Crafting as Making, Thinking and Being (together)

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Part of human nature is to make. Today, 'crafting' can evokes a messy DIY shed visited on weekends by 'the guys' while 'the girls' meet in knitting clubs, thus engendering activities that seem to affirm classical masculine and feminine identities. In reaction, the 'Do It Together' (DIT) movement emphasizes the collaborative character of crafting, undoing some of the gender codes. This movement believes that anyone can reverse-engineer to find out how something is made. Fab Labs and Fab Academies link people of all ages and backgrounds world-wide with the common interest in making things and turning ideas into material realities. Their actions strongly resemble craft activities, not in how crafts are traditionally understood, but as Richard Sennett describes them: a craftsperson as maker *and* thinker.[1] Both form a unifying process, in which crafting is exploring, problem-finding and -solving, and a social process. Crafting becomes the making of personal self-identity and citizenship, whether the craftsperson is an architect, gardener, or seamstress.

Adamson's definition of craft allows us to draw connections across a much wider range of activities than only the 'crafts' themselves.[2] Crafts are 'a set of concerns that is implicated across many types of cultural production: a pervasive, 'everyday' activity, implicated in the contingent flux of life'. Similar to 'cross-craft interaction', past or current crafts, their material outcomes, and aligned social practices do not stand on their own. Instead, they are interlinked at any given stage, through material acquisition, any part of their production lines, consumption, reuse and recycling, and final discard.

Crafting is a thoroughly embodied social practice: artisans being there with their entire being, *and* a as practice that connects. Crafting is about making, thinking, and about 'being': 'The action of making *and* its outcome *connect:* they connect people, materials, places, communities, landscapes, and generations. And, as handmade objects were touched, manipulated, hammered, thrown, blown and carved by human hands and, in being joined up, they become the story as they gather time.[3]

Recording objects' minute details enables us to reconstruct their biographies imprinted in their material make-up or break-down. In investigating workshops we aim to provide a realistic picture of what took place there, even if this does not fit existing interpretations.[4] Such socially-informed studies illustrate a larger compatibility with the complexity of people's existence with each other and materials. In studying objects and features from both empirical and social perspectives, we may weld technologies, meanings, practices and histories together into meaningful contextualized narratives about people's past lives where spatial and temporal aspects play their own interlinked role. Gauntlett's (2011) understanding of making as being creative while sharing and collaborating is thoroughly social. His 'social capital' is the satisfaction of making something useful (for others), *and* 'the community-glue made up of friendly connections with others'.

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Through training and practicing, people become skilled and develop differently than those who do not specialize. Socio-technical distinctions thus lead to value attributions. Social status within the person's household and within their 'communities of practice' become apparent. Value 'lies at the interface between individual and collective tastes, desires, sentiments and attitudes that inform the ways people select one thing over another'.[5] Value ascription may be both inclusive and exclusive: acquiring exotic goods, charged with high symbolic meaning and value may only be possible for specific groups. The object's age, its trajectory in time and space, and the mutually understood perception of these, may add to an object's rich biography before it is being valued as a new possession. Heirlooms exemplify this.

In architectural energetic studies, the traditional value ascription for labor is taken as a *measurable* value of energy expenditure invested in the *chaîne opératoire* of constructing. Labor is measured and calibrated to a standard, called person-hours. Looking differently at the value of labor is possible through the temporality of the taskscape.[6] Taskscape is the entire ensemble of mutual heterogeneous and qualitative interlocking tasks, such as building while also producing food for family and animals. The temporality of a taskscape is totally social because in performing our tasks, we also attend to one another. At once, the value of labor is social *and* economic; one does not exclude the other.

Bodies, places and things are all active agents in the construction of value. In constructing roads to transport building materials in a mountainous landscape, involving local farmers is ideal since they know how to cut terraces and to lead oxen yokes. As space is bodily experienced the significance of places is created through acts and performances played out in specific locations. With this in mind, examples from multiple-room workshop contexts combine quantitative and qualitative value ascriptions successfully too.[7]

Embedded in making, in using, and in the interaction between thing and maker, values as connectors entail both capacities (which emerge), and properties (which are measureable) that grow or decline, and can become lost. The Maussian (1925) approach whereby value linked to aspects of exchange makes it obvious that value goes far beyond the economic, and that rare, transformed, live, or inanimate items of high value were crucial in marking high status and maintaining it. Exotic items produced by highly skilled people embodied these far distant, unknown, dangerous, and unstable places, and link their characteristics to the heroic and mythical picture with which elites wanted to portray themselves. When offering gifts, the giver could create obligations, in which the receiver became indebted to reciprocate at least the same or more, in number or in mutually understood values. Thus gift economy personifies the object: the gift takes the qualities of the people involved and may increase or change the objects' value. In contrast, the commodity economy establishes an equivalence of value *between* objects.[8]

Each individual item or object, irrespective of its similarity to others, likely carries (intrinsic) multiple sets of values, and must have been valued by at least two people em-

bedded in its biography: its maker and its consumer, assuming they were not one and the same. If the item was appreciated, the artisan certainly 'made it'.

Notes

[1] Sennett 2009, 7–12.

[2] Adamson 2010, 4.

[3] After Ingold 1993.

[4] Brysbaert 2014.

[5] Papadopoulos – Urton 2012.

[6] Ingold 1993.

[7] E.g. Brysbaert 2014.

[8] Papadopoulos – Urton 2012, 15.

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