Editorial CRRE 9.2

Making Sense: Personal, ecological and social sustainability through craft

Kristina Niedderer, University of Wolverhampton, UK

Katherine Townsend, Nottingham Trent University, UK

Craft is both a global and local phenomenon: Every culture on earth has some form of craft and craft manufacture to fulfil its basic functional as well as its creative and social needs. Functional items reach from house and boat building to basketry, textile and clothing construction. The creative and cultural aspects refer to the process, its meaningful as well as playful nature, and its manifestation in artefacts. This can be expressed in the embellishment of functional items or the creation of items whose purpose is in its cultural value, such as jewellery. In this way artefacts can channel social and personal expression linked e.g. to individuality, social and cultural identity (Miller 1987, Pearce 1995). While this is a universal phenomenon, craft often incorporates local variations that are relative to it, and express a particular geographical region and associated cultural practices. Therefore, craft can be conceptualised as a global phenomenon, while at the same time it is local in its infinite possibilities determined by each local community and individuals, who are dependent on its social and cultural, economic and ecological settings. This ambiguity has long caused people to use objects, in particular crafts, to make sense of self (Miller 1987: 12, 28) as well as to make sense of craft, i.e. of one's creative activities. In this issue, this is manifest through a rich series of multi-national contributions and topics from around the world, including Chile, Finland, Guatemala, India, Israel, Norway, southern Africa and the UK.

Different ways in which authors interrogate crafts and their understanding of themselves in this issue, include Ojala, Karppinen and Syrjäläinen's research into craft-art students' explorations of themselves and their craft, particularly through engagement with textiles and fashion. Here the designing and making of clothing lines by young makers studying the Basic Education in the Arts (BEA) programme in Finland is analysed through the lens of emotional experience and how the tactile and cognitive aspects of crafting materials and viable products contributes to the 'development of the person' (Csikszentmihalyi and Rathunde 2014) by enhancing

self-esteem and confidence. Borzenkova reviews the international conference on 'Toys and Material Culture', which explored the themes of hybridisation, design and consumption. Predominant concerns were the dichotomy of tangible and digital toys, and what constitutes toy in the digital age. More subtly, cultural and social aspects of toys and play were explored, including the development of self and images of cultural diversity imbedded in and fostered through play.

In Dillon's review of Erotic Cloth: Seduction and Fetishism in Textiles (Millar and Kettle 2018), the sensorial *and* emotional exchange between textile materials and the body is explored through a collection of essays representing rare critical discourse on this fundamental interrelationship. While western in its focus, the publication tackles the universal phenomenon of how humans sense the world, from birth to death through the membranes of skin and cloth. Importantly, the book leaves the door open for 'further research into ways in which other cultures negotiate the relationship between cloth and the erotic.' (Millar and Kettle 2018: 2) Marlene Little's autobiographical Portrait, 'Mem-or-y' adds another dimension to cloth's ability to act as a canvas for making sense of self, through an overview of her ongoing research into the connected concepts of personal identity, the reliability of memory and the increasing incidence of different forms of dementia. Little's rationale for using cloth as a substrate to communicate loss through bereavement and dementia is explained as facilitating 'physical…hands on textile engagement' allowing for manipulations to interpret the 'thinning, interrupted, tangled [and] transformed' states of mind. The work supports other research in the crafts to make the hidden disability that is dementia, more visible and 'its tragedy acknowledged' (Gerrard 2015) which is why we have selected an early piece *Mem-or-y 1* (2013) as the cover image.

Bodenham's article investigates connections between *Ceramics and Locational Identity by using the symbolism of material culture* in relation to a sense of place and space through a case study of the work of Nadine Sterk and Lonny van Ryswyck, trading as Atelier NL. Based in Eindhoven, the company's ecologically based practice actively confronts the homogeneity of globally sourced materials, by demonstrating how ethically sourced clay can offer diverse characteristics through ethical production that reinforces the character of the local geographical area. This environmental philosophy extends to social engagement with the wider community, as illustrated in the Remarkable Image of ClayMAchine

(2010), which enabled 3000 tiles to be manufactured and sold to fund further work. Atelier NL questions how designer makers position themselves in the world and aim to make objects that matter and help people connect with the world they live in. Soraa's article is also environmentally focused, on how energy conservation practices are put into practice by carpenters to support the Norwegian political goal of making buildings more sustainable by reducing the 40 percent of the energy used in the building sector. Based on qualitative interviews, the article explores how craftspeople are effectively working as 'energy consultants' and evolving as a new group of 'green-collar workers'.

The ceremonial textiles and garments of the weavers featured in *Cofradia (2018)* at the Ixchel Museum, Guatemala City, particularly reflect the artisans relationship with their natural surroundings. Reviewed by Gutiérrez and Knoke de Arathoon, the ongoing exhibition visited by Townsend in May, features 30 ceremonial outfits and associated artefacts woven on back strap and foot looms, worn by male and female *cofradía* members, as symbols of the authority and status within their different local communities. The overblouses, or *huipiles*, multipurpose textiles, called *su't* in several Mayan languages, shirts, trousers and garments to dress images of saints, are all embellished using motifs of regional significance such as birds, flowers, mountains and water. Each hand woven and/or embroidered item is documented according to its ethnographic, historical design provenance in line with the museum's strategy to conserve the cultural and economic viability of the artisanal weaving tradition. In the same way, although a continent apart in southern Africa, the ostrich eggshell beads craft of the Ju/'hoansi reflects the artisans' relationship with their surroundings. Zoran reports on the contemporary developments of the craft of the Ju/'hoansi, and on three different models in which they adapt their traditional ways of the hunter-gatherer society to contemporary influences to build a both economically and ecologically viable culture that maintains their cultural heritage.

These issues reverberate through all hand crafting practices and is a concept interrogated by Hemmings in her Position Paper, which challenges contemporary notions of the power of craft to make a difference, by arguing for its ability to also accrue meaning through its limitations. This is exemplified through her re-reading of classic fictional stories from Chile, India and Zimbabwe where examples of craft practice reinforce ideas relating to it's 'smallness and powerlessness' (Goldfarb 2006)

and inability to change lives through engrained socio-cultural practices, expectations and economic necessity. This is illustrated by reference to Bianca, a ceramicist in Isabel Allende's *House of the Spirits* (1984), whose hands 'had been ruined by household chores and clay' (p. 302) and that 'Whenever it rained, she put on a pair of gloves to relieve the arctic cold that had seeped into her bones from the damp clay she used'. (p. 303) Such descriptions undermine the pervasive, positive craft narratives, by assimilating personal creativity with the darker realities of the maker's compromised physical health and meager financial reward.

This issue then brings together key issues including making sense of craft and of one's self through craft making and objects, identity in relation to place, and making sense and taking responsibility for one's environment, in terms of ecological, economical as well as cultural sustainability.

A word of thanks

We are delighted to present Volume 9.2 of Craft Research. As always, many people have been involved in the realization of this issue. We wish to thank all our contributors, as well as those authors whose submissions we regrettably had to turn away. Our gratitude also extends to all our advisors as well as to our reviewers for their excellent work. Their constructive advice and feedback to authors is an essential part in fulfilling the developmental role of the journal and in advancing the field. We further wish to thank Intellect Publishers for their continued support for the journal, in particular our journal's manager, Bethan Ball and her team.

Kristina Niedderer and Katherine Townsend
August 2018

References

Allende, I. (1985), *The House of the Spirits*, New York, Bantam Books.

Csikszentmihalyi, M. and Rathunde, K. (2014), 'The Development of the Person: An Experiential Perspective on the Ontogenesis of Psychological Complexity', in M. Csikszentmihalyi, *Applications of flow in human development and education: The collected works of Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi*. Dordrecht: Springer, pp. 7–79. 10.1007/978-94-017-9094-9_2 [Accessed 9 June 2017].

Goldfarb, J. (2006), *The Politics of Small Things: The Power of the Powerless in Dark Times*, Chicago & London: University of Chicago Press.

Millar, L. and Kettle, A. (2018). *The Erotic Cloth: Seduction and Fetishism in Textiles,* London and New York: Bloomsbury Academic.

Miller, D. (1987). *Material Culture and Mass Consumption*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell.

Pearce, S. M. (1995). *On Collecting. An Investigation into Collecting in the European Tradition*. London: Routledge.

Turkle, S. Ed. (2011). *The Things That Matter, Evocative Objects*, New York: MIT Press.

Contributor details

Kristina Niedderer, Ph.D. M.A. (RCA), is Professor of Design and Craft at the University of Wolverhampton. She was originally apprenticed and worked as a goldsmith and silversmith in Germany. She then trained as a designer and design researcher in the United Kingdom. Niedderer's research focuses on the role of design to engender mindful interaction and behaviour change. She leads the European project 'Designing for People with Dementia', MSCA grant agreement No 691001.

Contact:
Faculty of Arts, University of Wolverhampton, Molineux Street, Wolverhampton, WV1 1DT.
E-mail: k.niedderer@wlv.ac.uk

Web: http://www.niedderer.org

Katherine Townsend, Ph.D., is Reader in Fashion and Textile Crafts in the School of Art & Design at Nottingham Trent University. She is Course Leader for M.A. Applied Design Futures and leads the Digital Craft and Embodied Knowledge research cluster. Following a career as a practising designer and lecturer in the fashion and textile industry, she gained a practice-led Ph.D. in 2004, Transforming Shape, which explored the integration of hand and digital technology to design advanced 3D printed fashion and textile concepts. Her current research is focused on how digital craft is informed by experiential knowledge of established practices and technologies.

Contact:
School of Art and Design, Nottingham Trent University, Burton Street, Nottingham, UK, NG1 4BU.
E-mail: katherine.townsend@ntu.ac.uk