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ABSTRACT: Focusing on a little read text of the mid-1860s, *The Cestus of Aglaia*, the essay aims to retrace the development of the new emphasis accorded the hand and «manual execution» in Ruskin's later thinking on art. In the 1840s Ruskin considered the materially productive aspect of artistic creation as consistently subordinated to “thought”, “truth” and “poetry”. However, by the mid-1860s – as a consequence both of his new attention to the relation between art, commerce and manufacture, and of his own experience in teaching workmen – he began to consider the importance of the “outline” as an elementary principle of artistic creation and in terms of ethical qualities such as “resoluteness”, “control” and “steadiness of hand”, and above all of “rightness”.

I. Art as thought and art as industry

«Every day shows me more and more the importance of the Hand». This simple but emphatic remark, its deliberate simplicity suggestive almost of a confession, dominates the opening of a lecture on *The Technics of Wood Engraving* delivered by John Ruskin in 1872, his third year as Slade Professor of Fine Art at the University of Oxford, and later

published in
Ariadne Florentina
(1876)

[\[1\]](#)

. The prominence accorded the hand and «manual execution» here is characteristic of Ruskin's later thinking on art, but marks a decided shift in emphasis with respect to his early work. The present essay aims to trace the history of that shift, focusing in particular on a little read text of the mid-1860s,

The
Cestus of Aglaia
(hereafter
CA

). Excepting his evidence before the Royal Academy Commission, printed in an official report of 1863 (XIV, 476-489), this pivotal work contained Ruskin's first public pronouncements on art since the appearance of the fifth and final volume of

Modern Painters

in 1860. Moreover the aesthetic discourse therein resumed was greatly enhanced by his political and economical writings of the late 1850s and 1860s.

The distance separating Ruskin's late assessment of the significance and status of manual execution from that found in his early work may be gauged by comparing the above remark with a theoretical distinction advanced in the first volume of *Modern Painters* (1843). In the chapter entitled *Definition of Greatness in Art* – a question that would preoccupy him throughout his entire career – Ruskin argues that all art may be characterized in terms of the asymmetrical interdependence of “language” and “thought”: «Painting, or art generally, as such, with all its technicalities, difficulties, and particular ends, is nothing but a noble and expressive language, invaluable as the vehicle of thought, but by itself nothing» (III, 86). In a version of the doctrine of the Sister Arts centred not on the work but on its creator (“ut poeta pictor”), Ruskin declares the ultimate test of greatness in the artist, whatever his medium, to be his “thought”: «It is not by the mode of representing and saying, but by what is represented and said, that the respective greatness either of the painter or the writer is to be finally determined» (III, 88). Indeed, he considers the terms “poem” and “picture” as synonyms (III, 88) and a great “painter” to be classifiable as a great “poet”: «I say that the art is greatest which conveys to the mind of the spectator, by any means whatsoever, the greatest number of the greatest ideas». Received from the highest faculties of the mind, the greatest ideas are identified as Truth, Beauty and Relation. Ideas of Power, on the other hand, though neither «mean nor unimportant», are considered to be «almost always associated with, or dependent upon» the former (III, 116). Despite some recognition of the “linguistic” specificity of the «images or thoughts» (III, 88) conveyed respectively by painters and poets, and despite subsequent acknowledgment of the dependence, in painting, of some ideas of Power on “execution”

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, the materially productive aspect of artistic creation is consistently subordinated to what is professed to be the true aim of all art, that is, to “poetry”.

By the mid-1860s Ruskin had come to regard this position, and the distinction on which it was based, as questionable. Crucial in bringing about this change of opinion had been the reflections on architectural decoration elaborated in *The Seven Lamps of Architecture* (1849) and in the first volume of *The Stones of Venice* (1851),

where he had pointed to «evidence of manual labour» as «one of the chief sources of value in ornament»(IX, 453) and had advanced a general definition of artistic value in which such labour was accounted a criterion, though one subordinate to the criteria of «thought or moral purpose» and of «technical skill»

[3]

. Yet whereas in

The Stones of Venice

Ruskin had criticised the substitution of manual labour for skill and thought as a source of evil (IX, 454), in *CA*

he blamed his own earlier disregard of manual execution, in favour of thought, for some of the tendencies he most deplored in contemporary art: «Having spoken earnestly against painting without thinking, I now find our exhibitions decorated with works of students who think without painting; and our books illustrated by scratched woodcuts, representing very ordinary people, who are presumed to be interesting in the picture, because the text tells a story about them» (XIX, 118). Not long afterwards, at Oxford, he made a point of publicly correcting (without however wholly retracting) that disregard: «I ought to proceed from the skill of art to the choice of its subject, and show you how the moral temper of the workman is shown by his seeking lovely forms and thoughts to express, as well as by the force of his hand in expression»(XX, 80).

Apart from the self-criticism itself, what is notable here is its expression in terms explicitly evoking the hand and the workman. Neither of these had figured in the definition of “execution” given in the first volume of *Modern Painters*

: «By the term “execution” I understand the right mechanical use of the means of art to produce a given end»(III, 122). Indeed, in writings of that period the hand is referred to indirectly, for instance via the Latin roots of terms such as “manipulation”, or else implicitly, in use of the word “touch”, a critical category (especially as qualified by “delicacy”) itself subordinated, however, to overriding concerns with the attainment of Truth. By contrast, reference to the workman and the hand in Ruskin’s inaugural series of Oxford lectures is a clear index of the changed perspective from which the work of art was now considered. In

Modern Painters

I, painting in all its aspects had been discussed mainly from the viewpoint of the spectator, understood as the recipient of powerful visual statements regarding natural phenomena. Such an approach might perhaps have been thought consonant with the traditional goals of higher education at the universities. Yet at Oxford Ruskin made it part of his professorial “business” to involve the students in a course of «manual practice», complementing his official lectures, with a view to enabling them wisely to fulfil the role of patrons to which their social standing called them. Whereas in

Modern Painters

execution had been associated with qualities such as «mystery» and «strangeness»

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, which by reflex ennobled the largely passive appreciation of ideally “incomprehensible” artistic effects, comparable to the arcane operations and effects of nature, now the aim was to bring his audience empirically «to understand the nature and difficulties of executive skill»(XX, 34). Whereas formerly execution had been held most meritorious where it withdrew attention «from the means and fixed [it] on the result»(III, 125), now the manual work, even of the greatest artists, was at the centre of his thinking and teaching.

At this important juncture in Ruskin’s career art was less an epitome of natural truth than a paradigm of energy

and industry in the broadest sense. Indeed, in the inaugural lectures art is explicitly glossed as «general productive and formative energy»(XX, 39) and presented as offering clues for the discovery of the laws regulating all industries. The critical demand for truth to natural fact had given way to the laborious search for «elementary principles of *right* [our emphasis]»(XX, 26), a confessedly ethical criterion including in its meaning not only mere “correctness”, but good and wise action.

II. *Labour and love*

The emphasis in Ruskin’s Oxford teaching at Oxford on the work of the artist’s hands and its broad ethical significance, and his preoccupation there with the elementary principles of art, had an immediate precedent in *CA*. This was a series of papers published in “The Art Journal” between 1865 and 1866 and apparently written at the suggestion of its editor, Ruskin’s friend, Samuel Carter Hall

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, with whom he shared an interest in spiritualism

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. Nine “chapters” appeared, the first six between January and June of 1865, the remainder between January and March of the following year, after a pause necessitated by the writing of

The Ethics of the Dust

(1865). Though the March issue ended by announcing the topic to be discussed the following month (XIX, 159), no further articles appeared. It might perhaps be thought that – like its immediate predecessors, Ruskin’s two controversial series on political economy, published in the

Cornhill

(1860) and

Fraser’s Magazine

(1862-63) –

CA

was prematurely terminated by the journal’s editor. However, there is no evidence to support such a supposition; and the series’ discontinuation has been explained by reference to the author’s urgent need for rest (XVIII, xxxvi). It is possible, on the other hand, that Ruskin himself decided to interrupt the series – which he significantly never completed nor personally collected in book form

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– because he had lost a clear sense of its overall shape and purpose. As was pointed out by his editors (XIX, lxiv), there is a marked difference in manner between the first group of chapters and the second. The latter abandons the densely allusive and digressive style of the former, whose desultory and obscure character was the subject of ostentatious apology by the author, in the articles themselves

[\[8\]](#)

, in letters to Hall

[\[9\]](#)

and again in

The Queen of the Air

(1869), which incorporates two among the earlier chapters of

CA

[\[10\]](#)

. Yet not only are the final chapters in the series written in a more assertive and less exploratory manner, they are also narrower in scope. Whereas the series begins, as we shall now see, by addressing the old question of greatness in art, it ends by discussing a more specific set of topics, centred on engraving and its social and economical role in contemporary British society.

Assuming a general evaluation of contemporary art the converse of that previously advocated in the name of Turner and informing *Modern Painters* in its entirety, CA starts out by asking why modern art, despite the conspicuous talent, technical expertise and moral sensibility of its exponents, nevertheless lacks “greatness”. This immediately raises still more fundamental and perplexing questions, relating to the essence of “good” art and the difficulty of determining the principles governing its production and distinguishing it from “bad”. However, the spirit of Ruskin’s enquiry is not merely theoretical, nor yet critical (

CA

is not an appendix to

Modern Painters

), but practical and concerned with concrete educational issues. His declared intent indeed is

«to try if there may not be determined some of the simplest laws which are binding on Art practice and judgment. Beginning with elementary principle, and proceeding upwards as far as guiding laws are discernible, I hope to show that if we do not yet know them, there are at least such laws to be known, and that it is of a deep and intimate importance to any pupil, especially to the English at this time, that their children should be sincerely taught whatever arts they learn, and in a riper age become capable of a just choice and wise pleasure in the accomplished works of the artist»(XIX 57-58).

Equally, though, CA is not didactic in the sense applicable, for example, to *Elements of Drawing* (1856), the direct fruit of Ruskin’s activities, from the mid-1850s, as drawing master at the Working Men’s College in London

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. Rather, as initially envisaged,

CA

was to consist in an almost official enquiry, somewhat on the lines of the Parliamentary Select Committees before which he had himself appeared

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, but of unprecedented specificity and scope. As it were on behalf of the nation, Ruskin would collect and edit the testimony of the leading artists of the day with regard to those principles which not only underlay the practice of

artists, art-teachers and critics alike, but, in his own mind, informed right social and economic conduct.

For more directly and evidently than on the reflections on architectural ornament mentioned above, Ruskin's renewed discussion of specifically artistic questions in *CA* drew on his recent investigations of the elements and first principles of political economy. He had been provoked into this new field of enquiry by the public rhetoric surrounding the monumental Manchester Art Treasures Exhibition of 1857, which he countered in two lectures given that same year at Manchester itself and published under the title

The Political Economy of Art

[\[13\]](#)

. Over the following two years, in part no doubt as a result of the experience of teaching “working men” to draw and in renitent response to their specific expectations and demands, he turned his attention to the relation between art and industry, design and manufacture, polemically undermining popular assumptions on the subject in an intensive series of public lectures delivered around the country and immediately collected in

The Two Paths

(1859)

[\[14\]](#)

. By the early 1860s, however, Ruskin's interest in politics and economics, and even in industry, was unconditioned by specifically artistic concerns, as demonstrated by the two discontinued series of articles referred to earlier, afterwards republished as

Unto this Last

(1862) and

Munera Pulveris

(1872), which together constituted his controversial

début

as an out-and-out theorist of political economy.

Of particular relevance here is the emergence in the writings of this period, in which Ruskin came to devise a theory of economy explicitly defined in terms of “labour” [\[15\]](#), of concepts directly evoking the work of the hand. In

The Political Economy of Art

(1857), for example, Ruskin's exposition of the first of four phases in the economic process as applied to art – the discovery of men possessing artistic genius

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– is followed by remarks on a “lower” class of art workers, «artificers in various manual trades, who, without possessing the order of genius which you would desire to devote to higher purposes, yet possess wit, and humour, and sense of colour, and fancy for form—all commercially valuable as quantities of intellect, and all more or less expressible in the lower arts of iron-work, pottery, decorative sculpture, and such like»(XVI, 36). Again, in an

Addendum

to the published lectures, entitled

Right to Public Support

and immediately concerning the “masses”, Ruskin stresses the importance of education as a preventive measure against government interference, especially recommending the early learning of some “manual trade” as a means of ensuring self-support later in life. His remarks here however are intended to apply to men of all ranks, including the upper classes, and to highlight the practical orientation in his view urgently required by modern education:

«I believe all youths, of whatever rank, ought to learn some manual trade thoroughly; for it is quite wonderful how much a man's views of life are cleared by the attainment of the capacity of doing any one thing well with his hands and arms ... Then, in literary and scientific teaching, the great point of economy is to give the discipline of it through knowledge which will immediately bear on practical life»(XVI, 111).

Ruskin would again argue for, and to some extent put into practice, such a view of education during his years as Slade Professor at Oxford [\[17\]](#) .

In the public lectures of 1858 and 1859, evocations of the manual continually intertwine with arguments concerning the ideal unity of the mental and bodily faculties, the essential unity of art, high and low, fine and mechanical, and the dignity of all engaged in its production, whether artists, amateurs or “workmen”. Such manifold unity is generally presented as guaranteed by the work of the hand, a notion in whose interpretation Ruskin oscillates between long-standing emphasis on subtlety, delicacy of touch [\[18\]](#) and power (concepts harking back to his thinking in *Modern Painters I*) and an intensifying appraisal of manual execution as a form of “labour”.

For example, in February 1858 Ruskin advised a «fashionable and crowded audience» (XVI, lx) in Tunbridge Wells of the need, at all levels of art production, for a balance of «heart-passion with hand-power». For in his view «All art worthy the name is energy—neither of the human body alone, nor of the human soul alone, but of both united, one guiding the other: good craftsmanship and work of the fingers joined with good emotion and work of the heart». Currently, however, amateurs erred in neglecting «manual toil» in favour of fancy and sensibility, while workmen expended their energy in mere «trick or habit of fingers», to the detriment of their art, as of their soul. «The highest art unites [...] the action of the hand at its finest, with that of the heart at its fullest»(XVI, 385-386).

A year later, at the Manchester School of Art, the hand and the heart, with the significant addition of the head,

were the criteria used to distinguish, while yet uniting, three forms of productive energy: Manufacture, Art and Fine Art. «Anything proceeding from the hand of man is manufacture; but it must have proceeded from his hand only, acting mechanically and uninfluenced at the moment by direct intelligence». Art, on the other hand, «is the operation of the hand and the intelligence of man together», of which Ruskin's examples include the «art of making machinery» and «of building ships». Lastly, «Fine Art is that in which the hand, the head and the *heart* of man go together». The unifying factor was now more explicitly recognized as the hand: this, he stressed, «must be at the bottom of everything», but, as «the subtlest of all machines», «must also go to the top of everything». «Thoroughly perfect art is that which proceeds from the heart, which involves all the noble emotion;—associates with these the head, yet as inferior to the heart; and the hand, yet as inferior to the heart and head; and thus brings out the whole man»(XVI, 294-295)

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It is not possible here to give a detailed account of how Ruskin's concept of manual work was further enriched by the heterodox theory of economy he elaborated in the early 1860s. What must be stressed is his obdurate rethinking, in opposition to the received ideology of material gain and competition for profit, of traditional economic concepts such as "value", "wealth", "price", "property", "liberty" and "usefulness". His alternative conception of economic existence is summed up in the celebrated dictum «There is no Wealth but Life», where the concept of "Life" was glossed as "including all its powers of love, of joy, and of admiration» (XVII, 105) and again as comprehending «in its signification the happiness and power of the entire human nature, body and soul» (XVII, 149) [\[20\]](#) . On this assumption, all economical principles, such as labour, industry and commerce must be regulated by Love or «helpful influence ... over the lives of others» [\[21\]](#) .

As unconventional as Ruskin's understanding of the basic concepts of economic thought was the mode in which he communicated that understanding. In the two texts dealing specifically with the principles of political economy, but especially in *Munera Pulveris*, he began experimentally to combine a systematically analytic approach, proceeding from one (re)definition to the next, with a more oblique manner of expression. This entailed the construction of intricate genealogies of key terms, modelled on the etymological method of mythological analysis practised by Max Müller [\[22\]](#) , and complex imaginative reconstitutions of the great literary texts and mythic narratives of the European tradition. A growing «sense of the unintelligibility of things» [\[23\]](#) expressed itself in the conviction that «the best wisdom of the world has been spoken in ... strange enigmas»

[\[24\]](#)

and lay veiled behind the figures and fables of a vast inheritance of teaching that included the sapiential books of the Old Testament, the New Testament parables, Greek and Egyptian mythology, Plato, Homer, Hesiod, Chaucer, Dante, Shakespeare, Spenser and Goethe

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It is no coincidence, then, that the first appearance in Ruskin's published writings of the figure of Aglaia, one of the *Charites* or Graces and the tutelary divinity of *CA*, should have been in the chapter on commerce in *Munera Pulveris* (XVII, 225-227). Aglaia (meaning "splendour, beauty, brightness") is there presented as an aspect of Charis, the implications of whose name, comprehending all forms of gracious gesture and – Ruskin stresses – «deed», are expressed in a multilingual family of terms including "gratia", "gratitude", "cher", "cherish", "charité", "charity", and even "choir" and "choral"(XVII, 224-227). Aglaia personifies the economic principles of «household strength» and «benevolent and affectionate social action»

[\[26\]](#)

which render commerce the contrary of inhumane and mercenary (XVII, 222). Furthermore, by a genuinely mythopoeic process of division and conflation, Ruskin follows Hesiod's development of one Homeric tradition

[\[27\]](#)

and identifies Aglaia as the «true wife of Vulcan, or Labour» (XVII, 226), in opposition to Aphrodite

[\[28\]](#)

, the wife of Hephaestus in a different Homeric tradition

[\[29\]](#)

. Ruskin indeed interprets Aphrodite as a later and degraded manifestation of Grace, who gains in «mere beauty» what she loses in «sincerity of function» and in patience, and who (in becoming the lover of Ares) joins herself to «war and to the enmities of men instead of to labour and their services». Aglaia, on the other hand, thanks to her connection with Hephaestus, symbolizes manual work as «instant and humble» service and that dignity which renders commerce and the useful arts a worthy form of employment even for the higher classes (XVII, 226).

III. *The black line*

CA's cryptic title, the first in a series of such among Ruskin's later writings [\[30\]](#), carries the association of Aglaia and Aphrodite just alluded to one step further. Ruskin states the source of his title to have been the *Iliad*

, from which for epigraph he chose the passage in which Aphrodite presents her magic "cestus" or girdle to Hera, so as to enable her to seduce Zeus

[\[31\]](#)

. Yet nowhere in the

Iliad

is there mention of Aglaia, and though her mythological "original", Charis, does appear there, as the wife of Hephaestus, she has no connection with the "cestus". Ruskin's re-attribution of this to Aglaia, entirely unexplained in his text

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, is elucidated by reference to the passage from

Munera Pulveris

examined above: as we saw, this explicitly links Aglaia with Charis and makes implicit reference to the marriage of Aphrodite and Hephaestus in the *Odyssey*

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While apparently fixed on for his title from the start, the meaning of the re-ascribed “cestus” seems, initially at least, to have been obscure to Ruskin himself, thereby typifying the oblique and unsystematic method of enquiry, by visionary probing of the fabulations of tradition, which he had begun to adopt in *Munera Pulveris*. Of his Homeric “motto”, indeed, he says that it was chosen «partly in memory of these outcast fancies of the great master: and partly for the sake of a meaning which we shall find as we go on»(XIX, 65)

[\[33\]](#)

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Not one, but many meanings emerge as the papers progress. Firstly, the “cestus” – in which, as described by Homer, «all things are wrought» [\[34\]](#) – seems to signify the unifying and effectual power of the fundamental principles of art that form the primary object of Ruskin’s «labour of seeking» in this work (XIX, 59). Those principles are unifying both in the sense of binding practice and of equating the domains of art and life (XIX, 139), through manifold conjunction of love and labour and «harmony of hand and thought»(XIX, 74). As with the unity of art expounded in the lectures of 1858 and 1859, the unity of principle represented by Aglaia’s “cestus” is guaranteed by the work of the hand, in reverential, serviceable and productive action, guided by head and heart. The ineffable “performativity” of this principle, the ethical and technical discipline in deed it presumes, is aptly symbolized by the O famously drawn by Giotto with one unfaltering movement of the hand, unaided by the compass

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, and alluded to in the first chapter as the arithmetical epitome of extant verbal «contributions» by the great masters «to our practical knowledge of the principles of Art»(XIX, 63). Later in the same chapter, by virtue of a “weakness” that is simply the defect of its moral strength and indicates the sense of subordination and failure that is a necessary condition of right doing, the hand is explicitly presented as the practical exponent of an «entirely human art», as contrasted with the mechanical feats of modern engineering, magnificent in technical achievement and power but severely limited in function and

un

graciously triumphant. Taking a stationary locomotive as anti-type of the hand in this capacity, Ruskin asks:

«What would the men who thought out this—who beat it out—who touched it into its polished calm of power, who set it to its appointed task, and triumphantly saw it fulfil this task to the utmost of their will—feel or think about this weak hand of mine, timidly leading a little stain of watercolour, which I cannot manage into an imperfect shadow of something else—mere failure in every motion, and endless disappointment; what, I repeat, would these

Iron-dominant Genii think of me? and what ought I to think of them»(XIX, 33) [\[36\]](#) .

The second emergent meaning of Aglaia's "cestus" is that of a fabric whose «ground-threads»(XIX, 72), or of a chain whose "links" (XIX, 107), are constituted by the virtues to whose "law" art is subject. These are said to be "easily definable", but as expounded by Ruskin they turn out to have the dangerous tendency of transmuting into vices when they dissociate themselves from the inter-dependence that is the source of their power, thereby lapsing into incontinent self-satisfaction and seductive display (in this too being figured by the "cestus", as the proper attribute, however, of Aphrodite).

Lastly, and most importantly for the development of Ruskin's thinking on and teaching of art, the "cestus" may be taken to symbolize "line". This is treated both as a propaedeutic device and also, though less explicitly than subsequently at Oxford, as a formal element in the language of accomplished art, in particular of engraving, and again as eloquent testimony of the hand's humanity.

In the first two articles, largely concerned with the didactic implications of the search for the elementary principles of art, line figures as "outline". The simplest practical considerations are however overwhelmed by vast questions concerning the ultimate meaning and use of art and also, as already noted, by the dispiriting lack of clear teaching and elementary example on the part of the great artists of the past. The first «stepping-stone at the shore of this brook of despond and difficulty»(XIX, 66) is offered by the supposed fact that «Most masters agree (and I believe they are right) that the first thing to be taught to a pupil is how to draw an outline of such things that can be outlined»(XIX, 67). It must be pointed out, however, that the consensus whose existence Ruskin here asserts and whose validity he underwrites, was not in fact wholly consonant with his own prior practice as a teacher of drawing, above all as codified in *The Elements of Drawing*. Here, as in his classes at the Working Men's College, exercises in outline drawing, explicitly presented as serving to develop «steadiness» and «firmness of hand» (XV, 31), were not absolutely the first required of the student, but were subordinated to exercises in shading and drawing by shade alone, in accordance with a theory in which outlines were of secondary and purely instrumental relevance, in so far as they were not natural phenomena, but abstractions from optical experience, famously defined as the presentation to the eye of «an arrangement of patches of different colours, variously shaded»(XV, 27). Tantalising evidence of a subsequent change in Ruskin's estimate of the import and didactic role of outline drawing comes from a stray speculative remark made in the course of his 1859 lecture on

Modern Manufacture and Design

and concerning the possibility of teaching drawing by reference to «conventional» Egyptian and Greek outline, seen as the expression of vital superstition and reverence (XVI, 330).

This change of estimate is reflected in *CA* too. Not only is it there claimed that outline drawing is universally acknowledged to be the best form of elementary exercise, but, of the two possible types of outline distinguished by Ruskin – the «soft», in chalk or lead, and the «hard», a «firm line of equal darkness» produced by the pen or by means of an engraving tool on wood or metal – it is the second, and as it were more explicitly linear, for which he opts, without hesitation and again without explanation [\[37\]](#). Christened the «black outline», this is additionally characterized as «simple and open-hearted» and as not endeavouring «to escape into mist»

[\[38\]](#)

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«A pencil line may be obscurely and undemonstrably wrong; false in a cowardly manner, and without confession: but the ink line, if it goes wrong at all, goes wrong with a will, and may be convicted at our leisure, and put to such shame as its black complexion if capable of» (XIX, 67) [\[39\]](#).

Though immediate and decided, Ruskin's preference for the black outline leads to further perplexity, concerning the kind of point the outline should be traced with, and what it should be employed to draw. Picturing his dismay at the inappropriate or impossibly difficult objects demanded by an imaginary group of pupils [\[40\]](#), Ruskin appeals directly to the artists whose comments the articles are intended to elicit, asking them to specify what qualities the black outline should possess, and in particular how thick and how varied it should be. «My own idea of an elementary outline», he states, «is that it should be unvaried; distinctly visible; not thickened towards the shaded sides of the object

[\[41\]](#)

; nor express any exaggeration of aerial perspective, nor fade at the further side of a cup as if it were the further side of a crater of a volcano; and therefore in objects of ordinary size, show no gradation at all, unless where the real outline disappears, as in soft contours and folds». Indeed, indicating Dürer and Holbein as models, he goes so far as to query «whether we ought not to resolve that the line should never gradate itself at all, but terminate quite bluntly!» (XIX, 69).

While awaiting «reception of communications bearing upon» his first two articles, Ruskin embarked, in the third, on «another part of the inquiry», which developed into the series of representations of artistic virtues and vices referred to above. Provocatively taking as his text the «serenely crushing» assessment of his own work by Dürer – «Sir, it cannot be better done»—which he had quoted in his Prefatory article, in contrastive illustration of the lack of confidence in their art shown by modern artists (XIX, 52), Ruskin proceeded to explore the nature of Modesty, understood as «“the measuring virtue,” the virtue of *modes* or limits» [\[42\]](#). In his view of her, Modesty is the opposite of Shamefacedness: she is unafraid of «being pleased, when there is cause, with her own rightness»,

because essentially self-forgetful and «full of wonder» at the doings of others. «But the right to such» serene confidence and self-congratulation, Ruskin notes, «depends on continual reverence, and manifold sense of failure»(XIX, 74).

In composing this discourse on Modesty, Ruskin seems to have formed the plan to deal successively with other relevant virtues or values, starting with Patience and continuing with its “opposites” Haste and Liberty. In following out this plan, Ruskin independently resumed discussion of the “hard line”, no replies to his queries concerning which had been forthcoming. In a significant shift of emphasis, however, this was now considered less as an elementary than as the graphic element – the «black line» – distinctive of engraving, increasingly the focus of Ruskin’s reflections in this work, as noted earlier. Modern engraving indeed is singled out as the «field of labour»(XIX, 101) that specifically reveals the dangers inherent in the virtues of Patience and Liberty, by providing examples of a form of artistic activity whose extreme, indeed masterly, expenditure of technical effort is disproportionate to the ends on which it is employed, resulting, despite the “democratic” principles of wide-spread distribution and consumption on which it is predicated, in nothing less artistic slavery. In the face of the incalculable proliferation and precision and inestimable ethical cost of the lines and dots revealed by taking a magnifying glass to an engraving after Turner, Ruskin asserts: «It may be with lines as with soldiers: three hundred, knowing their work thoroughly, may be stronger than three thousand less sure of their game»(XIX, 92). Similarly, in his seventh chapter, he compares a modern engraved vignette with work by Holbein or Dürer employing the same number of lines but with «full intention of thought in every touch» and possessed of «real enduring and educational power»(XIX, 139-140), and declares: «The virtue of Art, as of life, is that no line shall be in vain»(XIX, 139).

The increasing focus on engraving develops Ruskin’s concept of line in terms of qualities such as “resoluteness”, “control” and “steadiness of hand”, and above all of “rightness”. It is significant, in this regard, that in the chapter on Liberty, Ruskin should once more allude to the O of Giotto, though not now as an example of non-existent testimony, nor yet of technical bravura, but rather of manual discipline, and as antithetical to Freedom as a supposed quality of art. «The qualities of hand and eye needful to do this are the first conditions of artistic craft». Such a feat is impossible if the hand is allowed “freedom”. «So far from being free, it must be under a control as absolute and accurate as if it were fastened to an inflexible bar or steel [43] . And yet it must move, under this necessary control, with perfect, untortured serenity of ease». Ruskin is categorical: «That is the condition of all good work whatsoever. All freedom is error. Every line you lay down is either right or wrong: it may be timidly and awkwardly wrong, or fearlessly and impudently wrong ... If right, it most assuredly is not a “free” line, but an intensely continent, restrained, and considered line; and the action of the hand in laying it is just as decisive, and just as “free” as the hand of a first-rate surgeon in a critical incision»(XIX, 120-121)

[44]

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Modern engraving not only exemplifies work in which the essential qualities of art are absent or perverted. It also

directly raises questions of political economy, by reason of its wide availability, waste of precious human resources and degraded function; and because it generates an endless, downward-spiralling cycle of perplexity and error, by «dividing the attention, and continually leading us restlessly to demand new subjects of interest, while the old are as yet not half exhausted», and by encouraging satisfaction with inferior and minor art, rather than aspiration towards «great public works» (XIX, 137). Indeed, when Ruskin resumed *CA* in January 1866, his concern was less with the intrinsic nature of the “black line” than with the use to which it should be put «at this present time, in England», noting that «the increasing interest and usefulness of our illustrated books render this an inquiry of very great social and educational importance» (XIX, 137). This new phase of enquiry produced three more chapters, culminating with one dedicated to the positive uses and powers of three “kinds” of engraving, actually three different modes of illustration specific to engraving, loosely associated with differences in technique: «pure line engraving», presumably on steel (Ruskin’s examples are Turner’s vignettes in Samuel Rogers’

Poems

); wood-cutting and etching for serious purpose, accounted the «most purely intellectual of all art»; and dramatic caricature (XIX, 150-159).

IV. *The art of scratch*

As seen at the start of this essay, in his Oxford lectures on engraving Ruskin publicly acknowledged his growing sense of the importance of the hand. As also seen, this sense was from the beginning manifest, though not explicitly stated, in Ruskin’s work at the University, which he at once determined should involve not only lectures on the theory of art but classes in «manual practice». Noteworthy in this respect is the fact that in presenting his planned course of teaching in his Inaugural Ruskin referred to the «arts with which I have special concern» as «the manual arts» (XX, 50), an aesthetic category not, it would seem, commonly associated with fine art at this time [\[45\]](#)

¹ Ruskin’s intention seems to have been to blur the distinction between Fine Art, Art and Manufacture which he had earlier employed in formulating a theory of the unity of art, in a further, and more extreme, drive towards unity of conception.

In what did the importance of the hand consist? And how did Ruskin understand the expression «the manual arts»? The statement from *Ariadne Florentina* with which we began is carefully qualified: «Of the hand as Servant, observe,—not of the hand as Master». And this qualifying statement is itself glossed as follows:

«For there are two great kinds of manual work: one in which the hand is continually receiving and obeying orders; the other in which it is acting independently, or even giving orders of its own. And the dependent and submissive hand is a noble hand; but the independent or imperative hand is a vile one. That is to say, as long as the pen, or chisel, or other graphic instrument is moved under the direct influence of mental attention, and obeys orders of the brain, it is working nobly; – the moment it moves independently of them, and performs some habitual dexterity of its own, it is base» (XXII, 347).

At first sight this may appear little more than a variation on the theme of the asymmetrical relation between “language” and “thought” posited in *Modern Painters* I, or indeed on that of the hierarchy of modes in which a work of art may have humanity “put into it” and so possess value—first, «thought and moral purpose»; second, «technical skill»; third, «bodily industry»—advanced in support of the definition of art from the first volume of *Stones of Venice*

(IX, 456) cited earlier. However, if considered in the light of Ruskin’s changing sense of the significance of the productive process in understanding and appreciating art, then it is clear that the qualities of manual submission and subordination prescribed in

Ariadne Florentina

are to be interpreted in a way that dissociates the position expressed in this work from that put forward in his earlier writings (as it is also clear that the hierarchy of modes postulated in

Stones

itself represents an advance on the language-thought dichotomy of

Modern Painters

).

The hand of the artist is no longer regarded as the mere executor of pre-conceived ideas or thoughts. Indeed, it is to serve both head and heart, to be the expression of a workman who both thinks and feels. But above all its submission is a condition of its power to bring about the material embodiment in the artwork of thought and ethical stance, through «bodily industry» that is in itself thoughtful and ethical. As the instrument of meaningful and considerate action, incorporating intellectual and moral purpose, the hand may be likened to the figure of the humble, but gracious and benevolent Aglaia and to related literary figures, such as Shakespeare’s Ariel, which in *Munera Pulveris*

symbolize generous service and faithful labour (XVII, 258-259).

As to the manual arts, Ruskin significantly does not attempt to define, in the sense of enumerating, them. His

primary interest seems to be in evincing the quality shared by any arts whose products exhibit a record of mind and moral disposition through the transforming work of the hand on materials. The closest he gets to a definition is in fact the statement: «I have simply to tell you, that the manual arts are as accurate exponents of ethical state as other modes of expression»(XX, 77).

In conclusion, Ruskin's conception of the manual arts may be brought into sharper focus by considering the reason why his emphatic statement regarding the importance of the hand should have occurred in a lecture on engraving. What was it about engraving, in Ruskin's conception of this 'minor' art form [\[46\]](#) , that made it an especially significant vehicle for his teaching at Oxford?

In *CA*, as we saw, Ruskin had stressed the socio-economical importance of engraving; and the point was amply reiterated in his university lectures. In his Inaugural, for instance, he painted a graphic picture of engraving's potential for good, but also of the actual harm operated through excessive availability of printed illustrations for popular consumption [\[47\]](#) . In *Ariadne Florentina*, too, – in which, significantly, a long passage from *CA* was reused

[\[48\]](#)

– engraving is said to be “one of the most powerful existing influences of education and sources of pleasure among civilized people” (XXII, 304). Yet aside from its social and economical relevance, Ruskin had by now come to see engraving as the “manual art”

par excellence

. It was the art that was most immediately defined by the transforming work of the hand, in its most elementary manifestation, the linear mark traced on a surface. In addition, as a linear mark

incised

in resistant material the engraved line was not only, like any line, «the simplest work of art you can produce»(XXII, 320), but possessed the character of permanence, valuable in so far as it challenged the workman to produce a significant and worthy record of his mind and feeling. As «the art of scratch», «engraving means, primarily, making a permanent cut or furrow in something»(XXII, 306), or «essentially the cutting into a solid substance for the sake of making your ideas as permanent as possible,—graven with an iron pen in the Rock for ever»(XXII, 320)

[\[49\]](#)

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These qualities rendered engraving «a prior art»(XXII, 304) or «first of the arts»(XXII, 305). This priority assumed various inflections. Not only did engraving particularly lend itself to analysis in terms of elementary linguistic forms, but through its typically illustrative status induced focus on the complementary relation between specific tools and materials. Moreover, engraving could be considered a prior art in the sense of basic to, and explanatory of, the essence and progress of other “major”, public manifestations of art, such as sculpture and architecture: «the art of engraving is so manifestly, at Florence, though not less essentially elsewhere, a basis of style both in architecture

and in sculpture, that it is absolutely necessary I should explain to you in what the skill of the engraver consists, before I can define with accuracy that of more admired artists»(XXII, 304) [\[50\]](#) .

The engraved line as interpreted in *Ariadne Florentina* inherits the qualities of decision and discipline predicated of the generic “hard” or “black” line in *CA* (itself, we saw, increasingly understood in terms of the engraved line as the series progressed). The engraved line was indeed characterized as deliberate «without repentance»and as «conclusive», not «experimental»(XXII, 323):

«in wood and steel, you ought to see that every line has been costly; but observe, costly of deliberative, no less than athletic or executive power. The main use of the restraint which makes the line difficult to draw, is to give time and motive for deliberation in drawing it, and to ensure its being the best in your power»(XXII, 322-323).

Ruskin’s sense of the precise and deliberate character of the engraved line was enhanced by his putting into practice at Oxford the scheme of elementary study tentatively proposed in *CA*. Indeed, not only was the first exercise required of the students attending his class an exercise in outline drawing

[\[51\]](#)

, but this actually consisted in copying an enlarged reproduction of a detail from a 15th

century Italian engraving

[\[52\]](#)

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More significantly still, Ruskin’s rethinking of line and engraving influenced his general view of the art of the past. Indeed, his sense of the priority of engraving was also the outcome of a theoretical analysis of art in terms of formal elements. As we saw, this had been initiated in *CA* through the discussion of line in engraving, but in the earlier Oxford lectures it had acquired a new historical dimension. In the inaugural series he had proposed visualizing the development of Western art in the form of a hexagonal diagram, a «map»at once formal and (broadly) chronological of the «great schools»(XX, 128):

«You have, thus, in your hexagonal scheme, the expression of the universal manner of advance in painting: Line first; then line enclosing flat spaces coloured or shaded; then the lines vanish, and the solid forms are seen within the spaces... But as you see, this advance may be made, and has been made, by two different roads; one advancing always through colour, the other through light and shade»(XX, 139).

«Then, lastly, -- the schools of colour advance steadily, till they adopt from those of light and shade whatever is compatible with their own power, -- and then you have perfect art, represented centrally by that of the great Venetians»(XX, 127).

The hexagon, however, also provided a neat overview of the syllabus of theoretical and practical study Ruskin proposed:

«And I wish you with your own eyes and fingers to trace, and in your own progress follow, the method of advance exemplified by these great schools. I wish you to begin by getting command of line, that is to say, by learning to draw a steady line [\[53\]](#) , limiting with absolute correctness the form or space you intend it to limit; to proceed by getting command over flat tints, so that you may be able to fill the spaces you have enclosed, evenly, either with shade or colour, according to the school you adopt; and finally to obtain the power of adding such fineness of gradation within the masses, as shall express the roundings, and their characters of texture»(XX, 18-129)

In *Ariadne Florentina* the dialectical complexity and historical implications of this scheme of formal elements was partially abandoned in favour of a simpler and more distinct subdivision of artists into the three classes or «utterly separate provinces, though in contact at their borders, of

The Delineators;

The Chiaroscurists; and

The Colourists» (XXII, 311).

Within this revised and largely ahistorical scheme [\[54\]](#) engravers held a typical or exemplary status within the class of Delineators. Delineators were indeed defined as «essentially engravers, the engraved line being the best means of delineation»(XXII, 311). «The quality of a pen drawing», Ruskin asserted,

«is to be produced easily,—deliberately, always, but with a point that *glides* over the paper. Engraving, on the contrary, requires always force, and its virtue is that of a line produced by pressure, or by blow of a chisel. It involves therefore, always, ideas of power and dexterity, but also of restraint; and the delight you take in it should involve the understanding of the difficulty the workman dealt with»(XXII, 322).

Thus all engraved work included «two definite ethical characters»: «It is Athletic; and it is Resolute. Add one more; that it is obedient;—in their infancy the nurse, but in their youth the slave, of the higher arts; servile both in the mechanism and labour of it, and in its function of interpreting the schools of painting as superior to itself»(XXII, 323-324)

Ethical qualities such as these, with their physical and moral implications [\[55\]](#) , made the engraved line the paradigm of “rightness” in art. In discussing execution in the first volume of *Modern Painters*

Ruskin had stated that it was «in the perfection and precision of the instantaneous line that the claim to immortality is laid». Yet the specifically linear character of such perfection and precision had been little more than a rhetorical

flourish, while these qualities had been explicitly dissociated from more commonly manifested and inferior modes of technical excellence, in so far as they were attributable to «a far higher power than that of mere execution,—knowledge of truth» (III, 122). Thirty years later manual precision in actual delineation had itself become a kind of truth, in so far as it manifested ethical purpose. With a typical show of linguistic inventiveness and etymological sapience, Ruskin now opposed the term “dexterity” (previously, in the main, a negative one in his vocabulary, but now revalued for its literal meaning of «right-handedness») to the expressly coined «sinisterity»: «For indeed we want such a word in speaking of modern art; it is all full of sinisterity. Hands independent of brains;—the left hand, by division of labour, not knowing what the right does,—still less what it ought to do» (XXII, 347-348).

NOTES

¹ References to Ruskin's writings by volume and page number(s) only are to the Library Edition of *The Works of John Ruskin*, ed. by E. T. Cook and A. Wedderburn, vols. I-XXXIX, London, George Allen, 1903-1912.

[1] *Ariadne Florentina* was first published in separate numbers from November 1873 to September 1876.

[2] «It is not, however, always easy, either in painting or literature, to determine where the influence of language stops, and where that of thought begins. Many thoughts are so dependent upon the language in which they are clothed, that they would lose half their beauty if otherwise expressed» (III, 89).

[3] IX, 456: «All art which is worth its room in this world ... is art which proceeds from an individual mind, working through instruments which assist, but do not supersede, the muscular action of the human hand, upon the materials which most tenderly receive, and most securely retain, the impressions of such human labour».

[4] In the chapter *Of Ideas of Power, as they are Dependent upon Execution*, the most important qualities of execution are held to be truth, simplicity and mystery, followed by inadequacy, decision, velocity and strangeness: «By the first three attention is withdrawn from the means and fixed on the result: by the last three, withdrawn from the result, and fixed on the means» (III, 125).

[5] See Ruskin's letters of 9 and 13 September 1864 to Miss Bell, headmistress of the girls' school at Winnington Hall, Northwich, where he frequently stayed and informally taught in this period: «The children may perhaps be amused by enclosed note [lost] from Ed. of Art Journal»; and «I am glad you and the children think I

ought to write now & then for Art Un[ion] for I think so too» (*The Winnington Letters. John Ruskin's Correspondence with Margaret Alexis Bell and the Children at Winnington Hall*, ed. by V. A. Burd, Cambridge (Mass.), Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1969, pp. 515, 516).

[6] In early April 1864 Hall and his wife had introduced Ruskin to the American medium Daniel Dunglas Home, a séance of whose he had attended on 15 June of that year (see *Christmas Story. John Ruskin's Venetian Letters of 1876-77*, ed. by V. A. Burd, Newark, University of Delaware Press / London & Toronto, Associated University Presses, 1990, pp. 53, 59).

[7] All the articles except those later inserted in other works (see below) were reprinted in the second volume of miscellaneous writings published by George Allen under the title *On the Old Road* in 1885. The series was reprinted in its entirety in vol. XIX of the Library Edition of Ruskin's Works in 1905.

[8] XIX, 135: «In recommencing this series of papers, I may perhaps take permission briefly to remind the reader of the special purpose which my desultory way of writing, (of so vast a subject I find it impossible to write otherwise than desultorily), may cause him sometimes to lose sight of ...». Their obscurity and consciously experimental status is emphasised by later commentators: : see XIX, lxiv; D. Birch, *Ruskin's Myths*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1988, pp. 79-80; T. Hilton, *John Ruskin. The Later Years*, London & New Haven, Yale University Press, 2000, pp. 83-85.

[9] On 1 April 1865 Ruskin wrote to Hall: «If you bear with this one more paper of nonsense, I hope the next will be somewhat readable. Or, are you getting into despair, and thinking you didn't [sic] know what you were to be in for?» (*The Winnington Letters*, cit., pp. 540-541). The absence of editorial comment within the journal itself makes it impossible to verify the impatience and dissatisfaction apparently imputed to Hall in this letter.

[10] XIX, 408: «I give now, for such farther illustration as they contain of the points I desire most to insist upon with respect both to education and employment, a portion of the series of notes published some time ago in the *Art Journal*

, on the opposition between Modesty and Liberty, and the unescapable law of wise restraint. I am sorry that they are written obscurely;—and it may be thought affectedly—but the fact is, I have always had three different ways of writing: one, with the single view of making myself understood, in which I necessarily omit a great deal of what comes into my head; another, in which I say what I think ought to be said, in what I suppose to be the best words I can find for it; (which is in reality an affected style—be it good or bad); and my third way of writing is to say all that comes into my head for my own pleasure, in the first words that come, retouching them afterwards into (approximate) grammar. These notes for the *Art Journal* were so written; and I like them myself of course; but ask the reader's pardon for their confusedness». Compare the report in the «*Pall Mall Gazette*» for November 24th

1884 of remarks by Ruskin on a passage from the chapter on Patience which he read at a lecture that year: «... Mr. Ruskin apologized for the over-allusive style in which much of his analysis was written, for "twenty years ago I was always fond of showing that I knew a good deal and had read a good deal"» (XXXIII, 525).

[11] On Ruskin's teaching at the Working Men's College, an educational experiment on Christian Socialist principles, see D. Levi & P. Tucker, *Ruskin didatta. Il disegno tra disciplina e diletto*, Venezia, Marsilio, 1997, pp. 121-174.

[12] Ruskin had given evidence in 1857 (National Gallery Site Commission, XIII 539-53), in 1860 (Public Institutions Committee, XVI 472-87) and, as recalled earlier in the text, in 1863.

[13] In a later edition (1880) given the title *A Joy for Ever*, from the inscription «chosen from Keats by the good folks of Manchester, to be written in letters of gold on the cornice, or Holy rood, of the great Exhibition» (XVI, 11).

[14] *The Deteriorative Power of Conventional Art over Nation*, delivered at the Architectural Museum, South Kensington Museum, Jan 13th 1858 (XVI, 259-292);
of Iron, in Nature, Art, and Policy
at Tunbridge Wells, Feb. 16th
1858 (XVI, 375-411);
The Unity of Art
at the Manchester School of Art, Feb. 22nd
1859 (XVI, 293-318); and
Modern Manufacture and Design
, at the Mechanics' Institute, Bradford, March 1st
1859 (XVI, 319-345).

[15] «In the simplest and clearest definition of it, economy, whether public or private, means the wise management of labour» (XVI, 19). The definition drew on the economic theories of Ricardo, reinterpreted by Ruskin in a sense opposite to that of the laissez-faire doctrine preached by the Manchester school.

[16] The following three phases concern the application of labour, the accumulation and preservation of the results of labour and the distribution of those results (XVI, 29).

[17] In his inaugural series of lectures Ruskin argued for the addition of «some practice of the lower arts to our scheme of University education», adding «but the thing which is vitally necessary is, that we should extend the spirit of University education to the practice of the lower arts». He envisaged an educational system in which the training of distinct professional classes would not be «by Universities of general knowledge, but by distinct schools of such knowledge as shall be most useful for every class: in which, first the principles of their special business may be perfectly taught, and whatever higher learning, and cultivation of the faculties for receiving and giving pleasure, may be properly joined with that labour, taught in connection with it. Thus, I do not despair of seeing a School of Agriculture, with its fully-endowed institutes of zoology, botany, and chemistry; and a School of Mercantile Seamanship, with its institutes of astronomy, meteorology, and natural history of the sea: and, to name only one of the finer, I do not say higher, arts, we shall, I hope, in a little time, have a perfect school of Metal-work,

at the head of which will be, not the ironmasters, but the goldsmiths: and therein, I believe, that artists, being taught how to deal wisely with the most precious of metals, will take into due government the uses of all others»(XX, 21-22). Cf. CA, where it is stressed that youths of the richer classes should not be «held less than gentlemen for doing a man's work honestly with a man's right hand»(XIX, 157).

[18] See his letter published in the «Literary Gazette», November 13th 1858, which Ruskin says was written «to defend a questioned expression respecting Turner's subtlety of hand from a charge of hyperbole» and dealt with refinement of colour and economy and delicacy of touch. This letter was used in Appendix to *Two Paths* (XVI, 419-420) with the title *Subtlety of Hand*.

[19] It must be acknowledged, however, that in this definition manufacture, as the exclusive domain of the hand, remains an empty concept, which seems to anticipate negative conceptualizations of Daedalus as type of the «practically executive craftsman, and the inventor of expedients in craftsmanship» and antitype of Prometheus «the institutor of moral order in art»(XX, 351-52), as developed by Ruskin in writings of the mid-1870s.

[20] See also the connected concept of value as the «life-giving power of anything» and of «intrinsic value» as «the absolute power of anything to support life»(XVII, 153).

[21] «That country is the richest which nourishes the greatest number of noble and happy human beings; that man is richest who, having perfected the functions of his own life to the utmost, has also the widest helpful influence, both personal, and by means of his possessions, over the lives of others»(XVII, 105).

[22] Birch, *Ruskin's Myths*, cit., pp. 40-42.

[23] *Ibidem*, p. 64.

[24] Letter to John James Ruskin, October 1862, quoted in XVII, lxii-lxiv.

[25] See also XVII, 208.

[26] In a letter to his father of 1 July 1861 from Boulogne (XVII, 224n) Ruskin had glossed the myths of Charis and the Charites as follows: «"Grace" is in the *Iliad* a single Goddess, the wife of Vulcan; she is feminine household strength; afterwards this single goddess becomes three, of whom the youngest and loveliest, Aglaia, was still the wife of Vulcan. They are the Powers of all benevolent and affectionate social action; and whereas every other Goddess occasionally becomes hostile or terrible, the Graces never appear but in acts of kindness,

whence gradually grace comes to signify kindness or favour».

[27] Charis is the wife of Hephaestus in the *Iliad*, xviii, 382 (see below). Hesiod (*Theogony* 945ff) names three Charites: Thalia, Euphrosyne and Aglaia, whom he identifies as the wife of Hephaestus.

[28] In Greek mythology, the Charites were in fact closely associated with Aphrodite, as her constant attendants and even daughters.

[29] *Odyssey*, viii, 266-367.

[30] This trend is already evident in the imaginative titles of some of the chapters in *Modern Painters V* (1860). The title of *Munera Pulveris* (derived from Horace), on the other hand, was not given until 1872, when the articles from «Fraser's Magazine» were published as a collection. In *The Examiner* for November 24th

1866, a review of two volumes published by the Early English Text Society included the following comment: «We return also by our new road to the old affections of Euphuism in the labelling of books and papers, till at last even a clever man like Mr. Ruskin is caught giving such affected titles as 'The Crown of Wild Olive,' 'The Cestus of Aglaia,' 'The Ethics of the Dust,' to writings of which the character is very distantly suggested by such names. The usual devisers of these ingenuities are not men of Mr. Ruskin's fullness and capacity of thought. But when the disease of the weak spreads to the strong we feel only the more assured that a revived and extended study of our early writers is still needed as an aid against the habit of recommending weak thought by affected utterance». For Ruskin's own view of the matter see his remark in

Ariadne Florentina in reference to the volume of lectures entitled *The Eagle's Nest* : «for I am not fantastic in these titles, as is often said; but try shortly to mark my chief purpose in the book by them»(XXII, 315).

[31] *Iliad*xiv. 220-221 (XIX 49).

[32] For references to Aglaia's cestus, see XIX, 72, 88, 107 and 119.

[33] Cf. XIX, 59.

[34] This is the translation given by Cook and Weddeburn (XIX, 49n).

[35] According to Vasari in his *Life of the painter*.

[36] Among the passages in previous writings on the hand as the most delicate and sophisticated of machines see in particular the following from the lecture on *The Unity of Art* in *The Two Paths*: «Fine Art must always be produced by the subtlest of all machines which is the human hand. No machine yet contrived, or hereafter contrivable will ever equal the fine machinery of the human fingers» (XVI, 295).

[37] Cf. the passage in the fifth of the Oxford *Lectures on Art* (1870), devoted specifically to *Line*, where Ruskin recognizes the novelty of a system of art instruction based on outline and justifies it by reference to the history of art and to his own experience as a draughtsman and teacher (XX, 129).

[38] See also his remarks on Rembrandt's «evasive» line (XIX, 112).

[39] Didactically, moreover, the possibility of rubbing out is considered not to be an advantage (XIX, 67-68).

[40] These objects are a wasp's leg or sting, inhumanely detached from body, considered too minute to be delineated boldly; a wasp's body, in which the presence of lines delimiting zones of colour raises the question of local colour; a shell, which involves problems of perspective; and finally a horse, perhaps deemed too complicated as a form. Ruskin laments lack of examples of outlines simply and rightly done). He would like to show and enlarged black outline of a coin of Tarentum, but, being this out of reach, he would suggest approaching this in stages, starting with outline studies of constructive parts of horse (hooves, ribs, vertebrae).

[41] An idea put forward in *Elements of Drawing* (XV, 32).

[42] Ruskin's Modesty is clearly the mythological sister of Aglaia, the «youngest and loveliest» (XVII, 224n) of the late, three-fold manifestation of Charis: «[Modesty] is, indeed, said to be only the third or youngest of the children of the cardinal virtue, Temperance; and apt to be despised, being more given to arithmetic and other vulgar studies (Cinderella-like) than her elder sisters: but she is useful in the household, and arrives at great results with her yard-measure and slate pencil» (XIX, 73).

[43] A clear echo of Vasari's description of Giotto's use of his arm, held close to his body as a kind of compass, in the anecdote of the O.

[44] Cf. *Elements of Drawing* (XV, 33): «But the hand of a great master at real *work* is *never* free: its swiftest dash is under perfect government. Paul Veronese or Tintoret could pause within a hair's-breadth of any appointed

mark, in their fastest touches; and follow, within a hair's breadth, the previously intended curve. You must never, therefore, aim at freedom. It is not required of your drawing that it should be free, but that it should be right; in time you will be able to do right easily, and then your work will be free in the best sense; but there is no merit in doing wrong easily».

[45] In the early nineteenth century the expression seems to have been associated with the “mechanical” or industrial arts: see the title of T. Martin's, *The Circle of the Mechanical Arts: containing practical treatises on the various manual arts, trades, and manufactures*, London, printed for J. Bumpus, 1818. It was later employed by Sidney Colvin, Slade Professor at Cambridge from 1873 to 1885, in an article on *Literature and the Manual Arts*, published in the «Fortnightly Review» (April, 1880, pp. 581-597) and as a synonym for the “shaping arts” in his entry on the *Fine Arts* in the *Encyclopedia Britannica* (1902). The expression gave its name to an American movement of the early 20th century which promoted the teaching of manual skills in schools.

[46] Engravers were admitted to the highest ranks of the Royal Academy only in 1855 (see W. Sandby, *The history of the Royal Academy of Arts from its foundation in 1768 to the present time. With biographical notices of all the members*, London, Longman, Green, Longman, Roberts & Green, 1862, p. 274).

[47] «Lastly, there is a continually increasing demand for popular art, multipliable by the printing-press, illustrative of daily events, of general literature, and of natural science. Admirable skill, and some of the best talent of modern times, are occupied in supplying this want; and there is no limit to the good which may be effected by rightly taking advantage of the powers we now possess of placing good and lovely art within the reach of the poorest classes. Much has been already accomplished; but great harm has been done also,—first, by forms of art definitely addressed to depraved tastes; and, secondly, in a more subtle way, by really beautiful and useful engravings which are yet not good enough to retain their influence on the public mind;—which weary it by redundant quantity of monotonous average excellence, and diminish or destroy its power of accurate attention to work of a higher order» (XX, 26-27).

[48] This was a reading of an engraving after Turner (XXII, 369-71), published in «The Art Journal», IV, 1865, p. 16.

[49] The same Biblical quotation (Job xix. 24) had served to qualify engraving in the same way in CA: "You think, perhaps, that an engraver's function is one of no very high dignity; - does not involve a serious choice of work. Consider it a little of it. Here is a steel point, and 'tis like Job's 'iron pen' - and you are going to cut into steel with it, in a most deliberate way, as into the rock for ever. And this scratch or inscription of your will be seen of a multitude of eyes..." (XIX, 100-101).

[50] Ruskin developed this conviction in the course of his first years of teaching and during this time he often changed his plans. In his Inaugural he announced that he intended to deal with natural history and landscape (XX, 35-37). But these were the subjects of lectures given during Hilary Term (January-March) in 1871 and in 1872, whilst in Michaelmas Term (October-December) of 1870 and Trinity Term (April-June) of 1871 he lectured respectively on *The Elementary Principles of Sculpture* (published as *Aratra Pentelici*) and on *The Relation between Michael Angelo and Tintoret*.

. In the
Preface

to

Aratra Pentelici

he says that the lectures on sculpture were to be followed by a course «of a like elementary character on Architecture; and [...] by a third series on Christian Sculpture», without however omitting «to direct the attention of the resident students to Natural History, and to the higher branches of ideal Landscape»(XX, 196).

[51] XX, 101: «the first exercise in drawing I shall put before you will be an outline of a laurel leaf». The importance of outline as a form of preliminary study is underlined in *Lectures on Art*: «But from the very beginning [...] you shall try to draw a line of absolute correctness with the point, not of pen or crayon, but of the brush, as Apelles did, and as all coloured lines are drawn on Greek vases. I do not care how slowly you do it, or with how many alterations, junctions, or retouchings; the one thing I ask of you is, that the line shall be right, and right by measurement, to the same minuteness which you would have to give in a Government chart to the map of a dangerous shoal»(XX, 132).

[52] XXI, 109: «*Laurel. Head of the Sceptre of Apollo.*(R.) **Outline from an Italian early engraving, probably by Baccio Baldini of Florence**)» was no. 8 in the Educational Series compiled as part of the teaching collection Ruskin arranged for his pupils at Oxford.

[53] See in *The Cestus of Aglaia* the passage in which Ruskin equate the artist's «right» line («not a “free” line, but an intensely continent, restrained, and considered line») to the incision of an operator: «and the action of the hand in lying it [the right line] is just as decisive, and just as “free” as the hand of a first-rate surgeon in a critical incision»(XIX, 121).

[54] It recalls a much earlier division of artists into Purists, Naturalists and Sensualists, which Ruskin put forward in the second volume of *The Stones of Venice* (1853) and which, three years later, in the third volume of *Modern Painters*, permitted him to divide the positive operations of the imagination into the purist, naturalistic and grotesque ideals. In both cases, however, the criteria of classification were based on the artists' views of, and attitudes towards, nature.

[55] Compare XX, 304-305: «All fine art requires the application of the whole strength and subtlety of the body, so that such art is not possible to any sickly person, but involves the action and force of a strong man's arm from the shoulder, as well as the delicatest touch of his fingers; and it is the evidence that this full and fine strength has been spent on it which makes the art executively noble; so that no instrument must be used, habitually, which is either too heavy to be delicately restrained, or too small and weak to transit a vigorous impulse; much less any mechanical aid, such as would render the sensibility of the fingers ineffectual».