

The Importance and Benefits of Practicing Craft

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Abstract

This article looks for value in craft. Not so much value in the industrial sense; money, time and effort but from an individual perspective; community, companionship, self-discovery and joy. Craft is more than just a final product, the true worth of it can be found in its process; time invested in learning the skills, building the communities, creating an object warm from human touch. The customer is bored of owning mass produced identical objects, instead they are searching for a connection with the maker. By identifying both professional and amateur craftsmen, the authors search for sense of value from them in terms of motivation for crafting, their interactions and community spirit, and their connections with their creations (Hackney, 2013).

Introduction

Greed, lust and a desire for uniformity are omnipresent in society today, as they have been throughout history. Depression and a general dissatisfaction with the status quo are being voiced more widely and discussed in greater detail more than ever before. This article does not attempt to reason that the answer to society's problems lies with craft, but rather to combine an understanding of its position in society with its possibilities for those who take part in its practice, in order to come to a conclusion about how valuable craft is and can be (Watt, 2016).

Resurgence in professional and amateur craft work has been building over the past couple of decades. Appreciation of the craftsman is building, as the time for botched flat pack kits is coming to an end and bespoke, handmade wonders are taking over. The convenience of mass production is a long-term grievance to craft, which cannot and does not wish to compete with the undervalued prices that mass manufacture can offer. Instead, the craft industry offers its customer something more valuable, a connection, a history, warmth already encompassed in the object's heart that stems from human touch. This association between the object and the maker and the object and the consumer is a link between strangers and a link to the community on both a local and global scale. The resurgence brings with it the hope of personal growth for both the creator and the consumer; growth that comes from finding a value in the time, effort and passion that goes into all crafted pieces. To find value one needs to look past the professional craftsman, to emulate their work and empathise with their effort from an amateur's perspective; this is where a deep understanding of value comes from. An appreciation of crafts comes from experiencing them, from improving them and learning from them; a process of development that goes hand in hand with amateur craft, adding worth to the consumer's purchases, to their activities and their daily life.

Craft has a Value

An understanding of craft value is rare in a society focussed on consumption. When low prices render products disposable, they can be of little consequence in a person's life (Wilde, 1893). A customer can't begin to fully appreciate a product when they are so disconnected from the source of the material and the manufacturing process. 'Out of sight out of mind' sums up our addiction to consuming. There is no indication of the time and energy put into the public's purchases, so no value is assigned to them. The editors of 'The Craft and the Makers' (Rey, et al., 2014) believe value is more evident in the field of craft.

Value is an understanding and an appreciation of the effort of others, but, as it is often mistaken for a synonym for price, it takes authors such as Campbell and his peers to reinvigorate its cause (Campbell et al., 2014). Being disconnected means there is no understanding and empathy for the maker and therefore no value in what they produce. Crane (1893) an active member in the Arts and Crafts movement wrote of this disconnected status in the 1800s, suggesting that the craftsman was as much detached from their customer as the customer was to them (Kaplan, 1987). Being a member of the Arts and Crafts movement and opposed to industrialisation, this opinion cannot be seen as without bias. Campbell and his peers believe there is resurgence in craft that is caused by a desire for products “imbued with a human touch” (Campbell et al., 2014: 6) to replace the impersonal duplicates from the production line. The industrial revolution made products accessible for the masses but with it brought a uniformity that has now grown out-dated. Just as the desire to consume arose with mass manufacturing so has the desire for value in this resurgence of craft.

When everything in this technically advanced world is immediately accessible the value in time is overlooked. According to the author and critic Dormer (1997), Neal French proposes that there is little human warmth in objects due to the speed of which products are created. When once it would have taken several years to produce a set of tableware, with the progress of CAD/CAM and new manufacturing techniques, it takes a matter of weeks from ideation to production. The newer, faster design process, is as relevant today as it was 20 years ago, but in regard to craft, a range of practices that in general are made by hand, the consideration of time being eradicated so drastically is unsupportable (Crilly, et al., 2008). The ‘old way’ that puts an emphasis on time adds greater value to craft, as it not only promotes greater depth and understanding of the design, but it creates a sociable environment and a bond in communities, as Campbell et al. (2014) suggested. For not only is the time invested in creating the crafted object, but it is invested in the relationships built between the master and the apprentice, and between the craftsman and their trade. This process can create the warmth that the customer is searching for that is missing from the mass-produced commodity (Laurence, 1994).

A factory worker is a nameless soul to the consumer, but with craft, as Laurence poetically said, there is life, passion and a history behind each object that gives the object a sense of permanence and a timeless value that so starkly opposes the throw away trend. To possess crafted objects that imbibe the efforts of the craftsman, are to have “shards of the ‘real’” (Adamson, 2007: 35) in amongst a house of mass-produced commodities. The sense of ‘real’ Adamson speaks of comes from the acknowledgement that when craftsmen share their work they are sharing their passion and their soul. The time and effort they put in to making, as opposed to a factory worker, is spent in satisfaction, the aim of their working day is not to earn money but to have created something with meaning (Adamson, 2013).

Market research has shown that the consumer demands uniformity and reliability from their possessions (Dormer, 1997), features that are not stereotypical of craft. The need for uniformity in the home can be traced back to the fear of germs and disease by housewives by the end of the nineteenth century (Rossi, 2016). The exaggerated dangers in the home led to a need for clinical cleanliness, an approach which has been pervasive. The need for consistency and dependability is a factor that will always restrict resurgence in craft for many demographics while there is an easier answer based on expendable cash and easily sourced goods. Craft is by this hand over shadowed by industrialisation. The consequences of this are visible in landfills and in the effects of global warming. Orsola De Castro, cofounder of the online publication, Fashion Revolution, uses its influence to point out that “almost everything we have been throwing away over the past decades still exists somewhere on this planet”

(De Castro 2017: 1). Along with over 80 professionals from across the creative industry, Castro uses an issue of the publication, to convince the reader that “loved clothes last” (De Castro, 2017). Building on their personal, professional and historical knowledge they are attempting to revitalise the ‘make do and mend’ mantra. By combining, if not amateur craft, then real care and attention to our possessions, with buying into crafted and sustainable products, then the effect on the environment can be combatted, by finding a real connection to the history of items and encourage a longer future.

Craft should not solely focus on the professional side of the spectrum but should be encouraged on a personal level. Amateur, originally stemming from the Latin ‘amare’, to love, was once associated with the pursuit of an activity for its own sake. Until the industrial revolution, to craft, as an amateur, was to craft for the love of it (Knott, 2013). This definition was lost when the professional craftsman, acting on their fear for the security of their income and profession, reduced the amateur to a hobbyist and encouraged the sexist, domestic scrutiny that has proved pervasive (Knott, 2015). Amateur craft is still tarnished with this slander and ridiculed, often considered as a Granny’s hobby. Amateur craft however can be the key to eradicating the dissatisfaction discussed earlier, which can be identified past the impersonal products on the market and can be perceived to be in the foundations of society. John Ruskin, the leading art critic of the Victorian era, wrote that “It is not that men are ill fed, but that they have no pleasure in the work by which they make their bread and therefore look to wealth as the only means of pleasure.” (Lambourne, 1980: 13). This identification was made over a century ago but time has not healed this rift between pleasure and duty. The attitude that we should be satisfied with work that does not satisfy on a deeper level is embedded in today’s culture, whether from a need to support on a financial level or from the lust for luxury. The capitalist attitude is beyond the level of discussion that this dissertation aims to explore. The focus instead is on what can be done in the personal hours that can add satisfaction to life (Lebowitz, 2013; Wilkinson-Weber, et al., 2016).

Nearly a century ago Ruskin recognised the need of freedom within creativity, it was this freedom and time that he believed drew from the maker all his imperfections and mistakes and which paved the way for his splendour (Lambourne, 1980). The concept of failure is observed throughout the educational system as causing anxiety, the demand for perfection that stems from the pressure of exams leaves society in constant fear of being rebuked (McDonald, 2001). The true beauty of amateur craft is that “it isn’t so much what you can do, but what you do.” (Barron, 2012). The skills of a true craftsman are built on failure, which not only improves understanding of the materials and process but encourages self-improvement. It is widely discussed that craft can be beneficial to your psychological state, that it does not only provide respite from busy schedules but it “promotes non-verbal self-expression and communication in people, and can increase their confidence, self-esteem, technical and social skills.” (Meeson, 2012). The influence of craft on the health sector has been largely studied and will not be examined in depth in this dissertation. In 2011, as part of a local government initiative in Sydney, individuals from a range of sectors took time out of work to participate in a number of craft classes. The individuals reported the effects to have reduced their stress levels and they found pleasure from the distraction that came from their activities (McDonald, 2001). The act of crafting is often referred to as a form of meditation, a time for self-reflection and deep concentration; it is within this time the creators are made.

Craft has been found to be replenishing not only on a personal level but in the service it can provide for others. The act of craft for charity’s sake has been an age-old motivation. Craft within the sphere of charity and political demonstrations has taken on a new lease of life over the past 20 years, leading to the term Craftivism, a combination of craft and activism. “The very essence of Craftivism lies in

creating something that gets people to ask questions; we invite others to join a conversation about the social and political intent of our creations.”(Greer, 2008). Craftivism can range from a pink knitted blanket on a tank, which ridicules war, to a mosaic created to explore injustice in the criminal system. Craftivism is a worldwide movement that is constantly bringing people together. As Prain (2014), author and embroiderer, sees it there is a common ground founded on craft that can bring the most unlikely people together. Craft is really nothing without its communities, whether it’s a group of crafters who meet monthly or a group of online bloggers speaking to the wider world, there is a connection that is binding. Acts of Craftivism strive to promote community, to be a part of and support that community is the true foundations of Craftivism (Greer, 2014: 8).

“The world needs more moments of joy, more unexpectedly wonderful things to happen, more enveloping moments of beauty that catch the eye and the heart, even if only for a second” (Lothian, 2014: 155). Bombarded with so many devastating events every day, the moments of joy are surely what everyone strives for. Through craft that joy can be found from understanding the true nature of value. Problems with consumption are causing global issues, by entering into the world of craft on a consumer level, one can find greater pleasure from ones possessions, which can overcome the throw away attitude of society. To find value in the time, commitment and satisfaction that each object has incurred, means a connection can be made between the maker, his work and the consumer. Craft is undervalued but its benefits on a global and personal level are significant (Connolly, 2017; Greenhalgh, 2002). By crafting as an amateur you not only gain an appreciation of the work of others but you can find your place in a community, you can learn to love your mistakes and you break out of a busy lifestyle. To find true value in one’s actions and the actions of others is the reward of crafting.

Methodology

The aim of this research is that it should lead to a comprehensive understanding of how craft adds value to everyday lives, specifically analysing what motivates the public to craft, how important community is in the sphere of craft and how generally satisfying craft is on all levels.

a) Media Analysis.

A driving factor in today’s society is the media. Using quantitative research methods, an analysis will be undertaken that aims to identify the key messages of craft from a commercial view. Having gathered an assortment of key terms, that arose from the literature review, relating to topics of value, community, reflection and aesthetics the research noted the frequency of these key terms on popular TV shows. For example, every time the term satisfied was used a note was made and after all the episodes were recorded the data was analysed and the results were calculated to find the average for an episode. The research was collected into graphs to assess how relevant the topics from the literature review were in the current resurgence of craft and which is thought, by media producers, to be the biggest selling point. The research worked with the popular programs ‘Craft It Yourself’ and ‘Christmas’. These specific shows have been chosen for their success and as they provide varying demographics. Craft It Yourself, is a new TV programme that was broadcast in the summer of 2017 and arose off the back of the current craft trend. The target audience are 25 to 35 year old first time buyers, looking to add their style to their house on a budget. Allsopps Christmas show (Kay, 2017) was chosen to balance the age groups but also as she has established herself over the past decade as a hand craft enthusiast. Comparing these two shows is intended to identify varying motives and benefits of craft. What has also be analysed is the radio programme, Woman’s Hour, (Garvey & Murray, 2017) which was chosen to stand alone, as it hosted a Craft Prize in collaboration with the V&A and the Craft Collective and focused on the professional craftsman. While the key terms, chosen to analyse the

television programmes aren't as relevant to this broadcast, it is intended to demonstrate the similarities and differences between amateur and professional craftsmen (Kay, 2017).

c) Observations

Following the research into what the media stylises, immersive observations will be undertaken, integrating into a pre-existing community, the NTSU student society, Knit Soc. The aim of this research will be to pin point the foundations that such groups are built on, and to gain an understanding as to how the spirit of community is established. In analysing this data, a comparison will be made of how contrasting the group dynamic is to that of media representation.

In the modern resurgence of craft there is a notable increase in the popularity of workshops. Further observations were made at two courses which the researcher attended. Both companies that run the courses are full time businesses, working at their trades and sharing their knowledge on the side. The first is a daylong weaving course in the centre of London, which teaches the basics of weaving while creating a wall hanging. The second is a week-long pottery course in Dublin, situated in the company's studio where they produce hand thrown pots (Greenhalgh, 2002). The observations strive to understand the social aspect of the courses and aim to find the emotional connection made to the craft and any value it can add to the industry. The intention of observing the workshop environment as well as the social group is to compare how the key terms, mentioned earlier, vary in their level of influence.

d) Focus Group.

The final stage of the research was in forming a focus group to participate in a 3-hour session of knitting. The research, which was carried out in a casual environment, consisted of three participants all with basic to no experience with the craft. The pattern that the group worked on is a mini hat for 'The Innocent Big Knit', which is an initiative started by Innocent Smoothies to raise money for Age UK. The pattern is for beginners and at the end the hats will be sent off to the charity. The study was recorded and at the beginning and end of the session the participants filled out a survey and then joined in with a group discussion about the activity and any benefits they felt they gained from it. It was expected that the group would begin to build relationships, have been able to unwind and had gained a sense of satisfaction and pleasure from the craft and the knowledge that their efforts were charitable. The questions at the end of the session were informed by the previous research and the intention was that the focus group supports any collective findings regarding the key terms. Overall the data collected should work together to identify the positive attributes of craft and analyse how these play a role on society.

Discussion the findings

a) Motivation

Craft is often said to be divorced from art and design, art is said to create beauty and design to create a functional item but having neither the beauty nor the function (Dormer, 1997: 6) where is the motivation for craft. Where do professionals and amateurs alike find the desire to take part in such an activity? Professional craftsmen have the ability to mix work and play. To be a craftsman is to love your work, going against the capitalist regime of working for money rather than pleasure, as Ruskin identified. In the television programme 'Craft It Yourself', full time weaver, Parker (2017), says after years of weaving it still creates butterflies in her stomach. Most people have limited opportunity to express creativity in their working lives they have little control over what they do, a craftsman on the other hand, by the exercise of creativity, takes back that control. This is one of the things that motivates them and is also true of the amateur who works in a controlled environment and finds their

freedom through their craft hobbies. Another motivation for craftsmen and amateurs is to create something beautiful. McEwan (2017), an artist, cum craftsman, cum jeweller, takes his pleasure from the process of turning scrap into beauty. One of the key terms, that was used to analyse the television programmes, as discussed in the methodology, was aesthetics. Analysing both Allsopp's *Handmade Christmas* and *Craft It Yourself* reveals that the aesthetics, within the media's representation of craft, is one of the most regarded factors.

The admiration the craftsman receives for creating something beautiful is also a motivating factor. This is a reason a craftsman likes to exhibit their work at exhibitions, such as the 'Slow Art' Exhibit in Sweden in 2013 that placed value on tradition, time and energy; competitions, like the Women's Hour Craft Prize in 2017 that searched for Britain's best; or from a more grounded form of admiration that comes from workshops. Wherever the ego boost stems from, the attention received is a form of recognition for the craftsman's efforts but it also justifies their life's works, builds their position in society and provides a sense of belonging, as touched on in the Women's Hour Craft Prize episode. With this it's clear to see that craft cuts deeper than credit, it touches a real personal depth (Brones, A., 2017; Bonython, E. & Burton, A., 2003).

The literature review identified that craft is therapeutic. Leith (2017) describes her experience when crafting as a meditative state, referring to a state of Zen. From the observational research, particularly during the week-long workshop at the pottery studio, a state of full concentration was required, but the best results arose when the mind was not over-thinking the activity of throwing. This mindfulness seemed a far-off concept to the participants of the focus group, who at the beginning questioned how it was possible for people to even chat and knit, let alone release the mind into a state of Zen. It would be expected from experienced crafters, who know their trade so well that it is second nature to their hands, but after 3 days of learning to throw pots, it became apparent that one of the true skills of craft was to let go. Accordingly, within a couple of hours of knitting the participants of the focus group were chatting away without even noticing the multitasking that they were undertaking. Dare (2013), from *Creative Kick-starts*, refers to this as time for reflection and a time to 'know thyself', a phrase so respected and revered that it was carved on temple walls and in sacred sites of Greece. To find peace such as this is a great motivation for many to craft.

Being led to where you think you ought to be instead of where you belong leads to self-doubt. Before the focus group the participants filled out a short survey. In this, one of the girls admitted that she was not at all creative. During the session she told of how her teachers had never trusted her with the crafty activities at school. By the end of the focus group session, when completing the second survey, she was asked if she would try more crafts. She responded that she's "not very good at craft" (Watson, 2018). Self-doubt is demotivating and restricting, the participant doesn't wish to try because she believes that she will fail. Ruskin believed that attitudes such as these were to be countered by creativity itself (Lambourne, 1980). The attitude by the end was infuriating to see as a teacher as well as an observer, as in 3 hours she had created a mini hat from scratch. It is a common presumption that crafting abilities are inherited, you either have them, or you don't. Radio presenter, Kearney laughs about her inabilities during the Woman's Hour Craft Prize broadcast. While it is assumed that she must have tried her hand at quilting, the craft her mother excels at, and most likely made mistakes, she seems unaware that her mother probably has at least 30 years' more experience than her. With encouragement from her crafty mother Martha began knitting and has found great satisfaction with it and yet even after having created a scarf, she still believes herself lacking the proper genes. It was therefore Martha's mother who was her motivation to try craft. From every area of the primary

research recorded, a common factor has arisen, craft is democratic, it oozes equality. No one is born a craftsman. In this light it has an anti-capitalist vibe, skills cannot be bought or sold, and they require time, practice and patience. This can be seen clearly in the focus group, all three participants had little to no experience of knitting, and all three of them made mistakes, and all three of them struggled in different areas to their peers, but all three of them came away having made a hat. The same can be said for the pottery workshop, in a group of novices with small experience everyone struggled, but it was the time that all the students put in that produced the best results. This suggests that it was their perception of how manageable the task was that became their motivation to try (Brophy, 2013).

The participants of the focus group found their crafting experience rewarding, they had a sense of achievement and belonging, both during and after. But after the session none of them were inclined to continue knitting, mainly putting it down to how time consuming it is. Time was also a key factor in both 'Craft It Yourself' and 'Kirstie's Handmade Christmas' (Kay, 2017). Time appears to have become a commodity, spent on work, food, sleep, fitness and friends. Craft is an added bonus for some and an extravagance for others, weighing up price and time vs the effort seems to determine its worth. Craft It Yourself, targeted at 25 to 35-year olds, attempts to appeal to this weighing up of factors. Every craft demonstrated on the show is ranked for its time required, rough cost and level of difficulty, this then tends to be compared to a similar product and the prices you would find it for on the high street. This suggests that the programme believes the younger generations are taking part in craft not for the joy, though that may be a bi-product, but for profit. While the media may suggest this attitude, from the observations it was noted that none of the students in the weaving workshop or the pottery workshop were there to save money and improve their living quarters. Quite the opposite, though all the weavers and over half the potters fell under the target market for the TV show, they had paid to learn a new skill, purely for pleasure (Kay, 2017). Kirstie's Handmade Christmas seems to have hit the mark more successfully at appealing to an audience who want to craft for crafts sake. The highest noted feature from this show was neither time or price nor effort but admiration, as seen in the graph below. As Kirstie kept repeating, she hoped the viewer would be inspired by the various crafters and their exquisite makes. Kirstie's mission is to persuade the viewer "to ditch shop bought in favour of handmade decorations" (Allsopp, 2017). The fact that she makes no reference to how it benefits the viewer past the joy, pride and satisfaction felt with the process suggests that these are the motivating factors rather than price.

There are many different motives for taking up a craft; the desire to take back a measure of control in one's life, to create something beautiful and to receive admiration, all of which have therapeutic benefits. But common to them all is gaining a greater awareness of self; a desire to be recognised, an urge to imprint our style on our surroundings, a time simply for oneself. Craft fulfils the innate desire to know ones self-better.

b) Interaction

Idealizing perfection can be toxic. The need for clinical perfection, discussed in the literature review, often comes as a result of industrial production methods. Craft is more than just the end product; the real joy comes from the act of making itself. As Adamson puts it "Craft only exists in motion. It is a way of doing things, not a classification of objects, institutions, or people." (Adamsson, 2007: 4). Any machine can build an object but only craft can give it life. If art and design are divorced from craft, then this is where craft is triumphant. For craft is an action, its true spirit is revealed not in its conclusion but within the moment. From the observations made at a Knitting Society, the weekly meetings are not only a scheduled time to knit but, for the gathered likeminded individuals, also a

place to gossip and be with friends old and new. Craft itself is made up of various entities; so many fields fall under its title, evident from the Woman's Hour Craft Prize, but diversity does not sit solely with the methods, people from all walks of life fall under its title too. "People who craft together manage to find common ground, even when it seems at first that they have nothing in common." (Prain, 2014) This perfectly summarizes and is supported by the observations made from both workshops and Knit Soc. Being alone and a stranger for the weaving and the knitting and with a friend for the potting, entering the scenarios was filled with apprehension and nerves, but looking back these feelings only lasted until the first stitch was cast and the first shuttle passed through the loom. The pottery studio took a different head on approach to break the ice, not only with the craft but with the group socially. Before learning anything in the class, and without any guidance, the group, novices and all, threw their first pot. At once on doing this nervous laughter broke out and afterwards, over the coffee break chatter came easily with talk of the failures of the first throw. Laughter, it seems, is the key to a comfortable crafting environment.

The media, represented by *Craft It Yourself* and *Kirstie's Handmade Christmas*, utilize humour in the form of puns. Whether the shows are trying to make you smile so you have a subconscious reaction when you hear its name, or whether they're actually trying to diffuse any fears and apprehensions the viewer may have in regard to tackling the crafts is unknown. What is clear is the approach is very kitsch, but perhaps that is the true point. *Craft It Yourself* love the terms cool and chic, perhaps in their recognition of craft's current trending spot, but even so the term cool is largely out dated and is almost falling into the kitsch category itself. Whatever the producer's aim was, their collaboration of humour and craft hit the nail on the head. Laughter is woven into the fabric of craft so tightly, but it is not often referred to in discussions regarding craft. Joking was a big part of the focus group, which cannot be put down to regular friendships, as out of the three participants two were complete strangers to each other. But the connections they made over craft were made over their short comings. Once again, failures within the group, as with all the observations, came through mostly in the form of humour and with it came an acknowledgment of being human. Not being perfect is hard to learn, but the crutch that holds one up in social crafting situations is the equality of failing together, a truly selfish sentiment but one that is filled with support when others go wrong. Here is where the community is formed.

The effort of learning from failure is timeless, so from failure a bond is formed in the community and there is an appreciation that even the teacher was once at the same stage. In turn a bond formed over failure can reach back in time to a master craftsman's shortcomings. Within this community there will always be an air of education, as basketry crafter, Evans tells the *Craft It Yourself* viewers "there's a million and one ways to make a basket that you'll never know everything in a lifetime" (2017). The community that accompanies craft is a life line in avoiding excessive self-criticism. While secluded, personal or self-taught crafting doesn't necessarily come with all the benefits that crafting groups can have, the individual is still part of the community and is able to access their skills and knowledge.

Allsopp reinforces this point; sharing, interaction and inspiration were all commonly found over the course of her TV series, beaten only by her admiration of other's work.

The encounters, interactions and friendships founded by craft can last a lifetime or can be as quick to end as it was to start. What has been observed from the workshops though, is that after the first five minutes the awkwardness melts away and what was frequently noted from both the workshops and the focus groups were the periods of silence. Silence is golden is a phrase all parents have used at some point, but it is quite common today for silence to be burdened by awkwardness, or at least perception of

it. There seems to be a need, associated with younger generations, to fill silence with background noise, which will either produce a topic of conversation or at the least allow everyone to do their own thing without feeling it necessary to speak. The silence produced in craft is very different though, it comes back to the meditative state that is induced by concentration and leads to a loss of self. Adamson might refer to this as the pastoral feeling, “the sense of removal from worldly affairs” (Adamson, 2007: 104).

What makes craft more than its siblings, art and design, is that it is not just a means to an end; it is a whole process that fills the amateur and professional alike with a heightened sense of self. When a crafted item is bought without interaction with the maker, the item is lost to the craftsman without its story being told; people gathering, knowledge discovered, failure creating success. For those who see the item as being in the same league as a mass manufactured object, they can have no further joy in the product past its initial duty. Those who have used their time to practise craft, however, can find the story, from their own past, they can feel the human warmth of the object, because they themselves have experienced it and in turn can laugh about the misadventures that took place over the process.

c) Warmth

Most of what we touch on a daily basis is outsourced, cut off completely from its origins and disconnected from the passer-by and even the owner. Hickey believes “consumers of craft have become like urban children who say that milk comes from cartons rather than cows, or like adults who nebulously refer to rubbish as being taken ‘away’.” (Hickey, 1997: 96) The idea of a personality behind the act goes unnoticed. Industrialisation removed the sense of human interaction with the objects and with the customers. Neil Brownsword, (2017) a finalist in the Woman’s Hour Craft Prize, suggests industrialisation made any implication of a human role in the manufacturing process a fault. Perhaps this is why people aren’t repairing their possessions anymore there, as there is no sense that they were produced by humans and so they can’t be mended by them either, we don’t see the point in it, the relationship is a cold and sterile one. A true gift so few possess is to find joy in mending the worn and broken, another way in which craft can be used to mend the disconnected society and restore warmth to the relationship between producer and consumer (Konig, 2013; Gwilt, 2014).

There is not just a disconnection from an item’s source, there’s also an equally alarming lack of education regarding the production methods, as became apparent in the focus group when the researcher was asked how knitted fashion is produced on an industrial scale. Lau, Judge of the Woman’s Hour Craft Prize and fashion blogger, suggests social media is the tool of choice to educate and intrigue, for the younger generations in particular. She too has noticed the general assumption that everything simply appears in shops, as if by magic. There are issues with using social media, but it cannot be denied that its influence is strong and its impact on the craft resurgence must be felt as it has acted as a forum for crafters worldwide for several years. All five students on the weaving course had heard about the class via social media, particularly Instagram, where most the students had been following the work of Balfour (2018) for years. Susie Lau got 200,000 views on one video of a crafting activity, she says “people were just so mesmerised by the visceral action of doing it by hand” (Lau, 2017).

While the aesthetic can be seen as the true merit of a good post on Instagram, a photograph or video can only enlighten one of the five senses; sight. Craft, as previously stated, is so much more than just an end product and here it is so much more than just a composition on a screen. As Benjamin, the philosopher, cultural critic and essayist, believed a photograph is simply an imitation, a piece of work

that was grounded in its time and origin, with an aura of its own, that's been ripped out of context in order for a wider audience to admire its severed soul (Benjamin, 1936). Greenlees, director of the Crafts Council and judge of the Woman's Hour Craft Prize, knows the importance of touch in regard to craft, noting the "tactility, texture and feel" (Greenlees, 2017) in particular. Margetts, radio presenter and a judge alongside Rosie, sees this need to touch as a deep characteristic of homo sapiens, "the first thing we do in life is seek to touch our mothers breast" (Margetts, 2017). It's that physical connection with a crafted object that is often all that's needed to start the imagination off on the journey of the maker. The warmth that Laurence and others spoke of, that were called upon in the literature review, is as visual as the aura, Benjamin speaks of. Not a thing to be viewed through a lens but to be viewed with all the senses.

It was identified in the literature review that there is a growing desire from the customer to rebel against the production line and convert their purchases to objects that have a sense of the maker's touch. The Craft It Yourself series supports this claim of a resurgence and with their overuse of the term 'trends' it could be assumed that craft is merely a current trend that will be passed over within time. To take on a crafter's attitude though is more than just a flirtatious wink, fiddling with one's purse strings and proclaiming a hate of all things mass produced. The characteristics of a crafter come from within and are shown in a love for love's sake attitude. People want to help save the planet and reducing consumption is an identified factor, they also want to be happy and content with what they do and what they own. This heightened sense of compassion, empathy and sentiment could suggest then that the craft resurgence isn't so much a passing trend but more a cultural shift.

Being disconnected from everything mass produced is one thing but it is a slap in the face for craft. So much time and effort go into every crafted object that without any context to this history it often reduces the buyer to question the worth. The power of social media has had an enlightening affect for some consumers, but without having experienced an amateur craft, one can have no real appreciation of the effort, time and passion that go into creating the beautiful.

By pursuing an amateur craft, one experiences the heart ache of failure alongside the ecstasy of success and the pleasure in sharing those with like-minded people. All emotions felt in the process can be identified in an object when observed by those who empathise with the maker. It is therefore imperative to craft to apply oneself to it as much as possible, in order to find the true value in an item.

Conclusion

Craft is an injection of joy, satisfaction, friendship, self-understanding and appreciation into a busy worker's life. Time is a recurring factor in the consideration of craft. Between work laden weeks, recuperation and social commitments, craft is often overlooked as a one-off activity in a weekend of house renovation. The time and effort required for craft is often compared with the price of its counterpart and together they amount to its worth. From the primary research it became apparent from the focus group and the analysis of the media that the younger generation are unwilling to commit to learning a craft if the time to worth ratio is off balance. This is just a pessimistic view from the 'uncreative' and a capitalist angle from the media. From the observations, those who label themselves as creative, regardless of age, are eager to take part in a craft activity for the love of it. In regards to time and worth there is a common perception that every activity must be justified, that nothing is to be ventured where there is no obvious sign of gain. What is not considered a gain by the cynic is the true value of craft: community, friendship, a deeper level of self-awareness and an appreciation of the world around us. By searching for value beyond the consumers' demands, amateur

and professional craftsmen alike find their place in a community of like-minded people, who are able to bond over their shortcomings and triumphs, through wit and merriment. From this community spirit comes a new-found level of empathy and appreciation for our own achievements and the achievements of other craftsmen. It is from this heightened sense of time and labour that we can build connections with our possessions and really find value in the human touch.

What does this all mean for crafts? Only time can tell if the resurgence is here to stay, but from this research a cultural shift is brewing, a need for transparency between the consumer and the maker is long overdue and a desire for general happiness is turning people to craft. There are endless reasons why one should craft, but there can be no crafting without a willingness to learn; a desire to be and a passion for using one's hands; a love of being sociable and a longing to be connected to the world we live in. The conclusion of this dissertation therefore is that craft is valuable on every level. Where there is craft there can be found respect, empathy and love and where these exist there is the power to change the negative and add true value to life in today's society.

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