Making Futures: crafting a sustainable Modernity - towards a maker aesthetics of production & consumption[1]

Introduction

"For a long time, the intellectual consensus has been that we can no longer ask Great Questions. Increasingly, it looks like we have no other choice."[2]

It gives me great pleasure to introduce this fourth volume of the proceedings of the biennial international Making Futures conference which took place in September 2015 at the magnificently located Mount Edgcumbe estate, in what was our third visit to this particular site since the series began in 2009. Moreover, with many academic journals (including craft journals) increasingly appearing behind pay walls, I am proud also to reaffirm the commitment to free Open Access that Making Futures has pledged to maintain since that first edition. The four volume archive currently holds over 214 entries on craft and maker enterprises investigating the themes the Making Futures community is exploring, establishing it as a unique and valuable research resource for anyone interested in these topics.

With each new volume, recognition and diffusion of Making Futures continues to grow. With this in mind and considering, therefore, that some readers may be new to Making Futures, I will begin this preface with some general observations on the key issues that mark out the series. I will then indicate how these themes were reflected in the sub-title and topics heading the 2015 conference; how this agenda resonated with the Making Futures community and, moreover, how it is increasingly gaining traction with international audiences – particularly in East Asia where the position of craft within what are rapidly modernising societies has become a pressing issue.

I then want to expand upon the subject of the 2015 edition by making a brief detour through a series of complex issues to do with crisis, Modernity, craft and aesthetics that will also possibly inform elements of the forthcoming 2017 Making Futures.[3] More a set of provisional reflections than systematic exposition, this line of enquiry is to a degree motivated by a question proposed by Cameron Tonkenwise, one of our 2015 Keynote speakers whose paper is featured in this volume. In his conference address Cameron observed the movement of craft in relation to design through industrial Modernity, noting a particular manifestation of its contemporary return in the "build it and see" neo-craft modus-operandi of contemporary high-tech design and manufacturing. Denouncing these regimes as a form of "craftless craft" he concluded his overview with a question (perhaps 'call' or even 'provocation' might better capture his intent) which, acknowledging the disruptive potential inherent within the Making Futures constituency, asked how its energies might best be harnessed and directed to effect progressive change.

My conditional response to Cameron's pertinent demand begins with recognition of the seemingly intractable social and environmental crisis we find ourselves in. However, rather than seeing this as grounds for a sweeping dismissal of the modern project and all its presuppositions, I refer to recent commentators who have called for a reframing of Modernity - one that seeks to reimagine, and reinvest in, its socially progressive elements. Recouping many of the themes running through Making Futures, I contend that contemporary craft and maker cultures, so often viewed as marginal to the political economies of modern life, should in fact be recognised as important components of, and help shape, emerging visions of a progressive future. I indicate some of the ways that they are already (arguably) doing so, and then go on to suggest that the identity politics and ideals innate to many maker practices (as typically communicated through the Making Futures papers) underpin the vitality of their contributions. While I don't pretend that these reflections constitute anything akin to a fully formed (or informed) set of solutions to Cameron's challenge, I do see them as possibly significant points of departure from which we might build responses and connections aligned to a modern future worth struggling for. Hence the title I have chosen to caption this essay with.

Finally, I will conclude this introduction by returning to the present volume and pointing to how some of these "responses and connections" are framed within the current edition through an outline description of its structure. The reader herself can then use these pointers to investigate the detail of the contributions.

Making Futures 2015 and the '(re)turn of the maker' theme:

Let us begin with a brief overview of the prevailing issues running through the Making Futures series. At its broadest, Making Futures seeks to reappraise craft and the renewed sense of possibility surrounding it. Moving between the individual and the social, the personal and the collective, it explores what it means to make now - personally, artistically, economically, socially, politically. In doing so, it implicates small-scale creative design-to-make and craft in progressive ecological, social and cultural agendas, and through this develops encounters with philosophical thought, sociology and anthropology, technology, economic and innovation theory, with students of consumer trends and behaviours, and with education.[4] Gathering these perspectives into a set of overlapping frames, it points toward the appearance of new types of often technologically enabled, socially engaged, small-scale, and locally sensitive making and doing in which the innovative practices of art, craft, and design-to-make play key roles. In this sense Making Futures finds itself attuned to the broader search for alternative ways of being and doing that include, for example, sharing and circular economies, alternative currencies, food sovereignty, experiments in micro-energy production, the "slow" and voluntary material simplicity movements and, again and not least, the crafts and maker movements.

Engaging this agenda, the 2015 Making Futures conference took as its headline thematic, "Craft and the (re)turn of the maker in a post global sustainably aware society." The proposition was intentionally provocative: whilst not suggesting that Globalisation was about to end (debate about the extent and impact of re-shoring, for example, remains contentious) we nevertheless ventured that we have reached an historic juncture in which small-scale making is primed to effect a return: indeed is making a return.[5] A point of 'peak Globalisation' perhaps, and maybe the early phase of what could turn out to be a slow but significant shift to more autonomous and locally rooted ways of meeting needs. The reasons for this are varied, but include both enforced and voluntary forms of de-Globalisation, for instance: in response to changing social needs and expectations (including rising popular discontent with the ongoing social damage in the wake of the 2008 global financial crisis); as labour to capital costs increase in the global East; as international insecurity intensifies through growing inequality, terrorism, war and migrations; as

commodity and energy prices (despite recent falls in oil) rise across the longer term; and above all, as worldwide climate change and accompanying environmental legislation impact on globalized production, transportation and consumption chains.[6]

The '(re)turn of the maker' theme clearly chimed with the Making Futures community: in my introduction to the third journal, published in 2014, I had recorded it as being the most ambitious up to that moment. However, this 2016 fourth volume has advanced the series a step further, consisting of over seventy papers, including keynote contributions, from an original conference programme that featured approximately eighty-five presenters who had passed the double-blind peer review process. It makes the current volume the largest in the series to date, yet one that continues to maintain an outstandingly rich and engaging level of contribution. It is a stunning effort by any measure, and testimony, if such were needed, to the growing value of the Making Futures series. Moreover, the submissions profile is increasingly international, from across the UK, Europe, the Americas, and the Asia-Pacific regions. This developing international awareness was further confirmed through invited appearances at Beijing Design Week in 2014 where a full two days 'Making Futures: Beijing' edition was produced as centerpiece of the 'Dashilar' district platform, and at a similar full-scale 'Making Futures: Cheongju' event with the 2015 Cheongju International Craft Biennale in South Korea. This expanding international dimension is important, not simply because it demonstrates that the Making Futures journal is increasingly recognised and studied further afield, but because of the way craft has historically been a strong place-holder for identity at regional and national levels within many of these societies, and debates about its contemporary meaning, position and possibilities are highly charged. Our intention is that these exchanges should increasingly contribute to our agendas by helping to develop a unique set of cross-cultural perspectives. In short, that Making Futures can foster a nascent trans-national community of researcher-practitioners exploring the position of creative small-scale making across non-Western as well as Western forms of Modernity.

The introduction of the term 'Modernity' here is, I believe, apposite, and we will shortly return to it below. However, for the moment I want to acknowledge its contested nature. Cultural debates languish in a confusion of periodisation regarding how best to describe the present.[7] Following from developments in post-colonial studies and the rapid development many southern hemisphere nations, some might argue for the use of the plural 'Modernities', or at least insist that specific national-cultural inflexions must modify our understanding of its singular use.[8] Still others might question whether in fact what we are living through can still usefully be called Modernity as such. I prefer the expression 'late Modern' but adopt it as a heuristic solution to this problem of how best to describe the current moment and the widespread experience of social crisis that seems such a profound part of it. I do this because it acknowledges the long trends and significant continuities (in urbanization, industrialization, consumerism, the exploitation of resources, rational bureaucratic systems, etc.,) that have led to this point and warrant its use.[9]

One other point briefly worth mentioning is my interchangeable use of the terms 'craft' and 'maker' that the reader will no doubt notice. As much as I recognise the practice-based distinctions sometimes implied in these terms, (for example, when craft is used to denote an obligation to traditional methodologies that 'makers' might not feel so strongly), I refer to both here as part of a relational field where, in the context of the issues discussed by Making Futures, (i.e. the 'idea of the transformative vocation') interconnections are generally more compelling than differences.[10] To develop this idea of interconnectivity, we might characterize this relational field as a four-dimensional configuration space. One axis takes in the unique (predominantly hand-made) productions typically associated with the studio art and crafts tradition; another, feminist and DIY 'craftivist' practices; third, (and mirror of hand craftivism) the digitally inspired hacker and maker movements; and fourth, designer-maker batch producers and types of neo-artisanal and (sometimes digitally tooled) micro-manufacturing initiatives. Although simultaneously independent and interconnected, Making Futures has consistently shown how each enriches the other when brought into dialogue - which is perhaps not so surprising if we consider any given individuals work a negotiated trajectory through this space of possible configurations.

Thinking (and acting) beyond crisis:

"Twenty-five years of neoliberalism have forced our thinking about change to   become small. But if we are bold enough to imagine we can rescue the planet,   we should also imagine rescuing ourselves from an economic system that doesn't work. In fact, the imagination stage is critical".[11]

It is commonly argued that we are living through a period of profound change; that the 2008 global economic crash represented a watershed and that we are now have little option but to conduct a fundamental reassessment of contemporary life on multiple fronts: the environment, the economy, technology, work, post-work, and possibly even post-capitalism. The dark thread running through this narrative covers compelling, if familiar, territory of industrial capitalisms quest for unfettered growth, value extraction and accumulation. Historically, this was registered in terms of enclosures, colonisation and empire. More recently it has taken the form of neo-liberal Globalisation with its disconnect between production and consumption (in so called 'disembedded' markets) and in the influence of vast accumulations of speculative (some would use the term 'fictitious') finance capital. The overall effect is of an incomprehensibly abstract and vast totalizing system that fosters gross inequalities, produces colossal waste, and wreaks unprecedented environmental havoc.[12] Throughout this story - from those early enclosures to the Rana Plaza catastrophe, to the ways in which our oceans and atmosphere have become, as Jason Moore puts it, unpaid garbage collectors, to events such as the astonishing VW scandal that was unfolding around the time of the 2015 conference - the metabolism of our industrial civilisation has been predicated on the continual opening up and exploitation of new cheap natures - human and non-human alike.

Within this context, Making Futures, at its best, can be thought of as a modest attempt to identify paths out of this predicament, towards new viable futures through a renewed sense of the possibilities surrounding making now. Or let us put it a different way by considering another quotation:

"Only a crisis - actual or perceived - produces real change. When that crisis   occurs, the actions that are taken depend on the ideas that are lying around.   That, I believe, is our basic function: to develop alternatives to existing policies, to keep them alive and available until the politically impossible becomes the politically inevitable."[13]

This passage neatly summarises the aspirations of Making Futures. However, there is a deep irony in appropriating it to our project, (but perhaps also some small sense of justice). It is, of course, by Milton Friedman, the leading Monetarist thinker whose ideas helped frame the global free-market policies now proving so detrimental to planetary life. But whereas Friedman talks in terms of preparing ideas (to be deployed when the time is right), Making Futures claims that the "return of the maker" is more than an idea. Maker micro-economies already exist, at least in fledgling form. In these the disjunctions between production and consumption, cause and effect, are to a considerable extent, restored, and more holistic work and social relationships encouraged and explored. The Making Futures journal points to numerous examples of these practice-led thought and action initiatives, developed around different forms. These include notions of DIY, hacking and 'Jugaad' low-cost innovation; the reappraisal and reframing of existing practices alongside the development of new materials and techniques, including the possibilities emerging through the use of affordable 3-D printers and complimentary tools; the contribution of making and co-design activities to ideas of place and community; circular, recycling and up-cycling economies; and (not least), the form and content of education in supporting future maker cultures. Rather than seeing this activity as somehow antithetical to contemporary Modernity, I want to suggest that in fact we frame it as part of a forward-looking attempt to reimagine and to make a viable Modernity.

Crafting a sustainable Modernity:

"It is entirely possible to build the elements of the new system molecularly within the old. In the cooperatives, the credit unions, the peer-networks, the unmanaged enterprises and the parallel, subcultural economies, those elements already exist."[14]

Notwithstanding my earlier acknowledgement of the disputed nature of the term Modernity, a number of prominent commentators are calling for a reinvention and reframing of its aspirations. Paul Mason, for example, from whom the above quote is taken, is one of these. Similarly, Srnicek and Williams, in 'Inventing the Future', remind us that Modernity was always a future orientated project, and that although the contemporary moment hardly appears to contain many optimistic notions of the future, the struggle for life essentially still takes place within the arc of Modernity.

They argue forcefully, therefore, for the urgent need to build new positive models of modern living: models that allow us to remain appreciative of, and to incorporate, Modernity's progressive secular achievements: for example, its universal approach to sanitation, healthcare, shelter, education, and not least its emancipatory democratic impulses.[15]

The idea of reclaiming a craft future within Modernity is important not least because it confronts at least 150 years of prejudice and marginalization. William Morris, of course, looked to an idealized Medieval artisanal past for his critique of 19th century industrial Modernity, and it would be true to say that craft has continued, more often than not, to be associated (at least in the vernacular imagination) with a nostalgic anti-industrial ethos that places a premium on the 'traditional', the 'authentic', and the 'natural'. While this might be taken as a crude popular characterization, it is arguably one that has conditioned the perception of much small-scale making, particularly craft, and perhaps even design-to-make practices, to significant degrees. And while many craft métiers do indeed retain strong connections to tradition, the (relatively) stable material, technical and commercial regimes of production and consumption associated with the craft past, (if indeed they ever were as stable as is popularly imagined), no longer exist in a majority of fields. Indeed, circumstances dictate a largely future-facing modus operandi in which makers too must innovate around technology, form, function, aesthetic meaning and social relevance: that they must critically examine and reformulate new practice-based conventions as an impulse towards a future-facing set of making possibilities, ones which nonetheless still abjure the totalizing formations of industrial commodity capitalism. In this context, imagining a sustainable Modernity that finds ways to include small-scale producers capable of contributing to community cohesion, resilience and regeneration, is a project worth struggling for.

Translated to Making Futures, it suggests that we must look at craft and small-scale making not as part of some indiscriminate and escapist refusal of modern life, as arguably some commentators have done.[16]

Rather, we should adopt a more constructive view to see how craft and small-scale making might usefully become integral components of a future-orientated sustainable Late Modernity. In short, how a post-crisis Modernity might beneficially be figured to include the political economies of small scale localized regimes of making and consumption as fundamental elements within it, rather than as constitutive of some imagined space outside it that all too easily relapses into nostalgia or even (dare one suggest) regressive forms of nationalism. (Note here the revival in contemporary marketing of the longstanding use craft to evoke an idealized past but which now seems at times to index the zeitgeist of an increasing inward-looking nationalist sentiment). However, in positioning contemporary craft and micro-makers as part of Srnicek and Williams summons to engage in positive future thinking, it is only fair to note here how, given our championing of the local and small-scale, they would no doubt categorise Making Futures as an expression of "folk politics". That is to say, a project they see as politically ineffective in the face of abstract, hegemonic and complex systems such as economic Globalisation and (its associated) anthropogenic climate change. While fully aware of the absolute and urgent necessity for international and nation state level coordinated action, my view is that they tend to underplay the value of small-scale 'localised' engagement and enterprise. Moreover, such a charge would also be to misunderstand the purpose and role of a project like Making Futures. For while our aim is to explore the possibility of socially progressive maker futures (which, hopefully, helps to advance the thinking and actions of our participants and readers) we do not, for example, pretend to be a social movement that is searching for political power as such.

However, thinking about how craft and small-scale making might become important elements of a more positive conception of Modernity also obliges us to recognize and explore how craft has often been, indeed still is, imbricated within many industrial systems of production, including the Fordist-style serried rows of sewing machinists in the garment factories of East Asia, as well as the more forward looking advanced technological systems producing bespoke items, for example, 3D printed surgical implants.

Again, it reminds us that we are not looking towards a simple black or white reading that posits craft on one side and industry on the other, but a spectrum of behaviours in which post-Fordist artisanal regimes of production (and/or customized finishing) will increasingly blend with batch-production, and on occasion, even mass-production systems. In one respect this echoes Cameron's warning concerning the contemporary emergence of a form of industrialised "craftless craft". More positively it might imply the practical options available for creating the spaces within a sustainable Modernity capable of integrating the positive features of localised small-scale maker cultures might be wider than typically imagined. Either way, while we seek to establish and expand more localised and community-based circuits of production and consumption, circumstances will dictate that these forms will continue to exist alongside, and sometimes interact with, a spectrum of medium-sized to larger scale industrial circuits, including global systems of communication, production and distribution. A key factor here are the networks (physical and digital) that help bring constellations of small maker groups together in mutually supportive sub-systems. As Making Futures has consistently sought to demonstrate there are models of how this can work: nascent maker micro-economies do exist that are trying to engage in responsible place-based market economics while simultaneously striving to step outside the exploitative commodification of human and non-human natures associated with the disembedded global markets shaped by neo-liberalism.

One especially significant example of a micro-maker economy is the Fibreshed, presented in this volume by one of our Keynote contributors, Jess Daniels. Fibreshed is a northern Californian regional regenerative textile system developed on behalf of independent producers and designers. At the time of the 2015 conference it consisted of approximately fifty-eight farm producers linked to sixty-one artisans and designer-makers all working within the 150 miles radius catchment area from the Fibreshed's central unit and united by a strong commitment to community enriching environmental production, design and consumption. Moreover, a key feature is that this system is scalable, its principles and methods can be, and are being, replicated both nationally across North America, but also internationally through a global network of interlinked localised regenerative systems of farmers, fibre producers, designer-makers and retailers.[17]

European models of networked maker ecologies also exist. For example, (and in contrast with the more rural/suburban Fibreshed geography/political economy) Angela McRobbie explores a socially orientated post-industrial maker economy built around European social democratic principles in her study of Berlin-based creative micro-entrepreneurs and small-scale fashion designers. Flourishing across the last decade, and represented through a proliferation of designer owned boutiques (often with goods displayed in front and atelier production space in view of customers at the back) this maker ecology couples a concern for environmental factors, re-cycling and up-cycling, with a Berlin-style 'alternative culture' of auteurist maker skepticism towards the business regimes of fast fashion, luxury fashion and big brands. In effect, less marketing orientated and grounded in a neo-artisanal sense of material (knitting, sewing, tailoring and pattern cutting) along with a strong commitment to city and neighbourhood. McRobbie locates this success story in the social democratic tradition of pro-active public sector support for promoting local economies on the part of local Berlin Senate and National Government levels.[18]

While both the Fibreshed and Berlin examples suggest that different forms of engagement will have to be invented for different contexts and locales, it is striking that both are based on textiles. A key question for Making Futures and its audiences will be to what extent the principles underlying the Californian Fibreshed and Berlin maker economies can be replicated, or at least adjusted and developed, to support similar initiatives in other fields of material production. That said, we are not so naïve to imagine that small and local necessarily translates as more socially or ecologically responsible, or that the local can be disengaged from the global - or indeed, that it would be unambiguously a good thing if it could. Again, the emphasis has to be on an ethically responsible sustainable Modernity. This recognition of the ethical grounds and disciplinary specificity of craft and maker cultures returns us to the level of the individual practitioner, and arguably to the foundations of an engaged practice. It compels us to take account of the identity politics and ideals innate in many discrete maker practices and which underpin the vitality of their potential contribution to a sustainable Modernity. It is to this topic that we now turn.

Towards a maker aesthetics of production and consumption:

Reflecting the concerns of the creative practitioners that form its constituency, Making Futures places a high value on the individual practitioner and the positive, transformative, one might say 'non-alienated', possibilities for a life associated with practice. The risk here, of course, is that the value placed on individual practice might be misinterpreted as an uncritical endorsement of the trope of the independent self-made creative which has become a hallmark of contemporary capitalism and which often serves to isolate and divide rather than support. (We are all 'creative' entrepreneurs obliged to 'curate' each and every moment of our lives). In this sense the task is, and perhaps has always been, how best to connect the two levels: the individual and the social. For few would disagree that the degree of societal change required to address the crisis conditions described above, must also involve a recalibration of the individual subject.[19] So while aware of the danger of fetishizing creative work as an individual field of production, Making Futures nonetheless argues that creative making can constitute a basis for one such version of this transformative subject. That the libidinal affective energies experienced through creative making have an emancipatory potential that encourage reflection on our onto-ethical senses of being-in-the-world, which, in turn, can help give us the resolve to challenge the status quo and to make radical material change.

Identity in modern society is a notoriously problematic issue, formed as much through regimes of consumption and leisure as through income generating labour. Work of course remains, for most, a necessity, but also something of an abstraction – their efforts realised as components of value-producing chains that are often spatially and temporally coded according to global imperatives. In this context the decision to craft becomes, fundamentally, an ideological one, of trying to be more than mere labour or mere commodity: a mode of sense making and identity construction that translates what we do in the world into a reflective being-in (and for) the world. This posture is clearly evident in many facets of Western-based craft production, from the realm of gallery-based art and craft, to design-to-make micro-production, to the blending of regimes of artisanal making with advanced digital fabrication tools, to the DIY ethic behind much craft activism (or 'craftivism'). These diverse maker cultures partake of

this outlook because, at its best, making fosters autonomy and self esteem through personally transformative engagements with media and materials. Agency is articulated in the deployment of (often hard won) making skills and know-how, the feedback system between action and effect typically tight and emphatic, with the maker essentially shaping the way she is known to herself and others in an effort to address the issue of the contemporary self in a globalized society. These micro-modal encounters are often constituted tacitly through proprioceptive sensibilities in performative acts of making that modify subject as much as object. The unfolding engagement not only fosters ingenuity and resourcefulness, stamina and determination, but also potentially promotes more subtle human sympathies of relational interdependence, empathy, equanimity, humility, and a certain generosity of spirit. These lend the encounter a decidedly moral dimension. Taken into the social domain they point to an inherent 'civility' embodied in craftwork, to the sense of it having affects that can empower us to make a better world. Fundamentally, this might also be characterized as an aesthetic stance because it is a part of how many of us conceive the 'good life'.

This is not to ignore the realities of contemporary working life and the labour process within creative micro-entrepreneurial enterprises, for it is clear that not all aspects of this life are unambiguously positive: high stress and precarious low wage project-based work is often a reality for many.[21] Nonetheless, many practitioners also report that they can and do experience authentically rewarding roles for themselves, and others, in and through making that have a reality beyond the rhetoric of creative entrepreneurship. Reflecting this, a clear priority for Making Futures has always been to support and advance the many discrete practices that constitute maker cultures today, as evidenced through the papers that this volume gives voice to. This responsiveness, and indeed responsibility, to the practice of making is, for Making Futures, its principal point of departure and point of return. But, as I have tried to show in this introduction, it is complemented by another key ambition: to create room for thinking outside of individual affective experience by connecting it to wider spaces of thinking and doing where the contributions of craft and small-scale maker cultures to socially progressive futures might be considered.

These two dimensions, the affective personal experience and strategic social questioning, are the two sides of an encounter continuously staged within Making Futures that allows it to productively grapple with ideas of the future. It is, of course, a dialectical friction that exists not simply within contemporary creative circles, but one which arguably goes to the heart of modern experience in all of its contradictory and problematic (but also productive) facets; indeed, as we have seen, is constitutive of Modernity as such.

The 2015 conference and structure of the present volume:

To conclude this introduction, I now return to the 2015 conference and to an outline description of how the present volume is structured. The scale of the 2015 conference on which this volume is based represented a limit-test of sorts. Despite restricting numbers (the conference was oversubscribed and registrations closed early) we felt we had reached a threshold in terms of scale, beyond which we might jeopardise the focused yet collegiate atmosphere that characterizes the series. Therefore, we are unlikely to expand beyond the point it established. Indeed, if anything, the tendency might be to return to a slightly smaller format in order to guarantee the 'retreat' style intimacy of the event, and to continue to ensure we facilitate high levels of delegate interaction. The size of the current volume has also presented a challenge to this introduction, making it all but impractical to try to review all seventy-plus contributions here. Rather, what I will do is summarise how the present volume rehearses the structure of the 2015 conference.

The 2015 conference programme was structured around four basic elements that ran across two-days: (i) Keynotes; (ii) Workshops; (iii) Thematic Parallel Sessions; (IV) Exhibitions and Installations. The papers collated in this volume are organized and presented under whichever of these elements they originally appeared in.

Five Keynotes:
Five plenary Keynote interventions divided the Workshops and Thematic Parallel Sessions. Two are presented in this volume through paper submissions, in order of appearance: Cameron Tonkinwise, Director of Design Studies at The School of Design, Carnegie Mellon University, USA; and Jess Daniels, from the Fibreshed in San Geronimo, Northern California, USA. Three other keynotes are presented through video recordings of their original conference presentations. Again, in order of their appearance: the international artist-maker Keith Harrison, (who also featured in the concurrent Acts of Making exhibition); Mark Miodownik, Director of the Institute of Making at University College London, UK; and Dries Verbruggen, co-founder of Studio Unfold, in Antwerp, Belgium.

Three workshops:
The workshop contributors appear under whichever of the three they participated in: (i) A Western Jugaad: Makers and Frugal Innovation, convened by Professor Jaideep Prabhu from The University of Cambridge, UK, and Tomas Díez Ladera, from the Institute for Advanced Architecture of Catalonia in Spain; (ii) Place-Making-Space: tools and methods for crafting communities and making places, convened by Nick Gant, co-founder of Community21.org and co-director of the Sustainable Design Research group at The University of Brighton; (iii) Digital Crafting: defining the field, convened by Peter Oakley, Research Leader of the School of Material at The Royal College of Art. Each workshop is introduced in this journal according to its original thematic outline.

Six thematic parallel sessions:
Similarly, contributors to the thematic parallel sessions appear under whichever one they contributed to: (i) Craft in an Expanded Field, chaired by Deirdre Figueiredo, Director of Craftspace, Birmingham, UK; (ii) Critical Perspectives on Producers and Consumers, chaired by Paul Harper, independent writer and curator on craft and ex-Director of ALIASARTS, UK; (iii) Making Thinking: Crafting Education, chaired by Professor Andrew Brewerton from Plymouth College of Art; (iv) Materials and Processes of Making, chaired by Tim Bolton from Plymouth College of Art; (v) Translations Across Local-Global Divides, chaired by Malcolm Ferris from Plymouth College of Art; and (vi) Lifecycles of Material Worlds, chaired by Ian Farren from Plymouth College of Art. Again, each session is introduced according to its original thematic outline.

The 2015 Conference Exhibitions & Installations:
Although not represented in this volume, the conference was accompanied by two related exhibitions: the 2015 Jerwood Makers Open at Plymouth College of Art; and the Crafts Council Touring Project, Acts of Making, a two-weeks festival of six artist-makers exploring process and audience engagement produced in conjunction with Plymouth College of Art and Plymouth City Museum & Art Gallery. The Acts of Making projects were distributed across Plymouth, but two were installed at the conference site: Catherine Bertola's wonderful dust carpet, and an interactive sound installation by Owl Projects. Additional pop-up installations in the grounds of the Mount Edgcumbe location included Joanne Tyler's two-day participatory artwork event, and Paula Wolton and Andy Visser's installation, 'One Hut Full', exploring the past, present and future of the Dartmoor wool industry.

Finally, a lot is talked about the need to create innovation-based economies. Often what is meant is the creation of new mass consumer products and services around high-tech innovation. But what this introduction and the papers in this volume also point to is the the need to re-imagine and re-invent existing products, processes and services for a sustainably aware post growth society - one that values meaningful work, social inclusion and cohesion, and respect for the contribution of non-human natures. This too is innovation. To my mind the maker who designs a low-cost low-energy glass furnace; or finds a way to use recycled Polypropylene from waste as usable filament for 3D printing; or who establishes a small designer-maker initiative up-cycling second hand clothes (to give but three examples presented in Making Futures) is an indigenous innovator of the first order. Exploring and experimenting with material form, and through this, with wider social and economic form, these innovators challenge the "as good as it gets" attitude that normalizes current circumstances by an approach rooted, fundamentally, in imagination and creativity, and (as we have noted) the transformative aesthetic and morale dimensions of work with material agencies.

This then is Making Futures, a platform for innovating artists, craftspeople, makers and designers who are responding to the challenges we face, trying to solve problems in small practical ways and marking out new horizons of the possible: in short, a platform to explore the thinking and doing that that the authors in the volume present and represent. At the time of writing, preparations are well under way for the fifth edition of Making Futures which will take place at Mount Edgcumbe House on Thursday 21st and Friday 22nd September, 2017. As I put it in an earlier introduction, we look forward to continuing the good work of exploring with colleagues and community our common future in, and through, making – and perhaps to interrogating more closely the theme of crafting a sustainable Modernity through a maker aesthetics of production and consumption.

Malcolm Ferris, Making Futures curator, September 2016.

[1] Minor elements of this essay were first published as my introduction to the print booklet of abstracts to the Making Futures conference at Mount Edgecumbe, September 2015; and in Ferris, Malcolm (2015) 'Craftwork as Problem Solving Afterword' in Trevor Marchand (ed) Craftwork as Problem Solving: Ethnographic Studies of Design and Making (Anthropological Studies of Creativity and Perception), Routledge. Finally, at one or two points where the issues cover similar territory, I have also referred back to elements in my introduction to Volume III of Making Futures.

[2] Graeber, David (2014) Debt: The First 5000 years, Melville, p. 19.

[3] I should make it clear that the ideas and positions explored in this paper represent my opinions only, and any errors or omissions are mine alone.

[4] These themes are all made explicit through the programming of each biennial edition - through keynotes who bring to bear a range of disciplinary perspectives, and through the parallel workshops and sessions that delegate presenters participate in.

[5] Many of the ideas underpinning the themes of the 2015 conference were first explored in my introduction to Volume 3 of the Making Futures journal.

[6] For example, for the first time, at the December 2015 COP21 Paris climate conference, countries adopted legally binding global climate agreements. As countries sign up to these targets it is inevitable that, at last, environmental legislation will begin to impact on globalized extraction, production, transportation and consumption regimes.

[7] Peter Osborne, for example, develops an extended debate around the artistic terms of 'Modernism', 'Post-Modernism' and the 'Contemporary' as reflections of distinct periods within Modernity. See: Osborne, Peter (2013) Anywhere Or Not At All: Philosophy of Contemporary Art, Verso, chapters 1 (The fiction of the contemporary) and 2 (Modernisms and mediations) especially.

[8] The Chinese scholar, Wang Hui, is particularly interesting here for the way he develops a subtle reading of 'Chinese Modernity' that stresses its differences as much as Western grounds. See: Hui, Wang (2006) China's New Order: Society, Politics, and Economy in Transition, Harvard University Press. Also: Hui, Wang (2009) The End of the Revolution: China and the limits of Modernity, Verso.

[9] Despite the problems surrounding use of the term Modernity, many would surely baulk at the relevance of the now seemingly dog-eared 'post-modern' outside of its use to denote a phase in art and design. As stated in the main text, I adopt the notion of the 'late Modern' as a best fit solution that emphasizes certain fundamental continuities. That said, I am of course acutely aware of the breakdown of many characteristic binary differences – for example, of technologically supported mass to micro manufacturing and prosumer regimes, in the commodification of the private sphere, and not least, in the reappraisal of the figure of craft.

[10] The quote is from Roberto Unger and is used in the earlier exploration of these themes in my introductory essay to Volume III of Making Futures. For the original see: Unger, Roberto Mangabeira (2004) Social Theory, its situation and its task, Volume 2 of A Critical Introduction to Politics, Verso, pp. 26-35 where the idea of the transformative vocation is discussed.

[11] Mason, Paul (2015) PostCapitalism: A Guide to Our Future, Allen Lane, p. 218.

[12] At the very least there is a sense that we are living in a space of hesitant expectation where we know we must change the actually existing construction of reality, but the locus of control seems beyond our reach, meaning that there is as yet no clear sense of what might be done to improve or replace this reality. For this reason, the sociologist and author of Liquid Modernity, Zygmunt Bauman, characterizes our time as an 'Interregnum'.

[13] Friedman, Milton (2002) Capitalism and Freedom: 40th Anniversary Edition, University of Chicago Press, Preface 1982, p. xiv.

[14] Mason, Paul (2015) PostCapitalism: A Guide to Our Future, Allen Lane, p. 244.

[15] Srnicek, Nick and Williams, Alex (2015) Inventing the Future: Postcapitalism and a World Without Work, Verso

[16] This, for example, is my essential criticism of Stuart Walker's 'Designing Sustainability'. See my review of: Walker, Stuart (201) Designing Sustainability: Making Changes in a Material World, Abingdon: Routlesdge, in Design Issues, Volume 32, Number 2 (Spring 2016), MIT Press, pp. 103-105.

[17] See the Fibreshed's Affiliate Membership page with Google map insert of the network at: http://www.fibershed.com/affiliates/

[18] McRobbie, Angela (2016) Be Creative, Making a Living in the New Culture Industries, Polity Press, pp 115-145

[19] The idea of reconfiguring the individual is, of course, a theme that runs through Modernity. Typically the 'new man' (early texts almost invariably refer to men) was aligned with science and technology, global transport systems (ocean liners and airplanes), and health and hygiene and sport. Early Modernist design is particularly interesting in this respect for the way it links this reconfiguration of the subject to the use of iconic modern materials in the designed environment - for example, steel in interior furnishing. See, for example, Charlotte Perriand, "Wood or Metal?" Studio 97, no 433, (London and New York, April 1929): 278-9.

[20] I also explore this idea of the slow drama of the performative encounter and its link to a progressive idea of craft as a 'Theatre of Becoming' in my introductory essay to the second volume of the Making Futures journal, Making Futures – the crafts as change-maker in sustainably aware cultures.

[21] Again, McRobbie offers an important contribution to our understanding of the political economy of micro-entrepreneurial creative labour in her analysis (and demystification) of the dominant 'dispositif' of the entrepreneurial creative artist/maker, which she essentially aligns to the rise of post 1980's neo-liberal ideology. McRobbie, Angela (2016) Be Creative, Making a Living in the New Culture Industries, Polity Press.