

INTRODUCTION

A Pursuit of Pleasurable Studies with Woodworkers



A CRAFT RENAISSANCE IN BRITAIN

Craft was undergoing a renaissance when I began this study. At the turn of the millennium, there was growing evidence that the value and potential benefits of things ‘handmade’ were on the radar of both producers and consumers in Britain and elsewhere in the post-industrial world.¹ By 2006, there were an estimated 32,000 self-identified craftspeople – or, in contemporary language, ‘designer-makers’ – living and working in England and Wales alone, and 5.6 million original crafted items were being purchased annually at an estimated total value of nearly £900 million.² While writing this introduction, the Crafts Council jubilantly reported that craft sales in the United Kingdom exceeded £3 billion in 2019.³ Clearly, craft survived the 2008 financial crisis and seemingly thrived during the messy aftermath of government-imposed austerity.⁴ In fact, over a brief two-decade period, Britain’s craftworld underwent rapid diversification and massive transformation in terms of the sheer number of practitioners, skill growth, innovations in materials, product quality, improved cultural status, marketing savvy and public outreach.

Already during the early years of the ‘renaissance’, *The Observer* reported:

Village fayres may still peddle brown pots and woven wall hangings, but in the galleries there is a whole other scene in which craft means aesthetically exciting, skilfully executed objects made of ceramic, glass, metal and wood that are every bit as desirable – and collectible – as contemporary painting and sculpture.⁵

Alongside the thriving ‘traditional’ craft sector that produces architectural components, functional items and aesthetic objects,⁶ new craft disciplines

emerged during the first decade of the 2000s that innovatively combined handwork technologies with mechanical and digital ones to create cutting-edge works. Some of these products provocatively blurred the age-old ‘functional versus conceptual’ divide that has distinguished craft from fine art since the Quattrocento,⁷ while others fruitfully engaged with an array of scientific fields, including engineering, material sciences, biotechnology and communications – and the onward march continues.

The dynamism of craft renders it notoriously difficult to define and contain. As a concept, it continually spills over into new realms of practice, materials and technologies, and the term is increasingly usurped by industry to construct affective, marketable narratives around mass-produced consumables. Nevertheless, craft seemingly retains a set of immutable, yet enigmatic core properties – at least in the popular imagination. For this reason, I have classified craft as a ‘polythetic’ category, which I will describe later in this introduction.

In juxtaposition to Britain’s ever-diversifying and expansive craftworld, this book tells a more intimate story: one about a small community of fine woodworkers training at a vocational college in East London, and set during the early years of this most recent and continuing renaissance of craftsmanship.⁸ It is a colourful account of personal and shared experiences, achievements and challenges, and an anthropology of skill and knowledge, the deep desire to create with our hands, and the persistent human longing to find pleasurable and purposeful work. The stories of these young men and women speak volumes to the vast field of contemporary craft, as well as to craft’s past and its possible futures in a troubled world.

THE ‘THIRD WAVE’

There have always been and always will be craftspeople and markets for the things they make. However, periods of flourishing activity and widespread enthusiasm for craft have tended to come in cycles, typically as a counter-cultural response to the prevailing modes of production or the governing economic models of a given era.

The Arts and Crafts movement that flourished from the late Victorian period until the end of the First World War was, in the eyes of its founder William Morris, a socialist critique of the hegemonic capitalist culture that arose with and was sustained by industrialisation, mass production and the progressive mechanisation of human labour. It is highly noteworthy that the elaboration of an antithetical relation between handwork and machine-made by Morris, and earlier by John Ruskin,⁹ gave rise to a modern and persisting concept of ‘craft’ as both practice and social ideology. Morris also

contravened rigid social and gender conventions of his day, which relegated manual labour to the lower classes and divided craft occupations between the sexes. Being an upper middle-class gentleman who put his hand to a wide range of craftwork, including tapestry weaving (which was typically associated with women's mill and factory work),¹⁰ Morris 'broke an important barrier . . . and gave handwork a classlessness that survives to this day'.¹¹

Stirred by Morris' socialist vision and by John Ruskin's writings on the plight of crafts and craftspeople, a number of arts and crafts organisations were founded during the final decades of the nineteenth century. Among the most celebrated of these were the Century Guild, founded by Arthur Heygate Mackmurdo,¹² the Guild and School of Handicraft, set up by Charles Robert Ashbee,¹³ and the Art Workers' Guild in central London.¹⁴ These organisations shared the 'ethos of collective solidarity and a vision of the importance of beauty, aesthetics and the ethical treatment of the craftsman in society', and they served as a model for craft organisations that evolved during the next century.¹⁵ In 1907, May Morris (daughter of William Morris) and Mary Elizabeth Turner founded the Women's Guild of Arts in reaction to women being barred from joining the aforementioned and to achieve professional identity and status for women artists and craftswomen.¹⁶

In the 1960s and 1970s, the Craft Revival movement similarly coalesced around anti-establishment sentiments and boundary-pushing issues. During the socially conservative decades following the Second World War, Fordism reached its florescence, powering an economic boom grounded in assembly-line manufacturing, standardised production, the further deskilling of labour, lower prices and mass consumption. Craftwork therefore offered its practitioners and patrons sanctuary from encroaching technologies and modes of production that threatened human autonomy, creativity and purpose. It also promised an alternative way of being to the one shaped by homogenising forces of consumer culture, faceless modernism, sprawling suburbia and capitalist-driven governance.¹⁷

Hastened by the momentum of that second wave in craft, the Craft Advisory Committee (CAC) was formed in 1971 to sponsor improvements in craft production, while keeping alive the relevance and value of craft in the minds of the British public and representing the needs of craftspeople to successive governments. To do so, the CAC launched a Development Award in 1973 to support those whom it judged to be the most innovative and influential makers in establishing their practices.¹⁸ It also staged public markets, including the *Chelsea Crafts Fair*, which became a long-running and fondly remembered annual event from its inception in 1974 until its closure in 2000. The CAC was renamed the Crafts Council in 1979 and received its Royal Charter three years later, with a clear but demanding mandate 'to advance and encourage the creation and conservation of works of fine craftsmanship

and to foster, promote and increase the interest of the public in the works of fine craftsmen and the accessibility of those works to the public in England and Wales'.¹⁹

Outside the capital, other key initiatives that supported craft in the post-war era through to the present day included the Gloucestershire Guild of Craftsmen, which was an outgrowth of the vibrant Arts and Crafts tradition of that county, and the Devon Guild of Craftsmen, set up in 1955 by a local furniture maker and fellow artisans. Both staged public exhibitions, as did a handful of dedicated galleries dotted around the country. A noteworthy newcomer to the scene was the Birmingham-based charity Craftspace. Established in 1986, its remit is to develop and promote contemporary craft and design through national and international touring exhibitions, lifelong learning projects and pioneering action-research partnerships.²⁰

By the late 1990s, with considerable infrastructure already in place, the so-called 'third wave' in craft arrived in Britain, North America and numerous other regions around the world. Established craftspeople were attracting fresh audiences and profiting from an expanding clientele with deeper pockets, while a new generation of makers were opening workshops and setting up studios and boutique galleries. With the passing years, growing numbers of makers harnessed the new digital and social media technologies not only to disseminate images of their finished works, but also to create and share narratives about their craft identities, and reveal the complex processes and duration of their creative production.²¹ These efforts augmented and connected craft communities at home and abroad, and they cultivated deeper public understanding and appreciation for the 'art of craft'.

In 2004, the Crafts Council launched *Collect*, an international fair of craft-inspired artworks that was first hosted at the Victoria and Albert Museum;²² and, two years later it staged *Origin* at Somerset House – a grand successor to the *Chelsea Crafts Fair*.²³ New craft award schemes were inaugurated with laudable aims to raise the status of handwork and reward the leading makers, promising recruits and daring innovators in the sector.²⁴

Craft as a way of doing, with emphases on process, materials and embodied engagement, was being steadily incorporated into the practices of fine artists and designers.²⁵ Previously, artists typically regarded craft as 'mere skill', and the artworld harboured 'contempt for the way most craft objects are designed to be used in a domestic setting or the way they are frequently employed in the non-monetary economy of gift-giving'.²⁶ This perspective has changed. Malcolm Ferris, creator and coordinator of the vibrant *Making Futures* craft conferences,²⁷ remarked that budding interests among fine artists and designers in craft's ethical and activist practices had come 'after a period of feverish global capitalism in which contemporary art and design both came to be seen as characteristic of conspicuous consumer excess'.²⁸

Somewhat earlier, artist, wood joiner and political activist Roger Coleman had already concluded that, for artists who adopted a craft ethos:

Doing and making things well, with care and concern for how and why they are made, brings real quality into everyday life . . . a quality which takes us beyond material wealth, and gives us a truer way of measuring value than a market economy does.²⁹

At a more popular level in UK society, special exhibitions at the V&A and the British Museum astonished visitors with displays of meticulously crafted objects and fuelled curiosity about how the everyday objects that surround us are made and how they work.³⁰ These shows were especially poignant during this digital epoch that has vanquished material and mechanical understandings of the things we use and consume, thereby engendering feelings of detachment, disembodiment and impotence. Achieving even wider-reaching impact, trendy television serials about home renovation and self-build projects spurred the growth of DIY (do-it-yourself) culture, empowering viewers to take up the tools and give it a try.³¹ As a result, some enrolled on short courses to further their skills, while those more profoundly inspired set out on career paths into the trades or crafts.

In the realm of training and education, the Labour government and the industry training boards were promoting Modern Apprenticeship programmes to school-leavers and young adults (albeit in the shadow of the Prime Minister's vociferous drive for 'fifty per cent in higher education').³² The main impetuses were the perennial need to reduce Britain's staggering skills gap and to create a workforce better prepared to meet the commercial and industrial demands of the twenty-first century.³³ The National Heritage Training Group (NHTG), formed in 2003,³⁴ was tasked with coordinating the development and delivery of traditional building crafts training and qualifications in the heritage sector of the United Kingdom's construction industry. The objective was to safeguard the preservation and sustainability of the estimated five million historic (i.e. pre-1919) buildings that existed in England alone.³⁵ However, to train trainees requires trainers with the necessary skills. Master Crafts qualifications were thus created, exceeding the criteria of the National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs) that underpinned the Modern Apprenticeships and centrally included a mentoring component.³⁶

Several of the London livery companies (i.e. guilds), including the Gunmakers, Goldsmiths, Farriers, Stationers, Newspaper Makers and Saddlers, had reinvigorated the binding of working apprentices to learn the 'misteries' (i.e. the skills and art) of their respective trades.³⁷ The Worshipful Company of Carpenters (i.e. the Carpenters' Livery), which I discuss at length in Chapter 2, had long maintained an active interest in the wood occupations in the capital and further afield. The Livery Company was the patron of the vocational college in East London where I carried out the core fieldwork for this

book and where Modern Apprenticeships in wood occupations took place. The apprenticeship route into various kinds of craftwork also garnered firm support from the Prince of Wales and the Prince's Trust.³⁸ In an interview with the BBC, Prince Charles declared:

I am a huge believer in the importance of craftsmanship, [and] in encouraging young people into professions which are not necessarily desk-bound and management-orientated – and actually using their unfulfilled vocational talents.³⁹

The Heritage Crafts Association (HCA), on which the Prince sat as President, was founded six years after the NHTG to promote and advocate for heritage crafts. This came in response to the Crafts Council's apparent redirection of its energies into supporting the more artistic, aesthetic and innovative crafts,⁴⁰ and promoting ideas of postdisciplinarity, postfunction and postmaterials in craftwork.⁴¹ The HCA's wide umbrella of heritage crafts included such occupations as blacksmithing, basketry, wheelwrighting and coach-building, as well as crafts classified as 'endangered', such as scissor-making, bell founding, piano-making and watch-making. Wood turner and HCA Trustee Robin Wood alleged that: 'Almost every country in the world [was] doing more to support these crafts than [the United Kingdom]'. Help is needed, he continued, to 'maintain them as real, thriving, evolving businesses, not just objects in a museum'.⁴² Indeed, the HCA was unique among the United Kingdom's craft advocacy groups in adopting the UNESCO Convention on intangible heritage and backing the conservation of the specialised ways of knowing that go into making crafted objects, and of their mastery by younger generations.⁴³

Scholars, too, were turning their minds to craft from the start of the third wave. There was already a long history of anthropologists studying material culture, handmade objects and even skill-learning and processes of production,⁴⁴ but the predominant focus had been on non-Western preindustrial societies. It was historians and economists who shone the narrower spotlight on Britain, documenting the activities of London's livery companies and the plight of the old craft trades and apprenticeship regimes, while educationalists and sociologists (several of who are cited in later chapters) scrutinised the government's ever-changing vocational training schemes and associated funding regimes.

There was, however, an emergent scholarship that made 'craft' its primary subject of study and that critically engaged with craft's history, meaning, identity/identities, practices, materials, technologies and contested boundaries.⁴⁵ Some of the seminal publications that mark the beginnings of the third wave include Tanya Harrod's unrivalled tome on twentieth-century crafts in Britain, and illuminating edited volumes by Peter Dormer, Jean Johnson and Paul Greenhalgh.⁴⁶ These were followed shortly afterwards by a string of celebrated books by academics Glenn Adamson, Howard Risatti and Richard Sennett, all of which reached wide reading audiences and dialogued with my

own musings on the nature of craft while researching and writing about my woodwork colleagues.⁴⁷

Given the hive of activity around craft in the twenty-first century, the obvious question that arises is: ‘What were the drivers that propagated the third wave and fuelled widespread intrigue with the “handmade” among such a diverse set of actors?’ Insightful responses emerge in the narratives and experiences of my fellow woodworkers documented in the forthcoming chapters. It becomes clear that a multitude of factors and concerns – some harmonising, others diametrically opposed – animated their individual moves into craftwork at the start of the new millennium. To an extent, their motivations resonated with those that incited the Arts and Crafts movement and the Craft Revival of the 1960s and 1970s, but the woodwork trainees, instructors and established makers who I interviewed also expressed uniquely contemporary concerns, sometimes with animated urgency. In short, craft served as a vehicle for pondering the state of our world and contemplating alternative paths that might lead to more sustainable, more fulfilling and more pleasurable ways of living and working.⁴⁸

Looking back upon the pre-2008 years of the new millennium, Malcolm Ferris neatly speculated that ‘the rehabilitation of the value of craft in society . . . constituted a shared utopian narrative that mobilised what became in effect a molecular ethical-communitarian revolt against the febrile pre-crash epoch of futures-financed consumption’. More than a century earlier, William Morris penned something not entirely dissimilar in spirit:

For some time past there has been a good deal of interest shown in [handicraft] . . . People interested, or who suppose that they are interested, in the details of the arts of life feel a desire to revert to methods of handicraft for production in general; and it may therefore be worth considering how far this is a mere reactionary sentiment incapable of realisation, and how far it may foreshadow a real coming change in our habits of life as irresistible as the former change which has produced the system of machine-production, the system against which revolt is now attempted.⁴⁹

Perhaps rather than conceiving of today’s revolt as a unique and bounded episode of our time, we might more beneficially understand it as the current phase in a timeless grassroots quest for a utopian society that is more humane, more just, peaceful, deferential to beauty, ecologically respectful and, above all, ethically purposeful.

A NOTE ON ‘CRAFT’

‘Craft has always been a supremely messy word’, observed curator and author Paul Greenhalgh.⁵⁰ I likewise qualified craft as a ‘polysemous, ambiguous, and often-contested term’.⁵¹ Wisely perhaps, Tanya Harrod resolved not

to attempt a definition and got on with telling its fascinating history through objects and the people who made them.⁵² Richard Sennett ventured that craftsmanship ‘names an enduring, basic human impulse, the desire to do a job well for its own sake’,⁵³ while for Glenn Adamson, craft is ‘not a classification of objects, institutions or people’, but rather ‘a way of doing things . . . an active, relational concept’, embodied most powerfully in skill.⁵⁴

Their contemporary, Howard Risatti, adhered to a more conventional but equally illuminating concept of craft, premised on the mastery of specific techniques and materials in the creation of objects that have ‘practical physical functionality’.⁵⁵ Furthermore, he noted, ‘because craft objects are by their very nature intended to be physiologically functional, they are objects made for the body and bodily “action”; therefore they must accommodate the body and be somatically oriented’.⁵⁶ Critical questioning of ‘functionality’ as a defining attribute of craft emerged during the Craft Revival and Studio Craft movements of the 1960s,⁵⁷ and debates around ‘post-functionality’, as well as ‘post-disciplinary practice’,⁵⁸ among makers, benefactors and scholars of craft gathered greater momentum during the third wave.

Attempts at staking boundaries around what craft is and what it is *not* do have valuable purpose. It is important, I contend, to safeguard the word against being used to define any and every creative endeavour that involves some level of skill – or, more problematically, being usurped by manufacturers to market mass-produced wares with auras of exclusivity and suggestions of hands-on attention to detail. Left unclaimed and undefended, the term ‘craft’ risks being rendered vacuous – and, so too, what craftspeople do and what they make.

In taking an inventory of the various attributes or defining features of craft that were identified by contributing authors to my book *Craftwork as Problem Solving*, I arrived at a list of twenty-two items. In alphabetical order, they were apprenticeship, attitude (qualified by commitment and patience, among other virtues), autonomy (over one’s production), bespoke, the body (in motion), design-and-making, economic precarity (i.e. vulnerability to fluctuating economies and markets), expertise, focus, functionality, identity (in terms of qualifications and professional status), innovation, locality (i.e. place-based), materials, problem solving, social politics, risk (in hand-work), the (perceptual) senses, skill, standards, tools and technologies, and tradition.⁵⁹

In reviewing the substantial literature on craftwork from different times and places around the world, it is striking that the members of any given craft community employ varying combinations of the above attributes in defining themselves, their practices and the objects they make. Some attributes may be especially emphasised and others disregarded or even unrecognised as belonging to their tradition of craftwork.⁶⁰ Indeed, each feature forms part of

an overarching and ever-shifting discourse on craft that no longer has clear-cut national or regional boundaries. For this reason, and in acknowledging the ‘messiness’ of the term, I propose that craft be framed as a ‘polythetic category’.

A polythetic category is one in which any of its members possess some, but not necessarily all of the properties attributed to that category. Most conveniently, polythetic categories possess an inherent capacity and flexibility to shed and absorb new ‘defining’ criteria; thus, the polythetic nature of craft licenses the inclusion of further attributes or the removal of existing ones as craft practices and craft identities evolve and transform. The power of a polythetic category lies in the fact that although no single property is essential for membership, popular belief maintains that the category is stable, and is so more or less across time and space.⁶¹ Thus, while it may be impossible to conclusively define craft or to reach any final consensus on its constituents, engaging with its polythetic nature does make the anthropological, historical or sociological task of determining what is *not* craft in a given context far more practicable.

Despite differences in the ways that craftspeople might define themselves and what they do, there are, to my mind, two seriously injurious experiences shared by large numbers of contemporary makers around the world, including fine woodworkers and furniture makers in the United Kingdom. First, whether practising in Europe, Asia, Africa, the Americas or elsewhere, craftspeople are operating in a surplus global economy in which the combination of mass production, cheaper prices and throwaway culture has steadily diminished demand for handcrafted wares and rendered bespoke production redundant or, at best, an inessential luxury – or poses an imminent threat to do so.⁶² The surplus economy is coupled with the serial displacement of production, whereby companies producing handmade wares transfer or outsource operations to factories and workshops in countries with lower labour costs – and, typically, with less stringent health and safety policies. As noted by economic sociologist Wolfgang Streeck: ‘The hellish Manchester of early industrialisation still exists, but on the global periphery.’⁶³ The combination of these phenomena has exacerbated an already precarious economic existence that countless artisans endure, most acutely in the Global South.⁶⁴

Indeed, while affluent countries of the Global North, or what is conventionally categorised as ‘the West’, have witnessed an upswing over the past two decades in the reskilling of local craftspeople and growing patronage for bespoke and handmade items, many nations in the Global South have experienced rapid deskilling as an effect of industrialisation, economic development and international trade deals that unleash floods of inexpensive, mass-produced imported (plastic) goods into local economies.⁶⁵ Of the

women and men who continue to eke out a living as craftspeople, significant numbers have been compelled to turn their hands to producing folk crafts for tourist markets and collectors. Not only are those markets highly unpredictable and subject to volatile global politics, economic recessions, pandemics and changing aesthetic trends, but what makers make is also disconnected from original purposes and functions, and decontextualised from local values. In his study of the predicament of Cretan craftsmen, anthropologist Michael Herzfeld shrewdly observed that:

Artisans face a chilling choice among accepting their role as the picturesque bearers of an obsolescent tradition, becoming merchants in a rat race that most of them are destined to lose, or joining an international labour force in which the price of modernity is to lose one's identity as a skilled and individual personality.⁶⁶

The second widely shared experience, and one that this book scrutinises at closer range, is the persistently low social status borne by craftspeople, even by many who profited from the third wave. Though British makers in several craft disciplines have benefited from increases in income and greater public recognition and appreciation for what they create, handwork continues to be stigmatised as a 'second-track' for those lacking academic aptitude. Two years after the 2008 financial crisis, the senior conservator for the Royal Household commented: 'The crafts have survived in the UK but they need support and a much better attitude towards technical skills because there is still the deep-seated view that working with your hands is somehow a second-rate career.'⁶⁷ This issue resurfaced repeatedly during my research.

For craftwork in Europe, the roots of its often low (and sometimes denigrated) status relative to that enjoyed by 'intellectuals', white-collar workers and the merchant classes can be traced back to ancient Greece. In *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle distinguished between *techné*, translated as 'craft', and *epistemé*, translated as 'scientific' knowledge, which at that time referred specifically to geometry, mathematics and logic. For Aristotle, *techné* is concerned with contingent reality, or the bringing into existence of things that can either exist or not, such as the artefacts produced by a craftsman (*technitai*). *Epistemé*, by contrast, is concerned with necessary 'truths' that stand apart from (and presumably above) the world of everyday contingencies. The philosopher supplied a straightforward example of their differences:

A carpenter's interest in the right angle is different from the geometrician's: the former is concerned with it only so far as it is useful for his work, but the other wants to know what it is or what its properties are, because his gaze is set on the truth.⁶⁸

This ancient Greek distinction supplied foundations for the modern-day conceptual split between theory and practice, which has in turn buttressed a hierarchy of value between work of the mind and that of the hand – and,

correspondingly, between university education and vocational training. The divide, along with its colossal social and economic ramifications, was exported around the globe with European colonialism and seeded by imperialist policies in the thinking, social-class politics, constructed ethnicities and educational systems of the Other.

In England and Wales, the divide between classroom learning at a desk (or computer terminal) and embodied practices of ‘making knowledge’ in handwork became further entrenched with the introduction of the National Curriculum in 1988. The aftermath of the Education Reform Act witnessed the further closure of woodworking and metalworking shops in schools, and their replacement in some cases with courses in design technology.

The forthcoming chapters make it plain that learning to relate directly to and create with materials entails a profound immersion in problem solving. Without access to that in schools, children are being denied the opportunity to develop an essential skillset: one that enables them simultaneously to conceptualise, emotionally respond to and physically engage with complex situations. This knowhow can be carried by them into adulthood and into whatever line of work they enter or career they pursue. The current curriculum, with objectives to prepare students for a narrow spectrum of the job market, is in fact equipping girls and boys with specific occupational skills that presently have a half-life of ‘about five years, and quickly shortening’.⁶⁹ In 2016, the World Economic Forum reported that an estimated ‘65% of children entering primary school today will ultimately end up working in completely new job types that don’t yet exist’.⁷⁰ It is therefore both a failure and an injustice on the part of government, educational institutions and society more generally to forgo more rounded forms of learning that unify body and mind in tasks of critical, exploratory thinking and that incite passion for creating and problem solving.

This book is a retort to the dehumanising trend of deskilling. My goal, as both an academic and a maker, is not merely to promote global appreciation for the learning, skill and knowledge at the heart of craftwork, but also to ignite a positive revaluation of creative handwork as a vehicle for individual fulfilment and wellbeing.

MY MOVE TO WOODWORKING

Over a period of thirteen years, I carried out anthropological fieldwork with teams of masons on building sites in West Africa and Arabia, studying their apprenticeship systems and the ways in which skilled trade knowledge was learned and practised in predominantly Islamic urban contexts. Two of the cities in which I worked were UNESCO World Heritage sites. That interna-

tional status, with its accompanying rules, regulations and expectations, had a significant bearing on what was built in terms of materials, structure, scale and architectural expression, and, on who was deemed qualified to build the buildings. While practices were framed by local and international discourses on ‘tradition’ and continuity, the master masons I laboured alongside tactically improvised and strategically innovated.⁷¹ This was part and parcel of everyday problem solving on site, but it also served to meet the changing needs and tastes of a contemporary clientele and, on occasion, to satisfy masons’ personal ambitions to concoct hallmark solutions or features and establish reputations.

To more fully consider the tensions between modernity and tradition, between the processes of globalisation and the politics of place, and between ‘useless toil’ and worthy work, it became necessary to include a Western case study of craft training and practice within the scope of my comparative research. A grant application to Britain’s Economic and Social Research Council in 2004 secured me a three-year Research Fellowship,⁷² which included two years of fieldwork at the historic Building Crafts College in Stratford, in London’s East End.

Since its founding in 1893, the Building Crafts College has been governed by the Worshipful Company of Carpenters, one of the oldest liveryies (i.e. guilds) in the City of London and one of the few to keep an active hand in craft training, the awarding of qualifications, and the regulation of standards and practice.⁷³ The Livery’s objective in opening the trade school was to safeguard traditional building crafts against sweeping changes wrought by industrialisation and mass production. The college remit has changed over time, but when I began fieldwork there in the autumn of 2005, it retained a strong sense of its founding spirit, committed to fostering craft excellence and perpetuating building-craft traditions in wood, stonemasonry and leadwork. Like an English woodcarver’s training in the seventeenth-century workshop of Grinling Gibbons or the contemporary apprenticeship systems I studied in West Africa and Arabia, learning at the Building Crafts College was first and foremost practice-based.

Although all of my fieldwork to date had been with masons, I chose to sign up to the College’s two-year City & Guilds-accredited programme in fine woodworking, which included tuition in both architectural joinery and furniture making. At the time, a number of other colleges in England had well-established and well-reputed programmes in furniture making: notably Buckinghamshire Chilterns University College, London Metropolitan University and Rycote College. Despite the decades-long erosion of Britain’s manufacturing sector, the furniture-making industry survived and there remain many thousands of companies and workshops, big and small, producing furniture in a variety of materials. The near-mythical Parnham College,

founded and run by renowned furniture maker-in-wood John Makepeace, had shut its doors in 2000, but short courses in ‘fine furniture making’ were being offered in the refined grounds of West Dean College in West Sussex and other such places around England. Established makers, too, were offering private training and tuition in their own workshops, thereby enriching learning with a modicum of work experience in a commercial environment.⁷⁴

The Building Crafts College, however, was of special interest for a number of reasons. For practical purposes, I lived in London and the College presented an easily accessible field site. For scholarly reasons, I was intrigued by the College’s long history and its strong links with the ancient Carpenters’ Livery Company and thus with the ever-fascinating Square Mile. The small student numbers on the fine woodworking programme suited my field methodology, which I will describe in more detail in Chapter 1 – and, close to my heart, the course prioritised hand tools and focused exclusively on timber.

The affinity I have for timber as a material has always been strong, and definitely stronger than that for stone or brick. I appreciate the warmth of timber and the endless variety of hues, figure and textures that it presents, and I relish its comforting smell when freshly cut or planed. Additionally, the process of assembling in carpentry is more appealing to my architectural sensibilities than the subtractive nature of woodcarving, woodturning or banker masonry (i.e. banker masons typically work in a workshop, shaping blocks of stone with tools). This point perhaps demands further explanation.

The primary objective of the one-year full-time banker masonry course at the College was to train students in traditional techniques, which included cutting stone, squaring-up, boning and dressing, and then to progress them to architectural stone carving, comprising the production of individual building components. All of these tasks entailed bringing a predefined and measured three-dimensional form out of a homogeneous block of raw material through meticulous processes of subtraction. These processes were mainly carried out in the time-honoured manner of the trade, wielding a mallet, chisels, a metal straight edge and a square.

A trainee might work at a single block of stone for many weeks or longer, cutting, chipping and tapping in highly controlled ways and continually making small adjustments to the angle of the chisel and force of their mallet. A stonemason’s skill is therefore qualified by their ability to proficiently employ a set of unchanging technical principles in the precise execution of a prefigured form. In their study with conservation stonemasons working on Glasgow Cathedral, anthropologists Thomas Yarrow and Sián Jones remarked that the mason’s skill is ‘in explicit opposition to creativity’, while their pride as a craftsperson is instead vested in ‘the discipline and patience required to actualise a tradition which remains fundamentally unchanged’.⁷⁵

Students at the College also learned about setting out masonry structures, which involved complex geometric calculations, technical drawing, and the production of templates and moulds. A cohort of trainees might collectively plan and create, for example, a Romanesque arch or the tracery of a Gothic-style window over the course of a year. The principal task of the individual student, however, was to produce one or more of the solid components for these collaboratively produced architectural assemblages.⁷⁶

The fine woodwork trainees, by contrast, individually produced full units of architectural joinery (in progression, a casement window, frame-and-panel door and staircase) and then, at the end of year one and throughout year two, pieces of furniture, culminating in a bespoke designed chair. All such carpentry projects naturally involved the subtractive processes of trimming, planing, cutting and possibly shaping planks of timber, but they also involved assembly, which was generally achieved by each trainee on their own using traditional joinery techniques (e.g. lap, bridge, mortise-and-tenon, dovetail and tusk-tenon joints). However, students also had licence to improvise and devise novel techniques for assembling their creations, as will be discussed in Chapters 4 and 10. In the additive process of assembling the finished components of, for example, a tool chest or a bedside cabinet, spatial relations were explored, solid planes and voids were juxtaposed, and interiors and exteriors came into existence.

Like my earlier overseas studies with masons, signing up to a community of woodworkers in London allowed me to engage directly and regularly in the very regime of training and social politics of craftwork that I had set out to investigate. Term commenced in mid-September and ended in early July, and the weekly schedule emulated the average full-time working week in the building trades. At the bench, with tools and timber in hand, I, like my fellow trainees, could at once dwell in creative contemplation, coordinated (and sometimes not-so-coordinated) physical movement and the dynamic social interactions that transpired among workshop instructors and students. Both individual learning and collaborative forms of knowledge-making were realised in the recurrent intersections between these three activities.

The instructors and their assistants imparted trade-related theory in dedicated lecture rooms or during impromptu ‘toolbox’ discussions in the workshop. As trainees, we regularly collaborated to complete our workbook assignments, either in the College library or after hours, huddled around a table in the nearby Builders Arms pub. We made fieldtrips, including one to the botanical gardens at Kew where we learned about the growth cycles of trees, the differences between hardwoods and softwoods, the choice species used in carpentry and the properties of their timber. We were taught to systematically mark the face and edge of our timber with a soft-lead pencil and, little by little, we acquired the rich vocabulary for the component parts of

the architectural joinery and furniture that we made and the hardware they required. We were tutored in technical drawing, preparing cutting lists and calculating project costs. We were introduced to a vast array of traditional hand tools in succession, as well as to a more limited number of power tools that we were permitted to use and to the deafening machinery in the mill. We dismantled wood planes and machines to maintain and repair them and to sharpen their blades. We were drilled in health and safety regulations, disciplined in timekeeping and etiquette, and obliged to sport appropriate attire and personal protection equipment when necessary. We became practised in taking up good posture at our workbenches, in lifting and moving heavy loads, and in executing our tool-wielding tasks with economy and rhythmic efficiency. We also learned to look and to touch in more discerning ways, which enabled us to critically evaluate our own work in progress and the work of our fellow trainees. The target was to achieve perfection in joinery, with tolerances of less than a millimetre.

Over the intensive two-year period, we gave shape and direction to our ambitions for becoming craftspeople and we discovered personal potential and limitations. Each of us came to realise that ‘patience’ was the essential ingredient to success in fine woodworking. Frustrations over making mistakes were gradually reframed as opportunities for practice, which in turn built confidence in our abilities to repair and make good. We learned the challenges of teamwork and the benefits of sharing best practice. Despite differences in age and in our social and cultural backgrounds, the members of the cohort formed strong social bonds and even friendships that extended beyond the bounds of the training college and, in some cases, well beyond the duration of the programme.

My cohort was made up of nine trainees, all of whom were male. Despite College ambitions for gender diversity in its programmes, only one woman had applied that year to the fine woodworking department and she ultimately declined the offer of a place. Four of the men in my cohort were teenagers and recent finishers of secondary education with GCSE (General Certificate of Secondary Education) qualifications. The remaining trainees were mature students, ranging in age from their early twenties to their late thirties. I was the eldest, at thirty-nine years old. The four teenagers had taken wood-shop classes at school, but prior experience ‘in the tools’ varied considerably among the older students, ranging from nearly none to possessing intermediate skills in joinery.

All the mature students had abandoned other lines of employment and the security of steady wages in their quest for a new and what they hoped would be a more satisfying way of living and working. In my writing, I coin them collectively as ‘vocational migrants’ and not ‘career changers’, which is the more conventional term.⁷⁷ I use this term because each one had made

a deliberate decision to pursue carpentry as a practice to which they would dedicate their whole person – heart, mind and body. The life experiences they brought to their learning and the thoughtful aspirations they had for the future made their contributions to my study especially rich.

The first and second-year cohorts of fine woodworkers shared a bright and airy workshop. There was ample social interaction between them at the bench, in the canteen and at the pub, and there was occasional overlap in their curricular activities. This allowed me to expand my community of study to include the trainees from the cohorts ahead of and behind my own. Out of a total of twenty-four trainees over three cohorts, just two of the students were women, both of whom were ‘vocational migrants’.⁷⁸ The fine-grained study of woodworking practices that I carried out was complemented by a series of recorded in-depth interviews with each student at progressive stages of their training. The interviews explored social backgrounds and career motivations, and they documented changes in the students’ thinking about both the programme structure and their personal development as craftspeople – or ‘designer-makers’ or ‘artist-craftsmen’, as some alternatively labelled themselves.

I also recorded lengthy interviews with a handful of recent graduates of the programme to discover where their training and qualifications were taking them, and with the instructors and shop assistants of the fine woodwork and bench joinery courses to learn about their backgrounds, expertise and teaching philosophies. In parallel with my research at the College, I met with and interviewed established furniture makers in England and other individuals in the industry who illuminated my thinking about contemporary trends, green agendas, politics and economies in the trade.

THE MINDFUL BODY IN WOODWORKING

A distinct but equally important line of inquiry of my research was to investigate the role that the motor domains of our cognition play in learning, simulating, rehearsing and communicating skilled practice. The aim was to contribute to a theory of human knowledge that begins from the premise that ‘knowing’ is an emergent state of mind-body engaged in and with the immediate social and physical environment. My thesis on the embodied ways that hand skills are communicated (and thereby learned) is grounded in a model of interactive alignment and shared utterance in dialogue and in the theory of Dynamic Syntax, both of which were developed in the field of linguistics.⁷⁹

In brief, the model of interactive alignment that I adopted describes how the mental representations of a speaker and a listener are individually and

incrementally constructed on-line (i.e. in the real time of dialogue), word-by-word, over the course of an utterance, and how parity in their mental representations is achieved (or not). Furthermore, it elegantly models the event of shared utterance, whereby the listener makes a cognitive ‘leap’ to complete their own context-dependent mental representation before the speaker has finished their utterance, and the listener interrupts by supplying the final word(s). If, however, the mental representation constructed by the listener is incongruous with that which the initial speaker had in mind to communicate, then the conclusion to the shared utterance supplied by listener-cum-speaker has the potential to either derail the dialogue or, more interestingly, take the dialogue in a new or different direction, and so on. The latter possibility makes plain that dialogue is not an articulation of fixed things already known, but rather is a kind of ‘knowing in progress’. The state of knowing is one of constant flux, update and transformation.

With these seminal ideas and with a focus on craftwork, I explored the occurrence of what I coined ‘shared performance’ between interacting craftspeople. In an earlier publication, I summarised my background thinking on this subject and the questions it spawned as follows:

[In] playing sports, dancing, working, or making things together, practitioners regularly co-ordinate their activities, and at some point, mid-action, one may intervene and successively complete the motions of another’s goal-directed sequence. In other words, co-practitioners swap roles as observers and generators (or parsers and producers, respectively) in performing tasks. We all regularly do so in the co-ordinated (and sometimes not-so-co-ordinated) tasks and activities that we do together, and that we have been doing since our days in the childhood nursery. Probing this seemingly mundane, everyday occurrence unleashes a multitude of questions concerning the ways that shared activity, and consequently shared productions of knowledge, is achieved. What are the processes (cognitive, motor and otherwise) that enable an observer to leap to the conclusion of what their co-practitioner has in mind to do, intercept the activity, and complete the task? How, as in shared utterance, do parser-cum-producers introduce new directions to the motor-based interpretations that co-practitioners are simultaneously constructing as they work together, and thereby introduce change to skilled practice? And, what role, too, does the environment of tools, materials, fellow actors, artefacts, and physical setting play in the interpretation and generation of activity?⁸⁰

My further thinking about these questions was supported by the theory of Dynamic Syntax. Dynamic Syntax foregrounds a model of incremental, on-line parsing to describe the cognitive processes involved in both interpreting *and* generating an utterance. During the first decade of the twenty-first century, researchers employing Dynamic Syntax theory focused almost exclusively on spoken dialogue, with more recent excursions into the performance of free improvisation music.⁸¹ My own research, however, explored

its possible applications to the communication of hand skills between two or more craftspeople working together in close proximity or on a shared task, and with a minimal exchange of words. Drawing inspiration from emerging theories and findings in the cognitive sciences and neurosciences, I considered how complex imitation, like that performed by an apprentice learning a new skill alongside their master, involves parsing the master's display into a composite of familiar actions and sequences that can be (re)produced, honed and transformed. Parsing and generating movement, I contended, occur principally in our motor domains of cognition and are grounded in motor-based concepts; in other words, the activities of interpreting, understanding and mentally rehearsing a skilled activity are seated in the very same neural networks that spring us into action.

Dedicated accounts of my research using Dynamic Syntax theory have been published separately.⁸² However, the interest in nonverbal communication percolates through much of the ethnography and anthropological thinking in this book – albeit in a more gentle manner and with fewer detours into the deep theory.

THE CENTRALITY OF PROBLEM SOLVING IN CRAFTWORK

Ongoing developments in my explorations of embodied ways of thinking and knowing returned me to the Building Crafts College in 2012 and 2013 to conduct new research, this time supported by a British Academy Mid-Career Fellowship. The field-based project (which, on this occasion, did not involve an apprentice-style methodology) investigated the intertwined relationship between our brains, our hands and the tools that we use. Over the duration of an academic year at the College, I spent a full day each week with the first-year cohort of fine woodworkers conducting one-on-one interviews and, with a smaller selection of willing trainees, making frequent digital video recordings of their practices at the workbench. Video recordings were made each week with the same individuals while they used chisels, wood planes and handsaws to complete course assignments.

A professional cameraman assisted with the visual recording exercises. By positioning our two cameras at 90° to one another – one in front and the other to one side of a student's workbench – we simultaneously captured their tool-wielding activities from both angles. The complementary recordings enabled me to take stock of and examine the grasps, postures and gestures that comprised a trainee's tooling actions on their timber. More importantly, by comparing and contrasting an entire series of video footage made with a single student over the year, I was able to observe and analyse progressions (or their absence) in the economy and efficiency

with which they employed a particular tool, as well as developments of individual tactics and of a personal style or ‘signature’ in their movements. Ultimately, my objective was to systematically document the microphysics of skill learning.

Additionally, data capture with the first-year cohort allowed me to scrutinise solo and collaborative problem-solving sessions at the workbench. Collaborative sessions between a student and the instructor typically entailed a mix of spoken discourse, hands-on exploration and experimentation, and practical demonstration. The recordings were therefore richly laden with information to mine. The models of shared utterance and shared performance that I had previously explored and developed were especially helpful for deliberating upon and accounting for the making of knowledge between the two parties as they collaboratively addressed and conquered challenges.

Creative problem solving is integral to every stage of carpentry production: from design and making to marketing and pricing, to delivery and installation.⁸³ Solving a problem draws heavily on past learning and practical experiences that are directly or tangentially related to the challenge at hand. At the same time, it relies on the ability to imagine options, forecast outcomes, weigh choices and strategise a plausible way forward. To do so in a manner that appears effortless is a defining trait of mastery. Like all makers who work with natural materials and hand tools, carpenters must be open to risk when experimenting with new solutions or with variations on old ones, and be amenable to backtracking or even starting all over again. Again, the esteemed virtue of patience is indispensable.

Because of the array of skills and the many kinds of intelligence called upon in problem solving, this activity features throughout this book and constitutes the central theme of Chapter 8. The ability to solve problems and overcome challenges in the flow of work is empowering. Crafting solutions builds confidence, motivates the desire to reach further, and heightens the sense of agency that makers have over their production and the contribution they make to society. Put simply, it is a vehicle to self-discovery, fulfilment and pleasurable work.⁸⁴

RUMINATIONS ON THE ‘PURSUIT OF PLEASURABLE WORK’

In discussing the title of this book with an academic colleague, she challenged me to define what I meant by ‘pleasure’.⁸⁵ The search for an answer returned me to foundational texts in ancient Greek philosophy and took me to current debates on the concept. I therefore take pause to offer explanation of the title and share my ruminations on the meaning of ‘pleasurable’ with the curious reader.

I settled on the book title at an early point in my study, when the motivations of fellow trainees on the woodworking programme were becoming clearer to me.⁸⁶ In individually interviewing them and during tea-break exchanges, I was struck by the degree to which the sociopolitical perspectives they articulated and their aspirations for life and work resonated in diverse ways with the spirit of William Morris' socialist utopian writings. Notably, this was despite the fact that few were aware at the time of the great Arts and Crafts figure, much less the politically charged speeches he delivered in London and elsewhere.

The wording of the title pays tribute to the style of Morris' prose and draws inspiration from ideals powerfully expressed in his socialist utopia *News from Nowhere* (1890) and his essays 'Useful Work versus Useless Toil' (1884) and 'The Relations of Art to Labour' (1884).⁸⁷ In 'Useful Work', Morris posed the following question: 'What is the nature of the hope which, when it is present in work, makes it worth doing?' The answer, he believed, is threefold: 'the hope of pleasure in rest, the hope of pleasure in our using what it makes, and the hope of pleasure in our daily creative skill'.⁸⁸

In English, 'a pursuit' can refer to the engagement in an activity of a specific kind, typically one that is done for leisure, outside the regular work schedule. In this sense, woodworking qualifies as 'a pursuit' for the hobbyist. A pursuit, however, may also be the defining activity of an individual in their vocation: for example, a lifelong pursuit of justice, truth, God, wealth, knowledge or mastery of an art, craft or trade. The intended signification of 'pursuit' in the title corresponds to the latter. More specifically, 'the pursuit of' denotes the attempt at attaining a goal, often entailing duration and demanding considerable effort, and possibly a measure of discomfort or sacrifice on the part of the pursuer.

All of my fellow fine-woodwork trainees were in pursuit of new trade skills and knowledge, as well as the official certifications that would clear the way to new job opportunities. Additionally, and perhaps more saliently, the majority, and especially those with previous experience in other employment sectors, were in pursuit of alternative ways of working and living that would be more integrative of the whole person and bring pleasure to being.

Before grappling with 'pleasurable', I first define 'work'. The word 'work' operates in the title as both a noun and verb. In its noun form, work refers to the compilation of mental and physical operations involved in doing 'the job' of, in this case, fine woodworking. As a verb, it stands for the activity of bringing a desired quality, consistency and shape to not only the timber (i.e. to work the material) but also, importantly, to the personhood of the carpenter. In other words, the pursuit of woodworking for the majority of those I trained with was not merely to work with wood in order to 'make a living'; it was also about engaging in an activity that would foster those values, ethics

and worldviews to which they aspired and would thereby lead to self-fulfilment. A sense of fulfilment is entwined with that of pleasure.

Evidently, ‘pleasurable’ is the key word here. Derived from the Old French *plaisir*, the root, pleasure, is conventionally defined as the ‘feeling of happy satisfaction and enjoyment’ or as ‘an event or activity from which one derives’ such a feeling of happy satisfaction. Pleasure can also refer to ‘sensual gratification’ that is experienced with any of the body’s stimulated senses.⁸⁹ However, the signification of ‘pleasure’, and consequently ‘pleasurable’, has proven far more complicated for philosophers, novelists and poets, psychologists, political agitators and even neuroscientists. In her investigation into its meaning in the works of eighteenth-century intellectuals, Rowan Boyson pinpoints the ‘weird difficulty’ that pleasure presents.⁹⁰ Philosopher Laura Sizer observes that: ‘Philosophers disagree over whether it’s a feeling, an attitude, or something else; whether it is the excitement that accompanies the pursuit of certain activities, or the contentment that marks the satisfaction of desire.’⁹¹ The history of thinking about the concept is fascinating, but equally enormous and unwieldy. I therefore attempt only to introduce a few of the most seminal ideas about pleasure and stake my position in the debates.

Hēdonē (ἡδονή), translated from the ancient Greek as ‘pleasure’, was an important subject in the philosophical investigations of Plato, Aristotle and Epicurus into what motivates us as humans. I ground my exploration of pleasure in these three because, in large measure, they framed the thinking that has persisted around the concept to the present day.

To begin, Plato’s *Philebus* is a Socratic dialogue dedicated to describing the good life (i.e. the life of the philosopher) and the way people ought to live.⁹² Pleasure and knowledge take prominence in the dialogue between Socrates, Protarchus and Philebus, the latter of whom espouses hedonism or the pursuit of pleasure for its own sake. Like many of the great thinkers who preceded and followed him, Plato holds that the relation between pleasure and pain is as oppositional correlates along a continuum,⁹³ and claims that pleasure is remedial of pain and replenishing of lack. In doing so, he squarely refutes hedonism by exposing its inherent contradiction: in desiring to maximise both the quantity and intensity of their (bodily and sensual) pleasure, Plato deduces that the hedonist must also desire to maximise the quantity and intensity of their pains. Pain – certainly in its extreme forms – is not a desirable element in the ‘good life’ idealised by Plato.

While acknowledging that pleasure of certain kinds and in moderate intensity does have a place in the good life,⁹⁴ Plato was wary of its latent potential to interrupt the mind at work. Indeed, pleasure in itself is conceived as being deceptive, in that it appears to be good when it is not. In scrutinising Plato’s distrust of pleasure, present-day philosopher Jessica Moss concludes that: ‘When we devote ourselves to pleasure, we accept a counterfeit reality

and fail to seek out the true world that lies beyond appearances.⁹⁵ Plato accordingly consigned pleasure to operations of the irrational in humankind, and in opposition to the rational aim of knowledge. Notably, however, pleasure and knowledge were not conceived as being mutually exclusive, but Plato did believe that ‘admissible’ pleasures should remain merely the means to attaining the real goal, which for him is knowledge. More concisely, pleasure should not be mistaken as a goal in itself.

Epicurus, in contrast to Plato and his exaltation of reason over the senses, was an ardent empiricist, believing that the sensations we perceive, including pleasure, are a reliable source of information and truth about the world. According to Epicurus, pleasure was indeed a ‘good’, and even the highest good in that: ‘It is the starting point of every choice and of every aversion, and to it we come back, inasmuch as we make feeling the rule by which to judge of every good thing.’ ‘Choice-worthy’ pleasure (distinct from prodigal pleasure or abandon to sensual delights) is ‘the absence of pain in the body and of trouble in the soul’ and is thus a fundamental component of a good life. For Epicurus, a good life – one defined by the virtues of prudence, honour and justice – is also a life of pleasure, and vice versa: ‘For the virtues have grown into one with a pleasant life, and a pleasant life is inseparable from them.’⁹⁶ It should be noted that the Epicurean take on pleasure comes a long stride closer than Plato to my interpretation of the pleasure that can arise *in* craftwork.

Of additional significance to my exploration, Epicurus distinguished between pleasure experienced in motion and activity, such as joy and delight, and that experienced during a state of rest, such as peace of mind and freedom from pain.⁹⁷ Philosophers often refer to these as kinetic and katastematic forms of pleasure respectively. Thus, kinetic pleasure may be found while engaged in the pursuit of satisfying a desire (e.g. drinking water when thirsty), and a katastematic one experienced in the state of having already satisfied it (e.g. having quenched one’s thirst).⁹⁸ For Epicurus, both kinds of pleasure can occur in the body and the soul (mind); however, he considers the absence of pain or deficiency (or the replenishment of lack) in the soul (mind) to be the highest good, and thus the ultimate goal: for, once ‘free from pain and fear . . . the tempest of the soul is laid’.⁹⁹

Although Epicurus characterised katastematic pleasure as a static one, associating it with a state of rest and peace of mind, it does not preclude experiencing such pleasure while engaged in an activity. In the words of philosopher Julia Annas, Epicurus’ category of static pleasure is experienced ‘when functioning without interference . . . the pleasure of normal untrammelled activity’.¹⁰⁰ While an example of such activity might be mindful contemplation, it might also be a physical activity, such as carpentry. Psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi uses the term ‘flow’ to describe that op-

timal state of pleasure and happiness experienced by athletes or artisans, for example, when fully absorbed in a challenging but achievable task in which action and awareness are seamlessly merged.¹⁰¹ Repetition, too, can give rise to *katastemic* pleasure, whereby the metrical reiteration of micro-gestures and actions that lead toward a desired goal induces a trance-like state of channelled concentration. In the same manner that athletes often describe the pleasure of being in full, unimpeded flow as being ‘in the zone’, so too did my fellow woodworkers when they found that ‘sweet spot’ of serene focus: body moving in controlled rhythm with the tool in hand and in harmonious exchange with the timber being worked.

It is important to acknowledge that pain, in a real physical sense, is a regular part of such pleasure-inducing activities. Aching muscles, inflamed joints or strained eyes may result from long hours of intense activity at the potter’s wheel, the loom or the carpenter’s bench. Artist Jenn Law noted that: ‘Many artisanal pursuits result in repetitive strain injuries, and that is certainly the case for me when printmaking and paper-cutting. I have worked so many consecutive hours on some paper cuts that I’ve lost feeling in my hand for days.’ But she qualified the pain by adding: ‘While engaged in that detailed, repetitive labour, there is definitely something deeply pleasurable about it. I think it has to do with “losing yourself” in the labour and the materials.’¹⁰² The relationship between pleasure and pain is therefore more nuanced than the ancient Greek’s model of a linear continuum suggests. Rather, a maker – or for that matter a musician or athlete – may simultaneously experience enrapture and the discomforts instantiated by being ‘in the zone’.¹⁰³

Returning to Julia Annas, she also pointed out the similarity between Epicurus’ notion of pleasure experienced in ‘normal untrammelled activity’ and that of Aristotle, for whom pleasure is the ‘unimpeded’ activity of our natural state.¹⁰⁴ For Aristotle, however, it is ‘happiness’ (Greek *eudaimonia*, *eudaimonia*) that is the final overall good to which our actions should be directed. This is because, when achieved, happiness is complete and self-sufficient. He distinguishes happiness from pleasure in a conceptually helpful way. The state of happiness, in contrast to pleasure, is ‘complete’ (or ‘final’) because it is sought for its own sake and not sought for the sake of attaining some other state. In other words, the pursuit of (choice-worthy) pleasure or even of good qualities, such as intelligence and honour, is for the sake of achieving happiness; yet, one does not pursue ‘happiness for *their* sake, or in general for any other reason’. Similarly, a state of happiness is ‘self-sufficient’ because happiness by itself ‘makes life desirable and in no way deficient’.¹⁰⁵

I would have described many of my fellow woodwork trainees, several of the college instructors and most of the established furniture makers I encountered during my research as ‘happy people’. However, I had no grounds for believing that any existed in an Aristotelian state of ‘completeness’,

whereby they had achieved happiness as a ‘final good’. In reality, I question the mortal likelihood of such achievement full stop. To greater or lesser degrees, quotidian worries impinged upon the lives of the woodworkers, as they do for everyone. Worries were experienced variously over finances, health, personal relationships, global issues, deficiencies in skills or knowledge, or future prospects. Consequently, they experienced periods of sadness and sometimes grief, and, in a few cases, depression. While presumably all wished to be ‘happy’, carpentry was just one activity (albeit a weighty one) of the many they pursued in their individual quests of that goal. When describing to me their aspirations for becoming fine woodworkers, some trainees in fact mentioned ‘happiness’. However, they more often spoke of engaging in work in which they could ‘take pride’, that produced ‘useful’ and ‘enduring’ things, that licensed ‘autonomy’ and ‘control’ over all stages of production, that would be embedded in a web of ‘meaningful’ (i.e. of worthy quality) social and professional relations with their suppliers of materials, their clients and a mutually supportive community of craftspeople, and, ultimately, that would be experienced as ‘pleasurable’. I therefore expound the relation of pleasure to work a little further.

Aristotle held that just as there is pleasure to thought and contemplation, there is also a pleasure corresponding to each of the senses, and that the perceptual activities (seeing, hearing, touching, etc.) are most pleasurable when each of the senses is directed towards the ‘worthiest of its objects’.¹⁰⁶ This notion he extended to encompass activity more generally, declaring that ‘pleasure does not occur without activity . . . and every activity is perfected by its pleasure’.¹⁰⁷ As pointed out by philosopher Talbot Brewer, Aristotle does not explain how pleasure perfects or completes an activity, but it appears that he held pleasure ‘to involve lively attentiveness to what we are doing’ in a way that renders it ‘wholehearted’.¹⁰⁸ In Aristotle’s words, ‘the mind is stimulated and exercises itself vigorously upon the object [of its activity]’.¹⁰⁹

The connections Aristotle drew between activity, attentiveness and pleasure were taken up by the mid-twentieth-century Oxford philosopher Gilbert Ryle in his cogitations on the nature of ‘pleasure’ (a term he uses interchangeably with ‘enjoyment’).¹¹⁰ Ryle contested the traditionally held account that pleasure is ‘an agreeable feeling’ in favour of the thesis that pleasure is a kind of ‘attention’: a wholehearted attending to the activity or object that is the source of pleasure. Such attending is characterised by being ‘so absorbed in an activity . . . that [one] is reluctant to stop, or even to think of anything else’.¹¹¹ According to Ryle’s account, an individual’s engagement in an activity is, notably, ‘*not a vehicle* for their pleasure’;¹¹² pleasure is not a concomitant (i.e. a naturally accompanying phenomenon) of the activity. In other words, to take pleasure is *not* taking pleasure *alongside* one’s activ-

ity, but rather it is instantiated *in* one's wholehearted engagement in that activity.¹¹³

Ryle's idea here corresponds closely with my findings about woodworking, namely that pleasure is not something separable from the activity that is being experienced as pleasant. When a carpenter experiences pleasure in planing an evenly figured plank of pungent yellow pine (*Pinus jeffreyi*), for example, they are not engaged in two separate activities: planing *and* having a pleasant experience. Rather, the pleasant experience is *in* planing; in the fully attentive, sensual and embodied engagement in the activity. I would add that pleasure can be instantiated not only in *doing* wood planing but also in the activity of contemplating it: in meditating on planning or preparing to do it, in rehearsing and simulating it in the motor domains of cognition, and in dwelling in the memory of having done it.

Over the millennia, scholars, religious leaders and political scientists have questioned whether pleasure is merely a selfish pursuit. Is it an indulgence that leads us astray? An experience whose only value is in and of itself? Or, conversely, can it possess a moral dimension? Can pleasure serve a wider good? Guided by Talbot Brewer's thoughtful reflections on the matter, I conclude by briefly addressing the positive potential in pleasure for both personal development and as an engine for social change.

Brewer's thinking builds on Ryle and, by turn, Aristotle, in that 'taking pleasure in an activity is tantamount to engaging in the activity while fervently desiring to do it and it alone'.¹¹⁴ But what is it, he asked, that drives such engagement to be 'wholehearted'?

In the preceding discussion, I cited the enduring idea that pleasure and pain constitute opposite poles on a continuum.¹¹⁵ Brewer contended that the duo also comes into play in qualifying our sense of self. We may be 'pained', for instance, when engaging in activities that give rise to a sense of our being 'at odds with ourselves', often manifested as thoughts that 'we ought to be other than we are'.¹¹⁶

Vocational migrants to the College's woodworking programme articulated clear examples of this when recounting their life journeys that had taken them to craftwork. They spoke of the painful misfit between the jobs they had been previously doing and the values, worldviews and aspirations they held, and the latent abilities they believed they possessed. One, a graduate in philosophy who delighted in putting his intellectual grasp of logic to hands-on repair and the creation of things, had found himself discontentedly working as a real-estate broker. Another, with an MPhil in social science and a resounding commitment to green issues, had pleasingly landed a position in an environmental agency, but soon discovered that realising effective green policy and legislation was repeatedly hampered by intractable bureaucratic mechanisms and competing financial priorities. In these two cases and many others, the

‘pain’ beneficially moved them onward in their quests to do something different: namely, work that promised fulfilment far beyond merely meeting basic necessities and that they perceived as having intrinsic social value.¹¹⁷

When we have a sense of the value or moral worth in a ‘genuinely good activity’, writes Brewer, the pleasure derived while engaging in it is instantiated not only when discovering that ‘sweet spot’ in the embodied work, as I described earlier, but also from the ‘harmony’ that we achieve as ‘agents’: agents with capacity to perceive ‘our actions, and ourselves manifest in those actions, as good’.¹¹⁸ When the latter arises, Brewer astutely observed that: ‘It alters the activity itself and enhances its value by making it . . . wholehearted.’¹¹⁹ Thus, engaging in activity or work of this nature provides ‘a valuable respite from the distractions and unwarranted doubts that so often leave us at odds with ourselves and alienated from our own doings’,¹²⁰ and, I would add, from the creative endeavours of others.

More than a century earlier, William Morris captured the spirit of that message when he wrote:

To all living things there is a pleasure in the exercise of their energies . . . A man at work, making something which he feels will exist because he is working at it and wills it, is exercising the energies of his mind and soul as well as of his body. Memory and imagination help him as he works. Not only his own thoughts, but the thoughts of the men of past ages guide his hands; and, as a part of the human race, he creates.¹²¹

It is hopefully clear by this point why the pursuit of pleasurable work lies at the heart of my book. It is my ‘wholehearted’ conviction that, as a society, we must ardently strive to make pleasure the basis for all work. The starting point, however, is to put pleasure at the heart of learning and enskilment at every level and in every branch of our educational system, from nursery schooling to higher education in all its varieties. Pleasure is, after all, the most essential ingredient in the making of a happier, healthier, purposeful, ethical and creative society – in short, a good one.

THE RIGHTS TO RESEARCH

Before concluding with an outline of the contents of this book, I offer a note on consent and representation.

The college director and instructors were fully informed about the nature of my anthropological study before I applied for a place on the fine woodwork programme in 2005, and again when I returned in 2012 to carry out the second project. Consent was generously granted for both and I benefited from the full cooperation of college administrators and teaching staff. At the very start of both fieldwork periods, I explained in detail my respective re-

search methods and objectives to fellow trainees and to the subjects of my ‘brain, hand and tool’ study. Consent was freely given by all involved in the research to publish my findings, to share their engrossing stories as crafts-people-in-the-making and to use their names. I have chosen to use the real names of the instructors and established furniture makers, but to change the names of the college trainees to protect their identities.

Throughout both periods of fieldwork, my invitations to interview were enthusiastically accepted by instructors and students alike, and I was regularly engaged by my peers in conversation during workshop hours and at break times about the issues I was exploring and the things I had observed. The Building Crafts College and the grand Hall of the Carpenters’ Company in the City of London have been among the many venues where I have delivered lectures on my woodworking research. In delivering my professorial inaugural lecture at the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS, University of London) in 2010, one of the most gratifying experiences that evening was having the support of close carpentry colleagues in the audience. I can only hope that my published accounts of their learning, skilled practice and dreams of satisfying work do them proud.

OUTLINE OF THE CONTENTS

In this final section, I summarise the remaining contents of the book. Although the progression of chapters loosely maps a timeline of events, it is possible to read them in any order and independently of one another, since each chapter grapples with a specific topic of investigation. For the reader less concerned with the histories of London’s Carpenters’ Company, the Building Crafts College and England’s apprenticeship system(s), and more interested in the ethnographically grounded study, you may wish to progress from Chapter 1 directly to Chapter 4. Notably, earlier versions of several chapters were published either as journal articles or as chapters in edited volumes, but all were substantially revised, elaborated and updated with new material for inclusion in this monograph.¹²²

As a prelude to the book’s core study of becoming a carpenter at a London vocational college, Chapter 1 offers a candid personal account of my journey into the anthropology of craftwork and deliberations on the apprentice-style method that I have developed and employed in the field. Training alongside the craftspeople I study has been key to my discoveries about the ways we as humans learn and become enskilled (and deskilled). The chapter revisits the main findings from earlier fieldwork projects in West Africa and Arabia, and examines the evolving array of research questions that defined not only what I was seeking but also how I went about finding it.

Chapters 2 and 3 furnish vital and fascinating histories of the carpentry trade in London, England's evolving apprenticeship system, and my chosen field site. In doing so, the two chapters also present an historical review of the British government's mix of neglect and intervention in skill training in step with changing economic ideologies and political ambitions. Chapter 2 begins with the colourful history of the Worshipful Company of Carpenters, reviewing its main functions and activities as a London livery from the thirteenth century to the late nineteenth century. This includes discussion of the seminal role played by the Company, its fellow liveries and the Crown in structuring apprenticeships and vocational training. Chapter 3 follows chronologically, taking its starting point in 1893 with the Carpenters' establishment of the Trades Training School in West London and concluding in 2001 when the institution, now known as the Building Crafts College, was relocated to Stratford, East London. It is there that I trained for two years, earning National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs) in wood occupations and a City & Guilds diploma in fine woodwork. It is also where I later returned to carry out dedicated studies on the relation between brain, hands and tools, and on problem solving at the bench.

The next seven chapters are grounded in my ethnographic observations and experiences of training and socialising at the College and in my anthropological analyses of skill, teaching, learning, problem solving, and individual pursuits of pleasurable and meaningful work. The stories and voices of my fellow students, our instructors and the established furniture makers who I interviewed take centre stage throughout. Their daily dialogue and the responses they offered to my open questions squarely challenge widely held misconceptions that craftspeople are good with their hands, but struggle to verbalise what they know. These men and women vividly recount their journeys into craftwork and thoughtfully articulate opinions, positions, hopes and concerns, at times with poetic insight and profound wisdom. Their ideas and reflections contribute directly to the theory and analysis I offer in the chapters. This book is therefore intended for a broad readership with shared interests in skill and making, including craftspeople themselves.

Chapter 4, 'Getting Started', supplies the backdrop to my initial two-year fieldwork project at the Building Crafts College. It begins with day one and progresses rapidly through the first term of the programme, introducing my fellow trainees, the college facilities at our disposal, and the curriculum of study and practical projects that we followed. The early relationships that formed between trainees quickly established a tight community, which in turn gave rise to a strongly (but not universally) shared ethos about craft, the value of handwork and our responsibility as makers to the natural environment. The tenor of the community was a significant factor in shaping the learning environment, as were the differences in social background, ex-

perience and expertise that individuals brought to the course. The chapter concludes with an account of the annual prize-giving ceremony at Carpenters' Hall, which both strengthened the sense of community and imputed a hierarchy of competency and achievement within it.

A medley of college woodwork instructors is formally introduced in Chapter 5, 'Crafting Craftspeople'. All came to teaching with an abundance of practical, on-site experience, and their recollections of becoming carpenters and working in urban and rural England provide fascinating historical illustrations of the transformations undergone by the wood industries. Reflections on years of teaching reveal critical changes and continuities in the country's vocational education framework. The passion they share for timber and the tools, and their dedication to passing that enthusiasm on to successive generations, comes through powerfully in their narratives. The importance of nurturing both physical and mental dexterity in trainees is underscored, and so too is the spiritual dimension of craftwork, which is positively manifested as confidence in oneself and pride in the things that one creates.

Chapter 6, 'Vocational Migrants to Craftwork', explores the motivations that propelled a majority of the mature trainees on the fine woodwork programme to abandon careers that afforded financial security in order to take up the tools and the risks involved in becoming craftspeople in the present era of mass consumerism and 'throwaway' culture. Each articulated their own reasoning, but all shared a longing to engage in work that they believed was meaningful, over which they felt they had control, and that promoted an authentic and aesthetic way of living in the world. In many respects, their aspirations were utopian. The chapter therefore begins with a survey of the roots of the socialist utopia in England, from the writings of Thomas More to William Morris, before examining its contemporary interpretations among craftspeople. For the vocational migrants featured in this chapter, and for some already established furniture makers, utopian narratives simultaneously encompass ideals about the nation's rural past and a post-industrial future that embraces an ethical green agenda for production and consumption.¹²³ What emerges, however, are the real political and marketplace challenges to achieving those ambitions. Indeed, following the thesis of sociologist Ruth Levitas,¹²⁴ the chapter reveals that utopias are not strategic plans for realising revolutionary ideologies or 'real worlds', but rather their key functions are to educate desire and direct human longing towards a future of more pleasing and enriching possibilities.

The desires expressed by vocational migrants in Chapter 6 to engage in work that fosters a greater sense of unity between mind and body, and between the maker, their tools and the natural materials they use, is further explored in Chapter 7, 'The Intelligent Hand'. The underlying message is that

engagement in skilled handwork can be an important conduit to emotional and spiritual wellbeing. The chapter considers how carpenter and tool reciprocally form one another and, more particularly, the way that hand tools become an extension of the body during the course of practical training and with use. With illustrations from the workshop, I show how mastering a tool modifies and expands both our conceptual and motor cognition, and strengthens the neural networks that bind them. In navigating the intricate connections between brain, hands and tools, my arguments draw upon related literature on skill and craft, and on research from the cognitive and neurosciences. Ultimately, it is hoped that the chapter encourages further thinking about our embodied relations to the material objects and implements with which we interact on a daily basis.

Nearly half a century ago, David Pye, Professor of Furniture Design at the Royal College of Art, declared that risk was inherent to handwork.¹²⁵ Trainee and seasoned craftsperson alike make mistakes, especially when experimenting with tools, techniques or new materials. The ability to correctly identify the source of an error and to make the necessary adjustments or repairs is essential to a maker's skillset. Chapter 8, 'Problem Solving at the Workbench', carries out a meticulous investigation into the ways that mistakes are identified and problems resolved by fine woodwork trainees in the workshop. My analysis adopts a 'situated cognition' approach, whereby problems of any kind are recognised as being anchored in concrete settings and resolved by reasoning in situation-specific ways.¹²⁶ The description and analysis focus on a one-on-one workbench tutorial session between the fine woodwork convenor and a first-year trainee with no previous woodworking experience. The complexity and density of the exchange that unfolds between the two in collaboratively resolving a practical carpentry problem is made apparent. While providing insights into the trainee's educational background, their preferred ways of learning and their motivations for becoming a woodworker, the chapter captures the dynamics of teaching and learning, and of communicating and interpreting techniques in language, and with the body.

Chapter 9, 'Managing Pleasurable Pursuits', revisits the theme of utopia. I consider how pastoral visions of work and life, and a strong emphasis at the College on practical bench time over classroom learning deflected efforts to acquire basic business skills as part of the curriculum. Additionally, a 'cult of the hand tool' emerged, most strongly amongst the vocational migrants. This was fuelled in large part by an active ignoring of the merits of machinery and downplaying the degree of skill involved in deftly and safely operating (the 'noisy') power tools. In combination, a perceived incompatibility between the ethics of craftwork and those of business, and an aversion to mechanised forms of practice curtailed chances of succeeding as a sole trader in the real

world of furniture making and architectural joinery. By considering some of the contradictory attitudes and desires expressed by trainees, the chapter probes the arts of ignoring and ‘not knowing’ that were employed to shield utopian ideals of ‘true’ craft and craftsmanship from corruption. At the end of the woodwork programme, when graduates confronted the enormity and sheer competitiveness of the design world beyond the College, many of the ideals and convictions that had been cultivated in the workshop became untethered. Gaps in knowledge that had been conveniently put to one side while training could no longer be ignored. The final section discusses how this awakening also tested the social bonds within the formerly tight-knit community of fine woodworkers.

Woodworking offers its practitioners constant challenge, and mastering the craft demands a persistent willingness to learn and develop. As revealed by the previous chapters, a carpenter’s skill is measured by their ability to creatively improvise, solve problems and incorporate new techniques and information into their working processes. However, skill-based knowledge does not merely grow and develop. Like the organic properties of the timber they work, a woodworker’s skill is susceptible to deterioration and decline. Chapter 10, ‘Skill and Ageing’, explores the development and the deterioration of craft skill over a human lifespan by bringing together narratives about work and life from four generations of carpenters. The generations are represented by a teenage trainee and an older vocational migrant who were enrolled on the College’s fine woodwork programme, an established middle-age designer-maker of furniture, and a retired carpenter who had been active in the trade for more than seventy years. By weaving their stories with findings from the neurosciences on brain plasticity, the chapter provides an ethnographic account of the kinds of transformation that occur in the nervous system as the body grows, practises and ages. It also conveys the need for craftspeople to reskill and to reorganise their working environments when injured or as they age so that they may stay active in their cherished trade.

In the ‘Epilogue’, I revisit several of the book’s main themes, beginning with an interview that a fellow woodworking student conducted with me about my personal experiences as a trainee. The interview was conducted at the midpoint of the fine woodwork programme and reveals my contemplations at the time about joining the vocational migrants to become a furniture maker. The Epilogue concludes with a reaffirmation of my longstanding convictions that skilled handwork be conferred greater status in all societies and that craft training be made an integral part of a rounded education that nurtures muscles, morals and mind. In order to advance in that direction, popular cultural definitions of ‘intelligence’ or ‘intellectual’ must be challenged and expanded to include, as a minimum, the skilled body at work and

play. After all, it is with bodies, and not merely words, that people communicate, interpret, improvise and negotiate – in a word, ‘craft’ – their ways of knowing and living in the world.

NOTES

1. See, for example, Adamson, *Thinking through Craft*, 166–67; Adamson, ‘Section Introduction: Contemporary Approaches’, 587; Luckman, *Craft*. At this same moment in history, anthropologist Rudi Collredo-Mansfeld stated in his study of artisans in non-Western contexts that artisans had proliferated in the global cultural economy, ‘perhaps no more strongly than in places that have embraced premarket reforms and global integration’, such as Mexico or Senegal (‘An Ethnography of Neoliberalism’, 115 and 124). Relatedly, artist and curator Ingrid Bachman observed that Western collectors tend to ‘fetishize the product of excessive and often skilled labour from an individual in the developed world, but disregard similar labour originating from the developing world’ (‘New Craft Paradigms’, 46).
2. Morris, Hargreaves and McIntyre, *The Market for Craft*, 6–8. See also Morris, Hargreaves and McIntyre, *Making It to Market*.
3. Morris, Hargreaves and McIntyre, *The Market for Craft*, 2.
4. See Crafts Council et al., *Craft in an Age of Change*, 44.
5. Abrahams, ‘Hands That Do Dishes’.
6. This sector broadly comprises makers working in the disciplines of ceramics, glass, stone, wood, iron, smithing of precious metals, jewellery-making, graphic crafts, heritage and traditional crafts (e.g. wheelwrights, broom-makers, thatchers, etc.), taxidermy, textiles, leather, musical instrument making, toys and automata (Creative & Cultural Skills and Crafts Council, *The Craft Blueprint*, 14).
7. For a fuller discussion about the history of the division made between art and craft, see Marchand, Introduction: ‘Craftwork as Problem Solving’, 3–10. For discussions of the high-level debates during the 1980s concerning competing definitions of ‘crafts’ and the commitments of the Crafts Council to the ‘artist crafts person’ as opposed to the vernacular crafts, see Harrod, *Crafts in Britain*, 409, 411–14, 421 and 460–61.
8. A 2011 survey of nearly 2,000 makers (which excluded hobbyists and makers of traditional and heritage craft) found that 10 per cent of makers in the UK worked in wood (excluding furniture making) and a further 5.9 per cent were makers of furniture in wood. Interestingly, 23.8 per cent of all male makers in the UK worked in wood and a further 15.4 per cent made wood furniture, while 4.7 per cent of all female makers worked in wood and a further 1.5 per cent made wood furniture (Crafts Council et al., *Craft in an Age of Change*, 24).
9. See, for example, Ruskin, ‘The Nature of Gothic’.
10. Morris established a tapestry factory at Merton Abbey in Surrey.
11. Metcalf, ‘Contemporary Craft’, 15.
12. Mackmurdo, an architect and designer, set up the Century Guild of Artists in 1882.
13. Ashbee, an architect and designer, set up his Guild in 1888 in East London, but it was later moved to the Cotswold town of Chipping Campden in Gloucestershire.
14. The Art Workers’ Guild was set up in 1884 in Central London by a group of architects, including W.R. Lethaby, who opposed the distinction made between fine arts and the applied arts. The Guild is still in operation.

15. Thomas, 'Modernity, Crafts and Guided Practices', 66–67.
16. The Art Workers' Guild and the Guild of Handicraft only began admitting women in the 1960s.
17. Marchand, Introduction: 'Craftwork as Problem Solving', 5. See also Harrod, *Crafts in Britain*, 242.
18. In 2001, the Crafts Council with support from Arts Council England launched 'Next Move', which aimed at providing selected graduates with financial, business and professional development support in setting up their creative businesses.
19. Retrieved 24 May 2021 from <https://www.craftscouncil.org.uk/about/history>.
20. To note, I had the pleasure of taking up a Craftspace research action partnership in 2015 to work with Ugandan-British craftsman-artist Andrew Omoding and document his creative processes and problem-solving strategies while engaged in making. For more information, see <https://craftspace.co.uk/radical-craft-explorations-in-creativity> (retrieved 24 May 2021). See also my film, *Art of Andrew Omoding*, and my publications from that research: Marchand, 'Explorations in Creativity'; 'Ducks and Daughters'; 'Toward an Anthropology of Mathematizing' and 'Dwelling in Craftwork'.
21. In 2012, it was reported that 57 per cent of makers in the UK were using digital technology in practice or production, and it was allowing them to reach an entirely new customer base (Crafts Council et al., *Craft in an Age of Change*, 8 and 39).
22. *Collect* shows featured the works of over 350 artists, many for whom craftwork is integral to their processes.
23. *Origin* was started in 2006, drawing exhibiting designer-makers from across the United Kingdom and around Europe.
24. Examples include the Wood Awards, launched in 2003 and replacing the earlier Carpenters' Award (1971–2001) and the Timber Industry Award (2001–2003). The annual Wood Awards recognise excellence in all areas of design, craftsmanship and installation in buildings and furniture in the twenty-first century. The Wesley-Barrell Craft Awards began in 2006, at a time when crafts were enjoying a well-deserved revival. They are organised in association with the Crafts Council, with the aim of supporting British craftsmanship and recognising the quality of home-grown mid-career talent, including a category for furniture. In the same year, the magazine *Country Living* launched the Balvenie Artisan Award to recognise excellence in the heritage crafts sector and those passing on their skills to future generations.
25. See Adamson, *Thinking through Craft*, 166–67; Hung and Magliaro, *By Hand*, 11–12; and the collection of chapters in Buszek, *Extra/Ordinary*.
26. Metcalf, 'Contemporary Craft', 22.
27. Beginning in 2009, this popular biennial conference series has been organised by the Plymouth College of Art, attracting participants from around the world to present on, discuss and advance current agendas in the craftworld and beyond.
28. Ferris, 'Making Futures'.
29. Coleman, *The Art of Work*, 37.
30. In 2007, the V&A hosted *Out of the Ordinary: Spectacular Craft*, which featured eight artists 'who place meticulous craftsmanship at the heart of their work', and, in 2011 the museum hosted the blockbuster show *Power of Making* that celebrated the role of making in our everyday lives and exhibited a diverse range of skills and imaginative uses of materials. In 2007, the British Museum hosted the astonishing *Crafting*

- Beauty in Modern Japan* exhibition, which showcased some of the very best works produced in that country during the previous half-century.
31. For example, the well-known American serial *This Old House* was launched in 1979 and is still running at the time of writing; Channel 4's *Grand Designs* was launched in 1999; and in 2003, BBC launched a set of television series called *Renovation*.
 32. The '50 per cent' target had been controversial from the start, being viewed as further prioritising higher education over vocational education and training, as well as exacerbating the existing skills gap in the United Kingdom. The objective was dropped in 2010 by the Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition government.
 33. These points were emphasised, for example, by Sir Michael Latham in a speech delivered on behalf of ConstructionSkills to the Construction Liveries Group at Carpenters' Hall, 24 March 2004.
 34. The NHTG was formed with support from ConstructionSkills, the Sector Skills Development Agency and English Heritage.
 35. This demanded substantial increases to the present numbers of skilful bricklayers, roofers (including thatchers), leadworkers, stonemasons, dry-stone wallers/masons, millwrights and earth-wall builders. See NHTG, *Traditional Building Crafts Skills*.
 36. In 2006, the Conference on Training in Architectural Conservation (COTAC) developed Master Crafts National Occupational Standards and was devising a mentoring programme for helping individuals to progress to Master Crafts status and thereby have qualifications to train others. In carpentry, a total of eighty-nine Master Carpenter Certificates had been issued by 2008, recognising 'excellence in the art, craft, science and practice' in the wood trades (Institute of Carpenters, *Annual Report* 2008, 11).
 37. Corporation of London, *The Livery Companies*, 17. Notably, the Livery Companies Skills Council was started in 1993 to establish a forum within the Livery to promote vocational training. The objective of the Council's sixty-two liveries, which included the Carpenters, Furniture Makers, Joiners and Ceilers, Shipwrights and Turners (all of which represent wood occupations), was to encourage government to channel funding to small and medium-sized businesses and to sole traders in specialised disciplines linked to ancient and modern livery companies.
 38. The Prince's Trust, founded in 1976, works to support vulnerable young people to get into training and work.
 39. BBC, 'Charles Promotes Apprenticeships'.
 40. Jakob and Thomas, 'Firing up Craft Capital', 499. Notably, the three studies conducted by McAuley and Fillis between 2002 and 2006 excluded hobbyists and those who described the 'subject or style' of their work as 'traditional' (Crafts Council et al., *Craft in an Age of Change*, 189–90).
 41. Marchand, 'Introduction: Craftwork as Problem Solving', 8.
 42. Henley, 'Heritage Crafts at Risk'.
 43. The Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage is a UNESCO treaty adopted by the UNESCO General Conference on 17 October 2003, which came into force in 2006.
 44. Concerted anthropological interest in material culture arguably begins with Franz Boas (1858–1942) and his students in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The early focus on the step-by-step processes of making, as well as using (and disposing of), artefacts is exemplified in anthropological studies that employ

- the 'chaîne opératoire', a methodology pioneered by French archaeologist André Leroi-Gourhan (1911–86), who was a student of Marcel Mauss.
45. Notably, this coincided with reinvigorated interest in the ideas of David Pye, Professor of Furniture Design at the Royal Academy of Art, who trained some of the leading Craft Revival furniture makers. During the 1960s, Pye authored two works of considerable importance to the study of craft: *The Nature of Design* and *The Nature of Art of Workmanship*.
 46. In order of mention: Harrod, *Crafts in Britain*; Dormer, *The Culture of Craft*; Johnson, *Exploring Contemporary Craft*; and Greenhalgh, *The Persistence of Craft*.
 47. In order of mention: Adamson, *Thinking through Craft*; Risatti, *A Theory of Craft*; and Sennett, *The Craftsman*.
 48. The term 'Craftivism', which succinctly captures this sentiment, was popularised by American writer and maker Betsy Greer in 2003.
 49. Morris, 'The Revival of Handicraft', 331.
 50. Greenhalgh, 'Craft in a Changing World', 1.
 51. Marchand, 'Introduction: Craftwork as Problem Solving', 8. This section of the Introduction presents in summarised form the key issues and ideas pertaining to the definition of craft that I explored in pages 3–10 of 'Introduction: Craftwork as Problem Solving'.
 52. Harrod, *Crafts in Britain*, 9.
 53. Sennett, *The Craftsman*, 9.
 54. Adamson, *Thinking through Craft*, 3–4.
 55. Risatti, *A Theory of Craft*, 16–18.
 56. *Ibid.*, 108–9.
 57. See *ibid.*, Chapter 27, 281–302. The Studio Craft movement began in the United States after the Second World War and is characterised by the works of 'craft artists' who experiment with nontraditional materials and techniques.
 58. See Adamson, *Thinking through Craft*, 6.
 59. Marchand, 'Introduction: Craftwork as Problem Solving', 9–10.
 60. *Ibid.*, 10.
 61. *Ibid.*, 8.
 62. *Ibid.*, 6. See also Metcalf, 'Contemporary Craft', 13.
 63. Streeck, 'Through Unending Halls', 30.
 64. For example, see Clifford Collard, 'Crafting Livelihood'.
 65. By contrast, in her study of seamstresses in Trinidad, anthropologist Rebecca Prentice found that changing demands in the neoliberal economic environment forced these women to be 'opportunistic, flexible and self-reliant'. Their ongoing accumulation of new sewing skills and abilities to produce the latest fashions 'prepare them for fragmented livelihoods that will see them seizing opportunities, withstanding economic uncertainties, and finding pleasure in what otherwise could be grinding and tedious work' (Prentice, "'No One Ever Showed Me Nothing'", 411).
 66. Herzfeld, *The Body Impolitic*, 60.
 67. Lightfoot, 'Pencil, Ruler, Fretsaw', 49.
 68. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book 1, Chapter vii, 1098a: 25–30.
 69. Sharp and Kinder, 'The New Workforce'.
 70. World Economic Forum, 'Chapter 1'.
 71. Marchand, 'Process over Product'; 'Negotiating License and Limits'; and 'Negotiating Tradition'.

72. Research Fellowship number RES 000-27-0159.
73. London's Worshipful Company of Goldsmiths also plays an active role in the City's jewellery industry by supporting apprenticeships in the trade, and its assay office hallmarks precious metals.
74. Examples include David Charlesworth, who had been teaching the craft since 1977 and offering courses at Harton Manor in Devon; David Savage, the experienced cabinet maker and furniture designer who offered courses in North Devon; and the famous Edward Barnsley Workshop in Hampshire, which has been training apprentices since 1980.
75. Yarrow and Jones, "Stone Is Stone", 265–66.
76. I thank Max Lawson, graduate of the stonemasonry course at the Building Crafts College, for verifying my description and supplying key information.
77. In 2011, 27.5 per cent of makers in the UK were categorised as 'career changers', and they were often in mid-life (Crafts Council et al., *Craft in an Age of Change*, 5).
78. By contrast, it was reported that the United Kingdom's craft sector is 'heavily female'. The percentage of Black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) individuals in the craft sector remained low (3.5 per cent), while representation of foreign-born and dyslexic/disabled people were above the national averages (*ibid.*, 7).
79. On interactive alignment in dialogue, see Purver and Kempson, 'Incrementality'. On Dynamic Syntax, see Kempson, Meyer-Viol and Gabbay, *Dynamic Syntax*; and Cann, Kempson and Marten, *The Dynamics of Language*.
80. Marchand, 'Making Knowledge', 12–13.
81. Orwin, 'Dynamic Syntax'. Though not using Dynamic Syntax, G. Novembre and P.E. Keller make a fascinating exploration of a 'general grammar of action' in the goal-directed actions and motor-based predictions of skilled musicians (Novembre and Keller, 'A Grammar of Action'). Their findings resonate in numerous ways with my own (Marchand, 'Making Knowledge').
82. Marchand, 'Crafting Knowledge'; 'Embodied Cognition, Communication and the Making of Place & Identity'; 'Making Knowledge'; and 'Embodied Cognition and Communication'.
83. Geographer Nicola Thomas claims that it is also important to understand such activities as part of a craftsperson's embodied practice 'if we are to appreciate a rounded understanding of the geographies of making' (Thomas, 'Modernity', 64).
84. On the nature of problem solving, see Marchand, 'Introduction: Craftwork as Problem Solving'.
85. I thank Dr Jenn Law for this productive challenge.
86. I first used the title for a lecture delivered in 2008 to the Archaeology and Anthropology Society at the University of Bristol, and it stuck as the title for this book.
87. The first two are published in Morris, *News from Nowhere* and the third in Morris, *The Relations of Art to Labour*. Other seminal essays by Morris that gave shape to my thinking are: with Webb and SPAB, 'Manifesto'; 'How We Live' (1896); 'Revival of Handicraft' (1888); 'Art and Its Producers', (1888); and 'The Arts and Crafts of Today' (1889).
88. Morris, 'Useful Work', 289.
89. *New Oxford Dictionary*.
90. Boyson, *Wordsworth*.
91. Sizer, 'The Two Facets', 215. In this essay, Sizer convincingly brings studies in the natural and neurological sciences to bear on some of the philosophical questions about pleasure.

92. Plato, *Philebus*.
93. It is not possible to include a full list in an endnote, but prominent figures include Scottish Enlightenment philosopher David Hume, who wrote: ‘There is implanted in the human mind a perception of pain and pleasure as the chief spring and moving principle of all its actions’ (*A Treatise of Human Nature*, Book 1, Part 3, section 10); and English utilitarian philosopher Jeremy Bentham, who wrote: ‘Nature has placed mankind under the governance of two sovereign masters, pain and pleasure. It is for them alone to point out what we ought to do, as well as to determine what we shall do. On the one hand the standard of right and wrong, on the other the chain of causes and effects, are fastened to their throne’ (*An Introduction to the Principles of Morals*, Chapter 1, ‘Of the Principle of Utility’, opening paragraph, p. 1). Another important example is the founder of psychoanalysis Sigmund Freud, whose theory of the ‘pleasure principle’ describes the basic motivating force of the id as being the instinctive drive to seek pleasure and avoid pain, with the function of reducing psychic tension (‘Beyond the Pleasure Principle’).
94. A great deal of dialogue in the *Philebus* is dedicated to discerning between sensual pleasures, pleasures derived from being respected and pleasures had in intellectual activity, and to categorising pleasures as pure or impure, true or false. In *The Republic*, Plato further separates out appetites (i.e. the desire for pleasures for pleasure’s sake) from desires for truth or honour, which yield their own kinds of pleasure when attained (Plato, *The Republic*, 206–17).
95. Moss, ‘Pleasure and Illusion’, 533.
96. Laërtius, ‘Epicurus’, passages 129–32.
97. *Ibid.*, passage 136.
98. See Annas, ‘Epicurus on Pleasure’, 8–10; Rosenbaum, ‘Epicurus on Pleasure’, 23–24; and Sizer, ‘Two Facets’, 228–29.
99. Laërtius, ‘Epicurus’, 128.
100. Annas, ‘Epicurus on Pleasure’, 9.
101. Csikszentmihalyi, *Flow*.
102. Personal communication, May 2020.
103. A number of (Counter-Reformation) Baroque artists succeeded in capturing in their works this dual experience of pleasure and pain. A prime example is Gian Lorenzo Bernini’s statue of *Ecstasy of Saint Teresa* (1647–52).
104. Annas, ‘Epicurus on Pleasure’, 9; and Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book VII, Chapter xi, 1153a. Like Plato, however, Aristotle held pleasure to be an ‘apparent’ good (i.e. with the potential to deceive), but he contended that there is something correct in the appearance that pleasure is good. After all, as an empiricist and champion of the perceptual senses as our instrument for knowledge, he maintained that, in general, there is something correct in appearances. For a discussion of this, see Moss, ‘Pleasure and Illusion’, 530 and footnote 56.
105. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book I, Chapter vii.
106. *Ibid.*, Book X, Chapter iv, 1174b: 20–24.
107. *Ibid.* Book X, Chapter iv, 1175a: 20–21.
108. Brewer, ‘Savouring Time’, 149.
109. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book X, 1175a.
110. Ryle, *The Concept of Mind*, Chapter 4, ‘Emotion’, part 6 ‘Enjoying & Wanting’, 91–94; and Ryle, ‘Pleasure, Part I’, 135–46.
111. Ryle, *The Concept of Mind*, 92. Though C.C.W. Taylor was in general agreement with Ryle’s analysis of ‘pleasure as attention . . . for pleasures in activities which

- themselves require the direction of attention’, he provocatively noted its limits in explaining ‘pleasures where the element of attention is minimal’ (Taylor, ‘Pleasure’, 4).
112. Ryle, *The Concept of Mind*, 93, emphasis added.
 113. Coming at the problem from an entirely different angle, namely a phenomenological one, Aaron Smuts’ ‘feel good theory’ of pleasure arrives at a conclusion somewhat commensurable with that of Ryle, in that ‘pleasure is not distinct from the experience’ of an activity. According to Smuts, what makes something pleasurable is simply the way the experience feels (Smuts, ‘The Feels Good Theory’).
 114. Brewer, ‘Savouring Time’, 143–44.
 115. However, it should be noted that Ryle made a distinction between a physical sensation of pain and a sense of being pained by, for instance, a thought or recollection: “‘pain”, in the sense in which I have pains in my stomach, is not the opposite of “pleasure”. In this sense, a pain is a sensation of a special sort, which we ordinarily dislike having’ (Ryle, *The Concept of Mind*, 93). See W.B. Gallie’s retort to Ryle’s argument (Gallie, ‘Pleasure, Part II’, in Ryle and Gallie, 147–64).
 116. Brewer, ‘Savouring Time’, 157.
 117. See also philosopher Hannah Arendt’s distinction between ‘work’ and ‘labour’ (*The Human Condition*, especially Parts III and IV).
 118. Brewer, ‘Savouring Time’, 157–58.
 119. *Ibid.*, 158.
 120. *Ibid.*, 144. Coming at the issue from a somewhat different angle, Laura Sizer similarly concludes that what she defines as the ‘pleasure system’ can imbue ‘goals . . . and activities with incentive salience making them wants – objects of striving in their own right, and can mark our achievements with satisfaction, giving us a sense of progress and accomplishment’ (Sizer, ‘Two Facets’, 232).
 121. Morris, ‘Useful Work’, 288–89.
 122. In numerical order, an earlier version of Chapter 6 was published (2007) as ‘Vocational Migrants and a Tradition of Longing’; an earlier version of Chapter 7 as ‘Knowledge in Hand’; an earlier version of Chapter 9 as ‘Managing Pleasurable Pursuits’; and an earlier version of Chapter 10 as ‘Skill and Ageing’. Synopses of the edited volumes in which the earlier versions of ‘Managing Pleasurable Pursuits’ and ‘Skill and Ageing’ appear at the beginning of the endnotes for Chapters 9 and 10 respectively. This is for the benefit of readers who wish to further explore the themes of either ‘ignorance and not knowing’ (Kirsch and Dilley, *Regimes of Ignorance*) or ‘making and growing’ (Hallam and Ingold, *Making and Growing*).
 123. In her book *Contemporary Crafts*, Imogen Racz explores the underlying philosophies that link craft and making to place, society and environment, and she specifically addresses the ways that concepts of nature, feelings for the land, the rural idyll and contemporary green agendas have informed craft and craft identities in England, from the Arts and Crafts movement to the present.
 124. Levitas, *The Concept of Utopia*.
 125. Pye, *The Nature and Art of Workmanship*.
 126. Kirsch, ‘Problem Solving’.