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What Goes Around Comes Around? Craft Revival, the 1970s and Today.

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Abstract
This article critically reviews the concept of 'revival' in relation to making in contemporary culture. The 1970s are a period, which craft historians and theorists generally acknowledge as one of revival and reinvention of craft practice across Britain. Today, we find ourselves in the midst of what has also been described as a 'craft renaissance'. This article will explore some of the causal factors that led to the craft revival of the 1970s to examine whether parallels can be drawn with today's developments. The purpose of the article is to determine whether craft revivals share any common identifying characteristics, or whether each is unique to its particular period in time. Three key factors which contributed to the revival of the craft in the 1970s will be examined: the role of the state, the ideological relationship of craft to contemporary fine art, and the socio-economic climate of the time. The comparison demonstrates that although today's craft revival shares many points of commonality with the 1970s, revivals are not simply a repetition of the past. Because craft is in a constant process of reinvention and reinvigoration, so-called 'revivals' are instead uniquely complex and historically changing, reflecting more about the present and the future than the past.

Keywords
1970s
artist craftsman
crafts
crafts advisory committee
crafts council
craftivism
craft history
craft revival

Introduction

Cultural historian and commentator Christopher Frayling asserts that 'Craftsmanship has again become fashionable …' (Fraying 2011: 7). Similarly, craft historian and theorist Glenn Adamson claims that '…craft seems positively fashionable in the present moment, as artists, architects and designers evince a fascination with process and materials not seen since the heyday of the Counterculture in the late 1960s' (Adamson 2007: 166). Even Ed Vaizey, Minister for Culture, Communication and Creative Industries, has noticed that craft has been 'enjoying something of a *Zeitgeist* moment.' (Crafts Council 2012b: 11). This renewed interest in making, described as a 'revival' (Crafts Council 2012b: 11; Minahan and Cox 2007: 5), is evidenced in the recent explosion of writing on the subject of craft, ranging from academic texts and journals, to websites and blogs. This revival can also be detected in a variety of social spheres, including education and cultural policy. Craft revivals have historically been explained as a response to periods of significant political, social, economic and technological upheaval. (Turney 2009: 53; Minahan and Cox 2007: 5). Parallels can be drawn with the Arts and Crafts movement of the late nineteenth century, as well as the current resurgence of interest in crafts. Each period can be characterized as sharing concerns over the loss of creative autonomy and quality of life, as well as a belief that craft might offer a redemptive and restorative role in the face of often bewildering change. The concept of 'revival' implies an improvement in the condition or strength of something, a resurgence of popularity or importance (Macmillan Dictionary 2013). The argument is that - in the context of craft - this reinvigoration can be linked to wider social, cultural and political structures and processes. By analysing these structures and processes, a greater understanding of revival can be gained.

Sharing many common reference points with today, the 1970s have been acknowledged by craft historians as a period when craft experienced a renaissance across Britain (Adamson 2007: 166; Harrod 1999: 370; Lucie-Smith 1981: 274). This article examines whether any parallels can be drawn between the craft revival in the 1970s and contemporary developments. It analyses the complex and historically changing nature of craft revival, by examining key spheres of influence contributing to that revival. These include: the role of infrastructure and the state, the ideological interpretation of craft practice in relation to fine art, and the socio-economic climate of the time. The comparison demonstrates that the craft revival of the 1970s shares common attributes and outcomes with today, but also some key differences, enabling us to better understand developments in contemporary craft practice and its cultural context.

Craft Revival and the 1970s

This section examines the phenomenon of the 1970s craft revival in Britain, a time when craft, as product, practice and concept, enjoyed a resurgence of interest. It explores three key contributing factors: the role of infrastructure and the state, craft and fine art ideologies, and revival as a response to socio-economic factors.

Craft Infrastructure and the State in the 1970s

The British craft revival of the 1970s can be linked to the influence of public events and state institutions. The relationship between the craftsperson and the state is one which craft writer and campaigner James Noel White argues has been overlooked in craft histories, which have focused on the lives and outputs of individual makers, rather than the impact of the wider socio-political context, including government funding, cultural policy and infrastructure: 'Initial research into the documents relating to the craft movement in the twentieth century suggests that the progress of events depended as much on the activities of cultural and economic groups as on those of individual craftsmen themselves' (White 1989: 208).

One such group was the Crafts Advisory Committee (CAC), founded in 1971. The CAC, now the Crafts Council, was a state-backed, central organization charged with the ideological development and management of craft, and effectively crystallized the craft revival in the 1970s. The CAC was not the first post-war British craft organization to have government support, but being larger and better funded, it eclipsed its predecessors. In comparison to the fine arts, crafts at this time had been 'virtually neglected by central government' (The Crafts Advisory Committee 1974: 1). The formation of the CAC would dramatically reverse this position. Crucially, the CAC did not receive its funding from the Board of Trade as with previous crafts organizations, but from the Arts Branch of the Department of Education, freeing it from any obligations to industry.

The CAC's remit was to establish a position of greater prominence for the crafts, and specifically champion the 'artist craftsman' (House of Lords 1971). This was a significant ideological term, adopted by the state in an unabashed attempt to distance craft from previous associations with industry. The CAC borrowed from, and aligned itself with, the institutional recognition and power of fine art in a bid to achieve greater prominence. It was believed that this new funding structure and central organization would not only unite 'a number of different voices' (House of Lords 1970) which comprised the crafts, but would also improve the quality of the products and promote national interests (House of Lords 1971). When queried about the definition of 'artist craftsman', Lord Eccles (Paymaster General with Responsibility for the Arts) replied: 'there are craftsmen whose work really equals that of any artist in what one might describe as fine arts; there are others who are really very near industrial producers. Our intention is to go for high quality first' (House of Lords 1971).

The CAC dealt with grants and loans, commissioning and patronage, exhibitions, publications and publicity, as well as conservation projects and training. By April 1974, grants of over £140,000 had been allocated to craftsmen and organizations across Britain (The Crafts Advisory Committee 1974: 4). The CAC's efforts to reinvigorate the crafts, are evidenced in their tax free bursary scheme, which allocated

a generous £2000 to makers (equivalent to £20,000 today). A selective index, 'Craftsmen of Quality', was published in 1976, to encourage the commissioning of high value craft objects, underlining the CAC's aspirations towards excellence and status. The CAC launched a high profile magazine, *Crafts*, in 1973 which is still in circulation today. Noticeably different to other art magazines of the period, *Crafts'* style was celebratory and contemporary, featuring makers engaging with 'the new crafts', and emphasising the CAC's support of the craft renaissance (Coleman 1973: 1). National exhibitions, most notably *The Craftsman's Art* at the V&A museum in 1973, were organised by the CAC, showcasing objects from makers across Britain (The Crafts Advisory Committee 1974: 6), and providing a focus to the 'strong but undirected interest in the crafts among the public' (Anon 1973: 41).

Positioning itself as leader of the 'new crafts', the CAC provided a focal point and ideological direction for the disparate constituents of the craft renaissance. However it is evident that the impact of the CAC was largely restricted to England and Wales, as this was the extent of its governing remit. Scotland had its own supporting bodies for craft, ensuring that craft followed a different trajectory in terms of its production and consumption (Peach 2007). Although the CAC's emphasis was on innovation and contemporary practice, it acknowledged the rise in popularity of amateur and traditional craft at this time (Harrod 1999: 403), and accepted that the constituents of the craft revival were not ideologically homogenous: 'Perhaps the one thing that needs to be said is that in the crafts movement there are people of every shade of conviction and the only possible qualification for belonging is that one has chosen to belong' (The Crafts Advisory Committee 1974: 8). As a state-backed institution, the CAC was therefore instrumental in defining, shaping and supporting the craft revival of the 1970s. However, because the crafts in the 1970s comprised a breadth of constituents, embracing disparate ideologies and aspirations, despite strenuous efforts it was ultimately unable to wholly unify the crafts or control their practical outcomes.

1970s Craft and Fine Art Ideologies

The craft revival of the 1970s can be linked to significant ideological changes in fine art practice at the time. It has been shown that the major funding organization, the CAC, was keen to align itself with 'fine art', and focused its attentions on high-end studio craft rather than vernacular, traditional or amateur crafts. This was evident from its inception and reiterated by the naming of its first major exhibition, *The Craftsman's Art*. However 'fine art' as a loose system of practices, ideas and values was undergoing profound changes in the 1970s, and was far from a unified body upon which craft could map itself. Perhaps the most significant impact on the cultural landscape at this time was conceptualism, a movement giving precedence to ideas over making, leading to what art critic Lucy Lippard described as the 'dematerialization of the art object' (Lippard 1997). In *The Culture of Craft* (1997), Peter Dormer ponders craft's complicated relationship with art:

> The separation of craft from art and design is one of the phenomena of late twentieth century culture. The consequences of this split have been quite startling. It has led to a separation of 'having ideas' from 'making objects'. It has also led to the idea that there exists some sort of mental attribute known as 'creativity' that precedes or can be divorced from a knowledge of how to make things. This has led to art without craft. (Dormer 1997: 18)

The concept of ‘art without craft’ meant that making had become a supplemental, less important, activity in the production of a work of art, as philosopher and historian R.G. Collingwood argued in 1958: ‘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’ (Greenhalgh 1997: 44). The notion that the mental and physical acts of making art had reached a philosophical divide, was reiterated by philosopher Richard Wollheim in 1968 (Greenhalgh 1997: 44), and this divide was to have an impact upon the revival of ‘making’ as a means of expression across all aspects of creative practice. Not only was the ideological move towards conceptualism refracted in contemporary craft practice with makers, such as Glenys Barton and Michael Rowe, creating non-functional, or ‘conceptual crafts’. But conversely, as Adamson argues, some artists of the 1970s rejected conceptualism, focusing instead on the very material qualities of the art object. As a counterpoint to Lippard’s thesis on dematerialization, Adamson cites the work of Process Artists, such as Peter Voulkos, who worked specifically with craft media, for example ceramics, as a means of interrogating the discourses of making (Adamson 2007: 58).

The CAC, which looked to fine art and the avant-garde, was interested in makers who pursued meaning and personal expression in craft (Coleman 1973: 7). This new form of crafts largely distanced itself from more conservative preoccupations with tradition and skill. However the CAC was supportive of veteran makers such as David Pye, author of *The Nature of Art and Workmanship* (1968), whose ideas appear somewhat reactionary in the wake of ‘the new crafts’. Pye sought to redress the decline in standards of making resulting from the hegemony of conceptualism, the rise of design as a profession, as well as the more liberal teachings of art schools. In the words of Peter Dormer:

> The crafts world divides between those who have a conservative ideology, of whom Pye is a good example, and those who seek a form of decorative arts avant-garde based often on a denial not only of function but also the primacy of skill. (Dormer 1990: 148)

Harrod substantiates this duality, writing that the 1970s craft revival consisted of two distinct types of craftsperson: ‘the knowing ironists and those who continued to be inspired by the modernist canon’ (Harrod 1999: 375), or as potter and writer Rob Bernard describes it, a division of ‘fine crafts’ and ‘functional crafts’. Whereas fine crafts strove to break boundaries and be exhibited in art galleries, functional crafts had more quotidian aspirations, and were destined largely for the home (Barnard 2005: 60).

Edward Lucie-Smith, attributed the craft renaissance to a reaction against what was happening in fine art, writing that ‘there began to appear a hunger for physical virtuosity in the handling of materials, something which many artists were no longer happy to provide’ (Lucie-Smith 1981: 274). This desire to return to a more highly skilled form of making was endorsed by the likes of David Pye, although a reverence of skill was only part of the equation. The craft revival of the 1970s was largely about re-embracing *making* as a generalized concept.The profound ideological changes in contemporary art, namely conceptualism and the dematerialization of the art object, led to a situation where craft skills and practices may have been rendered irrelevant or obsolete. However, the opposite happened, and these changes instead precipitated

circumstances whereby craft practice, in a wide variety of forms and discourses, was actively championed and revitalized.

1970s Revival as Response to Socio-Economic Factors

The 1970s in Britain were distinguished by specific socio-economic events, including the oil crisis of 1973, rising inflation, economic recession, growing public sector debt, rising unemployment, and industrial strikes. These causal factors contributed to an overall crisis of confidence in the state and its institutions (Chartrand 1988: 44; Spittles 1995). Opposition to the American war in Vietnam, student rebellions at Berkley and the Sorbonne, and the earliest stirrings of postmodernism, gave rise to a youth counter-culture, opposing consumerism and conformity. A growing concern with the impact of industrial processes and nuclear proliferation marked the beginning of the modern environmental movement, epitomized by Rachel Carson's bestseller *Silent Spring* (1962). Second wave feminism, and the questioning of women's roles in society, led to a subversive reclamation of 'feminine pastimes' including sewing, embroidery, knitting and weaving (Robertson 2011: 184). The search for creative autonomy and self-expression, as well the desire to live sustainably, had direct links with the resurgence of interest in 'making', and provided ideal circumstances in which craft could flourish. According to a CAC report, 'a remarkable renaissance has taken place', galvanized by 'a concern for human identity in a society that tends to require conformity' (The Crafts Advisory Committee 1974: 1).

Similar sentiments were reflected in *Crafts* magazine. The director of the Dove Centre for Creativity, a craft community outside Glastonbury, funded by the CAC, stated: 'It is obvious that today many people feel swamped by a flood of objects which closely resemble each other because they are standardized and mass-produced and there is a corresponding interest in handmade objects.' (Horrocks 1973: 16). *Crafts* magazine frequently featured articles about individuals who had abandoned more mainstream careers in pursuit of the rural idyll. This notion of taking charge of ones' destiny, by choosing the life of the craftsperson over that of corporate conformism, was lauded as a worthy choice as the *Crafts* editor explains:

> In this first issue craftsmen of different kinds, from many parts of the country, talk about their work and the kind of life they have chosen. What comes over is that as well as being hardworking, dedicated and idealistic, they are enjoying themselves…Small wonder he sometimes feels isolated in a society which is geared to mass production. But there is a growing public interest in his work, an interest which may be a combination of admiration for his products and envy of someone who has got his priorities right. (Coleman 1973: 1)

In sympathy with the ethos of craft production, the socio-economic conditions of the 1970s were a crucial part of its revival, but they also led to a resurgence of interest in craft that was at times synonymous with romanticized social rebellion. This concept of revival has been associated with escapism, and a desire to retreat from the present. Cultural theorist Raymond Williams, in *The Country and the City* (1973), analyses how similar ideas of retrospective regret for bygone eras are depicted in literature. The yearning for a preindustrial lifestyle as a form of escapism inspired craft activity that was often historicist and nostalgic in content (Turney 2009: 46). This type of craft production was at odds with the contemporary studio craft that the CAC wanted to

promote, and it can be assumed that the CAC preferred practitioners to be socially and institutionally engaged in order to guarantee the reproduction of its craft ideology.

To summarise, in the 1970s state backed institutions, such as the CAC played a defining role in the attempt to revitalise and unify the crafts – with varying degrees of success – and laid foundations which are still in existence today. Ideological changes in fine art, which may have precipitated the demise of craft, actually served to revalidate it in certain circles. Finally, the socio-economic conditions of the 1970s, which included financial crisis and civil unrest, were crucial in terms of instigating a collective desire to return to craft and the values it appeared to represent. One thing is clear, the disparate craft constituents and influences in the 1970s contributed overall to what is understood as a craft revival, but with divergent, rather than homogeneous intentions, audiences and outcomes.

Craft Revival Today: parallels with the 1970s

This section examines the role of infrastructure and the state, fine art ideology and socio-economics with regard to the current craft revival, with the aim to establish what can be learned from parallels with the 1970s craft revival.

Contemporary Craft Infrastructure and the State

As in the 1970s, government-backed infrastructure continues to be instrumental in maintaining and reaffirming the identity of craft. Today, the craft sector is supported by a number of government and voluntary bodies (Jennings 2012: 8). The Crafts Council (the CAC in the 1970s), now funded by the Arts Council England, persists, as does *Crafts* magazine. Its emphasis continues to be on contemporary, fine art studio craft, rather than traditional heritage craft. With a dynamic online presence, the Crafts Council's goal is to make the UK 'the best place to make, see, collect and learn about contemporary craft' (Crafts Council 2012a: 3). This ambition is reflected in its magazine, which is supported by commentary from key craft writers and theorists, such as Glenn Adamson and Tanya Harrod. Scottish craft is also gaining prominence, through the efforts of Craft Scotland, a registered charity funded by Creative Scotland (previously the Scottish Arts Council), whose aim is to support and grow the Scottish sector. Using their website as a platform from which to promote and develop the best of contemporary Scottish craft, Craft Scotland aspires to being 'the world's most inspirational creative organisation' (Craft Scotland 2013). More recently, Creative & Cultural Skills was founded in 2004, with the aim of supporting and enabling the UK's creative and cultural industries (in which craft is included), through the promotion of specialist skills and training.

These state-supported craft organisations give the outward appearance that craft in the UK is currently well provided for, and rhetorically speaking, the current Coalition government appears to be embracing the notion of its revival. John Hayes, the Coalition's Minister of State for Further Education, Skills and Lifelong Learning in 2010 drew direct parallels with the nineteenth century crafts revival in a speech at the Royal Society of Arts, where he opined: 'it's high time to create a new aesthetics of craft, indeed, a new Arts and Crafts movement for Britain in the 21st century' (Hayes 2010). Hayes' speech was underpinned by data obtained from a major skills audit undertaken in June 2009, titled *Craft Blueprint*, which identified the vital role that

craft plays in the nation's economy, but warned that Britain was suffering from a 'skills crisis'. The conclusion was that far from thriving, craft practices, in particular heritage crafts, were in urgent need of revitalization. (Creative & Cultural Skills and The Crafts Council 2009). The subsequent creation of the Craft Skills Advisory Board, 'to ensure that the voice of the craft community is heard at the very centre of government' (Hayes 2012) and various incentives, including financial grants and a Craft Apprenticeship programme, aiming to raise the profile of the UK craft sector and acknowledge excellent practice, seem to indicate the Coalition's commitment to craft. However parallels with the 1970s, in terms of state support are tenuous, and we are advised to view the contemporary revival with a degree of caution (Adamson 2012).

For example, the current government's desire to champion traditional or heritage crafts in a time of crisis is in sharp contrast to the more hubristic and forward-thinking aspirations the state had for craft in the 1970s, which sought to distance craft from industry and align it with the ideology and status of fine art. As Adamson argues, in these times of acute crisis, craft has particular appeal to the current, largely conservative, Coalition government:

> From their perspective, craft stands for the past, for enduring rather than transient values, and also for the old fashioned value of self-reliance, whether on the level of the individual or the society at large. (Adamson 2012: 21)

With its focus on the promotion of craft skills and their benefit to industry, it can be argued that the current political interest in craft is driven more by economic expedience, rather than any wider social or cultural benefits that craft might bring. Equally worrying is the current debate over the Department for Culture Media and Sport (DCMS) consultation 'Classifying and Measuring the Creative Industries' which proposes that 'crafts' is removed from its categories of data collection (Department for Culture Media and Sport 2013). The DCMS argue that the purpose of the exercise is not to determine which industries are creative or not, and that the decision will not impact on craft funding (Crafts Council 2012d). But for craft to be subsumed within the wider context of industrial and occupational production, is viewed by many as highly problematic. As Julia Bennett, Research and Policy Manager at the Crafts Council argues succinctly, 'what doesn't get counted, doesn't count' (Bennett 2013).

The notion of a state backed revival mirroring the 1970s is further eroded through evidence of brutal public sector cuts, affecting all areas of creative and cultural practice, including higher education. The Arts Council England announcement of a cut in grant in aid of £3.9 million in 2013/14 and £7.7 million in 2014/15 (Arts Council England 2012) has had a direct consequence on the activities of organizations such as the Crafts Council. As Joanna Foster, Crafts Council Chairman, stated:

> It is a decrease in our funds and it will have some effect on what we do, but we will ensure that we minimize the impact on the craft sector. We are already working hard to establish alternative sources of income and will continue to do so over the coming months. (Montgomery 2011)

A recent Crafts Council report, 'Craft in an Age of Change', commented less optimistically: 'Prospects for the years ahead look gloomy at the time of writing' (Crafts Council 2012c: 21). With the current recession predicted to be more prolonged and deep than that of the 1970s (Buckley 2009; Crafts Council 2012b: 44), the ongoing economic crisis presents considerable challenges to any attempts by the state to truly revitalize the crafts, making direct parallels with the 1970s revival seem unconvincing.

Contemporary Craft and Fine Art Ideologies

As in the 1970s, the current craft revival has a direct relationship with ideological developments in fine art practice. Conceptualism had been the defining force in twentieth century visual arts, challenging artists and craftspeople to rethink their relationship with making. In the 1970s, this led to art which valued ideas over skills. Towards the end of the twentieth century, as conceptualism began to lose its impetus, artists increasingly returned to craft - its materials, processes and attendant meanings - as a new means of expression. Today, with respect to fine art practice, we are in what Adamson describes as 'a climate of polymorphic production' (Adamson 2007: 165), where traditional boundaries and definitions no longer hold the same sway. This is affirmed by the Turner Prize being awarded to Tracey Emin (1999), Grayson Perry (2003) and Simon Starling (2005), all artists whose work engages on some level with craft practice and discourse.

More importantly, the once pejorative desire to champion 'skilled making', is now embraced across many aspects of creative practice, as can be seen in the highly popular V&A and Crafts Council exhibition, 'Power of Making' (Sept 2011-January 2012). Distancing itself from any engagement with the hierarchical 'is it art?' discourse, the exhibition focused instead on the very inclusive nature of craft practice - something that on a very basic level everyone can engage with - but equally has the potential to break boundaries, change lives and challenge preconceptions. Wide-ranging in both idea and application, but sharing a common purpose of 'skillful making', the exhibition included a diverse range of work by artists, such as David Mach with his 'Gorilla' coat hanger sculpture, and an 'extra-vehicular activity space suit' designed in collaboration with the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. As Daniel Miller writes: 'The core of this exhibition lies not in art, but in craft – objects that relate not to the quick invention of conceptual art, but to the slow perfection of skill' (Miller 2011: 20).

Further evidence of the return to skilled making in the contemporary visual arts can be seen in exhibitions such as *Undone – Making and Unmaking in Contemporary Sculpture* (Sept 2010- Jan 2011), at the Henry Moore Institute, which featured contemporary artists using traditional and improvised craft techniques, emphasising the tactile and the real, as opposed to the conceptual. Publications such as *By Hand: The Use of Craft in Contemporary Art* (Hung and Magliaro 2007), also document the rise of contemporary artists producing work using craft-based methods and materials. Its authors attribute the return to craft as part of a more general wave of interest in 'hand-making' evidenced across all aspects of contemporary creative practice, including a resurgence of interest in hand-knitting in fashion, and a return to hand-drawn lettering in graphic design. Hung and Magliaro argue that contemporary artists are turning to skill and craft-based practices, not as an antidote to conceptualism, but rather as a response to the loss of individuality that comes as a result of the anonymity

of mass media and digital culture. Artists, they argue, want the tactility and intimacy achieved through hand making, but rather than affect a wholesale rejection of technology, they are interested in using technology strategically, integrating it with hand-processes when, and where, it suits them, rather than the other way around (Hung and Magliaro 2007: 13).

Artist, writer and curator Janis Jeffries also explores the recent 'outburst' of craft in contemporary art, examining the ways in which artists have employed craft, conceptually and creatively, in their practice (Jeffries 2011). Although artists' preoccupations with craft might have superficial parallels with the 1970s revival, a key difference Jeffries argues, is that contemporary artists are interested in expressing wit and irony in their work (Jeffries 2011: 231). Whereas comparisons with the 1970s craft movement and today may seem apposite, Jeffries maintains that '…the opposition between art and craft, though informed by debates from the 1970s, is irrelevant'. (Jeffries 2011: 227). Artists are motivated instead, Jeffries argues, by a desire to reject consumer and corporate culture and '… to challenge preconceived notions of what gets shown as contemporary art' (Jeffries 2011: 231).

In terms of technology, it is important to remember that in the 1970s digital processes did not exist. When computer aided design was introduced to art and design schools in the 1990s, it posed a potential threat to hand-making. Instead, according to Professor Jane Harris, Kingston University, digital technology has 'reinvigorated' craft practice (Harris 2012: 109). Harris argues that the introduction of digital processes into more traditional craft contexts has enhanced rather than detracted from the work, offering creative and conceptual possibilities that were previously impossible. This purposeful integration of technology with tradition, is what differentiates the contemporary revival from that in the 1970s, along with a negation of the boundaries that have previously differentiated artist and craftsperson.

Contemporary Craft Revival as Response to Socio-Economic Factors

Finally, it has been argued that craft revivals have long been linked to periods of sustained social and economic instability, where craft, in a variety of material and symbolic forms, has been used as a protest and antidote to the perceived ills of the modern industrialised world. To practice craft has enabled the disenfranchised or disaffected to regain a sense of collective agency and autonomy. For this reason, craft has long been associated with activist movements, including feminism and environmentalism (Robertson 2011). However craft practice has also been used as a reactionary refuge from the modern world, and for this it has been criticised. Historian and writer, Garth Clark, uses the term 'revival' pejoratively in 'The Death of Craft':

> Nostalgia is the equivalent of sugar in art. Born as a revival, craft is powered by nostalgia. Some of this is unavoidable, and used with restraint can add charm and a romantic link to the past. But overdone it turns into restoration village sentimentality – certainly craft is afflicted with whimsy and syrupy cuteness. (Clark 2009: 50)

The socio-economic landscape of our current craft revival undoubtedly shares many points of commonality with the 1970s, in terms of economic instability, concerns over the depletion of natural resources, dissatisfaction with government involvement in

wars, and a desire to reject consumerism and private sector values. However there are also some important differences in terms of how craft has been used as a vehicle to confront these issues. Although previous craft revivals have been criticised as an idealistic retreat to a nostalgic and romanticised version of the past, the contemporary craft revival is not backward looking. Movements such as Craftivism (the amalgamation of craft and activism), and Stitch'n'Bitch, take advantage of innovations in new media to promote their cause, and are deliberately ironic in their referencing of the past, rather than advocating a wholesale rejection of the present (Minahan and Cox 2007: 6). Craft writer Henrik Most attributes the current craft revival to the fact that we increasingly inhabit a digital world and therefore have a fundamental need to return to more haptic, tactile experiences (Most 2005). The current craft revival can therefore be described as one that both embraces and rejects information technology.

Craftivism, a term coined by Betsy Greer in 2003, uses craft as an unlikely vehicle to campaign for social and political change. With their manifesto, 'changing the world one stitch at a time' embroidered in cross-stitch, the Craftivist Collective aims to combine creativity and fun with activism (Craftivist Collective 2013). Through its use of social media networks, which enable the formation of user groups and encourage the engagement in collective practice, contemporary crafting is generally a much less isolated activity than it was in the 1970s. The internet, as a means of building craft communities and relationships that would otherwise not have been possible, has been vital in the contemporary craft revival (Robertson 2011: 190). Groups such as the Craftivist Collective deliberately stage events in social spaces as a means of engaging public interest in a non-threatening way. This is not a movement which is overly concerned with skilled making, but rather with using handmade objects as a gentle way of raising awareness of issues such as global justice and poverty. It is the imperfections of the handmade artefact, with its connotations of individuality and humanity that make the Craftivist message so compelling.

The current period of economic downturn and austerity, although clearly presenting challenges for craft, also presents opportunities, and may well be galvanising makers into embracing change. In the Crafts Council's 2012 report 'Craft in an Age of Change' it is argued that craft is currently very well positioned to meet demands for more small-scale, and 'authentic' forms of production (Crafts Council 2012b: 10). The desire by consumers for a return to products that are environmentally and ethically produced, as well as being handmade using natural materials, makes craft products particularly appealing, despite the reality that many craft processes, including ceramics and glass are far from environmentally friendly (Crafts Council 2012b: 10). There are also sustainable and profitable business models offering hope in times of economic austerity, such as Cockpit Arts in London, which has reported significant growth despite the economic downturn. A recent study by Ellen O'Hara, Head of Business Development, demonstrates that social enterprises such as Cockpit Arts – which operate as 'incubators' for fledgling craft businesses by offering affordable studio space and support services, including business development coaching and skills workshops – have been successful in improving performance of craft businesses (O'Hara 2011). O'Hara argues that the key to the increased levels of profit and turnover for businesses at Cockpit Arts can be attributed to a number of factors including market diversification, exporting, licensing and the outsourcing of manufacture (O'Hara 2011: 134). Such craft business incubators, which are

withstanding the recession, perhaps indicate that austerity can lead to increased resourcefulness when it comes to craft economies.

Conclusion

Christopher Frayling writes that craftsmanship is definitely in the ether, as an idea ripe to be 'reclaimed', 're-evaluated' and 'redefined' (Frayling 2011: 8). This is evident today and the craft revival of the 1970s provides an opportunity to reflect upon the current attention being paid to the crafts. The article has revealed the importance of the state in supporting and enabling makers, as well as the limitations of government policy: state support is never wholly altruistic, and usually seeks to impose a particular ideology. It has been demonstrated that changes in attitudes to craft are linked to conceptual shifts in fine art ideology but that - as these are constantly changing - so too does the way that craft is perceived and projected. Today boundaries seem to be less relevant, as makers increasingly adopt a polymorphous approach to creative practice. Specific economic, social and environmental concerns such as the impact of mass production and economic recession, dissatisfaction with consumerism, the desire to revert to a simpler life, nostalgia and growing environmental awareness are factors which each period share. Each has led to a desire to return to craft, albeit with different outcomes, taking into consideration developments in new media and technology. These causal factors have heralded craft movements both in the 1970s and today, and it can be argued that the return to 'making' is something brought about by specific parameters within culture and society, which are shared but also constantly changing. Revival, as a catch phrase, is used loosely and indiscriminately when applied to the crafts both today and in the 1970s. Superficially it is tempting to draw parallels, but revivals are not simply a repetition of the past; instead they are historically complex and mutable, and each unique.

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Biography

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