provide Leach with a certain oriental authenticity.¹¹⁴ Hamada, of course, was also able to add to Leach's technical success with his knowledge of glaze technology. After helping Leach set up the St Ives pottery, Hamada returned to Japan in 1923. Seeking news about his family after an earthquake had extensively damaged the city of Tokyo, Hamada remained to set up his own pottery in Mashiko outside Tokyo. During his lifetime Hamada achieved international recognition and in the United Kingdom and the USA his style and philosophy became well known amongst studio potters and he was revered as the archetypal 'Oriental' potter.¹¹⁵ See *figure 4* for an example typical of Hamada's work.

Art pots and necessary pots

To establish his pottery in St Ives, Leach had to overcome a number of hurdles. The fishing and tin mining industries of Cornwall at the time were in decline. To fire their pots Leach and Hamada built a traditional Japanese climbing kiln that Leach says was the first of its kind in the West.¹¹⁶ Leach and Hamada needed supplies of suitable clay to make pots and wood to fire the kiln. In the beginning Leach could only find low temperature clay and supplies of wood in the area were of uncertain quality and scarce.¹¹⁷ Due to Leach and Hamada's inexperience and the variable quality of wood to fire the kiln, which caused problems with the firing and glazing, after two years parts of the kiln collapsed. A friend of Hamada's, Tsuronosuke Matsubayashi, an engineer and kiln specialist was engaged to rebuild the kiln. Tsuronosuke Matsubayashi then stayed at the pottery until 1924 when he returned to Japan.

Leach and Hamada had problems finding a market for their work. Whybrow describes the establishment of the pottery as "essentially an experimental

¹¹⁴ Leach, *Beyond East and West: Memoirs, Portraits, and Essays*. p 119.

¹¹⁵ Whybrow, *The Leach Legacy: The St.Ives Pottery and Its Influence*. p 13.

¹¹⁶ Leach, *Beyond East and West: Memoirs, Portraits, and Essays*. p 138.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.* p 137. Leach says that most of the trees near the pottery had been cut down for pit props (for the tin mines) and that the wind on the north side of the peninsula was too strong for the trees to reestablish themselves.

period” and says that the kiln losses from this time meant that the successful pots were expensive.¹¹⁸ During this time sales in Britain were poor and the work was regarded as inferior in contrast with the industrially produced ceramics available commercially at the time. The low-fired wares were liable to leak and the shapes, colours and textures would have been in strong contrast to commercial tableware. Leach was able to send his pots back to Japan at this time where an appreciative audience of his friends supported the pottery with their purchases. Leach also invited the public to observe and participate in Raku firings at St Ives. Visitors could decorate a pot, enjoy a cup of tea and then take their creations home. While Leach felt this would be a good way to market his pots initially it was not the financial or marketing success that he hoped and in his memoirs he is dismissive of those who participated.¹¹⁹

One of those who participated in these Raku firings and who was to help Leach was American collector Henry Bergen, who Whybrow says purchased much of the early work from the St Ives Pottery.¹²⁰ In typical Leach fashion, the well-connected Bergen was also to become friend of Leach, St Ives’ first patron, and would introduce Leach to contacts at the British Museum, the Victoria and Albert Museum, and the entrepreneur and collector George Eumorfopoulos. Leach reports that thanks to Bergen, eventually collectors began to buy his pots and those of his contemporaries of the time, Staite Murray, Charles Vyse and others.¹²¹ Leach gives a nod to his contemporaries in his memoirs in a way that suggests he believes that he was fully responsible for this new interest by collectors of ceramics.

By 1928 Leach’s ideas were beginning to take shape and he wrote his first article in England, published as one of a series of pamphlets on craft by a group of craftspeople at the New Handworkers Gallery in Bloomsbury, titled *A Potter’s Outlook*.¹²² De Waal describes these pamphlets as ‘the chosen form of publication in this bohemian world for addressing the social and ethical implications of

¹¹⁸ Whybrow, *The Leach Legacy: The St.Ives Pottery and Its Influence*. p 9.

¹¹⁹ Leach, *Beyond East and West: Memoirs, Portraits, and Essays*. p 142.

¹²⁰ Whybrow, *The Leach Legacy: The St.Ives Pottery and Its Influence*. p 12.

¹²¹ Leach, *Beyond East and West: Memoirs, Portraits, and Essays*. p 144.

¹²² *Ibid*.

handwork' and points out that this was the first of Leach's 'many public forays' in which he questions the place of the craftsperson in contemporary times.¹²³ In *A Potter's Outlook* Leach outlined his thoughts inspired by the ideas of William Morris on how machines could be used by the craftsman potter as an extension of the hand.¹²⁴

Leach's ideas were evolving at a time when a range of craft skills had become redundant as methods of production in an industrial context, with the danger that they would die out, and some were transitioning into what we would come to know as the modern studio crafts.¹²⁵ Making the comparison with the way photo-mechanical reproduction displaced engraving, etching and lithography, and were subsequently taken up by the fine art world, and what was happening to pottery at this time, Watson says that pottery was ideal as an expressive medium for the art world, but at the same time many artists were attracted to pottery because they saw it as much of a critique of contemporary fine art practice as that of industrial process.¹²⁶

The forces in play in the 1920s and 1930s were, on one hand, those who saw the potential of pottery simply as an art-form and wished to pull pottery into the art world, and on the other hand, those for whom the moral overtones of the Arts and Crafts Movement still resonated and for whom pottery offered a vocation with ethical and social interest.¹²⁷ For Watson the two positions were represented by Leach and his ethical pots and Leach's contemporary, William Staite Murray who considered pottery to be the link between painting and sculpture.¹²⁸

Leach was determined to position his work in opposition to the artist-made pot, represented at this time by the work of Staite Murray, and to industrially produced ceramics. Leach's approach to pottery was strongly informed by his

¹²³ de Waal, *Bernard Leach*.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*

¹²⁵ Watson, *Studio Pottery: Twentieth Century British Ceramics in the Victoria and Albert Museum Collection*. p 14.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.* p 15.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.* p 14 – 15.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.* p 15 Watson introduces the term 'ethical pot' at this point to explain the Leach/Yanagi approach to pottery and is credited with coining the term.

experience in Japan, which was in turn mediated by his experience learning the craft under a Japanese master, exposure to Japanese culture through the members of the Shirakaba, his investigations of Zen Buddhism, and in particular, his friendship with Yanagi. Leach's work during the period he was learning and working at pottery in Japan encompassed a wide range of forms and decorative content, using porcelain, stoneware and Raku and is generally inspired by his exposure to Oriental pottery, in particular an emerging interest in early Sung dynasty wares.¹²⁹ See *figure 5*, a Leach stoneware jar typical of his work inspired by his exposure to Oriental pottery.

Leach had applied decoration with a Western influence from the start of his time in Japan but it was toward the end of his Japanese experience when de Waal says Leach discovered English slipware through the book on English folk pottery tradition, Lomax's *Quaint Old English Pottery* that Leach's friend Tomimoto had bought in a Tokyo bookstore.¹³⁰ As an example of the way Leach mythologised his story, Whybrow recounts the story presumably told to her by Leach that he, Hamada and Cardew revived the technique of seventeenth-century English slipware at St Ives when it "was rediscovered accidentally when Leach and Hamada sliced through a sandwich of blackberry jam and cream and saw how the substances fused".¹³¹ There is no mention in the Whybrow version of the story of Tomimoto's find in the Tokyo bookstore.

Encouraged by his initial experiments with Western motifs executed in the Japanese calligraphic tradition Leach began to consider how he could draw on both Western and Eastern traditions to add to his repertoire. At St Ives Leach produced pots in English slipware, Oriental stoneware, hard porcelain and of course Raku, all influenced by Korean and Chinese ceramics, medieval English pots and early Japanese tea ware. De Waal says Leach was not alone in working with the idea that an authentic English identity could be created for pottery citing other potters who worked with slipware from local materials and Western influenced decoration, however de Waal credits Leach's first student Michael

¹²⁹ de Waal, *Bernard Leach*. p 18-19.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.* p 19.

¹³¹ Whybrow, *The Leach Legacy: The St.Ives Pottery and Its Influence*. p 9.

Cardew with impressing Leach with his enthusiasm for the folk pottery traditions of slipware of North Devon and inspiring Leach to further investigate the technique.

In his search for an authentic English identity for pottery and in response to economic imperatives of running a commercial enterprise, Leach experimented with producing these two different kinds of work, his decorative art pieces and what he called his necessary pots, utilitarian wares produced in batches and designed for everyday use.¹³² Unlike the artist-potter of the time Leach elected to exhibit each type of work in different galleries at the same time. This approach was received with mixed critical response but reflected an emerging interest in pottery from a new direction.

This new interest was, in contrast to Leach's traditional market of art-object collectors, from consumers who wanted utilitarian objects to use in their homes and who saw the work as an alternative to industrially produced work. De Waal says at this time a number of small galleries were beginning to become established for handmade artifacts rather than catering to collectors, and that this was the genesis of a distinct craft world.¹³³ Leach's other experiment, which was directly influenced by needing to create products that would bring money to the business, was making decorative fireplace tiles. The result was to encourage Leach to think more positively about the relationship between potter and machine.

The ethical pot

Philosophically Leach saw himself as the link between East and West and his work as a spiritual connection to the ideas of his friend Yanagi whose mingei philosophy was based on the beauty of anonymous folk craft. For Yanagi (and Leach) the individualism of Western style art represented the debilitating effect of the separation of the head, heart and hand brought about by the industrialisation of modern society. Making objects by hand offered the possibility of redemption through repetition, which according to Yanagi

¹³² de Waal, *Bernard Leach*. p 43.

¹³³ *Ibid.* p 41.

suppressed the ego and allowed deeper values to emerge. Watson credits Yanagi with the argument that art that bypassed the intellect and spoke directly to the soul. As Watson illustrates this idea was based on the affordable utility of the everyday object that would bring an aesthetic and spiritual dimension to everyday life, or, "The foundation of good work... should be the making of useful things at modest prices, objects that would bring true beauty into people's everyday lives".¹³⁴

What emerged from the relationship between Leach and Yanagi was an amalgam of the ideals of William Morris and the Arts and Crafts Movement, and the selfless humility of Zen Buddhism, where utility and function are more important than aesthetic concerns. What was new about Leach and Yanagi's approach, says Watson, is the connection that Leach and Yanagi made between Morris' concern with spiritual degradation of industrial life and their own interpretation of oriental spiritual beliefs. It is this moral dimension that Watson identifies as the basis for what he calls the "ethical pot" and it is one that he says distinguishes the craft of pottery from pottery as fine art.¹³⁵ Watson also makes it clear that this moral dimension is a two-way street. The ethical pot requires an ethical maker and a sympathetic audience, an audience in tune with the attitude of the maker, or, in Watson's words,

The pot made by a potter following the criteria of Leach and Yanagi carries a message whose importance goes beyond mere looks. When lovingly made in the correct way and with the correct attitudes, it contains, for those who are open to the message, a spiritual and moral dimension. It is, in effect, an 'ethical' pot.¹³⁶

¹³⁴ Watson, *Studio Pottery: Twentieth Century British Ceramics in the Victoria and Albert Museum Collection*. p 15.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*

A Potter's Book

A Potter's Book sets out practical information about handmade pottery for the individual potter or artist-potter. However, the first chapter in the book, titled "Towards A Standard", is about the philosophy of being a potter.¹³⁷ For Leach the philosophy and the practicality of pot making are intertwined. For artists looking for information about potting at a time when there was not much available this meant that Leach's philosophy was embedded in their introduction to the technical aspects of ceramics.

The Leach philosophy is thoughtfully presented and woven into the technical detail of the book. Leach's credentials as mediator between East and West are firmly established from the start in the introduction written by his friend Yanagi. Leach's protégé Michael Cardew adds a preface to the book recommending the book as a practical guide for the small studio potter and, perhaps insightfully, preempting criticism of Leach's advocacy of the early Chinese potters as archetype of good form.

Like Morris, Leach pointed to industrial manufacture as the source of badly designed and made products. However, unlike Morris who wanted to revive the medieval artisan as part of the industrial manufacturing system, Leach makes it clear from the start of "Towards A Standard" that the journeyman potter does not have a place in the industrial production of ceramics anymore. Leach had recognised that the division of labour of the factory had stripped the individual potter of their function in manufacturing and unless the skilled artisan could settle for less, that is settle for a part in the mindless repetition on the industrial production line, then they had become redundant. In a single sentence Leach sets the scene for how the modern crafts would conceptualize crafts practice in the twentieth century when he says,

The potter is no longer a peasant or journeyman as in the past,
nor can he be any longer described as an industrial worker: he is

¹³⁷ Bernard Leach, "Towards a Standard," in *A Potter's Book* (London: Faber, 1976).

by force of circumstances an artist-craftsman, working for the most part alone or with a few assistants.¹³⁸

Paralleling Ruskin's contrast of Gothic with classicism Leach argues that the designer-craftsperson represents a humanistic approach in contrast to the designer for mass-production whose rational approach has more in common with the engineer or constructor than the artist. Leach accepts that each method has its own aesthetic significance and that design excellence is possible with mechanical reproduction. However at this point in his discussion Leach rejects industrial production as a way of producing work "of a higher, more personal, order of beauty" arguing that work with these qualities could only be produced by the intuitive craftsman.¹³⁹ The reason for this according to Leach is that the aesthetic of the intuitive craftsman was achieved precisely because it was a human activity, and again echoing Morris, the "machine crafts" meant that this humanistic activity could not happen when the maker is a step removed from the making process.¹⁴⁰

With this emphasis on the head, heart and hand working in concert it is not surprising that Leach would draw on his experience in Japan and in particular his exposure to Zen Buddhism and advocate antique Chinese wares and in particular those of the Sung and early Ming dynasties, as archetypes to which the potter could aspire.¹⁴¹ In the chapter "Towards A Standard" and throughout the book Leach sets these Chinese pots as the standard for the studio potter looking for inspiration for form and finish. Leach singles out the lip and the foot for particular attention.¹⁴² See *figures 6, 7 & 8*.

Leach contrasts the aesthetic of the Sung and Ming ceramics and their use of natural colours and textures in the clay and glazes with, in his view, the overly decorated, badly designed forms of Wedgwood and other British ceramic

¹³⁸ Ibid. p 1.

¹³⁹ Ibid. p 2.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

¹⁴¹ Ibid. p 5.

¹⁴² Leach, *A Potter's Book*. see p 86 for types of cut feet.

manufacturers.¹⁴³ Leach gives his argument for a Sung standard further aesthetic weight by connecting the concept with the simple peasant Korean rice bowls adopted by the Japanese tea masters and in the oriental concepts of beauty embodied in Zen Buddhism.¹⁴⁴

Calling on intuition and sensory experience, Leach's standard allowed the person who was not a potter to judge the quality of a pot by examining the form, texture, pattern, colour and relating the object to a personal experience of its function rather than a set of aesthetic rules.¹⁴⁵ The character of the maker would be reflected in the character of the pot. It was the body that would make a good pot and the body that would recognize a good pot. Leach guides us to look for beauty that is the result of the fusing of the character of the potter with the materials of the pot saying,

Thus in looking for the best approach to pottery it seems reasonable to expect that beauty will emerge from a fusion of the individual character and culture of the potter with the nature of his materials - clay, pigment, glaze - and his management of the fire, and that consequently we may hope to find in good pots those innate qualities which we most admire in people.¹⁴⁶

Leach argues that a good pot relies on truth and sincerity on the part of the potter and is ultimately what he describes as "a genuine expression of life".¹⁴⁷ Rounding off his chapter, "Towards A Standard" with a set of rules, or as he calls them "constructional ideas" based on what he describes as "fundamental laws of proportion and composition" to be applied to the design of the shapes and proportion of pots, he adds that these 'laws' cannot be broken down into mathematical formula but should be applied as generalizations.¹⁴⁸

¹⁴³ ———, "Towards a Standard." p 3.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.* p 8 - 9.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.* p 18.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.* p 20.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.* p 23.

The final of Leach's eight constructional ideas is perhaps one of the most enduring of the Arts and Crafts notions, that of the idea that "technique is a means to an end".¹⁴⁹ This constructional idea however, requires a further paragraph for Leach to elaborate on what this entails, arguing that acceptance of technical imperfection is a signifier of the handmade. This idea has more than an echo of Ruskin's idea that the imperfection of the Gothic was a symbol of man's imperfection and links to Ruskin's concept of truth to nature. This also reflects Leach's experience of Raku and the humble peasant rice bowl made by the anonymous craftsman for everyday use and valued by tea ceremony masters. Leach had observed that the accidental imperfections that happened during the Raku firing were to be valued by Eastern art connoisseurs who viewed perfect technique with suspicion.¹⁵⁰ Contrasting the popular appeal of factory ceramics with its realistic detail and perfect surface finish with the material and tactile qualities of what he called "Far Eastern" pottery, Leach says "we have got our values upside down".¹⁵¹

Leach concludes "Towards A Standard" by lamenting the lack of practical hands-on training in schools (and art schools) arguing that making something is a way of understanding things and that the experience of throwing a pot can release a personal desire to make, use and be able to recognize "good things".¹⁵² Leach is dismissive of the quality of teaching in art schools and the skills of the students who would come to work at his pottery, pointing out their lack of elementary knowledge of the practical skills of ceramics.¹⁵³ This seems a recurring theme in arts and crafts training after the industrial revolution. Morris and Ashbee, for example, had expressed similar concerns. Ashbee, according to Lucie-Smith, considered both art school and trade workshop experience a positive disadvantage and preferred to train the people who came to work for him himself.¹⁵⁴

¹⁴⁹ Ibid. p 24.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid. p 25.

¹⁵¹ Ibid.

¹⁵² Ibid. p 26.

¹⁵³ Ibid. p 27.

¹⁵⁴ Lucie-Smith, *The Story of Craft: The Craftman's Role in Society*. p 213.

Leach had developed his ideas over a long period of time and during an era when the hand-made object was becoming a rarity while cheap industrially produced goods of an ever-increasing variety were meeting the needs of consumers. The ideas in *A Potter's Book* have become embedded deeply into what it means to learn, practice and view the crafts. This has happened as the self-taught practitioners of the early modern crafts movement began to teach others and as institutions that provided training in the crafts began to become established.

The influence of *A Potter's Book*

When *A Potter's Book* was first published in 1940 a willing audience saw a resonance between its values and certain concerns that prevailed in Britain at the time. These included the values associated with the continuity of English town and village life. These were ideas which government propaganda during the War years argued were at the core of the values for which the nation was fighting. Later, Leach's ideas resonated with concerns with environmental issues arising from increasing industrialisation, destruction of the rural landscape and wildlife. The ethical pot and its claim to represent values that are natural and traditional are what Watson says are central to the longevity and appeal of the book.¹⁵⁵

The Leach philosophy espoused in *A Potter's Book* would also influence the modern crafts movement as it emerged as part of the social revolution that swept North America, Western Europe, Japan, Australia and New Zealand during the nineteen-sixties and early 1970s, when it would dovetail with the concerns of the counterculture movement and a nascent environmental movement.

Chapter conclusion

In this chapter I have outlined how Arts and Crafts philosophies were highly influential because of the way in which they passed into the arts education system in the early part of the twentieth century, and because of their adaptability to a variety of times, cultures and places. The conveyance of these

¹⁵⁵ Watson, *Studio Pottery: Twentieth Century British Ceramics in the Victoria and Albert Museum Collection*. p 15.

ideas from the Victorian era into modern times can be attributed to the influence of Bernard Leach who found the objectives of Ruskin and Morris sympathetic to his own approach to art.

Leach was able to apply aspects of Arts and Crafts philosophies to pottery to construct a philosophy of making which strongly informed the development of the studio ceramics movement. Leach's ideas about the self sufficient potter who made useful wares for the local community was clearly the right idea at the right time and was received by an audience ready and willing to take up this approach.

However, as I point out in this chapter, this was not a simple application of Arts and Crafts ideas to a specific practice, in this case traditional pottery. Leach's ideas depended on an intercultural engagement with Japanese artists who were interested in Western ideas. Leach's application of the ideas of Ruskin and Morris was as much influenced by his own understanding, as by those of his Japanese collaborators who applied them as a way of viewing traditional Eastern crafts. In particular it is Leach's friendship with Soetsu Yanagi that provides the key to understanding what was a complex and mutually beneficial relationship that resulted in an amalgam of ideas about traditional crafts based on both Eastern and Western ideas.

It is Leach's translation of Yanagi's text *The unknown craftsman: a Japanese insight into beauty*, that introduced Western audiences to Yanagi's interpretation of traditional Japanese aesthetic values. These values found a resonance with core values of the Arts and Crafts Movement, in particular the role of handmaking, the idea of the anonymous craftsman and the integration of the handmade object into everyday life.

These values were augmented and supported by references to the aesthetics of Zen Buddhism. This lent Yanagi's ideas both a sense of cultural specificity and timelessness, which mirror Ruskin and Pugin's identification of the Gothic as a vernacular architectural practice, sanctioned by an organized set of spiritual values. The palatability of these ideas to their Japanese audience at a time when the benefits of what was Japan's equivalent of an industrial revolution, the Meiji Restoration were being questioned, parallels the Arts and Crafts Movement's

interest in pre-industrial technology as a cure for the problems they identified with mass production.

Central to the argument in this chapter - that it is Leach who informs the modern studio crafts movement through his activities as a potter - is his introduction to the Japanese ceramic tradition of Raku. It is Tomimoto Kenkichi who introduces Leach to Raku and it is Kenkichi's acquaintance with the ideas of William Morris that provided a moment of fusion between Japanese ceramic practices and Arts and Crafts ideas.

The relationship between Japanese aesthetics and Arts and Crafts ideas is strengthened by another of Leach's friends, Shoji Hamada, a graduate in ceramic glaze chemistry who saw an association with Leach as an escape from life as a traditional Japanese potter. Hamada's presence in Leach's studio gave Leach a certain oriental authenticity. This relationship was reciprocal and when Hamada returned to Japan he maintained his association with Leach. Hamada's many subsequent visits and tours to pottery studios in the English-speaking world would contribute to the development of his reputation as the archetypal 'Oriental' potter.

In this chapter it is Leach's eclectic influences that demonstrate the flexibility of Arts and Crafts ideas in their application. Chinese, Japanese and Korean ceramic traditions, as well as vernacular English ceramic pots influenced Leach's aesthetic repertoire and he used this fusion of ideas to reinvigorate the craft of pottery in Britain. Leach made a case that the handmade pot should be valued as both an object of aesthetic contemplation (his 'art pots') and as objects for everyday use (his 'necessary pots').

Leach's concept of the art pot and the necessary pot brought together Yanagi's ideas about the beauty of anonymous folk craft with the idea of the redemptive quality of hand making in the notion of the 'ethical pot'. In other words, hand making applied to the manufacture of everyday objects had the power to address the spiritual degradation of industrial society. The ethical pot, like the Arts and Crafts ethical object, operates at a spiritual and moral level for both maker and user.

These ideas are reinforced in *A Potters Book*, specifically in the chapter “Towards a Standard”, in which Leach juxtaposes the industrial designer and the artisan in a way that closely parallel the ideas of Ruskin. In much the same way that Ruskin viewed the work of the Gothic as a reflection of the character of the pre-industrial craftsman, the Arts and Crafts notion of the ethical object is further elaborated upon in “Towards a Standard”. Leach links the capacity for aesthetic discrimination with an innate human intuition, connecting aesthetic character with moral character, a quality which inhabits both the maker, the user and the pot itself. In this way the ethical pot is the product of the interaction between both a principled maker and an audience sympathetic to their ideals.

Publication of *A Potters Book* coincided with a resurgence of interest in traditional English values, at a time when these values were seen to be under threat as a result of World War Two. Later the ideas in Leach’s book would connect with a new generation of potters for whom the idea of the ethical pot dovetailed with their concerns about environmental issues arising from increasing industrialisation, such as the destruction of the rural landscape and wildlife.

The book’s wide dissemination after the War amongst professional and amateur potters in the English-speaking world ensured that the values Leach espoused found a new audience amongst those members of the studio craft movement for whom craft represented the opportunity to undertake alternative ways of living and working.

Demonstrating the adaptability of the Arts and Crafts values to suit the needs of Leach’s philosophy demonstrates how Arts and Crafts ideas have been pressed into service by those who have sought to position craft and hand making as an approach that is different from mass production. In this context Leach’s ideas remain remarkably well embedded in contemporary crafts practice and among the potters who have carried on the Leach tradition of Eastern influenced ceramics into contemporary times are, for example, Australian potters Gwyn Hanssen Pigott and Les Blakebrough.

However, as the next chapter examines, it is not clear that this dichotomy between hand and mass production will continue to be the context for contemporary practice in the future. Using case studies from two exhibitions of contemporary craft and design, the next chapter examines the crafts under pressure from new technologies that blur the distinction between the mass-produced object and the craft object, and threaten the traditional values associated with the handmade object with redundancy.

Chapter three: hand-making in the technological age

Chapter introduction

In the technological age the crafts are under a new kind of pressure from new technologies which challenge the notions about craft and handmade production that are the legacy of Ruskin, Morris and Leach. Industry is encroaching into the territory of the crafts as advances in digital technologies have made it possible for industry to adapt their mass production techniques to the needs of the individual consumer - the idea of mass customization - in ways that were only possible previously through bespoke individual manufacture. The distinction between the mass-produced object and the craft object is becoming difficult to discern as mass-produced objects take on the tactile and visual qualities of handmade objects, and technologically enabled craftspeople adapt industrial processes in creative ways to produce one-off craft objects that would be difficult or impossible to make by hand.

This chapter sets out to survey a range of attitudes to the changing relationship between craft and hand making in the past twenty years and consider how some of these attitudes shape the work of Australian artisans. Of particular interest is how these artisans are responding to the idea that the crafts are under pressure from technological change that is a result of the digital revolution. Between 2006 and 2007 there were two important national survey exhibitions of contemporary craft and design. These exhibitions, *Freestyle: new Australian design for living* and *Smart Works: design and the handmade* were held in conjunction with various symposia and events.¹⁵⁶ By looking at the choices the curators of *Freestyle* and *Smart Works* have made, both in choosing the participants for these exhibitions and how they have positioned them in the craft and design landscape, this chapter looks at the ways the issues surrounding contemporary object making are played out in the professional practice of Australian artisans.

¹⁵⁶ *Freestyle*, 5 October 2006 – 4 February 2007, Melbourne Museum, Melbourne. *Smart works*, 30 March – 4 November 2007, symposium March 30, 31 and April 1, 2007, Powerhouse Museum Sydney.

Hands-on making

For Peter Dormer computer technology presented craft with a problem: that is, when the computer can mimic the human touch, where does it leave craft?¹⁵⁷ Dormer argued that computer technology had changed the idea of what it means to make something. He added however, that this has not diminished the importance of hands-on making.¹⁵⁸ Dormer points out that the potential for computer software to mimic variation in pattern and imperfection associated with the craft object, and to do it in a way that is difficult to identify, challenges one of the foundations of craft, “that it produces things that machines cannot imitate”.¹⁵⁹ Dormer says that this calls into question values associated with studio craft such as, “that the hand of the maker is necessarily special, that craft objects are poetic objects, that crafts objects reveal aspects of the personality (some say the ‘soul’) of the maker”.¹⁶⁰

William Morris and the Arts and Crafts Movement were mostly able to reconcile the use of technology in the form of mechanisation as fitting within the category of the handmade. Morris’ concern was not with the machine *per se*, but with the division of labour that disenfranchised the craftsperson and replaced them with unskilled labour. However, for the contemporary craftsperson digital technology, where it is possible to make objects without touching the material, or even having an understanding of the process, challenges the notion that craft is about hands-on making.

For Bernard Leach the issue would have been clear-cut, the integrity of the object was forged in the hand throwing and decorating of pots, as well as the labour entailed in firing them. A machine-made object that mimicked the processes, no matter how closely the technology could simulate the maker’s touch, could never give the object the significance of the handmade object because, in Leach’s eyes, the handmade object was a reflection of the maker’s character and a

¹⁵⁷ Peter Dormer, “Craft and the Turing Test for Practical Thinking,” in *The Culture of Craft: Status and Future*, ed. Peter Dormer (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1996). p 137.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.* p 137.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.* p 144.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

manifestation of the qualities inherent in the Arts and Crafts ethical object. This was something that simply could not be replicated by a machine. Leach makes clear from the first page of the first chapter of *A Potters Book* his view of the values of hand and machine. For Leach there was a distinct divide between, on one hand, the intuitive and humanistic approach of the craftsperson, and on the other hand, the rational and tectonic work of the engineer. Importantly, considering the distinction that Leach made between the craftsman-potter and the artist-potter, he makes sure to include the potter-artist in the category that is one of opposition to mass-production. Leach outlines his thinking at the beginning of the first chapter, "Towards a Standard", saying,

Here at the very beginning it should be made clear that the work of the individual potter or potter-artist, who performs all or nearly all the processes of production with his own hands, belongs to one aesthetic category, and the finished result of the operations of industrialised manufacture, or mass-production, to another and quite different category.¹⁶¹

Today, new technology has spawned a set of objects that Leach could not have envisaged, such as the so-called 'impossible object', the object that seems to fit within the genus of craft objects and yet because of its complexity could not be made by hand. We cannot guess what Leach's response would be to the kinds of technology available to the artisan today, or the products of this kind of technology. However what is clear is that as the boundaries between mass production and craft production have become blurred the issues are no longer so clear-cut.

Risk and certainty

In the nineteen-sixties Professor of Furniture Design David Pye wrote about craft from the perspective of artisanship. Pye's idea was that because it was difficult to point to things that were made without tools of any sort the term 'hand-made' was a social or historical expression rather than a technical one. Basket weaving

¹⁶¹ Leach, "Towards a Standard." p 1.

and coiled pots excepted, when people referred to the hand-made Pye says they were really referring to artisanship of any kind prior to the industrial revolution.¹⁶² Pye blames this on Arts and Crafts misinterpretation of William Morris who he says actually saw the idea of something being handmade as work without the division of labour.¹⁶³

Pye's thesis was that the outcome of production that relied on the skill and knowledge of the maker for success was the *workmanship of risk*. In contrast the *workmanship of certainty* was the kind of artisanship that uses jigs and templates to achieve a consistency in making that is typical of serial and mass production.¹⁶⁴ Pye was not suggesting that mass production was inferior in terms of quality compared to craft production or vice versa, indeed he made it clear that the quality of mass-produced items could be high.¹⁶⁵ What interested Pye was that the *workmanship of risk* offered different outcomes, successful or otherwise, that meant the *workmanship of risk* represented the possibility for creative exploration essential to the development of new ideas and objects, or as he puts it, "an immensely various range of qualities, without which at its command the art of design becomes arid and impoverished".¹⁶⁶

Explaining his concept Pye used the example of writing with a pen and what he called "modern" printing, as an example of the "workmanship of risk" and the "workmanship of certainty", the pen being the "risk" and printing the "certainty".¹⁶⁷ Pye points out that in this case, and in any example of the "workmanship of certainty", the tools that are used to do the work are prepared with a high level of judgment, care and dexterity, possibly with even more judgment, care and dexterity than required by the "workmanship of risk". This happens in the preparation for printing when, Pye says, the type is carved by hand before it is cast and assembled for the printing press. In this way the

¹⁶² David Pye, *The Nature and Art of Workmanship* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1968). p 10.

¹⁶³ *Ibid.* p 12.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.* p 4.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.* p 7.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.* p 5.

judgment, care and dexterity is embedded in the process before the printing starts.¹⁶⁸

Comparing Pye's printed newspaper with its contemporary incarnation, the online version - an electronic file to be read on a computer - it is clear that Pye is writing this before the introduction of computers and desktop publishing software. Pye's concept becomes problematic as a way of interrogating craft because a paradigm shift in technology has occurred. The technology of the machine age has evolved into post-machine age technology introducing a level of complexity that has taken the process of storing up technical knowledge beyond the control of the individual artisan or collective. Pye's ideas rely on the materiality of an object, a quality that does not exist in the virtual world.

Digital technology has the capacity to distance the process of making even further from the maker than could ever have been envisaged by Pye. Indeed both professional and amateur makers can have things made, without the intervention of the hand at all and without needing to understand the process, which undermines the Arts and Crafts idea of "truth to materials".

Dormer believed Pye's concept of the *workmanship of risk* and the *workmanship of certainty* was useful and that it demonstrated how confused we could be about what it means for something to be made by hand.¹⁶⁹ Dormer however argued that another way of looking at the distinction between craft and non-craft production is to look at it as the difference between personal know-how and distributed knowledge.¹⁷⁰

In this model, personal know-how is the technical knowledge that experienced experts have and can demonstrate in undertaking a skilful task. Distributed knowledge on the other hand is based on what Dormer says are two linked ideas. The first of these ideas is that the majority of objects in modern times require the combined expertise of a variety of disciplines and industries to produce. This means that while an individual could learn to assemble such an object - Dormer

¹⁶⁸ Ibid. p 5.

¹⁶⁹ Dormer, "The Culture of Craft." p 138.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid. p 138 - 139.

gives the example of a television set – no one person could actually make one. The second idea is that distributed knowledge is embodied in the idea of tools, jigs and computer software, artefacts that enable people to make things without possessing the personal know-how needed to make them.¹⁷¹

The application of this idea to craft practice is that while the knowledge embedded within contemporary technology is not the craftsperson's to possess, the experienced craftsperson is able to use their personal know-how in applying the technology. As Dormer puts it, "It is not craft as 'handcraft' that defines contemporary craftsmanship: it is craft as knowledge that empowers a maker to take charge of technology".¹⁷²

The downside of this new relationship between craft and technology is that one of the aims of technology is to remove the risk of human error.¹⁷³ In Dormer's model, distributed knowledge was always acting to do away with the need for personal know-how and the risks and uncertainties that go with individual decision making. It is also in the nature of distributed knowledge for systems to generate design solutions that have a similar underlying thinking, so in exchange for simplicity and safety we achieve ubiquity. As Dormer says, "consistency and predictability of outcome are guaranteed, but the price is uniformity".¹⁷⁴

Dormer was writing about these issues on the cusp of the information technology revolution. Technologies like CAD/CAM were in their infancy and have advanced in ways that Dormer could not have foreseen. The debate has become more complex as the Arts and Crafts dichotomy between hand and machine is being broken down.

Ezra Shales argues that some Arts and Crafts Movement ideas that persist today need to be discarded. Shales points out that the craft skills of Wedgwood's throwers and turners were obscured by the positioning of the crafts as a contrast to the factory and by the Arts and Crafts Movement's opposition to the division of

¹⁷¹ Ibid. p 139.

¹⁷² Ibid. p 140.

¹⁷³ Ibid. p 141.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid. p 142.

labour of the factory system. Shales argues that ceramic factory production relies on what he describes as “truly artistic skill sets, even if they come down to us through ‘divided labor’”.¹⁷⁵ Shales advocates that craft should do away with three ideas that are the legacy of Ruskin and Morris and that he believes are a distraction to studio craft moving forward. These three ideas that constrain craft to traditional notions are, “the idealisation of the autonomous craftsman, the valorisation of the autonomous object and the criterion of ‘pleasure in work’”.¹⁷⁶

Shales’ solution for contemporary crafts is a re-evaluation of Arts and Crafts attitudes toward the factory that allows the contemporary craftsman to combine the manufacturing methods of the nineteenth century with the digital tools of the twenty-first.¹⁷⁷ Shales calls this “technophilic craft”, saying that it includes collaborative and interdependent production, that it tinkers with traditional social habits without discarding old ways of doing things by looking at them in new ways. Critically for Shales, his model locates craft in the factory rather than in folk traditions.¹⁷⁸

Makers themselves of course hold the key to understanding what it means to make objects by hand in the technological age. Innovative crafts practitioners are adding new technologies to their traditional workshop approach, adapting old technologies discarded by industry and are forging alliances with first world hand-crafts in order to compete with factory production. Each approach to the problem has something to offer in gaining an insight to the possibilities for handmade production in the technological age. As Adamson points out, “In the twentieth century, craft was mainly defined in terms of the crafts, but it is by no means clear that this will be the case in the future”.¹⁷⁹

New Australian craft and design

If the values associated with hand-making are under pressure in the technological age, how are contemporary craftspeople responding? In particular,

¹⁷⁵ Ezra. Shales, “Technophilic Craft,” *American Craft* 68, no. 2 (2008).

¹⁷⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid.

¹⁷⁹ Glenn Adamson, *Thinking through Craft* (New York: Berg, 2007). p 6.

what is the Australian response to contemporary issues? What opportunities exist for craftspeople to utilise new technologies and how do they reconcile these technologies with the values associated with the handmade? To interrogate these issues this section examines the work of craft and design practitioners in recent Australian survey exhibitions of craft and design in the context of how Arts and Crafts ideas have been reworked and filtered to remake them for a new particular audience. This section focuses on two particular exhibitions of Australian craft and design, *Freestyle: new Australian design for living* and *Smart Works: design and the handmade*.

Approaches to the crafts in contemporary times are diverse. Many contemporary studio crafts have markets for objects made by professional artisans who choose to continue with handmade craft in the tradition of their field. Enthusiastic amateurs, simply for enjoyment of the making process keep some traditional crafts alive, or these traditional crafts have found new markets for old techniques.¹⁸⁰ New technologies are being adapted to studio practice. Some object makers opt to work with industry and operate as designer-makers using their craft skills to create prototypes for mass production by industry, or subcontract parts of the production process to industry and produce their objects in the studio in limited editions. In the post-machine age the dichotomy between mass production and the handmade does not exist in the same way that it did in the twentieth century and the boundary between mass production and craft production has become blurred. The idea of craft as a contrast to factory production has changed in the technological age for both mass production and craft production.

A conventional curatorial argument is to position craft squarely within the traditions of the Arts and Crafts Movement. This is the approach taken by Robert Bell, Senior Curator of Decorative Arts and Design at the National Gallery of Australia who organized a survey exhibition of Australian and international

¹⁸⁰ Parsons uses the example of traditional basket makers who have switched from production of eel traps to baskets for hot-air balloons. Tim Parsons, "Value Judgment," *Crafts*, November/December 2009. p 43.

artisans titled *Transformations* that immediately precedes *Freestyle* and *Smart Works* in 2005.

Structured around three categories, materiality, narrative and structure (form), *Transformations* touches on the potential of new technologies but is largely a nostalgic view of skillfully made objects that in their expression of tradition and materiality offer a kind of antidote to the culture of mass consumption in keeping with the traditions of the Arts and Crafts Movement. This is not to say that its aim of engaging with material qualities, narrative, sculptural and functional objects, does not consider technology. Indeed curator Bell indicates that new technologies are often given form by craft objects and that the craft object can offer a critique of the technological world we live in. As Bell explains,

Transformations encourages visitors to encounter the eloquence of crafted objects as mediators of space and experience, and to consider the place of craft skills, traditions and values in an increasingly dematerialised, yet regimented, culture of consumption. The works exhibited and illustrated in this catalogue are drawn together in the themes of narrative, materiality and structure, creating settings in which unique crafted objects give form to innovations in the use of materials and technologies, offer commentaries on nature and the urban environment, express personal narratives, and reflect regional identity.¹⁸¹

Bell however, takes the stance that the effect of technology considered here is that it offers the audience new experiences through functional and decorative objects but that it does this at the risk of losing sight of the ameliorative benefit of the craft object steeped in Arts and Crafts tradition. Bell puts it this way,

It is a paradox that while we have become a society with an ability to quickly assimilate new technology and find value in a

¹⁸¹ Robert Bell, *Transformations: The Language of Craft* (Canberra: National Gallery of Australia, 2005). p viii.

plethora of new types of functional and decorative objects, we are doing so with a diminishing framework of understanding of the history and development of design and the decorative arts.¹⁸²

With the exception of sculptor and jeweller David Watkins, Bell has opted not to include craftspeople whose work makes a connection between digital technology and hands-on making. See *figure 9* - an example of Watkins jewellery. Omitted from *Transformations* is American jeweller Stanley Lechtzin who, for example has, since the late nineteen-eighties applied computer-aided technologies and adapted industrial technologies for the small-studio fabrication of jewelry and ceremonial objects.¹⁸³

Former associate Director of Object: Australian Centre for Craft and Design, Brian Parkes and former Senior Curator of Australian Decorative Arts and Design at the Powerhouse Museum, Grace Cochrane, curators of *Freestyle* and *Smart Works* respectively, opt for a different approach. Parkes and Cochrane focus in on how contemporary makers and designers are responding to the challenges of new technology in the digital age.

Similarities

Smart Works opened shortly after *Freestyle* and it is interesting to speculate why two similar projects might come to fruition within months of each other. Both are funded by The Australia Council for the Arts, hosted by publicly funded institutions and *Smart Works* curator Cochrane was involved in the production of *Freestyle* and contributed an essay to the book. Perhaps, as Parkes explains, the British Council exhibition *Home Sweet Home*, brought to Australia in 2002 by *Object*, illustrated the need for a survey of Australian craft and design and the time was right for an examination of a particularly Australian approach to design.¹⁸⁴

¹⁸² Ibid. p vii.

¹⁸³ David Watkins, *The Best in Contemporary Jewellery* (London: B.T. Batsford, 1993). p 100 – 101.

¹⁸⁴ Annabel Moir, "Freestyle: New Australian Design for Living," *Object*, no. 50 (2006). p 25.

Both projects set out to examine innovative contemporary craft practice responding to technological and cultural change and both recognize the diversity of approaches to manufacture that this response stimulates. The designers chosen for *Freestyle* and *Smart Works* approach their object making in different ways ranging from practice firmly grounded in the studio crafts to those who design for industrial production. The exhibitions include object makers who work with handmade, one-off, limited edition and industrially manufactured objects and prototypes.

Freestyle for example, includes the work of jewellers Julie Blyfield, Leslie Matthews and Catherine Truman from Gray Street Workshop. This collective is well known for their conceptual rigor and skillful and considered material manipulation using traditional hand skills such as repoussé and carving.¹⁸⁵ See *figure 10*. While the artisans from Gray Street Workshop would not identify themselves as designers, they are however, included alongside object makers who would. One of these is industrial designer Stefan Lie whose work in the exhibition includes a prototype teapot originally modelled using rapid prototyping technology designed for production by a commercial manufacturer.¹⁸⁶

One of the effects of technological and cultural change is the globalisation of markets and suppliers and the artists in *Freestyle* and *Smart Works* have responded to these issues from both a local and global perspective. Many have had to balance the benefits of increasing their production by taking advantage of opportunities to form partnerships with overseas manufacturers while at the same time retaining the qualities that give their objects their Australian character and retain the values associated with handmade production.

Glassblower Jonathan Baskett for example, has formed a partnership with an overseas company to produce his stacking *Caterpillar* bowls and *Bebol* bowls.¹⁸⁷ See *figures 11* and *12*. Baskett chose Nouvel Studio in Mexico because he had

¹⁸⁵ Brian Parkes, ed., *Freestyle: New Australian Design for Living* (Sydney: Object: Australian Centre for Craft and Design / Melbourne Museum, 2006). p 148 – 153.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid. p 180 – 182.

¹⁸⁷ Cochrane, ed., *Smart Works: Design and the Handmade*. p 67.

already established a working relationship with its director; however working with a Mexican company enables him to import his work into the USA without paying import duty thanks to the North American Free Trade Agreement. Baskett has weighed up the pros and cons of manufacturing his work in Australia and decided that in order to sell his work internationally it is best for him to take advantage of lower manufacturing and transport costs of manufacturing in Mexico. Clearly, marketing his work overseas has benefits both financially and in contributing to his profile as an international artist. Baskett still manufactures his *Utility cups* in Australia by hand as he says that after initial attempts to produce a batch of them at Nouvel Studios he found that he had to modify his designs to suit the industrial glass manufacturing facility.¹⁸⁸ See *figure 13*.

As survey exhibitions of Australian craft and design *Freestyle* and *Smart Works* complement each other. They share the aim of engaging with the issues that surround how designers and makers are adapting to a changing global environment and how the challenges of earning a living making and designing objects for a local or global market are creating opportunities for the small scale producer.

There are forty-one artists or collectives in *Freestyle* and the same number in *Smart Works*. There are nine artists who are participants in both *Freestyle* and *Smart Works*. Of course, in a country with a relatively small population and industrial base, the choice of artists to include in these exhibitions is limited and a comprehensive survey of Australian craft and design is bound to include some of the same artists. This also reflects the diversity of contemporary craft and design practice at the intersection of different modes of practice as artists apply themselves to different approaches and different markets at different times.

There are however several important differences in the curatorial approach of Parkes and Cochrane. Parkes uses the emotional connection that Australian designed objects make with their audience to draw this exhibition together and argues that tactility, materiality, functionality, craftsmanship and artistic intent

¹⁸⁸ Ibid. p 66.

are qualities that connect with our sense of Australian identity.¹⁸⁹ For Parkes it is the value that Australians place on quality of life that makes Australian designers particularly well placed to approach the design of everyday objects for the home and the body for global markets.¹⁹⁰

Parkes also eschews the more conventional categorical groupings of type of practice or material, choosing instead to group his participants into *skilled craftspeople, self-manufacturers, project managers, global roamers* and *branded houses*.¹⁹¹

Like Parkes, Cochrane has selected from Australian makers, however she chooses to also include makers from New Zealand recognizing that Australia and New Zealand share a similar colonial heritage, are in relatively close proximity and operate under the same global pressures.¹⁹²

Cochrane is interested in the relationship between different modes of making and aesthetic approach. She groups her artisans into more conventional categories under the practices of *jewellery and metalwork, ceramics, glass and resin, fashion and textiles and furniture*.¹⁹³ Most of Cochrane's artisans would easily fit within Parkes' groups of *skilled craftspeople* and *self-manufacturers*.

These different categories reflect the differences in approach of Parkes and Cochrane and the way they seek to position craft and design. Because of this, these groupings are not always straightforward. At first glance Gray Street Workshop is an unlikely inclusion in *Freestyle* and a seemingly obvious oversight in its omission in *Smart Works*. In the case of the designers and makers featured in both exhibitions, Parkes places Jon Goulder and Alexander Lotersztain into the categories of *project manager* and *global roamer* respectively rather than his categories of *skilled craftspeople* and *self-manufacturers* as might be expected. Cochrane fits both Goulder and Lotersztain into her furniture category in *Smart Works*.

¹⁸⁹ Parkes, ed., *Freestyle: New Australian Design for Living*. p 15.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid. p 15.

¹⁹¹ Ibid. p 16 – 20.

¹⁹² Cochrane, ed., *Smart Works: Design and the Handmade*. p 13.

¹⁹³ Ibid. p 4.

In the *Freestyle* catalogue Parkes declares that “we are witnessing a coming of age for Australian design” and sets out to reveal the particular qualities of contemporary Australian design.¹⁹⁴ Parkes proposes a new kind of Australian designer grounded in craft traditions who embraces opportunities to work with industry; the creative industries maker. Parkes credits the distinctive quality of Australian design to the lack of restrictive rules that might otherwise be seen in countries with a longer design history. He argues that there are several key contextual factors that shape the approach of Australian designers. Australia’s cultural diversity, reflected in the many influences on modern Australian cuisine, means that Australian designers draw on varied cultural backgrounds for inspiration. The geographic diversity of the Australian continent has resulted in the development of different lifestyles that have adapted to different regional conditions.

Australia’s relatively small population translates to a small market, meaning that designers need to adapt their approach by looking for overseas markets or to develop products that can be produced viably in small quantities for niche segments within the local market. Australia’s physical location in the Asia-Pacific region means Australian designers can take advantage of export or manufacturing opportunities.

Finally, Parkes points out, Australia’s diminishing manufacturing base has meant designers have had to establish good relationships with local manufacturers or develop their own methods of manufacturing.¹⁹⁵ As such the objects in *Freestyle* are largely the outcome of self-driven projects by designers responding to personal creative ideas. McGillick notes that the majority of Australian designers still fit in the categories of designer-makers and designer-manufacturers.¹⁹⁶

¹⁹⁴ Parkes, ed., *Freestyle: New Australian Design for Living*. p 14.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid. p 15 – 16.

¹⁹⁶ Paul McGillick, “A Diverse Practice: Contemporary Furniture, Lighting and Product Design in Australia,” in *Freestyle: New Australian Design for Living*, ed. Brian Parkes (Sydney: Object: Australian Centre for Craft and Design / Melbourne Museum, 2006). p 26.

Cochrane makes it clear from the start that *Smart Works* is about design that reflects the “values of the handmade”.¹⁹⁷ *Smart Works* reveals the choices that the artisans have made in adapting their handmade work for production and how craftspeople whose traditional approach of working in one-off or limited series and resolving their ideas directly in materials, might be able to translate their personal artistic expression into production, at the same time maintaining the values associated with the handmade object. These values are about how the object makes a connection between maker and consumer and is built on the consumer knowing who made the object and gaining insight into how the object is made.¹⁹⁸

A significant number of the artisans in *Smart Works* are taking advantage of industrial processes based on new technologies and Cochrane notes that the emergence of industries that designer-maker can access is a characteristic of the time.¹⁹⁹ These makers are out-sourcing part of their manufacturing to specialist industries who provide laser and water-jet cutting, rapid prototyping and metal casting services to small manufacturers. Cochrane calls these providers “smart industries” and says that some of these professional relationships between artisan and industry have taken so long to establish that they have become a kind of intellectual property.²⁰⁰

Cochrane outlines in the *Smart Works* catalogue introduction that the global context for craft-based industries is complex and changing.²⁰¹ Manufacturers in the West are losing skills-based industries to the emerging industrial nations of Brazil, Russia, India and China, as these countries come to dominate manufacturing.²⁰² As Western manufacturers relocate their production to the East they are faced with issues of cultural and economic exploitation, and the need to balance the benefits that collaboration between designers and these

¹⁹⁷ Cochrane, ed., *Smart Works: Design and the Handmade*. P 8.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid. p 9.

¹⁹⁹ Ibid. p 14.

²⁰⁰ Ibid. p

²⁰¹ Ibid. p 9.

²⁰² Peter Day, *Design in the Global Economy* (Sydney: Radio National (ABC), 2007), Podcast. http://www.powerhousemuseum.com/smartworks/symposium_speakers.php accessed 26th August 2008.

skilled artisans and their traditional crafts might offer both parties. Coupled with this is the issue of the sustainable use of resources such as water, timber and fuel, a problem that Cochrane calls “a global design issue”.²⁰³

In some countries natural materials and hand-skills have become identified with national characteristics and Cochrane argues that the danger for local industry in the West is not just the loss of craft skills but the potential for a form of cultural identity to be lost when traditional industries are relocated to the East.²⁰⁴

The value of this cultural identity is evident in the demise of Josiah Wedgwood’s pottery in its contemporary iteration. Waterford Wedgwood, went into receivership in 2009 on the eve of Wedgwood’s 250th year of business. The pressure of global competition and a shift to more casual dining might account for the gradual decline in Wedgwood’s market share and the mindset of corporate takeovers of the nineteen-eighties to blame for the lack of senior management with hands-on experience in ceramics production.²⁰⁵

However, for some time Waterford Wedgwood had been shifting production offshore culminating in the expansion of the Royal Doulton plant in Indonesia. What Wedgwood’s management had lost sight of was that their customers in countries like Japan and the US were drawn to the brand because of the historical tradition of North Staffordshire ceramics that Brownsworth describes as “Wedgwood’s unique selling point... the prestige of being British made, associated with the tradition of the master craftsmen”.²⁰⁶ It is perhaps this kind of cultural cachet that small designer makers can capitalise on in a competitive market.

Freestyle and *Smart Works* demonstrate the opportunities that local producers can create for themselves when they use innovative and experimental manufacturing techniques to manufacture goods that can compete with imported products, or collaborate with large manufacturers who have the

²⁰³ Cochrane, ed., *Smart Works: Design and the Handmade*. p 10.

²⁰⁴ *Ibid.* p 11.

²⁰⁵ Robin Pagnamenta, “Waterford Wedgwood Collapses in Debt Pile,” *The Australian* 2009.

²⁰⁶ Neil Brownsworth, “The Rise and Fall of the Wedgwood Empire,” *Crafts*, March/April 2009. p 16.

manufacturing capacity and access to markets that make it possible for them to reach global markets.

One such collaboration with industry included in both exhibitions is one which is blurring the boundaries between mass production and handmade. This is the work of studio ceramicist Janet DeBoos with a bone china factory in Zibo, Shandong Province, China.²⁰⁷ In this collaboration DeBoos has consciously sought to transfer the visual and tactile qualities of her hand-thrown work into factory production. In the Chinese factory her hand-thrown pieces are used to create moulds for reproduction on a factory scale. While there is some modification to the handmade design for production, for example DeBoos must make the original works at a slightly larger scale to allow for shrinkage in the molding process, the factory-produced tableware is effectively recreating her handmade work on a mass-produced scale. See *figures 14 and 15*, which illustrate both wheel-thrown and cast porcelain versions of DeBoos work.

The two exhibitions also demonstrate that the boundaries between craftspeople-as-maker and consumer-as-maker are also breaking down. Silversmith Gilbert Riedelbauch for example, creates objects using the rapid prototyping facility at the Australian National University (ANU) School of Art. Operating the rapid prototyping facility in-house, enables Riedelbauch to intervene at, as he says, “the moment when crucial decisions could be made by the maker to influence the outcome of the object”.²⁰⁸ Working in this way Riedelbauch is operating as craftspeople-as-maker. *Figure 16* illustrates a Riedelbauch work incorporating the rapid prototyping process. Riedelbauch also uses the services of an online rapid prototyping facility called RedEye.²⁰⁹ Both professional and amateur makers can access this technology over the Internet. When Riedelbauch uses RedEye to manufacture objects he is operating as consumer-as-maker.

If using new technologies and outsourcing to specialist industry is now part of contemporary craft production, how do craftspeople reconcile this with the way

²⁰⁷ Cochrane, ed., *Smart Works: Design and the Handmade*. p 82

²⁰⁸ *Ibid.* p 50

²⁰⁹ <http://au.redeyeondemand.com/About.aspx> accessed 22 May 2010, personal communication with Gilbert Riedelbauch, 2009.

the craft object is expected to evidence the hand of the maker and the process of making, evidence that may be obscured or replaced by technology? Or more succinctly, how do craftspeople reconcile using technology to augment handwork? The next section of this chapter looks at how two artists who are in both *Freestyle* and *Smart Works* - metalsmith Robert Foster and furniture maker Jon Goulder - approach these issues by adopting a kind of hybrid approach that encompasses both the handmade and mass production worlds.

Foster and Goulder work across two modes of production, mass production and one-off, a way of working that can be described as a hybrid practice. Both use hand making for exploration of material and form to produce prototypes and as mass production techniques, both in-house and by subcontracting the manufacture to industry. The way these artisans engage with the making of their objects, balancing what can be farmed out to industry with what can be done in-house, is a reflection of the limitations of manufacturing in Australia. This also goes some way to explaining why the Australian approach is different from, for example, that of Dutch so-called "free-designers" who have access to established industrial infrastructure to manufacture their products from start to finish.²¹⁰ In the case of Australian artisans working this way they are perhaps best described as designer-makers.

Robert Foster and F!NK & Co.

Foster trained in gold and silversmithing and credits his relationship with Norwegian silversmith Ragnar Hansen as "fundamental to the development of his career".²¹¹ Hansen instilled in Foster a keen sense of aesthetics and the drive to get the detail right and Hansen's insistence that his students make their own tools has clearly had an influence on Foster's approach to metalsmithing.²¹² See *figure 16*. Parkes notes that Hansen's rigorous craft training and interest in the

²¹⁰ Clark credits Dutch observers of craft and design with inventing the term "Free Design", or "*Vrije Vormgeving*" to describe a craftsperson who has the freedom to work between craft and design, making one-of-a-kind pieces or working in series, and who also designs for industry. Garth Clark, "The Death of Crafts," *Crafts*, January/February 2009. p 51.

²¹¹ Brian Parkes, "F!NK & Co.," in *Freestyle: New Australian Design for Living*, ed. Brian Parkes (Sydney: Object: Australian Centre for Craft and Design / Melbourne Museum, 2006). p 124.

²¹² *Ibid.* p124 - 126

relationship between design and nature – features that he describes as strong characteristics of twentieth-century Scandinavian design – has had a strong influence on Foster.²¹³

Foster's training with Hansen as a metalsmith, where the emphasis was on the integrity of skillfully handmade one-off works, initially put him off using production processes.²¹⁴ Hansen had instilled in Foster a "wary suspicion of production" and it was not until five years out from art school that Foster began to consider that it was possible to maintain the integrity of his one-off works while at the same time producing multiples.²¹⁵ It was when Foster realised that he could retain the qualities of his one-off works in the manufacture of multiples by making his own tooling that the idea of manufacturing multiples began to evolve.²¹⁶ As Gates says, "By keeping his hand in the making of the tools, more personality and humanness - the subtle characteristics of Foster's design - is retained in the multiple".²¹⁷

Foster makes one-off objects and produces multiples under the F!NK brand that he initially set up to produce the *F!NK water jug* and to support his one-off handmade works. Gates describes the *F!NK water jug* as the product that captures the qualities that F!NK & Co. represents, namely, "distinctive design, rethinking function and technical innovation".²¹⁸ See *figure 18 F!NK water jugs*.

Robert Foster is one of the artisans participating in these two exhibitions who can see the potential for local producers to use innovative and experimental manufacturing techniques to manufacture goods that can compete globally. His traditional skill as a metalsmith combined with his innovative and experimental approach to manipulating metal has forged a very particular kind of profile for Foster.

²¹³ Ibid. p 124 - 126

²¹⁴ Merryn Gates, "F!Nk and Co.," in *Smart Works: Design and the Handmade*, ed. Grace Cochrane (Sydney: Powerhouse Publishing, 2007). p 34.

²¹⁵ Parkes, "F!Nk & Co." p 126.

²¹⁶ Gates, "F!Nk and Co." p 34.

²¹⁷ Ibid.

²¹⁸ Merryn Gates, "Fostering Design: Drawing on a Pool of Raw Talent," *Object*, no. 49 (2006). p 19

Foster's reputation has been created through his innovative use of anodised aluminium, a material associated with factory produced objects. In recent years, ironically, in his quest to outsource some of his production, he has had to resort to other factory processes which are becoming redundant in the post industrial world. For example, the beakers which accompany the iconic F!NK water jug have to be spun. It took Foster some time to locate someone with the skills to do the work: a semi-retired spinner who lives in Wollongong. As these techniques become redundant, they are finding their way into the repertoire of the crafts, where they, in their turn, are acquiring a nostalgic aura. This has parallels with the way nineteenth-century Wedgwood's mass-production techniques were rejected by the Arts and Crafts Movement because they represented the division of labour typical of the emerging factory system, but in the post-machine age have become part of the nostalgic folklore surrounding the Wedgwood object.

Foster sees having a craft background as a distinct advantage because it gives him the ability to mock-up and prototype objects which look like the finished product and function like the mass-produced object but have the advantage that they are not expensive to get to that point. Working in three dimensions allows him to achieve the sensibility that he is after, he can manipulate the object, tweak and refine it accurately and then develop tooling from this to take it to production. In the workshop Foster uses a 500-ton press that he says is about reinterpreting the process of hammering, saying it gives him the ability to use the enormous force of the press to forge as you would with a hammer.²¹⁹

Foster's experience with tool making and engineering feeds back into his one-off work, something he says he did not realize would happen, having previously thought that going into mass production would be a burden or a compromise.²²⁰

Foster makes no ideological divide between his one-off works and his production work. He sees his work sitting on a sliding scale between handmade objects and those that need manufacturing technology to be made.²²¹ Combining redundant

²¹⁹ Mark. McAuliffe, *Freestyle [Videorecording]: New Australian Design for Living*. (Video Education Australasia, 2006).

²²⁰ Ibid.

²²¹ Gates, "F!NK and Co." p 34.

technology like his 500-ton press with the values associated with handmade production, Foster has managed to translate Hansen's Scandinavian modernist craft tradition into a new Australian context.

Furniture maker Jon Goulder

Jon Goulder sees the potential for artisans to collaborate with large manufacturers who have the manufacturing capacity and contacts that make it possible for Australian designers to reach global markets. Like Foster, Goulder develops his designs working directly in the materials to create three dimensional prototypes and tooling, and is able to do this because of his considerable skill as a maker.²²² Again like Foster, Goulder's adaption of industrial technology within the values associated with handmade production seems a particularly Australian approach. McGillick counts Goulder along with Khai Liew as the only two non-indigenous designers in *Freestyle* who are responding to an existing design tradition of colonial furniture in Australia. He credits this to Goulder's artisan-based approach and "a four-generation upholstery tradition".²²³

Goulder's approach to production is different from Foster's however, and demonstrates that there can be a variety of approaches to adapting industrial processes and out-sourcing. Frustrated with the inability to manufacture his *STAK stool* cost effectively himself, Goulder turned to manufacturing the stools in China. See *figure 19*. Parkes reports Goulder invested a significant amount of time and money in collaboration with the manufacturer in order to ensure that the product was produced to the high quality demanded by Goulder and the *STAK stool* is now being sold in Australia.²²⁴ Goulder's experience of China led him to establish a company, *Contemporary Australian Design*, with the aim of developing designs and prototypes for production in Asia. Through *Contemporary Australian Design*, Goulder and his business partners have

²²² Parkes, ed., *Freestyle: New Australian Design for Living*. p 136 -137.

²²³ McGillick, "A Diverse Practice: Contemporary Furniture, Lighting and Product Design in Australia." p 23.

²²⁴ Parkes, ed., *Freestyle: New Australian Design for Living*. p 138.

invested in developing new tooling and training for the Asian manufacturer.²²⁵ While the decision to manufacture Goulder's designs in Asia is clearly driven by the economics of production, Goulder also sees the relationship as an opportunity for him to improve the overseas company and opportunities for its workers.²²⁶

Goulder values the understanding of materials that designers gain through practical experience. He believes this know-how can engender integrity in a piece that might otherwise be lacking in a design by a designer whose ideas are developed only on a computer.²²⁷ Goulder has successfully translated his hands-on experience into designs for production using industrial technology. His *Leda seat* for example, was developed through handmade prototypes with production in mind and is now manufactured using CNC cut birch plywood strips and water-jet cut aluminum legs.

Goulder has also pursued opportunities with Australian manufacturers and has forged a relationship with Woodmark International, a company that began manufacturing Danish furniture under license, to produce his *Leda seat*.²²⁸ See *figure 20*. Manufacturing the *Leda seat* in Australia is part of a strategy to maintain the production of limited series pieces in Australia while at the same time manufacturing other items that spin-off from the same design and technology, in places where production costs are lower.²²⁹

It is worth noting that since the *Freestyle* and *Smart Works* exhibitions neither Foster nor Goulder are working with overseas manufacturers. While the potential to achieve economies of scale and lower production costs is still there, maintaining quality and protecting the intellectual property associated with the manufacture of their products must be difficult while working at a distance. There is a trade-off between cost effectiveness of overseas manufacture and

²²⁵ Cochrane, ed., *Smart Works: Design and the Handmade*. p 164.

²²⁶ *Ibid.* p 164.

²²⁷ *Ibid.*

²²⁸ Parkes, ed., *Freestyle: New Australian Design for Living*. p 140.

²²⁹ Cochrane, ed., *Smart Works: Design and the Handmade*. p 164.

preserving the quality of your brand if this quality is directly associated with the maker and with the idea that the work is made locally.

Chapter conclusion

In this chapter I have examined issues crafts are facing in the digital age. It is clear that in the twenty first century traditional Arts and Crafts values, based on the argument that there is a distinction between the work of the individual artisan and the mass-produced object of the factory, are under pressure from new technologies. These same technologies are reshaping techniques of making and the ways in which making can be organized. Objects can now be made without the agency of the human hand, and the Internet has even made it possible for these things to be made in a completely different country. The ability of digital technology to make it possible for mass production to imitate qualities associated with the handmade, leaves craft and its traditional association with the hand, with an identity crisis.

As I outlined early in the chapter, observers of craft have offered different ways of looking at how craft might adapt to these pressures while maintaining its identity as a particular way of working. To this end Dormer invokes Pye's ideas about the workmanship of risk and certainty, and proposes the notion of "distributed knowledge" as a model for thinking about the way in which digital technology might be understood in relationship to craft practice, so that craft is seen to be concerned with knowledge rather than hand skills.

Ezra Shales argues that for craft to survive, several of the old Arts and Crafts constraints need to be discarded. In particular he identifies the idealisation of individual artisan, valorization of the autonomous object and the idea of "pleasure in work" as concepts that are stopping craft from adapting to the pressures of the technological age. Shales recommends makers bring together techniques of the nineteenth century with the technology of the twenty-first, an approach he says should be termed technophilic craft. This confluence of technology and hand making suggests a hybrid form of making, one that is

already being undertaken by many Australian artisans under a variety of rubrics such as “designer-maker” or “creative industries”.²³⁰

I have used two landmark survey exhibitions of contemporary Australian design, *Freestyle* and *Smart Works* to discuss the ways in which local designers and artisans are engaging with new technologies and modes of production. While each exhibition categorises the practices of their selected designers differently, it is apparent that aspects of Shales’ ideas operate within the hybrid category of the designer-maker.

Using Robert Foster as an example I have examined how Shales’ hybrid approach might forge a connection between traditional skills and novel manufacturing processes. Foster’s material of choice is aluminium - a material associated with the factory produced object - and he has co-opted redundant factory skills such as spinning to combine with his hand making skills. These redundant technologies are in turn beginning to become part of a category of nostalgic craft skills as they disappear from mainstream manufacture. This interest by craft in the redundant techniques of the factory has parallels with the idealistic associations made by the Arts and Crafts Movement with pre-modern craft techniques during the industrial revolution.

Foster’s way of working combines his traditional silversmith skills alongside innovative processes such as explosion forming. In this way he is able to invest the qualities associated with the handmade into his serially produced objects. Hand making is simply part of a repertoire of skills to be drawn on as the task demands.

The designer-makers in *Freestyle* and *Smart Works* demonstrate that hand making retains a role in the practice of contemporary craft and the integration of hand making into the processes of the contemporary designer can still be seen to introduce an element of human-ness into objects. However, ‘handmade’ is no longer seen as an intrinsically ethical quality and it does not necessarily continue

²³⁰ Ibid. p 12.

to hold within it the meanings and values attributed to it by the Arts and Crafts Movement.

The ghost of the ethical object

In this study I have tracked the way in which certain ideas about the hand made object have emerged and been reworked in the period between the Industrial revolution of the nineteenth century and the advent of the post-industrial era of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries.

The first chapter brought into focus how the ideas of AWN Pugin and John Ruskin informed the way William Morris and the Arts and Crafts Movement theorized the hand-made object, and the study goes on to examine how the legacy of these ideas has resonated through the history of the studio craft movement into the present day.

Arts and Crafts theories about the value of the hand-made object responded to the aesthetic, moral and social crisis brought about by the rise of the factory and the division of labour, which occurred during the nineteenth century. The industrial revolution, like the agricultural revolution that preceded it, was as much a social revolution as it was about the discovery of new technologies. It reorganized the nature of work but it also reorganized social hierarchies and the distribution of wealth. To thinkers like Pugin, Ruskin and Morris these developments were threatening and represented a challenge to their beliefs and way of life.

Thus, the investment of ethical values into the aesthetics of the Arts and Crafts object was part of a broader critique of the values of Victorian England. Pugin, Ruskin and Morris proposed a return to an idealized pre-modern model of labour as a way of restoring the dignity of labour to the artisan as well as re-establishing a sense of spiritual and social continuity at a time of unprecedented social, spiritual and economic change.

Their belief in the improving quality of the act of hand making, the benefit of honest labour, transmitted itself to certain aesthetic qualities in the hand made object. The Arts and Crafts artisan respected the material from which his or her objects were made, did not conceal the methods of their construction and valued the imperfections and irregularities which, it was believed, were part of the

process of hand making. These qualities became part of a new aesthetic canon in which the act of hand making and the ethical benefits of hand making were fused, and which communicated themselves to the owner of such objects as well. Thus, to live an aesthetically discriminating life was to live a good and worthwhile life. In this triangular relationship between maker, object and user lies the idea of the ethical object.

While Pugin, Ruskin and Morris were writing for a specific time, place and set of historical circumstances, their ideas have proved robust and adaptable to a variety of different times and places. The reworking of these ideals by subsequent craft and design movements demonstrates that the ethical object has had a persistent influence on craft over its history and this has carried on into modern times.

Standing out among those responsible for the conveyance of Arts and Crafts values into modern times is the potter Bernard Leach. While Leach was not the only person to espouse and disseminate Arts and Crafts ideas, the popularity of *A Potter's Book* ensured that they were passed on to the large number of potters who were influenced by his ideas in the postwar period and who formed such a large part of the postwar studio crafts movement.

Leach's ideas depended on an intercultural engagement with Japanese artists who were interested in Western ideas. As I discuss in the second chapter, Leach's application of Arts and Crafts values to pottery was as much influenced by his own understanding of the ideas of Ruskin and Morris, as by those of his Japanese collaborators who applied them as a way of viewing traditional Eastern crafts, and his introduction to the Japanese ceramic tradition of Raku becomes a moment of fusion between Japanese ceramic practices and Arts and Crafts ideas.

Leach and his Japanese associates were able to fuse Arts and Crafts ideas about the value of the handmade with sympathetic notions about the role of the handmade object in Japanese folk culture, and incorporate aspects of Zen aesthetics. This amalgam of Arts and Crafts values with Zen aesthetics was in turn filtered through a Japanese interest in Western ideas at a time when Japan itself was going through a period of rapid modernization.

When Leach returned to Britain accompanied by Hamada he adeptly used this synthesis of Western and eastern ideas to reinvigorate the tradition of handmade ceramics in Britain and he set out his ideas on the practice of pottery in *A Potters Book*. His book was as much a philosophy of being a potter as it was a how-to manual for the neophyte potter. In it Leach argues for the redemptive power of hand making as a corrective to what he saw as the aesthetic and spiritual degradation of industrial society. As Leach explains, the honestly made pot, like the Arts and Crafts ethical object, had the power to communicate a set of spiritual and moral values to its maker and its user. Leach's ideology as set out in *A Potters Book* resonated with a public commitment to the idea of a set of traditional English values in wartime England. Later these values also seemed relevant to the generation of potters who made up a significant part of the postwar studio crafts movement interested in the idea of craft as a vehicle for alternative lifestyles.

Having established the path that Arts and Crafts values have taken, evolving from the time of Morris and Ruskin's arguments with the effects of the industrial revolution, and into modern times thanks to Leach's observations that connected Arts and Crafts values with Zen and traditional Japanese peasant pottery, this study then poses questions of the significance of these ideas in contemporary times. On the eve of another kind of making revolution, and at a time when digital technologies are re-shaping the process of making, do the values ascribed to the handmade continue to be important to object makers?

The values ascribed to hand making by the Arts and Crafts Movement and by Leach depend on the dichotomy of the studio and the factory. The idea that the product of the hand and the product of the machine can be distinguished by imperfections that are evidence of the hand of the maker is challenged by new technologies that can mimic these visual and tactile cues. This dichotomy is further challenged in a world where objects can be made without the agency of the human hand, and where it is even possible to make something in a place entirely geographically removed from the maker's studio. In the digital age handmade is no longer seen as an intrinsically ethical quality and does not

necessarily continue to hold within it the meanings and values attributed to it by the Arts and Crafts Movement.

A workplace somewhere between factory and studio

In the third and final chapter of this study I examined two recent Australian surveys of craft and design, *Freestyle* and *Smart Works*. These two exhibitions present a range of different models of working for the contemporary maker. Within these different models for practice, it is possible to discern ways in which hand making is still valued, albeit separated now from the kinds of values ascribed to manual labour by the Arts and Crafts Movement and Leach.

In this study I use the term hybrid practice to describe the potential of hand making combined with technology and the designer maker Robert Foster as an example of an object maker taking advantage of the potential of such an approach.

Foster's workplace is situated conceptually somewhere between the factory and the studio, and it is in this factory/studio that Foster moves between making that is a direct reflection of his traditional training as a silversmith, and making that is closer to factory production. In this factory/studio Foster tinkers with his hand made prototypes and hand-makes the tooling that will be used to mass-produce his production work. This is Foster's way of "humanizing" his mass-produced range and in this way he believes he is able to retain the qualities of his one-off works in his multiples.

Foster also co-opts innovative techniques that sit outside the two distinct categories of hand making and factory production. Furthermore, in Foster's use of aluminium, a material traditionally associated with mass-produced items, and in his advocacy of redundant processes associated with factory production such as spinning, it is possible to see emerging a new set of nostalgic discourses about the technologies of the first machine age.

A hybrid practice

It is clear that contemporary craft and design practice is diverse and encompasses both traditional and hybrid approaches to making. It is also clear that in the technological age the distinction between hand and machine is no longer as straightforward as it was in the time of Ruskin, Morris or Leach and this threatens to make craft, if it is positioned as an antidote to the factory, redundant.

This study concludes with the argument that, while a hybrid practice draws on elements of traditional hand making processes to inform craft production, handmade is no longer seen as an intrinsically ethical quality, and the meanings and values attributed to the ethical object are no longer necessarily relevant to the designer maker or creative industrialist. However, within the idea of hybrid practice where hand making contributes a human connection to the mass-produced object, there remain elements of Arts and Crafts values. Perhaps contained within the hand made object, and in its ability to connect maker and consumer, remains the ghost of the ethical object.

Illustrations



*Figure 1 - Josiah Wedgwood, Homer vase, stoneware (blue jasper), c. 1800. Margaret Legge, *Three Centuries of Wedgwood : Art, Industry & Design* (Melbourne: National Gallery of Victoria, 1995). p 52.*



*Figure 2 - Josiah Wedgwood, Portland vase, stoneware (blue-black jasper), c. 1791. Margaret Legge, *Three Centuries of Wedgwood : Art, Industry & Design* (Melbourne: National Gallery of Victoria, 1995). p 41.*



Figure 3 – Philip Webb & William Morris, Adjustable-back chair, ebonized wood, wool upholstery, c. 1866. Menz, Morris & Co. p 86.



Figure 4 – Shoji Hamada , Facetted bowl, stoneware, c. 1950. Tony Birks, Bernard Leach, Hamada & Their Circle (Oxford: Phaidon-Christie's, 1990). p 104.



Figure 5 – Bernard Leach, Jar, stoneware, 1958. Tony Birks, Bernard Leach, Hamada & Their Circle (Oxford: Phaidon-Christie's, 1990). p 27.

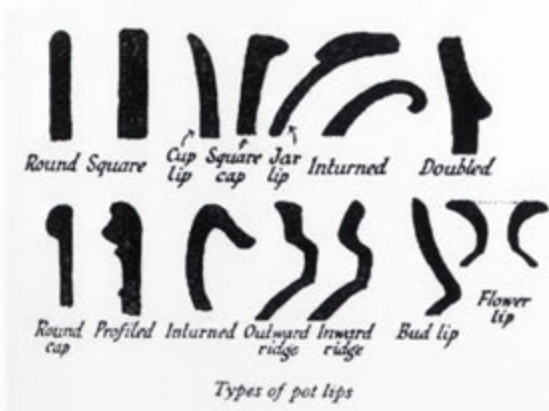


Figure 6 – Bernard Leach, *types of pot lips*, illustration.
 Leach, *A Potter's Book*. p 77.

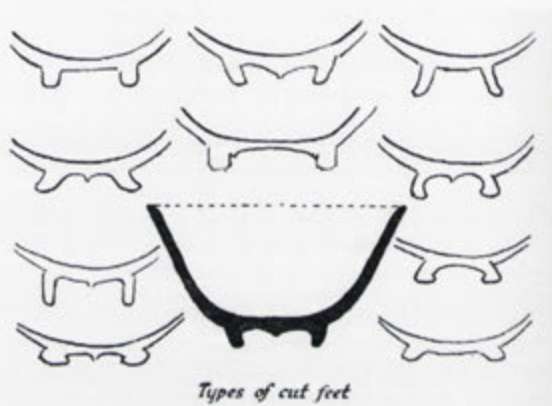


Figure 7 – Bernard Leach, *types of cut feet*, illustration.
 Leach, *A Potter's Book*. p 86.

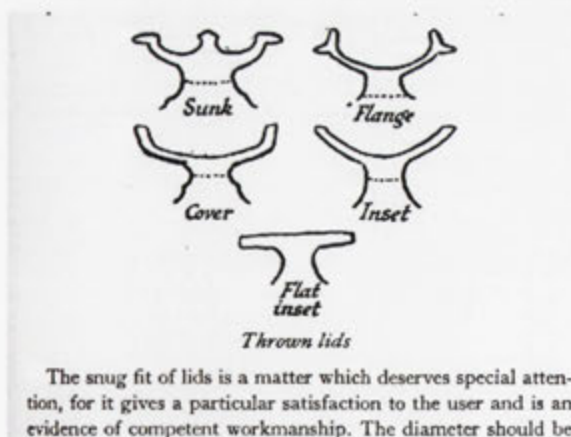


Figure 8 – Bernard Leach, *thrown lids*, illustration.
 Leach, *A Potter's Book*. p 91.

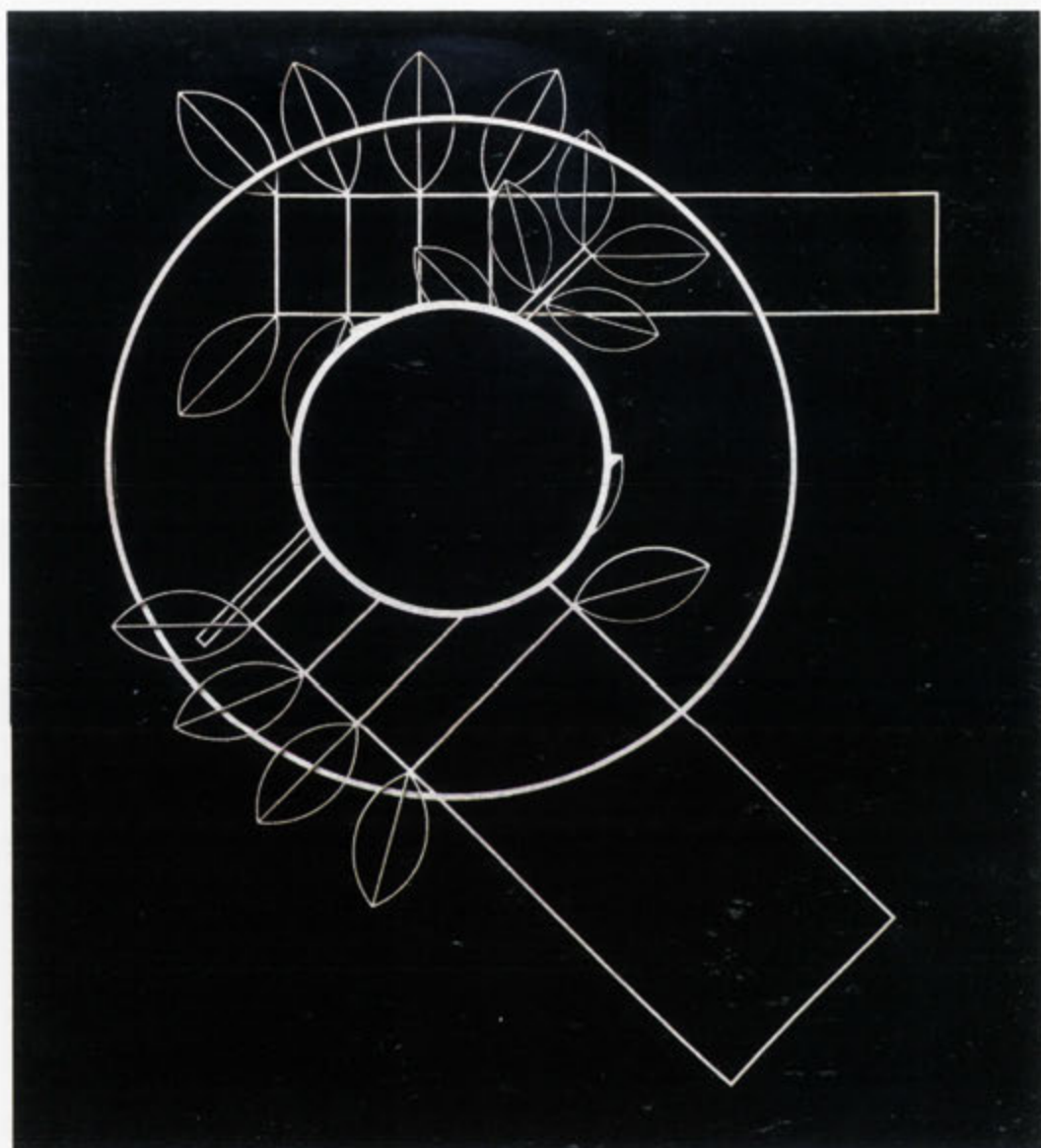


Figure 9 – David Watkins, In the gardens of Arqua Petarca, stainless steel, 2003. Bell, Transformations: The Language of Craft. p 87.



Figure 10 - Julie Blyfield, *Pressed desert plant brooch series*, silver, paint, wax, 2005. Parkes, ed., *Freestyle: New Australian Design for Living*. p 151.



*Figure 11 – Jonathan Baskett, Caterpillar bowls, blown and cut glass, 2006.
Cochrane, ed., Smart Works: Design and the Handmade. p 67.*



*Figure 12 – Jonathan Baskett, **Bebol bowls**, blown and cut glass, 2006.
Cochrane, ed., *Smart Works: Design and the Handmade*. p 69.*



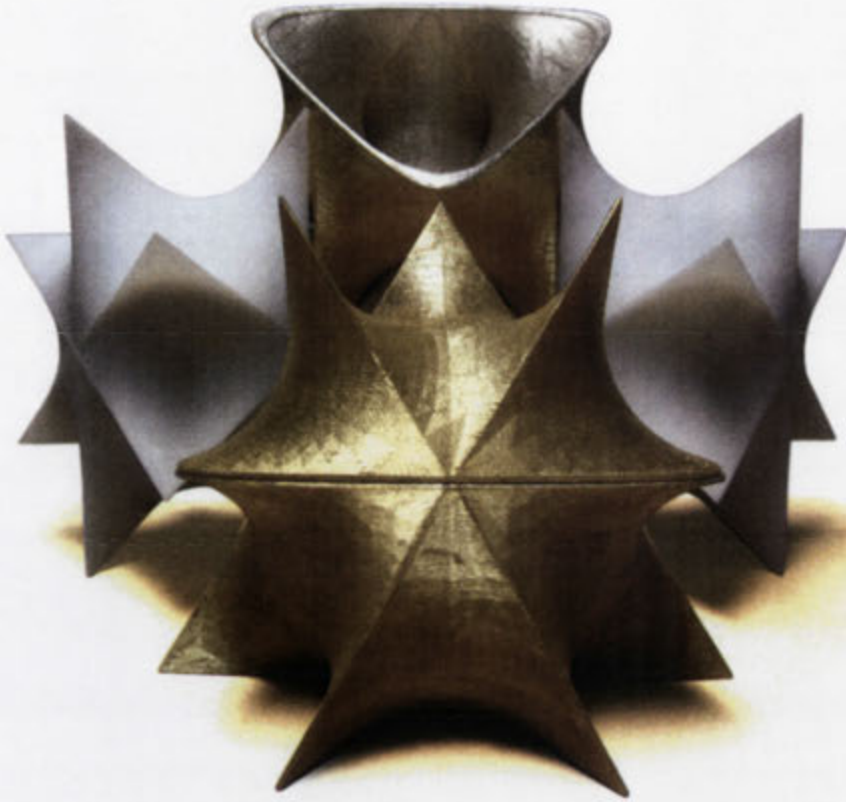
Figure 13 – Jonathan Baskett, Utility cups, blown and cut glass, 2006.
Cochrane, ed., *Smart Works: Design and the Handmade*. p 68.



Figure 14 – Janet DeBoos, *Leaving home*, wheel-thrown porcelain, 2005.
Cochrane, ed., *Smart Works: Design and the Handmade*. p 83.



Figure 15 – Janet DeBoos, *Jané (Janet) teaset home*, cast porcelain, 2002-03.
Cochrane, ed., *Smart Works: Design and the Handmade*. p 83.



*Figure 16 – Gilbert Riedelbauch , PD bowl 2.6 , ABS plastic, gold leaf, 2004.
Cochrane, ed., Smart Works: Design and the Handmade. p 51.*



Figure 17 – Robert Foster, Emerald odyssey teapot, stainless steel and anodised aluminium, 2005. Bell, Transformations: The Language of Craft. p 68.



*Figure 18 – F!NK & Co., F!NK water jugs, anodised aluminium, designed 1993.
Cochrane, ed., Smart Works: Design and the Handmade. p 36.*



*Figure 19 – Jon Goulder, STAK stool, plywood, 2001.
Parkes, ed., Freestyle: New Australian Design for Living. p 144.*



Figure 20 – Jon Goulder, Leda seat, plywood and aluminium, designed 2003. Parkes, ed., Freestyle: New Australian Design for Living. p 143.

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