Dangerous Liaisons

Relationships between Design, Craft and Art

Grace Lees-Maffei and Linda Sandino

The title for this special issue takes its starting point from Choderlos de Laclos’ novel depicting the machinations, seduction and jealousies of a ménage à trois, a fitting analogy for the complex matrixes of the affinities between design, craft and art over the last two hundred years. Drawing on our analogy, design, craft and art can be seen to occupy an unstable territory of permanently shifting allegiances, and this is true of both the histories of these three sets of practices and the three families of discourses surrounding them. The evolving nature of design practice on the part of some leading exponents defies categorization: the designed goods of groups such as Droog and manufacturers such as Alessi demonstrate a concern for allusive and narrative qualities beyond functionalism. The claim to art status by some craft practitioners of this century and the last is more vociferous than ever, and recent fine-art practice has increasingly looked outside the armoury of fine-art techniques to employ strategies previously considered to fall into the domain of material culture, architecture and design, and processes more traditionally associated with the crafts.

The rich and deepening liaison of textiles and fine art exemplifies this dynamic. Dale Chihuly’s work provides another example of such convergence. Existing debates have centred on liaisons between these practices and their objects as subject to a conventional hierarchy of the visual arts with fine art as the dominant partner. More recently, however, questions of status have no longer been seen as relevant, and understanding of the development of these cultural strains has been seen in terms of parallel development, or convergence, rather than hierarchy. Where design, craft and art can be seen to have existed distinctly, it is important to consider the extent to which these practices have developed internal principles or characteristics, or whether those principles have been forged solely in contradistinction to one another. To appreciate the significance of liaisons between design, craft and art it is necessary to interrogate the mutually informative relationship between practice and discourse. The principles that define the differences and relations between design, craft and art are subject to historical change, and vary regionally and culturally. This introduction proposes what the following articles demonstrate: namely that the interplay between design, craft and art is a compelling and revealing focal point for analysis. The articles establish, in addition, the inadequacy of normative or unchanging usage of the terms design, craft and art, which is mutable in relation to both time and space. This introduction reviews some salient instances in the development of discourses about the interplay of design, craft and art, while the articles which follow identify case studies of visual and material practice which mobilize or confound normative categories in a manner which invalidates, or at least complicates, discourses dependent upon conventionally discrete definitions.

Present

The Objects of Our Time exhibition held at the Crafts Council in 1996 to celebrate its Silver Jubilee provided an excellent opportunity to take stock of the place of craft within contemporary visual trends. The curator and the then director, Tony Ford, referred to the conclusive shift of craft from the margins to the mainstream: ‘to occupy an integrated position with fine art, fashion, architecture and industrial design.’ The use of the term ‘integrated’ is appropriate, if a little optimistic. In December 2001, Rosemary Hill delivered the Peter Dormer lecture at the Royal College of Art in which she discussed the demise of ‘the new crafts’, which had ‘found their voice and flourished’ in the space between art and craft, in the early 1970s, and specifically with the publication of the first Crafts magazine in 1973. These new crafts had become so
integrated with art, and indistinguishable from it, that they no longer existed, subsumed instead into a holistic category akin to the ‘Arts, Manufactures and Commerce’ shown at the Great Exhibition in 1851. Hill’s ambiguous obituary—the new crafts never quite arrived. They certainly never made it to the Tate—overlooked the exhibition of ceramics at the Barbican in The Raw and the Cooked (1993). Six months earlier, in the summer 2001 issue of Tate magazine, potter and critic Emmanuel Cooper complained that ‘although the definition of art continues to expand, craft is still left out in the margins’. Cooper cited recent exhibitions, including those at the Hayward Gallery (‘following exhibitions on art and film and art and fashion, would not one entitled “Art and Craft” push the boat out further?’) and New British Art 2000: Intelligence at Tate Britain, which had been ‘fearless in challenging accepted definitions between folk/naïve art and fine art’ and had neglected the crafts. Cooper ended with the rhetorical question that it was ‘surely time for institutions such as Tate and the Hayward to take a lead’.

In his acceptance speech for the Turner Prize 2003, Grayson Perry commented that the art world found it easier to accept his alter-ego transvestite personality Claire than the fact that he is a potter. Perry clearly identified the continuation of the institutional, perceptual and cultural distinction between craft and art and did so from a high-profile position. With his work, his personae and his philosophy, Perry contradicts the assumptions and categories through which contemporary practice has been understood. His ‘pots’ are canvases for the depiction and exploration of socially relevant themes such as gender identities, dysfunctional families, violence and unrest. Perry’s work demonstrates the impossibility of understanding objects without sensitivity to the categorization of people, practices and products. Recognition of Perry’s work by the art establishment surrounding the Turner Prize reflects recent institutional convergence of the kind that led, in 1999, to the Crafts Council becoming a ‘client’ of the Arts Council of England, meaning that independent makers would need to compete for Arts Council funding on a wider stage. With reorganization of the government Councils concerned with design, craft and art and changes in the higher education sector, scholars, students and practitioners of the various forms of visual and material culture need increasingly to view their subjects in a range of contexts and to make connections across disciplines. The institutional context has altered in a manner that reinvigorates discussion of the relationship between these fields.

Six months before Perry won the Turner Prize, in the thirtieth-birthday edition of Crafts magazine published in 2003, Geraldine Rudge’s editorial began with the following résumé of the changes wrought over three decades:

In March 1973, in issue 1, an article called The Concept of Craft asked—among others—two questions: ‘What is Craft?’ and ‘How does it differ on the one hand from industry and on the other hand from art?’ 30 years on, a third question follows up the second: ‘Does it matter?’ Certainly today few makers consider the barriers between art, craft and design of such significance. Craft and industry are routinely partners, and many designers happily combine the making of one-offs with the production-line process . . . [and] the term craft is now simply ‘inadequate’ to summarise the collaborative, interdisciplinary diversity of current practice.

Rudge’s position contains a contradiction commonly seen in contemporary discourses of making. On the one hand, it is felt, ‘barriers’ between design, craft and art no longer matter; on the other, the term ‘craft’ is inadequate to describe the diversity of current practice. Evidently, terminology both matters and does not matter, simultaneously. Rudge steps away from the next logical question: ‘If not craft, then what?’ Perhaps she is not sure whether the answer is ‘design’ or ‘art’, or something else. It seems that some practitioners and consumers of contemporary artefacts disregard or confound categorization while others are keen to uphold such distinctions. In 2001, writer Giles Foden published an article about the Jerwood Prize for Ceramics in which he presented the view that the exhibitors, whom he termed ‘parodists’, needed to ‘go back to basics’. The article elicited a rush of reactions from readers, published the following week, which illustrated the breadth of very strongly-held opinion clearly divided between those who believe that ceramics can be art and those who wish to champion the production of domestic utility wares. Given the range of views held and the strength of feeling about design, craft and art, anyone broaching the subject needs not only to be aware of the dangerous, inflammatory nature of the topic but also to recognize these liaisons as creative
and dynamic. Suppression of these debates results in a failure to acknowledge that the ‘collaborative, interdisciplinary diversity of current practice’ produces hybrid artefacts that render discussions of the interplay between design, craft and art essential. Such practice invigorates these constantly shifting relationships and necessitates further exploration.

Three decades ago, when the first issue of Crafts magazine was in press, a group of design historians were involved in forging a shared identity through special-interest group meetings at the Association of Art Historians’ annual conference. This led to the founding of the Design History Society in 1977 ‘to consolidate design history as a distinct field of study’. Thirty years on, this concern for distinction endures, but it is within a mature field that design historians can today engage with art history, craft, architecture, technology and other forms of material culture. Following a continuous stream of conferences and events concerned with articulating the changing nature of crafts practice in Britain, debates around craft theory are flourishing and maturing. As craft theory gathers momentum, its concerns move from statements of general principles as it was towards greater specificity of discourse. The same is true of design, which is increasingly positioned within the category of visual culture. This special issue brings together work by design historians, craft theorists and art historians for the benefit of the similarly diverse readership of the Journal of Design History.

Past

Two significant ways in which relationships between design, craft and art manifest themselves are, firstly, in the artefacts themselves as hybrid practice, and secondly in the reception of these artefacts. Consequently, any examination of the liaisons of the three domains needs to engage with the history of three sets of practices and with the genealogies of the discourses about these practices. We need to consider not only changes in the ways makers relate to these categories, as exemplified by Perry, but also changes in the categories themselves as they are applied through various institutions and discourses. Artefacts and their surrounding discourses are each subject to historical and cultural changes. Rosemary Hill has discussed the way in which ‘criticism has an existence independent from art’, referring to focal shifts in critical writing from watercolours, to pâte de verre, to the crafts. In her keenness to qualify the role that the objects and practices of design, craft and art have in shaping their discourses, Hill obscures the role that the practice of criticism plays in forming the artefacts it scrutinizes. Criticism may well enjoy histories distinct from those of design, craft and art, but to say so without acknowledging the mutually constitutive relationships between these histories is to disregard the liaisons which under scrutiny are so revealing.

As the articles in this special issue demonstrate, the principles that distinguish design, craft and art and their respective histories vary in type and over time. The various principles applied to design, craft and art have produced different hierarchical models within which they have been situated. It is more appropriate, then, to view these histories in the form of parallel tracks that have converged and diverged. Emphases within each of these practices have oscillated between structures of similitude and of distinction, leading to the continuing interweaving of principles and strategies as defined by each domain. Thus, the meanings invoked by the terms ‘design’, ‘craft’ and ‘art’, and the relationships between them, have changed across time and place. Discussions of a linguistic bent, such as Paul Greenhalgh’s account of the etymology of the word ‘craft’ and the development of the terms ‘fine art’ and ‘vernacular’, illustrate their fluidity.

The development of the history of design within the wider ideological developments of modernism has ensured the significance of the Arts and Crafts Movement as a touchstone of the attempt to integrate design, the crafts and art. Among its principles, a belief in craft as an antidote to industrialization (allied to the Romantic faith in the cathartic power of nature) has extensively influenced contemporary attitudes. The current situation arose from the persistent nineteenth-century Arts and Crafts Movement concern for the hand-made in an increasingly (post-)industrialized Britain. For at least the last 150 years, craft has been written about as an antidote to increasing industrialization. Even in 2000, the Guardian was seen reassuring readers that art glass had survived nineteenth-century industrialization.

From Pugin’s didactic True Principles, through Ruskin’s homily to the spiritually uplifting value of the hand made in ‘On the Nature of the Gothic’, to
Morris’s Arts and Crafts approach to valuing the lesser arts within a holistic approach to the improving capacity of creative manufacture, the design theorists of the mid-nineteenth century were concerned to promote craft practices rooted in centuries of tradition as a necessary correlative of industrial society.\textsuperscript{27} Just as design and the crafts of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries have continued to wrestle with their nineteenth-century formations, so fine art has inherited a nineteenth-century legacy of commodification which has withstood repeated attempts to undermine it, through such phenomena as performance and process arts, to name but two.

Such attitudes, in modified form, underpin the work and reception of the Bauhaus, with its related set of principles, including the insistence that design, craft and fine art be taught, practised and seen together, rather than separated in a hierarchy. The Bauhaus declared one of its aims to be the elevation of the status of design and the crafts to that enjoyed by fine art, painting and sculpture. Retrospectively, with recourse to the continuing nature of these arguments, we might question the success of this endeavour. British art education and training can be seen as the hot house in which the interplay of relationships between disciplines is cultivated.\textsuperscript{28} Martina Margetts has stressed the importance of art-school training, as opposed to apprenticeships, for the increasingly blurred boundaries of the craft/art debate: ‘mantras such as the “new ceramics” and “new jewellery” suggest changed priorities, in which conceptual ideas flourish alongside, sometimes instead of, considerations of use.’\textsuperscript{29} Institutional categorizations have played a significant role in constructing and maintaining taxonomies of people, which in turn have affected the classifications of objects and their disciplinary discourses. Consequently this special issue offers examinations of the sites of intersection which occur in objects, practices and materials; sites at which the production, reception and consumption of objects are intrinsic to an understanding of their polyvalent meanings.

This introduction does not seek to replicate the work already published on the historical antecedents of the present debate, but rather to acknowledge the place of this work. The history of design has documented the role of craft and art in its accounts of the production and consumption of material culture.\textsuperscript{30} As Martina Margetts writes in this special issue, in her review of Paul Greenhalgh’s recent edited collection of essays, what is needed is:
carefully researched analyses and theoretical engagement to achieve a more sophisticated context for discussing and understanding the crafts . . . we do not want a regurgitation of the Progressive Line . . . the Industrial Revolution begat the Arts and Crafts Movement which begat Modernism and Anti-Ornament which begat revisionist Postmodernism which begat Global Hybridity.\textsuperscript{31}

Writing about the crafts continues to exemplify the historical, and historicalist, appeal of craft to consumers as a way of accessing nostalgic, pre-industrial ideals.\textsuperscript{32} This is the case whether the artefacts are hand-made or use the latest technological innovations, although, of course, the former are especially potent, as heard in Peter Fuller’s lament:\textsuperscript{33}

Whatever our society may, or may not, have gained through its technological, political and social advances, when we are confronted with craftsmanship as superlative as this [Medici Mamluk carpet] we are compelled to admit what it is that we have lost.\textsuperscript{34} [Fuller’s italics]

A contemporary example is found in the reverent presentation of the consumption of Shaker objects, both antique and newly manufactured, and in the repeated heralding, seen in consumer publications, of the crafts as fashion’s improver.\textsuperscript{35} Despite a pervasive cultural preoccupation with media and digital technology, the earlier enthusiasms and fears that characterized the machine age, and continuing discussion about the role of CAD in the crafts,\textsuperscript{36} contemporary visual culture displays a continuing concern for spiritual enlightenment through consumption.\textsuperscript{37}

In a perplexing cultural context of violence and decay (Cronenberg and Hirst), what is offered by the crafts? They, too, give an image of society, perhaps more rooted in delight and enrichment, but there is also provocation and philosophical enquiry.\textsuperscript{38}

Traditional craft values of permanence and of personal investment are presented as desirable qualities in recent lifestyle media.\textsuperscript{39} It has been argued that, for the consumer, it hardly matters that ‘romanticism masks the reality of hard graft inherent in the work of craftspeople’.\textsuperscript{40} We may see this as a continuation of Roger Coleman’s defence of manual creative work in an increasingly technological society.\textsuperscript{41}

In the post-industrial era, craft can still mean the skilled production by hand or machine of utilitarian
and vernacular designs. However, interwoven with this is the principle by which 'craft' can also, increasingly, refer to an elite classification of hand or machine production displayed and sold through galleries such as Contemporary Applied Arts and the Crafts Council. In the face of experimental challenges to traditions of skill, Peter Fuller articulated in 1983 his conservative belief that:

The achievement of excellence is only possible through acceptance of the specific traditions and limitations of any given pursuit. Originality, as Donald Winnicott once put it, is only possible on the basis of tradition...the hand-made vessel exemplifies the union of man's functional skills and his aesthetic and symbolic intents.42

At the same time, Fuller used the exhibitions Jewellery Redefined and The Jewellery Project in an acidic derangement of technical innovation and the use of everyday materials in jewellery practice of the early 1980s.43 Adopting Fuller's mantle, the late Peter Dormer, in his 1994 book The Art of the Maker, lamented an emphasis upon individuality of expression that had led makers to neglect skill:

The modern orthodoxy is that conception and execution are separate activities and that execution—mere making—can take care of itself. Skills are regarded as technical constraints upon self-expression and they are not recognised as being the content as well as the means of expression.44

A shift away from the conventions of craft skills and the primacy of function to iconoclastic aesthetic experimentation mirrors cultural theorist Pierre Bourdieu's delineation of the increasing bid on the part of the artist for autonomy. The consumption of elite artefacts offers the promise of distinction articulated by Bourdieu,45 and elaborated by Mary Butcher in her analysis of an eel-trap by David Drew. Drew's eel-trap exemplifies the traditions of vernacular production but simultaneously undermines those traditions by being displayed as the product of a named maker at the Crafts Council, with a label alerting the visitor to its 'sculptural beauty'.46 Fine art's symbolic value has consistently outstripped the cultural capital of craft and design, both of which have been conventionally invested with use-value rather than conceptual distinction, based on the Western cultural primacy of the intellectual over the manual, content over form.47 Bourdieu's writings, and subsequent post-structural developments by Jean Baudrillard, are helpful in understanding the interleaved roles of producer and consumer in making meaning and value for objects. This has usefully illuminated yet another dynamic to be considered—the extent to which artefacts are conceived, made and consumed within the ordinance of consistent principles.48 Moira Vincentelli's discussion of Oaxacan wood carving in her review of Michaeł Chibnik's work on the subject in this special issue offers a compelling example of this. The articles here—and notably Jo Turney's study of amateur craft and Melanie Unwin's work on Mary Watts—also imply the importance of acknowledging that the principles informing the work of the design historian are distinct from those underpinning the production of the artefacts which form the subject of study.

Rosemary Hill has pointed out that the history of the reception of fine art has a 'place in an historical process' significant in perpetuating the 'art-craft divide'.49 That is why Antony Gormley, sculptor of Gateshead's 'Angel of the North', has received so much more media attention than his brother, the wood carver John Gormley.50 At the turn of this century, however, it is less accurate to lament the fact that the crafts are insufficiently discussed.51 The recent flurry of texts and events interrogating craft has provided a necessary response to the shared engagement by artists, designers and craftspeople with a plethora of materials and techniques. Within art history, increasing attention to the use of demotic objects or processes for gallery consumption has mirrored the debate within craft discourse.52

The 'institutionalization' of craft discourse as a historical and theoretical discipline in itself was aided by the Crafts Council's remit to promote the crafts since its inception in 1971 as the Crafts Advisory Committee, which had an additional concern for professionalizing the crafts. With the support of the Council's magazine, exhibition programme and conferences, craft began to stake out its disciplinary boundaries, structured around its relationship to design and art.53 Inevitably, craft historians and writers debated the definition, function and meaning of craft, focusing particularly on late-twentieth-century practices.54 Discussion of specific genres in craft was somewhat less embroiled in status agony, but exhibitions often took up the debate exploring the continuing relevance of the hand-made and/or its situation in the broader context of visual culture.55
The Crafts Council provided, and can be seen to continue to provide, an official platform for ‘establishment’ craft, which has continually engaged with shifting definitions and practices from the artist-craftsperson to the designer-maker.\textsuperscript{56} The advent of design groups such as Droog, Jam and El Ultimo Grito, and designers such as Carl Clerkin and Michael Marriott, who bring a combined design/craft approach to production and their aesthetic, seems to indicate a more profound interplay between craft and design processes than the material/status struggle of art and craft.

The patriarchal nature of hierarchies of visual practice, in which women have been associated with amateur and domestic practices and men with extra-domestic professionalism, remain to be thoroughly effaced.\textsuperscript{57} Ascribed status has tended to depend upon levels of intellectual input and conditions of production, as Rozsiska Parker and Griselda Pollock have suggested.\textsuperscript{58} Activities requiring high levels of skill, but little in the way of equipment (and, therefore, capital investment), such as crochet, have been viewed as little more than the amusements of the hobbyist.\textsuperscript{59} Women constitute the majority of amateur craft producers, and this emphasis feeds into expert engagement within the discipline, as evidenced by gender ratios of students across the subjects taught in art colleges and practised professionally.\textsuperscript{60} Fine art has conventionally been gendered male while craft has been posited as a female counterpart. Such binarism has been brought under scrutiny more recently as female artists such as Sarah Lucas and Tracey Emin have appropriated the stereotype of the (male) \textit{enfant terrible}. The contradictory and reductive nature of these stereotypes has been revealed by Pat Kirkham’s reassessment of the work of Charles and Ray Eames. The assumption that the craft elements present in the work of this modernist design partnership are Ray’s contribution alone is demolished in favour of a reading in which craft motifs, considered a feminine aberration by many design commentators, are shown to be very much the result of partnership, rather than gender.\textsuperscript{61} In this volume, Melanie Unwin, Jo Turney and Pamela Gerrish Nunn each contribute complex case studies of how discussion of such stereotypes throws light on prevailing attitudes to the gendering of visual practice.

While Greenhalgh has recently predicted that ‘the next phase of modernity will be to do with interdisciplinarity’, which will be ‘premised on relational rather than reductive visions of life’, his thesis represents the polemic optimism of much craft writing echoed in the pages of \textit{Crafts} magazine.\textsuperscript{52} The call for the dissolution of conventional genres is less evident in the discourses of design and art, which have, rather, mapped the intersections and appropriations occurring within their realms. While the historiography of the disciplinary discourses of design and art presents an increasingly closer parallel in their concerns with the context, production and consumption of their objects of study, crafts have a nascent rather than mature historiography.\textsuperscript{63} The shift to thematic studies, such as those on the body, has offered the opportunity for a meeting on common ground, presenting the illusion of interdisciplinarity rather than its achievement.\textsuperscript{64} Works of craft history and theory have been conceived as responses to, or as following, earlier works of design and art history: Edward Lucie Smith’s \textit{The Story of Craft} was conceived as a companion to Ernst Gombrich’s \textit{The Story of Art}; Peter Dormer’s collection \textit{The Culture of Craft: Status and Future} followed its stablemate \textit{The Culture of Fashion}, by Christopher Breward; Margot Coatts’s edited collection \textit{Pioneers of Modern Craft} borrows its title from Nikolaus Pevsner’s \textit{Pioneers of Modern Design}.\textsuperscript{65} As general editor of the Studies in Design and Material Culture series from which the latter two titles derive, Paul Greenhalgh invokes a much earlier work of art history, Georgio Vasari’s \textit{Lives of the Artists}, in introducing a group of essays that he viewed as indicative of a vital stage in the development of the literature of craft—the ‘monograph stage’.\textsuperscript{66} Published in the same year as \textit{Pioneers of Modern Craft}, but far beyond the monograph stage, lies Sue Rowley’s useful collection \textit{Craft and Contemporary Theory}, which begins with the idea that the art/craft debate, situated by Rowley in the 1980s, is part of a critique of the canon of art and that the task ahead is not to create a canon of craft but rather to ‘place craft momentarily at the centre of a range of ongoing interdisciplinary investigations of contemporary culture, as one might place a fulcrum momentarily under an intransigent object.’\textsuperscript{67} Rowley’s collection answers Peter Dormer’s resistance to theory—‘Academics prefer to write in \textit{lingua obscura}: what they are hiding from is unclear’—with a collection of essays, including Terry Smith’s ‘Craft, mod-
ernity and postmodernity’, determined to place the crafts within theoretical discourses of museology, reception theory and theories of film.68

The Journal of Design History has, from its inception, offered a forum for critical engagement with the crafts. A double issue in 1989 contained a variety of perspectives on the crafts, including analyses informed by ethnographic methods and theories of post modernity and consumption, and ranged from Algeria, to Ireland, to the USA. In 1997–98, another double special issue was published, comprising volumes on Craft, Culture and Identity and Craft, Modernism and Modernity, derived from a conference Obcure Objects of Desire: Reviewing the Crafts in the Twentieth Century.69 Tanya Harrod convened the conference, and was subsequently winner of the Design History Society prize for excellent scholarship for her book The Crafts in Britain in the Twentieth Century. Harrod’s has provided a key text for mapping the historical position of the crafts and their relationship to industry in the twentieth century, and makes muted reference to the increasingly contorted relationship of craft to art in the late twentieth century.

Future

It is the aim of Dangerous Liaisons: Relationships Between Design, Craft And Art to offer a selection of focused, historically-situated analyses that clearly elucidate the value of reflecting on the dynamism of these categories for understanding their objects. Each of the following articles explores a distinct instance of their interplay as it is embodied in hybrid artefacts, in their conception by makers and their reception at institutional or individual levels.70 Changes in the way that makers have situated themselves within the categories of visual and material endeavour, as well as changes in the reception of those endeavours as they have been objectified, have transformed the categories themselves. Dangerous Liaisons addresses an important area under-exploited in academic research. The continuing relevance of examining the historical and current interplay of design, craft and art affords an opportunity to examine the complex matrix in which visual and material culture is forged.

The selection opens with Martina Droth’s analysis of the design, craft and art of sculpture within a period heralded by the Great Exhibition of 1851—an omnivorous showcase of manufactures and decorative art—subsequent to which the popularization of Arts and Crafts Movement philosophies became increasingly pervasive. The status of the sculptor as workmanlike or imaginatively creative was contested within the context of relative commercial involvement. Droth demonstrates the radicalism of such new sculptural aesthetics based in decoration. Her concern for the significance of materials and processes is taken up by Linda Sandino’s paper on materiality, which focuses on the shared expressive use of materials in current design, art and studio jewellery.

Melanie Unwin’s case study of the work of Mary Watts contributes a refreshing and necessary reassessment of the role of creative partnership and the way in which personal and professional matters intersect with gender issues to shape the interplay of design, craft and art. This article acts as a counterpoint to the more pessimistic accounts of practice within marriage that have reproduced binaristic conceptions of gender, whereby women practitioners are eclipsed by their male partners. Unwin delineates the ways in which, through careful and subtle manipulation of the social codes that curtailed women’s professional and creative practices, Mary Watts turned the constraints, as well as the benefits, of marriage to her advantage in a manner which not only enabled her to continue to practise but also to produce artefacts which complicate the interface of design, craft and art, and of commerce and culture. By carefully negotiating forms of practice considered to fall into the realms of design, craft and art, Watts carved out a space for her professional output. As Elizabeth Cumming has noted, while Watts ‘synthesized the crafts within the fine arts, the “femininity” of the domestic studio with the “masculinity” of the public building’, she was also a ‘shrewd businesswoman’ employing agents to sell her ceramic wares internationally.71

Unwin’s original study reveals how Mary Watts’ work made an important contribution to the fields of architecture, art, ceramic design and craft. A gendered analysis of the interplay between design, craft and art, underpinned by a concern to elucidate the distinctions between amateur and professional, public and private in Unwin’s story, resurfaces in Jo Turney’s article on home crafts.

A methodological contribution is made by art historian Pamela Gerrish Nunn’s article ‘Fine Art
and the Fan, 1860–1930’ which, when read within the context of design history and this journal, exemplifies the way in which fine art practices, when applied to demotic forms more commonly associated with design and craft, such as the hand-held fan, ignite a range of responses from aesthetic arbiters, commercial concerns and consumers that upset those conventional hierarchies within which Gerrish Nunn situates her analysis. Gerrish Nunn explores some implications arising from the convergence of the meaningful representations she associates with fine art, with the decorative designs more usually applied to the fan. These objects therefore embody a particular relationship between design, craft and art and as such complicate each of those terms for anyone attempting to understand them through normative categories. Gerrish Nunn’s study bridges a period, 1860 to 1930, during which the development of visual and material forms appropriate to the articulation of modernity progressed apace and she considers that development in gendered terms as both normative and liberating.

Those themes are revisited in relation to contemporary culture in Jo Turney’s exploration of making and living with home craft. The pre-designed needlework kit confounds academic classifications of design, craft and art just as it thoroughly complicates concepts of authorship, creativity and originality, production and consumption. These artefacts, when completed, are important tools in the formation and display of identity that in turn have an impact upon the home as a designed construct, and the display practices which accompany the production of home crafts similarly engage issues of public and private domesticities.

Finally, Linda Sandino’s article reminds us that the qualities invoked by a consideration of materiality are aspects of objects arguably all too often overlooked by design historians. The allusive significance of materials is here presented with reference to relevant theoretical interjections. This article offers readers a reassessment of the significance of materials, articulating meanings found within the particular objects selected for analysis as disrupting assumptions about relationships between design, craft and art. By examining the shared expressive content of substances such as rubbish and processes of decay, Sandino offers a reading of objects that highlights the commonality of visual–arts practices as ‘plastic arts’.

Clearly, the interplay between design, craft and art is not only historically specific: it is equally determined by culture and region. Like this introduction, the group of articles that follows takes Britain as its focus. We acknowledge that a study of, for example, the production and consumption of hand-made objects in Japan and India would reveal other sets of complex practices and assumptions. In this volume, Moira Vincentelli’s review of Michael Chibnik’s study of the markets for Oaxacan wood carving explores the related issues of the significance of geographical and cultural regions in determining the meanings ascribed to various practices of production and consumption. Such issues have been raised in an earlier issue of the Journal of Design History, where articles by Yuko Kikuchi, Edmund de Waal and Patricia Baker collectively illuminated mythologies of authentic indigenous cultures. Each of the articles in that volume mobilized issues of identity and region. The limited range of studies of global practices of design, craft and art circulating in Britain are insufficient. We hope that this special issue will engage debates and provoke further studies sorely lacking. The Journal of Design History seeks to develop work in this direction.

The temporal reach of the articles frames the twentieth century. The interplay between design, craft and art is manifest in a variety of contexts and subject to historical and cultural conditions, hence the need to explore these relationships. The articles appear in this volume in chronological succession. Analysis extends from the Great Exhibition of 1851, used by Martina Droth as the starting point for her study of ‘The Ethics of Making’, through Melanie Unwin’s exploration of the complex practice of Mary Watts at the Compton Chapel, completed in 1904, and Pamela Gerrish Nunn’s narrative of the fan and modernity from 1860 to 1930, to Jo Turney’s examination of ‘home craft’ in the last quarter of the twentieth century and Linda Sandino’s fin-de-siècle reflection on contemporary practice. Although not specifically addressed here, the period following the Second World War is an enormously rich one for studies that focus on the interplay of design, craft and art and has been explored by Tanya Harrod in her landmark study The Crafts in Britain in the Twentieth Century, and by contributors to Harrod’s special issue of this journal, Craft, Modernism and Modernity.

It is hoped that readers who view scholarly liaisons between histories of design, craft and art as dangerous...
will be convinced that there is much of mutual benefit embedded here. We hope, equally, that those readers who regard the continuing debate about relationships between design, craft and art as stale or unimportant will recognize in the following articles a useful grounding of such debate in specific examples. The intersections analysed here reveal thematic complexity, and the wider importance of an awareness of the mutability of classifications as a methodological concern. The originality of the following selection of articles resides in our demonstration of the utility of a method which elucidates the relevance and historical contingency of reciprocity between design, craft and art. Each author has identified artefacts resulting from this conjunction and has demonstrated that an analysis sensitive to that conjunction can better elucidate those objects and their perception than one which applies normative, inherited categories or refuses to acknowledge the interplay of these phenomena.

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University of Hertfordshire, and the National Life Story Collection, National Sound Archive, the British Library

Notes

1 Choderlos de Laclos, Les Liaisons dangereuses, Paris, 1782; trans. P. W. K. Stone, Penguin, 1961. Itself an early intervention in the development of the novel, Laclos’ epistolary fiction has been translated into film by a number of directors, including most notably: Stephen Frear, Dangerous Liaisons (1988), starring John Malkovich and Glenn Close, which was an adaptation of Christopher Hampton’s play based on the novel; Milos Forman, Valmont (1989), starring Colin Firth and Annette Bening; and Roger Vadim, Les Liaisons dangereuses, starring Jeanne Moreau (1959). Roger Kumble’s Cruel Intentions of 1999 offered a popularized and contemporary setting for the story, starring Sarah Michelle Geller, Ryan Phillippe and Reese Witherspoon. The title of this special issue, Dangerous Liaisons: Relationships between Design, Craft And Art, derives from a conference held at the University of Hertfordshire in 1999 on the same theme. Grace Lees-Maffei would like to thank staff and students on the BA Hons. Applied Arts for the impetus to engage with the issues broached here, including Flea Cooke, Sally Freshwater, Wendy Tuxhill, Antje Illner and Steven Adams.


4 See M. Archer & G. Hilty, Material Culture: The Object in British Art of the 1980s and ‘90s, South Bank Centre, 1997, published to accompany the exhibition of the same name, Hayward Gallery, London, 3 April–18 May 1997; A. Murphy, ‘Look, don’t sit. Ballooning chairs, dressing tables that spout water: don’t laugh, it’s art’. Observer Life, 6 April 1997, pp. 20–1; D. Sudjic, ‘Art or Architecture: as it gets harder and harder to tell the difference between art and architecture, are these two disciplines really blurring?’, British Vogue, February 2002, pp. 71–4; D. Sudjic, ‘Is the future of art in their hands? Fashion has always borrowed from art for its inspiration. But not any longer. Now it’s the designers who are taking over our galleries and museums’, The Observer, 14 October 2001, http://observer.guardian.co.uk/review/story/0,6903,5733555,00.html.


12. P. Wollen & F. Bradley (eds.), Addressing the Century: 100 Years of Art and Fashion, Hayward Gallery Publishing, 1998, to accompany the exhibition of the same name at the Hayward Gallery which featured the work of Gilbert and George, and Caroline Broadhead among others; I. Christie & P. Dodd (eds.), Spellbound: Art and Film, British Film Institute, South Bank Centre, 1996, accompanied another Hayward Gallery show including the work of Terry Gilliam, Peter Greenaway and two Turner Prize winners, Douglas Gordon and Steve McQueen.


19. ‘This is an exciting time for potters—they should push back the boundaries’: Your reactions to last week’s article about pottery’, The Guardian, 27 October 2001, http://www.guardian.co.uk/saturday-review/story/0,3605,581482,00.html.


30. See, for example, J. A. Walker, Design History and the History of Design, Pluto Press, 1989; V. Margolin (ed.), Design Discourse:
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History, Theory, Criticism, University of Chicago Press, 1989;


33 See, in P. Dormer (ed.), The Culture of Craft, B. Metcalf’s view of the importance of ‘bodily intelligence’ as a criterion for defining craft: ‘Craft and Art, Culture and Biology’ (pp. 67–82), and P. Greenhalgh’s critique of craft as oppositional to mass manufacturing: ‘The progress of Captain Ludd’ (pp. 104–11).


35 A. Murphy, ‘Cooler Shaker. It’s a topsy-turvy world: Shaker has never had more followers (oval boxes, pegboards and ladderback chairs are de rigueur), but the Shaker religion has never had fewer’, Observer Life magazine, 18 May 1997, pp. 12–21; N. Yusuf, ‘Hard Craft. Reflecting growing concern for global conservation, fashion takes craft to its heart’, Elle (UK), September 1989, pp. 190–1; N. Niesewand, ‘Fashion Junkies: the biggest stars of the runway are recycled’, Vogue (British edition), March 1996, p. 97; D. Hall, ‘Future Imperfect. It’s been beyond the pale for 20 years, but craft is back. Tired of processed perfection, style seekers are turning to handmade individuality’, Vogue (British edition), April 1999, pp. 56–9.


38 Objects of Our Time, p. 18.


40 Objects of Our Time, pp. 9–10.


43 P. Fuller ‘Modern jewellery’, first published in Crafts magazine, reproduced in Images of God, pp. 269–73. Jewellery Redefined was exhibited at the British Crafts Centre in 1982 and The Jewellery Project was displayed at the Crafts Council in 1983.


47 A related discussion is developed by B. Metcalf, in ‘Craft and art, culture and biology’, in P. Dormer (ed.), The Culture of Craft, pp. 67–82.


50 M. Wainwright, ‘Home Sweet Home: While Antony Gormley was sculpting the giant Angel of the North, his brother John was carving out his own niche down the road in Thirsk, heart of British woodworking’, The Guardian Weekend, 11 July 1998, pp. 52–5.


52 Recent moves within the discipline to address issues of ‘visual culture’ include J. A. Walker & S. Chaplin, Visual Culture: An Introduction, Manchester University Press, 1997.


54 P. Fuller, Images of God (section ‘Arts and Crafts’), 1990; P. Dormer (ed.), The Culture of Craft; Dormer, The Art of the Maker; T. Harrod (ed.), Obscure Objects of Desire; C. Frayling &


59 ‘It’s not all looms and sad crochet: Yes, craftwork has changed. Forget the village hall and try Sotheby’s. (Just don’t ask for knitted teasocies)’, Observer Life, 25 January 1998, p. 27. This notice for the Contemporary Decorative Arts selling exhibition at Sotheby’s and the Futures: Decorative Arts Today sale at Bonhams invoked derogatory stereotypes of craft in order to efface them. Janice Blackburn is quoted as saying ‘We just need to find a new way of describing it.’

60 See H. Cumline–Charlesworth, ‘The RCA: its influence on education and design 1900–1950’, PhD thesis, Royal College of Art, 1991, and by the same author, ‘The Royal College of Art’, in J. Seddon & S. Worden (eds.), Women Designing: Redefining Design in Britain between the Wars, University of Brighton, 1994, pp. 10–15. It is relevant here to note that the readership of Crafts magazine is overwhelmingly female, with a 1999 Crafts readership survey noting that of its readers, 81% were female and 50% were makers. Interestingly, when readers were asked to identify their interests, 56% cited textiles, 47% ceramics and 45% jewellery, in contrast to only 28% of readers who admitted interest in metalwork, 29% interested in furniture and 30% interested in wood. ‘Summary of Crafts 1999 Readership Survey’, unpublished Crafts magazine document circulated to advertisers.


68 P. Dormer (ed.), The Culture of Craft, p. 186.

69 In publishing the proceedings of the conference which she had convened as the second University of East Anglia Fellow in the Critical Appreciation of the Crafts and Design, Tanya Harrod followed her predecessor Peter Dormer, who produced The Culture of Craft: Status and Future during his fellowship. Subsequent Fellows have included Pamela Johnson, who edited papers presented at a seminar ‘Ideas in the Making: Practice in Theory’ (Crafts Council, 1998), and Julian Stair, who edited the Body Politic anthology during his tenure (Crafts Council, 2000) at the University of Northumbria at Newcastle.

70 Another example of a method which focuses on an instance of interplay between several related factors is outlined by Ruth Schwartz Cowan in her chapter ‘The consumption junction: a
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proposal for research strategies in the sociology of technology’, in W. W. Bijker, T. P. Hughes & T. Pinch (eds.), The Social Construction of Technological Systems: New Directions in the Sociology and History of Technology, MIT Press, (1987) 1993, pp. 261–80. Cowan’s admirable explanation of the consumption junction (the moment in which a consumer makes a decision between a network of interrelated factors that effect purchase) is supported by communication of visual and spatial relationships between network factors described diagrammatically.


