

## Introduction

Well into an arduous journey from Cape Town to his mother's rural birth place amid a fictional civil war during the Apartheid era, the protagonist of J.M. Coetzee's novel *The Life & Times of Michael K.* contemplates what it means to be a craftsman:

The landscape was so empty that it was not hard to believe at times that his was the first foot ever to tread a particular inch of earth or disturb a particular pebble. But every mile or two there was a fence to remind him that he was a trespasser as well as a runaway.

Ducking through the fences, he could feel a craftsman's pleasure in wire spanned so taut that it hummed when it was plucked. Nonetheless, he could not imagine himself spending his life driving stakes into the ground, erecting fences, dividing up the land. (97)

Michael K. takes pleasure in a manual job done well, a sensibility he developed earlier in the novel during a spell of fencing work, for which he turned out to have an unusual facility. "You have a feel for wire," the farmer who supervised the job had commended him (95). "You should go into fencing. There will always be a need for good fencers" (ibid.). At the end of the week K. and his fellow workers are not only paid a reasonable wage, they also receive fresh fruit and used clothes (ibid.)—valuable gifts during wartime. The impression is that a craftsman may count not only on reliable employment and satisfying work, but also on the generosity and affection of his superiors.<sup>1</sup>

At the same time, this solidarity comes at the price of territorial divisions that expose many to a precarious, nomadic existence. It is this aspect of craftsmanship that moves K. to forgo a life organised around craft. This is not simply a matter of declining a privilege that clashes with his moral or political principles. Rather, K.'s reflections point to the exclusionary dynamic that ultimately bars him from the kind of craftsmanship commended by the Afrikaner farmer.

Although K. is never explicitly particularised as a Cape Coloured or Black, his circumstances and

experiences leave the reader in no doubt about his nonwhite racial status. In the capacity of hired-hand fencer, K. is one of the many grossly underprivileged Black farmworkers who effectively run the various Afrikaner-owned farms featured in Coetzee's oeuvre. As his felt sense of being a trespasser makes clear, for K. the craft of fencing marks an impossible conflation of "a craftsman's pleasure" with colonial exploitation and displacement. In the light of K.'s lived experience, the farmer's recommendation of a career in fencing registers as blindness to the racialized reality of this craft.

Much more might be said about K.'s entrapment, alternately as fencer and as gardener, in an Afrikaner myth of craftsmanship that extolls a vision of human flourishing even as it provides an ideological underpinning for the deprivation of many actual South Africans. Here I only want to point out how Coetzee's novel situates craft as a specifically literary nostalgia for a world where order reigned, and where the well-being and security of a privileged few depend on the exploitation and silencing of the many. There is a tension between the Afrikaner's idealised conception of craftsmanship and the reality of craft work in K.'s life. Yet when K. renounces a career in fencing for a wandering existence in the wild, he is once again living out a white man's vision of primitive craft—this time it is Coetzee's myth of a world without colonial agriculture, in which K. is reduced to an ecological ideograph: vegan Black man living off the land. As K.'s body wastes away from hunger and exposure, the novel once more marks a growing tension between K.'s pitiful attempts to grow food or construct some sort of shelter and its own repeated narrative gestures that strain to frame these craft activities as a model of the good life.

*The Life and Times of Michael K.* thus establishes a distinction between two kinds, aspects or domains of craftsmanship: on the one hand there is the lived experience of craft workers like K.—a complex reality of manual skill, stints of pleasurable work, colonial violence and extreme hardship. On the other hand there is a mythical idea of craftsmanship that structures the narration

of K.'s experiences, which aligns the narrative point of view with the frame of reference of the Afrikaner characters featured in the novel—a perspective that struggles or fails to take account of the gap between an idealised conception of craftsmanship and the actual experiences of craftsmen like K. A natural tendency might be to dismiss this craft discourse as a harmful myth with no basis in reality, or even the entire book as a white South-African author's failure to disentangle his narrative from the colonial craft discourse it seeks to unravel. In Coetzee's novel, however, the uneasy double life of craft is a major structuring device that not only aligns the literary imaginary with a mythical craft narrative, but also invites (critical) reflection on the various ways in which this discourse, regardless of its questionable descriptive value, informs peoples' understanding of what it means to be a craftsman and affects the lived experience of craft workers. In other words, the novel marks a specifically literary dimension of craftsmanship—a discursive yet emphatically real phenomenon that is both distinct and intimately entangled with craft practice.

This literary life of craft takes centre stage in Edmund de Waal's autobiography *The White Road. A Pilgrimage of Sorts*, published in 2015. De Waal read English at Cambridge before becoming a celebrated ceramicist, and the book interweaves life writing, travel narrative, historical episodes and discussions of modern art and poetry to inscribe, examine and reconfigure the various meanings of being a maker. Although the text makes extensive reference to de Waal's own craft practice and is structured as a personal quest to unearth the history of porcelain, his signature material, de Waal's engagement with different craft narratives moves beyond a descriptive or expository mode. That is to say, although it is possible to read *The White Road* as an extended commentary on de Waal's own work or an eccentric history of porcelain, its most innovative intervention is a critical and creative reconfiguration of the vexed story of craft from which Michael K. struggles in vain to extricate himself. *The White Road*, I argue in this thesis,

seeks not so much to describe a historical phenomenon or a class of objects but rather to recast a received narrative of craftsmanship.

De Waal's text shares with Coetzee's novel a Beckettian narrative structure centred around a quest that gradually falls apart. Both stories consist of a string of episodes in which the protagonist searches for the provenance of his working material or his mother's birthplace respectively—*mother* and *material* share the Latin root *māter* (de Vaan 367), which in turn goes back to Greek μήτηρ *mētēr* “womb” (*OED*, “mater, n.”). In the course of each story, the central quest for this ultimate origin loses focus as the protagonist gets waylaid and increasingly distracted, and his initially purposeful journey gives way to a seemingly endless succession of wanderings. Yet while K.'s nomadic existence entails his withering away and eventual death, de Waal's detours and reroutings instead mark out his formative years and establishment as a prominent potter. This wandering process of becoming is reflected at a metafictional level in the narrative, which frequently records its own writing in the lost moments between expeditions: “I have to focus,” de Waal notes. “I'm writing this in the very early morning. I can't sleep” (132).

Joseph Slaughter identifies this device, through which the text becomes a story of the protagonist's growing ability to provide a coherent narrative account of himself, as a conventional feature of first-person *Bildungsromane* (*Human Rights* 137). “This is the paradigmatic form of the *Künstlerroman*, the apprenticeship story of an artist,” Slaughter observes elsewhere (“Bildungsroman/Künstlerroman” 96). In this way de Waal's rambling autobiography stands as a somewhat paradoxical testament to a new-found mode of becoming and being-maker that is purposefully adrift and incoherent. In other words, in *The White Road* getting lost and being undone also entail a newly nomadic form of craft subjectivity. In contrast to the forced decampments and reroutings by means of which K. attempts to break free from a narrative that simultaneously promises and denies him a crafty fantasy of the good life, on a

social level de Waal's increasingly itinerant account of craftsmanship works to reconfigure the myth in which craft marks the nostalgia for a promised land governed by the iron law of a chosen few. In the chapters that follow, then, I mine *The White Road* for forms of craftsmanship that register alternative modes of being and open onto a more inclusive and egalitarian discourse of craft.

One reason for dwelling on Coetzee's novel in these opening pages is that Michael K.'s experience brings to the fore a possible pitfall of that reading strategy. Separating Edmund de Waal from craftsmen like K. is a gulf of race and class privilege. Written from a particularly hegemonic point of view, it is not always clear whether or how the elements of craftsmanship that I identify as performative, relational or even queer in *The White Road* entail an actual breakdown of the exclusionary dynamics that have made craft such a repressive, explosive and sometimes emancipatory narrative in the political, popular and academic debates I discuss in the literature review that follows here. More precisely, it remains difficult to ascertain whether de Waal's literary intervention constitutes a challenge to the hegemonic paradigm of craft or, conversely, merely aestheticises a different *style* of maker identity without dismantling the various hierarchies that play into contemporary discourses of craftsmanship. In terms of the *Bildung* paradigm: does *The White Road* simply describe de Waal's acculturation into a hegemonic craft narrative or does it reconfigure some aspect of that discourse?

I find a way to make sense of the fact that the conclusion to this thesis revisits rather than resolves that question in Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's expansive understanding of the term "queer." "Queer," Sedgwick reflects in *Tendencies*, "can signify only *when attached to the first person*" (8; emphasis in the original). This observation indicates the limited value of "queer" as a descriptive category to classify the *being* of another person or (I extrapolate from Sedgwick) a literary text, and posits "queer" as the name for a *doing*, or the methodology that has since become more

widely known as queering or queer reading. Sedgwick recalls her own queer childhood need for “cultural objects” whose “meanings didn’t line up tidily with each other” and reflects that she “learned to invest those sites with fascination and love” (3). Similarly, in this thesis I draw out and interpret ambivalent movements and moments in *The White Road*, and if this reading does not amount to an assertion that the text, let alone its author, can be classified as queer (whatever that might mean), my aim in the chapters that follow is to examine the messy places where de Waal’s narrative both rehearses a familiar, hegemonic story of craftsmanship and gestures towards other, less masterful modes of being-maker.

supremacist logic implicit in the valorisation of mastery, it becomes clear why even the autobiography of a relatively privileged maker and craft writer like Edmund de Waal would—sometimes intentionally, sometimes in spite of himself—inscribe a variety of reasons, attempts and strategies to resist the hegemonic paradigm that attends the ideal of masterful craftsmanship. In this way *The White Road* alternately registers a desire for mastery and gestures toward other, non-hegemonic ways of being-maker—a complex dynamic that lends itself to a reading for “vital ambivalence,” while it also renders the text apparently incoherent and possibly inaccessible to leisurely readers, and makes it an unpopular source among critical craft scholars as well as in the other, more traditional “humanist” school of craft writing (further discussed below). The reason that de Waal’s autobiography is relatively understudied, namely its ambivalence vis-à-vis the ideal of masterful craftsmanship, is thus also the way in which it gestures towards an alternative, non-hierarchical understanding of craft, as I show in the chapters that follow the overview of humanist craft writing I provide here.

### Humanist craft (life) writing

The discourse within which masterful craftsmanship is valorised for strengthening (or demonstrating) an individual’s sovereignty, agency and cognitive ability is hardly new: it goes back to Plato and Aristotle, who viewed craftsmanship (τέχνη *tékhnē*, “craft, art”) as a form of reason (ἐπιστήμη *epistēmē*, “scientific knowledge, systematic understanding”) and valued it in accordance with Sylvia Wynter’s understanding of “Man” (discussed above), namely as a quality that is at once distinctively *human* and shared only by *free men*—hence the inferiority of the enslaved doctor in *Gorgias*, who relies on ἐμπειρία *empeiriā* “experience, practice, without knowledge of principles” rather than knowledge (720 b–d; Liddell and Scott “τέχνη-η,” “ἐπιστήμη,” “ἐμπειρία-ία;” cf. Parry). Although amid the rapid industrialisation of Europe, both

Hegel and Marx remained decidedly unenthusiastic about craft (cf. Sayers), Marxist intellectuals working in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, notably John Ruskin and William Morris, considered craftsmanship to be the wellspring and embodiment of the better qualities of humankind, and for that reason promoted it as an effective remedy against the alienation of industrial workers. Such celebrations of craftsmanship, it is important to note, are thus premised on a highly specific understanding of what counts as “humanity” or “humane culture.” That this understanding is fundamentally *narrative* (as in Plato’s dialogue), and typically comes in the shape of an origin story that portrays prehistoric man as master craftsman, is particularly evident in Ruskin’s famous discussion of craftsmanship in “The Nature of the Gothic,” a chapter in the second volume of *The Stones of Venice* (1853), which, as design historian Tanya Harrod notes, still stands as the single most influential text in the history of craft writing in the West (17). Ruskin associates craftsmanship with six different qualities, from which he singles out “Savageness, or rudeness” as the most significant (155). Before mobilising this character trait in his well-known diatribe against industrial production (162–72), Ruskin takes time to frame it as a natural element of the boreal character, evolved in distant times on the windswept plains of Northern Europe (158–59). In Ruskin’s eyes the primitive structures erected by this primordial figure are “instinct with work of an imagination as wild and wayward as the northern sea; creations of ungainly shape and rigid limb, but full of wolfish life” (158). Ruskin then prevails on his readers to recognise that these craft activities are “all dignity and honorableness,” and praises “the strong spirit of men who may not gather redundant fruitage from the earth, nor bask in dreamy benignity of sunshine, but must break the rock for bread, and cleave the forest for fire” (158, 159).

Three narrative strategies stand out in Ruskin’s origin story of man as craftsman. Firstly, by associating primitive craft objects with natural phenomena (the sea, animal life), he presents

craftsmanship as something instinctive, natural and uncorrupted by the “inhumanity” found in industrialised societies. Secondly, Ruskin’s model craftsman is not only identified as male, but also embodies the qualities of assertiveness, physical strength and a predilection for hard labour associated with normative masculinity in cultures that stigmatise (and feminise) limited ability. Thirdly, Ruskin’s primordial craftsman is particularised as Northern European, which sets him apart from inhabitants of warmer, more fertile regions (read: the Global South) where, according to Ruskin, craftsmanship is not required for survival, and where the people are therefore weak in spirit, lazy and fond of sunbathing (these qualities are implicit in the antithesis quoted above). Consequently, when Ruskin’s origin story is used to promote craft as a restoration of “humanity” or “humane culture,” this celebration of craftsmanship implicitly affirms the alleged naturalness and intrinsic superiority of hegemonic masculinity, physical ability, Western culture and whiteness. A fifth bias is implicit in Ruskin’s framing of the story of craftsmanship as a whole: insofar as his case for the restoration of craftsmanship is premised on the disappearance of craft under industrialisation, it depends on a disavowal of the considerable contributions made by craftspeople to the Industrial Revolution (cf. Adamson, *The Invention of Craft* for an extensive overview), in a strategic elision of the lived experience of working-class labourers which would surely have complicated Ruskin’s rather elitist story of craft. These gender, race, ability and class biases in one of the first and most influential celebrations of craft should alert us to similar prejudice whenever stories are told that hail craftsmanship as strengthening or demonstrating an individual’s ability, dignity, or honourability—in short: whenever craftsmanship is framed as a form of *mastery* proper to human beings, and celebrated or promoted on that account.

As it happens, such an association of craftsmanship with humanity, ability and dignity is the guiding thread that connects the various texts on craft that I will term, for clarity’s sake, humanist craft writing. The most widely-read texts in this field are, in order of publication, *The*

*Craftsman* (2008) by sociologist Richard Sennett, *Shopclass as Soulcraft* (2009) by political-scientist-turned-mechanic Matthew Crawford, and *Making* (2013) by anthropologist Tim Ingold. Looking back on the decade since the first issue of *The Journal of Modern Craft* in 2008, editors Glenn Adamson, Edward Cooke and Tanya Harrod write of the work of Sennett and Crawford: “These disparate strands are held together by a single, simple idea: that craft is a fundamental aspect of humane culture” (9–10). It is good to note that Sennett, Crawford and Ingold all combine autobiographical storytelling, a personal tone and an anecdotal writing style with scholarly discussion and argument. Because these authors also align themselves with Enlightenment notions like objective truth and scholarly disinterestedness (“We want to recover something of the spirit of the Enlightenment on terms appropriate for our time,” as Sennett puts it [269]), this slide toward the personal is somewhat strange—and not comparable with the first-person reflections of scholars like Susan Stryker or Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, whose practice of auto-theory is part of a larger scholarly tradition, pioneered in the 1950s by postcolonial writers like Frantz Fanon and feminist scholars in the 1970s, precisely in order to question the objectivity of traditional scholarship and its stylistic conventions. However, since the ideas of Sennett, Crawford and Ingold have nevertheless been taken up by eminent scholars of craft from a variety of disciplines, I will briefly discuss them regardless of my own misgivings about the scholarly standard of these writings.<sup>5</sup> Besides, as a craft text that combines personal experience with historiography and philosophical reflection, *The White Road* contributes to (or intervenes in) the field established by these writers, and in the discussion below I contextualise my readings of de Waal in relation to the stories of craft told by Sennett, Crawford and Ingold. In a nutshell, these narratives of masterful craftsmanship work to naturalise, render invisible and legitimise various forms of inequality connected with craftwork in the past and in the present.

Let's start with Sennett's definition of craft: "Craftsmanship names an enduring, basic human impulse, the desire to do a job well for its own sake" (9; cf. also 36, 90, 145, 245, 266–267). This definition singles out as the timeless essence of craft a dedication to quality that is isolated from other, more pragmatic concerns—a kind of single-mindedness that, historically, only gentlemen amateurs have been able to enjoy (further discussed in chapter 3). Consequently, when Sennett proceeds to argue that comparatively proletarian craftsmen like the engineers employed at Nokia and Motorola, pressured to worry about production targets and competition, should be uplifted by relieving them of such mundane concerns in order to focus exclusively on quality and creativity (28–37), he implicitly affirms the idea that a European aristocratic lifestyle is intrinsically superior and universally desirable—and that, through craftsmanship, it can be attained by all. Besides, Sennett's understanding of craftsmanship as a maker's freedom from external pressures entails a sense of *mastery* over one's own craft practice that is indissociable from the oppression of other, less privileged craftspeople. One need look no further than the tech companies that feature in *The Craftsman* itself to note that even the relatively limited creative freedom enjoyed by designers of mobile phones depends on the exploitation and dehumanisation of those workers who mine raw materials and craft composite parts for Northern-European American companies. Sennett's story of craft thus promotes the emancipation of a very narrow stratum of craftsmen, and implicitly legitimises the further exploitation of those craftworkers who are conspicuous by their absence from *The Craftsman*.

This becomes especially clear in the conclusion of the book, where Sennett argues that "nearly anyone can become a good craftsman," because "craftsmanship draws on childhood experience of play, and almost all children can play well" (268). "Play is so universal, so full of adult implication—yet modern prejudice clings to the conviction that only a few have the ability to do really good work," is Sennett's diagnosis of inequality in the global marketplace (273). This

democratising manoeuvre, by which the recognition of masterful craftsmanship (“the ability to do really good work”) as a universal human quality is presented as a solution to inequality, comes after Sennett’s meditation on playgrounds designed by the Dutch architect Aldo van Eyk (231–35). Sennett disregards not only that few children have access to such playgrounds, but also, more fundamentally that few children in today’s world are able to play like those living on the Amsterdam canal ring—because they work in a factory producing mobile phone parts, for example, or need to manage a household and care for siblings while their adult caretakers work long hours there. In a word, even as Sennett’s promotion of masterful craftsmanship as a universal human quality is framed as an egalitarian and inclusive argument, it renders invisible and thereby naturalises the further exploitation of many other, less privileged craftworkers. In chapter 2 I take up Sennett’s connection between craftwork and children’s play, but in a different way. Drawing on Donald Winnicott’s idea that play is not a natural capacity children are born with, but a relational ability developed (or not) in the interaction between an infant and its caretaker, I examine how *The White Road* recounts de Waal’s growing ability to make porcelain in this playful manner, and show how this learning process registers an increasing recognition and appreciation of the relationality of craftwork. *The White Road*, I argue in that chapter and in the conclusion to this thesis, invites us to value craftspeople’s interdependence on one another (instead of promoting the freedom of individual master craftsmen at the expense of other, less privileged craftworkers)—and, if anything, it is this recognition of mutual dependence that constitutes a ground for distributing those dependencies more equally.

If Sennett’s promotion of masterful craftsmanship legitimises existing hierarchies only implicitly, Matthew Crawford’s eulogy to the craft of motorcycle maintenance in *Shop Class as Soulcraft* entails a more explicitly supremacist argument. Crawford extends (or rather, distorts) Mike Rose’s line of reasoning in *The American Mind at Work*, where Rose makes a case for

valuing manual and intellectual education equally (*passim*), into a claim for the superiority of manual work and those who perform it. “The best sort of democratic education is neither snobbish nor egalitarian,” Crawford observes before departing from Rose’s egalitarian argument: “Rather, it accords a place of honor in our common life to whatever is best. At this weird moment of growing passivity and dependence, let us publicly recognize a yeoman aristocracy: those who gain real knowledge of real things, the sort we all depend on every day” (29–30). In other words, for Crawford those who make or fix things have a firmer grip on reality than others—notably senior feminist scholars (the “harpies” who have turned academia into “an industry hostile to thinking” [80]) and liberal white-collar workers (“the sushi-eating, Brazilian-girlfriend having cosmopolitan” [141])—and for that reason craftsmen deserve a privileged place in society. Besides, for Crawford dependence in relation to craft only works in one direction: craftsmen are autonomous and self-reliant, while the rest of society is redundant and depends on them (cf. 18, 26–27). Crawford’s “yeoman aristocracy” is a play on Thomas Jefferson’s notion of a “yeoman democracy” (also referenced in Sennett 269), a vision that Jefferson declined to extend to the many enslaved people he owned (cf. Cohen). Crawford’s anti-feminist, anti-intellectualist and racist asides and allusions align his promotion of craftsmanship with the new articulations of “aggrieved manhood” Debbie Ging identifies in online communities advocating for men’s rights (638). Ging identifies the strategy by which these groups connect hegemonic masculinity with tropes of victimhood, as Crawford does by vindicating the rights of craftsmen, as “hybrid masculinities” (653), which work to entrench and conceal existing inequalities (cf. Bridges and Pascoe 250). Crawford’s narrative is thus indeed a promotion of crafts*manship*, in a way that foregrounds the affinity of this word with “Man” (cf. my discussion of Sylvia Wynter above), and with the expression “the Man,” which, as Raewyn Connell observes, reflects the intersection of gender and race privilege in Western cultures (75). Crawford romanticises speed shops as “a

clubhouse” where a man with the “vocation” to become a mechanic proceeds, after his “submission to the judgments of a master,” through various “differences of rank” to become a master himself (136, 120). In chapter 3 I examine how in *The White Road* Edmund de Waal negotiates similar values that are handed down as part of the alchemical tradition of porcelain production in Europe. Drawing on the theories of shame developed by Jean-Paul Sartre, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick and Lisa Guenther, I explore how de Waal mobilises shame about his own attraction to the strictly hierarchical, alchemical world of porcelain craft to foster a sense of community with and responsibility for other, less privileged makers who suffer under these hierarchies. In the conclusion to this thesis I ask whether this affiliation does not entail a form of “hybrid masculinity” that conceals and therewith fortifies existing hierarchies by means of a demonstration of marginality. Even if it does, I conclude, *The White Road* as a whole still registers a dynamic of “vital ambivalence” that enables us to read for unmasterful making—and in the figure of shame de Waal’s ambivalent relationship to masterful craftsmanship becomes not *only* a sign of his implicatedness in a hegemonic discourse of craftsmanship, but also a way in which *The White Road* tells another, affirmatively collaborative story of craft.

Tim Ingold’s argument is surprisingly similar to that of Crawford, even though it passes not by way of Hegelian dialectics (cf. Crawford 20, 120, 138), but via readings of Deleuze and Barad (*passim*; 5, 31, 97). The primary point of resemblance is the superior status makers are granted in Ingold’s work—a superiority grounded in the craftsman’s grasp on reality. In the opening chapter of *Making* Ingold discards traditional ethnography in favour of “knowing from the inside” (3–4)—that is, the “way of the craftsman,” or “a correspondence between mindful attention and lively materials conducted by skilled hands ‘at the trowel’s edge’” (6, 11). “It is from this correspondence,” Ingold explains, “that knowledge grows” (*ibid.*). This could have been a simple acknowledgement of the situatedness of all knowledges, if only Ingold’s argument

as a whole did not work toward a hierarchy in which master craftsmen come out on top. Picking up a distinction Le Corbusier makes between two forces that have shaped European cities: (1) the pack donkey, which “follow[s] the line of least resistance, wherever it goes,” generating the meandering alleyways typical of medieval city centres (137), and (2) the men who design modern cities—“Man walks in a straight line because he has a goal and knows where he is going; he has made up his mind to reach some particular place and he goes straight to it” (qtd. in Ingold 137), Ingold draws a familiar distinction between master craftsmen doing the real donkeywork on the ground and modern-day urban planners dreaming up entire cityscapes without ever leaving their high-rise offices. “Suppose we set them side by side: straight-line people and pack-donkey people,” Sennet proposes in the concluding section of the book: “Which of them are stupid, and which wise?” (140). Straight-line architects, Ingold warns, are detached from reality: “They have the information, mistaking it for knowledge. What need have they to ask the world, when they already know? Blinded by information and dazzled by images, they fail to see what’s happening before their very eyes” (141), while the primordial, pack-donkey craftsmen “find the grain of things and follow it, and in so doing find themselves” (ibid.). Granting the craftsman a monopoly on “wisdom” and “knowledge,” and indeed exclusive communion with “the grain of things,” Ingold lets slip an opportunity to explore the mutual dependence of builders and architects, and more fundamentally, to shift the discourse on craft from a focus on mastery to a recognition, valuation and fostering of interdependence and collaboration. In chapter 1 I take up Ingold’s contrast between distraction and goal-oriented craftwork in a reading of several historical episodes in *The White Road*. Yet where Ingold reads for wisdom and mastery, I draw on Jack Halberstam’s understanding of ignorance to analyse how purposive craft activity and *not knowing* work together in de Waal’s narrative to bring out not “the grain of things” and authentic self-

discovery, but rather a porcelain maker's attentiveness to the infinite variability not only of the material world, but also of their own self as maker.

In the stories of masterful craftsmanship told by John Ruskin, Richard Sennett, Matthew Crawford and Tim Ingold, the meaning and value of craft derive from its association with a very specific understanding of who or what counts as a worthy human being—i.e. the rational, self-determining subject named “Man.” Whether the ideal of masterful craftsmanship is framed as a vindication of traditional hierarchies, or promoted as an emancipatory ideal to which all must be uplifted—both versions of this story concede to the inescapability of mastery as a way of life, and thus remain bound to a logic of domination that further legitimises the oppression of those who cannot, or do not want to be “elevated” to the status of master craftsman. The telling of a more inclusive and egalitarian story of craft, then, begins with a search for the cracks in this ideal, and with lingering to see what other, non-hegemonic forms of craft remain in these crevices. Taking my cue from the momentarily unmasterful modes of making identified by Julietta Singh, Susan Stryker and Eve Kosofsky Segwick, in the chapters that follow I mine *The White Road* for slippages of masterful craftsmanship, trace the contours of craft subjectivities that straddle mastery and wonder, and sketch out the vulnerable forms of relation these ambivalent modes of making make possible. Chapter 1 gets this project underway with an examination of porcelain, de Waal's signature material, which is, unlike other kinds of clay, *made rather than found*. Tracing this motif back to the chemical poetics of Friedrich Schlegel, I examine how in *The White Road* porcelain's “unnatural” origin precludes a romanticisation of porcelain craft as a primordial, “natural” form of masterful craftsmanship, and instead registers a tentative openness to other, unmasterful modes of making.