

How Crafts Matter:  
Mapping the Terrain of Crafts Study

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## ABSTRACT

How Crafts Matter: Mapping the Terrain of Crafts Study

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Crafts in Canada have persisted and grown over the past century, despite being marginalised by industrialism and globalism. Crafts practice and the education of craftspeople has matured into a broad, expressive, cultural phenomenon. This has been accompanied by the blossoming of scholarship directed at illuminating the essential and distinctive character of crafts practices and objects. This growth has been supported in part by the relationship of crafts to creative visual arts production in the realms of fine arts and design. However, assimilation into the category of visual arts has distorted how crafts activity is understood, valued, and taught. In crafts degree programmes in Canada's four independent visual arts schools, the legitimate interests of craftspeople in the particular character, challenges, and import of their practices has been undermined by a dominant visual arts paradigm that has imposed ill-fitting curricula structures based on flawed underlying assumptions about crafts as a contemporary art form.

In Part One, I discuss semantic issues, characterise the available literature that pertains to crafts, and identify pertinent literature and ideas from other disciplines that often fail to reach students and instructors. In Part Two, I outline the history leading to the current professional crafts degree programmes in Canada providing a valuable portrait of a particular time in Canadian craft education. I examine the course offerings in Canadian art and design schools, and discuss the consequences of the restricted fit of the prevailing visual arts paradigm for crafts education. In particular, I direct attention to

lingering underlying assumptions about the place of crafts as visual art that should be addressed, especially in the educational context. In Part Three, I describe crafts practice from a practitioner's point of view, revealing what crafts activity really entails. I then characterise and exemplify crafts scholarship, using a case study of historical textiles to show how technical knowledge and experimental archaeology revealed an important development in the history of knowledge, and how the case study benefitted from the examination of many different but interrelated dimensions. This study leads to a proposed general framework for conducting and developing crafts scholarship. It argues especially for training and engaging practitioners in scholarship as well as dedicated academic programmes to train future crafts scholars. Finally, this study proposes a general framework to foster discussion and guide improvements in Canadian crafts education.



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## PREFACE

### Birth of a Practitioner-Scholar

Like many practitioners, my original intention was to investigate basic velvet techniques for use in my craftwork (Fig. 1). This was motivated by the potential that I saw in the technique for exploitation by handweavers, once I learned that the basic technique could be executed with commonly available looms, simply modified. Lacking many resources to explain this technique, but armed with a deep understanding and experience of weaving, I set out to teach myself what velvet techniques and effects had to offer (Landry, 1997). I further wanted to make this knowledge available to other weavers to help fill the gap in knowledge, and to encourage them to use the technique themselves. Many craftspeople build their careers not just on making and exhibiting their works, but on deploying and expanding their knowledge on behalf of their field, through teaching, experimentation, writing, artefact analysis, and economic development projects.

Given over 800 years of attested velvet weaving, I expected that the standard velvet structures and techniques would be documented. This was only partly true; some relevant weave structures were documented, but the ways of handling various technical problems were not. Through experimentation, I essentially had to “reverse engineer” the basic techniques, using locally available resources, from the structures of surviving fragments and analyses by museum curators. This foundation was necessary for implementing and exploiting the visual potential in variations that I imagined. To do this, I drew on all my practical weaving experience, as well as my understanding of gravity, tension, and loom mechanics. I also used woodworking and engineering knowledge to design and modify looms and other equipment for various tests.

My original investigative strategy was to study the oldest velvet artefacts, presumed to have a simple structure. Textiles scholars generally considered the origins of velvet technique to be indeterminable and there was no agreement on where it might have been invented. However, I found three scattered references (Bourgon-Amir, 1993; Vial, 1981; and Sunday, 1987) indicating that woven velvet technique existed in the early Coptic period, producing a linen pile cloth, rather than the more familiar silk velvet. Because of their other typically Coptic features, especially their adjacent tapestry imagery and their textural similarity to the linen *weft-looped* pile examples, they had been almost completely overlooked as velvet-weaving in the literature. The few scholars who recognized these as velvets failed to note that the warp velvets could not have been made using the Coptic looms typically described by historians.

The Coptic warp pile velvet represents a crucial *rethinking* of woven structure and the invention of a radically different structural and procedural *system*. The few catalogues and histories that discuss velvet fail to highlight this vital innovation. For practitioners like myself, this gap in the scholarship was worth filling, and a significant event in the history of textiles. I realised the necessity for practitioners to accept the challenge to fill such gaps in crafts scholarship, since we cannot depend on others to address our specific interests or to achieve more revealing understandings, however good their intentions. Thus I became interested in scholarship, with a particular concern to conjoin participant experiences, experimental archaeology, academic analysis, and philosophical reflection in the interests of my medium and, more generally, the field of crafts activities.

A practitioner-scholar was born.



Figure. 1. Wendy Landry (2008). *East Meets West*. Velvet panel. Cut and uncut wool pile; velvet pick-up technique.

## Part One: SCOUTING THE TERRAIN

### Chapter One

#### INTRODUCTION

This thesis examines two general, interrelated questions: 1) How do we understand how and why crafts activities matter to us? And 2) How do we effectively address crafts as a domain of study, in order to develop the necessary knowledge appropriate to the complementary interests of crafts makers and scholars, and improve their education? In exploring these questions, and offering answers to them, this thesis: a) critiques existing views of crafts, and crafts education; b) proposes an expanded view of crafts activities as cultural knowledge and practice; c) proposes and illustrates a material cultural approach to crafts scholarship; and d) proposes related improvements to the education of crafts makers and scholars.

Through the twentieth century, the crafts became subsumed into the post-secondary visual arts education system in Canada, especially because one or another craft is usually the concrete foundation of artwork in some degree. The unclear status and alternate interests of crafts compared to those of visual or fine arts has caused tensions and confusion in visual arts education, which are reflected in persistent attitudes and discourses, on one hand, and in the dissatisfactions of crafts students and instructors with curricula on the other hand. Approaching the questions from several perspectives, this thesis explores these tensions between visual arts and crafts orientations in terms of their central aspirations, attitudes, and priorities, the actual nature of crafts making and the legitimate interests of crafts makers, and the manner in which current visual arts education constrains an appropriate understanding of crafts practices and their social

value. It suggests how the education of crafts practitioners can be reconfigured to reflect the legitimate interests of crafts practice, whether or not they qualify as contemporary art. And it argues for programmes to prepare crafts scholars, and develop a broadly informed, insightful crafts scholarship.

In general, this thesis operates on the premise that crafts are cultural activities by means of which people do things and engage with ideas, often but not always through material objects. Myriad cultural commonalities and distinctions are realised through these crafts activities. Crafts knowledge—held and deployed by craftspeople and/or crafts scholars—is regarded as intrinsically conceptual, including technical, practical, and functional ideas. This thesis also presumes that understanding crafts as a social, human behaviour is an important element of degree level crafts education, beyond teaching how to make objects.<sup>1</sup> Finally, it is presumed that a craft is an intricate, complexly woven web of interconnected, often interdependent elements or dimensions, like a living organism. That complexity is addressed by highlighting diverse constituent dimensions and their interrelationships, revealing the many kinds of knowledge and academic perspectives whose integration will yield a richer understanding of crafts activities.

### **Brief Historical Background**

The production of individually made, useful, and decorative objects, commonly known as ‘crafts’, has been a persistent, if under-recognized, element of Canadian culture. The Industrial Revolution, mass industrial production, and globalized manufacturing and marketing gradually rendered such small-scale and ‘inefficient’

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<sup>1</sup> This distinction is also seen in the definitions and criteria found in the guidelines of the United States based National Association of Schools of Art and Design (NASAD) Handbook, 2007-2008.

modes of production redundant and economically unviable. Despite these conditions, handcraft activity persisted, suggesting that crafts activities or knowledge base fulfilled other valuable purposes, beyond survival or economic prosperity.

Freed from their predominant pre-industrial economic roles, crafts activities have become focused on the creation of desirable, distinctive objects (professional fine crafts) and/or gratifying activity (creative leisure activity). Contemporary crafts objects are valued for their expressive artistic individuality, their reflection of particular makers ideas and skills, and their contrast to the ubiquitous, monotonous, and ‘soulless’ uniformity of industrially mass-produced objects. It is principally as visual art media that several crafts now hold a place in Canadian post-secondary art programmes, galleries, and arts funding agencies—all major public indices of what is culturally valuable. Since the early 1970s, grass roots crafts organisations have been active all across Canada, supporting the activities of craft makers, and advocating for their interests. We believe crafts activities to be valuable, but we are less clear about how and why we value them.

Within the modern system of the visual arts, ‘the crafts’ have often been regarded as culturally less potent or less significant than fine art, as ‘merely’ practical, decorative, derivative, or traditional (Kristeller, 1990; Rowley, 1999; Shiner, 2001). This view implies: a) that ‘crafts’ lack the intellectual and conceptual import, or significant innovation, expected of contemporary artworks; b) that they are inevitably limited by their adherence to traditional practices, techniques, and forms; and c) that their social and practical servitude renders them insufficiently autonomous, socially critical, provocative, rebellious, or resistant, as is often expected of contemporary fine art. Since the rise of post-modernism, adoption of a socially or culturally critical attitude has become an

important criterion for acceptance or acclaim in contemporary fine arts (de Duve, 2005).<sup>2</sup> The rise of ‘critical studies’ and ‘critical theory’ courses in visual arts education curricula exemplifies this change; for example, at NSCAD, the main academic department was renamed “Historical and Critical Studies.” However, a broad range of crafts practices differs in character, aspirations and intentions from the contemporary art world: children’s and fair crafts, folk and survival crafts, domestic and leisure crafts, functional design and historical reproduction crafts. In most of these orientations, ‘criticality’ is not often a consideration, let alone a priority.

To counter exclusionary attitudes in the fine art world, professional crafts makers began to claim that their work should be respected as an equivalent, parallel form of art. Some crafts practitioners chose a contemporary fine art approach, contemplative rather than useful. Some fine artists incorporated craft techniques, materials, or references in their particular visions. These developments offered interesting, new options for craftspeople and artists, demonstrating that any medium had the potential to be fine art. However, the development of an *avant-garde* (Frayling, 1990) in the crafts also implied that the general framework of avant-garde fine art theory, criteria, and scholarship should be adopted or adapted to at least a forward-looking, well-educated sector of *fine crafts*. Some proclaimed that craft works were art, in the broadest sense of ‘art’, and no further discussion was necessary.<sup>3</sup> Few questioned why it should matter that craft be considered

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<sup>2</sup> The contemporary fine art system in Canada is strongly related to that of the United States and the UK, and Europe. Much of the historical, theoretical, and educational discourse and literature in Canadian fine art institutions derives from American or British authors or journals, and many of the instructors in Canadian art colleges through the later 20<sup>th</sup> century were American or British, or educated in American or British institutions. Alföldy (2005) points out the degree to which Canadian “fine” crafts expectations were influenced by American contemporary art expectations and exemplars.

<sup>3</sup> This move effectively evaded the problem of defining craft or art, and of articulating or clarifying the criteria that qualified anything for the status of art.

as art; the benefits of equivalent social status and respect offered sufficient justification. Few asked what was lost in our understanding of craft as a distinctive cultural activity, if we indiscriminately applied the prevailing criteria, goals and scholarly frameworks of art onto the crafts. Ideally, crafts scholarship would comprehend not only the artfulness of craft, in its largest sense, but also the distinctive, cultural import of craft in itself.

### **What Does ‘Craft’ Mean?**

When we discuss craft, we are implicitly confronted with the issue of clarifying just what we mean. The classification issue, and its consequent status connotations and implications, has plagued craft, as well as art, decorative art, applied art, design, and ornament, for three main reasons. First, there is a tendency to assume that everyone knows what is meant and understands the term in the same way, so that no explication is necessary. Second, the terms under discussion overlap in linguistic and figurative use, as do the processes and knowledge bases involved in making aesthetic objects. Third, specifying just what is meant has rarely been approached with adequate philosophical rigour.<sup>4</sup> There has been frequent confusion between denotations, connotations, and grammatical forms. Furthermore, definitions or meanings of the term ‘craft’ depend upon who is making them, in what context, and for what purpose (Flood, 2000).

Rather than attempting to define craft in terms of necessary and sufficient conditions, it is more useful simply to describe what particular meaning is intended. Among the

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<sup>4</sup> Greenhalgh (1998) provides an excellent example of an unbalanced, inadequately rigorous exploration of what craft means in his article “The History of Craft.” This article picks out primarily the negative connotations that he is trying to refute. But he does not counter the negative connotations with co-existing positive connotations or by arguing for the inherent neutrality of the term ‘craft’ as it refers to a particular activity. Instead, he rehearses a relatively short and selective history of negative use as if this were the entire, prevailing understanding, which other senses of the term’s use refute.



numerous possible meanings for ‘craft’, we can distinguish the following more or less distinctive but interrelated referents:

- 1) a body of specialist knowledge of a particular medium;
- 2) the skilful activity of object-making involving hand-guided processes, beyond simply labour; similar to artisanry but possibly connoting greater creative or artistic sensitivities; used synonymously with handcraft;
- 3) a form of practical design, generating prototypical samples for evaluation for possible production;
- 4) a class of objects produced through the skilful and intimately controlled hand-making; often related to particular ‘craft’ media;
- 5) material manipulation in general; more particularly, as a skilful, adroit, dexterous, and meticulous manner of doing, making, or performing; similar to artistry;
- 6) the quality of workmanship or performance; scales from awkward or poorly crafted to well-crafted; can refer to or include the conception or design of an object, project, or performance;
- 7) leisure pastime or hobby, also known as handicraft;
- 8) decorative art, primarily intended to fulfil a decorative function;
- 9) applied art, specifically integrating artistic or aesthetic making processes and sensitivities into the making of functional, everyday objects;
- 10) a form of visual art, or visual culture, also known as fine craft or avant-garde craft; non-functional, metaphorical or ironical works made in those particular media used for functional objects (clay, textiles, metal, wood, glass, leather, etc.);

- 11) vernacular, folk or ethnic artistic activities or artefacts, usually naïve, often informally learned or self-taught, and typically reproductive of traditional forms with minor variation;
- 12) *kitsch*, similar to folk or naïve art in adhering to traditional, crude, or clichéd forms, often populist, banal in subject matter, and of poor to mediocre aesthetic taste and/or workmanship; usually derogatory in use, kitsch implies low or contemptible status, quality and worth;
- 13) craft as vocational technical trade or service occupation, encompassing various non-artistic, utilitarian trade practices, such as carpentry, tile laying, etc.

Terms refer to real phenomena, as well as to conceptions or theories about such phenomena. Each of the above meanings refers to different conceptions or contexts to which the term craft can be applied. Each comprises a slightly different configuration of connotations, which might be positively or negatively intended by the speaker. Few of the above definitions are intrinsically negative or intrinsically devoid of knowledge.

The most generic and basic sense of ‘craft’ is; *the deliberate and sensitive deployment of skill and knowledge toward a variety of purposes*. This concords with the old Germanic sense in which *kraft* means ‘power’ or ‘strength’ and connects to the idea of strong agency, that is, the ability (power) to do something well (strongly). This generic sense seems to capture the use of the term as it is applied across many kinds of skilled practices. In reference to object-making media, the general meaning of ‘craft’ used in this thesis combines the first three senses listed above because they interdepend. I regard craft primarily as a purposeful human activity, rather than just a class of objects or a small selection of making media. So my working description for the craft of making

material objects may be stated as: *the purposeful and skilful deployment of a body of specialised knowledge through which materials are manipulated using hand-guided processes into useful objects capable of fulfilling particular functions, including aesthetic and symbolic functions*. This general working definition is intended to encompass the widest range of crafts activities, as might be pursued in any cultural context. For example, for a contemporary Canadian individual studio craftsperson, the specialised knowledge includes aesthetic, pragmatic, problem-solving, design knowledge and the ability to make fine discriminations in matters of aesthetics and symbolism as well as in material characteristics, dextrous touch and technical efficacy, as it relates to the particularities of one or more making media in which they specialise.<sup>5</sup>

There are a number of ways that diverse meanings of the term ‘craft’ might be classified. These include:

- a) Material definitions – crafts defined by the kinds of materials being manipulated (as in fibres or ceramics);
- b) Technical definitions – crafts defined by the use of particular techniques, tools or making knowledge/skills/processes, or the proportion of controlled handwork involved (as in weaving, painting, or glass-blowing);
- c) Functional definitions – crafts defined as objects having various purposeful (practical or decorative) functions, irrespective of making medium (as in furniture or jewellery);

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<sup>5</sup> There are many different making situations, from the work of mentally challenged individuals or those undergoing occupational therapy, through more or less serious amateur engagement, to highly skilled professionals pursuing an active career or business.

- d) Aesthetic definitions – crafts defined by the products having particular characteristics or style, that is, what they look like or do, or alternately fail to look like or do (as in contemporary, folk, or non-traditional);
- e) Qualitative definitions – crafts defined by the calibre of the workmanship of the objects (as in fine craft, hobby craft, or folk craft);
- f) ‘Professional’ definitions – crafts defined by the degree of commitment, experience or training/education pursued (as in serious, professional, or amateur);
- g) Ethno-cultural definitions – crafts defined by their adherence to particular cultural or ethnic traditions, including religion-specific or talismanic objects (as in Balinese crafts, which include puppet-making *wayang* and performances);
- h) Political definitions – crafts defined by the social status, aspirations or education of their practitioners or patrons (as in high or low, designer, dilettante, or naïve);
- i) Commercial definitions – crafts defined by their commercial niche market, manner of doing business, relating to patrons/clients (as in artisanal or luxury);
- j) Labour definitions – crafts defined by their working environment or labour structure (as in studio crafts, workshop, cottage industry);
- k) Intentional definitions – crafts defined by their aspirations or intended purposes (as in pottery, fibre-art, art jewellery, or sculpture);
- l) Institutional definitions – crafts defined by what institutions include (or exclude) or address in their programs (as in organizations, public funding programmes).

This is not an exhaustive list of categories, but it helps to identify what any given definition emphasises. Classifying these various senses in which ‘craft’ can be meant also reveals the limitations of the definition being used, and the context from which it

arises, including the underlying assumptions. As Appendix 1 shows, particular terminology is related to the classificatory focus. Furthermore, examining the concept of craft or the crafts in this manner reveals their inherent multi-dimensionality, because there is some accuracy about these ways of using the term 'craft.' Some definitional classes, like technical ones, are intrinsically descriptive and thus neutral; others, especially political definitions, are intrinsically evaluative, and often imposed by others outside the field to suit their own agendas. Examining what craft is by what we are prone to include or exclude in any of these categories is one method of discovering what craft is. Ideally, we would seek to describe the phenomena in terms of its intrinsic empirical characteristics before dealing with the issues arising from political or similarly evaluative definitions.

It is preferable that those engaged in crafts activities be centrally involved in defining their field. Crafts makers know best what they do and value. They know what kinds of ideas and concerns interest them. The primary responsibility of appropriate description and articulation belongs to those involved in the crafts. This does not preclude the assistance of others in the process of self-description. There are two kinds of institutions available to assume this responsibility. The first is the set of grass-roots crafts councils that represent the collective interests of craftspeople, providing supportive services and advocacy. They delineate the field of the crafts through which specific practices they support, including minority crafts. They also act as an umbrella for a variety of local media-specific grass-roots crafts organisations. Ostensibly, most of them represent the range of activity from amateur to professional. The second kind of institution is the set of educational institutions that teach crafts practitioners. In Canada, there are many such

institutions. They provide the most crucial forum for development and dissemination of the central conceptions of what craft is. Leading this group is the small set of degree-granting institutions conferring Bachelor degrees in craft media, studied in this thesis.

### **Thesis Structure**

This study is structured in three parts. Part One, “Scouting the Terrain”, introduces the territory of crafts in Canada: the issues that it confronts and the available resources from which it can draw. Chapters Two and Three examine the range of literature that not only informs this thesis, but is also a central issue for crafts education. Useful scholarship and theory addressing crafts directly is severely underdeveloped compared to the amount of scholarship devoted to fine arts, and design.<sup>6</sup> Chapter Two outlines the literature that already exists for and about the crafts. It also highlights the pertinence of the field of art education literature, which rarely reaches artist-instructors let alone practitioners. Chapter Three identifies pertinent scholarship generated by academic disciplines outside the visual arts, especially material culture. This chapter argues that introductions to pertinent portions of this literature should be systematically included in crafts education and scholarship. The lack of an essential theoretical or philosophical ground has been a continual criticism levelled at the craft world (Koplos, 1982), especially when compared to the long development and intellectual force of art theory. This criticism has reinforced the devaluation of intellectual or conceptual claims for craft activity, especially since much art theory treats craft as *mere* production—only the

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<sup>6</sup> Significant historical surveys of British (Harrod, 1999) and North American (Kardon, 1993-1995) crafts practice only began to emerge in the 1990s. Other historical work has been covered occasionally in special issues of the *Journal of Design History* and other journals for design or the decorative arts. Until recently, journals devoted to the craft world have been short-lived, (e.g. *Craft History*, *Artisan*) or media-specific (e.g. *Textile History*, *Textiles: The Journal of Cloth and Culture*). Berg’s *The Journal of Modern Craft* began in 2008. Only in 2007 did a scholarly, peer-reviewed Canadian journal devoted to crafts, *Cahiers metiers d’art: Craft Journal*, commence publication.

necessary crystallisation of an art idea into perceptible form. Interdisciplinary approaches are needed to develop the insights and syntheses appropriate to the complexity of crafts activities, and capable of describing the deeper meaningfulness felt by makers and users of crafted objects.

In Part Two, “Charting the Landmarks”, I focus in detail on the context of undergraduate degree level post-secondary craft education. Four independent educational institutions with bachelor degree programmes in crafts practices form the core of Canadian professional<sup>7</sup> craft education, especially as it extends beyond teaching proficient practice and into deeper scholarship for the crafts.<sup>8</sup> These four schools are: NSCAD University (Halifax, Nova Scotia), the Ontario College of Art and Design University (Toronto, Ontario), the Alberta College of Art and Design (Calgary, Alberta), and the Emily Carr University of Art and Design (Vancouver, British Columbia).<sup>9</sup> Attitudes and information about visual art forms and practices are formed and disseminated, reiterated or modified in these visual arts schools. Their faculties, curricula, and resources (facilities, libraries, external connections) embody and perpetuate what I call the dominant visual arts paradigm. This paradigm consists of the prevailing

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<sup>7</sup> The National Association of Schools of Art and Design (US) defines two kinds of Bachelor degrees for visual arts and crafts. The Bachelor of Arts is defined as a liberal arts degree, with a greater proportion of general liberal arts courses to studio practice and field major courses. The Bachelor of Fine Arts (BFA) or its equivalent is defined as a professional degree, with a greater proportion of studio practice and supportive academic courses devoted to the major field. Similarly, the Bachelor of Design in Material Arts at the Ontario College of Arts is also a professional degree.

<sup>8</sup> The many post-secondary non-degree programmes across Canada are also important educational resources performing much of the same role for the visual arts in helping to shape and disseminate our understanding of visual art practices, and especially in producing practitioners and supportive audiences. These programmes also produce craftspeople who practice professionally. However, such college programmes typically focus primarily on studio practices, with less emphasis on academic / liberal arts content. Art instructors in such colleges often have a less scholarly orientation.

<sup>9</sup> Since conducting my research, I have discovered that the University of New Brunswick offers a BFA degree in partnership with the New Brunswick College of Art and Design (Fredericton, New Brunswick), which remains a community college.

ideas, priorities, assessment criteria, and more or less implicit assumptions and beliefs that determine what visual arts comprises, and what its educational institutions teach or do. Chapter Four examines the historical evolution of craft education in these schools from technical schools to their present status as degree-granting universities. These schools hold the greatest potential for crafts scholarship, because they already value and actively sustain crafts practices, and have an interest in their growth. However, due to their history as visual art institutions, they continue to limit the scope of crafts education.

Chapter Five analyses the curricula of the four Canadian craft degree schools to show how they are currently structured. This analysis shows that art histories, traditional and contemporary, dominate the liberal arts offerings. Similarly, the studio course offerings related to traditional image-making<sup>10</sup> outnumber the media considered to be crafts.<sup>11</sup> Within crafts offerings, course contents are split between making useful objects and image-making, often expected to be informed by contemporary fine art practice. In addition, visual art degree programmes face increasing pressure to be more ‘critical’ and theoretical.<sup>12</sup>

In general, art colleges continue to reflect the dominant visual arts paradigm that supports the creation of objects for contemplation rather than for use. The dominance of the visual art paradigm is easily explained historically by the way in which craft became

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<sup>10</sup> Specifically, the image-making media are painting, drawing, sculpture, photography, print, film/video and digital media.

<sup>11</sup> Specifically, the crafts media include ceramics, fibres/textiles, jewellery/metalsmithing, and glass. At this time, wood and furniture, as well as other crafts specialties, are not strongly represented as programme majors in the four schools, although they are well represented in community colleges. Other major specialties, such as fashion or apparel design, are found in design programmes rather than crafts programmes. At NSCAD University, apparel crafts are blended into the fibres/textiles programme.

<sup>12</sup> The desire to provide more theoretical content is shown by the range of liberal arts, science, and sociology courses offered at the Ontario College of Art and Design. Their humanities courses include material culture and visual culture. Some of these courses are included in its bachelor degree requirements.



attached to fine art institutions and their development. However, this history does not justify the inadequate development and enrichment of understanding and teaching of crafts, let alone its continuance. If the current paradigm obstructs development of deeper understandings and useful scholarship of crafts activities, then we must carefully examine and improve the situation. To this end, Chapter Six characterises and critiques the visual arts paradigm in crafts education.

It is useful to view crafts activities as a *world*<sup>13</sup> wherein various making disciplines meet and inform each other around particular forms of cultural behaviour. The crafts world is held together by commonalities of material object production and meaningfulness despite diverse making technologies, histories, purposes, and intentions, which crafts scholarship would examine and articulate. These commonalities provide an underlying logic for the classifications and historical conjunctions of media, as well as educational provisions.<sup>14</sup> Given the complexity of crafts activities comprising the craft world and the usefulness of various scholarly perspectives for understanding crafts, a broad, interdisciplinary approach is more relevant for crafts study than a primarily art historical approach. Although art history incorporates social history perspectives, it remains too narrow in its purview. A material culture framework offers a more encompassing approach for studying the material, technical, instrumental, pleasurable, and symbolic nature of crafts as well as their internal and social structures. Such a framework permits us to study the crafts not only in terms of the objects or aesthetic

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<sup>13</sup> The idea of art world(s) was proposed by sociologist Howard Becker (1982). The community of crafts makers, teachers, scholars, curators, and supporters represented by Canadian Crafts Councils, for example, has all the features of a distinct art world much as he describes it, including their own internal types of practitioners corresponding roughly to Becker's types "integrated professionals, mavericks, folk, and naïve" makers.

<sup>14</sup> However loose, the cohesion of the diverse crafts in a general crafts world is not simply arbitrary or an historical convenience, as Greenhalgh (2003) seems to imply.

styles made but also as complicated forms of cultural behaviour in which the acts and broader contexts of making and using are themselves meaningful.

Part Three, “Redrawing the Borders”, develops the argument that crafts education and scholarship should be guided by the character and range of legitimate craft interests rather than by the presumptions of contemporary visual arts. Chapter Seven describes the nature of crafts activities, in part from a practitioner’s phenomenological point of view. The importance of technical ideas and issues of purpose, function, and use are highlighted, alongside a description of the elements and progress of the creative process as it is practiced by many individual designer/makers. This chapter introduces an alternative way to think about the central processes or ‘taskscape’ associated with the terms ‘art’ (conception and sensitive judgment), ‘designing’ (problem-solving and planning), ‘crafting’ (making), and ‘interpreting’ (determining meaning). It also identifies key features of the social worlds or orientations of ‘art’, ‘craft’, and ‘design’.

Having established in Part One the under-development of crafts scholarship, in Chapter Eight I reflect on the importance of crafts scholarship to complement and enhance an appropriate understanding of crafts activities. Neglect of the basic means for developing and disseminating the desired crafts scholarship is a key issue for craft education. This chapter argues for the need to create programmes for developing future craft scholars to do the necessary crafts scholarship, based on a material culture framework. To illustrate the value and potential of a broad, interdisciplinary, material culture approach, I analyse my on-going research of ancient velvet weaving as a case study of crafts scholarship conducted from this inclusive perspective. This research also

exemplifies the unique contribution that reflective, knowledgeable practitioners can make to such scholarship through experimental archaeology.

Crafts acquire their meaningfulness in terms of their integral relationship to local cultural behaviours and understandings, whether or not they reiterate traditional forms and ideas or generate new ones, whether or not they conform to expectations or transgress them. How they do so, and how this might be distinct from—despite similarities to—material mass-production or fine art expression, is a key question for crafts scholarship. The rapid growth in the literature addressing crafts activities, and the calls from craft instructors and students for more academic courses better suited to their specific needs, indicate that this question matters. This chapter proposes a framework for conducting and developing crafts scholarship with the assistance of two models: one showing the various dimensions of which crafts scholarship should be mindful, and the other showing the relationships between elements in a material object analysis.

Many improvements in the curricula of crafts education degree programmes and the growth and seriousness of the theoretical literature have occurred. However, I have not found any evidence that these improvements are guided by a well-grounded, comprehensive outline of what constitutes craft activities, especially as understood by crafts makers and supporters. Also missing is a general framework outlining what scholarship is pertinent, and how it might be integrated into crafts education. Pulling together the various threads of the preceding chapters, Chapter Nine proposes an interdisciplinary framework for craft scholarship, based on material culture approaches and the character and social world of crafts activities. This framework may be used to assess and guide curriculum development for craft education, as well as to evaluate the

range and state of scholarship for the crafts and highlight where work is needed. The maturing contemporary craft world has long awaited such developments, which the recent burgeoning of literature is beginning to address more seriously and systematically.

## Chapter Two

### LITERATURE PERTAINING TO CRAFTS

Recently, there has been a marked expansion in the literature pertaining directly to crafts. Relevant ideas also exist in the literature of art and design education. Much of this latter literature has not been well disseminated to craftspeople or post-secondary artist-instructors and administrators of crafts education. This chapter will survey:

- a) crafts literature, produced in and for the crafts world over the past 30 years;
- b) visual arts and design literature;
- c) art and design education literature;
- d) literature pertaining to other arts and the arts in general.

In addition, ideas pertinent to crafts activities or education exist in academic literatures outside the visual arts or crafts worlds. The following chapter will argue for the inclusion of some of these other kinds of scholarship in crafts education.

#### **Crafts Literature**

The bulk of the literature directly related to crafts can be described in terms of several relatively distinct, but not always separate, types: technical, historical, biographical, ethnographic, aesthetic, and ideological. In addition, some sociological, theoretical and philosophical literature has recently emerged in support of a deeper understanding of how crafts activity and products are culturally meaningful and may be ‘critically’ evaluated. Much such literature appears in collections of short essays. Finally there is a small body of statistical literature reporting on the crafts, often commissioned directly by crafts organisations. These types can be readily observed in library

cataloguing as well as in the publications produced for craftspeople across media or for specific media.

Crafts in the province of Québec are a well developed and supported cultural industry with an unbroken history since the colonial period. A rich body of mostly French-language literature on crafts in Quebec is represented in the *Bibliographie québécoise de l'artisanat et des métiers d'art (1689-1985)* (Saint-Pierre, 1986), along with audiovisual resources. French-language literature includes works in the various categories noted below. However, this literature is not well known in the predominantly English context of the four craft degree schools, all located outside Québec and New Brunswick. It has little opportunity to inform or influence Canadian discourse or scholarship in those schools, except when Francophone authors write for English anthologies or are translated. Most Francophone craftspeople of my acquaintance are accustomed to using English-language resources, and make similar complaints about the lack of craft literature in French. For example, this is the stated motivation of Louise Lemieux-Bérubé for writing her weaving book, *Le Tissage Créateur* (1998). What follows will focus on the dominant English-language literature arising from the United States, the United Kingdom, and English Canada.

### **Technical Craft Literature**

The technical type is perhaps the most obvious and intrinsic literature of crafting activity. This literature documents and explains how to manipulate materials to produce desirable objects or effects, and why making should be done in particular ways. It catalogues the accumulated knowledge of materials, general principles, and successful

techniques that have been tested by experienced practitioners. Each enduring craft, including painting and sculpture and other fine arts media, has such a literature. Its content covers how to make objects, sometimes step by step, identifying: the nature of the materials under consideration, the range of tools available and their particular capacities, the kinds of useful objects that might be made, the techniques of how to manipulate materials using tools and hands, the physical theories or structural principles of construction that matter to the process, and advice or cautions about what leads reliably to either good results or poor ones. This literature embodies the pertinent criteria of craftsmanship for the particular medium. At the same time reflecting some of the aesthetic, symbolic, and social concerns of the prevailing craft world or the particular medium. There are hundreds of these ‘how-to’ books and magazines used by craftspeople as references or self-teaching resources. Weavers still refer to the *Key to Weaving* (1980) first written by Canadian Mary E. Black during World War II. Sewers can refer to *The Vogue Sewing Book* (Perry, 1975). Jewellery makers can refer to the *The Jeweler’s Studio Handbook* (Holschuh, 2009). For woodworkers, there is *The Encyclopedia of Wood Working Techniques* (Broun, 1993). Some of this didactic literature attempts to be comprehensive or broad-ranging. Other works focus on a particular topic in depth. In every medium, the works range from professional level to amateur, recreational, novice, and even child-appropriate works.

Some technical literature, such as Leach’s *A Potter’s Book* (1945), incorporates a treatise on how making should be approached and appreciated, promoting an ideology along with the ‘how-to’ instruction and criteria for assessing successful practices and results. For example, Leach promoted a Buddhist-influenced, worshipful approach to

making and object appreciation, based on Asian ideas of beauty and action in the irregular, unity, and *chi*, the vital life force (Leach, 1945). By contrast, the European technical literature of textiles, which has for at least 200 years incorporated ‘*The Theory of*’ in their titles, reflects a predominantly scientific / technological / industrial ideology, in keeping with its integration with mass production throughout and since the Industrial Revolution. Wolfensberger’s *The Theory of Silk-Weaving* (1921) and Grimonprez’s *Tissage Analysé –Théorie et Pratique* (1878) are two such examples. Since making processes are the foundational knowledge base of actual crafting practices, the technical literature can also be regarded as the intrinsic theoretical literature of crafting in the sense of execution, embodying the physical, mechanical, or chemical principles governing the processes, and the perceived ethics and prevailing criteria of assessing good and poor craftsmanship for each medium.

### **Historical Craft Literature**

Historical craft literature catalogues the objects and crafts processes used as far back as can be found, often under the classification of ‘decorative art’. This literature deals first with object types and aesthetic styles, as well as attempting to locate processes or their origins chronologically. This kind of literature has been most often assembled by historians, art historians, and archaeologists, often in the context of museum collections and exhibitions. Much historical literature takes a media focus, such as *Coptic Textiles* (Kybalová, 1967) or *Les Metaux dans l’Ancien Monde du Vième au XIème siècles* (Lombard, 1974). Other historical literature cuts across all the crafts objects of a particular time and place, such as *Modernism and the Decorative Arts in France* (Troy,



1991) or *Japanese Studio Crafts: Tradition and the Avant-Garde* (Faulkner, 1995). More recently, curators of major shows and museum catalogues have added considerable historical background research, of a geographic, social, cultural, and political nature, to amplify and contextualise the artefacts they are describing. *Woven from the Soul, Spun from the Heart: Textile Arts of Safavid and Qajar Iran, 16<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup> centuries* (Bier, 1987) exemplifies such an extensive approach. Important exhibition catalogues thus both rely on and fill part of the role of scholarly historical writing for crafts history. Some works, such as *A Survey of Historic Costume* (Tortura, 2004) survey the entire known (Western world) history for the major media or object categories. Finally, there are a few histories for lesser profile crafts that someone has taken an interest in, such as *The Subversive Stitch: Embroidery and the Making of the Feminine* (Parker, 1984).

The degree of interest in media, styles, or types of objects can vary widely. Moreover, the objects investigated are more often luxury or fashionable objects, which undergo more striking and rapid aesthetic change than do mundane objects. Luxury goods may survive better because special care has been taken of them, or they have been entombed or otherwise protected from the ravages of use or decay. Collectors have shown greater interest in acquiring them, often because they contain precious materials or very elaborate figuration, as well as very fine craftsmanship and aesthetic satisfaction. The interest in luxury objects for their rarity, treasure value, exotic appeal or technical ingenuity is an ancient one, documented in such works as *Kitab al-Hadaya wa al-Tuhaf* (*The Book of Gifts and Rarities*), an 11<sup>th</sup> century Arabic text (Qaddumi, 1996).

Histories of craft tools are very rare. Some of the literature about tools is primarily descriptive, like *Japanese Woodworking Tools: Their Tradition, Spirit and Use* (Odate,

1984), rather than tracing a history of development as Broudy does in *The Book of Looms: A History of the Handloom from Ancient Times to the Present* (1993). The references to crafts tools and related techniques are usually very ambiguous in historical documents prior to the modern period. Some terms and surviving tool fragments are impossible to identify with the existing evidence. More recent historical textiles catalogues, especially of Belgian collections,<sup>15</sup> have been more thorough in including detailed technical explanations. Such explanations are derived from close examination coupled with experimental archaeology, which involves practical testing of alternate possible ways of making and reproduction of samples in an attempt to find the best explanation for the evidence. Some practitioners have produced very important contributions to scholarship by testing methods or claims from the past.<sup>16</sup> Deploying the expertise of advanced practitioners on problems of historical scholarship through experimental archaeology is an invaluable academic strategy that also demonstrates the academic value of insightful, deeply skilled practice.

Historical scholarship often deals either with the surviving objects or various social conditions for craftsmen of a particular era or region, such as may be deduced from primary source materials. It is often further focused around particular aesthetic styles

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<sup>15</sup> The work of Belgian textiles scholar Daniel de Jonghe stands out in this regard, in works published since the mid-1980s about ancient textiles in Belgian museums. Some examples are his technical sections in Lafontaine-Dosonge's *Textiles Coptes* (1988) and Bruwier's *Égyptiennes: Étoffes coptes du Nil* (1997) as well as his study with M. Tavernier and L. Pollett of "Le phénomène du croisage des fils de chaîne dans les tapisseries coptes" (1983)

<sup>16</sup> In textiles, for example, Nancy Arthur Hoskins (1992) produced an extensive study of compound weft textile patterning based on reproducing the complex patterns of surviving Byzantine cloths from about the 6<sup>th</sup> century. John Becker (1987) showed that the patterned warp pile structures of ancient Han textiles was possible using pattern rods rather than a more complex drawloom. Dyers have attempted to reproduce 3-4<sup>th</sup> century papyrus instructions for dyeing Coptic colours (Caley, 1926). And de Jonghe, Tavernier and Pollett (1983) revealed a simple and ingenious method of Coptic weaving in the above-mentioned study of Coptic tapestry, which I also tested, and thereby discovered also that it could be varied to easily make a Coptic brocade weave just as efficiently.

(such as Arts and Crafts, Art Nouveau, Art Deco), groups of craftspeople (such as the Guild of Handicrafts in Britain, the Deutscher Werkbund in Germany, the Wiener Werkstatte in Austria, or the Roycrofters in the USA), broader social movements (such as the Arts and Crafts Movement or Utopianism), or influential schools (such as the Bauhaus in Germany, or Cranbrook Academy of Art or the Black Mountain College in the USA). It also includes the social support of crafts in the industrial age, through such government or philanthropic strategies as the Home Industries programmes in the UK, or the Work Progress Administration in the USA. Topics in historical scholarship can encompass all areas of social behaviour and appearance, covering topics such as labour and sumptuary laws, commercial restrictions, material goods being used as pay, descriptions of environments, court culture, economic conditions and developments, the effects of technological inventions, plagues, wars, enslavement, and diverse political events on existing crafts activity or by way of stimulating it. Such scholarship is developed mainly in the fields of archaeology and history in general. Art historical scholarship has tended to highlight aesthetic aspects and meanings of style, motif, and the social uses of imagery and adornments. However, art historians of the twenty-first century typically incorporate socio-political and cultural contexts to explain the social meanings of images, objects, and related texts. Similar descriptive histories, often of an introductory nature, can be found for the crafts objects of other countries.

Recent attempts to deal with the crafts more broadly (across all the main media) are rare, and rarely succeed in delineating a coherent or satisfactory narrative. Edward Lucie-Smith's *The Story of Craft: The Craftsman's Role in Society* (1984) attempted to produce a comprehensive historical narrative comparable to Ernst H. Gombrich's

influential *The Story of Art* (1950). Most other pan-media histories wisely focus on particular eras, regions or thematic studies, such as editors Rock, Gilje and Asher's *American Artisans: Crafting Social Identity 1750-1850* (1995) or Lionel Lambourne's *Utopian Craftsmen: The Arts and Crafts Movement from the Cotswolds to Chicago* (1980). Most such examples are not merely descriptive of crafts practices, but could be regarded as social histories, because they are more about the social circumstances than the crafts as such. More recently, ambitious crafts histories of the United States and for Britain combine description and social history. A three volume *The History of Twentieth-Century American Craft* (Kardon, 1993-1995), sponsored by the American Craft Museum, only covers the century up to 1945, and so must be regarded as incomplete. Furthermore, the third volume of the set, *Craft in the Machine Age, 1920-1945*, is unsatisfactory because its somewhat random and incomplete eclectic selection of independently written essays fails to offer a coherent analysis or synthesis of the title theme. Perhaps this failure is in itself a recognition of the complexity and paucity of the necessary foundational data, although each essay makes an independent contribution. Tanya Harrod's *The Crafts in Britain in the Twentieth Century* (1999) also reads mainly as a social history of the contemporary craft world. Because it overtly omits crafts as heritage preservation, occupational therapy for the disabled, or as economic development, it cannot claim to be a comprehensive history. However, it is a valuable history of the world of professional studio crafts.

No such comprehensive documentation has been attempted for Canada, but several noteworthy works have addressed crafts in the twentieth century. Sandra Flood's *Canadian Craft and Museum Practice, 1900-1950* (2001) outlines key figures,

organizations, events and attitudes shaping the Canadian decorative crafts scene in the wake of the Arts and Crafts Movement. Alan Elder catalogues the relationship with contemporary design at mid-century in *Handmade in Canada: Craft and Design in the Sixties* (2005). Sandra Alfoldy's *Crafting Identity: The Development of Fine Craft in Canada* (2005), focuses on the pivotal figures, events, and attitudes in the late 1960s by which Canadian crafts makers were influenced to 'professionalise.' According to Alfoldy, crafts makers were encouraged to adopt the prevailing American fine art and/or design aesthetics and models of studio practice (including discourses, social structures, and resources), in order to avoid being viewed as 'amateur,' 'folk,' 'traditional,' or 'unsophisticated.' Such perceptions disadvantaged them commercially, in the contemporary market for decorative objects, and intellectually, in terms of the perceived cultural and intellectual value of their products.

There is little scholarly examination of regional trends in crafts, or of national views of particular media, let alone other historical works on Canadian craft, although Gustafson began to address this need in *Craft Perception and Practice, A Canadian Discourse* (2002, 2005).

### **Biographical Craft Literature**

The third type of craft literature is biographical, dealing with influential or important craftspeople and their works. A good example of this sort of literature is *Pioneers of Modern Craft* (Coatts, 1997), an anthology of 12 "key figures in the history of modern craft" in Britain. Similarly Stephen Inglis' *Masters of the Crafts* (1989) profiles the lives and works of the 10 Canadian craftspeople awarded the prestigious Prix Saidye

Bronfman Award over the preceding decade. Inglis is concerned mainly with practitioners rather than ‘key contributions’ to the craft world more generally. Many essays published by crafts magazines and newsletters tend to celebrate important figures in the medium for their works or their influence as teachers. Such publications include *Studio: Craft and Design in Canada*<sup>17</sup> and *American Crafts*, and media-focused magazines, such as *Ceramics Monthly*, *Fiberarts*, or *Metalsmith*.<sup>18</sup> This literature is oriented mainly to the professional crafts world, rather than scholarly standards, and is designed primarily to document, inform and critique studio crafts. Their focus is on makers, products, and professional interests. On the other hand, focused biographies of influential patrons, collectors, critics, or other supporters and promoters of crafts interests are generally scarce, and nearly non-existent in Canada. Documentation of such key Canadian figures would include patrons such as Joan Chalmers and the Bronfman Family Foundation, curators and scholars such as Harold and Dorothy Burnham, teachers and administrators such as Mary E. Black, and writer/publishers such as Paula Gustafson. It would also document influential organizations in greater depth, such as the Guild of Canadian Crafts or the Canadian Crafts Council.

As a complement to profiles written by others, I would also classify published interviews with craftspeople. Barbaralee Diamonstein’s *Handmade in America: Conversations with Fourteen Craftmasters* (1983) is a collection of such interviews, but

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<sup>17</sup> Due to the prohibitive economics of producing a national Canadian publication, or provincial council magazines, six provincial crafts organisations and the Canadian Crafts Federation banded together to expand the former *Ontario Craft*, published by the Ontario Crafts Council, into *Studio Magazine*, with a national mandate (*Studio Magazine*, website 2010). The additional five sponsoring organisations are the Crafts Association of British Columbia, Alberta Craft Council, the Saskatchewan Craft Council, Conseil des métiers d’art du Québec, and the Craft Council of Newfoundland & Labrador.

<sup>18</sup> The majority of these membership oriented publications are based in the United States, again for economic reasons, because a large critical mass of members is needed to support good publications. Many Canadian professional craftspeople belong to these United States based organisations because they expand their awareness of and participation in the larger North American crafts world.

such interviews are also a staple of the magazines mentioned above. To some extent, the set of videos profiling recipients of the Prix Saidye Bronfman Award of Excellence in Crafts is similarly biographical. The essence of this type of documentation is to record the views and experiences of makers themselves—the insider or participant perspective. It is valuable not only because it articulates key aspects that are not obvious or visible to non-practitioners, but also because it offers primary data for researchers to analyse. Similarly, craftspeople’s descriptions of their fields or their responses to particular issues usually reflects personal beliefs and values, derived from their individual histories of experience. Sometimes what is presented is a description of their medium or practice, as they understand it, as is the case with *Fifteen Craftsmen on their Crafts* (Farleigh, 1945). A handful of anthologies highlighting the voices of craftspeople have been produced since WWII. In addition to the above, we have *The Craftsperson Speaks: Artists in Varied Media Discuss their Crafts* (Jeffri, 1993), and most recently, *Choosing Craft: The Artist’s Viewpoint* (Halper and Douglas, 2009). Although *Choosing Craft* is limited by concentrating on published written accounts, it offers a useful consolidation of various craftspeople’s views regarding particular themes, from which the reader can more easily apprehend common or divergent trends. No such biographical collections exist for Canada, especially none that substantiate and synthesise general trends or highlight the range of diverse views among Canadian craftspeople.

Although researchers must be careful when using first person accounts, because it is not clear how edited, biased, or mediated they may be, the voice of the maker provides crucial testimony of what motivates and gratifies makers. Makers’ perspectives are a primary resource for documentation and analysis of crafting activity. However, this kind

of research also falls into the realm of qualitative sociological study—as well as cognitive study and psychology—for which many in the arts lack adequate academic preparation and skills for conducting or explaining such research. This is not a matter of imposing pre-existing social theory onto crafts activities, but of deriving pertinent social theory from the facts of the phenomena of crafts practice, an important distinction that is often overlooked by those bringing social theory into crafts scholarship. However, if there are pan-media interests and commonalities, as many craftspeople believe, the actual views and actual actions of the practitioners are the most vital resource to examine, in order to identify more clearly just what those commonalities are, or if they actually match what is typically believed.

### **Ethnographic Craft Literature**

Many crafts exist around the world, each with its own distinctive cultural context. Many first world craftspeople are curious about and inspired by these unfamiliar objects and contexts. Thus ethnographically oriented literature is an important type for craftspeople. Not only does ethnographical literature highlight diverse techniques and aesthetic styles or motifs, it also locates crafts activities within the social structures and particular cultural meanings of societies different from our own. Much such literature is provided by anthropologists studying small scale or ethnically-specific production around the world in contexts that retain authentic meanings and important links to pre-industrial, pre-colonial, indigenous cultural practices, despite the encroachment of a highly industrialized global present. Much ethnographic literature is also relevant to the interests of archaeologists, sociologists, and material culturists working on understanding



our own more familiar material pasts, because it can suggest alternate perspectives from which to view our own crafting activity or object use.

I would include in this category the material on both traditional and ethnically inflected contemporary work by North American and Central American indigenous peoples, as well as other immigrant traditions transplanted to North America. This might include traditional or adapted craft traditions from cultural groups such as African American, Mennonite, Quaker, Mayan, or Hispanic makers, in which their ethnographic identity, context, or traditional modes of expression contribute to the meaningfulness of the object or express the maker's cultural identity. Some examples of such literature are Ruth Phillip's *Trading Identities* (1998), Ruth Whitehead's *Micmac Quillwork* (1982), and Joleen Gordon's work on basket-making among Nova Scotia's Black population, *Edith Clayton's Market Basket* (1977).

A notable example of this literature is Maureen A. MacKenzie's study, *Androgynous Objects: String Bags and Gender in Central New Guinea* (1991). It is extraordinarily detailed in its description of the actual crafting process, without neglecting its other thematic goals. This dual focus is unusual for this kind of literature, which often offers only cursory accounts of the technical aspects of the crafts discussed. The level of detail provided by Mackenzie highlights her argument about the import of these objects to their social structures, and shows how the implicit understandings and valuing of this activity counter or balance the verbally explicit status attributed to this activity and its makers. It shows how subtle variation is noted and evaluated, while remaining within a relatively narrow range of objects, style and technique. This kind of crafting practice is quite

different to the expectation of professional fine craft, but it is important to a fuller understanding of crafting activity.

Another example of anthropological literature, *Cloth That Does Not Die: The Meaning of Cloth in Bùnú Social Life* by Elisha P. Renne (1995), reveals how the cultural meaning of colours in an African society is related to the use and production of specific textiles. Even when local hand-production of such cloths has died out, the meanings are retained as potent cultural conventions, and appropriate surviving cloths are valued all the more. Similarly, Emma Tarlo's study of Indian dress in *Clothing Matters: Dress and Identity in India* (1995), which began as an enquiry into embroidery traditions, revealed the deeper meanings embedded in different forms of dress. Both of these examples study how objects relate to both implicit and explicit cultural meanings, with which both makers and the users of objects are familiar. This differs little from the assumptions of artists about what their imagery might mean. It is less about the message than the nature of the relationship between experiences of social life and the material modes through which messages are conveyed. Thus, it is about the basic mechanisms of meaning—how all making and interpretation, including art, works.

The value of anthropological literature is not universally appreciated by the professional fine craft community, many of whom are more narrowly focused on building careers through critical appraisal, or making a viable living from work they prefer and do well. From this perspective, ethnographical literature from a sociological perspective is also less relevant. But there is a need and place for studies of alternate practices of the crafts—by amateurs, by 'folk' or rural craftspeople serving their own legitimate goals. Whether or not these types of crafting qualify as 'fine crafts' or a form of art may not

matter to them, and it should not matter to those really seeking to understand the reasons that such activity persists. Michael Owen Jones' ethnography of traditional chair makers, entitled *The Handmade Object and its Maker* (1975), examines in detail an individual 'folk' chair maker in Kentucky, contrasting him with other local chair makers. Jones' study shows how this individual, although 'traditional' and unsophisticated in many respects, is experimental and aesthetically sensitive, within the relatively narrow confines of the local chair traditions. In "Nostalgia, Identity, and Gender: Woven in 100 Per Cent Pure Silk," (1994), Millie Creighton examines another subject related to amateur activity, what might be called the 'craft retreat'. Japanese women take week-long silk-weaving workshops, exemplifying the function of crafting activity (undertaken voluntarily as 'serious leisure' work) as self-education and self-development. She also shows the importance of such activity in sustaining appreciative audiences for professional craftspeople, and helping to retain values and cultural activities that contribute to communal cultural identities, especially in the face of homogenising, depersonalising social forces of contemporary industrialised societies.

### **Aesthetic / Decorative Arts Literature**

The aesthetic crafts literature focuses attention on the visual styles and motifs embodied in craft objects. It overlaps, or might be a subset of, the art historical literature, but tends to focus on stylistic or design elements, and virtuoso craftsmanship, often dramatised in beautiful 'coffee-table' publications. Aesthetic styles such as Art Nouveau, Abstract Expressionism, Shaker style, or regional styles such as Japanese or Mexican, may be highlighted thematically. Alternately, the work may highlight the range of

aesthetic approaches over a period or region. Such works may have historical value, especially as time goes by. When they were produced, their primary intentions were (and remain) to survey and highlight aesthetic aspects of contemporary crafts or the range of styles. Since so many crafts objects are made for the purposes of being decorative as much as functional, they have historically been classed as decorative arts, alongside more mass-produced, machine-made objects designed by designers, such as Christopher Dresser, Eileen Gray, Isamu Noguchi, or Philip Stark. Aesthetic and functional design are important elements shared by contemporary craftspeople and designers. Furthermore, designed commodities tend to establish the aesthetic trends against which craftspeople compete for customer dollars as well as appreciation. Thus any of the literature about decorative art is pertinent to crafts activity, and many craftspeople are familiar with it.

Examples of this type of literature would be Lloyd Herman's *Art That Works: Decorative Arts of the Eighties Crafted in America*, (1990), and Timothy Burgard's *The Art of Craft: Contemporary Works from the Saxe Collection* (1999). Much of this kind of literature is in the form of lush exhibition catalogues that accompany contemporary crafts exhibitions from major collections. It records the variety of visual and object design propositions that constitute what may become a canon of crafts objects, while at the same time identifying particular makers as talented and important or potentially important for their fields. In addition, it reveals at least some of the often implicit aesthetic criteria and values prevailing across the crafts that underpin the critical discourse surrounding contemporary crafts critiques or reviews, which may or may not coincide with the criteria and values of the maker. This literature is especially important for those craftspeople who exhibit in galleries or whose work is oriented towards the goals and ideals of art. It

supports careers and helps to disseminate what is happening beyond the confines of particular exhibitions, ensuring that more people can benefit from them without being in a particular place at a particular time. Although magazine reviews and events reports describe and respond to exhibitions, they cannot fulfil the expanded documentary role of major exhibition catalogues, and they especially cannot match the essential visual information contained in catalogues or aesthetic texts.

A less common type of aesthetic literature is exemplified by Ernst Gombrich's important work, *The Sense of Order, A Study in the Psychology of Decorative Art* (1979). This work is theoretical in nature, but because it is largely concerned with the aesthetic strategies by means of which decorative art conveys visual impact and significance, it fits into the aesthetic category. Similarly, the design literature about 'principles of design' or 'visual literacy' can also be placed in this category, because they are mainly concerned with the creation of the visual forms and overall impression used to convey or create meaning in objects.

### **Ideological Literature**

Literature that promotes a particular view of crafts activity without undertaking a balanced philosophical examination is ideological rather than philosophical. In some respects, this corresponds to art works that promote various manifestos or political stances, of which there are many in twentieth century art.<sup>19</sup> It grounds its arguments in assumptions held by the author rather than in well-reasoned argumentation or analysis of

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<sup>19</sup> There have been many ideologically or politically oriented movements throughout modern art and design. Some prominent ones have been the Futurists, the Dadaists, Surrealists, and in Canada, the Automatistes. In decorative arts, De Stijl was particularly influential. Political orientations include feminism, post-colonialism, and a variety of social agendas, such as anti-war, that are usually anti-establishment or rebellious, such as punk.

alternative positions. Throughout the twentieth century, William Morris' socialist ideology influenced crafts ideals in Europe and North America, well into the 1960s and 1970s. Muneyoshi (Soetsu) Yanagi's *The Unknown Craftsman: A Japanese Insight Into Beauty* (1972), which was infused with a quasi-religious (Buddhist) philosophy, was widely promoted by followers in England and North America. Similarly, some feminist historians examine crafts, especially those culturally associated with women or femininity, through the lens of feminist critique. Rozsika Parker's *The Subversive Stitch: Embroidery and the Making of the Feminine* (1984) is one of numerous examples. While feminism has helped to illuminate and re-evaluate women's crafts activities in mundane, domestic, and rural contexts, it may have unwittingly reinforced gendered stereotypes. The North American tendency to associate crafts in general, or particular crafts, primarily with women, enables gendered stereotypes also to be applied in a simplistic manner to situations where the associations are untrue.<sup>20</sup> While gendered stereotypes may contain some truth, they are not universally or intrinsically true, and it is important to continually review ideological assumptions lest stereotypes of one or another kind interfere with fruitful insights. For example, important distinctions based on rural and urban, or domestic and commercial crafting situations may be overlooked when too much importance is placed on gender assumptions.

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<sup>20</sup> The misapplication of stereotypes occurs for situations around the world, industrialised and unindustrialised. For example, in some West African textile production, men were weavers and dyers to the exclusion of women. In other African situations, men and women each weave different categories of cloth. However, the problem also pervades assumptions about textile production in European and North American Colonial society, in which there were many professional male weavers, dyers, and tailors, and no evident gender association applied to such work. I have recently discovered several male ancestors who were tailors, weavers, and calico printers in Europe and in North America.

## Theoretical and Philosophical Literature

There have been a few serious attempts to examine crafts, decorative arts, and craftsmanship philosophically. Isabelle Frank's anthology *The Theory of Decorative Art: An Anthology of European and American Writings 1750-1940* (2000) sets out a variety of theoretical perspectives that have influenced thinking about the decorative roles and styles of objects designed by craftspeople or by designers for industry over the modern period. Although a valuable resource and introduction to pertinent ideas, some of enduring value, it does not offer a synthesis or coherent perspective of its own.

In the post-WWII era of predominant first-world machine production, one of the most thorough, extended philosophical/theoretical examinations of crafts practice was that of David Pye, a woodworker, designer and teacher. In *The Nature and Art of Workmanship* (1968, Cambridge University Press), he examined just what distinguishes works made by craftspeople 'by hand' ('workmanship of risk') from those made by machine ('workmanship of certainty'). His analysis highlighted three key distinctive elements: the personal adroitness of the maker's hands, the intimate monitoring and control of the process as making progresses, and the diversification from irregular to extreme consistency of the surface. Along with his subsequent text, *The Nature and Aesthetics of Design* (Pye, 1978), his work reportedly had a forceful but apparently brief impact—his ideas do not seem to be common currency in studio classrooms, or in craft discourse more generally.

Similar unfamiliarity can be claimed of numerous other ambitious theoretical or philosophical works by deeply informed and thoughtful scholars, such as *The Sense of Order* (Gombrich, 1979). Oleg Grabar's *The Mediation of Ornament* (1992), and James

Trilling's two works on ornament, *The Language of Ornament* (2001) and *Ornament: A Modern Perspective* (2003) are more examples that seem to have only limited currency in either the discourse or the literature of crafts, especially that produced by craftspeople themselves. Whether or not one agrees with the arguments, it is surprising that this literature is so poorly known or discussed in a field that claims to want a mature critical and theoretical discourse underpinned by supportive scholarship.

David Brett's *Rethinking Decoration: Pleasure and Ideology in the Visual Arts* (2005) takes a philosophical approach to the idea of decoration and the place of pleasure in artistic production and consumption. The idea of pleasure, sensuous pleasure in particular, is an under-examined one that has suffered from disparagement in the visual arts discourses of the twentieth century. Nevertheless, this idea is relevant in the context of the psychology of satisfactory artistic decision-making and audience reception, in the role that pleasure plays in the formation of taste, both cultivated and spontaneous, for example, and in the formation of criteria of assessment of 'good craft or design' or 'beauty' in decorative objects. Brett's ambitious work links visual cognition, Gestalt theories of perception, psycho-analysis, pragmatist philosophy, evolutionary theory, and sociological ideas such as Bourdieu's concept of *habitus*, into an expansive theoretical framework intended to recover the dignity and cultural import inherent in the social and performative functions of decoration. This is the kind of rich theoretical basis that crafts and the field of decorative arts more broadly needs to underpin its discourses and deepen scholarship of its own interests.

Even more recently, Howard Risatti published *A Theory of Craft: Function and Aesthetic Expression* (2007), the same year as Glenn Adamson published *Thinking*



*Through Craft* (2007). Each has their strengths and insights, and warrant wide distribution and discussion. Risatti's study raises many important ideas for consideration, with particular attention to the dimension of function. However, Risatti's theory is fundamentally flawed by his concentration on autonomous, portable objects, and his rejection of jewellery and architecture from his discussion due to their lack of autonomy from a bodily or architectural armature. Concentrating on the question of "what is a craft object," he defines 'craft' as an "independent object produced" rather than as the deployment of skill or a highly-refined, sensitive way of doing something. This is counter-intuitive to the more usual sense of craft as an application of knowledge and skilful practice, which might be equally applied to objects incorporated with armatures, such as garments and jewellery, as to permanent architectural elements (fences, windows, decorative woodwork & built-in cabinetry, etc.). This "theory of craft" is thus only a theory of some craft objects, and seems too strongly influenced by art world expectations to adequately highlight the full range of distinctions that might be addressed.

Adamson's approach is more satisfactory, examining the relationships that exist between maker, material, crafting process, function, expressiveness, and final object, as well as two persistent connotations of the idea of craft—pastoral and amateur. However, Adamson's use of the term "supplemental" seems to undermine the necessary foundational relationship of materiality and means to the final concrete works in which the 'content' is incorporated. He seems to intimate that content can be fully divorced from the means of conveyance of content. I contend that such an idea is an incomplete view of content. Such an idea does not apply to poetry or expressive language in general, where the *way* of saying is often precisely what is loaded with potency and import.

Verbal language is laden with implicit, performed intonations and formal features that contribute importantly to the message. The same is true of visual language, in which the way something is done is part of the ‘content’ or tone of the ‘message’.

In addition to Adamson, other studies examine amateur crafts activities. Cheryl Buckley’s study “On the margins: theorizing the history and significance of making and designing clothes at home” (1989, *Journal of Design History* 11(2), 157-172) shows how home sewing is not mere production, but often significantly involves design processes on the part of the maker. Several of the essays in the anthology *The Culture of Sewing: Gender, Consumption, and Home Dressmaking* (Burman, 1999) reveal the meanings and social importance of home sewing. In “Home Sewing: Motivational Changes in the Twentieth Century,” Sherry Schofield-Tomschin (1999) revealed the importance of challenge, accomplishment, and creativity to amateur sewers (106). I would also consider the same motivations valid for the amateur weaving community I have been involved with for many years. Similar motivations may well be valid for amateur activity in other crafts and in the current, popular, do-it-yourself (DIY) movement.

Although often undervalued by professionals, amateur activity is an important segment of crafts activity. Amateur participation helps to build a perceptive, supportive audience for professional craftspeople. It also provides a livelihood for many craftspeople through teaching of workshops, writing books, and supplying materials for amateurs. Amateur beginnings can often lead to viable craft businesses or professional careers. Serious amateur practitioners can collaborate with scholars in need of experimental archaeology. Many serious amateurs sustain cultural memory and heritage knowledge simply because it interests or challenges them.

Crafts activities, professional and amateur, play an active role in cultural preservation. Recently the British newspaper *The Guardian* aired the following plaint, voiced by Robin Wood of the Heritage Craft Association, in Jim Henley's article "Heritage Crafts at Risk" (Mar 22, 2010):

"... it seems quite extraordinary that we can protect the bricks and mortar of a place like this [Portland Works building, Sheffield, UK], but not care in the least about the skills and craftsmanship that are so much a part of this city's culture and identity."

Henley continues:

"Modern Britain, it seems, is not much fussed about the skills and knowledge that exist only in the minds, eyes and hands of people who make things – our living vernacular heritage. We like them, in a rose-tinted, nostalgic kind of way, but we don't do much to support them."

The values being deplored above tend to elevate the objects produced over knowledge and skilled abilities. Relatively little attention is devoted in the literature to the value of sustaining cultural continuity by supporting traditional crafts practices, despite the well-known example set by Japan in supporting some craftspeople known informally as Living National Treasures, that is, possessors and preservers of intangible cultural knowledge and values (Aoyama, 2004; Buruma, 2007; UNESCO, n.d.).<sup>21</sup>

Significant, well-developed theoretical works of any length are as yet extremely rare. This is largely because much of the necessary groundwork for theory, that is, the various kinds of descriptive and historical data, still has not accumulated. Scholars must continue to document, analyse, and reflect on all pertinent aspects of craft activities, not simply

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<sup>21</sup> The Japanese example has since been emulated by a few other countries, such as Korea, Australia, and France. UNESCO was approached in 1993 by Korea to establish international guidelines for such systems (UNESCO, n.d.), which are designed mainly to preserve the kind of knowledge held and perpetuated through teaching or master works by practitioners, most of whom are either makers of traditional objects (craftspeople) or performers of traditional dance, music, theatre, or other arts.

those of art historical interest. Part of this work is under way, as the next category of short essay collections shows.

### **Essay Collections**

The past 15 years has seen a rapid expansion in anthologies of shorter essays—some more or less theoretical or trying to be theoretical—fuelled by an increasing number of conferences around the world directed towards issues of the crafts. These collections are published as conference proceedings or edited anthologies. Peter Dormer’s *The Culture of Craft* (1997, Manchester University Press) was widely circulated, although the essays in *Craft and Contemporary Theory* edited by Sue Rowley (1997, Allen & Unwin, Australia) are more useful. That same year saw the publication of the valuable but now scarce conference proceedings entitled *Objects of Desire: Reviewing the Crafts in the Twentieth Century* (Harrod, 1997). Paul Greenhalgh also edited an uneven set of essays entitled *The Persistence of Craft* (2003). Love Jönsson’s *Craft in Dialogue: Six Views of a Practice in Change* (2005) permits a view from Sweden, a country that has had a deep and respected historical influence, especially in the integration of crafts with commercial production and modern design.

Perhaps one of the more valuable collections is that edited by Anna Fariello and Paula Owen entitled *Objects and Meaning: New Perspectives on Art and Craft* (2005), which is intentionally organised to highlight “missing” but pertinent aspects of craft activity worthy of further study. In particular, the third section of five essays offers a range of alternative theoretical frames that might be applied to craft activity and objects,

all of which should be examined as identifying features of importance and ways to discuss, analyse, and possibly critique crafts.

The Canadian publication edited by Gloria Hickey, *Making and Metaphor: A Discussion of Meaning in Contemporary Craft* (1994) was apparently the first such anthology in Canada. This anthology arose from national symposium held in 1993 at the Canadian Museum of Civilization, specifically to “address a range of issues related to the development of contemporary craft and its place within the broader context of material culture... [and] fill a void in the information available to professionals in the field” (Morrison in Hickey, 1994, p.8). Rosalind Morrison, Executive Director of the host Institute for Contemporary Canadian Craft, in 1993, further stated in her introduction to *Making and Metaphor* that

“a professional craftsperson working in Canada cannot readily point to a body of relevant, accessible, scholarship that addresses her or his field. The implications for the education of craftspeople, scholars, curators, writers, and, ultimately, the general public, are cause for concern. It is hoped that these papers and the resulting passionate debate ... will be the beginning of a dialogue that will encourage increased scholarship related to craft practice, more informed curatorial approaches, and greater interest in building collections of contemporary Canadian work.” (Morrison in Hickey, 1994, p. 8).

The professional crafts community was indicating its desire for a body of literature tailored to its needs and particular character, since by implication, the mainstream literature of academia, visual arts, and museum scholarship was not perceived as adequate or appropriate to their field of practice. More importantly, the crafts community were starting to take responsibility for filling the “void” and articulating their interests.

*Making and Metaphor* was followed eventually by *Exploring Contemporary Craft: History, Theory, and Critical Writing* (Johnson, 2002), *NeoCraft: Modernity and the*

*Crafts* (Alfoldy, 2007), and most recently *Crafting New Traditions: Canadian Innovators and Influences* (Egan, Elder, & Johnson, 2008). In addition, the late Paula Gustafson edited and published two volumes of critical essays about crafts under the title *Craft: Perception and Practice, A Canadian Discourse* (2002, 2005), in an effort to both document what was happening and stimulate critical analysis and discussion; she published the arts magazine *Artichoke* for 16 years, which documented and offered a voice for many craftspeople, as well as fostering writing for and about crafts, in western Canada.

Not all of the essays included in anthologies such as the afore-mentioned are theoretical as such, and the degree to which they are critical or scholarly is uneven. The essayists range from craftspeople to academics, historians to anthropologists, curators to collectors—most are therefore professional interpreters of art or craft works. Many teach or have taught in higher education institutions, in which written published research is often mandated. Most of these anthologies present a variety of perspectives, highlighting and advocating the value of and openness to diverse disciplinary approaches. So, it is vital to examine the offerings carefully to find those that are more perceptive, well-grounded, comprehensive, and useful.

That said, together these essay collections form a representative range of current ideas from which to develop or substantiate theoretical work. It is unfortunate that they do not receive wider dissemination to craftspeople and students. They provide the necessary basis for developing theory and scholarship, along with the similar range of articles published in the more thoughtful publications, like the *Journal of Design History* or *Crafts Magazine*, the publication of the British Crafts Council. In 2008, these were

joined by *The Journal of Modern Craft* from Berg Publishers, the British academic publisher of books and journals focused on the visual arts and culture. Since the late 1990s, this publisher has initiated several peer-reviewed journals of particular interest for the crafts and crafts scholars. These include:

- *Fashion Theory: The Journal of Dress, Body, and Culture* (1997);
- *The Design Journal* (1998), the official journal of the European Academy of Design;
- *Textile: The Journal of Cloth and Culture* (2003);
- *Design and Culture* (2009), the official journal of the Design Studies Forum;
- *Fashion Practice: The Journal of Design, Creative Process & the Fashion Industry* (2009).

Some of the most satisfactory theoretical ideas and support for scholarship comes from England and Australia. This suggests something distinctive about the education and openness of those countries' scholars of artistic and cultural activities, and the value afforded to scholarly study of the crafts as a persistent cultural phenomenon, and as a complex social world of interests. Finally, Canada now has the Quebec-based, bilingual *Cahiers metiers d'art: Craft Journal*, which began publication in 2007, but is not as well known across Canada as it should be.

Although there is a long way to go, there is now an initial accumulation of writing about crafts, voiced by craftspeople and their supporters, of which the above is a small but crucial sampling. The larger issue is ensuring that this literature is well disseminated among those studying the crafts, practically and academically.

## Statistical Literature

By statistical literature, I refer to studies or reports documenting crafts activities, such as government or commissioned economic impact studies, census surveys, etc. Most such literature is commissioned to support or to establish the status quo of the field, often in order to substantiate funding, cultural relevance, or some form of organised action. In addition there are reports from granting agencies about their criteria of assessment and the degree of success of applications, and about cultural labour. The government of Canada, as well as interested cultural organisations—such as the Canadian Crafts Federation—have periodically produced such empirical evidence to show the extent and impact of crafts activities. More such information would be invaluable to scholars, but its appearance tends to be episodic, sparse, and often narrowly focused. Because such studies are prepared with specific purposes in mind, the information it accumulates is focussed on those purposes, and provides only a partial portrait of the field, which is often insufficiently deep or broad for the needs of researchers. Moreover, results are usually based on responses to questionnaires, which are often ill-received by busy craftspeople. The data gathered may be an unrepresentative sampling of the population, thus distorting or weakening the validity of the results. Few such questionnaires deal with audiences or amateurs, thus overlooking a significant population of crafts practitioners. The report *Art is Never a Given: Professional Training in the Arts in Canada* (Task Force, Rossignol & White, 1991) is unfortunately now outdated as is the study, *Folk Arts and Crafts in Canada* (Heritage Canada, 1993). Craftspeople and artisans are specifically identified in *A Statistical Profile of Artists in Canada, based on*



*the 2006 census (2009)*,<sup>22</sup> which allows for comparison with other arts communities including the visual artists. This profile focuses on the size of the professional sector and the earnings of crafts people and visual artists relative to the rest of the Canadian workforce (and each other), as well as identifying proportionate participation of male to female in crafts and visual arts. This study shows the crafts and visual arts sectors to be disproportionately highly educated compared to their income levels, as compared with correlations of education levels and incomes for other occupations. The most recent Canadian research focused on crafts is a pair of studies produced by the Canadian Crafts Federation, entitled *A Study of the Crafts Sector in Canada (2001)*, and *Profile and Development Strategies for Craft in Canada and Appendices (2003)*. These two studies address both the working environment and the educational needs of craftspeople, as well as marketing and post-graduation skills development needs, such as business skills.

Similar British studies are useful for comparison. Anne Channon (1989) summarised the 1988 study entitled *Education for Crafts*, commissioned by the British Craft Council (co-authored by Channon). Among other things, this report noted the shift from apprenticeship programmes to certificate and degree education in the United Kingdom. Significantly, craftspeople felt that the emphasis of their courses on aesthetic appreciation, handling of materials, and developing visual awareness were generally less helpful than knowledge of new processes, speed of execution (efficiency), and professional and business skills. This is especially significant since the report also found that “a significant proportion of crafts oriented students choose self-employment as designer/makers” (229). At the same time, Susan Bittker surveyed crafts and design

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<sup>22</sup> These statistics are based on the long-form census, which samples 20% of the Canadian population.

graduates of Scottish art colleges (1989) about employment and craft education experiences. Her respondents suggested several improvements for training, the most common being provision of course content that prepared them realistically for the challenges of entrepreneurship, including marketing, product development, small business management, and career development.

However limited their scope and sampling, such studies are vital to scholars trying to substantiate particular points to which the studies relate, and to identify historical trends in practices, economic impact, educational programmes, etc. Preliminary findings point to the need for more targeted studies. Changes in craft curriculum should be based on the kind of concrete or empirical information generated by such studies. Again, these studies are now outdated. Also, it is not clear whether the suggestions made were implemented, and if so, how and to what effect. In both the United Kingdom and Canada, deeper research is needed to establish how best to improve craft education. At least these older studies provide a basis for comparison and models of procedure.

### **Visual Arts and Design Literature**

There is a wealth of literature related to the visual arts, with which most art school crafts students and instructors are familiar. They all have pertinence to making meaningful imagery in material forms, for the purposes of contemplation, expression, commentary, or provocation. Many artist-craftspeople take such an approach in their work, giving priority to the needs of the intended imagery and its symbolic function. Much of this literature can be classed according to categories used for crafts: technical, historical, biographical, ethnographical, etc. Works about stimulating creative visual

thinking that craftspeople have found useful, such as Roukes' *Art Synectics* (1984) or *Design Synectics* (1988), might be classed in the technical category because they involve techniques or strategies of problem-finding, problem-solving, and creative thinking. However, additional categories might also be added to the above, such as thematic or issue-oriented literature, which might be sociological or philosophical in character. This category would relate to the use of visual arts as a vehicle for activism or social commentary, and provide the necessary historical, theoretical, and critical support to artists using crafts media who are aligned primarily to the fine arts world. The anthology, *Theory in Contemporary Art since 1985* (Kocur and Leung, 2005), presents an overview of the kinds of theoretical ideas that have surfaced in visual arts, any of which might inform artist-craftspeople. Indeed, the degree to which some artist-craftspeople orient themselves primarily to the priorities of fine arts and imagery, rather than the main concerns of crafts, makes it appropriate to identify them simply as artists, unless they choose to self-identify with the interests of crafts. Another sector of visual arts' theoretical category would include philosophical literature, for which *The Philosophy of the Visual Arts* (Alperson, 1992) presents a good range of readings that include essays related to crafts. Works such as Howard Becker's *Art Worlds* (1982) would exemplify the sociological sector of visual arts literature.

Design literature dealing with principles of composition and visual effects, as well as with what is called 'visual literacy' (Dondis, 1973), fit the technical category of visual arts literature. Other scholarship commonly associated with design includes the field of semiotics (or semiology) which relates to the way that symbolism works and can be theorised. This body of literature would fit into the theoretical category. Dan Sperber's

*Rethinking Symbolism* (1975) exemplifies this type of literature. Because it is associated with the mechanisms by which aesthetic forms communicate meanings between artist and viewer, via the artwork, this literature has general pertinence to crafts works for both art and design oriented makers. Some design literature relates to what particular styles mean. One example of this is Dormer's *The Meanings of Modern Design* (1990), which includes a chapter discussing 'handmade' as a visual style that conveys particular cultural connotations. Some historical literature, such as Allan Elder's *Made in Canada: Craft and Design in the Sixties* (2005) highlights the close connections between design and crafts objects, and the use of craft to explore possible design solutions and to make prototypes for machine production.

### **Visual Arts and Design Education Literature**

The literature of art and design education has a bearing on craft education for three crucial reasons. First, because artists require crafts skills of some kind to realise tangible works, it is necessary for art and design students to achieve at least a basic competence with media they propose to use for their art. General familiarity with the potential of various media allows graduates to continue to build their skills and expand their options on their own. Second, because much craft education takes place in art and design education contexts, instructors are influenced by the conventions and assumptions prevailing there, which are documented and debated in its literature. Third, because the creation of finished objects entails art and design processes and aesthetic judgement, and the methods and expectations of symbolic, functional, and aesthetic design are pertinent.

Art education literature typically has been ignored by the majority of post-secondary artist-instructors, except those who have studied in the professional field of art education. Art education is a disciplinary field that, in contrast to education in visual arts, emphasises academic disciplines, especially psychology related to perception, human development, cognition and learning, and cultural and social behaviours that are relevant to studio practice. Considerable attention is devoted in art education programmes to childhood art education. The academic orientation of art education is regarded as suspect, if not anathema, by many artist-instructors who think, for example, that art ability cannot be taught, and that they only need to be acclaimed practitioners to be adequate teachers. This position is outlined in *Why Art Cannot Be Taught* (Elkins, 2001). Art education degree holders are often perceived as second-rate artists at best, because they have not chosen the fine arts degree path or been assessed in terms of their art making, rather than their academic abilities.<sup>23</sup> Similar to the attitude that accords greater credibility to acclaimed practitioners for teaching art, design teaching credibility arises from having worked successfully as a designer, and imparting that professional experience to students, especially the artistic and problem-solving aspects. In the arts, professional practice is remains as a stronger credential for post-secondary teaching than is learning to teach. This observation is demonstrated by the professional Master of Fine Arts (MFA) credential, in which teaching courses and experience is still often optional, and the prominence of slides of works and exhibition records as qualify evidence required in

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<sup>23</sup> This prejudice was expressed by a whole cohort of MFA students with which I was involved in 2001, when it was suggested that a Master of Art in Art Education student, a painter, be invited to participate in an MFA group exhibition. The group had not seen this painter's work; they simply assumed that it would be of lesser quality than their own because admission to the education degree was not based primarily on his studio practice. Alternately, they did not want to risk setting a precedent, whereby the work of MA students might not match the calibre of MFA students.

applications for post-secondary instruction. As yet, no clear correlation has been established between being a good artist or designer, and being a successful, articulate teacher, or producing successful students.

However, there is much analysis of artistic practices and documentation of teaching practices, successful and otherwise, from which to learn. Literature on adult education is also pertinent to the post-secondary setting, as well as the amateur setting. In fact, some of the research on child art contains insights and suggestions just as valuable for novice or naïve art of any age, because it concerns the development of skills, sensitivities, and understanding along the whole continuum from novice to expert level. Edward Mattil's *Meaning in Craft* (1970) and David Pariser's article "The Arts, Cognition, and Craft: Implications for Teaching and Research" (1983) discuss some of these concerns. The insights of art education cover a wide range of topics, including trying to understand the nature of artistic practices and aesthetic responses, and examinations of curricular and cultural issues. While some art education literature may not seem directly pertinent to crafts activities, it may also offer useful parallels or strategies that can be adapted in craft educational situations, such as studies of culturally-specific art, artistic interpretation, visual literacy, and symbolism.

Some art education literature is directly relevant to craft issues. Sally Markowitz, for example, tackles the persistent question of "The Distinction Between Art and Craft" (1994). Elizabeth Garber's outline of "Crafts Education in Finland: Definitions, Rationales and the Future" (2002) suggests central values of craft education. Jerome Hausman debates the role and value of the artist as post-secondary instructor in "Teacher as artist and artist as teacher" (1970). And David Pariser highlights the essential

cognitive role of craft in artistic production in “The Arts, Cognition, and Craft: Implications for Teaching and Research” (1983). Whether or not some of the art education literature specifies crafts media, its concepts frequently include or apply to crafts education.

In general, art education would seem to be mostly a kind of introductory craft education for diverse media blended with attention to expressive and symbolic intentions, aesthetic strategies, skills of interpretation of art, and historical and social contexts in which art works operate. It is controversial to say that art schools are basically crafts schools, whatever artistic media are involved. This is controversial because of the political rhetoric in which art is defined in opposition to craft. I maintain that this is the case, especially since the studio practice is the nucleus to which everything else is related. Student work is assessed in technical, aesthetic, intentional, symbolic, contextual, and innovative terms, in precisely the same way that crafts are assessed in technical, aesthetic, intentional, functional, contextual, and innovative terms. If art cannot be taught, as some would have it, at least its emergence would seem to be facilitated through immersion in a fertile craft and design environment. If art emerges from the tangible materiality of crafted objects, it is an entity of a different conceptual order, and the two are neither opposed to each other nor comparable. Craft (or design+production) thus becomes the fundamental constituent of art. It would seem that the job of the instructor is to provide appropriate stimuli to trigger and encourage that emergence, and to assess its strength or validity as art in terms of art world criteria.

In 1994, Virginia Wright wrote “Craft Education in Canada: A History of Confusion (*Making and Metaphor*, Canadian Museum of Civilization, 79-85). Since then, in my

involvement as student and instructor in a craft educational institution, NSCAD University, I have seen little significant reduction of that confusion within the visual art paradigm, and the post-secondary implementation of art education. Additional serious scholarship for Canadian craft education, is vitally needed to properly assess and better address not just the needs of crafts students and future patrons for competent practitioners, but also the needs for well-grounded scholarship that addresses the phenomenon of crafting activity and what is involved in effective craft learning.

Art education journals, such as the British *International Journal of Art and Design Education*, the *Journal of Art Education*, the *Canadian Review of Art Education*, *NSCAD Papers in Art Education*, and the many publications of the National Art Education Association (USA) are important resources for understanding ideas and trends in how art education has been and should be conducted. The range of topics covered is impressive, not the least because they cover many topics or issues in general terms as well as identifying the specific art education issue or perspective to which that topic relates. Questions of philosophy, history, future change, failures and omissions, public policy, student responses to teaching strategies or particular projects, assessment debates, stimulating creativity, addressing multi-cultural and multi-ethnic subject matter or student groups, and integrating new technologies, among many other possible topics, are covered, along with their implications for art education practice. Theories, principles, priorities, and goals of art education are debated intelligently, substantiated by informed academic research and rigour.

Much art education literature distinguishes between art and design education or issues. If considered at all, it is usually assumed that crafts education fits either an art or



a design model, rather than a model or curriculum all their own. In contrast, Gerry Williams' *Apprenticeship in Craft* (1981) deals with craft training through apprenticeship from the perspective of participants. In Canada, the European-style idea of apprenticeship in crafts has been largely replaced with credit-valued internship opportunities for degree students, while community college programmes may offer work-term situations with local craftspeople. Alberta has a government programme supporting apprenticeships. The question of apprenticeship was discussed frequently in the 1980s whenever craft training was discussed, because there was general agreement on the value of hands-on and real-world experience. Whether or not there are enough high-quality situations to accommodate the number of students in their chosen medium may be a problem, and the length of time available within a programme of study is another issue. So far, it appears that the provision of internships or apprentice opportunities for crafts has not been studied, so their degree of satisfaction as substitutes or supplements for courses remains unverified.

In craft degree programmes, as in other visual arts degree programmes, studio courses occupy about two-thirds of the total required credits. Most students prefer to be in the studio, working on their projects. They often display resentment or less enthusiasm about academic courses, as less directly related to their interests, from their point of view. Their priority is making, not academic research. This is reflected in the course requirements, as well as the qualifications of fine arts instructors. The dominance of technical practice is a hallmark of vocational education more generally. So the literature of professional education in other profession practices, from medicine and engineering to technical trades, may also have relevance for the situation of professional craftspeople.

This idea is partly supported by Richard Sennett's study of *The Craftsman* (2008), which he approaches by looking at a range of different kinds of work.

### **Literature Pertaining to Other Arts and Art in General**

In addition to scholarship relating to the range of visual arts concerns, a wider range of literature exists about written arts (especially fiction, poetry, drama), and performing arts (theatre, music, dance, and comedy). Further, there is literature relating to art in general, that examines ideas and trends across all the arts. For this latter literature, the term 'art' is intended in its broadest sense. Peter Abbs' *The Symbolic Order: A Contemporary Reader on the Arts Debate* (1989) exemplifies this broader perspective, including essays dealing with philosophical aesthetics, feeling, modernism, myth, creative process, and community. Literature dealing with the arts in the most abstract and inclusive sense is largely theoretical. On the other hand, it may deal with the range of arts of a particular region (geographically, socially, or politically), time (historically), or culture (ethnographically). The general ideas and values that such literature highlights is pertinent to examining how the crafts are socially or culturally interrelated with other arts in other cultural circumstances, as a source of questions to pose or proposed relationships to test. For example, I examined the literature on Byzantine aesthetics, related to painting and mosaics, when considering the question of why the texture of silk velvet was so appealing a luxury textile that it became a staple among the highest aristocracy and clergy. I approached this question not only from the point of view of rarity and costliness (due to expensive materials and specially skilled, labour-intensive production), but also from the point of view of visual, theatrical spectacle, for which lavish garments are used

to overawe and identify social power and state authority. This example illustrates the way that ideas derived from other kinds of art can be useful for considering questions arising in crafts research.

### **Conclusion**

This concludes my discussion of the variety of literatures that pertain to crafts. This chapter outlined how much literature already exists for the crafts, and where the scholarship needs to be deepened and expanded and by whom. It refers to the need for better and more systematic dissemination of various crafts literatures, and the opportunities of practitioners to contribute to crafts scholarship. It also addresses the pertinence of some of the literature in the visual arts and design, and the study of visual arts education, as well as the broad range of arts. Chapter Three will discuss the less obvious kinds of literature that I maintain are necessary to a more comprehensive approach to crafts education.

## Chapter Three

### OTHER PERTINENT LITERATURE

The preceding chapter outlined a range of literature that is relatively well understood to be relevant to crafts education. There are several fields of scholarship that are useful for gaining a broader perspective on crafts activities. These include: material culture, cultural anthropology, sociology, psychology, philosophy, and, occasionally, language. The most important of these fields is material culture, because it focuses directly on the socio-cultural roles and import of objects. My discussion of material culture literature will be followed by a brief discussion of literature from the anthropology of the senses, psychological and cognitive studies literature, and the literature of economic development.

#### **Material Culture Literature**

The literature of material culture is broad and multi-disciplinary. Material culture study centres on the realm of concrete material artefacts produced and used by humans, including representational and aesthetic objects, based on the idea that material objects embody, realise, and render perceptual and tangible the mental, emergent, or intangible features of culture. Material culture includes the material elements of performance (props), the use of tools and objects, and the physical aspects of books, as well as references to material objects or practices in literary works. Thus, material culture ideas apply to handcrafted objects and interpretations of their meanings, professional and amateur, either directly or in contrast to mass-produced objects. Closely related to cultural anthropology, sociology, archaeology, and history, material culture literature

seeks to understand how and why people engage with material objects in their relevant contexts. Any aspect of crafts activity related to making, using, and interpreting material objects can be the focus of a material culture study, including psychological aspects (Rochberg-Halton, 1984).

Since 1996, SAGE Publications (based in the United States and United Kingdom), has been publishing *The Journal of Material Culture*. Also, the full list of journals published by Berg Publishers (based in the United Kingdom) shows the great degree of complexity in the cultural world of artistic objects and creative production, and the many perspectives from which their study can be usefully approached. In addition to the journals listed in the previous chapter, and others related to visual art or design, Berg publishes two material culture journals that deal with topics pertinent to studying craft objects:

- *Home Cultures: The Journal of Architecture, Design & Domestic Space* (2004)
- *Interiors: Design, Architecture & Culture* (2010).

These journals focus on situations in which material objects are used, and for which they are deliberately designed. Not only are crafts objects normally displayed and used in these environments, so are the machine-made objects of industrial design with which crafts objects compete. It is useful to understand how people use and value all objects when trying to determine the extent and distinctiveness of meanings that crafts objects can have.

Material culture literature offers numerous valuable ideas and theories pertinent to contemporary crafts. This literature contains good models of scholarly description, methods, analysis, and cultural interpretation. It is more firmly grounded in empirical

observation and ethnographical practices than I have found cultural theory to be, and its suggestions and conclusions are usually intelligible to undergraduate students. Some of its scholars seek to anchor materiality (an abstraction) to the reality of life's experiences. While I don't dismiss the possible contributions of contemporary cultural or literary theory, I am concerned that their wholesale application to the field of crafts obscures the possibility of theory based on crafts activity and object use as they are, rather than what they are imagined to be. The field of crafts activities needs a foundation of fruitful and well-grounded theory (Koplos, 1992). A material culture approach offers such a foundation, integrating a wide range of disciplinary perspectives and insights.

As Daniel Miller says in *Material Cultures: Why Some Things Matter* (1997), material culture is not constrained by the narrow limits of literary analysis, by what people state, or overtly represent symbolically in their iconography. The ethnological methods of material culture studies also examine the actions of people, which may contradict their statements—a point also made by Maureen McKenzie in her study *Androgynous Objects* (1991). Material culture studies search for what matters to people and what they believe beneath the surface, by looking deeply at how making, exchanging, and using objects affect people in their daily lives, thereby shaping cultural thought and action. This is the powerful and specific 'meaningfulness' that may be found in apparently trivial, commonplace things and activities.

By examining specific material domains in detail, scholars can resist the tendency to reduce interpretations of individual cases to general models or theories of culture. Miller warns that "studies that map material culture onto gender or class are hardly likely to do more than reiterate the ideas of gender or class that they start with" (Miller, 1997, 10), so

nothing is learned or gained. More importantly, it is vital to ascertain the appropriateness of general assumptions, models or cultural theories to the crafts context(s) before applying them. This is precisely the problem confronted by the crafts under the dominance of the visual art paradigm of study, both as a practice and as a subject of scholarship. By circumventing many of the visual arts assumptions that might be imposed on crafts, a material culture approach can refocus attention on what crafts are and do in diverse ways.

The deeper levels of cultural values can be found in what is meaningful to people, as manifested in their actions and reasoning. In craft activities, the form and evident function(s) of the objects produced are only part of the story. What people value is also found in the efforts and knowledge invested in the making, and in the manner in which the object is used and regarded, over time and within its socio-cultural context. There is individual as well as social psychology at work that escapes reduction to generalities of cultural theory. Culture arises from the accumulation of diverse individual, but coordinated, acts and objects. It exists in their continual generation and reiteration, which produces more or less subtle variety across some dimensions, while at the same time preserving homologies across other dimensions. The ethnographic methods and insights of material culture studies are vital to understanding not only the objects produced but also the values and socio-cultural import instantiated by craft activities, however pursued. Crafts scholarship needs this broad view to better understand its subject, rather than the narrow 'fine craft as art' view typically espoused in the visual arts.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> There is every reason to suspect that insights from material culture approaches can also benefit our understanding of the visual arts, especially those that involve material objects. There is a body of anthropological literature pertaining to arts generally, and the visual arts in particular, but this literature is not well disseminated (or possibly not well regarded) among visual artists or scholars.

In what follows, I will highlight some theoretical ideas and methods emerging from material culture studies and other related academic disciplines that are useful for thinking about aspects of crafts activities. In particular, I will discuss: ideas from several scholars about the agency of objects, interacting with objects, Gottdiener's socio-semiotic view of the polysemy of objects, and Ingold's notion of taskscapes for understanding skills, techniques, and technologies.

### **The Agency of Objects**

Anthropologist Alfred Gell articulated a complex theory in *Art and Agency: An Anthropological Theory* (1998). His ideas of the persona of the object, distributed persona and the extended person, and the distributed brain, are pertinent to thinking about some of the meanings that crafts objects have for both makers and users, how they interact, and how these shape culture. Although attitudes about what comprises visual arts has become more inclusive of diverse practices, and art historians such as Gombrich, Trilling, Grabar, Risatti, and Adamson have been paving the way toward a better understanding of contemporary studio craft, some artists and art historians still regard anthropological theory as irrelevant to the way they approach visual arts. Many are unaware of the meaning and breadth of material culture, since they usually think in terms of visual culture, to which the material form is a relatively passive intermediary, rather than an active mediator (Bateson, 1973). But like any cultural behaviour, artistic making of any kind is an important phenomenon to examine from the anthropological, sociological, or material culture perspective. Already, some of the attention paid to art



objects and concepts by social theorists, sociologists, and art critics in the twentieth century has found its way into contemporary visual art scholarship. Why stop at that?

Gell's "nexus of art" (1998), shows how artwork influences and is influenced by other artworks, artists, bodies of art, and the general culture in which it is born and circulates. Because all of these factors influence and are influenced by all others, the overall picture as well as particular interpretations change as new works, artists, and ideas appear. Gell's model is applicable to material culture generally, including visual artworks, especially since the more general point that materiality matters culturally has been established for two decades now. As Miller says,

"To focus on material worlds does not fetishize them since they are not some separate superstructure to social worlds. The key theories of material culture developed in the 1980s [by Bourdieu, Appadurai, and Miller, for example] demonstrated that social worlds were as much constituted by materiality as the other way around" (Miller, 1997, 3).

Miller points out that valuable insights, overlooked by other disciplinary approaches or invisible under dominant ideologies, can arise from

"focusing upon the diversity of material worlds which becomes each other's contexts rather than reducing them either to models of the social world or to specific subdisciplinary concerns, such as the study of textiles or architecture" (1997, 3).

Although the study of any craft or crafts activities in general might appear reductive, because it draws on general commonalities, it need not be so limited. A careful ethnographic study of a craft situation forms a firmer basis from which to extrapolate pertinent cultural consequences, meanings and values. For example, Neil Jarman's study of textile banners in Protestant Ulster parades (1997) shows how the clothing and fabrics are integral expressions of particular communal cultural identity in Northern Ireland. More important than the simple ideas that they serve this function or

that they are social constructions is the manner in which their assembled materiality and complex cultural meanings interact to effectively produce this identity, recognisable as appropriate to the purpose by everyone concerned.<sup>25</sup>

The degree of effectiveness of material objects in projecting identity (Dittmar, 1992) exemplifies the semi-autonomy of objects, because what is projected also might be *unintended* by the maker or user (Mills, 1996, Lurie, 2002).<sup>26</sup> For example, the objects may stigmatise (Riggins, 1994) or produce undesirable impressions (Lurie, 2002). This depends on the interpreter. According to Gell (1998), the material object itself possesses particular *social* agency as well as physical agency, in that its specific presence and features—the constituents of its *persona*—provoke humans in its vicinity to respond in some way in reaction to encountering it. The social agency of artworks may surpass the intentions of the artist, producing either beneficial or detrimental effects. Either way, they are centrally dependent on the particular materiality and visual form presented by the object to a viewer. Once out of the hands of the maker, the art object continues to accrue meanings and to evoke responses as a result of how others use, interpret, or value it. The object develops its own social life more or less disassociated from the maker. These accrued meanings may be quite independent of the intentions of the artist; thus the object cannot be regarded solely in terms of those intentions, however important they were in forming the object. Thus the message conveyed by the object cannot be reduced to only an artist's particular speech act, as though it were bracketed from real life or the wayward interpretations of others, which the artist might consider 'misinterpretations.'

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<sup>25</sup> This resonates with Gottdiener's discussion of the polysemy of objects in *Postmodern Semiotics: Material Culture and the Forms of Postmodern Life* (1995), which not only stipulates multiple, interacting meanings (explicit and implicit) stemming from diverse features of the object, but also the necessity on the part of the audience to possess the cultural knowledge needed to decode them.

<sup>26</sup> Alison Lurie explicitly made this point in *The Language of Clothes* (2000).

A work of art is both an instrumental material object and a symbolising act—both a ‘doing’ and a ‘thing done’ as well as a ‘saying’ and a ‘statement’—that has social consequences beyond the control of the maker and even the owner/user. In both cases, some or many of these consequences might be unforeseen or undesirable.

How true this is of crafted objects, especially over time. Despite their practical instrumentality (furniture, clothing, etc), even the plainest practical objects cannot be reduced to pure utility, just as their making cannot be reduced to pure production. All objects acquire cultural meaning just because they are embedded in a variety of socio-cultural practices and conceptual frameworks. So, crafts objects are culturally significant simply because they are produced through, used in and interpreted by cultural processes, which they manifest in their forms. Their consequent social agency is an active constituent of culture, which is semi-autonomous because their agency depends on their interactions with people.

Many craft objects outlast their maker’s life span, and enter into diverse relationships with other owners or viewers, as well as with other objects. For example, the way we treat some objects as heirlooms, treasuring and preserving them, while rejecting other inherited objects as trivial and disposable (such as battered old shoes), exemplifies their cultural agency being exerted on people. The display of objects in any room in a house shows how this phenomenon works between objects, in which objects placed together create something particular—an atmosphere or story, perhaps—that the object maker, and possibly even the owner, may never have envisioned (Riggins, 1994). The individual persona of craft objects guides or suggests how they may be interpreted, responded to, or used by people. The relationships among objects also suggest how they might be

assembled into larger, more complexly affective groups like an orchestra, together producing yet stronger or different effects and additional layers of signification.

While the persona is partly made up of visual elements producing representations, styles and aesthetic atmosphere, visual form is not the only aspect that might be involved with craft objects. The meaningfulness cannot be reduced to aesthetic appearance, iconography, or representation. Consider, for example, the feel in arm and hand of a teapot while pouring. I once had a teapot in which the flow of the weight of the water was smooth and easy to control through the whole pouring action, because of its unusual extended shaping. Because of the ease and pleasure in handling this teapot, I preferred it to other teapots despite its banal visual decoration. I once used a buckskin passport wallet so soft that I was continually impelled to stroke it. Computers force me to sit still, to hold my hands and move my fingers in particular ways, and to organise my thought processes and sequences of actions differently than working with pen and paper. These anecdotes illustrate the persona of the object causing me to behave in concert with its characteristics, and to value objects according to my affective responses with them.

The literature of material culture (and of design) is full of examples in which objects or materials provoke particular happenings or reactions, simply by being present, or by having the form or manner of functioning that they have (Latour, 1988; Norman, 2005; Winner, 1986). This is enhanced when the object also has complex levels of symbolic meaning that impels contemplation, interpretation, or other particular intellectual responses, in addition to physical ones. *Fieldwork in the Living-room* (Riggins, 1994) identifies a set of very useful categories for kinds of meaningfulness that objects might have, as well as a ‘display syntax,’ to use in analysing what objects in interiors can mean.

Riggins' object categories include: status, esteem, stigma, collective, identifying and dis-identifying, occupational, indigenous and exotic, social facilitating. He also identifies categories relating to: normal and abnormal use, similar and different periods, scale and proportion, and hand or machine made. His categories of display syntax address how objects are displayed and how they relate to each other—conformity, consistent or eclectic, highlighted or understated, clustered or scattered, relative location, and overall flavour or atmosphere. These categories reveal the meaningfulness of objects as they are displayed and moved about in real life contexts, more fully than the artificial gallery environment. Everyday life is where craft objects are usually found and used, for which they are conceived; it is an important element of their reason for being. So it seems more appropriate to examine them in this context, rather than in the gallery environment that isolates them from real life, and from a fuller view of their persona.

In *The System of Objects*, Jean Baudrillard (1996) proposed other more general categories that are worth discussing for craft objects, including symbolic and atmospheric functions. The category of atmosphere is particularly interesting in the realm of decorative works, because it allows for the very subtle visual, tactile, and kinesthetic qualities of aniconic motifs (abstract and geometric) as well as the natural features of material qualities, whose 'symbolic' character may be too ephemeral to verbalise—this is similar to Riggins 'flavour' category. Baudrillard discusses these functional objects specifically in the sense of interior design, which is one of the two main environments for craft objects. Much of what he says would also apply to the other main environment,

clothing / bodily adornment.<sup>27</sup> That said, his discussion adds to the ideas of craft objects as social agents, and as extensions of the persons making and using them.

The field of material culture encompasses sociological and related theories related to consumption, use, and exchange of material objects (e.g. Douglas and Isherwood, 1996), including the cultural and political implications. Many crafts makers make objects for the use of others: as gifts, as commodities for sale, as commissioned decoration in buildings, and as contributions to community celebrations or ritual events, on behalf of their community. Creating deliberately to serve others is an important social dimension of crafts. Working on behalf of others relates crafts to the design field while distancing it from the contemporary visual arts, to which individuality is paramount. Although some artists have overtly set out to address the issues or practical problems of others, or to make works that invoke and depend on audience participation, I still encounter many visual artists who disclaim consideration of the audience's interests, because their goal is free comment or personal exploration rather than satisfaction of an audience's expectations. Many crafts makers seek to balance what their clients request, what is useful and desirable to their audience, and their own individuality of expression. Some are willing to forego their individual style in deference to a client's wishes. In considering what matters to others and attempting to fit products recognisably to social expectations, the crafts embrace tradition and established conventions of appropriateness, without necessarily falling into reproduction just for its own sake. Hence crafts activities sustain cultural continuity, by bridging past and future, by reiterating what remains important while continually updating it to fit the present, and by suggesting variations

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<sup>27</sup> While I disagree with his separation of the symbolic from the category of functions, he does so in order to distinguish practical / technical kinds of functions from cognitive / sociological / intellectual ones.

and improvements that lead to new processes and forms with potential for the future. This allows older knowledge to be preserved, maintaining ideational diversity as an inspirational and practical resource to counter potential sterility or stagnation of the homogenising tendencies of mass-production, globalisation, and economic or ecological disaster.

### **Interacting with Objects**

Taking a different perspective, there is literature focused on how we interact with objects, and the social supports necessary to such interactions. Tim Dant describes the interactions of body + board + wind + water in “Playing with Things: Interacting with a Windsurfer” (1999, chap. 6). His discussion highlights the active physical experience of interaction as well as the ‘actor-networks’ that enable or support the activity. This idea resonates with the networks of individuals and organisations that Howard Becker describes as forming *Art Worlds* (1982), which can appropriately be called actor-networks. Furthermore, because windsurfing is primarily recreational and voluntary, this essay models a way of discussing the amateur and connoisseur sectors of crafting activity and its gratifications, which are often based on similar motivations relating to voluntarily chosen recreational activities. This kind of interpretation can be enriched by the ideas of psychological gratifications and ideas of constructing the competent self, suggested by Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi in “Play and Intrinsic Rewards” (1975), as well as the burgeoning literature of leisure. From this, we can begin to grasp meaningfulness that exists outside the specific professional fine craft worlds of asserted meanings and examines broader cultural impulses that support the persistence of crafts activities.

The idea of active interaction with objects, materials or tools, especially as modelled by Dant's windsurfing example, applies to acts of making. Some are prone to discuss this interaction as a dialogue between material and maker, each reacting or responding to the other. Oddly, however, those taking this perspective rarely mention the tools, themselves objects, that often figure crucially in the process of interaction. There are a couple of ways to explain this omission. One explanation is that tools are often regarded as extensions of the body of the maker, rather than independent entities. The other explanation is that the tools are unaltered by the process. Because tools remain essentially the same before and following the interaction with material, they are treated as merely intermediate and neutral, making no significant contribution to the interaction or dialogue between maker and material. But is this the case? The neutrality of tools should not be assumed; nor should the neutrality of how the knowledge or ability of how to use them—technique. Perhaps we need to consider the full set of elements—human + tools + technical knowledge + material—in intimate connection with each other. This is closer to the kind of interaction experienced by craftspeople, because each element in that combination contributes and responds to whatever is happening in some degree.

It seems fruitful to consider crafts activity in light of the idea of *co(a)gency*, as introduced by Mike Michael in *Reconnecting Culture, Technology and Nature*. (2000). Whereas the idea of interaction seems to preserve the independence of each interacting element, Michael suggests that a new complex whole, a special entity capable of quite specific and predictable actions or behaviours, is created by the conjunction of, for example, human + dog lead + dog, or human + remote TV control + couch + TV. This idea of *co(a)gency* brings concrete meaning to the acts of skilled people as they work



knowledgeably with their tools. For example, it suggests that perhaps a weaver is only cogently a weaver when integrated with their loom in the act of weaving. The power and meaning of this full integration becomes clearer when contrasted with the monitoring of relatively unskilled workers in power-loom weaving factories. In those factories, the constructive knowledge is displaced into the power-driven machine designated to do all the physical crafting, while the worker simply stands beside one or more looms and monitors the machines. The only job of the worker then is to troubleshoot problems that arise during the process, or to shift work in progress from one machine to the next. This complete integration with tools and skilled worker is reclaimed in the craft workshop or studio, where key processes usually involve intimate hand control of tools, even those that are power assisted. In this situation, design or technical decisions can also be deferred to and amended during production, due to the close contact of the designer/maker with the making processes. The idea of the co-agent can be related readily to a version of the idea of the extended person. The craftsperson's natural physiological abilities—not only to act upon materials or objects but also to sense their character—is effectively extended by their tools, acting like additional limbs or organs. For example, I can feel the tension of the warp threads on the loom through my legs and feet as I press the pedals to lift some of the threads, or by the way the weight of my shuttle is born by those threads in its passage across them. The density of a clay body or piece of wood is perceived through the ease of slicing, scraping, or incising its surfaces with a tool. This understanding of tool use is relatively common; what is taken for granted is the inverse implication, that the human is the motor or the guidance system of the tool. The point is that at all times the human and the tool interact in cooperation with

not only each other but also the material, as well as environmental conditions (such as humidity). For example, high humidity is an advantage for weaving silk and linen, and sometimes wool, because moisture reduces the build-up of static and stickiness in threads, but well-ventilated dry conditions prolong storage life by preventing deterioration. On the other hand, when working with clay, humidity that is too high will slow the drying too much for convenience, whereas overly dry conditions will induce cracking of the clay.

### **Socio-semiotics and Polysemy**

Social-semiotics proposes a comprehensive approach to questions of meaning that is concerned with the interrelations between makers/designers, concrete objects, and the viewers or cultural recipients of the objects, from which cultural meanings derive. In *Postmodern Semiotics: Material Culture and the Forms of Postmodern Life* (1995), Mark Gottdiener explains how the acknowledgement and integration of various cultural forces surrounding the creation and interpretation of material objects is necessary to revealing the multiple, interacting layers of meaning that material objects contain or convey. This multiplicity of meanings, *polysemy*, makes understanding even the simplest object more complex than might appear. Polysemy arises because objects have many potential connotations or associations for diverse audiences that derive from the dominant cultural contexts of the situation in which the object(s) are encountered and the diverse histories of experience (cultural and individual) of viewers. The material features, overall form, and cultural understandings of how and why that form arose, and what associations it has, are factors that contribute layers to the full signification provided by an object. An object

is an index of the techniques, tools, knowledge, and human dexterity and sensitive judgments that shaped it, but its meaning is also dependent on its interpreters possessing the appropriate cultural knowledge to decode what the object encodes. The meaning of the object can no more be reduced to the subjectivity of the viewer than it can be reduced to the material facts of its physical form.

The socio-semiotic approach concords with the material culture ideas already discussed, reinforcing the importance of the interactions between physical and technical features and socio-cultural associations. Winner takes a similar approach, investigating the question, *Do Artifacts Have Politics?* (1996). He argues that objects can indeed enact political agendas, reflect particular political ideologies, or convey political connotations, often implicitly, and often without explicit representations or iconic symbolism. They can possess inherently political features that exert tangible social control or authority or that necessitate an elaborate system that controls their use, restricting it to powerful elites or deployment by state authority. Two examples of this are weapons of mass destruction and currency. Alternately objects may simply acquire arbitrary or even unintended associations to authority or to democratic ideals, for example. Uniforms, for example, are arbitrary in the sense that any form might be adopted as a uniform, but once the association is culturally established, it carries whatever authority or social status that society confers on that official position.

Crafts also have their political associations, in that they are often posited as alternatives to mass culture and its homogenising tendencies. In the past, they have been regarded as political opponents to technology and the social ills perpetrated on workers during the Industrial Revolution. Even today, adherents to crafts' traditional interests in

craftsmanship and technique are seen as opposed to the suppression of those same concerns among artists, while artists use the same suppression to distance themselves from ‘mere production’ and position themselves as intellectuals, thereby claiming higher social status (Rowley, 1999). Less generally, the *Swadeshi* (self-sufficiency) movement in India prior to achieving independence used a return to local handcrafts production, such as cotton handspinning and weaving, as a means of asserting an independent Indian state identity and regaining control of a once flourishing Indian textile economy. The handcraft strategy was more symbolic than pragmatic,<sup>28</sup> but it was indisputably a political act to participate in handspinning and to wear plain, handspun, handwoven cloth as an alternative to other, more desirable options. Furthermore, in the homogenising context of globalisation, handcrafts serve as a means of expressing local or ethnic identities, which occasionally have political implications.

### **Skills, Tools, and Technologies**

Craftsmanship is a central interest of the crafts world, and a measure of knowledge especially as it is manifested in skill. Social anthropologist Tim Ingold examines in detail the nature of skill, tool use and technology in *The Perception of the Environment: Essays in Livelihood, Dwelling and Skill* (2000). He introduces the concept of *taskscape*, defined as the sequence of actions involved in crafting, or indeed any kind of skilled activity. This concept can be used to describe or analyse designing or artistic making as well, because it includes the physical patterns of movements or practices and the thought processes that direct the decisions of makers. Ingold argues that the habitual tendency to

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<sup>28</sup> The scale of hand production was never likely to supplant industrial production, but independence meant the possibility of returning control of production and distribution of textiles to Indian producers.

separate and oppose intellectual design and mechanical execution is the direct product of industrial capitalism conjoined with Western modernity. The subjective skill knowledge of the technical maker was decentred, moved to the margins of production, and replaced with “objective principles of mechanical functioning” (289), which could be embodied in machines. This shift from human-centred to machine-centred is known as the displacement of skill. The skills deployed by craftspeople are not inherently simple just because machines can be made to do them. The displacement of skills into machinery represents only the most mechanistic portion of making knowledge. Thus it is an artificial reduction or oversimplification of the skilled knowledge possessed and sensitively deployed by proficient craftspeople. Machines alone are neither effective or efficient in the problem-solving, let alone problem-finding aspects of making, although they make excellent tools in creative hands. Ingold’s argument supports that of woodworker and designer David Pye (1968), especially with regard to the task of monitoring. The purpose of monitoring is to assess progress and find problems that need to be resolved, both in the immediate making instance, and in improving techniques or tools for future use.

In contemporary crafts studios, the full taskscape of making an object may be split among several cooperating workers or fully completed by a single individual. Either way design or aesthetic decision-making may be deferred to various points in the process, which is not possible when the designing process is fully segregated from mechanical production.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> The segregation of design from making means that designers cannot defer decisions, but have to specify as much as possible in advance of production, often without the benefits of a maker’s experience. This is not always problematic if the designer is well versed in the media they design for, or can place a lot of trust in a particular producer. It also allows them to push conservative making practices further,

Ingold also emphasises that

“any attempt to separate out the discourse surrounding vision from the actual practices of looking, watching and seeing is unsustainable. ... For what is discourse, if not a narrative interweaving of experience born of practical, perceptual activity? The meanings to which it gives rise, as I have shown, are not added ‘on top’ of lived, bodily experience, but lie in the ways in which the strands of this experience are woven together.”  
(Ingold, 2000, p. 286).

Ingold does not mistake mechanical, technical production by human makers for mindless activity, simply because machines can do some of it. The presence or absence of the human maker in the making process is significant—it alters the meaning of objects. This is due in part to the way in which skilled knowledge is tested and built through experience, and deployed with careful judgment, controlled adroitness, and perceptual sensitivity (Pye, 1968). It is also due in part to the investments of time and attention required by human making, which themselves have social and cultural connotations, particularly when machine making exists as an alternative.

Crafts activity in the modern industrialised world is increasingly affected by the rapid evolution of new digital technologies capable of assisting in design and production. Ingold addresses the relationship between human skill, tools and technology directly. The challenge for crafts is to highlight that these are assistive tools under the direction of the craftsperson, rather than the other way around. The real danger to society is when the technology decentres the human to simply another machine part, so that the human works on behalf of the machine rather than the machine working on behalf of the human. This is not an easily drawn line. Even the designer is constrained by the available technology; when focused on efficient, commercial production, she will design to suit the particular

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sometimes discovering viable new techniques or new capabilities for materials unsuspected by the technicians. However, this is a rare occurrence.

capabilities of the machine, and reject design ideas that cannot be produced by the equipment at hand. Alternately, it is only the human who can improve or invent technologies that fit human needs, or deploy existing technologies in new ways.

This is the problem-finding emphasised alongside problem-solving by sociologist Richard Sennett in *The Craftsman* (2008). Sennett does not restrict his observations to the limited set of contemporary fine crafts categories, although these are included. He highlights as craftsmen a wide range of workers deploying skilled knowledge and experienced bodily ability and perception in many fields. In so doing, he produces an insightful examination of *craftsman*, *craft*, and *craftsmanship* underwritten by the assumption that “making is thinking.” In addition to the expected concepts of ‘hand’ and ‘material consciousness’, Sennett examines in detail the ideas of ‘expressive instructions’, ‘arousing tools’, ‘resistance and ambiguity’, ‘quality-driven work’, and ‘ability’. Although much contemporary crafting activity is consigned to the visual arts world, on account of its decorative or intentional symbolic content, it has much in common with other kinds of skilled work. So, much can be learned about or verified for the crafts by comparison with other fields of skilled work.

### **Anthropology of the Senses**

Another literature related to that of material culture is that of the new field of anthropology of the senses. This literature seeks in part to counter the dominance of visuality in European and North American perception, which blinds us to the more subtle aspects of culture that address and play on other senses. Anthropology of the senses highlights the idea that the conceptual framework of perceptual meaning is socially

constructed by societies. Different cultures make differing attributions of import and priority producing different sensory orderings, often including more senses than the traditional ‘five’ senses of Euro-American culture. Meanings derived under different sensory orders produce different significations; vision is not always the most important or socially powerful sense.

Kathleen Guerts study of the Anlo-Ewe, *Culture and the Senses: Bodily Ways of Knowing in an African Community* (2002), shows that much more may be perceptually salient than the visual. Because a variety of sensory considerations contribute in various ways to the import of an event or object, the meaning of the event or object cannot be reduced to consideration of only the visual features, or the idea of visual representation. David Howes, a leading proponent of anthropology of the senses, has produced important literature on the topic, including *The Varieties of Sensory Experience* (1991), *Sensual Relations: Engaging the Senses in Culture and Social Theory* (2003), and *Empire of the Senses: The Sensual Culture Reader* (2004). This discipline is not limited to analysis of non-Euro-American situations; for example Constance Classen and Howes analyse “The Sensescape of the Museum: Western sensibilities and Indigenous Artifacts” (2006). In 2006, Berg launched *The Senses and Society*, a journal devoted to understanding the complex interactions and cultural mediations of the senses with minds, cultures, and environments.

This body of literature can inform crafts scholarship through its attention to tactile and kinaesthetic senses. For example, in the field of textiles, dominant visibility obscures the meaningfulness of many textural and draping qualities, which are often assumed to be just inevitable, inherent properties of the materials used, rather than deliberate decisions



made by designers to achieve particular results. Even the weight of a cloth perceived by the body may carry affective associations or represent a design achievement. As a result, the tactile knowledge of textile makers and the tactile qualities of cloth are underrated or taken for granted, and their intrinsic aesthetic range is not recognised as meaningful.

Classen's anthology *The Book of Touch* (2005) is a useful sourcebook for understanding this under-examined sense as a source of meaningfulness, pleasurable experience, and as a criterion of good crafts design. In addition, the sense of smell will be invoked by particular textiles, such as raw silk or wet dog hair or by the fumes of chemical processes. A burn test is used to identify textiles; different natural materials emit distinctive odours as well as distinctive qualities of ash or residue. Noxious scents typically alert the user to hazardous fumes, some of which may indicate processes going wrong.

Anthropology of the senses allows us to focus attention not only on sensory qualities of objects or displays, but also of interactions evoking kinaesthetic perception, such as I described early with the teapot. Thus, we can discuss the feelings of the hand working a clay pot on a wheel, in terms of the sensitivity of malleable material to the slightest pressure as well as the sensitivity of the hand to the slightest variations in clay body or width of a vessel wall. Or we can talk about the kinaesthetic feel of a fluttering or twirling cloth on a moving body, the tension of threads stretched on a loom, or the variation in sound of hot metal at different temperatures when pounded by a blacksmith. A blacksmith told me that he had to be sensitive to the varying tones of metal at different temperatures, which indicate the readiness or malleability of the metal for shaping. This degree of malleability cannot be touched or seen, but it controls when and how much he can beat the work, and when it must be returned to the fire for reheating. His ability to

hear and interpret the meaning of the various tones is a vital experiential knowledge of his craft. Such alternate perceptual sensitivity is not only practical; it can also inspire works. An award-winning MFA ceramics student at NSCAD University has produced metaphoric sound and clay works, some of which were inspired by the pinging sounds of expanding or contracting clay as its temperature changes or of clay striking clay—thus integrating the real voice of the material.<sup>30</sup>

### **Psychology and Cognition**

Psychology and cognition are two other kinds of literature that offer something to the understanding of object design, audience appeal, and craft learning. Like any area of skill, including windsurfing, craft learning is related to the development of personal competence and expertise. Understanding how adults learn, and how cognition and perception operate interactively to produce deeper understandings, is a key aspect of the educational process. Precisely what this means for the learning or enjoyment of crafts activities is not always clear. However, understanding how learning occurs or might be facilitated does not specify how to effectively instil in students the necessary rhythms and perceptual sensitivities. It does not specify how or when to encourage the subsequent shift of attention from the ponderous, mimetic step-by-step stage of habituation to the basic processes to the more advanced level of deciding what moves to choose and why. Gradually, with continued practice, effortful mimetic activity establishes the appropriate memory pathways that enable the learner's body to perform more automatically and

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<sup>30</sup> This is the work of Amélie Proulx, MFA 2010, an award-winning student whose sound and ceramics sculptural work *Voilà, Vois là, Voile (a)* (2009) has been featured on the NSCAD University website home page throughout 2010, and profiled in a short video there. It was my pleasure to teach and assist her during the first year of her Master's studies.

fluently. When this occurs, they can shift their attention from controlling and monitoring every gesture, to anticipating next moves and thinking at a more goal-oriented level, or not obviously thinking about their bodily movements at all.

Psychological and cognitive aspects have also been addressed fruitfully by sociologists such as Pierre Bourdieu. He was committed to explaining cultural production without losing sight of the role of experience and bodily action in that production. Bourdieu refers to the concept of *habitus* as the necessary dispositional foundation of purposive actions (1977, 1993), the epistemological basis to which learning must be fitted in order to be integrated. Bourdieu's *habitus* bears some similarity to Michael Polanyi's (1964) articulation of the conceptual framework, the set of interrelated dispositions and concepts in which we "dwell" and on the basis of which we think and act. In both cases, it encompasses all kinds of specialised and general knowledge: technical, practical, academic, and cultural. The idea of *habitus* includes the subconscious or intuitive kinds of knowledge as well as cultivated or learned understandings or beliefs that have become embodied habits, accepted *a priori* as true, reliable, or common sense (*doxa*). Embodiment is a central feature of Bourdieu's concept of *habitus*, just as it is in the fluent practice of a craft. Michael Polanyi (1964, 1967) outlines the distinctions between focal and distal attention, in his discussion of tacit knowledge, arguing that we "dwell in" and operate from the tacit, habituated level of knowledge as capabilities or competencies, and with experience derived from practice, we come to think in terms of that knowledge. At the same time, habituating that knowledge allows us to concentrate on a second order of thought. These ideas are relevant to the development from novice to expert in craft learning.

The difficulty with these ideas is their hypothetical status. These ideas can only be postulated because they are not open to direct observation or verification (de Certeau, 1984, pp. 50-60). They are produced by means of inferences, which cannot be easily confirmed or disconfirmed. Even when evidence can be offered, it may be open to alternate interpretation or explanation. Nevertheless, Bourdieu's and Polanyi's ideas are theoretically powerful ideas that feel true to my experience. They offer a partial, plausible explanation for the relationship of thoughts and desires to technical means and expert, strategic, purposeful actions enacted in and constituting cultural fields. Psychology is no less inferential, and cognition is also invisible to observation, even to introspection. Still they try to describe those mental processes that are necessarily at the core of perception, thought, deliberate action, and learning, such as craft education. Studies of the self-gratifications or pleasures of crafts activities, the intellectual challenge of mastering and applying skills, the intrinsic motivation of central ideas in particular crafts, and the therapeutic benefits of craft activity and creativity, all fall into the category of this type of literature.

There is also literature on the concept of play and its rewards. Much experimentation in the crafts can be regarded as a kind of serious play, an open mode of problem-finding (Sennett, 2008) as much as problem-solving. The constraints of one's medium, available materials and equipment constitute the 'playground' and the 'rules' of play, but they are often viewed as challenges to surmount rather than limits to one's creativity and competence. Success in spite of obstacles is more rewarding than unimpeded, unchallenging creation. Overcoming obstacles is a personal achievement, but it may also be an achievement within the cultural field. Bourdieu emphasised the

significance of bodily know-how and competent practice to the logic of social action (1977, 1990) and the status in specific fields that accrues as a result.

In his study, *The Hand* (1998), neurologist Frank Wilson examines the intimate connection between working with the hand and cognition. He highlights the importance of activity to all thought, even at the highest levels:

“The brain does not live inside the head, even though that is its formal habitat. It reaches out to the body, and with the body it reaches out to the world. ... brain is hand and hand is brain, and their interdependence includes everything else right down to the quarks.” (Wilson, 1998, p. 307)

The neurological evidence is showing that active action, especially as complex as hand-making processes, has vital cognitive benefits over a lifetime.

Finally, I would call attention to the psychological literature on meaning, such as Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton’s *The Meaning of Things: Domestic Symbols and the Self* (1981), which deals with the psychology of our relations to things, and our ability to derive both social and personal meaning and identity from them.<sup>31</sup> There are at least two ways that such work is pertinent to crafts. First, the alteration of meaning that occurs when we acquire things that are designed and made by hand, or by others that one knows, by contrast with mass-produced things. In the case of heirlooms or antiques, there can be an emotional and intellectual charge associated with objects that have been touched by other caring hands. Second, the relationships that we have with our tools by which we collaborate with materials to achieve desirable results. We extend our body, our hands, and our minds prosthetically and sensitively through our tools. The psychology and cognitive questions of making and using objects underlies our affections and desires for objects in our lives.

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<sup>31</sup> See also Rochberg-Halton (1984), *Object Relations, Role Models, and Cultivation of the Self*.

## **Literature on Crafts in Economic Development**

There is also literature relating to the use of crafts production in the revival of economies in underdeveloped or poverty-stricken regions, or to create independent livelihoods and social empowerment for impoverished women; some of this literature reports on active or successful projects around the world. In this sense, crafts activity can be a practical tool of social improvement as well as cultural expression. It has been called craft philanthropy. From the point of view of effective social agency, this use of crafts is more beneficial, sustainable, and empowering to those being assisted than simply drawing attention to issues by means of artistic representation, and hoping to inspire others somehow to act. The use of locally appropriate crafts activities as a strategy for economic development or individual survival has a long history in Britain (Hackney, 2006; Helland, 2007), Canada (Laverty, 2005; Phillips, 1998; Lotz, 1986), and the United States (Kessler, 1994; York, 1994) as well as in developing countries (Smith, 2010; Cohen, 1989).<sup>32</sup> It still surfaces as an economic strategy when times are tough, and unemployment is high. This seems to indicate the desire to reassert local control to counteract external forces. It also indicates the strategy of mobilising local resources and empowering people with the confidence and means to build a sustainable future based on what they have to offer.

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<sup>32</sup> One of hundreds of examples of reviving handicrafts for economic sustainability as well as cultural preservation is the Ock Pop Tok Textile Gallery and Weaving Centre in Luang Prabang, Laos.

## **Conclusion**

The scholarship relating to the phenomenon of crafting activity can draw fruitfully from a wide range of disciplines that offer ideas about the nature and sociology of many kinds of making practices and the cultural processes that give them particular meaning. Many perspectives can be encompassed and interrelated through the freedom of the material culture approach. I have provided only a sketch of the possible scholarship that might be pertinent, and left out reference to many other specific fields; taste, and fashion, for example, for which there is an enormous literature, as well as economic history. Some literature serves well as a model of description or analytical method. Other literature offers compelling insights and theoretical propositions. The main criterion is their contribution to our understanding of the social and personal phenomenon of crafts activities, whether or not they correspond to the particular parameters of ‘visual art’ or ‘visual culture’, the category in which crafts are most commonly classed.

## Part Two: CHARTING THE LANDMARKS

### Chapter Four

#### THE EVOLUTION OF DEGREE PROGRAMMES IN CANADIAN CRAFT EDUCATION

This chapter describes in detail the historical evolution that has produced the problems that characterise current post-secondary craft education in Canada. The following discussion emphasises the implications and ramifications that developments in the art education systems of Europe and North America have had on formal craft education and scholarship generally. A timeline for the history of the four independent art schools is provided in Appendix 2.

My central premise is that current Canadian degree programmes for professional craftspeople and scholars interested in the crafts are not yet adequate to suit their needs and interests or to transform academic scholarship in the field of crafts. Crafts have surprisingly managed to persist under the umbrella of creative, artistic cultural making, or creative designing of useful, decorative objects, despite large-scale industry. In craft degree programmes, academic scholarship is included to deepen the understanding of practitioners of their practice. Thus, the quality of this crafts education depends in part on the provision of appropriate crafts scholarship. In this chapter, I will outline the history of post-secondary degree-level craft education, its implications and ramifications.

I contend that a *visual arts paradigm* prevailing within the curriculum structures and course contents of these schools systematically imposes particular conditions and assumptions about art and craft that are inadequate, irrelevant, and perhaps detrimental to the interests of crafts students. This paradigm emphasises knowledge and attitudes



oriented toward a dominant visual art world perspective that privileges most often the making of ‘significant’, ‘innovative’, or ‘intellectual’ cultural representations. An implicit hierarchy, described by Kristeller (1990) as early as 1951, and others (eg. Greenhalgh 1997 and Shiner 2001) still pervades the crafts curricula of these schools and the discourses of craft, design, and art (Fig. 2). According to this hierarchy, crafts knowledge, utilitarian goals, and technical and commercial practices are deemed subordinate or supplementary (Adamson, 2007) to art knowledge, and hence are of lesser import. Excellence in workmanship, aesthetic pleasure, effective functioning, clever design, inventive processes, and cultural integration and continuity valued by many craftspeople have not been well supported by the trends and rhetoric of the professional visual arts world throughout most of the twentieth century, despite the rise of the complementary practices and scholarship related to design and style.

The prevailing concept of visual arts and visual culture neglects the non-visual aspects of experience, performance, and utility that are involved in both the processes and products of crafts making and object use, since non-visual features are deemed irrelevant to the primary concerns of visual art making. The dominance of this visual art paradigm for all decorative or crafts objects has rarely been challenged or analytically examined, even within the crafts world; neither has its effect on the curriculum of professional art schools or the underlying assumptions of art histories taught there. It can be regarded as a form of intellectual colonization, which post-colonial theory indicates should be critically reconsidered and countered. The place to do so is the nexus wherein the hierarchies and attitudes are most concentrated and perpetuated, and which today makes claims of criticality and theoretical rigor: the degree-granting art school or university.

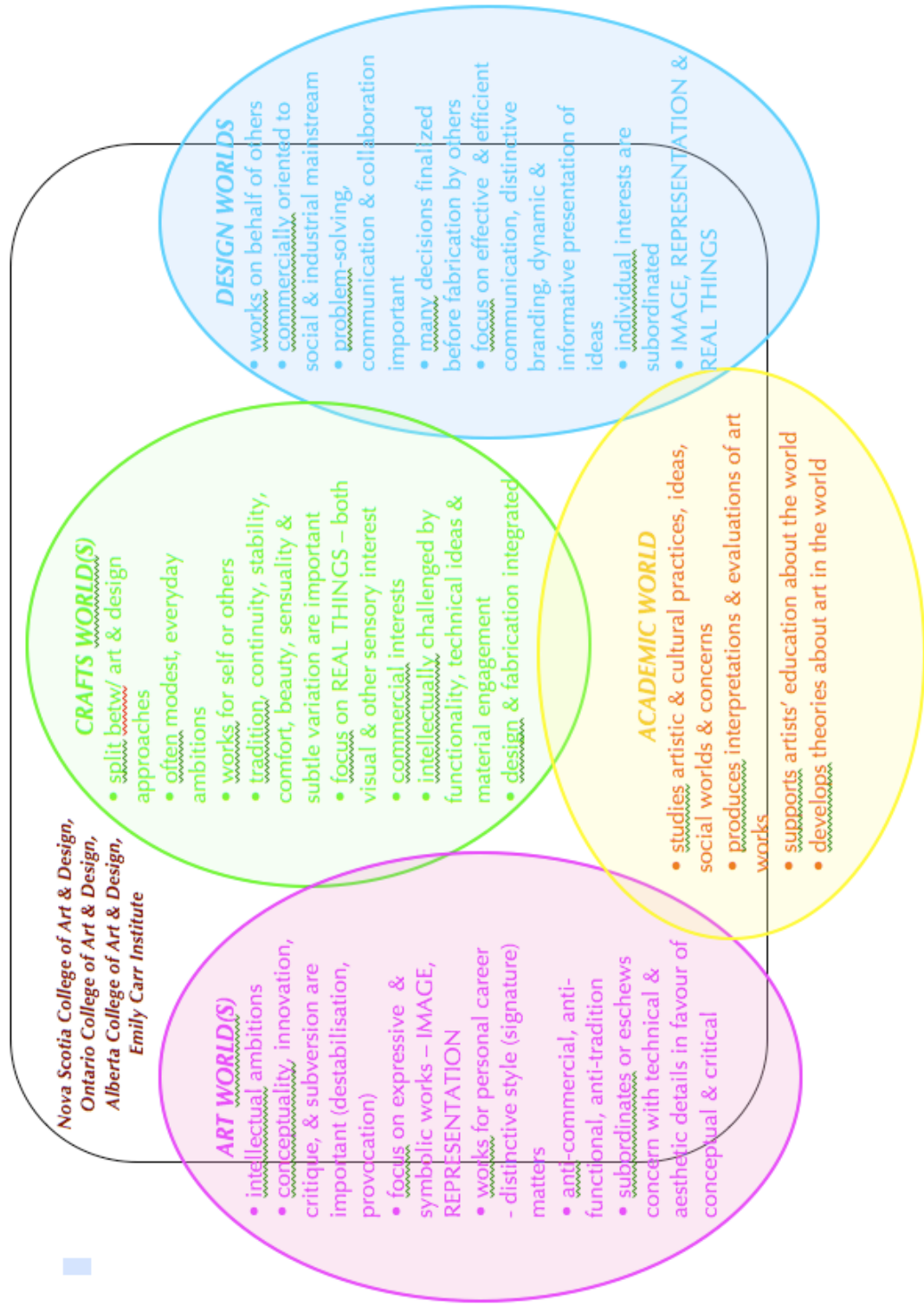


Figure 2. Comparison of Visual Arts Worlds.

The following discussion will focus mainly on the histories of NSCAD University and the Ontario College of Art and Design, the eastern Canadian schools, for the following reasons. First, these are the only two institutions in this study for which there are published histories. The two western Canadian schools were founded later, in the mid-1920s, and historical information about them is scarce. Second, for about 28 years, the only Bachelor degree programmes in Canada were located at the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design. Third, as a former crafts student at NSCAD in the 1970s and again in the 1990s, and a frequent part-time instructor at NSCAD U since 1999, I possess first-hand, participant experience of the NSCAD education system over a long period. Lacking concrete information, and judging by their current curricula, I can only postulate that the development of the western colleges paralleled and possibly modelled themselves according to the typical curricula of eastern art education.

### **History of the Problem**

The problems for crafts education arise in part from the historical development of the modern system of the visual arts and the manner in which particular arts and art history became institutionalised and evolved in higher education systems (Singerman, 1999). However, they had their roots in changing social attitudes during the Renaissance, the evolution of universities, modern epistemological theories and the scientific paradigm, and the increasing mechanisation of the industrial revolutions. The effect of the industrial revolutions was to deskill human labour, converting it from a complex, coherent body of skilled knowledge worthy of pride into fragmented sets of simple

actions requiring only vigilance, dexterity, and endurance in performing tasks of unrelenting tedium and hazard at inadequate pay.

Prior to the shift, the fine arts of painting, sculpture, and architecture were mainly viewed and taught as crafts. Now, the relationship is inverted, and crafts are viewed and taught as visual art forms. Kristeller (1951) and Shiner (2001) have thoroughly outlined this historical development in European thought about the fine arts, from Plato to Kant (see also Sutton 1967).<sup>33</sup> It is noteworthy that the other major arts of theatre, music, literature, and dance are not taught in the four independent Canadian art schools, and are, more often than not, separate departments or schools from the visual arts in larger universities across the country.

Following the Enlightenment, the next influential examination of ideas pertaining to the crafts and visual arts education arose with the social and educational reformers of the nineteenth century, especially after the establishment of the South Kensington National Art Training School in London, England, and was followed soon thereafter by the rhetoric of the Arts and Crafts Movement, the Vienna Secessionists, the founders of the Wiener Werkstätte, and the German Bauhaus.

Through the twentieth century, Modernism (manifested in a variety of vanguard movements and counter-movements) dominated European and North American art. The rhetoric of Modernism habitually denied any reliance on or credence for craft idioms. Unnecessary ornamentation was decried in the design of modern material objects by Loos in 1908, (Loos, 1998) and by Le Corbusier at the 1925 *Exposition Internationale des Arts Décoratifs et Industriels Modernes* in Paris (Adam, 1987). Nevertheless, some modern

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<sup>33</sup> The visual arts are the arts most readily associated in common parlance with the term 'art'.

artists' works referred to decorative patterns reminiscent of craft interests, and others produced designs for textile companies. Post-modern critiques of both modernist art ideas and dominant elements of society attempted to break down the barriers and encouraged 'blurring' of the categories of art and craft. What this 'blurring' really consisted of was the opening up of the kinds of media, beyond traditional painting, drawing, and sculpture media, that could be deployed credibly to create art. What was not blurred was the focus of art on symbolic, communicative functions – manifestly imagistic, representational, metaphorical, critical, and 'useless'<sup>34</sup> – in opposition to practical utility, technical ingenuity, or commercial popularity. Art made statements; craft made objects.

The trajectory of the impact of these and other ideas on art and artist education through the nineteenth and twentieth century periods have been covered by major regionally-based histories of art education, including: MacDonald (1970) and Sutton (1967) for England, and Efland (1990), Singerman (1999), Smith (1996), and Wygant (1983) for the United States. Shiner (2001) offers a slightly broader philosophical approach to the historical trajectory of cultural ideas culminating in the category of 'art' and 'the ideal of the artist', while showing its relation to the education of artists. Unfortunately, material covering Canadian art education history has been sparse, regionally specific, and lacking a comprehensive overview. Recently, Pearse (2006) published a chronologically organised anthology of historically oriented essays typifying the Canadian situation, with contributions from authors known for their research on art education history, such as F. Graeme Chalmers, Donald Soucy, and J. Craig Stirling.

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<sup>34</sup> Being 'useless' referred to the idea that art was not practically useful and did not serve instrumental or external purposes. Art was done "for its own sake", which marked its contemplative role and its freedom from subservience to other social purposes.

The historical trajectory of ideas and ideals mentioned above underpins modern visual arts education in Canada, which has been heavily influenced by the developments in Britain and the United States, and to a lesser extent, France, Germany, Scandinavia, and (more recently) Italy. These ideas and ideals have created key cultural assumptions in defining art or what artists do, comprising what I call the *visual arts paradigm* for art education. What follows will examine how these ideas and ideals influenced the rationales and evolution of the curricula of Canada's four independent post-secondary art schools, as well as specific community and technical colleges, and philanthropic enterprises through which various crafts and arts were learned by Canadians.

The following discussion will examine in greater detail:

- a) the separation of art and craft orientations
- b) the inclusion of crafts in art education institutions
- c) the effects of art history on crafts education
- d) the inception of Canadian Bachelor in Fine Arts degree programmes
- e) the omission of crafts scholarship in degree-level craft education
- f) anti-craft attitudes: theories against crafts as art
- g) counterclaims: defence of crafts as a kind of art
- h) professionalising the fine crafts and educating the professional

### **The Separation of Art and Craft Orientations**

Several factors figured influenced the evolution in how visual arts were taught. The first factor was the divide between drawing academies and practical apprenticeships, and the avocation of 'general liberal arts education' for artists, since the Italian Renaissance.

A second factor was the influence of the 17<sup>th</sup> century philosophy of René Descartes, which promoted a segregation and opposition, between mind / reason and body / experience, thereby establishing a conceptual basis for the theoretical superiority of mind / reason over body / experience. The epistemological split made between mechanical arts and the arts of imagination in Diderot and d'Alembert's map of knowledge in the *Encyclopédie* (1751-1772) was a third factor. A fourth influence was the increasing conceptual divide between artists and artisans, where previously all had operated as artist/artisans (Shiner, 2001) with production and service-oriented workshops and business practices. Fifth, the evolution of design as a separate category of practice, symbolized by the 'blueprint' (Sennett 2009), promoted the segregation of conception and planning from production as well as marketing of products, guided by a capitalist agenda. The growing dominance of individuality and innovation as key values in art was a sixth factor. Individuality was manifested through self-expression, positioned in opposition to traditions of social integration and conformity. This tendency supported a seventh factor, the increasing separation of art from everyday life, to the point of asserting a preferred role for artists as social critics purportedly standing apart from society. The separation of art from everyday life also supported an eighth factor: the segregation and professionalization of art interpretation as a separate specialty in the art world. The role of art interpreters (historians, curators, and critics) is to reveal and explain to an under-informed public the no-longer self-evident meanings of artistic works, as well as to establish their intellectual (and hence their cultural, social and economic) significance and value.

Prior to the Renaissance, the various visual arts now called fine arts were considered as utilitarian and as manual or 'mechanical'. As useful arts providing a wide range of objects and services, they were all understood as forms of manual work and technical, practical knowledge (Kristeller 1951, Shiner 2001, Sutton 1967), but not as elements of a liberal education. The professional artist's studio was as much a craft workshop as was a carpenter's or stone-cutter's workshop. Such artisan/artists (to use Shiner's term) as Leonardo da Vinci trained by becoming apprentices in such workshops and eventually belonging to guilds. None of the visual arts or crafts were counted among the key kinds of knowledge which required discursive education, which included the liberal arts of grammar, rhetoric, and dialectic (logic), or a gradually evolving array of other arts: most often including mathematics, astronomy, alchemy, music, poetry (Kristeller 1951, Shiner 2001, Sutton 1967). Although this structure of knowledge was frequently revised between the time of Plato and the rise of the Academies of the sixteenth and seventeenth century, professional study of the visual arts was still not included, although amateur study of one or more visual or other arts, both practice (manual making) and appreciation, might often be considered a desirable 'accomplishment' for an upper class gentleman or gentlewoman (Kristeller 1951, Shiner 2001, Sutton 1967). However, some Renaissance leaders, such as Lorenzo de' Medici, saw the advantage of providing talented artists with a broader classical education beyond what would be provided by apprenticeship in a typical artist's workshop (Pevsner 1973).

Perhaps even more crucial, is Shiner's observation that there was no category grouping the visual arts together, and distinguishing them from other categories of object-making. The modern concept of 'art' did not yet exist (Shiner 2001), but the specific



categories of drawing, painting, and sculpture, did. In 1563, an *Accademia del Disegno* in Florence was formed to focus on improving the drawing abilities of promising apprentice artist/artisans for whatever workshop media they practiced, and in service of whatever decorative project their patrons might demand (Duro 2002). Establishment of such academies increased through the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in the large urban centres of Europe. Most such academies focused on drawing, and sometimes modelling, as fundamental skill(s) for artists (MacDonald, 1970; Pevsner, 1973). This also coincided with the establishment of court artists, who were subsidized by the state to work on state art projects, rather than executing a variety of individual commissions for a variety of private patrons in a competitive marketplace of goods and services like other tradesmen. Such academies seemed to have proceeded not by observing a master at work (as occurred in a workshop), but by continual drawing practice from still or live models, receiving occasional criticism or advice from a master and possibly fellow students (MacDonald, 1970, Pevsner, 1973). In general, drawing academies complemented the guild / apprenticeship system of learning, permitting those apprentices already displaying artistic talent to further cultivate their representational skills, which might be useful for any medium, and the production ateliers continued to reinforce those skills.

Nevertheless, academies of drawing in Renaissance Italy marked the commencement of a gradual movement away from the on-the-job guild-workshop training system, towards institutes of learning, in which drawing practice was undertaken specifically for the perfection of image-making techniques, along with exposure to master works for models and master artists providing occasional feedback. These academies also marked the daring origins of a sustained claim that the visual arts might be more intellectual than

manual, similar to poetry in its evocative powers, divine inspiration, and human ingenuity. With this powerful intellectual claim, the conceptions of the visual arts gradually became distanced from their manual, mechanical artisan status. Around 1750, the most crucial ideas underlying the modern concept of ‘fine art’ become consolidated as idealised defining traits, sharply distinguished from artisanry (Shiner 2001).

Shiner concisely encapsulates the main distinctions before and after the split in the following way (2001, p.115):

Before the split <b>Artisan/Artist</b>	<b>Artist</b>	After the split	<b>Artisan</b>
Talent or wit	Genius		Rule
Inspiration	Inspiration/sensibility		Calculation
Facility (mind & body)	Spontaneity (mind over body)		Skill (body)
Reproductive imagination	Creative imagination	Reproductive imagination	
Emulation (of past masters)	Originality	Imitation (of models)	
Imitation (of nature)	Creation	Copying (of nature)	
Service	Freedom (play)		Trade (pay)

Although the above distinctions between artist & artisan could, and possibly should, have been taken as complementary portions of a balanced whole, in practice they tended to stratify into a hierarchy of labour, with intellectual & creative work valued more highly than manual & technical work. This is itself not surprising when we look at the hierarchical structure of a workshop, in which an experienced master at the head made or controlled the final decisions, including aesthetic ones, the journeymen proposed options and carried out advanced work, and the apprentices carried out the instructions of master and journeymen or assisted around the workshop as needed. The artists’ more mysterious, inexplicable creative, representational role and skill set now could be

segregated from the mere labour (however skilled) of the artisans within the atelier production setting, through labour specialisation. This creative training of the artist was developed principally by drawing, painting, compositional, and modelling practice and eventually expanded through abstract classical learning and discourse, like other intellectual pursuits (Shiner, 2001; Duro, 2002).

The process of apprenticeship permitted advancement and eventual placement in the range most suited to each individual's particular abilities and talents. Most importantly, it ensured that masters who had come through the system were fully versed in the practical, technical limitations of the media in which their creative visions would be realised. They also possessed enough technical and practical knowledge to assess the feasibility and even envision innovative potentials for their media. Master artisan/artists may have devoted more of their time to creative or to business tasks, but they knew their media intimately. Whatever the range of abilities of their apprentices, the masters were expected to integrate all the artistic and craft knowledge needed in their workshop.

Some of this sense of fully integrated artisan/artist mastery was revived centuries later. It seems to underlie William Morris' idealistic vision of the medieval craftsman, promoted within the Arts and Crafts Movement's rhetoric. Similar ideas were partly endorsed by the later Continental schools and workshops: the Wiener Werkstätte, the Deutscher Werkbund, and the Bauhaus. However, despite the claim of unifying art and crafts, the Bauhaus still tended to segregate art/design knowledge and practices from those of crafts, by having two masters for each medium, an art/design master and a technical master.

At the heart of Shiner's (2001) artisan/artist concept, is this sense of integration, of interdependence of the creative/conceptual and the pragmatic/practical – or put another way, of the interdependence of art, designing, and crafting modes or taskscapes.<sup>35</sup> Shiner sees this integration most fully exemplified in late twentieth and twenty-first century contemporary studio craftsmen.

It is notable that most of the early twentieth century schools mentioned above were headed by or involved architects as key founding or teaching figures. *Fin de siècle* architects in Britain and Europe integrated both the structural design of buildings and all of its exterior and interior detailing, most of which still relied primarily on manual crafts processes rather than on mass production, especially for specifically commissioned projects. They designed and oversaw all stylistic features, including furnishings and decoration, as an integrated whole. Into the twentieth century, architects embodied the general creative and co-ordination role of the workshop master. Thus the ideal of integration of art, craft, and design was expressed by the architect/masters, while paradoxically, their decreased direct experience of the technical knowledge, in the absence of a fully integrated workshop structure, reflects the increasing separation of designers and design from the crafts (technical) knowledge involved in execution.

The split between art and artisanry, outlined above, can be clearly seen in the thought and assumptions about the first two Canadian art schools, both established before the twentieth century (Appendix 2), with both initially emphasising designing skills for production in the general absence of productive crafts. In 1876, the Ontario Society of Artists opened the Ontario School of Art, with a curriculum consisting primarily of

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<sup>35</sup> Ingold's (2000) concept of *taskscape* is discussed in the previous chapter.

various forms of drawing, and a collection of casts and models for students to draw (OCA 1977). It offered daytime and evening classes in drawing, following a modified model of the ‘practical art’ system of the South Kensington Department of Science and Art in London (OCA 1977, Stirling 2006). This rigidly structured system was primarily designed to enable technicians and artisans to acquire drawing skills useful to their work. These consisted of ‘industrial drawing’ for architecture and manufacturing, and ornamental drawing for the design of tasteful patterns, objects and buildings.<sup>36</sup> However, fine art classes were also offered, usually for amateurs, ladies of leisure, or future teachers in Common Schools. This group, working for their private pleasure and education rather than to fulfil a broader socio-economic role, subsidized the utilitarian offerings. Similarly, the Victoria School of Art and Design opened in 1887 in Halifax with a curriculum of drawing, subdivided into ‘fine arts’ drawing in daytime classes, and ‘mechanical’ or ‘industrial’ drawing geared to working men (Soucy & Pearse 1993). The ‘fine arts’ drawing curriculum was for amateurs, mostly women of leisure, whose work would be regarded as an appropriate Victorian ‘accomplishment’ or else as a teaching subject preparatory to one of the only respectable careers for women outside marriage (Soucy & Pearse 1993). Although the ornamental and freehand drawing classes taught designing that could be applied to crafts of one or another kind, especially architectural

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<sup>36</sup> Crossman (*Architecture in Transition*, 1987) points out that in the late 1880s and 1890s, architectural education through in-office apprenticeship in Canada was much more disorganised, ineffective, and poorly paid than in the US or Europe. Canadian architecture was suffering because draftsmen eager for better training and pay were flocking to the US and Europe. A Newfoundland-trained architect stated that “the inexperience of Canadian architects in the design of ornamental work was . . . as important a cause of the low standard of architecture in the country as was the lack of money.” (J. Horwood, quoted in Crossman 1987). This situation could only be remedied by systematic education (Crossman 1987) that would avoid the inconsistencies of apprentice systems. Thus utilitarian-oriented art schools such as those in Ontario and the Maritimes, and the Québec-based Écoles des Arts et Métiers all provided classes related to the requirements of architectural design and drawing, both technical and ornamental.

crafts, crafts themselves were not originally part of the curriculum (OCA 1977, Soucy & Pearse 1993, Stirling 2006).

Increased attention to design for manufactured goods followed the establishment of the South Kensington Museum and associated National Art Training School.

Subsequently, the gradual rise of the Arts and Crafts movement in Britain and the United States boosted the respectability of decorative arts and crafts work as a dignified alternative to working in industry, and as a respectable artistic field for women. Artistic needlework was already a popular staple of private ladies' education. The Victoria School of Art and Design would have offered needlework at the outset (1887) if a qualified teacher could have been found (Soucy & Pearse 1993).

The goals of the South Kensington art teaching system and the Arts and Crafts Movements to improve the quality of design of decorative and everyday objects fit well with the utilitarian objectives of both the Ontario and Halifax art schools. Thus it is not surprising that Halifax's Victoria School opened as a school of "Art and Design," (hereafter referred to as VSAD) and that the Ontario School, following several years of political infighting and conflict with the government, was reborn in 1891 as the Central Ontario School of Art and Design (OCA 1977, Stirling 2006). The utility of artistic design to manufacturing and architecture was the paramount social reason for governmental support of artistic education in the industrial age. Maintaining and improving burgeoning manufacturing and trade, along with the attendant employment, were important economic goals, as well as a means of building and asserting Canada's newly independent national identity on the competitive international scene.

This utilitarianism remained strong for many decades in the Halifax school. It was especially encouraged by Anna Leonowens and Alexander McKay from the outset, and maintained by later principals, such as Elizabeth Nutt, through to the early 1940s (Soucy & Pearse 1993). McKay had successfully championed the provision of both industrial drawing and manual training in public education in Halifax because they both fostered the special skills that industries required. An art school would take this further still, by giving

“young artizans an opportunity for that artistic training so necessary to enable them to exhibit taste in the productions of their hands, thus at the same time enhancing to them the value of their products and administering pleasure to the general public. A secondary object, scarcely less important, was the general education of public taste to an adequate appreciation of beauty of form. The more people in general know of art the greater will be the demand for the highest results of skilled labour – so that there is a mutual benefit to employers and employed.” (McKay, 1892, in Soucy & Pearse 1993).

Similarly, the 1909-1910 prospectus for the Central Ontario School, stated that

“The purpose of the School is not to turn out only picture painters or sculptors, the main object of its promoters and guardians is, and has been, to meet the need for designers for manufactures in which decoration is essential.” (OCA 1977)

### **Crafts Education: Presence, Absence, and Occlusion**

Given this beginning, when, how and why does crafts education enter these institutions? The influence of the Arts and Crafts Movement rarely extended to providing crafts classes in these two schools in the early years, and not as a professional

pursuit. Clay modelling and woodcarving were available early on, but it is not clear whether these were understood mainly as forms of sculpture or crafts at this time.<sup>37</sup>

By 1896-1897, the Victoria School in Halifax had added china painting to the fine art group of classes, alongside drawing and painting. There was still no needlework. However, in 1911, under the leadership of Principal Lewis Smith, craft courses began to be offered – repoussé and metal work appear alongside woodcarving and clay modelling (Soucy & Pearce 1993). These classes were added to increase enrolment and revitalize the Halifax school, but the additions were also part of Smith’s plan to broaden the school’s outlook as well as its appeal. Some of the crafts were related to the programme of architectural design and rendering, especially the design of architectural ornamental detailing in wood and plaster finishes. It is unclear how much these 3D activities were distinguished as ‘crafts’ distinct from ‘art’ at this time. The programmes were not intent on training professional object-makers, but commercial artists to design ornamental schemes for manufactured goods or architecture.

By 1919, with the installation of Principal Elizabeth Nutt, more crafts became available at VSAD. The popularity and number of classes was enough to justify employing Margaret Brodie full time to teach and soon to head the expanded group of crafts offerings (Soucy & Pearce 1993). Among the crafts offered in 1919, are basketry, metalwork, embroidery, and modelling (clay), soon joined by jewellery and leatherwork (Soucy & Pearce 1993). In 1921, ‘crafts’ is one of the seven designated sections of the re-organised curriculum structure, alongside painting, design and mechanical drawing, architecture, commercial art, a teacher’s diploma course (preparatory for public school

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<sup>37</sup> Soucy and Pearce (1993) see it as part of craft when they begin to describe the crafts classes offered at VSAD from 1919, and the identification of crafts as a distinct section of the new 1921 curriculum there.



teaching), and a preparatory course. (Soucy & Pearse 1993). Nutt believed in the tenets deriving from the Arts and Crafts Movement: that the artist-craftsman should play a greater role, and that artists should direct their talents to practical ends, so as not to become “mere interesting experimenters” (Rothenstein quoted in Soucy & Pearse 1993). Essentially this meant becoming artist-designers rather than making ‘art for art’s sake’. These beliefs fit the emerging trends of such schools as the Bauhaus that sought to unify art & craft, in integration with modern industrial production.

Nutt was aware of international schools, especially the Moscow Technical School, which had made an impressive show at the 1904 St. Louis Exhibition (Soucy & Pearse 1993). At these schools students learned through hands-on crafts production rather than through abstract drawing or technical exercises, or abstract learning of artistic concepts (Soucy & Pearse 1993). The idea of making useful objects that were beautiful, and of learning through actual making, was validated internationally by diverse proponents as part of a “new creed of the arts, one which preached them as agents which should deal with realities – with things made for use and not for drill or show” (Haney, quoted in Soucy & Pearse 1993). In other words, art and design were to be at the service of society, the social good.<sup>38</sup> The best way to achieve this was to blend practical crafts experience with artistic sensibilities and drawing skills. To this end, Nutt made a class in crafts a requirement for students (Soucy & Pearse 1993).

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<sup>38</sup> This notion of art or craft being in service to the social good also underlay another strand of craft development, the philanthropic strand. This was played out through the first half of the twentieth in the form of developing cottage industries, both urban and rural, that provided training and a livelihood in depressed areas, or to the urban poor, or to impoverished women seeking respectable work. In Canada, some examples are the Grenfell Mission in Newfoundland (1893-late 1960s), the Star of the Sea enterprise (Nova Scotia, 1940s), and the crafts development and teaching work of Mary Black (Nova Scotia, 1942-55).

In 1921, the first diplomas were conferred by the VSAD for the teaching course graduates. In 1922, the first fine arts diploma was awarded to the painter Marjorie Tozer (Soucy & Pearse 1993). This was a good ten years after the institution of diplomas at the OCA in Toronto. We might regard these as the first ‘professional credentials’ to be offered by the VSAD. Tozer pursued a career as a professional artist & teacher (Soucy & Pearse 1993). The diploma programme lasted until at least the 1970s at the Halifax school, several years after the institution of Bachelor degree programmes in the 1960s.

Literature regarding the history of the Ontario art school(s) in its various manifestations and configurations is far less detailed and lacks much analysis, especially regarding the crafts programmes. From its inception in 1885, the Hamilton branch of the distributed Ontario School of Art had a unique and progressive industrial arts and design programme that included crafts. The Hamilton branch was led by headmaster John Ireland, trained at South Kensington, and his wife. The couple also co-founded the Hamilton Arts and Crafts Society that year (Stirling 2006). The Hamilton curriculum included “embroidery, tapestry, lace-making and weaving, printing on fabrics, wallpaper, jewellery and enamelling, pottery, tiles, lettering and illumination, and decorative illustration” (Stirling 2006). By contrast to the Hamilton school, the Central Ontario School of Art and Design in Toronto still apparently had no craft classes up to 1912. That year, in Toronto, the Ontario College of Art was officially incorporated as the provincial school, replacing the previous Central Ontario School. The incorporating statute identified its primary two purposes as “the training of students in the fine arts ... and in all branches of the applied arts ... and the training of teachers in the fine and applied arts” (OCA 1977). At this time, having incorporated the ‘applied arts’ in the

school's mandate, many of the same crafts that had been available in the Hamilton branch were added to the Applied Arts curriculum. This addition was the only essential difference of the new College from its predecessors in Toronto (Reid 1912, quoted in Stirling 2006). Also, the new College was authorised to confer diplomas.

In 1927, crafts still appear to be present in the Applied Design department of the school structure. At that time, the school was organised into “departments of Elementary Art and Teacher Training, Drawing and Painting, Applied Design, Graphic and Commercial Art, and Modelling” and including lectures in art history (OCA 1977). Modelling, with its own department, was apparently regarded like drawing, as an art fundament and a medium of sculpture rather than a craft.

Perhaps more important for the present discussion is the fact that the published OCA history (1977) occludes the presence of crafts (at least as a category distinct from art). Crafts courses are hidden under the term Applied Design. Evidently, the intention still is not to produce professional crafts makers, but to give designers sufficient craft experience to see how designing relates to diverse particular media of production. It is not until 1949 that a “General Course” is instituted to give special attention to knowledge of materials (OCA 1977), suggesting that the previous emphasis had been elsewhere, probably on visual effects.

One of the reasons given for this concentration on design over artisanry is that various vocational and technical schools, such as the Central Technical School in Toronto (established in 1892), had gradually taken over the role of providing all forms of artisan-type technical training and apprenticeship programmes (Chalmers 2006, OCA 1997). These programmes included artistic crafts or trades, and all the art colleges in this study

were considered to be part of this vocational system, just as were teacher's colleges and agricultural colleges. Their emphasis was practical and employment-oriented, and artistic design was understood to be an important aspect of some vocations. This historical trend is preserved in the numerous community colleges and polytechnical institutes that offer certificate or diploma programmes that overlap the areas of applied design, commercial and graphic arts, and crafts. Sheridan College in Oakville is a prime present-day example of such a college, which houses several crafts as well as technology-heavy media arts. So, there was not a clear split in the educational options available in technical by contrast with art schools. It was mostly a matter of emphasis or orientation between commercial graphic or industrial design and production vs individual, expressive image making.

In Nova Scotia, the establishment of the Nova Scotia Technical College in 1906 led to the decline of specifically architectural and industrial trade and artisanal focussed education at the VSAD in Halifax, including technical drawing and rendering. This initiated a shift in emphasis of the VSAD toward fine arts and its applications in commercial or useful arts (such as crafts) and away from the vocational education of the average 'working man'. The school continued to encourage the self-improvement of the 'general public', retaining the moral responsibility to 'elevate' their tastes to middle-class standards of civility through art classes, exhibitions, and public lectures.

The occlusion of crafts behind the title of Applied Design at OCA can also be explained by the idea that the term 'art' was still thought of as encompassing all possible artistic media and design practices. These included the artistic crafts, such as tapestry, or those crafts amenable to improvement through design training, which meant any decorative craft medium, especially those media related to local industries. This was the

argument used in 1925 when the Victoria School of Art and Design was elevated by the provincial government to the status of a college and its name was changed to the Nova Scotia College of Art (NSCA) (Soucy & Pearse 1993). Courses in designing for practical and commercial purposes, and the crafts courses used as a means of experiential learning did not disappear from the college curriculum or rationale at NSCA as a result of dropping the direct reference to Design in the name (Soucy & Pearse 1993). Similarly, OCA retained its similar utilitarian mandate, which expanded into Applied Arts and Interior Decoration and Design in the 1930s (OCA 1977).

On the surface, applying the term ‘art’ across a wide range of media, including craft media, would appear to be a desirable egalitarian approach. However, in practice, it did not dispel assumptions about the lowliness of crafts and technical work as ‘merely mechanical’ and lowest in status among the ‘minor’ or ‘applied’ arts. In both Ontario and Nova Scotia, the term ‘art’ was applied to all art and craft media, but it most commonly brought to mind the primary image-making fine arts of drawing, painting and sculpture. As a result, it was too easy to overlook the crafts and the technical design of objects as cultural practices with concerns that might not align completely with the image-making focus of many art and design media. This became clearer in the post-WWII period, as the avant-garde notions of modern and post-modern art, and the ideals and role of the modern artist – celebrated, elaborated, and evaluated by art historians and critics – began to diverge even farther from practical applications and technical or economic concerns toward democratically and morally responsible social critique and reconstruction (Panayotidis 2006).

Eventually, the essentialist discourses surrounding these main fine arts media developed an intellectual and theoretical rhetoric in complete opposition to and mutual exclusion from the notions of utility or service or tradition attached to crafts and design (Rowley 1999). There was no possibility of interdependence, complementarity, or hybridity available within this line of discourse. Craft was completely subservient to artistic intentions whereas art transcended the merely necessary physicality and technicality of craft. This oppositional, essentialist stance finds its origins and idealised models in the historical “split” between the traits of the artist from those of the artisan (Shiner 2001) discussed above, bolstered by sometimes overly simplified interpretations of both earlier and later philosophical discourses on knowledge and art. For example, Diderot and d’Alembert (1751-68) regarded knowledge as an integrated whole that was not to be viewed hierarchically. Nevertheless, their separation of the mechanical arts (including sculpture) from the ‘poetical’ arts of imagination in their model of knowledge could be used to support the essentialist, mutual exclusion of the arts-versus-crafts argument, and the superiority of the fine art triumvirate.<sup>39</sup> This dichotomy became exacerbated by the intellectual and status aspirations of the contemporary avant-garde art world throughout the twentieth century. Meanwhile, the rise of design could be viewed as the application of fine art principles and creativity to improve and overcome the limited, reproductive, and unimaginative scope of crafts regarded as simply making.

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<sup>39</sup> The model of knowledge published in the *Encyclopédie* of Diderot and d’Alembert (1751-68) reinforced for many the superiority of the arts of painting, sculpture, architecture, categorised under “Imagination” / “Poetry” over the “merely” mechanical arts, including all manner of crafts and trades, categorised under “Memory” / “History” as a “Use of Nature”. Ironically, engineering was alongside painting under “Poetry” (<http://quod.lib.umich.edu/d/did/tree.html>). Furthermore, Diderot and d’Alembert both argued that more attention should be paid to the crafts, acknowledging the low regard in which both were held – “Le mépris qu’on a pour les arts mécaniques” (d’Alembert, *Discours Préliminaire de l’Encyclopédie*, (1911[1751]) <http://art-bin.com/art/oalembert.html>, accessed 28 September 2008)

## **The Effects of Art History in Craft Education**

One of the ways in which this split became widened and disseminated through the Canadian art schools is through the provision of art history in the curriculum as important supplementary, interpretive knowledge for artists and cultivated amateurs of the arts. This gave art historians an increasingly important role in defining the attitudes and particular concerns of art and the art world. Because of their knowledge of art, many art historians also served as art critics, following the example set by John Ruskin with his art and design writing between 1836 and 1860. In the course of their writing, art historians select and establish a canon of exemplary art and artists, and produce a progressive historical narrative underpinned by assumptions about what constitutes and is central or pivotal to art. In doing so, they define the category of the fine arts through their choices, commentary, and evaluations. They thereby establish ideal traits and models of art, and articulate key concerns or trends in art at different moments. Since Vasari published his influential *Le Vite de' più eccellenti architetti, pittori, et scultori italiani, da Cimabue insino a' tempi nostri* in 1550, the primary focus of art historical research and artistic canons into the mid-twentieth century has been the triumvirate of painting, sculpture, and architecture. Meaning was embodied in stylistic forms and changes in style, subject matter, and social purposes and concerns. When crafts objects were discussed, it was mainly as passive carriers of imagery, as 'decorative' or 'minor arts'. Artists were discussed as makers of images or styles, not as makers or designers of objects. Hence, Cellini is a sculptor, even though his only surviving work was a usable object: an ornamented salt cellar, a tour-de-force of gold-smithing, albeit an extremely elaborate figurative (sculptural) one. Underlying this classification of Cellini is the sense of craft

knowledge as unchanging and unremarkable throughout time, and thus not meaningful. By contrast, Cellini's figuration is the uniquely imaginative, freely creative, even transcendent, element replete with evocative or specific symbolic meaning, later spoken of in terms of *zeitgeist* or 'statement,' in which *art* resides. The question of whether Cellini was expanding his craft technically, or contributing to the meaning through his choices of material or techniques, is typically never broached in art histories.

Two examples highlight the habitual omission of crafts in art histories as commonly taught in art history courses. The first example is Eileen Gray, an Irish-born artist who in 1898 was one of the first women to study at the Slade School in London. She became immersed in the craft of lacquer work in 1905, studying with a Japanese craftsman in London (Adam, 1987). Relocating to Paris, she was almost single-handedly responsible for the short-lived fashion for lacquer furniture prior to and following the First World War. She was a major innovator and experimenter in the technique, in a streamlined modernist style (Adam, 1987). From this crafts-based beginning, she began designing accessories for interiors (including rugs, furniture and light fixtures), whole interiors, and eventually architectural works. Gray received considerable attention from such important figures as Le Corbusier, despite the fact that few of her projects except her own homes were ever actually built (Adam, 1987). Her work integrated material effects with the imagery and forms of her various furnishing objects, all of which were useful as well as aesthetic. They clearly integrated the skills of visual arts with an understanding of form, material, and technique. She took a hands-on interest in what craftspeople working on her house E1027 should do with, for example, concrete and tubular steel.



The second example is Anni Albers, a well-known and influential graduate and teacher of the Bauhaus, who emigrated to the United States following its closure. Most literature about Albers describes her as an artist, highlighting her stand-alone textiles or print works as art for contemplation in the modern style (Albers, 1977, 1980). Her textile pieces are nearly always displayed as paintings, whether or not they were intended to be. Not until 1999 did a publication document her many textile designs for manufactured yardage, most of which would be described as textural in character, certainly not imagistic (Weber 1999). As a designer, she did not have to produce the actual yardage, but in her training, and in producing samples or prototypes, she was a competent, hands-on craftsperson. That foundational knowledge influenced the aesthetic of all her textile works, including the ‘art’ ones.

Both these women’s careers were tightly bound up with crafts, both useful and as art forms. But during most of the twentieth century, their work could not be described or understood as craft if we were to take them seriously in art historical terms. At least, discussing them as designers makes it easier to discuss them seriously.

Artists who worked as both painters and designers for industrial production fared similarly. For example, the repeat design work for textiles done by Fauvist painter Raoul Dufy in the early twentieth century, was barely, if at all, mentioned in art historical monographs about Dufy written around the mid-twentieth century (eg. Cogniat 1962, Lassaigne 1954). And the ‘Pattern and Decoration’ works of Miriam Shapiro in the 1970s, collages made with fabrics, could be valid as art because they only referred to patchwork quilts and garment pieces, while remaining flat and framed two-dimensional images. Had they been actual craft works, quilts or garments, they would not and could

not have been taken seriously as art (Broude 1982, Chadwick 1990). Furthermore, through their visual references to pattern and crafts, Shapiro's works made provocative statements and claims, abstractly challenging the predominant art world assumptions of the day.

In addition, art historical interpretation prefers that artwork can be clearly attributable to a particular artist. For example, despite the claims of collaboration and co-operation made by Judy Chicago, her famous work *The Dinner Party* (1974-79), whose execution and content relies heavily on crafts traditions of ceramics and textiles, is regarded principally as Chicago's work, as the original conceiver, artistic director, and final decision-maker. Art historians still mainly discuss this work in terms of its relation to currents in modern or feminist art history, rather than to the histories or collaborative practices of ceramics or textiles that are part of its content. Identification and attribution of the artistic contribution made by the crafts workers on the project is not emphasised by art historians. If recorded at all, it is treated more like the multiple credits at the end of a film, of little artistic consequence.

Many scholars, including art historians, have criticised the occlusion of crafts media in art histories (even when recognised artists were involved), highlighting the still frequent imbalance of painting and sculpture versus the many other artistic media, from print-making and photography to decorative crafts and design. Some also highlight the simplistic gendered association of crafts with women and the subsequently doubled disparagement of women as serious artists and of crafts as serious art (Attfield and Kirkham, 1995; Broude and Garrard, 1982; Mainardi, 1982; Parker, 1989; Singerman,

1999). Neither women nor craftspeople could be ‘real’ artists, in either social or art world terms.

The addition of art history and its attendant theories to the art school curriculum was an important part of the intellectualisation of art not only as a body of cultural knowledge but more importantly as a liberal arts academic discipline (Singerman 1999), beyond simply the professional practice of art-making. Art history is a *meta* level of study that studies art/image making as a socio-cultural, historical practice. Its primary goal is to understand how and why those practices change over time, rather than engaging directly in those practices. The proportion of art history included (along with other liberal arts courses) in Canadian art school programmes still typically marks the academic and professional calibre of the Bachelor degree from the more practically-oriented diplomas of post-secondary trade and technical schools. It is expected that degree programmes will require a higher proportion of ‘intellectual’ liberal arts knowledge along with practical studio knowledge, which purely practical trade training does not need to provide.

Singerman (1999) relates how fine arts studio practices gradually infiltrated the established liberal arts universities on the coattails of art history as an academic subject, as a supplement to understanding art history, and expressly not as a professional training ground. This is the inverse to the independent, professionally oriented Canadian art schools where art history was eventually added to supplement existing practical courses in the fine arts, design, craft, and teaching. In fact, until 1989, NSCAD was the only of Canada’s four independent art colleges offering degree programmes similar to the university model. These specialist schools were primarily vocational (in the sense of specialist, professional practice) in nature and described themselves as ‘professional’ in

their promotional materials. As hands-on studio courses expanded in university Bachelor of Fine Arts (BFA) programmes and university Schools of Fine Arts were often segregated from faculties of Arts and Science, university fine arts programmes became more professional and vocational in character, oriented toward a viable career in art practice, much like medical or law degrees. This was no longer simply a liberal arts, art historical or connoisseur approach to the study of art.

### **The Inception of Canadian Bachelor of Fine Art Programmes**

In 1955, R. H. Hubbard, chief curator of the National Gallery of Art in Ottawa, argued for the need to provide “a better general education for the artist” following the model of state universities in the United States rather than the European model in which art historians were trained in universities separately from practising artists trained in art schools (Harris 1976). He also expressed concern about the inadequacy of art historians and art history programmes in Canada. At that time, very few Canadian universities had established Bachelor degree programmes in the fine arts. Mount Allison University in New Brunswick established the first BFA degree in 1937, with an even balance between practical and theoretical courses (Harris 1976). The University of Manitoba established the second BFA degree programme in 1950, when it absorbed the Winnipeg School of Art (Harris 1976). The University of Toronto offered a four-year Bachelor of Arts (BA) honours course in Art and Archaeology. Nevertheless, “most of the training of professional artists continued to be given in institutions like the École des Beaux Arts in Montréal and the Ontario College of Art at Toronto” (Harris 1976), in which art history was mainly an adjunct to studio practice, when it was available at all.

Although the presence of the Nova Scotia College of Art did not entirely impede the development of fine art courses in Nova Scotia's universities, its diploma programme allowed those universities to avoid expanding their fine art offerings into major degree programmes, either art historical or fine arts practice. Despite the presence of fine art or art history courses in Acadia University's art and aesthetics department (established in 1928), and a small presence in Dalhousie University since sometime before 1926 to the 1960s at least<sup>40</sup>), neither developed into major degree programmes (Harris 1976). Indeed, it was NSCA Principal Donald Cameron MacKay who took over teaching art history at Dalhousie in 1938, while also teaching art history from 1934-1970 at NSCA (Soucy and Pearse 1993).

In Halifax, it was the independent NSCA that eventually developed Bachelor degree programmes in fine art in the late 1960s (Soucy and Pearse 1993), complete with enhanced academic requirements added to practical ones, rather than Dalhousie University, Saint Mary's University, or Mount Saint Vincent University. From the 1960s onward, degree art programmes in both art history and studio practice began to proliferate in other Canadian universities, despite the existence of the local independent art schools – or absorbing them as in the case of the Winnipeg School of Art. Consequently, with the exception of NSCA, none of the independent art schools became authorised to conduct full degree programmes until the mid 1990s.<sup>41</sup> As a result of their placement in liberal

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<sup>40</sup> Dalhousie's Art Gallery, established in 1953-54, bills itself (<http://artgallery.dal.ca/home.html>) as the oldest public art gallery in Halifax (presumably excluding the provincial Nova Scotia Museum of Fine Art). This gallery has survived, despite threats to close it because there are no fine art courses for it to support.

<sup>41</sup> Emily Carr Institute received degree-granting authority in 1989 through the Open Learning Agency, and then under its own name in 1994 (<http://www.ecuad.ca/about/history>, accessed 21 September 2008). Alberta College of Art and Design received degree-granting power in 1995 ([http://www.acad.ab.ca/reputation\\_history.html](http://www.acad.ab.ca/reputation_history.html), accessed 21 September 2008). OCAD did not receive

arts universities alongside art history programmes, many fine art degree programmes focused on the primary fine arts of painting, drawing, sculpture, and architecture, the focal media of art history. Sometimes printmaking and photography as well as newer media (film, video, digital) were added, once they became established art media. Few of these university programmes offered craft media, with the occasional exception of clay/ceramics & woodworking studios, due more to their pertinence to 3D sculptural interests than to any interest in useful pottery or furniture. The teaching and scholarship of art history began to grow in Canadian universities, following the mainstreams of art and its canons, the many avant-garde movements and innovations of the twentieth centuries, and the trajectory of modern and post-modern design. These art historical programmes offered academic liberal arts BA and graduate degrees, which did not require studio experience, and were often pursued in the absence of complementary studio BFA degree programmes.

### **Crafts Scholarship – The Missing Link**

What did not develop in Canadian fine art schools through most of the twentieth century was a serious historical or theoretical scholarship focused on the crafts, comparable to that of art history. There are several reasons for this omission.

First, perhaps the most prevalent reason was the assumption that art history courses covered whatever might be important and relevant to crafts media, considered as a form of art or representation. At the very least, the growing literature on design history was thought to address what art history did not, since crafts objects overlapped with design

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degree-granting power until 2002 ([http://www.ocad.ca/about\\_ocad/history/background.htm](http://www.ocad.ca/about_ocad/history/background.htm), accessed 21 September 2008).

history and concerns. Covering crafts history within design history to some extent removed the pressure for crafts-specific scholarship, since some design or decorative arts journals, such as the *Journal of Design History* (est. 1988), occasionally published articles and special issues about crafts history. Non-scholarly craft and media-specific publications also satisfied some of the desire for knowledge and documentation: *Craft Horizons* (American Crafts Council), *Crafts* (Crafts Council, Britain), *Craft Australia*, *Ceramics Monthly*, *FibreArts*, to name but a few. However, broad and in-depth scholarship on crafts remained under-developed.

Second, the crafts are not a unified subject for study. They are a diverse collection of technical practices that each evolved separately under different conditions. Thus, there are many craft histories, even within the broader media classifications. For example, within the media class ‘fibres’, we would find individual histories of knitting, quilting, weaving, clothing, basketry, lace, dyeing, and needlework. This diversity hinders the identification of a ‘general canon’ of influential works and makers, or of common themes. It also prevents creation of cohesive narratives, especially of progress from simple to complex, since the complex technical achievements were typically added to the expanding repertoire, alongside the simpler ones. The complexity of crafts activities depended on the set of conditions prevailing in any given situation.

Third, the crafts were persisting primarily as small, localised production, often with conservative or traditional utilitarian design and intention. Crafts objects were mostly populist or ‘low’ art rather than elite ‘high’ art objects. Usually, crafts were not closely aligned with contemporary fine art discourses or intellectual interests, especially as these rapidly grew more ‘conceptual’ or ‘intellectual’ after the formalist period of Modernism.

The stability, conservatism, and familiarity of the crafts held less interest for most art historians than the rapidly expanding, provocative, and challenging genres of art practice, which were increasingly in need of interpretation to the public. Many production craftspeople did not require historical or theoretical knowledge to carry on successful crafts making practices. They were able to educate themselves by reading and seeing the works of others if they wished. By contrast, artists were expected to be informed by the most current art discourses and to display a critical or theoretical awareness in their work, grounded in art history and art theory.

Fourth, crafts students' exposure to art history and fine art discourses in practically oriented diploma programmes was limited and possibly cursory, in contrast to the greater exposure built into the degree programmes of liberal arts colleges and universities. There was little demand for deeper scholarship or more historians for non-degree programmes.

Fifth, the central purposes or aspirations of fine artists appeared to be increasingly distant from those of craftspeople. Artists worked for the sake of art and their own intellectual intentions, creating works for contemplation, while craftspeople created practical, useful works for use, decoration, fashion, or amusement, often to suit individual clients or a marketplace. Craftspeople tended to keep their media at the nucleus of their work, modifying ideas to suit. Artists tended to place ideas at the nucleus, often placing their media at the periphery, among many options that could be chosen to suit an idea. Thus, artists and craftspeople often were not doing the same thing in their making, despite the overlap in dealing with forms, visual appearance, and even figural symbolism. Furthermore, the fine art discourse did not seem to have a counterpart in the craft world, where the concerns were so often technical, functional, or formal ideas rather than



‘conceptual’, ‘theoretical’, ‘intellectual’ ideas. For art historians, the practices and chief concerns of crafts were far removed from those of contemporary and avant-garde art (the main art history focus) and did not fit within the evolving trends or definitions of art. In their view, crafts objects needed less art historical interpretation and were derivatives of art rather than contributing significantly to the focal interests of art history.

So, the split between artist and artisan widened towards opposition (Rowley 1999). The vanguard art movements continued to distance themselves from technical and then formal issues, eventually minimising attention to the materiality and direct manipulation that was the nucleus of crafts activity.

### **Anti-Crafts: Attitudes against Craft as Art**

As educational institutions, art schools transmit to their students the attitudes current in the world of contemporary art. Doing so is a part of their role in socialising students to the ideas and ideals of that world of practice. It is also an inevitable consequence of using practicing artists as instructors, because most of them accept the attitudes prevailing in the art world. It is often a consequence of the instructor’s education. As a result, Canadian art institutions were imbued with the attitudes and rhetoric that opposed viewing crafts works as art, what I call anti-crafts attitudes. These attitudes influenced what was and was not relevant and valuable in art education, and they perpetuated various pre-existing hierarchical dichotomies, including: intellectual versus manual work, elite versus popular culture, male versus female work. In the oppositional stance against crafts, traditional crafts media were regarded as status seekers—derivative ‘wannabe art’ forms. Even at the schools where they persisted and have recently grown, the craft

programmes found themselves periodically under threat of elimination altogether,<sup>42</sup> as irrelevant to the interests and values of contemporary art practices. Although greatly weakened since being challenged by post-modern arguments, such attitudes are still reflected in art education environments, which are often very slow to change. In particular, some of the attitudes persist today in the structures and course provisions of art school curricula, which are slow to change. Therefore, it is pertinent to understand the history of the attitudes that persist, in order to refute them and effect change.

Throughout the twentieth century, a growing body of modernist art critics argued that decorative art, mainly the work of craftsmen, was a debasement of ‘true’ art. In 1908, Architect Adolf Loos penned a vastly influential tirade against ornamentation, “Ornament and Crime” (1997), which reinforced the connection of elaborate decoration with the false values and deceptions perpetrated by unscrupulous craftsmen using ornament to conceal poor workmanship (see also Gombrich 1979). Loos argued vehemently against the decorative excesses of previous Romantic, Art Nouveau, and historicist styles, as well as the decorative approach of rival architect Josef Hoffman (founder of the Wiener Werkstätte) and other Vienna Secessionists. Loos’ diatribe was also a rejection of the kind of Romanticism promoted by the Pre-Raphaelites and Art Nouveau, and to some extent the utopian idealism of William Morris’ ideal of the dignified craftsman working to a medieval archetype.

Loos’ argument echoed the sentiments of Chicago architect Louis Sullivan’s notion of “form follows function” in seeking to strip modern, forward-looking design work of all

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<sup>42</sup> A former NSCAD crafts faculty member reported to me in a personal communication that the crafts division was frequently under threat during the late 1960s and 1970s. The division’s defensive strategy was to maintain a low profile. Through the 1980s and 1990s, financial pressures forced a number of non-degree community colleges to abandon their craft programmes. Crafts programmes vanished in Newfoundland and Prince Edward Island (Holland College), for example.

unnecessary and ill-fitted ornament, leaving only essential form and the natural appearance of materials as the vehicles of pure and honest aesthetic expression. This repudiation of inappropriate ornamentation soon found expression in the stripped down modernism of the International Style, championed by a host of modern European designers, architects, such as Eileen Gray and Le Corbusier. Le Corbusier was instrumental in ensuring that the international, modernist style was showcased at the 1925 *Exposition Internationale des Arts Décoratifs et Industriels Modernes* in Paris. This modernist philosophy was also reflected in the work of Dutch *De Stijl* architects and artists, such as Gerrit Rietveld and Piet Mondrian. It underpinned the philosophy of the influential Bauhaus school of art and design in Germany, and was reflected in the work of Bauhaus faculty and alumni, such as Marcel Breuer, Mies van der Rohe, and Anni Albers. When the *Bauhauslers* eventually scattered due to the adverse political climate in Germany and the subsequent World War II, they were especially influential as teachers in schools of art and design across the United States.

Taken beyond the intentions of Loos himself, the modernist denouncement of decoration became generalised to all types of decorative work, rendering the entire range of decorative crafts production suspect, ugly, vulgar, or déclassé at worst, and unfashionable, naïve, or ‘pretty’ at best. In consequence, the craftsmen’s technical virtuosity and elaborative skill was devalued. At the same time, the variety of object forms and techniques was reduced to include only those that fit the practical and economic constraints of machine mass-production. The more complex of craftsmen’s skills eventually became industrially obsolete, preserved mainly in small manufactories

of elite goods serving a small luxury market.<sup>43</sup> In much industrial production, workers became machine operators, trouble-shooters, or served as the ‘connective tissue’ between machines.<sup>44</sup>

A contemporaneous line of argument was propounded in Clement Greenberg’s essay “Avant-garde vs Kitsch” (1939). Greenberg positioned *kitsch*, as a false pretence (or inadequate attempt) at art, in opposition to ‘true’ art, the avant-garde, as well as to authentic folk art. The literature may not have overtly equated crafts and kitsch, but much work that bore the defining traits of kitsch – bad taste, mimicry of art without sophisticated understanding or inherent truth, backward-looking, facile, sentimentality, formularity, and ubiquity – was also crafts work. As a result, the negative traits of kitsch were often attributed indiscriminately and stereotypically extended to include works of craft, which were already positioned in opposition to avant-garde art, and assessed as inadequate. Such similarities made it easy to use anti-kitsch arguments against crafts, to accuse modernist crafts of mistaking the overt appearances of art or avant-garde practices for authentic originality, and thus to regard modern art-influenced crafts as ‘wannabe’, ‘derivative’, or ‘banal’ art. This position required that the ‘truth’, of which only avant-garde art was capable, be clearly distinguished and distanced from the crafts, which could only be done by showing that craft (skill, virtuosity) could not be art, and art could not be (reduced to) craft. The superior status of art had to be maintained.

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<sup>43</sup> One such example is handwoven Harris tweed cloth weaving from the Scottish Outer Hebrides.

<sup>44</sup> The term “connective tissue” refers here to the processes in which humans physically connect, move, and disconnect materials or partially completed objects from one machine to the next in the sequence of manufacturing processes. I noticed this when touring a carpet weaving factory in Truro, Nova Scotia, where this was the main type of work done by humans on the manufacturing floor. Humans also did jobs that machines could not do as efficiently or inexpensively, including threading the looms, and inspecting and repairing flaws in the final carpet.

Many of the avant-garde art movements that occurred through the twentieth century, from Duchamp's ready-mades, through Surrealism, Dadaism, Abstract Expressionism, Action Painting, and Conceptual Art, were not readily translatable to the terms of diverse craft media. Some were so unconcerned with the crafting elements or the 'hand of the artist' that they repudiated the skills, values, and knowledge at the core of craftspeople's interests and self-esteem, as well as a vital source of inspiration and challenge. In particular, the notion of 'reframing' objects or processes was often incompatible with designing objects for use, because it threatened their utility. Basic criteria of utility or performance often override the criteria of visual appearance if the latter will cause the object will fail to fulfil its purpose satisfactorily. Such failure is undesirable. The performance requirements of practical purposes are often the least flexible, and the most readily criticised when they are not well considered or realised. Failure to accommodate performance standards can even be dangerous. In such circumstances, performance must outweigh appearance, since a variation in appearance might perform practically just as well. A traditional 'perfect' form or archetype has already undergone a long process of refinement that requires little further reconsideration.

It is also important to understand that as the century wore on, the crafts became less necessary or visible to industrialised societies. They were anachronistic except as expressions of local cultural identities, or gratifying recreational activity. They moved from primary industries to secondary cultural industries, (tourist souvenirs or giftware), unable to compete with mass-production in a mass consumption environment and not really interested in doing so. This can be seen as emancipation from the obligations of serving practical, consumer needs, in large quantities and to industrial performance

standards. No longer necessary for survival, except within rare utopian, impoverished, or isolated living situations, crafts became perceived publicly as mainly a recreational interest, with a small coterie of dedicated, marginally viable small production workshops offering small quantities of individuated work, often marketed to an audience with an appreciation of ‘handmade’ or unique qualities. Less visible to the public was the role of craftspeople and technicians in designing and prototyping for mass-production. Despite reduced social visibility and economic importance, crafts persisted through the efforts of minority ideologies, personal interest, and philanthropy to achieve a new kind of maturity and identity as ‘fine craft’, with acknowledgement as a valuable artistic cultural industry (Alfoldy 2005; Flood 2001).

### **The Crafts as a Kind of Art**

Anti-craft attitudes in the post-World War II modern art world were countered by a supportive environment for crafts throughout much of Canada. For its supportive audience, crafts continued to fill the art roles abandoned by modernist art: realistic representation, beautification, pleasure, communal identity, and reiteration of common values and symbols. Crafts were vernacular art, honestly pursued with modest ambitions and humility. They fit the budgets, lifestyles, and creative urges of everyday people. They were intelligible and familiar. They were ‘comfortable’ arts. Their status as a kind of art was substantiated by their pleasurable aesthetics and symbolising capabilities.

The crafts had an ally in design, once they recognised the need to attune their aesthetics to prevailing modern tastes, rather than just reproducing traditional forms. The elements and strategies of design could be taught or encouraged among both craftspeople

and their audiences. By regarding crafts practitioners as designer-makers, and teaching them the necessary modern design skills, art schools and community programmes<sup>45</sup> alike helped to disseminate modern design sensibilities and skills, and to attune crafts to the tastes and needs of sophisticated urban audiences. Strengthening the attention to modern design built audiences and markets for craftspeople educated at the four independent schools. The support of various community and government programmes, such as those of the Handcraft Centre in Nova Scotia or the Canadian Guild of Crafts, also fostered the growth of grass-roots crafts organisations, many of whose members were professional craftspeople making a living from their crafts businesses. These supportive programmes and organisations complemented and interacted regularly with the arts schools, as they still do. In particular, the art schools as well as several provincial organisations came to operate galleries and/or shops that contribute to both the educational experience of students and the livelihood or career of graduates. The craft works were (and still are) displayed and sold like art works, rather than like commodities. For all these supporters, the crafts were and remain a valuable kind of art.

Perreault, a former senior curator of the American Craft Museum<sup>46</sup> (formerly the Museum of Contemporary Craft) as well as an art critic, has been a vocal advocate of the “Crafts is Art” (2004) position for many years. He summarises his perspective this way:

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<sup>45</sup> This kind of community education is exemplified in Mary Black’s efforts in Nova Scotia. Between 1943 and 1955, Mary E. Black, employed by the Nova Scotia government, tirelessly promoted crafts and educating craftspeople, for recreation as well as livelihood and economic development. Her position had been established in response to demands by Nova Scotians to support economic development through local craft production (Lotz, 1986). Black emphasised modernisation in the design of craft product to improve their marketability. She also advocated designs reflecting their place of origin, rather than imported motifs.

<sup>46</sup> The American Craft Museum was formerly the Museum of Contemporary Craft. It is now known as the Museum of Art and Design.

“Crafts and fine art are one; it is only quality that makes a difference. There is no such thing as a good craft object, for a good craft object is an art object” (2005, 70).

### **‘Professionalising’ the ‘Fine Crafts’ and Educating the Professionals**

The term ‘professional’ is problematic. At heart, it refers to those who make a living from their craft, through small businesses, cottage industry, or teaching, for example. These might be fulltime or part-time enterprises. However, the term ‘professional’ is also applied to those who have completed some formal course of craft training or education, which would qualify them to receive funding from visual arts grant programmes, for example, even if they do not generate income from their craft work. In what follows, ‘professionalisation’ refers mainly to accreditation as a craftsperson through formal training, especially through the highest available level of education, the Bachelor degree.

The modernisation of Canadian crafts toward modern fine art and design styles and the professionalisation of the crafts field occurred in two parallel contexts: the Canadian crafts world, consisting of practitioners and their organisations, and the institutions that provided crafts education intended to socialise students to the surrounding crafts world. It is necessary to discuss these two contexts in tandem, because the crafts world was concerned with the nature of crafts education. When crafts education seemed inadequate, the crafts world either lobbied for improvements or filled in the gaps with workshops. Detailed information about these contexts affecting OCA or the western schools has not been available to me, but I was a participant and witness to the evolution as it occurred in Nova Scotia. The situation in Nova Scotia is an important case study for crafts education for two reasons. First, the inception of the Bachelor of Fine Arts degree at NSCAD in 1969 provided the first, and for many years the only, Canadian Bachelor degree



programme available to students across several crafts media. Second, this educational situation illustrates well the tensions and limitations in crafts education as it evolved within the visual arts paradigm.

In 1967, Garry Kennedy—an American-educated Canadian artist—was appointed President of NSCA, ushering in a new avant-garde era for the Halifax art school. His appointment coincided with important shifts in the direction of Canadian crafts toward modern fine art and design styling and practices, occurring in the mid-1960s for reasons well described by Sandra Alfoldy, in *Crafting Identity* (2005). Such shifts in the American craft scene, as promoted by the American Crafts Council (and notably Mrs. Aileen Osborn Webb) and exemplified by the work of its members, provided the model for the contemporary, professional development of the crafts in Canada.

Within two years of his appointment, Kennedy launched the Bachelor of Fine Arts programmes at NSCA, the first such degree programme in an independent post-secondary art school, outside a university. Kennedy, and the many American faculty members he recruited to teach at NSCA, radically shifted the school's emphasis toward experimental avant-garde fine art practices and away from the previous applied art orientation (Soucy & Pearse 1993). If the previous situation had permitted some craftspeople to move toward modern art approaches, the new situation now almost demanded it, or risk being dismissed as banal, outmoded, or uncreative. In particular, greater acclaim went to the most sculptural or monumental works, or those that pushed their techniques or aesthetics the farthest, often refuting their practical traditions in the manner of fine art's avant-garde. Many craftspeople regarded themselves as artists who just happened to use fibre or clay processes. They were inspired by the experimental approaches to which they

were exposed. More importantly, they aligned themselves with the intentions, aspirations, attitudes, discourses, and social practices of professional artists in the contemporary art world. However, this artist-craftsperson stance was often insufficient for works in media designated ‘craft’ media to be accepted as fine art. More often than not, these works were ignored by the art world, whatever their intentions, for the reasons cited above.

The criteria upon which such devaluations of craft works—and art works in craft media—were based were unclear to many craftspeople. The works themselves were well received by particular crafts-related institutions, such as the then Museum of Contemporary Craft in New York City, and by groups organised around particular craft media, such as ceramics, textiles, jewellery, wood, etc. Most of the craft-related publications available to Canadians were also American, due to the general conditions of the tiny Canadian publishing industry. So it comes as no surprise to see the strong influence of the American art and craft worlds on the Canadian crafts scene, and particularly on craft education. British craft was the other strong influence, for similar reasons, and because its public support for crafts and design was well established and relatively well funded. British craftspeople came to teach in Canada as well. However, American craftspeople and trends were more readily accessible and came to be better known through the higher exposure to publications and travel to American centres.

Art education generally was just as influenced by American models as were the practices and institutions that grew up to support Canadian crafts. This is due more to the importation of American born or educated artists and craftspeople to teach at the independent art colleges, as it is to the ideas in art education literature. At the renamed

Nova Scotia College of Art and Design (NSCAD), Kennedy and the other American artist-instructors were the main role models of what it meant to be a professional artist in the international avant-garde art world. These artists were mostly oriented toward conceptualism and performance arts (Soucy & Pearse 1993). Their presence attracted a stream of important international artists from the mid-1970s onward (Soucy & Pearse 1993). NSCAD curriculum offerings expanded into a variety of mixed media, performance, installation, and conceptual kinds of art, intentionally aligned with avant-garde trends in New York and Europe. NSCAD established a loft apartment in New York City to accommodate class visits to exhibitions there. Exchanges were organised with international sister schools to broaden the experience of students.

In the 1970s, under this avant-garde influence, NSCAD entered a period of ‘unstructured’ studio learning. There was little structured technical study in craft and art media past the beginner levels. Intermediate and advanced students were left free to explore media without interference or direction. The BFA degree programme was presented as a smorgasbord, from which to assemble their education from any of the range of offerings that suited their tastes.

As a textiles student at NSCAD in 1973 and 1974, I longed for more depth and concrete feedback technically, aesthetically, and ideationally than this liberal environment provided. Neither the art or design histories then available gave me a deeper understanding of how art worked, how it contributed to the building of a meaningful culture, or how it was shaped by social circumstances. At least with my craft, I knew why I was working and exemplars set my standards. My textiles were useful to daily life, and could be beautiful. Each project presented interesting challenges and

learning experiences. I gradually discovered the intrinsic principles and ideas governing my medium and the potential inherent in it, though not directly from instruction or critiques in courses. On graduating, however, I still had no idea what it would take to make good 'art'. Eventually, I had little desire to alter what I was accomplishing in my craft to try to fit into the incompatible expectations of the art world of the time.

By this time, Nova Scotian craftspeople had formed their own organisation, The Nova Scotia Designer Craftsmen (founded in 1973), through which craftspeople could create their own crafts world pursuant to their needs and concerns. This organisation provided me and other crafts students the kind of validation and social support for my work and my interests that had been lacking in my degree education. It allowed me the self-identity as a designer-craftsperson that suited me, which the art orientation of NSCAD had not. Craftspeople educated in other degree programmes where the art orientation dominated recount similar experiences, even in later periods. The problem was not that there is anything wrong with an art orientation in crafts education, but that it did not suit the interests and proclivities of all crafts students. It also did not provide the socialisation and skills that professional craftspeople needed to make their living from crafts, such as product design and business skills. Organisations of craftspeople took it upon themselves to try to bridge the gaps, by advocating for educational improvements and offering workshops to develop technical, design, and marketing skills. Crafts councils were important adjuncts to crafts education because these organisations were the official face and forum of the crafts world, locally. Their members modelled professional crafts practice and their work established its conventions and trends. Sometimes, students participated in crafts organisations' projects, such as

exhibitions, crafts markets, and conferences. Crafts instructors were often active in their local organisations, in part because they were interested in developing the professional environment, and in part because these organisations offered them the support and respect for their interests and concerns that was lacking in their teaching environment.

Between 1965 and 1980, all Canadian provinces established provincial or regional crafts councils, to advocate for funding and other support of craft and trade fairs, professional development, and government policy or structures, such as Canada Council categories and peer juries, etc. The Ontario Crafts Council was founded in 1976 through the merger of the Canadian Guild of Crafts (Ontario branch, established 1931) and the Ontario Craft Foundation (1966) (Alfoldy 2005). In 1974, the Canadian Crafts Council was founded through the merger of the Canadian Guild of Crafts (founded 1900) with the Canadian Craftsmen's Association. Through the activities of these associations, the crafts became fashionable, accomplished, and ambitious. Canadian crafts were thought to have achieved a mature professionalism in standards, and a sense of community as a particular sector of Canadian culture. The number of studio craftspeople making an adequate living grew, populating crafts markets with record numbers of increasingly sophisticated booths. Some sold wholesale to shops and were involved in exporting. A broad range of crafts was available in every province to suit an equally broad range of prices and aesthetic tastes. Maintaining high quality of crafts was an important issue of many of the provincial associations, which was typically expressed in standards committees and juried exhibitions and markets. The issue of whether this work was or was not 'art' became an issue of gaining public social *respect*, in the face of the elevated status claimed by avant-garde art. To this end, crafts associations sought to heighten their

public profile, educate and cultivate a knowledgeable audience, and acquire more public support (funding, market development assistance, and advanced professional development) tailored to their specific needs.

Alfoldy (2005) sees the period between 1965 and 1974 as the seminal period of professionalisation in Canadian crafts, the years in which sophisticated, well-educated studio craftspeople became makers of ‘fine craft’, paralleling fine art in those media designated ‘craft media’. The term ‘fine craft’ marks an internal hierarchy in the crafts, highlighting aesthetic intentions thoughtfully engaged with utilitarian design concerns as a desirable standard of achievement. The term signifies the expectation that such crafts be perceived and respected—beyond limited notions of technical skill or utility—as a world of activity that contributes significant cultural value, in contrast to ‘mere’ labour. It also emphasised crafts activities that were forward-looking or innovative in style and artistic intentions, in contrast to reproductive traditional making. It emphasised a contemporary professional approach, based on originality and individual artistic expression, even when it was manifested as applied design for serial production. Fine craftspeople were encouraged to elevate their skills and standards but to be flexible enough to tailor them to best convey their artistic intentions. They were encouraged to explore, through experimentation, their medium, their expressive forms, and interactions with other media or ideas originating outside their medium. Most importantly, they were expected to stand out from the ‘embarrassing’ array of traditional, commercial, or amateur crafts (Alfoldy 2005) that evidently failed to meet the expectations of artistic excellence or interest promulgated in post-secondary art school programmes and displayed in international

exhibitions. Fine crafts were evolving an academic phase and sowing the seeds for an avant-garde,<sup>47</sup> as Frayling suggests (1990).

Through the 1970s and 1980s, the provincial crafts councils succeeded in setting their own direction independent of visual arts organizations, and advocating for the needs of fine crafts as they defined them. Collaboratively, within the Canadian Crafts Council, they were defining themselves with respect to the arts world and their role in Canadian culture, and shedding the historical parochial presumptions about crafts practice. Their advocacy with the Canada Council resulted in a restructuring of the Canada Council's visual arts grants categories. New crafts categories were added so that crafts-based applications would be assessed with appropriate peer juries and crafts-appropriate criteria.<sup>48</sup>

Increasingly, and unfortunately, this professionalism also brought with it a shift in the degree of attention to, and the involvement of, 'serious amateurs', formerly among the most active supporters of crafts interests and a core of many crafts events. Due to limited resources, the concerns of amateurs were increasingly marginalised, at least in the provincial councils. Concerns such as marketing, taxation, cross-border trade, and insurance came to dominate over juried or periodical group exhibitions, or workshops in these overburdened councils. Some of the amateur constituency became alienated by the degree of professional focus, feeling that their particular interests were no longer well

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<sup>47</sup> Experimental and avant-garde craft practices were evolving earlier in North American art education contexts than Frayling suggests. Peter Voulkos (ceramics) and Ed Rossbach (textiles) were early influential examples.

<sup>48</sup> As of this writing there are three Canada Council grant programmes specifically for "fine crafts artists and curators" and crafts organisations, and one major prize – The Saidye Bronfman Award which was established in 1977 (<http://www.canadacouncil.ca/grants/visualarts/> accessed Oct 19, 2008).

served. They were especially frustrated because many amateurs had worked hard to build the organizations, the positive public profile, and the receptive audiences.

This growing professionalism was reinforced by the advent of the degree programmes at NSCAD, beginning in the 1969-70 academic year (Soucy & Pearse). At that time, as the only independent art school in Canada offering a well-developed set of crafts specialisations – ceramics, textiles, and jewellery – at the bachelor degree level, it was one of the only places in Canada where such a degree in these media could be obtained.<sup>49</sup> Very few university programmes included any of these media in their fine arts departments – that remains the case today (see Appendices 4). Everywhere else, including in Ontario and Quebec, diploma students looking to complete bachelor degrees had to apply to art-oriented university programmes. These programmes did not regard crafts education as visual arts education, and their art history offerings were geared primarily to the needs of their resident studio media. Of course, the broader liberal arts university environment could offer crafts students the opportunity to expand their horizons in many pertinent ways not specific to crafts practice. General art historical knowledge was part of this expanded understanding. In some cases, however, such degree programmes left crafts students confused about the value of their crafts proclivities and interests.<sup>50</sup>

By the later 1980s, under the influence of post-modernism, feminism, and post-colonialism, art education in Canada was developing a broader academic and cultural

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<sup>49</sup> Ceramics seems to have been an exception, as it was included as a medium in some university art programmes.

<sup>50</sup> One colleague expressed such confusion over her move from the Capilano College textiles programme in Vancouver to the degree programme at Montreal's Concordia University in the early 1990s. In her words, it "ruined" her as a craftsperson. This is likely meant in the sense of disrupting her self-identity and confidence. She is in fact an excellent and meticulous craftsperson whose works have enviable artistic merit, but who was very unhappy within the art-orientation as expressed at Concordia.



awareness, that was at least friendly to art-oriented work in crafts media, and to viewing craftspeople making less art-oriented work as contemporary designers.

**‘Intellectualising’ professional crafts education.**

NSCAD’s Bachelor degree curriculum followed the models of other Canadian university fine art programmes, in which art history courses were the central academic requirement complementing studio courses. Historical and relevant liberal arts studies were part of the ‘intellectual’ content that made Bachelor degrees more ‘professional’ than non-degree education. Since 1973, art history at NSCAD grew and became well entrenched as the key academic department, with several permanent faculty members, and a core requirement of at least 12 credits (Soucy & Pearse 1993). In addition an art education degree programme was initiated in 1970, to continue to accommodate the enduring need and responsibility to educate teachers for the public schools – a long-established role of the Halifax school. These two departments, art history in particular, were the main source of academically oriented faculty and liberal arts courses. Art history was the most influential, as every student had minimum art history requirements to fulfil, and typically added others as liberal arts electives, since these were so readily available and relevant to their art interests.

Between 1969 and 1972, two faculty members at NSCAD taught social science courses, an indication of the expanding social contexts that were becoming recognised as relevant to artists. Avant-garde artists had become very involved in the critique of dominant social institutions and conventions, based on white, middle-class, conservative paternalistic values. A variety of postmodern trends had brought forward political, social

and identity issues, including postcolonial critiques, feminism, immigrant or ethnic identity, racism, and multiculturalism. Activism through art, especially performance and conceptual art, could be directed toward social reconstruction, giving artists a new critical role that some took to be the main role of contemporary art practice. Art history, already influenced by psychology, philosophy, and semiotics in interpreting meanings and the significance of form, began to incorporate the influences of sociology, especially social or cultural criticism. Art history had long been mixing historical interpretation and art criticism, and it was sometimes difficult to tell where one ended and the other began (Smith, 1996). Similarly, philosophers such as Arthur Danto were publishing art criticism in an effort to understand what made avant-garde work, like Warhol's *Brillo Boxes* (1964), art (Danto 1992, 1994). Cultural context became an increasingly important element of artistic practice and historical interpretation, both in terms of authentic artistic motivation and the accessibility of original or alternate interpretations. Postmodern attitudes encouraged art works to be viewed as *relative* and *dynamic* rather than fixed embodiments of singular or static meaning, despite originating with the artists' particular intentions. Teaching art students about the complexities of the 'expanded field' of postmodern possibilities fell to art historians, leading to courses in criticism, twentieth century art theory, critical theory, and visual culture studies – abstract meta-levels of study for visual arts and decidedly academic in nature, as befitted the claims that art was a worthy academic subject.

This elevated analytical scholarship is also part of the intellectualisation of visual art, introduced to upper-level art students to make them aware of their cultural role, as creators and as professionals or specialists. It also helped them understand what is or will

be written about their practice in the art world, and respond to it.<sup>51</sup> As professionals in the art field, knowledge of this level of discourse and scholarship adds to their academic and intellectual credibility, and that of their field. Furthermore, since some form of teaching is the most likely full-time job directly related to their field through which degree graduates will end up making a living, a sound understanding of ideas and skills pertinent to art and the ability to assess intelligently and articulate those understandings to students is important. These understandings and abilities were cultivated by the academic courses.

### **Promoting professional visual arts education.**

The notion of professional artistic practice is at the heart of the art schools' degree programmes. Professional art practice of some sort has at every stage been central to the teaching curriculum at Canadian art schools, before and after degree institutions. Their websites describe their programmes as professional preparation. Often, artists have been employed as studio instructors principally on the basis of their professional artistic career record more than on their teaching career record. An MFA degree is now an essential minimum qualification for studio instructors at most postsecondary art schools.

Teaching and art history professions are treated as secondary and academic – in the view of some, these orientations are inimical to artistic practice. Nevertheless, they are visible professions that art degree recipients can pursue, although they often need to acquire additional qualifications to do so in public or post-secondary education.

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<sup>51</sup> Whether they actually need to know such things in order to simply make their work was debated by art students, and some instructors, many of whom resented the time spent on academic work that they would rather spend on honing their skills and ideas. The value of academic requirements to students depended on an individual student's intentions and the subject matter being addressed, as well as the student's degree of hubris.

However, despite the increased recent attention to writing criticism in the curriculum of the art school, there is as yet little attention to the alternate professional careers in the fine art world: exhibiting and curatorship, arts management, art dealing, art writing and criticism, or art publishing (Elkins, 2001). “Of a thousand art students, maybe five will make a living off their art, and perhaps one will be known outside her city” (Elkins, 2001). Given such discouraging figures,<sup>52</sup> which are quite dissimilar to the usual expectations of employment for other kinds of professional training (medicine, law, etc), it seems strange (and possibly even irresponsible) that the many other options for putting one’s art knowledge to work are rarely discussed with students as viable options. Granted that the actual making is the nucleus and *raison d’etre* of the extensive art world social network (Becker, 1982), the emphasis on making occludes other respectable and important means of using arts or crafts education productively, and of understanding it more deeply.

### **Professionalising crafts education.**

Returning to the specific situation of the crafts, the professional idealised model of the independent studio artist, informed about art history and social and political issues, has been served to Canadian crafts degree students with little modification. At NSCAD, media-specific history courses were occasionally offered by studio instructors, up to about 1994 when a fulltime crafts historian was employed for the first time. When she left in 1996, it was not until 2002 that another crafts historian was employed. The

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<sup>52</sup> The employment income levels for visual artists and craftspeople from the 2006 census analysis (Capriotti and Hill, 2009) confirm the low rates of fulltime practice and the low incomes for those who derive a living as art and crafts practitioners as compared to other occupations. It is not clear if these figures include or exclude practitioners who derive most of their income from other related employment, especially fulltime teaching, gallery work, or arts administration.

advantage of maintaining a specialist in crafts history is that the crafts students have an opportunity to learn about the formation of their craft world, and the important ideas and social contexts that have shaped it over the past couple of centuries. They encounter an alternate array of decorative art works and contemporary studio craftspeople, amongst whom to situate themselves and from whom they can learn and be inspired. Providing the desired crafts history courses was, and still is, hindered by the scarcity of crafts historians.

Intellectually, the dearth of historical and theoretical scholarship, as well as criticism, was a frequently cited reason for the devaluation of crafts by detractors in the fine art system (Koplos, 1992, 2002). The apparent paucity of such scholarship, compared to fine arts and design literature, suggested that there was little worthy of study.<sup>53</sup> The criticisms were somewhat unfair, because the inattention to crafts scholarship was a consequence of the visual arts paradigm and the principal orientation of art historians, emphasising fine arts and to a lesser extent, design interests. The applicability of the available historical and theoretical courses to crafts students' interests was not examined. It was assumed that all the elements important to the fine arts of painting and sculpture were equally relevant to crafts activity and education. Since there was no developed alternative education emphasising crafts' interests that go beyond fine arts study, such as the history of techniques or ethnic meanings attributed to crafts practices, there were few acceptable alternative academic courses to offer crafts students or to install as crafts degree requirements.

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<sup>53</sup> I say "apparent" paucity, because there is a great deal more scholarship pertinent to craft and design activity arising in other disciplines, to which students and art historians alike are rarely exposed.

Until recently, the field of material culture studies was not well known, and was under-developed. Now the value of this field has become increasingly recognised among crafts scholars and instructors. Material culture courses are now available in the Material Arts (crafts) curriculum of the degree programmes at the OCA, and at ACAD. Although NSCADU has been assiduously developing its art history offerings into a full BA degree, and has for a number of years included courses in semiotics and aesthetics, as well as philosophical, psychological, and sociological issues and similar socio/political topics as they relate to visual arts (e.g. Modernism and Post-modernism, or Feminism) and has expanded its range of offerings in the critical studies category, it has not offered courses in material culture studies. So far as I can tell, I am the only instructor at NSCAD to offer courses guided by a material culture perspective.

**Professional crafts at OCA: Bachelors-in-waiting.**

Despite its lack of degree programmes, the Ontario College of Art was clearly also a respected professional school offering studio courses similar to those at NSCAD, as well as some supportive academic courses. It did not take a backseat in the realm of avant-garde production and awareness in any of the artistic practices it covered following WWII (OCA 1977). Its proximity to the Toronto art scene, to the American art scene and media, and a population of well-travelled, sophisticated patrons, enabled local artists and students to keep abreast of contemporary art and to pursue successful professional careers.<sup>54</sup> Given this, and the large, dense population and prosperity of southern Ontario generally, we might have expected OCA to assume the lead in professional education of

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<sup>54</sup> One of the reasons for hiring Garry Kennedy at NSCA was his association with OCA and the Toronto art scene (Soucy & Pearse 1993).

avant-garde artists, or at least to rival the reputation of NSCAD in the 1970s and 1980s. However, its potential development in arts scholarship and as a leader in art education was severely curtailed by the decisions made by Ontario's Ministry of Education, with consequences that persisted through the 1970s, '80s, and '90s. The Ministry decided not to support special subject education generally. Moreover, the University of Toronto was given a monopoly on graduate education (in education) through the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education. These two measures effectively stifled the production of art education research (Clark 2006) because art was defined as special subject education, and OCA lacked the faculty and programmes to pursue research in higher art education in the place where it occurred. As a result, Concordia University in Montreal, the University of British Columbia, and NSCAD became the leading institutions for Canadian art education scholarship (Clark 2006). The rival fine art programmes of the nearby University of Toronto, instituted in 1935, also seem to have prevented OCA from receiving degree-granting authority until the 21<sup>st</sup> century. By contrast, NSCAD had no such rival programmes in Halifax universities. Furthermore, NSCAD offered the most extensive post-secondary art education throughout the Maritime provinces.

In 2005, the renamed Ontario College of Art and Design (OCAD) finally received degree-granting privileges. In the short time since then, they have instituted a variety of Bachelor and Masters degree programmes. They have reconfigured undergraduate crafts education into two distinct degrees: a Bachelor of Fine Arts stream for art-oriented crafts students, and a Bachelor of Design with a major in Material Arts and Design for crafts students with a design or production orientation. The speed with which this occurred

amply demonstrates how ready OCAD was, probably for a long time, to gain the official and equivalent status of a professional degree education.

### **Conclusion**

In general terms, the four independent Canadian art colleges providing degree education in crafts – primarily ceramics, textiles, and jewellery – began with a strong utilitarian or practical professional orientation, especially for design, commercial and communication arts, that fit the social values and priorities for ‘useful’ art in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. They were influenced by arts and crafts values and ideas that helped to establish an early place for important crafts in them, alongside the fine arts. It was expected that these crafts would benefit artistic learning, as well as benefit from artistic knowledge. Throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century, as the avant-garde movements of the contemporary art world gradually moved farther from formalism and dependence on skilled making of the artist’s hand, the crafts persisted in these schools, both resisting and benefiting from the new artistic approaches. Nevertheless, the typical curriculum of predominantly art oriented drawing foundations, art histories and critical theories, primarily focused on the creation of expressive imagery and eventually social critique, imposed on the crafts an ill-fitting idealised model of professional artistic practice and associated education, a visual arts paradigm. Frustration and resistance to the devaluation or occlusion in the rhetoric of the art world of the legitimate concerns and interests of many craftspeople—interests that were not always relevant to art, such as technical ideas and working within a tradition—prompted the craft world to begin defining itself and demanding the necessary scholarship and attention to the particular concerns of crafts, to



parallel and counterbalance the intellectuality and professionalism claimed by professional artists.

The complex history that has produced the current situation is the result of numerous assumptions and decisions made in the belief that crafts were a form of visual art or visual culture. But as we have discovered throughout the history of art and especially the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the definition of visual art or visual culture is unclear and unfixed. Art education shifts to keep up with our notions of what art practice or scholarship becomes. We now need to consider what crafts education and scholarship could become, to suit the maturity of the craft world, and to help it to be understood. How can craft degree programmes provide an appropriate, rigorous education, without devaluing the traditions or limiting the options of crafts making? What needs to be altered in existing curricula to overcome the limitations of the dominant visual arts paradigm and reinvest crafts education with a deeper understanding of the crafts' particular cultural contributions, irrespective of their status as art? Finally, where will the necessary scholarship and scholars for the crafts come from, and what content will their education require?

## Chapter Five

### CANADIAN CRAFT DEGREE PROGRAMMES

Crafts education in Canada currently takes place in a variety of situations and formats, including individual self-education, ad hoc recreational introductory courses, community college or technical school diploma or certificate programmes, and bachelor- to master- level Fine Arts degree programmes. Post-secondary art educational institutions continue to play a central, leadership role in sustaining this country's crafts activities and appreciation, by perpetuating and expanding crafts practices for contemporary society. The present study concentrates on the professionally oriented degree programmes of crafts education, as these are the most developed, intellectually committed, and self-aware specialist oriented programmes in the spectrum of crafts education. This chapter will describe and assess the professionally oriented, post-secondary craft degree programmes (undergraduate) in Canada, at the four institutions where such programmes are available: Emily Carr University of Art and Design (ECUAD) in Vancouver; Alberta College of Art and Design (ACAD) in Calgary; Ontario College of Art and Design (OCAD) in Toronto; and NSCAD University (NSCADU) in Halifax.

#### **Restating the Case for Improving Canadian Crafts Education**

Craft and art education fall under provincial jurisdiction. Various provincial educational systems have treated the crafts and decorative arts as primarily technical, productive vocations useful as 'applied arts' for industrial design. Across Canada, many post-secondary technical or vocational schools continue to provide a valuable crafts

education. In contrast, art making was allowed into universities, where it eventually developed degree programmes incorporating more ‘intellectual’ academic content.<sup>55</sup> In some universities, crafts media were included with art media as a basis for art-making. Ceramics, for example, was a useful modelling medium for sculpture, and found its way into numerous university programmes. Printmaking worked its way from being a craft that reproduced works by painters to an independent image-making medium. Photography followed a similar path to acceptance as an expressive art medium.

The success of fine arts in insinuating themselves into liberal arts universities as complex, intellectual (academic) fields of study (Singerman, 1999)—if only on sufferance as a general cultural ‘good’ or a historical or philosophical topic—reinforced the elevated status of ‘symbolic’ fine arts practices as opposed to ‘merely’ useful, productive crafts practices. Stereotyping the crafts as ‘practical’ or less rigorous (Wright, 1994) rather than ‘intellectual’ or ‘creative’, perpetuated the age-old Cartesian mind-body separation. This stereotype tended to reduce the crafts’ social and intellectual status to the lowest common denominator of competent production, little better than ‘mere’ labour or pleasant pastimes. Such attitudes prevented the crafts from being acknowledged for their fuller range of creative potential and value, and from being understood as potentially intellectually valuable.

The split between the practical (crafts and technical studios) and the intellectual (historical, aesthetic, symbolic, social, and theoretical) remains embedded in the various

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<sup>55</sup> Canadian design historian Virginia Wright (1994) discusses how this occurred in Ontario at OCA, highlighting the years following WWII, in which segregation and belittlement of crafts activity and education was promoted and institutionalized. She highlights especially the attitudes of Donald Buchanan, a founding editor of the magazine *Canadian Art* and “an influential advocate of industrial design and mass-production.” According to Wright, Buchanan saw the crafts as less “advanced” than design and promoted their clear segregation from design in education (Wright 1994).

distinctions of curriculum content, degree requirements and educational expectations that each type of institution (technical/vocational school and university) embodies. It is also embedded in the assumptions of instructors, and perpetuated through their teaching.<sup>56</sup> As a result, each type of educational institution presents contradictory perceptions of crafts to its constituency as well as to the surrounding society. Liberal arts universities and independent art schools with degree programmes support particular kinds of crafts practice within the established framework of visual art practices, but devalue crafts practices when they give priority to alternate interests, traditions, and values, such as technical ideas, functionality, or economic constraints.

University fine arts degree education has developed its intellectual status and theoretical strength through an extensive body of specialised scholarship in art history, theory, criticism, and to a lesser extent, philosophy of art, and art teaching. Since the mid-twentieth century, that scholarship has also aligned itself with supportive theories generated in intellectual disciplines, such as sociology, literature, and cultural studies. This intellectual content provides higher social and academic status on fine arts degree education. In contrast, the primarily technical, practice-oriented vocational colleges or trade schools typically include little contextualising historical, social, or theoretical course content—hence their lower intellectual status. The high status, intellectually grounded ideas become the concepts and attitudes that permeate general social knowledge and general education, and validate the cultural value of fine arts practice. The under-development of alternate perspectives on technical and crafts practices,

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<sup>56</sup> The bias toward intellectual ideas is often only present as an implication of comments or choices about what content to include and in what proportion. The idea that any medium can be used to produce art allows instructors to emphasise the visual art priorities while subordinating the import or concerns with crafts-specific interests, such as functional, decorative, or technical ideas.

grounded by appropriate scholarship, powerful theories and critical appraisal, means that the crafts have insufficient intellectual strength to effectively dispute and overturn the traditional constructions of their identity by those outside crafts activity.<sup>57</sup> Indeed, the adoption of crafts as a fine art form appears to remove the necessity of justifying or understanding crafts activities just because it offers them a supposedly valuable, social identity with acceptable symbolic and intellectual status. But at what cost?

My contention is that the cost of viewing crafts as fine art activity (as currently defined within visual art curricula and the professional art world) robs crafts activities of insightful understanding and appropriate cultural validation. Crafts practice is a completely integrated social practice of object-making, in which meaningful technical and practical dimensions are fully interwoven with the intellectual, symbolic, aesthetic, and social dimensions of their existence. Like art, crafts activities are both active social practices and substantial subjects for deeper academic study and understanding. Sometimes the dimensions of art, design, and craft overlap or interpenetrate. This does not obviate the need to understand each of these practices fully, especially in terms of the particular dimensions or ways in which they diverge and offer particular, if not unique, value. Thus I advocate a more comprehensive study of what crafts activity is in and for itself – from within its practices as well as from without – and for use of *that* fuller understanding as a better basis for the education of professional craftspeople, crafts scholars, and critics or professional interpreters of crafts. Such a study requires a review of the current state of Canadian crafts degree education.

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<sup>57</sup> Janet Koplos (1992; 2002) pointed out the on-going lack of theoretical or philosophical grounding for the crafts. Very little has changed since then in establishing crafts-specific criteria of critique, although thoughtful theoretical scholarship is beginning to emerge (Adamson, 2007; Risatti, 2007; Sennet, 2008).

### **Current Canadian Undergraduate Crafts Education**

As previously mentioned, Canadian degree programmes for crafts education are almost exclusively located in four autonomous post-secondary institutions of visual arts education: Emily Carr University of Art and Design (ECUAD) in Vancouver, BC<sup>58</sup>; Alberta College of Art and Design (ACAD) in Calgary, AB; Ontario College of Art and Design (OCAD) in Toronto, ON; and NSCAD University<sup>59</sup> (NSCADU) in Halifax, NS (Table 1). All presently offer Bachelor degrees in Fine Arts or Design (OCAD), with the possibility of a concentration (major) in one of four crafts media: ceramics, fibres, jewellery/ metalsmithing, or glass (ACAD only). ECUAD offers only ceramics—none of the other major crafts media. Woodworking studios are available at all institutions, but oddly, neither wood nor furniture-making/cabinetry are specifically offered as areas of degree concentration. Similarly, all schools except ECUAD have heavy metal-foundry facilities, but not blacksmithing as such. Whether or not this occurs informally is not clear. Papermaking and book arts are sometimes also offered. It is notable that furniture making or fine cabinetry and woodwork as well as blacksmithing are absent from this list, as they are recognized among the six primary crafts media in much of the literature profiling crafts objects and craftspeople (for example, Coatts, 1997; Diamonstein, 1983; Greenhalgh, 2003; Gustafson, 2002, 2005), as well as by museum curators and crafts organisations. Appendix 1 lists media commonly designated as ‘craft’ media.

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<sup>58</sup> Until recently known as the Emily Carr Institute of Art and Design (ECIAD).

<sup>59</sup> Until recently known as the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design.

Table 1. Canadian Visual Arts Degree Programmes offered at ECUAD, ACAD, OCADU, and NSCADU

ECUAD	ACAD	OCAD	NSCAD
<b>Bachelor of Design (BDes)</b> Communication Design Major Industrial Design Major	<b>Bachelor of Design (BDes)</b> Photography Major Visual Communications Design Major	<b>Bachelor of Design (BDes)</b> Advertising Major Graphic Design Major Illustration Major	<b>Bachelor of Design (BDes)</b> Interdisciplinary Design International Major in Graphic Design
		Industrial Design Major Environmental Design Material Art & Design Major	
<b>Bachelor of Fine Arts (BFA)</b> Visual Arts Major General Fine Arts Major Photography Major	<b>Bachelor of Fine Arts (BFA)</b> Ceramics Major Drawing Major Fibre Major Glass Major Jewellery & Metals Major Painting Major Sculpture Major Media Arts & Digital Technologies Major Print Media Major	<b>Bachelor of Fine Arts (BFA)</b> Criticism & Curatorial Practice Major Drawing & Painting Major Integrated Media Major Photography Major Printmaking Major Sculpture/Installation Major	<b>Bachelor of Fine Arts (BFA)</b> Interdisciplinary (no major) Major in Ceramics Major in Film Major in Fine Art Major in Intermedia Major in Jewellery & Metalsmithing Major in Photography Major in Textiles Minor in Art History Minor in Digital Media Minor in Drawing Minor in Fashion Minor in Film Studies Minor in Graphic Design <b>Bachelor of Arts (BA)</b> Major in Art History
<b>Bachelor of Media Arts (BMA)</b> Animation Major Film, Video + Integrated Media Major			
<b>Master of Applied Arts (MAA)</b> Design stream Visual Arts stream Media Arts stream	<b>Master of Fine Arts (MFA)</b> MFA Interdisciplinary MFA Critical and Curatorial Practice <b>Master of Design (MDes)</b> MDes Interdisciplinary	<b>Master of Fine Arts (MFA)</b> MFA in Craft MFA in Fine & Media Arts <b>Master of Design (MDes)</b> Domestic Stream (NA & European orientation)	<b>Master of Fine Arts (MFA)</b> MFA in Craft MFA in Fine & Media Arts <b>Master of Design (MDes)</b> Domestic Stream (NA & European orientation)
	MDes Strategic Foresight & Innovation <b>Master of Arts (MA)</b>	MDes Strategic Foresight & Innovation <b>Master of Arts (MA)</b>	International Stream (Chinese orientation) <b>Master of Arts in Art Education (MA ED)</b> <b>(currently inactive)</b>
	MA Interdisciplinary MA in Contemporary Art History Executive Master of Design in Advertising (EMDes)		

The same institutions all provide similar Bachelor degrees with concentrations available in most of the media classed as ‘fine and media arts’: painting, drawing, sculpture, photography, film & digital media, printmaking, sound arts, performance, and combinations of these. Educational content in these media is focused primarily on the creation of imagery, often as a cultural statement or commentary, as has become accepted in fine arts practices.<sup>60</sup>

The crafts degree programmes often attract students from two- or three- year certificate or diploma programmes at community colleges across the country. These diploma and certificate programmes are not charged with the particular academic mandate that is built into degree programmes. As a result, they do not currently qualify students for entrance to graduate programmes and the terminal Master of Fine Arts degree that qualifies its graduates for post-secondary teaching positions. They also do not necessarily carry the same expectation of disciplinary research by faculty that is expected at degree-granting institutions—an activity that is increasingly highlighted in their self-promotion. Thus, the degree-granting institutions are where we might expect the development of craft scholarship and understanding to occur in the most intense, rigorous, and systematic manner. These four institutions could form the nucleus of Canadian crafts scholarship.

More importantly, these institutions are not only places where novices move towards competent practice and insight into the cultural understanding of crafts activity, under the guidance of committed, experienced, fluent specialist practitioners, but also places where

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<sup>60</sup> The emphasis on imagery was made clear to me by an instructor of media arts at NSCADU whom I interviewed in 2001 in the course of previous graduate research (Landry, 2002). This instructor stated that when students showed greater abilities and interest in the technicalities of film craft than in the imagery, they were often advised to investigate alternate training situations that emphasised the technical side of film.



those instructors develop their teaching qualifications.<sup>61</sup> As instructors, graduates disseminate academic understanding alongside their practical experience, in whatever teaching situation they encounter, thus informally benefitting students in non-degree programmes. In addition, as concentrated sites of crafts activity, these four institutions offer the most numerous subjects and situations in which a variety of research questions may be investigated.<sup>62</sup>

### **Method Of Study**

The following study was conducted by examining the official websites of the four institutions between 2005 and 2010. Detailed course and general programme information was collected between 2006 and 2008, and updated between 2009 and 2010, using general course search and description pages, and degree programme guides. These are the same sources of information that students use when registering or assessing programme or course options, and that other institutions use to evaluate equivalency when assessing credits for transfer or admission. Official institutional histories and timelines posted on the schools' websites were also examined. From this information, I compiled a master table of undergraduate courses at each institution, matching comparable courses and categories while retaining the titles and designations given by each institution. Appendix 3 summarises this information. Shorter, summative tables were developed from the original table, by picking out and re-ordering courses related to particular points being made in the discussion, and by counting the numbers of developed

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<sup>61</sup> This is most obviously true where there are MFA programmes, since the MFA is the terminal university teaching degree for studio instruction. However, BFA graduates also go on to teach where the MFA is not a requirement, such as in recreational programmes, technical schools, and community colleges.

<sup>62</sup> This is less true of ECUAD, where ceramics is the only craft medium offered.

courses to determine roughly the proportional representation of different types of courses. Semester or yearly course schedules or timetables were also examined.

Additional listings of universities and other institutions offering art and craft degree programmes or courses were obtained from the on-line searchable databases at two Canadian websites: that of Canada's Higher Education and Career Guide, in 2006 and rechecked in 2008 and 2010; and the Online Directory of Canadian Universities Database of the Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada, checked in 2010. From those listings, I examined the official websites of each university to ascertain their degree programmes and course offerings. This information was compiled in a master table of visual arts degree programmes across Canada, as of 2010 (Appendix 4). From this table, a summary table enumerating proportional representation of crafts courses for degree-level art education was derived (Appendix 6). In addition, the courses listed on the official website of the Bard Graduate Centre: Decorative Arts, Design History, and Material Culture (New York City, NY) was consulted in 2006 and 2010 to compare its range with Canadian craft and design history and theory courses.

### **General Profile Of Visual Arts Education**

The four independent art institutions are now all institutions of *Art and Design*, specifically of the visual, plastic and media arts—as is reflected now in each of their names. Despite the use of the usually more inclusive term 'art', none of these institutions include programmes in the performing arts of Music, Drama or Theatre, or literary arts. Performance art, sound art, and writing may be accommodated, usually under the category of interdisciplinary, intermedia, or multimedia, insofar as they are recognised by

the contemporary fine arts world. All four institutions provide Bachelor-level degrees in Fine Arts (BFA), which can be further distinguished by selected major concentrations in particular media categories, and describe their range (or most of it) collectively as visual arts or visual culture education. These BFA programmes account for the majority of courses offered at three of these institutions (ACAD, OCAD, and NSCADU), as well as the majority of accompanying ‘academic’ liberal arts courses. At ECUAD, the several design programmes account for more of the courses. All four institutions offer Bachelor-level degrees in Design (BDes), in which visual communication fields tend to predominate over product or environmental design. The Bachelor of Design (BDes) programmes also variously provide for other specialisations, some of which are more or less related to graphic design or visual communication (eg. animation, illustration, advertising). BDes programmes may also include specialisation in industrial, product, or environmental design. Industrial or product design programmes typically focus on design of useful and decorative objects. In addition, full BA programmes in Art History (NSCADU)<sup>63</sup> and Critical and Curatorial Practice (OCAD), as well as a Master of Arts (MA) in Contemporary Art History (OCAD) have recently been added.

Education in the crafts media typically falls within the general structure of the BFA degree, as indicated in Table 1. The exception to this is OCAD, where ceramics, fibres, and jewellery (which includes fine metalsmithing) have been recently re-organised into two possible streams. One stream falls under the rubric of the BDes degree major in Material Arts and Design, presumably in recognition of the commonalities of these media with object design interests and the functional and commercial orientations of their

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<sup>63</sup> Until recently, NSCAD offered only a minor in Art History as an additional BFA qualification.

professional practice. The other stream permits concentrating on ceramics, fibres, or jewellery within a BFA degree programme. OCAD's provision of the second option implies two things. First, it implies that there is a different, primarily artistic or conceptual orientation geared to the production of singular, expressive, possibly anti-functional 'art works'. Second, it implies that there is a difference in the implicit name/designation given to the maker of each type of work, and possibly in their self-description as well—as a craftsperson or as an artist. It suggests differing priorities, intentions, aspirations, values, criteria of assessment, and social alignments for each stream or orientation.

The three primary media concentrations offered are ceramics, fibres/textiles, and jewellery/metalsmithing, all found at ACAD, OCAD & NSCADU (Table 1). In contrast, ECUAD offers only ceramics courses, and without identifying it as a major area of concentration. Glass is an available major at ACAD, and 'fashion', in the sense of wearable art / garments, is a minor concentration within the textiles department at NSCADU. As previously mentioned, woodworking, furniture, or large-scale metalsmithing (blacksmithing) is not found as a concentration at any of these four institutions, although wood and metal fabrication studios (with suitable introductory courses) and industrial or product design courses (ECUAD, OCAD, and NSCADU) may support crafts-type practice in such media.

The discrepancies between each of these four institutions have arisen in part because of their diverse histories of development under different provincial educational systems, as already discussed. Because NSCADU was the only degree-granting institution of these four (in their previous incarnations) between 1969 and 1995 (Appendix 2), it was a

model for degree education, an important source of instructors for the other three institutions, and the final stop of many of their students who were seeking to complete a BFA or MFA degree. NSCADU still maintains a distinct craft division with three media departments – ceramics, textiles, and jewellery – alongside the fine and media arts. The absence of art or design history courses at nearby universities enabled NSCADU to develop its present extensive array of historical and theoretical courses, along with a faculty active in scholarship.

With the long-overdue accreditation as a degree-granting university finally a reality, OCAD is now capitalising on its practical, technical, and aesthetic strengths in its studio courses for craft, aided by the rich resources of Toronto's nearby museums, galleries, and local crafts organizations, as well as supportive patrons. It now has an extensive roster of academic offerings in visual and material culture (including art, craft, and design history), humanities, social sciences, and science/mathematics/technology, and a large local community of scholars from which to draw instructors for those courses.

The longer history and experience of OCAD and NSCADU gave them an edge over ACAD and ECUAD in developing their crafts education. But ACAD has caught up, to the extent of offering similar ranges of crafts in its curriculum, and a range of supportive academic courses that include material culture studies and crafts histories. They recently added a fulltime crafts historian to their faculty. ECUAD's ceramics course offerings support a craft orientation, judging by the kind of functional work and technique-oriented courses that can be pursued there. However, its overt exclusion of the other main craft

media and its continuing paucity of craft-oriented liberal studies courses renders it a marginal or special case of crafts education<sup>64</sup> as compared with the other three schools.

### **Current Visual Arts Curricula for Crafts Education**

Degree-level craft education is still usually treated as a kind of art or design education, alongside painting, sculpture, photography, printmaking, filmmaking and other fine or media arts. The very term ‘decorative arts’ highlights the artistic, aesthetic dimensions, as does the significant requirement for art history in degree requirements—typically 25-30% of the total credits required to graduate. Most of the available courses have been traditional art history or decorative arts history courses, focused on visual style, imagery or representation for which there is well-developed canonical literature. Less frequently but increasingly, craft has been treated as a kind of design known as ‘applied art’: art applied to particular, instrumental, visual communications goals. This places crafts alongside advertising, product (object) design, illustration, and graphic design. Interior decoration and fashion are also regarded in this light as well. Until recently, craft programme requirements have been organized almost identically to the fine and media arts BFA programmes, usually with obligatory common foundations in general artistic or visual studio practices (colour, drawing, material manipulation, image-making, 3D object-making, articulating aesthetic concepts, etc.) and common introductions to visual culture and modern art history. With the exception of the BDes stream at OCAD, the basic configuration of a BFA predominates, even when a survey of

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<sup>64</sup> This is not a comment on the quality of the education received by ECUAD ceramics students, but on its possible position as a school interested in crafts education and its development broadly.

craft and decorative arts, or 20<sup>th</sup> century crafts replaces or is added to the usual requisite 20<sup>th</sup> century art history survey.

The first or foundation year is generally regarded as a means of both introducing the most common and essential skills and concepts, and of assisting students to assess their particular interests and abilities in order to decide what paths to follow, and what courses to choose in pursuit of their goals. The foundational year is used to introduce elements of aesthetic form, imaginative creation, material manipulation, conceptual development, and planning, interpretation, and articulation skills. Every medium requires such skills and general understanding from its practitioners, whatever their orientation. Learning about a variety of artistic practices shows students the broad range of creative options from which they can fruitfully draw ideas, methods or inspiration. In principle, this broad basis of understanding also allows students to see how their interests fit and operate within a larger conception of social values and symbolic practices. They begin to see artistic making practices as not only the production of objects, but also as a vital field of symbolic and social interaction and identification, in which they might participate in a range of roles, encompassing not only making, but also deeper study, innovation of methods, and interpretation and dissemination of ideas, practices, and values.

Typically, in the second year, students are introduced to specific studio media of their choice, and required to take a general survey of art history. The selection of one or two media-focused studios allows students to test their interests and become immersed in the challenges and experiences that are particular to specific media. Without necessarily declaring a media focus immediately, students investigate areas of interest or skills they want to develop generally, such as image-making (through drawing, painting, print-

making, photography), or 3D object-making (through sculpture, ceramics, wood or metal shops, casting, etc). For example, painting teaches about colour and 2D form; sculpture teaches about constructing 3D forms. Each of the fine arts media can be introduced as a possible career orientation, but also as a set of skills useful in ceramics, jewellery, fibres, glass, or other craft media. Furthermore, these studios hone various important sensitivities, such as to scale, balance, unity, colour, shape, proportion, visual weight, visual texture, etc. Students also refine their interpretive skills, assessment criteria, and articulation skills as they engage in studio critiques and writing.

At NSCADU or ACAD, declaration of a major need not occur immediately.

Students are expected to try some introductory courses before committing themselves to majoring in a medium. However, at OCAD, crafts students now declare their orientation in the admission process, in which they identify the BFA or BDes that they seek to enter. While this may alter aspects of how 3D object making is contextualised and how students understand crafts culturally or socially, it does not alter the progress of orientation from more general concepts to increasingly specific ideas, histories, and practices pertinent to specific media.

Third and fourth years are the period of increased specialisation in their primary choice of media, with expectations of both increasing levels and breadths of skill and greater independence in creativity and range of ideas. Many topical or thematic courses or workshops may be designated as third year options. Such courses may be offered only occasionally, and sometimes as one-time courses offered by Masters-degree students as part of their own programme. By the third year, students are expected to be increasingly self-directed and independent in all respects: to work towards technical self-reliance and



proficiency, to formulate, sustain, investigate, and defend their own ideas as fully as possible, and to develop useful professional habits and skills in articulating and presenting their work. Simultaneously, students are also expected to augment studio knowledge with additional academic (liberal studies)<sup>65</sup> knowledge, part of which must be drawn specifically from the pertinent historical, critical, or social studies curriculum, as well as personal research.

### **Structuring of studios by medium.**

Canadian art schools have historically segregated decorative or artistic craft object-making from fine art image-making, especially along media lines; these same media separations exist today (Appendix 3). This structure is efficient in terms of teaching particular making skills and organizing equipment and other resources. It also highlights the specificity of each medium's 'craft' or technical bases in terms of equipment, materials, and studio requirements. Types of art media are organized into distinct divisions or departments defined by faculty specialties, space and equipment facilities, and courses provided, within broader degree categories and sometimes subcategories. Studio course categories are identified administratively by a particular medium or type of workshop (i.e. technically, such as in jewellery studios), although individual students may work between two or more media, or combine them. Art schools retain this media-based structure at the core of their practical instruction, even when revamping its instructional organization; it is not clear how else the basic practice of specific media could be taught or mastered.

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<sup>65</sup> Non-studio, academic-type liberal studies or liberal arts courses are typically designated LS or LAS courses and credits in an institution's programme requirements.

In addition, some of the art schools maintain an objects-versus-imagery division in their departmental or studio subdivisions (see Appendix 3), despite the fact that crafts media students often produce works that align with the goals of sculpture or painting. For example, ceramics, textiles, and jewellery are clustered in the Crafts Division at NSCADU, and in the Material Arts & Design programme of OCAD. On the other hand, ACAD evidently makes no such distinction among media.

### **Ornamental, mechanical, and expressive drawing.**

Since at least the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, distinctions have been made between ornamental drawing, mechanical drawing, and what might be called ‘beaux-arts’ or ‘freely expressive’ drawing. This is apparent in the early courses offered at the Victoria School of Art in Halifax (Soucy & Pearse, 1993), and the Ontario equivalent (Ontario College of Art, 1977). Ornamental and mechanical drawing were based on geometric principles, with clear design purposes in mind—especially geared toward the expectations of working professionally as a designer of manufactured goods or buildings ornamentation. By contrast, *beaux-arts* drawing was based on the freehand life drawing courses deemed key to the painter or sculptor of images, realistic or expressive, in the European atelier and academy tradition (including that of the English Royal Academy). Realistic drawing of plants, for example, was important for ornamentalists such as the late nineteenth century English designer Christopher Dresser, but it was often a preparatory element leading to the stylisation of a motif for ornamentation, such as textile prints or wood-carving. Designers often use drawing as a thinking tool for working out the overall form

of three-dimensional objects. Illustration drawing was also important to render architectural visions concretely in presentation to clients, both for informational purposes and to make them appealing. However, all of these designers' uses of *beaux-arts* type drawing were for practical or commercial purposes; they were integral parts of the working and making process of craftspeople or designers rather than ends in themselves. They were not produced to be fine art works 'for their own sake' but as intermediate stages in the design process. Thus they were mainly considered as a means towards a proposed end or a 'beautification' without a particular or culturally important significance, despite having communicative or social purposes that impelled the use of imagery or decorative motif at all.

#### **Academic and open elective credits.**

Typically, the open academic electives chosen by students are some form of arts-related humanities course. Until recently, art history courses have been the most common in-house selection, due in part to the dearth of options. To their credit, many intermediate and advanced art histories incorporate significant amounts of sociological and political content in an effort to better address issues of context, which are vital to understanding the changes in art over time. As a result, students may have the opportunity to take courses relating to feminism, post-colonialism, Marxism, popular culture, or fashion as reflected in art or design, depending on the school.

Students usually have the option of taking courses for elective academic credit at other local universities, or through exchange programmes, or of applying comparable credits transferred from previously attended institutions. This option allows students

access to courses, ideas, and experiences beyond the limits of their school. Students can expand or deepen their understanding of other parts of life, engage with subjects or perspectives that could form the subject matter of their artwork, or relate their art to a wider world context. Broader academic experience can also help them to develop their skills of research, articulation, argumentation, and discover a means of furthering the scholarship of their field, beyond producing art objects. In principle, this option permits students to bring deeper dimensions of thought and solid scholarship to bear on their field, with few limits.

Despite external options, it is convenient for most students to choose their academic, liberal studies (LS or LAS) electives from the liberal arts or humanities courses provided within the institution: additional art or craft histories, critical studies, thematic social studies (such as art and feminism), art theory, or writing / literature, etc.<sup>66</sup> In recognition of the value of a wider range of academic perspectives, Canadian art schools have expanded their academic offerings beyond the traditional art histories available in the past in order to accommodate just such demands for broader, up-to-date, socially aware and pertinent theoretical and critical ideas about artistic practice. In the past decade alone, ECUAD, ACAD, and OCAD have added humanities or thematic cross-disciplinary courses, in order to provide a more interdisciplinary, inclusive, stimulating and socially valuable education. Internal provision of such courses allows institutions to tailor their contents to suit their programme goals and to designate some courses as required for a major or minor, or as art history or other qualifying credits (rather than free electives).

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<sup>66</sup> This observation was unofficially confirmed in a personal communication by a long-time staff member in the registrar's office at NSCADU who regularly deals with both internal and transferred credits.

The range of Liberal Studies courses offered by OCAD for 2009-2010 is particularly impressive (see Appendix 3). According to their 2009-2010 schedule, OCAD actively ran 48 of 76 listed Visual Culture courses, 9 of 14 listed English courses, 14 of 21 listed Humanities courses, 8 of 9 listed Science, Technology and Math courses, and 8 of 11 listed Social Sciences courses. These courses cover an extraordinary range of subjects in addition to the usual art history and theory fare: anthropology, sociology, physics, psychology, religious studies, ethics, urban life and issues, children's literature, fashion, sustainability, gender politics, social entrepreneurship, and the senses, to name just a few topics. More modestly, ACAD offers liberal studies courses in material culture, interdisciplinarity, cultures of display, cultural anthropology, craft theory, and visual culture analysis. NSCADU offers many art histories and a few topical or thematic courses related to humanities or visual culture (such as philosophy of art, aesthetics, psychological, sociological, and design issues) that are run under the category of critical studies. It does not have specific categories for humanities or social sciences courses, and few courses in general humanities (apart from English), social sciences, or science, that are not related directly to art.

### **History/theory and liberal studies courses.**

Table 2 summarises the history/theory courses, including those designated Liberal Studies Studio Seminars, in the categories of art, design, crafts, media, and visual culture, between 2006 and 2010. These figures show the relatively low proportion of courses devoted to crafts histories or theory developed and listed at each institution. Most of the courses included in the figures in Table 2 are offered by instructors with educational

backgrounds primarily in art history, in part due to the dominance of art history as the premier academic discipline for art, especially in Canada. Contemporary art history has embraced sociological and political dimensions to contextualise and theorise art; whether or not these are fully appropriate to the needs of crafts study or practice is not always clear.

Type of Course	ECUAD	ACAD	OCAD	NSCADU
Total History/Theory Courses	37	23	94	78
ART HISTORY/THEORY	15	10	35	40
% of Total History/Theory Courses	40.5%	43.4%	37.2%	51.3%
DESIGN HIST/THEORY	8	2	16	3
% of Total History/Theory Courses	21.6%	8.6%	17.0%	3.8%
<b>CRAFT HIST/TOPICS</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>15</b>
% of Total History/Theory Courses	<b>2.7%</b>	<b>2.6%</b>	<b>7.4%</b>	<b>19%</b>
MEDIA HISTORY	11	1	15	15
% of Total History/Theory Courses	29.7%	4.3%	16.0%	19.2%
VISUAL CULTURE	2	1	14	1
% of Total History/Theory Courses	5.4%	4.3%	14.9%	1.3%
CRITICAL/CURATORIAL	0	3	7	4
% of Total History/Theory Courses		13.0%	7.4%	5.1%

Although there is a respectable 19% proportion of craft history or crafts topics courses listed during the period 2006-2010 at NSCADU, several of the topical courses were only ever offered once. Others are regularly rotated or offered only occasionally. Only two courses approach the category of craft theory: *Senior Seminar in Art History: Craft Discourse*, and *The Philosophy of the Arts and Crafts Movement* (which is historically oriented). Since the idea of craft theory, or alternately, theory of or for the crafts, is as yet in its infancy, it is unclear just what its core contents should contain. There is room for a broadly based theoretical examination that draws from a variety of concepts and approaches, beyond the obvious Arts and Crafts Movement and its echoes

through the twentieth century. The issue of what craft theory could comprise will be discussed in subsequent chapters. At present there is no well-developed, regularly offered theoretical course for crafts comparable to such courses as *Introduction to Design Theory* (ACAD) or *Design Methodologies: Theories and Concepts* (OCAD).

Thematic and topical courses are one way that crafts historians have been incorporating elements of sociology and critical discourses into crafts study, and examining in greater detail the social roles and meanings of crafts and decorative art. Some examples of this are *Ornamenting Space – Decorative Arts in Public and Private Spheres*, *Architecture & Craft*, *Craft Discourse*, and *Narrative and Craft*, all at NSCADU, and at OCAD, *Cross-cultural Issues in Craft* and *Interior Architecture and the Decorative Arts*. This range of potential offerings could be expanded much more in principle. For example, the range of courses offered at the Bard Graduate Center: Decorative Arts, Design History, Material Culture<sup>67</sup> spans every continent, many prominent cultural contexts, and all important periods, including general surveys, focused regional histories, and detailed topical examinations of particular object types, stylistic movements, or social themes (Bard Graduate Center: Degree Programs Course Listings, 2006-2007, 2007-2008, Spring and Fall 2010). Similar introductory or topical courses could be added to BFA programme options regularly to enrich the current art history offerings, as suits the crafts and design programmes of a particular institution.

However, any expansion depends on resolving several issues: regular and more frequent access to courses, an agreed core curriculum of academic courses for crafts students, and the limited pool of qualified regular instructors and full-time faculty. At

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<sup>67</sup> “Bard Graduate Center: Decorative Arts, Design History, Material Culture” is the official name of this graduate school, as used on its official website, [www.bgc.bard.edu/about/bgc-overview.html](http://www.bgc.bard.edu/about/bgc-overview.html).

NSCADU and at ACAD, there is only one full-time faculty craft specialist position, while there is none at OCAD. OCAD has a faculty member with an anthropological background, who has covered crafts consumption and material culture, as well as several faculty members with design history expertise, and other faculty members specialising in non-Eurocentric cultures. ACAD also has an anthropologist on faculty who teaches courses in material culture and consumption. Furthermore, there appears to be little support for interested regular part-time faculty to contribute regularly to the scholarship or expansion of the available course options.

Where the number of crafts histories/issues courses is lower, the courses appear to be offered regularly and are sometimes required for completing a declared major. Further research in greater depth will be needed to analyse more finely the actual picture of course offerings and the number of crafts students who take such courses. For the moment, it is enough to recognise that among the offerings most recently on the books, there is a significant imbalance of academic crafts history/issues offerings by comparison with the totals of fine and media arts history/theory, visual culture, and critical courses at three of the four schools.<sup>68</sup> The discrepancy at ECUAD is most pronounced, with 1 in 37 such courses (3%) being crafts oriented. ACAD presents a balanced but under-developed picture, with 6 in 23 (26%) being crafts oriented. The proportion at OCAD is 7 in 94 or nearly 7.5% crafts oriented. The NSCADU ratio is 15 in 78 (19%) crafts oriented in terms of variety, which is relatively high. However, only a few of the number of both art and crafts oriented courses represented on the official listings are actually offered during

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<sup>68</sup> I am excluding the design history/theory courses from this comparison for the moment, to highlight the comparison of crafts-specific courses, since some of the design courses may be oriented to graphic design, mainstream fashion, product or industrial design rather than crafts activities. As the above figures highlight, design actually suffers worse than craft in some institutions (ACAD and NSCAD).



any given year. This last qualification is true for OCAD as well, but determining a more exact picture of the differences from these figures will require further study. Additional research would be needed to determine how these proportions compare with the total numbers of students doing crafts majors and how they compare with similar patterns among visual arts and design students.

Many of the above courses are framed thematically or topically, to be relevant across the spectrum of craft media at each school. This is efficient and valuable for bringing students out of media-specific isolation and creating broader discourse. Students may thus discover commonalities and different perspectives, and learn how general ideas affect or are received in other disciplines. However, the existence of good general courses should not be used to evade the responsibility of addressing media-specific interests, which in my experience has occurred in the past (usually but not always due to financial constraints). Although media-specific content may be provided in studio or studio/seminar courses as an integral aspect of practising the medium or discussing works, the inclusion of this kind of content depends upon the knowledge and intentions of individual instructors for individual courses. As a result, its quality and depth cannot be determined usefully and varies widely with each instructor. So, while media-specific academic content is immensely valuable when it occurs in studio classes, it cannot be regarded as systematically provided or adequately scholarly content in the same way that fully academic topical courses are regarded for this study. Furthermore, this content places an additional workload on studio instructors' limited timeframes. It is not usually the basis on which artist-instructors are hired.

The figures in Table 3 summarise the other kinds of liberal studies offerings from which crafts students might draw. Of these, only ACAD and OCAD offer material culture courses (one at each school) or model it as a scholarly approach – material culture and cultural anthropology (ACAD only) are included in the social sciences category. It should be noted that at ACAD, introduction to design theory and a visual culture course, included above, are classed as social sciences by ACAD; to avoid confusion, they are not included in the totals below.

Table 3. Summary of Other Liberal Studies Courses.				
	ECUAD	ACAD	OCAD	NSCADU
PROFESSIONAL PRACTICES	1	1	7	2
ENGLISH/WRITING	7	14	17	3
HUMANITIES/CULTURAL STUDIES	4	2	19	12
SCIENCE/TECHNOLOGY/MATH	6	0	7	2
SOCIAL SCIENCES	6	3	12	5
<b>INDUSTRIAL/PRODUCT DESIGN</b>			<b>2</b>	<b>5</b>

OCAD now provides the most extensive range of these additional liberal studies courses. OCAD and NSCADU designate several courses as liberal studies among their product design studios. These courses are practically and socially oriented to design practice and current discourse and issues, rather than historical or critical cultural studies (see Appendix 3). Unlike crafts studios, it is not expected that some of these topics should be dealt with in studio time. Included in the NSCADU figures is an issues course; I did not include it in the figures in Table 2 or 3, as it may deal with practical, social, or business issues outside the current mandate of NSCADU’s historical and critical studies. The management course, and the entrepreneurship course, could also be shifted to the category of professional practices.

The figures for the categories of social sciences and humanities/cultural studies should be combined, because each school classifies similar courses differently. NSCADU classes several courses with sociological, philosophical, and psychological content as cultural studies, along with courses in education and semiotics. The other schools have created a separate social sciences category for similar courses. For example, ECUAD classifies two courses in cultural or contemporary theory as social science courses. The large number of courses is again misleading, since several of the courses are topical variations of sociology, philosophy, or psychology, developed by different instructors, of which only one version is usually offered at a time, and sometimes not regularly. Therefore not all students have access to topics in which they might have a particular interest. ACAD and OCAD offer a material culture course, and ACAD also offers a course in cultural anthropology. NSCADU offers nothing in the realm of anthropology or material culture. Only NSCADU has courses relating to education.<sup>69</sup> Only ECUAD and OCAD offer liberal studies courses in science, math, or technology, although science or technology sometimes figures as a topical focus for a humanities course. A few courses at OCAD are classed as studio seminars. It is not clear how these are counted in assessing fulfilment of degree requirements.

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<sup>69</sup> The education course is a relic of the past when for about 20 years NSCAD offered undergraduate and graduate degrees in art education, which disappeared in the early 2000s due to provincial restructuring of post-secondary education throughout the province. NSCAD continued to deliver the courses, using the few faculty remaining from the past, under letters of agreement with the local university conferring the BEd. degree.

**Studio courses.**

The dominance of the visual arts is clear in the comparison of crafts studio courses to visual arts and design courses. Table 4 summarises the total numbers and proportions of current studio courses described and listed for the four schools:

Table 4. Summary of Studio Courses.				
	ECUAD	ACAD	OCAD	NSCADU
TOTAL STUDIO COURSES	262	362	341	322
<b>CRAFTS</b>	28	86	33	80
% of Total Studio Courses	<b>10.7%</b>	<b>23.8%</b>	<b>9.7%</b>	<b>24.8%</b>
FINE & MEDIA ARTS	172	247	190	186
% of Total Studio Courses	66%	68.2%	55.7%	57.8%
DESIGN	61	29	118	56
% of Total Studio Courses	23.3%	7.7%	33.6%	17.2%

Table 4 shows that only ACAD and NSCADU have a significant proportion of crafts courses, each just below ¼ of the total of studio courses. As ECUAD offers only one craft medium, its 10% portion of ceramics courses represents a strong position comparable to some of the other specific art media or design specialties. The low proportion (under 10%) of craft courses at OCAD may be of concern, and arguably merits further study. Despite its dual-streams approach to crafts education, the visual arts perspective dominates by a large margin. Whether or not this is a problem for this major Ontario centre of excellence needs to be assessed through a more refined study that also takes account of neighbouring programmes, including those at community colleges and private schools.

## Conclusion

The diversity of classification, variation of courses, and irregular availability makes it difficult to assess more precisely the underlying priorities and future goals of each school, and more generally of professional art or craft education across Canada. It is indeed a confusing smorgasbord of options. The split among students in craft media, between those with primarily fine art interests and those with more designer-maker interests, as well as those balancing the two orientations or those undecided, also complicates the picture. However, several observations can be made from this study.

1. Creative practice and cultural production takes priority over historical/theoretical understanding of the phenomena we call art, craft, and design, and their practices.
2. The number and variety of crafts-specific historical and theoretical or discourse related courses still lag behind similar courses for fine and media arts.
3. There is an inconsistency in balancing general courses about the social world and history of crafts collectively with the media-specific histories and perspectives.
4. The development of liberal arts courses to support the crafts specifically has occurred primarily in the historical category, within the current art history perspective and its traditions of scholarship.
5. The liberal arts courses of art colleges are mainly oriented toward the traditional concerns of art in imagery or representation, and *visual* culture, or more broadly, the abstracted concerns of cultural studies, critical theory, and art criticism.
6. No focused programmes exist to foster crafts scholars or develop the field of crafts scholarship in the schools where crafts education occurs at the highest academic levels available in Canada.

7. The general lack of crafts scholars and dedicated programmes to foster them poses significant challenges to the expansion of academic crafts courses and the growth of crafts scholarship with a Canadian perspective.

The above figures and discussion show that the visual arts paradigm still pervades the academy. Perhaps, when further research including all modes of education is done, the crafts training in community colleges and other specialist schools will dominate the scene of professional fine crafts education, at least in the sense of making a living fulltime from making objects. However, since those courses are mainly geared toward working in the craft, as with other trades, there remain these questions: Who will expand the scholarship? Where will crafts scholars come from? How should they be educated? If we agree that degree-level education is intended to lead not just to practice but to deep understanding of the phenomenon of crafts activity, then our degree programmes have to look at how they will balance the objective of competent practice with the objective of historical/theoretical understanding of the field.

## Chapter Six

### CRAFTS EDUCATION VS VISUAL ARTS EDUCATION

This chapter elaborates on the assessment of the craft education curricula and courses as documented in Chapter Five. Dissatisfactions expressed by faculty and students suggest that current craft education has a number of shortcomings that need improvement. The following discussion will examine several issues with current Canadian degree programmes in crafts as organised under the visual arts paradigm dominating art education, and consider how and why it should be improved to better address the needs of the crafts field. The discussion will be informed by additional evidence gathered from participant observation and personal communications. In particular, this chapter will explore:

- a) stereotypes and status issues for crafts under the visual arts paradigm along with the consequent crafts-as-art ideal and its flaws;
- b) deficits and issues in crafts education curricula resulting from the crafts-as-art idea, including: tensions between crafts history and art history, the question of where crafts scholars might be found, the relationship between content, form, and process, the consequences of under-determinacy in crafts, and the issue of disciplinary self-identification and the practice-scholarship divide;
- c) the conditions for improving crafts education and scholarship.

## Stereotypes and Status

As feminist art historians have amply shown,<sup>70</sup> work in fibres/textiles have suffered a long history of low status in the art world, and even within crafts. This is due in no small part to the large amount of amateur and domestic textile work produced by women. In the patriarchal societies of North America and Europe, this low status for textiles became entrenched, despite the significant presence of men in industrial production of textiles, as craftsmen and designers as well as entrepreneurs or owners. This example of the inferior status accorded to crafts illustrates the kinds of misunderstandings, stereotypes, and adverse social consequences generated by the effects of that patriarchy embedded in the visual arts paradigm, especially on its central art educational systems wherein attitudes and practices are formed and disseminated.

Until the 1970s, the predominant medium of fine art was painting, followed by sculpture. Yet in the mid-twentieth century, numerous important artists turned their hand to design and actual making specifically in or for craft media. Pablo Picasso pursued a long interest in decorated functional ceramics; Henry Moore produced designs for printed textiles, as well as tapestries and textile panels (Feldman, 2008). The idea of important artists working as designers for printed and woven patterned textiles is well-documented in the textile world, but tended to be overlooked in most art history courses that covered the bodies of work of these artists. For example, older works on painter Raoul Dufy (Cogniat, 1962), usually omit reference to his prolific textile design career. Older works on Anni Albers (Weber, 1985) focus on her singular woven wall hangings and prints on

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<sup>70</sup> See, for example, Roszika Parker, *The Subversive Stitch* (1984), and Patricia Mainardi, "Quilts: The Great American Art" (1982). These works on textiles, stereotyped as women's work, were part of the broader movement toward feminist oriented scholarship on art by women, exemplified in such anthologies as Norma Broude and Mary Garrard (eds.), *Feminism and Art History: Questioning the Litany* (1982) and its sequel, *The Expanding Discourse* (1992).



paper without reference to her large textile design output for industry.<sup>71</sup> While omissions might be understandable in historical surveys, it is less excusable in the more in-depth examinations of the work of these artists. Some design work was a short-lived undertaking by some artists. But for a number of artists, such as Matisse and Picasso, experimentation with crafts or design was as significant as their other artwork. Picasso's involvement and ceramics output was large, varied and long lasting, and it worked within the traditions of ceramics rather than seeking to displace them. Omission of such commercial and crafts interests on the part of visual artists can be viewed as the consequence of the prejudices engendered by the hierarchical visual arts paradigm on art historiography.

Visual arts priorities infiltrated the crafts even more when avant-garde artists began to eschew the traditions of making in particular media, both in terms of functional, decorative works, and in terms of the figural traditions of ceramic or tapestries. For example, the sculptural potential of ceramics was extended into the avant-garde with the work of abstract expressionists, notably Peter Voulkos, whose works can be seen at <http://www.voulkos.com/core.html>. Voulkos emphasised experimentation with form and material, exploring the expressiveness of clay and spontaneous gesture executed with nearly complete rejection of, if not disdain for, crafting values and traditions. Although he did not abandon functionality, some of his works compromised usefulness and other performance criteria. Also through the twentieth century, the crafts of printmaking and photography came to be accepted mainly as art in terms of their aesthetic, image

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<sup>71</sup> A recently published work on iconic artist Henry Moore's textile designs (Feldman, 2008) was hailed as a "revelation" (Sanders, 2008) of a little-known facet of both Moore's artwork and his social aims. This is astonishing when we consider how much study there has been of Moore's work and life. Roger Berthoud (2003) devotes only 2 of 542 pages of text and 1 illustration to his textiles work, and Christa Lichtenstern (2008) does not mention it, and no examples appear in the hundreds of images in her book.

possibilities. Education, discourse, and critique for these technically complex art forms de-emphasised the technical aspects, as primarily matters of production, except within each medium's internal discourses. Matters of craft became specialist shop talk, without general interest or import.

The patriarchy permeating the contemporary art world throughout the twentieth century also encouraged art that was large in scale and masculine. Modernist artists were ideally characterised as 'male': intellectually virile, challenging, even aggressive creators ruthlessly abandoning tradition as they critiqued the past and forged new visions for the future. Important art was public, monumental, and had 'universal' significance. Along with greater political activism in the social realm, the art world developed an activist agenda, as a forum of expression of individual opinion and often anti-establishment ideologies. These changes accompanied expansions in the repertoire of art practices. When I attended NSCAD in 1973-74, conceptual and performance art were gaining strength, further reducing the importance of the 'hand' of the artist and by extension, of technical concerns in general. So long as an idea was conveyed and provoked audience response, the crafting skills, materials, and process details came to be regarded as old-fashioned and of little conceptual importance in contemporary art discourses, unless they were obviously 'innovative' according to prevailing art world criteria.

In the 1980s, writing for and about the crafts world began to accelerate as more historians and academics took an interest in the persistence of crafts into the post-modern period, and crafts' responses to the conditions of 'modernity' and everyday contemporary life. Writers and academics in England such as Christopher Frayling (1988) and Peter Dormer (1997) made noteworthy contributions to such writing, as did others publishing

essays in, for example, the special craft issues of the *Journal of Design History*. This interest in crafts coincided with the growth of academic interest in popular culture and its forms, against a background of post-colonial and feminist political discourses. These trends called into question the processes of stereotyping and the hierarchical power structures they reinforce, including the hierarchies structuring the mainstream visual art world. This prompted not only feminist re-examinations of art history and art practices as noted above, but also the sympathetic re-assessment of craft's position in the hierarchy and the means of countering the persistent stigma of the 'craft' category in the art world.

### **The Crafts-as-Art Ideal**

In the twentieth century, art was characterised as something more than the sum of its material, technical parts—something transcendent that emerged from the form but could not be reduced to that form, or to the craft skills that brought it into being. In Collingwood's terms (1958), for example, art was 'language'. In Langer's terms (1953, 1970), art was 'expressiveness' and the art object was an expressive symbol. The art-is-not-craft argument relied on a stereotypical reduction of crafts activity and products to what might be called its lowest common denominator: *rote mechanical reproduction* of traditional forms, processes, and aesthetics. Craft was a means to a predetermined end that Collingwood (1958) referred to as *techné*.<sup>72</sup> According to this stereotypical means–end reduction, crafts objects became defined by a dominant visual art world in direct opposition to art (Rowley, 1999), at best a necessary but subordinate material, technical

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<sup>72</sup> In saying this, Collingwood was not referring to the narrow range of crafts media or their products as the art world seemed to assume, but to the abstract idea of the processes of executing or realising the art work in its perceptible form, which would apply to the craft of the actor or musician as well. Misreading Collingwood's meaning is the effect of slippage between meanings of 'craft'.

support or “supplement” (Adamson, 2007). According to Shiner (2001), only adoption of the craft-as-art ideal could ‘elevate’ the status of crafts making to that of fine art, so as to avoid the stigma and the risk of lowering the status of art generally. Alföldy (2005) describes in detail how this craft as modern art strategy was promoted and adopted across the Canadian craft world from the mid-sixties forward, resulting in the new terms ‘designer craftsman’, ‘designer/maker’, and ‘fine craft’. The continuing dominance of visual arts courses in crafts education, especially academic art histories and visual culture courses as described in the previous chapter, shows this strategy in practice.

Despite the crafts-as-art ideal, crafts remained burdened by the baggage of ‘art wannabe’ or ‘inferior art’. The art potential of craftspeople was limited by their regard for craftsmanship, their relationship to the past (both decorative and technical), and their interest in usefulness—all of which had been shunned by fine artists. Even now, maintaining ties to the technical interests and crafting values remains difficult under the visual art paradigm. At best, it seemed that craft could only aspire to being a modern design form, even when it seemed to challenge the parameters of mass-produced commercial design. Rowley (1999) argues that whenever craft manages to overcome the criticisms and fulfil the stipulated criteria for art that it previously had not met, the (often hidden) criteria by which the art world maintains its superiority shift so as to maintain a distinction and avoid the stigma of ‘craft’.<sup>73</sup> The underlying presumption seems to be that the constraints of material, technical, and traditional knowledge and standards that are fundamental concerns of craftspeople are too limiting to permit their works to attain

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<sup>73</sup> Becker (1989) describes in detail the process by which art shifts from exciting innovation to expectation, to exhausted convention or norm. As a norm whose continual reiteration has rendered it “merely craft” on the basis of its lack of innovation or inspiration, it becomes the foil or commonplace ground against which new art rebels and moves away from in its restless seeking of innovation.

the ideal conceptual ‘freedom’ and creative ‘innovation’ expected of ‘real’ art. Only letting go of these traditions would permit crafts objects to become art, to transcend real world concerns, as had occurred with avant-garde fine art. What now counted most in the fine art world was ‘attitude’ (de Duve, 1994), especially critical attitude. However, this entailed disavowing the intrinsic core of crafts makers’ knowledge, interests, and identity, as well as the sense of social integration provided by making useful, decorative objects that everyday people want and understand.

Like Alfoldy (2005), Shiner (2001) highlights the dominance of the crafts-as-art ideal that developed through the late twentieth century:

“Despite numerous holdouts in both the fine art and craft worlds, the new crafts-as-art approach soon came to dominate the leading craft organizations and journals, as well as craft departments in university art schools. By the 1970s, as the critic John Perrault has remarked, the dividing line between art and craft had become “a dotted line” (Manhart and Manhart, 1987, 190). When I attended a national symposium titled “Criticism in the Craft Arts” in 1992, what struck me most was the audience response. Declarations that “craft is art” were greeted with cheers and applause, but suggestions that the term “craft” had a dignity and honor all its own, or Perrault’s provocative comment, “I made the mistake once of saying that craft was art; no, it is better than art,” were met with silence and a shuffling of feet.” Even the Smithsonian’s Renwick Gallery of American Crafts in Washington, D.C., has fervently embraced the crafts-as-art ideal. A wall panel at a 1997 exhibition declared that “aesthetics [and] not function or design” is the “essential criteria” for its collection, and when the Renwick’s permanent collection was reinstalled in 1999, new panels relentlessly drummed into viewers the message that works in so-called craft media were really “art” and that function was incidental.” (Shiner, 2001, p. 277)

The awkward response provoked by Perrault’s comment indicates the continuing anxiety produced by any hint of demoting fine art’s status by association with the idea of (traditional) craft, let alone any suggestion that works of craft might be better or more

interesting than works of fine art. It also reveals the continuing dominance of visual aesthetics over anything to do with function or technical prowess.

Nevertheless, the crafts-as-art ideal helped to give the crafts world a continuing sense of contemporary pertinence, self-confidence, and continual renewal, as well as ambitions to demonstrate its cultural import in ways similar to those of the art world. Many craftspeople thought that what was needed was a stronger and clearer sense of their own history and persistence, in particular as an activity now practised mainly for cultural or personal, but not commercial, reasons. In Canada, this sentiment was voiced through provincial and national craft organizations that had formed mostly between 1972 and 1974, following some of the models of Crafts Councils in Britain and the USA.<sup>74</sup> This need required historical and sociological scholarship to underpin an ongoing, informed and philosophically grounded contemporary discourse (Koplos, 1992; Greenhalgh, 1997), such as existed for the fine arts and increasingly for the design fields. However, such scholarship was rare and almost never emerged from within the crafts communities, especially in Canada, in large part because their education system did not provide training or role models to promote its appropriate development. In other words, the craft-as-art approach evaded the difficulties of creating a new model for craft scholarship.

### **Flaws in the Crafts-as-Art Ideal**

Post-modernist critique has blurred some of the more arbitrary distinctions made by modernists against crafts' interests, especially that between 'useless' art undertaken 'for

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<sup>74</sup> Meetings and conferences held through the 1970s and 1980s, often sponsored by the Canadian Crafts Council and interested partners, continually bemoaned in particular the lack of historical and cultural scholarship, and envisioned vague "wish lists" for development of such scholarship that went largely unfulfilled prior to the marked expansion of crafts-specific scholarship emerging since the mid-1990s.

its own sake' (to be contemplated) and functional objects intended to serve non-art purposes and functional criteria. This blurring did not eliminate many underlying persistent attitudes within fine arts. Instead, it obscured them, so they remained active but hidden. The pluralist and conceptualist attitudes of the post-modernist art world no longer forced artists to define or articulate clearly the criteria of assessment they used to critique or evaluate art. Relativism, promoted in the interests of openness to new or alternate ideas and media forms in contemporary art, helped artists working in media previously ignored to gain acceptance for at least some of their work as art.

With the apparent dissolution of clear media-defined boundaries between fine arts and crafts, neither audiences nor makers themselves had recourse any longer to an overt, consensually approved set of criteria for assessing or discussing the artistic or cultural import of works of art of any kind. Instead, the post-modernist relativism that replaced modernist certainty and formalist standards produced both an honest confusion and a dubiously tolerant political correctness, with a declared abandonment of notions of 'good and bad' in art. Sometimes this relativism was understood to be purely subjective interpretation by the responsive viewer, since neutral objectivity was regarded as impossible. Sometimes this relativist position argued that if anything could be art, then 'whatever the artist claims is art' was art, especially if it was 'framed' as such in terms appropriate to the prevailing art world discourse. The most radical relativist stance argued that all art was equally valid and valuable, since no objective standards or clear definitions of art could be determined or agreed upon. Indeed such tasks were impossible and therefore fruitless to pursue. Nevertheless, the art world continued its claims to be

producing critical intellectual products, expressive of ideas and associated with social critique and agency, accompanied by professional criticism.

The acceptance of crafts media within the art world did not fully integrate the crafts and the fine arts as was sometimes claimed and supposedly intended, so much as create two divergent orientations within the crafts world(s)—art-crafts and design-crafts (Shiner, 2001; see also Frayling, 1990). The modernist distinctions and assumptions that served to create a status hierarchy in which crafts are generally positioned at the basic level of ‘mere execution’ continued to segregate crafts and art worlds as a way of enhancing the intellectual claims for art as focused on the expression and exploration of ideas rather than material, technique, or form (Rowley, 1999). It was, and remains, especially important for the art world to resist being reduced to the status of ‘mere’ craft. Artists using craft media with careful attention to craftsmanship and materials are clearly focused on making images that are metaphorical, ironical, or provocative—objects for contemplation rather than use. Making decorative objects for everyday use is still perceived as diminishing the intellectual or social goals to which modern fine art aspires.

Finally, the crafts-as-art ideal promoted free, individual expression of the maker over serving the desires or expectations of others<sup>75</sup>. This conflicts in part with the interests of designers and craftspeople to work on behalf of others to interpret and resolve the problems brought to them as problem-solving specialists. Designers and craftspeople do not need to sublimate their individuality completely to accomplish this, and they do not need to critique or dismiss the wishes or purposes of others, or a broader social sense of responsibility. For many designers and craftspeople, the challenges brought to them by

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<sup>75</sup> This was derogatorily referred to as ‘pandering’ by the most strident artists.



others offer opportunities to expand their experience and contribute their interpretations of problems and proposed solutions usefully to their society. Their skill lies in how well their resolutions fit the present and future, and how their reiterations of inherited values and forms accommodate present and future needs. Designers and craftspeople bridge past and future, blending what works and can be retained with improvements and new variations. This provides continuity and evolution suited to the psychology and pace of their society's circumstances, rather than abrupt and painful rebellion that in the end may not always produce lasting or appropriate, beneficial change.

### **Deficits in Current Crafts Curricula**

Undergraduate students are typically novices in art/design/craft. They look to their educational system for guidance and modelling of useful knowledge. Students cannot be expected to know what will be important or valuable to their understanding of craft or to their future practices. Many students have narrow conceptions of artistic practice. The open *smörgåsbord* approach to assembling their own set of options can reinforce their narrow perspectives. Too much freedom to select courses according to a narrow range of preferences can obstruct students from engaging with ideas that they did not realise would be important, or from challenging themselves to move into unfamiliar territory. Provision, and even requirement, of more general humanities courses helps students to fit their artwork and knowledge into larger contexts and to better understand the social meanings that shape and are shaped by art practices. Humanities courses introduce a wealth of ideas from which to draw inspiration and insight to express in their work. They can also introduce criteria by which to assess the quality of ideas and argumentation, an

area that is not explicitly present in many studio or historical courses. In addition, too much self-indulgence can inhibit their acquisition of necessary foundational knowledge that is expected of graduates in order to pursue a successful career in their chosen field.

At the same time, students' general expectations about what should be included in a professional craft programme can be quite sensible. Many crafts students expect media specific history courses to be available, and request courses on international crafts traditions. On their own, many crafts students investigate the making practices found in other societies, as documented by anthropologists and travelling craftspeople. Students involve themselves in learning how to create decorative art motifs and repeating patterns, sometimes taking an interest in the underlying mathematics or geometry. I have seen students create an individual or signature product line without being taught more than the rudiments of how to do so, or without having it required of them. This is indicative of laudable initiative on the part of some students and instructors, but what of other students who need more guidance, demonstration, and practice? Although education should encourage independent learning for the ongoing evolution of practitioners, it should also establish a comprehensive foundation on which to build, including teaching students how to determine what they need to learn, and how to self-assess.

Research studies and interviews with graduate craftspeople often highlight deficits in their art school education, ranging from frustration with lack of functional design and business or career preparation courses (Channon, 1989, p. 229; Bittker, 1989, pp. 221, 225-227) to confusion and belittlement of their concerns with design, technique, craftsmanship, function, or decorative strategies (Castell (1981) in Halper, 2009, p. 98; Fina, (1989-90) in Halper, 2009, pp. 100-101; Diamonstein, 1983; Metcalf, 1993). These

deficits are reasonable inclusions for an education that is oriented to real-world livelihoods as well as artistic self-expression, which is another point that Channon's respondents made (1989, p. 229, point 11). Channon (1989) reported that

“approximately half of the craftspeople who responded [to the survey] felt that some form of education and training not presently available would be a more effective preparation for professional crafts practice” (p. 229, point 12).

Surprisingly, despite highlighting such deficits, Channon's report also noted that

“the most common [training] is a fulltime course in art, craft, or design. Craftspeople continue to regard a degree or diploma in crafts as the most suitable preparation for a career in crafts” (p. 229, point 6).

Taking this last point together with the previous contradictory ones would seem to indicate that a) student expectations of art and design programmes and the recruitment claims of institutions are ill-matched to the professional needs of actual practice; and b) that more adequate options do not currently exist.

Although the reports by Channon (1989) and Bittker (1989) and the comments in Halper (2009), Diamonstein (1983), and Metcalf (1993) are now dated, and represent British and American views, two more recent Canadian studies echo similar concerns with the lack of useful preparation of crafts students in *realistic* entrepreneurship and business skills, as well as the weak quality of design and workmanship, and the inadequate supply of suitably trained artisans to employ. Apprenticeship programmes continue to be perceived as an important training option (Pereboom, 2001; Pereboom, 2003, Appendix D and E; see also Channon, 1989, p. 229, point 10), although very few exist now. High priority was identified for supportive public education. This general concern arose consistently in these two reports ((Pereboom, 2003, Appendix E2, 40-45).

An informed, supportive, and discriminating public is tied to the need to cultivate an appreciative audience, and hence, viable markets. “Lack of writing” was also tied to this need (Pereboom, 2003, Appendix F1). Mention was made of the need for more educational opportunities better suited to the needs of craftspeople for “a more complete artistic education,” and for craft histories (Pereboom, 2003, Appendix E2, 43), but otherwise the responses focused mainly on issues of making a living and growing the industry and markets on the basis of mostly small businesses. The reports also indicated a general decline over the past twenty years in craft education, numbers of craftspeople, and full-time earnings from crafts employment, exemplified by comparing Canadian census statistics from 1990 and 1995 (Pereboom, 2001, 8-12). Saskatchewan and Prince Edward Island were reported to have lost crafts programmes in textiles and jewellery. Craftspeople were discussing similar concerns in the late 1970s and through the 1980s, when I was intimately involved in provincial and national crafts organisations.

Clearly change is slow, and not always favourable. But we must acknowledge that since the studies mentioned above, Canadian art schools have added craft histories, product design and professional practice courses to their curricula (Appendix 3). Non-degree programmes have blossomed into full Bachelor degree programmes. Nevertheless, the four years of a typical BFA degree programme is short, compared to the amount of knowledge—technical, historical, design-related—that each craft encompasses. Most students will graduate with only a basic and partial competence in their media of choice, and will still require years of self-directed research and practice to become proficient. The call for apprenticeship programmes in the reports mentioned earlier seems to be motivated by an awareness of the limitations of formal education

formats. Perhaps a system of post-graduation internships and apprenticeships could work as they do for doctors, lawyers or designers, providing supervised workplace experience following graduation in which the student has an opportunity to hone skills and adjust to its demands. While most schools include internships for credit, they are short and few in number, and not always directly oriented to practising a craft. Internships also may offer a way to introduce students to other career options, such as museum and curatorial work or academic research. It is not clear how often such opportunities are offered informally by instructors, or found by students on their own. However, it seems important for craft education to actively assist students in moving towards viable livelihoods that use and build their specialist knowledge, either through initiatives with local craftspeople and employment programmes or lobbying for post-graduation apprenticeship opportunities. In this regard, it is worth noting that Channon's study (1989) reported "a high incidence of moving into crafts practice following initial studies in fine arts" (p. 229).

Even where a good variety of courses are listed that could potentially be chosen, some are only offered periodically or infrequently, or fail to fill adequately to run. Thus the options of in-house courses that students can take are even more limited at any given time than course listings suggest. If some of these rarely run or one-off courses are crafts-specific in some way, then crafts students lose crafts-specific course options that they might have found more pertinent to their practice and interests than some of the replacement options. This is more acute for crafts students than for painting students, perhaps, because of the lesser number of total courses available. For example, this has been the case with two textile history courses that I have offered. If the course is omitted one year, and fails to fill another year, then is not offered for a while due to economic

constraints or staff unavailability. Thus, textile students who feel that at least one textile history course would be important to their programme are prevented from obtaining it.

Table 2 (p.163) shows that crafts-specific academic course options are scarce in comparison to the often art-oriented humanities options that crafts students typically settle for. I contend that the prevailing generalising visual arts paradigm underpinning art school curricula and assumptions does not support crafts-oriented students' needs and interests as well as is claimed; rather it tends to push crafts students to conform to an ill-fitting set of aspirations and assumptions that tries to turn them into artists despite any inclinations and goals to the contrary. As with the fine art streams, the design streams have been oriented more to mainstream visual (graphic) communication or industrial product design, rather than to the object design needs of small craft production studios. The engagement in and usefulness of product design courses for producing craftspeople needs to be studied.<sup>76</sup> It also remains to be seen whether OCAD's streaming strategy through its Material Arts and Design programme provides a more satisfactory preparation for crafts producers. Even without streaming, entrepreneurship and/or professional practice courses are now found at all four schools (Appendix 3).

### **Crafts Histories versus Art History**

Having rejected formalist critique for its limitations, art historians have incorporated political and social meanings into their interpretations of imagery and its uses. While important, this approach still did not respond to questions or assertions of craft students

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<sup>76</sup> The institution of product design as a major section at NSCAD is very recent; its effects are as yet unclear.

regarding the symbolic role and meaningfulness that affect the creative intentions and decisions along with the formal and technical strategies of artists and craftsmen alike.

History is a key perspective in craft scholarship, and a huge amount of historical material in museum collections remains to be examined, contextualized, and added to the accumulating record. However, I contend that historical perspectives should be complemented by other perspectives: sociological, technological, economic, semiotic, and philosophical. The discipline of art history has incorporated sociological and political contexts, as well as cultural theory. However, for most craftspeople, the history of objects and styles, and the ethnographic histories of techniques and cultural iconography are the primary academic orientations that they have encountered and that shapes their impression of what could be added to a crafts curriculum. The idea of material culture is less well known. Its pertinence to crafts should be introduced into formal crafts education. This perspective is also useful to artists, since many artists make and depict material objects in their work, without realising that our vernacular understandings of material culture is a key source of the meaningful content of many artworks. Visual culture is not strictly visual, but derives from our experience of a material world with which we interact and to which we attribute cultural connotations. Visual representation relies on often tacit cultural knowledge to construct its meanings.

Students often arrive in art schools with backgrounds or interests in non-European-derived cultural expression, seeking a means of understanding or learning from the diverse range of material objects and making activities around the world. Cultural pluralism demands that we figure out how to assist students to engage fairly, rigorously, and respectfully with such diversity of ideas and expression, while developing their

personal artistic identity and cultural fit. The art histories we currently teach are only one portion of the global history of artistic and craft practices. We need to find ways to do more than just indoctrinate students with the dominant visual arts histories developed in and for mainstream first world societies. We need to look at the phenomenon of making and using objects as practiced and understood in many different situations. This is the approach found in material culture studies. It is broadly applicable across all the object-producing media, encompassing the understanding of the making of imagery through concrete objects.

The dominant approach of art history to craft objects or the craft world has been to highlight shifts in decorative styles since the Arts and Crafts Period, embodied in the works of major figures (such as Bernard Leach, Anni Albers, Peter Voulkos, or Dale Chihuly), and in social/political trends. Formal, aesthetic, and image-related concerns are related to the prevailing *Zietgeist* and political issues of their society. Sometimes this is irreverently referred to as the study of ‘dead objects’. The most crucial flaw of the *dominance* of this approach is that it often stops at these concerns, as though the objects alone were the full extent of cultural significance, unrelated to the purposes and processes that brought them into being in just that way, and the uses to which they were put.

Major histories of the crafts in Britain (Harrod, 1999) and America (Kardon, 1993, 1994, 1995), published at the end of the twentieth century, place considerable emphasis on the social worlds and trends of crafts makers and their patrons, and begin to outline a new canon of important works and professional makers. Important as these contributions have been in revealing the extent and interests of the craft world, their generality across the diverse media still barely skims the surface of the particular interests and trends in



crafts beyond their visual aesthetic presence. And although there are points of commonality across the various crafts worlds, especially from a social perspective, scholars like Greenhalgh (2003) emphasise that in fact there is not a single unified craft world, but a loosely associated cluster of diverse practices. Thus we must be wary of making assumptions about what characteristics or interests are common, or unique, to any given practice or set of practices. We need to study and compare practices to know what can and should be generalised about the crafts. Much of that research remains to be done.

Understandably, art historians can be defensive about criticisms of their offerings by crafts students and instructors, feeling that the call to provide more appropriate crafts history is beyond their expertise. This is a fair response. It is not the fault of current art historians that the underlying assumptions about art and the consequent structure of art school curricula<sup>77</sup> has positioned art history as the primary ‘academic’ liberal arts field needed in an art education. However, it is incumbent on them to question this primacy, rather than simply assume it.

In recognition of the need for craft history specialisation, some enterprising Canadians have undertaken self-directed academic doctoral programmes to become craft history specialists—NSCADU’s Sandra Alföldy is one such specialist.<sup>78</sup> Another craft historian, Sandra Flood, author of *Canadian Craft & Museum Practice 1900-1950* (2001) undertook her studies in England because nothing in Canada suited her needs. Alexandra Palmer, craft historian at NSCADU (1994-96) also studied in England. Such scholars are

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<sup>77</sup> The effects of limited funding resources are also part of this reliance on art history departments to fill in all the gaps with broadly encompassing courses, but the historical focus of art scholarship on imagery and form to the exclusion of other issues has resulted in the gaps identified. Even if other disciplines, like archaeology or anthropology, have filled some of those gaps, their scholarship has been largely absent from art college curricula because of the predominant position of art history and discourse.

<sup>78</sup> Sandra Alföldy did her doctoral studies in the Special Individualized Program available at Concordia University in Montreal, which gave her the freedom to assemble the program elements she needed.

rare in Canada, and the path of their study is not clear—to some extent they must invent the discipline themselves. Similarly, few programs in the USA prepare students to specialise in craft history, let alone theory or criticism for craft. The Bard Graduate Center for Studies in the Decorative Arts, Design, and Culture in New York City stands out for its commitment to the cultural history of the material world, but it runs rare and expensive graduate programmes for which there is no Canadian counterpart. Even in this specialized context, the notion of ‘craft’ does not appear to be highlighted or distinguished from the broader history of design activities to which it is typically appended. And for the most part, this kind of academic scholarship remains segregated from the practice of the crafts that it studies, outside those art schools where crafts are most directly taught.

Tension has arisen between MFA qualified studio instructors willing to teach specific histories, and art historians, typically possessing MA or PhD credentials, on the basis of distrust of the academic quality or rigour of MFA instructors. It is fair to say that few MFA instructors have the kind of rigorous scholarly research and writing experience that underlies a PhD, let alone strong academic research skills. In some cases brought to my attention anecdotally, the standards applied by studio instructors teaching liberal arts courses have been criticised as being too lenient for the university context. So it is not surprising that the academically oriented faculty have sought to ensure the overall academic quality of all liberal arts offerings, typically by relying on the PhD or MA qualifications.

## **Where Do Crafts Scholars Come From?**

While a few scholars with art historical backgrounds have begun the necessary development of history of design and craft, some of whom have been identified above, their interest in crafts is still an idiosyncratic, ad hoc choice. As the material on behalf of the crafts begins to accumulate from diverse sources, there is also a need for a more concerted effort to organise, debate, assess, and systematically disseminate the materials. This is the role of dedicated crafts scholars, historians and others, in addition to engaging in new in-depth research of crafts activity.

It is not surprising that there is such a dearth of scholars and programmes to develop them and their appropriate resources. Only two major programmes of graduate study in the decorative arts exists currently in North America—these are the MA and PhD programmes of the aforementioned Bard Graduate Center in New York City, an affiliate of Bard College in New York State. Now known as Bard Graduate Center: Decorative Arts, Design History, Material Culture, this specialist institute was established only in 1993. It began with a Masters programme focused on decorative arts, and expanded from that base, recognising in the process the interrelationships of decorative arts, design history, and material culture. Perusal of Bard's course offerings (Degree Programs Course Listings, 2010) shows the increasing importance of material culture perspectives for understanding design and decorative art. Nevertheless, craft-related perspectives appear to be subsumed to the more abstract ideas of decorative arts or design, although particular material fields, such as jewellery, metalsmithing, textiles, glass, ceramics, and book arts, appear as course topics, as do important movements, such as the Arts and Crafts Movement, the Aesthetic Movement, and Art Nouveau. International cultural

contexts are also included: Asian, Islamic, and Hispanic, for example. This programme models the breadth of courses relevant to both design and crafts students, that could form the foundation of design or craft focused academic degrees in Canada. Some similar courses have been instituted in Canadian schools, as I have already mentioned, but thus far they serve primarily as support for crafts or design practice, or as a supplement to art history degrees. Nowhere in Canada do we see the dedicated development of comparable focused degree programmes designed to prepare scholars for teaching and necessary scholarly development specifically of crafts fields that practitioners and studio instructors have been requesting for at least thirty years. Dedicated programmes or major concentrations along with scholarly crafts research projects need to be undertaken so we can cultivate crafts scholars and scholarship, especially to address our own Canadian or regional cultural contexts.

As I discussed in the literature review, there is now a significant and growing accumulation of literature to underpin a wide range of focused courses relevant to the crafts field. I suggest that a key factor inhibiting the growth of crafts scholarship is the dearth of appropriate, committed scholars focused on collecting the material and theorising *from* it, rather than indiscriminately applying existing visual or cultural theory to it. Students in Canadian craft and design schools are often ill-disposed to scholarship as an acceptable alternate occupation, despite their exposure to art historians and art educators. Creative practice remains the overwhelming expectation of study of the crafts, as it does for art and design generally, especially in our four art schools. Often, academic art fields, such as art history and art education, have been regarded as second-class, fallback career options for those who fail as practitioners, or who need paying jobs. This

attitude persists, based on the indisputable centrality of artistic practice as the focal phenomenon of study. This is shown by the fact that NSCADU, with the oldest degree programmes, has only recently instituted their BA in Art History and simultaneously lost their regionally important art education programmes.<sup>79</sup>

The obvious and most effective place for developing academic scholarship for the arts, crafts and design, is the place where they come together most intensively—the schools where they are taught and used, and where a critical mass of practitioners reside. These schools offer a ready-made situation for a variety of research into the crafts, as well as a network of connections. Now that the major degree-granting institutions in craft education have all achieved university status, it is more possible and important that they expand their interests into the realm of the academic study. Crafts instructors, students, and practitioners have identified these needs for supportive scholarship but the institutions have been slow to implement change, and expand their scholarly options, both for economic and ideological reasons.

The other impediment is the requisite breadth of interdisciplinary approaches that I believe is necessary to accommodate the complexity of crafts research. None of the four art colleges have this; it is usually only feasible in comprehensive universities that accommodate interdisciplinary research. On the other hand, every one of the four art colleges is located in a major city near at least one comprehensive university. In the short term, students are already able to take courses at other local institutions and transfer in the credits. This process, or exchange agreements, would allow students to draw together

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<sup>79</sup> Although this loss was due to external re-structuring of education by the Nova Scotia Provincial government in the early 2000s, the undergraduate art education programme was not strongly defended at the time by NSCADU's upper administration against the external restructuring of the provincial authorities.

the components deemed appropriate to crafts. In addition, collaborative partnerships or joint degree programmes may be a way to draw together a suitable faculty or set of courses.

### **Relationships Between Content, Form, and Process**

One issue that requires explicit attention in craft and art education is the relationship of the concept of ‘craft’ or ‘crafting’ to the integrated and complex wholeness of the artistic object produced. As I have already pointed out, there are numerous senses for the term ‘craft’ in operation. It may not be clear to students or instructors that their usage and interpretations of the term frequently slips between significantly different senses. This slippage causes confusion, and seems to support contradictory beliefs among artists and students.

The underlying conceptions of ‘craft’ and ‘crafting’ affect the discussion of content, form, and process. In *Postmodern Semiotics* (1995), Gottdiener points out the imbalance in postmodernist artistic discourse, in which too much emphasis is placed on the content of content, and too little attention is paid to the form of content or the content of form (Chapter 1). While performance arts have highlighted the potential of process to carry meaning, when framed as a kind of experience or dramatic presentation, the implicit processes and decisions that go into making concrete objects are typically overlooked or treated as mere ‘production’ without significance. For craftspeople, these formal, technical, and procedural elements contribute to the meaningfulness, usefulness and appeal of their objects whether or not they bear imagery open to critical interpretation.

The traditional and most generic sense of the term ‘craft’ is that of technical execution of a work and the knowledge of processes and materials that proficient craftsmanship entails. In the discourse of artists and artist-instructors, the processes of crafting the object are often sharply distinguished from the ‘content’ of the work, the ‘message’, ‘concept’, or ‘statement’ that the artist is trying to convey via the work. Our habit of segregating the notions of form and content—similar to the way that talk about language segregates ‘way of saying’ from ‘what is said’—tends to impose an artificial subdivision on a phenomenon or object that is typically an intrinsically integrated whole. In artworks of any sort, we cannot fully separate, or even clearly distinguish, what is said or done from the manner of saying or doing. Processes shape forms in a particular way, and forms shape content in a particular way, even though there is a central vision or concept that directs the processes and assesses the resultant particular forms and contents. While there may be a disparate emphasis on process, form or content, all aspects are inseparably integral to the whole artwork and thus, are interdependent. Together they produce what could be defined as *intelligibly or evocatively embodied meaning*.

### **Under-determinacy versus Determinacy**

Another confusion that can arise from visual art education stems from the emphasis on individuality in art, as well as the idea of a ‘finished’ work that is encouraged by instructors. These emphases underlie the usual understanding of the ‘art object’—even composite assemblages of components—as a self-sufficient object of contemplation, isolated from a vibrant context of use and everyday life, especially by art galleries and museums. This is sometimes expressed as the ability of the work to stand on its own, as a

criterion of assessing the potency or strength of an artwork or an artist's ability. In the art world, this focuses attention on the particular message or signature style of the artist. Even public, site-specific art is expected to be fore-grounded in its site, rather than to operate primarily as a constituent element of a larger whole. However, this expectation and instructional emphasis can prove problematic to craftspeople and designers, especially those who work to fulfil the purposes of others, their patrons.

In design and decorative practice, it is clear that many objects exist and are used in co-ordinated groupings and sets, installed and used alongside myriad other objects by owners. They operate more often as part of a more or less determined larger ensemble, both on display and in use; they are designed, selected and interpreted with this in mind, even when they are remarkably satisfactory objects when seen in isolation. Being a constituent of a more or less deliberate ensemble of objects is different from being a fully autonomous, self-referential, artwork or installation. The distinction is illustrated in the difference between objects in a living room (Riggins, 1994) and a gallery installation.

Being an object that becomes material for another craftsman or designer to manipulate is different again. It is a common situation for textile designer-makers or tile designers, for example, and it can produce confusion among students. It is common for people to fail to appreciate such objects as a cloth or a tile as a 'finished' object, and to ask "what is that cloth for" or "what do you plan to make?" But for that maker, the cloth or tile set may *be* the final product, and this under-determinacy of future use is a fact of their object-making practice that needs to be addressed in craft or design education. It is a 'problem element' to be resolved in their problem-solving process. Designing for situations that expect others to alter one's own product provides particular challenges and



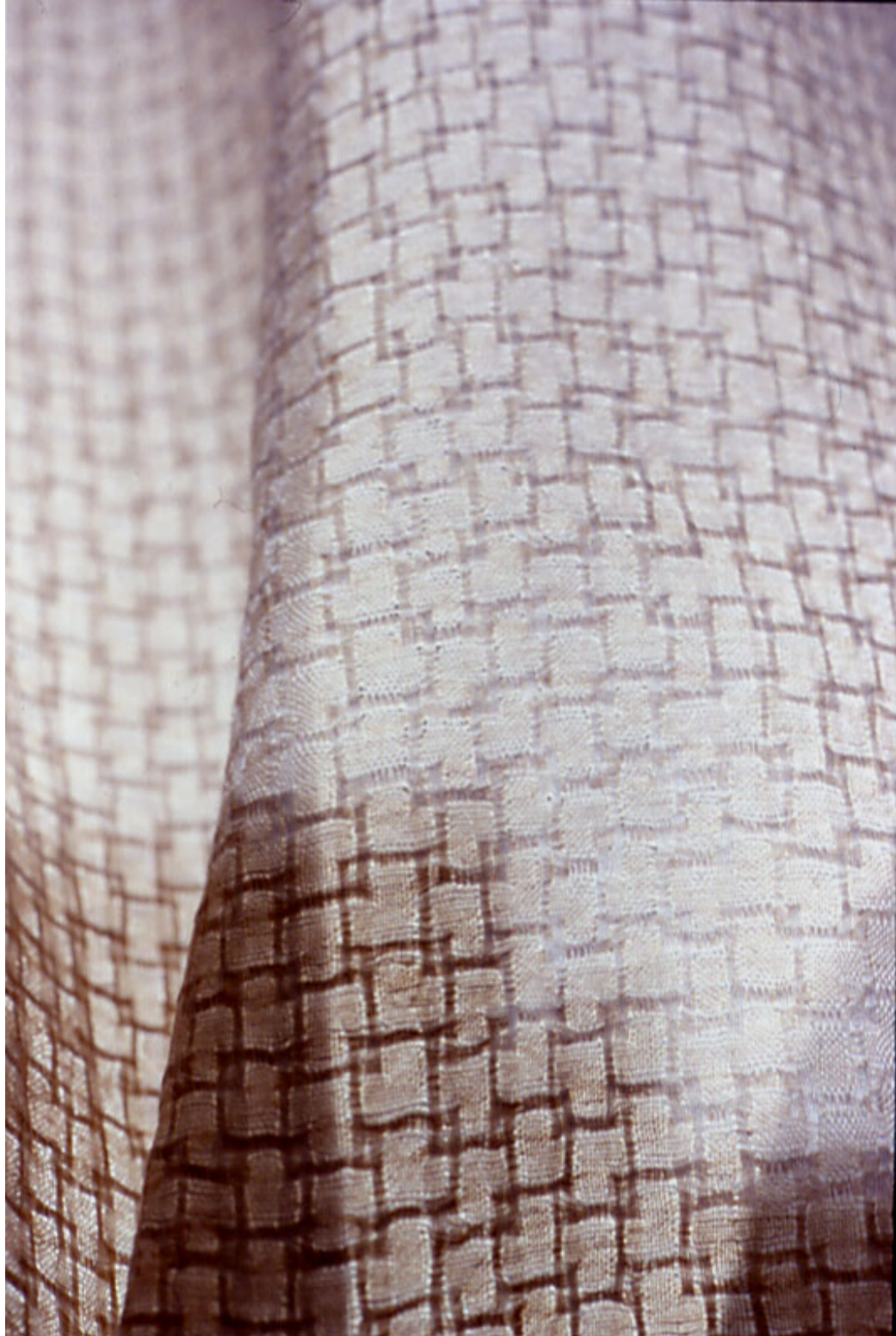


Figure 3. Wendy Landry (2000). Boxchain. Yardage. Silk, linen. 106.7 x 305 cm. Yardage is always made to be further transformed into 'something': drapery, clothing, etc.

gratifications. It need not be regarded as a subsidiary form of work just because it does not produce a ‘final’ product, but an intermediate one, like yardage (Fig. 3).

I have not yet encountered explicit discussion of the idea of designing for indeterminate, generic, or under-determined purposes in crafts discourse or theoretical discussions of crafts or design, although it may be regarded as being implicit in much textile design. Similarly, sampling is not necessarily a subsidiary part of work either. As a process, it does produce a ‘thing’ that embodies an idea and an exemplar that could be made, like a sketch. It is a thought and knowledge product, not a commodity, and its value is entailed by the idea it documents.

Economic and functional interests of objects figure overtly in the crafts world, while they are often ostensibly denied in the art world. The co-operative, economic, and utilitarian aspects are often not addressed in art history to the same extent as political stance or broad social trends and circumstances. Thus key social elements, including technologies, economics, utilitarian functions, social conventions, expectations and relationships that concern craftspeople and that influence what and how things get made, are rarely discussed and often play only a minor role in art or art history courses.

### **Disciplinary Self-identification**

A fundamental issue for serious students of any discipline is one of self-identification with their chosen field of study—of finding one’s most fulfilling path, sets of assumptions, gratifications, talents, and values; of discovering where one fits within the field. Self-identification is a primary social consequence and goal of art education, at least at the higher levels of concentration. Art schools socialise their students into their

special worlds of practice (Hockey & Allen-Collinson, 2005; Becker, 1982). Degree and professional certification programmes socialise students into professional levels of practice. Self-identification occurs not just through learning to practice a craft medium, but also through exposure to and adoption of its histories, theories, criteria of appreciation, social roles, and particular interests—in Becker’s (1982) terms, orientation to its social world.

The current crop of visual art students claims not to overtly make many distinctions between diverse media practices. Many art students and instructors say it is an artificial distinction to which they do not hold. However, privately, craftsperson to craftsperson, masters level crafts students and other experienced craftspeople/artists in craft media do indicate in conversation and class discussions that they still encounter stereotyping or expectations of craftspeople’s interests away from the direction of art. The underlying connotation is that craftspeople might be designers, but not often artists, and very likely not both. These experienced students still perceive a failure to understand or appreciate the particular balance of technical, material, and functional interests with expressive, aesthetic, and conceptual interests that many craftspeople bring to their work—irrespective of whether their work is oriented to commercial, functional, symbolic, or contemporary art contexts. This is especially galling to craftspeople working both sides of the artist/designer-maker divide.

Alfoldy (2009) praises Risatti (2007) for offering “useful challenges to our modern preoccupation with pretending that the art/craft debate is over” (Alfoldy, 2009, p. 363). The idea that the tensions between art and craft persist is supported by interviews with craftspeople. To declare oneself a craftsperson or designer rather than an artist in the

pluralist era when “anything can be art,” and a craft education produces a BFA—a ‘fine’ or visual arts degree—indicates some kind of identity distinction that should be examined, even when the craftspeople’s work is sculptural or conceptual rather than only functional in nature. Interestingly, Channon (1989) reported that

“almost 70% of [the craftspeople responding to a British survey] refer to themselves as designers rather than as craftspeople or as artists. “Designer/maker” is not the most common descriptor for craftspeople” (p. 228).

Meanwhile, artists continue to bristle at the idea of their work being ‘reduced’ to ‘mere’ craft (Rowley, 1999), let alone the commercial implications of being ‘design’.

While the debate about the continued existence of the contentious art/craft debate is revived, and we wonder why design does not figure more prominently therein, the nature of the central tensions too often goes unexamined. In my view, the question is not just one of ‘defining’ art, craft, or design (although crucial distinctions should be discussed openly). More centrally, it is one of self-identification with the social worlds, aspirations, priorities, and values of one of those categories, or of oscillation between them. I usually refer to this self-identification as an alignment, orientation, or affiliation, which ranges from a temporary or periodical affiliation to a permanent fervent allegiance. Such alignments constitute the particular identity adopted by practitioners. More generally, disciplinary self-identification is also an aspect of the overall construction of selfhood.<sup>80</sup>

Not all craftspeople reject being called artists in a generic sense. Often their work aligns with art world goals and practices, especially when it is symbolic rather than practical in its function. There are some who still understand art in its broadest, creative

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<sup>80</sup> The idea that competence or skill in artistic activities is a part of the formation of self-hood—one’s sense of self—is elaborated by Csikszentmihalyi (1978). See also Rochberg-Halton (1984) on cultivation of the self through valued material possessions, which would include self-made objects.

sense, embracing all media and contexts of deliberate aesthetic making, or alternately who do not worry about the distinctions. Some refute the validity of ‘labelling’ because labels are arbitrary and often stereotypical. But for some craftspeople, like myself, it is clear that they are doing something different from that which is *typically* connoted in common parlance by the term ‘artist’, in its narrower sense of visual imagery or representational arts, and according to the criteria of art criticism—that is, by the prevailing criteria that constitute and perpetuate the particular social and aesthetic values of the contemporary professional art world (Becker, 1982).

There are craftspeople for whom the craft distinction matters. Some, like myself, attempt to untangle and better understand the nature of that distinction. These craftspeople seek to associate with other like-minded craftspeople through crafts organizations, and call for crafts-specific funding and support systems as well as scholarship. Some of these craftspeople may oscillate between overtly conceptual, sculptural, symbolic work and practical, functional, decorative work, but they also find it important to identify with the histories and accumulated legacy of their crafts knowledge, its social values, and its sensibilities. It is not surprising that craftspeople and students would expect crafts educational institutions to be the central resource and active explorer of questions concerning the phenomenon of craft.

Alignment with design is not the whole solution, although the relationship and intersections with design merit investigation and dialogue. There may be untapped potential for employment, partnerships or internships with industrial producers. In Canada, design history is also an underdeveloped academic specialty. I found no specialised degree programme in design history, thus there is no systematic programme

of preparation to follow. A literature of Canadian design exists but it is small, reflecting the scale of the Canadian manufacturing sector. Perusal of US and UK design history literature shows that it tends to focus more on commercial, industrial or proto-industrial, developed design practice in the modern period than on the wide range of crafting activities worldwide. Learning more about design issues and practices can inspire craftspeople to forge a career or micro-manufacturing enterprise. Courses in entrepreneurship and product design are now available to crafts students, but it is not clear how these practical courses are enhanced by reference to either design history or case studies of small crafts and manufacturing businesses. Crafts market producers would be a locally available resource to tap for case study research and documentation of design-crafts enterprises in various regions of Canada.

As shown in the previous chapter (see Table 2, p. 163), design history and theoretical course offerings also are disproportionately low in Canadian art colleges, compared to the typical art history offerings. Like craft history, design history is also not as fully or proportionately integrated into craft or design programmes as is art history. As for theoretical development for design, there is a slowly developing scholarship, but it is not yet being brought systematically into undergraduate craft education. It typically remains segregated in design degree programmes when it is present at all. Both crafts and design students are aware of their kinship and overlapping interests. Crafts students as well as design students may well have overlapping interests in some design history and theory, especially as it pertains to product design or fashion. Since all of the schools we are looking at have a significant devotion to design practices as well as art, coupling the

academic needs of crafts and design education would seem to be an appropriate strategy to develop further.

### **The practice-scholarship divide.**

Whatever the scholarly focus, self-identification also tends to segregate practitioners from scholars. This is evident among art, design, and crafts practitioners, even those who respect scholarship in their fields. As already mentioned, entering students come to art schools mainly to become studio practitioners, not researchers. The balance of the degree requirements tends to reinforce this, with as little as 1/3 of credits for a BFA being required in liberal arts courses. More study would be needed to show how many students chose electives from liberal arts over studio options. However, it seems clear that students in BFA programmes do not identify with research or scholarship of their fields, beyond creative practice.

John Hockey and Jacquelyn Allen-Collinson (2005) have examined the question of self-identification in some detail.<sup>81</sup> Although their research is focused on students in doctoral level art and design practice-based programmes, their analysis describes the typical initial art and design self-identities that have to be overcome or altered, revealing the underlying assumptions and their roots in the student's previous practice-based education (Hockey & Allen-Collinson, 2005, p. 89). The descriptions they outline in "Identity Change: Doctoral Students in Art and Design" (2005) ring true for all the experiences I have had with undergraduate<sup>82</sup> and graduate students,<sup>83</sup> and for most artist-

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<sup>81</sup> See also Hockey, J. (2008).

<sup>82</sup> Observations made while teaching several undergraduate courses at NSCAD since 1999, as well as research for my MA in art education thesis, *Educating Artistry* (2002).

instructors<sup>84</sup> of my acquaintance. This article highlights two particular obstacles or differences that need to be overcome by students. The first obstacle is the lack of knowledge of how to conduct analytical research, which their previous education has not supplied, but which can be overcome by courses and practice in analysis methods. The second obstacle is more difficult and more traumatic for students, because it involves an *experiential* conflict between the processes of making and written analysis, whose “disparity created obstacles they found difficult to surmount” (p.81). In effect, they are “two very different modes of being” (p. 81). It is a cognitive issue for which neither students nor instructors are prepared. Neither, I suggest, is the Canadian higher educational system, despite the opening of PhD programmes in art or visual culture, etc. in a few universities (such as York University & Concordia University). Art students, accustomed to thinking in their making medium, regard uninhibited creative making as their central identity (p. 82). The character of that creative identity is intrinsically opposed to the character of research:

“In addition, the creative process was considered by students to be essentially non-linear. Although they did acknowledge a certain patterned sequencing of events (eg. a series of tests to evaluate temperature changes in a kiln), they were keen to portray the most important creative decisions as being made intuitively rather than programmatically, linearly, or mechanically” (Hockey & Allen-Collinson, 2005, p. 85).

By contrast the same students saw, as their education socialised them to see, the analytical academic writing as a very different, foreign, linear process and mode of thought, expected to be “precise, abstract, rational, objective”:

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<sup>83</sup> Observations made in the course of three successive years of teaching master’s level seminars in pedagogy and graduate research between 2007-2010, NSCAD.

<sup>84</sup> Observations based on interviews with NSCAD instructors as research for my MA in art education thesis, *Educating Artistry* (2002), as well as my experiences as a graduate student and then teacher at NSCAD, since 1995.



“Interestingly, doctoral research in general tended to be presented to them, by supervisors and in research methods training courses, as a highly rational process which involved, among other things, construction of abstract conceptual categories in order to generate theory. Emphasis was placed upon the systematic collection of evidence and the communication of results and outcomes in precisely formulated arguments and a logical progression of ideas. Under the regulatory framework of all the universities studied, it was mandatory that analysis be conducted in literary mode. The usual requirement was that thesis should be presented as a linear progression, something again viewed as problematic and constraining by students because they deemed it antithetical to the expressive forms they sought and to the reflexive sense of self developed over many years.” (Hockey & Allen-Collinson, 2005, p. 85)

Not only is written academic analysis a foreign way of working and possibly thinking for visual arts students generally, it highlights the lack of experience and competence of many students in the rigors of critical and analytical thinking. This contrasts sharply with the greater experience of research that students in other disciplines are expected to acquire much earlier in their education, and which they practice in more of their courses. Art and design students are thus confronted with their weaknesses. They often react defensively by asserting their making to an alternative kind of knowledge of equivalent value, and by distancing themselves from the written academic requirements, methods, and ideas, either by avoiding doing the work or by doing only a perfunctory, minimal job (p. 86). I have witnessed this resistance and defensiveness among MFA students in my graduate seminars in research, and in pedagogy, as well as among undergraduate students at both NSCAD University and Dalhousie University (where I taught a course in costume history). Given several years to adjust to the new analytic mode of thinking, the doctoral students studied by Hockey and Allen-Collinson eventually found an appropriate and fruitful equilibrium between the two states of mind required by the research practitioner, which they realised added to their ability to be

creative (pp. 88-89) rather than interfering with it. MFA programmes, which are typically two, or sometimes three, years in duration, do not offer enough time for most students who enter the graduate programme to adjust to an analytical way of thinking. Undergraduate students are too busy learning basic skills and assimilating the making identity to try to balance an unfamiliar analytical style of thought, unless they arrive with one already well formed.

In addition, crafts students are rarely apprised of the possibility that their practical experience, special knowledge of their medium, and creativity has research value that can be applied in the academic realm as experimental archaeology. Craftspeople can use their skills to attempt to reproduce or test inferences about historical processes from historical descriptions or artefacts. Even craftspeople who do not themselves become researchers can assist others by doing accurate reproductions of historical works, or by collaborating with academics and museum curators in artefact documentation and interpretation.<sup>85</sup> Many practitioners already engage in such experimentation for their own interests. Some, like the natural dyer Dr. Karen Casselman, Nova Scotian author of *Craft of the Dyer* (1993), have become scholars as a result.

The dearth of scholars and practitioner-scholars in the arts is also a consequence of the dearth of role models with whom to identify in their educational institutions. This is changing slowly, but it requires a commitment to the specificity of crafts scholarship distinct from art history.

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<sup>85</sup> I am personally engaged in all of these activities in textiles, in my on-going research of Coptic velvet-weaving (including experimental archaeology and artefact analysis), in regular textile analysis of archaeological textiles for Parks Canada, and for the inventory of Coptic textiles at the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts (experimental archaeology, artefact analysis, documentation, and collaborative artefact interpretation). Other similar researcher-makers, such as Nancy Arthur Hoskins (1992) or Karen Casselman (1993) publish their practical research for the benefit of others.

## **Conditions for Improving Crafts Education and Scholarship**

Rather than simply substituting a canon of craft objects, makers, styles, and social trends into the current art histories, we need to review just what craft is and has been, what its values and legitimate interests are, in all its various forms. Rather than blaming art historians for the oversights and particular focus of art history, which already covers a vast territory, we need to analyse seriously the dissatisfactions and legitimate interests and values expressed by instructors, students, and potential employers. We need to rethink what a degree education in crafts, or a particular craft, should mean and comprise, in all its potential cultural manifestations and dimensions.

I suggest that the following general conditions will be necessary if we hope to improve Canadian crafts education in its own right, for its own sake. Understanding this persistent activity in all its manifestations will entail deliberate commitment to such improvement, as opposed to just the ‘good enough’ extension of current visual arts curricula to crafts media.

1. Art colleges—as centres of excellence with a high stake and committed interest in cultural education that now make overt claims for conducting high level cultural, visual arts and creative innovation research—should be centrally involved, and preferably leaders, in the improvement of education for the crafts, and in providing the research and scholarship needed to support such improvement. Art colleges offer a critical mass of practitioners and other resources, and a forum for discourse. This provides a rich range of students and practitioners to study, and a context in which to test suggested improvements.

2. In-depth research programmes examining crafts activities should be launched within or in collaboration with one or more art institutions where crafts media are available. Such research would study and describe the character of crafts practices from a variety of perspectives. There should also be projects geared toward identifying and collecting the already existing pertinent interdisciplinary bodies of research that pertain to crafts practices.
3. Crafts curricula and educational programmes across Canada should be studied in greater depth and compared with the research on the character of crafts activities, to see how crafts education could be enhanced and to suggest alterations in curricula and teaching goals, strategies, and philosophy.
4. At least one of the art colleges should work toward degree programmes specialising in crafts scholarship, historical and theoretical, as an academic degree specialty. This could take the form of a minor in craft history, a BA in craft or decorative art history, or a graduate MA in crafts studies. Ideally, such a programme would incorporate practical crafts experience. It might be offered as an honours degree, in an extra year of study following completion of the 4 year BFA or a BA in craft history.
5. Students should be exposed to other role or career models for their craft knowledge, especially to the research role of crafts process knowledge, and to the benefits this research ability might have for their creativity. Students would be expected to develop rigorous criteria and methods in their research about making practices.

In the following chapters, I will commence some of the study of the phenomenon of crafts activity that I have recommended above. This will include a general outline of the

character of crafts, detailing various dimensions of crafts that might be studied in greater depth. It will be followed by an examination of on-going historical crafts scholarship that I have been conducting in the course of my dissertation research. This will exemplify and explain the various dimensions and perspectives that I found necessary or useful in conducting my research of ancient velvet weaving, and the insights that my practitioner experience was able to provide.

## Part Three: REDRAWING THE BORDERS

### Chapter Seven

#### THE CHARACTER OF CRAFTS ACTIVITY

This chapter describes dimensions and interrelationships of crafts activity and the cultural contexts to which it relates, in order to understand the necessary and useful elements that crafts education and scholarship could address, and to highlight its particular and legitimate interests. This analysis discusses components and processes of crafts practice, outlining the taskscapes that make up creative process. It also discusses the motivations, interests, and priorities of craft activity, as well as the specificity of sensitivities and skills that each medium engages. Distinctions between purpose, function, and use are examined and a taxonomy of functions, including social and symbolising functions is offered. Outlines of the taskscapes associated with the four main modes of thought and activity and of the creative process are provided. The idea of co(a)gency is used to understand the relationship of craftspeople with their tools. Techniques are discussed as ideas in order to reveal an underlying hierarchy of acceptable ideas in visual arts. Finally, the inherent ethics of craftsmanship and crafts makers to their surrounding community, as well as the extended social world of craftspeople is examined.

#### **The Character Of Craft Practice**

In the modern world, a rational reconsideration of craft education and scholarship must begin with an understanding of craft practice – its goals and purposes, its characteristic tasks and understandings, its standards, its products, and its rewards. How

do craftspeople go about their work? What motivates them in a contemporary world of mass production and globalism? How do they respond to a public expecting instantaneous gratification?

The core phenomenon of crafts is the making activity—what makers do in the course of crafting their objects. Understanding this making activity requires us to identify the various elements that comprise the activity at its fullest, irrespective of whether every craftsperson works this way. This general model most closely resembles the lone studio craftsperson, creating an object from start to finish in a primary medium. Yet, many crafted objects result from a distributed making process, spread across several craftspeople and/or designers, each contributing their particular expertise to the process. No matter how the making process is organised, all the elements are involved in creating well-crafted objects.

### **The Elements of Crafts Making**

Fig. 4 (below) outlines the mental and physical abilities deployed by craftspeople in their crafting activity, generally, as well as the social and practical resources or support systems needed to facilitate crafts activity, especially at a professional level. This table is not exhaustive, but it captures the major elements that craft students in any medium need to learn to do proficiently. Despite the category types used in the table, it should be evident that the elements cited in each section interrelate with other elements in myriad ways to constrain, support, or inspire the various decisions and practices that shape crafts activities. Obstacles and constraints can be vitally productive because they set important and useful parameters that help to focus the decision-making by narrowing the range of

options. The constraints of tradition may also pose creative challenges to fit within the traditional conventions while introducing subtle variations that extend the tradition and reinterpret it for the present.

Figure 4. General Elements of Crafts Making.

<p><b>Skills</b> (fluency via practice)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• materials / techniques</li> <li>• design rules &amp; principles</li> <li>• dexterity</li> <li>• analytical capacities</li> <li>• problem-solving strategies</li> </ul>	<p><b>Sensitivities</b> (fluency via exposure)</p> <p>egs:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• appropriateness of finish</li> <li>• appropriateness of material</li> <li>• appropriateness of process</li> <li>• proportion / scale</li> <li>• unity, harmony, balance</li> <li>• tactile, kinaesthetic qualities</li> <li>• aptness / subtle discrimination</li> </ul>
<p><b>Information</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• people, events, materials, equipment, supplies</li> <li>• historical / contemporary</li> <li>• vocabulary</li> <li>• conventions / social purposes</li> <li>• functions / performance criteria</li> <li>• pre-existing models</li> </ul>	<p><b>Imagination</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• innovation / creativity</li> <li>• memory</li> <li>• imaging</li> <li>• inspiration</li> </ul>
<p><b>Attitudes</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• motivation / perseverance</li> <li>• will: openness &amp; risk-taking, ('freedom to fail')</li> <li>• aspirations / purposes / priorities</li> <li>• social responsibility / humility / ethics</li> </ul>	<p><b>Articulation / Interpretation</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• reasoned criticism</li> <li>• felt response</li> <li>• semiotics / meaning</li> </ul>
<p><b>Social Context</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• experience vs object, action vs thing, process vs product</li> <li>• cultural identity, social purposes and uses of acts, objects (incl. celebration, ritual)</li> <li>• awareness of social structure, expectations</li> <li>• appreciative audience / supportive values</li> <li>• social support systems</li> </ul>	<p><b>Ideation</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• intent / content / interpretation</li> <li>• problem-finding, solving</li> <li>• insight (connections / synectics; idea development)</li> <li>• understanding of ramifications</li> <li>• reasonable access / intelligibility</li> <li>• analysis / foresight</li> </ul>
<p><b>Physical Resources</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• space / shelter</li> <li>• power source (gas, electric, water, etc.)</li> <li>• transportation / vehicle</li> <li>• communication &amp; shipping resources</li> </ul>	<p><b>Economic Resources</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• time</li> <li>• funding</li> <li>• appropriate market</li> </ul>



Figure 4 adapts and extends a basic, general model of art education developed by Dr. Nick Webb for his classes at NSCAD between 1990 and the present (used by permission).<sup>86</sup> The general abilities, knowledge and resources identified in this model serve as a general framework of crafting phenomena—ingredients of creation. I have not indicated specific relationships or proportions or priorities of any of the above elements, because diverse possible combinations of relationships, proportions and areas of emphasis characterise different instances of crafts activity.

### **Medium Specificity: Skills, Sensitivities, Motivations, Values**

Differences in crafts activities are contingent on the understandings, aspirations, and particular intentions of particular craftspeople and on their particular sets of proficiencies among this set. By working in a specific medium, the craftspeople is likely to develop some sensitivities specific to the kinds of materials, equipment, processes and sensory requirements of that medium. For example, one such sensitivity important to textiles is sensitivity to the degree of tension of stretched threads. Another is sensitivity to the relationship between rhythm and beat pressure when throwing the shuttle. A third is sensitivity to the qualities of weight and drape in the resultant cloth. A blacksmith tells me that sensitivity to the tone of the sound of metal during beating keeps him informed about the temperature of the metal, and thus its hardness and malleability. These examples can be partly explained verbally, but the vital sensitivities can develop and become tacit knowledge only through continual practice. As with language, practice is necessary to develop the *fluency* in the medium that characterises mastery.

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<sup>86</sup> Dr. Webb's model has not been published.

Information and ideation (thought) do not just inform crafts learning and sustain skilled practices; they engage and integrate with them. The medium serves as a medium of thought as well as practice: practice shapes thought as thought shapes practice. These are co-dependent and inseparable features of intelligent life, implicating cognition, epistemology, and psychology. The concepts and relationships within the craft become useful concepts for relationships in the world to which they are analogous; they are part of the holistic knowledge base of the craftsperson—the tacitly held dynamic framework of concepts and understandings in which we “dwell” (Polanyi, 1964) and through which we think and act—what Bourdieu terms the *habitus* (1977). To that extent, they cannot be segregated easily, despite the categories identified in the table. I would argue that media specific skills and sensitivities are interdependent with the purportedly general abilities, such as visual composition or problem-solving strategies, and further, that the broader one’s range within all the categories, the more likely a craftsperson will be to discover interesting problems, powerful solutions or statements, and valuable insights.

In *The Craftsman* (2008), Sennett examines the basic notion of craft as it appears in a wide range of productive activities against a broad backdrop of historical and practical understandings and a variety of practices, some but not all of which are artistic. He highlights common features that are intellectually and socially valuable in terms of the skilful deployment of experienced knowledge to problem-finding and problem-solving, despite

“the most basic of human limits, those of language to encompass the workings of the human body; especially the craftsman’s body at work. Neither the worker nor the analyst of labor can really explain what’s happening ... [Diderot] could not understand intellectually work he could not do practically” (p. 105).

According to Sennett, a key element of mastery of a craft is the full-bodied, fully-integrated *engagement* in one's practice *for its own sake* – full-bodied and fully-integrated in the senses of united body and mind, practiced experience and thoughtfulness, tacit and self-conscious understanding. Indeed, he argues that the arbitrary and artificial separation of “hand and head, technique and science, art and craft” in practical as well as abstract terms, *fundamentally impairs* the head and thereby limits creative powers. His argument also suggests that technique and product also suffer from such artificial segregations.

Sennett confirms that the development of mastery of a craft rests on intense and prolonged practice. Rather than tedious repetition, such as is characteristic of machines, prolonged practice of technique by the craftsperson involves the subtle transformation of explicit practical knowledge into reliable tacit (Polanyi, 1967) or habituated (Bourdieu, 1977) knowledge which Sennett calls “embedded”– i.e. habits that do not require conscious thought, and indeed form the bulk of ordinary human action and what we are often prone to call ‘instinctive’ or ‘intuitive’. The transformation to tacit knowledge is essential, to free up the mind from the details of pure action so as to address the problems and resolutions and to be able to make decisions and judgments. Studies of mastery have pointed out that the master perceives and thinks differently than the novice, or even the journeyman, in any practice, from game playing to crafts. This is because, having integrated vast amounts of knowledge through experience (including making practice as well as exposure to examples of the craft), the master now thinks in larger and possibly more abstract and global, complex ‘chunks’ of ideas, which include the possible ramifications or implications of various optional actions or solutions. This is essential to

imagining and evaluating processes and outcomes and anticipating problems before investing in the making process.

As a mode of experienced thought or skilful knowledge in action, mastery is complex, lateral or circular or even spiral in its trajectory, abstract, intuitive, and functionally evaluative, and largely ineffable. The master can see more than the immediate goal; she can see *potential* and *consequences* in what is in front of her. She can anticipate potential problems; moreover she knows how to go about countering or resolving them even if she has never encountered them before. She is, in other words, a visionary in terms of her materials, tools, problem-solving abilities, and the finding of new challenges within these parameters. The greatest masters – geniuses or originators – are those who pose and resolve new challenges with such strength, insight, general application, or generative power as to alter or deepen the understanding of the field and of human experience. However, at a more modest, localised level, mastery implies creative decisions, or creative adaption of a convention.

The movement toward mastery is the primary purpose of learning, and thus the primary purpose of professional crafts education. Sennett describes the problem implicit in learning dependent on inarticulate tacit knowledge:

“The apprentice is often expected to absorb the master’s lesson by osmosis; the master’s demonstration shows an act successfully performed, and the apprentice has to figure out what turned the key in the lock. Learning by demonstration puts the burden on the apprentice; it further assumes that direct imitation can occur. To be sure, the process often works, but equally often it fails. ... Written, directive language can make the process of osmosis more concrete and definite” (p. 181).

This observation is key to craft education and the importance of learning through studio practice. Furthermore, it highlights the importance for crafts instructors to try

sincerely to learn about and reflect on their practices more deeply—to find ways to articulate as much as possible their understanding of their practices and their field. Successful studio practice alone can conceivably rely solely or primarily on tacit knowledge or intuition, with little articulation being necessary. However, teaching requires more explicit insight and articulation abilities in order to be effective, especially in the compressed time frame of four years allotted to BFA-level education. Sennett's comments imply that failure is the likely outcome when attention to what needs to be absorbed is not overtly directed, pointed out, and reinforced verbally by instructors.

Mastery of the elements and processes of one's chosen medium provides the foundation for a kind of social authority on the one hand, as an expert, and self-identity and confidence on the other. This is the fundamental basis of various social and ethical values as well as self-esteem. True mastery entails not merely a pragmatic acceptance of standards, but more importantly, a commitment and a striving towards higher, more powerful standards, even those too ideal to be achievable. Standards may take the form of guiding principles or criteria of success, or satisfactorily appropriate results rather than specific technical details, like straight edges on cloth. It is in the realm of high crafting standards and social responsibility that mastery finds and implements its morality, and recognizes ethical dilemmas when those standards conflict with other imperatives (such as economics, external authority, etc.). The master can assess when to depart from convention or tradition, what to alter and why, because she understands the reasons underpinning the conventions of her medium.

Sennett also notes the importance of imperfections and failure in creative craft production, which is not only instructive but also a virtue, because it provides the subtle

individualising character to each handcrafted object (p. 104), even in serialised production. This is the crafts characteristic that Pye (1968) refers to as diversity of surface, which results from the *workmanship of risk* that distinguishes handmade objects from machined objects produced by the *workmanship of certainty* that aims to minimise or eliminate imperfection. Diversity of surface is produced also by the interrelation of material character—sometimes called the ‘voice’ of the material— and technique, coordinated, conjoined, and assessed under the guidance of the sensitivities of the skilled craftsman. Imperfections and failures in one context may fuel ideas and evocative solutions suitable for another context; alternatively serendipitous results may be assessed as improvements or enhancements to the current project. Sampling and experimentation are fundamental elements of crafts; some prefer these activities to finishing objects, just because it is instructive, stimulating, and fun to explore and discover ‘what happens if...’ rather than remaining in the realm of the already known.

However, Sennett also notes the cruel downside of failure: its ability to highlight our inadequacies and the limits of our skills or talents (p. 97) thus lowering our confidence by deflating our self-esteem. At the same time, the failures entailed in trial and error practice also can confer an important human virtue: “Failure ... can teach a fundamental modesty even if that virtue is gained at great pain” (p. 97). This modesty counterbalances the egotism that arises as confident mastery strengthens.

### **Purposes, Functions, and Uses**

Function, especially in the sense of applied physical function that Risatti (2007) uses as a criterion for the craft object, has long been recognised as a key interest of crafts

production. However, the terms ‘purpose’, ‘function’, and ‘use’ tend to be used interchangeably and generally, as do purposes and ‘intentions’, not to mention ‘utility’. Risatti brings welcome clarity to the discussion of functionality, highlighting important distinctions (2007, Chap. 1; also Landry, 2002). Briefly, people / craftspeople have purposes: wishes or needs that they desire to fulfil. Those purposes motivate the creation of objects specifically designed to fulfil those purposes, endowing those objects with those specific functions. Epiphenomenally, those same objects may also have capacities that allow them to be used in unanticipated ways, beyond those applied physical or visual functions intentionally embodied in their forms. Purposes produce more or less detailed specific intentions that guide the planning and execution of the project, and set the criteria of success. The general goal of the making is to build the function of the object to match or suit the intentions, although that does not prevent it surpassing those intentions. Also, as the planning and making progress, it is possible that original intentions will be clarified, refined, or radically altered, due to the emergent results and ideas that arise in response to such results, for example. The crafting process cannot be reduced to ‘mere’ making if the maker controls some of the decision-making.

Creative making—that is, making that is not primarily production of an established plan—is a dynamic process that has the power to reconfigure the original intentions of the designer/maker, even if the general purpose is maintained. It is not necessarily a linearly sequential process. Creation can be inspired or initiated by ideas arising from material, form, technique, equipment potential, physical need, as much as from abstract social ideas or a desire to provoke thoughtful contemplation. Narrative depiction and abstract decorative, atmospheric evocation are as valid subject matter as is social activism

or critical commentary, if they are what the maker wants to portray aesthetically. So too is the direct exploration of material qualities, technique and equipment potential as the primary content—all of these are ideas as well. However, it is likely that the media-bounded subject matters will be of interest primarily to practitioners within the medium, who may be the only group to whom such content is intelligible, because it operates through and refers to their specialised technical language. Form, on the other hand, refers to wider experiences shared by everyone to some extent; in this sense it is a broader and perhaps more accessible source of subject matter, as are abstract ideas (Fig. 5). For



Figure 5. Harlan House. (1997). *Reeded Tea Pot with Dogwood Handle*. Porcelain; imperial Snapdragon Yellow Glaze; dogwood. 18 cm. high. Photo by Harlan House.



example, in the Harlan House teapot (Fig. 5), the play of the highly refined, unified, and conventional symmetry of the body of the pot contrasts strongly with the rough assembly and natural appearance of the handle, to such an extent that the twig left on the handle appears to interfere with pouring it, while the form of the spout sports an idiosyncratic bulge that is also unexpectedly unconventional, even humorous.

However, in the main, the range of functions has already been well established by the range of object-types already evolved. Perfection of functional form is thus more a matter of the craftsman's individual mastery of the forms in which she takes an interest. This leaves little room for innovation of practical function; only refinement and variations played on the theme. In the two brooches by Pamela Ritchie (Fig. 6), which were part of a recent show in which brooches predominated, the typical scale and functional role of the brooch are unchallenged. Many of the brooches involved variations of using specifically the tiny circles formed by springs, so that each brooch projected

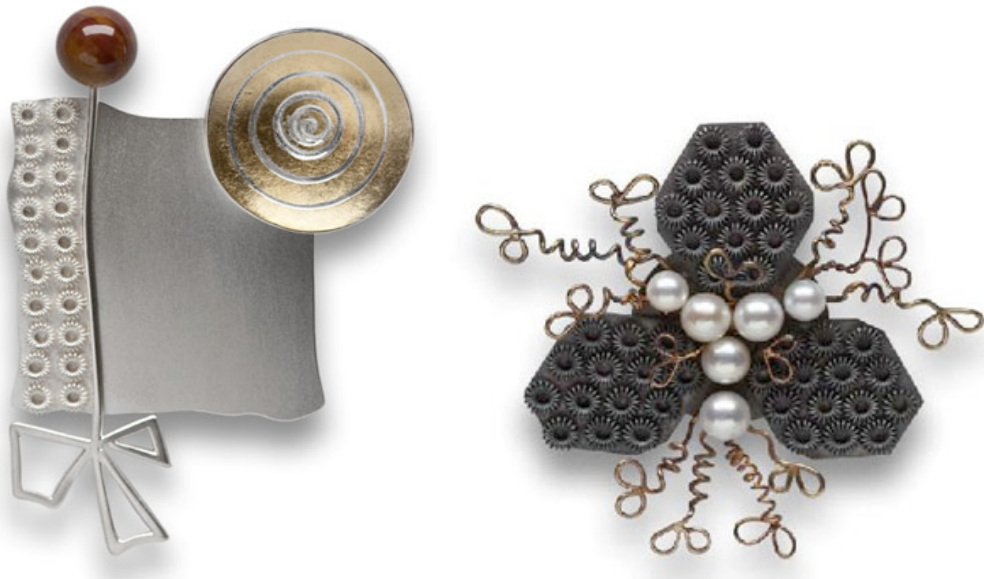


Figure 6. Pamela Ritchie (2010). Brooches.  
Left: Silver, 24 kt keum boo, agate. 7.3 x 5.2 x 1.1 cm. Right: Silver, pearls, gold. 5.3 x 5 x 2 cm. Photo by James Steeves.

a distinctively different character. Decorative, evocative, or communicative functions are much more open to variation and individuation than is practical function. So, decorative, evocative, or communicative functions are a much more appealing arena of play for the craftsperson, and one which the market / audience can readily appreciate. This is the aesthetic arena of style and fashion, in which craftspeople maintain what might be called a particular design / production niche, parallel to but distinct from commercial product design and mass production. If the potential for radical functional innovation is limited—and indeed might not even be recognisable as useful or desirable if it was in fact radically innovative—then we have to look at the *reiterative* role of crafts, and its importance in sustaining cultural stability and memory. Contrary to the creative mandate of avant-garde visual arts, innovation is not the only vital social role of cultural products. Cultural production also serves to reiterate and reinterpret social values that continue to be necessary and desirable, adapting their forms as necessary to suit contemporary life and local identities. This role is conservative, in the sense that it seeks specifically to preserve what is generally deemed to be valuable or indispensable, while at the same time varying the forms to maintain their vitality and aesthetic interest. Among the valuable social functions that material objects perform is individualisation, that is, selectively using objects to project images of ourselves and our cultural values into the world. Banal objects perform this function as well as interesting objects. Machined objects as well as individually crafted objects do the same thing. What becomes important are the meanings they project, through their embodied features as well as through their interactions with other objects in groupings, which may be deliberately or accidentally assembled.

This returns us to the idea of creating objects for under-determined future use as material for the design or crafting activity of others. Self-sufficiency is a typical criterion of art works, but not an essential criterion for craft works, only an option. As for ‘thingness’, the very fact that we can name and identify individual components as separable components with particular expected features, and manufacture them independently prior to assembly with the requisite embedded functionality, already confers clear objecthood on them, even if only for a limited audience. To the producing craftsman, they are ‘finished’ objects that serve their particular purposes, including the purpose of being suitable for integration into larger wholes. Michael Fortune’s Sanctuary furnishings for the United Church of Canada (Fig. 7) are designed from the beginning to fit with the architecture and interior design of the space, as elements comprising a larger whole, even though they might also stand on their own as fine furniture. Ceramic tiles, coffee tables, carved mantles, and woven cloth are all examples of the intentional production of objects to become materials of further designer-making activities, usually done by others to suit needs that the first maker can only vaguely or generally anticipate. Indeterminacy or under-determinacy poses different design problems and criteria that typically cause the crafts design to focus on performance and material qualities, and aesthetic features with more general, atmospheric appeal.



Figure 7. Michael C. Fortune (n.d). Sanctuary Area, United Church of Canada, Wood furnishings, altar table, side tables, and stands. Cherry, East Indian rosewood details. Altar Table, 10 ft. long. Works in an interior setting operate in concert with the surrounding objects and architecture. Photo by Michael C. Fortune.

More generally, I find it problematic to exclude a large segment of the actual deployment of craft knowledge and skills in this manner, for the sake of a particular social convention: the modern configuration of a self-sufficient fine crafts object in the Euro-American sense that is far from universal. In this sense, and in terms of his functional taxonomy of things—containers, covers, supports, and possibly shelters—I think Risatti has over-reduced the taxonomy of practical or ‘applied functions’ (Risatti’s term) for the sake of economy. However, I would agree on the importance of functionality among the key dimensions of craft. The very fact that he has to exempt

architectural craftwork because it fails his imposed criteria of portability and human scale (p. 34) shows that these criteria need to be reconsidered.

I agree with Risatti's emphasis on the essentially social character of art and its communicative purposes (p. 79). He notes that many crafts objects are conceived with both functional and communicative (aesthetic) intentions. Risatti views these two intentions as the extremities of a continuum along which distinctions can be arranged, since art-making necessarily requires some form of tangible craft to realise it in a physical object, accessible to the perception of others. This is also the feature that enables many crafts objects to qualify as art, and any makers using crafts media to consider themselves artists, orienting themselves to art world purposes and conventions. However, this hybrid nature of craft also facilitates the confusion and debate between art and craft categories, and the stereotyping of makers in particular media that ensues, and has been perpetuated by history, or more importantly, by art historiography.

Figure 8 outlines an initial taxonomy of possible functions that craft works can have, or be used for. It has been developed in part with reference to the functions described by Penny Storm (1987) in *Functions of Dress: Tool of Culture and the Individual*. Her outline provides an excellent basis that can be readily adapted to the broader context of all kinds of objects. Given the close relationship of purpose, intentions, and use to the functional agency of objects, it is not surprising that the following set of categories may also be applicable to purposes, intentions, and even to uses, even when the embedded function of the object itself differs from the uses to which it may be put. This simply means that objects can operate in multiple ways, not only with multiple intentions embodied by the maker, but also in terms of the ways in which the object becomes used.

Figure 8. Taxonomy of Functions

**Intrinsic Functions:**

- Adornment of body or environment – ornamenting or embellishing, diversifying or vivifying surfaces
- Utility, Convenience, Protection – purposeful, inbuilt capacity for particular practical, physical functions, including tool functions, extending physical or sensory capabilities of the body or the environment structuring the environment, covering, containing, cutting, supporting, sheltering, transporting
- Modesty and Privacy – concealing or revealing body or environment

**Symbolic Functions (Communicative, Expressive):**

- Communication of social roles – including age, gender, occupation, lifestyle, attainments (e.g. parenthood, independence, honours), ceremonial roles
- Communication of social status – including prestige (wealth, honours, education), social power, social or occupational authority, gender status, age status, assertion of social distance, marginality or alienation

**Sociological Functions:**

- Social Class – asserting relationship to social class system, reiterating taste preferences, instantiating social mobility
- Dissemination of Fashion – exposing, spreading innovations, trends, styles, expanding extending cultural memory
- Symbols – asserting particular claims or stances, conforming to or rejecting dominant cultural stances, asserting or integrating ethnicities, creating cultural visibility
- Economic – sustaining livelihoods, systems of exchange, using and extending available resources, reflecting or altering local economic conditions, global exchange
- Political – reflecting or maintaining social order, proposing change, social activism or critique, revolution, sumptuary legislation, symbolising affiliation, allegiance, authority or rebellion; depicting social histories; cementing diplomatic agreements, bonds, tribute
- Religion, Cosmology, Beliefs – sacred or devotional objects, talismans, conventional symbols and practices, conformity, acts of meditation, religious identity, depicting cultural, cosmological, or religious narratives and morality tales

**Psychological Functions:**

- Self-hood– reflection or development of self-hood, self-esteem, agency, curiosity
- Group dynamics – interpersonal bonding, community solidarity, cooperative agency, thinking & learning in groups, cultural learning
- Behaviour – conformity, discipline, restraint, decorum
- Well-being (psycho-physio factors) – therapeutics, strength, dexterity, motor control, mind-body coordination, social participation
- Issues and applications – values, interests, attitudes; integration and differentiation

Meaning emerges as a consequence of the presence and interaction of these multiple purposes, intentions, functions, and uses, alongside the material, technical, and practical connotations built into the object through the crafting activity.

## Processes of Creation

The simplest and most generic definition of the creative process might be expressed as *the process of placing the elements of object-making into fruitful relation with one another*. Descriptions of a creative process are deceptively simple and may appear reductive, in that it seems to reinforce the false idea of a singular, unified, sequential process that is followed by every maker for any situation. Like Heskitt (2002, p. 2), I would argue that there are many possible processes that craftspeople develop for themselves to suit the diverse purposes and circumstances that they might find themselves addressing. Personally, I am aware that my creative process differs, depending on my starting point or inspiration. For example, I have designed cloth based on exploring a particular contrast between a very shiny, smooth, white yarn and a mottled off-white, slubby, hairy yarn, using complex repeat patterns that occasionally foreground the white strongly against the uneven matte texture. Key to this project is the way that the shiny yarn reflects light as the fabric moves, and thus shows or conceals the pattern depending on the angle of viewing and the degree of available light. Another on-going project is the investigation of colour and tonal manipulation of two colours in cut and uncut velvet technique, picked up to create a tonal design with more than two effective colour contrasts (Fig. 1). Yet another project is an investigation of the multiple colours or tones orchestrated by corduroy pile weave structures and other twill structures, using only three weft colours alternated one after the other in strict 1, 2, 3, repeated sequence (Fig. 9). I have begun to investigate this idea of colour combinations for velvet pile technique as well, which does not seem to have occurred in historical velvets.





Figure 9. Wendy Landry (2001). *Papillons*. Jacquard-woven panel, cotton; 106 x 86 cm. The bottom half was woven with a sequence of red, yellow, blue. The top half was woven with a sequence of red, yellow, green. The warp on the loom was solid black. All colour variation is orchestrated by the weave structures.

In other cases, I begin with the desire for a particular object, a jacket for example, and decide what colours, overall visual and textural effect, and weight of material I want it to have. I may buy a beautiful ribbon, in colours that suit my living room furniture, and design a cushion cover to showcase the ribbon in a durable woven fabric. Or perhaps I will decide the ribbon should be applied onto fabric, rather than woven. Finally, I may work with a graphic drawing or image on the computer, running the image through successive transformations of colour and filters in Photoshop, to generate a range of variations that might make a good tapestry, velvet panel, or other kind of textile. Even



then, the velvet panel might be such as to inspire a set of coordinated inset panels for the sides of a wooden box, in which to keep my antique weaving books. Some projects begin simply with doodles or sampling of new materials, motivated by a purely physical urge to use my hands and work my tools in particular ways.

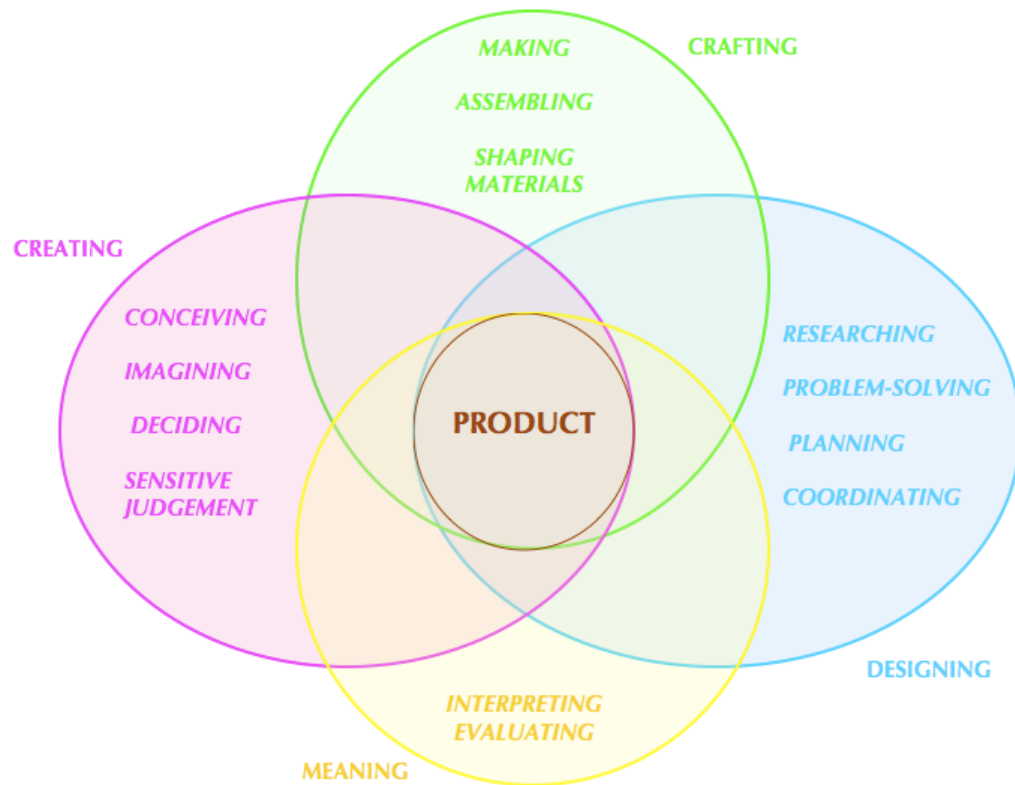
Not all of my decisions are immediately worked out. The nature of weaving permits me to defer some decisions while getting on with others. Projects set up to make samples will not require a full plan of variations to be tested; some ideas for variations may be generated in the course of testing other variations, as a result of what is discovered during the sampling. Some colour combinations may prove less satisfactory than imagined, and require rethinking. Thread densities may need to be amended. However, some aspects of weaving require advance planning and must be done in a particular order. The width and length of the project, and the number of threads per inch must be worked out in order to mount the warp on the loom. The weave must be determined early on, because different weave systems require different set-ups; some involve more than one warp, and velvet projects require two warps of different lengths with different thread densities across the width and different tensioning systems. Appropriate looms and thread spacers must be available to suit the technical requirements of the weave. If the materials have to be purchased, the amounts required by the project have to be calculated.

The full and final vision of the project may appear early in the process to the maker, or it may develop in incremental steps. Progress may not be steady; the maker may oscillate back and forth between conceiving and imagining, research, planning, testing or beginning crafting, assessing results, revising, doing more research, etc. Each medium dictates its necessary sequence of actual craft tasks for its techniques; each medium

allows deferral of decisions in different ways, at different times, within different component tasks. The nature of each project will also suggest the creative strategies and how to order and implement them.

There are many models of ‘the creative process’, simple and complex. I created the model depicted in Figure 10 based on the idea of activities or tasks engaged in while operating in different ‘modes’ of thought during a project, as I tried to understand distinctions between ‘crafting’, ‘designing’, and ‘the art part’ (‘creating’), as well as ‘interpreting’. For me, their most useful definition was related to the particular kinds of tasks or activities associated with each mode. It is interesting to note that ‘the art part’ has no directly associated verb in the way that the other terms have. But it is crucial to understand that working on creative problem-solving is above all an activity, a ‘doing’, more than just a ‘thing done’. To act is meaningful in itself, whether or not it leads to clear results or products. As a set of actions that amount to a coherent activity, the verbal form of the terms is more apt and less confusing—the sense of an active process is preserved.

Figure 10. General Taskscape of the Creative Process



Ingold’s (2000) concept of *taskscape* is useful for understanding skilled crafts activity. Ingold defines a taskscape as “the totality of tasks making up the pattern of activity” (p. 325).<sup>87</sup> And he regards “tasks” as “socially-embedded activities” with very specific characteristics:

“First and foremost, tasks are activities carried out by persons, calling for greater or lesser degrees of technical skill. Machines do not perform tasks, but people do. Thus with a task-orientation the human subject, equipped with a competence acquired through practising alongside more experienced hands, is situated right at the centre of productive activity. Secondly, tasks are defined primarily in terms of their objectives, without necessarily entailing any explicit codification of the rules and procedures to be followed in realising them. And these objectives, far from being independently prescribed in the form of exercises in problem-solving (as

<sup>87</sup> Ingold appears to apply this definition across whole communities. I am taking the liberty of applying it more discretely to the totality of tasks involved in completing a creative project, from conception to completion. In the design world, this would be a community of activity. For Ingold, a craft project would be a task, within the total activity of the community.

in the entirely artificial tasks of ‘testing’ in the school or psychological laboratory), themselves arise through the agent’s involvement within the current of social life. Thirdly, the particular kinds of tasks that a person performs are an index of his or her personal and social identity: the tasks you do depend on who you are, and in a sense the performance of certain tasks *makes* you the person who you are. And finally, tasks are never accomplished in isolation, but always within a setting that is itself constituted by the co-presence of others whose own performances necessarily have a bearing on one’s own.” (p. 325).

Like my model, his concept focuses on the active, procedural character of skilled activity in a way that usefully transcends the art/design/craft confusions. His concept of taskscape finds fit with my model of activities at one level. If we are prone to segregate these activities conceptually, we are likely to do so on the basis of the sets of particular tasks and subtasks that I identify in Fig. 8. These are the procedural components of crafting any object in general, without identifying particular proportions, sequence, or emphasis for any of them. The proportions or emphases are determined by what the project demands. But it also resonates with the placement of crafting in the greater social sense of crafts as sometimes a communal activity of “others whose own performances necessarily have a bearing on one’s own” (p.325). At an even larger scale, the concept bears on the constitution of the craft world, or the fit of a craftsperson within their family and local community.

Ingold offers other observations on the crafting of objects, the nature of artefacts and the relations between maker, idea, and materiality in the application of technical skills. He points out that design is itself very limited, as it is impossible to completely specify an object in advance of its making (p. 344) in such a way as to completely account for its generation. In contrast, he argues that the form is generated by and emerges from the interplay of forces between arising from *the patterns of skilled movement* of the maker

and the resistant or compliant characteristics of the material itself. Rather than imposing form onto a pre-existing, unresistant, and essentially passive surface, the process of building the artefact is one that I like to call “setting a process in motion” within particular parameters. The conception and detailed designing processes identify the operative parameters of the project, within which the processes set in motion will generate the object. Ingold views the making of artefacts as a process of growth:

“the form arises through a process of growth within what is known technically as the ‘morphogenetic field’—that is, the total system of relations set up by virtue of the presence of the developing organism in its environment. And the role of genes in the morphogenetic process is not to specify the form, even incompletely, but to set the parameters ... within which it unfolds (Goodwin 1982: 111).” (p. 344).

The designer-maker begins with a more or less clear idea of a final object, but the dynamics of the process of engaging the material with greater or lesser degrees of skill or control is still under-determined at the outset, and only emerges as the artefact is gradually built by the processes in motion; the precise form of the artefact is “the crystallisation of activity within a relational field, its regularities of form embodying the regularities of movement that gave rise to it” (p. 345). The conception and design of objects fulfils the role of genes in the morphogenetic process, establishing some of the explicit, appropriate parameters. The capacity of the maker, her tools, and the physical properties of the materials establish other, implicit parameters that affect that process. And the social and cultural environment of the maker establishes the purposes, functions, and form-types of objects as well as making practices, which provide other parameters. This is the total field of relations and regularities of thought from which the artefact arises and in terms of which it is evaluated.

The under-determinacy of this process mirrors what Pye (1968) means by the workmanship of risk, although with Pye, the issue of workmanship and control is more a matter of the continual risk of errors of technique or unanticipated material inconsistencies that cannot be avoided and that cause undesirable flaws in the work. The tasks of conceiving and designing the intended work are therefore not fully determinate, even if they leave the actual production to others. Thus the work of those crafting objects designed by others is also creative, as it fills in for the under-determined elements in skill, and resolves technical and material problems that arise. Designers rely on this skill of the craftsman to fill in or adjust the necessary parameters of the process, that the designer cannot supply. In the case of the lone craftsperson, in whom the designing and making roles are combined, not all the parameters need be established at the outset; some of those decisions can be deferred to a later point in the making process, as I described above.

As Ingold suggests, the maker is never fully alone, but is immersed in a world of conventions, understandings, and artefact types, to which they fit themselves. They have not invented their technical skills from scratch; for the most part they have learned from others. Furthermore, most craftspeople purchase many of their materials and supplies, rather than gathering and processing them from scratch. Often, craft tools are made by others, usually as a generic tool-type. Special needs evolved by the craftsperson may require modifying the generic tools to fit their particular needs. Their business or exhibiting activities bring them into contact with colleagues, patrons, critics, curators, etc. whose opinions or advice contribute information and examples that influence the maker's designs or goals. Their reading and looking at other artefacts connects them to scholars and other practitioners around the globe, as well as ideas about how artefacts fit into other

cultural settings. This involves them in a wider social sphere, which itself exemplifies various kinds of intellectual explorations, taskscapes and skilled activities they might engage in or adapt to their purposes.

Figure 11 outlines in more detail the general set and sequence of tasks forming the full taskscape of crafts or object-making.

Figure 11. General Outline of Creative Process

- Motivation
  - Intrinsic – maker’s particular interest in medium, techniques, materials, or problem under consideration; ideological position; fulfilment of personal needs or wants (material, psychological, intellectual)
  - Extrinsic – fulfilment of wishes of others; economic need for livelihood; completion of necessary but not intrinsically interesting chores; social pressures or obligations
  - Both in combination
- Conception
  - Finding / posing of problem – identification of intentions
  - Envisioning of resolution, outline of general project parameters, criteria of success
- Research
  - Review of pre-existing solutions, models & means of resolution
  - Identification and analysis of nature of problem being addressed
  - Goals or conditions of acceptable or successful resolution
- Ideational Development
  - Brainstorming possible approaches
  - Review of possible solutions
    - Appropriateness to problem-resolution goals
      - Appropriate level of finish
      - Fitness to purpose
    - Feasibility
      - Fitness to constraints
  - Modelling of feasible solutions
  - Sampling of elements for feasible solutions
  - Selection of best potential solutions
- Prototyping of best potential solutions
- Selection of optimum solution
- Production of “final” solution or “finished” object(s)
- Assessment of production
  - Quality, acceptability of objects produced
  - Quality, acceptability of process used
  - Degree and quality of fulfilment of goals & intentions

Figure 12 summarises the factors that constrain creative crafts making, that set the design and crafting parameters and influence the decisions made during the process.

Figure 12. Constraints On or Guiding Parameters of Creative Process

- Prior experience, degree of mastery of problem-solving, making, etc.
- Purposes – Intentions
  - Practical / functional
  - Aesthetic, symbolic
    - Decorative
    - Emotive
    - Communicative
    - Provocative
    - Descriptive, Didactic
- Repertoire of techniques
- Available material, supplies
- Available equipment
- Available labour
- Available time
- Available economic resources
- Availability and appropriateness of workshop or studio space
- Cultural norms, conventions, range of acceptable variation
  - Institutional, industry generated
  - Client generated
  - Audience generated
  - Field of practice generated
- Client, audience expectations
  - Commercial niche
  - Problem being addressed
    - Acceptable resolution based on criteria of acceptability

### ***Co(a)gency: Working with Tools***

One of the major characteristics distinguishing crafts making from machine making is the relationship of the craftsperson with her tools. This relationship is less well covered by the literature and discourse than is the encounter with materials. In the case of materials, the discourse gives a sense of an encounter, a dialog or even a contest with an “other” that has its own “persona” or resistant character, and thus its own individual agency (Gell, 1998). In the case of tools, the discourse, when it occurs, takes the



approach that the tools are simple extensions of the hands and fingers, with special capabilities, like slicing, abrading, holding, incising, etc. Sometimes the term ‘the third hand’ is used, emphasising this extension of body. Small power tools are treated the same way; the key idea is that all these tools are under the intimate control of the maker, specifically the maker’s hand. Thus the guiding hand, along with the monitoring eye, is viewed as of paramount importance, while the purpose-designed tool is taken for granted.

I want to offer another view of the craftsman’s relationship with tools, inspired by Michael’s (2000) idea of *co(a)gency*. Michael proposes that people using particular objects—ordinary objects in ordinary circumstances of use—behave in particular, regular, and thus predictable ways with those objects. In effect, the combination of person and object(s)—co-agency—produces a new entity with a particular *cogent* character that is specifically due to that co-agency. The person and the tool extend each other. Translating this to the case of weaving with a large handloom, for example, the idea of co(a)gency poses the question, *When* is a weaver a weaver? Or alternately, Is a weaver a weaver in the absence of her loom? Clearly, a weaver using her equipment is a weaver, otherwise she would not be able to use her equipment. But is she a weaver when not weaving, that is when not actively utilising her specialised knowledge?

A weaver is a good example of this concept, because the weaver is often inserted into the loom, as a vital component. The handweaver provides the power that sends the weft threads in the shuttle across the web; she pulls the beater forward to beat the weft into place; she pushes the pedals or pulls up the cords or bars that cause the threads to lift in their patterns (Figs.13 and 14).



Figure 13. Vietnamese Backstrap Weaver (n.d). Her body provides the tensioning frame for the loom, while the mechanism of sticks with string heddles attached to warp threads provides the ‘memory’ for making the complex pattern in the cloth. (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Government of Vietnam.)

Weavers using backstrap looms, such as the one shown in Figure 13, are most integrated with their loom, because their body is used as part of the frame holding the threads in tension. The backstrap weaver moves her back to tighten and release the tension rhythmically as part of the pattern of necessary movements as she weaves. In other words, the weaver is physically a part of the loom. Simultaneously, the loom extends the weaver’s ability, by holding the threads in complex orders, under tension, and by lifting threads efficiently in groups to form consistent patterns. Some of the weaver’s memory is displaced into the regular orderings of threadings and combinations of lift patterns held on the heddle bars, shafts or jacquard cords, rendering the process

consistent, smooth, and less arduous, as well as quicker (Fig. 14). Handweaving relies on this co(a)gency in which the combination of human and loom produces a cogent productive unit—weaver—that effectively only exists when the two are conjoined.



Fig. 14. North American Weaver Using Computer-assisted Loom (2005). She still sits close to the work, and operates the lifting, throwing, and beating with her body. The loom mechanism extends her memory by ‘storing’ the pattern. She can feel the tension of the threads when she presses the beater, throws the shuttle, and presses the treadles to lift the threads. Photo by Beryl Moody.

The weaver produces her cloth in *co-operation* with her loom; they are co-agents, each contributing their own particular abilities to the process in coordination with the other. Each type of loom constrains, but also suggests, what the weaver can do with its help. The weaver has the power to alter or adapt the loom, or interfere with its ordinary powers. Nevertheless, the weaver must behave in particular ways with the loom—indeed with each particular type of loom—in order to get the work done. Each loom offers

particular advantages at the cost of disadvantages—freedom and potential at the cost of time, effort, consistency, or mechanical constraints. Thus the weaver’s choice of equipment, when she has a choice, is a matter of balancing the advantages and disadvantages of each particular type against her plans for the project. When the weaver’s choice of equipment is already determined by circumstance or preference, she will design the project to fit within its constraints. This may introduce obstacles or limitations, but overcoming them may in fact induce creative solutions.

This relationship may or may not be true of all tools in all media. But even simple, purpose-built tools, such as a knife, require the assumption of particular stances, the application of particular muscular forces and gestures, in order to be used effectively and safely. Thus the user adapts to the forms and control requirements of their tools, both bodily and mentally. When we choose tools that do their job well in our hands, we do so on the basis of a sense of satisfactory co-agency. This can be the basis for developing affection for particular tools—when we are well attuned to them, we co-operate with them literally. Thus we become a more cogently powerful unity.

### **Techniques are Ideas, Too**

Techniques are the specific means by which the tool user engages or amplifies the capacities built into their tools—or if necessary, represses or redirects them. Physically, techniques are the systematic patterns of movement and deployment of the inbuilt capacities offered by the maker, the tools and the materials. Intellectually, techniques are the tested, reliable, specific set of arrangements of materials, sequences of actions, governing natural or conceptual principles, and ‘rules’ that together orchestrate those

patterns of movement and activate the inbuilt physical capacities. As a result, techniques are coherent ideas that direct physical practices of craftspeople.

Each medium has its set of techniques, developed in correspondence with the materials to be worked, the tools available, the capacities or limitations of the human body, and the forms and functions envisioned. These techniques have driven refinements in tools just as the capacities of tools have often suggested new techniques. In the history of weaving, for example, the principle of the drawn-out, perpendicular velvet loop being shifted into the warp direction as opposed to the weft direction, for the sake of uniformity and efficiency, led to the development of multiple warp systems with independent storage, tensions, and lengths—a major innovation in weaving technology and a whole new idea or principle to work with (Landry, 1997). Once techniques become established, with all the kinks worked out and encoded in ‘rules’ that lead to reliable results, it becomes part of the accumulated and transmittable knowledge of the medium, and the usual manner in which it is used becomes standardised and taken for granted. When this occurs, the technique no longer looks like an idea; it can be learned at the superficial level of simply a set pattern of actions leading to particular results. This is fine for reproduction of similar objects in quantity; however, it obscures the ideational value of technique, overlooking the possible creative potential that may remain untapped within the idea or the principle in question. In the case of velvet, for example, this untapped potential of the technique as idea is precisely what I am exploring in my studio work, inspired by surviving historical examples, but moving beyond them. My technical investigations are reviving the velvet technique for use in the contemporary repertoire of handweaving.

## **Crafts, Ethics, and Community**

In order to serve their community, craftspeople accept the obligations to give priority to their patrons' wishes, adopting the problems or requirements of others as their own. This may mean suppressing personal inclinations of style or innovative interpretation, and reiterating traditional forms, or remaining within the confines of traditional expectations and understanding.

More intrinsically, a core value of craftsmanship is to do the work well for the sake of doing it well—because doing it well matters, and has practical, social, and personal implications. This is an ethical, moral responsibility. When a craftsperson commits to craftsmanship, she commits to appropriate ethical standards toward both the objects made and the human roles and import those objects have for others.

## **Crafts: A Social World of Social Worlds**

I have referred to the idea of an art or craft world. We also need to think about multiple craft world(s), defined in terms of medium, or type of objects made, or distinctions between art (symbolic) or craft (practical) purposes. Becker's discussion of art worlds (1982) highlights the extent of these social worlds, as well as their links to the larger social community. In addition to the conventions and purposes that are provided by the community, he discusses the network of dealers, curators, publications, writers, suppliers, community institutions and organisations, schools, funding, libraries, and other resources that form the environment in which crafts activities operate and by which they are shaped. Some of these resources are specific to the crafts communities: provincial



crafts councils and the Canadian Crafts Federation; general publications such as *American Crafts* or the *Journal of Modern Craft* and media-oriented publications such as *Textiles* or *Ceramics Monthly*; craft funding programmes of the Canada Council; awards such as the Saidye Bronfman Award; shops, museums, and galleries, such as the gallery of the Guild of Canadian Crafts in Montreal the Textile Museum in Toronto, or the Clay and Glass Gallery in Kitchener; schools and studio residency programmes, such as the New Brunswick College of Craft and Design or the Harbourfront Studio residencies; manufacturers of equipment and materials for particular media; and finally, local guilds which may be professional or amateur in their orientation and membership. These form the core of the crafts world(s), and the context in which crafts discourse, such as it is, operates. In addition, there are patrons and connoisseurs who support the activities.

Appendix 8 depicts a model of crafts-related activity that corresponds to the crafts world.

Crafts worlds, usually bound together by media interests, are as much the arena of amateurs as of professionals. The activity of professionals sets some of the standards for amateur activity, but it does not always match the motivations and purposes to which amateurs give attention. It is an unfortunate development that amateur work is often reviled by crafts professionals, who claim that amateur work is inferior, under-educated, overly conventional, insufficiently innovative, and uninteresting. Granted, there is amateur craftwork for which this is true; there is also professional craftwork for which such comments are equally true.

Gift exchange, or the making of special objects as a gesture of affection, familial bonds, or celebration is a common reason behind amateur making. These kinds of interpersonal or social gestures are not necessarily subject to the same standards of

quality that would be used to assess the work of professionals. While high standards of craftsmanship are certainly appreciated in such objects, the potency of the meaning and the social bonding that is achieved by the gesture does not *depend* on those same standards; rather it is the effort, thoughtfulness, and appropriateness of the gesture itself that matters to the recipient. In such cases, high quality is something of a bonus.

It is important not to devalue the skills and capabilities of amateur work. Serious amateurs are often highly committed to the same standards of quality and the same purposes as are professionals. They may have attained the same or higher degrees of technical skill and knowledge, with or without formal education. Their alternate fields of experience may provide them with fruitful content to explore. Their social integration and appreciation of crafts traditions, that leads them voluntarily to choose to engage in a craft practice for its own sake, implies an appreciation of its values and creative potential. Amateurs are ardent supporters of the cultural value of crafts; indeed, they might be regarded as proof of such cultural value. In addition, their activity helps to support the work of professional craftspeople as well as the dealers, publications, suppliers, galleries, museums, and teaching activities that comprise the craft world. Holding to high standards (as opposed to just claiming high standards) should not entail disrespect for the general community that supports crafts activities.

### **Overview of Craft Activity**

Figure 15 outlines the various dimensions that comprise crafts activity, generally. As the title indicates, the component dimensions can also be regarded as analytical categories, useful for describing activities, analysing relationships, and interpreting or



Figure 15. Dimensions of Crafts Activity / Qualitative Assessment Categories

- Material dimensions – nature, quality, appropriateness, specialness
- Technical dimensions – nature, quality, appropriateness, specialness
- Intentional/purposive dimensions – appropriateness, degree of innovation
- Functional/performative dimensions
  - fitness to purpose
  - durability
  - ease or comfort of use
- Aesthetic dimensions
  - quality & character of formal appearance
  - symbolic potency or atmospheric impact
- Qualitative dimensions – quality of workmanship-craftsmanship
- Professional dimensions – alignment to general professional standards
- Ethno-cultural dimensions
  - reflection or expression of cultural or ethnic identity
  - investigation of cultural norms
  - contestation of stereotypes, colonialist or racist attitudes
- Religious or sacred dimensions
  - religious or sacred conventions
  - role, meaning in sacred practices or cosmology
  - magical or ritualistic functions (protective talisman, spiritual curative)
- Political dimensions
  - reflection of political authority
  - expression of particular ideology
- Institutional dimensions – alignment to expectations of social institutions
- Commercial/economic dimensions
  - feasibility
  - degree of success and influence
  - economic development of field or community
  - access to supportive community resources
  - systems and effectiveness of dissemination of goods or services
- Labour/production dimensions
  - organisation & efficiency of workers
  - organisation & efficiency of workshops, processes of production
  - working conditions and regulations
  - training of workers
- Personal dimensions
  - psychological expressiveness
  - audience responsiveness
  - development of personal body of work, career, reputation
- Intellectual dimensions
  - breadth and degree of insight
  - degree of intellectual challenge
  - degree & significance of innovation or discovery

assessing crafts works. It suggests what to consider or look for when looking at crafts works and attempting to understand what craftspeople do and what their activities mean.

Figure 15 can assist instructors to develop more specific guidelines for assessment in studio situations, and to discuss qualities and features of crafts works with their students. It also offers a template for what to investigate in scholarship projects involving crafts.

### **Conclusion**

In this chapter, I have described not only the manner in which crafts activities proceed, but also the manner in which they convey and accrue cultural meanings. Craft-making activities and the objects produced are active constituents and catalysts of meaning—they shape culture as much as they reflect it. Through their crafts, craftspeople give tangible form to desires, needs, and values on behalf of their complexly intersecting communities—reasserting and updating those values in the process. In addition, craftspeople expand and express their personal selfhood, intellectual growth, and social agency.

It will perhaps be noted how much of the above is also characteristic of visual arts activities. A case can be made for regarding visual arts as a special case of crafting activity, rather than the other way around, as is currently the habit.

It is reasonable to expect that crafts education would introduce and support all the elements that I have identified in crafts education. That is clearly a tall order, and one that the current state of crafts scholarship, instructor understanding, and graduate education does not yet support very clearly. In the next chapter, I will investigate the need to encourage and develop the necessary scholarship for crafts study.

## Chapter Eight

### CRAFTS SCHOLARSHIP

This chapter will discuss crafts scholarship, as a complementary activity to crafts practice. My view of crafts scholarship is based on the premise that crafts activities are cultural phenomena, that are not only shaped by the culture in which they appear, but also are active constituents of that culture, both in terms of the actions of participants and the material products or other consequences of the activity. This view takes culture to be what emerges from and through the everyday actions of cultural participants. It is not limited to what they are thought to believe or understand intellectually, or to what they articulate or claim, or to what emotional, social, or familial bonds they have. This view regards what cultural participants do, and how and why they do so, as culturally significant in its own right, as the crucial means of realising and thus shaping culture.

The tangible objects that emerge from the everyday crafting activities, and survive into the future, are thus not the culture, but representatives of that culture. They are materialisations of the actual culture that existed in and through the accumulated actions of its participants. These cultural actions include the making and use of objects in further cultural actions. Divorced by time from their originating context, in which they were active participants and tools, the 'dead objects' are now documents that provide a tangible guide toward understanding those activities. Similarly, the living practices and knowledge that have endured into the present are also tangible guides to the historical past of actions and ideas. The purpose of craft scholarship is not just to study the objects made, but through those objects to study the activities and understandings that give rise to

those objects and the purposes they fulfilled. From this perspective, crafting activities can be understood as a key *means of enacting* culture. Even if the main objective is just to understand the objects, they cannot be *fully* understood without understanding these same activities, which are complexly integrated with their relevant contexts. The objects produced share in this making of culture to the extent that they become the means of doing particular things. In other words, culture is *actually* formed of the *activities* of people and what those activities mean by virtue of their interrelations. The things produced are representatives of this active culture and provide clues to these activities. Thus I undertook to investigate velvet weaving, the craft activity, rather than just velvet, the product.

Velvet is a type of cloth. As such it is both a thing and a concept. Artefact types are representatives of particular ideas made concrete, or put into productive interaction with each other. Some of those ideas are related to the final tactile and visual effect of velvet cloth; some of those ideas are related to the woven, structural organisation of elements and processes, and how these differ from other means of achieving similar effects. Studying velvet cloth tells me only what had been made; studying velvet weaving in its material context tells me what was done in the past and why, and how I and others can continue to work with these ideas in the present. Understanding how crafts activities serve to make as well as reflect culture is necessarily a broad, complex enterprise to which many academic disciplines potentially may contribute.

Crafts scholarship as a whole fulfils four main purposes. The first purpose is *documentation and preservation*, which provides access through time to the accumulated knowledge and ideas produced by and about crafting activities and its products. The

second purpose is *illumination and explanation* of crafts activities: what motivates and sustains them, and how they operate and relate to other socio-cultural, economic or personal activities. The third purpose is *interpretation* of the meaningfulness of the activity: how the activity reflects and expresses cultural ideas and materially constitutes culture for its participants, and how it embeds both explicit and implicit meanings. The fourth purpose is *evaluation* of the more general import or contribution of the activity in its immediate context and as a pan-cultural human legacy over time.

### **Velvet Weaving: An On-Going Research Programme**

The arbitrary conclusion of my MFA research after two years (Landry, 1997) left me with intriguing unanswered questions related to the gaps found in the published literature of textiles, not only of velvet, but also of weaving technology. In particular, I wanted to insert the Coptic linen velvets<sup>88</sup> into the history of velvet, and to see how much of its mysterious origins I could reveal. These rare Coptic textiles have been attributed roughly to between the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> century, and are presumed to have been made in Egypt, possibly the famous southern weaving city of Achmîm, the Greek Panopolis (Kendrick, 1922). This project is on-going and multi-faceted, with many parts yet to be accomplished. In addition, I maintain a broader interest in the history of velvet to the present, and in developing its potential as a technique for contemporary handweavers. Historical exemplars inspire not only revitalisation of the techniques, but also ideas that were not historically exploited, and that are within the means of inventive weavers.

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<sup>88</sup> The Coptic velvets in the Victoria and Albert Museum have been attributed to between the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> centuries CE, and were reportedly recovered from Egyptian burial sites (Kendrick, 1922). Not all are dated, but with the exception of the examples at the Royal Ontario Museum, they are consistent with those that have attributions. I have been unable to obtain documentation of the ROM example.



Figure 16. Detail of Pick-up Velvet. Use of two colours is expanded to four using the subtle tonal variation between cut matte and shiny loops of texture in the original two colours of wool. In silk, the tonal differences between cut and uncut loops would be more pronounced and vivid, effectively producing more distinct colour differences.

As a result, my research has two main branches. The first branch involves experimental archaeology of the historical techniques in order to explain the extant artefacts and references, including the modifications to looms and other equipment. The second branch involves an expansive exploration of the diverse textural and colour combinations possible, many of which do not appear in historical exemplars but which

can be exploited by handweavers using simple looms and a hand manipulation weaving technique known as *pick-up* (Fig. 16).<sup>89</sup>

### **Crafts Scholarship: A Network of Interconnecting Questions**

Crafts scholarship may begin with any of a variety of questions, ranging from technical or aesthetic to social, political, or economic. To the extent that the questions implicate crafts activities, they constitute crafts scholarship, whatever disciplinary focus or topic is involved. In Chapter 7, I identified 15 dimensions of crafts activities that might be investigated: material; technical; intentional/purposive; functional/performative; aesthetic; qualitative; professional; ethno-cultural; religious/sacred; political; institutional; commercial/ economic; labour/production; psychological/personal; and intellectual (refer to Fig. 15). The linguistic dimension must also be added, because each craft generates a media-related vocabulary for its discursive categories and concepts. Even when terms are borrowed from the general culture or other fields of study, they may be adapted to have particular specialist meanings within a craft. So it is important to understand as far as possible the particular concepts to which terms refer. Furthermore, languages are replete with idioms derived from crafts practices. These terms and idioms are part of the cultural contribution made by crafts, often vividly. Consider how often the term ‘velvet’ is used figuratively to describe the appearance or softness of something.

Different questions are generated by the concerns highlighted by each of these 16 dimensions, and these questions often reveal complex interconnections between the

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<sup>89</sup> I am working on colour mixing in the pile, orchestrated by selectively picking up colours from a two-or-more coloured pile warp; I call this technique velvet pick-up. Although the visual effects and colour mixing do not seem to have been used in this way historically, they were inspired by the use of two colours in some ancient Chinese (Burnham, 1955), Safavid (Sunday, 1987), and Spanish exemplars (Landry, 1997).

dimensions. Taken together, their responses collectively describe and explain the cultural import of the crafts activities or artefacts. I will describe the kinds of questions and results arising for the various categories as I have encountered them in my velvet weaving research.

My research began by investigating a particular technical structure providing textural surface effects with visual and tactile aesthetic potential—that is, the interrelated technical and aesthetic dimensions. These two dimensions have the advantage of being generative tools in the weaving repertoire, rather than just end products. They are to object-making as language is to verbal expression: where the object is like a single statement made, the technical and aesthetic dimensions are like the language through which many statements can be made. For me, generative tools are ultimately more powerful than any given product made, because they are the wellspring of continual creation.

### **Analysis of a Research Project: Coptic Velvet Weaving**

First, a brief explanation is required for what is meant by the term *velvet* in weaving. Velvet, sometimes called ‘true’ velvet (Vial, 1981), is cloth with a pile surface formed of loops pulled up from and interlaced in the *warp* direction. It requires two independent warp layers, one for the pile and one for the foundation cloth into which the perpendicular pile is secured (see Fig. 17a). This contrasts with loops inlaid in the *weft* direction, and pulled up individually, at regular intervals, between the warp threads, called *weft-looped* pile (see Fig. 17b), or cut from aligned extra weft floats, as in corduroy structures (a later development). Velvet also contrasts with *knotted* pile, which



is also interlaced in the weft direction but is wrapped around the warp threads regularly across the width of the warp. Finally, velvet also differs from *embroidered* pile that is formed by sewing the pile threads into a completed foundation cloth using a needle, not by weaving. Although redundant, I will occasionally refer to velvet as *warp velvet* to clearly distinguish it from these other velvet-like woven pile fabrics.<sup>90</sup> From a weaving point of view, an historical study of velvet weaving must commence with the technicalities of the cloth-making process and weave, as a weaving system, as this is what distinguishes velvet among all the types of pile surfaced cloths.

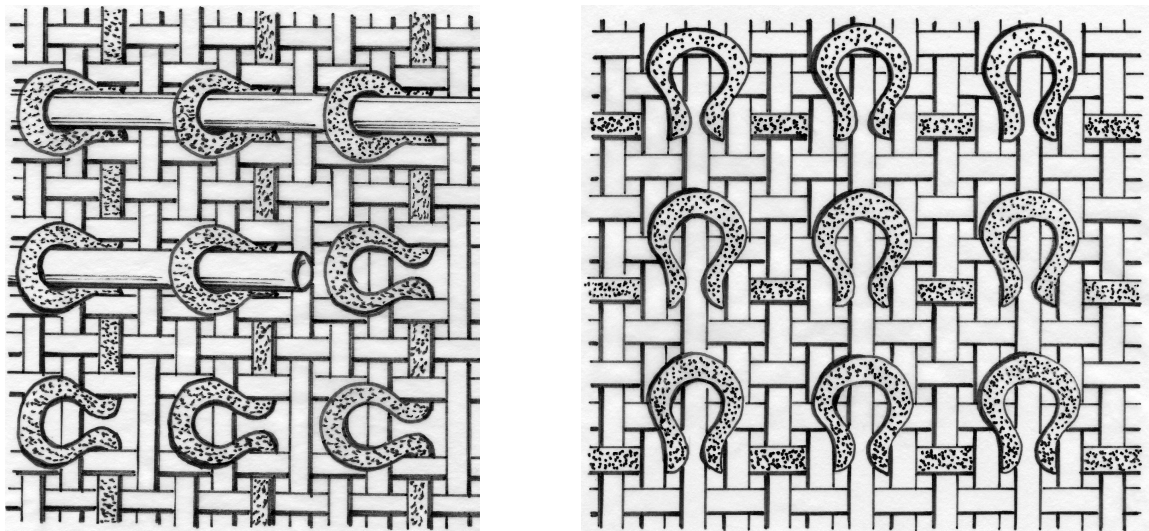


Figure 17. Comparison of velvet structure (left, a) and weft-looped structure (right, b). a) ‘True’ velvet structure: two warps, a foundation warp and a pile warp. The pile is lifted by a shaft of heddles. The rod is inserted like a weft to hold the pile up. b) Weft looping: the pile loops are pulled up as the weft is entered across the width.

### Technical Dimensions

In crafts, the technical dimension is a key concern of practitioners, so it must be a key concern of crafts scholarship. Technical features are closely integrated with

<sup>90</sup> There are also velvety pile fabrics formed in other ways, either during or following the construction of the foundation fabric construction through knitting, crochet or other fabric construction methods. Pile surfaces can be made by punch tufting through cloth, or even gluing on a layer of short, loose fibres onto cloth. These are considered pseudo-velvets, as well, and thus fall outside my study.

materials, as well as processes, tools, and supplementary supplies. They are also closely integrated with functional forms and performance criteria, such as durability and maintenance. They have an affect on visual appearance and other sensuous features, so they are linked to aesthetic dimensions. They are also linked to economic and labour/production dimensions, in terms of access to and cost of particular materials, skilled labour, equipment, and modes of distribution of products. And finally, they bear on meanings, and social conventions, because the degree of rarity, specialness, or complexity of technical processes, as well as their products, has particular meaningfulness in the context of normal social and cultural life.

Velvet technique may have been invented in order to improve efficiency and consistency in the laborious weft-looping technique, an economic and labour/production motive. It also may have been to make a shorter, denser, more lush, textural pile effect, more like animal fur than fringe, an aesthetic and a functional/purposive motive. But conceptually, the velvet technique also represents a response to the technical question, What if the pile threads could be mounted on the loom and be mechanically lifted in a group like other warp threads, instead of being inserted and pulled up individually by hand? This deceptively simple idea posed an inherently difficult problem: the loops of the pile use up the length of the warp threads at a much greater rate than the flat cloth warp threads in which they are interlaced (see Fig. 17). This ‘using up’ is called *take-up*. It results normally from the degree of curve or deflection that occurs in the interlacing of the warp around the weft. The pile loops are exaggerated curves, that interlace over a high profile, inflexible, rod or bar, inserted like a weft thread. Thus the warps for the pile threads had to be significantly longer than those of the base cloth, and they had to be

pulled forward separately at a faster rate. This requirement was incompatible with all the extant loom set-ups (horizontal and vertical) and operational techniques, which were designed only for single warps in which all threads were of a common length and were used up at the same rate. This incompatibility was an important question to address, not only to explain the extant artefacts, but also to correct or fill in gaps I found in existing technical explanations of the equipment and procedures used by Coptic weavers.

Arranging the pile-forming threads as an extra warp also generated three particular problems. The first problem was how to hold and store the much longer pile warp roughly parallel to the base warp at the back of the loom in an even, orderly fashion. The second problem was maintaining a tension that was slack enough to be pulled into a loop, taut enough so that it would not tangle with adjacent threads or get into the path of the shuttle, but not so taut that the loops would subsequently be pulled flat as the weaving proceeded. The third problem was to secure the thread loops firmly in the basic cloth, to keep them from pulling out over time, and to counteract the forces of the tension, beat, and pull of the weaving and loop-cutting processes on the pile threads.

The first two problems were resolved by modifying the loom set-up to accommodate two independently stored and mounted warps, one stretched above the other. There are three main loom types that would accommodate the two warps with different tensions. On a vertical loom set-up for tapestry techniques, the pile warp threads could be hung over the top of the loom, with its extra length wound up and gravity-weighted in narrow sections behind the loom (see Fig. 18a). On a horizontal loom set-up parallel to the ground, both cloth and pile warp threads could be affixed to rear roller beams (see Fig. 18b). There is historical evidence showing two relevant loom set-ups. The idea of the

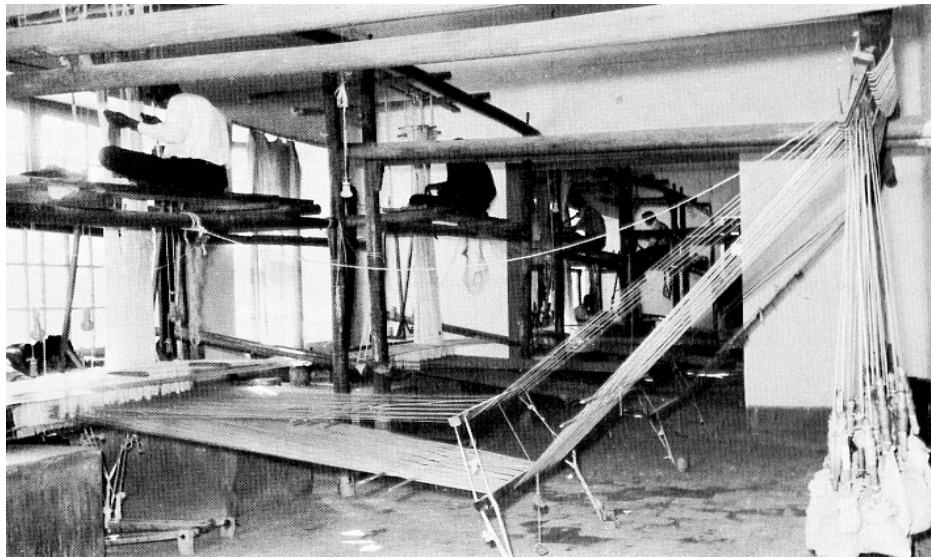
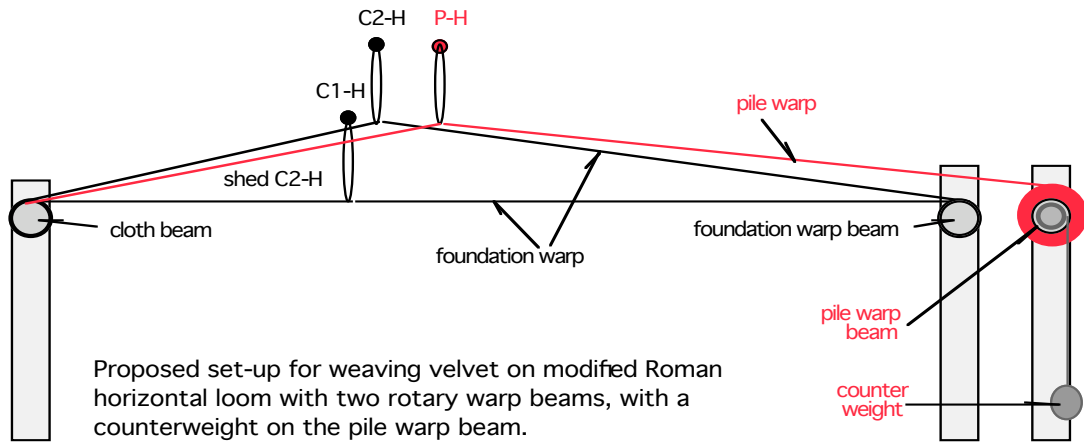
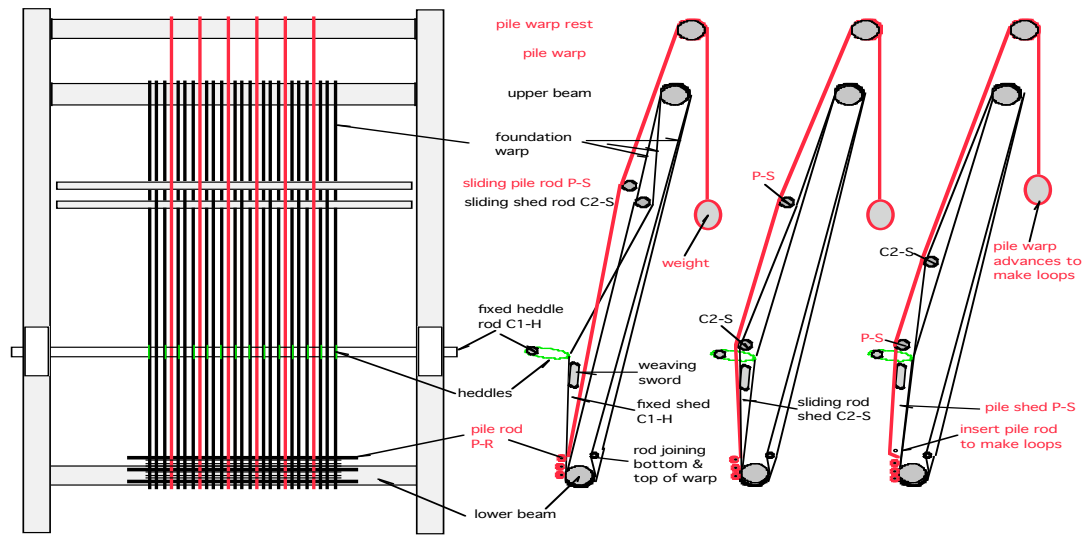


Figure 18. Loom set-ups for velvet on vertical and horizontal looms: a) Vertical loom with gravity weighted pile warp; b) horizontal loom with second roller beam; c) gravity-weighted looms with dual, independent tensioning systems for two warps (Wulff, 1966, Fig. 287, p. 206).

roller beam was shown in Greek vase paintings representing Penelope, for example, so it was clearly known in weaving at the time. A Middle Eastern loom documented through the nineteenth and twentieth centuries in Egypt and Syria shows the horizontal loom with dual, gravity weighted warps suspended at the back in place of roller beams (Fig. 18c).

In view of the Coptic velvet requirement for two warps, this survival suggests a continuous history for this loom arrangement that may date back to the Late Roman (3<sup>rd</sup>-mid 5<sup>th</sup> century) and Byzantine (mid-5<sup>th</sup> – mid 7<sup>th</sup> century), and may be the actual arrangement used for the Coptic linen velvets. However, this is not conclusive, and no representations of such looms for the intervening period have been found. The third problem, of firmly securing the pile loops in place, was resolved by modifying the basic weave structure to ‘sandwich’ the loop between two wefts passed through the same shed before and following the loop rod that holds the pile up at an even height. Subsequent wefts push these two wefts together closely, trapping the loop between them. Then the loop thread was interlaced like a warp in the foundation cloth between each loop. In addition, the thread density of the warps can be set closely, so the loops are crowded, and held tightly by friction. My tests have shown that only simple modifications to existing processes and looms were needed to resolve these problems.

Technical details like those outlined above are typically of interest primarily to textile specialists. I include them to illustrate the initial analysis of the central problems that my research sought to investigate. This analysis sets the parameters of what needs to be investigated and suggests the form of the technical experiments I would undertake.

## **Experimental Archaeology: Analysis and Practice in the Technical Dimension**

Experimental archaeology is the method of confirming hypotheses about how things were made, and why they were made that way, by attempting to replicate surviving historical artefacts and processes, or by attempting to follow verbal instructions as to processes or forms. It is a valuable method that places present craft understanding at the service of scholarship, as well as inspiring current practice. Crafts practitioners often do such experimentation for their own artistic purposes; more should be encouraged to expand their skills into the field of scholarship, following such examples as the late Danish weaver John Becker (1987) and Nancy Hoskins (1992).

In brief, my technical research involved the following components:

- a) discussions with key scholars whose work had alerted me to the existence of Coptic linen velvets, and whose documentation provided points of comparison with other works;
- b) extensive searches through exhibition catalogues and museum inventories of collections of Coptic and related textiles looking for Coptic linen exemplars, and assessing their rarity;
- c) viewing, documenting and analysing the handful of identified artefacts;<sup>91</sup>
- d) learning and practising the Coptic method of weaving that best explains a common feature of Coptic textiles (De Jonghe and Tavernier, 1983);
- e) designing and building a prototype loom modified to resolve the problems of the extra pile warp and separate gravity-weighting tensioning system (Fig. 19);

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<sup>91</sup> It remains my ambition to compile a comprehensive catalogue of the extant Coptic velvet pieces in collections around the world, comparable to that compiled by Muthesius (1997) for Byzantine silks.





Figure 19. Vertical frame loom built to test Coptic velvet weaving.

- f) attempting to replicate the textiles to scale with yarns apparently equivalent to those used in the Coptic textiles;
- g) becoming technical analyst for a comprehensive cataloguing project of the Coptic textiles collection at the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts (shortly to be published), which provided the important, detailed background context within which velvet weaving evolved, and against which to compare the velvets.

In my MFA research (Landry 1997), the primary goal was to implement the general structural idea of velvet, using the equipment and knowledge at hand; faithful replication of the processes was less important than learning and applying the principles involved. Now, the primary goal is to understand and replicate as faithfully as possible the extant samples of Coptic velvets and related techniques, using the same type and density of material, while testing a variety of weaving methods to evaluate the most likely means of production, and possibly the sequence of development. Such replication is key to revealing hidden features of weaving technique. Several problems encountered during my experiments posed new specific questions requiring investigation:

- a) Was the fibre I was using of the same quality as the Coptic fibre?
- b) Was the linen sized or strengthened for smoothness and easy weaving, and if so, what would have been used for sizing?
- c) Was a spacer or reed used to evenly spread or to beat in the wefts?
- d) What was the cutting procedure for the cut pile, and what tool was used?
- e) What was used as a rod to hold the loops up during weaving?

My observations of the rapidly increasing tension on the basic warp during the weaving process also prompted a closer investigation of the loom set-up for ordinary



weaving. Some adjustable or responsive warp tensioning system must have been in use to enable even weaving over the whole length. This evidence challenges the assumptions made in most catalogues of the fixed beam set-up, which never covers the crucial issues related to tension control.

### **Linguistic Dimensions**

Technical research inevitably involves dealing with weaving terminology as well as descriptions of textiles using non-specialist common parlance. However, common parlance is vague, especially to later researchers, because it is expected by the original writer that the audience will recognise what is being referred to and fill in the meaning from their cultural experience. Thus we rarely know when terms are being used in a specialist or generic sense; and even when we are sure that a term is technical or derived from some technical aspect, we have no access to the cultural information needed to complete the meaning. Despite this difficulty, a large vocabulary existed for the textiles industry and its participants, in all languages, and it can offer valuable clues or lines of inquiry. The following illustrates how the German term for velvet indicates a possible, hitherto unrecognised connection to other weaves, and an explanation for the difficulties in finding Greek terms for velvet.

Another weave developing in the same place and period also benefits from the independently tensioned, two-warp arrangement: the system of compound weaves known today as *samite* and *taqueté* (Hoskins, 1992; Muthesius, 1995). Thus a technical loom arrangement connects two quite different weaving systems with different visual effects, which have not previously been connected. Furthermore, this connection may explain

why the German term for velvet is *Samt*, which has typically been explained as a mistake due to ignorance. This leads to the question of whether the Greek term *hexamiton* from which the German derives, also encompassed velvet cloth based on some important technical similarity between the two kinds of cloth, unrelated to their distinctive appearances. Greek was the state language of Byzantine Egypt, especially of those who were wealthy or of high status—the most likely to buy velvet, or to give it as diplomatic gifts. Client orders, purchases, legal regulations and disputes, wills, inventories, and diplomatic gifts, as well as travelogues and geographical descriptions, are the kind of written evidence in which the terms related to weaving and woven goods appear. So the terminology informs us of what existed, and the social and cultural contexts behind the explicit meanings and implicit connotations of objects. The derivation into German indicates that the cloth entered Germanic culture from Greek (i.e. Byzantine) sources, bolstering the argument for its origins or association with the Byzantine Empire. This most likely occurred in the context of diplomatic gifts or dynastic marriages.

As with today, the term *velvet* refers in common parlance to the textural surface effect, to fine pile fabrics in general (whatever their underlying structure or method of making), or among specialists, to the warp velvet cloth or its weave. The term velvet can also be used metaphorically. The same variability seen in English, French and Italian today is true of ancient documentation in Greek, Latin, and Arabic. I noticed this when I began to compile an extended lexicon of terms pertaining to textiles in Greek, Arabic, and Latin in order to interpret resources appropriately.<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>92</sup> An extension of this work would be a searchable multi-lingual lexicon of textile terms in Latin, Greek, Arabic, Coptic and other medieval languages pertinent to the eastern Mediterranean cultures of the first millennium. This would be a useful tool for scholars of ancient textiles. It could extend the work

From searching for appropriate terms in translated documents of the period, I compiled historical references to velvet into a timeline along with date-attributed artefacts—even though some references in Arabic writings may be fictional, and may or may not indicate the warp velvet technique (for example, al-Qaddumi, 1996; Friedman, 1980-81; and Serjeant, 1972).<sup>93</sup> Such references must be interpreted in the context both of their period of writing, as well as the period and context to which they refer.

### **Material Dimensions**

Modern crafts discourse has made much of the craftsperson's dialogue with materials, or of enabling the material to 'sing' in its own 'voice'. I take this to mean working with and being guided by the characteristics of the material to reveal and enhance them, rather than fighting against them. From a contemporary point of view, this is part of my experimentation with different materials as velvet pile, to see the visual and tactile distinctions between wool, linen, silk, and cotton, during the weaving process and in the character of the resulting cloth. As historical research, experimentation with the various available materials allows me to assess possible reasons why linen was used for pile in the Coptic period, and what material issues had to be surmounted technically.

Historically, silk became the standard pile material for velvet in the late first millennium. An obvious starting point for many researchers of velvet fabrics is to follow

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already existing for European languages (Burnham, 1980), especially if the latter were to be included so as to be searchable.

<sup>93</sup> Working with this documentation has inspired two related projects. The first project is an analysis of the references to textiles in the *Book of Gifts and Rarities*, (al-Qaddumi, 1996), an eleventh century Arabic text. This analysis could be extended to include the references to other crafts objects as well. The second project, not yet begun, is the compilation of the many documentary sources and textile terms in Serjeant's *Islamic Textiles* (1972) into an expanded, more searchable and user-friendly database, to assist researchers working with this topic. Such a project could be complemented by a bibliography of resources for ancient velvet weaving or Byzantine textiles.

the Silk Road, and examine the documents referring to silk history in Asia and the eastern Mediterranean. But the Coptic group of textiles has linen rather than silk pile; indeed, silk is rarely found in surviving textiles of pre-Islamic or early Islamic Egypt. In my experiments the cut linen pile became remarkably soft when washed, with a soft visual sheen that differs from the stiff, clean cut linen pile of the Coptic velvets I have seen (see Fig. 20). This suggests either that a different type of linen may have been used, or that the Coptic velvet fragments I examined were rarely or only gently washed, despite evidently being remnants of tunics. Possibly such garments, recovered from burial grounds in Egypt, were made especially for the burial, and not previously worn or washed.



Figure 20. Coptic Velvet (V&A 691). Linen Pile; wool and linen tapestry bands.

The modern idea of ‘dialogue’ with materials, however, cannot be readily discerned among Coptic designer-weavers. The use of the available fibres was well established.

Although there is evidence that ancient consumers appreciated quality differences in their wools and linens, I have seen little evidence of experimenting to reveal their particular characteristics or use them in atypical ways. The technical innovation of velvet made no difference to the materials used generally in weaving cloth, and linen was used for the warp velvet pile just as it had been used for weft-looped piles.

When velvet later came to be executed predominately in silk, its aesthetic qualities and light weight supported the desirability of its luxurious qualities. However, I think the socio-political motivations to display power, wealth, refinement, access to rarities, and possibly fashion awareness were as or more important than the aesthetics of silk. As silk became more accessible in the eastern Mediterranean, it was still expensive and was made exclusive to the aristocracy and upper classes, for economic and socio-political reasons. Linen velvet pile may still have remained an affordable, even luxurious and desirable option for warm, thick, soft clothing and towels, common enough to go unremarked and unrestricted. Wool pile on the other hand, because it was easily dyed in multiple colours, was typically weft-looped to form colourful motifs. Despite this precedent, there is no evidence of warp velvet with wool pile in the Coptic resources. I have found no other fibres used in Coptic velvets.

### **Intentional/Purposive Dimensions**

This category addresses the motivations driving the invention and continuity of velvet weaving. Thus it asks, Why expend the effort to invent warp velvet, when there were well-developed weft techniques that produced pile, both in linen and in wool? Research of intentions can rarely be direct; it needs to be interpreted from writings and

other contextual features, such as how the products were used or what people said about them. However speculative and indeterminate that may be, it helps build a reasonable explanation for the invention of velvet.

My experiments suggest that efficiency and consistency in producing a dense pile cloth were most likely to have inspired the invention of warp velvet. The method had clear advantages in speed of production and density of pile surface, over all the other methods available. It also produced distinctive textures and weight of cloth quite different from weft-looped pile. Such desirable advantages would be sufficient to sustain perfection of the velvet technique, even though we cannot substantiate its continuity or show how widely it spread during the Coptic period due to the absence of adequate dating of the surviving artefacts.

### **Functional/Performative Dimensions**

The goal of velvet weaving is to produce velvet cloth that will successfully fulfil the desired intentions. The intrinsic, performative (practical) features of velvet cloth are rarely discussed, because the social, symbolic, and economic connotations of the fabric tend to predominate, while the actual nature of the cloth is taken for granted. The inherent qualities of velvet cloth have several practical advantages, all of which are found in the Coptic exemplars. These intrinsic features are warmth, cushioning, and environmental control of light, drafts, and sound. Garments with pile on the inside indicate that the Copts made pile cloth for warmth; those with pile on the outside indicate that the use of pile was also for the sake of aesthetics. A larger, heavy piece that could be a rug or bed cover (ROM 910.126.1) shows that they also made pile for cushioning, on

floors, divans, or as mattress covers. I have found no evidence suggesting that velvet was used for other environmental control functions in the Coptic context.

### **Aesthetic Dimensions**

The aesthetic properties of velvet and their connotations of wealth, luxury, refinement, and high status seem to be very important, perhaps more important than the intrinsic, practical properties mentioned above. In the garment fragments that I have examined, the dense, lush pile is visually appealing, like fur, and provides a rich visual and textural contrast to the flat wool tapestry motifs that it backgrounds in garment fragments. In all cases, the textural effect of the pile makes the cloth quite distinctive from the more common plain weave cloth of most garments. Such aesthetic distinction is the stuff of both fashion and social identification (ethno-cultural, social elements). In the artefacts I examined, the velvet texture was only used as an uniform background to decorative tapestry elements, not distributed in textural bands or shapes.

This use contrasts with most of the other decorative techniques in the Coptic weaving repertoire. Apart from tapestry bands and medallions, Coptic textiles display a wide range of subtle, textural weave variations, including overall lattice patterning, contrasting long float bands, raised lines, lacy effects, and tiny tassel effects. These could be used on their own, or to visually extend a colourful, tapestry element by framing it, as in MBAM 1917.B.2 (Fig. 21).





Figure 21. Coptic Sleeve Bands with textural bands. (MBAM 1917.B.2).

The velvet technique must be seen as yet another textural variation in this broad repertoire of decorative elements.<sup>94</sup> Although technically simple, and visually subtle, these textural weave variations are effortful, carefully planned, skilfully executed, and time-consuming to produce.

As texture, they may bear no particular symbolic significance. Most likely, they expressed fashionable, aesthetic interest and whatever that expresses about the socio-cultural position and personality of the wearer. Such non-pile decorative examples are important to the study of the velvets, because they establish the context of aesthetic conventions and fashion appreciation against which the velvets must be interpreted.

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<sup>94</sup> My examination of Coptic textiles in these collections has inspired the idea of highlighting the design ingenuity of Coptic textile makers beyond the tapestry work. The literature and examples of larger garment fragments indicates enormous variety in the disposition of visual forms and textures, including the use of pile, varying thread thicknesses, lacy effects, and textural top-stitching, as well as the application of corded trim at the neckline. I have not seen a study that deals with this material specifically from a design / aesthetics perspective, attending to textural variations and the placement and shape of clavi and medallions, the degree of elaboration, etc.



## **Qualitative Dimensions**

The qualitative dimension refers to the quality of craftsmanship—or workmanship, as some prefer to term it—as revealed in particular pieces. Craftsmanship is a key value in the evaluation of objects. High quality may be pursued for several reasons: commercial and economic advantage, pride of the craftsman in her skills and reputation, and the ethical desire to produce durable, well-functioning, and pleasing products.

Desirable, high quality, deluxe goods can usually command higher prices and perhaps a higher profit, offering commercial/economic advantages to the producers. The lush beauty and special texture of velvet, as well as its rarity, would have made it desirable enough to command high prices arising from its special weaving skills, equipment, and excessive consumption of material. Although there is no direct evidence of this for the Coptic velvets, it is evident from the Price Edict of Diocletian (Giacchero, 1974) that many linen textiles were desirable enough to command high prices.

Personal pride of the velvet-maker in their skills and standards, and the reputation arising from high quality work, is not only personally and ethically satisfying to the maker, but may also benefit their social status and economic position. Furthermore, when craftsmanship of different character can be discerned in a single textile, as I have seen in some Coptic pieces, it indicates more than one weaver at work, which in turn reveals something about a working environment.

### **Professional Dimensions**

The professional dimension refers to more general occupational factors affecting crafts activities, such as legal and guild regulations, and distinctions between household, domestic, or estate weavers and those making a living from their weaving as a primary occupation. It reveals the general context into which the velvet-weavers fit, which shaped their activities. I have found no evidence directly concerning velvet weaving for the Coptic period. Most likely, the velvet-weavers were governed by the general regulations concerning linen weavers.

Given the modifications to equipment that velvet production required, and the deluxe, extraordinary nature of the cloth produced, velvet weaving is likely to have arisen in an important urban weaving centre where expertise, and possibly competition, was plentiful. The examples found in the Victoria and Albert Museum's collection are all attributed to such a centre, Achmîm (Panopolis), although the basis for these attributions is unclear, and not recorded in the documentation I received from the museum.

The rarity of the Coptic velvets among the several collections of Coptic textiles I have perused so far may suggest that they were produced by a single workshop, but the variations in structure and visual effect may indicate different weavers or workshops, although these might have been located in close proximity.

### **Ethno-cultural Dimensions**

The ethno-cultural dimensions are the collection of culturally specific features that identify particular cultures. Research into such questions seeks to discover how velvet weaving and velvet products contributed to and reflected general cultural specificity, and

distinctions or values within the culture. This is relevant to the meaning represented by the artefacts.

Social status markers on garments, and possibly other household textiles, were important in Roman and Byzantine society. The colour purple, more specifically the purple colour obtained from a sea whelk, was one such marker, reserved to the use of the Byzantine imperial household. The wearing of purple stripes or borders, likely made from other dyes, was reserved in Roman society for senators and aristocratic citizens. While the sea whelk purple was highly regulated in the Justinian Code (Scott, 1932), for example, there is no clear evidence of control over other kinds of purple, for which many recipes existed from at least the third century (Caley, 1926). The restrictions of the use of textiles with sea whelk purple dye (as well as gold thread) exclusively to the Byzantine imperial family made these symbolic not only of the imperial family but also of their claim to ultimate state (and divine) authority.

The linen threads in the Coptic velvets are undyed, but most of the examples have in-woven, wool, tapestry work which is identified as purple in the Victoria and Albert Museum examples, although it now appears brown. If testing of the dyes in the in-woven tapestries of velvet fragments were to reveal them to be sea whelk purple, restricted to imperial use, it would strengthen the argument for the use of velvets by the imperial family or high status officials or citizens. Apart from this, I have not identified any clear references to warp velvet cloth in Egyptian or Byzantine Greek texts of the first millennium.

The more costly and visually elaborate the fabric of imperial garments or furnishings, the more they symbolised imperial political power, by virtue of their owner's

access to highly skilled labour using complex techniques, equipment, and costly materials. Such symbolism was expressed just by the degree, complexity, and refinement of elaboration, whatever figural motifs (with their own specific symbolic values) were included in the textile patterning. The content of figural motifs should not occlude the symbolic value inherent in the material forms and the general atmosphere evoked by the style and sensuous features of the textiles, which are culturally meaningful in their own right, and especially in their own time and region.

### **Religious/Sacred Dimensions**

Textiles have long been used in the religious or sacred contexts, around the world. In the ancient world, religion was inseparable from daily life. Roman rulers based their authority to rule on divine authority; Christian Byzantine rulers were deeply involved in Christian ceremonies. Surviving garments and other textiles are often adorned with religious figures or references; Graeco-Roman and Christian motifs are especially evident. Thus it is important to consider whether velvet weaving may have contributed to religious, sacred rituals and meanings. Some particularly religious or sacred meanings include: direct association with divinities through depictions and religious narratives; talismanic roles, conferring divine protection; and curative power, in which some feature of the artefact or activity is believed to have medical or spiritual benefits that cure or relieve disease, or mental or emotional distress.

The priests and clerics of various religions of the eastern Mediterranean had special wardrobes of ecclesiastical garments and altar cloths, etc. Sometimes these were made of very special, costly fabrics—highly elaborated and of dramatic, rich appearance,

appropriate to the theatrical display of religious celebration. It would not be surprising if velvets were used in this context during the Coptic period, as they were certainly used for priests robes and church furnishings in later times. Christian Byzantine emperors were intimately connected with religious ceremonies, as state heads of the Church. *The Book of Ceremonies of Constantine VII* (1935) stipulates particular robes to be worn by the emperor and various officials in a variety of religious ceremonies (codifying enduring historical practices), but it does not indicate particular types of fabric for the garments. Velvet is not mentioned. I have found little comparable evidence concerning Coptic Christian ceremonies, or those of other religions also present in Byzantine Egypt.

Some materials were considered unclean or impure, in religious terms. Linen was considered pure, and was commonly used in burials. Deceased Jewish people were typically wrapped in a pure linen shroud. In addition, fine linen of particular kinds (such as *byssus* and *othonion*) has been associated with priestly wear in Egypt, although it is not clear if these were actually linen from flax fibres or some other kind of material, generically referred to as linen.<sup>95</sup>

Whatever the particular religious context, I have found no evidence to suggest that the velvet texture had any particular sacred or cosmological import, any protective power, or that it was used as a spiritual curative.

### **Political Dimensions**

The political dimensions encompass the use of cloth to project powerful social status and authority or to express particular social ideologies. It also includes the political

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<sup>95</sup> The exact meaning of these textile types has not been determined, and their interpretation varies widely. It is also not clear if these terms refer to the material in the cloth, the type of weave, the cloth produced, or some other descriptor.

activities or responsibilities engaged in by a coherent group, either in support of the state or in opposition to it. In the case of craftspeople, such a group is most likely to be a form of guild or workshop, acting on behalf of their professional occupation. This is important for understanding whether velvet cloth connoted particular kinds of political meaning, as well as the social position and respectability that velvet-weavers may have had.

Textiles, especially garments, often were included among the valuable objects in diplomatic exchange or tribute payment between states, salary payment for officials and military, and gestures of honour or favour conferring distinction on the recipient. Banners and coloured textiles identified state or political affiliations. Purple dyes and gold threads were restricted to the use of the imperial family, and thus symbolised their power. The specialness of velvet, due in part to its technical complexity and excessive use of fine materials, made it especially suited for diplomatic displays and exchanges intended to project the power, wealth, and sophistication of the state. Sometimes, elaborate and special material objects were intended not just to impress, but to overawe and intimidate visitors. Sometimes, a gift of special textiles was given in order to cement a bond (as in dowries for state marriages) or to ‘sweeten’ negotiations. Sometimes, precious or unusual textiles were part of tribute payments or treaty settlements. And sometimes, special robes of honour were given as rewards to show favour.

It is likely that the most lush and beautiful of Coptic linen velvets were used this way, but there is no direct evidence substantiating this presumption. Later reports refer to velvets in the context of diplomatic exchanges and tribute between the Byzantine emperors (al-Qaddumi, 1996), but it cannot be ascertained if these references indicate warp velvets. The context of a tenth century reference suggests that these were silk rather

than linen pile textiles (al-Qaddumi, 1996). The use of silk velvets (along with other precious textiles) in diplomatic exchanges and state or aristocratic contexts becomes typical throughout the second millennium. More generally, the desirability of silk velvet cloth and its use in diplomatic gifts encouraged the eventual spread and development of the technique.

### **Institutional Dimensions**

I intend the institutional dimensions to highlight the social institutions that supported or regulated the activities of the craftsman. During the Coptic period, this mainly refers to any guild or state structures by which the activities of craftspeople might be organised or restricted, including the legal system. This dimension contributes to the understanding of the social conditions affecting velvet-weavers.

Once again, there is no direct reference to a guild, special workshop, or identified group of velvet-weavers, so far as can be determined by the literature, especially the thorough study of Wipzycka (1965) and rare references to guilds in published translations of Egyptian papyri (Grenfell, 1907). It is likely that the linen velvet-weavers were simply bound by the same regulations as all other linen weavers, as were the other workers related to the various parts of the linen industry. The rarity of the velvets, and thus the small number of velvet-weavers in a given town probably would not have been sufficient to justify a separate guild to support the usual social roles and obligations performed by other textile guilds, such as fullers. Thus it would seem that velvet weaving fit into the institutions already in place. Velvet weavers were likely taxed and treated as were other

professional linen weavers, and likely had all the same social benefits, obligations, and restrictions.

### **Commercial/Economic Dimensions**

The commercial and economic dimensions are concerned with questions of economic feasibility, the degree of success and influence of the products or processes, and the economic development or impact on the industry, types of goods, or community in which they are centred. Questions about access to community resources and systems of distributing the goods, services, and knowledge concern this category. Financial questions, such as the workings of the monetary system, banking, and other financial arrangements also fall into this category, as would the economic contribution of slaves. Inevitably, these questions affect the decisions made by makers. They are necessary components of the context of ancient textiles production, which was a key industry of the ancient world, as shown by relevant economic histories of the region.

As already mentioned, the Coptic velvet weaving technique was faster to produce in quantity than the other similar kinds of pile. The surviving fragments appear to have the entire surface covered evenly in pile, rather than just bands. The more pile desired, and the larger the cloth, the greater the economic advantage of using velvet technique. A professional urban workshop able to provide a popular luxury product more rapidly, and perhaps more affordably, would have a commercial advantage. Furthermore, the beauty and rarity of velvet, coupled with its practical characteristics, made it a desirable product for trade beyond local towns. The Price Edict of Diocletian (Giacchero, 1974) shows that the cloths of particular regions had particular reputations. A positive reputation for a



well-organised velvet-weaving centre would have contributed to the general economy of the place of origin, as well as encouraged copying of the material, thus spreading the technique and its commercial advantages more widely.

### **Labour/Production Dimensions**

Where the commercial/economic dimensions concern general contextual and financial questions, the labour/production dimensions concern the organisation and efficiency of the system of workers, workshops, and production processes spread across various sectors of the textile industry, from production of raw materials to the distribution of goods. This category would include questions regarding working conditions and regulations, from feeding workers to the working conditions of slaves. It also relates to apprenticeship contracts and the training of weavers and other related workers for the commercial industry, or in domestic production limited to fulfilling the needs of a family or estate.

As already mentioned, there is no indication that the linen velvet weaving was organised any differently from the general production of linen cloths and garments generally. Much of this has already been studied in some detail (for example, Wipszycka, 1965), and interrelates with legal regulations. The kinds of tasks involved in the processes were only modifications of existing ones. It is likely that existing workers could easily learn the necessary changes in process.

Professional families or workshops offered a prime training environment for passing on the craft and the business activities to heirs and subsequent generations. However, according to papyri, it was common for professional weavers to apprentice their children

or other dependents to other weavers for training. This may have been specifically to learn other techniques or better standards, or to help out a fellow weaver needing more workers. Undoubtedly, velvet weaving was learned and refined mainly through a combination of apprenticeship and professional family/workshop contexts; during periods of war, skilled velvet-weavers may have been taken as slaves to other centres.

### **Psychological / Personal Dimensions**

The personal dimensions encompass not only the personal pride in crafts abilities among velvet-weavers, but also the responsiveness of the audience to the appeal of the velvet textiles. Personal motivations include both self-challenge and self-esteem; arguably both amateurs and professionals can be gratified by successfully meeting the challenges and achieving high standards. Such success builds their personal sense of self as well as their reputation and the admiration (or envy) of those around them. It permitted the expression of personal taste. Today, this would be an important feature in understanding self-directed crafts activity, and taking on the particular challenges of velvet weaving. My research has not yet encountered any indication of how ancient weavers felt about their crafting abilities, or their social position in an important industry<sup>96</sup> although I speculate that at least some weavers mastering this difficult weaving specialty might be proud of their skills and rarity.

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<sup>96</sup> Apart from fulfilling domestic needs, personal gratifications drive the voluntary “amateur” engagement in crafts. It is not clear whether there was an “amateur” sector of makers, as such in the Coptic context. There is evidence that upper class women, who were not obligated to do textile work themselves to fill their needs, occasionally did some textile work by personal preference or for “ritual” reasons. However, this is unlikely to have included work as complex as velvet weaving.

## **Intellectual Dimensions**

Innovation and discovery are evidence of important, new ideas arising and changing some facet of their social, cultural context. This is what happened with Coptic velvet weaving, primarily in the technical dimension, and secondarily in the aesthetic and performative dimensions. This is what makes velvet weaving intellectually and culturally important. Clearly this technique was *a major, ingenious, technical innovation*.

Its invention represents an ingenious technical insight (a rethinking of loom set-up) and the successful solving and refining of several challenging problems that, in turn, had a significant impact on dimensions of commercial/economic production, political symbolism, the field of goods, and the range of aesthetic possibilities for future textiles. The result was an enduring, beautiful, new class of textiles, which underwent considerable additional refinement in twelfth-century Italy, and has remained a staple to the present day. It has been associated with imperial and aristocratic display in the Byzantine, Islamic (al-Qaddumi, 1996), Safavid (Sunday, 1987) and Mughal (Dhamija, 1989) empires as well as throughout Europe, reaching as far as China in the thirteenth century (Shih, 1977). The same technical modifications to the weaving set-up were also applicable to the other important but quite different class of decorative compound weaves, developing simultaneously, that is emblematic of Byzantine textiles.

## **Study Conclusions**

My on-going study of Coptic linen velvet weaving demonstrates what needs to be considered in crafts scholarship and why. The set of 16 dimensions, used above, represents the kinds of questions that arose in my research and that was encompassed by

the range of scholarship topics I encountered. Furthermore, this examination endeavoured to reveal and reflect the complex interrelationships among various dimensions. Technique and material affect aesthetics and commercial viability, which affect symbolic and cultural connotations, and so on. Examination of these dimensions and their interrelations contributes useful information or insights that helps us to understand cultural artefacts, even when the result is that a dimension is either inapplicable or indeterminate. By studying the object as an index of the many cultural ideas and practices that shaped it, my detailed investigation has revealed a significant, unacknowledged technical innovation that had not been revealed by scholarship conducted within the usual confines and concerns of art history. Crafts scholarship must embrace this complexity in order to accurately document, explain, interpret, and evaluate crafts activities as the cultural agents they are. The education of crafts scholars must also reflect this complexity, including but not confined to the questions or methods of a single discipline (such as art history) or perspective (such as the established visual arts education paradigm).

### **A Proposed Framework for Crafts Scholarship**

The framework I am proposing has two parts. The first part is a model of the dimensions by which to contextualise crafts objects and practices. The second part is a model of object analysis for interpreting material objects that shows the interrelationships between object features and meanings.

My proposed general model of the dimensions of crafts scholarship is represented in Figure 22. It outlines the 16 dimensions of social and cultural contexts that scholarship

projects might fruitfully investigate to illuminate crafts activity that I identified above. I have grouped these dimensions under the categories “society”, “knowledge / beliefs / values,” “feelings,” “technology,” and “use.”

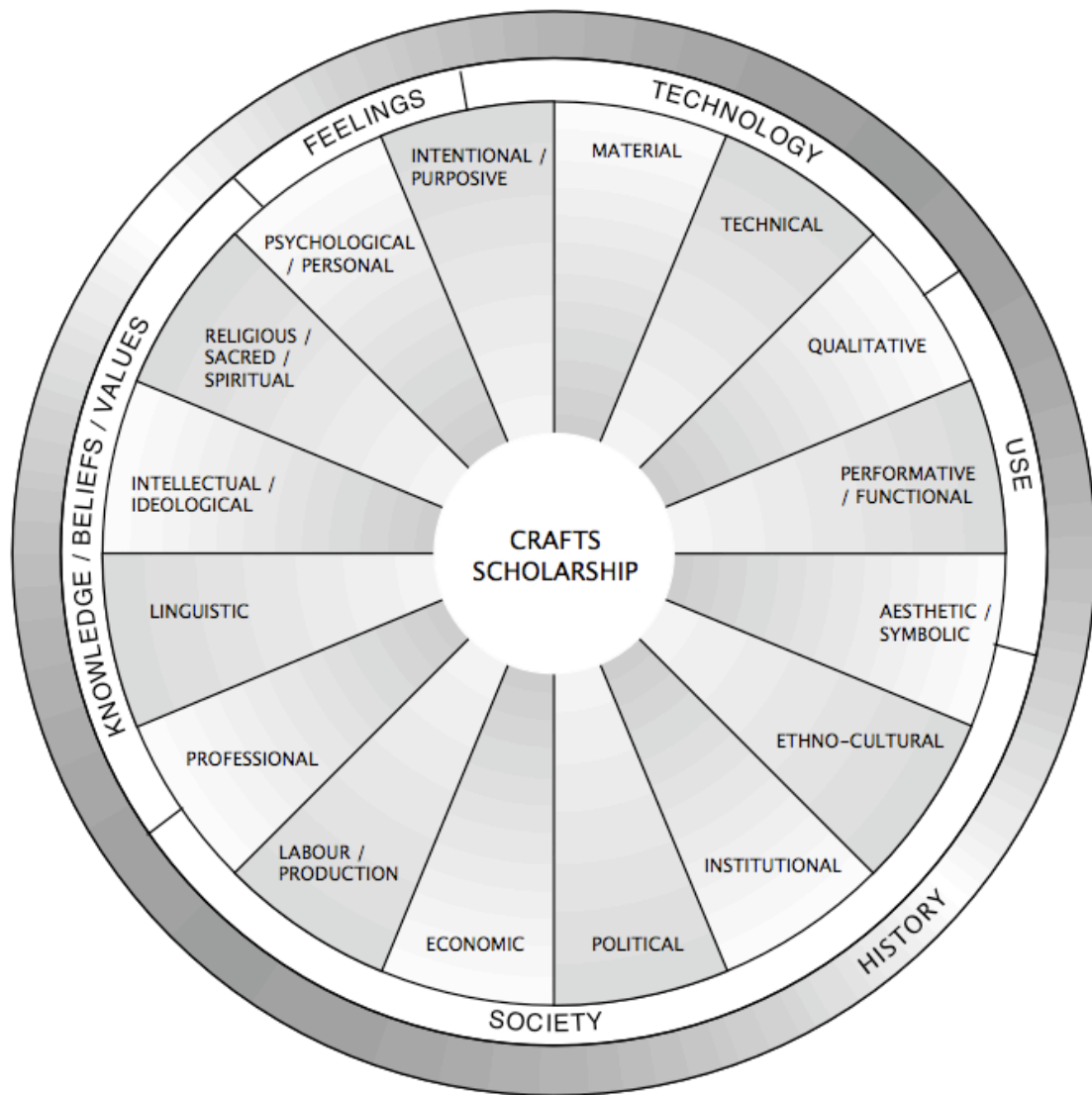


Figure 22. Dimensions of Crafts Scholarship. These dimension of social and cultural context, and academic knowledge, represent fields of research questions pertaining to crafts activities. Some may be less applicable than others to a particular research study, but cumulatively they provide a template for relevant research.

I have represented history (continuities and changes over time) in the outer ring, because all dimensions are subject to historical factors, but are typically studied synchronically. The historical (diachronic) category is envisioned as running perpendicular to the plane of dimensions.

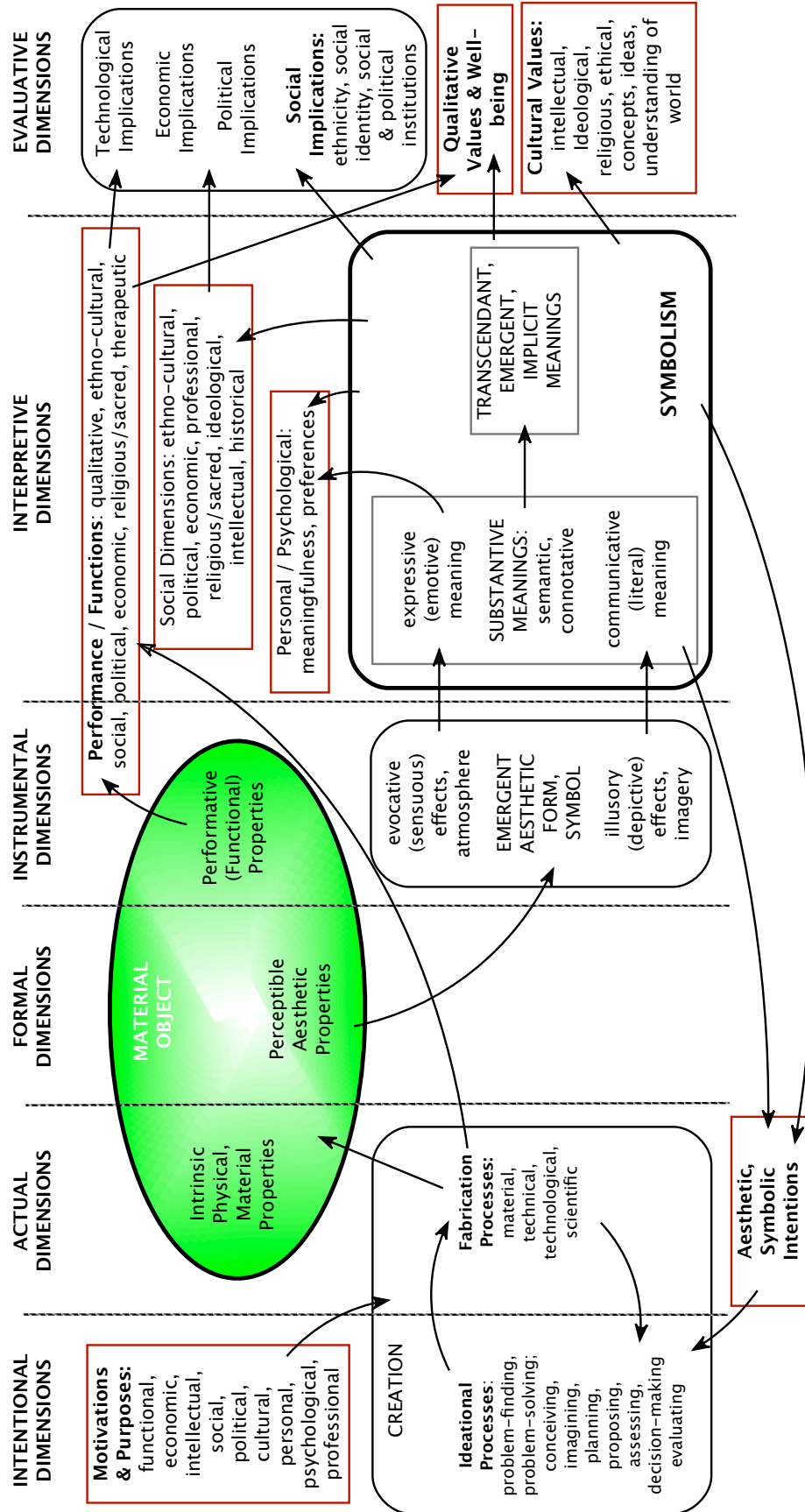
I have not indicated proportionate importance or interrelations in this model, because I think that it is a mistake to determine in advance the proportionate importance of or particular relationships between any particular dimensions in a study. That is what the parameters and findings of the particular study will determine. A particular study may reveal diverse unanticipated relationships and proportionate importance if the research is not blinkered by untested or unexamined presumptions. Meticulous compiling of evidence from a wide range of perspectives must be coupled with open-ended reflection to produce insightful portrayals of the broad field of crafts activity.

The benefit of my model is its breadth, compared to the general focus of art history on aesthetic and symbolic dimensions, supported by some social dimensions, particularly political, ethno-cultural, and some intellectual and intentional dimensions. Although art historical courses acknowledge the presence of material, technical, and performative/functional dimensions, little attention is explicitly paid to those dimensions. They are typically absent from the context of intellectual ideas or theoretical knowledge that are dealt with in art history and cultural studies. However, these dimensions represent the breadth of perspectives found in the field of material culture studies. It is self-evident that the crafts, as a cultural field focused on material objects, their meanings, and the processes that produce them, would be included in material culture studies.

There is no fundamental conflict between material culture perspectives and either the art scholarship or the art education perspectives. Visual art objects and activities can fruitfully be examined through the same general framework as crafts activities, as Prown and other art historians confirm in their analyses of art works (Prown, 1982). As Prown states:

“works of art constitute a large and special category within artifacts because their inevitable aesthetic and occasional ethical or spiritual (iconic) dimensions make them direct and often overt or intentional expressions of cultural belief. . . . all tangible works of art are part of material culture, but not all material of material culture is art.” (1982, p. 2).

The second part of my framework is a more comprehensive model for material object analysis, represented in Figure 23, into which the dimensions of Figure 22 may be fit. This model depicts key relationships between the kinds of interpretation to which material objects are subjected in formal analysis as well as in a viewer’s implicit or explicit experience. Thus this is also a conceptual model of interpretive experiencing. These analytical dimensions of interpretive experience also frame key relationships that the maker puts into play, more or less deliberately, through their crafting activities. This set of related analytical dimensions must be viewed against the backdrop of social and cultural contexts and knowledge in which both makers and interpreting viewers are embedded, and which is the subject of the first part of my model.



**Figure 23. Model of Material Object Analysis for Crafts Scholarship.** This diagram shows the various analytical dimensions of craft object-making activities and their products, relating them to the many practical, social, cultural, and personal / psychological dimensions by which they are shaped, and for which they have implications, value and import. The model is anchored empirically, to the physical, material, perceptible, and functional properties of material objects—the actual and factual dimensions of objects and the practices that generate and utilise material objects. From this firm empirical basis, more complex abstract scholarship can proceed. Furthermore, understanding these relationships also can assist makers in their creative work.



The model for object analysis corresponds in many respects with Prown's analytical sequence, for many of the same reasons. Two of the most important reasons are: first, that particular dimensions necessarily emerge from preceding dimensions (as the formal dimension is built on the actual dimension); and second, that scholarship is stronger and more accurate when built on a solid basis of appropriately detailed empirical data.

Overall, my framework envisions crafts scholarship as fundamentally practice-oriented rather than object-oriented, even though investigations can begin with objects by focusing on their features in detail using the object analysis model. The dimensions of scholarship guide the investigation to cumulatively build the context for the practice and the emergent meanings that the object represents. The set of 16 dimensions provides a template for case studies of particular objects or situations of crafts activity, bearing in mind that crafts activity can include audience activities and responses as well as those of makers and interpreters. This is because supportive audiences and patrons are linked to the crafts world by their interest in it.

A comparison of my two models with other models shows that my 16 dimensions of crafts scholarship are valid, as is my model of material object analysis. My dimensions of scholarship encompass the dimensions that Muthesius outlines (1995, p. 175) in her model of the history of Byzantine silks, and expands on it. My model of material object analysis generally corresponds to other models of study of artefacts and material culture, specifically those of Fleming (1974) and Prown (1982). My framework is more explicit than Fleming's and Prown's in outlining pertinent dimensions to investigate. For that reason, I believe it may be a more helpful tool than these models in guiding students

learning to do research. In addition, my framework allows for the interrelationships that form a craft world, along the lines that Becker (1982) describes for art worlds.

### **Conclusion**

Scholarship of the crafts produces both the central knowledge of practices and their cultural products, and the complementary knowledge by which to contextualise them. The range of this scholarship, which is the field of crafts studies, should form the basis on which crafts education is built. My model of crafts scholarship can guide the development of crafts education, in two ways:

- a) the reconfiguration and development of academic crafts courses to support and deepen practitioner education;
- b) the development of programmes focused on preparing scholars of crafts activities.

The academic field of material culture studies encompasses the various dimensions around which my research programme for velvet weaving and my framework for crafts scholarship are formed. My framework is designed to be a material culture approach because material culture studies have been developing a theoretical base that I find valuable to crafts scholarship. Material culture methods of study are well developed and suited to a practice-oriented study of crafts anchored to the concrete features of material objects and the way in which they generate meanings. For this reason, I recommend inclusion of material culture studies as a basic subject in craft education and a basic approach to teaching about objects and making generally. My framework for crafts scholarship is intended to foster discussion, while assisting in the development of crafts

scholarship and craft education curricula. The educational implications will be explored in the following chapter.

## Chapter Nine

### IMPLICATIONS FOR CRAFT EDUCATION

In this thesis, I have outlined the situation of crafts education and scholarship in the four Canadian art schools offering the Bachelor level of professional crafts education, and shown how professional crafts education is constrained within the framework of contemporary visual arts education. Through an analysis of this general situation, I have argued that the visual arts paradigm that pervades visual arts education and practice has distorted and inhibited a more appropriate, powerful, and inclusive study of crafts activities. Trapped within this paradigm, crafts education has failed to meet all the needs of both students and the crafts field generally, constraining the building of scholarship to support its interests.

As a remedy for this situation, I have proposed a framework for the field of crafts studies that is tailored to crafts activities, replacing the visual arts paradigm that currently prevails. The central premise of my rationale for this model is that, like other professional fields, professional crafts education should be based on the distinctive nature of crafts activities and an understanding of the full range of their legitimate interests, as cultural phenomena. To establish the foundations for the proposed model, I have examined in detail and categorized the range of existing scholarship for and about crafts, most of which does not reach crafts students during their education. Much useful literature also exists in other academic fields. I argue that the crafts scholarship provided in crafts programmes should address crafts broadly as culturally productive activities that people do purposefully within and for a complex socio-cultural context. I regard culture as the sum of activities, products, and ideas within which people operate. As a result, a

study of crafts as a particular kind of cultural activity and persistent social phenomenon needs a framework open to the wide spectrum of pertinent academic perspectives of crafts, many of which have arisen outside the visual arts framework. I argue that a broad, inclusive, material culture framework offers a more appropriate, comprehensive, and theoretically rich approach to the study of crafts products and activities than does the history and theory of art or design alone.

In addition, I show that crafts practitioners can contribute to valuable scholarship in unique ways through their deep and often technical understanding of their practices. In my own case, a profound understanding of the importance of tension in weaving has revealed an important new technological development in the history of looms and weaving systems. Further, I suggest that crafts students should be encouraged to see academic crafts scholarship as a viable model of practice, one that complements and enhances their making practices, and one to which they may contribute, possibly through experimental archaeology that replicates historical objects and practices, or re-applies historical ideas to contemporary practice.

My proposals for revision and improvement of crafts education are predicated on my survey of the historical development of four Canadian schools, namely, NSCAD University, Ontario College of Art and Design University<sup>97</sup>, Alberta College of Art and Design, and Emily Carr University of Art and Design. This survey has shown that crafts or applied arts have been included as essential sectors of visual and design arts education throughout the twentieth century, although the specific concerns of crafts or applied arts have been subordinated to the particular concerns of the contemporary visual arts world

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<sup>97</sup> On June 08, 2010, the bill to grant university status and rename OCAD the Ontario College of Art and Design University received Royal ascent from the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

and its view of appropriate scholarship. In order to substantiate the prevalence of the visual arts paradigm, and the corresponding underdevelopment of supportive crafts-specific academic offerings, I have examined in detail the recent course offerings of these four schools of art and design that provide degree programmes in important crafts media—specifically, ceramics, fibres, jewellery, and glass. This analysis provides a portrait of art, design, and crafts post-secondary education across Canada, showing how both crafts media and design have been both under-served by academic courses and arbitrarily segregated from the mainstream visual arts, despite their common interests in the production of useful material objects. I have outlined the benefits of including crafts in visual arts degree programmes, while highlighting the detrimental effects of the narrow visual arts perspective for alternative and fuller understanding of crafts media and useful material objects.

This extensive presentation of the historical and ideological context of Canadian crafts education has been followed by an examination of the character of crafts practice from a practitioner's reflective perspective and the experience of crafts colleagues. I have highlighted the various interests that craftspeople balance. I have examined the conceptual, ideational basis of technical aspects of crafts, which characterises the way that expert craftspeople think and design objects. I have discussed the importance of purpose, function, and use as guiding parameters in the successful design of objects, and as sources of implicit meaningfulness. Crafts objects not only exemplify their class of useful objects, but they also evoke atmosphere through their aesthetics. As a result, they embody a complex of cultural and personal meaningfulness, without necessarily making a particular statement or representational image. I examine the ideas of indeterminacy in

designing crafts objects, and the manner in which objects are assembled, displayed and used in concert with each other, producing complex new ensembles that together form the meaningful atmosphere of an environment. I highlight some theories that pertain to crafts practices and objects, most of which arise from material culture studies. In particular, I apply Michael's (2000) idea of co(a)gency to the relationship between craftspeople and their tools, and Ingold's (2000) idea of taskscape to an understanding of the complex and integrated process of designing and crafting a material object. I also relate crafts activities to Csikszentmihalyi's (1981, 1983) ideas of the formation of selfhood and self-identity. This personal aspect is additionally supported by Gell's (1998) ideas of the distributed persona and the distributed mind, by which material objects can be seen to both reflect and constitute the personality of both the maker and the user or owner. Furthermore, according to Gell's anthropological theory of the agency of art (1998), art objects themselves can be credited with possessing their own particular form of agency, capable of provoking particular responses, ideas, and actions in people, sometimes outside of the intentions of the makers or users. This contrasts with the usual view of media as passive and neutral in the transmission of aesthetic evocation or imagery.

My discussion of crafts scholarship highlights the importance of both general and media-specific studies. It also highlights the importance of understanding the interrelation between material, technical, and functional dimensions with other aesthetic, practical, social, and historical dimensions. The question is one of determining the proportionate balance of dimensions in interpreting particular objects or practices, rather than assuming in advance what dimensions should have priority, or treating them as though the various dimensions were isolated or independent. Using my on-going

historical research of Coptic velvet weaving to exemplify this approach to crafts scholarship, I show the range of dimensions that pertain to the cultural situation of the activity, the means, materials, and ideas available, and its potential meaningfulness. This research highlights the importance of each dimension to understanding the whole. It also shows how a ‘craft world’ is vitally integrated with a wider social world, beyond its specialist core interests.

The examination of both the character of crafts activities and crafts scholarship sets the parameters for developing a material culture framework to guide the development of crafts scholarship as well as crafts education curricula for professional practitioners. I compare the dimensions I have found necessary to my research and reflection to other frameworks for artefact analysis. Without dismissing what has recently been done to improve crafts education—moving in the direction that I would advocate—I have proposed an inclusive framework for crafts education and scholarship to foster discussion and assist in the development of crafts scholarship and educational curricula.

### **Reconsidering Crafts Education**

Crafts practice provides the central objects of study: the objects, practices, ideas, and people from whose interactions emerge a cultural sector so vital as to persist despite its displacement as an essential activity in industrialised societies. Crafts scholarship provides the academic, topical framework that underpins and inspires crafts practices and discourse, enabling a deeper understanding of crafts activities. This basic relationship should be the foundation of crafts degree programs, despite the focus on acquiring practical proficiency. However, the lack of a strong scholarship tailored specifically to



crafts practices remains a severe impediment to these programs, especially their claims to intellectual depth and openness, and research value.

In the absence of systematically structured academic courses in craft studies, many students and instructors in degree programmes relied on self-directed reading of anthropological scholarship for inspiration as well as information about the social and cultural roles and values of crafting activities. This alternate perspective addressed questions and revealed ideas that were not satisfied by their art history and critical or cultural studies courses. This was especially true for crafts students whose work was more oriented towards the designer/craftsman mode of practice rather than the artist mode.

#### **National Association of Schools of Art and Design Model**

The *Handbook, 2007-2008*, published by The United States' National Association of Schools of Art and Design (NASAD) sets out a detailed curriculum framework for degree programmes in visual arts education that specifically includes crafts media. The framework relates crafts education to either the real world of professional practice (the professional/vocational BFA type) or to an understanding of the activity (the liberal arts BA type). In broad terms, these two curriculum structures differ mainly in the proportion of requisite studio practice courses, and the overall proportion of course credits that must be focused on art and design subject matter. The NASAD standard guideline for BFA type degrees is at least 65% of the total course credits focused on the creation and study of art and design whereas only 30-40% is required for the BA degrees (2007, p. 71). In addition to outlining general standards for arts and design programme contents and competency goals, it outlines more detailed standards for both general crafts programmes

and those focused on specified crafts media: ceramics, glass, jewellery, weaving/fibres, woodworking. The general guidelines for textiles design and fashion design are nearly identical, differing only in the exclusion of craft history, and an orientation toward knowledge of industrial practices.

The NASAD curricula structure guidelines for BFA degrees in crafts (general) or craft media majors (ceramics, glassworking, jewelry/metals, weaving/fibers, or woodworking) are:

Studies (studio practice) in major area or general crafts	25-35%
Supportive courses in art, design, and crafts	20-30%
Studies in art and craft history and analysis	<u>10-15%</u>
	Sub-total at least 65%
General studies	25-35%

The NASAD category of general studies refers to subject areas outside of art, design, and craft. Specifically, the expected general competencies for a BFA graduate include:

- “(1) The ability to think, speak, and write clearly and effectively, and to communicate with precision, cogency, and rhetorical force.
- (2) An informed acquaintance with the mathematical and experimental methods of the physical and biological sciences and with the main forms of analysis and the historical and quantitative techniques needed for investigating the workings and developments of modern society.
- (3) An ability to address culture and history from a variety of perspectives.
- (4) Understanding of, and experience in thinking about, moral and ethical problems.
- (5) The ability to respect, understand, and evaluate work in a variety of disciplines.
- (6) The capacity to explain and defend views effectively and rationally.
- (7) Understanding of and experience in art forms other than the visual arts and design.” (p. 80)

Additional recommendations for BFA curricula include opportunities to develop teaching skills related to their major area, to explore multidisciplinary issues including

but not limited to art and design, and to practice analytical methods and synthesis of a broad range of artistic, social, and cultural knowledge (p.81). The general recommendation “to require that students study the development of works within the specialism” (p. 81) is reflected in the detailed standards for each of the specific craft media (pp. 82-103). Courses in business practices or career management are also recommended.

The NASAD model stipulates many specific guidelines, recommended courses and opportunities, and competency objectives as norms for craft education in particular media, in addition to the general expectations for all graduates. In general terms it seeks to produce a well-rounded, competent, and insightful practitioner, with a clear sense of the place of their practice in history and culture. It offers a pragmatic, conventional template against which to assess Canadian degree programmes, although not all of its particular recommendations are explained. Furthermore, it is necessarily ambiguous because institutions are expected to interpret the guidelines as they see fit, according to their particular ideology, social context, and available resources. Furthermore, the students’ exercise of choice among the particular available offerings also affects their resultant competencies. Thus it is necessary to assess each programme not only on its individual requirements, course offerings, and faculty, but also on the patterns of student choices of electives. This also depends on the identity model of a crafts practitioner that each student develops. A study of such factors is beyond the scope of the present work, but would make an important contribution to an understanding of crafts education.

### **A Proposed, Revised Map for Crafts Education**

Figure 24 depicts my proposed general map of crafts education. It reflects many of the same considerations as are present in the NASAD model described above, and I see no fundamental conflicts between the two models. It encapsulates my research, my experiences and understandings as a practitioner, and my experiences and observations as a participant in the current Canadian art and craft education system. I intend that this general map be read in conjunction with the previous models for crafts scholarship, depicted in Figures 22 and 23. My map attempts to preserve and show the complex character of crafts activities as cultural phenomena, and to indicate how and why broader cultural knowledge and crafts-focused scholarship must be better represented in the curriculum of crafts degree programmes, in order for it to really be crafts education, rather than art education.

In particular, my map specifies attention to the topic of function, that is, the practical, social, symbolic, and personal purposes/functions that crafts works fulfil/perform. It also identifies general cultural contexts of patronage and distribution of crafts, as well as a spectrum of pertinent general knowledge fields ranging from media-specific, to crafts-specific (decorative and applied arts), to general social, cultural, intellectual, and theoretical knowledge that comprise the surrounding cultural context. These dimensions have been explained in detail in my previous discussion of crafts scholarship, and the social networks to which crafts activities are connected (see Chapters Seven and Eight).



Figure 24. General Map of Craft Education. The grading of colour indicates that the interdependence of ‘academic’ and studio knowledge between which no clear boundary can be or need be drawn in practice.

The proposed map also includes professional interpreters as an identity category in craft education. This aligns with my argument for the importance of evolving degree programmes focused on developing crafts-oriented scholars in close proximity to practitioners and their educational environment. The lack of such programmes specifically tailored to crafts scholarship is the most important missing element of Canadian crafts education, and one that has yet to be addressed significantly by those in a position to do so. Its absence from the environment of crafts education is detrimental both the particular education of crafts students and to the broader understanding of cultural activities and society.

There are several difficulties in assuring that crafts education can usefully cover the range of material. In addition to the vagaries of interest of students and faculty, institutions must determine for themselves:

- a) what external-to-major-programme subjects to offer and how to frame them to interest their students;
- b) what constitutes an adequate level of introductory knowledge for the range of external social or cultural subjects they can offer;
- c) what to require for crafts degrees, as opposed to what to leave open to student choice;
- d) how to fit the desired range of subjects into the standard credit limits and timeframe of a typical Bachelor degree programme;
- e) how to ensure that particular courses contain an adequate degree of essential or desirable knowledge components in courses intended to develop several interrelated competencies;
- f) how explicitly must such knowledge components be addressed and assessed.

Maps or models cannot resolve these difficulties. But the fact that there are difficulties in implementation does not invalidate the model, it simply calls for dedicated reflection and discussion of the actual and viable goals of an effective, insightful crafts education.

As I have already noted, the will and resources to improve crafts education are building, and attempts over the past two decades to fill in some of the identified gaps have been implemented in Canadian crafts degree programmes. However, these have tended to be ad hoc and sometimes transient, without a clear underlying framework that reflects and transmits clearly to students a profound understanding of the character of crafts activities as fully embedded cultural activities, sometimes—but not always—in the guise of art or visual culture. I believe that crafts educators are sincerely trying to make their programmes more potent and pertinent to the character of crafts in the various forms in which it is practised even as they are hampered by the pervasive, detrimental effects of the dominant visual arts paradigm.

### **Implications of This Research**

To conclude, I offer five recommendations that reflect the implications of my detailed examination of the terrain of crafts education and the frameworks I have proposed as maps to guide improvements in crafts education curricula. These recommendations are:

- 1) to re-evaluate existing crafts education programmes;
- 2) to develop degree programmes in interdisciplinary crafts scholarship;
- 3) to present alternative options for professional practice;

- 4) to incorporate the empirical and critical bases of material culture in crafts education;
- 5) to re-conceive the relationships between art, craft, and design.

### **1. Re-evaluate Crafts Education Programmes**

Current crafts education programmes, especially their academic components, need to be reconsidered by each institution that provides professional crafts education. Using my framework as a guide, I recommend that institutions discuss and determine their intentions and goals for crafts education, and decide how best to reconfigure programmes and courses to fit those goals. Alternatively, those discussions could involve explicitly developing a better framework than the one I have presented here. A complete reconfiguration will require time and testing, and likely will proceed incrementally. However, I believe that a carefully considered framework with a well-thought-out plan for implementation will benefit crafts education more than an ad hoc, semi-intuitive approach without clear and substantive underpinnings.

### **2. Develop Degree Programmes in Interdisciplinary Crafts Scholarship**

Focused BA and MA degree programmes for training crafts scholars need to be developed, preferably in close proximity to the students and instructors with a clear interest in such scholarship. The curriculum content of such programmes should be adequate to support a graduate's application to PhD programmes, if the institution cannot support that level itself. Furthermore, all such programmes should be interdisciplinary in scope, and require, at the very least, introductory courses in material culture or crafts



studies at the undergraduate level. From these programmes of study, budding crafts scholars should emerge familiar with and open to a range of pertinent perspectives and theories that may relate to their central topical interests. In addition to more general, social history courses of the modern crafts world, such programmes should address the particularities of the specific craft media found within each institution. Technical and material developments in a craft medium should be incorporated with its social and aesthetic developments. Students should be introduced to this full range of dimensions, and taught to assess their balance or import within any pertinent craft object or activity.

### **3. Present Alternative Models of Professional Practice**

Crafts students should be exposed to models of professional practice beyond the creative artist model or the crafts business model. Arguably, this would not be attractive to many students, but would be useful for those interested in museum work or historical artefacts and techniques. My current practices range across textiles creation, scholarly research, and technical analysis for public collections, dealing directly with artefacts and experimental archaeology. Such polyvalent work can further inspire and sustain the ongoing development of one's identity and career as a craft professional, as it has for me. Crafts students should learn about other socially valuable options for their knowledge, which complement rather than detract from, their creative practice.

### **4. Incorporate Empirical Study and Critical Analysis in Material Culture**

It is important to ensure that empirical evidence be incorporated within cultural study, as the concrete basis for testing key ideas or hypotheses about crafts and

developing appropriate theories about crafts activities. While I recognise that some theories about cultural production or artistic activity offer pertinent insights into craft activity, the veracity or pertinence of those theories are often left untested or unconvincingly argued. The received view of crafts activities needs to be critically examined to question the imbedded/tacit/implicit presumptions of any theories that it uses to explain or better understand crafts activities, and any ideas and attitudes that it perpetuates. This requires more scholarship and interpretive abilities than most crafts students currently acquire, even well after graduation. Too often, students are encouraged to show familiarity with a pre-selected set of philosophical, theoretical, or sociological ideas that they do not understand well, and with whose antecedents, alternatives, and implications they are unacquainted. Thus they are ill equipped to do more than parrot quotations and drop the names of influential scholars, without being able to assemble cogent articulation and debate of the central ideas and their pertinence. Institutions and instructors need to address how to develop more insightful empirical, theoretical, and critical academic understanding in crafts students.

##### **5. Re-conceive Art and Design as Special Cases of Crafting Activities.**

Perhaps my most controversial suggestion is that art and design fields should be re-conceived *operatively* as particular kinds of craft, rather than the other way around. To the extent that both of these fields also produce material objects and generate meanings with reference to materiality, they are sectors of the broad field of material culture, and therefore, the same set of dimensions and analyses may also be applied.

Shifting the conceptual location of art and design fields to that of subsets of material culture does not denigrate either practice; rather it reflects real relationships and interdependencies. The distinction of visual art works is that they are specialised to fulfil the symbolic function, and they focus their attention on aesthetic, imagistic (iconographic) dimensions, to suit the individual interests and intentions of the artist/maker. The distinction of material design is that it tends to separate itself from the technicalities of final object production, concerning itself mainly with conception, problem-solving, and prototyping proposed solutions or alternative objects. Notwithstanding these conceptual distinctions and analytic categories, it is essential to recognize that in the case of the contemporary individual studio artist- or designer-craftsperson, all functions are typically unified and integrated within a single person who performs, specifies, and directs all tasks from conception to completion by oscillating between planning, making, and decision-making tasks. In the reality of that experience, there is often no need and no possibility to make a clear segregation of tasks or sensitivities, and no need for a clear articulation or discussion with others of the intentions or bases of decisions. Therefore the whole process can appear intuitive and opaque, when it is really susceptible to at least some degree of explication.

### **Suggestions for Future Research**

Several directions for future research arise directly from this thesis. An important research direction is toward more in-depth investigation of specific dimensions of craft education. Among many possible projects, I propose the following as examples of the kinds of research projects that need to be conducted. An ethnographic study of current

crafts students would be interesting, to better understand the expectations and attitudes of crafts students throughout their period of study. Yet another project could focus on the idea of a professional self-identity, by investigating the self-perceptions of practice oriented students and academically oriented students. It would also be useful to compile and analyse students' post-graduation assessments of their educational experiences.

Another direction for Canadian craft education research would be to query crafts instructors in degree programmes regarding my characterisation of crafts practice and appropriate scholarship. This would help to develop, correct, or refine the model I have proposed in this thesis. While these examples suggest specific directions for further research in craft education, I believe that such research would be pertinent across the spectrum of professional education in the visual arts and design.

Another direction for further research is in the history of crafting activities, including the technical / practical history. This is the direction in which I have established a trajectory of research projects, and to which I have an ongoing interest and commitment, as evidenced by my research projects and teaching related to textile history.

### **Concluding Thoughts**

Crafts are not objects, nor are they merely image-carrying media. They are purposive human activities: fields of processes and ideas through which material objects are produced, exchanged, and used. As such, they constitute two forms of agency set in motion by a maker: first, the direct agency of purposeful making enacted by the maker; and second, the consequent agency enacted through the actions and the objects made, only part of which can be attributed to the maker's agency. Culture is constituted by and

arises from such activities; this is the source of their meaningfulness. It is not enough to believe or to accept vaguely that crafts matter and bear cultural meaning. As a professional field of specialised knowledge, crafts studies must seek to understand just how crafts activities matter from a wholistic perspective that perceives its technical ideas as also cultural ideas. Focusing on a particular dimension is often necessary, but it is misleading to disconnect integrated processes and activities—practical or intellectual—from each other arbitrarily. It is better to anticipate and accommodate possible relationships among dimensions than to assume their self-sufficiency.

## POSTSCRIPT

In this thesis, I have portrayed visual arts education in part as I experienced and understood it through my undergraduate years at NSCAD in the 1970s, though my years as an active participant in provincial and national crafts organisations from the mid-1970s to the mid-1990s, and in part as I have experienced it as an active participant-observer in the visual arts education system at NSCAD University and at Concordia University, between 1995 and 2010. Informally, over this period, I have observed and discussed these evident dichotomies, issues, and concerns among crafts practitioners across the country. Little of this discourse has been documented, but much of it is recognised immediately among many craftspeople as a fair reflection of their perceptions and experiences. My comments regarding the visual arts world and art history cannot fully express the subtle complexity of those worlds and the diversity of interpretations within them, especially with the limitations of this format and the background role that my commentary plays in my whole discussion. I recognise that there is more of a mixed middle ground than I have been able to provide, but to do so would have obscured the points I needed to make about misunderstandings, imbalances, distinctions, and tensions that still persist in the educational environments with which I and other of my crafts colleagues are familiar. Furthermore, the constraints of formal visual arts education do permit students to graduate with only a simplified or narrow view of visual art practice, history, and theory within the limits of their degree programmes, however complex and nuanced the actual art world and practices may be. I and my colleagues encounter such students regularly, even in the graduate programmes.

In the past two decades in particular, there have been considerable positive shifts in attitudes towards craft in the art world, and artists who fight against the stereotypes of both artist and craftsperson. There have also been shifts in crafts curricula, moving in the directions I have been advocating, which I regard as partial validation of my proposals. The fact that change is occurring now and rapidly does not invalidate the importance of discussion, research, and development of a well-grounded basis for craft education and scholarship. So, while the situation of visual art and craft education is in rapid flux and my portrayal may be most valuable for capturing a historical moment in Canadian craft education, I believe that there are lingering underlying assumptions that must at least be addressed, until there is clear consensus from all sides that the tensions, confusions, and stereotypical attitudes that I have described no longer persist.

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## APPENDICES

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### Appendix One: CRAFT CLASSIFICATION CATEGORIES

by material	FIBRE	WOOD	CLAY	GLASS	METAL	STONE	LEATHER	PAPER
by medium	constructed textiles, surface design, costume	relief, marquetry, construction, assembly	pottery, ceramics		metalsmithing (gold, silver, iron, blacksmithing)			
by technique	spinning, felting, weaving, tapestry, knitting, lace, crochet, plaiting, quilting, plying, basketry, dyeing, needlework, printing, sewing, garment drafting & cutting, braiding, beadwork	woodcarving, carpentry, cabinetmaking, scrollwork, woodburning, basketry	turning, molding, slipcasting, slab-building, glazing, sculpting, china painting	glassblowing, stained glass, mosaic, casting, lampwork	casting, molding, heat-forming, beading, gemsetting, enamelling	gem cutting; stone carving, masonry, concrete casting	tanning, leatherworking, bookbinding; shoemaking	papermaking, casting, papier maché, quillwork
by product type	fabric, linens, garment, fashion, upholstery, millinery, passementerie	furniture, cabinetry, sculpture, trimwork, musical instrument	pottery, figurines, tableware	glassware, sculpture, mosaic, ornament	cutlery, holloware, jewellery, metal furniture, fittings, musical instrument	jewellery, sculpture, building blocks, tiles, garden accessory	skin, garment, footwear, bound book	stationery, sculpture, box, book
by object type	cloth, jacket, dress, scarf, hat, towel, placemat, blanket, cushion, runner, drapery, sweater, bag, container, picture, necklace, etc.	table, chair, bench, cabinet, ornament, door, fence, gate, moulding, guitar, violin, etc.	plate, bowl, vase, cup, ornament, etc.	beaker, lamp, window panel, vase, sculpture, bead, ornament, etc.	brooch, necklace, earring, bracelet, anchor, gate, railing, garden accessory, hinge, hanger, ornament, flute, drum, etc.	sculpture, birdbath, paver, etc.	belts, garments, shoes, handbags, wallets, briefcases, etc.	book, card, figure, ornament, etc.
by functional type	houseware (linens, tableware, etc), furnishing (drapery, upholstery, chairs, tables, etc), fashion (accessory, millinery, evening wear, etc), sacred, ritual, art, giftware, ornament, architectural							

## Appendix One: CRAFT CLASSIFICATION CATEGORIES

by material	FIBRE	WOOD	CLAY	GLASS	METAL	STONE	LEATHER	PAPER
by production mode	workshop, custom, handmade, studio, cottage industry							
by aesthetic style	contemporary, modernist, post-modernist, classic, historical, rustic, traditional, folk (vernacular), non-traditional							
by degree of proficiency	well-crafted, poorly crafted; well-designed, poorly designed							
by degree of professionalism	serious, amateur, hobbyist							
by ethno-cultural tradition	eg. Balinese, Yoruba, etc.							
by social context / status	high, low; designer, dilettante, naïve; fine craft, hobby craft, kitsch, folk craft							
by commercial interests	luxury, souvenir, giftware, non-commercial							
by labour structure	artisanal workshop, cottage industry, studio, industrial specialist							
by intentions or aspirations	tapestry, fibre art, fashion, wearable art	sculpture, furnishings, architecture	pottery, functional ceramics, ceramic sculpture	sculpture, technical equipment, stained glass	metalsmithing, sculpture, jewellery, art jewellery	sculpture, garden art	fashion, apparel, wearable art, art binding	specialty papers, decorative art, papier maché sculpture
by institution / priorities	grass roots organizations, funding agencies, public institutions, educational institutions; developmental agencies; commercial agencies							

## Appendix Two: TIMELINE FOR CANADIAN INDEPENDENT ART COLLEGES

YEAR	OCADU	NSCADU	ACAD	ECUAD
1868		Establishment of Nova Scotia Museum		
1876	Ontario Society of Artists opened Ontario School of Art in Toronto			
1885	Hamilton Branch of Ontario School of Art opens, offering embroidery, tapestry, lace-making and weaving, printing on fabrics, wallpaper, jewellery and enamelling, pottery, tiles, lettering and illumination, and decorative illustration			
1887		Victoria School of Art and Design opened in Halifax		
1891	Ontario School of Art reborn as Central Ontario School of Art and Design			
1895	Ontario Mechanics' Institutes replaced by Technical Schools dealing with technical/vocational training and apprenticeship programmes geared towards industries and employment needs			
1896-97		China-painting classes added		
1900	Canadian Guild of Crafts founded			
1900	Art Museum of Toronto founded (forerunner of Art Gallery of Ontario)			
1904	impressive work by Moscow Technical School at St. Louis Exhibition demonstrates value of learning through hands-on craft work, rather than simply drawing or technical exercises			
1906		Nova Scotia Technical College opens, with training for architectural and industrial trades, including technical types of drawing		
1908		Nova Scotia Museum of Fine Arts founded		
1908	Austrian architect Adolf Loos publishes influential essay "Crime and Ornament" denouncing unnecessary ornamentation in favour of streamlined modernism			

YEAR	OCADU	NSCADU	ACAD	ECUAD
1911		Repoussé, metalwork classes appear alongside wood-carving and clay modelling		
1914	Royal Ontario Museum created in Toronto from several University of Toronto collections			
1912	Central Ontario School reformed into Ontario College of Art in Toronto, with crafts courses similar to Hamilton offerings available under Applied Arts designation; college authorised to confer fine arts and teaching diplomas			
1919	Bauhaus opens in Weimar, Germany, with mandate to combine and unify crafts and fine art in the interests of modern design and living			
1919	Art history lectures likely available	Crafts offered include basketry, metalwork, embroidery, clay modelling, soon joined by jewellery and leatherwork		
1921		Crafts identified as one of 7 school divisions		
1921		First teaching diplomas conferred		
1922		First fine arts diploma conferred		
1925	Exposition Internationale des Arts Décoratifs et Industriels Modernes held in Paris			
1925		Victoria School of Art and Design redesignated Nova Scotia College of Art; Art History becomes a requirement		Vancouver School of Decorative and Applied Art opened in Vancouver
1926	Mingei (Folk Craft) Movement established in Japan by Soetsu Yanagi, Shoji Hamada, & Kanjiro Kawai			
1926			Provincial Institute of Art and Technology founded in Alberta, including crafts media	
1927	Crafts still available within Applied Arts; Art History also available			
1930s	OCA expanded Applied Arts, and Interior Decoration and Design sections			
1935	University of Toronto offers BA degree in Art and Archaeology			
1937	Mount Allison University in Sackville, NB, establishes first BFA degree programme in Canada, evenly balancing practice and theory			
1937				VSDAA renamed Vancouver School of Art
1938	R. G. Collingwood published <i>The Principles of Art</i> , distinguishing craft (as <i>techné</i> or production) sharply from "art proper" within his theory of art as language.			



YEAR	OCADU	NSCADU	ACAD	ECUAD
1939	Clement Greenberg published influential essay "Avant-garde vs. Kitsch," denouncing kitsch as inauthentic or inadequate attempts at art and opposing them to "true" art or authentic folk art.			
1940	Bernard Leach published "A Potter's Book," advocating the production of utilitarian "ethical" pots over "fine arts" pots; ie emphasising functional over aesthetic goals and properties			
1940s	NSCA added courses in silver-smithing, jewellery, weaving, needlework, embroidery, woodcarving, leatherwork, and pottery			
1943	Mary E. Black returns to NS to promote handcrafts development			
1946	American Crafts Council founded in USA			
1949	OCA instituted "General Course" on materials			
1950	University of Manitoba in Winnipeg establishes BFA programme when it absorbs the Winnipeg School of Art			
1954	Dalhousie Art Gallery established at Dalhousie University, Halifax			
1954	Art ceramics department founded at Los Angeles County Art Institute (later Otis College of Art and Design) by Peter Voulkos; advocated Abstract Expressionism in ceramics here and from 1959, at the University of California, Berkeley			
1956	American Craft Museum opened in New York City			
1967	Garry Kennedy appointed NSCA president; ushering in avant-garde era and closer ties to American & international contemporary art scenes			
1968	British woodworker, furniture designer, and teacher David Pye publishes "The Nature and Art of Workmanship," perhaps the first solidly philosophical attempt to analyse and theorise crafts practice			
1969	renamed NSCAD institutes BFA degree programmes, including crafts media			
1969-72	NSCAD offers social science courses			
1970	NSCAD institutes degree programme in art education			
1972	Bernard Leach publishes Soetsu Yanagi's essays from the 1920s as the widely distributed "The Unknown Craftsman."			
1973	Nova Scotia Designer Craftsmen founded		Provincial Institute of Art Technology built specially designed building for art programs	
1974	Canadian Crafts Council founded			
1976	Ontario Crafts Council founded			

YEAR	OCADU	NSCADU	ACAD	ECUAD
1978				Vancouver School of Art becomes Emily Carr Institute of Art and Design
1980s	Development and spread of discipline-based art education model, comprising studio practice, art history, art theory, and art appreciation			
1985			Alberta College of Art (Calgary) became independent from adjacent technical institute	
1989				Emily Carr Institute enabled to grant degrees under "Open Learning Agency"
1994		NSCAD had its first full time craft history academic, not immediately replaced when she left after only 2 yrs		Emily Carr College enabled to grant Bachelor degrees under its own name
1995			name changed to Alberta College of Art & Design, began BFA degree programmes (& Bdes?)	Emily Carr changes name to Emily Carr Institute of Art and Design
2002	Ontario College of Art and Design enabled to grant degrees, and acquired university status	NSCAD again hires a full time craft history academic - establishes program in fashion & product design, as well as expanded film facilities		
2003		NSCAD loses BA Art Education degree programme, along with ability to provide MA Art Education programme – changes name to NSCAD University		
2006				Emily Carr enabled to grant graduate degrees (Master of Applied Arts) in 3 streams: Design (Comm or Ind Prod), Visual Arts; or Media
2008	commencement of first Graduate degree programmes: MFA (Crit-Cur), Interdisciplinary MFA, MA or MDes, EMDes (Adv)			Emily Carr granted full university status; renamed Emily Carr University of Art and Design
2009	added MA (Contemp AH) & MDes (Strat Foresight & Innov) programmes		no graduate programmes as of 2010	
2010	granted University status; name changed to Ontario College of Art and Design University			

Appendix Three:  
SUMMATIVE TABLE OF CANADIAN UNDERGRADUATE ART, CRAFT, AND DESIGN COURSES, 2006-2010

	ECUAD				ACAD				OCAD				NSCAD			
	studio	LS	pract	other	studio	LS	pract	other	studio	LS/SEM	pract	other	studio	LS	pract	other
PROFESS PRACTICES						1			2		3			1		
ADVERTISING					8	1			14	2						
ANIMATION	21				2											
ART EDUCATION														2		11
ART HISTORY/THEORY		16				7				16				42		
DESIGN HIST/THEORY		5				1				6				3		
CRAFT HISTORY/ISSUES		1				1				3				15		
MEDIA HISTORY		10				1				11				15		
VISUAL CULTURE		4								15				1		
CERAMICS	28				15	2			9	9			22	1		
COMMUNICATIONS DESIGN	36				21				15	3			24	7		
GENERAL CRAFT					1				5			2	15			
CRITICAL/CURATORIAL										7		2		4		
DRAWING	13				24				9				39			
PAINTING	14				25	1			19				19	5		
IMAGE-MAKING [DRPT]									19	1		2				
ILLUSTRATION					16				18							
ENGLISH/WRITING		4			13			1		13				3		
ENVIRONMENTAL DESIGN									12	4						
FIBRE/TEXTILES					20	2			9	1			25			
OFF-CAMPUS EXCHANGE									8				3	3		
FINE ART PRACTICUM					1			1								
FOUNDATION	16				3	1				8			14			
GENERAL VISUAL ARTS	5				13				10	2			22	1	2	
GENERAL DESIGN									64	2			21	1		
GLASS					28											
HUMANITIES/CULT STUD		6				8				24				19		
INDUSTR/PROD DESIGN	25								13	4			11	5		
INTERDISCIPLINARY					2					2						
JEWELLERY / METALSMITHING					22	2			10				18	1		
DIGITAL	15				47	1										
FILM / VIDEO	25												16	1		
INTEGRATED MEDIA	7								39				23	4		
DIGITAL / MEDIA TECHN					40											
PHOTOGRAPHY	24				26	4			29				20	6		
PRINTMAKING	12				33				22	2			8	1		
SCIENCE /TECH / MATH		5								7						
SCULPTURE/INTERMEDIA	21				16	1			14	1			25	1		
FABRICATION									11							
SOCIAL SCIENCE		9				5				12						
	262	60	0	0	376	39	1	1	351	155	3	6	325	142	2	11

Appendix Three:  
SUMMATIVE TABLE OF CANADIAN UNDERGRADUATE ART, CRAFT, AND DESIGN COURSES, 2006-2010

SUBTOTALS:	ECUAD				ACAD				OCAD				NSCAD			
	studio	LS	pract	other	studio	LS	pract	other	studio	LS/SEM	pract	other	studio	LS	pract	other
FINE & MEDIA ARTS	173	30	0	0	248	16	1	0	190	58	0	0	186	77	2	0
DESIGN FIELDS	61	5	0	0	29	2	0	0	118	21	0	0	56	16	0	0
<b>CRAFTS</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>86</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>80</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>
OTHER	0	24	0	0	13	14	0	1	10	63	3	2	3	32	0	11
	262	60	0	0	376	39	1	1	351	155	3	4	325	142	2	11
REPRESENTATION:																
<b>Crafts</b>	<b>10.69%</b>				<b>22.87%</b>				<b>9.40%</b>				<b>24.62%</b>			
Fine & Media Arts	66.03%				65.96%				54.13%				57.23%			
Design	23.28%				7.71%				33.62%				17.23%			
<b>Crafts History</b>	<b>1.67%</b>				<b>17.95%</b>				<b>8.39%</b>				<b>11.97%</b>			
Fine & Media Arts History	50.00%				41.03%				37.42%				54.23%			
Design History	8.33%				5.13%				13.55%				11.27%			
Other Humanities	40.00%				35.90%				40.65%				22.54%			
Craft + Design Histories	10.00%				23.08%				21.94%				23.24%			
<b>CRAFTS + CRAFTS HISTORY</b>	<b>9.01%</b>				<b>22.41%</b>				<b>9.09%</b>				<b>20.77%</b>			
FINE ARTS + ART HISTORY	63.04%				63.61%				49.01%				56.32%			
DESIGN + DESIGN HISTORY	20.50%				7.47%				27.47%				15.42%			

The figures above represent:

a) the subtotals of studio courses in the Fine & Media Arts, Design, and Crafts categories, as well as the range of mostly liberal arts “other” courses, enumerated on the previous page;

b) the relative proportions of courses in the main categories of studios and histories, separately and in combination.

This shows the relative proportion of the curriculum that is devoted to art, craft, or design education in these schools, in order to show the continuing predominance of the visual art paradigm, as of 2010.

Appendix Four: TABLE OF CANADIAN VISUAL ARTS DEGREE PROGRAMMES ACROSS CANADA, 2010

	GEN ART STUDIES		CRAFTS				DESIGN / APPLIED ARTS					VISUAL ARTS					MEDIA ARTS			INTERDISC.	OTHER			
	GEN ART STUDIES	ART HIST, CRIT, CUR	GEN CRAFT	CERAMIC ARTS	FIBRES / TEXTILES	JEWELLERY /METALSM	GLASS	FASHION / COSTUME	INTERIOR DES	PROD DES IND DES	GEN DES	DES VIS COMM	GRAPHIC DES	FINE /VIS ARTS GEN	FINE ART STUDIO	DRAWING / ILLUSTR	PAINTING	PRINT MAKING	SCULPT			PHOTO	FILM /VIDEO	DIGITAL
BRITISH COLUMBIA																								
ECUAD		X		BFA					BDes	MAA	BDes; MAA		BFA	BFA; MAA	BFA	BFA	BFA	BFA	BFA	BFA	BMA; MAA	BMA		
Kwantlen Polytechnic U		X		X				BDes	BlntDes	Cert		BDes	BFA	BFA	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		
U Northern BC		ECUAD		ECUAD									BFA	ECUAD	ECUAD	ECUAD	ECUAD	ECUAD	ECUAD	ECUAD	ECUAD	ECUAD		
UBC (Vancouver)		BA; MA; PhD											BA; MFA	BFA	X	X	X	X	X	X	BA; MA; MFA	X		
UBC (Okanagan)		BA		X									MA; PhD	BFA;MFA	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		
U Fraser Valley	BA	X						Dipl				Dipl	Dipl	BFA	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		
U Simon Fraser	BA	BA											MFA		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	MA;PhD	MA;PhD	
Thompson Rivers U		Cert		X						BDes			BA	BFA	Cert	Cert	X	X	X	X				
Trinity Western U	BA	X		X						X				BA	X							X		
Vancouver Island U		X		X					BlntDes	X		BA	BA	BFA	X	X	X	X	X	X		X	X	
U Victoria		BA; MA; PhD											BFA/BSc	BFA; MFA	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	
ALBERTA																								
ACAD		X		BFA	BFA	BFA	BFA									BFA	BFA	BFA	BFA	BFA; BDes	BFA	BFA		
U Alberta	BA	MA; PhD							BDes; MDes					BFA; BA; MFA	BFA;MFA	BFA;MFA	BDes; BFA;MFA	BFA;MFA			BA;PhD			
U Alberta (Augustana)		BA											BA	X	X	X	X	X	X					
U Calgary		BA								MEDes			BFA;MFA	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	BA			
U Lethbridge	BA; MA	X											BFA;MFA	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	BFA	BFA	
Mount Royal U		X							BAIDes															
SASKATCHEWAN																								
First Nations U of Canada		BA												BA;BFA										
U Regina	MFA	BA		X									MFA	BFA; MFA	X	X	X	X	X	X	BA; BFA		MA;MFA	
U Saskatchewan	BA	BA											BA	BFA; MFA	X	X	X	X	X	X				
MANITOBA																								
Brandon U		X		BFA						BEnvDes	BFA		BA	BFA AbArt	BFA	BFA						BFA	X	
U Manitoba		BA; BFA		BFA					BlntDes			BFA		BFA	BFA	BFA	BFA	BFA	BFA	BFA	BA			
ONTARIO																								
Algoma U		X											BA	BFA	X	X	X	X	X	X				
Carleton U	BA	BA; MA							BIDes; MIDes												BA; MA			
U Guelph		BA											BA	BASArts; MFA	X	X	X	X	X	BAMS; BASArts		X	X	
Lakehead U		X		X									BA; BEd	BFA	X	X	X	X	X					
Nipissing U		X												BA; BFA	X	X	X	X	X	X				
OCAD	MA	BFA; MA; MFA		BDes	BDes	BDes			BDesID; BDesEV	MA; MDes	BDes; MFA	BDes; EMDes	BA; MA	BFA	BFA; BDes	BFA	BFA	BFA	BFA	BFA	BFA	BFA	BFA	BFA;MA; MDes
U Ottawa		BA												BFA; MFA	X	BFA	BFA	BFA	BFA	BFA	BA	BA		
Queen's U		BA; MA; PhD												BFA	X	BFA	BFA	BFA	BFA		BA; BFA	X	X	M Art Conserv
Redeemer U College	BA	X								X				BA	X	X			X			X	X	
Ryerson U	BA	X						BDes; MA	BIDes	Cert	Prof Cert			BFA; MFA					BFA	BFA	BFA	BFA	MFA	
U Toronto		BA; MA; PhD								BA			BA; MVS	BA	X	X	X	X	X	X	BA; MA	X		
Trent U		BA; MA													X	X	X	X	X	X	X			
U Waterloo		BA						X						BA;BFA; MFA	X	X	X	X	X	X	BA	X		
U Western Ontario		BA; MA; PhD											PhD	BFA; MFA	X	X	X	X	X	X	BA; MA	X		
York	BA	BA; MA; PhD								Prof Cert	Dig Des	BDes; MDes		BA	BFA; MFA; PhD	X	X	X	X	X	BFA; BA; MA; PhD	BFA		
U Windsor	BA	BA											BA	BA;BFA; MFA	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	



Appendix Four: TABLE OF CANADIAN VISUAL ARTS DEGREE PROGRAMMES ACROSS CANADA, 2010

LIBERAL ARTS DEGREES ONLY	GEN ARTS STUDIES	ART HIST, CRIT & CUR	ART/VIS CULT STUD	FINE ART STUDIES	FILM STUDIES	PROVINCE
U Winnipeg		BA			BA	Alberta
Brock U	BA; MA		BA		BA	Ontario
McMaster U		BA		BA	BA	Ontario
Wilfred Laurier U					BA; PhD	Ontario
Bishop's U		BA		BA	BA	Quebec
McGill U		BA; MA; PhD				Quebec
U Prince Edward Island		X	BA	X		PEI
Cape Breton U	BA	X				NS
Memorial U		MA Folk				NFLD
SUBTOTALS:						
BA	2	4	2	2	5	
MA	1	2			0	
PhD	0	1			1	
	3	7	2	2	6	

This continuation of Appendix Four lists the Canadian institutions offering only liberal arts degrees in visual arts (BA, MA, or PhD) rather than professional practice degrees (BFA, MFA). The provinces are indicated at the right side.

Appendix Five: SUMMATIVE TABLE OF UNDERGRADUATE VISUAL ARTS STUDIO COURSES

	ECUAD				ACAD				OCAD				NSCAD			
	studio	LS	pract	other	studio	LS	pract	other	studio	LS/SEM	pract	other	studio	LS	pract	other
<b>GENERAL CRAFT</b>					1				5			2	15			
<b>CERAMICS</b>	28				15	2			9	9			22	1		
<b>FIBRE/TEXTILES</b>					20	2			9	1			25			
<b>JEWELLERY / METALSMITHING</b>					22	2			10				18	1		
<b>GLASS</b>					28											
INDUSTR/PROD DESIGN	25								13	4			11	5		
GENERAL DESIGN									64	2			21	1		
ENVIRONMENTAL DESIGN									12	4						
COMMUNICATIONS DESIGN	36				21				15	3			24	7		
ADVERTISING					8	1			14	2						
FOUNDATION	16				3	1				8			14			
GENERAL VISUAL ARTS	5				13				10	2			22	1	2	
DRAWING	13				24				9				39			
ILLUSTRATION					16				18							
PAINTING	14				25	1			19				19	5		
IMAGE-MAKING [DRPT]									19	1		2				
PRINTMAKING	12				33				22	2			8	1		
SCULPTURE/INTERMEDIA	21				16	1			14	1			25	1		
FABRICATION									11							
PHOTOGRAPHY	24				26	4			29				20	6		
FILM / VIDEO	25												16	1		
ANIMATION	21				2											
INTEGRATED MEDIA	7								39				23	4		
DIGITAL / MEDIA TECHN					40											
DIGITAL	15				47	1										
INTERDISCIPLINARY					2					2						
PROFESS PRACTICES						1			2		3			1		
	262	0	0	0	359	15	0	0	336	39	0	2	307	34	2	0
SUBTOTALS:	ECUAD				ACAD				OCAD				NSCAD			
FINE & MEDIA ARTS	173	0	0	0	247	8	0	0	190	16	0	2	186	19	2	0
DESIGN FIELDS	61	0	0	0	29	1	0	0	118	15	0	0	56	13	0	0
<b>CRAFTS</b>	28	0	0	0	86	6	0	0	33	10	0	2	80	2	0	0
	262	0	0	0	362	15	0	0	341	41	0	4	322	34	2	0



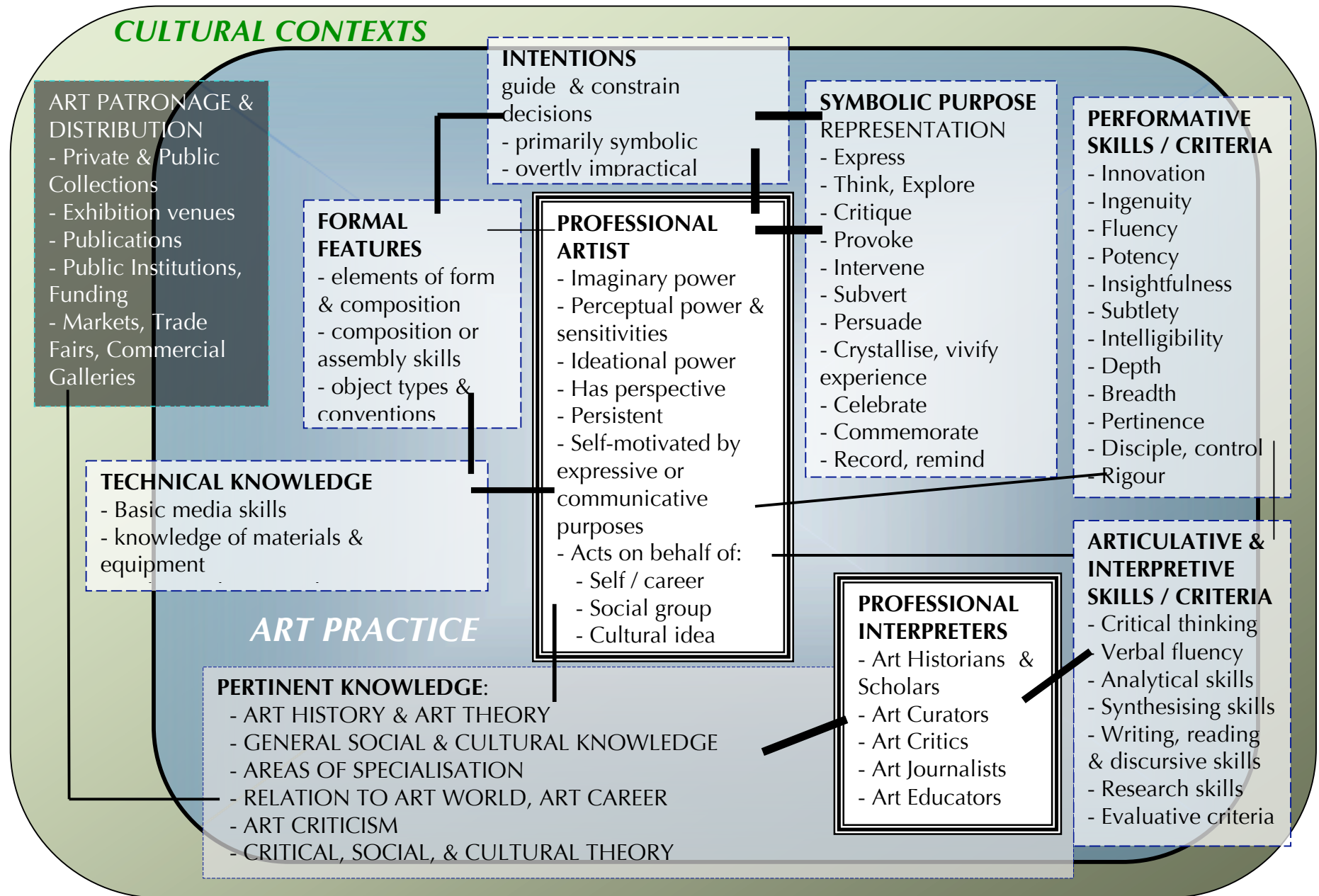
Appendix Six:  
SUMMARY OF CANADIAN VISUAL ARTS DEGREE PROGRAMMES, 2010

	HERITAGE	CRAFTS	DESIGN	VISUAL ARTS	MEDIA ARTS	INTERDISC ARTS	TOTAL
<b>BRITISH COLUMBIA</b>							
Specialised school							
College							
University:							
Bachelor		6	5	1	9		21
Master		2	1	3	4	2	12
PhD					1	2	3
Other			1	1			2
<b>ALBERTA</b>							
Specialised school							
College							
University:							
Bachelor		4	4	5	4	1	18
Master			2	3			5
PhD			1				1
Other							
<b>SASKATCHEWAN</b>							
Specialised school							
College							
University:							
Bachelor		1		3	2		6
Master		1		2	2	1	6
PhD							
Other							
<b>MANITOBA</b>							
College							
University:							
Bachelor	1	2		2	2	1	8
Master							
PhD							
Other							
<b>ONTARIO</b>							
Specialised school							
College							
University:							
Bachelor		2	6	14	15	5	42
Master			4	8	9		21
PhD				1	1		2
Other			2				2
<b>QUEBEC</b>							
Specialised school							
College							
University:							
Bachelor	1	1	6	7	7	3	25
Master		1	1	3	3	1	9
PhD				2	2		4
Other	1			2	2	1	6

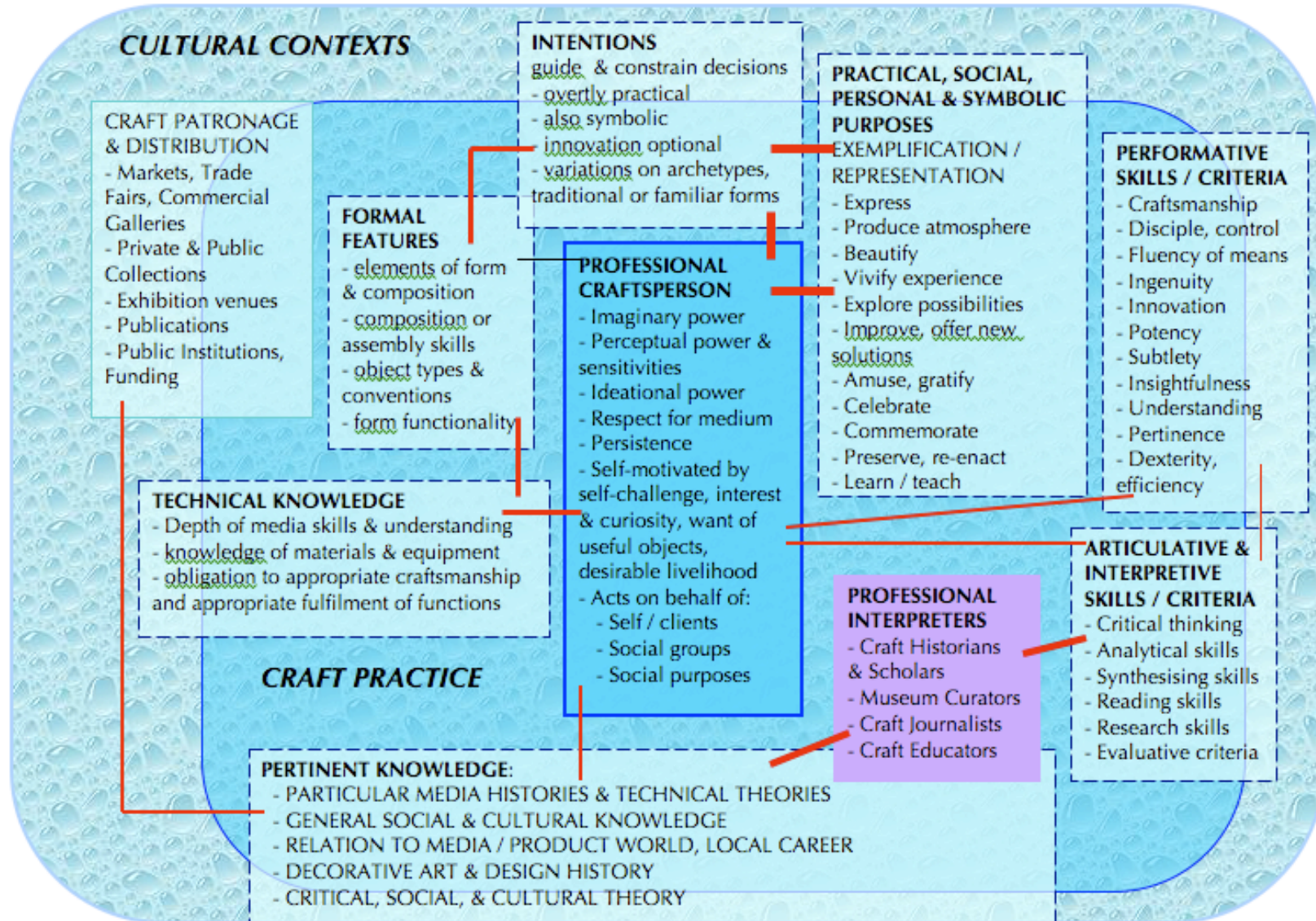
Appendix Six:  
SUMMARY OF CANADIAN VISUAL ARTS DEGREE PROGRAMMES, 2010

	HERITAGE	CRAFTS	DESIGN	VISUAL ARTS	MEDIA ARTS	INTERDISC ARTS	TOTAL
<b>NEW BRUNSWICK</b>							
Specialised school							
College		1	1				2
University:							
Bachelor		1		3	3	2	9
Master							
PhD							
Other	1				2	1	4
<b>PRINCE EDWARD ISLAND</b>							
Specialised school							
College							
University:							
Bachelor							
Master							
PhD							
Other							
<b>NOVA SCOTIA</b>							
Specialised school							
College							
University:							
Bachelor		1	1	1	1	1	5
Master		1	1	1	1	1	5
PhD							
Other			1				1
<b>NEWFOUNDLAND &amp; LABRADOR</b>							
Specialised school							
College							
University:							
Bachelor							
Master							
PhD							
Other							
<b>NORTH WEST TERRITORIES</b>							
Specialised school							
College							
University:							
Bachelor							
Master							
PhD							
Other							
<b>NUNAVUT</b>							
Specialised school							
College							
University:							
Bachelor							
Master							
PhD							
Other							

Appendix Seven: CHARACTERISTICS OF VISUAL ARTS PARADIGM



Appendix Eight: Characteristics of Crafts Activity



## Appendix Nine

### GLOSSARY OF WEAVING TERMS

<i>Batten</i>	Also known as <i>beater</i> . The part of the loom which the weaver pulls forward to beat the weft thread into place in the cloth.
<i>Block design</i>	Also known as <i>profile design</i> . Design which shows the visual patterning of groups of weave units or threads, rather than thread by thread. One design might be executed in any weave structure which conforms to the technical requirements of block weave units.
<i>Count</i>	The density of the threads across the surface. The warp is counted as ends per inch (epi) or ends per cm. The weft is counted as picks per inch (ppi) or picks per cm. Pile rows are counted as rows per inch (or cm.).
<i>Draft</i>	The drawing in of the threads, both on loom or on paper. As a noun, <i>draft</i> refers both to schematic notation or drawings on paper of the weave plan, and to the ordering of the threads. As a verb, <i>draft</i> describes the act of designing the thread order or of drawing it on paper.
<i>End</i>	Individual thread in the warp chain. When several individual strands side by side or twisted together are interlacing as one thread throughout the weave structure, they might also be called one <i>end</i> .
<i>Fell</i>	The edge of the woven section of cloth, against which each new weft is beaten.
<i>Float</i>	A thread which floats free across the surface of the cloth over a number of threads.
<i>Ground</i>	The structural cloth base in which a velvet weave or other ornamental weave floats or effects are held.
<i>Heddle</i>	The string or metal fittings on the loom through which the warp threads are passed and by means of which the warp threads are held in order and attached to the movement of the shaft.
<i>Interleave</i>	To blend or merge the ordered threads of two warps into a single regular order.
<i>Lease sticks</i>	A pair of sticks used to hold the warping cross, which maintains the order of threads. Lease sticks can be tied to the loom to hold threads like another pair of hands. They can also be bound tightly to beams during the dressing of the loom to help even out tension.

<i>Lift sequence</i>	The order in which combinations of shafts are lifted.
<i>Pick</i>	The passing of a weft through the weaving shed, by means of in shuttle.
<i>Pile</i>	Loops or cut loops or ends of thread which stick out perpendicular to the plane of woven cloth backing. Includes warp, weft, and knotted weaving. Also refers to other non-woven structures.
<i>Point twill</i>	A twill weave which changes its diagonal direction in either the threading or the lifting sequence, without a break in the twill step.
<i>Profile design</i>	Also known as <i>block design</i> , when used with block weave units. Design which shows the visual patterning of groups of weave units or threads, rather than thread by thread.
<i>Reed</i>	The metal comb through which the threads are passed to maintain their regular density and width. It is also used to beat the weft against the fell of the cloth.
<i>Repeat</i>	The minimum threading or lifting sequence which is repeated.
<i>Rod</i>	For velvet weaving, the velvet rod is inserted to hold up the loops of warp threads until they are securely entrapped in the weave and unable to be pulled out by the tension of the warp weights.
<i>Satin</i>	The third basic weave structure which steps by a regular counter, but not to the next step, as does twill. It attempts to create a minimally visible random stitching down of threads to avoid the distinct twill diagonal line, and maximise the profile of longer thread floats.
<i>Shaft</i>	The part of the harness which lifts the threads up and down to form the weaving shed through which the weft shuttle passes.
<i>Shed</i>	The space created between the lifted threads and those which remain sunk, through which the shuttle is passed to carry the weft thread from one side of the cloth to the other.
<i>Sizing</i>	Substance applied to yarn or finished cloth to give it extra body or strength. Often acts like a layer of glue to hold threads from shifting, pulling out, or to reduce abrasion of the surface of the yarn.
<i>Sley</i>	To pull the threads through the reed. As a noun, also refers to the order and density of the threads passed through the reed. Pre-sleying through a reed before mounting on the loom helps to comb out the warp and maintain its order and width on the back beam.



- Straight draw* The simplest possible order on the shafts - eg. 1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8 repeated.
- Supplementary* Threads which are not part of the primary structural cloth. Supplemental threads can be pulled out of the cloth without destroying the structural stability of the cloth.
- Tension brake* The mechanism which holds the back warp beam from spinning forward thus holding the warp threads under tension.
- Treadle* The foot-operated part of the loom to which the shafts are attached either singly or in combinations, by means of which the weaver lifts the groups of shafts to form the weave shed.
- Twill* The second basic weave. Each successive weft intersection steps by one thread to the right or left, thus forming the distinctive diagonal line.
- Unit* A standard group repeating of threads.
- Velvet* *'True' velvet:*
- a. supplementary warp pile which is woven at same time as foundation and manipulated by means of at least one pattern harness or pattern rod: solid uncut and cut pile, picked up colours or patterns, substituted pile warps.
  - b. supplementary warp pile woven at the same time as foundation with patterns manipulated by means of harnesses, pattern sticks or drawloom mechanism: voided, ciselé, polychrome, figured, brocaded.
  - c. supplementary warp pile woven on card or tablet woven foundation structure.
  - d. pile effect by double cloth with thread weaving between two separate layers and eventually cut apart [not a handweaving type].
- Not velvet in strictest sense - disputed or borderline types*
- a. non-supplementary warp pile, that weaves elsewhere in the cloth structure as an essential part of the main or ground or flat weave portions, such as Han dynasty compound plain or lifted twill figured float weaves.
  - b. warp pile, uncut or cut, whose floats are insufficiently high or dense to provide the effect commonly understood as velvet: Han dynasty compound plain or lifted twill figured float weave, eye-lash effect, etc.
  - c. weft pile derived from weft float structures woven at same time as foundation, either cut while weaving progresses or later, off-loom: fustian, corduroy, double corduroy, velveteen (weave), velours au sabre, chinese/japanese method (rods left in and pattern selectively cut later according to drawing or stencil marked in powder on surface).

*Pseudo-velvet*

- a. pile effect by thread not woven simultaneously with foundation fabric: embroidered, tufted, etc.
- b. pile effect by pre-cut knots inserted as foundation is woven.
- c. pile effect by weft thread which is pulled up between warp threads, possibly held up by wrapping around rod or needle: bouclé or cut.
- d. pile effect created by weaving with chenille warp or weft thread, previously existing as pile thread.
  - e. pile effect by heavy brushing, napping or felting: ie., abrasion against a rough surface.

<i>Warp</i>	The set of threads which is mounted on the loom under tension.
<i>Web</i>	The woven cloth.
<i>Weft</i>	The thread which is passed through the threads of the warp by means of the shuttle.
<i>Weight</i>	Any heavy bead, ring or other object used to provide tension on warp ends by means of gravity.