

**CLOTH WEAVING CLOTH, CLAY SHAPING
CLAY: TOWARD A RELIGION OF BEAUTY
(OR FOLK CRAFTS AS A WAY
OF DWELLING POETICALLY)¹**

Leni dIR Garcia
*Department of Philosophy
De La Salle University, Manila*

Prompted by Heidegger's search for great art in the modern times, this paper looks into crafts as answering the philosopher's frustrated call. Using Soetsu Yanagi's idea of a "religion of beauty," which turns to the ordinary as beautiful, it suggests that crafts—carefully made by hand while considering its affinity with nature and the human body that uses it—is a way of being, the way Heidegger described the way of "dwelling poetically."

INTRODUCTION

In this paper I wish to show the affinity of crafts with nature, the community, the human body, and the processes involved in making them, as evidences of its being a way of groundedness in Being, and as such, is also a way of revealing Being—the very process of Heidegger's *aletheia*. I therefore look into Heidegger's search for great art in modern times and realize that his frustration in finding art that reveals Being, that embodies truth the way art in the ancient and medieval times did, lies in his failure to look at the other side of fine arts—the folk or vernacular crafts. It is my claim that had Heidegger pursued his examination of jugs, as he did in "The origin of the work of art" (2001b) and "The thing" (2001c), among other works, and given crafts in general more attention rather than immediately lamenting the separation of craft and technical knowledge as embodied in the ancient Greek *techne*, he might have been able to identify it as a "way of dwelling poetically."

It will require another study to say that Heidegger might have been working on what has become the Western bias about art that was prevalent before the contemporary times: the idea of art for art's sake. This bias does not seem to exist in non-Western frameworks, where everyday things are not disqualified from being considered works of art.² The work of Soetsu Yanagi, a Japanese potter and philosopher of beauty—with insights from other contemporary philosophers of crafts—is here used as such a framework that may be able to supply what Heidegger sought and fail to find in modern art.³

In this paper, I mean by “crafts,” “handcrafts,” and “craft objects” those things that are handmade for use in day to day life, which can stand on their own as aesthetic objects, like jewelry,⁴ pots, plates, woven and quilted blankets, and tapestry, among others. I refer to people who engage in the making of craft objects as “craftspersons,” while calling their manner in which they accomplish their work “craft,” or “handcraft,” (to avoid the gender-laden term, craftsmanship), and the process of work is termed “craftworking” or “craftmaking.” I refer to those crafts indigenous to a culture and unaffected by modern technology,⁵ “vernacular” or “folk” crafts. In a sense, this whole paper is about the vernacular crafts defined almost unanimously by critics and craftspeople alike as—

The work of country craftsmen [that] was believed to have evolved “naturally” as the direct and honest expression of simple functional requirements and solid virtues. This vernacular tradition was construed as something static and timeless, in contrast to the dynamic and progressive modern world.⁶(Greenhalgh 1997, 31)

It is safe to assume, however, that when the term “crafts” is used, the meaning includes all that belongs to the making, use, and objects of crafts. By focusing on crafts, however, it is *not* the intention of this paper to dichotomize between crafts and art. On the contrary, it tries to show that *it is possible* that Heidegger’s frustration over the loss of great art is caused by his failing to see crafts as art, distracted by craft’s close connection with function.

HEIDEGGER ON ART

Heidegger, after several “turnings” in his thought, finally focuses his attention to art. He echoes Georg Hegel in saying that great art is long dead, having perished after the Medieval Ages. In his longing for this lost art, Heidegger looks back to the Ancient Greeks who were the originators of real art, and traced its demise also in the metaphysizing tendencies of Western Philosophy since Plato, amplified in the modern period by the Cartesian dichotomy between mind and body. In *Ancient Greece*, Heidegger (1977, 13) explains, there was no difference between art and craft. Both stem from “*techne*” which includes in its meaning not only technical skill but also technical *knowledge* (“*episteme*”) and the fine arts. But during the Renaissance period, art was severed from craft and then, was completely lost when Aesthetics was developed. With aesthetics, the science of that which is beautiful and pleasing, art ceased being a vehicle for truth and moral values and became mere “pastry for cooks.” In short, for Heidegger, art lost its connection with Being and therefore lost its capacity to reveal Being. As Heidegger (2000, 140) remarks:

What the Greeks meant by “beauty” is discipline. The gathering together of the highest contending is *polemos*, struggle in the sense of the confrontation, the setting-apart-from-each-other. . . In contrast, for us today, the beautiful is the relaxing, what is restful and thus intended for enjoyment.

Art then belongs in the domain of the pastry chef. Essentially it makes no difference whether the enjoyment of art serves to satisfy the refined taste of connoisseurs and aesthetes or serves for the moral elevation of the mind. *On* and *kalon* (“in being” and “beautiful”) say the same thing for the Greeks. . . . For aesthetics, art is the display of the beautiful in the sense of the pleasant, the agreeable.

In the first volume of *Nietzsche*, Heidegger shows that the Greeks had no need of aesthetics. This is because they did not conceptualize about their art. “Greek art was only ‘lived’,” writes Heidegger (1991, 80), “[t]hey had an originally mature and luminous knowledge, such a passion for knowledge, that in their luminous state of knowing they had no need of ‘aesthetics’.” He is also aware that in ancient times, the Greeks did not differentiate between fine arts and handcrafts. Both are involved in the practice of *techne*. Indeed, in both the ancient and medieval times, the artist worked hand in hand with the craftspeople, protected by the same community or the guilds that developed in the Middle Ages. “Side by side on primitive scaffolding, sculptors, glass artisans, painters, and metalsmiths collaborated to embellish monumental cathedrals” (Heidegger 1991, 81).

Understanding this, Heidegger (1991, 87) therefore knows that art in the olden times was a communal activity. Its essential character is that it is a “collective artwork”—

The dissolution of everything solid into a fluid, flexible, malleable state, into a swimming and floundering; the unmeasured, without laws or borders, clarity or definiteness; the boundless night of sheer submergence. In other words, art is once again to become an absolute need.

When achieved, this results in a state of *rapture*, “a state of feeling explodes the very subjectivity of the subject. By having a feeling for beauty the subject has already come out of himself” and ceases being a subject. On the other hand, beauty is also no longer objective. In the aesthetic state of rapture, subject and object disappear (Heidegger 1991, 123). But Heidegger (1991, 138) is quick to stress that this state is not something that is beyond ourselves: “Art belongs to a realm where we find ourselves—we are the very realm. . . . Art does not belong . . . to what is well known to us; art is *the most* familiar. . . . it is actual in the rapture of embodying life.”⁷

We see this point in Heidegger’s discussion of the work of Vincent van Gogh, in “The origin of the work of art,” portraying a pair of peasant shoes. Here he shows that the painted shoes, upon contemplation, ceases to be a mere pair of shoes. They start speaking of a whole life, a life of toil, as evidenced by their worn out state and the clods of earth that still stick to their soles. “The art work,” writes Heidegger (2001b, 35), “lets us know what shoes are in truth.” It opens up a world for us and discloses to us what is in truth. “This entity,” he continues, “emerges into the unconcealedness of its being. The Greeks called the unconcealedness of beings *aletheia*.”

Here Heidegger (2000, 140) is clearly pursuing his original project of finding the revealing—*aletheia*—of Being. “[A]rt is the opening up of the Being of beings. We must provide a new content for the word “art” and for what it intends to name, on the basis of a fundamental orientation to Being that has been won back in an originary

way.” We have, however, as Heidegger points out, lost this way and are now ourselves lost, perhaps wandering aimlessly, uneasy in a world where we do not seem to belong. Being, therefore, has been closed to us.

Trying to recover this revelation of Being through art, Heidegger (2001f) was drawn to the poet (specifically in the guise of Friedrich Holderlin, and to some extent, Rainer Maria Rilke), assigning to him the task of leading “in destitute times” toward the rediscovery of Being. He saw the poet, and the poetic art, as leading us home, teaching us once again the practice of *dwelling*, guiding us out of our being lost into the path of Being. The fact that he uses the poetic shows that there can never be a literal understanding of Being. Being can be approached only as a mystery. It is not something to be solved, but something to be experienced as that-which-cannot-be-solved—an enigma, through and through. “Man” then, according to Heidegger, can “dwell poetically” by acknowledging once more the enigma of Being. As he (2001e, 225) says:

Poetry builds up the very nature of dwelling. Poetry and dwelling not only do not exclude each other; on the contrary, poetry and dwelling belong together, each calling for the other. “Poetically man dwells.”

It is the poet who can name the Unnamable because the poet can speak of the holy through her metaphor. Heidegger sees the task of the poet to lead us to the holy for the poet is the patient one who is “*always on the lookout for signs of the return of the festival*” (Young 2004, 117).

There is a sense in which Heidegger can be read as longing for the return of great art the way it was in the ancient times with the Greeks. The modern times has lost the myths and rituals that the ancient peoples had that allowed them to experience the world anew every so often. In short, we have lost the enchanted way of living. We, in this heavily industrialized world, fail to see the magic in ordinary things, the soulfulness of everyday life because we are so enmeshed in our meaningless routines that we fail to take notice of significant happenings (*Ereignis*) that come in small packets, easily overlooked.

I suspect, however, that Heidegger carried the same biases about art that he was trying to deconstruct. This is so because, although there are elements in this work that refer to the other half of *techne*, which is crafts, he never pursued the investigation of it and kept on following the traces of what was considered to be great art back to ancient Greece. If he did pursue the other path, he most probably would have realized that what he was looking for—which he found to be embodied in poetry and in some paintings (those of Paul Klee’s and Paul Cezanne’s) in modern times—are actually practiced in the tradition of crafts, specifically the vernacular or folk crafts.

Several reasons might be offered to explain this. First, the Arts and Crafts Movement that expressed similar sentiments as Heidegger did (which Heidegger could have easily “Heideggerized”⁸) was a movement that basically proliferated in Britain, United States and Canada, and not in Europe, which was Heidegger’s immediate environment. Second, the tradition of crafts is neither optical nor linguistic (oral) but is primarily tactile, or a work of the hands—something that philosophers are mostly not given to engaging. Heidegger found, instead, in language an *aletheia* of Being and that is the reason he

was so fascinated with poetry. Third, it is also possible that he found unattractive the association of crafts with women. Traditionally in the Western world, crafts were what women did, and they did not qualify as proper profession, but only as hobbies.⁹ Fourth, it may also have been the lack of scholarly literature on crafts, given that the work of craft is mainly experiential—it has to be practiced, not theorized about.

Finally, and the most significant of all, Heidegger might have been so suspicious of the *functional* character of crafts, as it sounds very much like pure instrumentality. In *Nietzsche*, Heidegger (1991, 1:255) says of the craftsman that he brings forth “a thing to stand in the openness of its being,” yet, “[s]uch openness quickly narrows when the thing produced is absorbed in sheer serviceability or usefulness as a piece of equipment.” We will recall Heidegger’s original discussion of things in *Being and time* as “ready-to-hand” and “present-at-hand.” Craft objects, because they are things that are *used*, come very close to the fate of tools.

Those biases, however, whether they have influenced Heidegger’s blind spot when it comes to crafts or not, are evidences of a lack of understanding of the tradition of crafts. We will now turn from the West to the East in order to gain some understanding of this practice, hopefully to show that crafts could also take on the task that Heidegger delegated only to the poets.

SOETSU YANAGI AND THE *MINGEI*

The potter Bernard Leach (1989, 88) has described Soetsu Yanagi’s [1889-1961] aesthetics as “the story of the *seeing eye* of Japan...an Eastern perception of significant loveliness.” Yanagi, Leach says, tries to bring back “the function of true beauty in life,” something that was known in the early times, but started deteriorating during the time of the early Tea Masters in the 16th century, and eventually forgotten. He established, and thus is best known in the West through, the Japan Folkcraft Museum or *Nihon Mingeikan* in Tokyo. Here, some of the oldest and most beautiful potteries especially from Korea, will be found, having been collected by Yanagi himself through his struggle through the two world wars. Yanagi’s work in Japan is comparable to the work of William Morris and John Ruskin in England, establishing the Arts and Crafts Movement in the late 1800s, spreading through America and Canada in the early 1900s. In both cases, Leach (1989, 90) adds, there is a “deep and comprehensive statement...regarding work and the qualification of work by beauty, against a background of rapid industrialization.”

Handcraft and Machines

In the essay, “Towards a standard of beauty,” Yanagi (1989, 104-105) writes:

I would like to believe that beauty is of deep import to our modern age. Without question, the intention of morality, philosophy, and religious belief is to bring hope, joy, peace, and freedom to mankind. But in our time religion has lost its grip. Intellectualism has undermined spiritual aspiration in most people. At this juncture I would put the question, might not beauty, and the love of the beautiful, perhaps bring peace and harmony? Could it not carry

us forward to new concepts of life's meaning? Would it not establish a fresh concept of culture? Would it not be a dove of peace between the various cultures of mankind?

It is interesting to note that Yanagi did not refer to "art" at all in this passage. Rather, he referred to "beauty" and "the love of the beautiful." It is important, I think, that this should be the case, as Yanagi's "beauty" is not the beauty of objects housed in museums, but the beauty of objects found in everyday life. This is why he found the answer to his questions not in fine arts, but in folkcrafts. As proof of the growing need in the modern times for craftmaking, Yanagi mentions the fact that where industrialization is strongest, as in England, there also is the protest that advocated returning to the handcrafts, as in the Arts and Crafts Movement of Morris and Ruskin. Also, that the war that was made possible by advancement in technologies is the one that resulted in the proliferation of arts and crafts programs in the universities (Owen 2005, 29).¹⁰

All this, Yanagi seems to say, is a realization of the limitations of the machine. The machine, although it may be efficient, is cold and produces things that are monotonous. Once machine has taken over everyday life, the human spirit lost an important aspect of self-expression—the opportunity to make something with one's hands and the experience of variety and heterogeneity. Surely, the machine has benefitted humankind by providing cheap and easily replaceable goods (Rees 1997, 127). On the other hand, objects that are made by hand, although they could be costly, can be enjoyed for many generations. So Yanagi (1989, 107) asks, "Is spendthrift replacement economical?"—

...the chief characteristic of handcrafts is that *they maintain by their very nature a direct link with the human heart, so that the work always partakes of a human quality*. Machine-made things are children of the brain; they are not very human. The more they spread, the less the human being is needed. [Italics supplied.]

It is easy to glean from this that Yanagi is speaking about something more than the usual conception of crafts. He is speaking of crafts as a response to a spiritual need. As such, machines will never be able to take over the work of craft, even if nowadays, there are instances in which one cannot anymore tell apart an object made by hand and a replica made by a machine (see Dormer 1997 and Needleman 1993). At the very least, the craftsperson herself will know which, and it will make a difference to her that she has spent time and effort in creating the object.

Artist and Craftsperson, Art and Crafts

Yanagi differentiates between the artist (whom he also refers to as the individual craftsman, usually ignoring the difference between fine arts and crafts) and the craftsperson. The former works alone while the latter works with many, in a particular community. The former tends to be situated in the industrialized cities while the latter stays within the country life. Thus, the artist, since he works alone in an industrialized setting, tends to produce works that are meant only to be seen, that is, to be looked at,

like the objects displayed in museums—that which constitutes “art for art’s sake.” They are expensive and considered rare especially when signed by a famous artist, and are therefore collected in museums or in the homes of the rich who can afford to buy them. The craftsperson on the other hand, produces things which support and are supported by everyday things and environment. They produce things which “fit into everyday life.” The maker is usually unknown (apart from his or her fellow craftspeople), and the objects he makes are not costly, and are easily accessible by the many (Yanagi 1989, 105, 111).

In spite of their differences, however, Yanagi (1989, 106) can see the artist and the craftsperson working together toward the same goal—the preservation of folkcrafts. Yanagi admits that the simple folk, the craftspeople, are unable to cope with the changing times, while the individual artist easily does so. He therefore perceives the artist to be the leader in bringing the focus back to folkcrafts, without having to do away with all that the modern times have brought to reality.

Although many advocates of crafts have been accused of romanticizing the days of old when technology was not yet born, we see that this is not true of Yanagi. He is acutely aware of the presence of technology as well as its dangers, and yet, he does not call for its abandonment. Instead, admitting the shortcomings of the country craftspeople, he calls for the leadership of the artist—the one who could do something—in influencing the movement of the arts in order to bring about a revival of the folkcrafts. After all, he emphasizes that in both the cases of the artist and the craftspeople, what matters is self-examination: work that is done without any self-examination is bound to be poor work.

A Religion of Beauty: Seeing and Letting Go

Beauty, for Yanagi, is grasped intuitively. This is what he means by seeing. As he (1989, 110) says:

To “see” is to go direct to the core; to know the facts about an object of beauty is to go around the periphery. Intellectual discrimination is less essential to an understanding of beauty than the power of intuition that precedes it.

Yanagi’s (1989, 171-76) thoughts on beauty are definitely expressive of Buddhist thought. He favors natural, nonconscious processes (that is, nondeliberate) that give rise to beautiful things. The absence of control in throwing and shaping pottery, for instance, are revealed in imperfect and irregular figures that show, rather than symmetry, the asymmetry of Nature. This is the reason Yanagi is so fascinated by the Hakeme bowl—those pots that bear the brush strokes used to apply white slip on rough, dark clay bowls. These, he says, are considered the most beautiful bowls because of their imperfections. Moreover, the technique was born out of the need to make do with what material is available. White clay is usually limited, while dark clay comes in abundance. White clay found in the same place as dark clay are the best pair, for the white slip made out of the white clay will not chip off the dark clay. Craftspeople engaged in the making

of these bowls have to conserve their white slip and so developed the technique of simply brushing on the slip rather than the older technique of dipping the entire bowl in the slip.

I mention this about the Hakeme bowls because it speaks of a characteristic of crafts that may not be present in other artistic endeavors—crafts tend to preserve, rather than destroy, its resources in nature. Not only are materials used in crafts natural materials, they are also used in ways that are in accordance with their basic characteristics. Therefore, whereas the artist has to break marble in order to accomplish a sculpture, potters shape clay and work around the bumps¹¹ and incorporate them in the making of the object. Similarly, we see smoothness in a sculptural work and admire its perfection but we feel the rough finish of a clay pot and contemplate its imperfection. As Yanagi (1989, 214) says, “[T]hey are rough because they derive directly from nature, yet there is no higher intelligence than in the workings of nature.” Commenting on the difference between Eastern and Western ceramics, Yanagi (1989, 124) writes that those of the West tend to be decorated with pattern and does not allow asymmetry, having been modeled after the human body. In contrast, the ones in the East tend to be inspired by the irregularity found in nature.

Here, again, Yanagi (1989, 130) invokes the perception of beauty, the work of the *seeing eye* which sees beauty where usual categories have left the boundaries closed. True beauty, he says, is always freed from duality. It is not the mere antithesis of ugliness, but beauty that manifests in the “realm where there is no distinction between the beautiful and the ugly, a realm that is described as ‘prior to beauty and ugliness’ or as a state where “beauty and ugliness are as yet unseparated.” Clearly, Yanagi here echoes the Buddhist belief that beauty is found in the enlightened state. And since not only people but also things, can achieve Buddhahood, then he identifies the beautiful object as the embodiment of that enlightened delight that is the true Beauty. As he (1989, 129) puts it, “[a] beautiful artifact may be defined as one that reposes peacefully where it aspires to be.” Beauty is our *home*. That is why it is natural for us to long for Beauty because we long for home. Yanagi (1989, 155) remarks:

But home, as we know, is the world of Non-dual Entirety: everything that has been divided yearns to be reunited; everything has, so to speak, been divided in order to long to be one again. Regarding a beautiful object, then, is the same as looking at one’s own native home; put another way, it is the same as looking at the original condition of man himself. He who buys a beautiful object is in reality buying himself, and he who looks at a beautiful object is seeing it in his primordial self.

Given this, it is not now hard to understand Yanagi’s preference for the ordinary, seemingly commonplace crafts. In their use, they are where they are supposed to be. Their making itself, far from calculation, is an engaged *meditation*. It explains, and affirms the practice of apprenticeship in craftmaking. The innumerable repetition of making the same object induces a meditative state, guided by a Master of the craft. It is through this repetition that the craftsperson naturally appropriates the training and the skill becomes second nature to her. So when she does her craft, the skill comes out of her own nature.

No conscious control is necessary and the inherent trust in something that is beyond oneself takes over. This is the reason that ancient crafts (and vernacular crafts in general) carry no signature of its maker. Its anonymous maker made the object inspired by the craft itself, moved by what Yanagi (1989, 135) calls, “the Other Power” or “the Given Power.”

It is a *letting go*, a *letting be*, and a giving up of struggle in favor of the guidance of “grace” (Yanagi 1989, 125). The making of crafts produces work that is beautiful in itself, without having to rely on the authorship of its maker. In this manner, the crafts person’s individuality disappears in the process of making the object. Instead of saying “I am weaving cloth,” one sees that “cloth weaves cloth” (Yanagi 1989, 145). This utmost humility on the part of the maker paves the way of the open-endedness of the nature of craft objects. They are almost always seemingly incomplete or unfinished because, Yanagi stresses, they point to that which is more than they are. In fact, they are “more beautiful when they suggest something beyond themselves than when they end up being merely what they are,” while objects seen in its completeness “having shown all that they are and having nothing further to suggest, they give an impression of rigidity and coldness” (Yanagi 1989, 150).¹²

It is therefore no wonder that when Yanagi (1989, 105) aimed to establish the folkcraft museum, his concern was not just to “provide standards for beauty” but also to found “a meeting place where one may come into contact with *the religion of beauty*” [italics supplied]. Inasmuch as religion has to do with rituals that bind a community, crafts as beautiful objects provide the ritual of making, of feeling and connecting, of *seeing*, and of developing a quiet respect and reverence for things made by the sacred hand, which honor our day to day life, and bind us together in this world.

THE HUMAN BODY AND THE FUNCTION OF CRAFTS

In *A theory of craft*, echoing Yanagi’s idea of beauty, Howard Risatti (2007) also articulates the essence and meaning of crafts, arguing that at the core of crafts is its practical, physical function. Downplaying this as being the heart of crafts is the reason critics have been puzzled all this time about the classification of different craft objects. Traditionally, crafts are classified according to the materials used: ceramic, fiber, wood, glass, and metal. But nowadays, “crossover” artists have done sculptures in terra cotta and wood, and tapestries have been painted on with materials traditionally belonging to fine arts. These works have also been exhibited in museums reserved for fine arts. Other taxonomies are similarly suffering overlaps, for instance, when crafts are classified according to processes or techniques (blowing, throwing, turning, weaving, etc.) and according to forms (flat, cuboid, rectangular, ovoid, etc.).

In his analysis of these different taxonomies, Risatti offers one that solves the inherent problems in the others by showing that crafts, to be true to their nature, ought to be classified according to their function. We can classify them without overlaps into *containers* (bowls, cups, etc.), *covers* (quilts, blankets, etc) and *supports* (chairs, beds, etc.). This characteristic, however, need not make tools out of crafts (the way Heidegger probably feared). Tools, as Heidegger shows in his works, stand only in relation to other tools. They have to be in a particular context. A pair of scissors would be meaningless, for example, in the absence of anything to cut in the world. Or the famous

hammer, standing only in relation to a nail and so on. But craft objects are not tools. They can stand on their own without having to be in a system to make them “work.” Although craft objects may be used to perform the task of a tool, the performance is not their original function. Risatti (2007, 43-44) gives as an example, a cup which can be used to hammer a tack. But “[w]hen a cup is used in this way, one probably loses one’s morning coffee, but does the cup also lose its identity and temporarily become a hammer?” No. It retains its identity as a cup but becomes something that is used as a hammer.

More importantly, when we consider the functions of crafts—containing, covering, and supporting—they differ from the function of tools in that they tend to preserve rather than to expend energy. Risatti (2007, 46) explains:

Tools are system dependent, requiring the input of kinetic energy; this energy, associated with motion as tools “work” to carry out their tasks, is consumed in the “tooling” process. For this reason, tools can’t be considered self-contained, self-reliant entities nor ends in themselves. Craft objects, however, don’t “work.” In their applied function they “operate” without the input of energy from an outside agent. ...Containers contain by resisting the force of gravity to level their contents; something similar happens in supports as they support the body. Covers function to achieve constancy by resisting the dissipation or addition of energy...so unlike tools...craft objects are typically concerned with preservation and stasis.

Preserving, rather than expending, is an apt description if we see that crafts arose out of the human being’s encounter with Nature. Risatti (2007, 56) shows that as human beings learned to deal with nature, they also learned how to appropriate it in order to address their basic needs. Thus, crafts arose out of the human being’s physical necessity. The objects that have been crafted are useful objects that help us survive. Now, this is unique to human beings, as no other creatures respond to their physiological needs by creating crafts. He adds that this also explains why craft objects are not localized geographically or historically. They appear as remnants wherever human beings have lived for a time in any place.

When one reflects on this insight, one realizes that this is the reason that craft objects are often “handy.”¹³ Their sizes and shapes are appropriate for the hands to “handle.”—cups are just the right size, never too small or never too big. Bowls fit in the cupped hands, easily lifted even with soup in it and protecting the hands from burns by the lids and stands. Chairs are easily sat upon and never too high nor low, depending on the use they were intended for.¹⁴ Crafts obviously respond to and is intimately connected to the human body (Risatti 2007, 108-109).

In the same manner, the material that is used in crafts is appropriate for the function that they are being made for. Because it is the right material, the craft object remains safe. There is something about the naturalness of things associated with crafts that keep its makers and users safe (Risatti 2007, 134). In this sense, they also *preserve*. This is similarly what drives Yanagi to insist on what is natural and simple. They are often the loveliest because in the simple resides the no-mindedness (no willfulness) of the maker, and thus, Nature arises from it. Crafts are always local because they arise “where the

necessary raw materials are found. The closer we are to nature the *safer* we are...” (Yanagi 1981, 214-15). [Italics supplied.]

The safety that Yanagi and Risatti speak of is also a physical one. Crafts have so much intimacy with the human body—both in the process of making them (the squishing of clay or the separation of threads) and in their use (how they fit the human body)—that their essence seems to lie in their being touched and felt (as opposed, again, to art that is only to be looked at, but please, please, do not touch!).

Experiencing craft art that retains and celebrates utilitarian forms requires the ability to receive, perceive, and process more than one constellation of sense data at a time. By extension this means that one must also be able to think more than one thought at a time. If we can simultaneously manage seeing and touching and using, we have accomplished something quite miraculous. Only craft art allows us this. (Perreault 2005, 77)

The ancient peoples must have been aware of this miracle that they identified themselves with it. We all know that modern surnames like Smith, Potter, and Turner stem from the tradition of naming oneself with the kind of craft one is adept at. And it did not matter that one shared the name with many other people. When it comes to craftwork, as Yanagi shows, the best ones are those where the maker disappears and only the object is brought forth.

Crafts as *Aletheia*

Having presented what crafts are and why Heidegger might have been hesitant to see it as an answer to the great art he sought, we can now proceed to showing how crafts, as Yanagi has described them, might actually fulfill the requirements of *aletheia*.

In “The question concerning technology,” Heidegger (1977, 12) says that technology is “no mere means. Technology is a way of revealing”—an *aletheia*. Technology, after all, has been around since ancient times. The term *technikon* has *techne* as its root word, and has been used and understood by the early Greeks. However, modern technology is something else altogether. It has something that the original term did not have—its revealing is a kind of *challenging*. As such, it has the tendency to order, to *Enframe* (Heidegger 1977, 31 ff.). Things are now not only ready-to-hand or present-at-hand, but even nature is collected so that they are now standing-in-reserve.¹⁵ In his exposition of the totalizing effects of modern technology, one would think that Heidegger is espousing a turning back, away from technology and into the idyllic world of the past. But this is not the case. There is nothing that can be done about it, he says, as the desire to do something about it, to *solve* it, is itself technological. One must, instead, approach it with openness and *releasement*—a letting go. Whether we like it or not, the technological is another way of understanding Being, and it will stay and progress, or change, depending on how we take it.

What *can* be done, however, is to avoid being totalized by it, to learn that this is not the only way to understand Being, and perhaps, to counter it with other ways of revealing Being.¹⁶

This is where our project comes in. If the technological mainly promotes calculative thinking, we can try to avoid being sucked into the same mode by practicing meditative thinking instead. If modern technology concentrates on mass production, synthetic materials, and disposable objects, we can instead focus on handmade craft objects. Risatti (2007, 265) writes:

With utilitarian craft, utilitarian design, and utilitarian visual art, one automatically calculates whether they are right or consistent in terms of the practical advantage they offer; moreover, this is how they are intended to be understood. The opposite is true of fine craft, fine design, and fine art objects. They open the beholder to a realm of meditation and contemplation; this is their intended reason for being made.

As we have shown in the foregoing, traditional crafts join together mind and body as creativity is carried through the dexterity of the fingers that touch and shape the craft object. This is *poiesis*, the linking together of *theoria* and *praxis*. “It is a poetic act that entails creation of a human world directly out of the raw substance of nature itself” and “entails transformation of our direct sensuous experience of nature into a world of culture” (Risatti 2007, 170). And this is not reserved solely for the practitioners of crafts. One could be its user, or onlooker and *feeler*—as we have established the fact that crafts are to be touched and felt with all the other senses. This is something that Heidegger (2001d, 164-67) exemplifies in his discussion of the jug in “The thing” where he examines the attributes of a jug and concludes that its “thingliness” resides in its being a vessel, having a hollow or void within in order to hold and pour—an act of libation that brings together earth and the gods. What Heidegger achieves in this essay is a model by which we can bring to the fore ordinary things that we usually ignore and associate them with the sacred, the Holy. Not that this is a feat that could not be done without any model. This is what Yanagi means when he refers to the “seeing eye”—the eye that sees the beauty in everyday things and lifts them up to the level of the divine. In a sense, the eye that *mythicizes*.

Carla Needleman (1993, 85) explains that this kind of seeing/thinking seems to be rare nowadays not because we have lost “the mythic mind” (which Heidegger seems to have found in his later works). “Our lack,” she writes, is the “lack of receptivity to it. Our error is not the outer-directed confrontative mind itself, but overemphasis on it.” In fact, none of the contemporary thinkers and promoters of crafts that we have mentioned in this paper want to do away with technology. What they warn us against, like Heidegger, is our tendency to lose ourselves in it and forget other ways of being and revealing Being. Crafts, as the forsaken other half of the ancient *techne* has been offered as a talisman against this danger. It is a different kind of *worlding*.

Today making by hand is as much a symbolic statement about how to be in the world as is the making of pictures with a paintbrush. It is about trying to understand our place in the world by understanding the source of things, something implied in Heidegger’s belief that the jug unites earth and heaven, divinities and mortals, by gathering water from the spring in the ground that is fed by the rain from the sky (Risatti 2007, 205).

CRAFTMAKING AS DWELLING POETICALLY

Heidegger (see Parkes 1990, 9) is no stranger to the Easterners, especially in Japan, where his reception “has been the most enthusiastic of any country—perhaps even including Germany itself.” Parallelisms between his later thoughts and those of Eastern (mystical) thought such as Buddhism and Taoism have been researched and written on, although I believe much more can be said about these connections. Yanagi’s works on beauty is just one of those cornucopias where links with Heidegger’s ideas could be established. As presented, there are so many of what Heidegger expected of art in Yanagi’s—amplified by recent thinking about crafts—musing about beauty. That they were not on fine arts but on crafts made it all the more significant. Thus, I thought that Heidegger might have overlooked crafts, for one or all of the reasons mentioned in the beginning, as another window of *aletheia*.

Somewhere along the way, we have lost great art, says Heidegger, because art has ceased being a vehicle for truth and the revealing of Being. Modern technology, with its calculating and dichotomizing “mechano-techno-scientific”¹⁷ ways does not help any. In a sense, since great art is dead, it should remain so, for to go back and retrieve it is another reactionary way of responding to the challenge of technology. Such a response is not going to get us anywhere. But Heidegger is far from proclaiming our doom. We can never return to ancient Greece—the model of everything originary, for Heidegger—with its unity of life, enchanted environment, and mythical consciousness, or simply, the numinous. And yet, “in these destitute times,” we can follow the lead of the poet who can somehow capture the numinous once again and send us to a different mode of being, of *dwelling*, and thus reveal Being differently.

If great art was lost because of the dichotomies brought on continuously by philosophy since Plato, then crafts heals this by securing the wholeness of one’s body-mind-soul in its engagement with craftmaking. It counteracts mere aestheticism—art meant only to be pleasing and relaxing—by the essential element of work and discipline involved in its practice, similar to how Heidegger described art in the ancient times as “discipline.” Art was only “lived,” he says and here we have shown that crafts is mainly experiential, learned by practice, not by theorizing about it. Moreover, it is a response to the human beings physiological needs, necessarily bringing crafts into life itself by the everydayness of its character. Also, since Heidegger recognizes art as basically communal, crafts’ answer is that it best survives through the guilds and the craftspeople’s commitment to his community. Achieved properly, great art, according to Heidegger results in rapture where the subject and object both disappear. While according to Yanagi, the best work of craft is that where the maker becomes absent and yet, embodied in the object created. Thus, the anonymity of craftmakers. Art opens and sets up a world, says Heidegger, and crafts do this just as well, especially those that have been handed down from generation to generation, containing history and everyday stories of making, using and gift-giving that continue, perhaps forever.

Since Heidegger believes that kind of art to be dead, he assigns the task of rediscovering this—in a new way of worlding—to the poets who are supposed to teach us how to *dwell* once more, amidst the drudgery of merely existing in the technologically driven world. *Dwelling* involves finding a “place,” setting up a house, and caring for it,

as one enjoys its protection. Well, this perhaps, is what crafts do best. It is the *dwelling* that Heidegger speaks of—a way of living that cares (*Sorge*) while one is being taken care of (Young 2004, 129),¹⁸ evident in Yanagi’s insistence on that which is natural. Natural materials are safe. Natural techniques are never violent or aggressive but work around what would otherwise be obstacles to overpower. The most striking thing about this parallelism is that Yanagi explains our longing for beauty as the longing for *home*.

It is significant too that crafts is associated with the body, especially with the hand. The craftsperson’s hand is *the* caring hand. It touches, it holds, it shapes, it weaves, acts that are all lovingly done. Whereas the poet speaks the language of Being, the craftsperson’s hands poeticize the craft objects. The craftsperson, and the objects she makes, are all poets of silence—not uttering any words, but nevertheless expressing a rhythm of repetitions that produce original pieces of vessels (containers), protections (covers) and cradles (support). In a way, crafts (craftspersons, craftmaking, and craft objects) exceed the capacity of the poet in that they are not limited by language.¹⁹ Their roots are found earlier, way back in the past—since even before there was the Greek civilization—because they began when human beings first responded to their physiological needs by creating vessels for drinking and eating, by making covers to keep them warm, and building supports for their shelter.

This dwelling/caring/poeticizing is Heidegger’s view of the ancient festivals, celebrations of life, and the numinous. I say that none can bring this back better than crafts. The tradition of crafts, with its connection to the ancient past (and not just the Western past but perhaps, more so, the Eastern as well) and its reverent way of moving in the world, also partakes of this luminous, mysterious existence. Crafts is embodied ritual, not only in its making, but very much also in its use as an everyday thing. Through crafts, drinking and eating become once again a ritual of sustaining life, a celebration with every scrape of the spoon against stoneware or with every sip of the lips from earthenware. Wrapping our bodies or the bodies of our loved ones in carefully woven blankets becomes an archetypal gesture of protection and care. With crafts, we can live daily in enchantment. Crafts, if we wish it to be, could be our *way of dwelling poetically*.

In “The thinker as poet,” Heidegger (2001d, 14) writes:

Forests spread
Brooks plunge
Rocks persist
Mist diffuses

Meadows wait
Springs well
Winds dwell
Blessing muses

We may add—

Earthclay shapes
Cloth weaves

Glass melts
Handcraft fuses

NOTES

1. The phrases “cloth weaving cloth” and “religion of beauty” come from Soetsu Yanagi (1981) while “a way of dwelling poetically” alludes to Martin Heidegger’s (2001e) essay, “...Poetically, man dwells...” which Heidegger acknowledges as coming from Holderlin’s poem (2001a, 211).

2. Consider, for instance, the Japanese *wabi-sabi* that aestheticizes ordinary things such as teacups and bamboo vessels found and used in the simplest of homes, or any non-Western culture’s indigenous crafts.

3. To be sure, many contemporary works of art can be used as a response to Heidegger’s search for “great art.” Political art, like Pablo Picasso’s *Guernica* and thousands of other creative and artistic activities in this day and age, or the current question on the so-called “Holocaust art,” can be studied for the same purpose. Yanagi’s work has been chosen for this particular study for its strong affirmation of the functional nature of beautiful things and the value of handmade objects. The fact that Heidegger (2001b) has examined a jug in “The origin of the work of art” establishes close affinities with the work of Yanagi as primarily a potter, making vessels much like Heidegger’s jug.

4. Howard Risatti (2007) notes that jewelry is a bit problematic when considered purely as crafts. Its association with the body as decoration or adornment on one hand and as sculpture on the other hand, makes it difficult to classify. In this paper, we will consider jewelry as crafts because of its status as “wearable art,” which makes it as functional as, for example, a terracotta mug.

5. With this, I specifically mean those which are not mass produced through a machine, because traditional crafts are now enjoying the convenience of some technology based software like the CAD/CAM (see Peter Dormer 1997).

6. Adapted from Dean Darron (1994, 153). One significant component of crafts is its close connection—even identification—with the guild systems. This, however, is not the focus of this paper.

7. Hubert L. Dreyfus (2006, 351) writes that in the less nihilistic stage that Heidegger was speaking about, there was something at stake when people engaged in art—it was life itself. That was why people were committed to the community or to the guild, something that we rarely have in the modern times. The loss of this connection to life is evidenced by the use nowadays of Styrofoam cups, so far removed from the use of a Japanese tea cup, for instance. The Styrofoam cup is, machine-made and disposable. The Japanese tea cup is treated with reverence as it carries a history of actual people. Our understanding of these things reflects our understanding of today’s world and ourselves.

8. “Heideggerizing” is a word used by Julian Young (2004, 171) in his critical assessment of Heidegger’s “philosophy of art.”

9. But Heidegger in *Nietzsche* (1991, I: 71) did refer to Nature as “a female artist” when he was discussing the work of “craftsmen” as “bringing something forth,” comparable to giving birth.

10. Owen (2005, 29) says that the influx of returning GIs from World War II resulted in expanded curricula in the universities that included arts and crafts like ceramics, weaving, etc.

11. Compare Heidegger's (2001, 40-42) discussion of the Greek temple standing on a rocky mountain—how it stands out and at the same time blends in with its immediate environment.

12. Here, Yanagi specifically speaks of the Tea ceremony and how the roughest, most unfinished looking bowls are used while those with smooth finish and perfect shapes are not used at all. Tea ceremony makes sacred that which is most ordinary but not in order to make them more than they are. Rather, they are sacred precisely because they are the most ordinary.

13. Thus, the difference between a figurine falling under the category of craft as decoration, and the life-sized and bigger than life-sized sculpture, even if those sculptures are made with stone, earth, or wood, which are traditional craft materials.

14. Consider, for instance, Goldilocks's ("The story of Goldilocks...," n.d.) visit to the bear family's house. She ruined the chair of the baby bear when she sat on it, while the papa bear's chair was too high for her to reach. Obviously, the chairs were not crafted for the human body. It was only accidental that her body is similar in size to mama bear's that she becomes comfortable in the latter's chair.

15. See Heidegger's (1977, 16) discussion on the River Rhine and the hydroelectric plant.

16. Heidegger (1977, 35) asks, amidst the danger of totalizing technology, "Could it be that the fine arts are called to poetic revealing?"

17. Risatti's term.

18. Young explains that Heidegger's dwelling has two aspects: "caring for and being cared for" because to set up a dwelling place means one is secured in her world but at the same time, she has to conserve and take care of that world as its dweller.

19. It is not the case, though, that Heidegger meant by "language" only literal spoken or written language.

REFERENCES

- Dean, Darron. 1994. A slipware dish by Samuel Malkin: An analysis of vernacular design. *Journal of Design History* 7 (3).
- Dormer, Peter. 1997. Craft and the Turing test for practical thinking. *The culture of craft*. Edited by Peter Dormer. Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press.
- Dreyfus, Hubert L. 1995. Heidegger on the connection between nihilism, art, technology, and politics. *The Cambridge companion to Heidegger*. Edited by Chales Guignon. Cambridge, New York, Melbourne: Cambridge University Press.
- Greenhalgh, Paul. 1997. The history of craft. *The culture of craft: Status and future*. Edited by Peter Dormer. Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press.
- Heidegger, Martin. 1977. The question concerning technology. *The question concerning technology and other Essays*. Translated by William Lovitt. New York: Harper Torchbooks.

- _____. 1991. *Nietzsche (volumes I and II)*. Translated by David Farrell Krell. New York: HarperSanFrancisco.
- _____. 2000. *Introduction to metaphysics*. Translated by Gregory Fried and Richard Polt. New Haven and London: Yale University Press.
- _____. 2001a. ...Poetically man dwells... *Poetry, language, thought*. Translated by Albert Hofstadter. New York: Perennial Classics.
- _____. 2001b. The origin of the work of art. *Poetry, language, thought*. Translated by Albert Hofstadter. New York: Perennial Classics.
- _____. 2001c. "The thing." *Poetry, language, thought*. Translated by Albert Hofstadter. New York: Perennial Classics.
- _____. 2001d. The thinker as poet." *Poetry, language, thought*. Translated by Albert Hofstadter. New York: Perennial Classics.
- _____. 2001e. What are poets for? *Poetry, language, thought*. Translated by Albert Hofstadter. New York: Perennial Classics.
- _____. 2001f. *Poetry, language, thought*. Translated by Albert Hofstadter. New York: Perennial Classics.
- Leach, Bernard. 1989. "Introduction." *The Unknown Craftsman: a Japanese Insight into Beauty*. Adapted by Bernard Leach. New York and San Francisco: Kondansha International, Ltd.
- Needleman, Carla. 1993. *The work of craft: An inquiry into the nature of crafts and craftsmanship*. New York, Tokyo, and London: Kondansha International, Ltd.
- Owen, Paula. 2005. "Labels, lingo, and legacy: Crafts at a crossroads." *Objects and meaning: New perspectives on art and craft*. Edited by M. Anna Fariello and Paula Owen. Maryland, Toronto, Plymouth: The Scarecrow Press, Inc.
- Parkes, Graham. 1990. Thoughts on the way. *Heidegger and Asian thought*. Graham Parkes, Editor. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press.
- Perreault, John. 2005. Crafts is art: Tampering with power. *Objects and meaning: New perspectives on art and craft*. Maryland, Toronto, Plymouth: The Scarecrow Press, Inc.
- Rees, Helen. 1997. Patterns of making: Thinking and making in industrial design. *The culture of craft: Status and future*. Edited by Peter Dormer. Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press.
- Risatti, Howard. 2007. *A theory of craft: Function and aesthetic expression*. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press.
- The story of Goldilocks and the three bears. N.d. Available at http://www.dltk-teach.com/rhymes/pgoldilocks_story.asp: Accessed: 8 February 2016.
- Yanagi, Soetsu. 1989. *The unknown craftsman: A Japanese insight into beauty*. Adapted by Bernard Leach. New York and San Francisco: Kondansha International, Ltd.
- Young, Julian. 2004. *Heidegger's philosophy of art*. Cambridge, New York, Melbourne, Madrid, Cape Town: Cambridge University Press.

Submitted: 19 April 2015; revised: 9 February 2016