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ABSTRACT

This article examines how qualities of expertise are constructed and sustained within the televisual world of craft reality competition television. We suggest that part of the appeal of this relatively recent media typology beyond any didactic or instructional interest, is a desire to observe expertise and thus gain perceived but highly circumscribed access to the community of practice that is presented by these television shows. We identify three principal expertise positions as common to the contemporary mediation of expertise presented by craft reality competition television: 'Keystone', 'Relative' and 'Vicarious' Expertise. It is argued that these different forms of expertise are mobilized as roles across a variety of craft reality competition television programs to enable entertaining access to craft practice-specific expertise which enables the audience to become experts of spectating expertise, masking the real time, effort, and access to hands-on training involved in becoming proficient in crafts practice.

The groundswell of DIY maker content on social media, coupled with the rise of micro-enterprises and long tail distribution means that the relationship between production and consumption has been subject to aestheticization, shifting the spectacle of expertise to front of stage (Goffman, 1959). This trend profoundly influences the way making processes have become evident on our screens. Today, 'hipster capitalism'—a process of micro-cultural production within a 'variegated economy' requiring actors to engage in 'visible cultural and symbolic mediation to induce exchange' (Scott, 2017: 71)—intersects with wider cultural trends around the rise of the artisanal. Key to the higher prices which hand-made products and services are able to command is the specialist expertise which renders some objects more desirable than others. Identifying the people and processes underpinning an item's production has become a normalised part of the visible labour being valued as part of artisanal production and retail. Consequently, new workspaces and practices have been emerging across the Global North that foreground the visibility of production as part of supply chain transparency. While frequently motivated by a genuine desire by both producers and consumers to engage in more sustainable or ethical economies, these forms of consumption remain largely the preserve of the relatively privileged. Despite this, they reflect a broader value system to which a wider community of people aspire, many of whom constitute the potential global audience for the style of screened programming under discussion here. Within this larger context, this article will argue that the rise of craft reality competition television shows results from a broader cultural fascination with expertise which is now being showcased by screen content producers. We suggest that the appeal of such screen content lies beyond fulfilling a didactic or instructional role, rather, it reflects a desire to not only witness but gain insider access to technical proficiency and a disciplinary, practice-based value system. The texts of maker television provide us entrance into a self-contained world with its own rules and tangible outcomes whereby the audience is primed to develop their own vicarious expertise, as if they have become experts just by watching the show. We propose that within the screened world of maker television, expertise is not only a quality inherent in individuals but a discourse that is mutually constituted between text and the contemporary audience as part of larger trends around the mainstreaming of (and thus the wider growth of an interest in), the handmade, and handmaking, across much of the Global North (Luckman, 2013). However, we caution that the reduction of complex craft skills into easily digested entertainment has the potential to further undermine the perceived need to fund expensive hands-on studio training in schools and higher education, at a time of massive cutbacks to such courses across much of the Global North.

Focusing on the textual worlds created by craft reality competition television and the preferred reading they offer their audiences (Hall, 1980), in this article we identify three principal expertise positions as common to the contemporary mediation of expertise presented by these programs: 'Keystone', 'Relative' and 'Vicarious' Expertise. Defining expertise is always a contentious task that frequently relies on situated, discipline-specific, and case-based accounts of proficiency and experience. In this context, however, we argue that expertise is not judged through direct

consumption of the object, but rather by the arm's length perspective offered by seemingly privileged access into a community of practice - an expert community of practice the audience are themselves invited to feel part of. However, as we will see, within the narratives of these screened worlds, expertise is unevenly distributed between the various roles authorized by the generic expectations of reality competition television, with the judges positioned as the ultimate arbiters. The first half of the article will describe the current upsurge in craft reality competition television, before outlining, through a detailed description of an early episode of the *The Great Pottery Throwdown*, the generic features of much of this programming. In the second half, we outline the three expertise positions we identify as operating within these texts: 'Keystone', 'Relative' and 'Vicarious' Expertise. In so doing we acknowledge the reality of multiple viewer positions and responses in actuality; we are not seeking to essentialise the audience nor presume a preferred reading of the text. Indeed, as we know from our own discussions of these programs with people who are themselves experts in these craft fields, many of them are also watching this programming and bringing to bear their own readings of the quality of the work (and expertise) being presented. So too, all viewers bring their own experiences—and expertise—to the reading of any given text. However, the majority of people watching these programs have never blown glass or forged a knife and probably have no intention to yet they still enjoy this increasingly popular form of programming. We are thus concerned with how specialist knowledge is constructed and conveyed to this audience *within and by the text* as the focus of this analysis.

Screened Expertise: Competition Craft Reality Television

The third wave 'renaissance of craft' across much of the Global North (Luckman, 2015: 18)^[i] has been accompanied by an explosion in reality television programming foregrounding craft and making practices^[ii]. Building upon the successful reality competition television format, a breadth of demographics can be appealed to by the different programs depending upon their practice focus (see Table 1). Employing the broad definition of craft articulated by Richard Ocejó (2017), this could potentially even include *The Butcher* (USA, History Channel, 2019-present) where four butchers compete in what has become the reality competition television formula of each episode comprising of a series of challenges which determine that episode's winner (and loser/s)^[iii]. Like its History Channel sister show *Forged in Fire*, in *The Butcher* the contestant who comes last after each of the first two rounds is eliminated, leaving two contestants to compete against one another in the final challenge. Several other craft competition programs follow a season-long model based on earlier food-related programming such as *The Great British Bake-Off*, whereby both an episode winner and person to be disqualified are determined at the end of each episode; these include *The Great British Sewing Bee*, *The Great Pottery Throwdown*, and *Blown Away*.

Notably, while they may be competition-driven and filled with creative risk, the programs identified in Table 1 are examples of what Jorie Lagerway (2018) refers to as 'loving reality' programs. That is those which, following on from the success of *The Great British Bake-Off*,

“foreground positive affects like love and joy over and above more typical reality fare of competition, backbiting, and snark” (Lagerway, 2018: 442). As she goes on to note, an important part of the “love performed on screen and generated between viewers and performers” by such reality competition programming is the escape into “an imagined nation that is inclusive, diverse, and offers equal opportunity for Britons across regions, ages, sexualities, classes, races and ethnicities” (Lagerway, 2018: 443). While the national contexts of production may differ, the affects offered by this approach register in parallel ways across the international audiences for this programming in the English-speaking Global North. Whether produced in the United Kingdom, United States of America, Canada or Australia, a common feature of craft reality competition television is the attempt to present a community inclusive and welcoming of racial, gender and sexual diversity. This is true both of the competitor cohort, and in the casting of hosts and judges. It is important here to acknowledge the public service origins of the BBC, as the home of *The Great British Bake-Off*, which established the model many of these programs have sought to emulate. The sub-genre’s prevalent (but not exclusive) commitment to inclusive contestant and judge cohorts and often modest (or no) cash reward payment for winning is consistent with the community over commercial aspirations of public service broadcasting. That the programs produced in North America are more likely to have a substantial cash or in-kind (such as a high-profile residency) prize further reflects these different television market histories.

Television Program Name (craft practice)	Production Company	Initial Broadcaster	Years/ Series	Country where produced	Judges
<i>Craft Wars</i>	TLC	TLC (Discovery)	2012	USA	
<i>The Great British Sewing Bee</i> (dressmaking)	Love Productions	BBC	2013-present; 7 series	UK	Patrick Grant (series 1-present) May Martin (series 1 - 3), Esme Young (series 4 - present).

<i>The Great Pottery Throwdown</i> (ceramics)	Love Productions	BBC 2015–2017, Channel 4 2019–	2015–present; 4 series	UK	Keith Brymer Jones (series 1 – present) Kate Malone (series 1-2) Sue Pryke (series 3) Richard Miller (series 4 – present)
<i>Forged in Fire</i> (bladesmithing)	Outpost Entertainment	History Channel	2015–present; 8 seasons	USA	David Baker (series 1 – present) Doug Marcaida (season 1 – present) Jason Knight (season 3-4) J. Neilson (season 1 – 2, 4 – present) Ben Abbott (season 4–5)
<i>Making It</i> (various)	Universal Television	NBC	2018–present 2 seasons	USA	Dayna Isom Johnson (season 1-3) Simon Doonan, (season 1-3)
<i>Blown Away</i> (glassblowing)	Marblemedia	Netflix 2019– (Premiered on Makeful)	2019–present; 2 seasons	Canada	Katherine Gray (season 1 – present) - glass artist and Associate Professor at California State University
<i>All That Glitters</i> (jewellery)	Twenty Twenty	BBC	2021–present; 1 season	UK	Shaun Leane (series 1) Solange Azagury-Partridge (series 1)
<i>Making It Australia</i> (various)	Eureka Productions	Network 10	2021 – present; 1 series	Australia	Deborah Riley (series 1) Benja Harney (series 1)

	Matchbox Pictures				
<i>Handmade: Britain's Best Woodworker (production title: Good With Wood)</i>	Plimsoll Productions; Channel 4 Television	Channel 4	2021 – present; 1 series	UK	Helen Welch (series 1) Alex Di Rijke (series 1)

Table 1: Craft practice competition television programs

Inclusive casting is, however, easier to do where there is a larger, more diverse pool of people from which to select participants and this is less likely to be the case with specialized craftwork like glassblowing or knife forging. *Forged in Fire*, as a result, tends towards a dominance of white men among its contestants, reflecting the community of practice it showcases. Age is also a challenge for inclusive casting for some of these craft practices (the intensely physical and paired glassblowing, for example). But even then, many programs pay lip service to the absences (especially of gender), and affirmative action casting is evident potentially in the inclusion of more diverse contestants who sometimes display a skill level which is demonstrably less competitive than those of the other contestants. Ultimately, while such programming does feature inclusive casting to the point that it has become something of a cliché, they offer their audience a heartwarming rather than confronting mix of intersectional identities. Reality television is, after all, a highly mediated capitalist product designed to create affective bonds with the audience. The construction of all the key personas—those of the contestants, judges and hosts—exemplify the neoliberal idealisation of the branded self (Hearn, 2008a & b). Through a mixture of editing by the production company as well as cultivation by contestants, we see “the self-conscious development and management of public persona based on templates of the ‘self’ supplied by corporate media culture” (Hearn, 2006: 133) deployed by participants in craft reality television. Contestants successful in presenting a distinct and well-loved presentation of self are potentially able to leverage this profile to generate media careers beyond the life of any given program.

Thus unlike the kinds of DIY informational and advertorial craft and making shows that preceded it, craft reality competition television emerged out of reality television and its voyeuristic (rather than participatory) hands-on offering of viewer pleasure. It is in this way that this sub-genre of reality television differs from the kind of craft television long offered on such dedicated channels as ‘The Craft Store’ (formerly Hochanda – “the first shopping channel dedicated to crafts, hobbies and art”[iv]), that, as Hambleton and Quail write, “have historically

functioned as ‘how-to’ instructional programs for craft enthusiasts” (Hambleton and Quail, 2020: 1). As such, craft reality competition television programs seek to simultaneously interpellate the viewer with detailed insights into craft materials knowledge and specialised techniques, while also meeting generic and scheduling requirements to contain this complexity within the confines of a one-hour television show. As Barron notes of the US-produced *Forged in Fire*, while it “represents a detailed presentation of key blacksmithing and bladesmithing craft skills, the creative process is accelerated and dramatized to produce a sense of spectacle absent within professional or home forges” (2018: 235). Drawing upon David Pye’s influential writing of craft and the ‘workmanship of risk’ (1968: 4), we can observe that in craft reality competition television a key source of narrative tension is that “the quality of the result is continually at risk during the process of making” thereby the result is not predetermined but rather “depends upon the judgment, dexterity, and care” of the maker (1995: 20). In other words “the risk of technical failure ... is ever present as makers confront time constraints which test their ability to complete tasks” (Hambleton and Quail, 2020: 8). This sense of risk, heightened precisely by the time constraints of the televised competition, is built into the regular program narrative and the audience is quickly ‘trained’ to understand key moments where the risk of failing in the making process are (sometimes spectacularly) revealed, for example the quenching to temper a blade in *Forged in Fire* (Barron, 2018: 242) or the kiln firing process in *The Great Pottery Throwdown*. Such narrative tension is common across all reality competition programming, and to make sense of it in any given context the viewer requires accessible mediated access to the knowledge of a particular community of practice.

To examine strategies that bring the competition craft reality television viewer into the ‘shop-talk’ of expertise including field-specific terminology, it is illustrative to summarise how a standard episode unfolds. Most programs operate with variations of an ‘elimination’ model, where one contestant leaves the competition each week. The first ever episode of *The Great Pottery Throwdown* (2015, BBC2) exemplifies this program style and establishes expectations for future seasons. Notably, the episode opens with a note of British televisual nostalgia with the words ‘Interlude’ written over black and white interstitial 1960s footage of potters working at the wheel; as the host goes on to inform us “no, this isn’t the bit between the programs, this is *The Great Pottery Throwdown*”. A voiceover accompanying a montage of everyday use of ceramic ware then reminds us that ‘stuff made from clay’ is essential to our everyday lives, before then introducing the judges with the pronouncement: “And these are clay’s masters - ceramic artist Kate Malone and master potter Keith Brymer Jones”. Their credentials are then further established through their professional connections, including high profile and high status clients, as well as their ongoing passion for the medium. From here, the show itself starts to be introduced through an itemisation of the amount of material and time involved. Through a soundbite from Keith that once in the firing kiln the outcome is ‘in the lap of the pottery gods’, we develop a sense of potential narrative tension.

We are then individually introduced to the contestants who continue more explicitly the host's theme of distancing contemporary pottery from clichés of the past, perhaps ironically despite the immediately preceding work on the part of the judges of grounding pottery skills within hundreds of years of professional refinement. The parameters of the episode's 'main make' are then outlined, and the contestants begin the multi-day process of turning clay into, in this instance, a thrown set of five kitchen bowls which sit inside one another. While this occurs, the various qualities of the clays available to contestants and technical detail of the processes involved (and the risks associated with them) are explained to the audience via voice-over. Likewise, as they are interviewed while they make, the contestants also offer insights into the making process. In this episode, short interviews with external experts such as University lecturers on the history of pottery techniques further bring the audience into a basic understanding of the community of practice. Such interstitial vignettes, with or without a featured 'expert' voiceover (sometimes the voiceover may be supplied over video of a process by a presenter), are often deployed early in the life of a program or series to introduce the lay audience to specialist histories or processes.

While the main make dries, the contestants alternate to a 'spot test' activity focusing on unfamiliar technical skills. This episode's spot test is 'pulling' the clay to produce two sets of ten identical handles, to be applied to twenty mugs in ninety minutes. The multi-day reality of the pottery process gives rise to the biggest narrative difference to the *Bake Off* model as within the space of 60 minutes we are guided through a sequence of material iterations which took many days in real time. During this final glaze firing, the contestants undertake one final technical challenge. In-keeping with the 'throwdown' in the show title, this is a pottery wheel-specific task: throw as many small, even-sized egg cups 'off the hoof' (from the one piece of clay centred on the wheel) as they can in 20 minutes from five kilograms of clay. The episode ends with the final reveal of the main make, before the contestants leave the room and the judges, facilitated by the host, discuss the relative strengths and weaknesses of the works. The contestants then re-enter the room and a weekly 'top potter' is announced, so too is the person 'leaving the pottery this week'.

Whose Expertise?

Audience interest in the actual details behind how things are made or done—and the desire for evidence of expertise in action—can be seen as part of a wish for transparent modes of understanding as the basis of trusting relationships with other people and their claims to expertise. Gloria Dall'Alba describes how "[e]xperts, their knowledge, and domains of expertise are typically seen as separable and independent of each other" (2018: 34). This fragmentation of the components of expertise could be responsible for the recent decline of the expert's authority. James Fleck notes that while "virtually everyone has access to contingent knowledge to some extent, though depending on the structures and relations of power within and between organizations, not everyone's contingent knowledge is equally recognized, perceived as being

relevant, solicited, valued or acted on" (Fleck, 1998:158), pointing to how the performance and verification of expertise have become far less trusted and open to manipulation in the contemporary media and communications environment. It is now well-established that much contemporary public (particularly political) discourse frames such scholarly or professional displays of expertise as 'under attack' or 'untrustworthy' (Eyal, 2019) following the treatment of various expert opinions around the climate crisis, and more recently, the COVID-19 pandemic (Baniya and Potts, 2021; Lovari, 2020; van Dijck and Alinejad, 2020).

Regardless of the specific details of the format, a commonality amongst all competition programs is the pivotal role played by the judges as discipline experts not only in determining winners and losers, but in framing the overall narrative by constructing viewer expectations. It is the judge's scripts that define the show's desired form of creativity (Hambleton and Quail, 2020: 9). This is achieved through providing the viewer with a crash course in what 'correct' techniques to look for, and how (in their or the show's opinion) to judge skilled versus less competent work. Notably, while each of the tasks to be performed may be decided by the judges, it is left to the host—whose own expertise lies in the media world of enabling the narrative—to introduce these to the competitors. Importantly, this leaves the voice of the judge free to be deployed almost exclusively to perform their expertise. This can take a number of forms but is most commonly achieved in two key ways. Firstly, this is done through tips or advice offered to all competitors (generally after the announcement of the challenge) or individual candidates (during the 'walk arounds' undertaken during the actual round in progress if the practice allows this). The other narrative technique employed by the judges as resident specialists to guide the viewer's 'expert' reading of the program are the 'state of play' overviews undertaken mid-make and often led by the host. These are presented either away from the competitors in a private space aside from the main making floor, or while surveying the making action. The latter mode is one used by the programs showcasing the more dangerous making practices (glassblowing, forging). In the case of *Blown Away*, such moments of summative assessment are presented from the almost 'god's eye' view of the competition provided by the platform raised above the making floor. In these 'state of play' interactions, the host functions as a proxy for the presumed 'lay-expert' viewer at home, asking the interested and informed but outsider questions it is assumed the audience may have as a prompt to receive guidance from the experts in how to read, and appraise, the unfolding action.

To further explore where expertise is presented as lying within craft reality competition television, it is important to note that competitors are positioned differently across the various programs. In-keeping with the approach of *The Great British Bake-Off* as the pioneer of this particular format, contestants are editorially presented as unequivocally amateur, though 'talented', in derivative shows such as *The Great British Sewing Bee* (competing to become 'Britain's best home sewer') and *The Great Pottery Throwdown* ('best home potters'). Focusing on those aspiring to professional expertise, *All That Glitters* invites applications from both amateur and professional jewelers in its quest to identify "the country's most talented up and

coming jewelers" (Twenty Twenty, 2021). *Forged in Fire*, however bypasses complex gatekeeping issues around the divide between amateur and professional, instead simply presenting all contestants as 'world-class bladesmiths' (History, 2021). *Blown Away* is the only program to explicitly present all its competitors as professional 'master artists' even if working with glass is not their main source of employment.

However, while competitors are clearly positioned as talented, and sometimes even as professionals, it is the judges who remain the texts' unequivocal, unassailable, experts. Thus, a key generic feature of each episode of craft reality competition television shows is the re-stating of the judge's claims to expertise and status as the program's ultimate gatekeepers of proficiency. This generally takes the form of a strategic reciting of some of their top awards, high profile customers, and/or distinguished professional roles at the start of the program. It is also something that can be reinforced through more active display, such as when the judge performs a technical demonstration for the contestants. The representation of craft skills presented by these programs is, as Barron states:

a hyperreal one; the craft elements alone are not considered sufficient to capture and retain audience attention. Thus, the studio forge is a space of exaggeration in which core craft skills and traditions are hybridized with the staples of Reality TV constituting an environment in which the need for visual spectacle amplifies the nature of the craft skills (giving slow-motion gravitas to each hammer blow on the anvil). (Barron, 2018: 244)

The making skills as mediated by the production company are thus offered up to the viewer, with the judges operating both as proxies for the presence of specialist knowledge from the community of practice while also simultaneously needing to be alert to the televisual appeal of their judgements.

Screening the Spectacle of Skill: Keystone, Relative and Vicarious Expertise

Having examined the operation of expertise within craft reality competition television programming, we propose that three distinct expertise roles are present within the text: Keystone, Relative and Vicarious Expertise (see Table 2).

<p>Keystone Expertise</p>	<p><i>Judges/Judging Panel</i></p> <p>The judge’s expertise is foregrounded regularly throughout the episodes to establish their authority as incontestable within the parameters of the medium whereby. The judges are presented as the ultimate arbiter of the elimination and selection of the winner.</p>
<p>Relative Expertise</p>	<p><i>Competition Participants</i></p> <p>Participants may exhibit professional expertise or skilled amateurism depending upon the craft practice and television program. They may also bring their own differential experienced judgement from their practice to bear in evaluating their own work and that of their colleagues and of the judges themselves. This diversity of expertise is indeed part of the diversity of casting, and part of the <i>relativity</i> of this expertise. However, the narrative will still always present the judges as deciding the winner and framing ultimate expertise in ways that fit in with their—and the text’s— definitions of it.</p>
<p>Vicarious Expertise</p>	<p><i>Viewer</i></p> <p>The presumed consumer (viewer) is afforded a safe lay-insider position to vicariously critique and enjoy the consumed media.</p>

Table 2: The three levels of expertise roles present in craft reality competition television.

Keystone Expertise

The judge or judging panel, as we have seen, is central to craft competition reality television and they are thus framed as the keystone expert/s within the text. The judging panel serves as the ‘keystone’ against which the spectacle is judged; the participants within the screened ‘world’ all ultimately have to accept the authority of the keystone expert. The role of keystone expertise within competition television offers us, the viewer, a wayfinding value system. The ‘worlds’ that are created by reality television require at a structural level the privileging of one value system or the authority of one individual (or collective, in the case of a panel of judges). Another role of the keystone expert is the progressive empowerment of the viewer to construct their own evaluative knowledge system. By publicly and demonstratively critiquing a relative expert or an

artefact of relative expertise, the keystone expert provides ‘scaffolding’ which can allow the viewer to form value judgements of the objects in question. This includes deploying field-specific terminology which then needs to be explained to the lay audience, often following the prompt of the host as a proxy for the presumed audience within the screened world of the program. But even if the audience do not understand it, specialist knowledge as revealed through the leakage of field-specific discourse into the program nonetheless still serves to reinforce the keystone expert’s access to privileged knowledge. Exposure to this lexicon makes the viewer feel they are privy to knowledge exclusive to the community of practice; they are offered ‘insider’ status by being let in on the ‘shop-talk’ of that particular discipline. The viewer either reflects the judges own views or disagrees with the keystone expert’s position and may even question the keystone’s status as an expert. In each case, the keystone expert’s position is presented as the ultimate wayfinding device in the screened world.

Relative Expertise

Relative Expertise can describe either the contestants of reality competition television themselves or the objects they create. Indeed, it is the relative expertise that is the primary object of judgement by the keystone expert/s; it is the expertise in question or just in play. This remains true in the case of the craft reality competition television program regardless of whether the contestants are presented as amateur, professional, or somewhere in between. However the potential for some contestants to be themselves recognised, accredited, experts, allows for competition television participants to democratise what constitutes expertise, where it comes from, and how it can be accredited. But ultimately within the text the expertise of the competitors will always remain relative in relation to the keystone experts.

Expertise is constantly negotiated, tacitly defined, and displayed in the screened world of reality television and this is especially the case among the contestants. The influence of potentially scripted and produced moments in the construction of the television program have tremendous potential to shape the perceived expertise, performance, and general personality of the contestants in the viewers’ eyes. Different from observing the participants and their expertise ‘in real life’, the televised mediation relies on constructing characters to be understood in a series of known storyline roles (ie: the underdog, the out-of-touch veteran, the young upstart, etc.) This extends to judges, though very rarely are judges presented with ‘story arcs’ or character weaknesses that might undermine their authority as the keystone expert.

Vicarious Expertise

The vicarious expert—the preferred reading position afforded the viewer—derives enjoyment from spectating decision-making and value systems at a distance. Within the program the vicarious expert is led on a ‘guided tour’ of the keystone experts’ take on the internal value system of the community of practice. In the instance of craft reality competition television, they are guided in to objectively read which artefacts are ‘good’ and which are ‘bad’ through the

subjective but largely unquestioned lens of the judges, and they nuance this understanding through learning a vocabulary of craftsmanship: ‘polish’, ‘quality’, ‘finish’, ‘detail’. This preferred reading presented by the text does presume that the vicarious expert will accept the judgement of the keystone expert, but there is, of course, always dissent expressed by both casual viewers and fan communities dedicated to precisely these debates. For while keystone and relative expertise exist in the internally consistent self-contained world of the programs’ narrative structure, the real-world vicarious expert as an actively engaged audience member can potentially preside over both. Now, as a result of the programs’ sojourns through different communities of practice, the viewers can simulate smaller versions of the craft practice community’s conversations in their own discussions of the shows. However, the reality is their expertise does remain vicarious; they are not about to throw a pot successfully blindfolded just on account of having viewed and judged others conducting such activities. In this way, such screen content is more a kind of vicarious artisanal experiential tourism (Hracs and Jakob, 2015).

Ultimately, we suggest that the attraction towards the craft reality competition television discussed in this paper arises from a fascination with spectating expertise, in particular, through the construction of a screened world that welcomes viewers into the expert’s community (albeit in a proxy sense). The resulting familiarity with the field of expertise emboldens the vicarious expert to form their own opinions and positions within the screened world in which they participate. In a world of increasing uncertainty and ever-more things to know and learn, such media programming works to offer the viewer a far greater sense of expertise than they can so readily access in reality; a seemingly magical solution to ‘being in the know’. Thus, through this ‘witnessing’ of expertise, the vicarious expert still relies on the relative experts to make the artefacts that the vicarious expert can form positions about. In this sense, both the keystone and relative experts reflect to the vicarious expert the kind of expertise as outlined by Karin Knorr Cetina: “Experts, then, are those who have learned to engage with objects in reliable trust relationships and who, therefore, are trusted by colleagues who cannot engage in the relationships directly.” (2000: 135) In this description, Knorr Cetina describes how non-experts need to ‘trust’ experts due to the nonexpert’s inability to engage in making directly. Following this logic, the position of vicarious expert is clearly revealed as a non-expert. For the simple truth is that while the audience may be granted vicarious access to the community of practice, in reality the actual doing remains much harder than the easy structures of craft reality competition television reveal. While after viewing these texts the vicarious expert might like to feel they could now do better or ‘know how to do it’, they have gained no real praxeological knowledge. Instead, the familiar generic narrative formulas around which the performance of expertise unfolds ease the vicarious expert into these forms of making as familiar, accessible processes as skilled televisual viewers. Thus rendering them experts at spectating craft expertise, rather than skilled craft experts.

Conclusion

The three roles of expertise that we have introduced above describe the negotiation of expertise specifically within the context of craft reality competition television, but can be mapped more widely across a wider range of reality competition programming. The keystone expert is presented as responsible for the value judgments that are made within the narrative of the shows, but also ‘scaffolds’ the viewer’s knowledge of the field. Meanwhile, by virtue of the competition format, regardless of their own claims to particular expertise, the relative expert is positioned as the subject of judgement; that is, as the person to have their expertise appraised in light of the keystone expert’s experiences. The interaction between these roles is delivered up to the viewers for their enjoyment, and the viewer position offered by the text is one of vicarious expertise, regardless of the reality of any one viewer’s actual levels of expertise in the field. By definition, the vicarious expert is not an expert glassblower after watching three seasons of *Blown Away*. They may be slightly more educated about glassblowing, but they will not possess any of the required qualities of expertise in the glassblowing community of practice—hold no qualifications, experience, or demonstrated competencies. They are, in fact, experts of *spectating* expertise, with their limited knowledge of the skilled practices they observe having been selectively granted to them by the screened world they were introduced to in the television show.

Despite ‘seeing’ as a well-established means by which to verify and judge the reality of something with ‘one’s own eyes’, craft reality competition television texts remain a highly mediated “spectacle of the real” (King, 2005). Screened expertise reaches, and is enjoyed by, a wider audience than those actively engaged in the communities of practice which are the focus of the programs. In these controlled worlds, the manipulation of the physical as distinct from the social world is constructed as a containable aim in itself, not only in the making but even in the casting. But the texts of craft reality competition television clearly do not exist outside of the socio-cultural worlds of their making. It is for this reason that despite the *prima facie* cause for celebration around the enhanced visibility of, and interest in, craft skills such programs may seem to represent, they also have the potential to give rise to a disingenuous and superficial engagement with craft and trades. This has profound ramifications for how these making traditions survive culturally, when people make value judgements of glassblowing, ceramics, jewelry-making, or blade smithing by watching and not necessarily by doing. At a time when expensive post-secondary studio training is being cut back in the countries where these programs are produced across all levels of primary, secondary, and higher education, such programming may ultimately be contributing to a wider economic, political, and cultural environment whereby real-world expert craft skills are increasingly devalued and, ultimately, lost.

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expressed herein are those of the authors and are not necessarily those of the Australian Government or Australian Research Council.

Endnotes

[i] The first wave is widely seen as being marked by the emergence of the British Arts and Crafts Movement in the late nineteenth century, which subsequently spread more widely through English-speaking countries as well as being influential in the Nordic countries. The second wave denotes the upsurge of interest in DIY and craft making in the 1960s and 1970s that was an important part of the hippie movement.

[ii] In this article, the focus is on the performance of expertise by adults in craft reality competition television. Consequently, there are many more ‘craft’ television programs worthy of reference but out of scope for this analysis. Among these are a number of more (participatory) documentary-style programs such as: *Bespoke* (Australia, ABC, 2015); *Craftivism: Making a Difference* (UK, BBC, 2021); *Made in Great Britain* (UK, BBC, 2018); *Make! Craft Britain* (UK, BBC, 2016); *The Repair Shop* (UK, BBC, 2017-present); *The Wonderful World of Crafting* (UK, Channel 5, 2017-), as well as the children’s competition show *Craftopia* (USA, HBO Max, 2020-present).

[iii] In this article, ‘craft’ will be defined in the more conventional sense of skilled handmaking producing non-food or drink artefacts, but this is not to dismiss the *craft* involved in the wider field of artisanal production. There is a long history of contestation over what exactly qualifies as craft (including the ways it has been raced, classed and gendered), as well as the frequently uneasy relationship between craft and art, and craft and design. The authors, as have many others, have written extensively on this and there is unfortunately not space to do justice to these important debates here. However, if readers do wish to follow some of these threads, please see Luckman 2015 and 2020 for further discussion.

[iv] <https://thecraftstore.com/about/us>, Accessed 2/2/2022

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