Glenn Peers

2 Late Antique Making and Wonder

Abstract: This article examines materials, processes and meanings of late antique making. Often denigrated as craft, work accomplished through materials, such as reeds, marble and bronze, reveals deep relations of late antique Christians with their world. It demonstrates that bodies think through materials and show their rich attachments to divinity through making. Revision of objects, carved and cast, can also allow new arguments to emerge through engagement with prior craft. Wonder and awe inspired by the splendid making of that world, is examined for ways it expresses understandings of being alive in a world likewise made and alive. The Shield of Achilles is a remarkable *topos* for tracking those understandings, and late antique *homerica* reveal particular explanations for (literally) vivid craft. In these ways, this article argues for a re-evaluation of late antique working in and understandings of matter, stuff, craft – and ultimately God's redemptive involvement, too.

I enter into this discussion with the fear that appropriate modesty causes. Treating craft in the late antique world, let alone the Middle Ages, is a humbling enterprise, not any less for the company, for Anthony Cutler has for over twenty years been examining, with typical vigor and incisiveness, just these issues of maker, making and made – to provide a cognate-filled triad that covers the range of craft's life. He has presented compelling arguments and careful analyses, and he has treated that life-range of objects, without neglecting the thing at the center of craft's process.[1]

Cutler discussed the "shadow cast by a higher plane" onto late antique craft, that is, the way craft became simply a way of arguing on a symbolic level at the expense of making itself.[2] While engaging that symbolic world craft encourages, I will argue

1 Some of Anthony Cutler's work on the subject is listed in the bibliography. On craft's conception and realities, see the useful historical studies of Magoulias 1976, Burford 1998, 186–200, Sparkes 1998, Morel 1993, 214–44, and Burford 1972, 184–218.

2 Cutler 1997, 971.

Note: An early version of this paper was presented at a conference organized by Salvatore Cosentino called "Ravenna and the Traditions of Late Antique and Early Byzantine Craftsmanship: Labor, Culture and Economy," and held at the Italian Academy at Columbia University, New York, in March 2013. My thanks to everyone who made that conference possible and who made the event so stimulating. This essay was finished while I was a senior fellow at the Internationales Kolleg für Kulturtechnikforschung und Medienphilosophie, Bauhaus-Universität Weimar. I would also thank my friend and colleague Nassos Papalexandrou for his kind advice, and acknowledge guidance and suggestions from other colleagues: David Armstrong, Christoph Eggersglüß, and T'ai Smith. Finally, deep thanks for many years of mentoring and support to Antony Cutler. A version of this essay appears in my *Animism, Materiality and Museums: How Do Byzantine Things Feel?*

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for directing that plane back, in a sense, on the things themselves. By looking closely at the things and their processes in Late Antiquity, I want to argue for the hand making a world in its thinking and practice that are cognates of divine, world-making skills. Even if writers did not articulate that animating process always as such, craft skills – like metal-casting, painting and ceramics – *made* worlds, small and large, and they extended their agency, their material thinking, into a world constantly filled and re-filled with new versions of world-making things.[3]

Taking this position means pushing back against a deeply held bias in our culture, for the priority of interior thinking and against thinking with the body.[4] For example, in an article published in *The New Yorker*, a test for Parkinson's overtly privileged unseen thought as a sign of mental well-being, when the author attempted to experiment by moving objects around before submitting his answer. He was told, "Putting action before thinking is the kind of error you made. You did something and then thought about it. That's less efficient and less elegant than planning a strategy."[5] Of course, the statement cannot be validated, and many of us would not support such a position on principle, but the statement constitutes a diagnosis and carries serious weight for human subjects.

In modernism, that emphasis on innate abilities and intellectual inspiration is fundamental to our value-judgments of made things, namely art. The debate begins, perhaps, with Goethe and Schiller on dilettantism in 1799 – does a real artist, as opposed to an amateur, need more than genius (whatever that is)? In the 20th century, modernism went strongly toward 'genius,' because the hands of the real artist were guided by idea, concept, inspiration, at the expense of skill, technique, material knowledge. To take just one example, the German painter and teacher Willi Baumeister (1889–1955) wrote that genius is not taught, has no experience, or standard; modern art emancipates us from training or vocation.[6] In terms laid out by Gilbert Ryle (1900–76), for example, we value museum knowledge over instrumental knowledge,[7] or the elegance and efficiency of the thinking over the same qualities in the doing. These positions have a long history, beyond modernism, but bias against making and craft – hand-thinking – is still a prevalent mode of explaining our relation to the material world.[8]

3 Bray 2015 makes a case for her artistic practice as anthropological research in which a portrait gets "more intimate, truthful and 'thick' than were it to have been done in just a few hours." So, artistic practice learns and discloses essential truths about humans, in this approach, like it can about materials and materiality.

4 See, for instance, Adamson 2007, for a carefully reasoned response.

5 Kinsley 2014, 30.

6 Baumeister 1947, 124–5.

7 Ryle 1971, II: 212–25 (originally published 1946). See also Polanyi 1974, 92.

8 See Mark 1995, but also Auther 2010.

So, I am reacting to the weight and value, as I perceive them, of previous positions in the history of art. In the first place, my insistence on relation among all these agents – makers, things and users – comes from recent work in anthropology, that allows me to argue for a world livelier than we admit normally for our historical subjects and for ourselves.[9] In this way, craft's self-knowing process, a doing that thinks, rather than relying on rote learning and repetition, is a way into arguing for an extended mind that things bring into the world.[10] I posit an effective persuasion that craft can carry out in the world; its thinking, formed but not determined by the maker, is in force and difficult to resist. I want to address aspects of revision and renovation that also implicate issues of 'distributed authorship,' in which objects carry marks of multiple traces of renovation and re-making.[11]

Finally, I want to focus on wonder, sensations of perplexity and astonishment that made things cause, as a way of approaching cultural models of makers, and the effects and lives of the things they make. The Shield of Achilles in Archaic and Classical Greece provides incentive to think about the play of that model of craftsman (Hephaestus), commissioner (Thetis) and circles of recipients (among whom: Achilles, the Myrmidons, Greeks, and all the strata of readers of the *Iliad*) extended into Late Antiquity. The uncertainties of wonder, its displacements, fear and attraction, are means by which craftsmen and craft extend their reach out into their world and put all their agencies into play.

Craft Hands

The lives of almost all of the women and men who performed any kind of specialized work in Late Antiquity are invisible to us now. Representations like this example of a Late Roman sarcophagus show some of the *realia* of a studio, one supposes.[12] But of course this image is not transparent to process.[13] Indeed, many representations of craftsmen – even if done by craftsmen, as they invariably were – reveal very little that we can see about the realities and processes of craft that are *self-reflective*. They are commissioned and interpreted for their symbolic, referential value. For example, at the other end of Late Antiquity, the images of craftsmen in the painted program of the

9 For example, this pithy statement with tremendous potential: Conneller 2011, 20, "Becomings always exist in relation to something else (becoming-animal, becoming-stone)."

10 For example, see Descola 2013, Descola 2010, Marchand 2010, Ingold 2001, and essays in Rose & Rose 2000.

11 I also want to argue for a kind of social idealism around craft, which is often the case for writers on craftsmen in the modern world. I take Richard Sennet's model of social cohesion that arises from practicing craft to be very stimulating. See Sennett 2012.

12 Lazaridou 2011, 62.

13 On this issue, see Lehmann 2012.

desert palace Qusayr 'Amra (Jordan, early 8th century) are not autobiographical in a transparent way, but highly determined by the overall demands of the program in that set of rooms.[14] In other words, craftsmen most often describe themselves through their work and its outcomes, not by representational self-portraits.

Yet the sarcophagus, again, shows a pondering painter, his materials, and the results of thought-filled process.[15] The material results of that work, which is craft, tells us almost all we can know about the skills and knowledge of those workers or craftsmen. They scarcely reveal aspects of craftsmen's beliefs or aspirations in ways that we can understand. But made-things can demonstrate how craftsmen used their work to gain the world a thing, a "letting-appear," that confirmed, extended and amplified their agency.[16] For example, Karl Marx (1818–83) made this point of working on and with the world as a full reciprocity, "By thus acting on the eternal world and changing it, [man] at the same time changes himself." His examples of making are about loss of will and subordination, but I will not admit alienation is part of the process I am describing. For Marx, the spider and bee are supreme crafts-beings because they do not have an ideal form imposed on them for production – they do not have need to impose preformed images from their head directly on the world.[17]

Insisting on the skill of late antique craftsmen runs against certain official expressions that survive in hagiographies and theological texts. Church officials, priests, bishops and saints alike, revealed their suspicion of the independent hands of craftsmen, and they were often, at least in public pronouncements, willing to denigrate or neutralize that potential of unchecked power makers and their things had.[18] For example, an episode in the hagiography of Symeon the Younger (ca. 600) reveals an attempt on the part of the saint to dispense craft skill to a young man who wishes to become a sculptor.[19] The saint touched the chest of the young man in order to give him the inspiration and skill that God would provide. The gesture is almost romantic, in the sense of a generalized, transforming touch of the whole body; so it is not placing a hand on the head, the place of intellect, nor taking the man by the hand, where the wished-for skill would begin its world-changing. The saint channeled skill and

14 See Fowden 2004, 215–6, and see Maranci 2015, 146–56, on portraits of workers and their crafts at Zuart'noc'.

15 See Dormer 1994, 14, "Tacit knowledge refers to a body of knowledge which we have gained through experience – both through the experience of the senses and through the experience of doing work of various kinds. Tacit knowledge differs from propositional knowledge in that it cannot easily be articulated or described in words."

16 I take the "letting-appear," or "Erscheinenlassen" from Martin Heidegger (1889–1976); in his essay "Bauen Wohnen Denken," he described 'techne' as a dynamic process of bringing into being, rather than a stamp of mind on world. See Heidegger 2000, 161; Heidegger 1971, 159.

17 Marx 1962, IV: 178; Marx 1957, I: 169–70.

18 I make this case for Late Antiquity and Iconoclasm in Peers 2012b.

19 "Vita S. Symeonis Stylitae Iunoris," in *Acta Sanctorum, 24 Maii*, *: 349 [417B-C (14)].

inspiration, the apprentice accepted that hierarchy of craft, and presumably – according to the text – the sculpture was acceptable to the church. And yet this institutionally idealized process cannot be 'real,' for sculptors – then, as now – learned their craft through watching, doing, working with and against materials, in the usual ways craft is acquired and enacts.

World-Making Basket

My point is that humans and materials work together in a mutually enlivening process, of more or less ability or interest in self-articulation on the part of either. As Chris Gosden has recently written, "Artifacts do not reflect intellectual schemes, but help to create and shape them."[20] Basket weaving is an excellent example of this process, and as an ancient art, with not much technological change over millennia and with global applications, it allows us to see how weavers still manipulate raw materials into new, practical, pleasing objects. And yet weavers, like all craftsmen, do not impose an order or image; they must work with and on the material, just as the material works with and on them.[21] Moreover, the work is not simply performed by a person emptied of mind and initiative, fully trained to produce in rote; it does not eliminate creativity and free expression, because materials always insist on their equal role.

Baskets survive from the late antique period, mainly from Egypt, and anthropological work in that country also reveals essential features of making.[22] The craft depends on intense concentration and full-bodied engagement with materials.[23] But this precious equilibrium between attention to materials and application of acquired knowledge is also seen in other contexts, like modern workshops, in which highly developed skill is self-maintained at great cost in a battle to ensure quality and output.[24] Basket making is likewise improvisational to some extent, while maintaining a need for results. That is a little obvious maybe, but the point is that, unlike mechanical production, handicraft is process, and the environmental, material elements matter as much as the skill and strength of the maker. Where one makes a basket, indoors or outdoors, with a firm set or handheld, with resistant strands or pliant, all these are participants with maker in a process that does not need, maybe cannot have, a predetermined outcome. Moreover, baskets have no frame, no inside or outside, because wrapping

20 Gosden 2013, 39.

21 On this process, see Ingold 2011, and also Ingold & Lucas 2007, 296–8.

22 See Wright 1959, Colt 1962, 59–60, and Wendrich 1999.

23 In ways that reveal perhaps some of the tensions that Marx saw leading to alienation in modern workers.

24 Dormer 1994, 40–1.

transverse fibers make them alternately inside and outside.[25] That organic quality makes it sometimes difficult to know when a basket is finished, though when it is finished, it can last a very long time. The basket then emerges in a mutual agreement through an interaction of skilled action and materials, and repetitive, attentive action makes the resultant thing regular and complete.

The acquisition and development of such skills is a social activity, naturally, and in this world, they took place in workshops within master-apprentice frameworks. The mosaicists in the apse at San Vitale worked in tandem, beginning in the middle of the apse, for example, and worked outward from that point; constant communication, mutual realization and result matching must have taken place in that creative process.[26] That type of craft-learning then could not really be called independent, nor is it a fully integrated activity shared between teacher and pupil. It leads by example, in fact, to another kind of knowledge that has been called a "material consciousness," that is, a way of knowing that develops through sensitive, attentive familiarity with materials.[27] This kind of knowledge operates, perhaps, as a basis for a "dialogic social behavior,"[28] and if that is so, it comes out of those particular master-apprentice and maker-material relationships. Beyond the social ramifications, that set of relationships enlarges the maker's experience and knowledge of the world. As Peter Dormer (1949–96) wrote, "Craft knowledge is genuine knowledge. To possess it in any form is to see the world in an enriched way compared with someone who does not possess it."[29] Anna Odland Portisch tells a story about a craftswoman in Kazakhstan who constantly eyed and coveted her niece's new outfit, until she could manage to persuade the girl to relinquish it, so that she could make a wall hanging from the yarn.[30] Perhaps not the most likeable example one could adduce, but this story reveals the particular acuity with which craftsmen look at the world, not as a passive field, but as a realm for creative engagement and fashioning.

In that sense, baskets are both the result of a set of actions between maker and materials, and answering a vast number of needs in the world for containing, storage and transport. The objects themselves are modest, almost unremarkable, but they are found in a large number of contexts and in endless forms and sizes. Domestic and ecclesiastic uses are obvious, but their adaptability is remarkable, such as being used as insulating shutters in late antique houses in Egypt.[31] Holding and containing are natural uses to which these things have always been put, but they have added valences

25 Ingold 2000, 55.

26 See Andreescu-Treadgold 1992, 34.

27 See Venkatesan 2010.

28 Sennett 2012, 199–220; 2008.

29 Dormer 1994, 68. Kentridge 2014, is very rich in such observations on practice, perhaps most movingly on drawing as negotiation with the world.

30 Portisch 2010.

31 See Dauterman Maguire/ Maguire/Flowers 1989, 89–90.

when they are represented in late antique art as sources of bounty. So, for example, at Sant'Apollinare Nuovo in Ravenna, baskets (among other things) contain the bounty of paradise, and in other scenes, like the Miracle of the Loaves and Fishes, they are vessels of miraculous plenitude.

The Stuff of Making

These modest things, then, are impressive distillations of the dynamic relationship among makers and materials, of the work that happens in the flows of matter and attentive, evolving, reactive skill, by which thing and maker reciprocally emerge. This model, in general terms, applies equally well to humble objects like baskets as it does to elevated categories like metal working, bronze casting, mosaic and painting.[32] Just as all these categories of making belong to a more undifferentiated group of activities than they do for us and our fine art traditions, so all these ways of making take part in this same cooperative world-making actions and energies.

Can worked materials and the artisan's work form and change how we understand nature or life? And can the raw materials themselves also determine a craftsman's approach, experience and outcome?[33] Such questions have a history, and materials are not absolute in the world, because they have explanations and functions, of course, that change with period and culture.[34] So, engaging in a kind of materialist iconology can open up some of the ways materials and their worked states participate in a world-defining process.[35] How one explains the materiality of reeds and twigs, for example, might be one way into the inherent meaning of their worked forms.

Likewise, to travel to the other end of the spectrum of material values, how one explains the meaning of gold as mineral and medium should tell us a great deal about what the material and resultant thing *did* in its culture.[36] So, this small gold box in the Menil Collection does a great deal still, but it does more when its material explanations are examined and its worked qualities are explored (Fig. 1).[37] Only in this way can we approach the particular work the material and its partnering maker

32 On that categorization, see, for example, Scott 2006, Olson 2005, and Lapatin 2003.

33 See Bensaude-Vincent /Newman 2007, 9, and Cutler 2011, 186.

34 An important offshoot of material-culture studies needs to be noted here, because it examines the interplay between matter and form, but gives significant credit to the *Stoffe* or basic substances of making and life (and social effects). See Boscagli 2014, Espahangizi/Orland 2014, Hahn 2014, and Naumann/Strässle /Torra-Mattenklott 2006.

35 See Zaunschirm 2012.

36 Beer 1983.

37 This box figured in an exhibition at the Menil Collection in summer 2013 and in the accompanying volume, Peers 2013, and see also Peers 2012b.

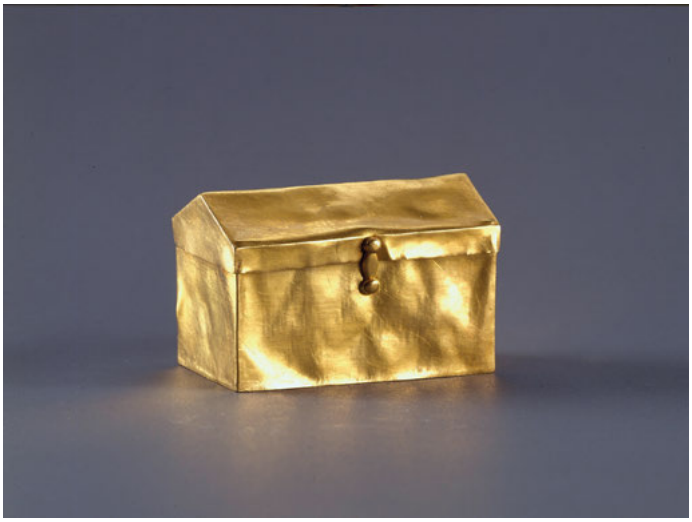

Fig. 1: Gold box, 6th/7th century. The Menil Collection (x 819), with permission of The Menil Collection, Houston, TX.

did, and how that thing went to work in its world. The box is small scale, and I want to talk about wonder and the miniature, too, but in the first place, I want to address briefly what gold did in Late Antiquity. By its doing, I mean the explanations that culture had for its materiality.

That understanding goes back at least to Classical antiquity, and it strikingly undermines our understanding of materials as inert. The geology is based on mixtures of elements, and most metals were thought to be primarily water-based, that is, water trapped in the earth and hardened into metals like gold and silver. This elemental combining then is an animating force in the earth, rather like a vital force that runs through creation, like a life-blood. Aristotle (384–22 B.C.E.) spoke of the spirit in the moisture within the earth that combined with life-heat to produce these metals. In some way that Aristotle could not explain, that combination charged the materials with soul, "In earth and in water, life occurs, and plants through the water in the earth appear, and in the water is spirit, and in everything the soul life-heat is present, so that in this way all things are full of soul."[38] If the world has soul, it also has feelings, and Pliny the Elder (23–79) describes the earth trembling in indignation at the rapaciousness of humanity; we would be better off if we had never broken

38 *De generatione animalium*, III.xi (762a). See also Theophrastus (371–287 B.C.E.) 1956, 19 (1). Likewise, gems are created through various actions in the environment, most importantly celestial bodies like the sun and moon, but also climatic conditions, like heat and cold. See Halleux 1981, 50–1, on theories of Poseidonius (ca. 135–51 B.C.E.), for example. And for miraculous, or otherwise inexplicable, generation, see Epstein 2012, and Van Der Lugt 2004.

ground and had never succumbed to the greed for what lies under earth's skin.[39] These general notions are basic to a material iconology, and they can be applied across a wide chronological range, because they continued to be in play well into the Renaissance, as Michael Cole has shown in his work on Benvenuto Cellini (1500–71).[40]

That play of spirit in matter is an essential part of the iconology of matter in that world, and it also affects the resultant forms, like this box, and its functions. In that sense, the watery nature of gold is part of the enlivening action apparent from careful attention to the box itself – perhaps better, from careful imagination, because to perform this action is to forget the ways most of us encounter such things, as well-lit objects in museum cases.[41] After something is made, the materials remain, and they continue to do things, like in this box, to shimmer and to halate in weak light, to disappear to luster in stronger light, to vacillate between elemental states apparently even as it glosses and maintains its natural, lambent substantiality. The limitations and expansions of life, one might say, are the subject of something like this mere box. The box cannot hide its history as water and earth, ensouled by geological process, and it adapts its nature to the ways the maker forms it. The dappling and denting, its uneven surfaces, are the result of handicraft, not machine work obviously, and the necessary way maker and materials worked through the sheeting's irregularities demonstrate the box's faceted reflecting and absorbing light. Seeing these aspects, imagining them as it were, means working against our own experiences, not just those determined by museums, and re-examining senses and relation to the natural world.

In the work of artists like Yves Klein (1928–62), Robert Rauschenberg (1925–2008) and James Lee Byers (1932–77), gold is the matter at hand.[42] Klein's Monogold series reveals the instability and partial quality of our perception of gold; it always shifts and changes, moves from gold to silver, reflects and absorbs, shows its environment back, while staying aloof from it (Fig. 2). These qualities are useful to observe and describe, because they are inherent to gold as matter and apply equally well in principle to the late antique box. But we are minimalists at heart, and we know the gold is just gold.[43] For people who made and witnessed the gold box in Late Antiquity, gold was more than the itself that we give it. Gold was a divine material that demonstrated in its birth, making and its made state, the wonder of the world that can contain and recapitulate divine truths and presence.

39 Pliny the Elder, *Naturalis historia*, 33.I.

40 Cole 2011, and Cole 2002.

41 See Greenblatt 1990.

42 The artists are included not only because of their mutual interest in working with and through gold, but also because their artworks were included in Peers 2013 and are discussed in the exhibition volume. For a comparable exploration, see Dupré et al. 2014.

43 Analogies with modernist approaches to gold are suggestive for understanding the divergent materialities at work. For the modern position, see the useful essay by Gehring 2012.

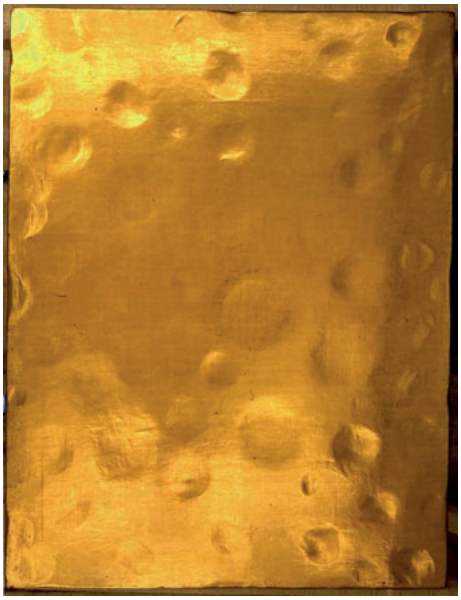

Fig. 2: Yves Klein, Untitled (Monogold), 1960, 199.4 x 153 x 2. Gold leaf on primed board. The Menil Collection (82–61 DJ), with permission of The Menil Collection, Houston, TX.

Emergent meaning in craft made the divine immanent, and craftsmen's knowledge and experience of the world were instrumental in this process.[44] But that reality is worth stating, because it asserts the distance between a theory of practice *and* activities based in practice and experience in a craft. It is the difference between reading a language with a dictionary and actually manipulating all potentialities of a language in its diverse forms – or, coming close to home, like writing about painting versus painting.[45] Separating the makers and users into a teleological relationship where the makers gave the box over after having done their separate work is probably false. Different agents played on the making and use of the box, in all likelihood, from the conception of a container, through its making and then birth into the world – and then its long life, which shows on the gold skin's marking. Its affordances, then, were the results of

44 Ludwig Wittgenstein was dealing with linguistic determinism, that words have a meaning but also a *work*, and in this way, he indicated an obvious craft reality, "To understand a sentence means to understand a language. To understand a language means to master a technique." See Wittgenstein 1958, 81 (199).

45 See Keller 2001, on the divergences in perceptions of an activity between practitioner and spectator, master and novice.

various actors at play, not least the materials themselves, and meaning was distributed amongst and by them.[46]

Our mastery of materials made into things is an easy illusion – let alone the things that result – but anyone who has worked by hand on wood or metal realizes that one is necessarily in a compromising position before materials.[47] The gold painting series by Robert Rauschenberg abounds in certain ironies about this sense of mastery (Fig. 3). Of course, he was a maker revealing his making at every turn, despite his denial of art as such, and he certainly played with the arbitrariness of process and the visual interest and pleasure that could result. In this series, he applied gold leaf to fabric or cardboard, and allowed the qualities of gold as glowing surface to emerge when it wanted to, as it were, and the surface qualities of the support, fabric etc., when it could. The subject is the gold and what it does, according to certain, varying aspects of his practice. Here materials and hands work together without forethought, but full of process-thought.[48]

I am arguing that the gold in the late antique gold box does more because it was allowed to perform beyond its surface (where Rauschenberg stayed so productively). While still significant, surface is just the place for late antique craftsmen, and anyone else in that culture, to find the different meanings, if not also the wonder, of the divine. Transmutable matter moves towards gold always, naturally, just as human nature moves towards the divine. Gold is that perfect condition of salvation.[49] For that reason, one of the first acts performed by Adam and Eve after tilling the soil was setting up a forge; they were crafting redemption.[50] Labor and making were basic ways heirs of Adam's fault could find a return to divine likeness.[51] On the one hand, pseudo-Macarius

46 See Knappett 2004, 43–51, and Knappett 2005. For convenience, I offer this definition of affordance from the OED, "A characteristic of an object, esp. relating to its potential utility, which can be inferred from visual or other perceptual signals; (more widely) a quality or utility which is readily apparent or available."

47 Warnier 2001, 8–9, and Latour 2007, 74–5, on homo faber as homo fable, "I never act, but I am always surprised by what I do. That which is acting through me is also surprised by what I do, by the occasion offered to mutate and change and bifurcate that which is offered, by me and by the circumstances surrounding me, to that which has been invited, recovered, welcomed." And moreover Gordon 1979, 21, "In the products both of ordinary labour and of the artist, conception is translated into artifact, into an object, which exists independently of those intentions. An idea is concretized, but in such a way that the object transcends the idea: the object does not merely 'betray' the intention which formed it, but provides the objective basis for further acts of signification. Its meaning is no longer confined to the intention of the maker, which has no special privilege and may, in a given society, have no privilege at all."

48 Here, I would note diverse examples of things making arguments and, moreover, demonstrating them non-verbally and materially. See Haug 2014, Kessler 2012, and Faraone 2011.

49 See Mertens 2004, and Peers forthcoming.

50 See the tenth-century ivory in the Castello Sforzesco, Milan, for example, in Dupré 2014, 12, and Daim 2010, 198.

51 Ballan 2011.

Fig. 3: Robert Rauschenberg, *Untitled (Gold Painting)*, 1956, 10 ½ x 10 7/8 x 1 ½ inches. Gold leaf, wood fabric, and cardboard in wood and glass frame. The Menil Collection (98–001), with permission of The Menil Collection, Houston, TX.

(ca. 400) wrote about Christian self-fashioning being comparable to a portrait-maker capturing a likeness (in this case, a Christian studying the face of Christ); and on the other hand, and in a less metaphorical sense of craft, Egyptian monks wove reeds into mats while in communal prayer and reading.[52] Handiwork accompanied the making of salvation and guided hand, and thus soul, back to the divine.[53]

The shape of the object, with its lid and receptacle, its box-ness, recalls sarcophagi and reliquaries, and so death; it too was connected with death, in its likely use as a reliquary.[54] In that way, moving from its utility as container and object of beauty and wonder, the box also travels from craft to art; as it withdraws in its role as holder of divine substance, it becomes the precious miniature that gives sacred death emotional resonance.[55] In this world, death was in life, and vice versa, and the box's material performance made that death dramatically, physically alive to one – all the while showing the animate, perdurant metal-life of the made thing. Gold is untarnishable, seemingly permanent in its conditions, and its deathless life is a perfect surround for sacred relics. That surplus or excess is the place where enlivened material is made

52 Peers 2004, and Zanetti / Davis 2016, and Veilleux 1968, 307 and 309 n. 142.

53 As painters, moreover, performed acts of piety through their active practice. See Limberis 2011, 53–96, and Webb 2007.

54 This indexical evocation is skeuomorphism, according to Knappett 2002, 108–110.

55 Olson 2005, 327. See, also, Kohring 2011.

dynamically active in the world by knowing hands of its maker.[56] Indeed, gold's material transcendence paradoxically foregrounds the madeness, the process by which it came into this being.[57]

Craft-Life of Things

At variance with the notion of authority in modernism,[58] craft presupposes distribution of authorship across makers who work together and also through time. In his stimulating book, *Medieval Modern*, Alexander Nagel glances at mosaic through the lens of the interest of Marshal McLuhan (1911–80) in Byzantium.[59] In striking ways, McLuhan's notion of authority, Nagel argues, approaches medieval notions, "Authorship before print was to a large degree the building of a mosaic." Mosaic then has long life in part because of the durability of the materials, but also because of the ongoing work of restoration that takes place on these fields. In effect, mosaics reveal an unstable set of practices with open, distributed authorship, where revision and restoration are the means by which things survive.

Craft is clearly in play when mosaic fields are being made and mended, however successful we consider the result, or however much we devalue the intervention at all. When interventions occur in painting or sculpture, we are almost always disappointed. The interference by Medicean painters in the Rabbula Gospels (Florence, Biblioteca Mediceo Laurenziana, cod. Plut. I, 56) was not a positive addition, for example, and discovering those Renaissance alterations to the sixth-century manuscript took a surprising amount of time.[60] The sculptor – if he deserves the name (I grant him the privilege at least) – re-carved a face in the 5th or 6th century evidently to remake a face into a human-cross composite. Such a move is related to the work of the carver who incised the cross on another late antique head.[61] The former is certainly engaged in a stronger statement and with more skill than the latter. But is that a qualitative distinction that matters? This act of replacing face with cross is brutal on one level, but perhaps one could also see this alteration as a way for an argument to be

56 So, I am arguing against the excellent, but to my mind limiting, argument in Schwarz 2012.

57 Conneller 2011, 13, provides a useful corrective for going too far to materials' side. ". . . at times, materials do seem more important in the generation of an artifact and the affects it may come to have; at other times, materials' properties are subsumed, transformed or transcended in the making of an object. As a result, a meta-theory where things are always animate only by virtue of their materials does not allow us to conceptualize the variability of past interactions."

58 No matter how hard Rauschenberg fought 'art', he was still Rauschenberg.

59 Nagel 2012, 159.

60 Bernabò 2008. And see Heilmeyer 2004, 409, on remaking of bronze in the Renaissance, too.

61 Drandaki/Papanikola/Tourta 2013, 60, and Lazaridou 2011, 147–148, and see Kristensen 2012, who stresses purification.

made about the indelibility of the cross in all reality. Justin Martyr in the 2nd century was already making claims that the cross is like a Christian DNA that was only visible after the Incarnation and Crucifixion.[62] Then we can know that all of reality is composed of this 'building block of life.' While unsubtle, this face clearly comprises the cross, that meeting of brow and nose that is one of the crosses embedded in the surface of our bodies. The victory stamp of cross and inscription demonstrates its reality in the partition of a human face into Christian quadrants.[63] Here certainly is an unstable set of practices that served to reveal skeleton and leave flesh, and both authors retain some claim to copyright here.

This bronze figurine of Dionysus likewise had its active life extended by craftsmen separated by centuries.[64] Cast in the 2nd/3rd century, it was once more elaborate than it is now, in the sense that peg holes reveal it also had a wreath and a cloak (and of course all four members), but toward the end of our period of concern, a new craftsman approached the object and revised it for new work. That new work was perhaps twofold: the presentation of Psalm 29: 3 (RSV: "The voice of the Lord is upon the waters; the God of glory thunders, the Lord, upon many waters.") as a belt resting on the hips of the god. The text begins to the right of a cross, which rests midway between navel and genitals; it does not follow the same sinuous curve of the hips, but its straight lines only serve to accentuate that sensuous s-pose of the god. If that cross might be said to be trying too hard, then the cross-shaped monograms on chest and thighs also work at sealing and inoculating.

I want to give proper credit to the person who performed these revisions, because to my mind, they are very sensitive to combining what might seem the incommensurable of sacred and sensual. And belief in innate qualities of material that relate to purity/impurity was also in play as the story related in the seventh-century *Vita* of Theodore of Sykeon indicates; a chalice and paten set was given by a deacon, but the saint perceived its taint, in its previous use in a profane context. In this version – textual naturally – once form is impressed, matter is marked, and the objects were refused. But this statuette obviously did not partake of the same unforgiving text-world analysis that Theodore directed at that silver.[65]

The statuette is a telling example of an object that was determined to retain essential aspects of its original make-up, while operating as something quite different

62 See Peers 2004.

63 Face is an essential, and under-studied aspect of late antique self-understandings. See for example, the theologian Evagrius (345–399) wrote, "So just as the mind receives the mental representations of all sensible objects, in this way it receives also that of its own organism – for this too is sensible – but of course with the exception of one's face, for it is incapable of creating a form of this within itself since it has never seen itself" [*On Thoughts* 25]. See Casiday 2013, 170, on the assimilative power of faces for Christian and Christ.

64 Cutler 2013, 172, and Althaus/Sutcliffe 2006, 50, 86, 171. On medieval revisions, see Cutler 2011 and Cutler 2010.

65 Festugière 1970, I: 36–8 (42).

at the same time. Irony has to be playing a role here, too, for that Psalm passage was also used at Epiphany for blessing the waters. The head too underwent revision, and it was opened at the crown to provide room for a small receptacle to hold, perhaps, oil or water or wine – something precious at least. One can certainly wish to know more about this piece (its context is not clear since it was found in the Don River in 1867), but the distribution of craft authorship over the surface and its interior is worth noting. While the cloak was likely missing by the time the revisions were made, the craftsman was evidently sensitive to the material qualities of the bronze and respected them to the degree of addressing the contours and surfaces of the figure, in a way that the sculptors who intervened in the marble female heads did not.

Bronze casting, materials and process, have a long and fascinating history, from Pliny's description in the *Natural History*, where he ascribed its invention to Hephaestus, to the Italian Renaissance, when the self-heroizing narrative of Cellini kept stakes at an Olympian height.[66] I cannot absolutely establish the connections, but I want to indicate the possibilities for bronze and casting in the late antique world that might have influenced choices made by the craftsman at updating and intensifying this statuette's work. Writers had long used bronze casting as a means to comprehend drawing order out of chaos, for world-making, and moreover, making humanity out of earth was also explored as a natural, even divine, precedent to this craft. The molten material used in casting was sometimes, evocatively but also in some sense literally, like blood.[67] Minerals and ores are like earth's blood, if not precisely, but blood is in the earth, and like blood does in this world, it becomes other things while retaining its nature. Hematite, for example, is obviously a bloody remnant in the earth, congealed somehow and transformed into a precious stone.[68] And if blood could be stone, the reverse was logically possible. Eusebius of Caesarea (ca. 263–339) tells of marble columns sympathetically weeping blood before the terrible martyrdom of Ennatha in 308; the stoas were forever stained, because they refused to relinquish their bloody witness. Moreover, the streets were wetted from no other sources than the secreting flagstone, and many stones wept real salty tears.

66 See Grammaccini 1987, 163–4.

67 Galen (129-ca. 200), *Peri physikon dynameon*, II.iii.83; *On the Natural Faculties*, trans. Arthur John Brock, London-New York, 1916, 131, "But nature does not preserve the original character of any kind of matter; if she did so, then all parts of the animal would be blood – that blood, namely, which flows to the semen from the impregnated female and which is, so to speak, is like the statuary's wax, a single uniform matter, subjected to the artificer. From this blood there arises no part of the animal which is as red and moist [as blood is], for bone artery, vein, nerve, cartilage, fat, gland, membrane, and marrow are not blood, though they arise from it."

68 Theophrastus, *On Stones*, 19 (37).

Their flesh suffered with her flesh.[69] (I am not claiming this as fact, only that stones always had the potential in this world for secretion, transformation and acting.)[70]

Blood was also a highly changeable material, altering according to conditions to breast milk and sperm, for example, and as a constituent material of all life, it also extended itself into the natural world again, for example as honey, all the more powerful because it is an excretion by bees, but incorruptible. Paradoxically, honey is like breast milk, though milk is a secretion, and yet both are almost miraculous nutrients.[71] Milk, however, loses it life the farther and longer it goes from the secreting body, and it becomes dangerous under those circumstances.[72] Honey has an enduring quality that appears nearly out from under constraints of time and space, like milk is, and it is closest to ambrosia in this world.[73] Blood, tears, milk all saturated the environment, throughout antiquity and into the Byzantine period, and while their outward forms changed, the vivid viscousness flowed all through the landscape.[74]

I am trying to suggest here some of the things bronze was in that world, along with other cognate phenomena that have, of course, very different meanings for us. I can indicate then some of these lexical cognates: blood was another constituent material in the world that carried with it animation as an enspiriting, enlivening element.[75] The miracle and wonder of this element are fantastic, and they likewise need to inform our view of how bronze and its working were understood in the world from extraordinary skill to world-making in its formation and renovation. Bronze workers into the Renaissance were fashioning life out of raw matter in ways God himself modeled, and they performed his acts again in the creation of form and in the infusion of forms with vivacity (literally) that made real and present the latent life of materials. This notion of God as first and perfect artist played a role in these conceptions of craft. According to Romanus the Melode in the 6th century, potting is God's act of creation of humanity, and Christ's blood was ink for writing;

69 See, generally, the tremendous work of Silverman 2009, but also Morel 1998, 43–85, specifically on the self-production of images in nature.

70 Cureton 1861, 33–4 (Syr. 35), "The atmosphere was perfectly calm and clear, when, all on a sudden, many of the columns of the porticos in the city emitted spots as it were of blood, while the market-places and the streets became sprinkled and wet as with water, although not a single drop had fallen from the heavens. And it was declared by the mouth of every one, that the stones shed tears and the ground wept; for even the senseless stones and the ground without feeling could not endure this foul and barbarous deed; and that the blood which flowed from the stones, and the earth which without any rain emitted as it were tears from its body, rebuked all these godless folk." And Bardy 1967, 151 [in the Greek version, just tears]. See Patrich 2011, 269–70.

71 See Tétart 2004.

72 Orland 2010.

73 Tétart 2004, 89.

74 Buxton 2009, 191–230.

75 See the tradition, too, that the Trojan Horse needed to bleed in order to convince the Trojans. See Burgess 2011, 211 n. 18.

in these instances, the divine is not only the maker but also the means of making. The Mandylion, Christ's miraculous self-portrait produced by his own blood (or sweat), is perhaps the very best example of God taking in hand the accuracy of his own portrait; it even had the extended agency of God in making versions of itself and acted on its own.[76]

Matter can be its own self-crafter, too, so deeply is this vivacity of making woven into the world by God. Stones again have marvelous power, as Philostratus said, one of which is to give birth.[77] That ability is an outcome perhaps of their gendering, apparent by observing different colors of the same stone.[78] Precious stones not only regenerated themselves, but as animate things, they also could demonstrate theology.[79] Gregory of Tours (538–94) related the story of three drops falling to form a gem that demonstrated orthodox thinking on the Trinity,

> While the drops were spinning in an indeterminate circle over the altar, they flowed unto the paten and immediately fused together, as if they formed one extremely beautiful gem. By an obvious deduction it was evident that this had taken place in opposition to the evil heresy of Arianism, which was hateful to God and which was spreading at that time.[80]

No other agency than matter itself is stated by Gregory; evidently water-before-gem thought out the act, planned the right moment and made evident to human bystanders what it intended. Indeed, cognitive mind is not necessary for thought or intentionality, as biologists and philosophers would claim.[81]

The Wonder of Craft

Wonder arises not only from materials, but also from intricate work, from miniature fine-work, and from the monumental – from every made thing out of our control. The wonder of the Shield of Achilles from book 19 of the *Iliad* is the first and greatest of such object emotions. Hephaestus with his robot maidens crafted the peerless shield, and to see it, as the poet did, is the wonder. Wonder or *thavma* is the uncanny animation of the shield itself. We are prepared for it by his robot apprentices, but nothing can fully cushion the blow of that incredible excess Homer relates. The *thavma* is, on one level, an aesthetic pleasure to be had from encountering a work

76 Grosdidier de Matons 1964, 33.10.6, and Peers 2004. Further on blood in western Christianity, see Jansen/Dresen 2012, and Fricke 2013.
77 Theophrastus, *On Stones*, 19 (5).
78 Theophrastus, *On Stones*, 23–4 (30–31).
79 See, for example, Gaifman 2008, 37–72.
80 Krusch 1885/1969, 496.24–7 [12]; trans. Van Dam 1998, 33.
81 See Turner 2007. From that point of view, the Trinitarian drops-to-gem of Gregory of Tours was a dramatic, theologically-oriented recapitulation of geological process.

of art, but the power to evoke wonder is not in mimesis, in capturing an evocation of life, but in the very ability of a made thing to produce life out of materials that may have seemed simply inert, inactivated.[82] In the shield is contained an impossible world, of course, and its manifold operations (including, at the end, craftsmen like architect and potter, and maybe a bard, who all do their work) are a real *mise en abyme*. And that self-sustaining generation of life within the ekphrasis is noted several times: the prediction by Hephaestus that before the shield all will marvel (18.467), and women within the scenes did (18.496), and the ploughed fields were the greatest marvel for they turned the gold black, as they overcame their own materials (18.548–9).[83] Homer's privileged vision mediates world and our imagination, and effects compound so that the description constantly shifts between real and poem in a way that is very difficult to disentangle.[84]

The history of reading of this Homeric ekphrasis traces understandings of central understandings of craft, materials, and even life itself. Some viewers within the shield itself are caught in moments of awe and wonder, before their crafted landscape and their very ability to be in such a living, crafted landscape, it would seem. But the witnesses of the shield, within the *Iliad*, are not so many, so we are led in other ways to understand how we should see and experience this made world. In book 19 (14–19), Achilles's mother delivers the armor, and the Myrmidons are fearful and look away.[85] The surfeit produced by Hephaestus's craft is not for everyone. Achilles himself experiences a range of reactions, from anger that blazes forth like flames, and then he lapses into gladness and delight.[86] This ekphrastic rendering of wonder was, of course, immensely influential throughout antiquity and into the period of Late Antiquity and up to the present day. How late antique poets took up the challenge of the shield is revealing of attitudes toward made things.[87] Achilles's elite, controlled viewing may have been a model in archaic and classical Greece, but it no longer applied in Late Antiquity. Hephaestus however is still heroic, an unattainable paragon of craftsman, who continues to stir wonder in those who experience his craft.

In Quintus Smyrnaeus's *Posthomerica* from the 3rd century, the shield is full once again of "countless other scenes upon the shield, artfully wrought by the

82 de Jong 2011.

83 See Cullhed 2014, Squire 2011, and Kokolakis 1980.

84 Squire 2011, 337.

85 See also Sprague Becker 1995, 29–30, on Aelion Theon (1st century), who presented the armor as positive for allies and as fearful for enemies.

86 Only then can he speak after he has travelled that emotional path to acceptance – and then his murderous mission. Achilles's vision is privileged, possessing, and it denies any easy access to that made, living world. See Papalexandrou 2011.

87 The conditions under which figures encounters their miraculous artifacts are also telling of attitudinal changes. Achilles and the Myrmidons do not figure as exemplars in the examples of *homerica* I briefly discuss, and book 19 is the least attested in surviving papyri of the poem, so its popularity seems to have passed in this period. See Cribiore 2001, 194.

deathless hands of cunning Hephaestus."[88] Quintus stressed the lifelikeness in a way that emphasizes also the poet's mediation; the shield here has been made, as we are not witnessing Hephaestus himself, and the life is in Quintus's own craft, one might say.[89] Quintus underlines the importance of 'know-how' when he describes Odysseus winning the armor from Ajax: metis is the key, the knowledge that is superior in performing every task.[90] The armor is lying on the floor before the competitors and judge on a sixth-century silver plate, and Ajax stands erect and principled, while Odysseus hunches over, his entire body entering the quarrel and channeling his powerful metis. Quintus has Odysseus laud the know-how of men, the intelligence of men who are able to overcome and tame the world (5.247–52). This championing of will and skills in human activities presents the very best model for the enrichment of the world that experienced doing produces.[91]

Ekphrasis is consistently dealing in verbal control of visual experience, and that trait is marked in late antique examples of the treatment of Homer's shield. Late antique writers on contemporary and still-extant monuments give some sense of a related, but not direct emulation of that great paradigm of poetic wonder. Quintus again picked up the Homeric topos, when Odysseus gives the armor of Achilles to the rightful owner, Achilles's son Neoptolemus,

> [Hephaestus took delight in making] those immortal things, which will be a great wonder to you as you look upon them, because the land and heaven and sea are artistically worked here and there on the shield, and creatures in a boundless circle are fashioned all around – they look as though they are moving, a wonder even to the immortals (7.200-4).

The wonder appears when Neoptolemus dons the armor, mounts his father's horses, and appears divine to those around him, as Deiphobus reacts in the poem – as we do, too.[92]

That oscillation between the real, made thing and the impossibility of its madeness brought about wonder, perplexity, fear and joy. In literary terms, the issue was never resolved through Late Antiquity, or in Byzantine writers either. Procopius of Gaza (ca.465–528), for example, wrote about a marvelous water clock, and his point of comparison at the outset is naturally Hephaistus and the shield, as well as Alcinous's dogs.[93]

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88 5.97–8; James 2004, 82. And see Baumbach 2007.

89 See Maciver 2012, 45–46.

90 7.200–4, Maciver 2012, 54.

91 In Nonnos of Panopolis (active first half of 5th century), *Dionysiaca*, the god is on campaign in India when the shield is delivered, unexpected and unmotivated – a clear case of Homeric emulation. See Hopkinson 1994, 23, Vian 1990, 33–42 and 260–262, and also Vian 1991. The shield is described at some length (25.384–567) as the richly wrought, cunning work of the god (383–384; *polydaidalon*, *sophon ergon*). The book ends with all gathered around and praising the fiery forge of Hephaestus.

92 Maciver 2012, 52, on 9.230–46, and 5.220–1, "The heavenly armor that covers the breast of the god resounds and flashes as brightly as fire."

93 Amato 2010, 204–212, here 204.

Through the unity of his mind and body, and through his sure action in gold and silver, Hephaestus made the handicraft as good as alive. Contemporary know-how is just as demanding of wonder, according to Procopius, and indeed it is not fiction, like Homer produced. The irresolution of the animate qualities, however, of both past and current examples of extraordinary crafting, gave that wonder its piquancy and allowed the animate quality of made things to simmer, percolate and erupt into experience for Procopius's audience, for example.

Sixth-century descriptions of Hagia Sophia even more powerfully evoke both the overwhelming madeness of everything *and* more-than-made plenitude, its excessive quality surpassing human skill *and* making it a heaven and earth.[94] In these descriptions, wonder is also evoked and programming our own reaction: for Paul the Silentiary (d. 575/80), the wonder is never-ceasing, and his prose travels the heights of Hagia Sophia to make it so.[95] Describing the crafting of this wonder intensifies the experience: the mason "weaved together with his hands" the slabs of marble that produced effects of fruits on boughs, vines and wreaths, in other words confounded orders of existence in making plant and stone indistinguishable.[96] Procopius of Caesarea (ca. 500–65) likewise emphasized his sense of wonder: "spectacle of great beauty, stupendous to those who see it and altogether incredible to those who hear of it . . . ."[97] It possesses "ineffable beauty," to the degree that the wonder of the place is simply impenetrable. God's richly wrought craft is at work here, "No matter how much they concentrate their attention on this side and that, and examine everything with contracted eyebrows, they are unable to understand the craftsmanship and always depart from there amazed by the perplexing spectacle."[98] The inevitable sense of perceptual shortcoming before this monument is perhaps shared by all who visit Hagia Sophia, though few would express that impression like Paul or Procopius did. Wonder for them, as it was for much of the Middle Ages and Early Modern period, was a *cognitive emotion*, a mixture of thought and feeling that is unsettling, irresolvable. The boundaries between the possible and impossible, made and not made, in other words the boundaries that craft breaches sometimes, undermine their categories of the world.[99]

Late antique *thavma* was expansive to all senses, and it was not restricted to that one sense, of sight, but extended across all ways of knowing the world through bodies. That relation of bodies to work was in Achilles's Shield and in other *Homerica* of Late Antiquity, and it was in that church, but it was also in the mere, in baskets and

94 On a parallel track, see Tanner 2013.

95 De Stefani 2011, 28.398–29.416; trans. Mango 1986, 82.

96 De Stefani 2011, 44.647–45.663; trans. Mango 1986, 86. On stone and metaphor, see Kiilerich 2012.

97 De Stefani 2011, I.i.27; trans. Mango 1986, 72–74.

98 De Stefani 2011, I.i.49; trans. Mango 1986, 75.

99 On these ideas, see Daston & Park 1998, 14.

boxes. It was in remade marble faces and in bronze flesh. Our bodies make judgments of scale, and the enormity of the church and tininess of the gold box both tell us what human bodies can do.[100] They especially tell us what we did not know bodies could do until we witnessed them, and then miraculous making shocks our world. The thinking hand of the craftsman is in and motivating all these phenomena. The making of small, gold reliquaries, for example, reveals in careful looking and imagining more in the object than passive description of the world on the part of the box or its maker. Such objects show that makers and made participated in producing powerful wonder through materials and their formation. Those things are never in one's hands fully, they constantly escape, captivate and make every view of the world wondrous – otherwise, they are false.[101]

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100 See Mack 2007, 46–57.

101 The last word, as is right, to Walker Bynum 1997.

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