

Crafting Clothing: An Art Historical Exploration of the Products and Practices
of Small-Scale Garment Manufacturing

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ABSTRACT

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Evan Stanfield

In response to various social and aesthetic concerns, clothing companies are increasingly rejecting the mass production and global supply chains that typify the contemporary garment industry in favour of small-scale and localized production. Many of the values and strategies they are now adhering to recall the ideals of crafting that were developed during the British Arts and Crafts movement in the late 19th century. The current implementation of these ideals – centred on a desire for the conditions of labor to be pleasant and stimulating and a belief that labor itself should entail a considerable amount of skill and creativity – reveals a potentially radical intersection between modern manufacturing and traditional crafting. This thesis explores the recent emergence of an interest in crafting within the garment industry. It focuses on two notable examples of Canadian clothing companies currently engaged in small-scale, localized garment manufacturing: Atelier b. and Betina Lou. Through interviews with the founders of both companies and analyses of their products and production processes, this thesis investigates how, and to what extent, small-scale garment manufacturing emulates the Arts and Crafts movement's ideals of crafting. In turn, it proposes how art historical enquiry can be directed towards the garment industry as an important site of contemporary craft activity where practices are currently being inspired by theories that were developed over a century ago.

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Introduction

Over the course of the 19th century, widespread industrial development rapidly transformed life in England through unprecedented innovations in manufacturing, transportation, communications, and organizational strategy. The Industrial Revolution coincided with a growing economy that has been likened to “an accelerating aircraft escaping the pull of gravity, [as it] made a decisive break with ‘the habits and institutions, the values and vested interests of the traditional society.’” According to economist W. W. Rostow, this “take-off” was “driven by a ‘leading sector,’ an industry with a particularly rapid rate of growth which could push the whole economy forward: in the case of Britain, it was cotton.”¹ For many workers, however, this new era entailed the introduction of new machinery and mechanized processes that separated them completely from the means of production, as “no longer could the spinner turn her wheel and the weaver throw his shuttle at home, free of supervision, both in their own good time. Now the work had to be done in a factory, at a pace set by tireless, inanimate equipment, as part of a large team that had to begin, pause, and stop in unison – all under the close eye of overseers.”² As the harshness of working conditions necessary to maintain the new era of progress became apparent, some observers began to voice concerns about the social and aesthetic consequences of industrialization.

Critics of England’s industrial development drew attention to the negative effects it was having on both the people involved in production and the objects being produced. In the early 1800s, political philosopher Thomas Carlyle argued that newly mechanized production demoralized skilled workers as he wrote,

¹ M. J. Daunton, *Progress and Poverty: An Economic and Social History of Britain 1700-1850* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1995), 11-12.

² David S. Landes, *The Unbound Prometheus: Technological Change and Industrial Development in Western Europe from 1750 to the Present*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 43.

the living artisan is driven from his workshop to make room for a speedier inanimate one. The shuttle drops from the fingers of the weaver and falls into the iron fingers that ply it faster... Men are grown mechanical in head and heart as well as in hand. They have lost faith in individual endeavor, and in natural force of any kind.³

A short time later, architect Augustus Pugin proposed a moralizing link between the conditions of labor and the quality of its product, as he pointed to the notion of “honesty” as a metric for judging art and architecture.⁴ Whereas an artist’s faithful commitment to their work produced art that was honest, Pugin suggested “the division of labor, a key practice on which the profitability of industry rested, was *dishonest* [as] it denied [the worker] any intellectual or creative contribution.”⁵ Mid-way through the century, art critic John Ruskin further elaborated on the link between labor and its product by suggesting the rough surface finish of an object showed evidence of the worker happily engaged in their work, whereas the smooth and impersonal surface of an industrial finish degraded the worker. As an alternative to industry’s tendency to divide labor into menial tasks that minimized evidence of the worker’s personal contribution, Ruskin claimed that “it is only by labor that thought can be made healthy, and only by thought that labor can be made happy, and the two cannot be separated with impunity.”⁶ For Ruskin and his contemporaries, the antidote to the negative social and aesthetic effects of industrialization was for skilled workers to be personally invested and fully involved in all aspects of production, from conception to execution.

³ John Carlyle, “Signs of the Times,” *Edinburgh Review*, June 1829, in *A Carlyle Reader: Selections from the Writings of Thomas Carlyle*, ed. George Bernhard Tennyson (New York, Modern Library, 1969), 34.

⁴ Rosalind P. Blakesley notes that Pugin’s idea of honesty derives from his appreciation for the Gothic style, which he felt exhibited certain principles that were essential to good architecture: “First, a building should show truth to purpose by demonstrating the use for which it is intended. Second, an architect must demonstrate structural honesty, so that the methods of construction are visible. Finally, an artisan (should) stay true to his material by drawing on its inherent properties, rather than adopting methods better suited to another medium.” The Gothic style’s adherence to these principles revealed its honesty in both the artisan’s process and the resulting architecture. Rosalind P. Blakesley, “Escaping the ‘Inexhaustible Mines of Bad Taste,’” in *The Arts and Crafts Movement* (London: Phaidon, 2006), 11-26.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 16.

⁶ John Ruskin, *The Works of John Ruskin*, ed. Edward Tyas Cook and Alexander D. O. Wedderburn, vol. 10 (New York: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1904), 201.

Ruskin's theories were foundational to the emergence of the Arts and Crafts movement, and in the 1860s William Morris started to put them into practice. Originally trained as an architect, Morris turned his attention to the decorative arts and with a small group of friends formed Morris, Marshall, Faulkner, and Co., which over time produced a large and diverse amount of work from stained glass to furniture to printed wallpapers and textiles to small household items in ceramic, metal, and wood. As the size of its staff grew, the company ultimately consolidated its weaving, printing, dyeing, and glass-staining operations within a single well-lit and well-ventilated workshop on the River Wandle just outside of London where Morris "endeavoured to provide a healthy working environment."⁷ Within this context, he advocated for work "which shall be worth doing, and be of itself pleasant to do, and which should be done under such circumstances as would make it neither over-wearisome nor over-anxious,"⁸ as "under these circumstances the worker could again become an artist."⁹ Others soon followed this precedent and formed groups such as the Art Worker's Guild and the Arts and Crafts Exhibition Society that were responsible for launching the Arts and Crafts movement in earnest, which historian Eileen Boris succinctly indicates

began as a creative response to the precarious position of the art worker and the degradation of their work under the commercialization of architecture and the allied arts. Designers, applied artists, and decorators – recognized neither as artists by the Royal Academy nor as laborers by the crafts unions – sought to define the craftsman as an artist and to form a professional identity in sharp contrast to the academic norm. They rebelled 'against the turning of men into machines, against artificial distinctions in art, and against making the immediate market value, or possibility of profit, the chief test of artistic merit.'¹⁰

⁷ Blakesley, 49-51.

⁸ May Morris, ed., "The Socialist Ideal," in *The Collected Works of William Morris*, vol. 22, *Signs of Change; Lectures on Socialism* (London, New York: Longmans, Green and Co., 1910-15), 3-27.

⁹ Eileen Boris, *Art and Labor: Ruskin, Morris, and the Craftsman Ideal in America* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1886), 11.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 13.

Coupled with their concern for improved labor conditions, proponents of the Arts and Crafts movement theorized ideals that constituted a compelling response to the problems arising from industrial development.¹¹ Despite these good intentions, however, it only ever managed to supply a niche market, as designer C. R. Ashbee lamented in 1938, “we have made of a great social movement, a narrow and tiresome little aristocracy working with great skill for the very rich”.¹² In the early 20th century, it was clear that the Arts and Crafts movement had failed to produce a viable alternative to industrialization in England, and while its ideals managed to find some success elsewhere in Europe where there had been no significant industrial heritage to confront, the following century would see industrial development become ever more sophisticated and pervasive.¹³

¹¹ Janice Helland notes that practical alternatives to industrial production were being explored prior to the emergence of the Arts and Crafts Movement. In addition to the Art Workers Guild and the Arts and Crafts Exhibition Society, a third organization – the Home Arts and Industries Association (and its many regional subsidiaries, including the Donegal Industrial Fund, the Irish Industries Association, and Scottish Home Industries) – “flourished in Britain and Ireland during the latter part of the nineteenth century,” and their focus on rural production and a reverence for the hand-made served as an important precursor to the movement. Helland indicates the organizers of these groups were equally concerned with philanthropy as with the market and that “distinct from associates of the Arts and Crafts movement, these cultural philanthropists did not yearn for a quixotic relocation from city to country, but rather they engaged with the inhabitants of existing poverty-stricken communities frequently located in remote areas. If, at times, the products and producers were romanticized for patrons and buyers, many of the organizers remained in touch with a harsher reality. The gap that existed between the home arts and industries and the Arts and Crafts movement can be located in this space between urban and rural and, most significantly, between professional and amateur. Nineteenth century debates tended to suggest that professionals earned their living from their craft. However, in the instance of cottage workers, the overriding designator was undoubtedly class and gender (peasant and poor, female with no status.) She further clarifies that while these groups “shared a concern for the worker, their focus tended toward the support of industries already functioning albeit in a limited way... Their focus was not upon ‘rescue work’ but upon domestic production that would subsidize mainly rural workers in remote areas.” Janice Helland, *British and Irish Home Arts and Industries 1880-1914: Marketing Craft, Making Fashion* (Dublin, Irish Academic Press, 2007), 1, 2, 10.

¹² C. R. Ashbee, “Memoirs” unpublished transcript, 1938, vol. 4, Victoria and Albert Museum Library, 201, quoted in Gillian Naylor, *The Arts and Crafts Movement: A Study of Its Sources, ideals, and Influence on Design Theory* (London: Studio Vista, 1971), 9.

¹³ In the concluding chapter of *The Arts and Crafts Movement: A Study of Its Sources, ideals, and Influence on Design Theory*, 191-194, author Gillian Naylor indicates that by the 1950s, Scandinavians had accomplished much of what British Arts and Crafts proponents had originally set out to do: their comparatively small industries encouraged designers and makers to work collaboratively to produce beautiful and functional objects that had a popular appeal.

Undeterred by two world wars, the industrial development that originated in England has progressed steadily since its inception, and in the 21st century its attendant innovations have become more refined, and its scope more expansive, than proponents of the Arts and Crafts movement could possibly have imagined. Amid advanced industrial protocols of international trade networks, ISO specification, and mass production, however, a seemingly counterintuitive interest in crafting has recently emerged within the sphere of industry.¹⁴ Examples can be seen from industries producing all kinds of goods from cosmetics to food and beverages to even automobiles, as companies increasingly seek to distinguish themselves from competitors by promoting the “crafted” nature of their products.¹⁵ While in some cases this phenomenon may be the result of fleeting trends in marketing, in other cases the re-emergence of an interest in crafting signals its renewed potential as a means to critique an industrial status quo and nowhere is such a critique more significant than in the case of the garment industry. The globally distributed supply chain and incomparably massive scale of production that typify the contemporary garment industry represent a veritable zenith of the problematic social and aesthetic circumstances that the Arts and Crafts movement struggled against over a century ago, but as clothing companies increasingly reject advanced industrial innovations in favour of small-

¹⁴ There have been several instances of an emergent interest in crafting since the 19th century: the Studio Craft movement of the 1920s-30s; back-to-the-land movements of the 1950s-70s; “stitch and bitch” groups of the 1990s; DIY and craftivism movements of the 2000s. Susan Luckman notes that these instances “do not emerge from nowhere but can be located in a longer, cyclical history of analysis, activism, and critical disavowal. As [David] Gauntlett observes, even as recently as the twentieth century, DIY and ‘make do and mend’ have variously had periods of popularity and decline, often in line with politico-economic circumstances. For example, the stoicism of ‘making do’ was endorsed government policy across the Allied nations during the Second World War, replaced from the 1950s onwards with greater fetishism of the new and a concurrent linking of the hand- made with poverty (Gauntlett, 2011, p. 63).” However, while each of these instances generally occurred outside the parameters of conventional industrial production, the recent interest in crafting described here appears to be emerging from within the very industries that it seeks to challenge. Susan Luckman, *Locating Cultural Work: The Politics and Poetics of Rural, Regional, and Remote Creativity* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 170-171.

¹⁵ For example, see advertising imagery for Herbal Essences (fig. 1), Okanagan Spring Brewery (fig. 2), and Lexus (fig. 3).

scale and localized production, they are revealing a new and potentially radical intersection between modern manufacturing and traditional crafting.

This thesis focuses on the recent emergence of an interest in crafting within the garment industry and proposes how best to situate new approaches to garment manufacturing within the broader discourse of contemporary craft production; specifically, it explores the current social and aesthetic implications of small-scale, localized garment manufacturing from an art historical perspective. The exploration is supplemented by a methodological approach anchored in material culture studies that seeks to understand “goods of all kinds” as art forms that should “undergo close formal, constructional, and socio-semantic scrutiny.”¹⁶ To that end, this thesis presents an analysis of both products and production processes to understand how and to what extent small-scale garment manufacturing emulates the ideals of crafting that were theorized during the Arts and Crafts movement. The analysis is informed by case studies of two notable examples of Canadian clothing companies currently engaged in small-scale garment manufacturing: Atelier b. and Betina Lou – both chosen for their explicit opposition to mass-production as well as their participation in a close community of garment manufacturers located in Montreal, Quebec. While the crafts are too rarely the subject of historical and theoretical study, scholarly research concentrated on garment manufacturing is more rare still, yet as new clothing companies adopt methods of production that correspond to the ideals of the Arts and Crafts movement, the subject of small-scale garment manufacturing is of increasing importance to contemporary craft discourse. Through its case studies, this thesis intends to propose how art historical enquiry can

¹⁶ Michael Yonan, “Toward a Fusion of Art History and Material Culture Studies,” *West 86th: A Journal of Decorative Arts, Design History, and Material Culture* 18, no 2 (2011): 246, https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1086/662520?seq=1#metadata_info_tab_contents/.

be directed towards the garment industry as an important site of contemporary craft activity where practices are currently being inspired by theories that were developed over a century ago.

1. Thinking About Making

The Arts and Crafts movement occupies a tenuous position within the canon of Western art history. This is perhaps due to the fact that while a vast amount of work was produced in association with the movement, a coherent style across works can be difficult to discern. Boris notes that within the best work produced by those involved in the movement,

styles ranged from the classic repeating patterns of Morris carpets and tapestries and the carved furniture of his firm to the peasant motifs of the Donegal Industrial Fund and the whiplash lines and geometric abstractions of the Century Guild; from the graphic, Pre-Raphaelite images of Walter Crane to the streamlined hollow ware of W. A. S. Benson and the chaste but intricate jewelry of the Guild of Handicraft under C. R. Ashbee. Amid such variety, there was a basic aesthetic commitment to fitness of purpose, unity of effect, and quality of execution.¹⁷

Despite the significant aesthetic diversity of work produced, the movement's stylistic essence is most often characterized by the output of William Morris and his company.¹⁸ Iconic works such as Morris' *Strawberry Thief* furnishing fabric designed in 1883 (fig. 4), and Philip Webb's Sussex Chairs designed ca. 1860 (fig. 5) – both made by Morris & Co. – reveal a preoccupation with images of nature and natural forms that broadly serve as the movement's de facto aesthetic signature. For Morris and other followers of Ruskin, “art meant individuality and the search for ‘truth’ – and truth could be found both in the study of nature and in the recreation of the spirit rather than the letter of mediaevalism.”¹⁹ Ruskin praised the irregularities of workmanship seen in gothic architecture as evidence of a human touch, and accordingly Morris drew much

¹⁷ Boris, 15.

¹⁸ Eileen Boris notes that by the late 1800s William Morris was “known as the classic designer of his generation... [and] the acknowledged master of British decorative art.” Boris, 8.

¹⁹ Gillian Naylor, *The Arts and Crafts Movement: A Study of Its Sources, ideals, and Influence on Design Theory* (London: Studio Vista, 1971), 101.

inspiration from mediaeval aesthetics while insisting that design “should express the vigor and growth of the plant form that inspired them, as ‘even where a line ends it should look as if it had plenty of capacity for more growth if it so would.’”²⁰ Works by other artists associated with the movement reveal other concerns: A silver salt cellar designed and made in 1899 by Charles Robert Ashbee (fig. 6) features a fairy-like figure supporting a spherical salt bowl that is “not unlike the Renaissance motif of Atlas upholding the world,” which according to the Victoria and Albert Museum “represents the winged spirit of imagination and idealism;”²¹ and an aluminum and copper clock designed in 1901 by Charles Francis Annesley Voysey (fig. 7) features an austere, architectural form contrasted by the whimsical Latin phrase, *empus fugit* or “time flies,” in place of numerals on the clock face.²² Although they tend to be lesser known, these works and many others explore aesthetic possibilities aside from those derived from nature. Further complicating matters, other artistic movements occurring around the turn of the 20th century also elaborated styles similar to those of the Arts and Crafts movement, which now serve to simultaneously obscure its stylistic identity and reveal its most crucial characteristic. Art Nouveau (1890–1910) was also inspired by nature and in addition to its emphasis on curvilinear forms it often took a bold and graphic appearance; Art Deco (1910–1939) extended the traditions of earlier decorative arts and while its aesthetic looked to the future instead of the past it was also characterized by bold forms, vibrant colors, and a close attention to materiality. These movements responded to the extraordinary changes associated with industrial development through the production of aesthetic objects and images, as did the Arts and Crafts movement, but

²⁰ Ibid., 106.

²¹ “Summary,” Salt Cellar: Ashbee, Charles Robert, born 1863 – died 1942, Victoria & Albert Collections, accessed September 21, 2018, <http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O94792/salt-cellar-ashbee-charles-robert/>.

²² “Summary,” Clock; C. F. A. Voysey, born 1857 – died 1941, Victoria & Albert Collections, accessed September 21, 2018, <http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O347106/clock-c-f-a/>.

the key characteristic that distinguishes the latter was its theoretical emphasis on process. For proponents of the Arts and Crafts movement, the process of making was just as important as the style of the end product, and the worker's role in this process was of central importance.²³

Given its focus on process, the Arts and Crafts movement was as much aligned with the social movements of its time as with the artistic movements. In the mid-nineteenth century, as Ruskin was theorizing the link between aesthetics and societal decline in *The Stones of Venice* (1851-53), Karl Marx was developing theories concerning industrial capitalism and its effect on society. In works such as *The Communist Manifesto* (1848), *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* (1859), and *Capital, Volume I* (1867) among others, Marx explored issues surrounding labor in a capitalist context such as the social relations of production and the idea of commodity fetishism, alienation resulting from capitalist production, and alienation's antithesis in communism.²⁴ Marx's ideas had a profound effect on William Morris and greatly influenced his particular approach to artistic production, which historian Maynard Solomon describes as "the first application of the Marxist theory of labor to art, a critique of the capitalist society in terms of the alienation of the laborer from the object of his production, a vision of a non-repressive order founded on the reintroduction of the aesthetic dimension into the labor process."²⁵ Through his art practice, rooted in the communal structure of a workshop, Morris

²³ In the preface to *Art and Labor*, Eileen Boris indicates the Arts and Crafts movement's proponents "defined art as man's expression of his joy in labor and lamented the fact that modern civilization had robbed work of pleasure," and in response they "would take up the cause of art and the practice of handicraft as alternatives to the immoral world of work, the lairs of the corporation, and the sweatshop." Boris, xi-xvi.

²⁴ Commodity fetishism is the idea that the social relations between workers and capitalists are equivalent to the economic relations between commodities, which are defined in terms of their relative value. Alienation within capitalism is a multifaceted idea that involves workers being estranged from the product (as design and production processes are dictated by market forces), the process (as commoditized labor is exchanged for wages), other workers (as commoditized labor competes amongst itself), and ultimately the self (as these forms of estrangement inhibit the worker from determining their own destiny in life.) Kieran Allen, *MARX and the Alternative to Capitalism* (New York: Pluto Press, 2011), 36-54.

²⁵ Maynard Solomon, "William Morris," in *Marxism and Art: Essays Classic and Contemporary*, ed. Maynard Solomon (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1979), 79.

sought to realize Marx's vision of more equitable relations of production, as he stated in his *Lectures on Socialism*,

we want by means of Social-Democracy to win a decent livelihood, we want in some sort to live, and that at once. Surely anyone who professes to think that the question of art and civilization must go before that of the knife and fork does not understand what art means, or how that its roots must have a soil of a thriving and unanxious life. Yet it must be remembered that civilization has reduced the workman to such a skinny and pitiful existence, that he scarcely knows how to frame a desire for any life much better than that which he now endures perforce. It is the province of art to set the true ideal of a full and reasonable life before him, a life to which the perception and creation of beauty, the enjoyment of real pleasure that is, shall be felt to be as necessary to man as his daily bread...²⁶

Others took Morris's views on socialism to be an integral component of the Arts and Crafts movement, as Eileen Boris notes that both he and Ruskin "served as icons for a generation of intellectual dissenters who came of age in the 1880s and 1890s and had their initial influence at the turn of the century."²⁷ Consequently, socialist theories are embedded in the ideals of crafting that were developed during the Arts and Crafts movement.

The ideals theorized by Morris and others centered on a desire for the conditions of labor to be both pleasant and stimulating, and a belief that labor itself should invariably entail a considerable amount of skill and creativity. In the process of theorizing these ideals, Morris "traced the gradual degradation of labor from the first division of tasks in the workshop through the speed-up of machine production in factories," and noted that "in the workshop of the eighteenth century... the capitalist still took pride in manufacturing fine products and the workman still maintained his skill."²⁸ With the workshop as a model, he further envisioned "small-scale working units... but rejected anarchism as undermining social cohesion and the collective labor necessary for a true communist society."²⁹ In the context of such a workshop,

²⁶ Morris, 280-281.

²⁷ Boris, 169.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 10.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

labor characterized by both skill and creativity necessitated a blurring of the distinction between designer and maker, as Morris felt “the designer must have personal knowledge of the potentials and limitations of the materials he is working with if he is to produce work of any validity, and such understanding of the processes of design must be learned at first hand; it cannot be communicated by a teacher or a book.”³⁰ Despite the goal of defining an alternative to industrial production, Morris was not opposed to the use of machinery or mechanized processes in the workshop, as he believed “the worker’s degree of control over machinery, not the use of machinery per se, determined how much pleasure would remain in labor.”³¹ Nevertheless, workmanship that emphasized both materiality and the hand of the worker (per Ruskin’s decree) was valued, where “ornament spontaneously resulted from the fashioning of useful goods because the need for variety in work compelled the maker to decorate.”³² For those involved in the Arts and Crafts movement, adhering to the ideals of crafting required as much attention be paid to the process as to the product; for scholars, situating craftwork produced during the movement within Western art history requires an equally multifaceted critical approach that takes into account both aesthetics and the broader conditions of production.

Perspectives on the Arts and Crafts movement generally situate its products and practices within art history, but instead of thinking about these aspects of craft in relation to art, Adamson proposes a different foil: industry. In his 2013 book, *The Invention of Craft*, Adamson explores the practical and discursive separation of craft and industry into two discrete categories of production that occurred during the 19th century and argues the very idea of craft “was invented at a time of conflict between the ranks of the skillful and others involved in production, who

³⁰ Naylor, 104.

³¹ Boris, 11.

³² Ibid.

recognized the unique potency of skill and therefore wanted to contain and control it.”³³ This was achieved by isolating and disempowering skilled labor (through the division and specialization of conventionally complex work), systematically revealing production methods (through the publication of technical illustrations and instruction guides), popularizing the conceptual dichotomy of manual and intellectual work (through the creation of training institutes), and emphasizing the sentimentality of crafts reformers like William Morris (through a portrayal of craft as anti-modern and essentially regressive).³⁴ In accordance with this project of “inventing” categories, Adamson’s argument presupposes the idea that all forms of production actually exist within a larger rubric, as he indicates in a note regarding etymology that “in non-European languages, one seeks in vain for an equivalent to the clear separation between art, craft, and industry that exists in modern English.”³⁵ The same idea was also acknowledged by proponents of the Arts and Crafts movement who were further concerned with the effect that such a separation of categories had on the worker, as Morris claimed in an 1888 speech that “their responsibility was to discover whatever independence remained among factory operatives, ‘and to win for them that applause and sympathy of their brother artists which every good workman naturally desires.’”³⁶ By considering craft in relation to industry and both as categories located within a larger field of production that also includes art, social issues related to labor become naturally and necessarily relevant to contemporary perspectives on craft itself.

Some scholarship has already begun to explore useful ways of thinking about craft in relation to industry and in doing so has helped to reveal the broad critical criteria necessary for such a consideration. In his book, *The Nature of Art and Workmanship*, author and craftsman

³³ Glenn Adamson, *The Invention of Craft* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2013), xxiv.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, xix-xxiii.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, xxv.

³⁶ Boris, 12.

David Pye contrasts craft – or workmanship – with mass-production and argues that “our environment is deteriorating... not because of bad workmanship in mass-production but because the range of qualities which mass-production is capable of just now is so dismally restricted.”³⁷ However, since workmanship outside of mass-production does not always yield high quality results and much achieved through mass-production is of unrivaled quality, he proposes two terms with which to more accurately describe the process of making: “the workmanship of risk” and “the workmanship of certainty.” Pye defines the former as “using any kind of technique or apparatus, in which the quality of the work is not predetermined, but depends on the judgment, dexterity, and care [of the] maker... [where] the quality of the result is continually at risk during the process of making,” and the latter as, “always to be found in quantity production... [where] the quality of the result is exactly predetermined before a single thing is made.”³⁸ Although both ways of working can lead to quality outcomes, he suggests the process of carefully negotiating uncertainty is preferable as “there is something about the workmanship of risk, or its results; or something associated with it; which has been long and widely valued.”³⁹ For Pye, this valuation is proportional to the maker’s creative contribution to the production process, rather than the exactness of the end product as he further notes that the workmanship of risk “produces and exploits the quality of diversity, and by means of it makes an extension of aesthetic experience beyond the domain controlled by design.”⁴⁰ The idea that a craft-based process where uncertainty presents a creative challenge is “beyond” a mass-production process where certainty is assured though design specifications recalls the Arts and Crafts belief that labor should always involve skill and creativity, and further highlights how craft can be thought of in relation to industry.

³⁷ David Pye, *The Nature and Art of Workmanship* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1968), 3.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 4.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 7.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 72.

Whereas David Pye explores the issue of quality as it concerns craft's relation to industry, curator Peter Hughes explores the issue of ethics. In the article, "Towards a Post-Consumer Subjectivity: A Future for the Crafts in the 21st Century," Hughes looks at the relationship between craft and ecology, and argues for the contemporary relevance of theories developed during the Arts and Crafts movement in light of the ecological challenges currently posed by global industrialization. He suggests that "rather than focus on the movement's aesthetic contribution in the history of art, it can be more usefully reframed as a social and political movement that attempted to address the question of what constitutes the 'good life.'"⁴¹ For Hughes, the good life is a matter of ethical living predicated on sustainability; while proponents of the Arts and Crafts movement theorized "good" ways of living and working within the context of early industrialization, similar concerns seem to have recently reappeared as he notes,

a change in sensibility...stimulated by the accelerating environmental damage and social alienation [associated with global industrialization], can be seen in contemporary developments such as the Slow movement, bioregionalism, a growing concern for cultural heritage preservation, the valuing of resources promoted by recycling and reuse and, most recently, the notion of 'emotionally durable' design. What these movements share is an emphasis on the historically determined particular that leads to craft approaches to lifestyle and the production of goods. This distinguishes them from the paradigm of industrial mass-production in which processes are designed to facilitate high-volume production by eliminating the kinds of particularity that requires care and attention.⁴²

Hughes associates the care and attention found in craft-based approaches to making with the presence of an ongoing dialogue between maker, object, materials, and process, and compellingly asserts that "by collapsing, to greater or lesser degrees, the distinction between the mind and the body, object and subject and, ultimately the material and spiritual, craft represents a

⁴¹ Peter Hughes, "Towards a Post-Consumer Subjectivity: A future for the Crafts in the Twenty First Century?" *Craft + Design Enquiry* 3 (January 2011): 7.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 15.

challenge to the [current] dominant conceptual framework of our civilization.”⁴³ Hughes’ thoughts on ethics and Pye’s thoughts on quality enrich the discussion of craft through their explorations of practical and theoretical alternatives to industrial processes; contemporary perspectives relating craft to industry can leverage such explorations to add an important critical dimension to conventional concerns derived from craft’s relation to art.

In addition to new perspectives that consider craft’s links to both industry and art, important discussions concerning issues related to craft have also recently been occurring in other fields. Among the contemporary developments listed in his article, Hughes mentions the Slow movement, which was first described in detail by Canadian journalist Carl Honoré in his 2004 book, *In Praise of Slowness: How a Worldwide Movement is Challenging the Cult of Speed*. Honoré looks at the effect that speed has on contemporary life – from rushing to get work done, to waiting impatiently, to feeling like there isn’t enough time in the day – and contrasts the current focus on “fast” with an emerging, global interest in slowing down. One of the book’s key case studies examines Italian food critic Carlo Petrini’s Slow Food organization, which was launched in 1986 in response to the opening of a McDonald’s fast food restaurant in an historic section of Rome. Honoré argues that Slow Food “stands for everything that McDonald’s does not: fresh, local, seasonal produce; recipes handed down through the generations; sustainable farming; artisanal production; leisurely dining with family and friends.”⁴⁴ As these particular characteristics indicate, the local food industry’s response to fast food constitutes an intriguing analogy to the ideals theorized by proponents of the Arts and Crafts movement over a century earlier. Like Hughes’ exploration of ethical living, Honoré’s concept of the Slow movement

⁴³ Ibid., 3.

⁴⁴ Carl Honoré, *In Praise of Slowness: How a Worldwide Movement is Challenging the Cult of Speed* (San Francisco: Harper Collins), 59.

encompasses a total lifestyle involving more than just alternatives to industrial production, but a specific criticism of industry is often implicit in his analysis of speed, as he notes for example, that “capitalism is getting too fast even for its own good, as the pressure to finish first leaves too little time for quality control.”⁴⁵ Despite many parallels to theories originating in the Arts and Crafts movement, Honoré stops short of acknowledging the legacy of craft-based approaches to living or working, opting instead to frame the emerging global interest in “slow” as an altogether new contemporary social movement. Although this may seem like an omission, it also suggests the ideals originally theorized to address concerns about emerging industrialization have not only endured the radical evolution of industry over time but have found a natural resonance in contemporary popular culture – specifically with consumers.

While Honoré’s consumer-focused perspective touches on ideals first theorized by those involved in production, other recent discussions concerning issues related to craft explore the broader culture surrounding the nexus of production and consumption. In their 2016 book, *Critical Craft*, Clare M. Wilkinson-Weber and Alicia Orly DeNicola look at craft from an anthropological perspective and argue that while “directing attention seriously and respectfully towards the practitioner is at the heart of the anthropological commitment to grasp the meanings of the everyday and the ordinary,”⁴⁶ it is important to note that

producers, designers, consumers, and policy makers use descriptors like tradition, authenticity, handmade, integrity, and so on to negotiate value in the marketplace, but the connections between discourse and actual relations and practices is typically a great deal more complex than what is implied. Who claims the right to speak about craft? In doing so do they suppress other voices? How do they seek to represent or dictate practice? How is effort and skill distributed according to both private and public rhetoric about craft? And how does this emerge from or even contradict habitual practice? In short, a ‘thick description’ of what artisans do ought to not simply cover the making – of things, art, identities, and so on – they engage in, but also include all the social and

⁴⁵ Ibid., 5.

⁴⁶ Claire M. Wilkinson-Weber and Alicia Orly DeNicola, “Introduction: Taking Stock of Craft in Anthropology” in *Critical Craft: Technology, Globalization, and Capitalism*, ed. Claire M. Wilkinson-Weber and Alicia Orly DeNicola (London, New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2016), 5.

cultural work entailed in securing a defensible position within what Bourdieu termed a ‘field of practice.’⁴⁷

As the authors’ questions indicate, many people have a stake in shaping discussions about contemporary craft, and while there is already a significant history of those not involved in production commenting on “the social and cultural work”⁴⁸ it entails, the question of how these stakeholders are able to define the culture associated with craft is of particular importance given the recent emergence of a popular interest in crafting. This is the culture that Hughes and Honoré now explore from an intellectual distance, but it is important to remember that it is the same culture that proponents of the Arts and Crafts movement developed directly through their practices. Despite Wilkinson-Weber and DeNicola’s assertion that descriptions of “what artisans do” should cover more than the making they engage in, contemporary perspectives that focus on the culture surrounding craft while neglecting to acknowledge the centrality of the worker within that culture miss the key point that proponents of the Arts and Crafts movement sought to elucidate in their struggle against early industrialization.

The Arts and Crafts movement provided meaningful strategies for thinking about making at a time when craftspeople needed to distinguish their work from industrial production, and in response to a renewed popular interest in crafting, others have started to contribute new and complementary perspectives on the related issues of quality, ethics, and culture. Although the theories, practices, and products associated with the Arts and Crafts movement are now unequivocally situated within art history, it is less clear how the discipline should accommodate recent examples of crafting that have once again emerged in response to industry. Glenn Adamson argues that the conventional strategy of considering craft in relation to art is no longer

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

adequate, as “well into the flourishing of an undefined post-disciplinary condition in which categories of making are increasingly intermingled and hybridized, it is not surprising that the modern, oppositional way of thinking about production has lost its purchase on the creative imagination.”⁴⁹ Despite acknowledging the historical link between craft and industry, Adamson suggests that the solution can be found in “a new generation of craft theorists [who have] begun to engage with the possibility arising from contemporary post-disciplinary practice.”⁵⁰ By focusing on the integration of craft-based processes into this practice, however, such an approach constitutes a break from the legacy of craft theory originating in the Arts and Crafts movement and thus dissociates itself from the recent emergence of a popular interest in craft’s potential to intervene in the processes of industry.⁵¹ In order for craft theorists to engage with the possibility arising from contemporary industrial intervention, new ways of thinking about making must reconnect with precedents established during the Arts and Crafts movement in an effort to consider craft in relation to industry. By identifying examples of contemporary craft practice within the field of industrial production and considering them in the context of the ideals theorized during the Arts and Crafts movement, these examples can be neatly situated within art history while demonstrating another kind of hybridity that clearly resonates with the imagination of producers and consumers alike. While countless such examples are waiting to be discovered, some of the most intriguing and poignant ones can be found within the garment industry.

⁴⁹ Adamson, *The Invention of Craft*, xviii.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵¹ Adamson notes the emergence of post-disciplinary art practice as an important development for craft. This way of working began to appear in the 1990s, when “on the one hand, there was a theoretical drive within the academy in the ultrapermissive message of Postmodernism. On the other hand, there was a shift in practice: a new generation of art school instructors began to distance themselves from the last vestiges of Modernist thinking. Truth to materials and fitness to function were long gone. The next logical step was to leave behind prejudgment of material selection and utility altogether. Students began to learn skills as and when they were needed, rather than as a standard foundational repertoire that could be turned to various ends.” *Ibid.*, 586.

2. The Garment Industry

Textile production was one of the very first processes to be affected by the Industrial Revolution. Historian David S. Landes notes that “in the 18th century, a series of inventions transformed the manufacture of cotton in England, and gave rise to a new mode of production – the factory system.”⁵² Where once the transformation of raw cotton into yarn, which is then woven into textiles, was a process done by hand either at home or in small workshops that were dispersed across the countryside, by the early 19th century “cotton manufacture was the most important in the kingdom in value of product, capital invested, and numbers employed; almost all of its employees... worked in mills under factory discipline.”⁵³ Textiles are an intermediary between the raw material of cotton and the finished product, which more often than not is a garment, and like cotton manufacture the garment industry also shifted from a home-based and hand-made process to the factory system during the 19th century.⁵⁴ Over time, the location of the garment industry’s primary region of operation would shift from Britain to North America to a dispersed network of hubs in India, Africa, and South East Asia. The mass production made possible by the factory system transformed the very idea of the garment from a personal object that was originally made to order and acquired when necessary to an impersonal commodity that was made continuously to supply a market – especially the American market.⁵⁵ As the Industrial Revolution increased the fortunes of an emergent middle class, it became the driver of an entirely new market where garments were consumed as fashion rather than utility. As a result,

⁵² Landes, 41.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 42.

⁵⁴ Jane Lou Collins, *Threads: Gender, Labor, and Power in the Global Apparel Industry* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 29.

⁵⁵ As early as the close of the 19th century, garment makers “recognized the important role that the American Market played in achieving international and financial success. [Jeanna] Paquin, who first opened her salon in 1891 and was considered the first important woman in haute couture, often remarked that the American market ‘is the most important in the world.’ Bonnie English, *A Cultural History of Fashion in the 20th Century: From the Catwalk to the Sidewalk* (New York: BERG, 2007), 28.29.

philosopher Maureen Sherlock notes that “the visibility of the producers of real goods [was] eclipsed by the sartorial glow of the commodity. The world of fashion has played itself out at the intersection of art and commerce since the French Revolution, disguising or denying a fragile and worked-to-the-bone body as its substrate.”⁵⁶ Like other processes affected by the Industrial Revolution, garment manufacturing relegated the worker to a mechanical role that was inseparable from the machinery of the factory system, but the particular form the system took in the case of the garment industry – the sweatshop – was especially problematic.

The drudgery associated with the factory system was increasingly acknowledged as the Industrial Revolution progressed, but factory employment remained enticing for many workers as it was plentiful and predictable. The same could not be said for the labor system that operated within the garment industry, due in large part to the circumstances of the market it supplied. As journalist Alan Howard explains,

clothing remains a most unpredictable commodity. Weather and season and the whims of fashion drive apparel merchants to minimize their risks of getting caught with goods they can’t sell or without goods that are flying off the shelves. The industry has historically dealt with this unpredictability by pushing risk down through the production chain: from retailer to manufacturer to contractor to subcontractor. From the retailer’s point of view, a broad base of readily available and easily disposable producers is the ideal solution to the inherent volatility of the market. From the point of view of the workers, it is a system that subjects them to relentless pressure, and the worst forms of exploitation. It creates the sweatshop, which in turn undermines legitimate enterprises and drives standards down even further.⁵⁷

The division of labor that was perfected in the factory system enabled the burden of the market’s unpredictability to be borne by a workforce whose size could be quickly and easily scaled up or down as needed. The location of this workforce was equally as flexible and, as a result,

⁵⁶ Maureen P Sherlock, “Piecework: Home, Factory, Studio, Exhibit” in *The Object of Labor: Art, Cloth, and Cultural Production*, ed. Joan Livingstone and John Ploof (Chicago: School of the Art Institute of Chicago Press, 2007), 1.

⁵⁷ Alan Howard, “Labor, History, and Sweatshops in the New Global Economy” in *The Object of Labor: Art, Cloth, and Cultural Production*, ed. Joan Livingstone and John Ploof (Chicago: School of the Art Institute of Chicago Press, 2007), 31.

operations could be easily established anywhere workers might be susceptible to exploitation, which at the turn of the 20th century was rapidly shifting from Britain to North America, as Howard notes that “between 1880 and 1900, more than three million European immigrants poured into American cities... they were drawn into the garment industry by the tens of thousands, desperate for work at almost any wage.”⁵⁸ Unfortunately, these workers were a perfect fit for the precarious circumstances of the sweatshop system, which economist John Commons described in 1901:

The term “sweating,” or “sweating system” originally denoted a system of subcontract, wherein the work is let out to contractors to be done in smaller shops... the system to be contrasted with the sweating system is the factory system, wherein the manufacturer employs his own workers, under the management of his own superintendent, in his own building... in the factory system the workers are congregated where they can be seen by the factory inspector and where they can organize and develop a common understanding. In the sweating system they are isolated and unknown.⁵⁹

If the factory system facilitated a division of labor, the sweatshop system further facilitated a division of responsibility, where subcontracted workers were physically separated from employers who were essentially unaware of – and unconcerned with – their employees’ working conditions. In the first decades of the 20th century, American garment workers slowly began to organize and demand workplace reforms, which eventually led to the creation of legal agreements that ensured employers would recognize subcontractor unions and respond to their grievances.⁶⁰ However, as industry regulations served to eliminate the conditions of negligence

⁵⁸ Ibid., 33.

⁵⁹ John R. Commons, quoted in *Out of the Sweatshop: The Struggle for Industrial Democracy*, ed. Leon Stein (New York: Quadrangle, 1977), xv.

⁶⁰ Following the unprecedented strike action of garment workers in New York from 1909 to 1910, lawyer Louis Brandeis worked to leverage public opinion – particularly that of middle class reformers – to help bring employees and employers together under an agreement called the Protocols of Peace, which according to historian Richard A. Greenwald “gave workers collective bargaining [power] and brought about improved conditions, better wages and hours, safer and cleaner workplaces, and a host of other important reforms. It also brought labor into the political economy as a partner by giving it a voice in industry, ushering in a tripartite system of labor relations that would find its crowning fulfillment in the National Labor Relations Act of 1936 (Wagner Act).” Enforcement of the standards introduced in the Protocols eventually became a matter of public policy overseen by the state. Richard A.

that enabled the original sweatshop system they also resulted in increased labor costs, and companies responded in turn by searching elsewhere for labor that was less regulated and therefore less expensive – first in other regions around the United States and later in other regions around the world.

The garment industry’s transition from localized to globalized production began as an attempt to work around labor regulations in the United States but quickly evolved into a complex strategy designed to take advantage of new international trade agreements that were introduced towards the end of the 20th century. While cities such as New York, Chicago, and Los Angeles had traditionally been the centers of the garment industry, sociologist Jane Collins notes that as regulations changed, companies “moved south in search of a more ‘favourable business climate,’ which included low wages, low rates of unionization, right-to-work laws, cheap resources, and community subsidies.”⁶¹ Although the original centers of production remained active, the shift to southern states was significant, as “of all apparel jobs in the nation, 44% were in the south in 1974, compared to 17% in 1950.”⁶² Despite the reduced domestic labor costs, companies soon faced a new challenge as fierce competition drove the retail price of garments down dramatically from the 1980s through the 1990s. This period was characterized by numerous mergers and acquisitions as companies sought to increase their financial power and by the development of sophisticated, data-driven supply chains as companies sought to increase their production and distribution efficiency, but ultimately “moving production operations offshore or developing subcontracting relations with offshore factories was the single most important step that apparel

Greenwald, “Introduction,” in *The Triangle Fire, the Protocols of Peace, and Industrial Democracy in Progressive Era New York* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University), 3-20.

⁶¹ Collins, 34.

⁶² Ibid.

companies could take to survive the price competition of the 1990s.”⁶³ As a result of trade agreements such as the Caribbean Basin Initiative (1983) and the North American Free Trade Agreement (1994), companies that had previously operated within the United States were compelled to move production processes around the world to locations where the cost of labor was not only the lowest but where import and export quotas were the most favourable; as a consequence, companies began shipping textiles woven in one country to be prepared for production in another country and then sewn in yet another country before shipping finished garments back to the United States.⁶⁴ Whereas this way of working would have been unthinkable only a short time earlier, advances in communications technology made it possible to manage such a vast supply chain, and as Collins notes, “for firms with substantial resources and a global strategy, these measures opened the door to the construction of multinational operations of a size never before seen in the industry. For firms that lacked such resources or vision, the rapid downward pressure on prices caused by global sourcing led to crisis and bankruptcy.”⁶⁵ For workers, the industry’s transition toward globalized production continually pushed the site of labor struggles from one location to another, resulting in a constant state of employment instability as companies leveraged a new form of control that sociologist Michael Burawoy terms “hegemonic despotism,” where the “arbitrary tyranny of the overseer over the individual worker” gives way to the “‘rational’ tyranny of capital mobility over the collective worker, (as) the fear of being fired is replaced by the fear of capital flight, plant closure, transfer of operations, and plant disinvestment.”⁶⁶ Aside from the financial advantages derived from the unprecedented ability of

⁶³ Ibid., 42

⁶⁴ Ibid., 48-53.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 52.

⁶⁶ Michael Burawoy, *The Politics of Production: Factory Regimes Under Capitalism and Socialism* (London: Verso, 1985), 150.

companies to easily and effectively establish operations anywhere in the world, disadvantageous labor relations were exacerbated, and as the garment industry became globalized, the sweatshop system became globalized as well.

While the scope of the garment industry as a whole changed considerably during the 20th century, the process of garment manufacturing itself remained essentially the same; nevertheless, attempts to refine and restructure this process in order to yield greater outputs at lower costs persisted. Collins notes that compared to other industries, the garment industry is particularly labor intensive but “because garment work involves manipulating limp fabrics, its operations are not easily mechanized. Most of the recent technological developments in the industry have been in non-sewing operations such as design, cutting, warehouse management, and distribution. The sewing itself is not all that different from what it was one hundred years ago,”⁶⁷ with garment workers positioned as the fulcrum of a larger production process. The general sequence of this process involves designing a pattern (or the shape of the garment), grading the pattern (or scaling the shape up and down), making markers (or organizing pieces of the pattern onto fabric), cutting the fabric according to the pieces, sewing the fabric pieces into finished garments, pressing and inspecting the garments, and attaching any labels and tags. Although an array of different sewing machines has been introduced since the beginning of the Industrial Revolution, garment workers remain essential in their ability to guide “limp” fabric through each operation. Despite the labor intensiveness of this process, however, contractors have been progressively compelled to find ways of increasing the scale of their production in order to meet the needs of a rapidly growing global apparel market. Whereas manufacturers historically determined the scale of their production, which was then offered to retailers, the situation changed at the turn of the 21st

⁶⁷ Collins, 7.

century as the retail sector of the garment industry experienced its own period of mergers and acquisitions that resulted in large retailers acquiring the extraordinary power to dictate the details of production. As Alan Howard explains,

many contractors now work directly for retailers, producing what is known in the trade as private labels. In this relationship, the retailer functions as a manufacturer, creating the design, providing the fabric and other raw materials, and setting the price. Even when a big retailer deals with a traditional manufacturer, the retailer by virtue of its dominant market position sets the parameters to such an extent as to often reduce the manufacturer to a virtual contractor. There is a wide and subtle spectrum to this relationship, but there is no question that the balance of power has shifted decisively to... the big retailers that have consolidated their control in this bankruptcy-wracked industry.⁶⁸

For manufacturers seeking to maximize their output, the two key strategies have been to expand the size and increase the speed of production

Before the advent of the Industrial Revolution, garments were generally produced in their entirety, one at a time, and by a single maker – often with the unique measurements and aesthetic preferences of the wearer in mind. With the invention of sewing machines in the 1850s most hand-sewing techniques became automated, but rather than reduce the maker’s overall skill set, this new machinery required new technical skills that also necessitated a proficiency in original techniques. In addition to understanding fabric characteristics, thread performance, and different stitching types, sewing machine operators needed to know how to select plate sizes, calibrate needles and feed-guards, and adjust stitching tension. While machinery required a significant amount of additional technical proficiency, one of its most important advantages was the consistency and precision of its sewing. The ability to accurately execute the exact same sewing process repeatedly precipitated a shift towards mass production where the traditional process of making a unique garment in its entirety gave way to a new process of making many multiples of a garment in a range of generic sizes based on pre-specified designs. Aided by the precision of

⁶⁸ Howard, 41.

sewing machines, several identical garments could be assembled at the same time, piece by piece, and the work of assembling these garment pieces could be divided between multiple sewing machine operators. By the 1930s, most factories had organized their operations in this way, which was known as the progressive bundle system, where

a worker receives a bundle of unfinished garments (and) performs a single operation on each garment in the bundle. The completed bundle is then placed in a bin with other bundles that have been completed to that point. Machines are laid out in a manner that speeds up shuttling a bin of garment bundles from operator to operator. With its roots in Taylorism, each task is given a target time or “SAM” (Standard Allocated Minutes). Time study engineers calculate the SAM for an entire garment for an experienced worker as the sum of the number of minutes required for each operation in the production process, including allowances for worker fatigue, rest periods, personal time, and so on.⁶⁹

The progressive bundle system prioritized efficiency and led to greatly increased productivity compared to the conventional way of making garments, but it was accompanied by a newly dehumanizing essence where the concept of worker performance was equated with machine performance. As mass production became standardized workers became increasingly concerned, and eventually attempted to resist the systemization of their work as

labor struggles in the apparel industry recognized that the progressive bundle system eroded craft control. In the first years of the 20th century, a group of Swedish seamstresses, who remained committed to sewing whole garments as tailors had done in the past, formed the Custom Clothing Makers Union. Their goal in this union was to resist the spread of section work. At the height of its power the CCMU had 3000 members.⁷⁰

Ultimately, the CCMU failed to resist the industry-wide shift towards mass production and their union was folded into the larger American Federation of Labor, which also advocated for workers but accepted the progressive bundle system as intrinsic to the production process.⁷¹

Towards the end of the 20th century, as retailers gained control of the garment industry, advances

⁶⁹ Frederick H. Abernathy et al., *A Stitch in Time: Lean Retailing and the Transformation of Manufacturing - Lessons from the Apparel and Textile Industries* (New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 28.

⁷⁰ Collins, 32.

⁷¹ Ibid.

in mass production were aligned with new strategies of branding and marketing giving rise to the growing importance of speed in manufacturing.

Acceleration in production speed may have originally been a welcome by-product of sewing mechanization, but it became a critically important factor in mass production towards the end of the 20th century as the garment industry's demands on manufacturers changed. Jane Collins notes that “not only are there more kinds of apparel on the market than ever before, but the fashion cycle has speeded up. Whereas in the past stores changed their stock twice a year, the number of fashion ‘seasons’ has now expanded to six or eight and many retailers change their lines monthly.”⁷² In order to supply retailers with new ranges of garments in time for each apparel season, manufacturers have increased the speed of production as much as technically possible regardless of how it might affect workers. With measurements such as SAM firmly in place, manufacturers now focus on speed not just as a means to optimize production systems, but as a means to meet extraordinarily tight production deadlines. Typical of the garment industry, however, the burden of increased production speed is ultimately borne by workers, as in the eyes of manufacturers “the ability to work at high speed became a new skill, inadvertently created by deskilling.”⁷³ Rather than be valued for the quality of their work, which is rendered consistently adequate by machinery, garment workers are instead valued for the quantity of work achieved within a certain amount of time – as is evidenced by piece-work payment schemes where workers are paid according to the number of garments produced instead of the number of hours worked.⁷⁴ In the 21st century, as the garment industry has spread its production facilities around

⁷² Ibid., 55.

⁷³ Ibid., 32.

⁷⁴ Piece-work payment schemes are deeply embedded in the history of the garment industry, as historian Steven A. Epstein notes that the earliest known records of labor contracts from 13th century England show “the structure of the labor market seems to have favoured wages by the day for journeymen. In some trades, however, most notably the cloth industry, piece-rate pay provided an objective standard of output that was conducive to paying by the amount of wool carded, thread spun, and cloth woven.” The reason for this difference in remuneration isn't clear,

the world, factory specific measurements like SAM have been extrapolated to account for efficiency throughout the entire supply chain in the form of “QR” or Quick Response

Management. QR is defined as

a state of responsiveness and flexibility in which an organization [i.e. retailer] seeks to provide a highly diverse range of products in the exact quantity, variety, and quality, and at the right time, place, and price as dictated by real-time consumer demand. QR provides the ability to make information driven decisions at the last possible moment in time, ensuring that diversity of offering is maximized and lead-times, expenditure, cost, and inventory minimized. QR places an emphasis upon flexibility and product velocity in order to meet the changing requirements of a highly competitive, volatile, and dynamic marketplace.⁷⁵

QR is designed to push the speed of manufacturing and distributing garments to the limit, but as the definition above indicates it does so with virtually no consideration for the workers involved.

The absence of any concern for the worker’s experience in advanced management systems like QR is the evolution of what proponents of the Arts and Crafts movement warned against as the Industrial Revolution first began to affect the way things were made. Recently however, observers have once again started looking at the often-negative effects associated with speed and mass production in the garment industry.

In the 21st century, the product of the Quick Response Management system of garment manufacturing is known as “fast fashion,” which as Carl Honoré has noted is a reference to the quick and cheap characteristics of fast food. While observers acknowledge the general validity of this comparison, industry consultants Kate Fletcher and Lynda Grose add a degree of specificity by suggesting the negative effects associated with the extreme speed and massive scale necessary

but he suggests an even older set of Italian labor contract records – the Genoese records from 1203 – “provides a rare glimpse into this [piece-rate] contract.” Epstein notes that while dyers at the time were sometimes paid a daily wage, wool-carders invariably received piece-rate pay, and “since [wool-carders] always worked for the same form of wages, more than market forces may have been at work; otherwise, some variation in the form of wages would have occurred. A strong force of custom was governing the way employers paid carders. These market customs may reflect the rules of *lanerii* [Italian wool guild], but even if they do not, these are precisely the kinds of forces that encouraged people in the same line of work to cooperate in the first place.” Steven A. Epstein, *Wage Labor and Guilds in Medieval Europe*, Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 116, 79.

⁷⁵ Alan Hunter, Russell King, and Robert H. Lowson, *The Textile/Clothing Pipeline and Quick Response Management* (Manchester: The Textile Institute, 2002), 18.

for the production of fast fashion are related to sustainability. As such, they argue any criticism that does not specifically address the unsustainability of the contemporary garment industry as a system inextricably tied to market forces

fails to deal with the long term or cumulative consequences of fast fashion across social and ecological systems as a whole, for these negative effects are endemic to the sector's underlying economic model. The better the fashion sector performs, the worse the effects will get. They are symptoms not of its failure, but of its success. Thus, to talk about the sustainability effects of fast fashion without also critiquing business practices is to deal with it superficially. By the same token, to discuss fast fashion's apparent antidote, slow fashion, without also framing it against a sustainability-supporting set of business practices, also fails to understand 'slow' at its deeper cultural level.⁷⁶

Essentially, fast fashion is designed to achieve economic success, not social or ecological (or even aesthetic) success, but the negative effects it has on these peripheral systems inevitably renders its success unsustainable; although there seems to be no end to the optimization of machines and the refinement of systems, there are real limits to what workers and the environment can endure. The alternative that Fletcher and Grose identify, slow fashion, represents in their words “a blatant discontinuity with the practices of today's sector; a break from the values and goals of fast (growth-based) fashion. It is a vision of the fashion sector built from a fundamentally different starting point.”⁷⁷ Despite a century of technological advancement and economic success, the vision associated with slow fashion recognizes the cheapness and quickness that now characterizes fast fashion as indicative of the garment industry's failure.

More than a mere inversion of production speed, the idea of slow fashion is part of the larger Slow movement that Honoré has described as prioritizing ethics above – or at least in balance with – economics. By challenging a status quo that emphasizes economic success, the Slow movement compels consumers and producers to question how contemporary forms of

⁷⁶ Kate Fletcher and Lynda Grose, *Fashion & Sustainability: Design for Change* (London, Laurence King, 2012), 126-127.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 128.

production and consumption affect both the environment and the people within it, and what alternatives might exist. As a facet of the Slow movement, Fletcher and Grose argue that

the slow fashion vocabulary of small-scale production, traditional craft techniques, local materials, and local markets offers one set of responses to these questions. It challenges growth fashion's obsession with mass-production and becomes a guardian of diversity. It changes the power relations between (makers) and consumers and forges new relationships that are only possible at smaller scales. It fosters a heightened state of awareness of the design process and how it impacts on resource flows, workers, communities, and ecosystems. It prices garments to reflect true costs.⁷⁸

Of this vocabulary, a move towards retail prices that reflect the “true cost” of garment manufacturing constitutes the most blunt and direct challenge to fast fashion's economic ambitions.⁷⁹ However, increased retail pricing has its own limits that hinder sustainability as can be seen in the diametric opposite of fast fashion: haute couture. With its origins in traditional tailoring, contemporary haute couture produced by leading fashion houses is invariably made in accordance with Slow methods, but the premium prices these garments command position them within a rarified market niche that is completely inaccessible to most consumers. While the connection between premium prices and haute couture's premium quality is generally well understood, in order for increased retail prices of mass-market garments to be accepted, their connection to the true social and ecological costs associated with garment production also needs to be understood. Fletcher and Grose suggest the key to facilitating this understanding can be found in slow fashion's paradigmatic shift toward small-scale production, as “the large scale and innate anonymity of a globalized fashion system perpetuates our inability to understand its social and ecological impacts. Shifting to a smaller scale of activity changes the relationship between

⁷⁸ Ibid., 128-129.

⁷⁹ Fletcher and Grose suggest the cost of a fast fashion garment (minimally) covers materials, labour, and logistics. Costs associated with ensuring the sustainability of those resources while minimizing pollution and ensuring the economic stability and social well-being of garment workers and their communities are generally deferred by the companies producing fast-fashion. Instead, regional governments cover costs associated with the environmental impact of manufacturing and transportation (if at all) and communities cover costs associated with the social and economic impact of poverty wages and corporate flight (if possible).

material, people, place, community, and environment.”⁸⁰ As consumers become better informed and more interested in the social and ecological issues surrounding the garment industry – and manufacturing in general – the move away from fast fashion and towards slower and smaller-scale methods of making becomes more realistic and ultimately necessary.⁸¹

Fletcher and Grose’s definition of slow fashion’s vocabulary reveals clear parallels to the ideals of crafting that proponents of the Arts and Crafts movement theorized at a time when the ultimate potential of industrialization could only be imagined. Like those earlier ideals, the values and goals of slow fashion affect the worker foremost and emanate outwards so as to eventually affect a wider cultural appreciation of ethical labor and the objects it produces. Whereas proponents of the Arts and Crafts movement championed a workshop environment where groups of skilled workers maintained a high degree of control over production, proponents of slow fashion now envision small scale production that operates at a local level as the alternative to fast fashion’s reliance on mass production and a global network of facilities. While experiments in slow fashion are a relatively recent phenomenon, the impulse to redefine garment manufacturing in terms of crafting has existed since the labor involved was first divided. Realizing that divided labor led to disempowerment, garment workers with specific skill sets have historically struggled to organize themselves in hopes of regaining leverage to negotiate with employers who increasingly viewed them as easily replaceable. Workers with unique skills, like cutters, also hoped their efforts to organize would empower other workers with similarly

⁸⁰ Ibid., 106.

⁸¹ In “Labor, History, and Sweatshops in the New Global Economy,” 31-50, Alan Howard argues that reconciling practices with the increasingly ethical values of consumers is essentially necessary because a failure to do so “spells big trouble for many apparel manufacturers and retailers, who in recent years have placed great importance on brand identity and the good image of their labels. Massive investments are made to enhance those images – and information reaching the public that damages them can have serious economic consequences for a firm’s bottom line. This vulnerability gives workers and consumers a powerful new weapon in the struggle against sweatshops.”

unique skills, like sewing machine operators, and “for much of the century, garment workers’ unions sought to defend the ‘craft’ nature of their work by these strategies.”⁸² In the 21st century, as concerns about sustainability capture the public imagination, consumers have become powerful new advocates of garment workers in their efforts to identify their work as craft.

In the fashion retail environment, labor involved in garment manufacturing is rendered invisible as consumers experience the product of that labor without having to confront its broader context. Whereas detailed information about the manufacturing process has historically been difficult for consumers to obtain, the internet has enabled those who are interested to not only learn more about this process but to organize around shared values and concerns related to what they learn. Countless online forums now exist where consumers can exchange information, but one of the most prominent platforms focused on the garment industry, *Fashion Revolution*, demonstrates how consumers are coordinating with each other in an effort to effect change. The “about” section of *Fashion Revolution*’s website states, “we are campaigning for a more accountable industry, where dignity of work and a safe environment are a standard and not an exception. As citizens and consumers, our questions, our voices, our shopping habits can have the power to help change things for the better. When we speak, brands and governments listen.”⁸³ Founded in 2013 by two UK-based fashion designers with a combined 40 years of industry experience, Cary Sommers and Orsola de Castro, *Fashion Revolution* was originally conceived as a response to the collapse of a neglected Bangladeshi garment factory, Rana Plaza, where over a thousand people died and many more were injured. As the “deadliest garment factory collapse in history,” the Rana Plaza disaster is now seen as an icon of unacceptable

⁸² Collins, 33.

⁸³ “Why Do We Need A Fashion Revolution?” Fashion Revolution Foundation, accessed April 03, 2018, <https://www.fashionrevolution.org/about/why-do-we-need-a-fashion-revolution/>.

working conditions and as such has served to “spark an international conversation around the social impact of the fashion industry.”⁸⁴ Through various media channels, *Fashion Revolution* encourages consumers to put pressure on fashion brands to be more transparent about who makes clothes and how they are made. As a result, the organization reports that in 2018, “there was significant global media coverage about transparency in the fashion industry and ways to consume more responsibly, with over 400 articles written [about *Fashion Revolution*] in the UK and over 2,000 across the world. Significant articles included Vogue, Marie Claire, FashionUnited, The Telegraph, The Guardian, The Independent, Huffington Post, Refinery 29, The Debrief and many more.”⁸⁵

With a focus on transparency, Fashion Revolution indicates that in response to their initiatives, they “have seen a number of fashion brands getting involved and answering, or attempting to answer, their customers’ #whomademyclothes questions.”⁸⁶ The organization’s website provides tools such as customizable email and social media templates, printable media such as posters, action kits outlining community-based activities, and educational resources that consumers can use to share information and engage directly with fashion brands. These tools and other information provided demonstrate *Fashion Revolution’s* attempt to link the idea of fashion with the idea of ethics as it relates to labor in the garment industry. A manifesto outlining ten key points emphasizes a focus on ethics as one point states that “fashion gives people a voice, making it possible to speak up without fear, join together in unity without repression and

⁸⁴ Jake Hall, “5 Years On From The Rana Plaza Collapse, How Much Has Actually Changed?” Opinion, British VOGUE, accessed February 09, 2019, <https://www.vogue.co.uk/article/rana-plaza-fifth-anniversary-how-has-fashion-industry-changed/>.

⁸⁵ “2018 Impact,” Fashion Revolution Foundation, accessed August 01, 2019, <https://www.fashionrevolution.org/2018-impact/>.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

negotiate for better conditions at work and across communities.”⁸⁷ Another point touches on the unique contributions of garment workers by indicating “fashion respects culture and heritage. It fosters, celebrates, and rewards skills and craftsmanship. It recognizes creativity as its strongest asset. Fashion never appropriates without giving due credit or steals without permission. Fashion honors the artisan.” Other points mention the importance of environmental sustainability and corporate accountability, thereby establishing a strong connection with the concerns of the larger Slow movement. *Fashion Revolution*’s efforts to inform consumers about the broader context of fashion and the often-harsh realities of garment manufacturing are an asset to garment workers in their long struggle within an industry that has relentlessly sought to deskill and disempower them. Despite the commendable ambitions of *Fashion Revolution* and other such platforms, however, the question of how newly reformed manufacturing practices should be evaluated remains largely unanswered.

As Kate Fletcher and Lynda Grose have suggested, concerns about unethical and unsustainable practices like fast fashion have led to the recent emergence of slow fashion as part of the contemporary Slow movement, but it is not entirely clear whether this new approach to manufacturing constitutes a practical alternative to the pervasiveness of the contemporary global garment industry. While the reflection of “true costs” is a clear allusion to slow fashion’s higher price point relative to fast fashion, Zara Berberyan et al. indicate that its barrier to entry is ultimately more a matter of motivation than privilege. Unlike the “very rich” consumers that Arts and Crafts proponent C. R. Ashbee was loath to admit his “narrow and tiresome aristocracy” catered to, slow fashion continues to serve the same “mostly middle-class consumers ingrained

⁸⁷ “Manifesto For A Fashion Revolution,” Fashion Revolution Foundation, accessed April 03, 2018, <https://www.fashionrevolution.org/manifesto/>.

in the culture of consumption” that originally catalyzed the emergence of the garment industry.⁸⁸ However, “despite the recent increase in consumers’ ethical concerns, their attitude is not [always] supported by their behavior.” Habits, personal interests, and social pressures can inhibit even ethically-minded consumers from engaging with slow fashion, and “despite living in the era of the internet... [the general consumer] still lacks knowledge on ethical fashion, ethical issues, and fashion brands’ ethical conducts. Fashion brands, [therefore], need to demonstrate that ethical fashion does not mean compromising on traditional purchasing criteria, such as price, quality, or [style.]”⁸⁹ If companies are able to both implement Fletcher and Grose’s idea of a slow fashion vocabulary involving “small-scale production, traditional craft techniques, local materials, and local markets” and tactfully engage consumers within the existing structure of the garment industry, then should they be thought of as a part of the industry, or as something entirely different? A closer look at two contemporary garment manufacturers operating at a small scale begins to demonstrate how such practices can be evaluated in terms of their production process and their products, and why such practices might be more accurately considered as examples of contemporary craft-based practices situated within an industrial context.

3. Crafting Clothing

Amidst a plethora of companies in cities around the world that are currently producing clothing on a small-scale, the following case studies focused on two Canadian companies, Atelier b. and Betina Lou, reveal notable alternative approaches to manufacturing within the

⁸⁸ Mark Sumner, “Mind the Gap: Fashion Consumers’ Intentions and Behaviors,” in *Eco-Friendly and Fair: Fast Fashion and Consumer Behavior*, ed. Carolin Becker-Leifhold and Mark Heuer (London and New York: Routledge, 2018), 27.

⁸⁹ Zara Berberyan, Sarah Margaretha Jastram, and Barry A. Friedman, “Drivers and Obstacles of Ethical Fashion Consumption,” in *Eco-Friendly and Fair: Fast Fashion and Consumer Behavior*, ed. Carolin Becker-Leifhold and Mark Heuer (London and New York: Routledge, 2018), 43.

complex circumstances of the contemporary global garment industry.⁹⁰ Both companies were founded in 2009 and their main sites of operation are currently located a short distance from each other in Montreal’s Mile End (Atelier b.) and Little Italy (Betina Lou) neighborhoods. Both companies produce goods that are available for purchase directly from their Montreal locations but their respective websites also allow consumers from anywhere in the world to explore and purchase garments from their collections. The “about” section of Betina Lou’s website briefly describes the company’s emphasis on sustainability and succinctly notes that its clothing “is designed and cut in Montreal, then assembled locally in small teams.”⁹¹ Information on Atelier b.’s website is comparatively less forthcoming as a site-wide footer simply states “atelier b.: ethically made clothing,” but further details found on its “collabos” page indicate the company’s collections “are defined by elegance, originality, and authenticity. The products... are guided by textiles and tailoring traditions. The duo [i.e., the company’s founders] is a quiet force that proceeds carefully, slowly but surely, all the while keeping a sense of play and celebration.”⁹² Neither company’s website provides specific information about their individual practices, so in order to get a better understanding of the procedures and the people involved in production I conducted interviews with the founders of each company and documented their production processes. Details about each company’s practices provide an important context with which to

⁹⁰ No comprehensive list of small-scale garment manufacturers currently exists to my knowledge; finding such companies can be a laborious process of exploring neighborhoods or websites. A biannual fashion event held in Toronto, called INLAND, acknowledges this challenge as it proclaims on its own website: “we make it easier to buy better.” INLAND describes itself as “Canada’s leading pop-up destination to shop emerging and contemporary fashion and apparel... [where] shoppers and retail buyers [can] discover, meet and shop directly from independent designers and makers.” The “About” page of the event’s website further indicates that “since launching in 2014, [it] has showcased over 450 Canadian labels from Vancouver to Halifax. 100% of all collections presented at INLAND are ethically made or manufactured in Canada;” an archive of which can be seen on the event’s website. “About,” INLAND, accessed February 14, 2019, <https://www.madeinland.ca/about/>.

⁹¹ “The Brand; The Workshop-Boutique,” About, Betina Lou, accessed September 21, 2018, <https://www.betinalou.com/en/page/about.html/>.

⁹² “Atelier b.: Our Vision; The Brand in a Few Words,” Collabos, Atelier b., accessed September 21, 2018, <https://atelier-b.ca/en/collabos/>.

analyze their products and help situate their approaches to manufacturing within the garment industry as well as within a larger field of production relevant to art history.

Betina Lou was founded in 2009 by Marie-Ève Emond, a veteran of the garment industry who previously worked as a production coordinator for a large garment manufacturer with global operations before leaving to “create a new project that was closer to [her] sensibilities; something with a very different culture and pace than what [she] was used to.”⁹³ Emond now serves as the head designer and creative director of a small team that consists of three core members: an assistant designer, Pauline, who helps develop concepts and draw patterns; a sample maker, Tricia, who translates concepts into technical sketches and cuts and sews prototypes, or samples; and a production coordinator, Clementine, who allocates resources and supervises the company’s production schedule. This core team is supported by a handful of retail associates, Arianne, Samara, and Jessica, who also contribute to design decisions as they take note of consumer input regarding fits and fabrics and communicate this information through logbooks; adjustments to garment designs can be easily made to accommodate this valuable input due to the company’s small production runs. Betina Lou’s design work and sample-making originally occurred on the mezzanine level of its large, luminous workshop located at 6510 Henri Julien Ave. which doubled as a retail space with the current season's collection displayed on the main floor. In 2019, the decision was made to move the workshop to another location – 5 minutes away at 6274 E Christophe-Colomb – to provide more space to both the retail and prototyping operations. The new workshop is a large, open-concept space that houses a variety of workstations with both computers and sewing machines. Within this space garment designs are developed, and once the designs have been finalized and fabrics have been selected, production specifications and fabric

⁹³ Marie-Ève Emond (Founder, Betina Lou), in discussion with the author, Montreal, June 27, 2018.

rolls are delivered to cutting and sewing teams that are located off-site, mostly in Montreal's garment district on Chabanel street just north of Betina Lou's workshop.⁹⁴ The workers who cut and sew garments for Betina Lou do so in a conventional contractor capacity, but Edmonds explains that while these people are not necessarily part of Betina Lou as they also work for a variety of other local companies, her relationship with them is considerably different from the way larger companies generally work with contractors. During production periods, Emond visits these contractors' facilities frequently to discuss production in person as she indicates,

we work with the same people since many years. At the beginning of the season we go see them and show them what we're going to do – what our quantities and styles are going to be – and sometimes they say 'oh, I would like to do this dress' and we give them the choice because... I mean I know what they prefer based on what they did before and what they're good at and what they love to do. So whenever possible I give them the choice to do what they prefer to do... some people prefer smaller quantities or bigger, easier or more complicated work, or some people really don't like to like to do shirts – the cuff and collar and pocket – they don't like this so they take the skirt with the zipper and that's it.

Further emphasizing the importance of working collaboratively with contractors to reach a mutually agreeable arrangement, Emond notes, “we don't negotiate that much... if I said its \$20 [per piece] and they're like, ok, it will be more like \$35 I'll say I'm sorry it's going to be too expensive in the end but if I propose \$20 based on experience and they say it will be more like \$22 because it's really complicated here with the pocket, I'll say ok, that's good!” Such a

⁹⁴ The renovated facades of the massive, industrial buildings that line Chabanel street obscure the often-troubled history of Montreal's garment industry, from its inception in the mid-19th century through its decline in the late-20th century. Characterized by the exploitation of a mostly inexperienced, French-Canadian, and female work-force and the ineffective activism of disparate workers unions, Gordon K. Rabchuck indicates “it must be concluded that the instability that plagued the garment industry [in Montreal] at all times negated all attempts to standardize production and profit.” Specific information on the current circumstances of Montreal's garment industry are not readily available, but the website of Montreal's Metropolitan Fashion Cluster, mmode.ca, indicates that “[although] the industry has been deeply affected by globalization, it has been able to reinvent itself through new business models and the inclusion of more and more world-class players. It sets itself apart via innovation, inventiveness, design and the know-how of its workforce.” Of that workforce, a considerable 14600 jobs are in “clothing manufacturing,” according to 2017 statistics listed at <https://mmode.ca/en/industry/portrait/>. This contradicts the impression of both Laflamme and Emond, expressed in separate conversations, that there was a marked lack of skilled labour in the Montreal garment industry and that that labour is benefitting from the high demand from local companies like Atelier b., Betina Lou and many others – presumably both in terms of finances and stability. Gordon K. Rabchuck, “The Quebec Garment Industry: A Study of the Failure to Stabilize Production and Wages, 1926-1937” (master's thesis, Concordia University, 1982), 82.

willingness to ensure contracts are negotiated in good faith demonstrates Emond's willingness to acknowledge that the success of Betina Lou is tied to the success of the small community of contractors in Montreal and that ensuring the sustainability of the local industry is in her company's best interests.⁹⁵

From concept to sample to finished garment, Emond describes Betina Lou's production process as being quite similar to the processes of much larger companies but she points out that the scale, speed, and culture of her company's production sets it apart. Production runs for a single garment type generally range from 50 to 300 pieces, which Emond notes is extraordinarily small compared to the production runs of several thousand pieces that typify the conventional mass-production of garments.⁹⁶ She explains such small production runs accommodate both practical and ethical concerns: as a small company with limited financial resources, they ensure funds are never tied-up and can be re-allocated easily, thereby protecting Betina Lou from the financial risk associated with garment designs that may not sell as quickly – an outcome that could be ruinous in the case of large production runs; they also ensure that material resources are never wasted through excess production as small production runs allow for subtle updates to designs that consumers already know and appreciate as opposed to constantly creating new collections. When asked if she follows trends in fashion, Emond exclaims “we are taking trends into consideration most of time to avoid them! Because – it depends – if a trend is going to be there for ten years, fine, we're going to do that, but, is [a fashion trend] going to be there just this

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Referring to a cutter she used to work with through her previous employer, Emond notes, “we were cutting tens of thousands of coats a year with them,” but now that she is at Betina Lou, she adds, “we usually [produce] at least 50 [units of a certain style]... if I want to do three or four colours, I'd rather do four times 50 than just do 200 [of a single color]. It's also a way of testing which [styles I produce] will do best... if I had an unlimited amount of money I might do more, but it's also because [since the styles I produce are] always new, I'm a bit scared there might be a fit problem, or a problem with the fabric...if I produce ten thousand pieces and that style flops it's a big loss, so I always test [the market] with a small quantity.

summer? Because if it's just for this summer... I'm not going to do it. I'm going to see if it's going to be there for a few years, because if I do it, [produce a new style], I want my customers to be able to wear it for years."⁹⁷ She argues such garments – the product of fast fashion – often have a high “cost-per-wear” quotient regardless of their retail price, whereas the garments produced by Betina Lou are intended to have a much lower quotient over time.⁹⁸ Emond adds that when garments transcend fashion cycles customers tend to buy fewer of them, further necessitating small production runs. The link between Betina Lou's focus on sustainable production and consumption is further underscored by the company's practice of offering to repair their older garments instead of persuading customers to simply buy new ones.

When asked if she thinks her company's emphasis on sustainability aligns it with the Slow movement, Emond explains the way they work is affected by circumstances that are often more complicated than they are directly aligned with Honoré's idea of slow culture:

“production... it's never as planned. Even if [the contractors we work with] want to have a schedule, my fabric [could be delivered late], so I'm going to tell them that I want [my production to be done] later than expected. There's always problems – even if it's not what I intended. It's really hard to [work in production]; you have to adjust all the time.”⁹⁹ Nevertheless, she makes clear that her previous experience working at a larger company whose production process was rigidly structured around multiple seasonal and special-collection releases encouraged her to establish more of a Slow culture at Betina Lou. The small team at the company's main location is conscious of working at a pace that suits its members best as Emond says that compared to the

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ For a good summary of this idea, see David Shuck, “Understanding Cost Per Wear – The Only Metric that Matters,” Lists, Heddels, last modified April 26, 2018, <https://www.heddels.com/2018/04/understanding-cost-per-wear-the-only-metric-that-matters/>.

⁹⁹ Emond, discussion.

workplace culture at her previous employer, “I think [my team] doesn’t really realize – especially the ones that never worked for large manufactures – that we’re really slow. I mean it’s a choice – we’re laughing and talking and having fun – we don’t do much overtime and when we do it’s because we want to... when we look at the clock we’re surprised it’s already 5pm. The feeling is really different – I want it that way; I don’t want people eating in front of their computer, stressed out; I don’t want stress in my company... I don’t know if it’s what they mean when they say slow fashion, for me it’s like stopping at the park with my agenda and saying: ‘I’m going to do my planning in the park. Why not?!’”¹⁰⁰ How this culture affects the workers contracted to cut and sew is less clear as their connection to Betina Lou exists only for the duration of their contracts, but Emond indicates “If you are a machine operator – I would like to think they enjoy their work – they have a set work schedule, but at the same time, I don’t know, do they want a ping pong table? We would have to sit down with them and ask what they would like.”¹⁰¹

One of the most important factors contributing to the particular culture that Emond encourages at Betina Lou is the company’s connection to the local resources and community in Montreal. When asked if she is familiar with any other small companies operating in the city Emond remarks, “yes, I know all of them – personally – almost! We see each other at fairs and markets [in Montreal] ... it’s fun that there’s many of us. Sometimes we can exchange [resources] and knowledge. We exchange and write to each other: ‘oh, did you ever work with

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Ibid. Emond’s uncertainty about the experience of the contractors who sew for Betina Lou reveals a problematic aspect of small companies’ tendency to rely on contract work: on the one hand, a single company like Betina Lou cannot be expected to take responsibility for the health-and-safety, wages, benefits, job-security, and autonomy of independent contractors who work with a variety of other clients; on the other hand, eschewing this responsibility constitutes a breakdown of the values that small companies like Betina Lou generally adhere to. A solution for ensuring that contractors benefit from their relationship with small companies seems yet to have been developed and is clearly needed in light of Emond’s comments.

this guy;’ even [helping each other with] credit references or things like that. I like to see it that way; if someone asks me for a reference I’m going to give it because the guy that does this kind of pleating on fabric is the only one left, so let’s all go see him and keep him in business!”¹⁰²

According to her observations, these companies seem to be less in competition with each other than in a kind of collaboration since they all share a stake in the health and longevity of the local garment industry. Emond notes that there are a limited number of skilled sewing and cutting contractors whose job stability depends on local contracts, and while local companies have production schedules that can sometimes be in conflict with each other, they all depend on the continued presence of these workers. In addition to shared resources, small companies in Montreal are further united by their common competitor: global fashion companies. To that end, Emond mentions that she is a member of a local industry advocacy group called Fibres Collective, whose mission “is to help [Montreal based] fashion entrepreneurs to make the consumption of local design a habit that surpasses mass consumption.”¹⁰³ Further information listed on its Facebook page indicates that “Fibers Collective was born out of a desire to rally the fashion and design industry to give a stronger voice to the creators of Montreal. We [promote] sustainable and ethical practices, creating responsible local fashion.”¹⁰⁴ Leveraging many of the same communications strategies as *Fashion Revolution*, Fibres Collective uses its web and social-media presence to position Montreal-based companies squarely in the public consciousness in an effort to highlight a local alternative to fast fashion. Emond reiterated the importance of Fibres Collective’s mission in an April 2018 article she wrote for Montreal’s *La Presse* newspaper about slow fashion, stating that her company is among

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ “Mission,” About, Fibres Collective, translated by Google, accessed September 21, 2018, <https://fr-ca.facebook.com/pg/fibrescollectiv/about/>.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

a growing number of local and international designers placing ethical and responsible production at the center of [their] day-to-day approach. We can testify to the increase in the ‘niche’ of people who adhere to the movement, whether by practicing slow fashion...by tending towards minimalism, by consuming locally, or by organizing clothes exchanges. This is very encouraging and inspiring, but much remains to be done and this revolution needs to break out of circles of insiders...to reach a more critical mass.¹⁰⁵

By maintaining close relationships with local contractors and local consumers alike, Betina Lou preserves the human element that can otherwise feel absent in the global matrix of fast fashion production and retail.

While Betina Lou’s relatively small-scale and localized production readily distinguish it from larger companies, comparing its products to fast fashion is another matter. When asked if her company’s garments should be thought of as craft Emond says that she knows her customers often think of them that way, but for her the idea of craft entails the handmade and since her company’s garments are made with machinery the association has always been somewhat confusing, as she adds “do you know the ‘Salon des métiers d’art’ [annual exposition of craft in Montreal]? You need to be certified as a craftsperson to present at this fair, and I’m like: I don’t have that.”¹⁰⁶ Nevertheless, she muses that the process of stitching garments by hand should undoubtedly be thought of as art (referring to contemporary haute couture) but adds that such garments are not conducive to her aspirations of ensuring that ideas about sustainability in the garment industry reach ‘a critical mass.’ Emond points out that the specific sewing machine operations necessary to produce garments for Betina Lou actually require a significant amount of skill that is apparent to the discerning customer. As an example, she mentions the high stitches per inch (SPI) that are used in her garments – a subtle detail that signals high quality production as “a higher stitch count... makes a stronger seam. However, it takes more time, skill, and can be

¹⁰⁵ Marie-Ève Emond, “La Revolution de la Mode a Besoin de Vous,” trans. Evan Stanfield, *La Presse*, April 26, 2018, *Débats*, http://plus.lapresse.ca/screens/dd2cf7ee-a755-4507-b8d1-334b21ba81f5__7C__0.html/.

¹⁰⁶ Emond, discussion.

more expensive to accomplish. Because of the time and cost associated with a higher SPI, many brands [use] a lower stitch count that will still make a structurally sound [garment] in an effort to keep costs down.¹⁰⁷ While such sewing techniques may not serve an overtly aesthetic purpose they ultimately contribute to a more elegant drape and fluid movement when the garment is worn – details that are emblematic of high quality and are noticeable to the wearer. The subtle quality of Betina Lou’s construction techniques is complemented by the refined, minimalist aesthetic of its garments that varies from classic, tailored forms to flowing, formless fits that are offered in muted color palettes. A closer inspection of their Cecile shirt (fig. 8) – a lightweight, short-sleeved shirt with notched collar and buttoned front placket – reveals various features that denote an understated quality and a concerted attention to detail. The front placket is fastened with locally-dyed buttons that are colour-matched to each of the three colours the shirt is produced in (fig. 9); in the absence of a stand collar, facing on the inside of the back simultaneously conceals structural overlock stitching and facilitates a more comfortable feel (fig. 10); tone-on-tone darting on the front and back provide a more natural drape on the wearer (fig. 11), and facing on the inside of the placket extends up to the edge of the collar to provide a clean and considered appearance (fig. 12).¹⁰⁸ Although “most of the time [Betina Lou] uses natural fabrics in [their] collection...for this item [they] wanted a fabric easy to wear...and doesn’t wrinkle.”¹⁰⁹ The shirt is therefore made from a blend of 73% modal and 27% polyester – “modal is a type of viscose, an artificial textile fiber obtained by spinning [plant-based] cellulose fibers.” Pauline Douge further notes that the shirt was designed to be worn in multiple ways: tucked-in for a more formal look or with the bottom of the placket unbuttoned and the sides tied together for a more

¹⁰⁷ Young Lee, “Stitches per Inch: What It is and Why It Matters,” Lists, Heddles, last modified February 1, 2015. <https://www.heddles.com/2015/02/stitches-per-inch-matters/>.

¹⁰⁸ Pauline Douge, Director of Collections, Betina Lou, email message to author, July 18, 2019.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

casual look.¹¹⁰ Although the Cecile shirt may appear similar to shirts available from many fast-fashion retailers, its refined aesthetics and considered construction set it apart.

Located a short distance away from Betina Lou at 5758 St Laurent, the main location of Atelier b. is a hybrid workshop and retail space where visitors can shop for garments at the same time as workers are operating various sewing machines. The space is a modest size compared to Betina Lou's main location, but it is a significant upgrade from the company's original location: the shared Verdun apartment of its founders Anne-Marie Laflamme and Catherine Métivier. In 2008, feeling frustrated by the lack of locally made clothing, the two friends began producing garments themselves as an experiment to see if the entire production could be done locally. At first Laflamme and Métivier did all of Atelier b.'s production, from designing to cutting to sewing, but they quickly discovered that consumers were just as excited about locally made clothing as they were and the decision was made to turn their experiment into a business. Laflamme explains the growth process of their company was organic as "instead of seeking out investors and securing capital [they] slowly found collaborators through [their] network of contacts to help with individual production processes. Helping hands came and went over the next few years and eventually Atelier b. arrived at the [production process] and team that is now in place."¹¹¹ Laflamme currently serves as the company's creative director responsible for researching and developing ideas for garments while Métivier manages production and logistics. The founders are assisted by Béatrice who translates Laflamme's ideas into technical patterns and Ozge who oversees sales in Atelier b.'s retail space. Like Betina Lou, Atelier b. also works with contractors located near Chabanel street in Montreal who cut and sew their garments, but Métivier travels frequently to meet with these workers during production. Laflamme echoes

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ Anne-Marie Laflamme (Co-founder, Atelier b.), in discussion with the author, Montreal, July 12, 2018.

Emond's comments in noting that Atelier b.'s current production process is technically the same as most garment manufacturers, but its small-scale and the close proximity of everyone involved differentiate it. The process begins in Atelier b.'s workshop – a narrow, open concept space with well-worn wooden floors and furnished with vintage industrial equipment and potted plants. Towards the back of the space garment designs are conceived and fabric options are selected before being sent off-site to Ghislaine who then makes and grades production patterns.¹¹² These technical specifications are then returned to Atelier b. and unique garment samples are sewn and adjusted on the sewing machines situated in the middle of the workshop space. Approved samples along with final fabric selections are then delivered to contactors to be cut – a task which Laflamme notes used to be done by hand when she and Métivier were responsible for production but is now done by computer controlled cutting tools operated by skilled workers. The cut fabric is then taken to another location to be sewn and finished before being returned to Atelier b.'s workshop where the garments are inspected before labels and tags are finally attached.

The scale of Atelier b.'s production is even smaller than Betina Lou's as Laflamme indicates it generally ranges from 10 to 120 pieces per design. When asked how this specific scale was decided upon, she explains that "it wasn't so much a conscious decision as a size that was reached by slowly scaling-up production while remaining focused on operating comfortably; the creative challenge of designing new garment styles was always seen as an end in itself rather than a means to increase production."¹¹³ Unlike Betina Lou, however, Atelier b. produces

¹¹² Patternmaking is the process of creating a template of shapes that will be cut out of fabric and assembled into the finished garment. Grading is the process of creating proportionally larger and smaller pieces from the original pattern to produce a range of garment sizes. For more information on this process, see Terry Horlamus, "Making Sense of Pattern Grading," How-To, Threads, last Modified November 1, 2008, <https://www.threadsmagazine.com/2008/11/01/making-sense-of-pattern-grading/>.

¹¹³ Laflamme, discussion.

collections of garments in accordance with conventional fashion seasons and works with an agent who presents their collections to wholesale buyers operating within the tight constraints of fashion retailing. Because of this, Laflamme indicates the company has to plan its production carefully to meet external deadlines without overextending itself. When asked if she considers increasing production as demand for her garments grows, Laflamme flatly says “no,” and reiterates that “the company isn’t a start-up with [its] sights set on growing revenue to satisfy investors,” further noting that “a larger scale [of production] would undoubtedly compromise the human connections that are best maintained at the company’s current size.”¹¹⁴ While the culture fostered by Atelier b’s small-scale of operations directly affects the core team working at its main location, Laflamme acknowledges that Atelier b. has to defer to the circumstances already in place at contractors’ facilities but is adamant that “[her] personal policy is to only work with contractors who have working conditions and a workplace culture [she] would feel comfortable working in.”¹¹⁵ Over the years, she and Métivier worked with a variety of contractors in Montreal before settling on a few with small teams of between 5 to 10 people who each have a broad range of skills enabling them to organize their work in a creative and engaging ways as opposed to relegating specific tasks to individual workers. In effect, the culture of prioritizing comfort derived from Atelier b.’s small-scale of operations extends beyond its workshop as Laflamme’s insistence on working with contractors that have suitably ethical practices compels

¹¹⁴ Ibid; Sociologist Jill Esbenshade further notes that investors in the contemporary garment industry now leverage an amount of influence over companies that is essentially equivalent to consumers as their “power has been greatly increased in a world where global consumer-driven image-dependent companies vie for stock value.” However, as Atelier b. operates independently, it remains unaffected by such influence and thus scale its operations (or not) as its owners see fit. Jill Esbenshade, “The Social Accountability Contract: Private Monitoring from Los Angeles to The Global Apparel Industry,” *Labor Studies Journal* 26, no. 1 (2001): 112, <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/0160449X0102600107>

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

all local contractors seeking higher-than-normal rates for their work to re-evaluate their practices.

While a small-scale of operations is an important factor in maintaining the particular workplace culture at Atelier b., Laflamme notes that an equally important factor is her company's connection to a local community of likeminded producers and consumers. From their original experiment of producing garments by themselves to their current model of working with local contractors, Laflamme and Métivier have remained committed to a completely local production process. Laflamme indicates this is due in large part to her personal ethics, noting that a small production ecosystem appeals to her broader interest in sustainable living. But it is also an interest that tends to be shared by Atelier b.'s consumers, whom Laflamme interacts with on a daily basis in the company's retail space. When asked to further elaborate on who her consumers tend to be, she says "they don't fit into a specific age category... but they seem to be often involved in the culture sector and are usually well-educated or professionals in [various fields.]"¹¹⁶ They also tend to be curious about production processes, as Laflamme makes the interesting observation that "a recent excitement about DIY [culture] seems to have played a role in inspiring greater [consumer] interest in [small-scale] production."¹¹⁷ Perhaps most importantly, she notes that many of her customers prioritize quality over quantity, opting to purchase a few garments that will last for many years as opposed to frequently replenishing their wardrobes – she points to the recent re-emergence of an interest in the "capsule wardrobe" as an example of this.¹¹⁸ Laflamme's connections with Atelier b.'s consumers are complemented by

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁸ Journalist Nicole Anzia notes the term "capsule wardrobe" was "coined by Susie Faux, the owner of a London boutique called Wardrobe, in the 1970s. According to Faux, a capsule wardrobe contains a few essential and timeless items, such as skirts and pants, that can be supplemented with seasonal pieces. The concept peaked in 1985 when designer Donna Karan introduced a capsule collection of interchangeable workwear attire called "Seven Easy Pieces," and has floated around ever since. Now, the capsule wardrobe seems to be having something of a revival."

her relationships with other local producers, whom she indicates have provided her with invaluable technical assistance and motivation over the years. This network of relationships distinguishes Atelier b. from companies operating at a larger scale by drawing all those involved closer to each other in a way that would be inconceivable if not for their close proximity.

According to Laflamme, “Atelier b. has never explicitly positioned itself in competition with fast fashion,”¹¹⁹ but it clearly provides a model against which Atelier b. intuitively contrasts its garments. Noting that her particular approach to design and production is anchored in her education, which is in graphic design rather than in fashion design, Laflamme says she “[doesn’t] think of [herself] as a fashion designer so much as a designer of objects.”¹²⁰ This sensibility is apparent in her creative direction as, like Betina Lou, Atelier b. tends to disregard fashion trends, opting instead to offer garments characterized by uncomplicated, tailored forms that are accented by subtle details like paneling and plain collars and offered in seasonal, solid colors and playful prints. Like Emond, Laflamme indicates that she pays close attention to fashion trends but makes sure her designs transcend the fashion industry’s rapidly changing cycles that can just as quickly render a garment unfashionable. As an example, she mentions a style of women’s wide-leg pants that are in style at the moment and says that “although [she] think[s] her customers would like to see Atelier b. offer such a garment now, [she] know[s] the trend won’t last and would prefer to not produce a garment that [her] customers won’t want to wear in the near future.”¹²¹ Atelier b.’s timeless designs are complemented by an emphasis on high-quality construction and careful finishing, which notably account for a higher price point compared to similar mass-produced

For more information about the capsule wardrobe and its apparent revival see Nicole Anzia, “Life is easier with a capsule wardrobe,” *The Washington Post*, May 8, 2018, Home & Garden; Perspective, https://www.washingtonpost.com/lifestyle/home/life-is-easier-with-a-capsule-wardrobe/2018/05/07/708d5b14-4d74-11e8-b725-92c89fe3ca4c_story.html/.

¹¹⁹ Laflamme, discussion.

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ Ibid.

garments. With regards to how her company's garments can be distinguished from fast fashion in terms of quality, Laflamme offers the example of a garment's interior and notes that while the most mass-produced garments tend to be either cheaply finished or unfinished interiors, Atelier b's carefully finished linings and interior stitching are details "that are apparent to the wearer only and that inspire a personal connection to the garment."¹²²

When asked if the attention to detail involved in Atelier b.'s production process also reveals the hand of the maker in the finished garment, Laflamme suggests that the opposite is in fact the case given a quality control process that ensures all sewing is executed with a high degree of precision, but adds that "[she doesn't] think [her] customers would necessarily value rough or uneven sewing, for example, as opposed to the intricate and precise sewing that demonstrates a sewer's skill."¹²³ Laflamme notes the quality of Atelier b.'s garments is only achieved as a result of the highly skilled contractors she works with and adds that her company's ability to ensure each garment is sewn with the same accuracy is facilitated by its small-scale production. While larger companies usually inspect the quality of one garment per one thousand, Laflamme and her team inspect every garment as soon as a production is delivered to their main location in order to be sure that each one meets their standard of quality. She muses that "the only time [she] had to send a production back to a contractor to be corrected was when [she] tried to rush an order by moving their deadline up at the last minute"¹²⁴ – an experience that underscored the importance of planning productions carefully enough to allow contractors to work at a slower and more manageable pace. Because of its small and sometimes time-consuming production runs, Laflamme says customers sometimes think Atelier b.'s garments are

¹²² Ibid.

¹²³ Ibid.

¹²⁴ Ibid.

sewn by hand, but notes the sewing machines that her contractors use play a critical role in achieving the level of quality her company's garments are known for. She jokingly adds that "[she has] never understood the appeal of hand-sewing a garment when machines are available to assist with the work; it's like cutting berries into tiny pieces and mashing them together to make a smoothie when you could use a blender instead."¹²⁵ While discussing whether or not the use of cutting and sewing machines makes it difficult for consumers to differentiate her garments from mass-produced ones that may have been made with the exact same kind of machinery, she assuredly says that consumers can tell the difference as soon as they hold the garment and try it on; it's like perceiving the quality in anything else, whether jewelry, furniture, or any functional object – accurate construction and careful finishing cannot be achieved when producing as many pieces as possible for as little cost as possible. A closer inspection of their A-line Dress No1906w (fig. 13) – a knee-length dress with short-sleeves and a boat-neck – reveals numerous features indicative of exceptional quality and thoughtful finishing. A narrow band of white facing on the inside of the sleeves and three panels of black facing on the inside of the neck-opening conceal structural stitching and allow the sleeves and neck to be finished with minimal stitching evident on the exterior (fig. 14, 15); the back of the dress is joined with additional fabric on the inside to provide a surface that accommodates the placement of an "invisible" zipper (fig. 16); the thread direction of all fabric pieces used to construct the garment has been matched so that the thread direction of the entire dress is uniform (fig. 17); even details like the garment tag have been considered as it is folded and sewn on the inside so as to conceal the stitching holding it in place (fig. 18). The fabric used for the dress is 100% linen, which gives it a subtle texture and confident drape despite its light weight. Catherine further mentions that Atelier

¹²⁵ Ibid.

b. even considers how the dress will look when on the hangar as she muses that, while their garments are designed to be appealing when worn, they are also objects that can be beautiful in their own right.¹²⁶ The details, finishing, and fabric of the A-line Dress No1906w set it apart from mass-produced garments that might appear similar at first glance.

In terms of the organization of procedures and the responsibilities of people involved in their production processes, Atelier b. and Betina Lou have much in common. While information available on each company's website begins to describe the specific motivations underlying their respective operations, my interviews with their founders reveal how similarly held values greatly influence their individual approaches to production. Marie-Ève Emond and Anne-Marie Laflamme both emphasize the importance of a local community that encompasses their core teams, contractors, and consumers, and the hybrid workshop and retail spaces of both Betina Lou and Atelier b. facilitate that community by blurring the boundary between production and consumption. The products of both companies also share considerable similarities in their refined, minimalist forms that that prioritize high-quality construction and attention to detail. Most importantly, however, the small-scale of both Atelier b.'s and Betina Lou's operations reflect their founders' commitment to sustainability as opposed to growth – a stance that positions them at odds with the strategies and innovations developed by the contemporary global garment industry.

4. Industrial Intervention

Betina Lou and Atelier b. both appear to be operating within the contemporary global garment industry, but their individual approaches to manufacturing constitute radical alternatives

¹²⁶ Catherine Métivier (Co-founder, Atelier b.), in discussion with the author, Montreal, July 17, 2019.

to industry conventions that suggest their practices should be considered within an entirely different context. Although neither Marie-Ève Emond nor Anne-Marie Laflamme describe their companies as associated with the Slow movement, their respective practices nevertheless closely resemble Fletcher and Grose's description of a slow fashion vocabulary. Given both companies' apparent ambivalence towards the ever-changing trends of fashion, however, these practices might be more accurately understood as a revival of the ideals of crafting that were theorized and practiced during the Arts and Crafts movement. While the subject of slow fashion is currently being taken up with great enthusiasm by consumers and activists alike, discussions generally lack a historical context that can account for its links to crafting's legacy. As a solution, an art historical perspective can supply a crucial frame of reference to such discussions by relating contemporary small-scale garment manufacturing to the theoretical and practical precedents established during the Arts and Crafts movement. These precedents, which "emphasized craftsmanship as process [where] the worker, as much as the work, was the product,"¹²⁷ provide a particularly suitable context within which to discuss the practices of Betina Lou and Atelier b. Situating contemporary, small-scale manufacturing practices within the context of precedents established during the Arts and Crafts movement also facilitates a re-aligning of craft and industry as equivalent categories within "an infinitely complex field of human production."¹²⁸ In the cases of both Betina Lou and Atelier b., this alignment of categories suggests that their practices – rooted in craft precedents and rejecting industry conventions – should actually be understood as operating parallel to the contemporary global garment industry.

Despite the extraordinary technological and logistical advancements achieved by the global garment industry since the Industrial Revolution first introduced the idea of the factory

¹²⁷ Boris, 14.

¹²⁸ Adamson, *The Invention of Craft*, xiii.

system, both Betina Lou and Atelier b. have made a conscious decision to operate in ways that are fundamentally different from current industry conventions. Writing in 1999, Abernath et al. surveyed the industry's general operational structure at the end of the 20th century, noting

the transformations in the [North American] retail-apparel-textile channel – lean retailing and rapid replenishment pressures, ever increasing product variety, the need for some short-cycle production – have also spread to the global marketplace, including Europe and Japan. As a consequence, new global patterns of trade and sourcing are evolving to match current competitive demands. Regionalization of textile and apparel production is now coming to the fore... [and] sourcing issues [will] become more complicated for the apparel and textile links in the channel. Some sewing, or assembly, will keep going to the developing countries – Mexico and those in the Caribbean basin, Eastern Europe, and Southeast Asia – that currently offer their “advanced” regional partners both lower labor costs and proximity to market. Meanwhile, the skilled cutting operations that now generally take place in advanced countries may move to developing nations, as industrialization becomes more sophisticated there.¹²⁹

However, as the industry continues to organize its global operations into strategic regions capable of supplying markets around the world as quickly and cost-effectively as possible, Betina Lou and Atelier b. have both opted for an entirely local, and considerably less-complex, production process instead. The implications of this decision are two-fold: on one hand, neither company is capable of competing meaningfully with larger companies in the global marketplace; on the other hand, both companies maintain a strong local presence that enables them to compete more effectively with larger companies in the local marketplace. Interestingly, both companies' products are actually available for purchase worldwide through their respective websites, which situate the garments as niche competitors to larger companies' brands. Regardless, both Emond and Laflamme note the ability to maintain close relationships with the people directly involved in their production processes is the key motivator to operating locally, which suggests their rejection of globally coordinated operations is more of an ethical decision than a technological or logistical decision.

¹²⁹ Abernathy et al., 238-239.

Betina Lou and Atelier b.'s mutual preference for a local production process as opposed to a globally distributed one is accentuated by their preference for small-scale production rather than mass-production. The significance of this preference cannot be overstated in light of the global garment industry's evolution over the 20th century as mass production sought to keep pace with the growth of the apparel market. Jane Collins notes that "at the end of the twentieth century, [apparel production in North America] changed from a patchwork of small firms to a field dominated by a few enormous companies"¹³⁰ – a consolidation that was necessitated by the rise of retailers' ability to control the market. Instead of simply reacting to the market, major retailers could actively grow the market by introducing more fashion seasons, each with more garment styles, and "because of their highly concentrated purchasing power, these large retail firms held enormous leverage over clothing manufacturers and could demand not just lower prices but more rapid response to orders."¹³¹ Manufacturers have tried to meet these demands by merging together, streamlining supply channels, and scaling-up production, but Betina Lou and Atelier b. have managed to insulate themselves from the situation altogether by selling directly to their customers. However, since neither company sells through major retailers, they effectively operate outside the very market that retailers fervently built over the last few decades and are therefore generally unable to reach most customers associated with it. The disconnect between the market's reliance on mass-production and Betina Lou and Atelier b.'s independent practices is reflected in both companies' products as small-scale production allows the quality of their garments to take precedence over quantity through laborious construction techniques and a heightened attention to detail. Such priorities denote a reversal of the garment industry's development since mass production first displaced traditional tailoring. Collins notes the shift

¹³⁰ Collins, 28.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, 39.

towards “producing for mass markets revolutionized the apparel industry, as clothing went from being ‘made for somebody’ to ‘made for anybody.’”¹³² While neither company’s garments are necessarily made for individual customers, the level of detail achieved through small-scale production inspires more of a personal connection than consumers might expect from mass-produced garments.

If the small-scale of Betina Lou and Atelier b.’s production constitutes a deviation from the “made for anybody” ethos of mass-produced fashion, their mutual apathy for the speed of their production processes further distances them from mass production’s signature product: fast fashion.¹³³ Whereas most garment manufacturers enhance their output by increasing both the size and speed of their production in order to remain competitive in contemporary markets, Betina Lou and Atelier b. do the opposite by working at a pace that is markedly more comfortable than speedy. Rather than leveraging industry-standard systems like Quick Response management, both companies proceed from design to production to retail at a natural pace unaffected by supply chain data or rapid inventory turnover. Betina Lou and Atelier b.’s comparatively less-efficient process results in products with a higher price point than fast fashion tends to have, but this is coupled with a sense that their garments are meant to be valued differently than the easily-replaced alternative. However, as Kate Fletcher and Linda Grose note,

slow fashion is not about business as usual and simply designing classics and planning long lead times...[it] represents a blatant discontinuity with the practices of today’s sector; a break from the

¹³² Ibid., 30.

¹³³ Although fashion was originally defined by couturiers who “produced extremely expensive [and unique] items for elite patronage,” art theorist Bonnie English notes that it was “democratized” in the early 20th century as an underground market of counterfeiting gave way to the emergence of a mass-market enabled by “a competitive pricing system, advanced manufacturing technologies which produced goods that were well made and designed, and an effective distribution network” that could serve “the increasingly large and prosperous working classes.” The current shift towards slow fashion doesn’t so much return to elite exclusivity as acknowledge the pendulum may have swung too far in the other direction to where mass-market garments are now often poorly made and designed. As such it manages to find a balance between the democratization of fashion and the careful design and production associated with the work of couturiers. Bonnie English, *A Cultural History of Fashion in the 20th Century: From the Catwalk to the Sidewalk* (New York: BERG, 2007), 31-32.

values and goals of fast (growth-based) fashion. It is a vision of the fashion sector built from a fundamentally different starting point.¹³⁴

By way of its scale and speed, the primary goal of the contemporary global garment industry is to increase revenue and to that end its finely-tuned systems express its core values of flexibility and efficiency. Although Betina Lou and Atelier b. are also both ostensibly in business to make a profit they clearly have other, overriding goals. Both Emond and Laflamme indicate their main focus is on producing garments of exceptional quality that will stand the test of time in terms of their aesthetics as much as their construction. This goal stems from values related to sustainability and ethics that acknowledge the impact that garment manufacturing can have on the environment as well as on the people involved in both production and consumption. In accordance, both founders emphasize the importance of their personal connections within the local community and their ability to extend the experience of their workplace culture to industry associates and consumers alike.

The importance of their connection to a larger community, voiced by both Emond and Laflamme reveals a significant parallel to developments in contemporary craft production. In the introduction to a special issue of the journal, *Textile: Cloth and Culture*, on the topic of “Crafting Community,” Kirsty Robertson and Lisa Vinebaum note that “contemporary artists are using textiles to create a range of participatory, politically-, and socially-motivated art” as they confront “a substantial shift in social structures in Western societies, and the United States in particular, over the past 40 years.”¹³⁵ The authors argue that factors such as the valuing of autonomy over collaboration, the rise of social conservatism, and the prevalence of passive screen culture have led people to become “increasingly disconnected from family, friends,

¹³⁴ Fletcher and Grose, 128.

¹³⁵ Kirsty Robertson and Lisa Vinebaum, “Crafting Community,” *TEXTILE: Cloth and Culture* 14, no. 1 (2016): 6, <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/14759756.2016.1084794>.

neighbors, and democratic structures,” but add that “where some theorists chart a breakdown in social relationships, others see in this the catalyst for the emergence of art practices aimed specifically at suturing those social bonds.”¹³⁶ To that end, they indicate that

many of today’s participatory and collaborative projects emphasize skills sharing and instruction; for this reason, the numerous hands-on craft education initiatives established in the United States and Britain around the turn of the twentieth century are of particular relevance to us. The British and American Arts and Crafts movements sought to valorize and revitalize hand-making, advocating hands-on craft education. . . . Making things together helps to foster social bonds, and we see connections between these historical examples of hands-on craft education and socially engaged projects by the contemporary fiber artists who turn to skills sharing and instruction as integral parts of their projects.¹³⁷

Although neither Atelier b. nor Betina Lou actively integrate skill sharing or instruction into their production processes, the close proximity of their customers to their prototyping facilities enabled by their hybrid workshop and retail spaces encourages an exchange of information that engenders a more personal connection between consumer and producer. As Emond notes, this connection is often collaborative as customer response to products can affect future production. Unlike the impersonal, retail-centric customer experience of the conventional garment industry, small-scale operations naturally facilitate the kind of connection valued by both Emond and Laflamme that can strengthen social bonds within a community of like-minded and mutually engaged consumers and producers.

Betina Lou and Atelier b.’s connection to the local community is one of many aspects that distinguish their practices from those of the contemporary global garment industry, but one significant aspect that remains similar is their reliance on contractors to execute their cutting and sewing. Alan Howard notes that due to the recently consolidated power of large retailers as well as a general decline in union membership, “a change has occurred in [the garment industry’s]

¹³⁶ Ibid.

¹³⁷ Ibid., 7-8.

internal structure that has accelerated the return of the sweatshop.”¹³⁸ In order to confront this situation, he advocates for two courses of action: increasing public visibility of the industry and enacting legislation “that establishes joint liability for retailers and manufacturers.”¹³⁹ These measures would presumably help expose the exploitation of contractors in order to pressure companies into taking greater responsibility for those involved in their production and to provide a legal framework instructing them how to do so, but the circumstances necessitating such measures are considerably different from those that exist in the relationship that Betina Lou and Atelier b. have with their contractors. Unlike the companies Howard has in mind, which strategically pressure contracted workers into accepting long working hours in unregulated and often unsafe working conditions, a different power dynamic exists between Betina Lou and Atelier b. and the local contractors they work with. Whereas exposure and legislation may be necessary to compel some companies to take responsibility for workers under contract, Emond and Laflamme both insist as a matter of principle on only working with contractors whom they know personally and whose working conditions meet their own ethical standards. This decision is apparent in the price point of both Betina Lou’s and Atelier b.s garments, which is an important public-facing factor that further distinguishes their practices from industry conventions. The cost of labor makes up the largest percentage of a garment’s retail price and fast fashion’s low prices are dependent on low labor costs; the higher price point of Betina Lou’s Atelier b.’s garments reflects the true cost of manufacturing, and in particular the fair wages paid to contractors.¹⁴⁰

¹³⁸ Howard, 41.

¹³⁹ Ibid, 46.

¹⁴⁰ As an example of the price point discrepancy between slow fashion and fast fashion, the 1906w dress from Atelier b. is priced at \$246CDN compared to a similar Square-Neck dress from the GAP priced at 79.95CDN, whereas the Cecile top from Betina Lou is priced at \$120CDN compared to a similar Short Sleeved Blouse from H&M priced at \$19.99CDN.

Ironically, while Betina Lou's and Atelier b.'s reliance on contractors is one of the few things their practices have in common with the conventions of the contemporary global garment industry, it is an issue that proponents of the Arts and Crafts movement also struggled to resolve in their practices over a century ago. In particular, they championed the idea of uniting the work of designing and making in hopes that "the craftsman would be able to impress individuality onto his work because he combined the talents of the designer with practical knowledge of the trades."¹⁴¹ This would have helped eliminate the capitalist labor hierarchy that situates making as subordinate to designing but as Rosalind Blakesley notes, the idea didn't always take hold: for example, Morris' habit of having artisans do the work of hand printing his intricate wallpaper designs instead of doing it himself "signals one of the tensions between theory and practice, for while Morris advocated an enjoyable, Ruskinian work process, he was happy to sanction tiresome, demeaning labor when his designs required it, and rarely allowed craftsmen working under him the luxury of carrying out their own designs."¹⁴² Of course, work under Morris was not always tiresome or demeaning as his mastery of myriad production methods enabled him to design with makers in mind, and as Ezra Shales further notes, "most crafts were never solo tasks but required recombining many sets of hands... numerous independent craftspeople produce museum quality [works], not solo artists."¹⁴³ Nevertheless, printing wallpaper by hand involves the repetition of a single operation, and while Betina Lou and Atelier b. also contract workers to cut and sew multiples of single garment designs, both Emond and Laflamme indicate that the contractors they work with are so small that rather than organize their work in an assembly line, each contractor operates a variety of machinery instead. As opposed to the repetitive labor that

¹⁴¹ Boris, 28-29.

¹⁴² Blakesley, 42.

¹⁴³ Ezra Shales, *The Shape of Craft* (London, UK: Reaktion books, 2017), 13.

characterizes the progressive bundle system, the ability to operate all of the machinery necessary to assemble a single garment is both challenging and rewarding. Laflamme recalls that she and Métivier took great pride in making Atelier b.'s garments entirely by themselves in the early days of their company, but as was the case when Morris gathered nearly 100 workers at his Merton Abbey workshop, it was ultimately necessary to work with a team of contractors in order to undertake production at a certain scale.

Aside from negotiating labor issues related to conventional industrial production, Betina Lou and Atelier b. both operate in ways that also recall the ideals theorized during the Arts and Crafts movement. Eileen Boris notes that for Morris, “true craftsmanship described ‘that form of work which involves the pleasurable exercise of our own energies, and sympathy with the capacities and aspirations of our neighbors.’”¹⁴⁴ This meant rejecting the harsh conditions and repetitive work associated with the factory system in favour of the more stimulating conditions of the workshop and labor that was characterized by skill and creativity. The thoughtfully organized hybrid workshop / retail spaces of both Betina Lou and Atelier b., each containing design and sample production facilities, bear much more of a resemblance to the kind of environment that Morris advocated for than to the factories he took issue with. Likewise, the small teams of workers at each company necessitate the use of an array of skills and significant creative engagement in their production process in contrast to the division of labor that typifies conventional assembly-line work. Morris and his contemporaries further sought to emphasize the process of production “by returning to handicraft methods and avoiding competitive commercial management, [whereby] Arts and Crafts would bring art into the everyday work of the industrial classes, humanizing and beautifying industry in the process.”¹⁴⁵ Correspondingly, both Emond

¹⁴⁴ Boris, 11.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., 14.

and Laflamme indicate that the sustainable pace of production underpinning their companies' workplace culture enables their small teams to feel an authentic connection to the production process and to each other compared to the sense of alienation that generally results from the garment industry's globally distributed processes. Additionally, their insistence on maintaining supportive relations with industry associates in the local community through groups such as Fibres Collective reflects Morris' socialist belief that "sympathy" with the pursuits of one's neighbors is a characteristic of true craftsmanship.

As the product of such craftsmanship, the garments made by Betina Lou and Atelier b. also reflect the values and goals developed during the Arts and Crafts movement. Boris notes that in response to 19th century industrialization, "the crafts movement was intended to stem the degeneration of design, to check the aesthetic decline of the age... It was essentially a reaction to the look of early mass-produced consumer goods,"¹⁴⁶ One of the key strategies used to counteract declining aesthetics was to maintain a truth to nature and in so doing, "to produce in each article superior utility, which is not to be sacrificed to ornament; to select pure forms; to decorate each article with appropriate details relating to its use, and to obtain these details as directly as possible from nature."¹⁴⁷ Although the garments produced by Betina Lou and Atelier b. do not feature imagery depicting nature nor do they emulate forms derived from nature, both Emond and Laflamme insist on using textiles made from natural fibers in contrast to the inexpensive synthetic-fiber textiles that typify fast fashion. The natural fibers used by both companies result in garments that feel robust, luxurious, and are as much of a tactile pleasure for the wearer as for the workers involved in their production. The decision to use natural fibers is emphasized by the avoidance of any unnecessary ornamentation – while each company has its

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., 15.

¹⁴⁷ Naylor, 19.

own unique approach to pattern design, both tend to produce garments with simple, bold forms in solid colors, which are complemented by tonal stitching that is functional rather than decorative. The sleeves, collars, and hems of both companies' garments are invariably finished with a subtlety that emphasizes the fabric rather than distracts from it while details such as plackets, collars, and pockets tend to be carefully integrated so that they seem to disappear into the fabric. Finally, Boris notes that Arts and Crafts proponents initially championed an anti-industrial aesthetic that "condemned machined perfection,"¹⁴⁸ and while Betina Lou and Atelier b.'s garments are made using machines, their thoughtfully considered patterns necessitating careful finishing sets their products apart from the aesthetics that generally result from as-fast-as-possible production.

While the practices and products of Betina Lou and Atelier b. encompass ideals theorized during the Arts and Crafts movement, they also challenge craft's historical legacy as a foil to industry. As Glenn Adamson suggests, the 19th century division of craft and industry into separate categories served to contain and control skilled production through a series of disempowering measures that simultaneously defined each category as the other's opposite. However, Kate Fletcher and Lynda Grose note that in the context of the contemporary garment industry, crafting has new political connotations as "an expression of production values, power relations, decision making, and pragmatism"¹⁴⁹ that effectively counteracts attempts to control and contain it. Neither Emond nor Laflamme explicitly refer to the political nature of their companies, but the ways in which they operate intuitively oppose the measures Adamson describes as having historically disempowered craft in relation to industry. Whereas the key strategy of dividing complex production processes into a series of menial tasks isolated skilled

¹⁴⁸ Boris, 15.

¹⁴⁹ Fletcher and Grose, 149.

labor, the small teams of workers at Betina Lou and Atelier b. maintain balanced power relations through a cooperative approach to production where high-level skill-sets often overlap. This way of working may not be as fast or efficient as the top-down organization of the global supply chain, but it enables both companies to serve the market while adhering to Carl Honoré's suggestion that "the world needs [to balance] 'la dolce vita' with the dynamism of the information age."¹⁵⁰ Whereas the revelation of production methods through the publication of instruction guides and technical illustrations was originally intended to diminish the potency of craft knowledge by allowing anyone to learn skills and processes, the hybrid workshop and retail spaces of both Betina Lou and Atelier b. intentionally put their production methods on display in order to convey one of their core production values: transparency. By revealing their methods on purpose, both companies exhibit the "care and attention" that Peter Hughes suggests is absent from the "paradigm of industrial mass production" while showing that transparency poses no real threat since "practical knowledge can neither be taught nor learned... it exists only in practice."¹⁵¹ Whereas the dichotomy of manual and intellectual work popularized through the establishment of trade schools was meant to render the work of making subordinate to the work of designing, Betina Lou and Atelier b. involve the entirety of their small teams in decision making processes from research to prototyping thus unifying the two spheres of work. Although Laflamme notes that the market demands products that reflect what David Pye calls "the workmanship of certainty," the process of turning ideas into prototypes nevertheless involves a "creative contribution to the production process [that is] beyond the domain controlled by design."¹⁵² Finally, whereas "many have presumed that craft describes primarily rustic or even

¹⁵⁰ Honoré, 275

¹⁵¹ Adamson, *The Invention of Craft*, 63.

¹⁵² Pye, 72.

obsolete ways of working,” the practices of both Betina Lou and Atelier b. are guided by a pragmatism that upholds a craft-based approach to production as the most logical way to solve contemporary problems related to ethics and sustainability.¹⁵³ As a result, they shift the narrative away from sentimentality and towards seriousness by adding their own voices to a description of craft that Clare M. Wilkinson-Weber and Alicia Ory DeNicola argue should “cover the making they engage in... [as well as] the social and cultural work entailed in securing a defensible position within what Bourdieu termed a ‘field of practice.’”¹⁵⁴ The ability to retain full control of their production processes within this field enables Betina Lou and Atelier b. to defy the intended disempowerment associated with historical attempts to frame craft as a foil to industry and demonstrates how small-scale manufacturing practices can align both categories as equivalents.

As contemporary small-scale garment manufacturers like Betina Lou and Atelier b. continue to blur the line between craft and industry, discussions surrounding their practices and products that integrate an art historical perspective can facilitate a critical interface between producers and their primary audience: consumers. Eileen Boris notes that proponents of the Arts and Crafts movement acknowledged the importance of consumers, as John Ruskin for example, “stressed the responsibility of the consumer, whose decisions influenced the style of produced objects, and therefore the manufacturing process, and thus, ultimately, the lives of their makers.”¹⁵⁵ Likewise, William Morris “understood the power of the consumer over the producer, yet he knew that until consumers and producers stood not as ‘purses’ and ‘machines’ but as neighbors and brothers, art would remain separate from labor and the beauty of the earth [would] wither under the pursuit of profit.”¹⁵⁶ Ruskin, Morris, and their peers recognized the crucial role

¹⁵³ Ezra Shales, *The Shape of Craft* (London, UK: Reaktion books, 2017), 9.

¹⁵⁴ Wilkinson-Weber and DeNicola, 5.

¹⁵⁵ Boris, 5.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 10.

consumers would need to play if their attempts to advance the ideals of crafting as a viable alternative to industrial production were to be realized; nearly a century later, despite the firmly entrenched conventions of contemporary industrial production, consumers are still leveraging their power – albeit in a less collaborative capacity than the Arts and Crafts movement had envisioned. Jane Collins indicates that “in the late 1990s, anti-sweatshop activists took advantage of the visibility of key brands, like Nike and the Gap, to link large corporations to low wages and poor working conditions in the factories where their goods were made.”¹⁵⁷ In doing so, they sought to pressure companies into improving the ethical nature of their operations, but unlike the sympathetic relations Morris had hoped for, such activism predominantly leverages antagonism as “brand names are vulnerable to bad press, and socially concerned consumers can use this fact to demand that a firm take responsibility for conditions along its commodity chain.”¹⁵⁸ However, as small-scale garment manufacturers like Betina Lou and Atelier b. voluntarily take the ethics of their operations into consideration, socially concerned consumers can instead use their power in a more supportive, or neighborly, capacity to help cement small-scale manufacturing as a truly viable alternative to industrial production.¹⁵⁹ In order for consumers to know how to wield their power in the market, they need sufficient information to be able to distinguish between the products and practices that reflect their values and those that do not.

¹⁵⁷ Collins, 45.

¹⁵⁸ “The Case for Brands,” *Economist*, September 8, 2001, 11.

¹⁵⁹ In terms of commercial viability, financial information about neither Atelier b. nor Betina Lou was disclosed during my discussions with Emond and Laflamme. However, both companies do appear to be achieving financial success as each one expanded their operations to open a second retail space during the writing of this thesis: Atelier b.’s new retail space is located at 162 Rue Saint Amable in Montreal’s Old Port, whereas Betina Lou’s new retail space is located at 5431 St Laurent Blvd in Montreal’s Mile End neighbourhood. What makes the practices of these companies and others like them a viable alternative to conventional industrial production is that the products of the former are positioned within the market to compete with those of the latter, thus the consumer is able to access either option. This accessibility contrasts with the high prices and limited production of the Arts and Crafts movement’s output.

Despite a growing interest in slow fashion, consumers currently have limited resources with which to understand and judge the products and practices of small-scale garment manufacturers like Atelier b. and Betina Lou and rarely do these resources offer sufficiently objective and nuanced information. Anne-Marie Laflamme mentions that changing technologies have allowed her to communicate with her consumers more effectively in recent years;¹⁶⁰ whereas she used to describe her company's products on a rudimentary blog, she now offers multi-media presentations on both her website and social media channels that enable and encourage Atelier b's consumers to react and respond. However, while this exchange of information can be engaging, its inherent bias provides a relatively narrow perspective on the company. Similarly, new publications that focus on small scale manufacturing have recently emerged as consumer interest in issues related to slow fashion has grown – many choosing to self-publish their content exclusively online. The Montreal-based publication, *Stories MTL*, for example, explains its objective in highlighting the “stories” of local producers is “to make creative talents shine through their innovative projects.”¹⁶¹ One of their issues published in 2018 features an extensive interview with the founders of Atelier b., but such content ultimately conveys an “advertorial” perspective that essentially mirrors the featured company's marketing strategies. Activist publications, like *Fashion Revolution's* own website and related printed material, offer a comparatively critical perspective but tend to portray the garment industry in reductive terms that disregard the nuances and complexity of the production process. While such informational resources increase in popularity along with the growing interest in slow fashion, they fail to facilitate the kind of sufficiently informed discussion about the practices and products

¹⁶⁰ Laflamme, discussion.

¹⁶¹ “Who Are We?” *Apropos*, *Stories MTL*, trans. Google, accessed September 21, 2018, <https://www.storiesmtl.com/apropos/>.

of small-scale garment manufacturing necessary for consumers to participate meaningfully in the production-consumption nexus that proponents of the Arts and Crafts movement believed was crucial to advancing the ideals of crafting as a viable alternative to industrial production.

As a supplement to the popular resources currently available, an art historical perspective provides much more pertinent information with which to understand – and ultimately judge – contemporary small-scale garment manufacturing. This perspective connects the practices and products associated with slow fashion to the theoretical and practical framework that was developed during the Arts and Crafts movement. The link to this framework is important not only because it relates the current efforts of companies like Atelier b. and Betina Lou to a rich, if obscured, history of making but because it offers consumers a pre-existing rubric with which to understand the nuances of these efforts and their outcomes. An art historical perspective also provides an appropriate methodology for discussing small-scale garment manufacturing as an important part of contemporary material culture. Although art history has tended to be primarily occupied with visuality, art historian Michael Yonan argues that it has in fact “tricked itself into believing that it is a discipline of images, when really it has always been a discipline of objects. Some of these objects are bearers of images, some are harder to understand as such, but all are objects nonetheless. More crucially, that object status insistently inflects and determines a work of art’s potential meanings, a fact that the best art history has always recognized.”¹⁶² He points to the pioneering work of another art historian, Jules David Prown, whose 1982 essay, “Mind in Matter: An Introduction to Material Culture Theory and Method,” proposes a methodology involving the assessment of objects’ physical, sensory, and cultural characteristics, and their

¹⁶² Michael Yonan, “Toward a Fusion of Art History and Material Culture Studies,” *West 86th: A Journal of Decorative Arts, Design History, and Material Culture* 18, no 2 (2011): 240, https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1086/662520?seq=1#metadata_info_tab_contents/.

organization into six categories: art, diversions, adornment (such as clothing), modifications of the landscape, applied arts, and devices. Rather than support a mere assessment of objects, however, such a radical conception of material culture effectively encompasses “the history of everything manipulated by human manufacture to take on a willed appearance,”¹⁶³ which Yonan acknowledges might yet be too radical of a disciplinary reorientation for some art historians. Nevertheless, he argues Prown’s proposed scope of enquiry would likely benefit the discipline of art history as much as the diverse objects that would be newly afforded its attention, because

in a world in which goods of all kinds play an enormous role in our lives, understanding art as material culture positions the discipline to become a site where the design of things can undergo close formal, constructional, and socio-economic scrutiny. The academy requires that knowledge, and in reorienting art history to highlight it, art history’s relevance to object studies of all kinds becomes clearer.¹⁶⁴

But as proponents of the Arts and Crafts movement sought to demonstrate, knowledge gleaned from the design of things remains incomplete without equally considering the making of things. As such, the products and practices of contemporary small-scale garment manufactures that recall the movement’s ideals are well-suited to a methodological approach that bridges material culture and art history. The link to this methodology is especially important because, unlike the popular resources currently available, it facilitates the objective scrutiny necessary for consumers to be able to judge companies like Atelier b. and Betina Lou effectively. Coupled with the theoretical and practical framework derived from the Arts and Crafts movement, a methodology focused on material culture informs a dynamic art historical perspective on contemporary slow fashion that links it to crafting’s legacy and object studies’ future, and discussions anchored in this art historical context will benefit not just consumers but producers, garment industry stakeholders, and art historians as well.

¹⁶³ Ibid, 241.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid, 246.

Conclusion

Clothing companies choosing to pursue small-scale and localized manufacturing instead of integrating with the infrastructures and innovations associated with advanced industrialization simultaneously challenge the boundary between craft and industry and deeply held convictions about the very trajectory of the Industrial Revolution. Whereas the pre-eminence of industry as modernity's chosen mode of production was once indisputable, the practices and products of companies like Atelier b., Betina Lou, as well as countless others, demonstrate that the path forward for conventional industrial progress is unclear. David S. Landes uses the analogy of a race to describe the nature of this progress over the course of the last century as he notes,

economic history has always been in part the story of international competition for wealth... The Industrial Revolution gave this competition a new focus – wealth through industrialization – and turned it into a chase. There was one leader, Britain, and all the rest were pursuers. The lead has since changed hands, but the pursuit goes on in what has become a race without a finishing line.¹⁶⁵

Nations engaged in this pursuit are powered by companies compelled by convention to tirelessly maximize the pace of their production, but Sociologist Juliet B. Schor further notes that in addition to speed, “the twentieth century was unquestionably the era of bigness...[and] when economists have addressed scale, they tended to interpret the growth in the size of production facilities as evidence of superior efficiency, or what are termed economies of scale.”¹⁶⁶ The culmination of a relentless refinement of these economies of scale, which are defined as “the link between the size of a company (especially the size of its production) and the company's ability to sell its products at the lowest possible cost,”¹⁶⁷ is perhaps best exemplified by the contemporary

¹⁶⁵ Landes, 538.

¹⁶⁶ Juliet B. Schor, *Plentitude: The New Economics of True Wealth* (New York, The Penguin Press, 2010), 154.

¹⁶⁷ Brian O'Connell, "Economies of Scale: Definitions, Types, and Examples," Personal Finance, The Street, last modified November 6, 2018, <https://www.thestreet.com/personal-finance/education/economies-of-scale-14769645/>.

garment industry and its signature product: fast fashion. However, as new clothing companies increasingly reject the garment industry's focus on "superior efficiency" in favour of practices and products aligned with slow fashion, they are revealing a radical shift towards the intersection of contemporary manufacturing and traditional crafting. Such a shift invariably necessitates abandoning the race originally set in motion by the Industrial Revolution, but as Shore argues,

if starting an economic revolution from individuals and small-scale activities sounds unrealistic, it's worth remembering that the first industrial revolution in Britain developed in just this manner. What became the powerhouse companies in textiles, potteries, shoes, and other manufacturers, began from individual craftspeople working on a small scale, in workshops and homes.¹⁶⁸

Rather than signal an impending regression, the recent shift towards localized, small-scale manufacturing in the garment industry points to the possibility of a different trajectory for production altogether.¹⁶⁹

While the recent emergence of an interest in crafting as an alternative to industrial production may seem to have emerged out of contemporary concerns such as immanent unsustainability and corporate irresponsibility, many of the ideas associated with it were previously explored during the Arts and Crafts movement. Long before the appearance of global supply chains and Quick Response management systems, proponents of the movement recognized the potential threat that industrialization posed to both workers and the work they produced. In response to the social and aesthetic decline that many perceived to be associated with industrial production, they charted a compellingly different path by way of the ideals of

¹⁶⁸ Schor, 156.

¹⁶⁹ The impact of the values of companies like Betina Lou, Atelier b. and others is becoming increasingly notable. Two of the industry's largest and most powerful companies, H&M and Zara – both iconic producers of fast fashion – have recently shifted their focus to align with values associated with slow fashion as reported in articles such as Forbes' "How H&M Is Striving to Become a Sustainable Fashion Brand," and Vogue's "As Zara Announces Its Latest Sustainability Goals, Three of Its Design Team Weigh In on Going Slower and Creating Responsibly." Barry Samha. *Style & Design*, Forbes, last modified March 26, 2018, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/barrysamaha/2018/03/26/hm-conscious-exclusive-collection-2018-sustainable-fashion-anna-gedda-interview/#589cf36274f0/>; Mark Holgate. *Runway*, Vogue, last modified July 16, 2019, <https://www.vogue.com/article/zara-sustainable-initiatives/>.

crafting, which foregrounded the importance of pleasant and stimulating labor conditions and championed the belief that labor should always entail a significant amount of skill and creativity. These same ideals now guide the practices of Anne-Mare Laflamme and Catherine Métivier's Atelier b. and Marie-Ève Emond's Betina Lou as their focus on slow fashion decisively opposes the direction which the contemporary garment industry has been rapidly moving in for decades. However, rather than reject the industry and its associated market outright, these companies operate parallel to it and thus recall circumstances that pre-date the binary distinction between craft and industry that was emphasized during the Industrial Revolution, which Glen Adamson describes as "an undifferentiated world of making, in which [craftspeople] enjoyed relatively high status within a broader continuum of professional trades"¹⁷⁰ Through practices rooted in creatively-engaged, cooperative production and products that reveal a concern for high quality rather than high quantity, these companies are realizing the aspirations of the Arts and Crafts movement, whose proponents "rebelled 'against the turning of men into machines, against artificial distinctions in art, and against making the immediate market value, or possibility of profit, the chief test of artistic merit.'"¹⁷¹

As clothing companies like Atelier b. and Betina Lou increasingly adopt methods of production that correspond to the ideals developed during the Arts and Crafts movement, art historical scholarship will need to confront the possibility that their practices and products constitute a contemporary iteration of the original movement. The strategies informing their practices and the decisions resulting in their products may respond to current problems in the garment industry but their inclination to find solutions in the ideals of crafting suggests the path originally charted by the Arts and Crafts movement may not have been permanently blocked by

¹⁷⁰ Adamson, *The Invention of Craft*, xiii.

¹⁷¹ Boris, 13.

industrial development but merely interrupted. It also recalls what Michelle Weinroth identifies as a central premise in William Morris' radical thought:

that things can be at once here and there – at the margins and at the centre; at once in the past and in the present; at once public and private; at once political and aesthetic. Opposite entities can be both the same and distinct. Such a view presupposes the coalescence of contrary elements, and in [Frederic] Jameson's words, 'creates an essential restlessness or negativity that fastens on to our thinking at those moments in which we seem arrested and paralyzed by an antinomy.'¹⁷²

The antinomy evident in the challenge that slow fashion now poses to the contemporary garment industry is a powerful example of craft-based processes serving as a newly viable alternative to industrial processes. It is not a unique one, as an interest in crafting can be seen in other industries that are also contending with the increasingly untenable limits of industrial development. This ongoing phenomenon opens up important questions about the intersection of craft and industry, and art history can assist in articulating answers by relating the practices and products of companies embracing the ideals of crafting to historical precedents found in the Arts and Crafts movement and by directing its enquiry toward industries of all types as potential sites of current and future craft activity.

¹⁷² Michele Weinroth, "Introduction," in *To Build a Shadowy Isle of Bliss: William Morris's Radicalism and the Embodiment of Dreams*, ed. Michelle Weinroth and Paul Leduc Browne (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2015), 10.



Figure 1. Herbal Essences. 2016. *Untitled*. Digital Advertisement.



Figure 2. Okanagan Spring Brewery. 2016. *Untitled*. Digital Advertisement.



Figure 3. Lexus. *Untitled*. 2016. Digital Advertisement.



Figure 4. William Morris. *Strawberry Thief*. 1883. Furnishing Fabric.



Figure 5. Philip Webb. *Sussex Chair*. 1860. Ebonised beech, with a rush seat.



Figure 6. Charles Robert Ashbee. *Salt Cellar*. 1899.
Silver, parcel gilt with cast, chased, and applied decoration set with carnelians.



Figure 7. Charles Francis Annesley Voysey. *Clock*. 1901.
Aluminium, copper, partially gilded, iron strap work, the movement of brass and steel.



Figure 8. Betina Lou. *Cecile Shirt*. 2019. Modal and Polyester.

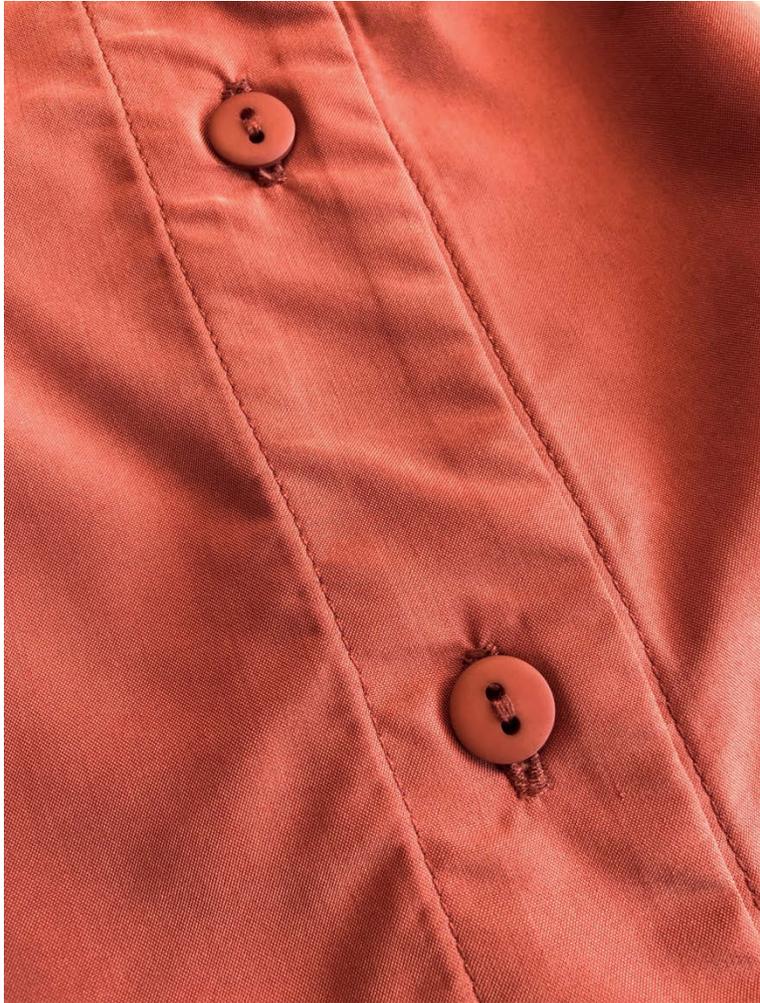


Figure 9. Betina Lou. *Cecile Shirt (detail of colour-matched buttons)*. 2019.
Modal, polyester, and wood.



Figure 10. Betina Lou. *Cecile Shirt (detail of back facing)*. 2019. Modal and polyester.

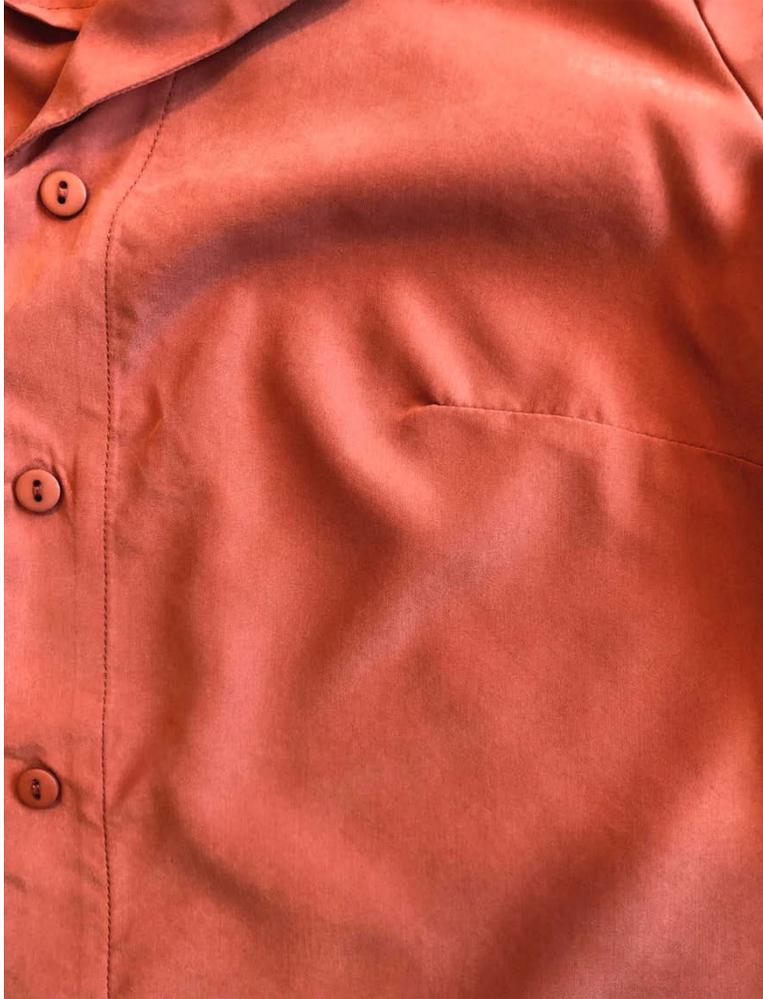


Figure 11, Betina Lou. *Cecile Shirt (detail of darting)*. 2019. Modal and polyester.



Figure 12. Betina Lou. *Cecile Shirt (detail of placket facing)*. 2019. Modal and polyester.



Figure 13. Atelier b. *1906w Dress*. 2019. Linen.



Figure 14. Atelier b. *1906w Dress (detail of sleeve facing)*. 2019. Linen.



Figure 15. *Atelier b. 1906w Dress (detail of collar facing)*. 2019. Linen.



Figure 16. Atelier b. 1906w Dress (detail of invisible zipper construction). 2019. Linen.



Figure 17. Atelier b. *1906w Dress (detail of uniform fabric direction)*. 2019. Linen.



Figure 18. Atelier b. *1906w Dress (detail of label)*. 2019. Linen and cotton webbing.

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