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NEW YORK FOLKLORE
129 Jay Street
Schenectady, NY 12305
518/346-7008
Fax 518/346-6617
Email: info@nyfolklore.org
<http://www.nyfolklore.org>

Craft Revisited:

MOVING TOWARD A CONSUMER REVOLUTION

BY JEROMY MCFARREN

Today's Western economic structure, based on technology and services, is radically different from the one that existed before industrialization and has resulted in many of the economic crises that face us in the early 21st century. The control of goods has been concentrated in the hands of a few large corporations, rather than distributed throughout the community of small, independent businesses. The production of goods by corporate manufacturing, through modern machinery and technology, has displaced the labor force, separated the mind from the production process, depersonalized and devalued the act of manual skill, and enslaved us to a system of forced consumption. The consequences of these manufacturing practices have had profound effects on us and on our communities.

Before the rise of industrialization, the value of human labor was immanent in the goods that were produced, where a physical connection existed between the maker, the product, and the customer/citizen, who was actively engaged in the consumption process through knowledge and the building of a network of real world relationships. Communities thrived by simply providing the necessities of life for themselves and the surrounding localities. Today, the picture is far different. According to Erik A. Swyngedouw, professor of urban planning, the new economic structure is built around four key elements: A scattered system of production that relies on cheap available

labor, centralized locations of administration, niche marketing, and a focus on technology and services (Swyngedouw 1989). Through modern technology, corporations are able to create cheap products with little effort and expenditure, and to distribute manufacturing processes to locations that advance those goals. Visual arts writer Peter Dormer (1997a) noted that this redistribution of processes through machinery, production systems, and information systems has displaced the need for human skill in manufacturing. This focus on technology has resulted in the devaluing of labor and workmanship and has replaced skill with a programmed set of instructions, relegating craftsmanship to antiquity and denoting technology as the symbol of progress (Risatti 2007).

Designed obsolescence

In order to keep this economic structure going, corporations have devised schemes of obsolescence to perpetuate the desire-demand cycle. Three main strategies have been employed, as illustrated by Susan Strasser, professor of American history. The first is "obsolescence of function," where newer, better models outdate their predecessors (Strasser 1999, 276). The second is "obsolescence of quality," wherein the product has failure built into its design (Strasser 1999, 276). And the third strategy is that of "obsolescence of desirability," which closely aligns with obsolescence of function and involves the product becoming replaced

through trends in style (Strasser 1999, 276). The last strategy is one of focus, for it is the tactic in which consumers are so entrenched.

Strasser further described obsolescence of desirability through what she termed "the fashion process": "[It] depends on ever-expanding needs and organizes production and consumption along principles of obsolescence, seduction, and diversification" (Strasser 1999, 187–188). Consumers are continuously exposed to the creation of false needs through the market's replacement of products by advertising and the media. The fashion process and obsolescence of desirability allow corporate manufacturers to produce excess amounts of goods that are continuously changing, while utilizing the media in order to manipulate desire for those new goods, the majority of which, if we are honest with ourselves, are much the same as those they have replaced.

Today, Western consumers have access to goods in a seemingly endless supply, which diminishes their value, while contributing to the devaluation of objects in general (Sōetsu 2010). Sociologist Daniel Miller (1995) pointed out that contemporary Western consumers are no longer inhibited by seasonality and scarcity. As a result, we have come to expect availability and affordability. The obsolescence of desirability feeds this system of abundance.

The abundance of goods available at low cost and their contribution to the obsolescence of desirability strategy are the result of



A sea of vehicles crowds the parking lot of a corporate retailer in Wilton, a suburb of Saratoga Springs, on a Saturday afternoon. *All photos by Jeromy McFarren.*

industrial design, an element of the division of labor by corporate manufacturers that is responsible for the conceptualization of mass-produced goods. Industrial design has led to systems of manufacturing that favor efficiency, uniformity, and limitations that create goods on a limitless scale.

The intention of industrial design is to create goods that are easily manufactured by machine technology, while promising products that are “new, improved” or “the latest,”

and so forth (Petroski 1992, 170). However, the designs that espouse these created benefits are often little different from those they replace, as noted by Henry Petroski (1992), engineer and professor, who reported that radically different designs are viewed with skepticism by the public. This suggests that the basic characteristics of the objects that we use are generally appropriate to their intended function, and that recreations on these basic themes are irrelevant.

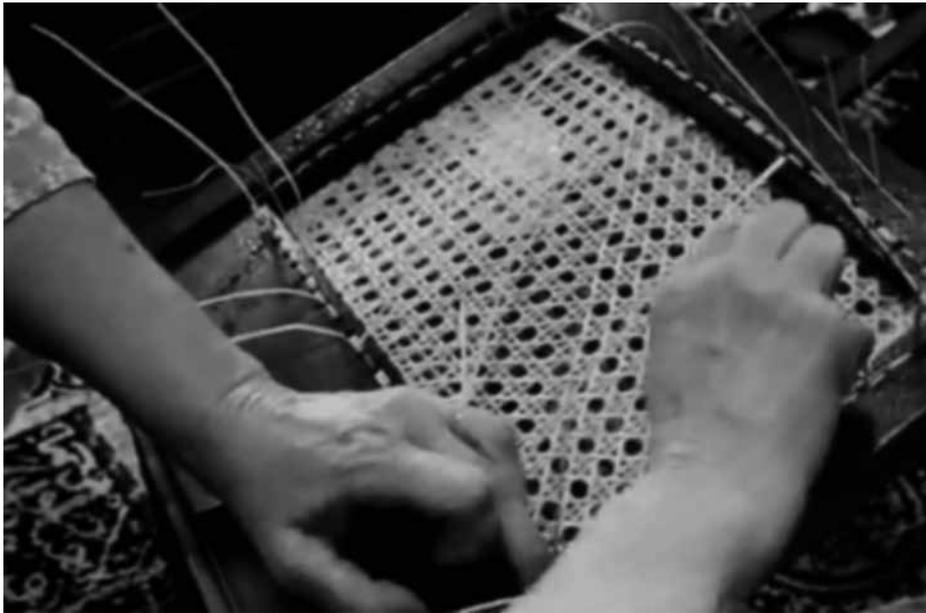
Uniformity and mass production

Industrial designers are in the business of creating desire and “satisfying” those already created (Dormer 1997c), and the designers are very much responsible for the perpetual discontent to which consumers are prone as a result of mass production. In part, this may be due to the limitations imposed on designers by machines and the available technologies they utilize. The designer’s ability to supply the instructions for an object’s creation is limited (Risatti 2007). Instead, designers must “accommodate themselves to machines,” and this compromise of technology over originality places limits on what can and cannot be manufactured (Risatti 2007, 178). A designer’s inhibition by machines, in turn, inhibits the consumer from realizing satisfaction from mass production in any meaningful sense. Because of the division of labor, the designer’s instructions must be easily understood and implemented by the programmers of the corporation’s manufacturing technology (Risatti 2007).

There are several negative consequences to the system of uniformity. The first is that, because everything looks the same, we have suffered the loss of difference and diversity in the world around us (McKnight



The Village of Greenwich’s main street, populated solely by independent businesses on the same Saturday afternoon (as in the previous photo shown above), is representative of the current economic and cultural consumer paradigm.



Chris Hubbard, of Salem, NY, canes a chair using traditional rattan materials and hand tool techniques.

and Block 2010). Our worlds become predictable and devoid of any special qualities. Think about the experiences we have when visiting a culture different from our own, where the objects that serve that culture look wildly different from what we are used to. They command attention and call out for the use of all of our senses to understand them. We become actively engaged with the objects and often ask questions about their creation. Relationships form between us, the objects, and their makers—the individuals who created the objects from imagination to production—and these relationships add to our own self-awareness.

This set of experiences is denied by mass production, as pointed out by Christina Goulding (2000), professor of marketing. Dormer agrees, stating, “The commonest feature about technology, with its distributed knowledge, is that everything begins to look the same” (Dormer 1997b, 142). Others, like art historian Rafael Cardoso (2010), would argue that because of its precise construction and ubiquity, uniformity is viewed negatively by people like myself. Uniformity, however, is unacceptable because it offers the same experience to everyone, it denies the uniqueness of the individual, and it is devoid of the true value that resides within anything handmade by one individual for

another. With the mass-produced object, the individual can only bring his or her own experience to the object; there is no reciprocation, no experience that leads to a context of self-fulfillment (Risatti 2007).

Uniformity in our everyday environments has led to the predictability of our lived experiences. Mass production thrives on predictability and on the institutionalization of standards (McKnight and Block 2010). Standards imply repetition, which becomes the normal state of our lives and mirrors the constructed norms of the generalized constructed consumer (Risatti 2007). We have come to expect a limited capability of expressiveness through the objects of the marketplace. Instead of diversity and a reciprocal experience, we have come to expect and value uniformity.

Corporations are fully aware of the consumer’s desire for fulfillment and have devised means of fooling the consumer into believing fulfillment can be achieved through mass production. This is known as mass customization, which “gives the illusion that this is just for you, even though the exact customized service or product is being offered to millions of people, all receiving the same treatment or product at the same moment” (McKnight and Block 2010, 30). Even though corporations would have us

believe that they are able to provide for limitless needs, they are in fact limited by their methods of production, so that nothing that is produced by a corporate manufacturer is unique or special.

Loss of beauty

Another result of industrially designed goods is the general lack of beauty that is found in objects made by hand. The beauty to which I am referring is more than being merely pretty or attractive, but that deeper aesthetic quality that is imparted by the “soul” of the maker into the object’s aura; it is the human personality imbued into the object’s physical materials. An early proponent of handcraft, artist and designer William Morris (2010) stated that machine goods are ugly and a “degradation of human life,” and that people, as a result of mass production, have lost the ability to discriminate between ugliness and beauty due to the conventionality of the appropriation of mass-produced goods. More recently, artist George Nakashima also remarked on the poor quality and lack of emotional resonance in mass-produced goods (Halper and Douglas 2009, 9). The ugliness that surrounds us on a daily basis is a consequence of the corporate value placed on flexible accumulation, the ability of manufacturers to change product lines quickly in order to cater to niche markets (Smith and Riley 2009). Smaller quantities intended for specific target markets are produced in rapid succession in order to capitalize on the fads and fashions of the consumer culture. This is what the kitsch that fills the malls is intended to do; it creates the excess of goods that keep the desire–demand cycle spinning.

Depersonalization of the worker

Today, the value of labor and skill in handmade goods has been replaced by the intellect. This shift in values has been directed and championed by the corporate structure as a means to drive down the cost of labor. The results have been disastrous for our economy. Risatti (2007) noted that the machine, in replacing the skilled worker, has

undermined the desire to learn a handcrafted skill and thus depersonalized the act of labor. Corporate manufacturing's transition from body to machine has actively engaged in this depersonalization by eliminating the interaction between the individual and the product. Instead, the individual, if present at all during the manufacturing process, is reduced to a tool to be used by the machine (Marx 2010, 75). As Risatti states, "Machines reverse the traditional relationship between a maker and his or her tools.... tools work as a function of man, but man works as a function of machines" (Risatti 2007, 50). The individual becomes subject to the machine and, consequently becomes alienated from the process of labor. The worker loses any sort of autonomy over the production process. He or she also loses any sort of knowledge or skill (Dormer 1997b, 102). The act of work becomes depersonalized, and the worker is no longer actively engaged in the production process, resulting in a monotonous slavery to the machine.

Additionally, machine production alters the way in which we relate to the world, further alienating and separating us from a relationship with our surroundings. Production processes favor quantity and limitless scale, which in turn depend on efficiency and predictability, four characteristics that better describe machine output than human labor (Risatti 2007). Because of this fact, technology and machinery, which have aided humanity in countless ways, have been misused to displace the human element from the production process. Dormer wrote that it is the choice of humanity to use technology toward specific ends, adding, "once technology is entrenched in a society it seems that nothing will dislodge it except another technology" (Dormer 1997c, 8). We decide how technology will be employed and must suffer the consequences of those choices (Muthesius 2010, 111). By replacing bodies with machines, we have created large-scale production at low costs with goods aplenty, but we have also relegated our fellow human beings to the endless drudgery of babysitting machines or to unemployment.

Technology *can*, and currently does coexist with precapitalist modes of production (Philibert 1989), because there are many things that limit the use of technology presently, such as the aesthetics of decorative details (Dormer 1997c). Mass-production techniques, in creating uniformity, must rely on machinery that often denies the ability to perform many functions that create character. In this way they stand opposed to objects marked by the human hand, which bring to them an aura of authenticity (Tucker 2004, 108), a quality defined by an object's undisputed origin as genuine. Sociologist and Professor Emeritus Brenda Danet and Tamal Katriel, professor of communications, noted that mass production undermines the aura of cultural objects (Danet and Katriel 1994). In contrast, Risatti argued that mass-produced objects have a different aura—one of anonymity that allows them to be appropriated to any context without thought of quality and value (Risatti 2007). The dichotomy stands between the human body's involvement in the production of goods or in its denial of any active participation. The ways in which we utilize technology determine whether human labor is valued or if human agents will become obsolete.

In the early 1900s, Alfred Loos (2010) stated that the artist's ownership of his work was lost by the advent of the day laborer. His insight marked the beginning of the devaluation of the worker with the introduction of the machine, but other factors have since compounded this effect of machine technology through its misuse, including displaced knowledge, the threat of human obsolescence, the cheapening of labor, and, indeed, forced labor.

John McKnight, professor emeritus of communications, and organizational development consultant Peter Block wrote that management is the ability to create repetition, but since people are not all the same, the role of repetition becomes delegated to machines through technological automation, where production can become standardized and the human agent, replaceable (McKnight and Block 2010). The individual is intentionally depersonalized, in effect, to become

the corporation, and to repeat procedures that result in the same experience for every individual. Human beings have a desire to express themselves in their work. Mechanical and technological processes seek to remove the variable element of human interaction to induce repeatability. As a result, the worker becomes lazy and ignorant, according to sociologist Peter R. Grahame (1994), due to the displacement of the knowledge of production from person to machine, a process recognized also by Professor Bjørnar Olsen (2003), an archaeologist, and by economist Floyd K. Harmston (1983).

As human beings become removed from the process of manufacturing, and as machines replace the knowledge of the individual, the value of labor becomes cheapened, people become easily replaceable, and training is quick. These are ideas espoused by the revolutionary socialist philosopher Karl Marx, ideas that are still (even more so) relevant today. As labor loses its perceived value, and the worker becomes ignorant of the process, he or she is often denied the pride of skill and the respect that should accompany it (Marx 2010). Sociologist John O'Neill (1978) stated that human obsolescence breeds insecure work identities, a sentiment with which psychologists Mihaly Csikszentmihaly and Eugene Rochberg-Halton agreed, writing, "Innovations developed to cope with a specific problem have a way of changing the way people do things and of altering how they relate to each other; eventually they effect the way people experience their lives" (Csikszentmihaly and Rochberg-Halton 1981, 46). Machines and technology, while relieving the burden of labor, have devalued the worker and taken away much of the pride or satisfaction involved in his or her work.

As a result of displaced knowledge and human obsolescence, the worker has become dependent on the structure that dominates him. Philosopher and mechanical engineer Charles Babbage wrote, "The economy of human time is the next advantage of machinery in manufactures" (Babbage 2010, 49). As people have been generally relegated to watching over machines rather than using

them, the labor force has been reduced to being competitors for low wages (Gaskell 2010; Marx 2010). It is no secret that technology has led to unemployment; the ability of machines now able to create other machines, coupled with a focus on service-based industries, has resulted in skilled workers becoming the most unemployed sector of the workforce. As a result of more applicants for fewer jobs, corporations can pay little for the positions they *do* offer. The worker, fearing the loss of his or her job, is in effect a wage slave (Berger 1995), forced to work in endless monotony. The repetitious babysitting of machinery was recognized by Marx (2010) and Morris (2010) as “drudgery,” and is still regarded in the same manner today. As stated by Norbert Wiener, philosopher and mathematics professor at MIT: “It is a degradation to a human being to chain him to an oar and use him as a source of power; but it is an almost equal degradation to assign him a purely repetitive task in a factory, which demands less than a millionth of his brain capacity” (Wiener 2010, 309). Marx and philosopher Alexis de Tocqueville are correct that cheapened labor combined with a misuse of machinery leads to “helpless dependence” of the worker upon the corporate manufacturing system (Marx 2010, 75; de Tocqueville 2010, 62), a sentiment also echoed by social reformer and activist Ellen Gates Starr (2010). Individuals become alienated from their work, and their self-worth suffers as they become resigned to their fate. This inability to realize the true self through work may also contribute to an individual’s use of consumption toward self-fulfillment, in yet another cycle of alienation and consumption.

How we can fix our broken economy

A starting point toward fixing our broken economy would be to refocus the concept of value back toward the labor process, as discussed by art historian M. Anna Fariello (Tucker 2004). Workers should be provided with the dignity that accompanies the production of objects. The misuse of machinery can be corrected. Self-expression does not have to be the province only of the “free

man,” as noted by Starr, but “it is only when a man is doing work which he wishes done, and delights in doing, and which he is free to do as he likes, that his work becomes a language to him” (Starr 2010, 157).

Through our purchasing decisions and consumer power, we can direct our dollars toward businesses and corporations that value human labor. The consumer revolution has already begun, and corporations, if they wish to thrive, will recognize the worth of human time. Social activist Arlene Goldbard (2006) noted that the growth of the do-it-yourself (DIY) and craft cultures is signaling this paradigm shift. A focus on buying locally redirects the value system back onto the maker, the worker, or the producer, and reassigns dignity to his or her sense of self. Miller stated, “Poverty is defined as the critical limit to our ability to realize ourselves as persons” (Miller 2010, 69). As consumers, we are responsible for the poverty that is plaguing our fellow human beings, by succumbing to the seductions of the fashion process and ignoring the processes of the production of goods. We need to wake up from the hypnotic distractions imposed on us by the mass media and become knowledgeable, active participants in putting our neighbors back to work. We should heed the words of Wendell Berry’s ample warning that “machines leave us more powerful but less content, less safe, and less free” (Berry 1987, 67).

Our definition of ourselves is currently derived from what we purchase, rather than what we produce (Csikszentmihaly and Rochberg-Halton 1981). Our economic system has come to be reflected in our daily lives by our own actions. We have relinquished our appreciation for beauty, in both goods and in the lived experience, and as a result we have displaced our appreciation for those who create beauty (Starr 2010, 158). We have allowed the corporate structure to deny us quality (Berry 1987) in the name of leisure and progress. We have essentially lost respect for the satisfaction that comes from realizing the physical manifestation of creation and labor. Our daily work results in the abstract symbol of money, not in something tangible and meaningful. Our daily goals are

geared toward imitation and the illusion of status, not toward true uniqueness and self-fulfillment. Handwork—realizing the physical fruits of labor—offers an insight into meaningful value and self-realization. It is a holistic process; as we will see, craftspeople are the essence of local business and are the necessary correlates between strong local economies and satisfied consumers.

Artist Bruce Metcalf wrote, “Most Western thought, which distrusts the body and its underlying cognition as a source of valid meaning, fails to find any significance in hand labour” (Metcalf 1997, 79). However, it is in handwork that satisfaction resides. Creative thought, though responsible for all of the world’s innovations, is nothing without the skill to produce a tangible benefit. McKnight and Block (2010) noted that before industry, pride came from making something for oneself, a pride that exists today with those who propagate those skills.

This is not to say that technologies have no value, because what are tools if not technologies? Tools are handheld devices that extend the capacities of the body, while still showing the mark of the creator. Machines are mechanical devices with several parts meant for precise construction, but limit the capacities of the human agent. Craftspeople do not reject machines, but object to their misuse in displacing the body from production (Greenhalgh 1997). However, in modern industry, the “tools of the eye have displaced the tools of the hand” (Csikszentmihaly and Rochberg-Halton 1981, 93). The value of craft lies in its ability to create an object that reflects its maker and communicates its value through its use by another individual, as well as through its acquisition. Unlike machinery, tools act as bodily extensions, and the skill behind their employment communicates the abilities and sensitivities of the maker.

Choosing to surround ourselves with beauty and meaning

Today very little value is derived from, or imparted to, the objects we use on a daily basis. The objects are generally uniform in design and similar in appearance to those used

by most everyone else, made of materials that are usually devoid of natural attributes, and are thus alienated from the user on every level. We do not usually know who made them or how, and as a result have no connection to either the maker or the process. No relationship has been communicated, and often no experience gained through the acquisition of the object, which was likely obtained through an anonymous environment. Diplomat and architect Hermann Muthesius (2010) remarked that there have always been attempts to argue that objects of frequent use that are mass-produced could be artistic. I would argue that they rarely are. Value itself, as previously defined, does not, in any case, lie in an object's aesthetic qualities alone, but in its form and existence in everything we use.

Value should be present in objects of frequent use. We should be allowed to surround ourselves with beauty and meaning. Instead, we have been convinced by corporate marketing that we need many things, as inexpensively as they can be acquired. The reality is that we only “need,” perhaps, one of most things and each item should be valuable to us. We should not be purchasing, for example, several plastic cups—which are ugly, wasteful, and bad for the environment—on a routine basis when we could spend our money on beautiful, unique, handmade cups, created by someone we know in our own community—someone who contributes to the local culture and economy. The former has zero value, while the latter is a meaningful experience that provides us with an object we will care for and be mindful of.

What this means is that choosing craft is a political statement (Wagner 2008). It denies the status quo and provides an alternative to the wasteful consumption that lines the pockets of corporate “leaders.” Choosing craft also serves as a symbol of true freedom. It is the acknowledgment that the maker's skill is valued, and an exercise of freedom through the knowledge of doing for oneself (Dormer 1997c), as well as freedom of choice by the consumer, illustrating liberty from the oppressive forced consumption of the marketplace's categorization of the



Bliss McIntosh of Cambridge, NY, soaks her own black ash logs in the brook near her home for her handmade baskets. Watch Bliss McIntosh create a black ash splint basket from beginning to end. The short documentary, by the author, won the 5th Peoples Pixel Project Award in 2014 from the Lake George Arts Project: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ObNWPaD862M>

constructed consumer. As consumers, every purchase we make is a political act. We are either supporting the hegemonic order or we are taking a stand against it. We are either supporting often distant corporations or our own communities. No one is outside of the political system, and choosing to spend our money on objects of real value communicates our devotion to ourselves, our families, and our communities.

Counterbalancing consumerism

Furthermore, craft is a tool in the fight to counterbalance the negative effects of consumerism, which has resulted in the current economic crisis. Architect Peter Greenhalgh wrote, “Three of the most important issues which face the global community... are unemployment, the exploitation of labour and the environment. All three are to do with the way things are made and are bound up with the appropriate use of technology” (Greenhalgh 1997, 113). He continued, “The way that people work, the conditions they work under, and the way they make things, is fundamental to the well-being of society. It is not possible to have a proper society if its

inhabitants are not humanely and creatively employed’ (33). Mass production is the very symbol of exploitation and technological misuse. It has resulted in society's expectancy of instant gratification and in laziness, ignorance, and dissatisfaction. Craft, by its very nature, requires patience, persistence, and active involvement, and leads to the pride that is lacking in mass production.

In order to counteract the exploitative effects of mass consumption, we, as consumers, must reevaluate our intentions with the objects we buy. Assuming we are willing to make all of our purchases meaningful and socially conscionable, we can begin to address the issues of accumulation. All of the objects we use or are surrounded by on a daily basis should recall Morris's statement that nothing that fills our lives should be anything but useful or beautiful, either serving a function or providing us with the experience of deep aesthetic enjoyment. Everything else, then, holds no place. Making this distinction is what it means to claim a stake in the goods and products that are consumed in the marketplace. It is the vital first step.

Anthropologist Grant McCracken noted, “Possession rituals allow the consumer to lay



Bliss McIntosh finishes a black ash basket using traditional materials, tools, and techniques.

claim and assume a kind of ownership of the meaning of his or her goods” (McCracken 1988, 85). By making every purchase an act of significance, that purchase is imbued with meaning. Choosing objects that are distinctly suited to one’s *own* preferences imparts further meaning to those objects. Rafael Cardoso wrote, “Things made in small batches, suited to specific needs and amenable to upgrading over time, are less likely to be rapidly discarded than changeless durables that are mass-produced and dumped onto the market” (Cardoso 2010, 328). We should express ourselves—our true selves—by choosing among objects that are representative of our own lived experience. Of course, if mass-produced items limit us in this way (and, they do), then the second step to claiming a stake in our goods is to become knowledgeable about where to find the distinct, the novel, the representative of our own cultural viewpoint.

This second step requires we consumers to become citizens again, to go forth into the community, to meet the local business owners and handcrafters, and to gather the knowledge they hold. We may also decide that what we are looking for could be made at home, which, in many cases, may be true. Sociologist Stephen Harold Riggins noted, “Homemade artifacts...embody so well signs of individuality, esteem, and personal

relationships” (Riggins 1994, 114). It is exactly these relationships that work toward the goal of self-fulfillment, and they take time to cultivate. Consequently, the instant gratification paradigm, to which we have become so accustomed, must be relinquished. As we actively begin to pay attention to the ethical concerns surrounding the mass-produced goods that fulfill instant gratification, the task of patience becomes easier. When choosing, we should ask ourselves who made this and how far away was it produced? What is it made of? Could we make it for ourselves or do we know someone in our communities who could produce a similar object customized to our own tastes?

To reiterate, claiming a stake in our goods refocuses the consumption goal away from accumulation and toward a meaningful experience and the communication of the self through objects. Anthropologist Mary Douglas remarked, “The essential function of consumption is its capacity to make sense ... commodities are good for thinking; treat them as a nonverbal medium for the human creative faculty” (Douglas and Isherwood 1979, 62).

Placeless objects alienate the consumer. Conversely, significance and meaning are inherent in objects of a specific place (McCracken 1988); they are created by a member of a given culture through the knowledge and

skill of that culture for an intended purpose of use, which, when acquired as the result of a relationship and used within a new context, communicate meanings for the user that affect memory and the senses. The objects provide the experiences that embody the creative forces for the realization of the true self. Psychologist Helga Dittmar remarked, “Symbolic meanings may often weigh more heavily when people buy ‘new things’” (Dittmar 1992, 65). When purchasing as the result of a relational context, symbolism cannot be separated; instead, it is reappropriated from the maker to the new owner. The object’s intent becomes transformed. As Risatti stated, “Only when use coincides with intention does use become one with function; only then does use become a meaningful indicator” (Risatti 2007, 46). And everything we use or fill up our lives with should be meaningful. W. R. Lethaby remarked, “*Every work of art shows that it was made by a human being for a human being*” [author’s stress] (Lethaby 2010, 162). If everything we use was created by someone with whom we have formed a relationship, then our lives will naturally be filled with works of art that are full of meaning. As Douglas noted, “When you are part of an object’s context it has more value” (Douglas 1994, 16). Its value lies in its socialness; it is the mediator between two individuals that influences interactions (Gell 2010). All objects should do this.

Purchasing options

I am fully aware that not every object may be obtained by a local hand-crafter. Electronics and hardware, in particular, may be next to impossible to find in such a manner. However, the goal is to be mindful and active in the purchasing process, to understand the consequences of our purchases. Here, the stress is on the consequence of choice. Choosing, as an active and engaged ethical consumer, refocuses the inward selfish pattern of consumption toward an outward socially aware pattern. Claiming a stake in our goods shifts the value system back toward our own well-being and self-fulfillment, and consequently the fulfillment of our families and communities.

The idea of craft as a purchasing choice can hold contradictory notions for consumers. In either case, these negative perceptions have hindered craft's ability to be taken seriously in the realm of commerce. However, Editor Garth Clark's statement, "The rot of death is the food for new life. Its demise presents an opportunity to rethink craft from the ground up" (Clark 2010, 451) suggests the awakening of the consumer revolution may help to turn the tide.

All consumers must learn to reevaluate what craft stands for and the high level of value its consumption entails. The reason the distinction matters is because fine craft, by its nature, requires a significant expenditure of materials and time, which results in fewer products at higher prices—the opposite of the corporate retail market that consumers are used to. Artist Charles M. Harder recognizes that quantity and price are often barriers to attracting buyers (Halper and Douglas 2009). The irony about craft's barriers is that to many consumers, craft falls at the opposite end of the spectrum from kitsch, to that of pricey (Perry 2010). Price becomes a barrier because consumers have become divorced and alienated from the time and skill required to produce objects by hand. Richard L. Priem (2007), a professor of management, notes that consumers who are more knowledgeable about the production of goods are more likely to spend more money, pointing to the fact that consumers need to be educated on production processes.

The fact is that it is expensive to create fine crafts, made from quality materials that require extensive education and years of practice to deliver quality objects. Consumers have come to expect cheap merchandise—and an overabundance of it. They are met with dozens of options within each category of goods. Those are the perceptions, because the multitudes of options are really just small variations on uniform designs. Also, mass-produced objects are cheap because they are created by exploited labor, made from worthless materials, and are intended to be discarded after a short period of time. Additionally, the obsolescence that is built into them requires their often, frequent

replacement. Consumers are led to believe that choices abound and that they are saving money, when really they are spending *more* money through continual replacement of predictable, boring, and uniform junk. The price paid for instant gratification is continual dissatisfaction, alienation, and a waste of money. After spending more on an item that is unique—possibly even made just for the buyer, if one collaborates with the maker—and constructed from quality materials, the consumer will likely take good care of it and have difficulty discarding it. The former option is worthless, while the latter is imbued with value and significance.

Luckily for craftspeople, there is hope. Consultant Paula Owen remarked that the preeminence of commerce has forced crafters to "capitulate to the demands of the marketplace" (Owen 2004, 28). McKnight and Block added, "The consumer marketplace now sells as a benefit the idea that you can do business in your home" (McKnight and Block 2010, 93). The authors imply that selling goods to a broad audience through the convenience of technology has somehow spoiled the crafts movement. My position is exactly the opposite. If crafters hope to make a living from their work, access to a broad audience is essential. Though the intimacy and immediacy of the craft practice may be lost, the benefits to local communities are still present. Additionally, the consumer is provided with access to a wider search area in order to acquire the goods they require while still adhering to the relational ethic. This is a perfect example of the craftspeople utilizing a technological tool toward his or her own creative direction.

Another facet of the consumer revolution is the ethical concern surrounding the products we purchase. Artist Grayson Perry (2010) noted that consumers face critical decisions about how much they are consuming and the consequences of their purchases and stated that craftspeople are positioned to provide ideal objects to relieve the ethical dilemma. Artist Ann Mohaupt (2008), from mohop, agreed, stating that issues surrounding labor and the environment are leading consumers to artisan-made goods.

Additionally, the elusive ethical concern of the constructed consumer could also be thwarted through the collaborative efforts between makers and consumers.

The final barrier to craft for consumers is the myth of the separation of art and the average person. The price of handmade goods recalls the use of art as a divider between those who have required the distinction of rank and have traditionally used fine art toward those ends and the rest of the population. If the consumer recognizes the value of handcrafted objects and is able to delay gratification in search for the objects of true self-expression, this barrier need not exist. Crafts are intended *to be used*, not solely to be looked at and pondered as fine art. Their beauty and craftsmanship are meant to be interacted with and handled, to "nourish" the consumer on a daily basis (Barnard 2004). They take the arts out of museums and bring them into our homes, where our experiences of them enhance our sense of ourselves and of our communities. ▼

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Jeremy McFarren is a public historian living in Schuylerville, NY. He works with the Folklife Center at Crandall Public Library, directing its film sharing series, *Portraits*. This article is excerpted from his nonfiction manuscript, *Buy Me: The Economic and Cultural Implications of the Objects We Purchase*.

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