

A Perspective from Ditchling

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I have inhabited two contrasting workplaces, a craftsman's workshop and a scientific research center—Xerox PARC—the source for much of the technology that powers our current digital revolution. These contrasting experiences have shaped my views on the inheritance I grew up with, namely my family's involvement over three generations with a community of craftspeople established by Eric Gill at Ditchling in Sussex in 1919.¹

This experience intersects with the interests of this symposium in two ways. Firstly, because part of the crisis in traditional crafts seems to be caused by the lure of successive new technologies and the changes in lifestyle, location, cultural values, and wealth that have constellated around them. Secondly, because the craft community at Ditchling had a particular, though peripheral, relationship to the development of the Mingei movement in Japan. In the latter respect you may be curious to discover how a member of such a community, outside Japan, has made the transition from the thought-world of the 1920s to that of our current century.² It makes an interesting case study.

1 The Guild of St. Joseph and St. Dominic, at Ditchling Common, Sussex, U.K.

2 See Susan Peterson, *Shoji Hamada: A Potters Way and Work* (Tokyo: Kōdansha, 1974). "The idea for this compound had come to him in 1921, in Ditchling, Sussex, during the time that he and Bernard Leach were setting up the pottery in Cornwall and Hamada was building the kilns. The two had gone as pilgrims to see Mrs. Ethel Mairet, a weaver whose work they had seen and admired. Hamada bought her book on vegetable dyeing in the Maruzen bookstore in Tokyo. At Mrs. Mairet's they had met Eric Gill, the British sculptor and designer, and then stayed at his home nearby. Hamada was very impressed by the life these artists led, making their own beer, cheese, bread, and doing their own weaving, building their own furniture, pursuing an existence different from others around them. So it was at Ditchling, when he was 26, that Hamada knew he had found his destiny. He wanted to live in this same way. He knew that his painter friends might have exhibits and they might get rich and become famous, but he knew that he had made a true discovery. It would be a long road, but he knew what he wanted to do. He resolved to start immediately he got home." See also Bernard Leach, *Hamada, Potter* (Tokyo: Kōdansha, 1975), pp. 56-61.

I will begin by describing the Ditchling I grew up in. First—a clarification; though Ditchling, like Bloomsbury, is a place that has come to be associated with a movement, historically there are two groups of people embraced by this name: a looser group of independent craftsmen who settled in Ditchling village from the first decade of the twentieth century onwards (this group included Ethel Mairet the weaver and Edward Johnston the calligrapher) and a second community of craftspeople that grew out of the former. This latter group is known as The Guild of St. Joseph and St. Dominic and, as the name indicates, the difference here is that the later community had a religious connection. Both groups however shared common roots and basic ideals, though it is the latter group with which my family were explicitly connected. My grandfather was a weaver; he trained with Mrs. Mairet and then moved from the village up to the Guild. I too was a member of this same Guild.

If you visited Ditchling, as Bernard Leach did many times, Hamada Shōji did three times (1921, 1923, 1929), and Yanagi Sōetsu did once (1929), the following is the kind of introduction to the Guild that you might have been given. You would have been told that The Guild was founded by Eric Gill, a stone carver, and Hilary Pepler, a printer, both recent converts to Roman Catholicism. They bought a farm and then built houses around its periphery and a group of workshops and a chapel in one corner of the land. These buildings and workshops were owned in common, but each craftworkshop carried on its business for its own profit or loss, renting the workshop from the Guild. Common ownership of the property was established to guarantee the continued occupancy of the workshops by craftspeople, and ensure they could not be put to some other use. Each morning Guild members would assemble in the chapel and say, in choir, the morning prayer of the Roman Catholic usage. The rest of the day they engaged in their business, plying their craft, receiving visitors, and occasionally meeting in each other's workshops for morning coffee or afternoon tea when the discussion would be intense and animated. During the year there were various communal festivals and activities. At one time the Guild ran its own school, at another it had a small shop. But each family's home was private, separated by fields from the others; such homes provided a balance to the more communal life centered on the workshops and chapel. This careful balance of the personal and the communal was one of the keys to the Guild's longevity. This way of life carried on for seventy years from 1919 to 1989 when the Guild was closed—over the protests of its younger members of whom I was one. It sounds like a typical rural arts and crafts, even medieval, idyll. But I want to explain it in a different way, naturally my

wider picture took a number of years to clarify; to start with I was just submerged within the Guild's daily routines.



Fig.1 Drawing by Peter Anson of the Guild Workshops, Ditchling

Growing up in and around the Guild (our family home was three miles away) was challenging for me personally. From the start I was surrounded by some remarkable and strong characters, who seemed to have thought of everything; their lives appeared sorted out and rationally structured, they had a reason for everything they did. A brief description of the Guild's constitution should give you a flavor of this.

The first principle set out in the constitution was that life and work were not two things, but one. The religious perspective of the founders meant that they saw work, alongside every other area of life, as part of our journey, both as individuals and as a society, towards greater human flourishing (they would have said 'God'). They believed work was vocational and it was the right of every human being to be happy and fulfilled in their work.³

³ Philip Greenhalgh, one of the historians of the Arts and Crafts movement, expressed the movement's belief in the following way, "the way people work, the conditions they work under and the way they make things, is fundamental to the well being of society. It is not possible to have a proper society if its inhabitants are not humanely and creatively employed. William Morris was centrally responsible for generating out of this position what I will term a politics of craft. His socialism was deceptively simple. He channelled the whole of his vision for a better society through the need to engage in creative work. Creative work would improve the environment, lead to an equitable system of the distribution of wealth and generate psychologically fulfilled peoples." See "The History of Craft" in *The Culture of Crafts*, ed. Peter Dormer (Manchester University Press, 1997), pp. 33-34.

The second item set out the means by which all this could be achieved. Every Guild member undertook to live in such a way that they could accept individual responsibility for the nature and quality of the work they undertook. Their way of life should enable them to be free to follow their conscience. They believed this required them to accept the principle of private ownership (for if craftsmen owned their own tools, their workshops, and the product of their work, no one else could tell them what to do⁴) and finally there was one unwritten understanding: that the adoption of a simple lifestyle was what would make their way of life economically viable. Simple living meant that overheads were kept to the bare essentials (no electricity, cars, telephone, central heating, or piped hot water in the early days) and each family maintained a degree of self-sufficiency, with orchards, chickens, large vegetable plots, bees, and other animals. This enabled them to survive whatever lean times came and also gave them the freedom to turn down work they did not agree with.

The difficult thing for me as a young man was discovering for myself what I thought of this way of life. I had few other experiences to compare it to. Eventually I opted out; I took myself off to a monastery! After four years of life as a Benedictine monk at Worth Abbey in Sussex, I felt I had sufficient perspective on my early life. I returned to the community and embarked on a more prolonged engagement with it. Two experiences made all the difference to me the second time around and it is these experiences that I will turn to now. The first was the work I engaged in immediately after I left the monastery.

In 1988, a few weeks after leaving monastic life, I was hired as a part-time consultant to the Palo Alto Research Center of the Xerox Corporation in California. PARC is a legendary place amongst computer scientists. It was there that the first personal computers were developed, the first useable mouse, the concept of windows, the laser printer, and the Ethernet. From the first computers used at PARC came the model for the Mac, their text-editing program was the direct ancestor of

4 This thinking was the combination of ideas flowing from the writings of William Morris (see William Morris, "Art and its Producers," *The National Association for the Advancement of Art and Its Application to Industry, Liverpool Conference Papers 1888* (London 1889), p. 255, and Catholic social teaching, in particular the papal encyclical *De Rerum Novarum* promulgated by Leo XIII in 1891, part of the church's response to the movement for worker's rights and the writings of Karl Marx.

Microsoft Word. So what was I, a craftsman, doing in a Hi-Tech research institute? The answer begins with an explanation of a problem. Whilst scientists at PARC had invented all this technology, Xerox's management back on the East coast of the United States did not know what to do with it. "We are a photocopying company" they thought, "what has this got to do with us?" And so they ignored, or sold off, all these inventions. Later they realized the whole world was going to go digital—even photocopying. They had discovered the future but had given it away. This understanding caused a company wide crisis of confidence and direction; they must never do this again. They reasoned that the error had been to identify themselves too closely with one specific piece of technology, the photocopier; if or when that product became redundant the whole company also lost its reason to exist. Thus they realized they had to come up with an idea of who they were as a company without tying themselves to any one technology or product. This, by the way, hints at the approach I will take to traditional crafts. Their survival too, I will suggest, depends on a bigger idea than the craft itself, but also on not giving away what may be a considerable asset for the future.

It was at this point that Xerox began to call itself The Document Company. This was a brilliant idea. It re-focused their research and product development and it opened the door to the continuous evolution of the company, developing tools to handle any kind of document that might come along: paper, electronic, auditory, and perhaps some we haven't even thought of yet. But then the company realized "we do not know what a document is?" So they began a new program of research which over the years brought together many different people from a multiplicity of disciplines all trying to get a handle on what documents are.

So there I was, a craftsman, a calligrapher, and historian of handmade documents, working alongside anthropologists, linguists, computer-scientists, experts in artificial intelligence, businessmen, historians, and philosophers—all of us trying to get a handle on what this material was. It was very exciting and intellectually stimulating. Every year for several weeks or months in the summer I would fly to California and join our group. But about eight years into this process we began to notice something which surprised us. For the first time documents and communication devices were beginning to get in the way of our working together. People were going home to work; e-mail, cell phones, pagers, and the open office door meant we were all being interrupted. Focused attention to work was becoming more difficult to cultivate and

people were expecting a response in ever faster turnaround times. The problems seemed to be speeded up technology and a lack of time for sustained focused awareness.

This is a phenomenon most people are familiar with today. In an ongoing study of local office workers, Gloria Marks of the University of California, Irvine, reported in 2004 that the typical office worker in the U.S. today changes tasks every three minutes, is interrupted every two, and has a maximum stretch of attention of just twelve. This is part of a scenario which many of us may recognize—though now the options for interruption and distraction have increased even further with cell phones and text messaging, search engines, wi-fi and blogs.

So in the mid-nineties, one of the topics that began to be discussed within our group at PARC was the concept of human presence itself. What does it actually mean for one person to be really and fully present to another? We soon realized this presence itself required a prior one, that we were present and sensitive to ourselves, noticing our own experience, bodily condition and reactions. This self-presence seemed to require both a personal discipline and a sympathetic environment. It felt like I was back in the monastery again!

This interest in human presence led us on to an interest in how digital technology was developing as whole. One of my fellow researchers David Levy drew our attention to several potentially disorientating trends. Firstly, the virtual reality of the screen tends to favor a *dematerialized reality*, deprived of weight, texture, smell, and even when it does use sight and sound, the experience is in fact quite restricted. Secondly, virtual reality is also a *dislocated reality*; you could be any place anytime, your body clock is immaterial, as is the weather, the landscape, its history, culture, etc. And finally one's attention is likely to be increasingly *fragmented* with shorter and shorter attention spans, multi-tasking and a speeded up quality to the medium. Of course digital technology has yielded immense benefits and I am not questioning or carping about that, but what I discovered as we began to debate these questions was that I, as a craftsperson, was beginning to contribute more and more to the thinking of the group. The reason for this was interesting; craftsmanship offers a perspective on the digital world, for craftsmanship is about *relating to materials*. Our skills are very much *located at a particular moment in space and time* (both in terms of the relationship between the craftworker to his/her environment, with its weather and

materials and organic processes and possibilities and in terms of our performance in real time). And finally craftsmanship requires *relaxed yet sustained attention* both of the maker and often from the user of the products that a craftsman has made. So, as a group, we were discovering that the world of the craftsman offered both balance, hi-touch to hi-tech, and new ways of viewing the digital world. I would like to make one final observation on this point—if the crafts offer a perspective on the micro-level (when one is considering the design of computer interfaces for instance) then it seems likely that they will also offer a balance and perspective on the macro-level as well, in other words to society as a whole. Surely this is one of the values of the traditional crafts of Japan for Japanese society and the world.

Now I would like to share a telling anecdote. I remember these issues coming to a head for me one day at PARC when I was taken down to a top secret room for some new technology to be demonstrated. The whole room was a communication device, with hidden cameras and screens and interactive tools to ‘capture’ information of all kinds. Unfortunately I found it an uncomfortable and disturbing experience. The room had no windows, and there was no sense of the time of day or location. In order to see the screens the lighting was kept low, but you could not clearly see your neighbors. To make matters worse the room was filled with large furniture—tall high backed leather executive chairs. There were too many of them, and the chairs themselves placed your body in an entirely passive position. They also had rollers on their feet, which made them feel unstable. I could be present neither to myself nor to others—the room had created a profoundly alienating experience. The next day I discussed this experience with the group and at the same time showed them a slide show by way of contrast. I showed them the compound at Mashiko created by Hamada Shōji (I have since given a similar presentation to Microsoft Research). I showed them Mashiko because there I had had the second interesting experience that began to bring my two worlds together. So if you can hold that thought about PARC and the rediscovery of the world of craft for a moment, I would now like to place my second experience alongside it.

I first visited Japan to teach Western calligraphy in the spring of 1997, and within a few days of arriving I made the journey to Mashiko. I knew that the potter Hamada Shōji had visited Ditchling three times over the course of his life. I also knew that he has said that it was at Ditchling he had first had a vision of what his life might be. There he had his idea for a compound in the countryside and, in 1929, when

life at Mashiko was difficult, it was another visit to Ditchling that confirmed to him the rightness of his original vision. I wanted to go to Mashiko because I wanted to see my home through Hamada's eyes. I thought that this way I might get another perspective on something that had always proved too close to me.

After arriving at the Hamada compound I walked quickly through the first few rooms displaying items from his Reference Collection, a term that initially I did not understand. But then I began to relax and quiet down. There was a smell of wood smoke in the air, and in the next room I noticed some furniture with which I felt very much at home. This was a table and bench that could have come from my own grandparents' house in Ditchling. But it was when I approached two bowls placed next to each other in a case that I was struck by something. One bowl was pure white with a dark smudge from a thumb print left in the glaze and the other brightly colored with a swiftly executed pattern of leaves and a bright orange butterfly zigzagging across the middle. The bowls were by different makers from different periods and countries, and visually as different from each other as you could possibly imagine. But as I looked at them I experienced that they had been made out of the same state of mind. I burst into smiles and clapped my hands together with astonishment and then as I walked on through the compound, I realized that almost everything I saw had been made with the same spirit. A carefree yet heartfelt state, a little naive and yet thoroughly knowing of the materials and forms employed. And each item existed in its own right. None was judging the other as more or less than perfect. They were complete rather than perfect, and as I saw each one it put me in touch with that way of creating inside myself—this was indeed a reference collection. I could have wept, for at that point I realized that through the craftsmanship with which I had grown up at Ditchling, so eloquently and persuasively argued for by Gill, in the environment of the monastery in which I had lived, and now here in Hamada Shōji's house, what my fellow human beings were reaching for was a quality of *experience* prior to any intellectualization of it. What mattered to these people was that they actually experience a particular quality of life, a particular way of being with themselves in the world. And I realized also that it was similar concerns that had made craftsmanship important within the context of a computer research center. The valuable thing in craft I realized, for me at least, is the way of life it enables a craftsman to live, and by 'way' I mean the experience of life that it gives the actual felt human awareness of living, thinking, eating, smelling, moving; the powers of focused attention we cultivate, the relationships and felt understanding we have of

the natural world, our local geology, the life of the plants and animals in this small part of the earth, its climate and its seasons, and how that effects everything within that environment. And then, taking all these things together, we craftspeople invent processes and methods that work with those things and experiences, and we then we live within the processes we invent and make something of them.⁵ Work and life are one, not two.

And so my experiences as PARC and Mashiko helped me to see the history of Ditchling (and the Mingei movement) as part of a much longer story of individuals and groups, who from the beginning of the industrial revolution and before, but especially from *that* moment on, sought to keep work and life balanced and harmonized around concepts of human well-being and quality of life. This is why I want to insist that Ditchling is not conflated with a phase of the Arts and Crafts movement in general, although there are important links. The movement as a whole is a much wider and grander one, and the Arts and Crafts movement itself is just one particular manifestation of this greater movement.

I would like to say a little more in detail about this. By the time craftspeople were moving to Ditchling in the first decade of the twentieth century (Gill moved in 1907), the first phase of the craft revival in Britain, which we might loosely identify with the Arts and Crafts movement, was over. You will find a statement similar to this in Leach's book on Hamada: "When we arrived in England, the movement started by William Morris represented by the English Arts and Crafts Society was in its old age. Neither of us really joined it.... neither Hamada or I fully agreed with that approach to crafts."⁶ In fact, as Tanya Harrod describes in her book *The Crafts in Britain in the 20th Century*,⁷ the new wave of craftsmen who began their working lives at the start of the last century had new ideas. They sensed the Arts and Crafts movement had betrayed its roots and been co-opted by the establishment onto a design reform agenda that had flowed from the great exhibition of 1851 and which resulted in the establishment of the South Kensington Museum (now the Victoria

5 See Borgmann on focal realism in Albert Borgmann, *Crossing the Postmodern Divide* (University of Chicago, 1992), pp. 120-122.

6 See also Bernard Leach, *Hamada, Potter* (Tokyo: Kōdansha, 1975), p. 61.

7 Tanya Harrod, *The Crafts in Britain in the 20th Century* (Yale, 1999).

and Albert Museum) and the Royal College of Art. This next generation was far more sceptical of the industrial system itself—and subsequently the experience of the First World War and then the Great Depression confirmed their views. So it was back to Ruskin rather than Morris to whom this next generation looked; they wanted something that led to better lives, not simply better designed products. To be fair to Morris, however, we should note that he too, towards the end of his life, was interested in an increasingly political agenda.

In the discussions I witnessed as a child at Ditchling, certain people kept cropping up as figures whose writings Guild members and their friends were reading—people they saw in some sense as their forebears. William Cobbett the politician was important; the St. Dominic's Press published his *Cottage Economy*, and we were all were familiar with his *Rural Rides*, a diary written as he traveled round Britain during the time of the industrial revolution. The historian Thomas Carlyle also was important. He was one of the early critics of the division of labor enforced in the factory system; here is a flavor of his writings. In 1828 he wrote: "We have much studied and much perfected of late the great civilised invention of the division of labour, only we give it a false name. It is not truly speaking the labourer that is divided, but the men—divided into segments of men—broken into small fragments and crumbs of life; so that all the little piece of intelligence that is left in a man is not enough to make a pin or a nail, but exhausts itself in making the point of a pin or the head of a nail. . ." and again, "Men are becoming mechanical in heart, mind and hand."⁸ It was Carlyle who coined the term "Industrialism" to describe the interaction of the social, economic, and technological factors that resulted in the industrial system. These interactions, these individuals thought, were not an inevitability, just the outcome of the particular distribution of wealth, resources, and ideas that existed in England at that time and to that pool of possibilities they wished to contribute their perspective and sometimes protest. Even the followers of Captain Ludd, represented simplistically today as backward looking machine-breakers, were in fact the product of a complex set of forces and their protest not just about hand versus machine. As Philip Greenhalgh, one of the craft historians of this period has written, "The cotton workers of Lancashire and the stocking makers of Nottingham were among the first to endure a significant loss of control over their lives that

8 These remarks appear in an essay of 1829, "Signs of the Times," quoted in Gillian Naylor, *The Arts and Crafts Movement: A Study of Its Sources, Ideals and Influence on Design Theory* (MIT Press, 1971), p.12.

working in a factory system entailed—it completely reorganised their lives”—where they lived, what they ate, how they held together as a family. It also dislocated them from their centuries old homes. As the historian E. P. Thompson has explained, “The conventional picture of Luddism as blind opposition to machinery as such becomes less and less tenable. What was at issue was the ‘freedom’ of the capitalist to destroy customs of the trade whether by new machinery, by the factory system or by unrestricted competition ... and undermining standards of craftsmanship.”⁹

I have mentioned some of the people that the Ditchling community looked to as forebears. A fuller list would include Benjamin Disraeli, the artist and poet William Blake, the writer Charles Dickens, the architect Augustus Pugin, the art critics John Ruskin and Ananda Coomaraswamy, the polymath William Morris, the naturalist Richard Jeffries, the social theorists Edward Carpenter and Arthur Penty, the Dominican friars Bede Jarret and Vincent McNabb, the American Shakers and indeed the Mingei movement of Japan. And the reason this is so wide ranging a collection of persons is because these were people or communities speaking from all the areas of society that industrialism, as it was received in Britain, had come to effect.

Once I had set the Guild’s ideas in a broader historical context (of development and industrialization) I then found it much easier to connect them with the present. They became part of an ongoing movement whose allies today would include all those concerned about work-life balance, the power of the corporation, the effect of industrialization on the environment, human psychology, indigenous cultures and social relations, deep ecology, the local and international effects of globalization, and unequal distributions of wealth and power.

I also began to be clearer about my own relationship to craft. I understood that I, and others like me, were making lifestyle choices when we turned to this way of life. That the old debates of hand versus machine, of freedom of conscience versus lack of control, of community cohesion versus dislocation, of well-being versus pollution and dangerous working conditions could all be reframed in terms of contemporary quality of life issues. These issues are still with us albeit under new labels and

9 See “The Progress of Captain Ludd” in *The Culture of Crafts*, ed. Peter Dormer (Manchester University Press, 1997), pp. 104-115.

seemingly different because now they are framed as global issues rather than ones peculiar to Britain at the end of the nineteenth century.

In trying to sharpen up my own thinking about what that phrase “quality of life issues” might mean, one person to which I have looked recently is the economist Richard Layard, professor at the London School of Economics and founder-director of the LSE Centre for Economic Performance.¹⁰ He is one of the thinkers beginning to move Economics in new directions. He is a Benthamite, in other words, following the work of the eighteenth century philosopher Bentham, he would believe that our moral behavior should be guided by the principle of maximizing the total sum of human well-being. He argues that most of the current research points to seven principal factors being important for human happiness. They are, in no particular order, firstly income level, though he notes that the research here has found that once above the poverty line, income is no longer a predictor of happiness, witnessed to by the fact that in Western Europe and Japan, where statistics have been available on a continuous basis for the last fifty years, though income has increased dramatically (by six times in the case of Japan) measures of the level of happiness have remained constant.¹¹ The next factor is safe, stable, and satisfying work. Indeed such work is seen as so important to well-being that most people would accept a cut in income in order to secure it. This flies in the face of current management practice to downsize and outsource as well as the re-engineering of labor markets in terms of mobility and flexibility. The research is clear—this may lead to bigger short term profits for shareholders—but it does not lead to human happiness across the working population as a whole. Health is the third factor and in relation to current work trends, the questions this factor raises are obvious. Stress, which lowers the immune system and contributes hugely to heart disease, is becoming recognized as a major problem in the work place. In a 1996, in a Eurobarometre survey of employed persons in every country in Europe, people were asked, “Has there been significant increases in the stress involved in your work over the last five years?” to which nearly 50 percent of respondents answered yes and just 10 percent no. The fourth factor is stable and rewarding personal relationships and the sixth stable and rewarding community relationships. Here again economists have pointed out that current management theory about job mobility works against this. Personal

10 See Richard Layard, *Happiness: Lessons from a New Science* (London: Penguin, 2005).

11 See Annex 3.1 to Richard Layard, *Happiness: Lessons from a New Science*, also found as a PDF file at <http://cep.lse.ac.uk/layard/>

and community relationships are stronger when people have developed roots in a particular area over time, are surrounded by several generations of their family, and in such situations, criminality has also shown to be lower. The sixth factor is freedom and the seventh is a philosophy of life that gives coherence and meaning to one's life.

If we were to take The Guild at Ditchling as an example of a community of craftspeople, we can see that many of these seven factors of well-being are already embedded in the way the community functioned.

This quality of life these craftsman, and perhaps all craftspeople are committed to, was certainly one where level of income was not the sole measure of success. It was indeed traded for job satisfaction and stability, for individual freedom of choice of what work to do and how and when. In terms of community and personal relations, it should be pointed out that the decision to embrace a craft often means, as it did for Hamada Shōji and the craftspeople at Ditchling, embracing stable living in one locality; living within the limitations of its geology, its weather, the natural life of its plants and animals and valuing these relationships, learning from them, building methods and processes around them, and placing the rhythm of your life within them. This stability is basic to building relationships—firstly with oneself, for against a stable and cyclical background the activity of ones own inner life comes more into the foreground and secondly with others. Because there is nothing pressured about these relationships, they can grow organically over time in a variety of contexts that relate to the whole of life and not just one part of it—the workplace. In terms of health, craftsmanship has the advantage of relating to one's entire embodied presence—sound, smell, touch, handling materials directly. Mind and hand and heart united. Under both Western interventionist medicine and Eastern traditional medical care this is recognized as beneficial. And so to freedom and coherence of meaning, local freedom at Ditchling was secured by the careful structuring of lifestyle and private and communal ownership and coherence of life and work was its very purpose. The opposite of this carefully balanced system of home and work, the personal and communal, work and recreation is what the philosopher Joseph Pieper has called the world of Total Work. His concept might bear some fresh attention for in my view he points to one of the problems in negotiating a new future for the crafts.

Pieper, a German philosopher writing in the aftermath of the last war, as Germany faced the massive task of reconstruction, feared that his country might opt for what he called the world of Total Work, rushing into the reconstruction without taking the necessary time for reflection from which true national renewal might come. The title of his book sets out his thesis: *Leisure: The Basis of Culture*. It is at heart a plea for contemplative space, for it is in such a space he maintains that real growth and change can happen. He expresses his fear that Germany will not take advantage of this space following the searing experience of war and will instead rush headlong into a world of business and total work, and in that way, nothing fundamental will shift, the past will not have been built upon, just ignored. Such a reconstruction would clearly imperil the past. The parallel with Japan's experience is obvious.

Leisure “is a form of stillness,” Pieper explains, “that is the necessary preparation for accepting reality; only the person who is still can hear, and whoever is not still cannot hear. Such stillness as this is not mere soundlessness or a dead muteness Leisure is the disposition of receptive understanding, of contemplative beholding, and immersion in the real.”¹² The traditional crafts in all our countries, it seems to me, may well require a contemplative dimension to our societies for their health. If a society is too busy, is living with a future orientated justification, rather than truly doing the work—as we are here—of understanding its deepest roots in a connected way through successive unfoldings of systems, kinships, thought-worlds, environmental relations, and religion, then something so redolent of that heritage as the crafts will simply (though wrongly) be seen by coming generations as sterile and not capable of regeneration.¹³

Ruskin would have understood our discussion of renewed vision; however, he would have added that there is one other cultural shift we need to make, and I speak here of Britain, for I do not know about Japan. In his book *Unto this Last* (“that book made me change the way I lived,” said Ghandi) Ruskin wrote, “the presence of a wise

12 Joseph Pieper, *Leisure: The Basis of Culture*, [a new translation of *Musse und Kult and Der Philosophische Akt*, 1948] (St. Augustine's Press, 1998), p. 31.

13 Underlying my presentation of this point is an anxiety that modern Japan's relation to events in East Asia in the 1920s — 1940s, the nature of its postwar occupation and chosen path of development have themselves created and maintained barriers to a re-imagining of traditional crafts. My intuition is that some of these barriers might seem less substantial were I to understand more about the premises and context in which Japan first undertook modernization and industrial development.

population implies the search for Felicity as well as food.” What is at stake here is a different idea about what constitutes wealth. “There is no wealth but life” is how Ruskin himself expressed it.¹⁴

Wealth in the Ruskinian view is surprisingly like Richard Layard’s. It consists in human health and happiness and what gives wealth is not just cash or assets but good air, supportive relationships, a healthy diet, gardens, places of worship, the ability to study, wisdom, humor, in short everything that is summed up in that small but powerful phrase *human flourishing*. What this view dethrones is what Eric Gill would have called “Mammon” or the undisputed assumption that money is the test and value of anything’s worth. I see craftsmanship and the life of the craftsman as rich in an alternative kind of wealth and it seems that many of my compatriots agree.

In 2004, for the first time in eighty years, a national survey of one section of the craft sector in England was undertaken.¹⁵ It looked at rural crafts in the countryside. Its findings were a revelation and were carried in all the national newspapers and on radio and television news bulletins. Up until the 1980s the rural crafts had suffered an apparently irreversible decline, but what the survey found was at that point the decline began to reverse. Today if present trends continue it is possible that in ten to fifteen years time the contribution of the crafts to the rural economy could exceed that of farming and eventually of all land-based industries.

I quote from the summary of the report: “There may be a tendency in some quarters to regard rural crafts as archaic survivals, as attempts to preserve outmoded traditions, and as such, largely irrelevant to the needs of modern society. However on the contrary this report shows them to be a vital and dynamic element within rural economies, making an important contribution to the leisure, tourism, construction, and consumer goods industries. It also notes, “they add diversity to the rural economies at the time that land-based industries are in decline; they are a safety valve and creative outlet for those wanting an alternative lifestyle in the rural

14 John Ruskin, “Unto this Last” in *Unto this Last and Other Writings* (London: Penguin, 1985), p. 226 and p. 222.

15 E.J.T Collins, ed., *Crafts in the English Countryside: Towards a Future* (The Countryside Agency, 2004). The full report can be obtained from www.countryside.gov.uk and an executive summary *English Rural Crafts, Today and Tomorrow* is available both in print and as a downloadable PDF file.

environment.”

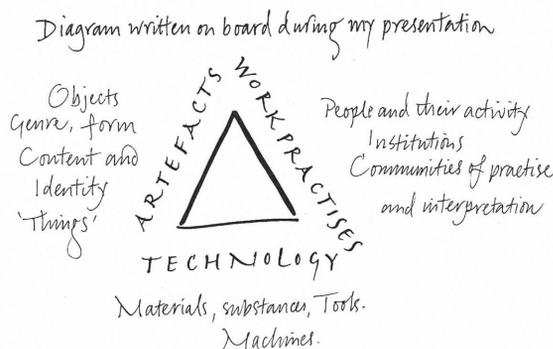
I mentioned earlier when I was discussing PARC that one of the things that experience had helped to me realize was the importance of developing the big picture, and at the same time I alluded to the way Xerox had disposed of its company’s research before realizing its true value for the future. It seems that a similar argument can be made for the crafts. In Britain we have seen a sector which went into massive decline now providing new opportunities for employment and as the report points out “their business model—small units, multiple occupations, craftsmanship combined with entrepreneurship—is particularly well adapted to the needs of a post-industrial society.” Traditional crafts are a valuable national resource—for the future, not just the past.

So far so good, the argument has been presented in primarily conventional economic terms, but one final remark. The 2004 report in Britain showed that the people coming into the rural crafts today were coming from very different backgrounds to the traditional practitioners. Typically they were older and middle-class and often highly educationally qualified. The report noted, “These craftspeople tend to be less motivated by money than by more general lifestyle considerations and concern for craftsmanship. The common replies to the question of why they chose a career in the rural crafts include a dislike of office or factory employment, a love of the countryside, an interest in old crafts and old buildings, strong preference for country over urban living, the desire for a creative job that involves working with their hands, a preference for self employment and flexibility.”¹⁶ There are no reasons in this list to do with money. The revival of the crafts, in this instance, has come not from some economic superplan but from an influx of life and meaning into the place the world of craft holds in people’s imagination and their quest for a more vivid experience of life. This is a revival of meaning and the imagination not of

16 But there is one problem: these new entrants are largely side-stepping the hereditary system of training which in most crafts is almost dead. They have had to devise their own programs of study, put together from a variety of sources. So the main problem we face in Britain today is not so much a shortage of recruits for traditional crafts, it is developing new models and methods of training outside the hereditary system. Several crafts have organized themselves into guilds to provide their own qualifications and training schemes, other craftsmen have started their own college based training programs, some have revived apprenticeships, supported by grants from government bodies or private charitable foundations. This area remains a significant problem.

balance sheets, efficiencies, or standards. From this I conclude that it is not useful to think about traditional crafts solely in one dimension. During the conference, under pressure of time as the last presenter on the last day, I took advantage of this situation to let this paper stand as read and so to develop this point further presenting a more multi-dimensional model for thinking about craft.

The centerpiece of my presentation became an explanation of the model we had used at PARC for explaining the artefact that was our central concern—documents. My reasoning was that this concept can be applied to modeling any artefact and that I had found it helpful during the conference for reconciling the perspectives of other speakers within a common framework. Our model had evolved as a response to a number of experiments in recording the workings of document rich environments (an airport, a lawyer’s office, a transport authority). In one experiment the team filmed and recorded the operation of a flight control tower in a regional airport in the U.S. After filming, the airport building was demolished and new airport erected. We then filmed the same flight schedule and personnel in the new environment. Fascinatingly, it was discovered that the kinds of documents used in the process of despatching and controlling flights had changed. Some of these changes were attributable to such simple things as the chairs now being in a fixed as opposed to a mobile position, thus rendering certain visual checks no longer possible. We came to see documents as existing in a finely balanced ecosystem of artefacts, work practices, and technology. This is the basis of the triangular diagram I drew with Artefacts on one side (with genre, form, content, and identity), Technology on the base (including tools and materials), and Work Practices/Activity on the other side (including people and their activities, institutions and institutional circuitries, communities of practice and interpretation).



In the case of documents, for instance, new digital technology has inevitably led to disruption and then change in all the documentary genre and institutions that we evolved over several centuries to bring order to the world of the written word. So, for instance, as soon as the new digital technology arrived, institutions like the library and the publishing house began to face renewed anxieties about their identity and role. Copyright and the authentication of text and images suddenly became an issue once more (music on the internet, electronic fraud), and whole industries like newspaper or academic publishing were opened up to change and confusion.¹⁷

But the same holds true for crafts. Change in any one area of the triangle will inevitably bring change in all the other aspects of the world that this craft object once helped to stabilize. Changed social patterns, new technologies, shifts of power structures all affect the world of craft. In Norma Respicio's presentation, for example, the story I heard was of unintended effects resulting from the introduction of new technology—the power loom. The power loom entailed capitalist production methods and the valuing of cheapness and speed, this led to a reduction in standards that made the product less unique and valued, artists left the community because there were less opportunities for creative work, as wage costs were driven down fewer people wanted to work in these conditions and succession became a problem, ultimately the logic of the search for less expensive production was that it was outsourced, this led to new questions about the product's authenticity. In Mr. Ōtaki's excellent presentation we saw how traditional crafts were built around certain activities and social structures (patronage for instance), but war and democratization had changed the structure of society. We also saw how the institution of exhibitions in Japan had helped shape craft activity and genre—similar related themes could be seen in most presentations. The implications of these insights for me as a practicing contemporary craftsman is that the revival of traditional crafts is not simply a question of upholding standards, or reinforcing promotion, but rather one of making the connection between our crafts and those areas of human activity which right now our society finds bring it an enlargement of meaning and purpose.

This was why the most fascinating paper for me at the conference was the opening talk on Kenzan presented by Richard Wilson—here we saw a craftsman doing

17 See David M. Levy, *Scrolling Forward—Making Sense of Documents in the Digital Age* (New York: Arcade, 2001). Chapter 9 is particularly useful.

just this. Richard Wilson consciously presented us with a model drawn from Kyoto's past. We saw Kenzan enlivening his craft through a new connection with literature—itsself flourishing through a combination of new publishing practices and a developing literacy. We saw him carefully shaping the context in which he lived at different moments in his life, enabling him and his clients to make specific connections and associations with his work. We saw him engaging with Kyoto food culture, and with gardening, poetry, theatre. It seems to me that the revival of traditional crafts has to be approached on all sides of the triangle, but ultimately what I have learned both from Ditchling and PARC is that it is human activity and the way we use artefacts in the construction of patterns of cultural meaning that brings vitality to the craft and its artefacts. From my perspective a revival of craft depends upon a renewed commitment to building patterns of human community in which locatedness, focused attention, and materiality have a valued place because they are experienced as life giving, and that these experiences are accessible to all in the midst of their daily lives—indeed they form part of the art of living. In this respect I also drew inspiration from several conference accounts of the role played at different times by chanoyu in the creation and patronage of crafts.

So to summarize my point of view, through the hi-tech world of PARC I came to appreciate that the world of craft has something to offer our brave new world, a balancing engagement with local particularity, material reality, organic time, and sustained attention. This itself makes the life of the craftsman worthwhile and rewarding to live. But if a market for the craftsman's work is to be developed, we must cultivate a receptive attitude to craft in society as a whole. This cultivation it seems to me cannot be separated from two things. Firstly the re-evaluation of our concept of wealth away from narrow economic measurements of GDP to wider measures that take in an appreciation of quality of life issues. And secondly, as part of discovering what quality of life or vivid experience means for us, we need to explore the development of new patterns of cultural behavior that involve material, located, focal objects employed in the arts of everyday living, new forms of active and contemplative life, new patterns of being family and community in which craft objects can play a part. This is of course nothing less than a program for a cultural renaissance, but then I believe that, like Kenzan, craftsmen at their best are makers and thus impressarios, choreographers, poets, and dreamers—not only of new forms of objects, but of human behavior, ritual, relationship, and experience.

Ewan CLAYTON

I would simply like to end by recording my gratitude to those Japanese craftsmen of an earlier generation who traveled West, and from whose work and living I and several generations of my family have benefited, and in which we found indeed great zest for life.