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Craft, Critical Theory and the Idea of the Post-modern

by

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Introduction

In a recent paper given to craft educators and students focusing on the development of “conceptual skills”, Michael Wilson made the following remarks:

[the single most important conceptual skill]...is the ability to discern the locally productive point of application of historically grounded critique. This skill involves identifying at what moment in the educational process or individual project or process, the interrogation of assumptions and premises can be productive and energising, rather than disruptive and tending to promote defensiveness. This skill will be to position discussion and critical interrogation somewhere other than at the very end as an add-on option, or alongside as a half hearted complementary pursuit. (Wilson, 1997, p.32)

By “conceptual skills” Wilson means the skills required to move beyond simply technical concerns, towards the theoretical realm. The desire to not only involve a critical attitude, but to incorporate it into craft practice, to be mobilised at the correct time, indicates a break with the accepted notions of craft as non-theoretical. This thesis will explore the implications of the combination of theory and craft, and identify the most important theoretical questions craft must answer.

For the most part the doing-of-craft and the writing-about-craft is undertaken by different groups of specialists. Many practising craftspeople do not read about their own discipline, or concern themselves with the ‘crisis in craft’ or the role of ceramic practice in the work of Walter Benjamin. Nor do they consider the categorisation of their output as art/craft/decorative/kitsch. They make what sells and enjoy the making as much as anyone loves or hates their job. However, for those crafts practitioners who choose to be “ceramic sculptors” or “glass artists”, the

situation is quite different. Theory, or the conceptual, or 'the ideas', become as important as technique. 'Crisis in craft' definitely does concern them, as it thematises the problems of the fusion between technical skill and theoretical ideas. This thesis focuses on this problematic craft—what follows does not relate to the forms of craft for which crisis means bankruptcy.

Since craft education does not cover theory, and the marketplace does not require theory, the emergent ceramic sculptor or glass artist must exist on a diet of half baked critical analysis prepared for them by interdisciplinary hacks. Wilson rightly stresses the need for theoretical or conceptual skills to be developed at the level of the individual. At the very least, this would nurture a critical attitude and provide the necessary skills for interpretation of the contemporary cultural climate.

To examine the possible role for theory in craft, I originally elected to use the critical theory of the Frankfurt School and French post-structuralism to deconstruct craft, the former to analyse the cultural/economic functions of craft goods, the latter to critique the modernist subjectivity which seems to thrive in the sculptural ceramics studios. This strategy meant that I would also have to give due attention to the opposition between these two schools, the modern/post-modern climates that they operate in and finally the role of the Enlightenment in both. Rather than dismember craft with convenient moments from the evolution of theory, it made more sense to place my discussion in the context of the historical development of the Enlightenment project.

The transition from the modern to the post-modern effected two very important shifts—an end to the straightforward categories of high and low art, and the retirement of the modernist subject To an extent it appeared that craft

practitioners could hum along in some manner with the various sounds of the 'return to narrative' or the new acceptability of expression, made possible by the disruptions of any number of critical threads in the cultural/intellectual spheres in the 1960s and 1970s. The playful, commercial, identifiable forms of certain post-modern works, the desire to be 'of humanity' or even further, the "double coding" of Jencks, for the expert and the public, coincided with the associations of craft materials and the trashy aesthetic that craft objects do so well. Unfortunately, once the crafts practitioner decides to move outside the confines of irony, ignorance of the nature of post-modern culture tends to, in the fullest sense, locate the work. Craft and postmodernism becomes the final consideration of this thesis.

To summarise the aims:

1. To analyse the existing theories of craft, and try to identify the weakest points of craft's current condition.
2. To situate craft in the larger framework of the critique of Enlightenment.
3. To suggest possible functions for craft in the post-modern.

In the first chapter I look at two essays on the function of theory in craft—one adopting a favourable view, the other disapproving. Both mistakenly try to discover an essence of craft, or reason for its appeal, in the pre-modern context, citing the folk traditions or the retreat from the traumas of modern, urban living. Craft, however, is a modern profession, and cannot make use of transhistorical or timeless qualities. For this reason my analysis of craft begins with the Arts and Craft Movement, and its combination of Victorian humanitarian politics with romanticised medieval

production. Craft comes into existence as a particular political project- the physical/ visual articulation of certain interpretations of Marxism and William Morris's own philosophies. The Victorian ideal of the liberation experienced by the labouring subject, and the morality of hard graft within that culture flavours the whole project. As the subject becomes alienated in the new form of labour and social structures, so just as great a reformation could be affected by steering labour in another direction—the shift in labour would produce a mimetic shift in subjectivity. The spiritual well-being of humanity was threatened by capitalist labour (maybe because it had more money and time off?). This chapter must demonstrate that the activities themselves, the materials and forms of work were secondary to the political or moral considerations.

In the second chapter, I want to bring the emancipatory ideals of the Arts and Crafts Movement into the context of the Enlightenment, and to develop the idea of craft as an aesthetic modernism. The work of the Frankfurt School, and in particular the critique of “degraded technical reason” which takes place in Adorno and Horkheimer's “Dialectic of Enlightenment”, provides the main focus for the assessment of the emancipatory impulse. The inevitable failure of the Arts and Crafts Movement according to this dialectic results in the dispersal of fragments of its meaning. The fragment that we examine here is the union of subject and material, and the development of that union as an aesthetic form. Jurgen Habermas's interpretation of aesthetic modernism and his attempts to formulate an emancipatory program concludes the idea of the modern, and ends the more unified form of history the modernism allows.

In the final chapter, the ideas of the post-modern become the focus. With any ideas of unitary history or definitions necessarily problematic, and the rational subject of modernity long departed, to speak about craft in the post-modern will be to describe something much less stable than the concept of the previous chapters. However, this is not to suggest that anything indicates that craft will not survive either the loss of a unified definition or the expressive subject of modernity.

Chapter 1

In his essay “The History of Craft” (Greenhalgh, 1997), Paul Greenhalgh attempts to develop historical structures in which various aspects of craft are said to reside, with the intention that they will indicate the direction a theory of craft would follow. He uses the analytic techniques of Foucault’s “The Order of Things”, making the historical appearance of words—when the ‘decorative’ becomes separate from the ‘artistic’—central to the meaning of craft. In “The Ideal World of Vermeer’s little Lacemaker”, Peter Dormer invalidates craft’s associations with trends in art theory, arguing that craft must set a distinctive brief for itself and work within the parameters of that brief. Both writers attempt to find justifications for craft and proffer their own readings of where craft’s future lies, in direct opposition to each other.

Greenhalgh divides craft into the history of the decorative arts, the vernacular (folk tradition), and the politics of work (the class he creates to cover Arts and Crafts origins in socialist thought). He reasons that the Arts and Crafts Movement summarised the collective histories of decorative wares and folk production around a political agenda. However, the Arts and Crafts Movement *defined* craft, which in his view eventually lead to the perceived marginalisation and ridicule of craft practice as opposed to the seriousness reserved for fine art or design. The broad spectra of ability, technique and professionalism within the crafts resulted in wild oscillations in the type and quality of output and varied conceptions of what the term represented.

The fractionalisation of craft has caused it to become an unstable compound but I do not think we should contemplate abandoning it as a term just yet. Indeed, it is a class system and therefore by definition its disbandment would prove extremely difficult...the time has come to analyse the three elements [decorative arts,

vernacular, politics of work] in order to determine their usefulness in our present context. Craft needs to be de- and then re- classified. It needs to become internally dynamic once more, rather than allowing itself to be externally constrained. (Greenhalgh, 1997, p.47)

In his view, the tasks of the crafts practitioner include, through research and analysis, the reanimation of the principles and politics of craft. This analysis, centred on the functions of the decorative arts, traditional techniques and the socialism of Arts and Crafts, will also present the directions craft should take and the type of objects it will make. Greenhalgh states that these decisions have been made for craft by exterior practices, and that only a thorough grounding in the historical and theoretical heritage of craft will allow it to reclaim the importance of the Arts and Crafts period.

These are quite unrealistic ambitions coupled to dubious historical links. Can craft aspire to redevelop Ruskin's and Morris's agenda for social transformation, considering the social role craft played after the Arts and Crafts Movement, particularly in an era when the left finds the revolutionary/emancipatory elements of its project almost traumatic? What exactly constitutes the "vernacular" as the 20th century concludes? Or the "decorative arts"? Undoubtedly, investigation of these questions would prove informative but it does not necessarily follow that this information could be applicable to craft.

Peter Dormer traces another history of craft, relating it to the different modes of design and fine art. He derides the points at which craft practitioners attempted to follow their counterparts in both these areas, and craft's affiliations with theory gave rise to all that dreadful 'conceptual craft', with potters eating clay and filming their wheels. Dormer looks at "three aspects of the craft phenomenon: the attraction of

being a craftsperson; the failure of the art-craft concept; and the role of craft as domestic decoration in contemporary western society” (Dormer, 1988, p. 138).

The attraction of being a craftsperson come[s] back to the essential nature of handicraft activity: the pleasure of losing oneself in a practical activity offers a way of life which is different from that of the designer or designer-cum-overseer. The constituency of consumers necessary to support this way of life exists provided that the craftsperson does not default on the implicit contract of service that has evolved as craft has evolved in this century: the contract is to remain within the bounds of what is familiar and acceptable domestically. If these bounds are too restrictive, then the craftsperson can only seek fortune as a designer or as an artist- in worlds much tougher, more competitive and less tolerant of the gentle way of life depicted by Vermeer in his painting of the lacemaker. (Dormer, 1988, p.144)

Dormer presents his definitions of craft—it is worthwhile because you “lose yourself”—although to what and where is not clear, nor is the need (if craft was the gentle art he imagines it to be, why would the practitioners be so keen to escape the hideousness of their existence at every available opportunity?). It should supply decorative products for the domestic environment in keeping with the consumer’s understanding of that environment. This tactic, which surely would protect a market for craft, and craft from the art-craft concept, depends on rigid, intransitive criteria of “the domestic”. It also makes pejorative assumptions about the consumer, as to the limits of what they could cope with intellectually, and in terms of decoration. Dormer seems to desire an isolation of craft from post-modernism, which he justifies by citing the “failure” of craft as conceptual art. It is difficult to see exactly what he means--it is probable that the works he mocks in his essay deserve negative critique. However, it is impossible to argue that they should not have occurred at all, and to seek a strategy so blinkered in its expectations as to generate only the safest, most obvious

work. Unfortunately, I can imagine that his readership may welcome the pseudo intellectual licence to get on with the job.

Greenhalgh and Dormer present two of many conflicting and diverse opinions as to craft's next move. The theoretical craft debate is founded on the tension between the broad notion of 'theory' and craft practice in its current forms, and the implications of closer links or a fusion. In the two essays cited above, craft is discussed in relational terms, never as a separate notion. It is also never considered as a modern or contemporary activity—the justifications or historical moments do not meet with the professional nature of craft as it stands. 'Theory' is treated as a take-it or leave-it. What I want to show is that theory and craft are impossible to reunite because craft has been a theoretical or critical project from its inception. Instead of looking at the history of craft in relation to either the history of traditional forms or the course of 20th century fine art or design, it would be useful at this stage to try to ascertain what craft embodies in isolation to other concerns.

If we are to look only at the craft concept, strict parameters of discussion must be observed. Apart from the troublesome quantity of techniques, media and occupations that have come to be thematised under the term 'craft', further obscurity of the topic is caused by vague associations with alternative lifestyles and an abstract opposition to modernity. In other attempts to analyse craft, such as those of Greenhalgh and Dormer, the confusion of factors brought wholly unnecessary and irrelevant concerns into play. This study will deal exclusively with the politics of craft, meaning the critical function to which the ideologues of the Arts and Crafts movement aspired.

Taking the Great Exhibition of 1851 as an historical reference point, the weakness of the British contributions resulted not from the use of machines in their manufacture, but the class they represented—specifically, that the immorality of the bourgeoisie produced a feckless and decadent aesthetic. Greed was the motivation for production, and was present in the ugliness of British products. For Ruskin and Morris, the bourgeois contempt for humanity expressed itself through the destructive powers of the ironworks or the cotton mills, and aesthetic ignorance. Capitalism betrayed its immorality with direct abuse of the working classes and barbarian tastes. The Arts and Crafts Movement (later 19th to early 20th century) did not imply direct criticism of technology. Its target was bourgeois economic and artistic activity. Its principle aim was the reorganisation of society along socialist lines, embodied in the guild system of production.

The capitalist development of commodities functioning primarily for exchange was reflected in the use of incongruous styles and pointless decoration. Mass production and the division of labour broke the link between the worker and the finished object. According to Arts and Crafts thinking, this robbed the worker of expression and meaningful connection with his/her task. It also prevented the inner logic of the object from being realised, as manufacture involved so many stages and individuals that the end result constituted only the labour process and commercial utility. Using the model of the medieval guild workshop, Arts and Crafts production would reunite the object and the worker, nourishing the soul with satisfying labour and worthy goods. Goods manufactured to this system would benefit from the focused attention of a small group, creating an entire work- not perfecting components. The emancipated worker would create beautiful, spiritual works

transmitting the harmony of his/her soul to the user. Natural materials, clay, wood, precious metals worked in simple ways were to sustain these ideals.

The Arts and Crafts project sought to challenge the adjudged inexorable nature of progress—the justification for the suffering of classes and social upheaval industrialisation caused. Its challenge manifestly attacked the factory environment and principles of mass production. In the abstract, it hoped to repair damaged souls and nurture a prudential society. The fundamental view was society could be shaped through the form of labour and products it used.

To summarise, the Arts and Crafts Movement created, as protest, the type of work which we now know as craft. The founders of the movement believed that the changes in social organisation wrought by capitalist production were unjust and spiritually damaging. Craft production would create and transmit morally wholesome values and lifestyles. The values are those of conservative Victorian England, with all the limitations of that era. Spiritual liberation through labour and the religious connotations of work at the end of the 19th century suffuse the philosophy of Arts and Crafts. Capitalist labour represents the wrong type of work, and as a result supported an immoral, spiritually bankrupt society. Ruskin and Morris dreamt of constructing a social order according to their ideas of the beautiful, healthy and spiritual. They believed in their role as protectors of the public interest—they do not suggest that the individual could correctly chart spiritual or moral development.

Within the first decade of the 20th century, the Arts and Crafts Movement, which had found followers throughout Europe and in the United States, ceased to be, at least in terms of a coherent global organisation. However, the concept of social responsibility in manufacture and revolutionary agendas in the arts transferred to the

Bauhaus¹ and the pioneering modern architects. Theories linking health and 'honest' materials, fitness-for-purpose, ornament as indicative of depravity, stem from the values espoused by Arts and Crafts practitioners. The visual language of craft goods did not travel so well, and a 'modern' formal vocabulary was devised.

After the second world war, craft's political function becomes the agenda of aesthetic modernism, expanding according to its own terms the variables of self-reflexivity and non-representation. Craft at this stage maintained something of the Ruskin/Morris ideal of unmediated expression by an unfettered consciousness, only now the unity between material and maker occurred in the angst fuelled climate of self-loathing that supported the creativity of the modernists. In the case of craft, consummate skill and control of material provided the point of entry to the subconscious. This unity would lead to pure expression, but without the extra demand for emancipation of the working classes. Studio craft, epitomised, for example, by Bernard Leach in ceramics and Dale Chihuly in glass (the highest earning living artist, by the way), and its politics of expression remains more or less intact, regardless of aesthetic modernism's widely reported demise.

Before I move into the next stage of analysis, I would like to state the axial points of the previous section:

- The Arts and Crafts Movement mobilised a wide range of techniques and materials in the service of a socialist political agenda--a three dimensional critique of capitalism.
- After the dissolution of Arts and Crafts, craft entered its aesthetic modernist phase.

¹ It is important to note that this trajectory is distinctly Anglophile. The Werkbund, experiences of American urban development in the 19th century and the heterogeneous influences of the ideologies of Modernism or the International style are alternative or concurrent considerations, at least as

Since both of these concerns- the liberation of the proletariat and the emancipation of the individual- form both the material of criticism and aspirations of critical theory as pursued by the Frankfurt School, I will continue with an extrapolation of two generations of leftist critique, Adorno and Horkheimer's pessimistic readings of modernity, and Jurgen Habermas's rehabilitation of the emancipatory program.

important as Arts and Crafts. I hope simply to illustrate that the 'socially responsible' function of the Arts and Crafts migrated to other disciplines.

Chapter 3

In my discussion of post-modernism and craft there are two central questions—what can be said of the category of craft in terms of post-modernisms, and what is the fate of the subject within those terms? However, before dealing with the question of craft, how might the post-modern itself be interpreted?

As Hans Bertens is at great pains to express in the introduction to “The Idea of the Postmodern” (Bertens, 1995), there is no temporal beginning or coherent movement of the post-modern. By gathering together numerous cultural and economic mutations occurring from the '50s on, he defines his idea of the post-modern as divergent tactics of anti-modernisms, and departures from the modern altogether. Post-modernism is both a set of reading practices and an attempt to chart the impact of a perceived breakdown in the traditionally separate spheres of the cultural and economic. To put it another way, post-modernism can be viewed as a recognition that types of information and the systems of thought which described modernity have become inoperative as a result of the failure of the project of modernity. This is not to say that those ‘systems of thought’ were appropriate in the first place, that is, that they related to a ‘truth’. Instead, the entire project of modernity is now seen as faulty in its belief or in its desire to uncover truths of any sort. Bertens maintains that post modernist concepts appear first in the humanities, with the emphasis on the study of language, with the gradual, but problematic shift to the “post-modern world”. However:

It's not the world that is postmodern...it is the perspectives from which that world is seen that is postmodern. We are dealing here with a set of intellectual propositions that to some people make a lot more sense than they do to others. Although the omnipresence of the postmodern and its advocates would seem to suggest

otherwise, not everybody subscribes to the view that language constitutes, rather than represents, reality; that the autonomous and stable subject of modernity has been replaced by a postmodern agent whose identity is largely other determined and always in process; that meaning has become social and provisional; or that knowledge only counts as such within a given discursive formation, that is, a given power structure—to mention only some of the more familiar postmodern tenets. (Bertens, 1995, pp. 9-10)

In some respects, then, the post-modern is a matter of adjudication, the acceptance or otherwise of the broader application of specific theoretical discourses. These discourses can again be limited in the breadth of their application, as useful only in certain contemporary cultural arenas. Bertens pursues, as must this discussion, the broadest application of the post-modern as described in the theories of Jean Baudrillard and Fredric Jameson, and it is to their work we will now turn.

Bertens sees Baudrillard and Jameson as identifying the great many artistic strategies and theoretical assumptions awkwardly conjoined in the idea of post-modernism as indicative of,

a cultural shift of epistemic proportions...The causal relationship between base and superstructure that obtained in capitalism's earlier stages has given way to an indeterminate situation in which the economic and the cultural—representations, signs—create and feed each other. (Bertens, 1995, p.10)

For Baudrillard, the loss of the 'real' through the orders of simulacra and the function of the sign in late capitalism are the starting points for his more paranoid, dystopic interpretations of the post-modern condition. In his early work Baudrillard follows both semiotics and Marxism to develop the differential function, or signification function, of commodities. Rather than pertaining to use/exchange value, commodities exist as signs, with the world itself ultimately constituted by the

practices of signification and commodification. The concept of the “simulacrum”—the copy for which no original ever existed—is developed by Baudrillard to show orders of the value of representation, moving from the Renaissance “natural”, the industrial “commercial”, and “differential” of the post-industrial. This third order, the order of “simulations”, is both formed and promulgated by the mass-media, and where representation once addressed the real, the simulation is a reproduction constituting the “hyperreal.”

The hyperreal is a reproduced real, the real as the “generation by models of a real without origin or reality”, constructed “from miniaturised units, from matrices, memory banks and command models”, a “meticulous reduplication of the real, preferably through another, reproductive medium”. In the hyperreal, the idea of representation has become irrelevant. Labour, production, the political, everything persists, but lacks all referentiality and is reduced to the status of meaningless sign: “Labour power is no longer violently bought and sold; it is designed, it is marketed, it is merchandised. Production thus joins the consumerist system of signs”. (Bertens, 1995, pp. 151-152)

Baudrillard’s “simulations” take different forms, with the notion of duplication particularly useful here. The suggestion that the duplicate can simulate the ‘real’ brings forth the idea that if it is possible to replicate any object or experience (the Lascaux cave paintings example cited by Bertens is both), then the original is not simply debased but transposed into the hyperreal. (Bertens, 1995, p.152).

The reason for this smash-and-grab look at Baudrillard is to push the notions of craft objects from a post-modern perspective: as well as remaining open to interpretation and fulfilling certain market needs or social differentiations, the craft object becomes a simulation of craft. Craftsmanship turns back on itself both in its

own ability to reproduce itself, and in the ability of the machine to achieve the same effect. Each file mark or donut pontil, any trademark flourish or finish, every pendular Chihuly lampshade, simulates the activities, duplicates the processes and contributes to the collapse of any possible notion of a coherent craft form or practice in the post-modern. "Everything persists", but cannot refer to an 'original' or even a history. Peter Behrens' A.E.G. hammer-finish, mass-produced electric kettles did not simply exploit the craft look, they understood that every hammer-mark, by either man or machine, was already involved in the artificial.

Moving from the "simulations" of Baudrillard to the post-modernism of Fredric Jameson, I want to look at one tiny element of his theory, that of pastiche. In the "Culture" section of "The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism", Jameson discusses the "idiosyncrasies of the moderns" (Jameson, 1991, p.16), characteristic deviations in style which reinforced their true voice or the gravitas of their subject matter. Parody, even of their own method, was a stylistic device, to be mobilised in the service of truth. From the post-modern viewpoint, the modernist style becomes a code (Jameson, 1991, p.17), and the real submits to the simulacrum. Style can no longer be mobilised in the service of meaning, as parody of the real, when style has becoming the meaning and the only remaining shadow of the 'real'. Jameson moves both style and parody into the realm of post-modern pastiche.

Pastiche is, like parody, the imitation of a peculiar or unique, idiosyncratic style, the wearing of a linguistic mask, speech in a dead language. But it is a neutral practice of such mimicry, without any of parody's ulterior motives, amputated of the satiric impulse, devoid of laughter and of any conviction that alongside the abnormal tongue you have momentarily borrowed, some healthy linguistic normality still exists. (Jameson, 1991, p.17)

Pastiche is not a form of historicism, it does not simply “cannibalise” the past, it transforms it into a “text” (ibid. p.18). History becomes no more or less than a set of images on which the simulacra of pastiche are based. Post-modern culture for Jameson can never present itself, all meaningful presentations having already been made. It is condemned to repeatedly reproduce the images which for postmodernism remain the only link to history—the representations and images of history made by previous generations (Bertens, 1995, p.163).

According to Jameson’s postmodernism, it could only be meaningful to speak of a craft style—no longer relying on any particular modes of production. The foundations or historical development of craft merely furnish its contemporary forms—be they mass-produced or hand-crafted—with images and associations. Craftsmanship and craft to an extent gained their meaning through a relation to the pre-industrial or the shoddiness of the industrial, or the alienation of the modern and the disappearance of tradition. However, with the concept of historical progression consigned to the scrapheap and the impossibility of anything other than the production of simulacra, only the style remains.

If we turn now to the rational subject, so crucial to the Arts and Crafts Movement and the studio crafts, it is plausible that it too may remain in terms of style, and continue to do battle with the inner demons and mediate the spiritual for the rest of us. However, I would like to go further, by identifying alternatives to modernist subjectivity, and going a little beyond the post-modern subject.

The later work of Michel Foucault contains a shift in emphasis in the type of study he conducts. In the second and third volumes of “The History of Sexuality”, Foucault moves from the themes of the production of knowledge as an experience of

power to consider instead the way in which the self related to itself. Arnold Davidson, in his essay "Ethics as ascetics: Foucault, the history of ethics, and ancient thought" (Davidson, 1994), raises, from the post-modern perspective, a number of problematic ideas regarding Foucault's interest in the care of the self. The evidence for sexual austerity or restraint in ancient texts is indicative not of a prohibitive moral code, but of "an intensification of the relationship to oneself by which one constituted oneself as the subject of one's own acts". (Foucault in Davidson, 1994, p120). Davidson goes on to point out that the care of the self has associations not just with pleasure, but it thematises an ancient philosophical code of practices, relating to transcendence through ascetics:

The care of the self receives its distinctive philosophical tint in late antiquity through the practices that raise the self to a universal level, that place the self within a cosmic dimension that at the same time transforms the self, even to the point of surpassing the self. (Davidson, 1994, p121)

Davidson sees in Foucault the contemporary form of these practices. After citing Foucault's own definition of philosophy as "an exercise of oneself in the activity of thought", Davidson continues, "for Foucault himself philosophy was a spiritual exercise... in which one submitted oneself to modifications and tests, underwent changes, in order to learn to think differently." (Davidson, 1994, p.123)

This new dimension in the work of Foucault, also in evidence in his seeming desire to identify his intellectual development in some way with the project of the Enlightenment, and his ideas of limit-experience, are not simply a volte face to his previous endeavours as a sceptical archaeologist of knowledge or prosecutor of the rational subject. In the ancient ideas of a cosmic or spiritual consciousness, even of a transcendent reason, the self never comes to resemble the subject of modernity.

Davidson deals with this issue, the fact that all this transcendence and spirituality is starting to sound like modernism, by turning to the work of Pierre Vernant:

[Vernant] makes analytically useful distinctions between the individual, the subject and the ego. The history of the individual, in the strict sense, concerns "his place and role in his group or groups; the value accorded him; the margin of movement left to him; his relative autonomy with respect to his institutional framework". Vernant marks out the subject as appearing "when the individual uses the first person to express himself and, speaking in his own name, enunciates certain features that make him a unique being". Finally, the ego is "the ensemble of psychological practices and attitudes that give an interior dimension and a sense of wholeness to the subject. These practices and attitudes constitute him within his himself as a unique being, real and original, whose authentic nature resides entirely in the secrecy of his interior life. It resides at the very heart of an intimacy to which no one except him can have access because it is defined as self-consciousness". (Davidson, 1994, p.127)

According to Vernant, and Davidson concurs, the Greeks could not conceive of the type of interiority described above, so often the target of Foucault's late studies. For this reason the practices of the ancients and their modes of experience offered an alternative to the dead subject of modernism and the now accepted, but seemingly limiting idea of the post-structuralist subject. Foucault's interest in the care of the self becomes an attempt to reconstitute the experience of the self away from the exhausted modern and towards a kind of subjectivity based on the annihilation of the subject as an experience. The body becomes the focus for this constitution and work of the self. In some way, which is impossible to describe without using unhelpful terms such as the 'spiritual' or 'transcendent', Foucault was trying to develop ideas of the self which effected, by their nature, transformations of that self. He had become interested in types of meditations which would bring the presence of death into life. By way of an example, Davidson cites one such

meditation composed by Nietzsche. The supposition is that a demon grabs you out of your sleep and tells you that you will have to relive your life over and over again for all eternity:

The question in each and every thing, "Do you desire this once more and innumerable times more?" would lie upon your actions as the greatest weight. Or how well disposed would you have to become to yourself and to life to crave nothing more fervently than this ultimate eternal confirmation and seal?
(Davidson, 1994, p.132)

The meditative and the work of the self in the later Foucault offer some more active alternatives to the idea of the subject. Since the body is the most immediate locus of the relations of power, the transformation of that body and mind become the work of the self, an active rather than passive pursuit of experiences of the self. Craft work, as a work of the body, need not imply any interiority to make sense of the experience, or to generate the expression of that experience. It becomes a work of the self, how the self relates to itself.

However, craft is now a profession—the idea that it can become an ascetic practice, or a philosophical pursuit would be indeed problematic, not to mention improbable.

Conclusion

This thesis attempted an assessment of the usefulness of theory within the object based practice of craft.

In the first chapter, the idea of the Arts and Crafts Movement as a form of social critique was posited, suggesting a theoretical origin for the crafts. The failure of the Arts and Crafts to succeed in their aims concluded the ‘socially responsible’ project of craft. Craft materials and practices subsequently become part of the order of cultural modernism, and to some extent, stand by the tenets of modernism even in the contemporary cultural climate of the post-modern.

The second chapter examined the implications of the emancipatory agenda of the Arts and Crafts Movement, and focused on the work of the Frankfurt School critique of Enlightenment. This chapter argued that Enlightenment reason, at the root of the philosophies of Ruskin and Morris, ensnared mankind in a dialectical process ultimately leading to reified experience, and the division of the mental and manual. The development of the “expert culture” allowed the production of art to become a project unto itself, i.e. the development of the formal possibilities of the art object.

Aesthetic modernism runs out of steam once many of its fundamental propositions become highly problematic. Structuralism, deconstruction, psychoanalysis and post-structuralist theory in general gradually fragmented the previously straightforward understandings of language, representation and subjectivity, all contributing to the idea of the post-modern.

The third chapter dealt with two elements of the craft concept from a post-modern perspective: the craft category and the expressive subject. To an extent, post-modernism appears to be elective, an optional set of practices. However, this does

not prevent the positioning of craft within post-modern culture. The principal effect of the post-modern perspective on the craft form is to collapse any notion of a system of craft, to deny any separation of craft from the post-industrial or late-capitalist landscape. Craft becomes a style, the techniques and materials it once bound together are now independent units, dissociated from any particular meanings that previously defined them. The expressive subject is no less fragmented, and discredited into the equation. The subject is constituted through the activities of the networks of power or language, always conditional or provisional. The idea of self expression becomes impossible as it bespeaks of the 'real' or of 'truths'. Post-modern works operate as simulacra, as reproductions of reproductions of the 'real'. The craftsman, the idea of craftsmanship, becomes the simulacrum—the duplication of a mode of production that did not exist, or which became artificial with the realisation of its own repeatability.

The constitution of the self through the body, "how the self relates to itself", offers the activity of craftwork a somewhat rejuvenated career in the post-modern. If we are to understand the body in post-modernism as a site of the reproduction of power and the means by which we understand the self, then the work of craft can become a work of the self. The ascetics of craft, the restrictive demands of technical perfection and the constraints of the material, are concurrent with the types of activity Foucault examines in "The Care of the Self".

Ultimately, the usefulness of theory in craft relates to the context in which it is used. Theory can act as a source of ideas and method of assessment of one's own work, or the role of craft in different areas. However, the collapse of categorical distinctions, and isolated forms of production would appear to be a non-negotiable



demand of the post-industrial age. The role theory may have already played in craft is this removal of distinctions as such. Craft would seem, in any case, to continue as it has done, and I would suggest that the 'crisis in craft' may be the last gasp of the craft concept as understood in modernist terms.

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