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ORIGINAL PAPER

Ethics, Tradition and Temporality in Craft Work: The Case of Japanese *Mingei*

Robin Holt[1] · **Yutaka Yamauchi**[1]

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Abstract

Based on an empirical illustration of Onta pottery and more broadly a discussion of the Japanese *Mingei* movement, we study the intimacy between craft work, ethics and time. We conceptualize craft work through the temporal structure of tradition, to which we find three aspects: generational rhythms of making; cycles of use and re-use amongst consumers and a commitment to historically and naturally attuned communities. We argue these temporal structures of tradition in craftwork are animated by two contrasting but co-existing ideas of the good: the moral and the ethical. By developing the work of Elizabeth Grosz, we conceptualize this distinction between moral and ethical as a temporal phenomenon, specifically in differing relations to ideas of the future. Moral aspects of craft work understand the future as a progression from past, whether in preserving practices and norms, or improving upon them in relation to ideals. Ethical aspects understand the future as inherently open to chance and divergence, valuing difference, accident and the possibilities for creativity these entail. Empirically, we show evidence of both aspects in the case of *Mingei*—a organized movement dedicated to preserving and promoting traditional Japanese craft work. We contribute to studies of craft work by revealing and classifying its temporal aspects. We contribute to studies in business ethics by conceptualising a generative distinction between morals and ethics configured through differing understandings of time.

Keywords Japan · Ethics · Craft work · Temporality · Time · Work practice · *Mingei* · Tradition

Introduction

Craft was once just the normal way of working. Nowadays, in the wake of intensifying and globalized patterns of industrialization, it is a form of work set apart from, and often in conflict with, mainstream work practices. Craft evokes experiences of making and using things that, in part at least, remain free from the logical strings of capital accumulation with which so much productive life has found itself threaded. Conceptualizations of this freedom are various, but typically they gravitate toward identifying how craft work both preserves and improves upon pre-industrial work patterns (Sasaki et al., 2019; Suddaby et al., 2017). New technologies are used, but to enhance rather than replace a close familiarity with materials and tools through which the human body, in concert with others, fashions a living from within a wider environmental setting upon which they acknowledged their dependency (Bell et. al., 2021a). In this craft work can be defined as the organized transmission and imaginative re-enactment of traditional work practice, potentially addressing the 'ills' of industrialization through the recovery of lost ways of doing things.

Craft is, then, a work practice deeply concerned with time. Not clock time, but time experienced in traditions of skilled production and attentive use associated with an embodied respect for the material, form and purpose of things. The traditions institute what Ingold (2010) calls a 'correspondence' between sentient and material things. It is a correspondence grounded in collectively shared ideas of the good. To work well, craft must organize people, materials and symbols in ways that more honestly, fruitfully and generously give to life. This 'giving to life' carries within it what Küpers (2020) calls organizational resonance: it is a gathering of practices that affords its exponents a mutually enhancing community of working and using things (Bell

✉ Robin Holt
robin.holt@bristol.ac.uk

Yutaka Yamauchi
yamauchi.yutaka.3r@kyoto-u.ac.jp

[1] Graduate School of Management, Kyoto University, Yoshida-Honmachi, Sakyo-Ku, Kyoto 606-8501, Japan

et al., 2021a, 2021b; Kontturi, 2018), one that invokes and attempts to learn from the old ways to improve life, not by habitually replicating the past, but augmenting and taking it on.

Throughout these readings of craftwork, however, comes the risk of an idealising imaginary that can, and ought, be challenged (Adamson, 2007). The claims that craftwork 'does good' are wrapped up in a value-based commitment to endurance that can slip into the habitual. To make and use things that last and to become skilled in traditions that last, is not, *ipso facto*, good. Indeed, the temporal structures found in craft practices—the longevity of apprenticeship, the pattern books stabilized in repetition, the generationally clad community values or the uncritical advocacy of time-worn folk wisdom—can be so hostile to difference, to experiment and to individuality, that they corrode rather than give to life.

In what follows we begin by discussing if, and how, the time of tradition extolled in craftwork is distinct from the clock time of industrialization, and, if so, whether this alternative, temporal quality of craft work is, itself, homogenous, or if it too exhibits internal distinctions. We then open up to a debate on the relation between tradition and the nature of 'the good'. Here we distinguish between morals and ethics. Specifically, we introduce the work of Elizabeth Grosz who associates ethics with a relation to an open and supervening future. In contrast, morality works to close down the future by understanding it as (ideally) a progression towards principles of right and wrong set down in the past. When embodied in the repetitions of tradition, morals encourage conformity, whereas ethics encourage difference. In its elevation of tradition, craftwork, we argue, embodies both ethics and morals. Yet when tradition becomes explicitly stipulated through codes and habituated through routine, it risks being more moral than ethical. Its moral quality emerges from a peculiarly intense and respectful embodiment of long-standing community norms and activities in which expert techniques and well-made things are enlisted in social commitments to an idea of the good life. Its ethical quality comes in the creative willingness to live alongside risk, where risk is not measured, but experienced as the unknowable eruption of the unexpected.

To elaborate on and illustrate these arguments we discuss the historical case of the Japanese *Mingei* movement, using writings of its leading exponents, notably their extensive commentary on the pottery community of Onta. Though explicitly set in opposition to the intensified pressure of industrialized, clock time regimes (Bakken et al, 2013), *Mingei's* exponents tended to argue for an equally intense submission to a moralized, invariant view of the past through which the future was to be reformed. Though moral, we find *Mingei* to be only minimally ethical. Our contribution is two-fold. First, we contribute to studies of craft by highlighting the temporal nature of craft practices, indeed we suggest what makes it distinct is its relation to time, not only in its critical relationship toward the clock time prevalent in industrialization, but also because its expressions of novelty and creativity can have a deliberately open, orientation toward the future. Second, we contribute to the literature on business ethics by arguing the distinction between morality and ethics is a sustained by differing relations to the future, and reveal how this distinction is embodied in experiences of work practice. Though limited to a specific case of craftwork, we argue other studies of craft, and of creative and innovative work practice more generally, might usefully pursue this distinction, notably when studying how work practice contributes to the good life. Where morality confines questions of the good to the practical application and development of principles that have been historically embedded, ethics demands a willingness to work with unplanned, and unexpected eruptions that can be prepared for and even encouraged, but not managed.

Craft Work, Tradition and Ideas of the Good

Time, Craft and Industrialization

Time, suggests Elizabeth Grosz (1999, p. 1), is an open ended, materializing and active force characterized by unpredictability and newness, it has its own enigmatic and irreversible impetus, yet it "disappears as such in order to make appearance, all appearance and disappearance, that is, events, possible." As it disappears into events and processes the supervening power of the future (the power that means the past and present can be utterly rewritten, they are at its mercy) is concealed, and in its stead come the ordering, spatial understandings by which events are stabilized into patterns. Time becomes history, or a plan, an era, or a span, or most insidiously, the uniformly aligned units of clock time by which global industrialization sequences itself into the 'if … then …' relations of efficiency and effectiveness.

Though global, this machinic sequencing of micro events in production and consumption, is not totalising. There are other stabilising temporal orders, notably tradition, which foster different work patterns, notably craftwork. In embodying tradition, craftwork is said to be a more ethically committed form of material production than mass manufacture, a claim that takes three forms. First come those related to working. Craftwork demands the careful, sustainable, and skilled selection of materials to be used respectfully. Tradition determines the rhythm of selecting materials, along with the slow acquisition of skills needed to work them properly, creating an intimacy of mutual influence between sentient and non-sentient things (Gibson, 2016; Ingold, 2010). This mutual influence is being shaped by historically sedimented structures, organizational routines and institutional norms

(e.g., guilds, examinations, apprenticeships) by which working is authenticated. Craft workers often talk of origin points from which an authorising lineage of influence in style and technique can be traced (Bell et al., 2021a). It is an awareness of connexion in which experiment and innovation remain respectful of established patterns. The general tenor is one of disciplined learning warranted by a collective pursuit of an historically located impression of how things should be. Craft workers acquire shared awareness of expertise through which they come to dedicate themselves to the furtherance of traditions that have been sedimented long before the progress hungry innovations of modern commercialism (Dreyfus, 1999, p. 17).

Second, are those related to prolonged and immersed education of customers or users, many of whom share, albeit vicariously, a grounding in practices of working in which natural materials and traditional values and forms are being respected. Through use, the customer comes to acquire the values and meanings associated with traditions, often otherwise unavailable to them (Dacin et al, 2019). Users disassociate themselves from the multinational (and therefore rootless and unhomely) behemoths with whom neither a customer nor a community could establish a bond of trust and belonging (Waehning et al, 2019, p. 158): Indeed, these users often become suspicious of larger commercial firms, as is testified to their often hostile reaction when the owners of craft businesses ‘sell out’ to corporate interests (Rice, 2016).

And thirdly, in addition to skilled working and attentive using, comes a concern for social and civic responsibility, both to an immediate community of makers and users and more broadly the locale in which the making and using occurs. Craft breweries, for example, emphasize their local or indigenous status, how they are willingly tithed to a locale whose integrity they have a responsibility to preserve (Gaytán, 2019; Ocejo, 2017). Here the social and cultural commitment cues up a process of what Max Weber (1921/1978, p. 40–41) called *Vergemeinschaftung*: an affective, solidaristic sense of shared emotional commitment. Craftwork makes things that are not only useful but can evoke a sense of generational belonging and duty, and which mark rituals and symbolize values, all which then feeds associations with ideas of collective unity, democracy (Sennett, 2008) and nationhood (Keshavarz & Zetterlun, 2019).

Though prevalent, these three claims around working practices, use value and community building do not go uncontested. Specifically, concerns are raised about affordability, autonomy, and exploitation. Making unique objects through rigorous replication of traditional techniques craft objects tends to be expensive, restricting access on the grounds of cost (what William Morris (1871) was to lament as “ministering to the swinish luxury of the rich”). On the other hand, if craftwork emulates mass production techniques and lower prices, the original value is lost. The upshot is a constant dance of using available technology and new work practices to innovate and so potentially reduce costs and widen accessibility, whilst continuing to adhere to the traditions by which craft claims its distinctiveness.

In addition to raising questions of affordability, an unquestioned adherence to tradition also raises questions of autonomy: the possibilities for creative deviation emerging from within craft practices are often limited to incremental twists of patterns that remain, fundamentally, unquestioned (Toraldo et al., 2019). As Sennett (2008, p. 101) observes, an insistence on the veracity of traditional knowledge can all too easily tip into a malign transmission of prejudice. Often the source of such conservatism emerges from institutional forces of training and certification. Though created to protect the work practice, traditional guilds, for example, have been found to stymy group and individual expression (Bonanni & Parkes, 2010). Similarly restrictive attempts encouraging unquestioned material, social and cultural conformity have been noticed in the protection of terroir in wine production (Smith and Maguire, 2013).

Finally, there are concerns of exploitation. There is a distinction to be acknowledged as to how traditional rules are followed. As Sennett (2008, p. 177) accepts: “commitments themselves come in two forms, as decisions and as obligations. In the one, we judge whether a particular action is worth doing or a particular person is worth spending time with; in the other, we submit to a duty, a custom, or to another person’s need, not of our own making.” Being aware of this distinction is important, because, in the slippage from judging to duty, the inherent, emotional rewards typically associated with craftwork thin out. Customary work is not always uplifting; indeed, it can be laborious and repetitive, revealing how the roots of the tradition can be indistinguishable from what was, then, just everyday work and meagre survival (Frayling, 2011; Glăveanu, 2017).

Being alive to the exploitative ways of following or obeying tradition also extends to being critical of users. In some cases, the communities established around craft recur into an isolated and isolating identity that quells rather than encourages difference. For example, and to recur to the skilled, manual labour and community spirit associated with craft beer, as both Land et al., (2019, pp. 138–139) and Rydzik and Ellis-Vowles (2019) argue, in some cases customers willingly find themselves characterized by an atavistic discourse of physicality, materiality and masculinity. More generally, Ocejo (2017, pp. 20–21) finds gendered and racial stereotypes being encoded into forms of elite manual labour, noticing how, for example, the prevalence of a white, middle-class taint to artisanal values.

Combined, these forms of critique reveal how the temporally grounded commitments to tradition by which craftwork is authorized can denude as much as they enhance the human power to act, think and feel critically: there is a closing off

as much as an opening up of possibility. Under the impress of tradition there is a skew toward conservative homogeneity which is legitimated by moral claims. The experience of working and using become secondary to the realization of a situation deemed good (and beautiful). The affective force of this morality comes in a yearning to learn from and re-enact, the past. Craftwork tradition becomes a form of temporal binding in which the manufactured (and increasingly digitized) present is experienced as ephemeral (superficial, tasteless, flimsy, mass) and totalising (uniform), in contrast to the past, which was substantial and regionally distinct and various. It is a binding that yields a kind of this-worldly eschatology: preserving the past (originals) enriches a niche form of the present, insulated from the intensification and disorientation characterising industrialized forms of production and consumption practice.

Not only does the insulation of the past risk inducing a somewhat staid, uncritical worldview amongst craft workers and users, it is, somewhat ironically, also a source of expsoure. Boltanksi and Chiapello (2005, p. 451) for example, argue the idealising narratives associated with tradition, authentic origins and the search for originals rather than copies, for the real not the fake, are not only seductive, but are so in ways attractive to the very forces of capital accumulation that craftwork ostensibly opposes. Their argument, though nuanced, might be summarized as a warning. By committing to the elevation of tradition the present is always being outshone by an imagined future in which the values of the past will be even more accurately, intensely and rigorously exemplified. The old is continually enlisted as a resource by which to justify improving the present, notably through consumption. In other words, in its use of tradition craftwork becomes an imaginary (Bell et al., 2021a, 2021b) that is constructed to legitimate and excite broader processes of scaled production and consumer branding. Rather than being opposed to industrialization, the intensity of craftwork's moralized opposition further enhances the ability of capital to transform itself, finding new markets through the commercialization of consumer's affective desire for tradition. In such a condition the commercial claim to be rediscovering original methods might more honestly—authentically—be described by what Fleming (2009) rather nicely calls an inauthentic making of an authenticity machine.

Ethics and the Open Future

In its embodying tradition, the temporal ordering of craftwork sets itself against contemporary forms of industrialized business practice. Workers and users communicate and congregate between themselves and their environment within a texture of repeating, time-worn patterns whose authority is warranted by a collective understanding that things are being made and used correctly. Industrialization, in contrast, lacks this moral commitment to traditions which can only ever play a subaltern role to forces of innovation and capital accumulation. In craft work, the adherence to tradition is a relation of abeyance in which the future defers to the past, and innovation is restricted to refinements of this deference. Tradition tends toward an organized unity realized through an historically closed trajectory of repetition. Even where this unity does issue a moral riposte to industrialization—and as Boltanski and Chiapello (2005) suggest, craft work can be understood either as an extension of industrialization—we have also argued the commitments it entails bring forth its own forms of ill in the shape of forced and unimaginative compliance. It is in the nature of morals to impress themselves upon life with repetitious force.

In contrast to morals, argues Elizabeth Grosz (2017, pp. 253–254), come ethics. Though often used as synonyms, she occupies a line of philosophical thinking in which ethics distinguish themselves from morals by acknowledging the exposing uncertainties of a future time that is free from the determinism associated with neither the predictive calculation of 'if … then …' industrial reasoning nor the idealism of fixed ideas of the good. Living within traditions, as Grosz admits, sustains a texture to human practice: they give purposive form to what otherwise are just activities. Yet if traditions are simply patterns of repetition enforced by adherence to a way of life deemed 'good' they risk being little more than formal, and empty, rituals. Ethical experience enjoins itself to tradition only insofar as the generational rhythm of repetition affords humans, as entangled beings, the opportunity to know themselves more fully than they otherwise would. An ethical tradition is one that encourages exponents to expand their experience beyond their capacity to fully apprehend and control it; it encourages them to relate to the future as an open field, not a known position. As such, ethical experience involves an expressive and continual modification of tradition. Heavily influenced by Gilles Deleuze's insistence that the repetitious forces of life can generate explosive forces of difference, Grosz suggests ethics to be an experiential form of freedom discovered from within those actions and thoughts of everyday practice that accept the future to be an unfathomable and provocative unknown. In repetition, suggests Deleuze, what is being repeated is not the same (which would imply time being experienced as an extension of what went before) but the generative force of individuated or fractured experiences in which little differences are being continually released, and which can be followed as creative lines of life (Deleuze, 1990, p. 127).

This experiential form of freedom can be parsed into three related aspects. First, it is a conscious experience of considering what it is to be a living being (rather than an everyday habit in which the question of being does not arise). This consciousness, though, is not of an isolate, sovereign subject self, but of a self that dissipates, spreading

through relational settings, more akin to what Chu and Vu (2021) call a 'non-self', whose detachment from an inner subjectivity emerges from continual experiences of chance and relational elaboration. Second, it is an experience of accepting the commonly held (natural) histories through which distinctiveness is mediated (Mandalaki & Fotaki, 2020); one cannot opt out of tradition. And third, it is a passionate and imaginative experience of emergence and eruption in which any divergence from established patterns of activity and thought is not simply a forking of options, but a trajectory along which one cannot anticipate a destination: movement freed from calculation (Grosz, 1999, p. 19). Combined, these lend the milieu-bound activity of craft work a sense of future time that is far less the working through of already established probabilities (innovation as an unfolding of tradition) and far more an eruption of the new. It is only in these moments of eruption, argues Grosz, that we experience time in its raw state as a supervening future. A future that supervenes has within it the possibility to transform the present and past utterly, and in ways that cannot be predicted. It is not a complex future of provisional randomness (i.e., not one that is in principle predictable were sufficient information processing power available), but a future where chance is ineliminable and to which knowledge (and especially the accrued expertise of a traditional way of doing things) can only ever be experienced as a restraint.

Grosz is not arguing in opposition to tradition, but against its gaining ascendency by being set in moralising aspic. The Latin root of tradition *tradere*, carries several meanings: "(i) delivery, (ii) handing down knowledge, (iii) passing on a doctrine, (iv) surrender or betrayal" (Williams, 1976/2015, p. 252–253). When something is handed down and passed on, it requires a handing over from one to the next (teacher to pupil: parents to children, emperor to people), it is an absorption which occurs when the latter succumbs and submits to the former. Morally speaking this submission or surrender is one of overt power and knowledge, a majoritarian imposition upon life. It is through such submission that learning occurs, but as Bell et al. (2021a, 2021b) remind us, if this learning is to be anything more than dry imitation, if the tradition is to live, then transference must also entertain the open possibility of transformation, of taking the tradition on, even for betraying the authority of an imperative.

If the new is to be pocketed in tradition rhythms of making and use become as steeped in disjunctive synthesis and multiplicity as they are repetitious conformity. The openness is realized not by opposing tradition, or pausing it, but through associative attempts to make its mediating force visible. In being made visible, tradition is exposed to its limits: the repetition becomes an explorative struggle with how the 'same' is always underdetermining and tends toward an individuating uncertainty (Bell & Vachhani, 2020). At the limit of tradition is life itself, the erupting, internal vital force of growth, a coming into being which cannot be contained by the spatial time of quantified instants (industrialization) nor by the historicized time of idealized patterns of activity (craft work as only morality).

The difference in this repetition creates what Haraway (2003) calls 'significant otherness'. It is significant because it still resides in the established tradition and so can be experiences as a sign, as something that signifies meaning, as something already organized and which, thereby is what makes ethics possible in the first place (Rhodes, 2022). Yet it is also 'other' because it hints at how, within the temporal entanglement of tradition, little differences reveal more than is being made present, thereby stretching the experience of time into what an incalculable and unrepresentable future. This future is more than possibility (if by the possible is meant events that can be predicted as probable by present readings off of the past). Rather, it is a virtuality, which is raw eruption (its origins cannot be traced to the present or past), pure multiplicity (its form cannot lay claim to prior forms) and uncanniness (it does not resemble what is already present) (Grosz, 1999, p. 27).

Methodology

Following Grosz (2017, p. 77–78), we have argued for an understanding of ethics that keeps company with chance, multiplicity and uncanniness, and so with what Strathern (2020, p. 15) calls the working potential of openness. This is not to abandon tradition, but to allows its effects to permeate the future without firm stipulation. Otherwise, future time is nothing but a reading from the past, and so no future at all. We have further argued that it is in craft work that this sense of supervening future more apparent than other work practices precisely because of its explicit and conscious commitment to tradition. Whilst this commitment can become overtly moral and collectively managed, many advocates for craft isolate the distinctiveness of craft work in its deliberately courting accident, imperfection and risk (Pye, 1964/2002). Craft work exposes itself to the surprise, frustration and perhaps even awe consequent on combining discipline and acquired skill in making with disturbing uncertainty. A ceramicist spends years understanding the chemical composition of different glazes and bodies, and how these interact within the kiln. They test different combinations constantly, examining the different effects, and then, where they feel a state of 'goodness' has been realized, they repeat. Yet each firing of the kiln and each use of a pot exhibits little differences, inducing what Peter Sloterdijk (2017, p. 256) calls an aesthetic preparedness of each individual to expend and so expand, and in ordinary ways, rather than in abeyance to idealizations of proper behaviour (moralized tradition) or machinic calculation (industrialized

clock time). Though acknowledging the rigours and necessary limits of tradition, ethics allows for the experimental, the disturbing, the vague, the suggestive and the scurrilous, within which unruly forces lies the potency of being. To experience the future is to undergo a continual elaboration of the new.

To critically elaborate on these arguments, we undertook a single historical case in a particular region at a particular time. Single cases allow for an intensive analysis of an individual occurrence stressing developmental factors in relation to the environment, allowing for closeness to the events, relations, and characters whilst being able to sustain conceptualization (Maclean et al., 2016). Being single, the goal is not generalizability but enriched, detailed knowledge of a phenomenon. For Flyvbjerg (2006, pp. 222–224) single cases are especially apt for studies of relational phenomena such as acquiring work-based expertise.

Our historical narrative follows the emergence of *Mingei*, a movement of largely Japanese craft workers, academics, collectors and cultural civil servants originating around 1910 and ending around 1970, though recently enjoying a resurgence. Between them they narrated a story of a pre-industrial Japan suffused in values of simplicity, honesty and collective responsibility, and the gradual loss of these to mechanized production and a growing uniformity of global consumer taste. Anxious to avert the capitulation of Japanese life to such industrialization, *Mingei's* exponents, notably Sōetsu (Muneyoshi) Yanagi and Bernard Leach, argued craft work could provide a vital enclave. It embodied old ways that had taken centuries to perfect but, apparently, only a single generation to potentially destroy (Matsui, 2005). Advocates of *Mingei* rushed to practice and study the traditions of craft work, notably those of flower arranging, paper making, lacquerware and, above all, ceramics. By the 1930's *Mingei* had become a fully-fledged, cultural, political and economic movement dedicated to the protection and revivification of the traditional and thereby good, ways of life so well embodied by craft communities (Idekawa, 1998). Given *Mingei* represents a concentrated and thorough evocation of craft work, it is, loosely, a paradigmatic case. It evokes what becomes a reference point for the nature of craftwork more generally. Yet though its protagonists declared its prototypical value, we found this a contested claim; it set a standard, but in doing so made clear an abundance of exceptions.

The leaders of the movement and others who followed have made many documented efforts to explicate the principles, rationale and ideals of craftwork using *Mingei* as grounding reference point. These abundant sources allow us to delineate the nuanced distinctions that would not normally come to full attention. These primary data sources were not commentaries, but written from within the practice of working and cultural lobbying. The sources included writings, letters, and exhibition records. Particularly, the leader Muneyoshi Yanagi's writing is abundant, published in essays in Japan, but also letters and materials in the archives of Bernard Leach (GB 2941 BHL) at the Crafts Study Centre, U.K., which we consulted online, and a three-day visit to the archives, photographing documents that included: letters, pamphlets, telegrams, essays, technical manuals and government permissions. For material in Japanese we used both published and our own translations. Though by using archives and secondary material we were not producing evidence, we were aware of these materials as original, or commentary on original source material (Popp & Fellman, 2020). The secondary data are constituted by studies referencing earlier studies, accumulating as a corpus of knowledge (Degawa, 1988; Irie, 2008; Matsui, 2005; Shiga, 2016; Shin, 2002; Takenaka, 1999).

To exemplify *Mingei* our case concentrates on the potting community of Onta. We visited Onta, observing daily activity, interviewing one family head, and conversing openly with two others, whilst on site. We also consulted texts written about by Yanagi and Leach, as well as sustained academic studies of Onta (e.g., Moeran, 1997) all of which cite original sources which we too could trace. Therefore, to complement empirical data from our visit, we use the procedure that prior studies have used (e.g., of reviewing secondary sources to better navigate primary documentary sources (e.g. Coraiola & Derry, 2020). In this way, we could work through the vast area of literature in a systematic manner, without ignoring the nuances (Van Maanen et al., 2007). Because the *Mingei* discourse is subtle and even contradictory, we sought to keep our analysis open and pluralistic rather than determining a meaning of events, things, or people in a single way (Maclean et al., 2016).

Craft work and Ethics: An illustrative, Historical Case of *Mingei* and the Potting Community of Onta

The Emergence of *Mingei* and the Thinking of Sōetsu Yanagi

The *Minge*i movement was initiated and then led by Muneyoshi Yanagi (柳宗悦 also pronounced Sōetsu Yanagi), a founding figure amongst a group of upper, middle class, western-oriented artists and intellectuals gathered around the journal *Shirakaba* (白樺, started 1910), one of many groups that young artists started in the 1910s. The 1910s and 20 s were a contradictory time. On one hand, it was considered a time of democracy, the post Meiji era, after Meiji ended when the emperor deceased and a new one succeeded in 1912, is said to flourish "Taisho democracy." Women were relatively more liberated, and individualism started to take root. Yet, it was also the time when the nation of Japan

rapidly slides into nationalism and imperialism. The successful Russo-Japanese war in 1904–1905 gave the government and the people confidence. Japan was in fact facing structural financial deficit and sought to expand to sustain its development. It annexed Korea in 1910, four months after the launch of *Shirakaba*. Young artists were compelled to counter such imperialist shift, opposing the militarism. These artists had learned European cultures and thoughts and found the parochial nationalism untenable. Yet they also found the industrialization encouraged by the Meiji regime deeply problematic. They looked back to the old traditions of Japanese culture, notably in both the functional (下手もの *getemono*) and more refined objects (上手もの *jôtemono*) being made by communities of Japanese craft workers. What emerged was a movement that both fashioned and championed these values using the moniker *Mingei* (people's craft as opposed to industrial, aristocratic, artistic ones) (see Irie, 2008; Kitazawa, 2013) .

Yanagi—maker, cultural commentator, critic—remained the leading light of *Mingei* throughout. Though multiple, primary artistic influence came in the figure of William Bake, a London printer, painter, engraver and poet whose creative genius belonged to and spoke with ordinary people, well outside of the academies and stylized mannerism of high taste. Blake recorded the ills of industrialization and how they had inveigled their way into the lives of ordinary people caught fast by machinery and the "mind forged manacles" of calculating reasoning. Set against these Blake created a personal, mytho-poetic visionary world of new beginnings in which a simpler, more honest and innocent life became possible, and one with which Yanagi (1915) was entranced.

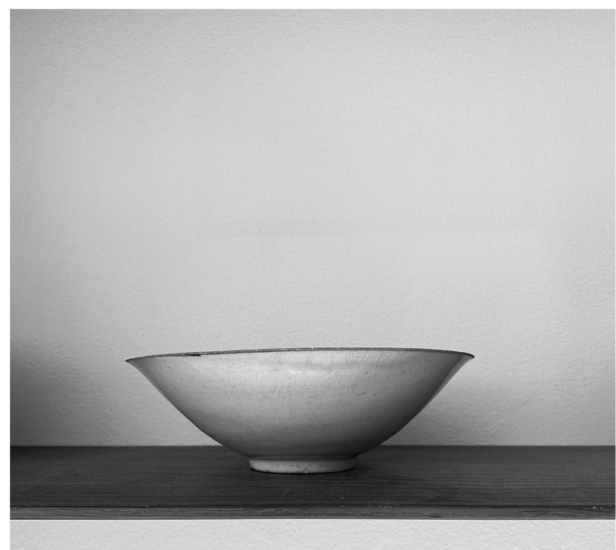
In addition to Blake, Yanagi (and so *Mingei*) was also influenced by his travels to China, and to occupied Korea in 1916. In Korea especially he was struck by the calm beauty of their everyday ceramics, something he also found in early Chinese pots, and extended this affection to the people, whose freedom movement established on March 1, 1919, he supported. In May 1919, Yanagi (1919, 1920a, 1920b) wrote a series of articles in a major Japanese newspaper, claiming the beauty of Korean folk arts and culture that Japan was trampling on, not to mention, the violent acts of Japan over Korea: He publicly apologizes as a Japanese. Yanagi then sought to raise money to establish a Korean folk-art museum. In 1922, he objected to the Japanese occupation government's plan to destroy the main gate of the palace (Kwanghwamun) and successfully convinced them to just move it.

In developing *Mingei*, then, Yanagi was thinking through folk art, or craft, about how to nurture new social forms informed by old cultural values, arguing: "[W]e should not keep crafts within individuals. Right crafts call for a right society" (Yanagi, 1928, p. 183), and continuing "[T]he right craft is itself a right expression of the time. To improve craft and to improve the society, we cannot think of these separately." (p. 185). He is blending a critique of industrialization with a veneration for collectively organized, anonymous workers of ordinary, yet naturally refined, objects. By the time he was initiating what, in 1936, was to become the Japan Folk Art Museum, Yanagi was writing:

> Why is beauty so much more apparent in "ordinary objects" than in "sophisticated objects"? First and foremost, because of a difference in frame of mind at the time of creation. Because the lack of intent of the former—compared to the ambition of the latter—is in a purer land. Because detachment implies something much deeper than consciousness. Because self-effacement is a more solid foundation than self-control. Because anonymity provides a calmer environment than signing. Because necessity is a better guarantee of beauty than the intentional act (Yanagi, 1934, p. 296).

Without conscious and deliberate planning, the craft is bound by rhythms of tradition, embodying wider forces of which workers are a part. An awareness of being placed in seasonal cycles, generational patterns of living or relations of dependency on natural raw materials overran the idea of individuality on the one hand, and industrialization on the other.

Take as an example the everyday celadon ware for eating or washing brushes made during the Chinese Sung dynasty. These things had existed for upwards of 1000 years, they lasted well, still worked, they outlived the workers but steadily, imperceptibly, continuing to function, echoing rather than standing in distinction to naturally occurring colours and forms. Their value was apparent only in use, it was



Chinese Sung dynasty bowl (960-1127CE). Photo: Authors

performed day by day: calm, contained, generous, practical, uncomplaining, without show.

To be classified *mingei*, Yanagi (1933/2019, pp.7–10) argued, a thing, like a bowl, must: be used, not just displayed; evoke traditional values (by which he meant a local or regional set of norms sedimented in time); be an ordinary, everyday object that is relatively inexpensive and available; be made according to long standing patterns of collective labour process; skew toward the natural environment in gesture, motif and material honesty; and finally, come from the hands of workers who are typically unschooled, anonymous, direct and whose genius was collective, they never signed their work. The thing made and the community making it would outlast the individual workers, and would uphold values associated with relational belonging, which would extend to users. *Mingei* is grounded in an embodied form of use-value that persists beyond the commercial intensification of work patterns, and which is immersed in, not separated from, natural rhythms.

Mingei's Wider Resonance

In addition to Yanagi, who remained primarily a cultural critic, collector and political figure, *Mingei* found vocal and articulate advocacy amongst the craft workers Bernard Leach, Kanjirō Kawai, Kenkichi Tomimoto, and Shōji Hamada, all of whom had connexions to *Shirakaba*. Being foreign, Leach's influence was pivotal. A relative outsider, he felt compelled to critically reflect on and catalyze the folk-art traditions that to native Japanese were more habituated dispositions (De Waal, 1997). In his diaries Leach (1911) writes of his "plan for the combined spreading of Art-love & the making of a living" which was to be undertaken with his Japanese friends. *Mingei* was to be thought about *and* practiced. He too venerated William Blake's anti-industrialism and Korean potters, talking somewhat condescendingly to modern ears, of their child-like wonder steeped in immediate sensory impression, unspoilt by thought (Leach, 1914).

In 1920 Leach left Japan with Hamada for St Ives, in Cornwall, England, to establish a workshop making and selling pots, both decorative and useful, experimenting with different kilns, forms, slips, bodies and glazes. Taking on apprentices, they were to learn through applied endeavour, re-discovering, cross-fertilizing, and revitalizing traditional techniques (such as medieval slipware) of pre-industrial Japanese and British craft communities. Hamada and Leach had about them a sense of being origins and originals, original in that they would recover what industrialization was concealing, and origins in that both felt it was through craft work that a unified sense of character became possible: the pot, the potter and the pottery were all one. The potter is responsible for how form gathers beauty and personality: the form of the pots, of the work practice, of the users, and of the maker, making her or him "a point of equilibrium" who "uses his [sic] natural faculties of heart, head and hand in balance", a maker in whose body the virtues of life and of the pot coalesce (Leach, 1950, p. 540). But the potter cannot act alone, only from within a collective practice that is itself attentive to and animated by, a collective sense of natural and historical indebtedness. They worked with small dramas of movement, a bending blade of grass set against darkly glazed clay, the curve of a leaping salmon following the rim of a plate, the minute deviations in the repeating patterns of herring bone, allowing the glaze and form to speak for themselves, quietly.

Recalling Grosz (1999, p. 27), there is willingness to work with ineliminable chance here: the vital force of nature was being admitted. Leach's gestural brush work has the vitality of a raw eruption and multiplicity: they acknowledge yet loosen themselves from notable precursors and forms, at times they have an uncanny energy. Openness was also courted in Leach's dependency on others. He was less proficient at throwing than decorating, often deferring to others to make the bodies, exposing each to moments of chance encounter. This loosening of deliberate design was thereby atmospherically transferred to the incoming apprentices at St Ives. Though mainly local apprentices (Leach preferred what he assumed to be the malleable, diligent temperament of locals rather than art students), there were some individualist outliers from further afield, such as Katherine Pleydell-Bouverie (1929) who talks of her distrust of "mutton fat and glitter" glazes, preferring pots that make people think "of things like pebbles & shells and birds' eggs and the stones over which moss grows. Flowers stand out of them more pleasantly, so it seems to me. And that seems to matter most." At a similar time, we find Yanagi (1929) chiding Leach (who had sent some of his efforts to Japan for an exhibition) for his exuberant glaze: "As a whole there is much change in your works. Westernized in a word. This is very natural. In taking out your old things, we noticed that the glazes of your new things are inferior to [sic] the former. They shine too much for our quiet Oriental mind." Too much shine, too much presence, too much confident statement.

Hamada had returned to Japan in 1923, establishing a workshop in Mashiko, and it was from here, as well as St Ives, under the leadership of Yanagi, a journal (*Kōgei 1931–1951*) and a network of regional craft museums, that *Mingei* ideals began to permeate throughout Japan. It was a mission to educate the Japanese people who, for Yanagi, had lapsed under the impress of industrialization, but not irredeemably so. He believed he had found a western outlier in Leach:

> I still believe how superior the Japanese public is in understanding your real merit. It's no use to bother about hard Murray, because I know, and all of your Japanese friends know very clearly how superior your works are to his. You know not a single of his potteries was sold here, it is not because he is quite a stranger to Japanese, but his works are quite imperfect both aesthetically & morally. You know very well that the criterion of the beauty of craft is high & keen here. Perhaps you have heard that Mrs. Mairet's works were welcomed so much by us. She is also quite a stranger to us, yet her sale went on very well, because her work is sincere and genuine in spirit (Yanagi, 1929)

(William Staithe) Murray was sculptural, infused with elevated thoughts about technique and controlling the form and material, whereas Leach and Mairet (a weaver dedicated to using vegetable dyes and working in the craft community at Ditchling in Sussex, England) were instinctual, gestural, quietly bringing about a synthesis of practical functionality and spiritual simplicity. Again, there is an ethical touch here: the managed possibilities nurtured in intentional design cede to more instinctual, open work.

Yet for all the ethical possibility of craft work revival, Yanagi and Leach often slip into a controlling and contrived ordering of activity, a tendency revealed in Yanagi's aloof, patrician tongue. The potteries at St Ives and Mashiko were far from open in their organization. The experimental play with climbing kilns, motifs and glazes was counteracted by a division of labour that, certainly in the UK, was resented as much as appreciated by apprentices, they became a subject for moral enforcement (Harrod, 1999, p. 184; Leach, 1914). The same with Yanagi's own organizational efforts in the commune or guild of craftspeople in Kyoto, *Kamigamo Mingei Kyodan*. It was an attempt to create a new form of craft work, called *Shinsaku Mingei* (新作民藝) in which tradition was explored to create new social forms. His nephew, Yoshitaka Yanagi, himself a weaver, recalled his uncle's claim, "For us, the relationship with the future is more important than that with the past. We appreciate the past to produce the future in the right way" (Shiga, 2016, p. 132). Yet, in contrast to Grosz's idea of an open future, it is a future emerging from the past: "Behold the ancient works, you see the eternal beauty hidden there. If so, there you find the law that penetrates even the future" (Yanagi, 1928, p. 63). One especially enticing example of the past from which Yanagi thought the future might was the pottery community of Onta (小鹿田), near Hita City in Ōita prefecture.

***Mingei* at Onta**

By the 1950's *Mingei* was enjoying some prominence. With defeat in WWII and the messy onset of war in Korea, Japanese society had begun to fixate on how it might renew itself in the wake of modern humiliations. *Mingei* provided an already mature articulation, and interest in its principles boomed (Kikuchi, 1994) The intensity of enthusiasm was encapsulated in a well-publicized trip Yanagi and Leach made to Onta. For the high priests of *Mingei*, Onta's distinction was its lowliness, through which it had managed to duck the forces of economic progress. Whilst all about Japan had ceded to commercial acceleration, the villagers of Onta, living in a secluded valley above Hita city and without even a road until the 1940's, continued to practice centuries-old folk art grounded in a collective and unreflective sentiment for the working, trade, and use of simple, well-made goods. The beauty of *onta-yaki* came in its simple, repetitive, functional forms: bowls, flasks, vases, plates, jars and jugs. The dark brown and milky glazed clay bodies, occasionally splashed with green, bears distinctive, if similar, decorative patination, much as the villagers own distinction is carried by the shared rhythms of collective, co-operative living.

The village (部落 *buraku*) of around 14 households organized in patriarchal family units (本家 *honke* 分家 *bunke*) and residence groups, 9 of which make pottery, is set along the banks of two small rivers. Some have their own kilns, but there is a collective climbing kiln, and all share responsibility for digging out body and glaze clays, securing firewood, preparing rice ash for glazes, sieving and drying the powdered clay, a collaboration set down since the founding families (who came from Kyushu, an area whose renown for ceramics emerged from the forcible re-settlement of Korean potters after the Japanese occupation of Korea 1592–1598) established pottery making here in 1705.

A dominating feature of the village are the *kara-usu* (唐臼), crushing machines consisting of large, pivoted pine beams with a hammer at one end and hopper at the other. Water is fed into the hopper to the point where its weight tips the hammer upwards, before then spilling out, leaving the hammer to fall onto the friable clay rock. The crushers

Climbing kiln and river through Onta. Photo: Authors

Kara-usu (interior) Onta Village. Photo: Authors

are spread evenly along the stone walled banks, each fed by a functional if makeshift race, working to rhythms governed by nature (tapping out a faster beat during the rains, coming to a standstill in winter's freeze).

When the soft, orange clay is ground to a powder, the clay is elutriated with water (*suihii)* in tanks, the heavy sand falls and the rising, finer particles are scooped out and fed through sieves and left in holding tanks (*oro*) where they settle into a plastic consistency. The clay is then dried in neatly arranged slabs on top of drying kilns, then wedged (removing air bubbles that can explode in the kiln) into workable blocks. Whilst women process the making of clay, men make the pots, though both glaze, fix handles and spouts, and lay the pots to dry and stack and unload the kilns. The clay body is covered with a cream-white clay slip which then dries for three further days, until ready for decorative marking using the techniques of *tobi kanna* (飛び鉋chattering), *yubikaki* (指描き finger marking) and *kushikaki* (櫛描き comb marking) and *hakeme*, (刷毛目brush marking into the slip), and further glazes (brown, black, cream, green and transparent, each made with combination s of clay and kiln ash, rice plant ash, felspar, copper oxide and iron oxide). Body, slip and glaze combine to create the distinctive patterns that characterize *onta yaki*. The pots are thrown on kick wheels, only two for each family, one worked by the father, the other by an apprenticed elder son, who learns through immersed observation. The *kara-usu* design means there is only enough room make prepare enough clay for nine households, each with two potters, and their mechanical operation demands each is separated from the next along the banks by a distance which has restricted the village to potting households. Kilns are stacked and fired across the households, and the finished pots—the orange turns darker brown when fired, contrasting with the decorated white slip—are bought by dealers immediately after a firing, or have already been sold on commission work, the leftovers being sold to visitors in small shops adjoining the households.

Onta yaki has a uniform quality exuding what Leach called an unanimity of presence and warmth that comes from time-worn awareness of how to make things with contextual sensitivity. The storage jars and vases are curved and not straight, and the plates are slightly bowled and limited in size, because the local clay tends to crack at the base of larger, straighter forms. Using foot rims meant pots are more stable when stacked in the kiln and provide a handhold for dipping into buckets of glaze, sake and soy jars are made light so one can better judge how much liquid is left when holding it, and tea pots have a deep rim on the lid to prevent it slipping when pouring. The decoration is simple, gestural and without excess, many pieces being left with a village but not a maker's stamp. All this is long-held, unspoken knowledge (*chokkan*) devoid of intellection refinement. Onta potters insist they are making folk art (焼き物 *yakimono*, literally burned stuff), not ceramic art (陶器 *tōki*), and doing so through collective anonymity (Moeran, 1997/2013).

Their sense of distinction comes with serving the household and village, securing a living, learning from within the constraints and possibilities of tradition. Objects matter, but only as part of a wider ecology of forces involving the acquisition of skills, living closely to one another and exposed to nature. The rhythms of digging local clay, crushing and mixing it with local water, drying it in the sun and firing it with kilns built along the riverside, using kick wheels tended by generations of the same family, selling to local traders the pots would unthinkingly embody what Moeran (1997/2013) calls a bond of unlearned, instinctive, patient, untroubled togetherness. The closeness to nature is unmediated by subjective concerns, it is held within the tradition, allowing beauty to emerge from an unthought communion of material, form, maker, user (Yanagi, 1930; 1933).

It is this freedom from self (*tarîki*), and the consequent ability to directly experience the immanent beauty of what is beyond, in nature, that grounded the *Mingei* movement's claims that craft work contributed to an enrichment of life. There is, as we have suggested, a virtual quality to this lessening of individual design, an opening up to what Deleuze (1994: 10) called "the theatre of repetition" in which "we experience pure forces, dynamic lines in space which act without intermediary upon the spirit, and link it directly with nature and history, with a language which speaks before words, with gestures which develop before organised bodies". *Tarîki* is less an abandoning than a loosening of the self through the direct perception, allowing nature, rather than an individual's conscious design, to in-form the object (Yanagi, 1972, p.8). Yet whilst the lessening of individual influence might expose workers to the situated succession of unanticipated events, for Yanagi

Onta yaki large serving plate and flask with *tobi kanna* decoration. Photo: Authors

Mingei was less about courting an open future than imposing collective order:

> Individualism must be made to collapse. For the sake of the union of society. Uncontrolled anarchy must be done away with. For the sake of world order. Self-consciousness must be surpassed. For the sake of the thorough pursuit of knowledge. A sense of 'being different' must be renounced (quoted in Moeran, 2013, p.36)

In favouring traditional work patterns *Mingei's* exponents became advocates for overtly stratified organization; spontaneity was confined, very firmly, to the chattering on the body of a plate or the glaze on a bottle, it did not extend to household and gendered norms. Yanagi argued that it was in settled union that the workers of Onta attained an unmediated appreciation of things (*chokkan*) in the way of their ancestors: the timeliness of their community for the present lay in its conservatism, not its ethical tolerance of excess. In committing to tradition each worker develops sufficient expertise to accept an intimacy between submission and autonomy, one worked at continually through lines of inter-generational belonging (Makovichy, 2020, p. 320).

For sure, the repetition of work and social patterns at Onta fosters forms of everyday experience that are distinct from those of industrialization. It was accepted by advocates of *Mingei* that in their making Onta potters might discover the patches of possibility within historically grounded practices. Yet only in the making of pots. What mattered more than the objects was the maintenance of collective feelings of interdependence, and collaboration which were, through the representations of *Mingei's* language, naturalized as constituting the good life (Marques, 2012). Under this moralized impress, the future was no less contained than it was under the significations of industrialization: both configured future time as an ordering of coexistent (spatial) and successive (temporal) phenomena rather than a virtual line of flight.

Tradition and Mingei

As Moeran (1997/2013) patiently argues, in their eulogy of communities like Onta *Mingei's* exponents became increasingly caught in contradictions of their own making. Their veneration for and promotion of craft communities like Onta served an explicit political and cultural vision in which old Japan grew amid the new. As a movement *Mingei* was dedicated, first to preserving and reviving the folk-art communities of the past, and second, to persuading the merchant and ruling classes to encourage and embody the restoration of traditional Japanese values best exemplified in these communities. Yanagi (1931, VI) is quite explicit on this:

The repeating patterns at Onta. Photo: Authors

> We want to learn what fosters beauty … if we cannot grasp this important fact, we cannot be proud of our new culture. Just as we cannot indulge ourselves in the past. Hita no Sarayama (Onta) is the direct opposite of today. But that is why there are so many things we can learn from it. Because it has abundant aspects that we lack. It has the strength that is not subject to the aspect of time.

Ironically, *Mingei's* veneration of permanence (natural beauty was invariant to history) became, socially speaking, a hostility to the immanent, unmanageable forces from which its protagonists argued that, aesthetically speaking, craftwork gains a distinctive energy. Yanagi's (1928) commitment is to tradition that textures a linear view of progress: the past is to recolonize the present from which the future unfolds as naturally and as unquestioningly as a flower blooms and withers with the seasons. The quiet openness characterizing the ethical nature of the *tariki* tradition which in the actual work gives voice to the eruptive spontaneity of nature, morphs into something more explicit, principled, a panacea of homogenized relations. For Yanagi (1928, p. 117) beauty and good were present only insofar as they constituted a persisting identity and sameness embodied in traditional patterns of activity and thought whose repetition was more a process of unlearning than learning (Moeran, 1981).

By (un)educating users as clients and collectors and writing eloquently of craft as both an origin of what is good and beautiful, and of a nation, *Mingei* became associated with a form of nationalist expression and principled distinction that sought to redefine the cultural and social history of Japan.

And because of the rhapsodic intensity of this moralizing, *Mingei's* exponents can appear almost unconscionably condescending (De Waal, 1997) as well as miserly. For example, in wishing to keep community workers in repetitious, lowly paid occupations, and begrudging any individual success. Though (according to the likes of Yanagi and Leach) they cannot know it themselves, the potters of Onta are blessed with a temporal disposition that innately gives toward life simply, without the mediation of a reasoning subject; their dignity arises from being unlearned. Yet this fluid sensuousness is then enlisted in the service of an ideal in whose ken a supervening future gave way to a scripted one.

As an ideal it was unrealistic, and events conspired to rupture the smooth rhythms. Yanagi especially bemoaned the growing self-awareness that befell the potters, both in terms of their becoming instructed in different techniques, and the attention being given by dealers and museum curators to certain individuals considered to excel, rather than simply exemplify the style of working. In talking so fluently and passionately about the traditional, pre-industrialized nature of these communities, and in venerating the objects for their use value (実用価値 *jitsuyō kachi*), their technical proficiency (技術価値 *gijutsu kachi*), and their spiritual, untroubled simplicity, it was almost inevitable that certain pieces drew more attention as having significant appreciative value (評価価値 *hyōka kachi*) and hence commodity exchange value (商品交換価値 *shōhin kōkan kachi*) (Moeran, 1997/2013, p. 301). As such *onta yaki* becomes caught in comparative structures that strip it of the unmediated naturalism for which it is revered. Sennett (2008) too wrote about "a workshop death" (p. 77). Once the quality is attributed to a single name, the workshop loses its power and cannot sustain itself when they die or leave.

On the flip side, however, if the collective workshop traditions (such as primogeniture) dominate there is a risk the families will alienate younger generations. Moreover, the use of a name can help: by combining Onta's collective reputation with individual exhibitions we observed potters gaining recognition sufficient to begin collaborations with much larger design and hospitality concerns. After all, it is not as if either Leach or Hamada were averse to detailing and claiming objects as their own, marking the pots and/or boxes with their own seals as well as those of the workshop (Leach decorated pieces of *onta yaki*, sharing authorship with the Onta thrower, Sakamoto Shigeki, with both then having pieces in international museums, for example the Met in New York (2017.166.11) (Moeran, 1989; V&A, 1977). They produced one-off works of art, often decorative rather than useful, consciously working on them as unique pieces, demanding care, and which in turn demand higher prices. They exhibited their art works in galleries or department stores (which in Japan have a long-standing role as acting as gallery spaces). Hamada even received the title 'Important Intangible Cultural Property' (*jūyō mukei bunkazai*), perhaps the highest accolade possible for a Japanese artist, and most certainly a distinguishing one. In a further twist, in 1995 *onta yaki* was itself inscribed by the government as an Intangible Cultural Property, thereby bringing the flesh of the potter and the clay together, one body migrating into another, sanctioned by official nomenclature.

Discussion: Craft Work and Relating to an Open Future

Aesthetically, *Mingei* embodied what Yanagi and Leach would call an 'abounding vitality': the generative forces of nature course through workers, users and pots. *Mingei* craftwork carries an ethical temperament within its mnemonic form, its tradition, it is holding itself open to nature and the force of otherness (or 'not self', *tariki*). In its self-effacing dedication to understanding the self-creating potential inherent in materials and forms it is dedicated to a world continually being made, not given, a world guided by a future in its virtual, dynamic necessity, toward which all ordinary

things are drawn (Grosz, 2017, pp. 245–248). In taking up tradition, the craft worker, enjoined to the risks of not knowing, of working in ways outside of explicit learning, experiences the potential of things in successive instantiations of the unexpected. Craft workers open themselves up to things (raw materials, tools, standard forms) that have agentic power (Gibson, 2016; Ingold, 2010). As such, craft workers are alive to suggestion from what Grosz terms 'vital things', which provoke in unexpected if often very small ways (Deleuze's "little differences"). The minor variations of form, glazing and decoration as each piece emerges from a kick wheel, submits to the controlled accidents of the kiln, carries the distinct locale of the different sources for raw materials, and bends to atmospheric vagaries of weather and family politics. In its repetition, the work flows along small lines of flight without any apparent destination: it is Grosz's (1999, p. 19) "movement freed from calculation".

This patient, traditional, quiet, and humble vitality is coded through tradition, out of which soil ethics grows as an organized threshold between the actual and virtual, at least in relation to the aesthetic experience of making, which in turn becomes a primary organizational force threading the community. The skill of folk-art potters is silent, anonymous, bedded into the anonymizing forces of future time: a true expert is known by an inscrutability, subsumed in the collective, working and re-working things without quibble, dying back as others come forth, keeping in tune with nature, preserving the capacity to act by refusing to bend too far one way or another (Julien, 2004, p.49). They commit to take the practice 'on' into the future so others might then learn, alive to the intimacy between community good and personal good (Frémeaux & Michelson, 2017). They give a profoundly moving, because ordinary, example of what it is to think, act and feel in the world by making things and values as one goes along, and for oneself (always in company), as opposed to being governed from the outside by explicitly stated values or knowledge. As such the craft workers of Onta reveal what it is to live in a world of life-enhancing potential, which is all abouts, only quietly so. Picking up on what Toraldo et al. (2019) observe to be the centrality of memory to tradition, here, rather than memory belonging to the maker or even a body of workers, it feels to be the other way round: it is as if the body of the potter, as of the pot, belongs to mnemonic forms of collective held memory that form the bodies by orienting and settling them in the repetitious actions of the working community in ways that expose the operations to forces that cannot be incorporated, what happens next is a mystery.

In these ways, then, we find *Mingei* and specifically Onta to be ethical, insofar as they are animated by an open sense of the future as a scene of potential. Yet, and here's the twist, it is the very act of venerating and idealising this ordinary, ethical experience that risks killing it. To extol the virtue of the old ways undermines them: as Adorno (2005, p. 55) remarked: to talk of rebuilding a culture is already to destroy it, for what is immanent to repetitious action—the gestures insinuated into interacting systems of life force, the life of raw materials, of generations of users, the subtleties in the lines of a vase—becomes the subject of conscious direction and distinction, and something that can be managed for gain, whether cultural and social, or economic. The virtual that lives in an ever-present way—it always accompanies embodied action as that into which action acts—is concealed in favour of the possible. Possibilities are futures imaginatively connected to the past. They have a linearity that textures traditions with the rhythm of progression (Grosz, 2017). Craftwork becomes understood as an activity of scripting lives. Workers are organized by traditional techniques, standard forms, all of which is enforced broader institutional power relations associated with families, guilds, apprenticeships etc. Users are enlisted to appreciate and sustain these patterns of working, finding in use a community of users similarly endowed with taste and values for which there is an explicit concern. In such a setting the ethical gives way to the moral, and as we found in through discussions, the moralizing can be restrictive and corrosive if it compels people to leave the village rather than submit to unbending principles. The origin is no longer an eruption opening onto divergence, but a determining point delineating the direction of future lives. Craftwork operates to a yardstick, and becomes itself a yardstick for a specific kind of living that, ultimately, dries-up and decays.

Concealing the open future to which the vitality of craftwork talks so intimately, finds it instead relying on atavistic appeals to an explicit set of traditions that encase lives in reasoned alliances of purpose. Where ethics are an incarnation of life's vitality, morals are a container in which immanence gives way to represented identities and goals that mediate everything, and mobilize nothing (Deleuze, 1994, p. 56). As we have shown with *Mingei,* these representations risk subsuming the future with a logic of sameness. Far from being a scene of open eruption, the future is a confirmation of what ought to be revived from the past.

The eulogy of Onta as a collective embodiment of tradition providing a template for future forms of material and cultural wealth production is a case in point. As others have noted, the dissolving of individualism inherent in morally principled worldviews, including those from the east, can also be oppressive (Chu & Vu, 2021; Hauge & Hauge, 2003; Shin, 2002). Though craft workers (and users) are being represented as distinct from forces of industrialization, the distinction furthers a situation which frames endlessly repeatable experience and wordless imitation as legitimate and desirable, even where craft workers themselves may demur. Morally, craftwork encourages the adoption of positions conforming to established relations of working (role

and status, standard forms, marks) using (rituals, functional activity) and community belonging (guilds, brands, family structures such as the patriarchal throwing of Onta) that commit adherents to a contestable idea of the good life. Whilst Yanagi and Leach and their colleagues were perhaps extreme examples of this advocacy, *Mingei* provides a compelling example of the possibly degenerative effects of a rigid adherence to tradition which, because it is locked into a projected future, cannot be transformed (Land et al, 2019; Ocejo, 2017).

Moreover, as we suggested at the outset, this overt moralization of life unfolds first as a call to authenticity, which then in turn risks becoming little more than a catalyst for an intensification of industrialization. As an historical case, it confirms, in part, what Boltanski and Chiapello (2005) argue is the capacity of industrialized forces to appropriate and then transform voices of opposition into new forms of capital. Though devoted to collectivism, anonymity and making affordable, functional objects, with *Mingei's* success the elevation of individual genius (and prices): some were more equal than others. In the wake of its rising popularity there was a scaling of production under the branding effect of *Mingei*, which was coupled to the emergence of the advocates themselves (notably Leach and Hamada) as distinct artists commanding high prices, rather than any of the 'lesser' potters amid the craft workers they championed. This confirms, somewhat, the argument that craftwork enlivens rather than disturbs patterns of industrialized commodification. Though *Mingei* seemed genuinely committed to fostering communities of self-less, unspoken, and embodied skill ordered by tradition and not clock time, and by communities and not isolate sovereign subjects (Rhodes, 2022; Rooney et al., 2021), its commitment to a future that was detailed, programmatic and idealized provided the commercial market with an attractive brand, a story that sold, and which, in the process, made that future yet more idealistic.

Following Grosz (1999, p. 27), and her association of the future with virtuality, we find in *Mingei* brief indications of how craft work might revivify tradition through a tolerance of raw eruption (the event cannot be traced to the present or past), multiplicity (its form cannot lay claim to prior forms) and uncanniness (it is distinct from what is already present) (Grosz, 1999, p. 27). That this is confined to largely aesthetic experiences of working, rather than extending to broader organizational conditions, is to its detriment. *Mingei* trades on what Carr and Gibson (2016) argue is a false reconstruction of modernist binary between artisanal preindustrial trades and industrialization. It ignores not just the often repressive and repetitive divisions of labour present in some craft work (Adamson, 2007), but fails to acknowledge the variety in current forms of craft work that make it so much more than the preservation of an antique vernacular form of production and use. As such it ceases to be paradigmatic, and becomes almost a pastiche, of craft work, one whose fixity belies what, for Carr and Gibson, (2016) is the potential of craft work to cope with volatile futures. To frame craft in relation to the future, and to think the idea of the future as either one of progression or as a supervening openness, enriches our understanding of this potential.

Conclusion

We have argued that the ethical claim of craftwork is couched within the confines of practices to which the individual is tithed (tradition), but which nevertheless entails a form of temporal exposure to an open future. Craftwork is both deeply predictable and capable of producing things of profound originality, and it is here, in the fleeting pull of difference found in repetition, that its ethical nature is apparent: craft gives form to immanence. As such, we have shown how the ethical nature of craftwork is related to open, supervening future: the past, carried in habituated memory of tradition, is being brought into alignments with an inherently open future. As Bell and Vachhani (2020) also comment, none of this is settled outside of its being continually enacted. There is a giving over to rhythms of work practice and nature that have the quality of what Grosz (2017, p. 254) calls nonnormative ethics: an entwining of materiality, skill and value that has no purpose outside of its own continuance in a succession on unrelatable, expressive, unexpected occurrences.

This is not to oppose craftwork to "orders of intelligibility and affective commitment" by which what is done continues to be done as a tradition, as a continuance in organizational tendencies (Grosz, 2017, p. 255). Yet in making an explicit virtue of this continuation, adherents to tradition also look to impose order on its operations. We have argued this is a moral and not ethical experience. Rather than encouraging an immanent relation to the future, morals lock activity into represented forms of repetition whose wider resonance (with nature, with other practices) is confirmed in conformity with, rather than divergence from, what is known and knowable. Here the future is a condition to be read from the past, without deviation.

Our study is single case based on observational and conversational data, and on secondary and archive materials related to Onta and then *Mingei*. It serves to isolate both the temporal distinction between craftwork and industrialized forms of clock time, and this then suggests future study into the ethical experience of industrialized conditions, and whether these might be more nuanced than those stipulated by 'if…then…' orders of clock time. Here the technological developments in craftwork provide an interesting riposte to a homogenized understanding of industrialization (Carr & Gibson, 2016). For example, the use of digital CAD

technology in textiles does not eradicate, indeed, reveals and animates, the importance of touch in innovation (Philpott, 2012). More studies pursuing the intimacy between advanced technological development and the openness of craftwork would further dispel the uneasy, moralising opposition between craft and industrialization attempted by the likes of *Mingei*.

Further, in relation to craft studies, we have explicitly addressed the intimacy between craftwork and temporality, not just the temporal structure of tradition, but the future. Future studies pursuing this intimacy might examine the different areas of craftwork to which an open or closed future might pertain. Guilds, for example, typically de-legitimize innovative practice, insisting on an obedience to standards that fix a future in repetitions of the past (Bonanni and Parkes, 2010). Elsewhere, we have studies of craft's potential to revitalize entire neighbourhoods through innovative re-use of discarded materials, working into an utterly open future (McGraw, 2012). Relatedly, we have touched on the power and politics inherent in craft work, and on the potentially unethical resonance of overtly moralized representations of craft. Further studies might pursue this, notably in relation to the temporal structures by which producers and users are organized.

Theorising ethics in relation to an open, supervening future has a broader relevance for business ethics studies. It connects to studies of standards, for example, asking whether ethics amounts to more than the regulation of behaviour with rules and principles, and if so, taking on what Alzola (2015) calls a non-reductive view of ethics. Typically, this non-reductive view is taken up by virtue ethics and its concern with situational sensitivity and character development, whether of individuals or an organization. Virtuous' organisations have a cohesive unity and purpose through which they might commit explicitly to certain values (List & Pettit, 2011). These are organisations who invest in role motivation and employee participation, who actively seek to inculcate a climate of trustworthiness, notably through organisational transparency in strategic, intent, operational systems and day-day personal communication (Moore, 2015). The resonance with *Mingei* is apparent here insofar as the struggle for virtuous business becomes an organizational problem of discovering the rules that encourage rather than constrain virtuous character. Though reasonable—the rules are often associated with pro-social behaviour, transparency, an explicit sense of purpose, trust and self-regulation (Moore, 2012)—they remain contested, whether in content or application.

Our study suggests an alternative framing for a non-reductive view of ethics. Advocates of virtue ethics concentrate on how, in the face of everyday contingencies, one might attain a settled character sufficient to gather and coordinate these experiences in relation to collectively upheld ideas of the good life. By introducing a distinction between ethics and morals, we suggest a non-reductive view of ethics might also be experienced within difference producing traditions such as craftwork (or parts of it) (Haraway, 2003). Rather than rules, or rules that guide virtues, ethical experience also emerges through a felt intimacy and sympathy with things that is generated by a disciplined and skilled willingness to give voice to accident and chance. The repetition of work practices stretches exponents (producers and users) into what is incalculable yet provocative, encouraging further experiment and intrigue. Further studies of non-reductive ethics could embrace this interesting trajectory.

One way this trajectory has already been followed is in studies of distinctions between eastern and western world views (Chu & Vu, 2021). Our case suggests essentialized differences between east–west are hard to sustain, the distinctions are more subtle and even generative than an assertive division allows for (Alzola et al., 2020; Chu & Vu, 2021; Marques, 2012). To the extent east–west differences are made explicit in *Mingei* writings, it is often by admitting the presence of an exception (for example in the figure of Leach) that supposedly proves the rule. We argue the differences, where they might pertain, are not so clear cut, nor so oppositional. *Mingei* specifically reveals itself more an international movement, configured in a creative blending of east and western influences: Blake's poetry, Korean potting communities, Chinese craft skills, English slipware, Japanese rituals, aristocratic socialism etc. etc. More generally, craftwork provides an interesting setting for further study, not least in suggesting continuities might pertain, especially in relation to an eruptive open future that, by definition, is free (potentially) from these geographic denominations.

A further way of following the trajectory is in emerging studies of collective creativity and virtue, notably Astola et al. (2022) consideration of how innovative group work might be characterized by the qualities associated with creative virtue: the production of worthwhile ideas or products; the acquisition of mastery and technical control over processes of making; and experiencing intrinsic motivation to act according to values laid down in the practice itself. Our study resonates with this breakdown of collective as opposed to individualistic creativity as a virtue, yet then disturbs it, insofar as we then differentiate between different ways in which the collective is organized in relation to its own traditions and how these unfold into 'the future'. Whilst the intrinsic motivation and mastery and technical skill are felt intensely, the teleological direction of activity goal is only loosely configured. Further studies in collective virtue and creativity might then pursue this, for what is implied by our study is that creativity is inherently ethical, not moral, and so generates a concern for 'little differences' for its own sake, rather than being directed toward the fulfilment of obligations.

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