THE CULTURE OF CRAFT
Status and future

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All art has been rigidly divided into classes, like the society it reflects .... We have the arts all ticketed and pigeon-holed on the shelves behind us. (Walter Crane, 1892)

When we establish a considered classification, when we say that a cat and a dog resemble each other less than two greyhounds do ... what is the ground on which we are able to establish the validity of this classification with complete certainty? On what 'table', according to what grid of identities, similitudes, analogies, have we become accustomed to sort out so many different and similar things? (Michel Foucault, 1974)

For several decades now the major debate within the craft world has been to do with the status of the word itself. Some makers and thinkers have revealed themselves unhappy with the nomenclature 'craftsperson'. Others have worn it with undisguised pride. Whether for or against it, however, most have professed an unsureness as to what exactly it means. Despite its undoubted importance as a descriptor in the visual arts, it seems to bounce between many partially-formed meanings, exuding a plurality which is more to do with confusion than complexity. This can have its advantages to makers and thinkers alike. One can take possession of the word, latch on to any number of previous and partial definitions and develop an individualised philosophy, aesthetics, technology, ethnology or economy of craft. We can all hunt for clothing in this wardrobe of meanings and emerge dressed as the craftsperson of our choice. But there are grave disadvantages also in a signifier that has no
stable significance. The fractionalised confusion of craft prevents those practices placed within its boundaries from forming a cohesive lobby. The commercial, institutional and creative survival of the practices held within its empire are threatened by the lack of clarity and confidence buried within the term itself.

This is the first and most important point to hold in mind. Craft is an empire. It is a constituency within the late-modern system of the arts, a naming-word and a major class in a professional world that is underpinned by a rigorous classificatory structure. For some time it has stood alongside two other classes, of design and fine art.

The crafts have not been well served by historians for much of the twentieth century. The lack of detailed historical analysis has been a contributory factor to what is undoubtedly a contemporary crisis of confidence. I will attempt to do two things in this chapter to help remedy this situation. I will take the word ‘craft’ and briefly chart its history from the Enlightenment onwards. Then I will look at craft as a class and examine the historical formation of its theoretical elements.

My main argument will be that the fundamental problem with the word is that it is being used to collectively describe genres and ideas that formerly were not grouped together and that grew from quite separate circumstances. I will also suggest that ‘craft’ as a naming-word is an unstable compound at this time because there is a disjuncture between its etymology and the constituency it is expected to represent. These problems are best addressed by history, prior to any recourse to theory.

The etymology of three craftsmen

Caleb D’Anvers could no longer keep quiet. In 1729 he published a news-sheet, which he himself had almost entirely written. He called his publication *The Country Journal or the Craftsman*, shortening this after several months to *The Craftsman*. It was the first publication ever to bear that name. *The Craftsman* averaged some four pages per week of topical discussion, unequivocally promoting the principle of free speech and using most of its column-space to wrestle with the great problems of the time. Anglo-Spanish relations were a main subject of the first issue, for example. The flavour of the whole was acrimonious, a bastion of xenophobic aggression. Caleb’s writers hated most races of which they
were aware: 'Irishmen [are] ridiculous and offensive ... Scotch impudence is of a different species.' Several of them also had an endearing if pompous disrespect for political power, constantly castigating an aristocracy they suspected of decadence and cosmopolitanism: 'the little regard you pay to the laws and religion of your country ... has produced such a deluge of vice and profanity, as may soon overwhelm the whole nation.' The entire intellectual structure of the news-sheet was formed through Whiggishly aggressive replies to, or attacks upon, other publications. A piece of verse in an early issue captured the spirit of the whole:

Once upon a time in sunshine weather,
Falshood and truth walk'd together,
The neighbouring Woods and Lawns to view,
As opposites sometimes do. 7

The abrasive style made The Craftsman popular. It survived Caleb and rolled on for almost six decades, finally petering out in the 1780s.

Caleb's title is particularly interesting in the present context, because it carried no references at all to making processes of any kind. Its connection to modern usage of the word is in the general sense of 'crafty', or 'shrewd', although the strongest implication of craft in the journal is of a sort of political acumen. Other mid-century texts used the word in this sense, often with an added sense of criminality: 'The unequal distribution of property must have been as ancient as craft, fraud and violence.'

Samuel Johnson's Dictionary of the English Language (1773) shows that these earlier references had not wholly characterised the meaning of the word, and that it could include the concepts of making and skill. One of his four definitions of craft is 'manual art or trade'. A craftsman could be 'an artificer, manufacturer, a mechanick'. Craft did not imply specific methods, trades or object types, however. It had no constituency, it could be applied to any form of practice within the culture. It was not a thing in itself. Ben Jonson was cited to explain the word, for example, showing that it could be applied to poetry, the most cerebral of the arts: 'A poem is the work of a poet, poetry is his skill or craft of making.' In Johnson's volume, the word was still clearly centred on the meanings that are apparent in Caleb's journal, these dominating the entry as a whole. Craft was 'fraud, cunning, artifice, full of artifices, fraudulent, sly', the verb derived from it meant 'to play tricks, to practice artifice'.

[22]
The history of craft

Taken collectively, the sources I cite here generate the flavour, if not the specificity, of a further sense of the word. Its use by Freemasons, preserved probably from the language of the guilds, combined trade with politics to imply power. Control of skill and labour, after all, had far less to do with aesthetics or technics, and far more to do with politics and economy. Craft as ungovernable power is also the implication of witchcraft.¹²

The reuse of The Craftsman as a title after the decline of the original is most revealing. During the nineteenth century there was no recorded publication of that name at all.¹³ The words 'craft' and 'craftsman' are not widely used in any context until the last quarter of the century, when both became powerful signifiers in advanced debates in the visual arts and relatively common in institutional circles. 'Handicraft' was used as frequently as craft. One writer noted of museum facilities, for example, that 'the handicraftsman pursuing his industry in one or other such divisions, could come to South Kensington and consult the works which belonged to his craft.'¹⁴

As a name to publish under, Caleb's word, therefore, had a conspicuous absence through much of the nineteenth century; it was destined to be omnipresent in the twentieth. In 1901 Gustave Stickley founded The Craftsman in New York.¹⁵ Picking up on contemporary developments in Britain, his publication became a principal means through which American producers and consumers of goods became completely familiar with developments in the visual arts, and especially the Arts and Crafts movement. Published by the United Crafts, an Arts and Crafts group based in Eastwood, the journal unashamedly supported the economic and political positions associated with that movement. The first two issues were dedicated to William Morris and John Ruskin respectively and carried lengthy discussions of their lives and work.¹⁶ Once it settled into a pattern, Stickley's journal simultaneously maintained a powerful polemic and styled itself as a broad-based visual arts magazine. The October 1906 issue carried articles on books, cabinet-making, city planning, etching, opera, painting, poetry, vernacular industries and religion.

At least six journals or series after Stickley's carried the name up to 1981, when Paul and Angie Boyer launched their Craftsman. Their version was far less catholic than Stickley's. Servicing what has proven to be a substantial and persistent readership, it appears every two months and
The status of craft

concentrates its attention on the processes and products of hand-making. In some senses it is a trade magazine, offering support to those who manufacture goods by hand using what are thought to be traditional methods. Issue 65 of 1995, for example, featured batik, knitting, pottery, spinning and stick-making. The magazine also has an ethical agenda, to protect a constituency it perceives to be under threat:

our traditional crafts are being forgotten in favour of something requiring less skill and creativity. There is, certainly, room for everything in the marketplace, but surely that is what traditional crafts should not be seen as – a marketplace.17

Having said this, there can be little doubt that the main function of the magazine is to sell and promote this manufacturing sector. The bulk of the pages are devoted to craft fairs and retail outlets, and articles such as 'I want to sell more, what do I do?'18 and 'Why and how to make changes in your business'19 offer advice.

Taken collectively, the most striking feature about all three of these publications is the shift in meaning of the word itself. The 'craftsman' implied by Caleb’s title, in so far as he can be characterised, was a confident, arrogant, self-reliant, free-living Englishman. A century after his belligerence, Gustave Stickley’s craftsman was an ethical aesthete. He clearly understood craft to principally relate to processes of making, but there were no limitations on what techniques or genres the word applied to. Craft for him was a broad, generic signifier that might be applied to any area of the arts or humanities; it could be used in the context of theology, opera or easel painting. Paul and Angie Boyer do not share this vision. For them, craft implies a particular type of person, environment, genre, technique and market. Pottery, weaving, basket-making, metalsmithing, stick-making; their craftsman makes things by hand using pre-industrial technologies and sells them to make a living. He is an eco-friendly small businessman.

The three examples could be added to. I have cited them as archetypes simply to make the point that whilst craft has represented specific ideas at any one time over the past three centuries, it has continually developed and changed. Time-laden and traditional as it might seem, the years have not bestowed the word with a solitary or even consistent meaning. It has acquired fresh ones on several occasions and
The history of craft

has inherited constituencies that did not formerly belong to it. It has moved from being an adjective to being a noun; from being a description of things to being a thing in itself. Yet it has managed, as it has rolled on, to hold on to shades of meaning from its earlier lives. Once it acquired a meaning, craft never wholly lost it. As Paul and Angie Boyer edit their copy in the late 1990s, the brutish nonconformism of Caleb D’Anvers belies their vision of tradition, and the high cultural aspirations of Gustave Stickley oppose the modesty of their aesthetic aims. In like manner, those who have inherited the mantle of Stickley feel uncomfortable in the shadow of the canvas awnings of country fairs.

The elements of craft

If it can be said that the word itself has been forming for over two and a half centuries, the constituency it is now used to represent is far younger. When the total range of genres presently described as crafts are put together and scrutinised, it becomes clear that there is a certain arbitrariness in the gathering. They arrived in that category from different beginnings, gathered by forces that emanated from without.

More important than this, the ideological and intellectual underpinning of the craft constituency is not a consistent whole, but has several distinct threads to it, which have only become intertwined relatively recently. It is these threads, or elements, that I will deal with here. There are three. I will describe them as decorative art, the vernacular and the politics of work. The first of these categories is a feature of all civilisations. Its importance in the present context is that it took on a particular set of meanings in Europe in the later eighteenth century. The other elements were formed, or perhaps transformed, during the nineteenth century. In the last years of that century the three elements were brought together by thinkers connected with the Arts and Crafts movement in order to form the concept of craft as it has existed throughout the twentieth century. I will analyse the three before describing what I believe to be the implications of their union.

There has always been decoration. There always will be. Decoration is a wide, amorphous practice engaged in by all cultures. It would be a mistake therefore to see the decorative arts as a natural grouping with an internal
The status of craft

logic. Their collectivisation in the present context is to do with negative circumstances, with the consolidation of a hierarchical classification system within the European visual arts. There came to be, to use Walter Crane's phrase, 'the fine arts, and the arts not fine'. The decorative arts were, and are, disenfranchised art: the arts not fine. They bring two things simultaneously to craft: art, and the crisis of being denied the status of art.

There has been disagreement amongst scholars as to the historical point at which fine art as a fully-formed grouping could be said to be in general usage. There is wide acknowledgement, however, that distinctions did not exist before the sixteenth century. Rudolf Wittkower summarises the consensus:

In Classical Antiquity and the Middle Ages the visual arts were regarded as purely imitative occupations in contrast to the speculative and intellectual occupations of the Liberal Arts [sciences], for which reason a separation of the arts and crafts was unknown and, in a scale of absolute values the visual arts ranked below the liberal arts.

Erwin Panofsky believed the formulation of fine art had effectively occurred by the sixteenth century, during the Renaissance:

the arts of painting (plus the 'graphic arts') sculpture and architecture, still commonly understood as the 'Fine Arts' in the narrower sense ... were firmly established as a unit by the middle of the sixteenth century. Vasari, the first to define them as the three 'arti del disegno' because of the fact that 'design is their common foundation', consistently treats them pari passu both from a biographical and from a systematic point of view.

This would seem now to be an over-simplification. Others have demonstrated that fine art as such continued well after the sixteenth century to routinely include other disciplines such as poetry, music, rhetoric and eloquence, and that the Renaissance groupings were not in any way systematic. Paul Oscar Kristellar asserted firmly that 'the Renaissance did not formulate a system of the fine arts or a comprehensive theory of aesthetics'. He identified the eighteenth century to be when a system emerged:

The fundamental importance of the eighteenth century in the history of aesthetics is generally recognised ... all the changes and controversies of the more recent past presuppose certain fundamental notions which go back to that classical century of modern aesthetics. It is known that the
very term ‘aesthetics’ was coined at that time ... it is generally agreed that such dominating concepts of modern aesthetics as taste and sentiment, genius, originality and creative imagination did not assume their definitive modern meaning before the eighteenth century ... scholars have noticed that the term ‘Art’ with a capital ‘A’ and in its modern sense, the related term ‘Fine Arts’ (Beaux Arts) originated in all probability in the eighteenth century.\textsuperscript{25}

Much evidence would support the idea that it was during the Enlightenment that the status and divinity of the arts was first assessed in absolutist terms. It was then that the Academies were created. Under their auspice the system of the five fine arts, of painting, sculpture, architecture, music and poetry, was formulated and brought to maturity. In the manner of Diderot’s Encyclopédie, what was irrational was made rational and what had little order was ordered.

It would be a mistake however to assume that even then this structure was universally understood or adhered to. In his \textit{Present State of the Arts in England} (1756), for example, M. Rouquet privileges some types of painting, which he divides into ten distinct types, but he reveals no understanding of a hierarchical system or even a sense of what the borders of ‘art’ might be. He discusses sixteen genres apart from painting, including the more predictable luxury trades of silk manufacture, engraving on stone, porcelain, chinaware, architecture, jewellery and the ‘decoration of shops’, but also the less familiar arts of ‘declaiming’, ‘preparation of aliments’, ‘physic’ and ‘surgery’.\textsuperscript{26} Contrary to Panofsky’s view, the compilers of \textit{The Builder’s Magazine} (1774) insisted on lamenting the fact that architecture was generally not considered a fine art. In a combative editorial the editors complained bitterly about the lack of support and recognition afforded to the profession in relation to the more prestigious arts, and especially poetry:

It appears a matter of astonishment that, while the Professors of Literature have monthly increased their intellectual treasures, the Architects, Surveyors, Carpenters, and Masons, have been unnoticed, and passed by as unworthy of the instruction or assistance of those who are eminent in their respective professions.\textsuperscript{27}

Nevertheless, by the opening of the nineteenth century, a hierarchy was broadly in place. The developing infrastructure of European professional
The status of craft

culture facilitated the further rise of academies, professional thinkers and connoisseurs, who further clarified a system from the amorphous, rolling actuality of object manufacture. The decorative arts steadily congealed into a salon de refuse of genres that cohered only by virtue of their exclusion. Outside the fine arts, there was no fixed nomenclature or hierarchy. Variousy – and interchangeably – known as the decorative, useful, industrial, applied or ornamental arts, they struggled to maintain a place in intellectual life at exactly the time when intellectual life was being classified and consolidated in museums, academies and universities.28

Supporters did not accept this fate quietly. The issue of status was widely and loudly debated, so much so that it was deemed important enough to be raised and recorded at governmental level. The following exchange between C. R. Cockerell and Richard Redgrave in a committee of 1846 exposed key aspects of the debate:

Cockerell There has been a great deal said about the principles of art. It is very difficult to know what these principles are; but you have no doubt considered what the differences are between poetical and prose art?

Redgrave Decidedly.

Cockerell Would you not say that the painter’s art with the knowledge of anatomy, the power of exact imitation, the knowledge of position, color [sic], perspective, foreshortening, illusion, movement and action, all these may be called a poetical art?

Redgrave Yes.

Cockerell Whereas the architect’s art, or the art of the designer for manufactures, is truly a prosaic art?

Redgrave I should be sorry to take such a low ground. I conceive that the architect’s art is as much addressed to the object of making poetical impressions upon the mind as that of the painter.

Cockerell Would you say the same of design as applied to manufactures, to chinzes [sic], to jewellery, to vases, to calico printing and china painting?

Redgrave Even there I conceive that the power of making an impression upon the mind may be exerted as well as in the painter’s art. If the poetry of invention does not enter into these designs, we shall never have proper designers.29
Cockerell’s division of the arts into poetry and prose revealed the continuing sense that poetry was one of the fine arts. It also identified high art with non-functional objects. For Cockerell, in order to be a truly disinterested vehicle of artistic ideas, a genre had to be severed from perceivable use-value. For this reason, he positions architecture alongside the decorative arts.

For Redgrave, utility was irrelevant. The intention behind the creation of the object was the key to its status as art. Using a position usually associated with John Ruskin, he was arguing that art was a quality that could be applied to any object and was not genre-specific. Poetry could manifest itself anywhere if the conceptual will was there. For the rest of the century, discussion on the status of the decorative arts revolved around this point. Either art was specific to the genres allocated the status of fine art, following the logic that ‘Designing, decorating, and the like, have each their important functions ... but no sane man ever claimed for them a very high place in art’, or it was a quality capable of emerging in any form of practice, a universally applicable quality that could make ‘poetical impressions upon the mind’.

The pejorative connotation of function led to a lack of stability at the edges of fine art. Much in the way that Cockerell questioned the status of architecture on these grounds, some forms of sculpture tended to be excluded. In a similar spirit the reverse could happen, and non-functional decorative arts, such as gem-carving, tapestry and porcelain manufacture, could, on occasion, gain admission. Oil-painting was the only absolute constant. It held sway over all other genres in that it was always unequivocally a high art. Some felt it was the only high art, but this was rare. Usually, other genres were sited alongside it to complete the class.

The privilege was not always an exclusive one. The Fine Art sections of the South Kensington International Exhibition of 1871, for example, included the following:

Paintings of all kinds including oil, water-colour, distemper, wax, enamel, on glass and porcelain; sculpture including modelling, carving, chasing in marble, stone, wood, terracotta, metal, ivory, glass, precious stones; mosaic; engraving, lithography, photography, architectural designs and drawings, photographs of recently completed buildings, restorations and models; tapestries, carpets, embroideries, shawls, lace; designs of all kinds for decorative manufactures; reproductions, i.e. exact, full life-size copies
of ancient and medieval pictures painted before 1556, reproductions of mosaics and enamels, copies in plaster and fictile ivory, electrotypes of ancient works of art. This gathering showed alternative yardsticks in operation for the measuring of fine art: the cost of production, the value of materials and the status of the patron. In the exhibition of 1871, porcelain, an expensive material selling into high markets, was a fine art, earthenware was not.

It also revealed the relative strength of the decorative arts in the nineteenth century. Compared with, say, the second half of the twentieth century, they enjoyed a healthy patronage and a substantial critical literature. A generation of designer-writers continually made the case, with considerable success. Richard Redgrave, Christopher Dresser, John Ruskin, William Morris, Walter Crane and many others wrote and spoke eloquently in their defence as arts worthy of consideration alongside all others. The decorative arts enjoyed prestige and patronage. Ruskin, always the maverick, was confident enough to place them above all other arts: 'There is no existing highest-order art but that it is decorative .... Get rid, then, at once of any idea of decorative art being a degraded or a separate kind of art.' With or without their place in the canon, the decorative arts were certainly not a beleaguered force. Indeed, the radical and progressive makers at work in Britain, Europe and North America in the twenty-five-year period which ended with the First World War were, in retrospect, participating in a golden age of ornamentation.

The suffering of the decorative arts within the cultural hegemony thus had nothing to do with quality or confidence, but the abundant presence of both could not reverse the ideological tide. A space had opened up between the actuality of practice and the discourse of classification. By 1890 the category of fine art occupied a clear space on its own, and for many commentators it had narrowed its range to exclude poetry and architecture. Whilst acknowledging that there was no historical precedent for it, one writer confirmed that 'unless the context shows that it must have a wider meaning, [fine art] is taken to mean the arts of painting and sculpture alone.'

The decorative arts were disenfranchised art. The high end of the furniture, ceramics, glass, metalwork, tapestry and jewellery worlds had the same pretensions and served the same patrons as, for example,
sculpture or portrait-painting. This was hardly the case with the genres represented by the second element I have identified within the craft constituency, the \textit{vernacular}.

The vernacular refers to the cultural produce of a community, the things collectively made, spoken and performed. It is as close to nature as a culture can get; the unselconscious and collective products of a social group, unpolluted by outside influence. It carries the mystique of being the authentic voice of society. There has been a tendency to associate this authenticity with pre-industrial, rural communities:

the work of country craftsmen was believed to have evolved `naturally' as the direct and honest expression of simple functional requirements and solid virtues. This vernacular tradition was construed as something static and timeless, in contrast to the dynamic and progressive modern world.\textsuperscript{15}

The vernacular was noticed only when other forms of living began to destroy it. The beginnings of vernacularism as a cultural phenomenon can be clearly identified in the writings of the Gothic revivalists in the early nineteenth century, as urbanism and industry took their inexorable toll on older forms of life. Its real significance in the present context dates from the last quarter of the century. It was of great symbolic importance to William Morris and the founders of the Arts and Crafts movement. The rural and handmade aspects of craft production arose at least partly as a result of the desire to return to the vernacular world.

There is a powerful irony, therefore, in the fact that it was the modernisation of European culture which gave the vernacular a presence on the cultural scene. Its status as being `authentic' culture has made it attractive to a surprisingly wide range of opinion over a long period of time, the Romantic vision of pure simplicity affecting the cultural sphere up to the present day. Victor Papanek observed of the persistence of vernacular models in architecture, for example, that `Rousseau's \'Noble Savage\' has spilled over into the concept of the \'Noble Savage's House\''.\textsuperscript{16}

It supplied modernists as varied as Wassily Kandinsky and Bernard Leach with forms whilst simultaneously providing a model for anti-modernist lobby groups committed to the preservation of tradition. Socialists admired it as being an appropriate way of developing and maintaining a community; fascists admired its blood-ties and its racial purity. It has furnished the Utopias of the left and the right in Europe and
The status of craft

North America since the onset of mass industrialisation. Its attractiveness to all lay in the fact that it stood outside such notions as professionalism, specialisation, authorship or academicism. It could make legitimate claims to universal honesty, that most desirable of normative values.

Real people through the millennia have unconsciously generated styles and techniques based on local values and economic necessity. People make things and entertain themselves in ethnic groupings well capable of cultural creativity in the absence of universities and museums. On one level, then, the vernacular is no more than the popular culture of an ethnic grouping. In the hands of some, however, it has been taken well beyond this simple reality, into the realm of myth. For over a century now it has become subject to nostalgic invention, it has been made into a beautiful, rustic land in which one can hide from an ever more alien world. As often as forms could claim to be the authentic expression of an unaffected culture, they could also be shown to be completely invented or the result of outside influence. Vernacular costumes, songs, histories, artefacts, architecture and foodstuffs, when they became tools of socialist or nationalist propaganda, could be distorted or fabricated. G. K. Chesterton’s xenophobia was typical:

The ordinary Englishman [was] duped out of his old possessions, such as they were, and always in the name of progress .... They took away his maypole, and his original rural life, and promised him instead the Golden Age of peace and commerce.

Walter Crane’s internationalist socialism had a more generous though no less fictitious spirit to it:

we want a vernacular in art, a consentaneousness of thought and feeling throughout society. As it was ... in the days of Homer, of Phideas, or even of Dante. No mere verbal or formal agreement, or dead level of uniformity, but that comprehensive and harmonising unity with individual variety, which can only be developed among a people politically and socially free.

Many political groups in Europe and North America have found, in the vernacular, a template for existence. In the closing decades of the nineteenth century, it was especially attractive to the third element I have identified as being part of the constituency of craft: the politics of work.
Work was a key area of politico-economic debate during the nineteenth century. For some, work actually defined the human condition. Thomas Carlyle believed that it not only underpinned the structure of society, but also lent psychological stability to the individual. Samuel Smiles saw in it national progress. For Karl Marx, they who controlled work – the means of production – controlled the world. It was logical, if not inevitable, therefore, that work would become an issue in that most prestigious area of commodity production, the visual arts.

Marx's theory of alienation established a causal relationship between work conditions and the degradation of the human personality:

What constitutes the alienation of labour? First, that the work is external to the worker, that it is not part of his nature; and that consequently, he does not fulfil himself in his work but denies himself, has a feeling of misery rather than well-being, does not develop freely his physical and mental energies but is physically exhausted and mentally debased ....

We arrive at the result that the man (the worker) feels himself to be freely active only in his animal functions – eating, drinking, procreating, or at most also in his dwelling and in his personal adornment – whilst in his human functions he is reduced to an animal. The animal becomes human and the human becomes animal.¹⁰

More influential in the British and the Arts and Crafts context, John Ruskin's 'The Nature of the Gothic', published in 1851, was strikingly close in its reasoning:

You must make a tool of the creature or a man of him. You cannot make both. Men were not intended to work with the accuracy of tools, to be precise and perfect in all their actions. If you will have that precision out of them, and make their fingers measure degrees like cog-wheels and their arms strike curves like compasses, you must unhumanise them.¹¹

In effect, the way that people work, the conditions they work under and the way they make things, is fundamental to the well-being of society. It is not possible to have a proper society if its inhabitants are not humanely and creatively employed. William Morris was centrally responsible for generating out of this position what I will term a politics of craft. His socialism was deceptively simple. He channelled the whole of his vision of a better society through the need to engage in creative
The status of craft

work. Creative work would improve the environment, lead to an equitable system of the distribution of wealth and generate psychologically fulfilled peoples. In this sense, craft – creative work – was about the empowering of individual workers, about the political control of the work situation. The objects produced were a by-product of this larger ideal:

It was essential to the [capitalist] system that the free-labourer should no longer be free in his work; he must be furnished with a master having complete control of that work, as a consequence of his owning the raw material and tools of labour; and with a universal market for the sale of the wares with which he had nothing to do directly, and the very existence of which he was unconscious of. He thus gradually ceased to be a craftsman, a man who in order to accomplish his work must necessarily take an interest in it .... Instead of a craftsman he must now become a hand, responsible for nothing but carrying out the orders of his foreman.42

Morris, Ruskin and indeed Marx were tapping a rich vein within British social life. Rebellion against the constraints of machinery and the division of labour were far from new in the mid nineteenth century. The heritage of Luddism – resistance to mechanical and political control of the workplace – went back to the origins of the Industrial Revolution itself.43 It embraced the most basic of all political ideals: the right to be human. This vision of craft, as unalienated labour, provided the intellectual and emotional underpinning to left-wing thought in British society throughout the entire period. The Trade Union movement and the Independent Labour Party, for example, were more squarely based on the politics of work than on any wider ideological struggle. The metaphysics of work provided craft with its moral core.

These three elements, decorative art, the vernacular and the politics of work, were brought together in the last two decades of the nineteenth century by makers and thinkers associated with the Arts and Crafts movement. Gillian Naylor has summed up the movement as being "inspired by a crisis of conscience. Its motivations were social and moral, and its aesthetic values derived from the conviction that society produces the art and architecture it deserves."44 The core ideal was that art should become life through the process of work. Walter Crane defined it along these lines:

this revival of handicraft, this claim of the workman to have some share
of the joy of the artist in his work ... this claim is ... a protest against the domination of our modern commercial and industrial system of production for profit.45

As I have described them, these elements were pulled together for specific reasons in a particular ideological climate. They had little common ground in any previous existence. The high decorative arts were not intrinsically political and they hardly contained many of the qualities of the vernacular. For many centuries they had been produced and traded in a highly sophisticated international environment. The politics of work had evolved through a century of political and philosophical discourse, its natural milieu being the corridors of radical education establishments and working-men’s meeting-halls.

But the historical moment was right, the combination in this context dynamic and compelling. The nineteenth century had seen widespread and protracted debate on the relationship of morality to culture. The Arts and Crafts movement, in retrospect, can be seen to be the most successful construction of a theory and practice of ethical art. The crafts were to be a politicised form of work which produced art objects to decorate society. The vernacular was the model, unalienated work was the means and art was the goal. The larger ideal pulled the three elements into proximity. It was a brilliant formulation: humankind would be liberated through communal creativity. Ultimately, for craft pioneers, the movement was centred on physical and mental freedom. By uniting the work process directly to the demand for a higher quality of life, they had regenerated the idea that craft was synonymous with power. A. H. MacMurdo eloquently outlined the agenda in a lecture of 1891:

If the tongue does not give itself to song, the mind to imaginative interest, we are at best sound animals, healthily stabled ... we give the people only that which we provide for the lunatic in the asylum. Unless then, we also increase our opportunities and possibilities for the higher life of the imaginative interest, and make life no less beautiful than healthy, we are not alive to this great tendency about us making for the completeness of existence.46

The Arts and Crafts movement enjoyed its best moments at the opening of the twentieth century, by which time it had become a fully international movement. Europe, North America and many nations within
The status of craft

the then British Empire had powerful craft movements of their own, motivated along similar lines to those formulated by the pioneers. It would not be an exaggeration to say that craft was invented at this time, in the sense that there came into being a generally recognised sense of craft as a thing in itself. It was now a noun as well as an adjective. The word had travelled from Caleb D’Anvers’s sense of guile and political intrigue, to Gustave Stickley’s vision of art and life.

After the First World War, when the original Arts and Crafts movement had dwindled into confusion and decline, it made its next, and possibly final move, by entering into common usage.

The formation of a new system of the arts

In the twentieth century, all definitions and movements within the craft world were derivations from and combinations of the three elements I have described. When craft was an issue in any sphere, the underlying motive forces would be one or a combination of these. The wardrobe of meanings I referred to in my introduction comes from the three, the confusion and complexity being a result of endless selections from these three broad churches.

A few managed to hold the three together very much in the Arts and Crafts spirit. Amongst these were the great studio-craftspeople such as Michael Cardew, Eric Gill, Bernard Leach and Ethel Mairet. Most inheritors of the mantle, however, quite deliberately decided to settle for a partial rather than a pure model. After 1918, therefore, craft began simultaneously to expand, fragment and factionalise. This degenerative process is the key to the condition of craft as we have it at the end of the twentieth century. Three very variant examples will show that all combinations and outcomes were possible.

First, the Bauhaus. The founders of the Bauhaus professed a debt to William Morris and the Arts and Crafts movement and passionately declared that:

Architects, sculptors, painters, we must all turn to the crafts .... There is no essential difference between the artist and the craftsman .... Let us create a new guild of craftsmen, without the class distinctions which raise an arrogant barrier between craftsman and artist.®
This vision of craft laid emphasis on the political and ideological aspects of the word. It recognised and attacked the class of fine art, and sought to reanimate the disenfranchised art forms. It also wished to use the practice of art as a weapon in the struggle towards human equality. As the school settled down, however, hand-making and the vernacular were aspects of the canon that went into steep decline. As far as the Bauhaus theorists were concerned, the politics of craft remained central; the sources and methods of craft were, however, far more open to doubt. Emphasis on hand-making appeared to be anti-progress and the vernacular politically reactionary.

If the Bauhaus combined the elements of decorative art and the politics of work, my second example, the Woodcraft Folk movement, developed a craft ethic that had little use for art. Ernest Thompson Seton, an American naturalist and folklorist, promoted the idea of a 'Woodcraft' life-style from the first years of the century. His Book of Woodcraft (1912) became rapidly known all over the world and a primary influence on a generation of parents who wished to educate their children following ecologically sound, humanist principles. In 1925, the Woodcraft Folk was founded in Britain as a deliberate alternative to Baden-Powell's imperially inspired Boy Scouts. Thompson Seton and William Morris were cited as the inspiration behind the British movement, which was sponsored by the Co-operative Society and supported by the Labour Party. Combining socialism with a love of nature and the vernacular, the Woodcraft Folk were, in effect, simply making use of the idea of craft as it had been formed thirty years earlier, without recourse to the element of decorative art. They wished to find Morris's Nowhere. By 1940, the Woodcraft movement was a huge international presence amongst children's organisations. It still is.\(^{48}\)

My third example, the Women's Institutes, passionately promoted the crafts on an amateur and semi-professional level. Craft here was a skilled pastime, or something which was in effect a rarefied form of household husbandry. This remains the single most common usage of the term. It is a vision of craft void of the original political commitment, a vernacular ruralism with pretensions to decorative art. The Women's Institutes are to do with making things in order to enhance the quality of life. They promoted and preserved the world of rural and domestic crafts. The Countess of Albemarle, a patron of the WI, recognised in 1950 that:
The status of craft

We owe to William Morris and other pioneers of the Arts and Crafts Movement in the last century the spread of this doctrine that we cannot afford to let craftsmanship perish .... Handicrafts, primarily in the form of home crafts (those that can be practised without a special workshop), have been amongst the activities of the Women's Institutes from the early days of the movement. Thousands of countrywomen have ... learnt a technique of a craft and find joy in practising it.45

The Bauhaus (craft without the vernacular), the Woodcraft Folk (craft without art) and the Women's Institutes (craft without its politics) are all examples from the inter-war period of selective visions from within the meaning of craft as it had been earlier formulated. The signs of strain between the three elements had surfaced; the confused plurality of what it was to be a craftsperson began to grow.

Craft expanded on the institutional front dramatically after the First World War. The Arts and Crafts Yearbooks through the 1920s cited thirteen national organisations considering themselves to be centrally involved in the crafts. Some of them, such as the Rural Industries Bureau (founded 1921), the Home Arts and Industries Association (founded 1884) and the Church Crafts League were well funded and powerful.50 There can be no doubt that they helped form a particular vision of life in Britain. The Art Schools became more overtly concerned with craft as a constituency and museums generally awoke to the issue of craft.51

Thus the transmutation of craft into a major class within a new system of the arts was a staged process. It began with the rise and triumph of the Arts and Crafts movement. In the Edwardian period, the movement began to lose its revolutionary edge to become embroiled in the fabrics of the various national cultures.32 In the inter-war years, the pioneer generation of thinkers and makers gradually died off and the conceptual unity of craft was undermined by factionalism and partial readings. The process of its stabilisation and institutionalisation gathered pace then, as did the idea that craft was a distinct class based upon processes and genres rather than ideas. After the Second World War, and particularly after 1960, institutional recognition of the class was complete.

A class within any hierarchy, however, does not simply arrive through its vulgar omnipresence. It is formed in relation to other classes and groupings. The new system was a tripartite affair – art – craft – design – and was largely a result of the perceived need to clarify problems of status,
meaning and control of the decorative arts. As I have demonstrated, the decorative arts were an amorphous collection of practices fashioned from the disenfranchised when the original concept of fine art was formed in the eighteenth century. Towards the end of the nineteenth century a further rift began to open up within the decorative arts, between those practices connected closely with the craft ethic and those seen to be centrally part of the world of large-scale manufacturing. The latter would ultimately become collectivised as design.

The space between design and craft – a space which we now use to organise our education systems, media networks, industries and cultural organisations – was opened up for ideological and political reasons by Arts and Crafts thinkers. It is not at all clear that, for example, the real methods and conditions used, say, in the furniture industry in the later nineteenth century, were fundamentally different from those used by Arts and Crafts studios. The difference was in the attitude to work, labour, politics and art. The decorative arts, therefore, were gradually pulled in two by the ideological wars waged in the intellectually aware workshops of Britain, mainland Europe and North America.

The evolution of design as a phenomenon is outside the scope of the present chapter, but suffice it to say here that, as with craft, it began its steady rise as a distinct area of activity from the later nineteenth century. It had been formerly used as a general term which implied a drawing, a plan or a preparatory study. As with craft, it had older roots in mental activity. To have a design on something, or someone, suggested an insatiable desire.

Deriving from the Italian (Latin) word for drawing, disegno, it was used to mean drawing or preparatory study throughout the European tradition. It is especially common in this regard throughout the nineteenth century. Thus the Schools of Design established in Britain from 1836 onwards, and the endless books written on design, broadly and loosely referred to the idea of preparing a study or design for a finished piece of work. Painters or sculptors might talk about a design for a painting, as much as an engineer or a potter would refer to designs for steam engines or pots.

Steadily through the closing decades of the century its meaning began to embrace the idea of the preparation of templates for longer runs of objects: to make a design for something. It also came to imply a
The status of craft

problem-solving activity lodged between art and science, a phenomenon akin to the Renaissance notion of the liberal arts.53 The term industrial design was occasionally used to suggest a pattern applicable to objects manufactured in long runs, such as textiles. Again, as with craft, it would be wrong to argue that design was a distinct area of activity or a constituency within the visual arts in this period. It was not. Indeed, many writers between 1880 and 1914 used the word 'design' far more often than 'craft', and used the former virtually interchangeably with art.

It was in the twentieth century that the idea fully evolved of a designer as a professional who saw an entire process of manufacture through from drawing-board to finished artefact. It was only then that 'design' became exclusively tied to the idea of industry and designers clearly distinguished from artists and craftspeople. They are now irrevocably associated with mass production, or at least highly-mechanised production.

As the fine arts had split from the decorative, so the decorative, under the aegis of craft, split from design. By the end of the 1920s, supporters of the various classes could bullishly support their causes with a growing sense of clarity. One could assert with authority that 'craft promises to be more important than fine art',54 or that 'the design of machine-made goods naturally belongs, of course, to an order entirely distinct from that of hand-made objects'.55

Due to the unstructured nature of the decorative arts, however, the constituencies of craft and design could never be separated out with clarity. Most written histories of design place the decorative arts within its empire, yet clearly these are at the heart of the history of craft also. Only at the extremities are the divisions clear. Design exclusively includes package, automotive and corporate design, as well as large-scale engineering and most forms of architecture.56

The genius and the mechanick

At the turn of the century, it could easily be argued that the crafts boasted the most advanced and vociferous theoretical, critical and historical writing. Indeed, Roger Fry, as he brought to maturity his own brand of formalism in the last years before the First World War, felt he had to specifically address and attack this intellectual powerhouse, as he perceived its influence to be the decisive one in visual culture.57 It all
declined with alarming suddenness after the First World War.

By contrast, writing on the fine arts blossomed dramatically, and can now be seen as one of the most potent areas of discourse in twentieth-century European and North American literary culture. So it tended to be that when the crafts received analysis of any kind after 1918, it was usually filtrated through ideas associated with the latter. There was a powerfully pejorative aspect to this discussion, in that it was invariably premised on the notion that it was important to distinguish the creativity of art from the worthiness of craft.

By the outbreak of the Second World War, the internal hegemony of the new classification system was justified using intellectual means. The classes were given an intelligence test, as it were, the questions being written by forces usually associated with fine art. When this was not the case, the parameters were set by the Modern movement in design. Predictably, and ironically, the intellectual rigour which had underpinned the idea of craft in the fin-de-siècle period was now identified as being non-intellectual. The borders of craft were going to be policed by discourses dedicated to its containment. Like sheepdogs circling a fold, these were going to check the odd gathering of jostling and uncomfortable genres and hold them in proximity.

The philosophy of craft developed by the Arts and Crafts pioneers had a core of immutable ideas. Perhaps the most important of these posited that creative practice – art – was inseparably part of the physical process of making. In short, craft was premised on the understanding that cognitive and manual activity were effectively the same. Indeed, the politics of craft were premised on their congruence. However, after 1918, aestheticians and practitioners associated with the fine arts steadily legitimised the idea that the two were two wholly separate realms. This had a drastic effect on the standing of craft. Two main types of discussion have dominated. The first relates to the process of making art and the role in that of the artist. The second is to do with where exactly the phenomenon 'art' resides in relation to 'art objects'.

The first of these has, perhaps, been the key site of any rift between fine art and craft. Dominated by the seemingly everlasting heritage of Romanticism, the majority of recent thinkers have considered art to be a state of mind, an outlook, a way of seeing things rather than a way of doing things. Art is centred in the artist, the absolute individual, rather
The status of craft

than in the object or in society. This vision of the artist has been the key to much avant-garde activity. Dada, Surrealism, Art Brut, NeoDada and Arte Povera, for example, all pushed Romantic anarchism and individualism to an extreme and inevitable conclusion. For them, art resided in the mind, it emanated out of life-style, welling up out of the intensity of being: 'The mere word freedom is the only one that still excites me .... To reduce the imagination to a state of slavery ... is to betray all sense of absolute justice within oneself.' This intensity of being could be manifested in an expressionistic way or as an ironic critique of the world and of previous developments in art.

The celebration of unfettered creative thought led inevitably to the development of artistic processes that eliminated the manual vehicle of artistic expression: skill. Whilst usually declining to define it, the Romanticist avant-garde wrested skill from the artistic process, made it into a relative value and then dispensed with any sense that there could be a useful heritage behind it. Skill was presented as a regimented phenomenon because it is mediated externally and is therefore potentially detrimental to subjective consciousness and innovation. Within the visual arts, skill has been characterised as the antithesis of the self. Jean Dubuffet, for example, talking of Art Brut, asserted that:

We mean by this the works executed by people untouched by artistic culture ... so that their makers derive everything (subjects, choice of materials used, means of transposition, rhythms, ways of patterning, etc.) from their own resources and not from the conventions of classic art or the art that happens to be fashionable. Here we find art at its purest and crudest; we see it being wholly reinvented at every stage of the operation by its maker, acting entirely on his own.

Any technique that achieved the sought-after end was legitimate. Art as a profession was dispensed with in an effort to capture its essence, which was believed to be a property buried within all of us.

A parallel and equally significant development occurred when Marcel Duchamp arrived at his concept of the 'ready-made' between 1912 and 1916. The ready-made – an object chosen by the artist, signed and put on display – was art because the artist declared it to be so. Thus, technical skill, indeed, physical process of any kind, was replaced by intellect. Duchamp altered the context of an otherwise banal object, claimed it as
a manifestation of his intellect by applying his signature to it. By successfully adding this process to the canon of twentieth-century art, he made irony a central vehicle for modern visual culture. His non-physical intervention was also intended to be a biting critique of the artist as a maker of things.

But as I have already demonstrated, as created by the Arts and Crafts movement, craft stood exactly for the making of things. Artistic expression through the making process was at the heart of craft aesthetics and politics. For them, skill – regardless of how one characterised it – was part of the infrastructure of making which empowered communities and allowed for the creation of a free, creative society. Skill as an actual phenomenon was far less important than what it represented on the ideological plane. For the craftsperson it was to do with empowerment, for the avant-garde fine artist it was to do with constraint. Indeed, for followers of Duchamp and Dubuffet, the idea of the ‘artist-craftsman’ is a contradiction in terms.

Much avant-garde practice has been dedicated to the subversion and transformation of normative values in art and life. One of the central features of the avant-garde has been its opposition. Renato Poggioli referred to a ‘spirit of hostility and opposition’ that was a ‘permanent tendency … of the avant-garde movement’.6 The philosophical positivism of craft as defined by the pioneers of the Arts and Crafts movement resulted in objects without irony or critique. Rather, they made exemplars of an appropriate way of living. Their politics, which were as radical as any within the fine-art world, emerged in the processes they made and lived by. It was this positivism that fed one of the other great threads of modernist practice, the Modern movement in design. The Utopianism of the various schools within the Modern movement stood alongside – and distinct from – the Romantic individualism of Surrealism. The tendency amongst historians of architecture and design has been to depict craft as the forebear that lost its way by the time of the First World War.

The second issue, of where exactly the phenomenon ‘art’ resides in relation to ‘art objects’, has had the effect of reinforcing the space between the physical and cognitive realms even further. It has been a concern of philosophers of all persuasions since the middle of the century. Jean-Paul Sartre, for example, confidently asserted that: ‘We can at once formulate the law that the work of art is an unreality … What is “beautiful” is something which cannot be experienced as a perception and which, by its
very nature, is out of the world. By 1968, the space between aesthetic experience and the art object had become such a truism that Richard Wollheim could uncontrovertially ask of works of art 'Are they mental? or physical? Are they constructs of the mind?'

In the present context, by far the most important discourse along these lines was provided by R. G. Collingwood. In his Principles of Art Collingwood set himself the task of clearly defining the nature of art. To this end he dedicated a considerable portion of his book to the philosophical separation of art from craft.

He was committed to the idea that art is not a physical but a cerebral quality:

We must disabuse ourselves of the notion that the business of an artist consists in producing a special kind of artifact, so-called 'works of art' or objets d'art, which are bodily and perceptible things (painted canvases, carved stones and so forth). We shall have, later on, to consider in some detail what it is that the artist, as such and essentially, produces. We shall find that it is two things. Primarily, it is an internal or mental thing, something (as we commonly say) 'existing in his head' and there only: something of the kind we would commonly call an experience. Secondarily, it is a bodily or perceptible thing (a picture, a statue etc.) whose exact relation to this 'mental' thing will need very careful definition.

The 'mental thing' was in his view by far the most significant. He goes on to call it 'the work of art proper'. The object gets far shorter shrift:

'The making of it is therefore not the activity in virtue of which a man is an artist, but only a subsidiary activity, incidental to that .... There is no such thing as an objet d'art in itself; if we call any bodily and perceptible thing by that name or an equivalent we do so only because of the relation in which it stands to the aesthetic experience which is the work of art proper.'

'The work of art proper' denied any inherent link between mind and body and divided the physical realm, processes and objects, off from art.

For Collingwood, art and craft were fundamentally different activities. Craft was 'the power to produce a preconceived result by means of consciously controlled and directed action'. Moreover, they could not be left in proximity: 'in order to take the first step towards a sound aesthetic, it is necessary to disentangle the notion of craft from that of art proper.'
In effect, Collingwood believed craft to be the technical (physical) means through which art (the cerebral) could be manifested. The two were linked only by the journey from conception to realisation. ‘Art proper’ could be made physical through the ‘subsidiary activity’ of craft, but craft was not intrinsic to the achievement of art. Of course, those held within the perimeters of craft have not been the only ones to suffer from this. Much contemporary painting and sculpture was also intellectually undermined.

Collingwood – indeed, most defenders of this type of discourse – was dependent on a Cartesian duality that had been under attack since the turn of the century. But despite the eventual discrediting of what Gilbert Ryle was to call ‘the dogma of the Ghost in the Machine’, the rift between the cerebral and the physical, the manual and the mental, has persisted in the visual arts.

Collingwood did not separate out the genres themselves into ‘arts’ and ‘crafts’ and he did not like the term ‘fine art’. He was opposed to a class system of arts based upon traditions and practices. It has been common practice throughout the century, however, to use his Cartesianism to reinforce the space between fine art and craft as classes. By taking his definition of craft as ‘subsidiary activity’, as non-intellectual manual skill, and simply applying it to craft as a class, one could define all of those genres contained therein as non-intellectual practices. In a similar way, ready-mades, objets trouvés, installations and happenings, acquire cognitive status by virtue of being in the fine-art class. They have been collectivised as intellectual, in contradistinction to the crafts, the mechanical practices. Individual objects are thus not judged by their inherent ingenuity, but rather by a generalised claim to cognitive status. In the same way as social class, gender and race, the genres are judged in advance and positioned within the hierarchy. In the absence of serious critical response from the craft world this situation has consolidated into a truism.

The image of being merely a maker of things has been reinforced by the issue of function. Much in the way that C. R. Cockerell, cited earlier, separated out the ‘poetical’ from the ‘prosaic’ principally according to whether they were ‘useful’ or ‘non-useful’ arts, so the crafts in the twentieth century have had the continual demand laid upon them to be functional. Cockerell’s idea of ‘useful’ was catholic and non-ideological; the modern notion of ‘functional’ is neither. The pressure to eliminate
The status of craft

what critic Peter Fuller called ‘singularly useless’ idioms has further reduced the range and role of one of the three elements of craft, the decorative arts. Ornamentation has always had a role; it has rarely had a material function. The demand for function has severed the tie back to the actuality of the decorative heritage and intensified the sense that craft is a purely technical activity.

Postscript: the order of things

The interesting thing about craft over the last century is that the further it consolidated into a classification – the more it became a naturalised and institutionalised signifier of a certain range of practices and attitudes – the less of a serious player it became. We have endured fifty years of embarrassed, apologetic explication on the meaning of craft. In the fin-de-siècle period, no apologies were necessary; craft was a set of principles and practices, it was a potent force on the international scene. Since then, as a way of classifying the arts and humanities, it has largely been a negative force. It was invented for good reasons; it has been held together for bad ones.

Nomenclature is vital in all this. How we name things determines what they are perceived to be, how they are used and thought about. How you are called is what you are. Nomenclature is the key product of the process of classification through which we order our lives. This process results in a hierarchy that is used to rank cultural produce so that value – ethical, aesthetic and economic – can be attached to classes and to individual objects within classes. Craft is a very important name.

The name of any class, of course, might eventually come to have little relationship to the things within it, and the objects within it may relate to one another only because they are in the same class. Situations might arise in which the cat and dog Foucault refers to on the opening page of this chapter are believed to sit logically together. If the pressure of class were strong enough, the two would undoubtedly start to look alike even to the least jaded of veterinarians. Indeed, it has to be said that a cat is more like a dog than a Meissen figurine is like a Welsh coracle, or a Tiffany vase is like a granite headstone. But these are all clearly discernible as craft, and are more firmly held together than a designed table and a crafted one.

We create orders according to the way we understand things. In due
course we come to understand things by their position in the order. A pot, a chair, a picture, a shoe, a motor car, a window, a brooch, whilst they have an infinite variety of relational meanings within culture, acquire an absolute status within the scheme of things.

I have attempted to demonstrate that the actual forces which gave craft cultural meaning in the nineteenth century were split in the twentieth century and exploited in isolation. The original combination of decorative arts, the vernacular and the politics of work had a dynamism which proved important on a global basis. They had an ideological power that was generated from within. In our own times, that power has been lost and replaced by one from without.

The fractionalisation of craft has caused it to become an unstable compound but I do not think that we should contemplate abandoning it as a term just yet. Indeed, it is a class system and therefore by definition its disbandment would prove extremely difficult. Thinkers have struggled for a generation to determine whether in fact we need to classify things before we can understand and use them. If this is the case, then we should hang on to craft for dear life. Rather, the time has come to analyse the three elements in order to determine their usefulness in our present context. Craft needs to be de- and then re-classified. It needs to become internally dynamic once more, rather than allowing itself to be externally constrained.

Questions need to be asked. Are these elements the ones craft needs at this point in time? How do they relate to wider socio-cultural issues? Do they work with or against each other? What exactly constitutes the vernacular in the present international framework? What is the real difference between the decorative art that is held within the empires of fine art, design and craft? What forms of work are the most appropriate to our times? Is morality intrinsic to the artistic process – as the pioneers believed – and, if it is, how is it made manifest through the artistic process? What concept of craft can be developed to allow it to generate a philosophy and aesthetics for the next century?

I believe that we are about to decide that the constituency and intellectual make-up of craft needs to change. Perhaps we will conclude, like our illustrious forebears of 1890, that this is part of the process of change within civilisation. Whatever form the change takes, we should constantly remind ourselves that, as it was handed to us at the base of the
The status of craft

century, craft was first and foremost the most articulate material outcome of a generation of brilliant positivist activity. Its elements had an ethical and aesthetic logic beyond the circumscribed world of art practice.

The art historian has an ethical role in this process of change, to attempt to expose the actuality of history. The crafts have been misunderstood too long by those who have been exposed only to halcyon myths and wishful thinking.

Notes
4 The journal occasionally changed its subheading through its long run. These were: The Gray's Inn Journal; Say's Weekly Journal; Being a Critique of the Times; Weekly Journalist; The London Intelligencer. See also Paul Langford, A Polite and Commercial People: England 1727-1783 (Oxford, Clarendon, 1989), pp. 24-6. Langford dates the first issue as being in 1726. I have remained with 1729, as the run held at the British Library does indicate this later start date.
5 Saturday 7 March 1729.
6 Saturday 7 March 1729.
7 Anon., Truth and Falshood: A Fable (18 January 1729).
10 Ibid.
11 Ibid.
12 I am grateful to Michael Archer, Malcolm Baker, Linda Parry and Clive Wainwright, colleagues in the Research Department of the V&K, for the points made in this paragraph.
13 There is nothing listed in the British or National Art Libraries.
14 Anon., 'The Educational and Technical Value of Public Collections', The
The history of craft


15 It ran from 1901 to 1906 through nine volumes.


17 Ibid., p. 5.


19 Ibid., p. 51.


25 Ibid., p. 496.


27 The Builder’s Magazine or Monthly Companion (London, 1774), Preface.

28 The history of these various other terms is outside the scope of the present chapter. I use ‘decorative arts’ mainly for convenience, but also because it has been the longest-standing, the most widely understood and the least ambiguous of the available terms.


30 Though he accepted further into this interview with Cockerell that painting was special and exceptional, demanding a higher intellectual calibre and artistic quality in greater degree: p. 42.


32 The international exhibitions often revealed a broad plurality. See Paul Greenhalgh, Ephemeral Vistas: Expositions Universelles, Great Exhibitions and World’s Fairs 1851–1939 (Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1988), Chapter 8.

33 John Ruskin, ‘Modern Manufacture and Design’, from Sesame and Lilies, The
The status of craft


34 Parker, Nature of the Fine Arts, p. 1.


39 Crane, The Claims of Decorative Art, p. 15.

40 Karl Marx, Extracts from the Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts, quoted from Paul Greenhalgh, Quotations and Sources from Design and the Decorative Arts 1800–1939 (Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1993), p. 35.


45 Crane, The Claims of Decorative Art, p. 64.


The history of craft

48 See We are of One Blood (London, CRS, 1985).
53 Wittkower, note 21.
56 I should make it clear here that my history of craft is only true of those nations which adopted the central principles of the Arts and Crafts movement, and then went on to allow a space to open up between industrial and craft production. The French, Italian and Scandinavian stories, for example, are quite different. My narrative rings true of America, Australia, Canada and Germany, however. The wider picture should be the subject of another study.
58 André Breton, 'First Manifesto of Surrealism', in Manifestoes of Surrealism (Michigan, Ann Arbor, 1972 edn), pp. 4-5.
59 Some of these issues are taken up in Peter Dormer, The Art of the Maker (London, Thames & Hudson, 1994); Peter Fuller, 'The Proper Work of the Potter', in Images of God (London, Chatto & Windus, 1986).
The status of craft

65 Ibid., p. 37.
66 Ibid., p. 15.