Joy in Labour: The Politicization of Craft from the Arts and Crafts Movement to Etsy

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Abstract: Since the time of the Arts and Crafts movement of the late nineteenth century, craft production and consumption has been politicized. Craft's focus on hand making has been used to contrast intentional, individual labour with the division of labour involved in industrial mass production. Through its mission to build a more fulfilling world through ethical commerce, craftsmanship, and fun, the contemporary e-commerce site Etsy participates in the discourse of politicized craft that was articulated over a hundred years ago by William Morris, with his dream of "joy in labour." While craft's individualism can limit its political effectiveness, craft's utopian impulse to build a better world through more fun and through labour that is more fair is a valuable ideal and one that has survived for more than a century.

Keywords: craft, Arts and Crafts movement, Etsy, labour, ethical consumption

Résumé : Depuis l'arrivée du mouvement Arts and Crafts (Arts et Artisanats) à la fin du dix-neuvième siècle, la production et la consommation de produits artisanaux n'ont cessé d'être politisées. La concentration de l'artisanat sur les produits faits main est utilisée par opposition au travail individuel, intentionnel, de la main-d'oeuvre travaillant dans la production industrielle de masse. Selon sa mission de construire un monde pleinement satisfaisant grâce au commerce éthique, à l'artisanat, et au plaisir, le site de commerce électronique contemporain Etsy participe au discours de l'artisanat démocratisé qui a été formulé il y a quelque cent ans par William Morris, et son rêve du « plaisir dans le travail ». Bien que l'individualisme de l'artisanat puisse limiter son efficacité politique, l'aspiration utopique de l'artisanat visant à construire un monde épanoui et meilleur par un travail plus enthousiasmant et plus juste est un idéal valable, un idéal qui a survécu depuis plus d'un siècle.

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Mots clés : métier, mouvement Arts and Crafts, Etsy, main-d'oeuvre, consommation éthique

Since the Arts and Crafts movement of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, discussions of craft have always related, indirectly or not, to labour practices. This discourse contrasts intentional, individual labour with the division of labour involved in industrial mass production. Although the Arts and Crafts movement was linked with socialist and progressive reforms in Britain and the United States, the most lasting contributions of the movement are the transformation of craft into a leisure activity and the linking of craft with unalienated labour, in opposition to mass production. Influences on contemporary craft, such as movements against globalization and sweatshops and for organic food, fair-trade goods, and green products, reveal that concerns with production and consumption remain. Individuals can use craft production as an outlet for their concerns about the exploitation of their own labour and the labour of others. Currently, many craft fairs and web sites, like Etsy, attract amateur crafters who make products in their leisure time. Craft production continues to be politicized by many. This paper will focus on the late nineteenth and then the early twenty-first centuries.

There are many definitions of craft. For art historian Howard Risatti, craft is a "fundamental expression of human values and human achievement," part nature, part culture, and to be distinguished from fine art and design (xiv). Craft, according to sociologist Howard Becker, is "a body of knowledge and skill which can be used to produce useful objects" (273). M. Anna Fariello speaks of an "essence of craft … bound to the hand, to the process of working, of making" (23). "The craft object embodies a moral act," in metal smith Bruce Metcalf's view ("Evolutionary" 227). For glass artist Che Rhodes, craft "connects the past with the future" (qtd. in Hampton, "More from"). Most definitions of craft involve the concepts of making by hand and connecting with tradition.[1] Yet, as furniture designer David Pye asserts, "'*Handicraft' and 'Hand-made' are historical or social terms, not technical ones*" (10; original emphasis), since almost nothing can be made completely by hand, without tools or machines. Instead, these terms refer "to workmanship *of any kind* which could have been found before the Industrial Revolution" (Pye 10; original emphasis). Therefore, the focus on "hand making" is used to make explicit the difference between the labour involved in individually producing objects and that involved in the context of the division of labour for mass producing objects.

The Arts and Crafts Movement

The Arts and Crafts movement started in England in the 1870s and spread to other European countries and North America, where the peak of the movement was from 1890 to 1910 (see, e.g., Kaplan, "Lamp"). It was motivated by three principle ideas, according to historian Alan Crawford: the "Unity of Art (artists and craftsmen working together), Joy in Labour (the creative satisfaction of ordinary work), [and] Design Reform (making manufactured objects better)" (20). The movement has been characterized as romantic, anti-modern, and nostalgic, since early exponents of the ideas, like John Ruskin and William Morris, looked to the artisan guilds of the Middle Ages for inspiration. The ethical and political dimensions of Ruskin's *The Nature of the Gothic*, in particular, inspired Morris's belief in art as the expression of man's joy in labour. In Metcalf's view, "Ruskin's genius was to move attention away from a disinterested contemplation of an artwork and toward a broader examination of the society from which the work emerges" ("Contemporary" 16). Moreover, Ruskin's version of the history of the Middle Ages strongly influenced Morris's. In "Architecture and History," Morris explains his belief that all workmen were artists in the Middle Ages and that this situation began to change in the sixteenth century, creating a division of labour between workmen and artists. By the late eighteenth century, this division had reduced workmen to machines. By the late nineteenth century, Morris felt that the situation was even worse; workmen were now slaves to machines. Morris believed a way to combat this problem was to change manufacturing conditions in order to reinstate the social relations of production of Middle Ages artisan guilds. In "The Revival of Handicraft," Morris argues that

> we do sorely need a system of production which will give us beautiful surroundings and pleasant occupation, and which will tend to make us good human animals, able to do something for ourselves, so that we may be generally intelligent.

Starting with the individual, human animal and then moving to the societal level, the Arts and Crafts movement sought to "reassert unity in a world perceived to be artificially fragmented," according to historian Tom Crook (26). The ideal place of unity was the workshop, where social solidarity and the production of objects necessary for life combined. In the workshop, craftsmen could learn from each other and produce objects in their entirety—from idea to material

reality. By removing the division between designers and workmen, Morris wanted workers to experience joy in their work, rather than alienation. Alienation, here, refers to Karl Marx's concept, where the worker confronts the product of his labour as "*something alien*, as a *power independent* of the producer" (Marx 71; original emphasis). In the capitalist mode of production, as the world of things becomes more valued, the world of men becomes devalued, according to Marx. Labour, therefore, does not just produce commodities but also "produces ... the worker as a commodity" (71). Morris wanted to use the social relations of craft to combat this alienation. If workers were in charge of the whole process of design and creation, they would find a satisfaction in their labour that they could never find as just part of the process. The "revival of handicraft" became, for Morris, "a token of the change which is transforming civilization into socialism" and was "both noteworthy and encouraging" ("Revival"). Art historian Lawrence Lutchmansingh believes that

> Morris's enshrinement of handicraft production ... entail[s] a comprehensive analysis of its attendant economic, social, and psychological conditions, and it has the effect precisely of exposing the nullity and the alienating effect of industrial manufacture, and of offering a glimpse of what disalienated labour might be under socialism. (20)

Yet, as Morris became more involved with socialism, he recognized that arts and crafts organizations, like the craft guilds, utopian communities, or even his own company, Morris and Co., were important but too small-scale and not political enough to effect the "complete unrivetting" of the "immense chain of the terrible organization of competitive commerce" that would free mankind (Morris; qtd. in Stansky 48).

Why were artists and craftsmen concerned with labour?[2] As an imperial power the Great Britain of Queen Victoria was at its peak in the 1880s, but there had been economic problems domestically since the late 1870s. Some of these problems included large working-class strikes, like the 1887 "Blood Sunday," the 1888 Matchgirls Strike, and the 1889 Dockers Strike, manifestations of a rapid growth in trade union activity. Around this time, the British government was also enacting a series of laws to safeguard the public against dangerous industrial conditions. In addition, trade rivalry between Germany, Great Britain, and the United States was increasing, leading to concerns over the poor quality of British goods. In the interests of competing better with foreign markets, the British government

supported the creation of design schools to improve manufacturing quality.

In the United States, starting around the 1890s, the Progressive Era middle class, composed in part of managers and professionals, were also trying to alleviate some of the problems caused by industrialization. Such problems included urbanization, immigration, child labour, tenement slums, and corporate monopoly corporations. Industrialization was blamed for destroying communities, destabilizing families, and making the individual nothing but a "cog in the machine of progress" (Boris, "Dreams" 210). In 1898, Wellesley College professor Vida Scudder claimed that, in "the days of handicraft, work was its own reward; it is so no longer … [T]he division of labour, leaves people where it found them, only a little more stupefied" (qtd. in Boris, "Crossing" 35). In response to these social problems, the middle class began to develop social-welfare programs and educational reforms. Elementary and high school curricula added drawing and handicrafts. Vocational, industrial art, and design schools, similar to those founded in Great Britain, were developed to make American goods competitive with European imports (Kaplan, "Spreading"). Many of these secondary education schools, such as the Rhode Island School of Design, the Pratt Institute, the Cooper Union, and the Cranbrook, still remain important and influential in the field of design (Edwards).

The social concerns over exploitative labour practices, international competition, and poor design quality influenced the Arts and Crafts movement reformers to link labour and art. Arts and Crafts reform attempts varied but generally focused on manufacturing conditions. In Britain, some reformers looked to the past and tried to recreate medieval craft guilds. Two of the most influential guilds of the Arts and Crafts movement were the Century Guild and the Art Workers' Guild. The Century Guild (1882) believed that "every aspect of a house should fit together" and good design should be available less expensively (Stansky 70). While the Century Guild's exhibitions started out cooperatively, with everyone's work intermixed and unlabelled, by the following year, their exhibition was divided by individual. They were not able to maintain the cooperative atmosphere they had imagined. Another important guild was the Art Workers' Guild (1884), which helped architects find craftsmen to assist in their buildings and helped craftsmen "affirm their own significance and independence" (150). Stansky concludes that the

Art Workers' Guild served to give members a "sense of identity and solidarity" and was crucial in spreading Morris's ideas (170).[3]

In addition to guilds, others tried to create utopian communities, schools of design, or philanthropic organizations, including the School of Handicraft (1887) for working class labourers and Toynbee Hall (1884), "a pioneering university settlement house in one of the poorest sections of London," where students lived among London's poor (Kaplan, "Spreading" 57–8). Further, the British Home Arts and Industries Association (1880) worked from the premise that "culturally deprived working-class people" and women would be given an uplifting activity and skill that they could market through the craft classes they established around Britain (Kaplan, "Lamp" 58).

Concerns about labour conditions led Arts and Crafts reformers to form a contradictory relationship to machines. Some reformers recognized their necessity; others called for their removal and a return to pure handicraft. Morris felt that, as "a condition of life, production by machinery is altogether an evil; as an instrument for forcing on us better conditions of life, it has been, and some time yet will be, indispensable" (qtd. in Stansky 64). Morris's contemporary, Arthur Mackmurdo, co-founder of the Century Guild, focused only on the positive aspects of machinery, and according to Stansky, "believed that machinery could act as a liberating force that would free men to spend more time in pursuit of the idea of beauty itself" (71). The two views on mechanical automation reveal what Ernest Mandel terms the "antinomies inherent in the capitalist mode of production" (216):

> On the one hand, [automation] represents the perfected development of material forces of production, which could in themselves potentially liberate mankind from the compulsion to perform mechanical, repetitive, dull and alienating labour. On the other hand, it represents a new threat to job and income, a new intensification of anxiety, insecurity ... and intellectual and moral impoverishment. (216)

The Arts and Crafts movement was not able to significantly affect production and automation and liberate mankind from alienating labour. In fact, Morris's company—initially called Morris, Marshall, Faulkner & Co. but later reorganized into Morris and Co.—perceived itself to be a cooperative of artists who designed as well as produced objects. While Morris, himself, embodied the designer as ideal craftsman, completing all components of his projects, a

division of labour existed among his workers. He was not able to make his company match his socialist ideal.

In the United States, middle-class men and women lived cooperatively with poorly educated and poorly paid workers and immigrants in settlement houses, like Chicago's Hull House and Boston's South End House. Here, the reformers used craft to fill workers' leisure hours that they feared might otherwise be spent drinking or gambling. These settlement houses and organizations like New York's Scuola d'Industrie Italiane then marketed immigrant crafts—in particular, in the case of the New York school, Italian embroidery and handmade lace. Yet, in some instances, "the line between handicraft and sweated labour was thinner than some imagined" (Boris, "Crafts Shop" 175). Reformers may have tried to use craftsmanship to better the lives of immigrants, but "their cottage industries often differed little from industrial homework, seen as the most destructive form of sweated labour" (Boris, "Crafts Shop" 175). Other attempts to market the Arts and Crafts ideal came from American companies, such as Gustav Stickley's *Craftsman* magazine and furniture company and the Roycroft mail-order gift catalogues. Stickley did not believe that craft meant hand production only but rather that the worker should master the machine as a useful tool. With the labour saved by the machine, the worker, theoretically, would be free to express his individuality in the finishing details. Feminist scholar Eileen Boris claims that this commercialization both democratized and diminished the legacy of Ruskin and Morris.

The impact of Arts and Crafts reforms varied. First of all, not all Arts and Crafts proponents were interested in political or social reforms. Those who were interested did not succeed in radically transforming social relations and the conditions of production. Charles Robert Ashbee, creator of the Guild and School of Handicraft, felt that the British made "a great social movement [into] a narrow and tiresome little aristocracy [of designers] working with high skill for the very rich" (Kaplan, "Lamp" 58). Thus, while Morris had wanted to create art that would be available to all classes of people, in practice, due to the costly nature of his production methods, his firm produced work mainly for the upper class. US Bureau of Labour economist Max West wrote, in 1904, that the most far-reaching effects of the Arts and Crafts movement would be the improved quality and design of factory-made goods. In fact, curator Wendy Kaplan argues, the glorification of work by hand actually reduced the quality of goods and downgraded professional

standards. Likewise, Pye feels that Ruskin and Morris destroyed Victorian workmanship by diverting "the attention of educated people from what was good in the workmanship of their own time" (66) and causing them to despise it. Moreover, Boris concludes that what began "as a critique of art and labour under industrial capitalism turned into a style of art, leisure activities, and personal and social therapy" (Boris, "Dreams" 209). Robert Edwards agrees that the most long-lasting legacy of the Arts and Crafts movement was "transformation of handicraft from an essential skill for earning a living to a nonessential enrichment of leisure time" (234). Art historian Maria Buszek finds it ironic that the Arts and Crafts movement ended up elitist and naïve, as

> criticism on the subject of craft doubled back to focus not on the everyday and sociohistorical relevance of craft media but on the preciousness and particularities of those media in regard to the objects they produced. (3)

Certainly, Morris's desire to change the nature of production was not seen as a danger to "the inevitable laws of economy," according to the *Times* editorial at the time of his death (qtd. in Stansky 259). Instead, the editorial claims that the "world can afford to judge him indulgently" and ignore "the results of a warm heart and a mistaken enthusiasm" (qtd. in Stansky 259). In the end, the most lasting contributions of the Arts and Crafts movement have been the transformation of craft into a leisure activity and the linking of craft with unalienated labour in opposition to mass production.

Craft in the Twentieth Century

Over the course of the twentieth century, the concept of craft was deployed in a variety of contexts, which this section will briefly discuss. By the 1920s, the legacy of the Arts and Crafts movement had divided into progressive and conservative tracts. Progressives, like Frank Lloyd Wright, argued that "truly democratic art" must embrace and control the machine. Likewise, the German Bauhaus School (1919–33) saw craft as preparation for mass manufacture. In their *Manifesto of the Bauhaus*, Walter Gropius and Lazslo Moholy-Nagy exclaim, "Architects, painters, sculptors, we must all return to the crafts! … a base in craft is essential to every artist" (554–5). The Bauhaus School then influenced movements in Germany, Italy, Japan, and Scandinavia in the 1950s. In contrast, conservatives were on "a nationalistic quest to preserve the values [of the] past" (Kaplan,

"Lamp" 59). Craft traditions were emphasized as morally righteous, authentic national expressions, in 1930s and 1940s fascist Germany and Italy.

After World War II, the Studio Craft movement developed in the United States, due, in part, to the large number of veterans taking advantage of the educational benefits from the GI Bill of Rights. The Studio Craft movement was institutionalized in the creation of the American Craft Council, in 1943. Art critic Janet Koplos and metal smith Metcalf describe studio craft as "handwork with aesthetic intent, largely or wholly created by individuals (usually art school or university trained) to their own designs" (ix). The GI Bill also increased interest in do-it-yourself (DIY) activity by making home ownership more accessible. According to curator Carolyn Goldstein, "Do-it-yourself seemed to represent independence from the corporate world" (68). DIY was linked to ideals of domesticity, leisure, independence, and Yankee ingenuity.

By the 1960s and 1970s, curators Vicki Halper and Diane Douglas argue,

> the social ferment ... expressed in the civil rights movement, hippie counterculture, and Vietnam War protests, reinforced the post-World War II attraction of craft production as an antiestablishment activity. Choosing craft was a way of choosing to live "off the grid" in relation to the dominant capitalist culture. (x)

The 1970s craft movement tried to "re-present traditional crafts as a way to reconnect modern culture to a tradition of making things ourselves" (Stevens, "Validity," 52). In addition, feminists began to re-evaluate the role of traditional women's domestic crafts, such as quilting, sewing, and basket weaving, as politicized craft activity. Although much of this political agenda was individualized, some collective actions emphasized practice as the primary political act.[4] Official crafts organizations, such as British Crafts Council and Canadian Crafts Council (now the Canadian Crafts Federation), were founded in many countries, and publications on crafts—many advocating craft and design as vehicles of improvement for society—grew in number.

In the 1980s, which Paul Greenhalgh claims was a decade of "voracious consumption and Post-Modern discourse" (2), the character of the craft world changed. Studio craft became more commercialized.

By the mid-1980s, galleries often handled only one medium, with glass being the most successful. Yet fewer fine-craft practitioners had salaried or academic positions, and they were, therefore, more dependent on selling their works on the market. The 1980s was also the beginning of DIY craft, according to Dennis Stevens, who argues that DIY craft emerged from punk and 'zines, as well as the 1990s Riot Grrrl movement. He explains DIY craft as a "shared, creative activity," relying "upon an ironic or satirical approach to forms of domestic creativity" (Stevens, "DIY" 1). In the 1990s, historical eclecticism became prominent in studio craft, and craftspeople were less concerned with the question: why am I not treated like an artist? than with, what does it matter as long as I create and communicate? (Greenhalgh 3).

With "the dawn of the new millennium," Andrew Wagner, editor of *American Craft* magazine, sees a chance for reconciliation between 1960s and 1970s hippie counter-culture that ignored quality and the 1980s and 1990s high-end craft world that embraced aesthetic qualities (Condon). He wants these worlds to reconnect and "elevate craft to its proper place in this world—as a uniquely qualified leader and a grounded member of a society that often seems on the verge of chaos" (Condon). Yet, even as craft became more popular in the larger community, several prominent institutions removed the term "craft" from their names.[5]

To summarize, over the course of the twentieth century, craft was deployed in a variety of contexts, from amateur to professional, from leisure to political. One aspect that remained constant was the importance of labouring by hand to the meaning of craft.

Craft in the Twenty-First Century

As for twenty-first century craft movements, Glenn Adamson views them as a palimpsest of all the previous models, with two main trends: politicization and post-disciplinarity. He argues that the

> new crafter wave is fuelled by an intriguing alliance of the oldest and newest of social technologies, the sewing circle and the blog. In a sense, the twenty-first century of craft is beginning the way that the twentieth did: by finding in tradition the possibility for social change. (585–6)

Where machine technology was an issue for many in the Arts and Crafts movement, some contemporary craftspeople use technology

to connect with each other and to make new kinds of crafts, but traditional skills and tools are still valued.

Another contemporary trend is craftivism (craft + activism) whose key features, according to curators Anthea Black and Nicole Burisch, include

> participatory projects that value democratic processes, the use of various cross-disciplinary media, and an ongoing commitment to politicized practices, issues and actions. Sustainable community-based activity and relationships are emphasized in the creation of politically engaged craft projects. (614)[6]

These relationships are then used to critique corporate and institutional culture.

Other indications of the contemporary interest in craft include the multiplication of amateur craft shows in the last five to ten years. The Magazine Publishers of America lists around three-hundred magazines devoted to craft, hobbies, and knitting. Countless blogs and online video tutorials explain craft techniques and share DIY tips. One of the largest sites, Ravelry, has user-driven content on knitting and fibre arts and over 4.1 million members ("Ravelry"). Further, a number of web sites devoted to selling handmade goods have been created, including Etsy, ArtFire, and Zibbet. As the first and largest craft e-commerce site, Etsy was founded in 2005 and is a global, online marketplace. As of May 2014, Etsy has over forty million members, of which over 1 million are sellers, either individuals or small businesses, making or selling handmade, supply, or vintage products. Etsy sellers are on track to sell over a billion dollars in merchandise this year ("Press").[7] Etsy's 2013 report "Redefining Entrepreneurship" states that "88% of US Etsy sellers are women"; "Etsy sellers [in the United States] have higher levels of education but lower household incomes than the general population"—10.2 per cent lower than the American national average. In terms of employment among Etsy sellers, 48 per cent are self-employed or work part-time at another job; 26 per cent are full-time employees at another company; 24 per cent are unemployed; and 2 per cent are working without pay. Ninety-seven per cent, nearly all Etsy sellers, "run their [creative] businesses from their homes." To summarize, some sellers use Etsy as a full-time job. Others may only want to support their hobby or make money on the side.

Over the past three years, Etsy's mission statement has changed at least four times.[8] Etsy now describes itself as "a marketplace where people around the world connect to buy and sell unique goods. Our mission is to reimagine commerce in ways that build a more fulfilling and lasting world" ("About" Oct. 2013). While the changing economy has been a part of all of their mission statements, it has become increasingly central, and the term "handmade" has disappeared, to be replaced first by "craftsmanship" and now by "unique." Through its mission statement, Etsy participates in the discourse of politicized craft that was articulated over a hundred years ago by Morris and other leaders of the Arts and Crafts movement. Where Morris dreamed of using craft as part of a socialist future, Etsy and others think of craft as part of the more sustainable future that will result from improving both environmental and business practices. Etsy chose to become a Certified Benefit, or B, Corporation in May 2012. B Corps are "a new class of corporation that voluntarily meets higher standards of corporate purpose, accountability, and transparency" ("Quick FAQ's").[9] According to Etsy CEO Chad Dickerson,

> B Corporations are a new kind of company that uses the power of business to solve social and environmental problems … We believe that business has a higher social purpose beyond simply profit. (qtd. in Traub)

Dickerson also wants to "make the world more like Etsy: a world based on community, shared success, commitment to sustainable operations, and using the power of business for a higher purpose" (Dickerson, "Notes … 30 Million"). Etsy's focus on reimagining commerce and business in more socially responsible and sustainable ways reveals some of the influences on twenty-first-century craft.

These influences on contemporary craft include the anti-globalization and the anti-sweatshop movements, both of which are concerned with exploitative labour practices. In the film *Handmade Nation*, crafter Jenine Bressner explains that the contemporary craft movement is "speaking and acting against … questionable labour practices and [in favour of] doing things local instead of wearing clothes from some place you've never heard of." In addition, furniture maker Daniel Michalik argues that people are crafting now because

> mass production needs to be rethought, and craft is the springboard that will put this into motion … Because the objects and production

> systems around us now need to be better. New and better ways of making things are waiting to emerge. (qtd. in Hampton, "Here's")

Further influences include the movements for organic food, fair-trade goods, and environmentally friendly products, all concerned with production processes. Writer Bethany Rex claims that the "origin of the products that we consume has become a central ethical concern," leading to an increase in the "DIY ethic at the moment." Curator Katie Lee states that makers and buyers of craft products "tend to be conscientious consumers, being aware of what and how they consume things, wanting to have a deeper appreciation of meaning with the things that they choose to engage with" (qtd. in Hampton, "More Views"). Lifestyle movements like Slow Food and simple living also have an impact on twenty-first century craft practices, according to participants—artists, gallery owners, academics, curators, writers, and other craft enthusiasts—at the 2010 convening of the American Craft Council and the Penland School of Crafts. Further, shop-local movements want consumers to recognize the importance of small businesses for job creation in local economies—something the global web site Etsy tries to encourage through its Shop Local search and its blog.

Craft fits with these movements because of its focus on consumption and production. Since the Arts and Crafts movement, craft has been linked—socially and politically—with unalienated personal labour, in contrast to impersonal industrial mass production. Since the appeal of craft comes from the focus on the individual labour involved in creation, craft is about the personality of the maker. Craftspeople make themselves into a brand and "sell their selves, their politics, and their interests in order to sell their crafts," according to Nicole Dawkins (272). Both shopping and vending crafts "constitute an intersubjective performance where vendors and shoppers alike are able to enact and assert their unique individualism through the exchange of crafted objects" (273). An article from the Etsy Blog, "Branding 101: How to Build a Memorable Etsy Shop," explains that

> [n]ow, branding is applied to everything and everyone. Including *you* … [A] big part of the appeal is the authenticity and personal aspect of what you do. The story behind your products can attract customers because it makes what they're buying special—and by extension, it makes them feel special. (Laite)

The Etsy Blog itself promotes the Etsy brand and provides evidence of the lifestyle they are appealing to. The blog combines articles on craft, art, design, and food with features on sellers and stories about the benefits of making, shopping local, and rediscovering and maintaining traditional working methods. The articles on featured shops include interviews with the sellers and beautiful photographs of their workspaces and their products, and more importantly, of them making their crafts. This usually includes close-ups of their hands as evidence of the "handmade" labour of production. Since September 2007, Etsy has featured 254 sellers (out of one million) who have "quit their day job." One of these shops, CausticThreads, writes,

> I love that my schedule is somewhat flexible, that I'm in control of my success, and I know I can go any direction I want with this business ... It's difficult for me to stop working, and because I work from home, it's even harder to separate my work life from my home life.

CausticThreads provides evidence for Dawkins's assertion that contemporary craft is "a form of highly individualized, flexible, affective work that blurs the boundaries of leisure and labour time" and "is informed by ... post-Fordist subjectivities" (263). According to Stuart Hall, post-Fordism involves—among other things—the decline of manufacturing; a shift to new information technologies; more flexible, decentralized labour processes; greater emphasis on personal choice; and the targeting of consumers by lifestyle and taste. This means that craft, as a day job, is valued as pleasurable and creative work, instead of being seen as unstable, precarious, or exploitative.

As *New York Times* writer Alex Williams explains, the catch, for those who can make a living from Etsy, is that it is hard work, involving thirteen- to sixteen-hour days, and it may be necessary to hire assistants with similar skills and ideals, thereby recreating a division of labour. Likewise, the business manual *Craft Inc.: Turn Your Creative Hobby into a Business* advises crafters to create a "mini-assembly line, [even though] this may take away from the romantic handmade spirit, ultimately you'll be happier getting your product to the client in a timely manner" (Ilasco 77). Ironically, then, making craft commodities, an activity thought to be opposed to mass production, can often end up reproducing a division of labour.

While making craft objects appeals to many people, far more are interested in being consumers than producers (as noted earlier, there are over forty million members—or potential shoppers—compared to its one million shops). Likewise, its mission statement has become increasingly focused on commerce rather than production. Since craft focuses not only on how objects look aesthetically but on the conditions under which they are manufactured, craft fits within contemporary ethical consumption movements that emphasize the origin of products. Some theorists, such as Clive Barnett et al., believe that ethical consumption strategies create "new forms of global feeling which are helping to reinvent political participation and civic activism" (200). Yet, other scholars debate the economic and social effects of ethical consumption. Jo Littler argues that the choice to consume less is only an option for "affluent consumers" with "enough resources and cultural capital to consume in the first place" (107). Certainly, well-made craft products are expensive and usually not vital to own. Because consumption of craft commodities emphasizes the human, creative labour that produces the commodity, it can also be seen as an example of what sociologist Sam Binkley calls the "'fetishized de-fetishization' of the commodity form," "a gestural unmasking of the purported artifice of commodified goods and services" in order to recover the "intrinsic humanity … they are believed to conceal" (602). The "fetishized de-fetishization" of commodities that is supposed to be a critique of capitalist relations, Binkley argues, becomes, instead, merely an effort to come to terms with the "accelerated conditions of contemporary life" (603). Artist Ingrid Bachmann finds that "the fetishization of labour for its own sake" often hides economic and cultural disparities (46). She finds it ironic that the "product of excessive and often highly skilled labour from an individual in the developed world" is valued higher than the similarly intensive work of "an anonymous maker in the developing world" (46). A similar problem occurred in the Arts and Crafts movement, when reformers tried to use craftsmanship to improve the lives of immigrants but often helped to create cottage industries that were actually sweatshops. The problem remains that the labour of some craftspeople gets valued more highly than that of others.

Conclusion

Since the time of the Arts and Crafts movement craft has always been related to labour practices, whether indirectly or not, as intentional and individual labour with industrial mass production were

contrasted. Craft has been accused of being anti-modern, nostalgic, and anachronistic. Yet its use as a political critique of industrial conditions and manufacturing processes provides a glimpse into a utopian future, where people enjoy their work and their lives to the fullest. In fact, it is the very slowness of crafting and its emphasis on production that provides "a modern way of thinking otherwise" (Adamson 10).

The Arts and Crafts movement did not succeed in implementing guild socialism focused around workshop production. Workshops like Morris and Co. and the Century Guild could not maintain their cooperative ideal. While Etsy has grown tremendously over the past nine years, it is still a tiny part of the world's economy. One problem is that much of the craft products sold on Etsy are non-necessary items. For example, jewellery, with over five million items for sale, is the largest category of crafts sold.

More importantly, the contemporary emphasis on individualism—on the unique personality of the maker and their self-brand—can limit craft's political effectiveness. The result is that individuals can use craft production as an outlet for their concerns about the exploitation of their own labour and the labour of others. Individuals gain satisfaction from either making or buying handmade products but the transition from *individuals* to *communities* to the *world* is not easy to accomplish. Nonetheless, craft's political and utopian impulse to build a better world through more fun and more fair labour is a valuable ideal and one that has survived for more than a century.

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Notes

1 Of twenty responses to the question, "Why craft now?" (from artists, curators, writers, etc., at the American Craft Council and Penland School of Crafts conference), eleven mention the words "making" or "maker," seven mention "hand," and seven refer to tradition or history; see Hampton "Here's"; "More from"; "More views."

2 For the account in the paragraph that follows, see Stansky.

3 The Art Workers' Guild still exists today and still offers ways to find craft apprenticeships.

4 Art historian Edward S. Cooke, Jr., lists the Fiberworks Center for Textile Arts in the San Francisco Bay Area or New Hamburger

Cabinetworks near Boston as evidence of politically oriented collective actions.

5 In 2002, the American Craft Museum became the Museum of Art and Design. In 2003, the California College of Arts and Crafts became the California College of the Arts.

6 Betsy Greer, godmother of craftivism, defines it as "the practice of engaged creativity, especially regarding political or social causes. By using their creative energy to help make the world a better place, craftivists help bring about positive change via personalized activism. Craftivism allows practitioners to customize their particular skills to address particular causes ... Through activities such as teaching knitting lessons, crocheting hats for the less fortunate, and sewing blankets for abandoned animals, craftivism allows for creativity to expand previous boundaries and enter the arena of activism." The only thing Greer discourages is making money from craftivist activities. The manifesto of one craftivist group, the Craftivist Collective, is "[t]o expose the scandal of global poverty, and human rights injustices though the power of craft and public art. This will be done through provocative, non-violent creative actions" (Corbett and Housley 344). One of their protests involves creating cross-stitched mini banners, with the intent that these cute, kitsch, unthreatening banners will "leave seeds in people's minds rather than telling them what to do" (Corbett and Housley 345).

7 Etsy sales have dramatically increased over the past several years: $180.6 million in 2009; $314.3 million in 2010; $525.6 million in 2011; $895.1 million in 2012 ("Press—Kit").

8 In 2010, Etsy's mission was "to enable people to make a living making things, and to reconnect makers with buyers. Our vision is to build a new economy and present a better choice: **Buy, Sell, and Live Handmade**" ("What Is Etsy?" original emphasis). In 2011, Etsy's mission statement became: "Etsy is the world's handmade marketplace. Our mission is to empower people to change the way the global economy works. We see a world in which very-very small businesses have much-much more sway in shaping the economy, local living economies are thriving everywhere, and people value authorship and provenance as much as price and convenience. We are bringing heart to commerce and making the world more fair, more sustainable, and more fun" ("About" 2011).
In 2013, Etsy's next mission statement was: "to reimagine commerce in ways that build a more fulfilling and lasting world.
We are a mindful, transparent, and humane business.
We plan and build for the long term.
We value craftsmanship in all we make.
We believe fun should be part of everything we do.
We keep it real, always." ("About" 2013, Feb)

9 Certified B Corporation is a certification conferred by the nonprofit B Lab, whereas Benefit Corporation is a legal status administered by states in the United States and has tax benefits. Benefit corporations are recognized in 23 states and legislation is pending in 15 others ("Legislation").

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